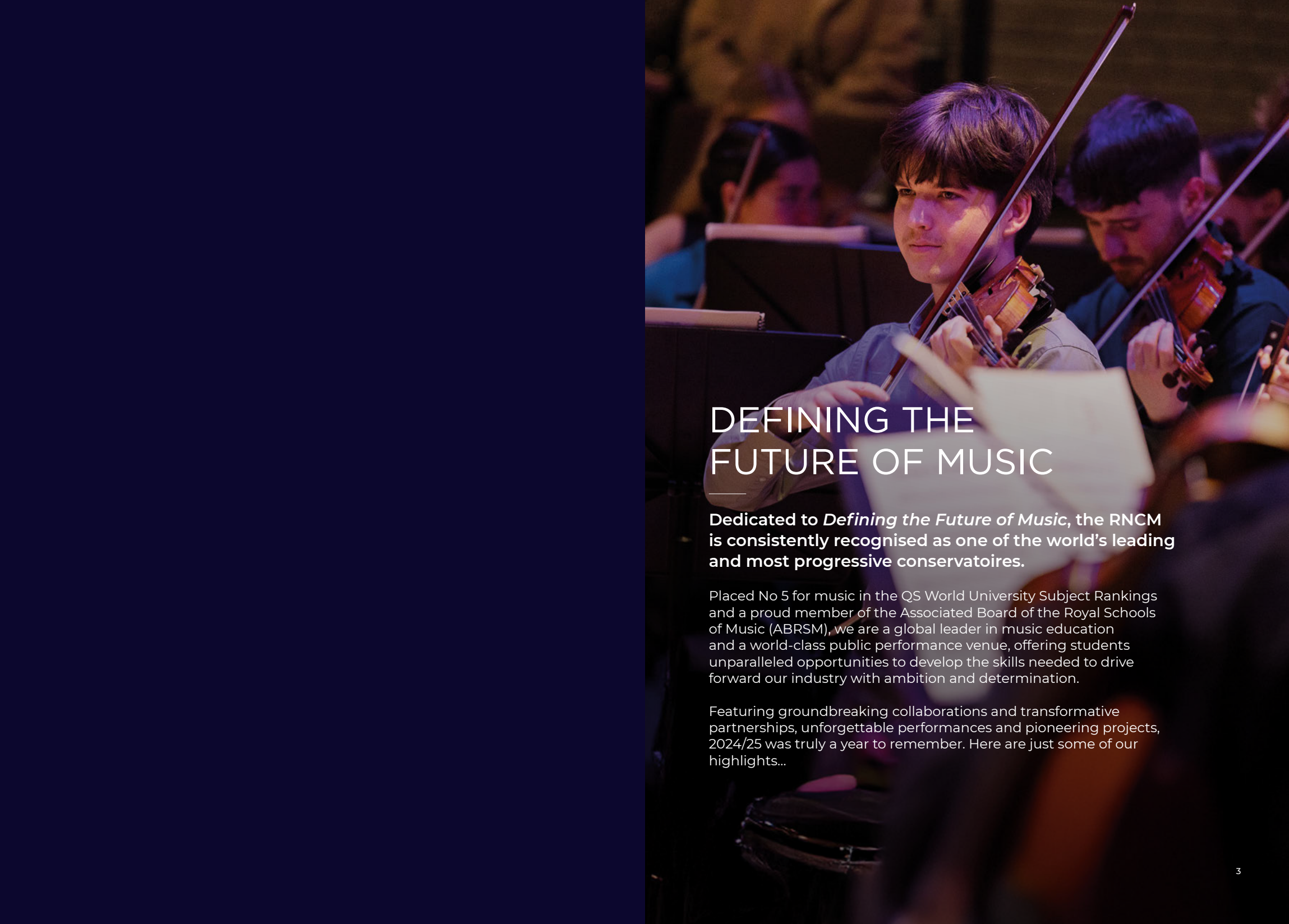


DEFINING THE FUTURE OF MUSIC

Annual Review
2024/25

RNCM
ROYAL NORTHERN
COLLEGE of MUSIC



DEFINING THE FUTURE OF MUSIC

Dedicated to *Defining the Future of Music*, the RNCM is consistently recognised as one of the world's leading and most progressive conservatoires.

Placed No 5 for music in the QS World University Subject Rankings and a proud member of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), we are a global leader in music education and a world-class public performance venue, offering students unparalleled opportunities to develop the skills needed to drive forward our industry with ambition and determination.

