



Graduate Vocal Arts Program

Dear Prospective Student,

There are so many words to describe this leg of your singing and academic careers. You are all full of excitement, expectation, uncertainty, resolve- just a few sentiments that might hit the mark. I know just how you feel. For the first time in a long time I have begun a new journey as well. One that has been rife with challenges, hard work, solutions, and a lot of joy. The kind of joy that comes from being a part of an artist's development. The kind that comes from a community of souls all brought together by the need to collaborate toward a common goal-to work together to build the skills necessary for a successful career in the arts. Thank you for considering Bard Conservatory as a place that can help you develop your art.

All my best wishes to you as you work toward your goals. I hope we can make this journey together.



Stephanie Blythe
Artistic Director



Curriculum

The Vocal Arts Program (VAP) curriculum has three main components: private instruction, Core Seminars, and workshops.

Private Instruction

Voice lessons

All students receive private voice instruction each week.

Vocal Coaching

Every student receives weekly individual sessions, alternating among Stephanie Blythe, Kayo Iwama, and Erika Switzer.

Alexander Technique

All students receive weekly private Alexander Technique tutorials.

Core Seminars

Core Seminars are a four-semester sequence that develop the historical and cultural perspectives, analytical tools, and performance skills that distinguish vocal and operatic performance at the highest level. At the same time, they provide intensive training in fundamental skill areas: working with text, expanding expressive and vocal resources, and professional development.

Core Seminar I: Poetry Into Song

This seminar views text as a central point of departure for all vocal performance. It introduces and develops an essential range of workshop skills in working with text and understanding its realization in song. The choice of poets becomes a means of connecting with primary bodies of established repertory, with works by lesser-known composers from past style periods, and with music by contemporary and active composers. The seminar is designed to begin with a study of a poet's life, work and style, and continues with a detailed examination of an appropriate musical exemplar. Workshop skills are further refined as the student works independently to find, prepare and perform related repertory.

Core Seminar II: Music for Today

This course explores developments in vocal music, acknowledging an artist's vital need to engage with music of and for today alongside canonical works that have shaped music history. With a curriculum that reflects contemporary currents in both music and broader society, the seminar incorporates the study and performance of seminal 20th and 21st century works with student-led exploration of living composers' repertoire. Renowned guest artists, including performers and composers, contextualize, coach, and offer perspective from their careers. Selected course projects and performances since 2020 have included György Kurtág's complete Kafka-Fragmente, a study of climate change and environmentalism in music, premieres of works in Yiddish at midtown Manhattan's YIVO Center, and a survey of contemporary BIPOC-identifying composers.

Core Seminar III: The Performer as Curator

In this seminar, groups of three to four students create and produce a concert which is performed in nearby community venues. Every aspect of creation and production—searching for music, choosing repertoire, shaping the program, securing a venue, attracting publicity, printing programs, writing program notes, and scheduling rehearsals—is coordinated and organized by the students themselves. This seminar helps students recognize their individual strengths and use them as a springboard to develop a broader range of artistic choices and possibilities. Building on skills and awareness acquired in the professional development workshop, students learn to develop working relationships not only with fellow musicians but also with those involved in other essential roles in the industry. The ultimate goal is for students to better understand the process of creating artistic projects that realize their musical and creative goals.

Core Seminar IV: The Singer and the Stage

Recognizing the inherent theatricality of all vocal performance, this seminar enhances theatrical skills and encompasses a fully staged operatic production. The seminar applies dramatic skills to selected vocal repertoire in close coordination with the acting and opera workshops. This seminar also includes intensive study of classical and Baroque operas by Mozart and Handel.



Erika Switzer (L), Diction and Phonetics

Kayo Iwama (L), Associate Director

Stephanie Blythe (C), Artistic Director

Elizabeth Reese (R), Alexander Technique

Workshops

Acting Explorations

This workshop gives students an opportunity to focus solely on the acting component of performing. In a studio setting, students work on a variety of theatrical texts selected to address the particular needs of each performer.

Diction and Phonetics

This workshop is an advanced study of the diction of the languages most commonly used by singers. German, Italian, and French diction are studied, with additional units in other languages such as Russian, Spanish, or English. Also included is attention to the physiology of phonetics, in order to create a better understanding of how diction relates to the production of sound, as well as an exploration of the repertoire and composers of each language.

Opera Workshop

The opera workshop develops the singing actor through creative questioning, acting and improvisation exercises, and aria and opera scene work. Stagecraft techniques are developed to create the most effective storytelling. Interpretation of character is developed through discussion, research, and analysis to enable clarity of communication and a personal artistic voice. Additional work in audition techniques and presentation of professional materials may also be addressed.

Professional Development

This workshop consists of 13 encounters with a variety of professionals who present topics of interest necessary for the students' development as individual artists. Led by Lucy Fitz Gibbon (VAP '15) the workshop's content ranges from "outer artist" concerns such as networking, auditioning, and promotion, to "inner artist" considerations of creativity, authenticity, and self-care.

