

**31st Annual General Meeting of the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras (and the 26th Annual General Meeting of IAYO Ltd) held on Sunday 06 October 2024 at 10 am online on Zoom.**

**Chairperson's Report delivered by Laoise O'Brien.**

## Welcome

Welcome everyone and thank you for taking the time to attend the Annual General Meeting of IAYO today.

It has been another exciting year at the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras, and, as you will hear, a busy one! The organisation continues to grow, and we are always looking to the future with optimism.

It is of note that IAYO passed the milestone of thirty years in existence on April 17th, 2024. It's not something we made a big deal about this year as we like to celebrate IAYO birthdays at the Festival of Youth Orchestras with our members and young people and we have started planning for an extra-special 30th Festival of Youth Orchestras in February 2026. We hope this will be at the National Concert Hall, but the potential renovation of the hall might cause us to replan this.

It has, as always, been a busy year at IAYO with courses, workshop and, of course, the Festival of Youth Orchestras in February. Since our last AGM, we had, for the first time, training for chamber music tutors alongside our Chamber Music Workshops involving observation and training at the course following an online training session. The workshops themselves were non-residential for the first time in more than 25 editions. This was so that we could bring the course into Dublin for the benefit of young players in the city without the very high cost of accommodation that we would have to pay. We will hold the workshops and accompanying tutor workshops, both led by Katharine Mac Mághnuis, in Dublin again this year and they will then move out to the regions again from 2025.

The Festival in February under the long-time directorship of Carol Daly, saw a first-time performance at the National Concert Hall of the Irish Chamber Orchestra Youth Orchestra (now called ICO Youth) along with the Kylemore Music Centre Orchestra, Budding Bows from South East Technological University (formerly WIT) and the Coole Music Youth Orchestra from Galway. Also at the festival for the first time was the Music Generation Laois Trad Orchestra. It is very encouraging to see ensembles of traditional instruments playing in an orchestral style and it is a wonderful bridge between the worlds of classical and traditional music. Also in the evening performance of the Festival, our compere, Sean Rocks, took on the role of comedic narrator with the Ceol na Mara Orchestra in a new work for the orchestra, and the MTU Cork School of Music Symphony Orchestra impressed with a wonderful performance of the Firebird Suite.

Finally, a special performance at the Festival came by way of a collaborative performance including Carlow Youth Orchestra, Kiltra School of Music Youth Orchestra from Wexford, St Agnes' CCMA Chamber Orchestra and St Peter's National School Orchestra, both from

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Dublin. This collaboration, which saw concerts in Carlow and Dublin as well as shared rehearsals and social activities was funded under the 2023 edition of our Collaboration Grant scheme. Also funded in the 2023 scheme were joint rehearsals between the Rockwell Academy of Music, SETU Music School and Banna Chluain Meala in November, support for the ICO Youth in a collaboration with the Music Generation programmes in Louth and Kerry that was performed at the Music Generation National Conference, and a collaboration between Limerick School of Music, Midlands Youth Orchestra and the Julianstown Youth Orchestra. For the 2024 grants, we will see collaborations between Donegal Youth Orchestra, Coole Music Youth Orchestra and Mayo Youth Orchestra, between Fingal Youth Orchestra, Musica Fusion Youth Orchestra, Galway Youth Orchestra and MTU Cork School of Music and between County Tipperary Ryan Youth Orchestra, Carlow Youth Orchestra and the Cork ETB Youth Orchestra. We have been very impressed with the music collaborations so far and are very much looking forward to the results of this year's collaborations.

We note to members here that, following feedback from applicants, the grant application will happen earlier in the year in 2025 to allow for planning to happen before the summer for the autumn term.

The summer was as busy as ever, beginning with our Orchestral Conducting Workshops which looks to be settling in Cork with support from the MTU Cork School of Music. This year, Bobby Houlihan was again joined by Dr Geoffrey Spratt and the group was split according to ability and experience for the technique sessions. It is our hope to grow the numbers attending the course in coming years and thereby allow its further development.

