

ABO

ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH ORCHESTRAS



REVIEW
OF THE
YEAR
2024/2025

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Front page image: CBSO in the Bullring Kazuki Yamada @ Andrew Fox,
& front page, bottom left: The BSO at Meyrick Park @ Corin Messer

PREFACE

I am proud to introduce the Association of British Orchestras' (ABO) Annual Review for 2024/25 - a year marked by a changing political and economic landscape, evolving cultural expectations and rapid technological developments - overcome, managed and/or embraced yet again by our profoundly resilient and innovative orchestral sector.

July saw the election of the first Labour UK government in 14 years, a hugely significant moment in history and the spark of something new and different for the arts and music education. As the new government went into listening mode, the ABO amplified its voice. By engaging directly with Ministers and policy makers across government departments, participating in key consultations in relation to DCMS funding, Arts Council England and the Curriculum Review, the ABO represented our interests every day and remained steadfast in its mission to support and champion British orchestras.

One thing is clear: within the orchestral sector, music, education, the arts and the creative industries, we need to speak with one voice. The ABO cannot do that alone, so thank you to our members for providing evidence and data to support our case during the year, as well as our newly formed CEO Policy Group that regularly informs our policy framework. Thanks also to our key industry partners and collaborators including the Musicians' Union, LIVE and UK Music for being part of our collective advocacy.

Collaboration like this makes a difference and the ABO's #MusicThatMovesYou campaign is no exception. Together with the Musicians' Union, Classic FM, Classical Music Magazine,

Within the orchestral sector, music, education, the arts and the creative industries, **we need to speak with one voice.**

LIVE, UK Music and the ISM, we are challenging preconceptions about classical music and championing the value of music education through the latest #AnOrchestraInEverySchool campaign, launched at the ABO Conference in February.

The campaign wouldn't happen without the generous support of the ABO Trust, thank you. Special thanks to Laurie Watt, who stood down as Chair and Trustee in October 2024 after many years' service and who has been an active supporter of the ABO and the orchestral sector for decades.

Finally, thanks to the ABO board past and present for all their support during the year, whether that's taking on a specific project or just being there as a sounding board when needed. Thanks and congratulations to Judith for her outstanding leadership again this year and to the whole ABO team for everything they do to help not just keep the show on the road, but to support a future that is inclusive, ambitious, sustainable and better understood.



Sophie Lewis

Chair, Association of British Orchestras

INTRODUCTION

In reflecting on 2024/25 for the ABO, three key themes come to mind: removing barriers to facilitate success; inclusion and collaboration; and values.

REMOVING BARRIERS TO FACILITATE SUCCESS

With a new Government in place from July 2024, the ABO quickly worked to build relationships with incoming ministers. We convened a CEO Policy Group to feed into the ABO's Policy Framework, prioritising removing barriers to touring, reinstating the value of arts education in schools and making the case for public investment in orchestras – both through direct funding and creative tax reliefs.

To support our work, we published the tri-annual Key Facts 2025 report, delivered a one-day symposium on 'Making the Case for Classical' which brought together academic researchers and industry colleagues, and completed an in-depth workforce survey – the Compelling Employment Offer.

INCLUSION AND COLLABORATION

2024 saw the launch of the Inclusive Recruitment programme with partners Black Lives in Music and the Musicians' Union. 33 orchestras joined the programme in year one. The ABO takes an inclusive approach to all its work, consulting a range of voices when developing new initiatives. In our advocacy work, we avoid a separatist approach for orchestras whilst simultaneously identifying and addressing barriers which are unique to them. The ABO's public engagement campaign, #AnOrchestraInEverySchool calls for access to live music making for all young people, with the orchestra being an inclusive concept for music making in a group. New campaign partners include Music Mark and Making Music – representing both music education and amateur musicians.

VALUES

The ABO continues to shine a light on values and standards of behaviour. This means calling out bad behaviour - even when it involves high profile artists - and addressing historic or systemic issues within our organisations which mitigate against the standards we seek. Our continued involvement with the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority, shows our commitment to this work, as does our aim to engage 'trailblazer' orchestras in trialling the new Standards Framework, and our ongoing dialogue with the Musicians' Union in this area.

Throughout the year, as Sophie said, we have become ever more conscious of the need to speak with one voice to policy makers, both as a sector and within the creative industries. The interdependency within our cultural ecosystem demands that we actively support each other if we are to thrive. The ABO continues to work closely with other sector bodies to achieve this. We are all in this together.



