

Teaching Artist Bobby Broom (right) works with students at the Chicago High School for the Arts.



# *Living the* **Dream**

## *How to get a job in jazz education*

By JB Dyas, Ph.D. 

**T**oday's jazz landscape is exploding with opportunities in education. Unlike the hey-days of traditional jazz, swing and bebop, in which jazz was virtually all self-taught and learned via apprenticeship by playing in groups led by edifying bandleaders, the contemporary jazz scene is dominated by formal, structured and professional jazz education. There are literally thousands of institutions and organizations around the globe, especially in the United States, where jazz is studied under the guidance of professional teaching artists and jazz educators.

But just where are these jobs, and how does one go about getting them? What skill set is required? Based on my years of diverse experiences as a jazz educator and jazz pedagogy teacher—and having helped myriad musicians secure employment in jazz education—I offer the following advice on how to find, prepare for, and get a job in this exciting field.



## Institutions & Organizations

Where to begin: The Student Music Guide that appears annually in the October issue of DownBeat provides a comprehensive list of nearly every university, college and conservatory that offers a bona fide jazz program. In addition to these institutions of higher learning, thousands of high schools have at least one jazz ensemble. This includes more than 100 performing arts high schools (located throughout the country) that offer courses in jazz improvisation, combo performance, piano, history and more. Many middle schools also have jazz bands. All of these programs require the services of skilled jazz musicians who know how to teach.

Additionally, there are many independent and nonprofit community arts organizations around the nation that offer music instruction and employ jazz-teaching artists and educators. Besides the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, where we engage dozens of musicians each year to teach students at all levels from middle school through graduate school, other organizations employing jazz educators include Jazz at Lincoln Center (New York City), Jazz House Kids (Montclair, New Jersey), B'Town Jazz (Bloomington, Indiana), Levine Music (Washington, D.C.) the Colburn School (Los Angeles) and copious others throughout the United States and beyond.

Summer jazz camps and workshops have proliferated as well, not only in the United States, but also around the world. Notable examples include the Jamey Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshops (Louisville, Kentucky), Litchfield Jazz Camp (Litchfield, Connecticut) and Jazz Port Townsend (Port Townsend, Washington).

Many camps and workshops are affiliated with renowned schools, such as Stanford University, the University of Miami and the University of

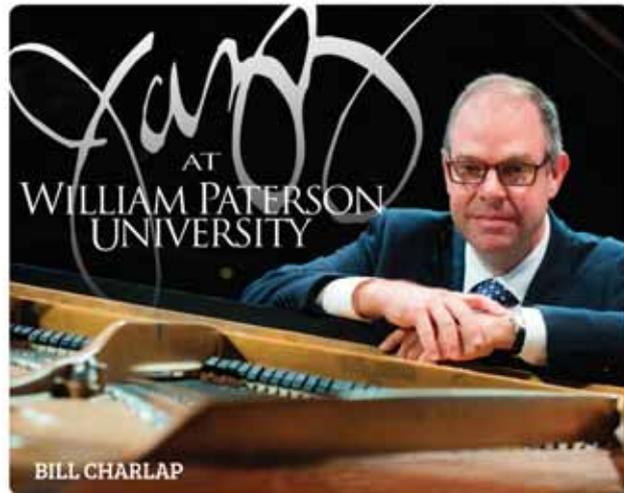
North Texas. International summer jazz programs include the Dutch Impro Academy (The Hague, Netherlands), the Samba Meets Jazz Workshop (Rio de Janeiro) and Funote Summer Music Camp (Jia Ding, China). The Jazz Camp Guide in DownBeat's March issue contains comprehensive lists.

Other venues to consider are musical instrument retailers. Whether they are small, "mom-and-pop" operations or part of a major chain, many music stores hire jazz musicians to teach private lessons, present workshops and direct jazz and rock combos. Houses of worship, Boys and Girls Clubs, recording studios, civic organizations, private learning centers and websites also employ jazz educators.

