

Paul Denegri

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SPEAKERS

Paul Denegri, Hattie Butterworth, Rebecca Toal

Rebecca Toal 00:00

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Hattie Butterworth 00:45

Hello, and welcome to Things Musicians Don't Talk About with your hosts Hattie Butterworth

Rebecca Toal 00:51

And me Rebecca Toal.

Hattie Butterworth 00:53

Within our vibrant musical world, it can often feel that the struggles and humanity of musicians is lost and restricted.

Rebecca Toal 01:00

Having both suffered in silence with mental physical and emotional issues we are now looking for a way to voice musician stories and discuss them further and to connect with the many others who suffer like we have.

Hattie Butterworth 01:11

No topic will be out of bounds as we're committed to raising awareness for all varieties of struggle.

Rebecca Toal 01:17

So join me, Hattie, and guests as we attempt to bring an end to stigma by uncovering the things musicians don't talk about. All right, so thank you very much Paul, for coming on the podcast today. For all of our listeners, This is Paul Denegri who is my old Head of Brass from Wells Cathedral School.

Well, even at that time, you were like Head of multiple, multiple things. But how are you doing today, Paul?

Paul Denegri 02:05

I'm okay because I'm, I'm in a lovely farmhouse in Somerset, just chilling. Somebody's lent me this for a few weeks just to chill out in ... well, actually, I'm working. There's the classic [inaudible] switch off. So I'm good, actually. So, so yeah, it's beautiful outside.

Rebecca Toal 02:20

Amazing. So for people that don't know you, although I'm sure a lot of people who do listen will know who you are from just Wells or whatever, could you just give a brief overview of... well, I guess, who you define yourself as now and then we'll go into your kind of musical upbringing?

Paul Denegri 02:40

So who I am now? So you mean as in what my job? What I'm doing...

Rebecca Toal 02:44

I guess so, yeah.

Paul Denegri 02:45

Okay. So I'm... I suppose, what they call a multifaceted musician. I think of myself as a musician first and a trumpet player second. Trumpet's just part of a core but that was never the intention, can I tell you that. But my dad gave me a really brilliant bit advice when I was about 19. He said, "if you're gonna go into this," you know, he wasn't a musician. He said, "You need to be going to this like a war with a machine gun, not a rifle. So you're gonna have to have lots of skills, otherwise you're not gonna earn a living." So there was ... so it was my dad that opened my eyes to fact that ... I was just heading down like trumpet, trumpet, trumpet, trumpet trumpet. Job in an orchestra, that very naive thing, and nobody ever told me, you know, "this is gonna be really, really tough. And why don't you open yourself wide, and you'll be a better human, let alone earn better money." So I'm now multifaceted musician by accident, literally. Because ... so I adjudicate, masterclasses, I teach, I write, I compose, songwriter, I play guitar, I do the trumpet. I do all these different things.

Rebecca Toal 03:42

Yeah, for however long I've known you've always had multiple things on the go. So tell us about where did it start? All that kind of stuff?

Paul Denegri 03:50

Well, I always say... I don't know whether you remember I said this at Wells. I would be packing eggs if it wasn't ... you know, I was a really quite a naughty boy in primary school. And so I just wanted to be a goalkeeper. It's all I wanted to do. And I would just muck around and my dad was a Head so he keep getting called in. It was bit embarrassing for him, you know, and because I was always mucking around doing something I shouldn't be doing because I hated school. I just didn't like it, I didn't engage with it, didn't connect with it, didn't see the purpose of it. And chances of me being goalkeeper: zero. Just as much... zero chance of me being in the LSO: zero. And, and then I ...you know, I was at one assembly, I

was down the front again, having been naughty so the headmistress pulled me out and I sat in the front with all the Year Ones who were tiny, and there's me, taller than all the rest. And I remember her putting on some music, and ... Mrs. Brown was her name and I can even remember the brooch she was wearing. It was such a moment. And then ... and at the end, she had an old Bush record player, and she put the thing on, and the needle ... got all that stuff going on. And this ... it wasn't loud music. It was really, really quiet music that came out and then suddenly from nowhere, this trumpet went "[singing]". Like this. And I was literally like, aged 11 I was like, "What the heck is that?" It did... I don't know what it did, it was like a little Bunsen burner or gas boiler went off, something went off. So she sent the rest of the school away and as usual kept me behind...getting the whole Denegri speech, you know, "Denegri, you know, you cannot behave like this. You're 11 you know? When are you gonna grow up?" But I kept saying "look, Miss, I'm not interested. Can you just tell me what that music was? Can you write it down on a bit of paper?" So she wrote down this, I didn't know what it meant. So I went home to my dad who tried me on recorder, voice, awh he tried me on everything as an amateur musician. And I went home and I said, "Dad, I want this piece of music on record." And interestingly enough, I also said, "I want to know what it looks like on paper." Because it was just out there. I don't know where it was. So my dad just went, "Oh, my son!" He was like... he was like, this wayward child has suddenly come home. And then, you know, it was Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony, first movement. And then there came a purpose to my life. I know it sounds really cheesy, but that's exactly what happened. What do I need? So I need five GCSEs. Right, I'd better work at maths, I'd better do this. It's funny. That's how it's happened, so I just set off on that real trumpet route aged 11. Yeah, and I've still got the score and I've still got the record. Yeah, still got both.

Rebecca Toal 05:42

Yeah. That's amazing!

Paul Denegri 06:09

Still haven't played it and still haven't conducted it. Isn't that weird?

Rebecca Toal 06:12

Would it ruin the magic?

Paul Denegri 06:13

Very good question, because it's the one I want to do. I don't know...yes, because I'll probably be dead scared about making mistakes and I'll go into some weird zone about ... and I'd disconnect from the emotion of that music. Does that make sense? I'll be going to trumpet playing mode.

Rebecca Toal 06:25

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 06:25

And I'll be more worried about that. And then I lose connection with the actual emotional music so it might ... you're right. At the moment is just magical to me.

Rebecca Toal 06:32

Yeah, it's out there, an abstract thing that you can't quite grasp. So then from age 11, you kind of took it more seriously then you went to music college?

Paul Denegri 06:42

Yeah, yeah. So I just went down this very, very narrow trumpet route and in actual fact, bubbling underneath was songwriting and rock music big time. Huge. In actual fact that was probably bigger if I'm honest. But when I played the trumpet of course I got music... it gave me every sort of ... you got applause didn't you? And you got ... my parents thought I was okay and you know. Everybody thought I was good at something rather than this waster guy that just was going nowhere, gonna pack eggs. Denegri's going nowhere. You know, so the trumpet bought, I suppose bought credibility where rock music wouldn't have done you know, it was all the thing you didn't do you know, it's the sort of wayward... it's a wayward life which is rubbish of course. It's not that life at all, but I...so I sort of locked that away secretly but kept it going. And did this whole trumpet business, yeah, but very narrow. It was only trumpet, trumpet, trumpet, trumpet trumpet. And everything had to be related to trumpet so GCSEs, A-levels... there was ... only reason ... the only reason I did then was not to learn anything, just to jump a hoop.

Rebecca Toal 07:33

Wow. And then how was your experience at music college? Like did you enjoy it? Did you find it difficult?

