



December 3, 2005

RSS Feed

In the States

Girls Make Noise at Rock 'n' Roll Summer Camps

Run Date: 02/01/05

By Ann Farmer
WeNews correspondent

Rock 'n' roll camps for girls are spreading across the country like swamp pop fever, encouraging fledgling female rockers to turn up amplifiers, bang on drum sets, make raucous music and feel good about themselves.

(WOMENSENEWS)--When Ingrid Dahl first began fiddling around with the electric guitar at age 13, everybody kept telling her how "pretty" she looked playing the instrument.

But no one wanted to take her rock 'n' roll aspirations seriously. Not even her usually supportive parents. "I was told to 'stop making all that noise,'" recalls Dahl, "but it was okay for my brother to rock out behind his bedroom door."



Girls performing at the Portland-based Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls

Courtesy Shayla Hason

Today 24-year-old Dahl sings and plays electric guitar, bass, piano and drums in her rock and roll group, The 303's. But she hasn't forgotten the obstacles she faced getting there. So she recently performed at a music benefit at the Knitting Factory in New York City to raise scholarship funds for the Willie Mae Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls. Named after the seminal blues-rock musician "Big Mama" Thornton, this summer camp, which starts up this year in Brooklyn, N.Y., will provide young girls and teens from ages 8 to 18 the chance to rock out just like the boys.

The camp is the newest addition to a string of rock 'n' roll camps for girls that have sprung up in Washington, D.C., Nashville, Tenn., Portland, Ore., California and Tucson, Ariz. All the camps are similarly structured with one-week sessions with approximately 75 to 100 girls that culminate in a live performance.

Una Rose is a 10-year-old from Portland, Ore., who first attended the rock camp in 2002 and has returned every summer. "One of the things I like best about camp," says Rose, who has subsequently formed a rock group, The Ready, with three other girls aged 12 to 13, "is girls forming bands and getting the chance to express themselves and having fun. It's a good feeling."

Started by Camp in Portland

All the camps are offshoots of the Portland-based Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls set up about four years ago to give girls at this critical age the opportunity to experiment with popular music as an enjoyable way to boost their self esteem.

While boys don't have their own rock camps, experts say that they have plenty of cultural cues supporting their desire to play the music and also don't

experience the drop in self-esteem that girls do.

At camp, girls learn to play electronic instruments as loud and crazily or as soft and silkily as they like. They sing and write songs and are encouraged to strut their stuff onstage, all without the distraction of boys. They also participate in workshops and panel discussions geared to developing their self-expression, tolerance and self-reliance.

For instance, when the volunteer teachers--almost all professional female musicians--aren't teaching musical chords and drumming techniques, they are performing skits about how to resolve group conflicts and create music as a team. These teachers might lead discussions on gender stereotyping and body image by watching MTV and critiquing the commercial portrayals of women in music videos. Girls also go home with a few self defense moves under their belt and marketing skills at their fingertips, like how to create band buttons and publish a music 'zine.

Former Roadie Started Trend

"We apply a feminist ideology and approach it as a holistic experience," says Portland founder Misty McElroy, 35, a former roadie who says during the nine years she set up band equipment for rock 'n' roll groups, she was never taken seriously. "I was always talked to like I didn't know what I was doing. It was always assumed that because I was a woman, I didn't know what I was doing. And as I aged, I realized it wasn't an age thing. It was a misogynistic environment."

McElroy quit the music world about five years ago to attend Portland State University for a degree in women's studies. To fulfill a course requirement, McElroy took a year to plan the camp and convened the first one on campus during the summer of 2001. "No one thought it would work," she recalls. "I thought I'd be lucky to get 20 girls." She ended up receiving 300 applicants of which she could only accept a 100. Two years ago, she added a second summer session and an after-school session.

Like many of the students and teachers who come from across the nation and abroad, Karla Schickele made the trek from New York City to Portland for two years, enthusiastically volunteering her skills as a songwriter and bassist for her rock band, Ida, before deciding to spearhead a New York City version of the camp this summer.

