

**Welcome Address delivered by Sophie Jones, Chief Strategy Officer, BPI
Liverpool Sound City+ Conference, Friday 2nd May 2025**

Good morning and welcome to this special edition of the BPI's 'In Tune with Tomorrow' conference – our first outside London.

I'm Sophie Jones, the Chief Strategy Officer of the BPI, which, as you may know, is the trade association that represents the UK's world-leading record companies and labels businesses.

We have some 500 members, and we are also home to The BRIT Awards, the Mercury Prize, and the Official Charts, as well as programmes like the Music Export Growth Scheme, which we run.

We are long-standing supporters of Liverpool Sound City and are proud to have Modern Sky UK as BPI members. So, we are particularly delighted to be joining forces with our hosts for today's conference. Our sincere thanks to them, and to all of you for joining us today.

It's especially exciting to be in Liverpool, which, as one of the UK's leading music cities, not only boasts an iconic heritage, but remains a powerhouse of brilliant artistic endeavour with an always-vibrant music scene – home to acclaimed new bands like Zuzu and Red Rum Club; world-beating indie labels such as Modern Sky UK and 3 Beat Records; and specialist creative arts schools including LIPA and the new ICMP.

Our role as the BPI is to champion British music and its artists by helping to create a policy and business environment in which our label members thrive, can take the risk to back artists and innovate, and, in turn, enable the whole music industry to grow.

As I was thinking about these opening remarks for today, I found a phrase rattling around my head: "*Come Together*". Maybe because being in Liverpool brought to mind one of my favourite Beatles tracks, or perhaps because – like the band – the music industry can be even more of a force to be reckoned with when it really comes together.

And we know that it tends to come together best when facing big challenges.

So that makes me think that these words really came to mind because right now the British music industry as a whole is facing some of the biggest challenges in its history.

From the development of the creative and technical skills that future generations and our industry will need, to the future of grassroots live music. And from fiercer-than-ever global competition in the streaming economy, to the impact of Artificial Intelligence. Challenges so significant, we need to stand together to confront them.

So, I'm going to speak to this "*Come Together*" theme today as a bit of a rallying cry for how we strengthen music and support creators into the future.

Across the series of panels and presentations we've arranged for today, we'll explore how all parts of the music ecosystem come together to support artists and creators in their careers.

Because music really *is* an ecosystem in which many different components work together to support each other and help creators thrive. Those of you who are embarking on a career in music whether as an artist, through a label, or in some other way, will know this better than anyone.

You will be able to identify the touchpoints in your career so far – charting your journey from your first introduction to making music (whether at school or elsewhere), to starting out in gigging, recording, and to setting your sights being on the global stage.

Our BPI label members exist to enable this success, by supporting creative education including through our relationships with specialist creative schools The BRIT School and ELAM in London and the new college we are opening in Bradford; investing in and supporting artists through A&R and marketing & promotion - well over £2bn in the UK in the 5 years between 2018-2023.

And they do this alongside colleagues working across the live sector, and in publishing, management, studios, and beyond. As the BPI, we support our label members in supporting their artists – celebrating their successes with our award shows, supporting their first forays into exports with our Music Export Growth Scheme.

Of course, artists now have more ways to give expression to their creative talent, and with much greater choice in how to release their music.

A great many are keen to entrust their careers and recordings to a record company (getting signed is still a big deal) whether a major or an indie, but others can choose another path, such as following the 'DIY' route and releasing themselves, or pursuing lots of other options in between.

We all want as many artists as possible to succeed and be able to enjoy sustainable careers, and a great many more are doing just that. It's why labels exist, and it's in the label's mutual interest to do everything possible to make their artist's music as popular as possible. Artist and label are in it together.

Of course, it has always been and continues to be the case that just how much an artist's music generates in sales and streams, depends on how much they are listened to. Which is where labels can make the biggest difference - by providing investment, strategic guidance and marketing and promotion to relevant audiences.

The challenges the whole music industry faces go well beyond what we can do to address issues within the UK sector alone. Streaming has opened up – quite literally – a world of opportunity and British music still shines brightly.

If you managed to catch this year's BRIT Awards, for example, you would have seen Charli XCX recognised for fulfilling all her exciting promise – her global success with 'Brat' helping her to claim a haul of 5 awards, including 'Artist of the Year'.

We also witnessed the next generation of brilliant rising stars break through, including the likes Myles Smith, Lola Young, and The Last Dinner Party – who have all announced their arrival in a major way in the past year or two.

