

To: Charlotte Moore; Lorna Clarke; Simon Webb

cc. Tim Davie; Richard Sharp

As choral conductors and representatives of the UK's thousands of amateur choirs, we write to express our outrage and dismay at the recent announcement to cut the BBC Singers from the BBC's portfolio.

We are profoundly concerned that this damaging decision has been taken without regard for the ways in which the BBC Singers help to foster the vibrant culture of amateur singing in this country. The BBC Singers support and feed into the UK's choral culture both as an exemplar and an educator, and it is precisely because of their unique position as the country's only full-time, salaried chamber choir, working within the structure of the BBC, that they are able to do this so successfully. The BBC's announcement of its new strategy for classical music acknowledges that "Choirs, from amateur to professional, form an integral part of the UK's thriving music scene;" but the report on which this strategy is based makes no substantive reference in its published form to choirs, and none at all to singers or singing. It is simply irresponsible for the BBC's senior management to press ahead with the abolition of the BBC Singers without troubling to inform themselves about the destructive and discouraging effect this will have on amateur choirs across the country.

Singing is not the preserve of a small minority. In 2021 the BBC itself reported that more than two million people in the UK sing regularly in more than 70,000 choirs the length and breadth of the country, led by professional musicians. Singing is a hugely popular activity with proven health benefits, and it is, crucially, open to all. Closing the BBC Singers – a vital contributor to the UK's choral ecosystem, in which the work of professionals and amateurs is intertwined – will have a huge negative impact on the grassroots. It is difficult to see how their contribution to this ecosystem could possibly be replaced, once lost.

Amateur choral singers look to their professional counterparts for inspiring examples of the very highest standards of artistic practice; and there is no group that sets higher standards than the BBC Singers, recognised worldwide for the exceptional quality of their performances. The BBC Singers have a unique position as the only full-time professional choir in the UK which is engaged in exactly the kind of concert performances undertaken by amateur choirs and choral societies. The group's commitment to innovative and diverse programming – for example their trailblazing 50:50 commitment which brings the work of female composers to a much wider audience – and their track record as commissioners of a vast range of new compositions for vocal ensembles, have a tangible effect, serving to inspire directors of amateur choirs to refresh and diversify their own repertoire.

As educators, the BBC Singers' contribution to the future of choral singing is unparalleled. To take one example: an important strand of the group's activities is regular participation in workshops for student conductors at UK conservatoires. These students are the future conductors of our amateur choirs, choral societies and symphonic choruses, and they frequently describe these training opportunities as

among their most valuable and formative educational experiences. The BBC's new strategy for classical music makes reference to plans – as yet unspecified – for a “new nationwide choral development programme.” But to seek to establish such a programme by first abolishing the BBC Singers is akin to attempting to nourish the body while forcibly removing the head.

We call on you to reverse the damaging decision you have made, and to seek instead to understand, support and promote the irreplaceable resource you have at your fingertips.

Yours sincerely,

[choral conductors]