

EXPECT TO BE SURPRISED, WOWED BY YOUNG ROCKERS

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Tripp Sommese is only a high school senior, but he's been working on a degree in rock for years.

The 18-year-old singer and guitarist, who compares himself to a mix between Robert Plant and Isaac Hayes, is coming to town Monday and he's bringing a band of underage all-stars with him. They hail from the School of Rock - the after-school music program started by Paul Green in 1998 in Philadelphia, not the unrelated Jack Black movie that came out five years later. As part of a holiday tour, a select group of dedicated students who make up the School of Rock All-Stars will perform at Frankie's Inner-City, 308 Main St.

Don't be fooled by the fact that these will be kids on stage. Sommese has seen audiences make that mistake before.

"They see kids from age 11 to 18 come out and they think these kids are cute but what all can they do? And then we play for them and then jaws just drop," he said.

These kids come to rock, with a set list that includes Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Michael Jackson, and Jane's Addiction. And they've learned from some of the best. Jon Anderson of Yes and Adrian Belew of King Crimson have been guest artists with the All-Stars, who represent some of the most talented musicians that the School of Rock has to offer.

"It's not just about kids playing music," said Teddi Tarnoff, All-Stars coordinator. "It just happens to be who we are. It's about truly great musicians putting on a truly great show."

The school focuses on guitar, vocals, drums, keyboards, and bass. It got its start after its founder taught music on the side and found that kids learned a lot better when they played together, Tarnoff said.

Now there are 52 schools across the country - including two in greater Detroit and two in the Cleveland area - with more than 4,000 students. The band members performing in Toledo will come from schools along the East Coast.

Sommese, who lives near Philadelphia, said he joined the School of Rock after seeing its students in concert and being blown away by their skill and fearlessness.

"I thought they were the best musicians that I've ever seen and I thought if they could do that - they could wow a crowd like that - I wanted to be part of it," he said.

Now he spends 10 hours a week between lessons and rehearsals, working on everything from technique to showmanship.

"When you become a rock star, you definitely need to bring the full package," he said. "If you're just standing there tapping your foot with your head down, not moving around, it really doesn't get the crowd involved."

So does he have a signature move?

"I throw up my leg a lot but it kind of looks like I'm jumping away from a mouse so I'm trying to change that," he said.

Still, his experience is a testament to rock's power to transform. He said he's gained confidence, better



Paul Green, center, started the School of Rock in 1998.

understands music's power to connect people, and more.

"I used to wear pink polos and cargo shorts," he said. "Now I wear shirts that have Led Zeppelin, Ramones, Sex Pistols on them because rock music has been such an influence."

The School of Rock All-Stars will perform Monday at Frankies Inner City, 308 Main St. Doors open at 6 p.m. Tickets are \$8 in advance from all Ticketmaster outlets, by phone at 419-474-1333, online at ticketmaster.com, or locally at Culture Clash (419-536-5683) and Ramalama Records (419-531-7625). Tickets are \$10 at the door the night of the show. Information: 419-693-5300 or frankiesinnercity.com.

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