

# ABO

ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH ORCHESTRAS



REVIEW OF  
THE YEAR  
**2023/2024**

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# PREFACE

It is a great pleasure to share the Association of British Orchestras' Annual Report 2023/24 – a year that represents positive progress for the ABO alongside both challenges and opportunities for our membership and our sector.

Becoming Chair of the ABO in September 2023 meant starting at a time when recent political chaos felt fresh and the uncertainty around a General Election was on everyone's mind. Rising costs set against limited arts funding continued to create serious budgetary pressures and the complexities of working internationally persisted. The claxon of concern about the de-prioritisation of music in our education system was, and continues to be, loud and strong.

These are big issues and not ones the ABO can conquer on its own but rather through increased consultation with members and powerful partnerships across the wider creative and cultural industries. The most tangible success during the year was the permanent extension to Orchestra Tax Relief at 45%, the very direct result of combined advocacy and action by the ABO, our members, SOLT/UK Theatre and partners right across the creative industries.

I believe the ABO is needed now more than ever. Yes, you may have heard that before, but these are surely extraordinarily complex times to navigate for our members and our sector. So, it is only right that through Judith's vision, the ABO takes a lead on the things that matter most. This includes actively challenging the narrative about what we do, lobbying for sustained investment in our



Kazuki Yamada  
at CBSO 2024  
© Hannah Fathers

orchestras and cultural education and improving Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in and around our organisations. All the while supporting the current and future workforce so that they can adapt and take risks as our world continues to change.

This year's conference in Bristol was a real highlight for me and on my home turf too! It was brilliant that so many more delegates chose to be there, the changes in format were well received and there was even an air of optimism due, in part, to the inclusion of young voices from the very start. The Conference also hosted the launch of the latest Orchestras in Healthcare Report, a joint initiative with Orchestras Live, that is not just raising awareness of the vital work orchestras are doing but also influencing policy.

Thank you to Judith for her purposeful leadership during this year and to the remarkable ABO team (Hanna, Fiona, Freya and Rosie) for the enormous contribution they made in advocating for our members within government and with policy makers whilst simultaneously delivering new

projects and strands of work, in consultation with members and in strategic partnership with others. This will help shape the future not only of our orchestras and the people who work in them but also the audiences and communities we exist to serve.

On behalf of the ABO I'd like to thank the ABO Trust for its valued support of the Learning and Development programme and the public engagement campaign #MusicThatMovesYou. Thank you also to outgoing Board Directors during this period - Jo Buckley, Phil Boughton and Linda Merrick for your invaluable contributions during your time on the Board.

Most importantly, thank you to our members and our partners for your collaborative spirit and engagement with the ABO. We will continue to listen, learn and lead.

**Sophie Lewis**  
Chair

The most  
**tangible**  
**success** during  
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the permanent  
extension  
to Orchestra  
Tax Relief at  
**45%**

# INTRODUCTION

In reflecting back on 2023-24, my first full year as CEO of the ABO, I see a year of both significant achievements and enduring challenges for our sector. I have learned so much through attending a wide range of work both on and off the concert platform, and experiencing first hand an orchestra's relationship with its audiences. This has provided a constant reminder of how hard colleagues work just to keep the show on the road, that there is a great deal of truly ground-breaking work happening both behind the scenes and in full public view, and that some of our cultural norms and behaviours really do need to shift as they are as great a threat to our future as any funding crisis, and are inextricably linked.

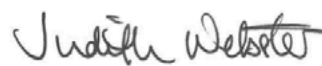
If the ABO is to be a development agency, then our role must be to both celebrate success and change when it occurs, to support and stimulate development within our ranks, and to hold our sector to account if our actions do not match our words and aspirations.

The ABO has made significant progress in key areas in 2023-24, none of which would have been possible without working closely with partners across the wider music industry. This year we:

- Actively started to tackle the narrative around classical music through the development of a new, positive hearts and minds public engagement campaign: #MusicThatMovesYou.
- Concluded a one-year consultation process and launched a sector endorsed 10-point plan for inclusive hiring and recruitment, in partnership with Black Lives in Music (BLiM) and the Musicians' Union.
- Working with partners across the creative industries, secured Orchestra Tax Relief (OTR) at the permanent rate of 45% - a game changer for our sector and the creative industries as a whole.
- Began the evolution of the ABO's annual conference – starting the conference in Bristol Beacon with the voices of young people, sharing a performance of unaccompanied Bach from the then Shadow Culture Secretary, Thangam Debbonaire and engaging with each other in depth through two Deep Dives.
- Refreshed the annual ABO Classical Music Awards, placing the emphasis on shared values.
- Appointed the ABO's first Co-opted Chair through an open recruitment process.

