

Catalysing Innovation at Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Innovation Studio

Pilot Report 2022-24

Welcome

Our Innovation Studio pilot was born out of a particular time and circumstance. In 2021, we became aware of a huge reservoir of creativity - ideas held up or held back by the global pandemic.

Additional investment from the Scottish Funding Council and a philanthropic donation provided the opportunity for us to explore how small but targeted investments in the ideas of our RCS community could release some of that creativity and innovation for wider benefit.

The structured programme of investments, events and support facilitated exciting new work, but it was also a way of testing how to unlock and support innovation in the future.

This report presents some of the outcomes of the Innovation Studio pilot - the projects and initiatives that sprang from connecting Conservatoire staff, students and alumni with dedicated resource, time and space to learn, grow and play.

We hope you enjoy reading it.

Professor Stephen Broad

Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange

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Introduction

Innovation Studio started out as a two-year pilot project (2022-2024) that explored what an embedded support system for innovation at RCS might look like.

Access to Innovation Studio happened in a range of ways, including seed funding, collaborative workshops, sharing sessions, consultations with our Innovators in Residence, and Mini-Residencies.

Innovation Studio also commissioned research to help shape the ongoing support available and better understand the innovative work and potential at RCS.

Building on the pilot's success, we will continue to grow Innovation Studio into our flagship programme for creative and cultural innovation.

► [Watch the video](#)

Images from top: Musicians at Student Collaboration Society | Funding recipient Ben Standish workshopping new play *Empty Chair* with collaborators





Funding recipient Sagnick Mukherjee

Ethos

As its core values, Innovation Studio embraces and supports **Creative Experimentation, Collaboration, and Interdisciplinary Work.**

Although the pilot programme has ended, we will continue to maintain a 'pilot mindset'. By this, we mean that Innovation Studio is a continuously evolving project that adapts to the needs of and feedback from our community.

Everything we have learned and continue to learn will inform our plans for a future Centre for Innovation at RCS.

[**➤ Read the Manifesto**](#)

How the Pilot Supported Innovation



The team behind *Empty Chair* conducting interviews in nature on the Isle of Mull

Seed Funding

Over the course of the pilot, Innovation Studio delivered three funding rounds, awarding a total of £66,000 to 32 projects.

Originally conceived as themed challenges lasting four months each, the first round was shaped by the Green Recovery Challenge, putting a focus on sustainability, community-building, and addressing existing challenges within the creative industries.

Specific strands enabled artists to collaborate with community organisations via the Civic Fund, develop early-stage ideas via the Research & Development Fund, and conduct early-stage business development via the Business Ideas Fund.

However, we soon learned that this structure was too restrictive and did not fully support the innovation we hoped to unlock within RCS.

Hence, for the second and third funding rounds, we adopted a simpler, open funding model with two tiers of up to £1,000 for R&D and up to £4,000 for early-stage projects.

Community of Practice

A key ambition of the pilot was to develop a support network for everyone who engaged with Innovation Studio: The Community of Practice.

Bringing together a diverse group of staff, students, and alumni, the Community of Practice provided a space for members to learn about and connect through their explorations of innovation.

We hosted three roundtable meetings where funded practitioners shared project updates and areas of interest. These sessions served as a useful forum for reflection, questions, and discussion of common themes and challenges.

For us, the roundtables were a much richer way of charting innovation and gathering insights that offered a valuable alternative to written reports.

The Community of Practice also encouraged members to try new things, tap into the group's 'hive mind' for problem-solving, and share resources.



Community of Practice roundtable meeting



Researcher Dr Michael Pierre Johnson

Mapping Your Creative Growth

Innovation Studio collaborated with Dr Michael Pierre Johnson, Creative Economy Leadership Fellow at The Glasgow School of Art, to undertake action research which enabled funding recipients to articulate and develop innovation within their projects.

Michael specialises in design practices that visualise the value of creative and cultural work and has developed a distinctive method to map growth potential.

He worked with 10 awardees to create narrative and network maps that helped define the ‘story of value’ behind their projects and identify opportunities for expanding their networks, knowledge, value, and audiences.

Workshops took place in the early stages of each project, supported reflection and helped participants strategically plan their next steps.

The collaboration has also strengthened our team’s capacity, allowing us to integrate aspects of Michael’s method into the next phase of Innovation Studio.

Mini-Residency

During the pilot, we identified a need among members of staff for dedicated time and space to focus on innovation. Busy teaching schedules often make it difficult for staff to develop new areas within their practice and introduce more innovative ways of working to their students.

In January 2024, we took 10 members of staff to Cove Park for a three-day mini-residency. Participants were chosen via blind selection and RCS ensured their usual work was covered to prevent a backlog upon return.

Each participant had a personal workspace and access to studio space. The residency combined solo work with optional group activities, allowing participants to decide how best to use their time and which aspects of their practice to focus on.

Over the three days, our Innovators in Residence led workshops, facilitated reflection sessions, and curated a programme of 10-minute micro-talks from artists around the world.



