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Noah Teachey: You are listening to *Notables*, an Education Through Music podcast. Our guest today, as you could probably tell from what you just heard, is Andy Hilfiger. The idea behind *Notables* is to sit down with notable figures from within the music industry or from adjacent to the music industry, and hear from them about their early experiences with music. Andy Hilfiger has been blurring the lines between music and fashion for decades, which has given him the unique opportunity to style and create brands for some of the world's biggest stars. Andy, thanks so much for being here.

Andy Hilfiger: Thanks for having me.

Noah Teachey: So I'm wondering if you could start off by just telling us a little bit about how you became a musician.

Andy Hilfiger: I'm from a large family with nine kids in our family. There was always music in the house. In my sister's room, she was playing Cat Stevens, some Carol King. In my brother Billy's room was the Allman Brothers. Tommy Tommy Hilfiger. He was listening to Hendrix and the Stones and my father loved the big bands, stuff like that. So music was always a part of our lives. In grade school, I took trumpet for a little bit. But I really wanted to play rock and roll. I saw the Rolling Stones and the Beatles albums, and I used to stare at the album covers saying, I wanna do this. My brother, Tommy, bought a bass. He had a little boutique clothing store that was all about music and fashion. But I was nine or ten years old, and he actually bought a bass and everybody in the family would pick the bass up and start fooling around with it. Tommy knew two songs. He knew "Badge" and "Sunshine of Your Love". And Billy knew a couple Rolling Stones. So I picked up from them. I started playing in bands, you know, in high school, and my brother Billy and I had a band together. And Tommy used to dress us in cool clothing, you know, fashion stuff when we went on stage. They also get us gigs.

Noah Teachey: What I'm hearing that I think is so cool is that family life was where a lot of the music was coming from. You got, like, a few different generations of music that, from the big bands to Hendrix...

Andy Hilfiger: I was also in chorus. We called it, you know, choir or chorus for a while. And I wasn't great in singing or at least the teachers thought I wasn't. So it always kinda made me feel like oh, I can't sing, but I started singing and playing together with my band and the bass. And now looking back, I wish that I would have stayed in chorus because you learn a lot from that. But the whole growing up in a large family, everybody is into music. It's all about music. And eventually all about music and fashion.

Noah Teachey: I'm curious to hear a little more about that. Something that I picked up on that I thought was interesting that you were you were looking at the album covers and thinking about wanting to do that. And that's I think is an interesting distinction knowing what I know about your interest in design,

Andy Hilfiger: That's really how Tommy got into fashion is looking at, like, oh my god, look at these look at what Jimmy Hendrix' wear and look like The Rolling Stones have not. And I would do the same. I remember there was a greatest hits Rolling Stones record called High Tide and Green Grass, and it had a

picture book in it. And it was so cool, the clothing, and then the music, I can't get no satisfaction. You know, I've been obsessed ever since.

A lot of the kids in the neighborhood where we grew up in upstate New York were into basketball and baseball. And it was never really my thing so much. I wasn't great at that. So I would come home and listen to the records and try to figure out how to play that stuff. Like, I learned by ear. I mean, I knew the notes and stuff like that from the trumpet, but it wasn't the same on the guitar and bass. And so I would listen to what they were doing and try to do the same thing. And then I would make up my own songs that were similar.

Noah Teachey: This integration of the image and also the sound.

Andy Hilfiger: It was the image in the sound. And, actually, years later, my brother became fashion designer and now worldwide fashion designer. But at that time, he said, Andy, maybe you know, you could dress musicians in my clothes. You know, it was his idea, like, get musicians dressed. But the clothing wasn't really ripe for rock and roll in a little bit, but one of my first jobs was to take Iman, David Bowie's wife, to the warehouse. Another day, I went to Mick Jagger's doorman. And we just tried to get this clothing on everybody. Well, kids in the neighborhood would come up to me. I lived on the Upper West Side and say, hey, Andy, they're saying your brother's name in a song. I was like, oh, really? That's crazy. And they would play me the song, so I took the cassette tape to Tommy's apartment. Said, listen to this, and they were wrapping about Tommy Hilfiger. And the company really became pretty cool. Like, oh my god. You know, Hilfiger's in the songs. So then I started dressing a lot of people, a lot of musicians in their videos.

