

Time Capsule Transcript: Carlo Cenciarelli and Barbara Gentili

Carlo [00:00:01] I was wondering, when did you first become aware of the RMA?

Barbara [00:00:07] Oh, well, it took a while. It took a while. I came to the UK for my PhD in 2014, and, because it was not funded, I worked throughout, so I didn't have much time for conference-going or, you know, in general, research activities outside the work I had to put into the PhD project. And then, after my transfer exam, from Royal Holloway, where I started, I moved to the Royal College of Music, and there Natasha Loges started to talk to me about the Association, and she was really enthusiastic about the activities they ran, especially for students. So, I became a member. But then, it was not until 2018 that I went to an annual meeting. Then, I realised that the Royal Musical Association was the breath [i.e. soul] of the discipline in the UK. And it was [a] really, really inspiring experience. But what about you? You came to the UK at an earlier stage, no?

Carlo [00:01:32] Yeah, that's right, yes: I came kind of right after high school. I did, like, a year of university in Italy, and I was studying composition at conservatoire, but then I decided to study music at university, here in the UK. And actually, I, it's funny, because I became aware of the RMA almost as soon as I arrived – like, as a first-year undergraduate. So, I was at Southampton, and I remember going to this film-music conference that was organised by Robynn Stilwell, who was there at the time. And it was at least partly sponsored by the RMA. I don't remember exactly now whether it was an RMA – was entirely, you know, funded by the RMA or not. But I remember becoming aware, you know, of this kind of, these three letters: the kind of, the RMA as a brand. You know, there were some really interesting people there and some big names. I remember this amazing paper by Matthew Head about music and eroticism in *The English Patient*, which went completely over my head. So, yeah, that was the first time I became aware of the RMA, probably not quite understanding what it was, as a first-year undergraduate student, and as, you know, coming, as a foreign student. And that was the very first symposium I ever attended. I'm not even sure I exactly understood what was going on and what it was. But yes, it was basically the RMA as a brand was pretty much attached to my very first experience of, kind of, scholarship in action, so to speak. Yeah, and I feel like that might be the case for quite a few students, actually, that you kind of become aware of the existence of the RMA, even if you don't exactly immediately get a sense of what their broader scope is, or the institution, how the institution works, of course. But yeah, it's kind of, I don't know, I feel it's kind of ubiquitous in a sense: it feels like it's really deeply rooted. I think that's quite indicative of that, for me.

Barbara [00:03:44] So, did you go to the Students' conferences?

Carlo [00:03:48] I did. I think that was, like, maybe not the first conference I presented at, but maybe the second one. I remember it was at Surrey, actually.

Barbara [00:03:57] Oh.

Carlo [00:03:58] Yes. And that's the thing: like, for me at least, I really remember those early, kind of early experiences, in terms of conferences. They really stay with you, I think. What was your experience like, in terms of the conferences?

Barbara [00:04:12] Very different from what I was expecting. For a start, people would talk to me, even though they had no idea who I was, which was refreshing. It was very intellectually lively, an

open environment, very democratic, with many people genuinely interested in ideas. And it gave me really a sense [that] I could go somewhere with the work I was doing. Freya Jarman came to me after I gave my paper and asked me if I was interested in sending an article to the journal. So, you can imagine my surprise. Also, I gave a paper on – it was constructions of femininity in post-unification Italy, and the article ended up to be an essay on the singing of Enrico Caruso. So, that, also, I regard as another sign of being open to ideas and listening to people with a sympathetic ear. You too, you also published your article with the RMA journal.

Carlo [00:05:26] Yeah, yeah, that's right yeah: it was the first time I was submitting an article to a journal. I also think, like, from the conferences and from the kind of material that was coming out in *JRMA*, you got this sense of, like, a very welcoming association: this sense of, you know, like, there was no sense when I sent the article, no sense, like, from editors or reviewers, you know, like, that this is not a proper topic for the journal or anything like that. This was a film-music article. And, you know – I'm talking like a properly old man now – but this was over, you know, 12 years ago. So, there weren't many articles on film by then, but again, there was no sense of like, no, I think you don't get any sense of gatekeeping, you know, from the RMA. I think that's how I look at the RMA more generally, although I don't know how similar musicological societies are elsewhere, but I suspect that's quite distinctive of the RMA: the fact that there isn't a sense of, like, policing the boundaries of the discipline.

