

**GOODENOUGH GLOBAL ALUMNI INTERVIEWS:
CAMERON ROBERTS IN CONVERSATION WITH OLIVIA HO**



CAMERON ROBERTS. Combining his skills as a concert pianist, a medical doctor, a PhD in the physical and perceptual aspects of touch, and author of "Optimizing Pianism – Evidence-based Perspectives" (Rowman & Littlefield, 2025), he holds an esteemed position as an international expert in the application of science to advanced piano technique and modern pedagogy.

Olivia: Thank you so much for making time to come and see us. First of all, tell us who is Cameron Roberts? What is your work? Where are you working? What's your career like and what motivates you?

Cameron: That's a big question—I've never had a neat answer. I wear many hats. I'm a doctor – an anaesthetist, and I also work in intensive care. But that's my hobby. I'm a concert pianist. I perform solo, in chamber groups, and occasionally with orchestras. More recently, I've been focusing on teaching—especially helping musicians solve technical problems or recover from injuries caused by their playing.

I've just published a book, *Optimising Pianism – Evidence-Based Perspectives*, aimed at providing musicians with better information to use in the practise room to help them fast-track performance excellence whilst minimising injury risk. I have trained in both medicine and music, including postgraduate studies, and have taught chamber music to talented undergraduates for years in Madrid. Somewhere inside me, I suppose, I feel compelled to help musicians and the arts. Alongside that, I'm also a dad, trying to live a normal life amidst all the chaos.

Olivia: At what point were you at Goodenough College?

Cameron: I was there from 2006 to 2007, doing postgraduate music studies and taking lessons at multiple institutions.

Olivia: What were some of your fondest memories of your time at GC?

Cameron: All of it, really! I arrived not knowing about the College and was lucky to find it—great practice spaces, central location, and a way to meet people. I played football and tennis, spent time at Freddy's, gave a Port Talk on Bach, and practised a lot. It was a special time of exploration and connection, and being back in London now, living near King's Cross, I wonder if there was some subconscious pull to return to Bloomsbury.

Olivia: I understand that you began work on your book while you were at GC. Is that correct?

Cameron: Yes, though I didn't realise it at the time. I was beginning to question my own technique and the inconsistencies in teaching methods I'd experienced. I started thinking critically about how musicians practise and why some methods lead to success, and others, stagnation or injuries. It was clear that while we all possess many strengths, hidden weaknesses—like a flat tyre on a good car—can hold us back.

My book addresses these overlooked issues and offers a framework grounded in science, not speculation. It's about unlocking efficient, effective practice routines—how to spend those 10,000 hours wisely, not blindly. I was seeing that much of the traditional teaching lacked evidence and often led to injuries or performance problems, despite its authoritarian stance. That realisation started here and deepened during my years teaching and performing in Spain.

Olivia: That would mean that if you were here in 2006, you've been thinking about this book for nearly 19 years.

Cameron: Probably longer. Even as a university student, I was bothered by contradictory advice—like whether to sit high or low at the piano or touch a key in a particular way. These weren't just preferences; they reflected deep pedagogical divides, with little scientific grounding. My book tries to strip away the myths by valuing physiology, physics, and psychology. It's about understanding the mechanics and the perception of what we hear and feel whilst playing an instrument.

I strongly believe that musicians deserve to understand better how their minds and bodies work when practicing so that both artistry AND longevity are fostered. Why gamble with something as precious as your time, talent, and health?

Olivia: Well, you're a very busy person. How do you find the time to write?

Cameron: Slowly! I once told my wife I just needed a few weeks to write the book... that was 14 years ago. Life intervened—kids, exams, moving countries, a PhD. Writing was on and off. At one point, I realised I needed a deeper understanding of touch perception, so I paused the book and pursued that PhD.

I'm not a natural writer. I'd rewrite a sentence five times then delete it the next day. Writing for me was blood, sweat, and tears—but I wanted to communicate something useful. The first chapter of the book is about belief systems – who'd have thought, hey, in a book about piano playing! – because unfounded beliefs in teaching can be damaging. Kids internalise concepts and routines, and only through struggle or injury do they unlearn them—if they're lucky.

While some teachers produce great players, many students suffer, switching teachers in search of that “secret edge.” The aim of my book is to empower musicians with knowledge to practise smarter, not harder.

Olivia: So, tell us, what's next for you?

Cameron: Sharing the book—with musicians, educators, conservatories. I want to collaborate with others interested in rational, evidence-based approaches to reaching peak performance. I'm trying to bridge the gap between science and art by applying science in the places where it can help musicians.

I've spent the hours on stage, I understand what it's like to perform under pressure. And I want to help others do that better, without pain or injury, and with more freedom! Musical performance is personal and context-dependent, and yet students are still often trained to meet rigid standards. That disconnect leads many to feel like failures when, in fact, the model they've been told to follow is flawed, not them.

Olivia: What do you think is the legacy of your work in helping other disciplines?

Cameron: Medical and sports sciences have helped me. Music science is now catching up. We already know a lot. I hope to bring the best information to performers, and also to teachers, so that musicians can get on with being more musical, and less confused about the *how* of playing! I think any person of any discipline could benefit from my book, as it deals with thinking bigger – MUCH bigger – acting better – MUCH better and improving the routines that get your product to the point at which it will best engage with the audience in which it is aimed.

Olivia: Thank you for your time.

Cameron: Absolute pleasure.