

Bard Music Program Podcast

0:00 Josh: Okay welcome back everyone my name is Josh Tyler, one of the Assistant Directors of Admission and today we will be talking about the music program here at Bard and I am here, as always, with Mackie Siebens.

0:12 Mackie: Hi everyone, as Josh said I'm Mackie Siebens, I am the Director of Admission and I graduated from Bard from 2012, so I'm an alumn of Bard College and we are joined by James Bagwell, want to introduce yourself?

0:24 James: Yes, James Bagwell, I'm the director of the music program at Bard and professor of music.

0:30 Mackie: So some of you may have remembered that we had Frank Corliss join us on a podcast earlier to talk about the Conservatory specifically, so today we're going to be focusing on the music program and the first question that we have for James is in what areas can one study as part of the music program?

0:46 James: Well the music program has a number of areas, sort of major areas. We have classical, which includes composition, performance, both in piano, voice, violin, whatever instrument you would do. We have jazz which also has a large number of ensembles and has its sort of own curriculum and electronic music which is studio work, studio production, and also in that as well is ethnomusicology which is the study of non-western music or the study of western music in a different kind of way. So it's a pretty, it's a, it's a large program with a lot of offerings to students.

1:28 Josh: Fantastic.

1:29 Mackie: Go for it, Josh.

1:30 Josh: Now, once students decide what they'd like to study, is there any overlap between that, can they explore different areas, say if someone were interested in jazz and classical or electronic music, would they be able to mix those?

1:42 James: That's one of the great things about the music program is that we're not trying to put students in a box artistically. We've had a lot of students do, you know, they might do a senior project where the first part of their project is a jazz concert and the second part of their senior project is doing something with media, somehow, or a film score, we've even had some students doing that, so as long as we have the people who can teach it, they can do it.

2:11 Mackie: And do you have to be a music major to participate in music classes or performance?

2:15 James: No, anybody, anybody can be involved. Our ensembles are populated by majors and non-majors that includes the orchestra, the choruses, the jazz ensemble, the percussion ensembles and so forth so you don't have to be a major to do that.

2:30 Josh: Great and so is there an audition process for the classes or the ensembles that you have?

2:36 James: Many of the ensembles have auditions, the orchestra we have a small group, chamber singers, but we also have a large symphonic chorus that is not audition, so anyone can do that. It just depends on the group, some, we have a samba ensemble which is not auditioned, so I think the balance is pretty good between auditioned and non-auditioned groups.

2:58 Josh: Sure and so when one decides that they want to become a major, would there be an audition process for that and how does that work?

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3:06 James: It's the same thing as any other declaring a major or moderating than any part of the college, students start in their first year they may explore music as an audition and sophomore year they make it more serious and then they moderate, so it'd be like moderating into English Literature or Biology. But there's no initial audition to join the music program as a first year student.

3:33 Mackie: So as, looking at the conservatory versus the music program, are there overlaps between students that are in the conservatory which, for those of you who listened to the other podcast, the conservatory is a five-year double degree program rooted mainly in orchestral classical music, but the music program is a four year program and as we just discussed has a little variety to it, you can really be a little bit more flexible, but are there overlaps between students in each program?

3:58 James: Yes, in both classes; in the history classes, in the theory classes as well as the ensemble..so we have conservatory students who participate in the Bard chamber singers for example, there have been music program students who have played in the conservatory orchestra, so there's, there is quite a bit of overlap and our buildings are seamless, you know you just, we're all in one big building so there's no sense of separateness at all.

4:25 Mackie: And if you are interested in music but you are also interested in something else, how many students can double major?

4:33 James: Quite a few, if you have the grit, it's a lot of work, but we've had over the years double majors in creative writing and music, French, French Literature, Science, Biology, I've had a couple who've been interested in both sides of this so yeah it's a lot of work, it's two senior projects, it's two moderations. So if you've got the wherewithal to do it, yes. Those tend to be some of our very best students, though, they tend to be the really the ones who can organize their time well, and they are looking for a very broad education.

5:14 Josh: So when one does do a senior project in music what are some examples of the types of projects that students do?

