



THE LIVING TRADITION

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**PLEASE SPREAD
THE NEWS!**

AN NUACHT - 50

Yes, we have reached No. 50 in our bulletin series which commenced in the early days of covid. It has been a momentous and challenging journey but the volunteer spirit in our cultural movement was supreme. Against the background of a wonderful 2023, we now look forward with great anticipation to many highlights, initiatives and innovations in 2024. Bí linn ar an ród seo romhainn. Join us for this journey and the journey to 2030.

THE WREN IS BACK

The “WREN IS BACK”! “HUNTING THE WREN” in years gone by was a festive occasion following Christmas Day. In recent years it has been in sharp decline. It was a great community interaction and celebration. It was also a great barometer of the talent in an area. Then again, the process helped many cultural and charitable causes.

In 2022, Comhaltas decided to intervene to save this ancient custom. They called it “Bring back the Wren” and it became evident that there was a welcome for this initiative.

In 2023, we are glad to report that the “Wren is Back”. Over 40 branches of Comhaltas took to the highways and byways bringing the festive joy of music, song and dance to young and old alike and particularly to the infirm and housebound. Needless to say, the wren is quite safe and, being a songster, hopefully enjoyed this celebration in its honour.

SPREADING THE NEWS

Coverage by television, radio and print media of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2023 in Mullingar was, by any standards, exceptional. We certainly have come a long way!

TG4 had in the region of 10 hours live coverage from the Fleadh and subsequently, for the first time, an hour-long programme of the 11 Céilí Bands. Well done to Michéal Ó Domhnaill and his team for bringing the Céilí Bands into our sitting rooms.

RTÉ had 6 programmes from the Fleadh. These were done by Maggie Breathnach of Red Shoe Productions. The viewing numbers were most impressive. Maith thú, Maggie.

RTÉ also had several of its main stream programmes covering the Fleadh including the much admired Céilí House with Kieran Hanrahan.

The recently initiated streaming of some major competitions, which brought the Fleadh to the world including the 22 Countries in which Comhaltas operates, was a major success. Well done to Michéal Ó Domhnaill and his team together with Majella Bartley and her team.

Sometimes it is said that “no news is good news” but great news trumps it all!

AIRGEAD GAN STRÓ

It is always a challenge for a Comhaltas branch – like all other organisations – to keep the wheels turning and the music playing. Yes, the branches – like the good volunteers they are – make a great effort and they are an important cog in the resurgence of our Irish cultural traditions.

However, the Ardchomhairle of Comhaltas would like to give them a helping hand.

Did you know about the Comhaltas National Draw? There are valuable prizes including one of €5,000. The selling branch can keep all the proceeds without any cost to themselves. The Ardchomhairle funds all costs from start to finish. With minimum efforts, it is easy to make a €1,000 or more. Ar aghaidh libh anois.

“CEANN FAOI” AND LIVING UNDER “HIGH BANKED CLOUDS OF RESIGNATION”

When launching the new Comhaltas Prospectus CONNECTING COMMUNITIES THROUGH OUR CULTURE, DR. MARY McALEESE, Iar-Uachtarán na hÉireann said:

The new Comhaltas PROSPECTUS which I have the privilege of launching promises us an exciting and ambitious future for Irish Culture at home and abroad. Comhaltas can do that confidently because it did not come to draft this with a blank sheet of paper but with seventy years of serious investment in the promotion and development of our heritage, whether through our language, music, dance, storytelling, gatherings, mentoring, teaching, fleadhs, Comhaltas branches and the daily outreach to individuals and audiences across Ireland and across the world. There is a truly inspirational story of how Comhaltas developed.

With the help of an army of volunteers, to the towering presence it is today. Those volunteers are still the engine of Comhaltas. They have never faltered but have gathered momentum year after year. Back in the middle of the last century they drove a small but fiercely ambitious organisation to turn around a pitiful common attitude of “ceann faoi” which Séamus Heaney memorably described as living under “high banked clouds of resignation”. Comhaltas knows our Irish cultural heritage intimately like no other organisation.

Who will ever forget the triumph of the first All-Ireland Fleadh to be held north of the border. That was Derry ten years ago. It brought almost half a million people of all sorts of politics and differing perspectives into each other's orbit in a beautiful simple way that only the best of music and dance can. Happy memories of being entertained yes, but being welcomed most of all, lodged deeply into hearts once perplexed by questions of how to transcend the borders and barriers of a baleful history. Questions answered by the universal language that is our musical heritage, mutual love of Irish culture whether in Belfast or Boston, Dublin or Dubai, Mullingar or Moscow, Scotland, or Sydney.

