
YOUNG GUNS BLAZING

By John Porter

Don't tell the likes of Cole (age 18) and Logan Layman (15), Jake Kulak (16), August Domanchuk (17), Joe Tellmann (16) and Jamiah Rogers (20) that the blues are disappearing, because these talented performers are among the next generation of blues artists working hard to keep the blues thriving. In a world driven by singers manufactured by shows like *The Voice* and *American Idol*, it's encouraging that they found their way despite the lack of the blues on most radio stations. These young guns face the same daily routines and challenges as most youth, but at night they jump on stage and bring down the house playing the blues – which may bring criticism and misunderstanding from their peers, but makes them inspiringly unique. In a way, they are like heroes of the blues, since their passion and commitment to blues culture and music is what will keep the blues alive.

"I discovered the blues on YouTube," says Cole Layman, "when I found *Riviera Paradise*, the Stevie Ray Vaughan

video. It was like someone flipped a switch and I knew this was the kind of music that excited me. I started looking at his influences and that took me deeper and deeper into the blues. I ended up taking the entire family in with me."

The whole family, making up their band *In Layman Terms*, includes his younger sister Logan, who plays bass and handles the vocals, as well as their mother Sandy, manager and occasional drummer. Father Doug heads up their road crew, and their dog Capo is the head of security.

Jake Kulak took a similar route to the blues, discovering the music via YouTube while researching the roots of musician Jack White. "A lot of his songs were covers of older blues songs," says Kulak. "My parents bought me a guitar when I was 11 and I quickly taught myself how to play blues songs. They arranged for me to take guitar lessons, and my guitar teacher had me performing with him in a few months. From



Cole and Logan Layman of *In Layman Terms*
Photo by Wendy Podmenik Darugar



Jake Kulak plays blues and jazz guitar, as well as classical piano
Photo by Exclusive Image

there, I was going to blues open mics. I created my own band and within a year I started gigging and represented The Connecticut Blues Society at the International Blues Challenge (IBC)."

August Domanchuk took a slightly different route, finding his way through another music performance. "I saw a flyer for Fernando Jones' Blues Camp while performing at a Battle of the Bands with my band Trance. I went to the try-out and joined the camp that summer in 2010." Since then, the 17-year-old high school junior has returned to camp several times, and has even received two scholarships to attend the Corona Camp in California.

Joe Tellmann – guitarist in several bands, namely The Joe Tellmann Band – discovered his passion through exposure to his parents' music collection, which had more than a few blues albums. Once he was bitten by the bug, it was only a matter of time before he found his way to the Dayton Blues Society open jams.

The blues has found a way into their systems and refuses to let go

Jamiah Rogers was also introduced to the blues through family ties – receiving hands-on experience starting at three years old from his musician father, Tony Rogers. He recorded his first CD by the age of seven, and has been on the rise in the blues community ever since. He is currently the front man of youth band trio, Jamiah "On Fire" & The Red Machine.

Many of these young performers hone their skills at one or more of the various blues camps throughout the country. Here, they can meet, receive instruction from top blues teachers and performers, network and just feel like kids in love with the blues – instead of outsiders, as they might among their everyday peers.

Rogers found Fernando Jones' Blues Camp at Columbia College to be "a very exciting learning experience, and an opportunity to play blues with other young blues musicians, as well as to make friends. It inspires me to have friends who enjoy playing blues."

Sandy Layman can't say enough about the camps her children have attended. "Our favorites are the Pinetop Perkins Master Class Workshops, with no disrespect to the others we have attended. At the workshops, we see all our closest blues family from around the states, and they are our very best friends. Bob Margolin, who runs the program, has been so much more to us than a workshop leader. He is a mentor, friend and family. He really cares about us and we talk to him all the time to get advice."

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Blues Programs: Inspire Your Budding Artist

By John Porter

Camp and workshop programs dedicated to teaching the blues are a great way for blues' young guns to connect with peers who share their passion, and the experience is bound to be enlightening and form friendships to last a lifetime.

"One of the things I really like about these camps is that most of today's young players can't get experience in the clubs like we did," says master bluesman Bob Margolin of The Pinetop Perkins Foundation's Master Class Workshops. "Muddy Waters used to have to make it possible for Freddie King to play with us when he was a teenager. We give them the opportunity to play in a safe environment."

Aside from these camps, workshops and classes, there are many other youth blues programs throughout the year such as various library musical programs, opportunities with local blues societies, workshops at blues festivals, and the Blues in the Schools (BITS) programs, which expand awareness of the blues to new listeners and help develop the skills of those who participate.

While some of these opportunities come at no cost to the participants, many incur fees in order to cover costs such as running the program and bringing in top musicians as instructors. Several programs, such as Generation Blues which is run by the Blues Foundation, offer scholarships to a number of deserving young musicians each year.

For more information, peruse the websites below, but please note – this list is not comprehensive! Do your homework and ask questions to make sure it's the right fit for you. These programs are essential to continuing the blues into the next generation!

