



Woke up this morning, had them Blues Camp Kids blues...

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March 2 | The young musicians of Blues Camp Kids jam together - and with Alabama bluesman Willie King - while learning about life and the blues.

The Blues Camp Kids, the prodigious brainchild of the Alabama Blues Project, showcased their mature musical talent alongside Willie King Tuesday evening as part of the University's African American Heritage Week.

The group's founder Debbie Bond said that the tight-knit group of kids, ages 11 to 18, is "the crème de la crème."

Most of the students have been playing music since an early age and are all part of the Alabama Blues Project. The group of kids took the stage before the legendary Willie King, who was recently voted best traditional blues artist of the year.

Bond, the blues musician and founder of the Blues Camp Kids, has been taking in kids from all walks of life since 1998 and introducing them to the world of blues. The program brings in 60 new students each year, provides students with extensive training and teaches them a "life skills curriculum." From housing projects, Girls and Boys Clubs and foster homes, the project has grown in size and popularity.



Willie King gets down with the musicians of Blues Camp Kids.

"We found that after starting to work with at risk kids, the program expanded over time," Bond said.

According to the Alabama Blues Project website, the project is dedicated to the preservation of blues music as a traditional and contemporary art form, reaching audiences that include at-risk or troubled youth. The programs teach self-esteem, discipline, cross cultural understanding, interaction and teamwork.

The kids voluntarily gather for weekly practice and take the music very seriously, Bond said. For some, the music shapes their lives.



Amos, who plays the harmonica and sings vocals in the band, said that it keeps him out of trouble. He said that the music is his life and playing is fun.

"I like singing the blues," he said. "It's like a gene."

Maggi, who has played the electric guitar since fourth grade, said that the people are really nice and that they know a lot about the blues.

"You just get such a rush playing in front of people," she said.

"It's nice to know that there are a lot of people who enjoy the blues."

Continued on next Page



After undergoing extensive training with renowned blues musicians including Willie King, Caroline Shine, B.J. Miller and Gary Edmunds, the band now plays on their own. They perform at community events such as City Fest and the Crawfish Festival.

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Comprised of seven kids on different instruments and four vocalists, the band covers blues tunes like "Use the Blues," "Hound Dog" and the late Ray Charles' "What I Say." The group is completely synchronized with animated dancing and music solos.

Although they are largely blues based, the band helps to show how blues is influential in modern-day music by incorporating some segments of hip-hop and rock.

Flowing from one song to the next, they requested that Willie King join them in their soulful finale "Stormy Monday."

Amos wants to take the blues with him into adulthood, hoping to one day involve music in his career.

"Music is life," he said. "It's what you breathe, that's basically my life."