

RCM Contemporary Music Strategy

The RCM places the performance of contemporary music at the heart of its artistic and performance strategies. New and challenging work for both performers and listeners is considered central to the growth and to the development of student performers and composers in that it provides creative breadth, diversity of outlook, depth of focus and crucial musical and technical preparation for professional life.

The aims of this strategy:

- To establish a distinctive focus on the music of the present day and thereby to enhance the awareness for students of the needs and functions of today's music in contemporary society.
- To provide a context and a rationale for the planning of events and programmes.
- To assert a definition as to what constitutes contemporary music in an increasingly diverse artistic climate
- To set down the context, rationale and the means within which programmes of new music are presented.

The RCM defines contemporary music as music of our own immediate time that confronts, questions or otherwise engages with, current and/or received or established musical ideas, philosophies, aesthetics and cultures. The performance of such music is crucial to the development of the skills, understanding and the techniques required to comprehend and to realise this material, whether it be for performers or for composers. Contemporary music for the purposes of this strategy is seen to cover concert music evolving from the European classical tradition, and although often receptive to and influenced by other traditions, does not include specifically jazz, musical theatre, and music from other world traditions.

Performers gain from direct contact with skilled and expert contemporary music practitioners, in particular conductors and composers, gaining in technique and confidence as they are guided through new and (perhaps) unfamiliar musical languages.

Composers gain from the exposure to new ideas, the in-depth exploration of new and unfamiliar repertoire and the enhanced visibility of their own work in an appropriate context.

To this end contemporary music is at the heart of all artistic planning at the RCM reflecting the best professional practice at national and international level. Furthermore the College is in a unique position in that, relatively free from purely commercial constraints in terms of its performance programming, it can provide a supportive and sympathetic environment for experiment, creation and discovery.

Priorities in contemporary music performance:

- Acquiring the relevant and appropriate performing skills for new work
- Live performance of student compositions across all RCM faculties including HIP, early music and Vocal and Opera.
- Encouraging experiment and discovery by performers and composers

Opportunities for the development of skills in contemporary music performance:

- Regular programming of contemporary work across all RCM programmes
- Annual composer residency
- Promotion of smaller, dedicated contemporary ensembles within the RCM performance programme
- Open stage for student-led performances

Performance platforms

- Performances by RCM orchestras and large ensembles
- Solo and chamber music including EAM (electro-acoustic music)
- Opera
- Residencies by established figures, composers and contemporary music practitioners
- Performance of student compositions.
- 'Open stage' experiment and exploration.

Orchestras and Ensembles

We consider it essential that large ensemble programmes in each year should contain contemporary work, and that the orchestral repertoire guide will continue to be updated as new important works are added to the general repertoire. Given that there can sometimes be a considerable lag between current contemporary composition and entry into general repertoire, RCM programming will, by virtue of its unique cultural position and its long established historical role, necessarily set out to take the initiative, playing its own part in establishing the repertoire of the future, programming non-standard works – especially in conjunction with the annual composer residencies.

Large ensembles include the various RCM orchestras:

- The RCM Symphony Orchestra – major large scale contemporary orchestral repertoire including work with Resident Composers
- RCM Philharmonic – contemporary repertoire where appropriate and works by RCM composers successful in the 'concerto' competition.

Smaller ensembles include:

- New Perspectives – a mid-sized and highly flexible grouping with a focus on new and very recent repertoire and works by RCM student composers
- Variable Geometry – a small scale flexible ensemble focussing on new and recent chamber-sized repertoire
- Faculty Ensemble performances

Solo, Chamber Music and EAM

Contemporary music will form a central part of the programming for chamber music, with thematic programming of chamber concerts also driven by the contemporary agenda. Chamber music will, when appropriate, be an important and deciding element in the planning of visiting resident composers. EAM and current music technologies will continue to play a full role in chamber music and, where necessary, in large ensemble repertoire planning. Individual exploration of relevant solo

repertoire will be encouraged by Heads of Faculty and individual one-to-one teachers and programming of this repertoire may feature in 'Sound House' events.

The Masters Programme in contemporary piano provides a unique opportunity for performers in this highly specialised area to develop the skill sets required in contemporary music. In addition, extended keyboard techniques and, in particular, the 'prepared piano' present challenges in terms of the appropriate use of instruments which are addressed in collaboration with the RCM Piano consultant and technician.

Vocal and Opera

Contemporary vocal music and opera presents particular challenges, in particular in the relationship between the demands of the repertoire and the physical strain that might be placed on young and developing voices. The RCM meets these through close, focussed and supported collaboration between student composers and the RCM vocal faculty. The recent involvement of Tête-à-Tête opera in conjunction with the RCM opera school and RCM composers provides an exceptional model for future development.

Residencies

The annual composer residency is a collaboration between the Composition Faculty led by the Head of Composition and the performance programme led by the Artistic Director. This is an opportunity to showcase the works of a single composer, and to provide teaching and learning opportunities for composition students in masterclasses, 1:1 sessions, rehearsals and workshops.

Student Compositions

The performance of works by student composers is vital to the growth and the development of compositional minds. Student works are heard in an exceptional range of platforms, from high-profile and public large ensemble and orchestral performance to individual solos and 'laboratory' workshops including the Composers Orchestral Workshop, Screen Composers Recording Workshop and Showcase, New Ensemble, and Masters Ensemble. Each of these meets different needs and is focussed to the demands of the particular composition programmes they support. Further engagement with student compositions takes place through a significant range of collaborations with internal and external bodies, with which composers learn to recognise their role as partners in performance, and, in important respects, joint creators with their performers.

Experiment and Exploration

Events will be planned each term ('Great Exhibitionists') to provide a free and open stage for students to experiment with new composition, performance and presentation techniques. Performance and Programming will support, and selected professors will provide mentoring, as projects are developed.

Looking Forward

New repertoire is constantly evolving. Vast amounts of music are being written and across an increasing range of media. New composers today are probably more likely to be heard and to be discovered through a computer speaker or on a video screen than they are in the concert hall. Those promoting new music and new contemporary performing groups now have a range of previously non-existing circumstances to take into account and the RCM is in the position to recognise this and to build on it. Repertoire choices must now take on these challenges, constructing a contemporary music environment that can support the development and the growth of today's and tomorrow's professional composers and performers as never before.

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