

The bass line of creation

The transition from destroyer to creator is never calm, especially if one is simply mortal. Those watching can only hope the creative process doesn't stall or go off course. Those going through it rarely chart its progress; it just sort of happens, and if you survive, then that's a bullet dodged.

There were moments in Drew Allgoewer's life where all he could do was smash his bass guitars while playing in bands, Sex Pistols' moments of punk-music desecration and rebellion. But it brought no satisfaction, the pieces of broken instruments almost more painful than the anger. There was too much beauty in music to

leave it rotting in a corner. A transition had to happen, and those who watched it breathed a sigh of relief.

So Allgoewer started building. Tired of the electric version, he wanted an acoustic bass, something apparently skipped over in pop-music's evolution. The goal was to produce guitars that were "honest, a pure way to play." And by failing miserably in his first few attempts, the urge to make something beautiful grew. Now it allows him to laugh at how he arrived at a studio/residence on the Byward Market by way of a musical mother, a moment of high-school clarity and a mentor.

"Once I started as a guitar player I knew

that no matter what, I was going to do it," he says. "I see it as survival, this passion for doing what you love is the only way to make life beautiful...and to deal with the anger."

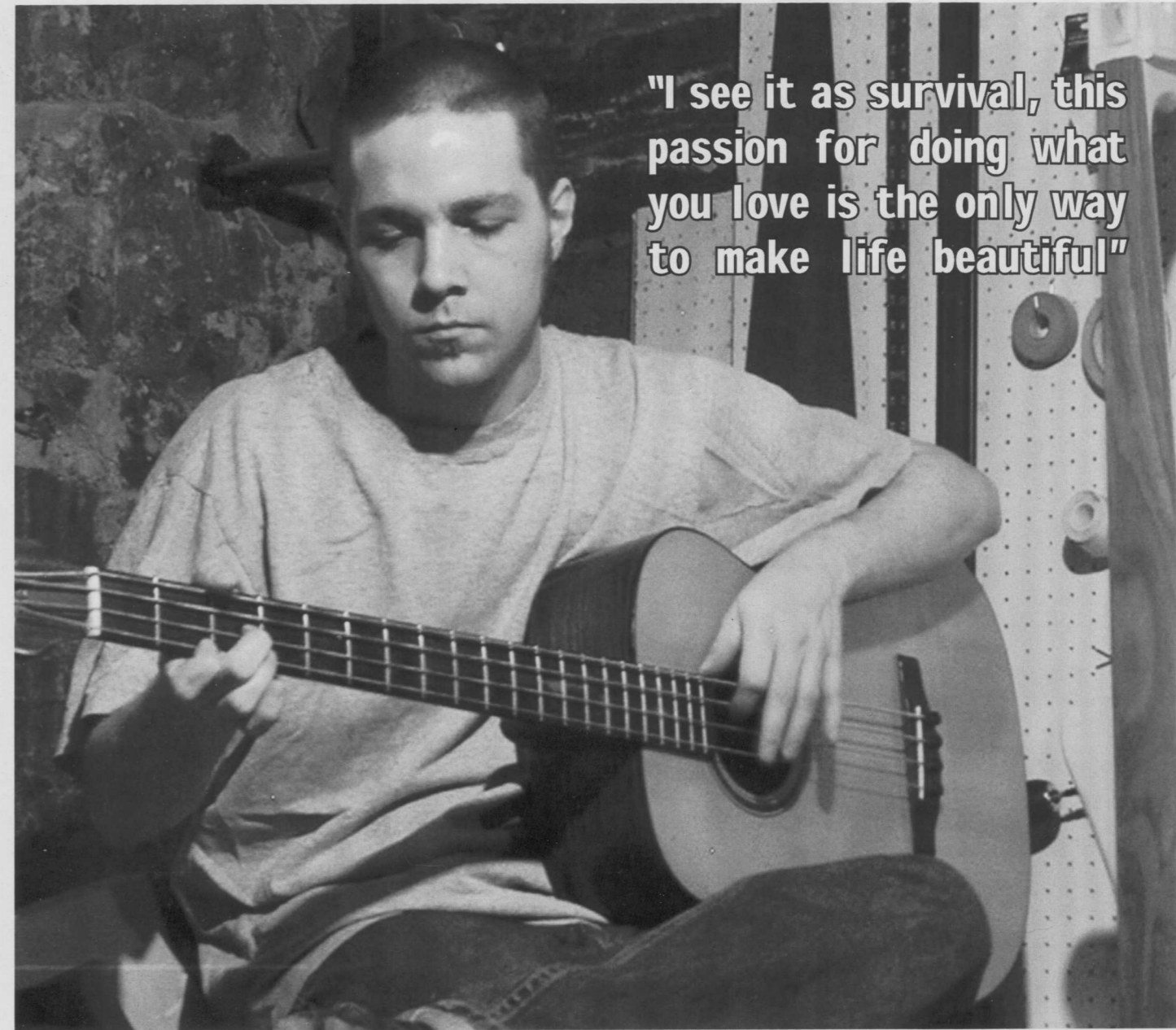
These bits and pieces started coming together as a child when he first hopped up onto a public stage in Deep River to perform with his mother. It was a family thing - especially an encouragement to experiment - and it satisfied an urge to make this stringed instrument do things others thought weren't possible. With that, music moved from his environment to his mind and became the best friend of a youth who never found roots.

