



BELONGING UPDATE

JULY 2024

Dean of Students, Liz Kenny

The Royal Academy of Music moves music forward by inspiring successive generations of musicians to connect, collaborate and create.

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**UNIVERSITY
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INTRODUCTION FROM LIZ KENNY

Welcome to the half-yearly update on Belonging work at the Academy. It's filled with stories about our community and the varied people we work with; it's designed to inspire as well as inform. It is complemented by the more quantifiable **Belonging Scheme** where we hold ourselves more formally to account. If now is not the ideal moment for you to read this, it will live with all the other reports on our **Belonging** page, which is becoming a fascinating archive of change at the Academy. As ever, I am grateful to all our contributors who not only do great work but have taken time at the end of the year to write about it.

BLUEPRINT FOR ALL

In 2020, we invited **Blueprint for All** to undertake a thorough review of Belonging at the Academy. After conducting in-depth interviews with staff and students, and an audit of all our policies and procedures, they recognised our commitment to change. They identified areas for improvement, and they have supported us in working towards our goals. In 2024 they returned and noted a marked sense of progress and optimism, as well as achievement, within our community. Read their new report [here](#).



STUDENTS LEAD CHANGE

As ever, our students' creativity and organisational initiatives are making waves at the Academy. Here are two updates from this year's *Seen & Heard* Festival and from the African Caribbean Society.

SEEN & HEARD FESTIVAL

Every year, students from across the Academy unite for our *Seen & Heard* Festival: a celebration of diversity in classical music which features a programme of work by under-represented composers.

Listen to an excerpt of **Rêverie** by Angela Morley which was performed by Will Clark and Siyuan Xu during this year's festival. Angela Morley was a three-time Emmy Award-winning musical director, and the first openly transgender person to be nominated for an Oscar, receiving two Academy Award nominations in her lifetime.

This year one of the programmes put the experience and perception of disability centre-stage. It was conceived and curated by 2024 graduate Verity Hall, who writes:

'When I first came to the Academy, I was unsure how my disability would be received, but when I spoke with the head of my department, I had such a positive response. I remember being told that 'I should shout it from the rooftops' as it was such a feat to become an opera singer with a disability such as Cystic Fibrosis. It was at that moment that I decided to create a concert featuring students at the Academy with disabilities to

perform a programme of amazing music while also sharing awareness of each person's illness. After communicating my idea with the Students' Union, Megan Humphries agreed to take it on and make it a part of *Seen & Heard*. On the 25 June 2024 we premiered the first ever concert celebrating musicians with Disability, and now I have graduated, I hope it will become an annual feature.'

NEURODIVERGENCE AND DISABILITY

We are listening to feedback we've had this year from students, organised by the SU, with a WhatsApp group of students with disabilities and/or Personal Learning Plans organised by the SU's Belonging re, Megan Humphries.

As a result we conducted two staff workshops with our Student Support team, and are now identifying training programmes in autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and other areas of difference for our Counselling and academic teaching staff, for the Autumn term 2024.

MANIFESTO OF THE AFRICAN CARRIBEAN SOCIETY

President, Joshua Furtado-Mendes

As a society we are here to provide support as well as a safe space for the student members of the Academy who are of Afro-Caribbean heritage. In order to accomplish this, we endeavour to provide backing to students who wish to share their cultures and shine lights on social issues that matter to them. Our fundamental goals include achieving exposure of and respect toward Afro-Caribbean culture, as well as integrating our points of view to broaden the social discourse at the Academy, now and in the future.

We celebrate and promote the multi-varied cultural and musical expressions of Afro-Caribbean men and women throughout history and seek to promote this history within the Academy. We seek to empower our members through education, fostering a sense of community and encouragement in personal and professional growth. We are a society of inclusivity and welcome individuals from all backgrounds to join us in our advocacy of greater awareness of Afro-Caribbean culture. We seek social justice, equality and recognition of our members in their contributions to the Academy.

We strive for implementation of change through more cooperation and awareness between the African Caribbean Society (ACS), Royal Academy Students' Union (RAM SU) and the Academy's administrative bodies, which will provide opportunities for the concerns of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students to be heard and addressed. We will provide a support service to students who want advice on matters of racism, guidance on navigating student life, or who would like any of their concerns heard.

As a new society, goals for the upcoming years include growing our presence at the Academy through holding events such as general meetings, cultural nights and bringing in a variety of speakers.

CO-CREATIVITY AND DEMENTIA

Head of Open Academy, Julian West

At the moment, I am leading a project at Penfold Court, a housing scheme in Marylebone operated by Housing 21: a not-for-profit provider of extra care and retirement living for older people.

