

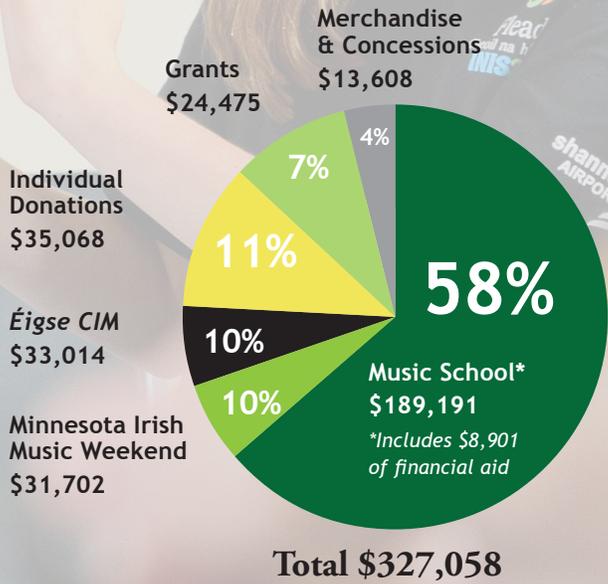


THE CENTER FOR IRISH MUSIC

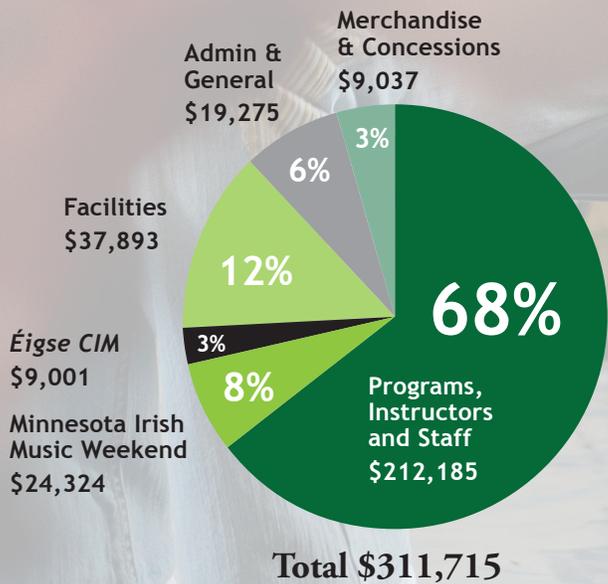
2016-17 ANNUAL REPORT



Sources of Revenue



Program and Mission Support



STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION	2016-17	2015-16
ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$115,151	\$101,487
Accounts receivable	\$(1,192)	\$(1191)
Fixed	\$9,011	\$5,711
TOTAL ASSETS	\$122,170	\$106,007
LIABILITIES & EQUITY		
Liabilities—current	\$2,200	\$1,378
Equity—retained earnings	\$104,629	\$82,978
Equity—net income	\$15,343	\$21,651
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	\$122,170	\$106,007

ON THE COVER: Owen Larsen and members of the U15 Céilí Band rehearsed together every day after Scoil Éigse in Ennis, a trip made possible by CIM's community of supporters.

Dear friends of the Center for Irish Music,

The CIM got its start more than a dozen years ago with a group of like-minded musicians committed to putting Minnesota on the map for traditional Irish music. While our fantastically talented teaching artists have always been outstanding ambassadors for the Twin Cities' vibrant trad scene, this year our students' success also helped spread the word far and wide.

Not only did 20 of our young students win first and second place awards at the Midwest Regional Fleadh in St. Louis, 18 of them traveled all the way to Ireland in August to play and compete at the All-Ireland Fleadh in Ennis, County Clare!

It was a transformative experience for all of us, one that is already adding new artistry, texture and depth to the music we make together at the CIM. This first group trip to Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann was proof that we're fulfilling our mission of "handing down the tradition," a milestone only made possible by a full decade of community support from tireless volunteers, generous donors, and musicians and partners who truly care about keeping traditional Irish music alive. As they say in Ennis, let's have a *bualadh bos* for all the great support our talented youth players get every day from this wonderful community.

Back on the home front, we have seen an energetic new crop of volunteers pitching in, an increase in weekly students, and requests for even more outreach performances throughout the Twin Cities. Established adult ensembles An Luan, Open Sky, and the Young Adult Ensemble have brought spirited performances to community partners like Irish On Grand, Irish Music and Dance Association and Claddagh Coffee Café, while our sparky and youthful Swallowtail Ensemble wowed the crowds at the Irish Fair of Minnesota with an impressive debut mainstage performance!

Behind the scenes, the CIM made great progress towards our goal of increasing organizational capacity through a sustainable staffing structure that will give us room to grow and develop new programs. We also applaud our friends at the Celtic Junction for launching the new nonprofit Celtic Junction Arts Center, continuing their great work at cultivating a collaborative and creative Irish cultural community right here on Prior Avenue.

