

# THE NEXT BIG THING

# AARON DOUGLAS

**A**aron Douglas first picked up a guitar when he was 16-years-old and within a week he'd bullied his parents into buying him his own guitar, and without really knowing how to play it, he wrote his first song. From this moment music became a constant in Aaron's life. Having moved from Portsmouth to Plymouth (to attend university) Aaron soon became well-known as a multi-instrumentalist in the Plymouth music scene and found himself playing in bands that were sharing stages with Frank Turner, Reef, KT Tunstall, Seth Lakeman, Akil MC (Jurassic 5), BabyHead, Imperial Leisure, Martin Harley, and the Dub Pistols. Aaron's approach to songwriting is all about honesty - 'If you don't believe in what you're singing about, who else is going to?' His debut EP, *Weapons Free* is out now on iTunes.

**For some readers who may not be familiar with your music, can you tell us a little bit about what you do and your sound?**

Well, I guess I'd say that what I do is play acoustic guitar and sing songs, occasionally including beatboxing and a looper pedal. As for the sound, it's probably acoustic pop with maybe a folky soul undertone. Whenever I get asked that question I just tend to regurgitate what other people have said and slap it together!

**What first got you into music? What were your guitar-based influences?**

I think I've always been drawn to music. Before playing the guitar, I was always making little compositions on the keyboard

and recording them for people to listen to. When I started playing guitar, that's when I knew it was something I was always going to be doing. My influences started with bands like Oasis, Radiohead, Reef, and Supergrass then Hendrix, Led Zeppelin and eventually heavier rock like Biffy Clyro and Span. I went through a little jazz phase at college and at the moment I'm listening to a lot of singer-songwriters with folk styles of guitar playing like Fink,

Lucy Rose and Tallest Man On Earth.

**How did you learn to play? Were you self-taught?**

I had a few lessons to get me started towards the end of secondary school, but for the most part I'm self-taught.

**Actually started off playing for Cosmo Jarvis... Why the switch to the acoustic singer-songwriter path?**

I've always been writing songs while I've been playing in bands. I guess I wanted to start feeling like I was in control of my own path instead of riding on someone else's wave. I love playing in bands but there is a freedom that comes with going solo.



Playing acoustic guitar was just the natural and logical choice for me.

#### **Do you still practice regularly?**

Not as much as I should! When I first started playing I couldn't put my guitar down. When I'm holding a guitar now, I'm either playing a gig or writing.

#### **What do you think the secret to good playing is?**

I'd probably have to say the 'feel'. For me, music is all about expression and emotion and if there's no feeling in the playing then all you're doing is making random noise.

#### **Talk us through your technique... fingerpicking / strum?**

It's a bit of a mixture. Predominantly, it would be strumming as most of the songs I write have a very prominent rhythm to them. Since I bought my Lakewood I've been fingerpicking a lot more. The change in dynamic you can get from using your fingers on that guitar is just amazing.

#### **Do you use any alternate tunings?**

Yeah, I could probably do with a few different guitars, (I'm looking at you Lakewood!) when I'm onstage, actually. Four out of the six tracks on *Weapons Free* are in alternate tunings. My favourite at the moment is what I like to call Zombie Tuning - DADEAD!

#### **Let's talk guitars, currently using Lakewood. Why do you play the guitar you do – what's so special about it?**

Everything! I love the look, the weight, the feel and the sound when it's played both acoustically and plugged in. It just feels really natural to play. Everything sounds incredible on it. When I was trying it out in the shop I immediately wrote a piece of music on it, and when I finally got it home I had finished three songs that I'd been struggling with.

#### **What was your first acoustic guitar?**

My first acoustic was also my first ever guitar. It was one of those Ovation copies by Encore. £150 from Argos! My first proper acoustic, if you like, was a Yamaha CPX5. I still use it regularly for open mic nights and such.

#### **Let's talk about your amps and pedals...**

Well, I've got a Fishman Loudbox 100, a Boss RC-50, a TC Helicon Harmony G-XT, and most recently, a Prolog by Logjam.

