

The Sir John Manduell Research Forum Series 2025–6

Spring 2026

17:00–18:30 Wednesday 21 January 2026

Prof. Emily Howard, Royal Northern College of Music

Discussion forum on artistic research

The Lounge

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 28 January 2026

Dr Anna Détári, Royal College of Music

The Neurodivergent Musician: A Participatory Action Research Study

Studio 8

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 4 February 2026

Dr Robert Gardiner and David Bullock, Royal Northern College of Music and Olympias Music Foundation, and Bryony Simcox and George Webster, Broaden

More than Music: Global Music Teacher Training with Olympias Music Foundation

Lecture Theatre

16:15–17:45 Wednesday 18 February 2026

Prof. Wiebke Thormählen, Royal Northern College of Music, Prof. Jeanice Brooks, University of Southampton, and Sarah Cleave, Manchester Metropolitan University

Country House Legends: Imagining Unsung Voices at Erddig

Carole Nash Recital Room

18:00–18:45 Thursday 19 February 2026

Dr Nico de Villiers, Royal Northern College of Music

Book launch: *Richard Hageman: The Becoming of a Song Composer*

Carole Nash Recital Room

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 25 February 2026

Dr Samuel Wilson, Guildhall School of Music and Drama

Contemporary Modernisms? Some Paradoxes of Time in British New Music

Lecture Theatre

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 4 March 2026

Tebogo Monnakgotla, Örebro University

Tebogo Monnakgotla Talks about Her Compositions

Studio 8

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 11 March 2026

Prof. Jennie Henley, Royal Northern College of Music

Book launch: *Inclusive Pedagogy in Music Education*

Enacting Change through Inclusive Pedagogy

Lecture Theatre

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 18 March 2026

Dr Toby Young, Guildhall School of Music and Drama

Opera in Extended Reality

Lecture Theatre

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 25 March 2026

Dr Morag Atchison, University of Auckland

Finding an Authentic Voice in the Art Song of Aotearoa New Zealand

Studio 8

Summer 2026

Tuesday 28–Wednesday 29 April 2026

Postgraduate Research Students' Conference

Lecture Theatre and Studio 8

Wednesday 20 May 2026

Eighteenth-Century Music Studies Symposium

Lecture Theatre

Wednesday 15–Friday 17 July 2026

**Re/sounding Visions: *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* at 20 and Sound on Screen V
joint conference**

Abstracts

The Neurodivergent Musician: A Participatory Action Research Study

Dr Anna Détári, Royal College of Music

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 28 January 2026, Studio 8

According to estimates, the prevalence of various forms of neurodivergence (ND) is much higher among musicians than in the general population. Despite this fact, we know very little about the lived experiences of ND musicians in musical settings, such as educational institutions and places of employment. The lack of information potentially leads to a lack of appropriate support, understanding, and inclusion of ND personnel in these spaces.

To advance our understanding of the lived experience of this previously understudied population, we conducted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) study: a string of conversations where members of the community (neurodivergent musicians, music educators, music researchers, and neurotypical allies; N = 15) were invited to discuss various aspects of their vocational education, professional lives, and careers. The meetings were recorded, transcribed, and analysed with thematic analysis. In alignment with the guiding principles of PAR, all participants were invited to contribute to the analysis and written outputs to ensure their autonomy and utilise their unique expertise to the fullest.

Two main themes and a list of action steps emerged from this research. The first theme related to the internal experience of being neurodivergent in musical settings, including cognitive and physiological differences, ND identity, (lack of) authenticity and masking, misfitting, and grief over lost opportunities due to challenges associated with ND characteristics. The second main theme covered the challenges within institutional environments, such as the relationship with one-on-one teachers, person-centred versus product-centred pedagogies, schedules, support services, and transitioning from higher educational settings to professional settings. The suggested action steps were arranged into four main themes: education, responsibility, communication, and evidence, arguing for support systems based on the lived experience rather than pre-conceived medical models, compulsory training for staff, training in non-academic topics for ND musicians, peer-to-peer support, and more community-led research.