Judith Webster

Chief Executive,
Association of British Orchestras



Paraorchestra Drone Refractions @shotawaydotcom



BO Conference @tynesightphoto

REVIEW OF THE YEAR **2024/25**

TO BE PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL
GENERAL MEETING OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH ORCHESTRAS



Joshua Bell and ASMF @ Christian Meuwly

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The mission of the ABO is to enable and support an innovative, collaborative and sustainable orchestral sector, and to provide advice, support, intelligence and information to the people who make British orchestras a global success.

The strategic objectives set out below have driven all activity in 2024/25:

- **Connecting** members to other members and the wider industry through networking opportunities, keeping our members well-informed and up-to-date with best practice to help build resilience and sustainability.
- **Championing** orchestras and the wider membership, raising their profile and influence with key stakeholders and the British public.
- **Developing** the skills and knowledge of our members' staff, including providing and signposting to high quality professional development opportunities and nurturing emerging leaders.

Within these objectives, the organisation's priorities are as follows:

1. Making the arguments for continued investment in orchestras.
2. Enabling the workforce, repertoire and audiences to better reflect the diversity of the country.
3. Developing and promoting leadership to ensure a sustainable orchestral sector.
4. Supporting the supply of a skilled, qualified and diverse workforce.
5. Maintaining and enhancing the ABO's role through the annual conference and opportunities for members.

The organisation has sought to balance the provision of development opportunities for its members, alongside a clear policy framework. The ABO's 2024/25 programme of activity is delivered via both topical and member services workstreams. These are,

- Topical Workstreams:
 - Equity, diversity & inclusion
 - Learning & Development
 - Green orchestras – net zero
 - Health & wellbeing
 - Innovation & digital
- Member Services Workstreams:
 - Membership
 - Data & sector intelligence
 - Communications
 - Policy

Critical to the ABO's work is a strong partnership approach both within the music industry and wider creative industries. Partners include Attitude is Everything, Black Lives in Music (BLiM), UK Music, LIVE, the Musicians' Union (MU), the Independent Society of Musicians (ISM), Creative UK, Help Musicians, Parents and Carers in Performing Arts (PiPA), the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA), BBC, Music Mark and SOLT/UK Theatre. International partners include the British Council, PEARLE* Live Performance Europe as well as sector bodies in North America, Australia and Asia.



English Baroque Soloists, Katia and Marielle Labèque (fortepianos), Marc Minkowski (conductor) – St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, 29 April 2025, © Paul Marc Mitchell.

POLICY

The ABO's policy workstream seeks to articulate and evidence the value of UK orchestras to policymakers, ensuring that the sector's social and economic impact are clearly understood and recognised. Policy work also seeks to address and remove barriers that impact ABO members' work - such as international touring regulations and tax reforms - through targeted policy engagement.

This workstream is directly supported by the Data & Sector Intelligence activity, providing a strong evidence base when making the case to policy makers. The ABO works in collaboration with a range of sector organisations - including the MU, LIVE, UK Music, ISM, Creative UK, and SOLT/UK Theatre - ensuring that the sector speaks with one, collective voice.



The ABO reviewed its policy framework in the lead-up to the 2024 General Election. This sets out the policy change that the ABO seeks to make. As part of this, a new subgroup of CEOs was convened - a policy working group - in order to regularly connect with a representative cross section of members on policy matters over the year. This group offers insight and different perspectives which help to prioritise and articulate the specific policy

asks of the new Government, and to assess which areas of policy change will deliver the biggest impact for ABO members and the sector as a whole.

In the lead up to the Election, members were provided with guidance to enable them to make the case for UK orchestras during the 2024 General Election campaign.

Newly appointed Arts Minister Sir Chris Bryant MP addressed the ABO 2025 Conference. The ABO sustains regular contact with policymakers across a range of portfolios. In 2024/25 this included meetings with HMRC resolving cases of delayed Orchestra Tax Relief (OTR) payments; the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) arts and creative industries policy teams; the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)'s Head of Soft Power; the Deputy Head of Creative Industries in the Department of Business & Trade (DBT); and the Department for the Environment (DEFRA) CITES policy team. Parliamentarians have spoken in support of the sector in Parliament as a result of ABO policy briefings.

The ABO submits comprehensive recommendations to Government consultations. In 2024/25 this included submissions to HM Treasury ahead of the October 2024 Budget Statement and Government's 2025 Spending Review. A collective response on behalf of ABO members was also submitted to the Curriculum and Assessment Review in November 2024.

The ABO continues to provide the Secretariat for the Classical Music All Party Parliamentary Group. Post General Election, Valerie Vaz MP and Baroness Barbara Keeley co-chair the group, which has over 30 members.

