OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 23 February 2023

Session 6

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Thursday 23 February 2023

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CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
6th Meeting 2023, Session 6

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
*Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)
*Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con)
*Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Finlay MacDonald (National Piping Centre)
Professor Simon McKerrell (Glasgow Caledonian University)
Professor Tommy Smith OBE (Scottish National Jazz Orchestra and Royal Conservatoire of Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 23 February 2023

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

BBC (Digital-first Agenda)

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, and a very warm welcome to the sixth meeting in 2023 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee.

Our first agenda item is to take evidence on the impact of the BBC's digital-first agenda and Radio Scotland's planned schedule changes to music programmes. We are joined by Professor Tommy Smith OBE, artistic director, Scottish National Jazz Orchestra, and head of jazz, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; Finlay MacDonald, director of piping, the National Piping Centre; and Professor Simon McKerrell, professor in media and music, Glasgow Caledonian University. I give a warm welcome to you all.

I will ask the opening question. In 2016, when the BBC royal charter and framework agreement was reviewed, Fiona Hyslop said in the chamber of some of the objectives at the time:

> "we expect the BBC to deliver better outcomes for audiences and implement commissioning and editorial practices that will support the growth and sustainability of Scotland's creative industries."—[*Official Report*, 6 October 2016; c 62.]

What are your reflections on the planned changes and the impact that they will have on the growth and sustainability of your particular areas of interest?

Professor Tommy Smith OBE (Scottish National Jazz Orchestra, and Head of Jazz, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland): Thanks for inviting us to the meeting.

Reflecting on all of this since that date, I think that traditional, classical and jazz music have definitely gone on an upwards trajectory, and it is an incredible time for our nation. However, in making its appalling decision, the BBC did not seek external artistic expertise from the vast community of professionals. It did not announce that it was axing those three genres—that was leaked. The process and the accountability to the public were flawed and draconian. However, I think that it would be better if Simon McKerrell answered that question, as he is more of a guru when it comes to the marketing initiative.

Professor Simon McKerrell (Glasgow Caledonian University): The impact on the three niche genres is devastating. There are probably three areas of impact, the first of which is the impact on the pipeline of talent in Scotland. I am not a professional musician but, many moons ago, I played on the radio when I was a musician. For our professional musicians, the pipeline of talent will simply disappear if the BBC rescinds broadcasting live sessions for jazz, traditional piping and classical musicians. That is one impact. I cannot see how moving or proxying any of those services down to England would have any useful impact for the development of professional Scottish talent.

The second area of impact is slightly more difficult to put a finger on. There has been a tacit agreement that the BBC essentially acts as a proxy for the national record or archive of live performances of traditional, jazz and classical music—music in Scotland as opposed to Scottish music. It has acted in that way for more than 70 years, on linear radio and now on digital platforms as well. That record that we have is now substantially under threat, which has never happened before in the entire history of public service broadcasting in Scotland. Even going way back to the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, BBC Scotland was broadcasting all the contemporary dance bands and musicians, light classical music and—to some extent, even at that stage—piping. The BBC is essentially saying that it is not going to service that record for the nation, so the cultural value of it will disappear overnight. That is a significant public service impact.

The third area that really concerns me is the impact on non-professional and community music. There is an impact on the pipeline for professional music making and on the actual living traditions in Scotland, but there is also an impact on kids, in particular poorer kids. We know that there is an unmet demand for music education in Scotland. For many kids all around Scotland, the only way in which they can contact the wider community of piping and drumming, jazz or early development for classical music is via radio, whether that is linear, downloadable or whatever. That service, which is about putting them in touch with the rest of their community of practice, is under threat.

Finlay MacDonald (National Piping Centre): Simon McKerrell has put that very well, and has put across many of the concerns that we have. I will speak to piping specifically.

Piping is now more popular than it has ever been. It is being taught more widely, not just across Scotland but around the world. The "Pipeline" show in particular has been at the absolute heart of that growth over the past 60 years.

To back up Simon's point about the benefits, the career trajectory of every piper whom I can think of who is now playing at the top level has developed through live broadcasts. Especially now, when creating music commercially is becoming so difficult for the traditional arts, the BBC's contribution in terms of live sessions for pipers is invaluable for pipers' careers, as it is for any musician.

To back up the point about the archive of material, we as a nation should be proud of that archive and should be putting it out to the world. We have 60 years of recordings of the best pipe music—recordings of our national instrument. If there is any chance of that stopping, we have to do all that we can to prevent that happening.

We might think ahead 100 years. We had an archive of the best recordings of the best musicians—did it stop in 2023? Did people stop playing that music? Who is going to take on the responsibility of noting that tradition and keeping it alive?

