



Royal Conservatoire
of Scotland

Donor Impact Report 2023/2024



Welcome

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland believes wholeheartedly in the power of the performing arts to inspire, challenge and change the world. Vital support from individuals and charitable organisations makes our work possible.



A very warm welcome to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland’s Donor Impact Report. In a world of division and complex challenges, it’s important to celebrate the essential contribution the arts and artists make to connecting us, healing us and bringing us a shared sense of purpose and joy.

You’ll meet exceptional young artists and creative producers and also those who make it possible for them to benefit from the outstanding professional training available here. Gifts large and small, increasingly, are essential in helping deliver a world-class education in Scotland for talented Scots and students from around the globe.

Donors help RCS create a training environment that prepares young professionals to be a positive force in the world. RCS’s graduates have impact wherever they go, be that in theatres, in classrooms, concert halls, behind and front of the camera, in community or corporate settings and absolutely everywhere in between.

Thank you for your interest in RCS and the next generation of artists. They and the performing arts need you, and we thank you for your support.

Professor Jeffrey Sharkey FRSE
Principal, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

On behalf of the Board of Governors, it’s a genuine pleasure to introduce this report and to highlight the transformative impact our donors have on the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Access to high-quality arts education is more challenging than ever, but RCS remains steadfast in its mission: to provide world-class training to talented individuals, regardless of the barriers they may face. This mission is only possible because of the philanthropic support we receive.

Delivering intensive performing and production arts education demands significant investment. With philanthropic help, we’re able to offer a high-impact student experience – supporting masterclasses, advanced facilities, specialist equipment, and much more.

We are deeply grateful to every donor who makes this work possible. Your belief in the power of the arts and in the potential of our students truly matters. If you are already part of our giving community, thank you. If you are inspired to join us, we would be delighted to welcome your support.

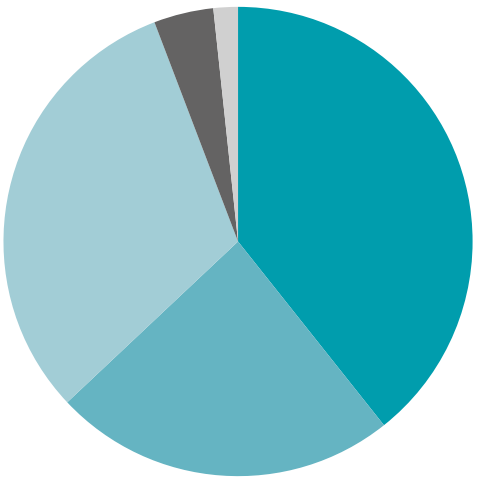
Professor Dorothy Miell OBE FRSE
Chair, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Board of Governors

Fundraising in Figures



23/24 Income

- Legacies 39%
- Individuals 24%
- Trusts and Foundations 31%
- Corporate 4%
- Company of Donors 2%



£1.48

Million raised from donations in 23/24

£148

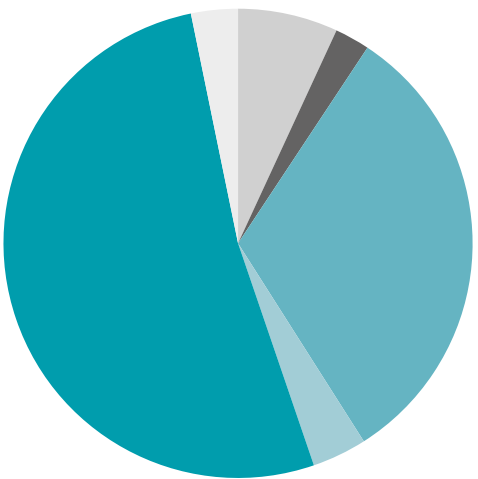
Thousand raised from gifts in kind

£1.1

Million donations for scholarships

Individual Donations

- Company of Donors: 7%
- General/ Unrestricted: 2%
- Named Scholarships: 32%
- Prize: 4%
- Project Funding: 52%
- RCS Scholarship Fund: 3%



342

Students supported by
scholarship funding

Individual Giving

Richard Parry

From audience member to advocate: how opera sparked a donor's lifelong support for the arts



When Richard Parry saw his first opera – *La Traviata* at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow – it wasn't just a cultural eye-opener. It was the beginning of a lifelong love of the arts.

That experience, on a student exchange trip, left a long-lasting impression and sparked an interest in opera that has taken him from an appreciative audience member to a benefactor of institutions including the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Born in Wales, Richard moved to Scotland with his parents in his teens. When he joined the civil service in London in the 1970s, he immersed himself in the city's opera scene, becoming a regular at the Royal Opera House and English National Opera.

He returned to Scotland and moved into academic political science jobs at the Universities of Strathclyde and later Edinburgh, frequently hopping on the train from the capital to follow Scottish Opera productions at the Theatre Royal in Glasgow. And that's when he found his way to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

"I became aware of the excellent productions at the Conservatoire, which always had very good conductors and directors who worked with professional opera companies around the world," said Richard.

It was at an RCS performance, when he was flicking through the programme, that prompted him to become a donor.

"I remember looking at the list of donors at the end and it didn't seem that long compared with what you saw in the programmes at Scottish Opera or Edinburgh International Festival," he recalled.

"People may think that the Conservatoire, as an aspect of the higher education system, is paid for by government, so it's not the responsibility of the public to look after it. But, of course, the reality is that it needs a variety of income streams and that's the reason I became involved."

For Richard, supporting the Conservatoire isn't simply about the financial element – it's being part of a community dedicated to nurturing talent and ensuring a vibrant future for the performing arts.

