

English Toastmaster blends pop music success and public speaking skills.

Dec Cluskey and The Bachelors

Ask for advice from someone in show business and the last thing you expect to hear is that education is paramount. Talk to Dec Cluskey, though, and that's exactly what you'll hear.

"When people inquire about succeeding in the music industry, I tell them to focus on an education first," says the Toastmaster and member of the band Con and Dec The Bachelors. "I believe that if you want to get ahead in any career, particularly show business, education is your most important asset.

"When you're educated, you're able to control the business side of things and no one can take you for a ride."

Cluskey and his brother, Con, have successfully navigated the music business for many years. They co-founded The Bachelors, the first Irish band to top the charts in the United Kingdom. (When they first split with the third group member in 1984, they performed as The New Bachelors. Now the brothers perform as Con and Dec The Bachelors.) In one lineup or another, the "Bachelor" brothers have released more than 70 albums, charted more than 15 singles, scored a No. 1 hit, and amassed a number of gold and platinum albums. In 2008, a compilation CD, "I Can't Believe – The Very Best of the Bachelors," reached the Top Ten on the U.K. charts.

Returning to the topic of education, Cluskey says he's certainly received one from Toastmasters. Although he has performed all over the world, Toastmasters taught him a great deal about communication, he says, and that's made him better onstage.

"From the first moment I joined, I realized that the speaking content of our show could be improved dramatically," notes Cluskey, a member of the Eastbourne Speakers in Eastbourne, near Sussex in England. "Now, four years later, the talking part of our show is absolutely dynamite – thanks to Toastmasters. It's a great feeling to know that I can stand in front of an audience and not only kill them with my singing, but also with my talking."

Singing the Praises of School

Those who approach Cluskey for tips on succeeding in the entertainment business are often taken aback by his emphasis on education. "Many people think of academics as the last thing they need," he says. "They think that to make it in show business you must be in the right place at the right time and have contacts and luck, but the truth is, to go the distance in this business an education is your best asset."

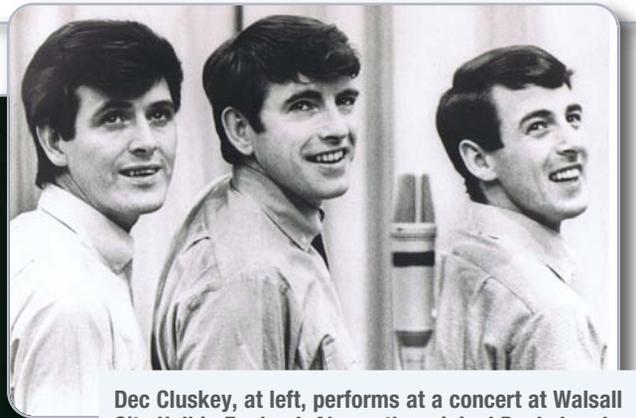
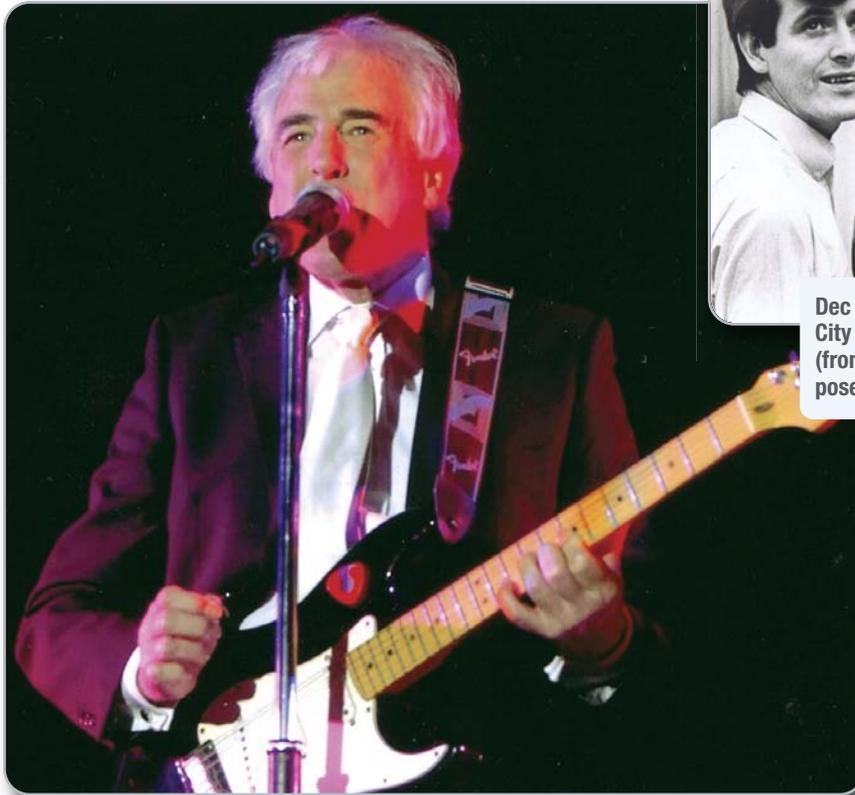
Cluskey grew up in Dublin, Ireland, and credits his mother for initiating his music career. "In addition to promoting my academic

