

By Arts Writer
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Andrew Hewitt is dedicated to making music accessible.

Andrew Hewitt is a successful Sydney-based drummer who just happens to live with cerebral palsy.

NOT YOUR AVERAGE DRUM LESSONS

As well as working as a performer, Andrew is also dedicated to making music more accessible for people with disability. He is one of the founding members of Can-Do Musos, a global, non-profit organisation which showcases musicians with disability. He also gives regular drum lessons to students with a range of access needs. Andrew spoke to *Link* about his role as a music educator.

"Drum lessons with me aren't your average drum lesson," Andrew said.

"I teach from absolute beginner to intermediate students with disability."

Music lessons provide students with a lot more than just the ability to

play drums, and Andrew tailors each lesson for individual students' needs.

"My lessons also teach about social inclusion, interaction and boosting the student's self-esteem," he said.

"They don't involve books or drum charts ... I use backing tracks of the students' favourite songs to help them learn."

Andrew's rehearsal studio is wheelchair accessible, and he can also help students make their drum kit accessible to their needs.

"Firstly, I work out what the playing ability of the student is, whether they use their feet, have strength ... I use electronics on my own drum kit to help with the physical

issues relating to my cerebral palsy. Often I suggest students buy an electronic kit where they can program pads so they can play with hands only and make it work for their own body movements," he said.

"As a drummer and teacher with disability, I can relate to the struggles the student has. It takes longer for some students to grasp on to the simple things, so each lesson is tailored to the student's needs."

Andrew's rehearsal studio features two drum kits sitting side by side and a small PA system so that he and his students can play together, or to backing tracks.

"Even though when I do gigs I play sitting on a drum stool, I stay in my wheelchair when teaching. This gives me the ability to move around and assist the student when they need it," he said.

As well as teaching private lessons, Andrew conducts all-abilities drum workshops for groups. Recently he has been working with The Sylvanbeats, an all-abilities percussion ensemble run by the Sylvanvale Foundation (formally the Handicapped Children's Centre New South Wales).

"They're led by percussionist, Claudia Chambers," Andrew said.

"They occasionally perform gigs around Sydney and are a really cool group to work with."

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