"There's an incredible breadth of performances and a wonderful atmosphere in the building that you don't often find elsewhere, and I very much enjoy walking through its doors. I hope more people will discover that and support RCS's work."

Richard's support helped deliver masterclasses with renowned opera professionals and ambitious productions.

"We've had excellent operas over the years, such as Mozart's *Idomeneo*, with the celebrated conductor John Butt, and directed by Stephen Lawless, who has worked with companies all over the world. Jonathan Dove wrote a new orchestral arrangement for the production of *Flight*."

"It's incredible to have these high-level figures come to Glasgow to work with students – it shows the Conservatoire is highly regarded."

What particularly resonates is the collaborative spirit of RCS's productions: "Everything is joined up, from the orchestra and the singers to the crew, the costume makers and the set builders, and that's one of the reasons why I'm so keen to support."

Alongside RCS, Richard regularly gives to Scottish Opera, the Edinburgh International Festival and Scotland's national orchestras. His involvement has deepened his understanding of the arts and heightened his awareness of the challenges it faces.

"After you've been seeing the arts for a long time, you get very interested in how it all works, and how it's all put together, and you become concerned about its future as you know that professional arts organisations are often living from year to year, and yet they have to make plans years ahead."

For those considering embarking on a giving journey, Richard offers some thoughtful advice.

"It depends on individual circumstances, of course, but I think we should all do charitable things and choose something that you can have an impact on. Once you start getting in the habit of giving, ask yourself, could I give more? It can make a real difference, and it also allows you to build an ongoing relationship."

And his message is clear: "People need to understand that we need a conservatoire – it's the only one in Scotland. If we don't have it, then the whole arts scene would be undermined. It's also so intimately linked with the professional companies in the country, which opens up opportunities for students and graduates."

"That's why individual support is so important. A building like RCS is open to everybody, both students and audiences. If you are concerned about the future of the arts, we can all do something and this way, everybody can benefit."

"We're all in this together."

"People may think that the Conservatoire is paid for by government, so it's not the responsibility of the public... The reality is that it needs a variety of income streams."

Richard Parry

Image below:
RCS's production of
Jonathan Dove's *Flight*
for which the composer
wrote a new arrangement.



Scholarships



Images:
Clockwise from top left: **Michali Dantes** in RCS's *Little Women*, **Fabian Soto Pacheco** in RCS's *Cinderella*, **Liz Botros** of the Mackintosh Foundation, **Annabelle Aquino** in *Les Misérables*.

The Mackintosh Foundation

From RCS to the West End – a partnership with a global theatre giant is propelling the stars of tomorrow and powering a vital talent pipeline for the industry.

Through scholarships from The Mackintosh Foundation, legendary producer Sir Cameron Mackintosh is helping Royal Conservatoire of Scotland students turn training into careers on the world's biggest stages.

In the last decade, The Mackintosh Foundation has funded 48 students across the BA Musical Theatre programme, many of whom have gone on to work on UK and international productions, including *Six* and *Dear Evan Hansen*.

Described as 'the most successful, influential and powerful theatrical producer in the world' by The New York Times, Sir Cameron has been producing shows since 1967 and remains the most prolific producer of musicals in theatre history, with credits including *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Cats*.

He also served as RCS President until 2022.

"Cameron has long maintained a special connection to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and it's wonderful to see that link between the institution and our productions," said Liz Botros, Director of Theatre Development at The Mackintosh Foundation.

"So many RCS alumni are in our shows as actors, crew or musicians and Annabelle Aquino (BA Musical Theatre 2023 graduate) is currently starring as Cosette in *Les Misérables* in London.

"As Scotland's only conservatoire, there's a real responsibility to deliver programmes and education to young people at the highest level.

"From the students working here and the alumni coming out of the school, it's clear that it's paying off. There's real care and time taken to make sure that they're ready to be in the world of theatre, music, film, and all the things they want to do. RCS really sets them up for success."

Scholarships remove financial barriers or pressures that students may face and ensure that everyone, regardless of circumstances, can make the most of their education.

And that has an impact on the industry at large – ensuring there's a steady stream of young professionals, with diverse voices and experiences, ready to make their mark.

"Our casting team has held several workshops and Q&As with the students, which is so valuable as it lets us see the next generation of actors and creatives coming through who they are going to see in auditions," said Liz.

"It also opens up the professional world to students while training. Having that connection between the industry and the school is key, as it's such an important pipeline."

Liz believes access to a conservatoire education exposes students to all aspects of the arts and offers a crucial insight into working life.



"The theatre is a truly collaborative environment, so while you're learning your craft at a conservatoire, you're also getting a fundamental understanding of how the industry works. RCS is remarkable and to be a student in a building that's so alive and vibrant is really important."

Beyond the training, scholarships and career pathways, the heart of the partnership with The Mackintosh Foundation lies in something even greater – a shared belief in the transformative power of the arts.

"In a world where there's so much distraction and noise, the arts are a place and a time and a space for people to join together as a community for a couple hours to laugh, cry or both," said Liz.

"They have such value. It has been proven time and time again, that young people who participate in the arts turn out to be, whether they pursue careers in them or not, better team players, collaborators and more confident adults.

"The arts are an escape and offer a mirror to society... and that's why we have to continue to support them."

Mackintosh Foundation Scholarship Recipients Michali Dantes

Since graduating, Michali has gone on to star in *Go!* at the Gatehouse Theatre in London, the UK live premiere of *First Date* at the Old Joint Stock Theatre in Birmingham, *Not Even the Dogs* at the Old Red Lion Theatre and is currently in *Jesus Christ Superstar* at the Watermill Theatre.

