

Issue 8  
Autumn 2023

RAM  
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RAM  
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*change*  
*edition*

'Being a  
musician in  
the 21st  
century'

Brand new  
wisdom from  
Agony Aunt

*including:*  
'Things I  
wish I'd  
known about  
RAM sooner!'

...plus a  
crossword!!



## Editor-in-Chief

Jonty Watt

## Design and Production

Jonty Watt

Kiersten Gustafson

## Contributors

Agony Aunt

Alexander Lee

Kennedy Miller

Martha Neugarten

Emily Trubshaw

Jonty Watt

Ellen Wilkinson

## Editors

Kennedy Miller

Jonty Watt

Ellen Wilkinson

## Artwork

Jess Bull Anderson

Ruby Howells

## Front Cover

### Design:

Jess Bull Anderson

@jessbullanderson.art

## Sponsor

Schott Music London

48 Great

Marlborough Street,

London

W1F 7BB

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## Editor's Note

For those of you who have never seen RAMpage before: welcome! And for those of you who have: welcome back! I'm really excited to be bringing you this wonderful edition to usher in a new year at the Academy, and I hope that you find everything in here useful, whether to get excited for a new year or to fend off those end-of-summer blues.

Though I'm as proud of this edition as ever, it's a slightly sad occasion for me as it represents my final edition with RAMpage. I'm delighted to be handing over to the wonderful Kennedy Miller for the forthcoming year, and can assure you that RAMpage is in fantastically capable hands. It has been a pleasure to work with such a talented team during my time at RAM, and would encourage anyone who is interested to get stuck in! It's one of the best things I did here.

Anyway, enough of that. What is actually in this edition, I hear you clamouring? Well, I can promise laughs, inspiration, thoughtful insights, and beautiful artwork. Agony aunt makes her second print appearance and has some advice for the romancers among you. And, as I'm sure many of you will be thrilled to hear, there is a new crossword for you to sink your teeth into.

I want to thank everyone who has been involved in the production of this edition for their hard work and dedication.

Happy reading everyone!

Jonty x



# Life Without Music

*an interview with Jess Bull Anderson*

**By Jonty Watt**

For those of us who dedicate much of our lives to music, it can be very difficult to imagine an existence in which music does not play a significant part. Especially in a conservatoire environment, it can be all too easy to forget the privilege and joy that music is. Jess Bull Anderson, a second-year trombonist at RAM, is someone who does not take this for granted. While dealing with severe health complications, Jess had to face the prospect of never being able to play her trombone again. Her condition also meant that she was unable to get any pleasure from listening to music. Thankfully, Jess is fully back being able to play and enjoy music again, but her experience has left her with a different perspective on everything. We sat down together to discuss this traumatic period of her life, but, more importantly, how she has recovered and grown from it.

**Jess Anderson:** "During my most severe migraine attacks, I was in so much pain that I couldn't see a way out. It's impossible to describe the feeling of complete helplessness: you can be bed-bound for over a month, without the coordination even to take medication out of its packet. You're not in control of your body in any capacity. You're just trapped."

Jess has suffered from migraine for most of her life. Migraine is a complex and potentially crippling neurological disorder which has been established by the WHO to be the sixth highest cause of years lost to disability. When she was in Sixth Form at Chetham's School of Music, Jess had between four and seven days wiped out by migraine each week, drastically decreasing her quality of life. When she joined RAM, she had just been referred to her fifth consultant neurologist and was having several ongoing procedures, including weekly cranial nerve block injections.

**JA:** "Coming to RAM had been my dream since I was nine. It should have been amazing, but it wasn't. The fact that I was there, but couldn't do anything...nothing was how I expected it to be. I started to lose sense of who I was, as my identity was taken over by chronic migraine."

On top of dealing with chronic migraine, Jess began to suffer from memory loss. This was due to a combination of factors, including the prolonged pain her body had endured, extreme side effects from medication, and severe depression from being so ill. Jess completely lost access to both her short- and long-term memory



*"Flowers Facing Forwards" by Jess Bull Anderson, the first painting she completed after recovering from memory loss*

**JA:** "When I tried to speak, no words would come. I wouldn't recognise people I had known my whole life. I forgot how to walk up and down stairs. I would sometimes put my hand directly on the stove to test if it was hot, and my cognitive processing was so slow that I wouldn't even realise it was hurting, and I'd burn myself."

Under such conditions, being a musician became harder and harder for Jess, who ultimately had to make the difficult decision to take time away from RAM.

**JA:** "I probably should have realised sooner, but the moment when this all sunk in was during a repertoire session. We were playing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, a piece I know very well, and I realised I had forgotten how to read the alto clef. Also, whenever I'd look up at the conductor, I'd completely lose my place, as I had no recognition of the



sheet music in front of me. I had to leave the session early and just cried. I couldn't comprehend what was happening to me. That's when I knew I had to take a break from RAM."

