

# Beating the middle-age blues



The comedian Al Murray, 39, tries to recapture his youth with a different kind of tattoo

Ben Hoyle Arts Reporter

Ringo Starr, Charlie Watts, Animal from the Muppets, the one with a missing arm from Def Leppard. And now, very possibly, your bank manager.

Middle-aged men with unfulfilled dreams of rock stardom are driving record sales of drumkits, according to the Music Industries Association (MIA), the trade association for the musical instruments industry.

Drum sales have doubled since 2000, reaching £41 million this year in an otherwise flat market for musical instruments. Only guitars are more popular. Better-value equipment and electronic kits that don't irritate the neighbours have helped, but the main reason has been the popularity of the drums among older men, the organisation said yesterday.

Across the country, copies of *Saga* magazine lie unread and family cars stand unpolished as more babyboomers ease themselves on to drumstools to attack the opening bars of *In the Air Tonight*, like the gorilla in the Dairy Milk advert.

Paul McManus, chief executive of the MIA, said: "A huge group of people in their forties and fifties are getting back into music or taking it up for the first time and there's something very therapeutic about rocking out on a set of drums. It tends to be mainly dads rather than mums, but this is a generation that really wants to do more not less as it gets older, whether that means buying a Harley-Davidson or joining a band."

Recent reunions of classic rock bands such as the Police, Genesis and Led Zeppelin have increased the number of high-profile drummers of a certain age, he said. "Thirty years ago you didn't have rock bands like the Stones playing in their sixties. Now

## 'The Stones are showing that it's OK to be old and still doing this stuff'

they're an inspiration, showing that it's OK to be old and still doing this stuff. The musical instrument industry is having to reorient itself towards the ageing population, which is the biggest growth opportunity that the industry has ever had."

It helps that drum kits are relatively much cheaper than in the 1960s. A good starter set costs about £200, Mr McManus said. The rising popularity of the electronic drum kit, which now accounts for more than half of total sales, has also helped to broaden the market.

"Because you can listen to them through headphones, they don't make a racket. So they're much more appealing for beginners, whether they are children or dads."

John Booth, managing director of Roland UK, a leading drum manufacturer, said: "We have seen drum sales increase year on year for the last ten. But this year has been unprecedented — in October our drum sales eclipsed piano sales for the first time ever."

Scott Lewis, of Sound Attak, a drum store in Colchester, Essex, said that last month had been his best since he started trading 12 years ago. "Rock bands are back in fashion and it's cooler than ever to be a drummer."

Applications to drumming academies and courses are also rising.

Darren Suckling, sales and marketing manager at DrumTech, a percussion school in West London, said that applications from people of all ages had increased by 10 per cent this year. "Bands like Arctic Monkeys and Muse have been major influences on our stu-



Ferris Cowper is heard, not seen

dents and, most importantly, their technique and style of drumming is really accessible for the beginner."

However, the drums have a particular allure for the more mature musician, according to Ferris Cowper, 58, the Tory chairman of East Hampshire District Council. Mr Cowper is also the drummer in Undercover, a five-piece outfit with a combined life experience of 250 years and a repertoire based around "lots of Stones, Beatles, Queen and Thin Lizzy, the stuff we all listened to when we were younger".

Mr Cowper took up the drums when he retired and enjoys the way that "the drummer runs the band", even if it means being less visible than the dentist, the film director and engineers he plays with. "When you are older and the hair's not as thick as it used to be you don't mind being out of sight. You care about being heard."

"Last night I was in a nightclub in Guildford playing *Back in the USSR* and *Jumpin' Jack Flash* — my favourite songs when I was a kid. It doesn't get any better than that."

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## Six who picked up sticks



**Jeremy Clarkson, 47**  
Top Gear presenter, newspaper columnist and author

**Tim Healy, 55**  
actor who starred in *Auf Wiedersehen Pet*

**Peter Schmeichel, 44**  
goalkeeper who captained Man Utd in the 1999 European Cup Final

**Harry Hill, 43**  
doctor turned television comedian

**Richard Desmond, 56**  
Publisher of *Express* newspapers and celebrity magazine *OK!*

**Jamie Oliver, 32**  
celebrity chef and campaigner



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