Meet the Academic – Dr Tom Goodman

Introduction

So I'm Tom, I'm a computer scientist and mathematician. Working here in WMG. My research is looking at how musicians and ensembles synchronised to each other when they are playing.

What route did you take into your current role?

Yeah, so at school I did kind of a range of GCSEs and none of them actually computer science. So I did like the Sciences, Maths, and different English.Then at A level, I again didn't do like a typical thing for computer science. But I did do computer science. I was very lucky to have that at them at school and then I did Chemistry and Maths to A level as well as doing Music and further Maths. From there I went to the University of Birmingham where I studied my bachelors in computer science and ended a PhD. Tentatively, in computer science, but it was a lot of maths and kind of music stuff. And then yeah, kind of got the job here.

When you were younger, what did you want to be when you grew up, did you want to be a scientist?

When I was younger, I'm not sure I really knew what I wanted to be, so I think I various points all the way up until coming to university. I wanted to be a musician, a doctor. I wanted to go into like conducting like orchestral conducting. I guess game developer was there as well. But I don't think I had like a clear path in science where I was like I want to be a scientist and kind of jumped into that. That's kind of muddled my way along and ended up in it.

Can you give some examples of your day to day responsibilities?

Academia and like science in general is quite varied in what you get to do. So I do everything from kind of data analysis. The things you kind of typically see as science, so some maths and data analysis kind of presenting things, both colleagues and more widely writing papers. There's also stuff like you know, organising events, organising away days, kind of helping to manage the team, other people, teaching as well, and outreach all of these kind of fall into that kind of bundle of science. Not just kind of going out and doing science or maths.

What challenges have you faced over the course of your STEM career?

So far, one of the biggest challenges I've faced is something called Imposter syndrome. So this kind of idea that I'd somehow ended up here through luck. I've got no idea what I'm doing really. It's something I feel a lot of the time actually, and it's one of those things I don't think you ever kind of get past that completely, not until very very far into your career if any, if ever. But it's kind of learning to accept that, actually, you know, look at this from a kind of probabilistic perspective. It's quite unlikely that I've

managed to get here completely through life. I must have done something. I must have some kind of talent to get here.

What advice would you give for someone aspiring to go into a STEM career?

Don't be afraid of failure. Like if stuff goes wrong, just try it again, be yourself. Don't be afraid to kind of go out and challenge ideas. Come up with new things, present stuff because usually ask questions as well. Actually, people are often worried to kind of ask things that they think are stupid questions. But you can almost guarantee if you're in a room of people about 20 other people have that same question. They're also just worried to ask it.