

RNCM Music Education News

Spring 2019



Playing with time

Dr Michelle Phillips (Assistant Head of Undergraduate Studies, pictured) and research collaborator Dr Luke Jones (University of Manchester) gave a talk on time perception to 10-year-old children at Flowery Fields Primary School, Hyde. The aim was to help the youngsters develop ideas for a newly-devised play about time, funded through a grant awarded to the school, which is in a low-income area. The discussion was wonderful, focusing on the children's musical tastes (including Black Sabbath and Iron Maiden), their experiences of whether Christmas feels like it approaches slowly (children) or quickly (adults), and the role of music in our lives. Questions showed remarkable insight. One girl asked, 'Why is music so powerful?' and another, 'If I feel sad, and I listen to sad music and then happy music, will I still feel sad?' The Artistic Director for the theatre project, Andy said: 'The children and grown-ups were totally engaged with these presentations, and I'm sure will impact on the development of our piece.'

Researchers from Sibelius Academy

In March, we welcomed two visitors from the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Finland, to present training seminars to doctoral students and supervisors.

Dr Guadalupe López-Íñiguez, Adjunct Professor of Music Education, discussed the 'Lifelong development of the musician's learner identity: A multidisciplinary postdoctoral research project at the Sibelius Academy' and Tuula Jääskeläinen, Doctoral Researcher and RNCM Erasmus Exchange Student, led a workshop on 'Exploring student's workload in Higher Music Education'. Dr Michelle Phillips (Assistant Head of Undergraduate Studies) said: 'Both seminars offered insightful and topical reflections (and stimulated interesting discussion!) on issues relevant to today's musicians, in particular those in conservatoires, who may be balancing multiple commitments that impact on workload.'



Percussion improvisation with older people

RNCM Percussion Tutor Andrea Vogler has had workshop material published as part of a new arts resource for working with older people. The Baring Foundation's *Treasury of Arts Activities for Older People* offers 50 activities, long and short, for use in any setting with older people. It can be downloaded for free [here](#).

RNCM Music Education Conference

On Friday 28 June, we'll welcome delegates from around the north-west and beyond for the RNCM's first [Music Education Conference: Pathways to progression](#). Aimed at music teachers from all backgrounds and settings, the event focuses on how to support young people at each stage of their musical learning journey, including at critical moments of transition. Practical workshops will run alongside panel debates, presented by a wide variety of RNCM staff and external speakers. Two

keynote speakers will set the tone for the day: Jimmy Rotherham, Feversham Primary Academy, Bradford; and alumna Kate Campbell-Green, Head of Music Service at Tameside Council.

There are still a small number of free staff places available. To apply, please complete the [online registration form](#) and enter 'RNCM Staff' in the comments section. Places are limited and will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. You will receive confirmation of your place by email.

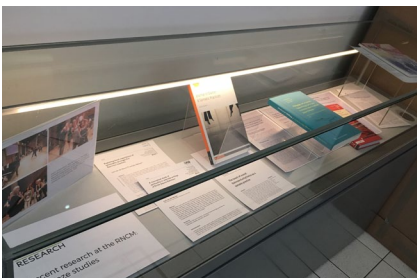
Welcome Sara

In January we welcomed [Sara Ascenso](#) as our first Lecturer in Musicians' Health and Wellbeing. A pianist and music psychologist by training, Sara is in the final stages of a doctorate on musicians' mental health (Royal College of Music). Her role at the RNCM is to develop and oversee a College-wide curriculum in this vital area and to help staff embed health education within RNCM pedagogy at all levels.



Dalcroze studies on display

If you haven't already done so, please stop by the display cabinet in the RNCM reception. It showcases a wide variety of recently published research on Dalcroze and related fields by RNCM staff.



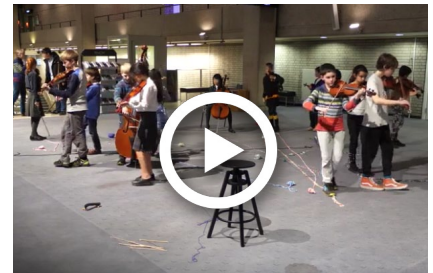
Congratulations to...

Bethan Habron-James (Tutor in Dalcroze Eurhythmics and Tutor for Young Strings), the latest member of staff to be accredited by AdvanceHE, previously known as the Higher Education Academy. After successfully completing the first year of a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCertHE) at Bangor University, Bethan is now Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (AFHEA).



Young Strings at RNCM festival

RNCM Young Strings featured at our January Strings Festival in a performance on the upper concourse. Amongst other items, some of the children presented the première of their own piece, *Spinning a Yarn*, a contribution to the College's *Sounds Original* season. This was a musical reflection on texture, with the young musicians improvising with voice, movement and instruments. Inspired by the ideas of music educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and anthropologist Tim Ingold, it was a wonderful example of



various practices (teaching, performance, research) being woven together.

Recent research success

Sara Ascenso (Lecturer in Musicians' Health and Wellbeing) has contributed a chapter to *Leadership of Pedagogy and Curriculum in Higher Music Education* (Routledge), one of two volumes on leadership development in higher music education. The chapter, 'Leadership in the transition from music student to professional musician' is co-authored with

Jonathan McCormick (Chicago Symphony Orchestra) and Rosie Perkins (Royal College of Music). The research explores the potential of an innovative fellowship being developed at The Civic Orchestra of Chicago as a model towards bridging the gap between conservatoire training and professional integration for recent graduates.