Innovator in Residence Lora Krasteva at Cove Park



Springboard event poster

Springboard

Springboard was an R&D opportunity for students and recent graduates to develop and experiment with an idea for a new piece of performance work.

The seven projects selected received two days of rehearsal space, a small honorarium and the opportunity to perform their work in progress in front of an audience.

Participants were encouraged to see this as a chance to take a risk and try something out without worrying about devising a fully finished performance. There were no restrictions on what the idea could be, with projects ranging from performance experiments, live music and new writing to theatre and spoken word.

Springboard culminated in a scratch night in the Jack Bruce Space on 22 February 2023.

At the event, audience members were given a booklet containing three questions about each work to elicit specific feedback. After each performance, the audience had five minutes to write down their thoughts and comments, which were later shared with the performers.

Themes

Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinary practice involves the blending of different disciplines to explore new processes and forms of expression beyond the confines of a single discipline.

Innovation Studio seeks to showcase and enhance interdisciplinary practices at RCS and bring together people who might not typically work together to learn from one another. Encouraging practitioners to adopt new perspectives helps them cultivate versatility and push creative boundaries in an ever-evolving arts landscape.

► [Watch the video](#)



Creative Health

We define Creative Health as a belief that art and creative expression have a profound influence on people's wellbeing. This encompasses how artists support positive health outcomes in society, but also the health of artists themselves.

Innovation Studio commissioned new research to map the ecosystems between RCS and the health and wellbeing sectors. Our goal was to better understand and build on our community's work in Creative Health to ensure its benefits are felt more broadly across society, helping people live full and balanced lives.

► [Watch the video](#)

Circular Economy

The climate emergency has brought immense changes to our day-to-day lives and imposed a sense of urgency to find solutions, influence policy, and work together in new ways to tackle environmental challenges.

The Innovation Studio pilot revealed the depth and breadth of work being done across the Conservatoire by staff, students, and graduates to develop more sustainable practices, create positive change, and limit our sector's environmental footprint.

► [Watch the video](#)



Images from left: Student Collaboration Society | Creative Health researcher Dr Sophie Boyd | Graduate start-up Marmoset Construction

Timeline

September 2021

Planning for the Innovation Studio Pilot begins

31 March 2022

Workshop with Suzy Glass (independent consultant, producer & facilitator) introducing the online collaboration space on Miro

April 2022

The Crowdfunding Lab, led by Paved with Gold, begins with 5 participants from the RCS community

26 April 2022

Green Recovery Roundtable event, hosted by Dr Laura Bissell

August 2022

Innovators in Residence are appointed

November 2022

Innovators in Residence start an engagement programme, meeting with students and staff from across RCS

8 March 2022

Innovation Studio Pilot launch, hosted by RCS Principal Professor Jeffrey Sharkey

April 2022

The Green Recovery Challenge opens with funding available through three schemes: the Civic Fund, the Business Ideas Fund, and the Research Fund

19 April 2022

Idea Generation Workshop, co-hosted with Converge

June 2022

Green Recovery Challenge projects are selected and £23,000 is distributed to 15 projects

November 2022

With feedback from the Innovators and the community, Innovation Studio adapts its format to create space and time for innovation and deeper engagement to unfold

22 November 2022

‘Exploring Innovation with our Innovators in Residence’ online event

January 2023

The Action Research Project with Dr Michael Pierre Johnson starts, with the aim of developing a better understanding of the innovation ecosystem at RCS

22 February 2023

Springboard Scratch Night takes place in the RCS Jack Bruce Space, featuring 7 performances

May 2023

A team of 3 researchers is commissioned to conduct Creative Health Research: Dr Sophie Boyd, Professor Celia Duffy, and Professor Laura Gonzalez

January 2024

Funded projects are selected and £23,000 is distributed to 9 projects

21 March 2024

Second Community of Practice Roundtable event

April 2024

Innovation Studio Pilot comes to a close

February 2023

Springboard is held as a mini residency for students and graduates, coordinated by Knowledge Exchange Placement Student Dale Thrupp

30 March 2023

First Community of Practice Roundtable event

December 2023

A new, simplified funding structure launches with two schemes: up to £1,000 for R&D and up to £4,000 for early-stage projects to grow and scale their impact

