

AN ANALYSIS OF AND REPORT ON:
BANDSTAND LEARNING WITH ROLE MODELS AND THE
JAZZAAR COLLEGE FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

David J. Elliott, A.R.C.T., Mus.B., B.Ed., Mus.M., Ph.D.

Professor of Music, New York University

1. Purposes

The purpose of this report is twofold. First, this report explains why *Bandstand Learning With Role Models* (or BLRM, for short) is a unique, highly effective, and creative concept of and approach to preparing gifted youth for professional careers as contemporary musicians. Thus, BLRM has achieved worldwide acclaim during the last twenty years. The second and closely related purpose of this report is to explain why the proposal and plan for the *Jazzaar College for Contemporary Music* (or JCCM, for short), which incorporates the principles and teaching-learning strategies of BLRM, fits perfectly with the needs of present and future contemporary musicians and matches the findings of the best research in this topic area. Indeed, the JCCM curriculum deliberately incorporates all characteristics and events of BLRM in order to provide students with opportunities to apply their JCCM studies (e.g., arranging, improvisation, music production projects, etc.) in a “real-world,” authentic context, which is the only way that the skills and understanding of professional musicianship develop, mature, and integrate over time.

2. Introductory Remarks

Student musicians seeking careers as professional musicians in all realms of contemporary music—e.g., jazz, pop, rock, R&B, Latin, fusion, “new” classical music—must be thoroughly prepared for a wide range of challenges that are inherent in the ever-changing worlds of (a) local, regional, and international music-making and recording, (b) consumer’s ever-shifting musical tastes, and (c) today’s volatile economic climate, which makes it very likely that professional musicians will be obliged to supplement their music-making wages with financial income from private, school, or community “music teaching” (as is often the case in New York and Los Angeles, for example). In short, preparing professional performers, improvisers, composers, arrangers, conductors, and/or music producers is an exceptionally complex task. More than ever before, professional musicians will be confronted with issues related to the question: “How can I function successfully in continuously changing musical, cultural, economic, and music-industry landscapes.” One example from current research on educating professional musicians for the future supports what I have just said:

Future musicians face major changes in their work place, changes that are taking place at an ever-increasing pace. This will result in professional musical careers consisting of several successive full-time and/or part-time periods of employment in which future musicians must be able to meet and integrate different musical roles (e.g., performer, arranger, music studio producer), all of which may require the ability of a musician to his/her own agent, business manager, and/or promoter. More than ever before, the future professional musician is confronted with

questions of how to function in new contexts and how to function adequately in a continuously changing professional practice. (Smilde, 2004, p. 5).

Given the many unpredictable variables of the music profession, now and in the future, gifted young instrumental and vocal musicians cannot be expected to have ready-made answers or techniques to fit every future musical situation. It is far more useful and necessary for them to acquire the musical and cognitive problem-solving abilities they will need to find solutions to new challenges by and for themselves.

Indeed, and assuming that BLRM and JCCM students are somewhere between 17 and 25 years of age, these young people will be engaged in present and future forms of music-making until at least 2050. But of course, no one knows what “contemporary music” will sound like or “look like” in 2030, 2040, 2050, and beyond. This leads to other questions: “Why, how, and where will new styles of music be produced in the future, and what will audiences pay to hear in live concerts and on recordings?”

On one hand, there is no doubt that many forms of today’s musical styles—e.g., jazz styles, rock, R&B, funk, fusion, Latin, Afro-Cuban, new “experimental classical” music, and so on—will continue to exist, and/or resemble, and morph into new and/or hybrid styles; on the other hand, there is no doubt that completely new styles of music will emerge and require future musicians to adapt and acquire new musical techniques, contexts, and consumer demands. Thus, the foremost challenge facing every form of professional music training today—including the kinds of education and training represented by the BLRM and JCCM—is to equip gifted young artists with (a) the ability to adapt to changes and, even more importantly, (b)

to lead and shape the direction of future musical creativity. In other words, professional music training should be developed within a framework where lifelong creativity is seen as an important concept (Wurzburg, 2002).

As I explain in a moment, the musical and educational flexibility that has been deliberately and carefully built into the BLRM and JCCM programs combines specific teaching-learning strategies and specific content that develops and motivates students to work diligently and passionately toward (a) exceedingly high standards of musical achievement and creativity and (b) an unmatched level of commitment to their lifelong creative development as professional musicians.

Following next, I provide details of the teaching-learning processes and content at the heart of the BLRM program that has made it so distinctive and so successful, and that guarantees its continued effectiveness and uniqueness. First, however, it is necessary to say a few words about the two research methodologies that I employed to understand and explain the operational structures and teaching-learning contexts of the BLRM.

