

A Guide to
Music Education



Structured Music Education: The Pathway to Success



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The Benefits of Structure

MUSIC IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE. It has the power to move us deeply, and everyone deserves the opportunity to make music.

The strongest foundation for realizing musical potential is provided by following a path of structured learning. Structured programs conducted by passionate, qualified teachers inspire students and lead to deep understanding of musical language.

On each step of their musical journey, students should be given benchmarks to measure themselves against. Regular assessments encourage students and keep them on track. Acknowledgement and celebration of achievements fuel ongoing motivation.

The Royal Conservatory of Music's programs provide a structured system of study and assessment that can fan a spark of interest in music into a lifelong flame. When parents, students, and teachers work together in harmony, striving for that moment where the benefits of regular practice reveal themselves in a liberating voyage of self-discovery – structure becomes freedom.

The Foundation for Lifelong Learning

Many parents make the decision, even before their children are born, to give them the gift of music education. The foundation for successful music study is established by providing musical experiences from the earliest stages of life. These may include simply filling the home with the sounds of music and listening to it together. When the time for formal study arrives, many approaches, methodologies, teachers, classes, and music schools are available. Even the most well-informed parents may need guidance to help them make the best choice.

Parents will find the following discussion useful in coming to an informed decision. This guide addresses frequently asked questions such as “When should my child begin music lessons?” and “What factors should be considered when selecting the best music program?” It outlines the benefits of a comprehensive, structured program of study involving high-quality evaluation and assessment. The study of music provides learners of all ages with the opportunity to realize many long-term intellectual, social, and creative benefits¹. However, a structured approach to music education will enhance those benefits and enable students to realize a level of proficiency that will allow them to learn music independently, leading to lifelong appreciation and enjoyment in music-making

1. See The Royal Conservatory of Music's article, *The Benefits of Music Education: An Overview of Current Neuroscience Research*, April 2014

Getting Started: Planning the Journey

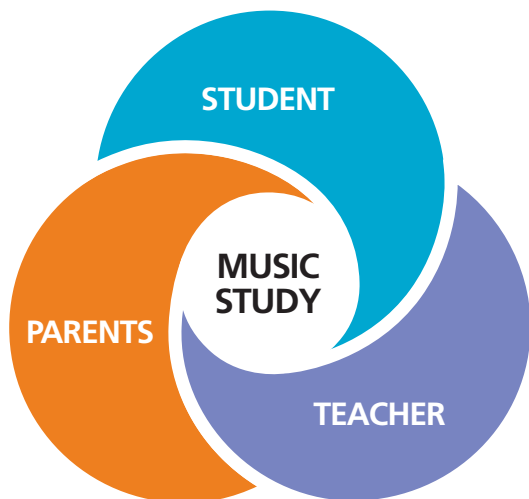
Learning during the early years is known to be crucial to a child's future success. Research on the benefits of music education on a child's development has increasingly been shown to have a positive influence on a child's cognitive skills and abilities. These core cognitive skills are important predictors of future academic performance.

It is not necessary to be an accomplished musician to impart enthusiasm for music. Parents can lay the groundwork for their children's musical growth by listening to music during pregnancy, singing lullabies to infants and folk tunes to toddlers – by experiencing the joy of music together. Preparatory music programs for babies and toddlers typically use movement, singing, and playing instruments to explore musical concepts and provide an engaging introduction. At this stage, group instruction helps increase confidence, creativity and self-expression while providing a firm foundation for the study of an instrument. But most importantly, the classes are fun!

Opinions vary as to what is the best age to begin studying an instrument. Parents should decide this based on each child's physical and intellectual development, in consultation with the teacher. Music study should always be enjoyable. Children should begin when they have developed the requisite motor skills and concentration, ensuring a positive and enjoyable learning experience.

Most music teachers have a preferred starting age for private lessons, based on their personal teaching philosophy and methodology. While selecting a teacher and a program, parents should discuss their goals and objectives with the music professional to make sure everyone's expectations are aligned before lessons begin.

Parents should also be aware of the important role played by the teacher as the guide on the journey of discovery. A strong collaborative team of student, parents, and teacher is the foundation for a lifetime of music-making.