31 January 2024

A 3-day residency for 10 staff members commences at Cove Park

April 2024

Funded projects are selected and £20,000 is distributed to 8 projects

Meet the Community of Practice



Dr Ankna Arockiam



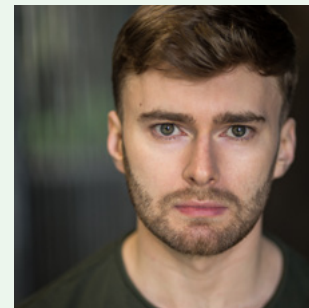
Rhonda Barclay



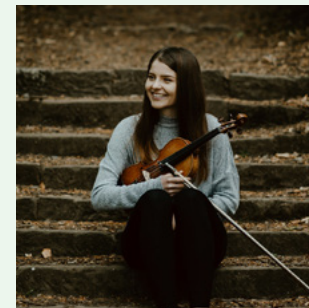
Connor Bristow



The Bubblyjock Collective



Adam Butler



Isla Callister



Penny Chivas



Merlin Currie



Lydia Davidson



Ellie Donald



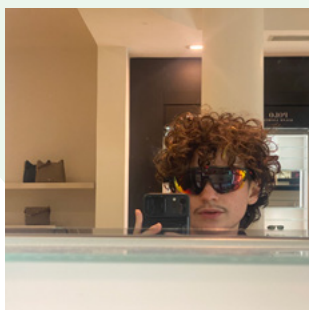
Dr Emily Doolittle



Hayley Earlam



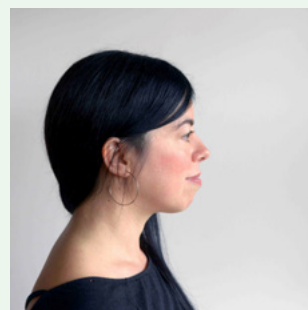
Rebecca Frances Edwards



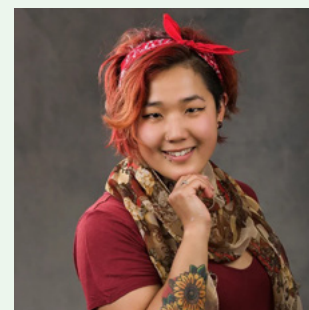
Zeo Fawcett



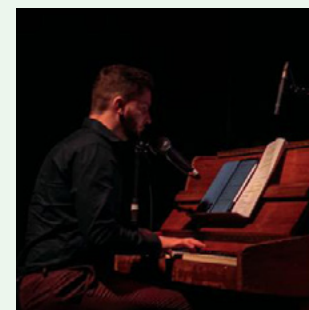
Marie Fielding



Professor Laura González



Megumi Hari



Filip Holacky

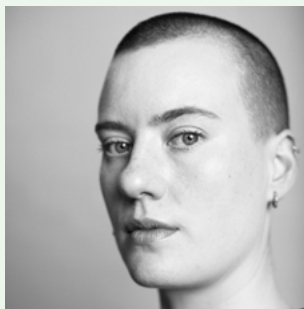
Meet the Community of Practice



Dr Angela Jaap



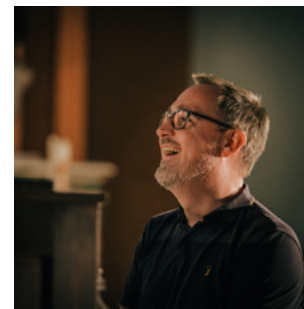
Jo Kalinowska



Anne Kjær



Malin Lewis



Dr Stuart MacRae



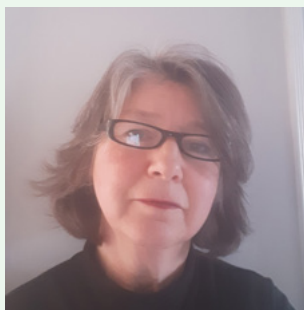
Yas Mawer



Claire McCue



Rebecca Minio-Paluello



Ailsa Mooney



Dr Lio Moscardini



Sagnick Mukherjee



Rachel Naylor



Seyoung Oh



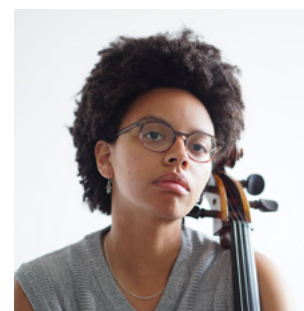
Jesse Paul



Mahri Reilly



Dr Brianna
Robertson-Kirkland



Simone Seales



Ben Standish

Meet the Community of Practice



Jennifer Stephenson



Dale Thrupp



Dr J Simon van der Walt



Dr Rūta Vitkauskaitė



Dr Aby Watson



Alison Wells



Dr Bethany Whiteside



Holly Worton



Althea Young

[Learn more about the people involved in Innovation Studio](#)

Case Study:

Ben Standish

Empty Chair

At a Glance

During the pandemic, Ben started collaborating with RCS lecturer Eve Jamieson to develop *Empty Chair*, a verbatim theatre project that explores themes of loss, loneliness, and isolation. Verbatim theatre is a form of documentary theatre constructed from the words and lived experiences of real people, examples include Gregory Burke's acclaimed *Black Watch*.

The duo's goal was to create a socially engaged verbatim theatre research model to facilitate honest, unfiltered conversations. They wanted to bring together an intergenerational group of artists, community participants, and creatives to explore and tackle the increasing isolation and loss exacerbated by modern society.

