

So you want to be a music major...

Tips For High School Students Considering A Career In Music

Congratulations! If you're reading this, you've expressed some level of interest in majoring in music. The world needs *passionate, talented, and dedicated* musicians to pass down this wonderful art form for generations to come! YOU can be an integral part of ensuring our culture continues to appreciate and enjoy *high quality, entertaining, and meaningful* musical performances!

This pamphlet contains some valuable information about what types of music programs are out there, and what steps you should take in preparing to apply, audition, and ready yourself for college and beyond. As always, if you have any questions, speak to your music teachers! Every music teacher was inspired by someone in their lives that encouraged them to become a lifelong musician. Yes, your teachers would love to be that person for you!

STEP 1: It all starts with what you do in High School!

When: All 4 years of HS

As you begin your journey, my best advice is to gain as much experience in high school as possible. By immersing yourself into the world of music, you will discover your strengths, weaknesses, and interests. You can prepare yourself for the rigors of college, and have a solid foundation upon which to build once you enter a college program. Here is a list of things you should do while in high school if you are contemplating a music career:

- *Take private lessons on your instrument.* This is perhaps THE most important advice for any future music major. Find a teacher in your area that can offer you 1-on-1 instruction on a weekly basis. If you need help finding a private teacher, speak with your classroom music teacher.
- *Learn as much music theory as possible.* You can be the best performer out there, but a lack of fundamental theory skills will hold you back in college. Take a music theory class, ask your teacher for additional resources to help you, and use websites like www.emusictheory.com and www.musictheory.net.
- *Learn how to play piano.* Piano skills are essential to understanding theory, and most colleges require some level of piano proficiency in order to graduate their program.
- *Learn as much music history as you can.* Most college music programs focus on classical music as their foundation. Some programs are specific to Broadway or Pop, but these are rare and can be difficult to get into. Find out about great composers besides Beethoven or Mozart.
- *Listen to music of all types.* Download music from every genre and time period. Immerse yourself in the world of music beyond today's popular music. You just might find something new to you that sparks your interest!

- *Join as many ensembles as possible.* If you are in band, join a choir. If you are in choir, try learning an instrument! This way, you'll be able to learn from different teachers and peers. If you've only performed in a large ensemble, chamber or small group experience is extremely valuable.
- *Perform as often as possible.* Don't just perform in your large ensemble's Winter or Spring Concerts. Volunteer for as many extra performances as you can, including talent shows, musicals, board meetings, honors banquets, graduations, special school events, community theater, etc. Every performance provides a different experience, and will prove invaluable for those choosing a career in music. If there is an opportunity to perform, no matter how small, do it!
- *Take on a leadership role.* Apply to be a section leader, drum major, president, etc. Do anything you can to promote the success of your ensemble, and offer your director as much assistance as you can. You will learn much more about what it takes to be a career musician by seeing what goes on behind the scenes.
- *Tell your music teacher you are considering a career in music.* Your teacher can help steer you in the right direction and give you more information about majoring in music. Use your teacher as your best resource. They will be more than happy to help you!

STEP 2: Research types of music majors and career options

When: Sophomore and Junior year

Here is a list of the most common music majors available at many colleges and universities:

- Music Performance – for those interested in performing professionally as your full-time career
- Music Education – for those interested in becoming a music teacher and working in a K-12 school system, and possibly teaching at a college/university in the future
- Music Composition – for those interested in writing music as a full-time career
- Music Production – for those interested in working in a music studio as an engineer or producer
- Music Business/Management – for those interested in working in the music business, recording industry, or artist management
- Music Therapy – for those interested in using music as a source of healing and comfort in hospitals or other healthcare settings
- Ethnomusicology – for those interested in making a career out of studying music in cultures around the world
- Musical Theater – for those interested in pursuing a career in performing professionally on a musical theater stage (Broadway, touring, regional, etc.)

