

Interview by Jane and Rob



English Lessons:

Chip English on Life with The Lunachicks and Beyond

Chip English, former drummer of The Lunachicks, visited drummergirl world headquarters in March of 2000. She played our drums. She accepted our offering of a drummergirltee-shirt and didn't even balk at the fact it wasn't black. In between laughs, she slapped our ping pong table for righteous emphasis. What can we say? We love this woman.

Basic English:

- Age: "Nobody should ever tell their age."
- Where she calls home: Lower East Side, New York.
- Current band: Between projects.
- Previous bands: Lunachicks. 1-900 BOX.
Joey Ramone's Resistance.
- Website or email address: Bite me dot com.

Rob: So what or who inspired you to play the drums and when was that?

Chip: I'd say my mother pretty much inspired me. We used to live on a street where there was this large main street on the end and they'd have parades there for everything--Veteran's Day, St. Patrick's, all of that. And whenever the drum section of any high school band would start coming by, my mother would be like, "OH MY GOD! Feel the drums!" So every-time the drum section would come by, I'd just get so excited. And so when I got to kindergarten, it was like, "Okay, everybody gets to play an instrument, what do you want to play?" It's like, "DRUMS!" And it's like, "No, you get to play the triangle because you're a girl." I was able to choose to play the drums maybe, like, fourth grade, but until then I was handed triangles and clarinets and stuff like that.

Jane: Did you take lessons?

Chip: I took lessons from fourth grade on until maybe sixteen.

Jane: Did you play in the high school marching band?

Chip: Nooo. I knew that was geeky from way, way in the beginning. Basically, bad footwear kept me out of the marching band.

Jane: Orchestra?

Chip: I played in orchestra. We'd do, like, the Christmas tunes.

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Jane: And when did you break out of the school thing and start doing your own garage band type thing?

Chip: The stupid thing was I started playing the drums never even thinking of joining a rock band. I was just playing the drums as far as I knew. And then I met up with this friend of mine. Her name was Rita, in Pennsylvania, and she had a band going. And she was like, "C'mon, play the drums." And I was like, "What do you mean? Get together with other people and play, like, Aerosmith?"

Rob: How old were you at that time?

Chip: Sixteen, oddly enough. I was kind of stupid slash innocent.

Rob: That's great, though. You weren't preoccupied, you were just learning how to play.

Chip: It was all about just playing, I just wanted to play. Went to my room, locked my door, and played.

Jane: How did you practice? To records?

Chip: Yeah, because when I was going to lessons I was learning jazz, like reading music and writing music, all different styles--swing, stuff like that. [My teacher] wouldn't let me go on to rock because he felt that that would come later. He wanted to teach me the basics, you know, so I did start listening to, like, actually easy stuff like Alice Cooper and Beatles and stuff like that. That's really good stuff to learn from. It's good rock drumming and it's pretty basic. You get all the ideas of...you know, the structure, the classic formula tunes, verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge-chorus-chorus-out. Every drummer should at least know that.

Jane: That's all I know.

Rob: Where do you buy your gear?

Chip: I always end up knowing somebody somewhere. To tell you the truth, I got a lot of things on tour. If we toured with, say, Offspring or Rancid or somebody like that, we'd end up being best friends with all the drum techs and guitar techs. So they'd just give us stuff because they're sweethearts like that. I don't have any specific place I go to. New York's actually the best. I've been surprised in other places like Rochester, New York. It's like you want that much for that? I could get that for a third of that in New York.

Rob: When'd you get your first actual kit?

Chip: I was twelve. It's funny, I was just telling a friend of mine this story. It was near Christmas and I was so convinced I was going to get a drum-

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set because I was playing in band and the two other guys that were the drummers in the band they both had drum sets and I just had a snare drum. I was like, "I know I'm getting a drumset I know it," and my parents were like, "Don't get your hopes up." I actually cried in this restaurant, because I was just so overexcited that I was going to get this drumset and they made me think for a second that I wasn't going to get it. But Christmas morning there was a US Mercury mother of pearl set. You know, econ-o first drumset. Five piece. Played around on that for a couple years. And then I got [this kit]--it was actually hot. Hot as in it belonged to somebody else and without them knowing it, it had stopped belonging to them. I didn't steal it, but I knew it was acquired illegally. And that was a Ludwig set, silver sparkle. 1970. Still have it. And to tell you the truth I went from there to the set I have now. I take care of my stuff. It's a Yamaha Touring Series, 24-inch bass drum--that's an important thing for me, I like the size of the bass drum. There's nothing like a big kick drum, y'know. I'd go to a 26 in a minute because of the John Bonham thing.

Jane: So your parents bought a drumset when you were twelve. Were they pretty supportive?

