

TOWARDS A POLICY AND ACTION PLAN
FOR OPERA

**A REPORT FOR
THE ARTS COUNCIL/AN CHOMHAIRLE EALAION
BY PAMELA SMITH**

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

To analyse the needs of opera from the perspective of artistic producers, creative personnel (including composers and performers) and audiences;

To advise the Arts Council on the most appropriate mix of developmental supports relative to the Arts Council's stated priorities, to available resources, and to the contribution of opera companies and other organisations with a key strategic role in opera in Ireland (including the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and RTE).

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

The Arts Council's role with regard to opera in recent years has been defined mainly in terms of professional production companies. Amateur companies, or companies managed by voluntary committees and involving amateur participants, are not currently funded by the Council and were not part of the scope of this report.

Given the relatively small number of professional opera companies in Ireland, and the large number of individuals working directly or indirectly in the opera sector, it was decided to conduct research in the following ways:

- Consultations with management of the Council-funded companies;
- Personal interviews with key individuals, including representatives of strategically important organisations such as RTE;
- Telephone and/or email interviews with representatives of other relevant organisations;
- Letters inviting written submissions to 110 individuals, including composers, teachers, directors, designers, promoters, writers, conductors and répétiteurs;
- Questionnaires to Opera Ireland, Opera Theatre Company, Wexford Festival Opera, Anna Livia International Opera Festival, Co-Opera, Opera Cork;
- Survey of regional venues North and South, conducted by Jan Branch;
- Attendance at performances by the three Arts Council-funded companies;
- Interviews with Arts Council executive staff;
- Desk-based research of relevant documents.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ireland has never had a National Company, but in the 18th and early 19th centuries its capital city was an important touring destination for international opera companies. What might be called a tradition of opera in Ireland emerged that consisted mainly of imported productions featuring famous singers and musical directors, usually en route from England or the Continent.

Italian opera had its heyday in the 19th century, and Dublin audiences were able to see the latest productions of works by Bellini, Donizetti, Rossini, Verdi and others with some of the most celebrated performers of the day. The vogue for English comic opera and operetta followed later. German opera sung in German was relatively unknown, and only appeared in translation towards the end of the century.

Touring international productions only rarely appeared outside Dublin, however. The city's glittering social and cultural life tended to reflect the fashions of London at the time and had relatively little connection with the rest of the country outside cities such as Cork or Belfast. A tradition of Irish opera, of work produced locally by Irish musicians and artists, arguably never developed.

Opera in Ireland today is partly a product of this history. Very few places outside Dublin to this day have venues that can accommodate grand opera – Cork and Belfast remain the only two even to have nominal Opera Houses. The principal venue in Dublin for visiting Italian opera in the 1800's, the Theatre Royal, burned down and has never been replaced; the Gaiety Theatre, originally built to cater for light opera and operetta, is now the city's only venue for grand opera and is becoming sadly dilapidated.

It was not until the mid- and late-19th century that the Irish Academy of Music in Dublin (the 'Royal' appellation was added later) and the Cork School of Music were established to make a musical education available to more than those few who could afford private teachers; then, as now, talented Irish singers had to train and make their names in foreign opera houses. Education and professional training remain key issues for today's aspiring opera performers, as does the lack of employment opportunity outside the performing groups supported by RTE.

Two other factors have proved obstacles for the establishment of a full time grand opera company over the years: cost and population size. Just across the Irish Sea, Welsh National Opera still relies heavily both on audiences and on public subsidy in England to cover its costs as a full time company in Wales. Ireland's financial strength has been a relatively recent phenomenon; while some might argue that the country can now afford a National Opera, others might still question the relevance for one in the perceived absence of a national opera tradition.

Developments in Ireland's operatic and cultural life in recent years have created the circumstances for a new debate, however – a debate that includes the question of the necessity, or otherwise, of creating a National Company.

- Small and mid-scale touring opera has become an established part of the cultural calendar, with two companies enjoying public subsidy.
- More and more Irish singers are finding employment opportunities both at home and abroad.
- Regional venues are springing up around the country, and their managers describe growing audiences for opera outside the capital city.
- Ireland's composers are growing in number and international recognition.

These and other factors are the basis of the consideration in this report of whether the concept of opera in Ireland might not evolve into one of Irish opera for the first time.

CONTEXT OF THE REPORT

There are no full time opera companies in Ireland. Of the four state-funded professional companies, three employ full time administrative or managerial staff but none employs full time artistic staff, chorus or orchestra, and none is in a position currently to present a year-round continuous programme of opera productions. Two of the four are seasonal Festivals.

There has been very little expansion in the professional opera sector in Ireland in the last 15 years, despite overall increases in public funding for the arts and successive Arts Plans detailing development policies for the art form. The Arts Council has supported the same three companies since the mid-1980s (including Wexford Opera Festival since 1951). The Arts Council's support has itself been limited, with two of its three companies receiving subsidised orchestral provision from RTE until last year. The touring arm of Opera Ireland, Co-Opera, was established in 1998 as an independent company, joining forces with OI in 2000 after two years of limited project funding. The Anna Livia International Opera Festival was initiated as recently as 2000, and is funded directly by the Department of Education & Science.

At the time of this report (2001-2002) the professional sector typically presents an annual programme of roughly 18 productions, with about 125 performances across Ireland, made up of:

- 4 productions, 18 performances, of main-scale opera in two seasons at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin (Opera Ireland);
- an average of 4 touring productions (about 45 performances in total per year) of small- to mid-scale Baroque, Classical and contemporary opera (Opera Theatre Company);
- 2 touring productions (about 20 performances) of small-scale reductions of grand opera (Co-Opera);
- 6 productions, 34 performances, mostly of rare and neglected repertoire in an Autumn Festival (Wexford Festival Opera);
- 2 productions, 8 performances of main-scale opera in a Summer Festival at the Gaiety Theatre and National Concert Hall, Dublin

The same companies also present a mixture of education work and outreach work and various types of concert activity, discussed in greater detail below. Other companies occasionally mount one-off opera productions, sometimes with public subsidy, but these are few and far between.

The total number of professional productions and performances given per year might seem reasonable until it is broken down into its component parts as above. In fact, the full range of operatic work is barely represented in this annual programme, and even this has only reached its current level in the last two years.

The artistic quality of the main companies' work has attracted praise more often than not in recent years, though it has little, if any, national identity. And the praise has come in the context of very modest levels of output. In areas of management and/or governance all the companies acknowledge areas that need improvement. Audience attendances are roughly comparable to those of small and mid-scale opera companies in the UK, with Wexford selling out annually and the two touring companies often attracting capacity houses. Demand from the regional venues and their audiences appears to be growing. Young Irish singers are achieving new levels of success, particularly abroad.

However, there has been little recognition by public bodies of the true cost of opera as an art form, or at least little response to it. Some venues have arguably unrealistic expectations of fee levels for touring opera, and have in any case been prevented until recently from using their Arts Council subsidies, if they have them, to offset the costs of buying in productions. The Arts Council has, itself, benefited directly from the opera companies' partnerships with RTE in that the real costs of providing orchestral accompaniment and chorus work have been borne for them.

Levels of Arts Council subsidy to opera undoubtedly increased in cash terms between 1996 and 2000, in line with the Council's own increases in Government grant aid, though the percentage of each company's income that this represented remained largely static, and the percentage of Council spending on opera relative to other art forms remained extremely low in comparison to that in other countries. The companies themselves have experienced increasing financial difficulties in recent years despite their uplifts, with one in particular having reached crisis stage in its negotiations with its bank and with the Arts Council by the end of 2001.

Other aspects of the infrastructure are also weak. There are insufficient opportunities for aspiring performers, creative artists and technical staff to gain pre-professional training. The low production base means not only a limited presentation of opera to Irish audiences but also very limited employment possibilities in the sector and negligible development of an indigenous repertoire. Provision for regional audiences is not managed strategically and, with notable exceptions, regional venues have no audience development strategies for opera. The question of a venue for opera in Dublin remains unresolved, though it had been one of the key recommendations of the Arts Council's own Opera Development Group in 1996.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

No assumptions were made during the research for this report about the continued existence of any of the publicly funded Irish companies as they currently exist. However, the fact that the companies have very different individual profiles, particularly artistically, presents a useful starting point for a consideration in general terms of the types of opera and opera-related activity that one might expect to be supported with public funds.

Therefore, the report begins with a description and analysis of the main professional opera companies, showing what each one represents in the mix of current opera provision and preparing the ground for an examination of their potential roles, if any, in the future.

A section is devoted to each company in turn, in a consistent format that allows for comparisons to be made in specific areas between the companies. Each section presents factual information on the relevant company's

- artistic profile
- employment and output levels
- audiences
- management and governance
- financial position, and
- future plans.

These headings were chosen partly to present a coherent picture of each company and the sector as a whole, and partly to reflect the priorities of the Arts Council's new Arts Plan. These priorities are the basis of the Arts Council's ongoing developmental work in all art forms:

- Make an arts career a realistic ambition for excellent and innovative artists
- Broaden and enrich participation in the arts
- Raise standards in arts leadership and management
- Broaden and enhance audiences for the arts
- Extend the international impact and success of Irish arts and artists
- Work with others to help bring the arts closer to local communities.

Factual information on the companies is followed by an analysis of the future plans of each one, as they have been expressed in policy documents or described to me during the consultations for the report. Some of these plans are sensitive and all are subject to ongoing revision by their respective managements and Boards, so discussion of them is largely conjectural. However, many of the issues raised in this section relate to areas of direct concern for the Arts Council and are specifically relevant to the future development of the artform in Ireland, so the discussion is presented as a stimulus to further debate between the Council and the sector and as the basis for the recommended options and scenarios at the end of the report.

The research for the report also drew to light a number of significant issues relating to but distinct from the individual profiles of the companies, and relevant to the provision of opera in general. These issues are not new, having been aired during an Arts Council review of opera in 1996, through ongoing debate in the sector before and since, and in the critical press. They also relate broadly to the new Arts Plan priorities. Furthermore, they bring into the discussion the roles of other key organisations in the provision of opera, including RTE and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. They have therefore been used to provide the structure for the remaining part of the discussion and analysis of opera in Ireland, and are:

- Access (ie outside Dublin)

- Orchestral provision
- Chorus provision
- New Work
- Training, and
- Public Funding.

Conclusions are presented in the final section of the report, in the context of a suggested debate on what might be meant by 'Irish opera' (a concept articulated in the Arts Plan) as opposed to 'Opera in Ireland'.

Finally, four possible future scenarios are described together with suggested steps towards achieving them. Each scenario features some of the desirable developments that are discussed in earlier sections of the report, but only one includes all.

2. THE COMPANIES

2.1 Opera Theatre Company

Artistic profile

OTC's vision statement proclaims the company's commitment to 'opera as a living, developing artform, representing the best of music, theatre and visual art, rather than a museum piece'.

Its policy on repertoire is summarised as 'a creative approach to small and middle scale opera, commission[ing] new work and making challenging presentations of old'. In practice, the company's repertoire, though broad, has tended to focus on Classical opera such as Mozart and Haydn, early opera, twentieth-century opera and new commissions – in other words, work that was either conceived for small forces or that lends itself relatively easily to performance with small forces.

OTC enjoys a generally good reputation in Ireland for the quality of both its productions and its education work, and is the only Irish company regularly to present its work overseas (though this is a factor of its size as well as its artistic profile).

Employment practice and output

OTC has a stated policy and practice of employing Irish artists in all aspects of its work, and has a good record of commissioning Irish composers and other creative artists relative to its level of output. Between 1996 and 2000 the company mounted 25 productions (including revivals), giving 226 performances in Ireland and abroad.

Audiences

The company estimates its annual audience attendance levels to be between 65% and 72% of capacity since 1996.

The actual capacity varies widely among the venues that the company visits, so actual numbers of attenders have varied widely from year to year, depending to a large extent on the repertoire chosen and its perceived suitability to venues of different sizes – the company has presented work in churches and tiny rural halls as well as the new regional venues that have come on stream in recent years.

Audience surveys have been conducted both with a regional focus and across national tours. More detailed data has been gathered on audiences in Dublin, where OTC operates its own box office rather than operating through the venues. The company had plans to initiate new systems of audience measurement in partnership with certain venues, particularly in Northern Ireland, from 2001 onwards.

Financial position

Financially, OTC is in a relatively stable position at present. It achieved surpluses at the end of the 1999 and 2000 financial years. The accumulated profit at the end of 2000 was just

over €85,000 – approximately 8.6% of its turnover. (It made an operating loss in 2001, which reduced this surplus by approximately half.) Its Arts Council grant-aid is relatively high in comparison with the other Irish companies (largely a factor of the need for touring subsidy) but not in comparison with companies in the UK. Arts Council grant-aid had risen to approximately 52% of its income in 2000. In total, its income breakdown that year was roughly:

66% from grants (including the Arts Council of Northern Ireland)

30% from box office and fees

3% from sponsorship and donations

The level of sponsorship that year was disappointing; between 1996 and 1999 it had been higher, at 9-15%. The proportion of OTC's income sources to one another, even in 2000, is not dissimilar from that of companies in England of comparable annual income.

OTC's expenditure split in 2000 was roughly:

70% on productions/activities (including personnel)

30% on administration

This has been a consistent expenditure pattern for the past five years, and is not unreasonable. The company's financial projections for the next two years, assuming current levels of production, show consistent ratios in expenditure and in income.

Management and governance

OTC's administrative structure has been through a period of change. At the time of writing (May 2002) the company employs five full-time and two part-time posts, headed by the new post of General Manager. The previous Director's post, which was both the artistic and administrative head of the organisation, has changed to that of part-time Artistic Director. Some changes are yet to be worked out, particularly on the marketing side where there is currently an Audience Development post and a PR/Sponsorship post. The anticipated changes will reflect the company's need to re-focus its fundraising operation. It is envisaged that responsibility for education work might be shared, with the General Manager devising projects in relation to the Artistic Director's programming, and the related tasks of fundraising for and marketing the education work falling to the relevant staff members. A new fundraising post is expected to be filled in May/June 2002, based in Northern Ireland. The education and fundraising posts are both under review, however. The second part-time post is that of Finance Officer; responsibility for overall financial management rests with the General Manager.

The most significant change should be seen in the new relationship between Artistic Director and General Manager. The person with overall financial responsibility for the company will now be its executive head, to whom the Artistic Director will be formally answerable. In principle, this should be a positive step as long as the overall artistic ethos of the company (rather than that of any given artistic director) is not compromised, as it should allow for creative and charismatic artistic leadership within a framework of financial control.

Future plans

OTC wishes to grow to fulfil what it sees as its potential – in its case, as a touring producer and development agency for opera throughout Ireland. Internally, the Board and senior staff have explored the need to expand the number of full-time staff to eight (plus AD), with the addition of a dedicated Education Officer, a dedicated fundraiser to complement the PR and marketing roles, and various freelance project managers for specific initiatives. In five years' time, with this staffing compliment – and associated income levels - it feels it could deliver a programme of activity featuring the following enhancements:

- orchestral accompaniment (26-40 players) of one tour per year
- experimental work in one small scale tour per year, including productions created in the Opera Theatre Studio (professional training project to be established) every other year
- touring project every year for target audience groups such as children, disabled people and older people
- ongoing developmental work including new opera projects with Irish composers and collaborations with other creative artists
- closer partnerships with regional promoters to assist audience development
- a biennial Opera Theatre Studio for young opera performers (see above)
- enhanced Festival-related work, including promotion of specific international opera festivals (for example, focusing on contemporary opera) in Dublin as well as presentation of Irish work overseas

All these would be desirable, though each brings considerations. The number of touring productions each year would be unlikely to change (the fourth annual tour, not mentioned above, might alternate between well-known classics and baroque or contemporary work in line with current practice). Each suggested type of tour, therefore, would have to be seen in the overall context of the company's output.

A larger orchestral tour each year, for example, would be highly desirable from the point of view of repertoire choice and scale of experience for regional audiences, but would place an additional burden on company finances. It would also be available to only a limited number of regional venues, though this need not necessarily be a disadvantage: arguably a positive development would be the emergence of a more-or-less defined network of regional venues for certain types of middle-scale touring opera production, that could be established in partnership with the venues themselves (discussed in greater detail later – Access section). However, given the company's established artistic profile, it could be the only tour on offer from OTC in any given year with relatively familiar repertoire (other than, say, the Opera Theatre Studio tour).

An annual tour of experimental work would be a high-risk option, requiring specific and probably ring-fenced levels of subsidy. Currently, the company engages in this type of work every other year at most. Experimental work is more vulnerable than any other to change or postponement if a company fails to reach income targets or cannot persuade promoters to take what they might see as too great a box office risk. However, an annual tour could ensure a platform for unusual repertoire and new work, particularly from Irish artists, for innovative production styles and, most importantly, act as a vehicle for emerging

professionals from the Opera Theatre Studio. Such a tour would be likely to appeal to a relatively small circuit of regional venues, and would require considerable levels of marketing and education support work, in addition to the basic finance, to maximise its impact and accessibility.

A specially designed tour for target audiences might be expected to be able to generate its own funding to some extent, particularly from Trusts and Foundations. Work in schools is already part of OTC's portfolio, for which it has a high level of support, and it is the only Irish opera company currently to offer this on anything like a regular basis. While other companies could and should be encouraged to explore their own contribution to the wider needs of audiences, OTC has a continuing role to play as a leader in this field, at least until such time as a dedicated opera-in-education company might come into being. (The Arts Council, perhaps in partnership with other bodies, might like to consider inviting proposals from individuals or groups interested in setting up such a company). OTC should not, however, be expected to assume responsibility for music and drama teaching in schools, which is a quite separate matter.

While such developments in OTC's touring programme would be highly desirable for many reasons, their overall profile should be noted. In any given year the larger orchestral tour might be the only one to offer relatively well-known work, and its scale would make it available to only a certain number of venues. The medium-sized tour might be a contemporary or baroque piece; the 'experimental' tour might be a new commission; and the 'target audience' tour might be anything from a devised work for school children to a piece designed specifically for elderly people in care environments. OTC has offered all these types of work (with the possible exception of the last example) in the past. A reasonably-sized regional venue with an established audience for opera and a sophisticated marketing and audience development programme could be well provided for with such an annual programme. OTC's planning would, in theory, ensure that the balance of unusual and familiar work each year was reasonably consistent, and its audience figures over the past five years would suggest that a similar programming policy has been successful.

In reality, however, there might be few venues in a position to take four such tours a year. The reasons for this are discussed in more detail in the Access section of this report. The strengths of such a programme would be its diversity, its artistic integrity, its contribution to the development of Irish creative work, and its reach across as wide a range of venues as possible. Some would consider the absence of the most familiar operatic repertoire to be a weakness. Were this to be the only subsidised touring opera product available in Ireland, many people would not have access to live performances of the standard classics in any form.

OTC's aspirations, summarised above, include developmental work. This has been touched on above in the context of experimental tours, particularly with regard to work with Irish composers. Further progress could be made towards the long-term development of an Irish opera repertoire through small, strategically planned projects that are not designed to tour at all. OTC has attempted a similar idea only rarely in the past, for example with the commissioning of four one-act pieces that were given workshop performances in Dublin.

One-off projects like this can only have limited effect, however beneficial in the short term to those involved. A more focussed approach might be to create the post of Associate Composer, or to create a Composer(s)-in-residence scheme that would involve one, or a small number of composers, working with OTC on small projects over a period of years.

