

## Topic 5 – Venues for rehearsals and performances

### SUMMARY

#### *What spaces?*

Spaces for regular activity (typically, weekly rehearsals) and for performances are absolutely essential for leisure-time music groups, whether they are performing groups (e.g. choirs, orchestras, bands) or volunteer promoters (presenting usually chamber-size professional ensembles or soloists in concert).

Religious buildings are the number one spaces used, both for regular activity (54%) and for performances (62% for performing groups, 52% for promoters).

For rehearsals, the next most popular two types of spaces are community halls and educational establishments. With the churches, these three types of venues provide 90% of our members' weekly meeting spaces.

For performances, performing groups rely very heavily on churches (62%), including very large ones, i.e. cathedrals; and the next 33% of events are almost evenly spread amongst open air, community halls, local authority venues, non-local-authority run cultural venues and educational establishments. A significant percentage perform in private premises or closed institutions (e.g. care homes), retail or hospitality premises, and some own their own spaces.

Promoters rely less on churches (52%) and use local authority venues (14%), educational establishments (13%) and non-local-authority cultural venues (8%) for the next 35% of their events. Their reliance on community halls, private/closed premises and retail/hospitality is similar to that of performing groups.

#### *At what cost?*

For rehearsals, costs increase as group size increases, unsurprisingly.

The most frequently reported cost bracket per hour is £16-30.

However, instrumental groups pay far more than vocal groups – depending on group size between 5-34% more per hour. This may be because an orchestra of 65 needs more space than a choir of 65 and/or because there may be storage, e.g. for large instruments, included in the price.

For performances, there are a number of free spaces which are potentially also the ones where groups don't promote concerts themselves, e.g. open air, private/closed premises, hospitality, retail, tourist or heritage attractions etc.

Of the hire charging venues, respondents' answers show clearly why churches, community halls and educational establishments remain favourites – only 11% of churches, 2% of community halls and no educational establishments charge more than £500 per concert day hire, whereas 51% of non-local-authority cultural venues (admittedly, some very large ones,

e.g. Glasshouse Gateshead, Royal Albert Hall) and 43% of local authority venues (some of them also large) charge over £500 for a one day hire.

### *What are the challenges?*

Finding the right spaces has always been a challenge, but in recent years, compounded by Covid, this challenge has in some cases become insurmountable and has prevented music groups from continuing or flourishing.

The three threats affecting all these types of spaces are:

- Churches of all denominations reducing their stock, in response to declining numbers of worshippers and/or prohibitive costs of maintaining often old and/or listed buildings
- Volunteers to run churches or community halls are increasingly hard to come by, fuelled by a decline in worshippers, but also in work/life pattern changes in the last decades
- The steady increase of regulation and compliance puts unacceptable burdens on volunteers who may feel ill equipped, and scared, to take responsibility for such matters as anti-terrorism and therefore leave volunteering or are hard to recruit

Making Music's #MakeSpaceForMusic campaign is working to address all these threats over a number of years, as this is such an important piece of infrastructure for leisure-time music groups, and in fact for other community-run activities.

#### **Note –**

This report is based on two surveys:

One gathers data from our **performing groups** where participants are usually hobby musicians, led by a professional music director, meeting regularly for practise and then performing, either at the invitation of others or in concerts they themselves organise and promote.

The other survey collects information from our **promoting groups** which are groups of volunteers who programme one or several events spread over a season or in a concentrated festival programme, presenting professional musicians (so only performance venue information is gathered – there are no regular rehearsals involved).

