

WHY MAJOR IN MUSIC?

Part 1: Jobs, and the Degree

Each year, thousands of young people graduate from colleges with bachelor's degrees. The assumption is that those holding such a degree are now educated enough to qualify for a better job, or to enter further academic training at the master's level. This is true, even if they majored in art history, philosophy, business, math, or English.

The same parents, who encouraged their children to study music *before* they entered college, may not see the value of a college degree in music versus another undergraduate program, like business or marketing. Yet the truth is that the music education requires skill development at a consistent, incremental, advanced, and intermediate level that has cross disciplinary applications for any employer. Newspaper employment classified ads hardly ever list a job opening for a philosopher, an art historian, a mathematician, or even a business major. Most employers list a preferred major, some will accept a work experience equivalency, but the majority just require a bachelor's degree. Your degree is your ticket to an interview – then you sell them on the benefits of your education that will directly enable you to contribute to the success of their company. Read on for an example of these music degree benefits...

Remember: those who have earned any Bachelor's Degree, regardless of the discipline, are able to apply for any job (music or otherwise) requiring a bachelor's degree.

Specialization, professionally and educationally, takes place once a student completes graduate studies at the Masters, Doctoral, or professional certification level—whether directly related or unrelated to their undergraduate program.

Your Bachelor of Music degree qualifies you to not only apply for many more jobs than otherwise would be available to you, but also prepares you to apply for entrance to a graduate programs (in music or in another field).

The difference is this: Those holding music degrees have the best background to work in the field—be it performance, teaching, or anything related to the industry. For a young musician looking to the future, a bachelor of music degree does not close doors—it opens them.

Part 2: The Quest for Perfection –The Joy of Expression

- Engineers and accountants do not have to worry about developing exceptionally fine muscle control in order to succeed.
- Musicians do—it takes years.
- The quest for perfection is a natural outgrowth of simply trying to get the music as mistake free as possible. The standards of "perfection" have increased dramatically since audio engineers first learned to cut and splice magnetic recording tape. How many edits are there in a typical classical recording? About a hundred. So much for perfection.
- The quest for perfection is the quest for excellence and a music education inculcates that into the student—**this motivation is applicable to every profession, not just music.**
- The quest for perfection is much easier to define than the elements of expression so dear to music performers and listeners alike. The problem is time and maturity. Time, because it takes so long to develop the fine control necessary to be profoundly expressive with music; maturity because while young musicians can always follow their teachers' instructions, there comes a point when they need to get their inspiration from within—tempered by what they have been taught.

This should not be a surprise for most adults. We all mature by first doing what our parents tell us. Then one day we discover that there are elements of finesse and style associated with every choice we make. And sometimes **how we do something is equally as important as what we do. Same with music.**

The ability to fully explore the expressive elements that make the music all it can be is something best gained from intensive work with a master teacher—and in an atmosphere where progress is recognized, appreciated, and rewarded. While this may seem like some kind of magical thing, only perceivable by those with trained ears and minds, it is not so. If you have an opportunity to attend a masterclass (public

lesson) sometime, you will immediately understand what can result when the teacher says something like: "I think I know what you are trying to do. Pause a little longer at the end of the phrase, and hold this "G" a little longer to stress the tension in the music." Small changes like that can result in a profound difference in the listener's experience.

Musical development takes place over a predictable span of time, beginning with the years it takes to develop the muscles (and the "ears") required to get the notes right; continuing as ability increases to perform musically; and (for most) culminating with the development of enough technical facility to attempt the most difficult and rewarding compositions. Music is a wonderful "enrichment" for those who take it to that point. And there are a lot of educational options available at that level—when the goal is simply "perfection."

For the relatively small percentage with the drive and dedication to "get beyond the notes," the number of educational options shrinks dramatically. For these exceptional performers, the technical "perfection" once regarded as THE musical goal now becomes simply a tool with which to express not only the musical ideas of the composer, but also the contribution of the performer. This puts us squarely in "Conservatory Country," where students of this type, and at this level, gather to become part of a dedicated community. Students travel half way around the world to study in such an advanced environment.