Paul Denegri 07:39

Do you know what? I ... to be perfectly honest, I look back on it as a waste of time. A complete and utter waste of my time. And in actual fact, when I look back at it, what I could have learned, what I could have done, looking back on it: hours and hours and hours, hours of doing nothing. You know and it was like "go and practice for five hours a day. Go and practise..." That's why you're not doing anything. And I've sort of got really strong views about it now in a way, because why four years? Why did I go through all that expense? Why, you know, you could have done it in two what you gave me. There was no direction, there was no careers advice in those days. There was nothing. Nothing like that. They didn't care. And I would skive. I would ... I wouldn't ... few things ... I didn't, never went to a piano lesson hardly. I met my tutor once in the lift. One of my mates said "ah you're Paul." "Hi Paul." And she said "are you Paul Denegri?" I said "Yeah." And she said "I'm Letty Stuart, I'm your tutor. You haven't been for six months." And nobody cared. It was like weird, it didn't matter, you know, who cares about you? "I don't really care about the fact you haven't been. I don't really care what's going to happen when you fall out at the end of it and ..." There was no, then, no attempt at being realistic about things... Trying to find my strengths you know, hours and hours doing orchestral excerpts and then no real sort of "what's Paul's strength? Let's let's draw out Paul's strengths. Where is his strengths? Where's his ... you know, where's his weaknesses? Where can we help?" None of that. None of that nurturing or care at all. It was just ... I just wandered through it if I'm perfectly honest. And it's just a such a waste of an exciting time of your life. And it was almost like you had to be you know, "man up. If you can't cope, sod off basically. They'll find you out and it's good it's find you out." "Oh no, it doesn't work like that I don't think."

Rebecca Toal 09:14

Sounds like it would be disappointing, having been that excited about trumpet and then getting there and it being like, "oh."

Paul Denegri 09:20

Yeah, it was ... yeah, looking back, yeah. Disappointed, total disappointment. Yeah, totally. And I know, it was easier for me, I guess it's easier for me at school as a Head of Brass, but I ... you could have done a lot more for the students than they did, you know, it just felt that, you know, it was a sort of bare minimum really. Could have done a lot more interesting and creative stuff actually. I just ... and I remember being just kind of scared all the time in the orchestra. But there was no, no, nobody...I don't know what it's like now so much but I mean, there was nobody to go and talk to and nobody to ... you know, you either survive or you don't, you know. And you almost had to change your personality to survive. And that's, that's not good. You got to be true to yourself at the end of the day. Otherwise, you just end up unhappy so it's almost like you had to become this battle-hardened, no emotional guy was going to just go through this, whatever happens. So yeah, it was just it was a disappointment for me.

Rebecca Toal 10:08

Then what happened after the four years? What happened when you came out the other side?

Paul Denegri 10:13

Well, I don't know what ... I mean like I think a lot of people, I just fell out. You know, you get your ... you go up on your graduation day and you've got your gown, which I refused to buy.

Rebecca Toal 10:21

Nice.

Paul Denegri 10:21

But I basically, I just fell out you know, literally just walk ... next day, 5th of July you'll ... nobody'll ring, nobody'll phone. I think you hear this story a lot actually. And I just sitting in the summer thinking "well, what do I do now?" You know, and so you're just picking up the odd day and you're picking up your thing and you're trying to open doors and nobody's really told you how to open doors, nobody's helped you do that. You're just scrabbling around thinking ... and then, course you become disillusioned because you've just put your whole life onto this. So I was gigging around London. I, you know, did London orchestras, a bit of freelancing, so I had to get ... I worked at the BBC record library for a year. I just got a job doing that because they allowed me to go and gig and ... and then I just got fed up of this one month great money and then nothing the next month. I thought I can't ... I'm never going to, you know, rent properly or buy a house. So I thought I'd get a job, full time job and that's when Wells came up. I saw it advertised and I ... so I put in for it. Well, my mum told me to put in for it. I wasn't going to put in for it, I said "I'm only 23 for God's sake. I haven't even taught! Let alone... I taught in 1 Day in Tunbridge Grammar School, Girls Grammar School," that's all I'd done. This is Head of Brass at a specialist music school brass for crying out loud. So my referee was my trumpet teacher at college. And I said "will you be my referee?" and he goes "Paul, you don't stand a chance." My referee... "you don't stand a chance at that". And my mum was like "you know, you gotta do it, you just don't know. Just go... do it for experience," which is good advice. Just get used to doing an interview. So turned up, did the interview and got the job. Now I think they were ... either I was cheap.

Rebecca Toal 11:47

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 11:48

Or desperate. Or both. Because I ... to this day, I don't understand why that happened. I really, really don't.

Rebecca Toal 11:55

Wow.

Paul Denegri 11:55

And what was interesting was when I fill... you know, they do all the ... they offer you the job, and I nearly fell off the chair. I was like "oh my god!" I think I nearly said, "You've got to be joking!" but I thought better not. And then they ... when I filled all my acceptance stuff, and they said the salary, they said "your qualifications aren't worth anything. We don't... they're not recognised. You're gonna have to start on the same salary as a domestic." So I started on the same salary as somebody who cleans the bedrooms in the boarding house. That's less than 6000 a year because my ... so you've gone through all four years, you've gone through all that practice, you gone all though that, and then you find out Licentiate and a fellowship isn't the same as a degree. And it's not worth anything. So that's how I got that.

Rebecca Toal 12:21

Oh my god. Wow.

Paul Denegri 12:35

Yeah, but I was certainly cheap.

Rebecca Toal 12:37

Yeah, that's actually ridiculous. But then, so then you moved from London to Somerset.

Paul Denegri 12:44

Yeah, yeah! Just literally uprooted and moved to Wells, moved to Wells.

Rebecca Toal 12:48

And then what was it like, like, starting... Having got this job that you were like, "you gotta be joking", then ... like, I can't even imagine the first day there being like, "what are the hell am I going to do?"

Paul Denegri 13:00

Well, oh, God, well, I can remember my first day because you probably remember those specialist music meetings... I felt about 10 years old. And then you know, cuz people know me because I've got long hair, but I cut my hair really short for the interview. How naive was I? I thought "what does a teacher look like? Oh, a tweed jacket, tweed tie." And you know, me, I'm all leather jackets and all that stuff. So I turned up to my first day in a tweed jacket and a tweed tie and my really short hair, and

course that's not being ... what I've learned in life that you've got to be true to you. And I wasn't being true to me. So anyway, I was standing there thinking "this is what I have to be like now. I have to be a Head of Brass, I gotta be this, this responsible kind of person, I got to look like a teacher, I've got to look like this." And I remember the specialist meeting at the end of the first day, I just standing there, and of course, these people with all their degrees and whatever, Cambridge degrees and university degrees and eminent musicians or whatever. And you go down the line, "they've got any announcements?" and course the a Head of Strings with a fantastic announcement, Head of Woodwind fantastic... and I'm at the end of the line going "I've got absolutely nothing to say, and what the hell am I doing here?" And he goes, "this is our new Head of Brass, Paul Denegri. And have you got anything to say?" And I just remember going really red, I can remember go boiling hot, and I thought in front of about 120 pupils all looking at me... and I've never done this! I've never even spoken to a group of pupils before and I just went, voice shaking, "can I see all the brass afterward?" That's all I could think of. And of course, what I didn't realise is afterwards, two turned up.

Rebecca Toal 14:24

Oh, wow.

Paul Denegri 14:25

Tuba and a horn player. That's all I had. So we sat in my room and I'm going "is this it?!" and they go "yeah, we're the only two specialists and we've only just arrived ourselves in year seven." So there was no brass department. And then the Head saw me about the next day or two days later and he goes "so Paul, you know, just a little brief on you. Your job is to make the brass as good as the strings," who had just done a world tour like New Zealand, Australia, Malaysia. I said "I've only got two kids," an he said "you'll find a way."

Rebecca Toal 14:48

And you did! You did find a way!

Paul Denegri 14:49

Totally out of my depth. And then Alan Hutt was a trombone teacher, you know really eminent player, and I thought...he came in for his first day and the first thing I said was, "Alan, I can't be your boss. I'm 23 and you play with the RPO, the Beatles, English National Opera." And he goes, he was so lovely as you know, and he goes, "You are my boss, and you're going to be good." And he was just really calm and lovely. So I said "have you got one piece of advice?" And he goes, "Yeah, just don't bring your private life into school. Always be the same. The kids don't deserve... they need, they need that stability. They need ...wherever you're feeling like just be ..." I remember this, "just be Paul. But always be that." And I've never forgotten that to my every lesson I've ever taught, whatever, and there's been some real horrible stuff gone in my life.

