

# BELONGING UPDATE

## AUGUST 2025

Dean of Students, Elizabeth 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  
OF LONDON**

# INTRODUCTION

This update is a way for me to share meaningful stories and photos highlighting the moments that strengthen our sense of community, connection and shared purpose.

You can find more comprehensive statistics relating to our overall progress in the Academy's [Belonging Annual Report 2023-24](#).

As ever, this report is the result of a collective effort. Thank you to all contributors, staff and students, and especially to our tireless Students' Union, brilliantly led over the past two years by Tiffany Qiu. A huge thanks to Tiffany, Megan Humphries, Lisa Archontidi-Tsaldaraki, Peter Raistrick, Stephanie Dring Draughton and Munro Ashton, along with the sub-team of Ruby Howells, Yan Ee Toh, Zac Taylor Schindler and Gabriel Alves Candido Da Silva.

We welcome Gabriel as Students' Union President for 2025-26. Farewell and another vote of thanks to Sylvie Woods, our Senior Copywriter and Publications Manager: Sylvie has skilfully guided the architecture and content of this and so many other public-facing documents during her time at the Academy. We wish her good luck in her next adventures.

In this issue, there's a strong focus on performance — especially student-curated work — reflecting how deeply Belonging is integrated into both our artistic and educational activity.

Elizabeth Kenny

## FESTIVALS

### STUDENTS CREATE

Project Manager – Artist Development, Rhiannon Crompton

This year's *Students Create* Festival saw 19 original creative projects performed over the course of three days, with 150 students involved.

Events included a new staging of *Pierrot lunaire*; 'Jazz meets Baroque'; a concert centred around the Steingraeber transducer piano (a traditional acoustic piano modified with hidden transducers that vibrate the soundboard, allowing it to produce both acoustic and electronic sounds); musical responses to the work of Charles Ives and Yoko Ono as well as a DJ set with live musicians.

The festival also presented world premieres of 29 student compositions. In total, students performed to a record 1665 audience members.



Performers in Students Create Festival 2025. *Photo Credit: Henry Hu*

## SEEN & HEARD

Our fifth *Seen & Heard* series, led and curated by the Students' Union's Belonging representative Megan Humphries, celebrated diversity in classical music through performances by inclusive ensembles of Academy students. The programmes explored themes of disability and celebrated global musical traditions.



Mezzo-soprano Rachael Simone Best-Babayeju, baritone Toben Durrant, harpist Hannah Runting, horn player Isaac Shieh and pianist Tiffany Qiu presented works by Hannah Runting, Isaac Shieh, Henry Lawes, Wolf and Schubert. Later in the week, soprano Andrea Rodríguez-Gómez, tenor Joshua Furtado-Mendes, pianist Andrew Tait, flautist Ruby Howells and harpist Bonnie Scott joined Simone again alongside brass ensemble Queentet — Sigrid Bengtsson, Sophie Kukulies, Rachel O'Connor, Alice Knight and Nona Lawrence — for works by Florence Price, Joan Tower, Yuko Uébayashi and others.



Seen & Heard Festival 2025: *Photo Credit: Megan Humphries*

## FOCUS ON DISABILITY

### DISABLED STUDENTS' GROUP

Megan's time in post included the launch of the Academy's first Disabled Students' Group. In this forum, students are able to express their experiences of and ideas about disability. This has fed into our Committee structure (Student-Staff Liaison Committee, Safeguarding and Support, E-learning, Belonging and Undergraduate and Postgraduate programme Boards) which are our practical levers for effecting change.

Getting involved in committee work sounds bureaucratic, but it is also a way to lift the lid on how a complicated institution like ours works. We welcome engagement from all students, including those from the Students' Union, and we are grateful for the time and effort these students contribute to our community. Making Asimut (the Academy's scheduling, room-booking and event management system) more

accessible for students with additional learning needs has been a response to this work. Another need the committee has highlighted is having a quiet space for individual students and staff who need a break from the busy-ness and volume that characterises our environment. The official Quiet Space is now located at the top of the library stairs near the Armstrong Room. Thank you to Adam Taylor, Amy Foster and all library team members for encouraging this development. Please remember that it is meant for quiet recuperation and thought, not for phone calls or group activity.

