

Michael Eakin OBE, Chief Executive of the of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society, Honoured at the Association of British Orchestras Awards 2025

Announced at a live event at the Wylam Brewery, situated in the picturesque Palace of Arts in Exhibition Park in Newcastle upon Tyne, on the evening of Wednesday 5 February, the award ceremony also revealed the winners of the 2025 ABO Annual Awards, which celebrated the work of Jackie Walduck, with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields; Manchester Camerata's Camerata 360° Ruth Sutton Fellowship team; Kate Whitley of Multi-Story Orchestra; and Clarence Adoo MBE of Royal Northern Sinfonia and Paraorchestra.

As the **Association of British Orchestras (ABO) Conference** kicks off in Gateshead, the industry body has announced **Michael Eakin OBE**, Chief Executive of the of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society as the recipient of its prestigious ABO Award.

The **ABO Award** is presented annually to the individual or institution considered by the membership to have made the most important contribution to the orchestral life of the UK. The ABO Award is unique among the many prestigious awards and prizes in the music world because its recipient is nominated by the members orchestra themselves.

Michael's impact on our sector has been nothing short of transformative. An expansion in reach and reputation nationally and internationally alongside groundbreaking audience development and community engagement programmes are down to his outstanding 16 years of leadership of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society. Michael's advocacy with government contributed towards the shift in emphasis about our sector's value from purely economic to include diversity and social impact as well. During the pandemic, Michael was instrumental in working with government, representing our needs and finding pragmatic solutions, making a real difference to the survival of the UK's orchestral sector.

Sophie Lewis, Chair of ABO said: *"Few people have impacted our sector more than Michael. As he retires later this year, Michael leaves behind a profound legacy of artistic excellence and community impact, which has cemented the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic's place as a cornerstone of Liverpool's cultural landscape and a significant contributor to the UK's orchestral and cultural life. Michael's calm, pragmatic and inclusive qualities imbue everything he does and everyone who works with him. A wise counsel for so many but also a powerful voice for our sector on key issues and at key times. And it is this that we celebrate through this award."*

Nominated by their peers throughout the industry, the recipients of the **ABO Annual Awards** were also announced. Rather than being linked to specific roles, the awards recognise those whose work has demonstrated the core values of **inspiration, innovation and collaboration** through their

contribution to the sector, across areas of **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI), Learning & Development, Green Orchestras, Health & Wellbeing, and Innovation & Digital.**

The awards were presented by **Classic FM presenter Ritula Shah**, with the ABO Award presented by **Sophie Lewis** on behalf of the ABO Board and ABO Annual Awards presented by sponsors **Help Musicians, Classical Music Magazine** and the **Royal Philharmonic Society**.

Jackie Walduck, composer and percussionist, and lead workshop facilitator / principal workshop leader with the **Academy of St Martin in the Fields (ASMF)**, has devoted over a quarter of a century to innovation, inclusivity and learning and lives the values the ABO Annual Awards seek to recognise. Jackie has devised and led community and participation projects for many of the ABO's members, including having established ASMF's work with homelessness centres. She holds a Doctorate and shares her learning and experience through academia. Her ability to create spaces in which everyone has equal opportunity to explore, thrive, and sometimes let things go wrong, is unparalleled.

The second award recognised **Max Thomas** and **Clara Marshall Cawley** and **Ruth Ellul** from **Manchester Camerata** for the creation of the **Camerata 360° Ruth Sutton Fellowship**. Specifically designed for musicians based in the North, the fellowship aims to equip future musicians with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to launch their careers and thrive. The Fellowship gives musicians experience in all aspects of our work and the impact it makes – from Camerata's award winning dementia work, to their boundary pushing performances. In today's climate, framed by the cost-of-living crisis and pressures on government budgets, a career in music might seem like a daunting or uncertain path. The recipients of this ABO Annual Award have worked to mitigate these uncertainties, and keep the talent pipeline flowing and open to everyone.

The third ABO Annual Award was presented to a composer and curator **Kate Whitley, of Multi-Story Orchestra**. Kate is the founder and artistic director of a pioneering ensemble which revolutionised the concert experience by staging major performances in large car parks. Described by her peers as, *"a radical creative ... [whose] ability to truly engage with diverse participants and audiences will leave a lasting legacy for many young people"*, she is an inspiration to the sector.

Clarence Adoo MBE, of **Royal Northern Sinfonia** and **Paraorchestra**, the recipient of the final award, developed adaptive technology with the Headspace instrument and became a founding member of Paraorchestra. A musician who grew up playing cornet in a Salvation Army Band in Essex, Clarence went on to study trumpet at the Royal College of Music, which paved the way for a successful freelance career in pop, jazz and classical music. Having played with London Sinfonietta, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Northern Sinfonia, a life-changing accident in 1995 saw Clarence reimagine his future as a musician. He played in the 2012 Paralympic Closing Ceremony, and received an MBE for his inspirational achievements. He is Patron of Open Up Music, and a founding member of [RNS Moves](#).

The **annual ABO Conference**, the UK's leading classical music forum, takes place at **The Glasshouse International Centre for Music** in Gateshead, bringing together over 300 delegates from every part of the industry from the UK and abroad this week (5-7 February). The Conference will hear from



prominent figures from across the worlds of music, culture, media and politics including **Arts Minister Sir Chris Bryant MP**; broadcaster and writer **Kate Molleson**; and **Linton Stephens**, BBC Radio 3 presenter, bassoonist and founding Chineke! Member.

An image of the award recipients will be shared with media on Wednesday after 9pm.

For more information and images please contact Hanna Madalska-Gayer, ABO Head of Policy and Communications:

Hanna@abo.org.uk | 07984772390 | www.abo.org.uk

Follow the latest developments from the ABO via social media:

@aborchestras
abo.org.uk | [Instagram](#) | [X](#) | [Facebook](#)

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors:

ABOUT THE ABO

The ABO is the national body representing the collective interest of professional orchestras, youth ensembles and the wider classical music industry throughout the UK. Our mission is to enable and support an innovative, collaborative and sustainable orchestral sector by providing advice, support, intelligence and information to the people who make British orchestras a global success.