

# **A Report on future options for RTÉ in chamber music provision**

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## **A Report on future options for RTÉ in chamber music provision**

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### **CONTEXT FOR THE REPORT**

RTÉ over the entire period of its history has had a major role in supporting live music making in Ireland, as through its orchestras, choirs and quartet, while offering other complementary interventions through its wider broadcasting, recording, management and “sponsorship” facilities.

Recently, there has been considerable internal RTÉ discussion about its supports for chamber music in Ireland and the co-incidence of the economic downturn and the resulting cutbacks within RTÉ has influenced the organisation’s decision to offer only a one-year contract to the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet for 2010. This is a notable change.

In the prevailing economic circumstances, a review of wider chamber music service issues has been thought to be timely. The commissioning of an independent report which would include options and recommendations for RTÉ to consider gives it the opportunity to take a wider perspective on the potential value and impact of future chamber music provision.

RTÉ has engaged, on various contractual terms, especially with the string quartet medium in an almost unbroken succession since 1959. The most recent quartet associated with RTÉ in this way has been the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet since 1986.

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE REPORT**

A Evaluate the corporate value to RTÉ of its support for chamber music to date and having consulted with relevant stake-holders, consider options for future activities in this area.

B With reference to other organisations which support chamber music, in Ireland and elsewhere, consider ways to optimise value for money to RTÉ in future chamber music services provision.

C Make a limited number of recommendations for future chamber music supports based on opportunities around activities of range and quality which will impact with audiences at both local and national levels.

### **THE PROCESS OF INFORMATION GATHERING FOR THE REPORT**

During December 2009, a limited number of representative stakeholders, possible future partners, promoters of chamber music and educationalists (see Appendix A) were invited to respond to a set of questions (see Appendix B ). This information gathering was carried out by the report writer either in face to face meetings, telephone conversations or in written format - depending on time considerations and accessibility. Based on this information, and on the report writer’s experience in the arts (see Appendix C), a short report has been completed and presented to RTÉ in January 2010 within the above Terms of Reference.

## BACKGROUND

***“Chamber Music: Music for a small group of instruments, particularly fitted for a performance in a private room or a small hall.”***

*(The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 1993)*

When the fledging radio station that was to become Radio Telefís Éireann some decades later first began to get involved in the promotion of music – western “classical” music that is – its nascent interventions were in the realm of “chamber music”, albeit sometimes encompassing the aspirations of the symphonic repertoire through arrangement. The “station orchestra” consisted of three players. In that modest beginning can be found the origins of the current RTÉ Performing Groups.

This aspect of RTÉ’s history has been well and fully documented by Richard Pine in his book **“Music and broadcasting in Ireland”** ( pub. Four Courts Press 2005) so there is little reason to reiterate the background here. However, of the points Pine makes early on, the following are particularly relevant:

*“For music, which is a social act, to thrive and develop, it requires political stability, financial security and an educated audience. None of these has been enjoyed by the music profession in Ireland for any length of time sufficient to allow a concrete infrastructure - or a significant level of creation, performance or appreciation - to develop....up to recently there has been no coherent policy on behalf of government, or the educational system or the music profession as a whole, as regards the nurturing of musical creativity, the development of an industry or even the appreciation of music and its social role. Whether by accident or design, RTÉ positioned itself at the centre of this serendipitous and haphazard process.”*

Over the latter two decades, the artistic landscape of Ireland has changed considerably. This is seen most evidently through the decentralised confidence in the regions beyond the capital city which has been encouraged by more financial security for the arts - until the recent economic downturn. There is now a recognisable infrastructure although the leadership within that infrastructure is still not always clearly defined.

Funds stemming directly from central and local government, and directly and indirectly through the Arts Council, have led to a newly established network of local government arts officers and arts centres. Still vibrant in certain regional areas are voluntary arts committees and, most importantly in terms of chamber music provision perhaps, “passionate” individuals whose energy and interest can be harnessed and who can work in conjunction with the more formal and professional bases.

The development of this infrastructure, in turn, has paralleled and fostered a sense of partnership amongst the diverse and diverse organisations directly involved in the promotion of “the classical music industry” for want of a better description, helping to bring about new opportunities for it throughout Ireland.

It may be true to suggest, however, that Pine’s point around the general lack of appreciation in the wider population - for the higher end of the classical music market and for chamber music especially – is still a fact of life. This being the case, it would suggest that increasing the profile for these two areas could be a priority for RTÉ through its broadcasting services and, with particular reference to this chamber music report, working closely in partnership with the other players in this relatively small pool.

Partnership has become a pivotal force in bureaucratic strategies, the perceived answer to many of the ills that in certain situations may otherwise beset individual players. And in many cases, that is indeed the exact solution needed. Even big fish cannot afford to be isolated in a small pool.

However, it is not always a straightforward process securing partnerships in areas where financial outlay is perceived as being the preserve - or the duty - of only one lead organisation. For example, in what may well be termed “*a serendipitous and haphazard process*”, Ireland’s national leadership of the symphonic orchestral world was undertaken and continues to be driven by RTÉ. This would seem to suggest a certain gap in the policy direction of the Arts Council, to all intents and purposes the Irish government’s defined and designated leader for the development of the arts.

If it were possible for RTÉ to try to dispose of its two orchestras, unable or unwilling any longer to pay for them through the licence fee and commercial income, RTÉ would surely be within its rights to make the arguments necessary for such a decision as a broadcasting organisation.

