

NEW FILM PORTRAYS AN UNUSUAL TEACHER AND HIS UNCONVENTIONAL SCHOOL

School of Hard Rocks

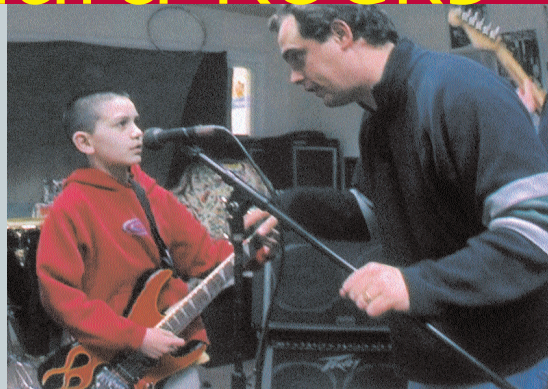
Although he teaches kids, Paul Green, CGS'01, is not a PG kind of guy. A hard-core rock 'n' roll guitarist turned music teacher, Green is the founder and hard-driving force behind the Paul Green School of Rock Music in Philadelphia. He mixes drill-sergeant intensity with a stage mother's hovering while his nerve-wracked charges perform before paying crowds.

"I learned a long time ago," he remarks, "that if you don't tell kids what they can't do, maybe they'll never find out." The comment comes from a new feature-length documentary, *Rock School*, which caught the attention of a film distributor at last year's LA Film Festival and of movie critics this year at Sundance. Green says he and his one-of-a-kind school inspired the 2003 hit movie *School of Rock*. Dewey Finn, the maniacal teacher played by Jack Black, resembles Green in how he berates and badgers, heartens and inspires. The Paul Green of *Rock School*, though, is more amped up, a bit deeper into the woods where the wild things are.

"He scares me to death," guitar prodigy C.J. Tywoniak confides to the camera. "He keeps yelling at people." Another would-be rocker complains, "He always tells me I suck and stuff." Still, the kids keep coming back and trying harder – and more than a few turn into impressive musicians and performers.

Napoleon Murphy Brock, a sax and flute player with the Mothers of Invention in the '70s, heard that the students of Rock School were playing some of the late Frank Zappa's most difficult music. Zappa, the Mothers' bandleader, is known for his sophisticated, genre-bridging compositions, and Brock was skeptical that children could perform at that level. So he went to one of their Zappa-themed concerts. "All I can say ... is that we could have captured a lot of flies in our mouths," he recalls. "I know what I had to go through to learn those songs."

Practice, practice, practice is the mantra of Green's after-school musical boot camp. The hectoring headmaster points out that much of the film that ended up on the



C. J. Tywoniak (left) takes a lesson from Paul Green.

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cutting-room floor is of him counting to four during lessons and rehearsals. Once students make progress with their chosen instruments, as a kind of final exam, they put it all on stage with a rock band composed of schoolmates. "We don't do recitals," Green explains. "We do rock concerts" – over 50 a year. Nothing will hurt these rock-stars-in-training more than a poor performance, he insists, which makes the concerts both a carrot and a stick.

"Paul wants us to think it's fun and serious," perceives 9-year-old rock student Asa Collins. In the film, young Asa takes part in a Black Sabbath show with his twin sister, Tucker. Both cherub-faced children wear black eye makeup. Asa has a spiky-hair Mohawk and sports a black T-shirt emblazoned with skull and crossbones. Tucker wears funeral garb. Shrouded in smoke set aglow by red light and shaken by heavy-metal bass, the angelic-satanic twins belt out "Iron Man" in squeaky-high child voices.

In the final scene, from behind the camera, director Don Argott gave the Collins twins the last say about Green's School of Rock. "If Don gave me a chance to be the last person on the documentary," Tucker recited in singsong measures as though delivering a school report, "I'd say, 'Long live rock.'" Then she sat back in her chair, crossed her legs and slipped a lollipop into her mouth. ■

—PETER NICHOLS