## Skill Set & Credentials

In today's precarious jazz performance business, in which gigging alone often falls short of providing financial security, many musicians look to teaching to supplement their incomes. Most of the jazz musicians I've encountered over the years have viewed teaching not only as a moral obligation—passing the art form along to the next generation, just as it had been passed on to them—but also a joyous, fulfilling experience. Even jazz greats like Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter (who work with our graduate students at the Monk Institute) find teaching to be among the most gratifying components of their careers.

But what if you're not a household name like Herbie and Wayne, or you're not an eminent jazz musician with an impressive discography, such as Geri Allen (who teaches at the University of Pittsburgh), Terri Lyne Carrington (Berklee College of Music), Benny Green (University of Michigan), Antonio Hart (Queens College), Bob Mintzer (University of Southern California), Terrell Stafford (Temple University) or Bobby Watson (University of Missouri–Kansas City)? Well, in order to get a job in jazz education, you must be an *obviously* effective and dynamic jazz educator, band director, administrator and pedagogue. And you *must* be able to play. Versatility is key. This means you not only need to be an accomplished and well-versed jazz musician on your respective instru-



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ment, but a functional player on all rhythm section instruments—especially piano. (See the sidebar on page 89 for the minimum skill set required for each rhythm section instrument.)

You also should be able to teach students of all ages and levels, especially beginning and intermediate because those are the levels of most jazz students. Strive to have your teaching and band-directing sessions focus on active learning, with your students actively *doing* (e.g., playing their instruments), as opposed to passively listening or taking notes. I always provide my students with handouts that include

all pertinent information regarding the topic at hand. Not having to take notes allows them to be completely engaged throughout the entire session.

When teaching private lessons, the cardinal rule is to do whatever is necessary so your students continue. This means teaching them not only what they *need*, but also what they *want*. After all, if they quit, you lose any chance of ever giving them what they need. Also, I've found that time spent pontificating about how your students should practice more and be more disciplined usually just results in valuable time

wasted. Rather, I suggest you spend the entirety of each session getting something *accomplished*; in other words, getting something solid under their fingers (in addition to giving them a definite assignment). The progress your students make is far more likely to inspire them to practice on their own accord than any sermonizing you might do. And always be as encouraging as possible and never, *ever* demeaning. Following these recommendations will likely make you a better teacher, increasing your reputation as such and the demand for your services. I always say that if you want to know how well a jazz musician plays, listen to him or her play; if you want to know how well a jazz musician teaches, listen to his or her *students* play. They are your best promoters and strongest advocates.

Today's jazz educator also needs to have administrative skills and be a competent writer. Being computer proficient and knowing a variety of software programs (including Word, Excel, Acrobat Pro, photo applications, and Finale or Sibelius) is definitely a prerequisite. The ability to write articles, design and create publications, and run a department have all come into play throughout my career. Organization, efficiency and people skills are paramount.

Regarding credentials, for teaching positions in middle and high schools, performing arts high schools and, especially, colleges and universities, the more advanced degree you have from the more prestigious institution, the better. A minimum of a bachelor's degree is required for a full-time position as a band director in middle and high schools. And it's almost impossible to get a full-time college gig without at least a master's degree (doctorate preferred). However, the degree and university prestige level doesn't matter nearly as much in all other arenas. This is often true for college and university adjunct (part-time) positions as well. How well you play and teach is what is most important.

**College & University Positions**

I suggest you join the College Music Society, which produces a Music Vacancy List that is continually updated to show virtually all college and university openings. Check these listings frequently. Then apply to as many schools as possible—even if the job description is not perfectly aligned with your skills—because university music department needs are often in flux. For instance, if the opening is for, say, someone to primarily teach jazz composition and arranging, and your forte is, say, trumpet playing and band directing, the powers-that-be just might engage an adjunct instructor to teach composition and arranging and hire you to teach trumpet and direct jazz ensembles if they're *really* impressed with you. Or



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they might remember you in the future when a trumpet/band directing position does eventually open up. Perhaps they will recommend you to a friend or colleague at another school where you would be a perfect fit. You never know. The more schools to which you apply, the more people who see how fabulous you are, the greater your odds of landing a job.

