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MATT CHAMBERLAIN

He’s moved from Texas to New York to Seattle and now to L.A., sometimes following employment and sometimes chasing his muse. With his technical abilities and artful aesthetic, however, the first-call drummer would probably have plenty of work even if he moved to the moon.

by Michael Dawson

AARON COMESS

It’s been twenty years since the Spin Doctors embedded themselves in the recesses of our ears with hits like “Two Princes,” “Little Miss Can’t Be Wrong,” and “Jimmy Olsen’s Blues.” Turns out those gloriously grooving performances represent but one side of this well-traveled drummer’s career.

by Robin Tolleson

THE 2012 MD PRO PANEL

This year the Pro Panel once again represents the remarkable scope and depth of modern drumming, from the absolute pinnacle of studio recording to the forefront of arena performance, from the most shredding metal to the cutting edge of jazz.

by David Jarnstrom

GRANT HART

In the mid-’80s, Hüsker Dü fused hardcore punk with bittersweet pop, setting the table for an entire generation of angst-ridden alterna-rockers. Two decades on, the band’s drummer traces the trio’s profound path of influence.

by David Jarnstrom

INFLUENCES: DENNIS CHAMBERS

By merging elements of funk, fusion, R&B, and jazz into a daunting style that rides magically on a carpet of stunning power and technical exhilaration, Dennis Chambers has become one of the most important and influential drummers of the post-fusion period.

by Ken Micallef
CONCEPTS
Memorizing Tempos
Tips for Finding Your Own Reference Points by Mark Schulman

STRICTLY TECHNIQUE
A Look at Hybrid Rudiments
The Hairta and Its Application on the Drumset
by Christopher Simms

ROCK ’N’ JAZZ CLINIC
Sticking the Beat: A Four-Step Process to
Discovering New Grooves by Joel Popelsky

DRUM SOLOIST
Ostinato Studies Part 3: Metric Modulation by Jason Gianni

FUNKY BEAT
Ideas From the Road: Soundcheck Grooves to Chew On
by David Garibaldi

AN EDITOR’S OVERVIEW
YouTube Hit and Run by Adam Budofsky

ASK A PRO
Gimme 10! With Train’s SCOTT UNDERWOOD
Back Through the Stack With Jazz Vet BEN RILEY

IT’S QUESTIONABLE
Cleaning Clear Kits - Drummers and Copyrights

SHOWCASE FEATURING DRUM MARKET

CRITIQUE

BACKBEATS
Remembering Eric Carr

KIT OF THE MONTH
Kid-Friendly Demons

PRODUCT CLOSE-UP
DW Performance Series Drumset
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SHOP TALK
The Working Drummer’s Survival Kit
by Benjamin Homola

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A healthy number of *Modern Drummer*’s followers have real aspirations to one day see their name within the pages of the magazine, and not just on the address label on the cover. This makes for an unusually active and intimate relationship between editors and readers, much of which is conducted via email exchanges. It’s inarguable that we wouldn’t be able to do what we do if it weren’t for the direct connection we have with our readers. Many story ideas begin with reader inquiries, and for a magazine such as ours, whose stated aim is to help players improve their craft, it’s incredibly important to encourage the public to offer editorial suggestions.

It gets sticky, of course, when readers’ suggestions involve doing a story on…them. On the surface, there’s no problem with this at all. After all, the music business has always been brutal, and drummers, by the nature of their role in the music, remain both literally and figuratively in the shadows at the back of the stage. Given this scenario, who’s to blame a musician for tracking down an editor’s email address and touting his or her own horn? But—and this is a big but—it’s all about how you do your touting.

Simply put, there’s been an alarming decrease in professionalism in the many unsolicited emails we receive from aspiring professional drummers. One day I hope to write a feature or even conduct a seminar on this subject—I really do think that developing professional communication skills is that important in terms of your potential for success in this business, and I really do see that much amateur behavior. But for now we’ll focus on the single most frustrating trend I’ve observed: the hit-and-run YouTube link. The email usually looks something like this:

Yo, yo, yo! Check out my playing. You need to cover drummers like me in *Modern Drummer!* Hit me back. www.youtube.com/watch-0w45986upw

Now, a big part of an editor’s job involves deciding on the relative merits of one story idea over another—editorial space is always at a premium, and there never seems to be quite enough room in the magazine to cover all the great drummers making worthwhile contributions to the art. I mean, some of these men and women have spent years humbly mailing in their latest recordings, DVDs, or method books, hoping for a mention in their favorite drum magazine. These individuals’ patience and perseverance is humbling, and it’s definitely not lost on us editors, each of whom has been on the pitching side of our own independent projects.

But when you read your third or fourth “Look at how awesome I am and get back to me immediately!” email in a day….well…an editor can get kinda cranky. By four or five o’clock, we might have already had to say no several times to drummers with real careers—players who are polite, concise, clear, and confident without being arrogant; who are patient if their first and second emails go unanswered for longer than they expected; who express a familiarity with the publication they’re soliciting; and who show a basic understanding of the realities of the game. Why on earth would editors go out of their way to check out a music dealers: *Modern Drummer* is distributed by Hal Leonard Corp. (855) 554-0626. sales@hal Leonard.com www.halleonard.com/dealers

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TAYLOR HAWKINS
I’ve been a subscriber to MD forever, and it’s the only drumming publication needed. What a great job Ken Micallef did on the Taylor Hawkins interview in the September 2011 issue. Personally, I always thought my son and myself were the only two drummers on earth that hit a rimshot on every 2 and 4. I always did this to give the song more balls. Reading that Taylor has been doing it since he started playing made me feel that we’re in such good company!

Louie Vecchio Sr.

I really enjoyed the Taylor Hawkins cover feature in MD’s September issue. I’m a huge Foo Fighters fan, and I think he’s the best. But his comments on Pro Tools editing have me confused and worried about today’s mainstream recording standards. If a studio pro and impeccable timekeeper can’t be trusted by a top producer to deliver an acceptable track that doesn’t need to be gridded and chopped up, why even hire him? Why not just use a drum machine or MIDI samples? Beat quantization, Auto-Tune, and note and pitch correction…where’s the performance? Are we buying a band’s album or a producer’s computer piece? Will there be a Grammy award for best beat placement?

The drums are the heart and soul of any song. They dictate the groove, vibe, emotion, and pulse and get you dancing. What’s so bad about a mistake on a record that no one would ever notice but the drummer who made it? I hope this opens a huge debate. Taylor and his band’s challenge to the status quo has not gone unnoticed. Wasting Light just may the best record they’ve ever done. And his drums on it sound killer!

Derek Lane

SAM ULANO
I just wanted to say what a great article was written by Ken Micallef on Sam Ulano in the September issue. I’ve known Sam for forty-five years, and he gets to the heart of drumming. I agree that learning and playing twenty-six rudiments does nothing if you can’t play the instrument—building the hands with weights, using metal drumsticks, and reading music is the way to help you become a professional drummer.

Carmen DiChillo

I’m a bebop drummer, but I enjoy the entire gamut of music. I was very impressed with Sam Ulano’s philosophy regarding rudiments in the September 2011 issue. I have a BA in music, and in my entire time playing in jazz ensembles, choirs, orchestra, wind symphony, African drum ensemble, Brazilian drum ensemble, and steel drum orchestra, I’ve never once seen any music that contained rudiments, or even fragments of rudiments (except for flams or rolls, but not double strokes). Sam is absolutely right in his concept of music being the most important part. Rudiments have nothing to do with phrasing when it comes to jazz, classical, rock, funk, samba, reggae, Greek, Brazilian, African, Latin, or any other genre of music, save marching band or archaic warfare. Thank you for speaking the truth.

Dustin Haner III

HOW TO REACH US
billya@moderndrummer.com
J.P. “THUNDERBOLT” PATTERSON

A posthumous Joey Ramone session is just the latest project for this stalwart NYC rocker.

It’s been an interesting life for J.P. “Thunderbolt” Patterson. After spending some of his formative years in Afghanistan, he’s enjoyed a unique dual career as a drummer (with New York punk legends the Dictators, among many others) and an actor, appearing in everything from The Sopranos to a Capital One commercial.

But he’d never done a session playing along to a guide vocal from a deceased punk icon until he was asked to contribute two drum tracks to an upcoming Joey Ramone album. The recording, which consists of previously unreleased demos and outtakes, will also feature Bun E. Carlos, Dennis Diken, and Richie Ramone on the kit.

“That was a Tupac situation,” Thunderbolt says with a laugh about the session, which found him doing about twenty takes of each song, playing along to Ramone’s voice, reference guitar and bass, and drum machine. “The two songs they had me play on were the backbeat things. I’ve got Al Jackson hi-hat catches all over it. Not what you’d expect on a Joey track—but I think it’s one of the best jobs I’ve done in the studio.”

Patrick Berkery

To learn more about J.P. Patterson’s unique career, go to moderndrummer.com.

JOEY ARMSTRONG

The overachieving drummer in Emily’s Army shares his father’s interest in societal concerns.

Joey Armstrong and his bandmates in Emily’s Army pile a lot on their plates in addition to cranking out undeniably catchy pop-punk tunes: They raise awareness for cystic fibrosis through their ties to the Emily’s Army Foundation, they tour across the nation, and they still manage to get all of their homework done.

Wait…what? Yup, teenage punk rockers, and remarkably mature ones at that. “School comes first,” Armstrong insists. “We do our homework and maintain good grades—but we don’t put music off.”

Although Emily’s Army first garnered media attention because the drummer is the son of famed Green Day leader Billie Joe Armstrong, the group has proven to be more than ready to stand on its own merit. Its debut, Don’t Be a Dick, manages to balance a serious-minded message—inspired by band members Max and Cole Brecker’s cousin Emily—with infectious grooves and humor on tracks such as “Ho-lloween.” “We love to make people aware of the seriousness of cystic fibrosis,” Armstrong says, “but we’re also fifteen, sixteen, and eighteen and like to goof off and make jokes.”

After touring the East Coast in the summer of 2011, the boys—who are longtime friends—returned to school and got down to jamming up new songs for their sophomore effort. Whereas Armstrong channeled Keith Moon and Ringo Starr on Emily’s Army’s debut, he cites the fast punk-to-solid-dance versatility of Blondie’s Clem Burke as his latest inspiration.

Billy Brennan
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**DVDs**

- **Counting Crows** August and Everything After (Jim Bogios) // **The Jesus Lizard** Club (Mac McNeilly) // **The Hollies** Look Through Any Window 1963–1975 (Bobby Elliott) // **Sonic Youth** 1991: The Year Punk Broke (Steve Shelley, Dave Grohl, Murph, Lori Barbero) // **Paul Rodgers & Friends** Live at Montreux 1994 (Jason Bonham)

**Books**

- **Rifftide: The Life and Opinions of Papa Jo Jones** as told to Albert Murray (University of Minnesota Press) // **Connecticut’s Fife & Drum Tradition** by James Clark (Wesleyan University Press) // **Mountains Come Out of the Sky: The Illustrated History of Prog Rock** by Will Romano (Backbeat Books)

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**OUT NOW**

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation has named drummer and composer **Dafnis Prieto** as one of twenty-two new MacArthur Fellows for 2011. The award is worth $500,000 and is distributed quarterly over five years. The MacArthur Fellowship, unofficially known as the “genius grant,” comes with no restrictions on spending, as it is designed to encourage future creativity. Prieto says that the award would provide him the freedom to focus on his own music, including an album with his Proverb Trio, and a book about drumming.

The Pearl Corporation and the Make-A-Wish Foundation recently partnered in hosting nineteen-year-old drummer and cancer survivor **Ben Hines** at Pearl’s headquarters in Nashville. Hines and his family toured the facilities, met the staff, and witnessed the unveiling of Ben’s brand-new custom Masterworks kit.

Twisted Sister drummer **A.J. Pero** was recently named the national spokesman for Fallen Blue, an organization founded to honor and help the families of police officers who have been killed outside the line of duty.

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**ON TOUR**

**WHO’S PLAYING WHAT**

- **Vinnie Colaiuta** with Sting // **Dennis Chambers** with Santana // **Daniel Williams** with the Devil Wears Prada // **Ringo Garza** with Los Lonely Boys // **Wuv** with P.O.D. // **Robin Diaz** with Daughtry // **Richard Beasley** with Gary Numan // **Walfredo Reyes Jr.** with Lindsey Buckingham // **John McEntire** with the Sea and Cake // **Gregory Hutchinson** with John Scofield // **Brant Bjork** with Kyuss // **Michael Lindsay** with Andy Grammer // **Donald Barrett** with Colbie Caillat // **Jeff Friedl** with Puscifer

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**WHO’S PLAYING WHAT**

- **Victor Indrizzo** (Beck, Sheryl Crow) is playing Vater sticks. His model of choice is the wood-tip New Orleans Jazz. // **A.D. Adams** (Louis Prima Jr.) is using Vic Firth sticks. // Paiste has added **Chris Tyrrell** (Luke Bryan), **Jamie Rogan** (Billy Currington), **Patrik Heilkinpieri** (Mando Diao), and **Kenny Bernard** (Ra Ra Riot) to its artist roster. // **Mike McPhee** is playing Johnny Rabb sticks.
DARE TO CHALLENGE YOURSELF. I played in my high school jazz band for a year and a half. A friend of mine who played in a punk rock band and the jazz band had quit high school, and they called me and asked if I would come play in the jazz band. I couldn’t read music, but the instructor really liked my feel, so he was willing to overlook the fact that I couldn’t read the charts. He said we’d just figure the songs out. The band actually won several awards during that time.

DARE TO BE WHO YOU ARE. I went to college and didn’t really know what I wanted to do. I dropped out a couple of times, and I tried new majors. The whole time I was doing that, I was playing in bands and doing gigs. I finally realized that I wasn’t good at holding a job and I didn’t like college, but I could play gigs and was pretty good at that.

DARE TO FORGE YOUR OWN STYLE. Not being heavily instructed, I developed my own approach to drumming. It might not be technically profound, but I believe in a drummer working on his or her own style. I may hold the drumsticks incorrectly because I’m not formally trained, but it’s a style that works for me.

DARE TO MOVE ACROSS THE COUNTRY. After my trials with college, I moved to Colorado. I started playing in bands with a bunch of musicians from California. This one guy was telling me that there was a band forming in San Francisco called Train. They needed bass and drums, so we moved out to California to join Train.

DARE TO BE SERIOUS. Everyone in Train was serious about it. We’d all been in bands where one or two guys were really into it and the others just weren’t dedicated. We were all like-minded about Train. We gave ourselves no other option but that this band would work out.

DARE TO GO THE DISTANCE. At first, as far as drumming was concerned, the music we were playing in Train wasn’t that technical. I wasn’t getting much attention, so I thought I’d step things up a bit. But in the end what really mattered was the song. Pat [Monahan, vocals] is so good at songwriting that it became a challenge for me to come up with just the right part to fit the tunes. We all started realizing that we needed each other. I think it’s that sense of knowing we need each other and appreciate each other that makes Save Me, San Francisco such a great record.

DARE TO TRY SOMETHING NEW. During a hiatus from touring with Train I went to L.A. and tried to get into the session world. That was way harder than I thought it would be. I developed a side project called Food Pill, and at some point I may do something more with that.

DARE TO BE CREATIVE. You need to learn piano, guitar, or some other melodic instrument and also learn Pro Tools. When I write a piece of music, I’m very structured about the verses, chorus, bridge… and I think that’s the drummer in me.

DARE TO TAKE TIME FOR FAMILY. I have two kids, and I bring them out on the road with me occasionally. They’re great to have around. It’s a challenge with the traveling, so about two weeks is probably a good limit.

DARE TO TRAVEL TO DISTANT LANDS. New Zealand and Australia are big for us. We’re playing in China in February. We are literally going all over the world.

In February 2005, MD asked jazz vet Ben Riley, who’d done classic work with Thelonious Monk and Sonny Rollins, among many others, about playing the fast tempos of the Johnny Griffin/Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis Tough Tenors sessions.

Ben: When we played that fast it got to the point where I would not look at my hands. I just had to beef up mentally and not think about the tempo. Actually, playing with singers got me accustomed to singing melodies to myself. When I played very fast like that, I would always keep the melody in my mind so I wouldn’t be thinking about the tempo.

MD: When we spoke to Bill Stewart a few months ago [August 2004 MD], he commented on how jazz musicians don’t play as many fast tempos as they used to back in the bop or post-bop days. Ben: For one thing, it’s very difficult! [laughs] And with the freeform way of playing that most groups use today, playing very fast tempos would be like going to war. You’d be clashing, because no one person is seemingly responsible for the time. Everybody is contributing their idea of what the song is supposed to be rather than keeping time. We used to do the same thing, but we would always mark beat 1 so everybody knew where we were.
CLEANING CLEAR KITS

I own a 2010 clear Ludwig Vistalite kit. Can you advise me on what to use to clean the shells and how to get out some scratches?

Dave Nilsson

According to MD Shop Talk columnist and drum repair/restoration specialist J.R. Frondelli, “There are several preparations formulated to clean and refresh acrylic plastic, which is what Vistalites are made of. My personal favorite is Meguiar’s PlastX, a one-step cleaner/polish that removes fine scratches and haze and, in most cases, restores shine. Meguiar’s also makes products specifically formulated for restoring optical clarity to auto headlight lenses, and these items would be suitable for use on acrylic plastics as well.

