



2026
31st VAIL JAZZ WORKSHOP
Application Instructions

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HISTORY OF VAIL JAZZ

The Vail Jazz Foundation (“Vail Jazz”) is a nonprofit organization based in Vail, Colorado, a year-round mountain resort 100 miles west of Denver. Now in its 32nd year of operation, Vail Jazz is dedicated to the perpetuation of jazz music. Its goals are to advance jazz education, with particular emphasis on young musicians and audiences, and to showcase jazz music and the artistry of great musicians. To implement this mission, Vail Jazz offers the Vail Jazz Workshop, a jazz study program for musicians aged 15-18. The Workshop coincides with the Vail Jazz Festival, a three-day celebration over the Labor Day weekend each year.

THE VAIL JAZZ WORKSHOP

In 2026, Vail Jazz will celebrate the 31st Vail Jazz Workshop (the “Workshop”), a 9-day residency program (students are guests of host families in Vail) for dedicated and gifted young musicians who have demonstrated a commitment to their musical studies and a level of skill to warrant special attention. The Workshop is limited to twelve students, with two students per instructor. The Workshop covers jazz theory, group lessons, private lessons, jazz improvisational work, and ensemble participation, and includes multiple performance opportunities. The students attend the Vail Jazz Festival to see, hear, and meet the world-renowned jazz artists performing at the Festival and perform for the Festival audience. The Workshop is designed as an intense learning experience set in an environment world-renowned for its natural beauty. Students can interact with their instructors and each other to maximize their learning experience, including jazz-rap sessions that allow instructors to share real-life jazz experiences with students in an open-forum format. In addition to musical instruction, outings are organized so students can enjoy what Vail has to offer, including a mountain-top excursion, walks, and picnics.

**The Workshop commences on Saturday, August 29, 2026, with
students returning home on Sunday, September 6, 2026.**

DEI Statement:

The Vail Jazz Festival is a welcoming place. We recognize our responsibility as stewards of America’s unique contribution to the world of music – jazz -- and will not tolerate discrimination, hatred, or harassment of any kind. Diversity in race, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical challenges, religion, and citizenship enriches the Vail Jazz organization, its staff, and all who encounter us. We are committed to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion, not only in our organization but in all our programs, performances, and other activities.

Anti-discrimination Policy:

Vail Jazz is committed to providing equal opportunity for all employees and applicants without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, political affiliation, personal appearance, family responsibilities, or any other characteristic protected under federal, state, or local law or that of the individual’s relatives, friends, or associates. Each person is evaluated based on personal skill and merit. Vail Jazz’s policy regarding equal employment opportunity applies to all aspects of employment, including recruitment, hiring, job assignments, promotions, working conditions, scheduling, benefits, wage and salary administration, disciplinary action, termination, and social, educational, and recreational programs. The Executive Director shall act as the responsible agent in fully implementing the Equal Employment Opportunity policy.

INSTRUCTORS

The faculty of the Workshop is composed of legendary musicians who are world-renowned educators with decades of experience teaching jazz at leading colleges, universities, and conservatories throughout the world. They share a teaching philosophy that stresses learning by ear. In addition, they firmly believe in the value of transcribing the performances of the masters to understand their techniques so that a student can develop their technique and voice. The faculty is comprised of:



John Clayton - Bass Instructor, Director of Education



Terell Stafford - Trumpet Instructor



Wycliffe Gordon - Trombone Instructor



Tim Green - Saxophone Instructor



Bill Cunliffe - Piano Instructor



Lewis Nash - Drum Instructor

ELIGIBILITY

The Workshop is open only to students who play the following instruments: piano, bass, drums, trumpet, trombone, and saxophone.

Students attending the Workshop must be at least 15 years of age and no more than 19 years of age (as of the first day of the Workshop). They must have been a full-time student enrolled in high school (grades 9 through 12) or homeschooled in compliance with applicable local law during the school year and completed just before the Workshop. Applicants who have just graduated from high school may apply. Still, an Applicant may not have attended a university, college, junior college, or other post-high school educational institution on a full-time basis, nor may an Applicant have attended a prior Workshop. Applicants must be permanent residents of North America at the time of application.