All applications must include a cover letter and resume. Your cover letter should succinctly include an overview of your experience and qualifications, respectfully state why you think teaching at their institution would make a great fit and, most important, make a positive impression. Of course, it must be grammatically correct with no typos or misspelled words. If writing such letters is not your strong suit, go to someone who can help you. It's important. Your resume should include your name, contact info and a listing of your education, experience and references. It should look professional and have standard formatting. (There are many good online resources with resume tips, such as Resume Genius: [resumegenius.com/how-to-write-a-resume](http://resumegenius.com/how-to-write-a-resume).)

**Interviews & Auditions**

If your letter and resume strike a chord and rise to the top of the search committee's stack of applications, you will be invited for an interview and audition. Make sure you are thor-



Levine Music faculty member Brad Linde (left) works with Levine School jazz students in Washington, D.C.

oughly knowledgeable about the school, its jazz program and the faculty members on the hiring committee prior to your visit. Don't wait until the last minute to decide on what you are going to wear. Select a nice outfit (a jacket and tie for men, a dress or blouse and pants for women). Be personable, animated, upbeat and likeable during your interview. Engage your committee members, subtly letting them know

you are aware of and admire their accomplishments. Say nothing disparaging, never use any foul language, don't complain about anything and say "yes" as often as you can. Be positive. Make it obvious that you would not only be a teacher of the first order, but an exceptional colleague as well, willing to go well beyond what is expected or required of you. This includes an enthusiastic willingness to serve on commit-

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tees, do recruitment work and contribute to the community.

Besides interviewing, you also will have to perform, teach a class or two, and perhaps direct an ensemble in front of the search committee, other faculty members, administrators and current students, all of whom have a say in whether you get the job. Your goal is to impress *everyone*. For your performance, pick a diversified, exciting and impressive set list featuring tunes that require no rehearsal with the house rhythm section and that will blow everyone away. Be sure to bring very readable lead sheets for piano, bass and drums.

Your teaching session should reflect your knowledge, organization, flexibility, warm personality, dynamism, sense of humor and pedagogic prowess. Come in with a definite, *practical* topic (e.g., II-V-I's in minor) and predetermined goal, but be flexible. Provide a concept, examples that can be learned/completed in class and a strategy for continuing. Demonstrate on your instrument and/or piano whenever possible and applicable. Also provide students with meticulous handouts (color-coded for faster accessibility), keeping the students' note-taking to a minimum so they can participate *actively*. Be profoundly clear, interesting, educative and entertaining. Be sure to speak loudly and articulately so that those sitting in the back can easily hear and understand you.

Use eye contact and humor (but not *too* much).

If the job description includes ensemble directing, you will be asked to direct a big band and small group during your visit. For big band, I suggest you bring a few of your own charts that include different level arrangements (beginning, intermediate and advanced) that you know especially well. But first, listen to the band perform what they consider the best tune currently in their repertoire. After hearing them play, make general comments with a positive spin, then address weaknesses with tangible suggestions that will improve their playing immediately. Rehearse those sections again with everyone seeing (and hearing) marked, immediate improvement.

Follow this up by handing out one of your charts, choosing the one best suited for the level of the group. After talking through the form, have the band sight-read the arrangement from beginning to end, then rehearse particular sections focusing on phrasing, blend, feel, time, dynamics, intonation, articulation, rhythmic interpretation and the like. Demonstrate on both your primary instrument (which should be easily accessible) and piano whenever applicable. And don't forget to address the rhythm section. The session should culminate with the ensemble playing the tune again from beginning to end with everyone awed by how incredible the band sounds and how much it

improved in such a short time. Again, make sure that whatever chart you choose to rehearse will be playable by the band at hand and that their performance of it at the end of the session will impress everyone involved.

Similar methodology can be used for working with a small group, especially with regard to first hearing the group play a tune they know, then working on an appropriate level tune that you select. In the combo setting, you can (and should) spend far more time on head arranging, groove, improvisation, rhythm section/soloist interaction and the like. And it doesn't hurt to show the pianist and guitarist some contemporary chord voicings, the bassist a couple of great walking lines, and the drummer a hip samba groove. Again, demonstrate as much as possible and *play* with the group, *demonstrably* enjoying what you're doing. The period should end with the ensemble sounding much better than at the beginning of the session, with all participants having gained *tangible* jazz skills and further knowledge, tremendously inspired to take all they learned and apply it to the next tune.