Change is in the air and there is an acknowledgement of the need to align some of our working practices more closely with those beyond our sector – particularly in the HR arena. This is to be applauded – whilst at the same time recognising just how deeply entrenched some of our practices and attitudes are, and how crucial this development work is. In the performance space, it is disheartening to witness a lack of openness and generosity from some critics who profess to love our industry but seem intent on ensuring its fossilisation and undermining those trying new things, particularly (dare I say it) if they are women. Sadly, this does nothing to attract new audiences and supporters to our work. We are proud to be actively tackling this through overtly positive messaging in our #MusicThatMovesYou public engagement campaign. It is my firm belief that persisting with positive messaging will in the end win over the negative and draw in the curious who may wish to try something new. Just as negative energy pulls you down, so positive energy pulls you up.

On that note, I would like to thank ABO members for their support during 2023-24. Thank you for responding positively to our efforts to be more inclusive, to trying new approaches and doing things differently. Thank you for being our critical friends as we develop our membership offer and do our level best to enable orchestras to thrive.



Judith Webster  
Chief Executive



Orchestras For All  
© Simeon Thaw

# REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2023/24

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

## 2023 STRATEGY REFRESH

The ABO's mission 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 objectives set out in the ABO's 2022-2025 strategic plan aim to support the ABO's continued mission of:

- 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.

In delivering on this mission, the strategic priorities for **2022-2025** are set out as:

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.

In 2023, the ABO conducted a refresh of the 2022-2025 strategic plan, in response to the challenge of ensuring that ABO members are able to make progress on equity, diversity and inclusion across the sector, build future resilience and adapt to the UK's move towards a net-zero economy. This strategy refresh has brought about a change of emphasis in the ABO's priorities, with the objective of 'Developing' the sector now a greater priority.

In order to achieve meaningful and measurable progress in these areas, the ABO set out a clear programme of activity for 2023-2025. The activity is structured across both topical and member services workstreams:



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- Topical Workstreams:
  - Equity, diversity & inclusion
  - Learning & Development (including HE/conservatoires, pathways into industry, youth ensembles)
  - Green orchestras – net zero
  - Health & wellbeing
  - Innovation & digital
- Member Services Workstreams:
  - Membership
  - Data & sector intelligence
  - Communications
  - Policy

Each workstream directly supports the delivery of the ABO's strategic objectives and mission. [See Appendix I for workstreams and activities mapped against the five strategic priorities.]

In delivering on these strategic objectives, the ABO works in partnership with a range of organisations within our sector as well as across the wider culture and creative industries. This includes working with partners such as Attitude is Everything, Black Lives in Music (BLiM), UK Music, LIVE, the Musicians' Union, the Independent Society of Musicians (ISM), Creative UK, Help Musicians, the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA), BBC and SOLT/UK Theatre. We also work with international partners including PEARLE\* Live Performance Europe as well as sector bodies in North America, Australia and Asia.

## 2023/24 ACHIEVEMENTS

### EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

The ABO aims to view all of its work through an inclusive lens, from speakers at events to working group membership, orchestral repertoire, to Board representation. In 2023/24, we took direct action in relation to the recruitment of musicians, acknowledging the specific challenges presented in this area due to the complex nature of the relationship between musicians and management.

#### INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

The ABO aims to support UK orchestras to be more representative of the UK population. As such, the key area of activity this year has been working towards establishing an industry endorsed code of practice for recruiting and hiring musicians.

The ABO has partnered with the Musicians' Union and BLiM to develop a **10-point plan for inclusive recruitment**, following an extensive consultation process with ABO members over the previous year. This was presented at the 2024 ABO Conference, with a programme of ongoing support due to be launched later in the year.



Kazuki Yamada at CBSO In The Bullring 2024 © Andrew Fox

#### SIRENS

In 2016, the ABO Trust received a donation of £200,000 from Diana Ambache to create the Sirens fund which supports the programming of **works by historical women composers** for a 10 year period. The ABO manages this fund. In its eighth year, in 2023/24, 11 applications were received and 8 awards were made as follows:

- City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra: Florence Price *Symphony No 1 in E Minor: III Juba Dance*
- Chethams: Elizabeth Maconchy *Land*
- London Symphony Orchestra: Elizabeth Maconchy *Nocturne for Orchestra (recording)*
- National Youth Orchestras of Scotland: Alma Mahler *Sieben Lieder*
- Orchestras for All: Florence Price *Symphony No 1, first movement*
- Royal Scottish National Orchestra: Louise Farrenc *Overture No.2 in E-flat Major Op 24*
- Scottish Chamber Orchestra: Louise Farrenc *Symphony No 3 in G Minor*
- Ulster Orchestra: Grazyna Bacewicz *Concerto for String Orchestra*

## LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

### LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

In line with our Strategy Refresh, the ABO has been developing a coherent Learning and Development (L&D) Programme for the membership, which covers both the development needs of the current workforce and those of the future workforce.

Learning & Development activity in 2023/24 has encompassed **events for the wider membership**, including HE/FE, Conservatoires, Learning & Engagement and youth ensembles, and a 'Deep Dive' session at the ABO Conference on the future musical workforce, led by the Royal Northern College of Music.

