

Chatterbox #174 – Playing in bands

Episode description

Everybody likes listening to music, but what is it like to actually make music? From song writing, to recording, to gigging, come learn all about Andrew and Suzanne's experiences playing in bands in Montreal. Rock on!

Fun fact

In 2013, Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield played David Bowie's "Space Oddity" while on the International Space Station. More than 22 million people have watched the song's video, which was the first ever to be made in space!

Expressions included in the learning materials

- Gibberish
- To click
- A tough pill to swallow
- Rock on
- A cover
- Take the lead



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: Hey, everybody, I'm Andrew.

Suzanne: And I'm Suzanne.

Andrew: And you are listening to another Culips episode.

Suzanne: If you want to learn English for everyday use, you've come to the right place. At Culips, we help make English understandable. By listening to our podcast, you can learn natural expressions and conversational structure. If you're interested in learning more about Culips and what we do, check us out of Facebook or our website, Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Thanks for listening. We hope you enjoy this episode.

Andrew: Hey, Suzanne.

Suzanne: Hey, Andrew.

Andrew: How are you?

Suzanne: I'm good. How are you?

Andrew: I'm doing pretty good. You know, something really big is happening in my life this week.

Suzanne: What's that?

Andrew: Well, my band is releasing an album.

Suzanne: Wow! That's so exciting!

Andrew: Yeah, it's pretty exciting. You know, we worked on it all winter, and now finally the day has come where we can release it to the world.

Suzanne: That must feel so good, and you must feel so accomplished. You have an actual product, you know?

Andrew: It does feel good to make things with your friends, you know? The guys in my band were all really close, and we had a really great time recording this record. We actually got to spend some time in a very professional studio. We won a contest and we got free studio space. So it was a neat experience to work in a professional studio. That was a first for all of us.

But, yeah, it's just cool that the record is finally seeing the light of day. You know, the time from when you actually finish the recording to the time that it is released feels like forever. So, yeah, I'm just happy that it's out there.

Suzanne: Yeah. Well, **rock on**.

Andrew: Thank you. I especially wanted to talk about my band today, because you also play in a band. And so I thought, hey, why don't we just do an episode about what it's like to be in a band and why we like doing this as a hobby?

Suzanne: It's true, I am in a band. I don't play an instrument, but I sing; I use my voice.

Andrew: Mmhmm. Well, that's a very important part.

Suzanne: Yeah, absolutely.

Andrew: Like I mentioned just a second ago, today our topic is about playing in bands, because that's something that Suzanne and I have in common. We are both musicians and we both play in bands.

So, Suzanne, tell me a little bit about your band. I know it's a relatively new band. Why don't you tell us your band name and what kind of music you make?

Suzanne: OK. I'm a little embarrassed about the band name.

Andrew: Oh, everybody is, don't worry.

Suzanne: We're still deciding on a band name that we all agree upon. We have not agreed upon a name.

Andrew: OK, so it's a work in progress?

Suzanne: It's a, exactly, a work in progress. So right now our band name is called Slush Devils.

Andrew: Slush Devils. That's a good winter Montreal band name.

- Suzanne: Which is when we thought of the name, because we were stepping in a lot of puddles of slush that looked like they were frozen, and then when you exit the car or cross the street and your foot goes into this big puddle of cold, mushy, snowy water up to your ankle, and you go, “Man!” You get angry. So that’s where it came from.
- Andrew: I like it.
- Suzanne: Our band is, it’s me—I’m the only Anglophone, I’m the American—and the other three guys ...
- Andrew: Are they all from France?
- Suzanne: Two of them are from France, and one of them is from a small island off of the coast of New Zealand, I’m not going to remember the name at this time. But he is from a small island off the coast of New Zealand and it is a French-speaking island.
- Andrew: Hmm, that’s really cool.
- Suzanne: It’s very interesting. They’re all three of them engineers by day.
- Andrew: They’re all engineers?
- Suzanne: They’re all engineers by day, and then there’s me, who is not an engineer at all.
- Andrew: So what kind of music do you play? Is it pop, is it rock? Country? Maybe a little bit of everything?
- Suzanne: Yeah, we do mostly rock. And I sing, so I have to sing really rough and gravelly sometimes. And we also have been including a lot of blues influence, so we’ve been playing kind of rock blues. And we’ve also put in some interesting sounds on some songs. We took a song that’s really country and we made the beat sound reggae.
- Andrew: OK.
- Suzanne: And then the guitar is really bluesy, we made the guitar really bluesy.
- Andrew: Mmhmm
- Suzanne: And the drums are reggae. And the way I sing is a very interesting way that I do my voice for this specific song. I make it really low and gravelly and airy sounding. So it sounds like a completely different song, and it’s so fun, and it sounds really cool when we play it. So we’re still finding our sound.
- Andrew: OK.