Yet how can and why should RTÉ be expected to make decisions on national arts policy which is, after all, subsidiary to its prime remit? Such decisions would have far-reaching ramifications beyond broadcasting and would surely have to involve the leader of national arts policy – the Arts Council, which of course currently has no financial investment in this arena and therefore little if any jurisdiction over how RTÉ directs and deploys its orchestras. It is this indisputable right and ability by several public bodies to act independently and in isolation which continues to confuse issues at both micro and macro levels in the arts in Ireland - and which, to some extent, undermines the developing arts infrastructure alluded to above.

The fact of the matter remains, however, that it is expressly within the remit of RTÉ to deliver and, anomalously perhaps, to lead on certain key aspects of arts provision nationally. The Broadcasting Act (2009) states that one of the objects of RTÉ is “...to establish and maintain orchestras, choirs and other cultural performing groups...” (para.114/1c)

The Performing Groups division of RTÉ therefore specifically maintains at present, on varying contractual and non-contractual bases, the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, the RTÉ Concert Orchestra, the RTÉ Philharmonic Choir, RTÉ Cór na nÓg and the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet.

This report is concerned with RTÉ's future provision of chamber music. This area bears some comparison to the symphonic orchestral world to which I have referred above in so far that RTÉ directly delivers live musical performances as part of its provision and especially through its resident string quartet. But in terms of size, audience and, most importantly, national leadership, there are signal differences; most importantly, RTÉ is clearly only one of the players, neither the leader nor the sole provider.

If RTÉ makes a decision to withdraw financial support from that provision, or aspects of that provision, it can do so knowing that others may, or could, or indeed should move in to fill the gap left by its withdrawal. It could make its arguments purely along broadcasting lines unfettered by wider, national artistic considerations.

However, some of its licence fee payers may not agree with the decision reached.

#### **THE CORPORATE VALUE OF THE CORK RESIDENCY FOR STRING QUARTET**

Although there are several ways in which RTÉ can supply and support chamber music, such as through live performances, broadcasts, recordings and simple publicity, the focal element of the organisation's provision in this area rests with its performing group and currently contracted supplier - the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet.

*"It can confidently be said that RTÉ, as the first radio station in the world to establish a quartet-in-residence, led the concept internationally and stimulated the appreciation of chamber music in Ireland over the past [fifty] years. The establishment of quartets -in-residence in Sligo (Vogler, 1999) and Galway (ConTempo, 2003) can be traced to this initiative. With quartets of the calibre of the Academica and the Vanbrugh, it has hosted music-making at a level not yet reached with any consistency by its other performing groups, while contributing significantly to the musical life of the city of Cork and, more recently, to the Munster region in general." (Richard Pine: **"Music and Broadcasting in Ireland"**).*

The string quartet residency in Cork has been the central pillar in RTÉ's support of chamber music for the past fifty years, albeit with certain breaks in continuity during changes from one quartet to another. Although living and based in Cork, the members of the various quartets have always had their programmes made available around the country through broadcasts and through regional live music tours. This approach could access audiences not previously served and at the same time profile RTÉ to a wider national constituency.

Of course, the RTÉ residency has had much more extensive benefits than those derived purely from live and/or broadcast performances. It is notable, however, that in its current contract for services with the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet, RTÉ only requires 30 concert performances and residency in Cork. Paradoxically, that makes a calculation of comparative “value for money” far from simple.

A “resident” quartet cannot simply be compared, for example, to a “visiting” string quartet which may charge less or more per concert, depending on the experience and standing of the ensemble, whether it is a one-off engagement or a tour comprising several concerts over whatever period of time. The “visiting” quartet would also demand in addition living and travelling expenses which are of a different order from the necessary inclusion of financial incentive needed to attract and maintain one ensemble to live in one place as a “resident” quartet. Currently, RTÉ has management and administration costs associated with the resident quartet and it also reimburses to the quartet certain travelling expenses in connection with tours within Ireland. These costs and expenses are in addition to the contracted “fee” for the resident quartet.

Trying to assess corporate value or calculate value for money must to some extent bring in the question of audience attendance. It would be accepted that audience numbers for chamber music concerts are not expected to be large and they depend on external factors such as, inter alia, ensemble profile, programme content, venue size and accessibility, and, to some extent, local promotion.

It is realistic to include therefore the wider benefits over and above audience numbers, and again these benefits are not so simple to evaluate in a “number crunching” exercise because they have more to do with community interaction and social education - the sorts of values to which Richard Pine refers in the quotation I used at the beginning of this report. Judging the corporate value of the residency solely on 30 concerts would, in my opinion, be an unreliable indicator.

For example, it is widely acknowledged in Cork that the city’s burgeoning string playing tradition was the outcome of RTÉ’s successive quartet residencies, either directly or indirectly. This linkage was most notably enhanced by the members of the Academica Quartet or, more precisely perhaps, by its family members. The residency’s formal connection with University College Cork in the past helped to focus attention on string tuition; through direct access to the quartet, or through individual tuition, masterclasses and mentoring, the successive RTÉ residencies have undoubtedly been a major factor in making Cork a prime producer of string players. It would be clear that Cork, through the representatives I contacted, sees the connection with the RTÉ residency as a vital and valuable part of the city’s and, indeed, the region’s musical life. This in itself has a political value all of its own. Both those examples demonstrate value that is difficult to quantify and compare numerically.

