



YOU NEVER GIVE ME YOUR MONEY: Paul McCartney's probably not doing much at the moment

Society needs its artists in the same way as it needs its accountants

ALMOST 15 years working in journalism has been a waste. According to the British government's newly-launched National Careers Service, I should retrain as an actor, someone who manages building contracts or a football referee. Building contracts it is then. Little did I know that those long hours spent trying to get a plumber to fix a leaking bathroom radiator during lockdown weren't a tedious annoyance but valuable training for my future career.

At least I wasn't alone in being baffled by the service's recommendations. Several academics complained on social media that they were told to retrain as boxers. Another said that when they'd put *Inspector Morse's* characteristics through the careers assessment it recommended the famously grumpy but brilliant fictional detective stopped working for Thames Valley Police to become... an IT security consultant.

It was unfortunate that the careers service's quiz was launched in the same week as Chancellor Rishi Sunak definitely did not suggest that all musicians and actors should find a different job.

Mr Sunak insisted that reports he told musicians to retrain were "inaccurate".

Unfortunately, the official transcript of the ITV interview in which he discussed the arts read like an exercise in waffle.

"It is possible to do theatrical performances online as well, and for people to engage with them that way and for new business models to emerge," he said.

"Plenty of music lessons are still carrying on. The same thing happens certainly in my household and elsewhere."

"So, yes, can things happen in exactly the way they did? No, but everyone is having to find ways to adapt and adjust to the new reality and that's what we all have to do. And that's why we're allowing that to happen, but also providing new opportunity for people if

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that's the right vehicle for them."

The issue is that there is no "new reality". The pandemic is changing week by week and restrictions differ depending on where you live. It's difficult to adjust to a situation which is constantly evolving.

Mr Sunak is right in that it certainly is possible for theatrical performances to take place online. Except, if given the option, most theatre-lovers would rather just go to see a live play, with actors on stage. And most actors, even those who have tried hard to adapt to online performances, feel the same way. Even high-quality cinema broadcasts of theatre productions, including NT Live, are never as good as the real thing.

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There have been no live performances since March, no gigs, no plays in proper theatres. Music lessons are happening online but since when was a lesson the same as a performance? Paul McCartney's probably not doing much at the moment. Maybe I should record myself playing *You Never Give Me Your Money* on the piano and get him to give me a few pointers.

Mr Sunak did eventually clarify: "Musicians don't need to retrain. When it's safe, venues need to reopen". But with frightening spikes in the number of coronavirus cases, particularly in the north, it will be months before any live venue will be able to open its doors again. Meanwhile, thousands of people working in the arts, entertainment and recreation industry have slipped through the cracks in the government's coronavirus support schemes and are unable to access any financial help, bar universal credit.

Arts are often seen as a hobby activity. At school, English literature, art and music were invariably seen as less important than the 'real' subjects of maths and physics. But the arts are what made lockdown bearable for millions of us. Reading novels and poetry,

watching films and listening to music reminded me that there was a world before the pandemic and there'll be a world after, albeit a very changed one.

Maybe the real issue is that we can't expect a government so out-of-touch with most of the electorate to understand the realities of what it is to be a working actor or musician, with an uncertain income at the best of times. Most arts professionals already have a second job – often in the hospitality sector which itself has been badly hit by the pandemic.

It's all very well suggesting different career paths but society needs its artists in the same way as it needs its accountants. The construction industry will be relieved to know I won't be looking at a career change just yet.

ON THIS DAY

OCTOBER 14 1920

'Divided Ireland'

SPEAKING at a luncheon in Belfast City Hall yesterday, Sir Hamar Greenwood, Chief Secretary for Ireland, said the Government were going on with the Home Rule Bill. A system of Special Constabulary composed of 'selected and patriotic men' under the control of the RIC was to be set up immediately.

The Chief Secretary, who was accompanied by Sir John Anderson, Under-Secretary [in Dublin Castle] and Sir Ernest Clark, Assistant Under-Secretary, received a deputation from the Ulster Unionist Council and also a deputation of Labour delegates regarding the question of unemployment.

The Lord Mayor said the post of Chief Secretary for Ireland was no doubt a very anxious one in view of the troubled state of the country. He could assure him that the more he saw of the North of Ireland, the more he would realise how proud they were of their part in the greatness of the United Kingdom and the British Empire.

Sir Hamar Greenwood, who was received with applause, said he had heard them sing the National Anthem and he profoundly regretted that the same Anthem was not sung in all parts of the country. The Government would not tolerate an independent Ireland. (Applause.) We believe in the imperial and strategic unity of these islands. The real bar to the peace of Ireland and the passing of a Bill that will enable Irishmen to govern their affairs is a campaign of deliberate, callous murder, arson and intimidation. No government – no civilised government – could tolerate that. We are breaking that terror.

The Government's Bill, he said, dealt with the great reality, namely that Ireland was historically divided into two main parts. He regretted it but there was the fact and they were the first Government that had faced the fact. (Applause.) He was a Canadian... He believed that the setting up of two Parliaments in Ireland would not carry with it any of those disabilities and awful consequences that some were prophesying.

Unemployment Raised

WE understand that the purpose of the Labour Conference was to find the cause of unemployment. A Councillor [John Harkin] attempted to raise the case of the Expelled Workers. However, strong opposition was raised to this by members of the Ulster Unionist Labour Party and on the assurance of the Chief Secretary that he had the matter under consideration, the subject was dropped. (A Lloyd George Liberal, Greenwood's sympathies lay with the Unionists who dominated the deputations he met. In this atmosphere of mutual admiration, the issue of the 8,000 expelled Catholic workers was easily brushed aside. The UULA was set up by Carson as a working-class satellite.)

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