“For deeper scratches, there’s the Novus 1, 2, 3 system, which contains a fine scratch remover (#2), a heavy scratch remover (#3), and a spray polish (#1), all formulated specifically for acrylic plastics.

“All plastic polishes should be applied with a microfiber cloth or a well-worn cotton cloth, like an old T-shirt. Shop rags that are carried in most hardware stores are not of a finishing grade and often contain abrasive contamination, which will create a worse situation than the one you started with.

“Anyone who owns acrylic or even wrapped drums should keep a bottle of Novus #1 spray polish handy, as it quickly and easily cleans surface dirt and restores the luster to all shiny plastic surfaces, as well as plated hardware, leaving behind a microscopic protective silicone finish. I’ve used this product with great success for over twenty years.”

DRUMMERS AND COPYRIGHTS

If a drummer writes the drum part to a song, is he or she entitled to any portion of the publishing rights, or does all of the credit go to whoever wrote the lyrics and melody?

Scott Miller

We sent your question to entertainment law attorney Paul Quin, who’s a drummer himself and has represented many drummers in the music industry. “This is really the million-dollar question and one that goes to the heart of what most drummers do and what most drummers want,” Quin says. “As always, however, remember that every situation is different and that you should find a lawyer to address your specific case. Accordingly, the following information does not constitute legal advice as it pertains to your particular situation.

“Generally speaking, publishing royalties are available only to those who own the copyright of a piece of music. U.S. copyright law, in very general terms, recognizes only the melody and lyrics as being worthy of copyright. As a general proposition, therefore, a drummer who writes the drum part to a song does not share in the publishing rights. There are, of course, exceptions where the drum part is so integral to the song that it warrants payment of a royalty. In truth, however, this is very hard to establish once the song has been submitted for copyright absent the drummer’s name, and often it can be established only by consent or through litigation—an expense that should usually be avoided. Here, your best option would be to try to persuade the other songwriters that your contribution warrants inclusion in the writing credits and inclusion on the copyright.

“In the absence of a separate agreement among the copyright owners, the publishing royalties would then be split evenly. That split, though, can always be negotiated by the copyright owners, and if the writer of the melody and lyrics does not think you deserve an equal share, he or she and you can negotiate a smaller percentage for you. In band situations, that can often be accomplished as long as you’re dealing with reasonable folks. At the session level, however, this is much harder to do and often depends upon the ‘name’ of the session drummer and the industry clout in proportion to the artist with whom the drummer is recording. Work on the musicians you record with, to have them accept your contribution as something worthy of a writing credit. Good luck!”
Enjoy the new standard.

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CHARLIE BENANTE Yankee Stadium. September 14, 2011.

Check out Anthrax’s long awaited release, “Worship Music” available now.
Starting out in 1972 as founder Don Lombardi’s teaching studio, Drum Workshop became an official company when Lombardi, looking to subsidize his business, began selling accessories and hired one of his students, John Good, to assist with sales. Shortly thereafter, Lombardi dreamed up their first product: the Drum Workshop height-adjustable trap-case seat, a 18x22 bass drum, 8x10 and 9x12 rack toms, a 12x14 floor tom, and a 5½x14 snare drum. The lugs on the snare drums and kick are unique to the Performance line and a private owned firm.

Recently the company went back to the drawing board to figure out how to offer an American-made drumkit with the now-legendary DW name and the same attention to detail as the flagship Collector’s series, but priced much more affordably. The result is the Performance series.

This line is not just a knockoff of its pricier brethren. It was conceived from the ground up as a completely different series, with subtle changes in appearance (such as minor logo and badge tweaks) and a new tonal flavor utilizing DW’s HVX shell technology, which is a combination of horizontal-, diagonal-, and vertical-grain plies to yield drums that favor medium-low pitches.

WHAT’S THE SCOOP?
The Performance series kit sent for review consisted of an 18x22 bass drum, 8x10 and 9x12 rack toms, a 12x14 floor tom, and a 5½x14 snare drum. The lugs on the toms and kick are unique to the Performance line and are quarter-size versions of DW’s Collector’s series turret lugs. The snare has a unique yet classy double-round lug design that almost looks like a tube lug. The finish on this kit is “black mirra,” a subtle yet striking look consisting of sparsely dispersed holographic metal flakes over black lacquer, all buffed to a mirror shine. When light hits the etched flakes, you see glittering reflections against the black background. This is one of DW’s trademark finishes, and it’s a beauty that elicits oohs and aahs from all who see it.

The toms are equipped with DW/Remo Coated/Clear batter heads and Clear Ambassador bottoms. The snare has a CS Coated Reverse Dot batter and an Ambassador bottom. The kick, which offered a big yet controlled studio sound out of the box, is supplied with a Clear Powerstroke 3 batter and a vented logo front head, as well as a factory-installed DW muffling pillow. If you don’t want a controlled kick sound, you can simply remove the pillow.

SOUNDS LIKE?
Once I had everything set up, I tweaked all of the drums and got them in tune with each other. This process was ridiculously easy, thanks to the True-Pitch tension rods (which have a 30 percent increase in threads per inch when compared with standard rods), precision bearing edges, and high-quality drumheads.

These drums were ultra-responsive and tunable over a wide range, and they possessed an excellent balance of bottom and attack, with stellar clarity. What’s really cool is how the kit sounded as a unit, even with the pillow installed in the bass drum. It had that great in-the-middle tonality that records and mikes well while occupying its own space without stepping on anything else. We can only assume this is due to the unique HVX shell design.

Even though I described the sound of the Performance series as being in the middle, don’t misconstrue that as meaning mediocre in any way. In every respect the line is up to the same sonic and build-quality standards as the Collector’s series. Think of it as another wonderful flavor on DW’s vast menu. The company simply employed some rudimentary economics to make the series more affordable. Smaller lugs, for instance, cost less to manufacture and weigh less for shipping, while limited finish and configuration options mean that fewer manufacturing logistics are involved.

The Performance line is available in five lacquer finishes (black mirra, white ice, sapphire blue, cherry stain, and ebony stain) and three finish-ply wraps (white marine, black diamond, and titanium sparkle). Two shell packs are offered, and two snare drums and seven add-on toms can be purchased separately, making it easy to build an affordable dream kit. The list price for a five-piece Performance shell pack is $3,667.98.

dwdrums.com

EXPLAINED ON FILM
All of the technology and thought processes involved in bringing the Performance series to fruition are contained in the Welcome to DW DVD included with each kit. DW vice president John Good, ably assisted by the eminent drummer John “JR” Robinson, walks viewers through shell construction, hardware and finish details, and tuning, plus there are some killer playing demonstrations by Robinson.
Paiste's Twenty series cymbals were first released in 2007 and have since become favorites among drummers of all types for their clean yet warm tones. These cymbals, which are made with B20 bronze, are forged in Turkey and are then processed in Paiste's Swiss facility.

For the Twenty Masters Collection, Paiste integrated ideas from many of its top endorsers to create eleven ride cymbal models, each of which has a unique sound without tipping the balance between Turkish-style complexity and crystalline Swiss sonority too far in either direction. We were sent a sample of the entire collection for review.

20" AND 21" MEDIUM RIDES
We begin with the 20" and 21" Masters Collection Medium rides. These were the most all-purpose cymbals of the bunch, and as such they provided a good foundation from which to compare the more extreme variations in the series. The Medium rides are medium in weight and had a great balance of stick articulation and warm, even wash with a lot of harmonic overtones. The bell sounds were strong and fairly bright. These cymbals could easily work in most contemporary musical styles, as well as in big bands. If you’re looking for a single ride to cover it all, one of these could be a great choice. The 20" ($678) had a slightly more prominent wash, while the 21" ($740) was more defined and lower in pitch.

20" AND 22" DARK RIDES
The Twenty Masters series Dark rides are thinner and more extensively hammered than the Medium models. This resulted in a softer feel and a smoky, breathy tone. These are the "jazz" cymbals of the group, with a sound closer to that of classic Turkish-made cymbals than regular Twenty series models. The stick sound on the 20" and 22" Dark rides remained clear and articulate, but the overtones opened up much more easily and the bells were less pronounced and more integrated. Again, the 20" ($678) was a bit washier and more aggressive sounding, while the 22" ($798) was a little darker and drier.

20" DARK CRASH RIDE AND 20" SWEET RIDE
The 20" Dark crash ride ($678) is very thin and had a wobbly feel and a dark and raspy voice. The stick definition was surprisingly clear, and the cymbal opened up instantly with a big, trashy crash when struck on the edge. This model could be used for explosive accents or for an alternate ride source when you want a groove to burn at a lower dynamic. It also responded very well to mallet rolls. The 20" Sweet ride ($678), on the other hand, had a firm yet silky feel with a super-clean stick sound, a deep and pleasing bell, and very smooth and brilliant overtones. This cymbal, which was developed in cooperation with the European jazz great André Ceccarelli, embodies the airy, intimate vibe of classic ECM records. It really excelled in the lower dynamic range, but it also sounded great when played a bit more aggressively in a hard-bop context. If the 20" Dark crash ride is akin to the tense, dissonant sound of an altered dominant chord, the Sweet ride has the ethereal feel of a major nine.

20" AND 22" DARK CRISP RIDES
The Dark Crisp rides have hammer markings similar to those on the Dark rides, but they are considerably heavier in weight. As a result, they had a pronounced stick sound and a clear bell tone, but with a fairly dark, complex, and controlled wash. These were the moodiest cymbals of the series, and they seemed most appropriate for darker and more aggressive playing styles, à la Josh...
24" DEEP RIDE

This heavy ride had a big, bold voice, just like the artist who helped design it, John "JR" Robinson. If you need an extra-strong-sounding ride that delivers a wide beat, this is one to check out. The stick “ping” was very pronounced, the bell was strong and powerful, and the sustain was warm and long. This cymbal responded best when played with larger sticks, and it could handle very loud strokes without washing out. List price is $898.

20" AND 21" DARK DRY RIDES

The 20" and 21" Dark Dry rides ($678 and $740, respectively) were the most distinctive-looking models in the collection. They feature alternating bands of lathing and unfinished bronze from the edge to the bell on the top of the cymbal, with a smooth sandblasted surface on the bottom. The stick sound was woody and silvery, and the sustain was dark and slightly muted. Fusion, R&B, modern jazz, and studio drummers will love these cymbals for their super-quick and dry stick attack, funky bell sound, and controlled, complex wash. Shoulder strikes brought out a cool harmonic burst that died down quickly and evenly. These cymbals made me want to play a lot of notes.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE?

In Paiste’s marketing brochure for the Twenty Masters Collection, the company claims that “Every cymbal [is] a masterpiece: Experience them to find your own.” As long as your tastes lean toward the warm, rich tones of Turkish-style cymbals, there’s likely a sound or two in this series that will inspire you to further check out the line, whether you’re looking for something nice and all-purpose, complex and trashy, dark and articulate, or more individualized, like Ceccarelli’s airy Sweet ride or JR Robinson’s boisterous Deep ride. To hear these cymbals in action, log on to moderndrummer.com.

Armor Cases

Armor Cases by Michael Dawson

A Ahead is best known for its durable synthetic drumsticks, but the brand continues to expand in very smart ways. A few years back Ahead released some fantastic snare drums, followed by cool practice pads, including versions with snare effects and one with a built-in metronome. Recently Ahead collaborated with fellow accessory manufacturer Revolution Drum to create Armor Cases, an innovative line of gig bags that are durable and weather resistant and offer a better fit. We were sent a four-piece set (kick, snare, rack tom, and floor tom) to check out for review.

TRUFORM TEARDROP SHAPE

Each Armor case has a unique teardrop shape, which was devised to accommodate various types of mounting hardware, including bulky suspension systems, while still providing a snug fit. Back in 1997, when I ordered cases for my Premier Signia kit, I was extremely frustrated when I discovered that the drums wouldn’t fit in them very easily. I either had to exchange the cases for ones that were a size up or deal with forcing the bags to zip up around the tom mounts. Ahead/Revolution’s TruForm design alleviates that problem entirely. We tested the tom case using an 11x14 Fibes fiberglass rack tom with a Gauger RIMS mount, which is one of the larger suspension systems currently on the market. The drum slid in easily, and the case zipped up with no problem.

DX-CORE DURABILITY

Armor Cases are made with what Ahead calls DX-Core technology, which involves an interior lining of soft and plush Sherpa fleece, two layers of foam padding in the middle, and a double-stitched 600-denier exterior fabric that’s strong yet flexible and is likely to withstand years of rigorous touring abuse. Armor Cases are also waterproof, so you don’t have to worry about your drums getting waterlogged while you’re loading into and out of gigs in the rain. The carrying handles, which run vertically on the tom and kick drum cases and horizontally on the snare cases, are big, soft, and securely stitched.

DYNAZIP SYSTEM

In addition to their perfect-fit TruForm shape and super-durable DX-Core construction, Armor Cases also have a unique zipper system that travels not only around the circumference of the drum but also vertically (tom and bass drum models only) at the tip of the teardrop. This system allows the case to open up more fully—without collapsing—so that a drum can be taken out and put back in very quickly and easily. (The zippers on Armor snare drum cases do not run vertically, but the tip of the teardrop is made of flexible fabric so that the lid can open widely.)

I’ve tried all types of hard cases, soft cases, and gig bags, and I can honestly say that these are among the most efficient, sturdy, and intelligently designed models I’ve come across. Highly recommended. Prices range from $49.50 for a 7x8 tom case to $226.50 for a 22x26 bass drum case.

bigbangdist.com
Latin Percussion recently teamed up with two of its most prolific artists, drumset specialist Stanton Moore and percussionist Michael Spiro, to create a pair of specialty instruments. Let’s check out each one.

STANTON MOORE PANDEIRO

New Orleans funk drummer Stanton Moore worked with LP to develop a signature pandeiro that emulates the sounds commonly heard in Mardi Gras Indian music and that also withstands repeated tribal stomps. In Moore’s words, his pandeiro “sounds like a floor tom with jingles.”

The 12” drum with a 2” wood frame looks quite ordinary, and I was having a difficult time digesting the idea that this could ever sound anything like a floor tom. Outfitted with a Remo Coated Emperor head, the drum produced a surprisingly deep acoustic sound. The seven sets of jingles were pleasantly present but did not overpower the low end. A thud was the prominent sonic focal point, especially when the eight tuning rods were detuned to their lowest point without losing tone. This created a great sonic texture that meshed well with a drumkit and could be used to provide a fat ballad backbeat, a snare alternative, or a colorful accent within a groove.

What really blew my mind was what I heard when I miked the pandeiro from underneath. I ran an AKG D112 kick drum mic through a small bass amp, and I couldn’t get over what an intense impact it made. The pandeiro not only sounded like a floor tom, it had more punch than my compact kit’s 18” bass drum.

The Stanton Moore pandeiro is solidly constructed with a heavy-duty bracket and fits 3/8” to 1/2” mounting rods. It can also fit in most snare baskets for an alternate mounting option. Another interesting use for the pandeiro is placing it upside down on the snare drum. This will automatically drop the pitch of the drum and produce a denser snare sound to fatten up grooves. The 2” frame made me focus on accuracy, and I found that switching to traditional grip helped me get a more consistent backbeat with less chance of striking the frame.

The only hiccup is that the tuning key is not a standard drum key. Drum keys seem to disappear on me at an alarming rate, so I was a bit worried by the prospect of having a drum on my kit that requires a unique key. (Don’t lose that thing!) Stanton’s signature pandeiro comes with a carry bag and lists for $149.

HI-HAT SHEKERE

Michael Spiro collaborated with LP to create a shekere that mounts on a hi-hat stand to create a gritty, chunky texture with the hi-hat foot. The silty chomp of the shekere sounds half traditional and half modern, thanks to the large netted beads that surround the fiberglass gourd.

Three large hi-hat felts are included to prevent the shekere from bottoming out during operation. The hi-hat shekere is a cool idea, and the product worked quite well, but it’s reserved for particular playing situations, like quieter acoustic performances where you’re backing up a singer-songwriter on cajon or a hybrid drumset/percussion setup. Unless you have ample time between songs during a live set, it wouldn’t be practical to repeatedly swap out your hi-hat cymbals for the shekere. (The two can’t be used simultaneously.) If space allows, however, you can always set up a second hi-hat stand to mount the shekere and get the best of both worlds.

List price: $175.

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Let the drums do the talking
As a longtime Pro Tools user, I was excited to get the chance to check out the new version of the software from Avid, and the experience has been quite rewarding. In today’s economic crunch, many of us can’t afford the higher-end HD/TDM or HD Native Pro Tools systems. Our only option prior to the release of Pro Tools 9 last year was to purchase a Pro Tools LE or M-Powered system, which enabled us to work with the award-winning audio recording/editing software at an affordable price but with limited functionality. The new features of Pro Tools bring us much closer to the full-scale Pro Tools HD systems, and the software works with any ASIO or Core Audio digital audio interface, so we’re no longer forced to use only Avid hardware.

LOADING IT UP
Installing the three discs of content for Pro Tools took twenty minutes. Minimum system requirements are Snow Leopard (10.6.7 or later) for Mac and Windows 7 for PC. The software comes with some plug-ins (effects) and numerous virtual synths, and the third disc contains various audio loops in different folders categorized by genre.