For nearly a quarter of a century, the Vanbrugh Quartet has been the incumbent of the RTÉ residency in Cork. That is a remarkable achievement both for the quartet and for RTÉ – the relationship has always been symbiotic. There are few if any such professional music ensembles who actually live in Ireland and work to this degree of consistently high quality – both in national and international terms. Wherever it travels abroad, this quartet carries with it the RTÉ epithet and brings credit to both the country and the organisation as a result.

The quartet itself has matured considerably as a grouping over this period (with one change of personnel throughout that entire time) and flourished artistically in the secure financial environment provided under RTÉ's tutelage and in the relative freedom of its contractual obligations to RTÉ.

Just as the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet has blossomed during its RTÉ residency, it has directly and indirectly encouraged the formation of new Irish string quartets, such as the Callino and the Carducci, and energetically used the firm foundation of the RTÉ residency to foster and encourage young chamber music players as, for example, through its recent appointment at the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama.

The RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet has offered a considerable exploration of the traditional string quartet repertoire throughout the country and has also delivered a sizeable number of new works commissioned by or for it- especially from Ireland's new generations of composers. Many of these commissions have stemmed from RTÉ itself. The quartet's musical journey has resulted in an impressive array of recordings both for radio broadcasts and on CD, again facilitated largely through RTÉ, and it has brought to RTÉ and Ireland an arts profile which would otherwise have been impossible to attain.

The quartet has taken many opportunities to engage with local promoters and music festivals in Ireland either through its provision for RTÉ or on its own initiative; it was central, for example, to the establishment of the West Cork Chamber Music Festival in Bantry as one of highlights on the international summer music festival calendar.

Through regular invitations to other musicians of high calibre, national and international, the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet has joined forces in the playing of the repertoire for other chamber music combinations thus extending the appreciation of the wider chamber music world.

The quartet has also acted not just as the sum of its parts. At home in Cork, for example, its second violinist accepted the unpaid conductorship of the Cork Symphony Orchestra and has brought about a reinvigoration of that group since he took over.

In all my meetings, consultations and information gathering, I have heard nothing but praise for the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet.

This RTÉ residency is, as I have written above, the “central pillar” of RTÉ’s support for chamber music to date. The amount RTÉ pays through the residency purely as regards concert performances could be seen as being at the higher end of the ensemble concert fees structure in Irish and UK terms. But, as I have already pointed out, there really is no “value for money” comparator with the wider requirements of this residency either in terms of length or specific location. I think that it is too unreliable simply to divide the overall residency “fee” by a number of concerts and come to a conclusion. It would be simple to find other quartets who charge less or more in terms of concert fees but that proves very little.

I would categorically state that in my opinion the corporate value to RTÉ of the residency has fully justified the organisation’s considerable investment of time, money and management over the past fifty years in its contribution to the promotion of chamber music in Ireland and in its wider social value to Ireland’s musical community. In particular, the residency proves in a very practical and public way RTÉ’s commitment to music and audiences outside Dublin.

With that acknowledgement, it is also clear that the RTÉ residency is an immensely valuable mechanism which in the future could foster the highest levels of achievement from new emerging groups, new emerging ensembles, new emerging musicians, who are willing and able to dedicate themselves to living and working in an environment which at least on the surface may seem outside the mainstream of the wider professional music world. The RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet experience for example clearly demonstrates the possibilities available within the residency context and the benefits to be accrued.

I suggest that that experience should be imaginatively documented by RTÉ as an example for others to explore, possibly as a web-based archive.

Residencies are a prime tool for achieving very diverse goals, especially in chamber music terms, and they exist at many different levels and durations on the international scene, often in close connection with universities and other educational establishments.

Within the UK, there are many residencies which would be worth closer study by RTÉ e.g. Aldeburgh’s Residencies Scheme; the Wiltshire Music Centre’s residency with the Doric Quartet; The Endellion’s several residencies at Cambridge, the Royal Northern College of Music and at The Venue in Leeds; The Allegri’s several residencies at the University of East Anglia, Middlesex, Bangor, Durham, Nottingham, Oxford and Southampton.

Farther afield, Chamber Music America has been a strong proponent for decades of the chamber music residency – it might be worth a closer study of its Residency Partnership Program and past examples such as The Fry Street Quartet, The Chiara Quartet or the Ying Quartet.

Within Ireland, reference has already been made to the string quartet residencies – of a somewhat different basis – undertaken in Sligo and Galway. A report by Fergus Shiel, centred around Sligo’s experience and consequent follow up, may, on request, be made available to RTÉ to study. What both residencies reveal, however, is that the existence, and development of, strong local and national partnerships are needed in order to integrate the resident group (in both these cases, string quartets) into the local community and for the realisation of its specific aims. Those residencies also show that change is both acceptable, manageable and desirable in the continual process of developing new directions and new opportunities.

Comparison with the experiences and findings of others may help to open up new ideas for future development of the RTÉ residency and suggest other goals for possible future incumbents.

I have deliberately emphasised the separation of the success of the RTÉ Cork residency on the one hand and the many accomplishments of the RTÉ Vanbrugh on the other. RTÉ can and should bear in mind this separation in deciding upon its future options.

