



Building a stronger  
performing arts  
community in Ireland.

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## Chair's Report

### Report on January-December 2019 activities

This Report accompanies the 2019 Directors' Report and Financial Statements.  
Presented at the AGM, 30 September 2020.

This is the company's seventeenth AGM. It is also my first as Theatre Forum's Chair. And while my AGM Report as Chair obviously looks at last year's activities, it's impossible to set aside the pandemic of 2020 or ignore its impact on our sector. So, I'll start with the traditional but concise review of the previous financial and calendar year but also try to think about the future role of Theatre Forum.

When I took over the Chair role from Peter last September, my aims were to carry on the good work of keeping Theatre Forum relevant to all of the performing arts community, and redouble the organisation's commitment to providing relevant and valuable support to individual or independent artist members as well as organisations. I gratefully acknowledge all the work of previous and current directors and chairs to achieve those aims.

The year since the last AGM has passed all too quickly. Today, I must thank my fellow directors Anne Maher and John Crumlish who retire at this AGM by rotation in accordance with the company's Constitution. Aaron Monaghan, a co-opted director, is also retiring today but is a candidate for election. All their insights, contributions, and hard work in shaping the organisation's strategic direction were invaluable and their support for me as Chair is very much appreciated.

### Mission

Working with the board and executive to reformulate Theatre Forum's strategy since late 2019, the sense of community amongst members was palpable. The company's aim of helping to build a truly sustainable performing arts sector for artists and arts organisations has new resonance since the start of the Covid-19 crisis and has continued to ring loudly for us all as we pick our way through the uncertainty. There is no doubt in my mind that maintaining and deepening that sense of community is crucial for the future, as we work together to protect our sector, our work, our co-workers. While our context has changed dramatically and uncertainty is the prevailing wind, I am certain, however, that the company's purpose and values remain relevant.

### Membership

Member numbers in 2019 increased to 282, up considerable from the 2018 number of 226 and 2017 total of 268. This is a trend that I will be working hard to sustain this year and in the difficult years ahead. Our members are our strength, now more than ever before.

### Partnerships

In my first year as Chair, I've seen the benefits of collaboration first-hand. The ongoing support of the Arts Council is essential to Theatre Forum's work and gratefully acknowledged. We value enormously our various partnerships with Dublin Theatre Festival, Dublin Fringe Festival, Cork Midsummer Festival, and Project Arts Centre, which enable us to deliver important artist development opportunities such as MAKE and the Next Stage. Connecting venues, producers, practitioners and artists, festivals and companies, local authorities, sponsors and resource organisations at events, meetings and the conference is made possible by the co-operation of partners including AIST, ITI, Theatre and Dance NI, Creative Carbon Scotland and IETM as well as the generosity of so many members. I'd like to thank everyone for their unstinting support.

### Activities

One of the early achievements of the year was focussing political and media attention on the pay and conditions of artists and arts workers. Reframing Theatre Forum's traditional Payscales survey to enable comparisons with national and sectoral employment data, as well as hearing directly from artists, created interest amongst policy makers and the public about the prevalence of low pay, poor conditions and precarious work in the performing



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arts. These research findings proved useful for members throughout the year in making a strong follow-up case with elected representatives, policy makers and funders, that employment conditions in the performing arts and artists' pay urgently needed attention.

### Initiatives

Taking the lead of Ben Twist of Creative Carbon Scotland and activist Catriona Fallon, the Green Arts Initiative in Ireland, a pilot programme for seven organisations to start their adaption for a more sustainable future was launched.

In addition to the well-established artist development programmes on The Next Stage and MAKE, the Centre Stage project, a Creative Europe (CE) project for career development for professional women artists working in theatre, dance, was awarded CE project funding in June 2019 and started in October 2019.

Theatre Forum rejoined IETM to offer members Europe wide connectivity.

### Financial Highlights

As an incoming Chair, it's very reassuring to take over from a chartered accountant. I'm happy to report a surplus, after providing for depreciation, of €23,917 in 2019. Our thanks to the auditor Alison Gray of UHY Farrelly Dawe White Limited for the sound advice on the company's audit and related governance and financial issues. It is fortunate that the company has reserves in line with its own policy as I've no doubt these reserves will be critical in the coming years.

### Looking ahead

As Chair, I must also look to the future. A feature of the last 6 months has been just when we thought that things couldn't get any worse, they did. Changes to restrictions have all but scuppered valiant efforts to get events back up and running, government wage supports continue to be gratefully received but changes to levels of payment and access are causing personal and professional turmoil. We are having to imagine projects and programmes for funding applications within a context that is changing constantly. Some of us are questioning, in the context of working like this or even as we were before, whether or not we can go on. My priority is to continue to support our members to sustain both their careers and their organisations as the context in which we are all operating continues to shift dramatically. This means redoubling our efforts to stay relevant to all members. It means finding the resilience to continue to adapt and evolve personally as well as leading the adaptation of our organisations. It means maintaining strong partnerships and drawing from the strength of our membership as we strive to sustain ourselves and our sector.

Last, but definitely not least, I'd like to thank our members, our partners, our funder and sponsors, and pay special tribute to the executive, Anna and Irma. Not alone have they wholeheartedly supported me in my first eventful year as Chair, but they have flexed and adapted with every fresh curveball thrown at us in recent months, providing support and space for gathering right across the community. It is absolutely in this spirit that we mean to go on.

Handwritten signature of Julie Kelleher in black ink.

Julie Kelleher  
Chair, Theatre Forum.