

DOWNBEAT's 2015 INTERNATIONAL JAZZ CAMP GUIDE

MOVING UP

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This guide offers detailed listings for more than 100 jazz camps, divided by geographic region. A red trumpet icon beside a camp's name indicates that there is an advertisement for that camp within this guide.





GLENN KAPLOWIT

Blues Kids Learn Life Lessons

By Aaron Cohen

When blues singer-guitarist Fernando Jones recently walked into a diner near his office at Columbia College Chicago, he clearly was the sharpest dressed man in the room. Wearing a gold-patterned suit with a white fedora matching his turtleneck, he strode in with ease, ignoring the lunchtime rush.

"I kind of dress like this all the time, but I'm in show business," Jones said. "It's better to be ready and not need it. And I'm being myself—this is what I am. I always have to be ready for anything."

Style tips are certainly not the only valuable pieces of advice that Jones doles out to students at the Blues Kids Foundation's summer Blues Camps. What started as a one-week program at Columbia College in 2010 has grown to camps in six U.S. cities, as well as camps in London and Italy, with plans to expand into Brazil. (Registration information is posted at blueskids.com.)

The students—primarily ages 12 to 18—enter

at all skill levels and on a range of instruments. They leave with stronger abilities and a deeper understanding of this musical tradition. Some overcome shyness to perform a big concert at the end of the week, and then apply that experience to other areas of their lives. All of these lessons are provided at no charge to the participants.

"We want to embrace kids," Jones said. "Where else can a kid go and study the blues in the U.S. for free under world-class musicians, meet kids just like them, form bands on their own and have lifelong friends? Nowhere."

With a personality that radiates youthful enthusiasm, Jones is very comfortable in a classroom. He has had the kind of life experiences that command students' respect, too. Jones, 51, grew up on Chicago's South Side. "How I got into the blues is that I never got into it," Jones said, "because it was always there."

That early immersion in the blues began with-

in Jones' family. His parents, migrants from Mississippi, brought their music to Chicago. When Jones was 6, an uncle took him to a department store and he walked out with his first electric guitar. Two of his older brothers, guitarist Greg and vocalist Foree, had made names for themselves on the local music scene. They became his primary teachers.

"Like a lot of guitar players in Chicago, I wanted to sing a little and play a whole lot, so I didn't work on my vocal confidence," Jones recalled. "My brother was a great singer, kind of sounded like Albert King, that resonance in his voice. And he knew it. He was a bully. He wanted to be with me, but he wanted me to survive as if he were a parent."

Jones had the chance to return the favor when he showcased his brothers alongside Buddy Guy and Koko Taylor at the first blues festival at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1985, which he organized when he was an undergraduate student.

Early in his career as an educator, Jones worked as a substitute teacher throughout the Chicago Public School system. He started bringing his guitar to class, leading assemblies and informally offering lessons on music. Then he established Blues Kids as a nonprofit educational organization in 1989. The following year, Jones began teaching at Columbia.

"As an educator, I had to ask, 'Where is the curriculum?' explained Jones, who is currently pursuing a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at National Lewis University. "Jazz has been institutionalized, it has been written down—and I say that in a respectful way. So I started creating content myself. I don't think the blues will ever die—it's part of the molecular structure of jazz, hip-hop and so much American music. But just because it won't die, doesn't mean it will be healthy. To be healthy, it has to have some sort of partnership in academia."

As a part-time faculty member at Columbia, Jones' duties include directing the college's blues ensemble. But he has also used blues instruction as a way to show adult educators how to improve literacy. Jones was showcasing his students on a side stage at the Chicago Blues Festival when a representative from the Mary Barnes Donnelley Family Foundation approached him about helping fund the first camp, which was held in 2010.

"There were about 77 kids in the camp," Jones said. "I must have sent 500 faxes promoting it. Everywhere I saw a kid, I gave out a flier. It was like I was running for office."

Raising revenue to keep this program free also involves constant campaigning. Jones said that he would rather build long-term relationships with potential sponsors than to just accept money outright. Funding comes from a mix of sources: Columbia College, philanthropic organizations (such as the Donnelley Foundation), corporations (including guitar accessories manufacturer Jim Dunlop) and individual donors who are reached through The Blues Kids Parent Fundraising Committees. But Jones noted that a key task in maintaining Blues Camp is not just economic.

