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# The ALIVE Project

(Accessible Live Internet Video Education)

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## Allan Molnar & Stewart Smith

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*Imagine trading “fours” on a standard tune while separated by over a thousand miles... imagine an alumnus of the New York Philharmonic teaching middle school percussionists on the Canadian prairies... imagine musicians performing in real time on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean... imagine a member of the Chicago Symphony’s renowned brass section in your rehearsal room... imagine team teaching a class with a colleguer who is in another country...*

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*For over seven years The ALIVE Project has been bringing musicians together on four continents and involving students ranging from elementary school to graduate school. These students have worked with a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, world-renowned jazz artists and alumni of the Count Basie Orchestra, faculty from top music schools in North America, Europe, and Australia, as well as members of the world-class orchestras of New York, Pittsburgh, Boston and Chicago.*

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***It’s something you can do and it’s easier than you might think!***

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# **Teaching Music at a Distance: The ALIVE Project Accessible Live Internet Video Education:**

Presented by Allan Molnar and Stewart Smith

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Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic, Chicago

Friday, December 15, 2011 2:30 PM

*Our experience has with online teaching has been that technology which already exists in your home, your school, and your classroom is quite functional and very effective. We have used standard high-speed internet, personal computers, iChat and Skype with excellent results. The affordability, the flexibility, and ease of use of "off the shelf" hardware has more than outweighed any potential loss of audio and video quality.*

**Since February 2004 the ALIVE Project has delivered and/or coordinated:**

- concert band rehearsals with renowned guest conductors
- day-long events with multiple guest artists
- individual lectures on a variety of topics
- jazz band rehearsals and clinics
- joint performances spanning continents
- lecture series culminating in live performances
- interviews with renowned jazz masters
- live concerts to remote locations
- instrument masterclasses
- music technology classes
- private lessons
- section rehearsals
- supervision of student teachers
- combo rehearsals and workshops
- "virtual" music festivals

**WOULD YOU LIKE TO SET UP YOUR OWN ONLINE SESSION?**

**We have a few suggestions based on our years of experience. Any online session succeed will succeed or fail as a result of:**

- **THE PREPARATION**
- **THE TECHNOLOGY**
- **THE DELIVERY**

## THE PREPARATION

*Like anything, the correct preparation will ultimately lead to a successful videoconference. In our experience we have found it best to work with people you know and trust. For example, the first ALIVE Project sessions ever done involved Allan working with Stewart's students and vice versa. Be aware that a learning curve is inevitable with both the technology and the musical/pedagogical aspects of the session. We recommend you begin with an individual with whom you can spend sufficient time on the preparation.*

### **Decide exactly what you want.**

- What are your reasons for hiring a guest artist?
- What is it that the artist can deliver?
- How would you like your students to benefit?
- How would you like to benefit?
- What is your relationship with the guest artist?
- How well can you work together?

### **Set it up to succeed.**

- What are you going to do prepare the artist?
- How will you prep or train the students/audience?
- How can you assist with the presentation?

### **Consider a team-teaching approach.**

- You know your students best, therefore...
- Be prepared to assist with the lesson.
- Note the ways you can get involved without being intrusive.

### **Secure the funding.**

- Can you afford the artist?
- How do you plan to pay him or her?
- Is this a "one off" or a series of presentations?
- Is there a way to share funding and/or resources?

## THE TECHNOLOGY

*The technology is only one aspect of a videoconference, but it impacts tremendously on the event. In many institutions you will be able to enlist the help of your IT department, freeing you to handle the musical side of things. Because videoconferencing recalls the excitement (and the risks) of live television, it is essential that you test the equipment and the reliability of your connections at both ends. Be prepared for two hours of preparation time for every hour of "onscreen" time with the artist, possibly more if you are the one assisting the artist with this new process. As mentioned earlier, a good working relationship with the individual and a strong sense of mutual trust and respect will make this considerably easier.*

- Are you completely comfortable with the technology you will be using?
- Will you have technical support?
- Is the artist computer literate? Are you prepared to train him or her?

