



Graduate Conducting Program

Choral and Orchestral

The Graduate Conducting Program, Orchestral and Choral, of The Bard College Conservatory of Music is a two-year graduate curriculum that culminates in the Master of Music (M.M.) degree. The program equips its graduates with the broad-based skills and experience necessary to meet the special opportunities and challenges of a conducting or conducting-related career.

The program's two tracks (concentrations)—orchestral conducting and choral conducting—have significant overlap. The program is designed and directed by James Bagwell, director of Bard's undergraduate Music Program, Associate Conductor of The Orchestra Now, and principal guest conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra, and Leon Botstein, president of Bard College, music director of the The Orchestra Now and the American Symphony Orchestra, and conductor laureate of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra.

The program balances a respect for established traditions with the flexibility and curiosity needed to keep abreast of evolving musical ideas. In addition to instruction in conducting, the curriculum includes an innovative, four-semester music history sequence (shared by the two tracks), voice lessons and diction for choral conductors, instrument lessons for orchestral conductors, and foreign language study, ear training, and composition for all students. Unique to the program is its access to the varied resources at Bard: the Conductors Chorus, the Orchestral Conductors Ensemble, the orchestra and chorus of the Bard Music Festival, and other affiliated music programs.

The program is built on years of experience. It admits relatively few students each year to ensure individual attention. Applications are welcome from all who wish to place their love of music at the service of those they conduct, the works they perform, and their audiences.



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Conducting Curriculum

Music History

This is a four-semester sequence that concentrates on major works from the 18th to 21st centuries with a focus each week on a particular composer within the larger musical, historical, biographical, and cultural context. This course, taken in conjunction with members of The Orchestra Now, has frequent guest lecturers focusing on the relationship of music history to the sociology of music. The course also examines shifting attitudes toward public performance and the different contexts of performance: spaces, politics, economics, and social status of musicians. Other topics include the history of the orchestra and chorus, as well as the impact of economics on concert life.

Ear Training and Score Reading

Four Semesters of Ear Training and Score Reading are required. The Ear Training and Score Reading course combines work on solfege and harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic dictation with practice in transposition and the reading of open score.

Career Workshops

This is a series of special event workshops held at different times throughout the duration of the program. Distinguished guest speakers address the practical aspects of working as a conductor and or music director. Topics can include creating an ensemble, applying for grants, and developing a board of directors.

Foreign Language Study

Students must study two foreign languages during their time in the Graduate Conducting Program. Semester-long courses are offered in Italian, German, and French. These courses have a special focus on developing the reading and text translation skills needed by conductors.

Composition

This two-semester class gives young conductors first hand experience in the compositional process. It deepens knowledge of the means of musical expression and increases awareness of the many notational challenges inherent in any printed score. Topics in the first semester include melodic organization and materials; basic counterpoint; motivic development in small forms; composing for strings, winds, brass, chorus, piano, and percussion; examination of non-standard pitch materials; and analysis of selected repertory, including 20th-century works. In the second semester students compose a theme and variations and either a woodwind quintet or choral work with small ensemble, to be read under the composer's baton.

Recitals and Thesis Concerts

Orchestral and choral conducting students prepare and conduct a recital during their final year in residence at Bard.



James Bagwell, Graduate Conducting Program Co-Director



Leon Botstein, Graduate Conducting Program Co-Director



Joan Tower, composition faculty



Conducting Seminar

The work of the four-semester sequence of the Conducting Seminar centers on podium time, in bi-weekly sessions with the Orchestral Conductors Ensemble, a small ensemble of members of The Orchestra Now and the Bard Conservatory Orchestra. Preparation for the Orchestral Conductors Ensemble is done through regular class work in conducting sessions with two pianos. Finally, conducting students have the opportunity to work once each semester with full orchestra in special reading sessions with the Bard Conservatory Orchestra.

