

Introduction and Welcome:

I am very pleased to be here to welcome delegates and speakers from the UK, and across the globe, to the Association of British Orchestras' 25th Annual Conference. It's a pleasure to welcome the Association back here in Scotland for the first time since 2002.

I can see from the programme that you have a very busy time ahead of you but I do hope you will be able to fit in some time to see some of Glasgow's many attractions.

Scottish Orchestras

The orchestral sector in the UK is among the most vibrant in the world and a critical part of our culture here in Scotland. We are fortunate in Scotland to have a wealth of Orchestral Music. This wealth is apparent from the members of this association based here in Scotland.

As well as our hosts the RSNO, we have the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the orchestras of Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet, all of which the Scottish Government supports as National Performing Companies. The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra plays a central role in Glasgow's magnificent City Halls and further afield in Scotland. The SSO reflects of course a vital part of the BBC's mission not only to the arts in Britain but also to the nations and regions of Britain beyond London.

I am pleased that the Association's membership also includes the Scottish Ensemble and important concert halls in both Glasgow and Perth. The youth and skills agenda which is vital to orchestras' current vibrancy and future success are represented by the RSAMD and the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland.

All these organisations represent an impressive volume and quality of music-making – a richness and variety which I know your Association represents across Britain. With audiences remaining as strong as ever there is no doubt that the people of Scotland appreciate the huge range and the quality of the music available to them.

Identity

Your conference theme is “Identity”. I would like to suggest to you this afternoon that orchestras incorporate multiple identities, spanning a range of purposes from the creative individual to the role of international ambassador. Let me expand on these identities a little further: I hope you will understand if my examples are from the Scottish experience, even if the themes are most definitely universal.

Creativity

The first identity is at the core of everything that orchestras set out to achieve: the skill and creativity of the individuals involved, a collective of musicians working together to interpret and perform for a variety of audiences with a wide repertoire of music. One of my first duties as culture Minister was the luxury of sitting in on a Scottish Chamber Orchestra rehearsal with newly appointed chief conductor Robin Ticciati rehearsing Berlioz’s “Death of Cleopatra”; witnessing the magic and professionalism of a performance being put together.

As well as being a rare privilege indeed for a Government Minister, it was important for me to see that behind the outward focus of public performance there is an intense, private creative process that drives every orchestra's identity.

Orchestras can of course be closely identified in the general public's mind with a particular musical experience. For example, for some of the world-wide audience on New Years Day the concert by the Vienna Philharmonic orchestra may be a rare annual taste of orchestral music. The same could be said for audiences of the BBC orchestras and the TV broadcasts of Last Night of the Proms in London, Glasgow and other major UK cities; or the annual Fireworks concert performed by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra at the end of each Edinburgh International Festival.

So, much of the identity of individual orchestras involves the challenge of reaching out to the public beyond these archetypal set events, through the quality of the music and the excitement of introducing new and sometimes unfamiliar repertoire. That is of course a major part of what orchestras do here in Scotland, and not only through subscription series week in, week out in our magnificent concert halls. A key element of orchestras' identity here in Scotland is touring to the many dispersed communities across the country – from the village halls of South West Scotland to the isolated communities in the Highlands and Islands – a geographical reach incidentally which is further than the distance from London to Glasgow.

Inspiring Young people

I want to turn next to the identity of orchestras in education. Introducing music to children at a young age is part of our school curriculum. These opportunities are a key not just to developing our musically talented youngsters but to helping all our young people to understand and enjoy a wide range of musical influences. Outside of school our young people can develop performance skills and enjoyment of music with our National Youth Orchestras of Scotland and at our world class conservatoire the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama here in Glasgow. All our nationally-funded orchestras have education as a core central activity.

As the Philosopher Roger Scruton so eloquently sums up: 'Through melody, harmony, and rhythm we enter a world where others exist beside the self, a world full of feeling but also ordered, disciplined but free. That is why music is a character-forming force.'

Inspiring Communities

Reflecting further on Roger Scruton's words, I believe we all recognise that orchestral music is increasingly seen as having the potential to help form the characters not just of individuals but of whole communities. We are all being challenged to think in new ways about transforming people and their prospects through music.

One high profile example of this is of course Sistema Scotland, the first officially partnered organisation in the UK with El Sistema in Venezuela. Sistema Scotland is running the Big Noise Orchestra in the Raploch, a community in Stirling long stigmatised by deprivation. Sistema is offering free participation and access to musical instruments, tuition and the joy and discipline of making music together. The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra plays a vital role in supporting the musical development of Sistema Scotland as it offers young people in the Raploch area another option in their lives and a creative opportunity for the community they live in.

Aside from this very high profile project, I can commend many other examples of successful orchestral outreach projects in Scotland: the annual community work the RSNO undertakes away from the central belt of Scotland – in Angus, Perth and this year in Aberdeen; the Scottish Chamber Orchestra’s ‘Tooters & Scrapers’ concerts bringing together people across the community with a diverse range of talents to prepare and perform concerts.

