

ABO submission to British Council APPG Parliamentary inquiry into the role of education and culture in the UK's future bilateral relations with the countries of Europe

1. Executive Summary

- British orchestras are a global success story, touring across the major continents and forging new markets in emerging economies. They have contributed to the UK Government and devolved administrations' ambitions for 'soft power' and cultural exchange. Europe, however, remains one of their most important marketplaces.
- Their work in Europe is not however restricted to touring. British orchestras have been active participants in cultural exchange programmes, funded by the Creative Europe programme and other programmes in former years. They have also contributed to the European Capital of Culture programme.
- The ABO has itself benefited through its participation in Pearle (Live Performance Europe), the European federation of performing arts employers' associations and in Live Performance Social Dialogue meetings.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 The Association of British Orchestras (ABO) is the representative body for professional orchestras in the UK. Its 65 full members range from the major symphony orchestras to chamber, opera and ballet orchestras. Other categories of membership include national and local youth orchestras, conservatoires, venues, festivals, broadcasters and funding agencies.
- 2.2 The ABO's mission is to enable and support an innovative, collaborative and sustainable orchestral sector. It exists to provide advice, support, intelligence and information to the people who make British orchestras a global success.

3 Touring across Borders

- 3.1 British orchestras perform a strong public relations role for the UK, showcasing the best of British culture and musical expertise to thousands of people across the globe. In 2016 British orchestras visited a total of 42 countries, compared with 35 countries in 2013. Europe is the most toured-to continent, with orchestras reporting 96 visits to 26 different European countries.¹
- 3.2 Membership of the single market and the customs union has been hugely beneficial in enabling British orchestras to tour across Europe, which generates both revenue and secures their international reputation.

¹ [The State of Britain's Orchestras in 2016](#), ABO, January 2017

- 3.3 The planning cycle for orchestras is often more than two years ahead of performance (and up to four years for opera), which means that contracts with promoters in the EU have already been signed for beyond March 2019. This means that fees have been fixed, and any additional costs that follow the UK's withdrawal from the EU have the potential to cause already contracted tours to lose money.
- 3.4 The UK has also benefited from visits by artists and orchestras from other EU countries, to take part in events such as the BBC Proms and the Edinburgh International Festival. This too may be impacted by additional costs and bureaucracy once the UK leave the EU.

4 Creative Europe

- 4.1 The EU has been an important source of funding for British orchestras through Creative Europe and other funding programmes. It remains unclear whether UK organisations will continue to be eligible for funding post-Brexit.
- 4.2 An example is the [European Orchestral Laboratory II](#). Funded from 1 October 2016 to 30 September 2019, the project aims to grow the role of orchestras in society by taking music closer to people. EO LAB II, which includes the Hallé Orchestra and the Ulster Orchestra, evolved from EO LAB I where four orchestras focused on new formats to reach non-traditional concert goers. Outcomes from the project were recently presented at the ABO Conference in Belfast, as well as a concert by the Chavorenge Roma Children's Choir.

5 European Capital of Culture

- 5.1 ABO members were actively involved in Glasgow 1990 (which saw the opening of the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall) and Liverpool 2008, which features concerts by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Both cities saw a significant increase in cultural tourism.
- 5.2 ABO members were also actively involved in the bids from UK cities to be European Capital of Culture in 2023, such as Opera North in Leeds. It was a blow to their ambitions for increased cultural tourism that the European Commission excluded the UK from eligibility for Capital of Culture bids.
- 5.3 The programme for European Capital of Culture 2019 in Plovdiv, Bulgaria includes the Brexit Blues music festival, which aims to send out a strong international message – that Europe's cultural links remain despite Brexit. The weekend programme of Brexit Blues will feature a series of city concerts of Bulgarian and British musicians presenting the British music scene from the 1950s to date – English rock'n'roll, progressive rock, punk, jazz and blues and choral performances, among other styles and forms of music presentation. The festival's final show will see some 400 performers – professional musicians; choral formations from Plovdiv; students of jazz, classical music and folklore; a big band; brass ensembles from the city; as well as amateur musicians will come together onstage. The Brexit Blues music festival is a joint project of two European capitals of culture – Plovdiv 2019 and Liverpool 2008 – and the Sofia branch of the British Council. It is part of the celebration of the 80th anniversary of the cultural institute's presence in Bulgaria.

6. The ABO and the European Union

- 6.1 The ABO is a member of [Pearle](#) (Live Performance Europe), the European federation of performing arts employers' association. It is also a member of its orchestra associations sub-group, the European Orchestras Forum.
- 6.2 Membership of Pearle enables the ABO and its colleagues in the Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre to forge connections with employers' associations in other European countries through twice-yearly conferences. The next conference will take place in Plovdiv in May 2019, as part of its European Capital of Culture programme.
- 6.3 Pearle is currently delivering the [Behind The Stage](#) programme, funded by the EU, which aims to empower the role and capacity of employers' associations and strengthen social dialogue in the European live performance sector. The ABO was recently awarded Special Mentions at the Behind The Stage Awards, presented in Brussels in November 2018, in the Co-operation category for the Family Arts Campaign, and the Skills, Training & Lifelong Learning category for its Find Your Way programme.
- 6.4 Through Russia's membership of Pearle, the ABO has been invited to address delegates at the International Culture Forum in St Petersburg these past two years, and is currently working with the British Council on bringing a British orchestra to perform at the International Culture Forum in November 2019 as part of the UK-Russia Year of Music.
- 6.4 As a member of Pearle, the ABO is able to influence the implementation of common standards and directives that affect the live performance industry through membership of the Live Performance Sector Social Dialogue Committee, which meets three times a year in Brussels. When the UK leaves the EU, the ABO and the Musicians' Union will lose their places on the Committee. The ABO needs assurances as to what the UK Government's position on these common approaches and directives will be.

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8 February 2019