

My Desert Island Discs: Ten songs telling the story of my life and disability

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In this presentation, the two authors Alan McGregor and Rolf Black will talk about ten songs and their impact on Alan throughout his lifetime. Alan was born with cerebral palsy and has no speech. Music always played a vital role in his life.

The talk draws some of its inspiration from the UK national radio programme “Desert Island Discs” which was first broadcast in 1942 and is still broadcast every week. During the programme a guest called “the castaway” chooses eight music recordings, a book and a luxury item, they could take to a desert island. They talk about their lives and the reason for their choices. Famous guests include Prof Stephen Hawking in 1992 who shared his experience of having no speech.

Alan has chosen these ten songs because they help him to express the feelings he has because he cannot talk.

“I love music and music helps me in my life”.

Alan used to go to the local disabled centre to write music back in 1989 and continued for 25 years. He would create the music on a computer and afterwards write the words. The music helped him to say things and eventually he created four CDs and loved making them. The music teacher helped by singing the songs.

“Music can create feelings, and say things, that you cannot say yourself. It can hold memories. It can remind you of a place or a time. Music is special to me as it helps me in my life. It is calming... and makes me feel happy. On days when I feel sad I turn on music and start to feel better. When I have had a difficult day trying to talk, music helps me then, as well, and calms things down.

“Back in the day I was frustrated and there were things I wanted to say and I wrote songs in order to say them.

“In my own music, the feelings I had then were like being in jail, a prisoner within myself, not able to speak. Writing the music helped me to release that feeling.

“Today I have my ten special songs for you. Each of the ten songs I have chosen tell stories about not being able to talk, disability and my feelings.”

The authors will explore Alan’s love for music in the form of a conversation interspersed with excerpts of the songs. This will be very personal and could be quite emotional for the audience as well because some of the songs describe some heartfelt feelings.

Alan's top 10 favourite songs for ISAAC

(You can find the playlist for listening to the songs on our website:
aac.dundee.ac.uk/isaac2018)

- 1: Power of music – Alan McGregor 1991
- 2: Living in hell – Alan McGregor 1991
- 3: It's only love - Bryan Adams & Tina Turner
- 4: Keep talking - Pink Floyd
- 5: The last dance – Magnum
- 6: I want to break free – Queen
- 7: Don't you forget about me - Simple Minds
- 8: Live to tell - Madonna
- 9: Strange - The Feeling
- 10: Paralympic games 3 bronze medals – Alan McGregor 1993