Initially struggling to sell the benefits and innovative nature of the project, Ben successfully applied for Innovation Studio funding to support early-stage R&D and did mapping sessions to explore his networks and the narratives around his project. With a clearer vision and pitch, he secured additional funding from Creative Scotland and in-kind support from An Tobar & Mull Theatre and the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow.

As the project progressed, his Innovation Studio award was able to fund two trips to the Isle of Mull, the first to conduct interviews and the second to workshop a work-in-progress script, culminating in a scratch performance for everyone who contributed to the project.



Empty Chair promotional image

The Creative Exploration

In 2022, Ben and Eve held free verbatim theatre workshops for participants over the age of 50, initially in Glasgow and then on the Isle of Mull. They worked with theatre companies, choirs, poetry collectives, and talking groups to offer creative learning opportunities to an underserved demographic. Each workshop was unique, setting the course for the project's flexible verbatim approach.

This was followed by individual interviews with participants from rural communities, which took place in village halls, theatres, cottages, galleries, even in fields and on beaches. People welcomed the theatre makers with openness, generosity, and honesty, expressing real gratitude for the invitation to talk. Ben and Eve collected 50+ hours of interviews, written testimony, and a wealth of evocative poetry.

Back in Glasgow, the artists started to review all the material they had captured, knowing they had something special on their hands. They began the project wrestling with their own personal experiences of loss and isolation and were struck by the many ways these profoundly human themes were reflected in conversations with the communities.

Masses of weighty material with no compelling link is often a key dramaturgical challenge inherent to verbatim theatre. In other words, what's the story? And how can it be told

responsibly, respecting the integrity of participants' words without betraying their confidence?

Ben and Eve found inspiration for their solution in Werner Herzog's concept of 'ecstatic truth' which admits that a carefully crafted fictional story can better reflect reality's true essence than reality itself.

They devised a quasi-fictional narrative using the verbatim text: the story of Rebecca, a woman who travels to an island to process a loss from her past, much like the collaborators' own journey. Through encounters with local creatives and the landscape, Rebecca reaches a place of acceptance and finds the courage to talk.

For the second stage of the project, Ben and Eve returned to Mull with a group of actors to develop the piece, reconnecting with the community groups, participants, and landscape that inspired the narrative.

They planned to work towards two parallel artistic outputs: a live theatre performance with an ensemble of actors and a pre-recorded audio guided walk where audiences follow Rebecca's journey across the island while listening to each encounter unfold.

For one week, Ben and Eve worked with four talented performers and various community groups, conducting

Case Study: Ben Standish – Empty Chair

creative experiments to evolve content and form. A filmmaker also joined to document the work and create a visual record illustrating the cyclical process of listening and sharing.

On the final day of their trip, two years after community creatives and participants had first entrusted the team with their words, it was finally time to present the imagined story back to them. Ben and Eve were nervous. They recalled every connection, conversation, and collaboration they had shared with individuals. Even though the 45-minute scratch performance was still a work in progress, they knew that the project's continuation hinged on their endorsement.

In the end, the sharing exceeded the theatre makers' expectations. Audience members were delighted to hear their words on stage. Moved by the story, some told them the piece had inspired them to continue their own creative practice. There was a sense that the narrative captured the island's spirit, particularly the importance of nature, poetry and singing. Although the team didn't have time for all the creative experiments originally planned, the week on Mull was a huge success.

Three years into the project (effective and ethical verbatim work necessitates time and care), Ben and Eve have grown immensely as artists and fostered enduring relationships with the local communities. They facilitated opportunities to engage with a lesser-known form of theatre and refined their own verbatim practice. Most importantly, they counteracted

the negative effects of the themes they sought to explore by listening and talking to isolated communities.

Ben and Eve have already been invited back to Mull for another development period and further community engagement to fully realise the narrative and prepare the piece for production.

Innovation to their Practice

Ben and Eve dedicated countless hours to community engagement, developing *Empty Chair* with ethical rigour. Using specialist interview, facilitation, and counselling skills, they fostered meaningful human connections and supported mental wellbeing for those living in remote areas with little social contact.

Although time-consuming, the project has been transformational for the artists and impactful for this rural Scottish community.

Exploring the untapped potential of a niche form of theatre, the project expanded their approach to artistic creation. By bringing together the strengths of verbatim theatre with the needs of Mull's communities in the aftermath of a global crisis, Ben and Eve created something truly innovative.

► **Watch the video to dive deeper**

Case Study: Ben Standish – Empty Chair



Case Study:

Neil Sutcliffe

The Bubblyjock Collective

At a Glance

The Bubblyjock Collective is an ensemble that performs and promotes music by neglected classical and contemporary Scottish composers. It was founded in 2023 by three RCS alumni: Rosie Lavery (soprano), Anna Michels (piano), and Neil Sutcliffe (accordion).

