



Alumna Subject Graduated Helen Reid
Music with German
2000
Place of Work Position Guildhall School of Music & Drama
Professor of Piano



Helen first came to public attention when she appeared on BBC2 in the National Keyboard Finals of the BBC Young Musician competition in 1998. She has since given recitals throughout the UK and all over Europe and is currently Professor of Piano at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

Great minds *go on to* great places

Why did you choose to study at Royal Holloway?

I actually had a place at Leicester to study French and German but during my year out I was invited to a concert at Royal Holloway by a postgraduate composer. I didn't know anything about the College then but as soon as I got here I was just struck by the high standards and I thought "well this is fantastic I want to come here!".

I was keen to study a joint degree as I love languages and at the time I didn't think I was massively into academic music. I wanted to develop my language skills and it seemed like a good combination to do Music with German as there is such a strong Germanic tradition in music as well. The advantage of doing a joint degree was that I could pick and choose a little bit; so I was able to create a programme of study that really suited me.

What was life like at Royal Holloway?

My time at the College was very varied. As I had previously studied at a specialist music school with only 30 people in my year initially it was a little overwhelming – even though it's a small campus – to be around 5,000 people. This made it very exciting too as I met so many people whose specialism wasn't music and I found it a particularly enjoyable challenge to try and get them to connect with composers and pieces they had never heard before.

What did you enjoy most about performing at the College as a student?

In my final year I chose performance as my main elective and so I did quite a few concerts in the Picture Gallery. With such beautiful surroundings it was an absolutely inspiring place to play - even though it has a very particular echo and you did have to deal with that!

Performing in the Picture Gallery was always a memorable occasion. I especially enjoyed the lunchtime concerts, some of which were open to the public which I found very good experience for my future career.

What is the most important thing that Royal Holloway taught you?

The performance opportunities were very important career wise and I was very grateful to the Music Department as they arranged for me to do some external recitals. When I was a student I also began teaching. I saw an advert in the Music Department from a 9 year old girl who wanted to learn to play the piano so I applied, was successful and began teaching her and some of her friends. Soon I had built up a piano teaching practice. In terms of transition from student life to professional life I learnt a lot from Royal Holloway.

I was also extremely grateful to my Performance

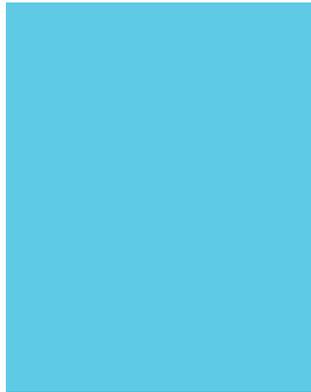
tutors Eric Levi and Katharine Ellis who were very kind to me and gave me lots of encouragement and advice over the years. As a musician you tend to be quite insecure about your performance so you really need people around you who can encourage and advise you.

What has been your career path since leaving Royal Holloway?

I have a lovely, varied career from teaching and mentoring students at the Guildhall to running children's workshops in primary schools. After I completed my degree I went to Germany for a year to study and then I did an MA in Music Performance at City University and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. During that time I was constantly building up my teaching and performance experience.

I then got a job teaching Piano in a couple of schools and about 7 years ago I secured a post at Trinity College of Music. This post was fantastic and gave me the opportunity to work with some very talented youngsters. My work in schools led me to Higher Education (HE) and jobs at the Guildhall and Leeds College of Music. I have particularly enjoyed working in HE as it has enabled me to continue with my research – something the Guildhall have very much encouraged. I've found that having taken the university route into Music I have the





people with passion

“It’s almost as though I started my career while I was at Royal Holloway and when I left all I did was carry on building up what I had already started there.”



academic background that is becoming very in demand, particularly in performance. In fact, I’ve just finished a research project: ‘A Qualitative Study into the Psychological Impact of Injuries on Musicians’ at the Guildhall. They asked if I’d like an external supervisor so I requested Professor John Rink who also supervised my dissertation at Royal Holloway ten years ago.

What is it particularly about teaching which appealed to you?

I enjoy helping people discover their potential. Just this week I have been working with a student in her late twenties and she wanted to learn more about technique. After showing her a new method in five minutes she then played a piece and looked at me in surprise and said “I’ve never been able to play something so easily”. I find that really satisfying.

Playing the piano is about expressing your emotions and so in helping students to express their emotions through performance you find out more about who they are. Especially at 18, 19, 20 you’re discovering a lot about who you are so to see students and how much they change is incredible. To feel that you’ve had a part in their development and to see how excited they are by how much they’ve achieved is really special.

What exciting projects are you working on at the moment?

As well as teaching, running master classes and performing I’ve also devised a new concert series called Lullabies at Lunchtime. I had a baby in January and I really wanted to do something musical with him. I wanted to take him to a concert and when he was two weeks old I did but only because I knew he would just sleep all the way through. However, very soon you can’t – they might sit there the whole time and not make a noise but you’re so paranoid that they might you don’t take them.

I wanted to do something that used my skills and was accessible to parents and babies so I came up with the idea of Lullabies at Lunchtime. I perform a classical concert to the standard I would do at any other concert for parents and their children. As well as offering parents a bit of a break, classical music has a lot of proven benefits for babies and it doesn’t matter if the babies make a noise or if one of them crawls under the piano – it is just a really lovely atmosphere.

What connection have you had with Royal Holloway since leaving?

I’ve returned recently to give a master class to current students and perform in the Alumni Concert. I wanted to help the students just

as others helped me during my time. It was particularly enjoyable as Eric Levi, my Performance Tutor while I was an undergraduate, was in the audience - it was a really interesting experience to then be the Performance Tutor in this context!

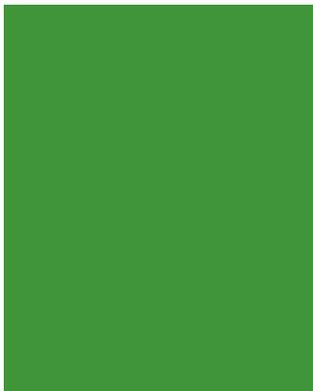
I was also delighted to perform a piece by Peter Wiegold, who was also one of my composition Professors when I was undergraduate, at the Alumni Concert.

It is always nice to return somewhere you have connections with and particularly as I had such a great time at Royal Holloway.

The master class also helped me realise that in 10 years I’ve actually done quite a lot. Hopefully that was beneficial for the students as well as they will have seen that I went through the exact same process as them and it also gave them a flavour of what they could do in 10 years time.

What would be your top tip for students looking to pursue a career in music?

It can be difficult but it’s also exciting because you have to come up with your own ideas of how to combine your love of music with a career. My experiences have demonstrated that it doesn’t matter how good you are as a player, if you sit back no one will ever know. Being a musician is really about creating your own path and being innovative and creative. A music career is so varied you can do anything but you have to do it!



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