

Sometimes there's room for Mom's who rock

NOW|NEWS|LOCAL|SPORTS|LIVING & E|BUSINESS|OPINION|MULTIMEDIA

CarsJobsReal EstateClassifieds

Motherhood can mean more than baking cookies and rides to soccer games

Sunday, May 10, 2009

By Scott Mervis, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

There's never been a busier time for moms, who often find themselves having to juggle home life, career and getting their kids from point A to point B, not to mention



John Heller/Post-Gazette

Lily Simmons, left, shares her mom, Pam Simmons, with the band Motorpsychos.

band practice and that club gig on Friday night.

Yes, some kids have moms who rock.

In the male-dominated world of pop and rock, there are certainly more dads flashing guitars and beating drums. But there are a few powerful prototypes for the mom who rocks, from the poppy (Sheryl Crow) to the racy (Madonna) to the sleazy (Courtney Love) to the fiercely indie (Patti Smith).

In observance of Mother's Day, we looked at three local moms who keep their kids and bands rocking.

Motorpsycho Mama

Pam Simmons

Fashion. It's a timeless source of tension between mothers and daughters. You know, jeans too tight, skirt too high, neckline too low. For Pam and Lily Simmons, it takes on a different dynamic.

"I've complained a few times, when she's wearing something really skanky," says Lily -- the daughter.

"Like what?"

"You wore that skeleton-grabbing-your-boobs hoodie to that family function, that Friends of CAPA thing."

"Oh, yeah," Pam says. "But it was casual. And it's a school for the performing arts for crying out loud!"

In this mother-daughter scenario, mom is more the rocker and rebel. Pam Simmons, Pittsburgh's answer to Morticia Adams and Joan Jett, is the singer-guitarist for the raw and explosive punk-metal band Motorpsychos, which has been haunting Pittsburgh clubs such as the 31st Street Pub and Smiling Moose for the past decade. For her part, Lily, a visual arts senior at the Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA), admits to a soft spot for pop-punk, Miley Cyrus and the Jonas Brothers, and recently dropped \$90 to see Britney Spears.

Pam has a day job for an industrial trade publication, but amid bland hallways of her South Side company, her office pops out like a Hot Topic store, with a gothic pall, twinkling lights and posters of chick-punk bands such as Kittie, Joan Jett and L7 covering the walls.

Pam, who grew up in Scott, says she was a rebel from the time she "came out of the womb," but the rocker life didn't kick in until she lost a job when Lily was about 5 and leaned on those five chords she learned a long time ago.

"I had this job that I really invested myself in, and when it ended, I started thinking, 'Gee, I better start doing stuff that I always wanted to do that I never did.' That was one of the things."

A divorce followed a few years later, unrelated to the punk rock thing, and now Pam is married to Peter Salvati, the cowboy-hat-wearing former singer of punk band Four Barrel Ghost.

Despite her more sugary tastes, Lily says Motorpsychos has grown on her, but she really doesn't have much to do with the band. She's still too young to go see them in the bars, and mom never dragged her to the weekly band practice.

"I've done so much other stuff to traumatize this child that the band thing pales in comparison," Pam jokes.

Lily gets mostly A's in school, works at a record store and is enrolled at Point Park

University for the fall. She and her mom are close, but if trouble does arise, she can run to her dad's place just 10 blocks away. And vice versa.

"Because she has two parents in two separate households she's not forced to stay in the same dwelling and battle it out," Pam says. "She has refuge at either place."

Lily is not without mischief.

"I'm not wild about these," Pam says, lifting Lily's dyed red hair to reveal large black ear gauges.

"You do it over time, so by the time mommy notices what's going on, she's already in National Geographic," Pam says. "What can I do? She's 18 and she's going to have pay for the plastic surgery to correct those."

Lily also gave herself a tattoo on her hip in art class with a sewing needle.

"At least she was keeping with the theme of the class," Pam says dryly.

Mom, who sports a serpent on one arm and a lizard on the other, stepped in and got her professional ink -- of a birdie -- to cover it up. It's the least a mom can do, and Lily says Pam is a good one.

"I wouldn't trade her in," she says, adding with a laugh, "Except for someone richer -- and famous."

"I wanna rich mom, too," Pam says. "I would advocate that."

As for mom's rocker image and deadly glare, Lily says most of her friends think it's cool. "The ones who have talked to her think she's cool. The ones who steer clear are afraid to talk to her."

Brownie Mary mom

Kelsey Friday

One day Mason and Cooper are going to have a lot of fun with, or much embarrassment over, the second Brownie Mary album, titled "Naked."

It depicted their mom, Kelsey Friday, in a dreamlike scene inside a classroom realizing that she had forgotten to get dressed for school. Only books cover her bare body.

"Naked" was Brownie Mary's semi-major label bid for national rock stardom. As those things often do, it fell a little short.

These days, they can find their mom on the Noggin channel between "Pinky Dinky Doo" and "Wow! Wow! Wubzy!" rocking with her colorful new kid-rock band, Kelsey Friday and

the Rest of the Week.

Friday, during a recent video shoot at a Fox Chapel playground for a second video for Noggin and a full-length DVD, reflects on her segue from Brownie Mary to mom.

