

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
2018
Interview opportunities available

SUMMER (June 11 - July 21)

contact: Hilary Jones, 401-443-2869

Nonprofit Launches Summer with New Hire, Two Camps, and Preview of Ten-year Anniversary

Reza Clifton is new Co-Executive Director of Girls Rock! Rhode Island, a statewide program based out of Providence, RI and heretofore run by musician and community leader Hilary Jones, PhD. She comes to the organization known for her work as an arts leader, media producer in RI and vocal advocate for educational equity, gender parity, and ending all forms of discrimination.

Who: Girls Rock! Rhode Island
Reza Clifton, New Co-Executive Director
Hilary Jones, Founding Executive Director
Geoff Griffin, Board Co-Chair
Jennifer Walker, Board Co-Chair

What: News at Girls Rock! Rhode Island:
New Hire, Summer Programming, Ten-Year Anniversary

When: June - September 2018

Where: Providence, RI

EXTENDED PRESS RELEASE: Starts below

INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES**: 1) Reza Clifton, 2) Hilary Jones, 3) Geoff Griffin, 4) Jennifer Walker, 5) Former Camper, 6) Involved Parent, 7) Collaborating Organizations and Musicians

OTHER INTERESTING NOTABLES: 1) Five Fun Facts about Reza; 2) Camp and Saturday Showcase Dates (July 16 through 21, Middle School ages; August 13 through 18, High School ages); 3) Volunteer training weekend (June 23-24); 4) Video footage available, Reza at RI Women's March and other archival video and audio; 5) Samples of Reza's art, essays and poems available at @3amblack on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and on VenusSings.com and AmbitiousBlackFeminist.com.

**QUOTES AVAILABLE BELOW

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Nonprofit Launches Summer with New Hire, Two Camps, and Preview of Ten-year Anniversary

Reza Clifton is new Co-Executive Director of Girls Rock! Rhode Island (GRR!), a statewide program based out of Providence, RI and heretofore run by musician and community leader Hilary Jones, PhD. She comes to the organization known for her work as an arts leader, media producer in RI and vocal advocate for educational equity, gender parity, and ending all forms of discrimination.

PROVIDENCE, RI - This week, Reza Clifton reported for duty as Girls Rock! RI's new Co-Executive Director. She joins Hilary Jones on the leadership team as the ten-year-old organization enters its busiest summer yet.

Born and raised in Providence, Clifton has a rich and varied biography with a consistent focus on creating outlets for underrepresented creative voices. She is known to many through her fifteen years of radio broadcasting, which has included time at WRIU, Brown Student Radio, and Rhode Island Public Radio. A prolific poet, essayist and storyteller, she has created and curated forums in print and online media, as well as produced podcasts, performance art presentations and gallery space exhibitions. Through this work, she has established herself as a leading force in the New England art and music scene.

Clifton also brings extensive experience as an educator, and the position at GRR! will allow her to match her scholarly and community advocacy experience with her background creating curriculum and working with students. Clifton has worked as a teaching artist, high school English teacher, middle school creative writing instructor, and as a digital media and multimedia storytelling teacher in schools, community settings and conferences locally and nationally. She is also regularly called upon for public speaking engagements and workshops; sites who have invited her to do such work include RI State Council on the Arts (RISCA), Brown University, the University of Rhode Island, and Families USA (a national health consumer agency) - to name just a few. She is currently enrolled in a Teacher Certification Prep and Masters in Urban Teaching program at Providence College.

With Clifton's arrival, GRR! moves to a dual leadership structure, with founding director Hilary Jones becoming her Co-Executive Director and partner. The move is the result of a six-month search led by GRR!'s board and volunteers that brought in applicants from across the country. Reflecting on the decision, Jones explained "Reza's responses to all of the questions with regard to mission and equity work were super thoughtful and clear, and really stood out from other applicants. She clearly showed a deep interest and commitment to the work that we are doing, and it was obvious that her combined experience advocating for this work in a variety of settings would be beneficial to our participants and the organization."

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As Board Co-Chair, Geoff Griffin, added "Listening to Reza talk about her work during the interview process, I had a new vision for how Girls Rock! RI could continue to grow beyond the standard rock-band model. She's worked in dozens of different media, from print journalism to podcasting, and found ways to use those outlets to amplify otherwise unheard voices. As Girls Rock enters a new decade, with a new American political era, a new understanding of the gender binary, and a new understanding of do-it-yourself culture, Rhode Island needs to invest in home-grown leaders like Reza and Hilary." Clifton's involvement in state and local political debates and public policy discussions position the organization for this part of their mission and future, a fact not lost on Jones. "Anyone who saw Reza speak at the RI Women's March earlier this year and last year can see that she is already a strong leader and community advocate. She has brought this analysis to the statehouse steps and televised debates, and now she brings it to Girls Rock!"