This PAR study is just an initial exploration into the neurodivergent experience, severely limited by the fact that all participants had awareness of their neurodivergent characteristics, were able to self-advocate, and many of them had established careers. More research is needed to give voice to those neurodivergent musicians who are less empowered and more dependent on support.

Biography

Dr Anna Détári is a classically trained flautist (BMus, MA) and music psychologist (MSc, PhD). Her primary interest is musicians' health and wellbeing; she is conducting research into performance-related disorders, particularly Musician's Focal Dystonia, the psychosocial environment of musicians and its impact on physical and mental health, and neurodivergent musicians. She is a Lecturer in Performance Science at the Royal College of Music and a member of the Centre for Performance Science, a collaboration between RCM and Imperial College.

More than Music: Global Music Teacher Training with Olympias Music Foundation

Dr Robert Gardiner and David Bullock, Royal Northern College of Music and Olympias Music Foundation, and Bryony Simcox and George Webster, Broaden
16:15–17:30 Wednesday 4 February 2026, Lecture Theatre

The event will spotlight the Olympias Music Foundation: it will feature a screening of the documentary *More Than Music*, overviews of a pilot research project and a recently commenced PhD project, and a Q&A with some of the researchers, musicians, and film makers involved in the projects.

More Than Music (directed by Bryony Simcox and George Webster) is a documentary about music education. From santoor to cello, classrooms to concert halls, the film follows music charity Olympias across the space of a year.

Against the bleak backdrop of dwindling investment in music education and inequality in Britain's north, Manchester-based Olympias work with bravery and joy. The documentary invites viewers into family homes, a bustling library, a music conservatoire, allotments and city streets asking: what do we lose without diverse, progressive, and sustainable music education?

Meet the teachers, musicians, parents, carers, and bunch of avid children leaving convention behind to make so much more than music, and see how Olympias's commitment to community transforms lives. Evocative and informative in equal measure, this is an honest portrayal of a resilient northern organisation redefining what music education can look like in Britain.

Country House Legends: Imagining Unsung Voices at Erddig

Prof. Wiebke Thormählen, Royal Northern College of Music, Prof. Jeanice Brooks, University of Southampton, and Sarah Cleave, Manchester Metropolitan University
16:15–17:45 Wednesday 18 February 2026, Carole Nash Recital Room

During an afternoon of poetry reading, music, and sound immersion, we will explore Erddig Hall, long-time country seat of the Yorke family. Located near Wrexham in North Wales, and among the National Trust's most fascinating houses, it is richly layered with sights, sounds, and stories from 300 years of habitation. Four poets and creative writers will share their re-imaginings of these stories through sounds, imagery, and the spoken word.

This performance-based Forum presents work undertaken during the project Hearing History: Writing the Sounds of Erddig, a University of Southampton Impact Accelerator-funded project following the large AHRC project Music, Home, and Heritage. The project explored country house histories through their sounding past to investigate how sounds give space to unseen voices and narratives. Hearing History asked creative writers and composers to bring these voices to life, and it tests how to present these through new immersive publication technology combined with traditional print. In this forum, we introduce the audience to this technology and celebrate the creative outputs in their live form.

Introduction, concept, and design

Wiebke Thormählen, Jeanice Brooks, and Sarah Cleave

Poets

Theo Langdale (with sounds by Sophia Hurst), Guruleen Khalo, Iris Skipworth, and Cherry Eckel

Composers

James Waide and Colin Wu

Book launch: *Richard Hageman: The Becoming of a Song Composer*

Dr Nico de Villiers, Royal Northern College of Music

18:00–18:45 Thursday 19 February 2026, Carole Nash Recital Room

As an important contributor to the arts in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century, Richard Hageman (1881–1966) is recognized as one of the Academy Award-winning film composers for John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939). While routinely referred to in the same context as Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, William Grant Still, and Erich Wolfgang Korngold in Hollywood, Hageman was also a celebrated pianist, coach, conductor, and composer of concert music. During his lifetime the gamut of singers of the day sang his songs, from opera stars Geraldine Farrar, Kirsten Flagstad, Lauritz Melchior, and Lawrence Tibbett and recital stalwarts Lotte Lehmann, Nan Merriman, and John McCormack to silver screen songbirds Jeanette MacDonald and Deanna Durbin. Later Kiri Te Kanawa, Thomas Hampson, and Roberta Alexander recorded some Hageman songs, but nowadays these songs remain generally unexplored. In *Richard Hageman: The Becoming of a Song Composer*, Nico de Villiers considers Hageman's songs in depth from the unique perspective of an art song scholar and pianist.

