

IN A DARK YEAR

THE ARTS IN LOCKDOWN

Report on the Arts in Northern Ireland during the Covid-19 Pandemic
By the Arts Council of Northern Ireland

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INTRODUCTION

“The music scene in Northern Ireland has flourished in peace time these last 20 or so years; but it’s still a fairly young scene and needs protecting if we want to have a music scene on the other side of all this”

Gary Lightbody, Snow Patrol

The Arts in lockdown; bright lights in a dark year tells an extraordinary story. It covers the journey of Northern Ireland’s arts and cultural sectors through the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic from the first national lockdown in March 2020. From there, practically overnight, we had to shut down our live arts and entertainment industries. Artists found their livelihoods under immediate threat and work for freelancers disappeared, as theatres, venues and festivals were asked to close their doors and go dark.

Against this bleak backdrop, the arts community rallied and did what it does best: it innovated, it evolved. Our artists and arts organisations developed exciting new ways of engaging with audiences, mainly online. The arts became once again our bright lights, providing entertainment, solace and inspiration and a very necessary distraction, helping to lift everyone’s spirits, just when we needed it most.

The Department for Communities and the Arts Council were able to offer the sector a lifeline, through a package of emergency funding programmes. This kept many afloat and protected key organisations. However, even as the rest of society moves forward, existential challenges persist for this already fragile sector; it has somehow to rebuild the confidence of audiences to return to live, in-person performances and events, whilst operating at a greatly-reduced capacity. So there remains a serious job of work to be done if we want to restore our rich and varied arts and culture assets, for all to enjoy, on the other side of the pandemic.

In the following pages we endeavour to tell their story. We have highlighted some of the key findings of Arts Council research conducted during the period, including the impact of the pandemic on returning audiences, and the role of the emergency funding programmes in stabilising and preserving the sector. Most importantly, we have gathered together a small but highly illustrative sample of the exceptional creative performances and activities that Northern Ireland’s arts and cultural organisations continued to provide for people during the public health crisis. These are just some of the creative interventions that shone out, like bright lights, through the dark times and gave us the creative lift, the promise of better times ahead. These are the Arts in Lockdown.

Liam Hannaway, Chair and Roisín McDonough, Chief Executive
Arts Council of Northern Ireland
June 2021



LOCKDOWN

“The benefits of the arts on our social wellbeing and cohesion, our physical and mental health, our education system, our status in the world and our economy are not just valuable, they are essential.”

Communities Minister, Carál Ní Chuilín

Friday 20th March 2020 was a defining date, as the UK Government instructed cafes, bars, restaurants, nightclubs, theatres, venues, cinemas, gyms and leisure centres to close, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Social distancing and restrictions on public gatherings put an end to live, in-person music, theatre and festivals, as we knew them. Virtually overnight, artists found their livelihoods threatened and organisations saw their ability to generate income disappear. Venues closed and freelancers had their contracts cancelled by commissioning organisations. For a sector already in a fragile state due to decades of underinvestment, the pandemic signalled ruinous losses.

Findings taken in the first 3 months of lockdown:



Source: 'Impact of the Coronavirus on the Northern Ireland Arts Sector', April 2020 and 'Arts Council of Northern Ireland Box Office Survey', June 2020

ARTISTS RESPOND

The Lyric Theatre's Splendid Isolation, a BBC/ACNI Culture in Quarantine project of 6 short films

“To be able to harness the fantastic creative talent we have on our doorstep and reflect the lockdown stories of Northern Ireland is truly exciting.”

Paul McClean, Executive Editor,
Arts, Music & Learning, BBC NI

The response of our artists to their predicament was nothing short of astonishing. Finding themselves unable to work directly with their audiences, but refusing to simply 'dig in', they found new ways to engage, largely by embracing online and digital platforms. The arts remained at the heart of life, providing a tonic to lockdown, entertaining people, enriching our lives and lifting our spirits, when we needed it most. From the earliest days of lockdown, local audiences got to enjoy everything, from online circus skills to virtual exhibitions, to live streaming of performances and recorded theatre productions. Artists reached out, many reaching further than they had ever done before. Online platforms created a shift in how the arts are consumed, with the potential to share local work, not only with wider local audiences, but with global audiences; in a sense, to evolve.



Source: 'Arts Council of Northern Ireland Covid-19 Organisational Survey', August 2020

PUBLIC TURNS INCREASINGLY TO THE ARTS

“I watched more theatre and listened to writers I wouldn’t have before. Suddenly my world was open.”

Female, Minority Ethnic, 35-45, rural

Hunger for the arts has never been stronger. Never have they been more needed and more appreciated. With the public turning increasingly to the arts online for solace and relief in lockdown, they have been our bright lights throughout these challenging times.

However, ingenuity, creative enterprise and dedication alone could never be enough to preserve a sector which has always drawn so much of its strength and inspiration from live work with live audiences.

Audience engagement during the pandemic.



Source: 'Survey to establish arts and culture engagement levels in NI during the COVID-19 Pandemic', November 2020

EMERGENCY FUNDING LIFELINE

“The support helped many like myself stay in this industry, keep going at a skill and passion nurtured and constructed around many years of dedication and hard work.”

Joe Lindsay, TV & Radio Broadcaster and DJ, on receiving DfC/ACNI Emergency Funding support

Emergency funding packages from the Department of Communities and the Arts Council provided a vital lifeline. The Arts Council co-designed and administered eight new programmes for individual practitioners and arts and cultural organisations. We awarded some 3,370 grants, totalling £26 million. This funding, in tandem with wider government support, including furloughing, has kept most artists and cultural organisations afloat. But only just. The arts are far from out of deep waters.

DfC / ACNI Emergency Funding Programmes (April – November 2020)

Programme	Grants	Grant Amount (£)
Artists Emergency Programme	224	£547,320
Health & Safety Capital Programme	53	£776,950
Small Capital Programme	69	£658,877
Stability & Renewal Programme for Organisations	167	£10,457,126
Individuals Emergency Resilience Programmes (1 & 2)	2,645	£10,751,994
Organisations Emergency Programmes (1 & 2)	212	£2,849,972
Grand Total	3,370	£26,042,239

TOWARDS REOPENING

“We need to come back. The arts community was on its knees prior to the pandemic. Theatres need to be brave. Of course, they need to be safe as well, but we also must believe that it’s going to be alright.”

