

# **Creating a Fairer and More Inclusive Classical Music Sector for England**

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**2021**

Arts Council Response

Arts Council England believes strongly in the value and importance of classical music. Our outstanding orchestras and ensembles – and the thousands of instrumentalists, conductors, composers, and other professionals who bring this music to life – are a vital, vibrant, and versatile part of the creative sector of this country. This music is a significant part of the soundtrack to our lives; from our favourite tv and film programmes and video games to the ensembles supporting the West End, BBC Proms, and the thousands of classical music concerts that take place across this country every year.

England's orchestras and ensembles perform all over the world and are a major contributor to our global reputation for cultural innovation and excellence. They are also major employers that contribute to the economic prosperity of towns and cities across this country. Their work reaches and engages millions of people in concert halls and theatres, communities and schools, and digitally.

As with all the arts, classical music opens doors to a world of inspiration, creativity, enjoyment, and employment. It delights and moves us, and helps us make sense of the world. These are the reasons that, from our foundation, the Arts Council has invested significantly in classical music and the orchestras, ensembles and opera and ballet companies that create and perform it. And, going forward, we plan to continue to invest significantly.

Classical music brings pleasure and inspiration to millions of people in this country. We do not subscribe to the view that there are limitations to the appeal of classical music: we believe it can and should reach even more people. We think it is especially important that all cultural organisations seeking public funding should focus on improving access and work to be as relevant as possible to the taxpayers and lottery players who ultimately provide them with the support they need to continue

their work. In other words, we want publicly funded cultural organisations in this country to matter more to more people. That includes giving everyone the opportunity to be part of the world of classical music.

We believe an important first step in making that happen is that those who work in the classical music sector should become more representative of England today – in terms of geography, disability, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic background. We recognise that the skills needed to perform in – or create music for – orchestras and other ensembles are not acquired over-night. The choice to learn an orchestral instrument and the investment in developing the technical skills needed to pursue a professional career within the classical music sector are generally made at an early age. The profile of those working in the industry is the result of a complex series of decisions and circumstances that arise, whatever the pathway in, at numerous points along a very long talent pipeline.

Classical music is of course not hermetically sealed from the rest of the music industry. And nor should it be. Many of those who commence their journey as orchestral instrumentalists choose to pursue careers that are not exclusively within classical music. The insights and skillset they acquired through their training invaluablely contribute to a host of other areas of the music industry, off as well as on the stage.

We commissioned the report we are publishing today to understand more about those decisions, circumstances and pathways, and what might be happening along that pipeline. We plan to use this learning – and that of other more recent reports championing inclusion including those by The Music Commission, UK Music Diversity Task Force, Black Lives in Music, Donne I Women in Music, and Help Musicians as well as the new National Plan for Music Education – to identify what

changes could be put in place to give more opportunities to a wider range of people to pursue a career in classical music.

In undertaking this project, we brought together a number of interested parties to help and advise us. We did this because although the Arts Council has a unique convening, development and investment role, we have influence over a relatively small part of a large and complex classical music ecosystem. For change to happen, a large number of different individuals and organisations will need to work in concert. We are grateful to our steering group – representatives from the Association of British Orchestras, the Musicians Union, Conservatoires UK, the BBC, and the Paraorchestra, Chineke! Foundation and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra – for their time, patience and wisdom. We also extend our thanks to the many individuals and organisations from all parts of the profession who contributed their time to our reference group and who took part in our workforce survey. They have all had a strong influence on the scope of this report and our response to it.

The reports prepared for us by ICM and DHA Associates assemble a number of existing and new data sets to paint a picture of what happens to young people on their journey to a possible career in the classical music industry. It brings together for the first time a broad range of learning and data that looks at what opportunities are available, and who is receiving them, at every stage along the way – from children tentatively learning their first pieces to adults who have chosen classical music as their career. Because of gaps in the data the picture it presents is not yet fully formed. But it is, nevertheless, clear.

Too many people currently encounter barriers, real or perceived, to entering, remaining and being successful in the sector. If Western classical music was not part of your daily life growing up, or your family did not have the means or opportunity to support your commitment to it, it is unlikely you

will join the classical music workforce. Where you live, and what opportunities are available locally, have an important influence on your ability to progress. The cost of lessons, of the instruments themselves, as well as of sheet music and other accessories, and even the cost of travel to lessons and to other related activities and events can all be barriers to enabling fair opportunities at an early age. Perhaps because of this, children who attend state schools are far less likely to be chosen for competitive specialist training opportunities, including in our conservatoires.