“Magical is not too strong a word for a child's connection to music; there is extraordinary receptivity and lively creativity in young minds, and the results can be enchanting. Think of how small children often make up songs all day long, musicalizing their own experience and the world around them... Everyone is delighted to be around such freedom of spirit, and in that sense a child's connection to music is magical.”

Chapter 1 – Music, Magic and Childhood in *The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning to Trust your Musical Self*.
William Westney, Amadeus Press, 2003 p. 19.

“There is a growing (and convincing) body of research that indicates a ‘window of opportunity’ from birth to age nine for developing a musical sensibility within children. During this time, the mental structures and mechanisms associated with processing and understanding music are in the prime stages of development, making it of utmost importance to expose children in this age range to music.”

PBS Parents, Music & Arts,
“What's the Right Age to Begin Music Lessons?”

CHOOSING THE BEST MUSIC TEACHER FOR YOUR CHILD

FIND A TEACHER WHO WILL INSPIRE YOUR CHILD TO DEVELOP THE SKILLS REQUIRED FOR A LIFETIME OF MUSIC-MAKING.

ASK

for recommendations or referrals from family, friends, and neighbours, especially those whose children are enjoying lessons and making steady progress.

CONSULT

The Royal Conservatory Teacher Directory*

MEET

with prospective teachers to discuss goals and expectations, as well as their personal teaching philosophies, to learn more about their pedagogical approach.

OBSERVE

a recital by a prospective teacher's students to get a feeling for their students' accomplishments, or request a trial lesson to get a feeling for their style of teaching.

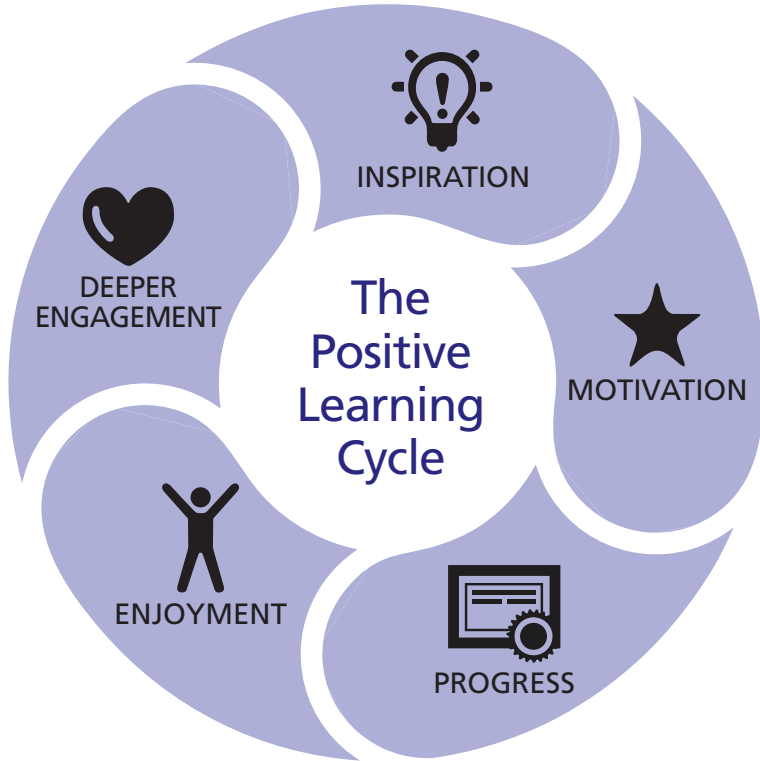
SEEK

teachers that convey enthusiasm, passion, and strong communication skills, along with formal training and a commitment to ongoing professional development.



Engaged students are the sign of successful teaching and learning.

*Visit rcmusic.com/find-a-teacher



Inspiration: The Key to Motivation and Progress

As with any worthwhile endeavour, students need to be motivated to progress in their music study. Lessons often begin with the parents' desire to impart the gift of music to their children. Music teachers can attest to the power of "parental motivation" – children develop more rapidly with parents who support and encourage daily practice routines. However, for the most successful learning experience, students must become *intrinsically* motivated. Motivation is directly linked to inspiration. The Oxford Dictionary defines inspiration as: "The process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially something creative." When students are inspired, they become more motivated; when they are motivated, they work harder and make more rapid progress; when they progress, they feel satisfaction and enjoy the learning experience.

