


Annual Impact Report

2024/25



RNCM
ROYAL NORTHERN
COLLEGE of MUSIC



**‘Your belief in
our vision and your
investment in our
students continue to
define the future
of music.’**

Professor Linda Merrick CBE
Principal

Thank you

At the RNCM, we take pride in being a progressive and world-leading conservatoire. One that not only nurtures exceptional talent but encourages entrepreneurial thinking and redefines what it means to be a musician in today's world.


This year, we retained our position among the top five institutions globally for music education in the QS World University Rankings, reaffirming our commitment to excellence and innovation. We celebrated the culmination of the RNCM Piano Fleet Campaign, safeguarding our 132-strong fleet of pianos for generations to come. We also launched two new giving schemes – the RNCM Opera Circle and RNCM Leadership Circle – to deepen engagement and grow support for our students.

This report demonstrates these and many more notable highlights of RNCM activity made possible by philanthropy. None of this would be possible without the generosity of our donor community – your belief in our vision and your investment in our students continue to define the future of music.

Thank you for standing with us, and for helping the RNCM remain elite, but never elitist.

Professor Linda Merrick CBE
Principal





Thanks to you, we...

RAISED

£2.86 million

with a further **£617,106**
committed to future support

OFFERED

**393 student
awards**

379 scholarships and bursaries
11 Junior Fellowships
3 International Artist Diplomas

GAVE

1 in 3 students

financial support to help
them through the year

ENGAGED

Over 10,500

children, young people,
and members of the local
community in music
engagement activities

Student Support

Student awards are vital in helping young musicians **overcome barriers to being able to study, championing talent, and allowing students to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to their development.**

Thanks to an increasing number of new and continued awards, including those to ensure inclusive and equitable access to music education, we are able to support our students amidst the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, giving them the space to thrive.

'Your investment in my education and development has opened doors I never imagined I'd walk through, and I am deeply thankful for your belief in me.'

Daniel Ott, Baritone

'To think that I was in an office job this time a year ago trying to balance practice and saving for this degree is unfathomable. Thank you for making all this happen – it's been completely life changing.'

Emily Ampt, Violin

'Your support has been a crucial part of allowing me to perform on so many stages and learn so much. For anything I continue to achieve in the future, I will fondly remember that you have been a part of helping me get there.'

Winnie Su, Piano

'Everything I have done at the RNCM will prove invaluable as I move on to a professional career, and I would not have these memories if it were not for you. Thank you.'

Nathan Jackson, Percussion



Annual Appeal

Our Annual Appeal raised funds to boost our Access to Learning Fund – a lifeline for students experiencing financial hardship.

With the pressures of the cost-of-living crisis, as well as maintenance loans failing to increase with inflation, a growing number of students are facing financial hardship, which can result in some having to make the difficult decision to interrupt or completely withdraw from their studies.

Your response to our winter appeal means that we are able to **distribute more hardship funding** to students in financial emergency and prevent interruption to study.

We've also been able to **create a new Opportunity Fund** for students most in need, removing financial barriers so they can take part in invaluable artistic enrichment projects, and **establish a new virtual food larder** to enable stigma-free food vouchers for our café.

£53,662

donated to boost our **Access to Learning Fund** and support our musicians to thrive



RNCM Piano Fleet Campaign

We were thrilled to surpass the £1 million milestone for our RNCM Piano Fleet Campaign this year, thanks to the incredible generosity of a dedicated community of supporters.

Previously leased, the fleet of 132 pianos officially came under RNCM ownership in July 2025. This transition will save the RNCM nearly £500,000 annually in leasing and servicing fees – vital funds that can now be reinvested directly into training and supporting our students.

Bringing the entire fleet into our ownership not only ensures long-term savings and financial sustainability but also enables access to the finest possible instruments for students at all levels, tutors, visiting artists, and RNCM Engage participants.

There is still the opportunity to 'adopt' a piano for yourself or a loved one, to ensure that we are able to maintain this world-class fleet for generations to come.



Leadership Circle

Led by our Chair, Ravi Gupta, the Leadership Circle was launched this year, welcoming an exclusive group of inaugural members who, collectively, through major annual gifts, will help drive our most transformative projects.



The launch event at iconic London venue Handel Hendrix House featured classical and popular music performances from RNCM musicians Valette Ensemble and Jack Critchlow, and guests enjoyed a fascinating roundtable conversation about the RNCM's unique position as an innovator in conservatoire training with staff, students, and esteemed musical guests.

We look forward to growing this vital group of individuals who will play a significant role in the RNCM's growth as a global leader in music education, ensuring that the next generation of artists, innovators, and leaders have the opportunities they need to thrive.

Contact eve.riley@rncm.ac.uk / 0161 907 5338 to learn more.

Opera Circle

Our new Opera Circle helps us to deliver **high-quality, professionally resourced opera productions** that are essential for nurturing the next generation of opera stars.

These productions provide our trainee opera singers with crucial experience, allowing them to hone their craft and gain the confidence needed to flourish in the industry.

