

Westport Children's Choir

Annual Report 2017

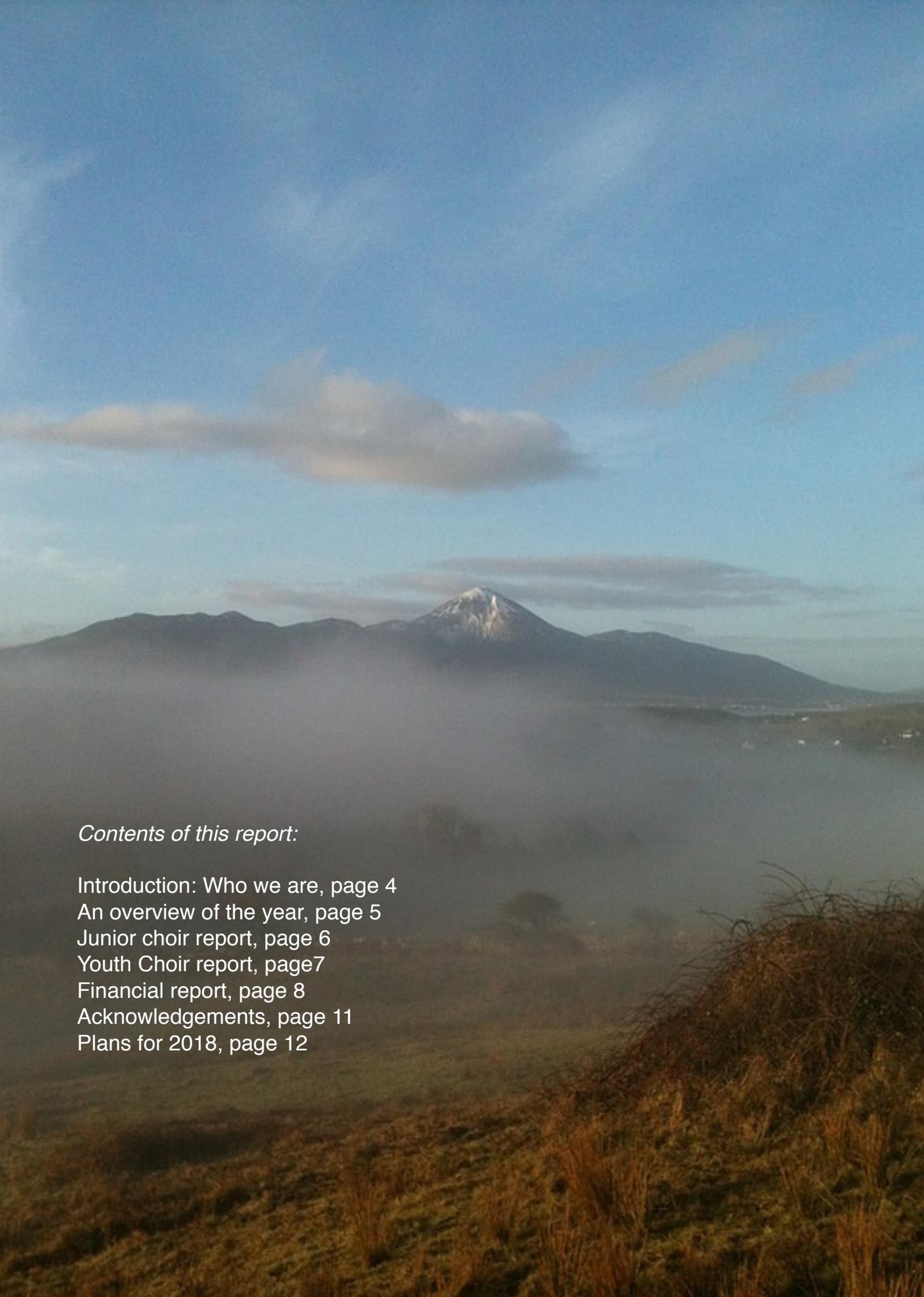


Westport Children's Choir

Our mission: To introduce local children of all backgrounds to the world of choral singing. Many studies have shown that an engagement with group singing has demonstrable benefits for both the individual and the community, and if children are introduced early to the enjoyment of singing in choirs, it will be something they can draw on throughout their lives. We also aim to promote understanding and sympathy with other cultures through the study and performance of different regional and national traditions of music, and by travelling abroad to perform and learn.

We hope to play an important role in helping our community's children grow into well-adjusted adults who will make a positive contribution to broader society; to help give them a sense of belonging, an understanding of individual and social responsibility, and a spirit of generosity.





