

Lecture given by :

Mr. John Dennehy, Secretary General,
Department of Education and Science .
International Symposium

"When I grow up, I want to be a musician"

Presented by Young European Strings.



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John Field Room,
National Concert Hall, Dublin.

I am delighted to be here this afternoon and I very much appreciate the invitation from Young European Strings to address this important international symposium on the early development and professional training of young musicians in Ireland. On behalf of the Department of Education and Science, I would especially like to extend a "céad míle fáilte" to Mr. Josef Frommelt, Director of the Lichtensteinische Musikschule who will speak on the situation in the European Union in general, and to Mrs. Consuelo Diez, Director of the Contemporary Music Centre, Madrid, who will speak in relation to Music Education in Spain. The input from our esteemed international colleagues and the debate that will undoubtedly ensue, will be helpful in informing our own deliberations as we move forward.

For the benefit of our foreign visitors, I wish to clarify my function vis-a-vis the Department of Education and Science generally, and in particular, music education in Ireland. As Secretary General of the Department of Education and Science, I am required to ensure the provision of a comprehensive, cost-effective and accessible education system of the highest possible standards, as measured by international standards, which will enable individuals to develop to their full potential as persons and to participate fully as citizens in society and contribute to social and economic development.

At a personal level I am keenly interested in the arts and, indeed, I am proud to serve as the current chairman of the National Youth Orchestra of Ireland. It is important, therefore, for me to contextualise the issue of the training of young professional musicians as it relates to the current position of music in Ireland. I also believe that it is important, at the outset, to acknowledge that there are, undoubtedly, deficiencies in the current system, some of which at least may be attributed to historical factors in the development of the education system in this country, including the centralised system that was inherited from a former era. Let us not pretend that there is not scope for improvement. However, in acknowledging the deficiencies that may be present, it is also important to recognize and affirm the work that is taking place in music education. It is clear that much excellent work takes place, both in the State supported sector through schools, colleges and other institutions, and indeed in the private sector through individuals, institutions and voluntary bodies and organisations.

The importance of the arts in general, and music in particular, in the development of the individual cannot be underestimated. Indeed, apart from the intrinsic value of the study of music in and of itself, the research suggests that the benefits that accrue from music education include increased confidence, greater clarity of thought and team-building skills among others.

Robert McLennan said:

"Music touches everyone. The study and practice of music can develop co-ordination, understanding, creativity, confidence and spiritual strength. Making music requires individuals to collaborate, listen and hear each other, compromise for the greater good, communicate clearly and develop individual responsibility and professional attitudes."

It is clear then, that the Performing Arts have a central role to play in education and social formation.

Now, more than ever, music is also an industry. From traditional to classical to popular music, we see that

music is a very substantial contributor to the economic wellbeing of the country. The transmission media and developments in music technology have made music a worldwide business and it is a source of pride to us all that Ireland has played and continues to play a central role and influence in the music industry. The inherent talent in this country is unquestionably the lynch pin of this success. I am aware of the research undertaken with regard to opportunities in the Music Industry and as a nation, we must ensure that the raw talent of our youth is nurtured, be it in performance, research or evolving music technology areas. There are, of course, differing views on the extent to which the State, historically, has supported the arts within education. Notwithstanding this, let us attempt to analyze the current situation and to plan the route forward. I would now like to examine the current role of the Department regarding music within the education system.

In terms of curriculum change, Music Education at primary level will have a renewed focus with the implementation of the revised overall curriculum for primary schools, which has been approved by the Minister. The revision of the music curriculum has been the responsibility of a sub-committee of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and is the culmination of many years of development and planning involving all the partners and interests in primary education. This approach to curriculum development in Ireland involving as it does the achievement of consensus among the education partners requires, as with all partnerships, a degree of compromise.

The broad context for the revision of the music curriculum, as with the other areas of arts education, emanated from the view of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (The Quinlan Report, 1990). That review was concerned at the absence from the 1971 curriculum handbooks of any rationale for the teaching of the arts as a whole, and the need for a general statement of aesthetic principles from which the aims and objectives of the various arts education disciplines could be derived.

The revised curriculum contains clearly articulated aims and objectives and the main features of the new music programme may be summarised as follows:

- A rationale and set of aims for music education which emphasise that music is a unique form of knowledge and an essential component in a balanced curriculum with creativity, imagination, enjoyment and aesthetic experience as central
- A coherent and balanced curriculum incorporating breadth and variety in the three strands of integrated activity - Listening and Responding, Performing (with voice and with instruments) and Composing
- The developmental and sequential nature of the learning objectives and the promotion of an active, yet reflective encounter with music within a learning environment which promotes group learning and builds on the social dimension of the learning process
- A music literacy programme which is fully integrated with and grows from musical activities in Performing and Composing
- A broad assessment strategy for music education
- The promotion of the use of information and communications technologies and interaction with music resources within the wider community
- The provision of separate and comprehensive teacher guidelines dealing with such matters as the content of the programme, school and classroom planning for music, approaches and methodologies and information on teaching resources.

