

BELFAST SUMMER SCHOOL OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC
TRUSTEES ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2024

Trustees' Annual Report

The trustees present their Trustees' Annual Report prepared in accordance with Charities SORP 2015 (FRS102) and the unaudited financial statements for the period ended 31 March 2024, also prepared in accordance with the aforementioned Statement of Recommended Practice and FRS 102.

Trustees

The trustees who served during the period are as follows:

Ray Morgan
Christine Dowling
Ian Burrows
Brendan Morgan
Andy McGregor
Goretti O'Connor

Structure, Governance & Management

The organisation is an unincorporated charity and was registered with the Charity Commission of Northern Ireland on 19 April 2016. The Charity number is NIC104823.

The charity is governed by its constitution and is managed by key persons from the main organisations delivering traditional music education in Belfast, both in Irish and in Ulster Scots. The charity plans and delivers an annual festival each July, Belfast TradFest and Belfast TradFest Summer School, and a Winter Weekend festival over 3 days each February based in Belfast city centre, with activities in various venues across the city.

The charity's principal address is:
173 University Street
Belfast
Co Antrim
BT7 1HR

Objectives and Activities

To deliver an annual traditional music festival and summer school and a winter weekend festival and music school within Belfast

To offer Internationally recognised professional musicians for tuition to participants and for performances for audiences.

To support and showcase local and emerging traditional musicians and artists.

To provide opportunities for meaningful interaction between cultural traditions.

To enhance and develop the skills, talents and creative ability of participants in the traditional arts, through the provision of our programme of activities.

To provide access for engagement in traditional music within Belfast where such opportunities are lacking and in a way that will increase accessibility to the socially disadvantaged. Achieved through bursary sponsorships, education programmes and free/easily accessible programming.

To contribute towards the development and promotion of traditional arts activities within Belfast (and NI in general).

To encourage and build tolerance, trust, respect and understanding among all cultural, traditional, ethnic and disabled communities.

To attract participants and audiences from outside NI with a programme, which highlights the many strands of traditional music here, our rich connections with the rest of Ireland and Scotland, and the renowned uniqueness of traditional music in the exciting cultural destination that is Belfast.

Financial Review

The charity achieved a net income surplus of £57,057 from a total income of £551,496.

(For 2023: Net income surplus was £22,603 for a total income of £284,504 this surplus was set against carried forward funds of £7,828). The principal funding sources were grants from the ACNI, and BCC along with self-generated income from Box Office.

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MARCH 2024

Trustees' Annual Report

Introduction

The financial year 2023-2024 marked a pivotal development in the trajectory of Belfast TradFest, underscoring significant advancements in the breadth and depth of our traditional arts programming and delivery. Through the execution of four distinct traditional music festivals, complemented by a spectrum of outreach initiatives, we have fortified our position as a linchpin in the preservation and dissemination of traditional music, dance, and song in Belfast and beyond. This report highlights the substantive progress achieved across various productions, affirming our steadfast commitment to fostering our shared cultural heritage through education, accessibility, and high-calibre artistic engagement.

Belfast TradFest employs local people, we rely on goods and services supplied locally, and festival attendees spend most of their money locally in small enterprises. Because of this, the money stays, and re-circulates, within the local economy. Small enterprises employ local people and source their goods from other local suppliers. In turn, these local employees spend much of their earnings locally. This is known as the 'multiplier effect'.

- Belfast TradFest produces real, sustainable, local economic impacts.
- Belfast TradFest develops existing, new and non- traditional audiences.
- Belfast TradFest trains, launches and supports artists and administrators.

Organisation Highlights

The 5th edition of Belfast TradFest, held in July 2023, represents the pioneering work of our team and board to promote traditional arts and achieve significant cultural impact with a total audience of over 16k attending a varied programme of events over 8 days.

Key highlights are detailed as follows:

- Comprehensive Event Programming:
 - The festival facilitated 245 events, including 14 sold-out concerts featuring both emergent and renowned artists. This plethora of offerings underscores our commitment to both artistic excellence and community engagement.
 - Afternoon programming at Ulster University attracted 1,970 attendees, encompassing song sessions, exhibitions, CD launches, and music stalls. These events served as a fulcrum for cultural dialogue, offering attendees immersive experiences in traditional arts.
- Summer School Enrolment and Outcomes:
 - The Summer School delivered in partnership with Ulster University experienced an unprecedented surge in participation, with 564 registrants representing a 73% year-over-year increase.
 - Of particular note, the 'Whistle and Sing' program attracted 60 young musicians aged 5-12, introducing a new generation to the tunes and songs of Belfast and Ulster. These young musicians subsequently sign up to the local traditional music schools and there is evidence to suggest that our work is helping to increase numbers in traditional music education participation throughout the city.
 - The geographic diversity of participants underscores the international prestige of our summer school programme: 43% from Belfast, 38% from other parts of Northern Ireland, 5% from the Republic of Ireland, and 15% from overseas. Such representation augments the cultural exchange integral to our mission.
- Session Trail:
 - Partnering with McConnell's Irish Whisky, we curated 62 sessions across 15 venues, drawing an audience of 3,600. These informal sessions not only fostered artistic expression but also reinforced the convivial spirit of traditional music and afforded young and aspiring musicians the opportunity to sit with and learn from masters of the tradition.

- **Economic Contributions:**
 - The festival employed 350 musicians, thereby supporting the livelihoods of artists and invigorating the local cultural economy. This encompassed opportunities for both emerging talent and seasoned practitioners.
 - Three Belfast BIDs commissioned the independent market research group CARD to undertake some research on the night-time economy and it is estimated that Belfast TradFest's economic impact was £1.34m. For every £1 of restricted funding, the festival is calculated to have generated £43 in return.