Featuring groundbreaking collaborations and transformative partnerships, unforgettable performances and pioneering projects, 2024/25 was truly a year to remember. Here are just some of our highlights...

AT A GLANCE

No 5 for Music

QS World University Subject Rankings

970+

students enrolled across our
degree programmes

£2.86
million

philanthropic support raised

250+

public concerts and events

50+

world premieres

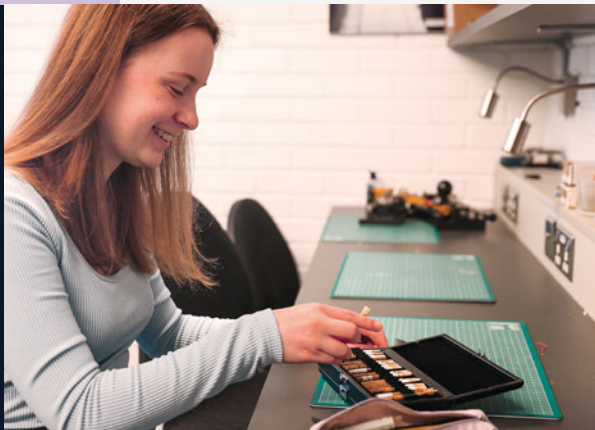
14

public research forums



390+

students benefitted from
financial awards



320+

paid performance
opportunities generated
for students

7,400+

members of the local community
participated in creative engagement
events and music activities

61,000+

tickets sold



3,000+

children and young people participating in
music making opportunities

EXCEPTIONAL TEACHING

RNCM students benefit from unrivalled opportunities to develop their professional and personal skills with experts and organisations from across the music industry. This includes masterclasses, side-by-side performances and workshops, entrepreneurial initiatives, work placements, and independent creative projects.

In a year that saw us introduce His Majesty King Charles III as our new Patron and welcome the first intake to our new Master of Education degree programme, our guests included: bassoonist **Andrea Zucco**; cellist **Hee-Young Lim**; clarinettist **Fàn Lei**; composers **Laurence Crane** and **Roxanna Panufnik**; conductors **Alexandre Bloch**, **Edward Gardner**, **Antony Hermus**, **David Hill**, and **Rory Macdonald**; double bassists **Billy Cole** and **Tim Gibbs**; flautists **Claudia Bucchini** and **Julien Beaudiment**; French hornists **Ben Goldscheider**, **Benoit de Barsony**, and **Alberto Menendez**; guitarist **Gabriel Bianco**; harpist **Louise Thompson**; oboists **Kai Frömbgen** and **Ramon Ortega**; percussionists **Emil Kuyumcuyan** and **Kai Strobel**; pianists **Jean Efflam Bavouzet**, **Julius Drake**, **Richard Goode**, **Sir Stephen Hough**, and **Kathryn Stott**; saxophonists **Lewis Banks**, **Hans**

de Jong, and **Valentine Michaud**; sitarist **Jasdeep Singh Degun**; trombonists **David Bremner** and **Ian Bousfield**; trumpeters **Merrie Klazek** and **Marc Geujon**; violinists **Ning Feng**, **Yair Kless**, **Henning Kraggerud**, and **Jennifer Pike**; violists **Wenhong Luo** and **Roger Benedict**; and singers **Fleur Barron**, **Susan Bullock**, **Elizabeth Llewellyn**, **Dame Ann Murray**, and **Sir John Tomlinson**. Across our Popular Music programme, guests included: singer-songwriter **Tim Burgess** (The Charlatans); bassists **Yolanda Charles** (Paul Weller, Robbie Williams, Hans Zimmer) and **Neil Fairclough** (Queen, Adam Lambert); composer and multi-instrumentalist **Bill Laurance** (Snarky Puppy); guitarist **Dominic Miller** (Sting); and drummer **Robert 'Sput' Searight** (Snarky Puppy).





We also welcomed experts from the wider music industry to work with students on entrepreneurship and career development, including: **Kelly Betts** (BBC Introducing); **Alex Brees** (founder and CEO of un:hurd); **Alex Guthrie** (business consultant); **Lucy Hawtin-Smith** (Head of VIP at SJM); **Carl Morris** (entrepreneur: Revolution Bars Group, Cress Clothing, and Yard and Coop); and **James Sargeant** (International Business Manager, Yamaha).

