

Strategy

itma

Irish Traditional
Music Archive

Taisce Cheol
Dúchais Éireann

PART 1

The background features a dark teal color. A large, bright teal shape, resembling a stylized 'K' or a series of overlapping triangles, is positioned on the right side of the page. The text 'PART 1' is written in a bold, yellow, serif font, oriented vertically on the left side.

ITMA - Who We Are

ITMA was established as part of an Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon policy initiative in 1987. A pilot project, proposed by Nicholas Carolan and Harry Bradshaw was funded and supported, and has grown into what we now know as ITMA. The impetus of the policy initiative was to support the development of Irish traditional music by focusing on the centrality of the process of transmission in the living tradition. We collect, preserve, organise and make available the materials of Irish traditional music in both the Irish and English languages. Our role is to be an agent of transmission, closely linked to contemporary practice, and in constant interaction with artists and audiences.

Vision

Our vision is of ITMA as a progressive, established, national archive and resource centre for Irish traditional music, playing a key role in the development of a vibrant traditional arts and heritage sector that is positioned at the heart of Ireland's cultural, social and economic life.

Mission

ITMA's mission is to be the national public archive and resource centre for Irish traditional music, song and dance, and the globally-recognised specialist advisory agency to advance appreciation, knowledge, and the practice of Irish traditional music.

We will do this by continuing to:

- collect and preserve the historical and contemporary materials of Irish traditional music, particularly those that are at risk
- organise and describe these materials according to international standards of archival and library practice to create collections that are discoverable by all
- present and publish content from our collections in ways that enhance the living tradition; contribute to the knowledge base of traditional music, and engage with our diverse audiences worldwide.

Values

- respect for all music, song and dance collections in our care and for those who create and donate the materials
- commitment to free and open access to collections while respecting privacy and legal obligations
- act with dignity, fairness and kindness in all engagement with users
- embrace diversity and inclusiveness
- commitment to creativity, curiosity, openness, and collaboration
- honesty, transparency, integrity, and adherence to legal and best practise guidelines.

Core Themes of Our Strategy

Content, Care, Access

Content

what we acquire and hold.

Care

**how we manage the content we hold;
our standards and practices; our
nurturing of professional expertise;
our relationships with artists, donors,
collectors and rights owners.**

Access

**how we encourage use of our
collections; how we ensure they are
easily discoverable and searchable;
how we present and curate
collections; how we extend our reach
within and beyond the traditional
music community worldwide.**

Strategic Priorities

Content

- identify, locate and preserve unique and at risk materials
- undertake a survey of the materials of traditional music in Ireland
- fill knowledge gaps in our collections to reflect the rich diversity of the practice of Irish traditional music including the representation of gender, language, and ethnicity
- continue and extend collaboration and cooperation with broadcast media.

Care

- review our long-term property requirements to meet increased storage demands; improve visitor experience, and minimise risk to our collections by providing the best possible security and safety for the materials that we hold
- strengthen our professional capacity in archival practice and share this knowledge at local and community level, including Local Authorities, to support best practice in archiving Irish traditional music
- increase investment in digitisation for preservation and access, and prioritise the long-term preservation of our digital assets
- invest in our staff's expertise and capability, and in recruitment, to ensure we deliver the highest standards of digital, information and preservation management.

Access

- animate the collections through in-house and collaborative creative and digital initiatives
- make collections more easily discoverable and searchable by improving ITMA's information architecture and move towards the principles of Universal Access
- improve public and research access to our collections through increased outreach and collaboration.
- expand our footprint and presence within Ireland and internationally and ensure diverse communities are aware of ITMA's services and resources.

Implementing the Strategy:

Indicative Actions and Projects

Content

- field collecting: individual artists and under-represented geographical areas, instruments and genres
- archival description: manuscript collections
- knowledge base audit: survey the materials of traditional Irish music
- collaborate with RTÉ and TG4 to catalogue and host digitised acetate collection and contemporary programming.

Care

- preserve at risk materials, especially tape-based content
- digitisation programme: image and print collections
- Dept. of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht funded digital file transfer and long-term digital preservation project
- knowledge sharing projects with regional Arts Offices and community-based initiatives.

Access

- collaborative projects with Music Network, Queen's University Belfast, RTÉ, TG4, Chamber Choir Ireland, Sing Ireland, National Print Museum, Clare and Cavan Arts Offices, and others
- pop-up archives
- podcasts
- public events and performances
- citizen archiving projects
- digital exhibitions featuring historical and other special collections
- development and expansion of PORT, ITMA's unique online audiovisual score-following resource for musicians
- artists/creators-in-residence.

