

Ian King Transcription

Tom: So shall we start right back at the beginning? I like hearing about people's backgrounds, it gives a better picture of everything and how it all goes together, so where did you grow up originally?

Ian: I'm originally from the Isle of White, so Level 42 territory. Obviously you have to get into Mark King if you live down there, it's just sort of obligatory! I grew up there, I got into playing bass when I was about twelve. I think I wanted to play electric guitar, I think my friend has just got an electric guitar for Christmas and I really wanted that so my parents said 'okay, we'll get you one but you've got to start on a Spanish guitar,' a nylon string, 'to start with.' They got me a teacher round the corner and he turned out to be a professional bass player, and a really good one! So I would go for these lessons and in the corner was this really cool black MusicMan StingRay 5-string bass guitar, which I would just ogle at for the whole lesson. Then after a while my parents got me a Columbus bass guitar and I started to go to lessons on that. The idea was the alternate between the nylon string one week and then bass guitar that next and in the end I just kept telling them 'it's bass guitar this week.' As it went on I did more and more of that and got in to playing in bands on the Isle of White. I went to the Isle of White Youth Jazz Orchestra I think it was. I started learning to read music and going to that. Then I eventually went off the uni and I was seventeen going into eighteen and that was my start!

Tom: So when did you actually start playing with other people after you started getting lessons?

Ian: Probably at about fifteen or sixteen I started playing in soul bands. One thing I missed out is that I also did a job in a holiday camp down there. That was a really good grounding because I got that when I was sixteen and I kind of did it instead of A Levels. I'd started A Levels and they were boring me to tears!

Tom: You mean you got a job playing music?

Ian: Yeah, I played in the house band in Harcourt Sands, in Puckpool on the Isle of White. It was a little four or five piece band just reading charts each night and backing cabaret acts. It was a real baptism in fire in terms of sight reading music.

Tom: So that was any kind of style, whatever came along?

Ian: Yeah, it's all light entertainment so it tended to be more pop and soul stuff. Each evening you would start off with a set for the kids with a load of kiddy music, and then you would do a set for the really old people so you would do a load of ballroom sort of music. Then you would do a couple of poppy sets with the band and in between that you would do the cabaret artists. Funnily enough, I thought the hardest acts to back were actually the magicians! Because they

would be doing a little act and not much is going on apart from something with their hands so they would need some funky music in the background. I used to find that they would bring up some really hard charts for that, they would probably be the hardest; harder than someone just coming to do singing like a soul singer because that would usually be song you knew. It was a really good grounding actually and I did that when I was sixteen and seventeen, and then went off to Uni after that.

Tom: That does sound like a really good grounding! From what you were saying, every night that was a lot of music for you to play.

Ian: Yes it really got me reading. I sort of got my way through the audition for it just about okay, but even the pad for the band was hundreds of charts. The bandleader would just shout out a number you'd have to quickly get to that number in this huge pad of music and you would just be reading every night. It got my sight-reading up fairly good quite quickly.

Tom: So you did that for a couple of years?

Ian: Yeah, that's right. It's funny, because there are different ways of getting to Music College and into music, and that was the way that got me fairly good. It got me so that I played a fairly hard tune for my audition for my music degree and I think it was that grounding at the holiday camp reading all this music, that got me good enough to do that. But I suppose it's different for different people.

Tom: Do you know if there is much of that kind of thing around at the moment?

Ian: I don't know, I mean I do hear of similar kind of work that is the cruise ships. I often hear of people looking for bands or musos for the cruise ships, that's a very similar set of music, the sort of stuff you would be asked to do. I'm not how many of the holiday camps have bands these days, it's been a while. But I know the cruise ships are still doing lots of stuff like that. They would be in-house shows as well, which is sort of like West End shows on a small scale. It's perfect grounding because you would be playing to click tracks and backing tracks and it would be just like doing a mini West End show. It's so handy to do!

Tom: It's very interesting the whole cruise ship thing. Have you ever done one?

Ian: I haven't myself but I think it's a really good thing to do. I hear of quite a few players that have just come out of Music College and they're desperate to get straight into the West End. Don't get me wrong, they might be fine and well good enough to do it, but I think it's a question of dealing with the pressure of these higher profile shows. I think it's a little bit dangerous to go straight into the West End because it is a high profile thing and if you go wrong, if it doesn't go well then it's going to get noted and you won't do very well from then on. But doing a cruise ship for a while and maybe doing some pantos are a really good way to practice what you're going to do when you get to the West End later on. I just think it's important to work your way up, and pay your dues really, just because it prepares you. There's a lot of stuff that flies at you when you do these shows

and not a lot of it is always to do with the music. What I mean by that is you get into an environment where suddenly the lighting might be weird. It might be really low light, you can't see very well, you can't see the dots on top of your bass very well. Suddenly you put the headphones on and the mix is completely different to what you practiced to or what you're expecting. There could be just a million things that are there to put you off. They're all the things you've got to deal with it's not necessarily the actual music on the page, although that's a big thing as well. Even things like how I'm going to turn the pages in time and how I'm going to prepare the music physically on the stand. There's just a million different things that can throw you and it can go badly wrong if you get those things wrong. I've heard of young guys come and sit in, I think there was a drummer came and sat in with a drummer I was working with, and he said "I've been offered a panto but I'm not doing that. I'll dep it out loads if I do do it," and I thought 'you're getting it wrong there.' This is a key time to practice what you're going to do on a bigger stage. I think it's important to do these smaller shows, touring shows and things like that to work your way up.

Tom: Yeah, it makes sense to hone the musical skills and everything you need before you get into a situation where all the other things come at you to make sure the music is still there, because that's the main thing.

Ian: Essentially, you want to go wrong in an environment that's not so important. If you just go straight into a top West End show with a top MD and you can't handle the pressure and something goes wrong, you won't really get much of a second chance. That's just how it is, because there are so many people trying to do it. So do a panto or something, a low-key thing, and if a few things go wrong it's not the end of the world.

Tom: Absolutely. Did you do anything similar towards that route, building yourself up, paying your dues?

Ian: Yeah, like I said I did the holiday camp thing to start with, I did three years of Music College. Towards the end of it, there wasn't an enormous amount of playing, not enough for what I wanted to do in my course, so I went along to NYJO and I would sit in. It was NYJO2 actually that I sat in, which was more of the rehearsal band. There was a guy, Janek Gwizdala was the bass player at the time. I remember sitting in with him, and then he moved on to do other stuff and I went into NYJO2. What was good about that was, every Saturday morning was, again, just more reading charts and getting used to that sort of stuff. So that was a good way to get back into things, and actually it's through the people I met at NYJO that I got into a bunch of function bands. I did a million functions up and down the country for absolutely years with some great players, some really good guys. I did that for quite a while, I'd done a few touring shows, various sorts of things. I remember doing cheesy sort of Latin pop shows and I was in disco bands, I did a salsa band that was really good.

Tom: So pretty much everything!

Ian: Yeah, I just did a lot of different things really, and a good function band is

again just a great way to get you playing lots of different stuff. There would always be a set at the beginning whilst people were having dinner, which would be the jazz set, so you would just be getting the Real Book out and reading down a bunch of charts for that. And then later on you would have more poppy stuff, a real wide range of music that you're asked to play. Again, it's all about getting your hands round a bunch of different tunes and getting used to how you're going to sound doing them. It's something I always say about these West End shows because again, I'm sort of banging on about it, but a lot of people want to come straight out of College and straight into it but the whole point of a West End show is that there will be lots of different styles. The whole point, musically, of a lot of these shows is there will be a swing section, there will be a funky section, there will be a rocky section and you have to have played that before. You can't just be learning whilst you're there, like 'how am I going to play this,' you need to bring something to the party that you've done before.