And the stylists would call Tommy Hilfiger Company and say, oh, we're doing an MTV thing or BET, whatever the case was. And that became my career for a while. And after that, the musicians wanted their own clothing lines. So I would introduce P Diddy, Puffy, to manufacture Russell Simmons or we were helping everybody in the fashion music business to get their thing together. So then I met this young lady named Jennifer Lopez and she wanted to do her own clothing line. So I signed her up. We did a clothing line. And we did a fragrance that was global. And it was really, listen, we weren't the first, but we were really an early near in putting music and fashion together as you see it today.

Noah Teachey: And now, I mean, now they're completely extricable.

Andy Hilfiger: Forget it. And then I met Snoop with my brother and I sing with the band Michael H, and we met Snoop in an after party from the Grammys. In New York. And Tommy said, oh, come to my showroom, you know, I've got great stuff. So the next morning, I gave Snoop Dogg my number. The next morning. Yeah. Listen like, here. Snoop, call me. And I figured out, I don't know if I'll hear from them, but whatever. Because at that time, we were dressing everybody -- Yeah. -- for their video. TLC, Salt-N-Pepa, Aaliyah, all these artists, also rock and roll bands we were doing. We had a line called Red Label, which was more rock and roll. And so we were like the music and fashion place to be in at this time in the nineties.

Well, anyway, the next morning, Snoop called said, hey, we met last night. I wanna see your gear. Right. Clothing. So he came up with a dog pound and loved everything. We gave him a bunch of stuff. They went back to LA, but they came back a couple weeks later and Snoop called and said, hey, we're in New York. We need some more stuff. I'm like, oh, we'll come back up. Oh, I can't. I'm rehearsing on Saturday night live. I'm like, oh, he said, can you meet me at my hotel at midnight? I said, sure. I lived on the Upper West, and the showroom was in the garment center, and I went and got clothes, went to his hotel, hung out, gave him some stuff and the guys. And the next night, he wore Tommy Hilfiger on stage on Saturday Night Live. It was his first big song, and the store sold out the next day. And really, that was the time where Hilfiger became, oh, that's cool. That's a cool brand. That's the brand.

And then from that moment on, it was just MTV, VH1, BET, awards shows. Wyclef was wearing Tommy at MTV's Spring Break, and we went and dressed everybody for the fashion shows, and it was really all about mixing in music and fashion, about pop culture. And in one of his songs, which I didn't even know, he said setting up shop with Andy Hilfiger in New York, blah blah blah. It's on one of his songs. And an intern came up to me and said, hey, Andy. You know, Snoop's rapping about you in the song. No. No. They're they're they're all wrapping about Tommy Hilfiger and Tommy and they're like he's like, oh, no. No. No. It's you. [music plays]

Noah Teachey: And now for a short break. This podcast is brought to you by Education Through Music. ETM is a nonprofit organization that partners with under-resourced schools to provide music as a core subject for all children and utilizes music education as a catalyst to improve overall achievement, motivation, and self confidence amongst students. To learn more or support the work of Education Through Music, check out etmonline.org.

I'm wondering, to what extent your musical background sort of positioned you as more of an insider than an outsider to the music industry.

Andy Hilfiger: What would happen is the record companies, the stylists, sometimes the artists, were calling around companies, other companies as well. And they weren't getting a lot of luck with other companies because it wasn't a thing. They call Hilfiger, and it's oh, music, that's Andy. Because simultaneously, I was playing in bands also. And I worked in video and before Tommy Hilfiger, before I worked at Tommy Hilfiger, I was doing videos with a friend of mine was a lighting director, a gaffer, and I just got it. I knew the culture. I knew how to deal with the whole thing. It's music and fashion. It was just like, wow, this is perfect. You know? Then you'd, you know, two weeks later, you'd be sitting home watching MTV. And there's Mary J and Method Man wearing the clothing you just gave them two weeks ago. We also sponsor ended up sponsoring The Stones, the Rolling Stones tour. And they didn't wear so much the logo stuff, but they were rocking some cool Tommy stuff, Lenny Kravitz, the Fugees, then a friend of mine called me, he was a music lawyer, but turned manager. It's like 1998. He called and said, hey, I have this artist and we just finished her video. And, you know, we really need your help. She wants to model. We need clothes, anything you can do. I said, okay. And I was in LA. Actually, and I was in LA at a studio for Quincy Jones because I had a side record company with Quincy and his daughter.

