

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

*“A Creative Community
Nurturing Irish Culture”*

**Vem ne pre cora quae
pa deriamet**

*Dunt qui natatemque iunt
offic tem quas sae nist,
ulparum utatem qui to volla-
tissus nones escia idessit, non
nus reperspelis rerum volorro
berum aut*

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A chairde a chara. Guím gach rath oraibh go léir agus tá súil agam agus gui go bhfuil tú sábháilte agus folláin.



Greetings to all in Comhaltas na Breataine. With the yearly report we think of all those happy memories concerned with all our branches. Our previous ideas, concerns, and actions are even more amplified by this present pandemic. Tragedies, and crisis caused by coronavirus have challenged us, but I have witnessed the spirit of Comhaltas spreading cheer, happiness and understanding. I am honoured to be asked to write a few words for Comhaltas na Breataine, who have led the way in a world wide powerful message, with examples of our work in the internet presentation of féile na Breataine. This lifted the spirits and morale of all.

History would show that in challenging times, people would gather 'round the fire' to talk, tell stories, sing songs, play music and dance to celebrate life. Throughout, neighbours would look out for each other, and particularly those who are alone and isolated. So, it has been during this Covid outbreak. People can

be a real inspiration.

Regions and Provinces are now invited to take part in FleadhFest, a Comhaltas initiative that will fill the vacuum in the absence of fleadhanna, and will help us look towards being back to normality. I would encourage all our members to be active in FleadhFest, because you have a lot to offer.

Gabhaimíd buiochas Le Riablas na hÉireann.

Le gach dea – ghui,
Uinsíonn MacSiúrtáin.

Uachtarán Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

A NEW DAWN AWAITS US

Dr. Labhrás Ó Murchú, Ardstiúrthóir CCÉ

Bliain nua. Dúshlán nua. Dóchas nua agus beart de réir ár mbriathar. Ní dhéanfar dearmad le fada an lá ar 2020 agus na cruatain a bhí ag gabháil leis. Ach freisin, ní dhéanfar dearmad ach a mhalairt ar na dea-scéalta a tháinig chun tosaigh in am an ghátair. Bímis dílis, díograiseach agus flaitiúil anois ar an ród seo romhainn.

A new year. A new challenge. A new dawn. New hope and a determination to overcome adversity in the midst of a pandemic. 2020 will long be remembered for its hardships, uncertainty and widespread disappointment and sadness. However, it will also be remembered for the many acts of kindness, compassion and creativity.

We also recall the many fine Comhaltas colleagues and friends who have passed to their Eternal Reward. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha.

The exceptional response of many people and branches to keep the music playing has left us with a memory and legacy which lifted our spirits and will, le cúnamh Dé, sustain us in our efforts in 2021.

The regular meetings of the Ardchomhairle via zoom throughout the COVID-19 pandemic exemplified the determination to keep the ship afloat and on course come what may. We assessed each new development and provided speedy responses. We sourced and distributed funds to units where this was deemed necessary.

Comhaltas na Breataine too has been an inspiration to us all. Through initiative, innovation and creativity you have excelled in your response to the pandemic crisis. Congratulations to each and every one of you. You are a credit to Comhaltas and your community. Bail ó Dhia oraibh.





CAPITAL RESEQUA

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CATHAOIRLEACH AN CHÚIGE

With this annual report we celebrate the achievements of Comhaltas in Britain, and goodness what a year for my first year having the privilege of being Cathaoirleach.

To quote my predecessor, Michael Nevin, “One thing you can say about the Comhaltas is that no two years are ever the same and this year proved to be no exception. “

Little did we all know when he penned this statement in February 2020, the challenges that we must overcome and gain strength from. But with a dynamic team, with fresh ideas and excellent communication skills, strength is what was built upon.

I would like to thank and pay tribute to the team of Provincial Council Officers, our Regional Cathaoirleach and delegates, branch Cathaoirleach, volunteers and members, as well as our 4 Project Officers and their manager, Jim Teevan. You have all risen to, and overcome with enthusiasm, the challenges of the year.