The Alabama Blues Project Summer Blues Camp: www.alabamablues.org

Augusta Heritage Center: augustaheritagecenter.org

B.B. King Museum's Art of Living Smart Summer Program:

www.bbkingmuseum.org/art-of-living-smart-summer-program

Berklee College of Music Summer Programs: www.berklee.edu

Blues in the Schools: www.blues.org/blues-in-the-schools

Blues Lovers United of San Diego's "Blues Music Summer Camp": blusd.org

Delta Blues Museum Blues Classes:

www.deltabluesmuseum.org/programs.asp

Fernando Jones' Blues Camp: www.blueskids.com/#!chicago-il/cdhk

Fur Peace Ranch: furpeaceranch.com/workshops.html

Grand River Blues Camp: www.grandriverblues.org/blues-camp

Harmonica Collective: www.harmonicacollective.com

The Jazz Community Music School, Berkeley, CA:

cjc.edu/community-music-school-youth/summer-youth-programs/girls-jazz-blues-camp

Paisley River Blues Festival Blues Camp, Paisley, Ontario, Canada:

www.paisleyrocks.com

Pinetop Perkins Foundation: www.pinetopperkinsfoundation.org

Pop Ferguson Blues and Heritage Festival: cjblues.com

Port Townsend Acoustic Blues:

centrum.org/port-townsend-acoustic-blues-festival-workshop

Roots Rock Revival: www.rootsrockrevival.com

Safeway Waterfront Blues Festival: www.waterfrontbluesfest.com

Sean Carney Camp Blues: www.artsinohio.com/event/camp-blues-4

Uptown Music Collective: uptowncollective.com/category/uptown-music



Jamiah Rogers of youth band, Jamiah "On Fire" & The Red Machine
Photo by Kurt Swanson

They all describe their experiences with blues camps in glowing terms. Tellmann has participated in the Pinetop Perkins Master Class, attesting, "My experiences at the camp have been fantastic. Everyone there is so nice and welcoming, and instructors like Bob Margolin and Gary Allegretto tell you stories of the blues and how their heroes kept the music alive. Plus, being in Clarksdale, MS, you can't help but feel the blues."

Aside from the instruction of some of the greatest musicians working, these young guns benefit from making connections with artists their own age. For so many young artists, finding that way to fit in and still maintain their art is difficult. But it's impossible for them to live any other way. The blues has found a way into their systems and refuses to let go.

As Logan Layman explains, "Our closest friends have been made at the camps. We stay in touch daily with some through social media and texting, and meet up with them whenever possible. It makes us feel 'connected' and 'normal,' you know? Not many teenagers get the blues, but these friends share that passion with us and it is more than friendship, it is like family."

Kulak, who has also attended the Master Class as well as the Notodden Band Seminar and the Notodden Blues Festival in Norway, agrees: "I have made so many friends at these programs from all over the country and the world! At Pinetop, I look forward to going back every year to see everyone. A lot of us perform every year at the IBCs in Memphis, so I get to see a lot of them twice a year. It is really cool when we go to the IBC – we all support each other and attend each other's shows. I have lots of new friends in Norway now, too. It is a great thing to be able to connect with other kids who share my love of the blues. If I didn't go to these camps, I would not have that."

Bob Margolin, who aside from being a well-known blues figure performing all over the world, is the music director for the Pinetop Perkins Master Class Workshops, and has a great opportunity to observe the efforts of the camps and the

artists who come to learn. "I'm often asked about the future of blues music now that the older generation of legendary musicians is almost gone," he says. "I'm inspired by the young musicians who are carrying on their own blues from original to traditional. I can feel the ghosts of the creators and enjoy the progress of the next generation."

It can be tough keeping young adults focused, but parents of young blues artists face other, unique situations with extra demands in the musical world of rehearsals, concerts, competitions and possible fame. For the parents of these artists, it can be an exhilarating but occasionally exhausting task to nurture talent while helping them navigate the world of adults. But like any parenting challenge, it's often the children themselves that will determine what needs to be done. Sandy Layman has found the way that works for her family; "Love them. LISTEN to them, support them, but follow their lead. It is a fine balance – we don't push too hard, but have to get on them to rehearse when something big is coming up."

Dave Tellmann sees helping his son maintain his focus as one of his primary responsibilities. "It's essential that we keep him focused on what's important: school, being a good person and not getting an ego. There are good role models in blues music, young and old."

Even though the blues community may be nurturing, finding your way can be difficult if you don't have the support of your friends. For most of these young guns, their friends have little – if any – idea about what it is that they do. Some, however, have turned the blues into a learning experience for their school friends.

Kulak says, "My school is very supportive of what I do and has let me introduce the blues to students through presentations in class. When we were discussing the play *The Piano Lesson*, I gave a history of the blues and played some songs on my guitar for the class."

Likewise, the Laymans have become more known since they appeared alongside blues master Tas Cru in one of his Blues in the Schools programs. Now, more of their friends are asking questions about the music and discovering it for themselves. Domanchuk has taken it one step further from introducing his friends to the blues to inspiring them to attend his favorite blues camps.

Cole and Logan Layman, Jake Kulak, August Domanchuk, Joe Tellmann and Jamiah Rogers are just a few of the young performers striving to preserve the tradition of the blues as well as evolve the music into the future. In a genre that is little acknowledged by most youth, blues' young guns stand out in their individuality, talent and passion. 🎵

John Porter is a blues historian, writer and the co-host with Henry Cook of Richmond, VA's Time For The Blues heard locally on WCVE-FM and via the Internet at ideastations.org. He regularly reviews new blues albums at professorjohnnyp.blogspot.com, and was delighted to meet so many future blues stars.