

Ep.97 The Business of Creativity: Why Life Experience is Your Greatest Asset

With Pete Doyle

Maria Lloyd

Hello everyone and welcome to the My Local Marketer podcast. I'm Maria and today I'm speaking with musician and composer Pete Doyle and we're here today in PDM Studios. Pete, hello, how are you?

Pete Doyle

Hi Maria, I'm very well. And you?

Maria Lloyd

Yeah, very well. Well, it's been two years now since we did, yes, two years since we did our last interview. For people who didn't listen to our original one, which I will link to at the bottom of this episode, but could you give a brief background to yourself for people who aren't familiar with you?

Pete Doyle

Yeah, I'm a local musician, composer. I add the word composer now more confidently than I used to two years ago because I've been doing a lot more composition work with museums, which we'll talk about in a bit, and full-time musician. So when I say that to people, they give me that look which says, yeah, but what do you do for a living?

No, I'm a full-time musician and composer. Yeah, but what's the real job? This is a real job, you know, so I feel much more confident now that I'm wearing the right shoes and doing the right work.

Maria Lloyd

I think it takes a bit of practise, doesn't it? Because at the time, you were still sort of relatively new to it per se, so actually haven't done it for a couple of years.

Pete Doyle

Yeah, and new to it in terms of making it a full-time job. I've always been playing guitar for 40 years, been teaching for 25, but it's always been a side hassle of doing that and doing the music in the charity, the Rock Academy. But like most people who look at music and think, well, if I can't make a decent living out of it, there's no point trying.

And of course, you know, my time of life, adult children, they've all grown up and bought their own houses. You get more time back, which is great. So all that energy that we're putting into raising a family and working, I can now redistribute that energy to writing melodies and thinking about colours and shapes when I'm composing a piece as a creative response to a piece of artwork.

Coming up to, well, I'm late 50s now, so this is the job I should have been doing when I was 19, you know, but I couldn't afford to effectively, you know. So I like the fact that I'm here in the studio I've rented here in Caversham, recording at PDM Studios, surrounded by all my instruments, but I've got a few guitars, piano, organ synthesisers behind me as well. I'm literally here composing an album and still teaching, I teach guitar as well.

Maria Lloyd

You've come a long way. So what has that journey looked like for you over the last two years?

Pete Doyle

It's been really interesting because when we last met, we were at our mutual friend's business premises and I was looking into 2025 being a sort of a guitar project. And I had this idea, which has now come to fruition, which is repairing guitars, recycling guitars, created a guitar library, created a brand, a website called playtheguitar.co.uk and the people in the bike hub in the middle of Reading very kindly said I could use a bit of space. So for most of this year, actually, people would have seen me if they came into the bike hub to get their bike fixed in town, the old mother care shop.

And there'll be this crazy guy in the corner with guitars. So I've doubled down on my craft of fixing guitars. I've been servicing a lot of guitars for musicians who work in the area and just connecting with the people who do this for a living.

Not so much people in bands, but composers. I've been a lot of networking in London with the Ivers Academy, with PRS, Musicians Union, which is really important. So looking at how people who compose music for a living and how the mechanics work.

So registered with PRS as a writer and how we get our work registered and how we start to look at the royalty side of it. I'm using that business brain that's still in there somewhere. I can draw on that business brain when I need to.

But also now there's this creative brain emerging, which is really enjoyable, you know, to tap into creativity. And I teach at Green Park on a Wednesday as a group there. And that all came about by winning this Pride of Reading Award, which was just an amazing experience.

So I've been this year, 2026, for nine months this year, I've been teaching a group every week of people who work at Green Park and the various companies. And it's great to help adults and help them relieve a bit of stress in their work day. And just trying to be imaginative and creative around how I can take a group of 15 people who don't know each other, but work on the site at Green Park.

Some can play very well, and some have never picked up guitar before. And I've got the same 45 minutes with that group. And most people would say, well, that's not going to work.

Everyone's going to be unhappy because, you know, the ones who can't play need time to develop that skill. The ones who can play will get bored because they're waiting for the people who can't play to get up to scratch. So I just started thinking on my feet and said, let's all play the same chord together.