## INTRODUCTION TO SUPPORT STAFF: DR JAMES FULLEGAR AND ANGEL PEREZ

Additional Support Tutor, Dr James Fullegar

As the Academy's Additional Support Tutor, I support students with strategies to enhance their learning, offering confidential sessions on organisation, study skills and managing learning differences, neurodivergence or disability alongside academic work. My goal is ensuring all students can work to the best of their ability and that no one is disadvantaged by our processes and frameworks. I work closely with the Disability Advisor and other staff to develop the Academy's support provision. I am passionate about inclusion and increasing understanding of neurodivergence. I am also a Mental Health First Aider, available to both students and staff. Reach out to me at [learningsupport@ram.ac.uk](mailto:learningsupport@ram.ac.uk)

Disability Advisor, Angel Perez

I am the Disability Advisor at the Royal Academy of Music. I provide individual advice for students, coordinate adjustments to support access and learning and liaise with academic staff to ensure an inclusive learning environment. My role includes discussing students' needs and addressing barriers, recommending specialist support and promoting best practices in accessibility and inclusion. As an inclusion specialist I help foster a culture of equity and inclusion across the Academy. Reach out to me at [disability@ram.ac.uk](mailto:disability@ram.ac.uk)



Pictured: Angel Perez. Photo credit: *Daniel Riera*

## THE ACADEMY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA PERFORMS TURNER'S REFUGEE

On 20 June, the Academy Symphony Orchestra performed Mark Anthony Turnage's *Refugee* conducted by Ed Gardner. The work, written as a response to the international migrant crisis, reflects themes of empathy and solidarity, setting texts by Emily Dickinson, W H Auden, Brian Bilston and Benjamin Zephaniah.

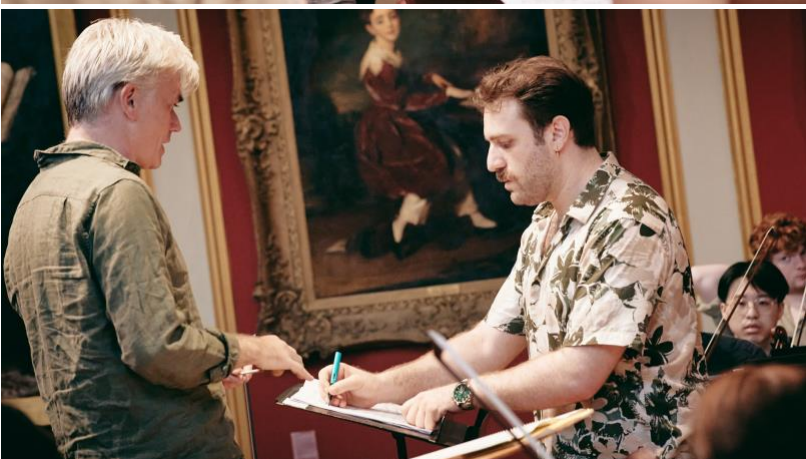




Ed Gardner conducting Turnage's *Refugee* in the Duke's Hall. *Photo credit: Mark Dawson*

The work connects themes of hope and solidarity to refugees' voices while addressing the persistent realities of displacement, prejudice and fear.

Interviewed in the printed concert programme, conductor Ed Gardner wrote: 'Academy students are trained these days with such a broad perspective in mind. This breadth of vision should be on the concert platform too.'



Ed Gardner and students in the Academy Symphony Orchestra. *Photo credit: Mark Dawson*

Student initiatives continued right through to the end of the year: *New Worlds, New Voices* was a celebration of diversity that highlighted different cultures and times, from new works by Academy composers, to Darius Milhaud's *La Création du monde*.



World premiere of Elliot Teo's Guitar Concerto, featuring soloist Louis Moisan and conducted by Jess Hoskins.

## EXHIBITION: THE OUD AND THE LUTE

On 24 March, the Academy presented *The Oud and the Lute*, an event exploring the cultural connections between these two related instruments — one central to European music, the other to Arabic traditions. The event launched a new exhibition that amplified the voices of a Syrian oud player, a Syrian oud maker, an English lute maker and a Mexican lute player.