Given that only a small number of composers might have the interest in or aptitude for working in the theatre, such an approach would give those composers an opportunity to experiment and to learn about the complex dynamics of opera creation in a supportive environment, without the pressure on them or on the company of making a tour financially viable. Over time, it would give OTC the opportunity to develop Irish work capable and worthy of being shown internationally as well as nationally. Once again, funding would have to be ring-fenced within OTC's budgets for such work to be protected in their overall programme. Dedicated funding might be found from a variety of sources, not just its revenue grant from the Arts Council (discussed further in Public Funding section).

Audience development work with regional venues relates to the earlier point on orchestral tours, and is discussed in the Access section of this report. A general point to be made here, though, is that any truly collaborative work in this field should involve discussion about repertoire. OTC has been criticised for offering only a 'set menu' of repertoire choices to local promoters after the company's plans have been put in place. This has become more of an issue since the arrival of a second touring company (Co-Opera), so that OTC no longer has the monopoly of touring product. While this approach is common with touring companies, not just in opera, many promoters say they would welcome an input into programming decisions – even in general terms – to help them address the perceived needs of their local audiences.

OTC experimented with the idea of an Opera Studio in 2000, with funding from the Gulbenkian Foundation. Despite teething problems with the Studio, the company was encouraged by evaluation feedback from participants to consider the experiment a success and has always stated its intention to continue with the Studio if dedicated funding could be found.

There appears to be general support amongst singing teachers for the idea of a 'young artists scheme' with a professional company. Whilst the teaching institutions themselves have aspirations to develop opera studios similar to those in UK music colleges, teachers differentiate between the advanced training role they would see for their institutions and the opportunity for professional development for singers in the context of a working company.

It might be argued that some students, given the choice, will always opt to go abroad to continue training and gain their first professional experiences in a broader environment, and that this is actually to be encouraged. The reality, however, is that many do not have this choice, and there are very few opportunities in Ireland outside the work of the National Chamber Choir for those whose circumstances (or luck) prevent them from going outside Ireland.

In any case, there is a strong argument in favour of providing the facilities for advanced learning and pre-professional training 'at home', so that young artists can develop their confidence as well as their skills in a supportive and familiar environment. Development of this type of activity would be entirely appropriate for OTC, given its policy of employing Irish performing artists in its productions, but to be successful it would need wholehearted endorsement – and probably input – from the principal teachers.

OTC's aspiration to host one or more international opera festivals in Ireland is valid, though it might not be achievable within the next five years. A long planning period would allow be necessary both for funding to be sourced, and, in the case of a contemporary opera festival, for new Irish work to be developed to a high standard. It is unlikely that the

company would be able to realise this aspiration without additional project management, even with an enhanced staff complement.

At present, OTC lacks a 'home'. Whilst this appears not to have featured prominently in the company's internal discussions about directions for future growth, there is a strong feeling among the executive staff that OTC's development as a company is compromised without a recognised base. One member considered it the single biggest issue facing the company.

Lack of a home presents both practical and developmental constraints. Rehearsal space in Dublin is expensive, hard to find, and not always suitable – problems common to other organisations including theatre companies. Storage space is also hard to find: at present, OTC stores what it can of its sets, costumes and props in Navan. It has no workshop space, and contracts out all such work. More importantly, perhaps, the lack of association with a particular venue is felt to hinder the consolidation and development of the company's identity.

It has been assumed that the most appropriate and cost-effective location for a home for OTC would be in Dublin, but this assumption has not been supported or tested by work to assess the feasibility of any alternatives. Nor, apparently, has there been much discussion with other companies (such as theatre companies and amateur operatic/musical groups) about the possibility of sharing a home of medium size (500-700 seats) in Dublin. No one group has, so far, taken the initiative to progress such an idea. Were the debate about building an opera house for Dublin to be re-opened, OTC could make a case for becoming a resident company, most logically in a small, second theatre or studio space. Such a space would also be appropriate for the development of new and experimental work, and for education and outreach initiatives.

On the other hand, there are proposals in development for new venues around Ireland that could offer real solutions to this problem. It would be in the company's long-term interests for the issue of a home base to be explored thoroughly.

2.2 Opera Ireland

Artistic profile

Opera Ireland is considered by some to be experiencing an artistic renaissance, attributed largely to the artistic direction of Dieter Kaegi since 1997.

The company's policy 'is to present opera in Ireland, to as wide an audience as possible'. Production standards have improved in recent years. Programming has been relatively broad, and has included the company's first Handel production and its first contemporary work (Turnage's *The Silver Tassie*) – both to critical acclaim.

Given OI's small output of four productions per year, there has been a good balance of earlier twentieth-century works, standard classics, and nineteenth-century warhorses, certainly in comparison to the company's programming of the early 1990's.

Surprisingly for a grand opera company in a European capital, these have included its first Wagner production since 1983, and the first productions in Dublin – by any company – of Strauss' *Salome* and Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*.

Much of this programming appears to have been done on instinct. The company currently has no stated policy on repertoire although it produced a five-year plan in 1999 that described a broad intention to present pieces new to the OI audience alongside more familiar works.

Employment practice and output

Opera Ireland's main contribution to the employment of Irish artists is its use of the RTE Concert Orchestra and the National Chamber Choir.

Since 1996 just under half (43%) of the singers in principal and supporting roles have been Irish, and the company has begun to extend its contact with young Irish artists through a masterclass programme at the University of Limerick and student workshops at the DIT College of Music.

Irish directors, conductors and designers are used, but are in a minority. The company's recent record with Irish lighting designers, répétiteurs and production managers is better.

Opera Ireland has never commissioned new work from a contemporary composer, and there are currently no plans to do so as it is felt that new work is not commercially viable in a 1200 seat venue (ie. The Gaiety Theatre).

Having said that, the Artistic Director appears keen to explore new work in the right circumstances, and mention has been made of possible co-productions in the future. Commissioned work was also described as a long-term aim of the company in its 2000 funding application to the Arts Council.

Audiences

Opera Ireland achieved audience levels between 74% and 89% capacity over the five years between 1996 and 2000, though the figures in the last three years are understood to incorporate the range of seating capacities of regional venues visited by OI's new touring operation, Co-Opera (see below).

The actual number of attenders for OI's two Dublin seasons has been more or less consistent since 1996 (apart from a dip in 1998), and in 2000 was 17,546. A further 4,311 attendances were generated that year by Co-Opera.

The company estimates that 63% of its audience is made up of regular attenders. Its Patrons and Friends have increased in number each year over the same period, and reached 807 in 2000.

The most recent market research undertaken by the company was in 1999, but this did not provide a profile of the company's audience.

Financial position

Opera Ireland's subvention from the Arts Council increased incrementally from 1996 to 1999, from 34% to 37% of its total income. It increased dramatically in 2000 as part of the company's new three-year funding package. The company changed its financial year at around the same time, and the Accounts for the 18-month period to the end of 2000 show an income breakdown of roughly:

58% from grants (almost entirely Arts Council; negligible income from Local Authority)

24% from box office and fees

15% from sponsorship and donations

3% from merchandising, subscriptions and a modest surplus on Co-Opera's work

OI's expenditure split during the same period was roughly:

82% on productions (including personnel)

18% on administration

Opera Ireland absorbed Co-Opera as its touring arm during 1999. According to the Accounts for 2000, there was a very small net benefit to the company from Co-Opera's activities, amounting to some €6,350. Co-Opera is discussed further below.

Opera Ireland's financial position is precarious, with operating deficits in each of the last five years. By September 2001 the accumulated deficit had risen to €545,987, and by the end of the year, this had risen still further. Where in the past, the company had been able to access a bank overdraft facility, and sometimes additional Arts Council funding, to cash-flow the Autumn season, in 2001 the overdraft facility was withdrawn.

The existing Arts Council package is a combination of revenue, capital and project funding. It originally consisted of:

- a one-year allocation (2000) of €760,000
- a two-year allocation (October 2000-September 2002) of €2,407,000

- a one-off audience development grant of €12,700
- a one-off capital grant of €6,000.

In the event, the first allocation in 2000 and the company's other sources of income together were not enough to cover both opera seasons. In an attempt to stabilise the company, the Arts Council agreed that Opera Ireland's subsequent multi-annual funding agreement, due to commence in January 2001, could commence in October 2000 with monies still available to be spent before the end of the financial year.

It was understood by both parties that a similar arrangement might be possible when the time came to negotiate a second multi-annual agreement for October 2002 onwards. It would seem that neither the Arts Council, nor Opera Ireland, made contingencies for what might happen if the Arts Council's own funding position changed so that new funding was not available half-way through the 2002 financial year (as turned out to be the case).

Even with a generous two-year funding package from 2000-2002, Opera Ireland's financial position worsened until it reached a critical point in Autumn 2001. Opera Ireland was provided with a further, exceptional grant in December 2001 from the Department of Arts, of €600,000, to offset the accumulated deficit. The grant was made subject to a number of conditions, one of which was for the company to avail itself of expert help from an outside advisor.

In theory, there is still €1,087,000 of the Arts Council grant for OI to access in the financial year 2002. The pattern of grant payment that was established at the beginning of the current funding agreement, however, meant that part of this sum was available to the company to cash flow the winter season 2001. OI accessed €385,520 for this purpose, leaving a balance of €701,480 to present the spring season 2002 and contribute to overhead costs until September.

Opera Ireland drastically altered its main season plans for 2002, and presented a spring season of only one, popular production – *Carmen* – to minimise costs and maximise income. Plans for Autumn 2002 are currently in negotiation with the Arts Council, although the company anticipates that it will not be able to finance an autumn season, after the summer tour, without further borrowing from the bank. Early estimates at the start of 2002 put this anticipated borrowing at about €300,000, but final costings are still being prepared and will have been affected by the outturn of the Spring season.

Whatever the final figure, it must be said that predicating a future season on significant bank borrowings would be an unhealthy, and possibly disastrous, basis on which to plan for the future.

Management and governance

Opera Ireland's management and Board structures are under review, work which began before the recent financial crisis.

At the end of 2001 there were five full-time members of administrative staff led by an Executive Director, and one part-time Box Office Executive. There were four part-time artistic staff, led by the Artistic Director. The full-time Touring Administrator and part-time Touring Director made up the staffing complement of Co-Opera. There was one Marketing Executive. Responsibility for financial management rested officially with the Executive Director. There was no separate finance manager.

One of the key findings of a PriceWaterhouseCoopers review was that the relationship between the posts of Executive Director and Artistic Director was unclear, leading to a lack of accountability regarding the financial implications of artistic decisions. Among the review's recommendations was the creation of the post of Chief Executive, with responsibility for all aspects of the company's work. Artistic decisions would remain with the Artistic Director, but subject to the Chief Executive's financial systems of control. The Board's response to this recommendation was to promote the Executive Director to the position of Chief Executive.

Future plans

In 1999 Opera Ireland produced a five-year plan, to be operated on a two-year rolling cycle. The plan sought to address all aspects of the company's work, including artistic policy, development, touring, education and outreach, training, audience development, marketing, company structure and finance. It was produced after a successful season that had produced good box office results, and reflected the company's then optimism about its future direction and growth. It expressed OI's aim of being 'a national resource for the creation and enjoyment of opera'.

The plan articulated a need for some structural change at Board and management levels, including the creation of Board sub-committees, the appointment of an Education Officer (on a project basis at first), the creation of the post of Associate Director (in charge of the development plan) and the re-definition of the then General Manager post as that of Executive Director. The plan also outlined a larger marketing department with two full-time and one part-time posts, in response to a perceived need to increase PR and fundraising activities. The redefinition of the GM post was put into effect at the time of the plan, but has been superseded by the recommendations of the PriceWaterhouseCoopers review (mentioned above – the PWC review also recommended, independently, an enhanced marketing department to realise the company's necessary fundraising targets). The Associate Director, education and new marketing posts have since been abandoned or remain aspirations.

At the time, with this revised management structure – and associated income levels - the company hoped to be able to deliver:

- increasing breadth of main scale programming
- increased demand for the company's annual Main Stage productions
- an education, community and outreach programme
- audience development work on a project basis
- support and training for Irish artists
- regional and international partnerships, mostly through Co-Opera
- market research

A number of long-term aims were also expressed in the plan. These included increasing the number of productions in the annual programme, and touring Main Stage work (particularly to Belfast).

Some of the five-year goals had begun to be delivered by the end of 2001. The breadth of programming has been discussed earlier (though it must be said that nothing that has been presented in recent years would be particularly unusual on a European stage).

An audience development project was initiated with the Red Box Club, with the help of a one-off grant from the Arts Council, and a lecture series on the main seasons was introduced.

An annual masterclass programme was developed with the University of Limerick, and the company's Artistic Director began work with singing students at DIT that resulted in a foyer-presentation of *Così fan tutte* by the students at the Gaiety Theatre during Opera Ireland's Autumn season 2001. The company was able to describe an emerging pattern of progression for some singers from the masterclass programme to chorus work, roles with Co-Opera and roles in the Dublin seasons. Co-Opera's work had expanded to two tours per year.

Other aspirations had yet to be realised. Education work of a project nature that had been anticipated through Co-Opera had not begun. The company had not been able substantially to test the demand for the main programme by offering more nights during a season, though this would have been partly due to the RTECO's availability (there were 18 performances during 1998, 20 during 2000, and 18 again in 2001 – though this included *The Silver Tassie*).

Some of the original aspirations might have been open to question anyway. The artistic relationship between Opera Ireland and Co-Opera was never fully established. The two operations had independent artistic leadership, and Co-Opera's work was not strongly tied to that of the main seasons.

The question of a 'home' for the company was not explored in any detail in the plan, but has since become a pressing issue. Opera Ireland's lease on its offices expires very soon and the company is urgently searching for new accommodation. Discussions with Dublin City University are ongoing. If DCU were to offer OI a residency, OI's immediate office, storage and rehearsal difficulties could be alleviated. Some argue that the association of OI with a student environment would have an adverse effect on the company's professional profile at home and abroad; on the other hand, there are examples of other arts organisations who have not suffered from such associations at all (eg. West Yorkshire Playhouse). The benefits of establishing a base, particularly in an establishment housing other arts organisations (including the National Chamber Choir and the RTECO, for example) would presumably outweigh such disadvantages anyway.

The plan made no provision for addressing Opera Ireland's accumulated deficit. It was presented as 'a way forward, not a solution for the consequences of the past problems of structural under-funding'. On the basis of the arguments and aspirations expressed in the plan, the company hoped that some form of stabilisation funding would be produced to clear its debts and allow it, effectively, to re-invent itself with the promise of increased activity in return for increased subsidy. It cited stabilisation programmes 'throughout Europe' as models for this approach. (In fact, stabilisation programmes in the UK have all demanded significant structural change from organisations and, in many cases, have still not delivered financially stable companies at the end of the process.)

The plan was incorporated, with some alterations, into Opera Ireland's application for multi-annual funding to the Arts Council, and provided the basis for the Council's new funding package described above. The five-year plan had stated Opera Ireland's wish to achieve Arts

Council funding amounting to 54% of expenditure on the main seasons. In the event, the funding allocated for the year 2000 amounted to 52% of total expenditure (or 53% of total income, as shown above), and might have been expected to represent a fresh start for the company from which it might at least halt the annual accumulation of its deficit.

That it has not achieved this result suggests the need for a rigorous and urgent analysis of the company's fixed and marginal costs, and a thorough testing of its financial assumptions before any new funding package can be negotiated.

2.3 Wexford Opera Festival

Artistic profile

Wexford Festival's vision statement expresses its aim 'to be the recognised world leader in the production of rare opera and to continue to win for Ireland a reputation as a centre of cultural excellence'.

Its policy on repertoire captures the dual focus of the organisation – rare operatic works, and the special nature of a three-week arts festival.

The organisation has successfully created a niche for itself in the international opera scene, with something approaching a cult following.

Its production values are generally considered good, though its choice of opera works from the more neglected areas of the repertoire have left it open to occasional criticisms.

Employment practice and output

The Festival's main programme offers 18 performances of 3 operas each year in the Theatre Royal, Wexford. In addition to the main programme, an extensive range of related events includes 16 performances of shortened versions of 3 popular operas, mainly featuring members of the festival opera chorus. The extended festival programme also features concerts, lectures and other music or opera events, numbering some 22 activities in various venues in the town, and not including an 'unofficial' fringe of separate arts events.

Artistic direction is currently in the hands of Luigi Ferrari, and any consistent criticism that has been levelled at the Festival over the years has been to do with his (and some of his predecessors') seeming indifference to Irish singers and other artists. In theory, the organisation's policy is to favour Irish artists in any situation where two or more artists of equal merit offer themselves for a role. The Board does not have a proactive policy on this issue, however, and gives complete discretion to the Artistic Director to cast as he or she chooses.

From 1996-2000 only 7 out of 140 singers in principal or supporting roles were Irish. It is fair to point out that Wexford's repertoire might not appeal to all singers. Roles learned for the main programme would be unlikely to be repeated often, if at all, in a singer's career. Furthermore, particular repertoire choices demand certain voice types which might not be offered among available Irish singers in any given year. Fee levels are not high for the three-week commitment that the Festival represents. On the other hand, the Festival presents more familiar repertoire in its shortened opera programme (*Madam Butterfly*, *Falstaff*, and *I Capuleti e I Montecchi* in 2001) that would offer classic, if abridged, roles to singers, not to mention opportunities for recital work during the rest of the Festival. Given its international profile, the Festival also offers excellent opportunities for young artists to be heard by agents and opera professionals from elsewhere. Until 2001, the situation was redeemed somewhat by the long-standing use of the National Symphony Orchestra during the Festival. The partnership with RTE is currently subject to negotiation, however, and the 2001 Festival engaged the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Belarus instead. Irish

directors and designers were also in a minority from 1996-2000, though the Festival's use of local production and stage managers was relatively high and local volunteers usually provide the crew and many of the backstage workers.

The Festival has presented contemporary work in the past, and in theory its policy of producing rare opera does not preclude this. There have been no commissions, however, nor are there any plans to commission work in the future.

Audiences

For the past six years the Festival's main programme has achieved audience levels of 97% capacity – full houses if complimentary tickets are taken into account. Although the Theatre Royal seats only 550 this is still a notable achievement, representing almost 10,000 attendances per year at the main programme alone. The three shortened operas in 2000 and 2001 also sold out, as did many of the other Festival events. The Festival has an expanding list of Patrons and Friends, which numbered 1,000 in 2000. It is also supported by roughly 250 local volunteers in all aspects of work 'behind the scenes'. The sales operation relies on a variety of direct marketing techniques to sell and make accessible the experience of the Festival rather than any works, artists or composers being featured. There is little formal market research, and no detailed information about the profile of the audience – other than that some 35% of the audience travels to the Festival from overseas. In percentage terms, Wexford's direct marketing costs are less than those of either Opera Theatre Company or Opera Ireland (roughly 3% of total expenditure).

Financial position

Wexford Festival's financial position is different from that of Opera Theatre Company and Opera Ireland in that it owns its own venue, the Theatre Royal. Although the Festival is able to derive income from its venue each year, the level of income is exceeded by the cost of maintaining the building. Despite having made operating deficits on the Festival each year from 1997-2000, the organisation shows a relatively healthy balance sheet and was able to acquire additional properties in Wexford town in 1999, including 'The People' newspaper site. The Festival's grant from the Arts Council, as a proportion of its total income, is currently lower than that of OTC and OI; in 2000 it amounted to some 31% of its total income, although the organisation aspires to a level of 45-50% to protect it from the danger of not being able to achieve 100% houses and high sponsorship levels in any given year.

