

Selection Criteria for the Festival of Youth Orchestras

The Irish Association of Youth Orchestras Festival of Youth Orchestras is held annually at the National Concert Hall in Dublin.

The Festival is a non-competitive event that aims to give youth orchestras and their young players the opportunity to perform on Ireland's national stage to the best of their ability.

The Festival is open to all member orchestras of the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras. Orchestras of all levels, standards and sizes are welcome to participate.

Membership: Participating orchestras must be members or affiliated to member organisations of IAYO.

Variety of Orchestras: It is the ethos of the Festival that it is representative of the youth orchestra community in Ireland. The selection process aims to include a variety of orchestras for each year's performances from:

- junior to senior;
- small to large;
- traditional format (string orchestra, symphony orchestra) to unorthodox (including wind ensembles and orchestras that contain non-standard instruments);
- near beginners to near professionals;
- school, community, third level and others;
- different parts of Ireland and Northern Ireland representing a good geographical spread.

Standard: There is no set requirement for the standard of the orchestras. All are welcome. The main consideration here is for the young people. Can they come and play in the National Concert Hall and feel that they deserve to be there and that their standard of performance is acceptable? In assessing the standard of an orchestra, the suitability of the proposed repertoire will be taken into account. Repertoire should provide a challenge and the chance for musical growth but should not be overly ambitious.

Composition: There is no requirement for an orchestra to fit a particular model. Instrumental combinations always vary with youth orchestras. Aiming to reach a specific composition or standard as part of the Festival preparation process is always desirable and orchestras should be helped to do this. Particularly, it is be pointed out to orchestras

that augmenting the ensemble through collaboration with another orchestra or including some adults in exposed or necessary parts is not against the rules. Again, the main consideration is the young people involved. Will the inclusion of some adult players enhance their experience?

Size: There is no minimum size set for orchestras. However, small ensembles should be able to carry the weight of performance well. 4,4,3,3,1 for a senior string ensemble is perfectly adequate. However, this configuration could be unsuitable in a junior orchestra that does not have performance experience. In the past, performances have included a string quintet, an eight-piece percussion ensemble, twenty-three double basses, wind ensembles and (in 2012) a jazz big band present at the Festival.

The 'Big' Orchestra: It has been the practice to include a full symphony orchestra as the finale to the Festival. On occasion, when no such orchestra has applied, invitations / requests have been issued to orchestras from the main urban centres that can provide large orchestras of a high standard. The reasons for this include:

- part of the mission of the Festival is to 'present excellence in the youth orchestra movement to a wider public through youth orchestra festivals.' This can be seen to require that the top level of Irish youth orchestras is represented. However, the general standard of performance of youth orchestras has risen and is still rising and there are many smaller and more rural orchestras that present excellence for their level of development and resources.
- it has always been felt that a 'big noise' forms a suitable ending to the Festival. However a very tight performance by a smaller group can enthral the audience and have them standing to applaud.

Last Performance: There is a positive weighting towards orchestras that have not ever performed at the Festival or who have not performed for a number of years.

Last Applied: There is a positive weighting towards orchestras if they have applied recently and not been selected. This is qualified by the date of last performance at the festival, if any.

Records: Records of applications for and performances by orchestras in the Festival are referenced for at least six years prior to the current round of applications.

Geographical spread: It is aimed to have a regional spread of orchestras around the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. This is considered in the context of other aspects of applications.

Repertoire: It is aimed to have a balance of arrangements and original scores amongst the repertoire to be played, representing the variety of choices of music by youth orchestras at different standards and stages of development. Commissions and new Irish

music are most welcome. There are still many young people out there who think that all composers are dead, never mind having seen, met, or worked with one. There is currently no procedure for advance applications for orchestras that wish to commission for the Festival.

Audience Potential: Selling tickets for the Festival is important financially. However, a greater consideration is getting a good audience for the performers. Performing to a full National Concert Hall is a much more memorable experience than performing to a half-full National Concert Hall. It should be noted that junior orchestras bring their extended families and friends along as it is often likely to be their first, and possibly only, performance at the National Concert Hall. Senior orchestras, particularly those from Dublin, have a much smaller audience potential. This consideration has minor weighting in the decisions regarding applications.