

INTERNATIONAL (HONG KONG) AUDITION ADVICE PACK

Thank you for your interest in Birmingham Conservatoire.

If you have not already received either our **At A Glance** prospectus or full **Prospectus for 08/09/10 Entry** and **Prospectus Supplement**, you can view or download these at www.conservatoire.bcu.ac.uk/prospectus

The prospectuses and the supplement contain information about all our courses, including course fees, information about Birmingham and the UK and more.

AUDITION SCHEDULE

Thursday 5 November 2009

Auditions. Each audition will last approximately 25 minutes and will include a short interview. There are no written tests.

YOUR AUDITION

We very much look forward to meeting you. When preparing for your audition, please note the following:

1. A non-refundable **audition fee** is payable in cash at the time of your audition. The fee is:
Hong Kong Auditions: HK\$ 500
2. **Audition requirements** are given on pages 14 & 15 of this pack. (*Additional Jazz audition recording requirements are given on pages 16 & 17 for reference.*) Your audition will be recorded so that it can be reviewed again in Birmingham.
3. In addition to your audition, you will need to fill in a **formal course application form**. (Forms are included in this pack. For undergraduate, see pages 4-7 and for postgraduate see pages 8-11.) It may be possible to receive help with this at the time of your audition. Your application will be considered along with your audition recording in Birmingham.
4. **All candidates** must provide two references – one musical and one academic – using the **Applicant Reference** forms (pages 12 & 13 of this pack). You should print these out, fill in the top (your details) and give them to your referees.
5. In addition to giving a successful audition, you will need to meet our **entry and English language requirements** before we can make you an unconditional offer. See pages 2 and 3 of this pack for details.
6. See our **Making the Most of Your Audition** (pages 18-21 of this pack) sheets for hints and tips. This guidance has been created in collaboration with other UK conservatoires specifically for candidates auditioning in the UK, however, you may find some of the advice useful.
7. Finally, see our **Next Steps** sheet (page 22 of this pack) to find out what happens after your audition.

We wish you the best of luck with your audition.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

All teaching at Birmingham Conservatoire is in English, so all applicants must be able to demonstrate a strong command of the English language.

If your first language is not English, you must have gained one of the following recognised English language qualifications:

- An IELTS score of at least 6.0* (British Council)
- A TOEFL score of at least 79-80 (iBT)*
- A minimum of Grade E in the Hong Kong Examination Authority use of English
- A Grade C or above in the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English or Certificate in Advanced English
- A Grade C or above in GCSE or IGCE English Language

* except:

- PgCert and Personal Study Programme candidates must have at least IELTS 5.5 / TOEFL 71 (iBT) or equivalent
- MMus candidates must have at least IELTS 6.5 / TOEFL 90-91 (iBT) or equivalent

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT

If, after taking your exam, you find that your English result is lower than the one we have asked for, you may still be able to study at Birmingham Conservatoire. We will do everything we can to make this possible.

If your English score is a little lower than we asked, you may be able to study on one of our **pre-sessionial courses** (5 weeks or 10 weeks).

If your English needs to improve quite a lot, you may be able to study on our one-year **Foundation Course in English (FCEAP)**. The lowest score you can have to study on this course is TOEFL 53-61 (iBT) / IELTS 4.5-5.0. The course is full-time, but you would also follow a part-time music course.

So, please ask us what the possibilities are if your English score is not quite as high as you expected.

Contact for more information or advice:

Ruth Stanton Assistant
Registrar Birmingham
Conservatoire

E: ruth.stanton@bcu.ac.uk

APPLICANT REFERENCE - ACADEMIC (ALL COURSES)

APPLICANT DETAILS

Applicant's Name _____

Course applied for _____ First Study _____

We should be grateful to receive your opinion of this candidate's suitability for undergraduate or postgraduate musical training, as appropriate to the course applied for. It would be helpful if your comments could include information on the following matters:

- intellectual powers and academic ability
- where appropriate, likely A-level/equivalent (undergraduate) / degree/diploma (postgraduate) results
- character and interests
- ability to relate to others
- ability to contribute to the student community
- suitability for the proposed course

It would be appreciated if your reference could be typed/word-processed on the reverse of this form or on a separate sheet. Please note that references sent by e-mail cannot be accepted.