#### **How did you first discover what a loop pedal could do? You use it to great effect in 'Head Up High'.**

Thanks! I try not to use it too much as I think they can be a bit of a gimmick if they're not used right. I like using them to embellish a song instead of being the fundamental part. I think the first time I saw a loop pedal used would have been when KT Tunstall performed 'Black Horse and the Cherry Tree' on Jools Holland. I went out and bought a Headrush pedal the next week!

#### **Let's talk about endorsements, recently singled up with Elixir and Logjam?**

Yeah, I played on the Logjam stand and Elixir Strings stand at the London Acoustic Guitar Show. It's certainly nice to have backing from companies like that, especially when you're unsigned. I got the Prolog stomper from Logjam, which is a great piece of kit and they've been really supportive of what I do. The Elixir endorsement is great, too, as I genuinely love their strings! I used them when my old band toured the French Alps and we gigged every night for a month. I didn't change the strings the entire time, and when we got back I did a gig and the sound engineer asked me if I had new strings on because they still sounded so bright! I'm also endorsed by Bare Knuckle Pickups on the electric side of things, too.

#### **What about your songwriting process – do you write as you go along, or do you lock yourself away and write? What inspires you lyrically?**

The process changes from song to song. Usually I need to be alone with a pad, pen and a cup of tea. Lyrics tend to come last. I write about whatever is going on in my head at the time.

#### **Your latest EP, *Weapons Free*, is out now.**

#### **What's the story behind the album? You've decided not to include songs like 'Head Up High' and 'Fade', why was that?**

I guess the EP is about the circumstances that led to me leaving Plymouth and deciding to go solo. Everything I'd been writing at that point was related to those feelings and decisions, so it made sense to make those the EP tracks. Recently I've been practising with a band of my own, so those songs will probably be on the next one!

#### **It is very well produced. Who produced this for you?**

It was recorded at Sawmills studios in Cornwall and Presspack studios in Plymouth. It was mixed and mastered by a friend of mine called Dave Ankers. He used to be in a band called Francis & The Drakes and regularly performs

with Ellie Williams. He also produced her album.

#### **What has been your most memorable gig? Supported some really great names lately...**

Yeah, I've been fairly lucky in terms of supports. To be honest, I think the most memorable gig would be the London Acoustic Guitar Show 2012. It was the first time my parents saw me play solo, and as well as securing the endorsements from being a part of the show, I also got a lot of good feedback at the show. I don't personally consider myself to be an amazing guitarist, so to play at the same show as Andy McKee and Newton Faulkner, and have people be so kind about what I do was an amazing feeling.

#### **How is it being an independent artist? Is it as much as struggle as some people make out?**

It certainly can be. The main struggle is time and money. If you have a job to do as well as your gigging, then you can probably afford to drive 200 miles to a non-paying gig, but you might not have the time to actually do the gig in the first place or write songs and practise. The flip side means you might have written loads of great songs, but you can't afford the petrol to get to some gigs. I also work as a freelance sound engineer, so I kind of get the best of both worlds. Lately I've been dealing with more business-type things than I have actually been making music! Learning to code websites, getting business cards made, recording the EP, trying to get gigs. All of those tasks can be quite demoralising, especially when people don't reply or aren't running to the same schedule as you. Just *A Little Music* is now looking after that sides of things for me and they're great. I can focus on the business of making music again.

#### **What's next for Aaron Douglas? What are your plans for 2013?**

More gigs. 2012 was very much about getting everything set in place for the EP, website, Facebook and Twitter. Now that's all done I can get back to the actual music. I've managed to recruit some very talented musicians, so there will be a few full band shows next year which I'm really looking forward to.

#### **What's the most important thing you've learnt as a musician?**

I think the key is learning to believe in yourself. I don't have the most confident personality, but I believe in what I'm doing musically. That alone allows me carry on with it when things aren't going according to plan.

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