

BBC cuts – Westminster Hall debate today

Tommy Smith, OBE, is spearheading the backlash against proposed cuts by the BBC in their programming of jazz, classical and folk music.

On Tuesday Pete Wishart MP, also a well-known keyboard player formerly of Runrig and Big Country, will chair a Westminster Hall debate at 4pm – Support for the smaller musical GENRES.

[Watch here.](#)



Dr Tommy Smith OBE

Smith had arranged a meeting with the BBC in Glasgow last

week. Those present included: Donald Shaw (Celtic Connections / <https://donaldshaw.net/about/>), Simon McKerrell (Piper, Professor in Media and Music at Glasgow Caledonian University <https://simonmckerrell.com/music/>), Colin Currie (Renowned Percussionist <https://www.colincurrie.com>), Alison Thewliss MSP (Vice Chair / APPJAG <https://appjag.org/parliamentary-jazz-awards/>) and Tommy Smith. In attendance from the BBC were Steve Carson (Director of BBC Scotland), Louise Thornton (Head of Commissioning), and Gareth Hydes (Commissioning Editor for Radio, Music and Events).

The musicians were clear that they are united in their vision as the BBC's decisions to cut Jazz Nights, Classics Unwrapped and Pipeline lessens the broadcaster's contributions to the creative economy and support infrastructure.

Smith said: "Talented, young, aspiring, emerging musicians and composers trying to get their foot on the ladder must have a "proving ground" on BBC Radio Scotland.

"They won't now because the removal of Jazz Nights, Classics Unwrapped, and a dilution and redistribution of Pipeline are disconnecting a vital piece of the Scottish music "ecosystem and infrastructure" – And doing so at a time when the Scottish Government are spending millions just getting started with the tech industry. And there are parallels between Scotland's "Chief Entrepreneur" Mark Logan's Tech Scalar program that supports the infrastructure for start-up companies and what you, the BBC and we have all contributed to improving the Scottish musical landscape over the last 35 years.

"We all fought, dreamed, developed, and provided pathways and infrastructure for our emerging Scottish artists, and that impact and those inspirational success stories are set in history, although there is much more we can do in the future. But, unfortunately, we believe the BBC is failing and excavating a crumbling hole in the "infrastructure for

musicians and composers.”

The decision has sadly was already made last month with no consultation with professionals in any of the smaller genres. Smith said: “It was evident there was nothing on the table to negotiate.”

Alison Thewllis MP said after the meeting: “Jazz Nights, Classics Unwrapped and Pipeline are a significant showcase for Scottish talent, a resource that BBC Scotland should be protecting and promoting. Unfortunately, following the meeting, I am none the wiser as to the decision-making process and the rationale for these brutal cuts to Scottish cultural broadcasting. I urge the BBC to reconsider this damaging decision.”

Smith concluded: “The BBC had no positive plan for the future, except for a youth competition (which we started in 2007). The winner will be left in a void. And there are sporadic tracks, most likely of the one-note variety, to be played on the afternoon show amongst chat, film, and pop culture. The Gaelic and English versions of Pipeline will be merged into one. How will that work? Classic Unwrapped, Jazz Nights, and Pipeline are all buried alive with so much life to give.

“What a tragedy! After an hour, we all left disheartened, as if leaving a funeral.

“We don’t claim that Jazz, Piping, and Classical music have greater aesthetic merit than other kinds of music; our genres are relevant to society and the economy and are used as soundtracks to every walk of life, from education, film, dancing, celebration, and national identity.”

Next steps may include a report to OFCOM the broadcasting regulator.



Paul and Charlotte Paterson jazz musicians pose at the front with Tommy Smith OBE in the middle of the Edinburgh musicians who are campaigning against the proposed BBC cuts. PHOTO 2023 The Edinburgh Reporter