

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT (June 2021)

Lizzie Lovejoy 0:10

Hello, everybody, welcome to the change of perspective podcast where we look at the world of creativity and art from many different perspectives. I am your host, Lizzie Lovejoy, artist of change for ARC creating work to celebrate the Northeast. Today our topic is music accessibility and creativity. And I'll be talking to Alex James.

Alex James 0:30

Hello, everybody. Welcome to the change of perspective podcast. I'm your host, Lizzie Lovejoy. And today we are talking to Alex James. Hi, how are you?

Oh, hello, I'm good. Thank you. How are you?

Lizzie Lovejoy 0:41

I'm good. Thanks. Yeah. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

Alex James 0:45

So my name is Alex James. I am currently at primary school teacher trainee. So I have just come out of university where I did music. So I did a degree in music, so a BA honours degree in music, which was closely followed by a master's degree in music. So I spent five years over at Newcastle University, doing that. And I would say, I've been doing that for around seven years now, because I did music in college, I went on to university and now I'm doing the teacher training, along with the music on the side. So I'm quite quite busy at this current time. So I'm 24 years old. And the band that I'm in is called Alex Jones, which is my first and middle name. And we're an alternative indie rock band with obviously a unique perspective because I'm actually in a wheelchair and I have Duchenne muscular dystrophy. So that's very different. We're like a wheelchair fronted band with like, a rock edge. So we're just wanting to, to change perspective of disability and everyone's like, thoughts on it. So that's me in a nutshell itself.

Lizzie Lovejoy 2:15

So you've been studying music for a long time, then before you started, you teach training and everything and actually recording. So what really got you started? What gave you your interest in music?

Alex James 2:27

So I have music in both sides of the family I've had, like, my, it's mostly grandparents who have had like, a been singers and clubs are played guitar and stuff. So it's kind of our family does have a good taste in music. So I've always been exposed to like different types of music. So like 80s music, 90s music, you know, like Oasis, and all that kind of good music, you know, but I really started it like in my bedroom, I would be listened to like, I think it was pop party albums. And I was like, listen to like, the Greece album and listen to like songs like that and be dancing in my bedroom when I was like seven.

But obviously, when I got to school, they invited me to do some drum lessons in Yeah, right. So I went, I decided, right, let's give it a shot. And I went in and had the natural rhythm of drums and stuff. So I started on the drum kit and played a lot of rock music, because I did like the rock, the rock school exams. But I think that's really the starting point was GCSE music like that kind of, like school kind of pushed me towards wanting to do music, because I was gonna do a levels. But then I was like, No, I want to do music. So I went for it and went to college. And obviously, it just kind of went from there. I started singing and start playing guitar. And I was exposed to a lot more music. So my tears kind of evolved around then.

And I started singing musical theater. That's where I started. And now I've gone from musical theater, which is quite a lot different to like heavy rock. So I've gone from there and now I'm currently in heavy rock. And I just think my passions always been there for music. And it's my thing. So that's kind of where I came from.

Lizzie Lovejoy 4:29

So there's that switch from musical theater to rock more just about your personal preference in like your music tastes in general.

Alex James 4:36

I think because I started writing music. I wrote 'Direction' our debut single. And but before that I wrote our recent release, I said that you look fine. And that was the first one that I brought. Obviously I'd written loads of songs before but this was the one I was like, wow, this is kind of the genre. Yeah, the rock genre that I want. Go with. So obviously, I still did the musical theater. And I used to sing and care homes before COVID and used to perform like musical theater, and then I would do my rock band stuff. So I might get back into the musical theater because that is quite still a part of me. But now it's currently like rock music. And you can only do so much at a time. With the teacher training and stuff.

Lizzie Lovejoy 5:24

Yeah, you have a long list of things that you're working on all at once,

Alex James 5:27

try to keep everything balanced. You're not burning yourself out.

Lizzie Lovejoy 5:30

I didn't know that you'd started with the musical theater side of it, because you can't tell from listening to the two singles that are on Spotify, they're a lot different.

