



Address to Oireachtas Committee on Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Introduction:

Many thanks for this opportunity to address you and I would like to start with a brief introduction to Irish Chamber Orchestra, which is at the core of our Sing Out with Strings project.

The **Irish Chamber Orchestra** is a professional orchestra resident at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick and is primarily funded by the Arts Council of Ireland/An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

The **Irish Chamber Orchestra (ICO)** is Ireland's finest chamber orchestra, combining high quality performances with an expansive artistic vision. Virtuoso, innovative and creative, the ICO's unique collaborative approach, and its rich relationship with an array of creative partners, continues to garner attention both locally and internationally. The repertoire is exciting, risk-taking and diverse – ranging from baroque to modern day masterpieces, including new commissions. The orchestra enjoys fruitful relationships with an array of Irish composers including **Garrett Sholdice, John Kinsella, Linda Buckley, Elaine Agnew, Michael Ó Súilleabháin, Frank Corcoran, Sam Perkin, and Ian Wilson.**

The orchestra has successfully toured across Europe, Australia, South Korea, China and the US performing in many prestigious venues. ICO made its debut at the **Konzerthaus Vienna** in March 2017 being the first Irish orchestra to play in this world-renowned venue. A vital part of each year is our two regional tours bringing exciting music to small venues throughout the country. ICO is also orchestra in residence at the annual Kilkenny Arts Festival and recently collaborated with Irish National Opera's production of *Marriage of Figaro* which drew wonderful reviews across the board.

Adding to the orchestras already numerous CD recordings, the *Orfeo* label has just released the third of a series of three CDs of Mendelssohn's Symphonies combined with works by **Jörg Widmann**, as directed by him.

ICO's flagship community outreach programme is *Sing Out with Strings*.

Sing Out with Strings: An Overview:

Our Mission

Sing Out with Strings aims to continue to expand, contribute and strengthen the social, cultural and creative hub of communities within Limerick's regeneration process. It works to engage children in positive community activities, through performing and experiencing music from an early age, thus facilitating change that feeds into the wider community. Drawing on the El Sistema model, the project uses music as a tool to enable children's personal, social, academic and artistic development, and aims to instigate measurable social change.

Our Story

Sing Out with Strings was established in 2008 by the Irish Chamber Orchestra as a Community Engagement Programme working within Limerick's regeneration process. It began in its pilot stage with 60 children in Galvone National School and has since gained a significant position within the musical fabric of primary music provision in Limerick's regeneration process. This expanding project now works with over 300 children, providing free weekly workshops in singing, song-writing, violin, viola, cello and double bass tuition in two schools, Le Chéile N.S. and St. Mary's National School. The project was inspired by El Sistema; the Venezuelan model of music education, which provides free instrumental and vocal tuition countrywide.

Through SOWS, these children learn about different types of music and musical instruments first hand through our 'Meet the Musician' series. One School teacher noted that SOWS children have 'developed a sense that music is for all. It fosters an interest in music and the possibility of taking up a musical instrument'. Evidence of SOWS music lessons, incorporating different languages, sounds, and cultural references that are meaningful for both student participants and staff, creates a mutually beneficial and symbiotic learning environment as students learn to compose their own pieces, and staff (classroom teachers, SNAs and SOWS tutors) learn about students' cultures and experiences.

Sing Out with Strings has attracted local and national attention and recognition as an excellent model of instrumental music provision within primary schools. The project addresses issues of inclusion, equality of access and provision and highlights the numerous benefits that a long-term project of this nature has on the children, staff, parents and the wider community.

Funding

Over the past **10 years** of *Sing Out with Strings*, the Irish Chamber Orchestra has spent **1.5 Million Euros** approx. on its community engagement initiative - 1.2 Million of this spend has been funded from private donors.

How we work

With **110 core teaching hours per week**, *Sing Out with Strings* provides free weekly workshops in singing, song writing, violin, viola, cello and double bass tuition for 300 children aged 4-12 years in Limerick City.