WEXFORD BECKONS

There is excitement in the air as we anticipate the great gathering of the Gaeil which is Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Wexford next August. Wexford is famous in song, story and history. Cathaoirleach Eddie Taaffe and his meitheal of volunteers will leave no stone unturned to deliver a cultural spectacle worthy of the boys and girls of Wexford, Comhaltas and the Irish nation.

AISTEAR 2030

THE AISTEAR 2030 projects which are hosted by the seven Regional Resource Centres of Comhaltas, is a major part of the roll out of the new Comhaltas Prospectus. AISTEAR, meaning journey, is the goal of Comhaltas up to 2030.

AISTEAR 2030 will have two star concerts, two lectures and two archive events. All of these will be free of charge to the general public and special invited guests.

The AISTEAR 2030 project in the Regional Centres will provide an opportunity for those attending to learn about the imaginative and ambitious plans of Comhaltas for the fortunes and future of our revered cultural traditions: an echo of the momentous journey from the founding of Comhaltas in 1951 to the heights to which these traditions have ascended. Fleadh 2023 attracted 600,000 people, 15,000 performers and generated €60,000,000 for the economy!

The Prospectus was launched by Iar-Uachtarán na hÉireann Dr. Mary McAleese in a riveting address in which she said that the PROSPECTUS reflects the “70 years of serious investment by Comhaltas in the promotion and development of our heritage”. She went on to say: “Comhaltas knows our Irish heritage like no other organisation”.

GOOD WISHES AND PRAYERS

It was with great sadness that we learned of the serious car accident involving our much respected colleagues Seamus and Teresa MacCormaic. It is good to know that they are making a fine recovery. They are in our thoughts and prayers.

Seamus was a former Uachtarán of Comhaltas and is now Competitions Officer – roles he has filled with distinction. He has played a leading role in many projects including the Scoraíocht and Pléaracha competitions which at present are experiencing a great resurgence. He is a staunch advocate of the Irish Language.

Séamus and Teresa are a dynamic duo working together and in close collaboration on the promotion of our Irish cultural traditions.

Guimíd Rath Dé ortha beirt agus, le cúnamh De, ní ró-fhada go mbeidh siad i mbarr a sláinte arís.

SLIGO TO HOST COMHDHÁIL 2024 WITH THE THEME OF “A SHARED ISLAND”

The annual Congress of Comhaltas is usually held at Cultúrlann na hÉireann in Dublin. For this year, the Ardchomhairle have decided to visit Sligo, the home of memorable All-Ireland Fleadhanna in the past and the All-Ireland Fleadh Fest during Covid. The Cathaoirleach of this special occasion is Bartley Gavin who excelled as Cathaoirleach of Fleadhanna and Fleadh Fest. It will be a joint project between the Ardchomhlairle and Sligo.

The Comhdháil section will as heretofore be held on the Saturday and Sunday. Central to this year’s Comhdháil will be the Comhaltas Prospectus. It will also include the launch of the new Comhaltas Website which has been described as innovative and imaginative and to which Comhaltas units can make their own contribution.

The Comhdháil will have all the usual elements such as the Annual Report, Audited Accounts, Motions, Elections, etc.

The SCT examinations project is a gem in the Comhaltas education programme. It was initiated by Micheál Ó hEidhin, Chief Music Inspector with the Department of Education and his accomplished team. Micheál’s father Pádraig Ó hEidhin was a former Uachtarán of Comhaltas. As in previous years, the SCT awards will be presented at the Comhdháil.

This year the Comhdháil with the “Shared Island” theme will have an extensive programme of céilithe, sessions, lectures, recitals, panel discussions and much more.

Uachtarán An Chomhaltais Éamonn Ó hÁrgáin will deliver his key note address at the start of the Comhdháil.

The venue is the Clayton Hotel.

Tel: (071) 9119000

Email: info.sligo@claytonhotels.com

MÍLE BUÍOCHAS

ARCHIVE TREASURE GIFTED TO COMHALTAS

Comhaltas has recently acquired the use of the RTÉ 1, “Fleadh Cheoil” 1994 to 2001 film material produced by Forefront Productions for archival educational purposes.

Joe and Tony McCarthy of the Forefront Productions were appreciated and respected by all involved in Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, Comhaltas, the host venues and all the Fleadh Cheoil series participants for their professional integrity and standards of excellence, together with their understanding of the Fleadh, Comhaltas and the broader traditional music community.

Comhaltas again acknowledges the contribution made by Joe, Tony and Forefront to the Fleadh and to Comhaltas and expresses its appreciation for this unique and particularly special archive donation.

This valuable collection will now be included in the extensive COMHALTAS ARCHIVE which is associated with EUROPEANNA SOUNDS. It will also have all the Fleadh Fest contributions from the counties and countries which were filmed during covid.

