



AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS 2022**

Best Public Relations Campaign for an Event



James Vincent McMorrow Iveagh Gardens NCH June 2021. Photo by Mark Stedman

Campaign

National Concert Hall: James Vincent McMorrow at the Iveagh Gardens

Description of Campaign

James Vincent McMorrow at the Iveagh Gardens, 10th June 2021; the first outdoor pilot concert staged with a live audience since the start of the pandemic in Ireland, planned and promoted by the National Concert Hall (NCH) on behalf of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.



Organisation

National Concert Hall

Background to the Campaign

The National Concert Hall was chosen as the lead venue to host, plan, promote and market the historic event that was the first pilot outdoor concert with an audience since the start of the pandemic, all within a two-week timeframe.

Staged and designed to inform decisions on the provision of additional music, arts and culture events to be held throughout the summer, the event was both high risk and high reward presenting the National Concert Hall with an opportunity to: 1) showcase its capacity to deliver on such a landmark event for music in Ireland, 2) raise awareness of the NCH brand and profile 3) attract current and new audiences back to live music 4) develop closer ties with its parent Department and 4) deliver on the NCH vision: to be a world-class centre for music and a symbol of national pride for Irish people everywhere.

The NCH managed all public and media communications to include concert announcement, ticket on-sale, social media marketing, customer service, targeted customer, and key stakeholder communications. Given the tight turnaround time to deliver on such a project and working with restrictions imposed as result of Covid-19, careful

planning, and constant and consistent communication, both to internal and external audiences, was critical in determining the success of this event.

The main communication challenges for external audiences and stakeholders were:

- Ensuring consistency of messaging in respect of public health guidelines and the measures put in place to protect all.
- Clear and concise communication to ticket holders, from announcement to gig, was key to ensuring the event was efficient, safe, and enjoyable for all.
- Informing key stakeholders and department officials of all decisions and arrangements at every step of the planning process and event.
- Ensuring equal representation and profiling opportunities were secured for key spokespeople representative of the Department, the artists, and the NCH.
- Appeasing and engaging all fans, including those disappointed fans who, due to the overwhelming demand for tickets, could not secure a ticket.
- Ensuring a broad range of national media would be in attendance, despite capacity and on-site restrictions.

Statement of Objectives

Tasked with managing all operational and public and media communications of the event, the objectives for the NCH were as follows:

- **Engage current and new audiences** by communicating the ‘What, When, Where’ and all relevant specifics of the pilot concert.
- **Achieve mass awareness** of the event through earned media ensuring NCH, The Department and the artists were all credited/profiled and cut through to target audiences.
- **Ensure public understanding and acceptance of the public health measures** in place to ensure the safety and protection for all in attendance.
- **Meet customer service needs** digitally and off-line, with clear, concise, and timely communications.
- Ensure the concert was a **sell-out event**.
- Showcase the event beyond the Iveagh Gardens with a superior **quality livestream**, increasing the opportunity to reach international audiences.
- **Enhance public perception** of the event and awareness of the NCH amongst the wider public, through earned media coverage, on site advertising and online via social media and livestream coverage.
- **Ensure the event was a success, delivering on stakeholder objectives** for the safe return to live music with an audience.
- Ensure all relevant **stakeholders were informed** and engaged throughout the planning process and for the event itself.
- Achieve a **high satisfaction rating** amongst attendees on their overall experience.
- **Attract new followers** to NCH social media platforms.
- Stimulate **positive social commentary** and sentiment amongst attendees based on their overall experience.
- Generate a **willingness by attendees to attend other such events** of this nature.

Programme Planning and Strategy

The **strategy** for this event was simple: to plan, co-ordinate and deliver an historic, memorable, and successful music event that would deliver on the stated objectives for the safe return to live music with an audience.

Careful **planning**, co-ordination and communication was key in ensuring all parties worked together to deliver the strategy in just two weeks. The marketing and publicity campaign was led by the in-house Marketing and Communications team, who created and implemented the PR and marketing strategy and oversaw all aspects of campaign delivery.

