

Jennifer Maidman

Born Upminster 1958

Mum - a secretary; Dad a surveyor and amateur musician. Paternal grandmother was a good piano player.

At home there was a banjo, an accordion, a grand piano and a mandolin. She discovered the guitar at a variety show at Margate with Lenny the Lion; then Freddie and the Dreamers come on with electric guitars, and she was hooked. When she was 11 or 12, she saw a cherry red guitar in a shop window, and saved up half the £15 cost and was given the rest. She had no amp, so plugged it into a record player.

At school there was no formal music lessons, but the chemistry teacher offered to give guitar lessons after school. Learned classical guitar piece.

First public performance was at school in Wanstead aged 15, with the school band. It was "terrifying", hands shook. "I was trans, although it was not called that in those days. Music got me through." Left school at 16 as had some gigs with a band called Orange.

First gig outside school was at The Marquee. Then, you could just walk in and say "Can we have a gig". Also played at Speakeasy in Margaret Street and Hope & Anchor in Islington.

The Marquee was smelly - smelt of beer and cigarettes from the night before.

Networking was done by people just showing up. The Giaconda Cafe in Denmark Street (Tin Pan Alley) is now a fancy restaurant with a blue plaque.

Maidman worked at Macaris music shop in Charing Cross Road. Musicians hung out in the West End, either working or looking for work.

Favourite venue: Speakeasy in Margaret Street, just off Oxford Street. Musicians, including big rock stars went after shows e.g. David Cassidy, Pete Townsend and Ginger Baker. They knew that they would not be hassled.

Got a record deal through one of the Small Faces agreeing to take part in a charade to expose a dodgy guy who offered to be their manager and falsely claimed to have worked with the Small Faces. Got a record deal with Phonogram - dropped after 1 year.

Then worked as a tape op in a studio, and worked with Marc Bolan and T-Rex. I was still struggling with my identity. 'Trans wasn't a thing. Even being gay wasn't a thing.'

Later Jennifer said: "I was quite a vulnerable person - quite cute. Guys would hit on me. I got assaulted quite badly on one occasion"

Bowie was unique; he didn't follow anyone. Joni Mitchell too - you never knew what her albums would be like.

Residency at Empire Ballroom, Leicester Sq at 18 years old. It was good money, had been earning £15 (a week?) at Macaris, then could earn £60-£70 from playing music.

Joined a tribute band, Xanadu. Played live. "I never lost the buzz I felt playing live at school. Playing live represented freedom. I hope I can keep playing live 'til I pop my clogs."

Soho was a law unto itself - there was a lot of the sex industry there - all on top of each other. "I hate the word "sleazy", but it is how it would have been described." Knew people who had been involved with the Kray twins.

Specialised in bass guitar - there were fewer bass players around.

"I like small gigs, I like seeing faces and sharing something. Get a surge of energy with big audiences. I like the Jazz Cafe, the Half Moon in Putney - not so much in West End, but I still like Ronnie Scotts. Just glad it's still there. It must be hard to keep it going financially.

Has made a solo record and has another "on the go".

Studio work is satisfying. "You are making something."

"We didn't become big stars but people got through because someone gave them a chance."

"I've been up and down - lots of money and then couldn't pay the mortgage. You have to ride the wave. I'm pretty lucky to have been a part of this thing."

Drugs made people unpleasant and make bad decisions. "I wasn't into it. That's not a moral position. I don't want to be like a killjoy."

We lost talented musicians to alcohol, such as Keith Moon of The Who. "He was a heavy drinker. It took him."

Still loyal to The Musicians Union. Most BBC stuff, including Top of the Pops, came through the Union. You got a cheque from the Musicians Union.

Things have changed for women; women used to be only the singer or singer/songwriters. Joan Armatrading became a woman playing music that didn't fit into any genre. Jennifer went on tour with her around the world.

"Musicians are pretty tolerant. I was able to transition in 1980s, and people just went "Oh, fine", or "What took you so long".

Still playing with Kokomo (Albert Hall May 2024). That band played the first Gay Lib march in Hyde Park (1972).

"Live music is new every time. You are creating energy in that space which people can be part of." Big move back to live work has to do with streaming. We were making money from making records and CDs, then streaming came along and nobody could sell anything. So people had to turn back to live. It's tough for young musicians, I got sufficiently established when the industry was spitting out money - enough to buy a house."

Jennifer's partner, Annie Whitehead, plays the trombone - mostly jazz.

Theatre work is huge - "but it's not a thing I could do."

"It's difficult to turn a profit from a tour. It's tough for smaller bands - but there will always be music - it's like food."