



EMPOWERING KIDS TO DANCE TO THE DRUMMER WITHIN Youth Advancement Through Music and Art (YATMA)

One two three, one two three, one two three. . .

“Nate” was in a groove, the ensemble was cookin’, and Miles Davis’ tune *All Blues* had never sounded better. Nate stayed with that simple beat, rode it out to the end, then finished in perfect time. The audience roared in appreciation, and Nate beamed from here to Sunday.

Nothing unusual going on here—just a music student keeping time, performing in front of his friends at high school graduation. Nothing unusual, that is, except that Nate is a traumatized youth who was unable to count rhythmically or sit still for more than 5 minutes when he began lessons a year ago, a boy who almost constantly demanded negative attention. But then, unusual is the norm at YATMA—Youth Advancement Through Music & Art. YATMA was created to fill a primal need that is so unfulfilled in children today they’re in our face and screaming at us: the need to find out who they are and develop as strong, healthy human beings with close, enduring relationships.

YATMA Philosophy

Creative growth is necessary for children to find out who they are, and when deprived of this they have shallow relationships with themselves and others. They are also unable to express and share their nature, which is essential to their happiness. We believe that the lack of opportunities for creative growth for youth is a major cause of the ills plaguing our society, and the lack of real community today is at once a cause and result of this.



Creative growth is a necessary ingredient to producing good communities: it’s the sharing of the human spirit that provides the cohesion.

—BILL ROSSI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, YATMA

At YATMA, our specific, long-term, creative mentoring/relational approach is the catalyst for personal growth. Simply put, we nourish our students’ creative spirit and fan the flames until it becomes the source of inner strength. This then creates a spiritual orientation from which they can grow.

Heady stuff? Yes, but no. We’re able to achieve real, significant success because our approach is specific and concrete and grounded in some of the basic, fundamental truths of life such as the one to which we referred above, that *children have an innate need to learn who they are and express (give and share) their spirit, which when filled can lead to deep, meaningful relationships with themselves and others.* It’s not rocket science! It’s basic and elemental, but in a culture that generally places a lot more emphasis on getting than on giving, our children are learning a way of being that is causing them pain.

So how does YATMA help children and youth learn who they are and empower them to develop into healthy, happy, generous human beings? By creating deep, creative relationships. On the surface, YATMA looks like any high quality arts school with private and small class instruction in piano, bass, drum set, guitar, percussion, horns, composition and voice, dance, writing, drawing, painting, and sculpture. But our approach and curriculum have been developed to stimulate kids to such an extent that they are willing to transcend their difficulties and fears and really begin to express themselves and learn

who they are. Time and time again, we see the most beautiful dance of all: the youth who is headed towards trouble slowly turning 180 (and proceeding to walk in the opposite direction).

During my 21 years as a pediatrician I have never seen a youth program that turns around lives as well as this one does.

—DR. ELEANOR GRAHAM, MEDICAL DIRECTOR, CHILDREN AND TEENS CLINIC, HARBORVIEW MEDICAL CENTER, SEATTLE, WA

In addition to personal observations, we also have the results of an independent study to verify that YATMA works. During a 2000 evaluation, Education 21, of Troy, New York, found the program to be “impressive” and stated: “Students showed a statistically significant decrease in overall negative behaviors... and highly significant improvements in positive attitudes and behaviors.... The program is a persuasive intervention and has had a powerful and statistically significant impact on the students.”



YATMA History and Curriculum

YATMA is a nonprofit organization that is funded through grants and individual donations and operates in both Seattle, Washington and Albany, New York. Students are often referred by teachers and

mental health professionals, and YATMA accepts all students who are willing to commit to the program. Students typically spend 1–2 hours a week in a YATMA class, either in a one-on-one lesson with an instructor or in a small art class or ensemble. The cost is \$45 an hour; YATMA provides scholarships as funds permit.

The YATMA curriculum, which encompasses both traditional and technology-based arts, is culturally relevant to our students, so they find it exciting and

stimulating. It’s also progressive, so that each step of learning builds on and is interrelated with the previous one. As this progression becomes tangible for the students, we show them how they are personally assimilating what they are learning— in other words, we familiarize them with their own learning style. We then show them how to consciously apply this to other aspects of their lives.

His confidence is soaring, he voices his own opinion, he’s happier and more outgoing.

