

The Future is Green

2023-24
Annual Theme Review



RNCM
ROYAL NORTHERN
COLLEGE of MUSIC

The Future is Green

2023-24 Annual Impact Report

During 2023-24, the RNCM placed the subject of climate and our environmental impact at the heart of our decision-making: actively seeking ways in which we could reduce our carbon footprint through online working, adopting environmentally friendly practices within our community and in alignment with larger-scale interventions in Manchester and the City Region, and using music as a catalyst to raise awareness.

Turning our attention to this worldwide crisis, we asked the question: What role could, and should musicians and creative artists have in response? We sought to use our platform to raise awareness and spark discussion, and to explore what we might achieve within our sector together and individually.

The Future is Green theme in numbers:

- 30 *The Future is Green* themed public performances
- 1 Earth Day symposium bringing together students, music and arts industry guests
- 8 student Spotlight concerts – devised and performed by RNCM students
- 5 Green Fund student projects funded
- Approximately 10,368 KWH of renewable energy and 12 tonnes of nutrient rich biofertilizer created from food waste recycling during the year
- CO2 emissions of Catering team reduced by approximately 7 tonnes per annum.
- 215 tonnes of carbon per annum set to be saved through Library Building Decarbonisation Project

Public Performances

In 30 public performances running from September to July, we brought a focus to climate change and the natural world through *The Future is Green*, providing opportunities for students, staff, audience members and the wider community to learn with us, and to understand and think about the role we all play. We also highlighted what goes on behind the scenes, including the important work within our curriculum and the sustainability measures in place across our estate.



Flagship performance projects included:

- **John Psathas' Voices at the End** – A moving six-piano spectacular that opened the season, fusing live performance, video, and recorded sound in a musical exploration of human civilisation and our relationship with the natural world.
- **In Focus: The Climate Agenda** – Performed at the RNCM by Brand New Orchestra, Carrot Revolution!, Riot Ensemble, and RNCM New Ensemble. At The Wigmore Hall, London, audiences enjoyed two concerts and a discussion.
- **The Silent Planet** – Holst's iconic masterpiece was reimagined in a unique artistic partnership with Delia Stevens and Will Pound, alongside the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and RNCM students, who breathed new life into four movements of The Planets plus an original work, Earth.
- **RNCM Community Opera: Silverwood** – Led by composer and conductor Kate Pearson and director Jonathan Ainscough, our Community Chorus wrote a new opera for their debut performance and presented it alongside RNCM students, plus local community organisations and pupils from four Greater Manchester primary schools.
- **Nature's Music at Manchester Museum** – For one night only, musicians from the RNCM transformed Manchester Museum into an immersive experience where the allure of music met the awe of nature. The event included a performance of Vaughan Williams' The Lark Ascending in a version for violin and chamber choir, new works by RNCM composers, and music from singer/activist group Trees.R.Good.

Additional performances included:

Eight **RNCM Spotlight** concerts, devised and performed by RNCM students encompassing all genres and immersive work, each inspired by the climate and environment we live in; the **RNCM Session Orchestra** playing 'green' inspired covers; the **RNCM Symphony Orchestra** presenting Tansy Davies' *Re-greening*; the **Terje Isungset Ice Quartet** performing on unique ice instruments; the **RNCM Children's Opera** with their adaption of *The Jungle Book*; **Nature on Film** live soundtracking early 20th century documentaries; partner projects with **Manchester Camerata** and RNCM students; and the **RNCM Chamber Orchestra** with **Henning Kraggerud** (director/violin) performing repertoire inspired by the Earth.



Audience engagement

Our plan at the beginning of the year was to find new ways to engage with audiences around our theme and share our story. We did this in two main ways: we made a video series that played at the beginning of many of our *The Future is Green* events, and we had representatives from *The Future is Green* Working Group at each themed event speaking with audiences members.

Chapter One: [Our Artistic Programme](#)

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Chapter Three: [Our Students' Union](#)

Across the performances, we spoke to 35-40 audience members about our *The Future is Green* theme, and there were a range of opinions on climate change. Audiences were most interested in the operational changes we were making.

