



AMS Program Director Mandy Guilfoyle interviews music educator and Summer Camp leader Andy John

Tell us about yourself! Where are you from? Where did you study music?

I grew up mostly in upstate New York. In high school my family moved to Bristol TN. I took piano for two years starting in 4th grade. I also played clarinet, bassoon, and cymbals in middle school and high school and took guitar up in eighth grade. I studied music at University of Tennessee in Knoxville and graduated with a degree in Studio Music and Jazz. I have studied under Mark Boling, Donald Brown, Jerry Coker, Lily Afshar, Dave Krakauer, Frank London, Henry Sapoznik, and Ken Maltz.

What is your favorite genre of music to play, and how did you get into it?

I probably have played jazz longer than anything else but I have been interested in almost all styles of music at some point. I grew up playing rock and blues before studying jazz and in the 2000s I started studying chromatic harmonica and developed a style of playing based on klezmer clarinet. I attended several workshops to learn Klezmer and studied with many great teachers. I also studied cello under Ryan Reardon and now play mostly cello in Bandana Klezmer.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up? Is it different than what you're doing now?

I wanted to be a truck driver, an archaeologist, then possibly something in science. I never drove a truck or dug fossils. I did have a brief stint as a science teacher but decided music was where my true passion was.

Who was the most influential person in your life and why?

I can't give credit to one person but I would have to say my parents were very influential and supportive because they allowed me to take chances, fail, and eventually succeed doing something that was completely self-driven. They trusted me and supported me.

What advice would you give to a young musician hoping to be in a band when they grow up?

Playing in a band can be one of the most rewarding experiences in your life. You can do it if you put in the time and have the drive. You may not be famous and make a lot of money so be aware of that and if you truly want to do it, you should.

What is a piece of advice that someone gave you that stuck with you the most?

Jerry Coker gave me the advice "be indispensable". When I play in a band I want to be the best I can so everyone can count on me. When I'm teaching I'm the best teacher I know how to be. There are a lot of people on the planet so you have to figure out where your skills are that make you unique and be the best at that.

What kind of instruments do you play?

Guitar, harmonica, electric bass, ukulele, and didgeridoo are my best instruments. I also play cello, 5-string banjo, and tenor banjo but I have some limits on those. I studied piano, clarinet, bassoon, and violin in school but I'm not terribly proficient on those.

What do you like to do when you're not rocking out?

I love to study foreign languages and learn about history.

If you're not from Asheville, what brought you here?

Music! I got here when my drummer started a family and so along with my bass player and my future wife, I got an apartment in Asheville. We found a lot of work in town and also in neighboring cities like Johnson City, Greenville/Spartanburg, Charlotte, Knoxville, Charleston, Columbia, Nashville, and also back in Memphis where we started.

Lastly, what is your favorite thing about being a musician?

There is a lot of creativity that goes in to music. Not just the music-making but also communicating in other ways like teaching. As I get older I don't get as much joy playing in front of groups of people but I really love watching my students progress and reach their potential.