Jess's memory loss also made it impossible to listen to music. Her inability to identify connections between things meant that melodies and harmonies sounded as if they had no internal logic. At this time, any music Jess listened to, even the simplest pop song, would sound completely atonal and dissonant. Pieces she had previously loved and knew extremely well became indecipherable.

Thankfully, largely due to the support and treatment provided by her neurologist, Jess has regained full control of her cognitive faculties, and is able to do everything she once could.

**JA:** "When I finally got my memory back, it was pretty overwhelming but so exciting. There was this one song by Andy Williams, called "Getting over you"—I listened to it on repeat for a month, because every time I listened it was something new. It was like I was discovering music for the very first time. The same happened with pretty much everything. The first coffee, the first hug—imagine feeling all those things for what seems like the first time in your life. It felt like discovering myself all over again."

Jess has been able to resume her studies at RAM, though describes how this transition has not been completely smooth.

**JA:** "I was finally able to come back to trombone, after nine months of not playing at all. This was obviously really hard in some ways, like that I couldn't play for more than two minutes at a time! But I had the opportunity to create new habits for myself, and I realised I had lost all of my bad habits. To have the trombone back in my life—and in this new, healthier way—was such a revelation. Not being able to play had been the biggest heartache ever. It has not all been easy though; I've only recently started to trust myself that music is something I want to do. Rebuilding those skills has been so much work, but I'm finally accepting that it feels right to be doing music again."

I ask Jess how she has been able to build this trust in herself.

**JA:** "It's been helpful to think of something I read in a book by Matt Haig called *The Comfort Book*. He encourages us to think of 'sideways momentum', which is basically acknowledging what is good about the present moment. For example you might think 'I'm not sure what the future holds, but I know that I just ate a pear, and it was a really nice pear'. I'm enjoying playing the trombone. That's enough at the moment."

Jess is also a very keen artist, and tries to balance art with

music as much as she can. She describes art as being the main source of comfort she had while suffering from migraines, as she would 'paint through the pain'. When she suffered from memory loss, however, Jess found herself unable to paint. I asked about this experience.

**JA:** "Art was always my source of comfort, and that was especially true during lockdown. I'd never taken any time off from art before, and it was always so intuitive—I'd just do it. Losing that was really scary, because I had no clue how I could get it back, how I could rebuild it."

Like music, however, Jess has now recovered her ability and love for painting. She describes how painting was a helpful way to deal with all the emotions she felt as she began her recovery process. The artwork accompanying this article is some of the work Jess produced during this time.

**JA:** "I think I've found a really healthy balance at the moment. Painting to me feels so stimulating and visceral. Most of all, it's so fun! Art has been a great way for me to get away from the clinical detail of trombone playing, especially while I have to rebuild technique from square one. It helps keep me from getting hyper-fixated on the music side of my life."

Reflecting on the life she is living now, which would have seemed completely alien just a year ago, Jess says: "Above all, it's the community that music and trombone playing allows you to be in—I think that's what I missed most."



"You Are The Sun" by Jess Bull Anderson



# An Interview With Conductor Johann Stuckenbruck

By Ellen Wilkinson

We are headed to the Royal Academy of Music's frequently deserted library, a suitable setting to get to know conductor and self-professed score nerd, Johann Stuckenbruck. Stuckenbruck graduated from RAM with an orchestral conducting masters in 2017, and returns six years later for the Royal Academy Opera's summer production of Rossini's uncharted but charming *La Cimbale di Matrimonio*. I am playing in the orchestra and we are on a rehearsal break. We sit down at a desk, April sunshine illuminating the innumerable shelves of scores, and books about scores.

Stuckenbruck's professional credits are international, including working with the San Diego Symphony, the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal and assisting on the 2022 Glyndebourne production of Ethyl Smyth's *The Wreckers*, which he describes as an "amazing" experience. Stuckenbruck began his musical life playing double bass in his school orchestra in Durham; his introduction to his current craft was also small-scale.

"My first experience of conducting was at the age of eighteen or so, when I got a group of wind player friends together and played through the Mozart serenades. My bass teacher suggested that I get some conducting lessons, so that I could interpret a gesture better when playing. That planted the seed, and it became very clear that conducting was a more rewarding way of making music for me."

"I also found that it brought me out of myself," Stuckenbruck ponders. "As a bass player I could hide, but I found that working with people and bringing it to life in that way was much more rewarding. My personality came out more, and I realised that conducting demanded more of me intellectually than bass playing."

