

How to play the organ on stage with a drummer and a singer while having a heart attack.

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**How to play the organ on stage with a drummer and a singer while having a heart attack.**

**By Michael David Shaw**

It's a strange title isn't it, but I did have a heart attack while backing a singer on stage very

recently and I thought I would share my experience with other musicians, who I know, have thought about, what if I had a heart attack while on stage.

First, let me say that having a heart attack is a very serious business and I nearly died from mine. This is not a tutorial on how to survive a heart attack while playing a musical instrument despite the slightly flippant title, but I have had the experience and that entitles me to write about it.

It's Saturday night, time 8:15PM, and I arrived at the club. I order a pint of beer then make my way to the stage. Already backstage are the compere, the drummer and the first artist of the evening. We have a normal jokey banter as we always do, and then the drummer and I play an instrumental piece, which if memory serves was a musical selection from *War of the Worlds*. The compere then sings a song, but I cannot remember what that song was.

It is now 8:40PM and in the dressing room we are taking the dots (music) for the first artist, a female vocalist, we take about twelve pieces of music which is about forty five minutes worth.

It is now 8:50PM and the first artist starts her spot. My memory is a bit shaky here because I cannot remember any of the pieces of music we played except the last one. From now on all times are approximate times.

9:00PM I have a strong heartburn feeling and I tried to cool it with a quick gulp of beer. We are on to about the third or fourth piece of music.

9:10PM I still have the heartburn feeling and I am starting to feel hot and sweaty. The piece of music we are now playing is *Sometimes When We Touch* by Dan Hill. I am now starting to feel ill and I am thinking to myself that I will have to go off stage to have a break, right in the middle of a spot, something I have never done since I starting playing in clubs thirty years ago. This piece of music seems to be going on and on my senses are now very heightened. Now playing the last page of this music and I feel very very ill. Finally, we finish the piece of music. While the audience are still

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applauding, I say to the artist "I am just going for a five minute break". She started to laugh, she thinks I am joking. I staggered to the dressing room.

9:15PM I sat down in the dressing room in front of the mirror, I was as white as a ghost and wet through and still did not realize I was having a heart attack. The compare enters the dressing room wanting to know why I had left the stage. I told him "I feel very ill" and "get an ambulance" and then I passed out.

Time unknown. I woke up with four or five people round me; somebody had placed a wet towel on the back of my neck, which felt great. I asked the compare how long I was unconscious he replied about thirty seconds, which I thought was unbelievable. I have checked with him since and he confirms it was about thirty seconds.

9:30PM Ambulance arrives, with full sirens blazing and the paramedics enter the dressing room which

seems to be getting full with people from the audience. They then proceed to walk me to the ambulance, get me in and strap me down.

While in the ambulance the paramedics start to take my blood pressure take a sample of blood, inform me that my blood pressure is very low and give me an aspirin to chew, and then literally bombed it to the hospital, which probably fortunate for me was only about five minutes away.

Having been rushed in to the A&E unit I was suddenly surrounded by doctors who took blood, wired me up to a heart monitor and I seem to remember being injected with morphine and I had to take a tablet and place it between my bottom lip and my gum. I was now getting quite delirious. I remember a doctor saying to me in slow precise words "you are having a heart attack" he also said "I need your permission to give you a drug that has a 1 in 100 chance of causing a stroke" I replied "do what you have to do".

I have a very vivid memory of my last moments in A&E. As I was passing out again, I kept saying I feel very bad, I feel rough and I heard voices saying hang on Michael and my wife who had arrived by then said later that they ripped all the electrodes of me and got ready with paddles I presume to shock me back in to life. I found out later that my heart slowed so much it was about to stop. Fortunately, my heart started up again just in the nick of time and then I was shipped to the coronary care unit where I started my recovery.

People have asked me "what did it feel like" and my answer is there was no pain if felt like heartburn initially, then dizziness and sweating but in my case no chest pains. Apparently, there are many different symptoms to a heart attack.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody from the Oldham Royal Hospital from the paramedics who were brilliant to the A&E doctors, the CCU 1 and F8 ward nurses and doctors that quite literally saved my life. Thank You.

Finally, much as been said about the National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom recently, that is not very flattering and while I am sure there must be some problems within this great creation,

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my experience has been and continues to be a positive one. So, God bless the NHS.

Visit

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Michael David Shaw (Mike to his friends) runs the website

<http://www.mikesmusicroom.co.uk>

the place

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## **Heart Attack Warning Signs**

### **By News Canada**

(NC)—Heart disease is a leading cause of death for Canadian men and women.<sup>1</sup> Chest pain (a classic symptom of angina or heart attack) occurs when not enough blood is reaching the heart muscles due to the narrowing of the heart's coronary arteries or complete blockage of these arteries. Learn the signs of a heart attack and the steps to take if you or a loved one experience these signs:

Uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the centre of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back  
Pain that spreads to the shoulders, neck or arms  
Chest discomfort with lightheadness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath  
Atypical chest pain, stomach or abdominal pain; nausea or dizziness  
Shortness of breath and difficulty breathing  
Unexplained anxiety, weakness or fatigue

Not all of these signs occur in every attack. Sometimes they go away and return. If any occur, get help fast.

If you or someone else is having heart attack warning signs, call 911 or your local emergency number immediately.

Speak to your doctor to determine your level of risk and to discuss what measures you can take to reduce the risk of heart attack.

<sup>1</sup> Selected leading causes of death by sex, Canada, 1997. Statistics Canada. [www.statscan.ca](http://www.statscan.ca) (November 22, 2002).

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