

Final Assignment:

To write a feature article of approximately 2,250 words on a topic approved by me.

It should be suitable for a magazine or online publication, which you have to identify. It needs to be written in the feature article style we have studied all year. It will require a minimum of 5 original interviews and extensive research and demonstrate your ability to write a scene and to describe some of the main characters.

The Young Classic

Jordan Gauthier is a 23-year-old man with the enthusiasm of an 11-year-old kid. We're sitting outside of Dundas and Carlaw, a coffee shop in Toronto. It's a popular place that happens to be across the street from the studio his current band, New Love, is recording in. His orange tinted hair has grown out and his beard has followed. A black snapback sits precariously on his curly hair as he leans forward to light his cigarette.

His vocal cords are now weathered from smoking far too many Pall Mall Reds, but he doesn't need to worry about that. He's the drummer in New Love, not the singer. In fact, all the man does is drum. He plays them, tunes them, techs them and builds them.

The last time I saw Gauthier he was sitting centre stage at Tattoo Queen West, a small venue on Queen Street West in Toronto. It was a private, sold out show for the wildly popular Toronto band July Talk. The place was packed with die-hard fans, an easy feat considering the size of the venue. Gauthier was a drum technician for the drummer, Danny Miles. Perhaps less glamorous than being part of the band himself, he was there to prepare Miles' kit for the impeccable night of songs ahead.

Gauthier builds drums for a living, although; in the starting phase of his company it's not quite enough income to make a living. Aside from creating kits, Gauthier also works as a freelance drum technician. He sets up drum kits in the way the drummer likes and tunes them. Tyler Booth, the drummer for a GTA-based-band called Pyramid, commented on the importance of this: "The ease of playing drums is all about the positioning. If it's not positioned how I'm used to, it's harder to play because your body

has muscle memory from a specific set up.” Gauthier is a technician for performances with various bands as well as in studio for recordings.

Gauthier started YC (Young Classics) Drum Company in 2013. He was inspired by the band Ten Second Epic and named his company Young Classics after one of their songs. The idea behind the name was to turn his company into an instant classic. Today, Gauthier has clients from big Canadian bands like July Talk, Arkells, PUP, The Dirty Nil, The Strumbellas and Wintersleep. He has an endorsement with Sabian cymbals as well as Evans Drumheads and Promark Drumsticks. He was even a drum technician for a few of Gord Downie’s solo shows around Toronto, and most recently worked as a drum technician at the 2017 Juno Awards.

I’ve known Gauthier for five years. I met him at 16. My older brother, Adam Favrin, had set out to find drummers for his band at the time: Her Majesty the King. Gauthier answered and ended up coming to Richmond Hill, a town about 40 kilometres north of Toronto, to record a couple of songs and play a couple of shows. He was from Ottawa, so my family spent the next five days with a strange teenage boy on our couch. A few years later and I’ve kept in contact with one of the most successful young men that I know.

Gauthier’s affinity for drums began early. James Reid, an old friend of Gauthier’s says, “I met Jordan at Dave's Drum Shop [in Ottawa] when I used to work there because he would come in all the time. He was 15 or 16 at the time.” His first workshop was his parent’s Ottawa garage in 2012. His current workshop is an 800 square foot loft in Waterloo, a city about 110 kilometres East of Toronto. He uses half of it for personal storage. It’s a spacious area that looks less like a warehouse and more like an upscale

apartment. There are wooden drum shells stacked on top of each other like the tiers of a wedding cake. Gauthier works on a table in the middle of the room. He handcrafts his drums under florescent lights in the high, industrial ceiling.

There are plenty of niche businesses like his all over Ontario. How many, he says he can't be sure. But he knows that the amount of care he puts in greatly improves the quality of the drum kit. The process of making drums is not a simple one. He has two options for his clients. The first is the refurbishing of old, worn-down drums (hint hint, Young Classics.) The second, and more popular method, is a drum kit built by hand. All of Gauthier's kits are tailor-made to suit the needs and sounds of the artist purchasing them.

“What differentiates me from other drum companies? I give a fuck. I ask for a link to their band, or, I say ‘can you send a link to some drummers you like?’ If someone says they want a 24-inch big kick drum and I think the sound would be better suited by a 20-inch then I’ll say that. Most of the time they’re like ‘oh, this is actually what I wanted,’” Gauthier says.

While he did go to college at The Audio Recording Academy in Ottawa for applied audio recording, he failed after his final exam. He recalls never having a good relationship with school. He says, “I actually finished [high school] a semester early, because I didn't enjoy high school at all.” His parents had saved up money for him to go to college, and they pushed him to apply. Even with the support of his parents, and studying a program that he should have loved, he knew school was not in his path.

“Within two weeks of going [to college] I was like, ‘this is not for me.’”

So how does a man with a high school education and minimal experience in the music industry earn his way into the hearts, and onto the stages, of some of Canada's most popular musicians?

After his brief stint in college, Gauthier began delivering auto parts in 2012 to earn money. All he had to do was drive back and forth and smoke cigarettes. He calls it "painlessly awful." During his summer job as a deliveryman, he checked out Kijiji and decided to try building a snare drum. He did his research, bought the tools, got halfway through building the drum and knew it was time to quit his job. "One lunch break I went to the Tim Hortons drive-through. I got a half-dozen donuts, took out a Sharpie and wrote 'I'm really sorry, but I quit.' I put it on my boss's desk while he was on lunch and left. He called me and I said, 'Hey man, I'm really sorry, but I'm gonna build drums.'" Gauthier says.