After school, on a gap year at Princeton, Johann had consultation lessons for bass and conducting, ultimately taking up a place to study music at King's College London. "King's opened the doors to the London music scene; I studied with Toby Purser, head of conducting at the Royal College of Music, and Sian Edwards, from RAM, on recommendation. I was the assistant conductor of the university orchestra and doing amateur stuff, trying to build up as much experience as possible. I enjoyed

studying with Sian, so I made the decision to study at RAM for my master's."

**Ellen Wilkinson:** What is your favourite memory of studying at RAM?

**Johann Stuckenbruck:** ...I hesitate because I have a lot of good memories from RAM! It was the best two years of my life up to that point. The concerts that I got to put on in the Duke's Hall were great; I conducted Mahler 7 in my first term, which was so much fun. I felt at home at the Academy, among people who were incredibly passionate about repertoire and art. A resounding memory was working with Semyon Bychkov and his assistant Mattieu Herzog on Mahler 2, which was the last symphony orchestra project that I was involved in.

**EW:** What was the most challenging part?

**JS:** The quantity of stuff going on. You are trying to get the best out of what you are doing, but you only have 24 hours in a day. By the end I was way more efficient at learning scores; you work out what is crucial, the thing that you have to nail. That experience massively shaped



Photo credits: Cristian Barcan



how I work now.

**EW:** What is your dream programme to conduct?

**JS:** Oh I love this question! I saw a programme that the LSO did a few years ago, and I thought "that's got to be up there". It was Berg's Violin Concerto in the first half, and Mahler 7 in the second. The Seventh is my favourite of the Mahler symphonies.

**EW:** Do you have any advice for current conducting students at RAM?

**JS:** Individuality. Keep who you are and what you believe in, that's it. Then there is a trajectory which is interesting.

At 32 years of age, Stuckenbruck's individuality emanates through a palpable self-assurance and a propensity for light rehearsal banter, his musical maturity on the podium offset by a boyish smile.

**JS:** I find comedy fascinating. I am intrigued by the craft of how to write a joke, that a stand-up comedian can learn and understand how to get a reaction and make people laugh. I find it very important to maintain a good atmosphere while conducting. Sometimes in rehearsal, throwing in an unexpected humorous comment can make people remember what was going on in the music, and why.

Conducting can be an isolating role, but Stuckenbruck assures me that he is driven by teamwork and a love of connecting with people, as well as the music.

**JS:** I aim to make music that I love with people that I love, regularly. What drives me is to make great quality music; whatever team we have, the performance should be to the best of our abilities. When you have 50+ people giving the energy that you are giving, then it is really electric. It is kind of on fire, like being on a rollercoaster but without the screaming... we hope!

**EW:** Are you referring to adrenaline?

**JS:** It is more controlled than that, a managed energy.

**EW:** Do you think it is important to encourage varied concert programmes, including new and diverse composers?

**JS:** "I think it is crucial. If we want to create a more viable and interesting profession, we need to encourage new

composers, and varied programmes. With a complete rotation of works, there is more opportunity for new voices alongside a greater appreciation and freshness when returning to core repertoire.

**EW:** What are your interests away from scores?

**JS:** I am a sci-fi nerd; I love escapism and using the imagination. I love that you watch something and it takes you to a completely different world that does not exist in reality. I get stressed if I'm watching human drama about relationship issues. Reality TV or Star Trek? Star Trek anyday.

**EW:** How has it been returning to RAM to conduct the RAO orchestra in *La Cambiale di Matrimonio*?

**JS:** Amazing and surreal. The first time that I walked in, I had the feeling that I was going in for a lesson. Then very quickly, I felt as comfortable as when I was studying here. Everyone has been really nice, and really responsive. It's like coming back home.





# Connecting with the audience in the twenty-first century

(and how to do it)

By Emily Trubshaw

Why does entertainment exist? Is it to make us feel good, to distract us from everyday life, to inspire us?

Perhaps all the above are true, but what do they have in common? Is it that entertainment of any sort seeks to stimulate the mind, to bewitch the senses, and to affect our mood and actions? Is it a kind of drug, which, like any other, we take to escape our humdrum lives? Good entertainment leaves us joyous, nostalgic, ecstatic; it heightens our emotions, distracting the mind and allowing it to consider new worlds of possibility. In some ways, we crave the emotional roller-coaster journey that art can provide. So, as musicians, how do we achieve this?

## Stimulate

Although we might think that any good performance can engage an audience and manipulate people's emotions, for our greedy modern minds it seems that this type of stimulation may no longer be enough.

Think about it: we wake up in the morning and rather than going into the fields to sow crops, we are presented with a thousand other stimulants. Not only are we hit by the stress of morning traffic and the overwhelming sights, smells, and sounds on the tube, but also, most critically, the continuous stream of notifications that flows into the small device we carry around with us so religiously. Every year, every month, every day, we evolve to be able to cope with more and more stimulation, and this gradually mutates into a craving that, if not appeased, leaves us empty and disengaged. And so, entertainment must keep up with our rapidly changing minds.

