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Argument

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### Diversity in Sound: A Proposal for Undergraduate Music School Programs

It is completely and utterly undeniable that music is one of the most important forces in the modern world. Music not only is exciting to listen to, but it also changes perspectives and outlooks on society and can spark groups of people to rise up and stand for what they believe in. This fact has been true since music's creation many millennia ago. It was true when Beethoven composed his French Revolution-inspired *Fidelio* (Robinson); it was true when Billie Holiday took the poem "Strange Fruit" and turned it into Time Magazine's song of the century for its powerful portrayal on the affect of systemic racism (Blair); and it was true when Dr. Dre, Easy-E, Ice Cube, and the rest of N.W.A. wrote "Fuck the Police", a song which unapologetically and emotionally railed on the oppressive Los Angeles police force (Gale). The more current and more diverse music becomes, the more important a role it plays in the development of societies across the globe. With the music industry growing larger than it ever has been and expanded opportunities for music makers to release content online, it makes sense that more and more people would want to pursue an undergraduate music degree. Unfortunately that simply isn't the case thanks to how incredibly outdated and archaic music schools are, with many simply refusing to modernize and focus on music that people actually listen to in the modern era. Undergraduate music programs need to rebuild their program to focus on music released in the past 100 years instead of focusing on the classical, baroque, and romantic eras.

Before discussing in detail the proposed plan which should be adopted in these programs, one must first understand the significance and importance of this change. Music schools simply refuse to require their students to understand more about the music that they

listen to the second they leave the classroom. Currently, as of December 15, 2016, there are absolutely no classical- or romantic-inspired pieces on the Billboard Hot 100, and the first and only album containing similar work on the Billboard 200 is a digital re-issue of *The Ghosts of Christmas Eve* by the Trans-Siberian Orchestra - the most popular orchestra in the world - ranking 37th in the rankings ("Billboard Hot 100 Chart"). While baroque, classical, and romantic music was not able to be recorded like modern music at the time, numerous collections and compilations have been released since the invention of recorded music, and yet these albums still refuse to sell well. All of this points to the rather obvious observation that this kind of music simply isn't listened to by a wide audience.

What is popular, however, is hip-hop and R&B, with *The Hamilton Mixtape* topping the Billboard 200, followed by The Weeknd's *Starboy* at No. 2, Childish Gambino's *Awaken, My Love!* at No. 5, *24K Magic* by Bruno Mars at No. 6, and the original *Hamilton* soundtrack at No. 11. What is also popular is rock and its derivatives, with the new Rolling Stones cover album, *Blue and Lonesome*, at No. 4 and Metallica's *Hardwired... to Self-Destruct* at No. 12, which peaked at No. 1 at the start of the month (*Billboard*).

All of this music largely derives from two genres. Most music today is either a form of blues - such as rock, heavy metal, and punk - jazz - such as jazz fusion and electro swing - or a combination of the two, such as rhythm & blues, hip-hop, and electronic dance music. Of the top music schools in the United States, only Berklee features a degree in electronic music production (Berklee), and none offer any sort of degree in blues, rock, or any of their derivatives. Very few schools have a degree path in hip-hop, with many, like University of Arizona, relegating it to a minor within a black/Africana studies program (Arizona). Academic music programs are stuck in the past and need to modernize in order to maintain relevance. The disconnect between academic music and popular music is ever-increasing and continues to make less and less sense.

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One of the most important fundamental aspects of the academic music degree path that must change is the idea that everyone should be required to take almost exclusively the same classes. Because different instruments play varying roles in different kinds of modern music, it is important that students study the types of music which not only appeal to the type of music they wish to pursue post-degree, but also which are most relevant to the instrument they play. A keyboard major will need to focus much more on jazz, electronic, and hip-hop music in addition to classical music, while a guitar major will need to focus more on blues, rock, and its derivatives. Instead of having a separate degree for different styles and genres of music, it makes more sense for the instrument to be the distinguishing factor in the degree, with the option to concentrate in a particular style. This would enable music students to have more control over what they learn in the classroom, making the material far more relevant to their experiences.

This is also why numerous elective classes focusing exclusively on a modern style of music should be created, as different instruments will need to take different courses. One may think that a trumpet player, for example, might not have much to study aside from classical and jazz, but this couldn't be further from the truth. A trumpet player could take a class on R&B and its contemporaries, as trumpet is used surprisingly often in certain styles of hip-hop. In addition, this student should be required to take a course discussing jazz styles, as there is much more to the trumpet's role in a jazz ensemble than that of the stereotypical "big band" setting, with the likes of jazz fusion heavily utilizing brass instruments in interesting and unique ways. Trumpets are also used in niche genres such as ska punk, which could be explored in courses of their own.

