



Becoming a Conservatory or College Music Major

So many choices. So many decisions. So little time.

Choices:

♪ **Conservatory**

- Music is the main focus.
- The core program usually includes literature and history courses. In addition to the core music classes (theory, ear-training, piano, conducting) you must take your applied major and perform in ensembles or larger groups. If your major is something besides performance, you will have those classes, too.
- This would include concentrations in music education, recording, business, etc.
- Entry is based on audition. Scholarship may be based on performance or academics.

♪ **College or University**

- Some have Schools of Music within the college while others simply have a Music Department.
- Although music is the main focus of study, besides core classes mentioned above, a foreign language, and math and/or science classes are often required.
- For the university or college, acceptance is two-fold. The student must be accepted in both the university/college (grades) **AND** the Music Department (audition).
 - Acceptance must be in both.

Decisions:

♪ **General considerations:**

- Housing – how many years on campus?
- “Outside the walls” – is it safe?
- Location and size of school
- Demographics of student population
- Student life
- Location: Urban / suburban / rural / USA / international

♪ **Unique considerations for music majors:**

- Access to practice rooms – always open or sign-up?
- Conductors?
- Playing opportunities – for example, are you able to play in an orchestra freshman year?
- What type of ensemble playing is there?
- Who will teach the lessons for your instrument – professors? Graduate students?
- How many semesters will it take to complete studies?
- Dual degree programs (music and something else); some special programs that combine a liberal arts education through a university with a music program through a conservatory (e.g., New England Conservatory and Tufts University)

♪ **Local programs** around the Capital District:

- College of St. Rose – music ed., performance and music industry.
- Schenectady Community College – music ed. and performance
- RPI – has some electronic music-type studies
- Skidmore College
- Union College

♪ **Finding schools outside the region**

- Performance & Visual Arts College Fairs – register to get information about college fairs, tips on finding schools, and much more
 - <http://www.nacacnet.org/EventsTraining/CollegeFairs/pva/Pages/default.aspx>
 - Bring pre-printed labels (mailing labels) to use for information sign-up sheets
 - New York and Boston fairs tend to be in October/early, early November
- Summer Music programs
 - A great opportunity to meet teachers, see schools, determine how strong is the passion for majoring in music

♪ **Before auditioning:**

- **At home:**
 - Take private lessons from a specialist on your instrument. This includes voice lessons for a vocal major.
 - Take piano lessons. Take piano lessons **now**. You need some type of keyboard experience to navigate through theory. Most music conservatories require 2 to 4 semesters of piano.
 - Take theory
 - Sing in a chorus
- **Research what others have been playing for their audition at that particular institution.**
 - Consider carefully before loading your senior year with AP classes. If you are sure you are going to audition for a music program, your AP classes may not be relevant in a conservatory. On the other hand, they may be very useful at a college or university.
 - **Preparing audition material is very, very intensive.**
 - Check carefully to see what audition repertoire the institution requires. There are often different repertoire requirements for performance vs. education majors.
 - Check the excerpt list.
- **At the school:**
 - Visit. Walk around the campus and beyond.
 - Take a lesson with someone you might want to study with. The personal relationship with the teacher is extremely important.
 - Call the school's music department directly to find out who you would study with as a freshman / who you might take a lesson with.
 - There may or may not be a fee. You should find out before hand and come prepared if there is a fee (and ask – cash or check?).



- Questions to ask during your lesson/visit:
 - Is the teacher an active performer?
 - If yes, how much time is he/she on/off campus?
 - Will grad students be handling lessons during the “off” (or “on”) time?
- Try to time your visit with a performance by their orchestra or band. Look at their recital schedule.
- Ask how many the school is accepting in your major and on your instrument.

Time:

♪ **Types of auditions:**

- Pre-Screening – just to qualify for auditions. Probably requires a recording (see below).
- Rolling auditions – when the audition dates are scattered throughout the year.
- Set dates – usually scheduled during the institute’s “week, or two, of auditions.”
- At the school v. regional auditions (in more convenient locations)

♪ **When you go to audition:**

- If there is any distance involved, go the night before. Auditions are usually in the winter – not a great time to travel!
- Wear comfortable clothing, but don’t forget - you are making an impression. Wear something you can play in but that shows that you know how important this audition is. First impressions count.
- Turn your phone off.
- Check to see how many copies of your music you need to have with you. Have it neatly organized and ready to present to each adjudicator.

♪ **Making a recording:**

- Sometimes a college may require a recording to pre-screen applicants and determine who will be invited to come for an audition.
 - In our area there are a number of places you can go to record. Some suggestions we are aware of: The College of St. Rose; SUNYTunes at University at Albany. These may or may not be open to the public. Commercial options include Cotton Hill Studio, Blue Sky and AudioART.
 - It used to be necessary to make a professional recording. With advances in technology, personal recording systems now provide higher-quality recordings at an affordable cost. You have to decide which method will meet the school’s criteria for recordings.
 - Costs: Recording fees vary; you may be required to have an accompanist(s) who may/may not charge a fee.

♪ **Keeping current:**

- Requirements for and programs offered at conservatories, colleges and universities are constantly changing.
 - Be sure to make your own inquiries so you know your information is current.
 - If college decisions are few years away, always check for the upcoming year.

Other Considerations



♪ Applications

- The Common App - Unified college application that may not be so unified as many schools require a unique supplement in addition to the Common App.
- Yes – essays may be required even for conservatories.
- Schools of music (within a university) and the university itself may each require separate applications.
- Music resume – keep a binder with copies of concert programs as an easy way to track the repertoire they have played. We are building an archive of programs on esyo.org – but it is not yet complete.
- Assistance from high school guidance – great resource but check with the counselor as to his/her experience with applications to conservatories and music schools. The process is different enough that you may need to be more of an advocate/manager of the process than might have been required for a more “standard” college application.

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- Tuition assistance can be based on financial need or playing ability.
- A college or university will also use high school grades to award scholarships.
- Check if you must apply for the scholarship every year. Some are granted for only one or two years and then renewed, based on performance.

♪ Accepted or not?

- It’s all about the audition but decisions can be very arbitrary and based on the need for a particular instrument at the school.

♪ Proficiency and Placement Exams

- Many schools offer on-line proficiency tests for non-music subjects. Some of these can be taken in the summer before the first semester.
- The first week of school is usually filled with proficiency tests. Many places allow you to test out of semesters of ear training, theory, music history and piano.

♪ What to study?

- A quick note about **not** being a music major: If you do not want to be a music major but wish to be part of a performing ensemble, be sure to look at the possibility of joining one as a non-music major before making a final decision.
 - Some colleges/universities that have music programs fill all the playing positions from their own music department and don’t have room for non-music majors.
 - Many large cities do have community orchestras or bands to perform in.
- Double majoring or dual degree programs
 - Not for the faint of heart!
 - Consider the time needed for both majors – especially practice time on your instrument or time needed in a lab, etc.
- **Ask yourself – what do you want to do with your degree?**



♪ Mom & Dad: Best advice: patience, patience, patience! And never say anything before the audition!