Tara Lynne O’Neill, Derry Girls’ actor

The transition from survival mode to reopening mode and the eventual return to a relative normality presents significant challenges for all of society. But the arts face particular challenges involved in rebuilding the confidence of audiences and practitioners to return, in person, to live events and indoor venues. It was widely recognised that the arts and cultural sectors would be amongst the very last to reopen; and they were (July 26 2021). There will be no ‘bounce-back’, with the process of post-Covid recalibration likely to take up to a year-and-a-half. They will continue to face an existential threat long after the lifting of lockdown restrictions.

Audience behaviour patterns during the pandemic



Source: ‘After the Interval: Act 1’ (May – June 2020). Findings taken before vaccinations programme

NEW FINANCIAL PRESSURES

“I will also be facing the inevitable fact that I will be asked to reduce my fees for many jobs from businesses also affected by the restrictions. This will not be just a year of hardship, this is only the tip of the iceberg.”

Artist contributor to ACNI Emergency Grant Survey, May 2021

The financial model for the arts in Northern Ireland shifted in recent times in response to sustained public spending reductions – reductions amounting to almost 40 percent in real terms for the arts over the last decade. The majority of arts organisations now have a relatively low dependency on public funding, with half of their income being generated through their earned income, such as box office and sales. The pandemic has placed this model, and the fragile ecosystem it supports, under intolerable pressure. It is financially impossible for theatres, concerts, festivals and venues to operate with audience capacity reduced to twenty or thirty percent. Paradoxically, some of Northern Ireland’s most commercially effective arts organisations now find themselves the worst affected.

Digital ambitions



Source: 'Digital Ambitions Survey', March – April 2021

SECURING RECOVERY

“Covid-19 has had a very negative impact on my mental health, the uncertainty of when I will perform again is devastating.”

Artist contributor to ACNI Emergency Grant Survey, May 2021

To ensure the recovery to health of Northern Ireland’s arts and cultural sectors will require substantial and sustained reinvestment and the kind of positive stance towards the arts that we are seeing elsewhere. To achieve parity with Wales, our closest comparator, will require an additional investment of £18.4m over the next three-year period.

A post-Covid recovery and stimulation package is also needed to:

- Help restore audience confidence to return to live arts
- Allow venues to reopen with greatly reduced capacity
- Support key workers until they can be reemployed by the arts venues who normally employ them
- Support artists and freelance workers to rebuild their careers
- Commission new artistic work for outdoor public spaces
- Develop the skills and capacity of the sector to optimise digital content

We are immensely proud of the huge and vital contribution made by Northern Ireland’s arts and cultural sectors throughout this pandemic; one that has robbed all of us of so much that we took for granted. If we want now to return our arts to at least their former vibrancy, in all their richness and variety, as surely we must, standing still is not an option.

Arts Council spending overview 2020-21:



IMPACT OF THE ARTS

This is a sector that enriches each and every one of our lives in a multitude of extraordinary ways.

The arts sector supports more than 6,500 jobs and generates almost £53m in income every year.

£24m is generated in ticket sales alone. The sector is a key part of the night-time economy; it promotes our international reputation for all the right reasons and significantly enhances our attractiveness as a tourist destination, with museums/art galleries accounting for 14% of all visitor attendances.

This is a sector that brings communities closer together.

The sector makes an acknowledged impact on the health and wellbeing of our citizens, as evidenced through years of partnership and projects with organisations such as the Public Health Agency. It supports pupil attainment in schools across Northern Ireland's most socially deprived areas, and it facilitates social inclusion with our minority ethnic communities. The sector is explicitly recognised as a key priority area in achieving two of the Outcomes of the draft Programme for Government; it impacts directly and indirectly on the delivery of at least eight in total.

This is a sector that provides the skills, the creative talent and the innovation that drive the creative industries.

The Creative Industries employ 29,000 people and generate £1.2bn GVA every year for the local economy. There are an estimated 3,200 creative businesses in Northern Ireland.

With more than half of the Arts Council's investment going to the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland, artists and arts organisations are actively engaged in delivering social change, economic prosperity and building a strong and shared community.

87% of the adult population engages with the arts.



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Mary McGurk in Replay Theatre Company's 'COCO', August 2020.

REPLAY THEATRE COMPANY BRIGHTENS THE LIVES OF SHIELDING VULNERABLE CHILDREN

For this immersive theatre experience for vulnerable children, Replay Theatre Company took a converted transit van on the road to bring a special performance to vulnerable children across Northern Ireland, shielding at home.

Created for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities and complex needs, 'COCO' created a full sensory experience through its use of sound, colour and texture. Written and performed by Mary McGurk and directed by Andrew Stanford, each performance was tailored to just one child and their family, creating a very different and intimate theatre experience. The show was performed to 126 children in locations across Northern Ireland, including Derry/Londonderry, Omagh, Newry, Dungannon, Enniskillen and Donaghadee.



Actor David Pearse is pictured with cameraman Jim Creagh filming 'Best Wishes', Abbie Spallen's tale of an elderly recluse who views the actions of local good Samaritans with distrust, as part of *Splendid Isolation: Lockdown Drama*, June 2020.

LYRIC THEATRE TELLS STORIES OF LOCKDOWN IN NI

Culture in Quarantine was a collaboration between BBC Arts, the Lyric Theatre and BBC NI, supported by the Arts Council. The Lyric project commissioned six new short dramas from some of Northern Ireland's biggest names in writing and acting, including Lisa McGee (*Derry Girls*), David Ireland (*Cyprus Avenue*) and Conleth Hill (*Game of Thrones*).

'*Splendid Isolation: Lockdown Drama*', broadcast on BBC NI in June 2020 and was available thereafter on BBC iPlayer, reaching new international audiences for drama from NI. It explored the positive and negative aspects of social isolation and lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Over 100,000 people tuned in to watch it on the Iplayer and it was nominated for a Royal Television Society award for Best Drama. A second series of films is planned for Summer 2021.



