

Report: What Brexit Means for Orchestras

By Mark Pemberton

Brexit—the exit of Great Britain from the European Union—will have profound effects at home and abroad, with wide-ranging repercussions on the economy and international trade whether it’s a negotiated “soft Brexit” or a no-deal “hard Brexit.” What are the implications of Brexit for classical music? The bottom line from my perspective: Brexit is bad news for British orchestras.

Of primary concern is the impact on touring. British orchestras are a global success story, touring across the major continents and forging new markets in emerging economies. Europe, however, remains British orchestras’ most important marketplace, with members of the Association of British Orchestras (ABO) reporting 96 visits to 26 different European countries in 2016 alone.

Touring is intrinsic to the orchestral business model, and the imposition of work permits, carnets, and other tariffs and barriers after a No Deal Brexit when touring into the European Union will damage British orchestras’ ability to serve as cultural ambassadors for the United Kingdom. Additionally, artistic exchange and cross-cultural music-making will suffer. European orchestras and ensembles will face possible delays and additional costs when touring into the UK. And EU soloists wanting to perform in the UK will have to navigate whatever new visa system the British government imposes.

Contracts with promoters in the EU

have already been signed for tours by British orchestras taking place beyond October 31, 2019, when Brexit is slated to take effect. Any additional costs following a No Deal Brexit will not be covered by the promoter, meaning UK orchestras



will incur a financial loss. As an example, the London Symphony Orchestra has 38 concerts in EU countries between November 2019 and December 2020, and faces significant extra costs.

Particularly important is the A1 form, which prevents the deduction of social security payments when EU nationals work in another EU country. The UK will lose access to the A1 system, meaning irrecoverable social security deductions will be imposed on UK orchestras and their musicians, in addition to the social security contributions they will already have paid in the UK. It is hoped that the UK will be

swiftly able to implement social security coordination agreements with each of the EU27 nations, as the U.S. has.

There are also concerns about delays at the border. Orchestras have their own “just in time” model, meaning that the musicians, instruments, and scores have to be in place at the concert venue ready for a specific start. Should the equipment truck be delayed at the border, the concert may well not go ahead, and the orchestra will be in breach of contract.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, better known as CITES, is a familiar topic for American orchestras and musicians. The UK government has announced that it will be imposing controls on the movement of CITES-listed materials between the UK and EU. This means ABO members will need to present Musical Instrument Certificates for inspection at a limited number of designated ports—and these do not include the ports most used by ABO members, such as the Dover-Calais Channel crossing.

The good news for American orchestras is that they will see little difference if touring directly into the UK. For example, the visa system will stay the same. But they will need to factor in delays and extra paperwork if arriving in an EU country before travelling into the UK, or departing the UK to tour within the EU. **S**

MARK PEMBERTON is the director of the Association of British Orchestras.



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