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## Rude Mechanicals: Grrl Action impacts Austin

By Barry Pineo

Rude Mechanicals, Austin's best-known theatre collective, has received extensive recognition for artistic excellence since its inception in 1995: dozens of local theatre nominations and awards, voted Austin's Best Theatre Company in the *Chronicle* "Best of Austin" readers poll four years in a row, an off-Broadway run and two national tours of *Lipstick Traces*, and currently an international tour of *Get Your War On*, to name just a few. But the Rudes recently received a grant from Impact Austin that they must place among the most illustrious of their achievements.

Community outreach is part of what the Rudes do, and they founded their Grrl Action program, a three-week summer intensive for 13- to 16-year-olds, back at the turn of the millennium. The program focuses on girls creatively expressing themselves and developing that expression into an artistic presentation. "When the Rudes started Grrl Action, they did a lot of research," says Carrie Fountain, who, along with Sarah Myers, co-manages the program. "The teenage years are the age when body-image issues kick in, and all the images that girls see in the media start affecting their self-esteem. At that time, it was a crisis of epic proportions. The Rudes created this program in response to that."

Especially in the current political and economic climate, money is tight for arts organizations, most of which operate on a nonprofit basis and therefore depend on public and private funds. Though little money was available for Grrl Action last year, the Rudes and Fountain and Myers still forged ahead. And then they decided to apply for a grant from Impact Austin.

For three years running, Impact Austin, now a group of close to 400 women, has given sizable grants to local nonprofit community organizations. These grants are awarded in one of five categories: culture, environment, education, family, and health. "Their grant process is very rigorous, very thorough," says Fountain, "It helped us define our program." It involved several stages: writing a letter of inquiry, writing the grant, having a site visit, and finally doing a presentation in front of the assembled Impact Austin members. Then each member voted, and the majority ruled, making the Rudes one of only four community nonprofits to receive such a grant this year and the first arts organization to gain Impact Austin's recognition.

It's a good fit. "They're interested in the development of new projects," says Myers, "and we had already planned to expand Grrl Action into a year-round program. We just needed help to make it happen. Being in that transitional, transformational stage was something that set us up very well. We had years of research and experience behind us to prove our commitment to Grrl Action, and we had a clear vision for the future."

Certainly, and perhaps most importantly, the members of Impact Austin can relate to what it was like to be a girl. "I think they were really attracted by our mission," says Fountain. "If we produce the next generation of great artists and performers, that's wonderful, but really what we want to do is try to help girls love themselves and find their voices."

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*Public performances of the 2007 class of Grrl Action will be July 21-22, Saturday and Sunday, 2pm, at the Off Center, 2211 Hidalgo. For more information, call 476-RUDE or visit [www.rudemechs.com](http://www.rudemechs.com).*

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