

Berklee Online

THE BENEFITS, THE CHALLENGES AND THE BALANCING ACT OF ONLINE LEARNING

By Scott Anthony Andrews and Dale MAC (McArthur), members Regina Regional Writers Group of the Songwriters Association of Canada and Berklee Online Graduates

"The music industry has changed" - a mantra-like chant repeated often within musical circles. This 'change' likely means different things to different people, though surely it refers (at least in part) to the accessibility and proliferation of musical technologies. Such availability seems to be impetus, opportunity and requirement for the DIY musician; in addition to the more traditional competencies, such as crafting songs, lyric writing, vocal techniques, etc. The question becomes how to easily access training for these myriad skills?

Well, Berklee Online (online.berklee.edu), an extension of the Berklee College of Music in Boston, has several at-a-distance music courses, certificates and degrees - ranging from songwriting, to music production, to vocal techniques, to arranging, to orchestration...and that is not all. We (Dale Mac and Scott Anthony Andrews) have recently taken some Berklee offerings. Dale completed a course in Audio Mastering using Cubase, and in Vocal Techniques. Scott Anthony completed the Songwriting Specialist Certificate, a course in Ableton Live and is currently enrolled in Lyric Writing: Tools and Strategies. The purpose here is to provide a brief snapshot of our experiences for Saskatchewan DIY musicians (writ large) - knowing that each person must decide what training (if any) is best for themselves.

Firstly, we both quite liked the knowledgeable and active faculty. Berklee Online seems to be consistent in this regard; some of the top names in lyric/songwriting for example are located there, such as Pat Pattison, Jimmy Kachulis, Neil Diercks, and Sarah Brindell.

Secondly, the courses are surprisingly interactive; students are expected to comment upon one another's work, and there is a weekly online class (or office hours) offered by the Instructor. This video component makes the courses feel quite live and is most helpful in creating a sense of class community. We have both kept in touch

with some musical colleagues we met online. Although there is lots of contact with students and instructor, at the same time there is no actual classroom to drive to, in which to socialize. Some people may simply prefer face-to-face contact.



THE AUTHORS

Thirdly, course curricula are comprehensive with textbooks, online training videos, notes, quizzes and exercises. There are Practices which are usually daily exercises; feedback is provided from other students. There are also weekly Assignments, which are typically graded by the course Instructors who provide specific comments. We never felt as though we were on our own if we were stuck on a topic or did not understand a studio lesson or lyric assignment. One does have to keep up with the workload, which is, indeed, a commitment; however, overall we found the frequent feedback to be a positive experience.

Fourthly, obviously there is the convenience factor; studying on one's own time and place, which has both challenges and benefits. We have seen fellow musicians taking courses turning in assignments, etc. all the while being on tour.

Further, training in some areas, such as Cubase or Ableton Live, is not easily accessible in Saskatchewan - at least that has been our experience. So, more than being convenient, online learning is sometimes the only realistic option for further education in certain areas (beyond self-teaching, of course). Finally, and this is not a small point: Berklee curricula are imminently practical. Dale invested in a home studio and the Audio Mastering course provided the necessary skills to produce his album and run his new home studio. He can add Audio Mastering to his list of skills as an artist. He has since added clients to the studio who want to record demos, singles, or seek audio advice, and there are songwriters who actively use his home studio (Dakota Red Productions).

If there were a drawback, it is that the courses tend to be slightly expensive. Having said that; if one registers early, there is often a substantial discount, or if one registers and pays for a certificate all at once, there is a discount, and, actually there is also SOCAN discount. On balance, we would most certainly recommend Berklee Online for those who want training while focusing on the demands of home. Our advice is to go with what feels right, what works best for your home schedule, what works easiest with your home studio DAW, and your career goals. Keep in mind the benefits, the challenges and the balancing act involved with online musical education are unique to each of us in our daily lives and professional working relationships. Perhaps the music industry has changed, but thanks to institutions such as Berklee Online, so has musical training.

Dale McArthur (Dale Mac) is a local songwriter, home studio engineer and producer in Regina. He has released two EPs under his home studio label Dakota Red Productions and is currently producing his full length album. www.Dalemac.com

Scott Anthony Andrews is a singer-songwriter who has just released his third CD, *I Don't Do Lazy Like That*, has also released a Christmas single, and is currently working on an Arts-Based Educational Research project with playwright Kelley Jo Burke, entitled *Ducks on the Moon: A Play with Music*. He is a recent graduate (2017) of Berklee Online with a Specialist Certificate in Songwriting. scottanthonyandrews.com