A vocal major has perhaps the largest library of options to draw from, thanks to the human voice being such an accessible instrument and it being an integral part to almost all

forms of music. Because of this, concentrations should especially be heavily encouraged, if not required, for vocal majors. For instance, a vocalist should be able to concentrate in hip-hop if they want to. In this instance, the hip-hop vocal major would have to take courses which specialize in that particular type of vocalization. Diction is already a series of courses which music majors are required to take in many universities, but a hip-hop vocalist has very different needs vocally from an opera singer. Because of this, upper-level diction courses should be split into different styles, and allow vocal majors to choose which ones fit their track best.

These changes are relatively superficial unless the program in its entirety adjusts around these changes. The current setup for academic music study needs to be overhauled at a fundamental level to accommodate for the new styles being taught while also not overwhelming students with more work than the already-intensive curriculum already overwhelms them with. This calls for classes which take up the same amount of time, but redistribute, remove, and add content to be more relevant to the modern music world.

For example, a music history curriculum is generally laid up over the course of a three-semester track, but this track should be changed to focus more on music after 1900. The first course in its entirety can still focus on baroque, classical, and romantic music, but neither the second or third levels should focus on these styles of music. This calls for a substantial purging of content from this curriculum, which would remove many composers which simply aren't as influential as the highlights from those eras. This is because the second course would focus on modern western music in its entirety, looking at the origins of jazz and blues before 1900 before diving head-first into the important artists of the past century and how musical styles have diversified thanks to the evolution and cross-infection of different approaches to jazz and blues. Artists such as Jimmy Page, Michael Jackson, Dr. Dre, and Paul McCartney would be discussed, because these are the musicians which continue to inspire artists to this day, among many, many others. Finally, a third course, entitled "Global Music History", would focus on non-

western music from approximately 1500 onwards, with the goal of communicating how these different styles have influenced and continue to influence western music to this day. A substantial example of this would be pre-colonial African music inspiring the religious music of enslaved persons in America, leading to the eventual development of modern jazz and blues which, as previously discussed, is the backbone for most popular music today.

For the likes of sight-singing, also commonly known as aural skills, the track should be kept largely the same with a few additions to accommodate for different rhythmic and melodic styles. As such, the courses should be renamed to “Rhythm & Pitch”, because that is what is being studied in these programs. Most music programs feature three or four semesters of this track. In this new system, the third and fourth levels would look into aspects of rhythm and pitch that aren’t currently mentioned or taught in class. With rhythm, the likes of swing, flexible rhythm, and rhythmic dissonance are currently not discussed. With pitch, looking at unhitched music such as percussion music or rap and look at how tone still plays a role in those styles would help diversify students’ understanding of music. It would also help solidify the fundamentals of aural skills, as applying these skills to real-world examples could help make the course more relatable to what students actually listen to.

Music theory is, in many ways, the core of music education currently, but it fails to take modern music into account in many cases. Many theory courses which look into music after 1900 tend to skip over most popular artists, looking instead at what happened in the modern classical music scene which, as discussed, barely exists. That is not to say that this scene is not worth looking into, but it should be optional, depending on concentration and instrument, and further diversified with multiple courses. The result would be a three-semester-long theory track with an optional fundamentals course prior and three or four mandatory styles electives of the student’s choosing. Schools would be encouraged to add multiple levels to these styles

electives to expand the curriculum beyond one semester. Students who wish to focus more on classical music could do so with more focused modern classical theory courses.

Most music schools also have an ensemble and lesson requirement for majors and minors of all kinds, which makes sense from a practicality standpoint. If these ensembles and lessons were further diversified, however, they have the potential to be the most useful aspects of a music program. Suppose a group of five students want to start a heavy metal band using their primary major instruments in the ensemble. In this modern music program, these five students should be able to contact a staff member who specializes in this field and have them back the band. After this, the group can practice on their own time and then get assessed by this staff member on a regular basis and get feedback. Now, the group of students are playing music that they love and get the positive experience that an ensemble can bring, all without hiring dozens of new staff members to manage all of these ensembles. This logic can also apply to chamber ensembles, hip-hop groups, electronic supergroups, and even the traditional chorus. Larger ensembles, such as concert band or orchestra, can and probably should still have a staff member directing them.

Lessons do not need to be re-invented, as the goal of a lesson is to get regular consultation with an instructor with the goal of improving and learning repertoire and then performing it later in the semester. This process should remain largely in-tact with the notable change of giving students the freedom to play whatever types of music they want. Then, at the jury or examination, the panel assessing the student should specialize in that style of music. This means that the aforementioned trumpet player would be assessed by jazz instructors if performing jazz music, or the hip-hop vocalist would be assessed by professors who know how to rap.

Another aspect of music-making that is not discussed whatsoever in the music school is the written aspect: lyrics. Not every type of music nowadays uses lyrics as a primary method of

delivering its message, but its prominence demands that students should know how to write them. This is not a skill set unique to music, however, as poetry has continued to use language in interesting ways since its inception. As such, music students should be required to take at least one poetry course before graduation. This will give composition majors a basis with which to write lyrics to their music if they so choose, and music performance majors a better understanding of the meaning of the lyrics in music they perform, regardless of style.

