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UCLA summer intensive passes on musical, technical skills to young jazz players



Graduate students Emma Dayhuff, Malachi Whitson, Lenard Simpson and Roni Eytan, among others from UCLA's Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz Performance, are teaching a weeklong virtual jazz intensive for high school students. (Photo Illustration by Ashley Kenney/Assistant Photo editor and Emily Dembinski/Illustrations director)

By [Tara Oldenburg](#)
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The "Global Jazz: Ongoing Conversations" summer intensive is taking tactile education and musical performance online.

The weeklong program for high school students, which begins Monday, will be taught online by graduates of UCLA's Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz Performance as well as campus faculty. Emma Dayhuff, a recent graduate from the Herbie Hancock Institute, said the intensive will cover a variety of topics spanning from improvisation and composition to jazz history and practice techniques. But the intensive is not as strict as a typical classroom – Dayhuff said high school students with varying

levels of familiarity with jazz are welcome to participate in daily private lessons and group workshops that teach universally applicable music theories.

“We’re going to be focusing on ... exciting students to want to learn more on their own – both during the intensive and after,” Dayhuff said. “We’re going to be working on doing (active) listening, connecting things like emotion to sound and harmonic colors.”

Dayhuff will be teaching alongside Malachi Whitson, a recent graduate of the Herbie Hancock Institute, who will be holding a technology class and one-on-one sessions for drum players. Since quarantine has had an effect on almost all musicians who rely on performance for income, Whitson said he is planning to focus on tangible skills like audio and video software usage. He hopes these abilities will prepare budding musicians for outstanding situations that may limit their performance careers, such as the stay-at-home order.

While reaching multiple skill levels and teaching tangible skills are important to the group, Whitson said the intensive will also explore the universality of music by concentrating on diverse, global jazz forms. The program will specifically focus on Irish, Afro-Cuban and African American music to teach students about the various roots and influences that make up jazz composition. The faculty aim to emphasize the universality within global music by focusing on improvisation, he said.

“Improvisation exists in all countries in some shape or another,” Whitson said. “There are some fundamental things ... that most artists need to know ... like reading notation or understanding harmony, but we want to investigate how that relates to other countries (by) ... pointing out connections and investigating those within the realm of improvisation.”

But improvisation is only one aspect of the intensive, said Roni Eytan, another graduate of the institute. There will also be special emphasis placed on composition and students will be encouraged to write their own pieces as a final project. This goal is only the beginning for students, however, as Eytan said he hopes the program can be a stepping stone to greater musical endeavors.

“Obviously (the intensive is) very short, but it will start a process (of) encouragement,” Eytan said. “In my experience with short intensives, (momentum is) initiated that can be valuable in the long term for writing, composing, playing and improvising (jazz).”

Although stay at home orders have created special circumstances for many jazz musicians, Herbie Hancock Institute graduate Lenard Simpson said he is hoping to spark a passion for composition within the students, even in times when performances cannot be held live. A lack of person-to-person contact makes teaching music a challenge since so much of it depends on tactile physical presence between a student and teacher, but he said he hopes to utilize video performances to express more complex ideas without the help of physical examples.

The final day of the intensive will culminate in a video or audio showcase of the participants’ compositions for the rest of the class to view. Although there are plans to teach both universally applicable musical theories and tangible audio software, Simpson said he ultimately hopes to continue a jazz tradition by passing down knowledge from generation to generation.

“We give them information ... but knowledge without wisdom is pointless,” Simpson said. “If (students) have their own profound experience then we’ve done our job and that begins to trickle down because ... now they might be inspired to tell someone else.”