This workstream also includes a review of the ABO membership offer for youth ensembles, to make greater connections between their work and insights and those of the industry itself. This evolving programme covers **professional development initiatives**, online webinars on a range of topics, learning and mentoring opportunities and resources in support of sector development and organisational priorities.

### FIND YOUR WAY (FYW)

The ABO's long running leadership development programme, Find Your Way (FYW), concluded with the final event for the FYW 2022-23 cohort at Help Musicians' (HM) offices in summer 2023.

As part of the review of the ABO's Learning and Development offer, FYW and other stand-alone training courses have been paused. They have been replaced by a mixed and flexible programme of online and in

person member events (see above). The offer has broadened to include CEOs and the wider membership. Discussions are ongoing regarding further professional development opportunities in response to identified member needs.

### BRITISH COUNCIL PROFESSIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

The ABO secured a British Council grant for a six-month professional exchange programme between UK based ABO members and international partners. This new partnership replaces previous years' ABO/British Council International Mentoring Programme. The new scheme now enables **organisational exchange** rather than individual mentoring and is open to the wider ABO membership. The scheme began with collaborations at the ABO 2024 Conference and continues during 2024. City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra is working with **Thailand Philharmonic** and City of London Sinfonia is working with the **Soweto Youth Orchestra in South Africa**.



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### INDUSTRY STANDARDS

The ABO are partnering with the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA), a new professional body that is committed to upholding and improving standards of behaviour across the creative industries to ultimately create safe and inclusive workplaces for creative industry professionals. Work is progressing on a new Standards Framework, and consideration of the support needed in order to work towards achieving those standards.

Discussions took place in 2023/24 with the Interim Chief Executive of the newly formed CIISA. The ABO will play a pivotal role in facilitating the understanding of the orchestral sector, its working practices and achieving buy-in from orchestras themselves as the framework is rolled out.

The ABO are partnering with the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority, a new professional body committed to **creating safe and inclusive workplaces** for creative industry professionals.



City of London Sinfonia's  
'Towards a new sound' at  
Southwark Cathedral ©  
Nick Rutter

## HEALTH & WELLBEING

This workstream covers both the work that orchestras undertake within healthcare settings and considerations of the health and wellbeing of the classical music workforce, both management and musicians. To that end, the culture and working practices of the orchestral sector are the focus of a number of different initiatives across workstreams e.g. in joint working groups with the MU linked to the ABO MU Agreement; in the consultation on Inclusive Recruitment; the development of the 10-Point Plan; and with CIISA as part of their work on a standards framework for the creative industries.

## GREEN ORCHESTRAS

The ABO seeks to incentivise green travel and to reduce the carbon footprint of the ABO membership. This area of work will be progressed specifically in year 2 of the Strategy Refresh, through a joint ABO/MU working group reviewing this aspect of the **ABO MU Agreement**. However, we continue to work with industry partners to deliver on this aim in the short term.

The ABO is a member of the **LIVE Green** working group and regularly shares opportunities for ABO members to access best practice and insights. This has included holding a free online event for ABO members with Indigo presenting their **Act Green** data, looking at audience attitudes to the climate crisis, with a specific focus on classical music audiences in relation to the benchmark. The 2024 ABO Conference included a session on sustainability in the orchestral sector and beyond, with contributions from Claire O'Neill, Co-founder and CEO of A Greener Future, Flo Carr from Indigo, ABO members and chaired by Jon Collins, CEO of LIVE.

As a member of the **Scottish Classical Sustainability Group (SCSG)**, the ABO fed into the Group's **July 2023 Classical Music Train Travel Report**. Collated using learnings from the 30+ members of the SCSG, the report highlights five key barriers currently preventing greater use of train travel by Scotland's classical music sector.

## ORCHESTRAS IN HEALTHCARE

As a strategic partner in Orchestras in Healthcare, and in partnership with Orchestras Live, the **Orchestras in Healthcare #2 report** was launched at the 2024 ABO Conference. This second report on current orchestral activity in the health and social care sector demonstrates significant progress made since the 2021 report, not only in the work itself but also the value placed on it by healthcare professionals, orchestra managements, musicians and the general public. The report was discussed in a meeting held with DCMS officials, exploring the potential for the creation of a forum for healthcare service and hospital arts managers.

The ABO will continue to work with our partners, Orchestras Live and the National Arts in Hospitals Network to champion the role of orchestras in health and social care practice and the benefits their work can bring to these sectors. Plans are under way for a third online event late in 2024.



## ORCHESTRAL CONNECTIONS – HEALTH & WELLBEING SYMPOSIUM

In September 2023, the ABO hosted an Orchestral Connections event focussing on health and well-being, in partnership with Symphony Services Australia. The free, online event saw 87 attendees join from the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Moderated by Laura Waters, Head of Arts, University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust, the symposium featured speakers from both Australasia and the UK, focusing on the work of orchestras in healthcare and other settings, and the health and wellbeing of the musicians themselves. Speakers included Jacinta Ewers (Orchestra Victoria), Zoe Armfield (Royal Liverpool Philharmonic), Alena Tompkins (West Australian Symphony Orchestra), Lisa Rodio (Royal Philharmonic Orchestra).

