

Study What's on Get involved About Research Support

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for Performance Science breaks down what taking care of our physical and mental health

When we think of our health it is all too easy to focus on what is unhealthy. On illness and injury, on symptoms and statistics, on treatments and tests. The current pandemic has put this focus into stark relief. But health is not defined only in these negative terms any more than we define a great performance by

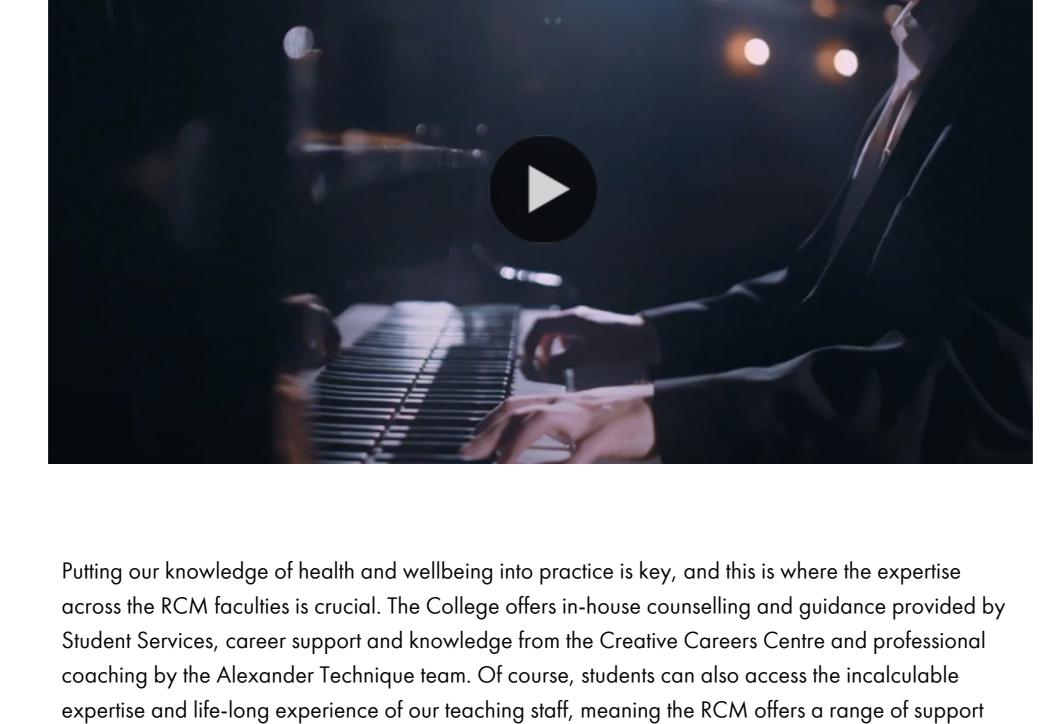
To be healthy is to be well physically, mentally and socially, allowing us to thrive in our lives and navigate the difficulties we face. As musicians we face a particular set of challenges as we learn and create music of incredible complexity and prepare for the pressures of the stage. The pandemic has not

Therefore, just as we care for our compositions, instruments, technique, interpretations and performances, we must give particular attention to ensuring that we ourselves are in optimal condition



The Royal College of Music takes the health and wellbeing of musicians seriously. This starts by understanding what it means and takes to be healthy. Through its Centre for Performance Science the

This work continues with the Healthy Performer project, where we have created a series of over 30 short films that will be released over the rest of the academic year. They highlight the latest research and introduce musicians (and performers of all kinds) to the healthcare specialists who help us stay well.



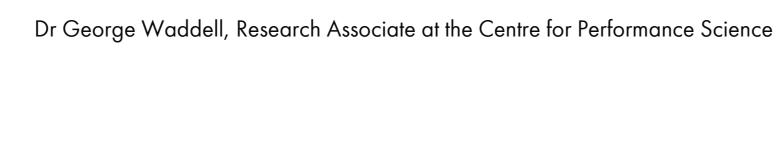
Healthy Musician module and the Healthy Performer film series being available for all students and staff.

allowing us to thrive in our lives and navigate the difficulties we face.

To be healthy is to be well physically, mentally and socially,

The RCM has long embedded health and wellbeing into its curriculum. This year the College offers its

most comprehensive approach yet with all incoming undergraduate students completing the BMus



Physical health

like nowhere else in the world.