"The challenge is, 'How do I keep kids interested in coming back?' What do you do for a student who has been coming for five years and gone from being a guitar player in grammar school to guitar player/singer/bandleader in high school? What can I do to keep him coming back for the next two years of his high school life? What can I do to keep him when he goes to college to want to come back—for me to develop a division for my adult learner students to give them a home? How do I create activities to keep them engaged that have nothing to do with music?"

Guitarist Dan Peetz attended the first Blues Camp as a student and did keep coming back. Today he is an instructor and said that one reason why he and others return is the environment that Jones and the participants create.

"With the camp, there's a sense of community from the love for the music," Peetz said. "It's a very friendly environment. Parents all love the music, too. These are people who show the same passion for the blues and keep it going."

During the past three years, Jones has expanded his weeklong summer course to California



Jones and some campers perform in concert





(Los Angeles and Corona), the South (Miami and Hampton, Va.), and Europe (London and Italy). Jones attends all of the camps and provides a blueprint for the program. The camps offer a combination of small group and individualized lessons, as well as lectures and time for jam sessions. Skill levels are assessed through auditions.

Instructors have the freedom to bring their own personalities and emphases to a course. Jackie Scott, who has taught at the Blues Camp

in Hampton since 2013, wants to help students evolve from being instrumentalists to becoming more versatile.

"Some of the kids come with everything they need," Scott said. "The only thing they don't have is confidence. Growing up singing in church, I didn't have that confidence, either. Last year one of the challenges was to get guitar players to sing a song without their guitar. They gave me 'the stink eye' because that was their security blan-

ket. When you put your guitar down, it frees your body movement up to do other things. The next year they loved it. We're trying to teach each one to front their own band, as well as to focus on writing their own songs. We want to nurture them into the whole thing about being a musician."

Many of the instructors in the Columbia camp are veterans of the blues scene in Chicago, such as singer-guitarist Fruteland Jackson and singer Nellie Travis. Others are younger, such as Peetz and brass teacher Branford Marsalis Parker (the prominent jazz saxophonist is his godfather). Their comparative youth has its advantages.

"Since some of the kids don't have mentors, when they see someone who is playing the same instrument as them and offering guidance, they can take that and run with it," Parker said. "It doesn't just relate to music, but to life, as well."

As Jones has expanded his camps internationally, he's noticed that in such countries as England, there is a different identification with the blues tradition than in the United States. He's found that Europeans look at the music as a Chicago idiom, rather than an American one. That can work to his benefit.

"They are so reverent to the city of Chicago," Jones said. "Often, people will look at Chicago, especially when they look at blues. They look at black America, New Orleans, Harlem, Watts, as being universes unto themselves. And Chicago is home to [historic record labels] Chess, Brunswick and Curtom. It doesn't mean that the musicians are better or worse in, say, Wisconsin—we're all cousins. But when you're from Chicago, unlike any other place, the whole [history] of the blacks who migrated from the South is so interesting to them. They look at it as an exodus from one country to another. So that's maybe why they think of Chicago as its own independent thing."

Along with performing, teaching and providing educational curricula, Jones also has promoted the blues through different instructive media. His 1988 book, *I Was There When the Blues Was Red Hot*, brings together history and sociology within an autobiographical context. Jones also created a board game, *The Blues Life*.

"The board is divided into four parts," Jones said. "You start off on the 'chitlin' circuit, do college tours, go back around and go on a world tour. The objective of the game is that the first one to put a band together wins, or the one who collects the chips—representing money—wins. It talks about paying your dues. I want you to be in the union, pay your union dues and collect royalties. This creates dialogue: 'You mean, I have to start off in the basement, not on American Idol?'"

Jones emphasized that his belief in education goes back to his own beginnings "One of the things I'm proud of as a human being, an African American male, is that I had an opportunity to be the college-educated son of two parents from Mississippi who understood the power and importance of higher ed, the importance of the arts, and that people learn differently," Jones said. "Being obedient to my parents and not wanting to embarrass them has been the path for me to walk my life. I'm proud of being [raised by] two Mississippi folks who said, 'Boy, if you go to school, you can be anything you want to be.' That ties into every walk of my life."