Chip: They were perfectly supportive in the way of they never said yes, they never said no. Which was perfect. They didn't push me to play, which would've turned me away from it. And they didn't discourage me, which, who knows what would've happened. So it was totally my own choosing.

Jane: Did you get a lot of crap for playing?

Chip: No, my sister and my friends kind of liked it. There wasn't ever a real big deal.

Rob: You mentioned John Bonham briefly. Would you consider him to be one of your major influences?

Chip: Yeah, definitely. I've just been so getting into Led Zeppelin again. I did Fraggle Rock [a venue in New York] maybe a year, maybe two years ago, and it was Led Zeppelin. We did, like, nine Zeppelin tunes. Damn, that was just a blast. Some of it was just so scary. It was like, "My God, am I actually going to have some part come up against me that I can't cut?" But it was great. It was finally something real challenging.

Rob: Who else besides John Bonham?

Chip: Bill Bruford. He was a big influence when I was younger because of all the odd time signatures and things like that. I liked stuff that challenged me. To tell you the truth, as much as I love Joey and everything, I wasn't a big Ramones fan because straightahead rock didn't give me

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anything to bite on to. I wanted stuff that made me think.

Rob: When you were listening or when you were trying to play?

Chip: When I'm listening. It's funny what I listen to and what I like to play tend to be two different things. Playing simple straightahead rock can be fun for me but listening to it, it's no big deal.

Rob: That's interesting, though.

Chip: Cause when you're listening to [challenging music] it's like, "What the hell time signature is this?"

Jane: Do you think drummers know what it is while they're playing it?

Chip: Bill Bruford does!

Jane: But other people they're like, "This sounds cool. I don't know what the hell I'm doing but it sounds cool."

Chip: I think that happens a lot. Which can make you look like a genius.

Rob: Who have you seen live in the last five years or so that's blown you away?

Chip: That's tough. That's one of those what's the last movie you've seen kind of things. I'm tough to get blown away by somebody....All right, the drummer from No Effects. Eric. He's brilliant. He's got the fastest kick foot.

Jane: How do you get that kick foot going fast?

Chip: You've just got to play play play play play. That's my answer to it. For one thing, you need to be challenged by the people you're playing with. We were playing with NOFX and it was like, "This guy's doing it; I want to throw it in." So I'd start trying to fit it in here and there and then, you know, [with] three rehearsals a week you're going to end up starting to get it. And just touring constantly is the most brilliant thing for getting your chops up. Nonstop playing, six week tours, home for two weeks, out for another six weeks, six nights a week playing...it's the best way to get your chops up.

Jane: Do you have a practice regimen?

Chip: Zero. I give myself a lot of shit about it. It's like, "Oh, I could go rehearse by myself right now...but I'm just going to go grab a beer someplace." And I do, I blow it off. I need people, like a band, waiting for me going, "We're going to be there at eight o'clock." Then I'm there. Eight to eleven, I'm there.

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Jane: Was there a point where you practiced all the time?

Rob: Well, obviously in high school.

Chip: Yeah, I think that's what it was. It wasn't like a rehearsal schedule, I just played because I loved it and wanted to. And then next thing you know I started playing in bands. And I've just been basically rehearsing my whole life.

Rob: Do you get intimidated when you go into a drum store?

Chip: I've had my days. I've guess I've had thirty seconds of intimidation and realized there's no need for me to go back into that drumstore. I go find another one. It's like: Okay, this is going to suck, so I'm going to leave and get my stuff someplace else--like Modern Drum Shop or something like that. Those guys were really cool there. I blew off Manny's years and years ago but they've cleaned up their act; they're good now. They don't bullshit with people anymore. I don't think it's because they know who I am or anything like that or cause I've spent large amounts of money there. I think they've learned to stop that shit.

Rob: Right, there's just a greater percentage of their customers that's female.

Chip: Or somebody that's just learning. When you got the guy selling you drumsticks and he's standing there doing double stick rolls while he's talking to you, it's like, "Get those fucking drumsticks out of your ass and just deal with me." I was hoping somewhere along the line the owners of these music stores would go, "You know what? We're losing a lot of sales because you guys are assholes. Could you change your attitude?" I think that's happened.

Rob: What sticks do you use?

Chip: Promark 5B. I have an endorsement with Promark which I'm very proud of. They treat me very well there.

Rob: Do you get any pressure from them now that you're not with the Lunachicks?

Chip: No. To tell you the truth, leaving the Lunachicks did not end anything so far. I'm still hooked up. A good friend of mine told me back in the beginning when I was hemming and hawing [about leaving], "Chip, your identity is not tied up with the Lunachicks. You have your own identity." So I try to keep that a little focused. Nothing's really stopped. I'm sure it'll die off as time goes on, but I figure by that time I'll be with somebody huge anyway so it won't matter.