Tom: So with all shows, because sometimes in the shows there are sections of styles that only last for four bars, eight bars, so you've got to be really on it with all that stuff?

Ian: Yeah, I guess so. You've just got to be able to pile straight in and also, things might change during rehearsal periods and they might suddenly throw something in and you've just got to have an idea of what they're talking about. I'm not even talking about anything crazily, technically hard to play, I'm talking about, you know, there might be a rhumba section or something. You've just got to know what they're talking about, you've got to know the basics of what a bass player might play, or whatever instrument you are playing, in the instance. I'm not necessarily talking about high level technical playing here, like 'we're now going to do this tapping section', it's more about knowing about what's going on, just knowing what you're talking about.

Tom: So you feel like you need a broad enough grounding so that if something comes in and it is a rhumba, you know what a rhumba is rather than 'I'll just do a generic Latin pattern that I know', that won't work in that.

Ian: Yeah, you just want to sound authentic, have a stab at sounding like you know what you're doing really, that's the idea!

Tom: Every person I've talked to so far, this comes up every time. I ask them about their back ground and the bottle neck of NYJO, everybody seems to have gone to there and met most of the guys they know from there and then, like you say, do function bands and cut their teeth doing that and paying their dues. It seems to be a running theme. I don't know if it's more now these days, or whether it's always been like that, but people are very impatient to get into the bigger stuff. Understandably, but maybe don't want to cut their teeth so much.

Ian: Yeah, that's it. It's funny, because years ago, you go back a few decades, there was plenty of session about, and the better players would be busy doing sessions and the West End stuff would be thought of as maybe a step down. What's ended up happening is the session scene is getting smaller and smaller and it's just a few

top guys that will be doing those things, and basically the most regular work you can get at a fairly good level is the West End stuff, so a lot more people are gravitating towards it. I think there's just more interest in the West End stuff now, and a lot of people want to do the short cut to it, and it just can't be done! I just don't think it can be done. I mean you could do it. You could go in and have a go, but you're just not going to sound ready. MD's know it; they can hear it a mile off. There's a fantastic MD that I've worked for for the past five years called Nick Finlow, who's basically one of the best around. Amazing MD and ridiculous player so it's just wonderful, and he can hear, when we're discussing for example a dep that's come in, and he can hear if someone doesn't sound quite ready yet. You're not specifically slagging off their playing or saying he did a specific thing wrong, they just don't sound very ready to be doing this level. By that I mean, for example, simple things like volumes. Making sure your volume is correct for each song, and maybe trying to keep it quite even when it needs to be. Some people might move up and down a bit, when they're not so confident on a song play in quieter and on another song when they're really confident they'll just pile in really loud, it's just not very helpful. I think it gets noted by the better MD's as to whether you sound like someone who's got a grounding in all the different styles. There's no bypassing it really, it gets noted.

Tom: So when you were saying it's quite cutthroat, if you come in and you don't do a good job you'll be blacklisted a little bit. Have you seen people come in who have done an okay job, they're good but they're not ready yet? Have you seen those kind of people come in and have a go, wait a couple of years and then get back into it? It's not a case of, if you go too soon, you've ruined it?

Ian: I think it depends on your attitude. If you go in kind of humble and you give it a go and you do the show right, you've obviously put the effort in to learn the pad well, but you maybe don't sound quite ready yet, then I don't think you've done anything to be blacklisted. That sounds quite extreme. The MD, for example, might say 'let them slip down the list a bit for now,' but it wouldn't be a never again situation.

Tom: But you're still on a list, as well?

Ian: Yeah, but it might be a good idea for that person to go off and do some other stuff to get a bit more experience, and then come back on maybe the next show you do. But alternatively, if a player came in really cocky and obviously hadn't done the homework and basically messed the show up for no other reason then they messed it up themselves, then that might get seen a bit worse. They probably wouldn't get another chance. So it can cutthroat, but I don't think people are too unfair about the whole thing. But if you imagine, there's only a handful of shows going around in London and there must be a hell of a lot of players wanting to do them. So in terms of the actual playing I think you have to be up to speed!

Tom: Yeah, it makes sense. The amount of money that's involved in all the shows, there must be 'X' amount of people wanting to make sure that it's perfect every night so it's understandable.

Ian: Yeah.

Tom: So, regardless of how old someone is or how experienced, is there an accepted process of how you get onto somebody's list? How you get into the bubble of the West End?

Ian: That's a good question really, because there is sort of. Essentially there is the stepping stones of: start by doing a bunch of bands of your own, then work up to maybe doing some touring shows – you could even dep on a touring show, then get your own touring show. Then you would start to try and work your way on to people's dep lists in town. Essentially, it usually comes from recommendation. People will want to know what you've done so far and it has to be the same vein as what they're about to do. What I'm saying is if you're doing a West End show, they want to know that you've been doing a similar type of work at a lower level and that it's then right for you to be moving up to this level. For example, if it was a bass player who was in a heavy rock band and they suddenly wanted to come into the West End they wouldn't be right for it. They want to know you've been doing the right sort of work and on the right trajectory to get up to there.

Tom: Do people check you out or do they talk to you directly?

Ian: How do you mean?

Tom: Like if you've been recommended is that good enough?

Ian: Yeah, I think what they would probably do is talk to the MD of any shows you've done before, and also a lot of the fixers who fix music in the West End also fix the tours so it's a lot of the same people fixing the bands. So you could basically do a bit of digging and find out about the person.

Tom: Once you're on a list, is your relationship with a specific fixer quite key to getting other stuff after the first thing you get?

Ian: I guess so, yeah. There's a few fixers around and they will want to see that you've been doing the right stepping-stones. They wouldn't put you straight into a top show. They would want to see that you've done some other stuff first, and I think you do have to pay your dues. There's a few fixers around, there's one in particular I can think of that I've done lesser shows for years ago and they've seen me move my way up, and they will put me up for better things now having seen me pay my dues. Everyone needs to see that you're doing all the right steps to be ready. Like I said, when you get to the top stuff it's not necessarily harder music, it's just there's less room for error. It's bigger venues, it's a bigger deal, there's more money involved, the spotlights more on the music and there's no real room for error. It's just got to be right all the time.

Tom: So you've got to build it up?

Ian: Yeah, you've got to cut your teeth elsewhere.

Tom: I wasn't really aware of where fixers went particularly, but if you're saying that they fix bands for a range of shows going from the top stuff down, there really is no way for you to do a shortcut if they want to watch you go through and they're the ones giving you the work.

Ian: That's it, and they won't like if you turn down lesser stuff and you're just saying 'No, I want to do top stuff,' and you're twenty, they're not going to take to that very well. They want to see that you're paying your dues and cutting your teeth on smaller shows and working your way up. Only at that point will they put you up for the better stuff.

Tom: In your experience is there an age range of when people start getting into the higher stuff?

Ian: Yeah, that's a good question. I would say it tends to be people in their mid to late twenties are starting depping on shows, and then late twenties into early thirties people start getting their own shows. There's obviously exceptions everywhere, but that's a general theme I'd say.

Tom: Yeah, the exceptions are probably a bit of an issue because people hear about the exceptions.

Ian: Yeah, and then they go 'what about him?' But I'm just thinking generally, that seems to be the way because again you need to have spent a few years doing the other stuff and it just takes that long. I think you're a bit more mature and a bit more ready for it really.

