

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES

As you will both know, British orchestras are a global success story. Each year, they play to nearly 5 million people in over 3,500 concerts and performances in the UK, and tour to around 35 countries across the world. This means orchestras bring in large revenues for the taxpayer, and by performing around the world provide a vital public relations role for the UK – which will be especially important over the coming years. Europe remains the largest marketplace, with our members reporting 96 visits to 26 different countries.

The Association of British Orchestras (ABO) is the representative body for professional orchestras and youth ensembles in the UK. Our members include internationally renowned symphony orchestras, chamber ensembles, and opera and ballet companies, as well as national and local youth orchestras and the wider classical music industry.

We urge the two contenders in the Conservative Party leadership contest to take account of some of the key issues affecting our membership. We take comfort from the fact that, whoever becomes the next Prime Minister, they will have experience of working with our members: one candidate, when Mayor of London, was supportive of the classical music sector and created the Mayor's Music Fund; and the other is a former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

However, both candidates have shown a willingness to countenance a No Deal Brexit on 31 October. This is a significant concern for our members. British orchestras have benefited for decades from freedom of movement of talent and touring within the EU, and we call on the next Prime Minister to pursue a deal that maintains frictionless movement of goods and people.

No Deal preparations have not gone far enough to reassure our members:

- First, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs have not taken steps to put social security co-ordination agreements in place with each of the EU27 nations. This is vital for ensuring our musicians do not face double-charging of social security contributions when working abroad.
- Second, the Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs is failing to prepare the UK ports most often used by our members, such as Dover-Calais, Eurotunnel, Immingham and Holyhead, for the mandatory inspection of Musical Instrument Certificates. Orchestras often transport musical instruments containing small quantities of CITES-listed species such as ivory and rosewood, and this situation leaves our members exposed to uncertainty about potential additional costs and delays.

Our members cannot prepare for a No Deal Brexit until all government departments have done their job of putting all the paperwork and systems in place. This must be a priority for the new Prime Minister.

Looking ahead to the Spending Review, we call on the candidates to maintain and increase public funding and creative industry tax relief for British orchestras. Since 2010, ABO members have seen significant cuts in public investment from funding agencies, devolved governments and local authorities. Without the implementation of Orchestra Tax Relief in 2016, there would have been a serious threat to their continued financial sustainability.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, when announcing the Comprehensive Spending Review in November 2015, said that cuts to the arts were a “false economy”. The same logic pertains today.

ABO members have been adept in increasing their income from philanthropy, helped by the implementation of the Catalyst programme in 2012. However, corporate support has seen significant decline since its peak in 2008. We urge the new Prime Minister to look into the development of tax incentives for corporate investment in cultural organisations, along with changes to Gift Aid to fuel further individual giving.

Britain’s orchestras have used their international renown to take the best of British music-making across the globe, from Europe and the USA to new markets in China and Korea. However, compared to our competitors in other countries, there is no financial support for our members to take their work outside the UK and develop new markets. We need the new Prime Minister to recognise the contribution that British orchestras can make to building a global Britain, and give us the resources to do so.

Crucial to this will be securing an effective pipeline for home-grown talent. The Government needs to ensure that sufficient funding to enable opportunities for sustained access to instrumental tuition will be made available through its investment in music education. This will enable all young people, regardless of their economic or social circumstances, to access high quality music education throughout their primary and secondary education, along with opportunities to perform in youth orchestras. We want to see talented British musicians securing places at our world-renowned music conservatoires, and turning these talents into professional employment, an ambition we expect the new Prime Minister to support.

We look forward to working positively and constructively with the winning candidate in the Conservative Party leadership contest.



Mark Pemberton
Director