DATA & SECTOR INTELLIGENCE

In 2024/25 the ABO completed its survey of the UK's professional orchestras, gathering data on activities, audiences, financials, and musicians. The survey relates to the 2022/23 financial period, in order to capture the impacts of the unique set of challenges posed by the pandemic, and to provide a benchmark against which the sector's recovery can be measured in future surveys. A total of 53 out of 85 member orchestras responded – up from 44 orchestras in 2019.

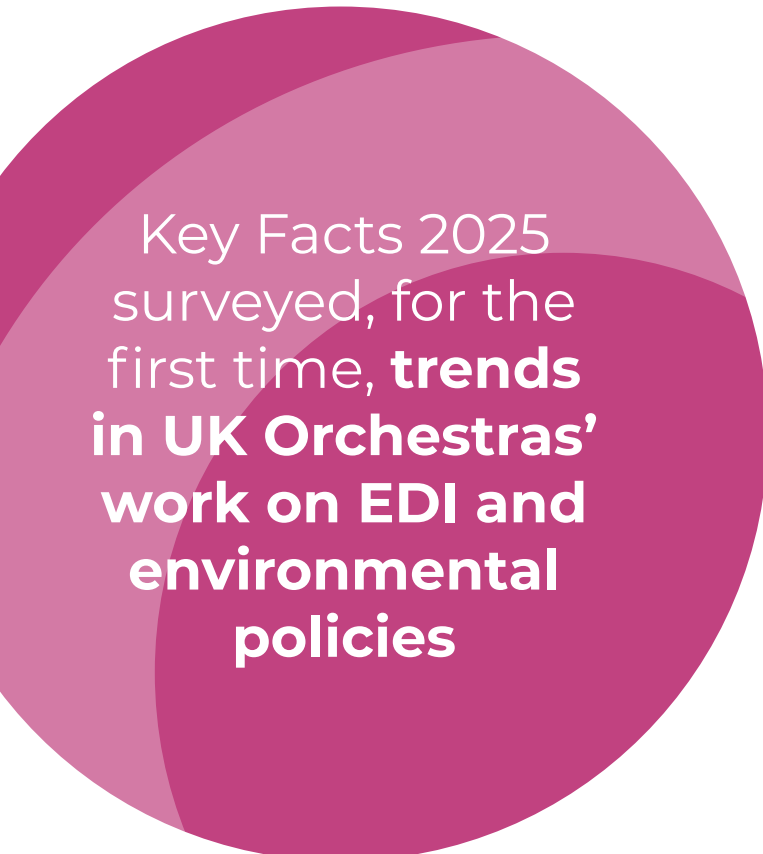
'Key Facts: The State of the UK's Orchestras' was launched in April 2025. This provided an update on key statistics for the UK orchestral sector last collected in 2019. Headline insights were shared at the ABO 2025 Conference in February. The release of the full report included a dedicated webinar for members. The report surveyed, for

the first time, trends in UK Orchestras' work on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and their environmental policies.

Other sector intelligence initiatives included the Compelling Employment Offer sector survey. The ABO partnered with the Advisory Board for the Arts (ABA) to conduct a bespoke staff preferences survey for UK orchestras. This survey sought to understand the employment preferences and values of those working for and with orchestras through a set of job offer simulations. The analysis provides organisations with a clearer understanding of what creates the most compelling employment environment and opportunities.

In May 2024, the ABO presented a 1-day Symposium: Making the Case for Classical: Research, Insight and Advocacy in Sheffield, in partnership with Dr Sarah Price from the University of Liverpool and Music in the Round, with funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The event explored the current state of research and data in the classical music sector. It brought together arts professionals, funders and academics and aimed to help organisations improve the quality and effectiveness of the evidence they collect to support better advocacy work.

The ABO also took part in National Cultural Data Observatory briefings and consultation, supporting data and evidence gathering for the wider cultural sector.



Key Facts 2025
surveyed, for the
first time, **trends**
in UK Orchestras'
work on EDI and
environmental
policies

EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

The ABO supports the orchestral sector to be more representative of the UK population. As such, a key focus of activity this year has been ongoing provision of a programme of support for the practice of recruiting and hiring musicians.

INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

Following the co-design of the 10-point plan for inclusive recruitment in orchestras and choirs, involving extensive sector consultation, 33 orchestras signed up to the Inclusive Recruitment Programme when it launched in May 2024. The programme is delivered in partnership with the MU and BliM, consisting of three online support sessions, facilitated by Judith Webster and Roger Wilson, and three online training sessions. Training providers were Come Play with Me for 'LGBTQ+ Advocacy & Inclusion'; Attitude is Everything for 'Creating an Accessible Workplace and Culture'; and Shonagh Reid for Black Lives in Music on Unconscious Bias. The programme also involves in depth evaluation, led by the MU, to monitor the impact of the work over time.



