

Time Capsule Transcript: Sarah Hibberd and Genevieve Arkle

Sarah [00:00:00] Hello, I'm Sarah Hibberd, and I'm Professor of Music at the University of Bristol.

Genevieve [00:00:05] Hi, I'm Genevieve Arkle. I'm a Lecturer in Music, also at the University of Bristol. We wanted to get started by me talking to Sarah and asking Sarah how you found your time on the RMA, when you joined: you know, your first impressions. How long have you been affiliated with the organisation?

Sarah [00:00:23] Well, I think I first joined Council in 2004, so 20 years ago: a bit frightening! And it was just after I got my first post at the University of Nottingham. So, a similar sort of point in my career to you, Genevieve. And my memories, really, from the first Council meeting were that it was, unsurprisingly, quite a male environment. I'm trying to remember who the President was at that time. It might have been Julian Rushton. I know John Deathridge came in during my time on Council. There weren't many women on Council. I think I remember Chris Banks and Katharine Ellis, maybe Jeanice Brooks. But in a way, the Council was a sort of reflection of, you know, Music in University departments, or a lot of Music departments at that time, so, it felt quite formal. I remember being a little bit intimidated. I came back on Council, I think, in the early teens, and then again more recently in 2018 as a Vice President. And that's interesting because at that point I think Simon McVeigh was still President, but then Barbara Kelly came in as the first female President, and at one point we had four female Vice Presidents as well. So, Pauline Fairclough and Laudin Nooshin and Elaine Kelly and me. So, during that 20 years, women have become, you know, very much more present on RMA Council and in University Music departments as well. So, it's not surprising. So, you and I overlapped for a year, I think, on Council, so what were your first impressions when you joined, Genevieve?

Genevieve [00:02:09] I must also have joined in 2021, 2022, just when you were on the way out of your third stint, I suppose. And yeah, I was also kind of fresh out of a PhD and a postdoc, so a bit unsure about what to expect. It was my first proper Council role, and [I was] unsure [of] the level of work or activity and how best to find space in that environment, as well. But I quickly found that everyone, I think, as you said, like that, that kind of, shift and dynamic was really noticeable. It was not as white male dominated as I thought it was going to be. And I could see that the organisation was really pushing, especially with the EDI Working Group to explore new boundaries and new ways of evolving the society, to be more encompassing and inclusive. And I think that's where I found my little niche to be able to contribute meaningfully, because that's something that I also really care about. And I wanted to get stuck in and think, well, this is one of the largest music organisations in the UK. How can I, you know, have an impact here and help to create some change? And I think because the EDI Working Group was kind of getting the ball rolling, especially after the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, I was just on that kind of wave of how do we continue to kind of decolonise and rework how we run the organisation? So, it was really exciting to be a part of something that was just formulating and, hopefully contribute to the development of that over my three or so years, on Council as well.

Sarah [00:03:48] Yeah, no, that's interesting because this there's also so as well as the sort of opening up becoming slightly more diverse in members of Council and hopefully membership, it's also an expansion of the discipline, as well as bringing in people from different parts of the discipline. I was I was going to say, as Vice President, one of my duties was to chair committees. So, hilariously, [I was] Chair of Finance Committee for some of my time. But what I found really rewarding was being part of Awards Committee. Because in a way that speaks to what we're

talking about. Because I think the RMA has sort of tried to find ways in which to appeal meaningfully to a sort of wider range of people, both in terms of their discipline and their identity. So, I mean, what were your impressions of being on Awards Committee? Are you still on Awards Committee?

Genevieve [00:04:48] I am still on Awards Committee. I've really enjoyed it. I'm on the Jerome Roche [sub-]committee and what I love is being able to read articles of people who are at my career level. Actually, when I first started, it was people who were just that step ahead of me. And so it was quite inspirational to look at the works that were being submitted going, 'Oh God, maybe one day I'll get to submit something. Maybe next year I'll be able to put one in.' But now I'm looking at it going, 'Isn't it amazing to see the work that my peers are doing?' And also from really different, discourses to the field that I work in. And a couple of years ago, when we had, an ethnomusicologist win the prize, I thought it was really refreshing, to see that, you know, kind of work getting a spotlight within the RMA, because I think it's often perceived as being an organisation that focuses on historical musicology. And then we had this really fantastic, invigorating article that was just brilliant. The problem was we had no one on the panel who was an ethnomusicologist. And so we did have to step back and go 'Oh, God. Okay, we need to rethink who's on our panels and who's reviewing this work, so that we can adequately assess it and make sure that we're delivering these awards, you know, in the most, equitable way possible.' But also that I think it's an opportunity to spotlight work that has maybe not gotten or not been able to take up as much space or been taken as seriously, historically speaking. So, kind of encouraging, particularly from popular musics, or from non-Western art music backgrounds, I think is really important, and it's a great space for that. How've you found that?

