

**Between the Poetic and the Practical:  
An address by Professor Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin  
on the acceptance of the 2018 SMEI Award.**

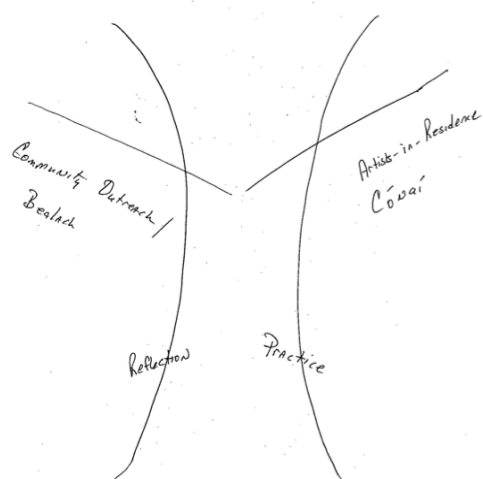
It is a very great honour for me to receive this award from my peers in Ireland. So much of my life has been given to the investigation and development of new models of music education that the granting of this award at this time has a special significance for me. Indeed, by highlighting my contribution in this way, I find it encouraging to think that whatever has been achieved will be all the more strengthened through this recognition. Let me begin therefore with a very sincere and humble thank you to all concerned in SMEI in the granting of this award which I accept with delight and honour.

In contemplating on what I might say to you today, I found myself going back on what is most likely my most self-contained project - namely, the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick. In so doing, I make no claims for some kind of utopian perfection, but would simply point out that the vision and hopes for the project were founded in good faith and with a view to future transformations of the ideas contained within it.

When I founded the Irish World Academy in January, 1994, it was in the context of an absolute greenfield site. The position at the University of Limerick that I was offered was Professor of Music. It came with no allocated university resources and no real notion as to what might happen apart from the ground plan I had articulated. There were no taught programmes at either undergraduate or postgraduate level relevant to music or dance; no specially built resources and essentially nothing in the library.

My overriding fear was an awareness that the first steps I would take would establish the fundamental direction and emerging philosophy of the Academy itself. I felt the enormity of this responsibility and trust that you do not mind me sharing with you in this context some of that journey.

The boundaries of those first steps included four aspects, which I remember sketching out on a paper napkin:



The Academy would be grounded in the symbiotic relationship between academic reflection and performance, within the surround of communities of practice and artistic residencies.

In establishing the logo of the Academy inspired by this vision, the essential nature of the Academy manifested itself:



The logo in this instance was not simply a graphic identifier but an actual ground-plan. From the very beginning, therefore, the idea of the juxtaposition of performance and academic reflection sat comfortably side by side. Along with that was a built-in programme of artists-in-residence and community outreach.

This ground-plan was developed in two seminal reports. *The PIPA Report* (1996) written by Professor Helen Phelan provided a blue-print for a five year plan of programme development (1996-2000), while *Artful Knowing* (1997) by Professor David Elliott further articulated the core values of the Academy.

A number of particularly innovative taught postgraduate programmes kick-started the model, building on a base of PhD academic research. Nine taught postgraduate programmes created a circle of activity, which supported the continued expansion of the PhD programme. The introduction of dance - both contemporary dance and Irish traditional dance - served to create the first such programmes in Irish higher education. Taught MAs in Community Music and Music Therapy, as well as postgraduate opportunities in music education, supported the idea of outreach as creating a context for studies across the board. The MA in Chant and Ritual Song and the MA in Classical String Performance rested into the professional contexts of the Benedictine monastery at Glenstal Abbey and the Irish Chamber Orchestra. Other programmes such as the taught MA in Irish Traditional Music Performance were built on the model pioneered at the Department of Music, University College, Cork.

The Academy model, therefore, has represented 20 years of work for me in order to create a demonstrable engine within which innovative approaches to music and dance education have been nurtured.

In looking to the future, my main concerns relate to the ability of the institution of the university to accept or fully understand the necessity to establish independent governmental processes around this model of education.

A lack of understanding of the importance of a certain level of independence at the governmental level for such an Academy is a threat to its survival. Certainly, burying the model within the normal structures of a faculty can rob the essential vision of the freedom to compete at a global level with equivalent models elsewhere. The university capable of embracing this model will find the secret of the sustainability of the idea at international level.

Cuireann sé mór-áthas orm an aitheanas seo a fháil inniu. Mo bhuíochas do mhuintir Cumann Ceoil Oideachas na hÉireann agus tá súil agam go mbeidh seans ag an fíis seo dul ó neart go neart sna blianta ós ár gcomhair.