



New Models for the Modern Conservatory

2023 AEC-PJP Meeting

Rome, Italy

USC Thornton
School of Music

<https://tinyurl.com/3c59y4r9>

Presenters

- Sean Holt
 - Vice Dean, Contemporary Division
 - Songwriting, Popular Music Performance, Music Production
 - seanholt@usc.edu
- Rick Schmunk
 - Founder Music Production Program
 - Chair, Music Technology
 - schmunk@usc.edu

Background

- European popular music programs predate USCs
- Watched and learned
- Developed programs to fit USC and Los Angeles
 - Popular Music degree program (2009)
 - Music Production (2015)

Institutional Responsibility

- Fundamental change in how schools operate
- Industry constantly changes—related programs must follow
- Outcome driven curricula



Single Faceted Careers

- Exception, not the rule
- Most grads' careers combine...
 - Performing/touring
 - Songwriting
 - Arranging/producing
 - Musical director
 - Studio musician
 - Music industry professional

Students/Applicants Have Changed

- Not specialists
- Multi-instrumentalists
- Want to do it all
- Making students choose doesn't serve



Students Have Changed

- Constantly question purpose and identity
- Compare themselves to young artists
- Why am I in school?

Breakdowns

Need to do everything now

Concerned with brand

- Don't know themselves
- Don't know their own strengths
- See peers succeed faster
- Emotional crises

Faculty

- Counsel – context, perspective, process

Program and Curricula Guiding Principles

- Cohort based structure
- Pop canon...
- All students are creators
- Spiral learning

Guiding Principles

- Collaboration/peer-based learning
- Coursework infused with soft skills
- Emphasize unique artistic voice
- Present to professionals
- Interrogatory feedback

Applicant Evaluation/Selection

- Who are they?
- Will they work well with others?
- How do they communicate?
- Do they have a learner's posture?
- And, do they have the skill(s)?

Outcomes

- The biggest winners are women
- Taking over LA-based touring bands...

The Weekend, Olivia Rodrigo, Halsey, REO Speedwagon, George Benson, Kanye, Terminal 5, Leon Bridges, John Mayer, Paramour, Vampire Weekend, Katy Perry, Broadway Show *Hamilton*

Outcomes...Artists

- Remi Wolf
- MUNA
- Rozzi
- Trousdale
- Jensen McCrae
- FEIN
- King Princess
- Aaron Childs
- NoSo
- Ethan Tasch



Outcomes...Producers

- Joey Messina-Doerning
- Grant Boutin
- Sync/library placements
- K-Pop, J-Pop artist placements
- Film trailers
- Producer assistants

Next Steps

- Tweak, tweak, tweak...
- Instill social awareness and DEI
- New Master of Music in *Popular Music Teaching and Learning*

Next Steps

- Connect our students and faculty to wider academic networks
 - Maymesters
 - Semesters abroad
- Guest teaching/faculty exchanges
- Collaborative research/best practices

Information

- [Popular Music 4-Year Plan](#)
- [Music Production 4-Year Plan](#)
- [Popular Music Teach and Learning \(MM\)](#)
- [Student releases](#)

Information

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