SIRENS

In 2016, the ABO Trust received a donation of £200,000 from Diana Ambache to create the Sirens fund. This restricted fund gives grants for the programming of works by historical women composers for a 10-year period.

33 orchestras
joined in year one
of the Inclusive
Recruitment
Programme





RNS Nil Venditti
@Tynesightphoto

The ABO manages this fund which will close in 2025/26. In 2024/25, 13 applications were received, and 12 awards were made as follows:

- Academy of Ancient Music: Maria Theresa Ahlefeldt *Movements from Telemak paa Calypsos Øe (or Telemachus on Calypso's Isle)*
- Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra: Lili Boulanger *D'un matin de printemps*
- City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra: Florence Price *Heart of a Woman Song Cycle*
- ESO Youth Symphony Orchestra: Dorothy Howell *Lamia*
- London Philharmonic Orchestra : Lili Boulanger *Faust et Hélène*
- London Symphony Orchestra: Imogen Holst *Persephone*

- National Youth Orchestra of Scotland: Grace Williams *Penillion*
- Philharmonia Orchestra: Grażyna Bacewicz *Divertimento*
- Royal Liverpool Philharmonic: Julia Perry A *Short Piece for Chamber Orchestra*
- Royal Philharmonic Orchestra: Dora Pejačević *'Phantasie Concertante' for Piano and Orchestra in D Minor, Op. 48*
- Sinfonia Smith Square: Grace Williams *Fantasia on Welsh Nursery Tunes*
- Sinfonia Viva: Imogen Holst *Festival Anthem*

During the year, ABO Chair Sophie Lewis joined a panel for the launch of the Donne Foundation's report, 'Equality & Diversity in Global Repertoire 2023/24' and the ABO will collaborate with the Donne Foundation on the data collection from member orchestras for future reports.



CCC © Fraser Band Honey090

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

The Learning & Development programme offers development opportunities for members within the ABO's wider membership offer. It encompasses activities which offer learning opportunities for the workforce, as well as bringing together ABO members who specialise in Learning & Participation work.

In 2024/25, the ABO delivered a number of member events and initiatives addressing special interests or development needs, including:

- 'Making the Case for Classical: Research, Insight and Advocacy' Symposium
- Development Needs of the Orchestral sector event
- Compelling Employment Offer survey, an in-depth workforce survey run in collaboration with the ABA

- Presentation of the Compelling Employment Offer survey findings at ABO Conference
- Deep Dive looking at the implications of the Compelling Employment Offer survey findings for employers, providing valuable insight into the motivations of orchestral management teams at all levels and informed future learning programmes
- Inclusive Recruitment programme training sessions for participating orchestras

The ABO received funding from the ABO Trust, and grant support from the AHRC for this work.

Fiona Harvey continued to consult with ABO member youth ensembles throughout the year, including on issues of specific relevance to their work, and representation in the 2025 Conference.

ABO ANNUAL AWARDS

The 2025 ABO Annual Awards celebrate the dedication, inspiration and achievements of the people who work in our sector.

They recognise individuals or groups of individuals whose work demonstrates the core values of inspiration, innovation or collaboration across the ABO's priority areas. The awards were presented by Classic FM presenter Ritula Shah with support from Help Musicians, Classical Music Magazine and the Royal Philharmonic Society.

The 2025 ABO Annual Awards winners were:

- Jackie Walduck, composer and percussionist, and principal workshop leader for the Academy of St Martin in the Fields (ASMF)
- Max Thomas, Clara Marshall Cawley and Ruth Ellul from Manchester Camerata for the creation of the Camerata 360° Ruth Sutton Fellowship
- Composer and curator Kate Whitley, of Multi-Story Orchestra
- Clarence Adoo MBE, of Royal Northern Sinfonia and Paraorchestra

The prestigious ABO Award was presented to Michael Eakin OBE, outgoing Chief Executive of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society.



ABO Conference
@tynesightphoto

ABO CONFERENCE

The ABO Conference took place in Gateshead from 5-7 February 2025, hosted by The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, supported by Principal Media Partner Classic FM, and International Partner British Council.

Topics included the findings of the Compelling Employment Offer, UK Touring, innovative performance models, prevention of sexual harassment at work, tools for measuring social value and carbon calculation, audience development toolkit, diversity in classical music, and pathways into the industry.

