

Drummer boy

Sydney drummer Andrew Hewitt hasn't let cerebral palsy restrict him from pursuing his musical passion. Link spoke to him.

How did you first get into drumming?

I first started playing drums when my parents got me a drum kit for Christmas in 1980. I was 10 years old! My parents thought it would be a good form of physical exercise for me and it developed into a major passion. Thirty years later, I am still doing it! Drums are the most physically challenging instrument anyone can learn to play – let alone a person with a disability...

[But] I have always been fairly positive about my disability and tried to do new things even when people said, 'No, you can't – impossible'.

I don't think I would be the person I am today if it wasn't for me having CP.



Photo: Roland Corporation



Hence, the drumming. It gets frustrating sometimes when I'm stuck in the chair and can't just go and do what I want to do. But, I don't think I would be the person I am today if it wasn't for me having CP.

How do you get around the restriction of your wheelchair with drumming?

Biggest issue I've had so far is stages that aren't wheelchair-accessible. Either I get on my crutches and climb up or have people lift the chair up on to the stage. Been dropped a few times!

What equipment do you use?

I have two drum kits, which I use "live", depending on the gig. I have just started using Roland V-Drums, which are the most disability-friendly drum kits on the market. The kit I am using is a Roland TD-12KX and it doesn't have any floor stands for the snare drum or floor tom pads, which means with a few slight programming modifications, the drums can be made very wheelchair-friendly. I also have a DW PDP acoustic drum kit with Zildjian cymbals. I am very lucky to have endorsement deals with DW Drums, Zildjian cymbals and Vic Firth drumsticks. I am also an official Roland artist.

Any career highlights?

Performing onstage at Australia's Ultimate Drummers Weekend in 2009 with US drumming legend Dom Famularo and one of his students, Mike Mignogna, also from the US. Mike has CP similar to myself – and the three of us put together a performance that received a huge standing ovation from an auditorium of 500+ people.

The Roland V-Drum Festival in Sydney last year was also awesome. After I did my clinic, I was invited to share the stage with drummers Terapai Richmond (The Whitlams/Delta Goodrem/Guy Sebastian), Karl Lewis (Savage Garden), Lucius Borich (COG), Mal Green (Split Enz), Chris Whitten (Dire Straits), and Michael Schack from Germany in an all-star jam.

What do you think other people with a disability could get out of drumming?

One thing I have noticed with the drumming workshops I do is that no matter how severe the disability is, put a drumstick in a person's hand and they know what to do. I feel if I can give one person in a group a little hope, my job is done!

For more on Hewitt, visit www.drummerstix.com.au. 