

## *Graduate School—An Inside Look*

By Vincent S. Du Beau

Just when I thought my college career was coming to a close and that first teaching job was on the horizon, that once in a lifetime opportunity popped its head up and put my goals for a new teaching career on hold. Here I am, back in college, but this time it's a bit different.

As my time in undergraduate school neared the end, an opportunity to study conducting at the master's level presented itself. Of course, realizing that this meant I would have the opportunity to study with a renowned composer/conductor, I was immediately running full speed to the computer lab to get the application in. Once that was said and done, only a few weeks stood between my interviews with local school districts and acceptance into graduate school. Low and behold, I was accepted into the program and it is this experience I would like to briefly share.

Over the past few years, I have read many articles in various publications that document the transition from college to first year teaching. However, since I gave up heading into the public schools to start work on my master's degree, I decided to put forth an article documenting the transition from "undergrad" to "grad." I can tell you right off the bat that it's a wonderful experience! Where else but graduate school can you focus on nothing but music all day, everyday?

So often music students get bogged down in their undergraduate years with general education courses, which end up taking a back seat to their music classes and practicing. Where I can understand this sentiment, the desire of students to just "play" is not enough. It should be understood by undergraduates that a more holistic approach is needed in those first four or five years. Truth be told, all that time spent in music history and college writing pays off! Who would have thought that all those hours of college algebra and astronomy would prove so useful after graduation?

Sure enough, graduate school is something of a culminating experience for the recent graduate of an undergraduate program. Scary? No. Enlightening? Absolutely! Perhaps the most experienced emotion amongst future graduate students is fear. A number of factors contribute to this. Some of them include:

- Being in a new place
- Feeling inadequately prepared
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Wondering if graduate school was worth giving up a job

Interestingly enough, three of the above four factors are exactly what we all went through upon entering our undergraduate careers. If graduate school is something you think you are interested in, then it is in your best interest to pursue it on the basis of your academic needs. It is a simple system of weighing one scenario against the other. On one hand, you will be craving financial security and a greater sense of independence. You will be able to save up money for that new car, new house, HD wall-mountable television, etc. On the other hand, that full-tuition graduate assistantship may seem quite appealing. Go for it! Your greatest musical aspiration is to study musicology at NYU, and they want to pay you to be there! What's to fear? It has been said that there is nothing to fear "but fear itself." Though nonsensical in nature, from that statement we can deduce the following: fearing attending NYU on the basis of missing a new car would be ludicrous. Having

uncertainties about what is to come of that assistantship, fearing the unknown, seems quite human and moreover, NORMAL.

Many of you will find upon obtaining your bachelor's degree that graduate school is something you'll do when you have some time. If you have the chance to go on an assistantship, do it while you have the time! Many of my colleagues, all of whom have successful careers, have done their degrees part time while juggling marching band, choir, musicals, and lessons. This is *not* to say they had any less of any experience. It *is* to say that their complete focus was not on school, due to their professional obligations (as we know it is increasingly more difficult to leave a job and get back in the academic trenches with a less than sufficient salary). That is what graduate school is about: taking time to focus in on something for you. If you've ever been told you get out of college what you put into it, it is certainly the case at the graduate level. Granted, there will be schools that will have you assisting the marching band, pep band, and university bands. You'll take performing groups to conventions and book the entire stay yourself. Someone will have you copying and collating until your eyes fall out and the copier is out of toner. Sounds like teaching! With all that said, what is to fear?

I wish I could tell you that there is a magical method to follow to get into a graduate program. There is never a substitute for diligence and perseverance, both of which will take you far in the competitive world of graduate auditions and applications. Even with a heads up on the life of a graduate student, you must always remember that getting into a program is likely the most difficult part of the process. Once you're there it's a world that is pretty much designed just for you. Whether you have chosen your school for its reputation or for one professor, it will be the best place for you to do your graduate work. Why? Though there are curricula you must adhere to, that skeleton is the formal process of your education. It is up to you to establish yourself and make the most of your time. But do not fear that experience. If you have been admitted to a program, you can only thrive. Don't worry about that job you had or could have had when things get a little sour. Remember—you have the chance to immerse yourself in a world of music that is incredibly unique. Build upon your undergraduate experiences and flourish. But remember: the preparation for graduate school starts now. Prepare well and the transition to graduate school will be one of the greatest experiences of your life.