Tom: It's interesting to hear you say that because even mid twenties, if people go to Music College, or even if they haven't, that's three, four years after they've actually finished Music College they would even start to do certain things. It sounds like more work than people are aware of.

Ian: I think I was maybe twenty-six, twenty-seven when I started depping in town and I did the 'Mamma Mia' gig. A person recommended me, because that's just really good pop songs and I was known as a good pop player I suppose, so I got put up for that. That went quite well, and then I did a bit of depping on Billy Elliot and maybe one or two others. Then one of the fixers for one of those shows had an opening on a new poppy show, it was called 'Daddy Cool' which was all the music of Boney M., and they just thought of me for that. I must have been getting into late twenties kind of thing.

Tom: So in between, because you've had several shows, which have been your chair since then, have you been depping on other shows in between all of those as well? Do you think that's still important?

Ian: I guess so. There's two camps really. Some people just play their own show and might just get out to do other gigs, and I know other people who have their own show and also like to dep on loads of other shows as well. I've been more

the first camp to be honest. I've been more just doing my own show and I might go out to do a few more gigs on stage and maybe some sessions but I don't tend to dep on other shows that much. The one exception was that I did 'Hair' a few years ago. It was for a fab bass player called Andy Pask, who one of the absolute best around, and also the drummer was Neal Wilkinson, who's just an absolutely sublime drummer. The opportunity to play with him was just too good to miss, so I got involved in that.

Tom: So it was more that then wanting to play the show for you?

Ian: It was really, yeah. It was a good show as well actually. It was good music, it was a really good MD whom ironically I'm about to play for again on my next show, which starts in a couple of months, so that's worked out well. Depping on that show was where I met this particular MD and that went quite well. He used me on a bunch of sessions and he's remembered me a few years later for this other show that's just come up and I'm going to be doing that soon. So in fact that worked quite well. Other than that, I think I've only had one six-month gap between having shows in the last twelve years.

Tom: Wow, that's incredibly good!

Ian: Yeah, I haven't had a lot of opportunity to do a lot of depping really.

Tom: How does that work for you specifically for that? Has it just been luck of when one show closes another opens or do you swap from one to another before it closes?

Ian: A bit of both, really. What I would say is, because that sounds quite fluky really, ten, twelve years of constant shows. But what's happened is I've either moved with an MD, he or she has taken me with them, or a drummer. What I mean by that is, for example, let me think back now, I did 'Hairspray' a few years ago, that was about eleven years ago, I did 'Hairspray' for a run and then the MD of that too me and the drummer on to the next show, which was 'Sister Act', so we did that with him. After 'Sister Act' I did 'Shrek', and I'll tell you what it was, the assistant MD of 'Sister Act' went on to be the MD of 'Shrek', he's a fab MD now, he's doing a lot of shows. He then thought of me for the 'Shrek' show and then I met a really fab drummer on that called Tim Goodyer, who's pretty much the best around. We then from 'Shrek' moved on to 'The Book of Mormon', so I went with the drummer. Usually the drummer gets asked first out of the whole band and he would have probably recommended me for 'The Book of Mormon'. So then I moved on to 'The Book of Mormon' and then he left a bit earlier than me to do 'Aladdin', but the MD of 'The Book of Mormon' is my current MD on 'Dreamgirls'. When he moved to 'Dreamgirls' he took me as well. So literally every show I've done I've either moved with the drummer I've just worked with or the MD I've just worked with. For a bass player specifically they are the two key roles in your career. Basically, if you get to know a bunch of good drummers and a bunch of good MD's then you're doing okay, I think. And actually, I'm on 'Dreamgirls' now with a fab drummer called Ed Carlile, but the next show I'm moving on to, which is 'Hamilton', is going to be with the drummer from the

previous two shows, with Tim Goodyer again. So we'll get reunited again on that and we sound good together and we get on well as mates. So that's all good, and that will be with the MD of 'Hair' which I depped on while I was doing 'Sister Act'.

Tom: So you can trace it all the way back to one relationship?

Ian: Yeah, there's a line.

Tom: That's great, but you obviously did an amazing job on the stuff you did, which is why people wanted to take you along. How important do you think playing verses personality and social relationships with those people, how important do you think that is alongside your playing?

Ian: That's a good question. There's a couple of key things. I think you've got to be a really solid player and there's got to be something about you playing that's a bit exciting. It's got to have a bit of vibe to it but without going too far. If you just want to walk in and be the star of the show then it's not really going to go well. You've still got to be a team player. You've got to be a really solid player but who bring a bit to the party as well, so you've got to have a bit of vibe about you. And alongside that I think you need to be a steady-eddy kind of character and you've just got to be amiable. You've just got to be friendly, chatty to people, you know, you're going to be sat with people eight shows a week and you need to get on well with people. Often you finish the matinee show on a Saturday, you look left and right and whoever is sat there, you've got to go and have dinner with them. You're hanging out with these people a lot, so I think that will come into it, probably fifty-fifty the playing and the personality. I think if people are thinking about players for a show, it's so important. Do I want to sit with this person? If they're a raging alcoholic and really violent then that's not going to go well!

Tom: Yeah, I can imagine that if you're an amazing player, literally the best, it doesn't really matter if you're not a nice person to hang out with or you've got a bad vibe in the pit, like you're saying, you can probably get on a show but I can't imagine that they would do as you've done and somebody would specifically take them with them to another show.

Ian: That's it, and I think also being really consistent sounds boring, but it's just so important. You've got to be able to bring what I've just said, the solid playing with a bit of vibe about it, has got to be consistent eight a week. You can't be like, 'on Thursday I had a really good show, that went really well, and the others I was just calling it in' as they say. You've got to bring something to this gig every single time you do it. When you think about it also, there's people out the front there that have saved up money and paid their hard-earned cash to come and see the show so you've got a responsibility to make it sound as good as you can.

Tom: Even on a Tuesday evening.

Ian: Yeah.

Tom: Maybe if you're not feeling it, you've still got to step up?

Ian: Completely. You've either got to step up and give it one hundred percent, or if you're not well enough, you've got to get someone to come and dep for you who is that night, and make sure that you're dep list is as strong or near to as strong as you are. I just think that's really important. Again, I think your consistency on a gig is really important because it gets noticed if you're up and down. I think that's one thing I'm quite into, actually. It's funny, I think I'm maybe the right personality, I'm quite into honing what I do in terms of my technique and the way I play the simplest things. I'm really into working on my playing day in, day out and so doing a show works really well for my personality because you're playing a lot of the same stuff, but you can sort of use it as practice. You can get better as a player by playing the same thing over and over and there's always room for maneuver in shows. That's one of the questions people ask me, 'don't you get bored just playing the same songs all the time?' but a lot of these shows, there'll be parts of the music that's written a little bit more open for you to do your thing on. Or you can interpret a chart, this is something I think why maybe I might have been booked over the years, especially on a string of pop shows, is that I will take a chart and interpret the part, just slightly tweak it. If I see something written I'll think 'actually, what you mean is this,' and I'll just slightly tweak it to make it how I would do it and, again, just bring something to the party.

Tom: Do you feel like you can only do that because you have the experience of 'X' amount of years before you got into that doing all these different styles?

Ian: Exactly that. For example, there might be a song and you can tell 'oh, this song is based on 'Good Times' by Chic,' you can tell that this has been written with that song in mind. So you need to know that original song and you need to be able to clock that that musical writer had that vibe of song in mind when they were writing this song. So when you approach that song, if you put a fill in, you can do something that springs to mind from that original record, so you're bringing something that's stylistically correct to the part.

