

# ABO

ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH ORCHESTRAS



## ABO Annual Conference Gateshead

5-7 February  
2025



Principal Media Partner:

CLASSIC *fm*

Hosted By:



The Glasshouse  
International  
Centre for Music

International Partner:



BRITISH  
COUNCIL

# ABO CONFERENCE WELCOME

As Chair of the Association of British Orchestras, and on behalf of the ABO Board, I am delighted to welcome you all to our 2025 conference.

It is great to be back in Gateshead once again, this time at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, recently reborn after 20 years as The Sage. Thank you to the whole Glasshouse team for working in partnership with us to deliver this year's conference.

With our first change of government in 14 years, this is our chance to hear first-hand from Ministers and policy makers about how we can support the delivery of Labour's mission. Within the context of multiple challenges directly impacting budgets, reach and relevance and our workforce, what does it mean for the UK's orchestras and what will it take?

This year's conference programme is designed to help us navigate the current context by focussing on key themes including our role in the delivery of the government's plan for a cultural education as well as innovation and audience development, health and wellbeing and organisational impact.

None of which is achievable without our people both on and off the concert platform. With an emphasis on workforce development and building a fairer and more inclusive orchestral sector, we aim to support you and the people you work with now and in the future so that

our organisations can meet these challenges, evolve and thrive.

And then there's the music. Huge thanks to Royal Northern Sinfonia for treating us to two very different performances over the next couple of days, showcasing the brilliance, versatility and innovation that exists within our orchestras and ensembles today.

Thanks of course to ABO Chief Executive Judith Webster and the ABO team for working so hard to design and deliver this year's conference with further thanks to our conference supporters - Principal Media Partner; Classic FM and International Partner; the British Council. We are also grateful to the Musicians' Union for supporting musicians to attend this conference.

I hope you enjoy the next few days meeting old and new friends, learning from our speakers and each other and come away feeling inspired and motivated. Thank you for being here and for your continued support of the ABO.



**Sophie Lewis**  
Chair, Association of British Orchestras  
Chief Executive, National Children's Orchestras of Great Britain

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR HOSTS

Welcome from Royal Northern Sinfonia and to The Glasshouse International Centre for Music. Welcome to our home, our place and from our people. We hope you will have an enriching time with us over the next few days.

## FROM THE CEO

The evolution of the ABO Annual Conference continues in 2025. Taking a collaborative approach, we have drawn on our first Conference Working Group to curate a programme which offers both in-depth Deep Dives on topical issues and short sprints via a carousel of 45 minute skills based workshops. These sessions are complemented by an array of panels and discussions which are designed to be interactive, informative and provocative – catalysing the development of our work, our workforce and our future growth. Indeed, 'development' and 'growth' are inextricably linked. The conference offers opportunities to explore how the former impacts the latter across a range of areas – from innovation and representation on the concert platform, and the social impact of our work in different settings, to workforce motivation and standards of behaviour across the creative industries, without which future investment cannot be

guaranteed. We are pleased to welcome Arts Minister Chris Bryant MP on Day 1, to discuss how our work supports the government's agenda on growth and cultural education, and – hot off the press - we will share headlines from our new sector report, Key Facts. The conference will close with a key debate on the interventions required to ensure that pathways into our industry are clear and achievable for all.

And finally, to the music. Through our partnership with this year's host, The Glasshouse, we will be treated to three opportunities to hear the Royal Northern Sinfonia in action – including a live orchestral workshop as part of the Royal Philharmonic Society Women Conductors Programme. As ever, we want to hear feedback from ABO members after conference so that your voices can inform the continuing development of your conference and our work on your behalf.



**Judith Webster**  
Chief Executive, Association  
of British Orchestras

With thanks to the Conference Working Group: Elise Brown, Jo Buckley, Thorben Dittes, Barry Farrimond-Chuong, Clara Marshall Cawley, James Murphy, James Thomas.

The Glasshouse is 20 this year and, coming into this new period of maturity, we'll hope to give you a snapshot of what we do and what our ambitions and hopes are for this country's orchestral music - for people of all ages and walks of life, for the next generation of musicians and for the artform. 'Music lives and grows here' is how we capture this. And we're really looking forward to dialogue with all of you about how we make a future for orchestral music happen together.