All information provided will be treated with the strictest confidence, other than where this conflicts with the requirements of the Data Protection Act. We are greatly indebted to all referees, and acknowledge with thanks your co-operation in this matter.

REFEREE DETAILS

Name (**BLOCKCAPITALS**) _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Designation _____

Institution _____
(if applicable)

THE REFERENCE: *Please turn over to type or write your reference overleaf*

The information provided will be held in accordance with the provisions of The Data Protection Act 1998.

RETURNING THE REFERENCE

Please return (with application form if appropriate) to

The Registrar
Birmingham Conservatoire
Paradise Place
Birmingham B3 3HG. UK.

APPLICANT REFERENCE - MUSICAL (ALL COURSES)

APPLICANT DETAILS

Applicant's Name _____

Course applied for _____ First Study _____

We should be grateful to receive your opinion of this candidate's suitability for undergraduate or postgraduate musical training, as appropriate to the course applied for. It would be helpful if your comments could include information on the following matters:

- musicianship
- actual and potential ability in First Study
- character and interests
- ability to relate to others
- ability to contribute to the student community
- suitability for the proposed course

It would be appreciated if your reference could be typed/word-processed on the reverse of this form or on a separate sheet. Please note that references sent by e-mail cannot be accepted.

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Birmingham Conservatoire
Paradise Place
Birmingham B3 3HG. UK.**

AUDITION REQUIREMENTS

Please note, you should bring your own accompanist.

UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

- Bachelor of Music with Honours [BMus (Hons)]

Instrumentalists and Singers must perform two contrasting pieces (or movements) of different styles and periods of their own choice. **Vocal** candidates must include one aria (from an opera or oratorio). **All** instrumental and vocal candidates will also be asked to play / sing some scales (ABSM Grade 8 standard) and sight read / sight sing.

Composers should send a portfolio of at least three compositions directly to Birmingham Conservatoire, together with a recording of at least one of these works.

- Bachelor of Music with Honours in Jazz [BMus (Hons) Jazz]

Applicants should follow the special Jazz requirements (see separate sheet) and send a recording instead of attending an international audition centre.

POSTGRADUATE COURSES

- Graduate Diploma in Jazz [GradDip Jazz]

Applicants should follow the special Jazz requirements (see separate sheet) and send a recording instead of attending an international audition centre.

- Postgraduate Certificate (Specialist Performance) [PgCert (Specialist Performance)]
- Postgraduate Diploma in Music [PGDip]
- Master of Music [MMus]
- Advanced Postgraduate Diploma (Professional Performance) [AdvPGDip]

Instrumental Performance (including Piano)

Candidates should be prepared to perform a varied 15-20 minute programme covering a range of styles and containing one extended movement or work. **Strings** and **woodwind** players should include a concerto movement (first or third). **Woodwind** and **brass** players should also prepare two contrasting orchestral excerpts. **Percussion** candidates may play orchestral excerpts as part of their programme.

Piano Accompaniment (as main study)

Candidates should bring a singer, with whom they should be prepared to perform three works (including a *Lied*). Candidates will also be required to perform an extended piece/movement for solo piano, and to undertake a sight-reading test.

Vocal Performance [MMus, PGDip and PgCert (Specialist Performance)]

Candidates will be required to perform a programme of songs of approximately **15** minutes' duration, including material to be sung in English and in two other European languages.

Advanced Vocal Performance [AdvPGDip]

Candidates will be required to perform a programme of songs of approximately **20** minutes' duration including material to be sung in English and two other languages. The programme may include arias from the operatic and/or oratorio repertoire.

Composition

Candidates should send a portfolio of at least three compositions and a high-quality recording of at least one of these works directly to Birmingham Conservatoire.

PLEASE NOTE:

Musicology candidates must send a proposal in lieu of an audition; **opera repetiteur**, **conducting** and **jazz** candidates must audition in Birmingham or send a recording as appropriate (see www.conservatoire.bcu.ac.uk for details).