Its income breakdown in 2000 showed roughly:

31% from grants (almost entirely Arts Council; negligible income from local authority)

39% from box office

20% from sponsorship and donations

10 % from other earned income

The Festival's expenditure breakdown the same year was roughly:

70% on productions/activities

30% on administration

This has been a relatively consistent expenditure pattern for the five years from 1996 onwards. A significant development in Wexford's spending on productions has been the imposition of VAT on artists' fees since 1997. This amounted to 5% of its total expenditure in 2000, and is an issue that the organisation is pursuing at Government level (with some financial assistance from the Arts Council). The other opera companies are also affected by VAT, but to a lesser extent.

Future plans

Wexford is the only one of the Arts Council-funded opera companies on annual grant-aid rather than three-year funding at the present time.

Its application for 2001, however, set out in detail the organisation's plans for growth over the three years to 2003 in anticipation of major capital development, the proposal for which currently lies with the Government. The proposal itself is for a €27.7M building and refurbishment programme that will deliver:

- a 36% increase in capacity in the Theatre Royal to 750 seats, plus enhanced front- and back-of-house facilities;
- a new 380-seat second venue;
- an arts gallery;
- close to a year-round schedule of opera-related and other artistic work.

In April 2000 the Arts Council made a commentary on Wexford's proposals to the Department of Arts. This confirmed the Council's endorsement of the proposals and highlighted significant benefits, including:

- establishment of a centre of excellence for opera in Ireland through the enhancement of the Wexford Opera Festival, the establishment of a new receiving venue for local and international touring opera, and the possible provision of a 'home' for Opera Theatre Company;
- expanded educational and outreach work, both through the Festival and through OTC;
- training opportunities in both performing arts (especially opera) and arts management;
- enhancement of other arts activities connected with the Festival, especially through the new gallery;
- increased opportunities for access to and participation in opera and other arts activities for local people, through the expansion to year round programming;
- enhancement of the already notable contribution of the Festival to tourism and the local economy.

The commentary recognised the need for:

- specialist reports on the structural, technical and architectural aspects of the building programme;
- revised management and governance structures;

- a wide range of uses for the complex, so fixed overheads and administration costs could be spread over as much of the year as possible;
- detailed costing of staffing, programming and management of the new complex.

18 months later this assessment of Wexford's proposals is still appropriate and sound. A recognised centre for opera in Ireland would have a much-needed positive impact on the profile of the art form, helping to raise public awareness and stimulate commercial and artistic interest from outside. Refurbishment of the Theatre Royal would help meet the demand for tickets, which currently outstrips supply each year. It would also address serious issues relating to working conditions and facilities that prevent the Festival from offering an international level of production standards.

More significantly, though, the potential association between the Festival and Opera Theatre Company at the new complex could bring many benefits if it were to come about. OTC could gain a 'home', within reach of Dublin from where it would need to draw audiences for its more experimental work, and with advantages to its profile, rehearsal arrangements and developmental work that have been mentioned earlier.

Wexford could enhance its own profile from association with another internationally known opera company, and could benefit from OTC's particular expertise and reputation in education and outreach work. There could be exciting opportunities for the development of a real training programme for young opera professionals (although this would need a stronger complementarity of approaches from the respective artistic directors and Boards with regard to Irish artists than is currently the case). Wexford could also gain income from OTC's tenancy.

The fact that the two organisations have strongly distinct artistic identities is appropriate and should be an advantage, since neither would compete with the other and both are associated with less familiar repertoire though at opposite ends of the spectrum. The complex could offer a base for some of OTC's ideas for hosting international opera festivals, and the year round programming should bring touring opera into Ireland of a suitable scale to visit other regional venues.

The Wexford Festival is not well known for its education and outreach work, and has made it clear to the Arts Council over the years that it regards this aspect of its activities to be of secondary importance.

Its recent work has been relatively modest, comprising free tickets for second level school children to rehearsals of the Opera Scenes (shortened operas), some Millennium celebrations, and occasional off-the-peg projects in collaboration with other organisations (such as last year's children's opera *The Raven King* mounted in collaboration with Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick).

Wexford's defence on this issue – that organisations should only be expected to deliver education work if it is a core part of their artistic ethos and if they have appropriate expertise available – is valid inasmuch as it offers a description of the basis of the best education work by arts organisations as opposed to (often poor) work that is done simply to access particular types of funding.

It is regrettable, though, that the Wexford Festival has not so far considered education work to be a core part of its artistic ethos, except in the most general sense, especially

considering the far-reaching links it has into the local community. It seems likely that this attitude is linked indirectly to the organisation's self-image as an international festival, in that many of the artists involved are from overseas, do not necessarily have any background in or understanding of education work appropriate to an Irish context (let alone sufficient language skills), and are not engaged by the Festival with any attention to their possible aptitude for such work.

By contrast, Opera Theatre Company does have a reputation for good work in this area. Some would even say that it risks over-reaching itself in demanding workshop skills and punishing schedules from almost all its artists in order to meet the demand for the work that it generates. Having a home base would undoubtedly enhance this work, however, and offer opportunities for developments in new directions that, as a touring company with no associated venue, OTC does not currently enjoy.

An expanded complex, and the presence of OTC with the opportunity of shared resources and expertise, could stimulate the Wexford Festival's own modest education and outreach programme in complementary ways. Such activities as the Festival has undertaken to date have, like other aspects of its operation, been well run and have attracted positive comment from those taking part, so there is at least a good starting point from which to proceed.

The possibility of using the new complex as a centre for training activities would be very exciting. OTC's own plans to develop an Opera Theatre Studio for Irish artists could be accommodated satisfactorily, and could be enhanced through opportunities that might present themselves or be created around the year-round programme of opera (and theatre) productions. Wexford Festival's new programme of internships could be expanded in the same way. There could also be the possibility of developing training activities in areas of arts management, which would be particularly appropriate given the Festival's excellent track record in this regard. Local amateur companies mounting productions in the centre throughout the year might be able to avail themselves of skills training for their members, perhaps organised in association with relevant partners such as AIMS.

All of these ideas for future growth, and many others that could be developed over a period of time (such as a strategic plan for audience development), would be predicated on appropriate levels of income, adequate levels of staffing with appropriate areas of expertise, and efficient and effective new structures of Board and management that would distinguish between the Wexford Festival Trust, the Theatre Royal, the Wexford Festival Opera, and the other activities planned for the new complex.

Wexford's 2001-03 application to the Arts Council, which set out plans for development in advance of the capital project, already outlined the need for staff in areas of Development and Marketing, Financial Control, Building Management, and Artistic Assistance (given that the Artistic Director is not based in Wexford), a need which has been articulated again through a separate survey of arts festivals conducted for the Arts Council by Doireann ni Bhraín. There would also need to be a satisfactory negotiation of a tenancy agreement for OTC (or whichever company might take up residency if it were not to be OTC).

Wexford's private fundraising campaign could take eighteen months to two years to reach its targets. The management estimates the actual building project to require roughly 21 months of work. In terms of the logistics of the building timetable, work would have to begin immediately after the close of the Opera Festival in any given year. In theory, only one year's Festival would be lost. Whenever the project started, the intervening years should

provide enough time to explore and put in place the revised management and Board structures mentioned above, and to recruit staff.

There is every reason to suppose that Wexford would mount a successful campaign to raise the private funding for the capital development project, assuming that the Government were to agree funding of a suitable level in the first place to act as a lever. The foundations of such a campaign are already in place. The Festival has an excellent record of prudent financial management, investment and sponsorship success.

The proposal represents the future for the Wexford Festival, for a number of reasons. The benefits to the Festival itself, and to particular aspects of the wider development of opera, have been outlined above. But it is worth asking what the future looks like for Wexford without the proposal.

In theory the Festival could continue to operate without the capital plan, or without its totality, much as it has in the past though for how long in a deteriorating venue would be open to question. A smaller fundraising initiative might deliver the refurbishment and expansion plan for the Theatre Royal and bring enhanced facilities in connection with the main Festival programme for patrons and artists alike, but this would not alleviate the mounting practical problems associated with other areas of the Festival's programming, such as the poor facilities offered in connection with the Opera Scenes in one of the local hotels.

On its own, an increase in capacity in the Theatre Royal would not alter significantly the shape or ethos of the Festival, nor lead it into a new era of artistic growth. From an Arts Council point of view this might be the most crucial point. For fifty years the Wexford Opera Festival has represented a certain kind of arts event in Ireland. It has prided itself on its international flavour, its exclusive repertoire, its high artistic goals and its quality of management. It has been a flagship arts event in Ireland and, uniquely in the opera sector, has attracted a worldwide reputation and following. It has huge and active local support and has fostered other arts activities in the town that have made Wexford an important arts venue in spite of its diminutive size.

Wexford has enjoyed fifty years of public subsidy on the basis of these attributes, and has done so in recent years even as the context of public funding for the arts has begun to change and as its major funding body, the Arts Council has begun to articulate new developmental priorities. It has also enjoyed this subsidy without presenting or making a major contribution to the work of Irish opera artists alongside their international counterparts. That it has done so suggests that the Festival might have represented more to the Arts Council than simply a provider of opera. If this is the case it might be argued, perhaps, that Wexford's place as an Arts Council client is more properly within a Festival's budget than an opera one.

The Council will need to understand its past reasons for funding Wexford before deciding what its future relationship with the Festival might be. In the context of the capital development plan the Opera Festival would undoubtedly remain true to its own artistic ethos, even while it might welcome an association with another broader one. Without the plan to offer a framework for other opera development work, however, the contribution of the Festival to the growth of Irish opera will be open to question.

2.4 Co-Opera

Artistic profile

Co-Opera is a relatively new small-scale touring opera company that has been operating as part of Opera Ireland for the last two years (see above). Co-Opera was first established in 1997 as an independent company, and came into being as a result of discussions with regional venue managers who had expressed an interest in touring opera with an alternative repertoire to that offered by Opera Theatre Company. The company developed an association with Opera Ireland soon afterwards, and became formally incorporated within OI in 1999.

In many ways the company continued to operate as a distinct entity within OI under the direction of Michael Hunt, its original Artistic Director, and described its *raison d'être* and artistic policy in terms of the two related factors of its original establishment: its 'symbiotic' relationship with regional venues, and its core repertoire choices.

It has stated a policy 'to be able to present opera in Ireland, to as wide an audience as possible and to make it as accessible as possible'.

Its aim with regard to repertoire is 'to develop the standard repertoire of the average opera-goer'. Its actual repertoire to date has featured largely the familiar, classic works such as *La Traviata* and *La Boheme*, with significantly reduced vocal and instrumental forces.

Co-Opera has attracted both praise and criticism. Regional promoters have welcomed an additional local company offering familiar repertoire with which they have been able to attract growing audiences for opera. Detractors include those who object on principle to the concept of reduced versions of grand opera, and particularly to such drastic reductions – typically instrumental ensembles of four or five in place of large symphony orchestras, and elimination of choruses. Co-Opera has also been criticised for casting young, relatively inexperienced voices in some of the operatic repertoire's major roles, albeit without pitching them against full orchestral forces.

The company's artistic ethos has been consistent, however, and many performances have received favourable comment in the press.

Employment practice and output

Since its inception in 1998 Co-Opera has mounted 6 productions, giving 94 performances throughout Ireland. The company has a policy of engaging a high proportion of Irish artists. Its casting of younger Irish singers is done in consultation with relevant singing tutors. Co-Opera has commissioned arrangements of music from Irish conductors and musical directors. It has not yet commissioned new operatic work from Irish composers, but has expressed a long-term aim to do so.

Audiences

Co-Opera estimates its total audiences to date to have reached between 25,000 and 28,000, with many venues achieving capacity houses. It claims to design its productions to

be suitable for any size of venue, rather than designing (as OTC does in some instances) particular tours for particular types of space. In reality, Co-Opera's tours have tended to visit a relatively consistent group of venues across the country. There has been no detailed market research done by the company in relation to its audiences, except through the venues themselves.

Financial position

Financially the company appears to have been reasonably stable, though it is difficult to establish its exact financial position currently within the overall picture at Opera Ireland. In fact, the worsening state of financial affairs of its parent company has been a significant factor in prompting Co-Opera to seek to re-establish its independent status, and the two companies are currently negotiating their separation.

In 2000, Co-Opera's income was split almost equally between box office and Arts Council grant. The Arts Council grant itself is understood to have covered the salaries of the two dedicated Co-Opera staff, at €63,490 including expenses, plus programming costs. Co-Opera's expenditure split appears to have been roughly 3% on administration and 97% on productions, though some of the administration was absorbed through Opera Ireland's administrative personnel (ie not including the two salaries). If Co-Opera were to become resident in a regional venue, it is possible that some of the administrative costs currently absorbed by Opera Ireland would be absorbed by the host venue instead. If not, its administrative costs would be bound to increase.

Co-Opera's practice has been to minimise its own box office risk by working only on a fee guarantee basis, leaving the regional venues to calculate and take the box office risk for themselves. It has managed so far to be a relatively low cost operation, though it should be noted that some fee levels that it offers would appear to be considerably lower than those offered by other companies.

Management and governance

Co-Opera's staffing is minimal – a part-time Artistic Director and a full-time Administrator - and it currently has no Board of Directors separate from that of Opera Ireland.

Its formal relationship with Opera Ireland is tied in to the multi-annual funding arrangement with the Arts Council, which is due to expire in September 2002.

For Co-Opera to pursue independent status the company recognises the need to establish appropriate structures for governance and management. It is currently pursuing the goal of becoming a resident company in a regional venue, with the most recent discussions being held with the Belltable Arts Centre in Limerick which is pursuing its own development plans through an Access application to the Government.

Co-Opera's summer tour 2002 (a revival of *La Boheme*) will be launched from the Belltable, and the two organisations are currently working on ideas for joint community development projects over the coming months.

Close partnerships are also being discussed by Co-Opera with other venues, particularly the Town Hall Theatre in Galway and Draocht in Blanchardstown (see below).

In general terms, a base in Limerick would appear to offer various collaborative opportunities for Co-Opera, not least through possible links with the Irish Chamber Orchestra, Lyric FM, Daghda Dance Company and the various musical activities of the University, though these links are at a merely exploratory stage at present.

Future plans

Assuming that this residency partnership, or another on similar lines, were to be successfully created, Co-Opera has outlined its aspirations for future growth in the following terms:

- to develop its range of repertoire to include more unfamiliar works;
- to commission Irish musicians to produce original small-scale arrangements of familiar works;
- to develop a Community Audience Development Programme with three venues;
- to develop local and international partnerships and co-productions;
- to continue to produce two Irish tours per year.

With regard to repertoire, Co-Opera has already experimented with producing work outside the classic grand opera canon. Its production in 2001 of Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale* was a collaboration with the West Cork Chamber Music Festival, where the Festival had already planned and budgeted to present a concert version of the piece. Co-Opera's contribution to the project was the provision of actors, dancer, narrator and director. Further projects are anticipated with the Festival, particularly in the lead-up to Cork's year as European City of Culture in 2005.

The opportunity that Co-Opera took of co-producing the Stravinsky piece raises an important consideration about repertoire. Opera Theatre Company mounted its own production of the piece in 1989, and it would have been a repertoire choice arguably more normally associated with OTC than with Co-Opera. At the same time, OTC has expressed its own intention to produce a version of *La Boheme* in the next few years – quite a departure from its normal repertoire. Both companies need to be careful not to weaken their respective artistic profiles by diversifying too much, even in a context where there is so little else on offer to local promoters. There needs to be closer communication between the two companies about programme plans, to ensure that local venues and audiences have access to as broad a range of work as possible.

Co-Opera's existing staff recognise that they are not 'educationalists', but are keen to develop an education and outreach aspect to the company's work. In Opera Ireland's five-year plan, much of the development work being proposed was anticipated to have been implemented through the touring arm, largely on the basis of its regional spread and its flexibility. Not surprisingly, the approach now being suggested by Co-Opera on its own resembles that described in Opera Ireland's plan.

The starting point would be specific projects commissioned from expert practitioners from elsewhere and run by them in conjunction with particular regional venues (such as Draocht, which has an established outreach programme already). This approach can work well and result in memorable and worthwhile projects, given the right personnel, as long as sufficient time is invested at the outset and throughout any given project in establishing effective links with the relevant partners in the local area and finding out what they

perceive their needs to be. With this in mind, projects would need to be devised over a reasonably long time-period. Co-Opera and the venues concerned would also have to examine their motivation in offering such activities; there is often an assumption about building the 'audience of the future' with education and outreach work, which is not always appropriate (discussed further in Access section).

If the company (and venues) were successful with this approach, it is envisaged that Co-Opera would move to appoint a permanent member of staff to develop the work further. This would seem a logical and desirable progression, again assuming that the artists and facilitators involved had the necessary skills.

Co-Opera has already exported one production to the Faroe Islands, and plans another collaboration in 2003. It is currently exploring a co-production with the Vienna Chamber Opera. At home, there is discussion with the Gate Theatre about a co-production that would tour Ireland in Autumn 2002 (ie after Co-Opera becomes independent of Opera Ireland). These are ambitious plans for a company that has only just established itself in Ireland.

While its future relationship with the Arts Council – if any – has yet to be established, post-Opera Ireland, it is expedient for the company to pursue collaborations that keep costs low and the company's profile and output high. In the event of a new public funding agreement, however, it might be argued that Co-Opera should concentrate on consolidating its work in Ireland and developing a recognisable product of quality before extending itself abroad.

2.5 Anna Livia International Opera Festival

Artistic profile

The Anna Livia Festival appears to have polarised artistic comment more than any other company since its arrival on the opera scene two years ago.

Some consider its production style to be old-fashioned and detrimental to the progress of opera production in Ireland as a whole. Others have embraced it for commendable work by individual performers, for memorable productions, for the repertoire it has offered, or as an addition to the otherwise empty summer calendar of professional opera production.

Its mission statement reads: 'The Anna Livia International Opera Festival is a completely Irish-oriented opera festival with emphasis on Irish artists being given the opportunity to work in their own capital city with international colleagues.'

Employment practice and output

The Festival comprises four performances each of two grand opera productions in the Gaiety Theatre, usually of mainstream 19th century repertoire, and a fringe festival of recitals, one-act operas and orchestral events.

Irish singers have featured in the main productions, particularly in principal female roles, in the chorus and in support roles, as well as in the fringe festival.

There have also been opportunities for Irish people to work as assistants to the (international) Conductor and Director.

The Festival employs a freelance orchestra of some 50-60 musicians, most of them Irish.

Audiences

The company's management estimates that the 2001 Festival achieved audience levels of 63% capacity.

Financial position

The Festival is currently in a stable financial position.

It is the only professional opera organisation in Ireland not funded by the Arts Council. Instead, it receives grant-aid directly from the Department of Education & Science, €535,000 for 2002.

According to Anna Livia's management, there is a requirement from the Department to operate break-even budgets each year, with no carry-forward of any surplus and no tolerance of deficits.

Management and governance

Anna Livia has a core management of three people, including its Artistic Director Bernadette Greevy. An additional part-time employee is responsible for the Friends scheme. Marketing is co-ordinated by a subcommittee of the Board of Directors and is among the responsibilities of the Festival Manager.

Future plans

The Festival has made its case for Government funding on the basis of its educational role for Irish opera artists and practitioners.

