

NI Opera
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)

Trustees' Report
For the year ended 31 March 2024

The Trustees present their Annual Report together with the audited financial statements of NI Opera for the year from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. The Annual Report serves the purposes of both a Trustees' Report and a Directors' Report under company law. The Trustees confirm that the Annual Report and financial statements of the Charitable Company comply with the current statutory requirements, the requirements of the Charitable Company's governing document and the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS102).

Since NI Opera qualifies as small under section 382 of the Companies Act 2006, the Strategic Report required of medium and large companies under the Companies Act 2006 (Strategic Report and Directors' Report Regulations 2013) has been omitted.

Objectives and activities

a. Policies and objectives

We have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing our aims and objectives and in planning our future activities.

The principal objects of the company as per the Articles of Association are to advance the education of the general public through the presentation of opera and other dramatic, musical and performing arts; and to further the development of public appreciation and taste in opera and the said arts.

Founded in 2010, Northern Ireland Opera is Northern Ireland's award-winning national opera company, widely acclaimed as one of the most exciting operatic start-ups in UK and Irish history. With a philosophy of artistic excellence and risk-taking, underpinned by a bold and imaginative approach to programming and productions, Northern Ireland Opera is committed to the idea of opera as a uniquely enriching 'total' art form and one which should be open to everyone. Through a modern but accessible production style, an emphasis on local participation and young people, and inexpensive ticket prices, the Company has broadened the audience for opera in a region where there has been historic under-provision and where the arts are uniquely placed to foster relations between communities. In only thirteen years, the Company's energy, ideas and high artistic standards have led to both national critical acclaim and an international profile.

Mission - To provide the highest-quality opera to the widest possible audience.

Vision - Northern Ireland Opera aims to promote the best of Northern Irish talent, engaging with local communities and young people, closely collaborating with other Northern Ireland arts organisations and using some of the province's most iconic spaces for its performances. It is determined to build up an international profile for the company, recognising the unique source of pride an opera company can be to any region and the benefits that are generated in global partnerships.

Objectives and activities (continued)

b. Strategies for achieving objectives

NI Opera have the following aims:

AIM 1 (ARTISTIC) REPERTOIRE & PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Maintain and develop our unique production aesthetic and identity whilst expanding our product range across scale and repertoire.

AIM 2 (ARTISTIC) TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Continue to promote and develop young and Irish talent whilst integrating this function into wider business objectives.

AIM 3 (ARTISTIC and ORGANISATIONAL) AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Identify and nurture core supporters, and build awareness, loyalty and engagement amongst a broader network of supporters.

AIM 4 (ORGANISATIONAL) RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Develop and expand current and future revenue streams with a particular emphasis on fundraising and box office revenues.

AIM 5 (ORGANISATIONAL) SUSTAINABILITY AND GOVERNANCE

Strengthen and stabilise the company's structures, policies and practices to deliver a more secure and sustainable financial and operational model.

c. Activities for achieving objectives

NI Opera will achieve its objectives by continuing to provide artistic excellence, community engagement and an artist training and development programme for Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland as a whole. The programme will be delivered throughout each calendar year centred on the opportunities created by NI Opera Studio training programme for young singers, the annual Festival of Voice vocal competition in Glenarm, Co. Antrim, the outreach and educational projects, and the main scale production in the Grand Opera House.

d. Main activities undertaken to further the charity's purposes for the public benefit

Cultural provision in Northern Ireland has been hugely underfunded compared to other UK regions. However, current circumstances offer NI Opera a once in a generation opportunity to address social, regenerative, cultural and economic imperatives via the medium of opera through unique educational experiences, training schemes and career pathways for potential artists, musicians and theatre practitioners.

Trustees' Report (continued)
For the year ended 31 March 2024

Achievements and performance

a. Review of activities

Northern Ireland Opera has had another busy year and we are delighted to have once again engaged so many freelance musicians and crew to make it a successful year.