Inspiring teachers share their passion to awaken the enthusiasm of their students and nurture creative expression. Different processes can be used in the provision of music study. A convergent approach is highly structured, and the students are merely recipients of the information. A divergent approach is flexible and student-oriented, and students are active participants in the learning process. One of the most effective methods of ensuring successful music study is a blend of these two approaches, which enables teachers to use different methods and techniques to cater to individual student ability, levels, and learning styles. As the students experience success and consequently a sense of confidence, their motivation is enhanced to pursue further learning.²

"I believe we have to differentiate between two kinds of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation comes from outside the student, including rewards ranging all the way from the gold stars on a piece well played to a large cash prize in a national competition... Intrinsic motivation is anything that happens inside students that makes them want to play the piano, to practice, to study a given composition, to master it and to perform it, both for their own enjoyment and for the joy of sharing it with others... The reward is immediate, and it is measured in terms of a student's own feelings of success and delight, his own needs, abilities and goals."

Frances Clark, in *Clavier* magazine, January 1978

2. *Divergent vs Convergent Teaching*, New England Complex Systems Institute 2002, Changes in the Teaching and Learning Process in a Complex Education System, Miriam Bar-Yam, Kathleen Rhoades, Linda Booth Sweeney, Jim Kaput, and Yaneer Bar-Yam

The Importance of a Plan: The Roadmap

Imagine two equally motivated students, both with strong parental support and a genuine desire to learn. Both study music with the goal of reaching a level of proficiency that will allow them to learn independently and play a variety of music for their own enjoyment. One follows a path that includes short-term goals in the form of assessments at regular intervals. The other progresses at his or her own pace, without clearly defined expectations or opportunities for regular feedback and recognition. Evidence clearly shows that students working within a structure that involves regular “check-in points” for evaluation and assessment will make better, more consistent progress.

When choosing a music teacher, parents should determine if a clear path for well-rounded musical training and a consistent, effective structure for recognizing achievement and rewarding excellence are part of their methodology. The best programs involve regular evaluations to help motivate students, instilling a sense of accomplishment as they complete each level. Valuable feedback is provided along the way, keeping teachers, students, and parents up to date on overall progress, level of achievement, and the specific areas that may require additional attention.

Used with skill, assessment can motivate the unmotivated, restore the desire to learn, and encourage students to keep learning, and it can actually create – not simply measure – increased achievement.³

3. Richard Stiggins, Judith A Arter, Jan Chappuis and Stephen Chappuis
Classroom assessment for Student Learning, © 2004 Assessment Training Institute, Inc., Portland, Oregon

PARENTS WEIGH IN ON THE DEVELOPMENTAL BENEFITS OF MUSIC STUDY

A 2014 Harris-Decima survey indicates the value that parents attach to their children’s musical education:



THE ROYAL CONSERVATORY CERTIFICATE PROGRAM: DEVELOPING SKILLS FOR LIFE

THE ROYAL CONSERVATORY CERTIFICATE PROGRAM SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF WELL-ROUNDED MUSICIANSHIP BY NURTURING SKILLS IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

TECHNICAL FACILITY

- Technical skills are developed gradually and logically from preparatory through to advanced levels.
- Technical tests, including scales, chords and arpeggios support and complement the study of repertoire at each level.
- New patterns and keys are added gradually while systematic expansion of skills reflects the performance demands at each level.

PERFORMANCE OF REPERTOIRE

- Repertoire is selected and reviewed by leading pedagogues across North America. It is sequenced carefully, ensuring that each selection provides opportunities for musical growth.
- At each level, students are presented with a wide selection of repertoire from the Baroque, Classical, Romantic and Modern eras, as well as opportunities to explore jazz and popular idioms.

