

## “ These assignments are super challenging and also really rewarding ”

**D**O YOU WANT to use your music to enrich the lives of public schoolchildren – while getting paid? Here’s some news: the Actors Fund has come up with a very creative way for musicians and other artists to do part-time teaching gigs in the New York City public schools through the Actors Fund Work Program.

It’s not without some fine print, but it just might turn out to be a positive experience for you and a way to increase your income.

Here’s the big picture.

The program is called STARRRS, and it stands for “Substitute Teachers for the Arts and the three R’s.”

The idea is that musicians, actors and other performing artists are sent into the New York City public schools as substitute teachers.

But instead of following a standard curriculum, you are allowed to use your music as a teaching tool. You may even give mini-concerts. It’s ultimately up to the principal what you are allowed to do, but the idea is that you use your artistry in the classroom.

The pay is \$154.97 for a full day of

teaching, minus taxes. That means getting to a school around 8:30 and getting out around 3. On top of this, there may be opportunities for additional work at an hourly rate. Subs are members of the United Federation of Teachers and are covered by its union contract.

Although the current budget situation has meant that some schools are not using substitutes, a number have expressed an interest in those from STARRRS – in fact many principals have expressed a specific interest in musicians.

Here’s the fine print.

- You have to attend a generic orientation session about the Actors Fund Work Program, which lasts 2.5 hours. (If you’re already a member of the Actors Fund Work Program, call your career counselor now and ask about the STARRRS program.)

- Working with a career counselor, you will determine whether STARRRS is appropriate for you. (Remember, the Actors Fund Work Program is there to help you find a meaningful sideline or new career, so if STARRRS isn’t right for you, the program will help you find another fit.)

- You must attend a separate STARRRS orientation and audition. (Yes, there is an audition.)

- There is a substantial training commitment. Training takes place three days a week, for four weeks. All participants must attend all sessions. The training lasts all day, but you’ll get out of training in time to do evening gigs.

- You’ll have to take a child abuse and violence prevention workshop.

- You’ll have to take 20 hours of on-line training.

- You’ll have to take the LAST (liberal arts and science test).

- It will ultimately cost you about \$350 in fees, but at the end of it all, you will have your substitute teachers’ license for the New York Public School system. (Part of the cost covers fingerprinting fees. If you’ve already been fingerprinted in the past from teaching or sub work, you don’t have to be fingerprinted again and can knock about \$115 off the required fees.)

- There are some recertification requirements if you want to do it again each year.

- If you finally make it through the

program, the expectation is that you will commit to at least two teaching days a week. (Remember, each teaching day is 8:30 to 3, approximately.)

### What’s it really like?

Local 802 member Michel Gohler is a woodwind doubler and freelancer. He read about the STARRRS program in *Allegro* when we first published an article about this program last year and decided to give it a try because he was interested in teaching in a classroom and this was a way to dip in part-time.

Gohler reports that the training he received was excellent. His first day in school was in mid-December, up at P.S. 173 in the Bronx. He notes that the school is situated in perhaps a tough neighborhood, but he felt safe. “School started at 8, but I got there at 7 to be prepared,” he told *Allegro*. “They were just unlocking the doors!”

Gohler did not realize he would be assigned a classroom made up of second grade children with special needs. However, the regular teacher was there along with two aides.

For the first three sessions that day,

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# Reading, writing and rhythm

Do you have what it takes to sub in the New York Public Schools? Creative teaching gigs are now available for musicians and other artists...

PHOTO BY SKYNESHER VIA ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

## ‘I believe that teaching is a wonderful way to make a difference in the lives of New York City public schoolchildren’



Pedro Libert

**P**EDRO LIBERT WAS born in Aruba and raised in Curaçao. As a teenager, he traveled to the Netherlands to study music, where he earned degrees in conducting, music theory and viola. Libert teaches in the STARRRS program (see story above) and was interviewed by Kathy Schrier, director of the Actors Fund Work Program.

*Kathy Schrier: I know you are interested in becoming a licensed teacher. Why?*

**Pedro Libert:** I believe teaching is a wonderful way to make a difference

in the lives of New York City public schoolchildren. Also, I am a new dad, and I welcome work opportunities that will give me stability, but also allow me to continue to be a musician. I am currently enrolled in the M.A. program in education at Lehman College and expect to be dual certified in music and special education.

*Kathy Schrier: How has the STARRRS program affected your career path?*

**Pedro Libert:** The brilliance of the program lies in our training instructor Howard Katzoff, who is not only

a seasoned educator, but also has a total commitment to children and nurturing artists. Howard believes very strongly that students’ skills and talents are the foundation of all classroom instruction. I experienced this approach as not only learning from the teacher but also learning with the teacher. Honestly, the STARRRS experience made me recognize the ingredients of quality education.

*Kathy Schrier: Would you recommend the STARRRS program to other Local 802 members?*

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# Reading, writing and rhythm

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Gohler just observed. Afterwards, the regular teacher left to attend a workshop, and Gohler stepped up to the plate: “I started by unpacking my flute and relating the names of the flute parts to the parts of the body...head, mouth-piece, body, and so on. Then I started playing.”

The students were interested at first, and then when they became a little rowdy, Gohler had them march around the room. In a second class, he took out his sax and repeated the concept.

