

Interview with Jason - Part One Transcript

Cam:

Hello, my name's Cameron, and I have a two-hour community radio program called *The Big Note*, which can be found on 97.1 FM 3MDR, based in the Dandenong Ranges near Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. On the program, I try to keep it interesting by discussing various aspects of the world of music and playing an eclectic range of tracks. Occasionally, I'm fortunate enough to talk to some brilliantly creative people. You're about to hear one of those chats now. I think you'll find it quite interesting.

Jason Lim is a Glasgow-based musician and technologist who works at the intersection of traditional musical instruments, composition, production, and experimental electronics. He has worked as a multi-instrumentalist composer and studio musician and now designs his own range of hardware and software instruments, used by creators in studios, on stages, and in art galleries around the world.

I had the great pleasure of chatting with Jason earlier in December 2024. He shared some of his story and musical choices, which we'll listen to as he explains why he chose those pieces of music. This is part one, and I start off by playing one of Jason's compositions and performances.

[**Music: IL3 - Performance by Jason H. J. Lim from *Instruo Compilation 1*]

Cam:

We just listened to *IL3 - Performance* by Jason Lim and that is from the *Instruo Compilation 1* album, which is available on Bandcamp. I'm talking with Jason today on *The Big Note* about his musical journey and other things.

You're tuned to 97.1 FM 3MDR, speaking to Jason Lim from Instruo Instruments in Glasgow. I've been fortunate to meet you in person a couple of times—what a nice chap you are! You also make a great cup of coffee and God, we needed that after the long flight.

Jason:

Yeah, did you come straight to the workshop from landing?

Cam:

We did.

Jason:

You did?

Cam:

We did.

Jason:

(laughs)

Cam:

Jason, I'd like to talk to you about music because that's what *The Big Note* is about—particularly your relationship with music and the things you've accomplished. First, what does music mean to you? What place does it hold in your life? Heavy...

Jason:

Good question. I mean, I've built a career from music, so it's been my focus for as long as I can remember. Music has always been my passion. I started on the violin, that was my first instrument that I studied...

Cam:

You were quite young, weren't you?

Jason:

Yeah, I was about nine, yeah, aged nine. I'm not entirely sure why I started; I think it was during primary school music class. There was an announcement about violin lessons, and a few of us signed up. Off the bat, there was an ear training test to check our ability to hold and recognise a note. I passed, but I think one of my classmates struggled and was politely redirected to the chanter or bagpipes, because, that's a different animal. So Yeah, that was the first instrument I got into.

Cam:

You're listening to *The Big Note* on 97.1 FM 3MDR. I'm talking with Jason H. J. Lim — a composer, producer, musician, and music technologist, and the founder of Instruo Modular in Glasgow, Scotland.

Jason:

Yeah, a kind of a combination of having really good teachers through early learning. Like my first violin teacher was, was great, Mr. Welsh, who is retired now, but I think is still in and around Falkirk.

Cam:

That's where the Kelpies are! Was your family musical? Was your family musical?

Jason:

Yeah, yeah, so my grandfather on my mum's side, he's, he played everything. Like, I think that's that's largely where it came, came through. My mum's very musical as well but didn't didn't follow that path, but she, she played clarinet in school. And, I mean, she plays flute now, so she's now actively taking flute lessons. And yeah, she's very musical, she could have been a musician but I think, went the medical route. So yeah, our, my dad both met in medical school, so I think it's one of those generational skips where it's like, she didn't want me and my sister to go into academia as much, so we were very much encouraged

to go the creative route. So I've got my mum to thank for, for going that, that path.

Cam:

That's lovely that they, they didn't want you guys studying, it's often the opposite, "Oh no, no, no, study hard, don't worry about music, that's not a real job" - but you're not just a musician even though you are, and there's no such thing as just a musician. Musicians are incredibly important to us in life, and they study very hard to get where they are. But you also played in bands. You started with violin and you went off and you learn drums and guitar. Did you have bands in high school?

Jason:

Yeah, so I kind of, uh, I think it was going from primary school into high school. I stuck with violin, and piano was my second instrument, so I took up classical piano maybe a year or two after violin, so I kind of studied them in parallel and did the classical music gradings up to... I can't remember what grade I got to at any point with them. But kind of like high school, and changed music teacher, so that was a bit of an influence. I think I was just, like, I wasn't enjoying violin as much at a certain point, and my stepbrother always played, he played guitar. So that was kind of his instrument, his thing, so he was, he was playing in bands. And yeah, I just, I really wanted to get into guitar, but that was, that was kind of Ross's thing. So it was like, it was a bit of diplomacy to, yeah, and I was like, I like, yeah, not wanting to tread on toes. Yeah, so I, um, I took up bass first. Um, so I got my grandfather's bass because he used to play, uh, bass in, and I mean, he, my grandfather played every instrument. He was a, an excellent classical piano player, played trumpet, guitar, bass. So he played in a Dixieland jazz band when he was in his younger years. And, uh, but yeah, his bass and amplifier was, um, in his garage or, um, his loft, sorry, uh, up in Aberdeen. So he brought it down one trip, and so I had that. It was a Japanese knockoff of a Fender jazz bass, which is, it's at my own place. So it's currently still, like, hanging on the wall. The amplifier is behind me here, so it needs servicing, but it's still quite, quite functional.

Cam:

The Japanese knockoffs of Fenders were actually, um, often renowned to be better built.

Jason:

It's, it's, it's such a good instrument. Yeah, I think, uh, no idea what brand it is because it had, it had a little symbol on it, which I've managed to track down. I think it was the logo of the music store in Aberdeen that he'll have bought it from, so they must have just, like, brought over lots of import instruments and slapped their own branding on it. So that, that fell off, and it's now just completely unbranded. But, uh, yeah, solid, solid guitar, so I self-taught on that.

Cam:

So you, you are a multi-instrumentalist because of them. Um, going back to that Japanese branding, I've got a guitar I think my dad bought it for me, and it's just a sort of three-quarter size acoustic guitar, and it's got a, a label on the inside of the sound hole, and it says Wayne guitars, Brashes, Melbourne, but the symbol is the Takamine label, that mountain. Yeah, and apparently they just got them made in Japan and shipped over to Australia. But it's actually, it's a Takamine. I think that's the brand, isn't it, with the mountain?

Jason:

I think so. It's, yeah, like it. Japanese instruments are fascinating because there were some patent disputes, because Gibson and Fender are very, they very aggressively protect their patents, which makes sense. But, um, I think they, they let things slide for a long time in terms of Japanese manufacturers making Les Paul styles, you know, Stratocaster or Telecaster styles. And it went along enough that they were not able to dispute it, so it's only a small number of Japanese manufacturers that are able to manufacture them with, without having to change headstocks, stuff like that. So that still goes on today. I think it's quite a...

Cam:

Yeah, I've got a wonderful, um, I've got a wonderful Telecaster copy by a company named Bacchus. And I'm not sure, I tried to trace it down, but it's a beautiful guitar. It's a really... can't play guitar for, for peanuts, but so, sorry, I'm getting distracted!