Rebecca Toal 15:27

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 15:27

But you don't show it. They don't...It's their one chance, he said, their time with you and he said, if you just stay true to Paul, he said, you're going to be great. Lovely Alan, eh?

Rebecca Toal 15:36

That's amazing, because it's like, you're such a personable person. Yeah, and it's not that you were telling us everything about your life, but yeah, it was really authentic. And I think that was ... that felt like the secret kind of ingredient to that all the brass teachers at Wells was that they will all just very real with you.

Paul Denegri 15:57

Yeah and I'm really pleased, I'm really touched you used the word authentic because that's quite important to me.

Rebecca Toal 16:02

Well, yeah, that was gonna be my next question. Like, at what point did you feel that you could go from the tweed jacket and the tweed tie to being back to the long hair and the leather jackets?

Paul Denegri 16:12

Um, good question, because... to be honest, I ... and this might be a bit controversial, but I just felt a lot of my time, people in the music business weren't authentic to me. And I'm not blaming them, because they're just caught up in a whole thing, this whole thing that's just been organically grown like this, but I just thought people weren't ... not fellow students but other people just weren't authentic. Every time I went anywhere, I didn't ... look, I didn't realise it at the time, but I do now.. people did were, just was so, you know, I can't reveal anything about myself. And it has to be this persona, and it has to be the way that professional musicians are and da da da and you don't share it. You don't do... this is why I love your podcast, you see, I think it's such a great breakthrough because people weren't authentic with me and it ... and it had a deep effect on me because, you know, it just ruined, it just ... there's stuff I'm unconfident about still now. People are amazed that I suffer from lack of self-worth, but it's true. And it's because I think if we'd shared more, and people had shared, we ... I would have thought, "oh gosh, you're just like me," you know, and I just thought there's something wrong with me and I'm too sensitive, I'm too emotional, too ... you know, I'm not good enough. I'm not a good enough player, because you know, I'm not ... I don't love the trumpet, I love music more than trumpet. Do you know what I mean? So it's all that bit ... You know, I wasn't obsessed with the trumpet. I liked it but I wasn't obsessed by it. But I thought everybody else was but I've come to realise, they're not actually. And then so, authenticity to me is really important. And I just remember thinking at Wells, I owe it to every pupil that ever comes across...it doesn't have to be a brass player, it can be a pianist, anybody I come in touch with at Wells, you know, who talks ... who I even say hello to, even hello, I've got to be me. Totally me. Apart from, as Alan Hutt says, just keep your private life... You know, if you're have a bad time, don't put it out there. But you know, I'm going to be totally me.

Rebecca Toal 17:55

Well, yeah, it always came across that you were so genuine, and for such a prestigious school...

Paul Denegri 18:01

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 18:02

...it was such a comfort that my teacher my Head of Department wasn't ... not not-prestigious, but didn't act like yeah, airs and graces, as you say. But you said you got in trouble for it?

Paul Denegri 18:15

Well, I ... yeah, I... trouble as you do. But I mean, I just, you know, I refused to wear a gown. And they kept saying, "where's your gown?" And I said, "I don't ... I'm not gonna wear a gown to cathedral services at the end of term. I'm not going to do it." In a polite way. Because I just felt we didn't need to. I don't know why we need to. It was, it was "look at us, we're learned and we're... I've achieved this and I've achieved this, and I'm learned and I'm, and I'm above you and somehow...", I just felt it was like, you don't need to do that to be a good teacher, you don't need to be a good Head to be a good Head of Department, you don't need to, don't need to put a gown on to prove anything. So of course, it was things like that, I ... you know, and the fact I didn't quite conform to the look, let's put it like that, you know? And I do generally think, well, I don't work there anymore so I'm quite happy to say, you know, I didn't get opportunities that other staff got. Other staff would talk... "Oh, go and do a talk here, and we'll send you here and we'll send you off to here and we'll send you ...". They didn't ... if I went anywhere, it's usually because I opened the door to go and do it with the brass players, you know. That's why I did it. I was very rarely sent off by the school to go represent them. You should be smart at work, I get that, but there was a very set way and I'd get emails saying you know, "Paul, I saw you without a tie and...", you know, I was like, "how old am I?" you know.

Rebecca Toal 19:27

Yeah, it was the sense of like 'othering'. You're right, it's this like "learned"... you know, "we are academic musicians and we are training you to be XYZ".

Paul Denegri 19:39

Exactly.

Rebecca Toal 19:40

What interests me is how you kind of reconciled your experiences with ... well, further music education and teaching students. So many of your students went off to music college. Did... was there an element of like...

Paul Denegri 19:55

They did.

Rebecca Toal 19:56

..."oh, you know, I hope they don't have the same experience as I did." Or, you know, "I'm going to try and teach them in a way that is completely different to what I had."

Paul Denegri 20:05

Yeah, I mean that just, just on the authenticity, just just as you said that came to mind, I didn't even feel I fit in the orchestra because of the way I looked, you know.

Rebecca Toal 20:11

Wow.

Paul Denegri 20:12

I think it's changing now, I don't know. But you're not judged on the length of your hair or you're not judged on the... you know, the colour of your hair or I mean ... it was, I felt like, completely ... having done this route and and wanting to be like that, that just, you know, people look, you could see the way people look at you, you could see, you know, "well, you know, get your hair cut." Well, what's that got to do...? I don't quite ... In actual fact, I have my hair every month, you wouldn't believe it. But I actually do! And that's the point. I always have. I've always had it cut because it's long, so I keep it in check. Do you know what I mean?! It's what's so bizarre about the whole thing is I probably look after my hair more than other blokes do, you know what I mean? But I always felt that authenticity... I had to, I had to fit... I had to fit that rather than, "d'you know what?" Music ... and what's so weird is music's such a widely emotional thing. It's such a free-spiriting thing music, isn't it? But then as a ... that when you're a performer, you're kind of ... you gotta, you gotta be classic-... classical world, you gotta be ... I think that's why I identified with the rock guys and girls, because, because the guys and girls in rock music just do what they do. You know, they get up on stage, but they do what they do, love it or hate it. But, you know, but classical music, I was having to to be bolted in, you know, it's like... It's part of this machine, you know, you have to conform... there are certain things you can say, you can have certain opinions and not other opinions. And, you know, and so yeah, yeah, I know... Yeah, so because I used to ... a lot of my pupils went to music college, which is the irony of ironies. I think I used to say you, you know, I don't think I ever said I was sure... I just wanted them to follow... It's a good question that. Do you know what? I've never been asked that one.

Rebecca Toal 20:45

For sure. No, really?!

Paul Denegri 21:40

It's a really good one, because I think I did... I probably did say, you know, I hope I did, you know, think, you know, think about university, think about other things. I hope I did say those other things, I hope I did open other doors and not just hothouse. And you know, because I never looked at it like statistics like, "Oh, great. I've got 90% into music college and I got 26 scholarships to the Royal Academy." All that stuff. And I was never into that. It was never about how that validated me. I didn't ... in a way, and this sounds really arrogant. And it's very unusual for me to say this. I didn't need the success of pupils to validate whether I was any good. Does that make sense?

Rebecca Toal 22:16

Yeah, I suppose because as you were as a student, like coming from that aspect, you kind of knew, actually, it didn't matter that I went to music college because it was a waste of time. So I'd rather have the students have a good experience than get in somewhere that they're not going to enjoy.

Paul Denegri 22:33

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Sometimes there's this need thing, isn't it? "I need to go because I've done it for six years. And you know, I've given up a lot of my life to practise and I need to go... I've got to do it." No, you don't have to, you know. And it's that sense of failure. A lot of musicians do it because, to say I don't want to do it anymore, big moment to turn around and go "Do you know what? I don't want to do it." "You don't want to be a classical musician?!"