'The Broads' perform outside the Cancer Centre, Belfast City Hospital, June 2020.

MARIA CONNOLLY TAKES LIVE THEATRE TO ISOLATED OLDER PEOPLE

One of the first live, outdoor, socially distanced performances to take place in Northern Ireland as we emerged from the first lockdown, actress and writer Maria Connolly transformed herself into Judy Garland for her new musical show 'The Broads'. Accompanied by Christina Nelson as Bette Midler, Roisin Gallagher as Marilyn Monroe and musician Richard Clements, the show was designed to appeal to older people living in social isolation.

It was performed at a range of hospitals, care homes and assisted living settings, in Belfast, Bangor and Carrickfergus. After Maria was awarded the emergency funding for the project by the Arts Council she went on to receive additional funding from Lisburn and Castlereagh Borough Council for a further 32 shows. Over the last year, 'The Broads' has entertained and improved the mental wellbeing of more than 3,000 healthcare staff, patients and vulnerable adults.



'We're Still Here', a film written and directed by Will McConnell for Culture Night 2020, featuring Cherrie on Top. September 2020.

CULTURE NIGHT MOVES 100 FREE EVENTS ONLINE

In September, the annual Culture Night celebrations moved from the city's streets to stream online across a number of virtual platforms. Over 82,000 people tuned in to watch Northern Ireland's largest free cultural event, as venues, including St Anne's Cathedral, and core Arts Council-funded venues such as the Black Box, the Oh Yeah Centre and The MAC, became the backdrop for a packed evening of arts and culture.

Among performers taking part were the Ulster Orchestra, Lyric Theatre, Cherrie On Top, Susie Blue, Sinead O'Donnell, tenx9, Charles Hurts, Becha, Stephen Beggs, Paul Currie, Rachael McCabe, Bounce Culture and Belfast Community Circus School. Whilst social distancing and Covid-19 restrictions meant the event could not be presented in the same way for 2020, the team at Culture Night successfully designed a full programme of over 100 free events, including music, debates, exhibitions and films, reminding us how vital culture is to all our lives.



Snow Water presents 'O Holy Night' performed by Mary McCabe of Northern Ireland Opera, as part of 'Under a Christmas Sky'. December 2020.

SNOW WATER OFFERS CHRISTMAS GIFT WITH SHOWCASE OF NI'S FINEST CREATIVE TALENT

With much-needed emergency funding, several of Northern Ireland's finest musicians, poets and storytellers performed in a special cultural highlight, 'Under a Christmas Sky', produced by Snow Water and filmed live at the Ulster Folk Museum.

Beautiful poetry from the likes of Michael Longley, George Bernard Shaw, Thackeray and Frank Ormsby, were combined with traditional carols and songs by Darlene Love, Joni Mitchell and Bing Crosby, and given new interpretations.

One cultural treat was revealed online each day in the lead up to Christmas, and on Christmas Eve the full programme was broadcast locally and showcased internationally to digital audiences across Europe and North America. Over 113,000 viewers watched the performances and the film was chosen by Tourism Ireland to be part of their worldwide campaign.



Ryan McMullan performing his tribute to the NHS with the Ulster Orchestra. December 2020.

ULSTER ORCHESTRA AND RYAN MCMULLAN CREATE A MUSICAL TRIBUTE TO THE NHS

Rising international star Ryan McMullan collaborated with the Ulster Orchestra to record a fittingly poignant new song, written and performed in tribute to the commitment and contribution of the NHS and its staff during the Covid-19 pandemic. 'If This Is The End' is a eulogy for those who have lost someone during 2020 and have been unable to mourn their loved ones in the usual way. It was commissioned by the Ulster Orchestra and supported by the Arts Council, before its release in December 2020. The song has had more than 27,000 views on YouTube.

Watch it here: <https://youtu.be/RRCHVs9jB2Q>.



Lady Portia Di'Mante entertains with online drag queen bingo, February 2021.

LADY PORTIA ENTERTAINS WITH ONLINE DRAG QUEEN BINGO AND CABARET

Marcus Hunter-Neill, well known for his drag queen persona Lady Portia Di'Mante, put his performance skills to good use during lockdown to deliver over 100 free online drag queen bingo and cabaret sessions. Funding received from the Arts Council's Emergency Funding Programme allowed Marcus to purchase new equipment and develop his video editing skills, as well as commissioning other artists to perform segments for the shows.

The sessions were open to all and designed to give a sense of connection to those feeling isolated and alone during the pandemic. Funds raised through donations were ploughed back into the community as Marcus cooked and delivered food parcels for those in need to over 400 homes in the Belfast and Greater Belfast area.



Max Cooper performs at the AVA Festival 2020 in Belfast, November 2020.

AUDIO VISUAL ARTS FESTIVAL REACHES NEW GLOBAL HEIGHTS

Over the last six years, AVA has developed Northern Ireland's only techno music festival and conference, offering a platform to develop local electronic artists. AVA has been named in the Top Ten Best City Music Festivals by *The Guardian*.

In November, AVA Festival evolved their offering, working with long-standing partner Red Bull with funding from the Arts Council's Organisations Emergency Programme, to transform the festival into an unforgettable online event that would dramatically expand their reach from the local to the international. In a homecoming show, Max Cooper's stunning electronic-audio-visual stream, set against the beautiful backdrop of Belfast's Carlisle Memorial Church, was streamed free of charge to an unprecedented global audience of 300,000.



Aisling McCormick's In-Situ Solos. June 2021.

NEW FILM SERIES RE-IMAGINES BELFAST STREETS AS A PERFORMANCE SPACE

Inspired by the empty streets and 'stay home' message during the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, choreographer Aisling McCormick's reimagined Belfast as an outdoor performance space for her latest project, 'In Situ Solos'. The six short films, captured by Elspeth Visher (Vish Films), each follow a female dancer, as they move through different parts of the city, exploring the familiar streets in the town centre and pathways around the docklands. Based on unique movement scores, the miniature solo dances explore the idea of becoming hypersensitive to the space around us, when told to stay and not go. The funding also allowed Aisling to collaborate with Janie Doherty, Mayte Segura, Paula O'Reilly, Sandy Cuthburt, Vasiliki Stasinaki, as well as Elspeth Vischer of Vish Films to complete the project.