3. Research Methods

The two forms of research methodologies I used to investigate the “deep structures” of BLRM are called *case study methodology* and *ethnographic research methodology*. I utilized both methodologies each time I was invited to investigate the BLRM programs—in April, 2008 and in April, 2012. On each occasion, I employed several data-gathering techniques that these two methodologies demand: *detailed observations* of sectional and large ensemble rehearsals, private lessons, and

occasional lectures, which, in combination, engage all students and role models in the ongoing, authentic contexts of their work; detailed written “field notes” (or *journal logs*) of my observations; *audio and video recordings of rehearsals, performances, and interviews* with students and role models (a) before, during, and after all musical/educational interactions and (b) during informal discussions and breaks in the “action” of the BLRM (e.g., during breakfast, lunch, and dinner with role models and during evening jam sessions).

To foreshadow a major finding of my research (explained below), the musical and educational transactions between the students and the world-renowned instrumental and vocal role models (who are very carefully chosen by Fritz and Helen Renold to “teach” properly in the BLRM context and to fulfill the musical needs and desires of the students) include a wide range of teaching strategies that are rarely (if ever) combined. These teaching strategies, explained below, are applied both deliberately and spontaneously, as I have observed and documented during my investigations of the BLRM program, and as they will be in the JCCM (as detailed in its curriculum documents).

In short, and beyond the outstanding roster of professional musicians who are chosen to function as role models in the BLRM program each year—e.g., Randy Brecker, Chico Freeman, Eddie Henderson, Dennis Montgomery III, Tierney Sutton, Christian Jacob, George Robert, Vernon “Ice” Black, Marques Young—the major reasons for the success and creativity of BLRM lie in: (a) Fritz and Helen Renold’s deep understanding of what contemporary musicianship involves; (b) BLRM’s effective teaching-learning strategies that help youth develop their musicianship; and (c) the ways that the professional role models deploy these strategies (sometimes

spontaneously, but most often deliberately), to support and advance individual students' needs in private, small group, and large group situations.

Next, I provide a brief explanation of the kinds of knowledge that professional musicians develop and possess and that students must acquire. I follow this with an explanation of the three basic categories of teaching-learning strategies at the heart of BLRM.

5. BLRM and Musicianship

The musicianship that future musicians must develop to function successfully in the current and future music business/industry consists of several complex forms of integrated thinking and knowing: cognitive, affective, psychomotor, emotional, and meta-cognitive. A simple way to explain the kinds of thinking and knowing that gifted youth need to develop in the BLRM program can be listed as follows:

(a) Basic/fundamental skills: instrumental and vocal production techniques, all of which must be “performed” perfectly, in action, and usually under the extraordinary pressure of appearing before live audiences or in recording studios (which, therefore, also includes emotional maturity and exceptional confidence); music literacy (e.g., sight-reading, ear training, and music theory), which requires high levels of concentration and self-discipline, and many hours of precise listening to hundreds of recordings of professional musicians past and present;

(b) Improvisation skills: the ability to improvise in a wide range of styles requires all skills and understandings in (a), above, plus a high degree of spontaneous

individuality, creativity, and meta-cognition, which, again, require emotional maturity and an exceptional level of self-efficacy and confidence);

(c) Intuitive and experiential knowledge: Implicit in (a) and (b) above are two additional kinds of knowing that are exceptionally difficult to acquire, and that only develop in “real musical situations,” or “on the bandstand,” meaning in the process of playing and improvising in ensembles, which require the practical and immediate application of all forms of knowledge explained in (a), (b), and (c). These two kinds of knowing have nothing to do with “verbal,” textbook knowledge. These forms of knowledge are “situational”: they only develop and emerge from *being-in* actual musical contexts—*being in the moment of real-time* performances and improvisations with other musicians, who either support one’s efforts as an improviser or who one supports through musical interactions that “backup” a soloist. BLRM deliberately creates a wide range of such “situated learning” contexts to develop these forms of knowing. The ultimate aim is to turn all these forms of knowing into artistic musical actions and creativity so that gifted youth will perform by means of “*knowing without knowing*.” This means that all types of knowing acquired through practice and study become *automatic*—students’ musical skills and understanding blend seamlessly and flow effortlessly in and during their playing and/or singing;

(d) Professional/ethical understandings. Regardless of how exceptional a musician may be, his or her musicianship will be nullified—it will count for nothing—if she or he fails to act *professionally and ethically before, during, and after every interaction with other musicians, contractors, conductors, and so forth*. Professional/ethical knowledge is, therefore, priceless. It can be taught directly by giving direct advice to students who (for example) fail to show up on time for

rehearsals or act unprofessionally during rehearsals and performances (etc.). But professional/ethical knowledge most often develops gradually, “by osmosis”—*by observing and reflecting on* the ways in which professional role models interact respectfully with their colleagues and with students in the BLRM programs.

