



Meet The Teacher

Been thinking about finding a local drum teacher to get your playing shipshape? Danny Pearson explains how he uses graded exams, playing to music and strong technique from day one to help drummers reach their goals

Words: Gemma Hill **Images:** Tracey Jayne Photography



The UK has a wealth of local drum teachers who dedicate their lives to helping students learn how to play. Danny Pearson is a fine example of this – he teaches in Bournemouth and runs a Mike Dolbear affiliated drum school, as well as coaching many students to the top 40, finals and even to win the Young Drummer of the Year competition. So what does it take to nurture the talent of these young drummers and what should you expect from a drum lesson?

Tell us about how you started playing and built your teaching business...

I've been playing drums for 35 years and professionally for 25 years. I started playing when I was about 10 years old. I saved up my pocket money and hired a snare drum and cymbal from a local music shop, and then spent all weekend playing. I have to thank my dad, because he realised I had a natural talent and bought me my first drum kit soon after. He then got me lessons with Bill Scott, a local professional drummer who really inspired me, and for the next seven years taught me all he knew. By 15 I was performing in local venues in bands and alongside a lot of experienced musicians. From there I went on to play all over the UK and Europe.

I started teaching when I was 25 after a friend approached me for lessons. My teaching business took off quickly from there, and after just six months I was teaching full time. I've now been teaching in the Bournemouth area for 20 years and have a small studio in Verwood. I also teach in a couple of schools in the New Forest. Recently, I teamed up with Mike Dolbear to run his affiliated drum school, which is based at Absolute Music in Poole, and I post a monthly lesson on mikedolbear.com, which you can find in the 'education' section.

You've taught a lot of finalists for the Young Drummer Of The Year competition. What qualities do you think you have as a teacher that have helped those students reach that level?

I always teach them to think musically. When I'm putting solos together with the students I think of it like a song. I always teach my students the rudiments and encourage them to explore numerous possibilities with each pattern to expand their vocabulary.

I'm also really into Latin and jazz rhythms and the independence/co-ordination challenges they can bring, so from the beginning I'll challenge them technically. I've studied most styles of music over the years so I'll recommend a lot of albums to check out too. You can learn so much from listening. Also, I'm still out every week playing in a lot of different bands and I think it's important for them to see that. You need to apply what you learn but be musical with it.

I teach each and every student as an individual, understanding their capabilities and where I can push them to in the time we have. If a student's goal is to reach the final of YDOTY then I'll take it very seriously. If they put the hours in then so will I. In between lessons I will get them to film the solo we are working on and send it to me so I can give them feedback on things to improve before their next lesson.

In 2010, my student Ben Clark won the competition and that inspired some of my other students to enter. Mike Braye (2011) and Zeke Skinner (2015) both made the top 40, and, just two years on from his first drum lesson with me, Nathan Wallington reached the 2012 final and a year later followed on to the 2013 final. It was an absolute pleasure working with those drummers and seeing how much they improved with that intense practice.

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What advice can you give to readers who feel in need of inspiration with their drumming?

I'd say find a teacher if you don't have one – someone to give you ideas and feedback on what you're doing. A good teacher should inspire you. Maybe book onto a masterclass where you get to see the best players up close. Also, I find that grades are great for focusing a student. They get a good sense of achievement when they pass and receive their certificate; it's good to have a goal. If you do the Trinity syllabus then there are a lot of different styles to play too.

What are your favourite drum DVDs or books?

I always recommend *Secret Weapons For The Modern Drummer* by Jojo Mayer. This DVD has everything you need for hand technique. My favourite books to use are Jim Chapin's *Advanced Techniques For The Modern Drummer*, *Stick Control* by George Lawrence Stone, *Groove Alchemy* by Stanton Moore, Tommy Igoe's *Groove Essentials* and the Trinity College London and Rockschool grade books.

Who have been your most influential teachers?

Bill Scott for getting me started and more recently Thomas Lang and Jojo Mayer. I've also been working recently with Pete Cater on traditional grip, which I've never really studied before.


Do you differentiate your teaching for different ways and types of learners?

Yes, everyone is different. Everyone learns and absorbs information differently. I always find out their goals and over time the best way to achieve them. Some people learn faster by reading, some by ear. I teach everyone to read music, I just use different ways to get there!

Do you have any practice methods that you use yourself?

I think the main thing is to know what you want to achieve and then you can work out the best plan for progress. I've always been into the idea of an hour a day, five times a week is better than five hours once a week; you will absorb and process information quicker that way without getting tired. Also, I think it's really important to listen to music – that was why I wanted to learn the instrument, to play music. I always tell students that are learning grade songs to make sure they actually just listen to it a few times before they start practicing it; to hear what they are about to play makes a big difference to how quickly they reach their goal. I also get them into working on a pad with a metronome, going through singles, doubles, paradiddles etc. in a routine that I'll put together for them. I still use that myself at least three times a week for an hour or two to keep my hands in shape.

How do you keep yourself motivated to keep improving as a drummer?

Through the affiliation with Mike Dolbear in Bournemouth, we've been putting on masterclasses with some great drummers, including Stanton Moore, Chris Coleman and Jojo Mayer. Just watching them in action keeps me motivated and inspires me to improve my own playing. Also the Ultimate Drum Experience courses I've been on and the masterclasses I've attended in the last five years have really helped me focus on areas I can improve on and therefore pass onto my students. I've always been one of those people who is never happy with where they're at and I always look to improve. I still love playing and practising the instrument and appreciate that I get to do this for a job. 

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