Bachelor of Music Degree in Popular Music Performance

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND

Founded in the Fall of 2009, the Popular Music Program at the USC Thornton School of Music is a unique music degree program for the rock, pop, R&B, folk, Latin and country artist. The USC Thornton School of Music began this program because it recognized the opportunity to address the needs of musicians who did not fit the traditional classical and jazz offerings that are typical in most university music programs. The degree program was launched after five years of planning and curricular review. Our first class of 25 talented songwriters, vocalists and instrumentalists were enrolled from all regions of the United States. In bringing these students together in Los Angeles, USC’s home and a music industry capital, the program also aspires to address the dynamic and changing landscape of the music profession. You may learn more about the launch of the Popular Music Program from this article written by the Los Angeles Times: http://articles.latimes.com/2008/oct/22/entertainment/et-uscpop22

THE EXPERIENCE

Admission to the Popular Music Program can be regarded as highly selective. Students not only have to be exceptionally talented as demonstrated in their audition, but must also be academically admissible into USC. Entering classes are kept small (around 25 students) and will work closely together as a cohort in classes, rehearsals, performances and arranging original songs. Students are highly encouraged to regularly perform their own songs and create
bands outside of class to begin to develop an audience base on the USC campus.

Students are introduced to professionals from the music industry every week in the Popular Music Forum class. Guest speakers have included industry leading producers, engineers, songwriters, publishers, tour managers, entertainment attorneys and many, many more.

Popular Music majors also have regular opportunities to perform off campus at sites such as CenterStaging studios in Burbank and the GRAMMY Museum in downtown Los Angeles.

Because the program is part of a major university, Popular Music majors can diversify their experience by working with cinema students on film projects, collaborating with jazz and classical students in extracurricular bands and teaming up with music industry students to promote shows and record tracks. In addition, daily interaction in the classrooms and residence halls with a diverse and intellectually motivated student body takes full advantage of our university setting.

**THE CURRICULUM**

The curriculum was specifically designed to meet the needs of the popular musician. The program’s approach to instruction places an emphasis on artistic achievement, musicianship, personal creativity, collaboration and relevance to the industry. Below are the broad areas of study that make up the BM in Popular Music Performance curriculum:

**General Education**

The Popular Music program highly values the General Education classes offered at USC. Courses in writing, literature, global cultures, critical thinking and social issues not only develop Popular Music majors as human beings; they also feed and inform their music by making them more aware of the world they ultimately want to connect with through their music.

**Performance Classes**

*Popular Music Performance Class (MPPM 120/320):* At the heart of the Popular Music Program is *Popular Music Performance Class.* This 6 semester class brings together all of the Popular Music majors to
learn about the essential genres, styles, performance nuances and ensemble skills required of popular musicians. Students are arranged by the faculty into a wide variety of bands. The first two years are dedicated to learning the traditions and performance practices of the greats while the third year places an emphasis on original songs and arrangements. Outside rehearsals are a critical component to the class. Students are taught leadership skills through the rotating assignment of Musical Director (MD) for each band. Students demonstrate their progress through mid-term and final performances. You may read a review of the Popular Music Performance class Spring 2010 mid-term performance at:

http://dailytrojan.com/2010/03/02/pop-music-majors-get-funky-for-midterm/

**Individual Instruction (MPPM 153/253):** All students will have weekly, private instruction on their primary instrument (or voice) with a USC Thornton faculty member. Individual Instruction is designed to not only develop advanced level technique and artistic achievement, but is also tied closely with the repertoire being studied in Popular Music Performance Class.

**Proficiency Classes (MPPM 240/250):** All majors are required to complete a Piano Proficiency and a Drumset Proficiency course. Drumset proficiency is a unique component to the curriculum and recognizes that time awareness and “groove” is essential to popular musicians. Students who already have sufficient piano and/or drum skills will substitute a guitar and/or vocal proficiency course.