The overall essence of the **communication campaign** was to engage and excite music fans, new and current audiences of the NCH, the wider public and key stakeholders (musicians, the media, corporate partners, promoters, event industry officials and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media) in reliving the magic of the live music experience with an audience, in a safe environment. In addition, the campaign was focused on delivering a

red-letter day for music in Ireland providing hope and a path forward for the provision of future live music events.

Campaign Delivery: given the timeframe involved, the team worked fast and efficiently, meeting daily online and coordinating with key decision makers on plans. The team was focused on delivering timely and clear messaging to all audiences, ensuring information was made available on multiple platforms, communications were targeted to relevant audiences and event plans were shared with key stakeholders at all stages of the planning process.

A **communication plan for ticket holders** was put in place advising of; Covid protocols and health and safety measures in place, staggered arrival times, and access requirements with three separate e-mails issued in the lead up to the event. These measures assisted greatly in reducing queues, supporting social distancing and adding to a calm and organised arrival for fans on the day.

The **PR and Communications plan** was crucial to ensuring all audiences and the wider public were informed of the event. The plan comprised of: media announcements via press releases, photo coverage and drone footage of the rehearsal and event, strategic use of social media and digital platforms to target new and current audiences, advertising in national newspapers and online, leveraging e-mail marketing to reach current audiences, using digital content to target music fans, using FAQs on the website to assist customers and engaging media to generate mass media awareness of the event.

Media played a key role in profiling the artists involved, generating interest in the event but also in informing the wider public of the health and safety measures in place providing necessary assurances to potential attendees.

An event specific **media plan** was put in place to ensure optimum coverage by a broad range of media outlets. Access to the Iveagh Gardens for media on the day of the concert was secured. Preferential viewing points were established for photographers and camera teams to work from and a digital hub for journalists and broadcasters was provided ensuring real-time and on-site reporting from early morning to evening. Access also allowed for 'behind-the-scenes' footage and in-the moment reporting, engaging fans with content, generating excitement and anticipation for the event. Media briefings took place and interviews were set up with key stakeholders to include NCH spokespersons (Chairwoman Maura McGrath and Head of Operations Barry Walsh), representatives of the event and security teams on site, musicians, and Minister Catherine Martin.

A **photoshoot** was arranged on the day to capture rehearsals and of the live performance with approved images issued to media and shared across digital platforms. Fans also used social media to share their own experience, sharing content widely. Drone footage of the event itself was also arranged, providing a birds-eye view of the event set-up and recording the event. (This footage was used in RTE news reports).

All **marketing collateral** used was designed to showcase the artists, venue, promoter (the NCH) and supporting partner (The Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media). All advertising (print, online and social media), written communications referenced and credited all parties involved. NCH branding on site was achieved by installing a branded stage banner, flags, hi-vis vests, media and staff lanyards, ticketing and directional signage on site. This was key to building brand awareness and recognition, and the NCH's association with the Iveagh Gardens.

A **post-concert survey** of ticket buyers was established to capture opinion and feedback on the experience recording satisfaction levels and willingness to attend other such likely events.

Key Dates/Moments

28th May – Government announced pilot events for Summer of 2021, including the Iveagh Gardens concert.

1st June – NCH CEO Robert Read interviewed on RTÉ Radio 1 Morning Ireland.

2nd June – NCH issues Media Release to announce the concert and on-sale details with print advertising in the Irish Independent, Irish Times and online advertising on the NCH's Facebook channel. Widespread media coverage was secured across Irishtimes.com, Irish Independent, Irish Examiner, Irish Mirror, The Journal, Daily Mail, Joe.ie, DublinLive.ie, Hotpress.com, Nialler9.com, RTE Radio 1 Tubridy and more.

3rd June – **tickets sold out in record time** with tens of thousands of customers looking for just 500 tickets.

