

A photograph of three musicians performing outdoors in front of a stone building with large arched windows. The musicians are a woman on the left playing a violin, a woman in the center playing a cello, and a man on the right playing a double bass. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter and a white border.

SLIGO FESTIVAL OF BAROQUE MUSIC

STRATEGIC PLAN

2021 - 2025

INTRODUCTION



Welcome to our new vision for the Sligo Baroque Festival! Allow me to introduce you to an extraordinary event, a vibrant music festival which is an essential part of the cultural tapestry of the Northwest of Ireland. On behalf of our committee, our funders, supporters and friends, I invite you to enter a world of passion, ambition and spectacle.

In the last weekend of September, for the past 25 years without fail, Sligo pulsates with Baroque musical culture. Across the city, concerts, lectures, performances and masterclasses are delivered by specialists to a varied and appreciative audience. We love the buzz, and draw support not only from music lovers, but from local businesses, the arts world and the community at large.

The festival is unique in its nourishing and inclusive approach. We invite renowned international and Irish performers to share a performance space and audience with students, young musicians and our own Sligo Baroque Orchestra - the original pioneers of the festival.

Now, with this new Strategic Plan we have a clear sense of where the festival is going and how we're going to get there. Over the coming years, the crafting of our festival programme will arouse curiosity, attention, and emotions, attracting listeners of all ages and walks of life. Themes and cycles will link the music performed to all our lives. It will encompass current events, history, nature, the supernatural, the passions of love and pain of loss.

Imaginative spectacles will draw new audiences to our annual outdoor event, in live free performance where Baroque music comes to life, as enriching, challenging and fresh as when the ink was still wet on the manuscript. Venues are chosen to be aesthetically sympathetic for the repertoire of each programme, sometimes in familiar locations, and also using new settings, allowing the listener to experience a new variety of acoustic atmospheres.

Programmes which are collaboratively developed by invited artists will result in vibrant performances for both the audience and the performers. We will continue to champion excellence in performance, inviting the most skilled, passionate and engaging interpreters of Baroque music to Sligo.

Partnerships including those with Sligo Baroque Orchestra, Irish Baroque Orchestra, Music Generation Sligo and Sligo Feis Ceoil will be nurtured. The launch of the Sligo Baroque Cup links the festival with 118 years of the Sligo Feis Ceoil performance tradition and the winning vocalists will perform at the festival, a valuable platform for emerging artists at this stage of their career.

The Irish Baroque Orchestra apprentice musicians will perform in both primary and secondary school classrooms, providing an up-close experience of live Baroque music introducing the instruments, their history, and style.

We are a festival in and for Sligo, but with a global perspective. We have survived and thrived because of our unwavering dedication to quality, learning and inclusion, and now, with the support of the Arts Council, we have an ambitious but achievable plan for the future. I can confidently say that the festival will continue to offer a delightful experience for performers and audiences, year in year out, whatever the challenges. Our mission is clear: great music, a welcome for all, and a vibrant transmission of this legacy.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the making of this plan, and I'm enthusiastically looking forward to the next five years.

Nicola Cleary
Artistic Director

ABOUT US

Sligo Festival of Baroque Music is founded on the belief that high quality performance of Baroque music should be accessible to the widest audience and presented in a friendly and relaxed context.

Conceived by Rod Alston, who had founded Sligo Baroque Orchestra in 1990, the festival was inaugurated in 1995, and has continued to be held as a weekend event in Sligo every year since then. Rod directed the festival until 2018, when Nicola Cleary, a professional violinist specialising in the Baroque period, and leader of Sligo Baroque Orchestra, became the festival's artistic director, supported by a voluntary committee.

The original vision was for internationally renowned musicians to perform alongside others at an earlier stage in their careers, and this model remains an integral feature of the festival. Education, collaboration, outreach and innovative programming have always been central to its ethos.

Leading Baroque performers and ensembles from Ireland and all over the world have appeared at the festival, including Emma Kirkby, Malcolm Proud, Maya Homburger, Elizabeth Wallfisch, Irish Baroque Orchestra, Collegium Marianum and many others.





The festival maintains a close partnership with Sligo Baroque Orchestra, and has joined the newly created Irish Early Music Network of like-minded festivals around the country.

While, as implied by its title, the festival focuses on music of the Baroque period, approximately 1600 to 1750, we are by no means exclusive, and welcome choices to dip into other periods and genres. Renaissance lute pieces? Vivaldi on uilleann pipes? Modern Argentine canción sung to viola da gamba? All heard with great pleasure in recent years.

Our 25th anniversary festival in 2020 had to be scaled down due to Covid-19, but we were lucky to be able to hold live concerts with an audience present. The inaugural open-air free concert was a hugely successful innovation and is now scheduled to remain as an integral annual highlight.

Covid also presented the opportunity to think about the future of the festival, and with the help of the Arts Council to engage a consultant who guided us through the process.