**Popular Music Forum (MPPM 100):** This is a weekly special topics course presented by a long list of guest speakers intended to provide the student with an overview of the music profession. Guest speakers have included Glen Ballard, Tom Sturges, Marc St. Louis, Patrice Rushen, Scott Boorey, Lamont Dozier, Sarah Kelly, representatives from the GRAMMY’s, BMI and many more.
**Final Project (MPPM 450):** The program places an emphasis on the entrepreneurial nature of successful music careers. Students are encouraged to think about what their niche will be in the industry over the course of their Freshman and Sophomore years. Students are then required to submit a proposal and business plan for their Final Project during their Junior year for faculty approval. Students will then proceed to execute their Final Project under faculty supervision during their Senior year. The Final Project is entirely student initiated, but does have two basic requirements: 1) It has to be entrepreneurial in nature and test where the student might fit into the music profession and 2) it must utilize a network of students (students from Music Industry, Cinema, Communications, Marketing, for example) for the project to be completed. Our ambition is for the Final Project to serve as a platform for students to launch successful careers in the industry.

**Music Industry**

All Popular Musicians must have a working knowledge of the music industry. The Popular Music curriculum offers classes that provide fundamental knowledge of the industry, such as contracts, publishing, promotion, etc., required for students to be successful. Many students, however, will amplify these courses with additional music industry electives depending on their individual objectives.

**Music Technology**

Popular Musicians must also understand the technological applications to music making. The Popular Music curriculum offers classes that provide essential knowledge in digital recording, MIDI techniques and computer notation. Many students, however, will supplement these courses with additional music technology electives depending on their individual objectives.
**Music Theory**

The Music Theory curriculum is also tailored to the specific needs of the Popular Musician. Music theory includes a three-year sequence: Year 1 - *Theory I*, Year 2 - *Harmony for the Popular Musician*, Year 3 – *Arranging for the Popular Musician*. All of these classes are complimented by rigorous *Aural Skills* (ear training) classes. Additionally, all Popular Music students regardless of their discipline will enroll in *Songwriting I*. Students admitted with a Songwriting emphasis will take an additional three courses in songwriting and individual instruction.

**Music History**

A wide-range of Music History courses are available to provide the historical context critical to the popular musicians understanding of their music. Examples include *Music and Culture, The Beatles, American Roots Music, The Broadway Musical, Hip-Hop and Society* and many more.

**Electives**

The Bachelor of Music in Popular Music Performance offers a significant number of elective units (22 units). These electives are an important part of the student’s experience as they allow students to customize the curriculum in order to meet their specific goals. Within a university setting, students have the opportunity to take courses in production, music industry, composition, cinema, communications and much more. Students with specific academic interests may choose to use Electives to pursue a minor in combination with the Popular Music Performance major.
THE FACULTY

The artist/faculty of the Popular Music program bring real world experience by performing with or writing for artists such as Santana, the Eagles, Marc Anthony, Joss Stone, The Supremes, Marvin Gaye, Michael Jackson, Juan Gabriel, Faith Hill and many, many more.

Faculty list:

Andy Abad, performance class and guitar
Jeffrey Allen, vocal
Robert Anderson, violin
Adriana Balic, songwriting, vocal and piano
Brian Carmody, drumming proficiency
Ndugu Chancler, drums
Lamont Dozier, artist-in-residence
Anne Farnsworth, piano and vocal
Jason Goldman, sax
Dr. Karen Harris, theory
Will Hollis, performance class
Alphonso Johnson, bass
Tim Kobza, guitar
Steve Miller, artist-in-residence
Jake Reed, drumming proficiency
Patrice Rushen, artist-in-residence
Chris Sampson, songwriting
Richard Smith, performance class and guitar
Andrea Stolpe, songwriting
Steve Trovato, guitar

Students Performing w/ the Steve Miller Band
CORPORATE PARTNERS

The Popular Music Performance program is very grateful of the support provided by Roland, KORG, DW Drums, Zildjian Cymbals, Evans Drum Heads, and Kaman Music/Genz Benz.

PROGRAM PARTNERS

The Popular Music Performance program expresses its gratitude to the Al Sherman Foundation for underwriting our showcase performances. Also, we are a proud partner with the GRAMMY Foundation in delivering GRAMMY in schools “Career Day” and GRAMMY Camp.

For more information about the Popular Music Program, please contact:

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For application and audition information and deadlines, please visit
www.usc.edu/music/admission