Rebecca Toal 22:55

"What a shame!"

Paul Denegri 22:57

You're giving up this amazing life and you're giving up ... you've got an amazing talent, you're so gifted at ... well I was never gifted a trumpet. But you know, you're so gifted. And of course, that's pressure and you go "oh gosh, I'm gifted. I ought to do this." Doesn't matter if you're gifted. If you don't like it... Just because you're gifted, doesn't automatically mean you love it. I mean, I might be gifted at making sofas, I don't know, but doesn't mean I want to do it. You know... I might sit down and make a sofa and be really bored, but it'd be come out brilliantly, but it doesn't ... d'you know what I mean? It doesn't ... this thing that you're gifted, therefore, you've got to do it and you should be...I just wanted them to do what they wanted to do, but I also wanted them to discover what they wanted to do. And that's that was key to me, not what I thought they should do, you know. Never that.

Rebecca Toal 23:37

Well, again it's this thing of like 'you're giving up this amazing life.' and it's like, "well, it's not amazing for me."

Paul Denegri 23:42

No!

Rebecca Toal 23:42

And that is almost blasphemous to say, "I'm not enjoying it." And then people are just made to feel like "oh wait, maybe I'm the problem if I'm not enjoying it."

Paul Denegri 23:52

Exactly. But I've learned over the decades that they weren't enjoying it just like... but they couldn't because they're paying their baked beans. You know, I remember one trumpet teacher said to me "Paul, when ... when you do it as a living it becomes a completely different thing," because I was like "argh! I love it!" I get all emotional. You know what I'm like. And he'd say "I'm off to Japan," and I'd say "argh I'd be..." ... to do Tchaik 6 or something. I said "that'd be great!" He said "when you've been to Japan 10 times, and you play Tchaikovsky symphony 30 times, it doesn't mean anything. You just do it, it's a job." It's like... I couldn't believe it. I was horrified. I was like "it'd be great!" but I kind of get those little messages were there. They were there. Little messages were there. Yeah so yeah, I just ... it's that, that that guilt feeling that you've got to say "d'you know what? I don't want to do this anymore."

Rebecca Toal 24:33

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 24:33

And you've ... God, it's almost like a thing around your neck innit? You're really talented at it, therefore you're, you're mad not to do it.

Rebecca Toal 24:38

Yeah, it's your duty to society to do this thing that even society doesn't appreciate.

Paul Denegri 24:45

I mean, I used to say that at Wells a lot. I used to say, you know, "oh Wells Cathedral School." Lovely and all that. And it is great and it's all ... it is a bubble. But no... but Joe ... but Joe Bloggs and Janet, Fred and Burt in Blackburn don't even know it exists. They don't even care. They wouldn't care if we didn't have a specialist musical in Wells. They wouldn't care! They'd go, "Well, what... doesn't ... that doesn't affect my life." You know, it can it can sometimes feel in the music world that everybody loves this thing. And people don't like people saying that, but that's the truth.

Rebecca Toal 25:13

I'm really interested in your role as Head of Department and, you know, music schools are notoriously difficult places. And how did you balance your kind of pastoral role and role as a, you know, somebody who does the the numb-... well, not the numbers, but like, you know, the admin side of things and teaching and ... I don't know, did it weigh heavily on you that you had all these people kind of under your care?

Paul Denegri 25:40

I enjoyed the pastoral bit, actually, more than the trumpet teaching to be honest. I enjoyed tutor group more than ... I mean I like teaching trumpet, don't get me wrong, but I enjoyed the pastoral bit more actually. Yeah, I was more interested in people's lives and as them as people, not how many, how many, you know, somebody's getting ... I remember a boy getting three GCSEs and they'd go "oooh." And I said "that was great for him. He was terrible academically, but that was an amazing achievement for that boy."

Rebecca Toal 26:04

Well, yeah, as you know, it, it feels like that's quite a tricky position to take in such a prestigious...

Paul Denegri 26:13

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 26:14

...place of education. And it always felt like you were fighting our corners. But again, it was always a fight.

Paul Denegri 26:19

Yeah, because I was, you know, there are good traditions, and there's bad traditions. There's traditions that hold us back and as traditions that are good to hold on to, because they've been worth ... they're valued, you can see them but I just thought so much of it was just because we've always done it like this. And we've always been like this, therefore, we're not going to change. "It's worked", they used to say in meetings, but it hasn't worked. You've got these pupils unhappy over here. How can ... you can't it's worked. "Oh, yes. But..." and it's almost like they... it was their problem.

Rebecca Toal 26:43

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 26:43

No, it's not their problem. You know, they're looking to us to support and help and understand and listen, and all those things that don't have exams on, listening, qualif-... you know, all that stuff, you know. Listen to them, you know, listen to what they've gotta say, you know, find out because if you listen to them, you'll find out a lot.

Rebecca Toal 27:00

Well particularly in the music world, where you actually often don't feel safe sharing with teachers or people above you, or people that you feel are kind of in control of your destiny at that point, that's really special.

Paul Denegri 27:13

It is yeah. You ... you know, don't say the right thing. Don't do the right thing. And this person can stop me from getting working in an orchestra or get me And you know, and that is irrelevant. It's still, but you're right, it's the dangers is the power thing, isn't it?

Rebecca Toal 27:28

I was, yeah, I was gonna ask how, you know, you talked a bit about low self-worth, and not feeling like you're the best trumpet player and, you know, how did you look after your own needs alongside this position of looking after other people?

Paul Denegri 27:46

Okay, that's a brilliant question. I've never been asked that. I did quite a few interviews and I've never been asked that one. And I think it's a really, really important one. You see, because I ... I'm going to be brutally honest here, and so people say "Paul, you're amazing at this", or "Mr. D you're an amazing teacher. An amazing composer, you're amazing at da da da...". I am still to this day don't think that. And I don't ... I really don't ... you know me well enough to know that I've got ... I've kept every thank you card I've ever been given because I thought if somebody takes time to write to me, I've kept every single one for 35 years. I've got boxes of them. And that sounds really arrogant, they're just tucked away on a little shelf nicely there for one day when I'll read them again, but ... And in there, you know, "you changed my life," all that stuff's been written and I never ever thought I was any good. And it's a real problem. I've had to have counselling for it, I've had to have help because I just can't see it. It's like they're talking about somebody else. I come back after gig you know, "...awful," you know. Beat myself up ... I beat myself up after masterclasses, after adjudicating, after everything. Sometimes, even if I get

it, I think it's gone well, I shudder. I literally recall myself adjudicating or playing the trumpet or standing up and giving a talk and I shudder, like literally shudder like that. "Oh, that's horrible!" what I can see myself. And so it's not ... it's been a real, real struggle for me, because everybody's saying this, and I don't that... I have, I don't need that validation. I'm not after that, I don't... In actual fact, I'm better if you don't do that, because in a way, it makes me think ... does that make sense? So ... and it's difficult because I wanted them to feel good about themselves, I wanted them to feel confident, I wanted them to feel secure, I wanted all the things that I didn't feel, I didn't feel any of those things. There's something I've never said publicly before. And so when I had counselling people were saying ... they would say "well, why can't you just do your ... teach yourself." You know, it's like, you've been Mr. D for years and I just ... I've never thought I was good enough. Never ever felt I've been good enough. And honestly, in all honesty, I've always thought I've just been the 'nearly man' and that is not ... I'm trying to come to terms with that now at age ... late 50s, you know, I've always been the 'nearly man' and people say "you've got honorary degrees, you've got this, you've got ... you got ... look at ... Paul, look at your website! You've done everything!" I've always just not quite done it.

Rebecca Toal 28:16

Wow. Yeah.

