

RNCM PGR CONFERENCE 2025



6th and 7th May 2025

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Welcome

Welcome to the 2025 Postgraduate Research Conference. As usual, this has been organized by postgraduate research students (PGRs) themselves – the conference is chaired by Dan Baczkowski and Matthew Holmes – and as usual it presents a wealth of work-in-progress from first-year PGRs at the beginning of their research journeys to final-year PGRs on the point of submitting their theses and/or portfolios.

In September 2010 we recruited our first five PGRs to the RNCM research degree programme and, since 2013 when the first PhDs were awarded, there have been a further 45 graduates, with six more pending. I am particularly delighted that Dr Ellen Sargen (2024) – this year’s keynote speaker – and Dr Rachel Johnson (2021), Dr Aled Smith (2018), Dr Naomi Norton (2016), Dr Nellinne Perera (2020), Dr Raluca Matei (2019) and Dr Keith Phillips (2019) will be joining current PGRs to give presentations at this year’s conference. Dr Maria Stratigou (2021) and Dr Simon Callaghan (2020) are also making welcome contributions to a special treat: a PGR performance showcase at the end of the conference organized by Dobromir Tsenov. The names, disciplines and years of graduation of all their peers are listed on the next page.

The current PGRs presenting at the conference include representatives of all the disciplines we offer, which are interconnected and often overlap: performance and musicology; composition and performance, in a wide range of genres including pop; composition and music psychology. This year we will have the pleasure of hearing progress reports from 10 composers: Dan Baczkowski, Hans-Martin Buff, Emma Clarke, Amelia Clarkson, Julia Han, SoYeon Kim, Cassie Layton, Merial Price, James Waide and Songhao Yao; six performers: Cee Haines, Christian Jones, Hwan Hee Kim, Matthew Lau, Rosie Middleton and Dobromir Tsenov; three music psychologists: Kate Andrews, Jacob Barns and Alex Chapman; two music educators: Eleanor Guénault and Jo Sear; and three musicologists: Matthew Holmes, Yangyi Mao and Faith Thompson.

Every one of our PGRs has a team of supervisors and reviewers to support them and their research: primary and secondary supervisors, typically based at RNCM, and a Principal Supervisor at Manchester Metropolitan University. They also have two reviewers who monitor their progress annually. The quality of the research reported at this conference is testament to the experience, expertise and commitment of the members of staff who fulfil these roles. Every one of our PGRs is supported, too, by staff in the RNCM Health and Wellbeing Hub. And conferences such as these could not take place without the help of RNCM’s professional services staff: Catering, IT, Sound and Video, and the Programmes and Assessment Coordinator (PGR), Charlotte Wheatcroft. Huge thanks to them all!

This is my last year as Programme Leader for Research Degrees. It has been the most enormous privilege to have been “in at the beginning” of so many amazing projects carried out by the most talented, creative and hardworking researchers I’ve had the luck to encounter in my academic career. *Thank you.*

Professor Jane Ginsborg

Associate Director of Research
Programme Leader for Research Degrees
Director, Centre for Music Performance Research

Dr Robert Fulford (2013) - Music psychology
 Dr Danielle Sirek (2013) - Music education
 Dr Jacob Thompson-Bell (2014) - Composition
 Dr Emma-Ruth Richards (2014) - Composition
 Dr Gillian Meninchino (2015) - Composition
 Dr Cheryl Duncan (2015) - Musicology (PhD by published works)
 Dr David Curington (2015) - Composition
 Dr Geoff Thomason (2016) - Musicology
 Dr Olga Paliy (2017) - Performance
 Dr Anna Zabuska (2017) - Music psychology
 Dr Jing Ouyang (2018) - Performance
 Dr Kiana Shafiei (2018) - Performance
 Dr Clive Critchett (2018) - Musicology
 Dr Rosamund Cole (2019) - Musicology
 Dr Bruno Heinen (2019) - Performance
 Dr Jessica Beck (2019) - Musicology
 Dr Karin Greenhead (2019) - Music education
 Dr Amir Sadeghi Konjani (2020) - Composition
 Dr Lucy Pankhurst (2020) - Composition
 Dr Silvia Lucas (2020) - Performance
 Dr Mark Dyer (2021) - Composition
 Dr Kerry Baldwin (2021) - Performance
 Dr Jo Yee Cheung (2021) - Music education
 Dr Isabel Benito-Gutierrez (2021) - Composition
 Dr Jason Alder (2021) - Performance
 Dr Bofan Ma (2021) - Composition
 Dr Harvey Davies (2022) - Performance
 Dr David Cane (2022) - Musicology
 Dr Zakiya Leeming (2022) - Composition
 Dr Jack Adler-McKean (2023) - Performance
 Dr Robert Laidlaw (2023) - Composition
 Dr David Bainbridge (2023) - Musicology
 Dr Jennie Hartley (2023) - Music education
 Dr Nate Chivers (2023) - Composition
 Dr Davide Sciacca (2023) - Performance
 Dr Melvin Tay (2024) - Performance
 Dr Anna Appleby (2024) - Composition
 Dr Matthew Brown (2024) - Composition
 Dr Caroline Clegg (2024) - Performance
 Dr Tywi Roberts (2024) - Composition
 Dr Elspeth Brooke (2025) - Composition

Conference Schedule

Clicking a name will navigate to the abstract and remote access link for that presentation

