

Band Workshop Showcases Turn Up the Heat

Picture a dimly lit bar, filled near capacity, warmed by scorching renditions of songs played by bands made up entirely of Blue Bear students. Keep in mind that these students have only played together for the duration of a ten-week quarter. It's amazing what comes together over the course of this short period. The bands pick their set lists during the first meeting of the class and nail down the numbers they've chosen, under the excellent tutelage of one of our instructors. Some teachers join the students on stage and play with them, while others conduct from the side.

Students choose from the Rock & Blues, Blues, Jazz or Beatles Workshops. All are destined for greatness piloted by incredible teachers like Johnny Nitro, Jim Peterson, Bill Spooner and Robe Williams. And occasionally we offer another hit, the Songwriters Workshop with the illustrious Bonnie Hayes. The end result of these workshops is a complete band, structured in a way to give all the players the opportunity to be part of a cohesive unit while taking turns in the forefront.

Before Winter 2001, all of the Workshop Showcases were held at the school in our performance hall. Through the organizational expertise of our office manager Justin Flores, we've ventured out into local clubs. Justin plays bass and also books gigs for the great local band Pedalsped. (Blue Bear co-worker Ryan Billia is Pedalsped's drummer.) Moving the Blue Bear shows to the clubs seemed like a

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WELCOME

to our first annual newsletter! We hope to keep you up-to-date about goings-on in the Blue Bear community with interesting stories on students, staff and scholarship winners (then and now). We'd love to get your comments at bluebearmusic@earthlink.net

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Angela Arnold belts one to the bleachers for Bill Spooner's Saturday Rock & Blues Workshop.



Bill Spooner and Emily Hsuan deliver the goods at The Voodoo Lounge Spring Showcase.

Band Workshop Showcases Turn Up the Heat

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logical decision to Justin. "The reason I thought about it," Flores reflects, "was that the audience coming in to the school was so large that we needed to move it to a club." As a result of this transition into the public arena, more people have become acquainted with Blue Bear. Workshop Bands have appeared at Red Devil Lounge, Paradise Lounge, Tongue & Groove, and most recently, at The Voodoo Lounge. "It's a hell of a lot of work," says Flores, "but it's always worth it. It's a lot of fun."

Our summer shows will be back in the Blue Bear Performance Hall, just in time to break in our new sound system. Look forward to more shows in the clubs in subsequent quarters.

Staff & Teacher Features

Randy Clark's band Crowsong will release a new CD entitled "Western" in July. For more info go to www.crowsong.com or call (415) 995-1976.

Jason Garoian stays up all night most nights and plays guitar through his headphones. Once in a while he goes to sleep.

Michael Gidding has just released his new CD of solo classical guitar works. Inquire at the Blue Bear desk or online at www.michaelgidding.com.

Stu Hamm will be touring this Fall in support of GHS III, the third CD release by Stu, Steve Smith and Frank Gambale. Stu was at the National Guitar Workshop Bass Summit in LA at the end of June, and is writing music for his next album, to be recorded live in SF this Fall.

Richard Kalman and his vocal group CON ALMA have been performing locally. CON ALMA features jazz harmonies like Manhattan Transfer or Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. Their CD "Lush Life Moments" is available by contacting Richard Kalman at richkalman@aol.com.

Raz Kennedy is featured singing leads on the upcoming Joel Harrison CD releases "Wishing Well" and "Free Country" (which also features new vocal sensation Norah Jones). Raz has been in the studio producing vocals for the A*Teens upcoming summer CD release as well as working with Aaron Carter, Wael Kabbani, Los Tigres Del Norte, and Disney's Hilary Duff.

Jessica Will is performing regularly in the Bay Area. Recently, she played an acoustic set for Berkeley's Independent Media Channel 25. This summer she has been asked to appear at BMI's Songwriter's Showcase in Highland Fairgrounds in LA, and by the USA Songwriting Competition at the Knitting Factory, LA. Her debut self-released album "Walk With Me," is available on Monkey Baby Records and can be purchased at www.jessicawill.com, Amoeba Records in SF and Maximum Music, San Rafael.