So what I've been doing is looking at how we can teach music, mainly through the guitar, by breaking down a chord, a major or minor chord, into different notes and intervals, and then allocating those notes to a group of guitarists at the same level in the group, a bit like a choir. And this amazing thing happened where, all of a sudden, everyone's playing the same note together. And this got me thinking, maybe we could create an orchestra out of guitars.

So this year has been amazing. Just listening to everyone and thinking about, as an educator, how do I teach a group of mixed ability? They all come from different base points.

So it's a real privilege, and I generally mean this, to be in that room to help them through that journey. And the other big thing I've been doing is working with Launchpad for a year and a half, actually. And I know you work with Launchpad as well, and it's a good charity.

And they've got this facility in Cardiff Road in Reading, where it's a life skills centre. And I started volunteering there. It's so grounding, being there, because we have everything that we need, but some people don't have that, and we take things for granted, like living in a house.

They're rebuilding their life. So I found that teaching guitar there in a group, I was using the same techniques of group teaching. That I found very enjoyable to do.

And if I'm honest, a bit scared to start with, because I don't have much experience of knowing people from that sort of background. So I was a bit sort of self-aware of, you know, how am I going to do this? But the people there, Zoe, who runs that centre, is fantastic.

She said, look, we've got a budget, we can pay you to do this. So I do it now for an hour a week. This idea of this project, Play the Guitar, is now becoming potentially a business in its own right.

It could be a community interest business, I'm not sure yet, but I'm having fun. And I'm very lucky I get to do what I've always wanted to do, just hang around with musicians and play guitar and teach.

Maria Lloyd

There was a lot to unpack there. First of all, you mentioned the orchestra, and you said about the process that you do to get a group of people at different levels and abilities, different ages, playing at the same time. Could you go into a bit more detail with how you get them all to connect?

Pete Doyle

Well, if we take, for example, an A major chord, so for your music listeners, there's three notes in an A major chord, A, C sharp and E. First of all, I'm assessing in real time that everyone's bass point, because they can just drop in, they don't have to come every week. So I don't know from one week to another who's going to be in the room.

Every week at quarter past 12, I'm looking who's coming in the room, so I set the room out for around 10, 15 people. If it's regulars, I know where their bass point is, so I've got an agenda of how I'm stretching each person individually from where they were the previous week. This week, for example, we had someone who's brand new.

So going back to A major, this new person, they couldn't play an A major chord, but I know that within a few seconds I can get someone playing an open string on a guitar, bass level. What can you do? Hold the guitar, show them how to hold the guitar, look comfortable, and in this case there's an open A string, second string down.

So I knew then we've got a bass note, I can get that person working in the group, and they will get the group experience in three minutes time. And then I'm setting up other things for the other group, I might have three or four people. You play a C sharp, you guys play an A with this new guy, and you guys play an E.

So they've got a note as a group, and then I count them in. When everyone arrives to a group lesson, and this happens when I do corporate workshops as well, everyone's still unpacking their day. They're busy people, they're working at big companies in Green Park, so I have to give them a few minutes to noodle.

And it was exactly the same when I was doing Rock Academy with teenagers. Exactly the same behaviour. Two or three minutes of, yep, get access to them, right, now we're here to work.

So I have to command the room, I have to get good eye contact with everyone, and semicircle, which is really important. And then I count everyone in. Everyone has to be present, and what I mean by that is, they can't even be thinking about work.

They're off the beat, or they're coming in a bit late, or they're coming in a bit early. My job is really sort of trying to keep everyone at the same tempo. It takes two or three times, but within a few minutes, everyone is playing their note perfectly.

They all start and stop at the same time. And something happens when you've got half a dozen or more people playing, like an orchestra. You know, it's different when you're playing on your own, or you're learning the guitar on your own.

There's a different chemistry that's happening there. And I'm looking for visuals. Are they enjoying it?

Are they getting it? Are they feeling comfortable? And then if I have to break the ice, I say, you know, I'm collecting smiles today.

