



College Music Programs 101

Ontario

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Introduction

If you're planning on studying music in college, you might have noticed there's a lot of different ways of doing that! From programs focusing on production to musical theatre, from 1-year certificates to 3-year advanced diplomas, there are many ways to pursue a college education in music. We're here to help navigate your choices with our helpful guides! This guide gives an overview of how college music programs in Ontario are structured, the different kinds of programs available, and things to know before you apply!

Key terms: Program Types

Ontario College Certificate

Certificate programs are two-semester programs (usually one school year). In music, they tend to be preparatory programs to build your fundamental skills for further study at college or university, or highly-focused programs in one subject.

Ontario College Diploma

Diploma programs are four-semester programs (usually two school years) which allow for a substantial grounding in the student's primary career focus, and are the most common kind of music program at college in Ontario.

Ontario College Advanced Diploma

Similar to the standard diploma, these are six-semester programs (three school years or two full years, including summers) which offer the chance to develop an even stronger focus in a subject and may feature industry work experience.

Bachelor of Music Degree

A Bachelor of Music (BMus) degree at a college is a program that specializes in music, and bears a strong resemblance to BMus degrees in university. BMus programs generally require an audition, and last four years. Most BMus programs include private one-on-one lessons in your instrument or voice, culminating in a final juried performance at the end of the school year. In college, often these are oriented around some performance rather than composition or theory, with a strong practical element and the ability to explore a broader variety of subjects and learn more about working in the music industry. Some colleges offer combined degrees with universities, in which students study both at a college and university in their chosen subject, enriching practical education with a strong theoretical knowledge base.

College Music Programs

Music programs are generally primarily focused on one area of music, generally either performance, music production and recording or musical theatre. Some are offered through a faculty of arts at a college, while others are offered through specialized programs at private colleges. Students apply for admission the year before they hope to begin their degree, and may be required to audition or to submit a portfolio of recorded or composed music.

Program Subjects

Generally, college music programs in Ontario can be divided into three kinds of programs: **performance**, **music production** or **musical theatre**. They often overlap in their practical approach to education, usually featuring some form of study in the business of music and a performance aspect, even if it is not the primary focus. Many have requirements to take general education courses outside of music.

Performance

Performance-focused programs in music take a variety of forms, but almost universally require an audition as part of their admission. Programs may focus on classical performance, jazz or even building skills to become a singer-songwriter. Students usually receive training on their chosen instrument, may play in ensembles and often receive opportunities to perform for the public. Bachelor of Music degrees at colleges are often offered in performance, and those programs marry their practical education with a strong theoretical foundation, the ability to pursue other interests in music and vital industry skills.

Production

Programs focused in music production are one of the most common offerings in college, and usually take the form of two-year diplomas. Students learn how to use recording technologies, the ins-and-outs of producing music and how to build a career in the music industry. Often, they also learn music theory, songwriting and valuable collaborative skills.

Musical Theatre

Musical theatre programs are always auditioned programs, often taking the form of a six-semester advanced diploma. Students will learn how to sing, act and dance, as well as developing auditioning and other career-related skills. They feature a variety of opportunities to perform on stage, and there may be opportunities to develop new works for musical theatre.

The Business Side

Many college programs offer a substantial grounding in the business of music, and may even offer entire diplomas in the subject. This is a key feature of college programs, and is a highly beneficial area of study for those looking to pursue a career as a working musician. Students may study subjects such as marketing, accounting, networking and business law, all focused around music's unique place in the performing arts industry.

Key Terms

Private Instruction/Lessons

Music programs often offer private, one-to-one instruction on the instrument they audition on, referred to as their primary instrument, or in voice. These lessons go throughout the full school year, and students usually are required to perform for a small panel of instructors (sometimes called a jury) during final exams, or have a performance requirement during the year.

Ensemble Courses

Playing in an ensemble with other music students (usually conducted or directed by an instructor) is often a requirement in music programs. They rehearse and have performances throughout the year, and students are enrolled in a course for which they receive a grade. The ensembles available to students may be limited by which instruments they play.

Triple-Threat

An industry term for a performer who can act, dance and sing. Most musical theatre programs bill themselves as “triple-threat” programs, meaning they provide teaching in all three subjects to help create well-rounded artists.

Auditions, Portfolios and Demos, Oh My!

Auditions

In addition to applying through a service like ontariocolleges.ca (or through the school for private colleges), most performance and musical theatre programs require an audition for admission, either virtual or in-person, and are usually held between January and April. These are administered by the school, and though they differ from school to school, they are usually similar. Schools often also ask about your musical background and goals, and a short interview may follow the audition.

Musical Theatre

Musical theatre programs require an audition that covers acting, singing, and dancing. Applicants usually need to perform a contemporary monologue (usually 1-2 minutes, age-appropriate in content), two short and contrasting songs (one musical theatre, one from any genre) and a dance combination (provided by the school).

Classical

In classical-focused programs, auditions are on a classical instrument, and students must perform repertoire that showcases their technical ability. This may include pieces, etudes and technique. They will also often test your sight-reading and ear training capacity. Different instruments have different requirements, so check each school for the specifics, though these usually overlap between schools with similar programs. They are often followed by a short interview for your panel to get to know you, and for you to ask questions about the program!

Jazz and Popular/Contemporary Music

Students auditioning in jazz or popular music have very different requirements, usually outlined in their program page. These often include a demonstration of a variety of songs which showcase their ability to play or sing, with specific style guidelines or repertoire lists provided by the school. Improvisation is usually a requirement of jazz programs, and may be part of popular music auditions. They usually require submission of a pre-screening video audition, and you will be asked to audition in person after review of this video, or only require a video audition.

There is often a fee for auditioning, charged by each school individually. Private colleges (such as the Glenn Gould School) will charge a more substantial fee for applying, as those applications are processed individually by the school rather than through a service like ontariocolleges.ca.

Accompanists

Some schools require students to have accompaniment of some sort for the music they perform. Accompanists are sometimes provided by the school, but you may have to hire one, and as such are another potential expense. Some pop & jazz programs may allow backing tracks for video submissions.

Pro Tip!

If you have a private teacher, lean on their expertise for what repertoire is appropriate for the programs you want to apply to, and get in touch with the school if you have any questions! Private lessons are not a requirement, but are often beneficial.

Demos and Portfolios

Especially for programs in production or songwriting, schools may request you send along a demo or more substantial portfolio. The demo is usually one or a collection of recordings that you either performed, recorded or produced. Schools want to see your capabilities before admission, and this is how you showcase them. A portfolio often includes a demo recording, but requires additional information such as a short biography, a short essay/paragraph on your goals in music and a resume which includes your musical experience.

Questionnaires and Other Get-to-Know-Yous

Schools may ask students to give them supplementary information, such as RCM exam certificates and references. Additionally, they might ask for information about your musical or academic background, your interests, etc. These are usually sent out online, and take the form of a questionnaire or package you submit to the school. You may be required to pay your audition fee as part of filling out this questionnaire, and submit your intended repertoire for the audition (though this is more common for university programs).

Thank you for reading our guide! Check out our [other guides](#) for more specialized looks at different kinds of programs, comparisons between schools, and guides for individual schools.

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