Randall Allsup’s article, “Popular Music and Classical Musicians,” presents a very unique approach to music education. The premise of Allsup’s article is that classically trained musicians are hesitant to step into the realm of popular music; however, Allsup has come up with unique a way to bridge the gap between classical musicians and popular music through what he calls “classroom garage bands.” In the beginning of the article, he states that much of the apprehension to this art form is due to a lack of hands-on experience. The method he presents, however, is not about moving students and teachers away from Western classical music like one might believe; rather, he says that his work with popular music and mostly classically trained students is “part of a larger goal to diversify and vitalize music education in public schools.” Much like studying music of another culture, studying music within one’s own culture can develop new ways of teaching and learning, ultimately aiding in becoming a masterful musician.

Much like a small chamber ensemble or jazz combo, the garage band is a small group, though somewhat unorthodox at times, that is more or less a “natural” combination of music education practices that utilizes creative music making and group problem solving without a coach or teacher. A modified version of this, as presented by Allsup, would have a teacher acting as a facilitator or guide; furthermore, the classroom garage band would give classically trained students access to important learning experiences, such as learning new musical styles and composing as a group. As with any subject, the learning is more productive in a healthy, positive environment where both teachers and students willingly engage in the diverse styles of music and multiple methods of learning.

Next, Allsup goes into a short description of a course lesson plan of sorts, in which he describes the application of the classroom garage band. Though the goal is ultimately to help primarily classical musicians develop an appreciation for and learn from popular music, he mentions that the processes is really building two way bridges. Basically, comparing uncanny similarities in two musical selections, one classical (such as the passacaglia from “Dido’s Lament”), and one popular (such as Led Zeppelin’s “Dazed and Confused”), a music educator could virtually “trick” a classically trained or popularly trained student into appreciating, or even developing a taste for, music on the reverse end of the spectrum.

Participating in small jazz combos and other chamber ensembles, I’ve developed a lot of the same skill-sets and practices that Randall is trying to produce through the garage band. Therefore, I can clearly see the importance and value in his methods. Utilizing a small group setting such as a chamber ensemble, jazz combo, garage band, or the like for any given genre or culture of music can help bring about vital skills that may be difficult to find, or even suppressed entirely, in formal practices. The value of building two-way bridges and exploring repertoire, genres, cultures, or practices outside one’s comfort zone is very high and can prove extremely beneficial in my book.