



BRITTENPEARS
ARTS

ThinkTank: Musicians Matter

1-2 August 2023

Executive Summary

Overview

ThinkTanks are facilitated and curated discussions held at Britten Pears Arts' unique site at Snape Maltings involving a broad range of stakeholders and cross-sector groups exploring specific themes. This interdisciplinary focus may include academic, health, social care, arts, culture and fundraising sectors aiming to embrace a wide range of perspectives and stimulate fresh thinking on contemporary topics in the arts, health and wellbeing.

Through connecting cross sector worlds, exploring cultural differences and establishing a common language, our ThinkTanks facilitate knowledge exchange, contribute to culture change and lay foundations for research, project development and collaborations.

Through these ThinkTank events, Britten Pears Arts aim to be a strong voice in changing landscape, helping shift culture away from siloed thinking to co-creation so that arts, health and wellbeing can flourish and be embedded in research, policy development, training and delivery.

Context

Music is an essential aspect of all human civilisations. It has the power to influence and shape the social fabric as well as have significant impact on the lives of individuals. The evidence base for music's meaning in the world continues to build, showing us its emotional, cultural, physiological, social and developmental impacts. Musicians are increasingly working in a whole range of contexts from performance platforms to prisons, hospitals, schools and other community settings, ensuring that everyone can connect to this extraordinary resource. Musicians matter - and we want to ensure that all musicians can thrive.

Numerous guidelines, programmes, leading initiatives and campaigns on wellbeing and workplace dignity for musicians have begun to emerge in recent years. In 2019 Britten Pears Arts held a ThinkTank on Musician Resilience, in the context of a growing focus on wellbeing and resilience for artists across sectors following the 2017 publication of the Creative Health report and the establishment of the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance. In this ThinkTank we wanted to bring together key organisations and leading thinkers to ask how we can embed and enact wellbeing and workplace support for musicians and build greater empowerment across the board; to identify what is needed in terms of advocacy in order to gain ground, and how we can work together to make this happen.

In the context of its Music Moves Europe initiative, the European Commission published a report “The Health and Wellbeing of Professional Musicians and Music Creators in the EU – insights from research for policy and practice” in January 2023. The report highlights the main risks for the physical and mental health of professional musicians and music creators. These include:

- **intrapersonal**, such as maladaptive self-regulation and certain personality traits frequently observed in music creators;
- **interpersonal**, such as a heightened sense of competition and the lack of a social network;
- **physical risk factors** due to the repetitive strain of playing an instrument and exposure to high decibels;
- **work environment risk factors** related to the state of the music industry; financial and occupational insecurity, irregular working hours and conditions, the need to combine jobs, travel, and blurred boundaries between work and family life;
- **societal**: the digital revolution, outdated practices in music education and a lack of social support for music creators.

We asked the question to our ThinkTank:

What actions do you think should be taken – and by whom – to improve long-term health and wellbeing for musicians working across a range of contexts in the UK?

Delegates

Katherine Zeserson (Facilitator), Nina Swann (Executive Director Live Music Now), Dr Anna Detari (Royal College of Music, Centre for Performance Science), Jo Laverty (National Organiser Orchestras, Musicians Union), Claire Cordeaux (CEO British Association for Performing Arts Medicine), Janine Irons (Co-Founder and Chief Executive, Tomorrow's Warriors), Laurie Oliva (Director of Musicians' Services, Help Musicians), Debbie Geraghty (CEO Plymouth Music Zone), Carol Leeming MBE (Black Lives in Music), Dena Oxley (Psychotherapeutic Counsellor), Cassie October Raine (Co-CEO and Executive Director, Parents and Carers in Performing Arts), Angie Lee-Foster (Producer for Creative Health, Britten Pears Arts)