- Suzanne: And we have just begun to write original music.
- Andrew: It sounds like your band kind of started out the way a lot of bands do, mine included. When you're first getting together, first starting up, you usually play **covers**.
- Suzanne: Yes.
- Andrew: Yeah, and that's because nobody has any songs written yet, or you have to work together to figure out the writing process.
- Suzanne: Yeah, you have to figure out: What do we like to play together, what does the singer sing well, what influences do we want to have in our music, and how do we want to collaborate?
- Andrew: Hmm, absolutely. So that takes a little while. But I'm happy to hear that you guys are writing originals. That's pretty cool.
- Suzanne: Yeah, it's a fun process. I wanted to ask you how you guys write original songs. Do you start with the lyrics? Do you start with the music? How do you begin?
- Andrew: Well, in the case of my band, we have three songwriters. So four people in the band, but three of us are writing songs.
- Suzanne: OK.
- Andrew: And I think on this record that's just coming out, maybe there's 12 or 13 songs. So I think I wrote four of them and then the other guys split up the remainder.
- But, yeah, usually what we would do is, in the case of my music, I would come to the band with a song and I would pretty much have it almost fully completed with lyrics and music, and I would kind of just teach it to the band. They would give me their opinion, and if there's something that they thought they should change, we would think about that and see if we could make it better as a unit.
- And, yeah, that's usually how we would write it, is just one person would **take the lead** and then we would give feedback and try and, you know, add our own parts and make it more of a blended sound.
- Suzanne: OK.
- Andrew: This is one of the problems with three people writing music, is how can we make all of these songs sound like one band, not three different bands?

- Suzanne: Three different styles, it's cohesive, and the album sounds like the brand of the band.
- Andrew: Yeah, exactly. This is one of the biggest challenges we faced, is making all of the songs sound uniform and not too different from one another.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: But this is one of the fun things about playing in a band for me, and also probably the most frustrating.
- Suzanne: Yes.
- Andrew: You really have to—especially when you're working with a song you wrote and then it gets criticized and chopped up by the other members of the band, you sort of have to leave that ego at the door and be open to changes. And you know what? A lot of times, especially in the studio this time, for some reason I was more defensive than I usually am. And while I'm not 100% satisfied with some of the changes we did, I do have to say, at the end of the day, they gave me some good advice and helped me to make the songs stronger. We, as a unit, made the songs stronger, so that's really cool.
- Suzanne: That's really cool, to learn that kind of lesson. It's really difficult to be open to suggestions when it's your creative accomplishment. When I write lyrics or, for example I'm the only native English speaker in the band, so I write my lyrics in English. And when we're writing a song, I don't sing with real words. They write the music and then I listen to the music and I create melodies on top of the music that they already wrote.
- Andrew: Hmm, OK.
- Suzanne: And I start to come up with melodies in the form of **gibberish**, or nonsense words, right? I'll just kind of say, like, we-a-lad-a-wo, like some weird sounds, and it's not real words in any language, and—that I know of—and then I go back and I feel the tone of the song. If it's like upbeat, more funky, or maybe it's more introspective or serious, or sad or something. And I begin to write a poem or lyrics, and then I fit the syllables and the vowels to the pitches. You know, some words start with a strong syllable in the beginning of the word ...
- Andrew: Sure.

