

Camptime Opportunities

Dakota Austin, 12, was nervous but glowing when he stepped on the main stage of last summer's Litchfield Jazz Festival to perform with Dave Brubeck. "As a rule, I never put children on stage with professionals," said Litchfield Jazz Festival founder and Executive Director Vita Muir.

But when Austin approached Brubeck after a question and answer forum, explaining that his dream was to one day play "Take Five" with him, Muir couldn't object. Austin had already pushed the envelope when he gained admission to the Litchfield Jazz Camp in Connecticut—which occurs right before the festival—in 2007, two years shy of its minimum age requirement. In response to Austin's request, Brubeck shrugged and directed him to his sax player, Bobby Militello, who agreed. Hours later, and with no rehearsal, Austin was welcomed onstage by Brubeck. "Bobby played alongside [Dakota] on bended knee and even let Dakota take the solo," Muir said. "It was the moment of a lifetime for him."

Austin was recently accepted to Hartford's Artists Collective after its director saw his performance video. "I usually don't have the guts to ask for something like that," Austin said. "But I wanted to do it."

Unlike Austin's impromptu request, opportunities at camp to play with the masters are usually harder-won. After seeing drummer Terri Lyne Carrington perform live, and sitting in on several of her Berklee classes, trombonist Tyler Ginsberg became determined to join her Summer Jazz Workshop while at Berklee's five-week summer camp. Ginsberg attended the workshops twice before being accepted into Carrington's ensemble during his third year. Carrington's teaching methods encouraged the trombonist to expand his playing. "Instead of giving us charts with chord changes she would yell out emotions, and we would have to convey those emotions," said Ginsberg, who attributes his time with Carrington as a step in his education and has since been offered a full scholarship to Berklee.

Although trumpeter and vocalist Crystal Torres also got the opportuni-



ty to work alongside several of her idols at William Paterson's summer jazz camp in Wayne, N.J., it was the connections made with her fellow campers that have brought her jazz training into a different musical arena.

When Torres was on tour with Roy Hargrove's RH Factor, she ran into a former camp friend who was playing trumpet in Beyoncé Knowles' backup band. She asked her friend for an audition and joined the pop star's touring lineup three months later, with which she has played since.

Though connections made during camps opened Torres up to new gigging opportunities, she, like Austin, believes that chutzpah is necessary to take advantage of them. "It's a combination between connections I made early on at camps, as well as [having] enough confidence to take an opportunity," she said. "And to ask for it."
—Mary Wilcox