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Chair's Report

Report on January-December 2016 activities.

This Report accompanies the 2016 Directors' Report and Financial Statements. Presented at the AGM, 14 September 2017.

This is my first Report as Chair of Theatre Forum. Given my Dublin Theatre Festival rehearsal commitments, I am especially grateful to my fellow directors for presenting it to you, the members, on my behalf.

It is the organisation's fourteenth AGM. Last September, when I took over from such an able Chair, Mona (Considine), my priority was to carry on the good work of keeping Theatre Forum relevant to the wider performing arts community, including artists like myself, and to ensure our organisation provides valuable support to members. I appreciate all the work of the executive and my fellow directors' ongoing support in delivering a packed programme of events and activities to meet the evolving needs of members.

This is also the organisation's first AGM as a Company Limited by Guarantee having adopted a new Constitution at the AGM held on 15 September 2016. At that same AGM, I was delighted to welcome newly elected directors, Julie Kelleher and Jen Coppinger, to the board. I would also like to thank my fellow Finance Sub-Committee members - Niamh Ní Chonchubhair and Pádraig Heneghan - for their work during 2016 and 2017.

Mission & Values

The organisation's mission is formally expressed in its Constitution.

It is;

- to support, develop and promote all aspects of performing arts on the island of Ireland
- to provide a resource organisation to all members
- and to raise standards of arts leadership, management and governance through the provision of services to members.

In a Strategic Review undertaken at the end of 2016, Theatre Forum's organisational purpose was set out clearly: 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 operates to core values which underpin its programme of events and activities as well as their delivery:

Collectivism Bringing together individuals and companies, providing training, organising events, creating opportunities for members to collaborate and to actively set the Community's agenda.

Supportive Providing a forum for members to share knowledge, expertise and resources to support each other, and to advance the sector.

Giving strength Deriving strength from its membership, Theatre Forum's connectivity strengthens the Community from within.

A key role for Theatre Forum is to cultivate collectivism in our community. As Chair, I'm happy to report that a collaborative approach is our default one. Theatre Forum connects various member



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groups; venues, producers, practitioners and artists working with member venues, festivals and companies, Local Authorities, sponsors, other resource organisations, including our conference partner of many years, TheatreNI. Often members derive strength from each other with colleagues able to offer wisdom and insights grounded in experience. Members' Meetings, formal and informal, consistently demonstrate the usefulness of a collective approach as well as making insights and support available from to other members.

Context

2016 was a year of economic upturn accompanied by heightened uncertainty - challenges in forming a government at home, Brexit across the water and election results in Europe and the US. The return on public money invested in the arts and culture for a successful Centenary Programme, made possible largely by the talent and vibrancy of Ireland's artistic community, was widely acknowledged as was the power of artists to imagine and produce cultural experiences for all citizens with an additional €5 million allocated to the Ireland 2016 Legacy Fund. It was a year of a measured but modest recovery in the arts. There was no funding bonanza but amidst uncertainty, increased Arts Council funding for Theatre Forum in 2016 enabled the provision of many high-quality services and events.

Membership

Growing membership numbers is limited by the reduction in the number of established companies and organisations in the sector allied to an increase in freelance roles and project teams. Obviously, this reduces Theatre Forum's potential membership numbers as well as its subscription income. Against this background, Theatre Forum maintained member numbers in its largest and valuable venue membership category with only small decreases in the number of members in other categories. Recruiting lapsed and new members in all categories continues to be important for the organisation.

Financial Highlights

I'm happy to report on a good financial position for the company at the end of 2016. Net company funds have increased by €5,809 (compared to a modest 2015 surplus of: €10). Note though that of the net funds of €3,220 at the 2016-year end, €4,555 are restricted funds.

In a continued effort to diversify its sources of funding, Theatre Forum attracted sponsorship for the Conference as well as funding from the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs under its Co-operation with Northern Ireland Scheme.

Activities

2016 successes included a well-attended Conference in Galway, another Theatre Forum and TheatreNI co-production. At the 2016 conference, speakers included renowned artist Mark Storer and dance company artists kabinet k who also led workshops about their practice in addition to delivering keynote addresses. Individual practitioners are another priority for Theatre Forum with artists and practitioners incentivised with low individual subscriptions and artist rates for events, especially the conference, to encourage attendance.

Operations

The company is the national performing arts representative organisation providing information, training and professional development, research and policy and advocacy for 240 members, including 62



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venues, 33 festivals, theatre and dance production companies and 115 individual members. Theatre Forum's annual programme of activity is designed to deliver on its strategic objectives with members developing their own capacity as well as that of their organisation. The board is very grateful for the significant in-kind support from members and making their considerable expertise available to Theatre Forum too.

Events, services and events are produced and delivered with many partners including member venues, festivals, companies and artists, the Irish Theatre Institute (ITI), the Association of Irish Stage Technicians (AIST), Local Authorities, specialist organisations, sponsors and importantly, Theatre Forum's conference co-producer of five years, TheatreNI. We are indebted to you all.

As a small team and a membership organisation, Theatre Forum relies on the expertise of directors to set strategic direction and align the organisation's activities with its objectives. Contributions that maximise the resources available to the organisation include the generous in-kind support from members, especially the provision of meeting and conference venues for larger events.

Looking ahead

Our member organisations will continue to experience political, social and economic change. In such uncertain times, demand in the travel, transport, tourism and leisure sectors will be volatile, affecting arts organisations and artists. With uncertainty comes increased risk. In response, Theatre Forum and our members must adapt their own strategies and programmes. Our priority for 2017 supporting all our members to sustain both their careers and their organisations in this changing environment.

Peter Daly
Chair, Theatre Forum.