

ECONOMIC EAR

Classical music gets a raise, but other arts rise even further

Following last month's account of the arts councils' spending in the UK over the last 70 years, Antony Feeny looks at how much of it was spent on classical music

Last month the Economic Ear looked at total expenditure by the UK's arts councils on all areas of the arts over the last 70 years. A loyal follower of *Classical Music* and of classical music who read to the end of that article might well have asked: 'But where was the beef?' Well, there was ample beef, but it's true that classical music was barely mentioned. So this month I'm going to slice and dice the meat to bring out the classical music flavouring. And, perhaps to the surprise of this particular cook, classical music has definitely been one of the strongest ingredients in the arts councils' historical mix.

Let's start by looking at the post-war spending on classical music by the various arts councils, which you will recall include:

the Arts Council of Great Britain (1945-1994); the arts councils of England, Wales, Scotland (later Creative Scotland) and Northern Ireland (from 1995); and the five organisations funded directly by the Scottish Executive (2008 onwards).

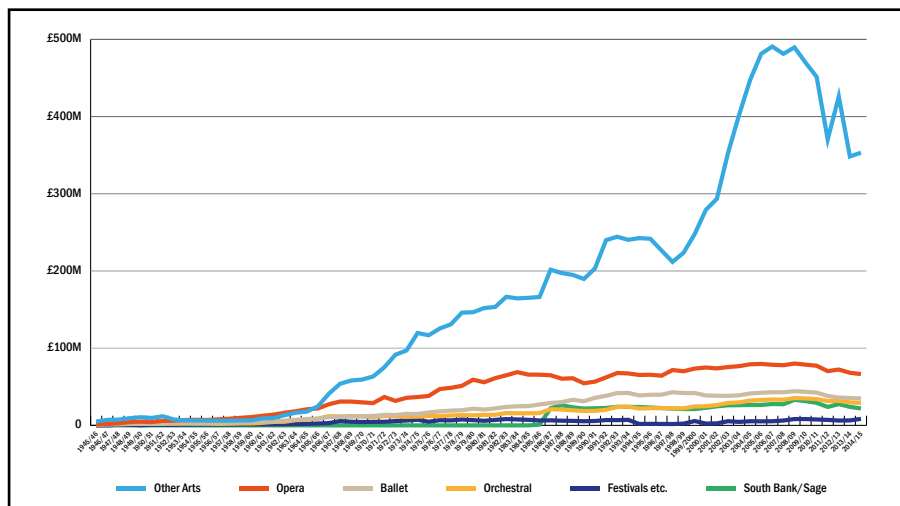
You will notice that this does not cover the spending by UK local authorities, which has often been important to individual musical organisations, but even the Economic Ear is not acute enough to plough through the accounts of 418 principal (unitary, upper and second tier) councils in the UK over the last 70 years, not to mention the 10,000-odd lower-tier councils. Nor does it include the substantial tax benefits enjoyed by donors which constitute another form of public subsidy. Nor, finally,

has it been possible to slice up all the spending by the regional arts associations/boards which at various times have administered some of the arts councils' total spending – but then again the overwhelming majority of spending will have been captured by the main arts councils' categories.

Last month we saw that total spending by the arts councils had risen in constant 2015 prices from £9m in 1945/46 to £514m (excluding restricted grant-in-aid and lottery funding) with a peak in 2008/09 of £690m (or £571m in current prices). Chart 1 breaks these figures down by the main components of classical music, namely opera, ballet, orchestral, festivals and other classical music, the Southbank¹ and Sage Gateshead, and all other areas of the arts. What is most striking about this detail is that, although spending on each category of classical music including the Southbank has increased relatively steadily until quite recently, from the early 1960s onwards there was an enormous increase in spending on other areas of the arts so that proportionately classical music looks considerably less important even though the money it received continued to grow.

For reasons summarised in the box at the end, I have not been able meaningfully to

CHART 1: ARTS COUNCILS GRANT-IN-AID EXPENDITURE ON CLASSICAL MUSIC AND OTHER ARTS 1946-2015 (EXC LOTTERY) IN CONSTANT 2015 PRICES



▲ Note: The above lines show the spending for each category, so for example the top line is the spending on Other Arts and not the total spending for all categories. The total spending for all categories was illustrated in Chart 1 of the Economic Ear article on page 28 of *CM* November 2016.

