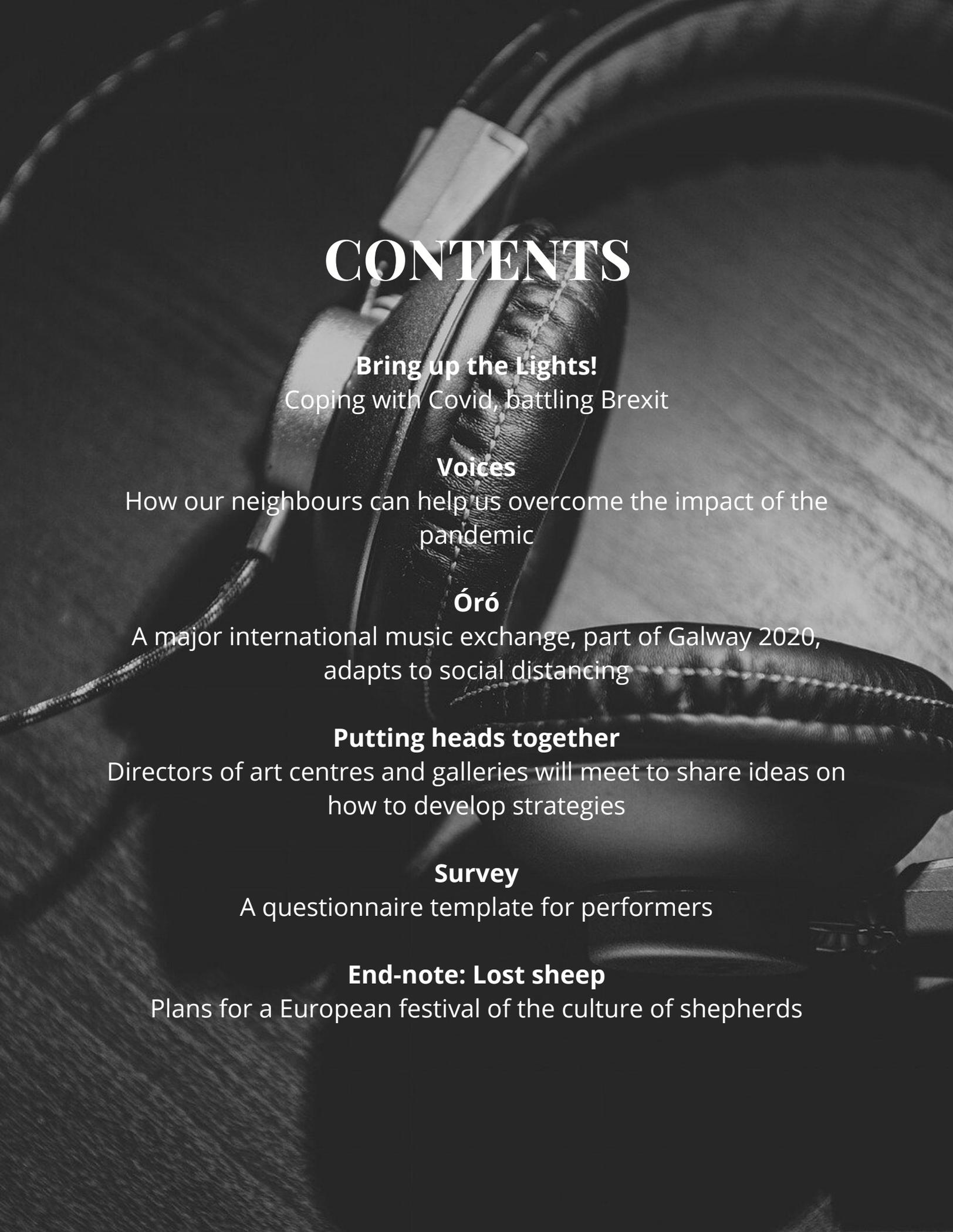


IMPACT



CELTIC NEIGHBOURS QUARTERLY
SUMMER 2020



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BRING UP THE LIGHTS!

COVID-19 has hit the cultural sector hard: in order to save lives most theatres and galleries are shut, leaving actors and musicians unemployed. Audiences as we knew them have largely disappeared.

How many artists will return to their calling after such closures, and how many venues will reopen, is unknown,

In their positively-named research document 'After the Interval', the UK research group Indigo have explored some of the questions we need to ask, and some of the answers we might look for, as we strive to bring up the lights again. If you haven't already read it I recommend it, you'll find it very helpful.