All postgraduate candidates: If your audition is successful, we may contact you for additional information before offering you a place.

Audition Requirements International Applications (Recording)

BIRMINGHAM
CONSERVATOIRE



BMus(Hons) Jazz **GradDip Jazz**

Candidates are required to perform two contrasting pieces with a rhythm section, and a short transcribed solo. They should record with their own rhythm group of piano, bass and drums, and any other appropriate instruments.

Recordings can be made on CD, minidisc or cassette tape. At the start of the recording, the applicant must state his/her name, and must say a few words in English about each of the pieces to be performed. If any pre-recorded tapes are being sent, then an additional tape with these details should also be enclosed.

1. The first piece must be chosen from the list of standards below.

1. Any 12 bar blues head in any key. Typical examples include:
Blue Monk, Now's the Time, Sandu, Tenor Madness, Straight No Chaser,
Relaxin' at Camarillo
2. Any Rhythm Changes in B flat concert. Typical examples include: Anthropology, Oleo,
I've Got Rhythm
3. Ladybird
4. Tune Up
5. Green Dolphin Street
6. I'll Remember April
7. Body and Soul
8. Cherokee
9. What Is This Thing Called Love?
10. All The Things You Are
11. Confirmation
12. Yardbird Suite

2. The second piece is a free choice. It may again be chosen from the list provided but can be any jazz standard, an original composition or a free improvisation.

3. Candidates are asked to perform a short transcription of an improvised solo for their instrument. A copy of the transcription should be sent with the tape recording. The transcription can be one that the candidate has done themselves or from any published source and should be performed unaccompanied. The transcription can be performed with click track or metronome.

Notes and Guidelines

- (a) The rhythm section should consist of bass and drums with either piano or guitar.
- (b) Bass players need only play the head in the Section 1 and can choose whether or not to do so for the "free choice" section.
- (c) Guitarists can choose to audition with just bass and drums or with the full rhythm trio
- (d) The transcription can be one that the candidate has done themselves or from any published source.
- (e) Drummers do not have to perform a transcribed solo, but have some additional audition requirements.

(See Appendix overleaf)

Appendix: Additional requirements for Drummers.

4. Instead of Section 3. Drummers should choose any of the standards listed in Section 1. and play through the chord changes at the piano.

PG Dip/MMus (Jazz)

Candidates are required to perform two contrasting pieces of their own choice with a rhythm section and also a transcribed solo.

The pieces can be a choice of any Jazz standard, a composition by a contemporary Jazz composer, a composition/arrangement by the candidate themselves or a free improvisation.

The transcribed solo is to be performed unaccompanied and must be transcribed by the candidate rather than from any published source. A copy of the transcription must be sent together with a cover letter authorising that the transcription is the candidate's own work.

Notes

1. One of the pieces must be a recording of a performance with a live rhythm section consisting of bass and drums with either guitar or piano.
2. The second piece can be with rhythm section also but could be with any combination of instruments or completely solo.
3. Bass players and drummers are not necessarily expected to give a rendition of the head in their performances, but are expected to present themselves as featured soloist as well as in their more traditional supportive roles.

Criteria

The audition panel will be judging candidates on the following criteria:

1. Level of improvisation.
2. General performance issues and instrumental ability.
3. Harmonic understanding through changes playing.
4. Time, phrasing and style.
5. Interaction with the group.

All Courses

Please send the recording with your completed application form and reference to:

**The Registrar
Birmingham Conservatoire
Paradise Place
Birmingham
B3 3HG
UK**

Making the Most of Your Audition

Conservatoires UK

The purpose of the audition

A key part of the process of applying for admission to a conservatoire is the audition.

The audition procedure is designed to enable a conservatoire to find out about you, not just how good a performer or composer you are, but what sort of a person you are, to assess whether you have the potential to be the sort of musician who will benefit from the approach of the conservatoire, and to give you the chance to demonstrate your performance skills in support of your application.

It is also an opportunity for you to find out more about the conservatoire and experience its atmosphere, either for the first time or under a different set of conditions. It is important that you try to get a feel for the place, to see if it fits with your own personal attitude, learning style and personality, and that you gather as much information as possible about the course to which you are applying.

