

Chair's Report

Report on January-December 2023 Activities

This report accompanies the 2023 Directors' Report and Financial Statements, presented at the AGM on 27 September 2024.

This is the company's 21st AGM and my second report as Chair.

As I reflect on the past 12 months, it's clear that 2023 was a pivotal year for our organisation as we developed our new strategy and paved the way for our name change to Performing Arts Forum. While it's always tempting to look ahead, this report will focus on the notable activities and challenges of 2023.

Financial Overview

On page 7 of the Financial Statements, you'll see that the company recorded a deficit of €8,227 for 2023. The directors agreed that this shortfall would be covered by the company's accumulated reserves, which stood at €46,430 by year's end. The deficit was mainly due to an overspend on MAKE and the broader economic pressures impacting the arts sector.

Programme of Activities

Looking back over 2023, we are proud of the range of events, programmes, and initiatives delivered. Despite the fluctuating external environment, we continued to offer a rich mix of in-person and digital programming, connecting with hundreds of artists and organisations. We had thousands (47,000) of unique users to the website in 2023 showing just how important this digital platform is to members and the sector.

Some highlights of the year include:

- **The Gathering:** Held in Waterford in May in Theatre Royal and Garter Lane, this significant event brought together hundreds of artists, arts workers, and organisations for two days of engaging discussions, presentations, and performances. Full bursaries were offered to independent artist and arts workers to attend funded by Local Authority Arts Offices around the country and by organisation members.

- **MAKE Residency:** Theatre Forum, Dublin Fringe Festival, Project Arts Centre, and Cork Midsummer Festival worked with renowned artist/programmer mentors to deliver an in-person MAKE residency for 15 artists on Inis Oírr in November 2023.
- **Green Arts Initiative:** We continued to lead the way in sustainability within the arts, working with venues and production companies to reduce environmental impact, with a particular focus on greener touring practices and energy efficiency.
- **Members' Meetings:** Throughout the year, regular members' meetings were held, both in person and online. These sessions fostered important discussions on topics such as funding challenges, production barriers, and the ongoing need for more sustainable working conditions for independent artists.
- **Audience Insights Research:** The first part of this research focused on aggregated audience data for both 2019 and 2022 and identified the trends and implications for the way in which we engage with audiences. The second part of this research focused on demographics, motivations, perceptions, and impact findings collected through the Audience Overview survey.
- **Pay & Conditions:** In collaboration with First Music Contact, we campaigned for more sustainable careers for those in the music and performing arts sectors. This resulted in three reports analysing pay and working conditions within the industry.

Strategic Transition:

In 2023, the organisation began developing its 2024-2028 strategy. This inclusive process, led by arts consultant Susan Coughlan, involved extensive consultations with the executive team, board, and members, funders and other stakeholders including meetings, a strategy away day, and a membership survey. The outcome was a new strategy and a proposed name change to Performing Arts Forum, which was approved by the membership at the September 2023 AGM. This transition is pivotal for future growth, increased member engagement, and sustained impact.

2023 Year-end outlook

As we close 2023, we look forward to building on the solid foundations established during this pivotal year. Our focus remains on supporting artists and arts workers and fostering a more sustainable arts ecosystem, with the implementation of our 2024-2028 strategy playing a central role in achieving these goals.

Closing Remarks

I wish to extend my gratitude to our members, partners, sponsors, and especially to the Arts Council, our principal funder. I also want to thank our 2023 executive team – Irma, Paul, Katie (who joined Culture Ireland in May), and of course Anna, who left after 11 years as Director to join the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in December. Their dedication has been invaluable in fostering a space for our community to gather and connect.

To my fellow board members, thank you for your continued support. In line with the company's Constitution, three of us will step down at this AGM, with myself and Orla Flanagan retiring, and Ronan Phelan standing for re-election.

As I step down as Chair, I leave with confidence in the vision, mission, and values that guide the organisation. With our core values of connection, change, and diversity at the heart of everything we do, Performing Arts Forum will continue to facilitate connections, enable change, and provide the resources that will shape a stronger future for the arts in Ireland. Mary Boland will take on the role and I wish her and the existing and new board members all the very best.

Thank you,

David Francis Moore

Chair, Theatre Forum CLG

Date: 27 September 2024