## INNOVATION & DIGITAL

The ABO aims to share innovative projects and practice in performance and other settings, and to provide stimulation and challenge for the membership through collaborations with digital partners, speakers and influencers at events and through the Learning & Development Programme.

In 2023/24, the ABO Conference featured a groundbreaking **immersive performance** by the Paraorchestra, and delegates attended a specially **curated session on Artificial Intelligence (AI)** which looked at both creative possibilities, through the eyes of composer, Rob Laidlow and the potential rights issues, addressed by Tom Kiehl, CEO of UK Music.

The ABO has supported UK Government initiatives to better understand the impacts of the use of AI in our sector. This has included sharing opportunities for ABO members to feed into the Government's draft code of practice on copyright and AI, to ensure that the specific concerns and impacts for the UK orchestral sector are taken into consideration.

The refreshed ABO Classical Music Awards, presented for the first time at the 2024 Conference, serve to champion inspiration, innovation and collaboration as core values of the ABO (see below).



*London Symphony  
Orchestra's LSO Connect*



Chris Cooper  
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## MEMBERSHIP

The ABO works to connect members to other members and the wider industry through networking opportunities, and keeping members well-informed and up-to-date with best practice and guidance. This is delivered through a programme of member events and the Annual Conference. In addition, the ABO provides online resources, fields member queries, and conducts the annual pay negotiations with the Musicians' Union.

### MEMBER NETWORKING EVENTS

The renamed 'Member Networking Events' (formerly Specialist Managers Meetings) have been expanded to be flexible and topic based, appealing to members across different departments. This includes a new

series of free, online Breakfast Briefings, open to all ABO members who have been unable to attend the Member Networking Events or who would like to hear about wider areas of ABO's work. Networking opportunities for colleagues with the same job roles continue to be offered on demand.

### MUSICIANS' UNION

A key relationship for the ABO members is between the ABO and the Musicians' Union. The annual negotiation of the ABO/MU Casual Concert / Freelance Orchestral Agreement was carried out with a high level of co-operation and understanding from both sides this year, resulting in a renewed sense of working together for the common good. Other collaborative work currently underway includes:

- Inclusive Recruitment Programme – 10 Point Plan
- Working groups linked to the ABO/MU agreement
- Collaborative sessions at the ABO conference

### ABO CONFERENCE

ABO Conference is the UK's leading classical music gathering. The 2024 Conference took place in Bristol on 24-26 January and was hosted by the newly reopened Bristol Beacon. With more delegates than ever before, and with a theme of 'Creative Solutions', a number of changes were incorporated into the conference format. These included opening the event with the **voices of young musicians** outlining what they are looking for from a future classical music sector followed by a response from **Arts Minister Lord Parkinson** and a panel discussion hosted by broadcaster, **Adam**



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## ABO CLASSICAL MUSIC AWARDS

Each year the ABO celebrates the dedication, inspiration and achievements of the people who work in our sector through the annual ABO Classical Music Awards, in partnership with Classical Music. In 2023/24, we presented a refreshed framework for the Awards. Instead of being linked to specific management roles, the Awards recognised individuals or groups of individuals whose work, particular project or initiative demonstrates **inspiration, innovation or collaboration** within any of the ABO's priority areas: **Equity, diversity and inclusion; Learning and development; Green orchestras; Health and wellbeing; and Innovation and digital.**

The 2024 ABO Classical Music Awards celebrated the work of **Scottish Ensemble, the Recruiting Classical consortium, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic's Music & Health team and Manchester Camerata's Principal Flute and Resident Music Therapist, Amina Hussain.**

The ABO Classical Music Awards are presented in addition to the **ABO Award. Louise Mitchell CBE**, Chief Executive of the Bristol Beacon was the recipient of this prestigious Award.

**Fleming.** There were two 'Deep Dive' sessions enabling delegates to go into major topics in depth. These were delivered in association with the Royal Philharmonic Society and the Royal Northern College of Music. An emphasis on 'round table' formats throughout the conference encouraged informal networking between delegates.

The First Night involved an informal social event with guest speaker, **Mihir Bose** and the presentation of refreshed ABO Classical Music Awards, by **Aled Jones**, courtesy of Principal Media Partner Classic FM. The second evening began with a solo cello performance of unaccompanied Bach from **Thangam Debonnaire MP**, followed by a Fireside Chat between Thangam and the new Chair of Bristol Beacon, Jonathan Dimpleby – a true conference highlight. This preceded a groundbreaking immersive performance from the **Paraorchestra** in the Beacon Hall.