Thanks to everyone's great work this year, even more of Minnesota's Irish music learners and lovers know just where to find us.

Sincerely,

Norah Rendell
Executive Director





Tuning Up the Next Generation

From lessons to sessions, Center for Irish Music students of all ages are building on Minnesota's Irish music tradition.

John McCormick picked up the bagpipes at the age of 11, taking lessons from Macalester College pipe band leader John Ford, and trying his best to keep his saffron-colored kilt a secret from his classmates. A leading member of the Brian Boru Irish Pipe Band long before he could drive himself to band practice, McCormick's father, Ed, was even dragooned into service as the group's drum major.

By his teens and twenties, McCormick had become a regular at the céilís and kitchen sessions that rose up in the wake of the folk revival, soon falling under the spell of box player Martin McHugh, a master artist who came to Minnesota from Castlereagh, County Roscommon. By his thirties, McCormick was learning all he could from McHugh, who loaned him his first single row Hohner accordion, and sent him home with hours of cassette tapes that he rewound and replayed "millions and millions of times."

Playing at pubs and stages from O'Gara's to the Half Time Rec to gigs with his band, Barra, McCormick's artistic skill and quiet leadership have earned so many respectful admirers that the Irish Music and Dance Association dedicated an evening in November 2016 to honoring him for all he's done to keep Irish music alive and growing in the Twin Cities. But even those four decades of *bona fides* are still no guarantee of a good seat on Sunday night at Keegan's, home to a series of increasingly crowded trad sessions for learners, advanced and master players.

"You can't be late to that session or you'll never be able to sit down," says McCormick, who is pleased to see so many students from the Center for Irish Music pulling up chairs to play along. "There was a time when I'd look out on the crowd and it was just a lot of gray hairs like me, but now there are so many young people taking it on, you know the music's not going to disappear. It's one of the few places where age doesn't matter. However old or young you are, if you have a tune to share, you're always welcome."



Above: “You pick up a language by living it, and these boys are already fluent,” CIM instructor John McCormick says about students Cathal Mee, 12, and Ian McKenna, 15, who each earned a first place in their age categories at the Midwest Fleadh Cheoil. “I took it up as an adult, so these boys will be playing rings around me very soon, but it’s something I love to see.” Below: At the CIM, early childhood music classes like Celtic Cuties (left) give little learners the foundation for playing together, a skill that teen trad players perfected before their trip to the All-Ireland Fleadh.





From Grand Old Day to sessions along O'Connell Street, CIM's teen trad musicians are always ready with a tune.

Harmonic Convergence

Tight seating at Twin Cities' trad sessions is one of the signs the Center for Irish Music is making good on its mission of handing down the tradition to the next generation. Not only has CIM's student enrollment doubled since 2009, ensemble groups have multiplied from one to eight active groups. Well-versed in a deep repertoire of traditional tunes, many of CIM's most engaged musicians now play multiple instruments. All of that playing and practicing is paying off in growing outreach performances from CIM players and instructors, who reached 10,000 listeners at venues ranging from small coffee house concerts to main stage performances at the Landmark Center and the Irish Fair of Minnesota.

In fact, there are so many adult students taking lessons that the CIM re-invented the standard recital experience this year and hosted a rollicking and informal "Open Mic" night emceed by CIM instructor Todd Menton, who, along with other instructors, offered his own bodhrán and mandolin accompaniment to students still too shy to go it alone.

"One of the most exciting things we've been seeing is the growth of CIM's adult ensembles," says Norah Rendell, CIM's executive director. "It takes quite a commitment for a group of busy, overworked adults to make the time to get together, practice challenging new tunes, and to keep raising their sights artistically, but amazingly we have four adult groups who are doing that every week and loving it."

An Luan, CIM's longest-running adult group, has made that commitment to the music for the last seven years, and like their counterparts in the newer Open Sky Ensemble perform frequently in the community at coffee shops



From workshops with master artists like James Kelly (top left) to public performances at the Irish Fair, CIM students draw from a common repertoire of tunes that keeps them playing together.

and community events. Several advanced youth players who graduated out of the Advanced Youth Ensemble have also helped to give new life to the hard-charging Young Adult Ensemble. This year, instructor Dáithí Sproule started up CIM's newest group "Uisce Gorm" (Irish for the "Blue Water" that gives Minnesota its name), enlisting several new adult students to play together.

"It's kind of magical what playing together as a group can do for a music student of any age, really," says CIM instructor Mary Varnory, who coaches the Starlings, an intermediate group of youth musicians. "Playing together and getting into a rhythmic groove with other musicians is exactly what Irish music is all about."