#### Middle & High Schools, Other Venues

To find teaching gigs outside the college and university setting, visit the websites of the public school district(s) in your area, as well as the websites of all private schools in which you may

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## Rhythm Section Instruments: *Minimum Skill Sets*

Besides being an accomplished and well-versed jazz musician on their primary instrument, well-rounded jazz educators should be *functional* players on all rhythm section instruments, especially piano. Below are the minimum skill sets required for each instrument. These skills can generally be acquired within one or two years by practicing 75 minutes daily: 30 minutes on piano, and 15 minutes each on guitar, bass and drums.

### Piano

- ✦ Be able to comp two-handed jazz voicings for blues in B-flat and F, "Rhythm" changes in B-flat, major and minor II-V-I's in all keys, and all tunes in Aebersold Play-A-Long Volumes 54 and 70.
- ✦ Be able to comp one-handed jazz voicings in the right hand while walking bass lines in the left hand for all of the above.
- ✦ Be able to play the idiomatic keyboard patterns associated with easy jazz tunes (e.g., "Cantaloupe Island," "Maiden Voyage," "All Blues," "Killer Joe," "Watermelon Man").

### Bass (upright and/or electric)

- ✦ Be able to play a simple bossa nova bass line for easy jazz tunes (e.g., "Blue Bossa," "Song For My Father").
- ✦ Be able to walk a blues in B-flat and F, "Rhythm" changes in B-flat, and all swing tunes in Aebersold Play-Along Volumes 54 and 70.
- ✦ Be able to play the idiomatic bass patterns associated with easy jazz tunes, (e.g., "Footprints," "Cantaloupe Island," "Maiden Voyage," "All Blues," "Killer Joe").

### Guitar

- ✦ Be able to comp basic four-note jazz voicings for blues in B-flat and F, "Rhythm" changes in B-flat, and all tunes in Aebersold Play-A-Long Volumes 54 and 70. (This can be done with just a half dozen or so simple, but authentic, movable chord forms.)

### Drums

- ✦ Be able to play a basic swing beat (in 2 and 4) with both sticks and brushes, a bossa nova, a samba and a basic rock/funk beat.

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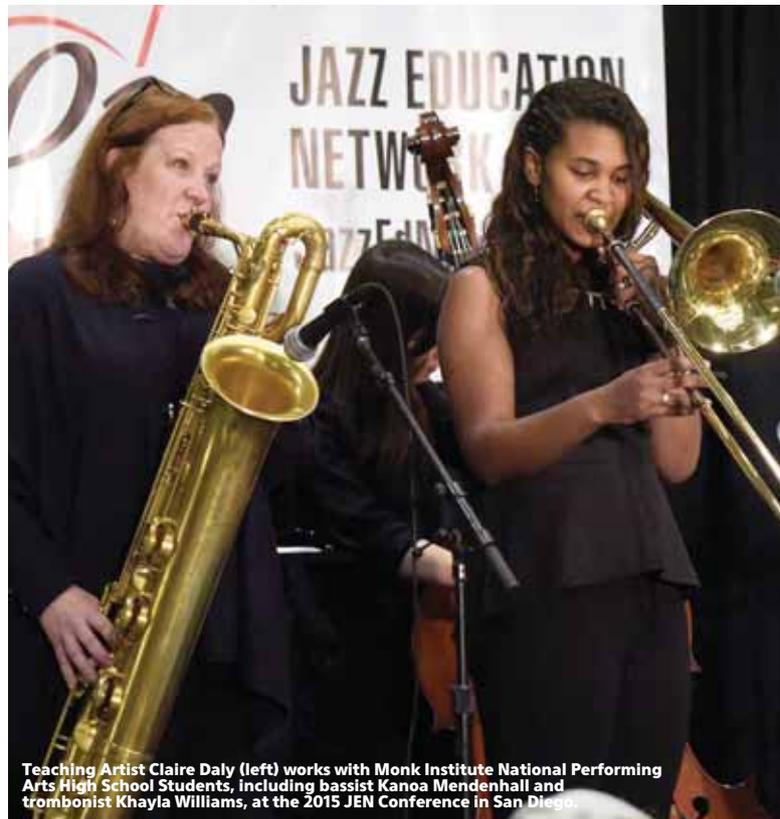
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Teaching Artist Claire Daly (left) works with Monk Institute National Performing Arts High School Students, including bassist Kanoa Mendenhall and trombonist Khayla Williams, at the 2015 JEN Conference in San Diego.

