

# RWCMD ALUMNI

NEWSLETTER  
WINTER  
2020



**ROYAL WELSH COLLEGE**  
OF MUSIC & DRAMA  
**COLEG BRENHINOL**  
CERDD A DRAMA CYMRU

[rwcmd.ac.uk/alumni](http://rwcmd.ac.uk/alumni)

# MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL



Photo by Kirsten McTernan

**AFTER A LONG FEW MONTHS, I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MUCH OF A DELIGHT IT WAS TO MEET A NEW COHORT OF STUDENTS AT THE START OF THE AUTUMN TERM, TO WELCOME BACK RETURNING STUDENTS, AND TO SEE THEM ALL THROW THEMSELVES INTO THEIR STUDIES AND COLLEGE LIFE, IN PERSON AND ONLINE. THE RWCMD SPIRIT, UNSTOPPABLE IMAGINATION AND SENSE OF PURPOSE HAVE BEEN PALPABLE!**

Although Covid-19 continues to restrict many aspects of our work, our staff have been working tirelessly to continue giving our talented students the best possible opportunities and training. All students are coming into College for some face-to-face work each week – from individual practice and one-to-one lessons, to small group classes and workshops, small ensemble work and performance.

Yet, with all the activity there has also been a sense of calm and increasingly shared responsibility across staff and students, with the absolute top priority being everyone's safety. Within the current social distancing restrictions, we are running at approximately 25% of previous numbers of people in the buildings at any one time.

Because of the space constraints on our own building – the College has taken over the Sherman Theatre! The Sherman itself remains closed and so we've hired rehearsal and studio

spaces so that the work of our Acting and Music students can be carried out socially distanced throughout the Autumn and Spring terms.

We know RWCMD Alumni are working in industries that are being some of the hardest hit during the pandemic, and we want to do as much as we can to support you. The current challenges also make it perhaps better than ever to hear the bits of good news of creative output coming through, despite the extraordinary times. I want to thank many of you for keeping in touch, and for responding to our recent Alumni Members survey, the responses will be invaluable in helping us develop the Alumni Association going forward. More on that in our next communication!

There are beginning to be signs of light at the end of the tunnel, but we also know that the next 6 months at least are going to be unpredictable. I have not lost any faith, however, in the winning combination of RWCMD's loyal supporters, brilliant alumni, experienced staff, talented and passionate students – we are ready to meet the challenges that come our way!

I wish you the very best for the holiday season, and hope to see some of you in person very soon.

**Nadolig Llawn!**

**Professor Helena Gaunt, Principal**

*Helena F. Gaunt*

# STUDENT AND GRADUATE SUCCESS

## DRAMA

- + **Rose Revitt** (MA Design for Performance, current) won the 2020 Stage Debut Awards for Best Designer for her set and costume designs for *Dr Korczak's Example* at the Leeds Playhouse.
- + **Sarah Cole** (BA Stage Management, year unknown) became only the second woman to win the Association of British Theatre's Technical Award, making her Technician of the Year 2020.
- + **Tom Cullen** (BA Acting, 2009) directed *Pink Wall*. The film cast and crew included graduates **Atena Pou**, **Gwyn Eiddior**, **Richard Elis**, **Sarah Ovens**, **Kyle Lima**, and **Katharine Mangold**.
- + **Emily Bates** (MA Design, 2017) is now designing for the Royal Danish Opera.
- + **Catrin Defis** (BA Stage Management & Theatre Design, 1989, and MA Arts Management, 2012) is the Producer of *Bang*, a Welsh bilingual crime drama television series starring 11 RWCMD acting graduates.
- + In 2019, **Rhiannon Boyle** (BA Acting, 1999) was made Wales' first Writer in Residence, backed by the BBC and National Theatre Wales.
- + Over 30 RWCMD alumni worked on the drama television series *His Dark Materials* in location, design and scenic roles.

## MUSIC

- + **Conal Bembridge-Sayers** (PGDip in Repetiteurship, 2018) has joined Opera Ballet Vlaanderen, Antwerp, as one of its full-time repetiteurs.
  - + Current Junior Conservatoire harpist **Huw Boucher** reached the strings final in the BBC Young Musician of the Year, one of the very few harpists in the history of the competition to reach this final stage.
  - + **Trystan Llyr Griffiths** (MA Opera, 2014) sang the role of Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* for Garsington Opera in the summer of 2019 and **Emyr Jones** (MA Opera, 2016) sang the role of
- + In June 2019, **Blaise Malaba** (MA Opera Performance, 2018) made his Royal Opera House debut at Covent Garden and in September 2020 became one of three Jette Parker Young Artists, chosen from over 400 applicants from more than 25 countries.
  - + Final year Composition student **Jasper Dommett** has been nominated for one of the UK's most prestigious music prizes, an Ivor Novello Award, as part of The Ivors Composer Awards 2020, for a piece he wrote for BBC NOW Composition Wales 2020.
  - + **Toks Dada** (BMus Viola, 2013 and MA Arts Management, 2015) has recently been made Head of Classical Music at the Southbank Centre.



