

**NATIONAL**  
**YOUTH CHOIR** of  
 **SCOTLAND**

Ack by letter  
18/01/05

Patron: Lady Gibson

23 NOV 2004

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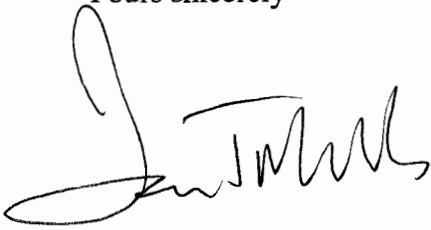
16 November 2004

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Dear James

I enclose a submission on behalf of the National Youth Choir of Scotland. This was approved by the NYCoS Board at it's meeting on 15 November.

Yours sincerely



IAN MILLS  
General Manager

supported by DUNFERMLINE BUILDING SOCIETY

Chairman: Raymond M Williamson    General Manager: Ian Mills    Artistic Director: Christopher Bell

Scottish Charity No: SCO 24899    Registered in Scotland No: 165149

## **Submission to Cultural Commission**

### **National Youth Choir of Scotland (NYCoS)**

#### **Summary of Recommendations::**

- **Singing is a fundamental activity for all and should be part of a person's experience from birth**
- **Singing should be encouraged in the home and at pre school level**
- **Teacher Education Institutions should provide adequate training for Primary Teachers to deliver the musical aspect of the curriculum. This training should initially be based on the use of 'singing' in the classroom**
- **School choirs should be seen as an integral part of the school community**
- **Consideration should be given to raising the profile of national bodies which reflect key cultural interests and developing a long term arts/education strategy**
- **The specific status of National Youth Arts organisations such as NYCoS within the national framework should be enhanced**
- **The system of (public) financial support should be rationalised to reflect the core needs of (approved) arts organisations and to establish an equitable system of financial support for individual members**
- **The current implications of VAT legislation on charitable organisations should be reviewed**
- **An audit should be taken of the performing/rehearsal venues in Scotland to establish their adequacy for the current needs of arts organisations and the community**
- **A national choral centre should be built**

## **1 Introduction**

NYCoS firmly believes in the principles set out by the First Minister on 30 November 2003 in terms of 'Cultural Rights', 'Collaboration and Co-ordination' and the need to harness the 'Creativity of Scots'. We also believe that the cultural infrastructure - in terms of organisation and funding - should reflect the needs and aspirations of Scots in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In this context we appreciate the opportunity whereby the Cultural Commission can examine the current situation and propose a way forward.

The NYCoS organisation is primarily concerned with music and the particular opportunities for singing. We believe in the development of the human voice as being the most accessible (and inexpensive!) musical instrument.

The NYCoS organisation currently manages a range of choirs (see attached leaflet) involving around 2000 young people together with an education programme in support of parents, teachers and choir leaders.

During the latter part of last century, 'singing' as an individual and group activity undertaken by young people in Scotland had been in decline in the home, school and community. Yet Scotland has a proud cultural tradition of vocal music. There are signs that the tide is turning and that increased awareness is in evidence in terms of vocal activities. Whilst the advent of NYCoS is not solely responsible for this, we believe that our organisation is making a significant contribution in raising the profile of singing amongst young people, in establishing a level of excellence (particularly in the main NYCoS choir) which can compare favourably at international level and in providing support for parents, teachers and others in promoting the enjoyment of singing for young people.

However, much more has to be done. The 'What's Going On' report (2003) identified the imbalance of singing provision across Scotland on a geographical and ethnic background basis. Greater collaboration has to take place between those promoting Western Classical, Gaelic, Scottish Traditional and the various other ethnic music forms to ensure we maximise the opportunities in sharing musical experiences. The definition of 'Scottish Culture' has to be viewed as the fusion of a wide spectrum of traditions.

The NYCoS organisation has, in the period of its 8 year history, done much to reinvigorate the vocal experience for young people. We seek to continue playing a significant role in whatever enlightened cultural environment emanates from the deliberations of the Commission.