Staff moonlighting: Financial Director **Carol Snow** will teach at U.C. Berkeley as the Fall 2002 Holloway Poet. And watch for **Justin Flores** performing with ODC/SF for the 2002-03 season. www.odcdance.org



Johnny Nitro instructs Paige Kluger in the fine points of blues bass lines in his Tuesday night Blues Band Workshop.

Johnny Nitro Recovers

Blue Bear teacher Johnny Nitro recently underwent triple bypass surgery. The esteemed San Francisco blues guitarist and bandleader says he is recovering nicely. He seems to have been away for about an eye blink. Having missed Winter Quarter, Johnny's already back at the school where he teaches workshops and blues guitar classes.

He's also back on stage performing Fridays and Sundays at The Saloon on Grant Street in North Beach (below), where he has delivered smoking, classic blues to eager audiences for almost



30 years. Friday nights you can see him playing with his band The Doorslammers. Johnny's wife Silvia plays some mean saxophone in the band and on some evenings is given to climbing atop the bar and traversing its length, blowing her horn like crazy the whole time. On Sundays, Johnny features special guests.

The greats who have joined him include the likes of Paul Butterfield, James Cotton, Freddie Roulette and Charlie Musselwhite.

Johnny's been playing since he was thirteen. Originally from Sacramento, he came to San Francisco in '71 or '72 to attend classes at the Art Institute but ended up staying in the area to play music. Nitro has an inimitable ability to reach out with his blues, to get inside of the audience. People come to dance and connect with the music, and Nitro never disappoints. He's able to keep a place going for hours.

In addition to his classes at the Bear and his playing engagements, Johnny tells us he is looking forward to the release of a new CD project soon. It's great to have Johnny back after his hiatus. Thanks for joining all of us here at Blue Bear in wishing him lasting good health.

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blue bear calendar

Blue Bear Calendar Showcase dates are tentative and subject to change. Please call the school at 415-673-3600 for details.

Summer Quarter Showcases

Blue Bear Performance Hall
 Tuesday, September 10
 Monday, September 16
 Tuesday, September 17

Fall Quarter Begins Monday, September 30

Fall Quarter Showcases
 Vocal Classes
 Tuesday, December 10
 Band Showcases
 Week of December 16

Q: What do these fine musicians have in common?

Peter Apfelbaum
 Pat Benatar & Neil Giraldo
 Charles Brown
 Cake
 Tommy Castro
 Tracy Chapman
 Les Claypool
 Clarence Clemons
 Counting Crows
 Robert Cray
 Alex de Grassi
 Greyboy Allstars
 Bonnie Hayes
 John Lee Hooker
 Bruce Hornsby
 Charlie Hunter
 Bobby McFerrin
 Bonnie Raitt
 Rancid
 Carlos Santana
 Alex Skolnick
 Bill "Sputnik" Spooner
 Tuck & Patti

Question Bear

Blue Bear roving reporter Ryan Billia checked in with a few of our students recently to ask them:

What was your most memorable moment at Blue Bear?

Alison Yee, alto sax, 3 years: My most memorable experience was about a month into my lessons when I discovered that maybe I could actually play this instrument. My fingers didn't hurt, I could reach all the keys and it didn't sound like I was strangling a cat.



Debra Hoiem, guitar: My association with Blue Bear began about four or five years ago. I wasn't a student, I was a parent of a student. My daughter was taking lessons from Caroline Dahl learning boogie-woogie piano. She won a couple of scholarships. I used to drive her here and sit in the car and listen to music or do my lesson plans, as I'm a teacher. One day I decided, "Now, hey, wait a minute. I could be going up there and taking a lesson." So I went upstairs, got a brochure and decided that I too, even in my forties, could begin a musical career. So that's how I ended up starting guitar. One of my funny memories is when Ryan (of Blue Bear front desk fame) would call me to reschedule my lessons, and call me Debbie, not thinking that a mom could be here taking a lesson, but that I was my daughter Rachel's sister. I thought, oh that's really charming. Not only am I learning music, I feel younger.

