iMA Newsletter

Voted top 100 educators in the world by the International Biographical Centre
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International Music Academy

Year XXX, No. 11 *November 2026*

NEWS

IMA DIRECTOR MAESTRO KRISTIAN ALEXANDER AWARDED HONORARY DOCTOR OF LETTERS BY YORK UNIVERSITY

The International Music Academy is delighted to share an important milestone in the career of its Music Director, Maestro Kristian Alexander, who received an Honorary **Doctor of Letters** (D.Litt.) from York University on October 15, 2026.

Recognizing his international artistic leadership, scholarly contributions, innovation, and service to the arts, this distinction places Maestro Alexander among a select group of conductors honoured by the university. He is only the third conductor in York University's history to receive this degree, joining Sir Andrew Davis and Jukka-Pekka Saraste.

The recognition reflects a career dedicated not only to musical excellence, but also to education, cultural development, youth engagement, and expanding access to the arts.

The IMA congratulates Maestro Alexander on this distinguished honour.



WELCOMING OUR NEW STUDENTS

Jewel Andon, piano
Alvin Guo, double bass
Joanne Wang, voice
Jewel Nathan Andon, violin
Abi Shiva, voice
Rahil Mujeeb, piano
Lucas Vo, piano
Ken Vo, piano

IMPORTANT DAYS IN NOVEMBER

November 3	Deadline for RCM winter examination registrations
November 8	*Diwali*
November 11	Remembrance Day
November 20	PA Day (YR). IMA is open.



GET A $30 CREDIT ON YOUR NEXT MONTH TUITION

We are always very happy to welcome new students of all ages, levels, and instruments to the iMA. **Please tell your friends about your experience with the International Music Academy.** Do you know someone who is thinking of taking music lessons or who has **children** who may be interested in getting their hands on a musical instrument or singing?

Do you know a **teenager** who needs a high school OAC credit? Do you know an **adult** who has wanted for a long time to learn how to play a musical instrument but has never had the time or inclination? **Please tell them about the IMA.** As an appreciation for your referral, we will give you a **$30 credit** for each new family who registers at the International Music Academy as a result of your referral.

IMA STUDENTS' BIRTHDAYS IN NOVEMBER

Lanzhong Z., Ahana N, Jack L., Shaurya B., Isla C., Tanisha M., Archsana R., Joy C., Binu S G., Oceanne G., Pippi K., Mikaylah M., Daya C., Theodore K., Elijah F., Kristina K., Mia M., Daniella F., Marianna P., Tracy T.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

COMPOSERS' ANNIVERSARIES IN NOVEMBER

14 Nov, 1719	MOZART, Leopold (father of Wolfgang)
14 Nov, 1778	HUMMEL, Johann Nepomuk
14 Nov, 1900	COPLAND, Aaron
18 Nov, 1786	WEBER, Carl Maria Friedrich Ernst
18 Nov, 1860	PADEREWSKI, Ignacy Jan
22 Nov, 1710	BACH, Wilhelm Friedemann
22 Nov, 1913	BRITTEN, Lord Benjamin



IMA WINTER MUSIC FESTIVAL

The **iMA Winter Music Festival** will take place on **Saturday–Sunday, December 12–13, 2026**, at the Cornell Recital Hall, located in the Cornell Community Centre and Library (3201 Bur Oak Ave.). The beautiful 5,000-square-foot hall features a Steinway grand piano, amphitheatre-style seating, and maple-wood walls that provide outstanding acoustics.

The festival will consist of ten 45-minute concerts, each featuring a small group of students (approximately 10–15), performing for their families and friends.





Our teachers will speak with you to confirm your child's participation. The deadline for finalizing the concert schedule is **Sunday, November 15.**

Please mark your calendars for this exciting event! Together with the iMA Summer Music Festival, it has always been one of the most significant highlights of the year for many of our students.

The iMA faculty, staff, and I look forward to encouraging and supporting our students and celebrating their musical achievements.

FEATURED STUDENTS OF THE MONTH

James Chen



1. **What instrument do you play?** - I play the clarinet.
2. **How long have you taken lessons?** - I have been taking clarinet lessons for over 3 years at IMA.
3. **Who are your favourite musical artist(s)?** - I don't really listen to a lot of music, but when I do, my favourite musical artists are Imagine Dragons and Coldplay.
4. **What are your other hobbies, besides music?** - I like sports like basketball, volleyball, or badminton. I also like to play video games.
5. **What is your Favourite food(s)?** - My favourite foods are Chinese food and pizza.
6. **What is the coolest thing you've learnt in your lessons in the past three months?** - The coolest thing I've learnt throughout the past three months is how to play 16th notes and building better articulations on the clarinet.
7. **Do you have any performance coming up?** I am looking forward to performing at the IMA - Winter Music Festival.



