

Northern Advocate

Talented Waipu kids form band: Alien Weaponry

By Sandra Bogart



BIG NOISE: Lewis de Jong is not afraid to be larger than life on stage when he sings and plays guitar with Alien Weaponry with brother Henry on drums and Ethan Trembath on bass guitar. PHOTO/NIEL DE JONG

In 1988, New York Times critic Jon Pareles wrote: "In the taxonomy of popular music, heavy metal is a major sub-species of hard rock - the breed with less syncopation, less blues, more showmanship and more brute force."

Loud distorted guitars, strong rhythms, massive bass-and-drum sound, and macho performances with vigorous vocals make up the genre that has developed since early bands such as Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath's sounds morphed into the sounds of Metallica, a band that began in 1981 and became the seventh biggest selling act in American history.

And now, with a lot of determination, comes a Waipu band, Alien Weaponry. Brothers Lewis (guitarist) and Henry (drummer) de Jong, needed a bassist. Their father, Niel, began testing each of their friends who came over to play after school to see who might be able to manage a bass guitar.

"The first kid who came along and could reach the end of the bass was Ethan Trembath. He had played ukulele and was keen to learn the bass so Lewis and I began teaching him," Niel said.

(Similarly, back in 1981 Metallica's Lars Ulrich didn't have a band when he began - just a song and a concept. He convinced guitar player/singer James Hetfield to join him and they talked Hetfield's friend and housemate Ron McGovney into taking up bass.)

Lewis, who attends Waipu Primary, is self-taught on guitar. He plays by ear and writes his own songs, and does not know one cover. He wrote his first song when he was 2 and in a full immersion Maori school.

Niel described a day when Lewis was out with the family and there was music playing in the background. "Lewis, who was 3, said, 'Dad, that sounds like David Gilmour on the guitar'. It was indeed Pink Floyd with Gilmour on guitar."

Elder brother Henry, who attends Bream Bay College, is also self-taught on the drums, with help from YouTube. "My dad listened to a lot of Metallica and Motorhead. When we moved up to Waipu, I met some people who introduced me to other metal bands."

Lewis starts most of the songs for Alien Weaponry. "I sit down and play random stuff," he said. "If I find a riff I find catchy, I'll think up words that go with it then Henry finds a drum beat. Ethan's new on the bass so I show him his part."

Alien Weaponry came third in the Smoke Free Rock Quest regional final this year and Henry also won the musicianship award for the whole Northland region ("A terrific feat given he is only 13 years old," said his proud dad).

Henry and Lewis also took out the lyric writers' award (Lewis, 11, is still at Waipu Primary School).

Ethan had not listened to much heavy metal music before he was chosen for the band 11 months ago.

"Now I play it, I'm getting used to it and I do like it," he said. "I'm growing my confidence on stage - learning from Lewis because he's never too shy to do anything on stage. I'm trying to be someone different on stage, someone hyper-excited because me, just normal, is like relaxed and not doing anything."

Ethan missed out on Niel's Anvil Project workshop earlier in the year where stagecraft and gig tips were taught by Niel and Andy Woodd, singer and guitarist for Cripple Mr Onion.

Niel has been a guitar player most of his life, playing with Voodoo Love in the early 1990s, and enjoying success on student radio. Isaac Blake Tansley, drummer for In Dread Response, Rogan Mortimer from The Punishment Due, and guitarist and Bream Bay College music teacher Scott Brown also helped.

They also taught the participants (10 to 16-year-old musicians) how to care for their instruments, fix things that break and readjust their bridges after changing strings. They let them have a go on lots of "different axes", an assortment of electric guitars. Isaac Blake Tansley taught a drum workshop, including how to blast beat and double kick on the drums.

There is another new vocabulary to be learned as well.

Niel said it was a challenge teaching the kids how to make fools of themselves and be proud of it. "It's a genre of music and performance - standing with their legs wide apart and shaking their heads. Teaching the kids to do it well and not give two hoots what their friends think, to push it to the extreme and use actions bigger than life is what we were after.

"The kids were really embarrassed when we made them play air guitar and act everything out. Some kids were shy, but the drummers got really enthused."

There is a short documentary of the workshop on The Anvil Project's YouTube station. Check it out - even if you don't like the genre, you'll feel excited for the kids. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvLH0ESNpOQ>

Alien Weaponry has played several gigs now and the band members are really into it. They practise daily and do not want to be seen as a kids band. They will likely surprise a few of the bands they are gigging with this weekend on the Brutal Beach Tour. The groups playing with Alien Weaponry are Ourselves Alone, Ivengeance, Jackel and Katastrophic. They all have Facebook pages.

The first concert is on January 3 at the Matakana Hall at 7pm. The next is on January 4 in Waipu at the Coronation Hall, at 7pm, and the youngsters finish their tour at the Mangawhai Tavern on January 5 at 7pm. Because the final concert is at a tavern, under-age persons must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.

For more information on the shows, check Facebook by searching the Brutal Beach Tour. To hear their music, go to YouTube and search the bands' names, and keep up with Niel and his guitar reviews on his "The Anvil project" channel.

Check out Alien Weaponry on youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IE05F3sRqRE>

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