He sent me the video. I put it in and it was this young singer named Britney Spears. I was like, oh, well, this is pretty cool. This is interesting. I said, well, I'd like to introduce her to Tommy, but I'll be in New York. We'll be in New York too. So, Britney came to the showroom and I said, you know, Tommy, this is Britney. Her songs coming out, her videos are very cool. Amazing. Tommy's like, oh, yeah. Cool. You know, whatever you think. So I said to Britney and her manager, you want to model in our ad campaign. We're shooting next week at a recording studio. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. We're about to go. We're gonna do it.

So the day we photograph Britney, that same song went number one in CNN, in VH1, and the Post, the Daily News, everybody came you know, we had a media thing saying, oh, we're shooting Q Tip, Mark Ronson, and Britney Spears, this one, that one. So it became this whole, like, the next day in the papers and the news. Brittany Spears was rocking Tommy Hilfiger for her first song. Right place right time. And that happened with us with Destiny's Child and Beyoncé. Like, I tell you about Snoop and plenty of others. Yeah. So it became my new my new career.

And then there like I said, the artists some of them all wanted to get in the business themselves. And we were giving them great advice in helping out with that, but I'd look at it and like, oh my god. You know, Sean John, Puffy's lines, you know, three hundred million dollars, you know, Let's get into this. And so I signed Jennifer Lopez. And we built the business together and had fragrances, and the velour suits, and the whole thing.

Noah Teachey: Just thinking back to a time when this didn't exist, like the affiliation between musical artists and fashion. It is one of those things that seem so obvious now. But I guess, having the idea...

Andy Hilfiger: No. I mean, it wasn't the fragrance companies were like, you know, I mean, we of course, we weren't the first there was Elizabeth Taylor or Isabella Rossellini or what there was designer celebrity fragrances. Let's say, but there wasn't, like, pop culture. Like it wasn't- they didn't have their own lines -- their own clothing lines. And I took my experience from music and fashion and put that to doing this whole new life. Then eventually I did my own line. And of course, they know Tommy, they don't really know me, but so Macy's was like, well, who are you gonna have you know, be your spokesperson, your model. I said, oh, I've been talking to this guy, Steven Tyler. They're like, oh, we know him. Steven and I did a partnership together, and we were launching the line and Steven I said, you know, let's do a fashion show at Macy's. That's what you do or personal appearance. He said, no. No. No. I wanna go in the windows of Macy's. And we when people walk by, they'll see me. And we did that, you know, it's like just a cool PR stunt. And it was called Andrew Charles. By Andy Hilfiger, by Andrew Charles, which is my middle name, and it was rock and roll clothing and had that for a couple of years. And did scarves..yeah, the scarves always sold out. Or they were missing. The scarves, the rock scarce were the coolest stuff, but it was funny. We were on the photo shoot in LA, and Steven had it was *American Idol*, sitting next to JLo. I hope they didn't talk about me, but because nothing's perfect.

Noah Teachey: Before we wrap up, I'm wondering if you could summarize what your thoughts are on the importance of music in schools.

Andy Hilfiger: I think it's amazing because, listen, I'm a guy who wasn't great in math and algebra and all that. The chance I got to play music, it's been with me my whole life. And I think it's probably one of the

greatest things you can do. I wish I would have learned piano at a young age. I mean, I could play a few chords, but you know, music education is really where it's at. And, you know, it's something they look forward to. And they can be creative themselves and there's so many creative kids out there that need an outlet and this is it.

Noah Teachey: Well, Thanks so much for your time. It's been great listening to these stories. I could I could listen to them all day. Really appreciate your time. Oh, there's more. Next time. But congratulations on your podcast and Education Through Music is very exciting to me.

Noah Teachey: Who is one other notable figure you would recommend we have on the show?

Andy Hilfiger: I challenge Frank Ferrer from Guns N' Roses to come on the podcast and tell all his stories about growing up in New York City going to the schools, playing rock and roll, and now he's in Guns N' Roses touring the world for the last twenty years.