- Suzanne: Like *record*, so I just sort of, you know, try to make that happen. And then when you get into the studio and I have my non-English-speaking friends and bandmates telling me that they don't like it, or they don't understand, or that doesn't make sense, I get sometimes upset because they can't understand the artistry and the metaphor in my song.
- Andrew: Right, that could be frustrating. Yeah, so it's a similar experience, I think I know exactly how you feel. This is part of playing in a band, you have to be open-minded and you have to work together as a team.
- Suzanne: Yeah. It's a team. Yeah.
- Andrew: If you're doing that and things are **clicking**, then I think you can really make some nice music.
- Suzanne: I totally agree. It's really similar in acting. It's similar with writing books and getting feedback, or even writing a paper and getting feedback. Once you put it out there, it no longer belongs to you. It becomes a shared experience and people can comment and have their own opinion and their own experience with what you've put out there. So it's hard to understand it's no longer your baby.
- Andrew: Yeah, definitely, it's **a tough pill to swallow** sometimes. But I also want to ask you about live shows. Is your band a gigging band?
- Suzanne: Our bass player is doing an internship right now in Ottawa, so we will not be playing. But I just recently had my birthday ...
- Andrew: Happy birthday.
- Suzanne: Thanks! And we have a really cool roof deck on our apartment, and so the band brought some of their instruments and acoustic amps, like their acoustic guitars and amps, and we set up on the roof because we have electricity up there.
- Andrew: Nice.
- Suzanne: And—yeah—and after we had hamburgers and hot dogs and sausages and stuff, we sat around and did an acoustic set.
- Andrew: Oh, nice.
- Suzanne: Yeah, so we played about an hour-long set of songs that we've worked on, or some were requests, also.
- Andrew: Oh, very cool, that must have been fun.

- Suzanne: Yeah, that was really fun, and my friends were very appreciative to have a private concert.
- Andrew: Yeah, that's really cool.
- Suzanne: Yeah! How about you? I've come to see you guys play.
- Andrew: Yeah, you saw us in the early days. You saw my band when we were just kind of starting out, I believe. Probably not the greatest gig you saw.
- Suzanne: No—oh? I really enjoyed it.
- Andrew: I do think we got better with time. But, yeah, of course I'm taking a break from the band since I am in Korea, but there's a replacement musician taking my role for the time being.
- Suzanne: OK.
- Andrew: But if I do end up back in Montreal, maybe I'll start gigging again. But, no, musically now I'm interested in making music by myself because I have never really done this, I have always played with bands. So, now, for the first time in a long time, I can make music for me. I've written a lot of songs recently, and I'm hoping that I get the opportunity to record some of them soon. I don't have a lot of musical gear with me here in Korea, so it's difficult to record. But maybe somebody out there is listening, a Korean with a recording studio. Hit me up, let's make some music.
- Suzanne: Get in touch with Andrew, yeah. And you play guitar, right? And drums?
- Andrew: You know, I'm what they call a jack of all trades and a master of none. So I can play pretty much every instrument a little bit, but nothing super well.
- Suzanne: That's OK, that's good for writing music.
- Andrew: Yeah, I can get the job done, but I'm not a virtuoso on any instrument.
- Suzanne: You're not a concert pianist?
- Andrew: No, I wish. But, unfortunately, no.
- Suzanne: Ah. I know that we're going to have to sign off in a minute, but I wanted to ask you, what's the name of your band? Since you have an album coming out, maybe we can check it out?
- Andrew: Yeah, so if you like rock 'n' roll music, you might be interested to hear my band. We're called No Aloha and our website is No-Aloha.bandcamp.com, and our new record is called Deluxe, and you can listen to it for free on the website, so check it out. It's really great.

Suzanne: Yeah! I'll check it out.

Andrew: Do the Slush Devils have a website yet?

Suzanne: We do not have a website yet, or any recordings online.

Andrew: OK.

Suzanne: Coming soon.

Andrew: Yeah, well, keep us in the know. Update us when that record comes out.

Suzanne: I will.

Andrew: Well, that's it for today's episode. Thanks for listening everyone.

Suzanne: We really appreciate it. And if you enjoyed this episode, please show us some love. Leave us a five-star review on iTunes and like our Facebook page.

Andrew: And tell your friends about us too. That would help us out a lot.

Suzanne: And if you have any questions about what you heard today, or any feedback you want to give us, feel free to drop us a line. Send us a message through our Facebook page at [Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast](https://www.facebook.com/CulipsPodcast).

Andrew: Yup, or you could always visit our website at Culips.com. That's the place where you can listen to all of our back episodes and find out more about joining the Culips community and studying with our learning materials. And we design our learning material to help you maximize your English studies, so, yeah, check 'em out.

Suzanne: And that's it for us today. We'll be back soon with another Culips episode, so stay tuned. Bye everyone!