In its inaugural year, the Opera Circle welcomed five members who supported with **£12,500** and contributed directly to the production costs of Chabrier's *L'étoile* and Britten's *Owen Wingrave*.

Members of our Opera Circle enjoyed unrivalled behind-the-scenes access during the planning and rehearsal process of our productions including meeting the cast and creatives, touring the stage and set, a preview of costumes, and the stage model box showing.

RNCM Opera: Chabrier's *L'étoile*



Principal's Circle

Our **Principal's Circle** is a loyal community of music lovers who have a meaningful collective impact on life at the RNCM, creating a dedicated fund that enhances the student experience with exceptional opportunities beyond the core curriculum.

This year, 38 members supported with **£45,000**, helping to make the following projects a reality:

- An inspiring collaboration with Clod Ensemble exploring movement in performance, including immersive workshops and a site-specific performance with the RNCM Chamber Choir.
- Workshops led by RNCM Innovate Fellow and sitarist Jasdeep Singh Degun, encouraging collaboration across musical traditions and expanding students' creative boundaries.
- Students attending *Beyond the Music Festival* to hear from innovative musicians and global industry leaders, while enhancing the RNCM's visibility on the international stage.
- Match-funding to help secure the future of the Williams-Howard Prize, which celebrates composers from the African diaspora and encourages new generations of performers to explore these underrepresented works.
- Transformative coaching from Olympian Claire Bennett, focused on wellbeing, resilience, and performance anxiety.

Contact bethan.ward@rncm.ac.uk / 0161 907 5388 to learn more.

RNCM Engage

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.

With a passion for supporting young people from all backgrounds, we are proud to work in partnership with local communities to grow a diverse and creative community of musicians.

This award-winning programme simply would not be possible without substantial philanthropic support.

Junior RNCM

Each Saturday, a vibrant community of gifted young musicians aged 8-18 come together to develop their talent at the RNCM. This year, **188 young musicians** received a holistic programme of instrumental, composition and conducting tuition, academic study, ensemble coaching, and transferrable skills, creating a solid platform for further study at a conservatoire or university. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we were able to offer **70 scholarships and bursaries** to enable talented young musicians to flourish at JRNCM.

RNCM Young Artists

This year, **71 Young Artists** took part in our popular music programme for 11-18 year-olds. With weekly sessions on composition, production, and performance, the groups worked together in bands to create, record, and distribute brilliant new pop music. Supported by professional tutors and student mentors, the Young Artists were also guests on the red carpet at the MTV Europe Music Awards, performed in two sold out Showcase performances, and had masterclasses with some of the industry's top talent.

Pathfinder

Pathfinder offered a wide range of deeply bespoke, open-access training and mentoring support to **49 young musicians** who face barriers to their musical progression. Centred on inclusive pedagogy, the programme promotes diverse opinions and voices, empowering Pathfinders to find their own voice and develop independence through ownership of learning.

This year, we were delighted to launch **Vocal Pathfinder** in partnership with One Education Music, supporting talented young vocalists by developing a direct pathway to RNCM Young Artists, as well as working closely with two schools in East Manchester to deliver taster sessions, workshops, and weekly rehearsals.



RNCM Engage Showcase

RNCM Transitions

Through one-to-one mentoring, audition advice, and application assistance tailored to the needs of each participant, RNCM Transitions helps bridge the gap to conservatoire study for talented young musicians aged 16-18 who benefit from high-quality additional support in pursuing music studies at Higher Education level.

RNCM Young Projects

With a focus on targeting the declining number of people playing endangered instruments, our free, targeted, instrument-specific workshops (from bassoons to double basses) enabled **203 young musicians** aged 8-18 to receive expert tuition and develop their creative, musical, and technical skills alongside like-minded peers.

RNCM Engage Brass

Fully funded through philanthropy, this first access project tackles the national decline in brass instrument

engagement and connects RNCM tutors and students with local primary school-aged children at the beginning of their musical journey. As well as raising aspirations and inspiring the next generation of brass band players, the project also enables our senior brass students to receive training and develop their pedagogy skills.

RNCM Engage West Cumbria

In the second year of this five-year programme, made possible by a transformational gift, the project continued to boost the provision of music education in West Cumbria, providing world-class tuition to **1,931 young people** as well as tailored support and Continuing Professional Development for teachers, and scholarships to support Cumbrian students to study at the RNCM. RNCM students also benefit, with vital training and experience as mentors, tutors, and role models.

Engage Community



Children's Opera

A charitable grant supported **125 children** from local primary schools in areas of social deprivation and low arts engagement to take part in our annual, fully-staged Children's Opera. With the support of professional composer Kate Pearson, the children co-created and performed a new work based on *Treasure Island*.

In addition, the project provided unique training opportunities for **145 RNCM students** who worked with and performed alongside the groups.

Projects

Music and Health

In the second year of this project – funded from the RNCM50 Gala together with trust support – **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.