In our century, Richard Hageman is known throughout the vocal world for only one song. In this well-researched volume, Nico de Villiers corrects this injustice by passionately showing us the unknown, uncelebrated Hageman. Any serious fan of vocal repertoire will find this a treasure trove of information about this composer, his life, and his music.

Martin Katz, internationally acclaimed pianist and author

The devoted expertise of Nico de Villiers will certainly excite singers, performers, and public alike to explore this extraordinary forgotten chapter of American creativity.

Thomas Hampson, world-renowned baritone

The second lecture in the José and Rafton Smallwood Masterclass Series, led by David Owen Norris and Nico de Villiers, will follow in the Carole Nash Recital Room 19:00–20:30.

Biography

South African-born Dr Nico de Villiers is a pianist, coach, and researcher and is the Deputy Head of Vocal Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music. He holds degrees from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, the University of Michigan, and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Prior to his appointment at RNCM, Nico worked as vocal coach at various institutions including the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA), the Royal College of Music (London, UK), and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (London, UK).

Contemporary Modernisms? Some Paradoxes of Time in British New Music

Dr Samuel Wilson, Guildhall School of Music and Drama

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 25 February 2026, Lecture Theatre

In this talk I'll examine some aspects of contemporary British 'new music' and suggest that this can tell us something about the paradoxical time that is 'the contemporary'.

In particular, I will outline two apparently contradictory responses to the problematic time of the contemporary: the turn towards advanced technologies on the one hand (for example, digital culture and AI), and archaic and arcane knowledges of folklore and magic on the other. Reflecting on music by composers Ben Nobuto (b. 1996) and Neil Luck (b. 1982) will focus the discussion. These very different responses to (musical) time make more sense if we keep in mind art theorist and philosopher Peter Osborne's proposal that 'the contemporary' comprises a historical moment of multiple and disjunctive experiences of temporality.

Building on this insight, I'll explore how, despite their outward differences, both compositional tendencies address and reformulate a cultural condition ('the contemporary') that is both shared yet disjunctive. Indeed, closer examination of the technology/folk-magic opposition also suggests that the picture isn't as clear as on first sight: often the technological and the arcane intermingle generatively, in-keeping with science fiction writer Arthur C Clarke's famous adage that '[a]ny sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic'.

These paradoxical engagements with time can, furthermore, be more fully appreciated if conceptualised as part of a longer historical – modernist – project of addressing temporality's cultural embeddedness. Musical modernism's temporal commitments – which in its twentieth-century instantiations were unpinned by what Franco 'Bifo' Berardi characterises as a trust in the future – now become refracted through the problem that is 'the contemporary'. I suggest that in their reengagement with modernist attendances to time, these contemporary modernist modalities express something of collective orientations towards the past, present, and future, at a contemporary moment that is conflictual, multiple, and without trust in the future.

Biography

Dr Samuel J Wilson's work explores critical approaches to contemporary music and performing arts. His publications include a monograph, *New Music and the Crises of Materiality: Sounding Bodies and Objects in Late Modernity* (Routledge, 2021), the edited collection *Music–Psychoanalysis–Musicology* (Routledge, 2018), a coedited special issue of *Contemporary Music Review* on 'Musical Modernisms' (2020); articles in journals such as the *Journal of the RMA*, *Music and Letters*, and *Twentieth-Century Music*; and book chapters in *The Oxford Handbook of Time in Music* (2022), *The Sound of Žižek: Musicological Perspectives on Slavoj Žižek* (2023), and *The Music of Absence: An Aesthetics of Loss in the New Millennium* (in press). He is the Events Coordinator for the Music and Philosophy Study Group of the Royal Musical Association and enjoys collaborative projects and events. He teaches critical performance theory at London Contemporary Dance School and music aesthetics at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where he is also a Research Fellow. More details are available at samueljwilson.com.

