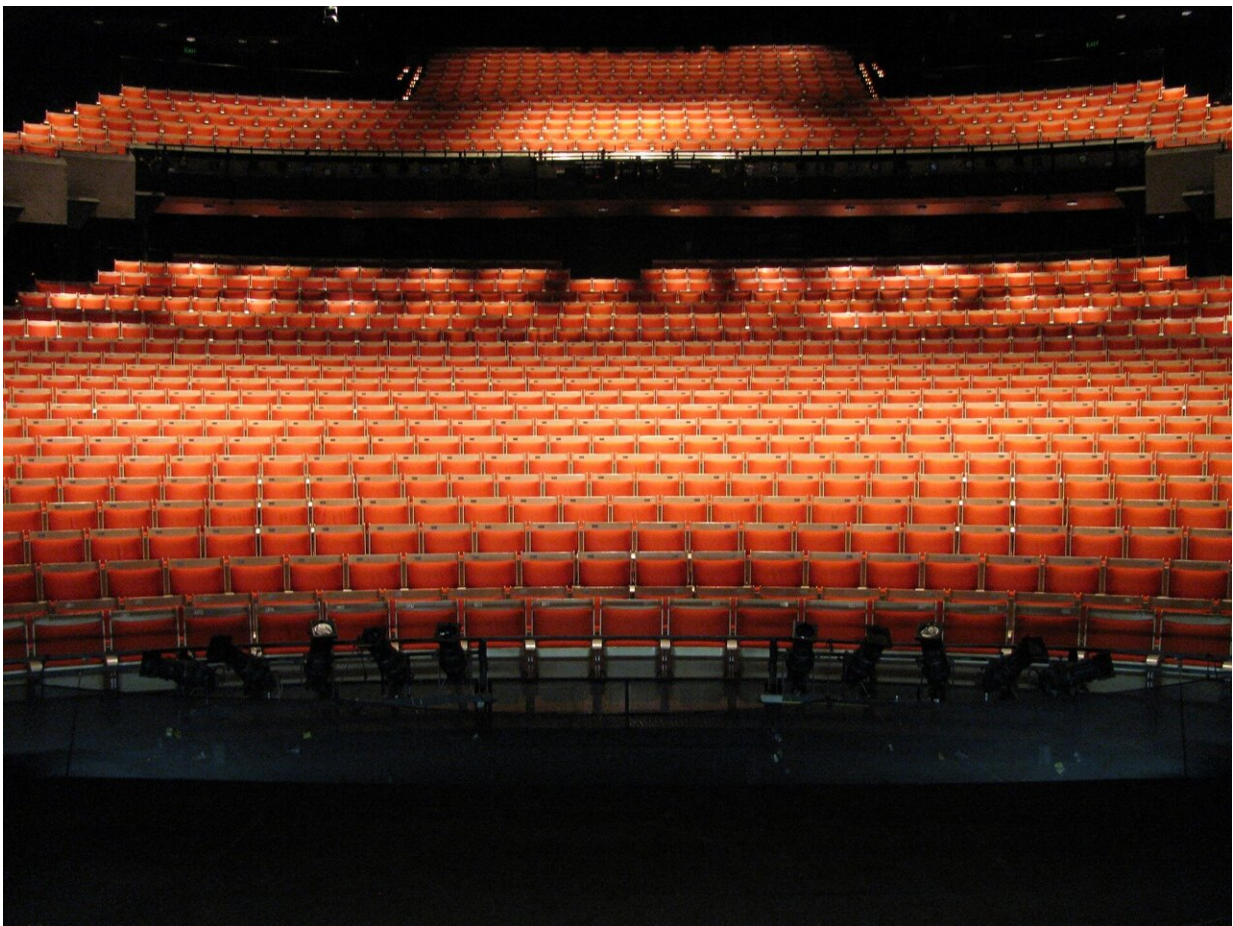


Performing arts under threat from future global shocks unless lessons are learned from pandemic

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Live performing arts are facing an existential threat from a range of potential global shocks unless there is significant and sustained investment in resilience planning, according to a new international study.