This transition comes at a time of tremendous growth for the organization. Founded in 2009, GRR! has grown exponentially to become a leader in youth arts and gender equity work in Rhode Island, having served more than 1000 participants. GRR!'s relocation in 2016 across the street from three public high schools in Providence, has led to programmatic expansion to meet the needs of participants - both the nearby youth and interested adults. Examples of the organization's sought-after programs include Group Music Lessons, a youth-led Gender Discussion Group, a Youth Drop-in program, Gear Loan, and Ladies Rock Camps.

This summer Girls Rock! Rhode Island will be hosting 90 campers at two Girls Rock Camps where youth ages 11-18 will learn an instrument, write an original song, and perform it live for an audience-- all in less than one week. In addition to the instruction and engagement around music, campers will attend workshops on topics like healthy relationships, media literacy, and power and privilege, and work with positive female, trans, and gender non-conforming mentors and musicians.

Clifton's hiring, and this season of camp, will also lead into a year-long celebration as GRR! looks ahead to its second decade. Planned activities and strategies that will be part of commemorating the organization's ten-year anniversary include highlighting the voices of youth, past and present, and organizing events to expand and deepen its reach in the community - with a particular focus on intentional anti-oppression work. With the decision to move to a Co-Directorship model, and the pairing of Clifton's skill-set alongside those of Jones, GRR! heads into its tenth year strengthening its commitment to equity, from the leadership structure all the way down to programming. "It's time to set the stage for the next decade of music and empowerment, and I'm ready" says Clifton.

Learn more about Girls Rock! Rhode Island by visiting girlsrockri.org or by finding @girlsrockri on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Learn more about Clifton and find current and recent samples of her art, essays and poems, by visiting @3amblack on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter or visit her blogs, VenusSings.com and AmbitiousBlackFeminist.com.

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ORGANIZATIONAL QUOTES

"Reza's responses to all of the questions with regard to mission and equity work were super thoughtful and clear, and really stood out from other applicants. She clearly showed a deep interest and commitment to the work that we are doing, and it was clear how her combined experience advocating for this work in a variety of settings would be beneficial to our participants and the organization." - Hilary Jones

"Listening to Reza talk about her work during the interview process, I had a new vision for how Girls Rock! RI could continue to grow beyond the standard rock-band model. She's worked in dozens of different media, from print journalism to podcasting, and found ways to use those outlets to amplify otherwise unheard voices. As Girls Rock enters a new decade, with a new American political era, a new understanding of the gender binary, and a new understanding of do-it-yourself culture, Rhode Island needs to invest in home-grown leaders like Reza and Hilary." - Geoff Griffin

"Anyone who saw Reza speak at the RI Women's March earlier this year and last year can see that she is already a strong leader and community advocate. She has brought this analysis to the statehouse steps and televised debates, and now she brings it to Girls Rock!" - Hilary Jones

"It's time to set the stage for the next decade of music and empowerment, and I'm ready." - Reza Clifton.

"While I was part of the deliberations and ultimate decision to hire Reza, I was not physically part of her interview process and only officially met her, along with the rest of the board, at her first board meeting. Moments into the meeting, it became blaringly clear that we had made an excellent choice in hiring Reza, one that will help grow our organization and move us further down the road towards fully achieving our mission. She is intelligent, thoughtful, passionate, collaborative, positive, knowledgeable, proactive, fierce, and high-energy! Girls Rock! RI is both lucky to have her join us and excited to see how her influence and input help shape our next ten years!" - Jennifer Walker

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REZA'S FIVE FUN FACTS

1. I learned trumpet, piano, guitar and drums growing up; percussion stuck, and even as an adult, I've participated in and even started drum circles. I began DJing later in life, and I credit some of the rhythmic choices and blends I deliver in that medium to my background as a percussionist.
2. I learned to dance salsa in Havana, Cuba in the year 2000. I was on a trip as a sophomore in college, and maybe it was the famous el Malecón (boardwalk/ocean wall) or the magic lots of visitors to Cuba describe, but finally and suddenly the steps clicked, and I've enjoyed dancing to the music and dance genre ever since. As Celia Cruz (from Cuba), the The Queen of Salsa would say, Azucar!!
3. I was on radio for 15 years (2001-2016), and my programming included... 1) international reporting - news, music, interviews and extensive coverage of Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and communities of color in the US and RI; 2) Venus Sings Radio where I brought hip hop, soul music, Cape Verdean, Brazilian, and Dominican music, for example, to Voices of Women, a music format show that airs on WRIU, a station broadcast from the University of RI in Kingston; and 3) health-related research-sharing and conversation focused on ending helping disparities, achieving health equity, and sharing resources for communities of color and those near or under the poverty line.
4. I speak Spanish, and learned it from neighbors, who became like extended family, while growing up in Providence. After moving to Cranston, I studied Spanish throughout junior and high school, and continued advancing in the language academically and through travel. I'm not perfectly bilingual, but I'm okay!
5. I've recently begun attempting to delve into songwriting, and so far...I think I'm terrible at it! I'm realizing I might have to return to guitar or piano to help me, but I really want to learn to play the bass! I'm looking forward to settling in, not only to "co-lead" at Girls Rock! Rhode Island, but also to learn and explore new skills and past joys.