

music boils down to 12 notes, "the same 12 notes, all styles...Really, the differences are in the rhythms."

Rock Kamp is in its seventh year. It grew out of the 'one on one.' "It started out as a combination of having students for a couple of years here in Orange that were getting some chops going. They were playing well, and almost across the board, they didn't have anybody to get together with to play. So in a way, it's all work and no play....This is a vehicle for all the kids who have worked hard on this stuff to get together and really get the experience of what it's all about, which is getting with others and playing."

Asked about the rewards of teaching, he comments, "It's one thing forcing somebody for a credit or something and getting this or that, but when you see somebody a few years later and they're still playing, then I know I've done my job. I know I've done it right, without taking it away from them. You have to leave music in every individual's hands. It's too important." His original five students that he taught



Rock Kamp campers and counselors. From left to right: Jeremy Lokabaugh, Jake Gaines, Counselor in training, Winston Givler (in back), Ben Leinhart (partially hidden), Callum Woodrell; Instructor Ian Sass-Basedow (partially hidden in back), Counselor in training, Kyle Guerra, Jane Horton, Studio Administrator, Jay Kole, Bryce Woodrell (with hat), Andy Gaines, Adam Gaines (in back), Jake Perdue, Austin Pullen, Noel Brear, and McCauley Calhoun.

in his living room are all still playing.

He tells his kids not to be intimidated by the unattainable perfection of music videos and edited digital recordings "that have been totally effected and sterilized. They see where they are and think that 'there's no way.'" He draws an analogy to playing basketball. "You go out in your yard and play basketball.

Well, you're not going to be able to dunk it. You're not going to be able to play like Kobe Bryant. But that doesn't mean we don't PLAY," he challenges wide-eyed. "We go out there and do what we can and it's fun, and that's why we do it. But music, we're immediately compared with the professional version."

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The slogan at Orange Music Instruction is "Live music is better." John Kiefer quotes a Zen saying. "In the expert's mind, possibilities are few. But in the beginner's mind, possibilities are endless.' And those are the people I want to play with, and those are the people I want to hang out with and those are these kids right here...When they're getting it, it's everything. There's nothing in the world but what they're doing right there at the moment. And as we all know, right there in the moment is where life is. Anywhere else and you're not living."

He makes a point. "What we're sharing here is something very primal. It goes into our DNA. And modern industrial life will lead us to believe it's not essential. It's not necessary. It's not efficient. We're not producing anything, when what we're producing is spirit. And without that, we've got nothing."

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Band of brothers, left to right: Andy Gaines, Bryce Woodrell, Jane Horton on vocals, Adam Gaines on guitar. Not pictured is Jake Gaines on drums and Callum Woodrell on guitar and vocals.



"Born to be Wild," John Kiefer can't resist jumping in and singing lead to this classic rock and roll anthem.



Above, John Kiefer holds the microphone as McCauley Calhoun displays guitar virtuosity that belies his age. Behind him is Ben Leinhart, another member of "The Attic Band" at Orange Music Instruction. Below, Kiefer proves he's still got his chops as he leads a power trio at the Trashy Ribs and Blues festival recently.

The brick house just up from the corner of Caroline and Main is fairly rocking. Three bands, one in the attic, one on the second floor and one in the basement are simultaneously rehearsing for tomorrow's concert. The overall effect is a cacophony of rim shots, bass runs, wailing vocals and heavy metal guitar licks.

It's the next to the last day of Orange Music Instruction's Rock Kamp. For a dozen or so kids ranging in age from 10 to mid-teens, the past week has been heaven. They wish it would never end. Instead of slouching on a couch with a Game Boy, they have actually been doing something creative and fun, and dare we whisper the word, educational. They've learned something, namely how to play with others, how to come in on time and on the beat, how to arrange the song and give it some dynamics, where to put the solos and the vocals so they don't tread on each other, knowing when to shut up and when to shine. It's a little like playing baseball.

At the head of this merry band of pranksters is an amiable aging rocker, a benevolent Pied Piper of sorts, by the name of John Kiefer. But John does not lure



these children into a cave so he can kill them as the creepy 13th century German legend goes. No, he leads them with his music out of the cave and into the glory of unfettered musical expression. He calls it "passing on the good stuff."

This is unlike any music school you've ever seen. John and his fellow instructors are the music teachers you wish you had when you were a kid. The way he sees it, there's a fence running right through the middle of music, and to climb on top of this fence, you have two ladders, one on each side. "Most people who come up as a musician, have come up on one side or the other: either a schooled, reading, technical place, or a folk pick-it-up-yourself, pick up what you can. The strongest musicians are the ones who've got both sides covered." It's sort of like a sandlot ball player who has been well-schooled in the fundamentals.