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Who we are:

Westport Children's Choir was formed in [September 2011](#) under the direction of Eriko Hopkinson; it is a secular, community-based choir for ages 6 to 18, and it was founded with the aim of giving the children of the Westport area the opportunity to experience the joy that comes from singing in harmony with others, and teaching them the skills and teamwork necessary for this. We also aim to open young minds to music they might not otherwise hear; thus the repertoire spans many musical genres including classical, traditional/world music, and jazz. The original choir was for ages 9 -14. The junior (preparatory) choir for ages 6-9 was added in 2014, followed by Westport Youth Choir in [September 2016](#), formed from past members of Westport Children's Choir, and auditioned singers. The Youth Choir is a small vocal ensemble for young people aged 14 and upwards, exploring the current music scene as well as diverse music styles, with members taking initiative for the musical direction of the choir, under the guidance of Eriko Hopkinson.

An important element of our organization is the promise to keep the cost of attending choir to a minimum. Families with a lower than average income find it hard to take advantage of all the extracurricular educational opportunities available to children from a better-off background, and there is very little support available from government agencies for hard-pressed families in this regard. Thus we undertake to offer a high standard of musical training at a fraction of the cost of private lessons.

We also believe that formal musical training is under-resourced in Irish schools, in contrast to some other countries; so the musically talented Irish child runs the risk of missing out on the essential early training that forms the foundation of a possible career in music. We hope that Westport Children's Choir goes a little way towards filling this gap.



An overview of the year

In March we took a choir of 18 children, along with 14 adults, to Prague to take part in the Young Bohemia festival of children's and youth choirs and orchestras. We learned and performed some challenging songs in competition, including one in Czech, and achieved a silver award; another highlight of the trip for many of our members was to see a Taiko drumming group from a Japanese secondary school, whose standard of performance might have opened minds to what children can achieve with the right support and encouragement.

Soon after returning home we sang in the Feis Ceoil, Ireland's national classical music festival, in Dublin. We took part in the Youth Choir two part competition.

This year we performed twice in the beautiful and acoustically enjoyable surroundings of Holy Trinity Church in Westport, once for the Mayo International Choral Festival, and once with pianist and organist John Dexter as part of a concert to raise funds for the restoration of the church organ.

Our Summer Concert in Westport Town Hall in June included a staged presentation of excerpts from the musical Matilda, accompanied by a band of young musicians from Westport. We continue to seek collaboration with other performing artists from within and outside the Westport area, to give our members the benefit of working with professional musicians of all genres.

In August we received an exciting invitation to sing at Carnegie Hall in New York, in a concert of new music written for children's choir and orchestra by Christian Grases, scheduled for June 2018. A committee of parents was formed to oversee fundraising, and a target was set of €30000.

The Youth Choir travelled north in October to compete in the Derry International Choral Festival, where they performed very well and were awarded a creditable third place in the National Vocal Ensemble competition.

In November, our new website westportchildrenschoir.ie went live for the first time, with the generous help of web designer Barry Murphy.

We rounded off the year with our annual Christmas concert in Westport Town Hall; the programme as usual included a wide variety of music, with African drumming providing one of the highlights.

Junior choir report:

Our junior choir for ages 6-9 is intended to provide a preparation for entry to the main choir. We teach the foundations of choir skills such as vocal production, breathing, posture, understanding rhythm and harmony, and group responsibility, with a strong emphasis on having fun! We started the year with only five juniors, but by early 2018 the group had grown to our target membership number of 15, which is encouraging as we believe that the basics of music learning should happen as early as possible in a child's life. The Junior Choir took part in both our Summer and Christmas concerts, where they did very well and acquired valuable performance experience.



Youth Choir report:

Our older group of singers (aged 14 -18) have progressed strongly this year, and we start the new year with a full complement of three singers per part. The Youth Choir performed this year at the Summer and Christmas concerts in the Town Hall, at the Holy Trinity Organ Restoration concert, and in the Folk Club in Matt Molloy's bar. Also a subset of the choir ambitiously performed Craig Kingsbury's wonderful arrangement of Personent Hodie to great acclaim in Holy Trinity's carol service in December.

Three of the members will be leaving at the end of the year to go on to higher education, so we will have to start the process of finding new members soon. It is always a struggle to find boys, something we have in common with many choirs. It is worth noting in this context that there is no music programme in the boy's school in Westport, and there is still a prevailing cultural attitude throughout rural Ireland that music is for girls, and sport is for boys. Naturally Westport Children's Choir does its best to try and change this!



Financial report:

The choir has two accounts with the Westport branch of the Allied Irish Bank: 28453082 (the “main account”) is for the regular dealings of the choir and 28453165 (the “NY account”) is for the New York trip.

The primary source of income into the main account is from membership fees, which are charged per rehearsal, and are payable each half term in advance. The per-rehearsal rate has increased from €2 at the foundation of the choir, to €4; this was raised to €5 in September 2017. Fees are currently collected in cash; half of the fees thus raised provide the stipendiary payment to the director Eriko Hopkinson and assistant Edward Hopkinson. Some of the remaining cash is put in a kitty for choir expenses, for instance copying music, biscuits for rehearsals, or stationary. Remaining cash is deposited in the main account.

