



RNCM Opera Circle

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RNCM
ROYAL NORTHERN
COLLEGE of MUSIC



Sir John Tomlinson CBE
President, RNCM

A message from the RNCM President

My relationship with the Royal Northern College of Music affords me a great sense of pride. I am an alumnus of its precursor, the Royal Manchester College of Music – a school at which I gained truly inspirational training and began my 50-year journey singing as a professional musician in the world's greatest opera houses and concert halls.

Since 2017, I have also had the honour to serve as President of the RNCM, and to observe the outstanding education that this RNCM continues to offer, and the commitment today's students have to becoming the finest musicians of the future. Every year, we see the young students develop into confident and skilled performers, and naturally I am particularly excited to watch the progress of students in my former department, the School of Vocal Studies and Opera.

The School is world-renowned and boasts the very best teaching staff and international visiting professors, plus close relationships with many professional organisations, including Opera North and Buxton International Festival. As part of their intensive and rigorous training, twice a year the School's students

perform in RNCM Opera productions in the RNCM's 670-seat theatre; but providing this level of specialist training and student experience requires serious investment.

That is why we have launched the RNCM Opera Circle – a new way for people to support these wonderful productions and to secure a future for the next generation of world-leading opera performers. As a thank you for supporting the initiative, Opera Circle members will enjoy unique opportunities to experience behind-the-scenes during the planning and rehearsal process, and to see for themselves the impact of their investment.

This valuable scheme can only succeed with the support of our friends and patrons, and so I would urge you to join today and help make a real difference to the futures of these talented young artists.

**SIR JOHN TOMLINSON CBE
PRESIDENT, RNCM**

Why do we need opera, anyway?



PROFESSOR LYNNE DAWSON HEAD OF VOCAL STUDIES AND OPERA, RNCM

I am still somewhat baffled that I've spent my working life as a professional musician; it seems to have come about by happenstance. I trained not in music, but in modern languages and spent five years in industry as a translator and interpreter. Those years were to stand me in excellent stead as a singer. I loved to sing and finally could not resist leaving that first employment in order to commence studies as an undergraduate in a conservatoire.

I very soon left those studies as, due to the recommendation of my first teacher, who was indeed a member of staff at the RNCM, I was rather catapulted into professional work by being asked to join a very long-established vocal ensemble, with whom I then sang for nearly four years. It was they who taught me to be a musician. One learns quickly to collect information from every colleague and, from very early, I was hugely fortunate to work with some wonderful musicians: singers, instrumentalists, conductors, accompanists, coaches, directors. The conductors with whom I worked, over many years, included Barenhoim, Mehta, Giulini, Hogwood, Pinnock, Rattle.

Opera came to me after consort and concert singing, and recordings of both opera and oratorio concert repertoire, with many major labels and orchestras. How can one possibly learn so quickly to multi-task on stage without prior training – how to rehearse, to react, to listen and be in time at a distance, how to enter the stage, walk, kneel, use the space, not upstage others on stage, use distance as tension, project, understand what is required at every level, when everything one sings is new repertoire. It was a very quick learning curve, and I was fortunate to work with some wonderful, and patient, directors. The directors of the first two productions in which I was involved were Colin Graham and Sir Nicholas Hytner.

Perhaps not having had the benefit of the training makes one super-aware of how to prepare young singers for the profession.

As tutors, many of whom have had long performing, and teaching, careers, we are very aware that the students are often looking at repertoire for the first time and our combined programme of voice and opera is specifically designed to give them the skills they need to develop into competent and confident performers. They need excellent technical, language and performance skills, imagination,



RNCM Opera: La scala di seta
Photographer: Craig Fuller



Backstage: RNCM Opera
Photographer: Robin Clewley

experience on stage, first-rate musicianship skills, in order to succeed.

At the RNCM, we have an extraordinary tradition to uphold; the School has decades of successful alumni, singers who have entered the profession and had, and currently have, international careers. This has not ceased in the latest decades, and we have alumni singing throughout the world as international soloists and choristers.

Singing in opera is of course not natural; in many ways the singer's training is similar to that of an athlete – how, for instance, do the singers possibly produce such volume without a microphone? It may take quite a long time to train a singer; there is natural maturity and development, and there is a recognised 'system' of training. Of the students, it requires huge commitment, drive, energy, generosity, integrity.