Climate-related emergencies, political unrest, economic pressures, and public health crises all threaten the viability of drama, dance, opera and other [live events](#), as well as their benefits to society and community well-being.

This is the conclusion of research, led by the Universities of Bristol and Exeter, looking at the varied responses of the G7 nations to the COVID-19 pandemic, saying major lessons must be learned to safeguard the future of the sector.

Commissioned by the British Academy, the [article](#) "Pandemic Preparedness in the Live Performing Arts: Lessons to Learn from COVID-19" has been researched and written by academics from leading institutions across the G7. Unprecedented in its geographical scope, the report was unveiled and discussed at an online briefing on Tuesday, 26 March.

Its five major recommendations are:

- U.K. and regional government should support arts councils and development agencies to establish a clear resilience strategy for live performance
- A U.K.-wide strategy should be developed to ensure that creative organizations, individuals and audiences have access to digital infrastructure, skills and rights frameworks
- Work should be undertaken to better understand the value of culture to society alongside its economic contribution
- Research and analysis is needed of the live performing arts sector's workforce, ecosystem and audience to identify

vulnerabilities

- Addressing skills gaps and recruiting a more diverse workforce are required to improve the sector's crisis response.

"In the course of this research, one of the themes that emerged was that theaters are already having to face the 'next pandemic,'" said co-lead author Dr. Karen Gray, Senior Research Associate at the University of Bristol School for Policy Studies.

"Whether it's Broadway being forced to deal with the impact of forest fires in Canada, [air conditioners](#) stretched to their limits during heat waves, or London theaters having to pump out floodwater, we are witnessing significant challenges to the resilience of the live performing arts sector caused by the climate crisis.

"So, we hope that this report, rooted in the lessons of the pandemic, but applicable to a range of future issues, can offer all parties a constructive roadmap to protecting the socioeconomic value of the performing arts."

The report looks specifically at policy interventions by governments and funders during the pandemic, as well as the individual responses by organizations, workers and audiences.

Among the key findings was that the [financial support](#) provided by governments and charities that prioritized individual arts buildings and "flagship" organizations did not "trickle down" to help the sector's substantial freelance creative workforce and grassroots programs. Indeed, the authors say, there remains a lack of understanding at governmental level of how the sector operates.

Also outlined is how major skills gaps opened in the industry because technical staff migrated to film and television, which offered greater employment security. And many workers reported that their [mental](#)

[health](#) was negatively impacted by some of the public policy and discourse, which they felt had undermined the value of cultural activity during the pandemic.

In looking at responses across the G7, the report highlights some of the success stories that might be incorporated by the U.K. in future. For example, in France, the intermittents du spectacle scheme left workers more financially resilient, and Germany's Neustart Kultur program mixed social assistance and project funding.

In Germany and Canada, steps were taken to enshrine the status of culture in legislation, and in the U.K.'s devolved regions, the targeted support offered by the councils of Manchester and Sheffield was founded upon detailed local understanding and consultation, as well as existing investment in infrastructure.

"It is well understood that the pandemic presented an existential threat to live performing arts at all levels," said Pascale Aebischer MBE, Professor of Shakespeare and Early Modern Performance Studies at the University of Exeter, and co-lead author of the report.

"Barred from indoor, in-person performance, companies became dependent on financial support from the state, and many freelance workers left the sector or experienced significant hardship.

"What this report offers is an overview of how G7 countries responded, identifying what worked best and why, and makes recommendations for how the sector might evolve from a reactive mode to one that anticipates future shocks and is better prepared for them. At a time when arts and culture programs face extreme funding cuts across the U.K., their value to community cohesion and societal well-being, as evidenced during the pandemic, needs to be better understood."

More information: Pandemic Preparedness in the Live Performing Arts: Lessons to Learn from COVID-19.

[www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/pr ... learn-from-covid-19/](http://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/pr...learn-from-covid-19/)

Provided by University of Bristol

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