Alex James 5:38

I used to be in like a performing arts group. And we do like big shows like Jesus Christ. circumstan and Darrell Cathedral. Yeah, like stuff like that. And

obviously, I didn't do much because obviously been disabled and having Duchenne it's really difficult. When I when I was able to walk, I could do the movement and dance around and well as best I could, and sing, sing these big musical theater songs, like seasons of love from rent and stuff like that. That was a long time ago. Like, it was only 2017. I left that group, but it feels like such a long time since that. Yeah. I mean, this year, specifically, it's been Yeah, definitely. Because coming out of the lockdown, and like shielding and stuff. I've had a hit. Get back out there. It's like, Whoa, like, socialize. And just everything's more tiring.

Lizzie Lovejoy 6:33

Yeah. So you said everything started it at school? Is that like the rest of your band? Or is it mostly yourself? Like, did you-

Alex James 6:41

Yeah, this is just myself. I met my band in university. So when we did the master's degree, we kind of came together to do a bit of a project around punk rock. So we did like a punk rock performance to begin with, like Green Day, and blink 182, and stuff like that. And that was my friends, Chris, on bass, Joe on drums, and Liam on guitar. But now, obviously, it's kind of changed a bit because the drummer has changed now. And we've got a new drama called Nathan.

But kinda to begin with, it was like a group of friends coming together to play great music. So it was like, let's jam and play some music. And then I wrote the songs and brought them into a rehearsal one time and we were like, right, let's give it a shot. And we've done it. And I was like, Well, we've got something going on here. So we decided we would record the songs in the Newcastle University studios. And then we kind of put them together.

And we'd finished these recordings, like one day before we went into lockdown. So it was quite, it was quite a tight turnaround. But it was until the lockdown like mere time when we decided to release like Direction, the debut

single, because we got it mixed. And we're like, yeah, that sounds good. We released that. And then, just recently, it's been a year since that release, we released our new song, I said that you look fine. Which you kinda like rock vibe, and we're kind of just gone from it each time, you know, like, developing and just keep going and see what happened.

Lizzie Lovejoy 8:22

Yeah. So how many songs have you done then? If these are the only two that I think you've released?

Alex James 8:28

Yes, we actually recorded five songs in the studio. So there's another, hopefully two or three singles that we might be releasing after this one, potentially in July, but we haven't quite decided yet.

Lizzie Lovejoy 8:41

So you recorded everything at Newcastle, in the in the studio? Is there? Is that like, an option for you to keep doing that? Or are you gonna have to find out the studio space?

Alex James 8:50

Yeah, because I was on the course. So I had access to all that. But now because obviously, like, we're not there, I'm not there anymore. I'm doing teacher training and somewhere else. It's kinda like, we need to find another space. So we've got, like, eight songs in total. So we got like, another five to record. And we'll probably get them recorded at some point.

Lizzie Lovejoy 9:16

Yeah. I mean, that'll be brilliant to hear.

Alex James 9:19

Yeah, definitely, I think, see what it sounds like.

Lizzie Lovejoy 9:22

So moving on to a slightly different subject, what kind of challenges have you faced in the music industry so far, because obviously, you're quite - your band's quite new to it. And you're just trying to get out there. So I'm interested in what your experience has been like so far.

Alex James 9:35

So experience wise, for me, it will probably be accessibility, that's as a matter of one, like the massive focus of our band trying to help with accessibility. So that kind of thing is like, it's the listener and the performance. So performance, it's getting the wheelchair on stage. And like the listener, it's getting a wheelchair to the front and not being put the back on the side which is quite segregating in a way, like I know they want to provide access to disabled people, but I sometimes like to be at the front with everyone bouncing around me.

Lizzie Lovejoy 10:10

Yeah, yeah, you want to be part of the energy

Alex James 10:12

Yeah, exactly. It's kinda like, Hey, you don't want to be sat at the back just doing nothing when sometimes you want to be in there in the mix. But I think accessibility and hall for performance and the people who go to concerts and stuff needs to be improved still.

Lizzie Lovejoy 10:31

So what, you are you talking about having been to shows, what's the your favorite show that you've been to?

