

ULSTER TOURING OPERA LTD
A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE
TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

The trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the charity's Memorandum and Articles of Association incorporated on 18 June 2021, the Companies Act 2006 and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019)".

Objectives and activities

UTO's objects are to advance the education of the general public through the presentation of opera, and to further the development of public appreciation and taste in the art form. Through cross-border touring, innovative outreach projects and immersive technology UTO enables greater access to opera. UTO is committed to ensuring audiences enjoy the physical and digital content it creates, whether they are attending one of UTO's cross-border touring productions, or engaging with an augmented reality opera experience using a smartphone.

The objectives can be split into two sections:

Artistic Objectives:

- to provide creative opportunities for opera practitioners on the north of the island of Ireland and beyond
- to run a flexible and lean organisation enabling artistic risk
- to develop talent and ideas through partnerships
- to develop excellent working relationships with UTO's existing and future touring venues in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland
- to undertake a flagship tour in Spring 2023

Research and Development Objectives

- to build partnerships within the immersive technology sector on the island of Ireland and beyond
- to explore a range of volumetric capture options
- to develop skills within UTO in preparation for an increase in immersive technology work

The strategies employed to achieve these objectives in the year covered by these accounts include undertaking a fully staged production in venues previously visited with the *A Night at the Opera* concert series, preparing the augmented reality app for release on iOS through cloud storage solutions, and developing strategic partners for the funding and delivery of School workshops and Ulster Youth Opera. In UTO's third year, the company has built upon the projects delivered in the previous year in the live touring and immersive technology sectors.

In reviewing and developing UTO's activities and future plans, careful consideration is given to the public benefit arising from UTO's work. The Trustees take particular account of the Charity Commission NI's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the aims and objectives of the charity. The Trustees consider that the work of the charity will provide considerable benefit to the public as illustrated by the activities described in this report.

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Achievements and Performance

The Barber of Seville tour 2023

Spring 2023 was be a key period for the company. UTO produced *The Barber of Seville*, its first fully staged cross-border tour. This production toured to two venues in the Republic of Ireland and two venues in Northern Ireland, with the MAC Belfast as a significant new partner.

The production opened at the Market Place Theatre, Armagh on Saturday 4th February 2023 and toured to the An Grianán theatre Letterkenny on 10.02.23, MAC Belfast on 15.02.23 (sold out) and Townhall Arts Space Cavan on 17.02.23.

Two Northern Irish winners of the Glenarm Festival of Voice joined a company of nine singers, as Malachy Frame performed the role of Basilio and Peter Harris covered the role of Count Almavia as well as performing tenor chorus. Northern Irish rising star Sarah Richmond made her role debut as Rosina and Thomas Chenhall played Figaro. Jack Roberts sang the role of Count Almaviva, having won acclaim for this performance of Lensky at the Opera Holland Park Young Artist Eugene Onegin. Wyn Pencarreg and Lorena Paz Nieto performed the roles of Dr. Bartolo and Berta.

The accompaniment for the production expanded on the success of the *A Night at the Opera* tour, adding clarinet to the piano accompaniment. Exceptional pianist and conductor Gary Matthewman was the Musical Director for the production. Critical acclaim was garnered from respected publications such as Opera Now magazine, which will feature a review in the May 2023 edition:

"Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* demands delicacy, fluency, and finesse of its performers. During its 15th February performance at Belfast's MAC, Ulster Touring Opera's company demonstrated capacity on all fronts in its delivery of Dafydd Hall Williams' witty staging of this comic masterpiece"

Sarah McCleave, **** Review in Opera Now May 2023

UTO collaborated with Thrive to collect feedback from audiences. The results demonstrate the company's ability to provide significant benefit to existing and new audiences:

- Of the people who said they 'definitely would' recommend a UTO event, 64% had never been to a UTO event before.
- UTO doubled the percentage of people between the ages of 25-34 between 2022 and 2023
- UTO doubled the amount of people identifying as disabled in the audience, totalling 16% of respondents who identify as D/deaf or disabled, or have a long-term health condition.