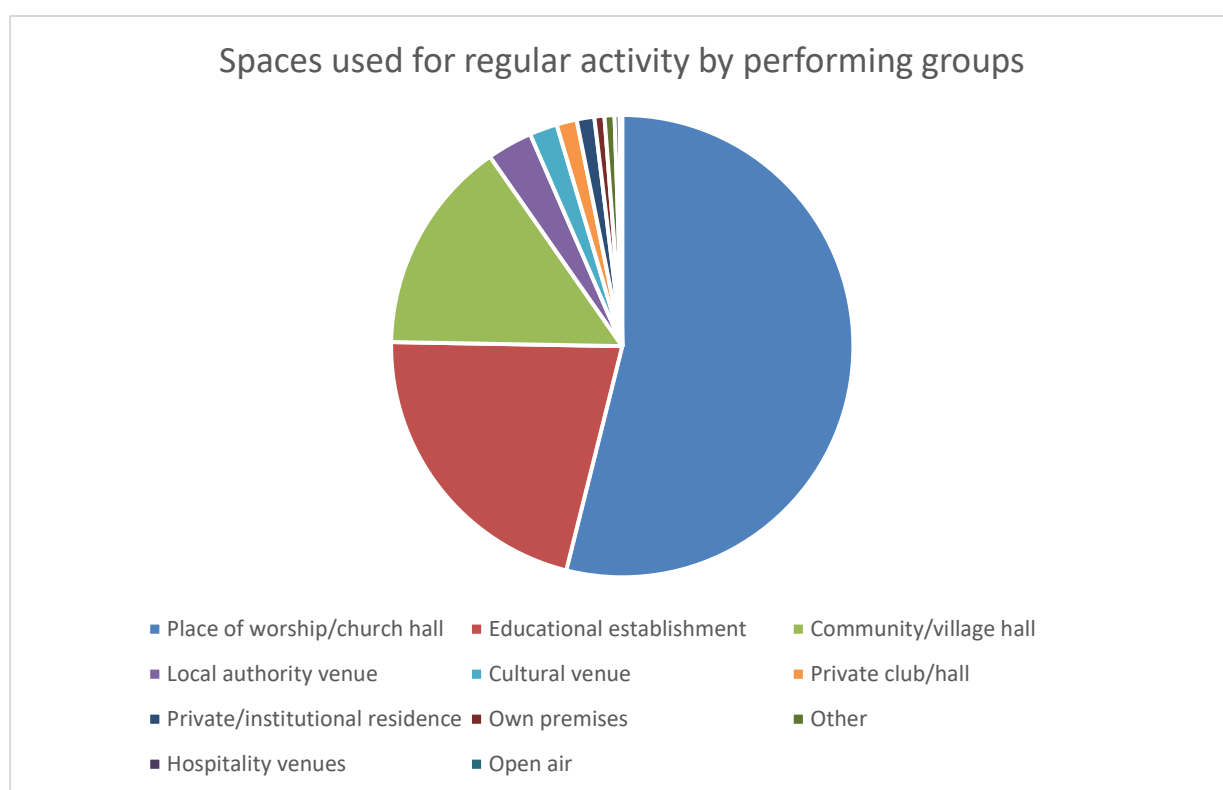
**Performing groups thus need two types of venues or spaces:** one for regular meetings and rehearsals, typically weekly throughout the year, perhaps with short pauses during holidays and a bigger break in the summer; and a second type of space for their performances or other public events (e.g. workshops, Come and Sing/Play events).

**Promoting groups on the other hand are usually exclusively focussed on performance spaces, i.e. venues for public events.**

## PART 1 – SPACES FOR REGULAR ACTIVITY (performing groups only)

### 1.1 What kind of spaces are used for regular meetings or rehearsals?

Venue	Used by groups
Place of worship/church hall	53.79%
Educational establishment	21.34%
Community/village hall	14.99%
Local authority venue	3.17%
Cultural venue not run by Local Authority, e.g. theatre, arts centre	1.94%
Private club/hall, e.g. working men's club, scout hut, dance studio, professional rehearsal studio, county showground	1.41%
Private or institutional residence (e.g. own home, care home, prison, hospital)	1.23%
Own premises	0.7%
Other: multiple types; lease whole building annually	0.7%
Hospitality venues (e.g. pub, hotel, café, restaurant)	0.35%
Open air	0.18%



**The top three spaces for music groups to meet regularly for rehearsals between them are used by 90% of groups: churches/ church halls, schools and other educational establishments, and community or village halls.**

It will thus be no surprise that the threat to churches through closures present a significant challenge for leisure-time music groups. Making Music is in dialogue with relevant authorities to make the case for these buildings as important community hubs.

