

The Mature Bass Player's Guidebook

Bonus Chapter

My Dad, David Bowie & A Lifetime Of Learning

People sometimes ask me what it was like growing up with a dad who had played with David Bowie. It's a story that has always been part of our family history.



Back in 1966, my dad was the drummer in *David Bowie and The Buzz*. He joined the band just as David Jones was changing his name to David Bowie

and still searching for his identity as an artist. They toured the country together in an old ambulance, appeared on *Ready, Steady, Go!*, and Dad played on Bowie's early recordings, including *The Laughing Gnome*, which went on to become an unlikely hit and still pops up on the radio now and again.



Then the band split up, David Bowie became Ziggy Stardust, and the rest is music history.

Growing up, though, none of that seemed particularly unusual. Occasionally, a Bowie biographer would arrive at our house to interview Dad about that period of his life, or a television crew would appear, filling our living room with cameras, lights and cables. As a young boy, I remember thinking it was incredibly exciting.

Looking back, I realise how fortunate I was; music was simply part of everyday life.

Dad never made a fuss about his time with Bowie, and was remarkably modest about it. He was far more interested in talking about what Steve Gadd was playing with Chick Corea than something he'd done decades before.

That probably influenced me more than I realised. Music filled our house: The Beatles, Genesis, Pink Floyd, Queen, Dire Straits, Eric Clapton, Level 42... The soundtrack of my childhood was the soundtrack of many of the students I teach today. Possibly, that's one of the reasons I feel so at home teaching mature bass players: we often speak the same musical language because we grew up listening to many of the same records.

Around the same time, Dad took me to see Paul McCartney at Wembley Arena. I'd watched concerts on VHS for years, but seeing a world-class band in front of me changed everything. Suddenly, music wasn't something that happened on a television screen. It was real.

I can still remember the band: Hamish Stuart, Robbie McIntosh, Paul "Wix" Wickens and Chris Whitten. I didn't fully appreciate just how good they were. Looking back now, they were an extraordinary group of musicians.

Not long afterwards, my hometown of Berkhamsted staged a live performance of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* to raise money for what would become the Pepper Foundation. I was invited to sing *Being For The Benefit Of Mr Kite* with the local youth theatre.

For an eight-year-old boy, those experiences were unforgettable. I can see how those experiences quietly shaped my future. But they still aren't the biggest lesson Dad taught me. That came much later.

One day, in his 40s, Dad put the sticks down and decided to learn the bass guitar. Or, as he used to joke, "become a musician." He became a beginner again.

Years later, after retiring, he took up the classical double bass and worked his way through the grades, eventually reaching Grade 8 and playing with some incredible amateur orchestras.

Most people would probably have been satisfied with that. Not Dad. More recently, he picked up the trombone again, an instrument he hadn't played since school. Today, in his late 70s, he's busier than ever. He's rehearsing every week, playing with concert bands and big bands, learning new music and continuing to challenge himself. That's just part

of who he is. He always needs a challenge. Every time he masters one thing, he's looking for the next.

That, to me, is far more inspiring than the Bowie story. That's a wonderful chapter in his life. But his lifelong curiosity is the real story.

The Greatest Lesson Dad Ever Taught Me

I think watching Dad's musical journey shaped my thinking far more than I realised at the time.

For years, I'd assumed becoming a better musician was mostly about talent, technique and hours of practice. But as I watched him move from drums to bass guitar, then to the classical double bass and the trombone, I started to notice something.

He wasn't slowing down. If anything, he seemed to be becoming more curious, more disciplined, more patient. He listened more intently, practised with greater purpose and genuinely enjoyed the process of learning. He was never trying to prove anything to anyone; he simply loved becoming a better musician.

Over the last decade, I've realised the same thing is true of so many of the students I've taught. The stereotype is that younger people learn faster; sometimes they do. But older musicians often bring something far more valuable; they understand the value of time. They practise because they want to, not because someone tells them to. They ask better

questions, listen more deeply, and appreciate the opportunity to learn.

Perhaps most importantly, they know why they're doing it. I think that's one of the reasons mature musicians often become such exceptional learners. Not because age gives you an advantage, but because experience changes the way you approach learning.

That's exactly what I've seen over the last decade at eBassGuitar. The students who continue improving aren't necessarily the most naturally talented. They're the ones who stay curious, who keep turning up, and aren't afraid to become beginners again.

I don't think Dad ever sat me down and taught me those lessons; he just *lived* them. Watching him continually challenge himself throughout his life made me realise that music isn't something you finish; it's something you keep discovering.

And perhaps that's the greatest lesson he's ever taught me.