**Abigail Pogson**  
Chief Executive, The Glasshouse  
International Centre for Music



**James Thomas**  
Executive Director, Royal Northern  
Sinfonia & Classical Music

# AT A GLANCE

## WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY THE GLASSHOUSE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR MUSIC

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 12:30-14:00 | <b>REGISTRATION OPEN &amp; WELCOME LUNCH</b> LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR |
| 14:00-14:30 | <b>OFFICIAL OPENING &amp; WELCOME SPEECHES</b> SAGE ONE                         |
| 14:30-15:30 | <b>THE 'PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE'</b> SAGE ONE                                       |
| 15:30-16:00 | <b>NETWORKING BREAK</b> LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR                      |
| 16:00-17:00 | <b>PLENARY STATE OF THE NATION</b> SAGE ONE                                     |
| 19:00       | <b>RECEPTION AND SUPPER</b> WYLAM BREWERY                                       |
| 20:00       | <b>PRESENTATION OF ABO AWARDS</b> WYLAM BREWERY                                 |
| 20:30       | <b>ROYAL NORTHERN SINFONIA - PERFORMANCE</b> WYLAM BREWERY                      |

## THURSDAY 6 FEBRUARY THE GLASSHOUSE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR MUSIC

|                           |   |   |  |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| 8:30                      | <b>REGISTRATION OPEN</b>  |   |  |
| 09:30-10:15               | <b>PLENARY THE COMPELLING EMPLOYMENT OFFER</b> SAGE ONE                           |   |  |
| 10.30-13:00               | <b>DEEP DIVE – Organisational Culture Change</b><br>NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION HALL | <b>DEEP DIVE – Thriving Orchestras: A Positive Vision for the Future</b> BARBOUR ROOM |  |
| 11:30-12:15               | <b>HALF TIME COFFEE BREAK</b> LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR                  |   |  |
| 12:15-13:00               | <b>DEEP DIVES - continued</b>   |   |  |
| 13:00-14:00               | <b>LUNCH &amp; ABO MARKETPLACE</b> LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR             |   |  |
| 14:00-15:15               | <b>BREAKOUT 1</b><br>NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION HALL                                | <b>BREAKOUT 2</b><br>BARBOUR WEST   | <b>BREAKOUT 3</b><br>SAGE TWO                      |
| 15:15-15:30               | <b>PIT STOP &amp; ABO MARKETPLACE</b> LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR          |   |  |
| 15:30-16:15 & 16:30-17:15 | <b>WORKSHOP 1</b><br>BARBOUR EAST   | <b>WORKSHOP 2</b><br>BARBOUR WEST   | <b>WORKSHOP 3</b><br>NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION HALL |
| 15:30-16:30 & 15:30-17:00 | <b>SUPPORTING ORCHESTRAL TOURING IN THE UK</b> LEVEL 3 BALCONY BAR                |   | <b>UK x INTERNATIONAL ROUNDTABLE</b> C4            |
| 18:15-19:15               | <b>PRE-CONCERT RECEPTION</b> NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION HALL                        |   |  |
| 19:30                     | <b>CONFERENCE CONCERT, ROYAL NORTHERN SINFONIA</b> SAGE ONE                       |   |  |

## FRIDAY 7 FEBRUARY THE GLASSHOUSE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR MUSIC

|             |  |  |                                   |
|-------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| 8:30        | <b>REGISTRATION OPEN</b>   |  |                                   |
| 10:00-11:15 | <b>BREAKOUT 1</b><br>SAGE TWO  | <b>BREAKOUT 2</b><br>NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION HALL | <b>BREAKOUT 3</b><br>BARBOUR ROOM |
| 11:15       | <b>NETWORKING BREAK &amp; ABO MARKETPLACE</b> LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR |  |                                   |
| 11:45-13:00 | <b>ORCHESTRAL WORKSHOP</b> SAGE ONE  |  |                                   |
| 11:45-13:00 | <b>BREAKOUT 1</b><br>SAGE TWO  | <b>BREAKOUT 2</b><br>BARBOUR ROOM                  |                                   |
| 13:00-14:00 | <b>LUNCH &amp; ABO MARKETPLACE</b> LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR            |  |                                   |
| 14:00-15:15 | <b>PLENARY NEXT GEN – PROGRESSIVE PATHWAYS</b> SAGE TWO                          |  |                                   |
| 15:15-15:30 | <b>CLOSING SESSION</b> SAGE TWO  |  |                                   |