1 Responsibility for expenditure on the Southbank complex transferred to ACGB from the Greater London Council when the GLC was abolished in 1985. This is assumed to be largely related to classical music, but because of its size and potential distortionary effect it has been shown separately. Since the present analysis excludes local government expenditure, earlier spending on the Southbank does not appear here. The Sage Gateshead is also a large beneficiary with special and similar considerations so has likewise been separated

break down the other areas of the arts (ie drama, visual arts, literature, etc), but Chart 2 shows greater detail about what has been happening in individual areas of classical music. Although all categories have broadly mirrored the pattern of overall spending in terms of the main peaks and troughs, opera has consistently been the largest recipient of the arts councils' classical music funding, in some years receiving up to twice as much as even classical ballet and orchestral music.

This is not surprising since opera and (to a slightly lesser extent) ballet are inherently more expensive since they require the involvement of often several hundred skilled professionals to make possible its staging and performance. The cost structure of orchestral music may not be quite so high since at the most only minimal staging is required, but nevertheless the operating costs of a symphony orchestra are not cheap. In contrast, literature, exhibitions, or even

plays, may require only a handful of participants, or even a solo performer, to realise their impacts.

Chart 3 combines the data from Charts 1 and 2 by showing the change in the relative proportions of total arts councils' funding received by all areas of the arts. This confirms the shift in emphasis away from classical music towards wider area of arts, as can be seen for example from the fact that opera and ballet together still accounted for some 50% of expenditure 50 years ago but have now dropped to about 20%. Symphonic and orchestral music was running at around 12-15% in the 1950s and 1960s, but gradually fell to a relatively constant proportion of 6% of ACGB expenditure from the mid-1970s onwards, although the large expenditure on the South Bank Board and concert halls adds another 4-5% to that figure.

These changes of course match the wider changes in British society. By the time that the Arts Council England ceased to list all major grant-in-aid recipients in its annual review in 2004/05, there were more than 1,000 organisations receiving amounts in excess of £25,000, of which only 67 were related to classical music. So it is not surprising that 'Other Arts' now constitute such a high proportion of total arts councils' spending.