"If I am a brave person, it came from my mom because we moved around a lot. She'd just get on with whatever she had to do, and I guess I had to too," Allgoewer says, recalling walking into staid Lisgar Collegiate in the 1990s, adorned with bracelets and long hair, and realizing that something didn't fit. A quick switch to the creative environment of Canterbury High School was more than a relief. For the first time Allgoewer was gobsmacked by a different reality for teenaged boys: sometimes jocks could write poetry. "We were all freaks there. Maybe for the first time I realized I wasn't the only one."

The destroyer/creator certainly wasn't a result of this freakishness because Allgoewer was born with strong technical wiring. He took apart the power metres brought home by his mother for him to play with, and then learned to do the same with computers, adding an ability to put them back together in working order. He's even been able to mold it into a day job doing graphic design (although one thing he learned from a dip into mainstream life is that his skill set never really fit into an office environment).

Allgoewer has never been surprised at the balance between the creative and process sides of his brain. To deconstruct is only a preliminary step to reinvention, to find a new way for the box to function, whatever that box is at the time. Taking something apart teaches you about the product, putting it back together teaches you about yourself.

"To me now, being technical means using the right tool for the right purpose. That usually is stripping something bare," he explains, offering as an example the occasional haiku he writes, "not good but a silly little art" that falls neatly into his idea of how creativity evolves from simple roots. "It's about always getting better and knowing that even if you're fantastic it's no



"I see it as survival, this passion for doing what you love is the only way to make life beautiful"

photos courtesy of Drew Allgoewer

Stripping something bare is a lesson in deconstruction; rebuilding it is a lesson in self-awareness.

guarantee of success. The end product has to be (personal) satisfaction or you never get rid of the crazies. Look, if you've never been bitten by the (passion) bug and don't know what you want to be, ask yourself 'what is the alternative?'"

It's one of two lessons he learned from Chelsea-based guitar maker Sergei de Jonge. The other was about alchemy. Before Allgoewer took a month-long course with his mentor, building a guitar was all black magic. Learning process and precision wasn't difficult; accepting that art is a lifetime study took a little longer to seep

in. He thinks people see God in strange places, akin to an artist's blind faith, and he's often found it in electronics.

Once Allgoewer realized that guitar making was tangible, he took a college course in audio technology, the right tool for the right purpose. The same practicality re-emerged a few years later when he formed the Imaginary Bass Players Union, a social-networking website for bass players around the world. He calls it symbiotic, even though it started simply as a test for Web navigation. Another tool, another step toward survival.

"I know (making acoustic basses) is what I'm supposed to do. Even if I tried I don't think I could quit. De Jonge did it by himself, he fought the good fight. I know it means not always being happy, but it is always about trying to achieve something beautiful. That's enough for me right now." And for now he appears to know just what fights to pick: the ones that inspire him.

Thirty years of battling has taught Allgoewer one thing: passion is the only way to make something of yourself. And it's a whole lot more satisfying to create than to destroy.