Audiences, students, and the sector have welcomed our set of resources, which we have compiled for future use and study: [Resources - Royal Northern College of Music \(rncm.ac.uk\)](https://resources-royal-northern-college-of-music.rncm.ac.uk)

Industry engagement

Earth Day: A Call to Action was a one-day symposium for students and music and arts industry guests bringing discussion, performances, and panels to the RNCM. By bringing together young people, music leaders, and industry experts we took stock of our industry's progress in tackling the climate crisis and celebrated the power of music to create change and foster impactful debate. The afternoon included a keynote address, two panel discussions, performances, installations, a tour of the RNCM's decarbonisation project, and time for networking.

Curriculum and Research

Research was conducted with RNCM staff to see if attitudes and behaviours around climate change have changed at all over our *The Future is Green* year. This is the first longitudinal exploration of whether a year of arts engagement can have that kind of impact, and results are to come.

The theme has propelled the RNCM to be recognised as an institution at the forefront of embedding green thinking into everything it does.

The year's theme has also triggered invitations for research collaborative projects and bids, including: Dr Michelle Phillips working on a grant on music, entrepreneurship, and sustainability with the University of Birmingham; our work being cited by music and climate change expert researcher Helen Prior; and invitations to join three other HEIs on a grant creating 30 PhD places for a project on climate change and resilience in young people.

We presented at the Music HE Conference on the topic of student involvement with ecological themes in their studies, and shared the case study of RNCM student Rhianna Wade and her *Sounds of the Earth* creative project (in which she worked with a film maker to capture cello performances in outside settings and presented to a local Friends of the Earth group).

New student initiatives continuing beyond our theme year include: students taking part in the Year 4 BMus Student Creative Projects will now need to consider sustainability; applicants in our Creative Innovators competition will have to consider and explain their sustainability approaches to their project; and the digital provision of most learning materials.

The RNCM hosted a Learning and Teaching Conference that included RNCM research presentations about 'belonging' to nature through 'connecting' to nature, and strategies for embedding eco-literacy into music teaching.

The RNCM participated in the 2023 and 2024 arts sector Act Green Surveys, which posed the question: Thinking specifically about the organisation who sent you this survey, how much importance do you think they place on playing an active role in tackling climate change?

Responses at the start and end of our *The Future is Green* programme suggested the project had had an encouraging impact on the opinion of those surveyed (see table).

	I don't know	Very little importance	Some importance	Great importance
2023	32%	8%	40%	20%
2024	26%	4%	42%	28%

Student Projects: RNCM Green Fund

Fundraised income supported a new £5,000 Green Fund to support student-led 'green' inspired music initiatives with five RNCM students/groups receiving funding:

- **Music at Brereton Nature Reserve** – Nicole Boardman, a PGCE student specialising in Instrumental Teaching, led a group of young children aged 11-12 to a nature reserve to explore the environment and create a song. They engaged in musical activities during the visit and later crafted instruments from items they collected at the reserve, and recorded a song reflecting on their experience.
- **Valette Ensemble: MOMENTUM** – Valette Ensemble performed a concert on Earth Day to bring awareness to the environmental crisis through classical music. Jeanette Szeto (viola) brought together RNCM strings musicians to perform John Adams' Shaker Loops and Richard Strauss' Metamorphosen. Poems were commissioned to interpret each environmental theme.
- **Botanical Beats** – A unique community outreach collaboration from Xaris Alexandratos (aka Trees.R.Good, and a postgraduate Popular Music student) with 10 musicians that utilised recorded samples from the Firs Environmental Research station to produce a 'botanical beat' for each biome and create an audio trail and playlist.
- **NOMAD: The Gardener's Daughter** – NOMAD chamber ensemble took their most recent work on tour. A music/theatre piece featuring strings, voice, and choir, it told the story of the gardener's daughter who is connected to nature from birth, exploring themes of grief and resilience while encouraging audiences to find joy and peace in spending time outside. Funding took it to venues in Manchester and Leeds.
- **The Juna Quartet: Evergreen** – Environmentally themed music performed at a sustainable venue, this event showcased compositions including *The Evergreen* by Caroline Shaw, from her 2022 album. The aim was to encourage audience members to contemplate and think about climate change in all its vastness and sadness, and to be moved and consoled by the music.

The Green Fund will continue and become part of our Creative Innovators initiative, with a Green Fund prize for a student entrepreneurial project from 2025 onwards.

Students' Union

The Students Union utilised Green Week to galvanise engagement, which included: litter picking around Oxford Road, the RNCM, and Whitworth Park; plant pot painting on the RNCM rooftop garden; beeswax wrap making; and reusing/recycling any past decorations purchased by the SU for our events/parties.