It is worth pointing out that tradition is not just about looking back. The only way that we develop within our tradition is by having that knowledge and by going back to the root of the tree, from which we then grow. If we look at piping, traditional music and jazz now, we are absolutely on that—Scotland is an amazing country in which to make music. However, we have to ensure that we support that and keep it going.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank you all for joining us this morning and for those initial comments. I would like to ask Tommy Smith in particular about "Jazz Nights". Can you give examples of how that programme has helped to support new emerging artists in Scotland?

Professor Smith: There has been a jazz programme for decades, ever since I was 15. It has gone under different names, including "Take the Jazz Train", "Be-Bop to Hip-Hop", "The Jazz House" and "Jazz Nights", but it is still the same two-hour slot in the dead zone on a Sunday, which has a limited audience. It starts at 9 o'clock, and then everybody is in their bed, preparing for work—except for the jazz musicians, of course.

Since 2015, about 60 per cent of the artists who have appeared on the show have been Scottish; 40 per cent are English or overseas. Of that 60 per cent, 34 per cent are established musicians; the rest are emerging artists, who use the programme as a stepping stone for their career. The first thing that young musicians need to do, as they practice their 10,000 hours to get to point A, is to become famous in their own town. Then, the aim is to become famous in their own country. Then, they go across the border. If the opportunity is not there, they will not be able to do that. They cannot just jump to London and become famous; they have to start locally, and then perform nationally and then globally. There are some people who do not go national, and some people do not go global. The important thing is that the people who stay here, the indigenous people who work here and do not go across any boundaries because of the level that they are at, also need a resource for playing their new albums or promoting their tours.

It is not that every artist makes one record and is established; they make one at least every year. I have made 30 records—perhaps too many—but there are more people like me, and they need a place for their music to be heard by the public, who are eager to hear and not miss any emerging artist or new collaborations by artists they respect, perhaps between genres, and who do not want to miss any tours that are promoted.

Two hours a week is really nothing compared with many European countries, which have 24-hour channels or four or five jazz shows a week. We are really at the bottom of Europe when it comes to jazz programmes, and to eradicate that is complete nonsense. I have toured the world, and I have always seen Scotland as being at the bottom of everything when it comes to our genre.

We have been working hard on the infrastructure. We have one jazz school, as compared with Norway's six. We have a lot of fantastic musicians, who are winning awards nationally against great competition from England, Wales and Ireland. People do not need money to make good music—they need passion and heart—but they do need a door that they can open up, so that they can get on the stage.

I do not know whether that has answered some of your questions.

Mark Ruskell: Yes, that is great—thank you.

I will go on to ask you about the BBC's response. It has said that it has jazz programmes on Radio 2 and Radio 3, and that it can incorporate Scottish emerging talent into those programmes. I had a chance to look at the past month of output that is currently on BBC Sounds. I looked at all the track listings for the jazz programmes, but I did not see Fergus McCreadie, Georgia Cécile or any Scottish artists in any of them. Is there something problematic about the formats of those programmes on Radio 2 and Radio 3 that makes it hard to reflect that ecosystem of Scottish talent that we have talked about?

Professor Smith: It is London-centric: there are more musicians down there than up there; there are more people down there than up there. Referring to the programmes on Radio 2, Jamie Cullum's show is not hard-core jazz. Indeed, jazz

has many genres within itself, including New Orleans, Dixieland, swing, bop, hard bop, modal and fusion; then there are electric, free and avant-garde—it goes on and on. There has also been an amalgamation of local Scottish music and jazz, which Fergus McCreadie and many of his contemporaries do.

On Radio 3, there is "Jazz Record Requests", which is mostly dead music, but musicians have to be requested, so they may have to call up, pretend to be someone else and request their own record—which is absurd—but people who are good at various accents could probably get away with it. There is also "Freeness", which is more of an improvisation and avant-garde show, which is another niche thing. Those shows rarely play Scottish artists, unlike "Jazz Nights"; since 2015, 40 per cent of the artists who have appeared on that show have been English, Welsh, Irish and overseas artists, and the rest have been Scottish.

10:15

You have to go back to January to hear Fergus McCreadie and Georgia Cécile represented on those Radio 2 and Radio 3 shows. Over two weeks—say, 265 hours of listening—you would have heard one jazz track a day by them, of three to four minutes. That is not good enough, but that is the situation. I had a thought about the forward motion that the BBC is presenting to us by saying that it can move listeners to those other shows, or put some jazz on "The Afternoon Show"—the Janice Forsyth show. If jazz was a sweet raisin and "The Afternoon Show" was a bowl of porridge, the listeners who like jazz would have to eat the whole bowl of porridge to get that raisin. However, unfortunately, if Janice Forsyth was to make the porridge, it would not be a sweet raisin; it would be a sour plum, because she is on record saying that jazz is not her cup of tea, although she does like some singers.