Greater Shantallow Community Arts received emergency funding to help sustain community arts provision in Derry/Londonderry. February 2021.

GREATER SHANTALLOW COMMUNITY ARTS HOSTS ONLINE ARTS CLASSES FOR DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Greater Shantallow Community Arts is a community organisation which provides access to the arts for people living in disadvantaged communities. They received support through the Organisations Emergency Programme to keep their Studio 2 Community Arts Centre open and to deliver a blended programme of weekly arts classes during lockdown to 1,200 participants of various ages and abilities. Their goal was to not let the pandemic hinder their work but to keep working to ensure that no one was left behind. Despite the many challenges presented as a result of Covid-19, GSCA also managed to complete phase 2 of their Studio 2 Youth and Community Arts refurbishment programme, allowing for even greater access to Youth and Community Arts Participation as the organisation continues to grow and develop.



Bradley Manor Nursing Home took part in Arts Care's Arts 4 U programme which upskills workers to deliver arts activities to residential and care home residents. May 2021.

ARTS CARE CONTRIBUTES TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF VULNERABLE OLDER PEOPLE IN CARE

In direct response to the pandemic, Arts Care, one of Northern Ireland's leading arts, health and well-being organisations, provided an online arts training programme for healthcare workers. Their Arts 4 U programme helped to upskill care workers and give them the confidence to deliver arts activities, including music, drawing, storytelling and dance, to vulnerable older people in residential care settings. Art Boxes were also delivered to residential and nursing care homes across the five Health and Social Care Trust areas, to complement the online resources, including all the materials needed to enjoy the various arts activities on offer. The programme helped staff use the arts as a tool to promote positive mental, emotional and physical health at a time when many residents are suffering greatly from isolation and loneliness as a result of the pandemic restrictions.



Conleth Kane released a remix of his hit song Proud to mark the 2021 Belfast Pride Celebrations. July 2021.

SINGER, CONLETH KANE, RELEASES ANTHEMIC SONG, PROUD, REMIXED BY LEADING POP MUSIC PRODUCERS

In July, singer-songwriter Conleth Kane released a new remix of his 2019 hit song, Proud, supported by Individual Emergency Resilience Programme (IERP) funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Department for Communities. Following the cancellation of multiple promotional opportunities for his EP in 2020, his 2019 track was remixed by 7th Heaven, the world leading pop music producers behind Kylie, Katie Perry and Britney, to mark the 2021 Belfast Pride celebrations. Originally hailing from Northern Ireland, Conleth Kane trained at the prestigious Arts Educational Schools in London and performed on screen and stage, starring in musicals in the West End and all over the UK and Ireland before becoming a singer-songwriter.



Dan Leith publishes a reassuring new story for children, 'The Stargazing Otter', October 2020.

DAN LEITH, THE STARGAZING OTTER

Belfast author Dan Leith penned a new story, *The Stargazing Otter*, to offer comfort and support to children suffering from mental health worries, as rates of young people reporting anxiety and depression soared during the pandemic. Stunningly illustrated and beautifully written, it tells the tale of an otter who finds himself so caught up with the beauty and details of the world that he is left behind on the riverbank and must find the courage within himself to move on. Dan has been a freelance performing artist and theatre-maker since 2008 and worked with companies including Tinderbox, Replay Theatre Company, Spanner In The Works, C21 and Young At Art. With theatres closed and work cancelled, Arts Council funding gave Dan an opportunity to devote his time to his writing and to produce his first book.



Moxie perform at the Duncairn, December 2020.

DUNCAIRN ARTS CENTRE LAUNCHES POPULAR WEEKLY VIRTUAL CABARET

When The Duncairn realised that they wouldn't be able to open their doors for classes and performances, they came up with the idea of the Virtual Cabaret. Artists were invited to submit videos of themselves performing from their own homes. The Virtual Cabaret aired on Youtube and Facebook Live every Saturday evening for two months, free with a link for donations. Their engagement rates grew week on week with additional shows added, reaching 10,000 viewers, including their latest Ring of Gullion Session in South Armagh.



Arborist live streamed performance at No Alibis.

SILVERINK, STAGE LEFT

Stage Left is a live streaming platform which enables artists to generate the income they deserve from online performances. Offering high-quality live video performances to fans, Stage Left offers an ethical and viable model for performance artists. Stage Left manages ticketing and access to performances, and flexibly transfers payment to artists, venues, management and technical experts.

The payment model ensures that the primary beneficiaries of any performance streamed are the artists themselves. They benefit from a uniquely generous financial model, dedicated customer service and an environment that's focused on building important fan relationships.



Clare Gormley, Belfast Photo Festival and Joanna Johnston, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, pictured at the Zanele Muholi's exhibition outside Queen's University Belfast. June 2021.

BELFAST PHOTO FESTIVAL RETURNS WITH STUNNING OUTDOOR EXHIBITIONS

Belfast Photo Festival returned in 2021 with an online and offline programme of immersive exhibitions and large-scale outdoor artworks showcased in galleries and public spaces throughout Belfast. Huge artworks were draped on buildings and displayed in public parks and spaces including Botanic Gardens, Queen's University, Donegall Quay, and Victoria Square, to create a truly inclusive and accessible festival experience. Alongside its physical exhibitions, the festival hosted an extensive programme of online talks and events. Taking "Future(s)" as its theme, this year's festival tackled issues as diverse as climate change, migration, the advancement of technology, government surveillance and the power of protest, to explore how the future is shaped by our actions in the present.



Mayte Segura and Victor Henriquez collaborated to create a new work entitled Dialogos, September 2020.

RESPONSE TO LOCKDOWN EXPLORED IN NEW LATIN AMERICAN INSPIRED WORK

With support from the Artists Emergency Programme, Mayte Segura, a Belfast-based contemporary and Mexican folk dancer/choreographer collaborated with musician Victor Henriquez to create a new dance and music work, 'Dialogos'. The piece explored the concept of confinement and the artists' individual and collective feelings as Latin American artists living in Northern Ireland. It was performed at Accidental Theatre, recorded by filmmaker Matthew Faris and broadcast online. In recognition of the success of the project, Mayta was recognised as an artist promoting Mexican culture in the UK and received an invitation from the Mexican embassy to virtually perform for Mexican Independence Day in the UK, reaching audiences across the globe.