Social media is one form of entertainment that is always right on the button, anticipating our every desire and need. Scrolling through Instagram not only are there pictures and videos of your friends, but also links to that washing line grandma mentioned and those fluffy socks you so dearly wanted to buy. Colours and sounds collide in this exciting and unpredictable chaos. If we so desire, we can search for videos of celebrities or famous musicians; if you get bored, just flick to the next one! In this world of constant activity, we can safely return to our childlike tendency to leave our toys strewn on the floor. The recent development of TikTok terrifyingly exemplifies this fact of modern life. The app assumes that we can only focus for between fifteen seconds and three minutes (sorry, Wagner). And

its astounding popularity suggests that it might be right. Indeed, if we watch anything longer than this, we get distracted, craving variety. Our minds have been so badly bulldozed by the onslaught of stimulation that our concentration span may never recover.

For us musicians, this leaves no other option than to keep up to date and to take part in this race to be the most exciting, different, stimulating form of entertainment. It is for this reason that a traditional concert format can no longer suffice; instead, we must be imaginative and push the boundaries of what a concert involves.

## "There is so much scope for exploration, a whole creative world waiting to be

A 'concert' could mean anything, and yet our understanding of it is as narrow-minded as it could get: when I think of a classical concert, I envision an ornate hall, packed with old couples dressed in tuxedos and expensive dresses, whilst an orchestra, also formally dressed, sits stiffly, stone-faced, on stage. After thirty minutes or so, we know that a large portion of the audience will have lost interest, and yet we do nothing about this, except perhaps play a slightly contrasting work in the hope that it may wake them from their slumbers. Classical music concerts are notoriously bad at maintaining engagement and stimulating the minds of (particularly young) audiences, and that is true now more than ever.

To get past this, we must think bigger. Yes, music is sound, but it can also be understood through touch, sight, smell: the whole range of human experience. There is so much scope for exploration, a whole creative world waiting to be discovered. I applaud those organisations, venues, and artists (including the Aurora Orchestra and composers like Lera Auerbach) who have begun to take a step in this direction and encourage all musicians to think in a similar way.

## Update

Increased stimulation can also be achieved through the modernisation of content. In entertainment, relevance is key. And we see this everywhere: classic movies are

constantly being remade and songs are almost always about current affairs, whether personal or more worldly problems.

In classical music, there is evidence of similar updates are happening, though with mixed success. At the Royal Opera House this year, Robert Carsen directed a new contemporary production of Verdi's *Aida*. Despite being a captivating performance, there were many clashing ideals between the composer's original intentions and the director's artistic vision (such as the exotic references in the libretto). Likewise, the suits and uniforms used seemed incredibly boring compared to the expected glittering golden costumes. Though a respectable attempt to make the opera relevant, the audience's senses were left wanting more. Clearly, this is not enough.

Similarly, it is tempting to include a contemporary work in a programme full of pieces by well-known composers; rather than helping to celebrate newer works, however, this tokenistic manner of curation instead brings attention to the

disparities in style and sound, leaving the audience confused and still in preference of the classics.

An update is clearly needed in classical music. What we need is not frantic attempts at trying to force existing works into a modern frame, but to be creative and imaginative in curation. There is, for instance, considerable potential for cross-artform collaboration that would not only increase stimulation of the mind to meet the demands of the modern world, but that would also enrich musical works, particularly lesser-known and contemporary pieces.

The modern brain is a reality, and it is something that we must contend with. However, a balance must also be struck between modernising and conserving classical music's central objectives. Unlike the short fragments we encounter on social media, classical music is a celebration of much longer forms; we must therefore find other creative ways of presenting our material that avoids its dissection and deconstruction. Only then will classical music be able to compete on the modern stage.

# Odyssey Festival Orchestra

## a brand-new young person's orchestra

By Martha Neugarten, Ellen Wilkinson and Alexander Lee

Odyssey Festival Orchestra (OFO) is a newly formed orchestra for and by 18 to 30 year-olds presenting philosophically-engaging concerts exploring musical masterpieces in the context of their time. OFO performs at London's most exciting concert venues alongside some of the biggest names in British theatre. In our debut year, actor Sir David Suchet, famous for his portrayal of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, joined us to imagine and bring to life twentieth century composers Gershwin and Ravel. Sir David narrated a concert of *An American in Paris*, *Rhapsody in Blue*, *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and *La Valse* to a sold-out Queen Elizabeth Hall.