5:21 James: Typically, well there's several ways. You can write a large paper, if you're interested in music history or ethnomusicology, if you're a performer, you what we typically do is have one recital in the fall and one recital in the spring. Some students take a, do a recording project, they'll record, I don't know what median you put it on anymore but it's not—it used to be CDs—but however it's, however the what the current modes are, we do that. So it's a pretty, you know, some students will do a recital in the fall and write a big paper in the spring. It's just, it's really a matter of discussion with your advisor, we want this to be personal. And I always tell the students that think about the senior project as your portfolio, what you can present to the world when you graduate, that you have these tangible things, whether it's a recording of your recital or your CD or whatever your creative process of making music.

6:14 Mackie: And speaking of presenting something to the world and being active, how active are the faculty in their own interests and pursuits in music?

6:24 James: This is an extraordinary faculty. We have, in composition, Joan Tower who is really one of the world's leading composers; George Tsontakis, equally, George just had a piece premiered by the Boston Symphony. In jazz, Thurman Barker is one of the great percussionists and has played and continues to play with some of the leading and most interesting jazz ensembles. In terms of music history and theory, Christopher Gibbs who is a musicologist and is published all over the world. Kyle Gann, maybe one of the, one of the smartest people I know, is a composer and a writer. Peter Laki who is in music history, published. I do a lot of work with the New York Philharmonic. So it's, yes, it's a very very active faculty and that's one of the reasons a lot of really great musicians want to teach at Bard is because there's that openness to pursuing your personal career and then bringing that growth back to the students.

7:23 Josh: Sure and speaking of the students and the opportunities that are available for them to perform, I know there's a multitude of, of venues on campus, but do the students get to get off campus and really perform in the community outside of, of Bard?

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7:37 James: We do, sometimes we go into the Red Hook High Schools and bring groups there to perform. We've had some groups go to Hudson, New York which is about thirty minutes north of here. So, yeah we do, we do try to get outside of campus.

7:52 Mackie: And is there, sort of access to New York City as this sort of venue or exploring at least music..?

7:58 James: Yeah we've had several, it's been, I guess it's been eight or nine years ago, we took the chamber singers to perform at Carnegie Hall, they did Mahler 8 with the American Symphony Orchestra, so there are opportunities for them to do that.

8:09 Mackie: Yeah, yeah. Wonderful. Anything else that we need to add?

8:16 Josh: Well, I'm thinking, you know, we talked a lot about the students here but how about after graduation? How many of them pursue music? What are some, some interesting things that students have done once they've left?

8:26 James: Well, some of them, they, some go to graduate school. Some go and move to another city, maybe Minneapolis, or a lot of them go to Brooklyn. I don't know if they're going to Brooklyn as much anymore because the cost of living there is enormous, but they just pursue their creative interests. We have some jazz players who tour, we have one graduate of Bard who is working as an assistant chorus master at Manhattan School of Music, and so it really depends on the student interest and what they want to do. Some graduate with a music degree but they don't pursue music as what they want to do, but they really wanted to do it during their four years at Bard.

9:04 Mackie: Yeah, it sounds like a diversity of placements, so..

9:08 James: It is, and I will tell you, the students are great. They are welcoming. It is a family, it is a community. They support each other we support them and they support us. So it's really, it's a really, I think a great place and a welcoming place.

9:25 Mackie: Well as someone who only dabbled in piano as a young person, I definitely appreciated the musical talent that exists on campus, just as a spectator and listener for sure.

9:34 James: Yeah and we welcome all levels, you know we're not trying to, we don't turn people away because they're just starting. In fact, some of our, some of our very best students started essentially as beginners during their freshman year..

9:48 Mackie: That's great.

9:49 James: ..And moved quickly into places they'd never thought they would go.

9:52 Mackie: Yeah. Great.

9:53 Josh: Absolutely, well thank you, James.

9:55 James: Thank you

9:56 Josh: It was a pleasure to have you come and talk with us today. Please stay tuned for future podcasts, we hope you enjoy that there will be many more to come, and if you do have any additional questions, you can reach out to admission@bard.edu and we look forward to the next time, take care.