

III. WORKING RELATIONSHIPS - WORKING CONDITIONS

7. Employment situations

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Ireland has a population of 4 million. There are two full time orchestras which are both part of the National Broadcasting body, RTÉ. The RTÉ National symphony Orchestra is complemented by the RTÉ Concert orchestra, a Smaller orchestra playing a lots of different repertoire including opera, jazz, classical and popular. I have played with both and currently play with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. I am on the executive of the Musicians Union of Ireland.

The orchestras are funded not by the tax payer directly, but by the television licence fee, and RTE commercial revenue – mainly advertising on TV and radio. I think this may be a model we have not seen so far at the conference, where there is public TV licence fee funding, but ultimately we are hugely dependant on the Television Advertising figures, as these are a major source of the Overall revenue for the company.

Ireland has had enormous financial challenges over the last two and a half years, and this has hit RTÉ in no small way. After some years of unprecedented boom driven by development and inflated property prices, Ireland became a property 'bubble'. A culture prevailed from corporate level down to the general population of 'invest or be left behind'. The level of growth was such that we were an inspiration to many other countries. When prices and rents started to dip, those who were making repayments on these properties came under pressure. Our major banks collapsed due to reckless lending.

RTÉ is in financial crisis through an enormous loss in advertising revenue. The licence fee return for RTE, normally about half of RTE's income, is reduced. RTE staff including orchestra members accepted pay cuts as an alternative to job losses. The station finds itself having to do more with less. My own orchestra, the RTE Concert Orchestra has seen large such as reduction of soloist numbers, less use of extra players, and fewer duties.

With all this difficulty, I feel we have much to be appreciative of in the orchestras. I feel that the security of musicians employment is strong under current legislation. Legislation requires RTE to 'Provide and maintain orchestras'. I would like to think the Government would not look kindly on the demise of an orchestra – especially as they are not paying for it. For RTE to abandon its statutory obligation would weaken their claim to the license fee - funding already coming under attack from RTE's competitors and certain sections of the public.

My hope is that in the orchestras we will re-examine our role in the cultural life of our country. I hope that we will not take for granted the apparent security of contracts and employment. Chasing financial gain in Ireland has proved to be a mistake. As orchestras, rather than focus on balance sheets as a measure of our success, we should prove our worth to the people of Ireland by the quality of our playing and our contribution to society by reaching out to and engaging with the community.

Public service needs to be at the heart of our activities. Educational projects, particularly where they are participative and interactive will build the support we may badly need should public attention focus on the orchestras in a way that would cause us to justify our existence.

Connecting with our regional and national Youth Orchestras, music schools at all levels is very important. In these places we will find those who will support us if the pressure comes on the orchestras as the economy struggles and questions where its money is going. By making the connection here we are also investing in a future audience. These are the people who will be our ambassadors.

In the context of this simple yet positive legislative standing of the orchestras, I believe we nonetheless need to work hard to ensure that we as orchestras justify the support of the licence

fee payer. While I do not see any need for fundamental legislative change in Ireland, I feel that a positive measure would be increased involvement of musicians in the running of their own orchestra. I would like to see musicians at the orchestra decision making table, contributing in a meaningful and structured way to the direction and artistic life of our orchestra. Orchestra Administrators are reporting to the financial departments, and success is measured in cost savings. We as musicians need to be there to sometimes show the value that can be added by maybe even a little spending where there was no spending before.

The Musicians Union of Ireland through a newly formed artists alliance known as AARO is campaigning for artist representation on boards of arts organisations, so that decisions affecting our work and careers are not left entirely in the hands of administrators. The view has been expressed at this conference that musicians are best at playing music. There is truth in this. Nonetheless we as musicians need to believe in the importance of our own perspective, and our ability to express it – nobody else will express it for us. It was very heartening to hear yesterday from managers and orchestra members about the universally positive experiences of musician involvement.

With a new Irish government beginning this week, we have an opportunity to gain political support for our profession. As we re-examine how we run our country and try to rebuild, it is up to us musicians as cultural ambassadors to be part of the changing mind-set and show the importance and value of what we do. We need to maximise that value, and demonstrate the importance of the music profession in revitalising the country's spirit, its morale and our economy.

