

# Diary from St George's Bristol, week 5: 'Money from the Arts Council has given us a fighting chance'

In her weekly bulletin, the St George's chief executive charts the efforts to ensure this beloved concert venue survives the Covid crisis

**SUZANNE ROLT**

10 July 2020 • 7:00am



**A**s a rule, Sunday evenings are a time for winding down and getting an early night before everything starts up again on Monday morning. Not this week though.

At 9pm my phone screen lights up with the first in a rapid succession of messages that continue without break into the small hours. Oliver Dowden, the Culture Secretary, has played a blinder, catching us all unawares by choosing this moment to announce a startling and unprecedented [£1.57 billion rescue package](#) for the arts. This is a real game-changer, restoring that precious commodity that has been so conspicuous by its absence: hope. Speculation is rife as to who will be the winners, who might fall through the gaps, and how soon the cash will start to flow, but the overwhelming sense is of a disaster narrowly averted.

In the meantime, we continue to do what we can, booking in two private recordings this week (with local group Spindle Ensemble and the pianist Daniel Inzani), without audience, of course, and responding to a very tentative inquiry from Radio 3 for a broadcast lunchtime concert – with no audience – in the autumn. We're giving more thought too to outdoor performances which are likely to receive the green light any day now.

When Tuesday arrives, it's a little like Groundhog Day as I find myself back in exactly the same position as last week, anxiously awaiting news of the emergency response funding from Arts Council England. If anything, the pressure on St George's has intensified because if we fail in our bid for help and are forced to close in September we'll also lose out on the chance to bid for a slice of this new rescue package. It's not always easy to stay ahead of the game but I'm deploying every trick I can think of. I'm reminded of an old Looney Tunes cartoon where the hapless hero is tied to the front of a runaway train, frantically throwing down pieces of railway track so that there's a line for the wheels to run along. I do wonder how long I can keep this up for.

Thankfully, I don't have to wait too much longer because news finally arrives that we've been successful with our grant bid and Arts Council England has awarded us a generous £111,416. We wanted something in the region of £150,000 but ACE could not have done more, valiantly trying to spread the funding in a way that saves as many arts organisations as possible across the entire country. Our gratitude is immense and it means we now have a fighting chance of getting through this crisis.

I call as many of the staff team as I can to share the good news and there's elation all around. We can cover our overheads for the next few months, delay redundancies and find some breathing space to reset our plans.

It's the first tantalising glimpse of a future for St George's and I intend holding on to it for dear life.

**Donate at [stgeorgesbristol.co.uk/support-us](https://stgeorgesbristol.co.uk/support-us). Look for 'Listen In' on the site to watch the lunchtime concerts**