MODERN DRUMMER

NOW INCORPORATING DRUMS & DRUMMING MAGAZINE

APRIL '93

MARVIN "SMITTY" SMITH

HIGHWAY 101'S CACTUS MOSER

SEAN KINNEY OF ALICE IN CHAINS

PLUS:

- YAMAHA'S AY10
- FRANCE'S ANDRE CECCARELLI
- PREMIER'S SIGNIA ON REVIEW
- MATT SORUM: OFF THE RECORD
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VOLUME 17, NUMBER 4

FEATURES

MARVIN "SMITTY" SMITH

One of the busiest and most exciting jazz drummers around, Smitty Smith has made his mark by melding drumming's past and future. In this special interview, get an up-close look at Marvin's methods and ideas.

• by Rick Mattingly

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CACTUS MOSER

Country music ain't what it used to be. Witness Cactus Moser, Highway 101's drummer, singer, businessman—and self-confessed busy player. In this interview, Cactus discusses how Highway 101 reached the top by breaking the rules, and how his drumming fits into the scheme.

• by Robyn Flans

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SEAN KINNEY

Alice In Chains is one of the hottest up-and-coming acts today—in no small part due to their drummer, Sean Kinney. Find out why Kinney's way of thinking about the drums is not to think at all!

• by Matt Peiken

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INSIDE GON BOPS

Well before bongos, congas, and the like were mass-marketed outside of Cuba, the Gon Bops company was making ground-breaking innovations in the field. Several decades later, they're still at it, so we decided to take a closer look at the company.

• by Rick Van Horn

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COVER PHOTO BY LISSA WALES
## Education

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Consultant To The Publisher

Over the past six years, you may have noticed the name Arnold E. Abramson on our masthead (to the right of this column), under the title Consultant To The Publisher. As a free-lance consultant, Arnie offered MD his expertise on matters far too numerous to mention. Arnie and I worked closely together on many projects, and his contribution to the growth of Modern Drummer over the past six years is immeasurable.

Arnie began his illustrious publishing career over forty years ago as founder of magazines like Family Handyman, Golf, and Ski. After selling off those publications, he soon found that retirement was not for him, so he re-entered the magazine business as a highly qualified consultant. In truth, I don't believe I've met anyone with a more thorough knowledge of magazine publishing than Arnie Abramson. He was a remarkable source of great wisdom, and there was hardly a publishing problem he hadn't experienced, nor one for which he didn't have an immediate solution. Arnie was a key figure in the negotiation of MD's contracts with printers, subscription fulfillment firms, and newsstand distributors. Years ago, when no one in the newsstand business would take a chance on Modern Drummer, he was successful in getting us the exposure we needed through this major distribution channel. Some time later, we established our current association with the largest national newsstand distributor in the country—again, thanks to Arnie's efforts. He was also instrumental in negotiating MD's purchase of Drums & Drumming magazine several years back—another important step in our growth.

As I look back fondly over the years we worked together, I realize that I learned more about the complexities of publishing from this one man than from any other single individual in the business. An association with Arnie was like a college education in a very specialized field. And though he knew nothing of the drum industry (he left that to me), he knew everything about the magazine business. In an industry with an incredibly high failure rate, Arnie was clearly a strong contributing factor in the success of MD.

Arnie's name will not appear in its usual place on MD's masthead next month. Unfortunately, this well-loved, highly respected elder statesman of publishing passed away over the Christmas weekend. It's a loss felt deeply by all of us at Modern Drummer, especially me. Even though there was a considerable age gap between us, Arnie was not only one of my closest business associates, he was also one of my very best friends. Needless to say, I'll miss him greatly.
Profile: Charlie Morgan
of the Elton John Band

PERSONAL DATA:
Charlie Morgan


CURRENT PROJECTS:
- Currently on a sold-out World Tour with the Elton John Band.
- Just completed new album with EMI artist Tismin Archer
- Video for Kate Bush’s “Rocket Man” cover on the “Two Rooms” Album.

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RICKY LAWSON
AND GEORGE JINDA
Hey—nice job in January, guys! Ricky Lawson—one of drumming’s most tasteful, talented, and underexposed players, and George Jinda—a classy and innovative percussionist in a league all his own. (It’s especially nice to see MD giving coverage to percussionists—first Trilok Gurtu on the November ’92 cover, and now George.) It’s creative and musical players like these who really make the art form what it is, and the next best thing to listening to them is reading about them in MD. Well done!

Peter Sappinger
Boise ID

FACING UP TO FORTY
I just finished Simon Goodwin’s column "Facing Up To Forty" in your January ’93 issue, and every single sentence is true. I’m only 34, but I’ve still reached that place where I’d rather hear a string quartet than most of this year’s “hot” rock bands—and where I can’t rock all night and make it to the office the next day.

I realized several years ago that big-time success wasn’t going to happen for me—and went through an extremely dark emotional period as a result. I can see why some older players just quit. But without a craft, discipline, or art form, life isn’t worth living. Nowadays, I’m only 34, but I’ve still reached that place where I’d rather hear a string quartet than most of this year’s “hot” rock bands—and where I can’t rock all night and make it to the office the next day.

I realized several years ago that big-time success wasn’t going to happen for me—and went through an extremely dark emotional period as a result. I can see why some older players just quit. But finally, I realized that I needed to play drums. Not to pump up my ego, or to get girls, or even to have a drumming "career"—but to be a complete human being. Without a craft, discipline, or art form, life isn’t worth living. Nowadays, I have to get up at 4:30 in the morning to have time to practice and still make it to the office by 9:00, but it’s worth it. I work on my music every day, and will until the day I die—regardless of any so-called "success" or "failure."

Lastly, I hope young drummers don’t put a negative spin on Mr. Goodwin’s wonderful article and decide that they have to postpone having a family in order to "make it" as a musician. There’s an expression that says, "Don’t postpone joy.” Being married and having kids is the greatest joy available on this earth—even better than drumming! Have a life first, and a career second.

Mike O’Brien
Brooklyn NY

MEL TORMÉ
The January ’93 article on Mel Tormé, which I must have read a dozen times or more, was great. I’d been waiting a long time for that one. Now, if Robyn Flans can catch up with Mel again, maybe she could do a story on his drummer, Donny Osborne. I’ve had the pleasure of seeing both Mel and Donny in person three times, and I enjoyed each performance immensely. Keep up the good work.

Jim Stavris
East Haven CT

NICK MENZA
I’d just like to thank you for your feature on Nick Menza of Megadeth [November ’92 MD]. I find his drumming quite energizing, and I am glad to see that he is getting some recognition. Megadeth is my favorite group, and I know the main reason is because of what Nick does on the drums. I saw him play on tour last summer, and I thought he was a great live player. Someday I hope to be as good a drummer as he is, and his unique style—as well as his words in your article—are a great inspiration to me.

Lee Sprague
Greendale WI

DRUMMER SEEKS HELP
Some years ago, MD did an article on me. [Dec. ’81/Jan. ’82 issue] I lost my leg at the age of eleven, and began drumming at 13. I’m still playing, but I’m having some trouble, and I need some help. I have an opportunity to obtain a new artificial leg that will help me to walk better and even to play double bass drums. But I have no way to cover the $15,000 cost (which is actually quite low for this type of prosthetic appliance). I am currently unemployed, have no insurance, and am not eligible for state aid. My hope is that some of the drum companies we drummers have supported for so many years might be willing to return some of that support to a drummer in need. I would also be grateful for any assistance from my fellow drummers. If you can help me, please contact me at the address shown below. Thank you.

Joe Baroncini
HC 73 Box 15050
2570 South Zepher Ave.
Pahrump, NV 89041-9340

FROM A DRUMMING GRANDMOTHER
I’m new at playing the drums, so I especially enjoy your magazine. MD encourages me when I see and read about the different drummers. It’s wonderful that your magazine is so up front and not dressed up with things that aren’t important. It’s a breath of fresh air.

I’m a woman drummer who started playing late in life, but I really do love it. I play my drums at church now. I’m not at all fancy, but I figure that timing and sensitivity are what’s important.

I thought you might enjoy this picture of my granddaughter, Jessica, who’s one year old. She likes playing my drums when she comes over, and I plan to keep on teaching her as she grows up.

Sharlene Deffinger
(no address given)
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Marvin “Smitty” Smith

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James Bradley, Jr.
For James Bradley, Jr., 1992 was the year of American Standard, the third LP by Mary’s Danish. “The first two months of the year were spent writing the album,” Bradley explains. “All six members shared in the writing. The girls write the lyrics and the rhythm section usually writes the music. On the last two albums, we usually paired off and brought songs into the band together. On this album, we all sat down and wrote it together. We like doing it this way.

“One of my favorite cuts is 'Just A Shade,' which is the longest song we’ve written to date,” Bradley says. “It was written with the idea of stretching out. There's something like a 36-bar guitar solo that goes through a number of changes—not time changes, but musical changes—which was influenced mainly by Led Zeppelin and Santana. Then we got into this samba rhythm for maybe 16 bars. It’s a total change from what we’re coming out of. Another one of my favorites is ‘My Dear Heretic.’ I particularly like the break-down section, and the ending, too. I always like to finish big.”

The band hired Bradley in 1989 after one one-hour rehearsal. "Their previous drummer had left the band the night before," James recalls. "I got called at 9:30 that night to rehearse six songs for a 7:00 A.M. radio show. Luckily I had seen the band before and I was really into it. It just clicked. Then two months after that, we got the record deal. The drummer they had before me was good, but his style was a little different. He was playing more in the Keith Moon style—an 8th- and 16th-note kind of thing—but the bass player was more rooted in an R&B sort of thing. I brought my style of experience in jazz, rock, and fusion to it.”

When James hasn’t been on the road with Mary’s Danish, he has been on tour with the Beastie Boys, playing percussion. In fact, he can be heard on six tracks of their recent Check Your Head album, playing congas, timbales, and cuica, as well as drums on one cut.

Frankie Banali
After the demise of L.A. metal band Quiet Riot, most of its members disappeared into obscurity. Not drummer Frankie Banali. He’s working with a new band, Heavy Bones, plus he’s etched a reputable name for himself on the session scene. "Even before Quiet Riot,” offers Banali, "I was involved in sessions, although not to the degree that I have been in the last few years." Although he’s a jazz addict, Banali has done mostly metal sessions and numerous ghost sessions, where he is brought in to play for another drummer under the stipulation that his identity remains anonymous.

How has he continued to work steadily? "It all comes down to having a good attitude,” he advises. "Whenever I go into a session, I still get nervous. It’s not that I don’t think that I’m adequate, it’s that I care so much about what I do that if something doesn’t sound right, I look at me first. I don’t look at anyone else. It’s all about caring. And I still have a long way to go; there’s so much I want to learn.”

Heavy Bones is something Frankie’s quite excited about—although he admits that the group will be starting from the ground up, despite being signed to a major label. "We have to slug it out with all the other new bands who have records coming out. We’re ready to support a big headliner or go out on our own to play small clubs. We’re just ready for anything.”

Robyn Flans
Teri Saccone
Fred Coury

Fred Coury says he carries a bit of guilt for the success he enjoyed as a member of platinum-selling rock act Cinderella. "I feel that way because I didn't play on the first record and barely played on the second one," says Coury, who left after the third record and tour this past year to form his own band, Arcade, with former Ratt frontman Stephen Pearcy. "But I have no excuses this time. I helped write a lot of the music and I played all the drum parts. If people like it or hate it, they can come to me."

With Calm Before The Storm, Coury kicks Arcade through a set of no-frills but energetic and catchy rock scorchers. "Cinderella started really going into the direction of the blues, and I didn't really feel comfortable with that," he says. "First, there's not much for a drummer to do, and second, I'm not bummered out enough to get into the blues. I'm only 27 years old, and I'm still happy with life."

Coury says it will take an adjustment to go from the large arenas that Cinderella played to a club setting, but he's looking forward to the challenge of in-your-face live shows. "Everyone knows how unhappy I was in Cinderella, and I hope people can look at me now as a legitimate player," he says. "I look at this as a chance to start over. This kind of reminds me of my first year with Cinderella, when we were still hungry. Stephen and I have that same kind of excitement right now, and so do the other guys in the band. I'm happy to kind of put the past behind me and just get back to full-blown hard rock."

* Matt Pelken

Clarence Penn

When Clarence Penn drums for veteran songstress Betty Carter, there's no dynamic too soft or loud, no tempo too slow or fast. With Carter for more than a year now, the 24-year-old Penn plays the gig with a constant energetic presence and an incredible attention to detail. On ballads, she interacts with you. One of the hardest things we do is play slow. I'll play a tune with brushes and then she'll want me to go to sticks, and it'll be 50 or even 40 on the metronome. Every stroke has to be right on with the bass player. Then the next song will be at a burning tempo, like 'What A Little Moonlight Can Do.' Just to be able to adjust your mind from very slow to very fast is an incredible challenge."

Penn may never have pursued jazz drumming in the first place had Wynton Marsalis not come to his Detroit public high school to give a lecture. When Clarence was 15, he performed 'A Night In Tunisia' for the trumpet great, but with a funk groove. "Wynton said, 'That's not the way to play it'—in front of the whole school," the drummer recalls. "Then he took the sticks and said, 'This is what you're supposed to be playing,' and he played some bad stuff that I couldn't even play. From then on I said to myself, I've got to learn to play jazz."

And learn he did. By the time he finished school, Penn received a Down Beat magazine outstanding soloist award. While at Virginia Commonwealth University, Clarence gigged regularly with Ellis Marsalis (who headed up the school's music department), traveling to the West Coast and Japan. During his junior year he received a $4,000 National Endowment for the Arts grant to study with Alan Dawson in Boston.

With New York as his ultimate goal after graduation, Clarence moved briefly to West Virginia and gigged in a lounge band. Then one day Betty Carter called and asked if he could make rehearsal the next day. Without hesitation, he packed everything he owned and drove thirty hours straight to the Big Apple.

With Wynton's mentoring still fresh in his mind, Penn wants to eventually do the same for other youngsters. "Education is what got me hooked," says Penn. "If I can take my own group out there some day, I'd like to give younger musicians a chance and let them express their musicality."

* Charles Levin

News...

**Rod Morgenstein** is on Winger's new album, Blind Revolution Mad.

**Russ McKinnon** on Tower of Power's new album, Soul With A Capital S.

**Walfredo Reyes, Jr.** has been playing scattered dates with Boz Scaggs and touring with Santana. There will be a live Santana album out later this year. And in case there has been any confusion, it is his father, Walfredo Reyes, Sr. (Walfredo de los Reyes) who has been working with Wayne Newton and has a video out on DCI with Dave Weckl.

**Alvino Bennett** has been doing some scattered dates with Brenda Russell. He can be heard on her new album as well as on Patrice Rushen's new release. And congratulations to Alvino and his wife Kerry on the birth of their daughter, Kaitlin Alexis.

**Paul Wertico** on tour with Pat Metheny.

**Mitch Marine** has joined Terrance Simien & the Mallet Playboys.

**Steve Jordan** is currently touring with Keith Richards.

**Bernard Purdie** is back in the studio with Aretha Franklin.

**Steve White** recently toured Japan and the U.S. with Paul Weller. Steve has also been recording with Motown artist Gerald Austin.

**Mark Schulman** is currently touring with Foreigner in support of their release The Very Best And Beyond. Mark also played on three new tracks on the album.

**Tommy Igoe** recently returned from a tour of Japan with New York Voices. Tommy can be heard on recent releases by Mike Zilber, Patty Dunham, and the Lew Anderson Big Band. A new New York Voices album will be out shortly.
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Gibson U.S.A., 1818 Elm Hill Pike, Nashville, TN 37210
Andy Newmark
I discovered you some years ago on a Neil Larson album entitled Jungle Fever. Was this done during the CTI days? Were you using a four-piece kit then, or a five-piece? And what were the drumheads?
I know you played on all the tracks for the Lennon/Ono Double Fantasy sessions, but could you tell me the tracks you played on for Milk 'n' Honey! I know one was "I'm Steppin' Out"; I think the others were "I Don't Wanna Face It," "O Sanity," "My Little Flower Princess," and possibly "Nobody Told Me." Finally, I wonder if you can remember which tracks you played on for the George Benson Space album for CTI. "Hold On I'm Coming" sounds like you.

Jon Ferguson
Summer Hill
New South Wales, Australia

I love it whenever someone brings up the Jungle Fever album, because it was such an obscure record and sold so little. But it's one of my favorites that I ever played on. To answer your question, I played a five-piece kit rented for the session in Los Angeles. You can hear the three different tom-tom notes if you listen closely. All I could do to ensure that I kept my "sound" or "vibe" was to put my choice of heads—Remo Ambassadors top and bottom—on all the drums before I played a note. That album was not on CTI, by the way, but rather on Horizon Records, which was a division of A&M. It was recorded around 1978 or '79.
The titles that you mentioned from Milk 'n' Honey all ring a bell, so I'm probably on all of them. We cut the tracks for Double Fantasy in August of 1980, and the leftover tracks went on Milk 'n' Honey. I was under the impression that I was the only drummer on that session, but your question implies that there are tracks without me. I'm sure it's me on 95% of it; I'd know if I heard the album again.
I'm afraid I have no idea at all which songs I'm on the Benson album. This is due to an interesting aspect of the "CTI experience." When we recorded tracks with Creed Taylor (president of CTI), we often had no idea whose album they would end up on. We would cut the basic track, and the melody and solos would be added later by whatever artist Creed decided the album would be by! So to be honest, I've never played with George Benson in my life. He came into the studio weeks later and played the melody and solos. CTI was a factory, with a formula. But they sold a lot of records, so what can I say?

Richie Hayward
Your playing on the Shake Me Up CD was incredible, to say the least—tasty throughout! Your work with splash cymbals is especially cool. Could you give a rundown of your cymbals—especially the hi-hats used on "Clownin"? Also, have you any plans to make an instructional video? The drumming community would certainly benefit!

J. Collins
Rogers AR

I'm glad you enjoyed the record; thanks for asking about it. The cymbals are (from my left): 8", 10", and 12" splashes, 14" Flat Hats, a 19" Chinese, an 18" medium crash, a 16" medium-thin crash, a 21" large-bell ride, a 19" medium crash, 14" closed Flat Hats on an auxiliary mount, and a 20" Chinese. All the cymbals are Sabian AA models. The "hi-hats" on "Clownin" are actually Remo Spoxe (which are really the frames from RotoToms) approximately 14½" in diameter.
An instructional video is in the works. We'll do it as soon as I figure out the format. Thanks again for your letter.

Eddie Bayers
I was fascinated to learn of your motorcycle accident and the early prognostications that you'd never recover sufficiently to play drums again. I was recently handed the same prognosis following an accident that lacerated the major tendons in my right arm. At the moment, I'm recovering slowly. It's definitely a battle, but nearly forty years of professional drumming are in that arm, and I'm not about to quit.

Did you use any special practice techniques, strength-building exercises, etc.? Physical therapists help, of course, but a few tips from a drummer who's been injured and knows how hard it is to rebuild one's touch, power, and endurance would be greatly appreciated.

Phil Trupp
Washington D.C.

One thing I did was to use a supportive cast I had made, so that I wouldn't further injure my wrist. I don't know your whole situation, so I wouldn't want to comment any more, other than to say that with faith and courage in yourself you can create miracles. Please write me at my studio for further correspondence. The address is: The Money Pit, 622 Hamilton Ave., Nashville, TN 37203.
When Avedis Zildjian hammered his first cymbal in 1623, the word spread for miles.
The year was 1623. The place was Constantinople. An alchemist by the name of Avedis discovered a secret process for treating alloys, and used it to produce cymbals of such extraordinary clarity and power, that he was given the name

"Zildjian" - Turkish for "cymbalsmith." Of course, Avedis had no way of knowing that 370 years later, the sound of his first cymbal would still carry. For while refinements have been made to that still-secret process over the years, today it remains essentially the same one Avedis hit upon almost 400 years ago, handed down from one generation of the Zildjian family, to the next. Through
The centuries, Zildjian’s have been synonymous with excellence and innovation, from their inclusion in classical music, to their use by the Jazz greats who pioneered modern music earlier this century.

Today’s Zildjian

HOWEVER,
F OR CENTURIES.

cymbal is a marriage of old world craftsmanship, modern technology and the input of today’s top drummers. And this same uncompromising dedication to quality is also evident in our drumsticks. So, naturally, we can’t say whether Avedis I would like today’s music. But no doubt he would be pleased to know that 370 years later, the cymbals that bear his name are really the only serious choice.

ZILDJIAN
370’ ANNIVERSARY
"Three-Hundred and Seventy Years of Making Cymbal History."
Pedals: Chain vs. Strap

I'd like to know the advantages of using a strap-drive pedal as opposed to a chain-drive, as well as the disadvantages. Do they operate better tight or loose, or is it just preference? Also, which company(s) make a double strap-drive pedal? Is the slave beater affected due to the rod?

Marc Livitz
Houston TX

The main advantages of a chain-drive system are durability and consistency. Leather straps can snap fairly easily. Web straps are less likely to snap, but it's not impossible. Both kinds can stretch, changing the feel of the pedal, and the adjusting holes attaching them to the pedal can become elongated, with the same effect.

The advantages of a strap-drive system generally pertain to feel and playability. Many chain-drive pedals employ a circular sprocket, while almost all strap-drive pedals fit the strap over an eccentric cam. The cam action uses leverage to make the pedal quicker and more responsive. A strap is also infinitely flexible, so that it conforms to the changing contour of the pedal as the pedal moves, giving a smoother action than would a chain over the same cam. Drum Workshop has recently introduced a double pedal based on their original DW 5000 nylon-strap-drive pedal design.

The question of tight or loose spring tension is a matter of personal preference based on physiology, musical style, and a host of other factors. Experimentation on your own is usually the best method of finding the right tension for you.

As far as our experience goes, as long as you're talking about a pro-quality double pedal (and there are many fine ones on the market), unless the rod connecting the slave pedal to the primary pedal is angled so severely as to cause binding, there is no appreciable difference in feel between the pedals.

Info On Leedy

I'm hoping you can give me some information about an old 20" Leedy drum that I bought recently—and on the history of the Leedy name. I'm convinced that the drum is original, right down to the old heads. The nameplate has never been removed, nor have the casings through which the long T-rods pass. The paint is also original, and all the hardware is intact. Curiously, there is no evidence of any spurs or tom mounts. There is no hardware for them, and no holes drilled for them. There is a large "M" stamped on the inside of the shell, which is composed of thin plies with two reinforcing rings. The hoops are somewhat warped and a couple of T-rods are a little bent, but otherwise the drum is in very good condition. Is it collectible, and can you estimate its value?

Raleigh Holtam
Fairview TN

We sent this question (along with several photos that accompanied it) to Eddie Dowd, our resident expert on Leedy drum history. Eddie replies, "Yes, your Leedy bass drum is certainly a collectible—any Leedy drum is. The photos you sent indicate that the drum is especially valuable because it was made in the 1960s, when Leedy didn't make very many single-tension bass drums. The photos pinpoint 1960s manufacture because of the air vent badge that says 'Chicago 48, Ill.' Prior to 1960, the badges just read 'Chicago, Ill.' with no postal zone number.

"Your drum was only sold as part of small, two-piece beginner sets (which explains the lack of a tom mount), with hoop-clamp spurs (which explains the lack of spur hardware), a cowbell, a wood block, and a low-priced snare drum. This kit was listed in the catalog as the "Casual Outfit." As far as its current value goes, in its present condition I'd estimate $100 to $150. If you restore it, the figures could very easily double. Keep the logo front head on the drum, since this adds even more value. Many collectors are very fussy about logo heads and air vent badges.
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MEINL
Below you find what is commonly called a win win situation.
Quality, craftsmanship, sound and value are all items of extreme concern for today’s drummer. No percussion manufacturer understands this better than Pearl, and there are no better examples of this philosophy than the ones you see below, Prestige Custom and Prestige Studio series drums.

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Prestige Studio’s 100% birch shells produce a sound described as “acoustically equalized.” Its brilliant high end attack and superior low end depth make Prestige Studio the favorite of artists like Omar Hakim, Chad Smith, Rob Afrasi and Walfredo Reyes Sr.

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Pearl
The best reason to play drums.

Prestige Custom
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The Art Of Self-Discovery

The Art Of Self-Discovery

The Art Of Self-Discovery

By Rick Mattingly
Inside studio A at the Power Station in New York, an unusual session was taking shape. Country singer Willie Nelson stood in the middle of the main room, discussing a tune with his guitarist, Reggie Young. Over in the corner, jazz drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith was setting up his drums. Rock 'n' roll producer Don Was came in, barefoot with jeans, a T-shirt, and dark sunglasses, and greeted Smith.

"Hey Don, what's happenin'?" Smith replied, shaking hands with the producer.

"Well, we're going to do this old Willie Dixon blues tune, 'I Live The Way I Love And I Love The Way I Live,'" Was said. "You might want to try brushes on it."

"Cool," Smith nodded. "I've got two pair with me."

In the meantime, two other jazz musicians had arrived: pianist Mose Allison and bassist Milt Hinton. "Let's go in the piano booth and run the tune down," Was suggested. Smith grabbed a pair of brushes and a cardboard box from which he had just removed a new Pearl rack tom and joined the others. Sitting on a chair and holding the box between his knees, Smith played a shuffle on the box as the band ran through the tune.

