

# Presidential Reflection

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It is a pleasure to be asked to contribute to this special issue of the *JSMI* celebrating the first twenty years of the Society for Musicology in Ireland. As serving SMI President for 2021–2024, a role I am deeply honoured to hold, I think it may come as a surprise for some to learn that my pathway to this wonderful network of music scholars was a somewhat circuitous one. This was partly due to my earlier professional work and disciplinary orientation towards music education, and, later the sociology of music. The latter became the area of my PhD, which I completed at the University of London in 2003 – the same year in which the SMI was established. Sadly, I missed the first annual conference that year at Maynooth, as well as the watershed moment of the 1995 Maynooth International Musicological Conference. I had, however, attended the annual plenary conference of the Royal Musical Society (Ireland Chapter) at Queen's University Belfast in the millennial year. It was there as a 'rookie' conference presenter, at least in the musicological world, that I first encountered the collegiality, warmth and encouragement (yes, even to a music sociologist) of our all-island academic community, with fond memories and appreciation of conference chair Hilary Bracefield's unstinting commitment to that endeavour.

Looking back at the programme for the 2003 conference at NUI Maynooth that marked the formal establishment of SMI, I am struck by several observations. First to note is the number of active musicologists (mostly Ireland-based) who filled a day-and-a-half's programme with two parallel sessions, with strong representation from university music departments and conservatoires across the country; this included several papers given by postgraduate students. While the numbers presenting at SMI annual plenary conferences – and from 2008 its dedicated postgraduate conferences – significantly increased by the mid-2010s, I am greatly impressed by and grateful for the leadership demonstrated by Harry White as founding president and by the inaugural SMI Council for bringing such a major endeavour to fruition. No less impressive is the commitment displayed by the first cohort of general members and by colleagues at the host institution. It is heartening to observe how this voluntary spirit has continued over the intervening twenty years, as more recently highlighted by the stellar efforts of

Council members, notably including student representatives, during the COVID-19 pandemic under the presidency of Lorraine Byrne Bodley.

My second observation from 2003 concerns the invitation extended by the programme committee (chaired by Barra Boydell) to keynote speaker Derek Scott. As with subsequent invitations for annual plenary and postgraduate conferences, this inspired choice demonstrated the capacity of SMI to recognise scholars of distinction whose research explored diverse disciplinary areas, in many cases pushing the boundaries of our field (and on that note, can I say how much I am looking forward to reading the featured contributions of past keynote speakers for this special issue of *JSMI*).

My third observation is that there were already signs of inclusivity in the 2003 programme; alongside a majority of papers addressing topics in music history, analysis and editing, it contained sessions that explored aspects of music education, traditional music, and music and politics. This was a promising sign of the developing parity of esteem for our collective research perspectives and interests. Indeed, at the present time, SMI can be considered relatively unique among European musicological associations for its embrace of the varied interests of its members, alongside a capacity and resilience to reflect on and contribute to programme changes in higher music education, as well as to wider developments in academic, creative and policy fields.

As I work with fellow members of the 2021–2024 Council, it has been a privilege and joy to be at the forefront of celebrations for SMI at 20. Although it did not strictly take place in the calendar year 2023, we can regard the awarding of the IRC-Harrison medal to Ita Beausang in November 2022 as our heralding event, not least because Ita's wonderful address on that occasion was themed on the growth of the society over twenty years. This was followed in March 2023 by the symposium 'Music for Stage and Screen: Celebrating the SMI at 20', held at the Jerome Hynes Theatre, National Opera House Wexford. Its proceedings featured a stimulating keynote address by Peter Franklin, four themed paper panels, a talk on the history of Wexford Opera, a special vocal recital and a roundtable discussion involving guest contributors Desirée Staverman (Chair, European Network of Musicological Societies), Barbara Kelly (RMA President), and past SMI presidents Harry White, Jan Smazcny, Kerry Houston, Lorraine Byrne Bodley and me. Not only did the Wexford symposium celebrate SMI's twenty-year history, including many of its key moments and leading figures; in keeping with the society's mission, it also provided showcase opportunities for emerging as well as established musicologists across several sub-disciplines, and further built a productive collaboration with a national cultural institution and the internationally renowned festival with which it is associated.

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Another reason to celebrate SMI at 20 in 2023 was a full return to in-person plenary gatherings, first at the joint postgraduate conference with ICTM-IE in January, hosted by University College Dublin, and later at the annual conference in June, located for the first time in the newly built campus of TU Dublin Conservatoire. As a measure of just how much we have grown as a society, it was wonderful to observe how one of the postgraduate student presenters at the inaugural 2003 conference (Elaine Kelly, currently professor at the University of Edinburgh) returned to deliver a meticulously researched and appropriately provocative keynote address — and one that from a personal perspective greatly appealed to both to my sociology of music and musicology ‘hats’.

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