From top: Blaise Malaba at the Royal Opera House; Huw Boucher in the BBC Young Musician of the Year string final, photo by BBC; Rhiannon Boyle was the 2019-2020 Wales Writer in Residence



Colline in Opera North's production of *La Bohème* the following autumn. **Christine Byrne** (PG Dip Voice, 2019) sang the role of Ninetta in WNO's *Sicilian Vespers* in February 2020.



# EXHIBITION: PAPER SCULPTURES



**I'M A FIRST YEAR DESIGN FOR PERFORMANCE STUDENT AT RWCMD. OUR FIRST PROJECT WAS TO CREATE A PAPER SCULPTURE INSTALLATION IN THE SOUTHERN FOYER OF THE LINBURY GALLERY HERE AT THE COLLEGE.**

Because of COVID restrictions we couldn't work in groups on a large-scale project as previous years have done, and so we had to create an individual bird. I was one of 8 who were tasked with creating Snow Geese, whilst the others in first year created Magpies, and the Masters students produced Herons.

Being able to do hands on work in the college was brilliant, particularly as we were taught by the ever enthusiastic tutor Chris Marfleet. It was a great introduction to the Design for Performance course, and gave me an eye-opening insight into what you could do with only paper and card.

Having to create a realistic looking bird was quite the challenge, especially when you were trying to avoid any cartoony features. Making each

**"OUR FORTHCOMING PROJECT IN THE NEW YEAR IS WORKING ON THE WHOLE DESIGN PROCESS FOR A PLAY CALLED 'SHAKESPEARE IN HOLLYWOOD' BY KEN LUDWIG."**

individual feather was very tedious, but the final outcome was really worth the hours put in.

After online teaching for a number of weeks, I'm really looking forward to getting back into college for our next practical project. Our forthcoming project in the new year is working on the whole design process for a play called 'Shakespeare in Hollywood' by Ken Ludwig. I'm also looking for opportunities to sing with other students as I'm also a keen musician!

**George Haylock, student designer**



Photos by Kirsten Mcternan



## SPOTLIGHT: TIANYI LU

### GRAD TIANYI LU WINS SIR GEORG SOLT INTERNATIONAL CONDUCTORS COMPETITION.

Tianyi studied on the RWCMD postgraduate orchestral conducting programme and graduated with a distinction in 2015. Leading the way for women in conducting, last year Tianyi became WNO's first Female Conductor in Residence and in another first, last month she became the first woman to be awarded First Prize at the Guido Cantelli International Conducting Competition in Italy. She was also awarded their Youth Award and Orchestra Prize, chosen by members of the Teatro Regio Orchestra.

'Tianyi embarked on a courageous adventure, travelling across the world from New Zealand to study at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama,' said Head of Music Performance Kevin Price. 'Her innate musicianship is framed with natural humility and respect and from the outset this attracted RWCMD staff and students like a musical magnet, swiftly generating individual creative projects. It's a joy to see Tianyi's beautiful combination of gifts

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recognised on the world stage, and to continue our work with her as a treasured colleague.'

Tianyi said 'This has been such a challenging year for so many all over the world, including myself, but I truly believe every setback and challenge has the power to transform and strengthen us for the better. I want to send my love and encouragement to all the students who have had to, and still are, facing seemingly insurmountable challenges and hardships. No man, or woman(!) is an island, we are a sum of all the guidance, support and encouragement of countless souls who have uplifted, inspired and touched our lives. I am deeply grateful to the staff and students at RWCMD who have been a vital force in my development over the years, especially to my teacher, David Jones.'

Tianyi Lu, photo by Antony Potts





# RWCMD CREATIVE



## WELL IT'S SAFE TO SAY, THERE'S NOT BEEN ANOTHER ONE LIKE IT – BUT WHAT A TERM IT'S BEEN!

Of course, so many things have had to be rethought and reshaped, but at College we love a challenge to our creativity and – as we all know – that RWCMD Show Must Go On. Since the summer we've produced seven operas, not to mention socially distanced concerts, a steady stream of masterclasses and, in the Christmas countdown, producing FIVE drama productions. Sharing the work with our audiences is vital and our new streaming platform means that we can now reach audiences online across the world. Since March we've externally streamed 18 live performances, with over 40,000 views – reaching an audience of well over 8,000 this last month. Not to mention starting the term with a new composition bringing together our 24 brand new Steinways...

