

PLAY

# School of **ROCK**





## LIFE LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH MUSIC

BY DANIEL JEWETT PHOTOS TIM PORTER

**T**he crowd quiets as the band takes the stage. The silence is broken by the sounds of guitars being plugged in and tuned. The anticipation is palpable in the audience as lights come on around the stage. Fans rush forward as the singer grabs the microphone and says, “Hi mom.”

This is not your ordinary rock group. Backstage is stocked with sodas, microphone stands are at their lowest setting and most of the band members arrived in their parents’ minivan. But this show will rock nonetheless and the group will come away with a taste of what it is like to perform live and, more often than not, a passion to try it again soon.

“It’s a lovefest,” says Marin Youth Accelerated Music Program (MY AMP) owner and instructor Chris Detrick. “Parents are partying and yelling. It’s not like a recital, it’s like a rock concert.”

OPENING PAGE:  
Nikita Daron of  
Brutus and Otter.  
THIS PAGE: Alexa  
Zener and Chris  
Detrick work  
on vocals.



**“As you get older it is hard to remember how you got obsessed with music in the first place,” Detrick says. “Working with 10- to 12-year-olds reminds me and awakens that passion. It keeps me young.”**

“The live shows are awesome,” confirms Susan Hauser, whose nine-year-old son West plays drums in several bands including a MY AMP band. “The kids get so fired up and gravitate toward each other’s energy. The shows sound really good.”

Detrick, 27, started the San Rafael-based MY AMP in 2007 after years of being an instructor at the Oakland branch of the rock school BandWorks and many of his students followed right along.

“Chris is great and West learned much more rapidly in a band setting with other instruments in the mix,” says Hauser, a self-confessed rock ’n’ roll soccer mom. “It’s amazing what they can pull together in eight weeks.”

Detrick himself caught the rock ’n’ roll bug in sixth grade and by the time he was at

Redwood High School he was “always scheming to be in a band.” He took music classes but it wasn’t until he majored in music at UC Berkeley that he learned theory and to read music, in what he calls a “trial by fire.”

And now Detrick strives to pass that knowledge along to his students, who practice once a week after school in two-hour band sessions for two months, all building up to live shows at places like Ashkenaz in Berkeley or the Woods in Mill Valley.

“I am trying to preserve the harmonic language for this generation of kids,” he says. “So they understand things like Neapolitan sixth chords or the applied dominant.”

But don’t tell that to the students at MY AMP, who might not realize how much they are learning.

“Our band likes to do the classics like Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin or the Pixies,” says guitarist, bassist, drummer and longtime MY AMP participant Nora Birch of Mill Valley. “It’s really helpful to be in a band; you can practice rhythm and soloing all in one session.” The 12-year-old plans to try organizing the band on her own next year. “I’ve practiced with this band a long time,” she says of the group that recently changed its name from Taco Truck to Brutus and Otter. “MY AMP helped me see that you can get onstage.”

In the end, Detrick hopes his students, who range in age from 7 to 70, find their own path in music, but he feels the lessons learned in a group can be taken beyond the practice studio.

“In order to make music you have to be a part of the whole and contribute responsi-

*To learn more about MY AMP or other local music programs check out these links.*

**MY AMP:**

[detrickmusicinstruction.com](http://detrickmusicinstruction.com)

**BandWorks:** [bandworks.com](http://bandworks.com)

**Crossroads:** [crozroadzmusic.com](http://crozroadzmusic.com)

**TamJams:** [tamjams.com](http://tamjams.com)

**Blue Star Music Camps:**

[bluestarmusiccamps.com](http://bluestarmusiccamps.com)

**Blue Bear School of Music:**

[bluebearmusic.org](http://bluebearmusic.org)

bly,” says the musician, who also plays guitar in the Eyewitness Blues Band, made up of well-known newscasters from CBS and KCBS. “People are relying on you; you have a job. These are skills you can absolutely use outside of the band.”

Sometimes, as with 12-year-old Paddy O’Brien, the lessons go even deeper. “Playing guitar really kept my spirits up,” O’Brien says about taking lessons while battling bone cancer. But now O’Brien is doing much better and decided to join a MY AMP band to play music like his hero Jimi Hendrix. “Playing with a full band sounds a lot cooler,” he says.

But Detrick’s students—he teaches anywhere from six to nine bands in quarterly sessions—aren’t the only ones who benefit from the musical interaction. “As you get older it is hard to remember how you saw things and how you got obsessed with music in the first place,” he says. “Working with 10- to 12-year-olds reminds me and awakens that passion. It keeps me young.”

Detrick says he feels lucky to be able to do music full time, but there is one aspect of his occupation that is particularly enjoyable. “Buying office equipment kicks ass,” he says.



Nora Birch of Brutus and Otter.