The Festival has endeavoured to provide opportunities for local singers to progress from chorus and support roles to principal roles over time, particularly male singers who are fewer than female singers in number and whose voices may not be appropriate or ready in any given year for the roles on offer.

The Festival's aspirations for the future include developing this educational remit in a variety of ways, with specific initiatives for schools and for artist training. Workbooks with accompanying CDs are being prepared as tools with which to introduce opera to school children; a pilot project based on *Martha* will be offered in 2002, and the Festival's management plan to extend this pilot into a longer scheme in subsequent years. With regard to artist training, a link already exists with the DIT Conservatory of Music where Bernadette Greevy is Artist-in-Residence. Many of the Irish singers featured in the main productions, and all those cast in the one-act operas of the fringe festival, are recruited from DIT students. There have also been opportunities for DIT graphic design students with regard to the Festival's publicity materials.

The Festival suffers from some of the same problems as other opera companies, in particular the problems of venue and of orchestral provision. It is understood that efforts are ongoing to establish a link with a permanent orchestra, though this has yet to be achieved.

3. THE ISSUES

3.1 ACCESS

Access to opera outside Dublin (and the Wexford Festival) in recent years has been limited more or less to the work of the two Irish touring companies, Opera Theatre Company and Co-Opera, occasional visiting productions of grand opera by Eastern European companies, and local semi-professional or amateur productions by groups such as Opera Cork.

In the days before the Arts Council took the decision to focus its funding on professionalising the sector, regionally based semi-professional opera companies were more numerous, but much of this activity has ceased through lack of funding.

It is very rare to see work by visiting small-scale touring companies such as those in the UK; there was a notable joint project in 2000, initiated by the Town Hall Theatre, Galway, which brought a production by the Welsh Company Theatr Mwldan to venues in Galway, Tallaght and Letterkenny (subsidised by the British Council), but such ventures have been the exception rather than the rule.

The arrival of Co-Opera as a second publicly subsidised small scale touring company in Ireland has raised questions about the strategic provision of opera to regional audiences. As part of the research for the Arts Council's Policy and Action Plan for Opera it was decided to make a survey of regional venues to learn more about available facilities, attitudes and practices with regard to programming, audience development and education, and the effect of the Arts Council's funding approach on demand and supply. As the two companies have presented work in Northern Ireland, Northern venues were included in the survey.

The questionnaire and follow-up research was conducted by Jan Branch, who provides this commentary on the information received:

Regional opera provision

A map of Ireland with the opera-receiving venues marked on it would show a wide spread across all areas, with no two venues being more than approximately 50 miles apart, so all potential audience members have a venue within 25 miles.

The venue provision is geographically satisfactory, but it is the great disparity between those venues which separates what can be promoted and what is not feasible. The seating capacity is widely varied, and may not always reflect the size of potential audiences. The acoustic may vary considerably. Backstage provision and wing space may or may not be available. Of the 21 venues in the South, only 6 have an orchestra pit, so the other 15 may be excluded from presenting some companies' programmes which would be perfectly acceptable to their regular audiences.

Almost all venues operate all year, with a widely varied programme. Programme planning may be done only a couple of months ahead, or up to two years ahead. Changes in top management are likely to cause a hiatus in the schedule, and may lead then to a shift in

policy or balance of programme. The diverse programme, with local companies and festivals to be accommodated, set pieces in the calendar such as the pantomime or Christmas show, and the limited availability of programme product and available dates in areas such as professional theatre and opera, all combine to create scheduling difficulties which must then be matched against the programming budget. All venue managers commented on the need to have a diverse and varied programme, and that it should include opera. Many wanted to maintain two visits a year; some have ambitions to expand to as many as four visits. In most cases these are one or two-night visits so, in real terms, four times a year may be four evenings in the small- to-middle size touring venues, a tiny part of the venue's overall activities. These one- or two night-touring visits create the further complication of a split week or staying dark for the remainder of the week, and in many cases break up the week even further with a day for getting-in the show with a subsequent loss of income against that day. And of course most would prefer to have their opera visits on the popular nights of the week, towards the weekend.

There was general consensus that Autumn and Spring are the best seasons for presenting opera, and no manager saw the summer as an appropriate time – although, as one commented, there is no evidence as to how this might work for the venues. Clearly there are no aspirations to emulate the continental opera summer season.

Most of the venues react to offers from touring companies, and few actively seek opera either in Ireland or further afield. Smaller venues complain they are offered only the new works or lesser-known pieces (presumably on the basis that these works will only attract small audiences anyway). It is worth remembering that the likely response to a lesser known or new work is always likely to be only a percentage of the regular audience who would come for popular work, whatever the size of the venue and the catchment area. So for lesser-known works the small venues are not covering the guarantee with their box office receipts, a cause of concern because it requires them to subsidise the visit from their revenue funding.

Cost is a problem flagged up by everyone. The number of nights in the venue's annual calendar is likely to be small, yet the cost of those nights will not be in the same proportion to the whole of the programme budget. Small venues with limited capacity are worried about meeting their guarantees with the box office takings. One Northern venue has had to cut out opera, at least for the time being, because of cutback funding by its District Council. A Southern venue commented that the increasing difficulty in finding the funding might eventually result in it being impossible to sustain opera in the programme.

All venues seek a varied and balanced programme, but some managers noted the difficulty in finding available and appropriate product, voicing concern that their aim to increase opera in their programme would be limited by what was available and when. New work is harder to sell and attracts smaller audiences; large-scale work is expensive and not much available. Some managers noted that quality was essential - if their audiences were seeing opera for only one or two nights a year, they must have the best possible.

Consultation with the companies and with neighbouring /competing venues was roughly half yes, half no. Some of the newer venues indicated that they are trying to work together as venues, not only on opera programming. Given the sizeable number that do not consult, the number of clashes reported is small; clashes tend to happen when large-scale imported promotions come into one of the large-capacity local venues. If and as this programming

expands, more consultation will be needed. The exclusivity clauses imposed by some venues will not prevent clashes if the programming puts indigenous against imported product.

The importance of education and outreach work was heavily emphasised by most venues, some of whom perceived it to be the touring company's contribution towards audience development for the venue as well as for the art-form. The quality of education and outreach work was commended. Some managers wanted more work involving local children in the production, as a way of easing them into opera and providing a healthy core audience with their families and friends.

Approximately half of the venues have strategic plans which include audience development, but almost all deal with this as a marketing issue rather than in terms of art forms. Clearly venues are going through the same struggle as are companies to differentiate marketing and audience development, and when there are small – if any - numbers of marketing and development staff, publicity is the priority. The critical need is for the venue to retain its core audience and attempt to draw in lapsed attenders. Only then, if resources allow, can attention be given to developing new audiences. The bulk of, if not the total, time and resources will therefore be concentrated upon informing and encouraging core attenders. There were a few comments about inappropriate or late publicity materials from companies.

There is clearly a positive desire in all the venue programmers to include opera as one of the markers of diverse programming reflecting work for all kinds of audiences. The physical limitations of the venues, including seating capacity and availability of an orchestra pit, their seasonal programming, their competitors' proximity and programming all affect what they can receive. Their programming budget and seating capacity determines what they can afford to receive, or what amount of funding they must contribute towards the visit. The number of nights of opera is probably disproportionate to the time taken to programme, fund and market such a small proportion of the year's activities, yet the inclusion of opera is seen as vital. Few of the venues are actively engaged in dialogue with touring companies; they simply accept what offered, sometimes with a grumble about lack of choice, yet they say clearly that their audiences need the well-known and popular works before they can progress to new and lesser known pieces, and that if they have only one tour a year, it should be a popular piece. They all demand work of a high quality, and even those managers who are not themselves fans of opera are sufficiently well experienced in production standards to make sharp judgements on quality.

Some venues aspire to as many as four visits a year, though some have not yet worked out in detail how to afford these. Many venues consider they have already established a core audience for opera, and that there is potential for expansion. And no venue wants less than its current provision of touring opera.

Jan Branch's survey of regional venues highlighted a number of issues:.

Popular vs. less familiar programming

There is a perception among a number of venue managers that popular programming can lead to programming of unfamiliar repertoire over a period of time, and that this approach can offer a means of developing audiences. The belief is that audience trust will be built up through the familiar works and that attendance habits will become strengthened so that audiences will be more inclined to take the risk of coming to a more challenging or

unfamiliar work in the future. It is a belief apparently shared by Co-Opera; the company's explanation for its choice of core repertoire, in conjunction with its partner venues, is partly to do with encouraging new audiences for opera who might need to be 'led' towards the more unfamiliar repertoire typically presented by Opera Theatre Company. It is possible that this approach has worked for some venue managers, either in the programming of opera or in other artform areas, though none indicated in their responses to the survey that this had actually been the case.

OTC's Artistic Director expresses a different view regarding the accessibility of less familiar repertoire, a view that is particularly common among those who champion new and contemporary work. The argument is that audiences are more likely to accept unfamiliar works when they are presented as a normal part of programming right from the start, rather than as something 'difficult' and rare. This argument holds that too much popular programming actually discourages audiences from attending unfamiliar works, because people become less accustomed to hearing the unconventional. (It has to be said that audiences will also accept unfamiliar programming when there is no alternative on offer – as was often the case before Co-Opera was established – so it is perhaps unsurprising to find OTC taking this view.)

There appears to have been no market research undertaken in Ireland to support either theory.

All venue managers who are in a position to programme more than one opera production a year express a desire for variety in the repertoire. A criticism sometimes heard of the touring opera companies, particularly OTC, is that venues have no input into the companies' programming choices and have to take or leave whatever is offered. This is apparently the case even where a company has been visiting a particular venue for a number of years.

On the other hand, companies themselves are limited in what they might be able to offer in response to a venue's particular request, especially if venues are not aware of the implications of their suggestions in terms of cost, suitable artists, or any number of other relevant factors.

There are also practical considerations to take into account. For example, companies have to plan their repertoire much further in advance than regional venues do – according to the survey venues plan their programme from as little as two or three months up to a year ahead, while opera companies routinely plan their core programme two years ahead. However, these factors need not preclude discussion between the companies and the venues about programming in general. In fact, it is highly desirable from an audience development point of view that such discussion take place, not just in terms of repertoire but also in terms of strategies for audience development that the companies and the venues can develop together, to the benefit of all concerned (see below)

Education and outreach work

Most of the venues that have received education projects in opera (usually from OTC) commented favourably upon them in the questionnaires, both for their intrinsic quality and also for their perceived contribution to audience development. Many venue managers appear to feel that education work is valuable because:

- it brings a guaranteed audience to performances (in the type of project where children are involved in the performance itself);

- it creates a positive association in the minds of children and their relatives and friends between interesting, enjoyable activities and the venue itself; and
- it helps to create 'the audience of the future'.

These three factors are linked to one another, but the last assumption on its own is open to question. It is a general assumption that is shared by many arts organisations undertaking education work. However, there is very little evidence anywhere to show that participation in education activities leads young people directly to become arts attenders in their adult lives, or that members of the wider public who are associated with children participating in education activities start to attend more arts events themselves, other than those in which the children are actually taking part. In fact, there is existing research that suggests that participation in and attendance at arts events are two quite unrelated things.

Research also suggests that the most effective types of audience development activities include traditional pre-performance talks (not necessarily just before the performance) and services designed to encourage audiences (of whatever age) to believe that they will be able to follow the story – such as provision of synopses and other information services, even for operas performed in English. Wexford Opera Festival's introduction of CDs with information about the operas in its main programme and excerpts from existing recordings of them is a good example. New work and unfamiliar repertoire requires even more of this type of investment than the standard works.

Some participatory education projects are directly related to a company's main production, involve the participants' attendance at the production in question, and prepare them well for the experience with information about the music, story, characters and so on. Many do not, however, but have value for completely different reasons. Both types of work, when done well, are valid and appropriate for both the venues and the companies to offer as part of their service to the public. Venues and opera companies should be aware of these differences when they choose their programmes, undertake their education work and plan their audience development strategies.

The high cost of opera

Many venues commented on the difficulty of programming opera because of its high cost. Venues may be charged a fee in the region of €3,810-5,080 per night for a Co-Opera production, depending on the seating capacity of the venue and the venue manager's assessment of likely box-office income. Fees for Opera Theatre Company are variable, and tend to be negotiated flexibly with the option of OTC itself taking some of the box office risk. Where OTC negotiates on a fee-only basis, the amount is usually in the region of €3,175-3,800 (though this can be less for challenging productions like new commissions).

The fees charged to venues for opera are considerably higher than fees for some other types of touring product. Arts Council-subsidised theatre companies, for example, are more likely to charge fees in the region of €1,015-1,270 per night.

It is not surprising that touring opera is relatively expensive for promoters to buy, given that it generally costs considerably more to produce than most other types of live performance. The problem lies with the venue managers' own perception of the likelihood of being able to meet the costs with box office takings, with their own programming subsidies (if they have them), or with other types of income that they might have to generate. Ticket prices

for the two opera companies' work outside Dublin are roughly comparable, and usually in the region of €13-19. This is only slightly higher than typical ticket prices for orchestral concerts or for touring theatre. In other words, many venue managers either do not feel able to charge, or do not think it appropriate to charge proportionately more for opera tickets in response to its high cost than for other types of events. They must therefore recoup the costs through sponsorship or other fundraising (very rare), or from their own revenue budgets.

Those venues in receipt of Arts Council funding were unable, until recently, to use their funding towards the cost of touring opera. There is no such restriction now, but neither have the levels of funding increased markedly. The result is that the venues have the same amount of subsidy to put towards their programme, but with more options regarding how they spend it. Obviously this is of no direct benefit to opera, unless individual venue managers choose to direct the subsidy that way and alter the funding of other parts of their programme instead. Venues with no subsidy, or with reducing amounts from their district councils, are under greater pressure to generate funds from more popular programming, thus reducing the time available during the year for costlier events and reducing the likelihood of venue managers taking what they consider to be box office risks on more than a few occasions.

There appears to have been little market research to test audiences' responses to pricing policies. This is not to disregard the knowledge, or 'gut feeling' that venue managers may have about what their audiences will tolerate, from the experience of selling different types of events. While more research is needed, it is possible to guess that ticket prices are most significant when they present an additional barrier to people who already feel intimidated by an art form they have never tried before, or by an unfamiliar type of repertoire. In terms of attracting new audiences to opera, therefore, ticket pricing is an important factor alongside others.

If venue managers cannot afford the opera they are offered, cannot or do not seek out alternative providers, and consequently programme very little, there is realistically no chance of building audiences for this art form.

Demand and supply

The survey indicates that there are now approximately 36 'visits' made by the two companies together to venues across the country, including Dublin, each year. (This level has only been reached in the last two years or so, and does not take account of 1-off appearances by OTC in particular venues, self-promoted performances, performances in Northern Ireland, or the activities of the Gaiety Theatre which does not present either OTC or Co-Opera). Unlike larger touring companies elsewhere, neither OTC nor Co-Opera presents a week's programme in any venue, so a 'visit' is meant in this context to be one or two consecutive nights of performances in a venue of any one production or double bill. No venue takes more than three productions a year. Most take one or two.

OTC and Co-Opera are probably operating at maximum capacity, given their current funding levels and staffing. However, the venues survey suggest a growing demand for touring opera that is not being met, even taking account of the recent increase represented by Co-Opera's two tours a year.

Most venue managers felt they were offering the right amount of opera in their yearly programme for their local audiences. A significant number, however, expressed a desire for more, and some had specific goals in mind for an optimum number of 'visits' per year. In most cases this was based on strong audience demand, with some venues achieving sell-outs for their current programme. In a few cases, the desire was part of an overall perception of the need to present regular, balanced programming of different art forms (particularly if the venue in question was starting from a very low base of opera programming). Demand was nearly always linked to repertoire: venues' responses varied predictably on this issue, but the most common requirement expressed was more variety, to include a basic component of standard repertoire as well as less familiar work.

The venues that would like more opera are tabulated below. They are spread reasonably widely around the country (apart from the two in Waterford and two in the greater Dublin area). All have seating capacities of between 200 and 400 except the Theatre Royal, which has about 600. Only two (Theatre Royal and An Grianan) have an orchestra pit. Of the nine listed, only three currently programme opera more than once a year. On the basis of the information received, the table presents a rough picture of the additional demand:

Venue	Current visits per year	Desired visits per year
Draiocht, Blanchardstown	1	3
An Grianan, Letterkenny	2	3
Backstage, Longford	2	3
Arts Centre, Mullingar	3	4
Siamsa Tire, Tralee	1	2
Garter Lane, Waterford	1 (occasional)	1
Civic Theatre, Tallaght	1	3
Abbey Centre, Ballyshannon	1	1-2
Theatre Royal, Waterford	0	4 *

* The Theatre Royal figure might be considered aspirational, given that the current manager is only recently in post and that there is currently no opera programme. For the sake of this argument, it is assumed that 2 visits per year would be more realistic, especially if Garter Lane were also to increase its programme. Similarly, while both Draiocht and the Civic Theatre are confident about their demand, 5 visits per year between them might be a more realistic ambition in the short-term.

The table suggests there is demand for at least an additional 10-12 opera visits a year across the country. This does not take account of possible demand from venues that did not submit questionnaires, or demand from venues in Northern Ireland. This suggests that an additional two tours a year might be feasible, to allow for programming choice and other variables.

The question of market saturation needs to be considered, notwithstanding the claims made about the additional demand for touring opera. Concerns have been expressed by one touring company that the presence of the second company might already have had a

detrimental effect on its bookings by regional venues and consequently on its audience reach, not to mention the actual box office returns. The venues' questionnaires do not appear to substantiate this fear; rather, they seem to point to the development of 'new audiences' in response to the increased provision. However, any consideration of a further increase in touring product should include the requirement to monitor audience patterns in detail.

A 'formal' touring circuit

One of the recommendations of the 1996 opera review was the establishment of

'a touring strategic alliance between opera companies and venues, where a company would agree to travel to five venues annually, with two productions annually for a period of five years (minimum)'.

While certain venues do appear more or less regularly on the touring schedules of the two companies, there appears to have been no formal arrangement to consolidate any of these relationships, and no dedicated funding to secure them, despite the review group's recommendation.

Both companies have, independently, described aspirations to develop more formal associations with certain venues. OTC's future plans include the possibility of a larger orchestral tour every year, which could only be accommodated in larger venues anyway. Co-Opera's plans include developing relationships with three or four venues in particular, where they have identified the possibility of creating outreach programmes and where demand for their work has been high. Both companies could be in a position to consider re-locating themselves in regional centres (Wexford and Limerick).

There could be advantages to establishing agreed touring circuits for the two companies, at least at certain times of the year or for certain types of production. Regular appearances of the same company in the same venue could help to build audience loyalty and a sense of ownership for the venue and for other local stakeholders in those towns and cities. They could also help in the building of audience development strategies and programmes of education work. They would have the practical advantage of minimising clashes of dates and repertoire. Some kind of agreed exclusivity in the relationships could, ultimately, make exchanges possible so that companies could be 'invited' to each other's venues in a complementary rather than a competitive manner, particularly if they retain distinctive repertoires. They would also help to give some level of security to the companies and a reliable supply of touring product to the venues.

This type of arrangement is the basis of the Spheres of Influence Policy that operates in Britain with regard to the large touring companies. The context is different, of course, and the SIP policy has itself come under scrutiny in a recent report by Graham Devlin for the Arts Council of England, but the principles remain the same. Important features of the policy in Britain are that it was essentially created at the instigation of the companies (rather than by the Arts Council), and that it is facilitated (and enforced to some extent) by an independently chaired group, the National Opera Coordination Committee.