There is surprising variance in how schools, particularly state schools, feel able to let space after school hours. For private schools, as commercial organisations, there is a more compelling reason to do so and they frequently offer good spaces, but at a price that may not be affordable.

Finally, of the top three, community and village halls have always been and remain fragile assets, as they are often volunteer-led and -run and therefore rely on finding ever new people available to take on the often considerable burden of running or overseeing such a building; yet their importance for their communities is undoubtedly a towering one.

Making Music supports relevant networks with lobbying and advocacy, for example making the case with Martyn's Law (in Parliament now) that anti-terrorism measures should be commensurate to size of hall and location (e.g. rural vs urban), to ensure that resource-poor volunteers are able to comply and contribute to the desired outcomes of this new law.

**Highlighted in blue** a category not specifically asked for, but which featured heavily in the free text 'other' section – clearly, there are a significant number of privately owned halls which are accessible to music groups whilst serving a different primary purpose.

**The four categories highlighted in grey** are used more as performance than as rehearsal venues.

The new category of 'own premises' reflects the increased membership in Making Music of brass bands which more often than other performing/instrumental groups own their own band rooms, as well as some cases of groups taking on spaces as community assets.

## 1.2 COSTS

Finding an affordable local regular meeting space has always been one of the main concerns for **performing groups**, as these spaces are crucial for the often weekly activity which is their main focus.

One third of respondents were from instrumental groups and two thirds from vocal groups, giving us a representative sample of membership.

Unsurprisingly, **as the group size increased – both for instrumental and vocal groups – so did the cost per hour** though there were some significant differences.

**Instrumental groups** tend to be a little smaller in terms of numbers of participants and none responded with over 121 participants.

However, **they tend to pay more per hour than vocal groups** – this may be related to size of room needed (a brass band of 25 needs more space than a choir of 25) and storage space used (again, more likely to be needed by instrumental groups). (Tables 1, 2 & 3) It means, though, that **instrumental groups pay on average between 5-34% per hour more for rehearsal spaces than vocal groups** (Table 4).

Table 5 shows that **for vocal or instrumental groups of all sizes, except the largest ones, the most reported rate for rehearsal space in 2022 was £16-£30 an hour**. For very large groups (121+ people), this jumped to the £31-£80 bracket.

We are reproducing here these detailed data, as groups have expressed an interest in comparing their own with other groups' costs.

**TABLE 1**  
**Instrumental groups (32.19% of respondents)**  
 Hourly rates/percentages of groups (2022 data)

Cost per hour	up to 35 people	36-70 people	71-120 people	121+ people
£1-5	10.1	0	14.3	0
£6-10	16.5	4.8	0	0
£11-15	17.7	12.9	0	0
<b>£1-15</b>	<b>44.3%</b>	<b>17.7%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	
£16-20	19.0	16.1	14.3	0
£21-25	11.4	16.1	0	0
£26-30	11.4	14.5	0	0
<b>£16-30</b>	<b>41.8%</b>	<b>46.7%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	
£31-40	3.8	16.1	14.3	0
£41-50	3.8	9.7	14.3	0
£51-60	3.8	3.2	0	0
£61-80	2.5	1.6	0	0
<b>£31-80</b>	<b>13.9%</b>	<b>30.6%</b>	<b>28.6%</b>	
£81-100	0	0	14.3	0
£100+	0	4.8	28.6	0
<b>£81+</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>4.8%</b>	<b>42.9%</b>	