Sarah [00:06:31] Yeah. I mean, I think on that occasion we co-opted an ethnomusicologist, someone with kind of the real expertise. And I think it made us really think more carefully about what we're looking at, and do we have the expertise on the panel? And it's all well and good saying that we reward work across the discipline, but making sure we have people who are able to understand the work. And yeah, I was part of the committee at that point, I remember that. I think also what's changed in the past 20 years (sounding like an old lady!) is the way in which practice research, composition, performance-practice research have been brought more into our activities. So, I think, Pauline Fairclough and Piers Halliwell really pushing to have a composition prize, which has now been running for a few years, and just at the sort of tail end of my time, we brought in the research-practice prize. And it's partly to make more visible that kind of work and appeal to a wider membership. It's also, I suppose, to support people. Often you will have a practitioner in a Music department who may feel a bit alone, having to make the case for why their work is important. Or the promotions committees for REF exercises where the criteria aren't obviously created for practice research. But it also feels important to educate us as well, so that we're better able to (I speak as a non-practitioner!), better [able] to recognise and support the diversity of what's going on in Music departments, particularly at this time when it's a time of crisis for some areas of the Arts. So, really making sure that we support each other and make a case and showcase the sort of richness of what we produce.

Genevieve [00:08:37] Yeah. It also always keeps us learning, I think. The more that I spend time reading works that would normally not maybe come across my desk because it's not within my kind of day to day research or teaching field, the more I get ideas for new things. And I think that collaboration of learning from these submissions, it's actually really enjoyable to see what everyone is up to and go 'Actually, well, maybe there is some possibility for collaboration with practice research in a way that I hadn't really thought about.' And I always find it quite eye-

opening. Not only, I mean, I think important for the for the winners and contributors, but actually also for panelists, to talk to each other about, you know, what we can all learn from different, submissions.

Sarah [00:09:20] I completely agree. I think part of what I like about the committee structure is the fact that in some ways, it's quite hard to keep on top of, because every year you have people rotating off Council and new people rotating on, and so keeping a kind of continuity, particularly if you're making decisions over a few years can be quite a challenge. But at the same time, it means you're constantly having fresh points of view, new people in. And I think for Awards Committee that's particularly important when you're trying to generate nominations for the different awards and different prizes. So having members on the Committee and on the Council who can draw our attention to work we're not necessarily familiar with is great. I've always found it incredibly rewarding and fascinating, as you say, as well being part of all of this and seeing what's going on. I mean, do you want to say anything more about your experiences and your work on the EDI Committee? Because it seems to me that the RMA has slowly and gradually sort of over the years, been sort of opening up, becoming more outward facing. Do you feel that's something that the EDI Committee is helping to sort of animate?

Genevieve [00:10:34] Absolutely. I think the RMA, from what I've learned from being on the inside now is that it's quite an unwieldy beast. And, you know, it's a huge organisation, and when you're sitting on the outside, you don't quite realise how many strands there are. And everyone on the EDI panel sits on another committee, so, you're kind of feeding back to every avenue and taking that on board. And there's so many areas where you can think about diversifying, or making musicology as a whole more equitable, that you can kind of get lost in focusing on one project and not the whole, but the general goals and aspirations of what the EDI working group are trying to do is absolutely brilliant. I think the change is inevitably quite slow, and it will take a little while for that ripple effect, I think, to kick in, and to see the impact of some of the kind of smaller changes that are being made. But there's a lot of fantastic kind of hard work and drive for change coming from inside the organisation. A lot of people with the same central value, which is to make what we do as kind of inclusive, safe and encouraging as possible, no matter what your background is, no matter what your musical interests are, and that this is a space where you can belong and thrive and be celebrated in that way. So, I think there's a lot of hope for that moving forwards. I think it's still going to take a lot of work. You know, we still need to see more people of colour taking up space, inside organisations like the RMA, but also more broadly, across academia. And, and I think that's something that's slowly again, the cogs are turning. But it does take a bit of time. So it's been a real pleasure and privilege to be one of those people kind of, flying the flag on the inside.

Sarah [00:12:25] Absolutely. Well, that sounds like a brilliant place for us to end. So, yeah, it's been great talking to you, Genevieve.

Genevieve [00:12:32] Yes. And to you, Sarah. It's lovely to have an excuse to chat!