In April 2023, the Northern Ireland Opera Chorus began their season with rehearsals for our main production 'Tosca' and other upcoming chorus events. The chorus enjoyed sessions with renowned conductor Jac van Steen, coach Bryan Evans and NI Opera's Artist in Development, Matthew Quinn. Soloists Mary McCabe and Catherine Donnelly plus the female voices from the chorus were invited to perform in Mendelssohn's Midsummer Night's Dream alongside the Ulster Orchestra in May 2023 at the Ulster Hall. The Chorus then performed their own sold-out concert a week later in the beautiful surroundings of the Harbour Commissioner's Room. This was a showcase concert where the audience could enjoy opera chorus' throughout the ages.

We were once again delighted to be able to perform in the Throne Room at Hillsborough Castle. The Salon Series, Les Nuits d'Été and A Chloris and other melodies by Hahn were performed by soprano Mary McCabe and accompanied by Bryan Evans.

The summer season started with a performance at Flowerfields Arts Centre in Portstewart with soprano Anna Gregg, mezzo Jenny Bourke accompanied by Frasier Hickland. The company were once again invited to take part in a series of Sunday performances on the Maritime Mile over the summer period and this also included main stage performances across the weekend of the Maritime Festival. All these events were free to the general public to attend. As a fundraiser for Tosca, we hosted a trivia quiz night called 'Tosca and a Tipple' in The Black Box, Belfast which was great fun for all who took part. The Rosemary Street Presbyterian Summer Recital Series returned once again and we were delighted to participate in two these concerts.

Throughout the summer months, we were delighted to host a series of workshops for those in school years 8-14 at Duncairn Arts Centre. The 6 week workshops were to give an insight to the different elements of an opera company from singing to make up, dance to set design. With thanks to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, we were able to offer these workshops free of charge and with thanks to the Garfield Weston Foundation, we were able to provide breakfast, snacks and lunch for those who attended.

Rehearsals for our main stage opera, Tosca, began in August 2023 with cast coming from Northern Ireland and also further afield and we were delighted to have many international performers making their Northern Ireland debut. Our Tosca Chorus were also invited to perform at the Ulster Rugby Gala Dinner in the ICC Belfast.

Our annual Festival of Voice returned at the end of August to the village of Glenarm once again. This included the masterclasses and finale for five singers and also three BBC Radio 3 recitals.

September 2023 saw rehearsals ramp up towards Tosca taking to the Grand Opera House stage. We were once again delighted to be able to hire the Ulster Orchestra to perform this alongside with us and it was wonderful to see the auditorium sold out for all four performances. Alongside the main opera, we held our outreach week at the Grand Opera House with a varied programme of song, dance, recitals and a very popular Come and Sing. We opened our dress rehearsal up to around 600 audience members made up of community groups, schools and youth music organisations.

In late September, soloists Mary McCabe, Margaret Bridge, Aaron O'Hare and Brendan Collins performed alongside pianist Tristan Russcher as part of the Merchant's Gala Dinner. Guests were treated to soothing harp on arrival, brass fanfare as a call to dinner and opera in between courses.

NI Opera
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)

Trustees' Report (continued)
For the year ended 31 March 2024

Achievements and performance (continued)

From October 2023, the company partnered with the MAC Theatre, Belfast and The Playhouse, Derry to perform the six Salon Series events (which premiered in early 2023) over a period of at least 6 months. This was an amazing opportunity for the music and performers to be heard in different parts of Northern Ireland.

We were delighted to send facilitator, Connie McGrath, to deliver a workshop on stage make up with members from Springboard in North Belfast. This workshop was held close to Halloween so the theme of the make up was very easy to establish!

In early November, we were invited to perform at the Synagogue in North Belfast. This included a lunchtime performance for the older members and then an evening Cabaret dinner. These events were very successful and brought all genres of music together.

