



Building a stronger
performing arts
community in Ireland.

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Chair's Report

Report on January-December 2018 activities

This Report accompanies the 2018 Directors' Report and Financial Statements. Presented at the AGM, 26 September 2018.

This is the organisation's sixteenth AGM. It is also my third and final Report as Theatre Forum's Chair. When I took over from Mona (Considine) in September 2016, my aim was to carry on the good work of keeping Theatre Forum relevant to the wider performing arts community, including artists like myself, and ensure the organisation provided valuable support to our members. I'm grateful for the ongoing support and work of the executive and my fellow directors to achieve that aim.

Three years since that AGM have passed quickly. Today, I have to thank my fellow directors Jen (Coppinger), Patricia (McBride) and Louise (Lowe) who, along with myself, retire at this AGM by rotation in accordance with good governance and the company's Constitution. Their insights, contributions and hard work on behalf of members over the years are very much appreciated.

Mission

Ever since a 2016 Strategic Review, Theatre Forum's purpose has been clear to me. It is to work alongside members and partners to strengthen Ireland's performing arts community, and to advance its interests to ensure a sustainable future. The organisation's core values of Community, Support and Strength underpin our programme of events and activities as well as their delivery. While we are familiar with these values and our purpose of Building a stronger performing arts community in Ireland, they're likely to be even more important to boost our resilience in the troubled times ahead.

Partnerships

In my years as Chair, I've experienced the benefits of collaboration first-hand. The continued and generous support in 2018 of our major funder, the Arts Council, was very much appreciated. We also greatly value our partnerships with the AIST, Dublin Theatre Festival, Dublin Fringe Festival, Cork Midsummer Festival, and Project Arts Centre enabling us to deliver important artist development opportunities such as MAKE and the Next Stage. Theatre Forum events, meetings and the conference connecting venues, producers, practitioners and artists, festivals and companies, local authorities, sponsors and resource organisations would not happen without the generosity of our venue members.

Activities

The uncertainty surrounding Brexit back in 2018 pales into insignificance compared to now. Back then, it was important to us to work closely with our long-time partner TheatreNI to launch the online showcasing platform Tourbook and co-produce our conference in Belfast's Lyric Theatre.

Conversations which started in Belfast, such as the one about sustainability, have had a legacy. That conference and the willingness of the Lyric Theatre team to making our conference a sustainable one formed the coalition that brought about the Green Arts initiative. The year's events and activities were underpinned by enhancement and rejuvenation of our website early in the year returning impressive website numbers of 42,078 unique users, 131,314 visits and 307,369 page-views by the year end.

Initiatives

After Belfast and taking the lead of Ben Twist in Creative Carbon Scotland and Catriona Fallon's work



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in Siamsa Tíre, Theatre Forum started work on the Green Arts Initiative which I'm glad to say will come to fruition later this year.

Theatre Forum also worked with Swedish arts resource organisation Kultur i Väst, on a Creative Europe (CE) pilot project for career development for professional women artists working in theatre, dance. This too has since had a successful outcome and awarded CE project funding in June 2019.

One of my key responsibilities as Chair was to ensure all events were inclusive of, open to and affordable for artists. This commitment to artists was also the driver for carrying our Payscales research, investigating employment conditions in the performing arts. These research findings proved vital for members making a strong follow-up case to policy-makers, funders, programmers and the public that employment conditions in the performing arts and artists' pay urgently needed attention.

Membership

Member numbers in 2018 were 230, down from a high of 268 in 2017 though subscription income was up a little on 2017 and significantly up on the 2016 level. Feedback from production companies who are not strategically funded suggests that any expense outside of actual productions must be 100% necessary and affordable. Independents, including artists, can easily overlook or not be able to afford membership organisations. In setting subscription rates for the following year, the board took action to keep subscriptions affordable for production companies not strategically funded.

Financial Highlights

As the retiring Chair and member of the Finance and Audit Committee as well as an accountant, I'm happy to report that the 2018 surplus, after providing for depreciation amounted to €10,549 compared to €1,810 in 2017. This surplus allows the company to start building its reserve, a prudent measure for all organisations. I know that careful financial management including getting value, controlling expenditure as well as diversifying income will remain part of the company's financial management approach to maintain and consolidate this strong position.

Looking ahead

As my last formal duty as Chair, I have to look to the future. A key priority has to be to continue to support our members to sustain both their careers and their organisations, especially as the context shifts dramatically. This will mean redoubling our efforts to stay relevant to all members and to convince an array of stakeholders and decision makers to invest in the performing arts. I'm convinced that maintaining strong partnerships and the agility to develop new ones is essential to deliver key programmes such as MAKE and the Next Stage, a Creative Europe project and a Green Arts Initiative and others in the future.

I'd like to thank our members, our partners, our funder and our sponsors as well as the executive who have wholeheartedly supported me and the organisation these last years.

Handwritten signature of Peter Daly in black ink.

Peter Daly
Chair, Theatre Forum.