



ANNUAL REPORT 2020







TABLE OF CONTENTS

01	Message: Chairperson and CEO
03	Company Information
04	Sing Ireland Strategy
07	Operational Report
09	Sing Ireland's Response to the Pandemic
10	Policy and Strategy
15	Education and Training

MESSAGE FROM CHAIRPERSON AND CEO



2020 was an unprecedented year for the world and indeed for the group singing community in Ireland. Sing Ireland supported the incredible ingenuity and resilience of the choral sector and is pleased to report on an extraordinary year.

In spite of the many challenges that the pandemic presented, the group singing sector emerges into 2021 stronger and more energised than ever. That is not to underestimate the very real challenges that we face as a result of the unprecedented shut down of Irish society and its many implications for singing groups, musicians/conductors, and indeed for Sing Ireland. We would like to pay tribute to the exceptional efforts of so many during this difficult year: to the indefatigable board, executive staff, and the many talented artists who work with Sing Ireland and inspire us all.

We know that so many have contributed to Sing Ireland's work in 2020, and we all realised afresh the life-enhancing ability that coming together to sing has. Its enforced absence has once again proved its phenomenal worth. We look forward with great optimism and excitement for the growth of the group singing sector and Sing Ireland.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Virginia Kerr".

Virginia Kerr
Chairperson

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dermot O'Callaghan".

Dermot O'Callaghan
CEO

GROUP SINGING

Sing Ireland represents a very large portion of society throughout the island of Ireland.

EVENTS

During the pandemic Sing Ireland held many events online.

ENGAGEMENT

During 2020, large numbers joined Sing Ireland for training, networking and development events.

229,000 people
in Ireland in
singing groups

More than 30
events online
during 2020

More than
10,000 people
from ages 5 to 90
took part

Company Information

Honorary President:

Mrs Justice Catherine McGuinness

Patron of the Irish Youth Choir

Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland

Directors:

Alan Kelly (Chairperson 2020)(Resigned April, 2021)

Virginia Kerr (Chairperson 2021)(Appointed April, 2021)

Raegnha Zutshi

Mark Armstrong

Jim Fitzsimons (Company Secretary)

Caroline Connolly (resigned September, 2020)

Sonia Brody

Eva O'Toole

Chief Executive Officer: Dermot O'Callaghan

Projects and Membership Manager: Lily Lacey

Registered Office: Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, Limerick

Bankers: Allied Irish Banks, p.l.c., Patrick St., Cork

Auditors: Crowley's DFK, 5 Lapp's Quay, Cork

Charitable Status: Cumann Náisiúnta na gCór is a registered charity with charity number 20012601 (CHY 6626)



Sing Ireland Strategy and 2020



2020 marked the first full year that the organisation operated as Sing Ireland, having re-branded the organisation in February 2019 to great support and enthusiasm. Sing Ireland is an organisation that holds choirs and group singing at its core but that embraces a broader definition of choral singing to include all types and size of singing group. Sing Ireland knows from experience and feedback that many who sing in a group do not necessarily identify with the word 'choir'. It is with this in mind that Sing Ireland imagines a more inclusive and diverse future for the group singing eco-system in Ireland.

2020 was an exceptional year for the choral community in Ireland, as the restrictions imposed by the pandemic had drastic effects upon choirs and singing groups across the country, and indeed the world. Sing Ireland adapted to the needs of the sector and provided advice, guidance and support to groups across the country. Many of the organisation's activities moved online as singing activities face-to-face were extremely challenging or prohibited.

In the lead up to the change to become Sing Ireland, the organisation engaged in robust processes of strategic planning that involved stakeholder consultation and input and brought our members and stakeholders on the journey to this change.



The organisation has set out the following core objectives in its current Strategic Plan:

1. Strengthening Our Collective Voice
2. Youth Singing Development
3. Embracing Collective Singing of All Types
4. Ensuring a Strong Organisation

Introduction

Through its broad remit to serve singing groups, choirs, individuals in choirs and choral directors the organisation plays a vital role in the resourcing of the group singing community in Ireland and in the enhancement of the lives of Irish people through their engagement with singing. As we report on 2020, a central concern for Sing Ireland is the unprecedented effect of the pandemic on singing groups' activities in 2020.



Sing Ireland Strategic Growth Plans



The organisation's highest decision making gathering is at the Company's AGM annually. The Board of Directors is charged with the governance and stewardship of the organisation, ensuring that policy and activity reflects the strategic aims of the organisation. Management is devolved to the executive.

Members are an essential part of the organisation, contributing to the work of the association and forming the core of choral activity nationwide.



