

Issue 9
Winter 2024

RAM
page

RAM
page

RESOLUTE
edition

A new
perspective
on rotting
food

An interview
with travel
writer Tomasz
Mazur

Brand new
wisdom from
Agony Aunt

Editor-in-Chief

Kennedy Blair Miller

Design and Production

Kennedy Blair Miller
Kiersten Gustafson

Contributors

Agony Aunt
Toby Anderson
Eric Davis
Kennedy Blair Miller
Mary Offer
Emily Trubshaw

Editors

Kennedy Blair Miller
Emily Trubshaw

Artwork

Jess Bull Anderson
Ruby Howells
Adam Zolty

Front Cover Design:

Jess Bull Anderson
@jessbullanderson.art

Sponsor

Schott Music London
48 Great
Marlborough Street,
London
W1F 7BB

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Editor's Note

Welcome to a new year and a new term from the RAMpage team! This is my first RAMpage edition as Editor-in-Chief, and I am so grateful for all the writers and artists who contributed to this fantastic collection of work.

For this year's winter edition, the RAMpage team decided to play on the idea of New Year's resolutions with an exploration of that root word - resolute. We discussed that the goals we set at the beginning of each year are rarely 'resolute' at all, but often wavering and short-lived. This disconnect led our team to explore other stories that challenge what it means to be strong, successful, and powerful. What we found is that often, the personal failures and setbacks we experience allow us to reframe difficulty and develop a more human and nuanced perspective on our dreams and aspirations. We hope that after reading this edition, you will also think more deeply about what it means to be strong and resolute.

Now, enough of my philosophising! As you turn the page (or scroll down), I guarantee inspiring stories, beautiful artwork, and compelling ideas await you! Making her third print appearance, Agony Aunt is back with more sound advice for RAM's most pressing issues, including the new lift and the agonies of Asimut.

I must offer tremendous thanks to the outstanding RAMpage team for their stellar contributions and for making my first edition a work I am abundantly proud to share with the world.

Happy reading!

Kennedy x



Resolutions of an Artist

an interview with Tomasz Mazur

By Emily Trubshaw



Pictured: travel writer Tomasz Mazur

To be an artist is to be creative, imaginative, and inspired. However, we must also be resolute, aspiring, and determined. I spoke with Polish author Tomasz Mazur about his experience pursuing his passion of writing and world travel. 'I simply wanted to understand the world', Tomasz told me. 'That was what intrigued me. I was born into this world, and everything was, and still is, fascinating.'

As the socialist regime in Poland crumbled at the end of the 80s and capitalism took over, Tomasz made the most of his situation and set up an independent publishing company selling travel guides; he invested all his savings and decided to make his dream a reality. Tomasz was hugely inspired by the richness of culture that he encountered, initially in Turkey and the Middle East, but soon realised that this sort of career required the mindset of a businessman, not an artist. Not only did he experience difficulties editing and self-publishing his books (this was back when the internet

had only just begun to develop), but it was equally hard to sell and market his work. Tomasz had emigrated to Germany and was unable to return to Poland, making his life immensely more difficult as he struggled to communicate with bookshops. All the while, Tomasz was fighting to stay afloat in a new foreign culture and society. When Tomasz reflected on this difficult period, he asked himself, 'After all, I wanted to travel – and what was I doing here? I was sitting in a complete bureaucracy.'

Tomasz was essentially forced to give up his passion out of financial necessity and lack of support. Initially, he worked for an IT company before finding a teaching position at a local school. Still, Tomasz dreamt of pursuing writing full-time. He told me, 'You cannot imagine anything more beautiful than combining your passion with earning money – this is perfection.' Tomasz remains incredibly disciplined in practicing his craft, because for him, it is inextricably



Pictured: Tomasz Mazur as a child

tied to his very sense of self. 'The writer is always at work, even at night – like musicians,' he told me. 'If you work in a factory, after eight hours you can say "goodbye", but we work permanently until death, and maybe after death, who knows!' He describes this feeling as one of being 'torn apart'. Despite all this, Tomasz has never given up; even when he has had to change careers, writing remains a huge part of his life, and he spends every spare moment dedicating his mind and thoughts to his passion. With the money earned from his regular job, he travels to different parts of the world twice a year in search of knowledge and inspiration for his books.

