

Girls rock out at Rock and Roll Camp

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Amy L. Stuart/Correspondent

Soundtrack, a band formed at last year's Rock and Roll Camp for Girls, performs at a benefit show at The Lunchbox in Gainesville.

Emma Lammens said she jumped on the couch when she received the acceptance email last year informing her that she would be part of the first class of Gainesville's Rock and Roll Camp for Girls.

"I feel free when I play music," the 10-year-old said. "I feel the words and everything bonding into something beautiful."

The Girls Rock Camp, which takes place June 9-13, ends its run with a finale showcase at the downtown concert venue High Dive.

Several promotional performances are scheduled in the coming weeks to raise money for camp scholarships so no one is turned away for lack of funds. A recent performance at The Lunchbox included a performance by the band Soundtrack, which was created by campers last year.

"Diversity is importance to us," said Chelsea Carnes, co-director of the Gainesville Girls Rock Camp. "We want all type of girls represented at the camp. All the money goes back to expanding the camp."

Carnes said the camp was created to encourage girls to express themselves through music and overcome any lingering notion that rock music is dominated by men.

"It is fairly obvious the music scene is very segregated gender-wise," said Carnes, who is a musician in the Gainesville band Wax Wings.

"Frequently I'll go to shows and five bands will play and not a single woman will be on stage," said the University of Florida history junior. "Most of the time when I see women in bands they are singers, and they don't have a drumstick in their hand or a guitar. It leaves one to question why more women aren't rocking out on drums or guitars."

The goal of the Gainesville Girls Rock Camp is to break down the wall of masculinity associated with rock music and make it accessible to women, Carnes said.

The camp is organized by local women, many of whom are in bands themselves, including members of Oriflamme, No More, Wax Wings, Soda, GUTS, and The Ones To Blame. Last year, the camp was run with the help of 18 volunteers.

Campers receive music instruction and attend workshops on empowering subjects, including women's rock history, she added.

"We talked about everyone from Dolly Parton to Missy Elliot... and a lot of powerful women (campers may) not have been exposed to before," Carnes said.

The camp provides the instruments, equipment and basic instruction needed to write songs and form bands of their own, Carnes said. At the end of the week, the bands perform their songs at a public showcase.

Music lessons and song writing are not the only outlets of self-expression at the camp.

Some of the most important camp activities are music-themed, including designing album art, screen printing and making performance persona, the latter described as getting campers out of their box and ready to perform on stage, Carnes said.

There's also a women's self-defense workshop taught by a martial arts instructor and dance workshops on a diverse styles of dance, Carnes said.

"We chose to incorporate dance because a lot of girls have issues with body image, and we thought dance and movement workshops might help with that," she said. "We had Egyptian belly dance (and) yoga classes, so they get diverse body movement."

Carnes said the girls have learned the importance of communication and conflict-resolution over arguing and making demands.

"You watch these girls learning all these new skills and translating these skills into writing songs," Carnes said.

Lammens, who began singing at the age of 6, played guitar in the band Awesomeness Overflowing at last summer's camp.

"One of the things I learned is never to judge people by how they look," she said. "We had the group with some of the youngest members. I was a little disappointed because it looked like the older girls had more experience. (But) we performed one of the best songs at the performance."

Lammens said her excitement overcomes her nervousness when she's about to go on stage.

"I just say 'You know what? I like this music. This is something that people I know wrote and I'm going to be proud singing it,'" she said.

One of the songs she helped write for the band Soundtrack, which is composed of former campers, is called "Jerk Pie Face." The idea for the song came from a joke, she said.

"It's about a guy breaking up with a girl," Lammens said. "The chorus is 'You're nothing but a jerk. You're nothing but a pie face.'"

Carnes said she hopes the girls' confidence in playing music will transfer into their personal lives and the way they interact with others and the world.

"We realized, as feminist musicians, (that) music is something (through which) we can offer girls the self-esteem and confidence it gave us," Carnes said.

"They've gone from being shy and quiet to expressing themselves and sharing ideas, which goes along with the confidence they gain from playing together in the band," Carnes said.

Carnes said she hopes to have 35 girls in camp this year, compared to the 28 girls the camp hosted last summer.

"The (camp) was one of the best experiences I ever had in my life," Lammens said. "If you end up with people you don't know at all, and you think that you write the worst song, put that out of your head and just rock on."

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