Tebogo Monnakgotla Talks about Her Compositions

Tebogo Monnakgotla, Örebro University

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 4 March 2026, Studio 8

Composer and teacher Tebogo Monnakgotla presents her work with three solo concertos centred on environmental themes, with particular attention to a violin concerto derived from a scientific article documenting a dragonfly crossing the Pacific Ocean.

In addition, she will talk about two operas: *Jean-Joseph*, based on the life of the Malagasy poet Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, who – due to colonial restrictions – was forbidden to visit his beloved Paris; and *Zebran*, which tells the story of two men fleeing a country where their relationship is forbidden, and the challenges they encounter upon arriving in the supposedly liberal Sweden.

Biography

With recent and upcoming premieres with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic's Nightcap series, the Grant Park Festival in Chicago (with Marina Piccinini and Andreas Haefliger), the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra (with Johan Dalene), the Chelsea Music Festival, as well as a residency at Tanglewood, Monnakgotla is an internationally acclaimed composer.

Currently Composer-in-Residence with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, her Violin Concerto written for the young star violinist Johan Dalene has been praised in the international press. She has been described as 'one of the most prominent Swedish composers of her generation'. Her career took off while she was still a student at the Royal College of Music, when she was awarded the Prize of Recommendation at the International Rostrum of Composers – the European Broadcasting Union's competition for contemporary music. Later that year she was appointed Composer-in-Residence at Swedish Radio, a position she held for two years. In addition to working as a freelance composer, she is Senior Lecturer in Composition at Örebro University.

Tebogo Monnakgotla was born and raised in Uppsala. At the age of ten she began playing the cello at the local music school. In 1994 she started studying composition and cello at the Piteå School of Music, and in 1999 she continued her studies at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, completing her postgraduate diploma in 2006.

Enacting Change through Inclusive Pedagogy

Prof. Jennie Henley, Royal Northern College of Music

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 11 March 2026, Lecture Theatre

Just like every child, young person, and adult we teach, every teacher, educator, facilitator, music leader, coach, etc. brings with them a variety of musical experiences. These musical experiences are all valid music-making activities, and create a rich tapestry in the musical ecosystem, yet we often hold notions of music and musical learning based on a single point of reference. Within an environment where we strive for excellence, using a single point of reference as to what that excellence is can create barriers to music education.

Questions such as who can teach music, who can be taught music, who has the ability to progress, and what excellence is are fundamental questions to interrogate in the discourses surrounding inclusive practice. If these questions are answered with one single idea of what music and musical learning is, not only do we neglect to take account of the rich variety of musical experiences that we each bring to the musical ecosystem, we risk taking a deficit approach to teaching that ultimately manifests as exclusionary practice.

Stepping out of their own experience puts the educator in a vulnerable position, but this is needed in order to understand how to work with others who have different experiences, meeting them at their starting points. The question the educator needs to ask is, 'does this position of vulnerability present a risk, or does it put me in a position of growth?' The answer to that question is key to engaging in inclusive pedagogy.

Drawing on a rich experience of teaching and facilitating music in many educational and community settings, coupled with over twenty years of researching the relationship between pedagogy and inclusion, Professor Jennie Henley explores inclusive pedagogy and how educators can enact change through the way that they work.

Exploring her own story of growth, Henley takes three principles of inclusive pedagogical practice, analyses them using Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), and demonstrates how reconceptualising the notions of quality, difference, expertise, growth, talent, ability, and vulnerability is fundamental to inclusive pedagogy.

Biography

An internationally renowned expert in music pedagogy and educational strategist, Professor Jennie Henley has taught and led music in various contexts for over 25 years. Her experience spans instrumental teaching, ensemble direction, class teaching, workshop leading and teacher education. She has worked with children, young people and adults and has a rich tapestry of practice crossing music education and community music, often working in challenging and complex settings.

Jennie is a Professor in Music Education with a research specialism in the relationship between pedagogy and inclusion. Her research has public impact, and she has attracted funding from a variety of funders including AHRC, ACE, and Comenius, and she is regularly engaged as a consultant for international and national education design and evaluation work.

