

Report on **RMA Study Day *RMA: Vision, mission, identity***, Online format, Monday 18 July, 2022, 13:00-17:00 (UTC+1)

Organising Committee: Nicola Dibben, Freya Jarman, Laudan Nooshin

The issue of the remit of the RMA and its inclusivity have been discussed at Council for the last few years and as a result it was decided to hold an event to allow a discussion at greater depth, length and inclusive of people beyond current RMA membership. This is a brief report on that event.

Purpose and motivation for the event. Since its founding as the “Musical Association” in 1874, both music and the ways we understand it have changed significantly. In recent years, there has been a move towards greater diversity within the organisation, both in its membership and in the areas of music study and practice that it encompasses. These changes have highlighted a need to reflect on the identity of the Royal Musical Association. For example, why might some people object to the remit and name of the Royal Musical Association? And why might others find it unproblematic? We therefore wanted to hold an event to provide the space to hear different perspectives on these topics. We shared the recently revised RMA mission statement and outlined the aims of the event:

- To imagine an RMA of the future
- To share multiple perspectives on the meanings of the Association’s name including why it might be perceived as problematic (or not).
- To propose specific actions regarding identity and mission.
- To engage voices from within and beyond the RMA membership on these questions.

The event was deliberately designed to model distributed leadership and inclusive working by incorporating co-chairing, crowd-sourcing of topics for discussion, and three ‘sandpit’ discussions followed by plenaries. There were 42 attendees (of 77 registrations).

The **Structure** of the afternoon was as follows:

- Welcome and introduction
- Provocations and reflections elicited through targeted invitations and an open call for expressions of interest (7 presented in total).
- Crowd-sourcing discussion topics
- Break
- 3 x sandpits and plenaries
- Closing plenary

Provocations on the symposium theme:

Erin Johnson-Williams: Outlined the way that “Royal” in the name of the RMA acts as a marker of prestige and social capital, exploring how connotations of “Royalty” operate as forms of power – and sometimes exclusion – in postcolonial contexts.

Jo Hicks: Started with the counterfactual question of what would be different if the Musical Association had not changed its name to the “Royal Musical Association” in the mid-20th century. His conclusion was that it may not have made much difference because the association is still embedded in a monarchist system and therefore the RMA may as well keep its name until such time as we are a republic.

Julian Rushton: Acknowledged the ways in which the RMA has become more inclusive of people and musics over the past half century and drew attention to the structures of the RMA as a way of ensuring that decision making was well-informed, open and transparent. He argued that discussion would benefit from evidence that people were currently deterred

from becoming a member (by the name), and by viewing the “Royal” in RMA in the context of other organisations which bear that term.

Tom Attah: Argued that whilst the term ‘Royal’ could be perceived as problematic by some, that it potentially provides a visible platform and public opportunity to address the Association’s stated remit “...for the investigation and discussion of subjects connected with the art and science of music,” particularly by being inclusive of all musics and embracing “...every conceivable aspect of music scholarship, whether expressed in words, notation or sounds,” as indicated by the current Association Mission Statement. Tom highlighted the importance of popular music as a topic and tool for meaningful inclusion in the Association’s activities, bringing forward themes of equality diversity, and inclusion. Tom suggested that if the name were to change, that this should reflect the Association’s current focus on Historical Musicology; but that the Association’s aim should be to retain the “royal”, and grow and engage in contemporary and popular musicking practices, contexts and discourse.

Laudan Nooshin: Pointed to the often unacknowledged link between colonial legacies of extractivism and violence, and the historic and continuing inequalities and influx of wealth on which our academic institutions and organisations are built. She argued that for many who have been impacted by colonial and post-colonial rule, ‘Royal’ is not a benign marker of prestige but a form of symbolic violence and tainted by colonialism in ways that are at odds with the RMA’s aspirations to inclusivity and therefore a potential barrier to a widening of the organisation’s membership. She offered suggestions for alternative names but also recognised that any change would likely trigger a backlash that would be an unwelcome distraction from the good diversity work that the RMA is currently doing.

Leanne Langley: Provided a historical perspective which showed that, given the decades-long emergence of all kinds of music 'researchers' from many fields in the UK - musical and non-musical, professional and amateur alike - the (R)MA was initially more diverse in social background, training and expertise than it is today. We ought to build on this positive legacy.

Michelle Phillips: Speaking in her capacity as Chair of the subject association MusicHE, she drew attention to the importance of an association/organisation in representing music in higher education, the importance of such associations advocating for the importance of music in HE (and championing music education through the whole education pipeline), and the value of working together as scholars, individuals, and organisations.

Crowd sourcing of topics and resulting sandpit discussion

After the provocations we **agreed topics** that would be discussed in the remainder of the afternoon. We populated an online whiteboard with three starting questions and participants added to these. The organising committee arranged the resulting topics into broad themes on which participants then voted by online poll. The three topics chosen by participants for debate were:

1. Who does the RMA represent? Questions discussed included: Is the RMA an umbrella organisation for music studies or does it represent a particular sub-disciplinary community within the larger field of music studies? Should it be genre or methods-specific?
2. What is the RMA’s relationship to other musical associations?
3. What (if anything) would the RMA need to do/change in order to be more inclusive?

This generated a number of concrete actions that could be taken forward, detailed on the accompanying Whiteboard (Figure 1).

