

# Girls Rock Out to PJ Harvey: Supporting Sisterhood at the Mic



Photo credit: Murray Scott

✘ Wearing a sparkly mini with lace-up boots, Caitlin Strokosch shot a knowing glance to her two bandmates and gave an alto roar into her mic. Performing as local act Me Jane, the buzzed-haired beauty played out during the PJ Harvey Cover show, an event held the night of Easter Sunday. A total of eight bands crooned and thrashed before a large audience clustered near Aurora’s neon-lit stage.

But the event was more than a peppy nod to PJ Harvey, the iconic British musician who first rose to fame in the ‘90s for her grungy indie sound, poetic lyrics and disregard for stuffy female conformity. The show’s proceeds benefitted Girls Rock! RI, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering females of all ages through music programming and workshops that cover sensitive topics including healthy relationships, media literacy and relational aggression.

“Often female-identified folks are not listened to in our society,” explained Hilary Jones, musician and director of Girls! Rock RI. “So our programs are a space where they are encouraged to express themselves and get loud and know that their voices, opinions, feelings and experiences are important.”

For Strokosch, supporting the cause was more than half the fun – especially because the members of Me Jane (which also includes Rachel Sholly on drums and Lisa Agustin on bass) met in 2010 through the org’s annual Ladies Rock Camp. There, the classically trained cellist picked up a guitar for the first time. The trio composes songs that range in genre, including a two-minute waltz and a lengthy stoner-rock epic about death and fire.

“Girls! Rock has been transformative experience for all of us – musically and personally... There’s no hierarchy in our band and most songs we write together, in what usually ends up being a ridiculous and organic process,” Strokosch said. “We always jump at the chance to support Girls! Rock anytime we can.”

Bill Keough, a local musician and a former booking manager, showed his support by playing renditions of "Victory" and "Yuri-G." As he explained on stage, he made a reverent vow to continue playing music after attending one of Harvey's Boston shows. "The power and honesty of her songwriting resonates deep within my psyche," he explained. "I know she is writing from a woman's perspective. But we are all creatures of emotion."

For others, the show helped inspire an evolution of identity. Vivian Madrid sang the song "Shame" and "This is Love" with a full band after taking vocal lessons through Girls! Rock. According to the self-proclaimed introvert, the experience blasted her outside her comfort zone.

"I have always loved to sing at home — in the shower and especially in my car. But my self-doubt and inferiority complex has always crept up in certain moments of my life," Madrid explained. "It's been amazing to know I can do something, even if I'm scared. Being part of this organization was life-altering."

*Girls Rock! RI will be holding a super fun fundraising event in May where bands will perform songs by "girl groups" from the '60s. This org is also currently holding Group Lessons for youth and adults in guitar, vocals and keyboards and the participants will be performing at a recital showcase in May. This summer, two Girls Rock Camps for more than 80 campers will be held. Volunteers are wanted!*