Highlighted in yellow – the biggest percentages in each category of group size

**TABLE 2**  
**Vocal groups (64.39% of respondents)**  
 Hourly rates/percentage of groups (2022 data)

Cost per hour	up to 35 people	36-70 people	71-120 people	121+ people
£1-5	3.4	1.6	6.1	0
£6-10	14.4	4.9	0	0
£11-15	21.2	17.1	3	0
<b>£1-15</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>23.6%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>0%</b>
£16-20	28.1	8.1	3	0
£21-25	15.1	25.2	24.2	0
£26-30	6.2	17.9	15.2	20
<b>£16-30</b>	<b>49.4%</b>	<b>51.2%</b>	<b>39.7%</b>	<b>20%</b>
£31-40	7.5	9.8	15.2	20
£41-50	2.7	5.7	12.1	20
£51-60	0.7	3.3	6.1	0
£61-80	0.7	4.9	0	40
<b>£31-80</b>	<b>11.6%</b>	<b>23.7%</b>	<b>43.4%</b>	<b>80%</b>
£81-100	0	0	6.1	0
£100+*	0	1.6	9.1	0
	<b>0%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>15.2%</b>	<b>0%</b>

Highlighted in yellow – the biggest percentages in each category of each group size

**TABLE 3**  
**2022 cost per hour: instrumental vs vocal vs ALL GROUPS**

Cost per hour	Instrumental (%)	Vocal (%)	All (%)
£1-5	6.0	2.9	4.2
£6-10	10.7	8.8	10.4
£11-15	14.8	17.2	16.2
£1-15	31.5%	28.9%	30.8%
£16-20	17.4	16.9	18.0
£21-25	12.8	20.1	16.8
£26-30	12.1	12	11.6
£16-30	42.3%	49%	46.4%
£31-40	9.4	9.4	9.3
£41-50	6.7	5.2	5.4
£51-60	3.4	2.3	2.9
£61-80	2.0	2.9	2.3
£31-80	21.5%	19.8%	19.9%
£81-100	1.3	0.6	1.0
£100+	3.4	1.6	1.9
£81+	4.7%	2.2%	2.9%

Highlighted in yellow – the biggest percentages of hourly rates for instrumental, vocal and all groups

**TABLE 4**  
**2022 average cost per hour – instrumental compared to vocal**

	Vocal average cost per hour	Instrumental average cost per hour	Difference (percentage)
Group size up to 35 ppl	£19.05	£20.11	+5.6%
36-70	£28.18	£31.58	+12.1%
71-120+	£45.81	£61.78	+34.9%

Highlighted in yellow – the biggest percentage difference

**TABLE 5**  
**All groups – size versus cost per hour in 2022**

Cost / hour	up to 35 people	36-70 people	71-120 people	121+ people
£1-5	6.8%	1.1%	7.1%	0
£6-10	15.3%	4.8%	2.4%	0
£11-15	19.5%	15.5%	2.4%	0
£1-15	41.6%	21.4%	11.9%	0%
£16-20	25%	11.8%	4.8%	0
£21-25	13.6%	21.9%	19%	0
£26-30	8.1%	16.6%	11.9%	16.7%
£16-30	46.7%	50.3%	35.7%	16.7%
£31-40	5.9%	11.8%	14.3%	33.3%
£41-50	3%	7%	11.9%	16.7%
£51-60	1.7%	3.2%	4.8%	0
£61-80	1.3%	3.7%	0	33.3%
£31-80	11.9%	25.7%	31%	84.3%
£81-100	0	0	9.5%	0
£100+	0	2.7%	11.9%	0

Highlighted in yellow – the biggest percentages in each category of group size, all groups

