Looking into music schools is, for every family, a daunting, overwhelming task.

There are over 600 accredited music programs in the US alone, and the sheer number of options that one can apply to is astronomically high.

Having worked with over 130 music students personally in my college consulting program, I can tell you one thing that is certainly true in music schools:

Change.

Since I first published articles about music schools in 2014, the world of these institutions has been constantly changing.

It can be more difficult than ever for those on the outside to accurately discern what schools are good—and which ones are less so—with all the change that occurs inside an institution from year to year.

To bring awareness into music schools, today I am highlighting 10 schools of all shapes, sizes, and cultures throughout America in this article.

Some are conservatories in major cities; others are universities in small college towns.

Some are more classically bent—while some others are jazz or contemporary/pop music focused.

These schools represent a fraction—albeit a very important fraction—of
what is out there.

However, all consumers looking into music colleges need a place to begin looking.

Of course, this list is just the beginning, and is by no means a “one-size-fits-all” list.

Every school on this list, by the way, has an undergraduate program.

Also, this is not a ranking list of the top 10 schools; rather, these 10 schools have been selected as they have demonstrated exemplary leadership and excellence in the field of music.

Also, I am not saying these are the 10 best music schools in the country. Rather, this article should be treated as a guide for where to look into when first researching music schools.

Finally, in an effort to create a well-rounded list of very different schools, I include schools in many major geographic regions. No US state is represented twice on this list.

Disclaimer: None of these schools have paid me to put them on this list.

While I have been offered in the past such compensation, I have not taken any money from music schools to promote them as that would run into ethical conflict with my college consulting program.

Okay, without further ado, let’s talk about 10 of the very best music schools in the US.

University of Southern California Thornton School of Music

I am consistently amazed at the quality of output USC delivers. USC is quickly rising as one of the top 5 music schools in the US, as it exemplifies a diversity of major interests that many schools are not daring enough to embrace.

We only have to look at two specific programs to really see what makes USC so cutting-edge—the Popular Music program as well as the Film Scoring program.

The Popular Music program is among the most selective in the world; I have been told from a source in the school that only 3% of the applying singer-songwriters are accepted…

This is Curtis-level selective!

And of course, the Film Scoring program—while a Master’s degree program—signifies a movement that only a handful of music schools are willing to embrace, which is this: commercial composition.

For years, writing & promoting music of a commercial nature has been considered “tasteless” and “jejune” in many US music schools. USC, understanding the needs of a modern-day musician to survive, has long been one of the champions of commercial music composition.

Of course, USC’s traditional classical program is among the very best and most selective in a university.

We find many of the top young musicians throughout the country studying at USC, flocking there to study with internationally renowned artist-faculty, many of whom are employed in the neighboring Los Angeles Philharmonic, the country’s highest-paying orchestra next to Chicago and San Francisco.

Finally, the jazz program at USC may just be among the most outstanding of its type. Legendary jazz musicians Bob Mintzer, Peter Erskine, and Vince Mendoza are just three of the 21 dedicated jazz faculty members who comprise this school.

As someone who has helped several students gain admission into USC, I can tell you that admission is competitive; outside of faculty, many people desire attending university in Los Angeles as it is one of the major music markets in the US.

USC is not for everybody, especially those that may be desiring to go to an independent conservatory or those looking to not go to school in one of the most populous, crowded cities in the country. But for those who USC is a match for, there are few schools that can claim to be equals.

Bottom Line: Diverse, Forward-Seeking School with a Taste for Traditional and Popular