



# SO YOU WANNA BE A ROCK'N'ROLL STAR?



**PINK FLOYD**  
NICK MASON  
**DAD COMPANY**  
SIMON KIRKE

**THE BEACH BOYS**  
BRIAN WILSON  
**AC/DC**  
CLIFF WILLIAMS

**THE MONKEES**  
MICKY DOLENZ  
**YES**  
ALAN WHITE

**MUSIC & LYRICS**  
LENNON & McCARTNEY

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO PLAY WITH  
THE BIG BOYS? FIND OUT BY SIGNING UP FOR  
THE FIFTH ANNUAL ROCK'N'ROLL FANTASY  
CAMP AT SIR STUDIOS AT SUNSET BLVD  
HOLLYWOOD, AND AFTERWARDS AT:

**THE HOUSE OF BLUES**  
8430 SUNSET BOULEVARD  
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## FOR GO, PINK FLOYD DRUMMER NICK MASON SIGNS UP AS A TUTOR AT ROCK'N' ROLL FANTASY CAMP, TRIGGERING TALES OF DEBAUCHERY AND DRUM SOLOS...

OK, so you've ticked off the bungee jump, skydiving and the white-water rafting in Nepal. The Silverstone Ferrari race experience was a blast, and you've nurtured your Yin with the Tuscan cookery course, yoga and creative writing. You've feng shui'd all the furniture and mastered "Through The Fire And Flames" by DragonForce (at expert level, of course) on your Xbox *Guitar Hero III*. But you still feel something is lacking from your life.

Chill. The missing element is available, courtesy of Mr David Fishof, a one-time American sports promoter, more lately responsible for a variety of live shows, ranging from *Mortal Kombat* to the Monkees reunion and Ringo Starr's All-Starr tour. Fishof has come up with something that really seems to fill a need (hit a chord - boom, boom): the Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp. The unique nature of the camp is almost certainly a product of his eclectic promotional background, deriving its influence from both live music and the experience of working with professional sports stars on children's sports camps.

"Camp" in the American sense that is. To a Brit it's a word that conjures up images of wrestling with canvas tents and portable Primus stoves, along with the unpleasant sensation of cold moisture enveloping everything. Even the "high net-worth individual" platinum card version involves a mosh pit of oozing mud at Glastonbury. Unless camp makes you think Julian Clary and Lily Savage, in which case you may need to move on to another article. This event is probably easier to comprehend if you substitute "Workshop" for "Camp" in terms of activity, and exchange the image of a tent for that of a luxury hotel in Hollywood.

The concept is an opportunity to make music over a fairly intensive long weekend

with like-minded souls, the operation overseen by an eclectic group of interesting music business survivors. Now in its fifth consecutive year, the camp has an increasing group of regulars working alongside an impressive cast list of musicians. So far it has included members of Guns N' Roses, the Eagles, Deep Purple and AC/DC, as well as Micky Dolenz from the Monkees, Jack Bruce and Roger Daltrey, their ranks now swollen by the graciously ageing drummer of that nifty beat combo, the Pink Floyd.

There are endless opportunities to pick up playing techniques and tricks from the professionals, as well as to benefit from the stories of all the things that can go wrong. A well-chosen question can produce a torrent of disaster stories - financial, musical, technical, marital and chemical. This and the chance to hear some great playing from your fellow campers, as well as your "councillors" (think "tutors" here). Everything is taken care of, from check-in to check-out. Indeed, you head straight away into a totally accurate rock'n'roll experience, since you arrive in the lobby to find the hotel bar in full swing.

The only unrealistic element is the dearth of eBay auction-hunters, who have become the bane of band hotel life. Nowadays the eBay merchants simply elbow the fans out of their way, these professionals clutching dozens of Fender Stratocaster scratchplates and drum skins. If they can get these signed by a recognisable band they can then hotfoot it down to the local music store where a few hundred dollars buys them a genuine Fender guitar or a decent snare drum. A few minutes' work with a screwdriver sees the signed scratchplate in situ, and they now have that unique relic, worth at least £1,000 online.

This rather devalues the odd guitar that does get autographed for charity - or maybe it's just me being envious of a missed opportunity. Roger Waters and I took this up with one of these entrepreneurs in New York last year, demanding to know if he really considered himself a dedicated fan. "Hey, a guy's gotta make a living," he sighed. Chastened, we both signed.