Andrew: Bye!

Detailed Explanations

Gibberish

Gibberish is a noun that refers to speech or writing that has no meaning. Here is an example of written **gibberish**: Sad Jeremiah dog flaked on kiddo. That collection of words is **gibberish** because it is meaningless and impossible to understand. **Gibberish** doesn't have to be real words; it can also be nonsense that looks or sounds sort of like language.

In this episode, Suzanne mentions that she writes songs with **gibberish** lyrics, and then puts in real words later. In other words, when she first writes songs she just sings noises or strings of nonsense words—**gibberish**.

True **gibberish** is nonsense; there is no way to find meaning in it. However, sometimes things can sound or look like **gibberish** because you don't understand them. Imagine if you didn't know about the Internet. If you heard someone talking about "googling," you would think they were speaking **gibberish**!

Here are a couple more examples with **gibberish**:

Mark:	I got quite the scare last night.
Hannah:	Oh yeah, what happened?
Mark:	My friend is staying over for a few days. I didn't know he's a sleepwalker!
Hannah:	Oh no! What did he do?
Mark:	It wasn't that bad, just scary! I woke up in the middle of the night to see him standing in my doorway talking gibberish . I thought he was possessed!

Sarah:	Bye, Roy—it was nice to meet you!
Benji:	OK, now that he's gone, I have to ask: Could you understand anything that dude said?
Sarah:	Really? He does have a pretty strong accent, but I understand him just fine.
Benji:	He might as well have been speaking gibberish , for all I understood. I swear he wasn't saying real words! That was so awkward! Everyone else seemed to be able to hold a conversation with him, but I was completely lost.

To click

To click is a verb that has multiple meanings. The two we're talking about today are *to become friendly* and *to become clear*.

The first meaning of **to click**, to become friendly, is used when talking about people. We talk about people **clicking** when they discover that they like each other and get along well. You can **click** with someone you've known for a while, but we usually talk about people **clicking** when they are first getting to know each other. If you talk about **clicking** with someone you already know, it implies that you weren't always friendly with them, but now you are.

The second meaning of **to click** is to become clear or to suddenly make sense. I'm sure you've had an experience where you've tried for a long time to understand a difficult concept and then, all of a sudden, you get it! That moment when you suddenly understand something is the moment that concept **clicks**.

In this episode, Andrew uses **to click** to refer to the times when musical collaboration goes smoothly, when "things are **clicking**." Here, Andrew uses **to click** in a combination of the two meanings, because he's talking about people getting along well together and a project going smoothly and making sense.

Here are a couple more examples with both meanings of **to click**:

Norah:	How was your date last night?
Bill:	I think it went really well! We made plans to go hiking next Saturday.
Norah:	Nice, the second date is already planned! What made it such a good date?
Bill:	It's hard to say exactly. We have really similar senses of humour. The conversation was great. We had fun dancing after dinner. But it wasn't anything in particular, you know?
Norah:	It sounds like you guys just clicked !

Pamela:	Thank goodness!!
Ross:	Woah, what's going on over there?
Pamela:	I've been trying to figure out this logic problem for 2 hours, and it finally clicked ! I'm glad I understand now, because I don't think I could have spent any more time on it.

A tough pill to swallow

A tough pill to swallow is an idiomatic expression that means that a situation, concept, or piece of information is difficult to accept.

In this episode, Andrew mentions that putting your finished music into the world, where people can and will judge it, can be **a tough pill to swallow**. In other words, it can be emotionally difficult to send your work into the world, because there will inevitably be people who don't like or understand it. That is a difficult situation, or **a tough pill to swallow**.

It's common to use "hard" or "difficult" in place of "tough" in this expression. In the United Kingdom, they will say "a bitter pill to swallow." All of these expressions have the same meaning.

Here are a couple more examples with **a tough pill to swallow**.

Wilfred:	Hey, Katherine! It's good to see you. I didn't think you would be back to school this year.
Katherine:	Yeah, I thought I was finished all my courses last summer. It turns out I messed up and I still have two courses left to take. I'm pretty disappointed, to be honest.
Wilfred:	That sounds like a tough pill to swallow ! At least it's only two courses—you'll be done in no time!
Katherine:	I hope so.