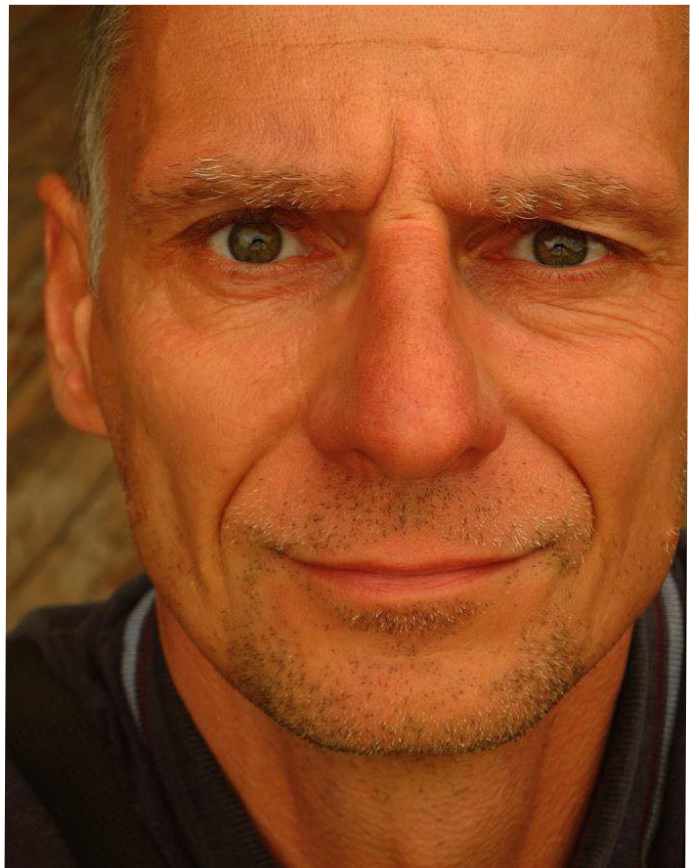
Initially, writing was something Tomasz did for himself, to learn more about these fascinating cultures, philosophies, and religions. Then, this passion morphed into a pursuit of self-improvement; he wanted to open his mind to different points of view so that he could become deeply embedded in various cultures and languages. Then, he began to experiment with his own language more, playing with structure, grammar, and inference. His writing became an art.

As Tomasz related his life story, I couldn't help but make parallels between his experience and my own in the music world.

After having completed boat trips across both the Atlantic and Pacific, a 5000km cycle across China, and many expeditions to India, Tomasz has become convinced that culture is a continual evolution and therefore believes that we have a responsibility to protect our planet. He now wants to try and make change through his writing and to have an impact on the world around him. Tomasz told me, 'Culture is an ongoing natural evolution, and we are responsible for how this evolution continues...there is wisdom in nature, and I am interested in how this wisdom is built...This is the topic of a lifetime! Not only do we change the world, but I would also go further – we create it. It isn't true that each of us has the same objective, clear vision of reality. By writing or playing an instrument, we offer people a specific vision, specific emotions.'

As Tomasz related his life story, I couldn't help but make parallels between his experience and my own in the music world. From feeling the strain of life's harsh realities on his artistic dreams to desperately wishing to use art as a vessel for change, Tomasz's life is a real and inspiring testament to the power of discipline, passion, and perspective for any artist.

This dichotomy is central to an artist's purpose: not only do we ourselves evolve as musicians or writers, but we also dedicate all our energies to improving the world or showing others how beautiful the world can be. And of course, evolution is never-ending – our whole lives are dedicated to it.