FEATURED TEACHER OF THE MONTH

Eric Szabo, B.Mus.

Winds, brass, piano, guitar and drums



Joel Eric Szabo holds a Bachelor of Music degree in Performance from the University of Toronto and a Level 9 Certificate in Piano Performance from the Royal Conservatory of Music. In addition to his many performances on French horn with orchestras across the GTA, Mr. Szabo has taught and performed on piano and keyboards, bass guitar, voice, and several other instruments, exploring a wide range of musical styles from chamber music and jazz to rock, pop, and beyond. As a member of the brass-rock band Turbo Street Funk, he has expanded the expressive possibilities of the French horn, taking it well beyond its traditional orchestral and chamber music roles. With more than a decade of performing experience, Mr. Szabo has also arranged and composed works for small ensembles. He has been teaching music for over 15 years, beginning in his high school days, and continues to inspire and guide students of all ages throughout his performing career.

Mr. Szabo was happy to answer a few questions for our students and parents:

1. What do you like most about teaching? My favourite thing about teaching is seeing my students develop a love and understanding of music. Seeing their excitement and inspiration to learn and grow is very rewarding as a teacher, and gives me a chance to relive some of the early discoveries and experiences I had that shaped me as a musician. One of the other things I really like about teaching is the way even simple questions can cause me to examine the intuitively held knowledge that I've developed from my experience. This closer examination can generate important insights into the most fundamental aspects of music making, and improves my own knowledge of music. Articulating implicitly held knowledge, and making it explicit, is very useful, even outside of music.

2. How do you inspire students to practice more? To inspire students to practice more I put an emphasis on achieving musical effect as an end to developing technique. Technique on its own is rarely satisfying, but achieving musical effects like a captivating pianissimo or an elegant and bright staccato is inspiring. Connecting the reward of satisfying music making to the work of practicing makes it clear that there's a personal gratification and not just skill building and work to music. In my opinion, music making should be fun, enjoyable, and full of emotional connection, not just mechanical and goal based. I also make an effort to incorporate material that is genuinely interesting to the student. Music is vast, and people's tastes are varied, so it's important to find repertoire that students have a personal connection with. Above all of this, of course, is having a positive attitude, growth-based mindset, and compassion and understanding for students.

3. What roles does performance play in student's development? Performance plays a very important role in student development. Practice is important and can be rewarding in and of itself, but it should ultimately serve the end goal of actually performing music. Performances help us to set concrete goals with deadlines, which gives direction and urgency to our practice. Without a performance date, practice and repertoire selection can become directionless and abstracted, which can allow us to overlook important weaknesses in our skillset. Being able to play a piece from beginning to end, without pauses or breaks, and hopefully with minimal error requires us to take a closer look at our playing and to not overlook weaknesses that get passed by. Performance is also an important skill set to develop in and of itself. The performance psychology techniques we develop through performance also have many applications outside of music.

4. Who are your favourite composers? This is a difficult question, considering the incredible breadth of truly excellent composers and music, and how varied my own taste in music is. For solo piano repertoire it would have to be Maurice Ravel for his use of colour and setting of scenes. I have been

learning his Tombeau de Couperin, which has been very satisfying (and challenging). For orchestral music it would be Tchaikovsky for his accessibility, emotional breadth, and use of brass (being a brass player myself). The horn solo in the second movement of his fifth symphony is especially beautiful. For chamber music Jacques Ibert's Trois Pieces Breves holds a special place in my heart. For blues, jazz, rock, etc. there are too many to mention. In the past I've been learning to play the Hammond organ, especially in a rock context, so I've been studying the organ playing and sound palette of Jon Lord from Deep Purple.

5. What was the last piece of music (sheet music or a recording) you purchased for yourself? The last recorded piece of music I bought was a live blues album: Little Magic Sam Live at the Rivoli. The authenticity and rawness of a live recording is a refreshing change from the high polish of most studio recordings, and blues has also been a nice change of scene for me recently. The latest pieces of sheet music that I've gotten have been a whole season's worth of orchestral horn parts from the Kindred Spirits Orchestra, for whom I'm playing fourth horn for this season. The repertoire with this orchestra in particular is always varied and interesting to me as a performer, and often features pieces from the orchestral repertoire that I haven't had a chance to perform yet, which is always rewarding for me. I very much enjoy learning new things, especially music, so that's been very rewarding for me.

