



INTRODUCING...

This week's team member is...

JAN CYRKA, Founder of JamTrackCentral and Composer

What is your role with DIME ONLINE?

I'm involved in the JTC Degree Course as I am one of the directors at Jam Track Central. I've known Kevin and Bruce from DIME for a very long time and when they approached me about combining forces to create this amazing online BA(Hons) degree course I knew we were going to make something truly remarkable. Which we did!

Can you tell us the inspiration behind JamTrackCentral? And how you have built the website to be one of the leading Guitar sites in the UK?

Jonny Carpenter, Adrian Clark and I wanted a guitar tuition website that was different from the rest. We wanted only the very best guitarists - famous or unknown. We would treat them not as teachers but as valued artist musicians. We would take care of the tuition side of things so that they would retain their artist status. We also wanted to do something that gave the contributing artists some financial empowerment as well as a platform to show off their amazing talents. We did this by splitting the profits 50/50. The majority of our competitors pay a fee to the artist for their contributions. We now have over 70 artists/composers who are all paid excellent royalties twice a year. We all grow together.

Can you define a Jam Track Central guitarist? And what advice would you give to anyone who's career goal it is to be included in JTC?

I'm always asked this question. The simple answer is that you just have to be good at what YOU do. Don't concern yourself about how great the other players are. If you have got something unique, confident and ultimately.... listenable, then we want to hear from you. Ideally you have to learn a few extra skills like pointing a video camera at yourself and learning a few things about lighting a room etc. Or if you have charm you could always get a friend to do all that.

Can you tell us a bit about your 'day job'? What do you spend most of your time doing?

Half my time is spent writing, recording and mixing Library Music. This is music that is made easily available for film and TV editors (for example) to use on shows or films or commercials or radio shows. I tend to write mainly in an Indie Rock style. I've been composing loyally for one company for 25 years now - EMI Production Music. They are a great team who know how to get the tunes placed all over the world. I hardly ever know where my tunes are going to be used, but

it's nice now and again to recognise one of my creations in a film whilst I'm munching popcorn in the cinema...ha ha!

The rest of my time is spent working on JamTrackCentral and it's associated interests such as the JTC Degree Online course.

How did you get into the music industry? What was your first break?

A friend who was a producer invited me to London. He had a job putting together a band for project fronted by an American guy, Jeffrey Michelson. He dreamt up this wacky alter ego Max Gelt. To cut a long story short, I got the job as one of the guitarists in the band. We recorded an album and played a couple of gigs but it kept me busy for about 2 years. I relocated from Halifax, West Yorks to London and have been here ever since. Incidentally, although this was 30 years ago, Jeffrey and I are still great friends and speak on the phone at least twice a week. Also this is when I met Kevin Nixon from DIME. He signed Max and the Broadway Metal Choir to his record label.

We spent an awful lot of time at EZEE studios in North London rehearsing and recording. During that time I became good friends with the owner Graham Oakes who very kindly allowed me to spend time in the recording studio when there were no clients. I pretty much learned how to use everything in there after about 2 months or so and then Graham gave me a job (now the Max Gelt gig was over) as a studio engineer. I worked solidly for 6 months and one day, Mark Manning aka Zodiac Mindwarp, came in to record some demos. We hit it off and he asked me to join his band. I thought Ok why not? It sounds like fun. For the next three years I dressed up as a biker! It was a lot of fun and a great experience too.

Who were some of your influences as you progressed as a musician/ writer?

My greatest influences for my guitar playing were David Gilmour, Andy Latimer from Camel, Pat Travers, Steve Lukather and Steve Vai. Composition wise....gosh I can't really say. I just find anything with a good tune or a hook that has some kind of emotion attached to it will have an influence on me somewhere down the line.

What was the first record you ever bought?

I think it was called The Faust Tapes. It cost 49p in Woolworths. Total crap. It had a Bridget Riley style album cover that made your eyes freaked out if you stared at it too long. My brother in law, Steve Bradley, gave me 'Hold your Head' up by Argent as my first 45rpm disc. I liked that a lot.

Best experience in music – (recording or live etc.?)

It was really nice when Steve Vai came to my house to record for Guitarist magazine during the 12 years I was their cover mount CD producer. He had me doing this, doing that, changing strings for him. I didn't mind at all, I was just happy for him to be there. After about an hour or so he starts looking around the room and sees all my Jan Cyrka master tapes on the shelf. "You're not Jan Cyrka are you?" he asks looking a bit sheepish. I replied 'Yes I am'. "Ah, sorry man I've had you jumping up and down all afternoon without realising who you are. I've heard all your stuff, you're really good!"

To be honest, I was delighted to roadie for him but equally chuffed to receive a compliment from this guitar god.

What gear and equipment are you using (or any studio tips or favourite gear)?

Nowadays, my work is very diverse so I have lots of different gear and instruments, all of which have a roll and character. I don't have favourites anymore. But what I will say is that the guys at Victory Amplification are making some truly wonderful gear. And I love the guitars made by Dave at Eternal Guitars. Recording wise; Neve 1073 and SM 57 / Neumann U87. You just can't go far wrong with these classics.

What's your top tip for being a professional musician in the modern age?

Turn up on time and be prepared.

Be nice. Be positive. No one wants to work with a moaning grumble bumps.

Any last words?

Be helpful to anyone who needs or asks for help.