

# These moms love to rock

Program gives mothers a welcome musical outlet **TEMPO**



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WEST-SOUTHWEST

## The mamas and the mamas: Snacktime to Stratocasters

By Dawn Klingensmith  
Special to the tribune

Trish Cook, a mother of two, wanted to set up a play date last spring, but not the sort where you get the kids together and try to keep the noise level under control.

Instead, the newbie guitarist was hoping to find other moms to jam with.

She posted an ad on craigslist.com, but her online search ended on a sour note.

"I got hecklers!" said Cook, who lives in Winnetka.

The prank e-mails implied that moms should stick to singing lullabies and leave the rock anthems to a different demographic.

Meanwhile, at Musical Expressions, a teaching studio in Naperville, instructor Tom Castonzo had a brainstorm when Dolly McCarthy, a mother of five, phoned him in March about guitar lessons for her son. "I could hear all these kids in the background, and I thought, 'That mom could use a break,'" he said.

So Castonzo started a program called Rockin' Moms. It lets musically inclined moms play and perform as part of a real band. Castonzo has since moved out of state, and Patrick Dugan took over where Castonzo left off.

Modeled after other ensemble groups at Musical Expressions, the Rockin' Moms program brings together participants according to their musical preference and skill level. Each band picks a name, chooses a song list

and meets weekly for instruction and rehearsals. The program culminates in a live performance at Synergy Entertainment Complex in West Chicago.

McCarthy, who grew up singing in church choirs and school musicals, signed up last March and persuaded Cook, whom she had met over the Internet, to join her.

Bea Borges, a Naperville mother of two, came on board as the bass guitar player. After a search lasting several weeks, Chicago drummer Sharon Jaffess, godmother of two and a dotting cat mom, came along to round out the band.

"Thank God for these women, none of the 18-year-old boys want to play with me," Jaffess said.

Calling themselves Playdate, the four women, ages 37 to 44, started practicing a list of 10 songs by artists such as Sheryl Crow, Skye Sweetnam and KT Tunstall.

"We didn't want to pick songs that moms would normally sing, although we did think about doing a rock 'n' roll version of 'Rock-a-bye Baby,'" McCarthy said.

The band rehearses in a lilac-colored studio at Musical Expressions and in Borges' unfinished basement.

A rehearsal session might be cut short if a mom needs to prepare snacks for her kids' sports team.

But "one of the nice things about playing with other moms is that we're all flexible and understand each other's crazy schedules," McCarthy said.

Domestic responsibilities aside, the four women glittered like rock stars at an October rehearsal. Wielding her beloved pink paisley Fender Stratocaster, Cook wore torn jeans and a snug black T-shirt emblazoned with her stage name, Trixie. McCarthy wore a sequined belt and star-shaped earrings as big as Christmas tree ornaments.

By this time, Playdate had mastered its repertoire of cover songs, as well as some original material, so Dugan was coaching the foursome on the finer points of showmanship.

"Look people in the eye when you sing," he told McCarthy. "You'll establish a stronger connection with the audience."

After seven months of practicing, McCarthy was eager to put Dugan's advice into practice.

"I can't stand to look at that purple wall anymore," she said. "I want to look at faces."

On Nov. 19, she got her chance. About 30 people showed up at Synergy for an all-ages show featuring Playdate and three



"I've always tried to encourage my kids to try new things, and I finally feel like I'm putting my words into action in my own life," says Bea Borges (left), shown with Dolly McCarthy.

Photo for the Tribune by Stacie Freudenberg

## ROCKERS: Moms' time in spotlight

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other groups. Before taking the stage, McCarthy devised a strategy to calm her nerves. "I told Bea I'm going to go onstage and picture all her Halloween and Christmas decorations," she said, "because we're used to playing in her basement."

That imagery must have worked. The performance went off without a hitch. While McCarthy belted out a Joan Jett song, her sisters waved Bic lighters. But it was the littlest people in attendance, the women's children, who turned out to be their biggest fans.

"I was nervous I'd be embarrassed, but I thought they were awesome," said Cook's daughter, Courtney, 11.

For the members of Playdate, the evening was not so much about acting like rock stars as being good role models.

"Aside from being fun, I see this as an opportunity to send a positive message to my kids—if you want to do something, do it. It's never too late," said Borges, who took up bass just two years ago. "I've always tried to encourage my kids to try new things, and I finally feel like I'm putting my words into action in my own life."

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Musical Expressions, 190 E. 5th Ave., Naperville, seeks musicians to form bands for its ongoing Rockin' Moms program. Call 630-355-1110. For information about Playdate, the inaugural Rockin' Moms band, visit [www.playdatetheband.com](http://www.playdatetheband.com)

Rock on!

*Musical Expressions congratulates the Rockin' Moms and Pat Dugan for their hard work and dedication put into making this dream a reality.....*

*Rock on!*