Ulster Youth Orchestra online rehearsals, August 2020

ULSTER YOUTH ORCHESTRA STUNS WITH AMBITIOUS ONLINE PERFORMANCE

In November 2020, The Ulster Youth Orchestra released a recording of Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet's Fantasy Overture. Recorded separately by 70 young musicians at home on phones and tablets during lockdown, the ambitious performance was directed by the Ulster Orchestra's Chief Conductor Daniele Rustioni. The recording was the result of a 10-day online course. Unable to come together for rehearsals, the group, made up of young people aged between 14 and 23, signed up for the first virtual course in 27 years of the Ulster Youth Orchestra's history. The final film involved individual recordings, carefully patched together to create a spectacular orchestral experience. The film has had over 4,000 views on Youtube.



Musician Jordan Adetunji developed new music and production skills thanks to funding from the Arts Council's Individuals Emergency Resilience Programme, February 2021

NEW MUSIC FROM JORDAN ADETUNJI

Belfast rapper Jordan Adetunji is currently taking the UK Hip Hop scene by storm, with over 300,000 streams on Spotify alone. He has released videos on UK Platforms such as GRM Daily and Link Up TV, and has been featured by the BBC. With scheduled work placed on hold as a result of the pandemic, Jordan applied for funding from the Arts Council through the Individuals Emergency Resilience Programme. With this support he was able to record new tracks, fund a new video and elevate his work by improving his mixing and editing skills. Being able to work with a full production team helped him to gain attention in the industry this year, reaching new audiences with higher quality content that showcases his talent.




Carnival of Colours brings joy and laughter to audiences in Derry/Londonderry, September 2021

CARNIVAL OF COLOURS BRINGS JOY AND LAUGHTER BACK TO THE STREETS AFTER LOCKDOWN

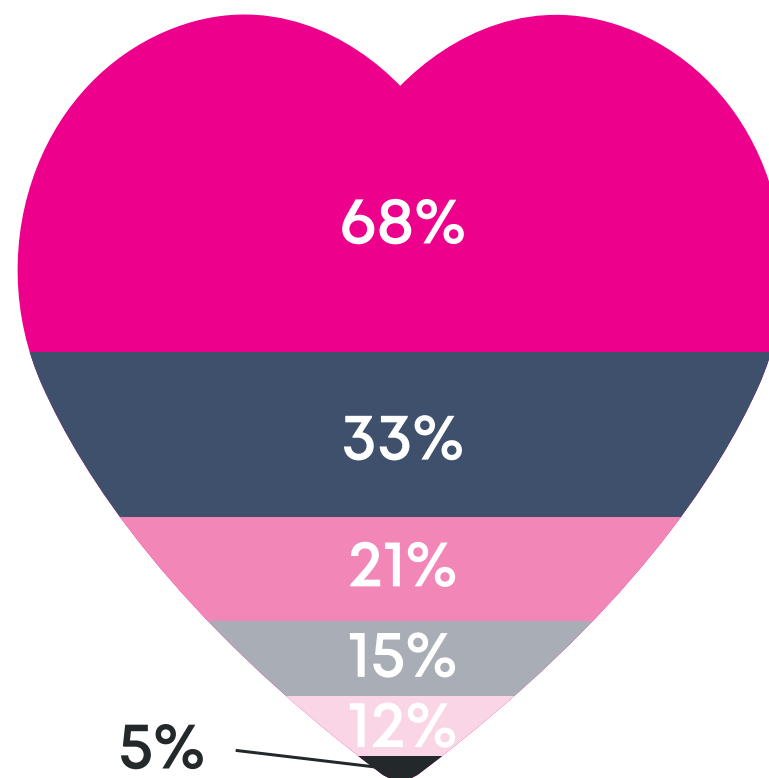
Derry/Londonderry's flagship circus arts and music festival, Carnival of Colours, brought joy and laughter back to the streets of the city with a Covid-compliant programme featuring the best of International Street Theatre, walkabout characters, workshops in circus and roller-skating, graffiti arts demos, portrait painting and music. The festival, organised by In Your Space Circus, attracted people of all ages from across the North West, bringing people together from all walks of life for a shared cultural experience.

ENGAGING WITH THE ARTS DURING LOCKDOWN

Among those engaging with the Arts during lockdown, **13%** did so for the first time. They were more likely to be older, be from lower down the socio-economic scale and have a disability. These are all groups the Arts Council feel it is important to engage in the arts.

13% 

Reasons for engaging with the arts during lockdown . . .



- Personal enjoyment and wellbeing
- Curiosity and something new
- Engaging with friends/family not in their household
- Engaging older people in their care
- Extending social circle
- Engaging with children and young people in their care

Source: 'Survey to establish the arts and culture engagement levels in NI during the COVID-19 Pandemic', November 2020

LIKELIHOOD OF ATTENDING ARTS EVENTS IN AN INDOOR SPACE IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES

64%



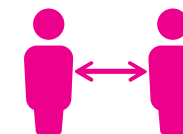
if masks were worn by staff and audience members

66%



if the venue adopted a rigorous cleaning regime

65%



if social distancing measures were strictly enforced

66%



if hand sanitisation was in place

54%



if ticket prices were reduced

67%



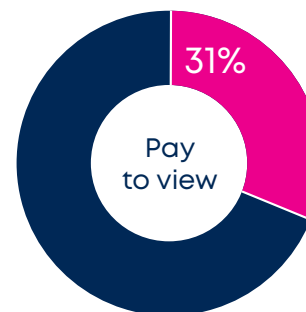
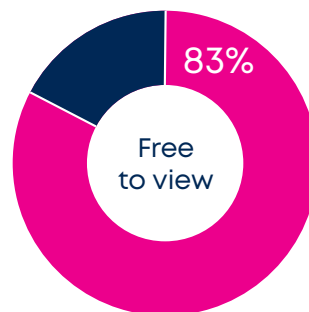
if there were fewer people in the venue

Source: 'Survey to establish the arts and culture engagement levels in NI during the COVID-19 Pandemic', November 2020

CONSUMPTION

% agreeing to subscribe to the following models for consuming the arts

No Yes

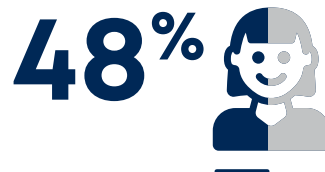


Supportive demographics:
Younger, Higher social classes, Economically active



agreed that ...