CHART 2: ARTS COUNCILS GRANT-IN-AID EXPENDITURE ON CLASSICAL MUSIC ONLY 1946-2015 IN CONSTANT 2015 PRICES

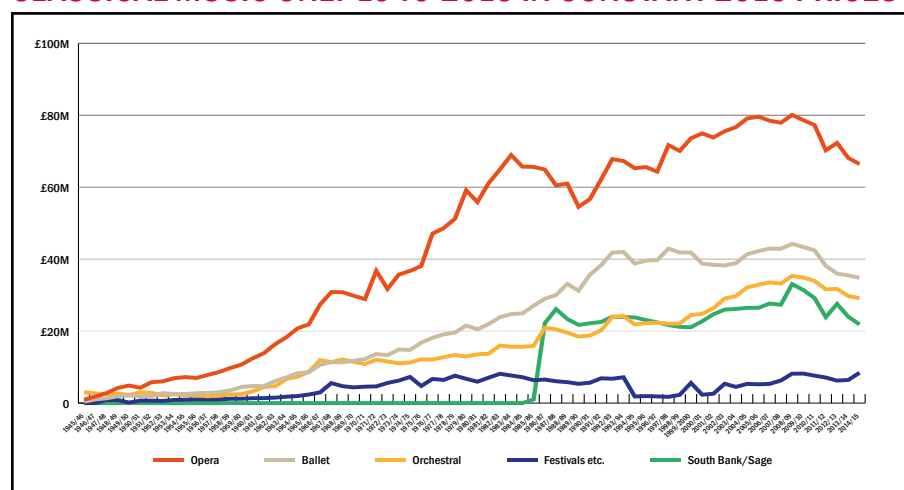


CHART 3: ARTS COUNCILS EXPENDITURE 1946-2015 SPLIT PROPORTIONATELY

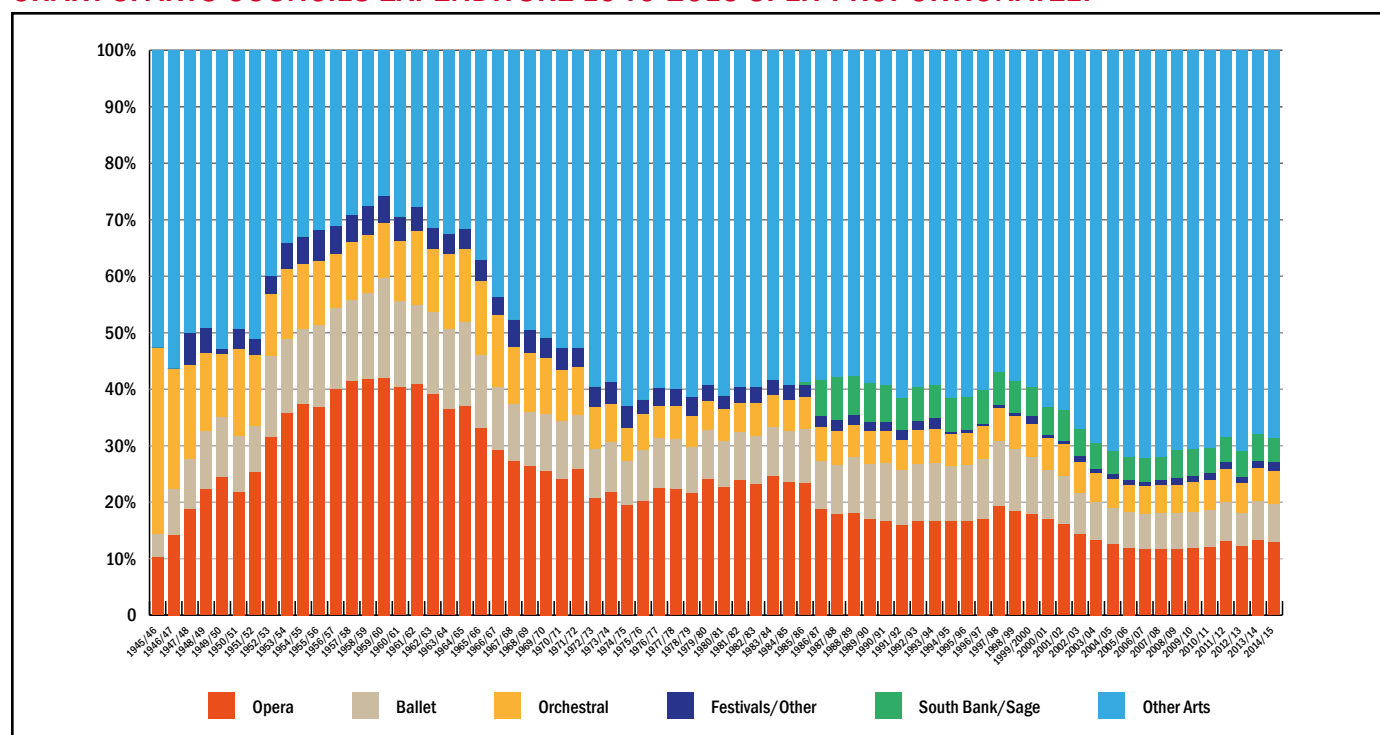
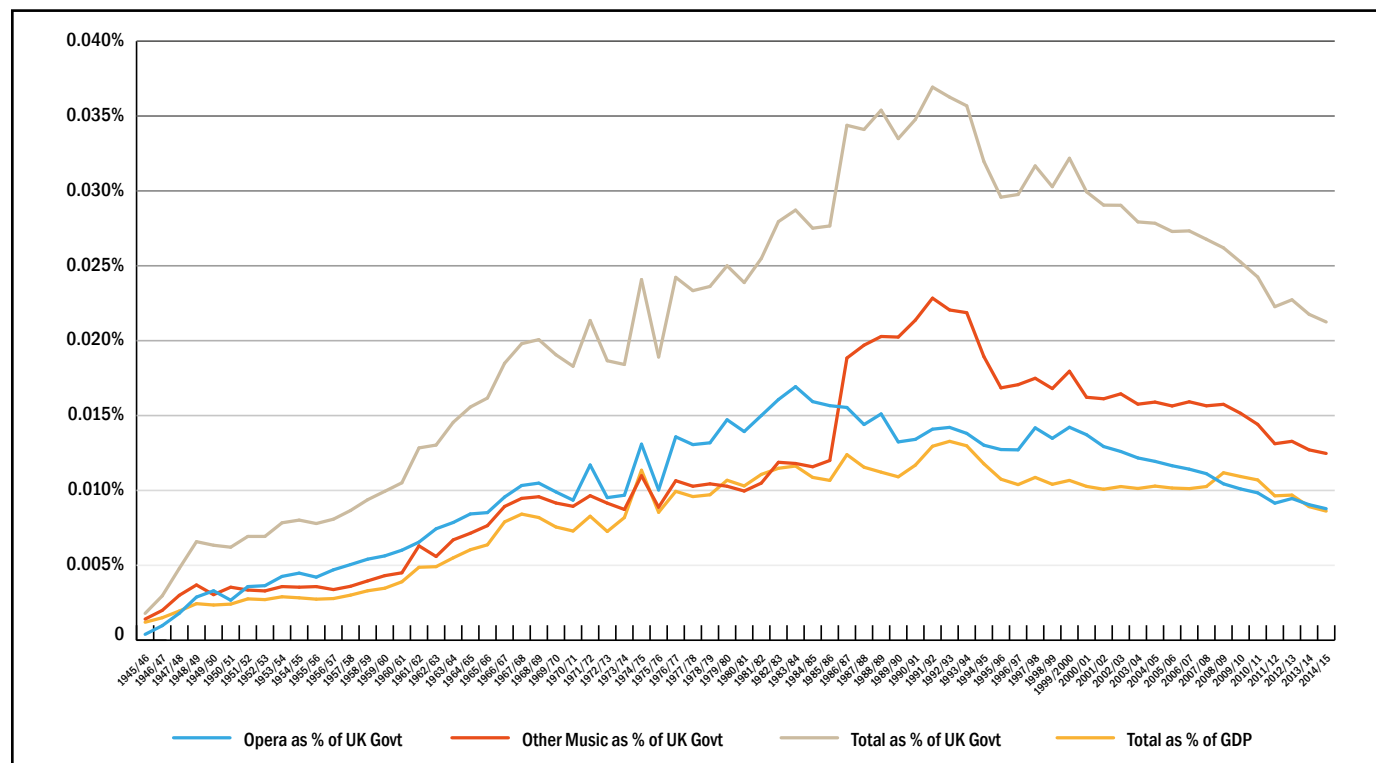