Learning in Latvia



Dr John Habron, Head of Music Education, enjoyed an Erasmus teaching visit to the Jāzeps Vītols Academy of Music, Riga, Latvia in March. In a series of four sessions, students and staff explored a variety of topics: Introduction to research (what, why, how); Introduction to music therapy; Dalcroze Eurhythmics, health and wellbeing; Re-animating the past to understand Dalcroze practice. Invited by colleague Dr Ginta Pētersone (pictured with John), this was also an opportunity to learn more about music education in Latvia and to strengthen links between our institutions.

Music Mark conference

In February, Robbie Gardiner (Assistant Head of Music Education, PGCE) represented the RNCM at a Music Mark Members Meeting. The College's choice to become a member of Music Mark followed their North-West Conference, hosted by RNCM in September 2018.

The meeting was a chance to network with partners and be updated about Music Mark's plans and lobbying work. Delegates discussed the development of the Model Music Curriculum and considered what should be included at each Key Stage. As expected, opinions varied according to individuals' educational contexts (popular music, special educational needs, higher education), yet discussions were insightful and thought-provoking. Robbie said, 'There is a real opportunity to join up thinking across the sector to present a clear voice at a national level, one that enriches children's musical experiences throughout the country.'

Westminster report launch

In February, Dr John Habron attended the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Music Education, at Portcullis House, Westminster. The APPG launched Music education: State of the nation, a hard-hitting report co-written by the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) and researchers at the University of Sussex. The findings show widespread decline in the numbers of schools offering opportunities to learn music, children taking music exams (GCSE, A-level and graded exams) and teachers being trained. The implications have been widely discussed, including within the RNCM, for example at the new Development Book Club, started by Suzie Thompson (Director of Development). You can download the report [here](#).

2 minutes with... Robbie Gardiner



The RNCM's Assistant Head of Music Education (PGCE) talks to Dr John Habron, Head of Music Education

Could you tell us a little bit about your background?

I have always made music and considered myself a musician, from my first band (where I could only play one note per line) to being a professional clarinetist (where there are often too many notes per line!). Having taught music to children for over 10 years, I believe everyone has a musician inside. It is part of being human to engage with music. My main responsibility is to nurture, enable and encourage the musicianship of all young people. As the leader of the RNCM PGCE, my role is to equip future music educators to teach music musically, immersing learners in thoroughly meaningful musical experiences.

Could you tell us a story about a teacher that had a big impact on you? What do you think made the difference?

Fortunately, I have always been immersed in a very musical world. I have very early memories of my mother singing to me and listening to Dixieland Jazz records with my Dad. They were the most important music teachers in my life. They cared about music deeply and supported my aspiration to pursue clarinet playing seriously, finding good teachers and ferrying me all over rural Scotland to make music with others. I am sure this story is mirrored by many other musicians, who benefited similar figures who were 'teachers', but not necessarily in name.

How did you get into teaching?

During my RNCM undergraduate degree, I observed some teaching at Salford Music Service. The tutor asked if I would like to try teaching saxophone. I loved it and Salford offered me work. Teaching in schools in the poorest areas of Manchester, but with the most enthusiastic children, was utterly inspiring. So, I did the RNCM PGCE with lecturer Geoff Reid, who challenged and inspired me to become the most musical music teacher I could possibly be. This experience remains with me and has guided me ever since.

How would you describe your approach to teaching and learning?

Recently, I have come to think of the teacher's role as emancipator, not giving knowledge but enabling students to learn for themselves. Or, the teacher as guide, asking good questions, suggesting useful approaches, challenging where appropriate,

avoiding didactic 'truths'. For me, knowledge is in the hands of the learner. The teacher helps the student grasp and own it for themselves, so that it truly becomes 'their knowledge'.

Are there specific areas of pedagogy that are important to you?

A principle of our approach on the PGCE course is immersion in musical experience before articulating understanding. Music making is the first step (playing, listening, moving), as is considering everyone a musician from the outset. I avoid the idea of children as 'incomplete musicians,' but rather as full musicians, who need more time and more experiences to develop their musical skills and understanding.

You are currently undertaking an EdDoc. Could you explain what that is and how you see the connection between pedagogy and research?

The EdDoc is a professional doctorate connecting my professional practice with academic research. I am investigating how music teachers begin subconsciously to allow national policies to influence their practice. This is important because the current political stance is one of holding educators to account and ensuring they prove children are progressing in a linear fashion. However, the things that matter (creativity, self-expression, musical tastes and choice, to name a few) don't fit this model and are at risk of being ignored. My hope is this research will reaffirm musical values within music education and help future teachers resist unhelpful trends.

What advice would you have for young musicians not sure about the place of teaching in their career?

Very few people know from the get-go that they want to be a teacher. It tends to be something we stumble across. I would suggest that you simply have a go and see what you think! Every year, I hear stories from students who found themselves in front of a group of children by chance, but then realised they loved the gratification that it afforded them. It's quite likely you don't know how good a teacher you might be and how much you might enjoy it unless you do it. So why not have a go?

How would you describe the ideal teacher in three words?

Passionate, caring, creative.