



Charles Hazlewood

MUSICIAN · TED SPEAKER

Most senior teams are full of experts who are used to being the smartest person in the room. Getting them to move as one, at pace, without flattening the specialism that made them valuable in the first place, is the hard problem. Inclusion compounds it: the leader who can only conduct a room of people who look and sound alike is running a narrower organisation than they think.

Charles Hazlewood is a conductor, broadcaster and founder of Paraorchestra who uses the craft of leading world-class orchestras to show senior teams how trust, authenticity and disruption produce performance under pressure.

Charles Hazlewood's 2026 Biography

Why organisations work with Charles Hazlewood

- He founded the world's first large-scale professional ensemble of disabled and non-disabled musicians, Paraorchestra, and can speak from direct experience about building a high-performing team by designing the assumptions out, not papering over them.
- His TED talk "Trusting the Ensemble" has been watched by more than half a million people and is used inside leadership programmes because it demonstrates, live on stage with a string ensemble, how trust is given, withheld and rebuilt in real time.
- He works regularly with the Royal Concertgebouw, the Philharmonia, the London Philharmonic and the BBC Concert Orchestra, so when he talks about getting sixty independent experts to act as one organism, he is describing his day job, not a metaphor.
- He converts conducting into a usable language for executives: how a leader holds the room without micromanaging it, how authority sits alongside vulnerability, how a single bad cue ripples through a group for the rest of the performance.
- He has been recognised by Making Music with the 2023 Sir Charles Groves Prize for outstanding contribution to UK musical life and holds an honorary doctorate in Social Inclusion from Bath Spa University, which locates him credibly at the intersection of artistic excellence and inclusive leadership.

Biography highlights

- Founder and Artistic Director of Paraorchestra, the first large-scale integrated ensemble of professional musicians with and without disabilities.
- Won first prize at the European Broadcasting Union Conducting

AVAILABLE FOR

- After Dinner Engagement
- Panel Participation
- Speaking

CHARLES'S SPEAKING THEMES

- Corporate Culture
- Creativity
- Culture Transformation
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
- Inclusive Leadership

LANGUAGES: English

Competition, Lisbon, 1995.

- Conducts the Royal Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Philharmonia, the London Philharmonic, the Swedish Radio Symphony and the BBC Concert Orchestra.
- Delivered the TED talk “Trusting the Ensemble” in 2011, viewed more than half a million times; one of three TED and TEDx appearances.
- Three Sony Radio Academy Awards for BBC Radio 2 music programming; Sky Arts Ambassador for Music since 2021.
- Awarded the Sir Charles Groves Prize by Making Music in 2023 and an Honorary Doctorate of Social Inclusion by Bath Spa University in 2025.

Biography

A good orchestra looks nothing like a command hierarchy once the baton comes down. Sixty independently brilliant specialists have to act as one living thing, at speed, with no time for committee. Charles Hazlewood has spent thirty years inside that problem, and has built a second career translating what he has learned back out to people running companies.

He came up through the classical mainstream. An organ scholarship to Keble College, Oxford, first prize at the European Broadcasting Union conducting competition in Lisbon in 1995, and a conducting life that now runs through the Royal Concertgebouw, the Philharmonia, the London Philharmonic and the BBC Concert Orchestra. Over 100 world premieres sit on the record.

In 2011 he founded Paraorchestra with director Claire Whalley: the world’s first large-scale professional ensemble of disabled and non-disabled virtuosi. Its closing-ceremony debut at the London 2012 Paralympics, performed alongside Coldplay, reached a stated global audience of around a billion. In 2016 the ensemble became the first orchestral headliner at Glastonbury, with Philip Glass’s “Heroes” Symphony.

His 2011 TED talk, “Trusting the Ensemble”, is the core of his work with organisations. He conducts a live ensemble on stage, withholds trust, restores it, and shows what each choice does to the sound. Making Music awarded him the Sir Charles Groves Prize in 2023 for outstanding contribution to UK musical life; Bath Spa University conferred an honorary doctorate in Social Inclusion in July 2025. The through-line is consistent: a room of experts does not become an ensemble by accident, and the leader’s job is to make the conditions in which it can.