CHART 4: ARTS COUNCILS EXPENDITURE ON CLASSICAL MUSIC 1946-2015 (EXC LOTTERY) AS A % OF UK PUBLIC EXPENDITURE AND OF GDP




Although these figures give the impression of a relatively constant long-term increase in arts councils' spending on music and the other arts, at least until recently, the picture is not necessarily entirely straightforward. If you compare the expenditure on, say, opera and other classical music as a proportion of all UK government expenditure and of gross domestic product (GDP), it is clear that there was a peak in the early 1990s but that there has been a fairly steady decline ever since, as shown in Chart 4. And in case you were wondering whether the situation would look different if these figures took into account population changes, the results per capita are not in fact dissimilar

– but I think that most readers will by now have had their fill of charts!

For better or worse, these data on the spending by the UK's arts councils over the last 70 years can be used to support different interpretations since they do not unambiguously illustrate either the strength or the decline of public arts spending nor the prominence or waning of spending on opera and other forms of classical music. A supporter could point to a dramatic increase over the period in total public arts expenditure and the relatively resilient total amount spent on classical music while developing new areas of spending with wider popular appeal. The critic would highlight the end of the long-term upward trend in spending

and the relatively entrenched position of opera. Nor of course do they tell you whether the money has been effectively, let alone 'appropriately', spent.

It is well known that governmental organisations in Germany and other continental European countries often see financial support for the arts and other cultural activities as a public and educational duty. It remains to be seen whether a Britain outside the European Union has a similar attitude. 

Antony Feeny is completing a PhD in Musicology at Royal Holloway University of London. His next article will appear in the January 2017 edition of *Classical Music*

A NOTE ON THE SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY USED HERE

Last month's article summarised some of the issues and complexities involved in extracting and processing 70 years of arts council data, drawn mainly from annual reports and accounts of the arts councils of Great Britain (pre-1994), England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as some of the accounts for individual

organisations. Further details are available at www.classicalmusicmagazine.org/economic-ear-sources. I would have liked to have analysed each of the main areas of arts council support, including not just classical music but also drama, visual art, literature, and so forth, in order to provide a fuller picture of arts funding by central government, but the problems of categorisation and consistency together

with the sheer quantity of data over 70 years made this impractical. For that reason I have broken down the figures for the main areas of classical music (opera, ballet, orchestral music, and festivals and other, along with the Southbank & Sage Gateshead explained in the footnote), but treated all other areas of expenditure as the balancing item within the overall annual expenditure by the arts councils