PLAY ON

Now, Then & Fleetwood Mac

The Autobiography

MICK FLEETWOOD

& Anthony Bozza

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For my children, Tessa, Lucy, Ruby and Amelia

START CLOSE IN

Start close in,
don't take the second step
or the third,
start with the first
thing
close in,
the step
you don't want to take.

Start with
the ground
you know,
the pale ground
beneath your feet,
your own
way of starting
the conversation.

Start with your own
question,
give up on other
people's questions,
don't let them
smother something
simple.

To find
another's voice,
follow
your own voice,
wait until
that voice
becomes a
private ear
listening
to another.

Start right now
take a small step
you can call your own
don't follow
someone else's
heroics, be humble
and focused,
start close in,
don't mistake
that other
for your own.

Start close in,
don't take
the second step
or the third,
start with the first
thing
close in,
the step
you don't want to take

David Whyte

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INTRODUCTION

IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE . . .

Play on. Two words, no more, but they've said it all to me.

They've been, at different times, a simple direct order, a call to action, a mantra and a comforting concept that promised rebirth. I first read them in the most beautiful and romantic couplet in *Twelfth Night*, my favourite of Shakespeare's works. I've never forgotten it; in fact I took it to heart immediately because it spoke to me. When things have moved me so profoundly in this life, be they people, places or things, no matter how they've come to me, I've made them forever a part of me. I've signed countless autographs with the phrase 'Play on'. I've said it to many people in many contexts. As I've made my way through life, as intricate and difficult as it has often been, as ecstatic and debauched as it has too often been, those words have always been with me. What they've come to mean to me has been a rock when the rest of my world was set adrift.

The entire couplet is the inspiration behind the title of Fleetwood Mac's fourth studio album, *Then Play On*, released in 1969, which I still count as my favourite record. My second favourite is easy to choose: it's *Tusk,* released ten years later by a very different incarnation of the band – the only one that

many of our fans are familiar with. To those fans reading these words, please do stick around, you'll be amazed to learn how many roads we travelled before we met you.

On the surface, *Then Play On* and *Tusk* have little in common sonically, but listen deeper and you'll hear a band with its back against the creative wall, recording music at the brink of its existence. Both of those albums were made when we would either play on or cease to be, and when the idea of overcoming the insurmountable through creating anew was the only way out for us. I can't say that I saw it as a solution, but I felt it as my faith, and I preached to my compatriots to play on – and that's what we did.

I'm still here, lucky enough to be partnered with the greatest musical comrades I could ever hope to have. We have been through so many ups and downs, and though I denied it for years, particularly to my loved ones, I know now that since this band began, I have devoted my entire life to it. In every incarnation Fleetwood Mac has brought me so much joy that I hope whatever our fans have taken from the music is a fraction of what I've got from it. I've also realised, through trial, lots of error, growing older and hopefully wiser, how much that choice has weighed on my family. It's hard to devote yourself to a musical family of our magnitude while trying to nurture one of your own; it's an unfair tug-of-war I am still working out.

Music is a beautiful language, one that anyone with a beating heart can understand, no matter where they're from. We need to share that, we need to honour that; it's one of the only things that defies the boundaries humans love to erect. Music has seen me through everything – because when all else failed me, it remained the one thing I could rely on. It was, literally, the only thing I knew I could do with some degree of skill.

More than that, it has always brought me joy and allowed me to find my centre. When I've felt lost in life, if I've lost myself in music, I've always found my way again.

I am sixty-five years old at the time of this writing, looking back at forty years in rock and roll. My first gig as a drummer took place in London in the 1960s when I was still a teenager too young to be legally drinking, even in England. I had no proper training, just a desire to be a part of the culture I saw evolving, combined with an innate attraction to rhythm. I went after a dream and found it backing some of the best English blues players of my generation during a time that changed history. I didn't plan any of it, but I did believe that if I stayed true to my muse, I would find my way. And I have – though it's never been easy.

