

2023 Feis Ceoil AGM – Chairman’s Report

On Behalf of the Board of Directors, it gives me great pleasure to present the Feis Ceoil Association’s (the “Feis Ceoil”) Annual Report in respect of the year ended 31 July 2023.

In last year’s Annual Report, we expressed our pleasure at our success in delivering a 2022 Feis that was as near normal as possible, albeit involving a cautious curtailment of some of our regular competitions. It is only in retrospect, and after experiencing the full blown live 2023 Feis that we realised just how much had been missing in 2022. As Joni Mitchell put it in her Big Yellow Taxi, “You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.” There really are no words to capture the sheer joy, exuberance, and enthusiasm of 5000 entrants participating in some 200 live competitions across 12 days at Easter. In particular, those competitors who would have experienced the virtual or hybrid events in the early 2020's would have been particularly appreciative of the full impact of the 2023 live Feis on their participation, engagement and all-round experience.

Simply put, in 2023, the “Festival” dimension of our mission was restored; the world was back on its axis and music and live performance, especially the group events – choirs and ensembles - were once more back where they belong.

Over the 127 years of the Feis Ceoil’s history it has evolved and been developed from a once-a-year event to a substantial “year-round” programme. This has been achieved by the progressive addition to its core Festival/Competition of non-competitive events such as Gala Concerts, recitals, workshops and international platform events. This development programme was continued and expanded in 2023 and will include additional collaborative partnerships in 2024 to help take certain senior competitions onto a more professional level. These developments as well as the addition of two new competitions are covered and expanded in our CEO, Laura’s Report.

As the influence of social media grows in the music world, Feis is moving with the times in providing more services, support and facilities for competitors and Members as well as stepping up to the mark as content providers by making more and more competition performances available online. Our project for developing a recorded history of the Feis is progressing and will provide a living and rich online archive for a future generation of users.

The logistics and organisational effort needed to produce a successful Feis, even in normal times, should never be underestimated and our CEO, Laura, and the entire Feis team of staff, adjudicators and army of volunteers are to be again warmly congratulated for another outstanding year.

Over recent years, music teachers all over the island of Ireland, experienced disruption in their activities that necessitated reorganising and adapting their normal working routines. The number of entries in Feis 2023 showed that the efforts of music teachers paid rich dividends with the number of entries in 2023 exceeding those of 2022. The mutual interest of Feis and music teachers, while obvious, is

worth recalling to highlight the importance of our continuing mutual support into the future.

I want to recognise the vital support of all our sponsors – RDS as our primary grant provider as well as Carmel Naughton and SteriPack and thank them for their confidence and support. I would also like to thank all those friends of the Feis who have provided bursaries and prizes for individual competitions.

I can report that the overall financial health of the Feis remains sustainable as you will see in the Financial Statements. However, our five-year agreements with various funders have now come to an end, putting pressure on us to seek additional sources of funding to support our growth and development plans for the future.

I would like to thank our loyal Members, our tireless and generous volunteers who contribute in so many minor and major ways, as well as all who help make the Feis happen.

I would also 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 generously share for the furtherance of the role of the Feis in Irish musical life. They are truly a special group of music lovers.

Not for the first time we find ourselves in a place where it would be reassuring for us to see a more certain and guaranteed future financial outlook. However, we are actively exploring new sources of funding both private and public. It is our hope that, as mere stewards of one thread of the future of classical music in Ireland, we will succeed in sourcing one or more funder-benefactors who appreciate the vital role played by Feis Ceoil.

Ray Bates
Chair