Paul Denegri 29:55

And I think that's something to do with the way the profession is and the way it's just never quite good enough. And ... You're never ... people are always finding something you've got to improve. "You can improve, you can improve, you can improve." Instead of just enjoying the moment for a few weeks or a month, they're saying "bloody hell Paul, that was amazing." You know, you need ... I dunno. I don't know what it is. I'm not quite sure. But it's ... I've learned it's nothing to do with me, do you know what I mean? This is stuff... So I've picked this up in the music profession. And now, I can see some battle-hardened musos going "Yeah, well, that's because you weren't suited or because you, you didn't get a..." No, no, no, no. There is something about the music business that, that's made me think I'm never good enough.

Rebecca Toal 30:02

Yeah. I feel that as well. I feel that it's partly because like success as a definition has to come from you because nobody else has set a definition. But then if you already feel like you're not good enough, then setting your own definition of success is going to be really hard. And you're more likely to just always put it slightly out of reach and then people can be like, "Oh, no, but look at all these things that you've done." And it's like, "but it's not... It's not up to you in this profession to say what's good and what's not. But I kind of wish that it was somebody else's job to say, okay, when you've done this, then you can feel good or when you've done this, you can have a rest, but it's not there."

Paul Denegri 31:12

It's never there. You saying that, it's like that's never been said to me, ever. You know, ever, ever was that ever said to me, you know, like, and so in counselling sessions I've had it's like, "Paul, that's great." And they'll always say "what have you done this week?" So I "da da da da da", and "that's great." And I'll go, "Oh, yeah." And they said, "you're always going, you're always wanting one bit more, one bit more. The next bit, the next bit, the next bit. Why don't you just relax into what you've done and

achieved? And, you know, and just stand back and look at yourself and go, 'Oh my God, I did that.'" You're ... I'm always on to the next thing and I think musicians are. I think, play a gig, it goes well. Write a composition, it's good. You think of the next thing. And I did this charity, you know, and so I raised two and a half thousand pounds in a month. I don't think that's good enough. And somebody wrote to me, "Paul, that last sentence you just ...". I said "2500 pounds in a month... I want to get to five." And they wrote to me and said, "That's nonsense. What you've just written there is nonsense." And it is nonsense isn't it? You know, from nowhere I've set up a charity and done all this other stuff and they go, "that's nonsense what you're saying." But that's that's typical musician, I think. It's like... Yeah, again, it's like, where did 5000 pounds come from? Like, I don't know, sometimes I'll be like, "oh, you know, I've done this thing but if I could do this thing..." Yeah. Exactly.

Rebecca Toal 32:14

...then I'd be happy. But it's like, I've just plucked out of thin air to make myself just have this thing that's again out of reach and then once I get that thing, or if I don't get that thing that's going to be even worse, you know?

Paul Denegri 32:34

Exactly. Where do you stop?

Rebecca Toal 32:36

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 32:37

And you end up with a heart attack, retiring and then looking back and going "what the heck? What was that all about?" You know, you ... to be alllike honestly, you know, I stand up and conduct any rehearsal at Wells, every masterclass I've ever done, anything I've ever done, I am bricking it. Absolutely going through it and I'm not joking. I am going ... I just to walk down to symphony orchestra on Wednesday afternoon going "god I haven't looked at the score, I haven't done this enough, I haven't done that enough, gonna get found out. You know, you can't get away with a funny story again, Paul, you know, got ... you've got ... they're gonna find you out. They're gonna find you out." You know, right up to the moment, then something happens once I get on that ... into the now, doing it and it all goes, and it happens. And then as soon as it stops, and I'm in the car, and on my own, the ruminating happens then, it all comes back. So it's this kind of weird thing, you know?

Rebecca Toal 32:41

Yeah. Yeah. And it's funny, because it's like, I ... yeah, sometimes I'll experience that and I'll be like, "but then which one is the real me?"

Paul Denegri 33:27

Yes. Yeah. Totally.

Rebecca Toal 33:28

Like, is this like flow state the true me and I've just like ... music has enabled me to get there? Or is that just like an anomaly and the rest of the time when I'm stressing and freaking out about everything, is that me? And yeah, I've come to the realisation that they both are...

Paul Denegri 33:43

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 33:44

And it's not, you know, magic that creates that like moment of calm. And that's almost more empowering to be like, "well, then the stressing and stuff is still something that I can work on because it is still me." But it's ... yeah. Easier said than done.

Paul Denegri 34:01

Easier said than done. But yeah, but I'm interested in how we become like that. I mean, I've said ... I'm quite open about this. I've said "everybody thinks I've got everything." I don't see that at all. You know, the struggle that goes in before and afterwards is huge. And you just think "why am I putting myself through this? Why? Why? Because it's all you know, Paul. It's all you did. You know, it's all you know, you're a musician, that's what you do." And you daren't give it up. Don't give it up because ... can you imagine if I give it up? That's what people ... "Paul Denegri's given up. He loves it. He loves every second of it." No, no, I don't love every second of it.

Rebecca Toal 34:05

Yeah. But then do you think there'd be a group of people that would be like "yeah, he was really busy all the time. I can understand that he'd just want a break."

Paul Denegri 34:43

Yeah, you see ... Yeah, cuz I'm 24/7 ... Well not 24/7 but d'you know yeah, I'm every single day, you know, even in this lovely farmhouse. What am I doing? I'm working all the time instead of just chilling out I'll be working so yeah, yeah, I think it would be ... Yeah, I think there would be quite a lot of people go "brave decision. Good guy," for that. You know, "He's done his bit". But then I don't like that idea. I've done my bit. My life's over. Isn't that funny?

Rebecca Toal 35:05

Because you've achieved that success.

Paul Denegri 35:07

Yeah but if I stop now I think, "well that's it. My life's over now. What do I do?" Because it's all-consuming music, isn't it? That's the other problem I think. It is all-...or I would... I learned somewhere that it had to be all-consuming. You give your life, your soul and everything. I mean, I heard that all sorts of places ... people, staff stand up and say that. "Got to be your bread, your butter, your li-..." I used to stand there thinking, "no it hasn't. It doesn't." In actual fact, if you take ... if you build rockets, and you go off to walk your dog and you'd be like, it actually makes you a better musician. Why are you saying that? Why are you saying that it has to be your whole life. You've got to do it... No, it

doesn't actually have to be like that at all. In actual fact, you'd be a better musician, better person if you did other things in your life. You know? Yeah. And all this like 24/7 craziness... Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 35:33

...I feel like it has had some negative effects on you.

Paul Denegri 35:58

Yeah, like things like, "never turn a date down. If you're free, take it because you don't know when your next one..." Bonkers. Absolutely bonkers stuff when you think about it. So you're knackered, working at Wells or the... or 8-5 and then a show comes in for two weeks and you think "oh I can't...Yeah, take it. Take it cuz I might not get it again. So I'll take it. I'll take the money now. Or somebody else'll sit... I'll turn it down, somebody else'll sit in there." And that's crazy! You're not looking after yourself. You're like, you're just ... you're looking after... I don't know what you're looking after! But you're not looking after yourself as a human being. You know, that...That's all drummed, isn't it? Take the date, take the date, take the date. So Sunday, Saturday's ... instead of saying looking back and going "no, really busy week. Don't need that. If I don't ... if I lose it, I lose... You know, somebody else comes in plays better than me, then. I lost it." But yeah, you're right. It's ... it's a different world.

Rebecca Toal 36:48

Would you be happy talking about some of your health problems towards the end of your time at Wells?

Paul Denegri 36:55

Yeah. Very happy to talk about it. Yeah, yeah.

Rebecca Toal 36:57

So I mean, I don't know details, but it felt like you'd just completely crashed from doing everything. Is that right? It's a huge move. I mean, it's almost too literal of like giving your life to music, isn't it?