With nearly 100 speakers over three days, delegates heard from prominent figures from across the worlds of music, culture, media and politics. The conference provided stimulation, information and provocations for delegates to reflect on, and a map of the ABO's future activity on behalf of the membership for the forthcoming year.

The ABO is grateful to Principal Media Partner **Classic FM**, Media Partner **Classical Music**, Charity Partner **Help Musicians** and International Partner British Council for their generous support, and also to the Musicians' Union, the British Association of Concert Halls (BACH), ISM, Orchestras Live, the Royal Philharmonic Society, Royal Northern College of Music, and Bristol Beacon.

## DATA & SECTOR INTELLIGENCE

The ABO is working to develop a data collection and impact measurement strategy which supports the ABO's advocacy work in championing the orchestral sector over the long term.

In 2023/24 we commissioned a new data analyst to conduct the ABO 2024 **Key Facts** sector survey. The triannual survey, last conducted in 2019, was delayed due to the impact of Covid.

The ABO also feeds into key data gathering across the wider sector. This has included taking part in the **Policy and Evidence Centre for the Creative Industries** (Creative PEC), Arts, Culture and Heritage launch. This was an opportunity to help shape what will become a national reference for sector data, case studies and other specific evidence.

The ABO also fed into and attended the launch of the McKinsey & Company report on the **Impact of the UK Arts Sector**. The report offers a fresh analysis of the impact of the UK arts sector on the UK economy, on the lives of individuals and the fabric of communities across the UK. Jonathan Deakin, Partner at McKinsey & Company presented the report's findings at the 2024 ABO Conference.

## COMMUNICATIONS

### PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN - #MUSICTHATMOVESYOU

The ABO Trust generously awarded £25,000 to the ABO to devise a nationwide public engagement campaign 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 aims to capture the hearts and minds of the general public and change the narrative around classical music and orchestras, safeguarding public investment in classical music in the UK in the long term.

Campaign development was carried out over 2023/24, with extensive consultation with the ABO membership and wider sector. This included the creation of a positive, central campaign narrative built around the core message of the power of connection of classical music; campaign logo and branding; and a campaign toolkit; as well as commissioning bespoke market research; and securing campaign partners.

Midas PR, engaged by the ABO for this project also drew on the discussions from the 2024 ABO Conference Deep Dive on the sector narrative.

### 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. We share this with policy makers, funders and stakeholders within and outside of the sector to highlight the value of UK orchestras and the work that takes place on and off stage, in education and health settings and in local communities.

### INFORMATION & GUIDANCE

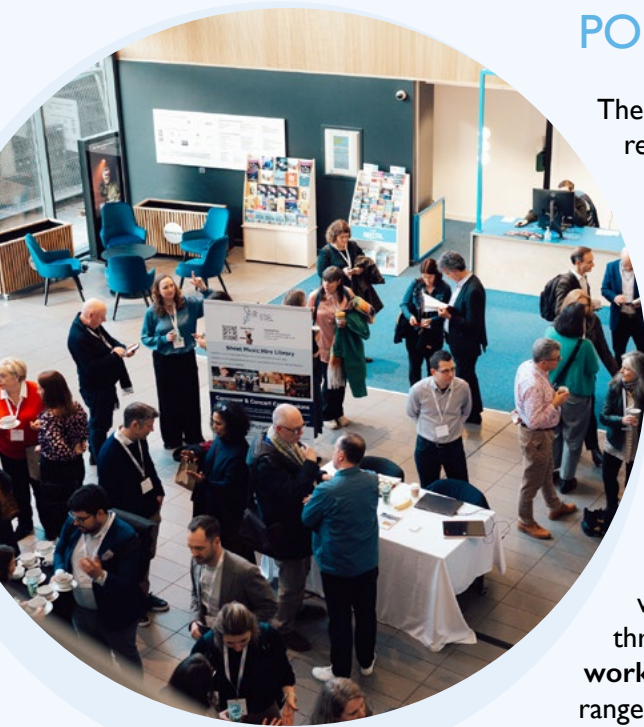
The ABO provides information, advice and guidance as well as resources, regular updates to the membership. This is through communication channels such as the ABO website, including a bespoke members area, regular e-newsletters and bulletins and social media channels.

### WEBSITE, SOCIAL MEDIA AND ABO UPDATE

The ABO Facebook page has had an increase in 66 followers totalling 2,969, with 8,486 impressions between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. The ABO LinkedIn page had a total of 2,029 followers on 31 March 2024, an increase of 1,125 from 31 March 2023. Current followers on X, formerly known as Twitter, now total 8,660. An Instagram account was set up for the ABO in this time period with a total of 270 followers as at 31 March 2024.

A key social media activation in 2023/24 has been the **#Spotlight** orchestras series, showcasing the impactful and innovative work of ABO member





Chris Cooper  
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## POLICY

The ABO advocates for the relevance and value of UK orchestras to policy makers and seeks to address and remove barriers to ABO members' work through policy engagement.