And it makes everyone smile. And then if someone doesn't want to smile, I give them a smile that I collected yesterday. Just having a bit of fun, you know, making it human.

The aim of that exercise is to play together.

Maria Lloyd

You make it sound so easy, but it's really difficult to have people at different levels, different interest rates, different abilities. So to keep them all entertained whilst bringing the ones that need a bit more help along at the same time, that's a real challenge. So hats off to you on that one.

Pete Doyle

Thank you, but I genuinely care about this stuff because I'm not now doing this and another job as well. I used to have a day job running my own social company and stuff. And so I still had stress going on, but now I don't have that stress.

I can just focus. On a Wednesday, I teach for 45 minutes at Green Park and I do nothing else in the morning. So in the morning, I don't book anything in before that session.

I get the guitars prepped. I take the guitars with me, so I take 10, 15 guitars. I've got this routine now, which focusses around that 45 minutes.

If I was trying to cram too much into the day, that would come across. So I have to get myself in a calm position and focused, which is not easy. You know, we like getting distracted.

So I've learned that this year. And also doing a group with the Launchpad, which I do on Tuesdays, sometimes I use the same material, the same song. So you know, I try and batch it up if I can.

Maria Lloyd

Some really good pieces of advice there with clearing out your morning to make sure that your headspace is there as the teacher and also being able to reuse, repurpose your content as well. I think those are two really good things that people can take on themselves. The thing that we talked about last time as well was Thin Ice, the composition you did two years ago now.

You're still doing compositions. What is your composition process like?

Pete Doyle

Yeah, that's a good question. So after Thin Ice, I did Humanity with an eye and that was really 2025 with the digital revolution exhibition at the Reading Museum and that was important. To get into that frame of mind, I had to go and see the exhibition, look at all the artefacts on display, think what am I going to do in, say, three or four minutes of music?

So I'm just at that point, I'm completely open to what's going on around me. I have to be completely present. And then all of a sudden, when you start looking at things, something will trigger a memory.

In this particular case, it was the Stephen Hawking Deck the Talk box, which Brendan was telling me about, they just had fixed and it was speaking in Stephen Hawking's voice. But of course, it wasn't his voice. It was the voice synthesis that came out of the box, but that voice became known as his voice.

I thought, well, that's an interesting story. What can we do with this? Can we get his voice to say something?

It's a monotone voice because he's not with us anymore. And then Brendan said, Stephen Hawking apparently took the decision not to enhance his voice using advanced voice synthesis and intonation. So we started playing with that voice.

You can change the pitch of the voice. We've got it to sing Happy Birthday. And I thought, OK, well, maybe we'll do a piece of music and that voice will come in at some point.

Because it was back 60 years of Tech and Reading, I thought, where will humans be in 60 years? So I just popped on to chat with GPT and said, will humans still exist in 60 years time? Because this exhibition was about the previous 60 years.

And it came up with all these different quotes. And I thought, let's use these quotes. So I gave it to this guy called Stuart, who was programming this bit of Tech and said, can you get it to say this?

This bit of Tech was pre-MIDI for those music listeners. So we had to put in the pauses and everything. Now I've got this bit of machine saying something.

I needed a piece of music. So I got my acoustic guitar, which was the opposite of Tech. And the synth that's behind me is called a Chroma Plane synth, which I got from Germany and imported it just for this composition, which was a bit extravagant, but any excuse to buy an instrument.

And I thought, well, OK, let's create something which is using this voice, using what chat GPT has said, whether chat GPT thinks humans will still exist, using that synthesiser to get some sort of space age sound, soundscaping, and then use my acoustic guitar to get something a bit more human that we would recognise, you know, and a special pick, which I've got, which is a three millimetre Indian teak pick. So I said to Brendan at the museum, I think I can do something around Tech versus Organic, Organic being the wood of the acoustic guitar and the Tech being this Chroma Plane.

And then six minutes of music came from that, really. So it's up on Spotify now, you can just search for Humanity with an I. And the museum did a whole video report on how the piece of music came about.