Colleges and universities across the United States offer many variations of the majors listed above. Some are very specialized and specific (such as Jazz Composition or Film Scoring), others have programs that are more generalized. You'll need to do your research to find what's best for you!

STEP 3: Choosing the right music major for you

When: Junior year-early Senior year

It all starts with an honest evaluation of your musical strengths, weaknesses, and interests. Knowing your *limits*, as well as your *potential*, is key in determining what path you should take as a music major. Different music majors require different skills:

- A **performer** must have the highest level of musical technique, dedication, and a willingness to spend most of his/her time auditioning, practicing, and rehearsing. Be prepared to move/travel depending on wherever you can find work! Jobs are tough to find, and only the absolute best in their craft will be able to sustain a career as a full-time performer.
- A **music teacher** must combine a personal passion for music with the ability and dedication to connect with children day in and day out. Music teachers must have a strong command of music theory, history, conducting, and technical skill on his/her instrument, as well as a full understanding of educational theories, pedagogy, and willingness to handle the rigors of working in a school setting. (*check out www.nafme.org*)
- A **composer** must have a complete command of music theory along with the creativity to continually write new works. Composers can work in film, television, advertising, or alongside producers in the music recording industry. Composers don't necessarily need the highest level of technical skill on their own instrument, but must understand how to write for every instrument or ensemble type.
- A **music engineer** must combine musicianship with a command of recording technology. This field requires someone to have the ability to operate complex equipment while collaborating with musicians and producers. Engineers and producers can work in film, television, advertising, music studios, live music venues, and more.
- A **music manager** is someone who handles the booking, travel, promotion, and finances of musicians or groups. A manager can work for a major record label, independent label, local orchestra, performance venue, or theater. This type of career requires more business, legal, and financial savvy than musicianship.
- A **music therapist** combines a passion for helping others with a strong level of musicianship. This career requires a deep knowledge of music of all genres, and an ability to use the emotional connection with music to heal and comfort others. (*check out www.musictherapy.org*)
- An **ethnomusicologist** must have a strong command of sociology, research skills, writing skills, and music history. Ethnomusicologists travel the world researching various cultures' musical traditions. They publish/lecture/write about their findings to help promote a greater understanding of how diverse and integral music is to societies worldwide. (*check out www.ethnomusicology.org*)

Next, picture yourself in 10-20 years. What do you see yourself doing? Which of the above descriptions appeal to you? Whatever your career path, make it something you LOVE to do. Of course, it's essential to earn enough money to provide for your family. Some music majors have greater earnings potential, job security, and job availability than others.

However, there is a huge difference between a JOB and a CAREER. A job is something you do to make money in order to sustain your everyday lifestyle. A career is a job that also fulfills your personal goals and dreams. A career is a “life calling,” something that *may* require sacrificing personal time and wealth for a larger purpose. If a job is all you are looking for (\$ to pay bills), becoming a music major is NOT for you. Being a life-long musician can be both challenging and rewarding at the same time, depending on your priorities and goals. Remember this quote: “Find a job you love and you’ll never work a day in your life.” - Confucius

STEP 4: Finding the right college or university

When: Junior year

Once you’ve chosen which major suits you best, use the internet to research the best schools that offer that program. Start by going to *bigfuture.collegeboard.org*. This site gives you the ability to search for colleges and programs using your specific parameters (location, size, etc.). You can also Google your major with some key words like “top music education programs” or “best music conservatory.” If staying close to home is a priority, check out all the state schools (Rowan, TCNJ, Rutgers, Monclair, Kean, William Patterson, Stockton) to see if they offer your major. Not every school has the programs listed in Step 2. Some only offer Performance and Education. Others have more varied opportunities. To help narrow your search, consider the following:

- Do I want to be in a rural area or city?
- Do I want to stay local, or go out of state?
- How big is the music program? Do I want to be in a big school or small school?
- Will I be able to have a job while in school?
- How are my grades? Can I get into my school of choice?
- Can I afford my school of choice? What scholarships do they offer?
- What is the program sequence to graduate? Can I finish this program in 4 years?
- What type of music is the main concentration? Classical? Broadway? Pop?
- Which professors will I be working with? What is their background and experience?

