



***Kurt Cobain Unplugged* – The story behind one of music’s most iconic guitars**

3 June – 18 November 2025

One of the most famous acoustic guitars in rock history – Kurt Cobain’s Martin D-18E – will go on show at the Royal College of Music Museum in London as part of a landmark exhibition exploring Nirvana’s groundbreaking *MTV Unplugged* performance. Opening on 3 June 2025, the *Kurt Cobain Unplugged* exhibition will be the first time Cobain’s iconic guitar has been shown in the UK. Booking for *Kurt Cobain Unplugged* opens on Wednesday 30 April. Visitors can [join the waitlist](#) to be among the first to know when tickets go on sale and receive updates and event highlights related to the exhibition.

Kurt Cobain Unplugged delves into the musical legacy of Nirvana and Kurt Cobain and traces the remarkable journey of this iconic guitar, which became the most expensive guitar ever sold at auction in 2020 when it was bought for over \$6 million by Australian entrepreneur Peter Freedman AM. Peter is the founder of RØDE Microphones, founding supporter of the Royal College of Music’s Australia Commonwealth Scholarship and has generously loaned the guitar for this special exhibition.

Peter Freedman commented: ‘When I purchased this guitar, my intention was to have it begin a worldwide tour of exhibitions, to support performing artists. I am delighted that this intent will be premiered at the Royal College of Music, London, with the first exhibition of its kind and will support talented musicians worldwide.’

The exhibition also reunites the guitar with another piece of rock history – Cobain’s famous olive-green mohair cardigan, worn during the 1993 *Unplugged* performance. This marks the first time these two legendary items have been displayed together.

Alongside these items, a carefully curated selection of Nirvana memorabilia will provide insight into the band’s influence, Cobain’s songwriting, and the enduring legacy of Nirvana and their *MTV Unplugged* performance. Key highlights of the exhibition also include:

- A selection of Nirvana gig posters featuring a 90s punk/grunge aesthetic.
- A selection of collectable Nirvana vinyl in its original shrink wrap.
- The top portion of a soundboard of another guitar from the same series.

The exhibition has been curated by Alan di Perna – one of America’s foremost rock journalists, and Royal College of Music Museum Curator Gabriele Rossi Rognoni. Alan di Perna’s work has appeared in titles including *Rolling Stone*, *Guitar World*, *Classic Rock* and *Billboard* amongst others, and he has interviewed iconic artists including Dave Grohl, Krist Novoselic, Courtney Love and Pat Smear.

Alan Di Perna says, ‘I’m delighted to be a part of the Royal College of Music Museum’s first-ever rock music exhibition. *MTV’s Nirvana Unplugged in New York* was a landmark event—a stand-out performance by a group that changed the course of rock history in the 1990s.’

Gabriele Rossi Rognoni hopes the *Kurt Cobain Unplugged* exhibition will extend the profile and reach of the work of the Museum and Royal College of Music, opening cross dialogues with students of different backgrounds and creating bridges between historical and contemporary music. He says: 'One of the treasures in the collections of the Royal College of Music Museum is the world's oldest guitar. I am thrilled that this exhibition will build on our extraordinary heritage, connecting it with a monument of today's music such as Kurt Cobain. I look forward to the dialogues, musical encounters and new ideas that this exhibition will spark among our visitors and the top-class musicians that study at the College.'

A series of events will accompany the exhibition including new works and performances by RCM students inspired by the guitar alongside family friendly workshops and concerts. More details to be announced.

About the guitar:

Kurt Cobain's Martin D-18E is a rare model and one of the earliest Martins fitted with electric pickups. Cobain's version was uniquely modified for his left-handed playing style, making it a defining element of Nirvana's distinctive sound. According to Courtney Love, quoted in *Billboard*, the Martin D-18E was the last guitar Cobain ever played. Following Cobain's death in 1994, the guitar passed into the possession of his daughter, Frances Bean Cobain, who kept it in a secret vault in Seattle, together with the rest of Cobain's belongings. In 2018, the guitar ended up with Isaiah Silva, Frances Bean's ex-husband, as part of a divorce settlement agreement. In June of 2020, Kurt Cobain's Martin D-18E was sold for a record price of \$6,010,000 at Julien's Auctions, to Peter Freedman AM. This sale became the most expensive guitar ever sold at auction.

About the sweater:

The green sweater was a favourite of Cobain's in his final year of life. He wore it on tour as well as for his *MTV Unplugged in New York* performance. With a missing button, two cigarette burns and a stain from an unidentified substance in one of the pockets, it is very much a lived-in garment. The fashion historian Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell has described it as 'a security blanket of a sweater.' Kurt Cobain's choice of thrift shop fare such as this well-worn sweater was a fashion statement in its own right—or rather an anti-fashion statement. Adopting other people's cast-off clothes was an essential part of the 1990s grunge aesthetic—a reaction against the spandex-and-glitter artifice of 1980s glam metal or 'hair metal.'

