

Delyth Jewell MS
Chair
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations
Committee
Senedd
By email: SeneddCulture@senedd.wales

19 September 2024

Dear Ms Jewell,

Update on Welsh National Opera (WNO)

I'm writing in advance of the Committee's next meeting on 26 September to give you and the other members of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee a brief update on the situation at WNO.

You will probably be aware that MU members in the WNO Orchestra and Equity members in the Chorus will be taking Action Short of Strike at WNO performances this autumn, beginning this weekend on the opening night of the 2024/25 Season, Saturday 21 September at Wales Millennium Centre. Members of the Committee are very welcome to come and talk to our members about their situation and our campaign that evening or on another date.

That action is taking place because we have not yet been able to come to an agreement with WNO about the future of the WNO Orchestra (and the Chorus for Equity). In fact, if anything our concerns about the management of WNO have deepened in recent weeks and we feel strongly that the funding, management, and oversight of nationally significant cultural organisations like WNO needs to be reviewed, particularly following the issues at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and St David's Hall. I outlined some thoughts in relation to this issue in the MU's response to the Committee's consultation on the impact of funding reductions for culture and sport.

We also continue to have related concerns about the draft Welsh Government Priorities for Culture. These include:

- Insufficient emphasis in the draft strategy's priorities and ambitions on high-quality, professional cultural provision and excellence, including easily accessible professional cultural experiences
- Insufficient emphasis on the long-term strategic support and investment that is needed to sustain major cultural organisations
- Excessive focus on heritage and insufficient emphasis on the performing arts
- Excessive focus on volunteers and insufficient emphasis on the need to sustain secure employment on fair terms, based on social partnership, for professionals in the culture sector
- Insufficient emphasis on sustaining cultural venues
- The omission of the creative industries supported by Creative Wales

- A lack of recognition that the culture sector does not just feel fragile and vulnerable, but is experiencing significant problems right now, such as those at WNO, RWCMD, the National Music Service, St David's Hall, and Blackwood Miner's Institute
- The omission of an ambition to support and enable the best possible management of cultural organisations

We were very pleased by the announcement of £5m of additional Welsh Government funding for culture, sport, and heritage in the last few weeks, including £1.5m for ACW, but are now concerned about how this money will be used and how far it will go given the scale of the problems at WNO and across the rest of the sector. We feel strongly that this money must be used to safeguard the full-time, employed, unionised jobs that are currently at risk in the WNO Orchestra and Chorus and that are rare across the arts in Wales.

I hope this update is helpful and thank you for your work on culture across Wales. Please do let me know if you'd like any further information or to discuss these issues with me or our members.

Diolch yn fawr,



Andy Warnock

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