

INTRODUCTION

This vision statement is a work in progress. We are developing it with our staff and players, but it cannot be completed until we have shared it with both our audiences and the public, in Birmingham and beyond. As we share it, it will evolve and change.

We are embarking on a journey and we want to hear from you, both in response to this document and the experience you have in our concerts over the coming 18 months.

Then, tested, enriched, and improved by your advice, and all of our experience, we will be able to present its final version as a road map for the next ten years of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

Please join us on this journey of collaboration, discovery, and joy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emma Stenning', written over a light grey horizontal line.

Emma Stenning, CEO



City of
Birmingham
Symphony
Orchestra

We live to create music that brings connection, inspiration, and joy to the people of Birmingham, the West Midlands and beyond.

Live Music is a connection between people. The ambition to nourish this connection drives everything that City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) does.

We make music that matters to people.

With 90 incredible musicians, alongside a family of choirs, youth ensembles, conductors, and staff, we create exciting musical experiences for all. From brightening up the morning commute to inspiring audiences and musicians of the future, we make epic, powerful, meaningful music that fills concert halls, communities, streets, schools and lives with passion, excitement, inspiration, hope and joy.

Great music is the foundation of everything, but even the greatest music is nothing without the people it connects; the audience, the musicians, and those who make it all happen. This is our role as an orchestra for 'now', and an orchestra for Birmingham, embracing diversity, individuality and the shared experience of performance, to fuel the connection between people without which music cannot exist.

Our 5 Resolutions:

1. We will share exceptional musical experiences, fulfilling and building the regional, national, and international reputation of the CBSO.
2. We will welcome audiences, artists, and staff from every community in Birmingham and beyond to everything we do.
3. We will collaborate and share creative opportunities and resources across the many communities in our diverse city, with the aim of driving real social change and expanding the talent pipeline into the creative industries.
4. We will respect and celebrate the presence, personality and individuality of our players, choirs, youth ensembles, conductors, staff, participants, and audiences.
5. We will demonstrate our belief that a symphony orchestra is a uniquely powerful and eloquent vehicle with which to achieve these things.

The CBSO faces a number of immediate challenges, including funding, financial uncertainty, changing audience expectations, and the lack of diversity within both performers and repertoire.

But there are opportunities too. Notably, an energy for and commitment to change from within the orchestra itself, the loyal support of our audiences and stakeholders, and the audience potential of Birmingham and the West Midlands, where we are one of very few professional symphony orchestras.

And so, through our conversations, an exciting set of ideas begin to emerge.

Over the next 10 years, the CBSO will boldly join the conversation about what future orchestral concerts might become. To widen its audience, heighten its impact and release its potential, orchestral music needs to be presented in new ways. By embracing a more purposeful approach to programming with, by and for a range of audiences and communities, we will begin to discover new relevance across our programme of events.

Key changes to programming will include:

1. Inviting new and diverse creative voices to join the conversation.

We will evolve our programming conversations in collaboration with a visiting Artistic Director (or directors) from a related field in music. They will work closely on a strand within the programme and enrich, interrogate and articulate the range of the programme from a perspective not currently represented in the orchestra or leadership team.

2. Rebalancing the programme and reallocating orchestral time to a wider range of performance experiences.

Expanding the range of venues in which we perform around our core programme in Symphony Hall will allow us to:

- Explore with the orchestra, staff and audiences what a transformative orchestral concert might be like, and develop the skills necessary to achieve it.
- Present a series of immersive concerts at the CBSO Centre designed as a 'gateway' to the world of orchestral music, welcoming a new audience to an informal and accessible concert experience in which they will be swallowed whole by the overwhelming sound of the symphony orchestra.
- Develop a series of collaborative concerts and participatory performances in public spaces across the West Midlands, designed in partnership with the many communities that comprise our region's young and diverse population.
- Create 5-10 "show concerts" in a year with enhanced production values - designed for touring, festivals and repeat performances in future years.
- Develop the highest quality learning, engagement and artist development programmes, inspiring our players and communities alike to release the power of music in their lives.

3. Highlighting and expressing the audience experience.

We will articulate the audience journey through the programme with the appointment of a well-known 'Audience Artist in Residence' who will attend concerts, host pre- or post-show events, engage in dialogue with the communities of Birmingham about what the orchestra is, can and should be, articulate the journey through the year's programme and create a season-closing event with the orchestra which reflects on all this in July 2025.

Alongside the changes to programming plans, we will begin the process of welcoming audiences and developing how we present concerts as early as January 2024. This will be done through open dialogue with both our established and new audiences. Designed to create a welcoming and comfortable environment for every audience member, these changes will include:

1. A new 'CBSO Welcome':

- There will always be an explicit welcome from the stage (by a member of the CBSO or a visiting artist).
- We will do everything we can to remember that artists and audiences are people, connected by music in every concert they attend. Artists will be introduced as individuals, and where possible they will speak for themselves.
- We will develop the pre- and post-concert experience in every venue, centring it around the audience and creating a joyful and welcoming environment. This could include:
 - Using voices of the organisation (players, Kazuki, Emma etc.) for announcements.
 - Curating playlists which enhance the experience and are relevant to the performance.
 - Briefing front of house staff to be welcoming and informal.
 - Having a strong CBSO presence to allow audiences to connect with staff and players.
 - Further developing and curating talks and events in both style and content.
- Introductory material will always be designed to help the audience listen clearly to the programme.
- We will commission a pre-show film (ideally mapped for Symphony Hall) which communicates the identity and character of the orchestra.
- The removal of any perceived 'rules' of a traditional concert, clearly inviting audiences to:
 - Bring drinks into the auditorium.
 - Clap whenever they like.
 - Wear whatever makes them feel comfortable.
 - Take photos or short snippets of film (and to share them with us).
 - Be mindful of everyone's experience.

2. An enhanced musical experience:

We will use theatrical and creative techniques including lighting, movement, staging, live video mix and elements of movement, to allow audiences to use their eyes as well as their ears, celebrating and showcasing the individuals on stage, enabling the audience to see who is playing what and to see the personalities within the orchestra.

3. Embracing the world as our stage:

We will find ways to share our performances to audiences beyond the concert hall and across the world. Building on existing relationships with Radio 3 and Classic FM, and by finding new audio and visual partners, eventually concerts will be streamed live. Inspired by the legacy of Paganini, Liszt and the pioneering orchestras of the nineteenth century, our concert "shows" will be toured nationally and internationally and grace the stages of festivals across the world.

The 'why'...

We are doing these things because we believe that the best music in the world should be for everyone.

For more than 100 years, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra has taken different names and forms. Weathering war, recession, and social change, and evolving from a part-time municipal ensemble into a symphony orchestra with a worldwide reputation.

Throughout everything, we strive to be 'Birmingham's Orchestra' – the musical embodiment of one of the world's great cities, in all its ambition, diversity and humility.

Building on this legacy, and with a hunger to secure a bright future for our artform and our city, we therefore choose respectful revolution inspired by the history of Birmingham, which in the 19th century was renowned for the way in which people from every walk of life took part in cultural life.

We choose a revolution that centres music, people, and the connection between the two, in order to create joyful experiences for everyone.