MUSICIANSHIP

- The inclusion of aural skills at every level encourages the development of critical listening and supports the expansion of music literacy.
- Testing of rhythmic reading and sight playing/singing at every level ensures that students are developing the skills required to learn music independently.
- Musicianship skills provide the foundation for the expression of musical creativity.

THEORY

- The study of theory provides students with the opportunity to explore the basic vocabulary and conventions of music notation, providing context for their practical musical experience and accelerating musical literacy.
- Aural awareness and analytical thinking are also developed through studying music theory.

Components of well-rounded music study

The key to meaningful music study is to build skills that allow students to experience music not just for a year or two, but for their entire lifetimes. Well-rounded study not only cultivates an appreciation and understanding of the musical language, it develops an ability to learn new music independently – this goes far beyond learning to play a few songs by rote. As a measure of success, students can use their “ear” to recreate a tune played on the radio, or perhaps buy the music and learn to play it on their own.

To achieve such proficiency requires essential skills balanced within a program of study that is sequentially structured and systematic. The fundamental elements for complete musical training can be summarized under four main headings.

● PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing comfort and ease in playing an instrument or singing allows students to effectively transform notes on the page into beautiful sound. The development of a secure and reliable technique will allow them to flourish as musicians.

● AURAL DEVELOPMENT

Learning to listen while performing and practicing is one of the most important aspects of musicianship. This involves developing critical listening skills that contribute to successful self-assessment as part of the learning process and bring a deeper appreciation of music.

● MUSICAL LITERACY

Building knowledge and understanding of the musical language will lead to lifelong enjoyment of music-making. The study of music theory leads to the acquisition of skills that empower students to learn music efficiently and, ultimately, independently.

● CREATIVITY, IMAGINATION, AND PERSONAL EXPRESSION

Studying an instrument or voice nurtures creativity and imagination, helping students discover their innate artistry.

These four pillars support the study and performance of music at all levels. They allow students to cultivate the skills required to perform a wide range of musical repertoire. Teachers who build their programs on these pillars have outstanding success in nurturing well-rounded musicians.

Using a set curriculum that provides a structured approach can guide students’ development in each of these areas. Every new level builds on previous ones. For example, a path for development of listening skills is provided, with new elements incorporated at each successive level. Repertoire provided for study should be rich, varied, and sequenced so as to support a positive learning experience for each student.

“Good practicing, of any musical instrument or genre, is a creative process. It needn’t be predictable, repetitious or tedious. Practicing takes us on the sort of lifelong odyssey that rewards each discovery with a new set of intriguing questions. The longer we experience this odyssey, the more open to new understandings we become, and there’s always something new to discover.”

Chapter 4 — *Step by Step: A Guide to Healthy Practicing in The Perfect Note: Learning to Trust Your Musical Self.* William Westney, Amadeus Press, 2003.

Promoting Progress through Productive Practicing

“Will my child need to practice outside the weekly lesson?” “How long, and how often?” These questions are often asked by parents embarking on a musical journey with their children. While regular practice is indeed required to ensure progressive development of musical skills, these sessions should be engaging, creative and something to be enjoyed.

In a recent *New York Times* article, Daniel Coyle, author of *The Talent Code*, writes about the value of practice to learning: “It’s about the power of sharp, focused, high-quality practice. It’s about the massive learning differences created by intense efforts within highly engaging practice environments.”

Indeed, it is the parents’ challenge to create a structure within the family schedule in which practicing becomes a regular part of the daily routine. Just as other activities – eating breakfast, brushing teeth, and walking to school – become habits, regular practice sessions can become a recurring item on the agenda.

Parents should talk to their child’s teacher to determine how long practice sessions should be. There should be an ongoing dialogue that will evolve each year as new levels of study demand different practice commitments. There’s no single formula to determine practice time. Some teachers, for example, prefer to establish expectations based on accomplishing specific tasks rather than practicing for a set length of time.

In the early stages of learning, parents may find it productive and inspiring to participate in their children’s daily practice sessions. They can help their children follow the teacher’s coaching instructions, or simply offer praise, encouragement, and be an attentive audience. Eventually students will become responsible for their own practice time, developing important time-management, problem-solving, and prioritization skills.

WHY FOLLOW THE RCM CERTIFICATE PROGRAM OF MUSIC STUDY?