Discovering Musical Identity Through Nature

By Mary Offer

As the darkness closes in more keenly in the winter months, it veils our British scenery in an ashy haze prone to rainstorms and ever-cloudy afternoons, often entirely devoid of sunshine. This can blur our creativity as musicians, as the barren trees and dreary greyness offer minimal motivation. However, it is often a oneness with nature that allows for contemplation, as the musician is granted a small window of precious time to consider their own identity and unique gifts within a densely populated musical landscape.



The bleak haze of icy, vapid landscapes can be truly extraordinary to experience, especially in the northern hemisphere, where we are fortunate to see a few dim hours of daylight in the winter months. These devastatingly cold and bitter landscapes utterly engulf their inhabitants, shrouding them in a sense of isolation and insignificance in contrast with the vast surroundings. Perhaps it is this incomprehensibility of the natural world which has entirely altered the trajectory of several composers' careers. Ultimately, these composers sought their musical inspiration from the same universal sonic foundations: the harmonic series often plays a central role in this process, drawing composers towards natural resonance and simplicity within an ever more complex musical world.

Arvo Pärt is one such musician who spent a hiatus from composition close within nature in the mid-1970s, emerging with a vastly different compositional style which was directly connected to the natural world. His tintinnabuli style, meaning 'little bell', was founded on the overtone series of a carillon bell, the vibrations of which create partials which are even more connected than those of a stringed instrument. This approach leads to an instinctive, resonant sound world for his later works, emulating the sound of a bell when struck, and essentially prolonging a single sonority throughout the course of an entire phrase or piece.

Pärt's *Für Alina*, one of his first compositions in this resonant style, elongates the presence of a single sonority throughout the work, mirroring the striking of a bell. This simplicity and resonance defines much of Pärt's later output, which was often informed by Gregorian chant. Indeed, during his compositional hiatus he spent much of his time studying plainchant, seeking a simplicity and organicism within the somewhat chaotic musical landscape of the late 1900s. He depicts this free, human quality of Gregorian chant with his notation, giving interpretative discretion to the performer through a lack of tempo and metre, allowing each pitch to resonate freely and without constriction. *Für Alina* can be seen to reflect a neo-medieval sound world, resonating in the aeolian mode and decorating a simple line with complementary resonance, perhaps as a *cantus firmus*.



Pärt sought a resonant simplicity mirroring that of the raw, human quality of medieval chant. His resulting emphasis on consonance, resolution, and simplicity proved innovative in a musical world consistently growing ever more dissonant and complex. This new style of composition created an era of New Resolution, in which the progression of each work was dependent on the resolution of a single sonority to its most resonant state. The sound of bells permeates all Pärt's later works in the tintinnabuli style, as he discovers a compositional identity which is at one with his natural sur-

roundings. Pärt also discovers a sense of his own personal identity through this isolation in nature and pursuit of resonance, as the resonance of the bells echoes throughout his daily life as a new member of the Christian Orthodox faith. Perhaps a oneness with nature in these darker months can encourage us to explore our own musical identity, allowing a sense of freedom and creativity uninterrupted by the hectic complexity of everyday life.

All artwork by Ruby Howells

Musings at the Museum

a reflection on 'Diva' at the V&A

By Kennedy Blair Miller

I look up from a sea of ballgowns and corsets to the dome ceiling of the Victoria & Albert Museum, where photos of the most esteemed 'divas' of the past two centuries are projected like divine constellations blessing their shrines below. It's a fitting visual for the 'Diva' exhibit at the V&A, where the viewer learns within seconds of stepping in the doorway that the word was derived from the Latin word for 'goddess'. The word was first used in the 19th century to describe female opera singers, whose otherworldly talent and stage presence gave them a fame and status that women rarely held before. However, the viewer quickly learns that these onstage skills were currency for holding this status, making any offstage display of power or agency a topic for discussion at best and a cultural offense at worst. This dichotomy quickly led to the word's dual association with both great talent and great contention.

