



CHRIS HORKAN VISITS ROCHESTER'S EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND FINDS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Playing it

Well, sometimes it's very cold, and sometimes it is only snowy,' begins the answer to one frequently asked question on the Eastman School of Music website. 'But we figure that if it were sunny and warm all the time, you wouldn't stay as long in the nice heated practice rooms, concert halls, classrooms, and library.'

The weather in Eastman's host city, Rochester in New York state, is a topic never far from the minds of the 900 musicians who study there. Even the school's dean, Douglas Lowry, acknowledges that its reputation precedes it: 'Everybody likes to beat up on Rochester for its weather.'

But climate aside, Rochester boasts a formidable music educator in the Eastman School of Music. 'Students considering Eastman are also considering Juilliard, Oberlin, New England and Curtis,' Dean Lowry says, 'but also in the areas of musicology and music theory we're competing head to head with Princeton, Cal Berkley, the University of Chicago and Harvard.'

The school, established in 1921 by local industrialist and philanthropist George Eastman, offers an undergraduate BM and MM, MA, DMA and PhD qualifications at graduate level, attracting 500 undergraduates and 400 graduate students at present. To cater for this size of student population, there are more than 95 full-time faculty members and over 130 in total.

'Eastman's traditional programs in music performance, composition, music education, musicology and music theory are really the attraction points,' says Dean Lowry, who became only the sixth permanent director in nine decades when he joined from the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music last August.

He adds that dual degrees – both at undergraduate and graduate level – are becoming more popular. Though it has its own in-house humanities faculty, Eastman is the professional music school of the University of Rochester, meaning students can take courses in sciences, for example, on the university's main 'river' campus. 'Dual degrees offer students an opportunity to take courses that will in the end inform their music,' Lowry explains.

Another attraction is the school's Institute of Music Leadership (IML), which was established in 2001. The institute offers around 30 optional courses to all Eastman students – including in entrepreneurship, community music teaching, building websites, and public speaking. 'It's a place where students can supplement their traditional music programs with very inspiring entrepreneurial experiences,' Dean Lowry says.

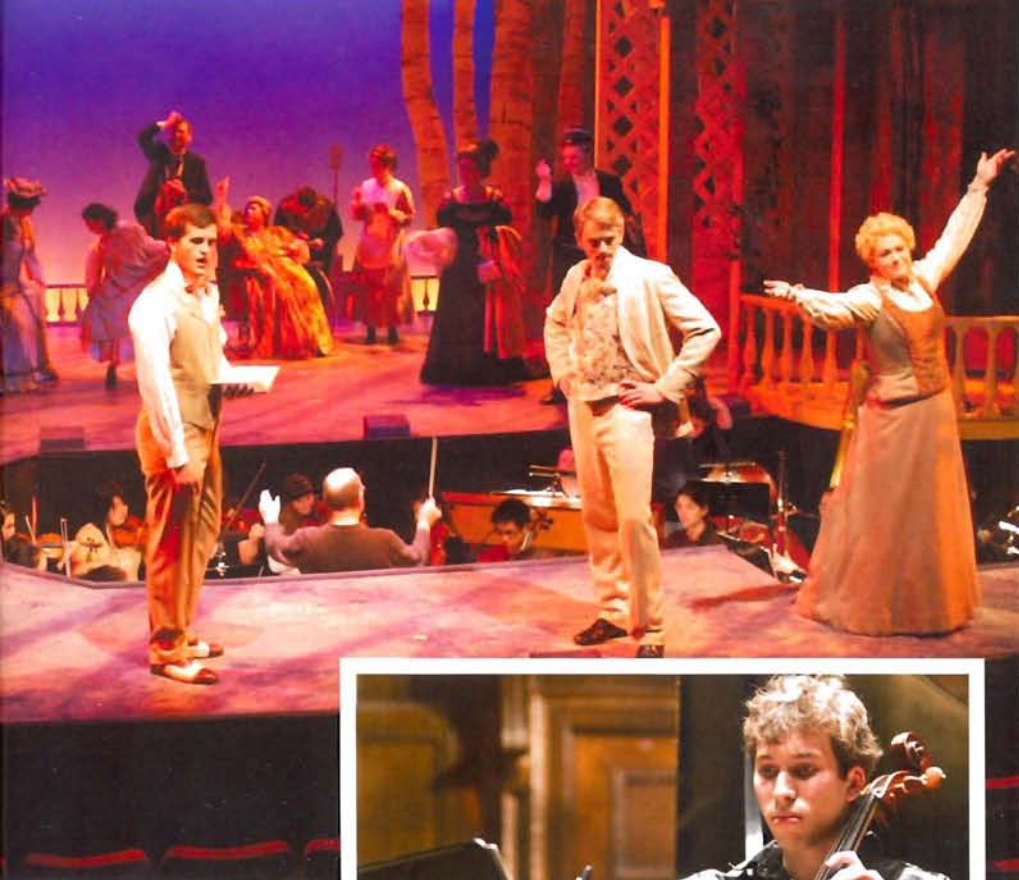
Richard Chen, a 22-year-old bassoon major in the final year of a Bachelor of music performance degree, has participated in IML courses since his freshman year

and expects to gain a certificate in arts leadership when he graduates. He's currently doing an internship in the school's communications offices, though positions with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra or local radio station WXXI are also available.