Professional/ethical understandings must be observed and then “put into practice” in real-time situations, which the structure, operation, and ethical foundation of the BLRM program are also deliberately intended to do.

All the preceding forms of knowing apply equally, but in slightly different ways, as students learn to compose, arrange, and/or conduct music, and as they learn to record and produce recordings.

6. Informal, Non-formal, and Formal Teaching and Learning

Developing and integrating all forms of knowledge that constitute professional musicianship requires a combination of three types of teaching and learning. Each one is characterized by (a) the types of teacher-student interactions that take place in a specific context and (b) specific features of the contexts themselves. The three types of teaching and learning I discuss next are *formal teaching and learning* (or FTL), *informal teaching and learning* (ITL), and *non-formal teaching and learning* (NF-TL). While BLRM and the JCCM curriculum are fundamentally based on ITL and NF-TL, “soft” forms of FTL are also used, if and when appropriate.

(a) Formal teaching and learning is typical of instruction in conservatories, schools, and universities. FTL is abstracted from real-life contexts; it is de-contextualized teaching and learning, which usually makes it difficult to energize

and motivate students, unless the “formal teacher” is naturally charismatic.

Motivation often drops when students fail to see or experience concrete connections between what has to be learned verbally and the personal or professional benefit and application of verbal concepts.

When applied rigidly, or in a “hard” form, FTL amounts to top-down, one-way instruction in which “the teacher” is “at the center” of the learning experience. The teacher exerts his or her power to dominate students’ learning by communicating information in an authoritative, or (too often) in a negative, undemocratic, authoritarian manner. In its hardest form, FTL is little more than indoctrination, not education.

Applied “softly,” however, FTL is efficient and necessary for transmitting certain types of verbal, textbook-type aspects of musicianship (e.g., concepts about music theory, jazz history, etc). The aim is to help students learn how to conceptualize and explain what they are learning how to do, to the extent that this is possible in music and music-making. My research revealed that FTL is applied “*softly*” in the BLRM program and in the JCCM curriculum, by which I mean that FTL is carried out *with deep and patient respect for students’ opinions and answers, acceptance of students’ questions, and with mutual teacher-student respect*. FTL is perfectly acceptable when it is used in this “soft” way.

For example, on-line curricula for and tutoring in music theory (which is included in the JCCM curriculum) is a contemporary form of long-distance FTL that provides many opportunities for teacher-student dialogues that can be highly effective (especially when students can learn at their own pace), just as “soft” FTL can be

effective in “live” classroom situations. As I said above, my research showed that BLRM makes room for efficient and respectful, or “soft,” FTL, when needed.

For example, during rehearsals, BLRM role models often give individual or small groups of students’ short explanations of what and why they should play or sing a passage of music in a certain way. Also, conductors of large ensembles often “direct” and explain what they want a large group to do and/or engage in discussions with students and role models about how to achieve (for example) subtle changes in the “feel” of a style, the phrasing of a melody, etc. The same happens more often in private lessons, as well as during nightly BLRM presentations by role models, who “lecture” in a soft (casual and interactive way) on many topics, including (for example) how to improvise in a certain style, how to arrange in a certain style, and so forth.

I observed several specific examples of FTL at the 2008 and 2012 BLRM programs. On one evening, the renowned jazz and classical trombonist, Marques Young, discussed his background as a child-musician in the southern USA, the difficulties and successes he experienced as a trombone student at Julliard, the responsibilities and challenges involved in the “art of interpreting a score” in classical styles, and strategies for developing one’s own creative improvisations. He also described his “trombone heroes,” who he listened to constantly while learning to perform classical and jazz masterpieces, and told stories about the ups and downs of being a professional performer. In a similar vein, the eminent alto sax player, George Robert, provided an evening FTL experience-lecture on improvisation, which included him modeling different ways of embellishing a melody, and phrasing and constructing a jazz solo. Neither Young nor Roberts “lectured” in the old-fashioned,

“hard” sense of a stern professor reading his lecture notes. What they did was centrally concerned with efficiently transmitting a great deal of advice and information in a short amount of time, and answering students’ questions in the process, which is mostly what soft FTL is good for.