The duality of the diva is further demonstrated in the exhibit's two 'acts', each with its own floor of displays. The first, 'Creation', concerns the opera singers and film stars that first inhabited the diva positionality, and whose offstage behaviours led to the mystique that has become as vital to the idea of the diva as the talents that earned them the title in the first place. Act II, 'Reclamation', explores the modern-day equivalent to the historic diva, and it is a floor dedicated to modern pop singers who similarly maintain an unapologetic and intriguing offstage life. Headphones given out at the entrance are controlled by the space itself, automatically switching to a music sample of whichever diva the viewer is encountering at a given time. Along with this aural encounter, the viewer simultaneously gazes into a shrine-like display, most of which contain a portrait of a diva, a description of their onstage talents and offstage

mystique, and a real clothing item they once wore in a famed performance. This two-fold encounter emphasizes the duality that surrounds the diva, constantly reminding the viewer that these performers had an onstage and offstage self, each of which informed the public's opinions of the other.



Pictured: Maria Callas in Verdi's opera *La Traviata* at Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, 1958, England. Houston Rogers © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

After walking through the timeline of the supposed evolution of the diva between Acts I and II, I was actually more inclined to believe that nothing has particularly changed. If the modern pop singer indeed exists in the same realm as the operatic diva at the height of opera's cultural popularity, then the offstage behaviours of today's divas undoubtedly continue to trigger a cultural unease that leaves us wavering in our support of their onstage talents. The wardrobe of Billie Eilish, the social media presence of Lil Nas X, and the political opinions of Taylor Swift are just as vital to their celebrity as their music is. The weight losses, weight gains, pregnancies, divorces, politics, and private jet miles of the modern celebrity are often the centre of the obsession, controversy, and intrigue that cast them as today's divas.

I was actually more inclined to believe that nothing has particularly changed.

The exhibit suggests that a reclamation of the word 'diva' has taken place among modern celebrities. In the introduction to Act II, a display reads, 'Now, the definition of a diva has exploded across different types of entertainment, as performers of all genders reclaim the word as an expression of their art, voice, and sense of self.' Instead of letting the controversies surrounding their offstage life disvalue the talent and creativity they possess, they live unapologetically, knowing that their identities as an artist and as a human are inextricably linked. But to argue that the modern diva is responsible for the reclaiming of this positionality is to suggest a sort of indifference from the original diva regarding her own status. Therefore, perhaps a more accurate word than reclamation would be freedom. As the exhibit aptly suggests, the original diva was trapped in a duality of being an onstage divinity and an offstage controversy because of her lack of offstage rights. The new freedom available to today's divas allows them to be explicitly empowered in a way that the operatic diva could not. The sense of power, creativity, and agency held by the diva has never wavered – only their rights to hold those qualities has changed.

The sense of power, creativity, and agency held by the diva has never wavered - only their rights to hold those qualities has changed.

Should the labelling of a diva necessitate this dualling consideration of their onstage and offstage selves? I'm not sure. On the one hand, I do think a true reclamation of the diva would define them solely by their talent. In the 19th century, the word's emergence was used to reflect the

brilliant artistry of female opera singers at the time. Celebrating artists purely for their art without consideration of their offstage selves is historically consistent with why we began using this word in the first place. On the other hand, artists are as complex and dichotomous as the history of the diva itself, and to erase their overall personhood to solely take in their art feels incomplete. I think what I most wish for is that the onstage and offstage versions of the diva are not pitted against one another in a cultural battle of support or opposition, but rather are used as a vessel to understand and appreciate their art even more. Reading about Maria Callas' unapologetic advocacy for herself in rehearsal rooms better informs our perception of the power of her Tosca. Loïe Fuller's sexuality offstage gives us insight for her sultry and passionate Salomé. The women they played offstage are certainly linked to the women they played onstage, and extending this nuance to our viewership promotes an empathy that divas have long been deprived of.