Chen is originally from Taiwan but is now based in New York City, some 300 miles – or a \$50 flight – south east of Rochester. He chose Eastman above his other main options, Peabody and Oberlin, partly because of the leadership institute, which was unique in North America at the time. He has also been studying towards a management certificate through Rochester's Simon Business School. 'A lot of people take these courses even if they don't count towards a certificate,' he says.

Despite his strong business interest, Chen is a regular performer, playing anywhere 'up to Toronto, down to SUNY Geneseo, east to Ithaca Cornell University and west to Buffalo', as he puts it. The school's Music For All program sends Eastman students out into the greater Rochester community each year to perform around 90 chamber music concerts in schools, nursing homes, libraries, and even book stores.

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cool

Twenty-year-old singer Stephania Romaniuk, from Calgary, Alberta, is a sophomore on the Bachelor of music program. 'Speaking primarily about the voice department, performance opportunities for freshmen and sophomores are harder to come by,' she says. All extracurricular performing must be approved by teachers to avoid conflicts with course commitments.

The school is home to one of the city's major music venues, the 3,000-seat Eastman Theatre, which hosts recitals and dance, film and opera events. Renovation work will begin this summer, lowering the capacity to 2,250 but adding a new 200-seat recital hall, additional studios, a recording complex, and a large rehearsal room in the process. 'We're addressing tremendous pressures that are brought to bear on our facilities,' Dean Lowry explains.

The new facilities will be 'wired to the hilt' for online masterclasses and video streaming, something Eastman pioneered in 2001 and remains a frequent participant in.

'We're the only major American school of music that has a nationally renowned, fully professional orchestra - the Rochester Philharmonic - living lock, stock and barrel in our buildings,' adds Dean Lowry. The close relationship means some orchestral players teach at the school and students often have the opportunity to sit in on rehearsals and performances. Having a professional orchestra on hand can have

negative effects too, however, as some students are inspired to work a little too hard. 'I often feel that we get spoiled because there are so many concerts going on,' says Chen. 'But a lot of people just lock themselves in and practice and tend to forget about what other students play.'

'I've heard that the piano and strings departments are quite competitive,' adds Romaniuk. 'Anyone who practices more than five or six hours a day is clearly serious about their craft. But in my experience, the voice major community here is very supportive.'

Romaniuk believes that more students are beginning to take courses, participate in sports, and work out at the river campus in order to temporarily escape 'the Eastman bubble'. 'Unfortunately, a round trip by bus is about an hour, not including wait times,' she says.

The school claims graduates in every major North American orchestra. 'Our alumni penetrate all areas of the music field and the careers taken on graduation are really quite remarkable,' says Lowry. Notable alumni include sopranos Renée Fleming and Nicole Cabell, plus a host of Pulitzer-, Grammy- and Emmy-winning composers and performers.

Chen plans to go to graduate business school next year, while continuing to perform and taking private lessons. From his class, he believes about 20 per cent are looking for performance work - with military bands, for example - while the rest plan to switch

fields like him or apply for graduate programs at Yale, Rice University, and the Colburn School in California, for example.

Rochester is 'a fabulous place to live', according to Dean Lowry: 'It's very rich culturally and intellectually and it's got a deep and abiding music tradition, with burgeoning chamber music societies and lots of music going on.' Outside of music, the school government organizes regular ski trips and visits to Niagara Falls, which is half an hour away.

With so many options, both academically and extracurricular, Eastman School of Music has something for everyone. 'There are many opportunities here to pursue your passions, to whatever extent you wish,' Romaniuk concludes. 'Anyone who seeks a challenge, can adapt to a fast-paced environment, and is willing to invest all of themselves in the pursuit of excellence will find inspiration, camaraderie, and, ultimately, a home here.' ■

VITAL STATISTICS

- The city of Rochester has a population of around 200,000, with over 1m in the greater Rochester area
- It was ranked the sixth most livable US city in 2007's *Places Rated Almanac*
- The Eastman School of Music is part of the University of Rochester - but is situated on its own campus in downtown Rochester
- The school has a student population of roughly 900 with around 260 new students enrolling each year from more than 2,000 applicants
- Musicians from 40 countries study at Eastman, including significant numbers from Korea, mainland China, Eastern Europe, and Russia
- It offers a BM at undergraduate level (plus a BA/BS through the university's College of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering) and MA, MM, DMA, and PhD qualifications at graduate level
- Dual degrees are also available at both levels
- The school is home to the Sibley Music Library, the largest academic music library in the western hemisphere, which holds almost 750,000 items
- The Student Living Center, also on Gibbs Street, accommodates most of the school's undergraduate students
- In this year's Kaplan/Newsweek *How to Get into College* guide, Eastman was named the 'Hottest School for Music' in the US

CONTACT

Eastman School of Music
26 Gibbs Street, Rochester, NY 14604
Tel: 585 274 1000
admissions@esm.rochester.edu
<http://esm.rochester.edu>