Christmas began early in Belfast with a Christmas Sing-Along at the MAC Theatre with members of our chorus. This was a very popular event and put audience members in the Christmas spirit early in the season. The company also had a visit to the offices from the Minister for Northern Ireland, Minister Steve Baker, who was treated to a performance from soloists and members of the chorus.

2024 began with our annual performance at the annual 'Out to Lunch' festival at The Black Box. This was a cabaret style event to a full house who also enjoyed their lunch.

Rehearsals also began in early January 2024 for two chamber sized events which would be performed in February 2024 in the Grand Opera House Studio. The first chamber event called 'Cupid's Bow' was based around the heartache and loves of opera and then the second chamber event was a rarely performed piece by Philip Glass and Robert Moran called 'The Juniper Tree'. This piece was to give chorus members a solo role in a smaller scale production to help develop their skills and singing. The Juniper Tree was rehearsed and conducted by Artist in Development répétiteur, Frasier Hickland and he did a wonderful job with the whole production and his 6-piece orchestra.

b. Factors relevant to achieve objectives

NI Opera have a small dedicated team and a committed Board of Trustees who are passionate about the art form of opera.

Financial review

a. Going concern

The net surplus for the year was £152,022 which resulted in positive total funds at the year end of £168,591. Appropriate enquiries have been made of the Trustees in regards adopting the going concern basis. Due to the continued grant support of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Trusts plus anticipated further Theatre Tax Relief credits, the Trustees have a reasonable expectation that the company has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for a period of at least 12 months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue. For this reason, the company continues to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements.

NI Opera
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)

Trustees' Report (continued)
For the year ended 31 March 2024

b. Reserves policy

Future reserves held by the charity are for the use of achieving the objective of advancing the education of the general public and furthering the development of public appreciation in opera through the presentation of opera and other dramatic, musical and performing arts.

c. Principal risks and uncertainties

As NI Opera's main funder, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland continue to support the company financially. Partnerships with key stakeholders, the Ulster Orchestra and the Grand Opera House, continue to develop.

Structure, governance and management

a. Constitution

The company is registered as a charitable company limited by guarantee and was set up by a Memorandum of Association on 17 December 2009.

The company is a registered charity number NIC101771.

The Trustees are responsible for the strategic management of the company.

Trustees are not paid and generally do not receive out of pocket expenses.

b. Methods of appointment or election of Trustees

The management of NI Opera is the responsibility of the Trustees who are elected and co-opted under the terms of the Memorandum of Association.

c. Risk management

The Trustees have assessed the major risks to which the company is exposed, in particular those related to the operations and finances of the company, and are satisfied that systems and procedures are in place to mitigate our exposure to the major risks.

Trustees' Report (continued)
For the year ended 31 March 2024

Plans for future periods

Our plans for the 2024/25 year and beyond are detailed below.

Chorus Concert at the Ulster Hall
May 2024

In May we showcased the new intake of chorus members in a celebration of the great choruses from opera through the ages. The singers worked with acclaimed conductor and language coach James Grossmith. The chorus presented all of the chorus moments in concert format from our opera for 2024 Eugene Onegin. Mary McCabe, who was cast as the lead soprano in the mainstage opera, Tatyana, performed a part of her famous letter scene aria for audiences as way of exposing them to the musical world of Onegin. This concert also featured the chorus singing in Russian, as they are required to perform in the full production later in the year from memory for the fully staged production.

Music and Creative Skills Workshops
June 2024

In June 10-14 we hosted and created education events for secondary school music students. We invited senior music students to participate in an outreach week at the Grand Opera House. We provided a unique educational experience tailored for students and included works by Tchaikovsky, Mozart, Humperdinck, Puccini, Bizet, Verdi and Britten. These sessions are designed for students.

Armagh – Salon Event, Palace Demesne, Armagh
June 2024

As part of the second round of The Salon Series, we presented as a premiere at the Bishops Palace in Armagh, a newly curated salon event called The Stars, The Moon and The Georgian Sky. We performed two performances at the Palace showcasing music composed in the Georgian era and about the heavens above. Starring Downpatrick's Mary McCabe and Holywood's Anna Gregg. This was a premiere of the new series of salon events.

