

WHERE TWO WORLDS COLLIDE

She's a ballerina and a trained pianist, but she's working in a fast-paced corporate environment and studying for an MBA.

Helen Carroll could aptly be described as a woman where two worlds collide, but she wouldn't have it any other way.

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As **Head of Communications and Partnerships at Business to Arts**, a not-for-profit organisation that forms links between business and arts organisations across Ireland, the 31-year-old has regular interaction with both the arts community, and with businesses interested in partnering with, and sponsoring artists and cultural events.

“A lot of companies have sports sponsorship already so they might also want to connect with people involved in culture or the arts. “Businesses can be interested in doing anything from sponsorship of an arts festival to sponsoring a single piece of art,” says Helen, who works as part of a six-member team.

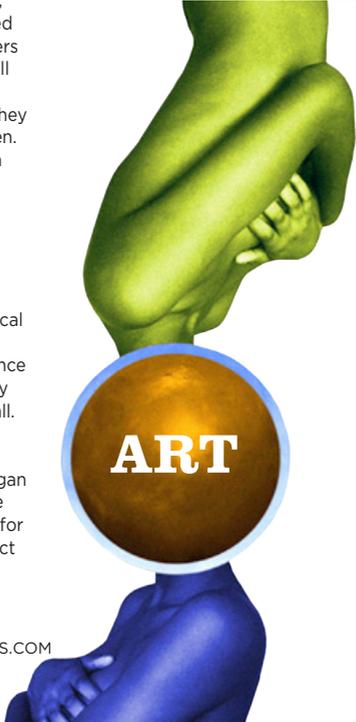
The organisation has 100 corporate members interested in forming partnerships with artists and artistic communities. One of its biggest projects to date has been with the professional services firm Accenture, which wanted to approach the issue of gender inclusion in its arts sponsorship programme: Business to Arts oversaw a visionary project under which two specially commissioned artists, one male, one female, produced five portraits of female members of the Royal Irish Academy. “All companies will have different strategies, or different issues they wish to address,” explains Helen.

Leading corporate law firm A&L Goodbody, for example, was very interested in literacy as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility Programme. In conjunction with Business to Arts, the company decided to embrace creativity at a very local level — and with young minds. The result — a writer-in-residence programme at a Dublin primary school, St Joseph’s, in East Wall.

And, when Dublin Port wanted to bring more people into the area, the company began to commission artists to create pieces of public art. Last year, for example, a special music project commissioned by Dublin Port and supported by the National



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Concert hall resulted in Starboard Home, an album featuring a diverse ensemble of Irish musicians, and a national Concert Hall performance.

Business to Arts is currently expanding its reach to engage more widely with regional-based arts organisations outside Dublin, in a bid to achieve a national balance of the artists and arts organisations with which it engages.

Helen enjoys the best of both of these worlds, she believes: “I tried to marry my love of being involved in the fast-paced corporate environment with my passion for creativity of the arts world,” she observes — though, it wasn’t always that way.

A trained ballerina — she began to study ballet at the age of three and dancing was



that if you decide your dance career is not working out you can do a master's degree and go into anything — because you have an undergraduate degree.”

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Master's degree in hand, Helen worked with various organisations including the Grand Canal Theatre, IMG Arts in London and, later, with Bord Gais Energy Theatre where she became Assistant Manager. Then in 2015 her sister Maire, a concert pianist, won an Allianz Business to Arts award. As Helen sat in the auditorium watching the presentation ceremony, she recalls, she was moved by the organisation and the work it did in its role as an intermediary between the corporate and arts worlds: “I found it fascinating that the business world was so active in partnering with the arts,” she recalls.

So when a job came up with Business to Arts the following year, she applied — and has never looked back. She kept up her regular ballet classes until last September, when she began the demanding MBA programme at Trinity College. Although she still dances, she says, for the first time in her life she's actively restricting her participation in ballet. “I still take a class every week and regularly attend ballet performances in London and in Paris. Next month I'm travelling to Amsterdam for a performance.”

“I love my job,” she says. “It's so rewarding; we do make a difference.”

her greatest passion until her mid-twenties — she is also a pianist. At 16, however, given the choice between going to London to further her ballet career, or continuing on the academic track, at which she excelled, she decided to study Law at Trinity College “I had to make a decision whether I wanted to go on, which meant I would have had to go to London but I made the decision to stay in school.”

However, she kept up her ballet all during college, spending summers in New York dancing and working with choreographers — and she still dances to this day. After graduating at 22, she decided that law was not the way she wanted to go, after all: “I didn't want to work in a job that I didn't love,” she says, adding that she then studied for a Master's

Degree in Cultural Policy and Arts Management at UCD: “People thought I was crazy,” she recalls ruefully.

“But I just felt there had to be a way where I could incorporate my lifelong passion with a job. “When I was 15 or 16 the support services were not there for exceptionally gifted people who needed to study abroad with the best teachers in the world, so the concept of support for the arts, and how it can be enhanced really interested me.

“When I was studying ballet years ago, I would have gone to ballet school, but I wouldn't have come out with a degree that would have been internationally recognised — that's possible nowadays as many of the programmes are degree programmes now. “This means