If you are leaving it to a presenter to represent the genre, you have to get the right presenter who is very open minded, and does not have that kind of vocal opinion, although everybody has an opinion and is entitled to it.

Mark Ruskell: I guess that this question is for all of you, but I will go back to you first, Professor Smith. I stumbled across "Jazz Nights"—I am not usually awake in that dead zone on a Sunday night—and I am glad that I did. Can we do more to promote that digital linear content through BBC Sounds? There is a lack of awareness of the three programmes that are up for cuts at the moment, which is a shame, because we are missing something if we do not know that those programmes exist.

Many of us are on a musical journey and we are trying to learn about new genres and wake ourselves up to new talent, but it is often difficult to find those programmes. They are not obvious—stumbling across them is not easy.

Professor Smith: "Jazz Nights"—the other shows do this for their genre—provide a valuable educational and entertaining source of discovery for existing and new jazz fans. If you were to compare streaming with the world's biggest all-you-can-eat restaurant, those shows are like having one of the best chefs sit beside you and guide you through what is best to eat. That means that you are not asking, "What do I do? There is so much. What do I listen to?"

Those shows are there to educate. There is an educational aspect to the "Jazz Nights" show, which is great. Richard Michael has done that for many years. Jazz is difficult to get into, but when you are into it, you are into it for life, not just for five minutes.

Mark Ruskell: That is particularly helpful if, like me, you do not have a musical education.

Professor McKerrell: The BBC faces a massive shift in consumption habits. It has set that out publicly with its digital first strategy, which is understandable, because it faces a huge challenge from music streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music and so on, which it cannot compete with.

However, if the argument is that consumption is changing, that is not an argument about high-quality production and the platformisation of those programmes. "Jazz Nights", "Pipeline" and "Classics Unwrapped"—niche musical programmes—could all be platformised, if you like, and in fact, they are in some respects, because they are on BBC Sounds. The consumption issue is tangential.

Consumption is changing. We know that 90 per cent of adults listen to live radio every week, but we also know that there has been a huge growth in music streaming. The BBC is in a really difficult position. Spotify and Apple Music have come in and basically eaten its lunch in terms of music streaming. However, none of those commercial services have a public service remit. For instance, music streaming was 8 per cent of audience time in 2017; in 2022, it was 20 per cent. That shift, which involves those global music streaming companies, does not touch the public service element at all, so, to me, that argument is tangential.

The argument that the BBC is somehow in competition with those services is problematic, too, because the BBC has a totally different remit. The argument that we need to produce more and more talk content for the digital platformisation of

the BBC does not speak to the idea around the public service remit of those programmes. I can tell you right now that Spotify is not going to make programmes like “Pipeline”, “Jazz Nights” or, indeed, “Classics Unwrapped”. That question around changing consumption does not really touch the idea about the public and cultural value of the production in those programmes for niche music.

Finlay MacDonald: I totally agree. It is about the cultural responsibility of nurturing our national music. You could look at the timings of when those programmes are on. However, as has been said, the more platforms there are, the more that music is made accessible, so the most important issue is what is on them. A DJ radio podcast with mostly chat and a few bits of music comes nowhere close to the experience of listening to live sessions of musicians or outside broadcasts. Those cost money and are not necessarily commercially viable, but that is the cultural responsibility of the BBC.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I have a great deal of sympathy with what you are all saying. My point was anticipated by Professor Smith, who talked about how European countries manage the issue. NRK in Norway—I do not know whether you were possibly alluding to another country—has several national radio stations for different types of music, so you can listen at any time of day to jazz, classical or folk music, as well as a news channel and so on. Is it realistic for BBC Scotland to try to shove all that stuff into, essentially, one frequency? Why are we not looking to have more frequencies with more diversity of music, instead of trying to save a couple of hours a week?

Professor Smith: That is exactly what I wrote to the BBC—that it could not carry that variety and that it had to increase frequencies because we have the capacity to do so at the moment.

My job is playing the saxophone. I started at 15 years of age, and the BBC made me. I am here because of the BBC; I was on the radio show when I was a kid and it is its fault that I am sitting here and nobody else. However, when it comes to—excuse me, I lost my thought; it is too early in the morning for me. [*Laughter.*]

Alasdair Allan: You were talking about multiple frequencies and so on.

Professor Smith: Each year, I audition 75 young people to take six or seven places at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; the rest go to England or further afield. We have more musicians here than meets the eye. The more musicians who become famous and inspiring reside here, or are indigenous to here, the more they inspire, which has a rolling effect. Those musicians need somewhere to play and present their music.

