

HIGHLIGHTS

Move Over, Beethoven

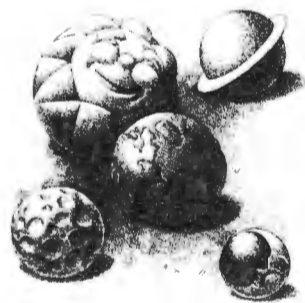
With symphony-orchestra jobs on the decline, the **Eastman School of Music** is expanding its curriculum to include rock and folk music along with Mozart and Brahms: A10



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MICHAEL GREENLAR FOR THE CHRONICLE

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The Faculty

To Help Its Students Find Jobs, Eastman School Expands Its Musical Repertoire Beyond the Classical

Mozart and Brahms make room for Frank Zappa in a broadening of the curriculum

BY ROBIN WILSON

ROCHESTER, N.Y.

AS BUSTS of Beethoven and Bach glared down on the stage here, a symphony orchestra at the Eastman School of Music cranked out Frank Zappa tunes last fall with the rock guitarist Steve Vai.

The performance, in Eastman's ornate concert hall, marked a turning point for the Eastman School, which is part of the University of Rochester. "It was pretty unprecedented," says Robert Fink, an assistant professor of musicology who helped organize a conference on popular music that was held in conjunction with the concert. "This stretched our players a lot. The orchestra was improvising, and that kind of thing is very, very threatening to classical musicians."

Eastman is engaged in a kind of improvisation of its own. Professors at the school, one of the most prestigious in the country, have undertaken an extensive effort to bring its curriculum more in tune with the music world today, expanding it to include the study of rock, folk, and even contemporary religious music. And they are preparing students for new kinds of careers in the music business, given the financial troubles of many symphony orchestras.

"What we're trying to prepare students for is to be musical entrepreneurs," says David Headlam, an associate professor of music theory who plays bass guitar in a local rock band called Love Ritual. "You can't just come here, play your instrument, and get a position in an orchestra."

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

The shift in philosophy is a major move for Eastman, which has always seen itself as a training ground for students studying 18th and 19th-century music by such European composers as Mozart and Brahms.

Many students come here with the idea of preparing for a career with a major orchestra. But the musical landscape is changing. Four years ago, Robert Freeman, who directed the school until last December, formed a panel to study solutions to what he called "the malaise in the classical-music world."

The problems include shrinking audiences for traditional concert-hall performances, a drop-off in sales of classical-music recordings, and the declining vitality of many of the country's major symphony orchestras.

Melinda Whiting, editor of the American Symphony Orchestra League's *Symphony* magazine, says audiences are graying as fewer young families make concert-going a priority. "This is a function of the culture and people having a lot more options for what to do with their time," she says.

People in the classical-music business are particularly concerned about the decline in classical music's share of the recorded-sound market. According to the



Pamela Frame (standing), a cello coach at the Eastman School of Music, takes students to perform at local galleries, schools, and clubs.

Recording Industry Association of America, 2.9 per cent of the recordings purchased in 1995 were classical, down from 3.7 per cent the year before.

A TOP RANKING

Eastman is one of the few music schools responding to those market issues in a big way, with an effort called the Eastman Initiatives. Administrators believe that this may be one reason why its graduate music programs earned the No. 1 ranking in a nationwide survey of music-school deans released last month by *U.S. News & World Report*. Although other schools have created programs to reflect changes in the music world, Eastman's effort is the broadest.

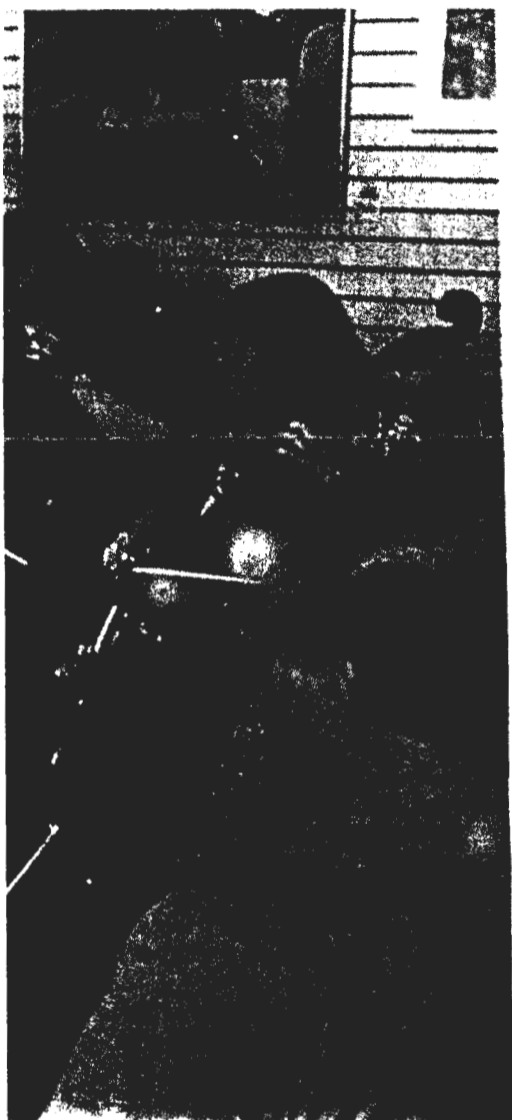
It is led by James Undercofler, who took over as acting director of the school after Mr. Freeman left to direct the New England Conservatory of Music. "We had the sense that if we made the move, others would follow," Mr. Undercofler says.

Other music schools are watching.

"Eastman has taken a very bold step," says Robert Sirota, director of the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University. "The future of music conservatories is they need to be more responsive to the realities of the arts world outside the conservatory. What do people want to see? Where is the audience of the future going to come from?"

