

## Undergraduate Music Majors – How to Succeed

It's easy to identify a committed music major. This student has expressed a desire to play, teach, or be involved with music at some professional level.

- **First**, students must acknowledge the importance and comprehensiveness of **music theory**. Don't become discouraged when you're entrenched in cumulative music theory and harmony courses that span two to three years. Even some fine performers have trouble with harmonic concepts, **but these concepts are essential if students plan to teach or perform on a high level**.

A fundamental mistake students make is to underestimate basic musicianship skills, as well as knowledge of scales, triads, and intervals. These form the groundwork for the study of and success in every other harmony and form course.

- **Second**, you must understand the significance of **music history** to their professional lives. A common complaint among undergraduates is that music history is a long, drawn-out trivia search. However, all teachers can attest to the value of music history as a tool not only in helping to select literature but also in properly teaching performance practices. A student's knowledge of music history will be called upon daily in the music profession.
- **Third, applied lessons are the groundwork for future growth**; practicing fundamentals such as scales, intervals, technique, articulation, long tones, and all the other skills that build technical proficiency. The repetition of solid fundamentals is the price one must pay for true technical mastery to be reached.
- **Fourth**, music students must **develop basic keyboard skills**; helpful for studying scores, teaching harmony, and providing basic accompaniment. A non-keyboard person can never get enough time at the keyboard. Students do not realize until they are out in the professional world that they will never again have the time or motivation to improve their piano skills. Time for professional music teachers is at a premium.
- **Faculty expect** to see students grapple with music theory, music history, applied studio study, and keyboard skills if a student as a serious music major. These four areas are the benchmarks along the path to becoming comprehensive musicians; they require skills that develop over time. While the skills of some students may already be advanced, other students may require more time to practice and refine their skills.
- **What do you want** to do with your music study? Do you want to teach or be an international recitalist? Do you want to go to graduate school or professional school?
- **Keep a portfolio** of your progress throughout your undergraduate studies. Theory tests (with high marks), programs of ensemble work and student recitals, notes from master classes, and other professionally related experiences will confirm your determination to succeed.
- **Manage your time carefully**. You must allow time for core courses, music major courses, studio practice time, ensemble rehearsal, and ensemble performance dates. This is also the true

training ground for becoming a teacher. Time management and organization will always be critical.

- **Prepare for your proficiency tests with great care.** Juries and recitals with your major instrument are the cornerstone for your musicianship. Work closely and diligently with your applied teacher. Plan appropriately for secondary instrumental requirements.
- Academic habits that are predictors of success in school-**punctuality, reliability, preparedness, industriousness, and effort**-are **also indispensable for success in the music profession.**