

THE LIVING TRADITION

CEARNÓG BELGRAVE, BAILE NA MANACH, CO. ÁTHA CLIATH

Phone: 01-2800295. Fax: 01-2803759

Email: eolas@comhaltas.ie

Website: <http://www.comhaltas.ie>

COMHALTAS – CORONAVIRUS

Communication No. 17

There's another nice seanfhocal (proverb) 'Ná cuir an sonas ar athlá!' – Don't postpone joy! How true this is during the present crisis. So many people have done so many things to bring joy and happiness to so many people who need support and encouragement. These thousands of acts of service and kindness by a 'meitheal' of volunteers are sowing a seed to-day which will give us an abundant harvest when the storm has passed. As another seanfhocal might put it, 'Níor chaill fear an mhisnigh riamh' – Fortune favours the brave!

- Frankie McCormick, who hails from County Armagh and now lives in America, is Chair of the Comhaltas North American Provincial Council. Here we would like to share some of his thoughts and experiences with you:

"To my North American Comhaltas Family.

We are in the midst of something unequalled and unparalleled in personal challenges in most of our lifetimes and hopefully the likes of which we hope to never encounter again. So many of us on a daily, even hourly basis, have faced a new test in getting through the day. From simple tasks as going to the grocery store, speaking through masks and plastic barriers to the realization of not being able to visit loved ones. Technology and Social Media have picked up a small part of that slack and have afforded family members some comfort knowing that they can pick up a phone or electronic device to see each other and feel a sense of security speaking to each other and easing their feeling of vulnerability or loneliness. We as a large family ourselves need to make sure that we are reaching out to and taking care of our Comhaltas families within our communities as well as within our communities at large. Please take 10 minutes out of your day and phone people you feel may be too afraid to leave their homes. Ask what you can do for them, it may be just that simple as having a conversation with them, reassuring them that you are only a phone call away, we owe it to ourselves to care for one another.

'Our Comhaltas family has had many temporary setbacks this year with the cancellation of our April Convention in San Francisco which was such a painful thing for the Steering Committee to have to come to terms with after two and a half years of preparation and buildup. Our own two Regional Fleadhanna cancelled and the All-Ireland in Mullingar suffering the same fate. One recent bright spot was the initiative of the Murphy Roche Branch in Chicago (who were originally to have hosted the 2020 Mid-West Fleadh Cheoil) hosting an online music competition, "Chicago eComortas Ceoil" and opening it up for all of North America and abroad to participate.

"The challenge this year has been to keep our spirits up, to believe that in time we will be able to go back to normal life, and to once again embrace the fun and joy of

dancing at the monthly Céilí, preparing for competition, playing at a seisiún, practicing in group settings without worry or fear. We still have a long road ahead of us in 2020 and we are already thinking of the challenges ahead in 2021.

‘There have been many initiatives undertaken this year in light of our current challenges. Sláinte 2020, to name one, has been organized to help support those in the New York area in need of financial support who otherwise may have no other recourse. Kitchen Pantries have been set up to literally feed those unable to leave their homes or who are facing hardships. It is our time to help as a family. Let us know of challenges you are facing as individuals, families and communities and what we can do to help. Send us your stories of champions in your own area or States, those who have gone the extra mile already to reach out and help within their own communities.’

- Then some good news for Frankie, as related by the PRO of Comhaltas North America, Paul Keating:

‘Perhaps with some divine intervention from Francie McCormick Sr. from up above, who gifted our Frankie's son also named Frankie a grey button accordion as a birthday present a number of years ago (Grandfather and grandson share the same birthday) has a further tale to tell. When young Frankie was a senior in college, the treasured gift went missing and was presumed stolen. Somehow it ended up in the public marketplace where fairly recently it was purchased at a flea market with the buyer getting a professional assessment as to its current value and he put it up on EBAY to try and obtain it from more knowledgeable and eager buyers. Veteran Chicago box player and pianist Marty Fahey noted the box and made out a Comhaltas label with the name Frankie McCormick on it and he messaged Frankie to see if he had it up for sale which he obviously did not. Our Frankie contacted the seller and a deal was struck and the accordion is about to be returned to its rightful owner as soon as the Pandemic allows. All's well that ends well, they say. – Paul Keating PRO of Comhaltas North America.’

- Sligo-based former School Principal Séamus MacCormaic is Oifigeach na gComórtas (National Competitions Officer) and former Uachtarán of Comhaltas. He had some interesting nuggets of information for us which we would like to share with you.

Sligo County Fleadh 2020 was due to be held in Riverstown on the week commencing May 25th with the competitions taking place on the weekend of May 30th and 31st. Sligo County Board has decided to have a virtual Fleadh Commemoration on that weekend and has asked each branch in the county to get members to record some tunes which will be streamed on the internet on Friday May 29th and Saturday May 30th commencing at 9.00pm each night. These events are also intended to be a fundraiser for some local charities.

While in Co. Sligo, let us visit one of the foremost Comhaltas branches in Ireland. In October 2019, the Fred Finn Branch, named after one of Sligo's iconic musicians, published a music learning programme entitled ‘The Sligo Book of Tunes’. The book contains more than 200 tunes, many associated with the Sligo style of music. A number of the teachers involved in the branch music classes have recorded all the tunes and they have made them available on line to all branch family members who were attending Fred Finn Branch classes prior to March.

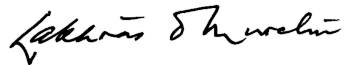
Well done to all concerned. Bail ó Dhia oraibh.

- Helen Gannon a former nurse, the driving force behind the St. Louis Irish Arts branch of Comhaltas, is a native of Limerick. Helen and her husband Dr. P.J. Gannon, emigrated to America several decades ago and brought their love of Ireland and her culture with them. They have left an indelible mark on the fortunes of Irish Culture in St. Louis and further afield.

Having served with distinction as Chair of the American Provincial Council of Comhaltas, Helen is now Cathaoirleach of the Comhaltas Meitheal America, which receives funding from the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. In the coming weeks she will be issuing DIASPORA No. 5 – her colourful and informative newsletter which gives a valuable insight into the Irish cultural life of America. It is designed by our Argentinian friend Fernando Marcos.

Slán go fóill. Lean ar aghaidh leis an obair eifeachtach atá ar siúl agaibh. Is cinnte go mbeidh lá eile ag an bPaorach!

Mise, le mór-mheas,



Labhrás Ó Murchú
Ardstiúrthóir CCÉ