Pictured: Grace Jones with flowers at the Drury Lane Theatre, London, October 1981. © David Corio

Maybe that's it – empathy. Perhaps our role as audiences is not to place the diva on a spectrum of likeability based on their onstage and offstage selves, but rather to cherish their art on a greater level because of their humanity and to respect their humanity on a greater level because of their art. This isn't to say we should not hold artists accountable for behaviours that are undeserving of their platforms. Rather, a nuanced and informed prioritisation of empathy removes the sense of divinity that first placed divas on the pedestal on which they've been continuously knocked down because of their humanness. To acknowledge brilliant talent without deifying the human who possesses it not only gives the artist breathing room to freely create and exist, but also promotes a more optimistic view of humanity.

King Lear Deletes Instagram

By Toby Anderson

Content warning: explicit language

Shoulders turned in, lowered
 To collapse inside, fold,
Folder myself, tighter
 My -- a tepidness, nose
Flared automatic disgust//any rot
 From cavernous, my
Sphincter taught – holder decay
 That wafts plane
Of Ssssalt, stinging.
 Again, I curl in.

Drooping lids, I try
 Look Up! Away
Trudging feet –
 — Startling blue, a win'
Morning, with hazy luminescence
 Feeling, walking memory
O, I have ta'en too little of this!
 Over beauty, that
Both thrills, crushes further.
 I cope, drifting
Thinkingly hibernation, with
 A sad, postmodern envy.

40 minutes to kill.

No discernibly thoughting, each
 Concrete worry surrounded
Cushioned by soft-squidge–
 Like half-defrosted food I navigate

Worlds on planar trimmings
 Of anxious fat – escape the superflux!

I swerve café. Eyes up,
 Smiling, contact. // I
Between waving charm
 Lathered thick _ coconut oil. // They
All laugh at this silly posh faggot, moments
 Invitation world of rainbows
And musicals, Ssssex.
 Once out sight postures slumped
The sting of stretching a wound open.
 I'd curl, dear Amfortas, furthering in.

It alleviates the crush
 Looking up feels easier, butter
Also fears and paranoia sours, turning
 More acute – it's all
Running homely rot. Sitting TikTok, turned
 Off brain doth surrender the crushing
Sadness of wishes lively away – away!
 'No,' everything – I exist pure
Castrated worlding simulacra
 Did Baudrillard know
That "losing the referent" would feel so cunt?y?
 Enough.
All beauty joy in the existing there.
 Please, my love, please
Show the world more just.

The Moldies

A New Perspective on Ordinary Things

By Eric Davis

Across the ordinary events of daily life, there is hardly a more devastating discovery than finding some food that you intended to eat has gone moldy. Every day is a battle against decay as we fight to keep our plants alive, our showers dry, and our produce firm and free of fungus. The cost of living needs no more discussion: money is tight, and food is valuable. Mold, then, feels like a deeply personal failure, a mundane reminder that we could have done better, saved more, and wasted less, if only we were better at

managing every minute aspect of our chaotic lives. Finding mold on a week-old loaf of sourdough serves as a stark reminder that ultimately, we can't control everything, and each day is another lost endeavor against entropy.

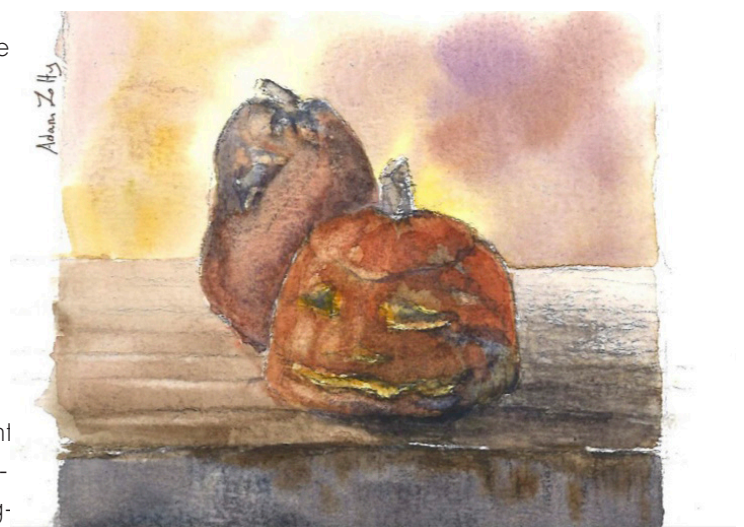
Mold is, of course, not that big a deal in the grand scheme of things. We don't hold global summits to discuss the Cladosporium crisis, after all, and an expired serving of spaghetti can be tossed and remade with minimal effort

or expense. Food decay is simply one of many trivial daily annoyances encountered by all, but recently, the universal (and somewhat unsavory) nature of this issue provided an unusual opportunity for me to reframe my perspective on the minor inconveniences of everyday living.