Key speaking topics

- Leadership and trust
- Ensemble performance
- Inclusive leadership and integrated teams
- Creativity under constraint
- Authenticity and vulnerability in leadership
- Culture change through the lens of a conductor

Ideal for

- Executive teams and boards looking to operate as an ensemble rather than a collection of individual stars.
- CHROs and culture leads working on inclusive leadership, talent design, and what real integration looks like beyond policy.
- Leadership development programmes that want an embodied, live demonstration of trust and authority rather than a slide deck.

- Organisations navigating restructure or post-merger integration where the hard task is getting senior specialists to move as one.

Audience outcomes

- A clear, tangible sense of what trust sounds like when it is present in a team, and what collapses when it is not.
- Language for talking about authority and vulnerability in leadership without defaulting to cliché.
- A reframe of inclusion grounded in a real example of professional disabled and non-disabled musicians performing at world-class level together.
- Specific cues for leading experts: how to hold the room without suffocating it, how to signal without scripting, how to recover from a missed entry.
- An unusually memorable session with a live conductor working with a live ensemble, not a talking-head keynote, that tends to be referenced back inside the business for months afterwards.

Charles Hazlewood's 2026 talks & topics

Orchestrating Success

A keynote built around the craft of conducting: how a leader gets a room of independent experts to perform as one, how trust is given and rebuilt, and what happens when you design assumptions about who belongs in the room out of the system.

Key takeaways:

- How trust functions inside a high-performing team, and what breaks it.
- Why authenticity and vulnerability, held together, are a conductor's and a leader's core instrument.
- What Paraorchestra reveals about inclusion when it is treated as a performance standard rather than a policy.

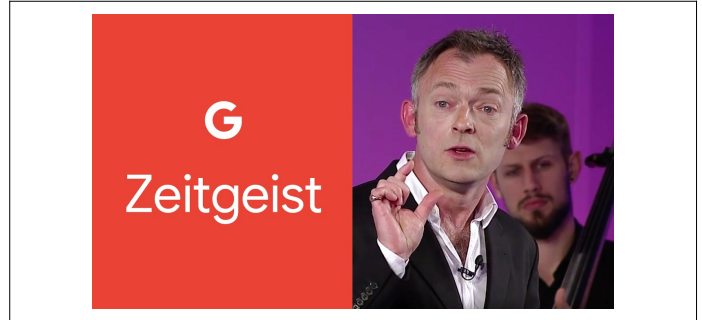
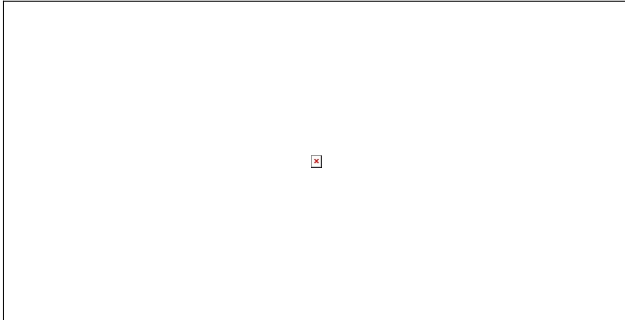
Trusting the Ensemble

A version of the TED talk delivered with a live ensemble where available: the conductor withdraws, restores and redirects trust in real time, and the audience hears the organisational consequence in the music.

Key takeaways:

- Trust as a set of specific, observable behaviours, not a value statement.
- The cost of a single withheld cue across a whole performance.
- How leaders can recover authority after getting it wrong, without losing the room.

Charles Hazlewood's Videos



What Charles Hazlewood's clients say

The face of classical music on television.

The Daily Telegraph

Charles Hazlewood is a major proselytizing force and his energy and enthusiasm are infectious.

The Guardian

Popstar lookalike... he could get anyone interested in music!

The Independent

An evangelist for every age and tradition of music.

The London Evening Standard

Charles Hazlewood is acid-hot!

The Observer

The ever-stimulating musical polyglot.

The Times