"I was over it, that need to be a rock star," she says. "I had come to a realization that I was just over it."

She actually found out she was pregnant with Cooper, who is now 4, the day after the release party for her first solo album in 2004. Foreshadowing her new project was an offer from a TV producer while she was pregnant to be cast in a children's show (it's still somewhat in the works) and the seed was planted in her to begin writing some kid songs.

Now, Friday divides her time between most-time mom, solo work, voice-overs, occasional Brownie Mary reunions and the Rest of the Week. At the video shoot, she and a few bandmates, including guitar hero Rick Witkowski, play on the swings with the kids and spin around on a merry-go-round until they're practically ready to barf. At one point, 2-year-old Mason executes an unrehearsed removal of his diaper over by the sand volleyball courts.

The shoot is for "Happy," one of the Rest of the Week's punchy pop songs. Some are silly; some, like the "The Afraid Parade," deal with themes like overcoming your fears. Cooper says his favorite is "Moose on the Loose," but he's biased -- his name is in it. Friday promises that Mason will get a shout-out on the next album.

Brownie Mary fans who see the Rest of the Week will be surprised and relieved to find that Friday isn't that much different in kid-rock mode.

"Yeah, and I don't want to. I'm just being me," she says. "If I put on a whole new persona, that wouldn't feel right. Maybe I'm a little more animated, but it doesn't feel remotely forced."

Friday says the best compliment she gets is that parents are listening to the songs in their car -- without their kids!

"They drop off their kids at school," she says, "and three songs later, they realize, 'Oh my God, I'm still listening to this.' "

Mama plays the blues

Patti Spadaro

Alison Spadaro's performance at the school talent show shouldn't have been a surprise to anyone. The 7-year-old girl strapped on a guitar and jammed -- just like her mom.

Patti Spadaro is a rarity in the music scene, not just because she's a mom who rocks, but because she's a lead-guitar-playing blueswoman.

How many of those can you name, beyond maybe Bonnie Raitt, Susan Tedeschi, Ana Popovic and Debbie Davis?

Spadaro is still new to the Pittsburgh scene. The Philadelphia native, who's not making much use of her B.S. in physics from Drexel, lived in Los Angeles during the '90s, performing with a band called the Zookeepers and giving private guitar lessons.

"My husband and I were ready to settle down and have kids and buy a house," she says, and when he got a job offer in Morgantown, W.Va., they moved to a five-acre country home in Washington, Pa.

She was pregnant with Alison when she released her 2001 solo debut, "Spadaro," showing off her bluesy jam-rock style, inspired by faves such as Raitt, Stevie Ray Vaughan, the Grateful Dead and the Allman Brothers.

"I like to improvise," says Spadaro, who started playing when she was 11. "The blues has a lot of feeling, a lot of soul. It's a lot of fun to play because you can go off and improvise and not have to play the same thing the same way."

It's no surprise she hasn't gotten around to a second album. "I had the infant and then two years later, I was pregnant again, and had an infant again, so there were four years or so where I wasn't doing a lot with music."

But then she got the itch to play and started going out to acoustic nights and jam nights and meeting musicians. She hooked up with the Pittsburgh Songwriter's Association and the Blues Society of Western Pennsylvania, and put together the Patti Spadaro Band, which plays regularly in clubs like Moondog's and PD's Pub. (She has a free family-friendly outdoor show coming up May 23 at 6 p.m. at the SouthSide Works.)

"It's challenging," she says, "but I pretty much spend time every day either writing or practicing or band rehearsal or calling clubs. It always seems like there's never enough time to do everything I want to do," she says, adding with a tense laugh, "but a lot of people have that same problem."

Spadaro doesn't write children's songs, but one way she combines music and motherhood is that Alison and Kaylee, 5, each have guitars. And Alison's song at the talent show wasn't some Hannah Montana cover, mind you. She wrote an original song called "Girls Wanna Rock." With a teaching pro right at hand, you'd have to figure these two will.

"We'll see," mom says. "For now, we just play around with it."

Scott Mervis can be reached at smervis@post-gazette.com or 412-263-2576.

First published on May 10, 2009 at 12:00 am



featured RENTALS

 Ross Twp / Summer Hill 2BR \$775+
 Place a Classified Ad  Coupons

 New Regency Apartment in the Bridgeville..
 Place a Classified Ad  Share to PG site..
\$800

Great 2br/1ba in the Mckees Rocks/stowe...
\$620

Monroeville-plum Regency Place Totally new
2br...
\$765

Lawrenceville 2bdr&4bdr Houses Close to Child...
\$650

Online: [Contact Us](#) [Site Map](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Advertise](#) [About Us](#) [What's New](#) [Help](#) [Corrections](#)

Print: [Home Delivery](#) [Payment](#) [Vacation](#) [Address Change](#) [Rates](#) [Customer Service](#) [Delivery Questions](#) [Back Copies](#) [Specials](#) [Gift Subscriptions](#) [Newsstand](#) [FAQ](#)

Copyright ©1997 - 2009 PG Publishing Co., Inc. All Rights Reserved.