Arts & Humanities

Famous Musicians Who Graduated from Columbia

From doo-wop artists to indie-pop stars, our alumni include scores of music celebrities.

By
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|
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From left: Ryan, Jack, and Adam Met of AJR.

AJR

Brothers Adam, Jack, and Ryan Met began making music together while growing up in New York City. Adam ’13CC went on to graduate from Columbia College and start the environmental nonprofit Planet Reimagined, while Jack and Ryan attended the

School of General Studies. Since releasing their debut single, “I’m Ready,” in 2013, the electronic indie-pop trio has put out four popular albums and several hit songs, including “Bang!,” “World’s Smallest Violin,” and “Burn the House Down.”

Nonesuch Records

Laurie Anderson

Laurie Anderson’s avant-garde oeuvre spans performance art and electropop music; her 1981 single “O Superman” and its accompanying video were both. Anderson ’69BC, ’72SOA, who majored in art history at Barnard and sculpture at Columbia’s School of the Arts, has also pioneered several new instruments, including a violin with a bow made of magnetic tape.

Brian Ross Weitz (left) with members of Animal Collective. (Hishram Bharoocha)

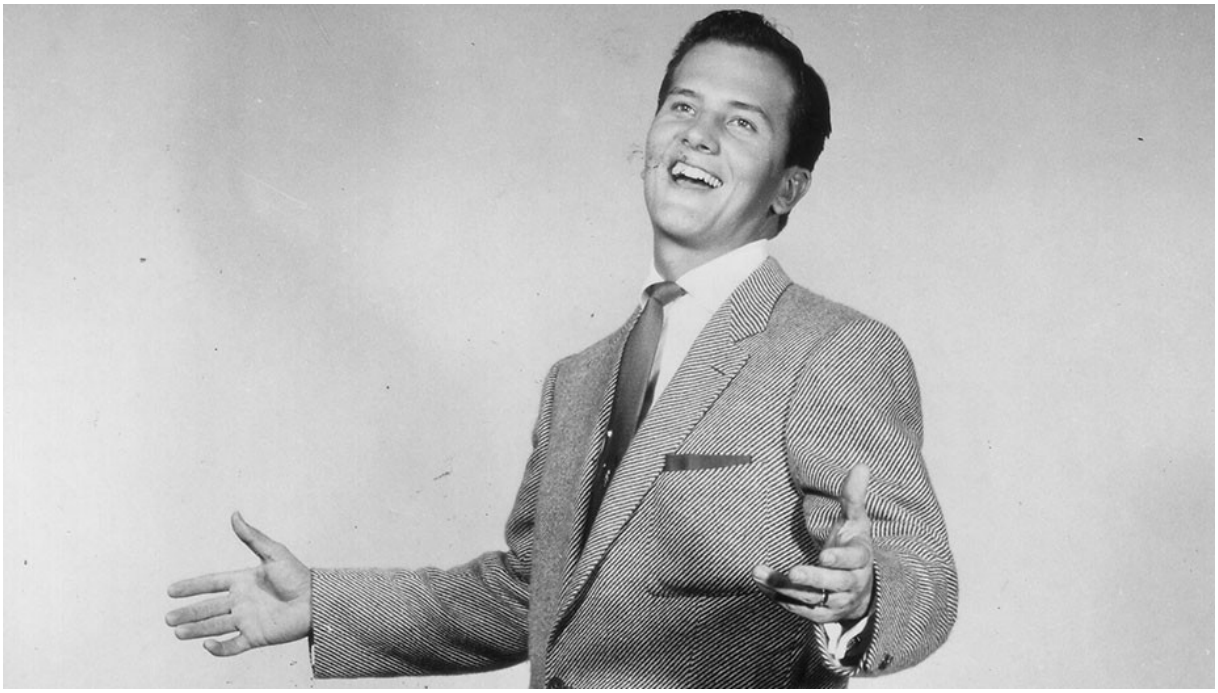
Animal Collective

The experimental indie band Animal Collective burst onto the underground scene in the early 2000s with the breakthrough album *Spirit They're Gone, Spirit They've Vanished*. Electronic musician Brian Ross Weitz '01CC, '03SIPA, who performs under the stage name Geologist, studied environmental policy at Columbia and is largely responsible for the band's unique instrumentals.