A similar system for touring opera in Ireland would need two features in particular:

- *a flexible approach to exclusivity* – neither of the companies offers enough touring productions each year to be the sole provider for venues requiring more than two opera visits per year;
- *a flexible approach to the definition of each touring circuit* – while there might be a core of venues receiving guaranteed visits from the company in question, it would be necessary to allow other venues in and out of the circuit to allow an element of choice and to accommodate wider needs.

It goes without saying that such a system could only be designed with the consent and participation of the venues, regional arts officers and companies themselves. It may have

been a lack of consent and participation that prevented the recommendation of the 1996 review from being realised. If a system were to be created on such terms, it would then fall to the Arts Council, as the major stakeholder, to ensure that it continued to operate equitably and effectively. The system could only operate with agreed levels of funding and guaranteed levels of production over a period of years.

The larger venues that could accommodate an orchestral tour from OTC are amongst those that also require more than two opera productions per year in their annual programme. Given the need for a flexible approach to exclusivity, one hypothetical touring system might be as shown in the table below. Roughly half the venues taking the large OTC tour would also feature a Co-Opera production; this assumption is based on current touring patterns but also keeps the possible regional bases of the two companies distinct. Exclusivity would be kept on the time of year for each company's tour. A third or fourth opera production at these venues would be provided by either of the Irish companies or by visiting touring companies at other times of the year, to be arranged on a more flexible basis.

OTC Spring orchl tour	Co-Opera Summer tour	Other (small touring prod.)
Town Hall, Dundalk		
Theatre Royal, Waterford		Theatre Royal, Waterford x 2
Dublin venue eg. RDS		
Town Hall, Galway	Town Hall, Galway	Town Hall, Galway
Arts Centre, Mullingar	Arts Centre, Mullingar	Arts Centre, Mullingar x 2
Hawkswell, Sligo	Hawkswell, Sligo	Hawkswell, Sligo
An Grianan, Letterkenny	An Grianan, Letterkenny	An Grianan, Letterkenny
Theatre Royal, Wexford		Theatre Royal, Wexford
	Watergate, Kilkenny	Watergate, Kilkenny x 2
	Belltable, Limerick	Belltable, Limerick
	Siamsa Tire, Tralee	Siamsa Tire, Tralee
	Civic Theatre, Tallaght	Civic Theatre, Tallaght
	Everyman, Cork	Everyman, Cork
	Pavillion, Dun Laoghaire	Pavillion, Dun Laoghaire
	Draiocht, Blanchardstown	Draiocht, Blanchardstown

Within these lists, OTC and Co-Opera might concentrate on particular relationships with two or three agreed venues each, in order to provide focussed audience development work. These could provide an additional element of exclusivity. Co-Opera's might be Draiocht, Belltable and Galway. OTC's might be Mullingar and Waterford from the Spring tour list and another regular venue such as Kilkenny that takes smaller tours. Other, complementary circuits would be envisaged for the two companies' work at other times of the year, and for those venues only requiring 1 or 2 opera visits per year in total. These circuits would be

relevant whether or not OTC were in a position to tour a large orchestral production each year.

(This table does not take into account Northern Irish venues; Letterkenny and Derry might be considered 'either/or' venues, and there might be other NI venues featuring on a larger orchestral tour by OTC. If this were the case, the number of Southern venues on the OTC circuit might need to be reduced slightly.)

Establishing a consistent touring circuit of some kind should be considered even if there were to be only one Arts Council-funded touring company in future. If OTC were the only company, for example, its large orchestral circuit would be more or less consistent but its other tours might remain flexible as they are now, including the circuit venues as well as the many other venues with smaller capacities. Remaining demand for touring opera would then be filled by visiting companies.

Touring of mainscale opera

Currently there is no touring of subsidised mainscale opera in Ireland.

Eastern European companies tour to a limited number of large venues (usually Cork Opera House, the Concert Hall at the University of Limerick, the National Concert Hall in Dublin and the Waterfront Hall in Belfast). Welsh National Opera visits the Grand Opera House in Belfast annually, but has not extended its tour to any other Irish venue.

The issue of mainscale touring opera was not addressed in the survey of regional venues, as nearly all of them are too small to accommodate it. The few that are, however, are poorly served at present, and audiences consequently have very limited access to mainscale opera performances. This is almost as true of Dublin as of other parts of the country, since there is no venue that can realistically accommodate the touring productions of international companies.

This report discusses elsewhere the aspiration of Opera Ireland to tour its main seasons outside Dublin. Were the company in a strong enough position financially to tour, and assuming the availability of orchestral resources to support touring work, the most obvious venues to begin with outside Dublin would appear to be Cork and Belfast. The feasibility study on an all-Ireland opera company, commissioned by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in 1999, suggested a touring pattern for such a company of Dublin and Belfast with a third venue of Cork and Derry in alternate years.

Cork is preparing for its year as European City of Culture in 2005. Cork Corporation has invested substantially in its Opera House in partnership with the Arts Council, with core funding amounting to approximately twice that of the Council over recent years. Further capital funding directly from the Government enabled the creation of a second venue within Cork Opera House. The venue's current opera programming consists mainly of touring Eastern European productions, and productions by the local semi-professional company, Opera Cork, which is funded by the local authority but not by the Arts Council.

In the past Cork has supported other local opera companies, including Opera South and the Irish Operatic Repertory Company. The Everyman Palace Theatre in Cork has received recent touring productions from Co-Opera and Opera Theatre Company. The City Hall is used as a venue for operatic concert productions. It is felt by local promoters that the city

has a history of support for opera, and that further touring of mainscale work to Cork would be well supported.

The Cork City Arts Development Plan 2000-2005 sets out a number of aspirations and objectives for opera. These include:

- the inclusion of the city on a national touring circuit
- supporting the production of opera in Cork
- encouraging the use of Irish artists in opera productions
- supporting local production initiatives (chiefly through Opera Cork/Cork Opera House)

The plan also mentions the importance of past partnerships with the Arts Council, including the joint funding of the Opera House and the position of Arts Officer. Its opera section includes an intention to seek the Arts Council's support in recognising a place for professional opera production in Cork.

The manager of the Cork Opera House, and the two arts officers for Cork City and the County, all expressed enthusiasm when interviewed for this report for the idea of Opera Ireland touring its main seasons to Cork. There would appear to be little scope for funding such touring productions from the Opera House's programming budget, so future touring by OI would depend on dedicated project funding from other sources. Welsh National Opera's tours to the Grand Opera House in Belfast are funded this way, with specific project funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to the Grand Opera House. The 1999 feasibility study on an all-Ireland Opera Company estimated marginal touring costs for two seasons per year of two productions each to be in the region of Stg£185,000, not including orchestral fees. ACNI's project grant to the Grand Opera House for WNO is currently Stg£185,000, which covers one season only with two productions but includes orchestral costs and the additional expense of bringing the entire company from Wales. Assuming that this project grant might be needed for any OI touring to Belfast, a similar sum would be needed again for touring to Cork.

Training links between OI and the School of Music at Cork Institute of Technology could be explored as part of a touring scheme. Both arts officers pointed out the desirability of providing further training and employment opportunities for young performing arts graduates from CIT in Cork itself, through the development of sustainable local production companies, rather than 'exporting' young local artists to companies based in Dublin or elsewhere. It was not possible to interview the relevant staff from the School of Music for this report, but any discussion of future touring by OI to Cork should include consultation with them.

Any plans to develop touring by OI to Cork would, of necessity, involve collaboration between the Arts Council, RTE, the Cork authorities, local arts officers, the Opera House and CIT. It could even be that, in the absence of progress on options for venues in Dublin, discussions could be held on the feasibility of OI's re-location to Cork altogether.

3.2 ORCHESTRAL PROVISION FOR OPERA

None of the professional opera companies in Ireland employs its own orchestra.

Opera Ireland buys in the services of the RTE Concert Orchestra. Wexford Opera Festival bought in the services of the National Symphony Orchestra until 2000 and then engaged a foreign orchestra for the 2001 Festival. Opera Theatre Company, Co-Opera and the Anna Livia International Opera Festival all engage freelance professional players to provide orchestral or instrumental accompaniment.

The situation at Wexford, the change in agreement between the RTECO and Opera Ireland, the general increase in opera provision through the arrival of Co-Opera and Anna Livia, and a perceived opportunity for growth in the opera sector, have combined to raise the question of whether dedicated and/or additional orchestral provision for opera should be made.

The total amount of orchestral/instrumental work currently generated by the professional opera companies in Ireland is estimated to be roughly 35-40 weeks (including rehearsal time). Of this, only 10-12 weeks involve a full orchestra of between 45-65 players (Wexford, Opera Ireland, Anna Livia). The remaining 25-30 weeks typically involve much smaller numbers of players, from 4-15 (Opera Theatre Company and Co-Opera).

None of the companies feels strongly that the current level of opera provision in Ireland merits the creation of a single, dedicated orchestral resource.

- OTC estimates that it regularly engages a core of some 8-10 players only. Of its four tours a year, only one would be likely to involve an ensemble of more than 10 players. Furthermore, given its breadth of repertoire, the company would be likely to mount at least one tour a year with specialist instrumental players (eg. period instrument or contemporary music ensembles), so the actual number of weeks' work for its core players might be more in the region of 10-15 per year.
- Co-Opera has not yet performed with an ensemble larger than 5 players.
- Opera Ireland's present relationship with the RTECO appears to be satisfactory to both parties, given that OI is not in a position financially to consider an increase in its output, regardless of orchestral provision, and that the RTECO considers its opera performances to be a desirable component of its yearly work.
- Wexford's management might be happy to consider using a dedicated Irish orchestra, given the change in its relationship with RTE, but this would depend, amongst other things, on there being a high enough level of subsidy and flexibility within the orchestra to compete with affordable packages on offer from elsewhere.

All companies consulted expressed doubts over whether enough work could be generated over and above the current opera seasons to sustain a permanent orchestra of any size.

There appears to be no immediate pressure to find additional orchestral resources to support the current provision of opera. However, it is worth speculating on what might be the demand for such resources if the opera sector were in a position to grow.

OTC's aspirations for the future include being able to mount one tour per year with larger orchestral forces (26-40 players), as well as developmental projects involving the creation of new work by contemporary composers. Opera Ireland's aspirations include the major

objective of mounting a third season each year, as well as touring its productions to other regional centres. Wexford Opera Festival's aspirations do not, currently, include expanding the number of main stage performances during the Festival itself, but it is possible that a year-round programme of activities based at the proposed new facility might generate increased work for local orchestral musicians, for example within international opera festivals or for touring productions from outside Ireland. Co-Opera's management has articulated, unofficially, an aspiration to mount tours with larger orchestral forces than it has done hitherto. Anna Livia wishes to establish a link with a permanent orchestra. The four Arts Council-funded companies have stated an aspiration to develop and increase their education and outreach work, which could involve orchestral players individually outside their performance in the productions themselves.

Any or all of these aspirations would need to be factored in to a consideration of the feasibility of establishing an additional orchestral resource for opera in the future. Given the probability of RTE having its own plans to increase the output of its orchestras and other performing groups, it is unlikely that the RTE orchestras would be able to respond to additional demands for opera work as well (although the NSO might have some flexibility in this regard if its relationship with Wexford is not renewed). It is possible that a dedicated opera orchestra would be able to source other types of orchestral work outside its opera periods, but if the RTE orchestras were also to increase their output the overall market for live orchestral concerts would have to be tested thoroughly.

Outside RTE there are professional orchestras and ensembles in Ireland that do not, generally, perform in opera productions. These include the Irish Chamber Orchestra, Crash Ensemble, Concorde and Christ Church Baroque. Just across the border, the Ulster Orchestra has recently ceased its association with Castleward Opera and now does not perform any opera accompaniment (prior to 1998 it provided two seasons a year in association with Opera Northern Ireland). Any of these groups might, in theory, be available for and interested in playing opera, and could offer an additional resource that would obviate the need for a separate, dedicated orchestra at the present time.

The Irish Chamber Orchestra currently employs a core of 19 players on permanent contract. The contract involves 10 months' work every year, with January and August being 'free' months. It promotes a subscription series that runs from February to May each year in Limerick (its home base) and Dublin, and performs two nationwide tours a year in Spring and Autumn. Its programme is typically planned 18 months in advance. Depending on the flexibility of its own touring schedule, its involvement with opera might be possible either in terms of small-scale productions that would use some or all of its existing players, or in terms of larger productions that would involve augmenting its basic strength with freelance players. The possibility of Co-Opera re-locating to Limerick should be remembered.

Christ Church Baroque is, as its name suggests, a period instrument ensemble. It has a core of 14 players engaged on a freelance basis, and promotes roughly 10 separate events in Dublin a year. Its programme is planned 6 months to a year in advance. Some of its members have performed with Opera Theatre Company in the past, but not under the banner of Christ Church Baroque. Indeed, not all of its core players are locally based, though all originate from Ireland: some are resident in London and travel to Dublin for each event as there is not enough period instrument work to make it feasible for them to base themselves in Dublin all year round. The costs of booking a large period instrument orchestra are therefore quite high for any organisation, since a sizeable proportion of the players have to be sourced from outside Ireland. Christ Church Baroque is still at a relatively

early stage of its development as an organisation. It aspires to be the period instrument orchestra of choice for Ireland, but has some way to go before achieving the stability and employment opportunities of, say, the Irish Chamber Orchestra.

The Ulster Orchestra employs 63 players on permanent full-time contracts. Its subscription series in Belfast runs from September to May, during which period it also performs in regional venues throughout Northern Ireland. It provides 12 weeks' work per year for the BBC. Its annual schedule in the past has also included performances and ballet accompaniment during the Belfast Festival at Queen's, and up to two seasons' opera accompaniment for what was then Opera Northern Ireland, and subsequently one season for Castleward Opera. Its current relationship with the Festival is flexible and changing; it ceased playing for opera productions as of 2001. The Orchestra is funded chiefly by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the BBC. Its availability for accompanying Irish opera at the present time would be likely to be governed not only by its fixed schedule during the year and by funding considerations but also to some extent by political sensitivities; for the present argument, therefore, it has been assumed that it might only be able to play for opera productions that would be seen in Northern Ireland as well as in the Republic, or on an exchange basis with an Irish orchestra. Even then it would probably have to operate on a virtually commercial basis, which might make any relationship unworkable from Wexford's point of view, for example.

The Crash Ensemble and Concorde are freelance groups operating on a similar basis to Christ Church Baroque.

The table below is an attempt to identify some hypothetical opportunities for the involvement of these groups, along with the RTE orchestras, with the increased opera provision aspired to by the companies:

Opera Ireland 3 rd season	Once a year	NSO or Ulster Orchestra or Each in alternate years
Opera Ireland tour to Cork, Limerick and/or Belfast	Tour of one or both productions from its two current seasons each year	RTECO or Ulster Orchestra or Each in alternation
Wexford Festival (as is)	Once a year	ICO (augmented)
Co-Opera orchestral tour	Once every two years	ICO (members of)
OTC orchestral tour	Once a year	RTECO or ICO or Ulster Orchestra or Each in alternation
OTC baroque tour	Once every two years	Christ Church Baroque
OTC 'classics' tour	Once every two years	(freelance)

OTC experimental tour/ Opera Theatre Studio tour	Once every two years	ICO or Crash Ensemble or Concorde or (freelance)
OTC 'target audience' tour	Once a year	(freelance)
Anna Livia (as is)	Once a year	(freelance)

The 'Either/Or' scenarios appear to offer a number of different permutations, such as:

Year One

Early Spring	Opera Ireland Spring season in Dublin, Belfast and Cork	RTECO
Feb/March	Opera Theatre Company large tour	Ulster Orchestra
Early Summer	Co-Opera tour	freelance
May	OTC children's opera	freelance
Summer	Opera Ireland 3 rd season	NSO/freelance
Summer	Anna Livia	freelance/NSO
August	Opera Theatre Studio tour	freelance
Early Autumn	OTC baroque tour	Christ Church
October	Wexford Opera Festival	ICO (augmented)
November	Opera Ireland Winter season in Dublin, Belfast and A N other venue	RTECO
Autumn	Co-Opera tour	freelance/ICO?

Year Two

Early Spring	Opera Ireland Spring season in Dublin, Belfast and Cork	RTECO
Feb/March	Opera Theatre Company large tour	ICO
Early Summer	Co-Opera tour	freelance
May	OTC children's opera	freelance
Summer	Opera Ireland 3 rd season	Ulster
Orchestra		
Summer	Anna Livia	freelance

August	OTC experimental tour	Crash/Concorde
Early Autumn	OTC 'classics' tour	RTECO
October	Wexford Opera Festival	foreign orchestra
November	Opera Ireland Winter season in Dublin, Belfast and another venue	NSO?
Autumn	Co-Opera tour	ICO?

In reality, however, it can be seen that there would be difficulties matching the different availabilities of orchestras and opera companies, given their existing working patterns. The following points can be observed straight away:

The ICO might not wish to commit the three to four weeks every year necessary to be resident orchestra for the Wexford Festival. Even if it played every other year, it is hard to imagine any of the other Irish orchestras providing a feasible alternative in the intervening years.

If the ICO did perform for Wexford in any given year, it might not wish to play for any other opera work, particularly touring opera, the same year, even if it were able to offer its players year-round contracts as a result. Thus the likelihood of it playing for, say, Co-Opera the same year might be very low. If the ICO chose to form a partnership with Co-Opera instead, Wexford might still feel itself forced to consider a foreign orchestra rather than any other Irish orchestra, on the basis of cost and flexibility.

The Ulster Orchestra might find it difficult to schedule a tour with OTC in the Spring, in the middle of its regular subscription series.

If Anna Livia and Opera Ireland were both to offer a summer season, it is unlikely that the same orchestra, or even either of the RTE orchestras, would be available for both.

Even assuming the relative availability of the various orchestras, there still appears to be a requirement for freelance resources, particularly for the smaller-scale work where it might not be cost-effective for the permanent orchestras to field small ensembles.

Christ Church Baroque, the Crash Ensemble and Concorde are all freelance ensembles anyway, so there would probably be little difference in cost terms to the opera companies in engaging them from engaging 'ad hoc' freelance groups.

The pattern outlined above does not include any additional touring that might be deemed desirable in response to the apparent demand for opera 'product' from the regional venues (discussed in the Access section).

The pattern also does not include Castleward Opera in the North, which takes place over six weeks in May-June each year and uses its own freelance orchestra of mostly Northern Irish musicians. In theory, this orchestra might also be available in the mix of orchestral resources, particularly if Castleward begins to tour its productions to the South (as it aspires to do). In reality, however, this may not be practical as quite a number of the players are full-time teachers.

Another factor is that many musicians are common to several orchestras - for example, some players perform with Christ Church Baroque, the Crash Ensemble, and RTECO at different times – so that none of these orchestras or ensembles is a discrete entity (apart from the Ulster Orchestra). The interdependence of the players and groups may be in a fragile state of equilibrium that would be tested if more time were to be devoted to opera by any or all of the groups.

When the groups have functioned as discrete entities, there have been occasions when two or more of them have clashed with regard to dates. It has been known, for example, for the Irish Chamber Orchestra, Crash Ensemble, Christ Church Baroque and Opera Ireland to be performing in Dublin at the same time (with very different types of events).