The Irish Youth Baroque Orchestra, our collaboration with the Irish Baroque Orchestra, under the direction of IBO's Associate Leader, Claire Duff, was next in the summer lineup. The course this year had the largest number of instrumental participants so far in addition to being joined by six young dancers who took part in a parallel course and joined the orchestra for the last days of rehearsals. This year, for the first time, the orchestra had natural horns, trumpets and baroque timpani in addition to the woodwind and strings that have been the foundation in previous years. The wind programme, which is primarily taught online, continued this year as well as holding the "Online Introduction to Historically Informed Performance Practice". The IYBO played a concert in Dublin as part of the Irish Baroque Orchestra's HandelFest and also performed in the beautiful performance room in City Hall in Waterford, hosted by the Symphony Club of Waterford. Along with Handel's Water Music, the orchestra also performed the 'Celebrated Overture and Irish Medley to The Island of Saints' by Tommaso Giordani to which the dancers made up their own routine from steps learned during the week. One enthusiastic audience member was heard to say, "It was more Smock Alley than Hampton Court", Smock Alley having been a famous Dublin dancing venue for many, many years.

Following on from this, the Irish Youth Wind Ensemble and ConCorda Chamber Music Course for Strings ran concurrently in the University of Limerick and Waterford respectively. The Irish Youth Wind Ensemble, under the baton of Ronan O'Reilly, had a very large group of 79 participants this year as it gears up for its fortieth anniversary in 2025. Plans for next year include a commission of a new work to celebrate, a

performance at the IAYO Festival in February and travel to the Mid-Europe Festival in Austria in July. We are awaiting funding decisions to confirm the programme but do hope to put on a great year of celebration for the ensemble. This year, IYWE performed in Ardee and in SETU Arena in Waterford, also in association with Symphony Club of Waterford.

ConCorda continued in Newtown School in Waterford, its home for quite a few years under the direction of Peggy Nolan and artistic direction of Katharine Hunka. The standard of playing on this course continues to be very high and the 'Fellowship Quartet' programme, supported by the National String Quartet Foundation, continues with young professionals receiving tutoring and masterclasses from the ConCorda staff and, in turn, helping the young players on the course.

The Esker Festival Orchestra and Choir, under the baton of Peter Joyce, achieved its ambition this year of performing at the National Concert Hall. The orchestra features a cast of Irish and International advanced students and young professionals, and each year gives opportunities for young Irish professionals to perform concertos and commission and perform new works from Irish composers. This year, cellist Zoë Nagle performed the Elgar Cello Concerto and a new movement for Holst's The Planets, 'Earth, the Cradle of Life' by Tom Lane was performed as part of the suite.

Across all our courses and activities this year, we had very high levels of participation from young people, and we have also had very good audiences at the public concerts.

In workshops for members, we supported 'Body Mapping' workshops in late 2023 and also had an online forum for choosing repertoire in October. A number of workshops and consultations with members were also held online around the topic of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion as part of the creation of IAYO's policy and action plan. Online engagement thus far in 2024 has focussed on connecting with young people who are taking part in our activities including a pre-Festival gathering and an advance meeting with players from the Wind Ensemble. We also held an online gathering of members who have taken part in the collaboration grants and those who were thinking of applying. We did not deliver online child protection training this year as the interest in taking the Designated Liaison Course was somewhat low. However, members who want to see this training repeated should let the staff in the office know and we can arrange it again when needed. In early 2024, we also completed the Online Rehearsal guide that was created as part of our Erasmus+ project with the Norwegian youth orchestra federation. The adoption of online tools for teaching and rehearsing has slowed somewhat since life returned to normal after the pandemic but online interaction still provides a lot of opportunities for connecting that we continue to explore and develop. The online rehearsal guide can be downloaded from our website and printed copies are available from the office. Online activities for the near future include a series on recruiting and retaining players and on pathways to participation at national level. Keep an eye on our website and news channels for more information.

A growing part of our work in recent years has been raising the voices of young people within the organisation and our activities. Following consultation with young people at our AGM at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in 2023, we have constituted a Youth Voice Subcommittee of the Board which has been working towards the creation of a Youth Voice Charter for IAYO that will be completed by the end of the year. We have also re-

affirmed our earlier commitment to have young people on the board and plan to have young people between the ages of 18 and 25 observe and fill two seats at board level during the coming year. We will also be having a gathering of the Youth Subcommittee along with representatives of a number of other youth orchestras this term that is funded by the European Youth Foundation. We have put a comprehensive plan in place for developing a youth work approach in IAYO over the coming years and have applied for specific funding for this from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth through the Youth Services Grant Scheme. Other similar national youth arts organisations are funded through this scheme so we are hopeful that the funding will come through.

