

Song and Lullabies: From commissioning to recording to teaching studio

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) aims to enhance performance/teaching links by bringing reflection and knowledge from the external professional practice of staff into the teaching environment. Research active staff share their knowledge, innovation, performance and educational expertise through numerous projects and consultancies with partners in the community and the commercial sector.

In one of these knowledge exchange projects, nineteen new works for solo cello were commissioned by myself from a variety of composers I have worked with over my career. I asked the composers to write pieces that raised awareness of children's suffering around the world, and all proceeds from the recording and performances were donated to UNICEF. The recording was released to critical acclaim by Delphian in November 2015. In order to complete this project I was given a trimester's sabbatical through the Athenaeum Awards, from the RCS. This allowed me to bring my playing up to the highest level, as well as giving me time to deal with the administrative aspects of coordinating the compositions and recording.

The impact on my teaching activities from this project was multi-faceted. The most important aspect to me was the effect on social awareness and the conversations this opened up with students: it highlighted the relevance of what we do as musicians, and facilitated important conversations in the teaching/learning relationship, both about the role of musicians in society and as individuals. The extra-musical aspects of the project, such as time management, focus, physical and mental stamina, recording studio skills, and liaising with composers, are all skills that conservatoire students will require in their professional careers, and as a result of the high profile of the project (numerous national radio broadcasts, as well as magazine and newspaper articles) students have specifically requested help and advice in these areas. In addition, the majority of the works are within the reach of most conservatoire level students, and therefore these pieces enhance the repertoire of shorter contemporary solo works available for students, and the recording is particularly valuable for students performing these pieces.

This presentation focuses on how the output of artistic research can be used as input in teaching activities, by examining the outputs from a recording research project and how this has affected my teaching. This project resulted in a physical recording as well as a number of broadcasts and performances, but the outputs were wider-ranging than these tangible pieces: the theme of the works was children's suffering around the world so the reactions to the work were more than about the musical content. In this presentation I hope to demonstrate, with specific examples, how this project changed my approach teaching, and how my students approach learning, particularly in regard to the wider roles of musicians in society, and the discussions around this.



Robert Irvine
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow, UK
irvinebert@btinternet.com

Robert studied with some of the finest cellists in the world and has held principal positions in the Philharmonia, Scottish Opera and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. He was a founding member of the Brindisi

Quartet, the Chamber Group of Scotland, the Da Vinci Trio and is currently Artistic Co-Director of Red Note Ensemble. Robert has recorded extensively including Complete Cello Works of Sally Beamish, Cello Works of Giles Swayne, 'Tree o' licht' Solo Cello Works by William Sweeney, Rachmaninov/Shostakovich: Sonatas For Cello And Piano with Graeme McNaught on piano, The Cellist of Sarajevo by David Wilde. He plays on a fine cello, a copy of a 1695 Rugeri made in 2014 by Melvyn Goldsmith and a fine bow by the Scottish maker Howard Green. Robert is senior tutor of cello and chamber music at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.