



# Artistic Policy

## (2024-2028)



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# Introduction

Irish Chamber Orchestra (ICO) is Ireland's national professional chamber orchestra. We are celebrated for working with some of the finest artists in the world, for our exceptional performance standards, engaging personality, and outstanding programming, and for our transformative work in the community. Our reputation is well established from the iconic concert halls in the world's great cities to the many small townhalls and churches across Ireland, where we perform throughout the year.

Our Vision, to be one of the world's most inspiring and innovative chamber orchestras, performing to the highest artistic standards for the widest possible audience, underscores our approach to everything we do.

Collaboration is part of our DNA. Time and again, ICO demonstrates astute judgement in our choice of collaborators, and routinely presents work of great vision and artistry, accessing diverse audiences, while building capability amongst our own musicians, as well as across the broader arts sector.

We take a long-term view on our artistic sustainability and that of the sector, assuming a proactive responsibility in this area. Our musicians mentor and teach ICO's young musician development programmes, including ICO Educate, which focusses on younger talent. Our association with the MA in Classical String Performance programme at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, demonstrates our commitment to feed into a lifecycle of active engagement with classical music.

Our latest strategy, Beyond the Notes (2024-2028), redefines our artistic approach through the variety and diversity of our programming of existing chamber orchestra repertoire, our commissioning and performance of new works from contemporary Irish composers, while showcasing Irish arts and artists internationally through a regular touring and recording programme.

# Artistic Policy Objectives

Beyond the Notes outlines four core objectives for us to achieve our artistic goal.

1. Implement a strategic approach to programming which extends our repertoire, our support of Irish musicians and composers, driving innovation in presentation.
2. Maintain our exceptional performance standards and artistic excellence.
3. Cultivate existing partnerships, develop new relationships and collaborations to enhance artistic output, and build on our reputation as a leading cultural ambassador for Ireland.
4. Consolidate and develop our recording and broadcasting output.





# ICO's Programming Approach

ICO's core programming principles reflect the views and creative contributions of our musicians, with a focus on the artist, our audiences, strategic programming, and cross-art form collaborations, while seeking new means of presentation in innovative formats and alternative venues.

We maintain a consultative approach to programming, involving a core artistic team consisting of our artistic partner/s, ICO's Leader, musicians, CEO and Artistic Adviser, and supported by input and oversight from our Artistic Subcommittee, including expert Board Members.

We balance the needs and expectations of our audiences with developmental opportunities for our musicians. In our continued efforts to engage with diverse audiences and grow new audiences across the country, we employ various programming devices such as:

- Season themes with programming arcs that explore overarching themes and concepts, providing continuity and coherence across multiple performances
- Repertoire threads that run across each season and across multiple seasons
- Composer focuses in each season
- Strategic Associate Artists
- A balance of repertoire, embracing diverse styles, eras, composers and performers, including works from the Baroque era right through to contemporary music
- Commissioning and platforming contemporary Irish composers and performers to showcase national talent, as well as presenting compelling new music by Irish and other internationally renowned composers.



# In pursuit of Excellence

We are committed to the highest standards of performance and artistic excellence, and we appreciate the various factors that directly influence our success in this key area. ICO's players are to the fore when considering performance standards. An effective co-created strategic programming approach challenges the musicians to present compelling performances on an ongoing basis, elicits enthusiastic audience reaction and grows new audiences over time.



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Ensuring excellent working conditions and best practice recruitment processes are key to ensuring player retention and empowered musicians. We also provide ongoing training, workshops, and resources for our musicians to continually refine their skills and deepen their understanding of the music they perform.

Our Artistic Partner plays a critical role within ICO. Dynamic and excellent artistic partner/s lift performance standards and inspire players and audiences alike. With an international career as a leading professional soloist or conductor, they raise our profile, leverage their professional contacts to attract outstanding guest artists, facilitate international touring and recording opportunities, and build a relationship with our audiences countrywide. Directing up to four programmes each season, they are a key figure in the artistic leadership team.

Alongside the ICO Leader, CEO, Artistic Adviser and artistic board sub-committee, they have the greatest responsibility for our continued artistic development by honing performance standards and continuing to shape ICO's unique sound and musical personality.