Glasgow is where Scotland’s first jazz school began. There was not really a deep scene there at the time, but now you can hear jazz every night because young musicians have created that scene—Monday to Sunday, with sometimes three concerts on a Wednesday night. If the school was in Edinburgh, the growth would be exponential. We have artists who are winning all the awards. That will inspire others, which will create a trajectory that we cannot even imagine now.

Many years from now, when we are all dead, what will be left? Will it be about ratings, how much something cost or what some person said? No. It will be about art, music, poetry and stories. That is what will be left, so we need to fight for it. We are not fighting for the people who are playing now; we are fighting for the people who have not even picked up an instrument yet.

Finlay MacDonald: I said earlier that we would welcome more diversity and more places when it comes to putting on that music, but those programmes are provided to support the creation of it—and the ability to create it—in the first place.

Professor McKerrell: Linear listening, or turning on a radio set and listening to the radio live, is dwindling and disappearing. The BBC has published stuff about more and more commercial and public broadcast channels being turned off every year. Although the BBC is saying that the production of those programmes is at stake, in a sense, that is not really what is at stake. The problem is that those programmes have high production costs because they record live sessions. The idea is that on any platform such as BBC Sounds or whatever, 70 per cent to 80 per cent of those programmes are music. “Pipeline” does 12 sessions a year with people who have been invited in to perform live. The same is true for “Jazz Nights”, although I do not know how many people are going in there every year. The point is that it costs a lot of money. You need a studio and technicians, and you need to pay people to come in and perform so that you can broadcast it.

The argument about the platformisation of the material is not the key point. The key point is about the production rather than the consumption. You can chop it up any which way you want to, but if we are not producing original content for BBC Scotland to broadcast, who will do that for our national cultural heritage?

Finlay MacDonald: Let us say that someone manages to get the finance together to make recordings. Where will the outlets be for them? Those core programmes support our traditional music, jazz and classical music by putting it out

there. Tommy Smith talked about the minute number of Scottish jazz musicians who are played on the Radio 2 jazz programme.

There are multiple layers to the problem. It is about the creation of the music, but if we can get the funding to create it, which is expensive, who will play it on air on the mainstream programmes?

Professor Smith: I disagree with you both about the expense. I do not think that it costs that much money, in the scheme of things, given the BBC budget, which is public money. It is not ITV, which can question its ratings and all of that stuff, but the BBC has more than £600 million, although we know that not all of it comes back to Scotland.

I would say that, in the scheme of things, the creation of the music is not that expensive, even though a solo piper or jazz musician would find it expensive to do it themselves. The BBC can easily afford to fund this from all its various pots, so why does it choose to completely eradicate the three genres without skimming some of the other programmes that cost 1,000 times more than the little programmes that we are talking about? I just do not see where the ideology is coming from.

Professor McKerrell: From the point of view of the diaspora, programmes such as “Pipeline” are huge overseas. At one point, it was BBC Radio Scotland’s most downloaded programme. Of course, you cannot get those figures from the BBC. I have tried sending freedom of information requests to the BBC and it will not give out those figures.

The diaspora point is very important for other aspects of Scottish soft power overseas and for tourism. There are many people who listen to “Pipeline” and come to Glasgow for piping tuition, come for a holiday and spend an awful lot of money here. The world championships and the Piping Live! festival bring in a lot of money. There is a real economic impact.

Overseas colleagues—pipers and drummers in the States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Brittany and across Europe—are astounded at the idea that the national broadcaster in Scotland is about to cut the feet off live music sessions and outside broadcasts for the national instrument.

10:30

Alasdair Allan: The BBC in Scotland has a fantastic resource in the form of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Is BBC Radio Scotland making any significant use of that resource? Is a place being given, or should more of a place be given, to the orchestra’s output?

Professor Smith: I once paid with my own money to hire the BBC SSO for three days and it sounded pretty good to me. The BBC should use it.

We have to apologise for Nicola Benedetti not being here. She should be the one to respond to that question, but she is busy. However, on her behalf, the answer is that the orchestra absolutely should be utilised.

The orchestra is contracted. Its members are employees so they have a lot of rights. Musicians usually do not have rights—they are all self-employed and it is a fragile ecosystem. You are only as good as you are on your next concert. You cannot rest on your laurels—a record that you have done or a concert that got a good review—but have to practice diligently. Your career has its ups and downs, and you need every help that you can get, especially after the pandemic and the lack of confidence in the audience.

It is a real tough game for anyone who is thinking about picking up an instrument. Think about all the parents in the country. They are going to say, “Hmm, I don’t think you should focus on the trombone, Johnny, because there’s no future in it.” They will say that their children should perhaps study engineering or something that will help the hard economy instead of the soft economy, which we keep hearing about from the Government.