Paul Denegri 37:06

Having been Head of Brass, they did ... they restructured so I was, and I was really happy with the job I was given actually, I was Head of Music Performance. I was like "woah! Love this! I can just be..." you know, just go... But it was huge. It was massive. I don't think anybody knew, compared to the other one, the other roles that they did like Head of Visiting Staff or Head of ...whatever, to be Head of Music Performance at Wells Cathedral School, it was like so like 350 concerts a year or something ridiculous. And of course, me being me went to every lunchtime, every gig, I was like "If the pupils were playing I'd go." Violinist, oboe, Bazooka player... I didn't know who it was. I'm Head of Performance. I've gotta be there. I've got to support them. I got to be there, backstage and all that stuff. So it was massive but I was really pleased with it. I actually liked that role. I thought it was really good. I thought this is a good change for me. And I could have done the brass forever, you know, I still had ideas and visions but I just thought that's not a bad thing for the brass department, it's not bad. I've done it for 30 years. It's not bad, a bit of change up there, it'd be good and I was still involved and I kept doing the job yeah, I kept turning up, doing teaching and ... but I did crash, yeah I crashed. Big time. Yeah inside I crashed hugely. And that's why I had to go in the end. I went for my health. Yeah, that's why I went, definitely. I thought you know what, I was told by doctors, you know just you 've got to go. You got to look after

yourself. It's like "woah. What do I do?" Yeah, but they said "Paul, you know, you're trying to sort things out and it's not happening. This has gone on long enough," and, and I'd been in intensive care as you know seven years before and then I went back to hospital two years later and then I had pneumonia and then I had a heart scare and I still I went turning, turning this wheel you know gigging, playing, writing... couldn't stop. I was on the wheel. Because I actually do love it when I'm in the now, I'm loving it, you see. So it's a bit like a drug isn't it? You're loving that, so I just remember thinking "right, I'm gonna resign. Just leave." I'd given it, yeah, given it all. And I know that sounds really dramatic.

Rebecca Toal 39:02

No.

Paul Denegri 39:03

I literally ... so I would go nine weeks without a day off. I still, you know, I don't wanna... someone listening going "oh, that's a sob story."

Rebecca Toal 39:12

No it's not!

Paul Denegri 39:13

Just fact, I'd go nine weeks without a day off. And I'd literally teach on Sundays and I'd teach Saturday mornings and I'd do a gig on Saturday and then I'd do 17 hours day. So I'd teach at Wells eight til five, take my kids home, feed them and then go straight to the theatre at seven, get home at 10, be writing out parts, doing composition stuff till two or three in the morning, I wrote for musicals at Wells. And yeah, I literally gave my life. Yeah, I just literally gave it. You know, if anybody says "what did I do with my life?" I gave it to music.

Rebecca Toal 39:40

Exactly what you'd been told to do.

Paul Denegri 39:42

Exactly what I've been told to do. You've got to give it your life and your all and it's ... if you're going to be a success, it has to be the most important thing in your life. And it's, it's wrong. Because you don't ... I've now realised you don't have to do that, you know. By that time I was just so programmed, it was just like it's too, you know. And because I'm multifaceted it went against me in a way.

Rebecca Toal 40:05

Yeah, I guess the combination of being able to do all those things, and not feeling like, good enough at any of them, just...

Paul Denegri 40:14

No, not one.

Rebecca Toal 40:15

... you just had to keep doing them all.

Paul Denegri 40:17

Because I was doing all these different things, and I was okay at it and it happened, and people like what I did, they'd ask me back.

Rebecca Toal 40:22

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 40:23

So I was being asked to do things on multiple targets, if you like, yeah. Because it was coming in all the time. Which lot of people might be listening and think "oh god, I'd love that." But you're not looking after you at all. I got lost, I lost me. I lost who, you know. lost who I was, you know, completely. ... true that authenticity went.

Rebecca Toal 40:39

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 40:39

I became Mr. D, the limited if you like, company, you know, this guy that ...

Rebecca Toal 40:44

And then, I imagine it was an incredibly difficult journey to move out of that zone of, yeah, Mr. Denegri Limited Company.

Paul Denegri 40:54

Yeah.. limited company, and you look at all the kind of "legend" and all that stuff I've had, you know, and it's ... that that makes me shudder. It's like, "no, no, you just don't know." You know, I'm glad I helped you and I wouldn't change it, you know, that's good. I'm glad I did my job, which is right, but uh, yeah. Because then I left thinking "ah well I've always had a big freelance diary on top of a full time job." So I thought, "well, I've got enough here." And then of course COVID strikes three months... I didn't know that was gonna happen when I took that decision. No one saw that coming. Otherwise, I'd have hung on for another couple of years and got a full-time salary and you know, stayed at home. But I just ... but of course, it ... and so I lost everything. Literally, I went from nutty busy, to zero. I mean, nothing happening. Because I wasn't Wells so I wasn't even doing my teaching or doing anything. So that was really, really hard. Really hard, actually. Yeah. Because I had to learn to live with my-... be with myself. Does that makes sense?

Rebecca Toal 41:48

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 41:49

Hours and hours and hours on my own, with myself. And that's really difficult when you're not done that at all, ever, you know. So, yeah, that was ... yeah, discovery time. It still is. Still going.

Rebecca Toal 42:00

Yeah, it's like a kind of baptism by fire into the new life of balance. It's like you have ... you're doing everything, and then you're doing nothing. And now it feels like you've found a bit of a happy medium maybe?

Paul Denegri 42:13

Um ... I'm a great believer in reinventing, I do believe in that. And over the time at Wells, I did reinvent myself. So I've got rid of the ... you know, I walked out ... I'd set the jazz up and ran all the big band for 25 years and I walked out on it just at the height, just felt I had to reinvent myself a bit. I was getting known for one thing, and I thought "I've gotta... I can't..." You know, so I'm a great believer in reinventing. I love people who reinvent themselves. I think that's amazing, where they just go through something, good or bad, whatever it is, and they reinvent themselves. That's so... I've got so much respect for that, you know, and not not saying, "Well, this is what I am and I've always done this, and I'm going to do it til I drop." People going "do you know what? I'm not going to be like that. I'm going to reinvent my life." So I had to reinvent me. People think I'm bonkers. I do a lot of stuff. I thought I was going to give back, that's what I thought. I know that sounds really cheesy. I thought I'm not going to do stuff just for money. I'm not going to take things that aren't just ... I'm gonna do things that actually I don't get paid for with music. So as you know, I do care home and dementia work and, and I conduct the Wells City Band for nothing.

Rebecca Toal 42:14

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 42:14

And they... and in actual fact, the care homes are often ... I go in two hours, two afternoons a week, and they said "Paul, we should pay you," and I said "don't pay me. For God's sake don't pay me. You start paying me, my brain is going to do something different. I'm going to try and get every note on that guitar right by that bedside." And I know that's daft but I will, if you start paying me... So I've turned the money down. And you know, same with Wells City Brass, I said "man" I said "don't pay me. I don't want...". I think it was really just just discovering emotion of music for not, for what it is. And I actually love the stuff I don't get paid for.

Rebecca Toal 43:42

Isn't that interesting?

Paul Denegri 43:43

Absolutely love it because I'm just there and ... and ... more... people say "What's your greatest moment in music?" Well, it's actually sitting by bed sides. It's not, not playing South Africa or San Francisco or things I did. Or my greatest musical moment is sitting by John's bedside, you know, and him selling me ... telling me, you know, "play it again. You're my hero." And that's ... That's ... and he dies two weeks later. That's the most my greatest musical moment is that somebody said that is it. Me with my guitar. They just connect emotionally with music. It's what music's all about you know, and I'd lost... That's what ... I've always said that at Wells wasn't it? It's always about music. Don't ever lose the emotional connection to what it can do. You know.

Rebecca Toal 43:55

It's come back to your original kind of mission of people. People first.

Paul Denegri 44:27

People first, yeah, yeah.