# 2025 CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

## WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY

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12:30-14:00

**REGISTRATION**

TYNE BRIDGE ENTRANCE

**LUNCH & ABO MARKETPLACE**

LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR

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14:00-14:30

**OFFICIAL OPENING**

SAGE ONE

**WELCOME SPEECHES**

**Sophie Lewis**, Chair, Association of British Orchestras & Chief Executive, National Children's Orchestras of Great Britain, and **Abigail Pogson**, Chief Executive, The Glasshouse International Centre for Music opens the 2025 Conference, with a welcome video from Principal Media Partner, Classic FM.

**Judith Webster**, Chief Executive, Association of British Orchestras welcomes delegates and reflects on 2024

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14:30-15:30

**THE 'PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE'**

SAGE ONE

Sure to start the conference with a bang, we present a fast-paced, big-hearted, presidential-style debate, following a record year of elections in the UK and US. Against the clock, six figures from different aspects of the profession will express their ardent, topical aspirations for classical music's future.

Whose vision might get your vote? Broadcaster and writer **Kate Molleson** will be our moderator, keeping order, and inviting delegates to cast their own questions, opinions and passions into the mix. You will also hear insights from **Alistair Mackie**, Chief Executive, RSNO; **Elise Brown**, Director, Revere Arts; **Laura Fullwood**, Youth Leadership Co-ordinator, Orchestras for All; **Rowan Rutter**, Chief Executive, City of London Sinfonia, and **Lloyd Coleman**, clarinettist, composer, and Associate Music Director, Paraorchestra.

A fun and lively session, with a serious edge.

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15:30-16:00

**NETWORKING BREAK & ABO MARKETPLACE**

LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR

**16:00-17:00**

**PLENARY STATE OF THE NATION**  
**SAGE ONE**

All delegates will come together in this plenary session offering unique insights into the current state of our sector. Delegates will hear first-hand from **Sir Chris Bryant** MP, Minister of State for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism on how the new Labour Government will deliver on its missions and what this means for the UK orchestral sector. The session will also include insights from **Jack Gamble**, Director, Campaign for the Arts; **Sophie Lewis**, Chair, Association of British Orchestras & Chief Executive, National Children’s Orchestras of Great Britain; and will be chaired by **Chris Loughran**, ABO Board Member and Co-Founder of Symbio Impact.

**17:00**

**SESSIONS END**

**ABO CONFERENCE DELEGATES PHOTOCALL**

We invite all Conference delegates to join us on the Concourse as you leave the final session at 17:00, for a brief photocall. Please listen out and check the Conference app for further instructions.

**19:00**

**CONFERENCE ‘FIRST NIGHT’ RECEPTION AND SUPPER**

*supported by the British Council*



WYLAM BREWERY

**PRESENTATION OF ABO AWARDS**

WYLAM BREWERY



Always a highlight of the ABO conference, this year’s **‘First Night’** takes place at Wylam Brewery, situated in the picturesque Palace of Arts in Exhibition Park. We’ll be announcing the winners of the prestigious **ABO Award**, and the **ABO Annual Awards**, hosted by **ABO Principal Media Partner Classic FM**.



**ROYAL NORTHERN SINFONIA - PERFORMANCE**

Following the ABO Awards, delegates will be treated to a **Royal Northern Sinfonia** performance of **Julius Eastman’s** 1974 composition *Feminine*, a minimalist groove for wind, percussion, piano and bass.



**Earworm melodies.** Slowly shifting chords. Waves of sound that wash over you like the tide coming in on the beach. **Julius Eastman’s** brand of minimalism has all the hallmarks of the genre, with an extra jazzy, bluesy, funky edge that gives it a proper wow factor.



Return coach travel to and from the **Wylam Brewery** will be provided.