'This experience has changed me significantly as a musician, and it has clarified my desire to pursue more community-focused music projects in the future.'

Finn Nguyen, violin

Throwing Open the Concert Doors

This year saw the completion of our project to safeguard our archive of audio recordings from the last 50 years and to engage our local community in the RNCM's history and activities. Through the project, **2,127 endangered reels** and **461 VHS tapes** were conserved and digitised and **over 900 people** took part in community group workshops and other events.



RNCM Fundraising Gala 2025

Over 100 guests, including a growing number of corporate sponsors and many loyal individuals, joined us for our biennial Fundraising Gala.

While enjoying a spectacular evening of performances by hundreds of students and guest artists alongside food, wine and dancing, guests raised **£50,000** towards our *Breaking Down Barriers Fund*, which has enabled us to invest directly into supporting students at all levels through bursaries.

We're already looking ahead to our next Fundraising Gala in 2027 – let us know if you would like to be among the first to hear when tables become available.



Artistic Enrichment



String Quartet Studio

Continued philanthropic support enabled the Studio to work with the renowned Kleio Quartet, an ambitious London-based ensemble, enabling them to develop their craft while also benefiting RNCM students significantly with their guidance and mentorship.

'Our year in the RNCM String Quartet Studio had a transformative impact on our development as a quartet and, we hope, on the broader musical community at RNCM.'

Kleio Quartet, 2024/25 String Quartet Studio ensemble

Williams-Howard Prize

Established to celebrate the study of art songs by composers of the African diaspora, the prize offers monetary prizes to **six students**, alongside bespoke coaching and a performance opportunity at Buxton International Festival. This year, donations of £30,335 surpassed the critical fundraising milestone of £50,000 since the prize was founded, allowing it to be endowed and ensure that it continues to inspire countless future generations of musicians.

José and Rafton Smallwood Masterclass Series

Long-term support enabled **twelve singers** and **seven pianists** to work with one of our International

Visiting Professors, exploring how song and opera developed alongside the evolution of the piano, from early pianofortes to modern-day instruments. The series promotes cross-school collaboration and enables students to explore repertoire with fresh perspectives.

Lucy Hale Award

Established in memory of composer and RNCM alumna Lucy Hale, this annual prize supports disabled and neurodivergent students with their music making. This year, Ilana Tapper received funding for ring splints to aid hypermobility, and Noa Nishizawa for a new baritone horn.

Student Wellbeing Hub

Thanks to a funding boost this year, our Student Wellbeing Hub was able to expand its provision, introducing additional Cognitive Behavioural Therapy resources to support management of a range of mental health challenges.

RNCM Creative Innovators Award

Students pitched their business ideas to a panel of industry experts, with **three winners** receiving financial support and mentoring to help them develop their creative projects. Winning pitches included an original concert series, a new collection of works for flute, and a project designed to make musical experiences more accessible for people with hearing loss.

Performance Programme



Inspirational Artists Series

A generous donation enabled us to launch a new concert series, inviting a range of groundbreaking artists – including Paraorchestra, Scottish Ensemble, Nobuyuki Tsujii, and Sō Percussion with Caroline Shaw – to perform at the RNCM, bringing incredible musicianship, stories, collaboration, and innovation, inspiring our students and audiences alike.

Dance:Music

Celebrating the powerful synergy between music and dance, our performance programme explored joyous and diverse music born from dance and created alongside dancers. We were excited to collaborate with the imaginative Clod Ensemble and the innovative Manchester-based Company Chameleon, providing opportunities for our students to explore the relationship between music and movement.

Legacy Giving

Each year we are kindly remembered by music lovers who leave a gift for the RNCM in their will. These ensure that a **lasting, often transformative, legacy** is left, directly investing in the next generation of musical talent.

£331,898

was generously gifted in wills this year

We are hugely grateful to everyone who has chosen to remember the RNCM in their will.

If you would like to make us aware of your plans to leave something to the RNCM in your will, do get in touch.

We would love to thank you and showcase the impact support has during your lifetime, including invitations to our annual **RNCM Legacy Club event**.

Contact bethan.ward@rncm.ac.uk / 0161 907 5388 to learn more.

Donations And Regular Giving

Every donation makes a difference, and we want to **thank everyone who supports the RNCM** through regular gifts, our Membership scheme, by naming a seat in one of our venues, or through ticket top-ups.

£47,930

donated via direct debit and standing orders by **88 generous supporters**

£13,538

raised through **Box Office donations** when booking to see performances at the RNCM

148 Members supported with

£5,180

8 seats

named across our Concert Hall and Theatre



'There's something deeply moving about watching young, gifted musicians at the start of their journey – so full of promise, passion, and possibility. Every note they play reminds me why I love music, and why I love this place. That's why I dedicated a seat here – to quietly support the next generation of artists as they find their voice and share it with the world.'

James, Name a Seat Donor





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Registered charity numbers

RNCM Awards Fund 504948 | RNCM Endowment Fund 504949