I am also delighted to hear that at this conference you will be discussing ways of making your orchestras greener, which resonates with one of the Scottish Government’s key strategic objectives and is vital to sustainable communities.

Champions

That brings me on to the role orchestras have to play in representing their own communities. Many of the orchestras attending this conference have strong links to cities, regions or nations acting as representatives both within and out with these communities. The success and reputation of the orchestras is often linked to people’s perceptions and associations of the cities, regions or nations that they champion.

Orchestras are only one part of the spectrum of music that champions Scotland and its communities. There is the Mod as a celebration of the Gaelic music tradition, as well as the Jazz and Blues Festival, Celtic Connections and the Aberdeen Music Festival. Many well known Scottish bands such as Travis and Franz Ferdinand have their identities rooted in Scotland but reach out far beyond it.

Glasgow UNESCO City of Music

Scotland is proud to be the only nation with 2 UNESCO creative cities. Edinburgh, UNESCO City of Literature and Glasgow, the UNESCO City of Music.

We are proud of Glasgow's well-deserved status. In a typical week an impressive 127 music events are presented here. Glasgow's music business generates £75 million worth of output to Glasgow's economy annually. With 38 Orchestras or large ensembles, 49 choirs, 123 Rock and Pop bands, 21 Jazz bands, 44 Traditional and Folk bands and many other musicians, groups and ensembles playing regularly in the city, there is no better place to be holding your conference.

To add to our home-grown wealth of orchestras and music, the Edinburgh Festivals provide us with the very best of orchestral music from outside of Scotland and an opportunity to showcase the very best of our companies.

The Scottish Government's Expo fund has allowed the International Festival to commission additional work each year from within Scotland including from Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

As Philip Ball noted in his recent book, "*The Music Instinct*" "music is part of what we are and how we perceive the world".

International Ambassadors

We know that music can have a far-reaching effect crossing boundaries. Our orchestras have an identity as international ambassadors promoting the vision of the culturally rich, modern European nation that is Scotland today by taking a part of our identity out to the wider world.

We understand the importance of this cultural diplomacy. The Scottish Government's International Touring Fund has supported our National Performing Companies to take the very best of their work on tour across the world: Scottish Ballet to China, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra to India and most recently the RSNO on their highly successful tour to 6 venues across Europe. Scottish Opera and the RSAMD have also recently collaborated with young Russian musicians from Rostov on a new version of WAR & PEACE which I saw recently in Edinburgh; the Scottish Government is helping to fund a return visit of the production to Rostov next month. Appropriately it was Tolstoy who noted that "music is the shorthand of emotion"; appropriately too this Scottish-Russian co production is happening in the centenary year of Tolstoy's death.

As Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond said recently when he attended an RSNO concert as part of a wide-ranging Government business trip to Paris, it is vital to remember that relations between nations go beyond trade and diplomacy: our shared values and passions can be brought together through music and the arts in a unique way.

Role of Scottish Government

I have already mentioned this afternoon several specific examples of how the Scottish Government views and supports the value of orchestras and music. If I could sum up my approach to the arts and culture, I see creativity and art for its own sake and the role of creative industries as mutually supportive. My role as a Minister is to create the conditions for success and not to influence the direction or content of that success. Culture helps to create resilience to support us through economic difficulty. Reflected, for example in the increased ticket sales both for the Edinburgh Festivals and many of our domestic artistic seasons during the past year.

With my background, I bring an understanding of the need to create the right economic conditions that help creativity to flourish. I bring a determination to promote, support and fight for culture – to ensure culture thrives.

I am absolutely clear on the importance of Culture and Creativity. Culture is not just a “nice to have”; it needs to be up front, mainstream and at the heart of what we do as a nation. That is why I have offered you this afternoon my views on the vital identities and roles that orchestras have to offer – as creative power-houses, inspirers of young people and communities, champions of cities and regions, and international ambassadors.

Personal

If I might end however with a personal anecdote about the power of Music. As Minister responsible for External Affairs, last month I met the agencies working to help the survivors of the earthquake in Haiti. I spent a long afternoon hearing of the devastation and horrific conditions that prevailed there and the suffering not only of the people of Haiti but of the aid agencies' own staff. On the same evening I heard the Faure Requiem at the Usher Hall performed by the RSNO, the RSNO Chorus and the RSNO Junior Chorus.

The knowledge of what was happening to the Haitian people was powerfully brought home for me by the music and the haunting choral singing, in a way which words alone could never convey. It makes me proud that we have such excellent musicians living and playing here in Scotland who can, with their skills and passion, allow us to reflect on the world not just here in Scotland but on the wider stage.

Conclusion

In conclusion I hope that you enjoy your time in Glasgow and that you have a successful and engaging conference.

And now it gives me great pleasure to hand over to Mick Elliott, Director of Culture at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport

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