Features included a carousel of short skills-based workshops, allowing delegates to attend more sessions and gain some practical skills, a live women conductors' workshop with the Royal Northern Sinfonia and the ABO's first 'presidential debate' with colleagues from across the sector.

Speakers included Sir Chris Bryant MP, (then) Minister of State for Department for Culture, Media and Sport; Jack Gamble, Campaign for the Arts; Kate Molleson, Broadcaster and Writer; Linton Stephens, musician and broadcaster; Steve Sacks, ABA Europe; Naomi Pohl, MU; Jon Collins, LIVE; Paul Hawkins, Attitude is Everything; Hollie Smith-Charles, Arts Council England; and Niyi Akeju, CIISA.

Additional conference supporters included: Air Edel, Classical Music Magazine, Encore, Partners&, Future Demand, John Good Ltd, Newzik, Sottovoce HQ Pty Ltd, ISM, Symphony Media Live, Help Musicians, the British Association of Concert Halls (BACH), Royal Philharmonic Society, Advisory Board for the Arts, Musicians' Union, and Orchestras Live using support from Arts Council England.

Over the 3 days of the ABO Conference there were:

- 31 different sessions: including two Deep Dives, panels and workshops
- 97 speakers / panellists
- 345 delegates
- International delegates from Ukraine, Vietnam, Egypt and China.

We are grateful to conference host, The Glasshouse International Centre for Music and Royal Northern Sinfonia for their support and collaboration.



ABO Conference
@tynesightphoto

Download our app for
all the info.

Scan the QR code and
enter event code:
abo2025



ABO
ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH ORCHESTRAS



**ABO Annual
Conference
Gateshead**

5-7 February 2025

Principal Media Partner:
CLASSIC fm

International Partner:
**BRITISH
COUNCIL**

Hosted By:
The Glasshouse
International
Centre for Music

Join the
conversation!
Use the hashtags

#abo2025

#AnOrchestraInEverySchool

#MusicThatMovesYou



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN - #MUSICTHATMOVESYOU

In May 2024, the ABO launched its public engagement campaign, #MusicThatMovesYou, generously supported by the ABO Trust.

The campaign seeks to demonstrate and celebrate the tangible social and economic value and joy that British orchestras and classical music bring to people's everyday lives, across the UK.

The campaign was supported by campaign partners the MU, Classic FM, Classical Music Magazine, LIVE, UK Music and the ISM. Bespoke market research commissioned by the ABO provided the basis of a compelling news story for media, and data.

The campaign saw coverage in national and industry, print and broadcast media outlets, including the Daily Express; BBC Radio 3; BBC Radio Wales; Classic FM; Classical Music Magazine; Arts Professional; The Stage; and Times Radio.

Our social media activation saw over 80 unique posts using the #MusicThatMovesYou hashtag on X, with overall impressions of 48,330 and 772 engagement, on activation day alone, with a further 66 unique posts in the days that followed. Overall impressions stood at 90,448 with engagements of 1,450. 44 ABO members shared content across Instagram and X, with a combined reach of 2,485,600 accounts on Instagram, and 1,363,000 accounts on X.

In October 2024, the ABO Trust generously awarded £25,000 of continued funding to support Year 2 of the campaign, which was launched at the ABO 2025 Conference with the #AnOrchestraInEverySchool initiative.

The
#MusicThatMovesYou
campaign celebrates
the social and economic
value and joy of
British orchestras
and classical
music



CCC © Acorns to Oaks
Max McGregor



Classical Music for
Life's Big Moments



INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

MUSICIANS' UNION (MU)

The ABO has a strong and positive relationship with the MU which extends beyond the annual negotiation of the ABO/MU Casual Concert / Freelance Orchestral Agreement. Joint collaborative projects are undertaken, including the Inclusive Recruitment programme (also with BLiM), and we sit on a number of steering groups and committees together. In addition, the MU and ABO have committed to maintaining a dialogue between the annual pay negotiations to address sector issues together in four joint working groups. These cover UK travel and subsistence; Foreign Touring; EDI and Health & Safety, and Learning & Participation codes of practice.

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES INDEPENDENT STANDARDS AUTHORITY (CIISA)

Since its inception, the ABO has been a member of the CIISA Standards Advisory Committee that has developed the standards framework and been closely involved with industry-wide consultation and promotion of the work.

LIVE

As a member of the LIVE Board, the ABO is involved in a number of sub-committees with the wider music industry, including LIVE Workforce, LIVE Green, LIVE Touring and the Misogyny in Music working group, which commissioned the Seat At The Table (SATT) report, which surveyed gender and ethnic representation in senior leadership roles in all 15 organisations represented on the LIVE Board. This paved the way for the SATT LIVE Inclusion Pledge - a sector-wide commitment to inclusive leadership across the UK live music industry.