With this Strategic Plan, the festival outlines its ambitions for the next five years, both affirming the founding vision and marking an exciting new chapter in its growth.

OUR PURPOSE

VISION

WE BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF BAROQUE MUSIC TO ENRICH THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE IT.

Our vision is for Baroque music to be an integral part of our community, enjoyed and valued by people of all ages and backgrounds.

MISSION

WE BELIEVE THAT EVERYONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF BAROQUE MUSIC.

Our mission is to bring live Baroque music to our contemporary audiences by delivering a high-quality, engaging and inclusive festival in Sligo, with a rich and varied programme of performance, educational and participatory events.

ARTISTIC INTEGRITY

We will offer imaginative programmes bringing together some of the finest exponents of Baroque music, from Ireland and abroad.

COLLABORATION

We understand the power of collaboration to achieve more than we could do alone. We will seek out mutually beneficial opportunities and engage generously with partners in the local community and beyond.

INCLUSION

We believe that the festival is enriched by diversity, and that everyone should have an equal opportunity to enjoy the experience of it, whether as performers, audience, or helpers and organisers, and we will strive to make it welcoming and accessible to people of every background, age, status and ability.

INNOVATION

We are innovative in our approaches and not afraid of being original. We will draw on new technology and new thinking to present Baroque music in a fresh way to contemporary audiences.

LEARNING

We will put education, practical engagement and participatory learning at the heart of the festival, fostering the next generation of Baroque music players, scholars and listeners.

OUR VALUES

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

ARTISTS

Our aim is to deliver a festival which brings some of the finest musicians and ensembles together in Sligo, presenting the quality, range and depth of Baroque music in an authentic, contemporary and accessible way.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

- To build on our strong record and continue developing an international reputation for artistic excellence in the performance, programming and interpretation of Baroque music.
- To programme thematic and interdisciplinary events in a well-balanced and innovative festival which is attractive and accessible to a wide contemporary audience.
- To present the work of unexplored composers of the period, and to promote contemporary interpretations of the Baroque style, including new works commissioned from Irish composers.
- To expand the place of vocal music in the programme, ultimately extending to full operatic productions.

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THIS?

- We will continue to seek out the very finest exponents, performers and interpreters of Baroque music in Ireland and internationally, bringing the most accomplished artists to Sligo.
- We will devise engaging, accessible thematic programming strands and will develop partnerships with other arts organisations to present collaborative cross-genre/ multi-disciplinary projects.
- We will commission new works inspired by the Baroque style from Irish composers.
- We will work closely with Irish National Opera and other partners to present a full operatic or large scale choral performance as part of the festival.

HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'VE BEEN SUCCESSFUL?

- By 2025:
 - Our annual audience surveys will show that at least 35% of respondents rate the artistic quality and programming as excellent, and rate the festival as innovative, diverse and well-balanced.
 - Our growing international reputation will be evidenced by increased audience attendance from Ireland and abroad (up by at least 20%), and greater presence in international classical music journals and online platforms.
 - We will have devised and presented at least two major collaborative cross-genre/ multi-disciplinary performance projects with partner arts organisations, commencing in 2023.
 - We will have commissioned and premièred at least two new works taking inspiration from Baroque music by Irish composers, commencing in 2022.
 - We will have presented at least one full operatic or large scale choral performance, commencing in 2024.
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STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

LEARNERS

Our aim to foster an appreciation, understanding and love of Baroque music across all ages and to inspire a new generation of performers.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

- To support the professional development of third-level music students through partnership with the Irish Baroque Orchestra's Apprentice Programme.
- To nurture the education and growth of young/amateur performers, through a year-round partnership with Sligo Baroque Orchestra.
- To bring Baroque music to students in schools across Sligo and the region.
- To provide a public platform for advanced young vocalists by sponsoring the Sligo Baroque Cup at Sligo Feis Ceoil.
- To present audiences with the opportunity to learn about Baroque music from leading practitioners of the art.

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THIS?

- We will collaborate with the Irish Baroque Orchestra's Apprentice Programme to offer third-level music students a solo recital platform at the festival, as well as the opportunity to give demonstrations in local schools.
- We will develop our year-round work with Sligo Baroque Orchestra (SBO), through ongoing mentoring for the young/amateur players, performance practice through the monthly Informal Music Afternoons, and the orchestra's annual main concert at the festival.
- We will work closely with Sligo Academy of Music, Music Generation Sligo, Sligo Arts Service and local schools to devise and deliver bespoke educational projects around the festival period, including master classes with guest performers and teachers.
- We will collaborate with the Sligo Feis Ceoil by sponsoring the Sligo Baroque Cup vocal competition, and provide the annual winner with a soloist platform at the festival.
- The festival will feature opportunities for the audience not only to hear the music but to hear and learn about it from the performers.

HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'VE BEEN SUCCESSFUL?

