Music

Music performance at Bowdoin ranges from student compositions to professional performances by visiting artists, and from solo recitals to large-scale performances for chorus and orchestra. Many ensembles, such as the Chamber Choir, World Music Ensemble, Middle Eastern Ensemble, Bowdoin Chorus, Concert Band, and Chamber and Jazz Ensembles are part of the curricular program. Other groups, such as a cappella vocal groups and many rock bands, are sponsored by the Office of Student Activities.

The Chamber Choir is a select group of approximately twenty-five to thirty singers that performs a wide variety of choral and soloistic music. Its repertoire in the past few years includes music by J.S. Bach, G.P. Palestrina, William Byrd, Eric Whitacre, Vineet Shende, Elliott Schwartz, Jean Sibelius, and Ralph Vaughan Williams, as well as Franz Schubert’s Mass in G with the Portland Symphony. Recent tours have taken the choir to Europe, South America, England, and Ireland, including a tour of Chile during the 2006 spring break. The Bowdoin Chorus is a choral ensemble composed of students, faculty, staff, and community members. The group toured Russia in 2002, has toured the east coast regularly each year, and traveled to Greece in summer 2009. The Chorus performs on campus with the Bowdoin Orchestra and combines with Down East Singers from time to time to form the Rachmaninoff Festival Choir. Recent performances by the Chorus include Ernest Bloch’s Sacred Service, Rachmaninoff’s Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Mozart’s Requiem, Haydn’s Heiligenmesse, Stravinsky’s Les Noces, Rutter’s Gloria, and Orff’s Trionfo di Afrodite.

The chamber music program at Bowdoin is large and lively, with forty or more students participating in ensembles that include wind quintets, brass quintets, string quartets, piano trios and quartets, etc., playing both standard repertory and new music. The Bowdoin Orchestra performs with the Chorus and usually performs an orchestral selection on the same concert. The Concert Band performs a mixture of popular and serious works, including some written especially for them.

Contemporary music receives considerable emphasis at Bowdoin. There are frequent visits by guest composers and the Chamber Choir and Band often perform new music. Student compositions can be heard on campus, and students who complete an honors thesis in composition can often have their music professionally performed. The guest artist series often includes jazz greats like pianists Kenny Barron, Brad Mehldau, and Renée Rosnes.

Other visiting artists in recent years have included the School for Improv Music; Roberto Díaz; Mark O’Connor; the Renée Rosnes Quartet; the Lydian String Quartet; the Publick Musick; the Guangzhou (China) Symphony Orchestra; the Eroica Trio; the Ying Quartet; and Kurt Ollmann ’77. In addition to performing, the artists often teach master classes and hold discussions with students.

Bowdoin owns a collection of orchestral and band instruments and more than twenty grand pianos available for use by students studying and performing music. There are also sizeable collections of early instruments, Asian instruments, and drums from a variety of world traditions. Soloists and ensembles perform in a number of venues on campus, including the new Studzinski Recital Hall and Kanbar Auditorium, the Tillotson Room in Gibson Hall, Pickard Theater, and the Chapel, which houses a forty-five-rank Austin organ and a small Cooper Tracker organ. Private instruction is available in piano, organ, harpsichord, voice, guitar, and all the major orchestral instruments.
Theater and Dance

Dance

The dance curriculum in the Department of Theater and Dance evolved from the Bowdoin Dance Program, which was founded in 1971 and soon developed academic courses. Each year, the department presents two major concerts of student- and faculty-choreographed works: one in December and one in April. Students also perform at Parents Weekend in the fall and at the Museum of Art in May and in additional informal showings. Performances are strongly linked to participation in technique, repertory, and choreography classes, but independent work and choreography by student clubs are also presented. A recent repertory concert incorporated the sculptural work of visiting faculty and Bowdoin alumnus Wade Kavanaugh, in a set created by the use of wooden I-beams, constantly shifting through different dances. Departmental student projects are presented with the generous support of the Ray Rutan Fund for the Performing Arts.