His growing success is a mixture of "hauling ass" and an insane amount of luck. His first big break actually came from Tim Oxford, the drummer for the Hamilton, Ontario band Arkells, who "championed" him. While Gauthier was working odd jobs, he took one as security for Ottawa University's Frosh Week where the Arkells were playing. After the show, Gauthier was having a smoke and ran into Oxford. He tells me, "I said, 'hey man I really like your Gretsch kit' and he goes 'how do you know it's a Gretsch kit?' and I told him I just knew from the lugs. He goes 'you're a nerd.' I offered to bring him my drums sometime." They exchanged numbers and Oxford became the first member of a popular band to own a YC kit.

Since that initial exchange, Gauthier's kit can be seen in the Arkells' music video "My Heart's Always Yours." The credibility of a popular drummer showing off and

playing his kit has gotten him other famous clientele. He says, “It validates you. You go, Tim from Arkells is playing my drums. And they go, ‘if Tim’s playing your drums, I wanna play your drums.’ I’ve spent no money on advertising.”

Kyle Fisher, the drummer from The Dirty Nil, became a huge fan of YC drum kits, and, of course, a huge fan of Gauthier himself. “Jordan and I have become really close friends over the last year and I couldn't be more proud of what he's achieved running YC. I know almost no one who is as committed and hard working as he is. He has so much passion for the drums, which he builds masterfully, and does everything he can to look after his artists. My life would literally not be the same without Jordan Gauthier. I love him to death and I hate when I have to play any other drums.” Fisher says.

This sort of domino effect among artists landed Gauthier a gig with one of Canada’s most prized artists: Gord Downie of The Tragically Hip. Dave Hamelin, originally the drummer for The Stills, and a record producer that Gauthier knew through other artists, called him up in October of 2016 and said he needed as a drum technician for a “thing.” He had no idea what was coming. When Hamelin told him it was for Downie, Gauthier had two days to prepare.

It was a last minute opportunity of a lifetime. “Fortunately for me I had nothing planned for those two days,” Gauthier says. Hamelin was playing YC drums for Downie’s solo shows and Gauthier was the one who had to perfect the set up and sound of the kit beforehand. On the last day of the tour Gauthier ran into Downie in the hallway, and he thanked him for his hard work on the past couple of days. “He’s one of those

people. He walks into the room and you can *feel* he's in the room. He's got this aura. There's something about him," says Gauthier.

Friends of Gauthier who have been with him since the beginning are constantly awed by his success. So far it's been impossible to find anyone who had anything negative to say. An old friend of his, Simon Chartrand, spoke highly of his fellow Ottawa native:

"Jordan and I used to take monthly trips down to Ogdensburg from Ottawa to pick up supplies he had shipped to a business centre by the border. This was when YC Drums existed solely out of the Gauthier family garage and in local Ottawa venues. [For Gauthier] no distance is too great and no task is too big if it means making a drummer happy. Essentially, from those drives onwards, I saw and continue to see Jordan go above and beyond for his passion."

Chartrand put into words the type of workmanship that can be expected from Gauthier. It's the reason that people in the music industry keep coming back to him for custom kits and expert work on their tours and recordings. Currently, Gauthier's kits sell for around \$2,500 for a three-piece. He wishes he could build the drums completely from scratch, but to err on the side of productivity he takes tiny shortcuts. Keller Shells, a U.S. drum company, manufactures the drum shells that he uses, and he purchases the metal components as well, but he does all the actual wood-working and designing behind the drums.

His most recent stint was at the 2017 Juno Awards. He was a drum technician for the Arkells' performance and three bands with YC drum kits won awards. The

Strumbellas, July Talk and The Dirty Nil made Gauthier insanely proud this year, and the weekend in general blew his mind:

"Being a part of the Junos this year was an incredible experience I'll never forget. Tim Oxford and Arkells were kind enough to have me back to drum tech, which is always an absolute pleasure. It was breathtaking to see that three of the artists I build drums for got to play the Junos, and it was surreal to see three drum kits I made on the broadcast. It really put into perspective how lucky I am to be able to do what I do. I wouldn't be able to do this without the ongoing support of clients, friends and peers."

Regardless of how well Gauthier is doing now, his life wasn't always this exciting, or enjoyable. "I had been so good at wearing a mask," he says. In high school he suffered from multiple mental illnesses. On top of struggling with depression, he also was diagnosed with anxiety. Mental illness used to take a huge toll on his everyday life. "I was so anxious and depressed that I would stay up all night. I would try and find anyone to hang out with because you know if you're hanging out with your friends and socializing you don't think about it as much." He now uses music, and networking, as a means to combat his inner negativity.

Jordan Gauthier is *the* classic underdog story. He was a college dropout, and before that, an anxious, depressed teen who had no time for anything but good music and smoking cigarettes, though he hasn't left either behind. A Kijiji search and a few trial kits later and Young Classics was born. Then suddenly he was preparing a stage for Gord Downie and having his kits on the broadcast of the Juno Awards. His passion for the music industry has put him on his way to becoming an Ottawa-born-drum-building tycoon.

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