Barbara [00:06:31] It is: have you never been to the Società Italiana di Musicologia, for instance?

Carlo [00:06:36] No, I have no experience, actually, of musicological societies elsewhere.

Barbara [00:06:42] Okay: that's interesting.

Carlo [00:06:44] How does your experience compare in terms of...

Barbara [00:06:48] So, I do not have a musicological background. I am a child of the conservatoire, and then my Bachelors' degree is in Law. But, from my PhD on, I started going to conferences in Italy. I am a quite regular attendee of the Società Italiana di Musicologia annual conference, which is the equivalent of the RMA annual meeting. And yeah, it's – how can I put it? It is a more formal environment and there is less, I think it's fair to say, interdisciplinary scope to it, although things are changing in that respect quite rapidly. It is smaller scale, just in terms of people involved: the UK musicological scene is more populated; the RMA conferences are bigger in terms of numbers, compared to those of the Società Italiana di Musicologia. Therefore, the vision of the discipline is more traditional, or tends to be more traditional and more anchored to the actual music, generally speaking – which can be refreshing at times. It is not as easy-going and welcoming as the RMA, but of course this is my impression coming from outside, because I am seen, I am considered there as a non-Italian entity if this makes sense!

Carlo [00:08:24] You are more of an outsider there.

Barbara [00:08:27] 100%, yeah, totally, yeah. And, so, because you are in this film-study field and so your branch of scholarship is really interdisciplinary, do you feel that the RMA responded well to this? And, I mean, in a way you said it when you talked about your...

Carlo [00:08:51] Yeah, yeah, exactly. As it happens actually, because I actually organised the student conference when I was a PhD student, at King's [College, London], back in the day. And we

organised that and I remember the theme was interdisciplinarity – you know, again, when the word was still, trendy, back then. This was with Amy Bliers Carruthers. Yeah. I never, I never got any sense of, controlling, kind of policing the boundaries of, of the discipline at all. And I think that's why I felt the confidence of approaching the journal with film-music material and things like that. I also got the sense of the RMA being a sort of bottom-up organisation, if you see what I mean. And a sense of being, kind of, almost a kind of grassroots thing, so not so much dictating the agenda, [but] responding to changes and providing, and kind of facilitating for change to happen in the discipline. So, yeah, I think that's been my experience also in terms of expanding the boundaries of what is considered to be a relevant topic for music studies and what kind of literature, you know, what is the kind of core of the discipline and how distributed that kind of discipline can be across the humanities. So, yes, that's very much been my experience. But your work also is drawing on a wide range of materials, so what's been your experience of that? And also just, you know, more generally, I mean, do you see that there are changes that are taking place? Did the RMA play an important role in understanding what, how music studies is done in the UK and how it can be changed? I don't know what's, this is a very vague question, but like, do you have any thoughts on this?

Barbara [00:10:51] No, it's an excellent question. Yeah, both, the meetings and the journal really sparked my interdisciplinary approach and helped me to think bigger. I really started with the what and the how in my PhD: it was really analytical and based on early recorded performances. But then I think it was the encounter of so many scholars through the RMA, that really projected me in the bigger picture. Why going beyond my specific focus and my piece of research, the project on which I'm working right now has been a contributing factor in making me question what the relevance is of what I do. So, it pushed me to get out there and read the work of others even beyond music. In fact, I would say that in recent years I have read perhaps most in other disciplines – theatre-studies, literature studies – than music *per se*. So, I think what you said, that the Association is also inspired by the work: it's not a closed, rigid, structure. And really the work of its members shapes musicology, according to what is happening, what the members do. That is really beautiful. That makes the discipline lively and, lively in the future.

Carlo [00:12:44] Yeah, well, that's a pretty, that's a pretty good point to end on, actually – also because we need to try and stay within, you know, our amount of time so as not to reinforce any stereotypes of, you know, Italians. That's another difference, right? With conferences in Italy, that people tend to speak well beyond their....

Barbara [00:13:04] Yeah: we are getting better at that.

Carlo [00:13:05] We're getting better, we're getting better. All right.

Barbara [00:13:09] Okay. It was really nice to speak to you.

Carlo [00:13:11] Yeah, same, same: okay.