It's up on the museum website. That was a whole process, that's over a year, mainly six or seven months, and then a few months actually producing the music. So at any point, I've got three or four compositions going around in my head at the same time.

So I've got one called Resilience I'm working on at the moment for my friend Thompson, who's running a festival in October. And that's about the path of refugees coming to the UK. There's an exhibition, photo exhibition called Resilience.

And it's something personal to me with my mum's story. So I'm writing that piece in my head. Another piece about the piano at Reading Station.

So the artist behind that was in the bike cup when I was mending guitars. He's up for a Pride of Reading award this year. Hopefully he'll get it and his team.

And there's a whole story of different forest animals on the piano. And when you close the lid, the owl appears. And so he's given me the backstory of each of the pieces of artwork of each of the animals.

I think there's 12 animals. So I'm writing a piece there. So it's not do one piece of composition, finish and do another.

You've got all these things going around in your head at the same time. And it's definitely not a nine to five job. I know the Beatles allegedly said that they did that.

They went in the studio and they did it as an office job. We're here to write and they did it. And if you can get some industrialisation going on, that will help focus.

But certainly I understand now why it's a whole different way of living. And you may have an idea at three in the morning. So you've got to go with it.

Or I often go to my favourite place, the Copper Club in Streetly. I just love sitting there with my little synth, little Roland S1 there. So I'll take that with me.

I can put my headphones in. It can create some lovely sounds, ambient sounds. And I'm there sat by the river and I'm watching the water.

And then that may be the starting point. But if I'm watching the water, the willow trees, if you know that area, they're moving at the speed of the wind, the tempo of the wind. And then you've got the water that's moving at a different tempo.

Then you might have a duck flying to the scene at another tempo. And all of a sudden you've got an orchestra of nature. And I'd never spotted that before.

And when I did this film music course at Guildhall, during this sort of transition from working in business to being creative, the person leading the course, she said, you're starting to think like a composer now, which is you see nature doing stuff at different tempos. So a lot of what I do is actually just sit in cafes and observe. I now understand that someone who composes, whether they're composing stories, you know, with words or art with colours or music with audio, we're doing observations.

Maria Lloyd

For anyone, I think that is the same process. You need to immerse yourself in whatever project it is that you're working on and have the space and time to think about it and mull over different things and the ideas come to you. Because when we try and work so systematically, it can work for repeatable processes, but not for something where you're trying to necessarily be creative or do something a bit different.

Pete Doyle

And also, I want to say something about being over 50, you know, starting a new career, because not many people get the opportunity to do that. Some people say to me, I've left it too late to learn the guitar. When we get older, we have more life experience, cuts and bruises and scars from life.

And that comes out in the music or the art or lyrics. So I'm really in favour of people who have got life experience to express that creatively. And you don't have to give up your job to do it, you can do it in parallel.

Life throws us some interesting challenges, doesn't it, over the years. If we lean into that, then we could play a note with vibrato, which will have a lot more meaning than someone who hasn't had as much life experience. And it does frustrate me that when I go to a music industry event in London, all the glamour and all the spotlight is on the young people.

I'm not anti young people, quite the opposite. But I'd like to see the spotlight on people who've got some life experience, so that we can say, we're not done yet. We've still got stuff to do.

If we look after our health, then we should live longer. And so we can have this creative autumn of our life, which could be quite interesting.

Maria Lloyd

It's different seasons of life for different things. And there are some things that, as you said, when you're older, you have a different perspective, which is so valuable. And I don't think society at the moment really respects age as much as we should.

Pete Doyle

Yeah, I think you're right. And I think the other thing I've noticed specifically in the last couple of years is I've connected with many more people from many different countries and different cultures and backgrounds just within Reading. And I've grown my knowledge and tolerance of other people just from hanging out with them through the work I'm doing with Launchpad and working with the Refugee Support Group.

I'm going to be volunteering there. I'll be running a monthly workshop at the new Sanctuary Cafe, which was the old Global Cafe. These are people who are really worried and anxious about where they're going to be.