#### **OTHER METHODS OF RTÉ’S SUPPORT FOR CHAMBER MUSIC PROVISION**

The mention of the West Cork Chamber Music Festival above highlights that there are other ways in which chamber music support has created corporate value for the organisation – and that has been through RTÉ’s sponsorship and broadcasting of new or already existing events in the area of chamber music. The wider audience recognition attained by this support is an invaluable tool for festival and/or concert promoters, giving credibility and return in real terms.

It is difficult to overestimate the benefit which RTÉ can bestow on regional promoters merely by its practical involvement through broadcasting. Again in my research for this report, I have encountered a notable ground swell of interest in seeking, establishing or continuing RTÉ interest through new or existing partnerships with the best of chamber music festivals and promotions either by independent festival organisers or through local government arts officers. In marketing and PR terms alone, it is worth a great deal to the promoters, and this association, almost amounting to “patronage”, has advantages also for RTÉ in the fulfilment of its remit to create a presence nationwide (and internationally through the EBU) - not just in “virtual” presence through broadcasting but in physical presence as well.

I have noted in the regions a perception that RTÉ is in danger of becoming too Dublin-centric in terms of the arts. This perception is nothing new and can be countered to some extent by quoting demographic statistics. But, under current economic restraints, it is something which could well be exacerbated unless clear and meaningful ways are found to

demonstrate the organisation's continuing commitment to the nationwide aspect of its provision, again especially in the area of the arts.

In this respect, partnerships with the regionally based festivals in particular are worth consideration because they offer varying repertoire, changing combinations of artists, niche market audiences and management which is not dependent on RTÉ's administration. This type of intervention would continue to be over and beyond the organisation's current scheme entitled "*Supporting the Arts*". This scheme seems to me to be an example of how RTÉ can provide an important promotional tool - something more than just a "listings service" - to which those organising public events in the arts can apply for broadcast mention.

A more formal, proactive stance on broadcasting from various festivals of chamber music could serve the two purposes of stimulating the provision of chamber music and exemplifying RTÉ's countrywide presence. An internal comparison between methods employed for the broadcast coverage of sports events, for example, and the broadcast coverage of arts events may be an uneasy but helpful exercise to undertake.

There are however internal difficulties in seeking greater broadcasting presence for the performance of chamber music that would have to be resolved, it seems to me, before the benefit could be realised. The main problem is that the Performing Groups rely for broadcasting on the decisions of other divisions.

The situation seems to me to be rather akin to the difficulties I referred to in relation to the arts infrastructure of the country. Supporting chamber music through RTÉ should rely heavily on, and be exemplified by, broadcasts; but the division in charge of the central pillar of chamber music provision has no authority over broadcasting programme content. The competition for resources, technical and financial, is also an internal factor which needs resolution in relation to the broadcasting of events outside the studio for example.

As a broadcasting organisation primarily – albeit with historical add-ons such as have been referred to above – it would be logical to assume that RTÉ's prime reason to support and provide chamber music would be for broadcasting purposes. It would appear to be wasteful to provide performances of chamber music directly and yet not use those performances as programme content.

A recent tour of the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet in five concerts which featured the internationally acclaimed pianist Peter Donohoe, and which I attended in Dublin, was not recorded for broadcast. Those five concerts represented a sixth of the annual output required by the current contract for RTÉ's resident quartet.

The restrictions on broadcasting performances, live or recorded, as I have already stated, may stem from the cost of outside broadcasts, the limits of technical resources, the scheduling of programming content. This is a perspective which may militate against chamber music provision on air and it would suggest that a policy decision involving all channels under RTÉ's broadcasting umbrella, including most importantly RTÉ Lyric FM, may bring clarity to what to outside eyes and ears appears an invalid situation.

At the moment, it would be a perception that, in broadcasting terms, RTÉ is, at the very least, not fully exploiting the contracted services for which it has already paid. Perhaps an exploration of the wider means of broadcasting, and by this I mean web-based facilities, could provide a more potent platform for the profiling and the dissemination of chamber music than is at present employed. I would also suggest that ways of making chamber music presentation more attractive to a wider and less well informed audience should be investigated – for example, a more encompassing contextual approach to whatever repertoire is being performed, with other related programming of an informative and stimulating nature perhaps involving concomitant artforms as well. A web-based approach in partnership with the more established methods of broadcasting could provide a basis for new directions.

As already noted, RTÉ is not a sole player in the area of chamber music provision. It has in the past partnered with various organisations in supplying product and delivering performances. There are always new opportunities for revisiting such partnerships and, of course, creating new ones. I've already referred to partnerships with regional festivals – there are also regular opportunities through the network of local government arts officers and regional venues.

One of the lead bodies for chamber music in Ireland is Music Network, "a professional arts organisation, funded by The Arts Council, committed to promoting, encouraging and funding the highest standards of music creation and performance throughout the island of Ireland. In pursuit of these objectives Music Network delivers a continuous programme of music-related events that are locally accessible throughout the country."

Although Music Network is not restricted to the area of chamber music, RTÉ could explore the synergy which may exist with this organisation in progressing its own chamber music provision. This would be especially pertinent in the development of the new generation of musicians currently emerging. Music Network in the past was enthusiastic about exploring the possibilities of the establishment of a "necklace" of residencies in different locations and with different instrumental combinations.

Invoking again Richard Pine's point about music education in Ireland, I note that Music Network is administering a new educational scheme which will be financed largely through philanthropic funds emanating from U2 and the American Ireland Fund. It may be that RTÉ,

in partnership with Music Network, could investigate some ways of enhancing the essentially educational function of this initiative through an aspect of its residency or through its other Performing Groups.