Here are just some of the many highlights:

### AMSERJAZZ

AmserJazzTime has gained friends across the globe with regular viewers hailing from Scotland to New York and Moscow and coming together as the **#JazzGang**. We're looking forward to sharing more jazz with them over the next year. There's still time to catch the festive special, the last session of the term on our Youtube channel **RWCMDTV**.

We're really grateful that as a place of training we're able to continue creating performances when all the other venues in Wales are still dark, and that we have special permission from the Welsh government to do this.

It's so important our students can continue to make productions and engage with such a diverse range of guest artists and live performance – and we really appreciate all the extra work that goes on both front and back stage to enable this to happen.



From top: Christmas Cabaret, photo by Kirsten McTernan;  
Opera Martin Constantine; Zoe Rahman's masterclass,  
photo by Kirsten McTernan



### OPERA

The one act operas *Venus and Adonis* and *Dido and Aeneas*, directed by MA directing students Fleur Snow and Madeleine Brooks, made up two of the seven operas we've performed since August.

They heroically brought the student-led initiative to the stage with over 25 singers, 10 players and 10 creatives and departments from across the College, while also battling the odds of a global pandemic and a national firebreak lockdown: **#RWCMDCollaboration**.

### STEINWAY

Back in October, with our 24 brand new Steinways nicely settling into their new home, we continued our celebration of the keyboard with the





College's Grand Weekend. Highlights included masterclasses and performances in the Dora on the new Concert Grand with jazz pianist Zoe Rahman, and the legendary Peter Donohoe.

### #RWCMDFILMFEST

Rising to the challenge of safely presenting drama performance to our audiences we launched our very first **#RWCMDFilmFest** – now available free online.

The Richard Burton Company, our final year actors, designers and stage managers, worked with a professional film crew to create three short films scripted by leading writers, Hodge International Chair in Drama Simon Stephens, RWCMD graduate Moira Buffini, and Simon Longman and there was collaboration with composition students creating the soundtracks for these fabulous films.

### #INCAMERA

Following fast on its footsteps was our inaugural **#InCamera** season. Five plays, some of which will be able to be seen by audiences online, were brought together by teams of student actors, stage managers, designers, scenic artists, constructors and costume designers.

All are supported and supervised by our amazing staff, committed to allowing the students to have a real experience, even with small invited audiences.

### SCHOOL CHRISTMAS CONCERT

The Covid Grinch didn't steal Christmas for some lucky Welsh primary school children who were able to enjoy a Christmas concert even when they were isolating. As part of their teaching skills

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module our third year jazz students usually come together to take their Christmas Jazz into schools, introducing children to music through performance, interaction and crucially, fun.

Determined not to let Covid beat them, this year they recorded the session in our festive foyer and Welsh schools can apply to watch it through their Music Services – so children can play along with the Christmas concerts safely in their bubbles and classrooms.

### CHRISTMAS CABARET

It just wouldn't be Christmas without our annual Musical Theatre Christmas Cabaret, lockdown or not! Longyfarchiadau to everyone who worked so hard to make this happen: distanced singing, mic changes after every song, sanitizer on stage, sparkly masks for everyone, and a partridge in a pear tree!

Read the full RWCMDCreative story here:

<https://blog.rwcmd.ac.uk/2020/12/17/rwcmdcreative-celebrates-christmas-nadolig-llawen/>

*Below left: Twelfth Night Remembered, directed by Jonathan Munby, photo by Kirsten McTernan;  
Below right: Short Film Festival*





Uzo Iwobi, RWCMD Hodge International Chair in Diversity, photo by Kirsten McTernan

## RWCMD EMBRACES STRATEGIC EQUALITY



**WE WANT RWCMD TO BE A SPACE FOR EVERYONE, A COMMUNITY WHICH THRIVES ON RESPECT AND CELEBRATES DIFFERENCE.**

To help us achieve this, this term we launched our five-year Strategic Equality Plan, linked with an annual Equality Action Plan, to spell out our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion across all protected characteristics.

Black Lives Matter brought into sharp focus the difficult reality that has existed in our own institution and so alongside these overarching plans, we have translated our equality objectives into an Anti-Racism Plan which illustrates how we will apply our ambitions to the protected

**"AS OUR INTERNATIONAL CHAIR OF DIVERSITY UZO IWOBİ SAID AT THE LAUNCH OF BLACK HISTORY CYMRU 365, THIS IS A JOURNEY WE ARE ON TOGETHER."**

characteristic of race and create the kind of inclusive College experience we all want to share.

As our International Chair of Diversity Uzo Iwobi said at the launch of Black History Cymru 365, this is a journey we are on together. We know we haven't arrived yet, but we are listening and learning as we go and it's great to have support across the College to help get it right. It's a challenging journey, but learning together creates huge value at many levels. Thank you to everyone who's working with us on this.

