Introduction

The Department of Music at Columbia University was one of the first established at any American university, and remains one of the most distinguished. It was founded in 1896 by Edward MacDowell (1860-1908), whose remarkable vision for the place of music in a liberal arts institution still holds today.

MacDowell saw a dual role for musical education at Columbia, and accordingly provided for courses of two kinds: general musical culture and technical training. The general courses now include Music Humanities, part of Columbia’s Core Curriculum, as well as courses in Western and non-Western repertories offered for students from all disciplines.

The undergraduate and graduate curricula include music history, music theory, ethnomusicology, and composition. Musical performance is also an important part of the Department, home to the Columbia University Orchestra, the longest continuously operating orchestra in America. Each year the Department’s Music Performance Program (MPP) enables hundreds of students to receive academic credit for lessons and chamber ensembles, including jazz; their teachers are among the best musicians in New York.

The Department of Music maintains and continues to expand its disciplinary depth and diversity.
Frequently Asked Questions

Do I have to be a Music Major to participate in Music?
No. Courses in Music are open to all students, and lessons to all students who pass the auditions. Ensembles are likewise open to all students, by audition; most offer the possibility of academic credit, but this is not necessary.

Can I get a performance degree at Columbia?
No. Columbia is not a conservatory. We offer a Bachelor of Arts degree; our Major, Concentration, and Premedical Concentration in Music, include music scholarship, composition, and performance.

How can I qualify for courses in Music Performance?
Auditions are required for all individual lessons and ensembles. They occur every year at the beginning of the Fall semester only. It is ESSENTIAL for students interested in performance to first access the MPP website for auditions information.

Can I take lessons as a beginner?
Only in piano. Interviews take place the first two days of every semester between 10 am and 2 pm in Rooms 109 and 110 Dodge Hall. You do not need to sign up ahead of time. Bring a piece of music to play if you have one.

What should I prepare for auditions?
Two pieces of contrasting character and style. Consult the websites of the Columbia University Orchestra and the Louis Armstrong Jazz Performance Program for more specific information.

If I do not get into lessons, can you help me find a teacher?
Yes. The Music Performance Program maintains a referral list of private teachers in the Columbia neighborhood.

Is there any charge for lessons at Columbia?
No. The cost of lessons is covered by tuition.

Is there support for performance study outside the University?
The Robert M. Dolan Prize awards funds to support a few exceptional students studying with outside teachers. Auditions are held in the second week of the Fall semester; information is available from the MPP website.

What is the Columbia-Juilliard Program?
A few students who qualify for study at Columbia and at the Juilliard School may be admitted to either of two joint programs, one offering degrees from both institutions. For more information, please contact David Buckwald at db2326@columbia.edu, 212-854-2522 or visit www.music.columbia.edu/programs/undergrad/juilliard.

Should I send audition material to the Department of Music when I apply to Columbia?
No. Auditions occur after enrollment. You may submit supplemental materials with your application, but only to the Office of Undergraduate Admissions with the application, not to the Music Department.

What is the Computer Music Center?
The Computer Music Center (CMC) is a state-of-the-art computer music facility. It was the first center for electroacoustic music established in the U.S., and has attracted guest composers and researchers from all over the world. It is housed in Dodge Hall on the main campus and Prentis Hall. CMC classes are open to qualified undergraduate and graduate students in all departments of the University. Please visit the CMC website: www.music.columbia.edu/cmc/

Are there any Practice Rooms available to students?
Yes. Practice rooms are accessible in the following locations: 3 rooms in East Campus (dormitory pass access only); 3 rooms in Broadway Hall (dormitory pass access only); and 6 rooms in Schapiro Hall (CUID access). A key deposit of $30 is required to use the practice rooms in B’way and East Campus. The Schapiro rooms are free. Grand pianos, available for public use, are located in Lerner Hall, John Jay Lounge, and the GSAS Student Lounge in 301 Philosophy Hall.