Alex James 10:37

I would probably say it was Papa Roach in O2 Academy. And they were really good. Like, the sound was amazing. And the other one will probably be Razor light, who we saw at the O2 Academy. I've seen a couple of Stone Roses tribute to watch a lot like Stone Roses, and we assess tributes and stuff like that. But I think my favorite so far is probably Papa Roach concert.

Lizzie Lovejoy 11:01

What Why? What did you like about it was just like, you just love the music or?

Alex James 11:04

Yeah, it was it was just, it was just great sound. He came around to the wheelchair people and the lead singer. And I was like, Hi. And he was just like singing at me. I was like, What? So that's why I felt good because he actually came off the stage and cam tours.

Lizzie Lovejoy 11:21

So like actual engagement from a performer that's like quite a big thing

Alex James 11:26

is it depends on the artist.

Lizzie Lovejoy 11:28

So what's your favorite artist then?

Alex James 11:30

I would say royal blood at the moment, I've got like a thing behind me a poster of a signpost for the new album that they did not really like that. And also the pale white. I'm a big fan of than Sam fender. Who else? I would say Oasis and Stone Roses is definitely up there.

Lizzie Lovejoy 11:50

You can definitely hear that influenced, I think, can your Music

Alex James 11:54

Yeah, I would say so. Yeah.

Lizzie Lovejoy 11:56

So we've kind of been talking about what you're working on right now. So I guess we'll expand on that and ask about the themes and your music. What kind of stuff do you like to write and sing about? Is there anything specific? Or is it just whatever you're feeling.

Alex James 12:10

So usually, it's like around concepts that people experience in everyday life. So it's like, not just what I experienced, but the general population will feel in their lives. So Direction was kinda like, this idea of heading in a better direction, find anywhere in life, and are positive and stuff. But for a 'I said that you look fine' it's a lot darker theme. It's more like rejection and being turned down. So it was kind of the idea of going into a club. That was what was in my head, like, this didn't actually happen to me, but it was kinda like the idea of a guy going into a bar going up to a girl and saying, You look fine kind of thing. And just being like, nope, no, she's gone. And you don't even know. And so it was kinda like, I never saw you and I never saw you again. Yeah, that's kind of what it was feel like stuff. It comes from your heart like stuff was tough. And like, Duchenne being disabled and stuff. Like, I like writing about positivity and change and making a difference and all this. I don't like to be too dark. But every now and again, I like a bit of a dark theme.

Lizzie Lovejoy 13:21

So what do you start with? Do you start with lyrics? Do you start with music?

Alex James 13:25

So I start with like, the guitar riff. And then I get the nice guitar riff. And I start singing over just random words, which can be funny sometimes if you listen to like some of my, my phone record, and I do the guitar riff, sing about then write some lyrics. Sometimes they don't make sense. And then I'll make the make sense. Sometimes songs work, sometimes they don't. It's kind of just a experiment or like writing process.

Lizzie Lovejoy 13:55

What's the favorite thing that you've written? Is it one of the ones that out there? Like I never saw you always it one of the ones that hasn't been released yet.

Alex James 14:02

So I think I said that you look fine. is probably my favorite out there, currently. But the new ones that I'm wanting to release. The next one is, is a pretty good one. So I'm looking looking forward to share with that.

Lizzie Lovejoy 14:17

What's it called? Are we not allowed to know

Alex James 14:19

no, yeah, we announced that. It's looking forward to it. Yeah, that's a good one.

Lizzie Lovejoy 14:26

So what's the balance like then between teacher training and getting into music?

Alex James 14:33

So I would say the balances to begin with, obviously, I was doing the music and stuff. Then I got back into the teacher train. And I was like, well, this is a lot like I was tired on the night and I'll be falling to sleep at around nine o'clock, and stuff like that. I'll be falling into bed late. Whoa. So I was burnt out for the first couple weeks of getting back into the music and training and stuff. But I feel like I've found like my own little balance now where I'm like, post it note all around my room, like have different things that need to do. So I'm not, don't have everything in my head at once. So that's why I was doing trying to do too many things at once I was going to like, I can't do all these things at the same time. So it was kinda like, bring it back a little and try and find your balance.