A few years ago, I was invited to join 'The Moldies', a group chat of various college-aged friends and strangers united under the simple goal of sharing photos of mold wherever it might be found. The only rule was that each participant was obliged to share any mold encounter, no matter how mundane. No colony was too small, no food too old to be shared, and every post would be met with enthusiasm and discussion. While this strange endeavor began largely as a joke, we soon began to really engage with the posted material, making lighthearted but concerted efforts to produce creative responses. The boldest among us would even cultivate their moldy possessions, hanging on to old oranges or porch pumpkins and giving weekly progress reports for the sake of scientific inquiry. We were eager to share our discoveries, wherever and however they might appear, and this simple excitement eclipsed any dismay that our discoveries might have otherwise entailed. The inherent silliness of this exercise made The Moldies a low-stakes and judgement-free environment where we could connect over a mutually mundane experience, and in so doing, transform it into something meaningful and fun.

Although the chat in question is now largely silent save for the occasional monumental mildew alert, I continue to carry the spirit of the group with me day to day. In the end, I can't honestly say that I waste any less food, and my produce-purchasing habits remain largely unchanged. However, my attitude towards mold, and my reaction to its discovery in my kitchen, has been fundamentally changed for the better. My time with The Moldies taught me how to take an ordinary occurrence and apply an extraordinary focus to it. By adding the context of the interactions with friends both old and new, the simple experience of expired food became something to remark upon and remember. It's a small thing, but I try to carry that lesson with me, to try and reframe trivial or trying experiences by adding extra significance to them. By focusing on the minute details of ordinary events, or by relating them to specific memories or people, I can elevate the experience and change my response to it. In the case of our silly little group chat, this was achieved largely through social interaction, reconditioning me to associate the experience of finding spoiled food with the warmth and levity of friendship. Going forward, I've resolved to continue to cultivate this same fascination with other small daily events, both positive and negative. From overgrown gardens to roadside graffiti, there is always an opportunity to focus on the shared humanity of everyday living, and in so doing make each day a little more fascinating.



All artwork by Adam Zolty

AGONY AUNT

Here to solve YOUR problems!

After a holiday break full of festivity and mulled wine, Agony Aunt is back to offer insights, advice, and wisdom for RAM's pressing problems!

A note from the editor:

In the Autumn 2023 RAMpage edition, our Agony Aunt column included an insensitive entry about the jazz students of RAM. A group of those students wrote a response and it has been included in this edition's Agony Aunt column along with Agony Aunt's response. Please note that this subject is now resolved.

To submit a question to Agony Aunt, please email ramagonyaunt@gmail.com. Not all questions will be answered. Agony Aunt should not be treated as genuine advice.

Dear Agony Aunt...

I understand that the LG and DR rooms need to be confiscated as dressing rooms when performances are going on, but when it's already hard enough to book a practice room, the weeks of LG/DR lockdowns make practising impossible. Where can I practise during those performance weeks? I'm at a loss.

Dearest reader, I believe this is a true tragedy of the modern day music student; those who fail the gauntlet of ASIMUT are left with the stale crumbs of tiny, sweaty rooms with out of tune pianos. What becomes of us, my space-deprived friends, when such offerings are stripped from us? All I can advise is creativity and brazenness in your practice space selection process – as 21st century musicians, is it not our job to think out of the box? Why not extend this to all aspects of one's creative practice? Look to the double basses, dear reader, and their monopoly of that one bit of corridor on the first floor. Who is to say that some friendly rivalry from down the hall would be out of place... Or the guitars and their dank corner of the stairwell that no one uses, choose a floor or two up and you too can have your own cold corner with Authentic Staircase Acoustics™. Should all else fail, I hear that the York Gate stairwell toi-

lets have just about enough space for a music stand.