Website traffic & Sales

In 2023, website traffic demonstrated remarkable growth compared to 2022.

- Total visits surged by 122%, rising to 91K from 41K, while unique visitors increased by an impressive 126%, reaching 61K from 27K.
- Page views also doubled, climbing to 211K from 105K, reflecting greater engagement.
- Revenue saw an extraordinary increase of 170%, growing to £170K from £63K, and the number of units sold rose by 150%, reaching 6.5K compared to 2.6K the previous year.

These metrics highlight significant progress across all key performance indicators

Expansion of Dance Programming

The evolution of our dance initiatives reflects a strategic endeavour to broaden engagement with traditional art forms:

- **Workshops and Céilís:**
 - Increased attendance at Set Dancing and Sean Nós workshops is indicative of burgeoning interest in traditional dance. Additionally, we hosted four highly successful Céilís: the Pride Céilí, Family Céilí, Sets Céilí at Duncairn Arts Centre, and Titanic Céilí. Each event reinforced the inclusivity and vibrancy inherent in traditional dance culture.
- **Future Trajectory:**
 - Dance programming remains a focal point for sustained growth, with aspirations to expand workshop offerings and elevate the prominence of Céilís in future festivals.

Bursary Scheme

Our bursary initiative embodies our core ethos of inclusivity, ensuring equitable access to traditional arts education:

- Over 60 bursaries were awarded to young musicians, enabling their participation in the Summer School. This initiative was made possible through the generosity of local businesses, individuals, organisations, traditional music providers, and community patrons.
- Bursary students expressed profound gratitude, and their positive feedback underscores the transformative impact of this program on young artists who might otherwise face barriers to participation.

Strategic Partnerships and Auxiliary Programming

- **Sound of Belfast Collaboration:** In November 2023, we co-hosted a sold-out concert and workshops with the Sound of Belfast Festival at the Oh Yeah Centre. Featuring artists such as Barry Kerr, Laura Kerr, Donogh Hennessy, Múlú, and local emerging ensemble Ó Ghlúin go Glúin, the event fortified partnerships with Belfast City Council and other cultural entities. Additionally, it provided a platform for emerging talent nurtured through our Summer School, exemplifying the cyclical nature of our educational initiatives.
- **Winter Weekend Expansion:** Our 3rd Belfast TradFest Winter Weekend, held February 24-25, 2024, epitomized the vitality of traditional arts during the winter season.
 - The Winter Weekend 2024 event delivered remarkable results, showcasing its significant impact on the cultural and economic landscape of Belfast.
 - We Attracted a total audience of 6,047
 - We employed 181 talented artists, further enriching the city's vibrant arts scene.

- Notably, 3,326 visitors travelled from outside Belfast, highlighting the event’s appeal beyond local boundaries.
- The total economic contribution to the city was an outstanding £502,203, demonstrating its pivotal role in driving tourism and supporting the local economy.

The program included:

- Workshops, concerts, céilís, and sessions, fostering communal participation.
- Five sold-out concerts, indicative of sustained audience demand.
- Universally positive feedback, affirming the Winter Weekend as a cornerstone of our year-round programming.

- **Bothy Band – Legacy Event**

We were delighted to invite The Bothy Band to return to the stage to play their first Irish concert for 45 years at Belfast’s Waterfront Hall. This was a landmark legacy event in the history of traditional Irish music and Belfast TradFest was central to this story. The positive press & reaction from the public was overwhelming and firmly placed our organisation and festival on the map with many saying “Belfast TradFest has arrived”. The sold out concert was a huge success and the financial return added positively to our Winter Weekend budget and the organisations finances.

- **Curated Concerts**

We are very pleased to now be in a position to be curating specific one off festival events that are being attended and received very well.

- WW23 – Seamus O’Kane – A Celebration
- WW24 – Bríd Harper Celebration Concert
- WW24 – The Songs of Shane MacGowan

St. Patrick's Music Weekend Programming

In March 2024, Belfast City Council commissioned us to curate a traditional arts program for St. Patrick’s Music weekend. Despite a short lead in and logistical constraints, we delivered a robust schedule:

- **Programme:**

Over 40 hours of events were delivered across 13 venues, including an outdoor Festival Village in central Belfast. These events encompassed concerts, seisiúins, and céilís, attracting an estimated 16,500 attendees.

- **Strategic Outcomes:**

This music weekend festival accentuated the unifying potential of traditional arts, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and celebrating St. Patrick’s legacy through an inclusive lens. Feedback from attendees and stakeholders, including Belfast City Council, Destination CQ and Arts Council NI underscored the program’s resounding success.

Conclusion

The financial year 2023-2024 has unequivocally underscored Belfast TradFest’s capacity to advance cultural enrichment and societal cohesion through traditional arts. Our multifaceted programming has amplified community engagement, expanded access to world-class artistic education, and reinforced the socioeconomic fabric of the arts sector here in Belfast.

Looking ahead, our priorities include:

- Sustained expansion of programming to reach broader and more diverse audiences.
- Deepening partnerships with arts organizations, local authorities, and international collaborators.
- Furthering our educational initiatives, with particular emphasis on youth engagement and financial accessibility.

We extend our sincerest gratitude to our funders, collaborators, participants, and audiences for their unwavering support. Collectively, we continue to preserve, celebrate, and innovate within the rich tapestry of traditional arts, ensuring its vitality for generations to come.

Trustees' Responsibilities Statement

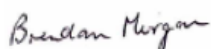
The trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustee's Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice)

The law applicable to charities in Northern Ireland requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity 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 in the Charities SORP 2015 (FRS 102);
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, and the provisions of the trust deed. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

By Order of the Board



Brendan Morgan Trustee

Date: 6th January 2025