Tom: But nobody tells you to do that?

Ian: No, see this is the sort of fine line. You've got to be able to interpret and embellish a part enough to give it a little something, a little bit of magic on it, but without going so far that you're suddenly trying to make it all about you. Especially as a bass player it's a real kind of art with some of the best bass players. I remember going to see Randy Hope-Taylor play a band in a local club in London. A guitarist I was playing with at 'Hairspray' took me down to see him and they were playing a bunch of covers, just really groovy stuff, like a Jocelyn Brown tune. What I noticed about his playing, I mean it's amazing playing all the time, but his specifically good thing I liked about his playing was that he found gaps in the music to put little embellishments in. So he wouldn't step on the singer's toes, for example. The singer would be doing their thing, there might be a gap in what they're doing and then out would come this beautiful bass fill. It would be where maybe we wouldn't always think to put them but I just that 'that's a real master at work. He really knows what he's doing. He knows how to

sound special, but without stepping on other people's toes.' As a bass player, that's a real key thing because you're a supportive instrument, you're not a soloing instrument but you still want to sound good! There's a real art to it and I find that's important in shows as well. As the years have gone on I've worked out more about, you know, listen to the vocals more than you normally would because they're the bits that the MD doesn't want you to step on their toes. If you start doing huge fills over the soloist singing, they're going to hate it! So you've got to find the gaps and you've got to find your moment to do your thing, and then you've got to get out of the way.

Tom: So having a broader awareness of everything else that's going on at the same time?

Ian: Completely, exactly that.

Tom: I don't think it's in every show, but in some shows, am I right in saying you're on in-ears, you've got click or you've got track in your ears because it's not all done live from the pit?

Ian: Yeah, we're playing everything live and we've always got headphones on because we're monitoring on headphones, but I would say at least fifty percent of the music is usually on click and there's also track playing as well, usually alongside those things, and there will be other sections where you're just following the MD. I'd say it's a pretty even mix these days of playing to click with a lot of extra track on it and just playing with an MD conducting you.

Tom: When you've got that mix in your ear, thinking about what you've just said about having an awareness of everything, has that changed over the years to what you want specifically to hear? And what do you actually listen to?

Ian: Yeah. You've got these fabulous personal mixers that you get now. You can have any mix you want, so obviously you've got all the instruments on there and you can turn them up and down as you please so you can set up your own mix. It's true a lot of rhythm section players tend to, as a bass player for example, you might have a load of drums, bass and guitar, a little bit of keys in there as well and then you might have the brass a little bit lower and you might have the vocals really low. But as the years have gone on I've started to make sure I listen to the brass lines more so I don't step on their toes. They might be doing something really nice, you've got to let them do their thing and I'll have the vocals a lot louder. This current show, 'Dreamgirls', that I'm doing, is this very soulful kind of thing and the singers are really doing their thing on it and it's a big part of it so I have that quite loud now actually. It makes you play less a lot of the time. If you're not listening to everything, you're not getting the full picture of what's going on. It's important.

Tom: So it's more about finding your moment and then doing what needs to be done when there's not that gap?

Ian: Exactly that, completely.

Tom: Going back to about being consistent when you're not filling in all those gaps, do you feel like that was something that you worked on and you built up through working on some smaller shows when you were younger?

Ian: Yeah, I think so. I suppose an example of that would be playing to click, just getting used to that. Even the holiday camp thing, I remember the way we used to play to click at holiday camp, he was all into that. We didn't have in-ear monitors at that point; we just had monitor speakers, little wedge monitors in front of us. So a way to get the click to us was he would often put a cowbell in, so we'd be playing along to a cowbell! That's something that I've always been in positions where I'm playing to track, so I think by default you're always working on your time. I kind of pride myself on having fairly good time.

Tom: Like you're saying, about half and half these days are to click and not, so it's important to have solid time without relying on the click?

Ian: Yeah, and having the confidence. Some of the hardest things to play in West End shows are the really simple but exposed bits. There might be a bit where it's a ballad where it's the singer and maybe a bit of piano and the bass, and the bass might be the majority of the movement that's happening. It's hugely exposed. So just the placement of simple notes, it's probably the most nerve-wracking part of doing it, especially as a dep. You might come into something new and suddenly you're really exposed. You can hear yourself in this enormous room, you touch your bass and it's thundering in the room. Over the years you get more and more confident with: 'I'm going to place this note where I think it is, and I', just going to confidently do it.' You can't really do it in any half measures; you've just got to go for it.

Tom: Thinking about the depping process now, if somebody was coming in to dep for you, first of all how would you meet someone new who was going to dep for you, how would that go?

Ian: There's a few guys that have been regulars throughout my last ten, twelve years and there's also a few new guys that have come in. It's always recommendation, really. I suppose in a way there's a key group of players that do each instrument in town and I suppose there's a little bit of helping each other out, if you know someone's not got a show at the moment but they've had a show for years before.

Tom: So it's not like all deps are young guys. If someone doesn't have a show currently they're come in and dep?

Ian: Yeah, for example there's a guy I know who did 'Jersey Boys' for nine years and suddenly he's gone from solid paycheck for nine years to suddenly out there freelancing. So other people who know that player will get them in on their shows to try and give them a hand. You know, you've got to make a living and

they've got small people to buy shoes for! So there's a certain amount of that going on.

Tom: So there's a bit of a community spirit within the West End?

Ian: Yeah! I'd like to think that if maybe I was suddenly without a show, some of the guys I know would get me in on their shows to help me out as well. But alongside that, it's not a completely closed shop. That sounds very closed, what I've just said. It's not as simple as that. There's a few guys that I know, younger guys that have come in, really nice chaps and very competent. They've come in and it's gone really well, they've just been integrated really quickly to the whole scene because they just tick all the boxes of nice laid back guy, very reliable and sound good. A lot of it's to do with doubling as well now. You have to be able to play, as a bass player in my example, you're not just playing electric bass or double bass. You've got to be able to both. The next show I'm about to do, 'Hamilton', I've got to play five-string electric bass, four-string hollow-body bass, kind of Paul McCartney sound, double bass with the string section, so a lot of bowing as well, and I'm playing a synth bass as well for some of the tunes. So you've got to find guys who will do all those things as well.

Tom: I suppose that makes finding a dep quite hard if there's all those different skills?

Ian: Yeah, for different shows. Conversely, the show I'm on at the moment is just electric bass so I've used a particular guy who used to dep for me on 'Hairspray' when that was just electric bass. So I remembered him from then and he's a good pal of mine, and a fabulous player, and he now comes in on that. It's sort of horses for courses; different shows require different types of players.

Tom: Horses for courses, but it sounds like you've got all of the horses covered! Do you think that's important for people to come in having had all that stuff or did you develop that as your career went along as and when you needed to?

Ian: You mean the different instruments and stuff?

Tom: Yeah.

Ian: Yeah, I started with electric bass when I was twelve and I did that for my first twenty-odd years, but the double bass, for example, has been something that's come in more recent years. I remember my first show with double bass was 'Sister Act' and that just had a little bit of double bass in it so I got away with that fairly easily. Then my next show, which was 'Shrek', had a much harder double bass part and it was quite involved. I had a bit of a heads up as to how long I had before that show was going to start so I went off and made sure I got some lessons with some great guys and really put the time in. Again, there's just no real short cuts, you've got to put the time in. So the double bass has been something I've brought in in more recent years and the keys thing for this next show is newish again. There's only a few tunes on keys and that's something I'm just putting the time in and getting it down. Weirdly you have the bass

sensibilities, you know what you want to play on it, you've just got to work out where everything is and get the touch right. I think it helps if you can play it all. There's still shows out there for specific instruments. I suppose you don't have to be able to play all the instruments to do well. If you're just a great player, that's going to get noted.