All of my preexisting plug-ins that ran with Pro Tools 8.04 reinstalled and opened without any problems, as did my Digi 002 and Mbox2 hardware. Despite the many strengths of previous versions of Pro Tools, one of the biggest drags was needing to have a Pro Tools–verified interface connected at all times. So I have to admit that with the new version I got pretty excited when I unplugged the hardware, opened a session, and played back my recordings while relaxing on the couch.

NEW FEATURES
Session sizes in Pro Tools have been increased to 96 audio tracks, 64 instrument tracks, 512 MIDI tracks, 256 busses, and 160 aux tracks. This is more than enough for just about any recording project, and it will change the way sessions are run for users who rely on smaller laptop systems. Want to triple-track your drums? No problem!

For advanced users, Pro Tools has simplified the I/O (in/out) settings option to make it much easier to route channels to different pieces of hardware via the new Output Bus, without having to change the original I/O setup. There are many options for headphone mixes and multiple output mixes, so grab the manual and check ‘em out.

Automatic Delay Compensation keeps the timing of your session locked in by compensating for the delays caused by the addition of plug-ins to your individual tracks. When you exceed the maximum compensation, the track view turns red. You can also mix audio file formats and bit depths in the same session, and the software supports 32-bit formats for higher-resolution recording.

BEAT DETECTIVE
The most helpful tool for drummers in Pro Tools, the time-correcting plug-in Beat Detective, now supports multitrack editing. Earlier versions of Beat Detective required users to purchase the Music Production Toolkit in order to edit multiple tracks, so a lot of users relied on another Pro Tools function, called Elastic Audio, for multichannel drum edits. Elastic Audio has the capability of stretching audio files to adjust note placement. The problem with stretching audio files, though, is that it can degrade the quality of the sound. Elastic Audio will continue to be used for its many features, especially in editing a single audio file. But drummers will really dig this new version of Beat Detective when they’re looking to adjust and/or correct timing issues in multitrack recordings.

Pro Tools also comes with an MP3 bounce function, which used to cost...
more with earlier versions, and you can export mixes directly to SoundCloud.

TEST DRIVE
I decided to record some real drums at a friend’s home studio so we could take a closer look at Beat Detective. After recording about twenty bars to a click track, we were ready to give it a go. In less than two minutes, we completely quantized and smoothed out the eight tracks of drums that were purposely played off the click—and you couldn’t even tell they had been edited!

Here’s how it works. After opening Beat Detective from the Event tab, there are three windows, labeled Operation, Selection, and Detection. The Operation window lets you choose whether you’ll be working with audio or MIDI and shows the processing choices. The Selection window is for picking the bars you wish to work with, setting the time signature and the note value for the portion you’re quantizing.

Once you’ve set up how you want Beat Detective to analyze the audio, you go through the three stages listed in the Operation window: Region Separation (analyze and set markers for separation), Region Conform (snap sliced regions to the grid), and Edit Smoothing (fill spaces and add crossfades). After making the proper selections, we had a perfectly locked-in track after about six mouse clicks. Saying that Beat Detective makes drum editing easy is an understatement, as what would normally take hours to accomplish manually was completed in mere minutes.

We came upon another great function of Beat Detective accidentally. When we first tried to use the plug-in, we had mistakenly selected the Marker Generation option, and after the processing completed and we started playback, we discovered that Pro Tools had just created a tempo map that followed our badly timed (on purpose) drum track perfectly. This is a great feature when you record without a click but then want the option to be able to lock in MIDI sequences (like keyboard parts or drum loops) after tracking live. How cool is that? List price: $699.

avid.com

DON’T LOSE YOUR iLOK

While you don’t need to carry around a bulky interface to run Pro Tools 9, the program does require an iLok USB key to be plugged in at all times. So when you’re looking to edit some recordings from the road, don’t forget your iLok, and be careful not to damage it.
LEARN THE SECRETS OF WORLD-CLASS DRUMSET RECORDING

The single most difficult part of recording a band is getting a good drum sound. You can always tell the difference between a finished recording and a demo by the sound of the drum mix.

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—Steve Gadd

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The Big Gig, by Zoro, provides a 440-page template for success— for drummers and all musicians—by covering the vocational, personal, and spiritual aspects of achievement. With chapters ranging from the art of practicing to marketing, this exceptional book is nothing short of life-changing.

RECOMMENDED BY Quincy Jones · Steve Gadd · Lenny Kravitz · Luis Conte · Keith Carlock · Shawn Pelton · Michael Kenyon · Vic Firth · Ron Tutt · Steve Houghton · Eddie Bayers · Ed Soph · and more!
Drums: Tama Starclassic Bubinga in custom black sparkle finish
A. 4x13 Metalworks steel snare
B. 6 1/2x14 snare
C. 7x12 tom
D. 16x18 floor tom
E. 16x16 floor tom
F. 20x22 bass drum

Not shown: 6x14 Starphonic brass snare

“I grew up playing funk, rock, jazz, fusion, punk, metal—you know, all of it,” Parsonssays. “So I needed a very versatile kit that I could take on gigs and record with different projects. I use a 12” tom, which is versatile, because I can turn around and use it on a jazz gig, or I can play it on a rock or a funk gig and it’s all there. I have a 20x22 kick drum. I was using a 24” for a while, but I feel you get a lot more attack out of a 22”, and the 20” depth gets a cannon kind of feel.

“I reversed my floor toms, which lets me get a lot more creative with my fills. It opens you up to a whole other page of ideas. My floor toms are deeper, because I like to get that deep funk tone but still maintain just a little bit of ring so it carries almost like an 808 sub.”

Cymbals: Zildjian
1. 15” A Custom Rezo hi-hats
2. 10” K Custom Dark splash
3. 17” K Custom Hybrid crash
4. 18” K Custom Hybrid crash
5. 9” K Custom Hybrid splash
6. 22” A Custom Ping ride
7. 19” K Custom Hybrid crash
8. 19” K Custom Hybrid China
9. 20” A Custom China

Hardware: Tama, including Road Pro stands (with Embark weights attached to the bottom of each tripod), an Ergo-Rider hydraulic throne, and a Speed Cobra bass drum pedal with wood beater

“This Speed Cobra pedal has great speed and comfort, and it’s smooth on the foot. It has a longer footboard, which allows for a lot of technique.”

Heads: Evans Onyx snare and tom batters, Hazy 300 snare bottoms, EC Resonant 12” and 16” tom bottoms, Coated G1 18” tom bottom, and EMAD Onyx bass drum batter

“The reason I use Black Onyx heads on everything, including the kick drum, is because they allow you to not rely on any kind of dampener. You get that dead funk tone, but you also get a lot of body and soul. The EMAD Onyx kick drum head has a lot of power. It’s real thumpy and has a deep tone.”

Drumsticks: Pro-Mark Longineu Parsons III Autograph series

Percussion: Roselynn signature cajon

Electronics: Ultimate Ears in-ear monitors, Audix microphones

“I also have a Blowit clamp-on-style fan that goes on my right side to keep me cool. And that’s it.”
Animals as Leaders’ self-titled debut featured the band’s innovative “djent”-based style, meshing manic odd time signatures, metal-meets-prog guitar aggression, and drums as dangerously twisting as a tornado. But the album’s biggest surprise was that the drumming wasn’t drumming. Programmed by engineer Misha Mansoor, the thundering rhythms comprised hits sampled from Toontrack’s Drumkit From Hell. Ferocious and complex, the album raised the bar on the possibilities of drum programming.

When the twenty-six-year-old former Animosity drummer Navene Koperweis joined Animals as Leaders, not only did he have to replicate the hyperdrive beats of that 2009 recording, but he also had to find a way to stamp the music with his own signature. Given his muscular metal history and accomplished programming skills, Koperweis was the perfect fit for this ultimate man-machine music. The drummer passed guitarist Tosin Abasi’s audition by performing a note-perfect video rendition of the group’s “Tempting Time”—and then took the concept into the stratosphere.

“Tosin definitely wanted my drumming to sound like the album,” Koperweis explains from Hamburg, Germany, while on tour with AAL. “So did I. That’s why I worked hard on the programmed drums, which have such intensity and high velocity. I wanted to make sure that intensity was there in my playing. Tosin gave me the first album when it was done, so I had been listening to it for a year already. But I hadn’t played odd signatures before. I like challenges, so I practiced everything for a couple weeks. When there was a tricky part, I would chart out the kick and snare pattern.”

Did he count the odd time signatures to make them easier to perform?

“Absolutely not,” Navene replies. “I went by the melodic phrase and the feel. I am used to playing songs that are much more complicated and have more parts. I knew the song structures, so it was a matter of perfecting each part—that was the hardest part. There’s so much going on within each section, multiple odd time signatures and polyrhythms. It’s nuts. It’s hard to understand at first.”

Given the complexity of AAL’s music and the speed-demon compression of the rhythms, Koperweis practiced by playing along with the basic tracks—and

**TOOLS OF THE TRADE**

Koperweis plays a Tama Superstar Hyper-Drive set with 6½×10 and 7×12 toms, a 14×16 floor tom, a 20×22 bass drum, and a 6×13 snare. His Meinl cymbals include a 21” Byzance Traditional Medium ride, 15” Byzance Brilliant Heavy hi-hats, two 18” Byzance Brilliant Chinas, a 20” Byzance Brilliant Medium crash, and a 14” Mb10 Soundwave hi-hat top stacked on a 16” Soundcaster Fusion China. He uses a Tama Speed Cobra pedal, and his electronics include a MacBook with QuickTime for audio and video.
“If they can withstand my punishment, they can withstand anything...”

— Mike Portnoy

on Silverstar
he has never stopped. “I practiced to the songs with the drum tracks running like training wheels,” he says. “After I got that down, I played with the tracks without drums. I still play to those tracks to this day on stage. I play to a click, a synth track, a bass track, and sometimes a guitar track. I like the comfort of the click and hearing the same tracks every night. The material was really hard in the beginning, so I needed a security blanket, something to follow no matter what. So I still use them, though I don’t have them as loud in my mix now.”

The trio’s latest album, Weightless, proves Koperweis’s drumming prowess and dazzling programming skills. A joint composer with Abasi and credited as the album’s producer, Koperweis wrote original drum tracks in Cubase, then replicated or added to the rhythms as needed. The result is a flawless interface of live and programmed drumming.

“We used Cubase to write the MIDI,” Navene explains, “and I use a Yamaha electronic kit with the Toontrack Drumkit From Hell as the samples. You’re able to play beyond your abilities (this way). We’re using MIDI. It’s not audio; we manipulate it and run it through the Toontrack software. I can play a bunch of fills and put them where I want, then program or play beats. It’s seamlessly arranged and then rammed through the Drumkit From Hell software. I did play a lot on the electronic kit, but sometimes I’d program a part, because then I’m not restricted to what I can play in the moment. And it’s a lot faster to not [play the drum tracks] right off the bat. It’s a weird, futuristic way of making music. It’s 60/40 programmed/live drums. Every song has a mixture. And I never program anything I can’t actually play.”

Such Weightless material as “Cylindrical Sea,” “Odessa,” “To Lead You to an Overwhelming Question,” and the stinging title track confuse the drumming mind. Segments of the songs flow and resonate with the relative assurance of live drumming—the space between strikes is natural and effortless, lacking the typically compressed sound of sampled drums. Elsewhere, and often on the same track, bass drum hits and snare smacks sound too cold, calculated, and perfect to be entirely human. But beyond the musicians themselves who’s to really know what’s what?

“All the songs have the same idea,” Koperweis says. “They all went through the same process and have a similar ratio of live versus programmed drums. To me it’s all ideas anyway. If I program it on the e-kit or play it live, there will be no difference to the music. I’m sure a lot of people are against it, but come see us live. There’s more impact.”

Koperweis’s goal is to integrate the influence of his electronic heroes Skrillex, Noisia, and Deadmau5 with his bionic drumming skills. “I’m also focusing on placing fills where they are not obvious, not at the end of a bar,” Navene says. “And since I adapted those original Animals programmed beats to my own style, now I can write like that. The programmed drums from the Animals’ first CD are a huge influence and a big part of the reason I play the way I do, in that gray area between drumming and programming. If I didn’t learn those original parts I wouldn’t play this way today.”

Currently working on his debut CD as an electronic artist, Koperweis believes that “People are ready to hear music with a lot of complexity—complex melody even. Animosity was straightforward metal. Animals’ music is slower, so I can focus more on each individual hit. And having a production focus, I always concentrate on what I’m playing, that the hits are even. Then I pay more attention to the fills because I’m being more selective when I play them.”
MEINL HAS BECOME MY FAVORITE CYMBAL. I KNOW THAT SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING YOU'D READ IN A MAGAZINE, BUT IT'S TRUE. YOU CAN GET ANY CYMBAL SOUND YOU'RE LOOKING FOR FROM THEM.

- NAVENEK

Navene Koperweis
Animals As Leaders
It’s been twenty years since the Spin Doctors embedded themselves in the recesses of our ears with hits like “Two Princes,” “Little Miss Can’t Be Wrong,” and “Jimmy Olsen’s Blues.” Turns out those gloriously grooving performances represent but one side of this well-traveled drummer’s career.

With his combination of technique, intuition, and inquisitiveness, Aaron Comess has crafted exactly the type of career he dreamed of as a young drummer. As a founding member of the Spin Doctors, who are currently celebrating the twentieth anniversary of their breakout album, Pocket Full of Kryptonite, he savors the closeness of a band situation. As a drummer for hire with Joan Osborne, Edie Brickell, James Maddock, and New York Electric Piano, he gets to enjoy the challenges associated with high-level recording sessions. And as a solo artist, he’s able to present his own unique musical vision; his recently released second album as a leader, Beautiful Mistake, is a breathtaking progressive, instrumental, roots-rock collection that showcases a musical approach to the kit, powerful stick work, and a strong songwriting sense.

Edie Brickell has followed Comess’s drumming since the two were in high school together in Dallas. “I love inventive drummers who sound relaxed and playful,” the singer says. “I’m really moved by that, because the player takes you on a ride that you can feel isn’t cliché. Aaron is a smart, thinking drummer with amazing feel and intuition—or connection—and it’s a privilege to play and record with him. He’s a beautiful soul, and he makes me sound better, lots better, than I would without him.”

As a child, Comess took advantage of solid music programs in the Dallas public schools, starting on piano in first grade. Later he attended a performing arts high school, where he studied theory and played drums in big bands, small combos, and orchestras. “We were doing music every day with other musicians, having jam sessions after school and on weekends,” he recalls. “I was lucky to be able to play music with people, because ultimately that’s what it’s all about.”

Comess’s first teacher, Jack Iden, taught Aaron traditional grip and insisted that he play on the practice pad for two years to learn the fundamentals before moving to the drumkit. In high school Comess began studying with Henry Okstel, a professor at North Texas State University (later renamed the University of North Texas). “He helped me with big band interpretation and reading charts,” Comess says, “which set up everything for me in terms of learning how to interpret songs, and that’s what I really love to do—try to make whatever I’m doing, regardless of the style, sound great. Learning that big band interpretation—setting up sections and hits—was a great lesson early on.

“We were doing advanced stuff,” Aaron continues. “Henry showed me a hundred ways to use the Syncopation book, and he had me doing Pete Magadini’s Poly-Cymbal Time book. He got me into the polyrhythmic thing and understanding rhythms over the bar and...
different groupings. But at the same time, his thing was always, 'It has to feel good. It has to sound good. It has to fit the song.' It was good being pushed hard technically, but it's also important to have somebody stress that it's all about making the music and the beat feel good.”

Comess says he’s always favored drummers with an organic sound and approach, like Bernard Purdie and Tony Williams. “I kind of grew up studying to be a really versatile drummer,” he explains, “and I tried to model myself after guys like Steve Gadd—somebody who plays great jazz, rock, blues, whatever. I saw myself more as a guy that was going to play with a ton of people.”

After a year at Berklee and another in Dallas studying with Okstel, Comess moved to New York and enrolled at the New School. One day some classmates knocked on his practice-room door and convinced him to check out their tunes. Comess liked the band, which called itself the Spin Doctors, and he decided to join. “We started writing songs together, and the vibe was cool,” Aaron recalls. “We were immediately playing out live in New York, and at the time our approach was the opposite of other bands’. Everybody else was rehearsing all week and doing their one showcase gig a month, trying to get a record deal. We were playing five nights a week in clubs, and we’d rehearse once a month. And we didn’t care about getting a record deal. We were just like, ‘We want to be a good band; we want to make a living.’ From playing so much, we got a big following. One thing led to another, and the record companies started coming around.”

Though the Spin Doctors’ debut album, Pocket Full of Kryptonite, became a multi-platinum blockbuster, the band was unable to sustain its popularity, and about ten years ago Comess began focusing on developing his reputation as a studio drummer. “That meant really putting myself out there on the scene,” he says, “playing with good people. You can take any gig under the sun, and that’s cool—you’ve got to work. But when you put yourself in a situation where you’re playing with really good people who play the kind of music you like, and you’re sounding good doing it, everything else kind of falls into place. I was lucky to be working with some great people around New York. If you can keep doing it, word gets around, and before you know it you’re working a lot.”
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In 2006 Comess released his first solo album, *Catskills Cry*, and soon after began composing the music that would become 2011’s *Beautiful Mistake*. “I like to sit around and play guitar and come up with little songs,” he says. “About a year ago I realized that I had the material together, and I decided to call some guys that I love playing with and do it.”

