

Topic 5 – Venues for rehearsals and performances

SUMMARY REPORT

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 heavily, and perhaps too much so, on churches (62%). The next 33% of their 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 use of 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.

In 2022, the most frequently reported cost bracket per hour was £16-30.

Instrumental groups paid 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 some free spaces, but this may be because groups don't promote their own concerts in them, but are booked to perform/curate a concert, e.g. festivals, bandstands, private/closed premises, hospitality, retail, heritage attractions etc..

Of the 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 in 2022 charged 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) charged over £500 for a one day hire (2022 data).

What are the challenges?

Finding the right spaces has always been a challenge, but in recent years this challenge has in some cases become insurmountable and has prevented music groups from 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 by work/life pattern changes in the last decades
- Regulation puts increasingly onerous burdens on volunteers who may feel uncomfortable taking responsibility for such matters as anti-terrorism and therefore leave

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.

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