



Erika Floreska

Director of Education, Jazz at Lincoln Center

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“I wanted to be math teacher,” recalled Erika Floreska, “but in college I decided it wasn’t for me, so I turned to my other love: music.” Erika got her undergraduate degree in flute performance and her master’s in classical flute performance. “There are lots of pianists and singers in my family, but my aunt Penny, a flute player, was a big inspiration,” she said. While pursuing her musical career, Erika’s uncle, a teacher and professional cellist, encouraged her to think of other ways to be involved with music. “I reached a point where I realized there were many other flute players who wanted it more than me,” she explained. Today, Erika is the Director of Education at Jazz at Lincoln Center, and she was nice enough to fill us in on how she made the move from performance to administration.

How did you transition into arts administration?

I interned backstage at the University of Michigan’s Musical Society, which led to a summer job as a production assistant at Chicago’s Ravinia Festival. I also worked at the Interlochen Center one summer as a tour guide and production assistant, and another as a counselor. All these jobs showed me different sides to the arts world that had nothing to do with performing, and I loved them. After completing my master’s, I worked at UMS handling all the details behind the scenes for concerts. I also took on projects coordinating education events and residencies. When I decided I wanted to move to New York, I did a lot of networking and met the executive director of the JALC Orchestra. I was hired on as an assistant, and later a position in the education department opened up—running our Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Festival. I’ve been here eleven years now and have worked my way up.

What are your responsibilities as director of education?

We have more than 20 different programs and resources split into three audience areas: kids and families; students and teachers; and adults. I manage a staff of 10 who are sectioned off according to these different audiences. I manage the big priorities and philosophy of the programs. I help brainstorm what we’d like to accomplish, how we want to do that, and how we can improve what we are already doing. It’s

a lot of planning, coordinating, and problem solving.

What skills are necessary in your position?

Besides having a knack for organization, you’ve got to have a love of people and personalities. I deal with people on the artistic side and the administration side, so being able to get along with different types of people is important. Also, being passionate about the art form helps you through the tough parts and keeps you connected to the bigger picture.

What do you like most about your career?

I like the music and the community that surrounds jazz.

What are some of the challenges you face?

A lot of the challenges are about time-management: prioritizing tasks and figuring out what’s most important to get done. There’s never enough time to do everything you want to do.

What advice would you like to offer to our readers?

Listen to music as much as you can, especially live. Also, volunteer and intern. Work at your local concert hall or help your band director with concert coordination. It helps build a different perspective about what goes into making concerts and gives you the experience to see if you like it. Major in something you are interested in and take some classes that are different to broaden your horizons.

—VERONICA DOMINGUEZ-GARCIA



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