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Award-Winning Songwriter Returns to Hometown for Guitar Workshop

By Jennifer Wake



Ali Handal Photo provided

Ali Handal has come a long way since singing in the choir and in musicals at Acalanes High School. Now a multi-award winning songwriter with three albums under her belt, her songs featured in numerous TV shows and movies, and author of a guitar instructional book/CD "Guitar For Girls," published worldwide by Hal Leonard, this gutsy guitarist will be returning to Lafayette July 27 for a special workshop at Lamorinda Music.

"I'm especially excited to start out the tour in my hometown!" says Handal, who is a member of the Les Paul Experience Artist Advisory Board along with Steve Miller and Alan Parsons. "My main goal is to share my story and encourage all aspiring guitarists."

Handal's first instrument was piano, which she started when she was 4, but her world changed forever when she discovered Led Zeppelin. From that moment on "it was all about the guitar," she notes on her website. "I wanted to be Jimmy Page." She started on a little acoustic, and went electric as soon as she could, ultimately swapping her acoustic for an airbrushed-dragon Fernandez Explorer purchased at a Berkeley music shop.

She attended college, first at Occidental and then UCLA, and earned a psychology degree with honors, but a career outside of music made her miserable. She decided to pursue her passion, and soon found herself living with a house full of musicians in North Hollywood, supporting herself with odd jobs while she worked on her craft. "I had to be willing to suck at first," she points out in her bio. "Something I'd never done. But that's what it takes."

Handal says she particularly loves encouraging young women to strive beyond what they think they're capable of.

"I was so timid when I first approached the guitar, and I

enjoy helping girls get over their own insecurities and fears," she says. "I like to share what held me back and how I overcame the obstacles to becoming the player and singer I am today."

On her website, she says "people love it when I bleed, when I scream and hurt my voice, and when I play really fast, even on acoustic guitar. They liked when I'd do something more masculine, energy-wise, something loud and fast."

The catalyst for her book was Hal Leonard calling her up and asking if she'd be interested in writing a guitar method book specifically for girls. "As an ardent feminist, I actually had mixed feelings about writing a music book targeted only to girls - after all, the mechanics of playing guitar are the same for everyone, and I had grown up worshipping exclusively male guitar heroes," she says. "But the more I thought about the project, the more I realized that there were differences between how girls approach guitar and how boys do (of course, there will always be exceptions to this generalization). Generally speaking, girls tend to be shyer about putting themselves 'out there' and playing before they're really good, and while that may seem to be a good quality it's actually not helpful as an aspiring musician."

One of the most important activities Handal says you can do as a student of music is to jam with other students, perform as much as possible, and just put yourself out there. "My experience, and what I've observed, is that many girls deny themselves these experiences because they're overly concerned with embarrassing themselves, whereas boys tend to just go for it."

The free workshop will be held from noon to 1:30 p.m. Saturday, July 27 at Lamorinda Music in Lafayette. Aspiring guitarists can also visit the Lessons page on Handal's website (alihandal.com), where she's posted free video lessons and a list of her favorite books on guitar playing, songwriting, and creativity in general.

Angel
Sarah McLachlan
Back on the Chain Gang
The Pretenders
Beautiful
Christina Aguilera
Black Horse and the Cherry Tree
KT Tunstall
Come to My Window
Melissa Etheridge
Crazy on You
Heart
Girls with Guitars
Wynonna Judd
Give Me One Reason
Tracy Chapman
How Was I to Know
Reba McEntire
I Love Rock 'N Roll
Joan Jett & the Blackhearts
If Matters to Me
Faith Hill

GUITAR for GIRLS
A Beginner's Guide to Playing Favorites on Electric Guitars
BY LAMORINDA
38 SONGS BY 38 ARTISTS
38 SONGS BY 38 ARTISTS
38 SONGS BY 38 ARTISTS

It's Too Late
Carole King
Landslide
Fleetwood Mac
Leather and Lace
Stevie Nicks
Love Sneakin' Up on You
Bonnie Raitt
Mean
Taylor Swift
Not a Pretty Girl
Ani DiFranco
Proud Mary
Ike & Tina Turner
Soak Up the Sun
Sheryl Crow
We Got the Beat
The Go-Go's
You Oughta Know
Alanis Morissette
You're Still the One
Shania Twain

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