

Scottish music audiences decline

DAVID KETTLE

Audiences for the Scottish government's three directly supported classical music companies are declining, a new report has revealed. The Annual Report on Activity for 2010/11 covers the five national performing companies that have a direct funding relationship with the Scottish government – the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Scottish Opera, the National Theatre of Scotland and Scottish Ballet. Looking across all five companies together, the document shows a 19% increase in audience numbers year on year (up from 383,643 in 2009/10 to 457,774 in 2010/11) and a 31% increase in the number of performances (from 692 in 2009/10 to 904 in 2010/11). But this has been led by a huge increase in performances and audience numbers from the National Theatre of Scotland, and

conceals falling figures for the three music companies since they entered a direct funding relationship with the government in 2007.

The RSNO's audience figures have slowly but steadily declined from 121,869 in 2007/8 to 115,956 in 2010/11. The Scottish Chamber Orchestra has suffered a 31% drop in audience numbers since 2007/8, falling steadily from 85,630 then to 58,475 in 2010/11. Scottish Opera has not shown the same steady decline in numbers: its 2010/11 audience numbers (72,131) show an increase on the previous year (67,125 in 2009/10), but do not reach the levels of 2008/9 (82,986) or 2007/8 (76,523).

A Scottish government spokesperson said that comparisons of more than one year are not relevant: 'Each year the programmes offered by the national performing companies, the projects they support, the number of performances they are invited to make, and venues where they perform, are necessarily different, so comparisons with five years ago have little merit. There are other factors the companies cannot control, such as poor weather conditions, which forced the cancellation of some performances last year.'

A spokesperson for the RSNO also drew attention to the impact of venue and programming changes on audience numbers, saying: 'We have fewer high-capacity

audience presentations than four years ago. Our traditional winter season has reduced to 17 programmes from a high of 22 four years ago. In addition, we dropped the Summer Proms a number of years ago, and we have introduced chamber-sized events and alternative programmes which have smaller audience capacities.'

The SCO's chief executive Roy McEwan highlighted the impact of season date changes on the orchestra's audience figures: 'There was a small dip in audiences in 2010/11 but this is partly explained by the difference between the financial year and the season dates, where there are three concerts less falling in 2010/11 than in the year before.' He also pointed out more recent positive movements: 'The broad pattern, season on season, is upwards, and in the 2011/12 season we are experiencing a 12% improvement on 2010/11. We are happy with the report and feel it gives a very fair and positive account of all the work of the national performing companies.'

The report also shows a small fall in box office income across all five companies, down from £6.9m in 2009/10 to £6.6m in 2010/11. Year-end financial figures for the three music companies are unequivocally positive, however: each ended the year with a healthy surplus, and more than doubled its surplus on the previous year.



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SCO: 31% decline since direct funding kicked in