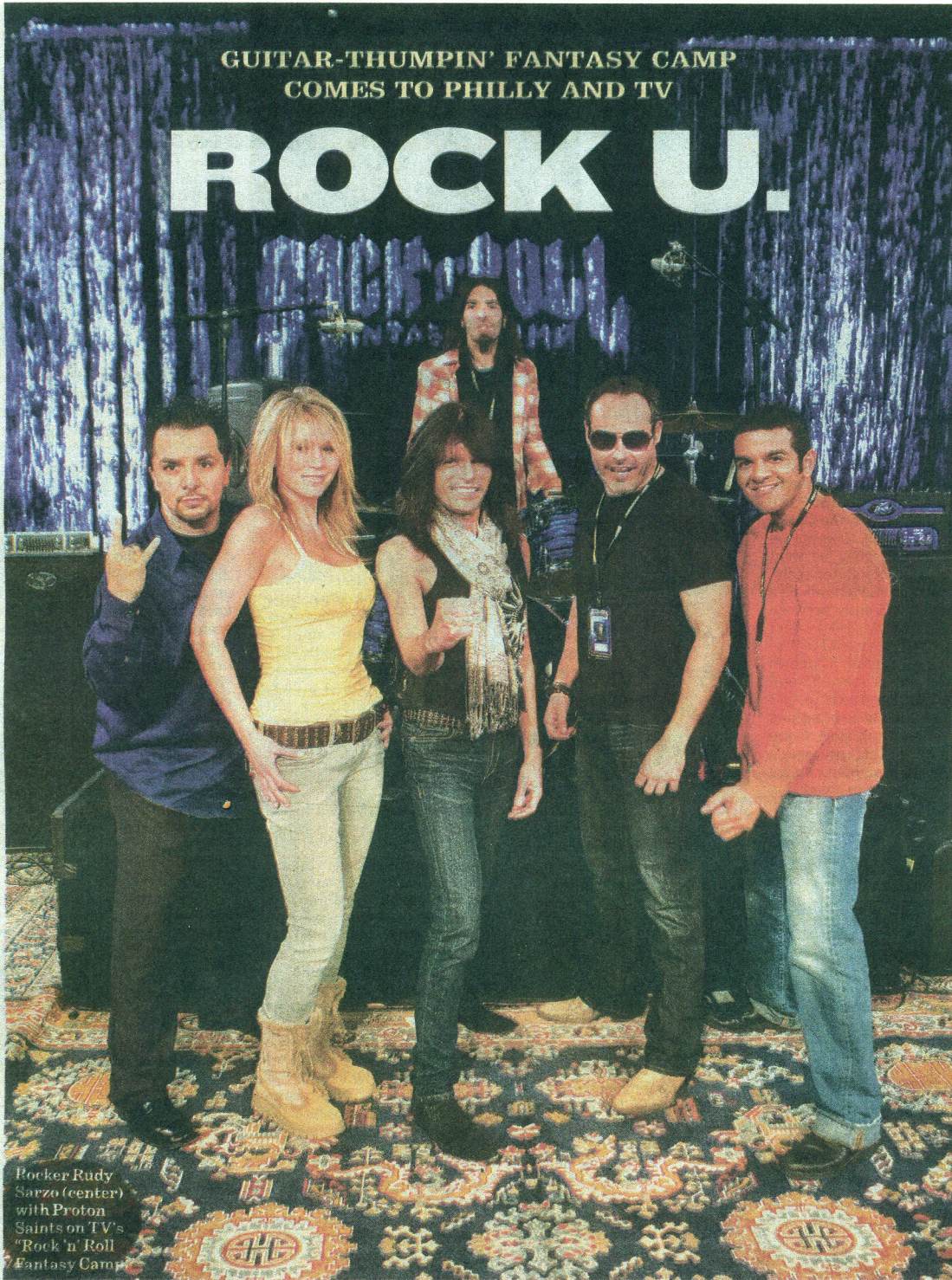


GUITAR-THUMPIN' FANTASY CAMP
 COMES TO PHILLY AND TV

ROCK U.