Our Ovation Awards have still not made it back on to the programme and we hope to reinstitute them again in the coming years as members have told us they value them, and the posters are displayed in many music schools and rehearsal spaces throughout the country. At the same time, the programming staff feel that the Festival of Youth Orchestras does run more smoothly without them.

Financially, the company is doing well enough although the inflation of the last few years is making for lots of negotiations and tailoring of plans to suit the means we have. We received a repeat grant from The Arts Council for 2024 which hasn't quite covered all of our needs, and we will likely dip into our reserves. We have secured some new funding through the European Youth Foundation and a grant under the Music Capital Scheme, but these do not contribute to our core running costs. We have applied for a significant increase from The Arts Council for 2025 and will know our allocation in December. We have also applied for significant funding through the Youth Services Grant Scheme through the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Such funding is specifically aimed at youth work and would contribute minimally to our musical resources and programming. However, it would contribute to our core costs while also allowing us to significantly increase the opportunities for young people on our activities to take leadership roles and to contribute directly to the development of IAYO and youth orchestras around Ireland.

Amongst the extra costs we have taken on this year is the very positive development that we now pay a training allowance to all of our contracted staff. As part of our Arts Council funding agreement, we are now required to have all staff take training in Bullying, Bystanding and Unconscious Bias. This comes on top of the need for staff to be Garda vetted, referenced, take the Tusla Children First E-Learning Programme, and to read and sign up to our Code of Behaviour for Working with Young People and the Safe to Create Dignity in the Workplace code of behaviour. While the cost of this is onerous without specific funding support, it has been noticeable in recent years that we were passing on more and more non-musical preparation to the nearly-100 contract staff who work with us annually and this was effectively reducing the rates of pay for musicians. We hope to have the programme fully rolled out over three years with all new staff then receiving the required training before joining us. All this training is self-directed, and the resources are available for free so if members wish to avail of them, we can signpost where to access the training.

The compliance and policy burden on IAYO and organisations like ours continues to be very heavy and in 2024, we will have completed a policy on Equality, Diversity and



Inclusion and one on Climate Action, both of these to be followed by action plans in 2025. We like to consider that one of the benefits of our working so intently on policy is that this can be of benefit to members that need or want to implement the policies and best-practice that goes with them. Most of our policies are available on the 'transparency' section of our website and members can request editable copies from the office including copies with changes marked from earlier versions of the same policies so that members can update their own versions without starting from scratch again.

The staff have been updating the information we hold about members over the last year. The change from paper membership forms to all-online meant that we didn't have up-to-date information on the membership for a few years. For members who have not provided us with updated information, please do so: you can get a link to the relevant form in the office, or you can just ring in and one of the staff will take notes and fill the form out for you. It looks like we will have a drop of between ten and fifteen members following the pandemic. Some of this represents the normal turnover of orchestras starting and winding up but some is very likely related to the closures of the pandemic itself.

In terms of membership fees, we have seen a drop off in the number of payments this year although, having increased the membership fee at last year's AGM, the amount collected rose slightly. We welcome feedback about the membership fees but would urge members to remember to pay fees annually as the number of current members forms an important part of our case for support to The Arts Council and other funders.

We are still awaiting the publication of the Arts Council-commissioned report on Youth Orchestra Provision in Ireland that was completed last year. The research, of which we have a copy for internal use, provided a very good snapshot of activity in Ireland and made recommendations around which our community could align to advocate for better provision. As most of us will already know, access to musicianship training at a foundational level through the education system continues to be the biggest barrier to access for playing instruments in the classical style and in participating in orchestras and classical ensembles. We continue to ask for the release of the research and will distribute it to members as soon as we can.

