

TO: BAND@UNFOLDINGTHEATRE.CO.UK
RE: PUTTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER

Hi folks – just got tickets for this Saturday’s show in Edinburgh when I spotted the call for house band members.

I’m a bitter and twisted ex-musician who’s been through the grinder, and had to be physically restrained from chopping up my guitars for firewood by the missus on more than one occasion, so thought I might be the kind of person you were looking for!

I mainly play guitar, but can tap/clap/shake/hum and even sing a little, so if you’re in the market for any of the above then put me down – and if not, best of luck with the show. I’ll be there enjoying it either way :-)

**Cheers,
Paul**

PAUL HAGAN
EDINBURGH HOUSE BAND

THE SONG OF HOW THIS WORKS

Before we go any further
It might help to pause and say
That once the team set off on tour
The show worked in this way:

The door was open to anyone
No matter what they play
Songs could be learned from video
And practised before the day.

Rehearsal took place two hours before
The show itself began
An hour in which to perfect four songs
(I'm amazed that nobody ran).

PUTTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER: STORIES FROM THE HOUSE BANDS

MADDY COSTA

Every Unfolding Theatre show comes with an invitation. On my first encounter with them, in Edinburgh in 2012, I was given a “motivational banana” and invited to celebrate the often overlooked sporting achievements of the great darts players. That opened the door to another celebration: of all the small and quirky ways in which human beings are – as the show itself was called – Best in the World, whether at something or for someone. It’s a key tenet in the Unfolding philosophy: every human has something remarkable about them. But as members of the audience came on stage to try their hands at scoring a treble 20, another key tenet revealed itself: we all could take pleasure in shooting arrows for the stars, never mind that they’ll never get there. Or, less fancifully: excellence is vital and winning does count – but imperfection and the possibility of failure shouldn’t stop anyone taking part.

Putting the Band Back Together is shaped by, energised by, the invitation to take part. It was originally conceived for people who used to play music, but haven’t for years, offering them an opportunity to join a band for a night. In practice, that invitation has been open to include any kind of relationship

to music, past or present. The House Band has expanded to include singers alongside instrumentalists, people who last played 15 years ago and people who have barely been learning for 15 weeks, people accustomed to performing live and people who never get the opportunity or give themselves the chance.

It is an invitation developed over the course of more than a year, as Unfolding Theatre director Annie Rigby, associate artist Alex Elliott, musician Ross Millard, writer Chloe Daykin, performer Maria Crocker and theatre-maker Mark Lloyd (whose experience of putting his own band back together after learning he had cancer was among the stories that inspired Annie to make the work) collaborated with a growing community of music enthusiasts in Sunderland to think through possibilities for the show. In Sunderland, musicians were able to attend workshops once a month, and contribute to songs as they were being written – some even heard their own stories become lyrics or text for the show. On tour, the relationship with musicians has necessarily been quicker, but no less meaningful. Taking part changes lives, however minutely.

This document is an attempt

to record some of the ripples from the show. I’ve done that partly through first-person accounts: between June 2016 and February 2017 I interviewed roughly 30 people, from all over the country, about their experience not just of being in the show, but of anticipation, rehearsal and being inspired afterwards. But because Putting the Band Back Together is also a gig, telling its stories in songs, I’ve written that way too: wonky paeans, doggerel sometimes, to the themes that kept coming up, such as how cultural participation raises confidence, and how the Unfolding company dismantled hierarchy. Also true to the company, this document is part of an unfolding story: the show will continue to tour long after I write my final sentence, and memories will continue to be cherished, or fade. Like any such document, this can only be a snapshot – I’m catching at melodies heard on the breeze.

But it’s partial in other ways. There are no stories here of people for whom this was just a lark, quickly forgotten. That’s partly because the group I spoke to was self-selecting: if people didn’t think they had anything interesting to tell me, they didn’t reply to emails or texts asking to talk. And I’ve had to edit to prevent the document becoming unwieldy, which has inevitably meant focusing on the stories of realisation, or transformation, of doors opening and opportunities being created, because who wouldn’t want to read about the activations of joy? Taking part in Putting the Band Back Together won’t have changed everyone’s lives, but where it has had an impact, however slight, that’s the tale I’ve felt most drawn to tell.

So hey, ho: let’s go. Let’s meet the House Band.

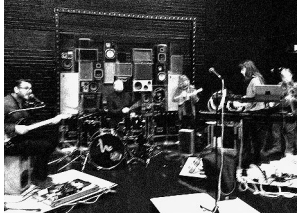
THIS IS MY STORY

PENNY FOLLAS, SALISBURY HOUSE BAND

Penny played piano and guitar in her youth but drifted from music when her children were born. She started learning the ukulele two years ago, and now plays in two bands, a big group who practise every Monday and a quartet who meet on a Wednesday and occasionally perform.

I didn't know but the story in the show is actually my story: when my son was seven I was diagnosed with breast cancer. So it was a bit weird when it started, I could feel myself shaking. But you get caught up with the music, luckily, it sort of takes over.

The first thing I did when I was recuperating was get singing lessons because



oxygen kills cancer cells. And music's just brilliant: it's one of the best things at

making you happy. I really love music and want to learn something a bit more challenging. And I would love to perform! I would love to be good enough to be able to perform: I'm a bit of a perfectionist and I don't like to play if I don't feel confident.

It's great performing with really good musicians who give you the courage to go for it and try it; if you're with people who are not sure of themselves it's harder. The company are so open and easy to let you play with them, no matter how good or bad you are: you just have a go, which is great.

