

Edward Keenan reports from the Royal Academy of Music

The past couple of months have been busy at the Royal Academy of Music. During March we had our first array of assessments. For the early undergraduates this contains a comprehensive technical exam with scales and studies being the main focus. The second year Master's students are required to perform a major concerto from memory – needless to say there was a lot of Hindemith and Bartok viola concertos to be heard around the Academy during this time.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of March we were joined by Garth Knox for a day of workshops which culminated in a concert held that evening. He explored his 'viola spaces' – a series of innovative studies which are designed to push one's technique and acclimatise oneself to the modern demands of contemporary music. During his workshop, he began working on the studies without the bow. This was very interesting as he explored a great variety of pizzicato sound, something he rightly said feels neglected in general. I particularly liked his emphasis on working on things in a totally relaxed manner. If one of the students was struggling with an element of the study, Garth emphasised that the only way to learn was to calmly apply the technique. If it was applied in a rushed or unthoughtful manner, the point would be missed and the body wouldn't enjoy playing the music.

During his concert that evening, I was blown away by the clear dramatic impulse of his performance. There was a clear element of theatre – he performed the pieces and really drew us into his own world. It was very inspiring and has made me strive to bring more showmanship to my own performances.

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