Being on the LIVE Board keeps the ABO closely in touch with issues affecting the wider music industry, and enables us to align on policy issues when appropriate.

Other sector initiatives the ABO has contributed to include being on the advisory group for the ISM's ECHR Sexual Harassment Toolkit; participating in the DCMS Good Work Review looking at job quality and working practices in the UK Creative Industries; and Arts Council England's Touring Research Reference Group.



ABO Conference @tynesightphoto

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Funding from the British Council enabled the ABO to foster international exchanges and collaborations as well as welcome international delegates to the ABO Conference.

The ABO/British Council Professional Exchange Programme supported online discussions and collaborations throughout the year. The 2024/25 exchanges were between:

- Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra
- City of London Sinfonia and the Johannesburg Theatre and Soweto Youth Orchestra.

Five delegates from Official Development Assistance (ODA) countries were funded to attend the ABO Conference which included

a roundtable session with UK orchestras, hosted by the British Council. The international delegates were:

- Nataliia Stets, Music Director, The National Philharmonic of Ukraine
- Phuong Vu, Program & Operation Director and Educational Curator, Vietnam Youth Music Institute
- Shady Hanna, Assistant Professor of Cello, Cairo Conservatoire, and Principal Cellist, Cairo Opera Orchestra
- Yi Huang, Music Director/conductor, Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra.
- Hiba Al Kawas, Director and President of the Board, Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music was unable to attend due to visa and travel safety concerns.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

This workstream addresses the work of orchestras in healthcare settings as well as the health and wellbeing of the classical music workforce, including both management and musicians.

ORCHESTRAS IN HEALTHCARE

The ABO continued to work with partners, Orchestras Live and the National Arts in Hospitals Network, and is a Strategic Member of the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance. The group convened a session at the ABO 2025 Conference session entitled ‘Myth busting Social Prescribing’, speakers including: Bev Taylor, National Network Facilitator, Centre of Excellence for Music and Dementia, Manchester Camerata; Jayne Howard, Creative Health Associates Programme Manager, National Centre for Creative Health, Georgina Aasgaard, Cellist and Liverpool Philharmonic

Lead Musician(Music & Health) and Hollie Smith-Charles, Director, Creative Health and Change, Arts Council England.

WORKFORCE

The health and wellbeing of the workforce has been a regular topic for discussion at ABO Member Networking Meetings and indeed the opportunity to meet colleagues in person is felt to be a valuable support for members. The topic is also an integral part of the Inclusive Recruitment programme and the MU negotiations, along with the work on Industry Standards, led by CIISA. There is an increasing awareness of mental health challenges for both musicians and management, and how these are affected by their working conditions.

GREEN ORCHESTRAS

As part of the ongoing dialogue with the Musicians' Union linked to the ABO/MU joint Agreement, the ABO seeks to incentivise green travel and work to reduce the carbon footprint of its membership. A specific working group was formed to consider the issue in relation to UK touring where discussions are ongoing.

The ABO 2025 Conference included a dedicated training session on carbon calculations which offered practical tools for measuring and managing environmental impact. This marked an important step in equipping organisations with the knowledge and resources needed to embed greener practices across the sector.

In 2024/25, the ABO continued to take part in the LIVE Green working group and is a member of the Scottish Classical Sustainability Group (SCSG),

INNOVATION & DIGITAL

In 2024/25, the ABO has continued to share innovative projects in performance and across a range of settings. Creative approaches from within the sector are spotlighted in our quarterly ABO News magazine.

Innovation in the sector was celebrated at the 2025 ABO Annual Awards, recognising Clarence Adoo MBE, of Royal Northern Sinfonia and Paraorchestra, who developed adaptive technology with the Headspace instrument.

MEMBERSHIP

The ABO's central role is to support its membership. Critical to this is connecting members with one another and with the wider industry, offering regular opportunities for networking and the exchange of insights and knowledge, and advocating on their behalf. Members are kept informed and supported through a programme of events, including the flagship Annual Conference, which serves as a key forum for discussion and collaboration. Alongside this, the ABO provides online resources, responds to member enquiries, and leads the annual pay negotiations with the MU, ensuring that members' interests are represented at a national level.

EVENTS

In 2024/25, the ABO delivered a year-round programme of online and in-person events for its members. These included Member Networking Events, specialist events on particular topics of interest, professional development opportunities and the Annual Conference. The ABO delivered 31 events across the year covering topics such as Noise at Work and Withholding Tax. 7 meetings took place in person, 3 of which were outside London. There was a total of 1,093 attendees. External speakers included academic researchers, Wesley Gryk Solicitors LLP and CIISA.