This was a year when our main aims were:

- to continue with the restructuring of Comhaltas in Britain,
- developing the skills and confidence of the volunteers, musicians, singers and dancers.
- providing opportunities to increase the health of musicians, volunteers and communities,
- increasing the membership and branches
- increasing the income of the Province to facilitate the salary commitments for the Project Officers.

Coupled with these was the challenge to remain open for business and in contact with the membership and wider diaspora, as well as our partner organisations following on from the March 20 lockdown. But we have our enthusiastic and innovative Provincial Council and the Investors in People award as our positive starting point for where our journey would continue.

We had many challenges but the two which stand out for me, and to which I devoted most time and energy was the Communication and restructuring, due to financial constrictions.

The management team, made up of Margaret Webster, Maire Doolin and I, in conversation with the Provincial Council, realised fairly quickly that the charity, Comhaltas in Britain could not sustain the financial commitments that we currently have. The Project Officers were tasked with generating funds to support this issue.

Though many of their normal funding sources were suspended due to Covid, they diligently scoured funding trails and applied for as many as possible. By July, it was apparent that we would



be unable to fend off the prospect of reducing our staff numbers to what we could afford, but also identified the need for Comhaltas in Britain to embrace a more digital presence, as well as a fundraising one, following on from the successes of the Feile, Never Too Late to Learn, Meet the Team, Adjudicator Seminar, Online teaching Guidance, Covid Guidance for branches and the Mental Health Training.

Comhaltas in Britain were leading the way, producing and tweaking our own An Rod Seo Romhain (Road Map), reacting to issues as they arose and overcoming them, as best we could.

The management team began more frequent meetings with the Jim Teevan and the Project Officers in an effort to encourage and generate alternative ideas and opportunities for funding sources and resources. The 4 Officers were advised of their risk of redundancy, as per ACAS guidelines and with UK employment law at the forefront to protect the Officers and the organisation, in mid-October unfortunately, via a zoom meeting.

We also initiated discussions with the Irish in Britain, Headquarters in Dublin and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), where 80% of the salaries are funded from. We are very grateful to them for the ongoing help, support and guidance.

Following on from this, in conjunction with core Provincial Council Committee, job descriptions and criteria's were compiled to continue to serve the needs of the charity going forward, for 2.5 posts, which the Officers were advised of in early December and encouraged to apply. The recruitment process initially was an internal one. The interview process took place for a Digital Marketing Project Officer and a Provincial and Corporate Officer in Early January '21.

Two of our long serving officers, John and Michelle, have been advised of their redundancy which will come into effect in April 21. We thank them for their commitment to Comhaltas in Britain, and wish them well as well as offering support, if required, to pursue other avenues on their journey, whilst always welcome to Comhaltas in Britain.

Going forward we will continue with similar aims to last session, ensuring that the branches in need of financial support to continue their membership, are encouraged to develop and gain strength. We will continue to utilise the Investors in People reports which advise of our strengths and areas for development. An updated review is due in March, part of the organisations ongoing self-evaluation.

Paddy and Patrick remain with us, as the Digital and Marketing, and Provincial and Corporate Officers, on our evolving journey to support of our projects, Regional and Provincial boards, as well as our diaspora and partners throughout the country and abroad. We congratulate them on their successful interviews and forthcoming appointments.

We long for a time when we can all meet up and rejoice in our heritage. When community comes together it brings out the best in people and makes the future seem much brighter. We look forward to these times which are on the horizon.

RÚNAÍ AN CHÚIGE

Comhaltas in Britain has been adversely affected by COVID 19 and if what scientists predict is true it could last well into 2022. The initial impact restricted our ability to play tunes, to socialize and enjoy the craic. However, we rose to the challenge despite the restrictions and adversity, our music, songs, stories and dancing have not stopped.

Our branches adapted to the restrictions and moved online for lessons and to connect with each other, the videos, Facebook posts and pictures give testimony to the desire to keep the music going. I pay tribute to the excellent work undertaken by our branches and volunteers and the joy that has been brought into many homes.