- By 2025:
 - Five third-level musicians will have gained valuable performance and teaching experience at the festival through participation in the Irish Baroque Orchestra's Apprentice Programme.
 - Together with Sligo Baroque Orchestra, we will be supporting and engaging with approximately 20 young/amateur musicians on a regular, year-round basis and providing each member of SBO with the opportunity to perform at the festival.
 - Our schools projects will have reached over 1,000 students in at least five different schools across Sligo and the region.
 - Over 60 young vocalists will have competed for the annual Sligo Baroque Cup at Sligo Feis Ceoil, and four bursary winners will have given a soloist performance at the festival, accompanied by Sligo Baroque Orchestra.
 - Each festival programme will have featured at least one lecture/recital, as well as informal opportunities for the audience members to learn from the performers about the varieties of Baroque music and forms.
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STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

AUDIENCES

We want to reach new audiences, deepen engagement with our existing audience and to collaborate generously with partner organisations to make Baroque music widely accessible.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

- To engage with new local audiences, gaining greater visibility and presence in Sligo, and using non-traditional and outdoor performance spaces.
- To improve communication with our existing audience, and to introduce a new Festival Friends scheme, to promote and reward involvement with the festival.
- To increase awareness of the festival locally, nationally and internationally, utilising a range of technologies to reach new and existing audiences.
- To establish a clear and contemporary brand identity for Sligo Festival of Baroque Music

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THIS?

- We will use targeted marketing techniques to identify and reach out to new audience segments for the festival.
- We will increase our visibility in Sligo through free outdoor performances and the use of non-traditional performance spaces to connect with people new to Baroque music.
- We will launch a new Festival Friends scheme in 2021, to grow our base of loyal supporters.
- We will work with community groups and tourism bodies to promote awareness of the festival as a draw for cultural tourism in the Sligo region.
- We will update the festival's brand identity, and use social media to promote the festival with high-quality digital content.

HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'VE BEEN SUCCESSFUL?

- By 2025:
 - We will have experienced an overall increase in festival audiences of at least 20%.
 - The Festival Friends scheme launched in 2021 will have a membership base of at least 50.
 - Our brand identity will be well established, giving the festival a consistent, fresh and contemporary image, which is attractive to new and existing audiences, as confirmed by the annual audience surveys.
 - Our mailing list subscribers will have increased by at least 50%.
 - The festival's social media presence will have at least 2,000 followers and viewers a year.
 - We will have delivered at least four free public concerts in new venues.
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STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

ORGANISATION

Our aim is to secure the long-term sustainability of the festival, to enable us to continue presenting the finest Baroque music to our audiences and to build upon the legacy of the past 25 years.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

- To sustain a robust organisational structure for the voluntary committee by having a stable membership with sufficient diversity of experience and skills, having clear roles and responsibilities, and the ability to attract new members.
- To bolster our financial situation and diversify our revenue sources, by increasing self-generated income, seeking new funding opportunities and implementing multi-year planning and budgeting
- To enhance the committee's capability to deliver the festival by engaging paid freelance professionals as required, such as in event management, production and marketing.
- To build upon the legacy of the last 25 years of enriching the arts landscape of Sligo through Baroque music, by developing strong partnerships with venues, businesses, individuals, voluntary bodies, networks, funders and other cultural organisations to help ensure the festival's continuing success.

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THIS?

- We will clarify the roles and responsibilities of the committee, identify the skills, knowledge and experience that we require, and recruit new committee members, to ensure an ample and well-balanced team.
- We will plan and budget the festival programme on a rolling three-year basis, and actively pursue sources of funds to deliver the plans, from a range of self-generated revenue streams including ticket sales, sponsorship and donations, in addition to grants from public sector bodies.
- We will budget for and engage experienced freelance festival managers and other professionals to help deliver our plans for the festival.
- We will collaborate with a broad range of potential partner organisations, and develop mutually beneficial relationships which will enable us achieve our shared goals.

HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'VE BEEN SUCCESSFUL?

- By 2025:
 - The organising committee will have an ample cohort of members with a broad spectrum of relevant skills and expertise as well as clear roles and responsibilities.
 - We will have increased our annual self-generated income by at least 30%.
 - The benefits of forward planning for the festival and of professional assistance in publicising and delivering it will be seen in better public awareness, increased attendance, and high ratings for the overall quality of the festival experience in the audience surveys.
 - A network of mutually supportive partnerships and relationships will have been created, which will put Sligo Festival of Baroque Music in a strong, confident position to plan for the future.

In relation to all our Strategic Priorities, the baseline for quantitative targets to be achieved by 2025 will be the first year of this plan, with the festival to take place on 24-26 September 2021.



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OUR FUNDERS, PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS



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FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

Nicola Cleary, John Fahy, Seamus Storey, Imelda Harte, Alan Moran.



This Strategic Plan has been developed in consultation with Arts Leaders Associates Ltd.



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Sligo Festival of Baroque Music is a registered charity, CRN 20083045.

www.sligo-baroque-festival.com