

The Musical Adventure Of My Youth by Issy Nochomovitz

I was born with music in my genes—it's woven into the very fabric of who I am. Even now, at the ripe old age of 75, music remains at the core of my life and soul.

As I love to say, "A Day without music is a day wasted!" It's my personal motto, and I live by it.

I like to think that I have Calvin Klein genes—only mine came with a musical twist!

My dad's side of the family, 6 brothers and 2 sisters, was a hot bed of musical talent, forming what one could call a "band of brothers." The 2 sisters were too young at the time to be included. Back then, guitars and drums weren't the instruments of choice. Instead, they played the piano, cello, and violin—classical, elegant, and deeply expressive.

My earliest memory of music is my dad playing the piano at my Aunt Hilda's house. He'd always say, "I play by ear," which tickled me because, of course, it was his fingers which were skimming over the ivories!

As a boy, he was the family's cello player, not by choice, but by practicality. Being on the heavier side, the cello was perfect because he could sit while playing.

Our journey into recorded music began with the 78 rpm records, followed by the LPs or vinyl (long-playing records), and eventually the EPs (extended play). Later came the era of cassette tapes and CDs, each format marking a new chapter in our musical lives.

I remember fondly spinning a Ray Conniff LP on our humble little turntable—what a joy that was!

Before I ever picked up an instrument, musical influences like Chubby Checker, Trini Lopez, Elvis Presley, Tommy Steele and of course, who could forget Cliff Richard and The Shadows, became part of a musical adventure that was to follow me throughout my life.

So how did my musical journey into "Bandship" begin?

It all started with my lifelong friend, Melvyn Kahn. He introduced me to the six strings of the guitar, those magical steel threads capable of producing endless combinations of different genres of songs.

I was instantly captivated which led to a fall in my test marks at school as I was too busy improving my guitar skills instead of concentrating on my studies

Melvyn had a school friend named David Breger, who played in a band called 'The Hawks'. David taught Melvyn how to play chords, and through that connection, I found myself swept into the world of guitar. I was ripe for the picking!

Melvyn and I began learning together: chords, and the chord progressions of our favorite songs. It wasn't long before we formed our own band, The Echo's, with my cousin Selwyn on third guitar (we didn't have a bass player yet) and Paul Zamek on drums.



L-R Noreen Factor's brother, Vic Davis, Issy Nochomovitz, Selwyn Liff, Melvyn Kahn, Paul Zamek

Though we lacked experience and technical finesse, we made up for it with sheer passion and unwavering dedication.

I still cherish the memory of playing two gigs for the iconic bandleader and clarinetist Vic Davis, who hosted talent shows around Cape Town. One performance was outdoors on the Sea Point Pavilion stage, and the other took place at the charming theatre in Muizenberg.

One of our favourite pastimes was taking the double decker bus from Sea Point into "Town" and strolling up St. George's Street, where Bothner's, the music store, was located. The main floor showcased a dazzling array of instruments, and up a flight of stairs was their record department. We'd marvel at the instruments before scampering upstairs to the music booths, eager to listen to the latest records.

One album in particular stands out in my memory: the debut LP by that innovative British group, The Kinks. Who could forget their electrifying hit "You Really Got Me," along with tracks like "Beautiful Delilah," "So Mystifying," and "Bald Headed Woman", to name but a few of the unforgettable tunes that defined that era.

Our next step unfolded when we were introduced to Derek Marks, a talented bass guitarist who had recently moved to Sea Point.

The timing couldn't have been better since Selwyn and his family had just emigrated from South Africa to Israel.

Then came a huge opportunity that would shape the course of my musical journey.

The Hawks approached me to join them as their rhythm guitarist, thanks to a recommendation from Derek, who had joined them after leaving The Echo's.

It was a difficult decision. Sadly, I had to part ways with Melvyn, a great friend and the person who had first set me on this musical path. After Derek left the band, it was just the two of us again, so the timing was perfect!

Fortunately, Melvyn was able to reinvent himself as he found a new home with another group called 'The Five Nuts'.

Playing alongside the talented guitarist Keith Lentin and drummer Anton Fig who would go on to enjoy a stellar musical career, was both inspiring and transformative. Their musicianship pushed me to elevate my own playing to a whole new level.

Our lead singer back then was Max Hendriks, a fellow high school classmate who blew a mean harmonica. It was Max who suggested we change the band's name and he came up with "Beethoven 5." The timing couldn't have been better. We were ready to move to the next level and the new name captured that perfectly. The clever wordplay also echoed our musical flair and creativity.