It has been a very difficult year presenting huge challenges to how we operate and adhere to our governance obligations. However, we overcame the challenge by holding meetings via Zoom and adhering to

our due diligence obligations.

Once the initial shock of the pandemic settled into a “new normal”, our attention shifted to running Fleadh Fest to bring our music into the homes of many who had to isolate, and engage new members or friends of Comhaltas- it was a fantastic success and credit must be paid to our Project Officers who were the driving force behind it.

The pandemic has helped us to realise that change can be positive and despite the restrictions, we could still contribute to our local communities i.e. St Patrick’s Day celebrations, delivering Food parcels playing music, Facebook Live etc. These are the records that in the future will allow us to look back and reflect on the present, and the significance of the events of this pandemic for history.

go raibh maith agat

Never too late to learn

Tin whistle Lessons



ADJUDICATORS SEMINAR

Every few years the Comhaltas in Britain Music Sub-Committee (MSC) facilitate an adjudicator training seminar weekend in order to train new adjudicators and deliver refreshers for existing adjudicators. Several years ago the Music Sub-Committee created a new 'Introduction to Adjudication' seminar which was aimed at those who were starting their journey to becoming an adjudicator. Plans had been afoot from 2019 that there would be a repeat of this seminar towards the end of 2020.

As with many projects across the world, plans were disrupted heavily by the Covid-19 pandemic – particularly given the seminar follows a residential weekend format which simply isn't possible due to current restrictions. Early on, discussions had taken place as to the possibility of hosting the seminar online using a video conferencing platform and eventually the decision was taken to go ahead using this format.

The seminar itself was held over 21st-22nd November 2020 and attracted 32 participants from across Britain who all demonstrated a real passion for traditional Irish music, song, dance and language and a willingness to learn and contribute their own knowledge and experiences to the benefit of those taking part.

The various elements of the course were delivered by members of the MSC and the emphasis was on giving the aspiring adjudicators an insight in to what the experience of adjudicating is like, and what qualities are required to be a successful adjudicator. From listening activities to debating scenarios which have (and regularly do) occurred to looking at examples of the good and bad when it comes to writing adjudication sheets, the maturity shown amongst the participants was excellent.

Particularly due to the online format of the seminar, the MSC were keen to gather feedback from participants in order to gauge what elements of the course worked well in a virtual format and which ones would need to be tweaked going forward should the need arise to host online events in the future.

Feedback exceeded all expectations with all participants saying that the seminar was interactive and engaging and with the exception of 1 response, all participants felt the seminar worked well in an online format. All participants said they would recommend the seminar to a friend which is fantastic.

Once covid-19 restrictions ease and Fleadhanna are once again able to resume, we will soon have a new group of adjudicators ready to help facilitate these competitions

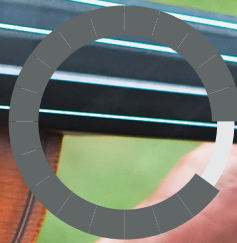
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Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic it was clear for quite some time that the All-Britain Fleadh scheduled to take place at the University of West London would not go ahead. As the main event of the Comhaltas in Britain calendar in terms of being the largest organised event by the Province and also the single largest opportunity for the province to boost its revenue from a sole event, the Fleadh has huge importance to the ongoing operations of Comhaltas in Britain let alone the event itself.

In May 2020, a proposal was put forward to the Provincial Council by Project Officer Paddy Callaghan that we should host an online festival over the weekend that was already scheduled for the Fleadh. The proposal was adopted and grew in to 'FÉILE – Comhaltas in Britains BIG Virtual Weekend 2020'

A committee was established featuring Provincial Council Leas Cathaoirleach Patrick Ballantyne, P.R.O. Michael Fitzgerald, Youth Officer David Browne and led by Project Officer Paddy Callaghan to deliver the event, and over the course of the next 2 months many other individuals were brought on board for their expertise including the remaining 3 Project Officers; Patrick Morrison, Michelle O'Leary & John Devine, and also Calum McGregor from Irish Minstrels CCÉ.

