

# New Year Message 2011

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*Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6: 31-33*

As this New Year approaches we are potentially facing rather worrying times. In the face of severe government budget cutbacks for the arts, the future for musicians and artists looks very uncertain.

However, this letter is primarily a message of hope for us as musicians and as God's children, so as you read this letter, and I first outline the bad news, please keep reading as there's also good news. And fix your eyes on Jesus to see what He may be saying to you...

## What we are facing

As part of the government spending review, the decision has been taken to reduce funding to all arts organisations as well as to training institutions such as the music colleges. The pot of money allocated to the Arts Council is being drastically cut over the next few years. Equally worrying is the fact that 'ring-fenced' funding for many orchestras and other arts organisations has now been removed and the funding opened up to anyone and everyone who wants to apply for the smaller pot of money that remains. What this means in reality is that everyone who has previously had some guaranteed income from the arts council has to reapply, along with many thousands of others, for a share of this smaller pot of money. The way it directly affects us as musicians is that if funding applications submitted by the orchestras we play with are unsuccessful, a number of them will go to the wall!



In addition, local authorities have decided in some cases to completely withdraw funding for music education in their schools. It is likely that more will follow suit. See for example:

[Bedfordshire Council cuts](#)

[Federation of Music Services comments](#)

There is a major short-sightedness in the decisions that are being taken. On the face of it, cutting funding for the arts is an easy road to take. Very few will complain as many see those involved in the arts as elitist and undeserving of Government support. You only have to read comments on various forums on this subject to see that many in this country believe that the arts should be able to 'stand on their own feet' and that such elitist groups don't deserve 'government handouts'.

However it is my belief that if you remove funding from the arts, there is great danger of ripping the soul out of a nation. The fact is that most arts organisations would be unable to

survive without public funding. Britain has a rich cultural heritage and it is that cultural heritage that has defined us as a nation over centuries. If the arts are decimated, we stand in danger of irreparably damaging the heart and soul of the nation. If all we are willing to fund are the utilitarian 'useful' areas of our nation's life, we lose the very thing that makes us who we are.

If we also remove opportunities for young people to learn to play an instrument, particularly in more deprived areas, we lose a force for good in society. It is a well attested fact that giving young people the opportunity to develop musical skills can begin to turn whole communities round. Look at Venezuela for example with the Simon Bolivar programme - but there are also examples here, such as [El Sistema in Scotland](#) and the ['In Harmony'](#) programme currently running in Liverpool and elsewhere, not forgetting all of the wonderful education work done by many of the orchestras in the UK. Those of us who have been involved in such programmes can testify to lives, families and communities being transformed.

What is most worrying is what we are storing up for the future if young people are not given these opportunities. It will be extremely difficult to stop us becoming a cultural desert if the tide starts rapidly receding from our cultural shoreline, and it will almost certainly have a very damaging impact on the whole fabric of our society.

## **Opportunity presented**

Should we as Christians take this as a crisis which fuels our fear for the future, or Is God saying something to us about how we should respond both in our hearts and practically?

Yes, we should make our voice heard to government through making our views known about the direction in which we seem to be heading. Write to your MP or local paper etc - but what else can we do as musicians who have been gifted by God?



Each of us is called to bring something of the beauty, mystery, creativity and love of God to a world that is increasingly starved of these things. Without these life has little value. We as musicians are gifted by God to share the attributes and truths of the eternal Kingdom - things which *cannot* be shaken or 'proved' scientifically. We can share and celebrate beauty, we can help people see beyond the mundane to explore mystery of life, we can as creative people speak of the creator Who brought everything into being with such astonishing diversity and we can share the love of God with those who have little hope.

As performers, I believe God is calling us to take risks. This means thinking prayerfully and creatively about how we can best use the gifts God has given us. And our first priority can't be 'where am I going to earn my next few pounds', but to intentionally seek God's Kingdom

first knowing that 'all these things will be added'. It may be putting on concerts in our local community or going into local hospitals or care homes - or into the local Costa Coffee with other creative people! Maybe we could give concerts where we ask people to pay for their tickets in relation to what they can afford or making application to other independent funding organisations for help with putting on creative outreach events.

If God is truly our provider, He will see that we will not only survive the times ahead, but will surprise us with his provision. It may not mean we'll be incredibly wealthy in human terms, but we will not lack anything that we actually need.

I don't know what that will actually mean for each person practically speaking, but as we take initiatives and share our faith stories with one another, hopefully we will be able to encourage one another to increasingly walk a life of faith. And it is likely to be faith that really stretches! We don't often truly live by faith - we may have to learn more of that in coming years.

For those who are teachers, your role is vital! Sowing into the lives of young people is much more than teaching them to play a musical instrument. You are ministering to the core of their being and helping to shape them with values and skills that have great worth. As they feel good about the skills you help them to develop, their outlook on life will change and have positive impact not only on their peers, but also on their families, their communities and ultimately on the nation as a whole. We need to see the value systems of the nation change, and the best place to start is with the next generation growing up. And although some of this will be through formal education (reading, writing, number skills and so on), a great deal of it will be through the development of the emotional and creative side of them as human beings - and music and the arts play a crucial role here! So as funding is cut it may be that you will have to be sacrificial with some of your time in order to bring life to deprived communities, but in so doing you will be sowing the seed of the gospel and bringing hope.

## **In summary**

We are potentially facing an enormous crisis for the arts. However this presents us with an opportunity to think creatively and to step in where others now can't. Will you join me in asking God to show you what He would have you do?

And may be it be a joyful and fruitful New Year for us all

## **Richard Williamson**

See also:

[Changes to Arts Council funding](#)

[Arts Council cuts following the Government Spending Review](#)