Rice University hosted a groundbreaking forum on careers in music performance: Convening Student Perspectives and Creating New Models for the 21st Century on the weekend of October 12-14, 2007*. The purpose of the forum was to explore how using a national student leadership forum could encourage acceptance of new career models within our educational system and within their community.

The forum represented the first collective action taken by a select number of premier music education institutions to bring national attention to the need for new ideas on how young musicians can be prepared and encouraged to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The outcomes revolved around three intersecting areas, all components of “a life in music”: Life Skills, Creative Performance/Engagement and Business Skills. In working toward that end, discussions at the forum focused on the following:

- How young non-traditional ensembles can get started in the profession
- New trends in audience engagement and presentation of live classical music
- How schools of music can work together with their communities to support young artists who embark on careers that are serving new audiences, but are outside the mainstream
- How our schools can better respond to our students’ need for business and entrepreneurial skills

Why a National Forum on Careers in Classical Music?
Our rapidly changing times are challenging the traditional models and the artists who work within the field of classical music performance. Globalization, fast-paced communication, and shifts in cultural trends all contribute to questions about the directions in which careers in classical music are headed. An innovative forum for students from sixteen of the nation’s top schools of music provided the opportunity to explore and embrace new ideas regarding the field of music performance.

Within this cultural milieu, new research tells us that student perceptions about music careers are significantly influenced by their interaction with their peer groups. Music students still view traditional careers in orchestras, chamber music and solo playing as the primary models for success in the profession. “Other” performance models such as teaching artists, composite careers, and alternative career paths may be overlooked simply because they are unfamiliar, don't have a high public profile, or carry the same cachet. This may limit the thinking of many talented young musicians in finding their own best career path, as well as limit the dissemination of the art form in today's society.

Overview of the Forum: Participants and Plan of Action
- 43 student leaders and 20 faculty/staff from sixteen of our nation’s top schools of music participated in the forum. Schools included the Cleveland Institute of Music, Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, Colburn Conservatory of Music, Curtis Institute of Music, Eastman School of Music, Juilliard School, Lamont School of Music, Manhattan School of Music, New England Conservatory, North Carolina School of the Arts, Northwestern University, Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Peabody Institute, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Shepherd School of Music, and the USC Thornton School of Music. Student leaders who were gifted performers and accomplished students with decidedly interesting ideas for their careers were chosen to participate.
- Eric Booth, nationally recognized arts consultant and faculty member at The Juilliard School, served as moderator for this student-centered forum.
- Professor Shoshana Dobrow, (Ph.D., Harvard Business School) presented key findings from her research on the social factors that influence students when making career-related decisions.
- eighth blackbird, a six member chamber ensemble and The Chiara String Quartet, two young groups who are nationally renowned for their adventurous programming, commitment to community outreach, and innovative presentation skills, gave showcase performances for the participants. They additionally participated in workshops and breakout groups, to discuss how they have met the challenges of working in the shifting arts landscape.
- Mini “lab” performances by the student participants on the last day exemplified the creative thinking that emerged during the forum.
- Rather than leading discussions, the faculty/staff only observed and responded when appropriate. Discussions involving the faculty/staff often focused on how to best encourage and support students and alumni who decide to pursue these new careers.
- Faculty/ staff attendees represented a cross section of educational roles within institutions, and included school administrators, studio teachers, career skills teachers and directors of outreach programs.
- A document summarizing the recommendations and ideas for implementing them was developed.

* Funding for the career forum was generously provided by Rice University in conjunction with The Shepherd School of Music.
Prior to the Forum:
The Chiara String Quartet and eighth blackbird embarked on “high risk” careers; their unique approach to programming and presentation of classical music falls outside of traditional and conventional pathways. Although these ensembles are now well established, they are only a few years older than most of the student participants hence they fall into nearly the same peer group. Would close interaction with these ensembles broaden the students’ ideas about what is possible in a classical music career?

Would students from schools where traditional career paths are intensely pursued show interest in non-traditional career paths? Would they, in turn, embrace a somewhat improvised performance situation (the public “lab” performances at the end of the forum) that involved some risk? Each student, having brought a prepared solo work, would be charged with presenting a cohesive 20-minute program in collaboration with 6 other students (randomly chosen) in less than 24 hours. Other areas of consideration were:

- How does this generation of students view success in our field? Is that view in sync with what our current arts environment can support?
- How important/appropriate are classes in business skills at the college/conservatory level? What is the most effective way to teach these skills?
- Faculty and staff from participating schools were asked to consider the following questions during the forum, as they observed the students’ response to the weekend: “What are the key skills we are seeing students exercise and how can we imagine ways to develop these skills within the broader population of musicians? What resources might we tap within training programs, with partnerships with other organizations, and societal opportunities to expand these capacities? We invite you to imagine beyond conservatory scheduling limitations to consider imaginative and ambitious ways to change the status quo—making it widely part of the artist’s world.” (Eric Booth)

Activities at the Forum: Performances, Interactive Workshops and Discussion Groups

The Chiara String Quartet began the weekend with a performance designed to showcase their programming for a club setting. They played recorded “groove music” as the audience came into the recital hall, and blue wash lighting gave a “club feel” to the 30-minute program that included standard quartet repertoire (Mozart and Brahms) and commissioned works (Jefferson Friedman and Gabriella Frank).