Rebecca Toal 44:28

The work in the in the care homes and just sounds ... after such a kind of traumatic or like a bumpy journey, you know, it feels like the perfect thing to rekindle your relationship with music and people.

Paul Denegri 44:46

Exactly, exactly. And I think people think I'm a bit bonkers doing stuff, all this stuff for free, you know, "you're Paul Denegri, you know, honorary RAM and all that stuff." And I'm ... "great. Thanks." I mean, when I got the honorary thing from the RAM, I didn't tell anybody. And I know other people who get them and it was all over the magazines every... "wow, I've got this." I got it in the letter, the letter at school and I go, "oh I've been given an honorary..." I was chuffed, but I just stuck it in my pocket. I was really embarrassed. Can you believe that?! I didn't tell anybody for five days that I'd got an honorary thing from the Associate of the Royal Academy of Music for services to music. I didn't tell anybody. I just couldn't do it. I just thought "I'm really embarrassed because I don't..." I just thought, "I don't know what I've done... What I've done is not that special. Why am I getting this?" And then the school are like "Paul, can we put it in the magazine?" I said, "No, I don't want it anywhere." See what I mean, it's really interesting. I don't think it's worth it. I don't think I've what I've done is valid.

Rebecca Toal 45:38

And what would you say if you had a student that felt this way, what would you say to them?

Paul Denegri 45:45

Oh, you see... You're really good. Okay, so I ... Yes, I would be saying, you know, if you've earned something, and people want to respect it and show it and thank you and say "You're amazing for what you've done and we want to recognise that," you should rejoice in that, you know. You should ... because you've, you've earned it, you worked... you must have done something. Because the ... I think you must have done something if somebody just writes you a thank you letter, you must have done something because people don't write unless they really mean it, you know. That's why I've never thrown one away because people have taken the time to write to say thank you. So, you know, that's what I'd be saying to them and use that as as a validation that what you are doing is what is good. As long as it's true to you and what you're doing, yeah, that's what I'd be saying.

Rebecca Toal 46:30

It's so hard to take that in, isn't it?

Paul Denegri 46:32

Yeah, it is. It is. It is very difficult. It ... the care homes is really interesting because I'd never set foot in a care home in ever as a professional musician. I never even thought of doing it. Don't know... have I ever told you this? Yeah, so many people could have done it.

Rebecca Toal 46:43

No.

Paul Denegri 46:43

...but I saw... so I ... my dad went into care home and died in a care home, so I'd never set foot... So one day, my dad got dementia. Basically I used to drive ... travel three and a half, four hours to see him. Not ... I couldn't go very often because of music! There's another g-... I watched my sister go through coma and I would not go and see her in Chelsea hospital because ... enough, because I had a gig. I mean, what the heck is that all about? I thought "oh I've gotta work first." I mean, that's bonkers. My dad was the same. I didn't even learn from my sister. "Hey Paul, put this on the backburner, you know?" And I remember my sister dying and then two days later, I'm taking ... a week later, I'm taking the Wells Cathedral School Big Band to Scotland tour. Because I said I was gonna do it, I've said I'm gonna do it, so I've got to do it, you know. It's just bonkers. I was in a state of grief. And there's me, I'm driving a truck full of gear up the road to Edinburgh. Like, what is that all about? Because you're.. I thought "I've said, I'm going to do it. You don't let people down. You don't let them down. You... So... who... if you don't conduct the big band Paul, who's gonna do it?" Well, somebody would have done it wouldn't they. But it's like me, I don't wanna let ... don't wanna let people down, you see, so my dad anyway, I went one day ... my dad, it would take him 20 ... I'd go and he wouldn't know who I was, you know. He just had not a clue. And he was the guy that got me into music, of course. And uh... So then one day, I went up and I saw him and he goes, he goes, "hello, Paul." I couldn't believe it. He said, "Hello, Paul. How are you? Oh, lovely to see you." And I thought "God, dad, you actually know who I am," you know, anyway, I said, "Dad, you look great. You look really happy." And he goes, "Yeah, I am, it's been a good day. This morning, we had two singers came into the care home," because they didn't have any music in their care home going on. This is ... and in their care home, they got ... because nobody goes in. So ... because people want to be paid. You know, that's why ... it's and so that, you know, and the care homes just don't have the money. They just don't have the money to pay 50 quid an hour for somebody to come... Anyway, so my dad goes "hello Paul." And he said "they had these two singers came in they sang to a karaoke thingy." And he said "Paul, they were absolutely awful." He said they were absolutely awful. They were dreadful. I said, "Ah sorry, Dad," like this. He said, "No, no, no." He said, "actually, that it was great." And I'll never forget this and this was a one... It was like a year seven moment, you know, year six moment. He goes...He said, "No, it was great, Paul." So he said "for one hour, I forgot I was getting old." And then the next thing really got to me, really, really got to me. And he said, "I also forgot that I'm going to die here. I'm not going home." And he said ... and I just thought "oh my god, for one hour..." So that means for 23 hours of that day, all the time, he knows he's ... even though he's got dementia, he knows he's never going home. He's gonna die here in a care home. And that music ... just however awful it was, he forgot it. He just forgot he was gonna ... and I've had that quite a lot. And so I'm driving up the A303 going... feeling ashamed... I can tell you ... guilt, anger ... that I ... and I remember saying to my head, "where the hell have you been Paul? Where the hell have you been for 33 years? You've got the skills and you've not thought for one moment to go in a care home, but I bet if a care home phoned you up now and said ... phoned you up and said Paul, can you come play the

guitar? We'll pay you 50 quid, you go in and do it." And of course the answer to that is self-searching is yes. I would have gone in. I'd have gone in. Yeah, okay, I'll do that for 50 quid. I'll go and play to a bunch of old people and then I'll walk out in an hour, 50 quid, great. That's done. I'd have done it. Why am I ... I get quiet angry now, look. Why have I not done that for free once a year? And what's even more shocking going up the A303, my dad loves music and I've been going to see... visit him for a year, I did not take the guitar, did not take my trumpet, did not suggest recording... I did nothing musically for him at all. And I've got all these skills. And I drove up the motorway going... I mean, I'm not joking Rebecca, utterly ashamed of myself. So you're happy to be paid for it. You're happy when people clap you, you're happy when you get a bunch of flowers, you're happy when you get the wine and your thank you cards, you love all that. Why are you not ... Why are you doing it just for that? Why have you not thought, "d'you know what, I'm just going to do this. And I don't care if ... people who can't clap me, they can't give me a bottle of wine, they can't give me another gig." We often do gigs cuz we want to get ... I'll go and do that gig, I don't want to do it, but because I might get more. I'm not gonna... you're not gonna get another gig, you're not going to probably get ... you might get a little thank you. But I would have done it for all those reasons. But "hey, but Paul, you can really help somebody's mental health in the last three or four weeks of their life or last month. You could really bring them some joy, but we can't pay you." "Oh, really sorry, I can't do that." And it really got ... I just ... Whoa, I've been sitting in a specialist music school and I've been with orchestras and all this. And that's why I struggle with people saying "You're a legend. You're a great guy. You give, you give, you give." Yeah, I give when you get ... you know, no, I don't give, not really I didn't think in my book I really gave. That's giving. And I thought, you know ... and I remember discussing with people in pits and stuff. And they go " ahh yeah Paul but..." I said, "Well, why don't ... just go once a year? Go for an hour a year." Just do it. You know, so I decided ... then I also decided driving up the 303, I'm going to do this and I'm going to keep doing it. I'm not going to be... a lot of people have ideas and they do for a month and two months and that's it, it fades, does'nt it?

Rebecca Toal 48:08

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 49:34

Well, trouble is people we... And I thought "God I'm gonna be ... we're all going to be there. Every single one... if we're lucky to make it, I'm going to be lying in a bed unable to move or walking around, and I'll be jolly glad if somebody sat in that ... by my bedside because that'd be the only visitor that ... of the week." And ... with their oboe or the french horn, you know, and so I I started this whole thing. And I thought "I can't take the trumpet really by the bedside."

