

EMMA MARTIN'S
UNITED FALL

OUR PRACTICE, OUR PEOPLE, OUR PLACE
STRATEGY
2023 – 2026

BACKGROUND and CONTEXT

Emma Martin made her first show in 2010, *Listowel Syndrome* and, having made four further works as an independent artist, she established United Fall as a company in 2018. Since then, she has made new work including *Night Dances*, *IAMIRELAND* (film), *Birdboy* and *King/Shrine*, directed *Orfeo and Euridice* for Irish National Opera. Based in rural County Carlow the company is committed to making work that is ambitious, visceral and authentic with a strong visual and atmospheric sensibility. Emma Martin's United Fall is in receipt of strategic funding from the Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon since 2018, funding that is allocated to organisations deemed essential to the arts infrastructure in Ireland.

The company operates a flexible management model allowing it to respond quickly and intelligently to challenges be they artistic, financial, social or environmental. This model, while it needs growth and stability, allows the company to channel its resources into the making of work, employment of artists and presentation and touring for audiences. In 2022, Emma Martin's United Fall attracted international interest with presentations, *Birdboy* and *Night Dances* at two prestigious platforms in Edinburgh, the *Imagine Festival* and *Edinburgh Festival Fringe/Dance Base* respectively, which demonstrated the diversity and scale of the company's work. Emma Martin regularly collaborates with other producers and artists in theatre, opera, film and visual arts which reflects her experience and engagement with other artistic disciplines and her ability to bring dance encounters to audiences who do not ordinarily engage with dance.

This is United Fall's first strategic plan. It comes at a time when the arts sector is recovering from the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic, a time when there is a serious economic crunch and when climate change is at the forefront of people's minds. It also comes at a time when the arts proved to be a comfort and support to many during lockdown periods, artists mined their creativity and ingenuity to make work on digital platforms for audiences and government funding has increased exponentially for the arts sector in Ireland. Furthermore, the Arts Council's newly published dance strategy, *Advancing Dance 2022 – 2025*, speaks to future investment, support and development of dance in Ireland. It is in this context that Emma Martin's United Fall will enter a period of consolidation and growth, development and creation, presentation and engagement. This plan outlines the company's priorities for the years 2023 – 2026 and how it intends to achieve them.

VISION

To be iconic and authentic in creating bold dance and interdisciplinary encounters for everyone.

MISSION

To create compelling work that reaches beyond the niche, engaging both the first timers and the committed dance audiences, from our rural base in Carlow; making visceral and ambitious work of different scales; growing and developing national and international audiences, partners and collaborators; nurturing and employing artists and arts workers; deepening our relationship with the wider Carlow community, guided by our core values: *Boldness*, *Excellence* and *Well-being*.

VALUES

BOLDNESS – we make work that's fresh, daring, rigorous and human, pushing the artform of dance forward

EXCELLENCE – we apply the highest standards to everything we do and how we do it, artistically and operationally

WELL-BEING – we respect and take care of the artists we work with, new and established, our audiences and participants and we want to play our role in the inclusivity and future development of the wider dance sector in Ireland

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2023 – 2026

Priority 1:	The Work: <i>artists, audiences and presentation</i>
Priority 2:	Placemaking: <i>building a community for dance</i>
Priority 3:	Engagement and Networking: <i>increasing visibility</i>
Priority 4:	Sustainability and Structure: <i>becoming fit for purpose</i>

PRIORITY 1:

THE WORK - *artists, audiences, presentation*

“United Fall’s work pushes dance into a new place”

Emma Martin’s choreography is described as *raw, sensuous, dark, visual, daring and feral yet accessible*. The interdisciplinary nature of our company’s artistic practice has created an audience for United Fall’s work that might not ordinarily attend dance performances. Our work has excellent production values, a theatricality, a strong design aesthetic across lighting, set and sound and an approach to collaboration that is creatively generous and trusting.

PRIORITY 1: Objectives

We will:

Artists

- Continue to invite dance artists and creative collaborators into creative processes that bring them into new and ambitious artistic places.
- Offer available resources to local artists and the wider performing arts community to develop their own work.
- Care for our artists and teams in relation to their professional well-being.

Audiences

- Make brave, ambitious and accessible work of the highest quality to grow our national and international audience.
- Place dance at the centre of our local cultural scene in Carlow creating a sense of local embeddedness which is essential in the context of deepening support and recognition.

