



Royal Conservatoire  
*of* Scotland

**WELCOME TO THE  
ROYAL CONSERVATOIRE  
OF SCOTLAND**



**Keep dancing:** BA Modern Ballet students rehearse a scene from *Don Quixote* in February 2021 under Covid guidelines



**Welcome to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.**

This global pandemic has been intensely challenging for the creative sector - all of us who love, live arts in every sense. We've seen theatres, cinemas and concert halls around the world close their doors and we've been physically separated from each other for some time. Yet, throughout the months of lockdown, as an artistic community at RCS, we have not been silent. We have used our passion for the performing arts and our creativity to unite people, make connections across continents and to bring joy and comfort to one another. We have stayed creatively connected and we have continued to produce exciting, new and inspiring work.

This conservatoire is a special place in many ways. RCS is one of the world's top three destinations to study the performing arts\*, it is Scotland's national conservatoire, working with artists and communities across the breadth of this beautiful country, and it is home to students and staff from more than 60 countries who are united in their passion for the performing arts.

Throughout the pandemic, we have worked hard to deliver the highest-quality learning and teaching experience possible through a blend of in-person and online activity. Working safely and carefully within all health and safety guidelines we've been able to offer on-campus ensemble opportunities, rehearsals and performances. This has allowed us to stage critically-acclaimed stage productions such as *The Bacchae* performed on the New Athenaeum Theatre stage and filmed and streamed to a global audience.

In the past 12 months, we have premiered new works from our concert halls, streamed digital performance festivals, invited world-renowned artists to work with our students, launched new music collectives and, where possible, undertaken in-person assessments across all of our programmes.

At the time of writing, we have not had a single reported case of Covid transfer on campus, testament both to the safety guidelines in place and the commitment of all students and staff to keeping each other safe.

Importantly, and at the centre of everything, we've prioritised student wellbeing and expanded our team of counsellors to ensure there is always support available to our students. In partnership with the Students' Union, we have offered quarantine support to students from the moment they arrive in Glasgow, and we continued this support throughout the year. As part of this 'RCS Home from Home' service, we've helped isolating students with everything from making sure they have groceries delivered to keeping them entertained during holiday breaks with outdoor activities, online games nights and cook-a-longs. It's this all-round support and care for one another that we see on a daily basis, that I believe goes to the heart of why RCS is a place like nowhere else.

As Scotland's vaccination programme rolls out at pace, we are looking towards a new academic year with real optimism and a renewed sense of opportunity.

I hope this short booklet gives you insight into our approach over the past year and a sense of what it has been like to be part of RCS at this extraordinary time. We look forward to a bright future for RCS and to welcoming you into this vibrant artistic community.

**Professor Jeffrey Sharkey**  
Principal

\*QS World University Rankings for Performing Arts 2021

# PERFORMING THROUGH A PANDEMIC

*“A conservatoire in your living room - sitting at home isn't where you'd expect to enjoy world-class performing arts.”*

The Guardian, April 2020

## RCS at Home

In response to a national lockdown in March 2020, we launched RCS at Home, a new digital platform to ensure the RCS community kept creatively connected and were able to continue to share our love of the performing and production arts with as wide an audience as possible.

Since then, thousands of viewers from across the globe have tuned in to RCS at Home to watch everything from world premieres of new choreographic dance work to classical theatre filmed and streamed from the New Athenaeum stage. RCS at Home has also hosted a new concert series RCS Presents which has showcased performance from across the School of Music and provided an international platform for our performers and composers.

## Propel

A festival of digital performance by Contemporary Performance Practice students using mediums of live work, recorded performance, interactive websites and the telephone.

## The Bacchae

*The Bacchae* was rehearsed, staged, performed all under strict Covid guidelines to ensure safety for the full cast and crew. It was shared digitally in November 2020, with thousands of viewers around the world tuning in to watch on RCS at Home.

This was a testament to the hard work of the BA Acting, BA Production Arts and Design and BA Production Technology and Management students who made sure this production was performed in a safe and secure way.

## Violet

BA Musical Theatre students performed the award-winning musical *Violet* in March 2021 as an actor-muso production, streamed as part of RCS at Home and under strict Covid guidelines. The production was viewed across the world and premiered in advance of the BA Musical Theatre industry showcase.