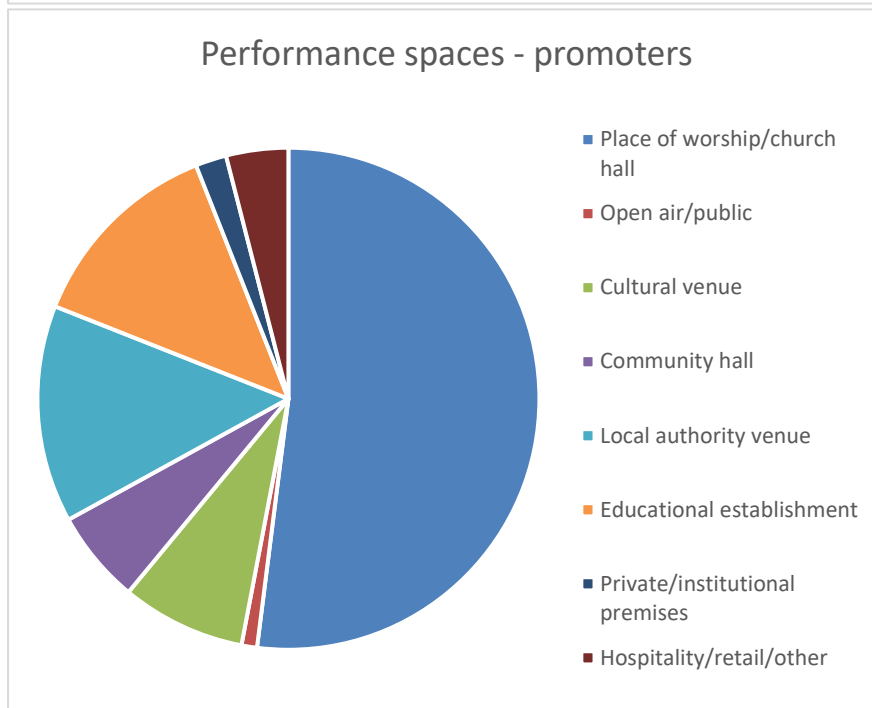
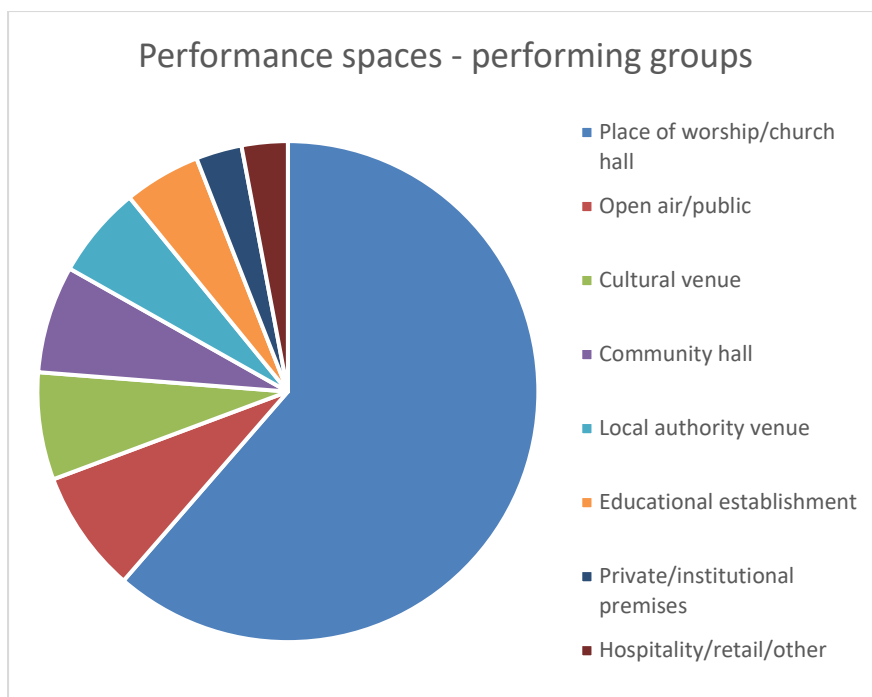
## PART 2 – SPACES FOR PUBLIC-FACING EVENTS AND PERFORMANCES (performing and promoting groups)

### 2.1 What kinds of spaces are used?

**TABLE 6**

	<b>Performing groups</b>	<b>Promoting groups</b>
Place of worship/church hall	62%	52%
Open air/ public (bandstands, squares, railway station, library etc.)	8%	1%
Cultural venue (not local authority run, e.g. theatre, arts centre)	7%	8%
Community hall	7%	6%
Local authority venue	6%	14%
Educational establishment	5%	13%
Private/institutional residence/premises (e.g. care home, hospital, own home, private social club)	3%	2%
Hospitality venues (bars, restaurants, hotels); retail premises (e.g. shopping centres); other: e.g. scout hall, zoo, holiday park, castle, local farm visitor centre; recording sessions/studios	3%	4%

Rounding means totals may exceed/be below 100%



Most performing groups use a mixture of spaces for different events – e.g. singing carols in the railway station at Christmas, performing two concerts a year in the church, holding an open access Come and Sing event in the school, performing for Make Music Day in the library or on the town centre square etc.

