

Oranmore Arts Festival Chairperson's Report 2020

The Oranmore Arts Festival is a not-for-profit arts organisation with a driving motivation to provide access to the arts across all stratas of the local community. In doing so, it aims to increase appreciation for the breadth of local talent within the community by providing opportunities to showcase local artists, as well as bringing art of outstanding merit from around the world to the doorstep of the local populace.

The Oranmore Arts Festival core focus is a four-day long annual event held every May, with other smaller events held throughout the year in conjunction with complimentary national events and initiatives. By working year-round, and in close association with other community groups and local business owners, the Oranmore Arts Festival takes a 'whole village' approach in an effort to build community relationships. With close and careful consideration given to diversity and inclusion, the festival practices it's remit in all that it does; art for everyone, right in our own village.

Festival Founding

The Oranmore Arts festival was founded by a group of five local residents in the Autumn of 2017. The committee came together fuelled by the success of local Culture Night events, elements of which members of the committee had been involved in organising. Witnessing the positive reaction of the local community to such events, as well as the willingness of existing community groups such as Active in Age, Men's Shed and local musicians to contribute their time and talents, the founding members felt there was great potential to establish a substantial annual contribution to the community calendar. The announcement that County Galway was to hold the European Capital of Culture in 2020 clinched the deal late in 2017 and the Oranmore Arts Festival was officially formed.

2018 Festival

The newly formed festival committee set a date for the first weekend in May 2018 for its inaugural Arts Festival. Starting with no funding, it was certainly an uphill climb, however our combined skillsets, professional experience, level of engagement with the local community- both residents and business owners- enthusiasm and optimism was high. An application was made to the Galway County Council Arts Office for festival funding however, even if were successful, the funding was to be awarded retrospectively. Community support was key to the success of the festival which meant raising local awareness through visibility. To this end, marketing materials were designed in-house and printing costs covered by the committee personally. Support funds to ensure a viable financial position came in the form of a fundraising drive comprising Bag Packs, Bake Sales and Table Quiz nights. These events provided a valuable opportunity to engage with the local community to raise awareness of the upcoming festival and to determine the type of events that would be well received by our local audience.

The Inaugural Festival took place from May 10th to 13th. The theme of the festival was Meitheal, both to highlight the sense of community in the coastal village and to encourage a tradition of working together for the common good. The festival, with events for all ages brought the wealth of local talent to the fore through a unique and exciting programme that included music, literature, art, theatre and film. Entry to the majority of events was free of charge.

The festival was officially opened with a performance by Bel Canto, three of Galway's finest sopranos, Delia Boyce, Hildegard Naughton and Sandra Schalks, on Thursday May 10 at 6.30pm in Oranmore Library. This was followed by the official opening of 'The Captured Palette' art exhibition curated by Leonie King of Oranmore Castle in conjunction with Artists from a collective of which she is a member. The exhibition was hosted in Armorica Restaurant.

In the press release issued to mark the launch of the festival programme, the committee stated: "In planning our first festival, we are delighted so many local creatives, artists and businesses have engaged with us. Events are being hosted by local businesses in a variety of spaces including restaurants, cafes, nightclubs, hotels and pubs in the village. We're making the most of the spaces and we look forward to working with people who make Oranmore such a vibrant community," says Rita Burke, Chair of the festival. "The festival is a conduit through which artists, businesses, families and the wider community can communicate and discuss projects. We can already see new collaborations forming and the festival is acting as a catalyst to encourage a new artistic energy in our village."

As the population of Oranmore is young and diverse and the 2018 programme included a number of events for children including two performances of Branar's 'Woolly's Quest' on the Sunday afternoon in Keane's Music Venue (formerly Kudos Nightclub). We knew there would be great demand for family events like the fairy door trail, art and craft workshops by Toodlelou Creativity Lab, storytelling by local author Rab Fulton and a Baby Disco for little ones on the Saturday afternoon in Keane's Music Venue (formerly Kudos Nightclub). Not forgetting the adults, there was an Acoustic Music night on Thursday night, upstairs in the Porterhouse with musicians invited to bring their own instruments. 'Unboxed' took place Friday night upstairs in the Porterhouse, to which guests could bring their own vinyl and play DJ for a song or two. Glynn's pub hosted Gerry Mulvihill, Mary Staunton and friends for a session on Friday night.

