



Magazine

- Arts & Culture

Empire of The Sun

We Will Rock You

Objects of Desire

Once Upon a Time



## We Will Rock You

Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp offers the ultimate opportunity to get up close and personal with rock legends and even play on the same stage. DAVID WALSH tunes up.

*"I got to play live on stage with Joe Walsh from The Eagles. He just stopped all the music and let me play solo. It was incredible."*

For one night only last year Michelle Blancard got the chance to live out her teenage rock'n'roll dream – to play live on stage with Guns'n'Roses guitarist Slash. "It was absolutely awesome," she remembers. We got to jam on a couple of songs and he showed me a few solos. Then I got to play live on stage with Joe Walsh from The Eagles. He just stopped all the music and let me play solo. It was incredible." Blancard is just one of hundreds of music fans who have paid US\$10,000 to perform with some of the living legends of music, courtesy of Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp.

The enthusiasts taking part are a wide and varied bunch. Everyone is welcome regardless of age, sex or ability. In fact, you don't even need to know how to play an instrument. Complete novices will be taught a part and for the most accomplished there are special 'master class' sessions. For example, musician and Oracle co-founder Ed Oates saw a camp advert in Guitar Player magazine and was completely hooked. "During that particular camp there was an opportunity to meet Brian Wilson," he says. "It was around the time of my 60th birthday and my wife said, 'That's it, you're going to camp.' So I went."

Other musicians who have not played for decades found the chance to relive their teenage dreams with their heroes irresistible. Robert Goldfarb is a Montréal venture capitalist and one night two years ago he walked out on stage at the famous House of Blues in LA, sat at his keyboard and sang The Who classic I Can See For Miles with the band's vocalist Roger Daltrey. "I had an out of body experience," Goldfarb said. With testimonials like that, repeat business is high. Some fans have enjoyed as many as eight consecutive camps.

There are even US\$2,000 'spouse packages' for music widows or widowers, allowing them the chance to enjoy a city tour while their partners practise their drum solos. Alternatively, the camp offers the chance to shake a tambourine or two on stage, or teach you the fundamentals of the favourite bit of kit you always wanted to try. If



## The Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp

The concept, created by music producer David Fishoff in 1997, is as seductively simple as a Beatles solo.

*"What doesn't kill you makes you stronger when rock'n'roll star counsellors dole out tough love to turn these amateur musicians into rock gods".*

Recruit some of the most famous musicians in the world from bands such as The Who, The Rolling Stones, Aerosmith and The Eagles and then offer fans like Blancard the chance to hang out, practise, record and play live with them at famous venues. Participants also get to take away what must be the ultimate in personalised concert footage, a DVD of their performance. "I got the idea while touring with Ringo Starr and the All-Star Band," says Fishoff. "I thought the experience was incredible and realised that I must give this to the ordinary fan."

This month there are two rock camps. In the UK the line up includes Cream bassist Jack Bruce and Pink Floyd's drummer Nick Mason and offers fans the opportunity to record at The Beatles' Abbey Road studio before performing at The Cavern Club in Liverpool, the (recreated) venue where the Fab Four first made their name. In New York over the same weekend another camp features Paul Stanley from Kiss, Ted Nugent and Glen Hughes of Deep Purple.

The idea has gained such traction that it has now become a reality television series for music channel VH1. The four-episode, one-hour series is set to premiere in July and is being marketed as "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger when rock'n'roll star counsellors dole out tough love to turn these amateur musicians into rock gods".

There's a lot of dressing up, wigs, tantrums and tears that sounds better than a night of karaoke. Scott Hamilton, an American ice-skating Olympic gold medal holder, who took part in the last camp in October found the experience "awesome", probably the most common adjective associated with the camp. "When you come in as a new musician, you just throw yourself into it and get carried away," he says.

even that sounds a little too demanding, there are classes in the business of rock as well as lectures in stage, tour and band management.

But what about the musicians? "People are surprised at how down to earth and accessible they are," says Fishoff. "They have the same issues as anyone else, they are just a lot more talented onstage. I think for the musicians it reminds them of what they were like when they started out. I've asked them who they would like to have in their fantasy camp and they talk about dreams of playing with Elvis... everyone has a musical hero."

Contrary to popular belief there is no time for wild and loose living at the camps. One participant described it as "more like a convention for workaholics". Rehearsals and workshops run throughout the day and counsellors insist on achieving high levels of perfection for performance day. "Interestingly, these are not the sort of musicians who have, erm, lifestyle problems," said one participant. "These are people who are really hard-working and not in rehab every other year." It's a sentiment echoed by Goldfarb. "There was no clowning around.

We didn't know each other and came together to create a band in just a few days. That's quite a challenge, so you can see why we rehearsed for three 14-hour days before performing I Can See For Miles." Breaking up the daily sessions are talks and question and answer sessions from musicians and producers. However, it is the workshops that prove to be particularly entertaining, ranging from the 'secrets of custom-made guitars' and the 'art of song writing' to the more popular 'impressions of favourite rock stars' and the occasional story or two.

For the musicians who take part it, the experience seems to be surprisingly fun. "I didn't know what to expect, but you walk in and there is a group of businessmen, a group of teenagers, groups of whatever, but they are all here to play music," says Duff McKagan, a bassist who spent 13 years with Guns'n'Roses and is now with the band Velvet Revolver. "They are all accomplished people, but for one weekend they can get out from behind their desk and do what they really love." Speaking on a YouTube video, The Who vocalist Roger Daltrey adds: "It's great to see so many people learn so much in such a short space of time and having fun."

Perhaps the most amusing comments of all, however, come from Pink Floyd drummer Nick Mason who is a camp counsellor for the second time this year. Well known for his dry wit and self-deprecating approach to the world of rock music, Mason charted his first Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp experiences for readers of American GQ magazine. What is attractive to Mason is the fact that the sessions are not designed to be a master-class for musicians. "They are more like a comfortable team building exercise without all that abseiling down cliff faces," he writes. "I'd actually be interested in the creation of an advanced version – if that happens – where the camp tackles musical differences, rock wives and pre-nuptial agreements."

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