Tom: The shows these days, especially some of the older ones, they're orchestrated for twenty plus instruments in a band but they're getting cut down more and more these days. So do you think it's important for other members of the band to be able to do doubling and tripling on all the other instruments?

Ian: Yeah, it is really important. More and more shows are exactly that. Maybe in the olden days you might have a separate violin and viola player, for example, and on 'The Book of Mormon' there's just one string player on it. The girl there, violin is her main thing and she hadn't played quite as much viola, but she had to work on her viola playing again to get that back up to the level of the violin and so she's doubling on that. It happens all across the band. You look and the brass, and saxophone players are just surrounded by instruments now, and it's the same in the rhythm section. Drummers are triggering all kinds of things and the percussion chair on the next show I'm doing is particularly involved. There's keyboards involved in that as well, they're running Ableton and like I said, I'm playing four instruments, the guitarist is playing four instruments, you have to be like an octopus now! That just seems to be the way it is.

Tom: It sounds like you have to be very switched on, very concentrated to be able to do all those things and be consistent.

Ian: Yeah, it's plate spinning. You're constantly trying to keep these instruments up to speed, you know, you haven't just got one instrument you're keeping up and running all the time. Not just even playing wise, physically you've got to keep these instruments, in my case, re-stung all the time and keeping them set up and put new hair on the bow and all this kind of stuff. It's a full-time job just keeping all the gear up and running!

Tom: Do you have a mental process or a way that you switch yourself on, like 'now I'm in gig mode', before you do something like that or is it when you sit down in the pit and the lights go down you're just zoned in?

Ian: Yeah, like a red light mode. I suppose I'm not really one of those people who walk in at the last minute, like seven twenty-nine, plonks themselves down and just starts playing. I do try to get in a little bit early. What I do myself is I have a playlist of songs that I know the bass lines to and I'll just put them on shuffle and I'll make sure I play along to a bunch of tunes to get my hands up and running and wake my brain up to what I'm about to do. I think you've got to be in the zone. You can't be doing other things, you can't be thinking about too much else you've just got to try and keep that concentration up during the show. That's something you just work on I suppose, trying to keep your mind on the job.

Tom: It does seem like a very important part of it. I'm sure in your position, if you had one duff show – I don't know whether you've had one duff show in the last twelve years, but if you did with your reputation you'd probably be alright. But if it's someone new coming in and they lose focus for half a show, you can get in your head about a lot of stuff. Is there a way that you went through that and is there a way that you are able, when you were younger, if you got something a little bit wrong, you were like 'I don't really know what I'm doing', was there a way that you got yourself mentally to relax?

Ian: I see what you're saying but I'm not sure. I think it's coming back to what we talked about at the beginning. It's having a bit of self-confidence to know that 'I can do this,' and that you're in a position that when things go wrong you're in a position to handle it and to know what to do. For example, in a lot of these shows you have what they call 'vamp' bars: a section of music, one, two or four bars will be repeated round and round whilst a person on stage is saying some lines or singing a particular thing. They could do that fast one night and slow another night so that length of time could change and you've got to be ready to come in when it's time to move on in the music. Sometimes a singer might come in completely wrong and throw everyone and you've got to be ready to know what to do in that instance. You've got to know what they're about to do, what they're about to sing and if they've jumped in in the wrong place you've got to be able to quickly clock where they've gone to and where that is on the chart and not panic. It's all about not panicking. I think the only real way to do that, to answer the question, is really just to do it a lot and to be in a few positions where it did go wrong. I've been in plenty of shows early in my career where things do go wrong and it just goes spectacularly wrong and it's just comic, it's hilarious! But in West End shows that's just not acceptable. It happened just the past few nights on our show where a singer came in in the wrong place. Luckily you can just hear the experience in the room a lot of the times and a lot of the musicians will jump to the right bit where they are. It's not really a spoken thing, the MD hasn't always got time to jump on the mic, which goes down to just our ears, to tell us where they are, we've just got to do it.

Tom: So you just know the music so well and you're listening enough to what's going on on stage as well as in the pit?

Ian: Yeah and just being able to clock what's happened when things have gone wrong. It's as much about knowing what to do when things go wrong as when it's all going swimmingly.

Tom: I guess that's just an experience thing?

Ian: Yeah. You're right to think about it. It's all about not panicking. For example, another slightly funny example is, every so often your mind might wander, and then you might suddenly realise 'Oh God, I'm not looking at the page, I'm not looking at the music but I'm still playing the song.' In my earlier career, if that happened that would be me making a mistake. I would go wrong or stop. But in my more recent years, if I realise I'm playing a song and my mind has wandered or I've looked away for a second and I've come back and I've looked at the page

and I think 'I don't know where I am', I've learned to force myself to not panic and to allow myself to keep playing in a muscle memory way. Then whilst I'm playing, like 'keep playing', just accept that your muscle memory is going to make it happen and then scan the page until you see on the page where you are, what you're hearing your hands doing. Almost like a detached thing from your body. I've got to scan the page until I see what my hands are doing. It's a slightly strange experience but then you go 'ah, there I am.' It's all about forcing yourself to not panic in situations like that. Nine times out of ten, if my mind wanders and then I'm snapped back in the room, I won't panic. I say to myself 'keep playing. You're in the right place, just keep playing,' and I'll scan the page and 'ah, there I am,' and you lock back on to the rails. Again, that's a self-confidence sort of thing. You've got to trust that you're going to do this right most of the time anyway.

Tom: When you start a new show, does it depend on the music or how the show is, how long does it take you to get to a point where your muscle memory is confident enough that something like that might happen and you'll be fine?

Ian: 'd say probably six weeks before it's starting to really sink in. We're kind of honing the part in the first few weeks, 'how am I going to play this, how am I going to approach that.'

Tom: So you're quite switched on at the beginning anyway?

Ian: Yeah, it's all about the levels of concentration. Right at the beginning they're sky high because you don't know what's coming next and you're absolutely on top concentration. And as the months and years go on concentration comes down but hopefully the playing stays the same. But it would take a good few weeks, I would say, before you're starting to feel like 'yeah, I know what's happening here.'

Tom: I guess after you've done it for months and years, the consistency thing, do you feel like that's the biggest challenge?

Ian: Yes, I suppose so. It's just making sure even the intensity of your playing, you can, what they would call 'call it in' or 'phone it in', where you're just going through the motions. But it's not going to sound as exciting as if you were really up for playing that day.

Tom: And they can tell when you're doing that?

Ian: I think so. I think you can hear the difference if someone's really enjoying what they're doing and putting in their one hundred percent. I do try to make sure, if I get into the show and I'm exhausted and I've had a busy day, I'll make sure I've had a strong cup of tea and something to eat before I play so I'm up and running and I'm in the room. I think you owe it, not just to the audience, but to the rest of the band. If the rest of the band are really going for it and you just can't be bothered, I just don't think that's acceptable. I think it's that consistency that keeps getting you rebooked for shows. I think I did this 'Book of Mormon' on for three and a half years, and I took into account holidays and time off, maybe

one show off a week, and I still worked out I probably played it over twelve hundred times. So it's quite something, trying to keep it playing as well on number twelve hundred as you were on number ten.