They've come to the country legally. We're not talking about illegal. They've legally come here and they're just trying to find their feet.

Some of them may already be musicians, which is great. And some may just be worried. So if they're learning a guitar for 90 minutes, we can take a bit of that anxiety away.

And I'm learning more from that. It's a two way thing. I want to learn from different people of their indigenous music and instruments as well.

Maria Lloyd

That's how we develop our own creativity. So would you say, if I was to say, what advice would you give anyone about how to develop their creative process? Is it that?

Is it just to go and put yourselves in different locations, in different situations, with different people?

Pete Doyle

Well, first of all, I would say don't listen to me because I'm still learning. And I would say. The more I know, the less I think.

For me, playing music, it's about an emotion. So I can get from my emotion to the fingertips, to the guitar quicker than I used to because I haven't got any blockages in the way. So I would say for me, it's not necessarily about learning creativity.

We learn technical skills like, you know, the brushstroke or the metre of a line if you're doing lyrics and things. Technical skills, good. But the creativity, I think, just comes from people letting go and just think about their emotions.

And if I'm playing guitar live, I'm thinking about stuff that's quite emotional. Regardless of who's watching. At the moment, at this time of year, this particular week, I'm thinking about my brother who went five years ago.

So this is quite a fragile moment. So I'll be every time I play in this time of year in September, I'll always be thinking of him and my mom passed away very close together. So I'm naturally going to play things a bit more sensitively than if I want to rock out.

Going back to your question, it's tapping into whatever they want to express themselves. So if they're using creativity, there's some really good books. In fact, I'm reading a book at the moment, Rick Rubin, and he defines creativity as imagination and innovation.

Doesn't have to be one of the three art forms of music, literacy or art. Could be just thinking imaginatively about how am I going to get through the day? Or if I'm doing a report for work, how am I going to get this done?

Maria Lloyd

I think that's a really important point. We don't let our souls do that. There's no time to sit and think.

We've got a routine. We know we've got X, Y, Z to do for work. There's so many projects.

You're sort of constantly behind and constantly in the thick of things. When you do have a break, you're sort of so tired in the evening anyway, you probably just want to go straight to sleep. So we don't actually ever let ourselves sink into a rhythm with how are we feeling?

Where does that come from? I suppose that's what meditation, when people get more into meditation, spirituality, they allow themselves to think more.

Pete Doyle

Yeah, it's true. And certainly know how to switch off. I've said no to a lot of things that I know will take away that time that I was going to use for creativity.

I don't do anything on Mondays and Thursdays. That's taboo. So that's the time when I'm at the Copper Club in Goring or Shreveley.

Or I'm somewhere in a cafe in Reading or something like that. And Monday mornings, I never do anything Monday mornings now. That's just a rebellion because Monday mornings used to be go to work.

And I'm celebrating that I don't need to do that anymore. And I'm forcing myself not to get back into that Monday morning or that Sunday evening feeling of how I've got work tomorrow.

Maria Lloyd

I think that's the funny thing about the body. I'm sure as I've said to you before, even when I stopped working, started my own business, it took me months of having that Sunday feeling. Although mentally, I knew straight away right from the first weekend, I don't need to go to work tomorrow.

It took me months to get rid of that feeling. There's a very big disconnect between what we mentally know and what physically we feel.

Pete Doyle

And of course, we both run our own businesses. Lucky enough to be employed for the first part of my career. And then the second part was running my own business.

And I definitely felt happier running my own business because I was more in control. Well, I thought I was. In actual fact, I probably spent more hours working.

Stress levels went up running a business, but control went up as well. In employment, I remember thinking, oh, I don't like my boss or I'm not a very good boss or whatever. And I had to do eight hours a day.

I just think I can't imagine going to a place for eight hours a day. That just seems so alien now in today's modern work. I can understand when I meet younger people and they say they've got three or four jobs.

I can understand. I think companies need to have more part-time work. And then that gives that employee a chance to be creative and get the balance.

Maria Lloyd

You mentioned there about connection. How can music be used to connect people? Musicians connecting with other musicians or just using music as a tool to help connect people?

