

# Tommy Smith heads petition to save BBC Scotland programmes from being axed

**BBC Scotland has publicised its plans to wind up shows including Classics Unwrapped, Jazz Nights, and Pipeline.**

But not if Wester Hailes born jazz musician, Tommy Smith, OBE, has anything to do with it. He has begun a [petition](#) to save the programmes from the BBC cuts. Smith said: “I say “Now is the Time” to expand Jazz, Classical, and Folk, on BBC Radio Scotland, not cut its head off and make invisible a music which is flourishing in Scotland and internationally.”

As part of a group of jazz, classical and folk musicians who have written an open letter, Smith is adamant that the cuts must be reversed.

The letter reads: “In recent years, jazz has flourished, with up-and-coming artists achieving national and international recognition. As the home of the Edinburgh International Festival, Scotland is at the centre of the global classical music world, and piping is critical to representing national identity at home and abroad. But, for a small country, we punch well above our weight.

“The continuing success of our music industry – at the centre of cultural life here at home and in representing Scotland on the global stage -depends entirely on the infrastructure to support and champion emerging artists.

“The broadcaster’s decision comes at a difficult time for all areas of the cultural and creative sectors. The pressures on the music industry are acute. However, we must do everything possible to protect the infrastructure supporting our fragile yet world-leading ecosystem at this pivotal time.

“The Scottish Government, through their meticulous study of other countries’ cultural sectors, clearly understands that arts and culture contribute significantly to a free and healthy society, and already in Scotland, the creative arts industries contribute £5.5 billion directly to Scottish GDP.

“The BBC have a long and laudable history of supporting more minor genres and up-and-coming artists, as well they should. Their doing so is their civic duty. However, these cuts run contrary to the BBC’s statutory mission to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain.

“The effect of these cuts will be devastating for Scotland’s classical, jazz and piping scenes.

“We have engaged directly with BBC leadership at the highest level to reverse this terrible decision. We have been invited to meet the Head of Commissioning, Director of BBC Scotland, and Commissioning Editor for Radio, Music and Event.”

Yours Sincerely, The Folk, Jazz, and Classical musicians of Scotland



Tommy Smith PHOTO Derek Clark

## **PETITION**

Smith has begun a petition [here](#) which has already been signed by more than 4,000 people who do not want the programming cuts to be made.

Illustrated with a photo of jazz legend, Charlie Parker, Smith explained the significance of the photograph. He explained: "This is the photo of Charlie Parker I had on the wall of the bedroom I shared with my two brothers in Wester Hailes when I was learning the tenor saxophone aged 12; Parker was a daily inspiration.

"Charlie 'Bird' Parker recorded "Now is the Time" in 1945 and it has a recurring musical figure for those who know it. Martin Luther King Jr. used the exact phrase in 1963 in his 'I Have a Dream' speech, breaking the rule of three and stating "Now is the Time" four times.

“But, as they say, things always happen in threes, so for all the BBC licence-paying JAZZ listeners in communities around Scotland – I regretfully announce that a BIRDY has tweeted in my ear that your national radio station has abandoned your art form, muting a triumphant genre and turning down the dial on our future JAZZ stars and fallen heroes like Parker. As a result, three shows, JAZZ NIGHTS (which currently airs weekly for a couple of hours, hidden away in a corner, late on Sundays) and CLASSIC UNWRAPPED, will be slashed, and possibly PIPELINE too.

“Eastwards, across the turbulent North Sea, in Norway, their swinging station, at NRK, drives every style of JAZZ, 24 hours daily; I even heard the SNJO and my own albums played there.”

## **MUSICIANS SPEAK OUT**

Scottish Album of the Year winner and Mercury Prize Nominee Fergus McCreadie said: “When I was 15, I made my first radio appearance as part of the Young Scottish Jazz Musician. When I was 17, I played my composition live on air for the first time. When I was 19, the programme was the first to play tracks from my very first album.

““Cutting the support at home and removing opportunities for young and established musicians to showcase their music is a very regrettable mistake at a time where we should be championing Scottish culture and music more than ever.”



Fergus McCreadie Trio. Scottish Album of the Year Award.  
Photo: Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)





Nicola Benedetti, CBE, Haymarket Yards, Edinburgh, 13 August 2021 © 2021 J.L. Preece

Other musicians offered these comments:

*“Axing these programmes is to perform a heartbreaking disservice to the irreplaceable role they have played in the lives of musicians and music lovers across the country and all parts of society.”* **Nicola Benedetti, CBE**, Director of Edinburgh International Festival.

*“This decision will have a devastating impact on Scottish music. Without JAZZNIGHTS, new and established artists will struggle to find a reputable outlet to broadcast their art and reach audiences. I hope our First Minister Nicola Sturgeon takes action to save these vital programmes!”* **Georgia Cécile**

## **– Jazz FM Award 2022**

*“I, and many of my contemporaries, have spent decades working with the BBC to find a forward-thinking voice for Scotland’s diverse cultural output. It’s a real shame to see this apparent back step. I hope that considered and respectful discussion might bring about an alternative resolution to the proposed situation.”* **Phil Cunningham**

*“The thrust of your new policy is like a self-inflicted BBC Radio Scotland suicide pact to push you further into the tailspin of a death spiral. We musicians have to band together to save you from yourselves.”* **John Wallace, OBE**

*“I feel it’s imperative that BBC Radio Scotland supports jazz, other forms of music, and performing artists based in Scotland. Scotland has so much young talent that needs to be heard.”* **Dr Martin Taylor, MBE**

*“BBC Radio Scotland’s support of jazz in this country is an essential part of the infrastructure in developing as a creative and performing artist living in Scotland. The presence of a Scottish-based Jazz Radio outlet expands our identity as a country worldwide and is integral in developing our home-grown artists.”* **Laura Macdonald – Saxophonist**

*“We must fight to save this and the other shows. The BBC is renowned the world over for its support for culture and the arts. Why is BBC Scotland abandoning this vital activity and damaging its own reputation?”* **Sir James MacMillan**

*“We at Scottish Opera stand in solidarity with those across the musical community, who are petitioning to reverse this decision. We urge BBC Scotland not to turn their backs on Scottish art forms and audiences, particularly when things are almost back to normal after the pandemic.”* **Scottish Opera, General Director Alex Reedijk**

*“Radio Scotland seems to be in full retreat from Scottish*

*culture. Where is the poetry and literature? Now they are threatening to cut jazz, classical and piping programmes. We have a thriving arts and music scene in Scotland – why not on our national radio?” Kathleen Jamie, MAKAR of Scotland*

*“Jazz Nights on BBC Radio Scotland has been significant in allowing opportunities for many emerging young jazz musicians to broadcast and promote their own music. It just doesn’t sit right to have been awarded the BBC Young Jazz Musician and then to have the volume turned off here in Scotland at the mains before there is even a chance to play! C’mon BBC give us a chance!” Ewan Hastie, BBC Young Jazz Musician of the Year 2022*



A Grey Day in Scotland PHOTO Derek Clark