Tuesday 6th May		
Session 1	Lecture Theatre	
10.00	Welcome Address - Prof. Jane Ginsborg	
	Chair: Prof. Jane Ginsborg	
10.15	<u>Emma Clarke</u>	
10.45	<u>Suting (Julia) Han</u>	
BREAK: 11.10 - 11.30 Lower Concourse		
Session 2	Lecture Theatre	Studio 8
	Chair: Joanna Sear	Chair: Meriel Price
11.30	<u>Alex Chapman</u>	<u>Rosie Middleton</u>
12.00	<u>Christian Jones</u>	<u>Amelia Clarkson</u>
12.30	<u>Kate Andrews</u>	<u>Cassie Layton</u>
LUNCH: 12.55 - 2.15		
Session 3	Lecture Theatre	Studio 8
	Chair: Rosie Middleton	Chair: James Waide
2.15	<u>Meriel Price</u>	<u>Dr Rachel Johnson</u>
2.45	<u>Songhao Yao</u>	<u>Faith Thompson</u>
3.15	<u>SoYeon Kim</u>	<u>Matthew Holmes</u>
BREAK - 3.40 - 4.00 - Lower Concourse		
Keynote address	Lecture Theatre	
4.00 - 5.00	<u>Dr Ellen Sargen</u>	

Wednesday 7 th May		
Session 4	Carole Nash Recital Room	Studio 8
	Chair: Dobromir Tsenov	Chair: Dan Baczkowski
10.00	<u>Yangyi Mao</u>	<u>Jacob Barns</u>
10.30	<u>Hwan Hee Kim</u>	<u>Hans-Martin Buff</u>
11.00	<u>Matthew Lau</u>	<u>Dr Aled Smith</u>
BREAK: 11.10 - 11.30 Lower Concourse		
Session 5	Carole Nash Recital Room	
	Chair: Eleanor Guenault	
11.45	<u>Dr Naomi Norton</u>	
12.15	<u>Dr Nellinne Perera</u>	
LUNCH: 12.45 - 2.15		
Session 6	Carole Nash Recital Room	
	Chair: Kate Andrews	
2.15	<u>Eleanor Guenault</u>	
2.45	<u>Joanna Sear</u>	
3.15	<u>Dr Raluca Matei and Dr Keith Phillips</u>	
BREAK: 3.40 - 4.00 Lower Concourse		
Session 7	Carole Nash Recital Room	Studio 8
	Chair: Matthew Holmes	Chair: Hans-Martin Buff
4.00	<u>Dobromir Tsenov</u>	<u>Cee Haines</u>
4.30	<u>James Waide</u>	<u>Dan Baczkowski</u>
5.00 – 6.30: Post-Conference Drinks Reception - Lower Concourse		
6.30 – 7.30: <u>PGR Performance Showcase</u> – Carole Nash Recital Room		

ABSTRACTS

Kate Andrews

Time: 6th May, 12.30

Room: Lecture Theatre

[Click here for remote access link](#)

A new(ish) frontier in music assessment: Are examiners as attentive to video performances as they are to live candidates

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, assessment of music performance via digital means has become increasingly common. Some conservatoires and orchestras now habitually conduct first round auditions via video recording and most major graded music exam boards now provide a digital exam product alongside their live offering, with these options considered equal by the exam regulator, Ofqual. At present, there is very little research exploring this topic, particularly the ways in which different people and groups might be advantaged, or disadvantaged, by each assessment medium. A particular consideration is whether or not examiners are able to engage with, and pay attention to, digital exams to the same extent as when there is a candidate in a live exam room. This paper presents a synthesis of existing literature and proposes two quasi-experimental studies to address this question.

Dan Baczkowski

Time: 7th May, 4.30

Room: Studio 8

[Click here for remote access link](#)

How passage of time judgements can influence a composer's decision-making in their music

Music is an "art of time". Therefore, for composers while they are writing, decisions of how their music will fill the time are some of the most crucial that they will make.

"Passage of time judgements" are a common criterion individuals may use to assess aesthetic works such as music or film. These are made based on how adequately a stimulus or stimuli hold one's attention. For instance, time seems to fly while watching an entertaining movie, compared to crawling while waiting for a flight or doctor's appointment. I propose that composers use similar judgements to resolve decisions such as for how much time should certain musical material be prolonged.

Existing research has shown that various factors can influence passage of time judgements for an individual. This includes one's experiences, such as listening habits and degrees of musical training. The quantity and distribution of repeated listening to the same material may also play a role. Finally, some authors note that the nature of time is partly a social construct. Different cultures may therefore have different conceptions of time, and this may be reflected in how music is produced and received.

In this presentation, I will discuss these various factors and how they have influenced my compositional choices through reflections on writing my piece *The Queen: Suite for Solo Cello* (2025). I will also share the perspective of two other composers and their writing processes, including responses from interviews I have conducted.

Jacob Barns

Time: 7th May, 10.00

Room: Studio 8

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Self-compassion and music performance anxiety: Exploring psychological and practical applications

Music performance anxiety (MPA) is a common experience among musicians, shaped by high personal standards, fear of evaluation, and performance-related stress. While various strategies exist to support performers, there is growing interest in how emotional regulation and self-related processes might also play a role.

This PhD research explores self-compassion as a potential support for musicians experiencing MPA. Informed by the work of Kristin Neff and Paul Gilbert, self-compassion is understood as a way of responding to difficulty with kindness, perspective, and mindful awareness, rather than self-criticism or avoidance.