be interested in teaching. Review the job openings and follow the college and university guidelines I have set forth for your benefit. For all other teaching venues (arts organizations, music stores, etc.), send a cover letter and resume even if there are no available positions at the moment. A week later, follow up with a phone call requesting an appointment to meet with the director in person (this is often granted), make a superb impression and offer a *free* workshop. Then, knock their socks off! I suggest you do this at *all* possible teaching venues and institutions (including all colleges and universities) that are within reasonable driving distance from your home. Remember, the more people you interact with, the greater the chances that someone will hire you or recommend you to a colleague who is seeking a musician with your skill set.

### General Tips

When auditioning for a job, be punctual, be likeable, don't be opinionated and do have an open mind. Don't insist on anything extra (e.g., rehearsals, longer class periods, extra equipment, etc.) Don't make *any* excuses; even if they're legitimate, keep them to yourself. Don't make numerous phone calls asking questions of the search committee chair, director of jazz studies, dean, head of human resources or anyone else who might find this annoying. Most everything you need to know can be found on the school's website. Make sure you have the "must know" list of standards and jazz classics solid under your fingers; you don't want to get caught not knowing what others consider obvious. Don't discuss salary until *after* an offer is made; *then* negotiate, realizing that the first proposal is often significantly lower than what they're willing to pay—if they really want you. Be savvy. Negotiate confidently yet respectfully. Be willing to compromise, and never dig your heels in so far that the venue might retract the offer altogether.

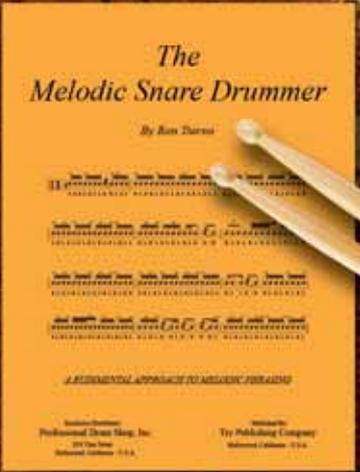
Just as it is for finding employment in most any field nowadays, networking has never been more important. This is especially true in jazz education. Join the Jazz Education Network (JEN) and attend its annual conferences. See if your area has any local jazz associations, and then attend their meetings. Apply to perform and present a clinic. Meet as

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## Suggested **Resources**

### Piano

- ✦ *Jazz Piano Voicings for the Non-Pianist* (Mike Tracy)
- ✦ Jamey Aebersold Play-A-Long Volumes 1, 54 and 70
- ✦ Transcribed Piano Voicings for Aebersold Play-A-Long Volumes 1, 54 and 70

### Bass

- ✦ "Linear Bass Line Construction" (JB Dyas), DownBeat, August 2006
- ✦ "Linear Bass Line Construction, Part 2" (JB Dyas), DownBeat, August 2007

### Drums

- ✦ *Drum Styles and Analysis for Aebersold Play-A-Long Volumes 54 and 70* (Steve Davis)
- ✦ *The Ultimate Play Along for Jazz Drummers* (Steve Davis)

### Guitar

- ✦ *Easy Jazz Guitar: Voicings & Comping* (Michael DiLiddo)

### Tune Learning

- ✦ "Methods for Fighting the Epidemic of Tune Illiteracy" (JB Dyas), DownBeat, May 2010
- ✦ "Methods for Fighting the Epidemic of Tune Illiteracy, Part 2" (JB Dyas), DownBeat, August 2010