The orchestra is there. If the BBC wanted to, it could have the programming. It is the BBC’s decision. Nobody can tell it what to do. It is the same as when we wanted a jazz course in Scotland. No one could tell any university that it had to provide the course; they had to decide themselves. It took people with the right ideology and the right jobs who were not just accountants to make that decision and it is a great one.

We can have more of everything—more schools and more shows. We definitely have more musicians because of the inspiration that we have had from all the great musicians before us.

Professor McKerrell: I will add a point about the European context. I have had a look across Europe at how traditional music in particular is funded. We are an outlier in this continent by not having any state-funded national sound archive. There is virtually no other country in that position. Academics know well the reason for that: for decades, the BBC has been the national sound archive by tacit agreement.

We are now at the point of saying that, if the tacit agreement that the BBC will record the national audio archive is being broken in Scotland, where we know that audiences are less happy with the BBC than in other parts of the United Kingdom, that opens up the question of how we do what other countries do. If the BBC is not doing it, how do we do it like Iceland, Finland, Spain,

Latvia, Belgium, Ireland, Sweden, Hungary and, to a certain extent, even Wales in the UK, which all have state-funded national sound archives and, in some cases, live radio stations? It opens up a big question about how we will do that and pay for it.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): From listening to the evidence and reading the submissions, it feels as though the decision cuts across four of the five key principles of the BBC charter. It seems to go in the opposite direction to the idea of the BBC working across the United Kingdom, which is meant to be one of the core principles of its operation. In addition, it does not deliver on the two high-level ambitions in the annual plan.

Do you think that the decision was not thought through? If there is no production on the ground, in communities in Scotland, it will not matter which radio programme the music is on: something will be lost. Has the BBC not thought through the detail? Is there any acknowledgement that the decision does not deliver what the BBC is meant to deliver as a public broadcasting company?

Professor Smith: The decision did not feel robust to me. I am the director of the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra. If I want to buy a microphone for the orchestra, I have to go to the members of my board to ask whether they think that is a good idea and get their permission, but the BBC decision did not seem to be transparent. There were no minutes and no proper systematic process behind the decision to cut those three genres of music. Nobody was told and nobody was asked for advice.

We went with Alison Thewliss, Donald Shaw and the Glasgow musician Colin Currie and questioned the BBC from every angle. We felt that it had not thought through the decision and that it wanted us to give it advice. We were not there to give the BBC advice about how to go forward, first because I did not want to be complicit in its cuts. I wanted to know how the BBC came to its decision. There was a sense of smoke and mirrors or passing the buck. There was no real systematic approach. There were also no minutes of the meeting that we were at. It was an important meeting, but no one was taking notes. If that is how the BBC does things, that is not a flawless or systematic approach. The system has to be tighter than that because of public accountability, but it is flawed.

Finlay MacDonald: I agree. The thought of replacing live sessions and outside broadcasts with what would essentially be a disc jockey programme does not fit the remit in any way.

Sarah Boyack: The BBC is also very big on digital and BBC Sounds. I am totally up for that, but there is still a need for productions that can be put on BBC Sounds. It feels as though the decision was not thought through.

You have talked about the impact on the core areas of education and accessibility. If the changes happen, it seems that there will be no pipeline through to live performance in pipe, classical and jazz, which are three key areas of Scottish musical culture. That is a critical disconnect. We will speak to the BBC next week. It would be useful to be able to reinforce the point that there will be a major impact on those three areas if that pipeline does not exist. Has that been acknowledged?

Professor McKerrell: No. The process for decision making at the BBC feels very odd now. When we spoke to the BBC, it felt to me as though the conversation was about audience metrics and audience reach. That answers only a small portion of the question about how we understand the BBC charter. It cannot be understood solely through audience reach, downloads and geographical or numerical metrics. There must be something in the decision-making process about meeting the public service remit and the nations and regions remit.

Compared with the rest of Europe, we are very unusual in that, as far as I can tell, no external experts are involved in any of these committee decisions at the BBC. We have made a bit of a stink about this. We have had a campaign and lots of people have signed the petitions, but we are now at a juncture at which the BBC must acknowledge the fact that the process itself is totally oblique.

Sarah Boyack: I take it that everybody agrees with that.

Finlay MacDonald: Consultation is the key there. I certainly did not know of any consultation in advance of the proposed cuts.

Sarah Boyack: That is helpful—thank you.