With this as background, it is time to return to the initial question...

As we said earlier, the value of a college education is more than simply the sum of the information learned. This is especially true for music students. Those with the drive, sensitivity, and dedication to succeed in music, develop associated skills and attributes along the way which serve them well in the work world.

*** Musicians tend to be creative people, in tune with their minds, bodies, and emotions.**

*** Producing performances based on planned growth (time to learn the music) make musicians good project managers, able to plan ahead toward individual or group goals.**

*** Private study (and the practice required to master the material each week) makes those**

with musical training comfortable with taking responsibility for accomplishing tasks.

*** Musicians come to understand that it is only through working effectively with others (accompanists, conductors, and/or other performers) that a performance will be successful. Teamwork.**

*** Anyone able to participate in life while at the same time doing the daily work required to excel in music is bound to be a good "time manager."**

*** Much of musical training has to do with identifying and mastering patterns in everything from compositional structure to technical passages. Musicians have been known to apply that ability in other working environments—everything from code breaking to computer programming. A computer guru at a major U.S. government agency recalled a study done in the early days of mainframe programming—trying to identify personality and skill characteristics associated with successful programmers. The study identified those with musical aptitude as the closest match.**

Translated into the language of business, a prospective employee may describe the benefits of their music education thusly:

- **Creative, and comfortable with themselves.**
- **Ability to perform under pressure.**
- **Self-discipline, self-starter, personal initiative.**
- **Having good planning and project management skills. Leadership.**
- **Having the ability to take the lead on a project, and to take responsibility for the outcome.**
- **Able to manage time wisely; able to handle several projects at once. Multitask.**
- **Able to identify patterns in behaviors and processes which may or may not work to the benefit of the company. Critical thinking.**

- **Able to work closely with others to meet group goals. Teamwork.**

By this time the truth should be obvious: Most music school graduates do just fine in the world, thank you. When music schools track their recent graduates, the following paths are typical.

1. **Many actually do make a living in music—sometimes entirely as performers. More often, we see a combination of performance and other musical endeavors. Some do quite well with their own private teaching studios, and/or teaching in more formal settings.**
2. **Some continue their musical studies in advanced degree programs. Others seek jobs in music-related businesses, and industries.**
3. **Some use their Bachelor's degree to get the same kind of job any other college graduate would seek.**
4. **Some use their Bachelor's degree to gain admission into a non-musical graduate program. That's right. There are doctors, lawyers, and psychologists out there who did their undergraduate work in music.**

In Summary

In years past, it was typical for college graduates to take a job in a good company, and stay there for their entire working careers. However, the rapid development of technology and the resulting changes in the skill sets needed for success has made that scenario less and less likely. **In a world where an ever increasing percentage of the population experiences several career changes in a lifetime, no college education can supply enough specific knowledge to cover all the possibilities.** Thus, an earned bachelor's degree—music or otherwise—is only a first step in the world. Those with a high-level, "musically flavored" college degree, not only have what it takes to make a good first step, they also have the creativity and drive to ensure that each succeeding step brings them closer to the happiness and fulfillment we all seek in life.

The "highest truth" here is actually very simple. Music education has been around for hundreds of years. They would not still be thriving if any significant portion of their graduates later concluded that they were not prepared to face life—that

somehow, they would have been happier had they majored in art history, philosophy, business, math, or (heaven help us) 18th century British literature (not to demean British lit!).

See below for some interesting study results:

1. Studies conducted in Georgia and Texas found that middle school and high school students who participated in instrumental music **scored significantly higher than their non-band peers in standardized tests.** The studies found a significant **correlation between the number of years of instrumental instruction and academic achievement in math, science and language arts.**

Source: University of Sarasota Study, Jeffrey Lyn Kluball; East Texas State University Study, Daryl Erick Trent

2. Students who were exposed to music-based lessons scored a full 100 percent higher on fractions tests than those who learned in the conventional manner. Second – grade and third – grade students were taught fractions in an untraditional manner by teaching them basic music rhythm notations.