For those of us living and working in the UK, and for colleagues in other places who would like to work with us, there is a second plague to confront – Brexit.

We haven't felt all of its economic effects yet, but already there is a palpable sense of threat: cultural pathways are closing, obstacles are being erected, relationships straining or in danger of shattering.



There are poisons in the atmosphere that we have to confront – xenophobia, isolationism, a distrust of minorities. For those of us living in minoritised language cultures, these challenges are intense and intimate.

Financially, our resources are scanty; in global terms, our audiences are tiny and our pools of expertise shallow. Our infrastructures of communication are as tenuous as our economies are marginalised. Yet on the other hand, our cultures have a resilience and vitality that has seen them endure, metamorphose and grow in spite of all these deficits for generations and centuries. We have been here before, and have the determination to respond to this latest plague.

But resilience and determination may not be enough. Scattered, isolated and impoverished as in many ways we are, we need to work together, to share ideas and experiments, strategies and inspirations, triumphs and disappointments, with all those facing these challenges and participating in these same struggles. The divergent settings and situations we are working in will be as fascinating – and as useful – as the common ground we will rediscover.

There's a saying in Welsh 'cam cyntaf yw hanner ffordd' – the first step takes you half the way – and as a first step in bringing up the lights again, Celtic Neighbours is proposing a consultation process to begin in September this year, developing at first through digital working groups, to be shaped and directed by their participants. We will be tightly focused on specific shared concerns, and the work will culminate in a face-to-face gathering in Inverness in Spring 2021, adding physical presence and human chemistry to the progress that we will have made remotely. We will create new collaborations, we will pool our expertise and enthusiasms – and we will have fun! For further information on this and other developing proposals – watch this space...

AFTER THE INTERVAL, Indigo research document, is available at:

<https://www.indigo-ltd.com/covid-19-after-the-interval-national-audience-survey>



THINGS THE NEIGHBOURS SAY

HOW DO WE SHARE THE
CHALLENGES AHEAD?

**Deirdre Mckenna, visual artist, Dingle,
Éire**

These are very uncertain times for artists, we all have feelings of disconnection – from our fellow artists, from the venues that help us to realise our projects and from the people who come to experience and engage with our work. There is also the disconnection from our fellow celtic nations. It seems like, now, more than ever, we need to look to organisations like Celtic Neighbours to strengthen the links that bring us together as a community. "Ar scáth a chéile a mairimid" we are stronger together.

**Nick Capaldi, C/E Arts Council of Wales,
Cymru**

In difficult and challenging times , how much do we really know about the world around us? Do we notice how other people live? Do we appreciate grace under pressure? Do we respect the values and beliefs of cultures other than our own, or recognise the wisdom and courage that has found better answers to complicated questions? Celtic Neighbours has encouraged us to experience, and learn from, the culture of others. In times of pain and discomfort, these connections are needed more than ever.





**Mirjam Vellinga, International Officer,
Afûk, Frýslan**

In Fryslân we value our Celtic neighbours very highly. We feel it is very important to be able to work together and share experiences in the field of culture and language. At this moment with the Covid 19 crisis and Brexit lurking around the corner it is hard to make plans for the future with our Celtic neighbours. We want to be able to keep our doors wide open in order to continue working together and we need Celtic Neighbours in doing so.

**Asier Bassurto, Sociolinguistic
researcher, Euskal Herria**

Encounters and exchanges between creators, producers and people committed to minority languages are immensely valuable. On the one hand, by the exchange of knowledge and new collaboration opportunities that they offer us. But, above all, because of the effect it has on the way we see world cultural diversity and our own peoples' cultures. Special mention should be made of the effect on young people who can see themselves reflected in other linguistic communities and live a very rich international cultural experience through their own language and culture.