Presentation

- Bring excellent and bold work around Ireland and to leading international festivals and dance platforms.

- Continue to collaborate with producers and companies across artforms to heighten the awareness of dance in an interdisciplinary context.

PRIORITY 1: Actions

How will we achieve our objectives?

Artists

- We will provide opportunities for artists both established and new through development, collaboration on works, residencies, mentoring and touring.
- We will present one new work, at least, biennially, starting with *Dark Days Need Ceremony Part I & II KING/SHRINE (2023)* presenting *Parts I, II & III* in 2024, placing excellence at the heart of our creative process.
- We will engage in well-structured, phased development periods for our work to ensure time for rigour, reflection, exploration and excellent artistic quality.
- We will provide employment opportunities for dancers, creatives and arts workers that offers good remuneration, a safe and happy working environment, high quality touring terms and consideration of their wellbeing at all times.
- We will explore the possibility of creating associate artist opportunities to deepen relationships with artists with whom we collaborate.

Audiences

- We will preview work in Carlow at VISUAL for local and invited audiences.
- We will, between 2023 – 2026, premiere new work for audiences that is of excellent quality and differing scales at Dublin Dance Festival, Dublin Theatre Festival and other leading Irish festivals.

Presentation

- We will maximise the lifespan of our work by retaining it in our repertoire, storing and maintaining our sets and costumes properly and reviving our work for national and international tours.
- We will nurture existing relationships with Irish National Opera and Dublin Theatre Festival and build new ones with Dublin Dance Festival and the proposed National Dance Company to identify appropriate projects for coproduction or collaboration, and so broaden our audiences in 2023 - 26.

PRIORITY 2:

PLACE-MAKING - *building a community for dance*

“Working in County Carlow presents exciting opportunities and development potential”

Our company's location in Carlow, the second smallest of Ireland's 32 counties, is a deliberate and long-term commitment. In line with the Arts Council's spatial strategy, *Place, Space & People*, we, United Fall, will play our part in making sure that people, no matter where they live, have access to artistic encounters, enhancing quality of life and engaging the imagination.

PRIORITY 2: Objectives

We will:

- Support the Arts Council's spatial strategy and dance policy, *Advancing Dance*, to provide access to people's cultural rights.
- Celebrate our location in rural County Carlow as an asset to our development potential and maximising the resources we have.
- Engage with stakeholders and peer organisations in Carlow to align dance policy across the county/region.
- Continue to provide experiences for young Carlow dancers to nurture their artistry, talent and lead by example, illustrating that dance can be a viable career choice.

PRIORITY 2: Actions

How will we achieve our objectives?

- We will function as advocates for dance in Carlow and will play our role in providing quality arts experiences in the South-East.
- We will build long-term relationships with Carlow County Council Arts Office, Carlow Arts Festival and Southeast Technical University (Carlow) to ensure that dance sits within regional arts strategies
- We will consolidate our relationship with VISUAL, collaborating on work that meets our mutual strategic intentions, for both the theatre and gallery spaces, leading to wider audience engagement (2023/24).
- We will make our El Paso GNZ11 studio (4.5m x 11m) and self-catering accommodation available to local, national and international artists, across artforms, both on a rental and in-kind basis.

- We will build on our connection and collaboration with teenage dancers from Dance Republic, Carlow and elsewhere through biannual workshops to deepen their understanding of the artform and to support their future ambitions in dance.

PRIORITY 3:

ENGAGEMENT and NETWORKING - *increasing our visibility*

“Build a national and international reputation from a rural location”

To date our focus has been placed on the making and producing our work to the highest standards. For our company to be sustainable we must diversify our income sources, grow our partnerships, collaborators, find touring opportunities and we must communicate clearly and regularly with our audiences. Over the life of this plan, we will allocate time and resources to strategic engagement and networking activities.

PRIORITY 3: Objectives

We will:

- Invest time and resources in improving our profile and visibility and promote Carlow nationally and internationally through our work.
- Build audiences for dance locally and nationally.
- Deepen existing connections both nationally and internationally to promote our work.
- Present work internationally at least every two years.
- Develop new connections and collaborations via strategic international networking.
- Undertake research into hosting residencies in Carlow for both national and international artists.
- Showcase our work at international markets and platforms nationally and internationally.

PRIORITY 3: Actions

How will we achieve our objectives?