- Will the artist have technical support?
- What additional human resources do you have available?
- What is your relationship with the IT department?
- Is the artist a Mac or PC user?
- What is the back-up plan in the rare event that the session completely crashes?

### **Audio Considerations**

- Will you be using external microphones?
- Will you be using an M-Box or other mixer?
- Do you plan to play audio files?
- Will latency be an issue and can you work around it?
- What and how will the audience be involved?
- Are you using spoken voice and instruments?
- Can you mix “on the fly”?

### **Video Considerations**

- What type of camera will you use?
- How do you plan to handle lighting and backgrounds?
- What will the audience see?
- Will you use a projector for the artist’s image?
- What are the potential distractions at both ends of the connection?
- Video quality and frame rate is dependent on available bandwidth, software and the computer’s processing power.
- Macs can handle H264 if there is sufficient bandwidth.

## **THE DELIVERY**

*With the preparations in place, it is necessary to focus on the actual delivery of the lesson. As with any lesson, breaking the flow of the class can greatly reduce the effectiveness. Distractions must be eliminated, or at least, reduced. This can include clutter in the room where the lesson is, easy access to volume, brightness controls, and other “production” considerations. If you are going to be team-teaching with the guest artist, strongly consider having another person present who can deal with technical considerations if necessary. In a worst case scenario the technology can fail completely and you will be expected to keep things moving until such time the connection is restored.*

- Who is your audience going to be?
- How well do you and your guest play to an audience?
- How flexible are you as the coordinator?
- Can you “read the room” and assist the artist if necessary?
- Can you aid with the flow of the session?
- What is the back-up plan if there are problems?
- What are your plans to follow-up the session?

## **GOOD LUCK!**

## Artists share their online teaching experiences:

*"The project sounds like the greatest Jazz Ed idea ever conceived.*

*"It was a very good experience for me, and the students were excellent with their questions and their responses... and hopefully there'll be more masterclasses."*

**Frank Foster:** NEA Jazz Master,  
Grammy Award Winner, Alumnus and Former Leader of the Count Basie Orchestra

*"Even though I entered the process with some degree of apprehension, this was soon dissipated and I felt I was actually in the room with the musicians. It turned out to be a great pleasure, and I believe that a real connection was made between the players and myself."*

**H. Robert Reynolds:** Principal Wind Ensemble Conductor, The University of Southern California;  
Director of Bands Emeritus, The University of Michigan

*"The online learning sessions that have occurred at St. John's-Ravenscourt School have been a tremendous asset to our music program. Being in direct contact with musicians in some of the finest orchestras and music schools in world is a unique experience for our students, and first-rate professional development for our faculty. These enrichment opportunities have been second to none in the province, and all for a very affordable cost. I strongly encourage all schools to explore what the ALIVE Project has been doing for the last seven years."*

**Dr. Stephen Johnson:** Head, St. John's-Ravenscourt School,  
Winnipeg, Canada

*"You guys have really HIT on the future of this area... I think this is a great idea, especially for those schools who cannot afford to fly in a major guest artist/clinician."*

**Bobby Shew:** Grammy Award Winner and Renowned Trumpet Performer/Teacher

*"I personally found it stimulating to work with students over such a large distance... This truly represents 'cutting-edge' technology applied in an artistic and educational way!"*

**Dan Haerle:** Renowned Jazz Pianist and Pedagogue,  
Professor Emeritus, University of North Texas

*"I first met Allan Molnar in 2002 at the KoSA International Percussion Workshop where his presentation on technology in the music classroom inspired me to put drumsticks in the hands of every general music student in fourth through sixth grade at Tuckerton Elementary School. The ALIVE Project has helped encourage my students by providing role models to inspire, educate, reinforce and sustain interest, provide knowledge and nurture a love and understanding of music."*

