

THE LIVING TRADITION

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COMHALTAS – CORONAVIRUS

Communication No. 42

We issued our first Communication to coincide with the start of Covid-19. In the intervening Communications, we hit many ‘lows’ but thankfully we had many an antidote of good news – initiatives, innovations, achievements and camaraderie. Hats off to all those wonderful people who didn’t let the grass grow under the feet but kept a firm eye on the stars. **Anois beidh lá eile ag an bpíobaire. The piper will have another day! Nuair a thosnaíonn an ceol bíonn na damhsóirí réidh. The dancers are always ready when the music starts. Ar aghaidh leis an gceol.**

ASHLING

Ashling Murphy left this world in the bloom of youth when she had so much to offer to so many people. She was central to the mission of Comhaltas as a musician, teacher, colleague and friend. Go raibh leaba aici i measc na naomh. May she have the joy of Heaven in the company of the Saints.

On the 26th February, CEILIÚRADH ASHLING was held at Cultúrlann na hÉireann. This was attended by Ashling’s family. Also in attendance were Ministers Catherine Martin and Jack Chambers; Senator Mark Daly, Cathaoirleach Seanad Éireann; Garda Síochána representative Pat Fitzpatrick; Cathaoirleach of Dún Laoighre Rathdown County Council Cllr. Lettie McCarthy.

The CEILIÚRADH was a celebration of the life and legacy of this remarkable young lady and included the Comhaltas National Folk Orchestra of Ireland; the CCÉ Macalla na hÉireann Concert Tour group; and Ballboy CCÉ. Ashling was a member of all three. Songs were by Shauna Denmead and Tadhg Maher.

The blessings were by Canon Gary Hastings and Fr. Colm Mannion. The readings were by two of Ashling’s school teacher colleagues Sharon Carroll and James Hogan. All of whom together with Garda Pat Fitzpatrick performed the music which Ashling so much loved.

There will be other CEILIÚRADH events throughout the year including scholarships and hopefully a re-enactment of the Macalla na hÉireann tour of 2017 of which Ashling was a member.

SAN FRANCISCO EXCELS

The Cooley-Keegan Branch of Comhaltas in San Francisco did us proud when in April they hosted the Comhaltas North American Convention. This, due to covid, had been cancelled twice but the 2022 event bounced back with panache. These were days of celebration and renewal held in the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Hundreds of delegates gathered from all over North America for four days of musicmaking, dancing, singing, Gaeilge, camaraderie, and of course deliberations and planning for the future.

We have come a long journey together which is marked by many milestones of challenge and achievement, sustained by friendship, loyalty, dedication and love of country. To the Provincial Council of North America and the Cooley-Keegan Branch of Comhaltas we say you have made this possible with your leadership, vision and volunteerism. We cherish the memories and the friendship. Míle buíochas agus Bail ó Dhia oraibh i gcónaí.

An early reminder that 2023 will be the 50th anniversary of Comhaltas in America. Plans are already underway for a musical extravaganza!

CONGRESS HERALDS A NEW DAWN

Exultation was in the air. It was as if the floating petals from the cherry blossom tree at Cultúrlann na hÉireann weaved a carpet of welcome for the delegates from home and abroad as they arrived for the first Comhaltas Comhdháil since 2019. The intervening pandemic years – at least for that weekend – were being consigned to history. This was a new dawn, the resurgence which is the hallmark of the cultural movement.

The music of the Gael wafted through the old Victorian building as a background to the friendly handshakes and cheerful greetings. Old friendships were being renewed. Plans were being crafted.

When the young musicians from Cumann na bPíobairí Uilleann opened the Comhdháil, our thoughts drifted back to those historic days in 1951 when members of the Cumann travelled to Mullingar to light the torch that was Comhaltas. How brightly that torch has illuminated our journey over the last 71 years.

As the delegates left the Cultúrlann and the cherry blossoms falling on them, they all vowed, le cúnamh Dé, to meet again at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Mullingar.

FULL FLEADH QUOTA

It would be difficult to envisage over the last two years but all Fleadhanna Cheoil are back on course for 2022. There will be 32 County Fleadhanna, Four Provincial Fleadhanna, and the Fleadhanna in America and Britain.

BACK TO MULLINGAR

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, which was cancelled for the years of the pandemic, will be back in style for 2022. It returns to Mullingar, the cradle of Comhaltas where the cultural movement was founded in 1951.

This will be a Fleadh of survival and celebration with hundreds of thousands from all over the world. With over 40 concerts; non-stop Gig Rigs with the cream of Irish talent; Ard-Ollamh and Bardic Awards; over 7,000 provincial qualifiers vying for national honours; hundreds of aspiring young performers at the Scoil Éigse; several céilithe; afternoon recitals; indoor and outdoor sessions, etc., there is something for everyone at this great family festival of Irish culture.

This year's Ard-Ollamh will be Peadar Ó Riada. The Bardic Awardees are Mick Foster, Sarah Ghriallais, Noel Battle, Pádraig Sinnott and Helena Rowsome.

Cathaoirleach Joe Connaire and his dedicated team are leaving no stone unturned to make Fleadh 22 one of the most memorable of all time.