Source: Neurological Research, March 15, 1999

3. **Music majors were found to be the most likely group of college grads to be admitted to medical school. Physician and biologist Lewis Thomas found that 66 percent of music majors who applied to medical school were admitted, the highest percentage for any group.**

A study of 7,500 university students revealed that music majors scored the highest reading scores among all majors including English, biology, chemistry and math.

Source: "The Comparative Academic Abilities of Students in Education and in Other Areas of a Multi-focus University," Peter H. Wood, ERIC Document No. ED327480. "The Case for Music in the Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, February, 1994

4. Music study can help students understand advanced music concepts. A grasp of proportional math and fractions is a prerequisite to math at higher levels. Music involves ratios, fractions and proportions and thinking space and time. Second-grade students were given four months of piano keyboard training ,as well as time using newly designed math software. The group scored over 27

percent higher on proportional math and fractions tests than children who used the math software.

Source: Neurological Research, March, 1999

5. Piano students are better equipped to comprehend mathematical and science concepts.

A group of preschoolers received private piano keyboard lessons and singing lessons. A second group received private computer lessons. Those children who received piano/keyboard training performed 34 percent higher on tests measuring spatial-temporal ability than the others. This concept has long been considered a major obstacle in the teaching of elementary math and science.

Source: Neurological Research, February 28, 1997

6. High school music students score higher on SAT's in both verbal and math than their peers. In 2001, SAT takers with coursework/experience in music performance scored 57 points higher on the verbal portion of the test and 41 points higher on the math portion than students with no coursework/experience in the arts.

Source: Profile of SAT and Achievement Test Takers, The College Board, compiled by Music Educators National Conference, 2001

7. Music training helps under-achievers. In Rhode Island, researchers studied eight public school first grade classes. Half of the classes became "test arts" groups, receiving ongoing music and visual arts training. In kindergarten, this group had lagged behind in scholastic performance. After seven months, the students were given a standardized test. The "test arts" group had caught up to their fellow students in reading and surpassed their classmates in math by 22 percent. In the second year of the project, the arts students widened this margin ever further.

Source: Nature, May 23, 1996

8. A 2004-2005 study found that students in high – quality school music education programs score higher on standardized tests compared to students with deficient music education programs. The study conducted by Dr. Christopher Johnson, Professor of Music Education and Music Therapy and Associate Dean of the School of Fine Arts, University of Kansas analyzed test scores from 4,739 elementary and middle school students in four regions in the United States – South, East Coast, Midwest and West Coast. The breakdown of participants was 1,119 in

either third or fourth grade and 3,620 in either eighth or ninth grade.

Results from the elementary schools indicated that:

a) Students in top-quality music programs scored 22% better in English and 20% better in mathematics than students in deficient music programs.

b) These academic differences were fairly consistent across geographical regions.

c) Students at the four elementary schools with high quality programs scored better than students participating in programs considered to be of lower quality.

Results from the middle schools indicated that:

a) Students in top-quality instrumental programs scored 19% higher in English than students in schools without a music program, and 32% higher in English than students in a deficient choral program.

b) Students in top-quality instrumental programs scored 17% higher in mathematics than children in schools without a music program, and 33% higher in mathematics than students in deficient choral programs.

Source: Journal for Research in Music Education, June 2007

9. A McGill University study found that pattern recognition and mental representation scores improved significantly for students given piano instruction over a three-year period.

Source: Dr. Eugenia Costa-Giomi, "The McGill Piano Project: Effects of three years of piano instruction on children's cognitive abilities, academic achievement and self-esteem," presented at the meeting of the Music Educators National Conference, Phoenix, AZ, April, 1998

10. A ten-year study, tracking more than 25,000 students, shows that music-making improves test scores. Regardless of socioeconomic background, music-making students get higher marks in standardized tests than those who had no music involvement. The test scores studied were not only standardized tests, such as the SAT, but also in reading proficiency exams.

Source: Dr. James Catterall, UCLA, 1997