- We will upgrade and revitalise our website, provide regular updates on our activities to local, regional and national print, broadcast and on-line/social media.
- We will maximise the opportunities generated from previous presentations in Edinburgh.

- We will collaborate with arts centre/venue networks in Ireland to develop regular tours of our most successful work to establish visibility and a connection with dance audiences nationwide.
- We will invest time and money in attending key international networking and showcasing platforms in Europe and beyond to build relationships and collaborations, starting with *Birdboy* at Aerowaves, Spring Forward Festival, Dublin 2023.
- We will engage the services of an experienced international dance curator/presenter to represent our work in Australia and Asia and to research into which markets/festivals our work fits best.
- We will explore the potential for international residencies and exchanges and will connect with Dance Ireland's national dance residency programme.

PRIORITY 4:

SUSTAINABILITY and STRUCTURE – *becoming fit for purpose*

“United Fall needs to remain small but be properly equipped to make brilliant work”

The challenge for a small dance organisation like ours is long term sustainability. We recognise the need to grow our income base, expand our board and engage the necessary people and expertise to ensure we are efficient, professional, compliant and robust in all aspects of our management and delivery processes.

PRIORITY 4: Objectives

We will:

- Strengthen and develop our operating model at board and management levels to meet the needs and ambition of our strategic plan 2023 – 2026.
- Establish and implement an efficient development, production and networking schedule for 2023-26.
- Operate best practice in relation to governance and fiscal responsibility.
- Grow our income base, increase our turnover and improve our financial well-being.

PRIORITY 4: Actions

How will we achieve our objectives?

- We will expand our Board of Directors to include artistic, international, legal, financial and local representation underpinned by a policy of inclusion and diversity.

- We will plan our programme to ensure maximum impact, intelligent use of resources and to avoid creative and organisational burn-out.
- We will diversify to generate new and/or additional income from grant aid, national and international touring fees and guarantees, commissions, co-productions, box office, residencies, studio hires, local authority funding and other public funding opportunities.
- We will move towards engaging a Producer on a full-time basis.
- We will expand our administrative core to include a part time bookkeeper/administrator (currently outsourced).
- We will remunerate our people at the accepted industry norms and will move towards offering pension contributions for full-time staff.
- We will expand and contract our teams in line with the rhythm of our programme i.e., developing and premiering work, touring nationally, internationally, showcasing, networking, mentoring, workshops and residencies.
- We will visit and engage with networks, creative projects and individual artists who have chosen to build a sustainable working model in a rural environment e.g., AREA (Arts in Rural European Areas/IETM).

HOW WILL WE RECOGNISE SUCCESS?

Dance engages with things that are beyond words. It transcends language and cultural barriers. Our company, Emma Martin's United Fall, creates work that crosses and fuses artforms but with dance and movement at its core. We have built a reputation as a leading dance company in Ireland in a short number of years and our international reputation is growing. Our Artistic Director, Emma Martin has successfully collaborated with other leading Irish producers to bring dance to opera, theatre, visual art and digital arts audiences. Our company, with external and partner support, will employ measures to assess the impact and success of its strategy 2023 - 2026:

We will monitor and evaluate:

- The number and quality of invitations to present work at national festivals and venues.
- The increase in the number and value (artistic and financial) of commissions and co-production partnerships with national and international partners.
- The results of audience surveys in collaboration with arts centres, presenters, festivals.
- Our statistics around the number of artists, creatives, technicians, touring personnel that we engage including pay rates, ethnicity and gender.
- Our bi-annual workshops with Dance Republic students and other young people to solicit opinion and feedback on the importance of dance in their lives and follow their progression.

- The annual financial position – growth in income and prudent management of overheads.
- Analysis of web traffic, social media followers and media coverage.

The Board will annually review the progress of the actions set out in the Strategy. The information gathered will be reviewed, analysed and applied to the development of the company's second strategic plan 2027 – 2030.

APPENDIX: I

Process:

The process for this strategic review and plan included extensive desk research, over thirty one-to-one interviews (face-to-face and zoom), a small focus group, email submissions, a series of meetings with United Fall Artistic Director and Producer, a site visit to Studio El Paso GNZ11, Milltown Co. Carlow, viewing of videos and performances.

Acknowledgements:

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Researcher/Consultant/Facilitator: Jane Daly Arts Management

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