

I wanted to be a concert pianist: Andrew Martin



But as I couldn't manage the 4 hours daily practice, I decided to become a drummer.

The mid sixties were an exciting time for British music. I was a boarder at King Edward VI School at Bury St Edmunds where I remember the first two Beatles albums being played to death in the common room. As the sixties advanced music became ever more sophisticated especially when pirate radio was able to broadcast it to the nation while the BBC limited it to about one hour a week.

My entry to the world of drumming started by having to pass an audition. I had to play Wipeout by the Surfari's on a drum that consisted of a biscuit tin covered by a yellow duster. I got the gig. The band consisted of two acoustic guitars with very basic pickups and me. The only other song I can remember that was in our repertoire was Poison Ivy by The Coasters recently covered by the Stones.

College in 68/69 resulted in no qualifications but some amazing musical experiences. Live concerts by Jimi Hendrix, Otis Redding and Cream's last concert to mention a few. While at college I bought some bongos and provided some percussion to a college folk trio. Moved to Exeter in 1970 and joined folk/blues group based initially on John Mayall's album Turning Point which ironically has no percussion. After a complicated personal life, I moved to Muswell Hill in 1974. Purchased a pair of Natal Congas and for a short time played in an Afro-Rock band. Then I joined a duo consisting of two scousers who were guitarists who wrote their own material.

This duo were friends with John Peel, who bought me a pint of Guinness when we met him one night. Somehow, we managed to get a gig at the famous Marquee club In Soho as a support act. The group was known as Big Sur, the coastal area in California but the name was misheard by the Melody Maker and printed as Big Fir!

Then moved back to Exeter in 1974 to join band No Mere Nosebleed where I played a standard drum kit. This was a band inspired by bands such as Yes so, most songs had unusual time signatures. Great bunch of musicians who played keyboards, guitars, saxophone, bass and percussion. Also, the band experimented with tape loops and special effects. I also worked with the guitarist in the band to provide music for a local dance. In 1976 the band split and I started a band, Junkyard Angels with guitarist and bass player. This was a blues rock band covering West Coast American music and Derek and Dominos songs etc. We managed to get lots of gigs around the college and pub circuit. The outstanding gig was as support to The Sensational Alex Harvey Band at Taunton Odeon. This band is still going today led by Julian Piper who is a great blues guitarist.

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At this time, I became interested in recording music. I bought what was the state-of-the-art equipment at the time, a very large reel to reel tape machine, mixer and microphones. I also took a course in electronic engineering for a year. After a couple of years I regarded myself as a recording engineer, so I applied for a job with Virgin Music. Unbelievably I was given the interview at The Manor studio, however despite borrowing a very cool leather jacket I didn't get the job.

In 1978 I went into disco mode after a spell as a DJ in a small nightclub in Exeter. The nightclub put on live bands at the beginning of the evening, so we put together a parody punk band named the Stoats. Our repertoire included a very fast version of Hard Rain's Gonna Fall and an original song named Bondage Tango (some punks actually believed we were the real thing for a while!).

I then moved to Oxford and ran a mobile disco for 3 years. You find out very rapidly that your clients do not always share your taste in music. I returned to university in 1982 at Swansea. I concentrated on my studies for three years and was not involved in any music apart from one night's DJ'ing when Gary Glitter was booked at the college. This was several years before he went out of fashion!

After college in 1986 I bought a standard drum kit and joined a band that played a regular weekly gig in a pub in North London. The style was rock/jazz. Occasionally the sax player in the band would pay for a guest instrumentalist to join us for the gig.

Australia beckoned in 1989. For some reason I decided to purchase an alto saxophone. I then had lessons with Percy, an Afro-American sax player from San Francisco who gave me a basic grounding. I then attended a few workshops to give me a little more confidence.

Returning to the UK in 1990 I now regarded myself as a saxophone player. I therefore put an ad in a local music shop offering myself as a sax player. This was a bit ambitious as my experience was just slightly more than zero. However, I got the job with a newly formed band called Brass Roots. This was a band based on the Blues Brothers and The Commitments. I managed to survive by learning the sax riffs by heart. I was now living in Chester and the band managed to get lots of gigs in the Manchester/Liverpool area.

We then emigrated to Australia in 1996. For the next 15 years I turned to choral singing with the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs and an a capella group Laanysta. With the Sydney Philharmonia we sang Tenor and later Bass in Handel's Messiah every year in the Opera House. Also, Carmina Borana, Verdi's Requiem etc. With Laanysta we sang world music, folk, pop, gospel, standards and all sorts.

In 2010 we purchased a piece of land on Magnetic Island which is off Townsville in North Queensland. Every year on the island they have an event called Music on Magnetic. This is an event where you can learn how to write songs, join in percussion with homemade instruments learn live looping and even Bollywood dancing so to be involved in this I thought I better take an instrument and as I didn't have much room to carry it I thought I would buy a ukulele so I learned a few chords, and so started my association with the instrument.

Returning to UK in 2012, I soon discovered the Plough and Fleece and its Thursday night music event. I added a few more songs to my repertoire of three songs and braved the room full of performers. Along with others I discovered the fear and excitement of solo performance. Recently I joined Alison White in a choir called Vocal Remix, which performs mashups of pop from the last 40 years. Never thought I would be singing Taylor Swift at my age!

Over the last couple of years Tony Philips and Peter Edwards have invented "Plough and Fleece on Tour". So far 5 of us have visited folk festivals in Dunkeld

and Derby. This year we are going to Sheffield and Filey. It's great to play our music in other people's pubs and join in with their songs. Derby reintroduced me to percussion where I discovered the fun of playing the cajon.

Just to square the circle I obtained a piano recently. Maybe if I have lessons and spend 4 hours practicing each day "The Music Keeps Rolling On"