Planning for the introduction and implementation of the revised curriculum is well underway and, through the Primary Curriculum Implementation Group, involves a partnership approach that mirrors the NCCA developmental phase. Implementation will be on a phased basis to facilitate an ordered programme of in-career development in the various curricular areas, including music. It is anticipated that support for the formal implementation of the arts education curriculum, including music, will begin in the second year of a three to four year support programme.

I have dwelt at length with the Revision of the Primary Curriculum since I believe that a sound base to the pyramid of music education is crucial. Indeed, the desired outcome from a revitalised music programme at primary level is that quality music education experiences at primary level would create its own needs and momentum for further development at second level. There have also been major developments in the music curriculum in the Post-Primary sector in recent years.

The revised Junior Certificate Music syllabus and Leaving Certificate Music syllabus were designed to accommodate individual differences in musical values and experiences and also accommodates divergence in students' musical needs, interests and ambitions. The Leaving Certificate syllabus was also designed to

provide continuity and progression in the skills acquired through the Junior Certificate syllabus in music, consistent with individual and special needs. Both Junior and Leaving Certificate syllabi are based on a similar structure, consistent with the development of the Primary curriculum. They are designed to develop knowledge and understanding, skills, and attitudes, and to encourage excellence in a variety of musical activities. All are based on the three essential activities of performing, listening and composing. There is an emphasis on the integration of the three components in the classroom and teaching methodologies are designed to reflect the essential unity of these elements.

The issue of performing within the school system has generated many debates. It is clear that some students have access to private instrumental tuition outside of the classroom context. In revising the curriculum, the options available to the NCCA included the creation of separate syllabi for students who had undertaken a private course of instrumental tuition. This particular option was discussed at some length and a decision was taken not to proceed on this basis.

The revised syllabi place an emphasis on the school based learning outcomes and an important feature is that students may present musical activities that are undertaken within the school, such as choirs, orchestras, and various groups and ensembles as the performing component for assessment purposes. The Department established a comprehensive programme of support for the implementation of the Leaving Certificate syllabus. This consisted of the appointment of a Curriculum Support Team, which consisted of four Post-Primary music teachers appointed for a two-year period. The innovative new Leaving Certificate syllabus has been extremely well received and has already resulted in significantly increased participation in the subject. This increase in the number of students taking Leaving Certificate Music in recent years is very encouraging. They have increased from c 1700 in 1998 to c 2700 in 1999 and c. 3300 in 2000. It is anticipated that a number of factors, including the nature of the syllabus and the importance of music to the economy, will provide an impetus to schools to offer music on the curriculum and will further encourage greater student participation.

Significant elements of the syllabus include:

- The integration of performing, listening and composing
- Performing for all candidates
- The inclusion of solo and group performing options
- The study of a broad range of musical styles
- Music Technology options

In terms of Music Technology, the relationship between the Performing Arts and Technology has always been a fascinating one. This is particularly true today, when advances in technology and software development continue at a tremendous rate, while creativity in the Arts continues to flourish. While there are those who would say that the Arts and Technology are mutually self-exclusive, technological expertise and artistic endeavour co-exist in many spheres, such as theatre, film, music scoring and arranging among others.

Music plays a vital role in Irish society. We are fortunate to have inherited an indigenous musical tradition, one that is unique in Western Europe. A number of our institutions have established a deserved reputation for excellence in the performance of and research in Irish traditional music. Others have outstanding reputations for excellence in the Western Art Music tradition. Of late, there is an exciting atmosphere of exploration, interchange and discovery as a result of a cultural interchange taking place between the traditions of Western Art Music, Irish Traditional Music and World Music. In addition to the availability of the more traditional courses, a wider range of performing options, courses in jazz and popular music, music technology, sound recording, original composition, arts administration and music therapy complement the core courses available. There are also many increased opportunities for students to pursue courses relevant to the music industry at Post Leaving Certificate level.

In terms of the theme of this symposium, it must be accepted that school-based curricula cannot, in themselves provide for the training of aspiring professional musicians. To what extent should the State dictate the compulsory subjects in schools? Clearly, however, at a time when there is much emphasis on technology and developments in this area, it is also important that we maintain a curricular balance between the technologies and the arts. Legitimate questions arise with regard to what the role of the State, in general, and the Department of Education and Science, in particular, should be in relation to support of the arts. A number of State supported institutions exist, admittedly mainly situated in urban areas.

These fulfil a vital role in the provision of instrumental tuition to the highest international standards. Interestingly, while these are designated third level institutions in the main, they also cater, in a significant way, for the development and nurturing of young talent. The high standards achieved in our schools of music are evidenced in the outstanding performances of our National Youth Orchestras, of which the Department of Education and Science is proud to be a significant sponsor. Additionally, it is satisfying to see the burgeoning youth orchestra network encompassed by the Irish Association of Youth Orchestras. However, the challenge of addressing the issue of geographic and economic inclusion remains, as does the need to respond to an increasing multicultural society.