"I am immensely grateful for the financial support I received from The Mackintosh Foundation. It relieved me of financial stresses, allowing me to focus wholeheartedly on my course. Without this support, I don't think I would have been able to keep up my studies at RCS. When I struggled with finding student housing, knowing I had the scholarship support made things a little easier. I am truly grateful this funding was available at RCS."

Fabian Soto Pacheco

Last year, Fabian played Evan Hansen in the first Costa Rican production of *Dear Evan Hansen*, translated entirely into Spanish.

"My time at RCS provided me with opportunities that would have been impossible to find in my home country, and it would have been equally as impossible to complete my studies at the Conservatoire without the Cameron Mackintosh Scholarship. It not only gave me and my family immense financial relief, but it filled me with a sense of duty and pride, pushing me to constantly do my best."

Joe and Elaine Gerber

Breaking Barriers in the Arts: *how scholarships pave the way for Scotland's next generation of actors*

"The arts are for everybody and should be reflective of the general population – it's important that we don't just see the same faces on our stages and screens."

As the steward of a charitable legacy rooted in a passion for the performing arts, Emma Jardine is ensuring that the next generation of Scottish talent can shine – regardless of background or means.

For many aspiring actors, financial barriers can keep the spotlight out of reach. Scholarships play a critical role in making space for diverse voices and stories to be heard.

Emma is continuing the work begun by her grandparents, Joe and Elaine Gerber, who established a charitable trust in the 1970s to champion the arts in Scotland.

"Talent alone isn't always enough. There are some avenues that are shut off to working-class actors because of a lack of financial means, and that shouldn't be the case. It isn't right or fair. The doors must not be closed to anybody who wants to become an actor."

Joe and Elaine played a significant role in the Scottish theatre scene. Joe, a chartered accountant, was instrumental in establishing and developing the Tron Theatre in Glasgow and was a board member and chair of Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre. Elaine, an elocution teacher in her younger years, was heavily involved with an amateur dramatic society in the city and a regular theatre goer.

The Joe and Elaine Gerber Charitable Trust provides a scholarship for a Scottish student on the BA Acting degree at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. It enables students to immerse themselves in developing their craft while cushioning the cost of living.

"I had a list of strict instructions when I took over the trust from my grandmother and it made perfect sense to support the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland – it would have been exactly what they would have wanted with the quality of the institution and it being based in Glasgow, where their hearts were.

"Tuition fees are paid for Scottish students so often the assumption is that they don't require additional funding. But some have to work or perhaps they have families that can support them in some way.

"We must keep investing in the arts because what is the world without dance, music, art and theatre? It would be less joyful, and that's not a society we want to be in."

Images:
(top) BA Acting rehearsals; (bottom) BA Acting students in *Twelfth Night*; (opposite) RCS's 2025 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Support a scholarship

Approximately one third of our students are supported by the RCS Scholarship Fund each year.

The fund offers opportunities for students from across the world to learn their craft here in Scotland, enriching their lives and the national artistic landscape.

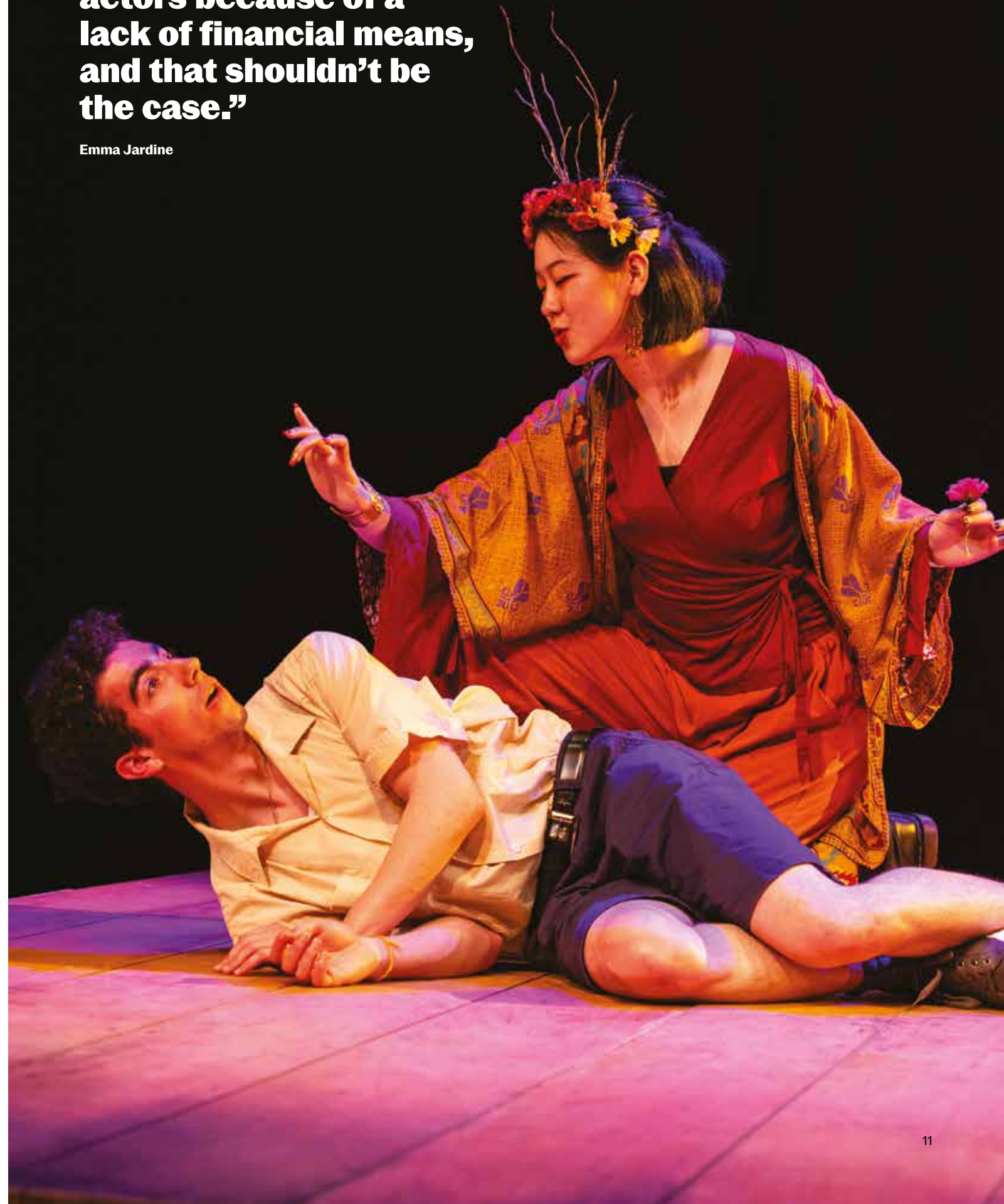
By donating to the Scholarship Fund, you are directly supporting a young person to study at a world-leading conservatoire, removing the financial barrier or pressures they might otherwise face.

