

GRAHAM SHEFFIELD: SPEECH FOR ABO 2021 – revision 9th March 2021

HELP: BUT IS IT ENOUGH!

I bet I'm not the only person who has found the last year an emotional rollercoaster – obsessive scanning of news headlines for trends in the pandemic, mood swings from joy (vaccine arrival) to despair (lockdown after lockdown), and everything in between, with tears (that I'm absolutely not ashamed of) triggered by the smallest of events – kindnesses of friends, messages from well-wishers, “good news stories” of survival and hope against the odds – and yes, music, music, music!

I cannot number the times that something I've listened to (usually on Radio 3) has simply triggered my emotions. I am sure everyone at this conference is desperate for live music with audiences, whether you earn your living from playing, or as part of an orchestral support system, or whether like me you rely on the thrill, inspiration and life-affirming satisfaction of a live concert with a live audience.

Live music for me is like a **life support**, part of a daily staple diet, and by goodness I've so missed it, it really hurts....but not half as much as it must be

hurting all who actually work for a living in the profession on a freelance basis.
So much stress, so much heartache.

I've been to just two concerts since last March – one at the enterprising Fidelio Café in Clerkenwell with Charles Owen (a valued Help Musicians' Ambassador), the other at the Barbican in September with Bryn Terfel and the Britten Sinfonia – both superb, but in truth a meagre diet in numbers for one so used to attending three or more concerts per week for four decades!

For all of us, 2020 was one of the most challenging years in our collective history, and it certainly was within the 99 year history of Help Musicians, as we enter our centenary year.

The lockdown last March, we all know, resulted in tens of thousands of freelance musicians effectively unemployed overnight. I spoke to many last year – the common themes being immediate economic stress, fears for mental health, and uncertainty for the future. From a survey we did last October, as well as a recent article by Richard Morrison, we know that a significant number of musicians were and are thinking seriously about whether music offers a viable future career option.

In March 2020 the team at Help Musicians mobilised swiftly and remotely - well beyond our regular programme of work - to offer urgent financial hardship support. To date, through three distinct phases of the Hardship Plan, we have distributed over £14.7m, providing help to 19,000 musicians struggling to make ends meet.

If hardship funding was the primary strand of our work last year, it remains so as we meet together. But the Covid-19 pandemic presented other challenges for musicians too. And that's before we even get going on the EU visa issues arising from Brexit.

We're now structuring our support to allow musicians flexibility in how we might help in meeting their different needs. Boosting our Creative Fund "Do It Differently" to allow musicians to (well) continue to **create** was a lifeline for many, allowing them to produce new work to improve their earning potential or develop a creative project which time now unexpectedly allowed. We distributed £1.2m in this fund alone, sustaining over 500 musicians (a 60% increase on 2019).

In addition we've started with help stabilising musicians' careers through our business advisors and mentoring scheme, providing over 300 musicians across the U.K with nearly 2,000 hours of 1:1 mentoring and business advice sessions. We're keen to build on this in 2021, recognising that empowering musicians with advice and connecting them with others is a fantastic framework to support musicians as **individuals** at very different life stages.

We all know that a musician's life is more often than not precarious, with inherent challenges that take their toll on mental and physical wellbeing. Unfortunate evidence of that lies in the 40% increase in requests for help to Music Minds Matter compared to the previous year – and up 60% in the last three months. This work will be a key area of focus for us in 2021 as we embark upon a “refresh” and expansion of this service, making it fully available to the whole of the music industry. Insights from a recent survey we've carried out have revealed that 9/10 musicians' mental health has deteriorated in the last year. So we fully understand that mental health, along with physical health, is crucial in our profession if we're together to rebuild a world where musicians thrive. Aside from the much-needed expansion of Music Minds Matter, we'll be following through on new collaborations from research

with Liverpool John Moores University to make significant advances in musicians' **physical** health awareness, thus prolonging careers of the future.

I mention all of this not out of any sense at all of self-congratulation: helping musicians was exactly what the charity was set up to do 100 years ago – first as the Gervase Elwes Memorial Fund (in memory of that famous English tenor) and from 1926 with the name Musicians Benevolent Fund. And that's exactly what we do now under our relatively new name Help Musicians.

What's different now is that in the last decade we've consciously tried to expand and diversify – reaching many thousands more musicians, not only in classical but in all genres, and covering many more in all four nations of the UK. We've been moved recently to provide seed-funding to the new Black Lives in Music organisation, spearheaded by one of Help Musicians' newest trustees. You'll hear more in the session immediately following this one.

Just as well we and our predecessors were and continue to be prudent with the money management. This “good housekeeping” goes back many decades: in the Chairman's Report from December 1943, then Chairman Frank Howes writes: *“The Committee thinks it right to continue the policy adopted in the*

past two years of building up a substantial reserve against the day when conditions of living are once more dislocated by demobilisation.” Substitute “pandemic” for “demob” and you pretty much have the charity’s current policy. Howes goes on: “it seems the barest prudence to build up as substantial a reserve as possible against contingency” by which he refers to the conditions in 1939 when war broke out. “Music, (Howes again) like the theatre and other arts and entertainments, invariably suffers first from any dislocations of normal routines.”

So it is, with this continuing “barest prudence” allied to the generosity of our partners, that we’ve been in a position to help with the near £15 million I mentioned just now. As I say, not all of it was “ours” – we’ve been genuinely heartened by the partnership funding, the donations, special fund-raising efforts from individuals (many of them musicians themselves), trusts and foundations, arts councils, who’ve all contributed for us to pass on directly and 100% to musicians in need.

And we of course have been concentrating on INDIVIDUAL musicians who have been so ignored and omitted from all the government’s schemes, despite well-argued pleas from many in the business. It’s nothing short of tragic.

