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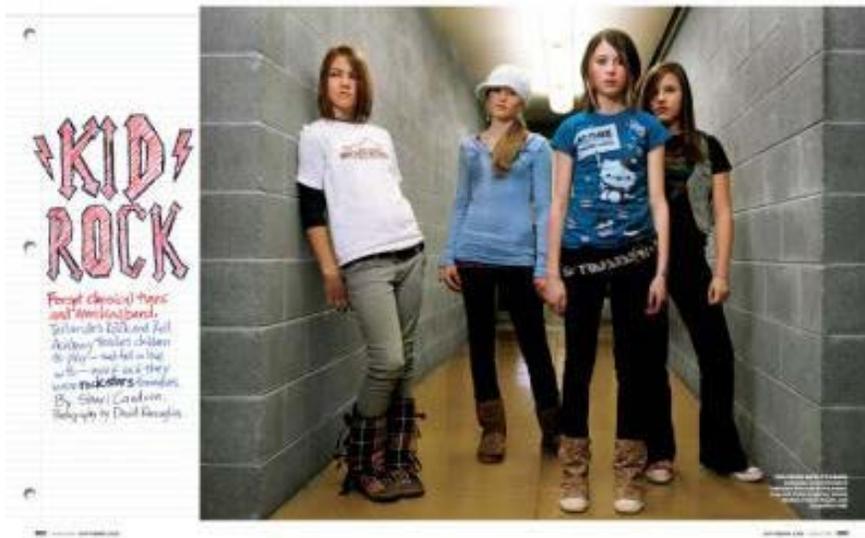
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FEATURE

Kid Rock

Forget classical tunes and marching bands. Telluride's Rock and Roll Academy teaches children to play—and fall in love—with music as if they were rock stars themselves.

BY SHARI CAUDRON
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See the Academy's favorite girl band Juxtapoze on stage and at school in our [multimedia slide show](#).

Juxtapoze is an all-girl band composed of four 13-year-olds who live in Telluride. Although the girls are generally polite and agreeable, like sitcom teens of the 1960s, they do have vociferous opinions where music is concerned. They think *High School Musical* is disgusting and painful to watch. They think boy bands are just too weird. And although each of them went through an AC/DC phase when they were little, they're way past that. Now, they think Amy Winehouse is the coolest.

It's early winter and the girls are reflecting on their musical tastes because they have a

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big show this Saturday night, and like any band gunning for a little publicity they've agreed to have a conversation with a reporter and whatever inanities that may entail. What they really want to talk about is the concert and whether or not they will draw a big crowd.

Juxtapoze will be performing with nine other kid bands, all part of the Rock and Roll Academy, a private rock music school based in Telluride. That's the good part. The bad part is that a touring ski event sponsored by Jeep has just blown into town, bringing with it a full slate of nightly musical acts, including Macy Gray and Michael Franti & Spearhead, who, as bad luck would have it, will be performing at the same time as the Academy. This makes the girls nervous. They're afraid they're going to lose their audience, and with it their musical edge—because if the members of Juxtapoze have learned anything at all about performing, it's that they do way better when surrounded by a crowd of adoring fans screaming I love you-I love you-I love you! The girls from Juxtapoze, and all the other bands appearing this weekend, will be performing thanks to the single-minded efforts of Mark Galbo, who founded the Rock and Roll Academy four years ago. It's a fancy name—academy—and one not normally associated with Led Zeppelin and Iron Maiden and all that other music our parents hated. But that's by design. "Academy" is a serious word, a word that denotes focus, purpose, growth, and ambition, and that's exactly what Galbo is trying to offer his students. To him, rock 'n' roll is just the medium. The message is about the magic that occurs when you meet kids on their own level.

On a wintry morning several days before the big concert, Galbo walks back and forth on the raised stage inside the Academy studio. The walls are persimmon red and papered with posters of Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix and Green Day; amps, speakers, guitars, keyboards, and drums crowd the small stage. Weaving in and out of the equipment, Galbo, a thoughtful man who can riff on the Who one minute and Buddhism the next, talks about how he came to teach rock in the Rockies.

