

It's takes more than talent to get to the top in rock 'n' roll

Education is not always in the classroom, Barry Reynolds writes

JAY Henry is going to make you a star. But be prepared to work hard for it.

Henry, a singer, songwriter and producer, has worked on stage and in the studio with everyone from Dusty Springfield to the Pet Shop Boys and George Michael, with whom he has toured extensively over the past couple of years. He has also written music and songs that can be heard in Love Actually and Shrek, as well as singing on TV commercials. Not bad for someone who is only 41, happily married with a young daughter, who lives the quiet, not-so-rock-and-roll life in north London.

Someone with this much experience is well worth listening to, but do not be deceived into thinking stardom will soon follow. For Henry, hard work is the only way to the top.

Like most people his age – and the previous generation – he started out listening to blues and soul music, and then forming a band while he was still at school in Bethnal Green.

"I used to listen to a lot of Motown and I had a craving to know how they developed as artists, how they came out with that passion," he said.

"There was a time when I used to go home every night and for two hours listen to Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye,

Aretha Franklin. I would listen to it phrase by phrase, trying to get into their licks, get into their passion."

And passion is a word that comes up continually in Henry's conversation – it is what he wants to pass on to his pupils. That and the fact that no matter what the reality shows portray, it takes a lot of time and effort to make it in the entertainment business.

Henry is a teacher who commands respect and demands that his pupils put some commitment into their work. Among his current pupils are X-Factor contestants and actors from Britannia High

"It wasn't so much that I had a craving to be a star one day, I just liked listening to good singers," he said.

It is not just the technical aspects of singing and tradecraft that Henry wants to pass on, the

experience of his own career also offers valuable lesson.

An early chance at a footballing career didn't go the way he wanted after playing for both West Ham and Leyton Orient as a junior.

"That didn't quite work out and that's when I really started to get into music," he said. "I just loved being in a band and singing."

It wasn't until he was 26 that he got his first record contract, which lasted about two years. By then he had toured with the Pet Shop Boys and been in the studio with George Michael, whom he joined as a backing singer.

"We did a mini world tour in the early 90s and everything just snowballed from there," Henry said. "I was writing as well. I did some vocals on Love Actually and Shrek. With the music industry you can't just rely on any one thing."

Henry then formed a band that was signed to Warner Brothers. But,

as with many such deals, when the A&R man left after two years, many of the acts he had brought to the label were let go.

Unfortunately, in about 2004, there was the inevitable "dry season", until he again worked with George Michael, this time on the Unplugged sessions.

"I then slowly got myself back into the session work," he said.

Then came his chance to teach.

"It was then that I decided I could teach and build up my own clientele. My thing really is mentoring people who have talent but have had no studio experience, people who don't know how to get the best out of their voice."

Part of this is helping students prepare for auditions and shows.

But not all his pupils are interested in getting into the business full-time, some just want to have the thrill of performance, while for others there are unintended results.

"Some kids who had been bullied suddenly become popular," he found. "Other kids say, 'I didn't know you could sing like that,' and they suddenly become popular. You'd be surprised how it helps kids."

"All the kids seem to be lacking in confidence, though. There is one thing about singing on stage – there is nowhere to hide. With a singer it

is just you and the song. They may not go on to be a star but it helps them in so many other avenues of life.

"It just tears down the fear. The thing I am most pleased with is that they are more prepared for auditions and even interviews."

"Quite often it is just a matter of telling people they are better than they think they are."

New technologies have also allowed him the chance to coach near and far. "Through my website I can keep in touch when I'm touring, and I now have international students. I can coach them through Skype, which has been ideal."

"I want to eventually have a finishing school. To even get a record deal these days, you need to have

the finished master and the video.

"When I spot talent I want to be able to take them to the next level."

And while Henry has no interest in managing any of his students his knowledge of the industry – and his contacts – mean that he knows exactly who to put them in touch with.

"I'm fortunate enough in that I have those connections," he said.

All of this depends, however, on hard work. Reality TV series make it sound as if fame and wealth can happen overnight.

"They need to have the right work ethic. That is the biggest problem. You need more than just the raw talent. I want to encourage more of the artistic side."



Jay Henry with George Michael.



Jay Henry belts it out on stage during a George Michael tour.

HENRY FACTS

❑ Jay Henry on www.jvoxacademy.com.

❑ Henry is available as a personal tutor and for groups in venues that suit his students.