Kristie and Katie Mersereau, voice lessons, 3 years: We were in a Band Workshop with Robe Williams. We all gathered around. It was our first class and we all had to agree on songs. It was this eclectic group of people. Rocker people, country people, hippies. Everyone gave extremely different music selections. And the worst for us at the time was when this couple picked Ozzy Osbourne "Crazy Train." We looked at each other and we're like, "No way." We wondered, "How is this group going to function together as one unit?" Everyone was giving each other looks like, "What are you doing here?" I just remember Ozzy Osbourne biting bats when I was little, and I thought, "I cannot scream like this guy." But, it ended up that our band totally got along. The song brought us all together. We balanced each other out. We brought out all these sides of us we've never seen before. Everywhere we went, we'd be practicing and people would say, "That song rocks. That Ozzy Osbourne song is amazing." People really responded to the Ozzy song. So we made it our grand finale.



Dennis Criteser, multi-instrumentalist, Blue Bear Director: It was back in 1980 in the middle of my piano lesson with Bonnie Hayes in Room B. I'd been accepted to a Master's program at SF State, having finally decided that I was going to be a vocational rehab counselor when I grew up. Suddenly, mid-lesson, I looked up from the piano and said to Bonnie, "What in the world am I doing?" I could see very clearly how unhappy I would be if I went through with the plan. I decided then and there, at age 29, to commit myself to a life in music, whatever it would bring. Looking back now over a couple decades of Blue Bear memories, I have no regrets!



30th Anniversary

A gathering of the clan

Our 30th Anniversary last summer drew students, staff and Board from almost every year of Blue Bear's life. Here, some Ur-bears. Clockwise from top: Director Dennis Criteser, Director Carol Snow, founder and Board President Steve Savage, founder and honoree Steve Strauss, founder Richard Strauss.


Blue Bear Student Lani Silver Reports

I've been a student at Blue Bear for 25 years. I am one of the happiest people alive because of this amazing music school. I have never had such good teachers in my life. Bill Spooner, Bonnie Hayes, and Erik Walker (and others) are amazing. My life has changed totally because of these three people. I don't know how I got to be so lucky. I can't thank them enough. I've been in Bill and Bonnie's songwriting classes now for five years and I have had to write a song a week, for this whole time. Isn't that amazing? Erik was my piano teacher.

Why do I love Blue Bear so much? 1) it's the teachers. 2) my classmates. 3) and it's the leadership of the school. I vividly remember my first class with Bill, the founder of the Tubes!! Five years ago,

when I signed up for his class, I was in bad shape. I was burnt-out from my work; separating from the love of my life and had just gone through a life-and-death illness. (I lived!) My work was really getting to me. I have an odd and hard career. I am a Holocaust and genocide oral historian, and I've been really busy: 200 million people died in the 20th century from genocide and war. I coordinated 1700 interviews with Holocaust survivors and witnesses over the past 20 years. All of this sadness was burning me out and making me sad. I heard about Auschwitz, Manzanar, Tienanmen Square and Dachau every day for years. I tell you about my work because I needed something as strong and powerful as what I'd studied for decades to pull me out of my funk.

And there was Bill and Bonnie. At the very first class I took with Spooner he said: "What do you want out of this class?" I said, "I want to write something that doesn't sound like a lullaby."

And guess what, my CD is coming out in a month! And one of my songs was played on KPFA, and a friend sang several of my songs in his show at a bookstore! I'm a different person now. Not only am I close to being a rock star (at 54), but I have so much love and music in my life. I love the songs I wrote this semester, "Don't talk to me if You Voted for Bush," "Blues for a Free Tibet," and "Somewhere in Sierra Leone." I advise you to run, don't walk, to sign up for a course by Bill or Bonnie. Or any teacher here. It will change your life. 