The iconic cardigan, once gifted by Courtney Love to Frances Bean's nanny Jackie Farry, also made history when it sold at auction for \$334,000 in 2019. According to *The Guardian*, it was the most expensive sweater ever sold.

About Nirvana's MTV Unplugged performance:

Nirvana's *MTV Unplugged* performance took place on 18 November 1993, just five months before Kurt Cobain's death. It is regarded as one of the most intimate and powerful moments in rock history, revealing a rarely seen side of the band. It stands alongside other legendary farewell performances, such as the Beatles' rooftop concert and *The Last Waltz* by the Band, as a landmark moment in musical history.

The performance was released as an album, *MTV Unplugged* in New York in 1994. It sold over eight million copies and became one of the most important live albums of all time, winning a Grammy for Best Alternative Music Performance in 1996. It was Nirvana's first album released posthumously and remains one of their most celebrated works.

'That show was supposed to be a disaster,' remembered Nirvana's Dave Grohl in an interview with *American Way* magazine. 'We hadn't rehearsed. We weren't used to playing acoustic. Even the people from MTV thought it was horrible. Then we sat down, the cameras started rolling, and something clicked. It became one of the band's most memorable performances.'

About the Royal College of Music Museum:

After extensive redevelopment, the Royal College of Music Museum reopened to the public in October 2021. It maintains one of the richest and most relevant collections of music-related objects in the UK and Europe, including around 1,000 musical instruments from the late 15th to the mid-20th century. Among them is the oldest guitar in the

world, dated 1581 and built in Lisbon by Belchior Dias. Gabriele Rossi Rognoni describes: 'The instrument is extraordinary for the materials – coming from all corners of the Portuguese empire of the time – and the quality of its manufacture. It was part of the Medici collection in Florence until the end of the 18th century, when it was sold at auction. It joined the collections of the Royal College of Music since the 1890s, when the institution was established in its current building in South Kensington.'

About Alan di Perna:

Alan di Perna is one of America's foremost rock journalists and his work has appeared in titles including *Rolling Stone*, *Guitar World*, *Classic Rock* and *Billboard* amongst others, and he has interviewed iconic artists including Dave Grohl, Krist Novoselic, Courtney Love and Pat Smear. Alan is the author of *Guitar Masters: Intimate Portraits* and co-author of *Play It Loud: An Epic History of the Sound, Style and Revolution of the Electric Guitar*, which became the inspiration for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame exhibition *Play It Loud: Instruments of Rock and Roll*. Di Perna has also served as a curatorial consultant for the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix.

How to book:

Tickets: £5

Ticket bookings for visits between 3 June and 17 August will open on Wednesday, 30 April at 10am. Sales for visits beyond these dates will be announced at a later time.

Royal College of Music Museum, Prince Consort Road, South Kensington, London, SW7 2BS
Open Tuesday – Sunday

For further information and to sign up to emails to be the first to hear updates about the exhibition, visit www.rcm.ac.uk/kurtcobain

For further information, press images, or interview requests, please contact:

Pandora George at Bullet PR
pandora@bulletpr.co.uk
Mobile: 07729 469220

Press images can be found [here](#).

NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Royal College of Music

Opened in 1883, the Royal College of Music (RCM) is a world-leading music conservatoire with a prestigious history and contemporary outlook. More than 900 undergraduate and postgraduate students come from over 60 countries and are taught in a dynamic environment, leaving the RCM to become the outstanding performers, conductors, and composers of the future. In 2025 the Royal College of Music was ranked the Global No. 1 institution for Performing Arts and Music for the fourth year running in the QS World University Rankings by Subject.

The Royal College of Music is a world-class centre for innovation and research, which informs teaching and helps students develop fully as artists. This includes the opportunity to hone the art of performance in the [Performance Laboratory](#), a world-leading simulation facility which acoustically and visually replicates a variety of different performance conditions. Recognising the value of heritage and reflecting on music history is equally important, and students have access to the [Royal College of Music Library](#) with manuscripts by Mozart, Elgar and Holst, the [Royal College of Music Museum](#) with over 14,000 musical items, and on-site collections.

The Royal College of Music has trained some of the most important figures in British and international music including composers and performers such as Gustav Holst, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Benjamin Britten, Michael Tippett, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Leopold Stokowski, Sir Hubert Parry, Sir Colin Davis, Sir Neville Marriner, Dame Joan Sutherland, Sir

Thomas Allen, Dame Sarah Connolly, Alina Ibragimova, Tarik O'Regan, Lord Lloyd Webber, Sir James Galway, Anna Meredith MBE, Louise Alder and Mark-Anthony Turnage.

Recent visitors to the Royal College of Music include Sir Thomas Allen, Sir Antonio Pappano, Dame Imogen Cooper, Sarah Willis, Vasily Petrenko and Lang Lang. Our recent honorary doctorates include Sir Antonio Pappano, Jonas Kaufmann, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Sir Roger Norrington, Sir Bryn Terfel, Steve Reich and Maxim Vengerov.

www.rcm.ac.uk