It has, nonetheless, been a source of a modest PRIDE that we've been able to fly the flag so charitably raised nearly 100 years ago by Edward Elgar, the fund's first President until his death in 1934 (incidentally a mile or so from where I'm sitting now in Worcester), together with Ralph Vaughan Williams: pride at the charity having lasted so long, and pride at being able to rise to the occasion, thanks to the prudence of our predecessors and generosity of our partners. I would never ever have wanted Help Musicians to increase its profile as a result of Covid, but that's what has happened...and all I say on behalf of all those we've helped is "thank goodness we're here" and "thank goodness we have such a dedicated team of colleagues" devoted to the cause. And a small silver lining here is that more musicians know about us for the future.

The case studies have not much changed over the years, although the amounts of money have. **This from 1939:** *Violinist applied for help. Hampstead Council of Social Service investigated the case. All engagements cancelled owing to the war. Miss C reported the musician would receive insurance of £250 in 1942 but is in need at the present moment. Miss C strongly recommended help for underclothes, clothes, strings for her violin, insurances. Said that £10 would cover everything – granted. 1940 Miss C reported the musician sees good*

prospect of work in a women's orchestra. At the moment is being paid for doing housework for a professional woman.

Aside from a measure of PRIDE, my primary emotions during this crisis have been ANGER and DESPAIR – ANGER at an ignorant government resolutely impervious to the plight of individual musicians, even as they continue to provide us with such joy and inspiration in lockdown. After WW1 and the Spanish Flu, the government of the day in WW11 (unlike ours now) did come to understand the role of music in bolstering morale; so musicians continued to find work – the crisis coming later when many serving musicians returned home from overseas without opportunities. Today we not only have Covid, but the wholly self-inflicted double-whammy of the Visa regulations mess following Brexit. I'll be interested to hear tomorrow if the current Arts Minister now grasps the gravity of both "whammys" (freelancers and EU work visas) and does something to sort them. I am not holding my breath in expectation.

According to the ISM, even last week's budget measures only now cover about 15% of musicians who'd previously fallen through the cracks of all the government support schemes. They just don't GET freelancers do they! What Andrew Comben of the Brighton Festival calls "a stubborn blind spot".

And DESPAIR – despair at wondering how on earth we might see a recovery in the art form we all so love. However, as a natural (though now less certain) optimist, I am buoyed by HOPE – the last emotion I’m sharing this afternoon.

HOPE – from one of the many musicians we’ve been able to help. **This from 2020** from a musician supported through the Do It Differently Fund: *Support from Help Musicians came at a crucial time, as my confidence in my music was reaching an all-time low. Receiving funding meant someone had listened to my songs and heard a future for me – something worth investing in, and someone worth helping. It was a confidence boost that I desperately needed.*

Our archive and current correspondence, as we’ve seen, shows how resilient musicians generally are. So how will this resilience translate into a revival of the sector and individual livelihoods as music slowly starts to be played and heard live again with audiences? Tune into the relevant panels tomorrow.

What musicians say they want to happen will very much guide our own programmes at Help Musicians: “listening” to musicians throughout the pandemic has been one of our mantras.

And to that end, please don't miss the lunchtime session on Thursday from Susannah Eastburn and Jane Williams on their research findings (commissioned by Help Musicians). Some truly insightful recommendations and action planning on future more sustainable careers for musicians.

So where else will we all genuinely find hope in the coming year?

HOPE, for a powerful resurgence in the love of music – listening and playing and choral singing (don't let's forget), as professionals and amateurs alike rediscover their social and professional connections and their love of music-making.

HOPE, in Help Musicians' continued ability (in partnership with many others) to offer financial support, training and health and welfare advice to musicians in unprecedented numbers.

And finally HOPE, as many people realise how much comfort music has given them in lockdown and as a result listen to more music, buy or download more music and attend more concerts.

As I enter my final year as Chair of this wonderful charity – I’m stepping down in April 2022 after the Centenary year and after nine years as Chair - I reflect on how much the charity has changed and grown stronger, thanks to the hard work of the leadership and the entire team. Back in 2014 we awarded 2.5k grants in toto. Last year we awarded close on 31.5k grants and assisted in all 36.5k musicians. And during my tenure we’ve awarded close to 57k grants to a total value of £51m.

In the first few months of this year we’ve raised an additional £1m in hardship funding from partners at Allianz insurance, the ISM, the Coop and the Jerwood Foundation. I’m delighted to be able to announce today that our trustees have agreed that we are in a strong enough position to be able to match those gifts with a further £1m from our reserves to create a “starter” pot for “hardship 4” of £2m – as always, the entirety of this will go to musicians with no deductions.

Even though I step down as Chair next year, I hope to remain actively involved in the music profession and music-making in the years to come, and I look forward to seeing and HEARING many of you live in concert before very long! As well as the Quiz of course tomorrow evening!! And to creating together a world where musicians can thrive – the primary purpose of this gathering.

And now....

I've been asked to segue directly into the next session, chaired by Roger Wilson, the Director of Operations for Black Lives in Music. Roger will be joined by a panel of three, whom he'll introduce.

(Linton Stephens (Musician and Chair, MU EDI Committee)

Victoria Sayles (Violinist, London Mozart Players)

Chi-chi Nwonoku OBE (Chineke! Orchestra)

Together they'll be addressing racial inequity in UK orchestras today, taking stock of progress in the area of diversity and inclusion, as well as the size of the task ahead to achieve meaningful change. The panel will also look at current initiatives in EDI, while exploring how orchestras need to change in order to achieve success in their quest for improved diversity.

Roger....