Another kind of equilibrium has been achieved through the partnership of Opera Ireland/RTECO and (until 2001) Wexford Opera Festival/NSO that has effectively maximised the use of available orchestral resources, but at the same time limited the opportunities for expansion. While Wexford has no plans to increase the length of the Festival, and Opera Ireland is not in a strong financial position to contemplate growth at present, there may be no compelling argument to alter this equilibrium.

If, however, the time is thought right for growth in opera *and* orchestral provision together (as the opera companies and RTE Music appear to feel), then a wider debate is needed on the subject of orchestras in Ireland, backed up by detailed research on possible models of additional orchestral provision.

3.3 CHORUS PROVISION FOR OPERA

Chorus provision for opera in Ireland, like orchestral provision, is a mixture of individual freelance and contract work.

No company employs its own chorus. Opera Ireland engages a chorus comprising the 17 members of the National Chamber Choir supplemented by freelance professionals as the need arises. The Wexford Festival has used the Prague Chamber Choir in recent years, with the choir performing other concerts during the Festival in addition to its opera chorus work. The Anna Livia Festival recruits chorus members from young professionals and student singers from DIT. The two touring companies do not use choruses as a rule.

Discussions about establishing a dedicated professional opera chorus have happened from time to time. In 1995 meetings were held involving representatives of both Arts Councils, the Opera companies, the National Chamber Choir and RTE about establishing a full-time choir that would provide chorus work for the opera companies as well as carrying out its own choral engagements. The opera companies and RTE researched the costs and structures of such a group and the National Chamber Choir produced a separate feasibility study.

The number of weeks of opera chorus work was calculated at 29, including the seasons of what was then Opera Northern Ireland, but not including Castleward Opera. The NCC study proposed a full-time core of 17 singers, with a further 15 singers engaged on 7-month contracts to provide the necessary strength for the choir's opera chorus work during the year (giving a total of 32 singers). Costings included the salaries of singers, a répétiteur, chorus master, administrator, rehearsal pianist, choral director, and related administrative costs, and amounted to just under €888,800 per year. This was roughly €222,200 per year more than the combined costs relating to opera chorus work of all the interested parties at the time, but the proposal was put forward as a means of increasing the numbers of professional singers available to the companies, of raising standards, and of offering meaningful employment opportunities to Irish singers. Two alternatives were suggested: a) to engage only a full time chamber choir, with additional singers recruited on a freelance basis; b) to establish a full time chamber choir *and* a separate, part time dedicated opera chorus (the most expensive but most flexible option).

These discussions were ultimately inconclusive. However, a year later there were separate negotiations between RTE and the NCC that resulted in new contract between the two organisations. The contract offered index-linked funding to the NCC and enabled it to offer work to its singers all year round on a 17 hour-per-week schedule, as well as a salary for its administrator. The Arts Council began funding the NCC on a project grant basis, eventually offering the Choir a multi-annual funding agreement.

The RTE relationship has a bearing on the NCC's 10 weeks of chorus work with Opera Ireland. The financial contract for this work is directly between NCC and OI (who pay a fee to the Choir), but RTE is entitled to recording rights covering the Choir's chorus work. The NCC's role with regard to OI is effectively the same as the chamber choir option of the NCC's 1995 opera chorus proposal, except that the service is only provided to Opera Ireland. On one occasion the Choir has performed with Opera Theatre Company (the Rake's Progress, with the RTECO), but this was a separate, one-off negotiation.

A new proposal for an 'Island of Ireland Opera Chorus' (IOIOC) was put forward in 1998 by Ciaran Nagle. This had many of the same objectives as the earlier proposal, but with an independent management structure and an integral training element comprising education workshops for its singers in areas of repertoire, stagecraft, movement, dance, language and other skills. It was intended that the Chorus would be able to provide 'covers' for the companies for certain roles. One significant difference from the earlier proposal was that the IOIOC was intended to perform opera work only: no concert work was included in the annual schedule. Two models were suggested, one focussing exclusively on opera work in Ireland, the other including work for opera companies in Europe. Both models envisaged some 30 weeks' contracted work per year to the companies. Total annual costs were estimated at roughly €1,485,600. This proposal also came to nothing.

Why was neither of these proposals successful? The most likely reason is that the costs involved were deemed prohibitive by some or all of the parties, whose priorities for additional funding may have been in other areas at the time.

In addition, both proposals were predicated on the fact that all opera companies in Ireland would engage the Chorus every year. Even the 'European' model of the IOIOC only substituted 4 weeks' work in Europe for 4 of the weeks in Ireland. The realities have proved different, however. Wexford Festival Opera did not commit itself to the idea of engaging a dedicated Irish opera chorus at the time of the first proposal, and might not have been a regular employer of it at all. Opera Northern Ireland and Opera South have since ceased to exist.

None of the existing companies appears to think there would be enough work generated by their combined output to sustain a full-time professional chorus at the present time. The situation is similar to that for orchestral provision, though there is even less opera work for chorus at present than for orchestral musicians. If we use the hypothetical model of growth in opera from the earlier discussion on orchestral provision, and apply it to the possible future need for chorus provision, there might still only be:

- 12-15 weeks across 3 seasons with Opera Ireland
- 2 weeks with Anna Livia (that might or might not clash with OI)
- 6 weeks with Wexford Festival

This would give a maximum total of 23 weeks' work, even assuming that OI and Anna Livia did not clash in the summer, that both companies were prepared to use the same chorus, and that Wexford decided to use the chorus at all. The larger orchestral tour that OTC aspires to do annually might or might not involve chorus. Castleward Opera, which was factored into the IOIOC proposal, and Opera Cork, a new company that has taken the place of Opera South, are excluded for the sake of this argument because both companies engage local singers for their choruses and arguably fulfil important and distinctive roles in doing so. It is unlikely that other touring opera from outside Ireland would need the services of a local professional chorus, so even the developments envisaged for the new Wexford/OTC complex might not add much work to this hypothetical work schedule.

In the event of this model of extra chorus work, or any one part of it, being realised in the future, it is hard to imagine that the National Chamber Choir would want to take it on. The Choir produced a three-year plan in 1998, which set out its aspiration to focus exclusively on chamber choir repertoire and to cease opera work entirely. The recent appointment of a new Artistic Director may prompt a revision of the three-year plan, but this general

aspiration may not change. The 1998 plan assumed the future existence of a separate dedicated opera chorus in Ireland. The main premise for the Choir's position was that chamber choir repertoire and opera repertoire make different demands on voices and the two types of work are essentially incompatible. Not all share this view, but the NCC obviously does not see itself as the permanent solution to the problem of professional opera chorus provision in Ireland.

The RTE's own choral groups, the Philharmonic Choir and the RTE Chorus, do not currently perform opera work, so the possibility might be explored of involving one or other of them in any additional mainscale work in future, with or without additional freelance professionals. This and other areas of potential partnership with RTE are discussed further in the Public Funding section.

Performing for the opera companies was not the only aspect of either of the original proposals. Both of them included time in the annual schedule for professional training for the singers. Some saw this aspect of the first proposal to contain the seeds of a future Opera Studio, distinct from but linked to the professional companies. The IOIOC saw itself as the future permanent chorus for a National Opera Company, when the time came for one to be established, where ongoing professional training would be a regular feature of work at the Company. The IOIOC's detailed proposal showed some 15 weeks of the year devoted to workshops, cover preparation, vocal coaching and rehearsals, outside the rehearsal and performance periods with the companies.

Singers and singing teachers in Ireland have identified the lack of professional training opportunities to be a serious obstacle in the career development of young opera artists. The main gap appears to be at the stage where singers have completed formal studies at undergraduate and postgraduate level but have little working experience within companies. If the full-time chorus/training model is impractical in the present circumstances there may be other ways of supporting the training aspect on its own, through the work of the companies rather than through a separate organisation. Teachers have expressed general support for some kind of Young Artist Programme at any or all of the Irish companies that would fill this gap and allow singers the chance to improve their professional skills 'at home' before attempting to launch their careers elsewhere. The companies' own plans for developing training activities are discussed earlier in this report.

3.4 NEW WORK

The recommendations of the Opera Development Group in 1996 included the following:

“That a new opera commission scheme be initiated, to encourage the generation of the artform....It was agreed that the scheme will include a requirement for a production plan, and that the opera be seen in three venues in the country.”

There have been only a handful of new opera commissions since the review, despite the creation by the Arts Council of a dedicated commissioning fund in response to this recommendation. Given the seasonal nature of Opera Ireland's work, its relatively high dependence on box office income, the financial risk involved in presenting contemporary work, and given the particular artistic profile of Wexford Festival Opera, this is less surprising than it might be, though disappointing.

Opera Theatre Company was singled out by contributors to the 1996 review for its efforts in this area. Quite apart from the artistic profile of the company, its scale has made it arguably the most appropriate vehicle for developing and presenting new work by Irish composers. The company has continued its work by commissioning two new operas in the last five years (from Kevin O'Connell and Raymond Deane), as well as a children's opera (by Stephen Deazley) for performance in Northern Ireland. It has not repeated its projects of the early '90s, where short, one-act operas were commissioned and new opera workshops were presented, but the company's aspirations for the future include more regular and strategic presentation of new work and the possible creation of some kind of composer-in-residence scheme.

The National Chamber Choir has commissioned children's operas from its conductor and Artistic Director, Colin Mawby, as an integral component of an ongoing education programme that is separate from its involvement with Opera Ireland. New opera/music theatre works have been produced occasionally by The Machine and by The Ark. Only four other operas have been composed in the same period by Irish or Irish-based composers (Deirdre Gribbin, Marian Ingoldsby (student work), James Wilson and John Gibson). Only two of these had performances in Ireland. One has never been performed at all.

One point made during the 1996 review, and repeated in the consultation for the present report, was that funding is needed for the cost of presenting new work as well as for commissioning it. This has not yet been factored in to the Arts Council's commissioning schemes. The latest scheme, introduced in 2001, is still intended primarily to help pay for artists' fees and allows for up to 75% of the fee to be considered. There is an expectation implicit in the scheme, however, that the applicant body will find other funds for presenting the commissioned work. The conditions state that

'the commission will normally lead to at least one performance/production....or in some cases the work being created/brought to the stage where production/dissemination can be envisaged',

and only add as a final point that:

'in exceptional circumstances, the Arts Council may consider supplementary project applications for production/performance costs'.

The scheme covers all art forms, and has yet to be tested with regard to opera. In March 2002 there were two applications for opera commissions with the Arts Council in what is

planned to be the only round of applications for the year. The scheme does not appear to offer much hope on its own for the possibility of increasing the amount of new Irish opera written or performed.

RTE has commissioned work from Irish composers for its performing groups, but has not done so in the field of opera despite its involvement in the art form through the orchestras and the National Chamber Choir. Informal discussions about the possibility of providing funds jointly with the Arts Council have so far come to nothing.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Lottery New Work scheme differs from the Arts Council's scheme in a number of respects, not least the fact that it can pay for a proportion of research and production costs as well as a proportion of an artist's commission fee. In the case of an opera this could, in theory, be used to support the sourcing of a text and the creation of a libretto, the writing of the music, as well as pre-production and final production costs (though with a standard limit of Stg£50,000 on any one commission this would only go part of the way towards the cost of a full-scale opera commission). Opera Theatre Company's commission of *Alexandra's House* by Stephen Deazley was an example of a successful application in 2000. The work was conceived for a Northern Irish tour, but is planned for revival in the South in the near future.

The concept of new work in opera is not limited to new music, of course, though arguably it is music that gives the most immediate and distinctive stamp to opera from any country. There have been few attempts so far to create new work with Irish writers, dancers or visual artists, though Irish designers and lighting designers have featured more often with the companies than other creative artists, and some Irish visual artists have received design commissions from foreign opera companies (for example Lorraine Shanahan's commission for Jaz Coleman's work for the Flora Room at Covent Garden). Such collaborative commissions are not precluded from the Arts Council's commission scheme (nor from ACNI's New Work scheme), and should be encouraged in tandem with commissions of new Irish music.

If special funding is required towards the production costs of new commissions, it can be argued that it is also required for the production costs of existing contemporary work. The likelihood of a new commission receiving more than one or two performances in Ireland is extremely remote, unless it is a work for a particular type of audience or project (such as the Deazley work mentioned above). If a new work were to be deemed successful it would be highly desirable for the work to be shown abroad, and/or to be showcased in Ireland in the context of international contemporary work, for example in a Festival. Furthermore, Irish companies should not be expected only to perform Irish contemporary work. If funding bodies are serious about creating a contemporary culture for opera in general, and creating an Irish repertoire in particular, then a more strategic approach is needed to create the necessary financial support. Partnerships between the relevant bodies would seem to be an obvious way forward.

3.5 TRAINING

There is no dedicated pre-professional opera training available in Ireland at present, either through an institution or through a company.

Ireland has had some success in producing high quality singers who have gone on to have national or international careers in opera. Two institutions in Dublin have played important roles in this area, the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM) and the Dublin Institute of Technology Conservatory of Music (DIT). The School of Music at Cork Institute of Technology has also been significant.

The RIAM offers a 4-year BA, a 1-year diploma (in teaching and performance) and a part-time Foundation course. It also offers a 2-year masters degree. As of January 2002 it has added specific opera classes that are optional extras on the full-time courses as well as being available to paying students as a separate module. For entry to the BA course students are required to have a level of music theory knowledge; this requirement is understood to be an obstacle in the case of some young singers - for example, those who do not have instrumental backgrounds – and the possibility has been expressed of creating a separate degree path to cater for such students at some point in the future.

DIT's undergraduate degree is the 4-year BMus (Perf). DIT also offers a 1-year Foundation course and a part-time programme that caters for younger singers (typically 15/16 year-olds) as well as older students. Entry to the BMus course entails passing an audition and written entry test. Like the RIAM, DIT is aware of the difficulties encountered by some singing students with relatively little music theory knowledge, and has recently introduced a new entry stream to the degree course for those whose theoretical knowledge may be limited relative to their vocal skills. These students have, in effect, extra time in which to complete the theoretical aspects of the degree.

DIT does not yet offer any postgraduate training for singers. There are aspirations to develop an Opera Studio that would offer a taught Masters course and would cater for student conductors and student répétiteurs as well as singers. These aspirations are currently being formalised, and are subject to internal discussion and dependent on allocation of additional funding. The RIAM appears to have abandoned the possibility of establishing its own Opera Studio for the time being. Vocal tutors at both institutions have informal links with their counterparts in conservatoires in the UK and, in the absence of their own facilities, often send their students on to further study there.

Both institutions appear to be operating at full capacity with regard to their available teaching resources for student singers. For postgraduate students, the courses available in English and Scottish conservatoires are usually the only ones available to them unless they can raise the money to go to Europe or America. For undergraduates there may be a variety of reasons for going to the UK rather than studying in Ireland. Along with the limited number of places at RIAM and DIT, Irish singing tutors cite lists of compelling reasons including more flexible entrance requirements to degree courses, better physical facilities, the opportunity to learn in a broader environment that includes foreign students, and larger student bodies that permit the regular presentation of opera with full orchestral accompaniment.

Both the RIAM and DIT have informal, fledgling links with Irish opera companies, however. Opera Ireland's Artistic Director has recently taken production workshops with DIT students

which led to a piano-accompanied performance of *Così fan tutte* in the foyer of the Gaiety Theatre during OI's winter season 2001. Opera Theatre Company's Artistic Director has given workshops for RIAM students. Both activities are expected to continue. The Heads of both vocal faculties, when interviewed for this report, described the desirability of some kind of Young Artists' Programme being developed at one or more of the companies that would offer meaningful training in all aspects of opera work to Irish students who have completed undergraduate and postgraduate study.

While the tutors expressed reservations about the idea of exposing relatively inexperienced singers in public to the major roles of classic, popular operas, it was felt that understudy, coaching, chorus and minor role opportunities could be created this way that would enhance the future employability of young singers, particularly those who might not be able to attend one of the major opera studios elsewhere. The aspirations of the companies to develop this type of work are discussed elsewhere in this report.

Neither the RIAM nor DIT has the size, the funding or the facilities to support an opera studio on its own at present. The Government has been considering proposals to establish an Irish Academy of Performing Arts since 1997, but there appears to have been little real progress on this issue in the four years.

So far mention has only been made of the training needs of singers. A similar situation exists for the many other types of arts practitioner involved in opera. Directors tend to come to opera from theatre, where few have the opportunity either in their training or in professional careers to learn skills that would be useful in a musical context (such as score-reading). There are only a handful of professional pianists in Ireland working in opera contexts at all, and no opportunities for student pianists wishing to learn the skills of a répétiteur or coach. There are no conducting courses. Lighting designers, stage managers and technical personnel often come to opera from the theatre and/or musical theatre sector where there are more opportunities for assistant-ships, but even here there are acknowledged training deficits (identified in the Arts Council's strategy paper on Drama).

Composition courses are offered at various third level institutions in Ireland, but few include any focus on writing music for the stage. The Ennis/IMRO Composition Summer School offered a specialist component on opera in 2000 and 2001, but it is the only School of its kind in Ireland and its focus is likely to change in future years. The opera course itself included devising a libretto from a list of set texts as well as writing the music for short scenes, and involved tutorials with experienced professional staff comprising composers, a producer, singers and a répétiteur. In the two years that the course was on offer there were only 11 students, ranging from undergraduate to post-doctoral level.

There is very little in the way of youth training in opera. Unlike youth dance, youth drama and youth music, youth opera in Ireland is notable by its absence. This is not entirely surprising, given the complexities of mounting operatic work at all and the fact that the main companies do relatively little work in the education field generally (apart from OTC). There is some youth work in the amateur sector but this appears to be done largely in isolation and has no links with the work of the professional companies. The only youth opera work in Northern Ireland currently is the imported summer project offered by Welsh National Opera with the Grand Opera House in Belfast.

Informal discussions have taken place between Jeunesses Musicales Ireland and Dieter Kaegi (in his personal capacity, not in his role as Opera Ireland's Artistic Director) with a view to piloting a summer residential youth opera course in Ireland along the lines of JM

activities in other countries. The model involves intensive coaching for young singers, orchestral musicians and aspiring technicians, stage directors, designers etc (but probably not young composers) over a period of some two weeks, resulting in a full production of an operatic work. At present it is envisaged that a pilot project might be run in 2003 or 2004, funding permitting. If the present discussions become concrete plans, this could be a fruitful area of development for the Arts Council to support.

The idea is not unrelated to the 'DiscoverING' project being run in 2002 by the National Youth Orchestra of Ireland, also in association with Dieter Kaegi (the Chair of Jeunesses Musicales Ireland, Joanna Crooks is also the General Manager of the NYOI). This project will see concert performances of the entire Ring cycle, first in Limerick and then in Birmingham, with the NYOI and an international cast of young singers and chorus members. This project places the NYOI in a central role and not as a pit orchestra. It is an opportunity for young musicians to experience Wagner's orchestral writing, rather than a training exercise in the business of opera. The residential course idea, by contrast, is precisely about opera, and a project along these or similar lines could prove valuable both on its own terms and in nurturing the enthusiasm and talent of young artists at a crucial stage in their development.