Student-run dance groups often perform as part of Bowdoin Dance Group concerts and in other shows on and off campus; they represent genres as diverse as hip-hop, ballet, ballroom, tap, break dance, capoeira, and African American step dancing.

Dance concerts are presented in the Dance Studios, Pickard Theater, Wish Theater, and the Museum of Art, as well as in unconventional spaces such as the David Saul Smith Union, the squash courts, or outdoors on the Quad. The renovation of Memorial Hall in 2000 provides a beautiful dance studio with skylights and a sprung wooden floor, in addition to the Sargent studio, as well as a new state-of-the-art flexible theater designed for both theater and dance.

Besides student and faculty performances, the department sponsors visits by nationally known dance companies, choreographers, and critics for teaching residencies and performances. A partial list includes Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, Merce Cunningham, David Dorfman Dance, Mark Morris, Pilobolus, Doug Varone, Trisha Brown Company, David Parker and the Bang Group, Susan Marshall Dance Company, Deborah Hay, Urban Bush Women, and lectures by dance writers Susan Foster, Jill Johnston, Laura Shapiro, and Marcia B. Seigel. These professionals teach master classes and offer lecture-demonstrations as part of their visits to campus, and sometimes are commissioned to create choreography especially for the Bowdoin dancers. In recent years, the Alice Cooper Morse Fund for the Performing Arts has brought numerous artists to campus both for public performance and for classroom workshops, including classical Indian dance and the Seattle-based dance company 33 Fainting Spells, and international choreographer/performers Susanne Martin and Bronja Novak.

Theater

The theater component of the Department of Theater and Dance evolved from the student performance group Masque and Gown, which was founded in 1903. In the mid-1990s an academic curriculum in theater was developed, combining courses and departmental productions, and Masque and Gown became an independent student organization with continued ties to the department. The department annually presents numerous plays and events, directed or created by faculty and by students, ranging from new plays to performance art to Shakespeare. Recent departmental offerings have included faculty-directed productions of Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure, Martin Crimp’s Attempts on Her Life, Suzan-Lori Parks’ 365 Days/365 Plays, Rodgers and Hart’s Babes in Arms, Thornton Wilder’s The Skin of Our Teeth, Henrik Ibsen’s An Enemy of the People, The Water Project (an original
production conceived by SITI Company member J. Ed Araiza), and Tony Kushner’s Angels in America. Recent student-directed projects have included an adaptation of Pedro Juan Soto’s short story collection Spiks, Tom Stoppard’s Arcadia, Six Characters in Search of an Author, The Laramie Project, The Glass Menagerie with film and live actors, The Bald Soprano in French, original student plays, and an English/Theater honors production of Henry V.

The department also presents a range of performances, workshops, and lecture/demonstrations by visiting artists. Past guests include award-winning playwrights Suzan-Lori Parks, Tony Kushner, Edward Albee, and Holly Hughes; actress/writer Anna Deavere-Smith; actress/SITI Company associate artistic director Ellen Lauren; Obie award-winning performance artists Spalding Gray, Dan Hurlin, and Paul Zaloom; activist Norma Bowles; and international touring artists such as 500 Clown, Wakka Wakka Productions, The Condors, and Javanese puppeteer Joko Susilo. Student projects and guest artists are funded in part by the generous support of the Ray Rutan Fund and the Alice Cooper Morse Fund for the Performing Arts.

Memorial Hall, a striking gothic-style granite and stained glass memorial to Bowdoin’s Civil War veterans, was completed in 1882 and houses the College’s main theater and dance performance spaces. Pickard Theater, the generous gift of Frederick William Pickard, LL.D., in 1955, includes a 600-seat theater with proscenium stage equipped with a full fly system and computer lighting. Major renovations of Memorial Hall, completed in 2000, include a complete remodeling of the main theater; construction of the 150-seat, flexible Wish Theater, made possible by an extraordinary gift from Barry N. Wish ’63 and Oblio Wish; and new seminar rooms, expanded rehearsal space, and a new dance studio.