SOMETHING MORE THAN NOTHING

DAVE, LUTON HOUSE BAND

Dave played brass in his younger years and performed in a brass band until work as a primary school teacher made it difficult to commit – and “motivation dried up as well”. He tried to teach himself guitar, “and lasted about 10 minutes”, so switched to ukulele, with the faultless logic that if young children can learn to play it, he ought to have no trouble. He now runs a ukulele group on Meetup, through which he received an invitation to join the House Band from the Hat Factory – a neat bit of outreach work from the venue.

I've been playing ukulele about six or seven months: it was a little challenge I set myself, to learn from a teach yourself app. I set up the Meetup group because I got bored of playing on my own: it's quite a recent thing, and there's only a couple of us who attend regularly, but out of molehills mountains are built (or whatever the saying is!).

Ross did say during the House Band rehearsal that the chords are not easy for ukuleles, but life isn't easy

and like everything, practice makes perfect. I found as I was strumming away I got into it, and it was the first time I've played ukulele publicly outside my class of children, so it was quite a big experience for me. And a really nice thing to do.

Having done the show, I realised that I can play – or, I can play to an audience. It did help that I had a drink in between the rehearsal and the show, but generally I thought: I can do this. I'm

never going to be the world's best ukulele player, but I can strum a few chords together, and Ellie – who's also in the Meetup group, and played in the House Band – can sing a bit, so why not just do it? So I've managed to book us a gig for a local festival in July, and we're going to the Luton Beer Festival this weekend: we're just going to turn up and have a jam in the corner. There's probably a lot of people who sit at home and have a little play and don't really think they can do it; what I want to do is go out and find people, whether by sitting in the pub having a jam, or busking at the beer fest, and give them the confidence to be able to play in public rather than at home on your own. The show has really inspired me to keep playing, rather than giving up and thinking I've had my little fun. I want to do more, it's really spurred me on.

THE SONG OF NO HIERARCHY (OR: LET'S MAKE IT TOGETHER)

I'm quiet in the corner of a big side room
Of Miss Tina's Cafe in Sunderland,
Marvelling as Zack, a withdrawn young man,
Takes Ross's place leading the band.
There really is no hierarchy here:
They're all in it together,
Taking turns to teach and suggest,
Always supporting each other.

Later, on tour, the same thing happens:
Ross steering without authority,
Always inviting contributions
In a way that flowers ability.
Every musician who comes along
Feels encouraged to give it their all:
And often I see how surprised they are
By how much they can bring to the ball.

THE GIVE AND TAKE

STEVE WILLIAMS, NEWCASTLE HOUSE BAND

Steve has played in bands all his life, as drummer, guitarist, bassist – he's adaptable, just happy to play. If asked to rank the most important events of his life, he'd say getting married, the birth of his son, and hearing his record played by much-missed DJ John Peel. He joined the House Band for all three nights of the run in Newcastle, and when we spoke was considering travelling to Leicester to join in there too.

I thought Ross and Annie took everybody through the rehearsals brilliantly. We had people who are quite experienced amateurs like me, and people who are relative beginners, and they made everybody feel very

welcome. And it was really lovely that there were some people who were in their late 60s there, and some young kids – imagine what it would be like as a kid to play with Ross. It's so good for young people to play live with

IT ALL STARTS WITH YES

DENNIS, SUNDERLAND (AND NORTH-EAST) HOUSE BAND

There's a song about Dennis in *Putting the Band Back Together*, a tribute to one of the people who has been central to the Sunderland House Band, and indeed the entire show, from the beginning. Dennis brought his brother, his daughter's father-in-law, and friends to the early workshops. He stayed with the House Band throughout its time in Sunderland, and has travelled with it across the north-east. But in the show, Ross gives his biggest reason for writing a song about him: Dennis acknowledges that he is, and always will be, "a crap guitarist", but goes for it anyway, and that's inspiring.

I first asked my mum and dad for a guitar when I was five or six, very little. They'd give me a plastic guitar, and not knowing what to do I'd be tightening the strings and snap the neck within a couple of days. After two years of that, I gave up. I've always been very bad-tempered, easily frustrated, no patience, not a very good learner, so I just dabbled and dabbled with music, but a couple of years ago I thought, I'm going to go for it. It's what I've always wanted and no matter what, no matter how I struggle, I'm

going to stick it out.

I've learned to play the ukulele, and I've been trying to improve my guitar skills. I even went to college for two years, and at the end of the course, the lad who took it said: "Dennis, you started as a beginner, and you're leaving as a beginner." As part of the Cultural Spring in Sunderland, I've been involved with a ukulele band, *Putting the Band Back Together*, the Whitburn singers, a massive production by Wildworks – I've said yes to everything. This sounds really crude but

experienced players.

It's Ross's songwriting for the show that makes this work. His songs are very, very simple, but there's also a depth to them, which means if you're learning the guitar and you only know 10 chords, you can still play, but if you're an experienced player you can play around with the music and get a lot out of it. I played drums and would ask Ross or Annie if they wanted a simple rhythm, a fill, it was very much give and take. So I felt I had a contribution to the songs, and that was great.

I am getting older, and if I don't cram it in now I might not be able to, because the mind and body do deteriorate, there's no doubt about that. So I've told all my family that I'm fulfilling the dreams I had when I was younger. It's affected looking after grandchildren – I'm in danger of missing some of their growth periods – but my daughter and son think it's great.

The thing that sets *Putting the Band Back Together* apart is that it's very creative. At a pilot meeting for it, I said if I'm going to be involved, I want it to be original: I don't want to be doing covers, I want it to be very original, very wacky, very creative, and it's been all of that. Now I've done this, I'm craving to do more but I don't know how I'm going to take it forward. I'd like to think I could create something but past experience with this old brain of mine is I'll start something off and won't finish. I need a kick up the backside basically, and this has done that.

THE SKILLS INSIDE

ALLEN MORNINGTON WEST, SALISBURY HOUSE BAND

Allen ran a folk-rock band in the 1970s that was so successful he even paid "musician tax" one year. But a work promotion prompting a geographical move meant that his more conventional career took over. "There was a year when I spent more time out of the country than in," he says. "That means you can never meet anyone locally with whom you can build a musical relationship." It wasn't until retirement approached – "69 is how young I am" – that he decided it was high time to start playing again. He now plays in two bands, a folk group that meets every Tuesday to practise but rarely performs, and an English barn dance outfit established in 1978.



One of the things about playing with people on spec but to order is that you have to find in yourself the fact that you have sufficient skills to match them. Finding that those skills actually really are there – because you only have an hour and you're on – that was among the most thrilling

elements of it and the most confidence-boosting. Also, I love the idea of going to a booking and not having to set up the PA, and not having to worry about whether I have to be out front, because someone else is out front: just plug in and someone else says you're on, brilliant.

Out of that evening I wrote a trite and trivial song, which one does once in a while, but in one sense it encapsulated what the evening was for me: about recognising you've come to the third stage in life and, looking at what you've done, how do you bring it back together again and how do you rejoice in it? It's of that evening, of that time, and an unusual expression of personal output from me.

THE SECRET ROCK CHICK

DOROTHY MUCKLES, SUNDERLAND HOUSE BAND

Dorothy's first experience of singing was joining in with the hymns at her local church. It's part of a partnership of five churches in Sunderland, and with her friend Barbara she helped to form a community choir drawing on all of their congregations. In 2012 that group performed at the Olympic torch ceremony in Sunderland, and they've kept a busy diary ever since.

I was quite nervous when I first came, but it was so welcoming – and really exciting, how they took the nucleus of an idea and said we'll do this now, try this now, so you could see how it all builds up. I have no musical background whatsoever: I can't read music, I know from listening that when the little dot goes up I have to go up. But I get a lot of enjoyment from it, and this is just fantastic. I didn't realise, but I think I'm a closet rock chick really: a

63-year-old closet rock chick.

Two years ago I got a condition called muscle tension dysphonia and basically lost my voice. I had to go to hospital and have speech therapy, and now I'm trying to find my singing voice. I thought this would be less pressured than being in a choir, where you have to really belt it out. And it's been great: a gentle reintroduction to singing and performing in a non-threatening way.

I hope the Cultural Spring



can get more funding to carry on, because it empowers people to think, 'Oh, I can do that.' You think of the word culture, you think people going to the opera, stuff like that: but it's nothing like that. It's what you are and what makes you human, isn't it?

THE SONG OF BOOSTING CONFIDENCE

"A" started coming to build up his confidence
He's retired and lives on his own
And though he was in a band once
Meanness just made him feel down.

Anthony has long been addicted to music
Singing his childhood dreams
It boosted his confidence, coming along
Gave him some self-belief.

Kevin wouldn't have come at all
Were it not for Dennis, his brother:
No matter how much he loves playing guitar
Mostly he just doesn't bother.

Wherever I travelled, near and far,
This line was repeated so often:
Doing this has given me confidence
To play more, or join in the next thing.



IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS (I) ANNIE RIGBY, DIRECTOR (AND HOUSE BAND MEMBER)

I've "interviewed" Annie a couple of times since joining *Putting the Band Back Together*, but somehow never asked the right questions. And the right question was always really simple: how has working with participants – over an extended period in Sunderland, and in a shorter time-frame on tour – affected the way you work, and how you see yourself? In a text Annie wrote to be delivered at a panel discussion held at Battersea Arts Centre, London, to share this document, she noted that artists are rarely asked those questions. The absence of this dialogue creates a hierarchy, in which information is only ever being passed downwards, from enlightened artists to amateurs; and in turn that limits creative potential.

Initially I thought I might include a few quotes from Annie's text here. But then another conversation with Annie prompted her to write this instead:

I've got so much to say about this, I never know where to start. But let's have a go. Basically, it's made me really happy.

I love seeing the different people who turn up. Kids aged eight through to people in their 80s, beginners, professional musicians, lefty hippies alongside UKIP campaigners, jazz trombonists, rock guitarists, church choir singers. Something about the

invitation reaches really wide. It brings very different people together. That really matters to me.

What else? It's made me let go. I remember planning early workshops, right at the beginning of the creative process. I've done lots of workshop plans in my time. I know lots of clever drama exercises. But when we got there, I realised the people who'd come didn't want to play drama games. They

wanted to play music and chat with Ross, and with each other. So that's what we did. And it was so rich. It made me wonder who workshop plans are for. Are they sometimes, really, about making us feel safer? Do they sometimes get in the way of us listening?

What else? The House Band in Sunderland has been with us for two years now. I gave birth to my second daughter during that time. I brought her to a workshop when she was two weeks old. And Mark Lloyd, who made the show with us, died a few months before we opened. The fact they'd played music, and laughed, with him, has made for a very particular bond. For a period of time, our lives have run alongside each other.

Now we're on tour, sometimes we only spend a few hours with our House Band players. But, a similar connection seems to happen. I love getting a glimpse of how playing in the House Band sits within people's lives. That's what has struck me most about reading this.

And what else? I'm playing my accordion again! After years of not. I've learned basic drums for when there isn't a drummer in the band. I've sung on my own in front of people. The show encourages people to let go of what's holding them back. It's made me to do the same.

It's raised my confidence. It's improved my well-being. I've made friends. These are the things I hope participants might say. I suppose what's been so rewarding for me, is that I've been a participant, as well as a director. It's been a shared journey.

EQUAL PARTS TO PLAY

GRAHAM HUNT, SUNDERLAND HOUSE BAND

Graham started playing saxophone in 2014, and when we spoke in summer 2016, he still considered himself “very much a novice”. He’d loved the instrument for years, but “there was always something getting in the way” of him learning. And then, one day, there just wasn’t. He was one of two saxophonists in the Sunderland House Band: the other, Charlotte, was in primary school, and came because her dad thought it would be good preparation for her first grade exam.

Saxophone is one of those instruments that anybody could blow down it and get a note and think, ooh, this is a good start. It doesn’t prepare you for all of the complexities though. I didn’t know how to read music either, so it’s not just learning the instrument, it’s also learning crotchets and minims. That’s something I still struggle with a bit.

At first in the House Band

it was the guitars and the ukuleles and I was the only saxophone. But four or five weeks after I started, I was joined by young Charlotte and that was really good as I was able to get a duet going. There’s been a mutual support between us: she’s got a more natural ability with what note sounds right, and I’ve got a bit more of a sense of what sounds as if it’s

working well. The beauty of it is that Ross and Alex start off with an idea, then me and Charlotte will say maybe it’ll work better with a different note, or if we shorten the passage, so what we play is very much an evolution. It really has felt an equal process in terms of listening to people’s thoughts and suggestions.

I’m not the most confident of people, but that encouragement and low-pressure environment has made it very warm and welcoming, and made everybody come together. Being a part of this has made me start to think seriously about whether or not I could do a buskers’ night in a local pub, where normally I would not entertain that idea at all.

Chris: I do as much social engagement as I can, because it’s been proven to improve mental and physical health. I didn’t go to the doctors for 35 years, then all of a sudden I’m ill, the kids are grown up, I’ve split up with their mum, I’m in this other world. It took me a long time to learn how to cope, I had to do classes on anxiety because I’d go out of the flat and go straight back in. I’m in recovery from drugs and alcohol and two mental health diagnoses, and recovery is about growth. There’s still a misunderstanding around mental health, as soon as it’s mentioned there’s this stigma. But we understand each other: we work with whoever turns up, we learn to improvise.

SIDE BY SIDE, INCLUDED

NETTY AND CHRIS, LEICESTER HOUSE BAND

The Leicester performance of Putting the Band Back Together was unusual, and all the more special for it. The House Band that night were all members of the Fosse Music Collective, a band set up by Tim Sayers as part of his work as the Arts in Mental Health Coordinator for Leicestershire Partnership Trust. I’ve always been struck by the grace and generosity of the House Band invitation, but never more so than when watching the company absorb this profoundly neurodiverse group. It made me contemplate how comparatively limited the approach to inclusion is in theatre generally, how narrow the general definition of “normal”, and how trammelled the conversation around difference.

Netty: I’ve had breast cancer, so I could relate to the story and found it quite therapeutic, because I could understand where they were coming from. It was a bit scary at first, because we’d never heard the songs before and didn’t know what part we would

be playing. But by the end of the rehearsal, I felt I could do it. It gives you confidence when you do something like this, off the cuff. When it comes to doing other things, you think: I did that all right, with about half an hour’s practice. And that helps your self-esteem.

INTERLUDE: A SHAME-FACED CONFESSION

There’s a beautiful thing François Matarasso, a writer who specialises in writing about community and participatory arts (and finding ways to differentiate between the two) has written about Ukelila, an organisation that gives mostly immigrant children music lessons in Beringen, Eastern Flanders. After attending a few classes, he noted:

“Ukelila does not want them to master their instruments but to befriend them, to experience the joy of music as a source of communication and expression and to understand that it really does belong to them.”

I’m not sure my guitar teacher ever invited me to befriend the instrument. I was a reasonably proficient player, and yet I never got my head around even basic chords, or how to make up tunes on my own (despite a lot of trying).

I think about this often now my children are learning piano, and their teacher ends every lesson with improvisation – because what’s the point of playing an instrument if you’re only ever doing what you’re told?

And I think about it in relation to Putting the Band Back Together: how it entwines its invitation to play music with a reminder of the friendship inherent in playing – whether with other musicians, or the instrument itself.

The guitar was never a friend to me, only a frustration. I convinced myself that working alongside this show would change that: I bought a proper tuner, and a second-hand book of chords; I even invested in a new amp. But the roots of my lack of confidence run deep.

That’s a weird thing to confess in this document. It’s as if I’ve broken the show: refused to heed its call.

Then again, it’s still on tour: anything might yet happen...

THE SONG OF WHAT COMES NEXT

Here's a story old and true —
Bobs from Sunderland told it
Of money coming into a town
And opening potential.
Classes, performance, community action
Suddenly spring into life
Only to fade away again
When the money runs out.

And here's a thing that Anthony said:
Taking part in these things is amazing
And I'm gutted when they come to an end
I'm desperate to jump to the next thing.
People want to be involved, want
Culture to bring them together.
And maybe it's sad, but the spark
Is money: it opens possibility.

PICK IT UP AND START AGAIN

MARK GORDON, NEWCASTLE HOUSE BAND

Mark is one of the surprisingly few people I spoke to who was a fan of the Futureheads and joined the House Band after recognising Ross Millard's face in a theatre brochure. He played guitar in all three shows at Northern Stage.

I'd been in a lot of bands when I was younger, went through the whole thing of wanting to get signed, then you get a bit older and realise that's probably not going to happen, people move on, the bands that you're in fade out. I still play with friends, just doing covers, but that kind of being a 'serious' band stopped a while ago. When I heard about the play, I thought it would give me a chance to re-examine some of that stuff: it's about starting again

and exploring the reasons why you stopped, and it was nice for me to reflect on that for myself.

After the shows we spent a lot of time chatting about music and bands we'd been in: some of them still are in bands, but most people, like me, have drifted and just do the odd bits and bobs. We all had a few drinks on the last night, everyone's euphoric, and I started asking around who would be interested in carrying on. I set up a little Facebook group and

we've had two rehearsals now in a space in Newcastle, with seven or eight people from the 20-odd who joined online. The drummer from the show is really into it, which is great because if you've got your drummer you've got your ground level, and I'm playing bass with them which is really exciting because I haven't played bass for years and years. We've just done a few covers to get ourselves started, but someone's got some original songs we're going to do, and Dennis from Sunderland was talking about doing some of his writing set to music, in a similar vein to what the show has done. So it feels like there's scope there, if we keep playing, to start developing something new and a bit different.

LITTLE TO A LOT

KEVIN, LUTON HOUSE BAND

Kevin left school at 16 and joined the Merchant Navy, so when he says that his guitar "has been all around the world with me", he really means it. He's always enjoyed jamming with people, but never played seriously, and some time in his 30s gave up altogether. He's now 55, and the show caught him at "quite a fortuitous moment", soon after he had decided to start playing again.

About six months ago I finished an Open University degree in psychology. I really enjoyed it, and what it taught me was the importance of applying yourself, and sticking to something. Whenever playing guitar got hard I gave up, I put it in my head that it was me and I couldn't do it, but this time I thought: I'm going to stick with it. I also started lifting weights a couple of years ago, and that's brilliant

because you look at a weight and think, I'm never going to lift that, but you just put a little bit more on each time and then all of a sudden... I lift silly weights now, I just keep applying and keep the consistency going – and that's what I'm doing with the guitar.

Being on stage with the House Band was great because you're playing a part: I like being in a team, I like being with people, and

I really enjoyed how all those small parts make up the whole production. And it was a lot cooler than I thought it was going to be! After doing it I looked around on a musician's Meetup group and found something else: I went along thinking I was just going to play with a few guitarists in a back room of a pub, but I've ended up in a band. At the moment it's me, a bass and the most incredible singer, and everyone has come to it with their stories: the singer runs a huge group on a karaoke app, and started singing when she lost a daughter a couple of years ago, as therapy. We've got a set now, we're practising, and we're going to recruit some more musicians through another Meetup. It's great being with people again.



A BEAUTIFUL SPACE FOR EVERYONE TO JUST BE
DANIEL BYE, LANCASTER HOUSE BAND

Dan is a theatre-maker, writing and performing his own solo shows and collaborating with others to make work for adults and children. He learned to play guitar as a teenager – although, he says, “it could be argued that I haven’t really learned” – and is remarkably sanguine about the fact that: “fundamentally I haven’t got any musical talent. I need to work quite hard to be pedestrian, but that’s still quite a satisfying thing to do.” He joined the House Band during a week of childcare with his first baby, which might have contributed something to his euphoria levels.

I probably would have wanted to take part in the House Band anyway, because I know Annie really well and I like the work, but also I’m a massive fan of the Futureheads, so to be in a band with Ross was just the most thrilling possible thing. There was a point during one of the songs, Happiness, where he turned around and smiled at everyone in the band, and I could have just died then. I’m being slightly flippant, but also I’ve just described that and a little shiver has gone down my spine: as a kind of fanboy, it was a

genuinely exciting moment.

I did very little prep in advance: I really met the brief in that the last time I picked up my guitar was probably 10 months ago. I’ve no ear for music and I never learned how to think musically; as a set of mechanical interactions with an instrument I got to a point when I was 18 where I was kind of all right, but I haven’t played regularly since then. One of the beautiful things about playing along to Ross’s instruction videos is that it’s the first time I’ve played the guitar in front of the baby,

and she was mesmerised. I’m sure that would have happened at some point, but I like that it happened because of this.

The only other guy in the House Band was a proper guitarist who’d done it a few times in Sunderland – so I really felt the odd one out, the sore thumb at the back. But it didn’t matter: it made space for me to be as good or as bad as I was, and that was OK. Maybe someone who didn’t know the company or who was a bit less robust or had anything riding on their ability to play the guitar might have felt more exposed, but I think the company did everything they could to put the right support structures in place without being patronising, and that’s a difficult balance to strike. Ross has not had any training at that, there’s no school you go to: he’s just got that knack for putting people at their ease and being human.

The one bit that made me a bit scared was in Happiness: everyone gets a few bars to do their thing, and to keep time and do something worthwhile or interesting felt quite terrifying. I think in some ways they’re right not to tell people in advance that they’re going to have to do that, because I think less people would come. But there’s something about giving people space who might not be the most brilliant musicians in the world that is quite beautiful, in the way it supports the message of the show and the way it supports the people to be part of that message.

NOTHING CAN STOP US NOW
BOB, SUNDERLAND HOUSE BAND

Bob lives a 40-minute drive from Sunderland, but that didn’t dissuade him from taking part in Putting the Band Back Together. Three years ago, he suggested to a friend that they join a choir, and when the friend objected that “we can’t sing”, he replied: “Let’s not let that stop us.” He’s been part of the Customs House choir in South Shields ever since, and also sings with a choir at Sage Gateshead.



My wife got me a ukulele for Christmas, and I thought coming here would push me to learn it quicker, rather than stumbling around as I do with the guitar. It puts a bit of structure to the learning, plus you see how you put a song together: all interesting educational stuff.

I’ve always liked music

THE TRICKLE EFFECT
ADAM FEATHERSTONE, EDINBURGH HOUSE BAND

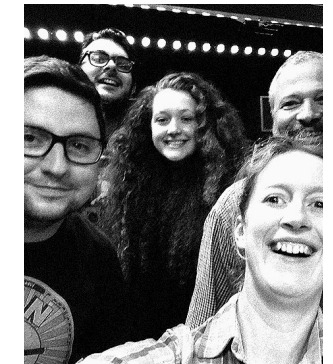
Adam tried playing guitar as a kid, and when that didn’t work out, he moved on to drums. Now in his 30s, he’s played for more than two decades, but struggles to fit it in around work. Like many people I spoke to, his enjoyment in taking part was laced with a sense of identification: he, too, used to be in bands, “and then life gets in the way, doesn’t it?”

I teach music in a special-needs school, so I teach everything but at a quite low level: lots of keyboard, a little bit of guitar, composition, a lot of different things. I don’t often get the chance to do much music myself because I’m too busy teaching it, so it was good to play with some other musicians, and in a different style (I did a jazz degree a long, long time ago). And I’m so used to teaching that it was really

lovely to be shown what to do by someone else, and get that enthusiastic feeling back again in the rehearsal before the show.

I’ve been meaning to start a band for a while now and it gave me the encouragement to just get out and do it. I’ve put together a nice little funk ensemble, with some people I studied with and haven’t seen for a long time, and hopefully the first rehearsal is in a couple of weeks’ time. It’s

and rather than going to listen to somebody, this is getting involved in a different level. Even if you can’t do it very well, it doesn’t seem to matter to most people as long as you’re enjoying it. I’ve played guitar for seven years, my wife asked a lad to give me a few lessons and that’s the lad I still play guitar with, go to gigs with and go to the choir with. We have a laugh, meeting like-minded people. And it’s learning, it’s pushing yourself a bit. I’m 67: I don’t want to just sit in a corner somewhere and fade away. I’d rather be doing something, and this is great – it’s invigorating.



as much to get a few good musicians playing music for the fun of it, not for money or anything else. It’s interesting to think about that trickle-down effect, because I’ll get someone else involved who didn’t see the show and get them to play some music, and then they might get someone else to play some music, and so on.

THE SONG OF CROSSING A POLITICAL GULF (OR JUST IGNORING IT'S THERE)

The night of 23 June I went to bed as Sunderland was called: Leave.
I woke on the morning of 24 June in the 48 camp and grieved.
The thing about that room at Miss Tina's, you wouldn't have known
It was coming. No tension, no argument, no groans
Of complaint at the EU Referendum.
No talk of the threat to arts funding, no hum
Of anxiety regarding UKIP: nothing
To disrupt the joyful work of playing
Music together. I was there first on 15 June; the next day
Jo Cox was murdered. And maybe it's wrong to say
Anything about this in a document like this one. I mean,
There are probably rules about being seen
To be politically partisan. But I will mention this: when I phoned
Carol (who also gets funding from Cultural Spring, for her own
Workshops, in literature), she confessed to not knowing
who in the room shared her politics, and not wanting
To know, because she might like some people less.
And in July, I talked for a long time with Charles —
Now Vice Chairman of UKIP South Tyneside —
Neither of us changed the other's mind,
But he confirmed my long-held suspicion:
That UKIP gained support through labour disaffection.
And although I'm not sure of his anti-fascist history,
It was good to find out we both abhor TTIP.
There's no moral to this story, no neat ending,
Just an observation, of how much music can transcend.



IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS (2)

ROSS MILLARD, COMPANY MEMBER

Back in 2004, Ross and his band the Futureheads released a self-titled album that I listened to on repeat, and can still sing huge chunks of from memory. A few months later they put out a cover version of Hounds of Love that remains one of my Desert Island Discs. So I was already quite the fan, but even so, spending a year with Ross has been a revelation. The immediacy with which he puts people at their ease, encourages them, despite — as he says below — no specific training, is remarkable. Plus his singing voice keeps tying knots around my heart.

When we stopped doing Futureheads I hadn't been in a room making music with anyone else for more than a few hours in 15 years. This was one of a couple of things that came along in the aftermath that put me in a position where I was meeting and playing with relative strangers, and because I don't have any background as a teacher, I didn't know whether I had the social skills to be able to deal with it. But I've found it an amazing experience in the sense that it's given me some confidence to try and arrange something in a big room, where people are coming in

without any prior knowledge of the music, and it's always a bit of a surprise because you don't know anyone's ability level, you don't know what instruments are going to come through the door.

At the start of the process I had no idea what we were going to end up with: it's not like the songs have been conceived with that in mind. It's been good fortune that they've managed to be songs that are flexible enough to have all these other people join in. Everyone who comes along, there has to be a place for that person and that instrument, and they have to feel as vital

in that arrangement as everyone else.

What I've really taken from it is it's improved my understanding of music a little bit more, and how certain instruments can fit in in certain places where others maybe can't. And I've enjoyed taking a different kind of approach with writing songs. I was used to writing in rehearsal: you'd go in and say, it's going to be dead intense, we're going to have serious aims, we're not going to leave till we've done x y z, and a lot of the time that's quite futile. Here we all got together, talked a lot about our relationship with musical instruments and our favourite records, people would suggest the first tune they ever learned and we had a go at doing that; it was just really relaxed, we poked and prodded in a few places to see what felt like a good direction to go in. My sense of ownership over the songs isn't like, I wrote these: I had input into this as much as everybody else had input into other areas.

I have definitely played more music in the years since the Heads went on hiatus. I suppose when you're touring you soundcheck and you play the show, you don't really play much beyond that, other than when you're home writing. I've really enjoyed playing music with loads of different other people: I think it makes you a better player, and it also makes you realise that some of the, what I perceive to be, little stumbling blocks in my ability, they don't really exist. They're almost your identity in your playing, something that characterises how you play: you can't play everything all the time, if you could you wouldn't really be you, would you?



SINGING THE HAPPY BLUES

FIONA ALLEN, EDINBURGH HOUSE BAND

Fiona sings in "two and a bit choirs" in Edinburgh: an a cappella community choir, a very small group (I assume this is the bit) that sings in nursing homes, and Protest in Harmony: you can guess from the name what they do. In 2016, Protest in Harmony performed at the Scottish Parliament for the 40th anniversary of Women's Aid: another event Fiona describes as "such a buzz".

I sang a lot when I was at school, then had a long period of not singing, because of life circumstances, exhaustion, illness, any of those things. I got into the first choir kind of accidentally, because my upstairs neighbour used to sing with them and she took me. I didn't used to be terribly good at meeting unfamiliar people, so it was nice to be taken along – and be vouched for, if you like. British people have self-consciousness built into us: we don't want to be different, we don't want to be conspicuous, and oh my

god we can't possibly be seen to fail or even not to be all that good. The thing about the community choir is, we don't audition and we don't have to read music, but we produce the most amazing sound.

At one point during the House Band rehearsal, apparently I bounced up and down on my heels and said: "Oh ho, I'm so happy!" The cast were killing themselves laughing because I got completely hyper. It was just such fun! I had a pedicure a couple of weeks later and told my podiatrist that I had to take part because inside

this mild-mannered ex-civil servant brackets retired is a blues singer in a sleazy satin dress, and I just wanted her to come out to play, but I don't know what the audience made of this little round elderly lady. Bless her, she said: "You'll just have to say, listen folks, don't be under any illusions, I'm not your average little round elderly lady." I thought that was wonderful.

I absolutely adore blues, but can you imagine this accent singing blues? I'm not your natural blues singer apart from the voice: I look like something that's wandered out of Thomas Hardy; the voice is fine, it's just the diction. I can't remember who it was said this to me, but if it's part of your soul it will always be part of your soul. To some extent, it doesn't really matter how good you are or how bad you think you are: you should have a crack at it.

THE SONG OF SO MANY ACCENTS (AND HOW WRITING STRIPS THEM AWAY)

Was the mention of Scottish Parliament enough of a clue
 For how to hear Fiona? The crisp hear rolling though
 Her voice, syllabic elongations. But what about when
 She gets all bouncy: how did she sound then?
 To me, the godmother in Disney's Cinderella
 The bibbity-bobbity one, sweet as nectar.

What about Bob, or Graham, or Dennis, the men
 Of the Sunderland band? If you could listen
 Back to our chats, you'd hear certain particularities:
 The way they'd use us instead of me, or me
 Instead of my. I haven't just transcribed talk
 But instantly translated it, to a grammar all
 Would recognise as "standard" English. But that implies that
 How they speak is – as Dan Bye challenged – "deviant".
 And that's not at all what I'm saying.

As a writer, I often feel how frustrating
 English is as a language: fixed at a time of empire,
 It is a framework for hierarchy, a dice
 Loaded of elitist superiority that I want
 Desperately to resist. But I don't
 Know how. I mean, it's what we have!
 All I can do is alert you to the music I love
 In these voices: and stress again that they
 Come from all over a blissfully sonorous country.



MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS

PAUL HAGAN, EDINBURGH HOUSE BAND

Paul lives in Liverpool but his wife is from Edinburgh, so they regularly go to the fringe festival, and his family know to look out for shows he might like. His father spotted a listing for *Putting the Band Back Together* and said: “It’s perfect for you – it’s failed musicians.” Thanks, Dad. For a few years, Paul had an actual career with the band Amsterdam, recording three albums and touring widely, but while they had some chart success, they “never reached the point where you were bringing in much money”. He’s now “grown up, with a mortgage and things”, and works as a web designer at the University of Liverpool. Paul wrote the email that starts this document, and emailed *Unfolding Theatre* again after the show to say thanks, adding: “I can happily say I now have another great reminder of why music is so important, and why going back to it after a few years in the wilderness is one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.”

After I left Amsterdam, I did a bit of travelling in America, and a friend of mine who lived in Seattle arranged for me to meet a few of his friends in a basement for a jam. When I arrived, they didn’t even stop playing: they had a guitar and a seat in the corner for me, gave me a nod, and I spent the next four or five hours playing music with a bunch of strangers and feeling so happy and joyful about it. I hadn’t felt like that about music in a

long time: I’d been working hard at it, but the pleasure and fun was gone. That’s the point where I thought, I’m not going to do it any more: I’m going to throw all my guitars in the Mersey and never touch an instrument again. Thankfully my wife stopped me – although she probably regrets it now, everywhere you go in our house there’s a guitar. I think I’ve got 17 at last count.

But it was a kind of epiphany: I made myself a

promise that I would only get involved in music again if it was on my terms. I stopped playing for about five years, and also became a dad in that time. But about 18 months ago a friend of mine from university asked me to play a couple of shows with his band, as a favour. That’s what got me playing again: having someone say, I need your help with this, and we’ll arrange it in a way that fits you. After that, I thought I’d check the musicians wanted website for Liverpool, in case there were a couple of guys locally who want to meet for a jam, just some people who want to do it for the love of it, to try and re-create that basement again. Sure enough, I’ve met a drummer and a bass player, we meet once a week in town, and just play songs we love. I call it the “dad band”.