The Arts Council's efforts to support training for opera have had mixed success. Awards and bursaries have been available for students wishing to undertake professional studies, but the take-up has been very small in comparison to awards in other disciplines. A dedicated Opera Training Award was established in response to the recommendations of the 1996 Opera Review but was eventually discontinued, apparently because of lack of interest, even though training had been highlighted as an issue during that Review by many of the individuals consulted. Most of the few opera-related applications came from singers and this trend looks set to continue: in the most recent round of applications for the Arts Council's Professional Development and Training Awards, there were no applications at all that were categorised as 'opera', and of the 42 music applications only 8 were from (student) singers. The Council has grant-aided the Ennis Summer School, but this is not a dedicated opera course and will probably concentrate on other areas in the forthcoming few years.

It would appear that the Council's Awards have been failing to reach aspiring opera practitioners. If this is the case, one must ask why. It may simply be that there has not been enough marketing of the Awards to target groups. On the other hand it may be that many artists who eventually work in opera do not associate their early professional training needs with operatic work *per se* and therefore do not seek out such opportunities from the Council. If so, more imaginative ways may need to be found to assist these artists to gain the training they need, at whatever stage of their careers they need it.

In the absence of an Irish Academy of Performing Arts, and given the restrictions under which the RIAM and DIT are operating, the Arts Council still has a role in supporting individuals who are pursuing professional studies or training. As opportunities for postgraduate study are rare in Ireland, and opera studios non-existent at present, it may be that the Council should prioritise awards for those students who are undertaking studies at this level overseas for the time being. The Council should also facilitate more established artists working in other disciplines to explore opportunities to develop work in the opera field, through assisted placements with companies or similar types of schemes. In the meantime, the Council should pursue its advocacy role with the Irish institutions with a view to establishing better training provision in Ireland in the long term.

3.6 PUBLIC FUNDING FOR OPERA

The Arts Council

The Arts Council carried out a detailed review of the opera sector in Ireland in 1996, through a dedicated committee, the Opera Development Group.

The review found, amongst other things, that there was little provision for opera training in Ireland, that demand for opera 'product' (particularly mainstream repertoire) in regional venues was not being met sufficiently or strategically, that there was relatively little investment in contemporary or innovative work, that there was a need for more education and outreach work in opera, and that serious development of the artform was compromised by the lack of both a dedicated venue and a full time National Company.

As a result of this review, the Council agreed to:

- initiate an opera commission scheme
- support a workshop/masterclass programme for composers and singers
- support a touring alliance between opera companies and venues
- support challenge grants to arts companies for innovation in opera
- support specific grant recommendations to the funded companies.
- (recorded in Minutes of Board meeting on 11 and 12 October 1996)

A 6th recommendation of the review concerned the drawing up of plans for a National Centre for Opera, Theatre and Dance. A short, internal feasibility study was subsequently conducted, which proposed the building of a new Centre on the north quays of Dublin with dedicated Millennium funding from the Government. The proposal was endorsed by the Council, but was ultimately unsuccessful.

After the 1996 review the Council gave responsibility for opera to one of its dedicated Officers: firstly to the (then) Drama Officer, and latterly to the Dance Officer. The opera brief had previously been carried out by the (then) Director.

In the second Arts Plan (1999-2001) the Arts Council proposed to continue providing awards and bursaries to opera artists, to continue funding new commissions and projects, and to continue funding production companies, including those touring overseas. It also proposed a number of new initiatives, including:

- encouraging production companies to share responsibility for the career development of Irish opera artists
- supporting education and outreach work by opera companies
- working jointly with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to develop a more integrated approach to the policy development needs of opera in Ireland.

Looking back over the five years since the Opera Development Group's work in 1996, it is possible to observe the following:

- Arts Council revenue funding to opera increased from €1,280,683 in 1996 to €2,495,500 in 2000, an increase of 95%. The proportion of Council spending on opera relative to other art forms did not change, however, and remained consistently low at roughly 5.6%.

- Between 1996 and 2000 the Council funded only four new opera commissions, one for Opera Theatre Company (Raymond Deane's *The Wall of Cloud*), one for the National Chamber Choir (Colin Mawby's children's opera *The Quest*) and two for *The Machine* (both by Michael Scott).
- OTC commissioned a children's opera (by Stephen Deazley) with funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and toured an opera by Kevin O'Connell (*My Love, My Umbrella*) that was funded and premiered in England. Four other operas and a children's opera were composed in that time by Irish-based composers (Deirdre Gribbin, Marian Ingoldsby (student work), James Wilson, John Gibson and Colin Mawby) without Arts Council subsidy. Only two of these had performances in Ireland. One has never been performed.
- Co-Opera was established in 1997 with Arts Council project funding. The company was absorbed into Opera Ireland, and continued to be funded by the Arts Council as part of the multi-annual funding agreement with Opera Ireland.
- New training opportunities, particularly for singers, have been initiated by the opera companies since 1996, but are at early stages of development. They comprise Opera Ireland's masterclasses at the University of Limerick and production workshops with DIT vocal students, Opera Theatre Company's Opera Studio in 2000, and internships at the Wexford Festival in 2000 and 2001. Arts Council funding has covered some, but not all of these activities.
- Arts Council funding for individuals has been through bursaries, awards, travel grants and Artflights to singers wishing to undertake further vocal study, often abroad. Applications from other artists wishing to develop their work in opera have been negligible: a dedicated Opera Training Award, established in response to the 1996 review, was terminated because of (apparent) lack of interest. Many artistic and technical personnel who eventually work in opera begin their training and professional lives in theatre, and application rates for Arts Council drama awards are high (though mostly from actors). It is likely that some orchestral musicians working in opera will have been supported at some stage in their development through Arts Council Music awards.
- The Council's joint work with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland has resulted, so far, in only one initiative – an Opera Summer School in 1999 and 2000. A proposed feasibility study into an all-Ireland opera company was eventually undertaken by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland alone (in 1999), and estimated the cost of running such a company to be over Stg£3M, of which at least half would be likely to be required in grant assistance.

An internal analysis of the impact of the Arts Council's second Arts Plan, found that

- there had been no significant improvements in support for training or career development for opera artists, either through the companies or through the Arts Council's own funding of individuals, other than through improved funding to the companies themselves;
- funding for the three main companies had increased substantially, resulting in improved company structures, more competitive short-term contracts and better conditions for the companies' artistic and management staff;

- there had been small steps forward in the companies' plans to implement education activities, but further developments were hindered by limitations of available expertise;
- Artflights for opera practitioners had increased from 15 in 1999 to 28 in 2000.

In summary, the Arts Council's funding of professional opera in Ireland since 1996 has had very little impact on the number of main productions of opera each year, the training and/or career development opportunities for opera practitioners, or the amount of education and/or outreach activity in opera. The number of commissions has been low, averaging two per year since a dedicated scheme was introduced in 1998. Audience figures have remained relatively consistent, at quite a high level, but have not shown much growth. The one notable area of change has been in touring opera, with the arrival of Co-Opera, the addition of two tours to the annual list, and the attraction of new audiences for these events.

Many of the problems identified by the 1996 review remain unsolved. The level of funding relative to other art form areas within the Arts Council's remit remains very small, despite significant uplifts in cash terms. The additional cash, itself, has supported a new touring company, but kept two of the existing companies only at a consistent level of output and did not prevent a serious financial problem developing at the third (Opera Ireland). Joint activity with Northern Ireland is minimal, although one company is now funded by both Councils. There is still no dedicated venue for opera in Dublin. It appears that Arts Council funding may have to be deployed in new ways for any significant development in the sector to take place in the future.

RTE

RTE is a key player in the provision of opera in Ireland. Its direct funding of the RTE Concert Orchestra and the National Symphony Orchestra, and its partnership with the National Chamber Choir, have for many years made a significant contribution to live opera provision, quite apart from RTE's broadcasting role. The National Symphony Orchestra accompanied operas at the Wexford Festival almost throughout the Festival's existence until 2001. The RTE Concert Orchestra has provided orchestral accompaniment and, more recently, the National Chamber Choir has formed the core of the professional chorus for all Opera Ireland's main seasons.

Important changes took place last year in RTE's relationships with Opera Ireland and Wexford Festival Opera. These flowed directly from changes in policy for the deployment of musical groups within RTE generally, and reflected a trend whereby the costs to the companies were increasingly being computed on a competitive basis, relative to other priorities within RTE. Negotiations between RTE and Opera Ireland resulted in a new three-year contract involving the continued use of the RTECO until 2003. Negotiations between RTE and Wexford were not resolved in 2001, and the Festival engaged the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Belarus for the 2001 Festival. The National Symphony Orchestra will not play at the 2002 Festival.

Until recently, RTE considered its subsidy of opera in terms of the provision of the basic orchestral salaries and expenses for the duration of each opera period. The opera companies' only payment to RTE was to cover, in full, the costs of additional players (that might be required for a particular opera beyond the normal playing strength of the

orchestra in question) and additional expenses due to the players over and above their basic salaries.

RTE's revised position, in general terms, requires the opera companies to pay a fee towards the provision of the basic orchestral service, *as well as* a fee to cover the additional players that might be required. In the case of Opera Ireland, the financial relationship would be broadly as follows. The RTECO, management and players, costs in the region of €10,860 per working day to RTE. The orchestra is made available for rehearsals and performances for 19 days over three weeks in each Opera Ireland season, or 38 days/six weeks for the whole year, giving a total cost for the year of approximately €412,665. RTE also provides marketing and publicity opportunities to OI in kind, which are estimated to be worth some €63,500. Opera Ireland's contribution to the basic orchestral cost is roughly €114,275, before paying, in full, any additional costs. RTE requires 'sponsor benefits' in addition to this fee, including free tickets and a degree of acknowledgement and advertising from Opera Ireland, all of which OI calculates to be worth in the region of €8,888-12,700 per year. (RTE also requires EBU rights, which may have implications for Opera Ireland in future in terms of increased fees to artists.)

In 2001 Opera Ireland 'bought' 38 days of RTECO orchestral services at a cost of approximately €141,575. Adding €12,700 of sponsor benefits and subtracting €63,500 worth of marketing in kind would, theoretically, give a net cost to Opera Ireland of €90,775. 38 days' provision to Opera Ireland of the RTECO, plus related marketing in kind cost RTE approximately €476,150. Recouping roughly €141,575+12,700 of this from OI would, theoretically, give a net cost to RTE of €321,875.

It could be argued that RTE would be paying the cost of running the Concert Orchestra regardless of whether or not it performed for Opera Ireland. If this were the case, the RTECO would seek fees from other sources such as regional promoters or commercial hirers towards this cost, and might or might not be able to generate more income as a result.

Other orchestras might, in theory, be available to Opera Ireland as an alternative to the RTECO, but it is doubtful that they would cost less. The (state-subsidised) Ulster Orchestra, for example, has a larger basic complement than the RTECO and its daily working rate would be in the region of Stg£10,000 before augmentation. A freelance Irish orchestra might cost in the region of €190,460 in fees alone for the same period of 38 days' rehearsals and performances, before adding subsistence, travel, or any management/fixing fee (assuming the same playing strength as the RTECO of 46 musicians, and a 'going rate' of about €165 per day).

These calculations do not take into account any negotiations that might take place between the company and an orchestra to reduce the basic orchestral fees in such scenarios, but it is clear that Opera Ireland would be unable to consider an alternative orchestral resource to the RTECO without some kind of additional subsidy.

Despite the increased fee it pays to RTE under the new contract, Opera Ireland would still appear to be engaging an orchestra at a reasonably competitive rate – within Ireland and the UK, that is. Wexford's solution to the problem of an increased fee to RTE was to look abroad, to Eastern Europe in 2001, for an orchestra that would cost considerably less. Whether this will continue to be a viable solution for Wexford in the future, and whether the Eastern European orchestras' fees will gradually approach local rates is open to question. In the meantime, however, some doubt must be expressed about the likelihood

of the relationship between RTE and Wexford being re-established in the foreseeable future.

Apart from the developments described above, the amount of opera accompaniment provided by RTE has remained static since the last Arts Council review of opera in 1996 (not including the recent change at Wexford). Opera Ireland continues to provide two seasons a year of four productions in total with the RTECO, the number of performances being limited to 18 each year by the terms of the current RTE contract. Any increase in the length of the current seasons would have to be negotiated outside the current contract, or postponed until the contract is due for renewal in 2003. Depending on the terms of the RTE's contract with its players, the cost and practical implications of additional performances might be prohibitive if the schedule for additional performances demanded extra payments and/or different working conditions for the orchestra.

Any increase in terms of an additional, third season, would appear to be beyond the capacity of the RTECO to provide at present. While there is an agreement in principle that would allow the orchestra to play for up to six opera productions a year, the orchestra's management might have concerns about the total amount of opera work relative to other types of work that the orchestra might undertake in any year.

The Wexford Festival continues to provide three main stage productions a year, also amounting to 18 performances. Within the context of the Festival's overall programme it is unlikely that this total will increase, whatever orchestra is engaged. RTE has provided orchestral accompaniment on only one occasion for Opera Theatre Company (tour of *The Rake's Progress*); as things stand, future partnerships would probably be negotiated on a one-off basis.

RTE's contribution in terms of broadcasting is harder to quantify. Lyric FM broadcasts 180 hours per year of dedicated opera programming, including full opera performances, as well as a proportion of regular programming and features covering operatic arias, overtures and choruses, profiles of opera singers etc. Some 50 operas are broadcast each year, including around 20 from the Metropolitan Opera, New York. Irish companies are well represented: currently all Opera Ireland's and Wexford's main productions, and many of Opera Theatre Company's (including new commissions) are given live or deferred broadcast. Anna Livia has also been supported with broadcasts in its start-up years.

RTE has stated that it 'will make an explicit statement on Opera policy in its forthcoming policy and strategy Document. This document will also commit to a strategic partnership with the Arts Council in the development of music and opera in Ireland, and as such RTE Music would wish to operate 'in concert with the Council and its own opera partners in mapping a shared way forward for orchestral provision for Irish Opera.'

While RTE's policy and strategy document is in preparation it may be worth speculating on possible areas of future growth.

RTE is currently exploring ways of making its Performing Groups more accessible to regional audiences in live performance. If circumstances permitted Opera Ireland to tour its main stage productions to regional centres with appropriate venues, such as Cork, it would seem desirable from RTE's perspective for the RTECO to tour with them. The same theory might apply in the event of an Irish opera company touring internationally.

RTE's own choral groups do not currently perform in opera productions. If the amount of mainscale opera production were to increase, and if the NCC were not in a position to offer

more time for opera work, it might be possible to involve either the Philharmonic Choir or the RTE Chorus for the first time.

RTE is also exploring ways of using its resources, including the Performing Groups, to support the development of a broad national music education programme. It is possible that resources could be identified within RTE to support particular education activities by opera companies as they might develop them. Such resources might include, for example, use of orchestral personnel for projects, publication of resource packs for schools, or specific broadcasting initiatives.

RTE regards itself as having a particular responsibility with regard to Irish musical inheritance, including contemporary Irish composition. Outside its current structures of support for opera, it might be possible to devise opportunities to create and present new Irish operatic work in partnership with other bodies. Examples might include any or all of: joint funding with the Arts Council of new commissions for opera companies; use of RTE Performing Groups to workshop and/or perform new Irish works or works-in-progress; and establishment of residencies within RTE for Irish composers, with access to the Performing Groups, perhaps but not necessarily in partnership with opera companies.

RTE already has relationships with commercial record labels. It is not out of the question that it could develop its own in-house label, particularly for recording of repertoire that would not attract a commercial partner. It might then be possible occasionally to record distinctive Irish productions of existing operatic repertoire, or new Irish operatic works in partnership, say, with the Contemporary Music Centre.

In the event of a partnership being developed between Wexford Opera Festival and Opera Theatre Company in a new venue in Wexford, it is possible that a new relationship could develop with RTE involving both opera companies.

If the old relationship between Wexford and the RTE/National Symphony Orchestra is not re-established, the NSO might be available for other opera work in future such as a third Opera Ireland season in Dublin.

It is highly likely that RTE's policy and strategy document will include plans to expand its own output of live orchestral, chamber and choral work as well as other developmental initiatives. It would be impossible for RTE to provide for, or sustain growth in its orchestral provision for opera alongside expansion in its other work within finite orchestral resources. Much of the speculation above does not involve a net increase in the orchestras' joint opera schedules over the current commitment, however, and it might be hoped that some new initiatives like these would coincide with RTE's own plans.

Local Government

Direct funding of opera by local district councils appears to be at a very low level. Opera Theatre Company and Co-Opera are not funded directly by any local council, despite their obvious regional remit. Wexford Opera Festival's grant from the local council typically amounts to less than 1% of its total income. Opera Ireland's grant from Dublin City Council typically amounts to less than 0.5% of its total income.

Local government funding to opera, where there is any, might be said to fall within its funding of regional venues, its budgets for local arts officers, or, exceptionally, its support

of local performing groups. Opera Cork, for example, was supported to the tune of €6,350 by its local council in 2000.

Few of the venues are supported by their councils in terms of programming budgets in addition to their running costs, however. For those that receive Arts Council funding, this is usually the only source of programming money outside box office and other earned incomes. Where venues and/or arts officers are in a position to offer a fee for touring opera, the fee itself usually goes towards marginal costs of the touring production, with no financial return to the company itself.

There appears to be no sense in which local authorities feel a responsibility towards Irish arts organisations that are not based within their own boundaries, even when those organisations bring their product to the local area itself.

Central Government

So far, the Irish Government has resisted pressure to provide funding for a dedicated opera venue in Dublin. Opportunities have come and gone: Government Millennium funding for a proposed venue on the north quays was not granted; the Government chose not to purchase the Gaiety Theatre in recent years when the opportunity arose; and the Department of Arts has recently also turned down an application for badly-needed refurbishment plans at the Gaiety, rendering its future as a venue for professional opera uncertain.

If the Government decision on Wexford Opera Festival's capital application is favourable, there could be many benefits for opera provision in Ireland and for Irish opera (discussed elsewhere in this report), but there would be no impact at all on the provision of mainscale grand opera in the capital city.

In the meantime, however, the Department of Education & Science has begun to provide funding directly to a new opera organisation in Dublin, the Anna Livia International Opera Festival. Anna Livia's grant from the Department in 2001 amounted to £500,000.

While some have welcomed the addition to the overall 'pot' of state funding for opera that the Anna Livia grant represents, others have questioned the rationale behind this exceptional funding.

The Anna Livia Festival justifies its claim on the Department on the basis that it has an educational mission, in that it provides training and performance opportunities for Irish artists alongside their international counterparts. It could be argued, however, that its work in this regard is not different in emphasis from that of Opera Ireland, Opera Theatre Company or Co-Opera, since all companies give Irish artists a degree of 'on the job' training during productions, and Opera Theatre Company in particular has piloted a specific training programme through its Opera Studio.

While this funding has evidently increased the amount of live opera available to audiences in Dublin, at a traditionally 'dead' time of year, has offered work to Irish artists, and proven that a market exists for opera beyond what Opera Ireland can provide at present, there remains a question over whether the sum of money involved could not be deployed more strategically for the development of Irish opera in other ways.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland

ACNI has provided revenue funding for Opera Theatre Company since 1999. Its other opera commitments comprise annual funding of Castleward Opera, project grants to Welsh National Opera through the Grand Opera House, Belfast, and project funding for educational initiatives that have included an Opera Summer School (1999 and 2000) and, more recently, youth opera schemes run by WNO. Its total revenue provision for opera in 2001/02 was Stg£410,000.

In addition to its revenue stream, ACNI has also provided funding for opera from its various Lottery schemes. For example, OTC's commission of a children's opera by Stephen Deazley in 2000 was funded by the New Work scheme; OTC also received an additional three-year package (2001-2003) for touring and education work from the Audience Development scheme. Castleward Opera has been supported by the Advancement scheme.