'since lockdown, I've really missed the opportunity to go to cultural events and venues'



'since lockdown, I have a greater appreciation of the role the arts can play in my life'

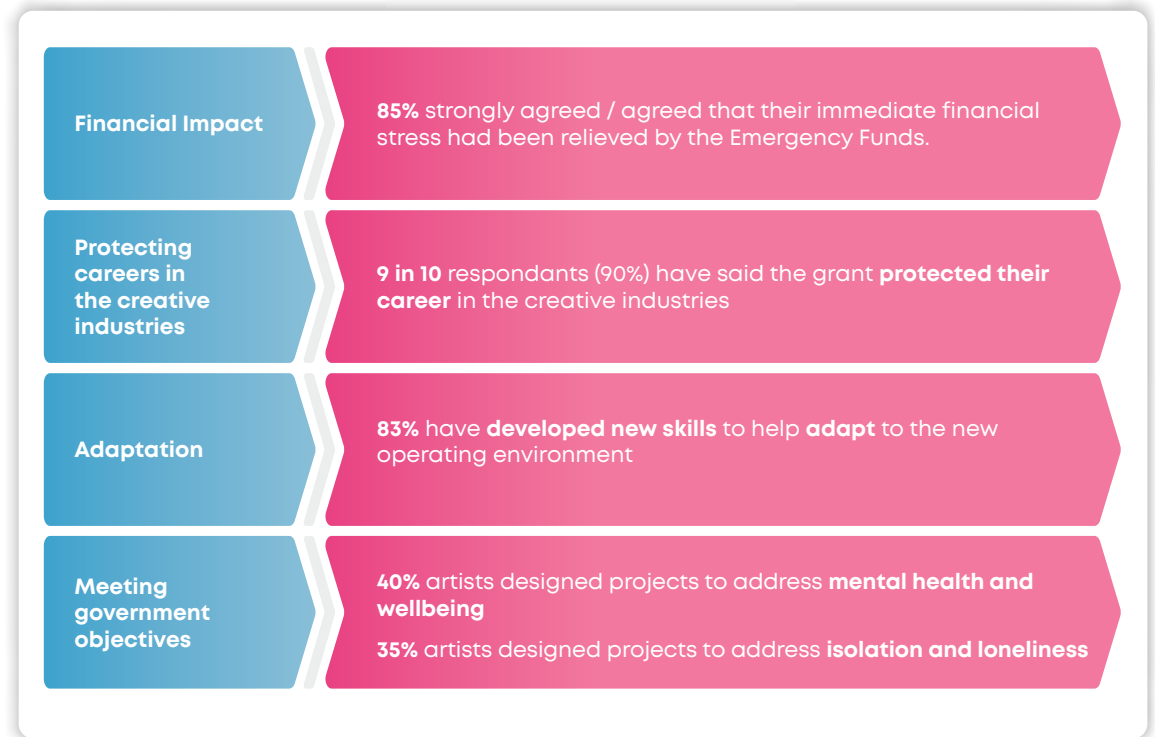


'I feel more inclined to get involved in the arts now there is more opportunity to online or via social media'

Source: 'Survey to establish the arts and culture engagement levels in NI during the COVID-19 Pandemic', November 2020

ATTITUDES

Artists' Evaluation Survey Findings (June 2020 – March 2021)



76% 76% lost over half of their income

£13k £13,000 - average loss of earnings

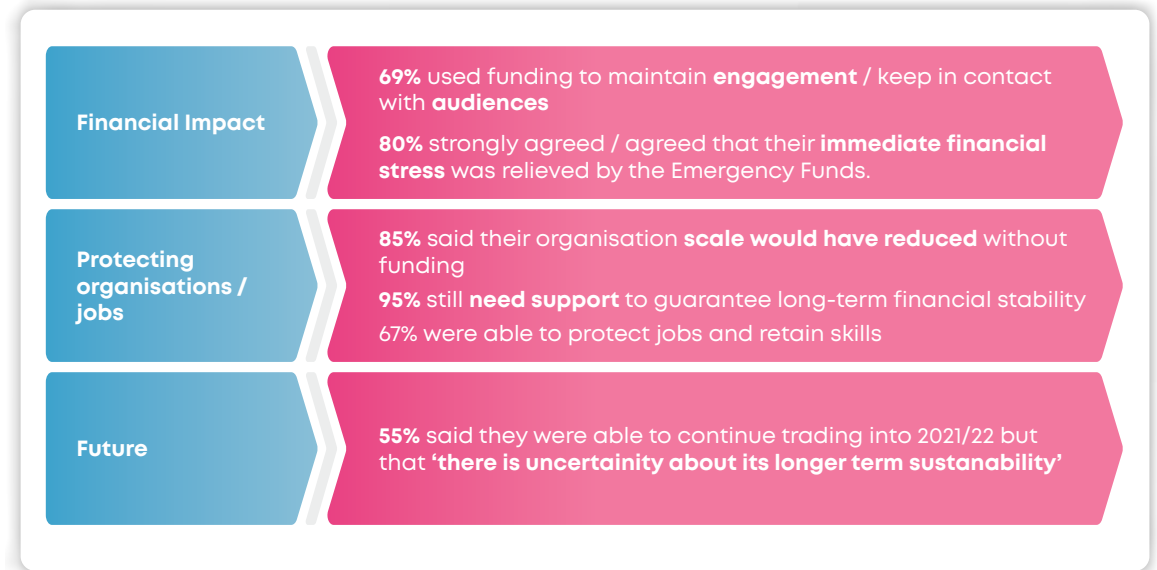
74% 74% were forced to curtail all non-essential spending

