

Building Sustainable Careers in Classical Music

Summary Report

Outcomes and Recommendations from the Future of Classical Music Careers Project 2019-2020

Commissioned by: Help Musicians 2019

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Foreword

Help Musicians

Hundreds of emerging musicians enter the classical music profession each year with ambitions to become soloists, auditioning for seats in an orchestra, leading their own ensembles, teaching, working in education, community outreach or creative projects. Many will achieve great things, touching lives locally and globally with their skill and talent. However, it is apparent that those first formative years of professional life can be the most challenging for musicians who must juggle auditions, developing networks, continuous practice, learning of repertoire and building up a wide range of non-music skills from project management to finance to marketing.

Help Musicians has become increasingly aware of the need to better understand how emerging professional musicians can build long term careers in classical music so that we can help them to become equipped with the right skills to thrive. This has been discussed within the sector through the Association of British Orchestras conferences and many are passionate about helping emerging professional musicians rise to the challenge. But there is a lack of joined up thinking across the sector.

By joining the dots, Help Musicians will be able to adapt better to the changing needs of emerging musicians so we can assist the building of long-term careers in classical music. And every part of the sector can consider their own response as we take joint responsibility for nurturing the next generation of musicians and leaders so that they will thrive in the future.

Graham Sheffield CBE

Researchers' Foreword

Reviewing the findings of this piece of work has been a huge but rewarding task. It was especially interesting to finish this during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown of spring 2020. Challenging in many ways, but also highly motivating. It became abundantly clear that a significant majority of the conclusions of the work are firmly reinforced by what was learnt during the pandemic.

We suggest that our key findings, Outcomes and Recommendations are *even more* relevant now and in the future. People were *already* telling us, before March 2020, about the need for musicians to be prepared with a wider range of skills, including digital, entrepreneurial and communication skills – all of which have been key to artists' negotiating the huge challenges of lockdown. The need to diversify the workforce and for musicians to communicate with more diverse audiences was *already* identified as an urgent priority. And the resilience and flexibility required for musicians to cope with an unpredictable world was *already* seen as an essential characteristic to be nurtured.

We hope – and believe – that these insights can be useful and supportive in the necessary rebuilding work that must be undertaken over the coming months and years. To Help Musicians, to conservatoires and training organisations, to organisations of all kinds engaged in classical music, and to musicians themselves.

Susanna Eastburn MBE and Jane Williams

Introduction

The Outcomes presented in this document are based on insights gathered from a project which took place over much of 2019 and early 2020 commissioned by Help Musicians in order to listen to those starting out as well as those already working in classical music. The study was qualitative, drawing together the views of nearly 60 interviewees from across the sector (employers, funders, creative partners, conservatoires and musicians at different career stages) together with some key literature spanning academic research, public policy, opinion pieces and the sector's own evaluations and insights. The purpose was to answer a series of questions such as "what are the skills musicians will need in the future?", "what is a sustainable career path in classical music" and "what needs to change?". The insights gained can ensure that the support Help Musicians offers is based on the needs of musicians currently entering the profession as well as a greater understanding of what employers require of emerging professionals.

The Outcomes and Recommendations of this study feel even more vividly important now, as the sector faces important questions about how it should be rebuilt post the Covid-19 pandemic and learns how it will approach restrictions imposed through Brexit. Both challenges create an unprecedentedly difficult economic and social climate for emerging professionals and those already working in the profession. The Outcomes and Recommendations in this report can only be effective in this context if the sector can come together to create fundamental change. With that, we can ensure that emerging talented musicians in the future have the right training and support both to enter the profession and then to create sustainable career paths in classical music.

Outcomes and Recommendations

In order to provide a concise, digestible summary of the research, this document outlines six desired outcomes which represent an emerging consensus between interviewees, comments from those who are already leading change, and a spotlight on recommended actions from the main report.

The Outcomes reflect some of the key changes that will make a difference to the sustainability of classical music careers over the next 10 years. They are intended to provide galvanising themes and ideas that can guide the sector.

The Recommendations are a starting point for discussion; they offer steps that can be taken towards achieving the outcomes. It is hoped that they can be owned and developed over time by those organisations involved in the training and development of postgraduate and early career classical musicians and their future employers, funders and commissioners. Help Musicians will continue to adapt and develop support for emerging professionals and will work collaboratively with the sector in joining up our efforts.

Six Outcomes for Change

- 1** The classical music workforce is **more diverse** and **more representative of society**.
- 2** Musicians are **equipped to create sustainable careers** in classical music.
- 3** Training for technical excellence is **better balanced** with the development of a broader range of skills and qualities that musicians will need to thrive and contribute to society.
- 4** There is **a more strategic and joined-up relationship** between higher education institutions and the industry.
- 5** Emerging musicians are **better supported to understand and navigate** the transition out of training into a career.
- 6** The value propositions of different career paths in classical music are **more equal**.