—MOTHER OF A 14-YEAR-OLD PIANO PLAYER

The YATMA Approach

The YATMA approach is both strengths-based, (thereby promoting success), and relational, (providing modeling and ultimately a deep connection), and it enables teachers to reach youth who are typically hard to reach. YATMA teachers actually become the students’ mentors and guides, and the healthy relationship that develops between them transfers far more than art to the children. It communicates the healthy human values that are present in the teachers we hire and transfers the value of an active creative process. It awakens the children’s innate desire to grow and learn as individuals and provides guidance for that growth.

YATMA not only helped me in my musicianship, but also helped me in shaping me to who I am today. I have learned everything from leadership to friendship, from rhythm to melodies. I thank you so much.

—18-year-old YATMA drummer, on her way to college after 3 years with YATMA

The teaching approach itself is very experiential on everyone’s part, and because it is unique, the best way to explain it is to describe a lesson. We’ll take the example of a piano lesson. Imagine a student and teacher together at the piano. The teacher is 100% present with the student, concentrating fully on the music and sensitive to where the student is at that moment. If the teacher has trained in the YATMA approach for some time, he is so involved that he almost hears the music as the student hears it. He is listening, tapping, sometimes thrusting his hands at the keyboard next to the student’s to express an articulation or a rhythm. The student begins to move with him, and for some time they are moving and playing together. It’s at that moment that real learning begins. Not

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from the teacher showing, or explaining, or outlining the theory involved, but from the experience of doing together. The teacher is being creative and vulnerable, the experience is fresh and new and exciting for them both, and they are learning together. The teacher's sensitivity and spontaneous acceptance of the child's undefended expression of himself is what begins the healing process, and their sharing—of the experience, their enjoyment and their creative spirit—creates the relationship. The approach is also grounded in the fact that it takes time for children to become strong people. A gifted child who lives in a relatively healthy environment will need less time; an at-risk child who lives in a negative environment might need many years. But over time, they become increasingly capable of thinking independently and caring about a greater good—they become empowered.

Being in a group of people [ensemble class] has shown me that lots of people have different ideas and that my idea isn't always the best and isn't always right. When a group plays together, you have to work with each other to make it happen. It helps me understand how to listen to people, even outside of YATMA in the other parts of my life.

—16-YEAR-OLD YATMA
GUITARIST

We would like to tell you about “Steve,” one of YATMA's first students. Diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), in 1995, Steve had a grade point average of 1.8. An only child of a single mom on welfare, he wandered the streets, experimented with drugs, spoke incoherently, and often hit himself on the head. He was a sophomore in high school. When he started studying piano at YATMA, his ADHD was most evident in his lack of focus and inability to keep time. He was literally unable to tap his foot four times in a row. Using our rhythmic and progressive curriculum, Steve's teacher worked with him to focus and build his concentration. At the same time, they began to build a relationship.

It quickly became clear that Steve had found something that mattered to him, and he was consistent in coming to his lessons. Within a year he had raised his GPA to 3.8. When he graduated from high school he obtained a fulltime professional job and attended community college at night. No longer on scholarship at

YATMA, he became a paying student (and still is). Last spring, he graduated from a major university with a GPA of over 3.5 and is now pursuing his master's degree.

We would like to end with one last story. One day we were presenting the YATMA program at a public school. A YATMA student who attended that school was with us, and when asked about his experience he replied that his work with YATMA had given him something to do with his frustrations, had helped him focus, and that he thought his life was much more promising now. When he finished the librarian spoke up to say, “Tony, around the same time you started your lessons, I noticed you started looking, well, taller, brighter, and more alive. Like you had a purpose. I wondered what had happened. Now I know.”

Next fall we will have the opportunity to scientifically test YATMA's therapeutic effectiveness against both therapeutic standard care and cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT) through a 10month controlled study by Parsons Child and Family Center. The study will include 60 youth, all of whom will be screened for post traumatic stress symptoms. We believe YATMA's results will at least parallel those of CBT as a mental health intervention.

We are currently working on documenting the YATMA model with the intention of publishing our approach and curriculum and sharing the insights gained from years of working in collaboration with others. If you would like to know more about YATMA, please view our website at www.yatma.org or contact us at edu@yatma.org or 518-399-4863.

The opportunities YATMA has given [my daughter] have contributed to her ability to maintain academic excellence, instill self discipline and develop confidence. This in the life of a child is formidable and a gift that will stay with her throughout her life.

—MOTHER OF AN 11-YEAR-OLD
GIRL WHO HAS STUDIED WITH YATMA
SINCE 1999

Mary Rossi serves as YATMA's Director of Development and Communications and finds her involvement in YATMA immensely satisfying. She is married to YATMA founder Bill Rossi.