

Weird, Wacky and potentially dangerous lecture at ISB 2023 Tues June 6th 10am

- 1) “Why would my kid come to a 5 day all day workshop when they barely play the bass for 20 min per day? They are not ready for that.” — A parent of one of my students before I made kcbassworkshop. My response “Your kid is not ready to walk around Disneyland all day for many days but, you will take em at the youngest of ages. This is Disneyland for bass players.” **THIS ENSEMBLE IS A IMPROVISED PLAY WRITTEN DURING THE BASS EVENT (USUALLY 5 DAYS).** Many people have asked me to publish them so now I’m offering one “When Gerbils Attack”.
- 2) My personal Inspiration/Sources. My sisters and childhood would put on made up plays when I was very young 4-8. The whole block would come see it. I wasn’t very out-going (i.e. I’m not a theatre person). To be a better YB teacher I watch lots of kids cartoons; SpongeBob was a personal fav. Brak from Space Ghost is also. I used in some lines from these things for some of these plays. Dr. Seuss books. I use my sense of humor of course but, I’d have to say that I’m just pulling from all of these places. **I do think it is vital to watch whatever kids are checking out to make sure you connect.**
- 3) Perform new published version of play When Gerbils Attack with assembled ISB crew.
- 4) Play the weird and wacky theme song aka Summertime for bass from Jammin on the Bass vol. 1 by J. Hamil (published see [johnnyhamil.com](http://johnnyhamil.com) in store). This is a parody on Summertime by Gershwin.

Weird and Wacky Potentially Dangerous  
We Might lose someone or Put out and Eye!  
Weird and Wacky Potentially Dangerous  
Creativity is the only way to survive!

**PARODY- is a great way to get young kids connected to the music and I use it a lot for these plays. I really want them to leave the week with learning great things that will last a lifetime.**

5) How do you make a play on your own or add more personal things to the published one?

**The first day** you ask a few crazy questions such as these and write down what they say on a billboard..... If you had a super power what would it be? ( I love having them look thru the magic bridge at another student and have them see a power). If your rosin could talk what would it say? What is your Ultimate Mash up movie? StarwarsGodzilla, SpiderHellokitty, etc. Do you have any weird things your body can do? Double joints, Cross eyes, wiggle ears, dances, handshakes, etc. Favorite mode of transportation... and let’s not be practical? What is your superhero name or Nickname? The best 2 evil villians of all time and who would in a cage match?

I improv all of these questions as many times I’m just talking to the students about what they are into.... Then the questions pour out of me. If I don’t get a smile out of the ? I usually don’t get good stuff to use in final play. Sometimes the kids just start writing the play itself other times they don’t see any connection to final product. I just use their answers to create the script. I split these ? Up with just rehearsing the music (seperate of any acting). I usually use the material that the kids are rehearsing in the Bass Orchestra. Most of these kids are not old enough or advanced enough to read the parts. They need help and this is the way to get them ready for final concert in both small ensemble and large. The craziness helps relieve any tension they maybe feeling as the workshops can be overwhelming. I also use some ? Just to

let them sit down for a bit while still working on the main goal. Also just asking them about what they love (outside of bass) is super helpful to making them feel welcomed. You also get them to talk about other things they can do well or have fun doing.

The first day I assess the students and what they need to do to get better. Many times I want work on their posture or bowing....so I prefer the George Vance show them a song by rote so they are watching to learn posture and bow speed, weight, and placement rather than intellectualizing it. If I realize they would be better off reading the music then we do that. I also want to know if they are thinking fingerings, letters, counting, etc. It's easy to do with games or just review of bass orch music. The review helps them remove the fear of not being able to play the final concerts with the other students (usually mind blowing intimidating students)

**Second Day** I start talking about scope of the play... Who is the hero, villain, and why and how are they in conflict? Then by now I know what I need to focus on musically/ technically so I can also just work on that and throw some questions in. The main thing is to send them out of the room with creative ideas flowing about how crazy this final show is going to be... We will always be better than any of the older more advanced ensembles. And to be honest when you have the Laws of Awesome and the Magic Toenail by your side it's actually true.....

**3rd Day:** I sometimes want them to focus on the technical and the music side so I tell them we put a pause on the script and get to the basics. Again I use games to help make it fun if I need. At this point I start asking about costumes and what people have... This can be anything they like to bring to having a parent have trunks of crazy stuff or going to the store to buy "an evil Giraffe with tiny wings".