Recital Class

This class provides a forum for an in-depth exploration of the repertoire programmed on the graduate degree recital. Weekly musical presentations and class discussion, along with an exploration of research materials, provide a comprehensive basis to enable performers to create unique and personal interpretations of their selected works. Singers also prepare a lecture/demonstration to be presented in class in advance of the graduation recital.

Language Translation for Singers

This workshop, taught by Bard College language professors, develops translation skills, reading facility, and general cultural awareness of the three main languages used by singers: French, German, and Italian.

Performance Workshop

The Performance Workshop offers all VAP singers an opportunity to perform in class, and share with their classmates. Students are encouraged to perform any well-prepared piece of their own choosing, three or four times a semester.

Vocal Chamber Music

The vocal chamber music workshop cultivates the skills of instrumental collaboration and is run in partnership with the Conservatory chamber music program. Vocal Arts Program students come together with Conservatory instrumentalists to perform works from the vocal chamber music repertory.

Vocal Ensemble Workshop

The study of duets, trios, and quartets from the art song repertory cultivates skills in listening and musicianship. The workshop culminates in a public performance of works for vocal ensemble.

Life after the VAP

The curriculum of the Vocal Arts Program fosters fearless entrepreneurial skills, unique artistic values, and provides access to contacts in the professional music world. These special aspects of the program, along with the support of the distinguished faculty, enable its graduates to lead lives in music that are diverse and wide-ranging. Bard VAP alumni/ae have gone on to participate in the following opportunities:

Young Artist Programs: The Metropolitan Opera, Lindemann Young Artist Development Program; Lyric Opera of Chicago, Ryan Opera Center; Houston Grand Opera Studio; Santa Fe Opera Apprentice Program; Los Angeles Opera, Domingo-Colburn-Stein Young Artist Program; San Francisco Opera, Merola Opera Program; Utah Opera, Resident Artists Program

Summer Festivals: Aspen Music Festival and School, Bard Music Festival, Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme, Chautauqua Music Festival, Marlboro Music Festival, Music Academy of the West, SongFest, Tanglewood Music Center

Professional Activities: American Symphony Orchestra, Albany Symphony, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Metropolitan Opera Chorus, Phoenix Symphony, Portland Baroque Orchestra, Resonant Bodies Festival

Postgraduate Programs: Curtis Institute of Music, The Juilliard School, New England Conservatory, Indiana University, Boston University Opera Institute

Competitions: winner, Astral Artists National Auditions; Debut Artist Award winner, Joy in Singing; winner, Marilyn Horne Foundation Competition; winner, Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions; winner, Walter W. Naumburg Foundation Competition; winner, Young Concert Artists International Competition; winner, Houston Grand Opera Concert of Arias Competition

Photography: Karl Rabe: p.1 nos. 5, 7, p.2 nos. 1-2, 4 p.4; Chris Kayden: p.1 nos. 1, 6; Chris Kendall: p.1 no. 2; Matt Dine: p.1 no.3, p.4 no.1

Faculty

Stephanie Blythe, Artistic Director

Kayo Iwama, Associate Director

Voice Faculty

Edith Bers
Richard Cox
Lucy Fitz Gibbon VAP '15
Lorraine Nubar
Joan Patendaude-Yarnell

Coaches

Stephanie Blythe
Kayo Iwama
Erika Switzer

Alexander Technique

Elizabeth Reese

Core Seminars

Stephanie Blythe
Lucy Fitz Gibbon VAP '15
Kayo Iwama

Acting Explorations

Jack Ferver

Diction and Phonetics

Javier Arrebola
Erika Switzer

Language Translation

Odile Chilton
Karen Raizen
Peter Filkins

Opera Workshop

Stephanie Blythe
Howard Watkins

Professional Development

Lucy Fitz Gibbon VAP '15

Vocal Ensemble Workshop

Erika Switzer

Quick Facts

Artistic Director

Bard Conservatory welcomed renowned mezzo-soprano, Stephanie Blythe, as artistic director of the Vocal Arts Program in fall 2019. In addition to leading the artistic vision of the Vocal Arts Program, Ms. Blythe is in residence at Bard teaching Core Seminar III, leading the weekly Performance Workshop, directing the Opera Workshop, and giving bi-weekly private coachings. Her inspirational presence sets the tone for exploration and discovery.

Program Size

Each class consists of a select group of up to ten singers. The small number of students in each class ensures that each singer receives the individual attention that can help to uncover and nurture their unique artistic voice.

Performance Opportunities

Performing is the central means of artistic self-discovery in the VAP. There are opportunities for each singer to perform in a fully-staged opera with an orchestra, in oratorios, in chamber music, and in song. Students perform on campus, in the artistically rich community of the Hudson Valley, and in New York City.

Location

Bard College is situated on nearly 1,000 acres along the Hudson River, on the grounds of three historic riverfront estates. Bard's main campus is 90 miles north of New York City.



Learn More