UTO collected a significant number of qualitative responses to *The Barber of Seville* which further evidences the impact of the company's work:

"Having it near where I live was wonderful. Didn't have to travel."

"Now that I know of your existence, I will endeavor to attend most of your productions. I would normally attend the Market Place Theatre in Armagh, but I was unable to make it, so I chose the MAC. I do hope more productions go to the Market Place."

AR Opera Belfast and Dublin premieres

Following the premiere of AR Don Giovanni at the SXSW Festival 2022, UTO brought this experience home through premieres in Belfast and Dublin. The Dublin Premiere took place at the ARVR Innovate conference on 15th June 2022, where Dafydd Hall Williams demonstrated the App as well as taking part in the Creative Industries panel discussion which is available to view on YouTube. The Belfast premiere took place at 2 Royal Avenue on 7th December 2022, where UTO invited members of the public to attend and enjoy the AR Operas for the first time.'

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Buttercrane Opera Flash Mob

UTO developed its relationship with Arts & Business NI to reach audiences in unexpected locations, such as business parks and shopping centres. On Monday 2nd May 2022 the company surprised shoppers at the Buttercrane Centre in Newry with an unforgettable performance, supported by Arts & Business NI. Tenor Patrick Hyland, pianist Keith McAlister and eight other performers undertook a Flash Mob of Puccini's classic opera aria with chorus 'Nessun Dorma'. The piece was performed at three different points in the day, and footage of the event has now been watched on YouTube over 4,000 times.

NI Screen Development Fund

With support from NI Screen through the Screen Development Fund, UTO worked with Belfast-based games development company Whitepot to bring the AR Opera demonstrator developed during the XRX programme to the iOS App Store and to a global market using cloud-based technology. While this work was completed in the 2023-24 financial year, a significant portion of this work was undertaken during the period of these accounts. As well as creating an engaging immersive experience, UTO has created unique intellectual property around the dissemination of volumetrically captured performance that UTO is looking to develop further.

Spring 2023 School Opera Workshops and Opera on the Lough Concert

The Fermanagh Choral Society secured an ACNI Rural Arts Engagement Programme grant in partnership with Ulster Touring Opera and the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. The grant supported an ambitious programme of engagement in Spring 2023, including an Opera on the Lough concert featuring the Choral Society as well as UTO's soloists, and an extensive school opera workshop programme.

The concert took place on 9th February 2023 at the Ardhowen, and included a professional pianist, mezzo-soprano and baritone as well as the Fermanagh Choral Society. 100% of the Choral Society members agreed that it felt rewarding to sing alongside professional opera singers, and 95% agreed that they felt happier after participating in the project. 87% of Choral Society Members felt that the project made them feel more connected to others in the Choral Society.

There was significant demand for the free schools' workshops: all of the workshops were fully booked within one week of release, and the team were able to deliver the project to 640 children. 25 workshops were delivered between 17th January 2023 and 14th February 2023 in areas such as Lisbellaw, Maguiresbridge, Brookeborough, Garrison, Enniskillen, Newtownbutler, Donagh, Ederney, Irvinestown, Aghadrumsee, Lisnaskea and Florencecourt.

The feedback from the children demonstrates that the workshops made a significant impact on their mood and sense of wellbeing. A quote from the report by Thrive confirms this:

"We saw a massive improvement in emotional levels as a result of the school workshops: before the workshops, 54% of students were happy. After the workshops, this metric increased to 76% of students."
Thrive report 2023

76% of the children who took part in the project agreed that they should do more music and drama workshops in schools, there is compelling data to support the need for this kind of positive impact on the lives of children in Fermanagh.

The impact of this project's work was recognised by the BBC, who sent a reporter to attend one of the workshops at the Ardhowen Theatre.