PLEASE NOTE: ***Please carefully review your academic and personal schedules before applying. All applicants must be able to commit to the full duration of the Workshop. If selected, you are required to be in attendance for the entire program and may not arrive late or depart early for any reason, including school, work, or other obligations.***

If you anticipate a potential scheduling conflict, such as the start of a school term, please notify Vail Jazz in advance. In many cases, schools will approve an absence for participation in the Workshop. Vail Jazz is happy to provide official confirmation of attendance if needed.

ADMISSION CRITERIA

Applicants are selected for the Workshop based on their demonstrated commitment to their musical studies and a level of skill to warrant the special attention provided by the Workshop. The Workshop is designed for advanced players, and an Applicant should have a technical command of their instrument, good sight-reading skills, improvisational skills, and a willingness to work hard. Applicants are selected for the Workshop based on the above criteria, regardless of financial need. Selections will be made in a non-discriminatory manner with no consideration given to race, creed, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, veteran status, marital status, sexual orientation, or other protected categories, in accordance with all applicable State and Federal laws.

ADMISSION PROCEDURE + DEADLINE

The application process consists of 1) an [online application](#) and 2) a video audition. To be considered for admission, an Applicant must complete and submit to Vail Jazz the completed application materials, a current photograph, and tax information (as described below) by the stated deadline. In addition, an Applicant must comply with the audition requirements (also described below). **The deadline for submitting all of the above is Thursday, April 30, 2026.**

REFERENCES: Because no written music is used during the Workshop, a student's improvisational ability, knowledge of rhythm changes, chord progressions, and familiarity with jazz standards are essential.

Each applicant is required to have a Nominator (band director, teacher, etc.) who is familiar with the Applicant's musicianship and can comment on the Applicant's level of skill, commitment to the Applicant's musical studies, performance experience, and other relevant information that establishes that the Applicant is qualified to attend the Workshop. The Nominator is required to submit the [Nomination Form](#).

The applicant must also have a reference (band director, teacher, etc.) listed on their Application. The applicant can use the same reference for these required items or different individuals. Please note that a recommendation letter is not required. The Vail Jazz Workshop faculty will contact your reference at their discretion.

Before naming their reference(s), the Applicant should contact the proposed reference(s) and seek permission to list the individual as the Applicant's reference before entering them on the application.

SCHOLARSHIPS

The Jeff Clayton Educational Fund provides full and partial scholarships to all Applicants admitted to the Workshop. Jeff Clayton was a founding faculty member of the Workshop who passionately taught and mentored Workshop students for a quarter-century, inspiring and shaping the careers of jazz's next generation. Always willing to share his knowledge and wisdom with his students, Jeff's legacy lives on with the establishment of the Fund.

A full scholarship covers all of the costs of the Workshop, including transportation to and from the Workshop, housing (students are guests of host families), all meals, all Workshop classes, and all special activities organized for the students. Partial scholarships, equal to 50% of the foregoing, are awarded to every Applicant admitted with additional funding available and determined using a sliding scale based upon household income as set forth below.

As indicated below, a copy of page one of an Applicant's family's most recent 1040 Federal Tax return must be provided to Vail Jazz if an Applicant wishes to be considered for a full or partial scholarship. **If you do not wish to apply for financial aid, you should check the box indicating that you are declining to seek financial aid. Under these circumstances, if you are selected, you will be responsible for paying for your transportation as set forth below, and \$3,000 towards the cost of the Workshop.** You may also provide us with supporting documentation if there are unusual circumstances that you feel may influence decisions regarding your eligibility for a scholarship. Please refer to the following chart for scholarship eligibility and costs.