13

students enrolled on our new and groundbreaking Master of Education degree programme, established to tackle the crisis in music education.

100+

students participated in Professional Experience Schemes with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Hallé, Manchester Camerata, Manchester Collective, Opera North, and the Royal Marines Band Service.

100+

students took part in work experience placements across the wider industry, including arts administration, marketing and communications, fundraising and advocacy, and orchestral management.

3

students won the Creative Innovators Award, receiving financial support and mentoring to help them develop their creative projects.

14

students received specialised training to work therapeutically with children and young people in health, care, and special educational needs and disabilities settings, in partnership with professional music therapy organisations Songbirds Music UK and Jessie's Fund.

30

students took part in the RNCM Spotlights series, enabling them to curate and present their own events as part of our public performance programme.

WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH

Research at the RNCM addresses questions on the production, dissemination, reception, and impact of music, new and old.

Aligning closely with our strategic mission to *Define the Future of Music*, the research environment at the RNCM is one in which the creative practitioners and teachers of tomorrow are supported in challenging traditions to contribute to the cultural and social landscape of the future.

Highlights this year included:

- + A six-month collaborative project funded by the Connecting Capability Fund (CCF) from the Research England Development (RED) Fund and led by the University of Manchester Innovation Factory in partnership with the RNCM, Manchester Metropolitan University, and the University of Salford, aimed at **increasing innovation and driving economic growth** across the region.
- + Securing an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Doctoral Focal Award to develop the ***Crafting Care for People, Place and Planet Doctoral College***, a new project supporting research and training in areas vital to the UK's creative economy and societal wellbeing in partnership with the University of Liverpool, the University of Central Lancashire, and 10 regional organisations.
- + Deepening our commitment to **embodied scientific research on music** through a unique collaboration between the RNCM and People with Parkinson's, featuring seven student composers.
- + Presenting **14 public Research Forum talks** featuring guest speakers such as Dr Oded Ben-Tal (Kingston University), Professor David Dolan (Guildhall School of Music and Drama), Professor Pamela Heaton (Goldsmiths, University of London), Dr Emily Payne (University of Leeds), and Dr Laura Ritchie (University of Chichester), alongside our own researchers and doctoral students.
- + Organising **international conferences** held at the RNCM, including the Manchester Music Analysis Conference (with the Martin Harris Centre for Music and Drama and the University of Manchester) and the SEMPRES Spring Conference 2025, as well as New Approaches to German Opera, 1650 – 1830 (with Dalhousie University) held in Český Krumlov, Czechia.



- + Producing around **70 research outputs** including sound recordings, compositions, articles, commissioned reports, dictionary entries, book chapters, and co-edited volumes.
- + Appointing Professor Pamela Heaton as RNCM Honorary Research Professor for her work in music psychology and education, as well as Dr Hongshuo Fan as RNCM Honorary Research Fellow and Professor David De Roure as RNCM Honorary Research Professor and Technical Director of PRISM 2025 - 2028 in recognition of their exceptional and ongoing contribution to the **RNCM Centre for Practice & Research in Science & Music (PRISM)**.

Additionally, we also soft launched a new research management platform to showcase the RNCM's international network of research. To date, the repository boasts over 800 outputs and more than 500 research-led activities, with more to come as the project further develops.

PERFORMANCE AND COLLABORATION

Our live events programme brings together some of the finest and most exciting musicians working in the music world today, providing unparalleled opportunities for our students to train with and learn from the very best.

This year, programme strands included ***Dance:Music*** exploring the powerful synergy between music and dance, ***Inspirational Artists*** celebrating musicians and groups forging their own unique path, and the **RNCM Spotlight** series featuring **30** concerts inspiringly curated by our students.

Inspirational Artists brought an exceptional line-up of performers and collaborators to the College, including the **Elias String Quartet**, **Kantos Chamber Choir**, **Manchester Collective**, **Paraorchestra**, **Scottish Ensemble**, **Sō Percussion** with composer **Caroline Shaw**, and violinist/vocalist **Alice Zawadzki** with multi-instrumentalist **Fred Thomas** and bassist **Misha Mullov-Abbado**. The series also included: mezzo-soprano **Fleur Barron** with pianist **Julius Drake**; renowned pianists **Jonathan Biss**, **Kathryn Stott**, and **Nobuyuki Tsujii**; and sitarist **Jasdeep Singh Degun**, who concluded his two-year tenure as the inaugural RNCM Innovate Fellow. In addition, **Clod Ensemble** and Manchester-based **Company Chameleon** worked with students on *Dance:Music* projects, including a unique off-site event at the historic Victoria Baths (pictured).

