



THE LIVING TRADITION

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COMHALTAS – CORONAVIRUS

Communication No. 32

Bliain nua. Dúshlán nua. Dóchas nua agus beart de réir ár mbriathar. Ní dhéanfar dearmad le fada an lá ar 2020 agus na cruatain a bhí ag gabháil leis. Ach freisin, ní dhéanfar dearmad ach a mhalairt ar na dea-scéalta a tháinig chun tosaigh in am an ghátair. Bímis dílis, díograiseach agus flaithiúil anois ar an ród seo romhainn.

A new year. A new challenge. New hope and a determination to overcome adversity in the midst of a pandemic. 2020 will long be remembered for its hardships, uncertainty and widespread disappointment and sadness. However, it will also be remembered for the many acts of kindness, compassion and creativity.

We also recall the many fine Comhaltas colleagues and friends who have passed to their Eternal Reward. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha.

The exceptional response of many people and branches to keep the music playing has left us with a memory and legacy which lifted our spirits and will, le cúnamh Dé, sustain us in our efforts in 2021.

The regular meetings of the Ardchomhairle via zoom throughout the COVID-19 pandemic exemplified the determination to keep the ship afloat and on course come what may. We assessed each new development and provided speedy responses. We sourced and distributed funds to units where this was deemed necessary. Guidance on restrictions we provided through Ronan O' Brien in the Brú Ború Cultural Centre in the shadow of the ancient Rock of Cashel.

- **MEETINGS IN TUNE!**

Music and song were never far from the Ardchomhairle deliberations as was evidenced at Cruinniú na Nollag. Peter Denmead of the Cultúrlann staff assembled an array of talent in a magnificent interlude to the weighty matters under consideration. Well done Peter and all concerned. Do spreag sibh sinn go mór.

- **CEILIÚRADH NA NOLLAG**

Bhí an tAifreann i gcónaí lárnach do cheiliuradh na Nollag. Faith and culture were always inextricably linked in Irish life. They defined and fortified us even in the most difficult times.

Attracta Brady, of the famous Irish traditional music dynasty on Offaly, was determined that 2020 – with all its challenges – would not pass without the customary Aifreann na Nollag at Cultúrlann na hÉireann. So she set about organising a ‘meitheal’ of like-minded people to deliver the annual festive spiritual experience on zoom.

With Attracta, Fr. Ralph of the Passionist Order, Máirín de Brún Kathleen Nesbitt, Tadhg Maher, Shauna Denmead, Paddy Ryan, Pádraig Ó Flanagáin, Noírín Ní Shúilleabháin, Seamus Brogan, Eibhlín Uí Mhaoldomhnaigh, rallied and the wish became a reality. The scene was set in a Christmas message by Uachtarán An Chomaltais Vince Jordan.

- **FLEADHFEST** will be a clarion call to positive action. It will find an echo in the counties and provinces of Ireland and throughout the Irish diaspora. It will be a cultural response to the devastating COVID-19. Ní neart go cur le chéile!

- **WELL DONE SAN FRANCISCO.**

Well done San Francisco Comhaltas and all who were involved in the two hour ‘Christmas Card’ programme which they transmitted to the world. This imaginative and creative response to the havoc caused by the coronavirus linked people worldwide in a show of determination and co-operation in the midst of crisis. Through the medium of an ancient and vibrant Irish cultural expression the ‘Christmas Card’ revitalised spirits and reminded people that we are not alone and that together we are strong. The music, camaraderie and feeling of wellbeing wafted across land and ocean and gave a whole new meaning to ‘family’. Comhgháirdeas agus Bail ó Dhia oraibh.

- **BRUACH NA CARRAIGE INITIATIVE.**

The members of the Bruach na Carraige branch set up an initiative called “Raising the Spirits”. The initiative involved a small group of performers bringing some “ceol agus craic” to the homes of their supporters. The performers did not enter the houses but rather played at a distance and could feel the sense of “togetherness” the initiative brought with it. The branch visited more than twenty-five households which took place mainly at weekends and over the Christmas period. The supporters were thrilled to receive a call from the Bruach na Carraige Comhaltas branch with some houses wondering could they call back again and more supporters had their own party piece ready to perform.

- **THE MISSING LINK RESTORED**

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the curtailment of flights into Ireland meant that many Irish exiles could not visit their loved ones back home. One can only imagine the sadness which this brought to many. Comhairle na Breataine of Comhaltas came to the rescue to make their contribution in alleviating this sadness. They provided an opportunity to the counties of Ireland to send messages online to the Irish community in Britain. This thoughtful gesture reminded us once more of the old Irish adage that it was better to light a candle than curse the darkness. How true. Well done Comhaltas na Breataine.

- **SLÁN LE PHYLLIS**

Comhaltas was saddened to learn of the passing of Phyllis Reynolds of Boston. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a h-anam uasal. Together with her late husband Larry, they were the bedrock of the ever-active and much admired Comhaltas branch in Boston. It is one of the foremost branches of the worldwide movement. The door of the Reynolds home was always open to greet and accommodate visitors from Ireland including Concert Tour performers. Many of us availed of this hospitality – home from home – and Phyllis was ever the gracious hostess. She will always be remembered with affection.