Image: Charlie Harris, accordion, at ITMA Heritage Week Concert, 2018.
Photograph: Marc O'Sullivan



Making it Happen

Organisation and Performance

ITMA's role is to be a progressive, professional, effective, national archive. The next phase of our development as an organisation will include a focus on building our internal capability to ensure that the collections entrusted to us are managed to the highest possible standards.

Our organisational capability must ensure that we meet not only professional archival standards but also other regulatory and governance standards and requirements. We will develop and measure our capability with reference to:

- archival and library practice
- organisational development
- internal governance
- regulatory requirements
- funders' requirements
- statutory compliance.

Broadening Our Funding Base

We fully acknowledge and value annual Strategic Funding from the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Throughout the period of this plan ITMA will continue to seek additional and diversified funding sources, and develop strategic alliances, in order to sustain current operations and services and support the implementation of this Strategy.

PART 2

ITMA Strategy in Context

Introduction

The diversity of organisations with whom we have consulted reflects the diverse origins of the main players in this sector, both here in Ireland and overseas.

In preparing this strategic plan, ITMA consulted widely within Ireland and overseas with organisations who operate in broadly the same domain as ITMA – digital repositories, libraries and archives, and resource organisations whose work is linked directly to contemporary creative practice and living traditions. The diversity of organisations with whom we have consulted reflects the diverse origins of the main players in this sector, both here in Ireland and overseas. Interestingly, all these organisations consistently identified a set of common strategic issues and priorities

that are shaped by policy, technology, resources and the idea of the contract with the public.

A recurring phrase has been “it’s all about the content and how we manage it” and this usefully encapsulates a complex and dynamic set

of challenges that ITMA needs to tackle in the immediate future. These sectoral challenges, all of which are pertinent to Ireland and ITMA, include dealing with original source materials (especially audiovisual materials) that are at risk; rights and intellectual property issues arising from digital publishing; maintaining strategic focus in the face of rapid and disruptive changes in technology and user behaviour; and securing resources to support stable operations and planned development and growth.

Current technology facilitates different ways of accessing materials, and this creates a set of user expectations (immediacy, ubiquity, totality) that ITMA needs to understand and manage. ITMA has a distinct role in maintaining a dynamic relationship with Irish traditional music in its contemporary practice in both the Irish and English languages, and our engagement with both languages is driven primarily by the evolving nature and needs of the bilingual tradition.

Archives and Repositories in Ireland

ITMA is one of a group of organisations in Ireland whose role is to act as a repository for collections of cultural materials and assets. Taken individually and collectively, they embody a vast, significant and priceless national collection of Ireland's heritage and its living traditions. A list of such organisations would include national cultural institutions based mainly in Dublin; university libraries and special collections in major urban centres; broadcasters (national, regional and local); and organisations that receive core funding and support principally from the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and, to a limited extent, from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Some organisations are part of the civil or public service, including central government departments, the Local Authorities and library service, while others are embedded within universities or are specialist functions within university departments. Some are primarily concerned with broadcasting while others are publicly-subsidised arts organisations that operate within the broader community, voluntary and charities sector in Ireland. ITMA belongs to the latter category.

Ireland, clearly, has a plurality of approaches to safeguarding and managing cultural archives and collections that are of national significance. This variation in the creation and management of archives and repositories, and how public access to collections is managed, promoted and facilitated, has arisen in the absence of a national policy on archives. It has given rise to a diffusion of responsibility for managing significant collections of cultural materials across a wide variety of types of organisations.

As we move further into the era of data and content as powerful drivers of social, behavioural, cultural and economic change, we believe that Ireland needs to have a clear strategic view, supported by a policy, on the role of archives in and for Ireland. We intend to be a catalyst, working in combination with our sister organisations and peers, in advocating for a policy on archives and in supporting the State's research into this area.

Policy Context:

The Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon

ITMA's core funder is the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and there are a number of policies and strategies that influence how ITMA's work is understood and supported by the Council.

1.

The Council's current strategic overview of the traditional arts is presented on their website.¹

It identifies five current priorities: the artist; public engagement; investment strategy; spatial and demographic planning; and developing capacity. There is a strong concordance between ITMA's new Strategy and these priorities.

2.

The artist and transmission are central to the Council's policy for supporting traditional arts, see section 5.2 of the 2004 report Towards a Policy for the Traditional Arts.²

These priorities are central to ITMA's focus on being an agent of transmission and a dynamic and active participant in Ireland's living traditional arts.

3.

