

New England Conservatory's Entrepreneurial Musicianship program hosted a "Pitch Night" in September 2018 at which students presented overviews of their intended projects. Winning entrants received cash awards towards the realization of their plans. In photo: Amanda Ekery describes her "El Paso Jazz Girls" project, which aims to increase the number of girls in jazz via a cost-free program taught by professional female musicians in El Paso for female-identifying high school students.



New England Conservatory

Head of the Class

New cultural and economic directions are redefining and expanding the role of the conservatory in the 21st century. Here, leaders from conservatories reflect on the issues of most importance today—and tomorrow—as music schools navigate a shifting landscape.



Julie Cutlerko

At the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Director of Professional Development Dana Jessen advises a student.

by Brin Solomon

It used to be that the goal of conservatories and schools of music was to produce virtuosic musicians, who would embark on solo careers or land tenured spots in orchestras. Changing expectations on the part of orchestras, presenters, and the musicians themselves mean that the former approaches are no longer enough.

Fortunately, while a career at an orchestra remains a cherished goal, there are other paths to building a life as a working musician in the 21st century. Enterprising players are forming chamber ensembles, organizing concert series in non-traditional venues, partnering with civic institutions to build community, and more. While all



At Fifth House Ensemble's two-week Fresh Inc Festival, emerging classical musicians get a grounding in some of the business principles behind a career in the arts.

these activities are built on a base of rock-solid musicianship, they also involve specific skill sets—grant writing, marketing, audience development—that aren't typically included in a fledgling musician's formal training.

In previous decades, musicians may have learned these skills on the fly, but more and more educational institutions are beginning to make this training part of their curricula. Some of these initiatives, like Oberlin Conservatory's division of Pedagogy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement or the Cleveland Institute of Music's

Center for Innovative Musicianship, are only a few years old, while others, like Chicago-based Fifth House Ensemble's Fresh Inc Festival, a two-week summer festival dedicated to teaching entrepreneurship skills to aspiring classical musicians, have existed for nearly a decade. Moreover, pressing contemporary issues—such as diversity, inclusion, and social equity—that might once have seemed distant from the focus of the academy are increasingly being elevated to central concerns.

Old or new, there are some challenges that all these programs face. How do you

add new classes to students' already-full curricular schedules? How do you overcome pushback from faculty and students who feel this kind of training is a distraction from developing virtuosic musicianship? But beyond the challenges, there are also surprising ways in which this kind of entrepreneurial training can dovetail with a traditional orchestral career to open unexpected new doors. Representatives from several organizations that have started offering this kind of training for undergraduate and graduate students share their thoughts on navigating this shifting new landscape.

Paul Hogle
President and CEO, Cleveland Institute of Music

When we created the Center for Innovative Musicianship in 2017, it integrated practices that had been done by individual



Robert Muller

“When we created the Center for Innovative Musicianship in 2017, it

integrated practices that had been done by individual faculty for generations. It wasn't like we woke up in 2017 and decided that business-savvy training was necessary.” Paul Hogle, Cleveland Institute of Music

faculty for generations. It wasn't like we woke up in 2017 and decided that business-savvy training was necessary, we just brought it into one place. There's always been an organic, informal process for students working with their private teachers. So we asked faculty to identify things you would need to be successful in the 21st century and tried to weave that into the curriculum, from preparing an audition to managing your finances to protecting intellectual property to arranging contracts and more.

These core classes are mandatory, so



Student ensembles from the Cleveland Institute of Music regularly perform in the elegant environs of Severance Hall, the home of the Cleveland Orchestra.



In November 2018, Juilliard President Damian Woetzel and violinist Vijay Gupta hosted a program for residents of Valley Lodge, a shelter on Manhattan's Upper West Side for older men and women who are homeless. In photo: Woetzel with Juilliard students Alberta Khoury (classical guitar) and Yin-Ying Tseng (viola).

**Melissa Ngan
Founding Member, Fifth
House Ensemble, which
created the Fresh Inc Festi-
val**

Fifth House has partnered with educational institutions since 2007, so a lot of what we brought to Fresh Inc comes from our own experiences at colleges and conservatories and understanding their challenges in implementing curricula to train the 21st-century musician. Time is our greatest commodity and also the most limiting factor. A lot

of this content is seen as either/or: if you're going to put this in the schedule, something else has to be taken out. And while Fresh Inc isn't bound by a conservatory's scheduling constraints, we have a *very* short time to accomplish what we need to in two weeks.