Comess made demos, playing all the instruments himself, and sent them to guitarist Teddy Kumpel and bassist Richard Hammond. “I got together with Teddy a couple times to go over stuff,” Aaron says, “and then we just went in and recorded it. I love that approach to music. You get the right musicians in there that you trust, and everybody does their homework. I love to capture something fresh before you have time to know it too well or overthink it, and that’s exactly what we did.”

For Comess, the drum parts were never a worry. “For me the song always comes first,” he says. “So before I even presented the material to these guys, I wanted to make sure that there was a song there on acoustic guitar—a melody and a form and everything—that stood on its own. Once you have a great song, something that you feel good about, how the drummer approaches it can make it go in many different directions. But ultimately I always think of the song first. If I’m working with an artist, I want to hear them play the song bare bones before I even hit the drums. I want to hear the lyrics, the melody, the chords—kind of get the vibe of it. That’s going to make me feel where I need to go sonically with the drums—what kind of snare sound to have, what kind of toms and cymbals, whether to use mallets, brushes, or sticks…. There are so many things you can do, but it’s all based on where the song’s coming from.”

Most of the *Beautiful Mistake* tracks feature guitar solos, but Comess thinks of these sections as group improvisations. “Maybe the guitar is the main voice of that improvisation,” he explains, “but the other instruments, we’re all happy and having a conversation together. Even though the guitar is kind of the main thing, everybody’s an equal part of the conversation. Kenny and Rich are really great at that.”

Comess recorded the album at his home studio in New York City’s East Village. The trio cut live over two days, then Comess and Kumpel spent another day on overdubs. “I love getting good sounds,” Aaron says, “and I’ve got a great

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engineer, Roman Klun. We went for a little different approach on this record. I didn’t want to use as many mics, so a lot of the songs are recorded with just three or four. I’m a big fan of capturing the kit the way it sounds and letting the drummer mix himself when he’s playing. If you’re using two or three mics, you’ve really got to be aware of dynamics when you go over to the toms.

“There was no fancy stuff, no sound manipulation at all, really,” Comess stresses. “It was just about getting good sounds and the right guys—the chemistry—and having the material together and doing it in an organic fashion. There’s a time and place for running drums through guitar amps and filters and crazy stuff. But for this particular project, the way I was hearing the music, I just wanted it to be completely open and organic.”

Rather than rely on postproduction to add variety to the drum sounds on the album, Comess expanded his choice of snares. “One of the records that was a huge influence on Beautiful Mistake was Bill Frisell’s Gone, Just Like a Train, with Victor Krauss and Jim Keltner,” Aaron says. “Keltner’s one of my favorite drummers, and the approach to that record was very organic, very loose. A lot of times Jim will use different snare sounds on a track, so I tried that out on this record. It’s cool to have different tones. I set up three snares on my kit for the whole record. In some cases I’d be bouncing around on all of them during the song, even within fills.”

As the Spin Doctors busily celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Kryptonite—they did an East Coast tour this past October and have European dates in early 2012—Comess says, “We’ve been having a wonderful time playing together, and the band sounds great.” But at this point, with the impressive list of credits he’s amassed, the drummer is clearly comfortable living the life of a musician for hire. “There’s a misconception that the session drummer plays it safe and boring, but that’s not the case at all,” he insists. “You have to be prepared to go in there and work fast and come up with something quick. But people want something unique as well, and your job is to serve the song and bring something to it without getting in the way.

“At the same time, you’ve got to know when to just lay it down, and sometimes the best thing to do is the bare minimum. But even when you’re doing the bare minimum, it’s how you play it that matters. It’s all about making it feel right and respecting the style. That’s the thing that’s so important to understand: Keep your mind open, listen to all kinds of music, respect and understand the styles. That’s the stuff that’s going to make people want to play with you.”

RECORDINGS


INFLUENCES

Miles Davis Filles de Kilimanjaro (Tony Williams) /// John Coltrane A Love Supreme (Elvin Jones) /// Bill Frisell Gone, Just Like a Train (Jim Keltner) /// Led Zeppelin Led Zeppelin II (John Bonham) /// Rolling Stones Tattoo You (Charlie Watts) /// Steely Dan The Royal Scam (Bernard Purdie, Rick Marotta) /// Stevie Wonder Innervisions (Stevie Wonder) /// Paul Simon Still Crazy After All These Years (Steve Gadd) /// AC/DC Back in Black (Phil Rudd) /// The Beatles The White Album (Ringo Starr) /// Frank Zappa Shut Up n’ Play Your Guitar (Vinnie Colaiuta)
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The life of a performing drummer can be tough. Not only do you have to be careful about how you’re treating your mind and body so that you’re able to perform at your best, but you also have to keep a sharp eye on your gear to prevent major mishaps from occurring in the middle of a set. Whether you’re playing weekend gigs at your local bar or you’re about to embark on a full run around the country, here’s a collection of essential tools that no drummer should leave home without.

**PRO-GAFF GAFFER’S TAPE**
This is the most versatile tool in your box. Gaffer’s tape is great for quick temporary fixes for just about anything, from dampening drums to spiking hardware to your drum rug. Pro-Gaff tape comes in a variety of colors and sizes. Get several rolls.

**DRUM KEYS**
Larger keys, like the ones DW manufactures, make tuning and working with hardware a lot easier, and they give you a bit more leverage. Evans’ magnetic drum key is also great, because you can leave it on a tension rod and not have to worry about it bouncing off and disappearing under your bass drum pedal.

**SCREWDRIVER SET**
Multiple sizes of flat and Phillips-head screwdrivers, like those made by Craftsman, will ensure that you can tighten just about any loose part that doesn’t require a drum key. Your underprepared guitarists will thank you too.

**CYMBAL CLEANER AND SHELL/HARDWARE POLISH**
There are lots of options for cymbal cleaners and drum/hardware polishes. Zildjian has made an excellent cymbal cleaner for years, and Dunlop Drum Shell 65 works great for drums and hardware. Find products you like, and use them every once in a while in order to keep your kit looking like new.

**SPARE CYMBAL FELTS**
Several companies offer prepackaged sets of cymbal felts and cymbal-stand sleeves. Always use felts—at least on the bottom—and sleeves to protect your cymbals from cracking and keyholing.
TACKLE ORGANIZER/TOOLBOX

Tackle organizers, like those from Plano, help you keep your tools and miscellaneous parts organized and easy to locate.

ALLEN WRENCH SET

Most drum hardware has moving parts, and parts that move can—and often do—malfunction. In addition to various sizes and types of screwdrivers, a set of Allen wrenches is essential for keeping those small parts in good working order.

LUCAS OIL WHITE LITHIUM GREASE/SMITH & WESSON GUN OIL

A little of this stuff goes a long way. Dropping a tiny bit on the end of each tension rod when you change heads will make tuning your drums easier, and it’ll extend the life of your tension rods.

SWISS ARMY POCKETKNIFE

Like every Boy Scout knows: Always be prepared! A quality pocketknife can help in a myriad of ways, from snipping off broken snare wires to opening a can of beans for a late-night snack.

HAND TOWELS

The gigging life can get messy at times, and odds are that you’re going to have to deal with at least one sticky beverage flying your way. Keep a few clean hand towels nearby to prevent an otherwise great gig from turning into a catastrophe.

EARPLUGS

Whether you go with the cheap, disposable foam ones or you spend a little extra cash on models designed especially for musicians (Hearos and Vater make high-quality yet reasonably priced versions), you should always carry a pair of earplugs. Longevity is the name of the game, and protecting your hearing is paramount.

MOONGEL DAMPENER PADS

Moongels are great for eliminating the pesky overtones that can build up in a not-so-gorgeous-sounding room. Get several containers, and try cutting some of them in half—or even in quarters—for lighter muffling options.

ALLEN WRENCH SET

Most drum hardware has moving parts, and parts that move can and often do—malfunction. In addition to various sizes and types of screwdrivers, a set of Allen wrenches is essential for keeping those small parts in good working order.

FLASHLIGHT

Streamlight makes a bright and rugged flashlight called the Scorpion, which can be a godsend when you’re working on dark stages.

600-GRIT AND 2,000-GRIT SANDPAPER

With good care, a drum’s bearing edge will last a long time. But little nicks and scratches are inevitable, especially when you’re trying to change heads in the cramped quarters of a small nightclub or in the back of an Econoline van. Running light-grade sandpaper over an uneven edge will allow the head to seat properly again. Make sure you do some research beforehand, however, so you’re confident with the process.

LUCAS OIL WHITE LITHIUM GREASE/SMITH & WESSON GUN OIL

A little of this stuff goes a long way. Dropping a tiny bit on the end of each tension rod when you change heads will make tuning your drums easier, and it’ll extend the life of your tension rods.

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Miking your drums has never been easier. The New Audix DP-QUAD drum pack includes a D6 on kick, IS on snare, and two ADX51 condensers for overheads. These mics are designed to capture your tone so clearly that your audience will hear exactly what you play. The industry standard in this pack is simple to use and are guaranteed to deliver your sound "straight out of the box" with little or no EQ adjustment needed. Take the DP-QUAD to your next gig and take your sound to the next level!
This year the Pro Panel once again represents the remarkable scope and depth of modern drumming, from the absolute pinnacle of studio recording to the forefront of arena performance, from the most shredding metal to the cutting edge of jazz. We'll be hearing from these rhythmic mavericks and magicians throughout the coming year, picking their brains about the great strides our drumming forefathers made yesterday, the issues that contemporary pros are dealing with today, and the fascinating directions in which drumming will be heading in the future. Let's meet our distinguished panel.

**Gerald Heyward**
Heyward has been the go-to guy for R&B superstars like Beyoncé and Mary J. Blige for over a decade and can be credited for introducing the sounds of modern gospel drumming to a wider audience through his work with crossover artists like Rob Thomas. You can read Gerald’s thoughts on fusion superstar Dennis Chambers on page 71 in this issue.

**Chris Adler**
A founding member of the popular metal band Lamb of God, Adler has garnered an enormous fan base for his atypical approach to heavy drumming. In recent years he’s made significant strides in the educational field via columns in *MD*, a string of SRO drum clinics, and his book, *The Making of New American Gospel*.

**Gregg Bissonette**
One of the most popular performers and well-respected clinicians of the past two decades, Bissonette has appeared on hit records with artists ranging from Gino Vannelli and Maynard Ferguson to David Lee Roth and Toto. Lately he’s been especially busy doing soundtrack work in L.A. and touring with Ringo Starr & His All-Starr Band.

**Jim Keltner**
It would be easier to list the artists that Keltner hasn’t worked with than to pick a representative sampling of the historic figures whose music he’s helped bring to fruition. From Joe Cocker to John Lennon to Elton John to Eric Clapton to Bob Dylan to Ry Cooder to Rickie Lee Jones—phew…see what we mean?—Keltner’s exhaustive résumé is a study in taste and invention.

**Terri Lyne Carrington**
Since first grabbing headlines in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s as a teenage drumming prodigy, Carrington has regularly collaborated with jazz royalty like Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, and Dianne Reeves. Her most recent CD as a leader, *The Mosaic Project*, features a stellar cast of artists including Cassandra Wilson, Geri Allen, and Esperanza Spalding.

**Matt Chamberlain**
Chamberlain is among an extremely small group of first-call studio and stage drummers, contributing provocative rhythms and sounds to projects by Fiona Apple, Tori Amos, Bill Frisell, Morrissey, the Wallflowers, David Bowie, and dozens of other artists. His *MD* cover story begins on the next spread.

**Bob Gatzen**
One of the most respected behind-the-scenes drum industry figures, Gatzen has had an incalculable influence, designing innovative gear for a number of manufacturers, notably DW drums and Evans heads. His philosophies and techniques in the area of drum tuning and setup have also been profoundly influential.

**Jim Riley**
As the drummer and musical director for the popular contemporary country act Rascal Flatts, Riley works continuously at the highest peaks of performance. And his dedication to drumming education—through clinic work (including the 2011 MD Fest), private lessons, articles in this magazine, and method books—is equally impressive.

**Antonio Sanchez**
Upon first hearing Sanchez, world-renowned jazz and fusion leaders like Pat Metheny, Danilo Perez, Chris Potter, and Avishai Cohen immediately understood the enormous skill and inventiveness the drummer possesses, and they subsequently welcomed him into their musical worlds. The three-time Grammy winner has also made significant recordings as a leader and is a highly regarded clinician.

**Bill Sharone**
Sharone is a unique player on today’s scene, able to perform blistering heavy rock with groups like Dillinger Escape Plan and Otep as well as heartfelt, completely credible reggae and associated styles. Gil’s recent instructional DVD, *Wicked Beats*, is the best exploration of island grooves available, covering in depth many of the topics the drummer touched on at his 2011 MD Fest appearance.

**Billy Ward**
Ward has had a long relationship with *Modern Drummer*, writing a series of mind-expanding columns for the magazine as well as authoring the MD-published book *Inside Out: Exploring the Mental Aspects of Drumming*. Billy’s playing credits include Robbie Robertson, Yoko Ono, Bill Evans, Joan Osborne, Ace Frehley, and Carly Simon. Ward is also a world-famous clinician, and his thoughts on the subject can be found in next month’s feature “Get Good: Clinics.”

The Modern Drummer Pro Panel is an annually revolving group of internationally recognized player/commentators with one essential purpose: to help you master the physical and mental techniques of our noble instrument, the drumset.
He’s moved from Texas to New York to Seattle and now to L.A., sometimes following employment and sometimes chasing his muse. With his technical abilities and artful aesthetic, however, the first-call drummer would probably have plenty of work even if he moved to the moon.
Back in the late ’80s, Matt Chamberlain was just a young Dallas-based drummer about to embark on his first big-time tour, with the folk-rock band Edie Brickell & New Bohemians, who were riding high on the successes of their breakthrough album, *Shooting Rubberbands at the Stars*. But it was only a matter of time before Chamberlain’s unique talents had piqued the interest of not only fellow aspiring musicians but also some of the key movers and shakers within the music industry. MTV viewers will likely remember spotting the fresh-faced drummer showing off his textbook traditional grip and nimble hi-hat technique—played on a blue Yamaha kit with power toms and sky-high cymbals, nonetheless—in the video for Brickell’s chart-topping hit, “What I Am,” while his slick Manu Katché/Stewart Copeland–inspired playing on the Bohemians’ sophomore release, 1990’s *Ghost of a Dog*, foreshadowed the many great things to come.

In 1991, Chamberlain became every young alt-rocker’s favorite drummer when he appeared in Pearl Jam’s live video for the song “Alive.” (The video was shot while Matt was filling in with the band for a brief two-week tour.) Later that year, Chamberlain was offered a spot in guitarist G.E. Smith’s *Saturday Night Live* house band. He ended up leaving the show after just one season, because, he explains, “New York City wasn’t exactly what I thought it would be, ”
“If you want to do this for a living, you have to at least try some other stuff. You might surprise some people, and you might discover something. Otherwise, why even be a session musician or offer your services as a drummer for hire if you’re not going to bring something to the table?”
What was it that finally prompted you to move to Los Angeles?

When I was home in Seattle, which wasn’t very often, I wasn’t working. Plus I’m married, and I figured I wanted to see the woman I’m married to. [laughs] She’s been with me for twenty years, but we were at a point last year where I was like, “You know what, I’m gone over 200 days a year. This is ridiculous.” So we got a little apartment in Silverlake, and it’s great because I can just come back here instead of going to a hotel or flying all over the place.

Are you working more in private studios around L.A., or are you still going to the big rooms?

I’m still going to the big studios. I spent most of this past summer at Sunset Sound working on a new Jason Mraz record. Luckily, artists that have budgets are still going to those studios, because the rooms sound great.

Do you still use a cartage company to handle your gear?

Yeah. For me things haven’t really changed at all. The music industry is changing, obviously. But since I moved down here, I’m busier than ever.

I imagine you get a lot more calls because you’re living in town.

Yeah, but I was still working, even when I was living in Seattle.
People who were hiring me would plan ahead and get the budget together to fly me in, but I wasn’t getting called for a lot of last-minute stuff. Now there’s a lot more opportunity to do things like movie soundtracks. A lot of the composers are constantly rewriting and doing last-minute sessions. Those are really fun to do because they throw a chart in front of you and you have to read.

MD: Is it interpretive reading, or is it note for note?

Matt: Some of it’s very arranged, but it depends on who the composer is and what kind of music they’re writing. If it’s more of a loose rock soundtrack, they won’t want you to play the fills they wrote on the computer. But if it’s more worked out, you’ll have to read it note for note.

MD: You played on the soundtrack to Horrible Bosses, which has more of a band sound.

Matt: A lot of that involved scores, but it’s more funk/rock grooves. Victor Indrizzo was on that, but he couldn’t make the second session because he was on the road with Sheryl Crow, so he recommended me. That was a last-minute thing that I got called to do.

