



ALL PHOTOS BY ATHENA MUSIC AND LEADERSHIP CAMP

## *Independent Summer Music Camps*

By Marty Steiner

**M**ention summer camp and visions of marshmallows in the campfire, poison ivy, and bee stings come to mind. Perhaps a fond memory about singing around that camp fire also comes back. (We don't write about those other memories!)

But all across this country, and the world, there are music camps that provide a wide variety of summer music training and experience. As this summer fades and the parade of yellow school busses resumes, it might be a good time to present the wide variety of the summer music camps that exist and how they might fit into the music education world.

These summer programs can be a real asset to any school's music program. Sharing these summer resources with your students and their families can provide much-needed assistance to your program with essentially little or no impact on your staff and budget. This article is essentially an addition to the recent (July) *SBO* youth symphony feature that briefly mentioned a few such camps.

While nearly all summer band camps are co-ed, there is one notable exception. Athena Music and Leadership Camp offers a totally different camp experience. Founded ten years ago by Dr. Myrna Rhoden, it is an all-girls, week-long experience with "Women's Leadership through Music" as its stated purpose. Athena only

offers two one-week sessions each year with one in Atlanta, Georgia and the other in St. Cloud, Minnesota. The activities support the "more than just music" approach. These include, especially, team-building skills and exercises.

Rhoden developed this camp concept to encapsulate and develop life skills and perspectives with music ability and discipline as the backdrop. Hailing from Tuskegee, Alabama with music degrees from the University of Alabama and Southern Mississippi, she started her teaching career in 1995. Her skills were immediately recognized and rewarded with the Sallie Mae First Class Teacher Award for Georgia. This award is given to one first year elementary or secondary teacher in each state by the Sallie Mae Corp. This corporation provides funding, education loans and financial services.

Today she leads the music department at Fayetteville (Georgia) High School. This Atlanta suburban community's high school boasts a competitive marching band, winter guard, three concert bands, jazz band, and several chamber ensembles. All units have been recognized for their outstanding performances.

Active at clinics as a judge and at honor bands, Rhoden frequently had young women share their aspirations, many in music, but also with concerns about being successful in any field as



women. Facing a “what are you going to do about it?” challenge, the Athena camp concept began to take form in Rhoden’s mind. With only a ten-year history, some of the early camp alumni already have become new women school band directors.

In an effort to expand the reach of this camp concept, Athena launched a St. Cloud, Minnesota camp this year. This new venture was highly successful and may lead to other locations in the future. Athena plans to have a booth at the Midwest Clinic: International Band and Orchestra Conference in Chicago this December to present this concept.

Athena also began a one-day director’s clinic, now two years old. Underwritten by a Conn-Selmer Educational Partnership, this clinic introduces the concept of leadership training utilizing music

as the vehicle to current band directors. The leadership skills acquired in the music education programs frequently produce our future leaders in many other fields in addition to music.

Another non-traditional summer music camp experience is Camp Jam. Founded in Atlanta in 2004 by Jeff Carlisi, lead guitarist and songwriter with 38 Special, it addresses the current methods and business of pop music. With input from a number of today’s successful performing musicians, it addresses many styles of music including rock, metal, punk, pop, blues and electronic music. The goal is to help musicians become effective band members and develop the self-confidence and discipline to perform in today’s music market. Over 20,000 musicians have already participated in these camps.

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Camp Jam's teen program accepts musicians with at least six months experience on their instrument, 11 to 17 years old. They are placed in bands based on their age, experience and style of musical interest. Each band is challenged to adopt or create their own cover song that will be performed at their final concert performance.

Camp Jam offers day camp, extended day camp, and overnight/resident options. The dinner and evening opportunities for the resident and extended day campers include a side project band (in addition to the assigned day band), jam sessions, open mic time, storyboard creation, and both video soundtrack creation and performances. The camp offers multiple, back-to-back weekly sessions with Weekend Rockover Programs for multi-session campers.

Another multi-week summer music camp is the Berklee College of Music's Five-Week Summer Performance Program. Described as an immersive experience with intensive one-on-one instruction, this Boston camp also provides college credits.



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Perhaps an international experience is of interest. Numerous domestic summer music camps have international venues available. A particularly unique and interesting program is the International French Jazz Summer School. Started in 1995, its sessions run for three weeks. In 2002, this U.K.-based operation added the Cuban Music School in Old Havana.

The inspiration for this article about summer music camps arose out of research for the July 2018 *SBO* youth symphony feature. It was noticed that a number of full-time, professional, and community symphonies also either offered or referenced summer music camps. These are the more traditional summer music camp offerings.

The Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra lists ten camps near Cleveland and over eighty others located all across the country. Many of these camps are associated with various colleges and universities.

With this wide variety of summer music camps available how can a prospective camper find the camp best suited for their needs?



Unlike other areas of music educational opportunities, the resources available to locate and learn about summer music camps are overwhelming, to say the least. A number of online sites list music camps, generally with links and/or direct contact information. Some list overview information about each of the camps. Getting information about summer music camps is incredibly easy.

Some of these resources and the information they offer include several websites such as [www.majoringinmusic.com](http://www.majoringinmusic.com), [www.kidscamps/art/music](http://www.kidscamps/art/music), and [www.nashvillefunforfamilies.com/guide](http://www.nashvillefunforfamilies.com/guide).

After spending a number of weekends

on the road checking out possible summer music camps for a precocious young son who was determined to become a professional musician, Barbra Weidlein created MajoringinMusic.com as a one-stop, online guide to assist with locating the best match of camp offerings to the needs of the student musician and their families. "It's not just about music, it's about life" commented Weidlein. This website is not just about music skills, "it's about entrepreneurship, not just in the sense of building a business but rather in

the business of building a music career, or any other career for that matter."

In spite of its name, Majoring in Music, this website is described as indispensable whether a music career is the goal or just a desire for more music in the camper's life. In addition to listing camps by state, the site offers a comprehensive how-to guide for selecting a camp and even a guide for college students who are seeking employment at a summer music camp.

How do we use all of this potentially overwhelming information to select the

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right summer music camp experience? First of all, ask the young musician in your care what *they* are looking for. Determine the available time, calendar schedule and funds available. And then go through determining some basic logistics such as resident or day camp; international, domestic, or specific area or location; and duration in days or weeks. The current and intended skill level of the student would suggest whether available private lessons in addition to small and larger group activities are desired. Is music just part of the camp experience or is it an intense focus? Is the relationship with a specific community, professional, educational or religious group of any importance? Does the application process require an audition? Is the cost and available financial assistance make the camp accessible to the student and their family?

What do these summer music camps offer to the educational process? No matter what your facility or budget, many summer music camps offer activities, perspectives and even equipment that simply are not available in your program. Fresh ideas, perhaps different from those prevailing at your school, location or in your community, may challenge and cause growth for you and your staff. In this way you will have gone to summer music camp as well!



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