**4th day:** Need to hash out the scripts and final rehearsal for technical things. We talk about action if there is any (the younger they are the less movement I want since just holding the bass is hard). I spend a great deal and usually don't sleep that night writing the script... depending on how good I taught the script writes itself and the kids love it the next day. This part is sheer bliss/exhaustion so be prepared to sleep for a week after the workshop....But it's super worth it.

**Parent Help:** I fortunately have a parent helper do the editing on making the scripts easy to read and sometimes taking the notes on the what the kids responses. I have also had the parents help as narrator, some minor characters, Wardrobe (one parents was clearly way into this and had a whole chest full of stuff), and other musical instruments (piano, guitar, drums, it doesn't matter as long as they already play). I Highly recommend you use their help unless the kids are nearing teenage years then leave them out.

**5th day:** I just run the play as many times as I can (3xs is a good number). Each time the focus gets better and that's your job to focus them. Cause it usually goes different at the performance (most are first time on stage and kids that really don't know how to play the bass yet). My advice is the younger the kid the less they speak or act without a group of them doing so. Let the narrator take most of the lines if needed. Also use a pianist or other advanced bassist if needed. You do not want to test them performance wise on this part of the concert. Let that be their solo performance and large bass orchestra. This one is built not to fail for them.

**Performance:** I get them all together before we start to thank them for the best week of my life like we are at the last hours of Disneyland and my funnel cake/cottoncandy/french fry intake mash up with as many whirly rides may just be the end of me but I'm so stoked to end it all on the stage with them tonight.... And then I segue into telling them all to go to the advanced kids and tell them we are really sorry that we will be so amazing that it will be impossible to go on after us.... But that's why you don't follow a potentially dangerous group such as ours.... So whenever they step out on stage their only goal is to unleash the fun from inside. This speech

has given myself goosebumps and yes I stole it from Goonies movie which maybe where I got the Put out an eye line? **I am honored to stand on stage with each one of them as they all blow me away with each one of their performances. I'd rather do that than anything and so should you. Cause when you really get a young kid to create something it's so much better than the adult mind. More adults need to listen to the young on a daily basis.**

**Games** I love to use most.... 1)Pass it, 2)names of notes (i.e. all of my names are Star Wars, Harry Potter etc.) 3) Improvisation/Jam with the rhythms they are needing reinforcement of... 4) either count it or come up with a secret message etc. 5) Trash ball 6) invent a game as it doesn't matter as long as you are able to access what your group can do.

It is important that I **program the Bass orch concert with all levels and ages present.** I have failed certain groups in early years because I wasn't thinking absolute beginners to college level students or just programing the music I wanted to hear. It isn't easy to program these things since you are asking to please everyone.... But it is more than possible. I am more than proud of my arrangements in this manner. So overall prep usually I start after the end of the summer workshop season.

I've had 15 years of doing these plays. I'd hate for anyone to think this isn't a lot of work or that It's a waste of time. It's the opposite. **I've had so many young kids love to be at the workshop that normally wouldn't want to hang out for a whole week at age 3-8 range. I also find if the students are not taking private lessons they can not wait to come back. This group really helps alleviating this issue. It is imperative to have a place for all levels of performance since it's the bass family support of each other greatest strength.** This group isn't just for the kids that cannot play as it's creativity sometimes the advanced kids want to be in it.

5) These **great memories** will help you understand it's importance.

I only had one student enrolled in the class at a new out of town workshop. The person parent met me at the door and said. My kid plays the bass at school and mildly likes it and doesn't really want to stay more than an hour at this 5 day workshop.... I asked her to give me til lunch. I had so much fun with him that other students (two that didn't play bass yet) were playing games with me all morning. I said goodbye to him and went to lunch. After the lunch the parent came up to me and said "what did you do to my kid?". Those three students went on to playing a pretty high level (one is a music major in college now). The young bassist program exploded at the workshop which could have easily just been older age groups.

I had an advanced kid who was done with the George Vance books but, still not in 4th grade. I assumed he would want to move on to the other ensembles. He said yes to me..... Then proceeded to cry to his mom. She sent me a discreet message about the issue so he got to be in the ensemble til he decided to move on. In the middle of the script we had him play the opening of the dragonneti (nanny) concerto along with almost leading things. He always brought the coolest ideas for the scripts. He is a freshman in high school and playing at virtuosic level.

