

# Musicians and teachers urged to fight the cuts

Arts and teaching organisations in the UK and the US rally members to make the case for music. **David Kettle** reports

Students protest against music service budget cuts in Waltham Forest, London



ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC, music education is facing an uncertain future. In the UK, the Henley Review of music education in England has been broadly welcomed by teaching groups, but the government's reluctance to agree to a number of the report's recommendations has led to musicians' organisations calling for action. In the US, the budget bill for 2011, narrowly passed by the House of Representatives, will cut funding to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) by \$43.1m if it is approved by the Senate.

At the same time, some UK local authorities are proposing severe cuts to music services, despite the Department for Education freezing the central government grant for music teaching at its 2010 level (see News, page 8). 'Local authorities contribute 10.5 per cent of total music services funds, and they have been cutting their contributions, which is unhelpful,' said a spokesperson for the Federation of Music Services. 'We hope that now the government has committed itself, those local authorities that have made major cuts or are planning to withdraw funding will be more sympathetic.'

'No matter what the Henley Review says, music services are under the cosh,' said Diane Widdison, national organiser for teaching at the Musicians' Union (MU). 'Because the Henley Review was about six weeks late, a lot of music services have had to start their redundancy processes already.'

The MU has entered into partnership with the National Union of Teachers to oppose the cuts to music services. 'We have a much stronger voice if there are two unions speaking on behalf of musicians who teach,' said Widdison. 'We can also put out a much stronger message and fight much harder.'

There's another battle looming for UK music and teaching groups over the inclusion of music in the new English Baccalaureate (E-Bac). The Henley Review calls for music to be included, warning that 'otherwise there is a risk that the subject may be devalued'. But Education Secretary Michael Gove has indicated that it will focus on traditional academic subjects, being awarded to students with good GCSE passes in English, maths, science, a language and history or geography.

'We've already started to hear that as a result of the E-Bac, some schools are starting to change where they're putting resources,' said Deborah Annetts, chief executive of the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM), which has launched a campaign to lobby the Education Select Committee on the issue. 'There's no point in putting resources into music if it doesn't qualify you for the E-Bac, and Michael Gove has made it very clear that that's how he's going to assess schools.'

In the face of proposed music service cuts and the possible devaluation of music in schools, the ISM is encouraging musicians and teachers to make the case for music more strongly. 'If you take the E-Bac together with a cut in arts funding, things are not looking good for music,' said Annetts. 'I think it really is time that musicians engage with the political process.'

Widdison echoes her sentiments: 'We're trying to get parents motivated to fight their corner, and to strengthen the feeling of musicians to fight for their jobs and fight the cuts to music services. Because otherwise we can just see music becoming an elite subject.'

In the US, the League of American Orchestras is calling for the lobbying of senators to ensure that the proposed NEA budget cut is rejected by the Senate. 'The kind of messages we're encouraging are to clearly tell the story about the impacts of the arts in the community,' said spokesperson Heather Noonan. 'Without hearing descriptive stories of what the money is doing, members of congress won't understand what will be lost. Our goal is to make sure that the arts, which contribute so much to society and the economy, are not disproportionately cut as part of a wider decrease in spending.'

Annetts is clear that responsibility for music education lies with musicians and teachers themselves: 'It is not good enough for people to say, "Well, someone else will do it." Actually, musicians have to do it. Because if they're not going to fight their corner, nobody else will.' ■