## THURSDAY 6 FEBRUARY

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08:30

**REGISTRATION**  
TYNE BRIDGE ENTRANCE

09:30-10:15

**PLENARY THE COMPELLING EMPLOYMENT OFFER**  
SAGE ONE

In this important plenary session, we will share findings and reflections from our recent workforce survey, the Compelling Employment Offer. The survey identifies the true motivations of staff, and aims to help develop successful strategies to recruit, retain and nurture a workforce that is facing considerable change over the next 5 – 10 years. We will hear from **Steve Sacks**, President ABA Europe and **Leila Ghorashi**, Executive Director, Research.

10:30-13:00

**DEEP DIVES**

Following the huge popularity of last year's Deep Dives, these bumper sessions return to the Conference again this year. Delegates are invited to choose between two Deep Dive sessions which will run concurrently and will delve into key sector issues. Each Deep Dive will include presentations and provocations from a range of contrasting speakers and facilitated discussions, resulting in tangible actions and recommendations for impactful change. The table discussions will be led by representative teams of colleagues from across the region and sector.

10.30-11:45

**DEEP DIVE – Organisational Culture Change**  
NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION HALL



What did we learn about our workforce from our recent **Compelling Employment Offer survey**? This Deep Dive is an opportunity to explore the implications of the findings for our people and our organisations, and to think about our individual and collective responses. How can we attract and retain the workforce we need? What motivates us to work in the sector and how can we respond to the needs of our people?

This is your opportunity to have your say, led by **Steve Sacks**, President ABA Europe, **Leila Ghorashi**, Executive Director, Research, ABA and **Nico Daswani**, Executive Director, Business Development, ABA, with sector voices, **Jo Buckley**, Chief Executive, Dunard Centre and **Lloyd Coleman**, composer and Associate Music Director, Paraorchestra.

**10:30-11:30**

**DEEP DIVE – Thriving Orchestras: A Positive Vision for the Future**  
BARBOUR ROOM

This interactive workshop addresses existential sector issues in a positive way, supporting delegates as we all strive to build constructive change in the sector we love. This session won't shy away from tackling the difficult issues, whilst keeping the focus on being constructive and action orientated.

Key questions to be addressed include: 'What does a thriving orchestra look like in 2025?; how can we better position the work of orchestras at the heart of the cultural life of the UK?; what culture change is necessary within orchestras to achieve our goals?; and what does positive change look like?

**Adam Szabo**, Director, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra steers us through these fundamental questions, with **Emma Stenning**, Chief Executive, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra; **John Harte**, Chief Executive, Aurora Orchestra; **Donagh Collins**, Chief Executive, **Askonas Holt** and **Helen Wallace**, Head of Music, Barbican Centre.

**11:30-12:15**

**HALF TIME COFFEE BREAK**  
LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR

**12:00/12:15-13:00**

**DEEP DIVES - continued**

Discussions continue after the break, coming together to produce actions, recommendations or statements for further dissemination.

**13:00-14:00**



**LUNCH & ABO MARKETPLACE**  
*supported by Encore, Performing Arts Insurance From Partners&*  
LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR



Right: Drummer participating in the Modulo Programme



14:00-15:15

**BREAKOUT 1**

NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION HALL

**IMPROVING IMPACT MEASUREMENT TO ATTRACT NEW CULTURAL FUNDING**

We know the arts have a positive impact on society. What if we could more confidently measure and explain that impact? How could we use the information to unlock new sources of funding and make even more of a difference in the world?

This session will explore changing approaches to impact measurement in the cultural and creative sector and explain how it underpins important new funding sources.

We'll discuss impact-driven philanthropy and introduce the concept of impact investment in the arts, with insights from an organisation that has received such investment. We will also consider how new culturally focused measurement tools can help organisations understand and articulate the true extent of their impact.

The session is hosted by Figurative, an independent not-for-profit dedicated to impact, investment and innovation in the cultural and creative sector. The panel discussion will be chaired by **Sir Vernon Ellis**, Chair of Live Music Now, and Figurative Board member; **Nick Wilsdon**, Impact Lead, Figurative; **Daniel Fulvio**, Director of Community Partnerships, Rambert; **Janet Fischer**, Chief Executive, Live Music Now; and **Sarah Bardwell**, Managing Director, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

14:00-15:15

**BREAKOUT 2**

BARBOUR WEST

**PARTNERSHIP MODELS: CREATIVE OPPORTUNITIES AND EVERYDAY CHALLENGES OF FULL-TIME RESIDENCY PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS**

This session aims to inspire deeper partnerships and collaborations between arts institutions and schools. Speakers will share experiences, models, and resources to enable action amongst our colleague orchestras and ensembles.