The main account is also used as a collection and payment facility for trips; for instance, for booking flights and accommodation, coach hire, and venue hire.

The New York account was opened in September 2017 to hold funds raised by the Westport Children’s Choir to Carnegie Hall campaign, and to act as a collection and payment facility for all the costs associated with the New York trip, which will take place in June 2018. This account is administered by the committee of the Westport Children’s Choir to Carnegie Hall campaign, treasurer Niamh O’Regan.

Breakdown of income and expenditure in 2017, main account:

Income:

Starting balance 1/1/17:

Total credit €14,924.55

of which:

Membership fees €2809

Travel fees from members €8851

Funds from ticket sales, fundraising and grants €3264.55 *

**NB this includes €1000 ‘amenity grant’ from Mayo County Council mistakenly lodged in the main account - should have been lodged in NY account*

Expenditure:

Total expenditure €14,919.65

of which:

Travel costs €10,643.64

Insurance €328.12

Expenses to Hopkinsons €300

Accompanists fees €820

Sheet music purchase €434.68

Bank charges and stamp duty €112.24

Venue hire €750

Publicity inc. social media €334.87

Miscellaneous - stationery, photocopying, uniforms, competition fees etc
€866.22

Breakdown of income and expenditure in 2017, New York account:**Income:**

Starting balance 6/9/17: €0

Total income: €5236

Of which:

Travel fees from members €5086

Donations: €150

End balance 31/12/17: €98.46

Expenditure:

Total expenditure €5137.48

Of which:

Travel fees: €5124

Bank charges and stamp duty €13.48

General notes on Financial Report:

A number of changes to our banking procedure would be in order for the new choir year, namely:

- To reduce the use of cash, unless it has first been banked and subsequently withdrawn into a petty cash box;
- To pay the stipend to the director and assistant from the main account, rather than from cash;
- To encourage payment of membership fees by bank transfer, and ensure that the member's name is on every transfer;
- To reduce the miscellaneous expenses payment to the Hopkinsons from €20 to €15 pm, since printer ink and paper is now paid from the choir account.
- When cash deposits are made, to deposit fees separate from other credit, and ensure that all deposits are properly labelled.



Regarding the stipend paid to choir director Eriko Hopkinson and assistant Edward Hopkinson, it is intended to partially recompense them for the time they dedicate to the choir, during which they are unavailable for paid employment. Their basic teaching time is five hours per week, which rises to eight or nine hours per week running up to performances. They are the sole administrators of the choir, with the exception of some fundraising activities

which up to now have been carried out by the parents' committee, and with regard to the New York trip are now carried out by a dedicated fundraising committee under the title Westport Children's Choir to Carnegie Hall. Other weekly duties carried out by the Hopkinsons include researching repertoire, preparing scores, communicating with the membership, design and distribution of publicity materials and organising trips and concerts, among other demands - an estimated average additional time commitment of twenty hours per week. They also accompany and lead all trips within Ireland and abroad, and conduct, perform and manage all concerts. The amount of the stipendiary payment is irregular in that it depends on the number of choir members in any given month, and also is affected by non-payment of membership fees, which occurs fairly regularly.

Acknowledgements:

Westport Children's Choir would like to acknowledge the kindness and support of many people within the Westport Community during 2017:

Brid Chambers, Niamh Fagan, Susan O'Brien and Niamh O'Regan of the Westport Children's Choir to Carnegie Hall Campaign;
Dr. Oliver Whyte, Chair of the Trustees of Westport Children's Choir;
Rosaleen Heraty and the staff of Westport Town Hall Theatre;
Linda McNulty at Westport Family Resource Centre;
Orla Brickenden of Holy Trinity School;
Barry Murphy of Barry Murphy Design;
Chris Harper at Mysign.ie
Darren at Print For U
Mairéad Ní Ruáin
Rosemary McCreery
Theresa Fitzpatrick
Siobhán Garrigan
John Dexter
Pauline Graham
McLoughlin's Books and Stationery, Westport
Ciara Moynihan at the Mayo News
Parents of Westport Children's Choir
Theresa McGuire
Christy Hyland
Brendan Mulroy

Plans for 2018:

- Feis Ceoil competition, March
- Fundraising concert for Holy Trinity Church, with Our Lady's Choir, Dublin, April
- Youth Choir concert, April
- Mayo International Choral Festival, May
- Summer Concert, June
- Carnegie Hall concert, June
- Summer Camp, August, joint program with the Burren Children's Choir
- Sligo International Choral Festival
- Joint concert with Coole Park School of Music and Mayo School of Ballet
- Winter Recital, Songs from the Musicals