Lizzie Lovejoy 15:23

post it notes. That's a good way of doing diary stuff. So yeah, it might take you take up your method. That seems like a good one first.

Alex James 15:33

I did. I did try the diary. But I forget that there. And then I'm like, Oh, I haven't even filled the thing again. It's just like, sat there. And I'm looking at and be like, ah, big list of like stuff.

Lizzie Lovejoy 15:46

Yeah. As opposed to notes right in front of you. So you know what's going on

Alex James 15:49

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Lizzie Lovejoy 15:51

What do you feel like it's important to be doing teaching, as well as music, do you feel like that's like a just a good thing in general to be doing both at the same time and be sharing that with students?

Alex James 16:03

I feel like, obviously, I want to change people's like children's lives and help the next generation of young people. So I've kind of always had that drive. So I want to do that, as well as my passion for music. It's kind of like, you don't want to leave the music just to go into teaching. Because I want them to both be the same thing. I want to be known as Mr. Kennedy in school, but obviously Alex James in the music. So it's kinda like I'm two different personas in and out of school. But I'm going to hopefully share my music with the children and show what I've been doing. So that might be interested to see how they, they react to that. But I feel like being a primary school teacher is really important to me, because I want to help educate children and really, almost go into a school and do the music and make a more positive ethos in the place and stuff like that.

Lizzie Lovejoy 17:03

It's such a vital age group as well, because I mean, it's primary school kids. So this is really, where they're starting to connect things and learn to enjoy stuff. How I found it so far.

Alex James 17:14

Yeah, pretty good. It's pretty tense at times, but I feel like it is very fun. There's no point in doing it if you're not gonna enjoy it. So it's kinda like, find, like different ways of enjoying it and stuff like that, and do the music lessons, like every week. Also, when we do like different activities, and it's so much fun.

Lizzie Lovejoy 17:37

Have you done performances, since starting teacher training?

Alex James 17:42

I haven't done any performances. And I did do online performances during the lockdown, but I kinda stopped doing it at some point, because I just got busy. But I would love to do like an online acoustic set or something like that.

Lizzie Lovejoy 17:58

Yeah, I've seen various different bands doing that over the course of lockdown. What's your response, really, in terms of that kind of thing happening in lockdown? Because from an accessibility perspective, I know there were so many things that I could now like, quote, unquote, go to over the course of lockdown that would just be available to me previously. So what do you-

Alex James 18:17

yeah, I feel like it can really connect with a lot more people. Because everyone was doing the live things that everyone was connected. I've connected with, like, hundreds of new people, just through these live concerts and just being able to talk to more people have this lockdown and connected.

Lizzie Lovejoy 18:37

So obviously, the way I found you was through the Newton News. Which is an interesting thing, because I tend not to see that kind of thing in our local newspaper. You've obviously been connecting to the media. Even though you've just started out. I saw that you'd done something with NARC at some point.

Alex James 18:59

Yeah, I was also in the Northern Echo, the regional newspaper. And I did an interview on BBC Tees. Oh, that was pretty interesting. Yeah, I mean, to hear my voice on the radio, I was like quite quite a good thing. And obviously, it's just,

you've just got to keep going and trying to get your name out there. But it's more it's not more to get my name out there. It's more like to get the point across of the band and actually show people what we're doing and help make a difference and inspire other people with disabilities and all that stuff.

Lizzie Lovejoy 19:33

So what's your favorite thing that you've done so far then?

Alex James 19:37

I think my favorite thing we've done so far is probably release this new song cos I feel like we just done it and then all of a sudden we got loads of attention on it. So gave me the positive boost that I needed. So kind of like helped me out and gave me that little bit of a jumpstart almost wish we started rehearsing again. Since like the lockdown stuff, so we got our first rehearsal last Sunday. And that went really well. My ears were ringing because I wasn't used to the loud sound, it was that loud. I was like, whoa. And I did have an ear plug in one ear, and the other one fell out. So it's like ringing, getting sidetracked. But obviously, I think my favorite thing is just writing music and connecting with people and make people happy kind of thing. And showing that someone with Duchenne can continue to defy the odds and stuff like that.

