

The Future of the Liberal Arts Music Curriculum

AALAC Faculty Workshop Proposal for Spring 2016

Music faculty at liberal arts colleges face multiple challenges: giving music students a cohesive education in the face of splintering musical tastes, practices and disciplines; maintaining high academic standards when students have had relatively less musical preparation from K-12 schools; and responding to declining numbers of majors. Music programs attempt to adjust curricula towards an unknown future without undermining current areas of success and strength. Each attempt happens in isolation, yet the challenges to which they respond are felt on many campuses. We propose an AALAC faculty workshop entitled “The Future of the Liberal Arts Music Curriculum.” This workshop brings progressive faculty representing the breadth of music disciplines (including music theory, musicology, ethnomusicology, composition, performance, and jazz) from various liberal arts colleges together to rethink liberal arts music curricula while still harnessing the strengths of our respective departments and curricular priorities.

These challenges reflect the state of the humanities and liberal arts throughout higher education. Falling numbers of majors and shifts in student and institutional priorities are directly tied to rising education costs and the insecure job market recognized by students, parents, and administrators. Our focus on the role of music departments can provide a concrete and coherent response to the questions facing humanistic and artistic disciplines. Most liberal arts music curricula are built on over 100 years of very specific pedagogical priorities. Many departments are confronted with questions such as how best to incorporate rapidly changing and increasingly important music technologies; how to balance the classical canon on which most music departments have been built with the breadth of musical practices heard globally in the 21st century, and how best to train music majors given how competitive the current job market is for performers, teachers, and professors.

Despite these challenges, we remain confident that music programs are central to their respective campuses and essential for fulfilling the values of a liberal arts education. By bringing diverse faculty together, we hope to find paths towards addressing these challenges and more effectively integrating liberal arts music programs into the broader educational aims of the arts, humanities, and the liberal arts.

Our workshop addresses four central questions:

- 1) What does it mean to provide a comprehensive music education in a 21st century liberal arts college?
- 2) How can we best serve students in the context of a changing job market and educational priorities?
- 3) How can music departments best respond to 21st century musical tastes, global dynamics, and technological advancements without compromising the strengths of our departments?
- 4) How can we proactively attract majors, encourage deeper engagement with music and keep music central to the liberal arts mission?

The principal goals are as follows:

- Facilitate dialogue between faculty members and departments on questions every liberal arts music department confronts.
- Provide a space away from institutional pressures and obligations to approach these questions creatively and collaboratively.
- Build a foundation for future collaborations involving curricular development.
- Compile and assess music curricula across AALAC music departments.
- Prepare a plan of action and a list of recommendations during the subsequent academic year involving curricular approaches at our respective institutions.

Host Institution and Conference Date:

Grinnell College; Two full days in spring 2016, shortly after completion of scheduled classes on AALAC campuses.

Conference Organizers:

Tony Perman, Assistant Professor of Music, Grinnell College (*workshop leader*)
Joti Rockwell, Associate Professor of Music, Pomona College (*workshop leader*)
Gurminder Bhogal, Associate Professor of Music, Wellesley College
Curt Cacioppo, Professor Music, Haverford College

Workshop Liaison:

Tony Perman, Assistant Professor of Music, Grinnell College
permanan@grinnell.edu

Interested Participants, by Discipline:

Ethnomusicology

Tony Perman, Grinnell College
Jeffers Englehardt, Amherst College
Jennifer Fraser, Oberlin College

Music Theory

Joti Rockwell, Pomona College
Victoria Malawey, Macalaster College

Musicology

Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, Wellesley College
Jennifer Brown, Grinnell College
Mark Burford, Reed College
Andy Flory, Carleton College
Barbara Milewski, Swarthmore College

Composition

Curt Cacioppo, Haverford College
Jon Chenette, Vassar College

Performance:

Carole Blankenship, Rhodes College
Genevieve Lee, Pomona College

Conducting:

Eric McIntyre, Grinnell College

Jazz Studies:

Mark Laver, Grinnell College

Jason Robinson, Amherst College

Potential Keynote Speakers:

To be determined by the Conference Organizers and participants. Preliminary discussions involve having one speaker with a background studying and evaluating music curricula at liberal arts colleges; the other speaker would bring experience and additional perspectives from the wider world of music and/or academic institutions other than liberal arts colleges.