



WISCONSIN CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC



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Wisconsin Conservatory of Music reaches 125 years of exceptional music education and community enrichment

The largest community music school in Wisconsin commemorates 125 years of achievements while laying the groundwork for future initiatives that will benefit over 10,000 students and the greater Milwaukee community.



Photo: A youth orchestra from 1920s-1930s



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IN 125 YEARS

the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music (WCM) has undergone transformation after transformation, anticipating the most pressing musical education needs of Milwaukee and Wisconsin communities and responding by delivering the finest instructors, classes and resources.

Founded in 1899, by William Boeppler, Dr. Louis Frank, and Hugo Kaun with a faculty of 26 and the intention to be “a centre of musical education not only for this city, but also for this State and the entire Northwest”—what is now known as the “midwest” in 2024. Offering quality musical education to those without means was also a value from the start with scholarships listed in their first class booklet. In 1913 the school used the phrase “accessible to all” which has continued on in WCM’s current mission of

“Inspiring individuals and communities through exceptional music education, accessible to all.”



WILLIAM BOEPLER
Founder
1863—1928

(Left) The Wisconsin Conservatory of Music in 1899 at the long since demolished Ethical Building, 558 N. Jefferson Street, Milwaukee.
(Right) Co-founder William Boeppler.



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BY 1906,

teaching certificates and postgraduate degrees were available. In its first few decades, most students and graduates were young women becoming music educators. WCM was a hub for higher education, offering master's degrees by 1920 and a range of ever-changing focuses and majors featuring a variety of instruments, classical music, dance, jazz (by the 1960s), theater, and briefly even fashion modeling. One early female alum was Adelaide Banaszynski, who graduated in 1920. She became a faculty member for seven decades, retiring shortly before her death in 1991. Her best-known student is pianist Ralph Votapek.

PHOTO: Girls learning percussion around the 1920s.



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STAYING AHEAD

of the evolving needs and cutting-edge interests of the community remains the spirit of WCM. In 1936 you could take not only whistling but classes in orthophonics—high quality vocal recordings for phonographs. In 1956 flamenco guitar lessons were a unique offering nationwide, and by the 1960s the school was one of the first to offer a bachelor of music degree in guitar. 1972 was the year an electronic music studio was constructed, and WCM became the first accredited college to offer degrees in jazz thanks to Tony King and Manty Ellis. Heavy Metal Guitar lessons were a popular choice in 1993.



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LESSONS FOR SCHOOL-AGED AND ADULT STUDENTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PRIMARY FOR WCM.

SO MUCH SO IN 1985 THE SCHOOL DROPPED ITS COLLEGE FOCUS AND EXPANDED AS A COMMUNITY-CENTERED RESOURCE.

Many other Milwaukee-area colleges had since developed strong music programs of their own so broadening WCM's children and non-degree-centered adult classes was the best way to provide accessible music to all. Satellite locations have been established over the years in a variety of neighborhoods to bring classes to kids and adults all over the county, maximizing WCM's community reach. The next satellite will be in Milwaukee's Bronzeville neighborhood.



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**WCM MAINTAINS ITS HISTORIC EAST SIDE MANSION
AS A GIFT TO ALL OF MILWAUKEE.**

IN 1968,

a merger formed between the accredited but financially struggling Wisconsin Conservatory of Music and the non-accredited Wisconsin College of Music which owned the iconic red Prospect Avenue mansion where today WCM hosts concerts, a large portion of its classes, and administrative offices. The building was declared a historic landmark by the City of Milwaukee Common Council in 1985 and is on the US National Register of Historic Places.



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LOOKING AHEAD,

WCM is focused on continuous growth and expansion. After achieving debt-free status in 2017, the Conservatory has been building its endowment to ensure the sustainability of music education in Wisconsin. In the past five years, WCM has launched a pioneering fellowship program for emerging Black and Latine classical musicians, taken on the management of Milwaukee's Children's Choir, and become the first U.S. institution to offer the innovative Royal Conservatory of Music SmartStart™ Early Childhood Education program, reaching 1,210 students in its inaugural year.



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TOMORROW'S LEGENDS TAKE CLASSES AT WCM

In 1926 at the age of seven, **Liberace** (born Władziu Valentino Liberace) won a scholarship to study piano at the Conservatory. He debuted at age 14 as a soloist with the Chicago Symphony. Actor **Gene Wilder** first got into theater as a kid taking classes at WCM.



"I realized at a pretty young age that I was not meant to be a performer, that I was better at writing it, which is what I do now. The more we invest in kids learning music, the better music we will have in ten or twenty years."

-Justin Hurwitz



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MANY MORE LUMINOUS ALUMNI OF NOTE:

- **Eddie Allen**, Jazz Trumpeter
- **Joyce Altman**, Alum, Then Teacher, and Finally CEO from 1993-2003
- **Lynne Arriale**, Jazz Pianist
- **B-Free + Quinten Farr**, Milwaukee Musician Couple, Now Based in Los Angeles
- **Helen Bader**, American Social Worker And Philanthropist
- **Kate Baldwin**, Broadway Actress And Singer
- **Angela Baldi Bartell**, Former Dane County Circuit Court Judge and Miss Wisconsin 1964
- **Pamela Britton**, 1950s Actress, Studied Voice and Piano at WCM
- **Gerald Cannon**, Instructor At Julliard, Jazz Bassist
- **Justin Hurwitz**, Composer
- **F. Wayne Taddey**, Pianist
- **Ralph Votapek**, pianist, winner of the first Van Cliburn International Piano Competition



“My mother wanted to get me guitar lessons, I was probably 14 years old. I had just left Lincoln Center Middle School of the arts where I was learning blues and I wanted to take it a step further and learn a different style of music... That’s what I found at the conservatory and that was the root of it all for me.” -Angie Swan



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- **Gene Wilder**, American actor, comedian, writer and filmmaker
- **Jeff Chambers**, Composer
- **Mark Davis**, Jazz Pianist
- **Manty Ellis**, Co-founder of the WCM Jazz Program
- **Berkeley Fudge**, Jazz Saxophone
- **Rick Germanson**, Jazz Pianist
- **Daron Hagen**, Composer, Director, Author, and Filmmaker
- **Jeff Hamann**, Jazz Bassist
- **David Hazeltine**, Jazz Pianist, Composer, Arranger, and Educator
- **Michael Hey**, Organist at Marble Collegiate Church, NYC
- **Carl Ziedler**, Milwaukee’s 1940s-era “Singing Mayor”
- **Klassik**, Milwaukee Hip-Hop Artist
- **Liz Lerman**, LA-based Choreographer, Guggenheim Fellow
- **Liberace**, Classical-Pop Pianist, Singer, and Actor
- **Brian Lynch**, Jazz Trumpeter, Grammy Award winner
- **Dan Nimmer**, Jazz Pianist
- **Julie Miller**, Vocalist with The New York City Opera
- **Angie Swan**, Guitarist, Composer, Tony Award Winner, and 2X Grammy Nominee



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AS THE LARGEST COMMUNITY MUSIC SCHOOL IN WISCONSIN

WCM is the future of this state's innovative music scene. With 125 years of experience, WCM continuously adjusts to the evolving needs of students of every age.. Despite massive changes over the years, creating accessible music education has been at the center of the school's mission for over a century, and overcoming more barriers remains our greatest desire. You are always welcome to join us for a concert, a class, or a financial gift. **It is only the support of community members like you that has gotten us so far.** Thank you for hearing our musical story, and cheers to the next 125 years!