Case studies – impact of the UK-EU trade deal for UK musicians working in the EU  
Briefing by the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) (Feb 2021)

The following case studies were sent to the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM), the UK’s oldest professional representative body for musicians, ahead of an oral evidence session on Tuesday 16 February with the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. For more information please contact Liam Budd, Senior External Affairs & Policy Manager at liam.budd@ism.org.

Joseph Middleton, pianist, Fellow of and Professor at the Royal Academy of Music, Director of Leeds Lieder and Resident Musician at Pembroke College Cambridge (February 2021)

"An email from my agent, the first post-Brexit correspondence relating to work in Spain, explaining that a recital for which I signed a contract two years ago, would now cost me £600 in visa-related bills. Even though I would only spend 24 hours there, my agent would be required to work on a raft of extra paper-work, my accountant to furnish me with documents giving proof of income, and my bank would need to provide me with recent certified bank statements (no pesky home print-offs here, thank you). My passport would need to be submitted to the Spanish Embassy and held there until the visa was processed, causing problems for when I had to travel for other work. Apparently the ‘normal’ visa cost would be nearer £150, but with the Embassy only currently open one day a week, the promoter had told my agent the only option would be to pay out for the £600 fast-track. The concert in Spain, one of the few remaining non-Covid cancellations in my diary, is part of a tour that also takes in recitals in France and Denmark. Pull out of one engagement because the numbers don’t stack up, and risk losing the work in the other countries as well. Too many visas, even at £150 each (and that figure obviously doesn’t include cost of travel to the embassies, the lost work time, or the extra costs to agents and accountants) and it’s clear that your livelihood is going to take a nosedive. Brexit means that musicians now need to apply for a short-term work permit before travelling to work in a number of EU countries, each with their own different requirements." 

Response from the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra to a prospective UK trumpet academy player (sent early December 2020).

Dear Oscar
I’m so sorry, I sent you an invitation last week for the upcoming trumpet audition, but unfortunately I have to inform you that as you are from the UK it will not be possible to participate in the audition after all.
All auditions for all tutti positions (not only Academy) are only for European Union citizens, plus Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein. At this moment the UK is no longer in the EU and the deals are not made yet. I feel so sorry but I can’t do anything about this. I wish you all the best

Maxim Calver – 21, cellist.

As a 21 year old cellist I have been lucky enough to be able to perform around Europe for the last few years participating in festivals and solo recitals. These concerts are vital for creating contacts but due to being at the start of my career, are often not huge paychecks. With the ATA Carnet now being necessary to transport my instrument into Europe, for young musicians like myself this is a huge upfront cost especially at a time where our income, like so many others, has been completely decimated. I have been invited to Spain and Germany for two festivals this summer, this now means two sets of flights, different
work permit/visa requirements and an ATA Carnet. I am still trying to work out if I can afford to go as the visa requirements are not clear and it is devastating to have to give up the opportunities to make music and make contacts with our colleagues in Europe, especially at the start of my career.

George Jackson – Conductor

Next October (2021) I am invited to conduct the premiere of a work by Steve Reich with the Ensemble Intercontemporain in Paris. We rehearse for 3 days in Paris, and then fly to Rome for one performance. Nobody knows how to do this now, because: I will be Entering Schengen in France, and paid by a French organisation. But entering Italy within Schengen so no checks, and therefore probably nobody to show a potential Italian visa too. So this demonstrates why the UK needs to negotiate something that treats Schengen as one entity, not bitty countries. Am I really supposed to pay 500 Pounds for an Italian visa that isn't necessary? The new system does not work!

Helen Power - Singer and Actor

I’m a professional singer and actor and I’m deeply concerned about the impact Brexit will have on my future employment and earnings. A lot of the talk has been around touring, i.e. a few weeks or months in a country at a time but my experience is mostly one-off overnight trips. Some years these European gigs have made up 30% of my annual income.