So the audition is a two-way process – the conservatoire auditions you, and you audition the conservatoire!

The conservatoire will aim to provide a positive and friendly atmosphere for the audition, enabling you to perform to your best ability, and to enjoy the process.

What the audition involves

Each conservatoire conducts auditions in a slightly different way. However, they usually include a practical element – when you will be asked to perform two or more pieces you have prepared in advance – and an interview, during which you will have an opportunity to ask questions.

Detailed advice on what your audition(s) will include and, if you are a performer, what kind of pieces you should prepare will be provided by the individual conservatoire(s) once you have been invited to audition.

In some cases an audition may have two parts, both held on the same day. In these cases, everyone takes part in round one, and then a limited number of candidates are selected to go forward to round two.

Composers and applicants in other non-performance areas are usually asked to submit a portfolio, video or other evidence of practical ability in lieu of an audition.

When are auditions held?

Most auditions take place between mid-October and mid-December. Sometimes a conservatoire will hold a second set of auditions for late applicants, but you should try to attend during a conservatoire's main audition period, because places can fill up quickly and not all instruments / areas may be offered late auditions.

Some conservatoires may offer international applicants the chance to audition at an overseas audition centre. These auditions may be offered at a different time of year, so you should check with the conservatoire(s) in question for details.

Photo courtesy of Kiran Ridley and RWCMD



How long will the audition last?

This will vary from one conservatoire to another, but generally speaking, you can expect the audition itself to last 10-30 minutes. If an interview or additional tests form part of the audition process, these will add to the overall length.

What will I have to play?

Precise requirements vary from one conservatoire to another and from one instrument / course to another. However, generally speaking, you will need to perform at least two contrasting pieces (i.e. pieces of different styles / periods and tempi), which display musicality, technical proficiency and an understanding of style.

Sometimes you will need to perform pieces specified by the conservatoire, or choose from a pre-defined list; sometimes you will be able to choose your pieces yourself. In the latter case, you should take care to select pieces which will allow you to demonstrate the full extent of your ability.

You will not be expected to play from memory, but you should be as familiar as possible with the pieces, to enable you to play with confidence and not appear overly reliant on reading the music.

Percussionists may be asked to play pieces on several different instruments.

Jazz candidates will normally need to perform with a rhythm section (provided) – or, if they are pianists, bassists or drummers, by taking their place in the rhythm trio. They may also be asked to perform a short unaccompanied transcribed solo.

Composers must send a portfolio of two or more compositions and may need to send a high-quality recording of at least one of these works.

Highly-specialised areas, such as conducting, community music, opera repetiteur etc, may have very specific audition requirements. You should contact your chosen conservatoire(s) for details.

What else will I have to do?

In addition to performing the pieces you have prepared for your audition, you may be asked to play / sing scales and arpeggios (ABSM Grade VIII standard), read / sing at sight, and / or take an aural test, all of which help to demonstrate your technical abilities.

Jazz candidates may have to undertake some unseen interactive exercises with an ensemble and demonstrate improvisation skills.

In some cases, you may also have to sit a written music theory paper / musicianship test; this will allow you to demonstrate your ability to produce a written response on a musical topic.



Photo courtesy of Richard Moran and LCM

Do I need to bring an accompanist?

Official accompanists are always provided but candidates can normally bring their own accompanist if they prefer.

Will there be an opportunity to rehearse before the audition?

You will normally be able to rehearse / warm up before the audition, although the time and facilities available will vary from one conservatoire to another, and may depend on the instrument and whether it is a main or a late audition. If you are not bringing your own instrument, you will be given time to practice on the instrument provided for audition, but this may only be the usual time allocated for warming up. You should check with your chosen conservatoire(s) in advance of your audition.

Will there be an interview?

The audition will normally include an interview where you will be asked to talk about your musical interests and activities, your artistic influences, what inspires you to be a musician, your reasons for wanting to study at a / the conservatoire and your career objectives. You may also be asked to talk about your non-musical interests.

The interview may include discussion of the repertoire you have performed (in regard to preparation, challenges, technique, style, etc).

