

Once he takes the stage, freshman music student Anthony Collins lets go and lets loose.

“When I perform I get to express myself. There’s no limits,” he said.

His saxophone and polished shoes glint as he rocks out jazz chords during a solo.

“I put my mind, body and soul into it,” he said.

A warm smile is on his face during pauses between play. He is in his element.

Music moves Collins, and he loves sharing that feeling with others.

“To be able to make music to make other people feel good makes me feel good,” he said.

Collins graduated from Rock Island High School in June 2018 and started at Black Hawk College in August. He immediately became active in the BHC Jazz Band.

He lives in The Villas, BHC housing just across the street from campus, and is enjoying being on his own and the quick commute to class.

Collins decided on Black Hawk College because of the cost savings and the quality of the music program.

He knows after earning his Associate in Arts he will be well-prepared for a four-year school. Right now he is leaning towards transferring to Western Illinois University in Macomb.

No matter where life takes him after graduation, music will be a big part of his journey. The business side of music and jazz performance both appeal to him as possible career paths.

Collins received a Catfish Jazz Society scholarship, and networking with society members led to him making BHC connections before graduating high school.

The Catfish Jazz Society is dedicated to promoting jazz, and in addition to awarding scholarships, the society holds jam sessions and sends students to band camps.

When Collins found out about Black Hawk College Jazz Ensemble jam sessions at Cool Beans in Rock Island, he checked them out and played as a guest with Dr. Edgar Crockett, BHC professor of music.

The BHC Jazz Ensemble welcomes high school students to attend performances, and will

invite them to take the stage as guests and see what the Jazz Ensemble is all about.

While Collins already knew he was attending Black Hawk College, Dr. Crockett's passion for music showed him he took the right path.

"He lives, breathes, eats, sleeps music," Collins said.

Collins likes that Black Hawk College's small class sizes allow you to really get to know professors. He knows he can always rely on Dr. Crockett if he needs help and to push him to be his best.

"If you do good he'll let you know," Collins said. "He's tough, but when he's tough, he sees potential in you."

Dr. Crockett said Collins is a great asset to the music program who is always eager to learn.

"Anthony is not only a talented musician," Dr. Crockett said. "He is also polite, hard-working and dependable."

Collins also picked Black Hawk College because of affordability.



"I think it is best to start off at a two-year so you can save money," Collins said. "If you rack up your scholarships you're not paying for anything."

Last month Collins received the M. L. Lockhart Scholarship.

The award is presented at the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center in Rock Island's Memorial Service and Awards celebration, which honors the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Collins was surprised and excited to receive the honor. His sister, Simone Collins, previously received the scholarship.

There is a service component, and Collins had donated to homeless shelters and volunteered with his sister at River Bend Foodbank.

The siblings stuffed bags for the nonprofit's Backpack Program together, which provides school children with food to take home over the weekend.

In high school Collins played varsity football and was in the concert and jazz bands.

He counts jazz among his favorite genres, but he doesn't have just one favorite genre. Hip hop, R&B, soul and gospel are some of his other favorites.

Jazz is one of the hardest to play because of the amount of chord changes, he said, and it's also different because it allows for solos and improvising.

That is one of Collins' favorite parts about jazz – you can make a song your own and really express yourself.

"You can change it up."

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