I’ve been engaged as a freelance performer for the incredibly successful Incognito Artists who have provided surprise-type entertainment for 20 years. Since the UK corporate entertainment market shrank with the 2008 recession, the company still grew by performing increasingly across Europe. In addition to corporates we do many birthdays, weddings and private functions and often these bookings are last minute, within a week or even 24 hours, an icing on the cake to get the party started. We have many repeat bookings from individuals now used to throwing parties at the last minute and with visas as a barrier both in time and cost, they will simply look elsewhere. A loss to us and a loss to the UK tax paying company. As an individual performer, our fee for these gigs is roughly £300-£450, so it is not feasible for us as individuals to pay more than 10% in visa fees nor spare the time in processing. The clients come to this UK based company because we are considered the very best, they can offer West End performers and now only those lucky enough to have Irish passports will be able to work. It really is that simple! I am married to an Irishman and have Irish heritage but am still not eligible for a passport. Brexit has cut off a significant proportion of my income not to mention the cultural benefit of the exchange. We warned this would happen and were dismissed as “project fear”, it is beyond galling! As a side, several major UK theatre tours I’ve been in have included a week or 2 in European cities. With large casts and several lorries of equipment, set and costumes these simply will not be viable in visa and carnet costs or administrative time.

Catherine Manson - Violin - Leader of Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra

As a violinist, I have worked for several decades touring, giving concerts, recording, broadcasting and teaching masterclasses all around the EU. I have been the leader of the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra since 2006 but earlier this week the orchestra management told me that I will not be able to participate in the orchestra’s next tour in March/April (assuming concerts can happen and that travel is possible by then). The reason for this is that they will now need to apply a work permit on my behalf. If they were to apply now, in good time, the application would be refused as a result of the travel restrictions currently in place, but if they wait, hoping that the restrictions are lifted, it will be too late to apply
for a work permit. My place will instead be taken by another violinist who lives in the Netherlands and I will have lost all my income for this season.

Typically this orchestra brings musicians from all around Europe, meeting approximately eight times per year to rehearse a programme in the Netherlands and then setting off to tour around Europe, giving up to ten concerts per project in different countries. For me to procure a work permit for each one of these events would place an enormous and unreasonable burden on the orchestra management. If each of these applications involved leaving my passport at each different embassy I would also be unable to travel for any other concerts. Normally I would also give another twenty concerts annually around Europe with my quartet, the London Haydn Quartet but as a result of Brexit, EU concert promoters are justifiably nervous about the expense and time involved in bringing a UK group, and so we have no further concerts booked in Europe. And this is not to even mention the carnets I would also need in order to travel with my violin. Essentially I am professionally paralysed by Brexit and have no idea how I can continue my career. I desperately need some resolution to this problem.

Poppy Walshaw, baroque cellist

In addition to regular touring with UK groups abroad, I consider myself very fortunate to have had more than 50% of my performing work with baroque orchestras based in the rest of Europe. I was the continuo cellist for ensembles in Poland and Germany since 2007, as well as appointments for several years as the principal cellist of Oslo Baroque Orchestra, as a member of Spanish orchestra Al Ayre Espanol, and so on. After my postgraduate study in Bremen, Germany, from 2001-4, I returned to the UK and have lived in London, travelling frequently for work. Specialising in early music, there is a small pool of players, many of whom work with several ensembles, often in different European countries. In the case of Poland, I first went there at less than 24 hours' notice to join a recording project with Arte dei Suonatori. It clicked musically straight away and the following month I became their regular cellist. I found my musical home in this ensemble, and centre of my musical identity and exploration. Most years I have worked in Poland far more than the future maximum of 30 days for Polish work that I have seen on information from the ISM. When the Brexit vote happened, I was with Arte at a festival in Copenhagen, performing as a concerto soloist as well as continuo cellist...With the unclarity on Brexit over the intervening four years, sadly my work in both Poland and Germany fizzled out in favour of the ensembles using musicians from the rest of Europe and locally. It is a huge loss for me, in terms of both personal and musical identity. The enriching opportunities that I have had were a result of jumping in for projects at short notice. Travelling at less than 24 hours' notice in that way will be impossible with the various future regulations, and something that I understand will also have an enormous impact on other areas of the performing arts, such as opera “stand-ins”.

Robert King - Conductor and Founder of “The Kings Consort”

For more than 30 years the professional orchestra and choir I founded and have overseen has toured extensively across Europe. We have brought millions of pounds back into the UK economy, annually employing hundreds of UK musicians.