On my farm in Maui, Hawaii, an island that I've been visiting regularly since the 1970s, and of which I've been a full-time resident for over a decade, I have a weather-sealed barn full of memorabilia: photographs, journals, clothes, cars, endless video tapes, concert recordings, all of it bits of Fleetwood Mac and my life. As much as I've always been driven creatively to move forward toward something bigger, brighter and unknown, I'm also a deeply-rooted nostalgic. I adore photos, mementoes, all bits of ephemera that represent each and every time and space I traverse. I'm a hoarder when it comes to these things. I love to document the moment, as much as I realise how much that moment is transient, nothing but a stop on the road.

I am thankful for that preservationist instinct because, having moved houses so many times, across continents, from the UK to Australia to Europe and the States, it's a minor miracle that so much of this stuff is still in my possession. I'm not sure how to accurately convey what it's like to open a photo album and find a Polaroid of a friend who has passed away, or pages of

handwritten lyrics of songs, all of them with edits by my bandmates, from decades previous. A flood of memories wash over me when I find these treasures, all of them new again, focused by the perspective I've gained in the years since. It's a beautiful kind of limbo, seeing yourself, your past alongside your present, through a new set of eyes.

I share this by way of an explanation of how this book began. My co-writer and collaborator, Anthony Bozza, interviewed me on my farm in Maui for *Playboy* magazine in March 2012, at a time when I'd just unearthed over fifty hours of footage of Fleetwood Mac touring Japan in 1977; the culmination of the *Rumours* tour. We were in our prime and it was the finale of the band's highest high to date, so I hired a film crew to travel with us, giving them free rein to capture us both on stage and off. My intention was to edit the film and release it as a feature to run in cinemas the year after we wrapped the tour. That never happened; so many things got in the way, and I forgot about that little film for *thirty years*. I wasn't even looking for it when I found it: I was trying to locate home movies my parents had shot of my siblings and me when we were kids. Instead I found a pile of tins in a box that had somehow made its way intact through the various storage units I've had over the years.

I had all of it converted to digital, preserving the saturated colours of the original work as much as possible, then I hired an editor and set about doing an organisational rough cut of what I decided would be a film, a DVD, who knew – I just knew it had to be shared. I was reviewing the first edit of those forty hours of history when Anthony arrived. It was wonderful to relive those all-but-forgotten moments with Anthony, a life long Fleetwood Mac fan. It refreshed my zeal and excitement and so began our journey. Over the course of the next two

years, during trips to Maui, and time on the road during our 2013 tour, he and I relived the past. The result is what you now hold in your hand.

This book will not be a definitive history of Fleetwood Mac; you can find the facts and figures and plenty of rumours elsewhere. This is much more personal. It is the story of all that has ever mattered to me, the moments, the people, the time. It's the story of my life in rock and roll and the blues and how the band that has meant everything to me came to define me. I used to say that wasn't the case, but I know now that it's true.

I see things with wonder each and every day. Sometimes I wonder how the hell I got here. I love drumming and I know I've never been suited to do much else, but truth be told, I regard myself as a guy who happens to drum, not as a guy who is a drummer. It's a strange and subtle contradiction, but it's part and parcel of how I see things and how I'm just now learning who I am. I've always valued progress over reflection, and romanticised drama and chaos more than I should have. I don't feel that way anymore. I'm taking the time to look inside now. I'm still a student. I'm still 'in process'.

It reminds me of another philosophy of mine that I rely on when the going gets tough. When it all becomes too much, pick yourself up and go somewhere. Go somewhere you've never been, somewhere you've dreamed of going, somewhere romantic and mysterious. Go anywhere you can, because a journey is an adventure and adventures are how we learn who we really are. Writing this memoir has been a journey for me and I invite you to join in my adventure. It's time now and I'm ready, so if you're coming with me, off we go.

CHAPTER 1

THE OLD MILL

Windmill, Norfolk, 1939 (an excerpt):

We stayed a week and awoke each dawning to the mournful cry of the curlew.
The old mill echoed to our youthful laughter
And we lived, oh how we lived.
Every minute was savoured as something special, something rare,
As if we knew the sand was running out
And each second should be cherished with infinite care.

My sweetheart looked at me with fear in her eyes,
'That telegram that arrived today,
'Tell me my darling, what did it say?'
It said, 'Rejoin squadron without delay'.

