



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of ERIC BIKALES



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I Am the AMA: Eric Bikales Professional musician

By Jay Smith

Jay Smith: How did you get involved with model aviation?

Eric Bikales: This time around, I became interested in learning to fly RC helicopters. I heard they were pretty tricky to fly, but I managed to progress from an indoor coaxial to an outdoor collective pitch.

Then Ed Bazel, a good friend of mine who happens to be a professional musician, asked if I'd like to fly his DJI Phantom Vision 2 quadcopter. He assured me it was easy. We flew it in the Nashville, Tennessee, area, landed it safely - and I was hooked! The two of us started an aerial video company called Fly By Day Productions and spent the next few years working commercially.

I do love flying drones but I am seriously attracted to flying RC aircraft. I even live on a farm that is perfect for flying. My next step is to take the plunge and get myself a trainer of some kind. Probably the best thing for me is to find myself a flying buddy and start learning the ropes. I'm actually very excited about it. After I learn to do takeoffs, keep it flying, and especially land without incident, I'd love to learn some aerobatics! That would be amazing!

JS: How has model aviation impacted your life and/or career?

EB: I have to chuckle a little at this question because at this point, flying RC is still a dream of mine. I'm sure it's going to happen, but I'm still preparing myself to take the plunge. Most of your readers are experienced in all facets of RC flying, but my music career has taken an amazing amount of time and effort.

I wouldn't trade my career for anything. I've been at it since high school. But I need diversions in my life to stay balanced. For that reason alone I am grateful for an incredible hobby like this - not to mention the AMA. *Model Aviation* magazine alone is the best magazine out there if you're interested in flying and building RC aircraft.

I'm planning my next CD release and I want to combine flying experiences with my music. I use my imagination to do this, but I'd like to use some aerial shots to incorporate into the music videos.

JS: What disciplines of modeling do you currently participate in?

EB: Although I intend to start flying fixed-wing RC aircraft, I do love the building aspect! When I was a teenager, I flew and built many Control Line planes, some from kits, some from scratch, and all gas powered.

Then I started building gliders. Too often they took weeks to build, and only a few minutes to destroy! I still want to fly gliders, although I'm less keen on building just because of the time factor. Maybe gliders will be my reward for learning to successfully fly a trainer!

JS: What are your other hobbies?

EB: My other hobby has been amateur radio. I got my ticket [license] when I was 11 or 12. I absolutely love it, but I let that slide in college when I started getting very serious about music.

After many years of doing music in Los Angeles, I was suddenly struck by the urge to get back into it. So I studied and passed my Extra Class license exam. My call is AC6NT and I'm a confirmed QRP operator - meaning very low power. We bounce our signal off the ionosphere sometimes several times.

In QRP, we often build our own radios, antennas, and all of the accessories. I've worked in well over 100 countries with less than 5 watts of power. I'd love to figure out a way of combining all my hobbies.

JS: Who (or what) has influenced you most?

EB: I have to give credit and thanks to Tony, John, Tom, and Mike Barelli, my good friends since grade school. They are all exceptional in science and they constantly amazed and inspired me in all things scientific.

I come from a family totally steeped in the arts - an amazing family, I might add. But it was the Barelli family that introduced me to the world of flying. Dr. Carmichael, a brain surgeon who lived up the street from me, got Mike and me into ham radio. He was an amazing mentor and Mike now bears Doc's old call sign: W0MAF.

JS: Looking back over your musical career, what are you most proud of?

EB: I have been involved in the creative end of the music business for 40-plus years. I love doing the recording sessions, writing for TV and film, touring, performing, and now teaching. I had a very exceptional band back in the 1970s called Sanctuary that wound up in the Kansas Musicians Hall of Fame.

My mentor, Mike Post, deserves so much credit for helping me to become a small part of what was possibly the best decades the music business has ever seen.

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