Rocker Rudy Sarzo (center) with Proton Saints on TV's "Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy Camp"

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RUDY SARZO used to believe it was his "destiny" to be a famous bass player — and he's surely gotten there, performing with the likes of Ozzy Osbourne, Quiet Riot, Whitesnake, DIO and Blue Oyster Cult.

But now, Sarzo said, he's "come to realize my destiny is to help others fulfill their dreams in music ... to bring out their inner rock star."

That's why he keeps coming back as a counselor at the traveling cavalcade of stars and wannabes called "Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy Camp" that's finally coming to our town next weekend.

A multipart TV reality show with the same name debuts tomorrow night at 10 on the VHI Classic channel.

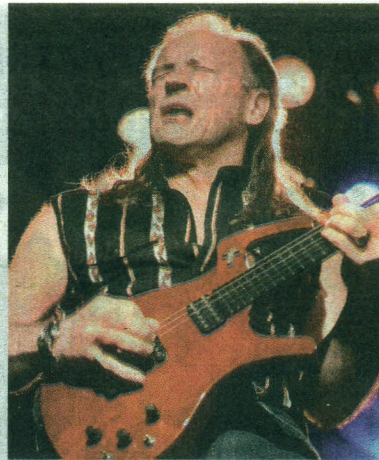
Given that the TV version has been developed by Mark Burnett Productions of "Survivor" fame, you might expect lots of backbiting,

hissy fits and survival-of-the-fittest challenges. But the video version, like the event itself, offers a kinder sort of encounter; "with positive results for everyone," said David Fishof, the veteran concert tour promoter (Ringo Starr All-Stars, The Monkees) who "gave that all up to just do this."

"The Burnett team demanded that we have a winning band for the televised camp" — earning the honor of jamming with Ace Frehley of Kiss, Fishof tipped. "And they had a hand in formulating the groups. But normally for us, everybody gets in on that fun. And unlike baseball fantasy camps, where you're not really going to go chase the fly ball when you're 55 and overweight, rock and roll is something you can do all your life."

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Mark Farner (above), formerly of Grand Funk Railroad, will be an instructor here.

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“a renewed sense of my confidence and my abilities,” which he’d pursued in his young adult years backing up talents like Danny & the Juniors, the Coasters and the Dovells, then put on the back burner when he went back to school (computer tech), got married and started raising a family. While currently between jobs in IT security, Brooks isn’t blinking about paying \$1,999 to come back to Fantasy Camp in Philly. “Hey, life is short. Two of my three kids are grown up, so I feel like I’ve got a little breathing room to go out and start living again.” And in his post-camp high, he’s also connected online and started playing in a new duo with vocal collaborator Debra Janove.

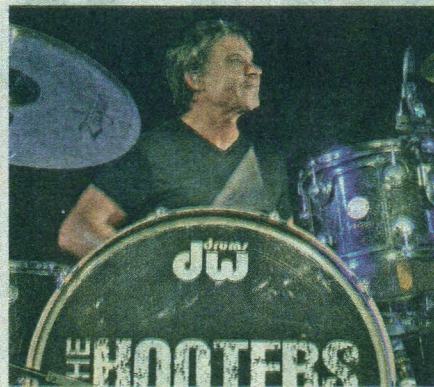
Certainly, living out the fantasy is not without pressures, prima donnas and the occasional meltdown, as the TV show reveals and we also heard about from Bill Brooks, a 53-year-old Mantua, N.J., resident who bunked in at the super pricey (\$15,000), week-long London Rock ‘n’ Roll Fantasy Camp in May as winner of a WMGK-sponsored contest. “There’s tears and elation all within the first four measures. And a lot of tough love from the counselors, trying to strip away the elements of amateurism and to get you to focus on how to act as a professional musician and get rid of bad habits you may have had.”

For the piano- and guitar-playing Brooks, the camp gave him

Bill Brooks, 53, of Mantua, N.J., with guitar from rock ‘n’ roll camp.



