

Bard Fisher Center Podcast

0:00 Josh: Hi everyone, welcome back to another edition of our podcast, I'm Josh Tyler, one of the Assistant Directors of Admission here at Bard College, I'm here with Mackie Siebens.

0:09 Mackie: Hi everyone, as Josh said I'm Mackie Siebens, I'm the Director of Admission and I graduated from Bard in 2012 and we are joined by our colleague from the Fisher Center, which is the performing arts center here at Bard, want to introduce yourself?

0:22 Michael: Hi, I'm Michael Hoffman, I am a graduate of the Vocal Arts (Graduate) Program at the Conservatory here at Bard, class of 2015 and I work at the Fisher Center as the executive assistant.

0:36 Josh: Great, so thanks for coming Michael and yeah we're going to learn a bit more about the Fisher Center, um how that's integrated into the Bard community and how the students utilize that space.

0:47 Michael: Of course

0:48 Josh: Great, so could you tell us a little bit about how the Fisher Center came to be, for those listening the Fisher Center was actually designed by architect, Frank Gehry, so that's an interesting part of this conversation, I think, but Mike what can you tell us a little bit more about the history there?

1:07 Michael: Yeah, for sure, um so the Fisher Center was born out of multiple necessities for the college, as a very strong, as a college from strong in the arts it was necessary to um create a space for all of the performing arts that happen here on campus, um the Theatre and Dance programs at the time didn't really have a home and so that was part of the necessity then that the Fisher Center was built to fulfil. It was also made to be a home for the Bard Music Festival, which is a two weekends of classical music that was previously happening in an outdoor tent on campus and some people, you know, during the summer in August, it's really hot, so you want to have a place that at least has air conditioning, uh but in addition to that it's one of, you know, the greatest, acoustically, small halls in the United States and possibly the world and was designed by Yasuhisa Toyota, who worked with Frank Gehry at the same time on the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, so we have a bit of a sister, sisterhood with them. Yeah, so it was a home for the Bard Music Festival, for the theatre and dance programs and soon after the Fisher Center was created the conservatory was born, so it was also supposed to be a home for all of those musicians as well.

2:30 Mackie: And can you tell us a little bit about, so we talked about um sort of the music festival and um noted some of the departments that have students using the space but can you talk in a little bit more detail, the kinds of access students have to creating performances and actually using the space and what kind of things happen?

2:50 Michael: Yeah so they're able to obviously take classes in Theatre and Performance and Dance and Music, um in addition to that there's student performances all the time, there's theatre performances and dance concerts and music concerts and they're able to participate in academic productions and things like that. But we also bring in a lot of... guest artists to come in and create works here at the Fisher Center and students are able to participate in that either behind the scenes, working in like electrics or in costumes, or in set or stage management or sometimes they're even asked to perform with the artists um as you know performers on stage and also just to be able to attend and to go to those performances is really, really enlightening.

3:55 Josh: Do the visiting artists ever do workshops with the students?

3:58 Michael: Yeah that's often built into a lot of what we do when we bring in artists' great work, we try to also carve out time for them to do workshops and master classes for students that are interested.

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4:12 Josh: Sure, so you know, speaking of the space itself, um you mention the Sosnoff Theatre, can you tell us a little bit more about the performance spaces that are there as well as the studio spaces that are there and available for the students and the professional performers that come.

4:28 Michael: Yeah, we have four rehearsal studios that serve as the, also as the classrooms for a lot of those classes there's two for each dance and for theatre and performance. Um, we have a 200-seat, approximately, flexible configuration space, called the LUMA Theatre. When you go inside it looks like a blackbox, but it's actually a proscenium theatre, weirdly, um I call it a flexible configuration space because you're able to have it be you know a completely bare stage for, like a blackbox, and you can seat in the round and all sorts of things or you can have you know raked stadium seating with a proscenium, which is how it's often used for you know theatre productions and sometimes for dance as well. And then we have the 850-seat Sosnoff Theatre which is a, typically configured as a concert hall, but that's also flexible. So, um— if you go there for you know an orchestra concert there's a big wooden shell behind it that is made for acoustic purposes but that can be completely removed so you have a bare stage for dance and opera during the summer.

5:40 Mackie: Cool, and are there discounts for students to see the professional performances?