Our inaugural concert at the Cadogan Hall in September 2022 highlighted an arrangement of Beethoven's only ballet, *The Creatures of Prometheus*, alongside his monumental *Eroica* symphony. The orchestra collaborated with theatrical legend Dame Janet Suzman and rising RSC star Luke Wilson who narrated the music with poetry, Beethoven's writings, and the Greek mythology from which the story of Prometheus originated.

We returned to Cadogan Hall in May 2023 to explore the power of humour and its relationship with art in 1920s and 30s Soviet Russia through Shostakovich's music, including excerpts from *The Nose*, *Lady Macbeth of Mt-sensk*, and his mighty Fifth Symphony.

OFO's upcoming concert on September 20th will present a programme of music centred around the great impresario Sergei Diaghilev and his pioneering dance company



Pictured: Sir David Suchet playing Ravel with OFO at the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

"I could not recommend it enough"



the Ballets Russes. We will dive into the story of the company and how it transformed the cultural landscape of Europe in the early 1900s. Excerpts from Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, De Falla's *Three-Cornered Hat*, and Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* will be accompanied by narration inspired by the memoirs of ballerina Tamara Karsavina.

"The energy of every single player and variety of music played was exceptional and something I won't be forgetting soon I'm sure. Anyone wanting more orchestral experience in a relaxed yet professional feeling environment, at an extremely high standard should not hesitate to apply"

We aim to be as accessible and inclusive as possible — we are committed to improving diversity in classical music, both on stage and off. We recruit players from a diverse range of backgrounds, and provide workshops and generously subsidised tickets to selected London state schools through our outreach programme. We are also committed to the professional development of our players, providing

first-rate instrumental tutors for our courses. Concerts in our 2023/24 season will continue to explore and question culture, politics, society, sustainability and more, and we welcome ideas for the stories we tell and how we tell them. Art does not exist in a vacuum, and we see this as an exciting opportunity and core responsibility. We'd love to welcome you on board the Odyssey ship - head to [odysseymusic.org](https://odysseymusic.org) to read more and get involved.

**Odyssey Festival Orchestra will be at Cadogan Hall on September 20th with a dance-inspired programme including excerpts from Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, De Falla's *Three-Cornered Hat*, and Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* - narrator to be announced. Read more about us and sign up to play at [odysseymusic.org](https://odysseymusic.org)!**

"After studying music at conservatoire for the past 4 years I can safely say that participating in this orchestra will leave you with the right approach to orchestral playing as well as wanting for more music making with wonderful musicians"



Pictured: Roly Botha as Shostakovich (left) and Alex Macqueen as Stalin (right) with OFO in Cadogan Hall.

# 10 Things I Wish I Knew Before I came to RAM

By Kennedy Blair Miller

## 10 things i wish i Knew

This autumn marks my one-year anniversary of living in London as a postgraduate singer at RAM. When I moved here from the US last year, I arrived with lots of excitement, expectations, and naivety about what the transition would be like. My first year at RAM was undoubtedly the best year of my life thus far, but even though the great moments were really great, the hard moments were really hard. As I begin my second year, I've been thinking a lot about the lessons I learned last year that I'm hoping will make this one even better. Whether you're an international student who has never attended a conservatoire before (like me!) or a postgrad Brit who's called RAM home for half a decade now, I hope some of these will be helpful for you as you navigate this year!

### Don't live in the building.

Last year, I made the mistake of subjecting myself to daily 12 hour days at RAM without ever going outside. Your schedule will be hectic, but even if you only have an hour break between classes or rehearsals, choose to leave the building; you'll be surprised how mentally refreshing it is to step out for a coffee, stroll around Regents Park, or even just sit outside on the picnic tables. Also, did you know London is technically classified as a forest because there are so many trees here? It's so easy to get stuck in the routine of spending all day at RAM and then going home, but implement an exploration of the parks and new parts of the city into your routine.



### Join a society.

Joining a community of students with similar interests that are outside of music will be a really refreshing social outlet for you. There are so many societies at RAM that speak to lots of different communities, from RAM Basketball to LGBTQ+ Soc to RAMpage (wink wink), so if you fancy a social outlet that isn't music related (and you should probably have at least one!), a RAM society is a great option.



### Meet musicians outside your instrument cohort.

It's great to bond with those who are studying the same thing as you, but you're at RAM not only to become better at your instrument, but also to become a better musician at large. Befriending and collaborating with other musicians will inspire and challenge you.

### Come to RAM Bar on Fridays.

Last year, I found that RAM Bar is at its best and most social on Fridays. After a busy and relentless week of classes, it's nice having access to a cheap and safe environment where you can catch up with friends over a drink (including lots of non-alcoholic options)!