Being well means taking small actions and decisions each day. Drawing on the knowledge of the Healthy Musician module, Healthy Performer project and Healthy Conservatoires network, here are the things you can do to be well:

Being well physically ensures that we have the ability to do the things we need to do. As musicians we ask a lot of our bodies, and our professors (and the Alexander Technique team) are there to help balance the necessities of making music with meeting our performance goals sustainably.

Beyond this, we can all do the following in our day-to-day lives:

• Get plenty of good sleep, at least 6-8 hours per night.

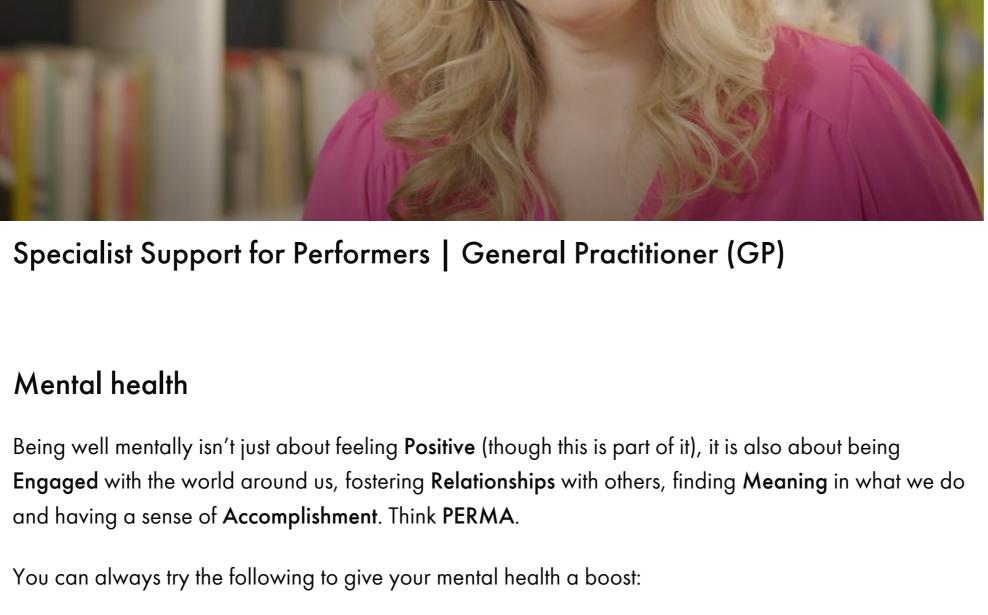
• Be mindful of how you are using your body while you work, whether sitting with a screen or practising your repertoire. Watch for tension and pain and take steps to reduce them. • Aim for at least 30 minutes of mild activity (e.g. a brisk walk) per day.

- If you have any concerns about your health, or if anything doesn't feel right, speak to your GP. Make sure to tell them that you are a musician so they can give you the advice you need or refer to
- the relevant specialist.

• Aim for 150 minutes of moderate activity (e.g. cycling, dancing, football) per week.

• Warm up before practice and performance, take breaks and warm down afterwards.

• Eat a balanced diet focusing on fruit, vegetables and protein, and drink lots of water.



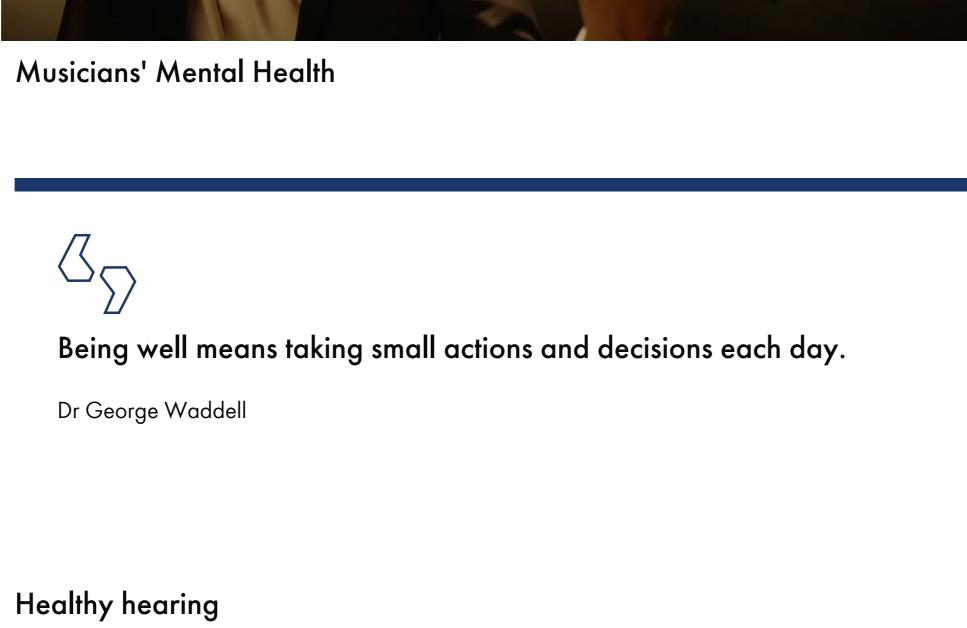
• Connect with another person. Reach out to someone you haven't spoken to in a while. Don't be afraid to speak to a professional. The RCM offers confidential in-house counselling through Student Services and access to Togetherall. • Do something active. Our physical health is closely linked with our mental health, and improving one