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Jane: So who do you want to hook up with? If you had your choice?

Chip: Oddly enough, I'm kind of psyched about something like Nashville Pussy. They would be fucking fun to play with. What I'm looking for is somebody that's signed to a major label, where I could buy a jet ski with my royalty check, you know, that kind of thing.

Rob: Would you play with anyone who's signed or are there certain things you wouldn't do?

Chip: There are certain things I would not do. Before Lunachicks to tell you the truth, I was s hired gun. I'd play with anybody that came along, which, in a way, is also a good thing for drummers to do because you learn to play just about every style out there and you can really do no wrong. But if you do have some sort of an image to keep up, it doesn't hurt to try to stay a little focused in a certain direction. I'd like to get into maybe a Korn kind of thing or something like that, Soundgarden-type drumming. Because that's really what I'm into. Just get back to the fucking basics, like fucking nailing the cymbals and shit. I am filling in for a band right now called Shining Mama and that's--it's not punk at all. We actually played at Mercury Lounge just this past weekend. You know, it's a hired gun situation and they're friends of mine. And it is keeping my chops up. And I'm playing stuff that I totally didn't play in the Lunachicks and having a lot of fun doing it. It's serving a purpose for right now.

Rob: What do you believe a drummer's role is in a band?

Chip: Driving the bus. As in musically. Everybody is following you. Nobody should ever drive the bus except for the drummer. Everybody should just be following what the drummer is doing. The timing, the dynamics, the way you execute the bridge on a specific night...the drummer can excite that. I like to even call people on it. It's like, "Nonono, you're getting ahead of me, you gotta listen to me." So I always call it driving the bus. Everybody else gets in the back, I'm driving.

Rob: What difference if any do you see between playing with male versus female musicians?

Chip: That's tough because I don't want to sound negative--which, I don't necessarily mean pro-women. It's unfortunate: I think you can have a great female musician get up there and she'll get intimidated more often than not. And a halfway decent male musician will get up there and rip up the stage.

Jane: So it's like a confidence thing?

Chip: Yeah. I think if you're going to play an instrument you have to have

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total command of your instrument. You are overpowering the drums, you're overpowering your guitar. You rip up that guitar and it's not like you're playing behind the guitar. It's an aggressive thing too, I think, to play your instrument for this style of music--punk rock, hard rock, whatever--I think you need to be super aggressive. I don't specifically play with men or women. But I find sometimes [that] a male with half the talent can onstage just rip it up and somebody that's great, some woman that's great, will just be like, "I'm not sure...I don't think I can make this part..." You know they're thinking that and you got to get past that. You got to be balls to the wall and fucking just play, be in total command.

Rob: Do you feel that it's still a male-dominated profession? Has it gotten better or do you not even think about that most of the time?

Chip: I try not to think about it because I don't want to have a big attitude about it, but it is an issue. I think The Lunachicks were a great band. And I think that girl bands aren't allowed to become successful. It's almost like you go for a loan, they look at your credit. And if the numbers don't match up, you don't get the loan. And I think with girl bands becoming successful or signed, the numbers have to match up. It's like, "Oh, you've sold out this many shows, you've put out this many albums, you have this much of a fan base. Maybe we'll allow you into the club." It's not about talent, unfortunately. [The] Go-Go's are still one of the hugest girl bands out there, you know? There's no reason why the Lunachicks didn't make it a lot bigger than they did. I mean, I guess there's always potential still. I don't mean to talk about them in the past tense.

Rob: Do you still talk with them?

Chip: Aw, yeah...we talk, we're friends. We've talked ever since the break-up, we actually talked things out during the break-up. Stayed friends, still great friends, no problem. Speaking of the Go-Go's again, they had come into town, I think it was probably two days after I had broken up with the band, and they're friends of ours so we wanted to go up to see them. And we all went up together. It's almost like breaking up with somebody you've been with for six years and then seeing them two days later and going, "Hey how ya doin'?" Everything's great here" and being able to move and just stay friends and put bullshit in the past. And we actually pulled that off, amazingly enough.

Rob: Was there anything that ever kept you from playing at any point in time? Medical, physical, mental, otherwise?

Chip: Well, unfortunately, I got tendonitis in both my arms after doing just nonstop touring. It never kept me from playing but it could've and maybe

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it should've but, I mean, we were on tour so I couldn't stop.

Jane: So do you get health insurance when you're on tour and stuff or no?

Chip: No.

Jane: So how would you deal with a medical condition like that? Because if you have a disability then you're screwed.