They applied for Innovation Studio funding to kickstart a collaboration with emerging composer Padruig Morrison, whose practice is steeped in the Gaelic oral tradition, to explore Gaelic text in a contemporary-classical setting. The funding covered research and workshopping time and enabled the creation of a new work for the ensemble, sung in Gaelic, that Bubblyjock first performed at their launch event at the Scottish Music Centre in Glasgow.

The Creative Exploration

The Scottish art song repertoire includes a plethora of settings of Scots poetry, but comparatively little Gaelic text is used by classical and contemporary composers. With a keen interest in incorporating more elements of Scottish culture and identity into their repertoire, The Bubblyjock Collective approached Padruig Morrison to compose a new piece that would set a Gaelic poetic text. Padruig is a composer, researcher, and crofter from South Uist steeped in Gaelic culture and music.



The Bubblyjock Collective:
Neil Sutcliffe, Rosie Lavery, Anna Michels

Case Study: Neil Sutcliffe – The Bubblyjock Collective

The intention of the project was not just to commission Padruig to write a piece but to collaborate creatively with him, exploring the performer-composer dynamic so that the final work would have a collective creative identity.

The group included workshopping, Zoom meetings, and research time into the project plan. Due to the challenges of workshopping the music at a distance with Padruig and the three performers, most of the composer-performer collaboration happened during the initial stages of the project: researching texts, discussing them, and planning programming around the commission.

From the beginning, they were thinking about how this new work would fit alongside the collective's other repertoire, which held no Gaelic texts at that point, and how best to present it to audiences unlikely to be fluent in Gaelic. Looking through their repertoire, Rosie, Anna, and Neil settled on 'Shores' by Ronald Stevenson as a starting point for the commission. This existing song sets an English translation of the middle verse of 'Traighean', a Gaelic poem by Sorley MacLean.

Stevenson's deeply moving piece was one of Bubblyjock's favourite songs, and the Collective were keen to examine the full, original Gaelic text. They discussed the themes in the text with Padruig and how these might manifest in a new musical response to the poem.

The piece Padruig wrote as a result of the collaboration, *Traighean*, is a stark contrast to Stevenson's song, making it the perfect companion in a programme. It uses air sounds on the accordion to evoke the waves and the wind, quotes traditional melodies linked to the physical places named in the poem, and slowly builds a soundscape for the scenes portrayed in the text.

At the launch concert, *Traighean* was the last piece in the programme and was received with an intense stillness and focus from the audience. The poet Gerda Stevenson, daughter of Ronald Stevenson, described it afterwards as a 'miniature epic'.

Since the launch, the trio has programmed *Traighean* in all their concerts, and it is always remarked upon afterwards. They also experimented with reading the poem in English before performing the work so audiences could fully focus on the music instead of reading a translation in the printed programme, which worked well.

The Bubblyjock Collective plans to record *Traighean* on an EP to give the work a wider life. They hope to work more with Padruig in the future, as well as other composers, to continue building a repertoire of Gaelic art songs.

Case Study: Neil Sutcliffe – The Bubblyjock Collective

Innovation to their Practice

Reflecting on the collaboration with Padruig, The Bubblyjock Collective highlighted that it has given the performers a much greater sense of engagement in the creative process, adding to their connection with the piece when they perform it. In order to work like this with composers in the future, the musicians will reassess how they schedule and budget projects so that meaningful collaborative processes can unfold.

Not only have they successfully incorporated Gaelic text into their own practice and repertoire (and will continue to do so), but they also created a new work to actively expand the canon of the contemporary Scottish art song genre.

► **Watch the video to dive deeper**



Case Study:

Simone Seales

Dearest

At a Glance

Simone sought funding from Innovation Studio to engage in research and development for their debut poetry-music album *Dearest*, centred around their experience of first queer love, trauma, and forgiveness. A classically-trained cellist, Simone's practice incorporates free improvisation, live looping, and spoken word elements.

Initially, Simone intended to explore their relationship to being Black; however, through mentoring from award-winning poet Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Simone realised they felt much more drawn to framing the album within the context of nostalgia and warmth of their first queer relationship.

While undoubtedly shaped by the trauma of racism experienced in that first relationship, Simone's exploration shifted focus to honouring the good times after having spent many years reflecting only on the bad times.



Cellist Simone Seales

The Creative Exploration

Simone described the process of developing the poetry for this album as far from smooth, taking much longer than expected due to the vulnerability needed to dive into the dusty memory boxes of their past relationship.

The first session with Victoria was eye-opening because Simone's poetic practice prior to the project was underdeveloped. No one had looked over their poetry with any guidance or seriousness since they left high school. In that first meeting, Victoria asked Simone to consider being more minimalist, avoid over-explanation, and be strange with their metaphors and descriptions.

None of these tips were new to the musician. Still, in the context of the album, they had not realised how much they relied on explanation to ensure that people didn't misunderstand. First queer love is complex and confusing, and it has taken Simone years to fully understand what happened. Trying to share snapshots of it through their poetry, they were simply saying too much.

Victoria also gave the invaluable advice that has become the foundation of the album: let the music carry the emotional weight.