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Ulster Youth Opera

UTO is committed to a long-term approach to engagement in the areas in which it works. The company secured support from the Bank of Ireland Begin Together Fund and the ACNI Young People and Wellbeing Fund to support a new and innovative Ulster Youth Opera programme in partnership with the Ardhowen, Enniskillen. The programme delivers workshops to young people between the ages of 8-18 for a heavily subsidised rate of £3 per workshop. Participants develop their music and drama skills, as well as building confidence and benefiting from the proven wellbeing benefits of community arts engagement.

The first session was held on Thursday 16th March 2023, with an 8-13 session between 5pm and 6.45pm and a 14-18 session between 7pm and 9pm. The pilot stage of the programme will conclude in December 2023, and UTO is working with Thrive to conduct an ongoing evaluation process of the programme.

Financial review

Total income received of £124,502 for the period ended 31st March 2023, with net expenditure of £124,168 and funds at the period end of £9,578 (restricted funds £6,738 and unrestricted funds of £2,840).

The trustees are currently working to establish a reserves policy.

Risk management

The trustees have assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed, and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to the major risks.

UTO has previously completed a robust verification process conducted by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Vincent Crossey, establishing that the company's risk management, contracting and financial procedures are in line with the best practice expected of a professional arts organisation.

Dafydd Hall Williams completed the Risk Assessment Awareness Course run by Regenerate, and has completed a range of risk assessments, including those for events held during the pandemic. To ensure best practice, UTO has undertaken a peer review of the risk assessment documents for similar sized organisations, in order to compare UTO's assessment process against their rehearsal and performance processes.

In October 2022 Ulster Touring Opera signed a service agreement with the Fermanagh Rural Community Initiative, which enables the FRCI to submit Access NI documents on behalf of UTO as a registered umbrella organisation. This is in line with UTO's safeguarding policy, and all company members who deliver work in schools are processed via Access NI.

Plans for future periods

The next financial year will see a focus on the growth and expansion of Ulster Youth Opera, both within Enniskillen, and also in new venues across Northern Ireland. Ulster Touring Opera will be appearing in the Belfast International Festival for the first time, both as a partner in an ACNI Organisation Digital Evolution partnership led by poetry company Quotidian, and also presenting the premiere of the Kraina song cycle by Anselm McDonnell and performed by Rebecca Murphy and Cahal Masterson.

UTO will develop its links to corporate partners, including a partnership event with Armagh Cider: Operas & Orchards. The event will take place in February 2024 and will involve UTO soloists, the Ulster String Quartet and the Armagh City Choir. This marks an important development for the company as it begins to partner with ensembles in NI rather than utilising piano for accompaniment.

This year will also enable UTO to act on the evaluation and conclusions from the spring 2023 tour, in preparation for the next cross-border tour. In particular, the company will research how to better apply the recommendations in the Theatre Green Book in future productions so that UTO can become a role model in sustainable opera production.

Finally, UTO will release the AR Opera app for free on the iOS app store platform. Following the release of the app, the company will seek a means to commercialise the AR Opera project and its associated IP for the Meta Quest 3 and Apple Vision Pro headsets.

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Structure, governance and management

UTO's first year of operations began with registration with Companies House on 23rd December 2019 by founder and Artistic Director Dafydd Hall Williams. As UTO was set up with the intention of achieving charity status, it was registered as a Company Limited by Guarantee.

The trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

Ms Catherine McCann	(Resigned 23 March 2023)
Ms Anne Doherty	
Ms Karen McShane	
Ms Marie-Louise Muir	
Dr Hyojung Sun	(Resigned 23 March 2023)
Mr Robert Thicknesse	
Mr James Donnelly	(Appointed 23 March 2023)
Ms Jane Monari	(Appointed 23 March 2023)
Mrs Nuala Trainor	(Appointed 23 March 2023)

The current Trustees of Ulster Touring Opera have been recruited to the board during the period covered by these accounts. Drawn from the arts, events, accounting, engineering, journalism and creative industries sectors, this group of professionals represents a diverse, experienced and passionate governing body, well suited to the task of overseeing the organisation's initial years of growth.

The trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.



Ms Karen McShane
Trustee

Date: 4 DEC 2023