

*interactions

creative strategies for business

Arts Council Consultation Process

**Meeting on the Promotion of Irish Music Abroad
11 March 2005**

The promotion of Irish music abroad

Friday 11 March 2005, 10.00am -1.00pm, The Arts Council

John O’Kane welcomed the attendees on behalf of The Arts Council and Fergus Sheil contextualised the questions for consideration at the meeting.

1. Question for discussion

The meeting discussed the following question.

- How can Irish music be most effectively promoted abroad?
- What is The Arts Council's role?

2. In discussing the question, the following emerged.

2.1 Culture Ireland

Those in attendance discussed Culture Ireland and the optimum relationship between that agency and The Arts Council.

It was suggested that The Arts Council should consolidate information on what is happening already, should influence Culture Ireland to develop strategic partnerships with organisations that have international experience and expertise, and should encourage Culture Ireland to be artist focussed. While accepting the realities of commercial selection of established artists, The Arts Council should encourage Culture Ireland to promote “Culture” rather than “Ireland Inc.”

Those in attendance suggested that agencies and organisations would much prefer a long-term relationship with Culture Ireland rather than a project by project approach. The application systems are deemed to be complicated and time-consuming for artists with little resources and time.

2.2 Favoured comparable models

A discussion ensued about favourable models that might be looked to – and included the British Council and the Scottish Arts Council's TUNE UP programme which works with

commercial promoters who can unlock the audience, although there is an inevitable preference for established acts.

2.3 Current experience internationally

A discussion ensued on the experience of those present of working internationally. Ireland is not part of a European circuit of music and festivals unlike, for example, the French Export Bureau which has worldwide offices or the Pan Scandinavian networks that aggressively seek international opportunities for their musicians. The experience of those in attendance was summarised as follows:

- When trying to place an Irish ensemble in an international setting, one must acknowledge the commercial competitiveness of this situation where the ability to pay for the group's travel is either expected or may be the deciding factor in a selection process.
- When musicians apply for a travel grant, it is not enough to give them only the flights, they need the full cost of the trip.
- Agencies and organisations that are funded by The Arts Council have in place international partnerships with foreign promoters.
- There is a need to know how to network better, pooling international intelligence. Traditional musicians do not have a resource organisation that could provide them with information.
- International bookers want to deal with individuals that have an infrastructural back-up. Musicians who attain success internationally create leverage for others and relationships that develop trust allow the Irish agent to suggest alternative artists.

2.4 Arts Council support in an international setting

The idea of an Arts Council-funded showcase was discussed. The consensus was that paying to get a large number of international buyers into Ireland (as Canada does) is very expensive and this would not be the most effective use of funds. Every performance is a showcase and agencies already exist to promote artists abroad - in some cases, The Arts Council already funds those agencies. Upon grant application, the activities of these organisations are reviewed and they may be judged on international work as part of their overall activities.

2.5 The Arts Council's role in research and development

The view of those in attendance was that young musicians cannot compete in an international setting without first having the opportunity to develop professionally at a local

and national level, and this is where The Arts Council support should be concentrated. This support could include early/mid-career master classes with foreign musicians and a mentoring programme in Ireland. Comparisons were made with the Rough Magic Seeds programme.

It was suggested that multi-disciplinary venues are more international in their visual arts and theatre and that the Arts Council should encourage venues and festivals to do more mainstream music programming.

2.6 The Art Council and commercial activity

Those in attendance suggested that there is a fine line between commercial and non-commercial activity in this area. Client organisations can engage in commercial practice (e.g. selling CDs) and every performance is a commercial transaction. If The Arts Council did not support ensembles, they would not exist because there are very few musicians who can live exclusively on those earnings. There is a need to define exactly what “professional” means. Is it based on quality or quantity? The Arts Council should celebrate when a musician can live on his/her earnings and often when they can do this, it is through international earnings. The distinctions between amateur and professional, commercial and subsidised are all in play and The Arts Council should adopt or create a sensitive mechanism to look at this.