

Royal College of Music.

It's been a busy and exciting beginning of term for the RCM viola department. It was kick-started with a captivating performance of Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben* by the RCM symphony orchestra, conducted by Venezuelan conductor, Rafel Payare. We were also lucky enough to receive an inspiring masterclass from Avri Levitan, who is recognised worldwide as an outstanding viola soloist. He focused on helping us realise that we have a habit to overcomplicate aspects of the music, our playing technique etc., and that it is useful to break things down and simplify them.

The buzz hasn't stopped during the last couple of weeks. We had a visit from the world's most highly regarded string luthier and dealer in the world, Florian Leonhard. Florian gave the string faculty an interesting and highly useful talk on the upkeep of our instruments. This half of term came to an end with a performance of Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony with the RCM Philharmonic Orchestra - I was lucky enough to lead the viola section. We were under the baton of Holly Mathieson and the concert was a huge success.

Helena Bartlett

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