Except at the very earliest stages of music learning, Black and other ethnically diverse people, as well as those who are disabled or have long-term health conditions, are also under-represented. And though female instrumentalists are in the majority among young learners, within the segment of the workforce examined within this study they are currently only a minority. Women are also under-represented in governance and senior leadership roles in the sector.

Cutting across all other factors, the evidence makes clear that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds struggle to get fair access to a full range of learning and employment opportunities. Informal practices and expectations, such as consultation lessons prior to auditions for conservatoires or closed networks supporting employment opportunities, create significant barriers to progress for those unused to this environment. These problems are exacerbated by the uncertain employment, low pay and unsocial hours that are a widespread feature of the arts. The consequence is that our professional orchestras and ensembles do not currently reflect the make-up of contemporary England. We will never know what talent that might have gone on to global acclaim was passed over by a system that fails to offer a fair opportunity for all.

None of this is surprising to those of us close to the classical music industry. But the familiarity of this picture does not

remove the urgent need for change. Barriers need to be broken down and new bridges built. And this is a timely opportunity to contribute to a wider process of change: a new National Plan for Music Education is currently in development, and, though we are yet to see its full impact, the Department for Education's new Model Music Curriculum was launched earlier this year. Both offer the opportunity to better secure young people's musical learning. Investment in children's music education in school is critical to ensuring the changes we want to see and we will continue to make the case to government for the importance of high levels of investment in music and other arts education within and beyond schools. We will also work to ensure that the music education opportunities offered by organisations receiving our investment are inclusive of, and accessible to, all children. Arts Council values and supports music in all its many forms: we want to encourage a healthy music ecology, one where the barriers between different genres of music are dissolved, where children, young people and adults are encouraged to develop an interest in, and play, a wide range of musical styles and where innovation within and across genres is actively encouraged.

In recent years the Arts Council has made a number of interventions to try to change the current picture, supporting and working with many National Portfolio Organisations and others in the sector to do so. Our work to support the Department of Education's investment in the national network of Music Education Hubs helps ensure that opportunities to access instrumental learning are more readily available to young people across this country. Initiatives such as In Harmony – a national programme that aims to inspire and transform the lives of children in disadvantaged communities – have brought joy and opportunity to young people in Lambeth, Liverpool, Nottingham, Telford, Stoke-on-Trent, Leeds and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain's 'NYO Inspire' scheme provides important opportunities

within secondary schools across the country, encouraging young people – especially those currently under-represented in the orchestral sector – to make connections with each other, learn from their peers, and break through to the next level of their music-making journey.

We have supported Paraorchestra to establish itself as the world's only large-scale virtuoso ensemble of professional disabled and non-disabled musicians. We have also invested in the National Open Youth Orchestra, the world's first disabled-led national youth orchestra and supported Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra to undertake a radical programme of change to make its orchestra more inclusive and accessible. We have invested in the establishment of the Chineke! Foundation, Europe's first professional orchestra comprising majority Black and ethnically diverse musicians. We have also supported Black Lives in Music – a new sector-led initiative to support the empowerment of Black musicians and professionals to realise their aspirations within classical music and jazz. And we have continued to support organisations like Drake Music and Attitude is Everything, and initiatives such as Creative United's Take it Away scheme and the OHMI Trust's accessible instruments project, to help build a more inclusive sector. We have also encouraged the classical music organisations we invest in to innovate, to develop new repertoire and experiment with the way they configure their ensembles and present their concerts. And there is encouraging evidence that these changes are bringing new audiences to classical music.

But initiatives of scale that genuinely enable a wide range of young people, irrespective of their background, to develop their talent and to progress are the exception and remain relatively isolated. Learning from these initiatives tends not to be widely shared or easily accessible. Consequently, the pace of change in the wider classical music sector remains too slow.

We want this report, and the hope that we can build back fairer after the pandemic, to act as a spur to accelerate change. Building on our vision for the future described in ‘Let’s Create’, and anticipating the arrival of the new National Plan for Music Education, we will use this learning to work with others to help build an even more vibrant classical music sector – especially that part of it which is dependent on public funding – that is more inclusive and more relevant to all.