Dermot McLaughlin, Musician and C/E Creative Solutions, Dublin, Éire

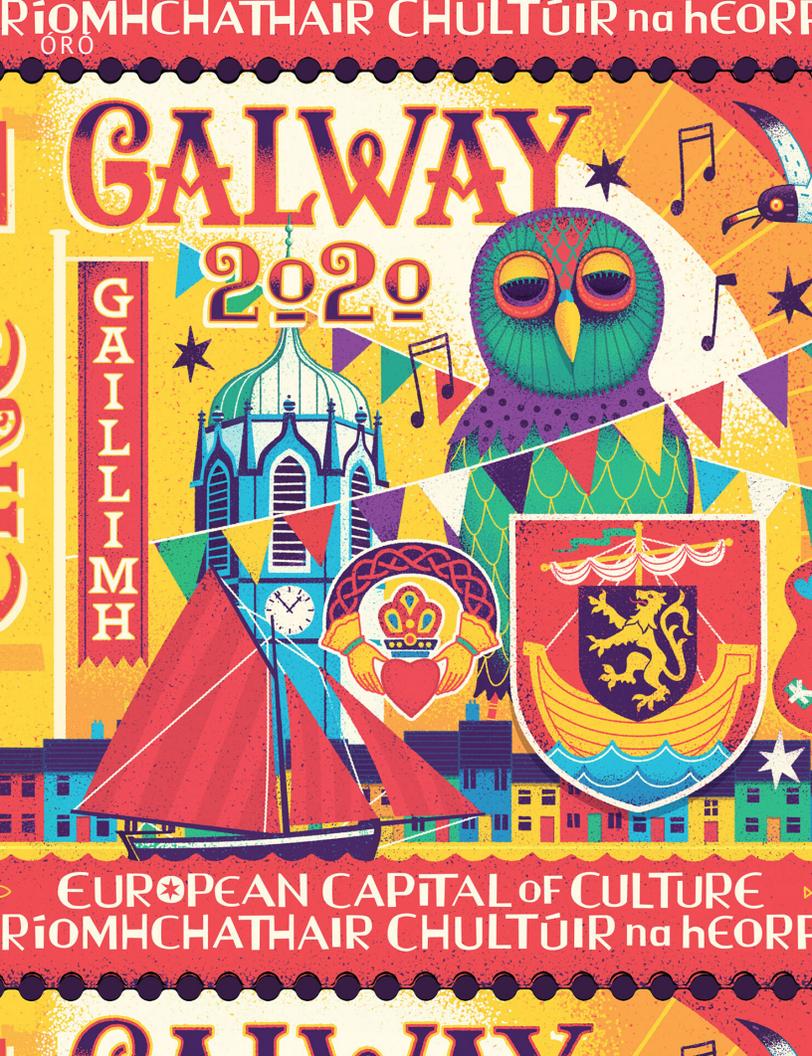
One problem that concerns me is the trend towards isolationism and exceptionalism that we see in more and more states - this brings with it intolerance and the suppression of diversity in all forms, including cultural and linguistic.

Close to home, we see Britain/England barreling blindly down the pot-holed cul de sac of Brexit and wilfully severing ties with neighbours, mirroring disturbing trends in USA, Hungary, Poland. At a time when multilateralism is under attack, the role of culture, arts, language, imagination and creativity becomes more important than ever as a positive binding force among peoples.

Even at this very early stage in the Covid-19 pandemic (July 2020) we see how culture and arts have sustained and inspired so many people across the globe, yet vision and support for culture and the arts still appear fragmented and minimal, particularly on these islands (Ireland, Britain).

Artists are experts at making different sense of the present, and at helping us imagine what's coming next. Artists coming together from diverse cultural, linguistic, geographical backgrounds are our version of the brilliant multidisciplinary teams working around the world to find treatments and vaccines for the virus.

Our challenge is to devise responses to ruptured social, cultural, behavioural and economic norms for the cultural sector, for individual artists, companies, audiences, funders and supporters.



ÓRÓ

GALWAY 2020

How does it feel when a long-planned and intensive multi-arts programme runs into the Covid-19 barrier? Some of us have already experienced these challenges and frustrations, and for those needing an injection of hope and positive energy, here is an update from within the heart of the crisis – from Darach Mac Con Iomaire, Director of the hugely ambitious Óró project, part of the planned celebrations of Galway European Capital of Culture 2020.

Celtic Neighbours has been a facilitating partner of Ealaín na Gaeltachta and the project partners throughout.

Óró is a major international artist-led collaboration between 10 professional European artists from different disciplines – theatre, dance, visual art, literature and music. All the participating artists are from minority language backgrounds across Europe. Óró.. is a cornerstone project of the initial Gaillimh 2020 bid book and is rooted in the core themes of Gaillimh 2020 – Language, Landscape and Migration. Five Irish artists are currently collaborating with Artists from Alba, Cymru, Euskal Herria, Cornwall and Frýslan to create a major new multi-disciplinary work that will premiere on the 21st of September 2020 in a large disused factory in An Cheathrú Rua, Co na Gaillimhe.