This workstream is closely aligned with the Data and Sector Intelligence workstream, building a **robust evidence base** to support policy work. Policy work is delivered through **collaboration and working in partnership** with a range of sector bodies, including the MU, LIVE, UK Music, ISM, Creative UK, SOLT/UK Theatre, amplifying the sector's voice.

orchestras across the ABO's priority areas: Equity, diversity and inclusion; Learning and development; Green orchestras; Health and wellbeing; and Innovation and digital.

The ABO have distributed 122 member mailings in the last year, maintaining an average 42% open rate. This includes the much-valued monthly members Update, supplemented by regular bulletins, and L&D/Education and Youth Ensemble bulletins.

### MEDIA

The ABO is regularly quoted and provides insights and comment on behalf of the sector in industry and national media including on BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4, and in Arts Professional, The Stage, Classical Music, the Sunday Times, The Times and Politico.

A key success this year has included **securing the permanent higher 45% Orchestra Tax Relief rate**, announced in the Spring Budget 2024, further to the collective case made by the ABO, alongside theatres, museums and galleries.

We continue to cement relationships and build constructive dialogue with key policy makers across UK Government. This has included roundtable meetings with Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer, Arts Minister Lord Parkinson, Shadow Culture Secretary Thangam Debbonaire. The ABO took part in **HM Treasury's** 'Treasury Connect: Creative Industries' conference alongside the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Culture, Education and Digital, Science & Technologies Secretaries of

State, discussing how to drive growth across the creative industries. We took part in a joint **Department for Culture (DCMS)** and **Department for Education** 'Pathways to Industry' roundtable in response to the National Plan for Music Education, and a high-level **Home Office** Ministerial Roundtable discussing protest and cultural events. We continue to regularly engage with the **Department for the Environment (DEFRA)** on CITES regulations. The ABO also took part in a Creatives Roundtable, hosted by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Nigel Huddleston and the 'Celebration of UK Music and The Future Global Music Economy' event, hosted by the **Department for Business and Trade**.

Sector issues are regularly raised in **Parliament** as a result of ABO briefings and engagement, including by Arts Minister Lord Parkinson during a

The ABO advocates for the relevance and value of UK orchestras to policy makers and **seeks to remove barriers** to ABO members' work through policy engagement.

debate about 'The contribution of the arts to the economy and society' in the House of Lords.

We have continued our work in advocating for UK orchestras' role in supporting UK cultural diplomacy and soft power, and tackling barriers to international touring. The ABO sat on the **UK Soft Power Group**, co-convened by the British Foreign Policy Group and the British Council and contributed to the Group's report on the role of culture in the future of the UK's soft power.

Addressing the ongoing challenges for European touring enshrined in the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the ABO has provided briefings and submissions to the **European Committee on Culture and Education** and provided evidence to the UK House of Lords **European Affairs Committee** on 'The future UK-EU relationship'. The ABO was invited to speak at a range of sector events including the 'Unlock the Music' panel hosted by the **European Movement**; a special meeting with the **Liberal Democrat DCMS** team on issues with Brexit touring and red tape; and a roundtable hosted by the **Independent Commission on UK-EU Relations** and the Musicians' Union.

Beyond Europe, the ABO successfully stalled steep **USA visa fee** increases for touring artists, contributing to the collective case made by the international creative industries sector.

We remain engaged in the devolved nations, and made a submission on behalf of the sector to the **Welsh Senedd's Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee** consultation on Culture and the new relationship with the EU. We also

made a submission to the Scottish Constitution, Europe, **External Affairs and Culture Committee's** Review of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement and published statements in response to Creative Scotland budget cuts, announced by the Scottish Government.

The ABO continues to provide the Secretariat for the **Classical Music All Party Parliamentary Group**. We convened a number of well attended meetings on topics ranging from the sector funding landscape, international touring to music education to Orchestra Tax Relief. Parliamentarians regularly hear first-hand from a range of ABO members at these meetings throughout the year. We held an EGM and managed changes to the Group's membership in order to comply with new APPG rules in force from March 2024, successfully recruiting 24 Members of the group.

During the **Political Party Conference** season, the ABO showcased some of the impactful and innovative work of ABO member orchestras on and off the stage, in and around the cities where the Conferences

took place, in Bournemouth, Liverpool, Manchester and Aberdeen. The ABO also attended a Creative UK Roundtable with Shadow Music Minister Barbara Keeley on the fringes of the Labour Party Conference.

We worked successfully alongside IMG Artists (UK) Ltd, Askonas Holt, former Shadow Arts Minister Barbara Keeley MP and DCMS and Home Office officials to ensure, for the second time, the waiving of visa fees and expediting of visa applications for the **Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra** and the **National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine** touring to the UK.

In 23/24 we have also worked to ensure that the ABO is well positioned to make a clear case for the sectors' policy asks in the lead up to the General Election.