Those tours tend to be a handful of concerts, usually across several EU countries. The usual daily fee paid to a freelance orchestral musician or a professional freelance choir member is around £160, plus a per diem for their meals. 80% of UK musicians are freelancers - even the members of the London Symphony are not salaried, but get paid by the day (few musicians have the luxury of a BBC or Royal Opera House salary: we are predominantly freelancers).

On a typical tour to the EU, multiply those freelance £160s across 45 people and 4 concerts in 4 different countries, add a freelance tour manager, a conductor and a “name” UK soloist (earning a larger but not excessive fee), and with a day of UK rehearsal...
beforehand the tour fee is perhaps £45,000 (all that comes back into the UK economy). Add Eurostar or flights, hotels, local buses etc (across 4 concerts, that’s another £35,000). Add a small percentage towards our annual management costs and the requested fee per concert is around £22,500. We used to be able to get promoters in France, Belgium, Germany, Spain etc to pay that sort of fee for a top-level, international quality concert. With the UK now outside the EU, now we must pay for a visa for every performer, for each country, plus a carnet for every instrument (instruments are the property of each individual player - we can’t claim them as being the orchestra’s property), so that’s 25 carnets at c.£350, plus a shedload of paperwork, and put down a deposit relative to the value of each instrument (on a decent violin typically worth say £60,000 that’s a large deposit). The visa for each performer for, say, Germany is €80, plus a shedload of advance paperwork and an unpaid half day’s attendance for every performer at the Embassy to get the visa. Multiply that process across 4 countries and with carnets and visas we have an additional cost of £700 per performer (plus 2 days unpaid attendance at embassies) - that’s an extra £31,500. The tour is now completely uneconomic.

The only current way around this would be to ditch almost all of our loyal UK members, employ largely EU performers and rehearse in the EU. So our wonderful UK performers, some of whom have performed with us for 25 years, would lose their work. And not just them - the ripples spread: our London rehearsal venue would lose its daily fee. The local takeaways and restaurants we would frequent whilst we rehearse in London would lose their income. We wouldn’t need to buy flights from any British airlines, so they and the specialist travel agency that orchestras must use when making complicated bookings for cellos and timpani would also lose their income.

So, for UK musicians, and for all the support services, it’s a potential disaster. We are only one orchestra: all our colleague organisations have the same issue. The UK music industry turns over more than £5 billion per annum. A substantial portion of that would now disappear. And then the loss of profile and reputation would mean fewer recordings get sold, less broadcast airtime, so the recording industry loses income. And so the ripples spread on. Visa-free and carnet-free would resolve so much of that, almost instantaneously.

Robert King - Slipped Disc

More often than not, certainly for the chamber and period instrument orchestras, it was those EU tours that generated the surpluses that enabled the (loss-making) UK concerts. Then add that almost all UK orchestras (the exceptions largely being the salaried BBC and opera orchestras) are made up of freelancers – even being a member of the London Symphony Orchestra (let alone all the wonderful chamber and period instrument orchestras) brings no salary: performers are only paid, by the day, when there are rehearsals and/or performances.

For many of those freelancers, up to 50% of their income came from European touring. That isn’t going to be replaced by concerts in the UK – they are already the loss-making concerts. That’s because the UK arts funding model sits way beneath that of almost every mainland European country. The UK music industry used to generate more than £5 billion (yes, billion) for the UK economy, much of it coming in from Europe (pop, jazz, classical – they are all similarly affected by these new restrictions). Then factor in loss of profile: if you don’t tour, you don’t get the exposure and PR, so your recording income and airtime reduces. That also directly affects income streams. Then factor in the “ripple” effects – less work means technicians, rehearsal venues, travel companies, truckers, editors, publishers, even the cafes next to the rehearsal premises: all these lose income too. So, even setting aside the less immediately quantifiable loss to culture, all this amounts to significant financial losses for the UK economy. There are no winners here.
Dame Sarah Connolly - Mezzo Soprano

Politicians don’t seem to get that classical music is largely composed by Europeans and in order to be able to be good enough to sing in German / French / Italian to a comparative high standard we need to be in the midst of the action: in a cast in Bayreuth, be invited to be a member of that orchestra (invitation only), be on a Fest contract in Germany, be invited to tour Europe with any number of high class Baroque groups, be invited to be in an all French cast of a French opera in Paris (2 month contract with a 2 month tour later in the year). Nick Boles wrote a great piece in yesterday’s Sunday Times calling for an overhaul of the education system and now would be a vital time to encourage the Arts. We all know why of course, but we must be viable in Europe and education is KEY!