The Welfare Officer organised walks around Manchester and the surrounding areas, such as the Peak District. The RNCM Art Society responded to *The Future is Green* by hosting an art exhibition on our rooftop garden. Students from across the College showcased their wide artistic endeavours with work that responded to their personal reflections on the natural world and the climate emergency through the medium of fine art.



The RNCM Opera embraced sustainability across all areas of production: scenery, lighting, wigs, costumes, and props. Initiatives now ongoing include:

- Developing a modular re-usable model box in addition to use of digital model box presentation.
- Set built from stock or hired modular parts when appropriate (decking, treads) and the use of projection in place of bespoke painted cloths.
- Upcycling of production flooring, re-painted and used multiple times, or sets re-used in other productions (the Figaro set was used in the RNCM Children's Opera, for example).
- Parts re-used in opera scenes (pillars, windows, archways) and stock gauzes, masking, and backcloths re-used across many productions and events.
- FSC grade timber used in constructed items, and local construction companies used when viable.
- Scenery disposed of via recycling, not landfill, when upcycling cannot be achieved.
- Upcycling of lighting equipment gifted from the National Theatre, and lighting gels filed and re-used.
- Costumes hired when practical or sourced from charity shops/second hand suppliers, and garments shared between double casts where appropriate.
- Purchased wigs stored for re-use; items hired or loaned from other companies; props and furniture stored for re-use, borrowed, or bought second hand.
- For music, digital scores used whenever possible.

Food and Drink



New introductions:

- Food waste recycling – from which we created approximately 10,368 KWH of renewable energy and 12 tonnes of nutrient rich biofertilizer during the year, and successfully reduced the department's CO2 emissions by approximately seven tonnes per annum.
- Single-use plastic glasses replaced with reusable half and pint cups, plus 100 per cent recyclable takeaway hot drink cups.
- The RNCM Keep Cup, for sale with discounts – saving approximately 2,400 single-use cups, 7kg of plastic, 54kg of timber, and 88kg of carbon dioxide.
- Plastic takeaway cutlery replaced with wooden or compostable plant-based options.
- Approximately 26 per cent of our Cafe Bar menu is now vegan.
- The RNCM follows the Guardians of Grub's 'six ways to save food waste', prioritising smart ordering, savvy storage, smart menu, essential skills, right portion sizes, and engaging customers.
- Our waste cooking oil is turned into biodiesel, reducing energy consumption and food waste.
- We recycled old furniture from the café, donating it to other organisations to reduce landfill.
- Our chopping boards are regularly swapped out for a resurfaced set using the Nella Cutlery resurfacing service. This saves money, ensures we are food safe, and reduces plastic waste.
- Our Sustainable Food Policy focuses on waste management.
- Sustainable procurement by purchasing products through TUCO (a framework which uses suppliers, brands, and businesses who meet sustainability requirements).
- Produce purchased from ethical sources including Fairtrade, free-range, Marine Conservation Society, Red Tractor, and Rainforest Alliance, and local suppliers prioritised where possible to support community businesses and reduce food miles.
- Cafeology, our new coffee supplier, is purchased direct from coffee growers, and ethically and responsibly sourced to minimise the impact on the environment.
- A SMART menu is in place where we use the same ingredients across numerous dishes

The Building



During the year, RNCM Members went on tours to visit the work of the RNCM Decarbonisation project. Completed in 2022, this project is on track to save an estimated 389 tonnes of carbon annually, lowering our energy usage by 41 per cent through the use of:

Solar PV Array: Combined with an efficient battery-storage system, we can optimise storage and purchase of electricity at off-peak rates. The roof-mounted solar panel array provides 14,329KWH, and is supported by a 1MW Tesvolt battery storage system.

Battery Storage: A new 1MW battery storage system with a 300kW peak charge and discharge capacity increases energy efficiency.

Gas Boilers: The RNCM was previously utilising 12 gas-fired modular boilers, with a total output of 2,400KW. The new system utilises only six modular boilers, each rated at 196KW, to give a total output of 1,176KW, resulting in annual carbon savings of 349 tCO₂e.

During the year we were nominated for a prestigious Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Contribution to Environmental Leadership. At the end of our *The Future is Green* year, the RNCM began the second phase of this initiative – a new **Library Building Decarbonisation Project** which, on completion, will save 215 tonnes of carbon per annum.