Gohler points out that one of the greatest perks of the STARRRS program is simply getting your New York City substitute teacher’s license. It’s very hard to get one on your own, Gohler says, and the Actors Fund really acts as your agent and walks you through the process. You can use your sub license to do any kind of sub work, not just through STARRRS.

“I would recommend the STARRRS program to other members, but you must have an interest in teaching,” Gohler says. “It’s quite challenging and usually with schools in the greatest need. These aren’t cushy assignments. Most of my STARRRS colleagues concur that these assignments are super challenging and also really rewarding. I’m glad I did it, but I’m about to go on a

union tour of ‘A Christmas Story: the Musical’ and so I won’t be available this fall. It’s really not an easy way to make money on the side: you’re in it for real.”

Local 802 member Clare Cooper would agree. She worked for three different placements in the STARRRS program last year.

“I was put in some very difficult situations and since I don’t have a lot of experience dealing with kids, I had a hard time,” Cooper told Allegro.

Cooper added, “I would recommend this program to other musicians who have teaching experience or are parents and know how to deal with children. I am grateful for the work during a time when gigs were scarce.”

Another member, violist and violinist Janet Lucy, came into the program with a lot of teaching experience, but not much subbing experience. She, like Michel Gohler, is a newcomer to STARRRS.

Lucy said, “I have enjoyed the moments where I have made a connection with a child – and there have been a fair amount for someone new at this. The children seem excited to have a teacher who does music with them, even though they also have a regular music teacher. I also have enjoyed the positive responses from some of the staff who make it clear that the school values music!”

Lucy added, “I would recommend this experience to musicians who are really interested in teaching school-aged children and who feel fairly comfortable presenting what they do for classroom environments. One thing to know is that in my classrooms, there have been floating assistants who can help with discipline, which has been a crucial element. If the children’s focus isn’t with you, they won’t listen to music well. On the other hand, I found my violin to be a good starting point for listening. I think the public schools are particularly hungry for the arts right now, especially the ones with principals who place a real value on them.”

Violist Pedro Libert also teaches through the STARRRS program (see interview below). During his training period, he taught a music/art lesson for seventh graders. “This class included some children with special needs,” Libert told Allegro. “I had observed this group earlier and had seen how difficult it was to get the class engaged in just about anything. For my lesson I used the story ‘The Zax’ by Dr. Seuss. After reading the story, I asked the students to summarize the story and to bring out the main ideas. Several students responded. Before reading the story again, I asked for two volunteers who wanted to be the Zaxes. I had four students form a band, playing some small percussion instruments I had brought in to accompany the story. I thought that by involving the students in some physical activity, I could stir their motivation. Adding a band proved to be good for a spirit of teamwork. I was delighted when the students requested to make up their own dialogue instead of the original

one. Some students suggested modifying the end of the story and integrating a dance. Eventually several students wanted a turn to play the Zax role or to have a round in the band.”

As Allegro goes to press, Libert had just finished his training period. He has been assigned to a classroom where he is in charge when the main teacher takes kids out of the room for assessments and testings. During these times, he is using some of the creative techniques he learned in STARRRS, but he is also managing the classroom and helping students like a traditional substitute teacher.

**Next steps**

Are you still interested? If so, the first step is to attend one of the Actors Fund Work Program orientation sessions. These sessions are not specifically about the STARRRS program, but you must start the whole process by attending one of these. They take place every Monday from 12 noon to 2:30 p.m. at 729 Seventh Avenue, between 48th and 49th Streets, on the 11th floor. (You must arrive on time: no latecomers permitted.)

After you do that, the next STARRRS orientation and auditions are planned for January.

If you need any more information, please contact Kathy Schrier, director of the Actors Fund Work Program, at [Kschrier@ActorsFund.org](mailto:Kschrier@ActorsFund.org) or (212) 354-5480.

Even if you’re not interested in the STARRRS program itself, but you want more information on career development, call the Actors Fund Work Program. It is a valuable resource for musicians and all performing artists.

**‘It’s really not an easy way to make money on the side: you’re in it for real.’**

**– Michel Gohler**

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**Pedro Libert:** The STARRRS Program is terrific. Local 802 members have many career options and the wonderful Actors Fund staff will help them identify them. I truly believe that the Actors Fund Work Program helps us be all we can be!

*Kathy Schrier: How were you introduced*

*to Local 802?*

**Pedro Libert:** I came to the United States in 2008, because I fell in love! I also knew that this country would have different professional opportunities for me. When I first got here I met a singer at a church who told me about the Monday night jazz jam sessions at Local 802. I went to the session, and it turned out that night there was a concert to sup-

port the union’s Justice for Jazz Artists campaign. At that point I recognized the importance of the union. I joined immediately. During one of my visits to Local 802, I mentioned that I really needed to find work to complement my music career. All roads led to the Actors Fund Work Program.

*The Actors Fund is a national human*

*service organization that helps all professionals in performing arts and entertainment. The Fund is a safety net, providing programs and services for those who are in need, crisis or transition.*

*For more information on the Actors Fund Work Program, the STARRRS program, or anything in these articles, please contact Kathy Schrier at [Kschrier@ActorsFund.org](mailto:Kschrier@ActorsFund.org) or (212) 354-5480.*