Another great thing about living in L.A. is that there are so many great musicians around that I love playing with, so I’m working on tons of little projects with friends. Everything is way more convenient.

MD: You’re actually getting out to jam on your own time?

Matt: Definitely. I’m not one of these guys that just does sessions. Session work is a way for me to make a living. Maybe 35 percent of it is super-creative and they’re hiring me to explore and push the envelope. Some people have huge budgets and are willing to spend an entire day on a song. But then there are people who want you to bust out as many songs as possible in one day, and they’ll just deal with it later in Pro Tools.

MD: What’s your mentality going into those two different scenarios?

Matt: Everything is so dependent on the situation. But generally if they’re going to take two weeks to do basic tracks, then you can mess with arrangements, deconstruct things, and try different grooves. I might have more of my drums, percussion, and odd bits lying around to make loops with or play grooves on. But if it’s a roots-rock kind of thing, you’re not going to get into making loops. If they gravitate toward wanting more beats and creating sounds and textures, then you can explore. I can record stuff into my laptop and tweak things out and then play drums on top of that, or I can work with the engineer to make a unique sound for that song, trying different drums and all that.

If it’s somebody that only has two days for tracking, you can still try stuff, but you’re kind of just throwing things at the wall. In Pro Tools, you can do multiple takes and try different things, which gives them a bunch of options. Then they go home and edit. That’s the good thing about Pro Tools.

MD: Even in that situation you’re not
looking to just settle on one approach and move on. You’re still trying a few different ideas.

**Matt:** Oh, yeah. That leaves things open for them later on. If I give them a bunch of ideas, they can edit things together. But some people just like to go for a bunch of takes so they can find a great one, and then maybe they grab a fill from someplace else.

There’s no one way of working, which is great. Some people will want to just get together in the studio with a bass player and track everything live. Some people will have the vocals and all the other stuff in Pro Tools, and they just want you to put drums on it. They’ll usually have demos, so you can hear where they’re coming from and feel out their aesthetic. And I’ll ask a lot of questions about what they’re going for. A lot of people will write to loops and get married to that sound, so I’ll ask if they’re going to use that loop and have me play on top or if they want me to re-create that loop. Or are they looking to go someplace else entirely?

**MD:** When I interviewed Steve Jordan a while back, he said that he doesn’t want to play to anything that’s not going to be on the final track.

**Matt:** That totally makes sense, because you’re playing off it, so it can influence what you do.

**MD:** And when they yank it out, what you played might sound weird.

**Matt:** Yeah, if somebody’s playing a crazy bass line and they’re like, “Just ignore the bass,” I’d rather mute it. You have to be prepared for just about anything. Generally the producer will give you an idea going in, like if you should bring a modern-sounding kit, an old-school midrangy kit, some options for snares, or whatever odd bits and percussion they’re hearing. Or they’ll just say, “Bring all your shit, and we’ll freak out for a few days.” [laughs]

For a thing I just did with [producer] Rich Costi for this artist named Birdy, we didn’t have a bass player. It was completely wide open, but at the same time Rich wanted it to have a programmed-beat aesthetic. In that situation, you could bring all your gear, but you still might not have what you need.

For one song I had to record myself into Ableton Live on my laptop so I could tweak out this one groove and then play on top of it. Then we added another drumkit. It was a process, and I didn’t know what we were going to do. All I knew was that I was going to show up and experiment, so it was good to have tons of options.

**Found Sounds**

**MD:** At this point, do you have an idea of the types of sounds various producers are going to want, or is it always flexible?

**Matt:** It’s totally flexible. You’re obviously going to bring a couple drumkits and some snares. I collect a lot of drums that aren’t necessarily snares and bass drums but sound like snares and bass drums. I have a bunch of Taos Native American drums, and there’s one that sounds like a sampled bass drum. I can throw that up to approximate the sound of a sample. I love having those kinds of things around, and...
that’s generally what songwriters are pushing for—they’re trying to get some different sounds to fit the mood of their songs.

MD: What do you look for in a piece of gear when you’re searching for an alternative sound?

Matt: You can just tap on things, and there are a lot of people making unusual instruments. There’s this one DW drum I’ve been using for years. It’s a single-headed 8” piccolo tom with snare wires pressed up against the bottom of the head. If you can crank it up and hit it really lightly, it sounds like an 808 snare.

Another cool thing is the Remo Ocean drum. If you hit it with your hands, it makes the weirdest sound. You can also put it on a snare stand, tape it down, and hit it with a stick, and you get a really mushy thing happening.

And I’ve been into miking tiny little things, like a piece of paper, and smacking them with my finger. If you crank the mic, it can sound incredible, and you don’t know what the hell it is. If you put these elements together in some kind of recording software, you can make weird percussion beats and then run them through amp simulators to crust them up a little bit. A snare sound is basically white noise, so you can try miking anything, like a bag of potato chips, and come up with really interesting sounds.

MD: What about alternate bass drum sounds?

Matt: Have you ever put your ear up to the edge of a cymbal and hit it lightly? There’s an insane amount of low end. If you stick a mic right there, muffle the cymbal, and smack it with your thumb, you can get an amazing bass drum sound. There’s tons of stuff like that, where you can get into making beats by magnifying things so that they’re out of context. With programs like Ableton Live, it’s endless.

MD: Are you coming into sessions with these sounds already in your laptop, or are you finding stuff to try when you get to the studio?

Matt: You just do it as you’re going. I’ll get the bpm of the song and then just start throwing things together with whatever’s lying around. They might like it, or they might not, or maybe they like one element of it. Even if they’re not 100 percent sure about it, it’s still something to play to that’s different from just a click.

MD: So when given the option, you’d rather create your own rhythm track?

Matt: Oh, yeah. But there are a lot of people who are really good at writing and programming on their laptops. There’s this group called Of Montreal that I’ve worked with a bunch. Their main songwriter, Kevin [Barnes], programs the most insane drum stuff in Logic. So whenever he comes to me with a song, I’m like, “Wow! What do you want me to do on this?” Sometimes I’ll transcribe his programming and just play it on drumkit, or sometimes I’ll play on top of his programming and he’ll do a hybrid thing.

Solo Projects, Drum Clinics, and Defining Your Sound

MD: Right before you moved to L.A. you built a studio in your house in
Seattle. Are you keeping that intact?

**Matt:** Pretty much. I did some stuff for Of Montreal there while I was working on my next solo project, Company 23. Some of my recording gear is down here in L.A., but there are so many studios around town. I prefer to just show up with my stuff and play, and then have somebody else deal with engineering.

**MD:** What is Company 23 all about?

**Matt:** It’s basically the stuff I do when I’m not being employed by other people. This record is a little more aggro because I decided to blast all of the synths through guitar and bass amps and then mike them. It has a visceral thing to it. I’m printing it up on vinyl and making it available for digital download at mattchamberlain.com.

**MD:** How did you write the music? Did you use a MIDI controller to record melodic ideas on your computer?

**Matt:** Yeah. It’s my attempt at doing a solo project where it’s just me and my laptop. It’s kind of the reverse of hip-hop, where everything but the drums is played live. I thought, *What if I have live drums and everything else is in the computer?* Plus with my schedule, it’s impossible to work with anybody on a regular basis. My plan is to tour it and try to schedule some drum clinics during the day, before the gigs.

**MD:** You haven’t done a lot of drum clinics.

**Matt:** They’re nerve-racking! I often get into a spiral of infinite possibilities, so when I start thinking about trying to explain what it is that I’m doing in a clinic context I break out in hives. I admire guys who can distill what they do down to a specific program. I don’t know what my thing would be that I would teach anybody, so I’m just going to play this music for people.

**MD:** It’s always illuminating to see someone play up close.

**Matt:** It is. The drum clinics that have made the greatest impression on me are the ones where the guy is just playing. They’re not talking a lot or telling stories. That’s fun and all, but I like to just go and experience some music. I remember seeing Jack DeJohnette do a drum clinic at a convention in ’89 or ’90. He had them turn the lights almost all the way off, and he did this freeform drum solo for forty-five minutes. It was the most insane, life-changing experience. It was like being abducted by a drumming alien. [laughs]

In the end, it’s art. Everybody is entitled to his or her opinion about how to present it. And with all the music that’s available now, you can draw influences from just about anything.

**MD:** How do you keep from getting overwhelmed by the possibilities?

**Matt:** You can only do what you can do. If you’re put in a situation where you’re making music with somebody, you’re hopefully going to follow your intuition and make it sound good by playing what feels right to you, even if it’s something completely different from what most people would expect.

I like the idea of being influenced by one thing while you’re playing something totally unrelated. Maybe on your
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drive to a session with a singer-songwriter, an N.W.A. song comes up on the radio and influences you to try some nasty groove over the top of a mellow song with acoustic guitar. Or maybe you were listening to Elvin Jones, so you wanted to try playing with that wide-open, loose feel. Would that be an interesting juxtaposition? Those are ways to break out of just playing the same old stuff. I like to think of the most unrelated drum concepts that might work on somebody’s song and try them out, as long as we have time for that type of exploration.

MD: It seems that it would take a certain amount of fearlessness to be comfortable doing that.

Matt: You can always just show up and do “the drummer thing.” That always works, and a lot of times that’s what people want. But if you do this every day for a living, or if you want to do this for a living, you have to at least try some other stuff. You might surprise some people, and you might discover something. Otherwise, why even be a session musician or offer your services as a drummer for hire if you’re not going to bring something to the table?

A lot of guys think being a session drummer is this super-serious thing, and you have to show up with the best gear and have this type-A personality the whole time. I think that’s a bunch of crap. You just have to be creative and be in there with the artist, trying to contribute something and be part of the team. There are a lot of drummers who aren’t working, because they have this attitude of, “I’m going to put my shit on top of your shit, and it’s going to sound great.” The audacity of that is sad to
me. I feel you should come in and be open and very humble, and let the music do its thing.

**MD:** What’s interesting is that while it’s clear that you take this approach, at the end of the day the track ends up sounding more like you. It’s pretty easy to tell that it’s you playing on a record, even though you’re always making decisions for the betterment of the music.

**Matt:** Yeah, and it could be anything. It’s not as if you go in like, “I’m just going to play the most simple beat because I don’t want to step on the music.” They might want you to do a frickin’ drum solo over the chorus and then run your drums through the guitar player’s rig for the verse. You have to be as open-minded as possible but still be musical.

**MD:** It’s not like you just show up and say, “Let’s get my sound together.”

**Matt:** That would be crazy! There are too many possibilities, and drum sounds have certain connotations. If you show up with a piccolo snare cranked up and ringy, or with something that’s really dead and Fleetwood Mac–sounding, or if you have a middle-of-the-road classic rock snare sound, like a Mitch Mitchell or Charlie Watts sound, each is going to make a song do something totally different. I can’t imagine saying that any one of those is “your” sound, when you don’t even know what the song is or how your drums relate to the other instruments. The bass player’s tone is going to interact with the guitar player’s tone, and your drums need to fit into that. If your sound is too dark to cut through the guitar tones, it’s not going to work.

The only time I think you can get away with having a sound is if people want that sound and they write a couple songs for that sound. I love too many different things, and there are too many options out there. I mean, Craviotto just made me a 20” snare drum that sounds so cool. [laughs]

**MD:** Has that drum made it on a record yet?

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**CLASSIC INFLUENCES**

- John Coltrane
- Sun Ship (Elvin Jones)
- Can
- Tago Mago (Jaki Liebezeit)
- Captain Beefheart & the Magic Band
- Lick My Decals Off, Baby (John “Drumbo” French)
- XTC
- Various (Terry Chambers)
- Brian Eno/David Byrne
- My Life in the Bush of Ghosts
- David Byrne, John Cooksey, Brian Eno, Chris Frantz, Prairie Prince, Jose Rossy, David Van Tieghem
- John Lennon
- Plastic Ono Band (Ringo Starr)

**CURRENT FAVES**

- Off!
- First Four EPs (Mario Rubalcaba)
- Battles
- Gloss Drop (John Stanier)
- Autechre
- Move of Ten (programmed)
- Hella
- Tripper (Zach Hill)
- Flying Lotus
- Cosmogramma (programmed)

**RECORDINGS**

- Edie Brickell & New Bohemians
- Ghost of a Dog
- Critters Buggin all
- The Wallflowers
- Bringing Down the Horse
- Ian Brown
- Tidal, When the Pawn…
- Macy Gray
- On How Life Is
- David Bowie
- Heathen
- Matt Chamberlain
- Matt Chamberlain
- Morrissey
- Ringleader of the Tormentors
- Viktor Krauss II
- Brandi Carlisle
- The Story
- Sara Bareilles
- Little Voice
- Floratone
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I’ll also often bring in a vintage kit, like a ’60s Ludwig or Gretsch, just in case the Craviottos have too much high end. Older drums have an interesting midrange and low end that you don’t get with modern drums. But they’re all equally valid. It’s just whatever works with the track.

MD: Do you take a variety of cymbals to sessions too?
Matt: Yeah. I have a ride that’s high-endy and pingy that’s good for rock, and I have one that’s more mellow but still has some high end. I also usually take a couple that are really dark and dry, almost like Jack DeJohnette’s sound. It all depends on the track, the room, and the engineer. The way the engineer is EQ’ing things and which mics he chooses to crank up is really important. Some cymbals sound really harsh in certain rooms, so you have to use something that’s a little darker.

Take a Breath
MD: We recently reprinted an excerpt from a Bill Rieflin interview where he was talking about a lesson he learned from you. He asked you what’s the most important thing a drummer should know, and you said to breathe. What did you mean by that?
Matt: There are a lot of different reasons. In the past ten to fifteen years I’ve gotten to play with a lot of people I really admire, like David Bowie and Morrissey. If you really think about that, you could work yourself up into a state and not be able to play. So breathing and doing simple centering exercises really helps me, because when you’re relaxed, everything flows. If you have your playing technique together, the most important thing is being centered and letting your body do what it does naturally, without inhibiting it.

MD: So that’s before you even play a note. What about while you’re playing?
Matt: It’s not a conscious thing where I’m like, “I’m going to play now, so I need to start breathing.” But if I’m playing and I find myself getting into my head or feeling insecure about something, I just sink more into feeling the music and being aware of my body. A lot of times when you’re tense, you’re not breathing.
MD: I’ve noticed that the more I try to play precisely, the tighter my body ends up getting. Has that happened to you?
Matt: Yeah. It’s one of those things where if something isn’t happening, stop trying. Just relax, and it’ll happen naturally. Grooving is supposed to feel good, even if you’re playing to a click. A lot of people get too obsessed with being on point with the click, but a lot of times you can draw your own line through it. If you’re centered in your playing, you’re going to make your own feeling around the click, and it’ll generally feel pretty good. But nothing’s perfect. If you listen to a lot of great-feeling old records, it’s speeding up and slowing down, but it feels great because everybody is playing together.

I remember a hang after a gig with Jon Brion where we were talking about how everything is so perfect and gridded out these days. [Led Zeppelin bassist] John Paul Jones was there, and he said something about how tempo and time are dynamics, not unlike any other dynamic in music—there’s loud and soft, but there’s also slower and faster. Tempo isn’t a static thing like a lot of people think it needs to be. If you put any Stones, Zeppelin, or Hendrix record on a grid in Pro Tools, it would sound like crap. It’s all the stuff that happens between the grid that’s the magical part. It’s constantly moving. Like John Paul Jones said, it’s dynamic.

MD: How do you bring that aesthetic when you’re playing to a click track?
Matt: Like I was saying, you have to draw your own line through it. Hopefully you’re playing the music, and the click is just there as a reference point. There are also situations when someone comes in with all these loops and programmed parts that they want you to play drums on, so you really have to focus in order to nail that stuff. That’s a whole other mindset, where you’re thinking like a drum machine and really getting inside the programming. With programmed parts, you often get a lot of subdivisions, so you’re able to sink into it more and meld your playing with what’s there. Okay…I just completely contradicted myself. [laughs]

MD: Well, those are the two worlds that you live in, where some stuff sounds really gridded out, but with other stuff you can tell there wasn’t a metronome in the building.
Matt: It all depends on what kind of music you’re playing. Some people want it to be raggedy and wide, and they want the beat to be super-loose.

MD: Let’s finish with the idea of touch. You have an interesting touch, where you play off the drum more than into it. Was that something you worked on consciously?
Matt: I don’t really know what I’m doing, but I do know that at one point in college, when I was playing around Dallas, a lot of the clubs didn’t have PA systems. I was playing in these loud rock bands, so I would crank my drums really high and play everything as a rimshot, even on the toms. That was the only way I could cut through. It wasn’t the best way to play the instrument, but I’m sure something from that stuck with me. But then, when you get into the studio, you end up playing way softer because you don’t have to generate as much volume to get your point across. A lot of times playing too loud can work against you. But my touch isn’t really a conscious thing. I’m just trying to make a good sound with people.
In the mid-'80s, Hüsker Dü fused hardcore punk with bittersweet pop, setting the table for an entire generation of angst-ridden alterna-rockers. Two decades on, the band's drummer—who also happened to contribute half of the compositions and vocals—traces the trio's profound path of influence.

MD: When did you start on the drums? What was your first kit?

Grant: I started out with a set of Ludwigs. It was the Ringo kit—the black oyster pearl. I inherited it from my brother. He was a drummer, and he died in an accident at work when I was ten. He had given me some basic [snare] lessons. I think we were into the second book of the Haskell Harr Drum Method.

