

Bard Conservatory Podcast

0:00 Josh: Hi everyone welcome back to our next podcast. In this podcast we're going to be focusing on the Conservatory of Music here at Bard. I'm Josh Tyler, one of the Assistant Directors of Admission and we're here with Mackie Siebens.

0:13 Mackie: Hi everyone, as Josh said—hi, Josh—I'm Mackie Siebens, I'm the Director of Admission and I also graduated from Bard in 2012, and we're joined by our colleague in Admission, Greg Armbruster and Frank Corliss, do you guys want to say hi?

0:27 Greg: Hi, this is Greg Armbruster, I usually read the college-portion of the Conservatory applications, so Conservatory students actually submit two applications, the common application to the college itself and then the, the separate Conservatory application and I'll let Frank describe that.

0:50 Frank: I'm Frank Corliss I'm the Director of the Conservatory of Music. Starting just this July. It's a two-part process for applying to the school as Greg mentioned, all students in the Conservatory do a double degree and so they have to submit a common application for the college and then an online application for the Conservatory which also involves a pre-screening, audio or video, and a final audition, which usually takes place in February or early March.

1:21 Mackie: Cool. So do we want to start of by, maybe I'll ask Frank, what makes the Conservatory at Bard unique?

1:31 Frank: So, the conservatory is unique in that it is the only one I think in the country in which all students are required to do the dual degree and we do that for a couple of reasons, the first is a kind of practical reason which is that it makes, it leaves students with lots of options once they graduate from Bard. So, the majority of our students go on in music, probably 85 percent of them go on in music, but a sizeable minority, probably about 15 percent or so decide to follow a path connected to their academic major in the college. So that's the practical reason for doing double degree, but we do it I think for a deeper, perhaps more important philosophical reason which is that we think that having a broad liberal arts training actually creates better musicians, especially in this day and age, music is a complicated world right now, it's going through incredible upheaval. Old ways of making music are breaking down and new ones are being created. So it's a time of tremendous upheaval, but also tremendous opportunity and it's really demanding of young musicians more than just being able to move your fingers quickly and well, you have to be able to place your music making in a larger context, you have to understand how it connects to society in a larger way, you have to be able to understand how it connects with an audience, you have to understand what it's talking about philosophically, emotionally, it really helps to be able to read well, to write well, to work collaboratively, well with others. Those are all skills that a liberal arts degree helps its students acquire. So we think that ultimately this double degree creates better students and we've sat in results of the students who have graduated from the Conservatory, they really feel like they are... they have more, they bring more to the table when they're working with their musical colleagues.

3:26 Greg: Can the second degree be in the arts?

3:29 Frank: It certainly can be in the arts, the only thing it cannot be in is music, as you all know we have a very robust liberal arts music program, the BA in Music Program, four year program, and so students cannot major in that program but they can do visual arts, they can do studio arts, they can do theatre, dance, we've had Conservatory students in all of the other areas.

3:52 Greg: As well as any other subject that we teach?

3:53 Frank: Yeah, any other subject. So there are some that students gravitate to, so we have many students that go, obviously lots of connections with foreign language, so we have lots of students who are German majors or Asian Studies majors, French majors, Italian majors, um, but we have students who do Psychology, Philosophy, History, anything..Computer Science, Math and Sciences are often a popular major for Conservatory students.

4:16 Greg: But I want to sing, so what are my options? Haha

4:19 Frank: Now, singing is a different thing, so this one quirk about Bard ecosystem, education ecosystem is that voice of the undergraduate program is only offered through the music program so you can't major in voice in the Conservatory, we do have, however, have students in the conservatory who are taking voice lessons through the music program and are singing in their opera singings and having quite involved vocal lives, so it is possible.

4:46 Josh: So, Frank, speaking to the differences between the Music program and the Conservatory, what would draw a student towards one or the other and are there differences in what one can study? Obviously vocal music is one, but are there other differences beyond that?

5:02 Frank: Yeah, there are some differences so there are some areas of music that you can really only do through the Music program, Ethnomusicology, Music Theory, Musicology, Voice, as I just mentioned.

5:16 Greg: Jazz.

5:17 Frank: Jazz, certainly, can only be done through the music program. There are some areas where it can be done in both so you can actually be a music performance major in the Conservatory or you can be a music performance major in the music program. Composition also is also an area in which there, you can do it in either program, um. I would say the difference in the program in terms of the students, it really has to do with what their education goals are and how they want to structure their college years. If they are really performance-driven, if they want to, be really, have less flexibility in what their performance demands are and what their options are for their music curriculum, then they might take the Conservatory because they, every semester all students in the conservatory have to be in an orchestra, they have to be in chamber music, they have to take lessons, they're really gearing toward that kind of educational experience. If students want to have a little bit more flexibility in the way they set up their educational life and musical life they might gravitate more toward the Music program.