INFORMATION, ADVICE & GUIDANCE

The ABO provides information, advice and guidance as well as resources, and regular updates to the membership. This is through communication channels such as the ABO website, including a bespoke members area, regular e-newsletters and bulletins and social media channels.

COMMUNICATIONS

ABO NEWS

The ABO publishes a digital magazine 3 times a year - ABO News - showcasing the impactful and innovative work of ABO members across the country. This is shared with policy makers, funders and stakeholders within and outside of the sector to highlight the value of UK orchestras and their work on and off stage, in education and healthcare settings and in local communities.

WEBSITE, SOCIAL MEDIA AND ABO UPDATE

The ABO Facebook page has had an increase in 82 followers totalling 3014, with 236 interactions between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The ABO LinkedIn page has a total of 2,288 followers on 31 March 2025, an increase of 259 from 31 March 2024. Current followers on X, formerly known as Twitter, now total 8,203. The ABO Instagram page has a total of 629 followers on 31 March 2025, an increase of 359 from 31 March 2024.

In June 2025 the ABO decided to pause posting to X, formerly known as Twitter. This decision had been taken by the majority of our members.

The ABO have distributed 78 member mailings in the last year, maintaining an average 46.7% open rate. This includes the much-valued monthly member newsletter, ABO Update, supplemented by regular topical and policy bulletins and the Learning & Development e-bulletin.

MEDIA

The ABO is regularly quoted and provides insights and comment on behalf of the sector in industry and national media including BBC Radio 3; LBC News; Arts Professional; and Classical Music Magazine.

ABO TRUST

In 2010, the ABO Trust was a beneficiary of a legacy from the estate of Mrs Elizabeth Ashton Edwards. Each year the Trust funded the ABO's Education Consultant as well as contributing to the Find Your Way leadership development programme. From 2023, the ABO made a special request for support for its ambitious Public Engagement Campaign. In October 2024, the Trust generously awarded a grant of £25,000 towards the second year of the Campaign which aims to change the public narrative around classical music. This was in addition to its continued support for the Learning & Development Consultant and related activity. The Trust also oversees the ABO's management of the Sirens fund (see page 11).

In October 2024, two long-standing trustees of the ABO Trust stood down after many years of service. They were Laurie Watt, Chair and Anna Rowe, trustee. The ABO would like to acknowledge and thank them for their loyal service. Marion Friend has taken over as Chair and is working with Sophie Lewis, ABO Chair, to update the Trust's governance procedures and articles.

GOVERNANCE

ABO BOARD APPOINTMENTS

The ABO Board of Directors met 5 times during the year, ensuring scrutiny of the Association's activities and finances.

Three new Nominee Directors (Full Members) were elected at the ABO AGM on 19th November 2024. They were David Burke, London Philharmonic Orchestra; Matthew Downes, Welsh National Opera and Dominic Parker, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

The ABO is grateful to incumbent Board members, Sophie Lewis (Chair), Thorben

Dittes, Helen Dunne, Ellen Gallagher, Lucy Galliard and Paul Philbert MBE for their continued support and contributions, and to Chris Loughran and Leslie Kwan, co-opted Directors who retired in 2025 and Bob Riley who stepped down in December 2024. Recruitment of Co-Opted Directors will follow elections for the Nominee Directors in Autumn 2025.

The ABO is grateful to Laurie Watt, former Senior Counsel at Charles Russell Speechlys, for his support as the Association's Honorary Legal Adviser.

FINANCE

The ABO made a small surplus of £7,492 at the year ended 31 March 2025. This resulted in reserves increasing to £189,361. The year end position was better than forecast largely due to tight budget management for the Conference, and a period of staff vacancy.



*Aurora Orchestra Symphonie
fantastique © Nick Rutter*

ABO MEMBERSHIP 2024/25

FULL MEMBERS

Those professional orchestras and ensembles which have existed for not less than two years in the UK, and have undertaken no fewer than 24 public performances, entitled to all services and discounts and having a vote at General Meetings.