35% 35% are unsure if they will continue their careers in the arts

Source: 'Emergency Grant Programme: Survey of Individual Artists', ACNI, July 2021

IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS ON NI'S ARTISTS AND CREATIVE FREELANCERS

Organisations' Evaluation Survey Findings (June 2020 – March 2021)



40% 40% anticipate income levels of 50% less than pre-Covid

48% 48% enhance their online services

31% 31% (only) confident their organisation will remain financially stable

94% 94% state that more support is required for long-term stability

Source: 'Emergency Grant Programme: Survey of Organisations', ACNI, July 2021

IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS ON NI'S ARTS ORGANISATIONS

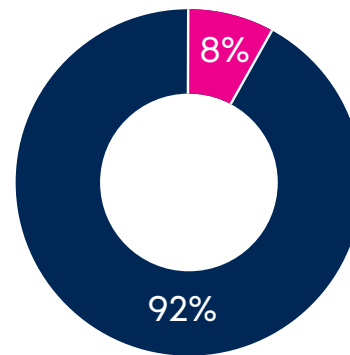
PROTECTING JOBS

Without the funding you received please say if any of the following would have happened?



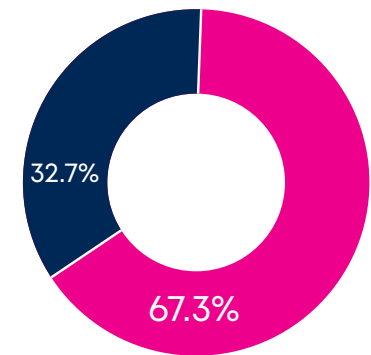
Would your organisation have been able to undertake this project work without the funding received?

No Yes



Have you been able to protect jobs and the retention of skills and experience as a result of the emergency funding you received from ACNI?

No Yes



Source: 'Emergency Grant Programme: Survey of Organisations', ACNI, July 2021

APPENDICES

Appendix I

Emergency Funding Programmes

The Department for Communities (DfC) announced its initial Creative Support Fund of £1.5m in April, subsequently increased to £5.5m in June. The Arts Council and DfC co-designed four support programmes to be administered by the Arts Council: the Artists Emergency Programme and the Individuals Emergency Resilience Programme 1 (part-funded and moderated by Future Screens NI), awarding more than 1,200 grants to individuals, including freelancers, working in the creative and cultural sectors; and two Organisations Emergency Programmes, awarding more than 120 grants to organisations, including those working in the wider creative industries.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's Culture Recovery Fund of £1.57bn, announced in July, represented, via the Barnett consequentials, £33m to the Northern Ireland Executive and resulted in DfC's investment of £29m in the arts, culture, heritage and language sectors. The Arts Council opened a further four emergency support programmes: the Health and Safety Capital Programme awarded 53 grants to enable organisations to adapt their spaces to Covid-19-related challenges; the Small Capital Programme awarded 69 grants for minor work or equipment purchases; the Stability and Renewal Programme for Organisations awarded grants to 168 organisations working in the arts and wider creative industries; a second Individuals Emergency Resilience Programme, awarded more than 1,500 grants to individuals working in the arts and the wider creative industries.

The emergency funding programmes successfully engaged with areas of the creative and cultural sectors with which the Arts Council may not previously have been closely associated. The

programmes supported many applications from individuals and organisations, including DJs, concert promoters and other freelancer creative workers.

Emergency Programmes for Individuals

Artists Emergency Programme

Grants up to £5,000 available for individual artists. Opened April – May 2020.

Awarded approximately £550k, with an average value of £2,240 to over 200 applicants.

Individuals Emergency Resilience Programme 1

Grants of £1,200, £3,000 or £5,000 for individual artists and broadened to include the wider creative industries. To sustain their practice as an artist or creative sector worker. Opened and closed in August 2020. Part funded (£100k) and moderated by Future Screens NI.

Awarded approximately £3.85m, with an average value of £3,500 to over 1000 applicants.

Individuals Emergency Resilience Programme 2

Grants up to £5,000 for individual artists and broadened to include the wider creative industries. Opened December 2020 and closed January 2021. Awarded approximately £6.9m, with an average value of £4,424 to over 1500 applicants.

Emergency Programmes for Organisations

Organisations Emergency Programme 1

Grants up to £25,000 for small- to medium-sized arts organisations to enable them to continue producing creative work, assist with operational costs and to help plan for recovery. Opened and closed in June 2020.

Awarded approximately £2m, with an average value of £13k to 150 organisations.

Organisations Emergency Programme 2

Grants up to £25,000 for organisations working in the arts and the wider creative industries. For operational costs, adapting to Covid-19 restrictions, and producing online content. Emergency Opened and closed in September 2020.

Awarded approximately £900k, with an average value of £14.5k to over 60 organisations.

Health and Safety Capital Programme

For small- to medium-scale organisations in the cultural sector to cover minor works to adapt their spaces to Covid-19 related challenges. Opened September and closed in October 2020. Organisations could apply for minor works to adapt their spaces to Covid-19 related challenges.

Small Capital Programme

For organisations to purchase equipment and/or carry out minor works to their premises which would address Covid-19 requirements and enhance their artistic services. Opened and closed in October 2020.

Stability and Renewal Programme for Organisations

To help stabilise organisations financially to prevent closure and/or to allow continued delivery of outcomes and underpin longer-term changes, and to support the development of Renewal Plans. Opened in October and closed in November 2020.

Awarded approximately £11m, with an average value of £60k to 168 organisations.

Appendix II

Strategic Insights

From the onset of the pandemic, the Arts Council has conducted sector-wide surveys and has published a series of research papers on the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the arts and cultural sectors in Northern Ireland. This work has provided a full picture of the damage inflicted on the sector and how it is adapting to the new operating environment. It has informed our assessment of how best to mitigate the challenges faced by practitioners and organisations, including skills shortages, infrastructural needs, and health and safety requirements.