Promoting groups are more likely to have a regular venue they use and which their audiences will grow to identify as connected to that promoter.

Note: hires tend to be for one day which will include a full rehearsal or a sound check (for professionals being presented by promoters), then a performance).



**Both performing and promoting groups' most used performance venues are churches (62% and 52%).** This makes sense as they are everywhere our members are, i.e. in all communities, small, large, rural, urban, unlike dedicated arts or music venues.

But beyond churches...

**Performing groups'** next most used types of venues are open air spaces, then a group of four other types of spaces used about equally. Between them, these account for 33% of performing groups' events.

**Promoting groups** rely more on local authority venues and educational establishments, for 27% of their events. But it is only 3 other types of venues (local authority, educational spaces, non-local-authority cultural venues) where they hold the next 35% of their events.

But for both types of groups, **churches are significant**, given their advantages:

- They are everywhere in the community – in walking distance of most homes
- They are already primed, from their religious background, to engage with the community
- They are usually affordable
- They are large (a choir of 200+ or a full symphony orchestra of 65-80 people with instruments need space for themselves and an audience)
- They can also be intimate and thus well suited to the chamber music presented by promoting groups
- They usually have great acoustics for unamplified music, which is what most Making Music members perform or present
- They are often attractive historical buildings, so well suited to a special occasion, an event, to invite audiences to
- They are accessible, being hyperlocal, frequently with parking. (Other access needs may not be so well met, e.g. toilets or building access for people with impaired mobility.)
- They often have ancillary rooms to be used for storage, e.g. instruments, tea breaks etc.
- Often, they have a piano or an organ that can be used to accompany, e.g. the choir or the soloist (relevant to both performing and promoting groups)
- Usually they are free-standing buildings, i.e. no issue with noise pollution for residents

### Comment

**Given the significance of churches as spaces (and their many advantages over almost any other kind of space), it is of concern that so many are under threat of closure.**

The threat comes from three sources;

- The church authorities, of all denominations, are centrally deciding increasingly to close churches, as the number of worshippers declines, and the cost of maintenance, for often significant and/or listed heritage buildings, goes up and up
- Churches/church halls are often run by volunteers. These are harder to come by if the base of worshippers gets smaller, where they have been traditionally drawn from; and volunteering is itself endangered, in a society with changing work- and life-patterns
- Regulation is ever-increasing, meaning volunteers are now having to deal with growing responsibilities around fire, health and safety, anti-terrorism, and more. This is hard for them, scary, even, and leads to loss of volunteers and difficulties recruiting new ones.

These are significant threats, difficult to address, as these buildings are owned by religious (independent) authorities, not by the state, so levers of influence are limited. Making Music is

engaging with the building owners in constructive dialogue, to understand how our members' activity can support churches' sustainability and enhance their status as community-hubs.

**Other types of venues for performances are also under pressure.**

**Local authority venues** are either being considered for sale or have considerably raised their fees in recent years to respond to their increasingly drastic budgetary crises.

**Non-local-authority cultural venues** have also been beset by funding issues and raised hire prices in recent years. Many of them, especially single-art form ones (less so arts centres which often have more in common with community halls, with a variety of activity), also remain stubbornly less permeable and accessible to community-led groups than other types of venues, often focussing exclusively on their primary purpose of professional arts.

**Community halls** face similar pressures to churches in terms of volunteers, regulatory red tape and coping with infrastructure that may need updating, renewing or future-proofing (e.g. heating, solar panels etc.), without much access to relevant funding.

**Educational establishments** offer some hope: they often have suitable spaces and need to earn additional money. Making Music is seeking to facilitate better access by promoting to educational establishments the value of hiring their spaces to music groups. Private schools are often more receptive to this message.