Tom: That's another level of consistency!

Ian: Yeah. There's a fabulous drummer called Frosty Beedle who plays drums on 'Mamma Mia', he's been there for absolutely years, he still sounds absolutely amazing. He's just one of the best around. He brings an excitement for music to what he's doing. That's to be commended because he's so good. Other guys in that same instance might have just lost the love for it and just wanted to leave. I think he keeps himself busy with other projects as well, which I think is key on a long-runner, but he brings his love for music to his playing on 'Mamma Mia' every night. People go in there, depping or whatever, and they say 'he sounds as great today as ever.' God knows how many shows he's done now if he's been there fifteen years or something. That's just scary.

Tom: To some people, if you say to them, 'you're going to play this show twelve hundred times over the next three years', they'll be like 'you're mental, I'm not doing that!' How do you keep yourself sane when you're doing that? Do you think it's a case of, you either have that mentality and you love doing it so you don't mind? Or do you know so people who do it but they absolutely hate it?

Ian: I think there is a few people like that that will make it more like a job. But I don't think it's going to go well for them. I think there was a few people who have done long running shows and when they finished they just never got booked again. So I think that people that make it work are the guys that make sure they play in some other bands outside their show. Or if they've been in a show for absolutely years then they probably will start depping on other shows to keep themselves up and running. I think you're right, I think there probably is a mindset, there's probably a type of person that wants to do this type of work and can get themselves in the headspace every night to do it, and it's not everyone. There's some guys that just like to mix it up every night and that's cool as well, that's their thing, that's totally cool. So maybe it does take a certain mindset to bring that consistency to every night. Also it changes, for example, if I'm playing my show and there's a different drummer and guitarist sat either side of me, they will play it in a different way and play different things over the charts, maybe leave gaps where the other guy doesn't or visa versa. That makes you play in a different way, so it sort of refreshes it for you. It's not quite as simple as just playing the same thing over and over, it changes. It's a slightly organic thing.

Tom: A lot of variables going on?

Ian: Yeah, a lot of variables and there's a lot of things that will change how you approach it each night as well. I just enjoy it myself; I just enjoy playing the bass!

Tom: So you don't feel like you ever get to a point where you're like 'Ah, I haven't taken a night off for three weeks, I need to go off and do a different gig.' Do you ever get into that headspace?

Ian: Occasionally. Don't get me wrong; it's not excitement every day. You do have times when you're tired or you've just done it too much and you just have to give yourself a break. That's important. I try to do a day a week off because you've only got Sundays off anyway so maybe book a Monday off or a Friday just to mix it up.

Ian: Do you fill that up intentionally with another gig or do you intentionally leave that as a weekend?

Tom: I tend to keep that as a day off and spend it with the wife and family. If I get another gig in I'll take another day off as well. I think it's sort of like an organic peak and trough thing. You need to have a little break from music occasionally. If I go away for a little ten-day holiday with the family I might have a complete break from listening to music and playing music. Other times you want to go away, stop playing music but listen to a bunch of new stuff and then that will make you excited about wanting to play again. I think it is important. The breaks are just as important as the playing. Because you're right, you can do your head in if you do it too much. Right now, for example, I've got tonight off the show and the tendons in my right hand are just feeling knackered. I physically need a break. Even if I'm still really enjoying what I'm doing my hands are tired. The percussionist in the show, I was talking to him recently, and he's the same. He's playing these congas and stuff every night and his hands are just knackered.

Tom: I guess you hear some people practice eight, ten, fifty hours a day, but the shows only two hours long?

Ian: Yeah, two and a half.

Tom: Yeah, I know 'Dreamgirls' is particularly quite intense with the music. But even just consistently doing two hours a day in that environment. That is particularly knacking?

Ian: That's it. For example, 'Dreamgirls', there's hardly any gaps. I think there's one four minute gap in the whole thing where we don't play. Everything else is pretty much back-to-back music. On a Wednesday and a Saturday when we do two shows that's pretty much five hours of playing in a pressure environment. So it's not just practice at home where you can have a little break and go back to it, it's full on. Yeah, it's tiring. There's quite a lot to it.

Tom: So if you get half way through a week and you're like 'Man, this week is not for me.' How far in advance do you need to get a dep in? Can you literally ring someone up after a show and be like 'do you want to do tomorrow?'

Ian: Yeah, you can do. I think you have to have a pool of players of maybe four or five dep. Also guys that do different stuff so if one's not available because they're booked up for something then another guy might be more free on a particular day for whatever reason. So have a pool of players. You have to check in with your fixer to make sure that there's not too many people off the show the particular night you want off. You can do it an hour before if you feel like it but

everything's got to work. You've got to have someone available and it's got to be cool to be off that night. I know what you mean, it does happen you just have days where you're like 'I can't do it tonight, I don't want to,' for whatever reason. Tom: Or if you have an emergency?

Ian: Completely.

Tom: When you're finding deps, do you feel like that takes a while and that's a bit of a chore as well? Sometimes are you just like 'it would just be easier to play tonight rather than find a dep'? Or is it that you have a group of guys that you know you can fire one text to and they'll reply pretty soon yes or no?

Ian: It sort of varies. I've got usually four or five deps available for a show and you have an idea of what people are up to generally. If you suddenly wanted a last minute dep, for example, there might be one or two of the guys that you think they're more likely to be available short notice than the others so you would try them first and work through the list. Whereas, for example, if I'm booking off something in two weeks time, you can probably take your time a bit more and choose. 'That guy might be available, they might not but I'll check with them.' I tend to try and rotate it so everyone gets a go quite often otherwise people are just forgetting how it goes.

Tom: I suppose you ask when they first come in, but is it just a general, you go back in and chat to the guys who played with your dep last night to find out how they did?

Ian: Yes.

Tom: Do you feel obliged to monitor that because it's your chair? It reflects on you?

Ian: Yeah, you do. I always use my instrument as the example, but for a bass player I would ask the drummer 'how was such-and-such last night?' And they would say whether they had a good one or a bad one. If there are any issues usually the MD will flag it up anyway and they're say 'X,Y, or Z person didn't do it well enough last night, have a word about this-that and the other,' so it is monitored. Like you say, it's my name in the program and you want to try and keep the standard as high as possible. You don't want people going in and being a bit blasé about the whole thing, not putting in the effort and getting it all wrong. People are going to look in the program and go 'well, that Ian King guy was pretty rubbish,' and it's like no, it wasn't me! So it does get monitored, they're always trying to keep the standard as high as possible.

Tom: Have you ever had the situation where you've gone back in and an MD's been like 'you know what, I don't want them back'?

Ian: Yeah, that has happened.

Tom: Do you then have to tell them that or do you just not ring them again?

Ian: You don't want to just go quiet on them because they'll just get paranoid. Normally there would be notes first, it wouldn't come out of the blue, they would be given a few notes about what they did. If it did get to a stage where 'that's it', you have to pluck up the courage to give them a call and just go 'sorry it's not working out but hopefully I'll give you a shout on the next show.' Sometimes there's grey areas as well, if I'm honest, where someone might have not done it that well but it's not so bad that we would 'never again' them, but the MD might say 'you've got five guys, try these three guys first in future and maybe put these two more to the lower end of your list and ask them not as often.' There's a grey area to it really. Like I said, No one really wants to have the words 'never again' put next to their name on a show because it's going to have an effect on their future work. So you try and give people as much of a go as possible. Sometimes people are just really great players at a particular thing but they're not so strong at something else so just because they've not worked out on one particular show doesn't mean they won't be brilliant on another one. You've got to try and be as fair as possible, I think. I know myself, if someone put me in some particular musical situation and I wasn't so good at it I would be a bit gutted if I got written off as a bad muso on that basis. I'd want to be judged on other things I can do as well.