In summary, when FTL is used in the tightly controlled contexts of formal educational institutions (e.g. a conservatoire, a public school) it is highly “intentional,” meaning that it follows a written curriculum (structured in terms of learning objectives, duration, content, methods and assessment). The aim of “hard” FTL is the acquisition of and assessment of student’s verbal knowledge. FTL is also associated with levels of achievement (e.g., diplomas, degrees). Thus, FTL is closely tied to specific institutional entry requirements, grades, testing, and so on. *None of these characteristics apply to BLRM.*

(b) Informal Teaching and Learning

The BLRM programs and the JCCM curriculum put ITL at the center of all students’ learning. ITL refers to teaching-learning contexts that are *not* top-down and one-way, but *reciprocal and highly contextualized*. ITL situations and strategies are flexible, designed specifically for the needs, desires, and abilities of specific learner groups. ITL has aims, of course, but ITL is planned and guided (not dictated) by the role models’ professional “savvy” and experience as their savvy relates to students’ needs and, more largely, by the teaching philosophy that Fritz and Helen Renold adhere to in planning, supervising, and carrying out all BLRM events.

Thus, the BLRM curriculum model is flexible. It centers on musical content that is highly meaningful, applicable, useful, and motivating for learners. The skills, knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions that students learn have high *practical* value—

they are directly related to and applied in the “working musical situations.” The BLRM context in which the student act and learn is complex because it requires students to not only know-*why*, know-*what* (know facts and concepts), but much more importantly, to know-*how* and know-*when* to apply conceptual knowledge.

Informal learning is deepened when students are encouraged and guided to *consciously reflect on their learning experiences* by role models and peers. Thus, and in addition to musical skills, many relevant attitudes, such as openness to other people’s ideas, a sense of responsibility to oneself and others, a disposition to work collaboratively with others, and “a personal work ethic” are encouraged and developed in IFL contexts. Accordingly, the BLRM experience is personally *transformative* for students because it fosters and supports the growth of each students’ personal and musical *identities*. Learning through and from “doing in an authentic context” drives young people’s commitment to lifelong learning. This is extremely obvious in BLRM and the JCCM, where the musical content and related skills and understandings being learned are exactly what professional musicians are applying—effectively, creatively, ethically—in the real world of contemporary music.

The huge amount of documentation provided in the BLRM and JCCM curriculum folios, and my personal research observations before, during, after rehearsals and performances, left no doubt that what I witnessed in 2008 and 2012 is solid and copious evidence that BLRM students are (and always have been) engaged in learning and performing an enormous range of the finest contemporary music of the past and present, as well as cutting-edge styles that are just emerging.

ITL includes teaching and learning scenarios that are intentional (but not formal) and highly experiential. In addition, some learning experiences are intended

to be “incidental”—they are intended to emerge naturally and subtly during and after student-teacher interactions, as students “look back” and reflect on their experiences. *The focus in ITL is on learning by doing—on learning experientially and on learning to be a “reflective practitioner” of each musical style. Accordingly, learning from the mistakes, successes, and advice of fellow students/participants is as important as learning from the expert role models.*

Coaching students, and modeling how things should sound and be performed, are the main ITL teaching strategies. In addition, expert role models-as-coaches know when to “fade” from their role as coaches, when students come to understand and perform what they’ve learned.

As one highly articulate role model explained to me in a long interview I had with him at the end of a one-week BLRM program in 2008:

The BLRM -Jazzaar experience is a really unique artistic-educational experience. It is artistically and socially intense and dynamic. It’s formal in some way, but its also very relaxed and informal. I can’t quite figure out why it’s so effective. I think it’s the way different kinds of formal instruction occur in, but get absorbed by, the holistic, authentic, informal learning processes.

The master-apprentice situations—which we call the “role model-student interactions”—that the BLRM context creates, lead naturally to superbly crafted and executed performances that expand the kids’ confidence, persistence, dedication, musical craftsmanship, aural acuity, and self-esteem—everything you need to be a professional musician in today’s world.

And for me, when I’m working in the BLRM context with these great kids, I learn so much about the strengths and weaknesses of my own teaching

skills. These kids are so smart and so musical that they really challenge me. They've taught me as much as I've taught them. I also have to tell you that teaching in the BLRM situation, and giving advice to the kids in various ways, creates a really strong bond between us. So it's been a really deep emotional experience for me, much more than many gigs I play. It's amazing to be part of these kid's personal and musical development—to watch and hear them “get it” after working so hard, and absorbing everything that surrounds them in this incredibly rich BLRM environment that Fritz and Helen have worked so hard for so long to make available to so many youth. It's really moving to see the kids' faces “light up” when they “get it.”

