



# Hitting the right note

The Royal Academy of Music has launched an exciting new collaboration that will help support young musicians. By **Jane Slade**



**'Mozart's table and Wagner's music stand are opposite my desk.** That's always inspiring,' observes Jonathan Freeman-Attwood CBE (*left*), the principal of the Royal Academy of Music. He may be busy leading one of the world's premier music schools, but he does not take the musical treasures

within its beautiful Edwardian walls for granted.

With illustrious alumni ranging from conductor Sir Simon Rattle to percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie, the Academy celebrates its 200th anniversary next year. And its dynamic principal, himself an accomplished trumpeter, recording producer, writer and broadcaster, is the man tasked with ensuring its position at the cutting edge of music education.

Excitingly, there is a new collaboration on the horizon – the Academy has got together with Saga Holidays to curate special music tours as well as create employment opportunities for some of the young musicians. For instance, once travel opens up again, they might perform the works of Beethoven and Mendelssohn on a musical river cruise on the Rhine.

Like Saga, the Academy is passionate about the future of today's talented younger generation and proud of its rich history. Saga's new Cultural Odyssey Tours

**MAKING MUSIC** Sir Simon Rattle, *right*, started his career at the Royal Academy of Music, *top*



will open the doors to the Academy's handsome Regent's Park home. 'We are the world's second oldest conservatoire,' Jonathan points out.

The new collaboration with Saga was inspired by a conversation between Saga chairman Sir Roger De Haan and chair of the Royal Academy of Music's board of trustees, Dame Jenny Abramsky. 'It is a perfect fit in many ways,' Jonathan enthuses. 'Saga is all about discovery and how the experience of a holiday can be life-enhancing. Music can play its part. And what is more thrilling than hearing a young person performing a piece of music with exceptional skills, expressive character and conviction?'

Indeed, one cannot help but feel a thrill walking up the Academy's sweeping staircase where conductor and cellist Sir John Barbirolli and jazz legend Sir John Dankworth once trod. Watching over everything is the

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bust of English conductor and former pupil Sir Henry Wood (*opposite*). It is usually on display in the Duke's Hall, except when it is at the Royal Albert Hall presiding over the BBC Proms concerts, which Sir Henry conducted for more than 50 years.

However, the Academy has had to innovate to keep on top of its game. It has a new 309-seat theatre, and over the years there have been collaborations with music schools such as the Juilliard in New York, as well as partnerships with alumni.

One of the Academy's donors is former pupil Sir Elton John, who attended the junior Royal Academy as a classical piano





**IN HARMONY**

*Clockwise*  
 from right:  
 the Academy's  
 theatre; and  
 Duke's Hall;  
 Sir Elton John  
 with Jonathan  
 Freeman-  
 Attwood;  
 and Sheku  
 Kanneh-Mason



Jonathan. 'As an ambassador, he has introduced a vast new audience to classical music, particularly young people.'

But for the moment the Academy is shrouded in an eerie silence. The concert halls are dark and rehearsal studios empty. Covid-19 has had a devastating effect on the lives of professional musicians and music students, many of whom rely on an income from live performances to support themselves. Last April, Jonathan co-founded a Response Fund to provide money for food, housing and transport for students unable to work ([ram.ac.uk/response](http://ram.ac.uk/response)).

'Students, staff and alumni have responded to the pandemic with resilience, energy and creativity,' he says. We ran a social media campaign, RAMplaysON, during the first lockdown that brought together the wonderful performances by our community, from solos in bedrooms to

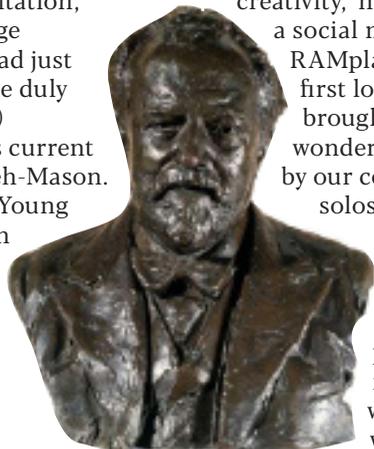
apart, the music never stopped.

'Our most important challenge is to imagine what the cultural world will look like post Covid-19,' he adds. 'It's about how musicians can adapt. We need – shamelessly – to remind people what they have missed.'

student and now not only sponsors eight scholarships each year but has gifted a £1 million organ. 'Sir Elton is a great friend of the institution,' Jonathan explains. 'It runs deep with him, hence the wonderful vignette in the recent biopic *Rocketman*.' (One of the instructors at the Academy recalled an 11-year-old Elton playing back, without hesitation, a four-page piece by George Frideric Handel that he had just heard for the first time. He duly won a junior scholarship.)

Another ambassador is current pupil cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason. Sheku won the 2016 BBC Young Musician of the Year when he was only 17 and reached celebrity status after playing at Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's wedding.

'We're hugely proud of Sheku's successes,' says



multi-musician collaborations. We reached more than five million people, but what was most heartening was that even while we were forced to be

**Culture Club**

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