You can give directly to the RCS Scholarship Fund or find out more about other specific scholarship funds on our website at: rcs.ac.uk/scholarships



"There are some avenues that are shut off to working-class actors because of a lack of financial means, and that shouldn't be the case."

Emma Jardine



Legacies and Prizes

“The financial award gives us the opportunity to pursue further coaching, which we’re really excited about. We are so grateful to Tamara for supporting this prize.”

Anna Marmion, winner of the 2025 prize as The Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte*.

The RCS Tony and Tania Music Prize

Celebrating a musical legacy: *annual award shines a spotlight on emerging musicians*

Established by the late Tony and Tania Webster, the annual award for piano and voice provides a platform for emerging artists to excel.

For their daughter, Tamara Schellander, it’s more than a competition – it celebrates her parents’ belief in the transformative power of music and nurtures the next generation of musical talent.

Tamara said: “My parents’ love of Scotland and music drew them to the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Carrying on this legacy has shown me what a wonderful environment this world-class conservatoire is for these talented young musicians coming here from all over the world.”

The 2024 prize winner, pianist Alexandru Plăcintă, was highly praised by the adjudicator, renowned pianist Hiroaki Takenouchi, for a performance of an Anatoly Alexandrov sonata.

“Receiving this award was a significant boost to my confidence and served as a validation of the hard work and knowledge I have been fortunate to receive from my teachers, Sinae Lee and Aaron Shorr, for which I will always be deeply grateful,” said Alexandru, who is currently studying on the Master of Music (Performance) programme.

Alexandru believes competitions offer students a vital opportunity for career development.

“Beyond the financial benefits and recognition from both audiences and professional adjudicators, the most significant outcomes for students in these contexts are the sense of excitement and the crucial professional growth that can only be attained through the competitive experience.”

Soprano Anna Marmion, who won the 2025 prize with her duo partner, Valeri Ayvazyan, said: “Awards like this are so valuable for young singers as it enables us to carve time out of our busy schedules to explore and rehearse new repertoire, put together a cohesive programme, and have the chance to perform it.

“The financial award gives us the opportunity to pursue further coaching, which we’re really excited about. We are so grateful to Tamara for supporting this prize.”

The RCS Tony and Tania Music Prize, which alternates each year between voice and piano, sees musicians perform works often from rarely heard composers from the Russian repertoire.

The prize not only celebrates Russia’s contribution to music and the arts but also pays tribute to Tania’s Russian roots.

Tony and Tania Webster’s journey began in vastly different cultural backgrounds. Tania was born in Iasi in Eastern Romania to a Romanian mother and Russian father who had left Russia and fled to Romania during the revolution.

The family later moved to Italy where Tania studied painting and music in Venice. Tony, however, was born in Aberdeen to a family who owned a typewriter business.

He was a keen pianist and music lover. He was conscripted into the army which took him to India, Pakistan, Egypt and finally Greece at the end of World War Two.

The young couple met through family in Greece and following an international courtship, they married in Aberdeen where they raised their family – Tamara and her brother Boris – in a home filled with music.

Tony and Tamara both played the piano, Tania took up the clarinet and Boris played the cello.

In 1994, for Tania’s 70th birthday, Tony and Tamara organised a surprise trip to St Petersburg, Tania’s father’s birth city: “This was the first time Tania set foot on Russian soil and it proved to be a major catalyst in her search for her roots,” said Tamara.

“My mother threw herself into learning Russian and became passionate about all things Russian (except politics!) and, of course, particularly music.”

Following Tony’s death in 2001, Tania’s journey in music continued and she forged the connection with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Tania passed away in 2022 at the age of 98 and her daughter Tamara has taken up the torch.



Tania and Tony Webster



Alexandru Plăcintă

Jean Armour Burns Trust Prize

A new award for actors from a Scottish cultural trust has the power to transform lives...

Graduation is always a special milestone ... but for Lisa Vetta, it was a day of extra celebration...

Not only was Lisa awarded the Principal's Prize for All-Round Excellence at RCS, she was also named the first-ever recipient of the Jean Armour Burns Trust Prize – a newly established annual award, worth £500, that recognises the outstanding academic and artistic achievements of a BA Acting student.

