

Teaching a captive audience

Company boss Stuart Miller discovered sax appeal as a teenager – and, now aged 38, he's still blowing strong. But little did he think that his love of music would one day send him to jail.

Not that Stuart has ever been on the wrong side of the bars. It's just that his passion for playing – and collecting saxophones – led him to teaching the sax in prisons throughout the UK.

Stuart, a former member of the World Music for Youth Orchestra, said: "I used to import the instruments from the US and at one time had a sizeable collection. But there came a time when I only had one spare instrument – and that was tucked away in the loft!

"It was then that I received, via an acquaintance on Radio 3, a letter from agony aunt Claire Rayner – a murderer in Gartree Prison in Leicestershire had appealed for someone to help him play the sax."

And, that, as they say, was the start of something totally different!

"It was not the usual type of teacher-pupil relationship," said Stuart, who is the Coventry-based chief executive of Bybox Ltd, one of the country's leading companies in the overnight parts distribution business. "I'd go to prison to give the inmate lessons – and on Sunday mornings he'd phone me for advice and his 'homework.' He would also send me his written work so I could check that as well. All that went on for a long, long time – and also involved a lot of travel, for my pupil, periodically, was moved around the country from prison to prison."



Stuart added: "The man knew he had committed a crime – and he was paying for it. But I got to know the other side of him – someone who was eloquent, extremely talented, creative and keen to learn. He was also an accomplished artist and I still have today the sketches he produced for me of Charlie Parker, one of the great sax players of the 1940s."

In prison, so they say, time goes slowly. But Stuart discovered to his cost that it can go quite quickly as well.

"One Christmas I was 'jamming' with the prison band and lost all track of time. My wife was worried sick – she thought they had kept me in for good!"

by Fred Bromwich, BFM Editor