For more information about things to consider when looking for a music school, visit: www.majoringinmusic.com

STEP 5: Visit and learn more

When: Junior year, summer before Senior year

Try to narrow your list down to 6-8 schools. More or less is OK, too. Once you are ready to learn more about them, do the following, ideally during your junior year:

- Visit every school on your list
- Try to schedule a sample “lesson” with one of the teachers on your instrument
- Watch a rehearsal of an ensemble (choir, band, etc.)
- Get a feel for the campus to see if the environment is right for you

- Speak with the professors who teach the classes you'd have to take.
- Speak with current music students to find out what their experience has been so far. Speak with as many as you can to get a wide variety of opinions.
- Speak with admissions counselors about the application process for the school
- Speak with someone in the music department about the process for auditioning for the music program.

STEP 6: Make your choice and apply

When: Fall of Senior year

After you've done your research, made a decision about your major, and visited schools, it's time to make your final choices and apply to the schools you'd be happy and excited to attend. It's recommended to apply to 6-8 schools, but more or less is OK, too. At this point in the process, it's best to work with your HS guidance counselor to make sure you are following the procedures correctly! Some suggestions:

- Know what's due, where, and when. Stay on top of every deadline!
- Make sure you get recommendations from music teachers
- Apply for as many scholarships as possible

STEP 7: Prepare for auditions

When: Summer after Junior year into Senior year

Depending on your major, you might need to audition to get into your program. It is possible to get accepted to the college or university without being accepted into the music program.

- Find out exactly what you need to prepare for auditions. Some schools require certain pieces to be performed, others give a genre/time requirement that you must follow.
- Some schools also have students complete a theory or aural skills exam in addition to performing at the audition.
- Practice with your private teacher or school music teacher for several months, not weeks before your audition.
- The more elite the institution, the tougher it will be to get in. Conservatories like Eastman or Julliard will have much higher standards than state schools. Remember, even if you are the best in your school on your instrument, there are thousands of others who fit the same description across the country. Spots in these programs are limited!
- Professors want to see how prepared you are, how mature and professional you can be, and if you have a strong enough foundation in musical technique to be successful at their institution.
- Those majoring in music performance are generally held to a higher standard than those entering music education, but that is not always the case.

- Don't take the "easy" route when picking your audition pieces. Choose challenging repertoire that fulfill the requirements while showcasing your skills, passion, and commitment to a music career.

STEP 8: Congratulations, you've been accepted! Time to make your decision

When: Between April 1st and May 1st of Senior year

After auditions, you generally wait until April 1st to be notified of each school's decision. You usually have until May 1st to make your choice. After you find out which schools have accepted you, you must make a final choice on where to attend! When doing that, consider the following:

- Which school meets your needs best in terms of location, size, and quality of program?
- Which school offered the most in scholarships and is most affordable?
- Which school will offer you the best experience in preparing you for your career?

STEP 9: You've committed to a school. Awesome! Now what?

When: Summer before starting college

After you have committed to a school, they will take it from there in regards to information about housing, billing, scheduling classes, etc. From a music standpoint, however, there are several things you should do in order to prepare for life as a music student:

- Continue practicing your instrument as often as possible. Your professor in college will expect you to be *at least* as good as you were in your audition. Don't lose your skills by taking the summer off!
- If you take private lessons, keep them going all summer before heading to school. If you don't take private lessons yet, consider finding a teacher for the summer.
- Continue learning and practicing as much music theory as possible.
- If you haven't learned to play piano, now is the time to start! Regardless of your major or instrument, piano skills are essential and extremely valuable.
- Use your summer free time to listen to as much music as possible from all time periods and genres. Broaden your horizons beyond Pop or Broadway, as most music schools focus on Classical music as the foundation for your skills.

**Any more questions?
See your music teacher!
Good Luck!**