

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Lessons from Warped

I believe that lessons come in all sorts of formats, in all sorts of classrooms. I received some great lessons from the Van's Warped Tour, which took place July 7 in Pomona, Calif. (A big thanks to NAMM's Warped promo and Shane Roeschlein, of course.)

First let me start by reminding everyone that I'm turning 54 shortly. You could say I'm not really in the Warped demographic. I mean, my first big live concert was The Beatles at Cleveland Auditorium in September 1964, an evening that would change my life. With that said, let's talk about what I learned in the "Warped Classroom."

(And in these parentheses, you'll find some common thoughts that, through my experience, I feel were warped into the nether region.)

1) Live music is alive and kicking. No drum machines. No sampling. Just like in 1964, it was musicians, instruments and enthusiasm.

(I thought no one was playing guitar anymore.)

2) Teens were there because of the music. Yeah, I saw my fair share of spikes and tats, but there were also Girl Scouts, French horn players, worship team players, suburbanites. If you were a teen, you wanted to be there, and in Pomona, there were 20,000! The Beatles only drew 11,000 in Cleveland in '64.

(I thought teens didn't like live music. I thought the real musicians wouldn't go to something like this.)

3) Most of the more than 50 bands were unknown. Certain big-name bands drew some of the kids there, but when I kept getting asked the names of the bands playing, I knew these kids were just digging the music. It was about the music! Many of these bands were making \$0 to get the chance to market their sound. Some were only 15 years old.

(I thought teens weren't very open to new music. I thought they liked what they liked.)

4) Teens want to play music. I talked to as many teens as I could that day, and I asked every single one, "Do

you play or sing?" To every one that didn't, I asked, "After seeing the bands today, do you want to play?" I got, "That would be cool" from over 90 percent.

To teens that said, "I used to play," I asked, "Why did you stop?" The top two answers: "It got boring," and "It was too hard." I pushed on: "What if someone could have taught you to play this kind of stuff?" They were skeptical that something like that was available, but when I confirmed that, yes, people and places exist that teach rock, they all asked, "Where?"

(I thought if you really want to teach music, it's supposed to be boring. You've got to "pay your dues" and learn theory first.)

5) There is one difference. Technology is the only difference between

Beatles 1964 and Warped 2006. Cell phones, digital cameras, iPods, BlackBerrys — you get the picture. These gadgets were out of "Dick Tracy" in 1964. But still, just like back then, the guitarists used guitars with humbuckers and plugged them into amps.

SUMMARY

I sat down after Warped (and after talking to Sterling Ball, whose company, Ernie Ball, has been involved with Warped for more than 10 years), and I realized something. Music retailers really don't get what's going on with kids today — and don't want to!

We all talk about the explosion of combo sales due to the Beatles, Stones, etc. But it could have been 100-times greater if music stores had sought me out to teach me how to play Beatles tunes, or sponsored a "Battle of the Bands," or a "local band" spot on local radio.

If music stores in 1964 went to Beatles concerts and handed out fliers that said they could show kids how to play rock, I bet they would have had more business and more students. It's the same in 2006! Now that I think about it, through NAMM, you could have handed out fliers at Warped. Where were you? **MI**

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The Warped Tour echoed with the pulse of youth and plenty of lessons for retailers