Collaborations

- The **Royal Irish Academy's Cara Award Examinations** were introduced to the *Sing Out with Strings* programme in 2016. This award is providing children with a measured focus and sense of achievement with national recognition.
- **Legacy Fund** A number of gifted students from the *Sing Out with Strings* programme are given scholarships to allow them to continue their studies with the Limerick School of Music, Saturday Strings and privately with ICO musicians. This has seen a significant growth in their confidence and self-esteem. The scholarships have given the children and their families a renewed sense of pride and achievement and it has boosted their ongoing resolve and commitment to music.
- In 2017 SOWS began working with two select Secondary Schools (Nano Nagle and Thomond Community College) allowing the programme to continue to support the musical progress of graduating *Sing Out with Strings* Students.

- **Summer Camps** Sing Out with Strings opened its summer camp last year to local primary schools in the Limerick city area - hosted by Nano Nagle Secondary School in the heart of Limerick City.
- ICO collaborates with the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance in offering an MA in classical strings. Our ultimate goal would be for one of our Sing Out students to make it to that level. The ICO strongly believes that education is a vital component of our work along with performing music at the highest level.

Evaluation

Working in one of the most disadvantaged regions in the country, ***Sing Out with Strings*** develops unique, valued and demonstrable transferable skills at a formative age. It is innovative, research based and its profound impacts are independently validated.

Dr Áine Mangaoang, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Department of Music, University of Liverpool, UK, undertook the most recent assessments. The Irish Chamber Orchestra commissioned her to conduct an internal assessment of the *Sing Out with Strings* programme from the perspective of the children participants in May 2015. A follow-up report evaluating the SOWS programme from the staff and tutors perspectives was commissioned in October 2015, which took place from November 2015 to March 2016.

“SOWS strengths lie in its advantageous plurality — its ability to profoundly change the lives of hundreds of children through music education and by that same action, affect the overall well-being of school staff...through SOWS real, meaningful and positive change is affected in the lives of countless children.”

Dr Áine Mangaoang, Department of Music, University of Liverpool, UK. Sing Out with Strings End-of-Year Report 2016.

Participating School staff, who were interviewed, believe the children benefit from participating in SOWS classes, drawing from a broad range of experience over the programme’s eight years, affirming a multitude of positive outcomes of SOWS education, such as:

- Individual cognitive and physical progress (e.g. motor skills, musical literacy),
- Behavioural development,
- Discipline,
- Experiencing respect and tolerance,
- Pride and self-confidence,
- Patience,
- Teamwork,
- Learning the value of active public and civic engagement,
- Sense of calm.

Feedback: What the participants say

“Sing Out with Strings has touched homes and families and is the greatest gift our school has been given.” Jacinta MacNamara, Principal

"It is wonderful to see the quietest child open up during their music time and likewise the most obstinate child forgets all their issues and behaviour problems to join in and engage in their music time." **Lorraine, class teacher**

"I love Sing Out with Strings because it makes my soul feel like it's free." **Hannah**

"Sing Out with Strings means everything to me because I am not afraid no more." **Holly**

"My oldest daughter is now in Secondary School and is continuing to play due to the roaring success and affect the programme had on her. She plays the violin and I'm so grateful to Sing Out with Strings for awarding her the scholarship to the Limerick School of Music so that she can continue to thrive and help her on her road ahead with music. I feel so proud and this is all thanks to the programme. I will be forever grateful for the opportunity it has given her." **Lisa O'Donoghue, Parent**

"It was a brilliant experience, my son loved going and helped with his confidence...I'm sure he will want to join orchestra after this". **Marguerite, Parent**

"Something is coming out of people and makes their lives better and makes them feel free and brave." **Anonymous**

Musicians of the ICO are very proud of what has been achieved in this project. Both at individual and collective levels, Sing Out with Strings unites communities, is building local pride, and creating vehicles for expression; and it is stimulating emotional responses as well as developing tangible musical knowledge and skills. We aim to continue to expand and strengthen the social, cultural and creative capital of communities within Limerick's regeneration process. We believe it plays a vital developmental role in introducing children in Limerick to the wonder of music, and empowers them to broaden their horizons.

Many thanks for your time and interest in our project.

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