You may be asked to analyse and assess your playing with questions such as: What do you think you need to do next with your playing? What are your technical strengths and weaknesses? How much practice do you do?

Composers will be asked to present and discuss the portfolio of works they have submitted.

The interview is also an opportunity for you to ask the panel questions about the department and what life will be like as a music student.

Preparing yourself in advance

There are many things you can do to prepare for your audition, so that you feel as confident and relaxed as possible on the day. Here are some suggestions:

- If you are a performer, practise the set or chosen pieces until you can play them with confidence and authority.
- Take advantage of any opportunities to perform in public or in front of other musicians to gain experience and confidence in performing under pressure.
- Practise with an accompanist as often as possible before the audition.
- Have a practice audition, if these are offered, or stage one with friends and family.
- Research the pieces that you will be playing so that you will be able to talk about them in an informed way and answer any questions. Knowledge of professional recordings, the composer, special features of the music, great performers, etc, may all be relevant in an audition situation.
- Be prepared to talk about your wider musical interests (performances undertaken, projects, collaborations with other musicians / artists) and live concerts / gigs that you have seen.
- Think about the questions you are likely to be asked at interview (see interview section), and make sure you are able both to present your ideas confidently and coherently and to show your initiative and commitment to what you do.
- Think about what you want to know about the conservatoire and make a list of questions that you would like to ask.
- Talk to your teacher.
- Practise relaxation and breathing techniques to help manage nerves and make them work to your advantage on the day.

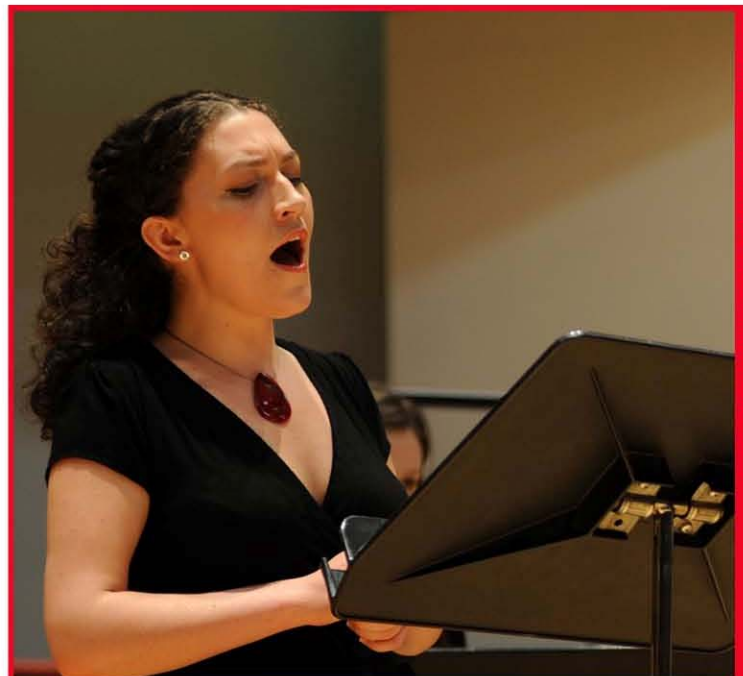


Photo courtesy of Christian Payne and Birmingham Conservatoire

Making the most of the day itself

Remember that you are presenting yourself as a potential student. Arriving on time and being prepared for your audition will help you both to make a good impression and to feel relaxed.

Wear something that is smart but comfortable to play in, that will not restrict your movements when performing, and will not distract from your playing.

The audition panel will be looking for good technical control, accurate intonation and rhythmic awareness in your performance, and, in the case of jazz candidates, some ability to improvise, but overall they will be judging your potential rather than your ability to give a flawless performance. They will also be assessing your attitude and musicality and trying to form an overall picture of you as a person.

If your audition includes an interview, don't feel you have to live up to a certain image – just be yourself, be honest about your aspirations as a musician and how you hope a conservatoire course will help you achieve those goals.

