

## Labhrás Ó Murchú

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Citation written and delivered by

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Music touches the soul; music inspires people. Music provides a means of expression to communities, societies and nations. The spirit of the Irish nation is reflected in the evocative Port na bPúcaí, the great Munster sean-nós song Bean Dubh an Ghleanna, the lyricism of traditional slow airs such as Úrchill an Chreagáin, the liveliness of the Sliabh Luachra slides and polkas. Social movements can foster musicians and audiences but true long-term development requires innovative entrepreneurial leaders to develop organizational infrastructures to support musicians in their craft and art.

Labhrás Ó Murchú, Ardstiúrthóir of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann since 1968 is one such social innovator and cultural entrepreneur. Born in 1939 in Cashel, Co. Tipperary, Labhrás Ó Murchú has given his life to public service and to the renaissance and flourishing of traditional Irish music at home and abroad. At the age of 21 he was Secretary of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Cashel, and at the age of 28 he became Ardstiúrthóir, or Director General, of an international organization that now spans 15 countries across five continents.

Under Labhrás's leadership and stewardship, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann become an international movement promoting traditional Irish music, culture and language through over 400 branches in Europe, North America, South America, Asia and Australia. Branches exist in cities such as Budapest, Moscow, Rosario (Argentina), Melbourne and Tokyo. Comhaltas now provides classes, workshops and concerts for around 3 million people every year. It has 50,000 volunteers supported by a network of 18 cultural centres nationwide.

Labhrás led the growth and development of Comhaltas initially through the acquisition of its headquarters in Monkstown, Co Dublin in the 1970s, to the flagship Brú Ború cultural centre in his native Cashel in the 1980s, and later the development

of six additional impressive Regional Resources Centres across the country. Three of these centres, in Sligo, Omagh and Dundalk, each serving five counties, specifically operate on a cross-border basis. This approach ensures that local groups in Northern Ireland, such as the cross-community Derry and Antrim Fiddlers Association, are equal partners in the formal infrastructures of Comhaltas and in the promotion of cross-border reconciliation and co-operation.

Comhaltas provided the necessary infrastructure of classes, competitions and performance outlets for many of the leaders in today's vibrant Irish traditional music scene. From the day a child, or an adult, enrolls in classes in their local branch, they can learn and achieve recognition through Fleadh Cheoil competitions at county, provincial and all-Ireland level. They can learn in formal settings and in informal intergenerational settings, becoming part of a broad vibrant community. Regional styles are preserved and fostered. Participation as performer, or audience member, engenders a sense of heritage, a sense of place, a sense of identity.

The Comhaltas Scrúdú Ceol Tíre 12-stage exam system from elementary to advanced performance level is complemented by the Teastas i dTeagasc Ceolta Tíre (Diploma in Teaching Traditional Music) and the Meitheal leadership development structure. Labhrás has grown an organization that is truly a leader in community-based education and in the development of Gaelic cultural tradition.

Comhaltas provides a local, regional, national and international community structure through the regular fleadhanna, seisiúin, international tours, archive initiatives, summer schools, language programmes, lectures, and publications. The highpoint of the year is the annual Fleadh Cheoil attended by over 400,000 people each year, of which 10,000 musicians take part. The Fleadh Cheoil programme also celebrates the innovative explorations traditional musicians make into other music genres such as African, jazz and American folk and blues music.

All of this performance-based activity is supported through publications, broadcasts and archives, such as the Comhaltas journal Treoir with a circulation of 35,000 readers worldwide; the IFTA Award-winning TG4 Fleadh TV, with over 1 million viewers, and the new repository of recordings and other materials in the USA.

Meán Fómhair 2017

Labhrás Ó Murchú has played a particularly active role in public life. He is very highly regarded in his native Cashel and Tipperary having been long associated with highlighting the need and provision for public amenities and services. He has held public office as a member of Cashel Urban Council for 18 years (some years as Chairman). Examples of awards he has received include Tipperary Person of the Year and the Dublin City Lord Mayor's Award. He was honoured with Gradam an Phiarsaigh, in the centenary year of 2016, in recognition of his work in the arts, community development, politics, peace and reconciliation.

Labhrás also held national office, as an elected member of the Cultural and Educational Panel of Seanad Éireann, for 19 years, from 1997 to 2016. He was Vice-Chairperson of An Fochoiste um an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 agus Rudaí Gaolmhara from 2011 to 2016. He has a proven record of active participation in Seanad debates on a wide and diverse range of issues including Irish culture and language, the role and future of the arts, the influence of sport in fostering a sense of purpose and place within communities, environmental protection, maritime and foreshore development, rural and social housing, and electoral reform.

Ceolta Gael; ceolta sí. Binn an fhuaim. Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann, agus a cheolann na daoine. Tréaslaímid a shaothar le Labhrás, tréaslaímid leis a thírghrá do dhúthaigh a óige, d'fhód a shinsear agus dá theanga dhúchais. Tá spiorad, saibhreas agus beocht i gceol, i rince agus in amhráin na nGael ó Shliabh na mBan go Bánchnoic Éireann Óighe. Tá Labhrás tiomanta do chultúr agus d'oidhreacht na nGael i gcéin agus i gcóngar. Is ceannaire den scoth é. Aithníonn sé spiorad agus cumhacht na meithle. Is fear misnigh é.

Labhrás Ó Murchú has provided the leadership, vision, enthusiasm, inspiration and lifelong commitment, to guide Comhaltas to being an outstanding international social and cultural enterprise. He is synonymous with the success of a voluntary movement, which has impacted and enriched millions of people in Ireland and among the Irish diaspora worldwide. He is a true patriot dedicated to the Irish nation.

A Uachtaráin, iarraim ort an chéim Dochtúir Fealsúnachta (*honoris causa*) a bhronnadh ar Labhrás Ó Murchú. President, I ask you to confer on Labhrás Ó Murchú the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (*honoris causa*).