Professor Smith: You have to look at specific points of the charter, as you said. I looked at it the other day and I picked out a couple of key points that the BBC will miss out if it goes forward with its plans. The first is:

> "To show the most creative, highest quality and distinctive output and services"

in many genres that "take creative risks". You are not taking risks if you put on something that has three or four notes on an afternoon show in the middle of a bowl of porridge. It is not going to happen. I do not know whether any of you have ever toured America and stayed in a Howard Johnson hotel, but the BBC is like the Howard Johnson hotel. It has 36 flavours of ice cream but one flavour of food. That is what I see happening. It is all becoming homogeneous.

The BBC is also supposed

"To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom's nations and regions and, in doing so, support the creative economy across the United Kingdom",

to

"raise awareness of the different cultures"

and to commission and deliver output and invest in the creative economy, and it is meant to do all that at the most creative and highest level. That means that it has to use all the amazing musicians we have here. It is not going to do that; it will pick some easy-listening record that will appeal to the masses and put it on an afternoon show. Jazz people are not going sit through a two-hour show to hear five minutes of jazz; it is not going to happen.

Sarah Boyack: That is helpful.

The Convener: Finlay, did you want to come in there?

Finlay MacDonald: No. I was just nodding in agreement.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): This has been incredibly informative. I have to lay my cards on the table: I am an ex-BBC Scotland employee. I have to admit that it was Stephen Duffy who introduced me to jazz, and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra that introduced me to classical music, and I would say the same about the World Pipe Band Championships and piping. Thank you very much for coming along.

I had been going to ask about the archive, but Professor McKerrell covered that point very well. There is something about a continuity of archive and knowledge of what is going on, and the ability to make other programmes from that, which is very important.

The content of the programmes is important, but I am also interested to hear your thoughts on how the loss of back-room staff and other experts in the different musical genres could be a loss to wider Scottish culture, and to ensuring that children can learn musical instruments in different genres. Professor McKerrell, do you want to start?

Professor McKerrell: Since the 1920s and the development of radio broadcasting, the BBC has developed admirable back-room staff expertise. If you read some of the research that has been done on music programming in Scotland in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, you will see that, at that time, the BBC employed musicians directly. Of course, it still employs musicians directly through the Scottish Symphony Orchestra, but in those days, the light entertainment producers and so on were extremely knowledgeable and expert in the music field. In the 1950s and 1960s, and even into the 1970s, that had a huge influence on how all sorts of different genres, such as light classical, Scottish dance bands and even piping, were presented. My sense is that the BBC still has knowledgeable staff, but nowhere near as many as it used to have back in the days when it had a more substantive budget in relation to programming.

10:45

The proposed move must be very difficult for the people who work at the BBC who are committed to the programmes that we are talking about. One of the reasons for us being here together, and for our having gone to meet the BBC together, is that it is essential that we talk about classical, piping and jazz all together, rather than separately. They are dealt with in the same department for niche musical programming in the BBC, in which there is great expertise—not least, among the presenters of those programmes, who are not direct employees but who come in to present them. It must be incredibly difficult for them.

The current situation is also indicative of how the BBC operates in the commercial digital age. There is not a critical mass of people who are high knowledgeable of and highly skilled in music. For instance, I do not know whether this is true, but I am not aware that any of the commissioners is a musician, nor am I aware of how, for example, musical expertise from the community outside the BBC plays into the commissioning process, because how that process works is totally untransparent.

Jenni Minto: Thank you for that. I was doing a bit of reading as well, and the operating licence says that BBC Radio Scotland must provide

"content and music of particular relevance to Scotland."

I would like to hear your thoughts on what the difference is in hearing somebody who is of Scotland introducing the programmes, and what that might add to the content.

Finlay MacDonald: I will mention "Pipeline" specifically. Gary West, who is the current presenter, and Iain Macinnes before him—this goes right back to people such as George McIlwham—are fonts of knowledge on the topic. It is not as easy as just reading the sleeve note of an album and then saying what that says. Decades of research and knowledge go into presenting such a show. Reading a sleeve note off the back of an album is one thing, but having a show presented by people who have that innate knowledge and understanding of the music makes all the difference to the show and the educational side of it. Listeners will get nuggets of information about the music that they cannot get in any other way.

Professor McKerrell: And the albums are not there.

Finlay MacDonald: Exactly. Albums are now so difficult to produce that that is not an option.

Professor McKerrell: That is key, specifically in relation to "Pipeline" and the idea that it will be possible to move to a DJ-ing show. We met the BBC, which said, "Well, piping is still going to be there on a Saturday night—same slot, same show." It is not. If the budget is removed for the 12 live sessions that are recorded a year, plus the outside broadcasts at Piping Live and the masters competition, the Glenfiddich solo piping championships and so on, and the programme is cut back to the extent that it is essentially a DJ-ing show, it will not perform the same function.

