

A lifetime in music

Stone Pony founder's passion for listening, playing and teaching

For most us, our first spoken word as a tiny tot was probably Mummy or Daddy.

Not so for Andy Graham. "I'm told the first word I spoke was 'record'," he says. And with that began a lifelong passion for music – listening, playing and also teaching.

This year marks 20 years since Andy and his wife Helen moved to West Norfolk and it's some 17 years since he formed Stone Pony which has been a regular and popular band on the local music scene.

But let's go back to the early days. Born in London, Andy was adopted as a child by Joan and Ken who must have soon realised where his interests lay.

"My nan had a radiogram and had Elvis and Everly Brothers records in her collection. When she came to see us in London I always asked her to bring records for me," he said.

"Then, when I was four, I pestered my parents to finally get me a record player. I had a pile of 78s I could play, but the first record that was bought for me was The Last Time, by the Rolling Stones."

The family later moved to Southampton and it was when he was about 14 that Andy first picked out some chords, playing the guitar of his younger sister, who was playing in a church group. It wasn't long before he had his own electric guitar – from Woolworths.

"I was in the Boy Scouts and, as I had the keys to the scout hall, I would go there on Saturday mornings for some jam sessions," he recalls.

With his mates also into music, they put together a group and at 17 he had his first gig at his college – with the award-

winning film superstar Colin Firth as the singer.

Andy said: "I said to Colin we were putting a band together and he could be the singer. He did the gig and he sang really well! We only did the one gig though."

"I practised hard before I had my first opening as a semi-pro musician with Bob Pearce and his Blues Band who were really well known along the south coast. This was in 1985 when he was putting a new band together and I stayed with Bob for around three-and-a-half years and then about the same time in another outfit called Blue Sunday, which was really good grounding experience for me."

"In the 1990s I moved to Leicester and joined a function band there before coming this way to West Norfolk because of work. Initially I joined TJ & The Switchblades, a Norwich-based band, which is when I started singing, but it wasn't long before I was putting Stone Pony together."

"I didn't expect my sons [Luke and Jake] to get into music, but perhaps it wasn't a big surprise as they were surrounded by it when they were growing up."

"Luke and Jake started playing with me at the Tudor Rose in Lynn, where I ran a jam session and they also played at the Providence Street Youth Centre when I ran music workshops."

The original intention for Stone Pony was to play traditional and early electric American blues, but over time the set lists have evolved and while blues is still often a major feature, the band can switch to rock, soul, pop, jazz, country, and rock 'n' roll depending on the venue and the event.



Stone Pony Band take a break after a rehearsal. Andy Graham is at the front with, from left, Jake Graham, Luke Graham and Alex Whyman. Photo by Adam Fairbrother MLNF16AF10143

The current line-up is Andy on guitar and vocals, backed up by Luke on guitar, Jake on drums and Alex Whyman on bass and vocals. Many other musicians play too when members of the core team are not available.

Andy says on his website: "We have an extensive repertoire of currently approaching 1,000 songs, but pride ourselves that the songs are performed in a flexible 'jam-like' approach. Songs can often sound different from gig to gig subject to what ideas spring up spontaneously from the musicians or perhaps feeding from the atmosphere of the gig."

"This makes the band extremely flexible and responsive, making a dynamic and exciting chemistry between the musicians. Incidentally, the name Stone Pony comes from a Charlie Patton song recorded in 1934 called Stone Pony Blues."

It was after Andy had moved

to West Norfolk (his job in industry bringing him here) that he took the plunge to earn a living from music and as well as his Stone Pony gigs, he started teaching.

He ran the teaching studio at East Coast Music in Lynn also for a while and workshops for Children's Services and he put on regular gigs for young bands including a showcase at Lynn Corn Exchange.

Now his tuition is from his own well-equipped studio at Ashwicken, which also includes recording facilities. Among those who have paid tribute to his skills are the Veck-Gilodi brothers and Lee Wilson from Deaf Havana, Jake Morrell and Harry Seaton.

Numerous other musicians who have been taught, or supported by through jam sessions and workshops now play in well-known local bands such as Jimmy Rockit, Movements, Genuine Fake, Jessie's Ghost, The Brink, The First and Hill-billy Cats (to name just a few).

And talking of local bands, the Stone Pony brothers are both in Vex, Jake is in Kingdom Keys, East Angles Brass Band and Collider and Luke has supported The Script.

While Andy has made his career out of music, his wife Helen runs a dog boarding business from their home at Ashwicken. He says: "We both pinch ourselves, sometimes, because we are both so privileged to be making a living out of things we just love doing."

The last word, however, is by James Veck-Gilodi from Deaf Havana, written on sleeve notes to Old Souls album: "I would like



Above: An early jam session in the lounge with his sons

Below: Andy says: This is me as a small child with mum. The interesting thing is my obsession with music even at that age meant I insisted on holding my favourite Everly Brothers record for the shot



to thank ...Andy Graham for teaching me how to fully understand and make the most of a guitar and persuading me to sing when I was 13 years old. Without you I truly doubt I

would be doing what I am doing now."

To contact Andy call on 01553 630747, or visit www.stoneponymusic.co.uk/wordpress



Andy Graham pointing out chords to a young Harry Seaton