Created by the Jean Armour Burns Trust, whose mission is to promote the Scots language and the legacy of Robert Burns, the prize is presented by RCS's BA Acting staff and the Centre for Voice in Performance to a student who has shown resolve, courage and adaptability throughout their studies.

In addition to the prize, the Jean Armour Burns Trust commissioned a custom plaque, designed and built by Frankie O'Connor, a student on the BA Production Arts and Design programme, under the guidance of tutor Merlin Currie.

"We are always looking for meaningful ways to promote the Scots language and keep the spirit of Robert Burns alive – particularly by engaging younger generations," said Robert L. Stevenson, Chair of the Jean Armour Burns Trust.

"We are proud to fund projects across the country, from school initiatives and museum collaborations to cultural events, and we're delighted to support students like Lisa.

"Through this prize, we hope to not only recognise excellence but to give students the encouragement and resources to take the next steps and continue developing their voices."

Lisa said being the first RCS recipient of the 'inspiring and unique award' is both humbling and emboldening.

"My sincere gratitude goes out to the generous Jean Armour Burns Trust who made this possible, as well as to my dedicated acting and voice lecturers who uplifted me as an actor and person," said Lisa, from Russia, who joined RCS in 2021.

Jean Sangster, Head of Voice and the Centre for Voice in Performance at RCS, said: "Throughout her three years of actor training at RCS, Lisa consistently contributed to the experience of staff and students within and outside the BA Acting programme.

"Her proactive attitude was evidenced through her involvement not only as an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion class representative, but also in the creative arts scene in Glasgow, frequenting spoken word events with original poetry.

"Lisa has grown to be an artist with a conscience and strong sense of responsibility, unashamedly using her voice to support those without, responding to injustice in a wholly creative and productive way."



"Through this prize, we hope to not only recognise excellence but to give students the encouragement and resources to take the next steps and continue developing their voices."

Robert L. Stevenson, Chair of the Jean Armour Burns Trust.

Image right: Lisa Vetta (centre) in RCS's production of *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*.



Awarding Excellence

“Scholarships make things more equitable and ensure that talent, not circumstances, defines a musician’s future.”

Geoff Parkin, ROSL Artistic Director

The Royal Over-Seas League

Flying the flag for classical talent for more than 70 years.

For over 70 years, the Royal Over-Seas League (ROSL) has been championing emerging artists, cultivating cross-cultural exchange, and providing a launchpad for careers on the international stage.

Through performance opportunities and prestigious prizes, the Royal Over-Seas League has carved a legacy of support for musicians across the Commonwealth and beyond. Central to ROSL’s mission is its scholarship programme, which gives young artists the time and space needed to grow.

Although based in London, ROSL has a deep connection with Scotland and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Its former clubhouse on Edinburgh’s Princes Street was once a vibrant home for live music and it inspired a long-standing member, Evelyn Small, to leave a generous legacy to ROSL following her death.

This gift now funds The Miss Evelyn Small and Royal Over-Seas League Music Scholarship at RCS, for undergraduate or postgraduate students from across the 55 Commonwealth nations.

This kind of support, said ROSL Artistic Director Geoff Parkin, is transformative. By easing financial burdens, scholarships give musicians the chance to fully immerse themselves in conservatoire life and concentrate on their studies.

“Scholarships are absolutely crucial,” Geoff explained.

“The training in UK conservatoires is excellent, but it’s also intensive. Students must have the time and space to develop their craft. Scholarships make things more equitable and ensure that talent, not circumstances, defines a musician’s future.”

Alongside the scholarship programme, ROSL’s Annual Music Competition elevates new voices in classical music, offering £70,000 in prizes each year to outstanding soloists and chamber ensembles.

Over the years, this prize has helped launch the careers of celebrated artists such as cellist Jacqueline du Pré and soprano Susan Bullock.

RCS students and alumni have consistently made their mark on the competition. Guitarist Sean Shibe won the coveted Gold Medal in 2011, followed by accordionist Ryan Corbett in 2021 – the first accordionist to win in nearly 30 years.

Saxophonist Lewis Banks secured the Sussex Prize for woodwind in 2023, and pianist George Todică was awarded the solo keyboard prize in 2022.

As the cultural landscape continues to evolve, ROSL’s work remains more vital than ever. In an age increasingly shaped by technology and automation, Geoff believes the human connection found in live performance is irreplaceable.

“That’s why we need to cherish the arts, fund them, and fight for them, because it’s about humanity.”

Images:
(left) RCS Chamber Orchestra in rehearsal
(right) Accordionist and winner of the 2021 prize, Ryan Corbett; RCS Jazz Orchestra in rehearsal.



Friends of Glasgow Museums

The organisation marked a milestone by supporting rising creative talent at RCS...

A milestone anniversary for a Glasgow arts organisation has inspired a new prize for Production students at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

When Friends of Glasgow Museums turned 80 in 2024, it wanted to honour the legacy of its visionary founder by nurturing the next generation of art and design talent in Scotland.

Friends of Glasgow Museums (FoGM) is one of the oldest established friends' organisations in the UK that cultivates interest in the arts, heritage, culture and science, and provides independent support for Glasgow's museums and art galleries and their collections.

To mark the anniversary, FoGM established a travel bursary and annual award for final-year students on the BA Production Arts and Design degree programme at RCS.

Funding is split into a £2,000 bursary to support placement or workshop costs for one or two students and £1,500 in Showcase Awards, recognising excellence and promise in graduating student work – £500 each for two first-place winners (promise and excellence) and £250 each for two runners-up.