The desire to establish a significant regional network of instrumental tuition for professional musicians and to support the development of music in the widest possible sense has occupied many interested groups and individuals over the years. There is evidence of frustrated demand for instrumental tuition in the historically high number of applications for limited places. Some of this demand is satisfied through the work of private instrumental teachers and schools of music that have been established on a private basis. The question arises as to what is the appropriate response of the State to this situation? It is also of note that some Vocational Education Committees currently operate music schemes. The operation of these schemes is currently under review.

The depth of talent and the extent of the interest in music and music education in Ireland is reflected in the range of individuals, agencies and voluntary and statutory bodies involved in the arts in Ireland. In this regard, I would cite the Music Network publication Irish Music Handbook. The handbook contains over 1700 entries covering such categories as funding sources, organisations, education, libraries, music promoters, venues, festivals, competitions, scholarships and suppliers and services. This, in itself, is an indication of the variety and complexity of the situation on the ground.

It has been suggested that the availability of instrumental tuition for professional musicians is confined to a relatively narrow, mainly urban, geographical base. It has also been suggested that even with State subsidies, the cost of instrumental tuition may be prohibitive to many families. These views must be acknowledged. The issue of access and inclusion needs to be addressed with strategic planning to positively discriminate by supporting those in society who, for economic, cultural or geographic reasons are disadvantaged. In the regard, it is crucial that we affirm the excellent work currently being accomplished, sometimes against the odds, by inspired music educators throughout Ireland. Valuable information might be revealed if we explored the factors which contribute to the effectiveness of the models of best practice in such places as for example the rural settings of Presentation Convent, Headfort or the FCJ Convent in Bunclody, or in urban satellite areas such as Tallaght or Corduff in Dublin or Ballincollig in Cork. The accomplishments of those schools who make up the Cross Border Orchestra are impressive. At primary level, within the Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage Project, excellent work in instrumental music has been achieved in the Glen schools in Cork and in Ballymun schools in Dublin.

A significant development in recent years has been the establishment of the Planning and Steering Group to plan for the development of the Academy for the Performing Arts. The Planning Group will oversee the detailed implementation of the project, which will involve a capital investment of £35million. As part of its work it will consult widely with interested parties. The Academy will have an independent Governing Body and will initially provide undergraduate and post-graduate training in music, dance and drama.

Allied to this central role will be the equally important need for a strong research and development arm and a strong continuing professional development role. This is a particularly exciting development in terms of the provision for the development of the performing arts in Ireland.

The Government's initiative on Public Private Partnerships, or PPPs as they are more commonly known is an interesting development. The Government appointed an Inter-Departmental Group to examine the feasibility of using PPPs to help address our infrastructure deficit. We had already seen these partnerships work very successfully in the decentralisation programme. The Inter-Departmental Group appointed independent consultants to advise on the options and they have recommended a pilot programme of projects, including projects in the education sector. The development of the Cork School of Music, for example, will be within a PPP framework.

It is timely, then, to assess the current situation regarding Music generally, and to open the debate with regard to the appropriate role of the State within the education system. To put in place a number of short-term measures without consideration of the overall situation would perhaps be shortsighted. I have outlined that while there have been a number of developments and improvements in recent years, a number of issues

remain. These include, for example, the relatively low uptake of music in boys' schools at Post-Primary level.

You may be aware of a recent report on the role and operating systems of the Department of Education and Science conducted by a former Secretary General of the Department of Finance, Mr. Seán Cromien. Fundamentally, the report suggests that the current education system is over-centralised and as a result of this and a number of other factors, the system is unable to allocate sufficient time to the crucial work of policy development.

The report recommends the establishment of local structures to ensure a more efficient and effective service to the customers of the Department and essentially recommends that the Department should focus essentially on the core work of policy formation and quality assurance. The recommendations of the report should be taken into consideration in the formulation of any proposals and policy developments in relation to instrumental tuition and structures. It may be, for example, that a regional focus and the harnessing and further development of existing structures may be one avenue that could be usefully explored.

Throughout the country, several bodies are engaged in developmental work with regard to the arts, for example, the Arts Council, Music Network, RTE, local government and county councils. Meaningful partnerships between such agencies will greatly assist the development of a strategic national policy for future work in the provision of music education. Furthermore, these partners need to develop strategies to encourage parents and families to participate in the arts and to value their relevance. In relation to the focus of this symposium, the training and development of young aspiring professional musicians, it is clear that any option needs careful consideration to ensure that future decisions are based on realism, educational best practice and critically, the needs of our students.

I know that many of you here today are particularly interested in the further development of instrumental tuition for aspiring professional musicians in this country. I am also aware of concerns regarding the lack of recognition of private schools of music that have been established in response to local needs. I would be interested to hear your views and suggestions on the way forward and I look forward to a continuation of the debate.

May I conclude by thanking you again for the opportunity of participating in this symposium?

May I also assure you of my own personal interest in the topic and wish you well in your further deliberations.