

Cross-Party Group on Music

25 October, 2022. 18.00

Minute

Present

MSPs

Michelle Thomson MSP, Claire Baker MSP, Audrey Nicoll MSP

Invited guests

Ailsa Macintosh, Helen Needham, Gary Innes (all BBC)

Non-MSP Group Members

Rab Noakes (MU), Mae Murray (MEPG), Kenneth Taylor (St Mary's Music School), John Wallace (MEPG), Morag Macdonald (Creative Scotland), Alan Morrison (Creative Scotland), Ronnie Gurr (SMIA), Beverley Whitrick (Music Venues Trust), Nick Stewart (Sneaky Pete's), Allan Dumbreck (UWS), Carol Main (Live Music Now Scotland), Diljeet Bhachu (SWIM/ MU), Khaleda Noon (Intercultural Youth Scotland), Mark Pemberton, Chidera Chukwujekwu (Intercultural Youth Scotland), Jen O'Brien (Music Broth), Adam Behr (Univ. of Newcastle), James Cunningham (HITS), Fiona Killen (Burness Paull), Matthew Terras, Stuart Fleming (PRS for Music)

In attendance: Diane McIntyre

Apologies

Clare Adamson MSP, Jenna Main (ABRSM), Brian Whittle MSP, Caroline Sewell (MU), Alison Reeves (Making Music), Andrew Cruickshank (MU), Sharon Mair, Keith Millar (Help Musicians), Lisa Whytock (Active), Matthew Whiteside (The Night With),

Minutes of previous meeting

Prop. Claire Baker MSP, Sec. Allan Dumbreck

1 CPG Music AGM

Present: Michelle Thomson MSP, Claire Baker MSP, Audrey Nicoll MSP

Election of Office Bearers

Convenor: Michelle Thomson MSP
Vice Convenor: Claire Baker MSP
Secretary: David Francis (Traditional Music Forum)

2 BBC Scotland and Music

Michelle Thomson: How have things been and how are they now?

Helen Needham (Senior Content Producer): The BBC was committed to doing everything it could to support musicians during the pandemic, bringing them into the studio, performing live and keeping the programmes on air. We're now in the position of being able to bring back shows with live audiences. There was a lot of new music made during the pandemic and there's a sense that there's a lot going on now we're out the other side.

Gary Innes (Presenter): It's taken a little bit of time for people to come back to live shows, but we are starting to see people coming back to events. With radio there was this incredible connection and a resurgence of listeners, radio became that old friend in the corner again, as exemplified by the request show that was started up with Scottish traditional music as its heart. It's been a surprise hit for the station.

MT: The BBC plays an important role in the provision of live music, particularly in breaking new music and encouraging diversity. What do you see as coming up in the near future?

HN: Can only speak for folk and trad, but we spend a lot of time in the team discussing issues of diversity and representation, an important priority for the BBC in general. Every week we include a BBC Introducing track. BBC Introducing enables musicians to upload unreleased tracks, a facility that is being increasingly used by trad musicians, to the extent that we were able to produce a show at Celtic Connections this year of brand new, unsigned artists and broadcast it on the BBC Scotland TV channel.

Audrey Nicoll MSP: The Big Noise project in Aberdeen does some fantastic work to reach out to children and young people, I'm interested in hearing ideas for how legacy of that work and that investment can be secured in the longer term.

Ailsa Macintosh: The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra does huge amounts of outreach work which takes it into schools and areas of multiple deprivation, so they are really invested in the next generation. They are aware that their field has not always been accessible or diverse in its recruitment of musicians or composers. Audiences too can find it difficult to accept a diversity in work presented, often favouring familiar material over more diverse offerings. How do we make music more accessible to everyone?

Kenneth Taylor: At St Mary's Music School we take young people from many different backgrounds and research has shown that most of them go on to use music in their future lives in one way or another. While there are a lot of opportunities for young people to make music in their communities there is much less for adults. Is the BBC doing anything active or planned in terms of getting adults more involved?

AM: It's difficult to take up an instrument as an adult but choirs would be one area, particularly pre-Covid, where there has been some engagement, particularly in religious broadcasts where we will bring people together to make communities of singers.

MT: What is your perception with whether live audiences are coming back?

HN: Recent experience has shown that if there's an opportunity to attend a BBC show in person, as for example at the Edinburgh Festival this year, people will come out in numbers to the extent that some shows have been massively oversubscribed.

GI: The Edinburgh Festival was a great marker of how people are returning post-Covid and social distancing, perhaps more in the cities than in other parts of the country.

John Wallace: Going back to Audrey Nicoll's question the BBC SSO was the first to get involved in the Big Noise project in Stirling, before Dudamel came and gave it prominence. But there's only so much that orchestras can do, and there's only so much you can do in the live situation.

A question for the BBC folk: are there any plans to use its educational potential and do something that involves very young children and traditional music, especially now that there is a lot less traditional music in the home?

AM: The BBC does a great deal in that respect, especially on Radio nan Gàidheal. The challenge for the BBC at the moment is finding the right platform for young people – which is not necessarily the radio. Digital First is a new initiative which is saying that digital is no longer an add-on.