Outcome One: The Classical Music Workforce is More Diverse and More Representative of Society

The barriers faced by musicians from diverse backgrounds are addressed, role models are identified, and more diverse audiences can see themselves represented in the musicians they listen to.

“ Ensuring that all musicians are able to develop and maintain a career in classical music irrespective of their background is a commitment that has spurred on the sector following the seminal moments in 2020. There is still more to be done and it is only through a collaborative effort that will we see the sector changing the dial on diversity and inclusion for future generations of musicians and audiences. The lived experience of Black and ethnically diverse musicians entering or working in the classical sector is one that has not been examined in any comprehensive way to date. Help Musicians has already played a small part in supporting some of the leaders in this area such as Chineke! and is working with a new organisation, Black Lives in Music, to uncover and learn from that experience and we intend to use those insights to help shape our breadth of support for emerging professionals and continue the conversation with the sector.

- **Help Musicians**

“ No organisation can afford to cut itself off from the talent and ability of a significant proportion of the population who could greatly contribute to their workforce. Now more than ever, with the racial awakening that followed the murder of George Floyd, every organisational leader needs to take responsibility for the necessary systemic changes in attitude and behaviour. The token appointment of a Black player here or there is not enough, neither is expecting a Black and ethnically diverse person to sort our diversity problems. To make real change happen, the mindset of the entire organisation, from Board to management to performers and repertoire needs to be examined, challenged and transformed.

- **Chi-chi Nwanoku OBE**

Double bassist, founder and artistic director Chineke! Foundation

Recommendations From Outcome One

- Conservatoires and training organisations are explicit in their commitment to have better representation among their students/participants
- Conservatoires and training organisations would benefit from publishing their student/participant data annually together with commitments to address any shortfall in representation from particular demographics
- As far as possible, funding for scholarships should support access and financial need. Conservatoires and training organisations should be clear in their criteria for applications for financial support that they welcome applications from diverse backgrounds.

- Publicly funded institutions (including NPOs and conservatoires) would benefit from unconscious bias and anti-racism training, for all staff and musicians working regularly for or employed by those institutions
- Conservatoires might at some stage consider learning from the example of Lady Margaret Hall at the University of Oxford (and, from 2022, the University of Cambridge), in setting up a foundation course designed to support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who would otherwise face disadvantages in the application process.

Outcome Two: Musicians Are Equipped to Create Sustainable Careers in Classical Music

Throughout the lifetime of a career, musicians need to have the knowledge and insight to look after their physical and mental health and wellbeing; and the resilience to navigate significant changes in the external environment such as Brexit, climate emergency or recovering from a pandemic.

“ We know that the music industry needs a collaborative and united mental wellbeing resource to help those who are struggling and to transform the ability of those working in music to proactively maintain strong mental health. We are committed to growing Music Minds Matter into a space for all of these conversations to happen and to lead a transformational change for all in the industry that prioritises looking after the mental wellbeing of its own.

- Help Musicians

“ It’s impossible to overstate the importance of positive mental and physical wellbeing in the lives of professional musicians. In my own 30-year journey as a professional player I experienced exhilarating highs and crushing lows. I entered the profession as a well trained musician but a poorly prepared human being and look back with regret at the amount of time I spent suffering from poor mental health. Far too often the least creative element of creative people is how creative we are about looking after ourselves and this needs to change.

I do believe there is good work beginning to be done in conservatoire education where finally acknowledgment of mental health issues are no longer seen as failure as weakness but as an inevitable and normal consequence of young people pursuing excellence in what will always be a hyper competitive environment. I’m encouraged that Help Musicians has commissioned this piece of research and hope it will contribute to advancing the awareness, research and support of mental health issues within the music profession.

- Alistair Mackie, Chief Executive, Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Recommendations From Outcome Two

- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) could adopt a more strategic approach to inviting alumni back to present to current students, thinking of them as role models who are showing that success takes different forms and that there are different ways that people have made it work in music, across all career paths
- HEIs should continue to build on the progress they have made to include mental and physical health awareness and support into the training offer, in the expectation that the need and demand for this will increase significantly in the coming years
- Conservatoires and training organisations can consider developing environmental policies that include how they support their students and participants to better understand that the world they will be working in will operate very differently from how it used to. This will include an understanding of the likely impact of the climate emergency, the development of skills to support them to work in new ways (including locally and digitally) and the resilience to navigate major change.

Outcome Three: Training for Technical Excellence is Better Balanced with the Development of a Broader Range of Skills and Qualities that Musicians Will Need to Thrive and Contribute to Society

Musicians will have had the training to develop all the musical and technical skills they need to work in a variety of contexts, develop the necessary business skills, be able to communicate with and nurture a wide range of audiences, the knowledge to look after their physical and mental health and wellbeing, and the psychological behaviours (such as resilience, flexibility and self-reflection) necessary to navigate and thrive across the different career paths of a musician's career.

