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Detroit School of Rock and Pop

Packin' heat: Summer 2008

By Brett Callwood

At the end of February, the Detroit School of Rock and Pop Music opened its doors for the first time to masses of eager students willing to do whatever it takes in order to make the transformation from bedroom rock stars to the real thing. What started out as simply a good idea on paper for head honcho Jason Gittinger became a reality 12 months ago when he took control of an old bicycle store in Royal Oak. A year and a whole lot of hard labor later, and the building is the perfect outlet for Gittinger's original vision, a vision that Gittinger himself summarizes eloquently in his "Declaration of Rock."

"We, therefore, the Representatives of The Detroit School of Rock and Pop Music™, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of this music school, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Rock Bands of The Detroit School of Rock and Pop Music™ are, and of Right ought to be Free to Rock and play the music they wish; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the music schools of the past, and that all connection between them and these schools, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent Rock Bands, they have full Power to sing, drum, strum, pluck, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent Bands may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Rock and Roll Honor."

And let's fact it, nothing is more sacred than rock 'n' roll honor.

Metromix paid a recent visit to the school and, upon entering the doors, we were immediately impressed with what Gittinger has achieved. With hardwood floors running through the entire building (formerly the basketball court at Michigan State Fairgrounds Coliseum – no kiddin'), and concert lighting covering the ceiling, the school definitely has a visual impact. Now the preparation is over though, and the real hard work begins.

"We had 150 people here for our opening day," Gittinger says. "From kids to lawyers – we get all ages coming through these doors. I'd say the average age of our students is 25."

The Detroit School of Rock and Pop Music isn't your average music school though. For one thing, a wallet full of cash or a wealthy parent won't guarantee you admission — there's an audition process.

"We're not necessarily looking for the most talented people through the auditions," Gittinger reveals. "We say on the website that an initial lack of ability won't stop us from taking you in. What we're looking for is the passion to want to learn. That's the most important thing. And the willingness to get out of the garage and start playing live with a band."

Playing live is something that Gittinger knows all about – he drums with the hugely popular cover group The Mega 80's, a popular area cover band. Perhaps surprisingly, Gittinger doesn't teach the drums at his school. He does hire an expert tutor for each instrument, including vocals, though. He even has The Motor City Horns, famous for performing with Bob Seger, on hand to teach some brass skills.

Gittinger isn't content to teach his students a few chords and send them on their way. The ultimate aim is to get them on stage, playing in front of an audience.

"I went on a three-day clinic tour with the Capital University Rock Ensemble," Gittinger says. "I spoke at the Michigan Music Educators Convention for a bunch of music teachers from all over Michigan, and then I invited them to Detroit for two days and we played at an elementary school in Warren and another school in Grosse Pointe. I wouldn't expect anything but my students to be playing on stage at the end of one of our courses."

"Thanks to my role in The Mega 80's, I have tones of experience at throwing concerts. That makes it very easy for me to do that for people who don't know what they're doing. It's awesome to see them on stage at the end. It's incredibly gratifying."

The Detroit School of Rock and Pop Music is located at 1109 South Washington Ave, Royal Oak, Michigan. 888-988-7625. Classes cost \$299 / month for the full production band course. For more info: www.detroitsofrock.com