"This feels great," Was told the musicians, and called the engineer over. Minutes later, having set up a piano mic', a vocal mic', for Nelson, a direct box for the bass, a small Boogie amp for the guitar, and a room mic', for Smith, they cut the track right there in the piano booth, with Smith's brushes sliding and slapping over that cardboard box.

A few feet away, $5,000 worth of state-of-the-art drums and cymbals sat silent.
"When people see you doing a certain thing," Smitty says a month later, sitting in a restaurant in the midst of the Percussive Arts Society International Convention in New Orleans, "they figure that's all you do. But I've always played different styles of music. It was only when I got to New York that they tried to pigeonhole me. People would say, 'Yeah, he's a good little bop drummer.' But I made sure I never got stuck in that. I'd be playing R&B gigs uptown with a totally different cast of characters—people who had no relationship with the jazz scene whatsoever."

However versatile Marvin "Smitty" Smith may be, one cannot be faulted for considering him "just" a jazz drummer. His credits include gigs and recordings with such jazz stalwarts as Hank Jones, Sonny Rollins, Jon Hendricks, Archie Shepp, Ray Brown, and Ron Carter, as well as with more modern players like Dave Holland, Hamiet Bluiett, Kevin Eubanks, David Murray, Steve Coleman, and the M-Base Collective. And his two solo albums on the Concord label are firmly in the jazz tradition.

But he's got a spirit of adventure and curiosity that causes him to turn up in unlikely places now and then, such as an appearance on Saturday Night Live with rock musician Sting or in the studio with Willie Nelson. "I never expected to work with Willie Nelson," Smitty says. "But hey, you know what? That stuff was swingin', man. It felt great! And I had a ball. But that's because I left my mind open to receive the experience. I could have said, 'Willie Nelson? Naw man, I ain't gonna work with that ol' hick.' But I was looking forward to the experience, like, 'Can I really fit the situation?' I wanted to try, at least.

"And we made a great track. The feeling was very natural. It wasn't about playing five over seven or rolling around the drums faster than the speed of light or quantized time or playing over a click. It was about some guys in a room making music. The time can shift a little this way and a little that way, but it's the feel. If you can just make those quarter notes swing," Smitty says, leaning forward for emphasis, "that's all that's necessary."

"I mean," Smith elaborates, "for all the complicated stuff I've done that could be considered ultra sophisticated, man, when I'm just playing four on the floor with the bass drum and playing hi-hat on 2 and 4, that still gives me some chills, because that goes WAY back. If you can make four quarter notes swing, you're saying a lot. All of our forefathers could do it. Listen to 'Pops' [Louis Armstrong] on 'Struttin' With Some Barbeque,'" Smitty says, singing the first few notes of the melody, most of which are quarters. "Just make those quarter notes swing. If you can put some feeling in those bad boys, then you're saying something. Everything else is gravy."

Smith's diminutive stature and inherent hipness remind one somewhat of a young Roy Haynes. His speech is energetic, reflecting the passion and joy with which he embraces his art. He is at once a practitioner and a fan of the music, and his knowledge of jazz history comes out in both his speech and his drumming.

But refer to Smith as a "Keeper of the Flame" and you'll evoke a frown and a shaking of the head. "To me," he says, "that phrase suggests that you're just keeping the old traditions. Sometimes I have a feeling that the powers at large are conspiring to treat jazz music the same way classical music has been treated. If Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, and Mendelssohn were alive today, they'd have a fit, man, because people are just playing their music the exact same way. Those guys were all improvisors, but once music publishing came into the picture, that just sealed it right there. All of a sudden, the version they wrote down one day became the version that will be played the same way from here on out.

"There's a positive side to that keeper of the flame stuff," Smith admits. "When Wynton Marsalis joined Art Blakey's band in 1980, all these young musicians flocked right after him. A positive aspect was that the general level of musicianship got a lot better. I've talked to some of the older musicians, and they told me that the '70s were very rough in New York because the avant-garde made it a free-for-all. People were just coming off the street with a horn or a set of drums and saying, 'I'm playing what I hear,' with no formal technique. But when people like Wynton and Branford came on the scene, the level of musicianship rose significantly. Cats were serious about learning their craft.

"The down side was the media and the record industry turned it into a renaissance, and people were re-creating instead of creating. A lot of musicians shut off a certain period of the music. I can't understand that. I'm 31, and I'm influenced as much by the Mahavishnu Orchestra, Tony Williams Lifetime, Sly & the Family Stone, Motown, James Brown, the Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Cream, and all those cats as I am by Charlie Parker, Duke
Ellington, John Coltrane, and Count Basie. I was living in that time, so how can I not be influenced by that? I embrace that music because it's a part of me. So, as a result, I have more of a range that I can draw from. I could be swinging 'spang-a-lang' and all of a sudden throw in a little 'Wipe Out' or 'In-A-Gadda-da-Vida' or something. Why not? If you know where to put it and it's done with care and sensitivity, it can work.

"Look, I'm a musician, okay? Whatever sounds are in the air, I'm going to use them. I don't have to wave a banner, like, 'Oh yes, I'm a true keeper of the flame because while all these other guys are playing that rock crap I'm being the martyr and upholding the grand jazz tradition.' If Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk, and those guys were here today, they'd probably slap us upside the head and ask us what the hell we're doing. They'd probably be telling us to take it somewhere. Pass the baton, pal."

So "Carrier of the Torch" might be a more fitting description for Smith, who uses traditions of the past as a basis for some very modern playing. "Yeah," Smitty agrees, "that's what I'm thinking about. This music thrives on change and evolution. A lot of jazz players and teachers focus on one little area of the music, and they try to turn that into the whole concept, which is ridiculous. You have to embrace the whole spectrum of this music.
Smitty's Setup

Drumset: Pearl MLX series
A. 6½ x 14 brass snare
B. 10 x 12 tom
C. 11 x 13 tom
D. 14 x 14 floor tom
E. 16 x 16 floor tom
F. 16 x 18 floor tom
G. 16 x 22 bass drum

Cymbals: Zildjian
1. 14" New Beat hi-hats
2. 17" K dark crash
3. 8" K splash
4. 15" K dark crash
5. 10" K splash
6. 22" K light ride with rivets
7. 12" K splash
8. 16" K dark crash
9. 16" China Boy high with rivets (upside down)

AA. LP Rock Bell
BB. LP Jam Block (high)
CC. LP Cha Cha Bell
DD. LP Jam Block (low)
EE. LP Mambo Bell

Hardware: Pearl 700 and 800 series, with an 880 model double pedal

Heads: Remo coated Ambassadors on tops and bottoms of toms, coated C.S. (black dot) on snare, Pinstripe on bass drum batter

Sticks: Voter 7A

"See, one problem is that a lot of cats don’t study the influences, so their playing comes out sounding weak because there’s no foundation under it. Cats have to do their homework. Get those records and play along with them. That’s how I learned to understand how Max Roach phrased, and how Kenny Clarke phrased, and how Papa Jo, Philly Joe, Roy Haynes, and Art Blakey phrased. Because it's a language.

"I would take a record and listen to it like ten times in a row, learning every song on the record. Then I’d play along with it. That’s when I started to figure out how they were placing their phrases. Most of the drummers at that time were playing a four-piece kit with two cymbals and hi-hat, so once you figured how a drummer was phrasing something, you could figure out what the sticking must be. That’s how you learn. You’re hearing the sound, and you’re sitting behind the drums saying, ‘How did he do that?’ So you sit there and fuss with it a little bit, and all of a sudden, BAM! You’ve got it.

"Cats don’t do that anymore," Smith says, shaking his head sadly. "Part of it is the age we’re in, where everything is spoon-fed to us. Nobody wants to find out things for themselves. They want it freeze-dried, microwaved, and BAM, it’s on your plate. You have to take the initiative to find out as much as you can, and don’t stop until you get everything. And I think that’s what’s missing in a lot of the kids today—they’re just not hungry. They figure they can learn a couple of licks around the drums and that’s all they need.

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Cactus Moser can vividly recall, as a kid, riding his bicycle to the local Denver music store each day to sit and drool at the drumsets in the window. Today, Cactus is not only the drummer, writer, and singer in Highway 101, he has also been one of its chief visionaries. Throughout their six albums—Highway 101, Highway 101 2, Paint The Town, Greatest Hits, and Bing Bang Boom—Cactus has been an integral part of the business affairs of the band. All of this activity, though, has resulted in Moser struggling to regain the feelings he had as a youngster, motivated only by his love of music.

While growing up on a Colorado cattle ranch, Moser began his musical adventures on guitar. He was only in the third grade, but he decided he didn't care for the instrument. He couldn't be bothered with "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star"; he wanted to play cool songs.
When his family moved to Denver when he was in the sixth grade, Cactus came in contact with the drums in his parents' friends' basement. That summer his parents got him a sparkle set for his birthday.

"My parents were great," he recalls. "They let me have whole bands in the basement. Nowadays, I think how our perspective has changed. Now, unless we have a big hall and techs to set everything up, we don't rehearse. In those days you rehearsed in your bedroom. I had my bed and all my goofy things in there, and we still could fit a whole band and be singing through the guitar player's amplifier. All the neighborhood kids would gather outside the house and listen to me jamming with records. Somewhere on the road I actually had a guy come up to me and say, "I used to sit outside of your bedroom window and listen to you practicing with records."

Aside from a few lessons at that local music store to learn to read, Cactus learned by copying the drummers on the records he listened to. He joined stage band, although he refused to be seen in the marching band by his friends. He admits now that he felt it just wasn't "cool" enough, and wishes he had spent more time studying as a youngster.

He must have learned well on his own, though, because Cactus has gone from a career as an LA. session drummer to the success of Highway 101. He's placed five years in a row in the country category of Modern Drummer's Readers Poll, and the band has won many awards, including the Country Music Association's Group of the Year (1988 and 1989).

Although he now lives on a ranch just outside of Nashville with his family, Cactus was on comfortable turf on the road in L.A., talking about his interesting adventure in the music business.

RF: What originally brought you out to LA?
CM: I got out of high school, having played in some clubs. I went to college for a semester, and I started hanging out in some of the places I knew were happening. There was a scene in Boulder, Colorado. Stephen Stills and Joe Walsh were up there, so I started going there. I met some people who were kind of the mainstays of the Boulder scene, and I started getting some work up there. I was in a band called the Too High Band, which was an offshoot of a band called Woody & The Peckers. It was post-'60s and Boulder was explosive. There was music everywhere.

The Too High Band was the first band I was in that got any national attention. There was a scene in Boulder, Colorado. Stephen Stills and Joe Walsh were up there, so I started going there. I met some people who were kind of the mainstays of the Boulder scene, and I started getting some work up there. I was in a band called the Too High Band, which was an offshoot of a band called Woody & The Peckers. It was post-'60s and Boulder was explosive. There was music everywhere.

The Too High Band was the first band I was in that got any national attention. We were sort of like the Stones meet the Eagles, and we actually had a deal offered by Mike Nesmith's label, Pacific Coast Records. We were waiting for a bigger label, though, and we started to come to L.A. to showcase. Actually I had come out here before that, playing with a guy named Dave McCorison. He had a record deal on MCA Records, and Chris Hillman was the producer. I watched a lot of little political things go down that ended his career, so I got a taste of that. But then the Too High Band was happening, and I was involved in a lot of the business of contacting record people. Finally we got an offer from Elektra/Asylum. I figured that was it, my whole fate was sealed—I was going to be a big star. Wrong! Along
came what they called Black Friday in 1980, when everyone in the record industry got fired and the whole bottom fell out. Our guy who was flying in on weekends to see us got dumped. The next week I was calling and it was, "His office is closed." No one was about to take any chances on anything at that point. We were all crushed. It all came undone.

So I started looking toward other things, and I met one of the key people in my career, a person who really is my mentor, if you will—Tris Imboden. Tris gave me a push at the time I needed it. I actually met Rick Marotta, too, who was a real sweetheart to me. He was really encouraging and cool, although we never became the friends Tris and I did. Tris came out to Colorado to work with Firefall, and the Too High Band opened some of the regional concerts for them. He'd come out to the gigs and watch me play, and he'd sit in and jam, and just became my buddy. He was very much a rudimental player, which was what I was seeking.

At that point, I was listening to Jeff Porcaro all the time, who was one of my all-time heroes, and Steve Gadd was happening at that time. I started to think in terms of chops and technique and not just groove things. And Tris came along with all that stuff, and he was right there in my lap. He'd write down rudiments I should work on, although we didn't spend anywhere near as much time doing that as we did just talking about the future: "You need to get out to L.A. and start doing it in the real world. This 'big fish in a small pond' isn't going to mean a thing," he'd say. I had always known that, but I had been waiting to meet enough people in L.A., and Tris was really a catalyst. When he left Firefall, he recommended me, so I did the dying end of Firefall.

I was preparing to come to L.A. when I met Steve Taylor, a power-punk new-wave gospel artist, of all things. I met him through some studio work I had begun to do back in Denver and Boulder. I played on some demos for him, and he called me about a month later. He got a record deal, and we made the record in Denver. The producer, Jonathan David Brown, came out from L.A., and he said, "Move out to L.A. I've got a big house; you can come and live with us and I'll help you find work." Through that, I got to start doing all these sessions. On my first record date in L.A., the bass player was John Patitucci. That was about '82. I had been hearing about all these guys, and it was amazing. I started doing all these gospel records, which were great musically.

continued on page 84
hen Sean Kinney says he doesn't think about what he plays, he means it. He also doesn't want anybody else to think about it. "With us, what counts is how we all sound together. No one instrument gives us our sound; but when you put it all together, it's this thick, sick, twisted thing," Kinney says with a deep chuckle. "And all I want to do is help make it more sick and twisted. If you think about how it happens, it ruins it. People should just listen to our music, let it sink in and destroy them, and then take a couple of seconds to recover before the next song."

Simple enough in philosophy, but difficult to achieve, at least with any lasting impression. Perhaps that best explains the meteoric rise—actually, volcanic eruption—of Alice In Chains. The Seattle band's 1990 debut, Facelift, inexplicably sat dormant on retail shelves for nearly a year—and probably never would have cracked the Billboard charts if not for MTV's heavy rotation of "Man In A Box." As it turned out, that single just whet the appetite of rockers waiting for a band this pulsatingly heavy. Since then, it's been nothing but bigger tours (a support gig with Van Halen among them) and higher sales, feeding off each other. Alice In Chains left 1991 with a gold record and an unspoken promise of better things to come.

By Matt Peiken
Photos By Ebet Roberts
The band took a severe left turn earlier this year with Sap, a batch of acoustic-based songs with surprising warmth and depth. Then came "Would?," a song for the soundtrack to the movie Singles that answered more questions than it asked: No, there won't be any sophomore jinx, and yes, the band could dig to new depths of depraved sonic beauty. And if there were any skeptics still waiting for something more substantial, all they had to do was look down in the Dirt, a compelling set of new songs that touches on the thickness of Facelift, but redefines the word "heavy." It's grunge through a kaleidoscope.

And then there's Kinney. Little has changed about his drumming—muscular, but not heavy-handed—and it probably takes a digital disc player to pick up some of the subtleties: soft hits on the China, double-stroke hi-hat work and tom playing that's as musical as it is tribal. But unlike Facelift, there's been little shelf life to Dirt. Fans have snatched up copies at chart-topping pace, sparking Alice In Chains on its first cross-country headlining tour.

Sure, Kinney is enjoying it, but he still doesn't want to think about it. Just playing a creative role in a heavy rock band is satisfaction in itself. If a million or more people want to come along for the ride—dizzingly unpredictable as it may be—that's a bonus.

**MP:** When I first met you, back in 1990, you were already talking about going back into the studio and leaving Facelift behind. Did the sudden success of that record kind of throw you off?

**SK:** It was a surprise, that's for sure. The record had already been out a year, and we really weren't expecting anything to happen. We'd been out with Extreme and then we did some dates with Iggy Pop. The second single kicked in ['Man In The Box'], and then it just never stopped. Then we started climbing higher on the charts, and that kept us out on the road another eighteen months. We did the Clash Of The Titans tour [supporting Megadeth, Slayer, and Anthrax] and then some headlining stuff. We went to Europe for a couple of months and then did the Van Halen thing. Each tour had a real different atmosphere, and none of them were really our type of crowd. But we'll play with anybody, anyway, so the crowds were good.

**MP:** Did you guys welcome that success with open arms, or did it overwhelm you?

**SK:** We didn't really notice it, to be honest, because we were on the road while it all happened. The only way we could really tell was by people acting more weird and fidgety around us. [laughs] We'd come through town before and people would be normal to us; maybe a few would tell us our music was cool. Then we'd come through a couple of months later and it would be a lot different. All kinds of people were telling us how they were always into us and our music, and how they always liked the "Seattle" bands. But all these bands have been around for a few years, except for Pearl Jam, and it took a long time for anybody to even pick up on it. Then when they did, the media just turned it into a big circus. It's like if you're from Seattle, you must be cool, and I hate that. The bands haven't changed and they're all still good, but I'm sure some people like us because of where we live, without really listening to our music and getting to know it.

**MP:** Did all the attention put on Seattle alter anything in terms of the way your band operated or affect the band's out-

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**Kinney's Kit**

**Drumset:**
- Drum Workshop
- 8 x 14 wood snare
- 10 x 12 tom
- 14 x 16 floor toms
- 16 x 18 floor toms
- 16 x 24 bass drum

**Cymbals:**
- Sabian
  - 15" rock sizzle hi-hat (with rivets)
  - 20" HH crash
  - 3.10" rock splash
  - 22" extra-heavy ride
  - 20" AA rock crash
  - 18" HH rock crash
  - 20" Carmine Appice China

**Hardware:**
- All DW

**Heads:**
- Remo Falams K on snare, coated Ambassador on toms with clear Ambassador on bottoms, clear Power Stroke 3 on bass drum

**Sticks:**
- Vic Firth American Classic Rock model
look or goals?

SK: It didn't do anything to us, because our first record was out and we were out on the road before any of that was going on. People weren't as hipped to it and it wasn't a trend until we were already back home. Nirvana, Soundgarden, and Pearl Jam all came out with their records at about the same time, and that's when it got insane. We were back home and looking at it from a distance, which was kind of strange because we were the band that kind of kicked it off. But that was good, too, because looking back on it, those three bands had to deal with all the media frenzy. But people are kind of getting sick of it, now that they've heard about Seattle so much. So Din has come out at the right time because the explosion about Seattle has died off and people can listen to the record and like it for what it really is.

MP: If Facelift had never taken off and you would have made your second record a year earlier, how would it have differed from Dirt?

SK: I don't think it would be much different. We wanted to make a heavier record, and this record is heavier, just in a different way. It's not speedier, but the feelings are heavier. It's just this depressing, evil thing [laughs], and we would have done that anyway. The songs wouldn't have really been any different; in fact, we were already getting into these kinds of songs with the last record. "Love Hate Love" was one of the last songs we wrote for Facelift, and we knew that was kind of the direction we were heading in. If anything, our playing is a little better on the new record because of the experience we got playing for so long together on the road.

MP: Did your personal playing style take any turns between records? You've always had a knack for adding spice to the basic heavy beat.

SK: I just play to the song, whatever I think should be there. I don't get technical or anything like that. I just like to hit and kick things. If I don't do that every day, I get in a bad mood. I don't sit around and think about anything I'm gonna play. We just jam and I play whatever I play. The other guys don't tell me what to play and I don't tell them; they play guitars and I play drums. We make comments, like maybe we should try different things, but nobody tells anybody else what to do.

MP: But you must think a little about what you're playing, at least when you're getting ready to record. For instance, sometimes it seems like you intentionally lay back and put the snare on the very back end of the beat, while other times you're right on it.

SK: That all just happens naturally. There's no planning to any of it; we're not making puzzles. It's just the way the song goes. We don't take 87,000 tracks of each song. When we're recording, if something's not happening one day, we go on to another song. We'll start jamming on it, and if we like it, it's done. You know, we're not polishing a turd. [laughs]

There were a couple of little things different about making the new record, though. For one thing, I didn't break my hand this time! I broke my hand three weeks before the last one, and we almost had another drummer do the record. I stayed in one piece this time, and it was a lot less painful to play. Also, for this record, I actually got writing credit for a song continued on page 162
The heart of the Los Angeles megalopolis isn't the first place you'd think to look for fine, hand-crafted musical instruments. Yet it's in just that location—the industrial community of Vernon, to be exact—that some of the finest congas, bongos, and other Latin percussion instruments are manufactured. Vernon is the home of Gon Bops of California, a name that has been synonymous with high-quality professional Latin drums for over thirty-five years.

Gon Bops founder Mariano Bobadilla is originally from Guadalajara, Mexico. The son of an inventor, he was trained as a tool-and-die maker, and worked with his father upon moving to Los Angeles. But he was also a part-time musician, playing trumpet on Olvera street (the heart of the historic Mexican district of L.A.) in the late 1940s and early '50s. These gigs allowed him to observe many Latin percussionists—and to note a major problem that they were experiencing.

"The last club I worked in," recalls Mariano, "had three floor shows a night, and they'd often feature artists from Cuba. Naturally, those artists would come in with their conga drums—which had tacked-on heads. When the heads would get slack due to the air conditioning in the club, the drummers would go into the kitchen and put the drums on top of
a little stove—to heat the heads and tighten them back up. They'd be running back and forth from the stage to the kitchen all night!

"I was a tool-and-die maker," Mariano continues, "so I started thinking about ways to create some hardware to tune the drumheads. As a result, I wound up putting the first tuning hardware on any Latin drum. This was in 1954. I used big hooks connected to a big metal ring, and put it on a big tumba. It looked pretty massive, but it worked. At first, the Cubans wouldn't accept it—because it looked too different. But once they realized what the tuning hardware could do for them, people like Mongo Santamaria really jumped on it; they wouldn't take anything else. It completely revolutionized conga-drum design. They knew that they could always get a good sound, no matter what the temperature or the condition of the air was."

At first, Mariano simply fitted his hardware onto existing conga drums. But after the hardware took off, he started thinking about making the drum shells, as well. "I had to start analyzing what made a good shell," he says. "In 1956 I began experimenting. I bent some staves and put a piece of wire on top. It worked, but it was too slow. So I made machines to do the bending. Then there was the water: What do you put in the water to act as a solvent? How hot should it be? How long should the wood be in the dryer? There wasn't any information available on all these questions. I had to learn it as we went along.
"From making one or two drums for specific drummers," continues Mariano, "I started making more and more, on a part-time basis. By 1966 it became a full-time job. Eventually, I had seventeen employees working in my garage! I said, 'What in the hell are we doing here? Let's move!' So in 1971 I bought our first building in Vernon. Now we have three buildings housing our various operations."

And where did the name Gon Bops come from? "I'm seventy years old," says Mariano. "When I was younger, bebop was a happening style of music. A lot of songs had 'bop' in their titles, and things that were hip were 'boppin'.' A friend of mine and I were working in the shop one night making drums, and he asked me what I was going to call them. So I started thinking...everything was 'bop' this and 'bop' that. And some other expressions came up, including 'gone'—as in 'real gone.' So we put them together and came up with Gon Bops."

As a true pioneer in the field of Latin percussion, Mariano is justifiably proud of his accomplishments—and understandably protective of his methods. "I get ticked off," he says, "when people ask if they can come to our factory and have us show them how we make our conga drums. After all the years and money I've invested in putting my business together, they want to learn it all right away! I'm tempted to say, 'Sure, you can come down and watch—for two minutes a day. In about forty years, you'll have learned it all, just the way I did!'"

In those forty years, Gon Bops has grown to the point of offering eight different models of congas, along with bongos, timbales, bata drums, boo-bams, cowbells, maracas, and other Latin percussion instruments. But it's significant that the company does not manufacture fiberglass drums at all. John Bobadilla, Mariano's son and vice president of Gon Bops, explains why:

"We did come out with a solid fiberglass conga about nine or ten years ago," says John. "We wanted to offer an alternative to wood, because a fiberglass conga is more durable than a wood drum. But we found that in order to get that durability, we had to sacrifice sound. Even though we invested tremendously in equipment, the sound wasn't what the musicians expected from us. So after about nine months we just phased out the fiberglass drums. My father's philosophy is very simple: If it doesn't sound right—if it doesn't sound good—we aren't going to manufacture it."

A similar philosophy has restricted the number of hand percussion and smaller items offered by Gon Bops. As John explains, "We make cowbells, because we can manufacture them here. But we've never gone into small hand percussion that involves taking an original design offshore, having it copied, and bringing it back in. If we can't manufacture an instrument in our own facility and con-
control the quality of the product—because our name is on it—then we don't sell it. For that reason, we've stayed away from getting into labor-intensive products—which some of the hand-percussion items are. We've stuck primarily with our main line of congas and bongos, and tried to sell quality. We don't try to com-pete in the low-end market, because there are too many people in that market already. They're not manufacturing; they're importing and selling—which is fine, there's a strong demand for that. Our philosophy is to manufacture and stick with what we do best.

"We even source all of our heads in the U.S.," John continues. "We don't use any African or Thai or Pakistani water buffalo—which are all readily available and very cheap. We figure that the head is one of the most important elements of a conga drum, and if we started skimping there, we might as well start importing all of it. We have chosen, instead, to do everything we must to maintain the quality at a level with which we feel satisfied. And it has become very expensive to do that. But, you get what you pay for—or at least we feel that way about our product."

