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Dear Members of the European Choral Association – Europa Cantat,

I am again putting my name forward as a candidate for the Board of the European Choral Association- Europa Cantat (ECA-EC) because I am passionate and invested in the future of choral music in Europe. I have learned a lot whilst on the board during these past three years. I am excited by the future direction of the Association and believe that there are wonderful developments that can be made for the choral community in Europe and for the Association. In the past three years the Board has worked with the Executive Staff to move both artistic and business/funding planning forward. With the external expertise of Ernst Houdkamp of Scherper Stellen we have together developed exciting ideas that will activate the Business Model Canvas that has been developed for the Association.

We have also managed to continue the strong artistic and programme work of the Association during these most challenging of times. I have been constantly amazed by the resilience and abilities of our Executive Staff, and my fellow board members who have worked with our brilliant partners to deliver the Europa Cantat Festival and the many events/webinars and resources that have been a part of our EU funded projects. I was also very proud to represent Ireland at the online ECA-EC general assembly in 2020 and also to help to organise the EuroChoir. Sadly, we were unable to host these events in Ireland as expected due to Covid-19 but we are even more keen now to host an event in Ireland in the near future.

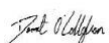
There is much that the Association has achieved over the past years and there is also scope for further development work that will strengthen the voice of European choral music. I know from personal experience the life changing ability that choral singing has and I am advocate for it both nationally and internationally. It is a great privilege to work in this field and I would be eager to bring my extensive skill, knowledge and expertise to the ECA-EC Board again. In Ireland, we have seen many changes recently in the choral sector. These changes have resulted in an increased level of engagement by Irish people both formally and informally in group singing. Sing Ireland (of which I am CEO) has been leading, enabling and connecting communities of singers in Ireland for decades.

I fully understand the responsibilities of a board member and at all times whilst sitting on the ECA-EC board, I would have the sole interests of ECA-EC to the fore. I enjoy working as part of a team to achieve great things, which is certainly the expectation that I would have for the continued outstanding work of ECA-EC.

A field of focus for my time as a Board member might be in institutional branding for ECA-EC and its communications strategies, a focus on youth singing development or advocacy and advice on further achieving an increased and varied income portfolio for the ECA-EC in the coming years.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I would be eager to answer any questions you might have regarding my candidacy. Please don't hesitate to contact me at [dermot@sigireland.ie](mailto:dermot@sigireland.ie) or by calling 00353 61 202715.

Yours sincerely,



Dermot O'Callaghan

## European Choral Association – Europa Cantat

### Board Candidature: Questions to be answered:

- Why are you interested in becoming a Board member of the European Choral Association – Europa Cantat? What makes you a good Board member?

I am interested in a second term with the Association because I am passionate about the future direction of choral music and group singing in Europe and in turn about the Federation's exciting future. I feel there is so much good work that is already in train. Some of this work was furthered under extremely difficult circumstances during the pandemic, but other parts of that work are on the cusp of development. I know that steadfast work has enabled the strategic positioning of the organisation and of choral music to ensure that ECA-EC can demonstrate the massive impact of collective singing in Europe as a mechanism for well-being, health and development of the whole person as well as an instrument for social cohesion and change. The work of the Executive Staff and previous boards has put the organisation in a strong place and a tipping point to further prove the value of choral singing to European society. In Ireland and at Sing Ireland, we are passionately advocating and leading the development of collective singing in Irish society and so that common goal with ECA-EC to further choral music, is an easy fit for me.

I bring a slightly different perspective, from the choral music setting of Ireland and the UK. However, having been thoroughly immersed in the work of ECA-EC over the past number of years, I feel I know how best to connect and contribute to the Association. I would continue to be a dedicated and committed Board member who is personally invested in the success of the ECA-EC. I take the duty that is entrusted to Board members very seriously and work with the best interests of European choral music and the ECA-EC in mind at all times. Being a musician and conductor myself, I understand well the needs of conductors, choirs and singers. I also have the experience of managing a national choral resource organisation and so can empathise with the demands and priorities of the executive team at ECA-EC.

- How can you contribute to the development of the federation and what would you like to focus on during the period on board?

As I mentioned, I am passionate and dedicated to the development of the federation and know that there are areas for development that will bring an even stronger advocacy voice to the ECA-EC's work. I think the involvement of an Irish board member helps to meet one of the ECA-EC's strategic priorities to develop western European connections further, along with other areas of Europe. I have strong connections to the UK choral scene as well as, of course, to the choral scene in Ireland and would act as a voluntary

board advocate for the ECA-EC. Over the next few years, I am eager to continue the partnerships that we have initiated and to finally hold an event in Ireland. We have been frustrated by the pandemic in our ability to do this in the last three years but I look forward to future planning. Sing Ireland and I have been advocating and facilitating stronger connections to ECA-EC, and I am excited about the development of connections to Ireland and for Ireland's area of western Europe for the European choral scene.