A diverse group of staff and residents are involved in the project, the majority of whom are living with dementia.

Building on my previous research into the benefits of working co-creatively with people living with dementia, the project harnesses the skills of a core group of experienced musicians and dancers working through free improvisation alongside the residents and staff.

Regular sessions happen throughout the academic year, allowing Open Academy Fellows and students opportunities to participate and gain experience.

The notion of agency – being able to affect one’s circumstances and environment – is seen as a key factor in maintaining a sense of wellbeing. This project investigates the ways in which improvisation through music and dance can help to identify and support agency for those living with dementia. It will be possible for the project to run for three years thanks to the generosity of the Constance Travis Charitable Trust.

WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Head of Widening Participation, Claire Cooke

The Widening Participation Department works to increase the diversity of applicants to the Academy (in terms of ethnic and economic background) via Your Academy: an annual programme of music clubs, collectives and summer schools for young people between the ages of 12 and 17 years old.

Over three active years of the programme, nearly 40 of our participants have progressed to Junior Academy in composition, jazz, musical theatre and percussion, and a significant number have gained places at Royal Holloway, Goldsmiths, Leeds Conservatoire and Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

Recent success stories include a percussion participant who attended Percussion Club in association with Haringey Music Service in January 2023, which culminated in a performance for friends and family at St Mark's Church.

The participant came back to the Academy as a regular member of Beyond the Dots (a monthly jazz club for former attendees of Widening Participation programmes) and gained a place at Junior Academy.

We are proud that this participant has now been offered a place at Guildhall School of Music & Drama in the Percussion Department from September 2024. We look forward to starting a careers-based talks programme from the Autumn term and well as Mentor Club for participants in Years 11 and 12 thinking about their future.

For more information, email participation@ram.ac.uk.



Widening Participation attendees on 'Takeover Day' 2023. Photo credit: Charlotte Levy

JUNIOR ACADEMY

Head of Junior Academy, John Hutchins

Adjacent to excellence, wellbeing is at the heart of Junior Academy's ethos. We are proud of the atmosphere we have created emphasising musical quality alongside happiness.

A new academic year always begins with a 'get-to-know you' session so that all new students can form relationships that will stay with them for the future.

Healthy Young Musician goes from strength to strength. It is the first course of its kind at a Junior Conservatoire constantly adapting its programme for the modern performer. Encouragement is offered for all students to be open about their concerns and discuss their fears linked with performance and practice. Our 'attentive listener', Helen Kuby, is available to students as a willing ear, and as a means to access needed resources and advice.

There is no assessment at Junior Academy. Performance opportunities are abundant, with feedback. Mistakes are accepted and digested, allowing for healthy and swift progression through learning.

In 2023/34, Junior Academy offered 97 bursaries to students. A total of £170,000 was made available through the help of a number of donors and the government's Music and Dance Scheme (MDS).

REPERTOIRE

Dean of Students, Liz Kenny and Head of Woodwind, Fraser Gordon

When we conducted last year's Postgraduate Review there was a strong sense from some students that they would like to be supported to research and create their own more diverse programming, and we've seen

wonderful results in Festivals such as *Seen & Heard, Students Create* and in applications to the Artistic Planning Group for our concert series.

Other students wanted to see more diversity in set repertoire and in our large scale projects and who directs them. The Diary of Events is a very good place to see how we are doing in this area. Here is another example from woodwind, as Fraser Gordon, Head of Woodwind, writes:

The Woodwind Department recognises the importance of ensuring the curriculum is regularly updated to remain relevant and reflect diversity in the composers being performed and programmed. For example, the saxophone syllabus has recently been updated to include orchestral excerpts from 2024 honoree Errollyn Wallen.

Set works for prizes this year have included 'An Encore for Bassoon and Wine' by Dani Howard, 'Clarinet Sonata Op 45' by Ruth Gipps and a movement of 'Sonata for Piccolo and Piano' by Amanda Harberg.

Woodwind classes are increasingly used by students to share their own research and present a broader range of music, which in turn influences choices made by both students and staff.



Oboist Ellen Wilkinson and Fraser Gordon performing 'An Encore for Bassoon and Wine' by Dani Howard on Double Reed Day, 2023. *Photo credit: Matthew Johnson. Red dye was used for the performance.*

GET INVOLVED

It starts with students. I am always more than happy to hear your ideas and help you to progress them. Email me at ekenny@ram.ac.uk