**Julie Bunucci:** Music Teacher  
Tuckerton Elementary School, Tuckerton, New Jersey

*"I found the entire event to be fascinating. Under Stewart's direction, both the class and the technology went very smoothly. I am very impressed that your school is on the cutting edge of such an endeavor.*

*"Clearly, these 'online masterclasses' are the wave of the future and I was honored to be initiated to the process in such a seamless manner. Your students will benefit greatly from the myriad of ideas that they will be exposed to in future classes."*

**Neal Berntsen:** Trumpet, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra  
Chairman, Brass Department, Carnegie-Mellon University

*"Our involvement with the ALIVE Project has already been a great recruitment tool for Yakima Valley Community College. By having our clinics open to the public we are attracting a new and diverse student population. Overall, The ALIVE Project has created a global community in which students, community members and faculty can interact in ways that could have never been imagined."*

**David Blink:** Director of Instrumental Music and Jazz Studies  
Yakima Valley Community College

*"The video masterclass format is getting better and easier to use. The instant feedback between student and teacher is quite effective and the results speak for themselves. There are many musical issues which can be dealt with quite effectively through this medium".*

**Rex Martin:** Professor of Tuba, Northwestern University,  
Performer with Chicago Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony

"Being part of The ALIVE Project since its early days has been an exciting and rewarding experience for us, and hopefully for the many students we have met online. The ability to interact with and to inspire young musicians all over the globe is truly a wonderful gift to the world of music education."

**Jack Mouse:** Jazz Drummer, Dan Haerle Trio, Janice Borla Group,  
Coordinator of Jazz Studies North Central College

**Janice Borla:** Vocalist, Leader of the Janice Borla Group,  
Founder of the Janice Borla Vocal Jazz Camp, Vocal Jazz Director at North Central College

*"[I] enjoyed my time working with administrators, teachers and students over the years with you. Your energy and wisdom on this topic is exemplary and I hope you continue to draw experts 'virtually' together this way. With the economic picture today, such events are a great way to add enormous value to instruction while keeping the costs down.*

*"What is so exciting about this work is that both Stewart and Allan are first rate musicians and educators along with having the technical ability to make these online experiences really work."*

**Dr. Peter Webster:** John Beattie Professor of Music Education/Technology  
Associate Dean, Northwestern University

*"Thanks for the opportunity. I enjoyed it and you are involved in a great wave of the future."*

**Peter Ellefson:** Former Principal Trombone, Seattle Symphony  
Professor of Trombone, Northwestern University/Indiana University

*“Thanks Stewart. I have to say I enjoyed working with the students. This is the future of the masterclass. It is much more affordable and beneficial for all.”*

**Gail Williams:** Former Associate Principal Horn, Chicago Symphony  
Professor of Horn, Northwestern University

*“It is a wonderful way to bring in, for the students of that school, well known teachers and performers from all over the world and to do it at a very reasonable cost!... The next best thing to being there!”*

**Norman Bolter:** Former 2<sup>nd</sup> Trombone, Boston Symphony  
Professor of Trombone, New England Conservatory of Music

*“I believe that they are uniquely qualified to lead this project since they [Stewart and Allan] have extensive experience as educators and professionals.”*

**Lynn Hunter, Ed.D:** Distance Learning Coordinator  
New York City Dept. of Education - Region 10

*“The University of Manitoba Wind Ensemble and I spent about seventy-five minutes in an internet rehearsal with friend and mentor, Allan McMurray from the University of Colorado. The technology was seamlessly integrated into the workshop and it was as if Mr. McMurray was in the room with us, listening and commenting. This kind of interaction allowed us to access the talents and experience of someone who, due to cost and time factors, would normally be unreachable for our ensemble. I would definitely encourage ensemble conductors at all levels to consider the possibilities offered by distance learning of this type.”*

**Dr. Fraser Linklater:** Conductor, University of Manitoba Wind Ensemble