6:22 Greg: And you don't have to audition when you come into the Music program, you're applying to the college and not specifically the Music program, but as Frank mentioned earlier if you are looking into the Conservatory, there is an audition process that you have to go through.

6:36 Josh: And, Frank, can you speak more to the audition process that students would go through who are interested in the Conservatory?

6:41 Frank: Sure, so it's very similar to what you will find at other Conservatories, very standard kind of process we have. Students submit pre-screening audio or video along with their application and then we invite people to come here for final auditions and it's usually done in front of our panel of faculty members, and the students listened to for about 15 minutes and then the faculty submit their comments to the admissions department and then we kind of go over everything and see what happens.

7:13 Greg: Is it a blind audition?

7:16 Frank: It's not a blind audition, it's not a blind audition. It's important, I think, for the student to meet the faculty members that they might be working with and I think it's also important, you know in the audition, often I have conversations and discussions with the student so it's not, it's more than just playing, right we want to find out what students are doing, find out what their characters like and so those things are important to me.

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7:40 Josh: And so since students can apply both to the college and the Conservatory, is it possible to be accepted to one and not the other?

7:48 Frank: Great question, Josh. So it's unusual, since all our students in the Conservatory have to do a double degree, it's not possible to be accepted just to the Conservatory at the undergraduate level, they have to be accepted to the college. That said, I think that, you know it's really important that everyone who is applying to Bard understands that we, Greg and I, as we read these applications, we're looking at the whole student, especially young musicians, I'm biased on musicians, so I tend to think we're smart, which may not always be true but I'm biased in that way, but young musicians are often making choices about what they do during their high school years so for instance they may not take the most rigorous program in their high school because they don't have time for their study and their chamber music work and their orchestra work in their high school years and so there may be certain gaps in their academic training. Conversely, there may be a student whose on the border for their audition but has an incredibly strong academic training and both sides help each other and so we—Greg and I—try to certainly look at the whole picture and see what the student has to offer and what their about.

8:58 Mackie: And are there opportunities for students who are music majors in four year music program and the five year double degree Conservatory program to collaborate?

9:07 Frank: Absolutely. I mean the funny thing about all of this of course is that we say we have the Conservatory program, we have this Music program and we act as if they're separate but the fact of the matter is, we're all over in the same building, the same music complex and there's lots of collaboration happening. Any class and ensemble in the Music program is open to any Conservatory student. Conversely, any class or ensemble in the Conservatory is open to any Music program student, as long as they tape the audition before the ensemble or meet the prerequisites for the class.

9:37 Greg: We actually have two orchestras. So we have the Bard College orchestra, which is about 80 percent non-music majors and then we have the Conservatory orchestra which is 100 percent music majors.

9:47 Frank: Actually, that's not true though. We have a couple of Music program students who are in the orchestra.

9:52 Greg: Oh, excellent.

9:52 Frank: And they auditioned for the Conservatory orchestra and are in that. And actually we have some Conservatory students who are in the Music program orchestra.

9:57 Mackie: I was just going to ask if there are students that end up on campus in their say, first semester, they actually decide they want to join in the Conservatory, does that happen?

10:05 Frank: That does happen. We do have students that will ask if they can transfer into the Conservatory. And the way we do that is we just have them do an audition during the regular round of auditions and there's no guarantee that the student will be able to transfer in but it sometimes happens and sometimes doesn't.

10:19 Greg: And all the classes are the same, I mean you take music theory, you take music history, if you take foreign analysis, orchestration, I mean there's no separate Conservatory class that only Conservatory students can take.

10:32 Frank: There's, there's not one that they can only take, we do have a slightly separate curriculum for music theory.

10:39 Greg: Music theory history, right?

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10:40 Frank: And music history. We have a kind of capstone class called Conservatory seminar, which really tries to encapsulate the values of the Bard musical education so it looks at, it takes the pieces that are being done by orchestra in that semester and uses them as object of study. So, they look at them from every possible angle, they look at them kind of internally, how they work as pieces of music, theoretically and in terms of the structure and the form of the piece, they look at them in terms of the, where its place is in music history, but they also look at the piece in a larger context to see what the, what's the philosophical message of this piece, what's its place in intellectual history, in social history. You know these pieces of art that we play, they're not just, it's not just a bunch of noise, you know? It really is ground in a society, it's based in a society, it's deeply rooted in a culture and so we want students to understand that bigger picture and not just read the notes on the page.