Wing Commander Fleetwood

I come from a very warm family. My father, John Joseph Kells Fleetwood, my mother Bridget Maureen, and my sisters Susan and Sally, and me, we were always close. We were the type of

family that did everything together and always had dinner together, usually my mum's homemade healthy food: lots of soup and roasted chickens, green beans and potatoes. There was always an abundance of huge belly laughs round the Fleetwood dinner table all our lives.

My parents moved house nearly every three years because of my father's career as a wing commander in the Royal Air Force, so for most of my early childhood we were freshly arrived in a new country. Our family unit was the only thing that was familiar and constant, and I believe the ever-changing backdrop and the feeling that we were strangers bound us even closer. I can recall the wonder of it all quite easily, because as a young boy I was fascinated, as were my sisters, by the exotic places where we lived. Norway and Egypt were wonderlands quite different from the UK, which we considered our true home. They instilled within me the idea that the world was a vast place full of amazing and very different people. It was also a great rock-and-roll training camp for me because I became used to travel and being a stranger just passing through. Both sets of my children travelled a lot as kids and inherited the same comfort with moving around.

My earliest memories are of learning to fit in wherever I was, which served me in ways I had yet to understand in my future life as a musician. I have a few vivid memories of those days before my teens. I remember nearly drowning in Egypt; I'm not sure how or why I got into water too deep for my abilities, but I was pulled out by a man in a flowing blue cloak and when I looked up at him I thought he was a magician. He was very much another type of being, which is how my time in Egypt and in Norway left me feeling overall. This was a good thing: I realised, even at my age, that there was something special about their culture and that I should learn from the

people who lived there. It was the proper way to do things, which was how my parents taught us.

My parents had a warm and wonderful relationship with each other and seeing that throughout my formative years affected my concept of love and what a romantic relationship should be. They cherished each other; they were best friends, always laughing together and completely in love and, aside from us children, they valued their time alone together above all. My mother was an anchor for my dad and supported all of his pipe dreams. He pursued his writing for three years after he left the Royal Air Force and before he rejoined civilian working life. Mum supported him by moving the family onto a sailing barge to cut costs and to allow him a sanctuary in which to create. She didn't for one minute question him nor complain about living on this odd little boat. Dad did his thing and though it didn't work out, there was no resentment or love lost between them.

My mum had a knack for both keeping my dad's feet on the ground and finding a way to make his dreams a reality. They'd planned, well ahead, how they would spend their later years, blissfully on their own in the South of France after we kids had flown the coop and Dad had retired from the RAF. The problem was that Dad didn't have the money to buy a house in the south of France, so the two of them came up with a plan they could afford. They leased a small parcel of land in Le Muy in the Provence region, near some farmland just a short ride from the Mediterranean coast. They put a caravan on it, the non-motorised camper type that gypsies would live in, and installed plumbing, and every summer they would go down there and have their time to themselves. Later on, when I had the means, I bought a parcel of land next to theirs and a second caravan to go with it so that my sisters and I might

visit them. It was a gorgeous piece of land with a view of the ocean and I hoped to build them a house on it eventually. It was such fun to live there like gypsies. My parents loved it and planned to live out their years there.

Dad was always well turned out. It was a holdover from his military days, because that expression meant your appearance was impeccable: a perfect spit and polish on your shoes, down to the soles, and with your hair and collar perfect. He had been in the Household Cavalry in addition to the RAF so he knew how to present himself properly. He had style and I really liked that. My mother did too, she loved to dress up and they always checked themselves in the mirror before they went out to a cocktail party. We weren't brought up surrounded by wealth and luxury, but my parents did a lot with a little and they always looked great. They also had fun up until the very end. I'd bought Dad his dream car, a red convertible Mercedes, and the two of them talked about driving it to their place in the South of France with the wind in their hair.

Unfortunately my father was taken from us too early, well before he and Mum had time to properly enjoy their golden years. When he became ill, at the age of sixty-two, I endeavoured to get them down there for at least one more week, but sadly that wasn't to be.

