



Submission by Music Network to the Future of Media Commission

8th January 2021

About Music Network

Music Network is Ireland's national music touring and development organisation, and was founded by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon in 1986. The organisation's role is to make high quality live music accessible to communities throughout Ireland and to support the careers of professional musicians. Music Network's vision is that of a culture which increasingly values live music in our everyday lives, embracing it as an essential part of a healthy, vibrant society.

Music Network is a founder member of Music Alliance Ireland, a group of national music organisations and companies which have come together to enhance their support for the music sector in Ireland. Sections 1 to 4 below echo our recommendations submitted under Music Alliance Ireland, with Section 5 providing additional recommendations in relation to improving nationwide access to live music:

1. A new vision for RTÉ Lyric fm

RTÉ lyric fm is a key part of the Irish music infrastructure. Given the pivotal role that lyric has established for itself in Irish musical culture over two decades, we are extremely concerned at the current lack of direction for the station. The threatened closure of the lyric studios in Limerick last year was the latest in a long line of cuts to resourcing and staff.

Music Network and our colleague organisations at the Irish Music Alliance are seeking:

- the appointment of a new Head of Station
- a clear statement of RTÉ's strategic vision for the future of the station, including studio location, programme development, music commissioning and financial resourcing
- the establishment of a plan for the future management and development of the RTÉ lyric fm record label, which is now in stasis after the departure of producer Eoin Brady last year; and
- the establishment of an advisory board for RTÉ lyric fm with members drawn from across Irish musical life.

2: The appointment of an RTÉ Group Head of Music

RTÉ needs a thriving music sector just as the music sector needs a dynamic RTÉ. Music forms a hugely significant part of all of RTÉ's broadcasting output and yet there is no clear leadership role in RTÉ driving its engagement with the sector and a vision for music output as there is, for example, in sports and news.

Music Network and our colleague organisations at the Irish Music Alliance are calling for the appointment of a new RTÉ Group Head of Music who will:

- lead on a new vision for music programming across all of RTÉ's television and radio stations and online
- establish a clear policy on music and lead the engagement with the Irish music sector
- ensure that in-depth coverage and presentation of the full range and diversity of music from Ireland is at the heart of Irish public service broadcasting
- re-establish the support for the RTÉ String Quartet (or alternative chamber music group) and develop long-term support for ensembles, artists and groups from other genres; and
- set out a clear policy on commissioning of Irish composers and musicians by all RTÉ music groups.

3. Relaunch of the RTÉ record labels

RTÉ has historically had an important record label, and in recent years the RTÉ lyric fm label too, but both of these initiatives are now characterised by a lack of activity and investment. This decline is not only regrettable, but RTÉ is missing out on a clear commercial opportunity in the contemporary growth in income from music streaming.

Music Network and our colleague organisations at the Irish Music Alliance are calling for:

- the relaunch of the RTÉ record labels under a new RTÉ Group Head of Music
- a cohesive plan for this relaunch, including recruitment, commissioning, A&R and market development.

4. Establish a new training and internship programme to attract new generations of musical talent

Currently, RTÉ has no regular internship, trainee or graduate scheme programme. This makes it impossible for new generations of musical talent who are interested in broadcasting to find a clear career path into the station, and it also means that RTÉ does not develop new, diverse talent as it should, whether it is in presenting, producing, researching or engineering.

Music Network and our colleague organisations at the Irish Music Alliance are calling for:

- the establishment of an internship/trainee/graduate scheme that would attract Irish musical talent and allow them become part of the future of the station.

5. Music Network's recommendations relating directly to nationwide access to live music

Music Network's mission is to make high quality live music accessible to people across Ireland, including outside the main population centres of Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick. RTÉ has played a critical role in helping us to achieve this mission in the past. In 2020, a total of 1.5 million people engaged with Music Network through a mixture of 47 live concerts across the country, 37 online performances and 25 radio broadcasts on RTÉ lyric fm and RTÉ Radio 1.

Our additional recommendations below would ensure that opportunities for the Irish population to access high quality and affordable live music experiences continue and increase in the future:

- increased coverage of music events on RTÉ's primetime news and current affairs programmes through regular cultural events news & listings segments, similar to sports news segments. This more reliable, What's On-style news coverage would help inform the Irish public of the many excellent performances that are accessible to them
- a significant increase in the broadcast of live music events from around Ireland on RTÉ lyric fm
- an increase in opportunities for live interviews and discussion on RTÉ lyric fm – our concern is that there has been a drift towards pre-recorded content only, that is not necessarily relevant or beneficial to promoting current activity in the Irish music sector
- the recent screenings of RTÉ NSO performances on RTÉ Television have been a valuable and important step forward. We recommend that RTÉ now also works with other national music content providers, such as Music Network, to broadcast a wider variety of high quality music performances on RTÉ Television and on digital platforms
- advertising support through RTÉ Supporting the Arts has been significant and valuable to Music Network and our colleagues in the music sector. We recommend that this support continues and is expanded by offering more opportunities for 100% advertising support across RTÉ's channels. One concern, for example, is that the funneling of classical music advertisements to RTÉ lyric fm only significantly reduces the number of listeners that advertisements for classical music events can reach.

Conclusion

Our key message is that the Commission's report should reflect **the centrality of music to public service broadcasting** and we believe the recommendations above will achieve that.

Sharon Rollston
CEO, Music Network