Conference attendees will leave with an understanding of the practicalities, financial implications, opportunities, and challenges of embedded residency partnerships with schools from a variety of perspectives: whether a concert hall at the heart of a community, an ensemble moving into a state secondary, or an orchestra opening a new state secondary with a Multi-Academy Trust.

The session will explore what these partnerships look like, and what creative and educational opportunities they have created; the impact on students' music education and the wider community; the challenges associated with these models; costs and sources of funding; and how conference attendees can benefit from these models.

Presented by Saffron Hall, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, speakers include **Crispin Woodhead**, Chief Executive, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment; **Anna Rimington**, Director of Learning KS5 and OAE Link, Acland Burghley School; **Angela Dixon**, Chief Executive, Saffron Hall; **Tom Spurgin**, Creative Director – Learning & Engagement, CBSO.

**14:00-15:15****BREAKOUT 3**  
SAGE TWO**WHAT IS CLASSICAL MUSIC ANYWAY? EMBRACING PLURALITY AND REACHING NEW AUDIENCES**

Dumbing down or reaching out? Diversifying or diluting? Post-pandemic we have watched audiences return and grow, their behaviour change and orchestras and promoters push the boundaries of the live concert experience. This session explores different approaches to attracting and sustaining new audiences through cross-genre and cross-art form collaborations, and examines their success. With the help of new research and fresh audience data, panellists share their reflections on different programming models, and explore ways in which classical music can embrace and sustain a new generation of concert goers.

**Jo Buckley**, Chief Executive, Dunard Centre chairs this session with **Mark Ball**, Artistic Director, Southbank Centre, **Sam Jackson** Controller, BBC Radio 3 & BBC Proms, **Clara Marshall Cawley**, Head of Artistic Planning, Manchester Camerata and **Audrey Lawrence Mattis**, Artistic Partner (AMC Gospel Choir) of Manchester Camerata.

**15:15-15:30****PIT STOP & ABO MARKETPLACE**  
LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR

Grab a cuppa and go... Workshops, meetings, time-outs – a flexible afternoon with lots of options to choose from.

**15:30-17:15****CAROUSEL OF PRACTICAL WORKSHOPS & TOOLKITS**

Delegates can choose to attend a selection of these small scale 45-minute sessions, each of which will be repeated twice.

**15:30-16:15;**  
**16:30-17:15****WORKSHOP I**  
BARBOUR EAST**ATTRACT MORE AUDIENCES – PRACTICAL STEPS LEADING TO INNOVATION, WITH RASMUSSENNORDIC**

Join Danish audience experts, **Søren Mikael Rasmussen** and **Cecilie Nielsen**, as they break down the barriers that prevent new audiences from buying tickets and becoming loyal guests. You'll receive a clear roadmap outlining what you will need to make this happen in your orchestra.

This session will share a comprehensive and practical tool kit developed specifically for orchestras and ensembles to address the necessary steps you need to take to become more relevant to more audiences; an overview of new testing methods to ensure that audience initiatives are impactful; and new in-depth and nuanced data on audience needs and preferences.

Together we will try one of the tools and see what happens when you work to break audience barriers.

15:30-16:15;  
16:30-17:15

**WORKSHOP 2**  
BARBOUR WEST

**PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN ORCHESTRAS**

This training session, led by the Independent Society of Musicians (ISM) and Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), focuses on how to address the issue of sexual harassment in orchestras.

The session will introduce the ISM and EHRC's new guidance: Preventing sexual harassment at work: a toolkit for orchestras. The ISM's 2022 Dignity at Work 2 report revealed that high levels of sexual harassment persist across the music sector and the toolkit is a practical guide designed to help orchestras tackle this issue.

The training session will be invaluable for anyone with HR or fixing responsibilities, tour managers and musicians concerned about levels of sexual harassment in their orchestra. It will help delegates understand what responsibilities orchestras have as employers to protect their musicians from sexual harassment, both within the orchestra and from third parties. It will cover the practicalities of using the toolkit, including in self-governing orchestras and those without an HR function. It will look at barriers to change that might exist in your orchestra and the culture of fear that stops many musicians from reporting incidents of harassment and how to overcome these – including what you can do if you witness sexual harassment taking place.