During the past three years as a Board member, I am delighted to have worked with the membership, board colleagues and executive staff to agree and sign off ECA-EC's strategic plan. I was heartened by the fact that this new strategic plan was completely in line with the priorities of the EU Creative Europe programme and it was an endorsement of the fact that ECA-EC is connecting to the political, creative and societal issues that are most relevant and urgent in 2021. I know that the work of ECA-EC must be future proofed by ensuring a succession plan for the Board and Executive staff and it is essential that further avenues for funding can be accessed to diversify ECA-EC's income base and ensure that it is not over reliant on EU or national state funding. The past three years have brought about some excellent foundational work in this area but there is much more that can be achieved.

I also would hope to continue to contribute to the development of the ECA-EC by furthering its work to embrace singing groups of all types. I fully agree with the way that ECA-EC embraces the terminology of collective or group singing. For many the word 'choir' perfectly defines the work that they do. However, there are those that sing in collective or group settings that do not identify as a 'choir'. The reality in the 21st Century is quite different and the ECA-EC knows that singing groups come in all musical styles and make ups and that the 'choirs' of today are diverse and in many ways difficult to define. Their musical output is varied and their performance practice is rich. I know there is much that can be achieved in ensuring an even broader base of support for the federation with singers and singing groups of all types being even more connected to it.

- What is your vision about the European Choral Association – Europa Cantat and its activities?

As I've mentioned above, I feel that ECA-EC is on the cusp of a really exciting further development and growth phase. ECA-EC makes a meaningful contribution to the cultural life of Europe through the sharing of the diverse experience of European countries, their music, their languages and cultures. Singing brings European nations together in a way that transcends barriers of language and culture and truly unites. ECA-EC has many years of wonderful work behind it that has put the organisation in this strong position but I also know there is even more that can be achieved. The strategic plan of ECA-EC sets out clearly that there is opportunity for development of the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda (including gender balance/equality), as well as the need to further develop sustainable ways for the choral sector and ECA-

EC to run events into the future. I also believe that the future of the European eco-system for choral music will depend on the engagement of young people as they grow to become the adults in the Europe of the next generation. The strong connections being made by ECA-EC to youth singing through the Youth Committee, Europa Cantat Junior and EuroChoir must be furthered and expanded to ensure the vitality of the future for ECA-EC. A European strategy on youth choral music led by ECA-EC would be a help to all nations and help to bring a shared approach to the delivery of group singing to young people throughout the EU.

**Dermot O’Callaghan** is CEO of Sing Ireland, the national organisation with a remit for the development of choral practice and collective singing in Ireland. Sing Ireland is the parent organisation of the Irish Youth Choirs (IYC), the national youth choirs of Ireland made up of the Irish Youth Choir for 18 – 28 year olds, the Irish Youth Training Choir (14 – 17 year olds) and the Irish Youth Chamber Choir (a selected and auditioned chamber choir from the larger IYC).

His career to date has also seen him work with Opera Theatre Company, Ireland’s national touring opera company, and Chamber Choir Ireland, Ireland’s professional chamber choir. He has worked as a choral and orchestral conductor, vocal and instrumental teacher and as a facilitator and holds a B.A. (Music and English), B.Mus. and M.A. in Arts Management. Dermot began his music training as a boy chorister of the Palestrina Choir in Dublin’s Pro-Cathedral and choral singing remained an important part of his life throughout school and college. Dermot has also worked as a deputy singer in the professional choir, National Chamber Choir of Ireland, with cathedral choirs, and with many other professional ‘fixer’ choirs over the years.

Recent achievements at Sing Ireland have included a restructuring of the organisation to rebrand and revision to launch as Sing Ireland (previously the Association of Irish Choirs) in 2019. This has involved a new strategy for the organisation and stakeholder and member ‘buy in’ to the new vision for the company. State funding through the Arts Council of Ireland has doubled to Sing Ireland in the years Dermot has been CEO. The organisation is now activating an ambitious growth and change plan to increase its philanthropic incomes. The organisation has also partnered with government through the Creative Ireland programme (an all of government programme located in the Department of Culture in Ireland) to develop a new model for youth singing in schools nationally. The YouthSing Ireland programme sees a staged interaction with collective singing for young people both inside and outside of formal schooling. The eco-system for choral singing in Ireland will only remain strong and grow if young people are afforded a high quality singing experience during their formative years.