Academy of Ancient Music	Monteverdi Choir and Orchestras	Glyndebourne
Academy of St Martin in the Fields	Northern Ballet	The Hallé
Arcangelo	Northern Chamber Orchestra	La Serenissima
Aurora Orchestra	Opera North	London Contemporary Orchestra
Bath Philharmonia	Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment	London Mozart Players
BBC Concert Orchestra	Orpheus Sinfonia	London Philharmonic Orchestra
BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales	Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra	London Sinfonietta
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra	Philharmonia Orchestra	
BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra	Red Note Ensemble	
BBC Symphony Orchestra	Royal Liverpool Philharmonic	
Birmingham Contemporary Music Group	Royal Opera House	
Birmingham Royal Ballet / Royal Ballet Sinfonia	Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra	
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra	Royal Philharmonic Orchestra	
Brighton Philharmonic Orchestra	Royal Scottish National Orchestra	
Britten Sinfonia	Scottish Chamber Orchestra	
Chineke! Foundation	Scottish Ensemble	
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra	Scottish Opera	
City of London Sinfonia	Sinfonia Cymru	
Dunedin Consort	Sinfonia of London	
English Chamber Orchestra	Sinfonia Smith Square	
English National Ballet	Sinfonia Verdi	
English National Opera	Sinfonia Viva	
English Sinfonia	Solomon's Knot Productions Ltd	
English Symphony Orchestra	The English Concert	
English Touring Opera	The Glasshouse ICM	
Gabrieli	The Limelight Orchestra	
London Symphony Orchestra	The Mozartists	
Manchester Camerata	The Outcry Ensemble	
	The Sixteen	
	Ulster Orchestra	
	Welsh National Opera	
	Worthing Symphony Orchestra	

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Those orchestras that have been in existence for less than two years or have given less than 24 professional public performances in the UK, non-UK professional orchestras, conservatoires and national youth orchestras

Britten Pears Arts	Orchestras	Royal Northern College of Music
Chamber Orchestra of Europe	National Children's Orchestras of Great Britain	Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama
Chetham's School of Music	National Concert Hall, Dublin	Scottish National Jazz Orchestra
Chromatica Orchestra	National Open Youth Orchestra	Singapore Symphony Group
Congleton Youth Orchestra	National Opera Studio	Stoneleigh Youth Orchestra
Cyprus Symphony Orchestra Foundation	National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain	Symphony Orchestra of India
Digital Orchestra (Drake Music Scotland)	National Youth Orchestras of Scotland	Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra
East Dunbarton Music Service	National Youth String Orchestra	Thames Youth Orchestra
English Folk Dance and Song Society (National Youth Folk Ensemble, London Youth Folk Ensemble)	Orchestras for All	The Multi-Story Orchestra
Guildhall School of Music & Drama	Paraorchestra	The Purcell School
Hallé Youth Orchestra	Royal Academy of Music	Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
Iceland Symphony Orchestra	Royal Birmingham Conservatoire	Ulster Youth Orchestra
Irish Association of Youth	Royal College of Music	University of Birmingham
	Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	Wells Cathedral School

AFFILIATE MEMBERS

Those organisations involved with the presentation, support and commissioning of the work of the Association and its full members, such as funding agencies, broadcasters, festivals and venues

Arts Council England	Children's Classic Concerts	Orchestras Live
ABRSM	Classic FM	Royal Albert Hall
B:Music	Creative Scotland	Royal Philharmonic Society
BBC Proms	Ex Cathedra	Southbank Centre
BBC Radio 3	Help Musicians	Spitalfields Music
Brass Bands England	Independent Society of Musicians	St Martin-in-the-Fields
Bristol Beacon	Making Music	The Tenebrae Choir
British Arts Festivals Association	Music at Oxford	Wigmore Hall
British Council	Music in the Round	
Cadogan Hall	Music Mark	

ABO BOARD

Sophie Lewis (Chair)	Chief Executive	National Children’s Orchestras of Great Britain
David Burke	Chief Executive	London Philharmonic Orchestra
Thorben Dittes	Chief Executive	Philharmonia Orchestra
Matthew Downes	Head of Orchestra	Welsh National Orchestra
Helen Dunne	Orchestra Director	Royal Opera House
Ellen Gallagher	Associate	Hamkins LLP
Lucy Galliard	Chief Executive	Sinfonia Viva
Dominic Parker	Director	BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra
Paul Philbert MBE	Principal Timpani	Royal Scottish National Orchestra/Chineke!

ABO STAFF

Freya Dawes	Communications & Events Co-ordinator
Andrea Crooks	Book-keeper (part time)
Rebecca Knights	Membership & Operations Manager (to November 2024)
Hanna Madalska-Gayer	Head of Policy & Communications (part time)
Judith Webster	Chief Executive
Fiona Harvey	Learning & Development Consultant
Chris Wright	Finance Consultant
Holly Cumming	Conference Producer (freelance)
Rosie Loker	Project Manager (freelance cover)



ASSOCIATION OF **BRITISH ORCHESTRAS**

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