ACNI's funding of OTC and its initiation of the Opera Summer School are two significant developments that signal the potential for increased collaboration between the two Arts Councils on specific opera projects. While it is unlikely that ACNI would consider providing core funding to any other Irish company in the foreseeable future, discussion is already ongoing between the Councils' relevant officers on other issues that could have a material impact on aspects of opera development in the island of Ireland. They include the opportunity to review the project funding of Welsh National Opera's annual tour to Northern Ireland when the current contract terminates in 2003, and the potential use of Lottery New Work funding jointly with Arts Council of Ireland commission funds to support the creation of new Irish operatic work that would be performed both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic.

Assuming that a level of financial stability could be achieved by Opera Ireland, and that its current artistic standards could be maintained, it is possible that ACNI's current WNO subsidy could be offered to Opera Ireland to permit at least one of its seasons to tour to Belfast each year. The sum dedicated to the WNO season is currently Stg£185,000 (not including a separate sum for its youth opera project).

ACNI's Lottery New Work scheme includes provision for performing costs as well as for the commission fees to artists for the creation of new work. It is possible that this scheme could be used to offset the costs, and therefore part of the risk, involved in bringing new operatic works to public performance (assuming eligibility criteria, such as the requirement to perform new works in Northern Ireland, were met – discussed earlier in the New Work section).

The potential availability of the Ulster Orchestra has been discussed earlier. Prior to 1999 the Orchestra accompanied two seasons of opera per year for Opera Northern Ireland, on a similar basis to that operated in the past by the RTECO and Opera Ireland. In recent years, the UO has provided orchestral accompaniment on the same basis for Castleward Opera's transfer of its summer productions to the Grand Opera House in Belfast. This latter arrangement ceased in 2002, and the Orchestra currently does no opera work. It should not be assumed that ACNI's subsidy of the Orchestra would cover any opera accompaniment that the Orchestra might perform in the South; nevertheless, the Orchestra's existence as one of a number of orchestral resources on the island should not be overlooked.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS: STRATEGIC OPTIONS AND SCENARIOS

The previous sections have attempted to describe and analyse the context in which professional opera is provided in Ireland, the perceived demand articulated by production companies, venues and training institutions, and the opportunities for growth and development within the framework of public funding.

From all of this, we can observe the following:

- **There has been little expansion in the professional opera sector in the last ten years.** Although artistic standards are generally high, the production base remains low, which restricts the level of access for audiences and the level of employment for artists. Two new companies have been established relatively recently. Their output has attracted a new market and demonstrated the potential for audience growth but their contribution to the sector has not been managed strategically.
- **There is a poor infrastructure regarding rehearsal, performance and storage facilities** for companies. With the exception of Wexford, none of the companies has a 'home'.
- **Public funding for opera remains at a very low level in real terms,** despite increases in cash spending. Partnerships between relevant bodies (eg. the Arts Council, RTE, local government, central government, ACNI) should be explored further. A positive government statement on the capital development proposals at Wexford looks possible, however.
- **Touring opera is not provided strategically.** There may be enough demand to support two additional small-mid-scale tours per year, as well as the introduction of limited mainscale touring. A touring circuit system should be developed.
- **There is little market research on audience trends.** This is a broad issue that has relevance for other art forms as well as for opera.
- **There are few examples of sophisticated audience development work** among companies and venues. Touring companies and regional venues in particular should work together to nurture these, particularly through the regular partnerships on a touring circuit.
- **Orchestral resources are sufficient only for current production levels.** Possible expansion in RTE orchestral concert-giving may put the present state of equilibrium under strain. A wide debate is needed on the perceived need for orchestral services over and above (but including) the needs of opera alone.
- **Professional chorus provision is in a similar state of equilibrium.** Future possibilities for growth may rest in a new partnership between RTE and the Arts Council.
- **The indigenous opera repertoire is small** and there are still very few opportunities to develop and present contemporary work. Realistic funding structures and partnerships are needed to create appropriate conditions for, and

alleviate the risk associated with creating and performing new work both at home and abroad.

- **Professional training opportunities are increasing**, but from a low base. More work needs to be done to strengthen links between training institutions and production companies, and to enable production companies to play a meaningful part in the career development of Irish opera artists. There is an almost complete absence of youth opera work.
- **The Arts Council's policies for opera development over the last five years have made only a small impact on the sector.** A new approach is needed.
- **The question of a dedicated venue in Dublin has not been resolved.** This is beyond the Arts Council's sole control. Without a persuasive proposal to central government from any organisation it is unlikely that a venue will be built. If the Gaiety Theatre deteriorates further, this may have implications in the medium-long term on the availability of any regular mainscale opera production in the capital city. The possibility of locating a professional mainscale company in Cork (or Belfast) has not been fully explored.

After several years of substantial growth in Government funding for the arts, the Arts Council found itself at the beginning of 2002 with a modest increase in Government grant-in-aid that represented virtually standstill funding (or less in real terms). While negotiations are ongoing with regard to the remainder of Opera Ireland's funding agreement, and the outcome of Wexford's capital bid is still unknown, it is difficult to make firm recommendations about the way forward for opera.

The Arts Council needs to achieve the best combination of excellence and accessibility. Graham Devlin's report on touring opera for the Arts Council of England talks about 'excellence that is affordable'. But in the Irish context, what has been deemed 'affordable' up to now has been very little, judging by the Council's percentage spend on the art form and the unwillingness of other public bodies to invest in it.

Opera is hugely expensive – in whatever form it takes. Unless this is fully realised by those in a position to make it available, opera will never really flourish and the majority of people will be denied its rich experience.

The options open to the Council are therefore:

- to re-direct some of its available funds to increase the proportion to opera
- to generate increased Government funding through successful lobbying
- to maximise the possibilities available through improved partnerships with other funders
- to accept that provision will only be limited, and concentrate current levels of funding in specific areas only
- to cease funding opera altogether
- to accept the status quo

In deciding which option to pursue, it might be worth attempting to define what might be considered Irish opera, as opposed to opera in Ireland.

The term is not meant to imply a kind of opera that concerns itself, necessarily, with Irish subject matter, or that is restricted solely to Irish traditional musical expression. But Irish opera, ideally, should have a strong national identity. It should be distinct from opera production elsewhere. It should be international in outlook and feature international artists, but be rooted in the work of Irish creative and performing artists. It should be accessible (in every sense) to Irish audiences. It should offer an environment in which Irish artists can grow and flourish, and from which they themselves can contribute to the international opera scene.

Opera in Ireland today features traces of these features – but not many. As it considers the various options below, the Arts Council might ask itself if Irish opera is being served by the existing funded companies and, if not, what changes might realistically be made to improve the situation.

The Council has just articulated its vision for the next five years in the 3rd Arts Plan. Six over-arching objectives are expressed, which are:

1. Make an arts career a realistic ambition for excellent and innovative artists
2. Broaden and enrich participation in the arts
3. Raise standards in arts leadership and management
4. Broaden and enhance audiences for the arts
5. Extend the international impact and success of Irish arts and artists
6. Work with others to help bring the arts closer to local communities.

It would be hard to argue with any of these statements. Equally, it would be hard to see how a policy for each art form could address all six objectives over the space of three to five years. An art form policy, arguably, needs to be conceived over a much broader span of time than three years, with relevant and achievable long-term goals that can be reached through a series of steps. So the questions are: what definition of Irish opera does the Arts Council endorse (if any), and what steps can the Council take over the course of the next Arts Plan to make Irish opera more stable, productive, and accessible?

The following table presents a ‘shopping list’ that suggests itself in the light of the previous sections of this report, with associated benefits, problems, and funding considerations.

A series of options is then presented, with different combinations of items from the ‘shopping list’ and the pros and cons that they represent.

All options include the development of new repertoire, as it is deemed both highly desirable and relatively affordable in partnership with others.

The options are accompanied, finally, by suggested steps that might be taken over the course of the next Arts Plan towards the realisation of each option.

The steps include initiatives that the Arts Council could undertake independently of the companies, such as research projects, partnership initiatives, awareness campaigns, and development of training and support mechanisms, in the interests of the sector as a whole.

'Shopping List'	Benefits	Problems	Funding considerations
1. Additional annual season of mainscale opera in Dublin.	More choice for audiences in the capital. Opportunity for full-time operation of 'Opera Ireland' ¹ , with associated benefits of employment, training programmes, touring, and eventual development of outreach work. Company achieves stability and strength to become resident in a dedicated venue, should one ever be built.	Opera Ireland's management has struggled to maintain two seasons a year within current budgets. Its capability of expanding to three seasons is open to question under present structures. Possible practical difficulties of finding extra orchestral resources. Deteriorating venue in Dublin ²	Increased staffing levels Increased production budget Increased orchestral provision Possible addition of ACNI project funding towards future costs of touring to Belfast
2. Touring of mainscale opera outside Dublin	Improved access for regional audiences to mainscale opera production	Does not increase production base	Touring to Belfast might be covered by ACNI project funding Touring to Cork would need additional funds
3. Centre of excellence at Wexford ³	a) Possible home for OTC b) Annual opera programming c) Increased regional touring d) Training programme for Irish opera artists and managers e) Developmental work f) Audience development and education packages. g) Enhanced national/international profile h) Enhanced facilities for Festival audiences and artists i) Enhanced contribution to local economy, and local voluntary participation	Government outcome still unknown. Less than full endorsement by Government compromises whole proposal.	New funding required for annual programme, including touring, plus associated staffing costs Dedicated funding for opera training programme (should lever funds from other sources) Enhanced funding package for OTC, tied to specific outcomes (eg. new work, orchestral tour)
4. Increased small to mid-scale regional touring	Meets expressed demand from regional venues Creates more choice and better access for local audiences Can be delivered from a variety of sources ⁴	Possible saturation of market Need for effective co-ordination of dates and repertoire	Two additional tours per year:
5. Development of Irish repertoire	Significant in developing national identity for Irish opera Enhances opportunities for Irish composers (and other creative artists) Helps to create contemporary opera culture	High risk work, with low box office potential.	Ringfenced funding to production companies for development work (eg. series of small commissions or creation of composer residency/ies). Partnership funding with

			ACNI and/or RTE
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Notes

1 *It is assumed that extra mainscale production in Dublin would be provided either by Opera Ireland or by another company that might take its place. Alternatively, it might be possible to buy in an extra season from a touring company eg. from Britain. There would probably be difficulties in accommodating some touring productions in the Gaiety, and there would be no longer-term contribution to the Irish opera sector. It could present a useful short-term solution to the problem of year-round provision until such time as Opera Ireland (or its replacement) might be sufficiently stable to provide a third season itself.*

2. *No assumption is made about the administrative or production base of Opera Ireland (or its replacement). Depending on the outcome of its negotiations with DCU, the company could be encouraged to explore relocation to Cork or Belfast, and still provide three seasons of opera in Dublin per year.*

3. *Predicated on an appropriate capital funding package from Government. Individual benefits listed in this option might still be achievable separately, without the Wexford development.*

4. *Extra touring product need not necessarily be provided by one or both of the existing companies. It could be bought in annually by like-minded groups of regional venues (with dedicated project funding), or co-ordinated as part of the annual programme at Wexford.*

SCENARIO 1

'Shopping list' items 1, 3, 4 and 5 - the provision of an additional annual season of mainscale opera in Dublin, the creation of a centre of excellence at Wexford based on its own capital development plans and incorporating development plans of Opera Theatre Company, increased small to mid-scale regional touring, and development of Irish repertoire through strategic partnership funding.

This would be the most desirable scenario from the point of view of the production base and audience access, but by far the most costly one.

An alternative would be to invest in limited mainscale touring instead of an additional Dublin season.

With appropriate conditions on funding agreements, this option would bring Irish opera as close as possible to the goals of having a full-time National Company, extensive and varied regional provision, and a distinctive profile, all of high quality. It implies many changes in the way opera is currently provided, not least in terms of management and accountability.

It has the most potential to address all six of the Objectives of the 3rd Arts Plan, and presents a realistic vision of what Irish opera ought to include.

In the present circumstances it seems unlikely to be an affordable option unless either the Council decides to realign its current funding to devote significantly more to opera, or is successful in persuading Government to invest substantially more in the arts.

Funding implications

Additional funding required for third season + associated staffing

Additional funding required for OTC's development plans

Programming funds required for Co-Opera two tours per year

Project funds required for aspects of Wexford centre's annual programme, training programme, separate touring projects

Stable funding suggested for Wexford Festival

Plus costs for Arts Council internal initiatives.

SCENARIO 2

'Shopping list' items 3 and 5 - the creation of a centre of excellence at Wexford incorporating development plans of Opera Theatre Company, plus development of Irish repertoire as above.

This scenario concentrates resources on provision of regional product, training and new work initiatives, but possibly at the expense of mainscale provision in Dublin.

It could address parts of all 6 Arts Plan Objectives, and go some way towards the goal of creating distinctive Irish opera.

It implies that subsidised small-scale regional touring would be co-ordinated almost exclusively by the OTC/Wexford base, and would not include the additional product supplied by Co-Opera.

It would not address the production of mainscale opera in Dublin at all.

If additional Arts Council funding were not sourced from elsewhere, this option might have to be financed by a reduction in funding to Opera Ireland and/or removal of funding from Co-Opera.

Opera Ireland in particular might cease to exist as a result.

Funding implications

Additional funding required for OTC's development plans

Project funds required for aspects of annual programme, training programme, separate touring projects.

Stable funding suggested for Wexford Festival

Plus costs for Arts Council internal initiatives.

SCENARIO 3

'Shopping list' items 1 and 5 - the provision of an additional annual season of mainscale opera in Dublin and the development of Irish repertoire.

This scenario concentrates resources on the provision of mainscale opera only. It includes an increase in regional provision of mainscale opera, but only to a very small number of venues. It implies an investment in the long-term goal of establishing a full-time National Company, probably but not necessarily based in Dublin.

It assumes that the types of benefits currently associated with other companies, such as widespread regional touring, education and outreach work, professional training, and repertoire development, could all be delivered by a single, strengthened company in due course (many years down the line).

If this were the case, this option could address parts of all six Arts Plan Objectives. However, there is no guarantee that this would, in fact, be the case, and it would entail the undesirable re-focusing of all opera requirements on a single provider, and the reduction of almost all non-mainscale work in the short to medium term.

If additional Arts Council funding were not sourced from elsewhere, this option might have to be financed by a reduction in funding to either or both OTC and Wexford, as well as the complete removal of funding from Co-Opera.

The option does not assume the continued existence of Opera Ireland; indeed, an exclusive commitment to OI could be considered a particularly high-risk option given the fragile state of the company at the present time.

In considering this option, the Council would have to decide whether to throw its full support behind the company or to abandon it altogether and create a brand new opera company.

Funding implications

Additional funding required for third season + mainscale touring + associated staffing

Possible future requirements for development of outreach work, training etc
Plus costs for Arts Council internal initiatives.

SCENARIO 4

'Shopping list' items 2, 3 (c), 3(e), 3 (f), 4, 5 - the provision of mainscale opera outside Dublin, increased small to mid-scale regional touring, developmental work, audience development and education packages, and the development of Irish repertoire.

This scenario concentrates resources on regional provision and the creation of a contemporary opera culture, but is not predicated on a successful outcome to Wexford's capital development plan.

It chiefly addresses Arts Plan Objectives 1, 4 and 6 (with a nod in the direction of 5).

Relatively modest additional funding would be required to tour mainscale productions to Cork, if ACNI were willing to provide project funding to cover touring to Belfast.

One or two additional regional tours, and/or some expansion of the touring product itself (eg. OTC's larger orchestral tour) could be funded on a project basis at first. Repertoire development (which is common to all options) should be enhanced by strategic funding partnerships with ACNI and RTE.

This option does nothing to improve the production base of mainscale opera.

It implies standstill or even a reduction in funding to the Wexford Festival.

If Wexford's capital proposal were to go ahead, however, other benefits might accrue anyway – for example, the provision of a home for OTC (2a), development of a training programme initially through funding sourced from dedicated Trusts and Foundations (2d), and enhanced international profile from the centre itself and the activities within it (2g).

An alternative would be to leave out the mainscale touring from this option, and to concentrate solely on the small to mid-scale regional touring.

Funding implications

Funding required for touring to Cork (if Belfast covered by ACNI)

Funding required for part of OTC's development plans

Funding required for two Co-Opera tours

Project funding required for additional touring product

Plus costs for Arts Council internal initiatives.

Steps	Options
Thorough analysis of OI's management and financial status and capabilities, conducted by ACE opera officer, external advisor and OI Chief Executive.	All options. Arts Council needs to make a decision about OI whichever option is pursued.
Stringent conditions to be attached to negotiation of any new funding package for OI, including specific targets for audience figures, numbers of performances, and particularly financial performance. Conditions could include Arts Council's right to demand changes in management and/or governance if company fails to meet financial targets.	Options 1 and 3 Other options might entail a scaling-down of OI's current activity, in which case funding conditions would still be relevant.
Arts Council liaises with ACNI regarding possible new funding package for OI from ACNI for Belfast season(s)	Options 1, 3 and 4
Wexford remains on annual funding until outcome of Government decision is known. Consideration given to moving Wexford from opera budget to festivals budget.	All options
If positive Government decision on Wexford development plan, Arts Council requests detailed analysis of management/staffing needs and associated costs for new centre.	Options 1, 2 and 3
New funding package for Wexford, pegging or possibly reducing revenue funding to Festival over time but incorporating new funding for annual programme and training.	Options 1, 2 and 4
New funding package negotiated with OTC that moves towards additional funding for enhanced orchestral tour and strategic development of new work. Funding agreement to include conditions about mutual accommodation on forward planning with other touring companies. Staffing requirements to be reviewed in context of OTC's development plans and/or new arrangements at Wexford.	Options 1, 2 and 3
New funding package negotiated with Co-Opera to deliver two tours per year. To be negotiated with due regard to funding arrangements with Belltable. To include conditions about mutual accommodation	Options 1 and 4

on forward planning with OTC	
Arts Council facilitates discussion between venues and touring companies with a view to establishing a formal touring circuit scheme.	Options 1, 2 and 4
Audience monitoring strategy to be put in place alongside agreements with two touring companies and establishment of touring circuit scheme.	Options 1, 2 and 4
Arts Council initiates discussions with RTE, after production of RTE policy paper, regarding potential areas of partnership eg. establishment of composer residencies, joint commissioning, chorus development.	All options
Arts Council facilitates national debate on orchestral provision, in partnership with RTE.	All options
Arts Council commissions market research on audience trends for performing arts in Ireland, to include opera.	All options
Arts Council facilitates discussion between companies regarding potential common initiatives (eg. creation of central web-based resource for Irish opera).	All options
Arts Council initiates discussions with ACNI regarding potential areas of partnership eg. establishment of composer residencies, joint commissioning.	All options
Arts Council commissions research and disseminates information on professional development opportunities abroad for opera artists (in partnership with education institutions?) Awareness campaign implemented in the sector re Arts Council awards for artists.	All options
Arts Council investigates possibility of providing management training and support mechanisms for companies and local arts promoters (not just in opera), after detailed training needs analysis.	All options
Arts Council liaises with key partners such as CMC and RTE to devise support mechanisms to facilitate repeat performances of successful work by local composers, especially abroad.	All options, especially 2, 4 and 5

