

SESSION STORIES
Digital Works

Interviewee:	Paul Clarvis
Instrument:	Percussion
Date of Birth:	1963
Place of Birth:	Enfield, North London
Parents' Occupations:	Father – insurance broker & worked in the city Mother – worked in the Foreign office before having kids
Interview Location:	Westminster Archives on 6 th March 2023
Interviewer:	Rozanne Gomes
Summariser:	Margaret Perrin

Definition of a session – employed by someone to go to a studio and record their music.

Paul got interested in music through free recorder lessons at school then went on to play the cornet and became part of the Boys Brigade band. He ended up playing drums after being drawn to the drum kit in the pit at a panto. From the age of 12 he was in a band and was doing gigs in pubs and clubs. Then started doing regular shows with a local amateur drama group.

Remembers a recording session at around the age of 15 at Olympic Studios in Barnes. Johnny Pearson came in who was the conductor on TOTP orchestra and he asked if he could count off the tempo as they were playing too quickly.

When he started session work film had mainly taken over. Most of the work was done in Abbey Road, Air Studios, Angel Studios, CTS in Wembley and other smaller places like Watford town hall.

Had to overcome insecurities and imposter syndrome and not feeling that you were as good as the others. Took 20 years before he could relax.

Got into the work after going to the Royal College and studying orchestral percussion. He then got into jazz and world music and started playing Indian, Japanese, African drums. The work opened up, it was well paid and regular and could keep going with the live gigs. He continues to do gig work – it'll be there when the session work isn't.

Early on got work from orchestras and writers he knew. Then started working with Frank Ricotti who got him onto Isobel Griffith's books and he started getting really busy.

Never had a typical day. You'd turn up and interpret the music. Working as a team you need to be aware of those around you, be reliable, be accurate and get it right as many times as needed. Going digital

opened up a lot of the other aspects of the work – could overdub and do tracking over and over. Often playing on a demo that's been put together by machines then your job is to bring it to life, make it human and get in between the beats. As percussion you'd usually come in at the end.

The team was him, Frank Ricotti and Gary Catell. Between the three of them they could cover all the percussion. Loves working in a team - the music opens up like a conversation and you can take the music to places that you hadn't imagined. Now moving more towards individual players working in isolation and following a click track.

For a long time, it was a very alpha-male dominated world. The trumpet players and drummers were always pretty forceful people. Now some great female percussion players coming through.

Always used to have a drink after the session and some used to drink throughout the day. Now that's all gone. People are now a lot more scared because of the lack of work. Everyone very polite and musicians now keep their heads down.

Reckons 6 hours is the optimum day. Two sessions with an hour in between. Seems to work for the music, a good working model.

Used to be get paid with a cheque on the day. Now it's banker's draft and it can be a couple of weeks. As an individual he's been credited on records and film. Thinks the Musician Union's important to keep on top of the rates and need to try and keep things workable for the next generation.

Work/life balance difficult. His wife is session musician as well. You'd miss weddings, holidays etc. Sometimes worth flying back from a holiday for a day to do a session. But the work did mean you could be around in the day so could go to daughter's school sports events etc.

Loves the invisibility of the work. Gets satisfaction from being a small cog in a big machine. Likes going into situations which are completely different, playing with friends and can then go home. Really enjoyed the recent Bond films (references SKYFALL) and liked working with Wes Anderson.

Session work has meant he has grown in confidence as a person and he's spent 40 years doing something he didn't think he'd ever do.