Opera in Extended Reality

Dr Toby Young, Guildhall School of Music and Drama

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 18 March 2026, Lecture Theatre

This talk explores the interaction between operatic form and extended-reality (XR) storytelling, investigating how opera's heightened affect and sustained emotions can function as a dramaturgical resource for immersive media, and proposing that opera's 'slow storytelling' (Taylor 2016) can counter prevailing tendencies toward fragmentation in digital environments. As a central case study, the paper discusses *LuciaVR*: a virtual reality reimaging of the 'mad scene' from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. *LuciaVR* situates the audience within Lucia's psyche, using spatialised sound to collapse distinctions between environment and interior voice, shifting the operatic voice from its conventional position of mediated distance to one of intimacy. The experience focuses viewers on psychological interiority rather than external spectacle, producing a first-person encounter with Lucia's breakdown articulated through a fractured sonic architecture. The paper positions this strategy as a feminist and phenomenological intervention and engages theories of attunement (Ahmed 2006), attentional economy (Citton 2017), immersive dramaturgy (Machon 2013), and acousmatic listening (Chion 1994).

Biography

Toby Young is Professor of Composition at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. His research focuses on the intersections of music, performance, and technology, with a particular interest in immersive and interactive theatre. As the Music Supervisor of Punchdrunk, he has contributed to soundtracks for a range of TV and stage works including BAFTA-nominated productions for HBO and Sky Arts. He currently leads Immersive Opera, a £1.4 million research initiative exploring extended reality (XR) and interactive storytelling in opera, which investigates the dramaturgical functions of musicality in immersive environments and aims to bridge theoretical inquiry with practical application in opera making.

Finding an Authentic Voice in the Art Song of Aotearoa New Zealand

Dr Morag Atchison, University of Auckland

16:15–17:30 Wednesday 25 March 2026, Studio 8

There is a long tradition of Western Art Music in Aotearoa New Zealand. Singers who travel from these islands in the South Pacific are frequently asked to perform ‘traditional’ music by Māori composers. Yet the Māori waiata (song) that classical singers often perform is largely Westernised and commonly referred to as ‘folk’ or ‘traditional’. Many of these waiata have named composers and poets that are frequently forgotten about or not acknowledged. Are these Aotearoa New Zealand’s first art songs? How did composers from the growing colonial population reflect their new homeland in their writing, how has this art form developed in a bi-cultural society, and does it reflect New Zealand and New Zealanders in the twenty-first century?

This lecture will be presented by soprano Morag Atchison, and she will be joined by current and former RNCM students from New Zealand. It will map the development of classical art song in Aotearoa New Zealand, from the songs by Māori and colonial composers and songs depicting an idealised view of twentieth-century New Zealand to the young composers of today who use the Māori language and the diverse nature of New Zealand as the inspiration for their writing. Featuring songs by Erima Maewa Kaihau (1897–1941), Douglas Lilburn (1915–2001), and David Hamilton (b. 1955) that use texts by New Zealand writers, this lecture recital will also include a new song written by young Māori composer Takerei Komene (b. 1999), bringing a canon of art song that has largely been unexplored internationally to a new audience and promoting the diverse voice of the art song of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Biography

Dr Morag Atchison has firmly established herself as one of New Zealand’s leading sopranos and pedagogues. She studied at the University of Auckland and Royal Academy of Music (London) and was a finalist in the Kathleen Ferrier and Royal Over-Seas League Competitions. She has performed operatic roles for NZ Opera, Auckland Philharmonia, NZSO, English Touring Opera, and Aspen Festival Opera, and recent concert performances include the Britten *War Requiem* (Orchestra Wellington) and a recital in Tunisa with Maria-Neus Devesa. Her debut CD, *The Distance: Songs of David Hamilton (Atoll)*, was released in 2022. Morag is a Senior Lecturer in Voice at the University of Auckland and vocal consultant for the award-winning New Zealand Youth Choir and Auckland Chamber Choir. In 2013 Morag was awarded a Doctorate in Musical Arts from the University of Auckland, the first DMA in vocal studies from a New Zealand University, and in 2019 she was elected as an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM).