

‘Everything I do I am 100 per cent in it. I don’t just dabble’

Chase correspondent **AMY FORDE**, marketing and communications assistant at Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance (ROAR), talks to musician James Fox.

I WAS lucky enough this month to sit down with professional musician and music tutor James Fox, one of our studio holders at ROAR, to discuss his teaching and creative practice.

I sometimes sit in the ROAR office typing away wondering about the artistic haven the studio holders might create in a room literally only metres away.

So I was filled with absolute glee to step into James’ studio and teaching space.

A line of guitars stretched across the wall and a piano was carefully positioned in the corner. I truly had entered a world of creative excitement.

The music geek in me was glowing.

James begins by telling me a great story about his granny who foresaw the creative path he was going to take.

She initially met his German grandfather through unusual circumstances, taking magazines and cigarettes to the prisoners of war in the UK, and through the relationship gained a lot of Germanic influence: “She’d apparently stroke the back of my head when I was a baby and say, in German, that I had ‘a musically-shaped head’.”

Highly experienced, James has been teaching music in Rotherham since 2003, starting as a guitar tutor at Get Sorted Academy of Music, an organisation he describes as incredibly supportive and nurturing. While there he was studying music at college and sat many music grades. He elaborates: “Everything I do I am 100 per cent in it. I don’t just dabble. It’s everything.”

Quite surprisingly he admits that for several years he felt creativity stopped. Even though he was playing in bands and learning a lot about music, he tells me it felt like something had been put on pause. It was with this realisation he decided to go to university.

This period of study not only filled his musical mind with more knowledge, but also expanded it.

He studied composition, something which he found to be one of his real strengths and is now an area he teaches.

Although his roots in composition are in contemporary music and punk rock, he admits his practice has expanded over time: “I still love that and I always will. I teach it and play it. But as far as my composition now, I am more interested in what sound can do or can be or what I can do with it.”



Freeing himself from the more traditional structures of chord sequence and melody, James tells me he has become really interested in sound as a whole, and at the minute he is working on a piece solely created with coins: “It’s about the sounds existing, how the sounds unfold and how this one blends into that one, just like what happens in nature in a way. Sounds that seem to just come and go and play against each other or work against each other can be like traditional types of music.”

I try to dig a bit deeper into this creative process and he adds: “I always enter into a composition with an idea, a concept, a principal in mind and then find the sounds that will do that and then see what I can do with those sounds.”

I wonder if this more freeing approach to creating music is something which goes on to inspire his teaching. True to his down to earth nature, he replies: “It’s all just work.”

But there is something about this discovery and exploration that really appeals to James as an artist: “I love contemporary and popular music. There is still a lot to explore, far more than I can ever do in my lifetime, but I have spent a long time doing that and I am in a position now where I have learnt other things, and they really burn very hot and very bright and I can’t ignore them.”

As he finishes this sentence he quotes composer Morton Feldman: “Art is a crucial, dangerous operation we perform on ourselves. Unless we take a chance, we die in art.”

James’s teaching is of course still a primary passion and his experience can only be described as impressive.

In case you were wondering, he teaches all of the following: electric guitar (all genres), classical guitar, acoustic guitar, bass guitar, ukulele, piano, keyboard, music theory and of course composition.

On teaching he says: “Face time with the students is brilliant. I love it and it doesn’t feel difficult. I am not saying it’s not challenging because of course working with people can be challenging, but it is fun, engaging and it feels natural.” Humbly he adds: “When something comes naturally surely that’s a sign you’re doing it well?”

On teaching in Rotherham he is only positive: “The diversity I have seen in terms of music teaching for 16 years is broad and remains broad, which is brilliant and really encouraging.”

James admits though that the current climate in terms of music education in schools in the UK is worrying: “There is less and less funding for music; departments are closing all over. It’s an absolute tragedy because now some students may never access music because they might not be able to afford it.”

He also touches upon the recent report by The Music Commission, about how digital technology has influenced the traditional ways of teaching of music, something he tells me he has not ignored: “I bring technology in, such as YouTube, and encourage people to do so.”

As is in keeping with his obvious driven nature and want to keep moving, it seems the future for James lies in exploring new territory. Research that was developed through his Masters degree expanded his horizons further, in particular looking at light: “I was interested in how I can use my knowledge of sound and music to work with video and light.”

The future is bright.

You can read more about James and contact him on his composer website: <http://www.musicalmrfx.co.uk> or **through his tuition website:** <http://www.musictuitionrotherham.co.uk/>

Pictured right: A visit to Whitby presented James with the opportunity to capture some coastal recordings for his sound library.





NEW EXHIBITION OFFERS SOME COMIC RELIEF



AN art gallery has been transformed into a massive comic strip for a new exhibition.

Scribble, Doodle and Draw is being held at Doncaster's The Point gallery until July 20.

The exhibition showcases giant original works created onsite by comic illustrators Jim Medway, Ed Syder and Tor Freeman.

It also gives visitors the opportunity to create their own comics and add them to the exhibition.

There are plenty of fun activities to take part in as well as comfy chairs in which you can relax and read comic books.

The Point is on South Parade in Doncaster and is open 10am to 4pm Monday and Friday, 10am to 7pm Tuesday to Thursday, and 9am to 1.30pm on Saturday.

Twelve-year-old Rufus and Wilf (seven) visited the exhibition on its opening day and said they enjoyed the experience.

Wilf said: "I liked that you could make your own comics for the exhibition."

"I spent ages reading comics upstairs."

He said that his favourite part of the exhibition was "the big comics on the walls".

Rufus enjoyed the giant comics. He said: "They were really funny and the artists' ideas were very clever."

He added that his favourite part was "the activities room because of the range of activities available".

Rufus said that once he had created his own comic and put it on the wall "it felt really good to see my work up there as everyone can be part of the exhibition. I think that there should be more exhibitions like this around to celebrate different artists' work. It was brilliant."

*** On May 25, family-friendly arts festival #PointFEST will be returning. This year the theme is Superheroes. As well as a fancy dress competition, there will be live music, arts activities, a family rave and more. There is no need to book and entry is free.**