“ We understand that musicians need to achieve a balance between the technical skills and craft of musicianship along with the skills that require an entrepreneurial approach to building a career as a business and maintaining physical and mental wellbeing. Getting that balance right is crucial to sustaining a career. As musicians needs adapt or change, we will ensure our help changes with them, carrying out regular research which informs the future support we offer. The outcomes of our research will have long lasting and positive impact on the lives and careers of musicians.

- Help Musicians

“ Life is made up of many compartments – and a musician's work is their life. It takes real dedication and motivation to “stay in the room” regardless of the challenges or opportunities you meet. Technical excellence can only take you so far: self-mastery also has to be a part of the conversation - leading yourself from the inside out. This allows musicians to see themselves as a whole, through the lens of high performance: how to perform consistently in all areas of life, taking into account who they are in their relationships, home life, emotional, mental and spiritual contexts.

Another important part of balanced development is mentorship - this is something I believe in strongly and when you look at the great musicians that have gone before us, this was always attached to their growth. Mentorship works both ways - it is not a one-sided relationship. Companies such as ENO, Snape, Music Masters, Opera Holland Park, Birmingham Opera are always looking at new ways to include this in their structures. Going forward the collaboration between musicians becomes extremely important, and I really believe that the pandemic has allowed each of us to form clear ideas about our value, what we have to say and how we wish to express it. This has opened up a window onto new voices who are willing to work with the new, multi-media digital technology.

- **Nadine Benjamin, Soprano and Certified High Performance & NLP Mind Coach/Mentor**

Recommendations From Outcome Three

- Training institutions can offer accredited coaching to all postgraduate and early career students. Its importance can be further highlighted by senior staff themselves engaging with it
- Training institutions should consider creating a compulsory module to equip every postgraduate student with the full breadth of skills needed to thrive in the realities of a professional career (in a rapidly changing future context), with its multiplicity of career paths. This will include building the skills and confidence to successfully lead or participate in structured creative music-making in a wide range of settings in and out of the concert hall, including education, community and social care
- The conservatoires and training organisations can work with each postgraduate student /early career musician to build the team that they need around them, learning from elite sports training where an athlete has access to a range of expertise including (for example) technical skill, nutrition, psychology and injury prevention.

Outcome Four: There is a More Strategic and Joined-up Relationship Between Higher Education Institutions and the Industry

Examples of good practice are shared widely and key stakeholders in the training of classical musicians (training institutions, employers, funders and musicians themselves) work together to ensure the most effective approach to preparing musicians for a life in classical music.

“ There are opportunities to learn from the good practices shown across the sector in joining up the dots between training and professional life. The evaluation of those programmes demonstrates the positive impact on future careers, but greater visibility of what is successful across the sector is needed to secure long-term careers in classical music. We will continue to work with sector organisations such as Association of British Orchestras to help nurture continued professional development for musicians. We have ambitious plans to scale up our mentoring offer and we will facilitate more connections and conversations between industry, trainers and musicians through our alumni.

- **Help Musicians**

“ We can no longer afford not to work together strategically - Black Lives Matter, Brexit and Covid-19 say it all. Collective imagination, vision, resources and kindness are now simply essential for classical music to flourish. We urgently need to build on examples we have, things like the Red Note Ensemble residency at the RCS exploring spaces for performance and transforming programming; the Wigmore Hall’s Music For Life programme in partnership with RAM, pioneering work with people with dementia; Cause4 and Guildhall’s Creative Entrepreneurs, catalysing innovative start-ups and social enterprise; YCAT bridging transition into the industry and connecting young alumni with students in several conservatoires; BBCNOW and WNO with RWCMD creating 360° immersive experiences for students in the orchestral field. We must go much further with multi-layered partnerships to develop the future if we care about this being sustainable.

- Professor Helena Gaunt, Principal, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama

Recommendations From Outcome Four

- Every year, one day of the annual Association of British Orchestras conference can be devoted to the training, early career and mid-career development of musicians. The outcomes put forward in this report can be used as a framework for self-evaluation and joint activity planning. Possibly this day could be (in the manner of Classical:NEXT) a dedicated “pre conference” event
- All classical music organisations (including conservatoires, training organisations and employers) should consider involving emerging musicians in their decision-making (e.g. on Boards). This will bring fresh perspectives in challenging times, identify any unintended barriers, give them a voice and involve them, and develop future leadership
- The music industry can work more strategically with conservatoires/training organisations in the R&D possibilities of the latter (time, space, not having to be linked to performance outcomes), learning also from innovative approaches within the sector itself.

