

The Teacher Feature

This month we meet **Ben Neal**, who teaches a range of students from his north Wales base and comes highly recommended as an inspiration to all he tutors

Ben Neal

Ben teaches Monday to Friday at his own private studio in Afonwen, Flintshire and also works for Denbighshire Peripatetic Music service, visiting schools during the daytime.

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WHAT HIS STUDENTS SAY ABOUT HIM...

I decided to take up drumming two years ago aged 46. Ben has made learning enjoyable, combining enthusiasm with a great sense of humour and, of course, expertise. He is always capable of inspiration when the chips are down. Every pupil gets the chance to play a song with his band at a Christmas concert in the local theatre and Ben puts in a huge amount of effort to organise this, and it's a fantastic chance for novices to get the feel of playing live – not many teachers offer this opportunity. A hard working, dedicated teacher and a top man to boot.

Simon Waterhouse

TELL US ABOUT YOUR TEACHER!

If you would like to see your teacher featured in a future issue, email us their details (under the heading 'Teacher Feature') and tell us in no more than 100 words why they deserve special mention:

nickc@blazepublishing.co.uk

If your teacher is featured here you'll receive a special prize as well as a mention for your nomination

How long have you been teaching?

I've been teaching full time for the last five years around north Wales, privately at my own studio, and for various schools and colleges.

Do you specialise in any particular styles or areas of drumming?

I'm really into electronica and re-creating programmed beats, but I love to play all kinds of music and feel as a drum teacher you should have a good grounding in all styles of popular music. My ethos has always been to give fun, inspiring lessons tailored around the student. I always think to myself at the end of a lesson – would I be inspired by what I've shown them to hit the practice shed when I get home?

What age range do you teach?

Anywhere from 6 to 60-plus.

Do you teach graded exams? What are your thoughts on them?

Grades can be something to aim for and working to exam dates can really motivate some people, but others prefer working out of books and learning songs. The important thing is to come out as a well-rounded player and I don't think if you just did your grades you'd get that. There's so much instructional material around now that I feel part of my job is to show people where to look. Putting a balanced program together borrowing from all the good stuff is important for me.

What set-up do you use when you are teaching?

Two acoustic kits set up side by side. I have an electronic kit, which is good for recording and if there are noise constraints, but you need to play on an acoustic to develop touch and sound. I use Audacity a lot to slow down songs to play along to and record students.

What do you think makes a good teacher?

Someone with a clear understanding about what the



student is looking for out of their lessons, and having the knowledge and experience to know how to make that happen for them. You have to be able to engage with your students. Having a friendly personality and making people feel welcome is important, along with lots of patience and encouragement. Being passionate about what you do is an obvious requirement, but you have to have the ability to communicate your ideas clearly. I've had lessons from many world class drummers with varying results; just because you are a great drummer does not make you a great teacher.

What should students think about when they are looking for

a good teacher?

If you're just starting out, someone who is an experienced performer and teacher, who has a broad musical knowledge. Are they sensitive to your needs? Well organised? Can they read music? Do they have a dedicated teaching studio? Do they have a sense of humour? Go and try different teachers out before settling on one – I'm always happy to give a free lesson to people to see if they like me or not.

Any advice for people thinking of having lessons?

It's never too late to learn. Find the right teacher and be prepared to put regular practice time. Have fun, work hard and you will get there.