3rd and 4th June – News of the sell-out concert is reported in the media - “Pilot Gig Sells out in Seconds” – in the Irish Daily Mail, The Sun, The Irish Times, RTE.ie, RTE Radio 1 Late Debate, Journal of Music.com

5th June – NCH CEO Robert Read interview in The Irish Times ‘A New Vision for a Reimagined Concert Hall’.

6th June – NCH CEO Robert Read interviewed on Newstalk’s Tom Dunne Show.

9th of June – NCH issues media release to announce a free livestream of the event, resulting in further media coverage across online and radio.

8th/9th June – James Vincent McMorrow interviewed on FM 104 and Virgin Media Ireland AM.

10th June – CONCERT DAY

Media Schedule

- Virgin Media Ireland AM – interview with Barry Walsh, Head of Operations NCH on site 8.30am
- RTÉ Radio 1 Morning Ireland – News items 8.50am
- Virgin Media News at One – interview with Barry Walsh, Head of Operations NCH
- RTÉ Radio 1 – News at 1 – report by Cian McCormack – interview with event production crew on importance of returning to work, 1pm
- RTÉ Radio 1 – Drivetime – report by Fergal Keane – interview with event production crew and NCH's Barry Walsh, Head of Operations, 4.30pm
- RTÉ Radio 1 – Six One and Nine O'clock News by Sinead Crowley – Interviews with James Vincent McMorrow and NCH Chairwoman Maura McGrath, 6pm and 9pm
- RTÉ Radio 1 – Arena report by Sinead Crowley on live concert, 7pm
- RTE.ie – Online News items by Sinead Crowley
- RTÉ 1 TV – Primetime – report by Conor Wilson Interview with Barry Walsh and Live interview with Minister Catherine Martin, 9.30pm
- Today FM, Newstalk Lunchtime Live, 98 FM interviews with James Vincent McMorrow, 1pm
- Live reports on Irish Times.com, The Journal.ie, Examiner, The Star, RTE.ie, Mirror, Extra.ie.

11th June – Front page photo coverage of the event was achieved across The Irish Times, Irish Examiner, The Irish Independent and Irish Sun.

Widespread photo and news coverage and reviews of the event was also secured on Newstalk Breakfast (interview with Barry Walsh, Head of Operations NCH), The Journal, The Irish Times, Irish Independent, Star, Daily Mail, Hotpress.com, Goldenplec.com, Image Magazine, RTE Radio 1, Business Post and Irish Mail on Sunday.

12th/13th June – Ongoing coverage and reference to the event across a range of print and radio.

Measurement

- The event **sold out in record time** with demand outstripping supply.
- Total views of the livestream equalled 26, 898 with 14,548 viewing it on their mobile phone – a record for a livestreamed music event in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was the **most watched stream** on the NCH YouTube channel. The event was also watched globally with fans tuning in from New Zealand to Brazil.
- Strong **visibility of NCH brand** on site was achieved.
- Social Media **commentary of the event was very positive** with many recognising the effort of the artists, NCH and Department as a collective in making the event a success and such a positive news story on Ireland’s journey in recovering from the pandemic.
- NCH **social media impressions** reached 1.3 million in just one week and the NCH gained 350 new followers across its social media platforms.
- **Audience feedback** saw that on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being excellent) customers rated their overall experience at 4.33.
- Almost 70% of those who attended reported they **would likely attend** an event under the same conditions in the future.

- NCH **attracted new audiences** with half of those who attended in the 18–30-year-old category and further 36% in the 30–44 category.
- **Earned media was seen as a significant differentiator** in hosting a memorable and historic event, driving interest in and awareness of the event with music fans and the wider public.
- **PR connected the NCH with many new audiences** for the first time, building awareness, and creating a positive news story for the sector and the NCH brand.
- Key **stakeholders were profiled** and credited in the media.
- The campaign and event achieved **blanket media coverage** across key media titles and outlets with wall-to-wall coverage of the day of the concert itself and photo coverage dominating the three main national newspapers the day after the event.

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