



ABO Conference 2011 – DERBY

Held at the Derby Assembly Rooms, 16-18 February 2011

Hosted by *sinfonia VIVA*

This report was written by Mike Wheeler and first appeared on the Music and Vision website. We are very grateful to Mike for allowing us to reproduce his report here. More can be found at www.mvdaily.com/

With its strapline - 'Protect and Survive' - and logo – a small oak sapling encircled by a lifebelt – there was no doubt about the main agenda for this year's Association of British Orchestras Annual Conference (Assembly Rooms, Derby, UK, 16-18 February, 2011): how can the orchestral sector best respond to the current economic climate, dominated as it is by stringent cuts in government funding for the arts?

ABO chairman Simon Taylor's welcome was followed by Darren Henley, Managing Director of Classic FM, who cited the station's recent listening figures as an assertion that the death-knell of classical music was wrong. Peter Helps, chief executive of this year's host orchestra – Derby-based Sinfonia Viva – put the question: how are orchestras to face the new situation of cuts in arts funding, and introduced what would emerge as an additional theme of the conference, that of partnerships.

Helen Bishop, Head of Community Relations at Rolls-Royce, gave an introduction to the firm's partnership with Sinfonia Viva, in terms of support for the orchestra's concerts and education work, and Viva's support for Rolls Royce events and employee development.

The keynote speech was delivered by Philip Blond, whose ideas have been a major influence on the UK government's 'Big Society' agenda. He attacked the failure of both free-market individualism and state intervention, which together have left us with a society in which we have "stopped operating with each other." A lack of objectivity in our culture has resulted in, on the one hand, more passivity and less participation, and on the other a reluctance to distinguish between good and bad.

We were, he said, "not going to recover society without culture". But his ideas on how this was to be achieved were controversial, to say the least. His belief in hierarchy seemed to sit oddly with his call for more mass participation in culture. He didn't seem to be referring to social hierarchy specifically, but if this is the case, he failed to make this clear. Commenting on the recent announcement of ring-fenced government funding for music in schools, he suggested that orchestras could bid to take over running school music, an idea greeted by several delegates with – well, let's call it a certain degree of scepticism. The debate continues on the ABO website blog, <http://aborchestras.posterous.com/>

Following the break, a six-member panel discussed the future landscape of public and private funding for the arts. Alan Davey, Chief Executive, Arts Council England, said that in spite of

difficulties it had been a good year for orchestras, in terms of both audiences and education work. Lorna Brown, Chair, National Association of Local Government Arts Officers, and first contributor to the ABO blog mentioned above, apologised for adopting the role of 'Mrs Glum', but the depth and speed of cuts in government funding were creating a 'panic factor'. But while we must acknowledge serious challenges, we can evolve and find our bearings in the new climate. Mick Gallagher, Director, Creative Contemporary Solutions Ltd, took up the partnership banner. A declared sceptic of the Big Society agenda, he called for cultural partnerships in every city and town, supported at every level. Holding tight and hoping for the best, he said, is the road to ruin.

David Hall, Chief Executive, Foyle Foundation, urged a re-examination of how the arts sector operates. The private sector can't take up all the slack, he said, and a culture of individual giving was still in its infancy. David Baile, Chief Executive, International Society for the Performing Arts, warned against an over-enthusiastic rush to emulate the American reliance on philanthropy. The US system was "a bit broken", relying as it does on a diverse revenue stream, with philanthropy playing a major but discretionary role.

The evening's conference concert, by Sinfonia ViVA, is reviewed separately, elsewhere on this site. It was during the reception afterwards that Roger Wright, Controller, BBC Radio 3, made the welcome announcement that the network would return to broadcasting live concerts every weekday evening, starting in May.

Thursday's opening session looked at 'Why Americans give'. Russell Jones, Vice President for Marketing & Membership Development, League of American Orchestras, and former ABO Director, introduced the session, concerned with "busting the myths" about the American system. A simple adoption of the system in the UK not the answer to the current situation, he said, but we can learn from it.

The main presentation came from Jon Limbacher, Chief Operating Officer, St Paul Chamber Orchestra, Minnesota. In the US, he said, donors were regarded as investors. Giving cultures tended to be variable and to go in cycles. He identified these as: 1. Necessity – a matter of "passing the hat". 2. Making a strong case for support, and working to make it stronger. 3. Working hard at getting support, and seeing fund-raising as fundamental to survival. 4. Engaging donors, getting them involved in decision-making. 5. Donors giving because they are asked. A willingness to ask was essential, even though finding the right approach often feels awkward: "without a culture of asking, there can be no culture of giving."