- The Royal Conservatory has provided the finest music and arts education to millions of people for well over a century. With the mission of developing human potential through leadership in music and the arts, it is considered the “gold standard” in many countries around the world.
- The Royal Conservatory’s internationally renowned standard of assessment develops complete musicianship by including technical tests, etudes, repertoire, ear tests, and sight reading in each practical assessment. The program accelerates the development of musical literacy, increases understanding of the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of the musical language, and encourages an enriched understanding of stylistic and structural awareness.
- The Certificate Program encompasses comprehensive programs for 21 different instruments, plus Speech Arts and Voice. There are ten levels (1-10) of sequential study, plus Preparatory Levels and professional ARCT diploma designations.
- Formal third-party assessments at each level provide an important check point, allowing musical progress to be evaluated and celebrated.
- The skills that students acquire through The RCM Certificate Program will help them attain a level of proficiency that will give them the tools they need to learn music independently, leading to a lifelong enjoyment of music.
- The Royal Conservatory Certificate Program and materials are focused mainly on classical music, though opportunities to play jazz, folk, and popular music are included within the framework. If a student chooses to explore other genres, the classical training provided by The Royal Conservatory system of study and assessment provides the strongest possible foundation upon which to continue a student’s musical journey.

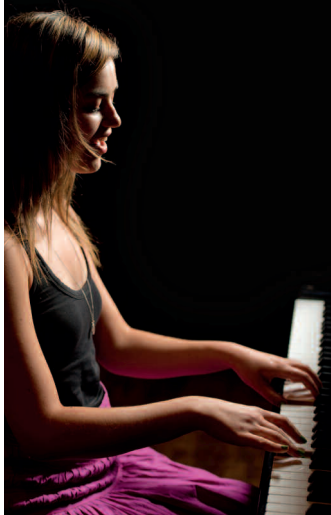


SUPPORTING SELF-REGULATED LEARNING IN MUSIC

SIX PARAMETERS BY MCPHERSON AND ZIMMERMAN (2002)

- 1 Students are motivated to set goals.
- 2 Students possess methods to create strategies to support their goals.
- 3 Students plan and manage their time.
- 4 Performance behaviour is self-monitored and -evaluated.
- 5 Students structure physical environments for optimal learning.
- 6 Students use social connections to seek help.

Journal of Instructional Pedagogies, Volume 9, October 2012 Uptis, Abrami, et al. "Learning to play a musical instrument with a digital portfolio tool"



Recognizing Success and Achievement through Assessment

Assessment and formal evaluations at regular intervals play a critical role in student development. Third-party assessment systems are designed to track and measure progress while encouraging the continued pursuit of excellence. Music examinations serve to evaluate a student's performance, celebrating success and identifying next steps for development.

Research shows that assessment is an extremely important part of the learning process. Tests demand a recall of learning that causes the brain to consolidate memory and strengthen its connections to what is already known. This makes it easier for learning to be recalled and retained.⁴

The assessments serve as milestones on the journey of musical development, highlighting a student's arrival at each consecutive level. All areas of musical study – technical development, aural skills, sight reading, and performance of repertoire – are tested at each level. Feedback should come in the form of constructive comments and a detailed breakdown of marks.

Teachers can enhance student achievement through assessment by providing proof of the student's success. As soon as pupils realize their own success what begins to grow in them is a sense of hopefulness and an expectation of more success in the future. This in turn fuels enthusiasm and the motivation to try hard, which fuels even more success.⁵

4. Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III and Mark A. McDaniel, (2014), *Make it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning*, Harvard University Press

5. R.J. Stiggins, 2005. *Student-Involved Assessment For Learning*, Pearson Prentice Hall

“The amount and quality of practice is the primary factor influencing superior performance in markedly different domains of expertise.”

Theory Into Practice: Spring 2002 “Becoming A Self Regulated Learner,” Barry J. Zimmerman

Maximizing Music Rewards

Taking part in structured study will maximize the rewards of music lessons. The profound value of music education is outlined in *The Benefits of Music Education: An Overview of Current Neuroscience Research* (April, 2014). Working hand in hand with a qualified and inspiring teacher, parents can create a plan that ensures a positive and successful musical journey for their children. The student's voyage of musical discovery will be acknowledged and celebrated each step of the way, encouraging further progress.