Finally, we advise music groups to think outside the box and **consider different spaces** in their community, e.g. sports clubs, scout halls, dance spaces, pub rooms, cinemas etc., in order to increase their options if/when they have to move rehearsal venue in particular. In this survey, we think the data show **they are beginning to do so in increasing numbers**.

## 2.2 COSTS

TABLE 7

**Performing groups – 2022 venue hire cost per concert**

Type of venue	£0-250	£251-500	£501-750	£751-1000	£1001-1500	£1501-2000	£2001+
Place of worship/ church hall	57%	27% = 84%	8%	2%	3%	2%	2%
Open air/ public space	100%						
Cultural venue (not local authority)	29%	11% = 40%	6%	13%	9%	8%	23%
Community hall	80%	17% = 97%	1%	-	1%	-	-
Local authority venue	36%	18% = 54%	7%	7%	10%	9%	12%
Educational establishment	65%	16% = 81%	8%	8%	2%	2%	-
Private/institutional residence/premises	100%						
Hospitality, retail, other	100%						

Rounding may mean some rows do not add up to 100%

To note: many of the **entirely free venues**, e.g. open air/public spaces, care homes, are often not booked by performing groups: they are instead invited to perform by the local authority, a festival, a charity or community event etc.. Also, some few of our members own their own

venue (therefore free); and some commented that they paid for their performance venue by sharing ticket income in an agreed formula.

Of the chargeable venues, adding the lowest two brackets together reveals Community halls as front runners of affordability (though only used for 7% of events) with 97% of them in 2022 charging below £500 for a performance hire, followed by churches (84% in 2022 charged £500 or less), with educational establishments hot on their heels (81% below £500).

Many cultural venues (not local authority owned/run) as well as local authority venues were more affordable than we anticipated – with 40/54% respectively charging £500 or less per hire in 2022 – but were also most represented at the top end of expenditure, with 23% of cultural venues charging over £2,000 (bearing in mind these will include prestigious venues such as the Queen Elizabeth Hall, The Glasshouse Gateshead etc.). Local authority venues presented a mixed picture, with a significant number represented in each cost bracket and 12% charging £2,000+. These would most likely be larger venues.

Looking at top prices, only 7% of churches, 4% of educational establishments and 1% of community halls cost more than £1,000 for a performance hire in 2022. But **40% of non-local-authority run cultural spaces and 31% of local authority venues charged more than £1,000 even back in 2022**, once again explaining groups' preferences for other types of performance spaces. These figures will have risen since then, given inflation.

**TABLE 8**  
**Promoting groups – 2022 venue hire cost per concert**

Type of venue	£0-250	£251-500	£501-750	£751-1000	£1000-1500	£1500-2000	£2000+
Place of worship/ church hall	80%	16% =96%		2%		2%	
Open air/ public space	100%						
Cultural venue (not local authority)	42%	17% =59%		8%	25%	8%	
Community hall	100%	=100%					
Local authority venue	40%	20% =60%	27%		7%		7%
Educational establishment	87%	13% =100%					
Private/institutional residence/premises	100%						
Hospitality, retail, other	86%						14%*

Rounding may mean some rows do not add up to 100%

\*single residential event of more than one day

Note of caution for data on promoting groups – these are based on only 73 respondents, so variances may look significant, but are unlikely to be statistically meaningful. Nonetheless, they show trends and the bigger picture, especially when combined with performing group data, as below in Table 10 (Table 9 is a comparison performing/promoting groups).

Perhaps unexpectedly, promoting groups do use open air as well as (to a lesser extent) the other free spaces as performing groups. The same caution applies: these spaces may be free because the group is invited to perform/curate a concert, rather than promoting it themselves (e.g. as part of a festival of which we have about 70+ in membership).

Of the chargeable venues, again the most affordable are churches, community halls and educational establishments. Promoters spend less than performing groups on churches due to the size of their events: mostly, they present chamber music size concerts (classical, jazz, or folk) that require smaller spaces, whereas a choral society with orchestra is likely to book a very large church or cathedral. The need for smaller venues is also the likely reason for lower costs by promoters hiring local authority and non-local-authority cultural venues.

