

**POLIFONIA WG 4****STUDY VISIT EDINBURGH  
RED NOTE****6-7 DECEMBER 2012****PARTICIPANTS:**

- Andree Almond
- Renate Böck
- Timo Klemettinen

**INTERVIEWEES:**

- John Harris
- Robert Irvine
- Richard Nelson
- Richard Greer
- Amble Skuse
- Lauren Sarah Hayes
- Zoltan Komives

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**1. The “story”**

Red Note - Scotland's contemporary music ensemble - was founded in 2008 by Scottish cellist Robert Irvine and John Harris who, as a coincidence, met each other on the streets of Edinburgh. Robert Irvine had had a strong sense of the renewal need of the concert programming in Scotland, which in those days was nearly exclusively focusing on classical repertoire, and there was a gap in the market and a need for ensemble which is dedicated to develop and perform contemporary music to the highest standards. The definition of contemporary here is understood to be an attitude of mind – something ground-breaking.

Harris, who became the Chief Executive and Artistic Co-Director, has a background as composer who has worked with theatre, opera and film music. His interest has been to combine live music with video, media and other forms of artistic expression – a practice that has been characteristic to the philosophy of the whole RN ensemble. Another Artistic Co-Director, Irvine, has further strengthened the artistic and musical authority of the ensemble as he is well respected cellist.

Later, Richard Nelson started as the Administrative Producer of RN. His background originally is as a viola player.

When starting the RN, Irvine and Harris decided that it will perform the established classics of contemporary music, commission new music, develop the work of new and emerging composers from around the world and find new spaces and new ways of performing contemporary music to attract new audiences.

RN's has rapidly become the foremost Scottish contemporary music ensemble comprising up to 20 front-rank Scottish professional players.

## 2. Vision and values

The values of RN were defined in a board meeting held in January 2011 which was attended by John Harris, Robert Irvine, Zinnie Harris, Dominic Hill, Peter Winckles and Celia Duffy.

The vision and values of RN is to play brilliantly while using challenging contemporary repertoire, to play with healthy jovial attitude and great respect to the audiences and to maintain an outward looking Scottish identity.

One of the leading ideas of RN is to question the ownership conventions of the music. Musical material can be used freely in similar ways to theatre, where e.g. Shakespeare plays are constantly adapted and renewed so that they respond to the time and context.

Repertoire aims to move art or audience forward; it needs to have value and something to say. It aims to combine local, national and international and it emphasises boldness in programming (*note: permission to use this link – 1000 Airplanes – publicly needs to be asked from John Harris*)

RN is part of the culture; it exists together with its audiences in immediacy without patronising them or trying to simplify art. RN uses new kinds of venues with special atmosphere and seeks new audiences which it invites to be part of art and not to stand outside of it.

RN seeks to reach new audiences also via the tools of online social networking. RN is open to work with different musical genres e.g. pop musicians.

RN wants to empower musicians to feel creative and treat conductors and players as equals.

As an employer RN wants to be generous: with pay, with opportunities, with space and with time.

RN wants to organise concerts that are 'cool' to go to.

## 3. Evolution of Red Note

Institute for Capitalising on Creativity produced an **audience research** for RN 2011/2012. The aims, amongst others, were to explore the perceptions and attitudes toward RN. Research was important in order to position RN in the cultural field and to identify future development of RN repertoire/programming. Some of the key findings of the research were that venue is very significant for the concert experience, that the Scottish audience is keen on culture, but needs a better infrastructure and for the performance to have something that will gain the interest and attention of the public. The research found the audience of RN to be younger and more urban than the usual classical music concert audience and they also like to attend broader spectrum of cultural events.

Besides challenging contemporary music, it is important to have various **"hooks"** within the performance in order to ensure that the audiences will want to come back. These kinds of "hooks" may be for instance combinations of dance, poems, videos, different kinds of venues and using buildings in exciting ways, cross-genre musical/artistic "sweeteners" etc.

**Social media** has become increasingly important for RN for its many uses. These include communicating with the audiences (promoting events and sharing information), funders and other companies and internally amongst the musicians, composers, conductors etc. Besides communication, social media is also used to manage information.

One of the important roles RN plays is to **provide mentoring**. For instance beside working opportunities and promotion, Noisy Nights (concerts in pubs), provide young composers possibilities to communicate with and get feedback from other composers, informal learning opportunities, chance to see their music played and response it creates and to learn new ways to compose music while working with top level musicians. All of these events are recorded.

**Noisy Nights** events also highlight the need for the young composers to be connected with their audience, consider the context and social aspects of their work. It is important to understand why one is composing the piece at hand – what is the story and message – what does the composer want to say to the audience.

The RN, has been also collaborating with **The Inventor Composer Coaction**, which is a project designed to facilitate collaboration between composers and developers of bespoke digital or electronic instruments, for the creation of new music.

Link: [Inventor Composer Coaction \(ICC\)](#)

**Outreach/education** has become increasingly important for RN. In future the significance of cooperation with conservatoires, research, composers and Aberdeen International Youth Festival (Sound Lab), primary school projects (6-11 year olds) and co-composing school projects will be even greater.

**Today** RN is a contemporary ensemble–in-residence at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and an Associate Company of the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh.

**In future** RN seeks more partners (for instance festivals), wants to produce more recordings, organise tours in the rural Scottish countryside, promote cross-over projects and creative programming and be more international.

#### 4. The business model

RN is a Creative Scotland Flexibly-Funded Organisation, and it receives annual funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the PRS for Music Foundation. RN has also received additional support from the Hope Scott Trust.

For fundraising purposes, in the beginning of RN, it was important to have reliable track record including top level musicians and recording, but subsequently also a new creative approach was also needed. The keywords in planning that were: creativity in fundraising, combination of artistic (soft) and management (hard) skills, writing desirable and successful applications, argument for reliability in the eyes of the funders and branding.

75% of RN's income is public funding and 25 % is generated through ticket sales.

All the staff members of RN, apart from PR/Marketing person, are originally musicians. As musicians they can use their particular skills, networks and knowledge in management of RN.

## 5. Skills and training for entrepreneurship

Besides artistic skills, graduates also need following sets of skills and knowledge:

- self-employment and ability to adapt flexible attitude and openness to different employment possibilities
- understanding the sector and context
- financial and business skills
- legal knowledge
- networking and group work skills
- promotional and preventative skills
- organising one's own work, and
- ability to enjoy freedom and see the possibilities to develop oneself outside of university/conservatoire

Besides aforementioned skills and knowledge, also a good network of contacts from university to musical life is important for graduates.

It is important to encourage an entrepreneurial attitude amongst students and support them to take risks in the form of starting businesses.

Sometimes, students who start their higher education studies after some working experiences can benefit more from their training. This is noteworthy for the universities in their student recruitment.

For universities/conservatoires there is a need for “tailor-made” training and sensitivity to recognise the individual needs of the students.