11:38 Mackie: Can you describe for us what an average week might look like for a Conservatory student? What lessons they might be taking and how often their with or spending time with the orchestra?

11:50 Frank: Sure, sure. So every student has a private lesson once a week. They have, usually most students are involved in chamber music every semester, usually it's one group, some students get very ambitious and do more than one. So they would have a private lesson, they would have, for the chamber music they would have a coaching once a week, hour-long coaching with a faculty member, and they would of course have rehearsals in preparation for that coaching. If a student played an orchestral instrument, they would have rehearsals, generally orchestra rehearses twice a week, Tuesday and Thursday evenings. We do it in the evening so that it doesn't conflict with academic classes. And then students might be in academic class in music so they might be taking music history class or music theory class. That's basically the way the music side of things work every week, there's of course individual practice a student needs to be doing everyday and then in addition to that usually students are taking two academic classes in the college. It's interesting because a lot of students that come to Bard, you know they worry about, you know 'oh how can I do both these degrees at the same time?' and the funny thing is that a serious student during their high school years is of course taking five, usually five or sometimes six academic classes in high school and doing lessons and chamber music, sometimes they're doing orchestra, and so actually in some ways the schedule is a little bit lighter in college 'cause it's a little bit more focused and compressed in that way.

13:10 Greg: Now, is there time to go study abroad with this, you know, dual program?

13:15 Frank: Yeah, absolutely, a lot of our students, because there's five, they're here for five years there's a little bit more leeway, in fact for study abroad, so we have a lot of our students that study abroad, we've sent students to Paris, Berlin..

13:27 Greg: Do they continue their lessons there?

13:29 Frank: Yeah they do. We can't recreate the entire music curriculum there but what we do is we will, the music world is incredibly incestuous, and everyone seems to know everyone else so usually we have good connections in every city that students want to study in and so we will set them up with a local teacher and actually we pay for those lessons while they're studying abroad.

13:51 Greg: And you mention Berlin as well, so..

13:53 Frank: Yeah, students are, we have like two flutists going to the Bard College Berlin campus next fall, we've sent students to Paris, we've sent students to Scotland, Montreal, Asia's a popular destination, Russia, Smolny College, you know also a part of the Bard network.

14:07 Mackie: And are there quite a lot of international students here on the Annandale-on-Hudson campus in the Conservatory?

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14:13 Frank: Yeah, it's about forty percent of the students are international, so we have two big pods of international students, we have a group from Asia, from China and Japan, fewer amounts, smaller amounts from Korea, a fairly large population from Taiwan and we also have a group from Eastern Europe, especially Hungary and that's because the historical ties that Bard had with Hungary and one of the large donors to the Conservatory, László Bitó, his wife is a great music lover and he's a graduate of Bard as you know and he, because of that we have strong ties with Hungary and we really want to sustain those ties over the future years.

14:57 Josh: So Frank, in terms of performances for the students, certainly we've spoken a lot about the structure of the program, but where... how often do students actually get to perform and where do they get to perform? Is it strictly on campus or do they travel? What times of opportunities are there, there?

15:17 Frank: Yeah the performance opportunities are essentially limitless, I mean it's based on the energy and goals and you know drive of the student. The orchestra performs, they do roughly two or three performances per year—or per semester, rather—I'll run down kind of what we're doing this coming year for orchestra, kind of give an idea of what's happening in terms of orchestral performance. So in the Fall we're doing, we have a new dean of the Conservatory coming in, coming in, the composer Tan Dun, so he's leaving film night, made up of three concertos drawn from music from films that he's composing music for and we have faculty members playing solos, playing those concertos and the orchestra will perform with him conducting, with Tan Dun conducting and then we'll show film excerpts, it's kind of tied in with the film so they're excerpts from the film while the orchestra plays.

16:11 Mackie: That's exciting!

16:12 Frank: Yeah, it should be fun!

16:12 Mackie: It's really cool.

16:13 Frank: Should be a lot of fun and then, that's end of September, then we have a regular formal concert in the middle of the semester which will be repeated at a local prison as a part of the Bard Prison Initiative and so because Leon Botstein is our president and conductor, every year he brings the orchestra, the whole orchestra, to a local maximum security prison. It's actually one of the highlights of the year, it's an incredible experience. So we'll do that and then at the end of the semester we have another formal concert which will be lead by James Bagwell the head of the music program and then at the very end we do, it's called a winter song fest, which is a kind of a holiday concert so a gift to the community, it draws on all the various elements of music.

16:56 Mackie: I've been myself.

16:57 Frank: Yeah.