A conga drum can only be as good as the wood used to make it. John Bobadilla states, "About seventy-five percent of our drums are made of mahogany; the other twenty-five percent are made of oak. For our oak drums, we always order a light red Appalachian oak. We try to make sure that there are no checks in it, because oak is a very dense wood, and once there is a check in it, it usually goes through the whole stave. We also try to make sure that there are no knots, because a knot will tend to loosen up."

"In the mahogany," continues John, "we always order a light red Philippine mahogany. There are light and dark red mahogany, and the dark will come in various shades of darkness. If we stick to the light red, we can always stain it darker; but if we get it dark coming in we can't keep it a nice, natural look. And with light wood, I can pretty much get all the walnut and cherry wood stained finishes to be the same."

Not surprisingly, Philippine mahogany must be imported from the Philippines. This presents its own problems, which John outlines. "I just double-ordered my last shipment coming in," he says, "because there are problems bringing in raw, unfinished lumber. They're putting a 14% value-added tax on unfinished material leaving the country, because they want to do the finishing work there. But the lumber will come in 1 15/16" or 1 7/8" thick, instead of exactly 2" thick—which is a big problem for me. Of course, every problem can be solved with money, but things are getting crazy. Every shipment comes in with a different price; it's a commodity that I can't control. Unfortunately, mahogany is the best wood for my purposes. It's not as hard as oak nor as soft as pine, it takes a beautiful finish, and it sounds great. But because of problems within the Philippine government, the over-foresting of the wood, and other things involved with the industry, things are very tentative right now. Regrettably, there is no domestic source for mahogany; it's a tropical wood."

Based on the problems that John outlined, it would seem that Gon Bops would benefit from an alternative source of materials—and the company is, in fact, looking into that option. "With deforestation happening all over the world, everybody is concerned about whether our children are going to have trees to climb," comments John. "Mahogany is becoming harder to obtain, so over a year ago we began research into whether or not we can make conga drums out of something else. We're experimenting right now with poplar, because it's much more readily available, takes a good finish, and doesn't have to come in from a foreign source."

A conga drum begins life as raw lumber purchased from wholesalers in lengths of 9’, 12’, or 16’, pre-cut to the thickness of the drums. Based on sales projections or actual current orders, staves for X number of quintos, X number of congas, etc. are cut according to cutting templates. The wood stock is cut lengthwise to give it the angles necessary to join with other pieces into a cylindrical shape. Once the boards are cut and inspected, they are steamed so that they can be bent to create the contour of the drum. Then they're put onto a press to create the contour for the "belly" of the conga. At this point, any staves with flaws in the wood are removed and replaced.
Premier Signia Drumkit

by Rick Van Horn

This English beauty offers some unique features in a package that's as attractive acoustically as it is visually.

In January of 1992 Premier launched their new Signia series to much fanfare and a lot of market interest. The kits didn't become available in the U.S. until the middle of the year, and it took us a while to obtain one for review. But the wait was worth it, since the Signia represents a real departure for Premier and offers a number of both original and time-tested features.

Construction And Appearance

The Signia is Premier's first all-maple kit, and features ply configurations that differ with the size of the drums. Tom-toms are four-ply; snare and bass drums are five-ply. The shells are also fitted with beech reinforcing hoops for additional strength. The kit we tested was a five-piece model, including 10x12 and 11x13 rack toms, a 16x16 floor tom, an 18x22 bass drum, and a 7x14 snare drum. (The standard five-piece configuration normally includes a 5½x14 snare drum instead of the 7x14, and a 16x22 bass drum instead of the 18x22. But Signia drums are available individually in a wide range of sizes, so you could tailor your own setup with no problem.)

Shell construction was excellent on all the drums, with exceptionally fine bearing edges and a nice, satiny sealer on the inside of the shells. A special feature of the Signia drums is that they are actually made slightly undersized. This means that there is a 6mm gap between the shell and the rim of the drumhead on each drum. This results in an "extended head" arrangement that is used on timpani and gong drums to improve resonance and projection. I think the design works, as we'll see later on.

Our test kit was finished in Premier's Coral White lacquer finish, which is quite different from a gloss white or creme. It has a distinct luster and depth under the color, giving a pinkish or greenish iridescence depending on how light strikes it. Other finishes available include Ebony, Cherry Wood, Topaz, and Sapphire. As is usual with Premier drums, the plating on all hardware is absolutely top-notch.

The look of the lugs is one of the major departures on the Signia kit. Rather than Premier's distinctive reverse-teardrop lugs, the Signia features small single-bolt posts that receive the tension rods. These posts are connected by long steel tubes that give the drums a somewhat old-fashioned tube-lug look—but are also a key ingredient of the kit's new mounting system (which I'll go into later). So even though the Signia offers cutting-edge technology, it actually has a somewhat traditional look about it at the same time. (I must say that all the large metal tubes on the drums seemed to contribute to their weight—which was significant.)

It's impossible to describe the appearance of the Signia kit without mentioning the unique method used to attach the tom holders, floor tom leg brackets, and bass drum spurs to the drums. None of these are attached directly to a drumshell. Instead, they are all attached to plates that span two of the tubular tension fittings. The plates are affixed to those fittings with a drumkey-operated clamp. Loosen the clamps, and the entire assembly can be moved up or down on the tubes—offering tremendous flexibility in positioning.

Premier's Tom Meyers told me that although this "isolation" system is designed to minimize hardware-to-shell contact, it isn't an attempt to duplicate the effect of RIMS mounting. But it does go a long way toward providing acoustic isolation, and that can't help but contribute to the overall resonance of the drums.

The snare drum was appointed differently from the other drums, in that it was fitted with a molded-aluminum "stress ring" top rim. This die-cast rim adds a massive look to the drum that is, frankly, inconsistent with the rest of the drums, and looks a bit out of place. I know that there are drummers who swear by the advantages of this type of hoop, including its ability to maintain the drum's tension even if one or more lugs should loosen. But I honestly have to say that I think this rim is a bit of overkill, and that a TRB triple-flanged steel hoop like those that grace the rest of the drums (and the bottom of the snare drum) would have been just fine. But this is a matter of personal choice, and is certainly not any sort of flaw in the drum's design.

Sound

In a word, Signia drums are resonant. The toms, especially, were loud, round, and penetrating—with plenty of ambience and attack. Much credit for this excellent sound must go to the new Rod Morgenstein Signature heads the toms were fitted with. These are medium-weight, single-ply, white-coated heads designed by Rod to offer a sound close to that of Ambassador-style heads, but with added durability for the hard hitter. I'm generally not fond of coated heads on toms, and I lean toward twin-ply heads (more for their acoustic characteristics than their durability). But I still enjoyed the sound, feel, and response of the toms fitted with the RM heads. And although the snare drum came with Premier's SD Studio batter (a heavy-duty, coated batter that sounded fine), I preferred it with a Morgenstein head. There was a bit more life and crispness to the drum with the slightly thinner head—and yet I had no lack of confidence in its durability.

To talk a bit more about the snare drum, I was impressed with its snare sensitivity, considering its 7" depth. Naturally,
with a drum this deep, the optimum pitch range was in the low registers. This would make a wonderful hard rock drum, or a studio fatback drum, or a drum for those who like a throaty sound from a snare. It did not shine when tightened up for a high pitch—in fact, it tended to choke a bit. But if you wanted to play in that register, you would probably opt for the 5½x14 model anyway. I must say that, when the 7" drum was tuned in its optimum range, its volume and projection were absolutely frightening. The heavy, clear plastic muffling ring supplied with the drum flattened the sound out a bit too much for my taste; I used a smaller, thinner Zero Ring instead—and wound up with a drum that penetrated through anything—and still had enough sensitivity for brush work!

Part of the snare drum's exceptional sound can be attributed to its unique strainer. Besides offering a totally new style of throw-off, it also features a completely removable butt bracket. By putting the throw-off in the "off" position and then loosening a thumbscrew on the butt, the snares can be removed entirely from the butt assembly—while still being attached to the butt bracket. This means that you can change a bottom head without having to disconnect the snares from the strainer (and thus lose your snare tension setting). When the new head is installed, the butt bracket simply slips back into its holder and the thumb screw is tightened back down to secure it. The tension adjustment on the snares is never affected in any way during this entire operation. What a nifty idea!

The bass drum posed the greatest acoustic problem for me. It came fitted with a Premier PD batter head and a black logo front head with an 8½" hole. The PD head is a single-ply head with a thin white ring added for sound control purposes. Out of the box, the Signia bass drum gave me punch, projection, resonance—everything I could want—except bottom. No matter how I tuned it, I just couldn't get the low end I thought I should from an 18x22 drum. That sucker should have sounded like thunder—and it didn't. That is, until I put on a series of two-ply, heavy batter heads. I tried Remo Emperor and Pinstripe models, and an Evans Rock model. And there was the sound. Big, boomy, and with lots of bottom. I think Premier has missed the boat here with their choice of head for this drum. They have a twin-ply damped drumhead called the DS in their line, and I earnestly suggest that they install it on the Signia bass drums in the future, to really maximize the wonderful low-end potential of this drum.

**Hardware**

The Signia kit is equipped with stands from Premier's 4000 series. It's heavy-duty, double-braced stuff, and works very well. The cymbal tilters on the straight stand and mini-boom are fitted with a cute feature: a small spring within the tilter itself that extends a tiny loop out of the ratchet teeth to create a memory lock. For those who rotate their tilters down when packing up, this feature would provide a convenient method of obtaining the same position each time the stand is set up.

The hi-hat features an inner spring adjusted by a large rotating dial. The tension level is easy to see, due to a slot in the unit through which you can see the spring and a set screw atop it that moves as the dial is turned. This is all to the good, and the unit works very smoothly. But I did have a problem with the amount of leg spread on the tripod. When it is at full extension (which it must be in order for the pedal unit to sit flat on the floor), the legs span 20" from foot to foot, and over 8" from the side of the pedal to either leg. Now, that's good for filling another pedal into (such as a double bass drum pedal or a remote hi-hat pedal) since the tripod doesn't rotate on the shaft. But it makes it tough to get the hi-hat in close to the snare while fitting it in and around the legs of other stands.

The bass drum pedal (a model 253
twin-chain-drive model) is small, quick, and easy to play. The tom-tom mount is Premier’s heavy-duty RokLok model. It works very well (and it includes a handy third hole for a cymbal arm), but it certainly looks massive—especially when combined with the tom-mounting brackets. (I do think Premier could shorten the down tube on this mount to save some weight. Does anyone really need rack toms four feet in the air?)

Problems
Let me preface this section by clearly stating that, generally speaking, the Signia kit is excellent. But I did find some problems, and though it might sound like I’m nit-picking, problems like these are all the more aggravating when they occur on a kit of such (otherwise) obvious quality.

To begin with, the 4016 mini-boom has the shortest boom arm I’ve ever seen—only 10” long. Short boom arms are common on combination straight/disappearing boom stands, but this isn’t one of those. It’s strictly boom-only, and being such, needs a longer boom arm to be practical for a stand with such a wide tripod base.

The bass drum spurs are designed with oversized rubber feet threaded to rotate back in order to expose the spiked tip of the spur. Unfortunately, the feet on our test model were fitted on so tightly that instead of rotating forward or back, they caused the spur tip itself to unscrew from the leg of the spur! I don’t understand why the spur leg was in two parts, anyway—it would make more sense to make the spur from one solid piece of steel. (After working with the foot for a while, I did manage to get it loosened up enough to spin freely—but this should not be an issue with a kit of this quality.)

Finally, and most aggravating of all, I found that the bass drum hoop was too thick (even after I removed the rubber protective strip) to allow me to attach my DW single or double pedal. Corporate competition and the excellence of the Premier 253 pedal notwithstanding, it seems strange to me to produce a drum that prohibits the use of an industry standard pedal.

Conclusion
Minor problems aside, the Signia is an attractive and innovative series. It sounds great, is available in a wide variety of sizes for those who like to custom-tailor their own kits, and offers features that make it unique among top-quality maple kits. A standard five-piece kit carries a suggested retail price of $3,279.

Slingerland
Radio King
Snare Drums
by Rick Mattingly

Over the past five years I’ve reviewed all kinds of snare drums: shallow drums, deep drums, drums with multiple strainers, drums with adjustable air vents, drums made of exotic woods, even drums made of cymbal metal. Every time I was sure that I had seen it all, someone would find yet another way to reinvent the instrument. Now, after years of promises, Slingerland has brought back Radio King snare drums. And there is absolutely nothing revolutionary about them.

The “new” Radio Kings come in only two sizes (5½x14 and 6½x14), are made from traditional maple, have very basic lugs, rims, and strainers, and feature only a few standard finishes. And they’re among the best snare drums I’ve seen in years.

This is not nostalgia on my part. I wasn’t around in the ’40s when Radio Kings were considered state-of-the-art, and I’ve never subscribed to the theory that something old is automatically better than something new.

But I do appreciate basic simplicity and quality, and these drums have both. They are constructed in the classic Radio King tradition from a steam-bent piece of solid maple. Wood reinforcement rings are used at the top and bottom to help keep the wood in shape. Each drum has eight tension lugs, a simple drop-lever snare strainer, and a butt plate. There are no internal mufflers. The snares are 16-strand spiral and are held onto the strainer and butt plate with nylon cord. The drums come fitted with an Evans Uno 58 WOO batter and an Evans Resonant 300 snare head. The logo badge is scalloped brass just like the original Radio Kings, except that these say “Ridgeland, S.C.” instead of “Chicago.”

There are two choices when it comes to rims. When these reissues were first introduced, they came with the original-style double-flanged hoops with the name Radio King engraved into the batter hoop. Slingerland has since made the drums
available with more modern triple-flanged hoops, without the engraved name, as an option.

No one has had to consider the number of flanges in a hoop for many years now, so perhaps a brief explanation is in order. On very old hoops, there is no flange at all. They are circular pieces of flat metal that were used to tension the heads by means of claw hooks. (Imagine a metal bass drum hoop and you’ll get the idea.) Double-flanged hoops were bent twice at the bottom to make a collar over the drumhead’s counter-hoop. This also allowed holes to be drilled for direct insertion of tension screws, eliminating the need for claw hooks. This is the type of hoop used on the "engraved" models. Triple-flanged hoops, which have been used on practically every drum made in the past 30 years, have an additional bend at the top of the hoop that provides a slightly rounded surface that offers more contact for rimshots and is easier on sticks. Most hoops are bent outwards at the tops; Slingerland hoops have always been bent inwards. The company refers to these as Stick Saver hoops.

I fully expected the engraved, straight-sided hoops to be a lot harder on my sticks on rimshots, so I was quite surprised when they weren't. The dents were a bit narrower and had sharper edges than those produced with the modern rim, but they weren’t any deeper. I happened to speak with a drum salesman at a local music store who had gotten in a new Radio King with the engraved rim, and he reported the same thing. He took the drum out on a loud gig where he was slamming a lot of rimshots, and he didn't break any more sticks than he usually does. The rim is reasonably thick, and the edges are slightly rounded, so perhaps those triple-flanged hoops we’ve been using all these years aren't as big a necessity as we've always assumed.

In terms of rimshot sound, I didn't detect any significant difference between the two rims. They both produced very solid pops that blended well with the fundamental sound of the drum. I also tried some bossa-nova style cross-stick rim clicks, and again found no significant difference. The engraved rim extends up above the drumhead a bit more than the standard rim, which can make rimshots a bit easier, but can also make unintentional rimshots more likely.

But you might want to forgo the engraved hoops and go with the Stick Saver model. Why? Because the engraved, straight hoops add three hundred and fifty dollars to the cost of the drum. Frankly, I found that hard to believe. I spent some time trying to find some other differences between the drums with the engraved hoops and the ones with the modern hoops, but couldn’t. So I called Slingerland and asked if, in fact, the engraved hoops were the only difference between a drum that sold for $600 and a drum that sold for $950.

Yep, that's the only difference.

The Slingerland spokesman did point out that the engraved rims are made of brass and are triple chrome-plated, while the regular rims are made of steel. Also, the engraved rims are made in the U.S., unlike the standard rims. And that engraved name on the rim is very attractive. But based on my tests, the differences between the hoops are more cosmetic than functional, so if you don't quite have the bucks for the engraved hoops, be assured that you can still have access to the classic Radio King sound at a more reasonable price.

And these drums definitely have that sound. I suppose it’s that solid shell that gives it the ring and brightness usually associated with metal drums, but also the warmth and depth of tone only found with wood. Without any mufflers, the drums have tremendous projection and ring that should cover the loudest situations. The extra ring produced by the 6½” model also made that drum a bit brighter sounding than its 5½” little brother. With a thin Zero Ring, the drums sounded more contained (without sounding muffled).

Snare response was excellent to within a half inch of the rim. The drums sounded equally good whether the snares were crisp or loose. They also sounded good over a wide tuning range, from fairly deep to cranked tight.

One item on the spec sheet that Slingerland sent me particularly caught my eye. It seems that hide glue is used on the shell joint and to attach the reinforcement rings. I once took an instrument-repair course in which I learned that hide glue is used on fine violins and classical guitars. The glue is made from leather, which means that it is porous, unlike...
plastic-based glues. When used to join wood together, the glue becomes like part of the wood itself, and vibrations are able to pass through it. It is also very strong. We were cautioned to be very careful in applying it, because once wood is joined together with hide glue, it’s virtually impossible to separate it. Many furniture manufacturers use it for this reason. Suffice it to say I was impressed that hide glue is used on **Radio Kings**.

The models with the engraved rims are available in five finishes: creme lacquer, black lacquer, red violin (stain), natural maple, and marine pearl. The models with the standard rim are not available with marine pearl. The natural maple and red violin finishes are excellent; in this respect, Slingerland is benefiting from being owned by Gretsch, who has always had excellent finishes. The marine pearl is classic, and seems right for the engraved models. There was absolutely nothing wrong with the creme finish that was on one of the drums we received, and I assume the black finish is of equally high quality, but I must admit it looked bland next to the marine pearl and wood finishes.

The 5½x14 **Radio King** with the engraved hoops (SRK 110) lists for $950 while the 6½x14 drum (SRK 111) goes for $1,000. For those who are happy with the standard rims, the 5½'' model (SRK 210) retail for $600 and the 6½'' drum (SRK 211) lists at $650. The drums with the engraved hoops are expensive, but they have that classic **Radio King** look. Either way, you're going to get the classic sound.

## Drumslinger Tom Bags

*by Rick Van Horn*

From the creative mind of Bob Gatzen and the high-quality production talents of Tough Traveler come the new **Drumslinger** tom bags. As usual with products from this design team, these bags offer features that set them apart from the norm.

Essentially, the **Drumslinger** tom bags are bags-within-bags. Each bag features an inner bag made of water-resistant Parapac nylon. This bag zips closed, completely enclosing the drum. The "lid" of the bag is padded for extra protection, and also features a pouch for the storage of a spare drumhead. The outside of the bag is created by a wrap-around "tongue" made of DuPont Cordura nylon, lined with Nulite foam. This tongue wraps around the drum and is cinched with two web straps that secure with Fastex side-release buckles. The main idea is that any given size of bag can adapt to a wide variety of models of drums, with or without RIMS mounts. Thus, if you happen to need to change drums or mounting systems, you don’t need to buy a new bag.

Working with the bags was a bit awkward at first, since the bag-within-a-bag design is a little bulkier than a standard hard-shell case or bag. But once I learned how to pop the inner bag over the drum from above (rather than trying to insert the drum into the bag) and then zip it closed, things got a lot smoother and faster. And once the tongue was secured around the drum, the amount of protection afforded to the drum by the bag was obvious.

As is normally the case with **Drumslinger** bags, the construction quality and durability of the tom bags is excellent. They are provided with both webbed carrying handles and removable web shoulder straps. They’re no substitute for hard-shell or ATA cases when serious travel or shipping is called for, but for situations where bags are appropriate, these bags offer exceptional quality and versatility. They’re available in the following sizes and prices: 10” (will also accommodate 8" drums) - $76.50; 12" - $84; 13" - $91.30; 14" - $101.50; 16" - $116.50; and 18" (doubles as bass drum bag) - $168.
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(Located within convenient traveling distance by public or private transportation from anywhere in the New York City/North New Jersey area)

Seating is limited, and all previous Festivals have sold out well in advance. Ticket orders must be handled on a first-come, first-served basis, so send your order today! Please use the form on the facing page (or a photo-copy) to order your tickets. Orders must be postmarked no later than April 15, 1993. Tickets will be accompanied by a flyer giving local directions and transportation information.

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**Ticket Order Form**
S&S Industries
Stinger P1 Trigger Pad
and Stealth ST7000
Bass Drum Trigger

by Rich Watson

The military gave us the Stealth, a superfast bomber with a weird, aerodynamic shape. S&S Industries offers the Stealth ST7000, a kick drum trigger so compact that it may only be noticed for its high-flying performance. The company's fondness for military nomenclature continues as its new recruit, the Stinger P1 trigger pad, follows the veteran Stealth into the not-so-cold war of electronic trigger competition.

**Stinger P1—Basics**

The Stinger's standard 10" drumhead and steel rim are tightened onto a black enameled cast aluminum base/stand mount with six 1¼ key rods. Two closely placed piezo transducers affixed to a steel resonator plate produce the head trigger spike. The second transducer provides a more uniform response and—in the event that one trigger fails—a backup. The steel plate is sandwiched between two 1 ¾"-thick circles of foam rubber. The externally mounted rim trigger (another piezo) is protected from stick attack by the "Rim Trigger Housing"—a small semi-enclosed block of aluminum pop-riveted to the base. Separate ¼" inputs access the head and rim triggers. The unit's overall outside dimensions are 12" x 4½". Despite its predominantly aluminum construction, the Stinger's weight is comparable to other pads made of plastic and rubber.

S&S's motto, "Shaping The Future," is exemplified in the delta wing-shaped (borrowed from the Stealth?) protuberance on the underside of the Stinger's base—ironically, the part of the product least visible to the public. This section houses the unit's two inputs and compression mounting clamp assembly. The clamp, which accommodates items like angle arms and tom and accessory mounts up to 7/16" in diameter, is tightened with a large, comfortable knob. This type of horizontal mount facilitates tilting the pad without the need for additional swivel clamps.

S&S recommends buying its own replacement drumheads, but standard 10" heads will do. A rectangle of gum rubber beneath the Rim Trigger Housing allows it to be "flexed" out of the way of the rim for head removal and installation.

**Sensitivity**

The strong spike produced by both Stinger triggers required a relatively low level of gain on my drumKAT. The pad trigger tracked all strokes—at all dynamics—exceptionally well. S&S's Larry Shamus tells me that the slight decrease in sensitivity away from the center of the head was a conscious choice to reproduce the same effect present on an acoustic drum.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the Stinger's response is that its commendable sensitivity doesn't compromise a truly discrete rim trigger signal. True, my drumKAT's, "interaction-suppression circuitry is largely responsible, but several other dual triggers have thwarted even the KAT. Pleasantly surprised by the two triggers' independence, I tried rooting out any telltale interaction with the acid test of trigger isolation: assigning two timbrally dissimilar sounds, such as concert bass drum and crash cymbal, that can't "hide" behind one another. Beating on the Stinger's head didn't trigger the rim. More impressively, beating on its rim didn't trigger the head. In short, the Stinger passed the test with flying colors.

S&S provides a chart of recommended settings for five of the most popular interfaces. As it turns out, the KAT "learned" the Stinger's clean, discrete signals easily, so I had no need to refer to it. But to me, its inclusion implies a) the manufacturer has successfully tested its product with a number of interfaces; b) its people care whether you return happily to the business of drumming or spend your time spelunking for a usable sound; and, just maybe, c) the manufacturer has exercised similar attention to detail in the design and quality control of your investment. All hats off to S&S!

**Feel**

The Stinger's, real drumhead and rim placed over foam rubber—a design it shares with several other pads on the market—provides a physical response that closely resembles that of acoustic drums. Its head can be tightened or loosened with the key rods to suit a player's personal taste. The rigidity of its metal rim enhances not only the tactile simulation, but, as I've mentioned in previous reviews, produces an audible rim shot that helps bridge the psycho-acoustic canyon between physical exertion and your monitor speaker. Drummers wishing to be seen and not heard—except through the sound system—or those wanting to practice undetected into the wee hours may be less attracted to this feature.

**Quality/Durability**

Larry pointed out that many of the Stinger's parts, including head, hoop, key rods, and mounting bracket, are industry-standard. This is especially good news to traveling drummers who don't want to conduct a treasure hunt for obscure replacement parts in the middle of an uncharted road gig. All visible parts of the Stinger housing are welded; nothing is bolted on. The resulting integrated appearance is not only aesthetically pleas-
ing, it suggests sturdiness as well. The unit's precise finish work further supports this impression. Its remarkable two-year warranty speaks louder than words.

**Stealth ST7000—Basics**

The **Stealth** kick trigger's playing surface, a 2 5/8"-high x 2"-diameter cylinder of soft urethane composite, is mounted on a 12-gauge black enameled cold-rolled steel base. A piezo transducer within the cylinder's hollow center responds not directly to beater contact, but to the impact of air produced when the beater compresses the chamber. Velcro strips on the bottom of the base help prevent it from creeping across a carpeted stage. The included reverse-angle hardwood beater features a unique tapered shaft that accommodates standard ¼" and Yamaha/Tama 6mm pedal fittings.

I got off on the wrong foot (as it were) with the **Stealth** when it wouldn't work with my battered but noble Slingerland Yellowjacket. Conflicting "feet" on the mounting areas of the products didn't allow the pedal's beater, offset from the center by ¾", to align with the **Stealth's** playing surface. Fortunately, the folks at Manny's Music, who have done me more favors than I'll ever repay, loaned me a pedal for a few days to do this review.

