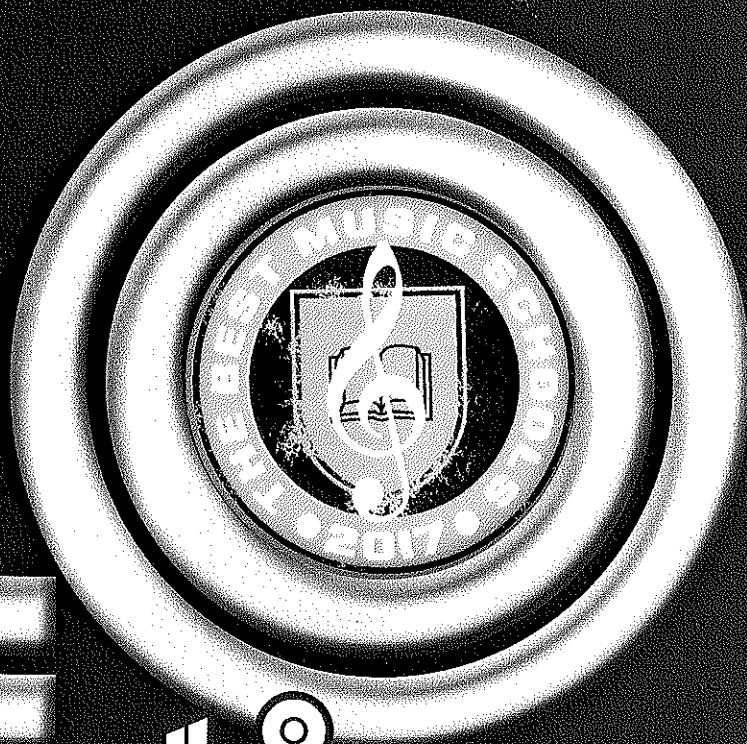


10



Questions

IT'S COLLEGE APPLICATION TIME!

Whether you're a high school senior planning on attending college next fall or an eighth-grader who's just had an inkling that studying music in college could be for you, you've got some work ahead. Maybe you want to perform. Or you could be considering a related major: music education, music business, music therapy. Perhaps you're also considering another major, making music simply one part of your college life.


As acceptance letters start coming in, the conversation gets more serious. The choice is now between specific alternatives, each of which can seem very similar—or markedly different from what you thought they were when you started searching. Will logic guide you here, or will your gut decide?

We talked to faculty members at several music schools about how to approach this crucial decision-making process, and emerged with 10 questions that are well worth asking.

TO ASK *BEFORE* AND *AFTER* YOU GET IN

BY RICH BRESKE

PHOTO: COURTESY OF
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY



A trombonist on the campus of Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music ponders his options while looking at Lake Michigan.



COLIN SORGI

Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University

Current Job: Concertmaster at the National Philharmonic, Artistic Director and CEO of Sonar New Music Ensemble, OrchKids Publications Coordinator

Major: Violin

Graduating Year: 2009 BM, 2013 MM

Instrument(s): Violin

How did your expectations as a freshman compare to the real experience?

I remember having no idea what I was getting myself into. I chose Peabody because my experience visiting the school left me with a sense of its nurturing atmosphere and, most of all, I had found a teacher that I clicked with.

What did you learn from the differences between your expectations and reality?

I think it's nearly impossible to know what is going to happen in what I would consider the four most formative years in a young musician's life—and I have a feeling most kids go into it having no clue. And that's totally fine!

Where would you look first to find a college's core identity and values?

Talk to anyone and everyone possible!

What course turned out to be more valuable than you expected?

I can't say enough about how important ear-training and theory classes are.

How did your education equip you for your current career?

Only a select few leave school and enter into their dream job right away. It takes a lot of focus, and we have to forge our own paths to be successful. I didn't learn about this in school, but I feel lucky that an ambitious attitude has always been a part of me.

What advice would you give high school students researching music schools?

Be honest with yourself and find a school that fits your personality. Explore. Be absolutely positive that you are willing to put in the intense amount of hard work and dedication required for being successful in this field.

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1 Do I pick a school based on its past track record?

"Some students think a school that produces successful students will provide them success as well. That is actually not true," says Terell Stafford, director of jazz studies and chair of instrumental studies at the **Boyer College of Music and Dance at Temple University** in Philadelphia, Pa. "It's more about finding the right fit for you, starting with a strong relationship with a teacher and guide who can lead you through those challenging four years."

2 When should I visit the campus?

Our team of experts unanimously agrees that a campus visit is a good idea prior to being accepted. But it can be even more helpful after you're accepted, especially when you have a list of specific items you want to consider. "Talk with professors, sit in on rehearsals, get a feel for it," says Frank Tracz, director of bands at **Kansas State University** in Manhattan, Kan. "It has to feel good to be good."