Total Family Gross Income:

Under \$75,000 - Student will receive a full scholarship covering Travel + Workshop cost = \$0 student cost

\$75,000 - \$100,000 - Student is responsible for \$750 Travel + \$500 Workshop cost = \$1,250 total student cost

\$100,000 - \$175,000 - Student is responsible for \$750 Travel + \$1,500 Workshop cost = \$2,250 total student cost

Over \$175,000 - Student is responsible for \$750 Travel + \$3,000 Workshop cost = \$3,750 total student cost

Note: Vail Jazz will arrange transportation for all students to Denver. Students will be met in Denver and receive

ground transportation to Vail.

CHAPERONES

Vail Jazz provides chaperones throughout the time students are in Vail to assist with and monitor the activities of the students.

WORKSHOP CELL PHONE POLICY

The Workshop is an extremely intense environment that requires each participant's complete concentration. The use of cell phones is prohibited when the Workshop is in session and during group meals. No texting or calling (inbound or outbound) will be tolerated. Participants may use their cell phones during breaks and when not participating in Workshop activities.

SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS

Although all efforts will be made to accommodate dietary needs and allergies, the Workshop cannot guarantee that any or all such restrictions can be met.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE ONLINE APPLICATION

Please use the detailed instructions below as a guide for completing the [Application](#). Ensure that you carefully follow all steps in the application process before submitting your Application to avoid delay and possible ineligibility. Applicant's progress while completing the application is saved automatically, and you may sign out and return to complete the form later. Once submitted, you cannot make any changes or updates. Application for admission to the Workshop will not be deemed complete until you submit all necessary materials described herein. **The deadline for submission is April 30, 2026.** Vail Jazz will confirm receipt of all application materials and notify Applicants when the application process is complete. Final selections will be announced mid-June. The Application form is a Google form designed to be completed online. The form contains specific instructions on printing out the form so that you may retain a copy for your records.

When you have completed and submitted your application form, an email will be generated and sent to whoever you designate as your parent or guardian. The designated parent/guardian **MUST** reply to the email they receive for your Application to be considered. Therefore, the Applicant must enter the complete name and email address of the designated parent/guardian in the Application as requested, and the returned email from the designated parent/guardian must be received as confirmation of approval of the Application. Any questions about the application process or difficulties encountered submitting the Application and/or supporting documents should be sent to john.clayton@vailjazz.org.

> BIOGRAPHY

- Provide a short biography (200 words or less) listing your place of birth, hobbies and non-musical activities, community service activities you have participated in, future educational plans, and any other information you believe is important.

> HISTORY OF MUSICAL STUDIES

- List the names of all previous instructors, type of instruction, length of instruction, etc.

> LIST THE BANDS/ GROUPS/ ORCHESTRAS YOU HAVE PLAYED IN

- List all performance experiences you have had, and indicate whether solo, combo, or band.

> REFERENCE

- Please provide the name and contact information of a music professional (band director,

private instructor, teacher, etc.) who is familiar with your musicianship and can speak to your level of skill, commitment to your musical studies, and performance experience. A formal letter of recommendation is not required. A Vail Jazz Workshop instructor may contact your listed reference directly if additional context is needed.

The reference you list does not need to be the same individual who completes the Nomination Form; you may list a different music professional if you choose. The Nomination Form must still be completed and submitted by a nominator on your behalf.

