

Spero heads up songwriting camp

Correne Spero heads up a summer songwriting camp for girls.

By Heather Steadham

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TED GILLIAM

SONGWRITING AS AN ENTRY POINT: Correne Spero (on drums) in DOT, one of the all-girl bands that inspired Spero to head up a songwriting camp.

First things first: No one calls Correne Spero "Correne." The musician, who's been curating shows at South on Main during the month of June, is known almost exclusively as "Spero," and one of the two Little Rock bands she's in even bears her name (though it's SPERO, in all caps — "the *person* is not in all caps," Spero says). Spero has been on the music scene for quite a while; Northern State, the New York-based all-girl band she performed with previously, toured with groups like Cake, Tegan and Sara and Questlove and The Roots, and some of Northern State's songs were featured on smash-hit television shows like "Grey's Anatomy" and "Damages." But these days, Spero is working on something much closer to her heart: a songwriting camp for girls. We sat down with Spero to get the goods on her unique plan to bolster the future of Little Rock music — and to help girls find out who they are and just what it is they're capable of.

So I have to ask, how did you end up in Little Rock after living in New York City and successfully touring internationally with Northern State?

We were looking for an opening act in the South — someone with a local draw. The co-producer of our last album was simultaneously working on an album with the American Princes out of Little Rock, which was a very random coincidence. We heard their album a bunch when he was working on it, so we reached out to them and asked if they wanted to open for us. We developed a great friendship on the road, and I stayed in touch with several of them. One of them — David Slade — convinced me to come to Little Rock and record some songs I'd been working on. About that time, Northern State came to a decision that, after 10 years, we were going to, at the very least, take a break, and at the very most, disband. Then one of the girls moved and I was like, "You know what? *I* could move!" I hated living in New York. I hated every minute of it. I loved my band, I loved my work and I loved my friends, but as far as the day-to-day life in New York, I just hated it. I had developed a network of friends down here when I was recording, and I just felt so welcomed here. I felt like the town really reached its arms around me and kind of gave me a big hug. I've been here for seven years now.

Do you have plans to go back?

Hell, no! I barely even visit.

Let's talk about what you have going on here in Little Rock this summer. What led you to wanting to host a summer camp?

I was inspired by a lot of different music camps around the country. I follow a bunch of them on Instagram and I kept wondering, "Why don't we have anything like that here? We need one." And then finally I just got to the point where I was like, "Well, maybe I should do it." But I didn't want to do the standard "rock camp" model that I've seen; I wanted to do something a little bit different ... to narrow the focus to songwriting. I wanted it to be a very small group: sort of an intensive workshop. Songwriting is such a valuable way to express ideas. To metaphorically — and literally! — find your voice. To turn your ideas and your thoughts into words and music and start to sort of believe that those things can be valid enough to create a whole song! Because if you haven't done that before, it can be really empowering. At least it was for me.

What made you decide to focus on girls only?

Well, I offer private sessions and workshops with anybody: kids, adults, boys, girls, whatever. With this camp, I don't mean to be exclusive or not inclusive, but I did want to carve away a little piece of the summer — one little week — and make it a girls-only space. ... In my experience as a songwriter and musician, I spent a lot of time in female-only spaces and groups with only girls, and I feel like working in an all-girls band, and learning and growing that way, just gave me a sense of freedom to experiment and explore. It helped me build my confidence. You know, it is a fact that girls in the music business tend to get a later start, maybe don't have as much encouragement, don't feel as comfortable occupying traditionally male spaces, like the recording studio. I was in the music business for a full decade and music engineers would talk down to me, think I didn't know what I was talking about. I went to audio engineering school! Guys at a show doing the sound check would make absolutely rude comments. There's so much sexism in every industry, and it continues to be pervasive in music. I just found that one of the best weapons against this was to create a bond with other women. We can feel strong together, so we can begin to occupy some of the spaces with more confidence. ... I wanted to provide a space for girls to create — free of all that other stuff, hopefully. It's always hard to put yourself out there, creatively. It always feels risky. I'm trying to remove some of the obstacles and create a really intimate space for sharing. I want to be empowering and also, hopefully, to help create another generation of women musicians here in Little Rock.

Is that important to you? Contributing to the music scene here in Little Rock?

Totally. I play in an all-girl band here called DOT, and we could count the number of women playing music in this town on one hand. OK, maybe two hands. I would love to help contribute to the next generation of girls who are going to come up and play music here. Little Rock has such a vibrant music scene! I would just love to see women play more fully in it.

Is there anything else about the camp we should know?

Yes! Girls don't have to have instrumental experience to participate. The emphasis is on songwriting — not being a brilliant instrumentalist. ... Songwriting came first for me. I had the songs in my head, so I got a guitar and started learning it. Now I play keyboards, drums, guitar — I play a little bit of everything. If a girl who comes this summer has never really played an instrument, I'm going to give them choices. We have a piano, a keyboard, drums. If you want to bang out a simple beat on a tambourine and rap, you could do that. That's songwriting. If you have a guitar and you want to play something on it, more power to you. If you've never played the keyboard before, I can show you the notes and you can hear what sounds good to you and write it down. And before you know it, you're playing an instrument! ... My whole thing is: We're in the trust tree. If you like how it sounds, that's good enough for me.

Spero's songwriting camp for girls will be held July 24-28 in North Little Rock. Contact Correne Spero at 917-202-6344 or spero44@gmail.com for more information. Tuition is \$200, but scholarships are available for those who need them.

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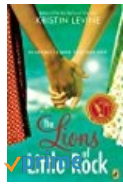
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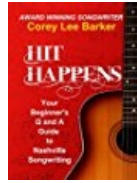
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January 20, 2015

by Rock Candy

After weeks of deliberation, violent debate and black magic, we've come up with our final and definitive list of semifinalists for the 2015 Arkansas Times Musicians Showcase. If you'll notice, there are 20 of them. Also, this is one of the strongest lineups we've ever had, with great artists in a variety of genres from all over the state. [more/](#)

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