Jen O'Brien: What we've found is that focusing on individuals rather than offering prescriptive education is a better approach in terms of people's development.

Khaleda Noon: In order to get more black people and people of colour involved in music we have to invest in anti-racist training to get a deeper understanding of how systemic racism stops diversity. Tokenism is a problem. The question is about how much the BBC, the Government is willing to invest in an anti-racist approach in order to demonstrate a commitment to change.

AM: The BBC is doing a lot of work in this area, which goes beyond the field of music. The BBC has set specific targets: 50% gender, 20% ethnic minority, 12% disability. Those targets are for staffing and on air representation.

David Francis: Is there a paradox whereby the more fragmented platforms become the less accessible music becomes? The tyranny of the algorithm has reduced the role of serendipity. Also, when you're online you're more likely to know what you're looking for than to come upon something by chance. That's where the mainstream channels come in because there's such a range of material on offer. My plea would be for minority music not just to be featured on niche channels but to have a place on the mainstream TV channels in particular.

James Cunningham: Agree with Gary that young people's relationship with traditional music is a long way from where it once was. When I first came to the Music Service in Renfrewshire it was 'middle class and classical'. Now the trad group (loosely defined) is a platform for creativity and open-mindedness that goes beyond pure traditional music. There is scope and pathways for young people to make careers in music that are not confined to classical music. Scotland has a lot to celebrate.

AM: (In response to David Francis) The advent of the BBC Scotland channel did mean the loss of some opt-out programming on BBC2, but it gives scope for tying in music programmes with major events such as the Mòd and Celtic Connections.

Chidera Chukwujekwu: A questions for the BBC. How are the diversity targets within the BBC created and who are they created with? And more generally, while there are important actors within Scotland such as Creative Scotland, the BBC, Scottish Government addressing the question of diversity what steps are being taken towards the democratisation of the music business, empowering people that are closer to the ground than the major actors?

AM: This diversity work runs across the BBC not just music. Would be more than happy to follow up offline.

MT: What more can politicians do to support the work of the BBC, especially a lot of the work that isn't publicly visible?

HN: More appreciation of the positive experiences that playing music bring. Programme makers are at the end of a chain of activities, and without support for those activities would have nothing to broadcast.

AM: The world is very polarised at the moment and there is real risk for the BBC in being caught up in that. There is risk to the licence fee, there is reputational risk in becoming a political football. If you value the BBC you should make that known.

3 YMI Update

MT: After the controversy over the pause in YMI funding in September I spoke to the Minister, Neil Gray, and received reassurances from him (subsequently put into the public domain) that the Scottish Government greatly valued the work of the YMI. It is, however, something we will need to keep a close eye on given the challenges coming to public sector financing.

Action Point: DF to share the letter from MEPG and the reply.

4 Music Education

JW: MEPG is now a broad partnership of 65 members across the whole spectrum of music education, which has now passed its second anniversary as a charity. The music education community is in good health despite the recent blip over YMI. More

blips are no doubt on the way. The demand for instrumental music education has gone through the roof and everyone is struggling to cope with post-covid recovery while remaining in good heart. We have been reassured that the 2021 manifesto commitment on removing fees for instrumental tuition is secure.

MEPG has entered into a partnership with ABRSM which is going to support a We Make Music kitemark for primary schools, We Make Music lending libraries, and digital resources. A crowd funding appeal has brought in money for the lending libraries, with the Fife project opening in November.

Mae Murray: Scottish Young Musician will happen again on 21 May at the RCS with a new ensemble category, and a National Singing Day on 9 June at the Caird Hall in Dundee.

JC: HITS is talking to Scottish Government about prospects for funding instrumental tuition long term, particularly round the conundrum of employing the necessary permanent staff when funding is allocated year to year. Having said that numbers are moving back to pre-pandemic levels with staff numbers remaining stable, so there are grounds for cautious optimism.

5 Other Business

Beverley Whitrick: Figures for the 89 venues in membership of the Music Venues Alliance are very worrying. Our data shows that in 2019 the number of events presented by the 89 venue members of the Music Venues Alliance in Scotland stood at 20,985. In 2022, this number has reduced to 16,395, a drop of 4,590 shows

Each live music event creates work opportunities for an average of 12.8 musicians and 5.6 touring crew. These 4,590 lost shows represent over 80,000 lost opportunities to work for musicians and crew, with other support sectors such as freelance staff, security, bar etc taking the total of lost work opportunities well in excess of 140,000. (These are extrapolated figures from a UK-wide survey.)

Carol Main: In the wake of the closure of the Filmhouse and Modern Art Gallery 2 are there any prospects of music venues closing? I'd also like to put on the record that a young pianist, Ethan Loch from Denny and blind from birth won the Piano final of the BBC Young Musician. He is one of Live Music Now's developing artists.

Action Point: congratulations to Ethan from this group. (MT has also put forward a motion to the Parliament.)

Nick Stewart: Also to note that Fergus McCreadie, jazz pianist, has won the Scottish Album of the Year and was recently nominated for the Mercury Prize.

6 Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday December 6 (NB in person)