I had once-a-week piano lessons, but the teacher caught me playing by ear and thought I needed some time away to mature. [laughs] I can read rhythm charts, but I don't pay attention to the notes that much. I've used the excuse for years that sheet music is essentially software for a machine, and I don't want to be a machine. I played in the school band—drumming, mallets, nothing terribly difficult. It was mostly still by ear. Even in high school they had recordings of what [the music] was supposed to be like.
sound like.

Once my brother died, drumming became one activity that I could do no wrong by pursuing. It made things so easy with my parents. I could sneak out of the house with a pair of drumsticks, no problem. If they thought that I was playing the drums somewhere, they would tolerate it very much because it was something that I’d picked up from my brother.

MD: Did you teach yourself how to play the actual drum set then?

Grant: Yeah, pretty much. I would put headphones on and play to 45s. In those days it was pretty easy to tell what people were doing. The song on the record was actually played, so you didn’t have a lot of three-handed drum parts. One thing that I probably spent a hundred hours playing along to was the Fifth Dimension’s “Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In.” It was real pop-funky. It had a lot of “back filling” going on.

MD: That’s something that became part of your style in Hüsker Dü.

Grant: Yeah, keep the snare busy—it kind of came from that. Also, the most important song for a drummer my age to know was the Surfaris’ “Wipeout,” because if you were a drummer in 1973, all of the high school kids would be like, “I bet you can’t play ‘Wipeout.’” [laughs] The surf stuff was real attractive to me because a lot of it was Hal Blaine, and he’s doing some really nice, tight stuff—really straight rolls for fills. I integrated that with the forever-accenting snare stuff I picked up from “Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In.”

MD: What were your first live experiences like? How did you learn to play in bands?

Grant: A big advantage for me was doing as many substitution gigs as I did—there’d be a lot of polka, but there’d also be the Greek New Year’s Eve party and the Hawaiian stuff. I had gigs where I got the job because I had a Hawaiian shirt. [laughs] Some of these polka guys—if you didn’t have, like, a clock going inside your head, they were surly. If you don’t have good time, how are you going to know it? It’s only by playing along with something that you can regard as being strict.

MD: How old were you when Hüsker Dü got started?

Grant: I was seventeen when Hüsker Dü played the first time. I had been playing the drum set for a good six years.

MD: Were you still in high school?

Grant: Yeah. Bob Mould was in his first year in college. [Bassist] Greg Norton did not matriculate. I went to the Minneapolis College of Art and Design for a year, for visual art.

MD: In the early days Hüsker Dü was playing a million miles an hour.

Grant: Part of it’s myth; part of it’s more of a development than a sudden change. For example, our first album, Land Speed Record—we had plenty of mid-tempo to slower stuff, but we concentrated all our fastest material into one set to deliberately make that record. We continued to play the fast set on tour after the first LP; it’s what people expected. There was more emphasis on speed than melody, clarity of performance, accuracy of trajectory…it was all about velocity. And it got to the point where we could play it in half the time of the original recording.

It’s arguable that there was a deliberate concentration of the very fastest stuff played faster to conform to this new thing that was starting to happen in different places. In the big picture certainly we were way ahead of the time, but there was the Dead Kennedys, Black Flag, D.O.A. in Vancouver…. A few years later there were so many bands like that, we changed the trajectory again and deliberately started playing more pop stuff because that was a surefire way to piss off the youngest of the hardcore bands. [laughs]

MD: Did you enjoy playing that fast?

Grant: The exhilaration of just slamming a roomful of people up against the wall—that’s nothing quite like it. There were other things that were more rewarding after we found out there were plenty of other people who played that way.

MD: Hüsker Dü never wanted to be part of a particular scene.

Grant: All of our hair got unsuitably long for the audience’s comfort level. [laughs] We enjoyed throwing something challenging at them. Are people coming to hear the band or just to fit in with something? We sent the message: “Don’t worry about fitting in. Do what’s right and fit into that. To thine own self be true.”

MD: How would you gear up for the intensity of a Hüsker Dü show?

Grant: I wasn’t that keen on stimulants after Land Speed Record. The old-time truck drivers had a formula that incorporated coffee, whiskey—just enough to kill fatigue pain—and keeping the cab of the truck as hot as you can get it so you’re metabolizing everything as much as possible. That could be applicable to what we were doing. I wouldn’t load myself up on a lot of beer. I would drink water, and as I was ready to get up and play I would drink a double shot of bourbon, and that would take care of the anaesthetic in the equation.

MD: You had better technique than many punk drummers back then—powerful, yet economical. How did that develop?

Grant: Technique is what people arrive at that produces the best result. If the result you’re looking for is playing longer and faster and not being quiet, you’re going to take into account everything that contributes to that.

Most of [my technique] is from discovering the path of least resistance. It was about keeping things loose. It’s a different kind of strength, the kind of drumming that I was doing. You’re letting the snap do the work. You’re letting the bounces do as much of the work as
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GRANT HART

possible. Snap it down and then relax and catch it when it’s up, and snap it back down again. Release the grip right after the stroke so that you can just keep your hand around the stick but not have to lift it.

A lot of people do too much. I had an instructor that called it “pump handling,” where you know, they keep everything too stiff. I would sit pretty high and let the drumhead be the elevator. If it’s going to bounce anyway, why lift it?

MD: Couldn’t have hurt. But also the energy for the kick drum was being directed straight down to the pedal instead of forward. The more upright you sat, the less you kicked the drum forward. When you’ve got mayhem happening on stage, you don’t want it happening on top of your drums.

MD: It’s amazing that you were able to play that style of music and at the same time sing so clearly, especially on the songs where you sang lead. How did you do it?

Grant: It’s concentration. I thought about the drums as little as possible while singing. It evolves more into a dance than a musical performance. You know where everything needs to be at a given time, and then you deliver it as best you can.

MD: Your setup seemed pretty ergonomic.

Grant: Early on I abandoned the second tom-tom. Eventually I lowered the ride cymbal.

MD: Boy, did you ever love that ride cymbal.

Grant: My hi-hat was mostly just a place to put my left tennis shoe.

MD: Wait, I thought you played barefoot.

Grant: Only for about the first four or five years in Hüsker. I got out of that by the time we did Flip Your Wig. I got tired of picking glass out of my feet.

MD: What was the rationale behind barefoot drumming in the first place?

Grant: You’re not picking up as much weight—you’ve got less to kick forward. Everything you throw down you have to pick up.

MD: What size of stick did you prefer?

Grant: I was using 7As, and I was playing them backwards. But I would still get the nylon tip for the times I’d want to switch them around and get the really nice contact with the nylon on the ride. I guess I always wanted to maximize that bright hit.

MD: Speaking of bright, your records have a unique sound. The drums have a light, almost ping-pong-ball sound to them.

Grant: To tell you the truth, a lot of the Hüsker stuff was poorly produced. Not to slag off the band, but I really think that had we known the longevity of some of those records, we would’ve—out of respect for that—maybe occasionally done a second or third take on some songs. We rehearsed the hell out of things, but some of the tones…. [grimaces]

MD: Did you ever use a click track in the studio?

Grant: There’s no click. There’s a massive tempo shift at the beginning of “Diame” on Metal Circus, but usually it’s very consistent.

The biggest compromise made by me was to record the last three albums without cymbals—we’d add cymbals after. It gave me the opportunity to use room mics without having a battle going on between the cymbals and the guitar tones—just to make it so that you can EQ the snare without screwing up the sound of the cymbals. You can facilitate a better sound.

Replacing the cymbals is easy; removing them is more difficult. I would just put a huge piece of carpet over the cymbal. It was kind of a compromise, because Greg got out of the hardcore thing at a good time. It had become so formulaic. I remember making a conscious effort; realizing that someone could ask us to do “Stars and Stripes Forever” and it would end up sounding like Hüsker Dü, I would try to bring things as uncommon to our practices as possible.

MD: Your song “Tell You Why Tomorrow” on Hüsker’s final record, Warehouse: Songs and Stories, even features a mini drum solo of sorts.

Grant: The drum solo had become such a negative cliché. That was one of the things that punk was supposed to get rid of. [laughs] But that was intended as a break fill, to propel it into the next verse.

It was always a little bit of a point of tension. I wouldn’t solo myself—any time my songs had an open eight, this is where the guitar solo would be. I’m glad for everything that I didn’t have to try and talk [Bob Mould] into.

“There was more emphasis on speed than melody, clarity of performance, accuracy of trajectory... it was all about velocity. And it got to the point where we could play it in half the time of the original recording.”

MD: You made it on the singles chart last April when Green Day released a cover of your song “Don’t Want to Know If You Are Lonely” from Candy Apple Grey. It’s extremely cool that they included your original version—on the A side, no less.

Grant: That was very flattering. I’ve been told it was the most successful Record Store Day release. I don’t know if that’s true or not. It all ends up trickling down. Every concert I play, the youngest person there has heard my stuff because of somebody else—or else they’re awful damn curious.

MD: Hüsker Dü never really got the big payday that was enjoyed by the bands that followed in your footsteps. Does that ever eat at you?

Grant: There’s a certain amount of satisfaction that comes from innovation. How flattering is it for me to say, “So and so took everything of mine and made millions”? Well, yeah, that has happened, but it has nothing to do with what I set out to do when I did it. It’s not like those people made what I was doing any more difficult. I end up having to spend a lot less money on bodyguards than the people who are super-successful. If I met the right bodyguard that I wanted to give the money to, then maybe I’d work on being a more valuable body to guard. [laughs]
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By merging elements of funk, fusion, R&B, and jazz into a daunting style that rides magically on a carpet of stunning power and technical exhilaration, Dennis Chambers has become one of the most important and influential drummers of the post-punk period. Chambers is self-taught, but he possesses great confidence and a unique drumming style, and his influence can be heard in drummers as diverse as Tony Royster Jr., Thomas Pridgen, and Teddy Campbell, all of whom draw on Dennis’s groove intricacy, deep pocket, nearly incomprehensible speed, and awe-inspiring soloing style.

Chambers made his initial foray into the music business with Parliament-Funkadelic, but he exploded onto the scene as a member of guitarist John Scofield’s innovative mid-’80s quartet, where the drummer’s multi-tiered groove approach and thunderous solos often threatened to overshadow the band-leader’s significant talents. Chambers went on to record and perform with George Duke, the Brecker Brothers, Tower of Power, David Sanborn, Stanley Clarke, Maceo Parker, Steve Khan’s Eyewitness, Mike Stern, Greg Howe, Steely Dan, and John McLaughlin, and for the past ten years he’s been a member of the multiplatinum Latin rock band Santana. He has also co-led the groups Niacin, Graffiti, and CAB and has released several solo albums, including *Getting Even, Outbreak, Front Page*, and *Planet Earth*.

Chambers was born in Baltimore and began drumming at the age of four. By six he was performing in local nightclubs. In 1978, not long after his eighteenth birthday, he joined the legendary funk group Parliament-Funkadelic, and he remained with the band until 1985. Dennis subsequently relocated to New York City, where he became the house drummer for the legendary Sugar Hill Record Company. His massive beats would be sampled ad infinitum for the many classic hip-hop tracks released by Sugar Hill.

In 1986 Chambers joined John Scofield’s band for the recording *Blue Matter*. Two tracks in particular, “Make Me” and “The Nag,” showcase Dennis’s blast-furnace beats and speed-demon velocity. Dropping accents in fresh places, Chambers drives “Make Me” with a stomping bass drum, dexterous 16th-note rolls between the ride cymbal bell and the snare (within the main portion of the groove!), and a 2-and-4 backbeat that sounds like a massive redwood falling in the forest. Chambers’ pocket, abetted by bassist Gary Grainger, is like a tank dancing on ballerina’s legs: awesomely powerful but surprisingly nimble.

“The Nag” sent thousands of drummers for the many classic hip-hop tracks in particular, “Make Me” and “The Nag” showcases Dennis’s blast-furnace beats and speed-demon velocity. Dropping accents in fresh places, Chambers drives “Make Me” with a stomping bass drum, dexterous 16th-note rolls between the ride cymbal bell and the snare (within the main portion of the groove!), and a 2-and-4 backbeat that sounds like a massive redwood falling in the forest. Chambers’ pocket, abetted by bassist Gary Grainger, is like a tank dancing on ballerina’s legs: awesomely powerful but surprisingly nimble.

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The drum sound is deep, his cymbal crashes enormous. Coupled with Scofield’s wily guitar patterns, Chambers is everywhere at once, propelling the locomotive groove with an earthquake-inducing right foot, inverting the beat and dropping bombs, and creating an unprecedented tidal wave of rhythm.

Chambers’ reign in Sco’s band continued to unleash depth charges: the fantastic bass drum triplets of “Blue Matter,” the gale-force drumming of “Pick Hits,” and the swaying off-kilter displacements, hi-hat/bell punctuations, and dizzying drum break of “Loud Jazz.” Scofield disbanded this very popular lineup in 1989, and Chambers has often cited his desire to re-form the group.

Dennis’s recordings as a leader, though somewhat overlooked, feature tremendous drumming and adventurous compositions by Jim Beard, Lenny Pickett, Bill Evans, Adam Rogers, and Scofield. “Roll Call,” from 2002’s *Outbreak*, is all slinky, semi–New Orleans shuffle. That’s followed by “Okay,” a stellar example of tapping hi-hat conflagrations, slippery snare-to-tom fills, and unmistakable bass drum originality. The track reunites Chambers with Scofield, and the sparks fly. Throughout, Dennis’s hi-hat pushes with alement humors while his bell creates lighter-than-air groove joy.

Midway through the tune, the drummer establishes a marching snare-to-tom pattern, a silken space that soon returns to the funk at hand. “Groovus Interruptus” is four on the floor and in your face, a moment of simple fatback thumpery that’s simply majestic in its delivery. “In Time,” however, is the album’s standout. A classic penned by Sylvester Stewart that featured Andy Newmark on its original Sly & the Family Stone version, the song sees Chambers revisiting its funk filigree with constantly shifting accents, broken full-set 16ths, and his instantly recognizable roundhouse tom rolls.

*Planet Earth*, from 2006, is equally flush with drum mastery and choice material, from the backward beat of the title track to the scalding bass drum accents of “Dance Music for Borneo Horns #4” to “Camel Hump,” a solo vehicle of itch’en snare drum figures, displaced hi-hat and bass drum, and all the seismic complexity of tectonic plates slipping on a funky planetary axis.

In the ’90s Chambers toured with Steely Dan, appearing on the 1995 album *Alive in America*, and worked with outstanding groups led by Mike Stern, John McLaughlin, and the Brecker Brothers. He joined Santana in time to record the 2002 album *Shaman* and later appeared on the *Multidimensional Warrior* and *All That I Am* discs and the *Hymns for Peace DVD*. Between his responsibilities with Santana, Dennis has continued to contribute to many top sessions (Niacin’s *Organik* and Barbara Dennerlein’s *Take Off! are particularly worthy), and most recently he appeared on Steve Khan’s *Parting Shot* and Bootsy Collins’ *Tha Funk Capital of the World*.

Ken Micallef

“A couple of my friends, like Lil’ John Roberts and Gorden Campbell, studied Dennis,” says 2012 MD Pro Panelist Gerald Heyward. “We were all church dudes, but hearing them bring Dennis’s influence to the R&B stuff and take the art to another level—playing all these fast cross-hand licks, coming around the drums real fast but being very crisp—got me into Dennis. My whole thing was a lot of doubles and singles, and Dennis was doubling and tripling everything that I was doing with singles and doubles.” [laughs] It was also remarkable to see that his style was versatile, coming out of Parliament and applying that to Scofield and the Brecker Brothers. So for me his influence was speed, taste, and versatility. Dennis took it all to another level.”
That seat we sit on is affectionately called a throne. This signifies to me that we are kings—or queens—of our domain. As such, we are in a position of power and honor. This means that we should never take for granted the responsibility that we have to create a reliable foundation for our band and the audience. Every decision we make, every tempo we choose, and every note we play matters.

Personally, I’m honored to pay attention to the little details—every ghost note, every nuance of every fill, every bass drum beat in every bar, and every exact tempo. Each song has a limited variation of tempo that will maintain the integrity of the groove. For that reason, I have my tempos memorized, which has proven to be a very useful talent for playing live and in the studio. Memorizing tempos helps you quickly determine the beats per minute (bpm) of a song, and it allows you to count off that song, for you and your mates, at an accurate pace. I love playing with a metronome on pop and rock gigs, but I don’t always have that luxury. In the cases where I don’t, having the tempos memorized helps me feel confident and secure from the first note to the last.

I have a couple of simple points of reference—120 bpm and 100 bpm—that I use to find any tempo. For me, 120 bpm is a comfortable walking tempo. I can call that up in my mind quite accurately. I also practiced a lot in the ’70s when disco was infiltrating the music scene, so I can always recall that standard dance tempo. (It’s branded in my brain for life!) A tempo of 100 bpm is about the fastest comfortable speed at which I can play 32-note single strokes with my hands on my knees. These are both great reference points for me, and they may work for you too. The point is to be able to consistently recall a couple of tempos based on your body’s built-in physiology.

