The USC Thornton School of Music Announces Five Innovative Master’s Degree Programs

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The USC Thornton School of Music, continuing to reimagine music education in the 21st century, is unveiling five innovative new master’s degree programs, in Contemporary Teaching Practice, Music Industry, Community Music, Arts Leadership and Screen Scoring.

The degrees are responding to a music industry and a music teaching and learning climate that is undergoing seismic changes. “We are trying to innovate our way ahead of the changes,” said Robert Cutietta, dean of USC Thornton. “Master’s degrees traditionally expand what you learn as an undergraduate. These five programs are designed to teach students new skills and to take their passions for a wide variety of music and turn them into new ways to imagine a contemporary music career.”

The programs vary in length from one to two years, and some are low-residency, allowing students to keep existing jobs while they pursue coursework. Contemporary Teaching Practice will begin classes in May 2018, and the Arts Leadership, Community Music, Music Industry, and Screen Scoring programs will begin in Fall 2018.

Three of the degrees – those in Community Music, Contemporary Teaching Practice and Screen Scoring – are designed for students who hold undergraduate degrees in music performance or composition and want to expand their musical toolkit. The Arts Leadership masters’ accepts students with a bachelor’s (not necessarily in an arts-related field), but expects students to have three to five years as a working artist. The master’s in Music Industry will accept students without a previous music degree, but with a professional interest in music supervision, live concert promotion, music entrepreneurship, and the recording industry.

Details on each program and links to a website for each are below.

All of the new degrees are the products of faculty committees taking hard looks at skills needed by musicians in business, education and community engagement.

Cutietta has emerged as one of the nation’s leading voices for reimaging music education. In addition to challenging his own faculty to create degrees that reflect current realities in the musical landscape, he has written and spoken widely on the topic. Recently, he was asked to write the closing chapter in a new book, Policy and the Political Life of Music Education (Oxford University Press), that looks at re-shaping education programs across the country.

The Arts Leadership degree is aimed at artists, arts administrators and cultural entrepreneurs who want to expand their personal vision and create a life and career for themselves in the arts. The degree takes advantage of the significant resources of all six arts schools at USC: music, art and design, architecture, dance, dramatic arts and cinematic arts, and graduates will be equipped to create and lead their own ensembles, programs and arts organizations around the world.
Combining skill sets in music education, community engagement and advocacy, the four-semester Master of Music in **Community Music** is focused on bringing music instruction and performance into non-traditional settings, such as prisons, hospitals, senior living communities and centers for marginalized and disadvantaged people of all ages. It’s a growing career option for musicians looking to move beyond the classroom or concert stage to explore fulfilling, service-oriented work.

For those interested in music teaching and learning in the K-12 schools, the **Contemporary Teaching Practice** degree will help them face a changed academic environment. Teachers now need to be nimble as classrooms become more culturally diverse and music learners’ tastes and expectations continue to diverge from the traditional instruments, ensemble types and repertoire of the Western canon.

In collaboration with the USC Rossier School of Education, the degree provides a credential path for graduate music students who wish to teach in a variety of K-12 schools in California and beyond. The curriculum will give graduates the tools to lead a choir, orchestra or marching band in the morning, and jazz sextet, a cappella group or mariachi band in the afternoon. They will be equally prepared to teach a school’s Advanced Placement music theory course and electives in keyboarding, electric guitar or songwriting.

“We see an opportunity for supplementing and enhancing traditional school programs that only feature big ensemble programs,” said Cutietta. “A wider variety of students are deeply interested in creating their own music in addition to reproducing the music of others,” he said.

**Screen Scoring** has been taught at USC Thornton for decades as a certificate program, but the highly-competitive, full-time program has been reimagined as a master’s degree. The two-semester program accepts a maximum of 20 students, who matriculate as a cohort. Students will learn how to compose, conduct and produce music for screens of all types and for live action and animated films, as well as video games and VR.

The program has always had close collaborations with the USC School of Cinematic Arts, but the master’s degree will allow students to take two of their courses at Cinematic Arts. As in the past, **Screen Scoring** students will compose and score music for at least five USC student films, creating relationships between composers and filmmakers that have been shown to extend into later professional collaborations.

The new **Music Industry** master’s degree starts in August and includes a summer mentorship. Instead of a thesis, students collaborate on a hands-on portfolio project, such as producing a live music event, rolling out an album campaign or creating a video series. The degree offers four emphasis options: Business of Live Promotion/Touring, Music Supervision and Visual Media, Performance, and Entrepreneurship. Courses in artist management, music publishing, music instrument manufacturing/distribution and radio are offered, as are business courses at the USC Marshall School of Business.
USC Thornton has been offering an undergraduate degree in Music Industry for 20 years, taking advantage of the school’s location in the undisputed epicenter of the music, film, television and video game industries. The new master’s degree is not a continuation for those holding the undergraduate degree. Rather, it is geared towards musicians and other students with a music background or a lifelong passion for music. As the record industry has shrunk to about a third of its former size in those past two decades, the Music Industry curriculum has expanded to the industry segments that are growing, such as live music and music supervision.

Los Angeles is home to all the major tour promoters, producing tens of thousands of concerts as well as major festivals. Talent agencies for all musical genres and supporting production houses also call the city home, which makes for excellent internship opportunities. The new master’s degree in Music Industry, like the other four new degrees, will take advantage of the extraordinarily vibrant arts environment in Los Angeles to create educational and professional experiences unavailable anywhere else.

The Five New Degrees at a Glance:
(Click on each to reach its website with course details and application information.)

**Arts Leadership – (Master of Science: MS)**
The two-semester Master of Science degree is designed for early and mid-career arts professionals who want to expand their personal vision of leadership and create a life and career in the arts. With close faculty mentorship, graduates go on to lead their own ensembles, programs and arts organizations.

**Community Music – (Master of Music: MM)**
Combining skillsets in music education, community engagement, and advocacy, the four-semester Master of Music in Community Music is focused on bringing music instruction and performance into non-traditional settings. It’s a growing career option for musicians looking to move beyond the classroom or concert stage to explore fulfilling, service-oriented work.

**Contemporary Teaching Practice – (Master of Music: MM)**
The Master of Music in Contemporary Teaching Practice degree provides a credential path to teach in a variety of K-12 schools in California and beyond. Graduates of the three-semester program will leave with the tools to lead a choir, orchestra, or wind ensemble in the morning, and a rock band, jazz quartet, or a cappella group in the afternoon.

**Music Industry – (Master of Science: MS)**
The Master of Science in Music Industry is designed to offer students the entrepreneurial skills, insights, and industry exposure necessary to make waves professionally. Featuring small class sizes, the 18-month program includes a semester mentorship and opportunities to work with established professionals.

**Screen Scoring – (Master of Music: MM)**
The two-semester Master of Music in Screen Scoring degree is widely recognized as one of the world’s finest programs for musical composition in visual media. With a faculty comprised of working professionals in the film, television, and video-game industries, the program offers its participants unrivaled practical experience and industry connections.