can improve the other.

small accomplishments pass by.

• Learn something. We get to do this every day as musicians, but sometimes the amount to learn can feel overwhelming. Take a break by pursuing another interest for an hour. • Find a way to do something for someone else, or to show someone gratitude for something they have done for you.

• Take notice of something that you appreciate or are proud of. Try not to let simple pleasures and



Our hearing slowly and naturally weakens as we age, but this can be accelerated by exposure to lots of noise, as musicians often are. To keep this important sense as strong as possible, try the following:

proofing in your practice space.

hearing. Damage can be permanent, so it is worth taking action before it affects your practice.

• Reduce the sound when you can; turn down headphones, do some pianissimo practice, place sound

• Have a set of custom-fitted musicians' earplugs made. These reduce the overall dynamic without

• Have your hearing tested by an audiologist, and get in touch if you have any concerns about your

distorting or obscuring particular pitches, and can be very useful in practice and rehearsal.

• Be mindful not just of how loud the noise is, but how long you are exposed to it.

Specialist Support for Performers | Audiologist

Healthy practising

include:

across a career.

and beyond the RCM.

As musicians we push ourselves to learn and do things most people only dream of being able to accomplish. Therefore we need to take particular care to make sure that we do not overextend ourselves at the risk of our mental and physical health. Working with our mentors, professors and instructors, we should do our best to: • Determine our long-term (years), medium-term (months), and short-term (days and weeks) goals. What do we want to achieve in our practice? • Make sure our goals are SMART: Specific: What exactly do I want to accomplish? Measurable: How will I know that I'm getting closer, or have achieved my goal? Achievable: Is my goal realistic? Relevant: Do my short-term goals help me achieve my long-term goals? Timely: Is this the right goal to work towards first, or have I skipped a step? • With our goals in place, plan our practice/work time strategically to meet them while aiming to avoid practising while tired, mentally or physically. • Evaluate whether we are meeting our goals, and if not, revise our plans. • Take time to celebrate goals when we achieve them! Healthy careers Not only do we want our careers to be healthy, but we want to be able to meet the pressures of

preparing for them. The RCM Creative Careers Centre can support you with both of these efforts and is

• Identify and establish a support network - no one can build a career alone. Find your mentors within

• Embrace technology and its potential to create new opportunities and reach new audiences.

available to access for up to five years post-graduation. Things that they suggest you can do now

• Seek inspiration from those within your industry and beyond. How are others adapting to current circumstances and how could you adapt those principles? • Finances can cause a lot of stress. Take time to understand yours and the different ways that musicians can make their living. • Reflect on the skills you have, those you wish to develop and the different ways you can use them

- Healthy performance The act of performance can be difficult and sometimes walking on stage and facing our audience or

• Practise for performance. Find ways to make key practice sessions feel more like performance, such

• Share any anxieties you have with others. You are not alone in feeling the pressure of performance,

• Plan your backstage routine, and how you will remain in control. • Visualise the performance as you would like it to go. Focus on the positive, not the negative, possibilities. • Avoid drugs and alcohol as tools to combat anxiety. They cause more problems in the long term.

as recording yourself or wearing your concert attire.

Healthy Conservatoires Network

There are things we can do to prepare for this:

judges can feel overwhelming.

and others can help.

The Royal College of Music and Centre for Performance Science are involved in research to understand how the coronavirus pandemic has affected those in the arts. To take part in this research, please visit the HEartS Professional website and complete the survey.