## 2 Principles supported by NYCoS

Within the general principle that everyone is entitled to a musical/cultural experience throughout their lives irrespective of race, geographical location, financial circumstances, NYCoS has a particular interest in supporting the principles whereby:

- Everyone is entitled to experience 'singing' from birth – both for its own sake but also as a means of broadening social skills. This is also a starting point to accessing a wider spectrum of musical experiences which can be sustained in the longer term.
- Pre school and Primary School Teachers should be properly trained to have confidence in delivering a music curriculum which includes singing as a fundamental activity.
- A population which is musically literate from an early age is more likely to embrace a life long participation in musical activities as a performer (amateur or professional) and audience member thus increasing the level of cultural awareness in the community.
- Public buildings ie schools, halls should be built/refurbished to accommodate cultural events eg performances, rehearsal facilities
- Funding policies should be rationalised to ensure that ALL young people (irrespective of post code) receive an equitable allocation of support to fulfil their cultural aspirations.

## 3 Comments on Commission's Remit

### a) Education

Whilst the current trend is to regard 'education' as a 'lifelong' experience, we will focus on the age range where the various activities of the NYCoS organisation can make a direct contribution to citizens as active participants ie 0-24 years. This is underpinned by the fact that there is clear evidence linking involvement in musical activities as enhancing other aspects of a child's development.

**We consider that every child should have the right to experience singing from birth** and thereafter have access to a structured programme of singing through pre-school, early years, primary and secondary school curriculum delivered by trained personnel. In addition, choirs should exist in school, local communities and at national level which provide an opportunity for young singers to attain enjoyment and a degree of vocal competence which is challenging and rewarding. Such choirs should not be viewed as an elitist activity but as a natural corporate activity open to young people with an interest and aptitude.

Education begins in the **home**. Many of today's parents come from the 'lost generation' who did not experience singing to any great extent themselves either at

school or in the community and as a result do not have the confidence to sing to/with their children.

Pre natal classes should include awareness of the parenting skills involved in singing to children and the various opportunities open to babies and toddlers to participate in singing groups. NYCoS has recently launched a programme called **Mini Music Makers** which addresses this issue.

Singing should continue to occupy a substantial part of the school experience as a classroom activity and also in the school based formal and informal curriculum. Given an early appreciation of music through singing, many young people may wish to broaden their musical horizons by learning a musical instrument. Opportunities should exist for interested young singers to participate at local, regional and national level. Such opportunities should NOT be dependent on an individual's financial status.

Within the Primary school sector, much emphasis is placed on the ability of the class teacher to deliver the full curriculum. Areas like Expressive Arts were traditionally supported by specialist teachers in the past. Recent evidence suggests that many authorities have reduced the level of specialist support.

Our experience suggests that many new Primary Teachers do not have the musical background or confidence to deliver this aspect of the curriculum themselves – nor indeed accept responsibility for running a school choir. The amount of time available in B.Ed courses at **Teacher Education Institutions (TEI)** whereby training can be provided is totally inadequate.

NYCoS staff have been involved in one TEI in meeting 3<sup>rd</sup> year B.Ed students to share ideas on the use of singing in the classroom. Whilst this contact is welcome, it in no way constitutes a proper training programme designed to prepare new teachers for the task ahead.

The Executive's recent **Youth Music Initiative** funding has provided a welcome opportunity to increase the level of provision in Primary schools. A number of authorities are seeking to address the need to revitalise the level of singing provided – in a number of cases this is being done in partnership with NYCoS.

The situation in Secondary schools is no better with singing being the preserve of those individual pupils following examination courses. Whilst a number of schools have sustained choirs, this is at a lower level than in the past – in particular choirs with male voices.

## b) The Cultural Infrastructure

### i) Organisational

Despite being a relatively small country, Scotland seems overloaded with organisations (and their bureaucracies) which have a responsibility/interest for the Arts in general and music/singing in particular.

Scottish Executive, Scottish Arts Council, Local government, organisations representing Traditional Music and Gaelic Music, various 'national' bodies at UK or Scottish Level. In many cases, these exert a funding influence over the providers eg NYCoS. Even within these organisations, there can be lack of common purpose and absence of evidence of joint initiatives eg local government where, depending on the council structure, staff engaged through Arts and Culture Departments may not be collaborating with staff in Education with a remit in Arts.

The recent elevation in the status of the Minister whose portfolio includes 'Culture' is welcomed but the opportunity should be taken to create a genuine **strategic body** representing the various arts interests. Various sector specific sub sections could then be created.

Within this, consideration should be given to the specific profile of **National Youth Arts** bodies whose role combines the provision of a national pathway for young people to develop their skills along with a 'grass roots' support mechanism for the promotion of the arts form. In the case of NYCoS, the organisation is encouraging young singers to achieve levels of excellence through the national choirs structure and through its educational programme is supporting teachers and others in delivering vocal training at local level.