It may be worth investigating, for example, the wider use of the musicians already employed as orchestral members of the two RTÉ orchestras. It is not the primary function of orchestral players to involve themselves in chamber music, but it is certainly the case with orchestras around the world that chamber music ensembles and small instrumental groups always voluntarily emerge from the ranks. They can offer a beneficial and complementary enhancement to the main output of the orchestra.

Obviously, it would be unfair and unwise to equate the product or to compare the aspirations of these types of groups to a professional, long established ensemble such as the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet but there are different objectives which could be achieved, still under the provision of the “chamber music” heading through such initiatives.

Outside of the RTÉ family as it were, it is worth noting that the number of chamber music ensembles emerging from or including the new generation of artistically maturing Irish musicians is expanding – groups such as the Callino, the Carducci, the Fidelio Trio, the Badke, the Avalon Ensemble, the Cappa Ensemble, and a host of individual pianists, instrumentalists and singers. To some extent, this reflects Ireland’s improving educational systems especially at third level although it is still a fact that many young Irish musicians travel abroad to complete their musical education, especially in practical performance.

Some of the Irish musicians who are involved with the groups I referred to above do not base themselves in Ireland but there is a noticeable desire on the part of many to return home and make a career in Ireland – or, at the very least, make part of their career here through performance. Inevitably this will enrich the cultural life of the country as a whole, helping to improve the general appreciation of the arts through volume if nothing else.

The encouragement of these new chamber music ensembles, and indeed individual musicians, is a vital part of this picture and RTÉ should continue to be a prime supporter and developer of this trend. Music Network already has a “Young Musicwide” scheme in position which RTÉ could look at. In Northern Ireland, a partnership exists between the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and BBC Northern Ireland entitled the Young Musicians Platform which, every other year, provides a monetary award and broadcast opportunities – including a solo concerto performance with the Ulster Orchestra. BBC Radio Three has had a remarkably successful New Generation Artists Scheme in place for well over a decade. RTÉ could consider similar broadcast services but also perhaps the option in the future of using its residency facility to encourage new and emerging Irish talent in the area of chamber music specifically.

Another example, perhaps in partnership with an organisation like Music Network, may be a combination of competition and residential/tour prize to encourage and develop chamber music groupings amongst younger, maturing players. Broadcast competitions are always good value for profile and, in this respect, I am reminded of the successful years of the RTÉ Musician of the Future Competition. There are drawbacks to any such competitions, not least for the organisers, as it can be work-intensive in management and administration terms. There is no doubt, however, that such competitions raise awareness amongst the general public and in the area of chamber music, a higher profile would not go amiss.

RTÉ can access information on emerging young talent and create partnerships with music performing institutions in Ireland - such as the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama, the Royal Irish Academy of Music, and the Cork School of Music. In addition to this, the possible input from third level academia is also important to recognise as there are partnerships to be developed here with universities in Dublin, Galway and Limerick— recognising that UCC has already been engaged. In other areas of higher education, the music departments of the Institutes of Technology may also be willing supporters in this type of partnership; an initial approach through the recognised co-ordinating body, Institutes of Technology Ireland, may be the starting point for discussion. Strangely enough, the Dublin Institute of Technology is not currently affiliated with this body.

Outside of Ireland, meaningful partnerships with organisations specifically geared towards the encouragement of emerging talent could also be explored. For example, the Young Concert Artists Trust would be the leading body in the United Kingdom in identifying, nurturing and promoting young classical soloists and chamber ensembles trained in the UK; because of its international remit, it would be interested in exploring possibilities and partnerships within Ireland.

For new compositions aimed at chamber music ensembles, RTÉ has already in existence an internal commissions co-ordination forum. It can continue to encourage Irish composers old and young through supporting and broadcasting new commissions as premiers, and, importantly, giving thought to second and subsequent performances of already existing works. The obvious external partnership here is with the Contemporary Music Centre and perhaps this relationship could be developed as it may help to coordinate a greater profile for everyone involved from instigator through composer to performer.

One important aspect of chamber music provision, to which currently perhaps insufficient thought is given, would be defining the audience at which it is aimed. Much effort has been put into the educational aspect of music making aimed mostly at the young and amongst the main reasons given for this concentration is the need to prepare musical audiences for the more distant future.

However, the audiences of the present are largely classed as “older”. This may be perceived as a generalisation. But if it is true, it must also be recognised that the current older audiences of over fifty years of age have not experienced those types of broad based educational programmes which have become so much part of current arts thinking over the past two decades.

It seems to me that it would be a worthwhile investment of effort to gain an insight into the requirements of this current “older” audience and cater specifically for its needs, thus opening the possibilities of achieving much greater audiences in the near future from this expanding demographic grouping. It should also be remembered that sections of this grouping have a natural and potentially developable interest in the subject, have disposable income and do not necessarily need subsidy. Such an exploration could be deemed the prerogative of the Arts Council but there is no reason why RTÉ should not be an initiator or partner in any such study as it would have a considerable bearing on its own search for increased audiences and, stemming from that, for commercial sponsorship.

Sponsorship is an area that I would suspect may not have been fully realised in terms of RTÉ’s provision of chamber music. It is a notoriously difficult area in which to define the commercial benefits for commercial concerns because its audiences are, as I have noted above, not substantial at this time. But there is a potential to be investigated, perhaps in specific relation to high quality branding associated with high quality artists. Could the RTÉ residency become “sponsored” in future?