Try to use your time at the conservatoire to get an impression of what it would be like to study there. What does your gut feeling tell you when you walk through the door? Is it easy to find your way around? Are there enough people around to help you if you are lost and are they friendly? What do the students seem to be doing?

Take some time to look at the facilities available to you at the conservatoire, including the halls of residence, practice rooms, communal areas, etc. Some conservatoires offer tours of the facilities as part of the audition experience, but if not, try to follow up or precede your audition by attending the conservatoire's open day. This will give you an idea of the standard of students already at the conservatoire and a chance to speak to current students and course tutors.

And don't forget to be nice to your fellow candidates, the ushers and the current students you meet when you go to an audition, because one day you might find yourself sitting next to them in a rehearsal!

What happens afterwards

Most conservatoires will try to respond to candidates within three to four weeks following the audition, and, at that point, will give you further information on what to do next.

It is very common to walk out of an audition or an interview and immediately think of something you should have asked. If this happens to you, don't panic, and don't be afraid to get in touch with the conservatoire to ask those questions. Admissions offices are there to help applicants throughout the application process and will respond to your queries as soon as they can.

Remember...

- **From practising to printing out directions, preparing well in advance will help you to be relaxed on the day.**
- **The conservatoire wants you to succeed as much as you do, so stay positive and try to enjoy yourself.**
- **The audition and/or interview is your chance to ask questions about the course or department in which you have applied to study. Come prepared with a few questions.**
- **Be yourself – your ability, attitude and ambition are what counts.**



Photo courtesy of Ben Rice and RCM

NEXT STEPS

What happens to my audition tape and application?

After your audition, your audition tape and application form will be returned to Birmingham. At the Conservatoire, the recording of your audition will be reviewed by a specialist audition panel for your instrument. Your application form will be assessed by our Admissions Team.

When will I hear something?

We will attempt to let you know the outcome of your audition before the Conservatoire closes for the Christmas holiday; however, please be aware that this is not always possible. If we cannot contact you before Christmas, you should expect to know the result of your audition by mid-January.

What does my offer mean?

We want all of our students to be successful in their studies. For this to happen, candidates must display the right combination of practical skills and academic skills, in addition to the dedication and attitude needed to become a professional musician. In general, there are three types of response you may receive from us:

Unconditional Offer

If our audition panel feels that you have demonstrated a suitable level of skill and potential at your audition AND your application (including your references) show the required level of academic and English language ability for your chosen course, we will make you an Unconditional Offer. This means that, as long as you formally accept the offer and are able to arrange your visa and finances, you will be able to enrol on the course.

Conditional Offer

We will make you a Conditional Offer if our audition panel feels that you have demonstrated a suitable level of skill and potential at your audition, but you have yet to attain an academic or English language qualification that would be required for entry. In your offer letter, we will tell you the conditions that you must meet before we are able to make you an Unconditional Offer. Normally, this will be either completing your current course of study or achieving a qualification in English language. As long as you formally accept your Conditional Offer, it will be converted into an Unconditional Offer (see above) once you have gained the qualifications (or met the other conditions) listed in your letter.

Unsuccessful (Reject)

If the audition panel feels you have not displayed at your audition a level of skill appropriate to your chosen course or level of study, and/or your application indicates that your academic abilities are not at the required level, we will return a reply of Unsuccessful (Reject). This means that you are not yet ready for study at your chosen level at Birmingham Conservatoire and we are unfortunately unable to offer you a place.

What do I need to do after receiving my offer?

Before you can enrol at the Conservatoire, you must:

Arrange a visa – you cannot arrange a visa until you have been made and have accepted an Unconditional Offer. Therefore, it is extremely important that you meet the conditions of your offer as soon as possible.

Arrange your finances – In addition to paying your course fees, you will need to have sufficient funds to cover your living expenses in the UK.

We consider all candidates for tuition fee scholarships. If we are able to award a scholarship to you, you will receive details in your offer letter.

If you have been made a Conditional Offer, you must also

Meet the conditions of your offer – please note, if you have yet to gain your English qualification, you should not wait until the last minute to take your exam; when scheduling it, remember to allow time for retakes (in case this is necessary). If you are unsure of how to attain an English qualification, contact the British Council in your area.