

The Music Column
By Scott Detweiler
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MGRAY MUSIC ACADEMY IN NOHO

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“Music Education is a tool to expose its students to beauty, confidence and self-expression. It encourages focus and discipline. It serves to cultivate imagination, individuality and excellence. It teaches collaboration and cooperation. Imagine what the world would be like if music was required learning for all students. The M. Gray Music Academy proposes that we can save the world through music education.”

Macy Gray (www.macygray.com) has just opened the M Gray Music Academy in North Hollywood and you have just read her mission statement.

The school is a magnificent facility, staffed by an incredibly experienced faculty and in an excellent location. I couldn't believe it when Macy told me that it only took about a year to open the school from her initial conception. “I wanted kids to have something to do after school,” she went on to say.

The curriculum at the M. Gray Music Academy is intensive and is formulated to serve students at three different levels: Beginning Students (students learning an instrument for the first time), Lab Students (students with 1 – 3 years background) and Master Students (students with 3 or more years' background). The vibe of the school is warm, non-intimidating and inspirational and open to all ages. Even adults.

Although Macy is known for her talent as a songwriter and vocalist and she studied classical piano, it would logically follow that there would have to be labs dedicated to the study of writing, singing and piano. But hold on. At the M. Gray Music Academy there are not only labs for writing, singing and piano, but also for the study of drums, percussion, mixing, production, guitar, bass, programming and composing as well! It is a living, relevant, modern, mini, music university.

Because Macy is such a brilliant vocalist, it is of no surprise that Vocal Lab would be a special department. One of the instructors that make the Vocal Lab such a special place is the person who actually trained Macy: renowned and well-known Hollywood voice coach, Mr. Roger Burnley (www.rogerburnley.com). (Nice.) Roger is known for his world-renowned learning process that frees the student from any technical vocal limitations.

They would first meet around 1989 when Macy went to him for vocal training. Roger recalls that although she was shy, he could see that she was a unique

talent. She would continue to study with him regularly and then return from time to time for assistance and consultation on specific vocal challenges.

Macy would also later send her back-up singers to train with Roger to learn techniques in voice preservation and maintenance, useful in combating vocal strain that is often suffered during extensive tours.

Roger said that having trained Grammy nominated Macy, watching her rise to certified multi-platinum status, and then being asked by her to become a member of the faculty at the M. Gray Music Academy is “the ultimate rewarding experience for a teacher.” (He is so proud of Macy. Congratulations, Roger!)

In addition to Roger, Dawn Beckman will be a faculty member of the Vocal Lab. The curriculum focuses on developing and increasing pitch, power and control, range, tonal quality and stamina. The students not only learn to sing but also to perform. Additionally, monthly seminars will be presented by recording artists (including Macy).

The other labs at the school, their focus and faculty members are as follows:

The Drum Lab, staffed by Al Pahanish and Marina Bambino, will primarily focus on hip-hop, rock, jazz, latin and soul. Renowned drummers Al Panahish and Kenny Dennis have designed the curriculum so that each student may develop their own creative style.

The Piano Lab, staffed by Dr. Tatiana Dutoit, will offer organ, synth and synth programming lessons, as well as song composition, orchestration and music direction. The lab contains nine new Yamaha electric pianos that can be played individually, with headsets or on a loudspeaker, in select ensemble pairings and groups of all sizes. Each piano is connected directly to the teacher’s unit for personal attention. The lab combines the best of acoustic piano study with all the advantages of electric keyboard.

The DJ Lab, staffed by producer and DJ, DJ Kiilu Grand, includes the art of listening and mixing records and turntable classes. Also included are field trips to record stores and production classes where the students learn to create his or her own mix tapes. They master all technical aspects of the turntables and gain a priceless knowledge of songs, albums and artists. Advanced classes teach the new Rhane Software. (Minimum age for DJ Lab is nine years old).

The Funk Lab, staffed by Michael Matarese, teaches Pro Tools, programming, drum programming and sound editing. This curriculum is a dynamic one that presents lessons in the latest hardware and software in this ever-evolving area of music. (Minimum age for Funk Lab is 13).

The Guitar and Bass Labs, staffed by Jason Golday, Josh Lopez, Dave Filice ,

Caleb Spier, and Dave Wilder will focus on modern jazz and funk. They will also examine the styles of masters such as Segovia, Jimi Hendrix and Prince to gain a consummate knowledge of rhythm and soloing in various styles of music.

The Film & TV Scoring Lab, staffed by Eimear Noon, will teach music theory, orchestration, string arrangement, and composition for film and TV.

All departments will coordinate for ensemble performances and recording.

The M. Gray Music Academy is an exciting, incredible facility and resource that will open the doors of creativity to our kids and bless our world with their artistic expression through music.

(Thank you, Macy.)

The M. Gray Music Academy (www.MgrayMusicAcademy.com), 4716 Vineland Avenue (just south of Lankershim Boulevard), North Hollywood, CA 91602. (818) 508-8733, fax (818)508-8966. A non-profit organization.

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