We're iterating all the time, learning as we go. One big question that's come up a lot has been diversity, helping people understand how their own identity relates to the art they create and also creating more inclusive spaces. Fresh Inc happens at a time in an artist's life when they're really wrestling with this, for personal and professional reasons. And so that's one of the reasons we started our Fresh Voices program—so marginalized musicians can develop the kind of leadership and entrepreneurial skills to make their careers flourish.

Ultimately, any program that promotes "extra-musical" skills needs to be viewed as "yes, and" as opposed to "instead of." Because none of the things we're talking about here are going to be effective if you don't have the chops. You gotta have the goods—even if you're playing for third graders, people know if you're faking.

**Damian Woetzel
President, The Juilliard School**

I teach an arts and society course at Juilliard that focuses heavily on different ways the arts intersect with society, which is all about the opportunity of where you take your art and how you manifest it. We have an entire program to bring in people like composer Caroline Shaw, who aren't limited by anything but their own imagina-

"Entrepreneurial skills are more important now, but they've always been part of the DNA of artistry. It's become increasingly important that this be part of a musician's education. The arts world is not static." Damian Woetzel, The Juilliard School



when new students arrive here, they have an understanding that they'll get exposure and training in this area. This was less clear to our returning students—"What's this new program I have to take?"—so for them it's been about educating them about why this is important. But once they get into it, they understand.



Korjaka Studios

"Any program that promotes 'extra-musical' skills needs to be viewed as 'yes, and'

as opposed to 'instead of.' Because none of the things we're talking about here are going to be effective if you don't have the chops."

Melissa Ngan, Fifth House Ensemble

And it's important even in traditional jobs! Imagine you just won a job in the Cleveland Orchestra, and five years into your tenure you get elected to the Players' Committee, and imagine if in college you had learned fundamentals of labor law and didn't have to learn it all on the job. Or imagine if you were going to start a festival and you knew you need to develop an audience and a donor base—you might want to know some fundamentals of arts marketing.

tions. It's all about capitalizing on opportunity, working with others to do things you couldn't do yourself. We also started an all-school jam session where we gather together the Music, Dance, and Drama Divisions and the students have three hours to make something with a series of prompts. It's a bit like *Iron Chef*: Here are your ingredients, here's what you're trying to make, how are you going to get there?



Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra

Musicians who participate in the Music Diversity Fellowship of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra/University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory receive academic training, professional mentoring, and paid performance opportunities with the CSO. In photo: Camellia Aftahi, a master of music student in the 2018-20 class of Diversity Fellows, performs with the CSO onstage at Cincinnati Music Hall.



Tanya Plesch-Jones

“How do we give our students agency to create the future of music?”

We want a comprehensive experience that allows students to develop to the highest level while thinking about how that connects to the world beyond.”

Andrea Kalyn, New England Conservatory

**Andrea Kalyn
President, New England Conservatory**

The broad frame we’re working with is: How do we give our students agency to create the future of music? We want a comprehensive experience that allows students to develop to the highest level while

Roger Mastrolanni

At the Cleveland Institute of Music, violinist Amy Schwartz Moretti leads a master class onstage in Mixon Hall. She is former concertmaster of the Florida Orchestra and the Oregon Symphony, has served as guest concertmaster at several U.S. orchestras, and is a CIM alumna.

And to a large degree, that’s what a lot of young artists are faced with in the world. It’s an outlook, but it’s also a skillset.

These skills are more important now, but they’ve always been part of the DNA of artistry. It’s become increasingly important that this be part of a musician’s education. But by the same token, I look

back at photos of Steve Reich and Philip Glass at Juilliard, and they were developing a different type of entrepreneurial ability: making things in different ways, exploring those possibilities that exist beyond simply the big proposition of becoming an excellent musician. The arts world is not static.

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“My entire life, I’ve heard dire predictions about

classical music, but I’m so encouraged by my students’ optimism. I don’t see in students this sense that there is only one path.”

Tanya Maggi, New England Conservatory

thinking about how that connects to the world beyond.