With its general interface-ability in doubt, I tried using the **Stealth** with other pedal makes and models. Except for my Yellowjacket and an old Tama (also no longer made), it mounted easily onto every pedal in the shop.

The **Stealth's** most obvious virtue is its compactness. Its tiny footprint extends less than 2½" beyond the front of a pedal! And with total dimensions of only 4" x 6¾" x 3¾", it won't crowd an Isuzu glove compartment, let alone a trap case.

Double kick players should note that the ST7000's playing surface is only large enough for a single beater. However, ½" inputs on both sides of the base not only accommodate different setup preferences, including left-footed playing, but they permit two **Stealth** triggers to be "chained" into a single interface or sound source input with no discernable degradation of signal. For players who use double pedals, S&S offers the **Stealth ST7002** double bass drum trigger.

**Sensitivity**

In general, I've found that kick drum triggers with a natural feel are not as "hot" as trigger pads meant to be played with sticks. The **Stealth 7000** is no exception, and performed best with the gain on my drumKAT nearly maxed. At that setting, the **Stealth** tracked all notes regardless of speed or dynamic, and produced a smooth, broad dynamic range. Its air-compression approach to triggering—which probably accounts for the modest spike level—virtually eliminates false triggering from external vibration and double triggering from sloppy foot technique.

**Feel**

The **Stealth's** playing surface is slightly higher than that of other triggers that incorporate a reverse-angle beater. Consequently, the distance the beater must travel is shorter. It is also shorter than on my straight-beater kick trigger. I found this difference frustrating when I tried to play hard (like being forced to bunt when I wanted to knock one out of the park). A couple of other drummers I talked to agreed. Anticipating my continued dissatisfaction with this characteristic after a test run with several pedals at Manny's, I specifically asked to borrow a Gibraltar
9211 pedal because of its adjustable stroke length. (Had I not been expected to return the Stealth to S&S in its original condition, I would have pursued the simpler, cheaper option of bending the beater rod to an angle that provides a comfortable throw.)

With the pedal spring tension cranked up high, the Stealth's low mass and minimal floor contact permitted a slight backward-forward rocking motion of the entire pedal—generated by the shifting force upon the pedal posts, and no doubt exacerbated by the increased stroke length. This didn't bother me particularly, but other tight-pedal drummers accustomed to behemoth bass drums or kick triggers with foot plates or heftier bases should be aware of it. At pedal tensions that most drummers would consider normal, and on a carpet or suitably large throw rug, the Stealth was as stable as triggers several times its size.

A pad's physical response is perhaps the most important component of "feel." Stealth's urethane composite material rebounds naturally and provides plenty of satisfying give when played hard, thus creating a very convincing tactile facsimile of an acoustic bass drum head.

Quality/Durability

Because the Stealth's design is so simple, only a couple of features invite inspection for quality: The urethane pad is mounted solidly on the base. Wires to the inputs, although exposed, are snugly heat-shrunk and sheltered within the steel base (which I suspect you could drive a truck over). Curiously, the double thickness of steel on the hoop clamp flange doesn't quite extend to the vertical base wall. The aim, it appears, was not to reinforce the point of the trigger subjected to the greatest stress, but to facilitate secure pedal attachment. Perhaps the most revealing evidence of Stealth's durability is its two-year guarantee. At least twice as long as the industry standard, this demonstrates S&S's confidence in their product's quality.

Conclusions

Acknowledging the subjectiveness of "feel," I still say the Stinger P1 and the Stealth ST7000 feel as good as or better than any trigger units presently on the market. Due to its size, the Stealth 7000 will appeal especially to the convenience-minded. But its excellent dynamic interpretation should intrigue sticklers for performance as well. The Stinger's independence between pad and rim triggers is, in my experience, unsurpassed. Both products exhibit a simple design, quality materials and workmanship, and an exceptional warranty that suggests they will survive the rigors of the road. The Stinger lists for $150, as does the Stealth single-pedal version. The Stealth 7002 lists for $200. More information is available through S&S Industries, 23 Great Oaks Blvd., #A, San Jose, CA 95119, tel: (408) 629-6434, fax: (408) 629-7364.

Yamaha RY10 Rhythm Programmer

by Rich Watson

They're ba-a-ack! Those infernal machines that threaten our jobs and mock us with their perfect time and consistency—until we pull their little plugs out. Or (depending largely on our perspective) those invaluable learning and compositional tools...or those providers of supplemental sounds (like that berimbau or that 3” piccolo snare) that just might make us a producer's first-rather than second-call drummer. In the RY10 Rhythm Programmer, the folks at Yamaha offer a compelling new reason for more drummers to adjust their attitudes—to see drum machines not as a problem, but as an opportunity.

The Basics—Keys, Controls, And Connections

One prerequisite to acceptance of drum machines is a friendly user interface. Never have I met one friendlier than the RY10's. All of its programming functions, such as basic song structure and recording operations, instrument pad volume levels, bass note length, transpose and mute, meter, tempo, and swing factor, are accessed via sixteen number keys and three mode keys that Yamaha calls the Function Selection Matrix. A large-character liquid crystal display indicates active modes and prompts the user through programming operations. The number keys are also used to enter pattern and song numbers and to enter and delete particular notes during step-time recording. Eight triangular LEDs indicate beat-by-beat progress through a pattern or song, and sixteen round LEDs indicate instrument placements on beats or beat subdivisions within the measure.

Twelve instrument pads access various groups of the RY10's 250 drum, bass, and percussion voices. The level of each instrument pad is independently adjustable, as is accent level—but the pads are not touch sensitive. That is, they do not produce more or less volume depending on how hard they are hit. This means that the RY10 can produce a maximum of two dynamic levels per pad, per bank.

Because each pad is just large enough for a single fingertip, oafs like me may have to resort to reducing the tempo when attempting to record fast or complex patterns or fills. Placement of both kick drum pads on the far left of the preset pad layout favors maintaining the ride or hi-hat with the right hand and playing kick and snare with the left. This is okay for step-time recording, but necessitates an awkward crossover for more complex two-hand kick and snare combinations in real-time mode.
Fortunately, the user can rearrange the instruments in up to sixteen different configurations and save them in the RY10’s internal memory area.

The Memory key toggles between the preset and user-defined patterns or pad banks. The Fill key, appropriately, plays the fill linked to the selected pattern—but which may be interchanged and played with other patterns. (Similarly, bass patterns can be interchanged with different drum patterns.) Other keys activate the drum, bass, or percussion voices of the selected pad bank, apply accents, and change bass-note octaves.

A fader controls volume of the left/mono and right outputs, the headphone output, and a built-in speaker (which can also be switched on or off independently). A MIDI In jack allows the RY10 to respond to sequencers and other MIDI instruments, but its functions are limited to drum and bass receive channels, program change channel, note number assign, and sync to another device’s MIDI clock.

By interfacing with any audio tape recorder through the miniature Tape jack, the RY10 can save pattern and song data, sound-to-pad assignments, and MIDI functions to tape. Through the same jack, that data can be reloaded into the RY10. Effectively expanding the RY10’s storage capacity beyond the fifty preset and fifty internal patterns, this feature will be welcome to musicians who don’t possess computers, sequencers, or other data storage facilities.

A ½” line-in jack allows a guitar, bass, or other line-level input device to be plugged directly into the RY10 and mixed with the drum, bass, and percussion patterns. A built-in tuner indicates this instrument’s deviation from standard or adjusted-median pitch. This could be particularly useful in helping to tune the instrument to the RY10’s bass patterns.

An optional footswitch can be set to start and stop the RY10, change patterns or songs, or play a pattern’s corresponding fill. A DC In jack for an optional power adapter provides an alternative power supply to the required six AA batteries. While the unit is off, RAM storage is maintained by a special long-life battery. The liquid crystal display warns the user when this battery should be replaced. At 7¼” x 7¼” x 1½” and just over 1½ lbs., the RY10 is very compact and portable.

### Programming

The RY10 offers the simplest, sleekest programming procedure of any drum machine on the market. By utilizing more function-dedicated buttons, Yamaha reduced the need for button pushing by largely eliminating the need to step through—and to some degree, memorize—multi-layered menus. The RY10 directly accesses basic programming operations with two-button combinations—one mode key and one number key—whose functions are always visible on a clearly labeled control panel. If it takes you more than a day to master this puppy, for gosh sake stay away from your toaster.

The RY10’s 250 voices are arranged into sixteen preset banks. Comprised of a drumset, an octave of bass notes, and an array of percussion instruments and/or sound effects, each bank is a palette of sounds from which rhythmic patterns are created. The RY10 also permits the user to mix and match voices and store them in sixteen additional user-defined banks.

The RY10 provides fifty preset one-measure patterns and fifty corresponding fills. Patterns and fills can be used "as is" or can be edited by the user and saved in the separate user-defined Internal pattern area. Patterns can also be created from scratch using real-time or step-time recording. Additional "tracks" of drums, bass, or percussion from any bank can be overdubbed. The RY10’s 28-note polyphony should be ample for even the busiest rhythm tracks. Different patterns, fills, and repetitions thereof can be joined to form song parts—which, in turn, are combined to create up to 36 songs. Songs can be programmed to play once, repeat, or segue into other songs.

Fourteen different swing settings determine the degree to which odd-numbered 8ths or 16ths may be advanced within the time to create various swing feels. These settings can be added to or removed from existing patterns.

### Preset Patterns

Truly a reflection of the times, the RY10’s fifty preset rhythms include five pop/rock, three rap, two hip hop, four house, five funk, two techno, and two Euro—but only one each of samba, bossa, jazz, and jazz waltz. Clearly, Yamaha isn’t targeting the
bossa nova/jazz waltz market, but I question their neglect of some styles and their treatment of some others. For instance, the library of voices includes a surdo and a samba whistle—yet the patterns don’t include a street samba. The drumset samba interpretation offered employs a floppy-headed kick drum flogged without mercy—or respect for the idiom. The same heavy foot is present on the jazz waltz. At the other extreme, all three heavy metal examples feature a sort of late-'70s synthesized electric bass sound. In short, Yamaha seems to have missed the essence of some musical styles. To be fair, other patterns—such as the songo and reggae beats, and a fusion pattern in 15/8—are pretty hip. All patterns can be modified to suit a player’s personal preferences and practice regimen. With this in mind, most of the fifty patterns provide an acceptable foundation upon which to build.

**Sounds**

Many of the **RY10**’s 250 voices would adapt well to the current popular music scene, whose sonic character has largely been created by drum machines. Produced by Yamaha’s AWM (Advanced Wave Memory) tone generator, the voices include 47 kicks, 48 snares, 47 toms, assorted hi-hats and cymbals, the more common Afro-Cuban percussion instruments, a talking drum, finger snaps, and a gong—as well as a number of rap scratches and techno-spacey sound effects. As with the preset rhythmic patterns, I would have preferred a wider variety or greater differentiation among the drum sounds, and I certainly would have traded a few of the narrow-application sound effects for a couple of resonant, jazzy toms or some orchestral percussion. But this, I admit, is largely an issue of taste, and the predominance of ambient and processed drum sounds over dry and “natural” ones is consistent with the product’s aforementioned emphasis on contemporary dance rhythmic patterns.

The unit’s tom sounds lean toward a heavy rock/pop tonality, but a couple of the kicks and snares might adapt to traditionally organic styles. The cymbal sounds are generally decent—and a couple of the ride cymbals are excellent. Oddly, there is no ride bell sound. I tried de-tuning several of the cymbal sounds, including a cymbal bell, to create one, but the pad tuning range of ± 200 cents—a whole tone—didn’t yield the desired clangy effect. (Other voice-editing parameters include accent level and pan positioning.)

All my nitpicking notwithstanding, almost all of the **RY10**’s voices are quite usable. Drummers who focus on contemporary pop styles will be more than pleased.

**Conclusions**

The **RY10** may have created its own niche in the drum machine market. It won’t challenge more sophisticated units as a primary studio instrument, but its portability, respectable sounds, and dead-easy operation make it a noteworthy practice and compositional tool. The **RY10** lists for $299.
WILL KENNEDY

"As I think of reasons why I play Paiste cymbals, I recognize similarities between the cymbals and the qualities of a good drummer: Professional, consistent, musical, dynamic, able to diversify. It is a great feeling to know that my cymbals are always helping me to sound my best."

Favorite Recordings:
Greenhouse
Yellowjackets
Live Wires
Yellowjackets
One Music
Bob Mintzer

Cymbal Set Up
1) 14" Sound Creation Dark Heavy
2) Sound Edge Hi-Hat
3) 14" Sound Formula Thin Crash
4) 19" Paiste Line Dry Ride
5) 16" Sound Formula Full Crash
6) 20" 2000 Sound Reflections Mellow China

CHAD WACKERMAN

"When dealing with a musical instrument company, I have two concerns. First, the instrument itself-sound, originality, quality, workmanship and consistency. Second, the company's willingness to listen to musicians ideas. When it comes to cymbals, Paiste is the leader in both areas."

Cymbal Set Up
1) 13" Sound Creation Dark Heavy Hi-Hat
2) 14" 3000 Rude Crash/Ride with 13" 2002 Crash on top
3) 12" Sound Formula Splash
4) 16" Paiste Line Fast Crash
5) #6 Cup Chime
6) #5 Cup Chime
7) 8" 3000 Rude Splash (top)/8" 2002 Bell (bottom) (as Hi-Hat)
8) 20" Paiste Line Dry Ride
9) 15" 3000 Rude Hi-Hat
10) 14" Paiste Line Fast Crash
11) 18" Paiste Line Fast Crash
12) 20" Paiste Line Thin China

Favorite Recordings:
Forty Reasons
Chad Wackerman
Make A Jazz Noise
Frank Zappa
Metal Fatigue
Allan Holdsworth

FRANK BRIGGS

"My cymbals are a big part of my sound, and something I could never compromise. In the 15 years I've been using Paiste, they have fulfilled my every need ... and then came the Paiste Line, which for me, is beyond description!"

Cymbal Set Up
1) 13" Paiste Line Dark Crisp Hi-Hat
2) 16" Paiste Line Full Crash
3) 14" Paiste Line Full Crash
4) 10" Paiste Line Splash
5) 20" Paiste Line Dry Ride
6) 13" 602 Medium Hi-Hat
7) 18" Paiste Line Thin China
8) 17" Paiste Line Mellow Crash

Favorite Recordings:
Love Crazy
Atlantic Starr
Stand In Line
805
World Keeps Turning
William Aura
The Darwin Drum Company has just released its first color catalog. The company, which reorganized under the Darwin name after purchasing the Corder drum company, offers drums in the Performing Artist (professional) and Rebel (entry level) series, along with Confederate hardware. Drums and hardware are made entirely in the U.S. For more information, contact Darwin Drum Co., P.O. Box 4196, Murfreesboro, TN 37133-4196, tel: (615) 890-1007, fax: (615) 849-8040.

As part of Kaman’s Toca percussion line, they’ve introduced the new Limited Edition (L.E.) series of bongos and congas, which feature a newly designed shell that the makers claim adds volume and tonality. L.E. congas come in 11”, 11½”, and 12½” sizes, feature six lugs, brass-plated steel hoops and tension rods, and a shell taper conducive to traditional playing style, and are available in white and black hand-rubbed finishes. Kaman Music Corp., P.O. Box 507, Bloomfield, CT 06002.

Kaman's new Legend snare drum is available in three sizes—4½x13, 5½x14, and 7x14—and three colors—black lacquer, natural lacquer, and black metalflake covering. It features an 8-ply rock maple shell, Kaman's "easy-adjustment and release" throw-off mechanism, "classic" lugs, and Remo Ambassador heads. The 13" snare has eight lugs and 2mm "super hoops," while the 14" models have ten lugs and die-cast hoops.

Also new from the company is their Tour-Master Gig Bag, made from black Cordura and featuring an adjustable shoulder strap and one inch of foam lining. This snare bag comes in two sizes, one that fits drums 3½" to 5½" in depth, and one for 6" to 8" depths.

Yamaha has introduced its special-edition of Drum Lines, in honor of the company’s 25th anniversary of drum manufacturing. Over sixty bios, drum setups, and photos of Yamaha artists are included, as well as musical examples from several of the artists. For a free copy, write to the address below.

In order to make it easier for musicians to purchase Yamaha gear, the company has instituted its First Time Buyers Program, in which players can finance up to $2,500 for new instruments, with no money down and no previously established credit. Look for brochures and counter-top displays at your local retail shop.

Kaman Snare Drums and Toca Percussion

Yamaha's Maple Custom drumsets now feature YESS (Yamaha Enhanced Sustain System) tom-tom and floor tom mounts. The YESS System was designed to allow for more tone sustain, but with less tom bounce, which Yamaha says other systems tend to promote.

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Yamaha Corp of America, Band & Orchestral Division, 3445 East Paris Ave., SE, P.O. Box 899, Grand Rapids, MI 49512-0899, (616) 940-4900.
RHYTHM TECH ADDITIONS

Rhythm Tech's New iT (index Tension) retrofit-tuning lugs are equipped with tiny ball bearings that ride through a series of "click stops," which, the makers say, prevents vibration and head pressure from changing a drum's tuning. Rhythm Tech also says that iTs make specific tuning changes more accurate.

Also new from the company is their Hat Trick tambourine, a light-weight device specifically meant for hi-hat mounting. The Hat Trick features an all-steel frame and black powder-coating, and is said to produce two distinct sounds when mounted either right-side up or up-side down.

In other Rhythm Tech news, the company has become the exclusive worldwide distributor of Pete Englehart metal percussion and accessories. Rhythm Tech, 511 Center Ave., Mamaroneck, NY 10543, tel: (914) 381-2279, fax: (914) 381-5389.

P&K PRO PADS

P&K Pro Pads are practice pads made of clear select hardwood maple. The pads are hand-cut, -sanded, -assembled, and -finished and feature a ¼" pure gum rubber surface, an acoustic sound chamber, a felt base, a pre-drilled hole to mount onto cymbal stands, an engraved, personalized brass plaque, and a natural maple stain finish with sprayed-on protective lacquer coating. P&K Pro Pads, 10 Kenney Hill Road, Hope Valley, RI 02832, (401) 596-9029.

LP PIN CHIMES

LP's Pin Chimes, an adaptation of the company's bar chimes, create a cutting, powerful, high-pitched chime sound. The bars are attached to a horizontal bar via Kevlar string, which LP claims reduces unwanted sway. Latin Percussion, Inc., 160 Belmont Ave., Garfield, NJ 07026.

LANG OFFERS GLADSTONE SETS

In addition to offering replicas of the historic Billy Gladstone snare drum, Lang Percussion is now offering complete sets. The drums feature the famous "three-way tensioning" system created by Gladstone for the original snare drum, allowing toms to be tuned without being removed from their holders. RIMS mounts, as well as Remo heads, come standard, though calf heads are also available. A standard set comes with a 14x22 bass drum, 9x12 and 10x14 toms, and a 16x16 floor tom. Lang Percussion, Inc., 635 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

REALFEEL BRUSH PRACTICE PAD

HQ Percussion Products has introduced its RealFeel Brush Pad. The pad is double-sided, with a gum surface on one side and a "special material" on the other side that resembles the feel of a coated drumhead, enabling the practice of brush technique. As with other RealFeel pads, the 12" Brush Pad can be played on a flat surface or on a snare drum stand. For a complete catalog, send $1 to HQ Percussion Products, P.O. Box 430065, St. Louis, MO 63143, (314) 647-9009.

CORRECTION

February's Industry Happenings incorrectly reported that purchasers of Sonor Force 1000 drumkits would receive a free Sonor tour jacket. That promotion is no longer in effect. We apologize to Sonor for the error.
"You asked about the Leedy name. The company was founded in 1895 by Mr. U.G. Leedy, of Indianapolis, Indiana. He sold out to C.G. Conn, of Elkhart, Indiana, in 1928. (W.F. Ludwig also sold his company to Conn, in 1929). Conn made Leedy drums up to 1951, when they combined both names to form Leedy & Ludwig. Around 1955, H.H. 'Bud' Slingerland purchased the Leedy name, patents, tooling, and dies. (W.F. Ludwig, Jr. purchased his father's 'name' back, too!)

"Slingerland made Leedy drums (such as yours) in their plant from 1955 to 1972, when they started phasing out the line. The Leedy name is owned today by the Fred Gretsch Company (along with the Slingerland name). I was recently told by the Gretsch people that they have no plans for bringing out the Leedy name again—which is a shame. The Leedy name was 'top-shelf' in the percussion world for over 75 years.

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Greg Gaylord
Minneapolis MN

By "dry" winters, we assume you mean dry indoor air caused by artificial heating. (You should certainly not be storing your drums in an unheated space subject to super-cold, super-dry winter air.) This can, indeed, pose problems for wood drums—as it can for any other wood product. We can't give you a scientific ratio of temperature-to-humidity, but there is a simple rule of thumb that has always applied well to questions of temperature or humidity: If you are comfortable, your drums are comfortable. That is to say, a room maintained at a temperature comfortable for a person wearing street clothes (without a jacket) will be warm enough for a wooden drum. As far as humidity goes, if you notice that your skin feels dry or your lips are chapped as a result of the heating in your house, it's likely that your drums are also losing moisture. If you use a humidifier to add moisture to your home air for your own comfort, that will probably be sufficient to protect drums stored in the same space. (You obviously don't want to get the drums sopping wet from condensation as a result of over-humidification.)
"Of course," Smitty continues, "another problem is cats who do learn the vocabulary but they don't do anything with it. They just mirror their influences verbatim. They have to find out what their voice is. There's an old saying, 'If you want to get along, you've got to sing your own song.' Once you get the information, you have to figure out how to use it to say what you want to say. But guys just take it verbatim. You've got to say, 'Well, if I do THIS with it, then it turns into this, and if I do THAT....'

"I was a mad scientist, man," Smitty laughs. "I'd even take my drums apart to see how they were constructed, because I really wanted to know everything about the drums. I was lucky, because I had teachers who helped me learn self-discovery."

Smitty's first teacher was his father, Marvin Smith, Sr., who started his son off at the age of three. "After two years," Smitty recalls, "the father/son relationship got too close, so he sent me to a friend of his named Charlie Williams. He made a very big impression on me because he could play in any context: big band, trio, any style, double bass—he could do it all. The command he had over what he was doing left a very heavy impression on me. I only studied with him for a year or so, and then he moved away."

Smitty's next teacher was another friend of his father's, Don Taylor, whom he studied with for the next ten years. "He was so great," Smitty says with genuine affection. "He let me discover the music for myself. It wasn't like, 'Okay, kid, here's your lesson. Come back next week and play this page perfectly and you'll get an A.' He'd give me records and say, 'Take these home and listen to them, and come back next week and show me what you got from them.' So I'd come back the next week and I'd say, 'Yeah, this guy was doing this, but you can also take that lick and do it this way....'

Smitty pauses, smiling at the memory. "Yeah, the art of self-discovery," he says, then leans forward and speaks with great feeling and emotion. "You have to understand how significant that is. When you find out things by yourself, that leaves an indelible impression on you. I discovered music in all kinds of ways, and I was hungry for more and more. Don would point me in all kinds of directions. 'Check this out, check that out. Okay, kid, take it.' My actual lesson was on Saturday, but I would go by his house during the week and we'd just play. He'd play xylophone and I'd play drums, and we'd jam. I was already forming my own ideas about how I wanted to make music, so I would respond to what he played and say, 'I can use this here and that there.' I didn't want to play cat and mouse. That's one of the things I hate. You'll hear a saxophone or whatever play a phrase, and the drummer plays it right back at him. That would be like if we were talking, and every time you said something, I said the exact same words right back at you. How am I ever going to express what I'm thinking if I do that?

"Sometimes," Smitty says, "you can kind of imitate another phrase a little bit. But don't do it every doggone time. Use some imagination. How about a counterphrase, an alternative view? That's what I like to do, give the opposite view."

Smitty's final teacher before going to the Berklee College of Music was a drummer named Marshall Thompson. "He had such a smooth touch," Smith says fondly of the teacher who recently passed away. "He could swing you into bad health, and he was very melodic. I learned about smoothness and fluidity from him. So all those teachers I had helped me find myself. That, and listening to a lot of records. A LOT of records."

And hearing guys play live? "Aw man," Smitty laughs, "the first time I saw Max play, wheeeew! I mean, I'd heard him on records. But when I got to see him live...." Smitty sits back, closes his eyes and smiles in ecstasy, lost in the memory. Suddenly he snaps forward, talking a mile a minute, miming Roach's playing. "Max was sitting there with that cymbal going 'ding-ding-ding-dinga-dinga-dinga-dinga-dinga' real fast, and his left hand was doing all these jabs, like 'shoomp...BAM...boom,' and he was so smooth, man, sitting there in his suit and tie with the jacket buttoned, with this real studious look. He was so cool, but he
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was DEALIN'. He was just KILLING it. But it wasn't no frantic frenzy. It was like he had this center of gravity, and this regal bearing. Man, he's the master, and he's my biggest role model for playing drums.

"And he's always been very encouraging to me," Smitty adds, "like he was to all the cats who came after him. Max has always been a very giving person. Very educated, very intelligent, a great musician. Man, if I could be on that kind of level, that would be one great feeling."