A change of use request for funding was submitted to the Irish Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade so that we could allocate funds which were originally ringfenced for the All-Britain Fleadh to the FÉILE and this was kindly granted meaning we had some flexibility in being able to deliver an event which appealed to a wide audience.

The FÉILE committee began by thinking big. The easy option for the event would have been to broadcast content over 3 or 4 hours each evening of the weekend, but this was never considered, the team were committed to delivering a full weekend of immersive content, with grass-roots Comhaltas members being the focal point. A call was put out to all branches to record videos for submission and originally 2 hours was pencilled in to accommodate these videos (with the idea that should submissions fall short, some may be repeated twice to make up the shortfall). Come the weekend of the FÉILE, the 2 hours had grown in to almost 6 as the number of videos sent in from far and wide blew away all expectations.

15 world class tutors were brought on board to each record a 1hr workshop in their chosen discipline, and to record a recital which would be broadcast live over the weekend (some of the tutors chose to broadcast the recital live as opposed recording in advance). The quality of tutors attracted helped underline the scale of the event, the FÉILE was big in every scale. I'd like to thank the following tutors for their expertise and professionalism in helping make the FÉILE such a big success: Conor Broderick – Piano, Adam Brown – Bodhran, Paul Clesham – Concertina, Kevin Crawford – Whistle, Michael Curran – Button Accordion, Tim Edey – Guitar, Colin Farrell – Fiddle, Edwina Guckian – Sean Nós Dance, Niall Hanna – Song, Emer Maguire – Gaeilge, Tadhg Maher – Piano Accordion, Orlaith McAuliffe – Flute, Ryan Murphy – Uilleann Pipes, Michael Rooney – Harp, and Ciaran Ryan – Banjo

Alongside the recitals and footage of our members, we also featured a number of special events including a live Trad Disco and a broadcast featuring the Echoes of Erin concert tour which tours Britain every year. The special event though was undoubtedly the premier of the Macalla 1916 event from the Barbican in London in 2016 – including a behind the scenes 30 minute show curated by Calum McGregor. The FÉILE needed a big event to underpin the online festival, and Macalla 1916 was undoubtedly it!

Although the event broadcast footage absolutely free to view on Facebook and YouTube for over 32 hours over the 3 day weekend, the workshops from the tutors were available to those only via the Comhaltas in Britain website for a short fee (£5 for members, and £10 for those who signed up just to take part in the workshops).

Overall, the take-up of the workshops was fantastic with over 154 people signing up – generating over £1,000 for the Province which has been particularly welcomed in these times. What has been the much wider success however, is the reach of the event with a much bigger audience than we could ever have imagined. In the 3 weeks previous to the event and one week following it, the number of people following our Facebook profile had increased by almost 30%. Unique 'views' of our Facebook page (actual individuals, with multiple views and visits only being counted once towards the total) over the same period was 286,984. Never in our wildest dreams did we think the event would expose Comhaltas in Britain to over a quarter of a million people, but the results are a testament to the work of the committee in making sure the content was engaging and that the growth would be viral.

Events on the scale of FÉILE don't happen by accident, they are the result of incredible hard work, of vision and ultimately of a will to show resilience in the face of adversity. The team and wider support network involved went above and beyond in a way to deliver an event that was as notable for its scale as its professionalism. Whilst creating an event that Comhaltas members could be hugely proud of, it is one which opened our organisation and the work that we do to a whole new audience and affirmed our status as an organisation who are on the front foot.

With physical events once again being challenging to arrange given the still uncertain nature of restrictions due to Covid-19, there will undoubtedly be an emphasis this year once again on an online element to our Fleadh season, and thanks to FÉILE we have the blueprint in place to ensure it will be a success once again.

I would like to offer special thanks and appreciation to the entire Provincial Council and all the Project Officers for welcoming me on board to the team and helping me learn the provincial ropes. Finally, I would like to thank all branch and regional officers for your continued hard work and innovation during the last 12 months. It has been incredibly challenging but your hard work is recognised and greatly appreciated. If you need my support over the next 12 months then please do contact me.