DAVID MAIALETTI/
Staff photographer



Dickie Betts (above left, in hat), veteran of the Allman Brothers Band, will be head counselor at the camp here. David Uosikinen (left), of the Hooters, also will be on the Philly camp staff.

ry — they gave up on performing when they were younger, but never lost their love for music,” said Sarzo. “Then once we’ve rekindled their passion, some of them keep coming back.” Fishof said “almost half” the people already signed up for the “recession-priced” Philly camp — “the only one we’re doing this run on the East Coast” — are repeat customers.

“You also get people who come in with no musical experience at all,” noted Sarzo. And the camp finds a place for everyone, “from the stay-at-home mom who can’t play anything but spends her days writing songs at the kitchen table, to the lawyer who litigates all day in

court, who I convinced had the performing skills to become a singer.

“Each bunk of players is placed with a famous talent, your counselor, who guides you through the process of becoming a band, taking master classes, learning a cover tune, writing your own song and recording in a studio — if there’s time, plus playing together before an audience and jamming with the counselors,” explained Brooks. At the longer London camp, he got to hang with and learn from the likes of Spike Edney (Queen), Nick Mason (Pink Floyd), Alan White (Yes) and Joey Molland (Badfinger), all of whom kindly signed his headless Steinberger guitar — “instantly turning a \$1,600 instrument into a \$6,000 collectible.” Brooks also got to play at Abbey Road Studios “on the same piano Paul McCartney used on ‘Let It Be.’”

Here, the counselor contingent

also includes Winger’s savvy frontman Kip Winger and the glibly entertaining producer/songwriter Mark Hudson (both likewise seen on the VHI series), plus head counselor Dickie Betts (Allman Brothers), Mark Farner (Grand Funk Railroad), Sandy Gennaro (Joan Jett), Rami Jaffee (Foo Fighters, Wallflowers) and Philly’s own David Uosikinen (Hooters). They’ll be doing lots of hanging and rehearsing with the campers at a recording studio in Upper Darby owned by Cinderella’s Jeff LaBar, while taking meals together in town and doing their big camp show finale Sunday night at 6 at the Trocadero. (Spectators can buy into that for \$24-\$29.)

Fishof acknowledged that the camp gig pays the counselors “decently. It’s nothing like what these guys make at a big concert, but we treat them right and they have so much fun that they keep coming back. In London, for instance, Nick Mason was supposed to come in for one day, but stayed the whole week.”

Sarzo said the gig for him is almost as much about life coaching as musical counseling. “To perform my duties, I must get inside each camper’s world, find where they’re coming from, and then bring them into a rock and roll environment. Everybody has different points of reference. They’re short-order cooks and salespeople, stock analysts and surgeons. So you have to find a common denominator to help them work as a unit. You’re rooting for them. And you’re compressing the ride you once took — from first forming a band to recording to getting a hit — from a year and a half to just a weekend or a week.

“And I gotta tell you, seeing the ear-to-ear grins on their faces when they get it together, it really takes me back,” Sarzo shared. “It reminds me why I got into this business in the first place.” ★

Rock ‘n’ Roll Fantasy Camp, 10 p.m. Saturdays on the VHI Classic channel, five episodes starting tomorrow. Then Rock ‘n’ Roll Fantasy Camp sets up in Philadelphia next weekend, Rocktober 22-24. Camp tuition starts at \$1,999 for “Rock Star” status. Fancier packages are also offered at \$2,299 (“Headliner”), \$2,699 (“VIP”) and \$2,999 (“Superstar”) and include extra face time and partying with the celebrity counselors, final show tickets and an autographed instrument. Info at 1-888-762-BAND, www.rockcamp.com. Open to all, the camp concert with a lengthy celebrity jam ends the weekend on Oct. 24, at 6 p.m. at the Trocadero, 10th and Arch streets, \$24-\$29 (all ages), 215-922-6888, www.thetroc.com.