In fact, looking at the faces of some of the young drummers who were checking Smitty out at his PAS clinic earlier in the day, one could see the same kind of awe that Smith must have felt on first seeing Roach. And watching Smitty answering questions for a small crowd of drummers long after his master class had officially ended, one couldn't help but think that some people are holding Smitty in the same regard as he holds Max Roach.

"I can never see myself like that," Smitty says, shaking his head. "I know how I feel when I see a guy like Max or Art Blakey or Papa Jo or Billy Cobham, and I just can't imagine anyone feeling that way about me. I don't feel that I've done anything of the magnitude that those guys have done. But I'm glad if someone can get something out of my clinic. I don't want it to be a big gladiator show, where people are saying, 'Man, he sure whipped around those drums quick.' That's not saying much. I always try to give information in my clinics, because people need that. I didn't create it; it's not mine. I can't take it with me when I'm dead. So you give it up, pass it on. All the great musicians did that—gave it back.

"I got a lot of my information from records. I'm always into hearing something that I haven't heard before. If it's an old record that I haven't checked out, let me get into the groove of it. When I did that little drum solo in my clinic, which was based on Thelonious Monk's 'Evidence,' there was one section in there where I played four quarter notes on the bass drum with the hi-hat on 2 and 4, and I played a little shimmy beat on the snare. I got that from guys like Baby Dodds, Big Sid Catlett, Papa Jo Jones. I acknowledge these guys because..."
they helped me get information I can use and make very relevant today. You put it in the right place, it works."

One element of Smitty's drumming that is steeped in tradition is his tendency to use a lot of drums. Whereas some jazz drummers seem to be primarily cymbal players who only use the actual drums for occasional accents and fills, Smith uses the drums themselves as an integral part of his timekeeping, sometimes forsaking the cymbals altogether.

"The tradition of the drum goes all the way back to Africa," Smith explains, "where the drum represents a strong, powerful force. It was used as a means of communication for speaking to the living as well as to the dead. By using different tonalities, the drum could signal anything from 'It's time for a revolution' to 'Hey, let's go get a couple of beers.' So it has that kind of power. When the African people were brought to this country as slaves, the first thing the slave owners did was take away the drums, because they knew that the drums were a very powerful force. But the African people, being a very persevering people and a very creative people, found ways to keep that tradition and preserve the lineage.

"I'm very intrigued by the sound of the drum—all the different textures and tones and harmonies and melodies and rhythms you can get out of the instrument. And I'm still discovering stuff. After I did my clinic, a person came up to me and said, 'You know, I didn't really expect you to have all these drums for your type of musicianship.' He didn't expect to see four rack toms and three floor toms and double bass drums," Smitty laughs. "I'm associated with being more of a jazz drummer, so I guess people were expecting me to just sit there and go 'spang-a-lang.' But I'm hearing all these tonalities. I like the sound of the double bass, as well as all the cymbal colors. You can still 'spang-a-lang,' but there's a wider dimension to what you're doing.

"So the drums have a real effect as far as what they can make people do. They can make people feel all the ranges of emotion, and to communicate with people like that, you have to really deal with the drums. I mean, I can do whatever I do on the cymbals, but I like to focus on the drums. Max certainly dealt with the drums; it wasn't just a cymbal thing. He really got in there and created melodies with a four-piece kit. Now if you can do that, you are seriously bad. And Max is.

"Look at the traditional New Orleans bands," Smitty continues, "where you have the snare drummer and the bass drummer. That music still has a strong pulse. Look at Afro-Cuban music. These guys show up with bongos, congas, and timbales, and they create a thick groove that's strong and pulsating and always moving. It's not like the four-on-the-floor bass drum they use in house music, which to me is just a retro-disco thing with slicker technology. It's not like that. It creates another kind of groove, but it still has the rhythmic finesse and sophistication.

"It intrigues me that guys like Trilok Gurtu or Zakir Hussain can sit there..."
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with a pair of tabla drums, just moving their fingers, and make magic. And here I am with this double bass kit with all these rack toms, and I'm not making half the music these cats are making," Smitty laughs. "So that really puts it all in perspective for me. I got a long way to go. I want to be able to create the kind of magic a guy like Trilok creates—have that kind of command over the instrument and be able to draw all these different sounds out of a drum."

Indeed, sounds are important to Smith, and besides the traditional drums and cymbals, he usually has cowbells, Jam Blocks, and other such paraphernalia scattered around his kit. Smitty points to Baby Dodds and Sonny Greer as two drummers who used similar sounds in their setups. But he also points out a more modern influence. "I used to listen to the Miles Davis group of the '70s with Airto and Jack DeJohnette," Smitty says, "and to me, the two of them made one sound. They had such a rapport and were so sensitive to the music. Airto knew exactly where to place his stuff, and it just sounded like one drummer to me. I'd hear the cowbells and woodblocks, and a little jingle with the bell tree, and I got into that. I saw that it was possible to throw different sounds in there and make it a conglomerate whole.

"I'm always one for trying to add a special element to make a piece come to life. A little triangle 'ting' in the right spot can raise the whole tune. Just one little thing here or there can make the difference."

"Working in New York, different people would ask me if I had a certain sound, like they'd want to know if I had a triangle. 'No, but I'll have one tomorrow,' and I'd go to Manny's and pick up a triangle. Someone else would ask if I had wind chimes. 'No, but I'll get some,' and I'd be back at Manny's. I just kept doing that, and the next thing you know, I was using all the stuff. When I was playing with Ron Carter, I used castanets, bell tree, wind chimes, and triangle, and it was great because each color added a texture. But see, I was hearing that in the music. Ron might ask for a triangle, and then I would hear other sounds as a result of bringing that element in. 'Okay, I can also add wind chimes and bell tree.'"

Eventually, Smitty's percussion evolved into a sort of percussion tree that he often turns up with at gigs. "It keeps growing," he boasts. "I've got cowbells, temple blocks, agogo bells, castanets, two sets of wind chimes, a bell tree, mini China gongs, a small suspended cymbal with rivets, a flat wind gong, and two sets of crotales, which the Zildjian company was gracious enough to make for me. I've also got two pedals, one hooked up to a tambourine and one hooked up to a cowbell. I'm trying to get another pedal hooked up to a yam Block. So I'm expanding it."

"The first time I used the setup, when it was in its early stages, was with the baritone saxophonist Hamiet Bluiett. We played a lot of avant-garde music, and in that situation you have to be a lot more sensitive about textures. Otherwise, you
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can run the risk of being monotonous and too random, and there is no balance as far as texture is concerned. Some people think it's just free music and so you can just bash out on the drums, but it's not really like that. There's structure to the music if you know how to do it.

"The drummers for me in that style of music were guys like Andrew Cyrille, who had played with musicians like Coleman Hawkins. He had that foundation, so when he went to play avant-garde music, he knew what he was doing. He was dealing with texture and sound and balance and dynamics. I also gravitated towards players like Beaver Harris, Milford Graves, Rashied Ali, Famoudou Don Moye, and Thurman Barker, because they were very structured in dealing with the music. So all those influences are wrapped up in what I am, and they come out at various times, depending on the context."

One context in which Smith uses some of his more modern influences is in his work with Steve Coleman and the Five Elements. When you first hear many of the group's tunes, you'd swear that the drumming is completely random. But on repeated listenings, patterns begin to emerge. Ultimately, you discover that the compositions are based around very long rhythmic cycles. On a song called "The X Format," from the album *Black Science*, the A section consists of a 26-beat sequence, divided 3-5-5-8-5. On "Blues Shifting," from the *Rhythm People* album, the basic phrase is 14 beats long, divided into two groups of seven. On "Armageddon," from the same album, the A section has a 20-beat sequence, divided into four bars of five, while the B section is in seven. And on the group's newest album, *Drop Kick*, the first cut, "Ramses" features an 11-beat cycle that Smitty says is thought of as two measures of five and a half.

Smith generally plays these pieces in a very linear fashion, with the snare drum, bass drum, and ride cymbal bell being the three primary sounds. He refers to the patterns as drum chants. "It's the basic African approach of layering things," Smitty explains. "Each drummer has his part, and it all interlocks and forms the thickest and strongest groove you can imagine. So the approach I take is to create a nice texture where everything hooks up. I'm also looking to create a balance. If the guitar player or bass player is being busy, I'll play less to balance the texture. Sometimes you might want to purposely be dense or purposely be spacious, but most times you want a balance, so you have to listen. If everything else is a little more simplistic, then you can throw in a little more drums. You just use your ears, the same way you would if you were playing 'spang-a-lang.' It's just that in the Five Elements, we're coming from a much stronger rhythmic base than what you usually hear."

Despite the mathematics involved in Coleman's music, the stuff feels great. Smitty explains that some of it has to do with looking at larger beat groupings, rather than counting every part of the beat. "When I play the B section of Armageddon," Smith explains, "I'm not sitting there thinking '1-2-3-4-5-6-7, 1-2-3-4-5-6-7.' I'm feeling it in three, with what I call the long beat/short beat concept. Certain beats are long, certain beats are short. In this case, the third beat is long, like 'one-two-threeeee, one-two-threeeee.'" Smith sings, giving the beats a two-to-three ratio so that the
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first two beats are worth two 8th notes each and the third beat is worth three.

"It's not any different than if you're playing a funky 16th-note groove in 4/4. I mean, you're not going to be sitting there going '1e&a 2e&a 3e&a 4e&a,'" Smith says, counting so fast that he nearly gets tongue-tied. "You're going to be concentrating on the main downbeats and backbeats, and the 16ths fall naturally into that because you understand their relationship inside the larger beats.

So why should it be any different if you are playing in seven, nine, eleven, or thirteen? It's all how you look at it."

Still, it would seem that playing a piece that's in eleven or thirteen would take a great deal of concentrated counting, even if one is using the long/short beat approach. "See," Smitty says, "you also have to hear the relationship of your part to the other parts. That's African. It's not about meter and always giving the 'one.' Having to hear the 'one' is the Western/European concept. In Africa, it's not about where 'one' is. It's about the relationship between the different parts. Once you understand the relationship between what you're doing and what all the other guys are playing, that's when you've got it."

It's that approach of not always marking the first beat of a subdivision that helps give this music a funk-like groove, despite the rhythmic complexity. Smitty will often have parts going that imply a straight-ahead groove, even though the numbers are changing underneath. A good example is "Blues Shifting," where a cowbell hits every other beat, in effect serving as a consistent backbeat. When viewed in terms of two measures of seven, the cowbell plays the even-numbered beats of the first measure and the odd-numbered beats of the second. One way of looking at it is that the cowbell is playing a half-time seven feel over the top of the two measures.

"Right," Smitty says. "There are a lot of cross-currents going on in my part, and between what I'm doing and the other parts. The main thing is, you have to think horizontal—linear. This approach is based on an influence from a drummer named Doug Hammond, who Steve used to play with. Doug would have a specific drum part for each tune, rather than just playing time for 32 bars or whatever. There were specific places that the bass drum, snare drum, cymbal, hi-hat, and so on would play. Doug called it a chant, because it had its own ostinato, as it were.

"When you have a part like that, it's like playing a melody. You're not thinking about what you do on each individual 8th or 16th note, you are thinking about the melody you're playing. Instead of sitting there mathematically counting in your head, you are playing phrases, and once you hear them as phrases, they stick in your head because you're hearing them as music, not as isolated beats. When you get to that level, you are able to play more inside the music."

While Smitty is totally comfortable in an ultra-modern setting such as Steve Coleman's, he is equally comfortable in more traditional settings, such as when he did several gigs with the Buddy Rich band a few months after participating in a Buddy Rich Scholarship Concert,
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which is now available as a DCI video.
Anyone familiar with the type of drumming Smitty does with Steve Coleman might wonder how he could fit into such a different setting, but to Smith, it's all the same.

"I don't care if it's a trio, quartet, quintet, big band, or orchestra," he says. "The fundamentals still apply. You just arrange them differently depending on the context. In a big band, you have to understand that you're dealing with twelve to fourteen horns. When you've got that many guys all trying to blow air through their horns to play these figures, there's going to be a slight delay—especially at faster tempos. So it's more of a responsibility for the drummer to establish the time firmly and really be clear with the beat. You can't be as loose, especially in ensemble sections, because then you're allowing for time fluctuations.

"Another thing is having a good sense of dynamics. You really have to exaggerate the dynamic factor in a big band more than in a small group. I mean, it's hard for fourteen horns to play pianissimo together and make it sound like pianissimo, because you've got all these layers of sound. So it really has to be exaggerated. Also, when you're playing behind soloists, start each one off real easy. Let the soloist set the direction that he or she wants to take it, and then build it from there. These are key issues in a big band.

"Basically, you have to know the language of each style of music. Big band music has its own language—certain ensemble figures that we've heard through the history of the music. So you've got to listen to the great big bands: Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Woody Herman, Buddy Rich, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, Fletcher Henderson, Chick Webb, Billy Eckstein, and Dizzy Gillespie's big band. Those bands were serious, and the drums had a similar function in all of them: They would help move things along. They were like the cattle prod. They helped guide the dynamics and shape the contour of the music."

Smith says the next step is learning the different ways in which each band approached the music, and cites his experience with the Buddy Rich band as well as an opportunity he once had to play with the Count Basie Orchestra as an example. "Buddy was obviously an aggressive player," Smitty says, "and would just plow right through things with a lot of impact. His music had a certain edge, where things were played forcefully. Basie's band had a real cool swing, like a bounce. It was kind of laid back, and you just sat in this pocket and relaxed, and the music took off."

In big band situations, Smitty observes the traditional technique of playing bass drum four beats to the bar. He does the same thing in more modern, small group contexts as well. "A lot of young players think that you're not supposed to play the bass drum that way," Smitty says, shaking his head. "They think it's dated. But that's what I saw the great drummers do, like Max and Art Blakey and Jimmy Cobb, and even Elvin and Tony Williams. A lot of drummers don't think that guys like Elvin or Tony or Jack DeJohnette do that, but they do. Even though they often play more intricate rhythms, when they stop doing that, they go back to playing quarter notes. And that's what I do."

As much as anything, Smitty likes the fact that it is based on tradition. "When the first drummers began playing the drumkit as we know it today," he says, "four quarter notes on the bass drum was the way to keep time, along with press rolls on 2 and 4. Baby Dodds was the first guy to utilize the four quarter notes, as opposed to the 1 and 3 that was used in the marching band style. When the hi-hat came into the picture, guys like Papa Jo Jones created that swing beat, but they still kept the bass drum going. Then when Kenny Clarke put that swing beat on the ride cymbal, he still played quarter notes. Sure, he was using accents and stuff, and getting more sophisticated, but when he stopped playing accents, he went back to quarter notes, as did all the other drummers." But Smitty isn't playing that way strictly to keep the flame of tradition. "It sounds good, man," he says. "When you
play quarter notes along with a string bass player who's playing a walking bass pattern, it creates a thicker pulsation, which gives a stronger momentum and thereby creates a stronger pulse or groove. It's not something to be heard, it's just something to be felt. But a by-product of that is that it really helps you internalize the time within yourself. So it's a good timekeeping measure on top of everything else."

Earlier, Smitty spoke of his admiration for his teacher, Charlie Williams, who could handle any style. Judging by the varied settings that Smitty performs in, he seems to have taken Williams' example to heart. "You have to embrace all different facets and styles and sounds," Smitty says, "because when you educate yourself like that, you're able to fit into any context. You should be able to sit in and play with people that you never played with before and immediately communicate and make music.

"You have to know what's expected in the musical situation you're playing in, and you have to play what fits. Some people say, 'Don't you feel limited?' You're only limited by your own mind. I can feel free dealing with whatever the situation is, because I know I can make it something more than what it is per se. In my inimitable fashion, I'll add something to it—sometimes, a lot. Maybe some people feel I put in too much, but hey, I can deal with that.

"But I'm not trying to out-drum anybody. I love Billy Cobham; I love Buddy Rich; I love Dennis Chambers. They can get around the drums like nobody's business. Totally awesome. I wish I could do that, but I can't. So what can I do? I can make the best music I can possibly make. I would love to be able to do more than I can do, but that's just impatience on my part, 'cause man, I want to get there. I put that intensity into what I do because I love music and I don't want to just throw it away. If the Lord gives me one talent, I want to make two. If He gives me five, I'll make ten. I want to multiply my talent and then let it out so people can dig on it. And maybe they can take some of that and multiply it within themselves.
In a previous two-part column on double-bass drumming, I placed emphasis on hand/feet independence, with the hands playing various rhythms over an uninterrupted flow of notes on the bass drums. These exercises included constant single- and double-stroke patterns and accented broken-up patterns.

This time, however, instead of a repetitive flow of notes on the bass drums (like 16ths or 8th-note triplets) the following patterns combine notes of different value (for instance, 16ths and 16th-note triplets). These exercises will help you "get in touch with your feet" and get away from the very effective but all-too-common tendency of playing constant 16ths. Before playing the double bass pattern, make sure you can hear it in your head or play it with your hands.
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Bobby Rock
Andre Ceccarelli is one of the most highly regarded drummers in France. At 46 years of age, he has a mature, completely developed style, an incredible technical virtuosity, and tremendous versatility. He is perhaps best-known in the U.S. for his astonishing fusion drumming on a 1978 release by Bunny Brunuei (Chick Corea’s bassist at that time). Nonetheless, he has played with innumerable other great artists, including Dee Dee Bridgewater, Tom Harrel, Didier Lockwood, and Michel Legrand. He has appeared on recordings with the Brecker Brothers, Tania Maria, Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, and Eddy Henderson.

Ceccarelli began drumming at the age of eight in Nice, and soon left with the renowned French rock band Les Chats Sauvages (translated: the Wildcats). In 1968, he met up with Scottish vocalist Alex Ligertwood and British drummer Steve Ferrone, who became good friends and who recommended “Dédé” for gigs. (He replaced Ferrone in Brian Auger’s group for a brief stint in the U.S.)

Ceccarelli moved to Paris permanently in 1970, where he found himself much in demand—working the jazz clubs at night and doing two or three sessions almost every day. In April of '92, he released his second solo recording—this time featuring the trio with whom he regularly performs in the Paris area.

CB: Can you tell us about your experiences as the drummer in Didier Lockwood's band?
AC: We spent three fantastic years together. I've known Didier forever. I met him in Paris, when he was starting out. We played several times together, and I was part of an early group of his. He'd already recorded a disc, which I hadn't played on. When I went on tour with him, Gordon Beck and Tom Kennedy were part of that group, which lasted one year. Afterwards, he formed another group and made a disc with Tom Kennedy, Thierry Eliez, and Alex Ligertwood. That was in 1987. Then Tom Kennedy left for the U.S., and Jean-Marc Jafet replaced him. We did the tour, but just when it came time to record the new disc, the group broke up. The new manager thought that this wasn't the best direction for Didier's career. So we didn't record the next disc.

CB: You are known as a jazz musician, but I understand that you played in R&B and rock groups early in your career.
AC: Jazz is the discipline I prefer, but I love everything else, too. When I started out, I played rock ‘n’ roll, the twist, R&B, and Brazilian music.

CB: Were you inspired by any drummer in particular when you were young?
AC: No, because I was playing a lot right from the beginning. I developed my own style with the guys I was playing with, rather than in relation to what I heard on albums or the methods of other drummers. It was just the fact of having two sticks in my hands and of being able to play here, there...to always be playing. That's the best school. Do that and practice at home too. I still practice. One always has a goal that one can never reach.

CB: Is there a difference in the way one perceives a musician in the United States as opposed to France?
AB: No. The musicians with whom I work are those who have the chance to play concerts and festivals, so they're generally
musicians for whom things are working out well. They're more or less happy. But often, when I meet young American musicians in France, they have an aggressiveness; they act tough. They say, "Watch out! Here we come!"—which is a bit arrogant. Sometimes they are distrustful. Generally, though, the musicians you meet are excellent players.

CB: What can you tell us about the music business in France today?

AC: People are very receptive. France is a bit behind, but less and less. Before, there was always a ten-year gap behind the States. Now it's different. One phone call and hup!

CB: Is there an indigenous French music, or is it influenced so much by American music that the two are indistinguishable? I'm referring to the kind of music that you play.

AC: French music these days is a melange of harmonic jazz coming from the States and also from France. It's a mix of Brazilian music, Cuban music, and African music. In France, we're a meeting point for all those influences and musics. Only in France does that exist. We have that melange of music termed "world musique" in the strict sense of the term.

CB: Do you strive consciously to integrate those elements into your playing?

AC: Yes, consciously and unconsciously. The other day I gave a master class and I played in a city where there are many young Arabs. I played something and someone said, "I know that; that's from our music!" I said, "Really?!" I was happily surprised! I play Brazilian music or Cuban music like I hear it in my head; I don't play it like the specialists. I've played a lot with Tania Maria, with whom I went to the States. I play in France with Marcia Maria—a fantastic Brazilian vocalist. I manage to play with all these people and eventually create what you could call a "melting pot": something undefinable but that results in something typically French. In Paris, there is a musical potential that is incredible. There are musicians who play jazz, specialists who play bebop, rock, and jazz.

CB: Can you explain where your style of playing comes from?

AC: In my playing, I think there are few licks that I copied from somewhere. But one day when somebody gave me the video of Steve Gadd playing on Zildjian day, I said, "Shit!" I recognized some very familiar phrases—and we've never met. I've never listened to other drummers to cop licks, but we've unconsciously got the same influences. I don't put down those who adopt other people's licks; it's just a procedure that goes against my character. Maybe I'm too proud. If I suddenly play something that someone else has played, I'm bothered. That's not to say that I'm super-original either. I'm still part of that crowd where everybody plays more or less like everybody else. But each still has his singular differences.

I went to a music conservatory, but I have a personal technique that's a bit anarchic—which has its advantages and its disadvantages. The disadvantages make it more difficult to play certain things, but the advantage is that I sound different. I've never gone to those schools where there are a hundred drummers and everybody plays like everybody else. If you end up playing like someone else, it's useless. You have to be careful. It's not a bad idea to study for a year, then to go back home and shed. That's what my son did. He practices by himself. If he succeeds, it will be thanks to him, because he worked at it. You don't need someone to tell you, "No, you don't do it like that!"

CB: You're perhaps best-known in the States for your collaboration on a record by Bunny Brunei. What are your memories of that period?

AC: That's an album that was made in very difficult circumstances in a not-too-great studio. But we were eager to do it. Bunny took the tape and had it mixed in the States by Chick Corea's producer. He managed to get a good sound out of it. Also, Chick played on it. The result was really good. I know that record is still popular now, which I'm very happy about!

CB: Can you tell us about your own most recent recording?

AC: It's my trio and it's entitled Hat Snatcher. Didier Lockwood and my brother have guest spots on it. The music is what is now called "jazz rock fusion." It's a melange of all sorts of music. It was recorded in the Studio de Dames—a state-of-the-art studio—in a "live" context, in order to get that "live" atmosphere. I'm pretty satisfied with the result, although it depresses me to do an album. I want so badly to record a good disc that when I finish one I don't even want to listen to it.

CB: How might you prepare for a recording session?

AC: It depends. If it's something normal, I don't necessarily have to prepare. I get there and just play it. I've been doing that for years. But now things are more specialized. So when I want to do something a bit more elaborate, I'm sent a cassette a few days before. I listen to it so that when I arrive, I already know the stuff.

CB: What is your approach to a tune when you first hear it?

AC: If there are no drums on the tape, I try to find my place inside the song. If there is an electronic drum track already, or a demo suggesting a rhythm, I get inspiration from it. If someone says, "That's it," I play that. If they say, "Do what you want," I try my best to come up with something.
CB: How do you approach a lead sheet?
AC: I look at the typography. Afterwards, it's a matter of habit. I look and I understand; it's logical. I don't need to count the measures.

CB: Do you have a special relationship with any particular musicians or producers?
AC: I am grateful to Mick Lanaro, without whom everything would have been more difficult. He's the producer of a dozen French artists who create music of top quality and yet bring him little money. He's won several French music awards—the equivalent of the American "Grammys." He makes as many records for small, unknown groups as for the commercial ones. Thanks to people like him, we've managed to make records in respectable conditions, with proper distribution, for a serious record company. Even if we don't sell millions of copies, we keep our dignity, and it doesn't cost them a lot. For example, Mick produced my solo album (*Danzes Sur Mot*). It was fantastic for us. For a jazz record, it has sold well—six or seven thousand copies—without any publicity.

CB: What constitutes success, in your opinion?
AC: If you are sincere and want to make music for music's sake—and not to make money or to become a star—and if you work at it seriously, there's normally no problem. On the other hand, if you want to make it at any cost—even being a good musician—you're banging on a door that is going to break.

The whole thing must come little by little. It's a science. Learning it isn't so much a matter of a string of separate experiences. You must learn about it in its wholeness. You can't say, "Alright, I'm going to play to make some money." You've got to play for the music. If, in so doing, you make money, great! But if you don't make anything, don't stop for that reason.

André Ceccarelli can truly be called a world class musician. His artistry spans many years and styles of music—from his early years at the Moulin Rouge to gigs with artists such as the Brecker Brothers, Tina Turner and Dee Dee Bridgewater. In collaboration with Vic Firth, André has translated these years of artistic experience into a potent and versatile stick.

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RF: Where had you learned how to record?
CM: I had done session work in Colorado, doing demos for guys and different things. Jim Mason, who produced Firefall, had moved there, and I did some of the things he was doing. I was in over my head when I got to LA, though; I'm sure I was.

