

PRESS RELEASE

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The Guildhall School of Music & Drama's fifth international Reflective Conservatoire Conference considered the challenges and opportunities of Artists as Citizens



The Guildhall School of Music & Drama hosted its fifth international Reflective Conservatoire Conference Tuesday 20 – Friday 23 February: over 300 delegates of leading performers, professionals, teachers and researchers with representation from 22 countries gathered over four days to address the key issues in Higher Education within music and drama.

This year's theme was Artists as Citizens, raising fundamental questions about what it is to be an artist and to bring work into society, to connect with society, to respond to – and dialogue with – society. Discussions centred around five core threads:

- Concepts and significance of artistic citizenship: what does the idea mean and how might it come alive?
- Promising new practices: highlighted practices that reconsider relationships to context or audiences, that comment on local/global issues or that are inclusive/socially engaged
- Enabling artist as citizens, from cradle to grave: what does this mean for all levels of training, where does training and citizenship converge?
- Organisational development and leadership: identified strong examples of how organisations and arts education can embrace activism
- Impact and advocacy: considered good practices for catalysing artistic citizenship

Professor Helena Gaunt, Vice-Principal & Director of Guildhall Innovation said: *'This year's conference created a powerful platform to sharpen current debate and consider next practice, connecting this to the latest evidence base. I am delighted that diverse contributions have firmly established exciting opportunities for music and theatre practitioners in society and have underlined the urgency of some immediate challenges.'*

Keynote speeches from academics and industry experts provoked delegates to reflect, disrupt and ask difficult questions of the current industry climate; whilst academic papers and practical workshops and performances considered the challenges and opportunities of artistic citizenship; and a student performance on the Barbican highwalk shocked audiences with its provocative perspective on the limits to and for the artist.

Professor Geoffrey Crossick (Distinguished Professor of Humanities, SAS, University of London) spoke about his AHRC project *Understanding the Value of the Arts*, highlighting how the value of the arts lies in processes, not objects. He proposed that the role of the arts in this context is not to provide ready answers but to offer reflective ways of engaging with the issues surrounding the civic realm where citizenship is defined and claimed.

Vikki Heywood's CBE (Chairman, RSA) keynote speech reflected that we are living in a world of increasing opportunity for creative people and their audiences: arts venues are flourishing and becoming spaces for the community, whilst the wider cultural sector has

added £26.8bn to the GVA of the UK economy in 2016. However, this new growth also brings challenges. In order to nurture the artists of the future, to recruit a diverse range of talented students, and to equip teachers to create effective institutions; boards, management and teachers need to stop resisting change – in how our institutions recruit, who we train, and how we train them. Those who make art and those who train artists need to come together to share best practice and learn lessons from failure.

Heywood was joined by **David Lan**, former Artistic Director, Young Vic, to explore these issues, arguing that artists for whom there can never be too much art in the world, or who try to change the world through art, are true artists as citizens. We are all artistic citizens of wherever we find ourselves, be it in our borough, city, country or planet. He focused on artists, audiences, and theatre makers coming together to change the world: the mere premise of artistic citizens promises change through culture.

Helen Marriage MBE (Director and Founder, Artichoke Trust) spoke about her pioneering work, bringing the arts into the public realm, highlighting the need for breaking and disrupting practice in order to be innovative and transformative.

Jodie Ginsberg (Index on Censorship) chaired a panel discussion with contributions from sector experts, asking the question: how free are our performing arts? It marked fifty years since the abolition of the 1737 Theatres Act which had controlled plays in Great Britain, and also launched Shakespeare's Globe's series on *Shakespeare and Censorship*.

What does the Reflective Conservatoire Conference aim to achieve?

- Illuminate the concept and significance of artistic citizenship: what does the idea mean? How might it come alive? What civic responsibility does it signify?
- Highlight new practices that are developing the momentum of artistic citizenship: practices that reconsider relationships to context or audience, practices that comment on local or global issues, practices that are inclusive or socially engaged
- Find ways to enable the artist as citizen: what does this mean for professional training, formal education, informal learning, and continuing professional development? Where does training and citizenship converge?
- Identify strong examples of how organisations and arts education can embrace activism: what are the supports for leadership, partnerships, cultural change?
- Advocate for the impact of the arts: consider good practices for catalysing artistic citizenship

The Guildhall School is provided by the City of London Corporation.

www.gsmd.ac.uk

For further press information please contact:

Rebecca Driver Media Relations

Tel: 020 7247 1894

Email: rebecca@rdmr.co.uk | ruth@rdmr.co.uk

Web: www.rdmr.co.uk

Notes to Editors

Reflective Conservatoire Conference

This was the fifth Reflective Conservatoire Conference. It started in 2006 and takes place every three years to bring research and practice together to discuss the key questions facing us as artists, performers, researchers, teachers. Themes over the years have included: 2006: Apprentices and Sorcerers; 2009: Building Connections; 2012: Performing at the Heart of Knowledge and 2015: Creativity and Changing Culture.

Guildhall School of Music & Drama

The Guildhall School is a vibrant, international community of young musicians, actors and theatre technicians in the heart of the City of London. Twice-rated No.1 specialist institution in the UK by the Guardian University Guide, and recently selected as one of the top ten institutions for performing arts in the world (QS World University Rankings 2016), the School is a global leader of creative and professional practice which promotes innovation, experiment and research, with over 900 students in higher education, drawn from nearly 60 countries around the world. Research at the Guildhall School explores fundamental questions about the creative arts. It embraces a wide range of disciplines within music and drama including composition, performance, pedagogy, historical musicology, music and literature studies, cultural history, electronic music, and music therapy.