

A MANIFESTO FOR RECOVERY: COVID-19 AND THE UK'S ORCHESTRAS

Despite the UK Government's generous support for business and its Culture Recovery Fund, the orchestral sector is under severe threat. From ticket sales and touring overseas to working in schools and communities, British orchestras rely on earned income to survive. But, unable to perform, that has plummeted since the start of the pandemic, and the UK's orchestras face a long road to recovery. With live events among the last sectors of the economy to re-open, musicians, the backbone of our world-leading orchestras, are facing mounting and significant financial hardship as they fall through the gaps of government support.

The current position for the UK orchestral sector:

- For the majority of musicians, the UK is a gig economy: no play, no pay. 30% of self-employed musicians fell through the cracks of the income support scheme, and government support for freelancers will cease after the end of August.
- While concert halls in the UK remain closed to audiences, orchestras across Asia and Europe are back in business thanks to more generous levels of government subsidy.
- The UK's orchestras have continued to reach audiences through digital platforms. But while pay models for streaming are beginning to emerge, online activity generates minimal revenue.
- Current social distancing rules mean concert halls will be unable to operate at anything like capacity, making performances and concerts economically unviable.

The shutdown of orchestral performances also impacts on soloists and conductors; concert halls; composers and publishers; youth orchestras and conservatoires; schools, music services and communities; and the managers and administrators that support them. Without an active orchestral sector – a significant employer, with a highly skilled workforce of more than 2,000 musicians on contract, 10,000 freelancers and 2,000 administrative and technical staff – the entire ecosystem is in jeopardy.

How the government could mitigate the prolonged shutdown of live events:

- **Build on the Culture Recovery Fund** by maintaining public funding for culture in the Comprehensive Spending Review.
- **Amend Orchestra Tax Relief and Gift Aid** to support live and digital concerts.
- **Work with the sector to develop a strategy for returning to financial viability**, including a definitive timetable for Stage 5 of the lifting of restrictions on live events.

- **Introduce a Government-backed insurance guarantee** to enable orchestras to commit to concerts and tours both in the UK and abroad.
- **Send out the message that it is safe to go back to our theatres and concert halls**, supported by an equivalent scheme to 'Eat Out To Help Out' for buying tickets.

In return orchestras will

- Use the power of the UK's world-class orchestras to contribute to the renewal, well-being and creativity of our nations and our communities.
- Get back to business, with additional government investment, to rebuild the economy, fuel jobs and growth, and prepare for the UK's post-Brexit future.
- Use our expertise and experience to build new opportunities across schools, health and social care and in the community.
- Focus our efforts on enabling greater diversity and equity across the sector.

Orchestras contribution to the UK and beyond

The creative industries are the fastest-growing sector in the UK economy, and UK orchestras are key to its success. Research by the ABO in 2019 shows that, until the pandemic

- our orchestras gave more than 3,500 concerts in the UK each year, reaching over 4 million people;
- toured to 40 countries, performing more than 400 concerts abroad, providing a vital international PR role for the UK's creative excellence;
- contributed over £148 million to the UK economy.

UK orchestras are heard globally every day on radio and streaming sites (not just on classical channels, but alongside rock and pop artists), as well as on soundtracks for feature films, TV and video games.

This success of the sector extends well beyond the concert hall. The UK's orchestras work with over 700,000 children and adults in education and community settings, from schools to care homes, and are an active participant in the government's ambitions for Social Prescribing.