RF: What did you have to learn?
CM: One thing I hadn't done a lot of was play with click tracks. That was right when we were coming into the techno era, and everything was sequenced. And it was, "Okay, do that and read"—which I was way rusty at—"plus, make it feel like you're not reading." I listen back now to things I played on, and it was fine, but...I was very fortunate. There were definitely times where I was just going, "Man, I just know I'm not doing as good a job as I should be."

RF: What did you do?
CM: I just kept plowing away and trying to study what I had done—what was wrong with it and why it wasn't feeling good to me—and praying that they'd keep calling me and not figure it out. The next thing I knew I was working with Michael Landau and Marty Walsh and all these major session guys. There was a keyboard player named Smitty Price, who was really cool, and he started calling me for stuff he was producing, and it just snowballed.

RF: By the way, where did the name "Cactus" come from?
CM: Back when I was in high school.
RF: So the credits on those albums say "Cactus"?
CM: Yeah. And I wasn't playing anything but rock 'n' roll. I was raised on a ranch and had pals who were cowboys. They'd come to see me at these wild rock 'n' roll shows, and they called me "kid." "Cactus Kid" became a catch phrase, and people never forgot it. I figured it was something people would remember.

RF: Does anyone call you Scott?
CM: My mother—and only when I'm in trouble. People think I changed my name because I'm in country music.
RF: How did Highway 101 actually come together?
CM: I was still living at Jonathan's house...
when I got a phone call from Denver from [manager] Chuck Morris. The last thing I had done before leaving Colorado was a session for the Dirt Band. It was a song about John Wayne, and Jimmie Fadden wasn't around. I don't even know how they found me, but Chuck got on the phone and said, "I have this idea for a band. In country music, there's never been a group sort of like Fleetwood Mac, with a female vocalist, but with the possibility of male vocals as well." I didn't have a clue about country music, but not wanting to turn anything down, I said okay. He had talked to Paulette [Carlson] already, and I felt good about being on the ground level of something. At that same time, I had been doing some work with David Williams, a great guitar player who plays with Michael Jackson. We had done a session for a girl singer who was sort of Madonna-esque, so when it came time for Madonna to actually go out on her Like A Virgin tour and there was some confusion as to whether Jonathan Moffet was going to work with Michael Jackson or Madonna, David Williams asked me if I'd be interested in working with Madonna. Of course we were all hearing about what the salaries were going to be, so I was very tempted, but at the same time, I got this call about Highway 101. So I went out to Colorado, having never met anybody in the band before. There were actually some other players who were involved at the time, and it was a very interesting band. It definitely wasn't a country band. Those original tapes were really rockin'.

RF: Are any of the original musicians involved today?
CM: Curds [Stone] came in on the original bunch. There were a lot of great players involved, who, for one reason or another, didn't make sense musically. We kept changing it and interacting. Every couple of months we'd get together for a day or two. I was just looking at it as a chance to meet producer Paul Worley, who was starting to happen in Nashville.
We put out the first record, and the next thing I knew I got a call from management saying, "Isn't that great what's going on with the record?" And I hadn't even thought about the record. I knew there was a single out, but I hadn't paid much attention. It was like number 15 the third week out. What was really appealing to me about the band thing was, as a session player, I was a slave to the phone. If it rang, I had work. If it didn't, I didn't. And the thought of the songwriting involved in the project was also appealing.

RF: Tell us about that first album.
CM: We cut four or five sides, which were out there happening, but we hadn't made an album yet. They called and said they were going to put us out on the road, and we weren't even a band yet. Jack Daniels came in at that point. The first gig was like 25,000 people at a baseball stadium opening for Waylon Jennings. I had gone out and done things with Johnny Rivers, but it was different being part of a band. It was different being the one talking to the audience.

I wanted this band to be different, so I walked into the first rehearsals we had...
and set up on the side of the stage, downstage right, on the front of the stage. In the Too High Band I had done a lot of the raps and had been very involved in it.

RF: When did you start singing?
CM: When I started playing in bands. I never thought anything about playing and singing at the same time. It just came naturally. Another thing was I got back into playing guitar, too. Guitar players started showing me how to make G chords, A chords, and D chords, and that's what I write on.

RF: So all of a sudden, Highway 101 was an entity. You were in country music for the first time in your life.
CM: It's really kind of a magical thing when you look back. We were immediately cast into the forefront of everything. Country music was just beginning to have this new face. Dwight Yoakam, Steve Earle, and Randy Travis were just starting to happen. There was still the old guard, but something new was happening. And we were like a rock 'n' roll band. We never thought about it, but we were never going to dress country. We weren't going to be any different than what we really had been. My goal was to be a drummer in country music who was going to play what I felt. You hear the stories of drummers playing the Grand Ole Opry without a bass drum—just a hi-hat, a snare, and a cymbal. Even though we're supposedly country, I actually play busier in this band than anything I've ever done. It's kind of funny. The drums have almost become the lead instrument...well...besides the guitar. In a country band, that's incredible.

I sort of envisioned what Terry Bozzio would do if he were playing in this country band. It obviously has to be within reason and taste, but I was doing 32nd-note rolls on the hi-hat and double-bass stuff in the middle of country songs, and guys were saying, "How are you getting that in there without totally ruining the songs?" I said, "I don't really know, to be honest. It just works."

RF: Considering that your method goes over so well and you've been successful at it, what doesn't make sense is how it seems that country radio wants the drums to be barely audible.
CM: That's true and not true. One of the things we really had a big hand in, in hindsight, is that we were the first to use big room sounds and big drum sounds. I remember one of the nicest compliments I've ever gotten was about the song "Settin' Me Up," which is actually a Dire Straits song that we cut. The start of the song is a big drum fill, and somebody said, "When my radio came on with the alarm in the morning, I thought my daughter had changed the channel to the rock station." I think country drums have come much more to the forefront than, say, ten years ago. Radio is still sort of conservative, but you've got Brooks & Dunn and a lot of things where drums are fairly prominent. And I've heard Paul Leim say he's gone to a session where they've said, "Let's do that Highway 101 thing." We certainly had an impact on that.

RF: And nobody has tried to tame you at all?

CM: No, they haven't. We were kind of shooting from the hip, which was good. Paul Worley was saying, "Let's just have this be a band and not sound like session guys." He encouraged it from the get-go. He'd say, "If you have something to play, just play it. Don't worry about what style anything is." There has been some backlash. There have been times when we were going to open for someone who would say, "We don't want them with us. The drums are loud and they're like a rock 'n' roll band."

RF: Your band has combined traditional songs with contemporary playing. How do you fit your "stuff" into a real traditional song?

CM: I hear a song and...I don't know...it's just total freedom of expression.

RF: You didn't grow up with country music.

CM: Right, so I don't have preconceived notions of what it has to be. I still hold true, in my heart of hearts, that there shouldn't be a stigma about different styles of music. To me, there's good or bad music. I don't listen to one thing. The other day in the studio, we put up the drum track and [engineer] Ed Seay looked at me and said, "Man, dig that. What a drum track! What kind of music is that?" Then he put up the bass part and it was, "Oh, it's a country record." And certainly I...
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don't just go wild. I think about what's going on with the song. You've got to be tasteful and think about the music, not just the drum part, though I've always kind of fed off the guitar player.

RF: Can you explain that?
CM: It's maybe because I play guitar as well, although I don't play like most of the people I feed off of. It's typical for the bass player and drummer to feed off of each other, but I think I listen a lot to what the guitar player is playing. So maybe I approach the drums a little less rhythmically and a little more musically. I tend to listen a little more to the frosting on top, maybe in coloring the songs with things like cymbal splashes and little intricacies, which might tend to sound like I'm playing with the guitar player.

RF: How do you record?
CM: Fairly live. We've always used a steel player and a piano player for tracking, and we bring guys on the road who play those instruments.

On this new record, we're making some changes in the sound of the band. We feel we were out in the forefront, but the records were starting to sound alike. We changed singers and we made *Bing Bang Boom* as kind of a transitional record.

RF: I heard the parting with Paulette was not amicable.
CM: I think it was amicable in the sense that we both wanted to do something different. There were some rough things, but it wasn't a big battle. It had been strained a little bit off and on for a while. Some people's viewpoint was that it was Paulette with some guys playing behind her. It was never that. It was a band and we had very definite views on what songs we did and on career decisions. We were having success and number-one songs on what songs we did and on career decisions. We were having success and number-one songs that we were having differences of opinions about. In my mind I was thinking, "It's working, so why would you want to jump ship?" She wasn't happy with the material we were doing and the things you have to do to have a career. We were definitely having to go out and work a lot on the road. I didn't want to do it any more than she did, but....

RF: How much does the average country band have to be out on the road?
CM: When we first started, we were having to go out over two hundred days a year. Now, because of the increasing record sales in country music, that's changed.

Last year we were probably out only about six months.

RF: When Nicki [Nelson] came into the situation, how did that change your approach?
CM: We looked at a broader range of tunes. By that point, I had really become more involved in the writing. That was cool because we could write more varied types of material.

Playing-wise, I feel that on our second album, *Highway 101 2*, I played more. I may have played a little more conservatively on *Paint The Town*. On *Bing Bang Boom*, I think I played a lot more stuff again. Every time we make a new record, I try to come in with some new kind of sound. I'm a big fan of trashy noises, so I've come in with things like broken cymbals sitting on top of each other, or little splash cymbals, and I'd incorporate that into songs. On "Just Say Yes," for instance, halfway through the verse, there's a tom fill and splash cymbal. It was like painting a picture. I thought, "Where's the place on the canvas for a little noise to be?" I was influenced by Terry Bozzio, and I was really into Manu Katché.
RF: How much electronics do you use?
CM: I've cut back somewhat in the studio. I was triggering toms as well as snare and kick on the last album [Greatest Hits]. I triggered cross-stick and some snare stuff on the last three albums or so. On the newest tracks we've cut, I've been using the Englehart Crasher. I slap a trigger on it and fire other trashy noises out of my sampler. I also use Spoxe with little effects cymbals inside them, like on "Who's Lonely Now." The only hi-hat part on that song was a pair of Spoxe with this weird effects cymbal inside of them.

Basically I'm just triggering snare in the studio now. Live, I trigger everything. You just kind of get the point across better. We go from playing a fairground one day to a coliseum the next day. This way, if the sound guy needs to enhance the kick drum, toms, or snare drum, he's got a direct feed from a sampler. I've been using the new Akai and the Alesis D4 together. I'm also mixing a few sounds from an Alesis HR16 for my cross-stick sound. The sound guy has a direct dry sound he can use no matter what else is going on with the miking or anything else. He gets three sounds—the snare, the sampler, and the D4—and he can mix them together.

I'm a real believer in acoustic drums. I use the electronics strictly as a helper. One of the things I was inspired by recently was the last John Cougar Mellencamp album. Kenny Aronoff's stuff is so real, and they get great sounds in that studio up there. It makes the drums sound so real, and whatever it takes to enhance that is all I do.

RF: Can you detail any other noises you might have used through the years on specific songs?
CM: I did play the Spoxe with a pang cymbal inside of it as the hi-hat track on the guitar solo section of "Not That Desperate Yet" [from Bing Bang Boom]. We were looking for something to give the triggered cross-stick more of a real sound when we were recording at Treasure Isle, so I went outside and found a piece of wood. I duct-taped it to my snare stand, and we put a trigger on that and I hit it. That was on the Greatest Hits' new tracks. Because of hearing the stick bleed into the rest of the drum mic's, it did get a little more of an ambient, real sound. I've thought about going back and doing that...
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again, because it's so much more organic than hitting a pad. I remember when I was done, there was a little pile of bark laying next to me.

RF: Of your vast repertoire with Highway 101, what would you say is most representative of you?
CM: "Settin' Me Up" is one of my favorite tunes. In fact, Tris Imboden's playing on "This Is It" was the inspiration—the left hand on the hi-hat and the right hand on the cymbal. I really like "Just Say Yes." The song was about two minutes, and then there was a thirty-second fade that was just a jam. It was dobro and guitar soloing back and forth and me playing on that. We had to battle with our label to get that on the single version. They said, "The words are over, that's all the public wants to hear. Let's fade it out right away." We were going, "No, listen to what the song is about, listen to the mood of it. This takes it somewhere else." Plus, when we were kids, that's what we listened to. You'd ask me what my favorite songs were about and maybe I could sing you the chorus if I heard it, but man, I could sing you the guitar solo in the middle of "Sunshine Of Your Love," or "Layla." We said, "That's what we're about, so let it be." We weren't going to be budged on that, and it was a number-one single. We cut that song live, which I still remember. For some reason, some people had come in to look at the studio or something, and I remember looking through the glass and seeing ten or twelve people in there, and we were rockin'. Sometimes that can be a detriment, but this time it was almost like we had an audience, and it was a first take, live, and that was it.

On Bing Bang Boom there were some cool things. There's a song called "The Restless Kind," which I felt pretty cool about the drums on. I even did a John Bonham bass drum trick in that song, which was kind of neat. He used to play that triplet between the hi-hat and bass drum, and I got that in there.

RF: Are there any tunes that come to mind as having been particularly challenging?
CM: We've had like fifteen straight Top-10 hits. One night I was on the bus and woke Curtis up and said, "Do you know what we didn't play today?" In changing set lists we just forgot "Cry Cry Cry," which was one of the biggest records we had. You can't do all the old hits, but to forget something like that! We're doing medleys now. I love "Cry Cry Cry."

I still love a song that I wrote on the Paint The Town album called "This Side Of Goodbye." I like the drum track on that a lot; I think I even copped some of what Jeff Porcaro did on Jackson Browne's "The Pretender." I think that was what I was envisioning on the song. I also really liked the song from a writing standpoint. It was a very visual song, and it painted a vivid picture to me.

I remember Paul Worley came to me after we did "Somewhere Tonight," where I used one brush and one stick. That one really had a cool groove. I was playing little Steve Gadd-isms, if you will, with inside triplets and things on the hi-hat. When we finished cutting that song, Paul said, "Well, we did it. We made a hillbilly drummer out of you." I remember thinking, "Gee, is that a compliment or what?" But now I know it was. And at the time, I didn't even like the song that much, but of course it became the calling card for the rest of our career.

"The Blame," which I wrote, was the
next-to-last single we had on the *Bing Bang Boom* album. I never even intended it to be a Highway 101 song. It was a big ballad, and it's probably the most country song we've ever done.

A song that I wrote for our new album that we're doing live as well is "Easier Done Than Said," and I'm playing jingle sticks on that—a direct Little Village rip-off. Jim Keltner is another drummer I must pay homage to.

**RF:** After six records, how do you keep it fresh?

**CM:** It's tough. That's something we're really looking at right now. There are going to be some changes on this record—it's time to make some new moves. We've cut some things recently that are more acoustic—drums, bass, and acoustic guitar—thinking of recordings like Neil Young's *Harvest*. We're experimenting to find something new. I want to make a record that people hear and say, "That's Highway 101?" It may be a big chance to take, but if you don't take chances, then you're getting stagnant.

The country music business right now is a really healthy environment because a lot of fresh things are going on and being accepted. I think what's been happening to rock 'n' roll recently is really scary, which I think is why people are turning to country music. People are realizing there are songs and real people playing. I'm proud of that.

**RF:** Why are you so involved in the business?

**CM:** I didn't set out to do that. I guess I've always had sort of a political mind. It just seemed that at the inception of Highway 101 there was a need. There was no road manager at first, and it was all thrown together. I went in more as a session player. Then all of a sudden, we had hits. We weren't a live touring band, and they were saying, "You've got to go out and play." So it was, "Who is going to do this? Who is going to do that?" It looked to me that I'd better step forward, so I did. That was the beginning of getting involved in the business part of it.

**RF:** What do you do business-wise today?

**CM:** Single choices are a big thing—what's the next song going to be? What is radio looking for right now? I'm on the phone with management, giving them my ideas on that, or calling the label and talking to the A&R person to see what kind of
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climate they're feeling and the feedback they're getting from the album. Or I'll be calling the radio stations. Then there's two more hours before soundcheck, and I need to call the agency to make sure about everything. You have to oversee everybody. It's the old cliche: If I don't do it, it's not going to get done right. Unfortunately that can almost kill you, too. I've had it affect my family life because I've been so involved and so busy. I've really had to work on delegating responsibility, because it was going to kill me and everything that mattered to me.

RF: What do you desire for down the road?
CM: I'm seeing the songwriting thing as being a great means to afford my music and family habits. That's one of the true joys—having children. You see a lot of what you didn't see in perspective. Ultimately, I'd like to see more with the band, obviously, but also working towards getting back playing on more records. I really miss that.

I remember reading a Jeff Porcaro quote in Modern Drummer where he said he couldn't imagine guys who were in bands who made one album a year. I used to sit there and go, "I agree," but actually, I'm almost doing that now. That isn't really fulfilling on that level. I love playing live; I love the crowd feedback. But I really enjoy being in the studio creating something right there. I've started to work towards producing some things, and through this band, fortunately, I have a lot of open doors in the business. There's that word again—"business." Even though I'm saying some negative things about it, I think if you're going to have a career, you've got to be aware of the business.

When you get into it, though, you have to be careful. You can lose the romantic draw you had for music. I can still remember when I was in junior high and I'd go to see some college guys play in the high school gym. I remember getting this incredible rush, almost like cold chills, going into the gym. Everybody would be sitting on the floor, the gym would be blacked out, and just seeing the blue and red lights on the amplifiers on stage would give me this incredible charge. I still get goose bumps thinking about it. That was the coolest thing. That's why I got into music, and I'd like to get those feelings back into the music.
Flam Workout

by Rodney Ledbetter

The following exercises are designed to develop flams by hand-to-hand succession in both odd and even groupings of 3-, 4-, 5-, and 6-note patterns. They will help your ability to place flams in virtually any location inside of any rhythmic grouping. They’ll also help you to develop a better feel for odd rhythm patterns that require different subdivisions of meter.

Each exercise is a hand-to-hand progression that only deviates from the alternation of right to left (or left to right) in the even exercises, which contain many doubled left-hand or doubled right-hand stickings. The odd exercises always alternate from hand to hand.

The use of a metronome is highly recommended in the development of these exercises. I suggest setting the metronome at a variety of tempos, but always make sure the subdivision matches that of the 16th notes. For example, set the metronome at 160 beats per minute, and that will give you the tempo of the 16th-note patterns. To help you understand this better, the time signatures are written in 3/16, 4/16, 5/16, and 6/16 formats.

Before playing the exercises as written, it may be helpful to play the patterns with accents first, and then continue by adding the flams later. Just play accents on any 16th note that has a flam preceding it.

Once you’ve mastered these exercises, try them with all rights and all lefts, or make up your own sticking patterns based on these and then apply them to a variety of situations. You might also want to expand these exercises to larger time signatures, including 7/16 and 8/16. Finally, be sure to pay close attention to the sticking patterns that I have included.
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So if you are looking for a new set of brushes or just a new sound, look for the name you can trust.
This month's *Drum Soloist* features a 32-bar solo from Joey Heredia. The solo appears near the end of "Fight The Giant," from Tribal Tech's self-titled album of a couple of years ago (on Relativity). Joey combines Latin, funk, and fusion influences into his own unique playing style, and on this particular solo you get to hear his sound as well as a good dose of impressive chops. Check it out.
Called "Rain When I Die." But that's kind of weird, too, because most of our songs just come from jamming as a band. If you're not a guitar player or you don't write the words, I guess you don't get writing credit; if you don't play notes, you don't make melody. "Rain When I Die" came from jamming, just like the other songs, but I guess I got credit because I started playing this drum beat in rehearsal and Jerry [Cantrell, guitarist] came up with a riff off it. But that whole song really just happened from a jam.

MP: Did any songs on Dirt take a little extra time or work to put on tape?
SK: Not really. We rehearsed for the album in L.A. and were still writing for the record right up until a couple weeks before we went in to record it. But the day that we actually started tracking was the day the verdict in the Rodney King trial came down and the riots started happening. We were staying up on the marina on this beach in Marina Del Rey and Venice, so we were away from it a bit. But the studio where we were recording was in North Hollywood, and we had to drive right through the mess to get there. What we saw was insane! It was martial law and you couldn't get around anywhere. I was freaked out because people were burning down their own neighborhoods, shooting each other and shooting at the firemen trying to put out the fires that they'd started! It was like a war and it was a really disturbing thing to watch, that people could be that stupid. We had to stop and take a week off, but it didn't affect our music or our record at all in any other way.

MP: Tell me about the Sap record. It seemed to be a real departure for you and artistically, I think it gave the band a lot of credibility.
SK: We'd recorded a bunch of songs for the movie Singles, just demo stuff. We did ten songs in two days, but they were songs we wouldn't put on an Alice In Chains album, because they're not in a style that really fits into what the band is about. But it's stuff we still like playing. One night, I woke up from this dream that told me we were going to release these songs on a record called Sap. I told the guys about it and they thought it was weird—but cool, too—and that we should do it. So we asked the record company to release it, but that we didn't want any advertising or promotion about it, just word of mouth. We gave copies away to people in our fan club, and we put it out in stores, and we were surprised that it actually sold a couple hundred thousand. It had four serious, slower songs and then one horrible song at the end that we didn't even give a name to. We all switched instruments for that one, and I sang vocals through a megaphone—it was just the worst thing ever recorded. [laughs] We listened back and said, "Cool, let's put it on the record." It was the perfect finishing touch. Still, Sap must have really set things up well for the new record.

SK: We didn't plan that way, but between Sap and the Singles soundtrack, they got a lot of hype going for the second record. The record company people were telling us it was going to be huge, but we were like, "Yeah, right." The last record got to be number 41 and we were...
thinking what it would be like to get into
the Top 40. We never thought we'd be
anything like a Top-40 band, and the
record company said Dirt would debut in
the Top 10. We figured if they were say-
ing that, it would really be something
like number 25 or 30, but then we heard
it was number 6 the first week out, and
that just blew us away. That's what
SoundScan [the actual sales charting
system now used for Billboard magazine
charts] has done for us. When we get
ahead of Michael Bolton, we'll know
we've made it—or at least that we have
bad hair!

MP: Did you ever want or realistically
hope for this level of success?
SK: Well, everybody wants it, but we've
never done anything special to help make
that happen. And the success doesn't
affect us in any way except that we have
to hole up in our hotel rooms more
because more weird people are after us.
But we love playing and hanging out, and
we don't want to get to the point where
we just can't hang out anymore. That's
what has happened to Pearl Jam; Eddie
Vedder gets freaked out by it so much he
can't live his life anymore, and I don't
want to have that happen to me. Things
are weird enough right now, but I want to
still be able to go out and have a drink.
You can control things like that, though.

MP: Where do you see this band going
artistically?
SK: We don't put a lot of thought into
things like that. We don't preconceive or
diagnose things, and the record company
is pretty cool about not pushing us in any
direction. We always want to be about
having fun on stage and playing as close
to the people as possible. One good thing
is that we've got twice as many songs to
play now, with the second album out.
And we're anxious to be on the road for a
while and play to real people to see what
they think of the new songs. And we're
going out in theaters this time, which
will be really cool. In clubs, kids some-
times can't get in because they're under-
age. And we just don't feel as comfort-
able in large arenas. I mean, we can do it,
and we have done it many times, but you
can pack a lot of people into a theater
and still play in their faces. You're not a
million miles away from everybody.

MP: Did you have any goals in life or
about your musical career before Alice
ever took shape or broke big?
SK: No, not really. I just knew I liked
playing drums, but I never even really
thought about joining a band. I started
out like every other kid, I guess, banging
on my mom's pots and pans in the
kitchen until they got me these little toy
drum sets. I used to go sit and watch my
grandfather's band, which was kind of a
country-swing band that played at wed-
dings and square dances. And when
they'd take breaks, I used to go sit on the
drummer's set and fool around. Then
when I was about nine years old, the
drummer they had retired and my grand-
pa asked me to come out and play with
him. And that's the only other band I've
ever played in except for this band. I was
in my grandfather's band from the time I
was nine until I was about thirteen, and
it was good for me because I traveled
around with all these fifty- and sixty-
year-olds and played all these different
styles of music. I never really joined a
band after that, just jammed with a
bunch of different people. But I never
felt any of those things were going to amount to anything. I took lessons when I was eleven for about a year, and I learned about the rudiments. But that's still something I never think about; they just naturally work their way into my playing. When I got in high school, I played with the stage band. It was a new school, so the program wasn't really developed yet, but I still got off playing jazz and swing. Later on, I did some studio stuff for some friends sometimes, just because they needed a drummer to play on their tunes. But Alice was the first band I actually joined.

**MP:** How did you come by meeting these guys?

**SK:** I've known Mike [Starr, bassist] ever since I was twelve years old. He was in one of the bands I jammed with, and we both got booted out because we were only twelve and the other guys were like seventeen and eighteen and they got guys their own age to play with them. But later on, Mike started jamming in a band with Jerry for a few weeks, and Mike and I met Layne [Staley, singer] down in Seattle somewhere. Meanwhile, Jerry started looking for a drummer and called me to come down and check his stuff out, and I thought it was really cool. It was just this heavier, shittier stuff that I'd always been into but hadn't found anybody else playing before. Everybody else was trying to be like Bon Jovi. Then we called Mike down to jam with us, and a couple days later, we were jamming in the room that Layne's band was using. Layne came in and just started screwing around while we were playing, and we thought it sounded cool. Layne couldn't decide whether he wanted to do our band or stay in this funk-type thing he was already involved in, but we talked him into it. Then we opened some shows for Mother Love Bone and Soundgarden, and we started seriously looking at Seattle for new bands. We never really had a band name, but we got close to signing a deal, so we just took the name from Layne's old band, which was called Alice In Chains. It was a glam band that played thrash. They'd dress up in dresses, big hair, and makeup, and play Slayer!

