



DALLAS Observer

What It Was Like: Rock 'N' Roll Fantasy Camp 2010

Rock 'N' Roll Fantasy Camp is a chance for musicians to get a crash course in playing in a rock band.

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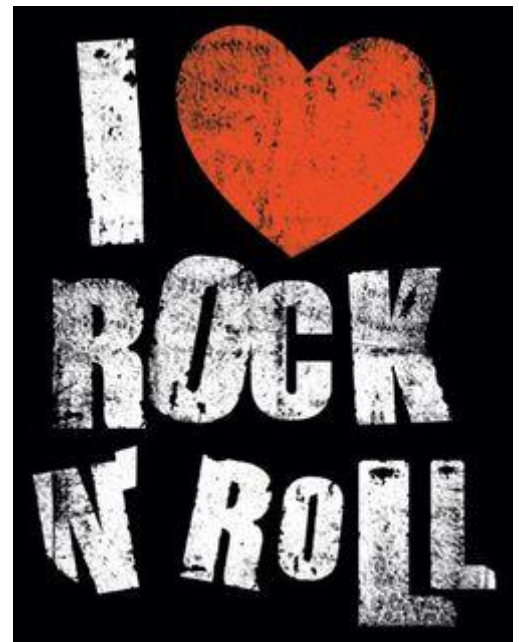
Whether your drumming skills are on par with Meg White's or somebody who can play "Pride & Joy" note-for-note in a dark corner of a Guitar Center, the intent of the camp is to become a better player. Oh, and to have a fun time while forming a band, recording an original song, and playing live at the House of Blues as members of Disturbed, Grand Funk Railroad, Quiet Riot, and Winger serve as camp counselors.

A preamble: I do not consider myself a failed musician. I've never truly had a desire to leave my everyday life for the rock star golden goose or the consolation prize of having enough money for rent and food at the beginning of the month.

I've played the drums since 1994. I've also played guitar, bass, trumpet, and piano, but drums have always been paramount. No amount of sparsely-attended shows or dream-killing critiques by my sister would stop me from playing when I was a teenager. When I was in college (also known as the perfect time to go for broke with a band in a van), I got things rolling with a career in radio while playing in a couple of bands. My desire for a career beyond retail and the service industry got me thrown out of two bands as a result. But I don't regret that at all. Both bands imploded not too long afterwards (not because of me, but because of personality issues that were always there). These days, when I'm not entering accident reports in a database or reporting accidents on the radio, I'm usually air-drumming.

Usually it's to a small section of a song I'm loving at the moment. I've played in a couple of bands in the Dallas area since I moved here in 2002. These days, I casually jam with my friends and keep playing on my set. Ask anybody who's a lifer, and he or she will tell you a personal story like that.

And, going into this past weekend's fantasy camp, that's what I had to show for my experience.



Day 1: Friday, November 12

The bulk of the rehearsal for Friday and Saturday was held at Absolute Space, a former office building converted into a rehearsal place. Since I've been to this place before with my last band, it definitely felt like home turf.

After checking in with the front desk, I run into David Fishof, the camp's founder. [He remembered me from our interview over the summer](#), and introduced me to Sandy Gennaro. Sandy has played with people like Joan Jett, Cyndi Lauper and The Monkees. I knew of him because he was featured on an instructional drumming tape my father bought me in high school. (Yes, I later had Sandy sign my tape.)

After jamming in Sandy's space with two guitarists, a bassist, a singer and another drummer, we had to go into another room to audition for our bands. After I nudged my way through Deep Purple's "Highway Star," I went to another jam room, this time hosted by Teddy Andreadis, who's played with Guns N' Roses, Carole King and Michael Jackson, among many others.

Dinner was served at 7 o'clock and I happened to sit at the table where Rudy Sarzo from Quiet Riot, Kip Winger, and Mark Farner from Grand Funk Railroad also sat. Listening in and adding a few comments to their conversations, I got the sense that these guys are very humble and really into this camp as a fun musical excursion. I definitely didn't detect any over-sized egos.

Also over dinner, I got to talking to some of the fellow campers. I was curious who could afford such an experience -- packages aren't cheap, starting at a cool \$2,000.

One camper was a lawyer from Tyler who was surprised by his wife on his 50th birthday with a chance to do the camp. Other campers were from University Park and Southlake. In other words, I doubted that I'd run into a starving artist from Oak Cliff who doesn't own a car and listens only to chillwave at the moment. Watching everyone play, I have to say, most of the talent level here was pretty good. I guess that makes sense; given the price of the camp, you can't be some slouch doing this as a blow-off sort of thing.