Fritz and Helen are amazing people—so musical, so dedicated, so selfless, so willing to sacrifice so much of their lives to bring this process to life for all of us.

(c) Non-formal Teaching and Learning

NF-TL refers to learning activities that are largely unplanned. Non-formal learning results largely from “hanging out” and “hanging around” role models and peers in various kinds of daily BLRM events, which are loosely planned to create opportunities for NF-learning to occur naturally. In this sense, the BLRM context is, itself, “the teacher”—an *indirect* teaching tool. Of course, learning via NF-TL is highly related to the personal learning drives and motives of the individual learner, but it can be heard, seen, witnessed, and “assessed” by observing the musical and personal growth of each student. Such growth is often the subject of discussions among role models during and after rehearsals and performances.

In addition, however, a central learning practice that students must engage in by themselves, before and after BLRM and JCCM situations, is solitary practice and listening. This involves close copying of recordings that leads to close imitation and, then, individual creativity in improvisation, arranging, and composing. In the early stages of learning, “the written score” is always secondary to aural experiences. Another basic activity that goes on in parallel with BLRM and JCCM experiences occurs when students learn from each other in pairs and or individually organized sectionals or combos. Through such interactions, students coach each other, and exchange ideas and techniques.

Here is one scholar’s attempt to explain what can happen when NF-TL is in progress. Note that her views apply to some aspects of BLRM and the JCCM curriculum, and to what some of the students do by themselves (outside BLRM). But her observations are only partially applicable to an understanding of NF-TL in the BLRM context because her focus is strictly on young pop/rock musicians who make music after school, and do not have any access to anything like the rich and robust context of the BLRM or the JCCM:

Young popular musicians largely teach themselves to play music, through processes of skill and knowledge acquisition that are both conscious and unconscious. One central early learning practice is solitary and involves purposive and attentive listening linked to the close copying of recordings, as well as more distracted listening leading to close imitation and improvisatory adaptation. The written is always secondary to the aural. Another central practice involves learning from each other in pairs and groups, through casual encounters and organized sessions, both aside from

and during music making. Through such interaction they copy and exchange ideas, knowledge and techniques, learn to play together, including making covers, improvisations and compositions, of original music. (Green, 2002, p. 97)

7. Conclusion

This report of my research on *Bandstand Learning With Role Models* and the *Jazzaar College for Contemporary Music* is not only based on my case studies and ethnographic studies of the BLRM program and my careful examination of the philosophies and curricula involved in both programs, it is also based on (a) my forty-year career as a music professor involved in preparing professional musicians and teachers at six university schools in Canada, the USA, and music around the world, as well as (b) my invited investigations and assessments of tertiary music programs in thirty-nine countries.

With this background, I feel confident in concluding my report by saying that the Jazzaar- BLRM and JCCM programs are among the very finest global examples of how young musicians should be prepared for careers as professional musicians for the present and future worlds of contemporary music. Specific features of these programs have already been explained above, but key features deserve to be highlighted in this concluding section.

The original music that is continually being composed and arranged for each BLRM program of Jazzaar is at the very highest level of professional creativity. The same holds true for the music composed by and for the greatest jazz, R&B, Gospel,

Latin, fusion (etc.) musicians that the BLRM and JCCM make available to student groups from the BLRM music library. Rehearsals, non-formal intervals, and informal workshops are carefully planned as socially affirming and identity-building opportunities for the students. All the professional musician/-role models engaged in BLRM programs are highly effective, ethical, and experienced teachers. They are extraordinarily gifted and inspirational artists and artist-teachers. They know why and how to empower students to solve musical problems independently and creatively, and how to motivate students at every stage of their development.

Given their careful designs and the varied teaching strategies they employ, the BLRM programs and the JCCM curriculum plans guarantee that students will have socially dynamic, master-apprentice interactions that prepare them to produce superbly crafted and executed performances and original compositions and, simultaneously, transform students' personal-ethical dispositions and their sense of responsibility to/for themselves and others.

In summary, current and future Jazzaar/ BLRM /JCCM programs provide gifted students from Switzerland, Europe, and the rest of the world with unparalleled opportunities to developing the musicianship and dispositions they need and desire for professional careers in music and for leadership roles in the music industry now and in the future.

References

- Green, L. (2002). *How popular musicians learn: A way ahead for music education*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Smilde, C.A. (2004). *Lifelong Learning in Music: Research Approach*. A joint lectorate from The North Netherlands Conservatoire and the Royal Conservatoire of the Hague.