

Chairman's Report 2022

As the effects of the pandemic began to dissipate and the Covid clouds lifted, our focus and efforts in 2022 turned towards transitioning and navigating to a more settled social and musical landscape. In spite of some residual reverberations from Covid, our CEO Laura and the entire Feis team of staff, adjudicators and volunteers succeeded in delivering a 2022 Feis that, in the circumstances, was as near as physically possible to a "normal Feis". After our cancellation in 2020 and our online format in 2021 this return to near normality was greeted by all involved with relief and no small measure of joy.

In order to minimise the potential risk of infection with ensembles we opted for the abundance of caution approach and continued the choir and orchestra competitions in an online format.

But all of the individual competitions and their participation rates returned to normal and, if that were not enough, the team profited from the 2021 online experience and carried over the practice of uploading to the Feis website videos of a selection of competitions and adjudications.

On top of this, and undaunted by the uncertain environment, the team also managed to research, develop and add a new Percussion competition to the Feis programme. Surely a case of "Who dares wins".

It truly is a time for adaptation, resilience and innovation, and Laura and the team are to be congratulated for demonstrating all of these qualities in responding to the changed environment. Not unexpectedly the enthusiasm and fearlessness of youth shone through as the competitors eagerly returned in numbers, enthusiastically embracing the new norm. Music only comes to life with performance and part of the mission of the Feis is to provide performance platforms for rising musicians. I am pleased to report that this activity was expanded in 2022 by finally giving life to some of the planned Feis 125th Anniversary events originally scheduled for 2021. For example, recitals in Farmleigh, St. Ann's Church and the Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris all proved successful events for performers and audiences. Over the past two years, music teachers all over the island of Ireland, experienced disruption in their activities that necessitated reorganising and adapting their normal working routines. They more than coped with the new demands and, in the context of our mutual interest, maintained their steady supply of talented Feis entrants.

I want to recognise the vital support of all of our sponsors – RDS as our primary grant provider; Carmel Naughton, SteriPack, ESB, for its support over the last decade; and a most welcome grant from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. I must also mention two gifts we received from generous friends of the Feis who requested anonymity.

So, I am pleased to report that the overall financial health of the Feis remains sustainable as you will see in the Financial Statements. However, given the uncertainty of times ahead, we will continue our quest for additional funds and funders to support our growth into new festival and performance opportunities.

I would like to thank our loyal Members, our tireless and generous volunteers and all those who help make the Feis happen. Many similar associations and bodies in Ireland in 2022 have been beset with difficulties in finding and retaining permanent or part-time staff. Luckily, and thanks to the loyal support of our volunteers, this has not been an issue for the Feis.

I would like to thank each and every member of the Board for their dedication and contribution to every aspect of the remit of the Feis. They continue to bring to the table an extraordinary range and depth of music, education and business experience which they are happy and eager to share for the furtherance of the role of the Feis in Irish musical life. They are truly a unique crew of music lovers.

With the pandemic firmly in our rear-view mirror, I believe we are better equipped than ever to move forward embracing new technology and platforms both technical and performing, amplifying their effect to encourage and facilitate the enjoyment and promotion of music in Irish life.

And we all definitely look forward with confidence and relish to the return of a 100% live Feis in 2023.

Ray Bates

Chair, Feis Ceoil