Pete Doyle

Well, that's interesting. So if we take the idea of how does a musician connect listeners to their music? I'm still learning that one.

I think people, when they see me live, may connect with what I'm doing, but I'm not trying to be anything other than myself. If I've got the opportunity, I'll always play something original. If I'm looping, I'll always play something instrumental because I don't sing.

And of course, nowadays, people can discover music. So if I analyse what I've learned, we're connecting with music at different times of the day, different days of the week and different moments. So when people ask me, what sort of music do I like?

My instant answer is blues because I can connect with that emotion and also the technique of what BB King used to do on the guitar. I just love that sound. But I now connect with classical music, orchestral music, which I never did three, four years ago because I've now experienced it live in the room.

Connect with music from different countries because I've been to Womad, hanging out with cool people in Ready. So I'm connecting with different styles of music. And as musicians, for me, making connections with other people to get work and to collaborate was something I was very familiar with.

You know, I did that running my own business. So I was always networking. I was going into London, doing talks and working on the socials and connecting with people on LinkedIn.

So that is natural to me. But as I'm now understanding the community I'm in, that's not natural for everyone. They feel very self-aware.

Imposter syndrome is always there with people like me and me as well. And also, how do you connect with someone to get another piece of work? For example, next year, I'll be thinking about doing a tour of museums and I want to do more creative response work.

So I know that I have to be proactive. I've got to ring these museums. I've got to connect with them.

I've got to do some research. I've got to go and visit the museum. And then when I put a proposal in saying, can I write a piece for your museum?

It's going to land a bit more intelligently than if I just rock up. The ability to network and make connections is really important. And to look at who's following me on Instagram and why are they following me?

And how can I start a conversation with them? Which is something I used to do automatically, training people on social. Now I do it for my own business.

There's a lot of work that creative people need to do to build their connections. And you can help them with that because you're good at this stuff.

Maria Lloyd

Work in progress, as you say. You're always a student, always something more to learn. So what have you got going forwards then for PDM Studios?

What are your plans? You mentioned next year in creative response, anything else?

Pete Doyle

Yeah, I mean, that's my main job, harmonic motion. So we're here in the studio in California because I'm writing an album. So the album will come out in the spring next year.

And that will be my first sort of big piece of creative work. More teaching, guitar group online. So I'm writing some content that people can then teach themselves online as well.

The Guitar Orchestra at Reading has got its second gig coming up at an award ceremony. I can't say too much about that, but yeah, that's going to be fun because getting these adults who don't know each other in a room with their own guitars and then learning repertoire and arranging songs. My ambition is to get an 80 or 100 piece orchestra together of just guitarists and play at the proms in 2028.

Have a goal, you know.

Maria Lloyd

Well, I see you've said it now on the podcast.

Pete Doyle

Come back in two years. Definitely more community minded, more group activity and just trying to break down some of the barriers towards music education. Make sure it's accessible for adults.

I think young people have got good access to music education now in this area in Reading, but adults don't. They're busy lives. So I want to make sure that there's a provision there for them.

Maria Lloyd

And I think they need it more than anything. As you said, if they're in jobs, a time of their life where they can't focus too much on music, they're the ones that need it more than anyone.

Pete Doyle

Yeah, I'll be looking forward to hearing your version of Snowman.

Maria Lloyd

I know I am practising a bar a day. OK, I am getting there. So is there anything you'd like to leave our listeners with?

Pete Doyle

Play the guitar? Did I say that last time? No, I just I am interested in anyone who's listening to this.

If they do generally want to learn to play an instrument or play the guitar, to get in touch with you and pass on my details, because I do this as a service. And if people can't afford it, that's fine. I'll just I'll find a way of making it available.

And if people want to learn how to build a guitar, then definitely get in touch. I just want to connect with a few more people who are thinking about playing the guitar and help them through that journey.

Maria Lloyd

Pete, thank you so much for your time today. We can go and have a look at your synthesisers next.

Pete Doyle

Thank you. Thanks for coming back.