

**JOINT COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, HERITAGE AND THE GAELTACHT**

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2019, at 1.30 p.m.**

**Leinster House**

**Committee Room 4: LH2000**

**Opening Statement**

**Dr Catherine Foley, The Firkin Crane, Cork**

Dear Chair and Members, on behalf of the Firkin Crane, Cork, I thank you for the invitation to address the committee today regarding 'The Importance of Dance as a Performance Art and Related Matters'. First, by way of introduction, I have worked at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick for 23 years designing and course directing the first MA in Ethnochoreology at any university in Europe, and designing and course directing the first MA in Dance Performance (Irish Dance ) at any university in the world. I am also Founding Director of the National Dance Archive of Ireland and Founding Chair of Dance Research Forum Ireland. I am the elected Chair of the International Council for Traditional Music's (ICTM) Study Group on Ethnochoreology and an elected member of the executive board of the ICTM. My dance performance training and my ethnochoreological research has been on Irish dance, Irish music, archives, and festivals with particular focus on issues of dance performance, dance documentation, identity, community, cultural heritage, and tourism. In addressing this meeting, I speak as a performer, academic, and, more recently, a Director of the Firkin Crane.

Dance as a performance art has the potential to affect change; to transcend ethnic and socio-economic boundaries; to challenge popular ideologies; and to bridge horizons of understanding between peoples of diverse cultures. Dance as a performance art has the power to transform, to educate, and to challenge. The Firkin Crane places great importance on dance as a performance art. Historically, this has been illustrated in the way that, since the 1980s, the Firkin Crane has been

home to two professional dance companies, Irish Ballet Company and Irish National Ballet – both under the artistic directorship of Joan Denise Moriarty. In the 1990s, the Development Officer, Mary Brady, made the Firkin Crane home to the Institute of Choreography and Dance, which placed a focus on choreographic research and dance performance. With this focus, new dance work was created which included Michael Keegan Dolan's work, 'Sunday Lunch' in 1997, when he founded *Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre* at the Firkin Crane. Since 2006, the Firkin Crane has developed dance, dance audiences, and dance initiatives in Cork under Paul McCarthy, the current CEO. The Firkin Crane programme consists of four strands: (1) Professional Development and Training; (2) Performance and Production Development; (3) Cork City Dance Artists in Residence at Firkin Crane (DAIR); and (4) Youth and Community Dance. The Firkin Crane has therefore a continuing dance legacy, which it aims to develop further and to sustain into the future.

As well as providing access to advanced dance training and skills for dancers to pursue careers as professional dancers and to make and present new dance works, the Firkin Crane aspires to a filtering of this training and knowledge into the wider society. For example, the Firkin Crane is located in a poor area of Cork city where extra-curricular dance tuition is financially out of reach for the majority. The Firkin Crane is attempting to address this issue by engaging dance artists in local schools to provide opportunities for young people to dance and to assist in building further audiences for dance as a performance art. Also, with an ethos of inclusivity and diversity, the Firkin Crane engages with dancers of different abilities and disabilities, across diverse ethnic, gender, age, and class boundaries. Examples of these 'inclusive dance' initiatives include the Firkin Crane's 'ReCreate' partnership with the Cope Foundation Department of Arts and Creative Arts Therapies in 2019 to develop and pilot a range of performing-arts based classes and leadership opportunities for marginalised adults at risk or unemployed who may wish to transition to employment in the performing arts sector. Currently, accreditation with the ETB is being sought. This follows on from an earlier partnership project with Cope in 2015 which related to a training programme for carers and dance teachers with people with intellectual disabilities. Other examples, include the Older People in Dance

(OPID) programme which was developed between the Firkin Crane and the HSE. These collaborative and outreach programmes have been, and continue to be, indicative of the ethos of inclusivity and diversity of the Firkin Crane.

Thus, the Firkin Crane aims to continue to develop as a centre of excellence in dance. It has a twin track objective: (1) to provide advanced vocational training and creative opportunities for dancers to produce and present new dance work in order to pursue careers as professional dancers; and (2) to develop inclusive dance, which engages the wider community. To realise these objectives, the Firkin Crane is currently undertaking the following:

1. A reorganisation of management structures at the Firkin Crane;
2. An undertaking of an independent expert review of the Firkin Crane (in consultation with the Arts Council); and
3. An appointment of a new Artistic Director

The Firkin Crane is fortunate in that it owns the historic Firkin Crane building, in the north side of Cork city with dance studio spaces and a working theatre with stage. It is one of the few dance facilities in Ireland where dance can be made, produced and presented. This is a valuable resource for aspiring and professional dancers and for audience development and engagement. To facilitate the development of an inclusive dance programme, however, the Firkin Crane is currently securing a lease on the Butter Market House building, another historic building, next door to the Firkin Crane. This will also have a dedicated dance studio space.

To maintain and sustain the Firkin Crane, however, as a leading place for dance in Ireland into the future, it will continue to require investment.

On behalf of the Firkin Crane, I thank you for the opportunity to present here today.