



Singles files: Leviatan teaches production by playing MP3s of pop hits.

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quiet but emotional read. Brielle Rassler, 15, teeters on a soft leg cast as she offers what sounds like a very personal original song, her pretty voice made more vulnerable by her quavering vibrato. Attired in a T-shirt with cartoons illustrating the phrase "I don't give a rat's ass," Bob Bergey, 14, gives a heartfelt rendition of Billy Joel's "Piano Man," his voice slightly trembling as he reads the words off a page he printed from the Internet. As the school's literary-magazine editor, Bergey has impressed his instructors with his fine writing more so than his vocal prowess.

"They all have their fortes," explains Conservatory Prep's founder and principal, Wendy Hirsch Weiner. "Some are more into music, some are more into theater, some are more into art. But the thing is, they're all artsy kids. So everybody gets trained in multiple areas; that's just part of their day."

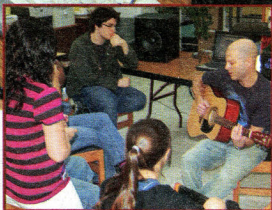
TAKING NOTES

"What I do mainly is theater," says Jesse Nevel, a studious-looking 17-year-old who carefully measures his words. "Outside of that, my main interest is comedy. That's what I want to do professionally."

While improvisation and drama are his favorite classes, Nevel's enjoying the garage-band class and the chance to learn about both the creative and business sides of the music industry. "Even though I don't want to be a musician," he relates, "I still find it interesting."

Taylor Penta, the 15-year-old drummer whose playing in local rock bands inspired the school to offer this workshop, *does* want to be a musician, but he's not exactly riveted by Leviatan's class. True to his rocker pedigree, Penta, whose wrists and forearms are ringed by a colorful riot of beads and bracelets he has collected at the raves he frequents, has missed one of the three garage-band classes and looks bored as hell when he is there. During a break, he puts his head down on the table to catch some z's.

"Most of it I already knew," he explains after



class. "I have a promoter who's already got a label, so he tells me what to do. Personally, my mom made me come here."

Still, Leviatan enjoys an easy rapport with the students, managing to keep them on topic even when they digress with commentary about *American Idol* or flatter him incessantly. His well-organized presentation even makes available a CD loaded with documents, including samples of a business plan and a sponsorship proposal.

Leviatan has so impressed Principal Weiner that she has invited him to join the faculty next year, when garage-band class will be offered twice weekly. He's looking forward to the opportunity to work with the kids more intensively, maybe even have them record.

In the meantime, he continues to pursue his dream of supporting himself primarily with his music. With solo and band gigs at venues such as Automatic Slim's in Fort Lauderdale, Purdy Lounge in Miami Beach and Club M in Hollywood and his aptly titled CD *Extra Credit* due out this summer, Leviatan is following his two-pronged attack to build a following locally as well as online. If he heeds his advice to his students, he just might make it to that level of what he calls "middle-class" musicians — not the ones who live in mansions, but the ones who make decent livings doing what they love. "At the end of the day," he imparts to his class, "it's about the product. Have a good product, and I guarantee a lot of great things will happen for you."

To find out where Yoni Leviatan will be performing, visit Songsforyoni.com.

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