An interactive workshop with students and the Chiara String Quartet followed the performance. Discussion at this workshop addressed the following:

- How creating a group mission statement became a key element in the Chiara’s success as an ensemble
- The positive effect of redirecting their goals somewhat away from competitions and booking prestigious engagements
- Deciding and honoring what programs an ensemble will and won’t perform is a vital element in their process
- Recognizing the need to reinvest earnings in the group is important
- Business skills are important, but when is the best time to teach/learn them?
- Should career skills classes be required?

A “Very Open Rehearsal” with The Chiara String Quartet and Eric Booth, Moderator

This session, with the Chiara rehearsing a section of Jefferson Friedman’s quartet, focused attention on the interpersonal skills of the Chiara. The moderator (Eric Booth) encouraged students to ask questions about the Chiara’s rehearsal process. Four small-group breakout sessions with student participants and members of the Chiara addressed the following topics:

- Music must be performed at the highest level with total commitment from the stage
- What is success in our field? Expand your definition of success
- The value of taking risks
- How to think about goal setting and the importance of respecting the value of process
- The artist’s relationship with the audience: the need to respect and connect with audiences
- How the Chiara was formed, when to look for management, how to make financial decisions
- The need for business classes in music schools
- The importance of exposing music students to alternative career paths
A faculty and staff session with Eric Booth ran concurrently with the student/Chiara breakout session. Topics discussed were related to the students’ comments after the Chiara’s performance and workshops.

**Summarizing the faculty and staff discussion session:**
- The Teachable Moment—when the students are receptive to learning (“just in time learning”)
- Foster interactive situations—students develop their own answers from other students’ ideas
- Lead by example: students view how their faculty work as a model for life skills
- When and how are the best times to introduce life skills?
- Many life skills are learned in chamber music
- The need to give up ownership of certain classes / involve students in the substance of selected classes
- Stress the process of developing life skills
- Emphasize creativity throughout the curriculum
- Create a sense of community
- Use of time saving tools/ Exploit internet for research and sharing
- Provide career services after they leave school
- Incorporate team teaching
- Address the ambivalence that exists about teaching career skills
- Integration of all of the above into the curriculum

**Music Career Research Presentation by Dr. Shoshana Dobrow**
Researcher Dr. Shoshana Dobrow presented findings from her *Longitudinal Study of Music Involvement*, an ongoing study of the effect of “calling” on young musicians. Beginning in 2001, this study has tracked almost 600 students from their high school years. In her presentation, Dr. Dobrow described how results from her survey show that the degree to which young musicians have a sense of calling towards music and their social interaction among peers can be a significant predictor of career outcomes.

**Sarah Rothenberg Presentation**
Music director (award winning *Da Camera Society of Houston*) and pianist Sarah Rothenberg’s presentation utilized her life/career story to motivate the student participants to creatively look at alternative career paths. She focused on two concepts: the importance of being passionate about what one does, and engaging an audience to connect to the music through non-musical (visual) elements such as art and literature. This talk resonated strongly with the students, and they incorporated many of her ideas into their performances the next day.

**eighth blackbird: Performance and Post-Performance Interactive Workshop**
*Eighth blackbird* chamber ensemble performed a 30-minute evening program that featured works by Dennis DeSantis, Frederic Rzewski and Thomas Albert.
Eric Booth led a second interactive post-performance workshop with *eighth blackbird* and student participants.

In summary, the *eighth blackbird* workshop centered in on interpersonal interaction in the ensemble and entrepreneurship. Key points were:
- The importance of interpersonal skills
- Making artistic decisions
- Performance at the highest level (lots of rehearsal)
- Having a mission, identifying and filling a niche
- The importance of total commitment to the ensemble
- Engaging with audiences in a direct and authentic way

**Student “Lab” Final Performances**
Seven groups of students, formed by a random drawing the previous day, were challenged to utilize their experience at the forum by creating and performing an innovative 20-minute “lab” program for the public—not in the usual concert hall setting, but rather alternative venues at the Shepherd School. Each presentation was unique, the programs were organized thematically and designed to be engaging for the audience. The performances were interactive, often used lighting and non-traditional configurations of the performers to enhance the presentation.
Discussions and Outcomes
Faculty/staff participants developed recommendations for moving ahead. A conceptual framework entitled *A Life in Music*, summarized the faculty/staff recommendations based on observations of the student-driven interactive sessions:

![A Life in Music diagram]

**Final Observations/Summary**
Eric Booth asked, “What are the students taking away from this weekend? What is the impact and the long term resonance for you?” Student observations (in their own words):

- The ideas promoted were liberating
- The idea of connecting students and faculty through collaboration
- Influence of studio teachers is strong—try to use that for change
- Schools should bring in young, innovative groups for students to observe
- The audience is there for you—there are many possibilities for delivering an effective performance
- Gives one the courage to do what you want to do / develop projects that incorporate the audience
- Importance of writing my own mission statement--being sincere with ourselves helps us to make decisions about careers and about our mission.
- Surround yourself with people who are as passionate as you are
- It is necessary to expand the definition of professional success within the institution

In summary, the forum created a wonderful sense of camaraderie among all the participants and offered an opportunity for informal, yet intense reflection on the issues we face. It was suggested that all of the faculty and staff attendees would go back to their own institutions, and in conjunction with their students, make a report to the school about the forum. It was hoped that they together would determine what recommendations would be feasible to implement and in turn share those with the other participating schools.

For more information on the Forum, please visit [http://music-careers.rice.edu/index.html](http://music-careers.rice.edu/index.html)