

PRESENTATION BY THE ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL
 ORCHESTRAS OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE PORTFOLIO
 COMMITTEE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE

Chairman/Lady Chair, Honourable Members.

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to address you today and to answer your questions. My name is Shadrack Bokaba and I speak to you today in my capacity as chairman of the Association of Professional Orchestras of South Africa (APOS), A section 21 Company which acts as the employer association for the Cape Philharmonic, Chamber Orchestra of South Africa, the Eastern Cape Philharmonic, the Free State Symphony and the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestras. Its objective is to lobby for funding and to share resources where possible.

More specifically, I approach you today with special pleadings for the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra (JPO) in which I play the violin. I am also the executive director of the South African Music Education Trust (SAMET) which has very close ties with the JPO, a relationship with which I shall deal later.

Your department currently funds two orchestras, the KZN Philharmonic and the Cape Philharmonic, to the extent of R3.77 million each. Our understanding is that in the last Budget allocation a similar amount was allocated to the Gauteng, but later diverted to Abdullah Ebrahim's jazz project. Let me say at once that I, like all South Africans, am a great admirer of Abdullah and his work and am grateful that the Department is supporting his project, but I would prefer it if it were not at our expense!

Let me tell you something about the JPO.

It was formed by a group of committed musicians in 2000 following the demise of the National Symphony Orchestra. The JPO strives to be nationally and internationally recognised as South Africa's foremost philharmonic orchestra, performing music that incorporates the greatest accomplishments of classical and South African genres.

May I just pause here to explain to you that we don't see ourselves so much as players of classical musical, but providers of orchestral music. That is to say, while inevitably a lot of the music we play comes from the

classical European tradition, we are in constant search for indigenous music and for classical music from cultures such as Indian, Chinese and

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Japanese. That fact that the vast body of notated work comes from the European masters such as Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Mozart etc makes it inevitable that much of our repertoire comes from these composers, but this is not to say we are Eurocentric. We don't regard our repertoire as European but universal.

We pride ourselves in the fact that we include at least one indigenous work in all of our seasons and were the requisite funding available, we would go out into the townships and the rural areas to capture traditional music, notate it and orchestrate it so that it could be preserved for future generations. That is one of our missions and one of the passions of our chairman, Mr Walter Mosetlhi, whom many of you would know as a vastly able experienced arts administrator from the North West Province.

The JPO's Performer Development Initiative emerged from the unique situation that the orchestra is owned by its musician. The musicians of the JPO believe that talented South African musicians – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds – should be given the opportunity to work and perform in their own country and in their own communities.

It is this context that our close relationship with SAMET is crucial. SAMET was founded in 1994 to provide music education to children in disadvantaged areas. It has been funded largely by the private sector and has provided music education to thousands of children in Alexandra Township, Kayelitsha, and Gugulethu, Mafikeng, rural projects in the North and North Western Province and already musicians of a professional standard are emerging from the 16 music education projects has run or is till running.

Three years ago a loose association was formed between the JPO and SAMET, in terms of which SAMET would draw on JPO musicians for its teaching pool. The association was further developed two years ago when the JPO and SAMET moved into shared offices and agreed to share administrative duties. It is envisaged that this association will be even further advanced in the near future under the urging of the JPO chairman, Mr Mosetlhi, who sees synergies in combining in one person the executive directorship of both bodies.

This, Honourable Members, makes the JPO unique in that it has a performing and training facility under one roof. Since all SAMET's students come from disadvantaged areas and since those who qualify for orchestral positions will inevitably make the JPO this first port of call as professional musicians, it follows that the "browning" of the JPO which is already taking place, will accelerate and, in due course it is my belief that the orchestra will be demographically representative.

But unless the JPO is a viable permanent orchestra, based in Johannesburg richest and most populous city, there will nowhere for the young musicians being trained by SAMET to go. Such a place, in my submission, is the JPO, which is already a world-class orchestra, performing for the citizens of Gauteng and charging as little for tickets as it possibly can so that its concerts can be accessible to as many music lovers as possible.

The JPO seeks to ensure the ongoing sustainability and growth of music traditions through nurturing accessibility to the broad community. As has been shown, the JPO is committed to the development of musical talent, thus creating a truly representative South African Orchestra with local musicians of a world class standard. The JPO also aims to drive a silver stake through the heart of the notion that classical music performances are elitist and eurocentric. We are here to show that we are an African orchestra, playing universally admired music by universally acknowledged musicians.

Our mission is:

- To ensure the financial sustainability of the JPO as a viably funded city orchestra. (Currently, we are neither really financially sustainable nor a permanent city orchestra!)
- To nurture, train and develop world class musicians

- To ensure that classical music of all genres serves all communities within the Gauteng region and beyond

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- To encourage a world class, uniquely South African classical music industry
- To play a meaningful role in music education, both formally and informally

The core values that underpin the JPO's approach its business are:

Excellence

- Understanding our context within South Africa and the communities we serve
- Dynamism and imagination
- Sustainability
- Diversity
- Innovation

Honourable Members, not only is Johannesburg the biggest city in South Africa and its biggest contributor to GDP, but it also the gateway for millions of tourist, business and recreational, to Africa.

As such, it deserves, in our submission, a permanent orchestra of international repute. That it has an orchestra at all is a tribute to the devotion, sacrifice and sheer hard work of freelance musicians and a couple of paid administrators. Johannesburg deserves more and the JPO, we think deserves the support, through your department, of the central government, because as I have suggested, a vibrant JPO will represent in the eyes of international, African and inter-provincial visitors not just Johannesburg or Gauteng, but South Africa itself

May I finish by quoting from the Minister of Arts of Britain'

"Music," he said, transcends the passage of time and has been doing so since time immemorial. What is it about the opening motif of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony or Louis Armstrong's What A Wonderful World? It is the instinctive realisation that we are not the first to be moved by these timeless sounds. We remain linked to audiences long gone, because that refrain still evokes the same emotion for listeners today as it did when it was first heard.

Honourable Members, we ask for your support in providing the musicians and the music to evoke the emotions that spell peace and goodwill.

We're not, after all, asking you to build us an extravagant concert hall - not that would mind if you did! - we are merely asking you to help us keep our musicians in work and in South Africa.