Rebecca Toal 51:55

Yeah! Bahhhh!

Paul Denegri 51:57

And there comes the whole thing. What am I gonna play? Arutunian Trumpet Concerto? Haydn Trumpet Concerto? Oh my god, Paul, you can't ... none of that's relevant.

Rebecca Toal 52:04

Yeah, they don't care!

Paul Denegri 52:05

No! All these people have got about to ... die. That's totally irrelevant. You can't play the Hayd. Everything you've learned on the trumpet, you can't do to help them. So that's why I got the guitar going and ...

Rebecca Toal 52:15

Wow.

Paul Denegri 52:15

...singing going because I thought I can sit there and sing and ... badly play the guitar. And connect with them. So that's that's, and that's my greatest musical moments are there, in those moments, you know? And that's what music was designed in the first place. To emotionally connect to people. I always say there's soul you can't touch, and music you can't touch so that's why they're the perfect partners. You know, but we lose touch with all that, you forget. Because it all becomes like "I'm too scared. I'm frightened on stage. I'm ... what do people think of me? Oh, God." God, that whole emotional connection is gone. That's why I love it and the City Band I love because they all come out... it's their hobby and they love it and it's their social life and...

Rebecca Toal 52:50

It sounds like you've got... Yeah, really, really meaningful things going on.

Paul Denegri 53:03

Yeah, it's a journey. You have to look after your heart a little bit because I talked to some of the nurses there because I walk away thinking ... I started and my first ... I've done it for 14 months now. I started to go "I've got to live my life, every moment, every second. Got to enjoy it all. Oh my gosh, Paul. Happy, happy, happy. Don't get down. It's raining, doesn't matter. Love the rain!" And it's like, no, no, no, it's impossible to live your life like that. That's what it did to me. So I thought I've got ... I can't waste a minute or not enjoy a minute, but you got to be realistic and go...

Rebecca Toal 53:26

There's only so much. So if people want to find you on the internet or connect with you, something's resonated with them...

Paul Denegri 53:39

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 53:39

Where do they find you?

Paul Denegri 53:41

Yeah, really happy to talk. Yeah, very happy if people want to email so they can ... with a name like Paul Denegri...

Rebecca Toal 53:47

That's true!

Paul Denegri 53:49

You only have to stick it in the ... in the... in the Google and my website comes up straightaway.

Rebecca Toal 53:52

Amazing.

Paul Denegri 53:53

Yeah, so, if you just put Paul Denegri on Instagram ... anything like that.

Rebecca Toal 53:57

Amazing. And you do have your own podcast as well. Would you like to plug that?

Paul Denegri 54:02

Well yeah, it's a bit of a ... I haven't done one for five months. You come on mine ...

Rebecca Toal 54:06

But there are some amazing ones in the archive that people can check out.

Paul Denegri 54:11

Yeah, yeah. The other one is on its way, yeah. It's just that life got really busy and it just gets pushed back, you know so...

Rebecca Toal 54:17

Wait, you're telling me that you're busy? No way.

Paul Denegri 54:21

So there are eight episodes done, yeah. I was trying to do one a month. I did it for eight months and then I haven't done one since August, so I need to... and I know it's... and in actual fact, I was thinking about it this morning so ... and of course you, you come on and do a thing called the 'bubble wrap', which is really lovely. So there's that lovely connection about wellbeing and looking after ourselves. So yeah, yeah, the Young Musician Matters podcast. Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 54:40

And the last thing we usually ask our guests on the podcast is, is there a little win of the week that you've had or something in the recent past that you feel proud of? Or, yeah, could be the tiniest thing. I was gonna say that my win of the week is I actually invested in some nice conditioner because I like to treat myself with like having curly hair, it's a problem, you know? I mean as a hair looker-after-er, you understand.

Paul Denegri 55:10

Yeah, yeah! That's good. That's a good win. That's a good win. Yeah. Well, it's not quite in the last week, it's like last two or three weeks, is that alright?

Rebecca Toal 55:18

It's perfect.

Paul Denegri 55:19

Okay, so I've had a leather jacket...

Rebecca Toal 55:21

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 55:21

...that's been with me for 35 years. But...

Rebecca Toal 55:25

The jacket?!

Paul Denegri 55:26

Leather jacket yeah, its been to loads... The one, yeah, ...

Rebecca Toal 55:28

The one?! Oh my gosh.

Paul Denegri 55:30

35 years it's been with me, and it's still going strong. But I just thought because I spent a lot of time looking at rock videos and go to a lot of rock gigs, you know, that's a bit of a weird thing with me is like, I go and see all these bands with a lot of Scandinavian rock don't ask... It's, it's huge over there. Hard rock is huge over there. It's not so big here, which I quite like it's not so big over here. So I do daft things like go to Cambridge in the evening and back just to watch a band called Heat in Sweden. Or, you know...

Rebecca Toal 55:56

Oh my gosh.

Paul Denegri 55:56

I'll literally go to Wolverhampton and back in the evening, just to watch a band in a club with about 300 other people, you know, although I am going to see Ozzy Osbourne because I haven't seen him for a bit, so I'm gonna go and see him.

Rebecca Toal 56:06

I've heard of him.

Paul Denegri 56:07

Yeah. So I do this stuff. But anyway, there's a certain jacket. My one is what they call a Marlon Brando one where...

Rebecca Toal 56:14

No!

Paul Denegri 56:14

Was a ... exactly what the one I wanted. I then ... but also not new, broken in you know, because I don't want it to look new. ... this big, chunky thing. You probably remember it and it's been to every gig, everything. And I noticed a lot of the bands wear the thinner ones, you know, but I can't afford really, you know, can't justify it. So I ... Yeah, so I went off to... I was just happened to be a charity shop in Glastonbury, I think it was, yeah, and I was just killing time for some reason, just before the care home actually, I just thought "oh I'll ...", I just walked up the street and "I'll go in this charity..." I didn't know why I was going in there, I was like "I'll go in there." You know, and there on the peg ...

Rebecca Toal 56:14

Okay. Oh yes!

Paul Denegri 56:48

And I looked at the ticket and it was like 65 quid. I was hoping like charity shop it'd be like 12 quid. I felt a bit bad about this, because I went up to the woman at the desk said, "what's your best price on this?" And I thought, "this is Cancer Research Paul, for crying out loud!" ... everybody go and give your time. This is what I thought in my brain. I just thought, "you've just spent your life going do you know what? You need to give your time and now I'm in a cancer research shop saying 'What's your best price?' Pay the 60 quid! For God's sake!" And then I backtracked and I said, "woops, I shouldn't have said that." and she laughed and she said, "Well, you know, I'll phone the manager" and I said "no, no, no! I'll pay 60 quid for that." So that was my win win.

Rebecca Toal 56:54

That's brilliant. Yeah!

Paul Denegri 56:55

And it because ... and I love it. And I haven't worn the other one since because I feel more comfortable this one now because it's a bit more what I wanted. Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 57:33

It's your new jacket. The next 35 years!

Paul Denegri 57:36

Yeah, that was my win win.

Rebecca Toal 57:37

That's amazing.

Paul Denegri 57:38

Big win. Huge win.

Rebecca Toal 57:40

Yeah! Literally huge win! Everybody always comes on with these huge wins. And I'm there like "oh I bought some shampoo."

Paul Denegri 57:45

Well no, that expense innit? What your huge win is you know?

Rebecca Toal 57:48

I invested. Yeah, well, thank you so so so so much, Paul, for your time.

Paul Denegri 57:54

My pleasure. Anytime.

Rebecca Toal 57:55

Yeah.

Paul Denegri 57:56

Enjoyed it.

Rebecca Toal 57:56

Thank you.

Paul Denegri 57:58

Thank you for having me on.