**MP:** Did you start out playing covers or did you always write your own songs?

**SK:** We never did covers. We couldn't do 'em if we tried! Actually, I think we put together a version of "Suffragette City" that was barely listenable. [laughs] But we had to get tunes together pretty quick because we had our first show only two weeks after forming the band. We rehearsed in this hall with about fifty other bands, and Layne and Jerry were actually living there at the time. Anyway, we never had something like five songs, and this promoter asked us to play a show at the University of Washington, and we said sure. And he asked us, "Can you play 45 minutes?" and we looked at each other and said "...yeah, sure we can." So we went out and played the only five songs we could throw together, which lasted about twenty minutes. I can't even remember what those songs were—we don't play them anymore—but the band just evolved from there.

We'd been playing more than half the songs from the first record for about a
year and a half in the clubs, so we were
pretty burned out on them before the
first record even came out. There's a
time span of about two years between
the first songs we wrote for that record
and the last ones. We've just become
much more of a band since then and
developed a kind of identity, so this new
album is probably more of a true state-
ment about what this band is. Actually,
the songs "Dirt" and "Rooster" were
written about two years ago, when we
first went out on the road, but most of
the others were written pretty recently,
right up until a few weeks before we
went into the studio.
MP: Did you record "Would?" at the
same time you recorded the other songs
for Dirt?
SK: "Would?" is kind of a song by itself.
That was originally written and recorded
at the same time we did Sap, but then
we re-recorded it for the movie sound-
track because they wanted a better ver-
tion. That song is real melodic and sim-
ple, and I guess it's a little different from
the other songs on Dirt or anything else
we've done.
MP: Do you see yourself getting more
into the writing?
SK: Yeah, definitely. I never had all the
equipment to do it before, like guitars,
but now I pluck around on the guitar and
keyboards and I'm getting a little better
at it. I'm always screwing around with
things, but I actually came up with stuff
by the end of writing for the new album
that we thought about putting together
and using. But we already had so much
stuff to work with and we didn't want to
clutter things up any more than we had
to. But those ideas are still there, and
maybe they'll surface on the next record.
MP: Do you think this band has a long
career ahead of it?
SK: I'd like to think so. I mean, I really
like what we're doing and the way things
have worked out so far. And we're all
pretty good friends, so I don't see any
member leaving and this band continue-
ing with a new guy. That's not what
we're about. The four of us have made
the band what it is, and it's our personal-
ity. Like I said, I've never been in another
real band except for this one, and I don't
know if I'd join another or even look for
one. Maybe I'll go into a polka band or
something like that. [laughs] Really,
though, I never wanted to do anything
else. I wasn't one of those kids who
wanted to be a fireman when he grew up.
I always knew that, somehow, I'd end up
being in a rock band. I never worried
about it or kissed anybody's ass to do it,
but I knew it would be there.
I was twenty when we got signed, and
we're still all young and I think we've got
a lot of music left in us. We're playing
the kind of stuff I've always wanted to
play, and we really make music that just
makes us happy. We want other people to
like it and I'm glad that, so far, it seems
like they do. It's good that people are
getting into heavier stuff, but I know
we're not going to change just because
trends might change and people start lis-
tening to other kinds of music. We'll
always do what feels right to us.
When Calfskin Was King: Part 3

by Woody Thompson

In our previous two installments, we examined the history of the calfskin drumhead—including its method of manufacture and its rise and fall within the drumming industry. But while it's undeniably true that the use of calfskin has reduced dramatically since its heyday in the 1940s and '50s, it is certainly not true to say that it has disappeared entirely. Several notable drummers still use calf, and are quite vocal in their admiration for its unique qualities. It's also true that certain musical trends are influencing today's drummers in such a way as to make experimentation with calfskin a very appealing prospect—as we shall see in this final installment of our series.

Today, some older jazz players still use calf because they believe that the sound of calfskin better complements the acoustic sound of a jazz group. Jake Hanna, well-known for his work with Woody Herman and an active player today, still uses calfskin batter heads. "If you're playing with musical people who get a good sound on their own instruments," says Jake, "you don't want to interrupt it with the harsh sound of plastic. You want to support them as best you can—because they're worth supporting.

"I was one of the first guys to use plastic heads, in 1957," Jake continues, "but Woody Herman hated them, so I went back to calf. Plastic heads are better for rock 'n' roll, where you're not looking for a mellow tone. Calf is so easy to roll on, so easy to play on. And if you're doing a lot of brushes, man, you gotta have calf; plastic doesn't deliver. Calf has a nice soft sound, and the surface of the head stays rough. Plastic loses its resiliency after a while, but calf lasts forever. I've seen some calf heads that are forty or fifty years old. I've got a head on my bass drum from the 1940s."

Jake is also an expert at keeping a calf head in a "musical frame of mind." "You need to tension them back at the end of every night," says Jake. "You loosen up the snare and the tomtoms. But you tighten the bass drum batter head up very tight when you get through playing. You have to be able to back that head off—it has to come down when you start playing. If you don't, you get a high-pitched kick drum; you don't have a bass drum anymore. You could run the risk of the snare and tomtoms ripping if you don't back them off, but not the bass drum. It's too big and the skin is too tough."

Drummers like Jake Hanna and the late Mel Lewis influenced a new generation of players. Jeff Hamilton, for example, has used calfskin batter heads on all his gigs in recent years—including work with Oscar Peterson, the Ray Brown Trio, and the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, and on records with Diane Schuur and Natalie Cole. Growing up in the late 1950s and early '60s, Jeff started playing drums at the same time that Mylar was starting to replace calf. Drawn to the sounds of big band, swing, and bebop, Jeff played with the Tommy Dorsey and Woody Herman big bands in the 1970s using Evans Blue-X plastic heads that Bob Beals, of Evans Drumheads, sprayed with a rough coating (to make them suitable for brush playing). However, as Jeff explains, "After hearing Mel Lewis, Jake Hanna, and an LA drummer named Ted Hawke playing on calf, I decided that I should give calf a shot—because these guys had great-sounding drums. I'd played on them, and they also felt better than mine with the plastic. So around '78 or '79 I went to calfskin on the snare. I liked it so much that I started to put them on the batter sides of all the drums. On Mel Lewis's advice, I didn't put them on..."
you strike the drum. The plastic tends to send the stick back a little bit on calf—giving you a better touch and a better feel when the way a calf head does. The stick will sink into the head a little bit on calf—giving you a better touch and a better feel when you strike the drum. The plastic tends to send the stick back quicker—with the exception of the lower tom-toms. Then it tends to feel a little "Mylar"-tions, Jeff has become attuned to the differences in sound and feel between the two materials. "Mylar tends to feel a little stiffer to me. I don't really feel like the head "grabs" the stick much. With calfskin, you get a more consistent touch, whether the head is low or high in pitch. I have calf on both heads of my bass drum, and it produces a big, round sound that way. I seem to get more true overtones than with a plastic head. For brushes, calf is incredible on the snare drum; I get a much fuller sound and much more control. Since calfskin heads are mounted on wooden hoops, I don't get the metal rim of the drum against the metal hoop of the plastic head producing a 'singing' sound. The drum rim sits on a wooden hoop, and that gives the drum a warmer sound.

Having played on both Mylar and calf in professional situations, Jeff has become attuned to the differences in sound and feel between the two materials. "Mylar tends to feel a little stiffer to me. I don't really feel like the head "grabs" the stick much. With calfskin, you get a more consistent touch, whether the head is low or high in pitch. I have calf on both heads of my bass drum, and it produces a big, round sound that way. I seem to get more true overtones than with a plastic head. For brushes, calf is incredible on the snare drum; I get a much fuller sound and much more control. Since calfskin heads are mounted on wooden hoops, I don't get the metal rim of the drum against the metal hoop of the plastic head producing a 'singing' sound. The drum rim sits on a wooden hoop, and that gives the drum a warmer sound.

The King Of Calfskin

"I will devote all my energy—whatever I still have left—to the making of the drumheads. I come here even on Sundays sometimes, when I just look at the skins or touch them. Sometimes my wife gets angry at me, but that's the way I am. We don't have any children, so this is my child."

In this way, Steve Palansky describes his dedication to the art of making calfskin drumheads. It is a dedication that has carried him through the good years and bad years of head-making to the present, where his company, United Rawhide Manufacturing, stands as the last remaining American maker of calfskin drumset and timpani heads.

Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, who were leather-workers in the Czechoslovakian town of Brezova, Palansky founded his business in Chicago in 1950 with $300 borrowed from a friend. "I felt there was a possibility for the market to carry another company," Palansky says. "I chose drumheads because it was the smallest investment. My first order was to Ludwig, and my second was to the Gretsch Drum Co., in New York. I took the night train, went to Brooklyn, and delivered the $200 order to Fred Gretsch in person. Even though my product, at the time, wasn't the best, they appreciated the personal service. I must have made a great impression on them, because they started dealing with me again. Ultimately, I became their sole supplier."

The introduction of Mylar drumheads hit United Rawhide as hard as it did the other calf-head manufacturers, and Palansky admits that the change caused him a few ulcers. In its peak years, United was turning out 1,500 to 2,500 heads a week. The decrease in demand caused by Mylar heads necessitated a diversification of their product line. This included the manufacture of rawhide dogbones and soft-cover cases for drums. But Palansky felt that the discerning drummer would always have a need for calfskin. "Mylar has certain advantages, and calfskin has certain advantages," says Palansky, "and it's up to the individual. If he wants to play outside, he would choose plastic. If he wants to make a recording, he will use genuine calfskin. Mylar will never vibrate the way a skin will vibrate. The duration of the beat on Mylar is very short, like a 'boom.' But calfskin will be 'booooom.' I can tell the difference between a plastic timpani and a rawhide timpani. But the beginners, they don't know the difference."

Today, as ever, Palansky pays a great deal of attention to the quality of his product. "It isn't just 'make a drumhead,'" he says. "The quality depends on the duration of the tannage, the temperature of the solution, and the different chemicals used. You can go to tanning school and they will teach you only the basics. Then you have to deviate from the basic processes and develop your own. Every company has its own secrets. We do it the old-fashioned way. In order for a skin to vibrate, it has to be free of all impurities—and only by hand can you get the impurities out."

Having survived the Mylar revolution, today Palansky is faced with a new problem: the scarcity of quality raw skins. "Even though we are getting more and more inquiries," he says, "we don't do any advertising whatsoever—because I am unable to get enough good skins. These so-called skinners who skin the animals—they don't care. They take a beautiful skin and cut it in the middle. I cannot give someone a timpani head with a cut in the center. The timpanists for the Chicago Symphony and the Cleveland Symphony are begging me, but I just cannot produce enough timpani heads because I cannot get enough skins."

The scarcity of quality skins is compounded by the scarcity of head-makers. Currently, most of the rawhide heads for American classical percussionists are provided either by United Rawhide or Vellum and Parchment Works, of Kildare, Ireland. Palansky, now 72 years old and childless, is concerned about the future of his craft. "I would love to sell the business to a father and son. It would take them six months to learn this trade, and they could make a nice living. There are many excellent drummers that don't even know that I exist; if they would buy just one drumhead every two years, can you imagine?"

Palansky's dedication to his work has earned him the respect of others in the drum industry. John Emory, formerly of American Rawhide, has called him a "good competitor." Barry Greenspan, of Drummer's World in New York, retails United's complete line of drum and percussion heads and says of Palansky, "He's a rare person in this business. He's got a real history with head-making and some kind of compassion with the people he deals with, which is rather unique."

Palansky himself has a very spiritual vision of his life and work. "I'm so happy. Whenever I pray, I thank God for finding me this job. Before I go to bed, I reminisce about my past. With God's guidance, it was so beautiful; whatever I touched turned to gold."

Steve Palansky in the 1950s
Combining calfskin batter heads with Mylar bottom heads seems to be common among present users of calfskin heads. Remo's Fiberskyn head is most often mentioned as a good match for calfskin on the bottom (or as a substitute for calf when calf is absolutely impractical). Jake Hanna goes so far as to recommend Mylar for certain uses: "The plastic drumhead companies make very good bottom heads. Even Billy Gladstone used plastic underneath, and he was a very, very fussy guy."

Mel Lewis's drum sound is considered so unusual and important that even today, several years after his death, drummers performing with his big band at the Village Vanguard on Monday nights use his drums, cymbals, drumheads, and even his drumsticks—in an effort to achieve the sound and blend that Mel produced with the group. There's little doubt that the beauty of his sound was largely due to his die-hard use of calfskin and his ability to tune it.

Danny Gottlieb has had many opportunities to use Mel's set on the Monday night gig. "Every part of Mel's drumkit seemed to fit in musically," says Danny, "and somehow make the band sound warmer and more complete. The calf heads added a certain musicality that is unique unto itself—and was characteristic of all the recordings that Mel did on calfskin. It's like a resonance that's not offensive, and that adds more sound and a certain kind of bottom to the music. Sometimes low frequencies can get in the way and blot things out, but this is a low end so subtle that it adds a certain kind of resonance that makes the tone stretch.

"Mel used to talk about the snare drum being like the fifth trumpet, on the bottom. The calf head doesn't just sound like a crack, it has a kind of ring to it that's like the under-bottom of the trumpet section. In the time that I knew Mel, he first had Gretsch, then Slingerland, and finally Pearl drums—and they always sounded identical. I would say that the combination of the small sticks he used, the way he held them, and without a doubt the calf heads was absolutely integral to his sound."

Compared to the world of popular music, change comes very slowly to classical music, where instruments and sounds have stayed relatively constant over the last hundred years. Timpanists were slower to make the change to Mylar heads, but once the synthetic head companies started to perfect their product for timpani, the advantages of plastic made themselves felt in orchestral percussion sections. John Beck, timpanist with the Rochester Philharmonic and percussion instructor at the Eastman School of Music, feels that switching to Mylar actually enhanced his performance and enjoyment of the music. "With calf," says John, "I wasn't enjoying concerts like I..."
am now. Now I can tune up the drums, sit back, count the measures, listen to the music, and make my entrance. With calf, I was constantly worried about the next entrance being in tune, so I was constantly tuning. It was a never-ending battle. On the other hand, when you get perfect conditions where the climate is stable, a skin head sounds great.

There are still timpanists who are willing to give calf the extra attention it needs, in order to enjoy the beauty of its sound and feel. Paul Yancich, of the Cleveland Symphony, uses calfskin as much as possible (not at outdoor concerts), and comments on his choice: "A good calfskin head has a more supple feel than plastic, the feel and response is more pleasing, and playing on it is a more rewarding experience. The calf provides a better focus of sound, especially in the lower pitches. Calfskin doesn't overload, it's more easily controlled, and the articulation is better. Also, the pitch is more recognizable on a calfskin head; it makes it easier for someone to hear what note it is that you're playing. And I think that it blends better with the overall sound of the orchestra."

Yancich points out that timpanists have been hurt by the scarcity of heads available today—the result of such a small number of head-makers plying their trade. "Back in 1975, when heads were reasonably plentiful," he says, "I had beautiful, perfect heads. But today, a good calfskin head is worth its weight in gold."

Just how difficult is it to deal with the hydroscopic whims of calfskin? A well-circulated story about Davey Tough, the legendary big band drummer, describes him dumping a bucket of water on his entire kit during a performance with the Jimmy Dorsey band in a desperate attempt to back off his calfskin heads, which had been shrunk to an unplayable point by powerful stage lights. It seems that drummers like to talk about those occasions, however rare, when the calfskin is completely unmanageable. Jeff Hamilton tries to put things in perspective: "The worst problem I ever had," says Jeff, "was in Washington D.C. at Wolf Trap. The temperature was about ninety-five degrees, and it was going to rain that night at any time. I had decided to try calfskin for all of the heads, top and bottom. Well, I could hardly get through the night because the heads got damp so quickly. I had the rims tightened down even with the shell, and the heads were still very, very soggy. But really, that's the only problem I've had with calf. I learned from Jake and Mel to loosen the heads after every time I play, and to put them on the plane with the heads loose so the varying temperatures don't affect the head that much. I tighten them up when I get to the gig—usually three turns will do it—and maybe touch them up a few times during the concert. That's generally all that's necessary.

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The Future

What does fate have in store for the calfskin drumhead as we approach the 21st century? Although no one is predicting a major comeback for the material, player/teachers like Jeff Hamilton and Paul Yancich report that there is an interest in calfskin heads among young players who have been exposed to them. At present, however, the major obstacle to re-popularizing calfskin is the scarcity of high-quality heads for Western-style drums. With only one domestic producer of calfskin snare, tom-tom, bass drum, and timpani heads left, availability, selection, and price are definitely issues for those who would use calfskin. (A snare batter head costs about $30 presently; a good timpani head costs $200 to $300.) However, it is quite reasonable to believe that if demand increased, there would be those enterprising enough to fill it, and that the cost would come down with an increased supply.

With an expanded interest in the music of other cultures, along with renewed interest in the thread of American pop music that was interrupted by rock 'n' roll, it is very possible that the music of the 21st century will be increasingly influenced by the beautiful sound of a wood stick on a natural skin. "It's another sound color that you can get from a drumset," says Danny Gottlieb. "And if you choose to use it, you can use it in a very musical way. In a recording situation, even if you're playing rock 'n' roll, you can have a real warm-sounding bass drum. You'd just need to mix it hot, so you wouldn't have to hit too hard. There's a lot of world music being integrated with rock 'n' roll, and if you want a drum sound that has kind of an Indian-African, organic sound, you could use calf. I think anyone who's interested in being a complete musician on the drumset should at least experience what calf feels and sounds like—whether they ultimately choose to use it or not. I intend to have a set constantly equipped with calf heads to use on record dates whenever the music calls for that sound. I'm so glad I know about them."

The drumhead is the vibrating, sound-producing part of a drum—and thus the key ingredient in getting a good sound from the instrument. A great drum can be ruined by the wrong head, while a mediocre drum can sound good with a great head. It's reasonable to think that serious drummers would take great pains to investigate and choose such an important component of their equipment. Because the Mylar head has become such a standard in the world of drumming, most players don't even think about the possible alternative of the natural skin head. But just as modern drummers draw from the playing traditions of their predecessors, perhaps they can also draw from the instrument traditions of those who came before, in order to expand and enrich the sound of their drums.
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When was the last time someone—a drummer, say—rocked your world, impacted your emotional equilibrium, set loose your body, and short-circuited your brain? Well, that someone, at least for a while there, was possessed of a certain greatness. But were they a great player? It's a question that's a good deal more open-ended and murky than it may seem.

To be “great” entails a full package of tangible and not-so-tangible qualities—a rare chemistry of technique and taste. It's easy to confuse the idea of greatness with out-and-out mastery—a no less venerable achievement. Yet mastery, for the most part, involves unbridled technical proficiency—big huge chops all around the instrument. Greatness is something more, something transcendent: big huge chops and an unfailing sense of how they can best serve the music. (Or maybe even just everyday chops and this all-important sense of musicality.)

This is why drummers like Keith Moon and Ringo Starr have as much claim to greatness as other, perhaps more obvious candidates—who may well be able to play faster with one stick. Moon had what every great player has: the power to evoke real emotion. It's a primary element of greatness, and a big part of what makes the notion so elusive and variable.

Non-drummers sometimes choose unlikely drum heroes, players that are not given to (or even capable of) ornate displays of fireworks. Yet the public's criteria includes players who, by some people's definition, do not qualify as full-fledged virtuosos. There are many artists who've developed and refined a particular area of their craft—be it funk, R&B, the half-time shuffle, or whatever—and raised it to levels that enter the realm of greatness.

Their particular hold on greatness, simply put, is not about monster licks. It's about laying down an unshakeable groove with a unique and original touch. It's about having a relaxed, confident approach to the instrument, free from anxieties and hang-ups that can afflict the unsuspecting: free of the need to prove how great you are by relentlessly trucking out dazzling tom fills and pulverizing double-kick assaults. In this world of workaday greatness, chops are but a vehicle that serve more essential matters, like feel and groove and fresh ideas.

But when extreme technical proficiency and great musical sense converge, someone needs to check for fire extinguishers. I've borne witness to such an event more than once, but never as memorably, as indelibly, as when I saw Buddy Rich.

There were maybe a hundred and fifty expectant fans in the small banquet room, packed in tight on institutional folding chairs. Buddy came bounding out and was up on stage and kicking off the band in very short order, leaving most of us a bit dazed. Right off, he started doing the legendary stuff, causing one vociferous audience member to commence what became a night-long fusillade of rapture. The man was more or less jumping out of his skin, ranting and raving at full bore. He pretty much spoke for everyone in the room.

It occurred to me that Buddy was happily residing in that place we all strive to get to—only he wasn't striving. He could simply do anything he wanted, and it was a source of obvious and unabashed joy to him. Every fleeting musical impulse found instant and effortless expression. This was way beyond technique: It was love. And it was greatness of the most indisputable kind.
I went home inspired but daunted that night. I simply had to have a taste, if not a regular diet, of that kind of freedom. But what would it take? The answer, not surprisingly, is not as easy to frame as the question. Perseverance? Fortitude? A burning singularity of purpose? Yes on all counts. But, more importantly, you need to have your head and heart properly located. You have to try hard, but you also have to try smart. You have to let the seeds of greatness take root and blossom—to let your own particular version of greatness sneak up on you when you’re not looking.

In the end, being great means continually endeavoring to make sparks fly. Even Buddy had a look on his face that seemed to say: "Yeah, I’ve got something here, but I want to take it even further!" Full-time greatness is the compulsion to soar to forever-distant heights, fueled by a need to feel what it’s like to be there—and to bring the people some measure of joy and escape along the way.

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"Double Talkin' Jive"
Here Matt plays a cool pattern that simulates double bass, but is actually just one bass drum. He creates the "illusion" by moving his right hand back and forth between the floor tom and the snare drum, creating a constant driving 8th-note pattern between his floor tom and kick drum. His left hand is just riding 8ths on the snare.

"Don't Damn Me"
This beat is a two-bar phrase that complements the 8th-note patterns the rest of the band is playing. It's simple, but again, very effective.

"Bad Apples"
This song shows Matt playing some nice fills around the following beat. The beat shown is the basic pattern Matt plays; he elaborates on it a bit with added 16ths (more often than not preceding the backbeats).
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Ed Blackwell's brown Sonor kit had been set up and waiting for him all week at the Village Vanguard. On Tuesday, September 22, 1992, opening night of tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano's gig, drummer Paul Motian filled in for the ailing Blackwell, who had checked into the hospital the week before with a bout of pancreatic inflammation. But his condition was improving, and Lovano had high hopes that Blackwell would return to the bandstand later in the week. By the weekend, drummer Al Foster was filling in for Blackwell, whose condition had suddenly taken a turn for the worse.

The pancreas problem only compounded Blackwell's long-standing kidney problem. He had been dependent on a dialysis machine since 1972 and constantly played in pain. But, as Max Roach pointed out, "He never said a mumbling word. He was a heroic figure."

Blackwell died at about 6:20 P.M. on Wednesday, October 7, 1992 (ironically the birthday of the great Count Basie drummer, Jo Jones). As his wife of 34 years, Frances Blackwell, explained, "The day that Blackwell was dying, we were all kind of hanging out in his room and playing music...there was just a lot of love and laughter. He was hooked up to a monitor and his heart rate started slowing down. Finally it read zero and we all started to say goodbye. There was some silence for a few moments, then his heart started again. It was beating out a real nice rhythm. And I realized then what he was really telling us...that the rhythm of the heart is really what it's all about."

Hundreds of fans and loved ones gathered at St. Peter's church in midtown Manhattan to say farewell to Blackwell on December 3. In his eulogy, the always-eloquent critic and drummer Stanley Crouch called Blackwell "a great detective of rhythm who solved all problems of swing," and described his approach to the drums as "bringing together the American skyline and the African village."

Blackwell's idol, Max Roach, presided over this moving ceremony, which included performances by such great drummers as Billy Hart, Billy Higgins, Andrew Cyrille, and the up-and-coming young left-handed drummer, Leon Parker—who captured Blackwell's loose feel on the kit. In his opening remarks, following a solo performance on Blackwell's kit set up in St. Peter's, Roach said, "Ed Blackwell was not just a great drummer, he was an original. He did things that none of the rest of us could do or even tried to do. And to be original is what this art is really about."

Poet Jayne Cortez read her "Everywhere Drums," which she had performed with Blackwell in 1991. Royal Hartigan, a student of Blackwell's at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, showed how he had learned to incorporate the talking drum and the trap set for a one-man polyrhythmic choir. A nicely orchestrated polyrhythmic drum solo by Blackwell's son Harry carried the spirit of Africa, as his father had done throughout his illustrious career. And Frances Blackwell sang "Far Country" and "Don't Cry For Me" to her late husband, the latter carrying the line: Don't cry for me/You know the beat goes on/In the breath of all living things.

The ceremony was concluded with a video from Blackwell's last performance—on August 6 at Yoshi's in San Francisco, as part of Eddie Moore's "Celebrate The Drums" Festival. On his final gig, Blackwell was accompanied by bassist Mark Helias, trumpeter Graham Haynes (son of drumming great Roy Haynes), and saxophonist Carlos Ward.

