ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC

DOCTORAL SYMPOSIUM AND OPEN DAY

FRIDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2026, 2PM
ANGELA BURGESS RECITAL HALL

Schedule

2.00-2.40	Brief Introduction to the Doctorate (Neil Heyde and Sarah Callis)
2.45-3.15	Erna Vala Arnardóttir (Piano)
3.15-3.45	Ashkan Layegh (Composition)
3.45-4.00	Break
4.00-4.30	Emma Warren (Choral Conducting)
4.30-5.00	Yuzhang Li (Piano)
5.00-5.30	Q&A

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Erna Vala Arnardóttir

Concert Conversations

My research explores the relationship between performers and audiences in classical music, drawing on my dual perspectives as a pianist and artistic director of *Seigla*, an annual chamber music festival in Reykjavík, Iceland. Through the design and development of the festival, I consider how programming, personal narratives, audience interaction and the use of shared spaces can challenge traditional concert conventions and shape the concert experience. Combining artistic practice with feedback from audiences and performers, the project looks at how musical experiences can create opportunities for connection and community, and how insights from festival contexts might inform the way classical music concerts are conceived and experienced. In this presentation, I will introduce the project's aims and findings, illustrated through examples from the festival.

Ashkan Layegh

Self-Reflexivity and Artificiality

This project investigates how as a composer/multi-instrumentalist/improviser and visual artist, I create and employ certain organisational systems that facilitate a specific type of interaction between the artifice and the spectator, where the artifice becomes reflexive about its own structure and the way it functions, thereby acknowledging its artificial nature, the conditions of its being, and the circumstances surrounding its process of creation. My practice is concerned with making these processes perceptible, while exploring how structures can simultaneously organise/reorganise, disrupt, and expose the mechanisms through which an artifice is produced and experienced.

Emma Warren

Performing and Recording the Choral Music of Elizabeth Poston

My research explores musical legacy and the twentieth-century composer Elizabeth Poston (1905-1987), with a focus on three of Poston's multi-movement choral works: *The Nativity* (1951), *An English Day Book* (1967) and *An English Kalendar* (1971). The preparation for conducting these works includes examining potential tensions between performer interpretation and composer authority, and historical performance practice and contemporary choral sound ideals. How do our decisions and actions, as performers in the twenty-first century, contribute to the way a composer is remembered? In today's presentation, I will give an overview of my research so far, with a focus on my upcoming recording of *The Nativity* with the BBC Singers and Concert Orchestra. I will also discuss how I chose my project topic, and how external factors have helped to shape and refine my research focus.

Yuzhang Li

Overcoming Inertia through Repetition: A Pianist's Journey through Encounter Practice

What happens in the fleeting moments before a pianist consciously recognises a sound? My research takes this question as a point of departure, investigating the subtle negotiations between music as Object and performer as Subject. To this end, I developed *Encounter Practice*, a Zen-informed approach involving the ceaseless, ritualistic repetition of extremely slow piano practice, designed to probe the pre-cognitive emergence of sound and the paradox of hearing: that this persistent, almost ascetic endeavour to hear may eventually give way to a more spontaneous mode of sensing, a gradually embodied 'hear-act' process. Drawing on experiments with Chopin, Scriabin and Schubert, this presentation will illustrate how this autobiographical research documents these elusive encounters through practice diaries, recordings and musical demonstrations.