The project begins with a systematic review examining the effectiveness of self-compassion practices in performance settings, with a particular focus on music. This will inform the development of brief, accessible practices, such as reflective writing or guided audio exercises, designed to support musicians in managing performance-related stress and promoting overall wellbeing.

This presentation will introduce the theoretical foundations of the research, outline the scope of the systematic review, and reflect on how self-compassion might be meaningfully integrated into music performance training. Attention will be given to the potential psychological value of self-compassion for musicians navigating high-pressure environments.

Hans-Martin Buff

Time: 7th May, 10.30

Room: Studio 8

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The immersive incubator

Immersive music (also known as spatial or 3D) has become an established way to distribute pop music, mainly in the form of Dolby Atmos. Currently, immersive is mostly presented as a companion piece to a stereo master, rather than as an independent way to create. This is both understandable and regrettable – today's pop music is created based on tried and trusted stereo workflows and components, but if the limitless sonic dimensions of immersive are tied to the restrictions of stereo, the longevity of the format may be questionable.

The research aims to explore whether the compositional process in pop music can be actively guided to a new immersive approach by presenting creatives with immersive, rather than stereo sonic components. A specifically designed starter set of immersive loops, pads and drones is therefore presented to creative participants in a recording studio, where they are asked to musically react to what they hear.

At the PGR conference, I will present the research involved in setting up a studio environment for immersive musical creation, encouraging the immersive thought process during creation and its capture in the recording process.

Alex Chapman

Time: 6th May, 11.30

Room: Lecture Theatre

[Click here for remote access link](#)

"Nothing about us without us": Development of an accessibility-focussed pilot strategy for surveys inclusive of neurodivergent populations

Engaging communities in research is essential for improving mental health, wellbeing, and quality of life; this includes providing neurodivergent individuals with a voice. Whilst recent research is proactive in emphasising participant engagement, traditional methods including surveys and questionnaires seem to naturally overlook inclusive strategies; however, this is unknown due to scientific reports often providing insufficient details on recruitment and data collection. Some neurodivergent individuals may be discouraged from the developmental and data collection

process in which their contribution would be of value. This study on the auditory processing experiences of neurodivergent musicians and audiences aims to increase the neurodivergent voice through the development of an accessible pilot strategy. By developing a survey approach that considers neurodivergent perceptions and needs, the study explores potential differences in participation and comfort levels for neurodivergent individuals. This presentation discusses the developmental process of creating an accessible pilot strategy for survey research with neurodivergent musicians and audiences. A literature review covered topics including survey and questionnaire methods, accessible recruitment strategies, and strengths and challenges of neurodivergent identities. Recruitment and data collection options were explored in aid of increasing accessibility and comfort for neurodivergent individuals; this was through approaches including voice recordings, interviews, and traditional methods. Key factors are presented in view of accessible research design, with a critical evaluation of survey methods in relation to neurodivergent individuals' strengths and challenges. The study aims to assist researchers in making surveys more inclusive and encourage the adoption of strategies that better support neurodivergent participants in research.

Emma Clarke

Time - 6th May, 11.15

Room - Lecture Theatre

[Click here for remote access link](#)

You Couldn't Make It Up: Choral speech, media discourse, and the sonic haunting of the airwaves

You Couldn't Make It Up is a choral speech composition that interrogates the sonic and rhetorical structures of broadcast media, specifically the aesthetic and ideological frameworks of UK commercial radio and talk radio discourse. This richly-textured piece operates at the intersection of speech, sung harmony, and vocal sound design, employing analogue radio as both a metaphor and a performative device. Through a series of stark vocal contrasts - cheerful commercial jingles, distorted whispers, exaggerated rhetoric, and haunting silences - this work explores the disappearing soundworld of analogue radio while critically engaging with the sociopolitical language of mass media.

Amelia Clarkson

Time - 6th May, 12.00

Room - Studio 8

[Click here for remote access link](#)

The View from Mars: Composing for dance and the choreography of collaboration

This talk shares the creative and collaborative process behind *The View from Mars* (2025), my recent interdisciplinary work for solo dancer and solo cellist. Framed through an abstract dystopian lens, the one-act piece explores themes of masculinity and mental health through immersive psychodramatic experience brought to life by choreography, live music, 3D digital visuals and sound design.

Focusing on the evolving relationship between movement and music throughout the process, I will reflect on my role as composer within a collaborative team of choreographer, visual artist, dancer, and cellist. Following the initial performances in Belfast, this presentation will share how intensive studio-based development, cross-genre improvisation and late-stage compositional decisions shaped the final dramatic structure and score.

Eleanor Guenault

Time: 7th May, 2.15

Room - Carole Nash Recital Room

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What is the influence of pre- and post-18 music education on the developing careers of female brass players?

There are many factors that affect the developing careers of young musicians, and it has been suggested that early influences are crucial to the successful formation of a career in music. Drawn from a study that investigates issues of gender and inequality in UK brass playing, this paper explores the influence of pre- and post-18 music education on the careers of female and non-binary brass players. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was applied to data collected via semi-structured interviews with successful female and non-binary brass players.

Participants generally had positive experiences in pre-18 music education, which encouraged them to build up their confidence and to develop musical proficiency. Themes included supportive teachers and mentors, easily accessible ensembles, and the signposting of opportunities to develop their careers. However, the typical experience of post-18 education was

less positive. Participants had experienced bullying, harassment and social isolation, as well as a lack of female role models in their learning environment. Participants found that their performance was affected by stress and lower levels of emotional wellbeing, but that this was not acknowledged or addressed by their place of study. These lived experiences suggest that pre-18 music education should be supported to retain its positive outlook despite current financial struggles, while the post-18 music education sector could work harder to provide a safer, more welcoming, and more equitable environment for female and non-binary brass players.

