Indiana University jazz piano student Ensar Kabil learned a lesson in humility when he played his first gig in a Bosnian bar during the second year of the siege of Sarajevo. Kabil admits that his performance was less than stellar. Fortunately, the audience, happy to escape the snipers and the bombs, didn't seem to mind.

"It was the kind of bar where people drink and they ask for a song and you play the song and they get all happy and throw money on the piano or they break glasses on their foreheads. It was a pretty wild bar."

Tucked in the bowels of the city under siege, this basement bar provided a safe haven for the black rruuketeers who could afford to drink when most Bosnians couldn't afford a nutritious meal. Despite its subculture status, this mixture of petty gangsters, prostitutes and common criminals represented a microcosm of the culturally diverse and divided city above them. A blend of Serbians, Bosnians and Croatians, these bar patrons preserved some of their rich cultural history through their mutual appreciation for the traditional Bosnian folk songs that played on despite the war.

Raised on classical music, then 17-year-old Kabil didn't recognize many of the songs. But he quickly realized that he couldn't afford to turn down a request from his rowdy patrons. So Kabil improvised, something that would later come in handy as a jazz musician at IU.

I watched my friend (Serbian guitar accompanist Branko Saran) and he was telling me the chords," Kabil recalls.

Thanks to Saran, who asked Kabil to continue accompanying him, the gig became more than just a one-night lesson in improvisation. As Kabil fumbled his way through subsequent gigs, he gained more than a tolerant audience, he gained a musical mentor. "It's important to hang with musicians, especially better musicians than yourself, who will show you stuff," says the 21-year-old sophomore.

"I realized that playing music is not about having an ego or thinking I'm the best. It's very important to admit they're better than you and ask them for advice."

Eventually, those occasional $10 bills patrons would toss on the piano proved just as precious as the advice. The gig became the primary source of income for Kabil's family, which was surviving off small token checks from his mother's bankrupt employers. But thanks to Kabil's new cash flow, the family did better than most of their friends and neighbors.

"I know people who completely lost half their weight in the span of two months," Kabil recalls. "My aunt was like 100 kilos, which is like 200 pounds. In two months, she lost like 100 pounds. She went down to nothing."

But as Kabil's 18th birthday and imminent draft notice crept closer, an even darker fate loomed ahead for him. The gig that kept him off the shrapnel-laden streets, where his mends wandered aimlessly, couldn't keep him out of the trenches. So Kabil and his mother began plotting how they could send him to stay with his brother in America.

Unfortunately, American visas were as scarce as food during the siege of Sarajevo, which compelled 2,000 college students and 800 university faculty to flee to foreign universities, according to an article in The Chronicle of Higher Education. And those were just the lucky ones. The New York-based Bosnian Student Project, which helps relocate Bosnian students in America, claims one-third of its initial 1993 requests for visas were denied.

To avoid the increasing competition of college-bound Bosnians, Kabil enrolled in a high-school exchange program instead. After irregularly attending school in a make-shift classroom for two years, Kabil gladly consented to another year of high school, a concession that eventually secured him political asylum in America a year later.

Looking back now, Kabil admits that the war isn't what really drove him out of Bosnia, however. Kabil blames his exodus on American vinyl. When Kabil

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Cronin Receives Honorary Degree

IUB Professor of Information Studies and Dean of the School of Library and Information Science, Blaise Cronin, was awarded the Doctor of Letters (Honoris causa) degree by Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh this past fall. The honorary degree was conferred in recognition of Cronin’s “distinguished academic career and outstanding contribution to the development of information science.”

Dr. Austin Reid, in his address to Professor Cronin, paid tribute to his achievements. “Nationally and internationally, he is in the top rank of scholars in his field. It is fair to say that the combined impact of his academic and professional leadership has transformed perceptions of library and information education as much as any other individual in the last decade.”

Cronin is currently the BLICMP Visiting Professor of Information Science at The Manchester Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom. He studied at Trinity College, Dublin, and The Queen’s University of Belfast before accepting the post of principal research officer at the Association of Information Management in London. He then joined the faculty of the University of Strathclyde as professor of information science and head of the Department of Information Science, before moving to Indiana in 1991.

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stumbled upon the Louis Armstrong record, “Dancing Cheek to Cheek,” he developed an addiction to jazz, a genre of music basically nonexistent in Bosnia. “I was listening to it over and over again. I was so excited about it. But I couldn’t play it.” Though Kabil continued to try to emulate the jazz style, he couldn’t find his swing, which left him very frustrated.

After two years of classical and jazz training at IU, most of the frustration has waned. “When Ensar came here, he definitely didn’t have that swing,” says Kabil’s former piano teacher Michael Lucas. “It’s something we’ve worked on a great deal and it’s something he’s made dramatic progress in.” Spending up to five hours a day echoing jazz off the narrow walls of the music practice room, Kabil has finally found his swing. Unlike many of his American counterparts, who marvel at his drive and dedication, Kabil can’t risk not being the best.

However, his Americanized brother, who escaped Bosnia before the war, doesn’t understand the musical dream that sustained Kabil either. Perhaps that’s why he often points to homeless street musicians and teases Kabil, “That’ll be you.” But Kabil, who once wandered the streets in Bosnia with the same hopelessness, says he doesn’t plan to go back.

— Jenny Land
School of Journalism

Alfred Aman, dean of the School of Law, IUB, is in Europe for spring of 1998, having received one of the Distinguished Chair Fulbright Lecturing Awards in Western Europe to teach comparative constitutional and administrative law at the University of Trento, Italy.

Leslie Cadavid, a long-time international student adviser on immigration matters with IUB’s Office of International Services, will give a workshop presentation at the 1998 NAFSA National Conference in May, supported by a Bloomington Professional Council grant.

Portia Maultsby (Afro-American Studies, IUB) will be distinguished visiting professor at Utrecht University in the Netherlands for three months beginning on April 1. She will teach two courses on African-American music, exploring religious and secular music genres of the 20th century and their roots in an effort to trace their influences in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

Allen Maxwell (Political Science, IUK) will lead a seminar group of students and friends in this year’s New York/United Nations Seminar during spring break, where they will be able to participate in briefings with UN officials and delegates dealing with the UN standoff with Iraq.

Kurt Zorn (SPEA, IUB) has recently returned from a stay in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where he was invited to consult on tax policy as the country struggles to create a central authority that will be able to collect and distribute tax revenues equitably.