

My 2025 Summer Enrichment Experience at the Stanford Jazz Workshop.

By Liam Bateau

Two weeks ago, I concluded one of the greatest journeys of my entire life. This adventure included the stepping stones I needed to continue my journey as a musician and as an upcoming adult. For any of these programs, I never know exactly what to expect; Stanford was no different. This camp felt different in my mind because it felt like there was weight behind it. Stanford is a very well-recognized program, and it is all the way across the country. Coming into it, I was excited because I knew that the hard work was paying off in a way. A year ago, I wouldn't have been able to get into this camp, but I'd been growing, and I had been able to reach another milestone in my musical journey. I also felt more comfortable with this transition; my life at home was very stable. I had support from all of the people in my life that loved me.

I knew it was going to be weird leaving for three weeks, and being that far away, I would miss my friends and my girlfriend, but I knew they weren't going anywhere. The journey getting there was hectic, with missed flights and sleeping in airports. Eventually, we got there and I said goodbye to my grandparents, signaling that I was truly alone in a sense, nothing for the next two weeks would be connected to my life in Carbondale. Walking in by myself was so scary, I really was nervous. When people introduced where they were from, they were all from the West Coast. Was I going to be able to fit in with these people? At home, making friends was something I always thought came easily to me, but we all came from the same area, and life outside of Carbondale was distant to us. Would I really be able to fit in with these people?

That was the main question daunting in my head, and not only fit in but keep up musically. In Carbondale, our music scene seems to be shrinking every year. Yes, we have a victorious music program at the high school, but they won't compare to schools focused on the arts. These thoughts were in my head, but I knew a few things: I know who I am, I was good enough to be there, I'm going to be me, and life at home will always be there no matter what.

The first person I met was a guy named Will, who was from Washington D.C, and he was a killer alto sax player. Will and I hit it off. We talked that whole night about back home and made plans to jam out this week. Jamming out was a way I have found easiest to make musical companions. It was comforting to have such a genuine conversation with someone, reassuring me that even though I wasn't home and we lived in different parts of the country, we bonded over music. Music really is a beautiful language, so easily can it connect two strangers who have different backgrounds. That same night I met one of my best buds, Jasper. He played drums and was from the Bay Area. We played pick-up basketball together and again connected over our love of music. What makes these camps so great is that they're full of people who love music so much that it's not just a hobby, it's a way of life. Throughout the first week, we were given a set of classes; these classes were set up as if it was a college. These classes were unlike any other music teaching I've undergone; we were being taught by people who were professionals and

recognized for their work in Jazz. Not only were the teachers professionals, but they treated us like that and taught us like that. I was in classes that tested my playing by ear, playing with people I've never played with, my theory knowledge, sight reading, and my knowledge of jazz in itself. This music was so much more than I thought it was. These people who were teaching loved this music and wanted to teach us how to carry on this beautiful music style. At the beginning, I felt like I was behind. We were learning things that I'd never been taught before, everyone was getting it fast, and I was trying my best to keep up. The first few days were harder, adjusting to life outside of home, making new friends, and taking in all this new information. I really have a lot left to learn, but the teachers put it in a perspective that seemed like I could attain it.

My favorite part of the first week was being able to play freely with people and make connections through that. We would all get a practice room, and all just play. We would solo, showing who we are through the notes we played. These friends I made didn't know everything about me, but we made a friendship based on our love of music and playing. One time, we were messing around and wrote a whole rap song; it was so much fun just letting myself be me. The week taught me how life is going to get scarier. There is so much I have left to learn, but I didn't have to be the best— I just loved playing with my friends. My combo for the week was the highlight of my week. In every other class, I was trying to take in as much information as I could, but for my combo, I was playing with my friends and being instructed by the great Joel Ross. Joel is one of the most influential people I've ever met. He let us use our skills and make music together. One of the songs we played for the combo was a piece of music I had written, a song I'd written with our piano player the night before. Joel took this idea of mine, and as a combo, we completed this song that was in my mind. The first week ended with my favorite concert that I ever performed, playing with my friends, playing music that came from all of the ideas in my head. After our concert, I got to spend time with my friends, watching them perform.

The next week of the camp was the advanced week. I knew that there would be a change in tempo, not only that, but I expected more from myself. The week started off slow. Throughout the last week, I created such a good group of friends, and now for this week, there will be a bunch of new people. The classes were also different. There would be a bunch of classes, and we could choose which ones we would like to go to. This was a neat concept, but I was always worried that I would be missing out on the information being provided in each one. The second week began, and once again I felt a little behind, but I knew that there would be space for me to grow. I just need to allow for the growth to happen. My goals for the week were to network with people as much as I could and really take in as much information as I could get a hold of during the program. A person I met this week who really made the camp so worth it was my friend Tahina. Tahina is an amazing drummer, who also produces and makes music. He is doing stuff that I really want to start to do.

During this week, we got to jam out with my friend Victor, who is an amazing piano player. The three of us would get a practice room to sit down and play. It was so relaxing and really made me feel like a musician. Those guys I still keep in contact with and were hoping to

record and put out some music of our own. Another great thing about this week was the more hands-on approach we had with the instructors; being able to listen to them play and hear their journeys and their lessons was magical. My combo leader was Harish Ragvahn, who is a well-respected jazz bassist. He really pushed me. Harish brought up bass ideas I hadn't even thought of; I took these ideas and implemented them into my playing as soon as possible. The more he would teach, the more I had the desire to get better. It was hard, though. I always felt like I was letting him down, or I wasn't doing the right thing. This week, I could really feel myself bloom. I missed home, but I really had made a home where I was. I loved my friends, and I loved playing music.

The finale concert was amazing. One song we played was another musical idea I had that we turned into a full song. Throughout that whole last day, I was sad, all this would be coming to an end. I was proud of myself and thankful that GFF had given me this life-changing opportunity. For once in my life, as I left to go with my family again, I felt a bittersweet feeling—leaving a home far away from home, a home I had created, a home that opened up a whole new light on the world. Leaving Carbondale will come one day soon. It will be hard, but there's more out there for me. There's more out there for everyone; sometimes, we just need to see it.