**If you would like to read the RWCMD Strategic Equality Objectives, Anti-Racism Plan and Respect Statement please visit our website [www.rwcmd.ac.uk](http://www.rwcmd.ac.uk)**








## KEEP IN TOUCH

There are many benefits of joining the Alumni Association. Apart from helping you reconnect with your peers, we offer a range of services including discounted Library membership for up to 3 years after graduation, box office and rehearsal space discounts, professional membership discounts.

The Class of 2020 graduated into astonishingly difficult times. Our alumni community have skills and professional experiences that could be invaluable to our newest alumni. Do you have something to offer your fellow alumni? Are you looking for support? Email [alumni@rwcmd.ac.uk](mailto:alumni@rwcmd.ac.uk) start talking about how we can help.

**PLEASE HELP US TO RECONNECT  
WITH OTHER ALUMNI BY SHARING  
INFORMATION ABOUT THE  
ASSOCIATION WITH THEM:  
[RWCMD.AC.UK/ALUMNI](http://RWCMD.AC.UK/ALUMNI)**



Chanae Curtis in *The Marriage of Figaro*,  
photo by Robert Workman

## HARDSHIP CAMPAIGN

**WITH THE CORONAVIRUS  
CRISIS CONTINUING, MORE AND  
MORE OF OUR STUDENTS ARE  
NOW FACING REAL FINANCIAL  
HARDSHIP AND PRACTICAL  
DIFFICULTIES.**

We are doing as much as we can, with limited budget and resource, to support our students during these challenging times.

The College recently launched an urgent Special Appeal to support those students who have been affected the most by the Covid-19 pandemic and we are incredibly grateful to those who have helped us build up this fund. Thank you.

[Click here to find out more](#)

Become a member and  
support student training **experiences**  
and **performance opportunities**



For more information on joining **CONNECT**  
visit **WWW.RWCMD.AC.UK/SUPPORT-US/CONNECT**  
or through emailing **CONNECT@RWCMD.AC.UK**



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## LEGACY

"BY INCLUDING THE GIFT OF MY CELLO,  
'HOTCH', IN MY WILL AND SETTING  
UP A CELLO SCHOLARSHIP, I HAVE  
SECURED A FUTURE FOR 'HOTCH'  
AS WELL AS FUNDS TO ENABLE  
FUTURE GIFTED STUDENTS TO  
CONTINUE THEIR MUSICAL STUDIES.  
I COULD NOT WISH FOR MORE."

**ELISABETH HOTCHKISS, LEGATOR**

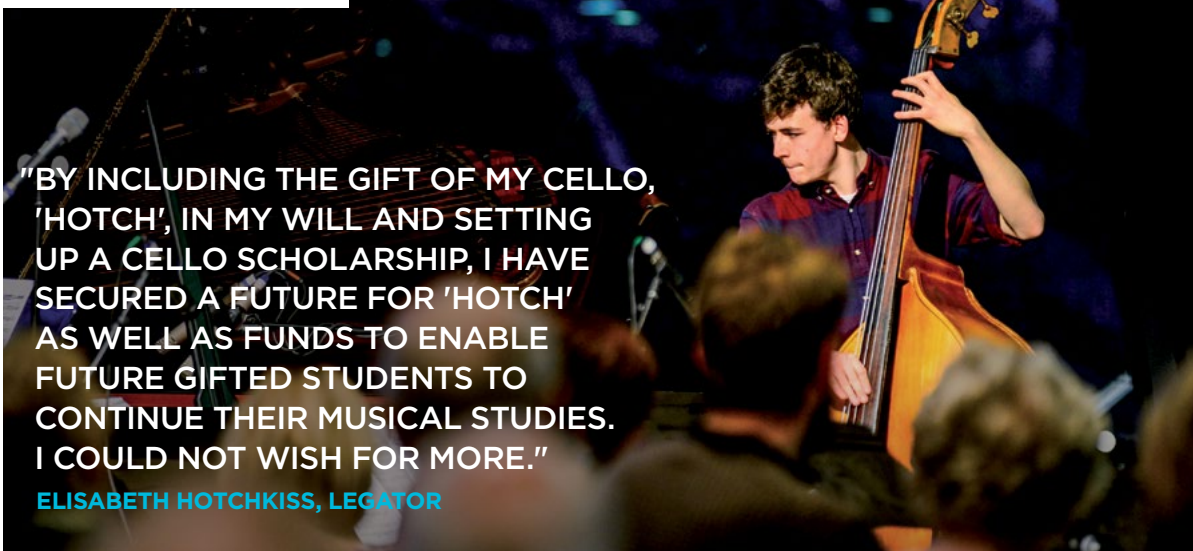


PHOTO BY KIRSTEN MCNERMAN

To talk to someone about  
supporting the students of  
RWCMD through leaving a gift  
in your will, please contact:

**SARA WEST**  
Sara.west@rwcmd.ac.uk **or**  
**MARIE WOOD**  
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