Dear Agony Aunt...

As a singer, I can report that we are very self aware about how loud and obvious our presence can be in the RAM canteen. Last year, we were at least somewhat contained to the corner near the coat rack where the couches used to be. Now that they've been moved, I worry everyone is more acutely aware of our tendency to break out into Puccini without a moment's warning. Should the singers plan a heist to restore the couches to their original habitat so we can commune and keep our noise contained?

My large-lunged friend, I hate to be the one to break this news but, in a public setting, there will never be a time nor place for spontaneous Puccini. It is no longer 2009, the days of the T-Mobile flash mob are over and we move on to better, brighter things. Believe me, I fully understand the clawing desire to burst into spontaneous song (I watched Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again last weekend and it was impossible to stay silent) and that such desires can eat one from the inside if not acted upon, however sometimes the proverbial bullet must be proverbially bitten. In regard

to your inquiry, personally
I love a heist – don't we all – so will
naturally support any sofa subterfuge you may
have in mind, largely out of curiosity to see how
many singers it takes to move a settee.

Dear Agony Aunt...

Last year, we had to endure months and months of climbing stairs all the way to the fifth floor while the lift was being engineered. Now, it's barely big enough to fit three people, much less when there's a double bass or a harp involved. Will there ever be an easy way to get around in this place?

Oh my poor, poor esteemed colleague, I can only sympathise. One would hope, with the grandeur of the red-ribboned reopening, that our lift would be refurbished to the highest standards suitable for an institution with Royal in the name. Is this how the King lives, squashed in a bland, characterless lift with neither space nor utility for its primary purpose? I should hope not! Why then are we made to suffer, I hear you cry. What you must remember, dear reader, is that our institution has a history of making things as impractical as possible; it is tradition and to prepare us for the unwelcoming world of work. What musicians would we be if we studied and practised in comfort?? Lugging one's bass clarinet to the fourth floor, navigating to the library, keeping up with the ever-changing canteen layout; all these experiences are to build character, to strengthen one's resolve. I urge you to look beyond the inconvenience towards a future where no staircase will stop you from achieving your potential.

Dear Agony Aunt...

Hoping you can help us, what should we do if we were recently shocked by a RAM publication that seemed to suggest our entire musical lives and output could be reduced to "POSH 'CAMP ROCK'"? Ought we be concerned that it was additionally insensitive and ignorant given the fact our music is music of Black Culture and the African Diaspora, and to insult that rich, complex and century old history by calling it "posh 'camp rock'" is about as offensive as it gets? Not to mention some of the other lazy stereotypes glibly regurgitated along the way. Tell us, do we need to worry that this is a common view here or was it just one out-of-touch aunt's poorly judged attempt at humour?

Yours hopefully,

The Jazz Students

(P.S. don't call us jazzers, we won't call anyone 'straighties' - it's not 1983.)

Dear Jazz Students,

When readers come to me with their niche, RAM-centred problems, it becomes easy to let that bubble become shrouded in ignorance. I welcome any and all criticisms if I ever go too far. Please accept my sincerest apologies for those jokes that should never have been made in the first place. The Academy is a lovely place (unless you're counting the T rooms), and I know we're all here to make it better and safer.

Dear Agony Aunt...

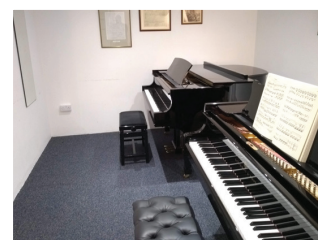
Help - I'm addicted to vanilla oat lattes. The Canteen staff keep laughing at me.

Grow up. Have a flat white.

DISCLAIMER: Agony Aunt does not accept responsibility for any poor decisions made following her advice



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