

Songwriting for Young Artists with Courtney Kaiser
Master Class: Interdisciplinary Arts/Creative Writing/Music-Jazz Department



Courtney Kaiser will discuss the craft of songwriting and her career and professional path as a singer-songwriter. Additionally, she will be reading, discussing, and critiquing student work. Courtney will discuss her biography, her path as a young arts school graduate and educator, her work and touring life, and a pertinent music history.

Summary of Courtney Kaiser master class, mentorship, and resulting influence by Katherine Factor, coordinator:

Courtney's visit was incredibly lively. Prior to her visit she wrote about her excitement: her blog can be found here: courtneykaiser.com. Her master class was well- attended by interdisciplinary, theatre, jazz , visual arts, and music students. She began her class with her life story of studying classical music at an arts high school while writing contemporary song, life on the road and as a recording artist, her interest in music education, and the importance of following your dream.

Using a paraphrasing exercise, she had the students write, and share, responding positively. Courtney was very impressed. Over 25 students from theatre, writing, interdisciplinary students attended the class.



When eight students all wanted to continue on mentoring with her, Courtney insisted on mentoring all of them, seeing who could meet her deadlines and rise to the challenge. In the end, Marijose Sapina Perez and Brian Shin – both interdisciplinary arts students - pursued the whole mentorship – as well as its challenges of correspondence, writing multiple songs, recording them on garage band to send to her, then rehearsing and recording in a professional studio with Don Put.



Here is their mid-term feedback:

MJ Sapina: Having the opportunity to meet Courtney was amazing. I love the way she expresses her feelings through her original and unique style of music. The master class was very helpful because the exercise we did has helped me a lot and I have written four songs with melodies and everything! That is a huge deal for me because writing songs takes me forever. Courtney is an amazing person, she knows what she loves and she does it amazingly. It is an honor to have met her, heard her play live and work with her on the mentorship. I will do my best and learn from her and from my mistakes. Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity to meet her, Kat! - MJ Sapina Perez

Brian Shin: The master class was great and it was very helpful for my understanding of lyrics writing, the different know-how's to do it was very helpful. - B Shin



Additionally, Courtney rehearsed all day with jazz student drummer “Ashi” Jacob Manoff, so that he could hone his drum part for the show that night. At their performance that night, Courtney supported Jacob as he played, and her wondrous voice filled Rush Hall. Students, administration, and locals Idyllwildians gathered to hear.



Thank you, Courtney, AEL and Don Put! We really generated excitement and possibility for students from multiple majors. It became clear in this process there is a need to boost the school with contemporary music opportunities, and there is much interest in songwriting. It was a lot of work, wrangling the drummer, adding in elements, encouraging all the students involved, and getting them to make choices and rehearse – but it was well worth it. Don was very helpful in offering advice about the process and how to propose the most do-able arrangement.

I grew as an educator, able to re-connect in a profound way with a former arts high school mate, seeing each other as teachers and working artists totally touched by the arts from a young age. Students really respond to adults that have traversed a similar path!

I was repeatedly impressed with Courtney's teaching through consisted and thorough emails, so I wanted to include it: **Here are several examples, illuminating the process (providing a good template for deadlines) by which they worked, but also showing how mentors can handle young artists with overwhelming schedules:**

Feb 2011

Dear students,

I'm so excited to be working with you all. This is going to be a great process for all of us. I would like to start by encouraging you all to know each other better. Peers are always good people to ask for a critique, so as you work, share your working with others as well.

You can email me CoCoUST@aol.com when you have needs or questions. I do like to talk over skype and ichtat when we can so we will set up a time to do so in the next two weeks. The best times for me are mon, wed, or fri 12 to 2:30.

Because there are more of you than expected we will focus on one song. I would like all of you to email me by feb 20th your expectations of this mentorship, as well as your strengths and struggles. All of you should write lyrics and email to me by march 10. If you usually write your melody first, please make an mp3 in garageband of the melody and instrumentation by march 1.

Anyone who does not submit expectations on feb 20 will not continue on in the mentorship. It is important that you are motivated on your own. We cannot chase you down in order to obtain your work.

I was so impressed by your paraphrased lyrics and I have heard some of your music already. This is a very strong group of students. I know that the music you create will be brilliant. I look forward to getting started!

Step One: you must email Katherine at kfactor@idyllwildarts.org with a quote or two about your experience in the master class. Always CC her on all of your emails to me.

You can email me CoCoUST@aol.com when you have needs or questions. I do like to talk over skype and ichtat when we can so we will set up a time to do so in the next two weeks. The best times for me are mon, wed, or fri 12 to 2:30.

Step Two: Because there are more of you than expected, we will focus on one song. I would like all of you to email me your expectations of this mentorship, as well as your strengths and struggles in songwriting by **Feb 23rd**.

Step Three: Some of you write your melodies first, therefore a rough melody will be due March 1st which you can record in garageband. If you write your lyrics first, I would like to see a rough draft of your lyrics on March 1st. I will revise both of what it turned in and we will move forward with you doing revisions and submitting back to me March 10. If you are unsure of how to start or which method you want to use, please include that in your email of expectations on Feb 23rd.