This led the artist to really consider what this album might be and how they wanted it to function. For the last 16 years, they

used the cello as their voice, expressing grief, joy, confusion, rage, queerness, tension, and various other emotions and states of being. Poetry and text became a window, an invitation to listeners that helps contextualise the sounds Simone makes on their instrument.

Through the research and development process, Simone also managed to put together a team for the album. The next steps will be to write the music and then get in the studio with the music producer and performer, who will deliver the poetry for another development period. They also envision expanding *Dearest* into a zine and a short film.

Innovation to their Practice

Through the initial R&D process and Victoria's mentorship, Simone developed a clearer understanding of poetic writing devices, gained the confidence to experiment with form, and began developing a method for incorporating musical notation into written poetry. Putting themselves in a space that felt uncomfortable at first, they developed a bespoke process to elevate their existing creative practice, using poetry to contextualise their musical expression.

► [**Watch the video to dive deeper**](#)

Case Study: Simone Seales – Dearest



Case Study:

Tom Macfadyen

Student Collaboration Society

At a Glance

The Student Collaboration Society is a student-led, cross-Conservatoire group that provides space and support for students looking to engage in interdisciplinary collaboration with peers from different departments. The group runs regular workshops, allowing students to innovate new creative practices, improvise, explore new media, and produce collaborative works.

Innovation Studio has continuously supported the society's growth and development and provided funding to help with promotion and marketing, room bookings, external venue hire, equipment rental, and purchase of materials used during workshops.

Recognising the importance of challenging one's own practice and creative perspective, Tom played an important role in forming the society, organising and running collaborative sessions throughout the academic year.



Student Collaboration Society workshop

The Creative Exploration

The Student Collaboration Society began as a creative experiment between a small group of students at the Conservatoire. Tom arranged several collaborative sessions in the spring of 2022 to observe what happens when students from different creative backgrounds come together to improvise and generate ideas. The results were interesting and surprising, igniting a sense of curiosity in all of those involved.

A drama student would recite a poem, which would be supported by a live improvised musical accompaniment – which, in turn, would affect how the poem was read. Others would engage in improvised movement, drawing attention to the body and the form of those in the room, leading to different ways of thinking about space. These feedback loops were rich and inspiring, sparking new ideas in everyone attending.

Tom brought a series of prompts to each session, which acted as starting points for the collaboration and discussion. The prompts involved different media and applied to multiple disciplines, such as graphic notation, text scores, films, drawings, objects, instruments, and elements within the space. Tom also encouraged participants to bring along their own ideas and prompts.

Initially, the society intended to generate new interdisciplinary works, but it has since shifted focus to structures and processes. The society's ambition is to develop a community of students who are interested in coming together and exploring innovative ways of working with each other. To Tom, this felt like a more worthwhile long-term goal with a potentially longer-lasting influence on the creative practices that are forming at RCS.

The Student Collaboration Society is committed to providing a safe space for people with different access requirements to comfortably express themselves and explore new ideas without the fear of being judged. They encourage attending students to be mindful of differing experiences and creative values and highlight the importance of seeking consent when engaging in creative collaboration.

This focus on the social aspects and the ethics of collaboration has also informed Tom's own practice as a composer and improviser, particularly in his use of live electronics. During workshops, Tom would process sounds from microphones in the room on his laptop using a custom-built Max/MSP patch, which he controls with his iPad. The laptop becomes both an instrument and an environment through which Tom explores how human performers interact with computers

Case Study: Tom Macfadyen – Student Collaboration Society

in improvisation - and the questions around performativity, authorship, agency, and influence that arise when improvising with technology.

The society has received a lot of constructive feedback from its attendees, gaining insight into the kinds of ideas and mediums people are interested in exploring and the resources needed to collaborate. Going forward, they plan to reach out to more students from non-musical disciplines and organise more opportunities to perform in front of audiences.

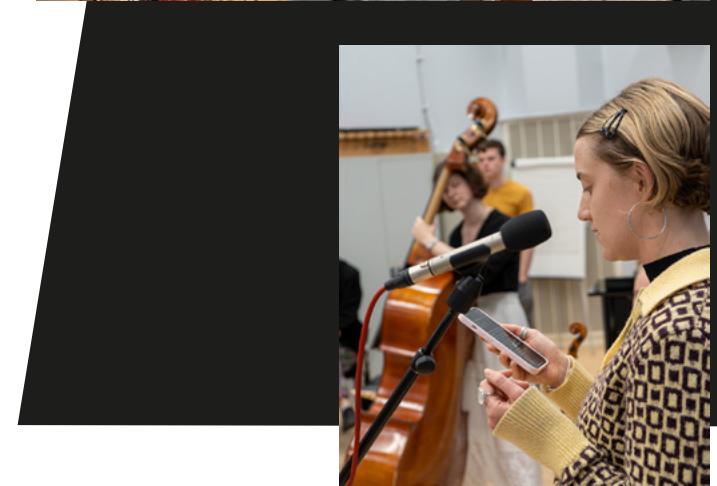
Innovation to their Practice

Since no such offer previously existed, The Student Collaboration Society is an innovation at RCS. Being a self-led community bolsters buy-in from the student body and brilliantly supplements the formal structures for collaborative work available through the curriculum. The society provides a space to explore without having an intended outcome, allowing new processes to emerge organically. Ideally, the connections made last long after students graduate, giving them a network of collaborators to draw on later in their careers.