Some of the other events which took place over the four days, included a photography exhibition by Tomas Szumski in Brazco Café Carraig Láir, an art exhibition from Active in Age in Péarla na Mara restaurant, walking tours by the local Heritage Society, a mural painted by the community in association with TidyTowns, and a live cake-build by local talent Corinna McGuire.

A significant number of the local businesses were very supportive and gave freely of their venues. In other occasions they themselves organised an event in order to be part of the program. Though the Oranmore Arts Festival was still a relatively unknown entity, there was a sense amongst the local businesses that what the committee was trying to create was something that the community had needed for some time. The community groups and schools were also heavily involved both as event organisers and as audiences members.

As with any events organised in Ireland, the weather played a huge part in the overall success of the festival. Glorious sunshine over the weekend of the festival which meant that people of all ages from Oranmore were able to get out around the village to be part of the events that had been organised. Though many of our events were ticketed through the Eventbrite app and can be easily deemed a success through ticket sales, revenue and audience numbers other events such as our Outdoor Fairy Trail event, our Historical Walking Tour and the Community Mural were harder to quantify in these terms. Their presence in the festival programme, however, helped people of Oranmore to interact not only with their local community with but with the very village of Oranmore which continues to evolve and grow around us.

Bolstered by the overwhelming success of the 2018 festival, the committee set about extending our network of connections within the local community and organising events outside of the annual four-day festival in May. Events were held for Culture Night, Heritage Week and two projects were funded through the Galway 2020 'Small Town Big Ideas' initiative, which took place from 2018-2019.

Having secured funding support from the Galway County Council Arts Office, a more ambitious festival programme was initiated in Autumn 2018 for the following year. The festival committee grew to seven members.

The second annual Oranmore Arts Festival took place from the 16th to 19th May, 2019. Building on the success of the previous year's inaugural festival, the organising committee continued to focus on sense of community and to encourage a tradition of working together. Once again, the festival programme was designed to provide events for all ages and focussed very heavily on the promotion of local artists. The programme included music, literature, art, and theatre and film and entry to the majority of events was once again free of charge.

The festival was officially opened with a performance by Helen Hancock, a soprano and resident of the village, who made her musical debut with a performance in St Augustine Church in 2018. She was accompanied by the Marine Institute Choir. The concert was on Thursday May 16 in Keane's Music Venue and was free to attend. This was followed by the launch of an art exhibition featuring the work of Christopher Banahan as well as an exhibit by members of the local Active in Age group, followed by live jazz by the Koko Ensemble in Armorica Restaurant.

As the organising committee expressed in the a press release issued to mark the launch of the programme: "Having been delighted with the success of our first festival last year, we felt that the 2019 programme had to up the ante and would firmly cement the festival in Galways's art calendar. We are delighted that once again, so many local creatives, artists and businesses have engaged with us. Events are being hosted by local businesses in a variety of spaces including restaurants, cafes, nightclubs, hotels and pubs in the village. We're making the most of the spaces and we look forward to working with people who make Oranmore such a vibrant community," says Ciara McDonagh, Chair of the festival.

The 2019 programme included a number of events for children including a performance of Pink & Blue, a non-verbal clowning show by Amadán of Belfast on the Friday afternoon in Keanes Music Venue (formerly Kudos Nightclub). A private performance of the same was organised for an attended by children in the local preschools. Family events organised included a Story & a Craft workshop by two local businesses, the Babbling Book Club and Toodlelou Creativity Lab in the library on the Saturday morning, Circus Skills workshops for the whole family, two Baby Disco's, one for littles, and a second for older children, on the Sunday afternoon in the Community Centre. Children of all ages were delighted by the return of the fairy door trail, enhanced in 2019 by the participation of the local Scouts.