education, my mother also insisted I play the piano, and I am so grateful for that. By the age of 12, for some unknown reason I had also decided to play the mouth organ, and I excelled thanks to my piano work."

He performed on his first radio broadcast, playing the mouth organ, when he was 12 and performed on *The Ed Sullivan Show* when Sullivan visited Dublin on St. Patrick's Day. By the time he was 15, Cluskey wrote and played the background music for a 26-week primetime Irish radio comedy series known as *Odd Noises*.

Dec and his brother formed a harmonica group called The Harmonichords in 1957. Eventually, they added vocals and guitars, grew hugely popular in Ireland and, in 1962, renamed their band The Bachelors – all of this while still in school. In 1963, when he was 21, Cluskey graduated at the top of his class with a degree in civil engineering. But he decided to pursue his singing career in England with the Bachelors, and the group hit it big with its song "Charmaine," which rose to No. 5 on the U.K. charts.

Cluskey decided to try Toastmasters in 2006 after a friend urged him on numerous occasions to attend a club meeting. "When it was suggested that I get involved in Toastmasters, I misinterpreted the message," he says. "I thought that Toastmasters was an agency and



Dec Cluskey, at left, performs at a concert at Walsall City Hall in England. Above, the original Bachelors band (from left, John Stokes, Con Cluskey and Dec Cluskey) pose for a promotional photo in the early 1960s.

played “I Believe” for the Pope and a crowd of 250,000.

As a tribute to his standing in British show business, Cluskey was chosen as a King Rat and Trustee of the exclusive entertainment charity, The Grand Order of Water Rats. Members include royalty such as Prince Charles, and Bob Hope, Charlie Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy were also members.

that I should get booked as an afternoon speaker. Then I finally attended a meeting, and once I understood the group’s purpose, I immediately thought that as a member of the show business community, I would show everyone what it’s all about.

“But quite the opposite occurred. They showed *me* what it was all about.”

Giles Robinson, a fellow member of the Eastbourne Speakers club, says Cluskey’s speaking abilities have improved since he joined Toastmasters.

“As a result of his show business career, he was already familiar with dealing with big audiences, but developing his ability to speak to smaller groups in a less showbiz-way has really improved, and he recognizes that,” says Robinson. “Dec is full of humor and always looks to enjoy himself. He has more than a touch of blarney, which carries him through on many occasions.”

Giving Toastmasters His All

Soon after becoming a member, Cluskey immersed himself in

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Toastmasters. Besides serving in various leadership roles, he shares his entertainment experience by giving presentations on subjects such as effective microphone techniques.

“Dec is a confident, proficient and amusing presenter and is very good on stage,” says Gordon Piggott, another member of the Eastbourne club. “He provides expert evaluation that is refreshing, because it comes with a show business twist.”

Over the years Cluskey has shared the stage with many show business legends, including Judy Garland and Sammy Davis, Jr., and has played on the recordings of a variety of artists, including the Rolling Stones. Cluskey is especially proud of the time in 1983 when he

For Cluskey, one of the best things about being a Toastmaster is the exposure to like-minded people.

“The hidden benefit of Toastmasters is who you get to meet and learn from. Through the organization, I’ve learned a lot by listening to other members.

“It’s a tremendous education.”

To learn more about Dec Cluskey and his music, visit www.thebachelors.co.uk. 

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