NA NÓG YOUTH REPORT

2020 will always be a year to remember for Comhaltas in Britain. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has brought ever-changing restrictions on gatherings and travel. As such, we have required to be flexible and adapt the way in which we work as an organisation.

It was great to see branches engaging young people in new ways by embracing technology and continuing to pass on the tradition through a digital medium. As well as conventional lessons in music and song, this has brought opportunity for new projects for youth members to get involved in such as collaborative videos and online recitals.

Branch, regional and even the Provincial committee have also adopted Zoom for online meetings. Although it is unfortunate that we cannot continue to meet in person, it has brought significant reduction in expense to the Province.

Investment in Zoom licences for the province was of massive benefit to allow all of these meetings and classes to take place. We have created an online booking system where branches can book slots to host meetings and events. Feedback has been positive that it's an intuitive and hassle-free system.

Our hallmark event this year was "Feile 2020 – Comhaltas in Britain's Virtual Big Weekend" – an online 'virtual' festival weekend streamed

on Facebook and Youtube. This was conceived to replace the weekend of festivities that would have been the All Britain Fleadh. It was a great – albeit stressful – weekend with various recitals and masterclasses from expert tutors across UK, Ireland & USA; Macalla 1916 recorded in the Barbican Theatre; highlights from Echoes of Erin; footage of music that our branches had been working on in lockdown and a 'Gig Rig' comprising of tracks from more established bands and artists. Of course, the weekend would not be complete without a Trad Disco with our own DJ Paddy Callaghan.

It surpassed all our expectations and reached an astounding 280,000 people across various platforms! Programming, production and broadcast was all done in house by our 'Feile Team' led by Paddy Callahan along with myself, Patrick Ballantyne, Michael Fitzgerald and with help from Ard Comhairle's Orla Brannigan. In addition to the live broadcast, we created a "Member's Area" within the Comhaltas in Britain website. This allowed audience members to become a "Friend of Comhaltas" and have extended access to broadcast material, creating a stream of income for the Provincial Council

It has been great to see the youth leading the way with new innovative ideas, progressing the way we work within Comhaltas in Britain. It is key we reflect on this and plan forwards

Provincial Youth Officer
DAVID BROWNE
davidbrowne@comhaltas.co.uk



Photo credit: CCÉ/ Ena Doocey

2020's BAPTISM OF FIRE

Since our last Comhaltas in Britain Convention, there's been a lot of water under the bridge.

We could not have imagined at that meeting, that very shortly after, the world as we knew it would change so much. The onset of the dreaded Covid-19 has changed the lives of every individual in the world in some way or another. As far as we in Comhaltas are concerned, a lot of us have lost loved ones to the disease and the vast majority have lost friends or acquaintances at home and abroad. We have not been able to visit family or friends in Ireland and in most cases in Britain since last March.

Comhaltas has been to the fore in using the latest technology available to keep its membership worldwide up to date with the latest developments in the organisation. This has extended to bringing music, song and dance into every home that has a device to connect to the worldwide web. In particular, Comhaltas in Britain has been a leading light in the use of this technology. With thanks to our team of Development Workers and Provincial Council committees, we introduced "A Tune a Day" videos which is still running and there were also "Meet the Team" videos where each member of Provincial Council introduced themselves and either played or sang, or nominated their favourite piece of music.

In the absence of Fleadh Cheoil na Breataine, we produced a weekend of the finest Workshops, Master classes and sessions from all across the Comhaltas spectrum which included a very successful Storytelling competition. We are indebted to the Féile Committee for the unstinting amount of work that went into making the weekend a huge success. A lot of sleep was lost in the run up to and over the weekend making sure that the event ran smoothly.

Comhaltas in Britain also produced an official Christmas card designed by one of our junior members and "A Message from Ireland" for the Irish Diaspora worldwide. We carried on our usual business using "Zoom" (something I had not heard of until the pandemic struck, but now use on a daily basis). Our branches and regions have also been using technology to have their meetings online. Music classes are now run very successfully on Zoom, Skype, Google or any number of internet-based platforms. We have become adept at keeping in touch with each other on Email, Whatsapp and other messenger platforms.