Operational Report

FINANCIAL REVIEW 2020

In common with many organisations, the financial year 2020 was an unusual one for the Company's finances. As an overall comment, the organisation's ability to take in earned income from running events was severely diminished given the impact of the pandemic. However, we had projected and secured significant growth for the organisation in terms of its income from other funding, apart from earned income, and so the net result was that our finances year on year were impacted to a lesser degree than they might have been. The organisation ran a surplus at year end (€13,866) that was budgeted for to reverse some similarly sized deficits in preceding years. In 2020, Cumann Náisiúnta na gCór (t/a Sing Ireland) had an income of €340,473 (with a small other operating income of €417 and interest receivable of €5) and spent €327,029 on services for its Members, supporting their needs and those of the sector. Having a reduction in earned income from courses, we also had a corresponding reduction in direct costs from activities.

The Arts Council of Ireland remained the organisation's largest funder and expenditure was made up primarily of expenditure on programmes and administration of the organisation (including staffing).

Arts Council core support stood in 2020 at €179,000 and we are happy to report a significant increase in Arts Council funding in 2021 to €250,000, an increase of 40 percent. As well as Arts Council funding in 2020, the organisation was supported by the Creative Ireland programme (€126,402) to run two programmes, the Ageing Voices project and YouthSing Ireland.



Operational Report



Alan Kelly continued in the position of Chairman during 2020 and Jim Fitzsimons continued in the role of Company Secretary. Having adopted the Governance Code the Board led the organisation in continuing best practice in Governance and complying with the Code.

Sing Ireland is now complying with and on the journey to compliance with the regulations and requirements of the Charities Governance Code, with a report coming at the end of October, 2021 with its annual return to the Charities Regulator.

Since year end 2020, Alan Kelly has stood down as Chairperson given the end of his term of office. Sing Ireland would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his dedication, commitment and passion for Sing Ireland's work.

Following an open call for a new Chairperson, Virginia Kerr was appointed Chairperson in April 2021. Virginia is a renowned soprano and professor of singing at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. She is also a psychotherapist and has a keen interest in performance anxiety and helping singers to overcome it.

Board sub-committees continued to operate in 2020 (Business and Audit, Fundraising and Development, Membership, Communications and Artistic)

Board Meeting Dates 2020:

Sunday, 9th February

Friday, 27th November - AGM

Wednesday, 22nd April

Sunday, 7th July

Wednesday, 9th September

Sing Ireland's Response to the Pandemic

In 2020, Sing Ireland responded to the new ways of working and advice required by the group singing sector in Ireland. COVID-19 impacted the way that singing groups throughout Ireland (and the world) operated and functioned. Sing Ireland sought to give singing groups the best advice and skills/tools to aid and inform their activities.

In order to assist groups to support and learn from Sing Ireland, relevant professionals, and each other, there were webinars held that were designed to support and advise the sector, as well as deliver some content and training for singing groups and conductors for their development, whilst they couldn't meet in person. The webinar sessions were extremely well attended.

An extensive resource of COVID-19 supports for choirs and singing groups were maintained and built on the Sing Ireland website throughout the year.

Webinar Events

A series of training events and webinars took place as below:

1. Looking to the Future of Group Singing in Ireland – 8 July
2. Risk Assessment and Mitigation - 30 July
3. Exploring our Vocal Colours (Patrick Barrett) – 12 August
4. Why are We Singing This? Programming for Choirs (Bernie Sherlock) - 26 August
5. What can singing groups do now? – 7 September
6. Back to Basics: A Choral Conducting Refresher (Orla Flanagan) – 12 September
7. What are Singing Groups Doing: An exploration of digital rehearsal means and shared practice – 5 October
8. Group Singing in Ireland During the Pandemic (with Professor Luke O'Neill) – 9 December, 2020

Policy and Strategy

Sing Ireland has set key strategic objectives with key actions and indicators to monitor the success of its strategic plan over the period to 2024.

Central to SI's remit is the promotion of choral music and group singing in Ireland, with a commitment to high quality education, training and services for members.

International contacts

Sing Ireland maintained its association with a number of international choral music organisations, including ABCD (Association of British Choral Directors), ACDA (American Choral Directors' Association), and The European Choral Association, Europa Cantat (ECA-EC) and the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM)

Dermot O'Callaghan, CEO of Sing Ireland, is a Vice President of the European Choral Association – Europa Cantat.

Age and Opportunity / Bealtaine Festival

2020 saw the Dawn Chorus initiative take place online as part of a partnership between Sing Ireland and Age and Opportunity Ireland which has up to this point operated in person pivoted to online as a project response to Covid-19. The initiative saw choirs and active retirement groups perform online as part of a virtual choir.

Sing Ireland National Singing Week and Virtual Choirs Performances

National Choral Singing Week took place online from 5th - 11th October 2020 with a mixture of online events, virtual choir performances and coinciding with World Mental Health Day (10th October), demonstrating the link between choral singing and positive mental health.