If I cut 100 or 120 bpm in half, I get 50 or 60 bpm. By playing quarter-note triplets at 120 bpm, I can find 90 or 180 bpm very easily, as 180 bpm is the pulse of the quarter-note triplet, and half of that is 90 bpm. Using that same formula with 100 bpm, I can now find 150 and 75 bpm. Using just 100 and 120 bpm as my reference points, I can call up a bunch of other tempos with accuracy (50, 60, 75, 90, 150, and 180 bpm). If I slow down or speed up any of these tempos, I can estimate nearly every rate in between.

Of course, I love working with a metronome, and I always suggest to my students to practice everything with a metronome to develop a consistent internal pulse. The more you practice with a metronome, the better you will memorize tempos. It’s also fun to test yourself by working at a few specific tempos per day and seeing if you can recall them the following day. Your body clock does change from day to day, so some days your recollection of tempos will be better than others. I’ve freaked myself out by being inaccurate at times. Don’t worry—it happens to all of us. The only remedy is to play to a metronome whenever you practice and perform, or at least to have one nearby for reference.

When I was touring with Pink, I always played to a metronome, regardless of whether we were jamming without sequences or I was getting a click track to play to in order to be in sync with sequenced parts. I did that because I wanted to know that all of the tempos were locked in. It created absolute consistency for every show. (I also used a metronome when I auditioned for gigs with Cher and Stevie Nicks.) You may be comfortable using the metronome just to give you starting tempos, and then you play the songs without it. It’s your choice. Either way, I say have a great time—with great time!
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Hybrid rudiments are permutations, mixtures, or combinations of the classic forty rudiments established by the Percussive Arts Society. In this article we’ll take a look at how one of the more widely recognized hybrid rudiments, the hairta, has been utilized in musical styles from bebop to metal.

The hairta is most commonly articulated as an 8th-note triplet subdivided into two 16th notes followed by two 8th notes. This subdivision can be applied within any rhythmic context.

As with any rudiment, practicing the hairta from slow to fast, from fast to slow, from soft to loud, and from loud to soft are good ways to develop muscle memory and dexterity. The exercises presented here will help you gain control of the hairta.

The following exercise should be practiced at very slow tempos (40–80 bpm), because it progresses up to dense rhythmic subdivisions.

You can also add accents to the hairta to create dynamic contour within the rudiment.

The following transcriptions showcase various ways that the hairta can be applied to the drumset.

Here’s how Tomas Haake plays the hairta on the Meshuggah track “Bleed.” The tune centers on a 32nd- to 16th-note double bass hairta variation juxtaposed against a half-time rock groove. (0:00)

Steve Gadd uses the hairta to great effect (at 9:03) on the Chick Corea track “Samba Song.” Gadd articulates the hairta on the snare drum, with the third note being played on a cowbell.

Hard-bop legend Jimmy Cobb uses the hairta to create little flourishes within more melodic solo phrases on the classic Wes Montgomery/Wynton Kelly track “Four on Six.” (5:14)
The possibilities for playing the hairta on the drumset are infinite, and there are plenty more examples of this distinctive rudiment being used very creatively. Fusion great Billy Cobham and pop drummer Carter Beauford, for instance, often use the hairta to create excitement and tension in their solos and fills. Once you’ve learned how other drummers have incorporated this powerful hybrid rudiment into their playing, try experimenting with some of your own variations. Good luck!
In this article I’ll show you how sticking patterns can be applied to the drumset to create various grooves. Each groove is built from the ground up, progressing through four easy-to-understand steps.

The first step is to learn the basic sticking pattern by itself. This is the building block for the final groove. The second step is to apply accents to the sticking pattern. (I recommend practicing the first two steps on a practice pad.) Don’t concern yourself with playing these patterns at lightning speeds. Try to play them at tempos that feel comfortable, and focus on making them groove.

Once you’ve mastered the first two steps, you can move on to the third, which incorporates the bass drum. The final step is to apply the accented sticking pattern and the bass drum part to the drumset.

Our first groove is based on a 4/4 16th-note sticking that leads with the right hand. Note the three groups of five (RLRRL) followed by a right-hand stroke.

Here’s the pattern without accents.

Now let’s add the bass drum.

Finally, we’ll apply the pattern to the drumset.

For our second groove, we’ll start with a 4/4 16th-note sticking that leads with the left hand.

Here’s the pattern with accents added.

Now let’s add the bass drum.

Finally, we’ll play the groove on the drumset. It’s important to note that playing the toms would be awkward if the sticking were reversed so that you were leading with the right hand.

Our third groove will explore two-surface riding. Here’s the pattern without accents.

Here’s the pattern with accents added.

Finally, we’ll apply the pattern to the drumset.

Now let’s add the bass drum.
Finally, we’ll play the groove on the drumset.

Our next groove incorporates 32nd notes. Here’s the pattern without accents.

Here’s the pattern with accents added.

Now let’s add the bass drum.

Finally, we’ll play the groove on the drumset.

The next groove is based on 16th-note triplets leading with the left hand. Here’s the pattern without accents.

Here’s the pattern with accents added.

Now let’s add the bass drum.

Finally, we’ll play the groove on the drumset.

Our final groove is in 7/4 and is based on a 16th-note sticking that leads with the right hand. Here’s the pattern without accents.

Here’s the pattern with accents added.

Now let’s add the bass drum.

Finally, we’ll play the groove on the drumset.

Once you’ve mastered these six grooves, you can experiment with different ways to interpret them. For example, you could combine two of the grooves to create two-bar patterns, you could substitute a cowbell for the hi-hat or ride cymbal parts, or you could incorporate open and closed hi-hat sounds. You could also play the accented sticking pattern as a fill.

These exercises are meant to be thought-provoking yet tangible enough that you can go on to come up with your own unique grooves based on your favorite sticking patterns. Have fun!
Welcome to the final installment of “Ostinato Studies.” Those of you who’ve been practicing parts one and two of the series should by now have a firm grasp on the foundation of developing solo phrases on top of an ostinato, as well as how to apply polymeters. This time we’re going to explore the idea of playing metrically modulated feels over our ongoing multi-pedal ostinato.

Metric modulation is defined as changing from one time signature or tempo to another by the use of polymetric phrases or atypical accents over a common pulse. The accents act like a pivot point to generate the perception that you’re playing in a completely different tempo from where you began.

The steps below will enable you to produce a splitting effect with your limbs, where your feet will stay at the original time signature/tempo while your hands pivot to a new time signature/tempo.

As with parts one and two, video examples of the material from this article are posted on the Education page of moderndrummer.com.

The following foot ostinato is the same simple pattern from the previous articles, which initially involves two pedals (hi-hat and bass drum) but eventually moves to four pedals.

The most logical way to begin soloing over this foot pattern is with a consistent stream of 16th notes with no accents. Make sure the notes line up with each other from hand to foot.

By adding an accent on every third 16th note, you can create the illusion of a 3/16 pattern played over the ostinato. Keep in mind that it takes three measures for this pattern to reset back to beat 1.

The next example shows only the accents from the previous pattern. Try orchestrating them on an alternate cymbal surface, like an X-hat on your ride cymbal side.

The next step is to add an accent on every other note to produce the effect of a new tempo.

Once you’re comfortable with the new pulse produced by your ride hand, add snare drum notes to create a backbeat in the new tempo.
If your setup allows you to do so, you can use your snare hand to strike a floor tom to suggest a bass drum part in the new tempo. (Your snare hand would now alternate between the floor tom and snare.)

From here, go back to the beginning and repeat all of the steps using the following multi-pedal ostinato.

Although the topics presented in this series of articles are quite challenging and can be exciting to incorporate into your drumming vocabulary, I can’t stress enough the importance of first developing the essentials of drumming—playing appropriately for the music, being well versed in a multitude of styles, and providing musical support for the artists you work with. The material in this series can open up a new world to you, providing endless avenues to explore. Enjoy, but use the ideas wisely!

Jason Gianni is a full-time faculty member at Drummers Collective in New York City and a coauthor of the acclaimed instructional book *The Drummer’s Bible*. For more information, visit jasongianni.com.
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Ideas From the Road
Soundcheck Grooves to Chew On
by David Garibaldi

I’d like to share with you some simple ideas that evolved from a jam session at a soundcheck with Tower of Power. These grooves felt so good that I thought I’d pass them on.

On the road, we usually have a fairly routine schedule—at least as routine as it can be while roaming around the world in a funk band. Generally, we do three to five shows in a row followed by a day off, which is usually spent traveling to a faraway city for the next series of shows. Each day there’s a memo (the “Sheet of Lies”) listing the following day’s events: departure time, crew schedule, band schedule, soundcheck time, dinner and show times, and so on. We travel regularly on show days, unless we have to go a particularly long distance. In that case, we travel overnight on our tour bus.

Believe it or not, we still rehearse. This usually happens at soundcheck, which for us is a combination of a traditional soundcheck, a rehearsal (if necessary), and a jam. We’re always working on our music—whether that’s tweaking arrangements, learning new songs to be added to the live show, or developing ideas for songs to be recorded. The daily jam has been going on since my first day in the band and has provided us with source material for many of our songs. It’s an important part of the inner workings of Tower of Power.

Here are some of the grooves that developed out of one of these jams. Example 1 is the basic idea, and Examples 2–9 are variations. Examples 10 and 11 are some extra things that weren’t part of this particular jam, but they’re pretty cool. As always, the key elements here are patience and precision. If necessary, disregard the tempo markings and focus on making the exercises comfortable for you. Practicing with a metronome is a must, and you should make sure that your ghost strokes are light and transparent.
Just in case you’ve forgotten (or you’re new to my methods), here’s a graph that describes the two-sound-level concept that’s a key component in my approach to drumming. The dynamics of the music being played always determine how you interpret these levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dynamics</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fff</td>
<td>SD accent/rimshot</td>
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<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>BD accent</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HH accent/shoulder of stick</td>
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<tr>
<td>mf</td>
<td>BD non-accent</td>
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<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>SD ghost note/tap, HH ghost note/tip of stick</td>
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<tr>
<td>ppp</td>
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If you have any questions, I can be reached through the Tower of Power website, towerofpower.com. See you next time, and enjoy!
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HUMAN ELEMENT
HUMAN ELEMENT
GARY NOVAK has played with Chick Corea, Allan Holdsworth, and Alanis Morissette, but Human Element is his first outing as a joint leader. The album’s Weather Report–meets-2070 fusion gives this drumming enigma plenty of room to set the joint on fire. “Izzy” offers scalding hyper-bop leavened by Novak’s textural dynamics, blazing-fast stickings, and gorgeous tom smashes. The title track plies drum ‘n’ bass burn and straight-ahead overdrive, with Novak swinging like Elvin channeling a Jedi knight. The drummer’s pocket is deep and wide when required, as on “Cut” and “Speak With Your Eye,” the latter unleashing a feel so perfect it could slice ice. Gary Novak defies gravity. (Abstract Logix)
Ken Micallef

BLUE COUPE
TORNADO ON THE TRACKS
Drummer ALBERT BOUCHARD helped to conjure Blue Öyster Cult’s image as grand wizards of sci-fi-inspired sludge rock, through his inventive tom phrasing, steady timekeeping, and compositional skills. With his new project, Blue Coupe, featuring brother and former BÖC bassist Joe Bouchard, former Alice Cooper bassist/songwriting collaborator Dennis Dunaway, and Doors guitarist Robbie Krieger, Bouchard hasn’t lost his touch. On supernatural-themed originals and covers, he lays down solid grooves and easily shifts feels, suggesting beat displacement. Blue Coupe isn’t a BÖC clone, but the music’s strong rhythmic foundation and haunting, if at times satirical, lyrical content recall classic Cult. (bluecoupeband.com) Will Romano

MD CONTRIBUTOR ROUNDUP
by Ilya Stemkovsky

HONEY EAR TRIO’s Steampunk Serenade features an avant-jazz sax/bass/drums lineup, with 2011 MD Pro Panelist ALLISON MILLER playing big grooves (“Olney 60/30”) and caressing her snare and cymbals with an assured touch (“High Water”). Check out Alli’s control with the tempo changes in “Six Nettes.” (honeyeartrio.com)

HUMAN ELEMENT

WICKED BEATS FEATURING GIL SHARONE
DVD LEVEL: ALL $24.99
Wicked Beats lives up to its name. Gil Sharone’s enthusiasm for Jamaican ska, rocksteady, and reggae is contagious, and the drummer offers ample practical and technical knowledge here. He keeps it all within reach, demonstrating, for instance, how varying the hi-hat parts alone changes the beats. Sharone also wisely invites the contributions of several important experts in the field, giving greater depth to the discussion. Historian Roger Steffens brings cultural perspective to the music, beginning with the heartbeat rhythm, Nyabingi. Sharone blazes on a cool reverse rimclick technique and then introduces the beat’s inventor, Lloyd Knibb (Skatalites). And Carlton “Santa” Davis (Peter Tosh, Ziggy Marley) shows off his patented hi-hat groove, “the flying cymbal.” The performances shine, and even the bonus scenes—covering dancehall patterns, hip-hop/reggae fusion, the use of dynamics, and getting tones—are awesome. (Hudson) Robin Tolleson

MULTIMEDIA

MD scribe Vinnie Zunno’s (this past February’s “Making Drum Loops” article) main contribution is as a guitar player with Joe Jackson, but his all-pocket, no-frills drumming is solid on Swinging Guitar Sounds of Young America, his latest disc of retro-style jazz, rock, and everything else. Guest drummers include Ray Machica, Gary Burke, Shawn Pelton, Matty Amendola, Bashiri Johnson, and Steve Merola. (vinniezunno.com)

MD contributor ROBIN TOLLESON’S syncopated kick and vintage-sounding snare groove might be good on the Secret B-Sides’ infectious blend of hip-hop, old-school R&B, and slinky funk. Flowers & Chocolate is a soul party on disc, and the drummer grasps the idea of using space and knows just when to open the hi-hats. (thesecretb-sides.com)
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FEATURING CARLOS SKINFOILL
DVD LEVEL: BEGINNER TO INTERMEDIATE
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In this fifty-five-minute DVD, composer and contemporary jazz drummer Carlos Skinfill demonstrates various brush techniques, including stacatto and legato brushing and “off”-tone strikes (deadening a drum’s natural harmonics by pressing the brush flush against the snare head). Onscreen graphics and overhead camera angles help to illustrate traditional approaches such as two-handed circular sweeps. In addition, Skinfill employs double paradiddles (mistakenly called paradiddle-diddles) when performing an African bembe-style composition with his son Alex in the section titled Rudiments. In the second half of the video, Skinfill discusses his gear and offers personal, faith-based testimony. While there’s nothing necessarily wrong with the inclusion of these features, the viewer might prefer that the time were used for more in-depth technical analysis. Ultimately, though, this is a useful, if fractured, instructional primer. (carlosskinfill.com) Will Romano

A RHYTHMIC TWIST:
TRIPEL CONCEPTS FOR DRUMSET
BY JEFF SALEM
BOOK/CD LEVEL: BEGINNER TO ADVANCED
$14.99
Triplets “bring the swing” to rhythm. And Jeff Salem brings this diverse, rhythmically seductive feel to the limelight in an easy-to-follow seventy-five-page instructional. Once he establishes the crucial nuances of the triplet feel, Salem introduces 12/8 grooves; shuffle variations; jazz, hip-hop, and world patterns; and triplet-based fills from easy to advanced. He emphasizes the unique distinction between straight and triplet feels and offers challenging combination exercises. The recommended listening references within each musical style are spot-on, showcasing era-specific radio classics that feature the triplet in all its three-legged glory. MP3 audio examples of each exercise and a variety of play-along tracks make this a fun, inexpensive, and challenging journey into the twisting, triangular world of triplets. (Hudson) Mike Haid

THE FORGOTTEN FOOT: A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING FOOT INDEPENDENCE AND HI-HAT/BASS COORDINATION FOR ALL DRUMMERS BY KOFI BAKER AND JORDAN HILL
BOOK/CD LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE $19.99
Written collectively by Kofi Baker (Cream drummer Ginger Baker’s son) and Jordan Hill, The Forgotten Foot shines a light on the hi-hat hoof and its overlooked role in timekeeping and four-way coordination. Various examples of rock, jazz, and shuffle beats and fills are featured, including the hi-hat’s function within each pattern and the specific independence needed. Also covered is double bass drumming and “pedal-bridging” (playing the hi-hat and second bass drum simultaneously). But it’s not all about the feet—your hands also need to be together to execute the 16th-note-triplet crashes and 2-3 rumba clave pieces found here. A well-recorded fifty-eight-track CD of Baker demonstrating many of these exercises rounds out a nice package that investigates an uncommon instructional-text topic. (Hal Leonard) Ilya Stemkovsky

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Greetings From Brazil! by Ben Meyer

Two new offerings help drummers and percussionists decode the vast topic of Brazilian percussion styles, instruments, and musical applications. Though written with different audiences in mind, the packages are well organized and put together thoughtfully.

CREATIVE BRAZILIAN DRUMMING BY CHRISTIANO GALVÃO
BOOK/CD LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED $14.99
Written by Brazilian native and prolific drumset artist Christiano Galvão, Creative Brazilian Drumming is focused on teaching you to play four popular Brazilian styles and also to develop the skills to unleash your own creativity within each. The included CD provides examples of every exercise in the book, as well as play-along tracks for each of the styles addressed within: baião, maracatu, frevo, and samba. The CD is a great idea, given the many subtleties of Brazilian percussion.