All the action will be captured by TG4, RTÉ, local radio and other media outlets. In an innovative gesture, many of the competitions will be streamed live to the world.

As an exciting curtain-raiser, TG4 will have four programmes from the four Provincial Fleadhanna for the four Sundays preceding Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

THE ROYAL PERFORMANCE

The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall were hosted at the Brú Ború Comhaltas cultural centre in Cashel on the 25th March as part of their Irish visit.

On their arrival, the Royal couple were greeted by the Director of Brú Ború Úna Ó Murchú; the Ardstiúrthóir of Comhaltas and Chair of the IFHF Dr. Labhrás Ó Murchú; and the Manager of the centre Ronan O' Brien. The Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media Catherine Martin, T.D., on behalf of the Irish Government, welcomed the Prince and Duchess. The Minister also addressed the gathering.

During their one-hour visit, the Royal couple were entertained in the Teach Cheoil by the young musicians of the Cashel Branch of Comhaltas and in the theatre by the world renowned Brú Ború group who have represented Ireland at five World Expos and performed on the Great Wall of China. The Prince and Duchess were taught a step of Irish dancing.

During their visit, the Royal couple met with the family of Ashling Murphy who was tragically killed in Co. Offaly. Their Royal Highnesses said they were glad to have been able to express their condolences to the Murphy family and hear about Ashling's life.

Prince Charles said in his speech ‘words often speak to the mind, but music speaks to the heart in a deeply moving, even spiritual way. I am pleased that we were able to reflect on the positive role traditional music played in Ashling’s life during the visit to Brú Ború’.

The event was attended by Uachtarán An Chomhaltais Éamonn Ó hArgáin; members of Craobh Chaisil CCÉ and Bord Chontae; members of the Ardchomhairle CCÉ; Vince Jordan of Birmingham former Uachtarán CCÉ; local TDs and Councillors; and community leaders.

In his address to the gathering, Prince Charles spoke of the strong ties between our two countries and the value of overcoming past memories and focusing on the future. He was most appreciative of the warm welcome which he received and the special cultural experience in Brú Ború.

Welcoming the Royal couple, Labhrás Ó Murchú said: ‘Tá céad míle fáilte roimh ár gcuaisceoirí Ríoga. Céad míle fáilte ‘a hundred thousand welcomes’ is a special greeting for friends who come visiting and this is true of Brú Ború which nestles in the shadow of the ancient Rock of Cashel. This is where our High King Brian Ború was crowned. Our cultural movement Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is now worldwide and in Britain there was always a céad míle fáilte for us.’

The British Ambassador Paul Johnston wrote:

‘Their Royal Highnesses commented to me how much they had enjoyed the visit, and how glad they were to be back in Ireland for the first time since 2019. The visit underlined the warmth and depth of the strong links which exist between our countries and the final event at Brú Ború was a wonderful way to conclude the trip. Please allow me to wish you every success in your ongoing work, and to express my thanks to you once again.’

MOL AN ÓIGE

The two Óg-Bhail, who at the Comhdháil were elected to the Ardchomhairle, symbolised in a powerful way that our young people have generously embraced our cultural traditions. Ciara Ní hÓraín, who only a few weeks before was dancing with the Prince of Wales in Brú Ború! holds the position for a number of years. Breege Gleeson even at a young age has distinguished herself in Comhaltas. Tributes were paid to the outgoing Óg-Bhall, who had completed his term, Antoine Ó Caomhánaigh, who continues to give valuable and dedicated service to Comhaltas. [Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí!](#)

AR SCÁTH A CHÉILE

Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine. We live in each other's shadow. We are all members of a global community. When one hurts we all hurt. Given our turbulent history, no nation knows better than Ireland the need for support in times of crisis. We in turn are noted for our generosity when help is needed abroad. This will be evident in our support for the Ukraine in their hour of need.

At home, Comhaltas has been responding to help the Ukrainian refugees who have come to Ireland. Branches are providing language lessons, music lessons, involvement in joint ventures and other ways.

GRADAM NA hÉIGSE

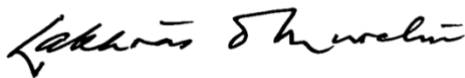
The first presentations of the new Comhaltas GRADAM NA hÉIGSE were made at Comhdháil 2022. The recipients were Pádraig Ó Riain, Oifigeach Cheoil; Kathleen Nesbitt, Ceannaire Oideachais; and Máirtín de Paor Stiúrthóir TTCT. All three made an exceptional contribution to the comprehensive Comhaltas Education Programme including the TTCT.

Bailíonn brobh beart. Every little counts. **Is mór iad na beaganna i dteannta a chéile.** All the little things help. The big story starts with the smaller story. The County and Provincial Fleadhanna lead into the crescendo which is Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

The constant endeavours of the local Comhaltas branch in the community build step by step the global movement which we have today. Our native Irish culture is now propagated by Comhaltas branches worldwide in 18 countries. **Is glas iad na cnoic i bhfad uainn.** The hills far from home are getting greener!

Ní bhíonn bua gan dua. There isn't any achievement without effort. Together, we will create a Summer of musicmaking. Bí linn!

Mise, le mór-mheas,



Labhrás Ó Murchú
Ardstiúrthóir CCÉ