

**NI Opera**  
**(A Company Limited by Guarantee)**

**Trustees' Report**  
**For the year ended 31 March 2025**

The Trustees present their Annual Report together with the audited financial statements of NI Opera for the year from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. 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.

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**Trustees' Report (continued)**  
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**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 Creative Skills Development and Chorus Development training programme for young singers, the annual Festival of Voice vocal competition in Glenarm, Co. Antrim, the outreach and educational projects, the Hydebank Prison Choir Project 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 2025**

**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 2024 NI Opera started off the year with an exciting week of outreach and education for Senior Music Students to participate in an exciting week of learning. Including sessions to explore acting, singing, staging, directing and linguistics unveiling the multifaceted world of opera. Expert-led workshops were held in the Grand Opera House Studio space where a performance showcase was held at the end of the week for parents and school teachers.

The highly successful Salon Series began a run at the MAC Belfast on 13 April 2024. This is a six part series where audiences were able to immerse themselves in the world of song, opera and music through storytelling. Starting off with the salon performance of Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered starring Ruth McGinley and Wendy Ferguson. Other Salon pieces were performed from April onwards throughout 2024. Including La Voix Humaine by Poulenc starring soloist Mary McCabe and David Quigley, Sea Wrack with Frasier Hickland, Jenny Bourke and Susie Gibbons. Sea Wrack also saw a collaboration on costume with NI Artist Sarah O'Neill.

The Salon Series was then appearing in Derry/Londonderry at The Playhouse Derry for a weekend of Musical Melodies. The Lost Boy starring Conor Quinn and Greg Arrowsmith on piano was performed along with Ruth McGinley and Wendy Ferguson performing Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered. Alongside these two performances over the weekend NI Opera ran a series of free workshops in creative and skills development along with pre-show talks with director Cameron Menzies on the Salon Series and in particular the two shows that were being performed.

In May Northern Ireland Opera with their Chorus Development Programme singers performed at the Ulster Hall. The singers performed works by Wagner, Purcell, Puccini Verdi and Tchaikovsky including works by John Adams. This concert was prepared and conducted by the esteemed James Gross Smith and accompanied on piano by Tristan Rusccher. This concert also included a section for our NI Opera Artist in Development Conductor Margaret Bridge to conduct sections of Purcell's The Fairy Queen. This concert gave Margaret a performance credit and a real opportunity to conduct on the professional concert platform. Soloist Mary McCabe performed her aria from Eugene Onegin as part of this concert and to promote the mainstage opera work for 2024.

Our very popular Morning Melodies series continued in 2024. This 11am Wednesday morning concert series is an opportunity for our singers to work on new and developing repertoire and to present a varied array of musical genre to an intimate audience. Each Morning Melodies has sold out and we mostly hold these concerts in the Studio Space at the Grand Opera house. They are always at 11am and contain 50 minutes of varied music from Opera, Song to Music Theatre. They are proving very popular with audiences who do not like to travel at night.

We released our main stage opera for 2024 which was the Tchaikovsky masterpiece Eugene Onegin to be performed at the Grand Opera House on Sept 14, 17, 19 and 21. We were very happy to announce that the cast consisted of an all female cast from the island of Ireland, a first for the company. Mary McCabe made her principal role debut at the lead soprano Tatyana, Sarah Richmond played the role of Olga, Caroline Dobbin the role of Madame Larina and Jenny Bourke also making her principal role debut as Filipevna. European opera conductor Dominic Limburg was engaged to lead the premiere of the Orchestra of Northern Ireland Opera to great acclaim. The Chorus singers, all working throughout the year on skills and a huge amount of language hours to sing in Russian (the majority of them for the first time), appeared in the production to great acclaim.

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**Trustees' Report (continued)**  
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**Achievements and performance (continued)**

NI Opera were engaged to perform at the Belfast City Hall to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Belfast Exposed, Northern Ireland's leading centre for photography. Soloists Mary McCabe and Jenny Bourke appeared with the full forces of the NI Opera Chorus.

Our schools outreach programme commenced in May and throughout the year, led by India Chapman-Webb, has been travelling across NI to help support or to introduce music into school classrooms. India has provided 12 months of outreach to a mix of schools across NI.

2024 saw us launch a new initiative to see how we might help support local artists and art sector workers. We were delighted to be able to provide a very limited number of complimentary tickets to anyone in these sectors. This programme was launched as part of the Chorus performance at the Ulster Hall and was also a way of getting people who may not usually attend such events to give it a try and see what they thought. All we asked for in return was some feedback about what they had seen. This programme has worked well to engage with new audiences for NI Opera.

NI Opera performed in Armagh at The Palace Chamber, Palace Demesne a programme of Georgian delights called The Stars, The Moon and the Georgian Sky. Soloists Anna Gregg and Mary McCabe performed two concerts with pianist Bryan Evans to two sold out performances.