Creative Brazilian Drumming is laid out in a user-friendly format and includes track listings for each example. The notation is clear and easy to read, and the layering of parts and the inclusion of multiple variations on each pattern make the book a truly practical volume. The up-to-date recommended listening suggestions and reasonable price tag only sweeten the deal. (Hal Leonard)

AFRO-BRAZILIAN PERCUSSION GUIDE BY KIRK BRUNDAGE
BOOKS (3) LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED $15.99 EACH
Afro-Brazilian Percussion Guide is an extensive three-volume study of folkloric and modern Brazilian percussion history, styles, and culture. Author Kirk Brundage is a Brazilian percussion expert based in Los Angeles and has traveled extensively throughout the South American country. The first of the three volumes, Introduction, is somewhat of an overview and includes sections on capoeira, samba, carnavalet, and candomblé traditions. The book also includes a section on drumset adaptations of the included styles, which is a nice touch. The Carnival and Candomblé volumes delve much more deeply into each of these topics and flesh out the information presented in Introduction. Afro-Brazilian Percussion Guide contains a huge amount of information and would be of great value to high school and university instructors interested in starting Brazilian percussion ensembles. The series would benefit from the inclusion of recorded examples, though recommended listening, viewing, and websites are provided to aid the reader. (Alfred)
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All the great drummers have a really good feeling,” Marcus Miller says. “They all love music and love listening to music. A lot of drummers don’t really listen or know how to accompany. Other drummers, because they love music and love people, that’s what they do naturally. Music is really just an extension of your personality. The guy who only wants to talk about himself, who doesn’t want to share—that will translate to his drumming; he’ll play exactly the same way.”

Miller’s latest album, A Night in Monte-Carlo, is a concert recording with the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra, featuring original material and choice covers in grand style. Here, Marcus speaks about the drummer on that release, Poogie Bell, as well as many of the other great players he’s shared stage and studio time with.

“POOGIE BELL

When we do a take together, I don’t ask the guitar player or the horn player which take they like the best. I ask Poogie, or Buddy Williams, or Tony Williams. Those guys always see the whole picture. They don’t have their head buried in their instrument. Poogie loves music, and he listens to the whole thing. Other drummers will just choose the take they played the best on. If you have a lot of experience but you’re not really a team player, you can fake it. But if you’re really that kind of person, it’s a lot more natural. Poogie has a great feel. And he knows how to swing; some funk drummers can’t swing. Poogie speaks both languages authentically.

One of the premier bass players and producers of his generation, he helped reinvigorate Miles Davis’s career, has worked with artists such as Frank Sinatra, Aretha Franklin, Luther Vandross, and Jay-Z, and has recorded fourteen albums as a leader with some of the best drummers in the world.

by Ken Micallef

Bengt Nyman

MARCUS MILLER

by Ken Micallef
STEVE GADD

Steve Gadd is a beautiful person. He is so interested in you, whoever you are. When we did sessions, before Steve even pulled out his sticks he would ask for the demo to be played twenty times. He’d order coffee and just sit there and listen to the demo. By the time he pulled out sticks and played, he knew the song. He didn’t know the music, he knew the song. What he played was always so appropriate and so beautiful and supportive to the music—as opposed to drummers who hear the demo and play along the first time. They think they’ve got it down. That is a guy who’s insecure and wants to show you how bad he is.

Personality and your willingness to be a human being are real important. Other successful drummers can be more self-centered, but because they’re so talented you just fall in and follow them—they have a little something special that allows people to enjoy what they do. But if it weren’t for that, they’d have difficulty, because their personality doesn’t allow them to be a group player.

STEVE JORDAN

Steve began as a fusion drummer. He has re-created himself. He thought fusion was getting old, and then he saw the value in groove. Usually the fusion cats have devalued groove so much that by the time they get back to groove, it’s too late. But Steve really became known for his groove.

Our best record together is David Sanborn’s *Upfront*. He killed that record. He came in with this old snare drum that sounded like a trash can, and we argued over using it. But when I hear the record now, that snare drum makes the record. And the way Jordan feels on that record, it’s beautiful.

STEVE GADD

Steve Gadd sounds more drum-and-bugle corps than Steve Jordan. When you play with Gadd, there may be a click track, but you will never hear it. Gadd covers every click with a beat. If the band starts speeding up, Gadd plays a five-stroke roll and brings everybody back into the pocket. He’s like a surgeon.

Jordan, even if it’s a straight feel, will put a little swing into it, like the old New Orleans cats. It’s in between the two feels. Zigaboo (Modeliste) would do that a lot. And Steve Jordan is really committed to the sound of his drums.

Vinnie Colaiuta

You might think a guy like Vinnie can’t groove because he can play such complicated stuff. But Vinnie has a really good feel. And that makes it nice. I have been in situations where Vinnie kept that feel, then when it was time to create excitement he broke out those chops. That’s the ultimate, when you can use your chops to create emotion. I really like Vinnie’s feel.

Lenny White

Lenny swings from that late-’60s framework. He’s one of the most creative drummers I’ve ever played with. You’re not sure how or why it works; sometimes he just wills the drums to do stuff. He’s really a genius on the drums. My first gig was in Lenny White’s fusion band when I was seventeen. He came to a club where Omar Hakim and I were jamming, when I was sixteen. Lenny came in and invited me to his house. We began hanging out, and I took a semester off from college to go on the road with him. We toured on the *Astral Pirates* album, then recorded *Streamline*.

OMAR HAKIM

Omar is very free. When he plays, he plays reactionary. He will help you build energy. He’s been playing the way he is now since we were fifteen years old. He comes from the funk school that people don’t remember, that late-’60s/early-’70s school. He used to play at block parties where he had to groove to keep people excited. If someone plays busy, I usually play less. But since Omar and I grew up together, we can both play busy and it’s still cool.

TEDDY CAMPBELL

He’s from gospel, and he’s fast. He knows how to play with machines and make them feel good. That was hard when I was coming up; it wasn’t part of the culture then.

CHRIS DAVE

I jammed with him early on. I recognized that he was the new guy. He’s incorporated a lot of the J Dilla push-and-pull aspect of the hip-hop beat. Chris looks at the drumset differently from the drummers who came before him. He’s a very creative cat.
Rhythm is essential to the music of John Cage (1912–1992). Throughout his long career Cage used rhythm as a compositional building block and was one of the first Western composers to create works for percussion ensemble. Over the years he was influenced by serialism, Zen Buddhism, indeterminacy, and mesostics (the latter being Cage’s word for his own version of acrostic poems), but rhythmic elements and the use of percussion would continue to be essential features of his work.

Cage’s use of rhythm had its roots in studies with Arnold Schoenberg, father of the serialist method (also known as the Second Viennese School). Cage wrote that for his teacher, “Harmony was not just coloristic: it was structural,” and he applied that principle to his own music, replacing harmony with rhythm.

One example of this is “Pulse,” composed in 1939 for six percussionists. Instead of a melodic motif driving the structure of the piece (think of the opening riff of Led Zeppelin’s “Stairway to Heaven”), “Pulse” is split into two sections, each defined by a separate rhythmic pattern (think Gwen Stefani’s “Hollaback Girl”).

As a composer who focused so much on rhythm, Cage wrote a lot of music for dance. Over the years, many of his pieces were created for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company; Cage was also a musician for the company and often toured with it. He described the relationship between music and dance in this partnership as “independent but coexistent.” Dance and sound occur in the same space at the same time but are unrelated in terms of rhythm.

Cage also used silence as a compositional tool, starting early in his career and culminating in the famous piece “4’33″.” He described his first pieces for percussion as “short motives expressed either as sound or as silence of the same length.” In 1948, Cage was deeply affected by a visit to Harvard University’s anechoic chamber, a room designed to absorb all sound. Cage had expected total silence but still heard sounds, which he later learned were his own blood pressure and nervous system. He realized that for most of us, there is no such thing as silence.

The piece “4’33″,” which can be played on any instrument and is made up entirely of rests (yes, there is sheet music), highlights this concept. It draws attention to the ambient noise that exists at all times and asks the listener to reconsider the differences and similarities between music, noise, and silence. “Silence is not acoustic,” Cage said. “It is a change of mind, a turning around.”

Cage wrote for both traditional and nontraditional percussion instruments, but he’s best remembered for expanding the percussive capabilities of the piano. The prepared piano, which he created for a friend’s dance performance in 1940, turned a familiar old keyboard into something new and exotic. Inspired by the work of his former teacher Henry Cowell, Cage experimented with inserting common household items like screws, bolts, paper, and weather stripping in the piano strings. The result was “Bacchanale,” the first of many pieces he wrote for prepared piano. Fans of Wilco drummer Glenn Kotche, who for years has explored the idea of a “prepared drumset,” are sure to connect the dots to Cage’s experiments in this area.

Later in his career, Cage became interested in using chance, or indeterminacy, as a means of exploring sound. He used the I Ching, a classic Chinese text and divination tool, to make choices while writing music. Frequently, he also allowed the performer to determine how a piece would evolve. “Apartment House 1776,” for example, is written for “Four singers and any number of musicians with any melody or keyboard instruments and a drum ad lib.” The piece’s length is undecided, and the singers choose what they will sing.

“The spirit of percussion opens everything, even what was, so to speak, completely closed.” —John Cage

Cage’s influence on twentieth-century music is massive. His writing style had a major impact on minimalism, and composers who worked for and with him include David Tudor, Earle Brown, and Joan La Barbara. Even the Beatles were affected by his work; Paul McCartney has said that Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen influenced the Fab Four’s legendary unreleased track “Carnival of Light,” which was recorded in 1967.

The work of John Cage is groundbreaking in many ways. The composer experimented with compositional technique, the structure of musical works, and performance methodology. But his use of rhythm, and his love of percussion, was constant throughout his career; through them he expanded the vocabulary of Western music and challenged artists to step into the unknown.
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It’s been two decades since the passing of the man who powered Kiss’s ‘80s comeback. ZO2 drummer and Carr fanatic Joey Cassata, who contributed to a brand-new EC tribute album, marks the occasion.

I still can’t believe it’s been twenty years since my favorite drummer of all time, Eric Carr, passed away. It feels like it was only yesterday when I first heard the Kiss album Creatures of the Night. It completely blew me away. To this day, I think that’s the biggest drum sound ever recorded.

Eric replaced Kiss’s original drummer, Peter Criss, in 1980. He brought new life and energy to the band, which many felt had been missing for years. Taking on the “Fox” makeup persona, Eric was quickly accepted and became a fan favorite for the next decade. Sadly, on November 24, 1991, he passed away following a yearlong battle with cancer.

Some of Carr’s highlights with Kiss include the aforementioned Creatures of the Night, the Kiss DVD box set Kissology Volume 2 (which focuses on Eric’s years with the band), and my personal favorite, the video Animalize Live Uncensored.

The first time I saw Eric play behind his monstrous Ludwig kit, I knew that was what I had to do for the rest of my life. Eric is the main reason why I’m a drummer today, and he’s why I play Ludwig drums. Needless to say, I was at a loss for words when his sister Loretta contacted me to be part of his upcoming twentieth-anniversary commemorative CD, Unfinished Business. Not only did she want me to be part of the project, she also wanted me to rerecord Eric’s finest moment, “Carr Jam.” I was both excited and extremely nervous.

For those of you unfamiliar with the song, “Carr Jam 1981” appears on the Kiss album Revenge, which was released right after Eric’s passing. The version on Revenge is based on a demo that Ace Frehley and Eric were working on; later it was the basis of the song “Breakout” from the first album by Frehley’s Comet. The best part of “Carr Jam 1981” was the middle section, where a professional recording of Eric’s iconic drum solo was featured.

As I sat down to record “Carr Jam,” I felt as though I was actually in Eric’s shoes for a brief second. It was as though I was ten years old again, jamming along to Kiss songs in my room in Brooklyn.

Unfinished Business features rare Eric Carr drum and vocal recordings, previously unreleased songs from his time with Kiss, live performances, and remixes. There’s also a version of Kiss’s “All Hell’s Breaking Loose,” which I recorded with my band, ZO2. Plus, as a cool bonus feature, in between the tracks are never-before-heard audio recordings of Eric joking around and commenting on various subjects related to his career in Kiss. It’s really a must-have for any Carr fan or Kiss collector, and I’m very proud to be a small part of it.

You will also be treated to some unforgettable performances by many of Eric’s friends and fellow musicians. The care and emotion that they express on each track are a testament to a man whose personality and heart were as enormous as his talent. Eric Carr’s spirit is truly alive in each and every song.

A highlight of Unfinished Business is a section from Eric’s Kiss vocal audition tape where he sings the song “Shandi” from the Unmasked album. Eric’s vocals were lifted from the tape and combined with a refreshing new musical arrangement; this is one of my personal favorites on the CD.

I never got the chance to meet Eric Carr, but everyone who did have the pleasure of knowing him says the same thing: Not only was he a monster drummer, but he was also the nicest person you could ever meet. I hope this commemorative CD and article keep his memory alive for many years to come. Eric, we all miss you.
“No finer human being ever walked the face of the earth. Eric Carr, besides being a bombastic drummer and a great singer, had many friends and admirers. We loved him. We miss him still.”
—Gene Simmons, Kiss

“Eric’s dynamic drumming reinvigorated Kiss at a time of upheaval, and his passion and dedication helped remind us of what we may have lost during that chapter in the band’s history. He was a little guy with enormous heart, sensitivity, and compassion for others. A very unfair and cruel loss.”
—Paul Stanley, Kiss

“I always felt that Peter and Eric were exactly the right drummers for Kiss during their times in the band. Each guy brought his unique style and singing into Kiss and helped propel them forward while doing so.” —Eric Singer, Kiss

“Eric Carr will always be remembered by the fans and musicians he impressed during his years in Kiss. He got a thunderous sound from his Ludwig kit, and he was fearless in his desire to put on a great show, with his tremendous drum solos. His drumkit would dwarf him, but he didn’t care—of course he had to end the solo standing on the drum stool so that the crowd could see him! Not only were his live performances electric in nature, but Eric could also sing powerfully and play bass and guitar, and he was a great songwriter. He is sorely missed and loved by all. If heaven has a band, Eric is having some amazing jams for sure!”
—Bruce Kulick, former Kiss guitarist

“Not only was Eric Carr an amazing drummer, he was also an amazing person. Truly one of the nicest guys in the business.”
—Mike Portnoy

“Eric was the best drummer Kiss could ever have. To this day, Creatures of the Night is my favorite Kiss LP. His drum sound and performance make that album!”
—John Humphrey, Seether

“Eric was a class act, a great friend, and a great musician. Many miss him. I was honored to record a song for his tribute CD, which he wrote, and to be part of his memory. Rest in peace, my friend.”
—A.J. Pero, Twisted Sister

“Eric Carr joining Kiss in 1980 gave the band a much-needed shot in the arm, and his thunderous style helped push Kiss into a more hard-rock-driven direction. His ball busting was legendary, and I often think of how much he would have loved That Metal Show, the TV show I currently host on VH1 Classic. He would have been a regular for sure.” —Eddie Trunk

“Eric and I had a great relationship—kinda cool to have that kind of relationship with someone you admire.”
—Scott Rockenfield, Queensrÿche

“Eric brought a more mature style of drumming to Kiss, which they didn’t have before and haven’t had since.”
—Frankie Banali, Quiet Riot

“Eric was, believe it or not, my favorite Kiss member.”
—Lydia Criss, ex-wife of Peter Criss

The author would like to thank Carr’s sister Loretta Caravello and the entire Caravello family, Gene Simmons, Paul Stanley, Bruce Kulick, and Kiss fans everywhere. To buy a copy of Unfinished Business, go to ericcarr.com.

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This screaming set comes from schoolteacher Richard Lewis of Bridgend, South Wales. “I decided to make a kit to play in school that I thought might encourage children to play—not that they needed any encouragement to make noise,” Lewis says. “After speaking to my friend Ralph Davis, who runs an apparel design company, Obsolete Industries, we settled on what I call the Demon, which is colorful enough to catch the eye in any school.

“First we prepped the drums for painting. Once they were nice and smooth I painted them white and sent them off for the artwork. To draw the graffiti-style images, Ralph used Posca paints, which are usually used on surfboards and are pretty much ‘paint in a pen.’ Notice the clever positioning of the air vents for eyes. Then it was back to the shop for a few layers of lacquer, which really brought out the bright colors, and the hardware went to a local powder coater.”

As all drummers know, there’s nothing worse than a tom rubbing against the bass drum and causing scratches. To combat this, Lewis added rubber trim around the bottom hoop of the rack tom. “The trim fits perfectly,” he says, “and when added to the top hoops it also stops children from breaking their sticks!”

So, did Richard achieve his goals for the Demon drums? “The kit is now in a school,” he says, “standing up to a daily beating from various kids, and it has done its job of encouraging children to take up playing the drums.”

**Photo Submission:** Hi-res digital photos, along with descriptive text, may be emailed to billya@moderndrummer.com. Show “Kit of the Month” in the subject line of the message.
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