In the following discussion, Lisa Smith, Head of Fundraising, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, mentioned the importance of maintaining direct contact with donors by phone. Angel Ysaguirre, Director of Global Community Investing, The Boeing Company, challenged the idea that there was "no money in corporates", pointing out that the US government did not start giving money to the arts until the 60s, and that corporates have a longer history of arts funding. It was essential, he added, to "know your corporation."

Concurrent with that discussion, Sue Isherwood, Director, National Culture Forum's Leading Learning Programme, chaired a session on 'Strategic commissioning', while Louise Mitchell chaired a discussion between Simon Hollingworth, Director, Lincoln Drill Hall, Kenneth Osborne, Finance Director, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and Anthony Sargent, General Director, The Sage, Gateshead, on 'Partnerships that work'.

There was, naturally, considerable interest in the appearance by Ed Vaizey MP, Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries. Under the title 'A culture of giving: increasing philanthropy in the UK', he outlined the government's latest thinking on arts policy and philanthropy. Among other things he urged orchestras to engage with technological innovations like social networks, apparently unaware that this is already happening. Urging engagement with new audiences, he commended the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment's Night Shift series of late-night, informal concerts, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's Citizen Musician Initiative, which encourages musicians at all levels to "create meaningful connections in the community". In conclusion, he commended the Department for Education's recently-published review of music education, chaired by Darren Henley. Orchestras had a role at the heart of music education, and they should seize the opportunity.

The ensuing discussion on the prospects of increasing philanthropy and the fundraising capacity of British orchestras was joined by Sir Vernon Ellis, Chair, British Council and Chairman, English National Opera, Russell Jones, Terry O'Rourke, Chairman Designate, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Amanda Saunders, Director of Development, Royal Opera House, and Charlotte Spencer, Head of Development, Manchester Camerata.

As this got underway, two other sessions were taking place. Darren Henley, led a discussion on the role professional orchestras can play in protecting our youth orchestras, for which he was joined by Sarah Alexander, Director, National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, Richard Hallam, National Music Participation Director, Virginia Haworth-Galt, Chief Executive, Federation of Music Services, and Stephen Maddock, Chief Executive, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

Meanwhile, Catherine Langabeer, Operations Manager, Julie's Bicycle, and Kathryn McDowell, Managing Director, London Symphony Orchestra, led a discussion on 'Protecting the sustainability agenda'. Set up in 2007, Julie's Bicycle is "a broad coalition of music, theatre and scientific experts committed to delivering a concerted response to climate change." Focussing particularly on the mechanics of touring, discussion touched on the need to work across the "supply chain" to build sustainability into tour planning, with agents playing a key role, and on incentives for orchestral players to use coaches and trains more, as is already the case with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. It was suggested that each organisation could have its own 'green team', and there was an aim to produce a sustainability charter for ABO itself.

Three concurrent sessions followed the lunch break. In the light of recent announcements of changes to funding for students in Higher Education, Hilary Boulding, Principal, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, discussed the role of orchestras working in partnership with conservatoires to ensure continued access to the highest quality training for our most talented young musicians, joined by Manus Carey, Head of Artistic Planning, Manchester Camerata, Barry

Ife, Principal, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Jonty Stockdale, Principal, Royal Northern College of Music, John Summers, Chief Executive, The Hallé, and Stephen Threlfall, Head of Music, Chetham's School of Music.

Under the title 'Toolbox: We're all fundraisers now', Michelle Wright from Cause4, an organisation that supports charities and social enterprises in organisational development and fundraising, led a practical, interactive session exploring the complex ecology of orchestras, identifying the very many challenges that confront charities generally and orchestras in particular, and brainstorming new ideas to 'make things happen'.

Henry Little, Chief Executive, Orchestras Live, led a session looking at his organisation's approach to partnership working, focusing on two projects delivered in 2010. Connected to Music saw the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, sinfonia ViVA, and Northamptonshire County Council working in a deprived area of Northampton. Hear and Now was a partnership between the Philharmonia Orchestra and intergenerational groups working in a multi-cultural area of Bedford, developing community engagement and social cohesion. Panel members involved in the two projects spoke about the benefits to both the communities and individuals (one Northampton teacher took up the double bass as a direct result).

The final, plenary, session of the afternoon focussed on the education projects run by host orchestra Sinfonia Viva, particularly the one currently under way based on Anna Meredith's new piece (see concert review). Workshop leader James Redwood led the discussion with conductor André de Ridder and Anna Meredith. We heard about the music workshops and the art workshops led by Anna's sister Eleanor, and Viva was on hand, together with two of the participating student groups, to let delegates hear, see and join in with, some of the work in progress.

