

Talking Points from Jazz Connector 26th February 2020

At Jazz Connector on 26th February 2020, members of Ireland's jazz and improvised music scene gathered to identify and discuss current issues affecting the scene. The conversation followed on from the [Jazz Connective Public Discussion](#) in December 2019. Below is an outline of some of the points which emerged over the course of the discussion in February.

Fragmentation

- Jazz Connective's public discussion in December 2019 suggested that the jazz and improvised music scene in Ireland feels quite fragmented.
- The Arts Council is working towards creating a National Music Policy. For jazz and improvised music to be properly represented, it's necessary that the sector comes together to speak with one voice. For example, other sectors have unified bodies, such as [Theatre Forum](#), [Dance Ireland](#), [Visual Artists Ireland](#) etc.
- Gathering, collating and interpreting statistics and data from across jazz/improvising musicians and organisations throughout Ireland is key to effective lobbying. IMC's musician survey publishing in May 2020 will be one way to help gather this information.

Curation

- Curation could be key to audience building and touring possibilities. Initiatives like JazzGate at [The Black Gate](#), [Sofa Sessions](#), [Dublin Jazz Co-Op](#) and [Signal Series](#) develop their audiences based on the curation rather than individual artists, building sustainable long term audience members.
- However, curators providing a valuable service, particularly grassroots initiatives, should receive proportionate fees for their work and not become part of the silent subsidy.

Spaces

- A dedicated venue for jazz/improvised music would be of value to the scene and could go a long way towards giving the scene a cohesive identity. It will offer young musicians the regular opportunities they need to be inspired by and work alongside more experienced players. It will offer possibilities to engage with audiences on different levels, e.g. young musicians and children during the day and general audiences at night.
- However, this needs to be balanced against the need to develop regional scenes, a Dublin venue would further centralise and would not be of service to a large number of artists countrywide.
- A venue is also a long term project, although initial investigations are underway by Dublin City Council. Funding for a large-scale project like this is very difficult to come by because it is also in demand across every other artform. As evidenced in other

countries, significant private investment, in addition to state aid and financial support are required to develop dedicated infrastructure which is both viable and sustainable.

Regional Scenes

- The vast majority of jazz and improvised music takes place in the capital city, Dublin and the absence in 2020 of Bray and Galway Jazz Festivals magnifies this further.
- To be environmentally sustainable, a scene of localised smaller performances will be necessary.
- Regional arts centres are often unfamiliar to jazz. A toolkit illuminating them as to the possibilities in terms of style, marketing/audience-building ideas, and usual audience figures could be very useful to artists pitching ideas. This is an area Improvised Music Company can develop in association with artists as part of ongoing dialogue between artists, organisations and other key stakeholders in Ireland
- A touring network, if built on the curation principles above, could also be of assistance in making jazz/improvised music attractive to audiences and venues. However, past touring agreements with arts centres have collapsed because of new funding structures among other things - a new system would have to be built which takes into account current touring funding structures. For musicians, a network of jazz-friendly arts centres would be much more manageable than pitching to 50/60 venues countrywide.
- The Arts Council's current [Touring and Dissemination of Work Scheme](#), which arose from the Touring Experiment framework, and centralized domestic touring funding across all art forms, is under-represented in jazz and creative improvised music. More artists need to apply for these supports in time, particularly the longer-term planning options, which could be viewed as proportionally less competitive

Value of music

- Professional musicians are consistently making things happen far under the necessary budget, which sends the message to funding bodies that events will be realised regardless of subvention levels.
- Irish jazz musicians suggest they are generally underpaid compared with the averages of some European countries. Anecdotally, the technical costs of producing music have generally gone up, and the value of music has gone down. Concerts would often need either to have upwards of €50 tickets to break even, or be otherwise heavily subsidised to break even if proper artist remuneration is to be considered.
- As a long term strategy to ensure fair payment into the future, artists would need to be in broad agreement on a baseline fee, across all performance types, which could, if adhered to, be the basis for annual incremental increases to reach an adequate baseline for all musicians

Please ensure that you are signed up to our [Musicians' Newsletter](#) to receive information on future editions of Jazz Connector and our Musicians' Survey.

The next Jazz Connector meeting was due to take place in May, but has been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

If you have any questions or comments, please send them by email to **production [at] improvisedmusic [dot] ie** with 'Jazz Connector 1' in the subject line.