My father was an Irish storyteller and a wonderful, generous soul; the type that still believed he hadn't done enough at the end of his life, even though his list of achievements outshines most. He was a gentleman and a dreamer and I've done my best to live my life as I imagine he would have, because he was a true role model. I know that I'm very lucky in this regard, because so many people go through life without a guide, and without parents who led by example. My father flew planes, he led men in wartime, and along with Mum he taught my

sisters and me how to live and how to love, and I'm proud that I truly knew him. So many men never know their fathers as men, but not me. As adults, before he passed away, we really got to know each other.

I attended quite a few schools in my youth, not only because we moved frequently but also because I was a terrible student. It wasn't that I didn't want to learn, I did and still do. I have a curious mind and I enjoy all manner of history, science and philosophy. I'm also fascinated by what would be considered 'fringe' subjects – the occult, conspiracy theories, and so on – as much as I am by traditional fields of study. The desire was there, but it was disproportionate to my abilities. I have what would be diagnosed easily today as severe dyslexia, so reading, reading comprehension, and most of the basic skills required to stay afloat in school without major assistance are absent in me. Back then, particularly in the UK, learning disabilities weren't understood or even accepted, so students like me were simply left behind. My parents only knew I had problems at school.

Not once did they make me feel that I was disappointing them or that I'd failed them. Nor did they ever beat me up and tell me I needed to go to college. I just have a sense that they understood, as I did, that school wasn't for me. They didn't know the shame I felt at being so unable to succeed. It wasn't easy to show them tests where I'd scored zero per cent, nor did I want to tell them that the times when I had got some paltry per cent right, I'd had to cheat. I found cheating to be worse than failing because it's so exhausting, constantly trying to cover your bases. Dyslexia is very hard; you spend hours going in circles because you don't know how to go in a straight line.

My days at school were nothing short of torture. I developed what I've come to call, since it has followed me through my life, the 'Blackboard Syndrome'. It is a form of paralysis that I can trace back to the very first time I was asked to go to the chalkboard to answer a question. I can't remember the subject – perhaps it was maths – but it wouldn't have mattered; I was done for the moment my name was called. The anxiety of performing something I didn't understand before my class was more than I could bear. If the teacher had handed me a piece of paper with the answer just before calling me, it would have made no difference. The act of walking to the front of the room and attempting to reason through anything at all in front of my peers was just too much for me.

I've suffered from the Blackboard Syndrome for years, so now I understand that it is a lethal combination of performance anxiety and my dyslexia, a duo of traits that renders me useless under pressure given certain conditions. If I feel the pressure to produce or to get something 'right', added to the fact that I know myself well enough to distrust my interpretation of 'the facts' and 'the answer', and I have no one close by who can help me reason my way through it, I find myself in a bind. You'll see how it has played out in my life and how I've learned to live with it, but as a young man in school there could have been nothing worse. Absorbing knowledge in the traditional schoolbook and classroom setting is the antithesis of how I'm able to learn things. I was a fish out of water in an organised educational institution, no matter how liberal or progressive it may have been – and believe me, my parents tried everything under the sun.

School was a matter of survival for me each and every day. I did what I could; whenever I felt that a teacher might call on me, I'd raise my hand first and ask to go to the bathroom.

Some of them figured this out and waited for my return to call me up front. This made things even worse, knowing that a trial awaited me upon my return to the classroom. When they got me up there, I would stand, taller than anyone else in my grade class (I'd shot up past them all by the time I was ten, suffering the bone-wrenching aches of growing pains in my legs every summer) and I'd go mute. I'd just stand there and say nothing. I'd do my best to waste time while appearing to work out the answer, which essentially consisted of doodling on the board. I wished that I could draw better, because I was crap at that too, thinking that maybe if I drew something clever at least I'd get a laugh and perhaps a benevolent pass from the teacher.

It never worked out that way. Instead I was too shy and too paralysed, which made those moments at the board last forever, until the teacher realised just how little I knew and just how poor a student I was and finally had mercy on me. What I needed was a sense of humour and a form of expression. Alas that came much, much later, after I'd abandoned school altogether.

I'm quite convinced that the brain I have comes from my mum's side, because my mother and her kin have a very different, very wonderful way of thinking – one that's not suited to stereotypical 'straight' thought. My sister Susan had the same issue that I do, and like me, she found a way to turn it into something positive and creative. She became an actress and made it a part of her art.