This unique production involves 2 development phases; a week in April and another week in early May. Instead of bringing the European artists to Connemara for these development weeks as initially planned, the group development work was done online, using the apps - Zoom and Slack - which facilitated the group communicating and creating together despite being physically apart. As this production is being created post Covid-19 lockdown, we hope we are perfectly placed to adapt the production to this new reality we all now face.

Our current aim is to present the finished work as per our original plan, premiering in An Cheathrú Rua on 21st September. Our rehearsals are to begin on site in An Cheathrú Rua on Monday 24th August. If phase five of the Irish Government's current roadmap for reopening the economy and society continues on Monday 10th August, as set out, we will be able to continue with Óró.. as planned.



However, in the event of possible delays in implementing this roadmap for reopening the country, we have a number of contingency plans in place to ensure that Óró still goes ahead from the 21st September. These contingencies involve alternative methods of presenting the work, including online streaming, live television broadcasts in each of the participating European states and regions, and finally, the possibility of producing the work as a film.

The eventual choice of these options will be dictated by developments re Covid-19 across Europe in the immediate future. Whichever option comes to pass, we are determined that Óró.. will still premiere to the public on Monday 21st September 2020 somehow, and every stage of whatever presentation process that ensues, will adhere to all relevant social distancing and public health measures. The health and safety of our artists, production team and crew has been, and will continue to be our first priority.



Putting Heads Together

Gallery and arts centre directors and their staff in every corner of our continent have been considering how to get their shows back on the road as soon as they are able, and how to overcome the deficits created by Covid in particular. In our minoritised cultures some problems are compounded by scant resources, tenuous communication links and a sense of isolation. On the other hand, we have unique strengths to draw on too. In this situation, Celtic Neighbours is proposing a short, tightly focussed and condensed digital forum between six arts centres: two in Ireland, two in Gaelic Scotland, and two in Wales.

During this late summer and autumn, we will hold three meetings; the first will share information about each centre's current situation and aspirations, the second will compare emerging strategies to facilitate new activity, and the third will explore possibilities for longer-term collaborations.

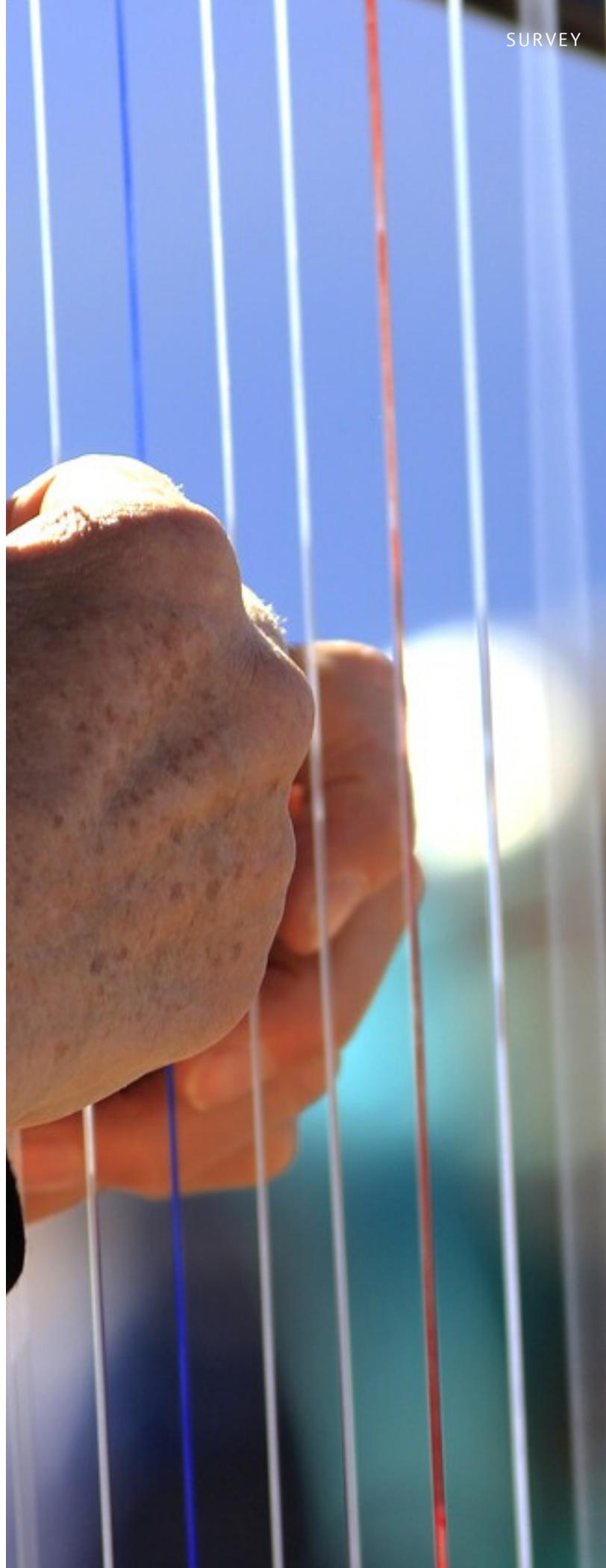
This short process will exist quite apart from the wider, more ambitious consultation mentioned in our leading article, but could well feed into it. We'll report back on our progress, any conclusions we can reach or recommendations we can make as soon as possible in this publication. Any centres we haven't been able to approach who would like to share this process with us will be very welcome; please contact our coordinator via the email address at the end of this quarterly.