A very special event at the 2019 Festival was the inaugural performance of Amhran Mor (A Big Sing). This multi-generational choir was established earlier in 2019 and its 60+ members are of all ages, from the very young to the very young at heart, with some families boasting three generations of singers. They performed in Nano Nagle Hall, Calasanctius on Saturday afternoon to a sold-out crowd.

Nighttime events included an Open Mic night on Thursday upstairs in the Porterhouse with musicians invited to bring their own instruments, a Brewery tour and tasting at the Galway Hooker

Brewery after work on the Friday. Heartstrings, a concert by Deirbhile Ni Bhrolochain and friends took place in Oranmore Castle on the Friday night and was a very special event. The headline act of the 2019 festival however was Mundy, who performed to a sold-out audience in Oranmore Castle on the Saturday night with support from local singer-songwriter Niamh Regan.

Some of the other events that took place over the four days included the launch of the two 'Small Town Big Ideas' projects in Unit 4, Tesco Complex, and art exhibition by Lorraine Fletcher at Brazco Carrig Lair, an art exhibition from Active in Age in the Tea Room, Armorica, and a live cake build by local talent Corinna McGuire with a cake cutting to close the festival in Brazco Carrig Lair on Sunday evening.

The 2019 festival was funded by the Galway County Council and also received support funds from the Small Scale Local Festival and Summer Schools funding which was administered through the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

2020 Festival.

Once again building on the success of the programme events, the festival committee grew to 12 members in late 2019 and set out to plan our most ambitious festival yet for 2020. While working to plan for the 4 day event in May, the committee also organised events for Culture Night (Marcus can you write something here about our Mural artist!!), Social Inclusion Week and Heritage Week.

Having successfully acquired funding through Creative Ireland, administered through the Galway County Council Arts Office. The Festival invited artist, Tomislav Brajnovic, who works at the University of Rijeka in Croatia, which was to co-host the European Capital of Culture alongside Galway in 2020, to complete a though provoking mural Diktatura Ljubavi (Dictatorship of Love) on one of the derelict buildings in the village for Culture Night 2019.

The Oranmore Arts Festival was just weeks away from announcing an exciting programme of events for the 2020 Festival, to be held May 7-10 when the Coronavirus Crisis called a halt to plans. Founded 3 years ago on the mission to provide arts for all in their local community, the organising committee decided to move a selection of the programme online rather than cancel the festival outright. Over the planned festival weekend, audiences could see an Open Mic, sponsored by Brazco Coffee Company with entrants of all ages given the chance to submit a recording of a song for a chance to win a hamper filled with items sourced from other local businesses.

A big highlight was the Literary event featuring Nuala O' Connor, Gerard O' Brien, Paul Mc Mahon, Michelle Coyne and Demi Anter. These writers, who were due to read at our Literary Lunch event in Oranmore Castle over the weekend, read online from a selection of their recent works loosely based around the central Galway 2020 theme of Language, Landscape and Migration.

Little ones enjoyed listening to a story from the wonderful Suzanne Reilly of Babbling Bookclub with instructions for a craft tied to the narrative led by Lindsay Deely of Toodlelou. Families were led in a live yoga session by local yoga teacher Suzanne Clarke, a chance to stretch the body and mind.

Oranmore Community Garden has been busy establishing their new polytunnel, and have extensive produce growing, from which local businesswoman Cepta Mahon of Cookalicious selected ingredients and shared a live cooking demonstration from her own kitchen. Also featured was local

Flamenco dance artist Yolanda del Monte giving a performance and teaching the audience a few steps.

There was additional participation from various artists over the weekend and a call to locals to get involved whatever way they can from the safety of their homes. The majority of this content was provided via the Oranmore Arts Festival Facebook page
<https://www.facebook.com/oranmoreartsfestival/>.