Where Are They Now? Blue Bear Scholarship Success Stories

For the past 16 years we've awarded annual scholarships to a handful of talented, eager young musicians. We recently heard from drummer **Joe Kenny**, who won scholarships in 1994, 1995 and 1998, and subsequently went off to Berklee College of Music in Boston. Joe wrote: "I had an amazing experience at Berklee. I followed the Professional Music Major while concentrating on Performance and a bit of Music Education. My plan for the future is to get my Master's in Music Therapy. . . I just left a great six-piece rock band in Boston, but I felt I needed to come back to California. I would not have gone to Berklee or taken the musical adventures I have without Blue Bear. Once again, I want to thank you for everything." Not only has Joe come back to California, he's come back to Blue Bear! We recruited him to drum for **Bonnie Hayes's** Songwriters Band Workshop. Joe can be seen at left in rehearsal with the band in the Blue Bear Performance Hall. And Joe's assessment of his Blue Bear drum instructor, **Shaun McGonegal**? "He is one of the funkier guys I have ever known or ever had the pleasure of learning from." High praise, indeed.



Perhaps the biggest success story to come from the Scholarship Program so far is **Arion Salazar**, scholarship recipient in 1988. Arion first gained some industry success as the bassist for **Fungo Mungo**, who released an album on Island

How do we choose our scholarship recipients?


With the gracious assistance of our Sponsors and Donors, Blue Bear is pleased to offer yearly tuition scholarships to musicians aged 12 to 25. We also grant special scholarships to younger Suzuki guitar students. Through this program we are able to contribute to the musical development of some very talented individuals. This year ten outstanding applicants have been chosen to receive funding.

Auditions are held at the school in two stages, a preliminary and then a final audition. Both are supervised by Director Dennis Criteser, with a professional guitarist or keyboard player as accompanist. For the final

audition, a panel of four or more judges is made up of past or current Blue Bear instructors. All the Scholarship finalists will receive some award for study at Blue Bear, with the top-ranking finalists granted tuition for a year of study including private lessons and the classes and workshops of their choice.

Imagine you've applied for a Blue Bear scholarship and you've arrived for your audition appointment. First, Dennis asks you to perform a technical exercise relative to your area of study. Guitarists play different scales, vocalists run through their vocal range, drummers might demonstrate a paradiddle. Then you'll sing or play two pieces of your choice. Next, an ear test. In

rare cases, young musicians are able to replicate phrases played by the accompanist with uncanny ability. Additionally, you will improvise over a twelve-bar blues with the accompanist in the key and "feel" of your choice. It's fun to play with a pro, and you're cookin'! Finally, the judges will talk with you to determine your degree of enthusiasm and dedication. Of course, you wax eloquent.

In making the final evaluation, all the strengths of the applicants are weighed. Ultimately, the winners have displayed natural talent, a level of accomplishment impressive for their length of study, and a real passion for music. 

Records in 1992. Now Arion is a bona fide rock star as bassist for **Third Eye Blind**. Arion has said that he really valued his year at Blue Bear for the confidence it gave him and for insights into the lifestyles of musicians gained from his teachers. We've been especially pleased and honored since Arion himself began supporting the Scholarship Program in 1999.

For the latest crop of scholarship winners, see the photo below. The next round of auditions will be Spring of 2003; applications become available in January 2003.



on facing page:
top, Arion Salazar (2nd from r) and Third Eye Blind;
below, Joe Kenny at work,
l to r: Bonnie Hayes, Stephanie Ryder, Jim Haile.

at left:
Spotlight on our 2002 Blue Bear Scholarship Winners!
l to r: Alexander McMath, Michelle McDevitt, Thomas Harrington, Alexei Wajchman, Natasha Weidner, Adriana Hayter, Bridgette Wentworth (not pictured: Cecilia Chritz, Angelica Ng, and Ryan Scholle)

**PLEASE
 HELP US WITH
 SCHOLARSHIP
 OUTREACH!**

Next year
 we'd like to have more
 applicants than ever.

*Blue Bear School of Music does not discriminate according to race, color, or national or ethnic origin.
 Blue Bear School of Music operates at Fort Mason Center in co-operation with the Fort Mason Foundation and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.*



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In thanks for gifts of \$500 or more, we will be happy to acknowledge your name(s) as indicated above in Blue Bear's quarterly catalogs and on the website for the next year.

As always, every gift is important to Blue Bear and its students, and we are grateful for your support.



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