

PULLING OUT ALL THE STOPS

The Royal College of Music's new organ in the Amaryllis Fleming Concert Hall, designed and built by Flentrop Orgelbouw, is an exceptional new facility for the College. Thanks to Kingdom Music Education Group and other generous supporters and named in honour of James Zheng Huang HonRCM, the organ will enhance students' learning and feature regularly in performance.



Designed to complement the gilding of the Amaryllis Fleming Concert Hall, the organ's eye-catching casework is resonant with the centuries-old Dutch and German tradition, and echoes historical instruments from those regions. Its mechanical action allows the greatest sense of feel and control for the player, whilst the careful blend and balance of stops gives the maximum versatility of repertoire with a coherent and complementary sound.

'Dutch organ builders Flentrop Orgelbouw were commissioned after a careful selection process,' says RCM Artistic Director Stephen Johns. 'Their combination of design, historical understanding, quality of material and construction, and musical knowledge and experience put them well ahead. The result is an organ that fulfils all the needs of the RCM performance and teaching programme.'

'The new organ is an instrument of integrity, flexibility and, above all, musicality,' says David Graham, professor in charge of organ at the RCM. 'It is truly thrilling to play and will be a fantastic teaching facility for future generations of organists.' Those future generations follow in the footsteps of the Royal College of Music's distinguished roster of alumni, including Dame Gillian Weir, Ralph Downes, Wayne Marshall, Thomas Trotter and Nicholas Danby.

In February, the organ featured in a performance of Richard Strauss' *Alpine Symphony* conducted by Bernard Haitink. The complete performance is available to watch on medici.tv.

MEET THE SUPPORTER

In January, the organ was unveiled in a special celebration with Founding Patrons Kingdom Music Education Group (KMEG), organ builders Flentrop Orgelbouw and special guests.

Upbeat spoke to KMEG's Director **James Zheng Huang** to find out why they are supporting this magnificent instrument, and how they hope to inspire future generations of musicians.

When did your relationship with the Royal College of Music begin?

I was Managing Director at Lang Lang Music World, which is one of the best piano training centres. The centre invited RCM Professor Vanessa Latache [Head of Keyboard & Associate Director for Partnerships in China] to teach and give masterclasses to the students there and they began to learn and grow so much. Vanessa recommended some of her colleagues, such as the pianist Gordon Fergus-Thompson and I was invited to visit the Royal College of Music when China's First Lady came in 2015. So we have been working together for a few years now.

What attracted you to supporting the new RCM organ?

I am an oboist, and the organ is similar to a wind instrument as it produces sound through the pipes. KMEG are Founding Patrons of the More Music: Reimagining the Royal College of Music Campaign, and as soon as I found out there would be a new organ I knew I wanted to support it. I made the right choice – it's a very beautiful instrument.

You performed with the organ when it was unveiled in January – what did you think of the instrument?

It was actually the first time I had played with an organ but I felt that it just embraced me. I performed the second movement of Marcello's Concerto for Oboe and felt very comfortable and the sound was so pure.

Alongside my piece we also heard many different organ works – I can sense that the intonation and the tone quality are really beautiful and sweet. I think we probably have one of the best organs in the world.



I studied in America at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and while I was there I saw an organ for the first time in my life, because they are very rare in China. What's interesting is that it was by the same builder – Flentrop! So the first organ I ever saw was a Flentrop organ. It was fate!

Why is it important to you to support music students?

When I first studied music in China I had a good teacher, which gave me the opportunity to go to one of the best schools. Later when I attended Oberlin, I had another wonderful teacher who played with the Philadelphia Orchestra. So I believe good teaching is really important and I'm excited that KMEG and the RCM are working together to build the best music training centres in China, to give this opportunity to other young people.

Where did your passion for music start?

My father is a director of three major opera companies in China, and he also had a symphony orchestra. When I was younger I sang in a children's choir, but my music teacher said I should choose an instrument because eventually my voice would change. One day I went to see my father's rehearsal of *Swan Lake*, and the melody was so beautiful and I thought wow – the oboe looks great! After just one year and three months of studying I was accepted into the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, so I was very lucky.

What words of advice would you give to RCM graduates as they set about trying to establish their careers?

I would say that you should have a goal and work very hard. Be generous with your talent and share the wonderful gift of music as widely as you can.

Opposite

The new RCM organ

Above

James Zheng Huang with RCM Director Colin Lawson and Lake Zhang Mozi and Dennis Yu Xudong.