Within about six weeks of playing in the show in Edinburgh, we decided that we should book a gig in the pub at the end of the road. The show had been a very timely reminder of what it is I enjoyed about making music – and part of that is being in front of an audience. I’m a terror for that. But it’s also a mood-enhancer: if I’m feeling down or tired or frustrated, I lock myself away for half an hour and learn a song. The head space that you can get into when you’re playing or writing music, where you forget everything, allows you to relax and be a bit more yourself I guess.

The show got me thinking a lot about why I stopped, the things I didn’t like – but also the happy memories and the positive things. Partly inspired by that, and at the behest of my dad, I’ve started writing everything down. Whether anyone will ever want to read it, I’ve no idea, but I wanted to jot it down before I forget all the fun we got up to.

LEARNING TO LET GO

MARK WALLACE, EDINBURGH HOUSE BAND

Mark is the director of Beaford Arts, an organisation that works with promoters across Devon to programme contemporary performance in non-traditional rural venues. He booked to see the show for professional purposes – but took part in it as a lapsed musician. He ran a jazz band in college but felt he was “never good enough to make a living out of it”, and no longer plays in public except to accompany his teenage daughter, a jazz saxophonist.

I immediately recognised at least three of the 10 reasons given on stage for why people stop doing music and felt quite a strong affinity to another four of them. Probably the biggest stumbling block for me personally is that, having been working professionally in the arts now for about 15 years, I meet really, really good people, excellent professionals who are at the top of their game, and it’s reassuring to hear you as another sector person feel the same thing as me: which is that we’re surrounded by so many brilliant people, how could we possibly step up

and do it ourselves? I know what I’d like to sound like, and every time I sit down to play the piano I just don’t have the technique to get anywhere near what I’m hearing in my head; I don’t have the time to develop that technique and so I choose not to play in public, because I couldn’t possibly be happy with what I was doing.

I did the show because I thought I would hate myself if I didn’t grab that chance. And the experience itself was great: I realised in the rehearsal they’d written the music for guitarists – E major is not the obvious key to jam in if you’re a failed pianist –

but there was no sense at all of anybody trying to find musical superiority, the way you would often find in a jazz session. I just recall having a great time: nervous to start with, I felt my timing was not bang on, but it didn’t take long for us to lock in together, and fairly early on I thought, this was actually working like a band, we were actually playing together.

It’s made me think about carrying on playing music. In the same way that you realise at 20 that you’re never going to be David Bowie, I’m at the point – in my late 40s – where I’ve realised I enjoy playing music and it’s going to be an enjoyable pastime that is going to enrich my life. The sheer high I felt being up on the stage, and for some time afterwards, has given me that slight kick to say: don’t be quite so precious and pretentious, just get out and have fun.



THE SONG OF SIX MONTHS LATER

It's a funny thing to do, listening to people's stories
Just a peek through the window of someone's life
Is enough to make you care.

To make you wonder : what happened next
To all those plans and dreams?

Well Paul is still writing his memoirs, and Fiona
Is still being brave : going to workshops
In unusual styles
That before she might have ignored.

Kevin is playing with Dave and Bev
At "buskers' nights" down the pub.
But Mark says the Facebook group
Dripped apart once January
Got underway. He's confident,
Though, it will start up again
With just a little message.

Adam's band never got off the ground
It was too much hire and work,
And now his wife is pregnant, too -
But I get the impression he's ready.
The show gave him this : he "learned to adapt"
And how to be "clever with time".
So he's playing again, in a restaurant,
And gigs with a jazz big band.

Life keeps moving, time keeps turning
And excuses will always come up.

The thing to remember is simply this :
Playing music is fun! A friend, a release,
A thing of joy, and anyone can do it.

Writing and research by Maddy Costa

With huge thanks to everyone whose words appear in this document, for all the invigorating and enjoyable chats: I'd have had no story without you.

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More thanks to François Matarasso, whose work in this field continually inspires me, and whose piece about Ukulila can be read here: www.arestlessart.com/2016/12/16/a-hippo-among-fish-thinking-about-children-and-music/

Final thanks to Unfolding Theatre, for the invitation, the ongoing dialogue, and especially the generosity.

UNFOLDINGTHEATRE.CO.UK

**TO DATE 419 PEOPLE HAVE PLAYED IN THE HOUSE BANDS OF
54 PERFORMANCES OF PUTTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER.
THANK YOU TO EVERY SINGLE ONE OF YOU.**



**BATTERSEA
ARTS CENTRE**



**Trusthouse
Charitable
Foundation**



TO: BAND@UNFOLDINGTHEATRE.CO.UK
RE: SO I'M THINKING...

**What should I do now that it's all over...
I dare not visit Cash Converters for fear of
coming out with a drum kit. And much as
Jan loves me, she'd love me a little less if
a set of those appeared in the house. It's
not like shoes and handbags where you can
say... oh, those... I've had them ages!!**

So I'm thinking... yeah what am I thinking...

**I'm thinking I should say a HUGE thanks to
Annie, Ross, Maria & Alex and everyone
else involved for making this last month
or so such a fun-filled experience for
me. A journey that started with fears
and anxieties ended on a note of joy and
happiness.**

**I've now fulfilled one of my life's ambitions/
dreams to be on stage in a band... at the
grand old age of 60!! It's been a truly
uplifting experience.**

**Thanks again
Dave x**

DAVID RIDLEY
SUNDERLAND (AND EDINBURGH) HOUSE BAND