Lizzie Lovejoy 20:35

Have you been talking to a lot of people then if you had messages, or-

Alex James 20:38

I have had a few like messages, like usually the positive and like about how they find the song catchy and stuff and stuff like that, but I just like talking to new people. So when they connect with me, I like, Hi. So I was like, I'm wanting to, like, connect with as many people as possible.

Lizzie Lovejoy 20:56

So what's next, then? What's the plan?

Alex James 21:00

So I think the plan is rehearse, perform somewhere, get a performance, done, your debut and performance, release a few more singles. And just take it from there, get in the studio, record some more songs, and then kinda just go from there.

Lizzie Lovejoy 21:18

What's the what's the rehearsal process been like

Alex James 21:20

we were in, but we couldn't hear each other space. And we were like shouting at each other, trying to understand what each other was saying. So it was that loud, but like, we tried to turn it down. But obviously, you've got to balance out with the drums and stuff. So it's just kind of you taking apart the songs and build the structure up and kind of rock out

Lizzie Lovejoy 21:42

I'm kind of interested in how you how you record.

Alex James 21:45

Yeah, so there was two ways of doing it, you can do it live performance in a studio, where they record everything in like one, little take, so it feels like a more of a live performance. And the other one is to start with the drums, build up the bass guitar, then the guitar on top of that. And then you kind of feather it off with the vocals on top.

And we did this all by ourselves like in the studio without the sound engineer and stuff like that. But we did have help from the guy who works in the the

university and the technician called David. They set it up for us. So you kind of set everything up and got us sorted. So we just recorded into the system. And just kinda after that you've got like all your tracks and stuff, and you've got to put it all together. And then you get someone to mix it, then you get someone to master it. So mixings like, sorting it all out, masterings getting it ready for commercial release.

Lizzie Lovejoy 22:49

So when you get back to a new studio space, it's going to be a whole new learning curve, again, to work through all-

Alex James 22:56

Yeah and hopefully, and hopefully we have a team of like sound engineer and all the people that you meant to have an own recording studio. So they'll be setting everything up for us. And we won't have that stress of we just come and perform kind of thing.

Lizzie Lovejoy 23:12

So in terms of writing lyrics, have you ever done any writing before? Because obviously, before, before we started recording, you were saying that you've been doing a lot of maths today and that that was your preference over english. I'm interested in how the writing process is for you.

Alex James 23:29

Yeah, so it's quite an interesting, they are bright. I've got 1000s of notes on my phone of just random lines that I think of in my head. And sometimes they turn into ideas, sometimes they just left. But I kind of take the idea and just try and write in - So the lyrics actually fit a melody. So I think of like syllables of words and stuff like that to try and really make it sound good. But some words will be like, yeah, that doesn't sound nice. And I'll be like, right, I need to change the word. And sometimes you find a new word. Sometimes you don't, it's kind of

like it's like a diary. Or you're writing a poem. So you just kind of like typing in your phone some ideas, and it just kind of grows from there.

Lizzie Lovejoy 24:19

What's your main goal? What's your end goal? What you want to do? Is it releasing an album? Is it going on tour? What is what's the dream?

Alex James 24:28

I think the dream is to like, have a complete full album of bangers for people to listen to, just to like, it's almost like a legacy. Like I want something to leave behind. Like I don't mean that in like a dark way that should mean meaning like, like every musician like Prince and David Bowie and stuff like that, they've left stuff behind. So it's kind of like I want that I want people to be like yeah, this was Alex James.

Lizzie Lovejoy 24:58

Do you have like a vision for music videos for that kind of thing.

Alex James 25:02

Yeah, so I've had a lot of ideas for like music videos and stuff for the ones we've done. But it's obviously because of COVID. It's difficult to find, like location and the team. So currently, we're going to try and find someone to potentially put their music video together. And then it's bringing that to gather on a low budget. Because it's not like we're like a high budget, like band. So it's kinda like, we have to work with what we have.