The first semester is devoted to the physical movement of the baton. Symphonies of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven are the primary tool for analyzing problems and formulating technical solutions to meet the needs of the music. The second semester is devoted to a closer examination of baton technique. Composers such as Berlioz, Mendelssohn and Schumann are studied for harmonic and melodic analysis and consideration of phrase structure, orchestration, and tone color. The third semester includes composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the further study of new baton movements to serve new compositional concepts. The fourth semester examines 20th and 21st century orchestral repertoire and emphasizes the musical heritage of the United States, with attention to works of Ives, Copland, Ellington, and Price.

Throughout the semester students will work with the Bard Festival Chorale, a professional choral ensemble based in New York City. There is considerable podium time with the Bard College Chamber Singers and The Bard Symphonic Chorus. The choral repertoire that is studied and conducted is in conjunction with the orchestral repertoire.

Diction and Phonetics

This two-semester course is an introduction to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), including its symbols and practical use in preparing and performing Italian, French, German, and English vocal literature. Through the study of songs, arias, and choral literature, students gain a basic understanding of the pronunciation rules and rhythm of each language.

Choral Literature

This one semester course is a survey of choral literature from the 16th century to the present with a specific emphasis on shorter works suitable for college, church, or high school choruses.

Vocal Pedagogy

This one-semester class focuses on the basic anatomy and physiology of the vocal apparatus. It covers general vocal pedagogical theory and develops an individual understanding of each student's vocal instrument. It also explores how the basic principles of a healthy vocal technique can be applied—in teaching, in choral warm-ups, and in rehearsals.

Studio Instruction

Conducting students take weekly private lessons in piano, a string instrument or another orchestral instrument for two semester. Students may also choose to study voice.

Faculty

James Bagwell, co-director

Leon Botstein, co-director

History Seminar

James Bagwell
Christopher Gibbs
Peter Laki
Sebastian Danila
Kyle Gann

Ear Training & Score Reading

Zachary Swartzman

Language

Sara Marzioli
Peter Laki

Composition

Joan Tower

Choral Conducting Seminar

James Bagwell

Diction and Phonetics

Erika Switzer

Choral Literature

James Bagwell

Studio Voice Instruction

Teresa Buchholz
Rufus Muller

Vocal Pedagogy

Teresa Buchholz

Orchestral Conducting Seminar

James Bagwell
Leon Botstein

Studio Piano Instruction

Isabelle O'Connell

Quick Facts

Podium Time

Choral conducting students work regularly with three types of choruses; community, collegiate, and professional. They work with the Bard Symphonic Chorus and the Bard Chamber Singers on Bard's campus and they travel to New York City to work with the professional Bard Conductors Chorale. Additionally, students have opportunities to conduct on chorus concerts and assist with the Graduate Vocal Arts program mainstage opera. Opportunities to conduct instrumentalists are also available to choral conducting students.

Orchestral conducting students have bi-weekly sessions with the Orchestral Conductors Ensemble, a small ensemble of members of The Orchestra Now and the Bard Conservatory Orchestra. Preparation for these sessions is done through regular class work with piano. Students also work once each semester with full orchestra in special reading sessions with the Bard Conservatory Orchestra.

Life After Bard

The unique and hands-on opportunities available to the Bard Conservatory Graduate Conducting Program have lead our students to exciting and varied careers. Distinctions of our graduates include:

- Ensembles and Institutions: BBC Symphony; Brooks School, director of choral and classical music; Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music Orchestra, assistant conductor; Collegiate Chorale, assistant conductor; Hilliard Ensemble; Luzerne Music Center; New York Youth Symphony; Opera Philadelphia; Tulsa Oratorio Chorus, assistant artistic director
- Festivals: Bang on a Can Marathon; Night at Proms 2015; Opera Company of the Highlands 2011
- Venues: Carnegie Hall; Le poisson rouge; Lincoln Center; Merkin Concert Hall

Location

Bard College is situated on nearly 1,000 acres along the Hudson River, on the grounds of three historic riverfront estates. Its location and faculty connections allows for unique access to the resources of the New York City music world.



Learn More

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