"Our 80th anniversary was a way to celebrate the past but look to the future," said Caroline Robertson, Chair of FoGM.

"Our members leave us bequests for projects that will generate interest in culture and the arts in Glasgow and bring people together.

"We looked for ways that we could make a difference with the world-leading institutions that we have in Glasgow, organisations that people maybe assume are taken care of financially.

"The reason RCS is such a good fit for us is that our founder, Dr Tom Honeyman, did so much to put Glasgow on the world stage."

Dr Tom Honeyman founded FoGM in 1944 and was the visionary director of Glasgow Art Galleries and Museums from 1939-1954, as well as a co-founder of the Citizens Theatre.

During his tenure as director, he brought numerous internationally significant works to Glasgow's collections, the most famous being Salvador Dali's Christ of St John of the Cross.

Barbara Daly, Vice-Chair of FoGM, added: "Promoting the development of the arts in Glasgow, particularly with young people, is a key focus for us and we recognise the need to support artists at the start of their journeys."

And funding is already having an impact. One student used the FoGM bursary to attend a specialist puppet-making workshop in Bristol, which led to a professional job offer.

"That's exactly the kind of difference we hope our support can make," Barbara added.

"It's not just about funding or preserving the past – it's about opening doors and investing in the future."

The Showcase Award is presented at the annual Production Showcase in June – where graduating students exhibit their work – from RCS performances and personal projects – in RCS's Chandler Studio Theatre.

FoGM members visited the showcase and had a behind-the-scenes tour of Wallace Studios, where the scenic art, costume, carpentry and prop workshops are located.

"We were so impressed with the work that we saw – it was such an incredibly high and professional standard," said Caroline.

"It was so interesting to see how the students are taught and how collaborative it is. Everyone had their specialisms but collaborate so well, and it was a great working environment."

The tour was followed by a performance of *Sweet Charity*, staged by the BA Musical Theatre students, and with sets, props and costumes designed in-house at RCS.

FoGM's partnership with RCS not only enhances the student experience, it also enriches its community of over 600 members, many who have a lifelong love of the arts.

"We're passionate about bridging the gap between generations," Barbara explained.

"Inviting our members to RCS for exhibitions or performances allows them to engage with fresh talent and new ideas. It's a two-way connection."

And FoGM strongly believes in championing the creative visionaries whose work adds so much to the nation's rich cultural fabric.

"At a time when arts and culture aren't as prioritised as they should be, it's important that we stand behind and encourage the next generation as you don't know what you've got until it's gone," said Caroline.



Caroline Robertson
Friends of Glasgow
Museums, Chair



Barbara Daly
Friends of Glasgow
Museums, Vice-Chair

"It's not just about funding or preserving the past — it's about opening doors and investing in the future."

Barbara Daly, Friends of Glasgow Museums



Alumni Giving Back



Kate Dickie

The award-winning actress returned to RCS to inspire a new generation with her latest role as a patron of the Junior Conservatoire.

Her career has taken her everywhere from *Game of Thrones* to the *Star Wars* galaxy – and Kate Dickie is gearing up for one of her most ‘exciting’ roles yet.

The award-winning film, TV and theatre actor is a new patron of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland’s Junior Conservatoire of Stage and Screen.

And she hopes to be a champion and positive force for the next generation of actors, filmmakers and production artists, aged 11 to 18, training at Scotland’s national conservatoire.

“It’s so exciting and a huge honour to be named a patron and work with all these brilliant young people and be part of their journey, even in a small way,” said Kate.

“I can’t wait to get to know everyone and to be there to elevate and support them. I’m to be a sounding board if they need advice or want to ask about some of my experiences in the industry. I’d like them to see me as someone like them, who they can relate to and have a laugh with – I don’t want to be a formal figure.”

Dr Marc Silberschatz, Director of the School of Stage and Screen at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, said: “With an extensive and critically acclaimed career in film, theatre and television, Kate Dickie will offer a wealth of experience as patron.

“It is an honour to welcome an artist of her calibre to this role. Her expertise and insights, combined with her warmth and approachability, will inspire young artists to explore their creativity. We are confident her guidance will profoundly impact their artistic journeys.”

Kate studied on the BA in Dramatic Studies, graduating in 1993. She received an honorary doctorate from RCS in 2023 for services to drama.

She is passionate about the necessity of arts access for young people, viewing it as critical for their creative development, emotional articulation, and for boosting confidence and resilience.

“The arts are so important and have so many layers – from the straightforward to the more complex. It might be a fun thing to do, a hobby to express yourself and explore characters right down to a more private layer where you get to escape reality because maybe life isn’t that pleasant.

“If you have young people exploring other people’s stories and lives, it helps build a generation that has empathy and understanding for scenarios that aren’t their own. And that can only be a good thing.”

And she says it’s often how young people find their tribe and a sense of belonging: “I remember coming to the Academy and suddenly I was in a community of people who all loved the same thing as me, which allowed us to build friendships quickly. It was brilliant and life-affirming.

“I liked the feeling of being part of something bigger than just me, made my dream seem a bit more realistic rather than just a pipe dream, and that it was something that could be possible, particularly as a working-class person.”

Born in East Kilbride, South Lanarkshire, Kate moved to Perthshire, Ayr and Dumfries and Galloway due to her dad’s job as a professional gardener.

“Drama was a way of making pals and channelling the imagination I had. I loved it and had a great teacher who was really encouraging and helped me with my audition for the Academy.”

Her studies at RSAMD were formative, and the first time she didn’t feel like a ‘square peg in a round hole’. Looking back, what advice would she share with her younger self – and to aspiring artists today?