## **QUESTIONS FOR RTÉ**

In this short report, I have attempted to expound the broad context, currency and corporate positions of RTÉ's chamber music involvement, expressing the wider value of both RTÉ's individual role and its partnership role in exploring new directions and revisiting existing ones. That is, I think, where the basis of its future chamber music provision lies.

There are three basic questions which RTÉ may need to consider before it can progress clarification of any optional future scenarios in relation to chamber music provision. These questions, of course, lead on to other questions but the starting point may be as follows:

- A.** What does RTÉ consider as its future role in chamber music in Ireland – provider or supporter or both?
  
- B.** What is it that RTÉ wants to achieve specifically from its future role in chamber music in Ireland?
  
- C.** How much in money and human resources is RTÉ prepared to commit to its role in chamber music in Ireland in the future?

## SUMMARISED ANSWERS TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REPORT

- **ToR1: Evaluate the corporate value to RTÉ of its support for chamber music to date and having consulted with relevant stake-holders, consider options for future activities in this area.**

As was pointed out to me during my information gathering, it is ultimately only RTÉ which can judge the corporate value it gets from its chamber music provision to date. However, as already stated, it is my opinion that the corporate value to RTÉ of the Cork residency in particular - the “central pillar” of RTÉ’s chamber music provision - has fully justified the organisation’s investment of time, money and management over the past fifty years in its contribution to the promotion of chamber music in Ireland, and especially in terms of RTÉ’s standing and profile in the wider international musical community.

I would also add the following opinions:

RTÉ attracts a limited profile from its directly managed, nationwide toured performances, and from its broadcasts of events not directly managed by the organisation; this limited profile nonetheless adds to the overall corporate value for the organisation. It may be worth considering, however, if the balance between the organisation’s promotion of directly managed chamber music events and its broadcasting of chamber music in general is in need of review.

The live audiences RTÉ attracts for its chamber music performances which it directly administers and manages are at least on a par with those promoted by other agencies and organisations. It has been suggested, in fact, that the public recognition of and repeated acquaintance with the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet has led to higher than “normal” audience figures; as I have already noted, a number of external factors can influence attendance at chamber music events. I think there are explorations which if undertaken could increase that audience potential and thereby add corporate value to RTÉ’s investment.

In considering the following **Options** for future provision of chamber music, as requested under this Term of Reference, it is important to bear in mind that the concept of the residency is separate from the quartet which currently holds that position.

**1. Concentrate on re-developing and re-invigorating the residency with the current incumbents and explore new objectives and partnerships.**

*The RTÉ Vanbrugh partnership has produced a great many outcomes over the space of almost twenty five years. In the past few years, however, it seems to me that the energy in that partnership has subsided. This option seeks change through re-approaching the original objectives of the residency in discussion with the main protagonists, and determining new ones – for example, maybe concentrating on fewer areas of touring live concert performances but establishing more in-depth partnerships with specific local promoters/arts officers/venues – “mini-residencies” with time-limited and targeted aims. More focused, broadcast programme content and the use of the multimedia facilities available to RTÉ may also help to re-invigorate the partnership and public profile of the residency through more “on air” presence. Use of the RTÉ Cork studios for recording regular broadcasts could be investigated. A renewed connection and partnership with the well established music educational infrastructure in Cork county could also produce new results. A re-visioning of wider local partnerships and collaborations could be undertaken.*

**2. Plan a “succession” strategy for the residency with the current incumbents and within a specified period.**

*The Vanbrugh Quartet has benefited from and brought benefits to the RTÉ residency over a very long period of time. For the quartet to move to a different stage in its own career development would be challenging as indeed would replacing the RTÉ Vanbrugh in Cork - its individual members have made that city and the country their home. This option suggests gradual change and allows for the benefits of the residency to be exploited and experienced by new emerging chamber music ensembles – of whatever instrumental combination. It takes into account that the process of withdrawal by the Vanbrugh and the establishment of a new ensemble there would have to be achieved over a period of perhaps up to three years with specific targets and milestones agreed by the current incumbents and RTÉ. An open, parallel process of identifying a new ensemble, of whatever instrumental combination, would also have to be determined and defined, building in time limited aims and objectives.*

**3. Continue the residency at the end of the current supply contract with new incumbents in the same location and explore new partnerships.**

*As above, an open process of identifying a new ensemble would have to be determined and defined. This would take time but the current contract with the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet lasts only until the end of December 2010. Although this option would seek to have in place a new ensemble by January 2011, such a timetable would be tight as it also involves the exploration of new partnerships. However, in the past, there have been temporal breaks in the succession process. Although the string quartet medium is widely regarded as the most persuasive instrumental combination because of its wide repertoire*

and its “transportability”, there is no reason to think that only a string quartet is possible in Cork. That city has a thriving school of music which covers all instruments. A string trio, a wind quintet, a brass quintet, a piano trio or a piano plus instrument combination (or indeed even voice combination) is also a possibility to be explored. In any new contract, time durations and specific targets should be clearly defined. Specific broadcasting goals and a stronger educational element to the contract may be introduced – “education” in its widest sense and including audiences other than “young”.