Cee Haines

Time: 7th May, 4.00

Room: Studio 8

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Identity within ecosystem; an ecological approach to composition and performance

My research has been concerned with issues of identity; I have been documenting how I have used music and its associated technologies to explore my own sense of self - especially the notion of an "authentic" self. Increasingly, I find myself moving away from the topic of identity as a means of self discovery, and towards a way to musically play and explore. As I do so, it becomes clear that in order to describe an identity (human or otherwise) satisfactorily, their environment must also be described. No person or being is without the environment they inhabit, and if I find ideas of place creeping into my work, both historically and currently, I now better understand why this is the case.

In this conference, I will explain how I have been using an ecological model to map qualities of identity and environment onto musical material, aspects of musical performance and technologies, and how this explores the relationships between identity, embodiment and environment.

Suting (Julia) Han

Time: 6th May, 10.45

Room: Lecture Theatre

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Storyboard theory in audiovisual composition: A structural approach to *The 24 Solar Terms*

This presentation explores my third-year research on the integration of storyboard theory into the composition and notation of *The 24 Solar Terms*, a large-scale, interdisciplinary audiovisual project that blends music, movement, electronics, and visuals. Drawing from storyboard theory in film, the project reimagines traditional musical notation, positioning it as a flexible framework rather than a prescriptive system. Through the application of concepts such as multi-sensory perception, interpretative flexibility, indexicality, and new conceptualism, I have developed a notational system that bridges the gap between sound and visual storytelling. This system encourages performers, visual artists, and audiences to engage in a real-time, evolving narrative, mirroring the cyclical transformations of the seasons in a way that transcends conventional music scores.

The presentation will address the challenges and opportunities presented by this approach, particularly in balancing control and flexibility within a structured framework. By referencing philosophical and theoretical concepts such as Merleau-Ponty's embodied cognition, Umberto Eco's "open work," and Ciciliani's theories of indexicality and intertextuality, the talk will demonstrate how storyboard notation supports dynamic, interdisciplinary interactions while maintaining structural coherence. Key examples from the project will be shared, highlighting the role of notational flexibility, unexpected performance variations, and the interactivity of live visuals and electronics. Ultimately, this work proposes a new methodology for composing multimedia performances that fosters creative agency within a carefully designed, yet adaptable, narrative structure.

Matthew Holmes

Time: 6th May, 3.15

Room: Studio 8

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Robert Simpson's 10th Symphony and his five symphonic principles

In 1967, British symphonist, broadcaster, and writer, Robert Simpson (1921-97) edited a two-volume, collaborative, historical overview of the symphonic genre, titled, *The Symphony*. In his introduction, he articulates five elements that a composer must master in order to write a "true symphony". This paper takes these principles as points of departure in an analysis of the first

movement of Simpson's most substantial contribution to the genre – his Tenth (1988); the culmination of 40 years of symphonic composition and thinking. To paraphrase, these symphonic principles are: 1) the fusion of diverse elements into an organic whole; 2) the continuous control of pace; 3) the reserves of strength necessary to achieve the previous two principles; 4) the dynamic treatment of tonality (this is contextualised by its comparison to the 'tonal passivity of earlier music', therefore leaving room for some reinterpretation); and, 5) that no 'prime element (rhythm, melody, harmony, tonality) of the music [must] seem to die' (Simpson, 1967).

Regardless of whether or not these criteria can be considered accurate or fair measurements of universal symphonic value, or, indeed, if one can define a "true symphony" at all, I will argue in this paper that for Simpson's own symphonies, and in particular, No. 10, they are invaluable. In particular, this paper's analysis will explore how the interconnected, symbiotic relationship between the work's motivic/pitch material, structural rhythm (i.e. 'the control of pace') and larger formal elements, such as the Tenth's close relationship with sonata form, interacts with Simpson's symphonic principles.

Christian Jones

Time: 6th May, 12.00

Room: Lecture Theatre

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Which types of trombone and mouthpiece should the bass trombonist use in auditions and what are the most important factors influencing these choices?

These seemingly straightforward questions arise whenever students enquire about using bass or contrabass trombone for particularly low passages including Verdi's *Falstaff* and Strauss's *Alpensinfonie*. However, as publicly-funded UK opera regrettably contracts, I recently auditioned unsuccessfully for a wechselfposaune job in Germany advertised as 'Bass trombone with obligation to play tenor'.

Having spent decades considering the lower bass trombone register and its relationship to the tuba/cimbasso/contrabass trombone, my first overseas audition demanded a focus on our high range and the significant implications for equipment choice and stamina.

The modern trombone family consists mostly of tenor and bass instruments in Bb, with less common roles for the alto in Eb and so-called contrabass in F. This gradually became a global standard only since the 1950s, before which innumerable designs, bore sizes and pitches were developed by disparate individuals and manufacturers according to local technical knowledge and requirements.

Since most orchestral and operatic excerpts commonly requested in auditions today were composed during the 19th century, our modern instruments diverge substantially from the composer's sound world. For instance, technical advances allow the 4th trombone part in Wagner's *Ring Cycle* to be performed entirely on today's bass trombone, rather than the contrabass for which sections are written. Similarly, modern bass and tenor trombones differ only in bore size (diameter of the slide), so have the same theoretical high register, but divergent timbres.