Other standout collaborations included: saxophonist **Iain Ballamy** and vocalist **Madeline Bell** with the RNCM Big Band; singer **Tim Burgess** and violinist **Helen O'Hara** with the RNCM Session Orchestra; conductors **Edward Gardner** with the RNCM Chamber Orchestra and **Antony Hermus** with the RNCM Symphony Orchestra; and violinist **Henning Kraggerud** with the RNCM String Orchestra. Inspirational Artist **Fred Thomas** returned to the College to work with our improvisation ensemble MIUAWGA, pianist **Steven Osborne** collaborated with multiple keyboard students, RNCM postgraduate conductors gained experience with the **BBC Philharmonic Orchestra** and the **Royal Marines Band Service**, and string students performed alongside both the **Hallé** and **Manchester Camerata** on separate occasions.





NEW MUSIC

The stimulating environment we provide means that there are exceptional opportunities for new music and creativity to flourish at the RNCM.

Initiatives such as our *In Focus* series of public workshops, masterclasses, and performances enable composition students to develop their craft alongside some of the world's critically acclaimed composers, with many gaining the opportunity to work with professional ensembles while they study. This year, we welcomed **Laurence Crane** and **Roxanna Panufnik** to the RNCM for two *In Focus* festivals, both of which featured new works by our students and performances by our Brand New Orchestra. We also presented our annual **Lab Week**, which encourages students from all disciplines to push the boundaries of traditional music practice and develop their creativity in a 'safe to fail' environment.

Additionally, students on our Popular Music programme received outstanding opportunities to develop and present their own music, with many benefitting from external studio recording sessions and gigs across the city as part of our **Artists Live** series and the **RNCM Session Orchestra: Original Artists** concert.

UNRIVALLED PARTNERSHIPS

This year, the RNCM launched three exclusive creative partnerships to support modern careers in the music industry.

New projects with **English National Opera (ENO)**, **BBC Radio 3 at Audio North**, and groundbreaking ensemble **Manchester Collective** are set to provide innovative opportunities for students and recent graduates to develop core skills in opera, contemporary performance, and broadcast media.

ENO Creative Incubator Scheme

Supporting early career artists to write new operas, bringing fresh voices and narratives to the artform.

Manchester Collective Studio

Supporting postgraduate strings students to take a holistic approach to contemporary performance, including composing new music.

BBC Radio 3 at Audio North

Demonstrating alternative career paths in classical music by offering undergraduates studio production and presenting experiences.

All three initiatives will deepen our relationship with the wider music industry by growing the internationally unrivalled list of close professional partnerships and experience schemes open to RNCM students, including with the Hallé, BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Opera North, and Manchester Camerata.



A young woman with blonde curly hair is playing a flute in an orchestra. She is wearing a black top and a necklace. The background is dark with other musicians and instruments visible.

'One of the strongest indicators of our success is that graduates from the RNCM go on to establish and sustain fulfilling careers in the music industry, finding creative ways to engage with new audiences. They are also committed to making a difference to the lives and wellbeing of others in society, sharing their passion for music by applying their skills across an increasingly wide range of education and healthcare settings.'

Professor Linda Merrick CBE
Principal



INSPIRING UNDER-18S

RNCM Engage is our incredible programme of work that inspires children, young people, and local communities to make music, raise musical attainment, and provide progression pathways to higher music education and beyond.

Alongside our junior conservatoire for young musicians aged eight to 18, the programme incorporates several key initiatives, including RNCM Young Projects, Young Artists, Young Strings, Engage West Cumbria, Engage Brass, and Pathfinder.

THIS YEAR:

1,935

young musicians received bespoke, open-access training and mentoring via RNCM Pathfinder, supporting them to find their own voice and develop independence through ownership of learning.

71

young artists took part in our popular music programme for 11 to 18-year-olds, which this year included two sold-out showcase performances, masterclasses with some of the industry's top talent, and the chance to walk the red carpet at the MTV Europe Music Awards.

1,935

young people in West Cumbria received world-class tuition through Engage West Cumbria, our five-year programme that also offers tailored support and continuing professional development to teachers.

203

musicians aged five to 18 received expert tuition through RNCM Young Projects, our free and targeted series of workshops designed to aid creative, musical, and technical skills.

