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Blues project teaches lessons in music, life

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Staff Writer
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TUSCALOOSA | Blues bands aren't as common of a sight in Alabama as they used to be.

Some might say that the demise of this form of music is imminent because it no longer appeals to young people. But since 1998, a group of young boys and girls from a variety of backgrounds has come together to do nothing but learn and play the blues.

"The reason I like being in the Alabama Blues Band is because I really enjoy what I'm doing in my life," said a student named Tasheka from Tuscaloosa. "Blues Band keeps me going places and out of the streets after school and helps me with my drumming skills," she said. "I have learned the true meaning of blues and learned music touches people's hearts, and I love that."

Debbie Bond, the program director for the Alabama Blues Project, said she initially started the Alabama Blues Project in 1998 to keep Alabama's blues heritage alive and had no intention of teaching the music to children.

"There was this wonderful blues heritage in the state that was being overlooked, so myself and the co-founder wanted a way to bring attention to the blues artists still alive and the ones in the past," Bond said. "The program wasn't originally intended to work with kids but it just kind of happened like that."

The beginning blues camp meets every Tuesday, and the advanced camp meets every Wednesday at Presbyterian Covenant for lessons on blues history, life skills and, of course, how to play the blues.

They accept 50 new students a year.

The advanced band will be performing at the Tuscaloosa Crawfish Festival on April 8.

"I have learned that being in a band, a real band, is more than just playing the right notes," said Sam, a Tuscaloosa native in the advanced band. "It's about communication. There must be an intimate musical relationship between everyone in the band, and if one person isn't contributing to the whole, everyone is thrown off."



Arkeithan Bivins, the 10-year-old son of Adian and Chris Bivins sings "The Blues is Allright" during Summertime Blues Camp in this 2002 photo.
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