

Learning to Play

Rock and Roll Academy Focuses on the Social Side of Music Education

BY DAMIEN ALEXANDER WILLIAMSON, TIME OUT WRITER



The Rock and Roll Academy might just change the way music is taught to kids.

The academy, now in its third year in Aspen, brings an altogether different approach to music education. There's no rote memorization of chords and scales, no funny mnemonics devices for remembering notes, and even the idea of private instruction has been tossed. Instead, the organization, founded in 2003 in Telluride, focuses on the social aspects of learning.

"Our music education program is social,

play-based, and student driven," says director Russell Cattaneo. "Students form bands, choose their own music, and work collaboratively. They learn to play instruments by playing instruments."

Cattaneo likens the Rock and Roll Academy's approach to music education to the way kids learn how to play sports: you put them on the field and give them a ball.

And, he adds, by not making the process of such a chore, you increase the fun factor which, in turn, leads to higher levels of learning.

"Learning the technical aspects of music is important," he says. "And the kids definitely do that, but maybe not with the same terminology they're typically used to getting in the classroom."

The major impetus for the start of the academy in Telluride was founder Mark Galbo's view that schools in Colorado, and America in general, weren't doing enough in terms of music education. So he decided to create a program that could augment that education while showcasing a new way to learn.

What he created is an experiential music program that emphasizes the musical, technological and social aspects of students' creative processes within a multimedia environment. The objectives of the RRA program are as much about team building, self-expression and social responsibility as they are about learning to play music, says Cattaneo.

"There are also groups of kids in places like Aspen and Telluride that aren't super sporty, and they don't always have a great outlet for things to do," Cattaneo says.

One of the most surprising aspects of the program is that kids often learn two or three different instruments.

"Kids just pick up instruments and start playing," Cattaneo says. "And the parents are always wowed by at the high level the kids are playing at by the end."

The fall semester for the Rock and Roll Academy runs Sept. 10 through early-De-

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ember, culminating in a band showcase at the Wheeler Opera House on Dec. 7. Over the course of the program, students will meet weekly for 90 minute sessions, and form custom bands of 4-6 students. No experience is necessary.

The Rock and Roll Academy has served over 1,400 students in its in-school, after-school and summer programs. It was awarded a National Association of Independent Schools "Best of Show" Award at the NAIS Annual Conference in Denver in 2007. In the fall of 2008 The Rock and Roll Academy was also featured in 5280 magazine in the "Denver's Top Schools" edition.

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Fall Semester: Sept. 10-Dec. 7
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Aspen Daily News