At the RNCM, in addition to a curriculum which includes movement, physicalisation, stagecraft, we programme opera scenes and two fully staged operas with orchestra, double cast, every year. One can't simply describe how to be an effective singing actor; the students need the experience of doing it.

Why do we need opera, anyway? Perhaps the Arts have been, and are, the way of bringing emotion into all matters which are challenging: political, social, societal, nowadays around climate change, and so on – all areas about which our students care enormously.

Opera today is experiencing an interesting evolution and growth as generation of musicians, composers, and writers bring through new stories, new voices, and a fresh perspective on operatic narratives and music, drawing renewed interest in its possibilities and purpose.

In opera, there is the combination of many art forms – music, theatre, acting, design, declamation, rhetoric – and opera isn't a completely straightforward sport; it has been described as 'life amplified' and it can easily take 10 years of study and experience for a young artist to enjoy resilience and confidence in their skills. Even if, eventually, our young singers and instrumentalists may not decide to follow full-time operatic careers, the skills they will have learned will enable them to flourish in many careers.

I feel enormously fortunate to have been able to work as a professional musician for most of my life, and privileged to be part of the journey our students will experience as they discover their own future career paths.

We will be hugely grateful if you are able to offer support to our young students by joining the Opera Circle. It helps to give us not only the possibility to continue this exceptional training, but it gives the students confidence that we care that their musical ambitions are cherished and respected. With that confidence, they may just be able to fly.



Ryan Vaughan Davies

Shaping the Future of Opera

‘The RNCM’s emphasis on real-world experience, through masterclasses, workshops, and full-scale productions, prepared me for the demands of a professional career in music; from the workings of backstage to rehearsal etiquette. This holistic approach to education at the RNCM was not only vital to my technical development, but also instrumental in shaping my confidence and artistry in a safe and nurturing environment, which has allowed my career to flourish.’

Ryan Vaughan Davies ARNCM, graduated 2019. RNCM performances included Chorus (*Così fan tutte*, *La Vie Parisienne*), Gherardo (*Gianni Schicchi*), Mr By-Ends (*The Pilgrim’s Progress*); appearances at Edinburgh Festival and Bergen Grieghallen.



Alexandra Lowe

‘I sang my first Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* at the RNCM. This has really been my core role since leaving the RNCM, having sung it five times since then, most recently with Opera North. All the roles I sang at the RNCM were the perfect fit for me and my voice type, giving me the best foundation and experience I could have asked for. The quality of the productions and the support of the creative teams were all world class and very much shaped me into the artist I am today.’

Alexandra Lowe ARNCM, graduated 2017. RNCM roles included Helena (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*), the title role in Theodora, Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*), Métella (*La Vie Parisienne*) and Rose Murrant (*Street Scene*). *Brasileiras No. 5* by Heitor Villa-Lobos with the RNCM Cello Ensemble.

Support the Future of Opera: Join the RNCM Opera Circle

Your support is vital to the success of the RNCM's opera productions. By becoming a member of the Opera Circle, you help us deliver high-quality, professionally resourced productions that are essential for nurturing the next generation of opera stars.

These productions provide our trainee opera singers with invaluable experience, allowing them to hone their craft and gain the confidence needed to enter the industry. Your investment ensures that our students have the opportunity to perform on a distinguished stage, preparing them for successful careers in the industry.

Join the Opera Circle today with an annual donation of £2,500+ and play a crucial role in shaping the future of opera.



RNCM Opera: Mansfield Park
Photographer: Robin Clewley

As a thank you for your support, Opera Circle members have the unique opportunity to see behind-the-scenes during the planning and rehearsal process and get under the skin of opera at the RNCM.

Supporters can enjoy:

Invitations to attend chorus rehearsals, piano rehearsals and sitzprobes

The chance to meet the artistic teams and cast members

Set tours and previews of costumes and design

Exclusive content including videos from leading cast members

Thank you and credit in programmes and on our website

Invitations to exclusive Principal's Opera Receptions

rncm.ac.uk/opera-circle

CONTACT

For more information and to join, contact Bethan Ward, Head of Corporate and Regular Giving

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RNCM Opera: The Snow Maiden
Photographer: Craig Fuller

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