

# Fueling the Passion for Music

**Bonamassa promotes music education first-hand at his in-school clinic** Photo by Marco van Rooijen



**By Brian Reiser**

Joe Bonamassa's Keeping The Blues Alive Foundation fuels the passion for music by funding programs and scholarships for students and teachers who possess the desire for quality music education but lack the resources.

Keeping The Blues Alive Foundation was founded by blues-rock guitar star Joe Bonamassa in order to foster and cultivate a love of music in future generations and to help them acquire the musical skills that will benefit them in all areas of life. As blues and blues-rock have been inspirational forms of music for Joe since he was a small child, the blues genre is the vehicle through which he most often expresses himself musically and, in terms of this organization, inspired its name.

Why is music education so important? For one, research shows that music education enhances students' abilities to comprehend and excel in other subjects, increases their skills in other areas of life and helps to develop language skills in young students. Evidence supports the notion that music education can increase I.Q. It enhances general cognitive development by forming unique neural pathways in the brain, improves spatial-temporal skills and leads to higher scores on standardized testing. Being musical and learning about music also taps into the creativity of the human mind, one of the cornerstones of all cultures. The cliché that music is a universal language is very much true – it speaks to all of our hearts and enhances all of our lives in one way or another.

As an organization, Keeping The Blues Alive (KTBA) makes a difference by helping to finance musical resources in disadvantaged schools and by offering scholarships to students who would not otherwise be able to finance a music education. To further this mission, KTBA partners with such enterprises as

Guitar Center, Ernie Ball and the J&R Adventures record label.

For example, KTBA has created a scholarship for Musicians Institute (MI) – the College of Contemporary Music in Hollywood – called the Joe Bonamassa Torch Bearer Scholarship, offering \$35,000 in tuition credit to support the educational growth of a newly enrolling MI Guitar Program student.

In the public education sector, KTBA instills the message that music is a critical asset to any public education curriculum by spreading awareness about the benefits of adding arts to the core fields of studies – science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) – that are integrated in the classroom. The positive return of investing in the arts can be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Just recently, KTBA announced its third annual music festival with Sixthman and Norwegian Cruise Lines, called Keeping The Blues Alive at Sea. The last cruise was able to raise over \$52,000 to help fund KTBA weekly programming and scholarships! Approximately \$20,000 of this money was donated by Joe Bonamassa, \$5,000 was donated by Norwegian Cruise Lines, and over \$25,000 was raised through the generosity of the cruise guests from their direct donations and participation in various foundation activities aboard the ship. All in all, a great success!

Keeping The Blues Alive Foundation often receives letters of gratitude from teachers and students alike. For example, Mrs. Arellano from Chicago, IL, wrote, "In my name, my teacher's assistant's and my future students for next school year's name, we would love to thank you for your kindness in giving us new musical instruments. I am pretty sure that they will love to play these new instruments during our music time next school year.



Joe Bonamassa, founder of Keeping The Blues Alive Foundation Photo by Rick Gould

Especially playing new, different, and cultural instruments that probably they have never seen nor heard before in their lives." And one student from Muncie, IN, wrote, "Without your donation our band wouldn't be possible! Thank you so much for supporting our classroom and for giving us the gift of music!"

Blues – the unique American art form – has evolved over the past 100 years from African American poetry,

spirituals and work-songs into a thriving musical movement that incorporates a wide array of musical elements and inspiration. In fact, many genres of music, including jazz, rock, R&B and soul, can trace their roots back to the blues. Joe's personal experience and growth within the blues/rock community over the past 20+ years is reflected in the Keeping The Blues Alive Foundation. The website offers a wealth of information about both blues history and contemporary blues, in the interest of continuing to foster a love and passion for the music.

KTBA preaches the message that although music is an innate and accessible outlet for creativity, realizing your dreams in the music industry requires discipline, perseverance and extreme dedication. Becoming a professional musician is a difficult task, and requires an amazing amount of ambition, discipline, education and even financial resources. It is KTBA's mission to help students achieve their goals as aspiring musicians and help get them on the path to success. Today's music students are tomorrow's opera singers, first violinists, maestros and blues guitarists. It is never too early to begin aiding these students on the path to musical success, which in turn helps to breed success in all the various facets of their lives.

To date, KTBA has donated over \$100K in every state in the country. Eight scholarships have provided students access to higher education, and over 35,000 students have gained access to new instruments, sheet music, supplies and field trips!

If you would like to help Joe Bonamassa keep music alive in schools by making a donation or if you know a school that could use some "TLC" in their music department, please visit [keepingthebluesalive.org](http://keepingthebluesalive.org) to learn how to get involved! 🎵

Brian Reiser currently works as the content manager for J&R Adventures and as a copywriter for Keeping The Blues Alive. Before his writing career, Brian earned degrees in both management and philosophy, but he's always had a passion for music. Favorite blues artists include Joe Bonamassa, Keb' Mo', Joanne Shaw Taylor and, of course, B.B. King.

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