Yeah, he says, he's got the degree in music. Yeah, he plays a ton of instruments, including guitar, drums, trumpet, and keyboard. Yeah, he even did the professional music thing—for 16 years. He produced 25 albums, including a children's album that won a Parent's Choice Recommended Award. He recorded four of his own solo CDs, featuring a blend of traditional folk and rock 'n' roll. He also played in bands, at weddings, and on television shows. He knows what it's like driving through the night with a bunch of guys to get to another gig in another city, all for a hundred and twenty bucks.

But, man, did it get old. "Music, geez, it's such a weird way to make a living," he says. "The pay is inconsistent. The hours are bizarre. And your professional environment is the place where everyone else is going to get away from work." So he gave up the touring. He married his wife, Jessica, moved to Monticello, Utah, had three kids—a fourth arrived later—and worked 12 hours a day in a restaurant. At least he was home every night.

After five years, though, music tapped him on the shoulder once again. Galbo began by teaching a workshop at the Blues & Brews Festival in Telluride. After all, he'd always taught music. He'd even published three instructional guides. While in Telluride, Galbo learned there was no guitar teacher in town. So he started offering private lessons, commuting 125 miles from his Utah home. The more he taught, the more he remembered a long-ago dream: to open a private music school, one that did things a little differently, one that taught kids to love playing music.

So here's what happens when the universe points you toward your destiny: people appear. They offer part-time teaching jobs. They get you affordable mountain housing. And pretty soon you get the courage to give that long-dormant dream a try—which Galbo did in January 2004 when he hung his shingle for the Rock and Roll Academy, a unique school-within-a-school music program that has seven- to 18-year-old kids



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FAMILY

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playing in rock bands from day one. In a woo-woo kind of coincidence, the movie *School of Rock*, starring Jack Black, came out as Galbo was prepping to open the Academy. "I was literally painting the studio when I heard about the movie," Galbo says. Though it may be hard to believe, before that moment he had no idea anything like this existed anywhere else on Earth.

The curriculum would be pure rock 'n' roll. Forget emo, hip-hop, death metal, and whatever else kids are Limewiring these days. We're talking Aerosmith and Steppenwolf and Deep Purple. Classic rock. Their parents' rock. This being Telluride, where many of those parents are aging baby boomers with dusty stacks of vinyl in their basements, a rock academy wasn't a tough sell, at least not at first. The kids were totally into it, and so were most of the parents. But some of the grown-ups didn't think playing in a rock band was the best way to learn music. What about musical notation? What about key signatures and time signatures and learning the difference between a bass and treble clef? Wasn't that important? No, Galbo told them—not for what he's doing at the Academy. His approach is to thrust instruments into kids' hands and let them intuitively figure out how to play music they enjoy. And they always do. "When people saw their children playing two or three instruments in their first concert, the resistance disappeared," Galbo says. And now, this Saturday, almost four years later, Juxtapoze and 46 other kids will perform, hopefully, for a sellout crowd.

Tuesday night before the concert, the members of Juxtapoze meet at the Academy to rehearse. Walking into the small, warm room, they peel off hats and parkas and unwind long scarves and drop them all into a heap on the floor.

Frances Rogers hops onto the stage first. She's the drummer, one of the best drummers Galbo has ever worked with, and to prove it he pays her the ultimate girl compliment: "Even 17-year-old boys like to play music with her." Today, Frances' hair is streaked pink, although she's dyed it something like 10 or 15 times because she gets bored with her hair. She's also gets bored with Hannah Montana, also known as Miley Cyrus, whom she thinks needs to get a life. What she's definitely not bored with is U2, which is like the biggest band of her life. Frances walks behind the white-and-black Roland drum set and sits on the round, black stool and attempts to push it down, but she's stick-figure thin and the stool won't budge. "Frances," Galbo says, walking up to help her, "ya gotta start eatin' some cheeseburgers."

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Shari Caudron

[AUTHOR'S COMPLETE ARCHIVE](#)

Best Bites: Tables' Salmon with Sorrel Hollandaise

Perfect Pairing: Sushi Sasa and Moët Imperial Rosé

Best Bites: Salt Bistro's Sweet Pea Ravioli

Light Bites: CafeBar's Blackened Trout Salad

Road Bike Rest Stop: Lowry Beer Garden