

Karl Gans: “Get Your Timing Right”

Life-long drummer shares stellar advice and explains some history about Ross Neilsen and the Sufferin’ Bastards.

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Karl Gans endorses Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals.

As a solo guitarist, I’ve never expressed interest in the drums. I don’t think I’ve ever even talked to a drummer. I had no clue what type of person they would be. But Karl Gans set a darn good standard. He’s been performing / recording for 35 years and you wouldn’t question it based on what he says and how he says it. The well-known Fredericton drummer has played in all sorts of bands, but is best known for being the backbone of “Ross Neilsen and the Sufferin’ Bastards”. Karl is a humble, laid back and likeable guy. He thoughtfully answered all my questions with solid depth. His mix of knowledge and sense of humour makes for a great interviewee. If you’re a guitarist, a bass player, or any other type of musician, don’t think that only drummers will benefit from this article. Gans shares valuable advice for all musicians and provides interesting history on his band.

So Karl, I know you work at Tony’s Music Box, and I’m sure there are some pros... and some cons of working at a music store as a musician, what are some of those pros and cons?

Well, the pros are definitely bigger than the cons in a lot of ways. First of all, there's a large community of musicians, so you're constantly making connections in terms of music. I teach as well so I also have a steady stream of students that I get to know quite well. There's a hip environment in music stores and I appreciate that. The employee discount is pretty nice too.

Are there any cons? I bet you hear Stairway to Heaven quite a bit.

Ha-ha, yes there's definitely cons. For me, the biggest con tends to be scheduling. Right now, since we're going through the 'plague of the century', you don't get too many gigs. But when you're working a job as a musician, you have to keep your scheduling in mind. Say if you have a Friday night gig that runs super late and you don't get home until 4 am after you pack up all your gear and then you have to be at work for 9 o'clock. So that's a con! But really, I don't have anything to complain about. It's a pretty sweet job, especially if you're a musician.

I've been playing guitar seriously for about 4 years now, and I wanted to know from a drummers perspective, what's one complaint you have for guitarists in general?

Well, I could generalize it to all musicians. You don't need to play super loud ha-ha. You don't need to crank up that 100-watt Marshall to an ear splitting, ear bleeding level. But that goes for drummers too. You don't need to beat everything so hard so that it's painful for people. And just listen and feel the people you're playing with and try to mix yourself in. But I don't really have a complaint for one individual group of musicians. Except for maybe banjo players... I'm just kidding around. I don't have any complaints for a single group of musicians.

So, I know you play with Ross Neilsen and The Sufferin' Bastards, how long have you known Ross? What's your relationship like?

I've known Ross for quite a long time, he actually used to work at Tony's a few years back! But I met Ross sometime in the mid 90's. We started working together sometime around 2006. But we had played together in jams just around town.

Is that how you guys met? Just being around the same places and jammin' around town?

Yeah, pretty much. You play guitar so you probably know what it's like. You get a group of friends or colleagues that you hang out with and you meet people, and you say hey we should play together sometime, and that's how it starts.

Cool. I didn't want to ask what your favorite song or favorite artist was because I know that's constantly changing as a musician, so instead, what's on your record player right now? What are you into?

Oh Jeez... I've been listening to a lot of improvisational music. That can be some pretty weird and creepy crawly stuff. But in the same breath, I like a lot of pop music. I just listened to a Bruce Cockburn called Mummy Dust. So that's some pretty not experimental/ weird music. I just listened to a Chieftains album, which is super traditional Irish music. I just listened to some King Crimson. I like music, if it's good (and by that I mean if it covers all the bases; if it's in tune, it's

got good time and all that stuff) then I like it. There's some exceptions to super mainstream stuff, but for the most part it's not my thing.

I read that back in 2012, the Sufferin' Bastards had a line-up change in the bass section (Will Pacey took over from Shawn Worden) What's it like bringing someone new into the band, especially a trio, where everyone becomes pretty close? Was the band chemistry easy to regain?

Well, it's always quite difficult. When you tour and record with a band for that long, you really get that band vibe goin'. And like you said, it's a trio, and one person is a huge chunk of that sound. So when Will came to play for us, he was a very competent player and could fit himself in very quickly. It was a group effort between me, Ross and Will to get things up and running fast. We worked on "Tops and Tails" a lot which is very important for a bands sound. It's basically the beginning and end of tunes. It's the first and last thing people hear, so if you have that stuff tight, it's going to have a really big impact on your sound. We had a good idea of the type of bass player we wanted in the band. If a killer blues or funk player or country player came along but didn't match the vibe of the band, we probably would've stayed away from them. The more versatile you are, the better off you are. Just because you're going to fit in to just about anywhere.

What is one piece of advice you'd give to all young, aspiring musicians?

Get your time together. Timing is the most important aspect of music. When a guitarist bends a note, it's going to go out of tune for a second, but it's not that noticeable. But if you're out of time, if your one is different than everyone else's, it'll be sketchy and weird. A lot of audience's don't necessarily know the in's and out's of music, but they know when something sounds bad. So yeah, get your timing right. Oh, and get a driver's license.