To cover its operational expenses, which will include a robust scholarship and sliding scale payment plan, Schickele, recently organized a number of fundraisers. "I want to make it affordable to all socio-economic levels and to reflect the ethnic diversity of New York," she says, explaining that she's asking people and organizations to donate enough new and used instruments and sound equipment to provide the instrument of choice for each of the 75 girls who will be accepted for the initial session.



Willie Mae Rock Camp

On the first day of the week-long session, the girls form groups according to the type of music they want to explore.

"Musically, we mean rock 'n' roll in the widest possible sense," says Schickele, who says that currently includes hip hop, Latin, punk rock, folk, and country western. "Any music we can get an enthusiastic woman on board to teach, we want to teach it," says Schickele, whose enthusiasm stems in part from growing up with a composer, musician father, Peter Schickele, the radio host and creator of PDQ Bach, who stressed that "all musics are created equal."

Lack of Role Models

Despite receiving more-than-average family support, 37-year-old Schickele says it was difficult as a teenager to find female role models on record covers or female band members to play with. She continues to see a lot of sexism in this still male-dominated field.

"You still see the sexy girl singer out front," says Schickele. "But being sexy is not a requisite for playing music. There are a lot of ugly guys playing music," she laughs.

How does Schickele describe the experience of playing rock 'n' roll? "Totally fun. It makes me feel happy. It makes me feel like a million bucks . . . like the sky's the limit and you won't take no for an answer."

That's exactly the experience the camp organizers hope to impart to the girls, says Suzanne Grossman, a fiddler and an associate with the Rutgers University-based Institute for Women's Leadership, who is helping to fundraise for the New York City camp. "We want them leaving thinking they live in a world of opportunities. To imagine themselves in roles they hadn't imagined before; that being a drummer or a bass player isn't just a role for men."

As the week progresses and the girls gear up for a live cap-off performance, their confidence also rises.

"We had girls who were very silent at first," says Dahl, "but by the end of the week, they couldn't shut up. They were singing all over the place, hitting drumsticks on all kinds of things, high-fiving each other. They were so excited. It was really, really cool."

McElroy also says her camp also doesn't discriminate against deaf girls or others with disabilities. "You're never going to see a girl in a wheelchair performing on MTV. But you'll see her in camp rocking out," she adds.

Ann Farmer is an independent journalist who lives in New York City. She reports for The New York Times and contributes stories to various publications including Emmy, More, Dance Magazine, and others.

For more information:

Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls:
<http://www.williemarockcamp.org/>

Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls:
<http://www.girlsrockcamp.org>

[go back to archive search results.](#)

Send this story to a friend.

Your Name:

Friend's Email:

Permissions: To reprint this article, Click here:

COPYRIGHT.COM
REUSE THIS CONTENT

Copyright 2005 Women's eNews. The information contained in this Women's eNews report may--with the prior written authorization of Women's eNews--be published, broadcast, rewritten or otherwise distributed.

Women's eNews is a nonprofit independent news service covering issues of concern to women and their allies. An incubator program of the International Institute for Community Solutions, Fund for the City of New York,

Women's eNews is supported by our readers; reprints and licensing fees; and the Carnegie Corporation of New York; the International Institute for Community Solutions, Fund for the City of New York; the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; the Barbara Lee Family Foundation; the Open Society Institute; the Rockefeller Family Fund; The Helena Rubinstein Foundation; the Sister Fund and the Starry Night Fund. The donations from readers are critical to our success. Donate now by going to <http://www.womensenews.org/support.cfm>.

Women's eNews subscribers may select whether to receive a daily full text, daily summary or weekly summary. To change your email address, send mail to membersvcs@womensenews.org. To change the frequency of your mail or to cancel your subscription, send a message to Member Services (membersvcs@womensenews.org) or use our online form: http://www.womensenews.org/update_subscription.cfm

[Home](#) [About us](#) [Donate](#) [Arabic Women's eNews](#) [Press Release](#) [Sylvia](#) [Links](#) [Contact us](#)
[Search Archives](#) [Letters to the Editors](#) [Subscription and Membership](#) [Pressroom](#) [Help](#)
[21 Leaders for the 21st Century 2005](#)

[ORDER REPRINTS](#)

[Make Us Your Homepage!](#)

[sign in](#)

Copyright 2005 Women's eNews Inc.