An important aspect of the work of the choral sector in 2020 was the compilation of virtual choirs. Choirs and singing groups across the country put virtual choir performances together. Sing Ireland also undertook a number of national virtual choir projects which saw hundreds of people singing online to celebrate what was possible to achieve during the strangest of times; working together but apart.

Policy and Strategy

Vision

A nation that is fully immersed in quality group singing experiences.

People living on the island of Ireland will value, recognise and experience the life changing ability that singing has to impact on their health, creativity and well-being.

Mission

Sing Ireland develops and supports all forms of group singing in Ireland. It does this by providing quality experiences through activities led by Sing Ireland and supporting the work of our members and the wider choral sector.

The organisation has set out the following **core objectives** in its Strategic Plan:

1. Strengthening Our Collective Voice
2. Youth Singing Development
3. Embracing Collective Singing of All Types
4. Ensuring a Strong Organisation





RESOURCES

In 2020, Sing Ireland produced resources, guides and supports for choirs and singing groups.

76 resources:
including guides,
statements and
supports

ARTISTS

During the pandemic Sing Ireland worked with many artists and facilitators.

More than 45
artists and
facilitators

PARTICIPANTS

Many national and international participants engaged with Sing Ireland in 2020.

People from 32
counties and 25
other countries



Education and Training

EDUCATION

Education and training is a key component of the work of Sing Ireland. Sing Ireland's strategic objectives prioritise training and education for the singer, choir/singing group and conductor. The Irish Youth Choir (including the Irish Youth Choir for 18 – 28 year olds, the Irish Youth Training Choir for 14 – 17 year olds and the Irish Youth Chamber Choir) and youth singing development nationally are also identified as being central to the education and training work of Sing Ireland. Training events had to move online or were curtailed in many ways as a result of the pandemic during 2020.

Irish Youth Choirs

IRISH YOUTH CHOIR

The IYC was formed in 1982 in Cork under its first conductor, Geoffrey Spratt. In 2020, Bernie Sherlock was appointed Artistic Director of the Irish Youth Choirs. The choir has seen thousands of young people interact with it through auditions, training and performance. During its 36-year history the choir has been a valuable resource for the development of youth choral practice in Ireland.

Given the effects of the pandemic, the Irish Youth Choir could not meet for its residential training course in the summer. However, many outreach events were planned with the choir online during the year.

Education and Training

IRISH YOUTH TRAINING CHOIR

Patrick Barrett was appointed Conductor of the Irish Youth Training choir in March, 2020. The Irish Youth Training Choir was a long-held ambition of Sing Ireland as a means to provide choral training at national level for younger ages, particularly for 14-17 year olds.

As Sing Ireland strategically positions its output to enhance people's lives through their interaction with singing, it is recognised that for the future of the Irish Youth Choir, and more broadly for group singing in Ireland, youth singing development needs investment of funds and resources. This responded to recommendations in the Arts Council of Ireland's policy document *Raising Your Voice* and a strategic plan for the development of the Irish Youth Choir commissioned by Sing Ireland in 2008. The IYTC was formed for the first time, on a pilot basis in 2014 and since then has gone from strength to strength and has built a committed and engaged following of young singers from almost every country in Ireland.