The Royal Conservatory of Music can help students and parents successfully navigate the process of enrolling for music lessons by providing the information, advice, and resources they need – including a national directory of music teachers, searchable by postal code or zip code. To find a teacher near you as well as access a vast array of valuable links, publications, and music resources, please visit the website. Join the growing community of teachers, students, and families who are discovering the benefits of The Royal Conservatory as it enriches their lives.

To learn more, call **1.800.461.6058** or visit **rcmusic.com/learning**

RELATED READING

THE ROYAL CONSERVATORY is committed to advancing the study of the benefits of music education and sharing those results with Canadian parents. To this end, we are pleased to provide a comprehensive list of sources for further reading. We will continue to report new research findings on our website at rcmusic.com/research.



- *Do Musicians Have Different Brains*, Psychology Today, Susan R. Barry, Ph.D., Published on June 11, 2010, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/eyes-the-brain/201006/do-musicians-have-different-brains>
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- *Doing well and doing good by doing art: The effects of education in the visual and performing arts on the achievements and values of young adults*, James S. Catterall
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- *Developing Assessments of Deeper Learning: The Costs and Benefits of Using Tests that Help Students Learn*, Linda Darling-Hammond and Frank Adamson, https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/developing-assessments-deeper-learning-costs-and-benefits-using-tests-help-students-learn_1.pdf, March 15, 2013
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- *Beyond Testing and Grading: Using Assessment to Improve Student Learning*, Joan B. Garfield, University of Minnesota, Journal of Statistics Education 1994
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- *18 Benefits of Playing a Musical Instrument*, <http://www.effectivemusicteaching.com/articles/directors/18-benefits-of-playing-a-musical-instrument/> Michael Matthews, August 28, 2011
- *Beyond Technology: Questioning, Research and the information Literate School Community*, James McKenzie, FNO PR (January 2000)
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- *The Power Of Music*, http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk/archive/archive_home.cfm?volumeID=22&editionID=182&ArticleID=1597 Volume 22 Part 12 – December 2009, Adrian C. North and David J. Hargreaves
- *Music, Language, and the Brain*, Aniruddh Patel
- *The effect of piano lessons on the vocabulary and verbal sequencing skills of primary grade students*, Joseph M Piro and Camilo Ortiz, Psychology of Music, July 2009; vol. 37, 3: pp. 325-347
- *Listen to This*, Alex Ross
- *The Benefits of Music Education: An Overview of Current Neuroscience Research*, The Royal Conservatory of Music, April 2014
- *Musophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*, Oliver Sacks
- *Music and the Brain: How Music Changes the Brain*, C.D. Shelton, Amazon Digital Services, Choice PH (May 6, 2013)
- *Classroom Assessment for Student Learning*, Richard Stiggins, Judith A. Arter, Jan Chappuis and Stephen Chappuis, 2004 Assessment Training Institute, Portland Oregon
- *Student-Involved Assessment for Learning*, Richard Stiggins, Prentice Hall, 2005
- *Music and the Mind*, Anthony Storr
- *The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning to Trust Your Musical Self*, William Westney, June 2006, Amadeus Press
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- *The Role of Assessment in Learning* <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/role/html>

ABOUT THE ROYAL CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

The Royal Conservatory is one of the largest and most respected institutions in the world dedicated to music and arts-based education. Providing the definitive standard of excellence in music education through its curriculum, assessment, performances, and teacher education programs, The Conservatory has had a substantial impact on the lives of millions of people globally. In addition, the organization has helped to train a number of internationally celebrated artists including Glenn Gould, Oscar Peterson, David Foster, Sarah McLachlan, Angela Hewitt, and Diana Krall.

Motivated by its powerful mission to develop human potential through leadership in music and arts education, The Royal Conservatory is committed to the advancement of research and science in the field. Consequently, The Conservatory has emerged over the last two decades as a leader in the development of arts-based programs that address a wide range of social issues.



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