### Take advantage of RAM's mental health services.

The free and confidential mental health services at RAM are excellent. Whether you're struggling with seasonal affective disorder, homesickness, or imposter syndrome, it's always a good idea to talk to someone.

All artwork by Ruby Howells



Enjoying RAMpage? Check out more of our content over at our website: [rampagenews.co.uk](http://rampagenews.co.uk). If you'd like to be involved in our next projects, feel free to get in touch with Kennedy, our editor-in-chief: [kennedy.miller22@ram.ac.uk](mailto:kennedy.miller22@ram.ac.uk).



### Check out the student schemes for live music and theatre in London.

The sheer amount of classical music being performed in London every day is truly unbelievable. I'm sure I haven't discovered half the student schemes to affordably access these performances, but here are some of my favourites: YoungROH, YoungBarbican, ENO Under 21s Scheme, ENO Under 35s Scheme, and Southbank Centre 25% off scheme for full-time students. Also, download the TodayTix app for cheap tickets to the West End!

### Use affirmations.

You deserve to be here! RAM is one of the best conservatoires in the world; that can be affirming and also really intimidating. Remind yourself that you earned a place here. Work hard, but also recognise that making progress can be messy and nonlinear. Make a list of the things you love about being a musician and read it on the hard days. It's amazing and remarkable that you're here, and you deserve to be.



### Be prepared for the cultural learning curve if you're an international student.

It has been so fun to become immersed in British culture, but I was naive about how different things would be coming from the US. Dry humour, witty banter, and niche lingo will dominate a lot of your conversations with your British peers. You'll know you've lived here a while when you're able to dish it back, though!

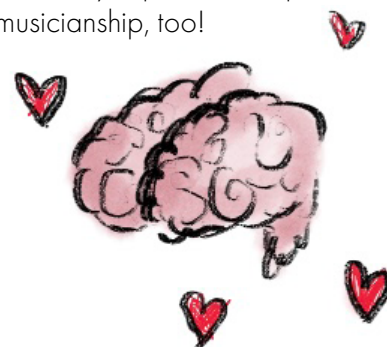
### Be prepared for winter.

For those from warmer climates like myself, anticipate having to adjust to the shorter days and the colder temperatures in the winter months. There were days on end last winter when I didn't see the sun, and this impacted my mental health more severely than I had anticipated. I benefited from taking vitamin D supplements and recommend surrounding yourself with a community that loves and supports you during the winter, especially if this will be new for you.



### Don't forget that music is also supposed to be fun.

At some points last year, I found myself in a rut of treating my singing solely as a technical craft to perfect rather than an art that I am passionate about. The technique and the routine of practising is crucially important, but prioritise the joy you have in your musicianship, too!



# Florence Foster Jenkins

## my inspiration

By Jonty Watt

This article was selected as the third-prize winning submission in the [Royal Philharmonic Society's annual Young Classical Writers Prize, 2023](#). It was originally written for the RAMpage News website, for a series to celebrate Women's History Month, in which RAMpage team members wrote about a woman who had inspired them. The series is still available to view on our website: <https://rampagenews.co.uk/blog>.

If you have ever happened upon a recording of Florence Foster Jenkins's singing, you may think she makes a remarkably strange choice of inspirational figure. Dubbed the 'anti-Callas' and 'exquisitely bad', her recordings of difficult operatic repertoire are, indeed, legendarily woeful. Her ['Queen of the Night' aria](#) has racked up nearly two million views on YouTube, and it's easy to hear why. Jenkins's consistently haphazard pitching, her optimistic attempts at high notes, her anti-metronomic rhythm – these all surely make for entertaining listening. What separates Florence Foster Jenkins from your typical, common-or-garden bad performance, however, is her confidence. And on this front, she is legendary.

Scrolling through the comments on the aforementioned YouTube video is an enlightening experience. Far from exhibiting unanimous ridicule, these comments suggest a legion of devoted fans finding enormous inspiration (even catharsis) in her wayward vocalisations. So what is going on?

There remains considerable debate over whether Jenkins knew quite how bad she was. On the one hand, she continued to give performances and compared herself favourably to opera's biggest stars. On the other hand, she was certainly aware of her detractors. I'm not sure it matters though. What I, and so many others, find liberating in Jenkins's performances is their utter, reckless abandon. 'Verlassen sei auf ewig', sings Lady Florence in her 'Queen of the Night': 'Abandoned be you forever' she exhorts with a pitch lost in the uncanny valley between E and F. Somehow, there could be no more fitting musical accompaniment.