I have to say that when I was first told about the camp I assumed it was the musical equivalent of that Nigerian diplomat who keeps asking me to bank £8m on his behalf. ▶





Previous camps enlisted the skills of rock legends such as, clockwise from far left, Roger Daltrey and Robin Zander, LA, 2006; Mark Hudson, Joe Walsh and Slash (with student) - all Las Vegas, 2007

► The truth is, I couldn't imagine all those musicians spending time on this activity. Selfless dedication to the encouragement of others is not a quality I immediately associate with my peer group, and I have to confess that a couple of years ago I advised a friend's daughter, who asked my opinion, against signing up for one of these camps, certain it could not fulfil its promises. When she told me it was to be held at Abbey Road Studios I was even more convinced it was a hoax, and simply assumed it would be an Abbey Road somewhere in the East Midlands. Wisely, she ignored my words of wisdom and later wrote to tell me how fantastic it had been. So, lured by her enthusiasm, coupled with my curiosity, and topped off with a cash offer from David Fishof, I packed my flared trousers, drum sticks and iPod and set off for Los Angeles.

The night I arrived there was a concert held in one of the rehearsal studios. I have to admit I was completely bowled over. Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys, accompanied by his musical director, Jeff Foskett, and a terrific six-piece band, delivered an hour-long concert of Brian's finest writing to a rapt audience of 60-odd campers and councillors - or should that be 60 extremely odd campers and councillors. It's not a cheap weekend for the campers but this concert alone could be seen as justifying the cost of the entire course, which weighs in at a fairly hefty

## FUELLED BY VODKA AND JET LAG, I JAMMED WITH ALAN WHITE ON 'INSTANT KARMA'

£5,000 a pop - but hey, that's less than some people paid to see the Zep.

The whole event took place in the huge SIR Studios on Sunset Boulevard. This was a perfect arrangement since, as a large studio hire centre, it has every possible piece of equipment needed to support five-dozen musicians. It also has enormous amounts of rehearsal space, sufficient for eight separate bands to work simultaneously, as well as room to feed them and somewhere to lounge around in the *de rigueur* way for recording studios. Unlike the adrenaline-fuelled atmosphere backstage, studios involve hours of loitering with intent to commit a backing track, while waiting for the perfect take of that interminable guitar solo to be finished.

The campers were divided up into eight bands of six or seven members. Mornings and afternoons were mainly spent working on

three songs (one an original to be written by the band on the day). After dinner there would be a number of options. One of the councillors might talk about songwriting or experiences in the music business, or a group of us, such as the English drum contingent, would discuss more technical aspects. I'm afraid we inevitably tended to drift onto reminiscences about difficult bass players we had worked with, before ending up swapping Keith Moon stories. But you won't want to hear one of those.

Oh, all right then. It's late at night, after a Who show in Cleveland, Ohio. We're all in Keith's room in some smart hotel. The minibar has already been emptied. Suddenly a mouse skitters across the floor. Keith seizes the phone and demands to speak to the night manager. We all anticipate a tirade of abuse on falling hotel standards and the lack of vermin control.

But Keith simply demands that room service immediately send up the entire cheese trolley from the restaurant for his extra guest.

Anyway, back to camp. The other main after-dinner activity is jamming. Every night a number of rooms would be set aside, with at least one dedicated to Beatles music, with the size of the band and the complexity of the songs increasing as the evening wore on.

One night I found myself, jet lagged and fuelled with complimentary vodka, assisting Alan White (now drummer with Yes) in a rendition of the John Lennon track "Instant Karma". I only joined in because I knew Alan had played on the original recording. It may sound initially like a simple track, but listen to the drum fills and weep. I performed like the consummate professional - and waved my arms in time with the music during the really tricky drum fills, which, upon consideration, is probably a really useful demonstration to my students. Better than the critique often levelled at the percussion department of "loud, confident and wrong".

One lunch break was enlivened by the arrival of the Plastics. It was not clear if these ladies were a band or simply a group of girls attempting to form a union of groupies. Since this was before the evening watershed and so the audience contained many nearest and dearest, the discussion remained a little restrained. The Plastics described themselves as people who had a spiritual relationship with musicians. Hmm, I've always seen that as the drummer's role (drum roll and cymbal crash... I thank you).

There also seemed to be a number of rules regarding sexual favours and backstage passes, with a code of conduct that escaped me. It made Pamela Des Barres and Cynthia Plaster Caster look rather radical. Oh God, was that a reader asking, "Who is Cynthia Plaster Caster?" Really? In the late Sixties ►



► Cynthia and her sidekick Dianne, known as the Plaster Casters of Chicago, were notorious for arriving backstage to take an impression of the erect member of any hardened professional who was happy to be exhibited in their hall of fame. Dianne was the "plater" (appropriately rhyming with "fellater") who would encourage them to pose, while Cynthia mixed and applied the plaster. Legend has it that when they took a mould of a tumescent Jimi Hendrix, Cynthia had to nip out for extra supplies of plaster of Paris. A friend of mine believes that the original castings could be among the iconic items of the late 20th century. It certainly would make an eye-watering edition of *Antiques Roadshow* when Auntie's niece retrieves said item from the attic and plants it on the table for valuation.

