

## “A Summer Camp Where Play Time Isn’t Just for Kids”

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Saxophonist Matice Wright took a deep breath and hoped she wouldn’t mess up when the teacher called on her. Owen Dall and Glenn Spiegel also were fidgeting with nerves.

It was the second day of band camp, and performance anxiety was building.

Never mind that Wright is a 41-year-old former Navy navigator, Dall, 55, is a software designer and Spiegel, 58, a senior analyst for the federal government. Unlike many day-campers across the Washington region, these students had life experiences to draw on.

They weren’t antsy preschoolers eager to master papier-mache, or self-conscious middle-schoolers learning to dunk like Shaq. Among the 42 participants at the Maryland Summer Jazz Band Boot Camp held two weeks ago were a former federal judge, a defense industry consultant, lawyers and computer systems analysts, along with a smattering of physicians, teachers, sales representatives and clergy members.

The campers had traveled from as far as New England to a Rockville church to take a shot at dreams they’d closed the case on and stuffed into the backs of their closets.

Spiegel, a Chevy Chase father of three and business owner, said he attended the camp for a “rare opportunity to do music.”

“You’ve got music in you, and you are trying to get it out,” he said. “I know that coming to this camp, I’m going to get encouragement, and I need it. I’m a 58-year-old guy who is not confident about his musical abilities. I listen to great jazz—Coltrane, Ellington, Michael Brecker—and think, ‘I’ll never sound like that.’ I need encouragement to get up there and play the way I play and not be self-conscious, like ‘Oh, I’m going to mess up.’”

Maryland Summer Jazz, which held two three-day summer camps this year, was the brainchild of jazz saxophonist and bandleader Jeff Antoniuk of Annapolis. It costs about \$400 to participate in the camp, which ends with student and faculty performances.

“I had adult students who were taking private lessons from me, and they were interested in expanding their jazz experiences,” said Antoniuk, 40, who has played on about 25 jazz albums and leads a band called Jazz Update that is releasing its first album this summer.

Drawing instructional help from his colleagues in the East Coast jazz community, he held the inaugural session last summer and, when it proved a success, decided to make it an annual event.

For three days, campers come together for eight hours a day for in-depth instruction in everything from theory to hand position. They tested their mettle during improvisation sessions that often sounded so polished that listeners could have sworn the group had played together for years. Lunch was catered by Antoniuk’s wife, Terry.

Campers performed such popular jazz standards as “The Girl From Ipanema,” by Antonio Carlos Jobim, and “All Blues,” by Miles Davis, and more modern tunes such as Pat Metheny’s “Song for Bilbao,” honing the improvisational skills necessary for any good jazz performer.

“That’s what it’s all about—learning how to improvise and feeling comfortable with it,” said Josh Katzen, 57, a shopping center developer who traveled from Boston for the camp. Katzen played trumpet as a child, ventured into piano in high school and plays cello in a jazz quartet and a string quartet with his wife, Amelia.

“That’s also the fun part about playing jazz—playing your part, your solo, then hearing how all the

solos fit together to make music,” Katzen said.

The campers ranged in age from 17 -- Matthew Gallo of Silver Spring, who attended on scholarship because of his exemplary playing — to 75-year-old John Perito of Silver Spring, a retired psychologist who plays piano.

Some of the band campers said they enrolled to polish up their playing; others said they wanted to help their children with music lessons. A few around retirement age said they planned to get into playing for a second career or at least a hobby that would earn them some pocket change.

Among the youngest campers was drummer Andrew Green, 19, of McLean, who switched to jazz 18 months ago after playing classical music for several years. During a session with Antoniuk, Katzen and others, he held his own with the older players on a sexy rendition of “Summertime,” by George Gershwin, from the musical “Porgy and Bess.”

“Even though I don’t know Andrew’s playing that well, I could tell from what I’ve seen today that he would be able to handle it,” Antoniuk said.

Then, turning to Green: “Besides, I kind of like seeing you sweat.”

Dave Lorentz, 61, of Takoma Park — who helped build the old USA Today building in Rosslyn, a half-dozen bridges and 17 Metro stations as a construction ironworker — said he has been playing the piano off and on since teaching himself at age 14. He plans to put together a Kansas City-style jazz band when he retires next year.

“There was straight swing like Benny Goodman and Kansas City-style jazz like Count Basie, which is more in the area that I like,” said Lorentz, founder of Takoma Park JazzFest. “It’s less formally arranged and more intuitive — more blues-based.”

Lorentz was one of the calmer students during a jazz improvisation exercise led by renowned drummer Tony Martucci. The class was, according to the course description, “an improvisation-based group experimenting with instrumentation, texture and group playing,” which meant that at any minute, Martucci might point to any of them to play a solo.

But before he did, there was a lesson.

The idea behind playing jazz, he told them, was to communicate with the audience, to enjoy playing the music.

“You are playing something of your life, no matter what your experiences have been,” Martucci said.

“People won’t know you are doing that, but if you are in that place where there is something of real substance happening, they will get that.”

On improvised pieces he nicknamed “Mold in My Basement Blues” and “Barbecue and Booty,” Martucci’s students took turns. Despite her apprehension, Wright, who said she enrolled for much needed “fun,” played beautifully.

“That was great!” Martucci said after the session.

Spiegel, who said he draws a blank for a second every time he prepares to solo, gave himself an A for incorporating a riff he had heard on the drums into his saxophone solo.

Antoniuk might be giving the campers A’s, too.

“Music has been a part of their lives since they were kids,” he said, “and while a lot of them made the sensible choice to pursue law, being a cop or fill-in-the-blank, once you love music and have played it . . . that love doesn’t go away.”