What I didn't know was that my dyslexia would later serve me well once I turned to playing drums. It wasn't clear to me until years later, when I really began to *think* about drumming, which was something I found myself doing quite naturally. After I'd become known for drumming, and had a 'style' that

people talked about, I began to ponder, wonder what exactly that style was. By nature what we drummers do is manage a series of spinning plates, but I realised quite quickly when I found myself talking shop with other plate-spinners that my methods of keeping my plates spinning are entirely my own. When I tried to explain it, they thought I was having a laugh at their expense or entirely mad.

That made it all crystal clear to me – my drumming was an extension of the Blackboard Syndrome. I really had no idea, nor the ability to explain in musical terms, what I was ever doing in a particular song. Upon further reflection, I've realised that all of this stems from my learning disability, and now that I've made something out of my irregular way of processing information, I'm damn glad. Dyslexia has absolutely tempered the way I think about rhythm and the way I've played my instrument, or any other for that matter, and that's the long and short of it.

In the late 1970s Boz Scaggs opened up for us on tour and he had the incredibly gifted Jeff Porcaro on drums. Jeff was still a teenager, and a couple of years away from getting together with his brother to form Toto, who went on to great success in the 1980s. Jeff, may he rest in peace, died at just thirty-eight, but in a short period of time, as a session drummer, had a career that defined the sound of that decade. He was, literally, a part of every big pop and rock record that charted in the 1980s. Along with many of his bandmates, Jeff played on mega-huge records like Michael Jackson's *Thriller* and so many other albums and singles of that era.

That was years ahead, but I'd been aware of Jeff even before he showed up in Boz's band. People talk about talent like his the moment it emerges on the touring circuit, and after watching him play just once I was quite intimidated that he was in our

supporting band. His style was so technically perfect and consistent that it gave me a huge dose of the Blackboard Syndrome.

It didn't help that once the tour got under way I noticed Jeff sitting at the side of the stage watching me each and every night. He and I had met but we hadn't spent much time together, and that didn't change as the tour drew into its second, then its third week. Still, there he was, every night, watching me play, for the entire set. It rattled me, but I played through it, with the aid of a few additional servings of brandy and red wine. Eventually I'd forget he was there and go about my business. Then sometime during the third week of the tour he came to my dressing room.

'I give up,' he said. 'I can't figure it out so you've gotta tell me. Tell me how you do it.'

'How I do what?' I asked, completely befuddled. I really had no idea what he was talking about.

'I've watched you, I've tried to understand it. Nothing you do up there makes sense, but it sounds beautiful. What's your method? What are you doing during that last fill in "Go Your Own Way"? I can't figure it out! I've been watching every night. What do you do in the last measure on that last beat? Is the snare ahead or behind? Is the hi-hat off beat by two quarters or is it a little more than that?'

'Oh,' I said, taking a huge breath. At least I had an answer, just not the one he wanted. 'Oh, *fuck*. Really . . . I have no idea. I'm telling you, truly, Jeff, I have no idea at all.'

Jeff Porcaro didn't believe me at first; in fact it was clear that he thought I was being coy and pretentious. I don't blame him because the idea that a drummer with my experience had no idea of musical nomenclature was ridiculous. It was only after we continued to talk that Jeff realised I wasn't kidding around. We eventually had a tremendous laugh about it, and when I

later told him that I was dyslexic, it finally made sense. He analysed my playing from the perspective of a trained drummer and explained to me that my fills weren't precisely the opposite of what a traditionally trained drummer would choose to play, but they were something close to it. Yet all of it worked, which is what Jeff couldn't get his head around. I had nothing to offer, because I don't ever make a conscious decision to place a hi-hat accent a half beat behind the beat while my snare is just ahead, what I do just comes. I do what feels right and I always have. It's something that Lindsey Buckingham has come to rely on me for and I'm very proud of that. I have what he calls *the feel*.