Chris Cooper  
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## ABO TRUST

In 2010, the ABO Trust was a beneficiary of a legacy from the estate of Mrs Elizabeth Ashton Edwards. Each year since then, trustees have awarded a grant to the ABO towards the costs of managing its work with Education & Youth Ensembles and the Find Your Way programme. In 2023, the ABO paused the Find Your Way programme, and the Trust generously awarded a grant of £25,000 towards the ABO's Public Engagement Campaign which aims to change the public narrative around classical music. This was in addition to its continued support for the Education & Youth Ensembles activity. The Trust also oversees the ABO's management of the Sirens fund (Equity, Diversity & Inclusion).

## FINANCE

The ABO made a deficit for the year ended 31 March 2024 of £28,585. This resulted in reserves decreasing to £182,746. The year end position was better than forecast despite some unplanned personnel costs. This was largely due to careful management of expenditure and maximising income from the Annual Conference, which attracted more delegates than ever before. There is currently an operating deficit due to the increased headcount in 2021. This will be addressed through diversifying income streams beyond member subscriptions.

## GOVERNANCE

### ABO BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Following an inclusive and wide-ranging recruitment process, Sophie Lewis, CEO of the National Children's Orchestras of Great Britain, was appointed Chair of the ABO in October 2023. Following a change of articles in February 2023, Sophie is the first Co-Opted Chair to be appointed.

At the AGM on 21st November, there was an open election process to fill three Nominee Director (Full Member) positions. These were due to Phil Boughton retiring, Jo Buckley resigning due to a change of job and Linda Merrick stepping down. Voting took place both online in advance and in person at the AGM. This attracted an unprecedented eleven nominations.

**Lucy Galliard**, Chief Executive, Sinfonia Viva; **Helen Dunne**, Orchestra Director, Royal Ballet and Opera; and **Bob Riley**, Chief Executive, Manchester Camerata were elected to the Board.

The ABO is grateful to incumbent Board members James Williams, Thorben Dittes, Lisa Tregale, Paul Philbert, Chris Loughran, Leslie Kwan, Ellen Gallagher and Jenny Jamison for their continued support and contributions.

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

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



# ABO MEMBERSHIP 2023/24

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

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

## 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, and nine regional offices*	Creative Scotland	Southbank Sinfonia at St John's Smith Square
Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music	Ex Cathedra	Spitalfields Music
B:Music	Help Musicians	St Martin-in-the-Fields
BBC Proms	IMPACT Scotland	The Tenebrae Choir
BBC Radio	Independent Society of Musicians	Wigmore Hall
Brass Bands England	Live Music Now Scotland	
Bristol Beacon	Making Music	
British Arts Festivals Association	Music at Oxford	
British Council	Music in the Round	
Cadogan Hall	Music Mark	
Children's Classic Concerts	Orchestras Live	
Classic FM	Royal Albert Hall	
	Royal Philharmonic Society	
	Southbank Centre	

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## CORPORATE MEMBERS

*Other interested parties and commercial organisations that support the work of the Association and its members*

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442plus GmbH	League of American Orchestras
Acoustic GRG Products Ltd	Map a Muso
Action for Children's Arts	Orchestras Canada / Orchestres Canada
Air Edel Associates Ltd	Pulleyn Orchestra Transport
Arts Marketing Association	Rock-it Global
Askonas Holt Limited	Sound Sense
Black Cat Music and Acoustics	Specialised Travel Ltd
Boomerang Carnets	Stagecast Ltd
Cameron Mackintosh Ltd	Symphony Services International
China Symphony Development Foundation	The Ivors Academy
Harrison Parrott	The Musicians Answering Service
Hennessey Brown Music	TRG Arts
IMG Artists	Young Classical Artists Trust
Intermusica Artists' Management	
International Artist Managers' Association	
John Good Ltd – Printing	

## SOLE TRADER MEMBERS

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Anna Rowe	Thistle Music
Imagine Sound Limited	Thoroughly Good
Marion Friend MBE	VLT Legal
Mark Pemberton OBE	

## HONORARY MEMBERS

*By invitation of the ABO board*

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Catherine Arlidge MBE	Malcolm Warne Holland/MWH Associates
Andrew Bennett	Chi-chi Nwanoku MBE
Simon Crookall	Edward Smith
Trevor Ford	David Sulkin
Sir Clive Gillinson CBE	John Summers
Peter Helps	Timothy Walker
Michael Henson	Laurie Watt
Antony Lewis-Crosby	David Whelton
Ian Maclay	
Roy McEwan	

## ABO BOARD

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Thorben Dittes	Chief Executive	Philharmonia Orchestra
Helen Dunne	Orchestra Director	Royal Ballet and Opera
Ellen Gallagher	Associate	Hamlins LLP
Lucy Galliard	Chief Executive	Sinfonia Viva
Jenny Jamison	Chief Executive	Scottish Ensemble
Leslie Kwan	Managing Director	The Monarch Network
Sophie Lewis	Managing Director	National Children's Orchestras
Chris Loughran	Co-Founder & Director	Symbio Impact
Paul Philbert MBE	Principal Timpanist	Royal Scottish National Orchestra
Bob Riley	Chief Executive	Manchester Camerata
Lisa Tregale	Director	BBC National Orchestra of Wales
James Williams	Managing Director	Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