Dr George Waddell

Article type

George is a Research Associate in Performance Science at the Centre for Performance Science and an honorary Research Associate at Imperial

On kindness and

compassion

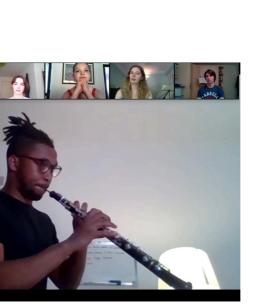


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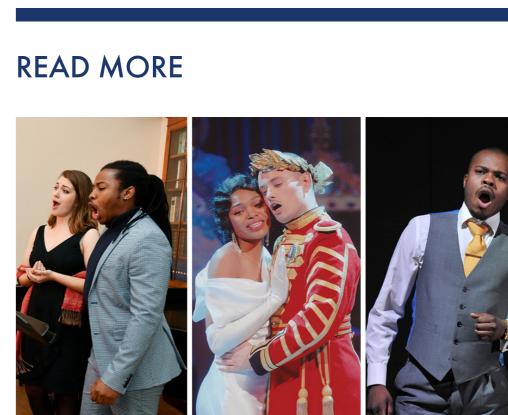
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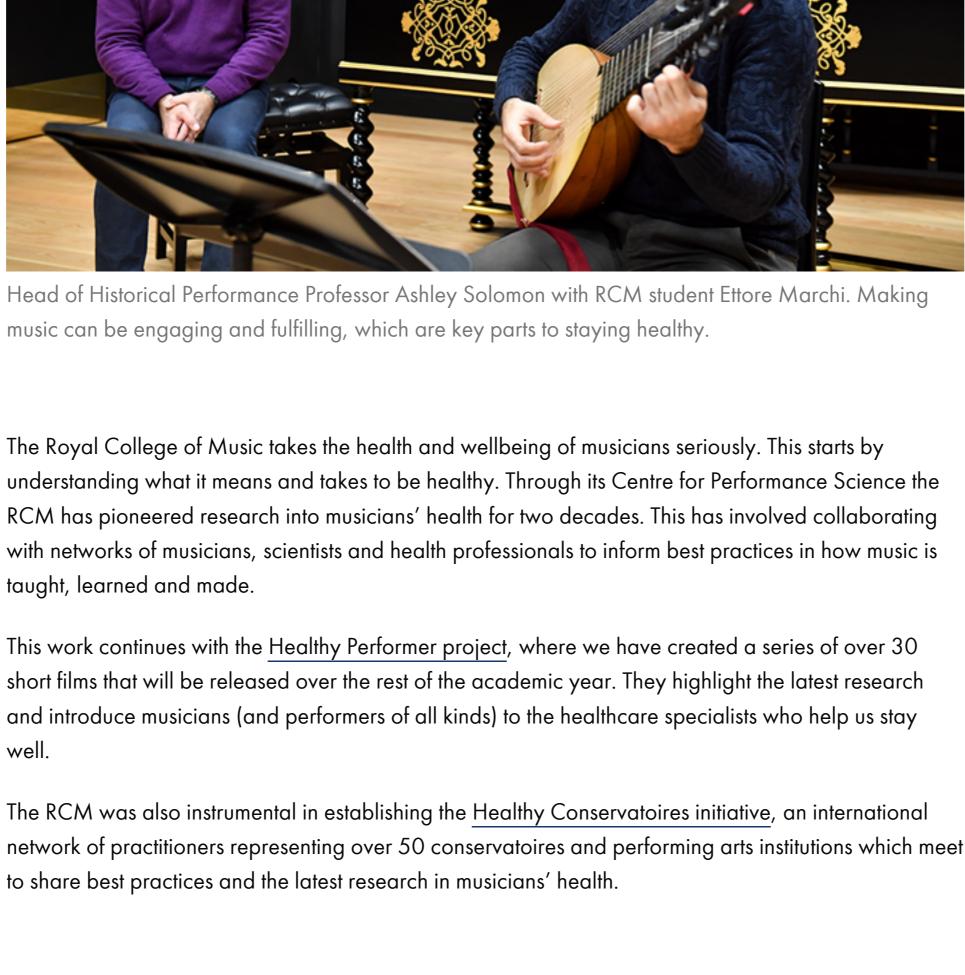
RCM students and alumni star in Theater

production of Gershwin's Porgy and Bess in Vienna this

an der Wien's Porgy and Bess

October.

Four RCM singers are to perform lead roles in a



a lack of wrong notes. made this any easier. to have long and healthy careers.

FEATURE AUTUMN 2020 Being a healthy musician Share #UpbeatOnline What does it mean to be a heathy musician? Here, Dr George Waddell from the Centre looks like in practice.

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