188

students studied at Junior RNCM, our centre for advanced training for talented young musicians, with **70** receiving scholarships.

112

young brass musicians from local primary schools participated in Engage Brass, the first access project to tackle the decline in brass instrument engagement.

UNITING COMMUNITIES

With a passion for making music accessible to people from all backgrounds, we continue to work in partnership with local communities to implement new initiatives and grow a diverse and creative community of musicians.

THIS YEAR:

2,580+

endangered reels and VHS tapes were conserved and digitised as part of our *Throwing Open the Concert Doors* initiative to safeguard our audio recordings from the last 50 years. More than **900** people from the local community took part in group workshops and other events as part of the project roll-out.

250+

local performers from more than **20** nationalities took part in Explore@RNCM, our all-ages annual celebration of the music within our community.

250+

children across four local schools created and performed our Children's Opera, based on *Treasure Island*. The project also provided a unique training opportunity for **145** RNCM students who worked with, and performed alongside, the children.

50

people aged between 20 and 80 participated in projects with the RNCM Community Chorus, including an uplifting event at The Bridgewater Hall as part of Manchester Classical.



GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

The RNCM is a truly global conservatoire, represented worldwide by the multitude of alumni, professional partners, and collaborators working extensively across the music industry.

Our strong connections with graduates across all years continue to enhance our international reputation and foster the supportive, nurturing environment we proudly promote. Over the past academic year, many alumni joined us for events around the world, including reunions and recruitment drives in **America, Australia, China, and Hong Kong**, and we welcomed multiple graduates back to participate in student Q&As, open day panels, archive campaigns, fundraising appeals, and concerts as part of our public events programme. We also hosted gatherings in Glasgow and Liverpool and were thrilled to confer Associate Membership (ARNCM) on **12** recent graduates during our 2024 Congregation of Awards.

Alongside this, our online community gained momentum through RNCM Connect, with more than **1,800** members currently utilising the platform for professional development, mentorship, and networking, and we continued to build and strengthen our presence overseas as leader of the **International Benchmarking Group**. Established by the RNCM over 10 years ago, this unique network of world-leading conservatoires works together each year to enhance the professional and personal development of young musicians.



ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP

We are proud to say that the RNCM continues to lead the way in environmental responsibility within the conservatoire sector.

Following the successful completion of phase one of our **£6.5 million decarbonisation project** in 2022, work on phase two started in 2024 and is set to be completed in 2026.

This vital stage will see an investment by the RNCM of **£7.1 million** which will deliver ecofriendly benefits and an improved experience to users of our library and link buildings. Key project deliverables include the creation of an innovative air source heat pump (ASHP) network fed from our main building, the replacement of end-of-life environmental control equipment, and the replacement of the whole roof system. The outcome is set to provide a low carbon solution to heating and air-conditioning across this part of our estate, saving the RNCM **£100,000** on annual running costs and **215 tonnes of carbon** each year.

COMPONENTS IN OUR OVERALL MISSION TO REDUCE OUR CARBON FOOTPRINT ACROSS THE RNCM INCLUDE:

New roof and cavity wall insulation

Renewable energy from PV arrays to the main building roof

New ASHP technology

Upgrades to our metering and electrical infrastructure

Improved mechanical and electrical control of our heating and cooling network via BMS

An all-electric backstage lift with regenerative braking

1MW of battery storage

THANK YOU

We know that music can transform lives. We see it every day in the next generation of professional musicians we nurture at the start of their journey, in the inspiring work we do with young people and adults across the region, and in the significant projects and initiatives we're part of which enhance our students' practice and personal development.

This year we raised **£2.86 million** through initiatives such as our Gala Dinner and Annual Appeal, with a further **£600,000** committed to future support. We also celebrated the culmination of the RNCM Piano Fleet Campaign, safeguarding our **132-strong fleet of pianos** for generations to come.

Philanthropy plays a vital role in enabling our students to reach their full potential, and it is because of you – our generous community – that the RNCM continues to thrive. Your belief in our vision and your investment in our students is lifechanging for many young musicians and ensures that we can remain at the forefront of conservatoire education and training globally. Thank you.

We give special thanks to the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), which supports the teaching and learning of music in partnership with the four Royal Schools of Music. We are grateful for the ABRSM's generosity this year for RNCM Student Awards and wider financial support that promotes access to music education, progression, and excellence.





PHOTO CREDITS

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