5:44 Michael: Yes there are.

5:46 Mackie: Can you tell us about those?

5:47 Michael: Yeah, so thanks to an anonymous donor we have been able to create a program called the Passloff Pass which is named an emeritus professor in the Dance program, Aileen Passloff. Thanks to that program, Bard students have access to five dollar tickets to all of our performances or the performance is free so it's either five dollars or nothing.

6:12 Mackie: Cool.

6:13 Josh: That's fantastic, um you know can students participate in theatre and dance classes if they're not majors?

6:19 Michael: Oh absolutely, yeah yeah that's a really special thing I think about Bard and being able to welcome people of all academic programs to come in and participate with people that are more you know more focused in them as well

6:37 Josh: And do you find that there's a lot of collaboration with other areas of the college as a result of that? Students, say collaborate with music students or other arts students or even say science students or..

6:50 Michael: Oh yeah, definitely, yeah I think that there's a lot of collaboration happening with other programs on campus and we're trying to even more than what we're doing now. For example there's, in the works there's an opera production, supposedly happening next spring, that will involve like all areas of campus, involving the studio arts program to do you know set and costume design, to involve the classics program to explore the text and you know bring in students from the you know music department and the theatre and dance department all together to create this one big production, but it even, even on a smaller scale there's a lot of students from all walks of life coming in and participating with their special skill sets for what we do.

7:47 Josh: Fantastic and because you also, because you have so many shows that are happening throughout the year, are there opportunities for students who are looking for on-campus employment during the year, are there opportunities for them to work at the Fisher Center?

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7:59 Michael: Absolutely. The Fisher Center is actually the single largest employer of Bard students on campus, it's something like 120 and 150 students every year have a job at the Fisher Center, whether it is behind the scenes working in the shops or you know helping us put up the set or set up lights or we have an administrative intern program over the summer that frequently we hire Bard students for that, um you know ushers, parkers, golf cart drivers, um the box office, those are all primarily staffed by Bard students so if you're interested at all in the performing arts and being involved then there is a job for you.

8:43 Mackie: And I imagine those sort of positions, the usher positions and those kinds of jobs are pretty coveted because you go to watch the performances for free.

8:51 Michael: Yeah, yup. Exactly.

8:56 Mackie: So I guess we can close with one final question which is what made you choose Bard as a student when you came for the Vocal Arts program and why did you choose to stay and work at the Fisher Center?

9:06 Michael: Yeah that's a big one. Haha. Um so I actually came to Bard from Vassar College just down the road. And I definitely felt a kinship in terms of the approach to academics and um the ability to really focus on the individual and my own pursuit of what I'm interested in while being in, you know, the context of a conservatory, which is very heavily, you know obviously, I'm going to get a music degree so I'm going to focus on music but even so being um in a community that has such a diversity of thought and of interests was definitely something that really appealed to me as you know an applicant to the vocal arts program and also just the, the intimacy of the program, I don't know if you really know but it's a, they accept basically eight people every year and so it's a very small, focused group of singers and that was very appealing to me and I actually, honestly almost didn't audition because I was like 'there's no way I could get in,' but anyway, here I am. And um I, through the program, I realized that I was so much more than just being a singer and I really wanted to explore my ability to be an administrator and to be a stage director actually and I found an in through the internship program at the Fisher Center and that's how I started as an intern in audience services and from there I moved on to the box office as a manager and now to my current position as Executive Assistant and um I've been really appreciative of the staff and how they understand my necessity to be, you know artistically fulfilled in addition to being an administrator and working for a world-class performing arts venue here in the Hudson Valley. It's really been a privilege to be able to pursue my art in addition to working for an organization that is pursuing art you know on a global scale.

11:31 Mackie: Cool.

11:32 Mackie: Well, yeah thanks for joining us Michael, this has been enlightening and I hope that everyone listening, I hope some of your questions were answered, um if you have any other questions that come to mind, reach out to us at admission@bard.edu and we'll be happy to make sure we find the right people to answer your questions if they're, if they get into a level of specificity that we need Michael's help for, so um thank you very much and we'll be putting out some new podcasts, so take a listen to those too!

12:01 Josh: Yeah, definitely, thanks and we'll see you next time. Actually, we won't see you, you'll hear us. Looking forward to that time, so take care, thanks.