In addition, as Finlay MacDonald has said, there is no commercial catalogue that can be leaned on for that show, which is why the programme has always recorded local musicians from all over Scotland—and from abroad as well, when they visit. That whole function will just disappear. That is a key aspect. If we are saying that it is still going to be there, that is like a headteacher in a school saying, "Do you know what? We're going to take the library away from the school. There'll be no books left in the school, but that's okay, because you'll be able to go online and download five books a year." It is akin to that.

Jenni Minto: Tommy, do you have anything to add?

Professor Smith: No, I do not.

Jenni Minto: No improvisation, then. [*Laughter*.]

Professor Smith: Oh, I can do that in my sleep.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Thank you to the witnesses. A lot of this has been covered already, but I specifically want to ask about "Pipeline" and piping.

You have been eloquent, Mr MacDonald, about not just the educational purpose behind the programme but also its international reach; I would like to bring a local perspective. I represent the Highlands and Islands, where there is a lot of interest and, in fact, concern about the programme disappearing. I know that more than 6,000 signatories have backed the petition—[*Interruption*.] It was 10,000—thank you for the correction. That just shows the level of support.

Could you give me your observations on the local importance of programmes such as that one?

Finlay MacDonald: Looking at the performances that are recorded and put out on "Pipeline" for a start, you have people such as Angus MacColl from Benderloch, who are very much local. It is not just a recording in Glasgow; the BBC has been brilliant in going out to record people from different communities in those communities. One of the things that we are so desperate not to lose is the fact that you will hear someone from Benderloch playing in a slightly different style than someone from Glasgow or the east coast—a fact that is represented fully in all those recordings.

In the world pipe band championships, bands from all over Scotland and the world compete and are broadcast. At the moment, the programme deals with local elements of the music. During the interview sessions, pipers talk about their upbringing and their journey through music, whether they are from Lewis, Skye, Oban or wherever—they talk about their own area, and young people hear that. I did it myself; I remember sitting at my gran's table with my dad, listening to "Pipeline" on a Sunday night—when it used to be on—hearing the music and listening to those people talk about their lives in music. That was the inspiration for me, and it is important to capture that.

Donald Cameron: The issue of young musicians is really important. It is well known that many established musicians credit those standalone shows as being integral to their success. I would like all the witnesses to comment on that—Finlay MacDonald has covered that point a bit already.

Secondly, the BBC has said, and will say next week, that its defence is that it will cover all those things in other programmes. It is not my view, but that is what it will say. It would be useful to get all your responses to that on record.

Finlay MacDonald: I can speak about my own experience. I still remember going to Queen Margaret Drive for my first-ever "Pipeline" recording. Being asked to go there is a huge moment in any young piper or young musician's career.

For me, being in a group of like-minded people was being in a pipe band, where the talking point was, "Did you hear who was on 'Pipeline' this week?", and people would discuss the performances. It creates that feeling of community among the young musicians. It is something cool that they all have that maybe their other friends do not, who do not play music. It is a way in to make that experience their own.

There are lots of different levels to the experience. Simon McKerrell will remember how being invited to play on that show for the first time was a huge moment in his musical life. It is hugely important for youth development and creating that community of young people.

Professor McKerrell: The situation in which there are people inside the BBC who are well connected to those musical communities will end.

Therefore, how will the BBC be able to know who the really fantastic young saxophonist in Forres is, or who the next best piano player from the Hebrides will be, in order to invite them? I cannot see a producer in Manchester or London being well-enough connected in the regions of Scotland to know what is happening in communities around all those areas, so that local knowledge is vital.

On the linguistic and cultural diversity point about "Crùnluath" and the Gaelic broadcasting elements of the situation, one of the reasons why there is a separate Gaelic-language piping programme is because it serves a different audience in Scotland. It serves an audience of first-language speakers of Gaelic and it is different if you are talking for them. They are talking about the very rich heritage of piping and traditional music and song across all the Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland. To then perhaps have the main programme translated into Gaelic in some cost-cutting exercise would not serve the Gaelic-speaking audience at all.

Your point about the local and regional differences is key. For any of the genres that we are talking about, if the producers do not know who is out there—particularly the kids who are coming through—they will not be able to hear them and those communities will not hear themselves on our national broadcaster.

Professor Smith: It is ironic to hear the differences between the politicians and the commissioners at the BBC because it sounds like the politicians are more aware. I refer to people such as Pete Wishart, who was a musician, Alison Thewliss, who is vice chair of the All-party parliamentary jazz appreciation group—APPJAG—in the Westminster Parliament, and even Ms Minto, who has experience through Stephen Duffy's work and various other shows. You seem to be clued in at the heart of the matter.