Springtime, Summertime and Mischief – Red Sails Festival - Flowerfield
July 2024

We presented an hour of arias and songs on a theme of 'Springtime, Summertime and Mischief!' performed by soprano Petra Wells, mezzo Jenny Bourke and pianist Frasier Hickland. NI Opera appeared at the Saturday Lunchtimes at Flowerfield Park where NI Opera soloists serenaded in the beautiful surroundings of the park as part of The Red Sails Festival.

The 14th Glenarm Festival of Voice
August 2024

NI Opera presented the 14th festival from August 23rd - 25th. This included three free BBC Radio 3 recitals to experience, recorded live at the festival for national broadcast in September as four 'Lunchtime Concerts', an afternoon recital in The Londonderry Arms in Carnlough, and the weekend culminated in a thrilling vocal competition featuring five young opera singers selected from across the island of Ireland. Our Competition Finale, which was again hosted by our Patron, BBC Radio 3 broadcaster Sean Rafferty, showcased five singers selected from entrants from across the island of Ireland who competed in front of a live jury panel to win the Deborah Voigt Opera Prize and become the NI Opera Young Opera Voice of 2024. There was also a Song Prize award and the Kathryn Harries Audience Prize, voted for by the audience during a short interval on the night.

Eugene Onegin - Grand Opera House Belfast
Sept 2024

For the mainstage season, we produced a wonderful Tchaikovsky opera called Eugene Onegin at the Grand Opera House. This saw the casting of the four main female roles with all singers from Northern Ireland, a first for the company. In another first for the company, we also launched our own orchestra made up of players all from the island of Ireland. We launched the Orchestra of Northern Ireland Opera, these 43 amazing local

NI Opera
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)

Trustees' Report (continued)
For the year ended 31 March 2024

Plans for future periods (continued)

instrumentalists were led by the Kapellmeister from the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Dominic Limburg. This was a very pivotal production for the company and allowed us to extend on our already much acclaimed work and keep being able to premiere new grand opera in Northern Ireland.

Pop up and regional events for 24/25

The next year will see the company also remain open and flexible to being able to respond to the sector and to continue working with our community partners and sectoral partners such as Derry Play House, The MAC, Big Telly Theatre Company. This will also allow us to produce and perform residencies at stunning venues across Northern Ireland such as the Palace Demesne in Armagh, The Merchant Hotel, The Harrison Chambers of Distinction and to present pop up works across Northern Ireland from the Maritime Mile to the Botanic Gardens and to regional festivals in Newry and along the North Coast from Castlerock to Glenarm.

Statement of Trustees' responsibilities

The Trustees (who are also the Directors of NI Opera for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial . Under company law, the Trustees must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of NI Opera and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles of the Charities SORP (FRS 102);
- make judgments and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards (FRS 102) have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that NI Opera will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain NI Opera's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of NI Opera and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of NI Opera and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Disclosure of information to auditors

Each of the persons who are Trustees at the time when this Trustees' Report is approved has confirmed that:

- so far as that Trustee is aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the charity's auditors are unaware, and
- that Trustee has taken all the steps that ought to have been taken as a Trustee in order to be aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the charity's auditors are aware of that information.

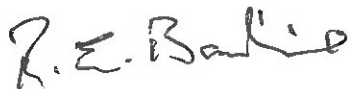
NI Opera
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)

Trustees' Report (continued)
For the year ended 31 March 2024

Auditors

The auditors, Sumer AuditCo NI Ltd, have indicated their willingness to continue in office. The designated Trustees will propose a motion reappointing the auditors at a meeting of the Trustees.

Approved by order of the members of the board of Trustees and signed on their behalf by:



Mr R E Bailie CBE
Chair
Date: 2 December 2024