



Placido Domingo hails copyright extension

By Geoff Meade

Monday, 12 September 2011

Opera star Placido Domingo welcomed an extension of copyright protection across Europe today as "great news for performing artists".

The singer, who is also chairman of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), was speaking after EU governments endorsed plans to increase the copyright limit from 50 to 70 years.

The European Commission originally pressed for a virtual doubling of copyright protection to give musicians and performers copyright safeguards for 95 years.

Today's compromise brings Europe's artists more in line with the copyright protection offered to authors and composers, who are covered for 70 years beyond their deaths.

But any extension was originally opposed by the then UK chancellor Gordon brown, who rejected the case as "weak" after ordering a review of copyright rules.

That response was attacked at the time by major recording stars including Who singer Roger Daltrey and veteran hit maker Sir Cliff Richard, who said they were speaking for thousands of artists who provided entertainment but did not earn fortunes which could see them into old age.

Domingo said: "The decision to extend the term of protection for recordings in Europe is great news for performing artists.

"Artists at the start of their careers will benefit from an increased pool of revenue that

will be available to invest in new talent. Established artists can benefit from their work throughout their lifetimes. This is especially important today when licensed digital services make music widely available online."

He said extending copyright protection "reflects the important role performers play in the success of songs by narrowing the gap between the protection offered to recorded performances and that offered to compositions".

Frances Moore, chief executive of the IFPI, which represents about 1,400 major and independent recording companies in 65 countries, said the extension was "a victory for fairness" which would encourage more investment in new musical talent.

"Over 38,000 artists and performers petitioned for this extension, supported by right holders from across the European music sector. Their calls have been heeded."

An increase in EU copyright protection to 95 years - in line with America - was first proposed by the European Commission in 2008, but MEPs reduced the figure a year later to 70 years.

Today's endorsement of the lower figure at EU talks in Brussels means the change will be implemented in two years - in time to rekindle copyright fees of early works by music industry legends and veterans including Sir Cliff and Sir Paul McCartney.

Helen Smith, executive chairman of Impala, the Independent Music Companies Association, said: "Narrowing the copyright gap with the USA and other territories is an essential move for Europe to capitalise on its world-leading position in creating music.

"Those most affected by the extension will be hundreds of thousands of individual artists and performers, as well as thousands of micro, small and medium-sized music companies which produce so much of the innovative and diverse music released in Europe today.

She added: "At a time when certain interests seek to weaken copyright for their own purposes, this sends a vital message that the right of creators to earn a living is taken seriously by the EU."

The move was widely welcomed by musicians and other figures from the UK music industry.

Geoff Taylor, chief executive of the British Phonographic Industry, said, "An exceptional period of British musical genius was about to lose its protection.

"As a matter of principle, it is right that our musicians should benefit from their creativity during their lifetimes, and that they should not be disadvantaged compared to musicians in other countries."

Musician and broadcaster Jools Holland said: "Artists put their hearts and souls into creating music and it is only fair that they are recompensed in line with the rest of Europe. It's important that creators get paid for the work they do and this extra 20 years is much deserved."

Jazz singer Dame Cleo Laine: "It's never easy to make money in the field of jazz so this extension, which will mean extra royalties, is critically important."

Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera said: "I have been very fortunate in my own music career and worked with many recording musicians around the world to whom these extra revenue royalties will be significant."

Live music campaigner and former Undertones frontman Feargal Sharkey said: "It's great that recorded music gets the cultural recognition it deserves, bringing those rights more in line with the rights of other areas of the creative arts."

Europe's commissioner for the single market Michel Barnier said the copyright change would make a real difference to performers.

"With increasing life expectancy, the previous 50-year protection term was clearly insufficient," he said.

"Despite the fact that their music and songs are still popular, today many performers are left without income when they are older.

"The increase to a 70-year term means performers can still receive remuneration when their music is played once they have retired.

"Today's agreement gives performers the recognition and reward they justly deserve for their creative contributions to society and stimulates creation for future generations of music fans."

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