Regarding his personal development, Tom highlighted that improvising with performers from different backgrounds helped him build and develop his digital instrument for different performance contexts and improved his ability to better communicate with collaborators, leading to more engaged sessions.

► **Watch the video to dive deeper**

📌 **Follow the Student Collaboration Society on Instagram**



Case Study:

Yas Mawer and Holly Worton Blue

At a Glance

Aiming to bring artistic and scientific communities together in new collaborative ways, Yas Mawer and Holly Worton teamed up with the Marine Conservation Society to create the performance film *Blue*.

The project was funded through Innovation Studio's Civic Fund, a scheme designed for RCS students, staff or alumni to co-create a project with local charities or social enterprises from beyond the creative arts. Encouraging teams to work side by side, the fund fostered innovative forms of exchange with meaningful results and impact.

Originally intended as a site-specific live performance, the project focused on harmful activities that threaten coastal and marine environments, as well as solutions to restore, rewild, and recover these habitats. Filming was preceded by extensive research, including several environmental reports, and a beach clean and creative arts workshop co-hosted with the MCS, where volunteers collected 13kg of waste.



Still from performance film *Blue*

The Creative Exploration

The project started out as conversations between Yas and Holly during the summer of 2022. It was a nice summer, and they visited the beach often, where they couldn't help but notice the amount of rubbish.

The “Blue carbon: Ocean-based solutions to fight the climate crisis” report, released by the Marine Conservation Society and Rewilding Britain the previous year, became an ongoing point of discussion at these outings.

Overwhelmed by the serenity and power of the sea, the artists started wondering why anyone would harm such a beautiful thing. They decided to collaborate with the MCS, bringing a scientific perspective into their work as artists and vice versa.

Together, they hosted the ‘Creative Arts Beach Clean’ at Irvine Beach, combining proactive environmentalism with art-based experimentation. Yas and Holly introduced creative writing, visual arts, poetry, and creative reflection activities, making it a very different type of event from what MCS usually puts on. The group of volunteers collected 13kg of waste, an average of 424 items per 100 metres. 82% of items were plastic, 38% came from a public source, and 3.8% were sanitary waste products flushed through the sewage system.

A few people at the event had never been to a beach clean and were attracted to the art side of it all. Others had never tried

anything artistic before but were involved with environmental activism. This brought together two different worlds of people with one shared goal: to make a change.

The footage from the beach clean later became an important integration into the film. The project was initially intended to be a live performance, but Yas and Holly quickly switched to film due to accessibility concerns. When speaking with their contact at the MCS, they realised just how important awareness and outreach were. The reach of a live performance on a small beach out of the way of the city centre would be too small.

The pair also felt that their process in the water would translate better over film. They could do more with different camera angles, natural light, and different ways of manipulating the camera to show different qualities. Rather than the audience standing on the shoreline looking out to the ocean, with a camera, they could take the audience underwater with them.

However, underwater filming was also one of the biggest challenges. Since the artists couldn't see what we were filming as we were filming it, their process involved a lot of trial and error. The exploratory nature of this method allowed them to produce surprising footage, inviting uncertainty into the work. Responding to the ever-changing site as it was being shaped by nature also meant that no two takes were ever the same.

Case Study: Yas Mawer and Holly Worton – Blue

Another major collaboration for this project was with the drone artist, who brought another skill set into the filmmaking process. The way the drone moved worked really well with Yas and Holly's ideas of ebbs and flows and significantly enhanced the film. It was something they could not have done on their own.

Innovation to their Practice

Engaging deeply in the work of the MCS around blue carbon, Yas and Holly developed a unique perspective and approach to sharing this knowledge with audiences, strengthening their belief that art can be a useful and innovative tool in environmental activism.

The final film was a portrayal of the state of the shoreline, filmed and edited through an artistic lens. It was deeply informed by the exchange with the MCS, the enthusiastic volunteers Yas and Holly met at the beach clean, and different perspectives on pollution, waste, and government legislation the artists encountered throughout the making of *Blue*.

They used the project for creative experimentation and added new techniques to their practice, including underwater filming and drone videography.

► **Watch the video to dive deeper**



Innovators in Residence: Learnings and Reflections

In August 2022, Innovation Studio appointed artist and cultural producer Lora Krasteva and multi-reality director Leonie Rae Gasson as Innovators in Residence. Joining us part-time, Lora and Leo worked alongside the Innovation Studio team to help deliver the pilot programme and articulate what innovation means at RCS, how it can be supported and fostered, what an Innovation Studio might look and feel like, and how it might work.