3 University or conservatory?

If you're considering a music performance degree, you might be wondering whether a music conservatory is a better choice than a univer-

sity. Karl Paulnack, dean at the **Ithaca College School of Music** in Ithaca, N.Y., says that the difference between the two types of schools, though worth noting, is not as significant as it may at first appear: "Because all music programs are some combination of conservatory and university approaches, the size of the school is probably a more important consideration for students."

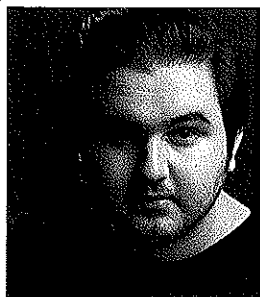
Tim Hays, director of the music business program at **Elmhurst College** in Elmhurst, Ill., sees things a little differently. "If you are seeking a more versatile degree, then the college degree far outweighs the conservatory degree. When it comes to most performance situations, decisions are *not* made on the basis of having a degree. It's how well you perform, period!"

4 Should I go for a broad-based music degree or take a more narrow focus?

Depending on the schools you're looking at, several different types of music degrees may be on offer, from a broader-based B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) degrees to a finely tuned B.M. (Bachelor of Music). And as Terell Stafford points out, "Within the music department, there are many different concentrations—education and music therapy, for example. Students can drive their own interest, whether it's jazz, classical,

University of Houston • Houston, TX





GIL GLAZE

Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music, New York University

Current Job: DJ, producer, owner of Breeze Records, owner of Echo Artist Management, head of merchandise for NoXcuses (Sirup Music)

Graduating Year: 2016

Major: Recorded Music

Instrument(s): Piano

How did your expectations as a freshman compare to the real experience?

Since I had moved away from Switzerland for the first time, I had no idea what to expect. Moving to a new continent was a big change for me and going to an American university was an even bigger challenge, yet the school made me feel at home from day one.

What did you learn from the differences between your expectations and reality?

Going in, I was quite nervous since I did not know if being from Europe gave me a disadvantage as I was not fully aware of American music history. In the end, the music history classes helped me a lot.

Where would you look first to find a college's core identity and values?

I found social media to be a big help as I would find students in the program and contact them through email or Facebook Messenger with any questions I had.

What course turned out to be more valuable than you expected?

Music Marketing by Seth Faber. He would tell us about real-life situations from his daily job. I found this to be the best way to learn in comparison to just sitting and reading textbooks.

How did your education equip you for your current career?

Music Marketing and Music Business classes helped me so much in managing my own DJ career. I also had opportunities to do remixes for labels from teachers who connected me.

What advice would you give a high school student researching music schools?

Never judge a school from what you see online. Find a way to connect with students and talk to them about their experiences.

The Best Music Schools 2017

arranging, recording, etc. If you have interests in music outside of specific performance, be sure these other opportunities are available."

5 How much time will I get with faculty members?

"This is a big deal!" Tim Hays emphasizes. "You'll never again get a chance to work closely with a wide spectrum of experts the way you do at college. High student/faculty ratios mean you'll be fighting to get noticed. Seek schools where this isn't the case."

"Any faculty member who is dedicated to teaching and who genuinely loves the art will be available to their students," Karl Paulnack says. "There may be differences in 'mechanical' availability where a majority of faculty are part-time or commuting in from large distances, but these are not insurmountable."

6 Should my concentration be more on improving individual skills or on group playing opportunities?

"Music is always a balance of 'me' and 'we,'" Paulnack says. "It's rare that the successful solo violinist has not had exceptional participation in chamber music, orchestral, or other 'we' types of playing, and it's equally exceptional that a superb orchestral violist has not had significant accomplishment as a soloist. Students should look for schools that can provide them both halves of the training, regardless of where each student hopes to end up in life."

7 What kinds of choices do I have in terms of class selection?

"You want a wide variety of class subjects, and a variety of faculty overall," Hays says. "You also want to be able to get into those classes. Too small a music department, and there are problems with the first two

issues. Too large a department, and you have a problem with the third."

"A certain flexibility in terms of elective selection is desirable," Paulnack acknowledges, "but here I have a caution. Students may wish they could sign up for all sorts of extra courses and performing opportunities, but there are only 24 hours. The demands of individual practice and the limit of human energy are very real. If we can only eat three meals a day, then consider whether you would like to order from a menu of 12 items or a menu of 240. At the end of the day, you will have eaten just three meals. Certainly insist that the class 'menu' offer an attractive number of options, but this is a case where less is more."

Tracz adds this advice: "Talk with alumni and ask how well they think they were prepared."

8 How big are the classes?

Paulnack considers this question extremely important: "Most skill-based classes favor smaller class size where students can get more individualized attention." Hays says, "Ideally, it should be in the 12-to-20 range of students per faculty member. That's the size where real education takes place. Faculty members should know every student in class."

On the other hand, Frank Tracz went to a large school and insists that "I had all the attention I needed and wanted, because they taught me how to interact and ask questions."