1. Impact of the Coronavirus on the Northern Ireland Arts Sector (April 2020) <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-Coronavirus-Survey-Report-April2020.pdf>
2. Arts Council of Northern Ireland Box Office Survey <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-Box-Office-Survey-June2020.pdf>
3. Arts Council of Northern Ireland Covid-19 Organisational Survey (August 2020) <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-C19-Organisational-Survey-July2020-Summary-and-Key-Findings.pdf>
4. Survey to establish arts and culture engagement levels in NI during the COVID-19 Pandemic (November 2020) <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-Arts-Culture-engagement-levels-in-NI-during-Covid19-Pandemic-Survey.pdf>

5. Headline Findings from the 2019/20 Annual Funding Survey of Core Arts Organisations (January 2021) <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-AFS-Headline-Report-2019-20.pdf>
6. Survey of Freelance Theatre & Dance Practitioners in Northern Ireland <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-Freelance-Practitioner-Research-Report-Executive-Summary.pdf>
7. Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Qualitative Research: Arts Engagement and Covid. Supported by Thrive audience development agency (March 2021) [http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-Qualitative-Research-Arts-Engagement-and-Covid\(March2021\).pdf](http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-Qualitative-Research-Arts-Engagement-and-Covid(March2021).pdf)
8. Digital Ambitions Survey (March – April 2021) <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-Digital-Ambitions-Survey-Findings-Report-October2021.pdf>
9. Emergency Grant Programme: Survey of Individual Artists (July 2020-March 2021) <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-Emergency-Grant-Programme-Artists.pdf>
10. Emergency Grant Programme: Survey of Organisations (July 2020-March 2021) <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-Emergency-Grant-Programme-Organisations.pdf>

Audience Insight surveys by Thrive audience development agency for Northern Ireland

1. After the Interval: Act 1 (May – June 2020) www.willthrive.co.uk/audience-insights/reports/after-the-interval-act-1-insights
2. After the Interval: Act 2 (June – July 2020) www.willthrive.co.uk/audience-insights/reports/after-the-interval-act-2
3. Culture Beyond Covid: Arts (October-November 2020) www.willthrive.co.uk/audience-insights/reports/culture-beyond-covid-for-heritage-insights

The Arts in Lockdown covers the period of the first year of the pandemic, from the first national lockdown in March 2020. We are now almost two years on from that momentous date. In the time since writing this report in June 2021, and now, December 2021, there have been a number of developments that merit inclusion.

Annual Funding Survey 2020/21 (November 2021)

The Arts Council's survey of Annually Funded Organisations reveals the stark pressures placed on the arts sector as a direct result of the pandemic. Employment levels and income generation have shifted substantially, and major changes were reported on how audiences access arts programming, as more activities moved online. Key findings:

- 9% fall in total income compared to 2019/20
- 99% fall in income from ticket sales
- 27% decline in contract/freelance employment
- 22% increase in income from public sources, eg. ACNI Emergency Programmes.
- 67,000 to 59 drop in in-person arts activities
- 15m audiences for online arts activities

<http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/images/uploads/publications-documents/ACNI-AFS-Headline-Report-2020-21.pdf>

Additional ACNI Emergency Funding Programmes

Creative Individuals Recovery Programme (December 2021)

£2.7m awarded to 1,433 self-employed and freelance individuals working in the creative sector, supporting individuals to reconnect or maintain their trade, profession or vocation within the creative sector as it emerges from the pandemic restrictions.

Health and Safety Capital Programme 2

Supporting organisations to reopen their spaces safely. Applications closed in November 2021, with decisions expected mid-January 2022.

Culture, Arts and Heritage Recovery Taskforce

The taskforce, established in May 2021 by Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey, MLA, published its key recommendations in November 2021, to bring Northern Ireland's arts and cultural sectors back to good health:

- Flexible financial support for individuals and organisations adversely affected by COVID-19 restrictions and required mitigations
- NI Executive roadmap from Lockdown to Recovery
- Talent acquisition, retention and development programme
- Support the health and wellbeing of those working in these sectors
- Investment in Built Heritage and Capital Investment renewal
- Commissioning and development fund to stimulate new work
- Create strategic partnerships with local councils
- Build public confidence to return to events and activities

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/art-recovery-survive-stabilise-strengthen>

Our final word goes, where it should, to our incredible artists, creative practitioners, organisations and venues, for keeping our arts, culture and entertainment alive and reminding everyone of the promise of better times ahead. Thank you.

YOU CONTINUE
TO BE OUR
BRIGHTEST
LIGHTS



Major works by NI's leading theatre and dance artists and organisations are showcased at a special online industry event at the Edinburgh Fringe. Part funded by Culture Ireland. August 2020

Image: 'Removed' written by Fionnuala Kennedy. Produced by Prime Cut Productions



Can I just start with a huge personal thank you to everyone at the Arts Council, for so many reasons. But the support I and so many of my peers have had through this is just incredible and will never be forgotten. Also despite the sheer amount of work you all must have had piled on you, not to mention some very desperate people the whole process of the funding was as pain free and well communicated as anything Ive done. So yeah, life savers!

Rory Friers: Film Composer and Member of ASIWFYA



Due to the restrictions having no end in sight for nightclubs, I'm going to have to use the ACNI grant mainly for living expenses (apart from some production tools). This will enable me to continue to be creative at home and work on extra areas where I can expand my musical arsenal. It will most definitely relieve me from any financial strain which I've been experiencing recently & I'm over the moon we have been able to connect to help, not just myself, but a lot of other struggling DJs.

Thank you for your support and continued communication.

Johnny Hollier: DJ Collective



I cannot tell you how much the Arts Council funding assisted in getting my project off the ground. The Individual Emergency Funding helped me create a full-scale music video for my new single 'Proud' (7th Heaven Remix) and also invest in PR with one of the most reputable dance-track promo agencies in the country. I am releasing the music video this weekend to celebrate the launch of the Belfast Pride Celebrations.

Conleth Kane



Firstly, thank you so much for the grant you presented me with. It will really help take this project to the next level.

Joe: EnolaGay Band



And thank you for all of the hard work that staff at The Arts Council have been doing over the past year to help freelance artists as best they can.

Francis Mezza



A huge thank you to everyone at The Arts' Council for your support.

Michael Rafferty: musician



A massive thanks to you and your team for making the art grant go through it's been extremely helpful.

Paul McCarthy: DJ



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