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John Douglass

Head of Access to Music Bristol

Interview **Mark Wilding**

The thing I love about music is the emotion it gives you, the thrill it gives you that nothing else does. The first time I felt it was listening to 'Hot Love' by T-Rex and Marc Bolan when I was about 10. You want to recreate that feeling, that first buzz that the record or sound gives you.

I first got into the music industry by playing in bands. I also worked in a record shop, which was a good way of making contacts. I got my first record deal with Atlantic Records through a contact at the shop. Then I reached a stage in my mid-30s when I wanted to do something slightly different. I did the Access to Music Educator course, which started me off in formal education, and I ended up with a proper job!

For the right person, the music industry is very exciting. It's a good career if it's your vocation and it's something you really want to do. If it's all about getting rich quick and becoming famous, then it's probably not the right industry. You have to enjoy it. It sounds clichéd but the fun is the journey. If you don't enjoy the journey (like people throwing up out of a van on the M4 at 3am), then you won't enjoy it!

We've had a few success stories. We've certainly had high-profile people like Billy Fuller, who's playing with Robert Plant, a few of the guys from Malakai... we've also got Alex Ross, who has worked with Jason Nevins. And Big Jeff was one of our students! But one of the big successes is that we've got a lot of people in the music industry locally. If you go into a music shop or you go into a venue, you'll see an ex-student working there, playing or promoting. I think that's the real success, that these people are actually working in the music industry and that the infrastructure we help to create is employing them.



John Douglass (inset) and the rock-tastic Access to Music students

If you want to be a rock star, you won't necessarily end up where you imagine you want to be but you don't know if you don't try. You have successes and you have disappointments but I don't have any regrets. Apart from the dodgy mullet in the 80s!

Both music and football have a unifying influence that crosses boundaries. In many ways a lot of the problems in the world are caused by communication problems and music can communicate those things. I think the Nelson Mandela concerts had quite a big part to play in the resulting pressure because they got so many people involved.

When I was in a band called Washcatte, we were told by our record company that we were doing a promotional gig. We were a little unsure about it. They assured us it was going to be a proper event and the current number one act

would be there, so we agreed to do it. The number one happened to be Mr Blobby. We ended up doing a gig with Mr Blobby and the Chip n Dales.

At Access to Music we want to be in a position where we're continuing to be relevant in terms of both the local music scene and the national scene. It's great when you go into venues and you see that the people playing and promoting are our ex-students. We want to make sure it's the sons and daughters of our ex-students who are the next generation. It's always brilliant when bands make it in the traditional sense but if we're continuing to make the music scene a better place for Bristol, I think we'll have been a success.

ACCESS TO MUSIC ARE CELEBRATING 10 YEARS IN BRISTOL. AN ACOUSTIC SHOWCASE IS TAKING PLACE AT COLSTON HALL ON THUR 26 JUNE FOLLOWED BY A ROCK GIG AT THE FLEECE ON 9 JULY. FFI: WWW.ATMBRISTOL.CO.UK