Anton Lukoszevieze – Musician

We have a concert in Italy in May, postponed from last year. Now the promoters are a) very confused as to whether or what kind of visa or work permits we need b) so are we c) if we have to pay for work permits/visas it will cost us a large cut in our fees d) the Carnet business with out instruments will cost us over £1500 apparently for a year e) still have no clear info. from the UK govt about what is going on, etc etc etc etc... Disaster.

Louise Alder – Soprano

I have to say thus far I haven’t had much bad experience brexit wise. I have been lucky. I was in Spain on 31st Dec and they only asked for visas for contracts after my contract ended (Jan 10th). I was in Austria for 3 weeks in January and needed no visa either because it’s under the 30 day limit. However, in April/May/June and then again in Nov/Dec I will most definitely need an Austrian visa because I will be there too long. As yet we don’t know what that visa is, but we are asking and desperately hoping that as a German resident I will be allowed to apply for it in Germany and not have to fly back to the UK each time.

The headache is of course each EU country has their own rules with regards to 3rd country nationals and trying to get them to make sense when most or all of your work is in the EU, back to back, is a nightmare. I have lived in Germany since 2014 and have been granted permanent residency by the government here. All I need to do is have an interview and collect my card. It was very painless. It only allows me to live and work in Germany without a visa however... not the rest of the EU. HOURS have been spent on the phone to my agent trying to work out day counts in every country and then overall in the EU. This will not get easier. And I fear for those who are not so well represented as I, working with smaller companies, living in the UK. The future certainly looks bleak.

Musician – Anon.

I have a position in a Norwegian orchestra - I’m a British citizen with residency there. I have had to reapply for my residency in the wake of Brexit and my changed status. My situation has been relatively uncomplicated but British freelancers who work in the same orchestra have already been pushed down the ‘extras list’ as it takes 2-3 days for the administration to process their paperwork for each visit they make. Other domestic and European freelancers are now being preferentially engaged - often less able/talented musicians but ‘easier’ for the orchestra to book. This onerous administrative burden doesn’t take account of the extra new costs incurred by the British musicians themselves.

David Parry – Conductor – (letter to his MP)

I am writing ahead of the debate in Parliament next Monday to alert you to the problems I, as a freelance international conductor, and many other of my colleagues will be facing...
unless an agreement can be reached with the EU to waive visa and work-permit requirements for visiting musicians, orchestras and groups. Flexibility is of the utmost importance in this field: I have to be able to go at a moment's notice to conduct at the last minute in opera houses and concert halls all over the EU. My schedule is by no means always fixed a long time in advance, and last-minute engagements will be particularly prevalent as soon as Covid 19 restrictions are relaxed here and in the EU. This is a separate issue from the potentially catastrophic costs for orchestras and groups, and for smaller organisations that arrange tours, often in fact run by one person, who will be impossibly hard-pressed both in terms of workload and cost, unless there is a reciprocal agreement on this matter. Both problem-lines are critically important.

As you know, the music industry is one of the UK’s most successful industries, a billions-of-pounds a year exporter, and, through the visits of orchestras, groups and individual artists, a huge magnet for tourism. I would implore you to put as much pressure on ministers as you can to make clear to them how important this issue is, and how vital it is for an agreement to be reached.

**Bergen National Opera - cancellation of Artists from all non EU/EEA countries**

Much to art life’s big surprise, the Norwegian Government has decided that citizens outside the EU/EEA area will be denied to enter the kingdom of Norway. There is now a new temporary law which is valid until the 1st of June 2021 which will stop you from coming here.