Finally, with music becoming more and more commonly produced through software, it should be mandated that all music majors learn a little bit about music production. Many schools have a dedicated Sound Recording Technologies major, but music production experience is something that should not be exclusive to this specific degree path. This arms students with the capability to be flexible with their skill set, which is particularly useful in the workforce.

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Figure A, shown below, provides a sample of what this revolutionary program could look like in practice. The academic plan takes the current undergraduate music performance program, using an academic plan from Ithaca College's Whalen School of Music as a base ("Degree Schematic"), and applies the proposed changes with the aforementioned trumpet student in mind. This student will be concentrating in jazz for this example.

	Fall	Spring
Year 1	Fundamentals of Music Theory Introduction to Musical Styles Rhythm & Pitch I Secondary Instrument Lessons Ensemble (Jazz Fusion Band) Repertoire Concert Attendance	Music Theory I Rhythm & Pitch II Music Technology Secondary Instrument Lessons Ensemble (Jazz Fusion Band) Repertoire Concert Attendance

Year 2	Music Theory II Rhythm & Pitch III Western Music History I Lessons Ensemble (Jazz Fusion Band) Repertoire Concert Attendance	Music Theory III Rhythm & Pitch IV Western Music History II Lessons Ensemble (Jazz Fusion Band) Repertoire Concert Attendance
Year 3	Jazz Styles I Global Music History Form & Analysis Lessons Ensemble (Jazz Fusion Band) Repertoire Concert Attendance	Jazz Styles II Rock Styles I Junior Recital Lessons Ensemble (Jazz Fusion Band) Repertoire Concert Attendance
Year 4	Hip-Hop Styles I Lyricism Lessons Ensemble (Jazz Fusion Band) Repertoire Concert Attendance	Music Production Senior Recital Lessons Ensemble (Jazz Fusion Band) Repertoire Concert Attendance

This academic plan allows for three core music class (two during senior year) in addition to four years of lessons, ensemble, and repertoire. This plan would even allow for this student to take an elective or liberal arts course every single semester (two during senior year), proving that diversifying the music program does not have to come at the students' expense.

The key to this program is to find a notable balance between the music which students want to learn and the music students need to learn, neither of which is currently being taught in current programs. Even the stereotypical music major who wants to join the typical symphony orchestra would be better off learning about modern pop music. Just like computer science majors learn new coding languages and journalism majors learn about new forms of media, music majors should be learning about where their industry is headed, as it directly affects their career path.

This is not to say that music prior to 1900 is not useful or worth learning about. In fact, there is a tremendous benefit to training musicians classically. Many successful modern musicians, such as Paul McCartney or Frank Zappa, have used classical training to not only



succeed in rock, but also have written classical pieces of their own (DeGroot). This not only demonstrates the importance of classical music education, but it also gives validity to the idea that these artists are not only important in the field they are best known for, but also for the styles currently taught in undergraduate music programs. With that in mind, however, there is no denying that baroque, classical, and romantic music make up an extraordinarily small slice of the music-listening space today. It would be ignorant to continue to teach students exclusively about an ever-shrinking field instead of opening the floodgates and permitting students to pursue the numerous avenues available to them.

Other than the clear benefit for students, however, it also provides a clear benefit for the music industry at large. Schools who adopt a plan like this first would be pushing the boundaries of what music education could do, and it most certainly would attract attention from a wide array of students. This would, in effect, allow people with untapped musical potential to have a shot at working on bettering themselves musically that normally would not have that opportunity. These students, after spending four years of hard work improving their craft, would then go out into the workforce armed like no prior generation of music-makers ever have been, resulting in what could be some of the most interesting and diverse music scenes in history. Considering how incredibly diverse music already is, that prospect is undeniably exciting for listeners across the globe.

This also provides a clear benefit for the schools who choose to implement. Unlike current successful musicians who might attribute their success to family, friends, peers, or private teachers, students who succeed as a result of this revolutionary program would give credit to the school that bred their talent. This brings accreditation that is impossible for music schools in their current incarnation.

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The most successful hip-hop artist of the modern era, Marshall Mathers - known as Eminem, dropped out of high school after failing the 9th grade three times. He lived in a poor side of Detroit, and had numerous other problems in his personal life. In various interviews, Mathers has stated that he left school because it wasn't for him, but that people shouldn't follow his example (Reece). Mathers went on to be signed by Dr. Dre and make three of the most popular albums in hip-hop, but that doesn't change the fact that he still never had the education that even he admits people should get. As mentioned, there were numerous other problems in Mathers' personal life, but in times of hardship, people need a goal to work towards - a reason to keep trying. Because his source of happiness came through hip-hop, he dropped out of school to pursue that instead. Imagine, then, if there was a undergraduate music program which taught hip-hop courses and maybe even offered a hip-hop degree path. In that case, the solution for someone in Mathers' situation would be not to drop out of school to pursue rap; rather, the solution would be to stay in school to pursue rap. If the next Eminem had such an opportunity, one can only imagine how much happier that person would be.

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