

GRANGER

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Living

Trey Gray
Beating the Odds

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A professional drummer with local roots, Trey Gray regularly tours with country music stars Brooks & Dunn and Reba McEntire.

Trey Gray

Beating the Odds

Trey Gray remembers he was only 5 years old when he said to his mom, “I want to do that.” The 1970s rock band KISS was performing on TV and drummer Peter Criss had Trey’s full attention. To his mother’s credit, she did not dismiss his interest but bought him a KISS poster and record album. Soon, Trey was converting toys into drum sticks and banging on everything in the house. Nearly five decades later, Trey, a Penn High School graduate, has spent a career as a drummer backing up international stars like Faith Hill, Jewel, Brooks & Dunn, and Reba McEntire. When he is not on the road, Trey plays locally with Paul Erdman. After all these years, he still loves to tour and make music, but Trey has added a new dimension to his work.

“I realized I had this platform, a way to help spread the word,” said Trey who has been helping raise awareness of Huntington’s Disease for the past 15 years. In 2003 Trey was diagnosed with Huntington’s Disease, a hereditary degenerative neurological disorder. He lost his mother to the disease six years ago. Each child of an affected parent has a 50% chance of inheriting the disease-causing gene. Symptoms usually manifest between the ages of 30 and 50, and the prognosis is a 10 to 30-year decline in motor skills and cognitive function. At the time of his diagnosis, Trey was given 10 to 15 years to live. Seventeen years later, Trey is defying expectations, and it is believed that drumming may have something to do with it. “Making music is good for the brain,” said Trey. “Drumming, I’m using all four limbs, getting blood and oxygen flowing, firing up the brain.” Trey has not

let the prognosis get him down and has continued to live a life energized by love, family, friends, and music. It only seemed natural to connect his advocacy and fundraising to his musical career.

He started by putting out information pamphlets on Huntington’s Disease at concerts. Then, he began working directly with the foundation at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee to raise support for the university’s Huntington’s Disease Clinic. While on tour in Melbourne, Australia, Trey was inspired by a facility he visited where people with advanced HD received individualized care in a home-like setting. He found a similar program in the US at the not-for-profit Sitrin Health Care Center in New Hartford, New York. Trey is honored to be the official celebrity spokesperson for the Sitrin NeuroCare Program that provides specialized programs for residents with HD and ALS. In 2019, Trey formed the Trey Gray Foundation to fund HD research and continue making a difference in people’s lives.

Trey was scheduled to have a big year touring in 2020 with Brooks & Dunn and Reba McEntire in addition to doing 25 shows with them in Las Vegas. Trey has received tremendous support from his fellow artists, and he planned to promote the Trey Gray Foundation in markets across the country while on tour. All that was brought to a stop by the pandemic. Trey and his longtime friend and fellow professional drummer Kevin Rappillo took advantage of their time off the road to start a podcast called Trey and Kevin Change the World where they have fun talking about a wide range of topics and occasionally bring other guest musicians into the conversation.

The Refinery Roasting Company in Goshen sponsors the podcast and went a

step further to support the foundation by developing a special brew of coffee to raise money for the Trey Gray Foundation. Trey personally sampled and selected the variety of beans to go into his special Foundation Blend. The Refinery gives \$10 to the Trey Gray Foundation for every pound of Foundation Blend sold. The coffee has been such a success that Trey worked with the roasters at The Refinery this summer to develop a second blend to benefit the foundation. The newly released Irish Blues coffee tastes of blueberries with a hint of Irish whiskey.

Because Trey does not do downtime, he also used his extended layover at home this summer to launch a drum academy to provide one-on-one instruction to area teens and adults interested in playing drums. Trey launched his first band as a teenager and then learned his greatest lessons playing on the road. He paid his dues in Nashville before getting his first big shot with Faith Hill when her career was just getting started. Since then, he has performed in venues across the world. Now, he wants to share his experience and passion for music with others. Trey is connecting with people interested in The Trey Gray Drum Academy on Facebook.

Trey, a father of four, believes in giving it your all no matter what life throws at you. He would tell any aspiring musician the same things he would tell his children. Expose yourself to a wide variety of artists. Don’t have an attitude. Be kind and patient. Do it to the best of your ability. Be a good person. And trust your heart. Trey tries to follow his own advice by living every day with determination, an open mind, and a loving heart. It also doesn’t hurt, to grab some sticks and bang on some drums. ●

By Shannan Miller

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