- **GAEL DEN SCOTH ABEA PÁDRAIG Ó LIDEADHA**

The news of the passing of that renowned Gael of the Banner County Pádraig Ó Lideadha spread throughout the Irish cultural world in the latter days of 2020. It evoked sadness tinged with admiration among those who had the good fortune to know and be inspired by this proud Clare man.

Pádraig Ó Lideadha epitomised all the finest characteristics of the Irish nation. His loyalty and commitment to the promotion and enhancement of the many strands of Irish Culture which he embraced were legendary.

During his many decades of service to Comhaltas at local and national levels his motto could well have been ask not why but when. He was an innovator and a doer and he has left his mark on many facets of Comhaltas achievements – Cois na hAbhna, Céilí and Set Dancing, Fleadhanna and many more.

Is fíor nach mbeidh a leithéid arís ann.

We extend our heartfelt sympathy and appreciation to Nora and family who shared his passion for cultúr na nGael.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal Gaelach.



FLEADHFEST in 2021 promises to be one of the most interesting and comprehensive cultural responses to COvid-19 nationwide and among the Irish diaspora. It is organised by the Irish cultural movement Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann which operates throughout Ireland and in 18 countries worldwide.

FLEADHFEST is a celebration of our Irish cultural heritage across the whole island of Ireland and among the Irish diaspora worldwide. It embraces each county and the global Irish and all friends of Ireland.

The national FLEADHFEST will be held in Sligo from the 1st to the 9th August 2021. It will reflect all the much-loved elements of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann – the largest cultural festival in the world – which is on hold due to Covid-19.

Fleadh fans worldwide – 750,000 in 2019 – can enjoy the FLEADHFEST extravaganza from the comfort of their own home.

Vince Jordan, the Uachtarán of Comhaltas said: ‘Comhaltas now operates in every one of the 32 counties and in 18 countries worldwide. FLEADHFEST is our gift to the millions of musicians, singers, dancers and fans to compensate for what they missed during the pandemic. It brings with it a message of renewal and renaissance.’

TG4 will provide major coverage of FLEADHFEST 2021 in Sligo. There will be 8 hours programming from this historic event. This will be preceded by one-hour programmes from each of the four provinces. In addition to the comprehensive and multifaceted programme of events, competitions will also be streamed live to the world.

Alan Eslemont, Stiúrthóir of TG4 said: ‘TG4 is pleased to be media partner and broadcaster for FLEADH 2021. This year, in addition to broadcast of FLEADHFEST in August, TG4 will also broadcast 4 special Provincial Fleadh Cheoil programmes during the month of July. TG4’s partnership with Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is an opportunity to give a platform and recognition to the many talented musicians who take part in Fleadh Ceoil each year, and TG4’s broadcasting of Fleadh on our player service worldwide ensures access and enjoyment of the music to those who cannot attend.’

The host-venue of Sligo is regarded as one of the foremost Fleadh venues of all time having hosted Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann on several occasions. In addition to the core elements of this FLEADHFEST, the local community in Sligo, which is noted for its artistic and cultural achievements, will also be invited to be an integral part of the celebration. It gives them an opportunity to showcase the richness and diversity of its many cultural and artistic expressions.

From Peter Farrell, Cathaoirleach CCÉ, Craobh Fred Finn, the host branch ‘The Fred Finn branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is thrilled that Sligo has been selected to host the All Ireland FLEADHFEST in August 2021. Every aspect of our community embraced and became part of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Sligo in 2014 and 2015, resulting in two exceptional fleadhhs which have had a transformative effect on our community. We look forward once again to working with the full array of community organisations and statutory partners to deliver an uplifting response to the restrictions we are all having to live with at present. FLEADHFEST will enable a worldwide audience to experience and partake in a celebration of Irish culture. Sligo which has such a rich heritage and strength of volunteerism, is uniquely positioned to deliver a superb festival event.’

Cathaoirleach of Sligo County Council, Councillor Dara Mulvey

‘Our county’s musical, literary and cultural heritage is arguably our greatest attraction. The recent hosting of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Sligo brought those attractions to an appreciative audience. In 2021, once again, we are privileged to partner Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in hosting the National FLEADHFEST in Sligo.’

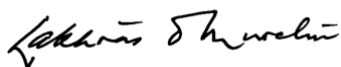
Deputy Chief Executive of Sligo County Council, Tom Kilfeather

‘FLEADHFEST is a unique and innovative way of overcoming COVID restrictions to celebrate our unique musical heritage. It will provide a major lift to our communities following a challenging year for the every sector of society. We owe a debt of gratitude to the exceptional Comhaltas volunteers countrywide who will deliver this wonderful event with their characteristic professional, expertise and enthusiasm.’

Comhaltas will also have a FLEADHFEST celebration which will be streamed to world audiences. FLEADHFEST will give each County the opportunity of telling it’s story, introducing their favourite musicians, singers, dancers, poets, storytellers, sports heroes, An Ghaeilge, Cultural Centres and archive footage to our world neighbours. It places Comhaltas at the heart of the community. Each county has a unique story to tell and a strong sense of pride in themselves. The Comhaltas Irish community worldwide will tell their story of emigration, cultural acknowledgement and achievement through the medium of FLEADHFEST.

2021 marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, a cultural milestone which will be celebrated by FLEADHFEST at all levels. This will be the most extensive and varied cultural offering of Comhaltas in its 70-year history.

The seven Regional Resource Centres of Comhaltas will play a pivotal role in the delivery of the FLEADHFEST extravaganza.



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