Anton's drumming accomplishments are remarkable: he spent 30 years as the drummer for the Paul Shaffer band on The Late Show with David Letterman. After the show ended, he joined forces with renowned rock guitarist Joe Bonamassa, touring and recording with him for about five years. Today, Anton continues to show his talent as the drummer for none other than world famous artist and recording star, Bob Dylan

Back in our early teens, we were too young to drive, but thanks to Anton's father who owned a large family-run food wholesale company, we had access to a driver and transport for our gigs. Enter the legendary "Paddy Rice Van," our trusty ride to and from performances.

I still have fond memories of our driver, Felice, effortlessly hauling two Vox amplifiers at a time in and out of venues. Those were formative years, filled with music, friendship, and the kind of experiences that stay with you for life-anecdotes and memories to tell our children and grandchildren!

What I have related to you took place 60 plus years ago, so my memory is cloudy at best as to actual details of our music gigs.

However, one sticks out above the rest and was the highlight of my musical career.

1965 was the year!

Every year a band competition took place in Cape Town, aptly named 'The Battle of the Bands'. The competition was organized by Jimmy Kirwin and started with a "Playoff" at the Weizmann Hall in Sea Point and culminated with the finals at the large Alhambra Theatre in Cape Town



L-R Keith Lentin, Anton Fig, Derek Marks with famous wig, Max Hendrix , Issy Nochomovitz

In 1964 we did not compete but were invited to perform as guest artists. I still have the photograph taken backstage at the Weizmann. There we were all dressed up in our white pants, frilly white shirts with black and white checkered vests. Our bassist Derek Marks had competed in a high school band competition that morning so to cover his short back and sides haircut, wore a black wig for the evening rock performance

The following year, 1965 we competed with a different line up of musicians. Max Hendrix our singer had left the band and we replaced him with Bryan Miller. Bryan was a school friend and like Max could play the harmonica which we needed for many of our songs. Derek had also left the band to join The Ronnie Singer Sound as a professional musician. He was replaced on bass by Alvin Kramer. For this gig we wore denim from top to bottom. Somehow, we made it through the "Playoffs" and were booked for the finals at the Alhambra Theatre. Once again, we went through a change of personnel adding David Bregar on the Vox organ and Keith Moffat as our lead singer. Bryan had departed from the band

We were all teenagers, but Keith was an adult working at the local radio station as a DJ.

For the finals and influenced by Keith, we all wore barathea blazers, white shirts, ties and dress pants. We looked very professional and rather spiffy. We also toned down our song selection to be more "pop" than "rock" The night arrived and with it the usual pre-performance nerves. Our turn came and we walked onto the huge stage. The curtains parted and there we were doing

our “thing”. I don’t remember too much about the performance other than seeing my granny below me dancing in the aisles.

Seeing “ouma” rejoicing brought the realization, that I had always received support from my parents, sister, family and friends in my pursuit of music. As poor as my school grades were I was never told to give up “my guitar” and concentrate on my studies which would lead to a career. I was supported wholeheartedly and my parents were very proud of my accomplishments!

The “gods” were smiling on us that night as we won the competition. That feeling of accomplishment and being on Cloud 9 was something to experience.



L-R Anton Fig, Issy Nochomovitz, Alvin Kramer, Mr. Bottaro from Bothners, Keith Moffat, Keith Lentin, David Breger

I have another unforgettable memory!

After winning Battle of the Bands, we had achieved minor “celebrity status”!

Cape Town had its own local celebrity—a hypnotist named Max Colley.

Jimmy Kirwin, the organizer of Battle of the Bands, came up with a wild idea.

If Max Colley hypnotized the band, he could suggest under trance that we’d perform like the Beatles. It was brilliant in theory, but not so much in practice. Keith was the only one truly hypnotized; the rest of us just “played” along. Needless to say, the live performance didn’t quite live up to the hype. Still, it was good enough for a laugh!

I continued playing in the band until March 1967 performing mainly at private parties in the Cape Town area. There were a few public performances, but nothing of significance.

In April of that year, I began my compulsory military service with the South African Defence Force.

And so, a chapter of my life came to a close—my music career ended, giving way to nine months as a soldier, followed by my entry into the workforce.

Yet the memories have lasted a lifetime, along with the enduring friendships I shared with my fellow band members.

60 years later in Kitchener Ontario, Canada!



L-R Anton Fig, Issy Nochomovitz, Keith Lentin

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**Written by Issy Nochomovitz in 2025**

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