FEATURED ARTICLE

BBC music MAGAZINE

INVENTIVE COMPOSERS... VIVID IMAGINATIONS AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

By Rebecca Franks



Composers are, by their very nature, a creative bunch. They bring into being something new where it didn't exist before. Rather like an inventor, arguably. And while revolutionising the symphony or wowing the world as a virtuoso pianist-composer would be achievement enough for most people, some composers didn't get that memo. When the final double bar line had been written, they turned their vivid imaginations to solving a whole host of practical problems. Whether as enthusiastic amateurs or prolific professionals, bank-rolling philanthropists or supportive family members, composers have made surprising contributions to the world of inventions.

Inventive composers: Beethoven and bone conduction
That Beethoven went deaf has become part of his personal mythology, most often told as a tale of triumph over adversity. The reality is, of course, far more nuanced – and through living with deafness, Beethoven inadvertently found himself exploring and even, arguably, inventing the latest hearing technology. At one point, he drew on the expertise of his friend Johann Nepomuk Mälzel, inventor of the metronome, who designed him ear trumpets. As Robin Wallace explains in his book *Hearing Beethoven*, these were lengths of tubing with an expanding hollow end inserted into the ear. Sometimes these were linked to a resonating device to pick up sound, which meant they worked like hearing aids.

There's also speculation that Beethoven found a way to still hear his music being played, via vibrations passing through a wooden stick that he placed in his mouth and on the piano. This used the concept of bone conduction, which was first described by an Italian physicist, Girolamo Cardano, in the 16th century. It's unclear if Beethoven was familiar with Cardano's work, or if he came to his technique independently. Either way, in the last few decades, bone conduction hearing devices have become a mainstream option available to people with certain types of hearing loss, while bone conduction headphones are widely available for everyone.

Inventive composers: Borodin the chemist
One of the major Russian nationalist composers, Alexander Borodin was also, by profession, a medical doctor and a chemist (and an advocate for the higher education of women in Russia). In 1864, he was appointed chair and professor of chemistry at Saint Petersburg's Medical-Surgical Academy, where he pursued research into aldehydes – a class of organic compounds. Even if he's much better known for his music nowadays, Borodin contributed to the advancement of scientific research when he discovered the Aldol reaction in 1869, independently from a French chemist who found it around the same time. His work on the synthesis of methyl bromide into silver acetate was later developed and patented in the 1930s and is known as the Hunsdiecker or Hunsdiecker-Borodin reaction. Not quite as catchy as his *Polovtsian Dances*, but notable nonetheless.

Inventive composers: Elgar and the Sulphuretted Hydrogen Machine
Borodin wasn't the only composer fascinated by chemistry. Elgar also dabbled in the science, albeit as a keen amateur. He loved to spend hours working on his projects in, first, his basement laboratory and, later, his shed, named The Ark. 'I am

resuming chemistry & made soap yesterday between fits of scoring (not scouring!) the symphony,' he wrote to a friend. Elgar's experiments didn't always go to plan, and on one notable occasion he made a 'phosphoric concoction' that accidentally blew up a water butt. Far more successful was his device for synthesising hydrogen sulfide, the Sulpheretted Hydrogen Machine, which even went on to be patented and manufactured as the Elgar S.H. Apparatus – briefly at least. In a letter to August Jaeger in 1908, he was self-deprecating about the news. 'I will not offer to send you my invention – you would soon tire of it – although a nice toy.'

Inventive composers: Antheil and a radio guidance system
An avant-garde, modernist composer and a glamorous Hollywood film star hardly seem the most likely duo to come up with a torpedo guidance system, but that's just what happened in the case of George Antheil and Hedy Lamarr. The pair joined forces after Lamarr had the idea that jumping between radio frequencies would make it much harder for a foe to intercept a radio-guided torpedo. (She'd gained her knowledge of military technology from being married to an Austrian arms dealer who circulated with the Nazis. She escaped in disguise and divorced him.)

Antheil had previously written his *Ballet mécanique*, in which 16 player pianos are synchronised, and that experience helped him co-invent a mechanism not dissimilar to piano player rolls to move between frequencies. The pair were granted a patent for their invention in 1942. It was later used for military communications during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, and seen as a forerunner to Wi-Fi, GPS and Bluetooth.