Those skills were on great display at the Midwest Fleadh Ceoil in St. Louis in May, where 27 students and their families traveled to play and compete. While CIM's youth students took home an impressive 35 medals in solo, duo and trio competitions, it was the success of the CIM's ensemble groups—including first place finishes for both the U15 ceili band and the U18 Grúpa Ceoil—that inspired more than a dozen CIM families to venture to Ennis for the Fleadh Ceoil na hÉireann in August.

"We've debated about going before, but it took a harmonic convergence like this to make it happen," says CIM instructor and Advanced Youth Ensemble leader Brian Miller. "They're such a

strong group of players that sending them to compete as a group just seemed like an opportunity we couldn't pass up."

CIM's community agreed, and quickly pitched in to support a parent-led Go Fund Me campaign, a board challenge match on CIM's GiveMN page, and youth players who busked at Grand Old Day and other high-traffic community events. The combined efforts raised enough funding to send Rendell on the trip to rehearse and direct the three competing ensemble groups, while covering the full cost of tuition for CIM students to attend Scoil Éigse, an immersive four-day music workshop taught by traditional master artists.

CIM students started their week in County Clare, a region known for its rich musical heritage, exploring everything from the late night session culture of O'Connell Street, to the rugged landscape of the nearby Burren and the Cliffs of Moher. By weekend, as more than 450,000 visitors descended on Ennis for the Fleadh competitions and concerts, CIM students raced between more than a dozen performance venues, receiving warm applause for

having traveled all the way "from St. Paul's" to be part of the international festival. "It's one thing to be part of a great community of kids learning this music on Prior Avenue, but I think going to the Fleadh proved to them that they're actually part of something even bigger and more meaningful," says CIM parent Nick Coleman. "Irish music is a living tradition with a deep sense of place, and being part of all of that was an experience they're going to be unpacking for a long time."



CIM's U15 céilí band was one of three ensemble groups that performed during a full weekend of fleadh competition. Before flying home, CIM families gathered for the final senior céilí competition (above)—the hottest ticket in Ennis. To learn more about what CIM students took home from their Scoil Éigse experience, visit our new community blog at centerforirishmusiceducation.org.



Putting Minnesota on the Map

While traveling to the All-Ireland Fleadh marked a new milestone for the school, bringing Ireland to Minnesota is a tradition with deep roots at the CIM. In June, the school celebrated the 10th annual Minnesota Irish Music Weekend with an impressive roster of master artists who represented a wealth of regional Irish influences, from accordion player and singer Méabh Ní Bheaglaioich, a member of a renowned multi-generation family of trad musicians in the Dingle Peninsula, to Colm O'Donnell, an acclaimed sean-nós singer and flute player from County Sligo.

“I was very lucky to come from a place that’s renowned for traditional Irish music,” says O’Donnell, a working sheep farmer who was initially reluctant to make the trip to Minnesota during the height of lambing season. “I’m from the land, working on the land, and the way I approach the music is inspired by that. But I was really taken by the level of dedication that’s here in the younger generation, and the good work that’s

gone into teaching them. I discovered that I could teach them a tune without playing an instrument. I just diddled the tune, they diddled it back, and picked up their instruments and played. It was in their heads before it was in their hands.”



Good reviews of CIM’s students and teaching artists are music to the ears of board chair Mike O’Connor, who says that the whole community deserves credit for a big year of growth at the Center for Irish Music. “If you spend any time sitting in the CIM lobby on a busy weeknight, you know there are great things happening at this school,” he says. “But it’s very affirming to see us fulfilling our mission out in the wider world, whether it’s seeing a great set of adult ensemble performers at the Irish Fair, or sending our next generation of students off to

play and compete in Ennis. We’re just a small part of a much bigger movement that’s keeping traditional music alive, and the Center for Irish Music is proud to be a player.”





Opposite: Méabh Ní Bheaglaoich and Seán Gavin perform at the Master Artists Concert at the 10th annual Minnesota Irish Music Week-end. (Below) CIM instructors Brian Miller, Todd Menton, and Charlie Heymann perform at the Éigse concert. This page: “I was really taken by the level of dedication that’s here in the younger generation, and the good work that’s gone into teaching them,” says Colm O’Donnell, a master artist from Sligo. Below, players of all ages come together at the Great Session Experience. The immersive music education workshop was made possible, in part, by a grant from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council.



Thank you, donors!

The following individuals, families and businesses gave generously to support the annual fund, instrument fund and special events in 2016-17. Your direct donations, in-kind contributions and community support for Éigse CIM, A Gaela Event helped us hand down the tradition all year long.



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Generous donations at Éigse CIM, A Gaela Event helped to raise more than \$30,000 in 2017, record-setting support for the Center for Irish Music. A corps of more than 125 annual volunteers also kept our community music school humming. Thank you for all you do to help us hand down the tradition!

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