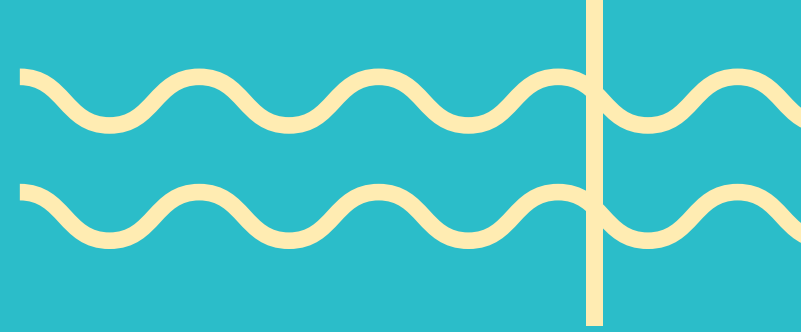


In preparing programmes that align with our programming policy, each artistic partner brings their insights and preferences to the programme, and consequently is given a degree of artistic license in its development.

In addition to the Artistic Partner, the quality of our guest artists is a further developmental experience for our musicians; an effective guest soloist, director or conductor can act as an inspiration to the orchestra, strongly influencing performance cohesion and audience engagement.



## Cultivating artistic relationships and building new partnerships



ICO has an extraordinary record of collaborating with exceptional creative partners and co-creating memorable and excellent concerts and events. We have initiated many successful partnerships, both with other classical music organisations, other music genres and cross art forms, as well as regularly working with other external organisations and individuals. We believe that every collaboration should create work that is excellent, that elevates our artistic practice and enhances audience development.

In recent seasons, at the time of writing, we can celebrate the success of performances, with aerial dancers Fidget Feet, DJ Kormac, West Wicklow Chamber Music Festival and an award-winning recording with sean-nós singer Muireann Nic Amhlaoibh, as well as our regular partnerships with organisations such as Kilkenny Arts Festival, Blackwater Valley Opera Festival, Clifden Arts Festival, Irish National Opera, and Chamber Choir Ireland, in addition to record labels such as Orfeo and Alpha / Outhere Music.

- In the coming years, we will seek out collaborations with artists from other disciplines, such as visual arts, dance, theatre, and technology, to create multidimensional and immersive experiences that push the boundaries of traditional concert formats.
- Leveraging our relationships with key venues, such as University Concert Hall, Limerick, Whyte Recital Hall, Royal Irish Academy of Music, Dublin, and with our rural venues across the country is an ongoing goal to develop and sustain a national audience base.
- We will also forge partnerships with local schools, community organisations, and cultural institutions to co-create programmes and initiatives that reflect the needs and interests of the communities we serve.
- With support from Culture Ireland, we will actively seek out opportunities for international collaborations and cultural exchange, fostering connections with musicians and organisations across the globe.

# Building Audiences

We have developed a comprehensive Audience Development Strategy in alignment with Beyond the Notes, and our audience experience is a central consideration for us in ICO. We issue surveys to our audiences to learn more about their needs and expectations and incorporate our learnings into what we do.

Feedback informs key decisions about concert venues, formats, appropriate programming, and concert timings. Inclusivity is one of our core values and we encourage inclusive practice in the way we work and across the design, development and delivery of our performances, programmes and collaborations.

- We commit to ensuring access to orchestral music performance and breaking down traditional barriers to concert-going by incorporating non-traditional concert formats, venues, ticketing options and informal presentation styles.
- We prioritise accessibility in our programming, and cross art form and music genre collaborations, to reach new audiences and engage with audiences of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. We view each collaboration as an opportunity to bring the joy and inspiration of orchestral performance to a new and diverse audience.
- We will develop community engagement initiatives, such as workshops, residencies, and other programmes that actively involve underserved and marginalised communities in the creation and enjoyment of music.
- We will continue to leverage digital technologies to enhance accessibility, offering live streams, virtual concerts, and interactive online content that reaches audiences beyond the confines of physical venues.





## Consolidating and developing ICO's recording and broadcasting output

With an existing catalogue of exceptional recordings of core repertoire and works by Irish composers, we have an established reputation in this area and are well positioned to consider future commercial recording opportunities with our artistic partner or preferred guest artists, in collaboration with key record labels.

In addition, we routinely record at least one performance from each project for broadcast on RTÉ lyric fm. This valuable partnership provides a strong backdrop for ICO's work helping reach a diverse audience and sharing our art as far as possible nationwide.