On the international scene, we continue to engage with the European Orchestra Federation and our board member, Carol Daly, is currently on the board of EOFed. Our administrator, Jack Mahony, is taking part in the European Music Council Fellowship Programme this year which has involved attendance at the European Forum on Music and continued networking and mentoring throughout the year. Our CEO, Allin, is joining us from Hamburg this morning where he is attending a conference on the importance of orchestras to society, hosted jointly by the German orchestra association, BDLO, the World Federation of Amateur Orchestras and EOFed. All going well, he will have delivered a talk and discussion this morning on music as an alternative to consumerism. I'll take this opportunity to remind members that the EOFed European Orchestra Festival will take place in Avignon in France from 28th May to 1st June next year. It is a wonderful opportunity for orchestral players from around Europe to play together in the various workshop orchestras and also perform to an international audience with their own orchestra.

We also continue to keep up our ties with the Association of British Orchestras and the UK national-level ensembles that are part of ABO. At this year's ABO conference in Bristol, the conference was opened with videos of young people from around the UK and Ireland talking about their experiences and love of playing in orchestras. The conference was attended by Rachel Dunne-Lambe, our Youth Participation Officer and we do hope that our young board members or young people from our Youth Subcommittee may get the opportunity to take part in person in the future. We share many of the same concerns around youth music across our islands and it is good for us to make an extra effort to keep in touch now that the UK has left the EU.

As always, we are grateful to The Arts Council for their strong support for IAYO and the work that we do. Without this support, we would not be able to deliver our services to member orchestras and young musicians. We are working steadily on opening up new sources of funding so we can continue to deliver our full programme and develop new opportunities for members and young people alike.

I would like to close by thanking our staff, Allin, Edel, Jack, Rachel, Sinéad and Sibéal for the incredible work they have done in the last year on behalf of IAYO and our membership. Congratulations are due to Sinéad who is on maternity leave after the arrival of her daughter, Aifric, earlier in the year. Sibéal, who we first met at our Festival Orchestra in 2015 and who has been part of numerous IAYO activities since as a volunteer and paid staff, is keeping Sinéad's seat warm and getting our programmes ready for 2025.

I would very much like to thank all of the board members that have served this past year and especially those who are stepping down. Carol Daly, Wendy Arlow and Denise Ní Dhuibhir have given a huge amount of their time and expertise to the board over the past number of years. I know Carol's work with the festival has been phenomenal, but she has also helped to strengthen our links internationally and has been a consistently positive voice at board meetings over the years. Wendy has contributed massively to our governance at IAYO. I know she has worked closely with Allin on numerous pieces of policy and other items relating to good governance. As Vice Chair, Wendy has been a huge support to me since taking on the role of Chair. Her counsel and encouragement have been invaluable to me, and I would like to thank her on a personal level for her support. I would also like to thank Denise who stood down earlier in the year due to personal commitments. Denise's expertise in the area of EDI was of particular value during the process of developing our EDI policy and on behalf of the board I'd like to thank her for her commitment to IAYO over the last number of years.

We have two nominations for the board at today's meeting, Kathrine Barnecutt and Avril Crotty, who's biographies have been circulated previously. We will also be welcoming Anna Rosa Mari, the General Manager of the National Youth Orchestra of Ireland who will be co-opted to the board in a return to a practice from the early years of IAYO where the organisations worked closely together and co-ordinated plans. We are very much looking forward to working with all three.

I would like to thank the members of the board for their enormous input over the last year. We welcomed two new members, Matthew Toal and Mark Thomas and their professional experience, particularly in the area of finance, has greatly enhance the board's understanding of the complex finances of the organisation. Alongside Allin's

meticulous work in this area, and Liam's terrific oversight as Treasurer, the board has a very transparent and comprehensive understanding of our finances. Each member of the board brings a set of skills that allows us to look at the organisation through different lenses. I am enormously grateful to the board for their generosity and wise counsel over the last year. And on behalf of all of us, I'd like to especially thank Allin for his role in supporting the board in our work.

Finally, a huge thank you to our musical directors, our tutors, our course staff and volunteers and to the member of IAYO, without whom there would be no association of youth orchestras. I look forward to another year of music-making and witnessing the transformative experiences that all our collective efforts bring to the lives of young musicians.

Thank you all for attending today's AGM, it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to share our experiences and passion for what we do.

Laoise O'Brien  
Chairperson