### Teaching Venues

- ✦ The College Music Society: [music.org](http://music.org)
- ✦ Jazz in America: [jazzinamerica.org/JazzResources/JazzEducation/College](http://jazzinamerica.org/JazzResources/JazzEducation/College)
- ✦ Arts Schools Network: [artsschoolsnetwork.org/membership-list.html](http://artsschoolsnetwork.org/membership-list.html)
- ✦ Public School Districts: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists\\_of\\_school\\_districts\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists_of_school_districts_in_the_United_States)
- ✦ National Guild for Community Arts Education: [nationalguild.org/MemberSearch/Member-Directory.aspx](http://nationalguild.org/MemberSearch/Member-Directory.aspx)

many potential employers as possible. Impress them. Impress everyone.

It all comes down to three basic steps: learn to play and teach as well as possible, be entrepreneurial and, most important, *do everything to the nines*. Following these guidelines will put you well on your way to enjoying one of the most satisfying and rewarding careers in the arts: teaching *jazz* for a living. **DB**

Dr. JB Dyas has taught jazz to students of all levels in a variety of venues, including middle and high schools, performing arts high schools, summer jazz camps, colleges and universities, jazz institutes and more. His video series "How to Teach Jazz to High School and College Students" can be found free online at [artisthousemusic.org](http://artisthousemusic.org). Formerly the executive director of the Brubeck Institute, Dr. Dyas currently serves as Vice President for Education and Curriculum Development at the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz at UCLA.



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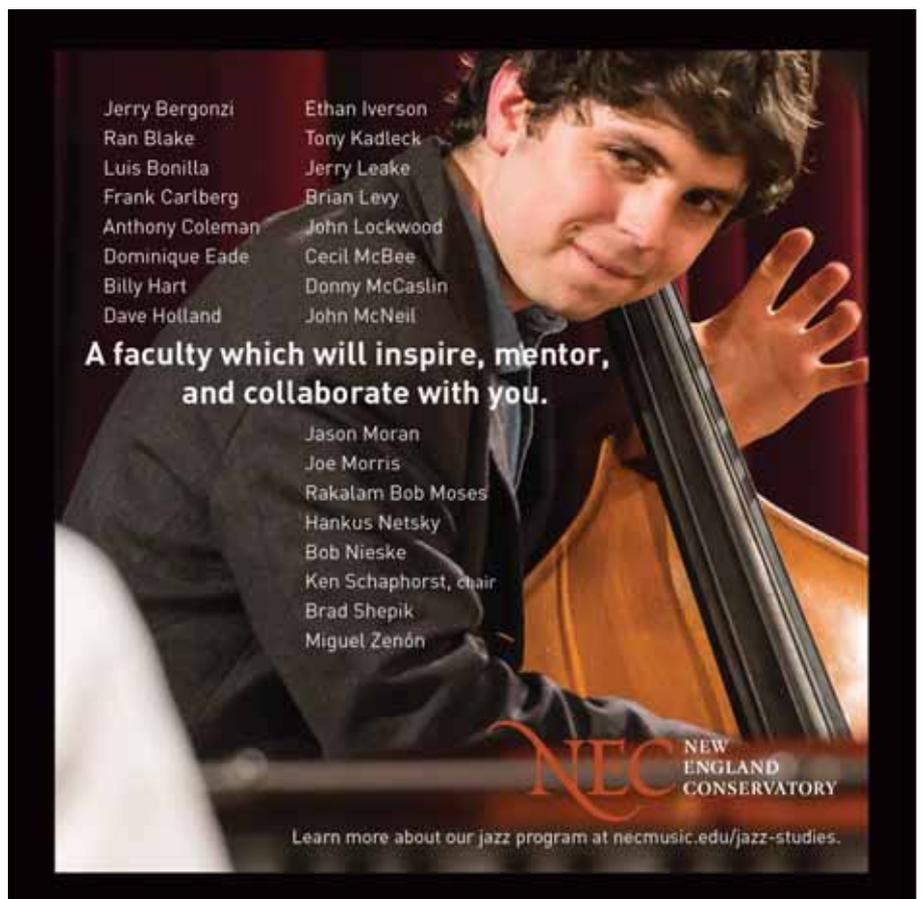
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