



PHOTO COURTESY OF BETH WOOTEN

Girls at the Bahrain Rock Camp, where Beth Wooten and the Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls was invited to host a camp.

condensed into a three-day weekend. They write an original song in three days. I'm a musician and think that is terrifying. I'm amazed that people have so much enthusiasm for it. It's really inspiring to experience.

It's also wonderful because it creates an opportunity for community building and networking for women who might volunteer for the girls' camp as well. And tuition from Ladies Rock Camp can go toward financial aid for the girls' camp.

S.Z.: How many campers come from outside of Portland?

B.W.: Earlier on, there was a greater number of girls coming from out of town. But now that there are so many Rock Camps everywhere, we get fewer out-of-towners.

S.Z.: Tell me about the invitation to take the Rock 'n' Roll Camp to Bahrain.

B.W.: That came kind of out of the blue. The public affairs officer from the U.S. Embassy of Bahrain, Brad Niemann sent us an email. He is married to Haifaa Al Mansour, the first female Saudi filmmaker. Her film "Wadja" (2012) was the first feature film shot entirely in Saudi Arabia. They contacted us and said that they do kids programs in the Middle East and would we be interested in doing a Girl's Rock Camp.

It took some thinking ... and pondering. "Is this real?" It took a little homework. I thought, "Well, if there are women in Bahrain who are interested in doing this with us, then yes. I want to do it."

I started emailing people that I knew who had been to the Middle East or knew something about Bahrain. I was able to get in touch with a woman named Wadeeah (Al Meshkhas) who is 22 years old and a

musician in Bahrain. We started e-mailing. She told me she was doing a student exchange program and was going to be in Seattle. I was able to meet her and we were able to hash it out. What would this look like? My concerns, her concerns. I really didn't want to just fly out there and do a camp as it looks in Portland. I wanted it to be a conversation with female musicians in Bahrain.

We were there 10 days. It was very different than the Portland Rock Camp. We didn't have as many instruments, it was way more improvisational. But 45 girls showed up. It was a blast.

There were two music stores in Bahrain. They were so kind to us. They closed their shops and let us use their practice rooms. It was really exciting.

S.Z.: What is the importance of bringing the camp to Bahrain?

B.W.: You'd have to ask the girls what they thought of the experience.

For me, it was meeting the girls. Getting to know what their life is like. It was so similar. It was different in that ... you know how you asked me the "Why girls only?" question? Over there it's for the most part gender-segregated education. So why girls? - there was no questioning that. It was just understood - it's the music camp for girls.

The songs were strikingly thematically similar. It was a lot of "I hate school, I love music, school sucks, I put in my headphones, everything is OK."

S.Z.: Are the issues of adolescent girls universal?

B.W.: Yes. "You can't tell me what to think. You can't tell me what to say."

S.Z.: I imagine, here in Portland, you have return campers who help create that excitement...

B.W.: Exactly. It was different too in that (in Bahrain) we had four guitars and two basses and one drum set and 45 girls. Whereas here, we have 30 guitars and 15 girls taking guitar classes. We talked a lot about collaboration and sharing. The girls in Bahrain were so excited to have the program that it seemed that sharing wasn't an issue.

I was teaching the guitar class and I would show them an E chord. And then three girls would play it and then teach it to the three other girls. It was a great opportunity for peer mentoring.

S.Z.: Will you go back?

B.W.: Yes! In August, with the idea that Wadeeah will hold the leadership role now.

S.Z.: What is it about girls and women playing music together that is so fantastic?

B.W.: I think some of it has to do with the fact that we aren't necessarily socialized to take up a lot of space; and music often requires amplification. Rock music has an anti-authoritative aesthetic to it. So that can be really compelling. It's just a release. This song that you write this week doesn't have to define you. But you can kind of let something out of you or try on an emotion and see how it feels and try to connect with other people.

Learn more about the Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls at www.girlsrockcamp.org

