

Submission by Music Alliance Ireland to the Future of Media Commission

8 January 2021

About Music Alliance Ireland

Music Alliance Ireland / Comhaontas Ceoil na hÉireann is a group of national music organisations and companies that have come together to enhance their support for the music sector in Ireland. Our membership consists of performance groups, concert promoters and resource organisations with a remit across the island and involvement in a variety of musical genres.

The current members are Music Network, Contemporary Music Centre, Improvised Music Company, Trad Ireland/Traid Éireann, Crash Ensemble, Diatribe Records, Kirkos Ensemble, Association of Irish Composers and Journal of Music.

Music Alliance Ireland has been meeting since the pandemic began and is engaging in a number of advocacy initiatives to ensure that musicians and the structures that support them are supported now and into the future.

Our concern in this submission is public service media, and in particular RTÉ, which plays an essential role in Irish musical life.

Introduction

The Terms of Reference for the Commission state that one of the key roles of national media, and in particular public service broadcasting, is 'To inform, educate and entertain the Irish public with regard to matters of Irish culture...' and 'To ensure that creative Irish talent gets the opportunity to have their work reach audiences in Ireland and, where possible, further afield.'

It is important to state from the outset that public service broadcasting would be unimaginable without the contribution of music and the Irish music sector. Music recordings constitute the majority of public service radio broadcasting, and music permeates every aspect of television and online broadcasting, from music performances to music themes, soundtracks and all forms of entertainment. **It is therefore important that the Commission recognises music's centrality to Irish public service broadcasting.** This tenet informs our submission.

RTÉ has played a crucial role in the development of music in Ireland in the twentieth and twenty-first century. It has done this through its broadcasting on radio and television, its employment of musicians and composers, its use of music in programmes and broadcasts, its orchestra, choirs, quartet, recording, archiving, publishing, awards and live music events.

In recent years, however, RTÉ has been shrinking back from its leadership role in music. This is evident from the following list:

- It no longer has a Director of Music or Head of Music

- The role of Head of RTÉ Lyric FM has been vacant for over six months
- The RTÉ Lyric FM Limerick studios were threatened with closure last year, a development that was prevented only by a public outcry
- The Helen Boaden orchestras report from 2018 detailed a list of problems with RTÉ's support for the two national orchestras, with the result that RTÉ is now losing the National Symphony Orchestra
- The recent cessation of the support for the RTÉ string quartet
- The lack of activity on the RTÉ record label and now the RTÉ Lyric FM label has become moribund also
- The fact that music and arts programmes have been moved to the periphery of the schedule on RTÉ Radio 1 (whereas in the mid-2000s *Rattlebag* was on at 3pm, now *Arena* is on at 7pm)
- The lack of investment in in-depth coverage of the full range and diversity of musical life
- A 179-page report published in December 2020 by Trad Ireland, *Navigating the Traditional Arts Sector Ireland*, detailed significant dissatisfaction in the traditional arts community with RTÉ's coverage of music. It states: 'Many of the traditional artists and commentators who participated in this research discussed insufficient media coverage as a major challenge encountered by the traditional arts sector in Ireland today.'
- The lack of newly composed music in programming by the RTÉ NSO (less than 3% in 2019/20 Season)
- No clear music policy

We recognise the value of some recent initiatives, such as the RTÉ Radio 1 Folk Awards and the screenings of RTÉ NSO performances on RTE Television, but the overall trend in recent years is one of shrinkage and does not reflect, as we have stated already, the *centrality* of music to public service broadcasting.

Our recommendations, therefore, are as follows:

1. A new vision for RTÉ Lyric FM

RTÉ Lyric FM is a key part of the Irish music infrastructure. Lyric's broadcasters provide an excellent classical and contemporary music service to the Irish public; the station broadcasts the work of Irish artists, orchestras, music groups and labels across a number of genres; it helps promote Irish festivals, concerts and amateur and professional choirs and orchestras; it informs, educates and keeps at the heart of Irish culture a knowledge of the world of classical and contemporary music among the general public; and it acts as a connector for the Irish music community, keeping practitioners in touch with the work of their contemporaries and contributing to the dynamism of Irish cultural life.

In addition, Lyric has commissioned many major works from Irish composers and musicians over two decades; its record label has been a key documenter of Irish orchestral work in particular; it has hosted a composer in residence scheme; it provides representation for music from Ireland internationally through its active membership of the EBU and International Rostrum

of Composers; and its shows and presenters provide opportunities for Irish artists, organisations and promoters to reach out to a wide listenership and build new audiences.

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.

We are seeking:

- (i) The immediate appointment of a new Head of Station;
- (ii) A clear statement of RTÉ's strategic vision for the future of the station, including studio location, programme development, music commissioning and financial resourcing;
- (iii) 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
- (iv) The establishment of an advisory board for RTÉ Lyric FM with members drawn from across Irish musical life.

Despite the fact that the station has been under-resourced in the past, it has maintained a loyal listenership (including an increase in weekday JNLR figures from 3% to 4% in 2020; it now has more weekday listeners in Dublin than 2FM). Now is the time to forge a new vision for the station.

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.

It is not satisfactory that music is subsumed into 'arts and culture' or 'music and entertainment' in management structures. There is a Group Head of Arts and Culture, a Group Head of Entertainment & Music, Heads of Music in different radio stations, and the position of Director of RTÉ Lyric fm, Orchestras and Choirs is vacant. There is no clear music leadership at higher management level in RTÉ with a well-resourced role.

The result is that music broadcasting at RTÉ lacks leadership, investment and joined-up thinking in programming.

We are calling for the appointment of a new RTÉ Group Head of Music who will

- Lead 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;
- Explore the establishment of quotas on-air for music by Irish artists;
- 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 by 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 not regrettable, but RTÉ is missing out on a clear commercial opportunity in the contemporary growth in income from music streaming. Although music streaming has received negative press in recent years, a less frequently acknowledged fact is that it is now 56% of the \$20bn of revenue generated by the global music records industry. Labels with a back catalogue (such as RTÉ has) are benefiting in particular. According to the *Financial Times* (Dec 2020), almost 60% of streaming income goes to the record label and performers. At a time of financial insecurity for RTÉ, it is imperative that it start seriously developing its record labels again in order to grow its streaming income.

The RTÉ record labels should therefore be relaunched. The new RTÉ Group Head of Music should develop a plan for the relaunch of the labels, including recruitment, commissioning, A&R and market development. This would be a significant source of employment for the Irish music sector, and a new stream of income for RTÉ.

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.

As part of a new engagement with the music sector, we are recommending 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. Increased musical expertise in the station across all sectors would not only benefit the Irish music sector but also reflect the centrality of music to RTÉ's output.

Conclusion

The Future of Media Commission is an excellent opportunity to set out a new vision for public service broadcasting in Ireland. 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. Thank you for your attention.

Submitted by Music Alliance Ireland / Comhaontas Ceoil na hÉireann

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