In standing on stage and singing joyfully, unapologetically, Lady Florence empowers us to be bad, to fail, to ignore (whether deliberately or not) the restrictions and expectations imposed on us by everyone and everything around us. Her recordings are at once proto-punk, queerly utopic, anarchic, and utterly dreadful. To me, they are euphoric. As

a classical musician, I have spent a considerable amount of my life in a conservatoire. In this environment, where there is no time whatsoever for amateurishness, it is such a revelation to allow oneself to be bad. To embrace the possibility of imperfection, to stare down the gullet of failure: this has been emancipatory. As Jenkins herself put it:

'People may say I can't sing, but no one can ever say I didn't sing.'



Florence Foster Jenkins



# AGONY AUNT

**Here to solve YOUR problems!**

After a successful term of helping hapless RAM students with all their problems, Agony Aunt is back and rested after a summer spent sipping mojitos on the golden sands of the Mediterranean. Alongside working tirelessly to maintain the world's sharpest wit, she somehow found time to dish out a bit more advice to make that back-to-school period just a little less painful...

Remember, you can't spell drama without RAM...

To submit a question to Agony Aunt, please email [ramagonyaunt@gmail.com](mailto:ramagonyaunt@gmail.com). Not all questions will be answered. Agony Aunt should not be treated as genuine advice.

## **Dear Agony Aunt...**

***I keep getting kicked out of B58 by jazzers, even when it's not booked! Please tell me why they have a special room!***

***Yours, truly,***

***A disgruntled singer***

Dear disgruntled singer,

I myself am often irate at the tempting emptiness of B58. However, the fear of having to interact with a jazz guitarist is, I find, too great to risk entering that seductive space. And that's not even mentioning the empty jazz storage room beside LG47, which I can't believe is not a practice room. As far as I can tell, it's just a glorified band room.

Unfortunately, although the jazz department seems to be essentially posh 'Camp Rock', they need spaces to practice too. I'm also sure that B58 must be teeming with amps and equipment they can't carry around. There's probably also some jazz-specific system to limit the amount of daylight that gets in there that they don't want us tampering with, so let's not give them a hard time.

Remember that not everyone can live the unburdened life of a singer that you are lucky enough to lead (thank goodness, there's already far too many).

## **Dear Agony Aunt...**

***Whose idea were those abominable motion-detecting lights in Cross Keys? Why do they turn off every ten seconds? Why am I forced to practise in total darkness in those godforsaken, windowless furnaces? Why am I being punished for having such exceedingly economical technique that I don't flail around like a frightened eel every time I play?***

The Cross Keys practice block is like the wastewater treatment facility to the main building's crisp bottled spring water: everyone knows it's there, but nobody likes to talk about it, even though deep down we know we all need it (in this analogy, the basement practice rooms are surely an ice-cold glass of San Pellegrino). We could fill many happy column inches complaining about CK's various shortcomings, but we would be better off reflecting on how much more hellish things would be without it.

With that said, I agree that there is no excuse whatsoever for the lighting situation. As is evidenced by those artificial, LED skylights in the microwave and computer rooms, however, it's clear that we are the victims of an institution-wide anti-light regime. To resist, perhaps you could consider bringing in one of those torches you can buy on Amazon that promises to be brighter than a thousand suns, or whatever it is they claim these days.

### **Dear Agony Aunt...**

#### **Where's the best place in RAM to do a poo?**

First, I want to thank you for your important question. I'm glad that we at RAM are finally thinking of the important things. After some pretty extensive soul-searching, I have decided that the best room for the described activity is LG52, where your scents can only ever blend with the room's already pungent aroma. Don't let the lack of plumbing or privacy discourage you: I'm unable to come up with any other plausible use for this room, so I can only conclude that this must be what RAM intends. There's a reason, you know, that people always say "LG52, best place for a poo".

P.S. In all seriousness, I would put in a strong word for the third floor main building or bottom floor T-room bathrooms. Both are reasonably quiet and safe environments. PLUS, the T-room toilets have free period sanitary products!

### **Dear Agony Aunt...**

**Okay, so I'm in a bit of a predicament... I may or may not have recently had romantic engagements with a couple of people in RAM. I need some advice, what is the general corridor etiquette for a post ram shag interaction? Is a simple nod enough, or is that borderline rude?**

Dear RAM romancer,

Ah, this old chestnut. As someone well versed in this subject, I find myself wondering if this question might even be aimed at me... Luckily, with experience comes wisdom, and I have some tips for you.

For a long-term solution, might I suggest celibacy? Easy. Simple. Effective.

However, if that ship has already sailed and there is now no avoiding those awkward, sexually charged encounters in the canteen as Mary pours your coffee, I have another solution: 'The Face'. This is a move I have pioneered, and I think you might benefit from using it. To execute 'The Face', simply give your target a blank stare, then quickly avert your gaze. To seal the deal, flash them a closed-lipped, British smile. I promise: results are guaranteed in seconds.

