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DRUMMER'S  
— J♦URNAL —

AN INDEPENDENT DRUM MAGAZINE

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# THE LIGHTHOUSE

## MUSICAL ATTAINMENT

*Words and photography by Tom Hoare*

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It's early on a Saturday morning at The Filomen M. D'Agostino Greenberg Music School in New York. I'm sat in a classroom full of kids who are all holding some sort of percussion instrument in their hands. At the head of the class stands Marc Wagnon, an esteemed Swiss percussionist and composer. Leaning against the wall are a series of white canes. This is where they will remain for the next 55 minutes.

The Lighthouse, as the school is also known, is unique. It's the only community music school in the entire United States for the blind and visually impaired. The class that is about to begin is percussion 101.





There are lots of excited faces as Marc instructs the students to copy the patterns he plays. Initially, there's an enormous din as everyone begins feverously striking their instruments, but after a few minutes, a pattern begins to emerge. Before long, everyone is playing in unison. When Marc calls a congratulatory halt, there is lots of uncontrollable giggling and audible delight.

In times of austerity, the music department is often the first to have its budget slashed and many schools now don't have the equipment and capacity to provide any sort of music classes in their general curriculum. To say this is simply a shame is an understatement because the evidence to suggest that music education plays a hugely important role in school curriculum is overwhelming. Kids that learn an instrument routinely attain higher test scores across the board. It's been suggested that this is because music education promotes engagement, achievement, imagination and curiosity. Students have also shown to be more emotionally developed than their non-musical counterparts, able to better empathise with other cultures.

When Marc's class was over, he kindly let us chat to the students about their experiences playing music.

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Madeline Mau [*Age 9*]: Should I do the interview in my regular accent, British accent or gangster accent?

**The Drummer's Journal: Whatever you like.**

[*Adopts regal British accent*] Ok then, let's proceed.

**I wanted to ask you some questions about music...**

If you insist.

**How long have you been taking percussion classes here?**

Since I was six, which was three years ago.

**What do you like about it?**

I get to play music and I get to associate with my correspondents.

**Your correspondents?**

I'm not authorised to tell you who they are. But I have a few. They store all the information I give them in vaults. And the vaults are made of gold and silver.

**Vaults? Like Gringotts Bank?**

Exactly. I have a dragon guarding my big vault of treasure.

**How did you get so much treasure?**

Well, I don't actually have it yet. But I will when I'm a singer like Demi Lovato. Do you know who she is?

**Demi Lovato – she sang the theme from Frozen right?**

[*Sighs heavily*] Her version wasn't as good as Idina Menzel's though.

**So what instruments do you play?**

Piano, violin, I don't know if I'd count drums yet.

**Why not?**

I don't really practise enough. I have too much homework, and also, I don't have the right equipment.

**What do you like about playing music?**

Music just sounds good. I like writing my own songs. I'd like to be a singer-songwriter, write my own life into songs and stuff.

**Do you think it's important to learn how to play an instrument?**

Yes, well, depending on what you want to do. If you want to be a musician then it's pretty important.

**Well put. Would you say music has a function in society?**

Basically enriching culture and stuff like that. Without it there would be no folk songs or church sermons. I think music plays a big role in people's lives, even if they don't actually realise it.

**Is the world a better place with music?**

Yes, because if there was no music this school wouldn't even be here. And I would not be able to contact my correspondents as often. And we wouldn't be able to make a racket.

**A lot of schools have had their funding for music programs cut. What do you think about that?**

That's bad. Basically, the government is corrupt.

**That's quite an accusation...**

It's simple really. Schools who are not being funded







will have worse programs, which will produce worse students, and then consequently worse teachers for the next generation.

**Can studying music help people do well in other studies?**

It can calm you down. I suppose it helps in math because it's about fractions and stuff. I'll have to think that one over and get back to you.

**You mentioned you want to be a pop star...**

Yes. I want to be on TV and I want people to think I'm awesome. But importantly I want to make good music. When I get mad I write songs about things. And also, I want to drive around in an SUV accompanied by lots of limousines.

**Are you in the SUV or limo?**

Actually, I'm in the limo. I could arrive in one limousine and then leave in a different one.

**That sounds luxurious. How would you say playing music makes you feel?**

Depends on the type of music really. If I'm writing a pop song, I feel whatever emotion the song is trying to convey. But if I'm playing Chopin on the piano, I basically imagine this scenario where I'm at a concert and there's a loved one in the audience and I'm trying to convey my love for them. And I hope it makes my playing sound more emotional.

**Is it important for music to have emotion?**

Yes, otherwise it's just bland and boring.

**How do you write a song?**

I think about a topic in my life. Recently I was

betrayed by a person – who I won't name – because I invited them into my club, but they didn't want to join.

**The ultimate betrayal...**

I know, right? This person is my nemesis slash friend. So I've been writing a song about that. But usually, I'll think of a hook first, then I'll think of a key and then I'll start thinking about the production. And I have to ask some people to help with that.

**Thanks for chatting to us.**

That's ok. Are you going back to Britain now?

**Not right now.**

Ok, well safe trip.

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