

Guitarists bring rock to Boston

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Guitar heroes hailing from Memphis to Mattapan proved this weekend that the home of Aerosmith, The Cars and New Kids on the Block can still rock and roll.

In an unprecedented congregation of rock, thousands of guitar enthusiasts from around the country descended upon Boston to hear their favorite artists perform, teach and discuss music the past two days at the Premier Guitar Festival at the Bayside Expo Center. The event, hosted by TrueFire Studios and Premier Guitar Magazine, featured hundreds of guitar and gear exhibitors, live performances and a variety of workshops.

"We've had smaller shows all over New England, but this is the first of this magnitude," said Shelby Kraus, director of operations for Premier Guitar Magazine, who noted the workshops and demonstrations were for guitarists of all ages and abilities.

Peter Stroud, who said he has worked with the likes of Sheryl Crow, Eric Clapton and Keith Richards, ran an intricate instructional workshop focused on amps and pedals for experienced musicians. Bronx schoolteacher Jesse Cervantes taught future rockers between ages 5 and 10 how to wail on the axe.

Cervantes said music education is vital for kids but must be approached by any teacher with patience.

"You wouldn't give a kid in kindergarten Romeo and Juliet even though it's a classic," Cervantes said. "You'd give them Dr. Seuss because that's what they understand. It's the same thing with guitar. You don't start them on 'Ode to Joy' even though it's a classic by Beethoven. You start them on rock and Christina Aguilera because that's what they're listening to."

While eager children strummed their first chords, other workshops focused more on the glamorous aspects of playing lead guitar, including stage presence.

Before leading an extemporaneous jam session, the leader of the Frank Vignola Quintet conveyed the importance of non-verbal communication with fellow band members while performing.

"A very simple way to communicate is visually," Vignola said. "Toss the melody back and forth by looking at each other."

Johnny A. -- described as a "local legend" by other area musicians -- spoke to a packed room about the necessary hunger musicians must have to succeed in the competitive industry.

"I always want to be the worst player in the band, because then you're always pushed to do better," he said.

Despite the large number of attendees, the event noticeably lacked a large female presence.

Mimi Fox, a jazz guitarist who ran several workshops, said Fox, despite the dearth of female musicians, she was not intimidated.

"I used to be very shy but I just got over it," Fox said, who joked, at least "there's never a very long line for the ladies room."

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