"So that's what we're doing here. We're giving them the fundamentals and the reading, the theory, whatever they want...but then also, we're showing them when they leave this place and go out into the world, we give them the skills that they can get with anybody they see."

He cites a troubling statistic, namely that barely 2 percent of high school marching band members go on to play music after they graduate. But he points out, "John Phillips Sousa just ain't cutting it. That's just not the language these kids hear when they go out in the world." He compares that "militaristic, old European style of training," to speaking in Latin. "Latin is a great language. Amazing. We can say it's where we came from. So it's important. But you can study Latin for years, and you go out on the street, and who are you going to be able to converse with? Nobody! So, all this work and nowhere to put it. And that's what happens with music."

John Kiefer came up on the jammin'-on-the-back-porch side. He remembers as a kid, growing up in Brooklyn, NY not making it through even a semester of piano lessons. The teacher lived in a split level; his studio was downstairs. "It was always dark, curtains closed, and he had a nice piano with all the little busts on there, Beethoven and all this. And he smoked a pipe, and I remember he'd be sitting next to me puffing away with these clouds of smoke, and I'm trying my little 'Twinkle Twinkle.' And you know, I didn't practice, I didn't do anything."

Sound familiar, anyone?

Besides, John Kiefer wanted to play baseball; he didn't want to learn Fur Elise. And remember those plastic tonette thingies they passed out in grade school? John was just as confused by those as the rest of us. He wanted to play bugle, like he heard in camp; that and more baseball. When they passed out letters to the parents that said, "'Your child has shown musical ability and so will be able to take an instrument in school band,' I didn't get one," snorts this music instructor.

Then, when he was in the seventh grade, his mom took him to a midnight John Denver concert, and that



John Kiefer's other enduring passion is baseball. When he was young, baseball won out over music.



Strumming an acoustic when he was first learning to play.

hooked him. Still, "it took me to age 18 to get over this idea that I didn't have any musical ability; didn't show any. So, at that point I really said, 'I don't care if I don't have any musical ability. I'm going to get this thing and try to figure it out.'"

He bought a guitar from a little shop in Greenwich Village and a book of chords. "So I learned my alphabet. I learned an A chord, a B chord, a C chord, a D chord, and after a few months I said, 'alright, I guess I need a song book.'" He found an old typewritten collection of Woody Guthrie songs at the library. Every evening when he came home from work, he'd sit down with his guitar and "bang away."

"What I had to do was break everything down to its easiest step for me to teach myself. So, with that, I think that's part of what I bring in here now in terms of instruction. You open up most music books and by the third page it's like way up here!" He holds his hand over his head. "Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! So there you go; you put it down. I can't do this."

John Kiefer went on a walkabout instead. "I went on my little '60s Promised Land dream and hitchhiked out to California, and went up and down the coast, and then called home for some money." His mom wired him \$100 and, even better, a 30-day bus ticket. "You can go wherever you want any time for 30 days."

The walkabout turned into a quest. "What am I going to do for eight hours a day for the next 50 years of my life. What am I going to do? What do I want to do? And I looked at everybody I passed by. The bus driver on the bus; is that something I'd like to do? It'd be kinda cool. I'd get to the Grand Canyon and I'd see the rangers. Ranger, that would be pretty awesome. So I'd go in the ranger station and talk to them. What's it like to be a ranger?"

The walkabout ended when he realized "the only thing that I wanted to do for eight hours a day for 50 years is play guitar even though, at that point, I'd only been playing for a year. But, this is all I can do. I'm sorry, I can't do an office job. It would just be death to me. So, for good or ill, here we go."

John Kiefer says "here we go" a lot. He quotes a line from Saturday Night Live. "Music (baseball) has been bery bery good to me.' That's all I did, is put my time into something that I loved, and try to figure out a way to make a living doing it. So, at any rate, at that point I said 'well I better actually learn how to play.'"

By this time, he was living in Northern Virginia. He enrolled in the community college there, and called up the music instructor to see if he could join his class, and the instructor, a jazz guy, asked him 'Are you any good?' And I say, 'Yeah.' And he said, 'Who said?'" John was caught speechless. "It just stopped me dead in my tracks." He muttered something about friends and family, but still managed to get into the class, where the same instructor interrupted a lesson to deliver the following off-the-cuff homily.

"You know what?" said the instructor. "I don't know many rich musicians. In fact I don't know any. But I know a lot of happy musicians." John had an epiphany. "At that point, in my first community college class, my confirmation that I'm on the right path. And here we go."

He enrolled at VCU to study music. "It was a great musical scene. Got a band together, and spent all my grant money on the biggest amplifier I could buy, and then I never went back to class." He winces, a tad shamefaced. It's just that he had bands to play with and places to go first.

