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Time Out Chicago Issue 20: July 14–July 21, 2005

The real school of rock

Power Chord Academy is what a summer camp should be



ROCK PRODIGIES Bryan Joseph jumpstarted a music bootcamp that preps teens for the stage.

When then-16-year-old Bryan Joseph went to the Fireside Bowl for the first time in 1994, it was still a place that gave underage performers a stage to rock and grimy walls to hang their show posters on.

While some future music scenesters at the time were lucky enough to have a space to experiment and network, it wasn't as easy to hop online to look up tips on things like how to start recording. And when Joseph started playing in a band as a student at Northern Illinois University, he realized that a lot of people looking to break into the music industry didn't know where to start.

"There were a ton of bands who had absolutely no idea how to do anything—from booking a show to how to get signed to a record label to how to tour," Joseph, now 27, says.

So when Joseph, who studied entrepreneurship and music, was asked to create a business plan for a class during his senior year, he drummed up a wild idea: a rock camp where kids ages 12 to 18 could

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play in a band, meet top musicians, record in a studio, attend lectures on topics like songwriting and even make their own music video.

Seven years later, Power Chord Academy is rocking. The camp hosts one- and two-week seminars in San Diego, New York and Chicago, with a session taking place at DePaul University from Sunday 17 to Saturday 23. The intensive educational program brings in industry professionals such as Alkaline Trio touring engineer Lance Reynolds, and special guests like the Donnas to perform; and it rotates jam and lecture sessions in between. The week culminates with two concerts featuring all the students' bands (kind of like *School of Rock*, but with more structure and without Jack Black).

"A lot of people my age, or older musicians, they had to learn this stuff the hard way," says Joseph, who grew up in Addison and now lives in L.A. "It just gives [younger musicians] such an edge."

Including an edge on the not-easily-teachable aspects of playing music, like "how to work with other people who don't necessarily have the same opinions as you," says Rebecca Priebe, 16, who will attend the Chicago session as a third-year student.

Priebe went out and bought herself a guitar when a boyfriend started "showing off" one New Year's Eve, and started taking lessons. Power Chord Academy is for beginners as well, but as a veteran, Priebe is coming prepared with some songs to try out with whatever group she's placed in (based on musical interests).

"At first it was like, 'So what do you guys listen to,' and now it's like, 'Come on, let's get going,'" she says. "Everything starts with an idea, and it's a lot easier when someone has one." But fun is part of the deal, too. "I can't tell you how many of my friends are like, 'Dude, let me just come for a week, I'll be good,'" Joseph laughs.

But he also gets a lot of thank-yous from parents for other things. "We get letters saying, 'My kid was a D-student and...now he's pulling together a plan for his music and is more interested in learning,'" Joseph says. "When we get letters like that, we're like, 'Yes, that's why we wanted to do this.'"—*Leah Pietrusiak*

For more information or to sign up, visit www.powerchordacademy.com.

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