Fernando:	Anna, you're looking so much better!
Anna:	Thanks! I'm really glad to be back on my feet and walking around.
Fernando:	It was a pretty bad bike accident you were in, right?
Anna:	Yes, that's right. For a while I thought I'd never get totally better. When the doctors told me that I might not be able to walk properly, that was a tough pill to swallow . But after a year of physio, I'm all right.
Fernando:	That must have been terrifying. But look at you now: I can't tell that anything has changed.

Rock on

Rock on is a very informal phrase that you can use to show approval of a situation and that you think it should keep going. You may also occasionally hear someone use **rock on** as a way of saying goodbye, but this is very uncommon and likely will be said as a joke.

It's tough to say exactly when this phrase came about, but it definitely originated from the culture around rock and roll music. There was an international hit single called "**Rock On**," by David Essex, that came out in 1973, and surely helped the popularity of the phrase.

Rock on, used to show that you like something, can be used in almost any situation. It's very similar to saying "great" or "nice" in response to something or someone. However, it also means that you want whatever it is to continue. In the original context, said to those listening to or playing rock music, saying "**rock on**" is like saying "keep rocking" or "keep playing that music."

Here's one more example with **rock on**:

Estelle:	Oh, Emile, I didn't know you were home already! Do you mind if I keep playing my music this loud?
Emile:	Rock on! It doesn't bother me.

A cover

When talking about music, **a cover** is a piece of music that a musician or band plays that was originally written by someone else.

As Andrew and Suzanne discuss in this episode, most bands start out by playing **covers**. In other words, they begin playing music written by other bands before they write their own original songs.

Here's one more example with **a cover**:

Colin:	What's your favourite Beatles cover ? I think Al Green's cover of "I Want to Hold Your Hand" is the best.
Penny:	No way! The best Beatles cover is definitely the Feelies' version of "Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey."
Colin:	I guess we'll have to agree to disagree!

Take the lead

Take the lead is an expression that means to direct or take control of an activity or a group of people.

In this episode, Andrew says that one person in his band usually **takes the lead** in the song-writing process. In other words, one of the band members is in control and takes responsibility for directing the other members. While they all work together, one person **takes the lead**. So, the person who **takes the lead** is the one who organizes the other members.

The simplest way of thinking about it is that when you **take the lead**, you become the leader of an activity or group of people.

Here are a couple more examples with **take the lead**:

Amelia:	Oh man, this group project is killing me.
Irving:	Why's that?
Amelia:	It's madness, completely disorganized. No one wants to take the lead , so it's just a complete mess.
Irving:	Why don't you take the lead and whip everyone into shape?
Amelia:	I wish I could, but I don't have the spare time to organize everyone and make sure they keep on track.
Irving:	It might be less of a headache to direct everyone rather than keep working in chaos—just saying.
Amelia:	You might be right.

Jeff:	I got a promotion!
Jana:	Wow, that's great news!
Jeff:	Yeah, I got promoted to assistant manager. They said I was so good at taking the lead when working in teams that I was the natural choice.
Jana:	That's awesome! I'm sure you'll make a great assistant manager with all those leadership skills.
Jeff:	Thanks!

Quiz

1. If someone says “rock on,” what do they mean?
 - a) “That’s enough.”
 - b) “That’s too loud.”
 - c) “That’s great, keep going.”
 - d) “That’s my favourite.”

2. True or false: A cover is an original song that was inspired by another artist.
 - a) true
 - b) false

3. Gibberish is speech or writing that:
 - a) you don’t understand
 - b) has no meaning
 - c) is a language you don’t know
 - d) uses archaic language

4. A tough pill to swallow is a situation or piece of information that is:
 - a) completely normal
 - b) fun and enjoyable
 - c) difficult to understand
 - d) difficult to accept

5. If you take the lead, you ____ an activity:
 - a) direct
 - b) design
 - c) enjoy
 - d) complete

6. When you click with someone, you feel ____ them.
 - a) angry at
 - b) friendly towards
 - c) hurt by
 - d) ambivalent about

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.b 3.b 4.d 5.a 6.b

Episode credits

Hosts: Andrew Bates and Suzanne Cerreta
Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates
Audio editor: Andrew Bates
Transcription: Transcript Heroes Transcription Services
Learning materials writer: Morag St. Clair
English editor: Stephanie MacLean
Business manager: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima
Project manager: Jessica Cox