

Why musicians must care about music governance

Trevor Lyttleton MBE, composer, lawyer and campaigner, discusses the importance of musicians' rights being legally enshrined

When Finnish composer Jean Sibelius was asked why he spent more time with businessmen than musicians, he said – 'When I'm with businessmen they talk about beautiful things like art and music, and when I'm with musicians they talk about money'. That is why musicians depend on legal and institutional frameworks that determine whether they are protected or overlooked. Governance does not constrain creativity – it protects and enables it. My own experience as a composer, including a Broadway Grammy nomination in 1980, taught me that talent alone is not enough. Creative opportunity depends on the integrity of the systems that safeguard it.

That conviction led me to establish The Philip & Dorothy Green Trust (PDGT) in 1995, as solicitor and Court of Protection Deputy for Dorothy Green, widow of the distinguished film composer Philip Green. The Court approved my proposal in her statutory will that part of her estate be held in trust for young musicians and composers. I was delighted to select Making Music as beneficiary. The Trust received a lump sum and royalty income and has supported outstanding emerging talent for three decades – evidence that governance decisions have lasting artistic impact. These principles must apply within our major institutions.

In the 1970s and 1980s, as a member of the Performing Rights Society (PRS), I campaigned to reform PRS after discovering that 86% of members of this de facto monopoly had no right to vote, attend AGMs or inspect accounts. After sustained campaigning in the media, Parliament and courts – supported by a cross-party group of MPs – reforms followed. All members were enfranchised, voting procedures became transparent, and interest-free loans to senior executives ceased. The dispute over disclosure of voting lists contributed to what became known as the 'PRS amendment to the Companies Act 1982', strengthening members' rights in guarantee companies.

The reforms were welcomed in the media and Parliament as a victory for democracy, not least by US Corporate Watchdog Lewis Gilbert and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in 1996.

PRS later acknowledged in its 2015 Centenary Report that the structural reforms I initiated in 1975 led to significant change and Parliamentary scrutiny. Those reforms were grounded in a simple principle: creators deserve democratic oversight of the bodies that collect and distribute their income.

Today, artificial intelligence, streaming economics and global copyright enforcement are reshaping the landscape. Without transparent rules, accountable boards and enforceable rights, creative work is vulnerable.

At 90, I remain engaged in these debates. I wrote a letter to the Daily Mail (Music Money, 1 September 2025) on the impact of streaming economics on emerging British musicians and questioned whether independent creators are adequately represented in current policy discussions.

Read more about Trevor Lyttleton's work at **trevorlyttleton.com**

Photo: Trevor Lyttleton honoured by the National Lottery as a 'Game Changer' with an art installation portrait on St James's Park Lake, 2024 - 'I never thought I'd walk on water!'

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