Speakers include **Sophie Cowell**, Senior Associate – Compliance GB, EHRC, **Vick Bain**, Music Business & Diversity Research Consultant, **F-List for Music**, and **Naomi McCarthy**, Senior Policy and Campaigns Officer, Independent Society of Musicians.



Right: Orchestras For All © Simeon Thaw

15:30-16:15;  
16:30-17:15

**WORKSHOP 3**  
NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION HALL

**MEASURING SOCIAL VALUE: AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL  
RETURN ON INVESTMENT**

In this session you will learn about the main concepts and benefits of social value measurement and get a free framework to estimate your own SROI.

The workshop is led by **Cimeon Ellerton-Kay** of Orchestras Live and will include the opportunity to ask questions of an experienced producer who has seen the benefits of measuring social value in action.

15:30-16:15;  
16:30-17:15

**WORKSHOP 4**  
SAGE TWO

**CARBON CALCULATOR – SKILLS WORKSHOP**

Carbon footprints are calculated after emissions have happened – but what about when you want to plan ahead? Carbon budgets can be an effective tool for thinking ahead in a sustainable way.

This practical workshop will take a look at how carbon footprints and carbon budgets can complement each other. Taking in the Greenhouse Gas Protocol's Scopes framework for thinking about emissions, and the Spheres of Control model for identifying effective ways to reduce them, the workshop will provide a template carbon budget and suggest some principles for applying this to your own work. The workshop will explore how carbon budgets can be used to set and track carbon reduction targets and how they can relate to offsetting and 'insetting'. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions and get guidance.

The workshop will be hosted by **Scott Morrison**, Environment and EDI Lead at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, and co-founder of the award-winning Scottish Classical Sustainability group.



*Right: The Glasshouse  
International Centre  
for Music*

**15:30 – 16:30**

*Please note - this session will be held once, only at this time*

**SUPPORTING ORCHESTRAL TOURING IN THE UK**  
LEVEL 3 BALCONY BAR

Despite some established relationships and pockets of excellent work, orchestral touring by British orchestras within the UK is at best sub-optimal. The UK is home to some of the best orchestras and concert halls in Europe, but collectively the sector and audiences are poorly served in respect of touring. Costs for orchestras and halls have risen exponentially, while many presenting halls face reduced funding, meaning they are no longer able to accept the risk and likely considerable loss of presenting a UK orchestra.

This interactive session aims to address this challenge by bringing together representatives from concert halls and orchestras to ignite a conversation about how to create a new model built around long-range planning, financial transparency, synergy and meaningful audience development.

Chaired by **Nick Reed**, Chief Executive of B:Music; with **Simon Wales**, Chief Executive, Bristol Beacon; **Sarah Bardwell**, Managing Director, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and **James Thomas**, Director, Royal Northern Sinfonia & Classical Programme, The Glasshouse International Centre for Music; **Claire Mera-Nelson**, Director, Music, Arts Council England and **Hannah Lake**, Director, Touring, Arts Council England.

**15:30-17:00**

**UK x INTERNATIONAL ROUNDTABLE**

Pre-arranged Session Hosted by British Council  
C4

British Council are supporting a cohort of international delegates to attend the ABO conference. This pre-arranged roundtable session provides an opportunity to connect with international music contacts. We will explore conversations around how UK and international classical music sector can best create equitable relationships for professional exchange and best work towards collaboration, co-commissioning of new work.

**17:15**

**SESSIONS END**

**18:15-19:15**

**PRE-CONCERT RECEPTION**

NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION HALL

Hosted by The Glasshouse

**19:30**

**CONFERENCE CONCERT, ROYAL NORTHERN SINFONIA**

SAGE ONE



**The Glasshouse**  
International  
Centre for Music

This year's conference concert sees pianist **Víkingur Ólafsson** play Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 'Emperor' with the Royal Northern Sinfonia and their Principal Conductor **Dinis Sousa**. This is preceded by **Kaija Saariaho's** atmospheric Ciel d'hiver (Winter sky) and Bartók's spine tingling Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta.