16:58 Mackie: There's a sing-along aspect.

16:58 Frank: Sing along, right, haha..absolutely!

17:00 Mackie: Which everyone gets into which is really fun!

17:02 Frank: And then in the spring we'll do, the orchestras doing a very exciting project, they're doing the Strauss Opera, *Salome*, with professional singers and the orchestra will be in the pit and it will be a kind of semi-stage performance and we're tying that in with kind of some academic classes also which is kind of an exciting project, so it should kind of have tentacles around, all over the campus. And then at the end of the semester, we're doing a side-by-side concert with the professional training orchestra that we have here, The Orchestra Now, and they're doing Mahler's Second Symphony, the Resurrection symphony, it's a gigantic work, and a very exciting way to end the year. So it's a big, big year, so the students are, they're performing five, six times a semester in orchestra, but in chamber music, of course students are doing, we have kind of at the end of every semester, we have these chamber music marathons and students perform the pieces they've been working on throughout the year, and then of course for solo work, students are performing more casually in our Noon Concert series which happens every other Tuesday and then they often do their own recitals at the end of the year, in the middle of the year. And...

18:11 Greg: Senior projects, in the spring.

18:13 Frank: And then in the spring, that's a great point, in the spring of course all our fifth year, fourth or fifth year students for their senior project in the Conservatory, do a degree recital, a full recital. But then beyond that we have, you know the Conservatory has lots of ties to arts organizations in the area; this is a very fertile, rich area for arts. The Hudson Valley is a really exciting place to be and so we often send students off campus for..to do house concerts or vocal concert series, so students are performing all the time.

18:44 Greg: Are there any plans to on tour as, as a group?

18:47 Frank: We have gone, yeah, we have gone on tour and we're kind of toying with it, Tan Dun has some big ideas which I cannot talk about right now but he has some really exciting possibilities..

18:58 Greg: So stay posted..

18:59 Frank: Yeah, yes.

18:59 Mackie: Yeah.

19:00 Frank: In the next podcast for the conservatory.

19:01 Mackie: Yeah.

19:02 Josh: And Greg, you mentioned a good point, the senior project, and and since the Conservatory is a double degree program, I would assume there are two—actually I know there are two—senior projects. So do they happen at the same time or are they separate?

19:17 Frank: That's actually a great point, so since students are here for five years, they tend to plan their fourth and fifth year carefully, so it depends what they want to do after they leave Bard, so if they are likely to follow their academic path, they might be more likely to do their degree recital in the Conservatory in the fourth year or early in the fifth year and use the end of fifth year to prepare for academic study after they leave Bard. If they think they might follow the music path, they might try to complete their senior project in the college in the fourth year, so that they can focus in the fifth year on preparing for their auditions for music grad school.

19:55 Josh: On that note, do you find the students who have graduated do more than tend towards music or towards their other major or is there a balance?

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20:04 Frank: It's an interesting question, we, this year we did a review of the double degree program and we found that over the past eleven, twelve years, the vast majority of students have gone on in music in some way, but there's a sizeable minority who have not, so we have, graduates who have gone on to become doctors and lawyers and we have, actually I tell this story every tour so I'll be repeating myself but one of the best pianists we've ever had in the school, he was a math major in the, in the college and he decided to go to UT Austin to get a business degree. Now he's teaching, he's a professor of economics and econ. So it's a nice way, it's great. I think students have lots of options and they have rich lives when they leave here.

20:48 Josh: That's fantastic, well thanks so much, Frank for speaking with us. Thank you, Greg, for joining us.

20:54 Mackie: And I just noticed, I mean Frank you introduced yourself as a musician, but Greg and Josh are also musicians. I dabble, but actually Josh you were a music student here.

21:04 Josh: I was, as part of the Music program, um definitely, so..

21:08 Mackie: So I just, I realized that as we're sitting around the microphone that I'm surrounded by talent.

21:13 Greg: You're outnumbered, haha.

21:14 Mackie: I'm outnumbered by musicians, so, um, well yeah thanks Frank.

21:18 Frank: You're most welcome.

21:20 Mackie: And thank you Greg.

21:20 Greg: Yeah.

21:20 Mackie: And stay tuned, we said that we would be putting out a podcast pretty soon on the music program, specifically, so stay tuned for that.

21:29 Josh: Yeah, that'll be our next podcast, so we hope you enjoy it and if you do have questions about today, feel free to reach out to us at admission@bard.edu. We'll answer any questions that you have and if you have questions about the conservatory specifically, you can reach out to conservatory@bard.edu and Frank and his colleagues will be happy to answer any questions you have regarding those and we will look forward to the next time, take care, thanks.