

The **Desert Music Institute** is based on the premise that if the music is relevant to the aspiring musician, they can learn faster and stick with it longer than with traditional music education models. If we as educators take the time to learn the songs that the kids love, they will be stoked! They often get super motivated to learn these songs and end up practicing without prodding from the parents. This helps the parent/kid dynamic because the parent no longer needs to nag the kid to practice.

Kids who learn the popular songs of their generation often get kudos from their peers who like the same songs. Their cool factor goes up, their confidence soars, and the results are impressive.

If we encourage the kids to express themselves they will play with passion and emotion. We want our students to practice improvising, so they can channel their creativity with increasing dexterity as their skill set grows. Bach and Mozart and Chopin and virtually all the great composers were fabulous improvisers. If we teach our students to improvise, their energy and commitment will rise along with their inspiration.

In a traditional music education, the student is usually not allowed to choose what notes they play. The ones who choose their own notes are people with names like Beethoven, Brahms, etc. The students are judged by how accurately they reproduce the ideas written by others. We take a different approach.

We also want to show the students how to adapt a song to bring out the best of who is playing with them at that moment. If Wynton Marsalis sits in with your band and you don't give him a solo because the song "doesn't have a trumpet solo", then you are making a big mistake! When you have a good ear you don't get flustered when someone new steps into your band. You let them shine, and adapt to the moment.

We believe in playing multiple instruments! Every instrument has a different lesson to teach. The more instruments you learn to play, the deeper your understanding of the inner workings of the music. You will play better with others if you know a little bit about how to play their part and not just yours. Plus, once you learn your first instrument, the second is easier, the third is even easier, the fourth is easier still, and so on! All the instruments play the same 12 notes. Once you understand how those 12 notes can be strung together to make musical ideas, then learning a new instrument gets a whole lot easier.

We teach the Nashville Numbering System. It is the type of music theory that is most commonly used among pro session musicians who are called in to play on other people's albums. It is key flexible. That is, if the musician learns a song in the key of C, then they will be able to play that same song in different keys such as A, B flat, D, F sharp, etc.

When we are key flexible we are able to quickly change the key of a song we know in order to accommodate a singer who has a higher or lower pitched voice. We like to bring out the best music out of the assembled group, and that often means changing the key to adapt to the singer who is present on that day.

Our program is ear based. We recognize that great musicians need great ears. Being a great sight reader can be very helpful but having great ears is even more useful when playing modern music like rock, soul, pop, funk, R&B, blues, folk, country, bluegrass, etc.

We encourage jamming! What we mean by jamming is not over-rehearsing to the point of nausea! We like to play songs because they are fun, and then move on to another song before it becomes not fun! We believe there would be more musicians in the world soothing the ears and minds of the world if only music education was made more fun!

We also mean by the word jamming that we are not focused on playing the same arrangement every time. We want to be present in the moment the music is happening and communicate through our body language and our instrument what our intention is at that moment.

We don't want to play too loud! Too many musicians have hearing loss from playing with musicians who turn their amps up way too loud! Kids have great hearing. We aim to keep it that way!

Erik Kramer-Webb
Co-Founder, California Climbing School
(760) 625-7115
www.californiaclimbingschool.com