Only health workers or those related to the oil industry will be allowed in. Artists are sorrowly not regarded as amongst the critical personnel needed to keep the country running. As an Armenian citizen you will not be granted a visa, and your British residency will not help you as the UK is now outside the EU - it is horrible and cruel. The Tito production will go on in a reduced "chess board" fashion (a square patterned stage and no set) and the chorus will be off-stage. Servilia, Tito, you, the lighting designer and maestro will be replaced, as you all are citizens outside the EU. So this is a huge blow to all of us.

**Sophia Rahman, pianist**

A glance through my accounts for the year ending April 2020 tells me that well over two thirds of my income was either earned within the EU (Austria, Estonia, etc.) or within the UK with one or more collaborators from the EU. When UK musicians tour abroad we are not 'taking work away’ from local musicians but representing our country’s rich cultural heritage. When foreign musicians come to the UK to collaborate with us there is an exchange of ideas which stimulates both sides and offers a chance for unique work to be created. Artistic standards are driven up by such interaction as each party benefits from the opportunity to learn from the other.

Because of Covid travel restrictions I have given only two live performances within the EU since March 2020. I am extremely concerned that when these restrictions are eventually lifted the practical difficulties (red tape) of touring post-Brexit will mean the permanent loss of two-thirds of my income. This would render a formerly viable career unsustainable, even more so when you consider that work at home has been so limited for the past year with no prospect of a return in the foreseeable future.

If the government seems to be in denial about the very real difficulties other businesses are experiencing as a result of Brexit, it seems utterly oblivious to the distinct needs of the average touring musician and the catastrophic impact that a blanket denial is already having on the economy. Caroline Dineage makes sympathetic noises but we need so much more than platitudes and passivity; we need affirmative action to ensure that our tax-paying livelihoods and the cultural landscape that sustained them are salvaged from the Brweckage.
Jessica Walker, mezzo-soprano

Some singers I've spoken to couldn't easily untangle how many of their problems were more to do with Covid. This doesn't mean the Visa/ work permit issues aren't massive, but they are currently being obscured.

As an example, a friend directing something in Spain, didn't have time to apply for a working visa, with less than 90 days before the show. She was advised to go slightly under the radar on a tourist visa - she was being paid by an organisation in France - but then being a tourist became no-go because of Covid. Fast-tracking a working visa was the next option, but the French company she's working for said they would only get the visa with massive pressure from the Spanish theatre, who were not inclined to help out. My friend doesn't want to pay it herself (£400), because the production could get cancelled on account of Covid! Even if she somehow manages to go, she could lose her whole fee on the visa, multiple Covid tests, and then any potential hotel quarantine if the rules change again.

Other friends have had so much work cancelled due to Covid, they won't know how badly they are affected by the new Brexit situation until a year or two years hence. I know this is probably stating the obvious, but an important part of the discourse is that this currently looks like a much smaller problem than it actually is, and could therefore be more easily dismissed.

Anna Patalong, Operatic Soprano (May 2019)

'Freedom of movement is of course essential for our jobs, enabling us to move freely around the continent and work without restrictions. But even more importantly it allows artists of every kind in Europe to interact and share our languages, cultures and ideas. Collaboration is fundamental to Opera, which is an amalgamation of many art forms, and the opportunity to, as Oscar Wilde put it, 'play gracefully with ideas' is vital to keep us producing great work. The further apart we move, the harder that becomes.'

Testimony from respondents of ISM's Fifth Brexit report – Will Music Survive Brexit? (May 2020)

'European opera houses have now categorically stated that they will no longer offer auditions to British artists not holding anything except a UK passport. Loss of Freedom of movement will be virtually career ending for myself and many of my friends and colleagues.‘

'I will struggle to continue as a performer as more and more UK singers, unable to secure work in the EU, are forced to chase the same, limited number of opportunities in the UK.’

'British nationals have already joined other 'third country nationals' on the lowest rung of hiring desirability as a result [of Brexit uncertainty]. In an industry that often casts two, four, sometimes even seven years ahead, this is catastrophic for individual artists' careers and livelihoods.’

'My "break" with one major continental ensemble came when I was able to go to Belgium at 72 hours' notice to do a week of recording sessions when a regular ensemble member was indisposed. This kind of short-notice engagement, which in my case (as in many others) was genuinely career-advancing, will probably not be possible in future.’

† https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/feb/12/brexit-is-destroying-music-why-has-the-government-let-this-happen