



Alumnus David Burke
Subject BA Management and Music
Graduated 1996
Place of Work London Philharmonic Orchestra
Position General Manager and Finance Director

London
Philharmonic
Orchestra

Nearly 80 years after it was founded, the London Philharmonic Orchestra is recognised today as one of the best orchestras on the international stage. The LPO is the resident orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall, and has a long history of recording and broadcasting, as well as working with the UK and Hollywood film industries.

David Burke was the first student to study joint honours Management and Music at Royal Holloway. Having worked with the English Touring Opera for seven years, he is currently the General Manager and Finance Director at the LPO.

Great minds *go on to* great places

Why did you apply to Royal Holloway?

I wanted to be near London, and the campus feel really appealed to me. I knew both departments were highly regarded, and when I visited on an Open Day I just fell in love with the place.

Why did you choose to study Management and Music?

Management and Music are two subject areas that really fascinate me. When it came to applying to university, I could not choose between them and so decided to look for a course that would enable me to explore both. Back then, no university offered such a course, but Royal Holloway offered the opportunity to take a minor elective; so I applied for Management with Music. Once I arrived, I was able to convert this to a joint honours degree with the support of my tutors Derrick Chong and Erik Levi – the course had to be specially approved by the senate.

Tell us about your time at Royal Holloway.

It was incredible. I studied composition with John Woolrich, clarinet with Nicholas Cox, and innovation with Sir Alec Reed. As an 18-year-old from Yorkshire this opened up a whole new world to me. Within minutes of walking into my first-year room at the top of Williamson Block I had made friendships so strong that I still keep in touch with many of them 18 years on.

In my first year I did not make it into the orchestra, but this meant that I had time to explore other areas of interest. In addition to my studies, I helped friends with plays, spent time with the technical crew, learnt how to play pool and the rules of rugby. In my final year I established a 22-piece big band. We begged and borrowed music at the start, but by the end of its first year we had recorded a CD, commissioned music, and earned several thousand pounds towards our own equipment.

What is your favourite memory of the college?

There are so many! Sir Alec Reed used to start his seminars with 'war stories' – two minute tales about his current work issues that invariably left the students in awe. I remember a Christmas Party at Professor Brian Dennis' house (20th-century Music lecturer) where he was encouraged to play a piece he was writing for piano and voice, which still haunts me today. From opening the Summer Ball with twenty music students that made up the big band, to just sitting eating a jacket potato in the Happy Man or putting the world to rights with good friends: these are all memories that make up my Royal Holloway experience.

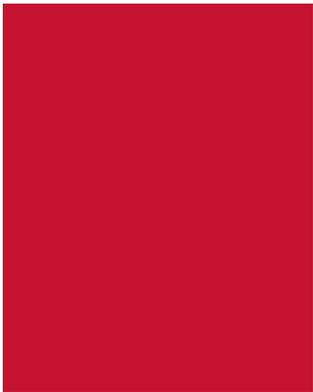
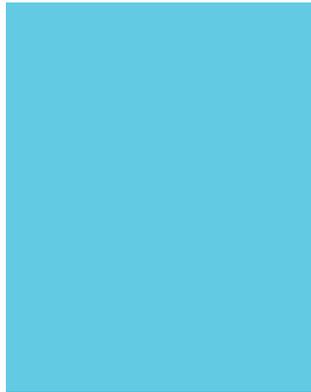
How have your studies helped you in your professional life?

Looking back, I was always going to do the type of job I do now, but when I applied to university I was much less clear. My studies enabled me to gain a greater understanding of all the basics, from marketing to international finance, historic analysis to performance practice. Whether it is appreciating the detail of the work of our musicians, or statistical analysis of the latest ticket information, I probably use 90 percent of what I learnt on a regular basis.



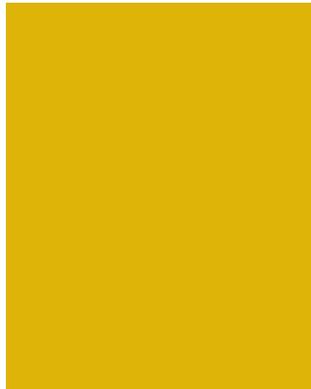
people with passion

“I worked hard to be in the right place at the right time, and that started with choosing Royal Holloway.”



What has been your career path since graduating?

In my second year the College awarded me a bursary to study at the Classical Music Summer School in Dartington, Devon. After I graduated, I returned to the School as a volunteer. There I came into contact with a couple of small chamber groups who needed some administrative support. I topped up the money I earned through this job with work at a local pub to cover the rent! Through my work with these groups I was recommended to others, leading to a full time administrative role organising concerts and festivals from Hackney to Paxos. A few years later, and midway through studying for my MBA, I got the job as Administrative and Finance Manager at the English Touring Opera, where I stayed for seven fantastic years before leaving for my current role at the London Philharmonic Orchestra. I have built on my experience through all my positions, and now have a great network of contacts as well.



What is your current role at the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and what do you do in a typical day?

As the General Manager and Finance Director, every day is different. First and foremost I ensure that the finances of the organisation are kept in order, but if the budgets are good and the systems in place this should be fairly self-running. I try to stretch the budgets as far as they will go in order to get musicians, conductors and soloists of the best possible standard, and to give them the environment in which they can create their best work. The other part of my role involves working with my colleagues to ensure that the administrative side of things runs smoothly. There is no 'typical' day: that is one of the things I love about the role.

What are the best parts of your job?

These are challenging times and the role has been very full on since I joined 15 months ago. However, at the end of it all, I get to walk down the Southbank, listen to a world-class concert and spend the interval talking to people who care very deeply about the organisation that I work for. It's great to feel that I played a part in making it all happen.

Do you have any advice for students looking at working in the arts industry?

Be generous with your time and take every opportunity with both hands. At present, there is a trend within the arts industry for unpaid internships, about which I have very conflicting feelings. The good ones offer a fantastic opportunity to gain first hand experience of how complex arts organisations work, which will really make you stand out when you are applying for jobs. However, I could never have afforded to do one, and am aware of how limiting working for free can be.

I can only talk through my own experiences, and I managed to get a lot of these whilst I was still studying, through managing the big band, listening to the insights of guest business lecturers, helping to produce plays and the scholarship to Dartington. I have been very lucky but that is partly because I worked hard to be in the right place at the right time, and that started with choosing Royal Holloway.

For more Alumni Profiles visit: www.rhul.ac.uk/alumni/profiles/