Key Discussion Points

Building resilience

- Protecting and enhancing the wellbeing and resilience of musicians, the majority of whom are freelance, requires both building individual resilience and creating a supportive environment.
- From the very beginning who has access to making music and call themselves a musician is skewed to the affluent and well supported.
- For most musicians who are freelance it is a precarious career often with poor terms and conditions and little in the way of wellbeing support.
- Coming out of Covid musicians are often overwhelmed and struggling to see how they can make sustainable careers in music.
- There is a significant rise in mental health problems¹ and throughout their careers 75% of musicians will face an occupational health problem².
- Musicians are adept at sharing their skills and knowledge, we can extend this to peer support for wellbeing – 'each one teach one' approach
- Further exploration is needed to identify what can be developed in terms of generic training and specialist intervention, in particular what can be learned from the socially engaged creative health and community music sector.
- Identities of musicians are so tied up with their work, there is significant research in sports psychology about how to support performative practice we could learn from.
- The pressures of perfectionism in musicians often inculcated through education, this needs to be tackled. Prevention is always better than cure.

¹ Musicians Minds Matter

² British Association of Performance Arts Medicine

Systemic issues

- There are systemic issues around discrimination for women, black people and parents among others as highlighted in reports by Independent Society of Musicians³, Black Lives in Music⁴, and Parents and Carers in Performing Arts⁵.
- Tackling intersectional systemic issues is at the heart of wellbeing equity for musicians.
- An infrastructure is needed that allows musicians to thrive, not just survive and this needs investment from the music industry itself.
- Economic research is needed to identify what is the cost of not supporting musicians on the NHS and other statutory services.
- The industry has a duty of care towards musicians. There is potential for an occupational health scheme for musicians funded by the industry.
- Transformational change is needed at an individual and system level. This involves not only the music industry but government and organisational policy in supporting the welfare of musicians.
- A levy could be placed on the music industry to create scalable and sustainable support for musicians.
- Wellbeing should be an essential element of contracts and funding.

Building a consortium for change

- A consortium of key people and organisations in the music industry is needed to embed and promote wellbeing equity for musicians.
- Commitment from the breadth of the music industry is needed to form this consortium and have it should be funded by those who profit from musicians.
- As part of this initiative a one-stop-shop could be developed where musicians could seek help on terms and conditions, wellbeing and health related issues and ensure musicians know their rights.
- Good practice can be made visible through action research, and award schemes.
- A national charter or set of standards, which organisations could pledge to sign up to, should be developed.

³ [ISM-Dignity-2-report.pdf](#)

⁴ [Report - Black Lives in Music \(blim.org.uk\)](#) and [Report UNSEEN, UNHEARD \(blim.org.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Bittersweet Symphony | Our Research | Parents & Carers in Performing Arts \(pipacampaign.org\)](#)

- A model like ‘trip advisor’ for promoters and venues could be created and a check list for the musicians, so they can understand the red flags of companies that are not following the good standards with regard to wellbeing and support.
- A national learning programme could be established with action research to gather data to improve on this support.
- The consortium should involve musicians themselves in a cocreated model.
- We can also enlist the support of the public in an awareness campaign to highlight the conditions musicians work under.

Outcomes

We need to value music and those who make music and create conditions that help musicians flourish. Our vision is to create wellbeing equity for musicians.

Musicians’ wellbeing is intrinsically bound up with questions of equity and social justice. Despite pockets of inspiring progress, we see a distressing lack of common cause on these vital topics across music in the UK. We need to come together across the multiple sectors that make up this industry – music education, publishing, the commercial sector, the subsidised sector, community music, creative health and more – to commit to musician wellbeing, to identify and replicate good practice in wellbeing equity, invest in musicians’ wellbeing. We see potential to build **an alliance-based campaign** based on a commitment model through which institutions and individuals would pledge to ensure the wellbeing equity (welfare and wellbeing) of musicians they work with, employ or commission. From attitude change we aim to inspire behaviour change – by coming together as an industry, we believe we can help all musicians to flourish.

Angie Lee-Foster, August 2023