Inventive composers: Rachmaninov and Sikorsky
Rachmaninov was not short of a bob or two and he had a penchant for fast machines, which is how he came to be in the unlikely situation of turning around the fortunes of the aircraft manufacturer Sikorsky. Exiled from Russia, Rachmaninov had moved to the United States, where he lived for 25 years, composing little but pursuing a lucrative career as a pianist. One of his fellow Russian émigrés was the aviation pioneer Igor Sikorsky, acclaimed back home for his multi-engine planes but unknown in the US. His fledgling aero-engineering company in Long Island, located on a chicken farm of all places, was struggling to make ends meet.

Word clearly got round as, according to the Sikorsky archives, one day in 1923 Rachmaninov rocked up in a chauffeur-driven limousine. Sikorsky's son Sergei recalls: 'After about a half-hour visit, Rachmaninov said, "I believe in you and your plane, and I want to help you." The composer sat down and wrote a cheque for $5,000 (approximately $100,000 today). With a smile, he gave the cheque to the stunned Sikorsky and said, "Pay me back whenever you can."' The great musician's contribution made all the difference. Rachmaninov became Sikorsky's first vice- president, and six years later Sikorsky paid back the money with interest.

Inventive composers: Hofmann and his many patents
Rachmaninov recognised genius when he saw it, and he once named Józef Hofmann as the greatest pianist in the world. But the Polish pianist-composer wasn't only a superlative virtuoso, he was also a prolific inventor with over 70 patents to his name. They ranged from electric clocks to windscreen wipers (inspired by the movement of a metronome), piano-key shock absorbers (still used by Steinway today) to motorboats. Hofmann's passion for inventing started when he was young. When he was just 11, in 1887, he struck up a correspondence with Thomas Alva Edison, who later sent him his new phonograph.

Hofmann was fascinated by airplanes (Rachmaninov once took him on a visit to the Sikorsky factory) and, particularly, cars, for which he came up with pneumatic shock absorbers (tested by the New York police) and even a navigational device. 'I have invented a helpful improvement of location-showing devices,' he wrote in the description for Patent No. 909 7989 on 12 January 1909. The problem he had with maps for driving was that the scale of those used in cities was too big when the driver was travelling between cities and villages. The solution? A rotating disc featuring maps of different scales, that allowed the driver to navigate happily between town and countryside.

Inventive composers: Oram and the Oramics Machine
'It's a real bit of home brew. Just by looking at it, you can tell that it was always a work in progress. It was always being modified, and it's unique,' says Tim Boon, head of research and public history at London's Science Museum, which is now home to one of the landmark inventions in electronic music's history, the Oramics Machine. Boon is talking about an electro-mechanical interface that was an important forerunner to the MIDI sequencing and DAW technology used so widely today. It was the brainchild of Daphne Oram, who was a pioneer in the UK of *musique concrète* – where recorded sounds are used to create compositions, originally through manipulating tape.

Oram also had an inventor's mind, and an ethos of self-reliance and experimentalism – and she came up with the idea of a machine that could, essentially, turn drawings into sound. It meant she could draw waveforms, pitches and volume envelopes onto film or glass, which was then optically scanned and used to synthesise sound. Oram found the machine had technical limitations, but the opening of her *Bird of Parallax* ballet music for the 1972 Edinburgh Festival was composed using the Oramics Machine.

Inventive composers: Ravel and the Whirlwind of Death
Ravel was dubbed the 'most perfect of Swiss watchmakers' by Stravinsky– but it was his father who was the real precision engineer. Pierre-Joseph was a prolific inventor (and civil engineer) whose gadgets included a machine for making paper bags and a water track with an artificial current for training swimmers. He was particularly fascinated by engines, and in 1868 came up with a 'steam generator heated by oil, applied to locomotion' – or, in other words, a steam-powered automobile.

However, one of his inventions resulted in tragedy. Pierre-Joseph had teamed up with his other son, Edouard, to create the *Tourbillon de la mort* (Whirlwind of death), a circus spectacle involving a car somersaulting ten metres up in the air. The pair had high hopes it would make them a fortune, and it was indeed a success when it was first presented to the

public in March 1905. 'The word "intrepid" is not enough, one has to say "heroic",' wrote *Le Figaro*.

But disaster struck on 14 April when the car crashed and the driver, Marcelle Randal, died from her injuries. Father and son had to appear in front of the French court but were ultimately acquitted of negligence. The following year, they filed their invention with the US Patent and Trademark Office. Is it too much of a stretch to suggest his father's inventions shaped Ravel's music – the mechanical repetitions of *Boléro*, say, or the deathly implosion of *La valse*? Perhaps.

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