Describing RCS as a rich environment where innovation was already blossoming, they saw their roles as critical friends and outside voices, bringing in questions, challenges and best practices they had encountered. Both felt that sitting slightly outside the institution benefitted their engagement at RCS, enabling staff and students to interact with them more openly.

Over the course of 19 months, they engaged with over 50 individuals via one-to-one conversations, roundtable meetings, and a 3-day residency at Cove Park.

Through a mix of remote and in-person work, Lora and Leo played an important role in making Innovation Studio visible, championing innovation at RCS and giving it an embodied presence.

This article summarises their reflections on the successes and challenges of their residency and recommendations for further development of Innovation Studio.



Innovators in Residence Lora Krasteva and Leonie Rae Gasson

Challenges to Innovation

- Coming up with a shared definition and understanding of innovation, recognising that what might be innovative for one person might be regular practice for someone else.
- Innovation needs space - physical, temporal, and mental. Finding room for innovation is challenging for students, staff and alumni who juggle their creative practice, study/research/teaching obligations, and (for many students) part-time jobs in or outside the industry.
- The belief that “innovation is not for me”. Combined with the high demands of Conservatoire study/teaching, people may not have the confidence to pursue innovation.
- Limited resources: Staff and students noted that physical spaces are at capacity. In addition, innovation in certain areas requires an investment in software and/or hardware, and advocating for their purchase is tricky since these resources can quickly become obsolete as technologies move on.



Successes in Innovation

- Amazing and interesting things related to innovation are happening all across RCS. Lora and Leo observed plenty of ad hoc, informal ways students and staff shared knowledge and opportunities. Innovation is finding its way through the cracks of busy schedules and packed curriculums.
- Students lead regular collaboration meetups and educate peers and staff on important issues, such as racial inequalities and other aspects of diversity and inclusion.
- Some courses and departments showed a particular openness or proneness to innovation.
- Engaging with external artists and practitioners throughout the curriculum is a key driver of innovation at RCS, along with the Conservatoire's support for collaboration between departments and across disciplines. Many managers actively help colleagues and students make connections inside and beyond their departments or the institution.
- Conversations with staff highlighted the importance of research at RCS. A focus on research as well as teaching is an incentive for staff to keep up-to-date and bring any new findings back into their teaching. The fact that the teaching body is made up of educators who are also practitioners and/or researchers is celebrated at RCS.
- Existing initiatives that encourage student agency include the “Learn to collaborate” module, which everyone must attend in their first year. Bridge Week was also mentioned as an ideal moment for connection, experimentation, and cross-departmental performance.

Approach

Consultations with staff, students, and graduates formed the basis for interventions and recommendations made by our Innovators in Residence. Showing that Innovation Studio was listening and acting on feedback was a powerful tool for gaining buy-in from the RCS community.

Peering into the intricate world of RCS, and its complexity, a great portion of their job as Innovators in Residence was to simplify and streamline processes. As noted previously, innovation benefits from space and time, and their constant advice to the Innovation Studio team was to slow down and simplify.

This work of simplification extended to every activity Lora and Leo were involved in: Redesigning application forms to ask fewer and better questions, removing thematic restrictions from funding rounds, introducing a non-negotiable level of support for marginalised communities, separating access and documentation from the main funding pots, and utilising roundtables and group discussions for evaluation instead of individual written reports.

Lora and Leo expressed deep gratitude for this fruitful collaboration, underscoring the impact that long-term embedded arts roles within organisations can have on residents and hosts.

Links and Resources

- [Innovation Studio Website](#)
- ['What does Innovation mean to you' Miro Board](#)
- ['Exploring Innovation With Our Innovators in Residence' Workshop](#)
- [Dr Michael Pierre Johnson's Research](#)
- [SHARE Creative Health Symposium](#)
- [Cove Park Residency](#)
- [Green Recovery Funded Projects](#)
- [Round 2 Funded Projects](#)
- [Round 3 Funded Projects](#)



Innovation Studio roundtable session

Thanks and Acknowledgements

Warmest thanks to all those who got involved and gave their time to the Innovation Studio pilot programme, especially:

Dale Thrupp

Suzy Glass

Kaye Symington

Dr Laura Bissell

Dr Michael Pierre Johnson

Professor Celia Duffy

Professor Laura Gonzales

Dr Sophie Boyd

Rebecca Livesey-Wright

Cove Park

Louise Mather

and all members of our Innovation Studio Community of Practice.

A very special thanks to the Rose Fund at RCS for generously supporting the pilot and helping us to get it off the ground.

Photo credits: Robbie McFadzean, Louise Mather, Beth Chalmers, Jacob Gandy, Ben Standish, The Bubblyjock Collective, Simone Seales, Student Collaboration Society, Yas Mawer & Holly Worton, Sagnick Mukherjee, Hayley Earlam

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