**4. Transfer the residency with new incumbents to another location and develop new partnerships with other key players.**

Cork has had fifty years association with the RTÉ Residency and this option looks at transferring the residency to another centre. That centre would preferably have a connection with music making, perhaps preferably at third level. Limerick, Galway, Sligo or perhaps Dundalk or Waterford may prove fertile ground upon which to build new partnerships, relationships and new ideas. As above, a string trio, a wind quintet, a brass quintet, a piano trio or a piano plus instrument combination (or indeed even voice combination) is also a possibility to be explored. In any new contract, time durations and specific targets should be clearly defined. Specific broadcasting goals and a stronger educational element to the contract may be introduced – “education” in its widest sense and including audiences other than “young”.

**5. Terminate the residency and explore the possible outcomes of new chamber music projects and partnerships.**

This option looks at terminating the residency and using the budget to initiate different types of projects and partnerships with multiple centres in Ireland. These could include short term “residencies” in specific areas which could culminate perhaps in the chamber music festivals already in existence. It would not be impossible to start a new chamber music festival as the outcome of such short term residencies but this is an unlikely aspect of this option in the current financial climate. The idea of a chamber music competition could become part of this option. Short term educational projects, again not simply connected with the “young”, could also be explored and linkage with institutes of technology and establishments at higher education levels may be helpful. Again, a string quartet is not the only chamber music combination available for this sort of intervention. A wider exploration of the chamber music repertoire offering new directions would be preferable under this option.

**6. Terminate the residency and discontinue proactive chamber music provision.**

In this option, RTÉ would withdraw from proactive financing and management of the residency in any shape or form and simply offer broadcasting opportunities for events which were already planned by other agencies, as long as the internal resources, scheduling and programming content allowed for this to be a possibility.

- **ToR 2: With reference to other organisations which support chamber music, in Ireland and elsewhere, consider ways to optimise value for money to RTÉ in future chamber music services provision.**

Through the current contract with the incumbents of the residency, I am of the opinion that RTÉ does not make full use of the broadcasting possibilities available to it and, in that respect, this situation could be interpreted as not producing value for money. This is something which RTÉ itself can amend.

In other residencies nationally, such as those connected in the past with the Vogler and the ConTempo, the length of the residency was considerably shorter than the RTÉ Residency involving the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet. Short term residencies do not achieve the same degree of involvement either for the community or for the ensemble but its aims are necessarily more focussed and to some extent of a different nature. However, there is no reason why in future shorter term residencies should not be considered. RTÉ could disaggregate aspects of its current residency budget for a series of short term, goal specific residencies; these could thus cover more areas of the country in residency terms and optimise value for money through management and financial partnerships with local arts officers, venues and/or promoters.

Internationally, comparison with the methods adopted by Chamber Music America could provide models for this approach, as indeed could the university and other venue/festival-based residencies established in the UK. Partnership in Ireland could be explored with other educational establishments, Music Network and even the Arts Council. Strong local partnerships are key to this approach.

In all cases of RTÉ involvement with the provision and support of chamber music, optimisation of value for money would probably involve greater concentration on broadcast product in whatever aspect of the multimedia facilities available to the organisation and on whatever channel.

- **ToR3: Make a limited number of recommendations for future chamber music supports based on opportunities around activities of range and quality which will impact with audiences at both local and national levels.**

I have made many suggestions throughout the narrative of this report. Recognising that the context and logic of the following “limited number of recommendations” have already been given in the report and have arisen from the process of information gathering undertaken in its preparation, I recommend, in no especial order of priority, that:

1. Partnership possibilities with the following groupings and organisations are explored:
  - The Arts Council
  - Music Network
  - Contemporary Music Centre
  - Music Festival Organisers
  - Local Arts Officers
  - Local Venue Managers
  - Higher Educational /music teaching establishments
  - University Music Departments
2. A study of chamber music audiences is undertaken with particular regard to the needs of older audiences.
3. Sponsor partnership is sought for the RTÉ Residency in whatever form it may take.
4. A web-based archive of the RTÉ Residency, with particular concentration on the musical achievements of the RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet, is created as part of the RTÉ website.
5. RTÉ internally reviews its current opportunities for a greater broadcasting profile of chamber music through all its channels and multimedia outlets.

## CONTACTS IN THE INFORMATION GATHERING PROCESS

## APPENDIX A

Cathal Goan, (Director-General, RTÉ)

Clare Duignan, (Managing Director, RTÉ Radio)

Seamus Crimmins, (Executive Director, RTÉ Performing Groups)

David McKenna, (Executive Producer, Cross Media and Arts RTÉ TV),

Kieran Dempsey, (General Manager, RTÉ Performing Groups)

Pauline Ashwood, (former Manager RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet)

Aodán ODubhghaill, (Head of RTÉ Lyric fm)

Greg Ellis, Keith Pascoe, Simon Aspell, Christopher Marwood (RTÉ Vanbrugh Quartet)

John O’Kane, (The Arts Council)

Rosemary Collier, (The Arts Council )

Niall Doyle, (Chief Executive, Opera Ireland and former Executive Director , RTÉ Performing Groups)

Dr.Cliona Doris, (Acting Head DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama)

Dr.John O’Conor, (Director, Royal Irish Academy of Music)

Eve O’Kelly, (Director, Contemporary Music Centre)

Aisling Roche, ( Acting CEO Music Network)

Dr. Geoffrey Spratt, (Director, CIT School of Music)