My presentation will investigate some of the challenges and inevitable trade-offs which arise when we try to balance authenticity with reliability, under pressure.

Dr Rachel Johnson

Time: 6th May, 2.15

Room: Studio 8

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Music(ology) and the Law of Unintended Consequences

This talk looks at some of the weird and wonderful directions research (and life) have taken me post-PhD. The recurring theme is how different ideas about what music will do in any given situation are from what music actually does in practice. I'll share some of the (often unexpected) commonalities I'm noticing between my PhD (music in industrial Manchester), music in nineteenth-century and present-day prisons, military bands from the French Revolution to Afghanistan, and music in everyday life.

Hwan Hee Kim

Time: 7th May, 10.30

Room: Carole Nash Recital Room

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Beyond the score: Reconstructing Kuk-Jin Kim's life and musical vision through oral history

This presentation examines the life and musical philosophy of Korean composer Kuk-Jin Kim (1930-2020), with a focus on biographical material gathered through a recent field interview with pianist Jung Hwa Ko and former pupil Juae Lee in Busan. Building on an earlier presentation that introduced Kim's compositional style and his approach to Korean musical identity, this session shifts towards reconstructing aspects of his personal and professional journey through oral history.

Kim developed his musical voice outside the dominant academic system, receiving intensive private instruction in composition from Dwight Malsbary rather than formal education at a conservatoire. According to Lee, Kim took pride in this path and regarded his compositional training and musical output as artistically equivalent to those of institutionally recognised composers. The interview also offers insights into Kim's values as a teacher, his belief in the importance of cultural authenticity, and his efforts to integrate Korean idioms into Western forms. These accounts contribute to a fuller understanding of Kim not only as a composer, but also as a figure who navigated complex cultural and educational landscapes in post-war Korea.

SoYeon Kim

Time: 7th May, 3.15

Room: Lecture Theatre

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Exploring musical identity in pop music songwriting: A practice-based application of the MIIA framework

As a musician influenced by a wide range of styles and genres, shaped by cultural differences, I seek to understand how my musical identity evolves through the creative process. This practice-based study applies the Musical Identities in Action (MIIA) framework by MacDonald and Saarikallio (2022) to examine how songwriting, composition, and performance contribute to the ongoing negotiation of musical identity. The MIIA framework conceptualises musical identity as dynamic, embodied, and situated, constantly shifting through engagement with musical activities. Given the limited application of this framework in popular music songwriting, this research aims to provide unique insights into how identity is shaped through individual creative practice. Using Participant Observation and Journaling, I document and reflect on my artistic process to capture how musical identity is formed and redefined through songwriting. In the next phase, I will extend this approach to collaborative projects, enabling a comparative analysis of individual and collective influences on identity formation. Initial findings, illustrated through demos and recordings of original compositions, suggest that songwriting offers a valuable lens for examining the fluid nature of musical identity. This study contributes to broader discussions on the role of creative processes in shaping and redefining musical identity within contemporary popular music practice.

Matthew Lau

Time: 7th May, 11.00

Room: Carole Nash Recital Room

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A trip to the Charles Griffes Archives

New York was the home of the composer Charles Griffes (1884-1920). Having grown up in Elmira, he moved to Berlin in 1903 to study at the Stern Conservatory. In 1907, Griffes returned to New York to take on the position of Director of Music at the Hackley School for boys and alongside this role, he began his career as a composer. Despite passing away at the early age of 35, his musical output was large and works such as the Roman Sketches, Fantasy Pieces and The Pleasure Dome of Kubla Khan began to give him public recognition. However, there are many works that are overlooked and yet to be published.

After his passing, Griffes's concert programmes, correspondences and manuscripts were housed at the New York Public Library and the Elmira College Library. The first scholar to discover these archives was Donna Anderson and in 1966, she published her doctoral thesis *The Works of Charles T. Griffes: A Descriptive Catalogue*. Her research was vital in drawing our attention to Griffes's works but the archive poses unanswered questions, particularly in the presentation and content of the manuscripts.

In my research, I have been creating performance editions to enable other pianists to tackle the lesser-known works. In February, I travelled to New York to investigate the manuscripts in person. This presentation will present my research findings from this archival visit, including discoveries that shed new light on Griffes's compositional practice.

Cassie Layton

Time: 6th May, 12.30

Room: Studio 8

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Refusing the archive: Collaborative sound practices and diasporic resistance in Sri Lanka's colonial legacy

Cassie Layton, a Sri Lankan-British second-year PhD student in a Collaborative Doctoral Partnership between the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) and The National Archives (TNA), is exploring how sound and multimedia art can challenge colonial histories and create new narratives within the context of Sri Lanka's colonial past. Her project, *Sounds and Silences in the*

Archives of Empire, examines the silences embedded in the colonial records held at TNA and how these omissions shape historical understanding.

Over the past year, she has moved away from traditional archival methods, instead developing collaborative, community-led practices that amplify voices often excluded from official histories. Cassie has worked directly with the Sri Lankan diaspora in the UK, facilitating workshops and performances that encourage participants to respond to archival materials through sound, storytelling, and collective creation. In doing so, she has challenged the authority of the colonial archive, creating spaces for people to share their lived experiences, memories, and sonic creations.

By embracing a participatory, non-extractive approach, Cassie's research is working towards creating a counter-archive that resists institutional power structures. This counter-archive centres sound as an active, affective force that goes beyond the audible, using it as a tool to un-silence and reshape the past. In this presentation, Cassie will share insights from her first year of research, discussing how community collaboration and sonic practices can reshape archival methodologies and challenge the legacies of empire.