A musician in Scotland will now be lucky to be on those shows two or three times every five years. As my colleagues have said, that first time when you are young is the most important time because it is so inspiring for you to get on that ladder, which is precarious. You have to do so much hard work to get there. If that opportunity does not exist, I do not know where the door is.

I have heard that the youth competitions for trad and, potentially, jazz are the avenue that the BBC will focus on for emergent artists but you will get only one winner, and where is their music going to be played? What show will it be on? Perhaps, if it is elevated enough, that single musician will be played down south because the result will be in the news, but what about the rest of them?

There are many musicians in Scotland who are lucky to be on the shows two to three times every five years as it is already, so the future is bleak to say the least.

Donald Cameron: Thank you for those answers.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): We have covered extensively the programming on radio. That is really helpful for when we ask the BBC about the situation, but is there anything else outwith that sphere that you would like to ask the BBC about with regard to supporting jazz, piping and traditional music? I was interested that Professor McKerrell mentioned, for example, musical experience at commissioner level. Would you like to add anything so that we can ask the BBC about it, whether with regard to television or visual digital format or on the structuring of how the programmes are commissioned?

Professor McKerrell: One of the really interesting aspects is that of the metrics that the BBC is using to measure its delivery. The only metric that it seems interested in at present is the stuff that is easily measurable, which means downloads and audience figures. You can get that stuff through the radio joint audience research—RAJAR—and the media nations reports. Those all deal with that stuff.

11:00

The problem is that those metrics do not really deliver on the public service remit. They can tell you how you are doing in competition with the commercial broadcasters. The things that are always top of the list for the commercial broadcasters, whether in podcasting or other forms of radio consumption, are talk, such as true crime and drama. Those really niche musical areas will never be covered by the commercial broadcasters because it is too expensive to do so and there is not enough of an audience for it.

This really is a question about the public good. I would like to see far more transparency from the BBC about how decisions are reached. The BBC should be publishing those metrics annually, by programme. There should also be a conversation that goes beyond simple download figures to look at how the BBC is actually delivering on its public service and charter remits.

It is much harder to measure the linear than the digital. If someone signs in and downloads a programme, you can capture the digital and platform-based information much more easily than you can capture someone who is listening to the radio in their car on the A9. There is a question about how the charter commitments can be measured.

Maurice Golden: That is really useful. Would any other witnesses like to contribute?

Finlay MacDonald: I do not want to seem as if I am bashing the BBC, but, if there had been consultation and transparency, we could have helped. There is a whole industry of musicians who want to see the programmes continue and succeed. A transparent consultation progress would be very welcome.

Maurice Golden: That is really useful.

Professor Smith: There are 22,322 signatures on the petitions about the three programmes. If we took all those people's licence fees, we could make those three shows with absolutely no problem, although the viewers would not be allowed to watch "Strictly Come Dancing" or any of the other London-centric programmes.

The licence fee is there to allow the BBC to make shows that get smaller ratings. It is not there to please the majority: the BBC is not like ITV.

Professor McKerrell: It is a tax. The Office for National Statistics classifies it as a tax.

Professor Smith: The licence fee is there to enable the BBC to make smaller genre programs for the entire country. I do not think that there is a way of measuring exactly who is listening. It is an archaic process. Perhaps you should ask the BBC how it knows that Miss Jones is listening to the jazz show. How does it know that?

Maurice Golden: We have some interesting analogies for when the BBC appears before us.

The Convener: We have covered most of the areas that we wanted to cover. Scottish cultural identity and soft power have been mentioned and are really important.

I have a final quick question based on something that Professor Smith said. I will use one of his own concerts as my example. It was a collaboration with Tam Dean Burn on a jazz version of "Peter and the Wolf" in Scots. To my mind, that sums up all the issues of collaboration. How important are the innovative programmes and projects that are completely unique to Scotland?

Professor Smith: I am glad that you mentioned that. The Scottish National Jazz Orchestra is funded by Creative Scotland and reaches the entire country. We have also done "Peter and the Wolf" in Japanese, although we did not use any Scottish funding for that tour, because the Japanese could afford to pay every penny. We have done it in Norwegian and next month we are doing it in Doric with an actor from "River City" called Joyce Falconer.

Doric is a very niche language. I do not know whether any of you speak it, but it is fascinating. If I was to say in English, "I wasn't a bad boy," that would be, "Ah wisnae a bad boy," in Scots and "Ah wisna a coorse loon," in Doric. It is a very distinctive language. We are going to go up there and represent that, which is an important thing for a national body such as the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra to do. We do not produce work for commercial reasons; we do it for the good of everyone.

The Convener: This has been a fascinating evidence session. I thank all the witnesses for their attendance. We will have the BBC at the committee soon so that we can reflect on some of the issues we have covered today.

11:05

Meeting continued in private until 11:14.

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