

28. 3. 04.

Michelle McCarthy  
BBC Charter Review Team  
DCMS,

Dear Madam,

Thank you for your letter of 23.3.04. I am glad to have this opportunity of raising what I believe to be a major deficiency in public service broadcasting: failure to make use of the facility provided by TV vastly to extend to the general public access to the performing arts.

Season by season our national institutions, RNT, RSC, RO, ENO, ON, RB, BRB, the major orchestras, produce work of the highest quality which is accessible only to the tiny proportion of the public able to attend the live performances.

The output of these bodies during the 2002/3 season included

- 36 different productions by the RO and RB,
- 5 different productions by ENO (season curtailed)
- 21 different plays by the RNT and RSC,

from which the BBC broadcast two operas and one ballet.

It is left chiefly to the commercial channels, Artsworld and Performance, to provide regular performances of opera, ballet and concerts, predominantly by foreign companies, (and very good too,) but for TV viewers here, domestic performances are mainly non-events, a sad waste.

It could reasonably be expected that one of the essential functions in the remit of a publicly funded broadcaster should be to include, in its service of education, information and entertainment, coverage of the activities of the major performing arts bodies so as to provide the broadest selection possible to the public at large.

The ideal in a new BBC regime would be a channel comparable with Radio 3. However, relays of 2 performances a year, say, from each of the major companies would be a start and should at least give the public some insight into their work, without too much strain on BBC schedules, given the amount of time allotted to other national activities, particularly sport.

Such a remit would clearly require the collaboration of the other bodies involved who could fairly be expected to welcome the wider presentation of their work and who are all clients of the Arts Council, which is keen to promote outreach, and from which they receive substantial financial support. If such public funding is justified for the present limited access, greatly increased access would provide even greater justification for support.

I very much hope that this issue will be pursued in the debate on the future of the BBC and appropriate provision made, under a new dispensation, for proper access through TV to the performing arts for the general (and paying) public.

On the general question of funding for the BBC, my own view is that the fairer method would be provision from general taxation as for other forms of public service, education, health etc.. For the government to fix the level of grant revenue for a period of years, as it now does with the level of revenue from licences, does not seem any more likely to affect the BBC's independence and should be more easily administered. Subscription charges for some specialist channels should not be ruled out.

Yours sincerely,

Alan C. Brierty

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