“I’d encourage them to own their space, to set boundaries and trust their instincts. And don’t be fearful. There might be different tastes, opinions and interpretations but there really is no wrong way of doing anything. I lived in fear of being wrong and being found out that I was awful!

“I wasted so much time worrying, and I wish I could have been a bit more in the present.”

“I’m to be a sounding board if they need advice or want to ask about some of my experiences in the industry.”

Kate Dickie





Images:
Alumni Ambassadors clockwise
from top left: Daniel Ciobanu,
Bethany Kingsley-Garner,
Emma Mullen, The Ayoub Sisters.



Alumni Ambassadors

RCS's new alumni ambassadors are championing the arts around the world.

A Netflix star, a Mercury Prize-nominated musician, and one of the UK's leading ballerinas are just a few of the artists who fly the flag for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland on the world stage.

RCS Alumni Ambassadors are leading lights in the performing and production arts who amplify RCS's work across the globe.

Either graduates or members of the Conservatoire's wider community, ambassadors represent degree programmes and departments and champion the institution at regional and national levels.

"Ambassadors support us to enhance the understanding of RCS across the world, building our connections and developing a dynamic student and alumni community," said Katy Higham, Alumni Relations Manager at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

"It's fantastic to work together on so much RCS activity, whether it's recruitment, alumni engagement or events. They also offer an invaluable insight into life at RCS and Scotland for prospective students."

Here, actor **Jeremy Crawford**, who graduated from the Classical and Contemporary Text (Acting) master's programme in 2009 and **Dustin Struhall**, a 2015 graduate of the MA Musical Directing programme, share what being an ambassador means to them.

Why did you decide to come on board as an ambassador?

Dustin: I chose to become an ambassador because of the lasting impact my time at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland had on me. RCS isn't just a world-class institution for the arts – it's shaped by the warmth, humility, and generosity of Scottish culture.

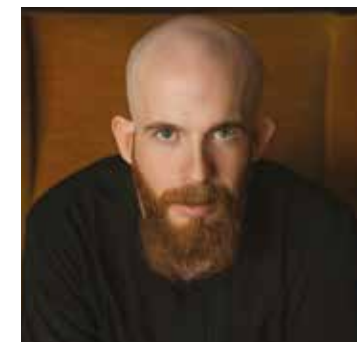
Jeremy: My time at RCS was incredibly crucial to me as a young actor. As an individual with dwarfism, there traditionally hasn't been many opportunities for someone who looks like me in the industry.

My desire was high, but my confidence was low. RCS as an institution, its instructors, guest lecturers and directors gave me the tools and provided the sandbox to help me explore who I was as a performer.

Each passing week, I felt both my confidence and ability grow. RCS didn't care about my size, they saw my potential and they helped me see that in myself. I will forever be indebted to the Conservatoire for what they gave me.

When I was approached about being an ambassador, I didn't hesitate to say yes. Making that decision to continue in your education can be exciting and scary at the same time. Is the institution right for you? Is the cost, emotionally and financially, worth it? Should I just go ahead and make the leap into the industry instead? Or should I simply just walk away and pursue other endeavours?

These questions can haunt you, and I wanted to be able to provide comfort, and lend my experience and knowledge to those potential (and current) students who may be struggling with the choices ahead of them. RCS helped me when I was in their position and I can't think of a better way to give back to an institution that has given me so much.



Images:
(left) Jeremy Crawford
(right) Dustin Struhall



Why is it important to support the future of the arts?

Dustin: In today’s fast-paced world driven by content and quick consumption, it’s more important than ever to invest in depth and development. RCS fosters exactly that – space and time to stretch, take risks, and grow.

It nurtures artists with technical grounding, collaborative spirit, and a strong sense of self within a wider creative community. Talent is just the beginning. What RCS offers is a place to truly understand your voice and how it fits in a larger artistic and cultural landscape. That kind of education builds not just skilled artists, but generous, thoughtful contributors to the world.

There’s a deep-rooted kindness in the environment that invites you to grow with intention and generosity, rather than ego. It encouraged me to approach my craft with integrity and curiosity. I want more students to experience that kind of support and see the arts as a space for meaningful exploration and connection.

Jeremy: During the height of the Covid pandemic, the whole world saw the importance the arts can have. When we couldn’t leave our homes, television and film became our connection to the outside world. It provided a sense of escapism to what was going on around us. It gave us the ability to have a cathartic release, whether it was to laugh or to cry, in some of our darkest moments.

Picking up an instrument, learning how to paint or draw, or jumping on Zoom to take a dance class saved so many of us during that time. The world seemingly realised that the arts wasn’t just a form of entertainment, but also a release that can enrich our lives in so many ways.

Lately, it seems that many in the world have quickly forgotten this. Governments and national leaders worldwide have even dismissed the arts as being a frill or a frivolous expense as funding cuts to the arts have sadly become a norm.

The arts are more than simply entertainment. They are a connection to the world around us. They can be the beating heart of a cultural moment, or simply the reflection of who we were, who we are and what we could become. We need to continue to support the arts, not only to show our appreciation for them, but to ensure that they’ll continue to be around to inspire and enrich our lives on a daily basis.

“My desire was high, but my confidence was low. RCS as an institution, its instructors, guest lecturers and directors gave me the tools and provided the sandbox to help me explore who I was as a performer.”

Jeremy Crawford

Ambassadors fly the flag for RCS in a variety of ways – what are you enjoying about the role and have there been any highlights?

Dustin: What I enjoy most is watching people’s reactions when they find out I studied musical theatre in Scotland. It’s not what they expect – they often think of the Highlands, tartans, bagpipes, and whisky – not fine arts training, and certainly not musical theatre. That moment of surprise often opens a new way of thinking: that artistry can be nurtured in places we don’t always associate with it.

