Night at the Cinema

Posted on

The Royal College Western Orchestra commands the stage, bringing together young musicians in a vibrant celebration of orchestral music.

The Western Music Society of the Royal College was first formed in November 1919 by Acting Principal Lewis Walker, as the Royal College Music Society, making it one of the first music-based organizations in the country. The Society reached great heights thanks to the efforts of E. K. de Zilva and J. M. Fonseka.

The Society conducted many programs to uplift musical standards at college, which included visits to musical concerts, lectures, workshops, lunch hour programs,

arranging recitals by well-known musicians, listening sessions to the works of masters, and arranged screenings of educational films provided by institutions such as the British Council, United States Information Service and Aliance Française.

> From marking its presence at the Centenary concert of the Western Music Society to the recent concert ‘Night at the Cinema’ and ‘The Odyssey’ and the tenth Anniversary Concert, the RCWO has introduced audiences to classical music as well as modern favorites in an orchestral setting.

The Society presently oversees three ensembles, the Royal College Western Band, the Royal College Choir, and the Royal College Western Orchestra, each of which has made a significant contribution to the College’s musical legacy. The Western Band, now over 65 years old, is the oldest Western band in the College and has consistently upheld a proud tradition of excellence. The Royal College Choir, with a distinguished history spanning over 107 years, has earned international recognition, including bronze-level achievements at global platforms such as the Olympic Games, reflecting its high standard of choral performance.

Meanwhile, the Royal College Western Orchestra, established in 2015, is among the pioneering school-level orchestras in the country. Within just over a decade, it has risen to national prominence by securing first place at All-Island competitions for eight consecutive years, outperforming leading school orchestras including those of Ananda College, Lyceum College, and S. Thomas’ College.

The Royal College Western Orchestra showcases the depth and dynamism of its young musicians in a captivating orchestral performance.

Together, these ensembles continue to elevate the standards of Western music at the Royal College while bringing distinction to the Society at both national and international levels. The Royal College Orchestra was formed in 1999 with the consent of H.L.B. Gomez, the principal of the Royal College at the time. Since its inception, the orchestra has had several trainers from the Symphony Orchestra of Sri Lanka (SOSL), and its conductor has been Lalanath De Silva, a former conductor at the SOSL. The orchestra held its first public performance in 2002, conducted by Prof. Ajith Abeysekera, a conductor at the SOSL. Amal Abeysekera was the concertmaster of the orchestra.

The final performance of the RCO was at the launch of a stamp to mark the 125th Battle of the Blues Encounter in 2004. After an 11-year hiatus, the RCWO resumed

in 2015, with Prof. Ajith Abeysekera as the Conductor of RCWO, Nisal Jinadasa as the concertmaster, Srimal Weerasinghe as the Royal College Conductor, and Priyanthi Sudusinghe as the teacher-in-charge. Its first performance was at the All-Island Western Music and Dance Competition 2015, where it competed against some of the best school orchestras in Sri Lanka and emerged in first place. Since then, the orchestra has consistently ranked first over the years. In 2025, the orchestra won the All-Island Western Music and Dance Competition for the eighth consecutive time, remaining unbeaten.

Conductor Kim Pan Ju shares a moment on stage with a member of the RCWO.

Over the years, the orchestra has performed multiple concerts of its own, collaborating with choirs and orchestras from other schools and sharing a love for music. From marking its presence at the Centenary concert of the Western Music Society to the recent concert ‘Night at the Cinema’ and ‘The Odyssey’ and the tenth

Anniversary Concert, the RCWO has introduced audiences to classical music as well as modern favorites in an orchestral setting. The senior members of the orchestra appeared at the 2023 and 2024 Annual General Meetings of the Royal College of Lawyers' Association and welcomed His Excellency the President with a chamber performance of timeless melodies.

Opportunities provided through this environment have helped nurture some of the country's most skilled musicians. To highlight the young, talented musicians and expose their talent to the public, the Royal College Western Orchestra, along with the Royal College Western Music Society, has decided to organize the sixth consecutive public performance of the Royal College Western Orchestra since its reassembly. Displaying a vast array of talents and creative arrangements, and exploring the boundaries of traditional and contemporary music, the school orchestra has thrilled and amazed audiences for many years.

For this concert, the orchestra will be performing a wide array of music from popular movies, spanning many genres and cultures, including works by John Williams, Elton John, A. R. Rahman, and many more. We hope that this will entice musicians and non-musicians alike to witness a live orchestral performance.

Conducting the orchestra for the evening will be Shakya Mataraarachchi and Methuka Warusavithana. In the past, the orchestra has worked with international conductors and professional musicians, helping to improve its overall standard. We hope to do the same this year with the help of Tatsuya Daniel.

Joining the RCWO will be the Royal College Choir, the Senior Choir of Visakha Vidyalaya. The concert will also feature an item including young prospective musicians from the primary section of the Royal College, providing them with a unique opportunity to perform at such an event.

Night at the Cinema;
October 23, 2026
Venue: Navarangahala, Royal College, Colombo 7;
Time: 6.30pm.
Ticket prices: Rs. 2,500, Rs. 1,500