Francis Humphrys (Artistic Director/CEO, West Cork Music)

Dr.Jane O’Leary (Artistic Director, Music for Galway)

Rhona McGrath (Arts Officer, Sligo County Council)

Pat Grogan (Promoter, Music for Waterford)

Dr.Martin Barrett (Development Director, University Concert Hall ,Limerick)

Dr.Ian Wilson (Composer)

Ian McDonagh (Arts Officer, Cork County Council)

Liz Meaney (Arts Officer, Cork City Council)

Margaret Lioi (Chief Executive Officer, Chamber Music America)

John Horgan (Music lover)

Alasdair Tait (Young Concert Artists Trust, London)

## QUESTIONS

- 1a What do you think can be learnt from the experience of RTÉ in chamber music promotion over the past years?
- 1b What do you think has been the general impact of this association with string quartets in general?
- 1c Over and above the prime consideration of recording programme content, do you think residencies should be the prime way for RTÉ to be involved in chamber music?
- 1d Do you think residencies are the only way for RTÉ to proceed in the future?
- 1e Do you think separating touring, recording and residency would be an effective way for RTÉ to develop chamber music throughout Ireland in the future?
- 2a Do you think the policy of a “resident” RTÉ string quartet in one particular centre is something which should be promoted into the future?
- 2b Are there other centres which could/should also be closely involved?
- 2c Do you think there is an optimum duration for resident soloists or groups?
- 2d Do you think a string quartet is the best combination for a chamber music residency?
- 2e Are there other chamber music combinations which may be effective in residency terms and also in other different ways?
- 2f What do you think of RTÉ engaging solo musicians for possible residencies?
- 3a Do you think there is a particular repertoire which should /could be profiled through chamber music residencies and tours and recordings?
- 3b As more and more young Irish musicians reach musical maturity, do you think there is a particular way in which RTÉ could/should encourage their development in the world of chamber music?
- 3c Do you think RTÉ’s continuing engagement with the area of chamber music enhances prospects for commissioning new music?
- 3d Should RTÉ look at closer involvement with “mentoring” young chamber music players, or indeed amateur chamber music players? How do you think it would do that?
- 4a Do you think there are other promoters of chamber music who would, could and/or should partner with RTÉ and vice versa in a formal agreement? Who do you think those partners would/could/should be?
- 4b What do you think might be the advantages of that more formal approach to partnership?
- 5a How you think RTÉ’s current engagement with the area of chamber music attracts audiences and profile? How do you think RTÉ could encourage greater involvement in the future?
- 5b Should RTÉ be encouraging more educational and community outreach projects in this area of chamber music? How do you think it would do that?

## APPENDIX C

**PHILIP HAMMOND** was born in Belfast in 1951. He graduated from Queen's University Belfast in 1974 as a Bachelor of Music and Master of Arts. He was awarded a Doctorate of Music from Queen's in July 2003 – and he became the first person ever to graduate as a composer at this level in the university.

He retired from the **Arts Council of Northern Ireland** in 2009 after twenty years as a Director there. This included two years secondment to government from 2005 - 2007 to design and manage an international Arts Festival in Washington DC, complementing Northern Ireland's presence in 2007 at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

Philip Hammond's wider career has encompassed teaching, performing and writing. His work as a broadcaster and composer continues to bring him before public attention either on radio or on the concert platform. He is regularly engaged as a presenter and correspondent by the BBC and RTÉ and currently he writes for the Belfast Telegraph and the Culture Northern Ireland website.

As a composer, Philip Hammond has been commissioned by individuals and groups in Ireland and in Britain. He has written works for, among others, the **Ulster Orchestra**, the contemporary ensemble **Lontano**, the **Brodsky String Quartet** and for individual musicians such as **James Galway**, **Sarah Walker**, **Suzanne Murphy**, **Tasmin Little**, **Barry Douglas**, **Nikolai Demidenko** and **Ann Murray**.

He is often commissioned as an "occasional" composer and his "**Waterfront Fanfares**" (1997) were written to open the Waterfront Hall in Belfast. His "**...the starry dynamo in the machinery of night...**" was specially commissioned by Queen's University to celebrate the visit of President Clinton in May 2001 and was subsequently toured around the USA by Camerata Ireland. The National Youth Orchestra of Ireland commissioned and performed his "**Carnavalesque**" for Double Orchestra and Percussion in July 2003 which was subsequently toured around Europe.

Many of his works have a strong literary association. His orchestral piece "**Die Ersten Blumen**" (1996) was a response to a poem by Hermann Hesse. "**The White Lake**" (1999) was a choral and orchestral setting of a specially commissioned poem by Michael Longley, and one of his most recent large-scale compositions, "**Psalms and Songs from the Hebrew**" (2000) for chorus and orchestra, was a setting of mediaeval Jewish poetry from Spain.

His work, "**...while the sun shines**", was commissioned by BBC Radio Three for performance in September 2005 and celebrates the music of the great Irish conductor and composer Sir Hamilton Harty (in 1979, Philip Hammond contributed two biographical chapters to a book on **Sir Hamilton Harty** pub. Blackstaff).

In retirement, Philip Hammond has again expanded his work as a respected arts correspondent and music critic in several media. Most recently as a composer, he worked on a series of piano pieces, focused on Lorca and written for the young Irish pianist Cathal Breslin to premiere in his debut recital at the Carnegie Hall, New York, in June 2009.