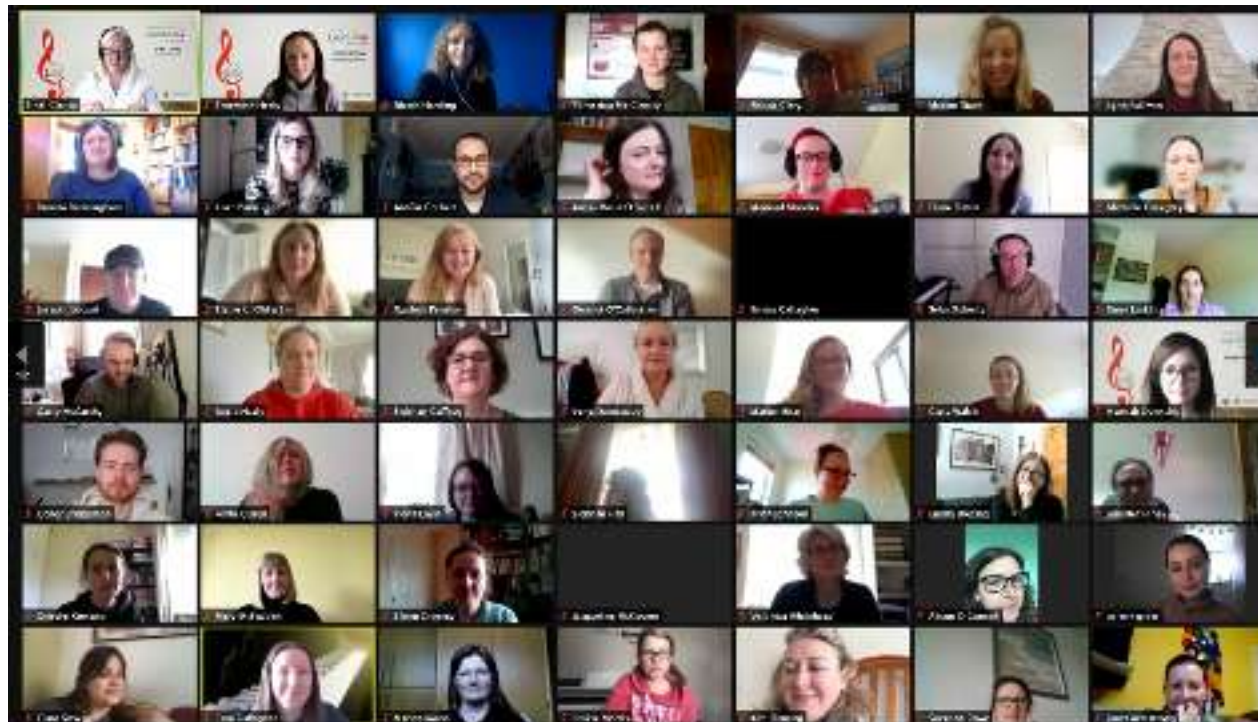


Education and Training

JUNIOR CYCLE FOR TEACHERS

Sing Ireland in collaboration with Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) and the Irish Music Rights Organisation (IMRO), offered an initiative entitled 'Me and My Music' for music teachers, visiting musicians and first-year students of Junior Cycle Music.

This Arts in Junior Cycle initiative aimed to support the integration of the principles and key skills which underpin the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), the Arts in Education Charter and the Creative Ireland Programme (2017-2022), Pillar 1 Creative Youth. Sing Ireland musicians and choral facilitators set up meetings and music workshops with students and teachers in developing their creative voice and allowing their musical self and identity to emerge. This programme began in the first quarter of 2020 but was curtailed given the effects of the pandemic. Online workshops were undertaken as part of this work later in 2020.



MUSIC GENERATION AND SING IRELAND

Sing Ireland continued its choral residency for young musicians in Offaly and Westmeath during 2020.

Singfest builds on the strong foundation of performance music education laid by Music Generation Offaly Westmeath musicians and allied them with the work of the Irish Youth Choirs.

Through this unique partnership which was made possible by significant financial investment from the Music Generation/Arts Council Partnership, Singfest brought together local, national and international professional musicians to create new opportunities and experiences for children and young people, centred on the benefits and joys of learning to sing together.

The project seeks to create a homogenised approach to choral pedagogy in participating MGOW schools and sees upwards of 3,000 children and young people take part.

In 2020, the Singfest choirs and activities moved online. It was possible for events to be planned but taking different approaches and pivoting to online delivery. Sing Ireland also worked on workshops with secondary school-aged young people in Music Generation Louth in their Young Voices Louth programme.

Education and Training

YOUTHSING IRELAND

During 2020, Sing Ireland worked in partnership with Creative Ireland to further Action Point 9 of the Creative Youth Plan which was published in late 2017. This action point calls for ‘a strategy to develop and extend choral singing’ for young people in Ireland.

A wide-ranging consultation process was undertaken during 2018/19, which explored interest and support for a national youth singing project and the creative processes grounded in singing. The resulting report by Helen Doyle formed the basis of an agreement with Creative Ireland to develop action research models and development during 2019/2020.

This work aims to show ‘proof of model’ and give rich group singing experiences to young people. The programme developed newly commissioned repertoire in the Irish language or of Irish cultural heritage, alongside the delivery of online SingSpaces, where young people in classrooms across the country came together to sing. The project has been extended into 2021, to allow for the roll out of further face to face activities that were not possible in 2020.



Education and Training

AGEING VOICES

Sing Ireland has worked with national partners on the delivery of projects for the ageing demographic over a long number of years. As well as this, Sing Ireland has many member singing groups who specialise in projects and run choirs for people in older life. There is a particular emphasis on the improved health and well-being that singing can bring to those involved in these groups/projects.

Starting in July 2020, Sing Ireland in partnership with Creative Aging International delivered a project funded by Creative Ireland as part of their Positive Ageing and Creative Well Being Programme. The project explored and provided the following: Singing among older adults, including people in receipt of care, measurement and surveying of the singing quality and engagement across the health and cultural sectors, practical workshops for people in older life who were looking to improve their singing and to benefit from the many well-being and health benefits that singing can bring. A knowledge and skill share between musicians and carers was also a central aspect of the work of Ageing Voices.



CREATIVE AGING
INTERNATIONAL
We celebrate Aging