Lizzie Lovejoy 25:29

I feel like a lot of that, the northern way of doing it as well. At least the northern music scene from what I find is that we're just kind of like, yeah, we'll make something happen. Let's see what we can do.

Alex James 25:39

Yeah, we'll see what we can do. Yeah, that's it. Yeah. Obviously, I've got a lot of like, connections with like, people. So I've got like a good guy who mixes and masters all my stuff called Alex as well. Alex McArthur. And we also have Christoph who does, like all the photography and like the promo, promo videos and stuff. So it's kinda like you use your friends to help you out and stuff. Obviously, I paired them and stuff, but like, they do a good job.

Lizzie Lovejoy 26:14

It's like it's a collaborative friendship.

Alex James 26:16

Yeah the whole thing. Like that's what I like about music, you just collaborate with people

Lizzie Lovejoy 26:20

Is there anything else specific you want to talk about

Alex James 26:22

just talking about my condition a little bit, Bob Duchenne my diagnosis and stuff, I was diagnosed with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy at the age of four. So my reception teachers saw that was like struggling to get off the floor and stuff. Then I was kind of diagnosed with this, it was obviously worse for my parents. And it is for every parent who like gets diagnosed, get a diagnosis like that.

But obviously, I didn't know anything, because I was a little kid. So I just lived a normal childhood, really. And obviously, I walked until I was about 21. I think I think about that. So a I kept on my for quite a while because usually boys, my

diagnosis, they were saying I was going to be potentially gone by the age of 18. So I was quite a hard hitting thing, but obviously, I'm still healthy. And but obviously, I'm in a wheelchair full time now. But it's kinda like, better this way. Because I like zooming around in my electric wheelchair and stuff. It's much it's much safer for me, and I don't feel like I'm being accepted a lot more now. Yeah.

Lizzie Lovejoy 27:41

Has it been? I mean, I imagine it's been like, a hard experience having to let go of different instruments like thinking about the drums. That's gonna be-

Alex James 27:49

yeah. So I had to move with from rock Roman to begin with, because I lost strength. But then I went into Jazz Drumming, which I did for a good four years or something. But obviously, my knowledge of drums is still in my head. So when I write the songs, I write a good a good drum line, you know?

Lizzie Lovejoy 28:09

Yeah, you're still mapping out even Yeah, physically performing it.

Alex James 28:12

Yeah. Because it's in my head. And But yeah, I would still love a drum kit my house just so I can like see if I could play it. Even if it like tired me out after a few like hits.

Lizzie Lovejoy 28:22

But you said that you hadn't done live shows yet? What do you think - Like what's your vision for a live show? Would it be specifically an acoustic set? Would it be a smaller venue? Or do you have like, a full vision of things that you'd want to be able to do?

Alex James 28:36

I see a big stage lights? mosh pit? Yeah, cuz I can just watch everyone jumping up and down to to my tunes. And that would just be like, a really good... Even if it's like a smallish venue. I don't really mind. But like, as long as I have some kind of lights and some kind of i dont know audience, maybe some pyrotechnics out of be really funny. Put Like rocket boosters on the bottom of the wheelchair and like, shoot up into space or something. I don't just go for it. Yeah, probably health and safety issues that can work but why not? We could work around that. But that's just like a big dream idea, like, have something that would be cool people singing along to your song and stuff. I can't imagine what that would be like, like, you've written a song and they're singing it back. It's kinda like a big, big moment. It's a good feeling when you're singing together.

Lizzie Lovejoy 29:31

thank you, everyone so much for listening. Thank you for being here. Alex. It's been wonderful to talk to you

Alex James 29:36

you're very Welcome

Lizzie Lovejoy 29:37

Message when the next singles out. Look forward to hearing it.

Alex James 29:42

Right. Brilliant. Thank you.

Lizzie Lovejoy 29:43

Talk to you all later. Bye Bye.

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