

ANDY CATO BIOGRAPHY

Never in the history of dance music has someone with so much talent so successfully avoided the media's avid attentions. Of course, if you study generations of pop music, you'll see that behind every spotlight shining full beam into the lives of A-list singers, there's a bevy of affluent songwriters lurking anonymously in the background. Yet not only has Andy Cato written ten years worth of Groove Armada anthems – alongside the band's co-founder Tom Findlay – he also stands centre stage at their breathtaking live shows, raising his trombone to the skies, showcasing the dozens of hits that have led the band to phenomenal, international success. Add the fact that he's a much sought after remixer – working with the Kylies, Amys and Roisins of this world – and given his conspicuous size (he's 6ft 8), you've got to applaud the gifted giant for keeping it real, keeping a low profile and keeping focused on entertaining his global army of fans...

Andy never wasted his youth second-guessing the truly great heights he might reach, not even physically (for while his parents both measure in at 6ft, Andy says that his inherent eight inches remain a mystery). With basketball not exactly an option in 1980s Yorkshire, where he lived until he was 18, Andy turned his attentions to music. From the moment he could stand up without falling down (and he learned quickly, he had a long way to fall) his jazz musician father introduced him to the piano and trombone. His talent was obvious, his parents supportive. Andy was soon attending as many gigs as possible, practicing with all his heart and soul. One of his earliest achievements was playing for a colliery brass band. He remembers, "I was just the little kid in the corner opposite the pit, but I got to play with the band because I had trombone lessons with one of the old guys who said I was up to the job. They were the most talented set of musicians I've ever known." Then, in 1987, he won Yorkshire's Young Jazz Musician Of The Year award. His future path jingle jangled invitingly before him, so with one of his size-12 feet he stepped onto the first rung of a career in music...

Outside of playing music, Andy made it through school excelling in "talking about things I know nothing about" and afterwards, playing on skateboards until it was too dark to see. At home he listened to 'spirituals', blues, the Quo and the Stones and in his teenage years, Level 42 and Tangerine Dream. He credits his cousin Digs (a member of the cult, excellent house collective DIY and now a regular guest at the Lovebox bi-monthly club nights at The End, London) for his induction into the acid house explosion that swept the length and breadth of Britain. "We crossed the country in my Hillman, stopping at service stations and waiting for the phone call with the final location. Whatever you do when you're 17 or 18 seems pretty special, but even allowing for that, or trying to, the DIY parties; Basics [Leeds], Hacienda [Manchester], Kaos...1989-95 were like nothing I've seen anywhere in the world. A lot of factors came together in the UK which made it a unique moment in time, just as had happened in the 60's."

Without doubt this late-80s/early-90s house music bubble subconsciously programmed Andy's musical brain to later churn out the most defining musical moments of the last decade. The scene's sunrise joie de vivre is always reignited with Groove Armada's best 'chill out' melodies; the beauty of their music is it gets better with every listen, with every gig, so that no one need ever forget the spirit of those amazing, unifying party years.

In 1991, Andy moved to London. “I was in Brixton on the dole, with a bedroom studio bought with a bank loan, teaching myself all aspects of the business, playing cocktail piano in a ‘No Jacket Required’ Phil Collins theme bar to pay back the debt. During this time I went through every music business cliché of management sharks, record company politics and missed opportunities. Success? In the end, it's just like your Gran always said. Stick at it.”

One opportunity he didn't miss was to hook up with Cambridge man Tom Findlay. Together they launched a club night, which led to a series of parties, a band and eventually a festival. All of these grew from strength to strength and thrive in their individual rights to this day. If you live in London, you'll have heard of the Lovebox Weekender event that takes place every July in Victoria Park, Hackney. London's premier festival started life as a live concert six years ago, expanding to embrace culture, art, family entertainment, gastronomy, cabaret and performance art. If you don't live in London, you'll be seeing Lovebox in a city near you very soon (if Andy has his way, Lovebox New York City will be high up on that list!). Otherwise, you'll almost certainly own one of Groove Armada's seven artist albums or countless compilations.

With an ear for a fine dancefloor tune demonstrated through his increasing DJ bookings, Andy set up his first label Skinnymalinky. Anyone who had their arms in the air between 1991 and 1995 will have heard Beat Foundation, Mothers Pride or JourneyMan on a dancefloor. More recently he launched the PackUpandDance imprint, releasing the likes of the Ibiza classic, ‘The 7am Drop’, followed by a succession of grooves that “returned to the house sound of my ‘Hillman Imp’ days”.

Andy's a formidable DJ (he's spun in all the best clubs in England, Australia, Russia, NYC, Spain and beyond), a committed A&R scout (the band's live shows feature the best support artists in any dance act), a keen snowboarder and like Tom, a football fanatic. He's also a Sagittarian. If you believe in horoscopes you'll be pleased to hear that he exudes all the sign's positive DNA: he loves travelling (“although since I was 15, I've only ever got round to it with a box of records, a trombone or on a tour bus”); integrity is important and has been a key element to the continuing global domination of the good ship Groove Armada. And as for being optimistic, he readily admits to being “a pint half full” kind of man.

A few years ago, Andy moved his family to Barcelona, lured by the Catalan “humane pace of life with its fewer rules and regulations”. Small, ice-cold lagers also feature highly among his lifestyle priorities, along with beaches and mountains. Throwing out everything he was familiar with and starting all over again was no mean feat. But like all true Brits living in the sun, family, friends and their cups of tea are all he really misses. While his aspirations remain relatively normal for a musician “to get out the music that's in my head that's been there for years” he'd like to welcome a future full of less talk, more music and perhaps more ambitiously, he'd like to reconcile making a living and not destroying the planet. “Any suggestions,” he adds, “are welcome”.