The Council's high level strategic vision is set out in Making Great Art Work – Arts Council Strategy 2016–2025.³

ITMA's work and ambitions help to translate the Council's vision into operational reality for the traditional arts in Ireland, and ITMA's own strategic themes (content, care, access) contribute directly to supporting the Council's vision for how the relationship between citizens and the arts should develop.

¹ <http://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Traditional-arts/Overview/>

² http://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/Main_Site/Content/Research_and_Publications/Traditional_arts/traditional_arts_eng.pdf

³ http://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/Making_Great_Art_Work.pdf

4.

The recent iteration of Council policy on the traditional arts Traditional Arts Policy and Strategy⁴ focuses on two priorities: The Artist and Public Engagement. The policy identifies “the individual artist as the cornerstone of the traditional arts” and notes that:

“ Artistic research is an important and ongoing element of traditional artists’ creative work, and the Arts Council supports this through its Strategic Funding investment in archival resources and archival recording of contemporary practice.”

When discussing Public Engagement, it notes that there is:

“ a high value placed within the traditional arts on transmission, the acknowledgement of source, and the enjoyment of sharing repertoire, skills and learning. Many professional traditional artists are committed to the artistic life of their home place and work to promote knowledge of their respective regional traditions.”

ITMA's direct alignment with these priorities places us at the heart of current and future practice and creativity through collecting, preserving, organising and describing the historical and contemporary materials of Irish traditional music, and acting as an active agent in their transmission.

Broader Public Policy and ITMA

The policy context within which ITMA operates is complex and dynamic. While acknowledging the primary role of the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, the work of ITMA also needs to be placed within a broader frame of reference. This includes public policy initiatives such as the Creative Ireland programme; the Good Friday Agreement and the ongoing work of the Department of Foreign Affairs and others on reconciliation; Global Irish (Ireland's Diaspora Strategy); and Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World, amongst others. EU policies on culture, identity, social cohesion, heritage, citizen engagement, mobility, access, managing information and data, and research, likewise form an important part of the policy context within which we work and plan.

Traditional music is at the heart of a shared living tradition and heritage that reflects the vibrant cultural diversity of the island of Ireland as an intensely globalised European country. There is a common shared repertoire within these islands that has its roots in European folk music, and in Ireland the expression of this repertoire and artform has evolved and developed in ways that reflect the inflections, accents and diverse cultures of people and communities all over Ireland. Irish traditional music is recognised worldwide because it is distinctive.

Irish traditional music is an inclusive, age-friendly community resource. It's a potent connector between individuals, and within and among communities, as well as being a prominent element of Ireland's global identity, character and reputation.

As part of ITMA's new Strategy we will also explore the potential of working with organisations involved in delivering arts in healthcare settings, given the potential of traditional song, music and dance to help people establish connections with place, community and time.

At a European level, our work in promoting public engagement with traditional music will contribute to better understanding the rich cultural diversity across Europe. Through animating our collections and holdings, we will make it easier for people to explore the story of traditional music in ways that can help us understand better the breadth and depth of the common European heritage that we share.

Our work with like-minded organisations across Europe will remain a central plank of our approach, with opportunities for ITMA to develop productive partnerships under EU research and innovation programmes.

Within the island of Ireland there is increasing understanding that traditional music, in all its forms, embodies and represents a shared and vibrant heritage that connects people who often identify with very different social, cultural and demographic groupings. This is particularly the case in Northern Ireland and ITMA sees the potential for our work to make an effective long-term contribution to post-conflict reconciliation by acknowledging and celebrating the remarkable diversity of cultural expression that is represented by the living tradition of instrumental music, song and dance. With the backdrop of uncertainty caused by Brexit, it is important that the creative, cultural and artistic corridors within and between these islands remain open and used.

In this context ITMA will work with others to develop projects that build on the North-South and West-East axes that underpin structures and relationships within and among these islands.

The broader policy context within which ITMA operates also includes Ireland's outward-facing policies in areas such as Foreign Affairs and Trade, Culture Ireland, Creative Ireland, cultural diplomacy and the Irish diaspora. ITMA's international focus will be on the community of practitioners and enthusiasts of traditional music worldwide, and this includes the Irish diaspora. The Irish traditional music community is to be found all over the world and embodies a cultural web that extends from Ireland to Canada and North America, mainland Europe, Australia and Asia and it includes people who may have no direct connection to Ireland but who are drawn to and captivated by Ireland's living tradition of music, song and dance.

Serving the worldwide Irish traditional music community will help us achieve our mission, it will also make a supportive contribution to Ireland's strategic positioning, and will allow us to engage more fully with a broader support base for our work.