FÁILTE

We are pleased to extend a céad míle fáilte to recently formed branches abroad – Singapore, Dubai, Peyriac de Mar in France and another in the offing for Paris. With Comhaltas branches now spread across 22 countries, the vast cultural network shows that the dream of the Comhaltas founders in 1951 has become a reality.

FOCAL AR FHOCAL

The FOCAL AR FHOCAL Irish Language booklet has now been distributed to all branches with a recommendation that a circle be established in the branch for members and the local community. Extra copies are available on request. There is no charge. Labhair Gaeilge linn!

GRADAM NA hÉIGSE

This award is suitable for teachers and others. Branches should consider having a special occasion for presentations. The certificate and medallion are free of charge. All that is required is that a very short cv of the proposed awardee be submitted to Head Office. The presentations should be publicised on local radio, local newspapers and social media. Family members of the awardees could be invited. Where Gradam na hÉigse has been awarded, the report is that the awardees were most appreciative of the honour.

FLEADH AN PHOBAIL

This represents embracing other community organisations and their activities in the Provincial Fleadhanna. The pilot scheme at the Connacht Fleadh in 2023 held in Ballina was an outstanding success. Hopefully, we will see this community project expanded and enhanced in 2024.

NEW BRANCHES

Perhaps now – in line with the new Prospectus - is the time for expansion and enhancement. The branch is the foundation of our cultural movement. The good news is that new branches are coming on stream at home and abroad. With leadership from Ardchomhairle members, County Boards and others should proactively research and plan a branch recruitment campaign. The first step is to identify an interested leader or leaders where a branch might be successful. Such a campaign can have a refreshing influence on the whole movement.

New branches do not pay the CISTE levy in the first year of operation. The DRAW could also be cited as an incentive. Lets make 2024 the year of renewal.

DONATIONS

The late Bernard Waldron has donated his uilleann pipes to Comhaltas.

Alison Mall has donated the Yamaha baby grand piano of her late husband to Comhaltas.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha.

IRISH DIASPORA

The Irish Diaspora global network of Comhaltas is unique and unequalled in the history of the State. See map in this issue of TREOIR depicting the 22 countries with Comhaltas operations. These embrace USA, Canada, Britain, Europe, South America, United Arab Emirates, Asia and Australia.

The Irish Diaspora are our people, "bone of our bone" and ever-constant in support of their homeland. It is estimated that people of Irish extraction could be in the region of 70 million worldwide.

The message from that founding seismic event of Comhaltas in Mullingar in 1951 spread throughout the land and to many far-flung places worldwide. It struck a chord in the hearts of all who cherish our sovereignty and our distinctive cultural heritage. It found an echo not just among the Irish Diaspora but with non-Irish friends worldwide. We salute our Comhaltas colleagues worldwide and assure them of our support in every way possible.

A NOBLE SALUTE

Looking back over the years, one could not but be impressed by the thousands of musicians, singers and dancers who have graced our sessions and our stages. They have lifted our spirits and reminded us of the wonderful cultural treasure which has been bequeathed to us by past generations. As the former Uachtarán na hÉireann Dr. Mary McAleese put in when launching the new Comhaltas Prospectus:

"...It draws us in, inspires us, gives us pride, makes new friends and admirers for us at home and abroad".

In recognition of those traditional performers, Comhaltas over the years initiated a number of awards among which are the ARD-OLLAMH and BARDIC AWARDS (ceannródaithe).

Looking back at the recipients of these awards it reads like a "whose who" of the Irish traditional culture world.

The Ard-Ollamh for Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Wexford this year will be Domhnall de Barra, one of the most prominent traditional musicians of his generation. He has an in-depth knowledge of our culture and has written extensively on it including in TREOIR. Domhnall has served two terms as Uachtarán of Comhaltas.

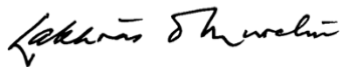
The Maestros to receive Bardic Awards in Wexford are Vincent Crowley, Sarah Jane Woods, Deirdre Collis, Mark Redmond, Bríd Harper.

A SPORTING DUO

The Dublin Marathon is not for the faint-hearted. It takes months - perhaps years - to train for this great challenge. Many people dream of it but only very special people get to the starting line and the finishing line.

We watched it on television to see if we could spot anyone we might know. We did. There in all their glory were two prominent Comhaltas people - the renowned Cultúrlann Chef Cathal Clarke and dancer supreme Liam Guiney. Hats off to this sporting duo. They did us proud. In years to come we might say "Comhaltas did the Dublin Marathon".

Le mór-mheas,



Labhrás Ó Murchú
Ardstiúrthóir CCÉ