Looking at top prices for promoters, in 2022 only 2% of churches and 14% of local authority venues cost them more than £1,000 to hire, but 33% of non-local-authority cultural venues.

**TABLE 9**  
**2022 Cost comparison performing/promoting groups**

Type of venue	£0-500		£501-1000		£1000-1500		£1501-2000		£2000+	
	Perf	Prom	Perf	Prom	Perf	Prom	Perf	Prom	Perf	Prom
Place of worship/ church hall	84%	96%	10%	2%	3%		2%	2%	2%	
Open air/ public space	100%	100%								
Cultural venue (not local authority)	40%	59%	19%	8%	8%	25%	9%	8%	23%	
Community hall	97%	100%	1%		1%					
Local authority venue	54%	60%	14%	27%	10%	7%	9%		12%	7%
Educational establishment	100%	100%								
Private/institutional residence/premises	100%	100%								
Hospitality, retail, other	100%	86%								14%*

Rounding may mean some rows do not add up to 100%

\*relates to a single residential event, i.e. more than one day

**TABLE 10**  
**2022 Costs performing/promoting groups combined**

Type of venue	£0-500	£501-1000	£1000-1500	£1501-2000	£2000+
Place of worship/ church hall	90%	6%	2%	2%	1%
Open air/ public space	100%				
Cultural venue (not local authority)	50%	14%	16%	9%	12%
Community hall	98%	1%	1%		
Local authority venue	57%	20%	9%	5%	10%
Educational establishment	100%				
Private/institutional residence/premises	100%				
Hospitality, retail, other	93%				6%

Rounding may mean some rows do not add up to 100%

Yellow – free/below £500 per hire

Green – next most affordable

Blue – most expensive

***Overall, for performing and promoting groups combined, local authority venues and cultural venues not run by a local authority (e.g. theatres, arts centres) are the most expensive to hire for performances and events, with 24% and 37% respectively charging £1,000 or more. They also tend to be the larger/largest venues available to our members (apart from the cathedrals regularly used by a small percentage of performing groups).***

### **Comment**

Larger and aspirational venues, such as the Royal Albert Hall, Liverpool Cathedral or Glasshouse Gateshead, are as essential to the flourishing of our groups as the smaller hyperlocal spaces that provide the bulk of rehearsal and performance spaces for our groups – the churches in number one place, the community halls, the educational establishments.

**It is therefore important that the building owners and managers of these larger spaces understand the important role they play for the leisure-time music ecology and how they can support it – and best benefit themselves from an interaction with it, in terms of hires and promotion of their venue to a greater and perhaps different audience.**

Free spaces, including open air ones, play a more significant role for our members than we had anticipated. Partly, this may be financially motivated – venue hires have been rising steadily post-Covid, with increases in energy and staffing costs, etc. It may also indicate a greater proportion of our members now being booked to perform, rather than promoting concerts themselves. Finally, it may also indicate a shift to a greater number of members taking their music to people, rather than inviting audiences in. This can only be a good thing if it brings groups' activities to the attention of a wider range of people in their community and spreads joy unexpectedly in spaces as diverse as shopping centres, railway stations, care homes, hospitals, high streets and parks. Perhaps that is also a legacy from Covid times.

**Spaces for regular and for performing activity remain a top issue for Making Music to lobby on. More information on our #MakeSpaceForMusic page on our website.**

## **2.3 Accessibility (performance venues)**

**Performing groups** - 84% of respondents said all the venues they use are accessible for disabled people, 16% said that some of the venues were accessible. No respondents used only venues with no access.

**Promoting groups** – 90% of respondents said all the venues they use are accessible for disabled people, 8% said some of the venues were accessible, only 1% (one single respondent) used a venue with no access.

### **Comment**

These answers – with only between 9% and 16% of venues with no or limited access for disabled people – are better than the national data (Office for National Statistics 2022) which show that 26.6% of disabled people found it difficult to access cinemas, sporting events and music venues. Whilst the data are not directly comparable, to our mind the trend shows our members are aware of, and prioritise, access for disabled people as much as they are able to in the limited range of venues available to them for hire.

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