## ABO TEAM

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Jenny Daly	Membership & Operations Manager
Rosie Loker	Membership & Operations Manager (maternity)
Hanna Madalska-Gayer	Head of Policy & Communications
Freya Dawes	Communications & Events Administrator
Judith Webster	Chief Executive
Fiona Harvey	Learning & Development Consultant
Chris Wright	Finance Consultant

# APPENDIX I

## PRIORITIES

1. making the arguments for continued investment in orchestras **[cultural value & advocacy]**
2. enabling the workforce, repertoire and audiences to better reflect the diversity of the country, **[EDI]**
3. developing and promoting leadership to ensure a sustainable orchestral sector **[leadership & resilience]**
4. supporting the supply of a skilled, qualified and diverse workforce **[workforce]**
5. maintaining and enhancing the ABO's role through the annual conference and opportunities for members **[ABO leadership]**

*Note: The delivery of the activities outlined below relate to a two-year period over 2023-25 (beyond the 2023-24 period of this Annual review).*

TOPICAL WORKSTREAMS	ACTIVITIES	PRIORITY (1-5)
Equity, diversity & inclusion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creation of Industry endorsed Code of Practice for recruiting and hiring (BLiM / MU / ABO)</li> <li>2. Creation of specialist support service for members supporting the sharing of practice</li> <li>3. Provision of EDI focused CPD events for members, including repertoire and audience focused activity</li> </ol>	1, 2, 5
Learning & Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stakeholder endorsed Learning &amp; Development strategy</li> <li>2. Successful income generation for a comprehensive 'Learning and Development Programme.</li> <li>3. Delivery of a fully funded programme of apprenticeships, leadership training, CPD and events</li> <li>4. Sector endorsed code of practice for Learning &amp; Engagement work (L&amp;P)</li> <li>5. Map the work of ABO members beyond the concert platform</li> </ol>	2, 3, 4, 5
Green orchestras – net zero	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review and refresh the ABO's Green Orchestras Charter and action plan</li> <li>2. Incorporate wider 'green' issues in the joint ABO/MU Agreement working group</li> </ol>	3, 4, 5
Health and well-being	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish working group with MU which addresses health and wellbeing in ABO/MU agreement</li> <li>2. Engage with musicians directly (via Musicians Advisory Council) and ABO membership (via SMMs) to identify specific actions in support of objectives 1&amp;2.</li> <li>3. Publish OiH strategy and action plan for 2023-24</li> </ol>	1, 2, 3, 4
Innovation & Digital	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research and map innovative and digitally based projects and performances by the membership</li> <li>2. Provide opportunities for skills development and to share best practice at events throughout the year</li> <li>3. Source funding/sponsorship for targeted national awards</li> </ol>	1, 3, 4, 5

TOPICAL WORKSTREAMS	ACTIVITIES	PRIORITY (1-5)
<b>Membership</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Curate and deliver the ABO annual conference for the membership and key stakeholders</li> <li>2. Deliver an annual programme of online and in-person member events as part of the topical workstreams</li> <li>3. Support the ABO's monitoring and evaluation requirements across workstreams as needed</li> <li>4. Lead the negotiation of the ABO/MU agreement, including member consultation, to conclusion</li> <li>5. Service the evidence and data collection requirements of other workstreams</li> </ol>	1-5
<b>Data and sector intelligence</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Scope out the data project in relation to both short term and longer term requirements</li> <li>2. Source funding and commission the Key Facts data collection work or an alternative solution for short term advocacy purposes</li> <li>3. Promote, communicate and implement data strategy with ABO membership</li> </ol>	1-5
<b>Communications</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Disseminate ABO and member news and activity via current core communications channels e.g. mailings, social media, website etc.</li> <li>2. Develop sector campaign promoting the value and impact of the orchestral sector to UK plc and in UK society</li> <li>3. Review ABO website, social media and communications channels to ensure that they represent and support the delivery of ABO's strategic priorities</li> </ol>	1-5
<b>Policy</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review ABO political stakeholder mapping and put in place an engagement plan to build and cement relationships and constructive dialogue with key policy makers</li> <li>2. Carry out ABO member mapping exercise demonstrating breadth of ABO membership and activities across the country and identifying ABO member local MPs and local government stakeholders</li> <li>3. Build a robust evidence base supporting the policy work, through alignment with data and sector intelligence workstream</li> <li>4. Maintain, strengthen and build new national and international partnerships to amplify the sector's voice</li> </ol>	1-5



# ABO

ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH ORCHESTRAS

**Association of British Orchestras**

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We are grateful to the following for their support during the year:

**ABO Trust, British Council, Classic FM,  
Classical Music, Help Musicians**