The particular contribution being made by the national organisations such as NYCoS should be maximised. This could be an opportunity to increase the extent to which the national groups take on a co-ordinating role with similar (localised) groups across Scotland. Thus in the case of 'singing', it should be possible for NYCoS to be more proactive in liaising with existing groups of singers eg school choirs, independently run choirs, the Gaelic and Traditional music communities along with the emerging range of ethnic cultures to maximise the networking opportunities thus enhancing this particular aspect of culture in Scotland.

### ii) Financial

The above organisational complexity is reflected in the means by which arts bodies are sustained financially. Whilst accepting that where public funding is being used, there has to be accountability etc, there has in recent years been a trend towards funding 'additionality' and 'projects' at the expense of the basic funding required to sustain the core activity of an organisation.

NYCoS derives its funding from a variety of sources – many of which are subject to annual changes of priorities. There would be sense in agreeing the level of public funding required to allow an organisation to **deliver its core programme of activity**

and by reviewing this provision on a regular basis. Thereafter any additionality should be subject to the successful acquisition of funding from elsewhere.

A particular issue is the recent **changes to VAT** and the impact on arts organisations. In the past year, the VAT reclaimed from NYCoS has been equivalent to the core funding grant obtained from SAC! ie whilst one part of the public funding regime provides funding, another part of the public funding process takes it away!!

Difficulties also arise in the level of **financial support available to individuals** who wish to participate as members of the national youth arts body.

Different local authorities have different policies on financial support. Thus we can have a situation whereby young people from neighbouring authorities can be subject to different funding criteria – albeit they are members of the same group eg NYCoS.

### iii) **Physical**

Many of the facilities available for **performance and rehearsal** are inadequate from an audience and performer perspective. For the NYCoS choirs, the ideal concert venues have a good acoustic, are not too large eg Glasgow City Hall size, have good 'backstage' facilities and have a quality piano available.

In addition, the difficulties of finding accommodation for residential courses (especially in summer) when choir members meet for an intensive week of repertoire training is proving a problem. Private sector schools which have residential accommodation are most obvious. However within the limited time frame available, it can be difficult to secure suitable venues.

In addition, the NYCoS Area choirs often find the normal school facilities inadequate for their purpose.

Ideally, a purpose built facility with rehearsal, performing and administrative spaces – adjacent to residential accommodation- would prove most beneficial. Within the schools building programme, more consideration should be given to meeting the cultural community needs - especially when major programmes of refurbishment are taking place.

We look enviously at the Scottish Youth Theatre with a purpose built facility offering rehearsal space and administrative accommodation. There is a case for a **national choral centre** with purpose built rehearsal and performance facilities

### c) **Marketing and Promotion**

NYCoS exists as an organisation keen to attract young singers into **membership** of our various choirs at local and national level. We are also keen to attract audiences to attend concerts given by the various choirs.

Hopefully, given the earlier comments on 'Education', an increasing number of young people would experience the enjoyment of singing and be motivated to participate in choirs at local and national level.

Also, for those singers who see a possible career pathway in singing, then opportunities have to be apparent in attending post school education courses at RSAMD or university and availability of employment in the longer term.

**Audiences** of parents and friends are always guaranteed when young singers are involved. However, in terms of the general public attending performances, we need to adopt modern technological methods of raising awareness and using the public service broadcasting medium to a greater extent. At present, the costs of commercial advertising can be prohibitive to many organisations.

### **Conclusions**

We believe in the fundamental concept of 'entitlement'.

The NYCoS organisation is making an important contribution in offering an opportunity for young singers to access their 'entitlement' to a national infrastructure to promote singing and choral activities in Scotland.

We believe that more can be done to ensure that 'singing' is the natural medium by which babies and young children gain their first introduction to music. We have taken forward the spirit of the Youth Music Initiative in creating new partnerships with a number of education authorities and we see this as an ongoing role along with developing wider training opportunities through teacher education institutions.

NYCoS is well placed to oversee a more strategic development of 'singing' in Scotland and to consolidate networking opportunities with other groups and individuals with an interest in this field.

Within our own choirs - especially the national choirs, it is already clear that Scotland can produce youth choirs of international quality. More should be done to promote this excellence at home and abroad.

To ensure the long term effectiveness of these aspirations, there has to be a consolidation of the organisational and financial infrastructure in which we operate.

NYCoS November 2004