## RCS Presents

This new online concert series was commissioned to bring joy to homes across the world during the extended period of isolation. Artists included percussionist and Yamaha Artist **Calum Huggan**, Manchester Collective violinist **Rakhi Singh**, saxophonist **Tommy Smith OBE** and the piano and clarinet duo **Steven Osborne** and **Jean Johnson**.

## Guitar Digifest

A spectacular two-day online festival with performances, masterclasses and live Q and As.

## The Assumption

*The Assumption* was written by **Douglas Maxwell** specifically for BA Performance in British Sign Language and English students. This play was performed at Tramway in Glasgow and streamed as part of RCS at Home in December 2020.



For more performances, masterclasses, recitals and sharings please see [rcs.ac.uk/RCSatHome](https://rcs.ac.uk/RCSatHome)



*“These brave young artists have a tale to tell, and they tell it with undeniable gusto [...] despite being hemmed in by public health restrictions, Violet's production values are actually superior to some of the professional online offerings I have seen over the last year.”*

The National, April 2021



**Images:** *A Site Seen from Within and Without* from the Propel Festival, *Violet*, *The Bacchae*, Leverhulme conductor Teresa Riveiro Böhm leads Strings rehearsal in the Stevenson Hall, *The Assumption*.

# STUDYING THROUGH A PANDEMIC

## Safety first

As artists, much of what we do requires collaboration and connection with one another. We have worked carefully with health and safety specialists to ensure that throughout the pandemic we have been able to offer a blend of in-person and online learning and teaching that enables our students to develop their artistry, continue to create new performance, meet their critical assessments on time, and above all, prioritise student safety and wellbeing.

Please see [rcs.ac.uk/covid](https://rcs.ac.uk/covid) for the most up-to-date information on Covid student guidelines.

## Campus and facilities

A number of changes have taken place to the campus to ensure it is a safe learning environment and that social distancing can be maintained at all times. These changes range from reducing numbers on campus, creating one way systems around campus, installing handwashing stations, transforming spaces into new performance venues and student break-out areas and ensuring every room has strict capacities.

Every room and performance venue is cleaned after activity takes place, and the Estates and Domestic Services team work closely with colleagues across the conservatoire to ensure safety across our buildings.

All of these precautions make our campus a safe place to learn and work, and we take pride in being a Covid considerate community.

👁 You can see what our campus looks like now by taking the virtual tour: [rcs.ac.uk/virtualtour](https://rcs.ac.uk/virtualtour)

## Blended learning

Throughout the pandemic, we have continued to have in-person activity when safe to do so and where necessary for assessment and teaching purposes.

This has varied across programme, depending on the needs of each of our students. Socially distanced ensemble learning has taken place to facilitate rehearsals of orchestral projects, dramatic performance, dance lessons, filming on location, set creation and much more.

All in-person learning and teaching is done under strict Covid guidelines.

## Learn from the best

The global pandemic has not stopped RCS from working with some of the world's most acclaimed artists and in 2020/21 we introduced new Visiting Artists, residencies, masterclasses and a host of new opportunities for students to engage with.

New appointments include **Martyn Brabbins** as Visiting Professor of Conducting and **Errollyn Wallen CBE** as Visiting Professor of Composition. Both of these international artists spend significant time working with students, offering deep and meaningful learning experiences.

Soloist and collaborative artist **Daniel Piore** began a new Studio Collective in 2021 with plans to tour the Collective in the coming months.

Other leading artists who have worked with students in 2021 include conductors **Marin Alsop**, **Roderick Cox** and **Sir John Eliot Gardiner**, clarinettist **Anthony McGill**, dancer and choreographer **Paul Liburd MBE**, vocalists **Giselle Allen**, **Matthew Rose** and **Sue Bullock**.

*“From the beginning, the teaching staff have been so accommodating of our individual needs, which has been lovely especially when you’re moving country in the middle of a pandemic. You can tell they genuinely care about us as students.”*

Jesse Drwiega, MA Musical Theatre (Performance) student

**Images:** Production Technology and Management student Zsanka Bollok behind the scenes of *The Bacchae*, ballet students warm up in the studio, Filmmaking student Alexander Halford on the set of graduating film *Sizzle*, MMus student Simone Seales performs in Pollok Park and Errollyn Wallen CBE inside RCS.