- **LIST OF MUSIC AWARDS, SCHOLARSHIPS, ETC. THAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED**
 - List all relevant honors, including the awarding body and date received.
- **HISTORY OF YOUR JAZZ PLAYING AND LISTENING EXPERIENCES**
 - Indicate what style(s) of jazz you play and describe your jazz listening experiences (it is okay if they vary).
- **NAMES OF 3 FAVORITE PLAYERS ON YOUR INSTRUMENT**
 - List three of your favorite players on your instrument, what it is about each of their playing that has made them one of your favorites, and how you try to incorporate that into your playing.
- **YOUR GOALS FOR THE WORKSHOP**
 - Indicate your goals concerning the Workshop. Describe, in detail, the areas you believe you need help with and what you want to accomplish while at the Workshop.
- **YOUR PLANS FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE**
 - Vail Jazz's mission is to perpetuate jazz with a focus on young musicians and audiences. Through the lens of that mission, please indicate what community service activities you have undertaken in the past and your plans for future activities. The Workshop provides students with direct access to decades of performance expertise. Vail Jazz expects each student to pay back their "debt" by sharing that information with as many other students as possible.
- **SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION**
 - As previously stated, check the appropriate box to indicate whether or not you are applying for a scholarship. If you elect to seek a scholarship to the Workshop, you must indicate the level of total family gross income and the number of family members in your household to determine your eligibility for and the scope of a scholarship. You must attach to the Application a copy of page one of your family's most recent 1040 Federal Tax return if you believe you qualify for a partial or full scholarship. You may also provide us with supporting documentation as an attachment to the application if unusual circumstances influence decisions regarding your eligibility for a scholarship. If you prefer to email page one of your family's most recent 1040 Federal Tax return, please scan and save it as a PDF file. You may black out sensitive information such as Social Security Numbers, etc. The PDF file should be attached to an email sent to john.clayton@vailjazz.org and clearly identify the applicant's name for which the information is being submitted.
- **PHOTOGRAPH**
 - You must attach to your Application a current high-resolution picture of you (headshot or playing your instrument) that will be used for publicity purposes if you are admitted to the Workshop.

AUDITION REQUIREMENTS

The following are the requirements for an Applicant's audition. All Applicants must submit an audition video via YouTube. The audition video may be submitted after the application submission, provided it is before the expiration of the deadline (i.e., April 30th, 2026). Once you have completed your audition videos, you are to upload them directly to YouTube. If you have difficulty uploading your videos to YouTube, please contact Vail Jazz at john.clayton@vailjazz.org. As mentioned above, you can elect to submit your audition videos after you have submitted your Application. If you have completed and

uploaded your audition videos to YouTube, when you submit your Application, attach the link(s) to your Application when prompted. If, instead, you are submitting your audition videos after you have submitted your Application, you may send the file mentioned above to john.clayton@vailjazz.org.

In some cases, below, an instructor has suggested the minimum preparation required for participation in the Workshop. At a minimum, you should meet these requirements and not apply if you cannot.

PLEASE NOTE: All audition videos must be recorded specifically for this Application. Any audition video that appears to be pre-recorded for another purpose will be rejected. This includes audition videos recorded for a previous Vail Jazz Workshop application. Before you begin playing at the beginning of your audition video, **clearly and slowly state your name, age, school, and instrument. Before each musical selection, state the information required below.**

BASS STUDENTS

1. The audition video is to contain the following: (i) transcriptions (played solo) of two bass lines from bassists such as Ray Brown, Paul Chambers, Sam Jones, Dave Holland, etc.; and (ii) a piece of your choice. This can be accompanied or unaccompanied. It can be a bass solo, another transcription— perhaps from a trumpet or guitar solo, or just a tune of your choice, etc. Make sure, however, that you are featured. Playing something from the classical repertoire or another style would be welcome here. You do not need to send any written transcription you used.
2. Remember the following: (i) choose pieces that are close to your level and not so challenging that your performance suffers; (ii) write out the bass lines but memorize (do NOT write out) any bass solos; (iii) choose a piece that you will be able to transcribe entirely; and (iv) be sure to play the bass line with the recording, exactly as it was done on the recording.
3. Before each selection, state (i) the bass lines selected; (ii) whose performance you transcribed; (iii) the source material, e.g., the title of the album, etc.; and (iv) the name of the piece you selected.
4. While at the Workshop, you will need to know and be able to play the following: (i) major scales in all keys, two octaves, and (ii) harmonic minor scales in all keys, two octaves.

DRUM STUDENTS

1. The audition video should demonstrate your ability to improvise and play with a rhythm section using a live band. Sticks and brushes must be used.
2. The audition video is to contain the following: (i) the piece performed should be the 12- bar blues piece "Billie's Bounce" in medium tempo - include at least four choruses behind a soloist and at least two choruses of drum solo; (ii) perform a medium tempo selection or a ballad demonstrating ability to perform with brushes; and (iii) perform two additional selections in different jazz styles, moods, and tempos. Each selection must include at least three choruses of playing time behind a soloist and at least two choruses of trading fours, eighths, and/or soloing.
3. Before each selection, state the name of the tune performed.