## FRIDAY 7 FEBRUARY

**09:00**

**REGISTRATION**  
TYNE BRIDGE ENTRANCE

**10:00-11:15**

**BREAKOUT I**  
SAGE TWO

### INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT - ONEYEAR ON

Over the last year, 33 orchestras have been taking part in the Inclusive Recruitment in Orchestras programme. Following the ABO Conference in Leeds in 2023, Black Lives in Music, the Musicians' Union and the ABO came together with the sector to co-design a 10-Point-Plan to support orchestras in best practice for Inclusive Recruitment of musicians. The programme launched in May 2024. How has it been? What have they learnt and where do we go from here?

**Roger Wilson**, Director of Operations, Black Lives in Music, will moderate the session, with **Judith Webster**, Chief Executive, Association of British Orchestras; **Jo Lavery**, National Organiser, Orchestras, Musicians' Union; **Lynn Henderson**, Musicians' Union EDI Committee Chair; **Flynn Le Brocq**, Chief Executive, London Mozart Players; and **David Rimbault**, Violinist, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.



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

10:00-11:15

**BREAKOUT 2**  
NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION HALL

**LESS WORRY, MORE MUSIC**

Commissioning composers from minority backgrounds has seen effective shifts in concert programming across Britain. However disabled people are still often excluded from conversations around diversity and the support that results. Similarly, efforts in creating accessible and/or relaxed performances have shown wonderfully creative ways to make the concert experience more welcoming to disabled audiences. Through looking at the ground-breaking work done by Drake Music Scotland and the Disabled Artist Network, and looking at the stellar work of Attitude is Everything, this panel discussion will show through proactive changes any organisation is capable of bold ambitious, and artistically striking work which actively includes disabled artists and can be more open for disabled and non-disabled audiences alike.

The panel will discuss what practical steps were taken to accommodate various disabled artists during the development of various projects, including the RPS award winning Call of the Mountains.

Delegates will learn practical actions to help employ and support disabled artists, as well as considering what practical things can be done to reach out to more audiences and ultimately come to the understanding that including disabled people is not a scary or delicate process but with the correct approach will be akin to any other high quality work they do.

Speakers include **Ben Lunn**, Associate Composer; Drake Music Scotland; **Thursa Sanderson**, Chief Executive, Drake Music Scotland; **Pete Sparkes**, Artistic Director, Drake Music Scotland; and **Paul Hawkins**, Interim Chief Executive, Attitude is Everything.

10:00-11:15

**BREAKOUT 3**  
BARBOUR ROOM

**SOCIAL PRESCRIBING – A MYTH-BUSTING SESSION FOR ORCHESTRAS**



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

Join us for a dynamic session that demystifies the landscape of social prescribing and highlights powerful opportunities for orchestras to deepen their health and wellbeing work. With the recent Orchestras in Healthcare report revealing that fewer than 50% of orchestras currently engage with social prescribing programmes, this session offers practical insights into a key growth area that aligns closely with public health priorities and the shift toward person-centered care.

We'll tackle the challenge of building a musical workforce suited to social prescribing, featuring new approaches and case studies presented by leaders from health and social care, as well as orchestras and musicians already pioneering in this field.

Chaired by **Sarah Derbyshire**, Chief Executive, Orchestras Live, speakers include **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.

11:15

**NETWORKING BREAK & ABO MARKETPLACE**  
LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGETWO BAR

11:45-13:00

**ORCHESTRAL WORKSHOP**  
SAGE ONE



**CHANGING THE FACE OF CONDUCTING**

Ten years ago, conductor **Alice Farnham** set out to make a practical difference to the stark gender imbalance on the professional conducting podium. Today she leads the Royal Philharmonic Society Women Conductors Programme that's helped over 500 women to build experience and fulfil their calling, in a range of courses and workshops nationwide. Central to this is a collaboration with Royal Northern Sinfonia in which the orchestra devotes dedicated rehearsal and discussion time to propelling a cohort of exceptional conductors into the profession. You can meet them and take a ringside seat in SAGE ONE to see this collaboration between the full orchestra and conductors in action. Alice with **Kyra Humphreys**, RNS Co-Leader; and **Helen Blythe**, RNS Classical Music Producer and Programmer will share their approach and the venture's successes, reveal next steps towards greater inclusion, and welcome your perspectives.