Last fall, Eastman decided to help students answer those questions by instituting a new set of courses called the Arts Leadership Program, which is one part of the Eastman Initiatives. The half-semester courses for seniors focus on how musicians can better communicate with their audiences—and how they can piece together a variety of free-lance jobs into a career. The classes help them learn how to deal with a booking agent, for example, and how to develop a multimedia résumé that features sounds and images from their performances.

Professors at Eastman are also reviewing the undergraduate core curriculum



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL GREENIAR FOR THE CHRONICLE

with an eye toward giving students more choices. Students now stick to a strict academic schedule, which varies depending on their major, and have little room for electives. Allowing them to design their own schedules should be good practice for when they shape their careers later on, professors say.

EXPANDING THE CANON

A faculty committee has just started exploring changes in the curriculum itself. The school's 11 departments are setting out their "wish lists," and the committee is to present a plan to Mr. Undercofler in the next few months.

Several departments, including music theory, want to expand the canon. "When we're studying a particular chord or harmonic concept now, we might look at a Mozart string quartet and Schubert," says Elizabeth West Marvin, chairwoman of the music-theory department, which studies the underlying musical structure of compositions. In the future, she says, "maybe we'll also look at a popular ballad or a Beatles song."

In addition to being familiar with popular music, she says, students should develop improvisation skills, so they can play without sheet music. "We want to make a more versatile musician," she says. "It can be as mundane an incarnation as sitting down in a choir rehearsal and being able to play 'Happy Birthday.' We want them to develop ear skills."

Professors have also proposed a restructuring of the sequence of four musicology courses at Eastman that all undergraduates

must take. The courses now cover the history and culture of Western music from the Middle Ages on. The musicology department wants to revamp the first course to focus on such issues as music and religion or music and gender, with works from all over the world. "We want to bring in music from Tibetan Buddhists and Shaker hymns and show how there are similarities and differences," says Ralph P. Locke, a professor of musicology. The other three courses would cover the history of music chronologically, with an emphasis on popular music in the last course.

When Eastman began considering curricular changes a few years ago, one professor predicted that each department would have to slice 25 per cent from its current offerings to make way for new courses. Now, most people say, it is more likely that some new concepts and music will gradually replace some of the old. Faculty members, for example, have proposed shortening some courses, such as music theory, to make room for others. Mr. Fink, the musicology professor, likened Eastman to an "800-foot ocean liner," and said changes will come slowly.

'NOT A TURF WAR'

So far, the process of rewriting the curriculum has been collegial. "We don't have a history of polarization," says Carol S. Webber, a professor of voice. "This is not a turf war. This is an ideological self-examination."

Even so, some of the school's 85 faculty members are leery of change. Ramon Ricker, chairman of the woodwind, brass, and percussion department, says he doesn't think Eastman "can chase after some faddish thing that happens to be hot." He also thinks the school should reconsider whether it wants to steer students away from traditional music careers. "These kids want to play, and their dream is to play in an orchestra. Maybe we should let those who still want to do it, do it."

A few departments, however, already are making changes. As part of their "juries," which are performance exams judged by professors, all string students are now required to play at least one piece written in the past 40 years. "We haven't specified that it be a pop piece, but it should be by any composer who is alive," says John Graham, chairman of the string department. Students might even play a piece that they have commissioned from a classmate at Eastman who is studying composition.

Trumpet students have been asked to spend time trying to identify new audiences for classical performances. The students must find people who have never attended a concert, help them find one they are interested in, escort them to the performance, and then encourage them to

attend another. Eastman is also pushing its players out of their practice rooms and into the community to perform at schools, churches, and nursing homes. Professors say the experience teaches students that musicians must take more responsibility for building audiences and for educating people about music.

The stereotype of the musician dressed in formal black who enters the stage, gives a quick bow to the audience, and sits down to play is on its way out, many here say. Musicians must invite their audiences to understand and enjoy the music they play.

"Most of the world thinks a classical musician is one who sets himself above the rest of the community," says Pamela Frame, an associate professor of cello who coaches quartets and takes students into the Rochester community to perform. "We have to figure out how to create common ground. Going to a community and getting to know people is terribly important. Otherwise, playing is a one-way street."

Getting to know people often means going to the places where they gather and playing the kinds of music they enjoy. One morning last month, Ms. Frame took four cello students to a café for a 7:30 breakfast meeting of the local chamber of commerce. After she talked about the cello, the group played a fiddle tune arranged for cellos and a Gershwin song, "Someone to Watch Over Me." They played a 16th-century sonata, but also did a song from the Disney movie *The Little Mermaid*. The audience seemed to love it, and "we had a blast," says Ms. Frame.

AN EARLY SUCCESS STORY

One of Eastman's early success stories is the *Ying Quartet*, a group of three brothers and a sister, all of whom graduated from Eastman and play string instruments. They spent two years in rural Jesup, Iowa, under a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, playing in school gymnasiums, a barn, and for Amish children.

"A traditional conservatory education doesn't address the tools and skills we found we needed, as basic as learning to speak in public," says Phillip Ying, who plays viola. "How do you apply what you've learned in theory class to someone who has never even thought about a dominant chord?"

The Yings will return to Eastman next academic year to coach other string quartets. "When we talk about shifting the curriculum, there is the inherent worry about what we throw out," says Mr. Ying. "Our hope is that we don't ever lessen the expectations of how well you have to be trained in a traditional sense. But students also have to apply their skills to real-world situations and have the courage to go into any situation and be a spokesperson." ■



Elizabeth West Marvin, a professor of music theory, helps Peter Kodzas, a graduate student, design computer software to teach music.