And taking a look at the 2024 Official Charts – whilst these also pointed to the growing competition faced by British artists, they also told the brilliant story of women having their best ever year. They claimed the No.1 spot in the Singles Chart for the majority of weeks – 34 in fact – as well as half of the year's Top 20 albums for the first time.

So, in some ways, it has never been a more exciting time to be in music but, it's also the case that it has never been tougher.

As the Competition & Markets Authority noted in 2022, "*Streaming has offered new opportunities for global reach in a way that was previously unimaginable*" but it also highlighted the increased competition artists now face, when more than 100k new tracks are uploaded to streaming services daily. In the pre-streaming era, just a few thousand new releases would come out yearly, but the number of artists being streamed in the UK rose from 200k in 2014 to around 400k in 2020.

In a world shaped by streaming, those of you here today that already are recording, or soon hope to be, will be competing not just with these new releases, but with the tens of millions of tracks that have been released since the very start of recorded music.

And whilst British artists still punch above their weight on the world stage, we are not quite the dominant force we once were. Whereas in 2015 British music accounted for around 17% of the music consumed globally – admittedly a chunk of this down to Adele – the figure now is closer to 8 or 9%. Still not bad for just 1% of the world's population, but a signal of the hyper-competitive global music economy, with new markets fast-growing in Latin America, Africa and in Asia.

And we now have the new frontier of Artificial Intelligence to navigate. While promising many exciting prospects as a tool to aid music creation, to connect with fans and enhance the listening experience, the opportunity can only truly exist where the creator or the creative business has choice and control.

What we cannot allow to happen is that control – in the form of the copyright that underpins content value and protection – is taken away. And yet, despite the unarguable cultural and economic (global and personal) value of music, this is precisely what the UK Government is proposing to do. By effectively reversing the principle of copyright to take away guaranteed

rights, and effectively handing access to scrape music without permission, unless you opt out of allowing AI firms to do so.

The BPI is firmly opposing these proposals.

Instead, we believe in an ‘opt-in’ system of licensing – where creators and labels are empowered to permit (or refuse) permission to AI companies to use their music to train AI systems. And this, in turn, depends on AI companies being transparent and keeping records of the material they are using to train AI models and what use they are putting it to. Without this, AI is a black box – and we cannot know whose music has been ingested to train it.

We need AI companies to open that box up, so we can see what’s inside, and decide what they can use and how much they need to pay to use it. Crucially, the music industry and the wider creative industries have, I am pleased to say, really come together to push the Government to protect our rights and make sure AI is developed fairly.

You may have seen the ‘MAKE IT FAIR’ campaign splashed across the front of every national and a number of regional newspapers early in the year – and supported by many of the artists that we were with us at The BRIT Awards in March. A clear example of how collaboration can be a powerful force.

We still have a long way to go to change Government minds – and if you feel strongly, please do support the ‘MAKE IT FAIR’ campaign, or even write to your MP. More details can be found at (the snappily titled): www.dontletAIstealourmusic.com

To shape how policy makers can help the music ecosystem thrive and grow across the piece, I today update and restate the calls to action that we set out at our first *In Tune* event in April last year:

1. Prioritisation of the education and skills needs to support talented people and the needs of the sector
2. That Human Creativity and the creative industries – and the copyright that sustain them – must be among the Government’s top policy priorities – especially in relation to AI
3. For a healthy regulatory climate that enables investment in human creativity
4. And that British music is kept globally competitive, including through the successful Music Export Growth Scheme which the BPI runs with Government to support predominantly independent artists to build fanbases overseas.

BPI will continue to press for all these key priorities as it looks to create an environment in which artists and music can thrive, and that is also diverse, inclusive and sustainable.

So, in conclusion, today we'll look to unpack and discuss all this and more as, collectively, we explore how creators can build success and navigate the challenges ahead – in what we hope will be a cohesive and united music industry.

We have some wonderful speakers lined up for you – specialists in their respective sectors, with years of accumulated expertise, and drawn from all parts of the music community. A big thanks in advance to all of them.

I hope today will be enlightening, and provide you with inspiring insights and advice, wherever your music career takes you next.

And what better way to start us than someone who has a fantastic overview of the whole industry from leadership roles in labels, the iconic Abbey Road Studios and a brilliant perspective on music and the intersection of creativity and digital disruption. Please join me in welcoming COO at Warner Music Isabel Garvey to the stage.

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