We will take the following initial actions:-

**1/. We believe that we need to try new approaches to supporting young people looking to develop careers in the music industry including orchestras, building on the learning from existing programmes and initiatives. We will therefore work with a range of partners to undertake a major new project that will focus on young musicians aged 15 to 25 from backgrounds under-represented within Western classical music. This long-term action research project will test initiatives aimed at supporting those from a wider range of backgrounds looking to make developing sustainable careers in classical music, and the wider music industry, an achievable goal. We will support people who are currently under-represented within the sector to help guide the design and oversight of this project to create a classical ecosystem that supports young people to flourish and develop their skills and aspirations to the highest level.**

**We will work in partnership with organisations including Birmingham City University/Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Music Education Hubs East Midlands, West Midlands Music, Orchestras Live, Nottingham Trent University and the BBC to design and deliver this project.**



**2/. We recognise that the home is a key formative environment for developing an early interest in music. Working in partnership with Decca/Universal Music we will undertake research to understand more about how people experience classical music at home today and what influence that might have on enabling and encouraging children to develop and pursue an interest in learning to play an instrument and consider going on to develop a career in the sector. We will look especially at the impact that the pandemic has had on new ways of experiencing classical music inside and outside the home.**

**3/. We believe that the classical music organisations that we invest in, including those working in opera and ballet, should lead the way in responding to this report and helping to implement change. As a first step, we will require all classical music organisations seeking to join the next National Portfolio to set out how they propose to respond to this report both individually and collectively. These plans will then form part of their future funding agreements.**

**4/. We recognise the importance of the role of Music Education Hubs and other Department of Education sponsored provision of classical music learning and performance opportunities for children and young people in helping effect the change we want to see. We will explore with DfE how our research can inform future music education policy and delivery, including the forthcoming new National Plan for Music Education.**

**5/. We do not yet have a fully comprehensive data set on which to design a full set of policy options and interventions. We also recognise that individuals, including many of those with protected characteristics, do not always feel confident to share their personal details. We**

**want to strengthen the data sets that underpin this research so will work with our partners to encourage more accurate reporting by communicating the value and importance of this data, seeking to address individuals' concerns to help transform the culture of disclosure and drive change. In particular we will:-**

- Improve data collection from the Arts Council's National Portfolio Organisations and National Lottery Project Grants recipients**
- Work with Association of British Orchestras to gather more – and more accurate data – from its members**
- Work with the Musicians Union to encourage their members to complete data returns through both the Union and their employers**
- Work with the BBC to ensure that the high-quality data from their orchestras continues to contribute towards a fuller data picture of this country's classical music workforce**
- Work with the Department for Education to encourage and support a more joined up approach to sharing and collecting data across music education and training**

**6/. We know that a range of initiatives are already underway across the sector to strengthen inclusivity and diversity. However, they remain largely under-reported and, as a result, the learning from them is not being widely shared. We will work with the Association of British Orchestras to build an easy to access repository for these interventions so that we can improve the sharing of best practice, learning, insights, and outcomes.**

**7/. We want to ensure that the sector provides fair and inclusive treatment for all those involved in the arts, including freelance musicians involved in classical music. In articulating our plans for Increasing our Support for Individuals, one of the five themes of our Delivery Plan 2021-2024, we have emphasised our intention to fund organisations that are committed to providing more equitable and transparent support for creative and cultural practitioners and offer clear progression routes into the industry. Drawing from and building on the resources already available on the Arts Council website, such as our Information Sheet on fair pay, by January 2022 we will develop a resource which offers guidance on good practice principles in relation to recruitment, offering work and developing and retaining talent.**

**8/. We will build on the impetus of the steering group for this research and establish a working group of key stakeholders that will meet twice a year to help ensure that learning from this report is implemented. This working group will combine those who are currently under-represented in the sector with those who carry influence and can implement change. It will help us track and report on the progress of the various actions in play that are intended to make the classical music sector in this country fairer and more inclusive.**

**9/. We will share this report and its findings as widely as possible through our own networks and those of the steering and reference groups who have contributed to it. We will look for opportunities to present the report and its findings to the sector as a whole and work to support opportunities for mutual learning about the issues it explores. We will also create a dashboard to improve access to the data from the workforce survey.**