Yangyi Mao

Time: 7th May, 10.00

Room: Carole Nash Recital Room

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Tracing Chinese art song's journey: Historical roots, cross-cultural dialogues and its global musical history

The art song is a genre whose roots can be traced back to Germany in the late 18th century, and defined as a harmonious fusion of poetry and music, predominantly composed for voice and piano. This artistic form radiated to France in the 1820s, where it evolved from the earlier Romance, and then its development elsewhere, such as England, America and it found its way to China in the 1920s.

This presentation will begin with a brief overview of how Western music and Western Art Song were introduced to China and how they shaped the emergence of Chinese Art Song. Next, the discussion will define Chinese Art Song through six key aspects: lyrics, musicality, accompaniment, performance, themes and content, and performance format. It will then outline the key characteristics of its three developmental stages—the nascent, transitional, and mature stages—exploring how the genre evolved in response to historical, political, and societal changes.

Finally, the discussion will assess the global positioning of Chinese Art Song, exploring whether it can assert its artistic identity—not as an exoticized “other” but as an autonomous, fully realised

genre. The presentation will also conclude with an overview of the research project, contextualising its significance within contemporary musicology and performance studies.

Dr Raluca Matei and Dr Keith Phillips

Time: 7th May, 3.15

Room: Carole Nash Recital Room

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Is the composer dead or alive and watching you? A survey of beliefs around values in Western Classical Music

Background: Western Classical Music (WCM) is based on a set of core norms that are being promoted through various gatekeepers, and which are internalised by performers and rarely questioned. Some of these norms, such as the assumption that classical musicians should mainly give voice to the intentions of dead composers, may be too restrictive and may be related to increased performance anxiety. Although some of these norms have been captured by musicological research, no empirical research has been done on the extent to which classical musicians actually adhere to them, and no studies have been published on the assumptions that classical musicians may make about key aspects of classical music performance.

Aim: To capture the views of classical musicians around a) the role of musicians, b) what counts as good performance; c) freedom of expression in classical music, as well as the rules that govern the relationships between d) performers and composers, and e) performers and the audience.

Method: To address the aim, a survey of closed- and open-ended questions was constructed and distributed via Jisc Online Survey to be completed by classical musicians worldwide. Quantitative data is being analysed via descriptive statistics, whereas qualitative data is being analysed via template analysis.

Results: The study gathered responses from 191 participants worldwide, encompassing both classical music students and professionals. The majority identified as White (91%) and female (54%), with a mean age of 34 years. Performing was the primary musical occupation for 75% of respondents, representing all major instrumental and vocal groups. A diverse range of perspectives emerged. In this presentation, we will explore key themes, including definitions of a "good" performance and the perceived responsibilities toward composers.

Conclusion: Findings indicate a variety of views among classical musicians around values in WCM. A better understanding of these can inform innovative pedagogical approaches in higher education music institutions that could be aimed at training students' critical thinking. Musicians

can be encouraged to question assumptions that may be too restrictive and that may inhibit individual artistry and creative autonomy.

Rosie Middleton

Time: 6th May, 11.30

Room: Studio 8

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Navigating 'risk', 'safety' and 'performer brain' at the extremes of classical music

The performances in my doctoral project contain explicit risk: 12HOURS, a marathon durational performance in which I performed for 12 hours; PLASTIC BODIES which contains themes of abuse; and Songs After Nature, a collaboration with a shibari artist*, in which I sang bound by ropes. There were multiple risks associated with these projects including: vocal fatigue and/or damage; psychological triggers; and physical injury.

In this paper I will reflect on risk and safety, sharing the strategies I employed in my preparation, and my growing understanding of performer agency and safety that emerged throughout these processes. I will talk about 'performer brain' - a state that became clear when I realised that in 'flow state' (Zielker et al., 2023, p.1), my capacity to assess risk and take care, was significantly diminished. Performer Brain is a non-scientific term that I am using to examine the state in which a performer's sole objective is to deliver the best possible performance at any cost. I will link performer brain in classical music to a mindset instilled in performers from a young age, where the training fosters a culture of perfectionism (Fraser, 2022), conformity (Leech-Wilkinson, 2018), and obedience (Wagner, 2015). (*a form of rope bondage).

Dr Naomi Norton

Time: 7th May, 11.45

Room: Carole Nash Recital Room

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A 20-minute romp through nine years of life since RNCM

It has been just over nine years since I completed my PhD thesis 'Health promotion in instrumental and vocal music lessons: The teacher's perspective' at RNCM under the supervision of Professor Jane Ginsborg and Dr Alinka Greasley. A lot has happened since then: I shan't bore you with too many of the details but would like to spend this 20 minutes reflecting on the journey and some of the destinations that I have visited in the intervening years. My time at the RNCM has been hugely influential in terms of developing my research focus and place within a wider community of people and organisations interested in promoting and protecting the health and wellbeing of musicians. Since those formative years the discipline has moved on, and so have I, but the 'red thread' that was stitched into my tapestry at the RNCM continues to permeate my professional activities. This presentation will be a celebration of what I have achieved as a result of being enrolled in the PhD programme at RNCM and I hope maybe an interesting insight into a possible version of post-PhD life.