Sandra "Puma" Jones (center) with members of Black Uhuru. (YouTube)

Black Uhuru

South Carolina native Sandra “Puma” Jones ’77SW got a master’s degree from Columbia and practiced social work before switching to music full-time. She moved to Jamaica, joined the reggae group Black Uhuru, and sang on seven studio albums. The band’s 1983 record *Anthem* won the first-ever Grammy Award for best reggae album.



Pat Boone

Pat Boone

Singer and film actor Pat Boone ’58GS — one of the most popular recording artists of the 1950s — rose to fame with hit covers of “Ain’t That a Shame,” “Tutti Frutti,” and other songs from the American rock and R&B canon. In the 1970s he pivoted to gospel and country music and later reentered the spotlight as a media personality and political commentator.

Domenic Cicala

Laura Cantrell

Best known for her 2000 debut album *Not the Tremblin' Kind*, country singer-songwriter Laura Cantrell '89CC grew up in Nashville and studied English at Columbia, where she DJed for campus radio station WKCR. She continues to live and perform in New York City.

Art Garfunkel

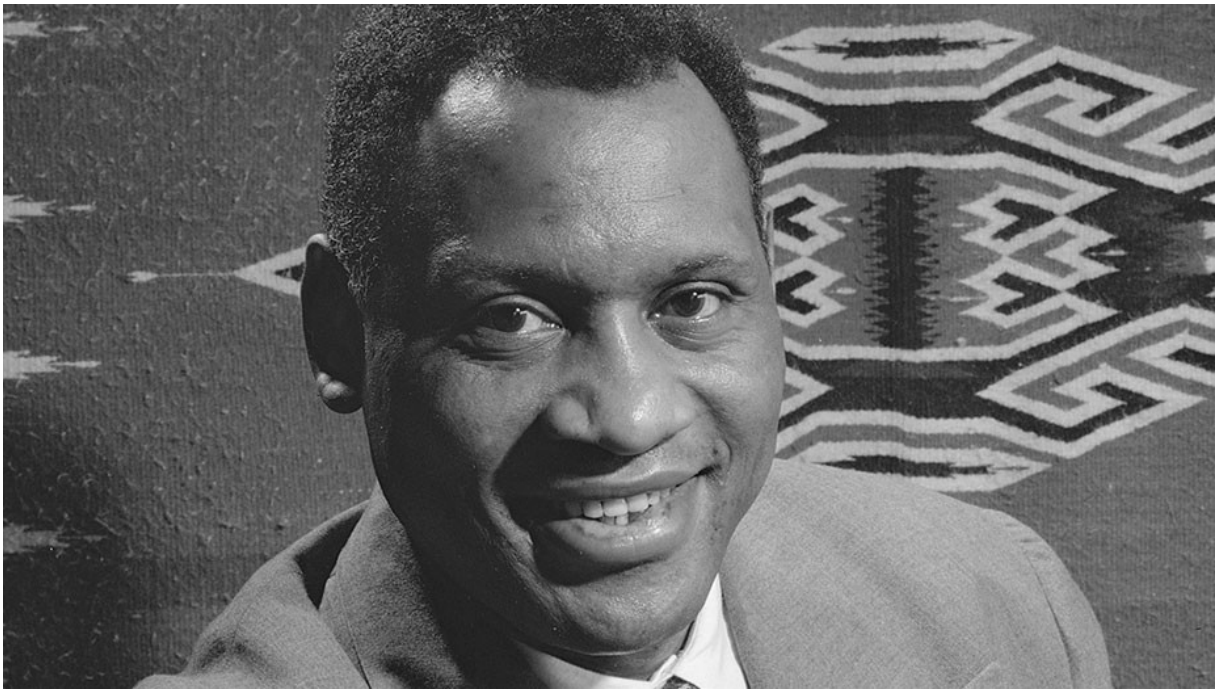
Art Garfunkel

As folk-rock duo Simon and Garfunkel, Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel ’65CC recorded some of the most iconic songs of the 1960s through 1970, including “The Sound of Silence,” “Mrs. Robinson,” and “Bridge over Troubled Water.” After the group’s 1970 split, Garfunkel, who majored in art history at Columbia and sang with the a cappella group the Columbia Kingsmen, embarked on a decades-long solo career while also pursuing poetry, acting, and teaching.

Maude Latour in the music video for "Headphones."

Maude Latour

While a Columbia undergrad, indie-pop singer-songwriter Maude Latour ’22CC filmed several music videos on campus and built a large following on Instagram and TikTok. (Low Library makes bold cameos in the videos for her singles “One More Weekend” and "Headphones.") Latour’s third EP, *001*, was released in the fall of 2022.



Gordon Parks / Library of Congress

Paul Robeson

Actor, bass-baritone, and activist Paul Robeson 1923LAW worked for several years as an attorney before pursuing theater and music full-time, starring in plays such as Eugene O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings* and *The Emperor Jones*. His performance in the stage and film musical *Show Boat*, in which he sang "Ol' Man River" (with lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II 1916CC, '54HON), helped make him an international star. Robeson was an accomplished recording artist, releasing nearly 300 songs ranging from gospel to classical to spoken word.