My time at RCS didn’t feel easy or effortless. In fact, I resisted a lot of it while I was there. But over the years, I’ve come to understand just how much it shaped me, especially in how I communicate with both actors and musicians.

The experience softened some of the rigidity I brought into my musical approach. Being an ambassador is a way of honouring that growth and helping others imagine that kind of transformation for themselves – even if it unfolds slowly.

Jeremy: What I’ve enjoyed the most has been getting to meet (and to know) so many potential and current RCS students. I’ve lost count of the amount of potential students who have reached out, either via social media or by email, to ask questions about RCS or the MACCT programme. It’s been such a joy to hear about their journey and to help out where I can.

I’ve had numerous Zoom or Google Meet sessions answering questions, dispersing fears, providing advice or simply being a sounding board. It’s been fun looking back knowing that I’ve talked to students who’ve wanted to apply to RCS, who have applied, who are currently students and who have just graduated.

Also, I’ve greatly enjoyed the platform that being an RCS Ambassador has provided to discuss the importance of representation in the arts. A major hurdle for members of the LP (little people) community, and for other under-represented groups, is that not many are listening.

It’s hard to get your foot in the door if people don’t even know you exist. As an RCS Ambassador, I’ve had numerous occasions where my voice has been elevated to be able to bring attention to representation. The more opportunities that individuals from under-represented groups get to see and hear you, doing what you love and making an impact in the industry, the more they realise that it’s possible for themselves.

One of my favourite moments as an Ambassador, thus far, has been discussing representation, answering questions about life at RCS and talking about the joys of living in Scotland at an industry function during the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF).

It was such a thrill to be able to talk about the opportunities that RCS has provided and to correlate that to my own journey as an actor to potential students, current students, donors and other industry professionals.

However, the highlight for me is always when I receive an email/DM from a potential student I’ve talked to, to tell me that they were accepted to RCS. Or, when I get the same from a current student/recent graduate to tell me that they just signed with an agent or booked their first gig out of school.

Images:
Opposite from top: **Fergus McCreadie, Morven McLeod; JP Radelet.**

What have you been working on lately?

Dustin: Since finishing postgrad, my musical focus has centred on electronic instrument design for musical theatre – keyboard, drum pad and playback programming. I work alongside Ethan Deppe as his associate on productions across the country, including The Paramount Theater in Aurora, Drury Lane in Oakbrook, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and The MUNY in St. Louis. Upcoming projects include *Cats*, *Into the Woods*, and regional premieres of *Come from Away* and *Dear Evan Hansen*.

It’s deeply satisfying work – blending music and technology in ways that bring both precision and artistry to the stage. My long-standing love of spreadsheets finally has an outlet in music-making.

I serve as one of the two music directors for The Beaus, Chicago’s favourite MAN-Band. We lead a trio of vocalists backed by a piano bar-style band, performing original mashups of pop, musical theatre and classic hits. What I love most is shaping the vocal sound of the group – making it tight, expressive and full of life. When the voices lock in, the energy shifts, and suddenly you’re in the middle of a party. That feeling – of connection, celebration and shared joy – is at the heart of what we do.

Jeremy: Season 4 of *The Witcher*, where I return to guest star as dwarven warrior ‘Yarpen Zigrin’, is set to release on Netflix later this year. In addition, I’ll be making my return to the UK shortly to conclude filming *The Witcher* saga with the fifth and final season.

Also, I’ve recently co-written a screenplay that is currently being shopped around to studios. I’m so excited to eventually be able to talk about this project as it’s a story that is very close to my heart.

Degree programme ambassadors include:	Regional and national ambassadors include:
Musical duo The Ayoub Sisters: <i>Strings</i>	Actor Jeremy Crawford: <i>Toronto</i>
Jazz saxophonist Matt Carmichael: <i>Jazz (Saxophone)</i>	Pianist Wilson Chu: <i>Indonesia</i>
Pianist Daniel Ciobanu: <i>Keyboard</i>	Violinist JP Radelet: <i>Toronto</i>
Ballet dancer Bethany Kingsley-Garner: <i>Modern Ballet</i>	Musical Director Dustin Struhall: <i>Chicago</i>
Jazz pianist Fergus McCreadie: <i>Jazz (Piano)</i>	Cellist Kathleen Wallfisch: <i>Germany</i>
Composer Claire McKenzie: <i>Composition</i>	
Set and costume designer Morven McLeod: <i>Production Arts and Design</i>	
Actor Emma Mullen: <i>Musical Theatre</i>	
Stage Manager Ruby Noble: <i>Production Technology and Management (Stage Management)</i>	
	See all the ambassadors at: rcs.ac.uk/rcs-ambassadors



Thank You



It’s important giving is seen not just in terms of figures on balance or time sheets but also through the stories, connections and emotions that compel these generous acts. Thank you for your support of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and its community of staff, students and alumni. Whether you are one of those mentioned in the preceding pages or listed below, your contribution matters. We thank you warmly.

For the arts and for arts education particularly, these are incredibly challenging times. Performing arts training is a specialist, often intensive form of learning. The cost of the skilled professionals, specialist equipment and space required to deliver it is ever increasing. But we live in a fractured world where art and artists help us share moments of togetherness and help us make sense of the chaos around us. We need them. In turn, in our mission to train the next generation of artists and creative producers, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland needs you. We simply couldn’t do it without you. Thank you for your support now and, I hope, in times to come. You do make a difference, and we are very grateful.

Janette Harkess
Director of External Relations

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