

MH SPEECH TO ABO CONFERENCE
1,500 WORDS
APPROX 15 MINS

Good afternoon and thank you very much for inviting me to come here and speak to you again. It's great to get such a wonderful mix of people together in a room so I can tell you all how wonderful you are! I know how demanding schedules are, with training, rehearsals, performances, recording and community and education work. I've got some sympathy with you all there. You should try being a Minister and running for re-election at the same time!

I want to start with a few thank yous, to Mark Pemberton and his team at the ABO for organising this conference and putting together such an impressive programme.

Secondly to the Royal Concert Hall for hosting us, this is the first time I've been here and it's a really fantastic building. And thank you to Glasgow for hosting us too. It's such a pleasure to be in this great city - one that, like Liverpool, has shown the power of culture, and specifically the European Capital of Culture title, to regenerate a city. While culture might be a devolved issue, it doesn't mean I can't enjoy my brief foray north of the border!

20 years ago London might have been the only choice,

but now cities like Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow and Edinburgh all boast a strong and growing cultural infrastructure and a mature understanding of the importance of things like music and culture not just for lifting of the spirits of each of us individually but for making places attractive for people to live and work in.

But most importantly I want to thank you. I've been to enough conferences and receptions to know that it's the attendees that matter, and the most important thing you can do over the next three days is to talk to each other. Talk about excellence, talk about creativity, talk about business models and funding, talk about politics.

Because it's hugely important to be talking about culture now. First and foremost because culture has never been so important to us as it is today. It's a challenging time, socially we're working longer and harder, with more stress, politically we've got a general election around the corner, economically, we've just emerged from a long and deep recession. Culture is an antidote to this. It can broaden our horizons and enrich our souls but we know it's more than that. It gives us a platform to experience, interpret and understand the world that we see around us.

I've been Culture Minister twice now, for more than two years in total, and I'm very happy to say it's been my favourite job in Government. In what other position would I have the opportunity to see Cecilia Bartoli at the Barbican, Daniel Barenboim at the Royal Festival Hall, handle the Staffordshire Hoard in Birmingham and see Banksy's burned-out ice-cream van in Bristol? And at the same time open up new cultural opportunities to children and young people, to help nurture talent and to grow our creative industries.

And what an exciting time in music - building the Sage in Gateshead, completely refurbishing the Royal Festival Hall, the national and international success of so many of our orchestras and our continued ability to draw in the greatest conductors, players and orchestras from around the globe. There's very few places around the world, if any, where music lovers are better catered for.

Just as we excel in music, we excel in all forms of culture - theatre, dance, the visual arts, our museums and galleries - it's an area where we really are on top of the international league. But we also know that culture, like all areas of government, is threatened with funding cuts, so it becomes all the more important that we shout from the rooftops about what the very best in culture can do, for individuals

and for society.

Gone are the days when this was a fight between intrinsic and instrumental values. There's been some bloody battles over that in the past, but we're in a place now where we can talk about both with more confidence. To speak so simply about intrinsic or instrumental benefits of culture is to create an artificial divide between them. It's absolutely the case that we should be seeking both. Excellence, risk-taking and innovation underpin the success of our cultural sectors. But at the same time, publicly funded culture is a public service, so the benefits of cultural engagement should be shared by everyone, not just those who know about them. And we know exactly what those benefits are from music, and from culture more generally - health and wellbeing, a stronger sense of community and engagement, regeneration...and above all...happiness!

It's because we feel so strongly about these benefits that we have invested so heavily in them. Over £4 billion invested in the arts since 1997, with a real-terms increase of 83% in annual funding since 1997. We're proud of this investment and I'll fight to protect it, just as the Dutch have protected their cultural spending from cuts, we should be aiming to do the same.

We've also invested £330 million over three years to improve music opportunities for children. This includes *In Harmony*, a community development programme inspired by the incredibly successful Venezuelan project. [You have already heard from Fiona talk about the Scottish El Sistema experience] I don't think anybody who has seen the Simon Bolivar Orchestra could deny the transformative power of music, and what that project has done to change the lives of the young people involved.

So we know about the many benefits to children and young people of engaging in music. We know that it improves confidence, life and social skills and self-esteem. We also know that it is important to build the audiences of the future and if you experience music as a child you are far more likely to take it forward into adulthood.

So I want to take this opportunity to give a special mention to Tune In -Year of Music - a Government initiative which aims to encourage children and young people across England and from birth to nineteen to take part in more music-related activities. I welcome the role and support of the Association of British Orchestras in becoming a partner.

Tune In will run throughout the 2009/10 academic year to highlight the wide variety of excellent music

making opportunities already open to children and young people and to highlight the benefits.

There are a wealth of organisations working to provide a wide range of opportunities for children and young people to connect with music. Tune In aims to promote existing activity and develop new partnership activities.

And of course, ABO has been taking a strong lead in advocating the importance of extending access to classical music and nurturing the talent of the future. Many of you here today provide wonderful opportunities for children and young people to become involved in music, and hopefully are involved in Live the Experience. I hope you don't mind me plugging this on the ABO's behalf, but the aim of providing every child with the opportunity to experience a concert performance strikes a perfect chord (if you'll excuse the pun) with our own aim to offer every child at least five hours of high quality culture a week.

So that's what we've done, and what we're doing, but what about the future, what are the challenges that the next decade will present?

During this conference you are looking at how orchestras can validate their identity and celebrate

their contemporary relevance. It's true that orchestras, like all cultural organisations are having to look at ways to adapt to both survive and thrive in the years to come. The digital world is fast-moving and arts organisations cannot ignore this fundamental shift in the cultural landscape. But the digital age is also presenting new opportunities to attract and engage new audiences in new ways.

Orchestras have already been making those connections and embracing new technology. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra was the first UK orchestra to stream its entire series of concerts live from Cadogan Hall to a worldwide audience. Manchester Camerata took part in a project enabling them to play alongside Venetian ensemble Ex Novo under a single conductor, whilst a thousand miles apart, using high-speed broadband technology. And the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra held a concert "live" in the virtual world of Second Life. Orchestras are also offering podcasts, making use of social networking, Tweeting, and are tapping into the power of YouTube.

The purpose of all this, of course, is to reach out to new, unfamiliar audiences, to push their boundaries and ours. If maintaining funding for culture is one of the biggest challenges we face, then this is surely the other. We need to be able to get the message across about the power and the joy of

culture to everyone. On the one hand we've got an economic, statistical, value for money debate to be had with the Treasury. On the other, with those people who don't currently engage, who don't see the value for them, or don't feel part of the gang. That isn't about justifying spending, it's about justifying culture as the tool it can be in making the country a better place to live.

And it's all of you that will make this possible. It's your passion and your excellence; your hard work and your consistent commitment, your innovation and your skills that give us the superb performances which enthuse so many and encourage them to take part in culture. As I said at the start, we need to shout about the power of culture from the rooftops, I hope you'll join me with my megaphone! Enjoy the conference!