I might as well say it now: I have no idea what I'm playing, each and every time I play our songs. I've never played the same thing the same way twice – which has driven many a producer and recording engineer to near madness. I really don't know what the hell I'm doing up there. Lindsey Buckingham can vouch for me when I say that there have been more times than either of us would care to count that he's had to tell me what to play by sounding it out. He and I share a language all of our own comprised of noises that fall within the 'boom-crash-buh-bump' category. At this point we are fluent in it.

In 1985, during the writing and recording of *Tango in the Night*, which Lindsey also produced, he was keen to have my drum tracks replicated on a portable drum machine so that he could take them home with him and do further work on the songs there. That is when I think he truly understood just how deeply embedded this dyslexic drum style of mine is, and just how little I know about what I do in a conscious, calculated manner. Machines are logical and methodical and just like Lindsey's brilliant approach to music, machines make sense. Try as he would, there was no way he could programme what

I was playing in the studio into a drum machine, because none of it adhered to a set repeating rhythm that could be tracked on grid. It's not that I was ever out of time, it's just that I never played the basic rhythm of the songs the same way twice from verse to verse. Lindsey isn't one to give up so he did his best, but eventually he realised that how I play doesn't adhere to anything the drum machines of the day could be programmed to do.

It's always been this way, since my second professional gig as a drummer. I've always needed a translator. Back in 1967, I played briefly for a great guitarist named Billy Thorpe (whom I would reunite with years later in my band the Zoo) who had to come over to me before every song to dictate the beat, and usually did so by singing horribly sexual lyrics in the tempo and rhythm that he wanted me to play. It would go something like this: '1,2,3,4, They're going to bang it in your ass, they're going to take it in the ass,' which, to me, would spell out where the bass drum, snare and cymbals needed to fall within the beat.

My father was a military man, but in the true sense of what that means, he was a man who knew the value of service to others and he strove to pass that on to my sisters and me. He wasn't ironclad in his beliefs when it came to how this should be done, however. He allowed all three of us to follow life paths that were far from the straight and narrow because he believed in us, and – along with our mother – he always helped us along the way. His faith in us was a source of strength to me and I feel lucky, because other fathers from a background like his would have been very different. Many men of his generation might have looked upon my dreams and goals as something to be plucked out like a weed, rather than be nurtured like a

flower. My dad imparted something to me as a very young man that has stayed with me and set the tone for how I've lived my life. He told me that no matter what I chose to do with my life, if I had a chance to be a part of something I believed in, I must never let my ego get in the way.

He said that it was better to let someone else take the credit for your work if that's the way it had to be, so long as the work got done, got out there and was of service to people. The act of doing good, of making something that served the good of everyone in and of itself, was more important than getting the credit for it, according to Dad. I do believe he was right. When I look at how my life has played out, I know I took his advice to heart because I've spent all of my energy keeping something going that has been for the whole more than it has ever been for my own personal ego satisfaction. There is something to Dad's choices and efforts in that way that I know is within me as well. I don't think it's entirely philanthropic either. It has something to do with deep-seated issues regarding self-esteem and I mean that for both of us. It was hard for Dad to take a compliment and to truly acknowledge how many wonderful things he'd achieved in his life. I am the same way, though these days I'm doing my best to give myself a break.

One of the values my father had, which wasn't typical for a lifelong military man of his generation, was that he valued the arts tremendously. My father always wanted to be a writer, and I believe that is why he supported my sisters and me when we gravitated toward pursuits that were hardly practical. My sister Susan became an actress, attending drama school and eventually enjoying a respected career in theatre and film. My sister Sally went to study at the London Polytechnic when she was sixteen, became a sculptor and eventually a clothing

designer. When I showed an interest in playing the drums, my father, who on paper should have been against it, was completely in favour. Rather than browbeat me for having little interest in school (though in truth it was really an inability to properly participate), he and Mum supported the one interest they clearly saw that I had: playing drums.

I love them so much for that, because in my early teens I wasn't easy. I failed miserably in every school they sent me to, and I ran away from several of the boarding schools they enrolled me in, hoping that the well-documented brand of stiff-upper-lip education practised in those institutions would break me from my school daze. That didn't happen, so as the old adage goes, I had two choices, fight or flight, and I always chose flight.