### **Dear Agony Aunt...**

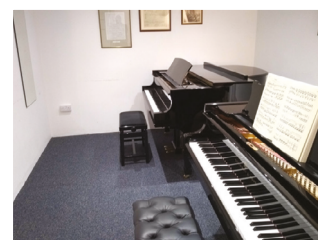
**I'm addicted to Sprite - help. The Canteen staff keep laughing at me.**

Grow up. Have a coke.

**DISCLAIMER: Agony Aunt does not accept responsibility for any poor decisions made following her advice**



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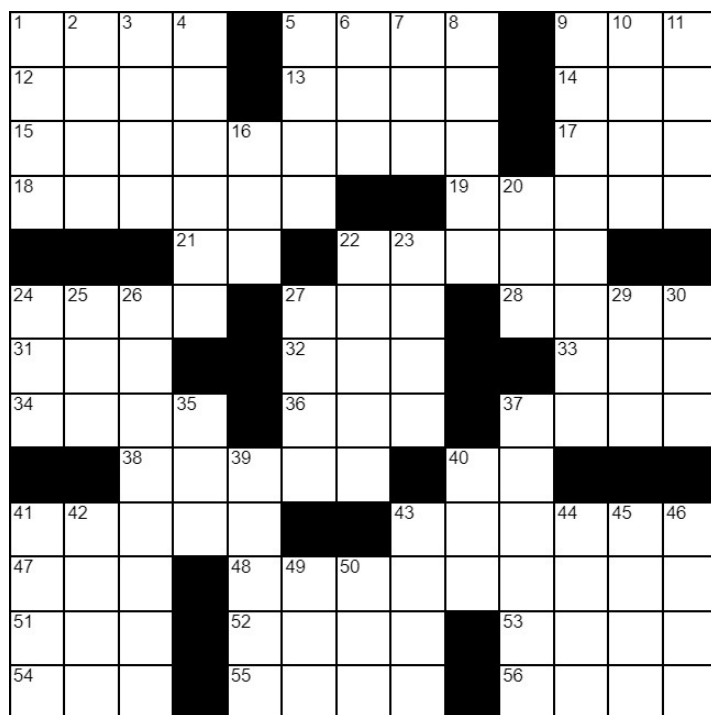
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# The Crossword

By Jonty Watt



## Across

1. A spot for lunch in London (4)
5. Trivial quarrel (between lovers?) (4)
9. Pet animal (3)
12. Curse – promise (4)
13. Duo (4)
14. Raw metal material (3)
15. Exactly – Earl Tilly (anag.) (9)
17. Influential chairman – author of little red book (3)
18. South American camels? (6)
19. Police frontman (5)
21. Thirteenth letter (2)
22. Conductor's implement (5)
24. Baby bears (4)
27. Photo (abbr.) (3)
28. Average – nasty (4)
31. Wired garment (3)
32. Submachine gun (3)
33. Old-timey before (3)
34. Additionally (4)
36. First rainbow colour (3)
37. Captain's helpers (4)
38. Sudden movement of surprise (5)
40. "Is this the way \_\_\_ Amarillo?" (2)
41. Pianist's support (5)
43. Legendary jazz pianist, Erroll (6)
47. Excessively (3)
48. Support (9)

51. Where ashes are stored (3)
52. Indoor ball game (4)
53. Singing competition, American \_\_\_\_\_ (4)
54. Games console (3)
55. Clapping body part (4)
56. Facile (4)

## Down

1. Vote (4)
2. What a curtain is hung on (4)
3. American singer, \_\_\_\_\_ James (4)
4. They go with variations (6)
5. Places to relax (4)
6. Buddy (3)
7. Make unwell (3)
8. Lovers' moonlit meeting (5)
9. Assert arrogantly (8)
10. Algerian city – name (4)
11. School subj. (4)
16. Where you call home (3)
20. "What's New Pussycat?" singer, \_\_\_\_\_ Jones (3)
22. *Carmen* composer (5)
23. Found in the stomach (4)
24. Lazy acronym (3)
25. Web page address (3)
26. There are three in *Symphonie Fantastique* (8)
27. Cat noise (4)
29. Oliver Knussen opera, *Where the Wild Things* \_\_\_\_\_ (3)
30. "\_\_\_\_\_ World" Symphony (3)
35. East London new music venue, Cafe \_\_\_\_\_ (3)
37. Weatherfield soap opera (abbr.) (6)
39. First letter of Hebrew alphabet (5)
40. Greek T (3)
41. One of two phaser modes (4)
42. Ripped (4)
43. Spandau Ballet song – metal (4)
44. Nothing in Spain (4)
45. Musicians might have big ones (4)
46. Depend (4)
49. Mozart's Clarinet Concerto without the tonic (2,1)
50. Trick (3)