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James Boyle,
Cultural Commission,
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Dear Mr Boyle, I should start off by admitting that I have a consuming interest in the future of classical music in Scotland. As you can see from my address I live in an area which is perhaps more richly endowed with cultural opportunities than many parts of the country, given my proximity to centres such as St. Andrews, Dundee and Perth which, among them, have museums, galleries, theatres and concert halls. Despite this, I still have a feeling of dissatisfaction and concern. Why should this be?

It arises partly from the local ambience, a kind of lack of cultural awareness which is difficult to describe without sounding precisious or condescending. I have taken part, over the quarter-century, that I have lived here in a range of amateur musical activities but I have the impression that, outside the actual members of these groups, there was little general public interest in, or even awareness of, these activities.

This is particularly true of Cupar, the nearest town of size. For instance, I can recall only one visit to Cupar of professional musicians, a string quartet, whose audience consisted of about a dozen, all members of the then local amateurs

orchestra. The only other time Cupar as a community hears or has contact with professionals is when the local choral society employs them to accompany. Yet, Cupar is a typical small town with a fairly numerous and well-heeled petit bourgeoisie and a hinterland of well-off gentry. Cultural activity is of the National Trust/country house kind. I don't mean to be disparaging but interests revolve round the "big house" culture, architecture, gardens, interior decoration, art collection and so on, but no great interest in music.

Cupar may, I fear, be typical. It was not always so but Scotland seemed to lose the way sometime around 1900. I have been reading John Purser's excellent "Scotland's Music" and you can feel his embarrassment as he chronicles the sad decline in the late 19th - early 20th century of patronage, aristocratic, bourgeois and municipal. The result is that Scotland enters the 21st century bereft of the necessary structure of opera houses, concert halls and recital rooms within the great cities while convinced that this is its great deprivation as the world of universal "high culture" is not part of our tradition. Even in the cities, Scotland compares unfavourably with Scandinavia or Holland. Edinburgh must be alone among capital-cities in not having its own opera company and opera house, and symphony orchestra. In any self-respecting country, a city like Dundee or Aberdeen would be similarly endowed.

Much of this comes presumably from the centralised nature of the British state in things cultural as much as economic and political, which is why devolution is to be welcomed as an opportunity to break free from its enveloping grip. Unfortunately, the low-glass of devolution seem to be draining away fast with little to show. The main achievement, if you can call it that, is being headlined as the closure of Scottish Opera virtually for a whole season.

The first thing that the Commission has to do is to show leadership and to be visionary. The big "vision" that you'll have to get across is going to be a difficult thing because it brings us up against an ingrained flaw in the Scottish psyche. It is the oft-expressed feeling that opera, say, is not for us, it's not part of Scottish culture, and it's going to take an effort of a tectonic dimension to get that changed. The big vision that you have to sell is that all great works of art belong to all peoples everywhere, of all ages, all times and all climes.

We have to overcome the apartheid between "traditional" ~~Scottish~~ culture and the so-called non-traditional or "high" culture. Elsewhere, and at other times, the relationship has been more of the symbiotic, as witness, Verdi, Bartok, Janacek, Gershwin, Copland

As with selling anything, the approach will have to be pretty flamboyant, even OTT. We have a government which uses the language of hypertext and quantifies everything in terms of numerical targets. We should play them at their

own game and set targets along the lines of: "by 2050 75% of the population should have the opportunity to see X operas, Y concerts - - - - - etc." (I am being only semi-facetious).

As well as the visionary, to which I would give priority, there is the practical or ~~programmable~~ pragmatic in money. I have been in correspondence over the last few months with the Executive and with my MSPs, both constituents and last. They quote seemingly impressive figures of many millions which, by themselves, are meaningless. It took a lot of prodding to find that, expressed as a percentage of total governmental expenditure from taxation, spending on the arts is a mere 0.45%, rising with the new budget to 0.54%. That is, a ha'penny in every £1.00 goes to the arts in all their manifestations. According to the Minister, that is a 70% increase since devolution. All that shows is how inadequate arts funding has been historically, except that "adequate" is an inadequate word. We have to get over that this is a national disgrace and that an immediate 10 fold increase is the least that can restore national pride.

A last observation, although I know that you will not really need to be told this. Please keep your fellow emancipators on the same wavelength and not let the Government to use the tactic of "divide et impera" to win the day. I feel that this immediate post-devolution period is a make-or-break time for Scotland and we must not let the chance fall and shatter.

Yours sincerely,
Alun Mackay (A.D. MACKAY) (M.P.)