Chip: Like I said, you would just play. There's no stopping and you would heal yourself when you got home. No health insurance. See that's what I'm saying, that's what I'm looking for, the next level up.

Rob: How long were you playing before you knew that this was the thing for you?

Chip: All I know is playing, so it's hard to say. Something like five, you know? The first time I hit two sticks together.

Rob: What's the best compliment you ever got for your drumming?

Chip: It's not necessarily a straightforward compliment, but it was kind of like a moment in my life. It was when Joey Ramone called me up and said I saw you play last night and you were great and I'd like you to play with this project that I have. That was a big moment, very big.

Jane: Do you teach?

Chip: I'm in the process of hooking up with somebody right now.

Jane: Do you like teaching?

Chip: Yeah, I don't mind it. I've been told I'm a good teacher. I've had friends where it's like, "Oh, show me something," and it's like, "Okay, I'm going to teach you how to play 'Honky Tonk Woman' right now." So somebody walks away playing a song. That's satisfying. It's easy enough to teach somebody one simple beat. Cause you don't want to learn right-left-right-left for six months.

Rob: Is that how you had to learn?

Chip: Yeah.

Jane: That's why she's so good.

Chip: Stick control, on the practice pad...It's all about holding the drumsticks in your hands for so many hundreds of thousands of hours it just becomes--

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Jane: It just becomes one almost, just an extension of you.

Chip: Exactly. I remember my drum teacher twirling a drumstick just on the ends of his fingertips and thinking, "That's so amazing." But now it's like, "Yeah, I could do that." Because you know the weight, you know the size, you just hold the sticks in your hands so much.

Rob: What drumming resources--stores, books, teacher, magazines--do you recommend?

Chip: Well, Modern Drummer is good. Even if--to tell you the truth, the interviews in those things can almost piss me off sometimes. Like, what the hell are you talking about? [But it] can almost, like, light a fire up your ass and make you just pursue your own thing even more. So I'm not saying it's like you sit there and read it and go, "Ooh, he thinks this, he thinks that"--notice I'm saying "he" because it's all male-dominated. But yeah, I did the Modern Drummer subscription thing for a long time. And other than that, I listen to everything. I can listen to every single radio station there is. I like the Latin stations, I like the hip hop. Anything that has any kind of percussion in it.

Rob: What would you see as your most positive drumming experiences?

Chip: Oddly enough, it's the Joey Ramone situation. It was pre-Lunachicks so I didn't have any experience with huge crowds. We were playing up on 72nd Street for some rally or something. It was an outdoor concert and for three blocks, all you could see was people. And we were playing, "I Want to Be Sedated." And at one point I just remember thinking that I'm up here playing "I Want to Be Sedated" with Joey Ramone and all I could see was just a sea of people. And that was another huge, huge moment.

Jane: What's the biggest crowd you've ever played for?

Chip: As far as I know, it was when we played with No Doubt at the PNC Banks Art Center. Supposedly it was 24,000.

Jane: That's amazing. And are you charged or are you really nervous?

Chip: That was so smack in the middle of just constant touring that it was, like, barely noticed. It was cool, though, because I had my sister come to that show. We walked out from backstage and I literally got, like, swamped with like young girls going, "Chip! Chip! Give me your autograph!" and all that stuff. And she always tells the story: "And she handed me her drink and she stood there and signed autographs

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for half an hour and it was the greatest thing in the world." But that's what it was about. Those fans, the young girls, they're good fans. They're real loyal, they're right there. Total admiration and they're nice. That was a good tour.

Jane: Any negative experience?

Chip: You know what? No.

Jane: Do you have specific goals that you see for yourself or are you just following this road and seeing where it takes you?

Chip: I think that unfortunately--I guess I do have to say it aloud to myself--I am following more of a business direction at this point. I've had great fame with The Lunachicks, I've had great times, great tours. We've toured the world, been around the world, been satisfied musically. Now I just feel that it's just time to have it pay off a little bit. Find the next big thing. Not to sound too greedy but, hey, you put so much time into it, you just want to at least get that jet ski, you know what I'm saying? You want to buy toys. I mean, I've turned down quite a few things since I've broken up with The Lunachicks only because they were kind of at the same level.

Rob: Do you have a day job and if so, what is it?

Chip: Hmm. I, uh, work at a potpourri factory. It's actually volunteer work that I do for the potpourri factory because I just love it.

Jane: It smells so good.

Chip: I decide the combinations. It's like, This is too much cinnamon. Too much cinnamon! So yeah. I enjoy that. It gets me up in the morning.

Rob: What do you think you'd be doing if you weren't a drummer?

Chip: Wow. Oddly enough, I've never even thought of that. I don't know. I'd probably be playing percussion.