Comhaltas in Britain has also produced a booklet online on how to conduct meetings and Music classes in an online setting. In most cases we were forced to either get to grips with the use of technology or get left behind and fortunately in the case of Comhaltas there is always help at the end of a phone line and any member of the organisation is only too willing to respond.

A huge thank you must go to the Irish Government and the Dept of Foreign Affairs for their continued support over the years and especially in this time of crisis.

As the Comhaltas in Britain delegate to the Ard Comhairle I've also been busy with "Zoom", we've continued to have our regular meetings without interruption and thanks to Labhrás Ó Murchú and Ronan O'Brien in Brú Ború we have been receiving regular "Comhaltas-Communications" (32 so far) which keep us up to date with what's happening in Comhaltas worldwide.

There are numerous Music sessions, Singing sessions and even Storytelling sessions online and available free of charge to anyone who has the technology to connect.

I would love to see us going forward with a project to provide our vulnerable and lonely members with the means and help to keep in touch with the outside world and bring the news of Comhaltas into their lives for the future.

So, I will take this opportunity to wish you all the very best of health and happiness for the future agus go mbeirimíd beó ar an am seo arís

Seamus Brogan
ArdComhairle Delegate
seamusbrogan@comhaltas.co.uk

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL OF BRITAIN -- MUSIC SUB-COMMITTEE

The Role of the Music Sub-Committee

Provide adjudicators

The Music Sub-Committee (MSC) is responsible for helping to provide adjudicators for the Regional Fleadhanna and the Provincial Fleadh each year. Adjudicators are selected from the official adjudicators list and the committee are constantly looking for new adjudicators to add to the list. The Regions throughout the Province are requested to suggest suitable names for the list and those put forward are required to 'sit-in' at a number of Fleadhanna in order to give them the confidence and experience to then adjudicate on their own. They are also required to attend and complete at least one (and more if possible) seminar for adjudicators. The list of adjudicators is updated every year.

The MSC secretary has emailed all adjudicators informing them of the information that was held on them by the MSC (in accordance with GDPR guidelines).

A 'Code of Best Practice' issued from headquarters in Ireland will also be sent out to all adjudicators.

Brief adjudicators

The Music Sub-Committee are expected to brief adjudicators on the day of the Fleadh before they adjudicate, so that problems on the day are kept to a minimum. Where possible, we send briefing notes before the Fleadh in order to remind adjudicators of the latest updates. The Music Sub-Committee members from the Region running the Fleadh are responsible for briefing the adjudicators.

Assist with timetable for Fleadhanna

We also deal with aspects of the timetable for Fleadhanna. As we are responsible for selection of adjudicators, there needs to be some liaison between the committee running the Fleadh and the Music Sub-Committee members in that Region to ensure that the relevant adjudicator is being used for the correct competitions and that length of time for competitions has been allocated correctly.

Coordinate dates of Regional Fleadhanna

We try to ensure that all of the Regional Fleadhanna take place on different dates so that we are not limited in selection of adjudicators. Due to overlaps in previous years, it was decided that a Region should let the Music Sub-Committee secretary know the date of their Regional Fleadh as soon as possible. However due to the Coronavirus (COVID 19) pandemic we have not been able to run any Regional Fleadh or the Fleadh Cheoil na Breataine.

Seminars for adjudicators

Every few years, the Music Sub-Committee holds a Seminar for adjudicators. These seminars are for sit-

in adjudicators (18 years and upwards), new adjudicators who have been added to the list and for more experienced adjudicators, as there are always new ideas and points to consider. The first stage of training is the 'Introduction to Adjudication' course took place during the weekend of 21/22 November 2020 online via Zoom. The online course covered all the same areas & activities that would be included in the 'in-person' version of the course and was run by a team of experienced adjudicators & trainers.

Julie O'Hare
Runai - Music Sub-Committee
January 2021

"A Creative Community Nurturing Irish Culture"
Comhaltas in Britain is a registered Charity 1185729

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Standard

Members of:



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Government of Ireland
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An Roinn Gnóthaí Eactracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

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