

Girls Rock Charlotte
photography & words by: Kacie Smagacz



"Isn't a bikini body just a body that has a bikini on it?" "Why can't I find a girl that looks like me? Not *everyone* looks like *this*." "I am an athlete. I have muscles. I can't find a single female athlete in Sports Illustrated. Why?"

To some, these questions might seem pretty simple. To me, hearing these questions and more like them, so passionately expressed at Girls Rock Charlotte, was profound. I sat there, almost speechless at some of the piercingly honest questions and observations from the brains of eleven and twelve year old girls, as they looked through current popular magazines and shared their unfiltered thoughts. Questions that, as a twenty-seven year old, I had yet to even think of asking.

What I realized is that some of these girls have not been raised to believe that they are anything other than enough. They know that they are capable of doing anything they want. Some of these girls know full well that being female is a strength that they can own. For others, Girls Rock is a catalyst for this transformation into self-confidence and becoming a more empowered human. Some of the campers, mentors and volunteers are learning for the first time that they have a voice that can impact their immediate community in a powerful way. This is why Girls Rock, and programs like it, matters.

Part of Girls Rock's enrichment includes workshops that incorporate more than musical training. In this particular workshop, where the theme was "deconstructing media", I saw girls at an age before we are pitted against one another by society, seeking to repair emotional tears and to not shame the differences in one another, but to embrace what sets them apart. In this workshop I realized even more so why Girls Rock is a necessary tool for positive change within the lives of those involved. In this workshop I realized how much *I* needed this week at Girls Rock and the "unjaded" minds of these girls.



Girls Rock Charlotte is a member of the international Girls Rock Camp Alliance. The GRCA has camps from Seattle, Washington to Paris, France, and onward into Sweden, along with several places in between. The GRCA was formed when representatives from seven music-based camps for girls formed a connection. With one motive, *empowering young girls to find their voice*, the GRCA moved forward and camps have been spreading across the world. In Charlotte, Kelly Finley, a professor of Women's and Genders Studies, a mother, a wife, an empowered female, sought to bring Girls Rock home after bringing her daughter to the camp in Raleigh/Durham- and bring it home to Charlotte she did.

Girls Rock Charlotte had its first camp in 2014 and was held again this past summer of 2015. The girls use the week long camp to learn an instrument, form a band, write a song and then perform it in front of an audience. This year, the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center hosted the camp and concert. Each day at Girls Rock, the campers spend time with their band directors and volunteers, their instrument coaches and mentors. This past year featured confidence-building workshops and special guest performances by local female musicians from the volunteer staff bands to local rapper, Lockstarr, who talked about her experience as a female in a male-dominated industry and how to use the beauty of your mind to propel you forward as an artist. Girls Rock Charlotte seeks to make sure that the campers are "taught by leading women, musicians, artist and professionals."

Girls Rock is inclusive. Girls Rock welcomes girls and gender diverse youth from every belief system, train of thought, nationality, learning style, physical ability, economic status, home life, gender expression, sexual orientation and more. Girls Rock offers scholarships and that is one way you, dear reader, can support the growth of Girls Rock Charlotte. Why? Because every girl needs to know that she is a candidate for amazing success in whatever she puts her time and effort into. Because every girl is capable and every girl needs to know that she is. Because there *should* be female athletes all OVER Sports Illustrated. Women who are strong, have a sense of accomplishment and are breaking barriers with their minds and bodies to go against previously set expectations. Because, according to



Girls Inc.'s most recent Harris survey, "when asked whether girls and boys have the same abilities and strengths, only 47% of the girls among the 2,028 third- to twelfth-graders surveyed responded yes. Just 29% of boys thought girls equal." Because in Charlotte, and around the world, Girls Rock, and they deserve every opportunity to have their voices heard.

"Creativity is in my lifeblood and I am beyond elated to share my knowledge with children. Being a mother of a girl myself, and a female in a male dominated profession, I am very driven to change equality issues for young girls and women through the universal language of music. Seeing the kids build confidence in themselves is the most rewarding thing I have ever experienced and I look forward to continuing to empower females of all ages. We really can be anything we want to be!" (Krystle Baller, music director and bass instructor)

"There's such synergy in my life. Everything I do is centered on empowering girls, women and everyone. My energy and passion for Girls Rock Charlotte is boundless and positive because I am surrounded by so many talented, passionate and supportive people. I'll be rockin' this gig for many years to come" (Kelly Finley, Founder and Director of Girls Rock Charlotte)

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