*“The Students’ Union works in partnership with RCS to ensure students are fully supported as they start or return to their studies and through practical challenges such as quarantine and self-isolation. This year we have helped to deliver the Welcome Home Support Team as well as ensuring a programme of online social activities have been offered during the holiday breaks.”*

John Craig, Students’ Union President (pictured below with Student Union Vice Presidents Zweyla Mitchell dos Santos and Ken Fairbrother)

# HEALTH AND WELLBEING

## Health and wellbeing

The mental health of the RCS community is paramount as we continue to live through this challenging period. A number of measures and initiatives are in place for students and staff to look after their mental health.

## RCS Counselling Team

We have expanded the number of counsellors available to support our students. Counselling provides a neutral, confidential space to talk through whatever is on your mind and our team of experienced counsellors are there to help you explore the issues that are causing you distress and anxiety, and help you to feel more in control.

All of our students can access counselling for free through RCS whenever it is required. If you'd like more information on our counselling service, please contact Jane Balmforth, Counsellor and Disability Advisor: [j.balmforth@rcs.ac.uk](mailto:j.balmforth@rcs.ac.uk)

## Togetherall

Togetherall is a free, 24-hour, 7 days week online service, available to students. It offers access to a range of mental health and wellbeing resources, and is a safe online community where members can get support and feel better.

Find out more: [togetherall.com](https://togetherall.com)

## RCS Home from Home

In partnership with the Students' Union, the RCS Home from Home service supports students through quarantine, periods of self-isolation, and throughout the holiday breaks where students may not have been able to return home.

Providing moments of connection, conversation, fun, as well as essential support, RCS Home from Home aims to ensure no-one in the student community feels alone or without assistance throughout the pandemic.

Some of the services offered included:

- | A Welcome Home Support Team service in the first term of 2020/21 to help new and returning students settle in Glasgow, quarantine safely and still receive essentials such as groceries, medical supplies and household items needed when moving to a new city.
- | Welcome bags with Scottish treats, as well as RCS face masks and hand sanitiser.
- | Online social events hosted by the Students' Union and members of staff. Over the year these have included yoga sessions, games nights, craft sessions, cook-a-longs, quiz nights, and online, specially commissioned DJ sets.
- | A peer-to-peer support system where any student who wanted to talk to someone over the winter break could pick up the phone and speak to someone within the RCS community.
- | Socially distanced, outdoor activities including mural trails of Glasgow city centre and walks through the city's historic Southside.

# A CONSERVATOIRE FOR EVERYONE

## A conservatoire for everyone

With students from more than 60 countries studying across the broadest range of the performing and production arts, RCS is a diverse environment where new ideas and creative potential are encouraged and celebrated.

Equality and diversity are central to our working ethos. We value the unique identity of every student and staff member- art and performance need diversity in the classrooms, on the stage and behind the scenes.

You can find information on our equality and diversity work at [rcs.ac.uk/equality](https://rcs.ac.uk/equality)

## Anti-Racism Action Plan

Published in August 2020, the RCS Anti-Racism Action Plan is a 'living document' which aims to make meaningful change to students now and for generations of students in the future.

The plan currently contains a set of more than 30 wide-ranging actions for the conservatoire to work towards and report on every three months. It was created following consultation with current students, alumni, the Students' Union and staff and promises to focus and improve on areas including transparency, representation and accountability.

You can access the Anti-Racism Action and its regular updates on our website: [rcs.ac.uk/ARAP](https://rcs.ac.uk/ARAP)

You can also read an interview with Assistant Principal Dr **Lois Fitch** and Students' Union member **Zweyla Mitchell dos Santos** discussing the origins of the Anti-Racism Action Plan and their hopes for its future at [rcs.ac.uk/review](https://rcs.ac.uk/review)

*“The more versatility and diversity there is in the curriculum, the more well-rounded an artist you’re going to be. At that point, it doesn’t matter what background you’re from but instead, what you’ve been exposed to, so your artistic personality has something in it of everything you’ve ever encountered. The shift is happening and that is encouraging.”*

Dr Lois Fitch

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