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Parents Battle of the Bands Rocks St Kilda

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Dagmar Yeaman and Anna Vermooten, PBOB organisers. Photographer: Dave Tacon

A friendly rivalry and love of music brought Anna Vermooten and Dagmar Yeaman together. The two Port Phillip residents were introduced by a mutual friend prior to the inaugural Parents Battle of the Bands (PBOB) at the Prince Bandroom in 2018.

This competition, founded by Anna, aims to raise money for the musical programs of local primary schools, foster a sense of community and invigorate the local live music scene. Clearly it has been a success on all counts.

Tonight will see the fifth incarnation of PBOB at the Prince Bandroom. Eight local parents' bands will battle it out for trophies and boasting rights, but the real winners will be the eight local primary schools, their students, parents and school staff. In what will be the biggest PBOB to date, Albert Park Primary School will be competing for the first time.

According to Anna and Dagmar, over \$40,000 has been raised by PBOB so far and they are optimistic about clearing around \$10,000 this evening. It's not just the bands that compete. The schools themselves are responsible for getting people in the door and will be rewarded directly for the support they draw. Each ticket and piece of PBOB merchandise is earmarked for whichever school is nominated by the buyer.

Back in 2018, the pair were belting it out onstage for St Kilda Park and Ripponlea Primary Schools respectively. Now that their children are enrolled at local secondary colleges, the pair who bonded over a mutual adoration of the artist Prince, have become PBOB's promoters and registered it as a charity.

For the past two weeks, Anna, a guitarist and vocalist and Dagmar, a vocalist and self-described "one handed keyboard player", both with a mutual penchant for funk and soul, have been spruiking the event while selling tickets and PBOB merchandise from a pop-up box office at a former florist on Blessington Street, St Kilda. In the meantime the parents have been busy rehearsing at local studios and in some cases at the schools themselves.

Such is the success of PBOBs that this year will see the Melbourne's first Northside battle, which will take place on June 8 at the Northcote Social Club, Anna and Dagmar, hope to expand the movement statewide but tonight all eyes will be on the Southside battle.

Many musicians who take part have had to juggle a day job as well as child rearing. In Anna's case that has been running local cafes and restaurants while Dagmar moved from gigging at local venues to a career in marketing.

Nevertheless, previous battles have been able to draw from a deep well of established local talent including Chris Cheney from the Living End, who played in St Kilda Primary School's Primary Scream in 2018 and comedian Dave Hugh's who emceed the following year. The requirement to be pupil's parent ensures a rotating roster of participants.

"The area is just so rich with musicians and industry people", says Dagmar.

"Chris Cheney was awesome and added a lot of visibility. Having people like that gives the event more cred, but it also makes it more fun and aspirational."

Tonight's judging panel will feature local luminaries Phil Ceberano, the gun guitarist who also runs the school holiday workshop 'Rock Academy', Tottie Goldsmith of the Chantoozies and Jack Howard who as well as the trumpet player in Hunters & Collectors, is also a founding member of Elwood Secondary College's 'Elwood Dad's Band'.

For, Anna and Dagmar, PBOB's greatest achievements have been off-stage. "First there's the funding of the kid's musical education," says Anna, "then there's the positive impact on everyone's mental health - including the volunteers."

In some instances PBOB has both spurred creativity and rekindled musical dreams. "One of our lead singers Danielle Paltos said she hadn't sung to anyone but her kids in twenty years," says Dagmar, "but now she's rediscovered her love of music and just finished recording an album."

For more info, check out parentsbattleofthebands.com

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