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Roswell's School of Rock publication date: Aug 15, 2007

|
author/source: Roswell Beacon

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By Tim Altork / STAFF

If you've seen one music store you've seen them all, right? Guitars on one wall. Picks and strings on the other. Amps and pianos on the floor in between. Maybe a drum set in the back or few wind instruments here and there. They're all pretty much the same, right?

Wrong.

Music Matters in Roswell has essentially revolutionized the local music store for the 21st century, and most of it is the brainchild of owner and founder Aaron Soriero. Soriero won't come right out and say it, but the musical instruments that he has on his sales floor are almost there just for show.

Music Matters owner and founder Aaron Soriero has reinvented the concept of the local music store. (Daniel Tyree McElrath / STAFF)

The crux of his business is based in the ingenuity that he has shown in creating a clientele of music students that is one of the largest in the area and supports the full-time careers of around 20 instructors. At Music Matters they don't just try to sell you a dusty old guitar from off the wall. They sell you the chance to pursue your musical dreams.

NOT A ROCK STAR

With a last name like Soriero, the Music Matters owner seemed almost destined to have one of those rock bands that get their name from one of the members' surname. You know, like Van Halen or Bon Jovi or Nelson.

But that's not what Soriero envisioned for himself when he graduated from high school and enrolled at Life University in Marietta. Life specializes in chiropractic education and other applied medical fields.

"I didn't really know what I wanted to do, so I figured I'd just do what my dad did and become a doctor," said Soriero.

But it was in the dorm rooms at Life that music invaded Soriero's life in a way that made studying the lumbar vertebrae seem as pointless as a black and white rainbow.

"When I was 18 I went to college and there was a kid in the dorm rooms just strumming. And all the girls were

in there and everybody was in there and he was so cool,” Soriero recalled. “And I was like, ‘Man, you’ve got to show me how to do that.’”

Soriero picked up the guitar pretty quickly and decided he wanted to pursue his musical education further. He left Life and enrolled at the Atlanta Institute of Music in Norcross. It was there that visions of joining a band and becoming a rock star began to dance in his head. But while he was at school he took a job working at a friend’s music store, and that’s where the inspiration began for where his store is today.

“I started working at a friend’s store that just gave only lessons and stuff like that,” he said. “So I really fell in love with the students and the education aspect of it. But I saw that the people at the store would have to go up the street to buy their instruments, so I thought why not make it all in one store?”

That was the seminal moment that led to an eventual snowballing of ideas that, in turn, created one of the most innovative music businesses to ever hang out a shingle.

FROM THE CRADLE TO THE STAGE

Since Soriero opened his doors in 2003, he has always focused on educating young musicians and creating an environment that young music students would deem friendly and inviting.

To that end, most of Soriero’s instructors are in their 20’s. (At 30 years of age, Soriero says he is one of the oldest members of the Music Matters team.) And they don’t sit the students down and bore them to tears by making them suffer through scales lessons for two months before they ever play a song.

“We learn the fun stuff,” said Soriero. “We learn the real knowledge too, but through the fun stuff.”

This philosophy has helped Music Matters grow from a 2,000 square foot facility in its infancy to a place that is twice that size today. It features two soundproof studios, a mixing room, a sales floor and a hallway lined with lesson rooms.

The growth can be credited to Soriero’s innovative idea of creating a rock band camp for his students to attend each year.

Soriero explains: “I think every kid who walks in here when he’s nine, I think his goal is he wants to be in a band. But most kids, they have a guitar and they sign up for lessons and they learn how to play in their room. And then maybe when they’re older they start a band. So I want to speed up the whole process. So we organize all the kids into rock bands, and then they work all week with their bands.”

The camp culminates in a full-fledged rock concert where all the bands get to put their skills to use in front of an audience at the Roswell High School auditorium. The concert is complemented by all of the accoutrements of a typical rock show. They have a full light rig and a fog machine that they set up to give it the look and feel of a typical show by rock band X.

Soriero is in the process of expanding on the wildly popular rock band camp idea. He is creating a program in which he groups some of his more learned students into bands, and they use the on-site studios for eight weeks – rather than just one week — to prepare for a show.

“And at the end of eight weeks we have a show just like we do with the camp,” Soriero said.

PATENT PENDING

The aforementioned lesson rooms at Music Matters are equipped with one way glass on the outside so moms and dads can look in on their kids without distracting junior from his chords.

But, like true beauty, what's on the outside isn't what makes the rooms special. It's what's on the inside.

Soriero has developed a music database network – accessible to his students from anywhere they can get on the Internet – that contains just about any song from any musical genre you can think of. The network is hardwired into every lesson room in the store. That means that if little Johnny comes in and wants to learn how to play “Johnny B. Goode,” all the instructor has to do is pull it up on the system, and he can instantly hear Chuck Berry wailing away and look at the notes and tabs for the song.

In addition, the system has recording capabilities, so that the student can gauge his progress.

“If the kid's been working on a song and he's got it, he can it put in the computer and record it. And he can go home with a CD of what he's been doing,” said Soriero. “Or if I want him to work on a riff or a lick I can record it and he can go home and work on it.”

It's a dynamic teaching tool and it helps keep things fresh and fun for the students. The concept is so cutting edge that “We've actually filed a patent on it,” said Soriero.

All these things – the camp, the lessons, the network and yes, the instruments – combine to make Music Matters a pioneer in making the local music store relevant once again.

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