Outcome Five: Emerging Musicians Are Better Supported to Understand and Navigate the Transition Out of Training Into a Career

Musicians understand where and how they can access support, including more consistent support for musicians once they are working professionally, and a better feedback culture is established.

“ An emerging classical musician can find sources of support available to them but often the challenge is about knowing when they’re relevant and which ones to listen to. Greater collaboration across the sector will help emerging professionals make the right decisions in these early stages of their careers to ensure they are able to realise their ambitions. We understand that musicians need a range of support at the times that are most relevant to them. This year we are making it easier for musicians to achieve their creative and career potential by removing deadlines and making funds available throughout the year. We will also explore how we can better support musicians as they transition from higher education into the first few years of professional life by reviewing our awards for emerging professionals.

- Help Musicians

“The need to better support and understand the many challenges facing musicians as they enter the profession has never felt more critical, especially now when the future shape of our industry and range of opportunities able to support sustainable careers are evolving so radically. At YCAT, we became hugely aware of the need for emerging musicians at all levels to have access to a clear, relevant and realistic package of training resources. Since launching the 21st Century Musician Toolkit in 2020, the feedback we constantly receive is how important and welcome this independent, accessible and free toolkit of career skills and advice has been for so many young musicians. At a time when young professionals often feel overwhelmed and confused, providing consistent, responsive and evolving sources of information, practical mentoring and creative, challenging forums for peers to share experience and knowledge is surely an important responsibility for the entire industry.

-Alasdair Tait, Chief Executive, Young Classical Artists Trust

Recommendations From Outcome Five

- Training institutions and organisations can develop a “top up” training offer, with accessible short courses and programmes designed as far as possible to complement the realities of the portfolio career life. Bursaries should be available for these courses and programmes wherever possible
- Offer mentoring programmes to early career musicians, with training for mentors in good mentoring practice including how to give constructive feedback
- Commit, as institutions and as a sector, to developing a culture of reflective and constructive feedback to emerging musicians.

Outcome Six: The Value Propositions of Different Career Paths in Classical Music are More Equal

Emerging musicians understand that they are likely to move across different career paths at different times, and do not perceive a hierarchy of success relating to the different paths of performer (in its various manifestations), educator and administrator.

“ In 2020 musicians showed great resilience and agility making changes to their working lives, taking up new opportunities to adapt their careers, trying out new approaches to performing and creating music and adding to their versatility as more than just performers. Musicians need to be empowered to continue to think differently about their futures by capturing this learning as they re-enter workplaces and live performances return, to make sure they are aware of all opportunities before them and can build up multiple, diverse strands of income. We want to make a meaningful difference to the lives of musicians so we will continue to offer timely interventions, whether that’s a mentor to help navigate the next steps or learning a skill that can have a career-changing impact. By sharing more of these impactful stories of adaptability and variety, we hope that musicians will be inspired by the positive experiences of their peers.

- Help Musicians

“Just as emerging musicians no longer recognise and are stifled by outdated definitions of genre, so I hope that our sector will stop promoting professional career options as hierarchical and linear. To be a musician has many facets and creative outlets, all of which exist in a state of flux, coming to the fore as required by a given situation. This is what makes musicians such fabulously versatile individuals. At Live Music Now we see musicians flourish as brilliant performers, communicators, innovators, improvisors, leaders, followers, teachers, entrepreneurs, creators, conduits and healers, mirroring and magnifying what it is to be human. Each of these aspects feed off the others, allowing all to be greater than the sum of the individual parts. By placing more importance on one quality over the others, we fail to acknowledge and nurture the potential of the bigger picture and the full role that musicians can play in society.

- Nina Swann, Executive Director, Live Music Now

Recommendations From Outcome Six

- (As suggested under Outcome Two) HEIs could adopt a more strategic approach to inviting alumni back to present to current students, thinking of them as role models who are showing that success takes different forms and that there are different ways that people have made it work in music, across all career paths
- (As suggested under Outcome Four) All classical music organisations (including conservatoires, training organisations and employers) should consider involving emerging musicians in their decision-making (e.g. on Boards). This will bring fresh perspectives in challenging times, identify any unintended barriers, give them a voice and involve them, and develop future leadership.

Summary & Final Comments

As well as identifying the Outcomes and Recommendations there were also areas for further research that became apparent such as looking into the impact on finances, the impact of Covid-19 on training and early career development.

Help Musicians will continue to change and adapt to the needs of musicians, helping them overcome challenges and offering support when it's needed the most. These insights have told us that now is the time that change must happen and can be most effective emerging from a pandemic. It has also shown that the sector needs to come together by joining up the dots and collaborating using the Recommendations in this report as a starting point to ensure that musicians are able to build sustainable careers in classical music and can thrive.

The full unabridged report which includes extended thematic analyses of the evidence and findings is available from the researchers on request. Please email creative@helpmusicians.org.uk for more information.

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