

cians, he adds, are having to deal with proposed government cuts to their salaries as civil servants. 'It's been pretty bad in Germany for a year now and some orchestras have been on strike.'

The union leader hopes not to be put in the position of advising MU members to accept pay cuts. Sustaining public funding for the arts in the UK, he observes, makes far greater economic sense than shaving it. A 20% reduction in the arts budget would do serious and lasting damage to the sector, while only returning a microscopic sum to the Treasury. Smith recently made the point to Andy Burnham as part of a delegation led by the National Campaign for the Arts, in company with the Association of British Orchestras' director, Mark Pemberton, and representatives from theatre, opera and dance. The minister made supportive noises. 'But he fired a warning shot across our bows by suggesting that the spending round's third year won't now be as big,' recalls the man from the MU. 'Unless there's an almighty turn around, we're going to see those spending figures considerably reduced.'

John Smith sighs. The feeling of déjà-vu, he says, is more than spooky – it's seriously depressing. 'We've had a few years when things have been pretty good. But now we're back to arguing about why government should support the arts. We thought those arguments had been put to bed, and that the main political parties supported the need for the arts. Now, in a period of instability, they've been thrown out of bed again.'

Lobbying and advocacy were already high on the ABO's agenda before the present recession seized the British economy. Mark Pemberton is adamant that any cuts to the existing arts budget will affect all ABO members, among them symphony and chamber orchestras not in receipt of direct public funding. 'Our priority at present is to make the strongest possible argument for maintaining public investment,' he says. 'Even those orchestras that do not benefit directly from funding from an arts council rely on a network of promoters and venues that have local authority support – there is a public sector component to

a vibrant orchestral sector. We were disturbed by the secretary of state's suggestion that the third year of the funding round might be less generous than originally stated. He has asked for our help in arguing to Treasury that third-year funding should be maintained at the levels set in the last comprehensive spending review.'

Orchestras on the Arts Council's list of regularly funded clients, adds Pemberton, are already committed to programmes, conductors and soloists based on figures set for the present funding settlement's final year. 'Clearly, it's destabilising to have this suggestion about reneging on the public spending commitments for 2010/11,' he comments. 'We're also very nervous about what will be in the comprehensive spending review for 2011-14. We're under no illusions that there will be major cuts to public expenditure, regardless of which party is in power. But we have to make the case, in partnership with other arts organisations, to preserve what is such a tiny sliver of public expenditure.'

While arts policy shapers and representative organisations are lobbying to sustain public spending next year and beyond, arts managers could be forgiven for asking what practical steps they might take now to overcome recession. Bruce Woodings, an Associate for sfwork (The Centre for Solutions Focus at Work) and a member of the BBC Philharmonic's advisory board, is ready with an answer. He draws on over 30 years in business, including long spells in oil and gas manufacturing and fashion design, and the experience of shaping the collaborative management partnership now followed by the BBC's six performing groups. His work as a managerial team and executive management coach is guided by Solution Focus approaches to business performance improvement. In plain language, Solution Focus aims to bring simplicity to the complexities of modern business.

'Everyone knows that the music industry is undergoing significant changes as a result of technological improvements and the way we listen to music,' Woodings observes. 'It is further impacted

by the severe economic challenges we face today. So many people, faced with a dilemma, will say "Well, that's not how we do things" or "We can't do that". They don't look to the future; they're only concerned with the present problem. When we talk about Solution Focus, we want to discover what it is that people would like to have happen to them in the future. If a business is to survive, it must explicitly understand how best to satisfy its future customers' needs. Regardless of whether you have a strategic plan for your company or not, you must reassess your approach if you are to continue to be a key player in the industry.'

Bruce Woodings sends me details of a Solution Focus-based programme. Its four steps carry advantages of simplicity and clear logic:

#### STRATEGY CRAFTING

Developing the basis for competitive advantage

#### STRATEGY DIRECTION

Developing strategic direction

#### STRATEGY ACTION

Aligning actions

#### PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Measuring success

'The first three points focus on creating the direction and the last point on leading achievement,' he explains. 'The question in today's world is about how we positively deal with the complexities of an uncertain future.'

Woodings' four-step programme offers practical responses that can be applied to arts organisations of all shapes and sizes. He cites its use by the BBC Philharmonic's general manager, Richard Wigley, and his management team. They developed a vision of what a world-class orchestra might look like, before setting the goal of securing a major international tour as one of its key strategic directions.

'It's essential that the organisation aligns all actions on its strategic direction objectives, viewing it as part of the ongoing journey towards achieving their future vision,' Woodings notes. 'This journey needs to be taken in small steps, usually

Think tank (from left): Alan Davey, Bruce Woodings, John Low, Mark Pemberton, John Smith

