

Help Musicians Festival of St Cecilia speech, London 18/11/2021

Good afternoon everyone: it's very good to be with you all again in person after last year's virtual St Cecilia service from Gloucester Cathedral. For those here for the first time, I am Graham Sheffield, Chair of Help Musicians.

I've been in post now for over eight years and this will be my last St Cecilia service as Chair – I step down at the Annual General Meeting next April after nine years. I have to say it's been a true privilege to serve this great charity and to take it to the scale and prominence we have achieved together in recent years. I love music passionately - as we all do here, and I am proud to have been able – as a trained musician myself – to have been able to “put back something into the profession” through my work with Help Musician colleagues and fellow trustees since 2014.

It's our centenary this year – as you know – but it's something of an understatement to say we haven't had the kind of centenary year we were originally planning – no parties, no celebrations, no galas! Almost overnight the pandemic put paid to the careers of thousands of musicians for close on two years, and as a result catapulted this charity into a position of extreme prominence as one of the primary potential providers of urgent support. Much more important than any celebration of centenary, you'll agree.

As these musicians turned to us in their thousands, we embraced our mission with energy and commitment – by immediately launching hardship funding on a significant scale, increasing support to assist musicians develop creative new ideas as well as additional income streams, along with helping more musicians with their mental health given many were facing severe anxiety about their future. To date we have spent £18m to help over 19,000 musicians survive the last 18 months but our work to help musicians recover from the pandemic is far from over.

In August, the charity ran a survey to find out more about how optimistic musicians were feeling about the future, and the results were sobering. A few pertinent headlines:

- 50% of musicians believe they will not be able to achieve a sufficient income until the end of 2022
- Only 20% felt confident that they would be able to continue with a career in music
- And 34% of those who responded said that they worried about their finances daily

Many told us that their mental health was at an all-time low – a lack of confidence, loss of contacts and for many who were starting out with their careers, a feeling that

they had to start from scratch. One musician provided a personal comment on a situation which appeared common to many, they said their issue was:

“Lack of money. All resources ground down and used up. Can’t afford to book train/hotels to earn or invest in rebuilding confidence through lessons and coaching”.

I’ve said before that it is a huge irony that Help Musicians has come to the fore in its centenary in a way no one could have predicted, as a result of the pandemic’s destruction of musicians’ livelihoods and live music-making. Not what we’d have wanted in a thousand years – but at least we’ve been here to help. And at least thousands more musicians know about us for the future. And we’ve been able to forge some brilliant partnerships with fellow-funders and donors (like you here today) to the extent that we’ve been able to support musicians with that £18m – five million of which has come from our reserves.

So, on behalf of those musicians helped by us, thank you to all who have given or partnered with us. I must also thank my fellow trustees who have worked so hard and supported the charity through this truly dark time for the music profession. Thank you to our Ambassadors as well (some of you are here today) and also to our dedicated staff team led by James Ainscough our CEO; like most of us, they have worked from home since March 2019 and with no diminution in the energy and spirit they bring to their work. Please can all trustees, ambassadors and staff colleagues here stand to receive your appreciation.

Although we were saddened not to be able to welcome our Patron, Her Majesty the Queen to our service today – and we send her our warmest wishes for a return to full strength and health – we have been happy to have our new President Dame Evelyn Glennie play for us at the service, as well as xxx. And my thanks go to all the musicians who took part this morning – to the choirs of xxxx and the xxx of music at St Paul’s xxxxx

I’d also like to note that we welcome our former chair, Richard Lyttleton, who did so much for the charity prior to my tenure, and our future chair, Bob Shennan, MD of the BBC, who will take over seamlessly from me next year. I’ve no doubt that he will continue to develop Help Musicians in dynamic new directions, whilst remaining true to the principles of the charity’s founders Edward Elgar and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

It will always be the case that the more musicians we serve, the more will come forward and ask for help or support. The more challenging the environment the more we need to reach out nationally to musicians of all kinds – classical, jazz, rock, pop, folk and every kind of genre you can name. So we need to redouble our efforts to reach more of them, even though so many more know about us than did so two years ago.

As musicians return to work many will need our help to rebuild their careers

Our support will need to reach many more thousands to ensure that they can take forward the opportunities ahead of them. From next year we shall invest significantly more in mental health support, increase the scope of our mentoring schemes to

enable more professional connections to provide career support, reinvigorate our creative funding opportunities and ensure we remain ready to pick up those who are in real crisis.

We are also removing deadlines from our funding applications for creative work, so that we can provide help when musicians need it. Musicians can be assured we will be with them every step of the way.

We believe the scale of the rebuilding task will be every bit as hard as the hardship issues over the last 18 months. We intend to meet this head on, but without damaging the sustainability of the charity's funding base, which has enabled us to give out the help we have done for a hundred years.

Previously as the Musicians Benevolent Fund, and thanks to previous leadership from those that ran the charity through decades gone by, the charity has invested its philanthropic income wisely, building financial reserves to ensure that we can be relied upon to help musicians when they need it the most. Over £9m of the £18m we spent on hardship payments to musicians came from the charity's reserves. Legacy gifts from fellow music lovers being of significant influence on our ability to do this.

I'd like to share with you three comments from different musicians whom we were able to help last year through that support:

"Help Musicians has been a lifeline to me throughout 2020. They offered me support when at times it felt like I had nowhere to go and no one to turn to. They've encouraged me to continue pursuing my music career and made me feel valued as a British musician in these dark times."

"The Hardship support meant everything to me. I was drowning and the fund was the lifeline I needed to survive. It resuscitated me at a crucial time in my life, as no-one out there was able to help me. I never expect to be helped, so this benevolence was incredible."

And finally, "An incredible act of human kindness from people who don't know of me, yet reached out an arm when I was in dire straits."

I share those comments with you to ensure that you, our supporters, understand the difference your support makes to those we seek to help. It really is a lifeline.

This is unlikely to be the last crisis to hit the musicians of this country – and we must together ensure we're there in the future to help.

If you are able to, please continue to support this charity in whatever form suits you – you will see that there are cards on your table today for those that perhaps would like to consider leaving a gift to the charity in your will, but there are so many other ways you can support if you'd like to do so. Whether taking part in today's raffle or donating through one of our appeals we hope you will continue to help us support the U. K's exceptional musical talent.

And now I'd like to introduce to you (*not sure if the Quintet has a name or whether we should name each musician – will check*) who will play for us first a piece from Russian composer Victor Ewald: like many Russian composers of the time, he did other things as well (it's called a portfolio career these days!) Victor was an architect and engineer, as well as a composer – we'll hear the first movement from his Brass Quintet No.3. And then a piece from American composer and conductor Michael Kamen – aptly named 'Quintet.

Finally a personal thank you to all for your support during my tenure as Chair and I wish the charity great fortune in the coming years under the leadership of James and Bob.