Tom: It seems like there is a kind of hierarchy. I know there technically is on paper, but is it if the MD tells you to do something you have to do it?

Ian: In terms of booking people for deps or just generally?

Tom: Just generally. You were saying that the MD comes back to you with some notes, because the MD is in the pit as well, so you are musician friends together.

Ian: Yeah, but they are the boss really.

Tom: Is that a relationship you have to watch out for, as they are technically your boss?

Ian: Yeah, they are really. They're the musical director and they're usually the reason you're sat there, they've asked for you to be in the show with them. So they are the person, not only conducting you, but they're clocking what you're playing and whether it's right for the show and they'll also be clocking about your deps and what they're doing. They're the boss. It's just as simple as that. They're usually really cool guys. The chap I'm working with at the moment, you forget he's the boss half the time because he's a great laugh. When everything's running smoothly there's no reason to keep telling you 'I'm the boss'. He's just a cool guy and you have a good time with him. We enjoy playing music together and most of the time you're clocking him as a musician. 'That's a guy playing great piano'. He'll only stamp his authority on things when needed. Also in these theatre worlds, you have the musical supervisor as well, who's above the MD who's usually someone who oversees the whole thing. In my current they're the same person, the musical director is the supervisor. So he will then go on and supervise other productions of this show when it goes to Broadway, for example.

In other instances you might have a different guy who's the musical director. For example, for 'Hamilton', which is the next one I'm doing, there's a musical supervisor in America for the first ever production on Broadway is going to supervise what happens over in England. He'll come over and have a say in how it's set up in England and liaise with the musical director over here. Then once it's all set up he'll go back to America and the musical director will be the boss here. So it's sort of like a hierarchy but also it's just helping things get set up in how it needs to be done.

Tom: Have you ever had a musical supervisor or a musical director where you've had to manage what you say if they're not as cool?

Ian: They tend to be alright and usually the reason you're there is because they like you so it's usually a positive experience.

Tom: So you've normally got on before hand?

Ian: Yeah. Obviously there's a few that are maybe a bit more strict and you would just play your role and that's that. More often than not they're usually really nice people. Ninety-nine out of a hundred will be cool guys and that's it.

Tom: I suppose when you're at the top, like you are, there's no room for bad social politics?

Ian: I do find that with music in general that people that are the most down on things, slagging people off or moaning about things don't tend to be at the top. On whatever in instrument or whatever role we're talking about you find the best people are just a bit more self-assured and usually much easier to get on with to be honest. They've got less to prove and I find that the higher up you go, people are easier to deal with, I think. You often get frustrated people at the lower rungs of things. I think you're right to ask that question; it's managing those guys really. I keep using my current MD as an example, but he's so good at what he does but he doesn't need to prove that. He's got nothing to prove, his CV is as long as your arm, and it's all there in front of you. He's got nothing to prove so you just get on with the job. He's a good laugh as well so it all works well.

Tom: It's nice to hear you say that. I suppose a lot of people might view the music industry as quite cutthroat, and it is in a way, but also maybe not the best social environment. But it's nice to hear you say that if you stick with it, the higher up you go, the easier it gets with all that kind of stuff.

Ian: I think so. You know what I mean, in terms of people having less to prove once they're up the top. I think that really shows. Also, it sounds a bit nasty, but in the lower rungs of things, maybe the players, if they're not so good, if they're making more mistakes and not doing what's needed, there's more to be said. And you need a hard taskmaster to keep that in check maybe. I don't know, I'm making this up! But when you get to the top echelons of this whole scenario you've got better players and better MD's. There's probably less going wrong to be spoken about so it all seems to go a bit easier.

Tom: There's one thing I wanted to ask you about that we mentioned right at the beginning in terms of the cruise ships. I know you said you didn't do any of them but it sounds like you know of or you know people who have done them. It's interesting because there are certain conversations that go on about cruise ships specifically, because they are like mini shows in the West End so you are away for three months, six months, a year, maybe even longer. Some people feel that if you go on a cruise ship then you go away for a year, and then you come back and you don't have any work when you come back because you've gone away. I suppose it's a bit different when you're in the West End because you're still around, you're still in town or if you're on a West End tour people still know you're doing that. Do you have any views on that?

Ian: I suppose it keeps coming back to that there's no way around paying your dues. I think a big block of work like that just does you so much good. If you think about it it's a different way of thinking about it. You could think 'yeah, I'm away from the scene and people won't know I'm around and therefore when I get back there's not as much work,' but the other thing is, we were talking at the beginning about, you need to go wrong in situations where it's not so important. So it's sort of a perfect scenario if you went away on a boat for three months and you're learning your craft and it's the beginnings of it all for you, and if things go wrong in that scenario it's only a finite amount of people that will find out about it. What I'm saying is that if you go into London's West End and you play and something goes wrong, everyone knows about it and you've got the never again. So it might be a good place to go away for a while, be off the scene for a while whilst you learn your craft. Then you start to bring the skills that you've honed back to London and wherever else and you've got better. I just think it's a great thing to do. Say you've just come out of College, you go on a cruise, you get to see some great bits of the world, you get to play a load of music every night and you earn a bit of money, probably with very low cost at home because you don't need to pay rent. I just think it's the perfect scenario to get started and from then on maybe go into some touring shows or get in a function band and build up your contacts. I don't think it's a bad thing to be off the scene for a short while. Obviously you don't want to be away for years, but I think it's an important part of it. You have to try out these scenarios like min West End shows. You've got to have done them a lot in order to get the grounding, and then off you go. I would do it as soon as possible and do it as young as possible because you've got a whole career ahead of you, you've got years ahead of you playing music and there's plenty of time to do the other stuff. I think if you rush it you're going to set yourself up for a fall.

Tom: It's good to hear you say that, that's one of the first positive views I've heard. I've probably only talked to younger guys about it.

Ian: I can understand the thinking 'I don't want to be away,' but it is an inevitable thing, you know. You will be away for a little while but at the same time you're honing these skills. You want to make sure that when you go into higher level stuff that you've got good at what you do. Because there's so many people, there's loads of these pop Colleges now and various things churning out people

year on year all with a promise of a session career, and it's pretty cutthroat. There's not that much work out there in this specific thing, in this theatre style stuff.

Tom: The theatre stuff in it's self seems to be quite a small world. Like you said, there's only a certain amount of shows, there's only a certain amount of theatres in London so there's only so much work.

Ian: Also, pantos are a perfect thing to do. A lot of people poo-poo it, they go 'oh I'm not doing a panto because it's not cool.' But again, it's a mini West End show. In fact a few years ago, you were talking about whether I've depped on things, there was one scenario I did have to go in. A big fixer that I work for a lot does all the big shows, I just had a very short gap in between two shows and there was a panto going on in Hammersmith. Very sadly the bass player's dad passed away and he suddenly couldn't go to work. So the fixer just said 'look, I hope you don't mind but do you fancy going in and helping us out with four shows because this guy's got to go, his dad's just died.' So I went in, and there's you just finished a West End run and you feel pretty good about yourself. I went into this panto and it was just full of modern pop music, which I'd never read. The last time I'd been doing functions it was a whole different set of music. It was all seventies classics, and suddenly I'm reading down all these pop charts, you know, it was pretty hard! So point is that people play down these pantos, 'ah I don't want to do a panto because it's not cool,' but it's absolutely perfect for your sight-reading, you're often on click and listening to track, you've got MD's conducting you. It's an absolutely perfect scenario. It's a little run of work and actually often it's not too far from London. There's a lot of them, if you wanted to be based in London, there's loads of them around. It's just a perfect scenario to get that grounding. It's all about honing those skills in smaller scenarios and not sticking yourself straight in at the deep end.