## Ensuring appropriate payment for artists and arts workers

While we recognise that the key factor contributing to artistic development and audience engagement is the quality of our artists, (both guests and our own musicians), we also want to create an environment where artists can make work of ambition and quality and be remunerated appropriately for it. Fair and equitable remuneration and contracting of our artists is integral to the way we operate.

When vacancies arise, performance fees and retainers are competitive to attract the finest players. Similarly, to secure the engagement of preferred guest artists and artistic partners, fees negotiated are based on sector norms and are sufficient and appropriate.



## Monitoring and Evaluation

Regular Reporting: Progress on our artistic programme will be reviewed quarterly by the ICO artistic sub-committee. This will be a living document, updated regularly to reflect new insights, challenges, and opportunities.

# Conclusion

In this Artistic Policy, we illustrate how we intend to realise our vision and mission, while promoting our core values, as set out in our strategy, Beyond the Notes, with a specific focus on the artistic pillar therein.

By adhering to our guiding principles, we strive to support a thriving and inclusive musical environment that enriches the cultural fabric of our community.





# Appendix 1

## IRISH MUSIC AND NEW MUSIC POLICY

In setting out ICO's commitment to developing and programming Irish music and composers, we recognise the leading role we play in supporting Irish arts and artists.

### Commissioning Irish Music

We are proud of our longstanding commitment, from our earliest days, to commissioning music by Irish composers. This has helped to raise the profile of Irish composers and has enriched the chamber orchestra canon, as well as enhancing our own programming each season.

When we engage in a cross-genre or cross artform collaboration, we prioritise working with Irish composers to create new works or to write orchestral arrangements. Apart from Irish-born composers, we extend opportunities to composers who have made Ireland their home.

### Key Actions

There will be at least one new major commissioned Irish work annually.

We will engage Irish composers to contribute to any cross-genre or cross artform collaboration where it is required.

While always adhering to the highest artistic standards, we will ensure a gender balance, with commissioned and programmed female composers equaling male composers, and non-binary composers being afforded every opportunity.

### Supporting Irish Composers

We understand the challenges that emerging and established Irish composers face in their work as creative artists. There are few opportunities for composers to practice writing for excellent ensembles or to receive expert feedback while they go through the process. There are also very few residency opportunities in Ireland for established composers, which are valuable for their profile and professional development.

By addressing these deficiencies, we have an opportunity to strengthen the future of new composition in Ireland and to enhance our own practice by the performance of excellent new works by Irish composers while supporting the creation of innovative and boundary-pushing music that reflects the spirit of our time.

- In 2025, we will commence two new composer development programmes, including the engagement of a Composer-in-Residence.
- Additionally, 2025 will see the introduction of a cycle of composition workshops for young composers to hone their practice and to develop new works in collaboration with ICO musicians.

## Methodology

- Open call to Irish and Ireland-based composers to write a score for string orchestra. All submitted ideas will be considered and 4 to 5 composers will be selected to expand their ideas by writing a work for ICO. This project will be in collaboration with the Contemporary Music Centre, with the associated costs being shared between the two organisations.
- The first call for submissions will be in 2024, and the first workshops will take place in 2025.
- The compositions will be workshopped at 2 points across a one-year period. At the end of this period, the works will be performed and recorded by ICO at our studio. The participants will work with a composer mentor as a key part of the process.
- We will carry out a capacity and financial feasibility study on engaging a Composer-in-Residence, a 2-year term, with responsibilities including composing a new work for ICO, creating arrangements for cross-art form activity, collaborating with our community engagement programmes and mentoring the young composers undertaking the composition workshops.

## Appendix 2

In our strategy, *Beyond the Notes*, we have stated a Climate Awareness goal which commits ICO to minimise our impact on the environment and work towards ensuring the sustainable use of our precious natural resources. The artistic planning process can have a direct and positive impact on ICO's carbon footprint, while also ensuring optimal artistic outcomes.

- With a strategic approach to national and international touring, we will minimize our carbon footprint by driving shorter distances, avoiding air travel and taking trains where possible, ensuring more comfortable touring conditions for our musicians and team, which ultimately results in optimal performance outcomes on the concert stage.

- Our position as an island nation at the edge of Europe necessitates some degree of air travel in order to continue working with the finest international artists, but we are committed to engaging guest artists who aren't required to take long-haul flights to work with the orchestra to minimise the carbon footprint of international artist travel.



Feel every  
note

