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Making great art work : opera policy and strategy

Item Type	report
Citation	Arts Council of Ireland, 'Making great art work : opera policy and strategy', [report], Arts Council of Ireland, 2016-12
Publisher	Arts Council of Ireland
Download date	2026-06-16 10:00:42
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14765/108931

Making Great Art Work

OPERA POLICY and STRATEGY

December 2016



1 Opera Policy

Arts Council opera policy derives from, and gives expression to, the Arts Council's ten-year strategy, *Making Great Art Work (MGAW)* (2016–25). The Arts Council supports the development of opera in Ireland by investing in opera practice that is focused on addressing its twin strategy priorities of the artist and public engagement.

In this context we recognise that public engagement with opera is primarily (though not exclusively) as audience, and that the term 'artist' refers to diverse creative and interpretive practitioners, including composers and librettists, singers, musicians, dancers, directors, designers, choreographers and those with opera-specific technical expertise.

The Council recognises the importance of providing for the sustainable development of audiences and artists by supporting the making and presentation of high-quality opera in Ireland across all scales and genres, and presented to audiences in all regions of the country. We recognise the central place in Irish opera provision of the international canon of great historic and contemporary opera, as well as the special importance of Irish opera from all historic periods, and of contemporary opera by living Irish composers and librettists.

We also recognise that for opera to be well made to high artistic standards, for it to effectively, efficiently and consistently reach and engage audiences and deliver best value for public investment in the long term, most opera needs to be made by stable, efficient, well-governed, well-managed and artistically well-directed professional companies.

We recognise, too, that for Irish opera to be innovative and self-renewing, and for new and emerging artists and producers to find ways to express themselves, reach a public and advance their careers, it is essential to also support a vibrant 'independent' production sector working at all stages of opera development up to fully staged production.

In supporting both regularly-producing companies and independent producers, we recognise that (within the Council's own finite means and broad remit) it is essential to provide adequate investment to opera producers. We are cognisant of the fact that sufficient advance commitment of investment is essential to enable the long-term planning, contracting and national and international collaborations required by opera production.

Separate from its supports of opera production and the benefits of this for the careers of opera artists, it is also of core policy importance to the Council to provide an appropriate and balanced range of direct-investment supports for individual artists at all stages of their career development.

2 Opera Strategy

A nine-strand strategic framework was suggested by consultative dialogue with, and other inputs from, the opera sector, by the subsequent detailed 2016 *Review of Opera Policy and Provision*, and developed further by the Council's Opera Policy Working Group in September/October 2016.

The strategy falls into two main sections: four 'Retain and Develop' and four 'Change and Develop' strategies (those which require more substantive-change interventions on the part of Council). Underpinning delivery of these eight strategies is a ninth dealing with Council investment in opera.

The individual strategies form an integrated and interdependent whole. They are not presented in any order of priority. Each of these opera strategies addresses different aspects of the *MGAW* strategy priorities.

MGAW priority	Opera strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The artist •Public engagement 	1. Ensure continuance of a strong strand of new Irish opera production involving the development and regular production of fully staged new work.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The artist •Public engagement •Developing capacity 	2. Ensure retention of a vibrant 'independent' production sector – a dynamic sector of existing and 'new-entrant' producers enabled to produce at all scales up to full main scale.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The artist •Public engagement •Spatial & demographic planning 	3. Ensure continued growth and development of Baroque-scale and chamber-scale opera touring to centres in all the regions of Ireland.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Public engagement •The artist 	4. Ensure continued development of regionally, nationally and internationally important festival opera.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Engagement •The artist •Spatial & demographic planning 	5. Increase provision of the two core strands of Irish opera production, ensuring an appropriate spatial and repertoire balance for audiences: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Rapid restoration of regular, main-scale core repertoire production, especially in Dublin. b) Additional provision of both baroque-scale and chamber-scale touring opera to all regions and limited touring of main-scale opera to presentation 'hubs' in south and south-east regions. c) Collaboratively explore with Arts Council Northern Ireland how a shared approach to developing the artform can benefit producers, audiences and artists in both parts of the island.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Developing capacity •Investment strategy 	6. Ensure a secure, sustainable 'regular-producer' organisational base for three key opera production strands: main-scale core repertoire, baroque-scale/chamber-scale touring repertoire, and festival opera.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Public engagement 	7. Encourage and support the publication, performance, recording and dissemination of historic Irish opera, and lead in advocating with appropriate bodies for the establishment of a best-practice initiative for digital documentation and dissemination of Irish opera of all periods.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The artist 	8. Strengthen supports for individual opera artists through bursaries, opera-commission supports, and travel and training supports.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Investment strategy 	9. Provide sufficient investment to enable the implementation of policy and integrated strategies in a planned <i>MGAW</i> framework, and aim to make investment decisions for all opera production two years in advance.