My first exposure to the power of live music came when I was ten or eleven. During a family summer holiday in Italy, we'd all gone down to the beach one day, when I was still young enough to know nothing of sexuality, but my sister Susan had begun to mature. She was looking absolutely gorgeous and this young chap came up to her in a pair of Speedos with a big hard-on. I remember seeing it, just right there, nearly sticking out of his swimsuit, so I ran to tell my dad because Sue was young, probably fourteen, and I didn't know what it all meant.

That night Mum and Dad let the chap take Sue into town to go to a dance and charged me with going along as the chaperone. I'm not sure if it was more cruel for them to send me along, or for Sue to have to bring her little brother on a date, but I forgot about all that when we got to the dance. There was a local band doing nothing exciting, just covering songs by surf-rock pioneers the Ventures, but they had the entire town audience in the palm of their hand. That was fandom: the entire town knew those guys, and they were all

dancing, young, old and every age in between. All I could focus on was the drummer; I was fascinated with what he was doing. It was a great feeling.

My parents saw me tapping along on cardboard boxes or furniture to whatever song was on the radio and by the time I was eleven, they rewarded my initiative with a drum set. I'd play along to hits by the Shadows or Acker Bilk and his Paramount Jazz Band, and Mum used to play old 78 rpm records by Charlie Kunz, a great American piano player who came to England in World War II and never left. We listened to a lot of Charlie Kunz and still do. Mum would be humming to the radio and she also liked to make up songs off the top of her head and I learned to play listening to her. When we got our first tape recorder, she used to hum into that and I'd tap out rhythms to her little songs. I never studied music at school, it was entirely a home-grown exercise.

My parents supported my musical interest entirely, even letting me turn a shed out behind our house into my personal rehearsal space, which my mother fondly dubbed 'Club Keller'. By then I was attending a progressive day school, a very enlightened institution. I enjoyed my time there more than any other school I attended, and perhaps if I'd started my education there from the beginning I would have been able to complete school, but that wasn't the case.

The school was based on the Rudolf Steiner philosophy of teaching, and was one of a thousand Waldorf Schools that Rudolf Steiner's followers had started founding as early as 1922. Steiner's schools preached a very individualistic philosophy that was suited to me because it meant I could literally do what I liked all day, so long as I was learning. I do think that Rudolf Steiner had the right idea, but looking back it may have become watered down by the time it got to my generation. I was able

to more or less do what I wanted, to learn about maths by juggling, for example, but I still found a way to not quite 'get it' as far as proper learning went. I can't say that I flunked out, because that idea didn't exist in the Steiner universe, but I came as close as possible to doing so. Somehow, I stuck out from the crowd at a place where anything went. I wasn't a misanthrope at all, I was quite social. I just really wasn't myself in any type of regimented school environment.

That is why I chose to spend every minute I could in Club Keller, playing drums, making any kids from the neighbourhood who chose to come by as happy as I could. I took some of my father's old fishing nets and hung them on the walls, I borrowed the family's wind-up Victrola gramophone to play my mum's 78s out there, got some Coca-Cola and invited all the kids I knew to come by after school. I'd charge them admission and give them soda and they'd listen to me play drums along to the records. It was the first time I realised that I might be good at something, which was bringing people together and showing them a good time.

I was inspired to do so because I had caught a fleeting glimpse of what I wanted to do with my life. When I would go to and from boarding school, as a young boy, I'd usually pass through London and spend a night with my sister Sally at her place in Notting Hill. She was in the art scene and she'd take me to an art school party or to Café des Artistes, a famous club in the Chelsea area, where I'd see things that blew my mind.

As a young schoolboy I saw beatnik culture, people reciting poetry, girls in men's black turtleneck sweaters and sunglasses smoking French cigarettes. There was jazz playing, people beating on bongos, wild paintings on the walls and performances of all kinds going on. It was a wonder to me and I cherished those odd nights I got to spend with my sister. Sally was my

guide, my protector and in every way my catalyst, because without her I'd never have experienced any of that. I would not have grown into the man I am today. I doubt I'd even have pursued the drums with the same degree of fervour that I did because if she had not taken me around with her, I'd never have known that such a wonderland existed. I saw there was a place for me. I just had to figure out how to get there, because it was close by, just barely out of reach.