



Fergus Linehan warned against any further cuts to instrumental tuition  
JAMES GLOSSOP/THE TIMES

## Classical music will be elitist, says festival chief

Mike Wade

Wednesday August 07 2019, 12.01am, The Times

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Classical music will become the preserve of a privileged elite if instrumental tuition is cut from the school curriculum, the Edinburgh International Festival director has said.

Fergus Linehan said that tuition was in decline in British schools leaving fee-paying children to soak up the benefits of learning an instrument, a trend that would inevitably create a “social structure” around classical music.

The “prior knowledge” delivered by free instrumental tuition was vital in developing a passion for music and a wider appreciation of the arts, he said.

Research from the University of Bath last month found that children from the “sharp-elbowed middle classes” were three times more likely to take music lessons out of school hours than those from disadvantaged families.

Evidence to the Scottish parliament’s education committee last year showed that the number of music instructors had almost halved to 667 in primary and secondary schools, from 1,043 in 2007, while more than two thirds of the country’s 32 local authorities had imposed annual fees of up to £524 for lessons.

Mr Linehan said: “The biggest danger to classical music is if you strip music out of state schools, and just leave in private schools, then you create a kind of social structure around a genre of music which we [as a festival] inherit.”

Mr Linehan argued that prior knowledge was important to enjoying any discipline, whether it be a musical form or a sport. “Sit anyone down to watch a five-day test, when they haven’t watched cricket in their lives, they won’t understand. It is the same with *Gotterdammerung*, when they’ve never listened to Wagner,” he said.

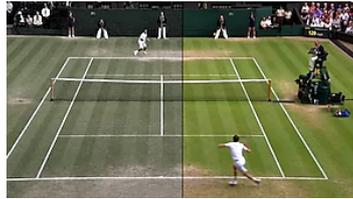
“You need to understand certain bits to enjoy something. When people talk about prior knowledge, it is in some way an elitist tag. Actually, in any walk of life it is important.”

Part of the remit of the international festival is community engagement, and it operates schools and outreach initiatives. An estimated 70 per cent of the 15,000 audience members for

last week’s opening concert at Tynecastle Park stadium were first-time festival-goers.

Mr Linehan argued that the programme of film music, played by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, was “a point of contact” for most of the crowd because it featured familiar pieces from *Casablanca*, *Star Wars* and the *Harry Potter* series.

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There is a lifetime goal in a popular concert of this type, he said. “You’ll probably find in 20 years someone goes, ‘I developed an interest, and that’s when I started to listen’.

“This is a long game. What we like at 19 is not what we like at 40, which is not what we like at 60. People have been taking photos of classical music audiences for ever saying, ‘Oh my god, they are going to die.’ Well, they didn’t.”

Michael Donnelly, lead author of the Bath study, said that its findings “point to the concerted efforts of the sharp-elbowed middle classes, taking up every opportunity they can to nurture their child’s sporting, musical and artistic abilities”.

He added: “Years of austerity have left the poorest without these opportunities, as youth centres have closed and available activities have shifted further towards costly private provision.”

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Craig White



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**Thersites** 7 AUGUST

It has been shown time and time and time and again that performing "classical" (completely the wrong adjective, but that's a fish of another catching) music is beneficial to the general intellect out of all proportion to the time and effort spent on it. So why is it so vitally important to deprive state schoolchildren of it?



**Alan Rodger** 7 AUGUST

Report

I agree with a lot of what Mr Linehan says. However, it is a rather simplistic argument as lack of music tuition in schools is not the only reason why classical music may become increasingly elitist. The classical music industry - for it is indeed that and not entirely purely a branch of the arts - really must look at itself, its costs, its appeal and how it portrays itself to and appeals the public. And those appeals cannot always be for more money, more subsidy without evidence that the industry is willing to change. And I do not eman that they just move on from the Edwardian fancy dress of white tie and tails.

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**gordon duncan** 7 AUGUST ← Alan Rodger

I go to a load of EIF concerts every year. They are generally cheaper than a ticket to watch an SPL football match. And I can't remember the last time I saw an orchestra or other performer wearing 'white tie and tails'; tends to be all-black these days, much more modern and appealing.



**AJ** 7 AUGUST  
Classical music is NOT elitist.

More than a decade of austerity will have many casualties for years to come. Sadly free music tuition is but one of them.

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**Jamie Gerry** 7 AUGUST

**J** Grunge and grime (?) music is also elite, just in a different way.  
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**J** **Jeanne Taylor** 7 AUGUST  
 A very good point. In my fairly run of the mill state primary and secondary school we had periods of general musical education every week. We were taught about music ; we listened to music and we sang. I heard the famous arias , overtures concertos and symphonies there.

Someone had translated, Schubert lieder and Mozart arias rather loosely but effectively so we could sing them in English. Over 40 years on if I hear Die Forelle, Der Erlkönig et al , Voi Che Sapete , Non più andrai I still remember singing them in their simple English translations.

**I** **ian morse** 7 AUGUST Edited [Reply](#) [Recommend](#) [Report](#)

why is Gaelic promoted when music is neglected ?

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**G** **gordon duncan** 7 AUGUST [← iain morse](#)  
 Why does it have to be one or the other?  
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**A** **Alan Rodger** 7 AUGUST [← iain morse](#)  
 Surely you do not need to ask that question. Maybe the answer lies in what and who are "governing" us in Scotland and have done so for over a decade and because it is the will of the people - and they know how to appeal to those people. Besides it is good for the taxi and bus companies that get the "school bus" contracts.  
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