Right: Kazuki Yamada  
at CBSO In The  
Bullring 2024 ©  
Andrew Fox



11:45-13:00

**BREAKOUT 1**  
SAGE TWO

**WORKING TOGETHER IN A CHANGED WORLD**

In a world where 'change' is our only constant, it is vital that we work together to enable orchestras to thrive and to champion the value of the art from the cradle to the grave. To do this, we must hold ourselves to account and strive for good practice across all that we do.

This year's session with the Musicians' Union focuses on improving standards within our industry, looking at the work of the Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority (CIISA), joint MU and ABO working groups and how best to support orchestras to modernise long established working practices.

Speakers will include **Naomi Pohl**, General Secretary, Musicians' Union; **Judith Webster**, Chief Executive, Association of British Orchestras; and **Niyi Akeju**, Head of Standards Development, Creative Industries Independent Standards Authority and **Jon Collins**, Chief Executive, LIVE.

11:45-13:00

**BREAKOUT 2**  
BARBOUR ROOM

**EVOLVING HORIZONS: THE NEXT DECADE OF INCLUSIVITY IN CLASSICAL MUSIC**

As we celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Chineke! Orchestra, and the Chineke! Junior Orchestra, this panel discussion aims to evaluate the progress made within the sector over the past decade and to outline our collective goals for the future. We will present recent research findings and insights from across the sector.

The discussion will also address how the classical music canon might evolve to better reflect a diverse array of voices and what steps we need to take to be genuinely receptive to these changes. Furthermore, we will explore strategies to level the playing field for upcoming generations of musicians, including players, composers, conductors, and administrators.

Chaired by **Linton Stephens**, BBC Radio 3 presenter, bassoonist and founding Chineke! Member; speakers include **Frank Douglas**, Chair, Board of Directors, Chineke!; **Ayanna Witter-Johnson**, singer/songwriter, cellist and composer; **Sacha Johnson**, Principal Percussionist and founding Chineke! Member; and **Anton Clarke-Butler**, Chineke! Clarinettist.

13:00-14:00

**LUNCH & ABO MARKETPLACE**

*supported by Sottovoce*

LEVEL 1 BALCONY BAR & SAGE TWO BAR



**14:00-15:15**

**PLENERY NEXT GEN – PROGRESSIVE PATHWAYS**  
SAGE TWO

The new Labour government is making all the right noises about the value it places on the arts as part of every child's education.

Following Keir Starmer's lead, how can we ensure that all young people access a rich music education, that pathways into the arts are clear and achievable for all, and that the industry is one they aspire to be part of?

This session considers what interventions are required to facilitate the aspirations of a future workforce, and the health and well-being of our young people through music. With representatives from different levels of education right up to the profession itself, panellists give their perspectives on the decline of music education in schools and how to reverse it for the benefit of us all.

Chaired by ABO Chair and Chief Executive of the National Children's Orchestras, **Sophie Lewis**, speakers include **Manus Carey**, Deputy Principal (Performance and Programmes), Royal Northern College of Music; **Wendy Smith**, Creative Director, The Glasshouse International Centre for Music; **Linton Stephens**, BBC Radio 3 presenter, bassoonist and founding Chineke! Member; and **Hester Cockcroft**, Chief Executive, Young Sounds UK.

**15:15**

**CLOSING SESSION**  
SAGE TWO

Conference closing remarks and looking ahead to next year

ABO Chair, **Sophie Lewis** and ABO Chief Executive, **Judith Webster** and an invitation to the 2026 Conference.

**15:30**

**CONFERENCE ENDS**



*Right: BSO Proms in the Park, Meyrick Park, Bournemouth.*

# ABO Marketplace

SAGE TWO BAR

We invite Conference delegates to explore the ABO Marketplace, which stands as a unique stage within the conference, providing a space for organisations and professionals to exchange knowledge, spotlight their brand, and foster meaningful connections within the classical music industry. Whether you're looking to network, collaborate, or simply stay informed, the ABO Marketplace is the place to be.

We are delighted to welcome colleagues from:



Air Edel



Classical Music Magazine



Encore, Performing Arts  
Insurance From Partners&



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Future Demand



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ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH ORCHESTRAS



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**moves** you

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