Edward Blackwell was born in New Orleans on October 10, 1929. As New Orleans music writer Kalamu ya Salaam pointed out in his liner notes to Old And New Dreams: A Tribute To Blackwell (Black Saint): "African polyrhythms are still very much alive in the street music of New Orleans, and it is from this context that drummer Edward Blackwell springs."

Blackwell began by imitating his older sister's tap-dancing rhythms with a pair of sticks. Later, he got involved with the drum & bugle corps at Booker T. Washington High School, where he learned the art of parade drumming. His first paying gig came in 1950 with the Johnson Brothers, an R&B band that played popular tunes of the day. Blackwell moved to California in 1951 and later met Ornette Coleman. From 1953 to 1955 they roomed together and practiced on a daily basis. Their paths...
would cross later in New York, where they would make jazz history.

Blackwell returned to New Orleans in 1956 and began working the R&B circuit with Roy Brown, before landing a gig with Ray Charles the following year. At the end of 1957, he returned to New Orleans and joined the modern American Jazz Quintet with pianist Ellis Marsalis, bassist Richard Payne, tenor saxophonist Harold Battiste, and clarinetist Alvin Batiste. Blackwell moved to New York in 1960 and joined Ornette Coleman's revolutionary quartet for an engagement at the Five Spot—an event that served as the springboard for the avant-garde jazz movement. Perhaps the most creative and controversial of his recordings with Coleman was 1960's *Free Jazz*, a collective improvisation between two quartets that included second drummer Billy Higgins.

Blackwell's depth and understanding of African drumming became more acute during a State Department-sponsored tour of Africa in 1969 with pianist Randy Weston. It was at a funeral ceremony in Ghana that the similarities between New Orleans and Africa hit home. Following that trip, Blackwell continued to be as comfortable with 12/8 rhythms as most American drummers are with 4/4.

Some other landmark sessions that Blackwell played on include the John Coltrane-Don Cherry collaboration, *The Avant Garde*, Ornette's *The Art Of The Improviser*, the Eric Dolphy-Booker Little Quintet's *Live At The Five Spot*, and a series of albums by Old And New Dreams, an Ornette alumni-repertory group.

In the last year of his life, Ed Blackwell was exhibiting the same wonderful bounce and organic swing on his kit that he had played with all his life. You can hear the New Orleans parade drumming influence on "Muddy And Willie," a swampy N'awlins funeral dirge from Ray Anderson's *Every One Of Us*, recorded in June of 1992 for Gramavision Records. His omnipresent cowbell work and loose rebound on the snare enliven several tracks from Steve Coleman's *Rhythm In Mind*, recorded on April 29, 1991 for RCA/Novus. But perhaps the most extraordinary showcase of Blackwell's latter-day genius can be heard on Joe Lovano's *From The Soul*, recorded on December 28, 1991 for Blue Note. Between the drums-sax dialog on "Modern Man," his melodic mallet work on Coltrane's "Central Park West," his brisk swing on Thelonius Monk's "Work," and his playful call-and-response playing on "Fort Worth," you get a very revealing glimpse of this ailing man with the warrior’s heart.

During the Blackwell tribute at St. Peter's church, Max Roach read a short message that Ornette had sent from Poland: "For Blackwell. We all knew you and share our existence with you. No one could share, give, or love the international expression and be so dedicated unless they were a saint."

Amen to that.
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ished drum. Once a drum is glued, it's over with; we use a urethane glue that's harder than the wood itself."

After the staves are re-assembled into a drum and glued, they're put into heaters that set the catalytic glue in about fifteen minutes. At that point, the clamping hoops are taken off, and the drum is turned down on a lathe. This is a key operation, as John explains. "It takes an operator about forty minutes to turn the drum down from the rough stage to the finished shape. The excess glue is removed, and the shell is shaped to our specs. Most importantly, the area of the drum on which the drumhead will sit is turned down to the exact diameter it's supposed to be. This top diameter also determines the total shape of the drum, as well as the size of the opening at the bottom."

Isn't forty minutes for one operation on a single drum a very long time in the manufacturing world? "It certainly is," replies John. "And that's for a regular-finish drum made of mahogany. A fiberglass-covered drum—which we offer as one of our finishes—is on the lathe three times. With every application of fiberglass, the drum is brought back into the drum room and turned down. That's something we do that no other drum company does."

After the drum is turned down, it goes to the finishing department, where it receives a stain, a lacquer finish, a fiberglass covering, or Gon Bops' Gel Coat finish—on the exterior only. Nothing is done to the interior. "This is how we maintain the natural concept of mellow wood drums," says John. "I think that putting something on the inside—lacquer or fiberglass—will make the sound brighter, and make it move out faster. The natural wood finish on the inside seems to be the one that produces the best sound. Some people have asked us to lacquer the insides, and that's fine; we'll do whatever the customer wants. But as a rule, we leave them completely raw. Once the drum has a head on it, not very many people are going to look at the inside, anyway."

When it comes to cosmetic finishing, Gon Bops has tried to keep things "real simple," as John puts it. "In the mahogany drum lines there are natural
mahogany, cherry red, or walnut finishes. Those are stains applied to the drum after it has been completely turned down and finished. Oak drums come in natural oak only. Once the stain is applied, the drum is either banded, or lacquered and then banded. We have two different types of finishes: The Mariano mahogany series has a hand-rubbed finish with no lacquer involved. The other mahogany and the oak series all have lacquer finishes."

Gon Bops also offers fiberglass-coated drums. John stresses that the fiberglass on Gon Bops drums is a covering only; the drums themselves are still made of wood. "Some people want fiberglass covering for cosmetic reasons," he explains. "We can create virtually any color or finish that way. We also have natural-wood-finish drums that have fiberglass reinforcement. It's not just a coat of fiberglass; there's fiberglass cloth on the drum. I would say that all of the drums coming from Thailand have fiberglass finishes, but they're not reinforced with fiberglass cloth the way ours are. Once the drum receives its final lacquer coating, you can't see the fiberglass cloth at all—but the drum actually has three layers of fiberglass on it. In addition to the cosmetic factor, the fiberglass adds strength. None of our fiberglass-covered drums have metal bands around them, except at the very bottom. The cloth gives the drums added strength, as well as exceptional looks. Once the fiberglass is set, the drum will be turned down again. Then it will come back to the finishing area for another coat of fiberglass. And then it will go back into the turning room and be turned down a final time. That's what gives it its smooth finish.

"We also have colored finish drums," John continues, "in what we call our Gel Coat. We can do colors, sparkles, and other special looks. The beauty of this finish is that it's not painted—it's a pigment in a resin that goes on the drum. The finish won't chip as readily as paint will."

Finished drums are sent to the assembly department, where they are drilled to accept the tuning hardware, and fitted with pre-mounted heads. This is another critical step, which Gon Bops has addressed with a special technique. "We've learned that if you put a conga head on a drum that's round to begin with," explains John, "but there's a little bit of unevenness in the head, that head can pull the drum out of round. So every head we put on a drum has been preshaped and dried on a mold. In that way, when we assemble a drum, the head is already completely round and has the exact collar length and diameter required for that drum.

"We buy the cowhide for our heads as whole sides," John continues, "thirty-five at a time. Basically, we use medium-thin heads for the quintos, mediums for the large congas and small tumbas, and medium-heavy heads for larger drums. We can usually get around eight or nine heads, depending on their diameter, out of a
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side—and we use the remnants to make our rawhide maracas. There’s very little waste.”

Gon Bops also makes virtually all of its own hardware, in a machine shop that includes metal spinning lathes for the timbales, punch presses for different parts, and a bending machine to make tuning hooks, crowns, and hoops for the conga drums. “We also have dies to stamp out our cowbells,” says John. “Then they’re formed and butt-welded. Finished hardware is polished on our buffing lathes and grinding/sanding equipment, and then sent out to a plater. We’ve had the same plater for twenty-one years, and they do a very good job of triple-chrome plating. Once the parts are plated, they come back here and are put into inventory.”

“All of our manufacturing equipment was custom-made by my father,” John adds proudly. “It was only about twenty years ago that he started to automate the making of congas. The heaters, the presses, the turning lathes—he made all of those. You can’t go out and buy that stuff.”

Finally, after all the elements—finished shell, head, and hardware—are combined, each finished drum goes to the shipping department, where it is inspected for flaws and adjusted to the variances in the material. Every operator at every stage acts as a quality control inspector, right down to the shipping clerk who puts it in the box.”

Customer service is another important aspect of the Gon Bops operation. “People call me and say that they can’t find parts for a drum from some other manufactur-
er. If I have the ability to help them, I will. If I don't have pre-mounted heads in stock for other makes of drums, but if they'll send me the drum, I'll fit a head for them. If they want me to finish one of their drums—and it isn't solid fiberglass—then I'll do it, without hesitation. I make a fairly decent profit on repairs, so I offer that as a service. And maybe next time they'll buy a Gon Bops drum instead of something that needs to be fixed all the time.”

Is all this dedication and attention to detail rewarded in the marketplace? How do the Bobadillas view the current Latin percussion scene? “At one time,” replies Mariano, “there were no other conga manufacturers in the industry. I had the entire field, and nobody could compete with me—not even Cuba. But all of a sudden, people saw that there was money to be made in this market. So now I have competition from other companies making congas in Thailand with eight-dollar-a-week labor that can produce a $95 drum. I can't compete with that kind of price.”

“There's a much greater awareness of ethnic and third-world percussion today than in past years,” adds John. “But the Latin market is still small in terms of the entire percussion field, and the real high-end, professional stuff we're selling goes to only about ten to fifteen percent of the players in that market. The low-end stuff goes to the beginners, the students, and the hobbyists. That's the stuff that comes in mainly from Thailand. And that low-end market is very important for our business, because people have to have an instrument they can afford to learn on before they are ready to step up to one of our drums in the future.”

Congas and other Latin drums are very traditional, very earthy, and very physical instruments. As such, the drummers who play them feel a particular connection to them. Like other companies, Gon Bops has endorsers for their products, along with dedicated consumers who have purchased their products. How important is the input of these players to the development of Gon Bops products?

“Sound is our most important consideration,” replies John. “So when we make something new, we loan it out to some professionals we respect and have them test it. And we don't only go to the traditional Latin players; we'll do it with rock players and musicians in other markets, because these instruments are being used by groups in every style, around the world. They come back with an objective report, and we act accordingly.”

“We certainly listen to our endorsers,” adds Mariano. “But many musicians are fanatics, and sometimes they say things that are very silly. I'll give you an example. There is a Cuban percussionist who's one of the best in the world. He's a very intelligent man, too. I asked him what the best way to make a cowbell was. He said, 'You have to take the tail section of an airplane that crashed, and make your cowbell out of that!' He also told us that for a crisp sound, the best material to put inside our maracas was corn. So we did. But after about six months, corn gets eaten up by tiny worms in the kernels. We got calls from people saying, 'I had my maracas in my trunk for a couple of months. When I took them out, there was no sound!'”

“So,” concludes John, “to answer your question: Yes, we do listen to musicians. But we also add a little bit of manufacturing common sense. We incorporate all of that, and do what we can do best in order for our products to improve.”
Having your own "sound" is a concept often bandied about, but in reality, it's something of a rarity. Drummer Boris Williams, who is generally known for his work with the Cure, has truly developed his own personality on the set.

On this release by newcomers Shelleyan Orphan, Williams orchestrates the drumset with a subtlety and imagination not often heard in pop music. His style, though not overly intellectual, manages to be thoughtful and experimental enough to be consistently interesting. On Humroot, Boris winningly explores a previous interest: creating strong, linear grooves around the set, often varying them in two- or four-bar phrases. He also employs nice dynamics (particularly on the low end of the scale), unusual beat placements, and colorful timbres like snares-off snare drums, all of which have become trademarks of his style.

The music on Humroot is very British, indie-label pop stuff: melodic, clean-sounding, and sung by the kind of winsome female vocalist bright college boys develop major crushes on. It's often very joyful-sounding and creative arrangement-wise, as well, leaving Williams plenty to work with. A fine sidetrack to an already interesting body of drumwork.

\* Adam Budofsky

Johnny Hodges blues becomes mysterious while a Screamin’ Jay Hawkins stomper is made serene.

Granelli has backed Vince Guaraldi, Denny Zeitlin, Mose Allison, Ralph Towner, Ornette Coleman, and others. As a player, he’s "busy" in the best sense of the word: Feeding off soloists, he stretches out and kicks the energy right back under the band’s heels. Guiding it all is his deep time feel.

Granelli's fifth disc as a leader shows clear vision. In Slaughter, a fellow musician describing Bolden's never-recorded sound could just as well be praising the strengths of this disc: "There was pain and gentleness—everything—cramped into each number." (Songline Productions, 1402 Hearst Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702, (510) 644-3737.)

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\* Jeff Potter
Is swing a genetic thing? That might explain why the Marsalis family has it in abundance. Passed on from patriarch Ellis down to sons Branford, Wynton, Delfeayo, and Jason, swing seems to be the common thread running through New Orleans' first family of jazz.

Despite the proselytizing and pretensions that producer Delfeayo has exhibited in the past, this is a very fine debut album by the trombone-playing Marsalis. His robust tone and soulful phrasing tell the story of "Adam's Ecstasy; Eve's Delight," "Son Of The Virgin Mary," and "Simon's Journey." Delfeayo shows a penchant for harmonically rich horn arrangements ("Barabbas," "The Last Supper"), and he also seems comfortable swinging in an uptempo fashion alongside Wynton and Branford on "Nicodemus" and the title track.

But the real surprise of this family affair is the youngest Marsalis, Jason, who was only fourteen years old at the time of this recording! His sense of melody, looseness, and sheer abandon on the kit is astonishing, particularly on "Simon's Journey." Delfeayo shows he can change gears in mid-kick, downshifting into a death-funk beat on "No Flesh."

The sonic dredge inherent in current death metal leaves little room for percussive originality. But Marquez, at least, enhances the music while removing himself from the drone of it.

**Allen Farnham**

*Play-cation*  
Concord Jazz 4521  
JAMIEY HADDAD: dr, perc  
DREW GROSS, RUFUS REID: bs  
ALLEN FARNHAM: pno  
DICK OATTS: sx  
M'kashi B'nashi: Play-cation; Long Ago And Far Away; My Man's Gone Now; Foot Prince; Alone Together; Stablemates; Day Dream; Cheek To Chiko

Allen Farnham picked some nice standards for *Play-cation*, but his originals are the highlights here. The arrangements are creative, the band thinks of the music first, and they play together. And skinsman Haddad makes it all swing free. His brushwork is as feisty as it is colorful (though it should be a bit higher in the mix), and his stickwork kicks it up a notch without losing control.

Haddad plays the slow, bluesy title track with a lot of feeling, giving full value to each note. He adds some rich tones from the Hadgini clay drum (his design) on "Foot Prince," and gets mighty frisky on "Stablemates." kicking an interesting Latin-jazz groove while the band rips right alongside. And his fluttering hard-bop intro and teasing triplet feel give life to "Long Ago And Far Away," embellishing and driving the tune along. As Carson would say, "That's nice stuff."

Death metal drummers are responsible for some of the fastest continuous double-bass playing on record, and you won't find any death drummers with more kicks per millisecond than Paul Marquez, who pumps out the pedal mileage on *Retribution*. There's nothing intricate here, just a lot of endurance—lay down a groove.

There are any catchy beats here, they're woven into the structures of the compositions, and he's a fierce improvisor.

**Bill Milkowski**

Death metal drummers are responsible for some of the fastest continuous double-bass playing on record, and you won't find any death drummers with more kicks per millisecond than Paul Marquez, who pumps out the pedal mileage on *Retribution*. There's nothing intricate here, just a lot of endurance—for Marquez and for the listener. It takes a lot out of the ear to stand up to such a sternum-crushing assault, but Marquez, unlike others of his ilk, does the music a favor by mixing up his beats, giving a rest to the twin-kick rolls at times, and actually going so far as to—no sarcasm intended—lay down a groove.

Marquez puts as much variety into his playing as the music allows, spicing up his ride patterns and syncopating with the guitars. This lends a lot more room for the blinding double-bass ruff and triplet accents to have impact. If there are any catchy beats here, they're woven into the bridges of "Slaughter" and "Coronation." Marquez also shows he can change gears in mid-kick, downshifting into a death-funk beat on "No Flesh."

The sonic dredge inherent in current death metal leaves little room for percussive originality. But Marquez, at least, enhances the music while removing himself from the drone of it.

**Bill Milkowski**

**Randall Brecker Quintet**

*Live At Sweet Basil*  
GNP Crescendo GNPD 2210

**JOHN CLARK**: fr hn  
**JOHN SCOFIELD, BILL FRISELL**: gtr  
**PHIL FASCIANA, BOB BARRETT**: gtr  
**DIETER ILG**: bs  
**JIM PUGH**: tbn  
**JASON BLACHOWICZ**: bs  
**ALEX MARQUEZ**: dr

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**Matt Peiken**
On the Randy Brecker live date, the concept is horns in unison, solo, solo, solo, horns out. But Baron throws a few twists on this classic jazz formula. On “Ting Chang,” his crossing of Elvin Jones’ and Tony Williams’ rhythmic styles creates a new way to look at Latin grooves on the drumset. And his solo on “Mojo” has a rest before it begins, so at first you think the song is over—then Baron slowly paints a sonic picture, with a great deal of taste and being overbearing or busy.

With Scofield, Baron is on more familiar ground, playing in support of his regular leader, Bill Frissell. But again his unique use of grooves—the Latin feel on “You Bet,” the funky blues backbeat on “Bill Me”—and his crossing of bar lines and extended fills create a dancing quality to what, in another drummer’s hands, would be very tame.

Baron is in that small group of innovative, ground-breaking drummers with a definite sound—in a way reminiscent of Bob Moses or Paul Motian, but with a rock aggression thrown in.

* Adam Ward Seligman

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If you’re at all familiar with the music of the Band, the group with whom Levon Helm originally made a name for himself, you know that much of their appeal is in their salt-of-the-earth feel, image, and lyrics. Like his playing, which is definitely from the “nuthin’ fancy” school, Helm’s verbal delivery is a lot closer to an after-dinner conversation on a country porch than a “lesson” from a specialist. Once you get used to the pace of this video, though, you realize that there really is some good information to be picked up.

After some reminiscences about his early influences (including some neat historic photographs), Helm explains some of the concepts he employs, like finding that “sweet spot” between a shuffle and an 8th-note feel, adjusting parts for different feels, playing in half time, and playing with another drummer. All of these concepts are easily seen and heard by the viewer, with good sound and camera angles.

As an added bonus, original Band members Rick Danko and Garth Hudson—along with newcomers Jim Weider and Randy Ciarlante—help Helm along by accompanying him live on some classic old tunes and some Band originals. To get a real idea of Helm’s—and the Band’s—magic, though, I’d suggest also renting the classic Martin Scorsese-directed film *The Last Waltz*, the Band’s farewell party-concert-film, where you’ll see Levon doing his thing not only with the original Band, but with a star-studded cast of musicians. Speaking of renting, you might want to look into doing the same with this instructional video—or perhaps going in on a copy with another drummer friend—because you might find the $49.95 price tag daunting. Still, it’s a fine package and definitely worth checking out.

* Adam Budofsky

**BOOKS**

**THE FORGOTTEN POWER OF RHYTHM: TA KE TI NA**

by Reinhard Flatischler

LifeRhythm

P.O. Box 806

Mendocino CA 95460

Price: Book, $14.95;

Cassette, $12.95; CD, $16.95

To many musicians, rhythm is something that is done by the hands and/or feet, representing mathematical divisions. But as Reinhard Flatischler makes clear in this engrossing study, rhythm is an internal force that exists in the foundations of life (breathing and heartbeat) and is best experienced through movement and vocal sounds. One quickly discovers that being able to feel rhythm through the entire body gives musical performance (especially drumming) a great deal of conviction.

The book combines historical and cultural information about rhythm with exercises designed to make one more aware of rhythmic pulse and subdivision. Some of the material is based around the Indian system of assigning syllables to different subdivisions. Singing sounds such as “ta ke ti na” may seem exotic at first, but it’s not all that different than counting “1 e & a,” except that it proves to be more sophisticated, especially with groupings such as five and seven, in which the Western counting system falls apart. Flatischler’s exercises help one discover the character of different subdivisions as opposed to the mere arithmetic involved.

The corresponding tape (or CD) gives relevant examples of the subjects discussed in the book. Some are meant as aids to rhythmic discovery, others are just for listening. All are enlightening.

* Adam Budofsky

**RINGO STARR: STRAIGHT MAN OR JOKER?**

by Alan Clayson

Paragon House

90 Fifth Ave.

New York NY 10011

Price: $21.95

These 292 decidedly unsentimental pages on the life and times of Richard Starkey, MBE cover our hero’s humble birth, chronic illness, menial day jobs, musical beginnings, stage name, seminal trips to Hamburg, and the long, winding, wonderful road to the present. Countryman Clayson interestingly surveys the careers of Ringo’s Liverpool colleagues who were left in the dust by the Fabs’ historic success (though there’s more than you may wish to know about the unfortunate Pete Best).

The author paints a vividly sooty picture of Merseyside then and now, helping you appreciate the miracle of the Beatles. He gives rare glimpses into Ringo’s relationships with John, Paul, and especially George, as well as with relatives, friends, lovers, wives, and business partners. And Clayson eagerly chronicles Ringo’s personal and artistic disappointments—painful reading made more so by the author’s convoluted prose.

Musically there’s nothing here that a good Beatle fan doesn’t know. (The definitive guide to what matters remains Mark Lewisohn’s *Beatles Recording Sessions.*) And Clayson’s insights into Ringo’s unique musicianship are often marinated in tabloid venom. But if you read between the lines, you emerge with a deeper affection for that most human Beatle, the sad-eyed mother’s son whose easy smile invited you to join him on the greatest ride of all time.

* Rick Mattingly

* Hal Howland

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**OF RHYTHM: TAKE TI NA**

FORGOTTEN POWER

THE

PAUL MOITIAN

* Rick Mattingly

**VIDEO**

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The Percussive Arts Society should be congratulated for choosing New Orleans as the site for its 1992 convention. A city rich with tradition in music and drumming, New Orleans' jovial spirit and enthusiasm seemed to be reflected in the concerts, clinics, and even the conventioneers at this fine event. A wide selection of artists, from all different styles of percussion, enthusiastically offered their advice and help to the hundreds of eager drummers and percussionists in attendance. And the exhibit area allowed musicians to check out some of the finest percussion products on the market today, from the largest manufacturers to the smallest entrepreneurs. There was a real sense of communication and sharing at this year's PASIC.

The four-day event covered many different aspects of the percussion field, and conventioneers interested specifically in drumset had the opportunity to check out a diverse gathering of players in a clinic setting. Modern Drummer was again proud to sponsor the drumset master classes this year, allowing some well-known players to work closely with drummers on specific needs in a classroom setting. Our sincere thanks go to Ed Soph, Pete Magadini, Adam Nussbaum, Joe Morello, Steve Houghton, Marvin "Smitty" Smith, and Ed Thigpen for contributing their time and energy to the master classes. Following are some of the highlights of the show.

Joe Morello gave a very educational (and well-attended) clinic covering such topics as hand development, bass drum control, and hi-hat tricks. Joe talked technique, but he finished up with a musical solo, using mallets, sticks, and even his hands on the drums to get his point across.

Butch Miles discussed ways of getting around the drums more efficiently, using triplets, paradiddle-diddles, and flatflam combinations. His mastery of the '30s and '40s big band playing style was evident.

One of the most musical and educational clinics of the entire convention was put on by Adam Nussbaum, who performed in a trio setting. He discussed the importance of musicality and balance, thinking in phrases, and defining your own sound and feel. He then backed up the talk with some brilliant playing with the other musicians.
Rayford Griffin just made it in time for his clinic, having flown directly from Boston, where he was performing with George Duke. Rayford ripped through an opening solo showing all of the excellent fusion technique he is known for (including a little African-influenced chanting).

Billy Cobham gave an excellent clinic, performing on a very small acoustic kit (unusual for him) with some KAT pads adding some nice sounds. He played an inspired solo, and then proceeded to give a very positive lecture on the mental challenges of drumming and how to meet them.

Will Calhoun revealed his aggressive approach to playing drums in his clinic. Will drummed along to some sequenced patterns and pre-recorded materials, playing some delightfully heavy grooves.

One of the highlights of the convention was a clinic on New Orleans drumming. L.A. studio veteran Earl Palmer (originally from New Orleans) discussed the history of drums and played some grooves that he mentioned were heavily N'awlins-inspired. The Meters' Zigaboo Modeliste came out next, performing a long solo interspersed with some very hip grooves. And finally, current New Orleans resident and drumming star Johnny Vidacovich performed original compositions with his trio. His colorful approach (and personality) at the kit was a wild combination of bebop and New Orleans influences—totally unique!

The surprise hit of the convention was the clinic performance of Trilok Gurtu. Trilok held the huge audience spellbound with his complete mastery of his unique percussion/drum setup. After his first solo, which ran the gamut of percussion from sound effects to tabla to funk grooves, the audience rose to their feet in a thunderous standing ovation. He then took questions, demonstrated the method of counting and "syllabling" in the Indian style, and had the audience clap a rhythm in 7 that he soloed over.

Several other excellent clinics were given by such artists as Tony Verderosa, Marvin "Smitty" Smith, and Dave Weckl. Our congratulations to the PASIC '92 planning committee for putting together a great program.

Photos by Lissa Wales and Adam Budofsky
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