The exhibition acknowledges the importance of diversity and migration in the evolution of these instruments and in carrying them into the future. The event was well attended, with participants reflecting a broad range of cultural backgrounds.



'The Oud and the Lute' exhibition 2025. Photo credit: Rihab Azar



## FROM OPEN ACADEMY

### DR JACKIE WALDUCK'S ABO AWARD

We congratulate Open Academy lecturer, Dr Jackie Walduck, who in March this year was honoured with the Association of British Orchestras Health and Wellbeing Award. You can read about the wonderful work for which Jackie has been recognised, including her extensive contribution to people experiencing homelessness, [here](#).

### COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES IN TOWER HAMLETS

We recently announced plans to create new teaching and rehearsal spaces on London City Island in Docklands in a major expansion of facilities. (If you missed it, you can find the announcement [here](#).)



CGI image of plans of the new facilities at City Island. © AOC Architecture

### INTOUNIVERSITY BOW AND HACKNEY DOWNS

In collaboration with the IntoUniversity centres in Bow and Hackney Downs, Open Academy Fellows and their mentor John Webb delivered workshops for Year 5 pupils from local primary schools. These sessions formed part of IntoUniversity's Primary FOCUS days, designed to introduce children to university life and learning. Through the workshops, students discovered the Academy, were given information about student life and took part in hands-on, creative music-making activities.

### SPITALFIELDS MUSIC SCHOOLS TOUR

Organised by Spitalfields Music and in partnership with Open Academy, Fellows visited three neighbouring primary schools in Tower Hamlets, giving interactive performances, supported by Hazel Gould and Jessie Maryon Davies.

### ROYAL LONDON HOSPITAL (YEAR-ROUND PROJECT)

This term, workshop leaders Mary Martin and Tony Robb will deliver six creative music workshops at the Royal London Hospital for young people attending the hospital school. Workshops will include a combination of group-based work in a large play space and visits to individual children on the wards. Each session will be supported by a small group of Open Academy Fellows, undergraduate and postgraduate students and will



include instrumental demonstrations, repertoire performances, improvisation, singing, conducting and musical storytelling.

## BROMLEY BY BOW CENTRE

This term saw the creation of a pilot project with Bromley by Bow Centre, a charity that supports individuals and families through integrated services tailored to their needs. By addressing the social factors that influence health, the centre helps people improve wellbeing, learn new skills, find employment and build confidence. The day included a relaxed concert experience performed by Open Academy Fellow, Anna Phillips.

## GRADUATION 2025



Back row, left to right: Matthew Wadsworth, Alexis Ffrench, Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, Pretty Yende, Iain Farrington, William de Winton; front row, left to right: Anna Tilbrook, Brian Eno, Louisa Tuck, Gary Crosby. *Photo credit: Frances Marshall*

At our recent graduation ceremony, we celebrated people from all corners of the music profession. An Honorary Doctorate (Hon DMus) was presented to musician, producer and visual artist Brian Eno and we welcomed six new Fellows of the Royal Academy of Music (FRAM) – an honour reserved for distinguished former students: Alexis Ffrench, Classical-Soul pioneer and Academy Governing Body member; Anna Tilbrook, acclaimed pianist and chamber musician; Matthew Wadsworth, celebrated lutenist and producer; Louisa Tuck, Principal Cello of the Oslo Philharmonic; and Iain Farrington, pianist, organist, composer and arranger.

An Honorary Fellowship (Hon FRAM) was awarded to William de Winton, a dedicated member of the Academy's Governing Body since 2016, recognised for championing initiatives to widen access to top-tier musical education.

Honorary Membership of the Royal Academy of Music (Hon RAM) — an award limited to 300 outstanding musicians who did not study at the Academy — was conferred on two exceptional artists: leading jazz

musician, composer and educator Dr Gary Crosby, and internationally renowned soprano Pretty Yende, who has quickly become a superstar of the opera world.

Read more [here](#).



Opera star honoured in July 2025: Pretty Yende Hon RAM. *Photo credit: Frances Marshall*

## GET INVOLVED

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