Moving swiftly along. It sounds a little trite to say that the campers came from all walks of life, but they were an interesting bunch. I don't think any of them saw this as an easy way into the music business. Many were of an age where this wasn't a career option anyway, and some probably were better off financially than Mick Jagger. There was at least one multimillionaire CEO with his own Challenger jet parked up at the airport, and another was a recognisable face as the anchorman on a major news channel. He turned out to be a talented drummer, and worked through some unison drum fills with Simon Kirke from Bad Company that really impressed (ie alarmed) me.

There were a number of doctors, as well as a great EMT nurse doing lead vocals for one of the bands, and if you want a bit of family bonding, one solution is to go to camp with your dad. There was more than one father and son playing together.

The musical ability of the participants was as varied as their backgrounds, and this, for me, was one of the best aspects. Just for once, this camp is not a competition. I rather disapprove of the arts – performing or fine – being turned into a competitive sport. It won't be long before contestants for the Turner Prize will be forced to slug it out live on TV in front of Simon Cowell. Here, the better musicians carried the less experienced or able, and inevitably raised their standards, which I suspect gave an unexpected sense of fulfilment to people who thought they'd just come to learn something and ended up contributing some teaching.

Many attendees are becoming camp junkies – at least one was on his seventh visit – and there's no doubt that experienced campers arrived knowing exactly which councillor they wanted to work with and frequently possessing a damned good understanding of the arrangements of most of the Lennon/McCartney song book. I know that if I am ever asked to take part again, that will be my essential piece of homework. I've already said music shouldn't be a contest,

but often there should be a prize-giving ceremony after a show for first to finish (usually the drummer); loudest (usually the guitarist); and the Laurence Olivier prize for overacting (always the singer). This may explain why keyboard players and bassists are so often withdrawn and grumpy.

As a social event, I give the camp top marks. It's taken me some time to get to grips (literally) with the American weakness for men hugging, but by the end of the Sunday night I was embracing with the best of them. My fellow survivors included the aforementioned Jeff Foskett – one of the

**From top: At rock camp 2008, Nick Mason shows off paradiddles honed over years on the road with Pink Floyd, from Denmark (1970) to Wembley Arena (1977)**



**I'D LIKE TO SEE AN ADVANCED CLASS: CHEMICALS, ROCKWIVES, PRE-NUPS...**

Beach Boys and their MD (musical director rather than managing director, for any hedge funders reading) since the Eighties, who appeared at both Live Aid and Live 8; and Mark Hudson aka the "Nostradamus of Rock" as he modestly bills himself. Mark is a Grammy Award-winner with a background in both music and comedy from his work with Arsenio Hall and Joan Rivers. It was also fun to spend time again with Simon Kirke. I've known Simon since approximately the dawn of time, I think. Free supported us at a college gig in the early Seventies:

I remember these small boys arriving – I don't think they were much out of school uniform – and putting on a set that blew us off the stage. Fortunately, I'm becoming more adept at blanking those moments, along with slipping the odd Quaalude into Simon's drink. It may not stop him, but by God it slows him down.

As the new boy on the councillor team, I was given the relatively easy task of swanning from room to room to dispense a little advice and a lot of encouragement. It was probably not entirely dissimilar to the sort of job the Queen does on a regular basis, but without the clothing allowance.

I was particularly impressed by the work rate of both campers and councillors. After three days each band had rehearsed three songs, one of which they had written themselves. On the final night, all the bands performed at the House Of Blues on Sunset to standing-room only. The show was great, the atmosphere electric. Even better, when it was all over, the councillors assembled to play together and clearly demonstrate that they were just as susceptible to overexcitement and overplaying as anyone else.

I can now add to my CV the memorable musical experience of playing "I'm A Believer" with Micky Dolenz singing, Alan White and myself on drums, Keith Emerson on keys and Cliff Williams from AC/DC on bass, and those were just the ones I could see.

You can tell that it's a proper event by checking out the crowd. It's the same for any music event. Of course you need some celebrities, and that crossover you get, especially in LA, where half the film and TV stars really fancy being musicians in their spare time. I know we had Corey Feldman on guitar and dark glasses at some point, and he really knew the guitar part to "Money", but to give the event full status you need the crazies as well. And they were out in force. It is possible that some of them are Jedi Knights, since they always seem to be able to breeze past the same security that will stop Bob Dylan and the guitarist's mother.

What is nice is that this is not a master-class environment. All levels are welcome, and frankly this is not a new and different way in to a career in music. It's more like a comfortable team-building exercise, without all that abseiling down cliff faces.

I'd do it again like a shot, and I'd certainly be interested in the advanced version – where camp subjects could tackle pharmaceuticals, rock wives and pre-nups, along with musical differences – and I did wonder if there might be a niche camp for musicians to go and hang out with lawyers and record executives, culminating in a real courtroom on the Sunday night, where the bands get to sue the lawyers and record companies for embezzlement. ☺

For more information on future events, visit [www.rockandrollfantasycamp.com](http://www.rockandrollfantasycamp.com)