PIANO STUDENTS

1. Auditions must be performed on an acoustic piano. Auditions performed on electric pianos or keyboards will not be accepted. You do not need to send any written transcriptions you may have used.
2. The audition video is to contain the following: (i) two memorized or written-out transcriptions of piano solos. You may select any artists you admire and (ii) three standards of your choice with

your solo on them; at least one should be a ballad. Each transcription should be two or three choruses of the solo unless it is a blues, in which case you should include four choruses. You do not need to use a rhythm section for the standards, but it should only be for one tune if you want to use one.

3. Before each selection, state: (i) the piano solo selected; (ii) whose performance you transcribed; (iii) the source material, e.g., the title of the album, etc.; and (iv) the standards you selected.

SAX STUDENTS

1. The audition video is to contain the following: (i) play the melody of three tunes (standards of your choice) and solo in the form using a rhythm section or a play-along recording; and (ii) play transcriptions of two solos without accompaniment (by memory as opposed to writing them down) by notable sax players - Trane, Ball, Dexter, etc.
2. Before each selection state (i) the name of the tune performed; (ii), if applicable, whose performance you transcribed and the source material, e.g., title of the album, etc.

TROMBONE STUDENTS

1. The audition video is to contain the following: (i) ballad (choose one): "Lament," "Misty," or "In A Sentimental Mood" (2 chorus rendition); (ii) medium tempo in "F": "Au Privave" and four choruses improv; (iii) up-tempo rhythm changes in "Bb": any head ("Anthropology") and three choruses; (iv) "Blues for Alice" head in 3 keys: F, Ab, and Eb; and (v) "Donna Lee" head in 4 keys: Ab, F, D, and B.
2. It is preferred that you play with a rhythm section, but if necessary, you may play with a "play-along recording."
3. Before each selection, state the name of the tune performed.

TRUMPET STUDENTS

1. The audition video is to contain the following: (i) two memorized transcriptions of standards by noted jazz trumpet masters - you may select any artists you admire, and (ii) improvise over a blues.
2. Before each selection, state (i) the name of the tune performed, (ii) whose performance you transcribed, and (iii) the source material, e.g., the title of the album, etc.
3. In an email to Vail Jazz, provide a list of 5 jazz standards that you can perform in all 12 keys and five standards that you will be able to play in all 12 keys by the beginning of the Workshop.

As mentioned above, if you encounter any difficulties submitting your Application and/or supporting documentation or have questions about these instructions, please contact Vail Jazz at john.clayton@vailjazz.org or contact Anneliese Swift, Executive Director, at 715.551.7517.

Application Checklist
Deadline for submission is April 30, 2026

Prepare and verify before starting the online application:

- You are at least 15 and not more than 19 years old as of Saturday, August 29, 2026

Gather and confirm up-to-date contact information for:

- Parent or Guardian
- Reference to list on the online application
- Nominator asking to complete [Nominator Form](#) (can be Reference listing on the application or a separate individual)
- Parent or Guardian notified of application submission. Applicant must enter the designated Parent or Guardian's complete name and email address in the Application as requested. A confirmation email from the designated Parent or Guardian must be received as authorization of the Application.
- Page one of Parent/Guardian most recent 1040 Federal Tax return (for scholarship applications only)
- Any unusual circumstances to consider regarding eligibility for a scholarship (for scholarship applications only)
- List of music awards, scholarships, etc. you have received
- Audition YouTube video (specifically for this application, review requirements listed in instructions)
- High-resolution photo (headshot or playing your instrument)
- List of Bands, Groups, and Orchestras you have participated in

Once you have gathered the above information, documents, and media requests, set aside 60 minutes to complete the [online application](#).

Vail Jazz will notify you that your submission has been accepted or requires further information.