

Finding a place in classic rock 'n' roll

School of Rock teaches young musicians about teamwork, determination, self-reliance, goals - and then finally music

By Sandy Jensen
Close-Up Correspondent



Anna Bowman, a student at Wasatch Junior High in Salt Lake City, is studying hard to be the best. The best heavy metal drummer in her school.

Bowman has been playing drums for about two years, but it's the last year she has spent as a student in her other school, the Paul Green School of Rock in Sandy, that has rocked her world.

The Paul Green School of Rock aims to teach kids not just how to play an instrument, but about music, how to play music, how to perform music. And not just any music - rock music. Established in Philadelphia in 1998, the Paul Green chain now has 23 schools nationwide, two of which are in Utah: Sandy and Salt Lake.

Bowman is upbeat about the quality of education at the rock school. "It's got . . . some of the best teachers in the country," she says. "It's helped me become a better person, which has helped me be a better student."

Her mom, Jane Bowman, agrees. She says the school has helped her daughter become more responsible and self-confident.



"They are very pro responsibility," she says, adding the school is also anti-drug.

Steve Auerbach, director of Paul Green's two branches in Utah, says the last thing the school teaches is music. At least, music may be the last thing the students learn. He says the students learn teamwork, determination, self-reliance and how to accomplish goals.

They experience "a sense of community that is so sublime," he says. "It's joyous to watch."

Dominic Walker of Herriman echoes Auerbach's sentiments. The Herriman 14-year-old closed the recent Best of Season show in Salt Lake City by performing rock 'n' roll great Peter Frampton's monster hit, "Do You Feel Like We Do."

"Oh, it was great," says Walker, who looked a lot like the rock idol at the show with his long, curly hair, and the Frampton-style button-up shirt and red pants that he wore for the occasion. His parents, Gina and Jerry Walker, also have another son, Eli, attending the school. "It's really great to have my kids playing and listening to stuff that I did as a kid, and still do," says their mom. "When you see them up on stage performing, it's a whole different experience."

While having her children wear their hair a little long has taken some getting used to, Gina Walker says the school has been a boon for her children and others along the Wasatch Front. She says her children have also stayed caught up on their academic homework.

For her part, Anna Bowman has found getting her homework done has been a bit challenging at times since she began studying at the music school. But she says she wouldn't trade the Paul Green experience for anything. "The Metallica show was the best time of my life," she says.

Auerbach says plenty of parents and grandparents enjoy themselves as well. One of his greatest pleasures, he adds, is watching a skeptical grandparent have an epiphany about the connection between Buddy Holly and Metallica.

Students at the school, ages 7 to 17, perform songs by Janice Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Kiss, Frank Zappa, the Ramones, Rush, Yes, Queen, and many other rock 'n' roll stars. They also learn about the fate of rock 'n' rollers who dabbled in drugs and suffered the consequences.

What's more, Auerbach adds, the school rewards hard work. For instance, the school has a show band of 18 hand-picked musicians who perform and act as ambassadors. Nationally, the chain of rock schools has a group known as the "All Stars" that performs nationally and internationally.

"Before [becoming a student with the School of Rock], I didn't know where I was going, what I was doing," Bowman says. "Everyone has their aspiration or talent. I didn't have any of that. The School of Rock helped me discover it."

The best rock drummer in her class.