Delegates were grouped round tables for this session, which moved on to inviting responses to a number of questions - 1: Money's too tight to mention. If orchestras die, who cares? 2a: There are too many orchestras doing the same things. What's wrong with merging departments or even merging entirely? 2b: If in our education and outreach work we take it as a given that everyone has a valid contribution to make, why are our management structures so authoritarian? 2c: If "sharing is diluting", is it inevitable that working in partnership results in a loss of identity? 2d: If orchestras are going to find a place in the government's Big Society, where community cohesion is a universal responsibility, what effect does this have on the focus of our priorities? 3: Hope for the future: What do we want the orchestral landscape to look like when our primary school children leave education? Responses, written by each group on large pieces of card, were collected for collation and a summary will be issued in due course.

At the conference dinner on Thursday evening, Chairman Simon Taylor presented the ABO Award for 2010 to violin teacher David Takeno, in honour of his distinguished work at the Guildhall School and elsewhere. Touching messages of congratulation were read out from three former pupils – Anthony Marwood, Rachel Podger and Stephanie Gonley. The evening

was rounded off by a very accomplished quartet of players taking part in a scheme run by promoters Derby Jazz to foster young talent.

The final day opened with two concurrent sessions. Jon Limbacher described the St Paul Chamber Orchestra's business model, based on the belief that philanthropic support is the core/primary revenue and that ticket sales, while critical, are a loss-leader.

Graham Sheffield, meanwhile, chaired a discussion on the composer's role, with Andrew Cornall, Head of A&R, at EMI, Anna Meredith, André de Ridder, and Ros Rigby, Performance Programme Director, The Sage Gateshead. André de Ridder spoke about the importance of everyone working towards the same goal, the value of having the composer on hand for specific projects, and opportunities for audience development, while both Andrew Cornall and Anna Meredith acknowledged the importance of knowing the players individually.

The morning's second session was split three ways. 'Protecting the musicians' was a discussion on working with the Musicians' Union and artist management to ensure fair rates of pay for musicians in the current climate, and how to retain the world class status of our orchestras. Taking part were Julian Bird, Chief Executive, SOLT/TMA (Society of London Theatre & the Theatrical Management Association), Sibylle Jackson, Director: Artist Management for agents Hazard Chase, Chi-chi Nwanoku, Principal Double Bass with the OAE, John Smith, General Secretary, Musicians Union and Timothy Walker AM, Chief Executive & Artistic Director, London Philharmonic Orchestra.

'Enabling effective collaboration' was led by Clare Cooper, Co-Founder and Co-Director, Mission Models Money, which describes itself as "a passionate network of thinkers and doers whose vision is to transform the way the arts use their resources to support the creation and experience of great art." With Lesley Patrick, Collaboration Manager of Opera North and University of Leeds' DARE programme, which "aims to fuse the artistic with the academic to inspire and stimulate new ways of thinking and working", the session looked at MMM's 2007 report 'Towards a Healthy Ecology of Arts and Culture' and ways of following up its call for increasing levels of partnership and responding to the challenges and opportunities.

In the third of these sessions, Henry Little chaired a discussion on Orchestras Live's partnerships with orchestras and promoters, including local authorities, particularly in terms of helping new music to reach a wider audience. The discussion focussed partly on Alec Roth's recent Guitar Concerto, composed for Morgan Szymanski and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. Orchestras Live's involvement took in not just the premiere, last September, but five further performances around the country. David Richardson, Artistic Consultant at Orchestras Live, spoke about the importance of building trust between the orchestra, the ABO, and promoters, comments echoed by Susan Allison, Secretary of Cockermouth Music Society and Paula Redway, Director, Ludlow Assembly Rooms, two organisations that also work with Orchestras Live. The composer's role, particularly the importance of their public visibility, was touched on by Ken Sillito, the Artistic Director of the ASMF, and Henry Little, who pointed out that while some composers are fantastic ambassadors for their work, some aren't. Alec Roth himself

floated the idea of composers serving some kind of apprenticeship once they leave college. Speaking from the floor, Edward Gregson, former principal of the Royal Northern College of Music, mentioned that the composer's public role was becoming an increasingly important element in the college's composition courses.

The final session, after lunch both summed up the last few days and handed on the baton to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, as the host orchestra in January 2012. Madam Guo Shan of the China Symphony Development Foundation, speaking through an interpreter, spoke briefly about building stronger social relevance for orchestras. Jon Limbacher found the conference "rewarding and enlightening", and was impressed by general air of optimism and what he called the spirit of "chin-up determination" he found. He added that the USA looks up to the UK in terms of the place of culture in society, echoing his comment, the day before, that the UK was "one of the bastions of classical music." Mark Pemberton called for strong advocacy, especially to local government, at the same time as sending out a strong message to the public. He paid tribute to Sinfonia Viva's hosting of the conference, which "set a model" for the future.

Simon Taylor closed the conference by adding his thanks, and suggesting that orchestras might encourage more board members to attend in future years. His final words were "Orchestras are here to spread joy. Let's go and do that."

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