He shared a house with several roommates and, "only two of us played; the other two just sitting on the couch. So 'come on, we need a bass player, we need a drummer,'" he remembers saying to them. And it worked; he actually taught those guys how to play. That's how he learned he had a gift for teaching. "You can just take anybody off the couch and get him in with an instrument... I mean we got signed to a record label after a year and a half of playing," he marvels.

The band's name was Always August. They played "a conglomeration of folk, punk rock, psychedellic, and anything we could manage." They were signed by an independent record label just before alternative and the Seattle sound went mainstream. They toured for five years, playing mostly college towns; two months on the road; one month off. They cut three records.

It couldn't last forever. "You know the way bands go... little squabbles here and there, and of course at that time I also had met this wonderful young lady and she smelt a lot better than the four other guys in the van." He flashes his snaggle-toothed grin. "We've been together ever since." He refers to Kristen as "definitely my better half."

So John Kiefer went back to school. "I decided I needed to learn exactly what it is I'm doing. I wanted the other side of the fence because I had come up self-taught, picking up from anybody I could. But I couldn't read. I didn't know anything really about theory or any of that. It was all just instinct kind of."

His first guitar instructor at VCU noticed that he played left handed; advised him "to turn that thing around." John

asked why. "And his response to me, and this is a professor at a university, he said 'they don't make left handed pianos do they?'" John gets an expression on his face like he stepped in something icky. "Does that even make sense?" he asks incredulously. This guy had obviously never heard of Jimi Hendrix. John asked for and got another teacher. He completed his music education degree, qualifying him to teach instrumental music K-12. He majored in guitar and woodwinds, even studied classical music, which this rock and roller admits gave him second thoughts at first. "But it was the best thing in the world. It totally opened me up." He discovered Brazilian



John Kiefer has run Orange Music Instruction since shortly after he moved to Orange in 2000. His teaching philosophy is to take it slow and prepare his students so they can play for fun with others.

style music played on a nylon string guitar. He learned about music theory, ear training, "the whole bit. I loved every minute of it." He was now climbing the ladder on the other side of the fence. The sandlot ball player was picking up some fundamentals.

From there he and Kristen moved to the Charlottesville area where he taught music, and then they found the house on Belleview in Orange. He started out just teaching Saturdays in his living room, until Kristen kicked him down to the basement. Lesson slots soon filled up. He brought in other instructors "because there was a waiting list. There were more people wanting music instruction in Orange than I ever imagined." He moved to a space in the Food Lion Shopping Center, taught at Grymes, and this past November moved to the

current space at 161 West Main. "This is great. It's got more of that homey vibe. The best music starts at home." About 100 students come here weekly to be taught by a half dozen instructors in all manner of instruments, from piano to violin. But, of course the most popular instrument is the supremely versatile and portable guitar.

The Rock Kamp kids have just finished lunch. It's now time for them to showcase their talents to each other, a dress rehearsal for tomorrow's concert. "Why don't you guys huddle up in your practice rooms, write out your set list, talk about any last minute things," advises John as he slurps beef stew between fielding questions.

There is a tremendous vibe going on here. As the kids perform for each other, John is all over the place with a video camera in his hand. He films; he sings back up; he encourages, he adjusts volume levels. Drummers pound, lead guitarists soar, head-bangers bang, singers wail and shout, sometimes reading lyrics off of their cell phones. When it's the attic band's turn, everyone is blown away by McCauley Calhoun's precision lead guitar work. Vibrato, bending notes, lickety-split licks, concise structured solos that start and end on time; he's got it down. Looking like he's 10 years old, he's been taking lessons here for three years. "I was still just picking my nose at that age," marvels Kiefer.

John prefers teaching private lessons, what he calls, "the one on one thing... You know, I think I'm pretty good at it. You don't have to be a policeman...One on one, everybody can be themselves." He also notes that "often the best players are the worst teachers because if it came naturally to them, they didn't have to work. They don't understand when somebody has to work at it." But he knows what it feels like to be a beginner. Recently he picked up banjo and mandolin to relive that experience and make him a better teacher.

"The approaches we take here are very personal, very individual. Everybody moves at their own speed. You can't yank the skin off the snake; you have to let it fall off," he says prophetically. "We can get anybody playing music. A couple of chords and you're into hundreds of songs, and you're participating."

Incidentally, being left handed is a plus for a teacher because as he sits across from you, the student, his hands are lined up just like yours in a mirror. When he's working with beginners, "The first thing we do is introduce you to your locomotive hand, which is your picking hand. Your picking hand is your locomotive, your speed, your chugga-chugga." The other hand, the fingering hand, the one that makes the notes; he does what he calls "target practice," just hitting individual notes here and there; maybe a scale.

By the way, here's another baseball analogy: playing guitar, the right hand and the left hand are doing two totally different things, just like you are at the top and bottom of the inning. Hitting and fielding. "At its essence, music is notes plus rhythms," says Kiefer. All western