Flexibility, curiosity, experimentation—these things are the path to professional freedom. They give you the latitude to craft a musical life beyond the conserva-



As part of her activities as director of Pedagogy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement at Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Jody Kerchner works with a choir at an area prison.

tory. Musicians have *always* done this; it’s a fairly new concept that you’re just going to drop into one job and stay there. And if you look at the analogue outside the musical world—you go to college, get a job, and stay there until you die—that’s not modeled on anything now! Musicians are better set up for the gig economy because everything we do is about imagining something and then figuring out a process to make it real.

Tanya Maggi
Dean, Community Engagement and Professional Studies at the New England Conservatory

Music students today are increasingly aware of their agency in making a life in music that resonates with who they are. My entire life, I’ve heard dire predictions about classical music, but I’m so encouraged by my students’ optimism. I don’t see in students this sense that there is only one path.

So we take a menu approach: We have a lot of different offerings; students design their own adventure. This raises the question of how we ensure everyone has a particular set of skills. We have a required catchall entrepreneurship course for all our juniors. But there are many opportunities before that, and we regularly turn students away from our entrepreneurship offerings, even as about a third of the student body is participating at any given time. Since 2011, across all areas of our community engagement and entrepreneurship programs, about 75 percent of our students have participated in one of those areas.

Dana Jessen
Director, Professional Development at Oberlin Conservatory of Music

One of the biggest challenges for institutions teaching professional development is staying relevant and engaged with current topics that musicians face. One example is that textbooks tend to become dated very quickly, so from a curricular standpoint, it requires keeping active and aware of relevant, up-to-date information.

Most careers in the arts are not as straightforward as simply searching and applying for employment. A large majority of music careers encompass multiple streams of income that could span a range of work related to an individual’s artistic practice. Because of this, it is important for young musicians to have a clear understanding of the industry and how to best navigate the many components of the field in order to create a valuable and meaningful artistic career. Oberlin’s Professional Development Office is essentially a resource for students to learn all of the practical skills necessary for a career in music.

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Dana Jessen, Oberlin Conservatory of Music



Tanya Rosen-Jones

Jody Kerchner
Director, Pedagogy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement Division at Oberlin Conservatory of Music

I come from a music education background, so I’ve spent *years* of my career in public schools teaching music and then at the conservatory preparing music teachers. These skills have always been important, and something we’ve promoted. These are absolutely skills that every musician should have.

Pedagogy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement is currently a program, and while it’s not yet a concentration or a minor, we’re moving in that direction. We’re putting together courses to develop students’ understanding of community engagement and the ethics behind community-based learning. There’s going to be a larger curricular discussion in the fall. How many semesters do we need of music theory? Can we be more creative about how this content is packaged so that we have extra electives and students can be more intentional? Can we give students flexibility to do this? This is a larger curriculum decision that we’re working on.

Stanley Romanstein
Dean, University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music

Our Diversity Fellows program, a partnership with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, was created in 2015 by then-College-Conservatory of Music Dean Peter Landgren and then-CSO President and CEO Trey Devey. They were concerned about the stark lack of racial and ethnic diversity within American orchestras, and



New England Conservatory flutist Sho Kato (MM '18) engages young listeners during a Musical Storytelling demonstration at an NEC open house.

to find seats on stage for a more diverse population of artists, and we have to do everything possible to help these artists succeed once they get on stage. The CSO-CCM Diversity Fellows program makes it possible for aspiring orchestral musicians to receive a conservatory-level education and earn an advanced degree while gaining priceless experience playing with

and learning from orchestra professionals. Who better to help young musicians understand the rigors and expectations of life as a working member of a professional orchestra?

about limited professional opportunities for students of color graduating from American conservatories. They realized that changing the status quo would require serious commitment from both orchestras and conservatories, and from other arts groups as well. Our Diversity Fellows program was a first step.

The tension between traditional conservatory training and initiatives like this is a persistent—and, I think, healthy—tension within any top-tier conservatory. The key is to ask, repeatedly: “To what kinds of careers, which kinds of professional op-



“If we’re serious about enhancing racial and ethnic diversity in the arts,

orchestras and conservatories have to work together to find seats on stage for a more diverse population of artists.”

**Stanley Romanstein,
University of Cincinnati
College-Conservatory of
Music**

portunities, do our students aspire? How can we best prepare them to succeed when presented with those opportunities?” **S**

BRIN SOLOMON writes words and music in various genres and is doing their best to queer all of them. Their music journalism has appeared in *VAN*, *San Francisco Classical Voice*, and the *National Sawdust Log*.

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