Scott "Babydaddy" Hoffman (left) with members of Scissor Sisters.

Scissor Sisters

Before becoming a founding member of the alt-glam-rock band Scissor Sisters, multi-instrumentalist Scott “Babydaddy” Hoffman ’99CC grew up in Kentucky and majored in writing and music at Columbia. Moderately successful in the US, Scissor Sisters’ self-titled debut album was the best-selling record of 2004 in the United Kingdom, with singles like “Laura,” “Take Your Mama,” and a cover of Pink Floyd’s “Comfortably Numb.”

Members of Sha Na Na. (Wikipedia)

Sha Na Na

After a breakthrough performance at Woodstock in the summer of ’69, Sha Na Na went on to become a long-running doo-wop revival band known for flamboyant costumes. Started by members of the Columbia Kingsmen — a campus a cappella group — the group’s original members included Bruce “Bruno” Clarke ’74CC, Alan Cooper ’71CC, Dave Garrett ’70SEAS, Frederick Greene ’72CC, Richard Joffe ’72CC, ’93LAW, Rob Leonard ’70CC, ’82GSAS, John “Jocko” Marcellino ’72CC, Scott Powell ’70CC, Joe Witkin ’70CC, and Donald York ’71CC.

Mac McCaughan of "Superchunk." (Alamy)

Superchunk

Guitarist and vocalist Mac McCaughan ’90CC cofounded the North Carolina indie-rock band Superchunk in 1989 under his independent label Merge Records, eventually releasing twelve albums and a number of singles with the band. (“Slack Motherfucker” from 1990 is among the best-known hits.) Merge, which McCaughan continues to lead in Durham, has also produced music for a prolific roster of indie artists including Arcade Fire, Spoon, and Neutral Milk Hotel.

From left: Rostam Batmanglij, Ezra Koenig, Chris Baio, Chris Tomson. (XL Recordings)

Vampire Weekend

A key shaper of 2000s indie rock, Vampire Weekend came together at Columbia, thanks to founding members Ezra Koenig ’06CC, Rostam Batmanglij ’06CC, Chris Baio ’07CC, and Chris Tomson ’06CC. The cover of the band’s self-titled debut album from 2008, which includes singles like “A-Punk” and “Oxford Comma,” features a photo of a chandelier at a Columbia campus concert.

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