Again, NI Opera provided a full summer series programme of free events across NI, performances were held at Warrenpoint, Armagh, Flowerfields, Bangor, Derry/Londonderry, Bankmore Square and Maritime Mile. These performances across NI enable us to reach new audiences and to consolidate our loyal following.

The 14th Glenarm Festival of Voice was held from Friday 23 to Sunday 25 August in Glenarm Co. Antrim. The 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.

August 2024 saw rehearsals ramp up towards Eugene Onegin taking to the Grand Opera House stage. 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.

As part of our outreach work we held a week long series at the Grand Opera House working with students from a variety of secondary schools including St Genevieve's, Rathmore Grammar, Hunterhouse college, The Royal Belfast Academical Institution, Bangor Grammar and Dominican College where these students took part in expert-led sessions in Music and Creative Skills with an open performance at the end of the week for invited family and guests.

NI Opera Chorus performed as part of a charity event at the Ulster Hall for Solás which is a special needs charity which supports children and young people with a broad range of needs including Autism.

NI Opera performed across the festive holiday season in December at The Merchant Hotel, we hosted our Christmas – Sing a Long with a packed audience all there to hear Christmas music and then to join in a big sing along together with the NI Opera Chorus.

We saw another two sold out events for the start of 2025 with a showcase of local and young talent at Opera for Tea at the Blackbox as part of the Cathedral Arts Festival in January.



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**Trustees' Report (continued)**  
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**Achievements and performance (continued)**

**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 deficit for the year was £111,374 which resulted in positive total funds at the year end of £57,216. 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.

**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.

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**Trustees' Report (continued)**  
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**Structure, governance and management (continued)**

**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.

**Plans for future periods**

Our plans for 2025/26 year and beyond are detailed below.

**Seven Last Words of Christ**

In April we showcased the Northern Ireland Opera Chorus and four soloists Mary McCabe, Jenny Bourke, Euan McDonald and Seamus Brady to perform Haydn's The Seven Last Words of Christ in with the Ulster Orchestra at the Ulster Hall for the Music for Good Friday programme.

**Music and Creative Skills Workshops**

April 21 to 25 NI Opera hosted and created creative skills and education week events for children. This is a free holiday scheme for children to be held at St John the Evangelist on the Falls Road. We provide a unique tailored week of sessions all themed around Easter for children aged from 9-11 where they experience different creative skills used to bring an opera to life and onto a stage, including singing, choreography, costume, props and acting all led by our expert facilitators.

**La Voix Humaine – The Everyman Theatre, Cork**

Our production of Poulenc's one woman opera La Voix Humaine was produced with the Everyman Theatre in Cork. This is the company's first time since before covid being invited to perform in the republic. The piece starred Mary McCabe and pianist David Quigley.

**Feline Intimate – Meow Meow**

International Singing Sensation Meow Meow returned to Belfast for one night only with NI Opera direct from her triumph at the Soho Theatre in London. NI Opera's Artistic Director directs this one night only concert of repertoire from Kurt Weill, Spoliansky and originals by Meow Meow at the Deers Head in Belfast.

**The 15th Glenarm Festival of Voice, August 2025**

NI Opera presented the 15th Festival of voice from 22 to 24 August. This included three free BBC Radio 3 recitals to experience, recorded live for national broadcast in September, an afternoon recital held at Glenarm Castle and the weekend culminated in a vocal competition featuring four young singers from the island of Ireland. Our competition Finale, which was hosted by our Patron, Sean Rafferty. The singers compete 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.

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**Trustees' Report (continued)**  
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**Plans for future periods (continued)**

**Follies - Grand Opera House Belfast, Sept 2025**

For the mainstage season, we present a Sondheim Musical – Follies. This piece will be performed in the Grand Opera House Belfast. The cast of 38 performers in a mix of West End leading artists, local stars and young local artists making their professional theatre debuts with the company. Follies sees the return of the Orchestra of Northern Ireland Opera now in its second year. The orchestra draws its players from the island of Ireland. We launched the orchestra in 2024 on the production of Eugene Onegin to great acclaim. West End Music director Greg Arrowsmith joined as the Music Director and Conductor of Follies. This production was a very important piece for the company to present as we have not presented a musical since 2022 with the award-winning production of Into the Woods. The company remains set up to produce opera, operetta and music theatre and to explore the art of storytelling through music.

**Pop Up Events and regional events 25/26**

The next year will see the company remain open and flexible to being able to respond to the sector and to continue working with partners and sectoral partners such as Big Telly Theatre Co. Derry PlayHouse and looking to collaborate with new partners such as Diva Opera to provide more touring capabilities. We will continue to create and produce pop up events and free summer concert series events at stunning and unexpected venues across Northern Ireland such as the Palace Demesne in Armagh, The Merchant Hotel, Glenarm Castle in Co. Antrim, The Harrison Chambers of Distinction, The First Church Belfast and Bangor Court House. We will also be creating pop up events for the Maritime Mile to the Botanic Gardens.

**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.



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**Trustees' Report (continued)**  
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**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.

**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 2025