Dr Nellinne Perera

Time: 7th May, 12.15

Room: Carole Nash Recital Room

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The role of leisure activities in musicians' health and wellbeing

During my PhD at the Royal Northern College of Music, I explored the role of leisure activities as a new avenue to musicians' health and well-being. My research examined how engaging in various musical and non-musical leisure activities could contribute to physical and psychological health, helping full-time music students and professional musicians manage the unique demands of their profession. In this talk, I will discuss key findings from my research and their practical implications for musicians, educators, and health professionals. Additionally, I will reflect on my career journey post-PhD, highlighting my interests in pedagogical research and supervision in health and well-being across different contexts.

Meriel Price

Time: 6th May, 2.15

Room: Lecture Theatre

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The borders between life and art: Questioning how and why artists inhabit the space between the everyday and art and what creative material for a compositional practice can be found there

Examining my own artistic practice embedded in the tradition of artists working on the boundaries of life and art, I seek to unpick what can be gained from these liminal spaces in terms of reinterpretation of artistic material and daily life.

*I shall be focussing on two forms this may take. Firstly, the distillation of art from the everyday, creating art from everyday objects, events, occurrences, investigating the subtle forms in which the two can be brought into close dialogue. Secondly, the titration of the everyday into art, investigating how real-life infiltrates art contexts and is used as creative material. As a case study, the work with my music theatre duo *Aside* in which we*

Particularly, I will consider how techniques such as breaking the fourth wall and failure are employed to question what is intended and where the border lies. [sic]

Joanna Sear

Time: 7th May, 2.45

Room: Carole Nash Recital Room

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Popular music cross-training for Classical singing teachers: Can it and should it be done?

Recent research data has highlighted a growing need for improved pedagogical training in Popular Music singing. Reasons posited for this include the increase in PM courses at HMEIs across the West, declining interest in and careers within the once-dominant sphere of Western classical music, and student demand for better career-oriented preparation within the PM industry.

Conversely, most singing teachers currently working in Western schools and colleges are likely to have been classically trained due to long-standing cultural hegemonies and the lack of a PM-specific voice pedagogy framework. This leaves a considerable gap between the demand for PM genre-specific voice training and the supply of appropriately trained teachers.

Generic 'functional' voice pedagogy and 'cross-training' (a term borrowed from sports science terminology) for classical singers and singing teachers have been suggested as suitable approaches to fill this gap. However, wider debates currently taking place concerning cultural context and authenticity in singing voice pedagogy render this solution potentially problematic: If cultural context and immersion are an essential part of PM voice education, how do we reconcile this with cross-training teachers who have been immersed in an entirely different culture?

This systematic literature review study explores current thinking on the feasibility and advisability of cross-training singing teachers between different genres, incorporating issues surrounding ethics and power dynamics in music education policy.

Dr Aled Smith

Time: 7th May, 11.00

Room: Studio 8

[Click here for remote access link](#)

The augmented playground: Designing creative futures with hypercreative imagination

As our entanglement with technology deepens and realities become interlinked, we find ourselves not at the end of creativity—instead, it is unfolding into a hybrid space where instinct converges with algorithms and imagination becomes infinite.

The dissolving boundaries of artistic identity emanate a quiet strangeness as futuristic concepts—artificial consciousness, neurotechnology, and 'phygital' immersion—drift from the speculative frontier to the artistic toolset. From within this space, a redefinition of creative modes emerges. Artists are less isolated auteurs and more embedded nodes in complex, adaptive ecosystems. As co-agents and generative systems take on creative roles, identity ceases to be fixed or singular—it becomes networked, dynamic, and responsive.

The self endures but is refracted, multiplied, and made porous by the architectures it now inhabits. Creative work becomes a means of exploring situated consciousness—our own and that of synthetics—through neuroaesthetic practice and generative tools, opening new perceptual dimensions. The shift is not away from the artist but beyond them—into a co-creative field where imagination intersects with code and returns expanded, sharpened, and illuminated.

This talk explores how emerging technologies are reshaping creative processes and collaboration within an evolving artistic ecology. Drawing from sound-based practices, AI-generated systems, and transdisciplinary experimentation, it examines how artists operate within dynamic machine intelligence systems to design new modes of perception, authorship, and aesthetic experience.

The Playground is a framework and a metaphor: a space where speculative imagination intersects with technical structure and creative agency is redefined through iteration and emergent co-evolution.

As the artist evolves, so must our sense of art, authorship, and imagination. The future of creativity is neither purely human nor purely machine but a shared space between systems of perception, intelligence, and experience.

Faith Thompson

Time: 6th May, 2.45

Room: Studio 8

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Gabriel Pierné as conductor: Poetry over precision

Gabriel Pierné (1863–1937) was one of the most prominent conductors of early twentieth-century Paris. He led the Colonne Orchestra for 22 years (1910–32), giving premières of works by, among others, Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky and Milhaud. His interpretative style has largely been neglected, however, as scholars have focused on conductors with firmer international reputations. Using a range of primary sources from both France and England, this paper will seek to reconstruct Pierné's conducting style. It will draw on letters, reminiscences and reviews from such major figures as Claude Debussy, Sir Adrian Boult and Nadia Boulanger, as well as analysing a series of recordings made by Pierné in 1928–31. While confirming that high-profile performances were less precise a century ago than they are today, this study will demonstrate that there were still 'degrees' of imprecision. In Pierné's case, expressive details were often prioritised over large-scale structure and rhythmic vigour, earning him a reputation as a 'poetic' conductor. Different approaches can be found in his conducting peers, however. Direct comparisons will be drawn with interpretations by Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht and, across the channel, Hamilton Harty. As well as shedding light on Pierné's own career, this paper will show how his conducting style intersected with romantic and modernist trends, thereby adding to a growing body of scholarship on early twentieth-century performance practice.