9 What's the environment like?

"Some students go to music school and find themselves wanting 'all music, all the time,'" Paulnack observes. "Other students want a more balanced collegiate experience and find it meaningful to participate in a variety of organizations. Colleges offer plenty of opportunities for both types of students and all of those in between."

Elmhurst's Hays agrees. "Your education includes far more than just the class experi-



ALAN WILLIAMS

Professor and Chair of Music Department, University of Massachusetts Lowell

Teaches: Music business

Degrees: B.M. in Third Stream Studies, New England Conservatory of Music; M.A. and Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology, Brown University

Instruments: Piano, guitar, voice

How important were your undergraduate years?

They were transformative. I walked in thinking I knew what I was going to do, and I walked out with a very different view. I was still interested in popular music, but the way I looked at it had been colored by the Third Stream approach [which blends many different styles of music], and that was at the root of my decision to go on and study ethnomusicology.

Did your initial expectations of college match the reality?

Not quite. When I first got to NEC, the Third Stream department was basically hidden away in the basement. The whole program seemed very marginalized. At the same time, it felt nice to be scrappy upstarts. But over time, things evolved, and now that program—which has a different name today, Contemporary Improvisation—is highly respected.

How has your own college experience influenced your work now?

The Third Stream emphasis on ear training and personal style really clicked for me. I asked myself, "Why isn't everybody learning this way?" At UMass Lowell, we threw out the old way of teaching theory and put in a new curriculum based on ear training. You take your instruments into class with you.

Where should students look to find the true identity of a music program?

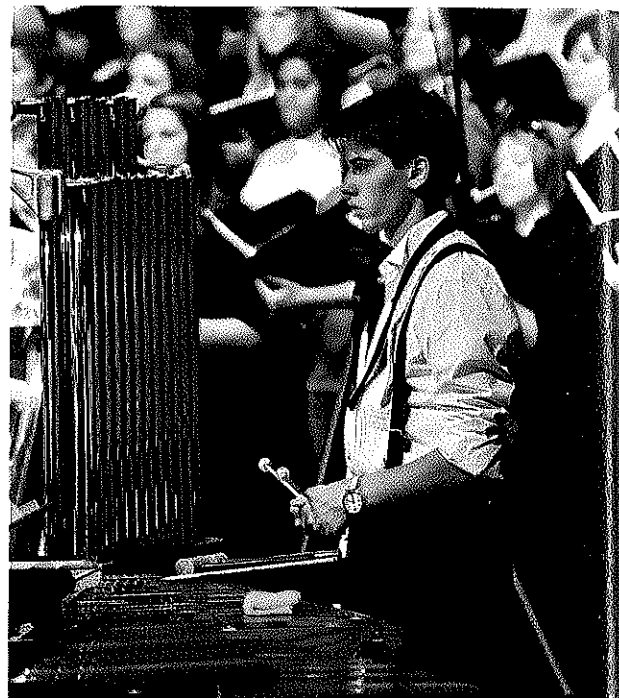
What you see on a college website only tells you what the school wants you to think. Go beyond that. Check out the faculty of a school and see what they're doing. You'll find amazing people working somewhere you've never heard of.

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Wright State Univ. • Dayton, OH

ence. It includes the interactions you have with students outside of class. Music thrives in urban environments. The best experience is a school that may not be directly in a city, but certainly has easy access to it. That is a vibe that is often overlooked in seeking a music school."

Terrell Stafford adds, "One of the most important considerations is personality of the student. For example, if you're easily distracted, you might want to select a school that's a bit more peaceful, rather than a location that has many other activities to take your attention away from your studies."



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What's the stress level?

Every college expects you to work hard, attend your classes, and manage your schedule. For musicians, there's additional stress when you audition, not only for your place in the school but for your place in those coveted ensembles.

"There's an ideal balance between the positive situation where you're challenged as a student because there are a number of quality peers who push you to improve, and the negative situation where there are so many that only a few get the big performance opportunities," Hays says. "It's really important to get the opportunity to play in the department's signature ensembles."

"Temple's ensemble auditions are open to all students, and students are encouraged to be audience participants as well," Stafford says. "We promote a congenial and family atmosphere at these auditions, but some may still find it a little daunting at first."

Paulnack warns, "Investigate carefully to see if there is evidence of either healthy

or unhealthy competition within musical communities. In a supportive environment, healthy competition can sometimes allow students to achieve outcomes they themselves did not think possible."

Outcomes and Decisions

So where does all this lead the inquiring mind? "If everything feels right, it probably is," Stafford says. "If you are just not happy with the courses or instructors, it can affect you mentally. Be sure to meet with other students to see what college life is like through their eyes."

Paulnack suggests finding out a bit more. "Ask what happens to students after they leave the school: 'Tell me about last year's graduating class; where are they now, what are they doing?' Also, let your potential teachers know if you have a particular dream, hope, or goal for your life. It's very important to talk about this, rather than simply look for statistics, because careers in music are utterly unpredictable, and many students end up having great success in an area they never imagined pursuing." **T**