Later, when I found that I had been placed in Teddy's band, I was quite pleased. The hour spent in the jam room before dinner went well. And I looked forward to the following day --which would be the longest day of rehearsal.

But, before that, we were sent off with all the counselors getting up and playing after dinner. Beatles songs, Rod Stewart's "Hot Legs," and Grand Funk tunes were played. Then various campers (including myself) got up and played songs. Some came off well ("Livin' on the Edge") while others were massacred ("Daytripper").

Day 2: Saturday, November 13

On this day, over the course of seven hours, six bands were formed. In that time, we had to come up with a 12 minute set. And one of the songs they'd play had to be an original composition.

In my case, I was paired with two guitarists from Little Rock and a singer from Sherman. Under the guidance of Teddy Andreadis, we got things cooking pretty quickly. Even though I wasn't that familiar with the Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd songs they started playing, I played along. Pretty much right away, we had a great vibe together. I credit my previous band and its occasional blues jams as to how I had the chops to play on this day.

Towards the end of our day, our band had a name now: The Shotgun Brothers. Hell yes.

In between jam sessions and lunch, one-hour classes were taught by the counselors. I obviously took the drumming class. Sandy stressed the importance of playing to a metronome and strongly urged us drummers to get one. Duly noted.

After dinner, I got the chance to jam with Rudy Sarzo. Sarzo, very notable for his time in Quiet Riot and with Ozzy Osbourne, was a very welcoming and friendly person. So when we started playing bluesy funk and Northern Soul, I felt very comfortable.

It just wasn't what I would expect playing with him.

With another blues jam with my bandmates back in Teddy's room, we called it a night.

Day 3: Sunday, November 13

Another hour of private lessons, followed by more jamming. The Shotgun Brothers kept tinkering with the arrangements of our songs. We had four songs at this point: our original tune (which sounded kinda like T. Rex jamming with Allman Brothers) and covers "They Call Me The Breeze," "Simple Man" and "Born to Be Wild."

Everybody seemed to be working their asses off trying to get a good set. After lunch, every jam room got to play with Dickey Betts from the Allman Brothers. "One Way Out" got played a few times, but by the time he hit our room, we played a slow blues number called "Stormy Monday." Dickey's son Duane also played with us. The tune came off great and my fellow Little Rock guitarists are in heaven. I was trying not to rush (which I'm very guilty of from time to time).

Then it was off to showtime -- at the House of Blues, not too shabby -- where all six bands had under fifteen minutes to rock.

The first band kept things very simple and slow. Never did I think you could play "Oh, Pretty Woman" and "You Can't Always Get What You Want" at a snail's pace. I had to cut these guys slack, though, because they had limited time behind their instruments. Still, I wanted my group to get up there and play balls-out crazy.

Frankly, though, once we did, the time flew by. We had some kinks, but overall, we were all very happy. I played my brains out -- like it was my last show in my life. I came offstage to a number of compliments and even an offer to join a local cover band.

Rudy Sarzo's band opened with the same song we closed with, but they were a little more faithful to original version of "Born to Be Wild." Their singer had some metal pipes in his chest, though; they did a great rendition of Quiet Riot's "Bang Your Head."

Mark Hudson's band pretty much stole the whole show. Playing "Can't Buy Me Love" along with a Clapton medley and an original, they really put on a show instead of set of songs. Conversing with the audience, ad-libbing, and playing powerfully left an impression.

Sandy Gennaro's band and Kip Winger's band put in fine sets as well, all leading up to a lengthy set by a number of the camp counselors. Playing songs like "School's Out" and "Helter Skelter," these guys

could go on and on. And on and on they did when Dickey and Duane Betts came out. Jamming extensively on Allman Brothers tunes, they closed the night with "Ramblin' Man" (which Dickey jokingly introduced as "The song that pays the rent.")

At the end of the whole experience, hugs, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses were exchanged. Everybody had a ball and many people said their rock star dreams came true.

Nobody said any sour grapes about going back to a normal life on Monday.

Me? I kept thinking about my 4 a.m. wakeup to report traffic. But I don't regret spending an entire weekend forming a band one day and playing a show the next night.

It might have been a crash course, but I don't think I would have had as much fun if it weren't one.