

# Another level

POSTGRADUATE PERFORMANCE TRAINING PROGRAMS ARE A POPULAR OPTION FOR MUSICIANS IN A COMPETITIVE

**Y**ou've done your undergraduate degree; you've spent two years studying for a Masters; you might even have a doctorate. But if you want to succeed as a performer in today's competitive musical marketplace, sometimes even that's not enough.

In most of the working world a postgraduate qualification is one way to show that you're prepared to go that extra mile to succeed. But does a Masters in music really set you up for the cutthroat world of auditioning, performing, recording, and juggling a portfolio career?

Michelle Vachon doesn't think so. 'I still felt I needed the polish of performing and to be more comfortable on stage,' says the 26-year-old mezzo-soprano, who finished a Masters in music at Longy School of Music two years ago. 'I also felt that I would be able to learn at a much faster pace if I was focused on the practical rather than the theoretical aspects of performing.'

The solution, she found, was to continue at Longy on its two-year Graduate Performance Diploma (GPD). Programs such as this – and the school's Artist Diploma – are a popular way of applying the finishing touches to musical training. The scope varies from school to school but almost always revolves around improving performance.

Several conservatories and music schools offer such courses: the Jacobs School of Music, Shenandoah, the New England Conservatory, and the Glenn Gould School all offer Artist Diplomas, for example. Performance Diplomas are available from Boston Conservatory and Princeton, while Berklee and the Cleveland Institute both run a Professional Diploma.

Up in Canada, the Banff Centre does things differently. Students train for between three weeks and six months towards specific professional aims – learning concert repertoire, recording a CD, preparing for competitions and auditions, and so on. These short 'career development residencies' have welcomed an average of 100 musicians each year since 1979, representing between eight and 14 nationalities annually.

The system attracts musicians for different reasons, says Jorie Adams, director of operations for the center's Music and Sound programs: 'Many have had a great academic education but few opportunities to perform; many want to find their own voice rather than repeat the musical thoughts of their teachers; and many have been focused on a narrow area of music and are keen to expand their musical perspective and vocabulary.'

Others, Adams says, treat the mountain-lined Banff Centre as a professional retreat: 'Many postgraduates will choose to stay in an urban center so they can do orchestral freelancing or part-time teaching. Financial realities often dictate that this is where they must be. But some of these folks will eventually come to a place like Banff, when they're ready for a break from the profession, or ready for some rejuvenation or stimulation.'



## MARKET. CHRIS HORKAN FINDS OUT WHAT'S ON OFFER

*Students at the Curtis Institute give more than 100 free performances a year in Field Concert Hall*



Money is always a big factor when considering professional training. Residents at the Banff Centre often get assistance from grants, foundations, or arts councils, while others take out student loans and receive sabbatical support. Most also receive a scholarship from the center.

Vachon also has a scholarship to continue at Longy, took out government loans, and works approximately 25 hours each week to cover her living expenses. 'I consider this degree an investment in my career,' she says.

British bass Matthew Rose believes working is vital at this post-education, pre-career stage. 'I don't understand any other way to learn what to do as a singer, other than doing it,' says Rose, a holder of the Curtis Institute's Professional Studies Certificate. Like all students at Curtis, he received a scholarship – but also took out large loans and worked for the Opera Company of Philadelphia and in church jobs during his studies.

Rose, 29, adds that the size of Curtis lends itself to a large number of performance opportunities: 'It's a very small school with 25 singers, so I did a main role in practically every opera while I was there. In England you would only do that in the last year of a postgraduate opera course.'

Vachon, too, is impressed by her program's intensity. 'With five major performances a year, one of which is a fully staged opera, we essentially have one concert every two months. We begin rehearsals as soon as we begin the semester, and as soon as we are finished with one performance we are preparing for the next. There is no time to play catch-up.'

## 'I STILL FELT I NEEDED THE POLISH OF PERFORMING AND TO BE MORE COMFORTABLE ON STAGE'



*Polished: Michelle Vachon*



*The Banff Centre*

She says students are expected to independently learn their music, focus on character development, and gain an understanding of performance practice and style. Every student has to be highly focused and determined to carve out his or her music career, she says, adding that many GPD students have taken time off to work after their postgraduate studies so often bring plenty of performance experience with them.

At the Banff Centre, Adams says the lure of a regular pay check is attractive for some of its graduates: 'But often these folks will re-apply to Banff, knowing that a year or two with us will propel them into a more interesting job, or one that pays better, or involves more interesting work.'

She puts this down to the faculty coming from the music business and Banff's strong links with the industry. Partnerships with the likes of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, CBC, the New York City Opera, and Holland's Grachtenfestival also allow residents to take part in competitions and appear on major stages.

Three quarters of the way through her GPD, Vachon is sure she made the right choice. 'I have a dramatically more secure technique, which will allow me to meet the demands of a professional career,' she says. 'And I've already had several successful auditions, landing me performing opportunities with Boston-area ensembles and opera productions.'

Most importantly, she says her extra training has helped her answer that dreaded question: what are you going to do after you graduate? 'I'm auditioning, I'm out there, and I'm ready to spread my wings and try all of these skills out.' ■

## EDUCATION

### WHERE TO STUDY

- **Banff Centre**  
Professional development in a wide range of disciplines
- **Berklee College of Music**  
ProDip
- **Boston Conservatory**  
PerfDip in various disciplines
- **Boston University, School of Music**  
ArtDip; PerfDip
- **Carnegie Mellon University, School of Music**  
ArtDip
- **Cleveland Institute of Music**  
ArtDip; ProDip
- **Curtis Institute of Music**  
Professional Studies Certificate in Opera; general professional development
- **Indiana University, Jacobs School of Music**  
ArtDip; PerfDip
- **Longy School of Music**  
ArtDip; PerfDip
- **Manhattan School of Music**  
ArtDip; Professional Studies Certificate
- **New England Conservatory**  
ArtDip
- **Princeton University**  
PerfDip
- **Purchase College**  
ArtDip; Performance Certificate
- **Royal Conservatory of Music, Glenn Gould School**  
ArtDip in solo piano, voice, orchestral performance, performance and pedagogy; PerfDip
- **Shenandoah Conservatory**  
ArtDip

### GLOSSARY

<b>ArtDip</b>	Artist Diploma
<b>GPD</b>	Graduate Performance Diploma
<b>PerfDip</b>	Performance Diploma
<b>ProDip</b>	Professional Diploma