****Anyone who does not submit expectations on feb 23rd will not continue on in the mentorship. It is important that you are motivated on your own. We cannot chase you down in order to obtain your work. Those of you that propose to me your project, meet the March deadlines, will get feedback, continued mentorship and the possibility of recording one song in late April in a professional studio.**

I was so impressed by your paraphrased lyrics and I have heard some of your music already. This is a very strong group of students. I know that the music you create will be brilliant. I look forward to getting started!

Talk soon, Courtney

Marijose, a freshman from Mexico City, struggled with managing all her responsibilities. Here is what she wrote to Courtney when she needed help from us:

March 2011

Hi Courtney,

First of all I wanted to tell you that this means so much to me. I really want to thank you for giving me this once in a life time opportunity and I swear that I am doing my best and trying really hard. My problem is that I missed like 2 weeks of school when I was sick so I have a lot of catching up to do plus the work I am doing right now. I thought I could do everything because I had free time in my afternoons and evenings, and it turns out I am a techie for the dance show, which means I have a completely full schedule until 10 at night and that is the latest hour I have to take my sleeping pill because of my insomnia. Room Study is at 8:30 but I am going to miss it until spring break because of the dance show. I am so stressed out and I have so much work to do and so much stuff to catch up on my academics, that I am really worried about the mentorship. I really want this, it is very important to me and I don't want to mess it up. I want to do it right but I don't even have time to finish other homework and I am so stressed that I am not inspired, I am having a lack of creativity. A huge one.

I thought I could do everything but I am human, and it is very overwhelming. I talked to Kat and she suggested the idea that I offer new dates. Spring Break starts the 19th of this month and I come back to Idyllwild the 4th of April. I am willing to work on spring break on the mentorship but if you are too busy maybe after Spring Break?

I am so sorry and I really wish I was superwoman to do all this in a week or even a day! Thank you so much and again, I am sorry. – MJ Sapina

And Courtney's encouraging response:

MJ,

I totally understand. I know you are a hardworker and I trust you to manage your own time. Basically, we just need your song to be ready by May. Lets figure out when you will be recording and can be flexible with due dates with you. As long as we stay in communication, we can do this. You begin when you begin:) Smile!

Katherine, what is the timeline for recording? That will help us to know the real hard deadline for that." C- Kasier

Courtney Kaiser final feedback in her words:

I was unsure of what to expect out of my lecture, performance, and mentorship with the students of Idyllwild. I remember what it was like to be in an arts high school. Some of the students were respectful and others felt there was nothing to teach them. The students I encountered were gracious, respectful, and soaked up my knowledge and experience like sponges.

I thoroughly enjoyed teaching this particular group of students as well as the high school age. I felt inspired myself by their song lyrics and their forward thinking about music today. I was amazed with how willing they were to be open with me. This says a lot about the school as well as the kind of environment Katherine has created with the students.

I also felt like I was giving them a different kind of musical education than they had received before. Schools I attended did not have any kind of musical experience other than a classical one, and I could have benefitted from having a mentorship such as this myself.

It was wonderful to have several months to work one on one with student work and to talk about production and performance. I think each student would also agree that this helped them feel more confident as well as assisted in pulling out their best work.

By having such an opportunity for the students, Idyllwild is proving to be a progressive performing arts school. If the school continues to support outside the box thinking, the most amazing musicians will be born. I hope that other schools begin to follow your lead.

--C Kaiser
May 2011

And final feedback from the mentees:

Brian Shin: The beginning was quite rough. It started out with a few emails to and from Courtney regarding songs which we had wrote. As we write mores songs and each song was critiqued by Courtney as she told what was good and what is not as good, we fixed it and we wrote more songs. In these ways we were able to learn a little bit more about song writing.

At the end, the recording with Don was very valuable in the way we were able to increase our knowledge of recording and get more familiar with the idea of the studio. Overall the chance to work with both Courtney and Don seemed to be a very valuable experience.

MJ Sapina-Perez: My Recording experience.

I found Courtney very patient and understanding as a mentor. She was really nice and flexible, during timelines and deadlines. She gave me good advice and taught me things I have never thought about. She helped me feel in control of my song as the writer – she made me feel confident as the writer. Courtney was a good listener and didn't judge, giving advice to help me improve...and good ideas to get inspired and useful methods of writing songs. Ultimately, her suggestions were presented as choices I could make – it was up to me, it was my song – this I found very empowering.

Coming to Idyllwild has been a privilege. I've grown not only as a person, but as an artist as well.

I am so lucky to be here and to have had this amazing opportunity of recording. It was very difference to what I expected, I thought everything was going to be "studio magic" but it really wasn't. It was hard and intimidating. All I could think in my head is "I have to get it right this time" but my guitar skills were failing me. Don was very nice and patient and he let me borrow one of his guitars since mine was not adequate for the type of song I was going to record. It took us like an hour and half to record the guitar while I had it right and for vocals, I liked the first track. At the end, it ended pretty well and I learned how does it feel to record something. I came to IAA to learn, not the be the best and even though I am still learning a lot and this helped me. It was amazing and i learned so much, I really want to thank who ever gave me this opportunity. It helped me to grow even more as an artist.