SURVEY: AFTER THE LOCK-DOWNS

Deirdre Mckenna's comments elsewhere here reveal how important it is for artists, performers, venues and audiences to begin coming together again. It seems possible that rural areas, where movement has been most limited, Covid generally less intrusive and community ties strongest, may be able to begin developing events first. At the same time, everyone concerned will need to feel secure as they do. Would venues feel more secure working with local artists, who don't need accommodation or food? What facilities and precautions would make performers feel safer when they come before a live audience again?

In an attempt to address some such questions, Celtic Neighbours has been working with the Arts Council of Wales to draft a simple questionnaire for performers. Our findings can then be shared with venues and other agencies, and may help to stimulate events as soon as the time is right.

We include the English-language version of the draft here, in case it may be useful to partners as a template or starting point for something similar. But circumstances, policies and the disease itself are changing by the day at the moment – some of these questions may soon become outdated, and different ones may need to be posed.



A questionnaire for performers

Celtic Neighbours and Noson Allan/ Night Out

Your feedback will be very valuable as we work together to restore live music and maximise performance opportunities

Where are you based?

When do you feel you will be ready to start performing again?

How many of you would normally perform together?

How far are you willing to travel for an evening performance? Within what radius could you travel and return home on one night?

What do you feel would help you perform safely?

What facilities or restrictions would you like event organisers put in place?

Please return as soon as you can to meic.tycerrig@gmail.com

Thanks a million for your help. With your permission, we will be able to share this information with venues and promoters, to benefit everyone. And please let us know of other questions you feel need to be asked.

I'm happy for you to share this information:

Name

Group or company (if applicable)

End-note: Lost sheep

Two long-term members of our partnership – Danny Kilbride and Meic Llewellyn – have been nourishing a dream for more than a decade. From time to time the dream moves into a sharper focus and our hopes rise; then time moves on, other commitments crowd in, and the opportunity diminishes again. The dream is of a European festival of the sheep and the culture of shepherds, encompassing poetry and music, storytelling and dance, the breeding of dogs and the cooking of a really good lamb chop. It would bring farmers, performers, folklorists and craftspeople together in a unique creative mix. We want to see Vlach shepherds from the plains of Romania deep in conversation with smallholders from the Hebrides, and pipers from the mountains of Crete jamming in a corner with txallaparta players from the Basque County. We could go on. For now, we've called the project 'Cân y Bugail – the shepherd's song'. Isn't it just too exciting a possibility to wither away? But we need partners to help realise it.

An undertaking like this will be expensive, and would demand significant funding support. Both of us have experience working with UK and EU culture funds, and could offer to take a lead in an approach to them. But before looking for the big money, we suggest a two-day meeting of interested parties, where we'll work together to create a shape and time-scale for the proposal that we can all take ownership of. So if you feel you could help rescue a beautiful lost sheep, please contact us at cyfarwyddydd@trac-cymru.org (Danny) or meic.tycerrig@gmail.com (Meic) – and let's get moving!