Tom: Yeah, it all makes sense when you say it like that. To me it sounds like you're just a very positive thinker trying to find all the positives from it, and it does all make sense.

Ian: Yeah, I try to.

Tom: So just a few quick questions to finish. What gear to you use? Have you got a range of gear or if you were advising people what to get?

Ian: Yeah, just a quick run down. I use Overwater basses because they're just really nice basses but also they pay particular attention to how quiet they are. What I mean by that is they don't pick up hum and buzz from lighting rigs and what not, so there won't be lots of grounding and shielding issues. They're very professional instruments and they sound and feel great so they're the ones I always go to. I have a few go-to pedals. Pit's these days are always, what they call silent pits, so you won't have an amp and you'll just be on headphones. So I tend to use a bass preamp, I use an EBS one called Microbass II, which everyone knows about, and my current show I've using a Layla mono volume pedal. Other

than that different shows need different effects and stuff. It changes from show to show so it's not worth mentioning them because they change all the time.

Tom: But that's your standard. You'll go in and use that on everything if you can?

Ian: Pretty much. I've got a couple of Overwater five-string basses, their Jazz basses, that I use which just sound great and you can make them sound a bit more like a Precision or a Jazz or whatever you need and they work really well. I always use Ultraphones, which are the best headphones for pit work. I find they're really good at getting rid of the outside noise.

Tom: Are they over-ears or are they in-ears?

Ian: They're these huge over-ear things that look like you're drilling the road, the ones the guys wear for that. They've got drivers in them and they sound really good.

Tom: If you had to give three or four albums that are your favorite albums for recommended listening, any that spring to mind?

Ian: That's a good question. I always come at these things from a bass player perspective so stuff like 'Off the Wall' by Michael Jackson is just a desert island disk. You've got to be honest haven't you, stuff that you would listen to over and over. I grew up listening to a lot of Prince, but it's trying to narrow down a single Prince album, that's really hard! 'Sign of the Time' probably, that's a good one. I like Lionel Richie stuff, if I think about albums I listened to growing up, there was one called 'Dancing on the Ceiling', which just had such a great bass sound to it and some of it's a bit cheesy now you listen to it. It's older cheesy music but it's stood the test of time for me.

Tom: Is there anything on that playlist that you were saying you do before shows?

Ian: Yeah, there's an Al Jarreau album just called 'Jarreau' which is fabulous; just such great stuff on it. There's some Stevie Wonder one's. I'm trying to think because everyone always say, for example, 'Songs in the Key of Life' because that's the one that we all go to but things that I grew up with, there's an album called 'Hotter Than July' that's got really good stuff on it. Music that I got into in more recent years, I suppose you get into your more muso music so people always mention Steely Dan. Obviously I love some Steely Dan stuff, but that wasn't really one of the bands that got me into bass playing at the beginning. It's stuff I love now, but maybe back in the day I listened to Jamiroquai's 'Return of the Space Cowboy' album that had wicked bass playing on it. I love the first one, 'Emergency on Planet Earth' because it was this new band that was so groovy and I just loved everything on that. But I think the sweet spot for me was that second album, the bass on it is just so cool. Equally, I got into Incognito when I was younger and a Randy Hope-Taylor album I really like is this album called 'Positivity'. All the bass lines on it are so good and he's so brilliant on that, so

that's one I really enjoyed growing up. I was all into my brand new heavies: Incognito, Jamiroquai back in those days and Level 42. I don't know if you find this, but a lot of muso's, you ask them for top five's or top ten's and they'll often say albums that they think are the coolest ones by a band but I reckon there's always an honest one which isn't that. So for example, for Level 42, being a fan of Mark King back in the day, there's some really hip albums that everyone always talks about. 'World Machine' and 'Pursuit of Excellence' and they were really good. But the one that made me want to play bass was the more commercial one, which was 'Running in the Family'. I suppose you might call it the more cheesy album but that's the one that made me want to play bass, listening to those records. The more I talk about it the more albums are coming out from my childhood! But bass playing one's would be 'Return of the Space Cowboy', Jamiroquai, Incognito's 'Positivity', Level 42 probably 'Running in the Family', Lionel Richie 'Dancing on the Ceiling', Al Jarreau's 'Jarreau' and 'Off the Wall'. Again, this is another one, Michael Jackson albums. 'Off the Wall' is the one that everyone talks about, that's the cool one. But if I'm honest, during my childhood it was probably the 'Bad' album, which everyone thinks is the cheesy album. But that's probably the one I grew up loving the most. Even just the track 'Bad' itself, you start to listen to the organ on it, I think it's Greg Phillingains on it, it's absolutely the coolest thing ever. You've just got to re-listen to some of these old albums. In later years I got into Anita Baker and stuff like that, a lot of female soul singers. 'Rapture' is one of the albums she did. Alita Addams' 'Circle of One' that's got Pino all over it. I've done way more than five now haven't I! It's too hard to hone them all.

Tom: That's often the hardest question! Finally, you're currently on 'Dreamgirls' and you're going on to 'Hamilton'. Is there anything else that you're doing when you're not on a show that people can see you in? Are you part of any other bands that do stuff outside the West End?

Ian: Yeah. At one point there was a band called 'Real', which was run by Winston Rollins, which is a sort of funk outfit. He used quite a few of the guys that played in Jamiroquai to play in that. There is an album on iTunes, called 'Love Crazy' that we played on. I played on all the tracks and it's got a lot of the Jamiroquai players on that, which I was proud of, that little bit I did. I recent months I've been doing little freelance bits. One of the things I did recently was I depped for Andy Pask on an Elvis show. What it is is they took an old recording, a filmed gig that Elvis did, one of his comeback concerts. What's happening is they're projecting Elvis on a big screen at the back of the stage and they've taken his isolated vocal and they've re-orchestrated it for the Royal Philharmonic to play along as well. So I did a gig where it's drums, bass, guitar, keys and they'll have the Philharmonic there as well and Elvis up on a screen. That was fun. So I've just done a few one-off's and bits and bobs like that. I did an arena tour on this 'Jesus Christ Superstar' thing a few years ago, I think it was two thousand and twelve, there's a video of that out. I did a load of Doctor Who stuff as well, so it's a bit freelancy I'm not really in a band as such these days. I'm just Mr. Freelance.

Tom: So if people want to come and hear you play West End is a good bet?

Ian: It is really, yeah. I've started to do a few more online lessons because people are becoming more and more interested in this sphere of work and the skill set. There's a website called basschat that loads of people are on and I've had a few people contact me through that asking for a few lessons, so I do that as well.

Tom: So that's the best way if people want to reach you?

Ian: Yeah, I'm called 'King Bassist' on that. As things go on I'm going to get more of an online presence going forward so I'll probably do myself a website in the next year or so and offer a few more things on that. It's a 'watch this space' moment, but recently I've been working too much to do that, but that's definitely something I'm going to be doing. I did an interview with Scott Devine, who does these lessons as well online, so there's a video with me on that as well.

Tom: Thank you very much Ian.

Ian: Nice one, cheers!