6) Reasons for having this ensemble in your bass event>

"Imagination is More Important than Knowledge"- Einstein

1) **A Place for them** at the workshop: give them the space to compete with the more experienced kids (i.e. get them to want to come back to the workshop the next year and not

see it as a boring event). This is something that these events have that make it hard to reach these kids. Disneyland has a place for all ages. Where is the place for the 3 year olds or the non readers? Public school kids? etc. Disneyland has thought of every age group.

2) **You can learn more about your students** thru this creative process than you ever will otherwise. They really open up about themselves and you can connect with them on a much more meaningful way. This will make you a much more effective teacher when you say now lets practice “scales, exercises, theory, sight-reading, You should attend this week long bass event, etc”. Plus you may find easier ways to get to the desired results.

3) **Self expression is important to nurture.** This is a fun way for them to find it. If they came up with some part of the character they will perform better and connect better.

4) **Have a fun way to practice technique/sight reading/ improv/ etc. without them really knowing they are doing so.** Vic Wooten thoughts on music is a language and no-one admonish you if you say something wrong they just repeat the correct answer.

5) **Grow your own workshop family support system in your city/studio.** There needs to be a workshop for YB in every city as well as YB teachers that support such an event. This class out of all of the others helped my studio/kcbass than anything else. The youngest kid age 3 will be your support system for the next 10-15 years if you do your job correctly. If you are looking at a great career consider doing what I do in your home town. The bass world needs 10,000 versions of me.

7). Quotes from colleagues who've watched it in action over the past years.

“The key to developing imagination & creativity is quite simply play. (After all, we ‘play’ music.) Weird & Wacky is a fun, hilarious, brilliant, inspiring game where everyone wins, learns, explores, and creates.” Dr. Hans Sturm UNL Bass Instructor and ISB President.

“Weird and wacky class is really important. Kids learn best when they are having fun, and when creativity is flowing. Johnny’s approach helps these things happen in a framework where kids feel comfortable and free. They are practicing their pieces and techniques together in a fun and engaging way.” Tracy Rowell CIM Young Bassists instructor

8) Highlights from previous scripts: Note: I’ve put the full scripts up on a webpage at [johnnyhamil.com](http://johnnyhamil.com) for all to read.

*Scene opens with all standing waving tree like arms!*

Narrator: Meanwhile in the dimension of Bassa-tron at the headquarters of the one and only Lowvengers are going thru their daily training.

*Action: All sway like trees and then bounce when names are called.*

Freeze Frame (who has the power to freeze time, and can make all your pictures look good, and also can levitate). Farth Dader (who controls all the

flies and has laser which come from his eyes, he also has the most awesomely high squeaky voice in the land) and NO Speed Limit (nicknamed Speed-o-meter) (is so fast he can run across the galaxy and also has just the weirdest goofy eyes which distract all evil villains) .

And now you've been waiting all of the past 60 seconds just to see the 2nd most incredible sound in the world (1st one being the sound of rubbing two pickles together). This time we will witness it in slow motion.....

*Make sound and move thumb*

NARRATOR: So the battle wages on between the Skittles (ALL STOP ON THE SKITTLES SIDE AND WIGGLE THEIR BACKSIDES) and the PIZZA (ALL STOP ON THE PIZZA SIDE AND LAUGH IN A FUNNY FASHION)

Why did this conflict begin you wonder? It happened so long ago that no one really knows . . .

Scholars believe that it was because...because...because...because... This epic battle will definitely hold up the morale values of because... and if one...if one side doesn't win then we will lose because forever. Then no one will ever, ever, ever, never . . . Because!!!

NARRATOR: Meanwhile... Venusian Bass trees were swaying in harmony. They were concerned that the War of Because was tearing the universe apart. Did they need to intercede?

"We can't stop playing the beautiful Instruments." " I love my Bass so much, I am going to stop fighting."

ALL SAY: "I love to lick the rosin." Mmmmm...

ALL PAUSE

That is very, very, very potentially dangerous.

NARRATION: So all is right in the world as the music of Bass soothed the Pizza People and Skittles People. Over the years many of the two tribes would think it was silly that they had fought for so long just because... because... because... because. And each year they came together for a big festival in which they ate Skittle Pizza and danced the night away.