Dobromir Tsenov

Time: 7th May, 4.00

Room: Carole Nash Recital Room

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Folklore and identity: The piano works of Panayot and L'ubomir Pipkov

Panayot Pipkov (1871-1943), and his son, L'ubomir Pipkov (1904-1974) were two of the most prominent representatives of the first two generations of Bulgarian composers since the Liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman rule in 1878. This performance-based presentation will assess their piano music in the period after the Liberation until the Bulgarian coup d'état in 1944. Through examination of the use of folklore material it is possible to trace the development of the Bulgarian national style across two generations of composers.

I will explore how the political environment shaped their lives and brought them into conflict with the ruling regime. I will highlight the similarities and differences in their compositional approaches, particularly with reference to L'ubomir Pipkov's efforts to establish a distinct Bulgarian musical identity. This will provide a new context in which the subsequent shifting of Bulgarian style (under the USSR regime) may be better understood in modern scholarship.

James Waide

Time: 7th May, 4.30

Room: Carole Nash Recital Room

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The composer's lack: Voiced composition

The voice is both an intimate identifier of the speaking subject and an alien presence, revealing the complexities of desire. While Matthew Shlomowitz argues for discarding the metaphor of compositional voice, I contend that this metaphor remains essential to understanding composition as a practice—not as a direct expression of the composer's inner self, but as a site of identification structured by lack. Drawing on Lacanian theory, this paper examines how compositional voice operates as a contested space, shaping the desires of both composer and audience. Through an analysis of my own vocal work, *Gardening Edit #7*, I will demonstrate how this perspective accommodates both the artistic identification inherent in composition and the capricious qualities that Shlomowitz advocates.

Songhao Yao

Time: 6th May, 2.45

Room: Lecture Theatre

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Exploration of breathing patterns in non-wind instruments composition - - notating the physical breathing actions of non-wind instruments in performance

Physical breathing, as a latent factor in the presentation of musical works, is often not specifically considered during composition. From my perspective, I believe that deliberately notating breathing can expand the expressive potential of composition into more multidimensional realms. Breathing is a fundamental element in my compositional process. This research aims to explore composing for non-wind instruments using a variety of breathing-themed techniques through practice-based methods. It focuses on how various breathing approaches can develop my composition. In this presentation, I will show the evolution of my breathing notations throughout the research process, the elements that require thoughtful consideration, and the different ways in which breathing is applied in my works.

Keynote Speaker

Dr Ellen Sargen

Time: 6th May, 4.00

Room: Lecture Theatre

[Click here for remote access link](#)

Politics, ethics and the control of aesthetics: community research in diverse participatory music activities.

During my PhD, I conducted a practice-led project to explore how the performers I worked with as a composer could be more meaningfully integrated into my pieces and creative process. I critically investigated how the unique behaviour and identity of these individuals could be constructed (and co-constructed) through new compositions and performance. Over four years, I maintained a community of collaborators who ranged from professional musicians to leisure-time experimental music-makers through CoMA Manchester ensemble. Working from within this community of instrumentalists, I defined “abstract spaces of practice” structured by theories in embodiment (see Spatz, 2015; Spatz, 2016) and performativity (Butler, 2015). Handling liveness, vulnerability and ‘amateurism’ (Frisk, 2017) became important in my transforming compositional process which was pulled in different directions as I sought to write pieces completely wrapped around each individual. I developed specific scoring and audiovisual methods which pulled my dispersed musical voice into a somewhat ‘permanently unclosed’ whole (Haraway, 2016), and operated fluidly as/ between a composer, performer, facilitator and editor in these spaces of practice. In this talk, I will discuss the transformations in my positionality and aesthetics as a result of this work with(in) this community and discuss the resonances of my research design with the discipline of (auto-)ethnography. I will end by discussing my compositional research practice in other communities and share how my positionality as a composer-researcher generates new knowledge including the different ways I am disseminating this within and outside of academia.

Dr Ellen Sargen is a Manchester-based composer and flautist specialising in the co-creation of new music with professional and leisure time musicians and young people in education. Ellen completed her PhD in collaborative composition at the RNCM in 2024, supervised by Larry Goves and Steven Daverson, and supported by a North West Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership. Ellen’s thesis and portfolio, titled *“Creative bodies; embodied creation: performative behaviour and identity as emergent materials for new collaborative works”*, critically examines how performer identity can be creatively harnessed and co-constructed as a compositional material through collaborative methods, reflexive practices, and alternative performance spaces beyond traditional Western art music structures.

PGR Performance Showcase

Time: 7th May, 6.30

Room: Carole Nash Recital Room

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Join us for an exciting and educational PGR Performance Showcase, where current and former PhD performance researchers will present a diverse piano repertoire from around the globe, featuring music from France (Louise Farrenc), South Korea (Kuk Jin Kim), America (Charles Griffes), Bulgaria (L'ubomir Pipkov), and Britain (Roger Sacheverell Coke).

Postgraduate Research Showcase 2025

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Kuk Jin Kim

Hwan Hee Kim



Charles Griffes

Matthew Lau



L'ubomir Pipkov

Dobromir Tsenov



Roger Sacheverell Coke

Dr Simon Callaghan



Carole Nash Recital Room - 7 May, 18:30 pm - free admission