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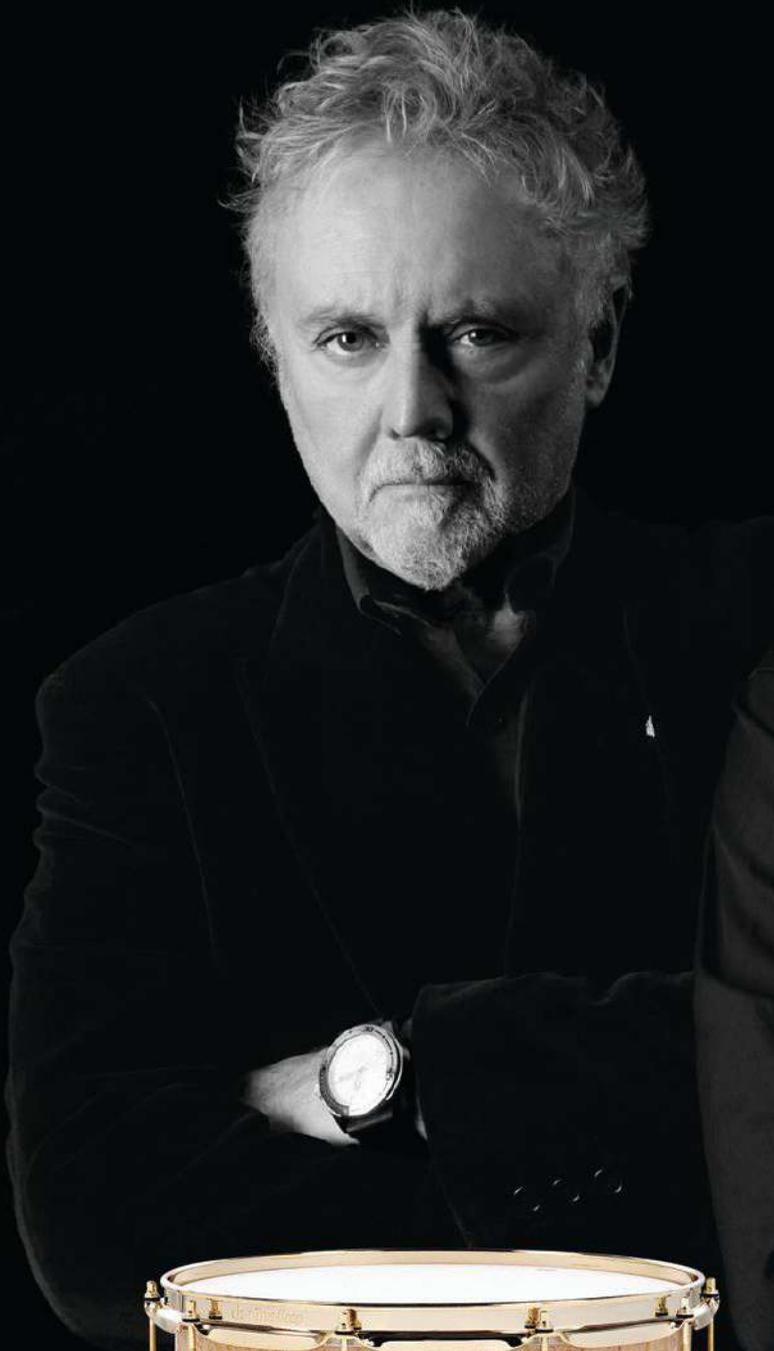
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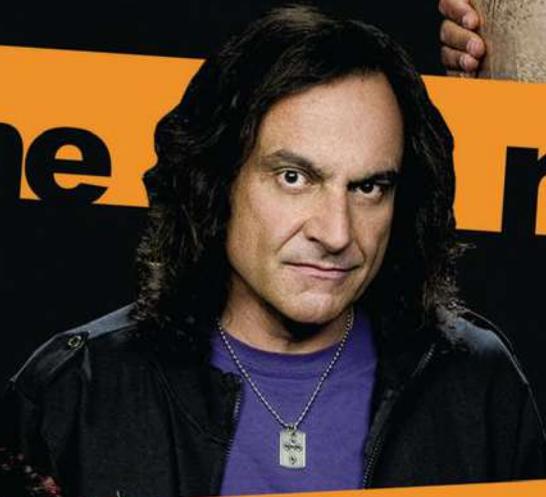
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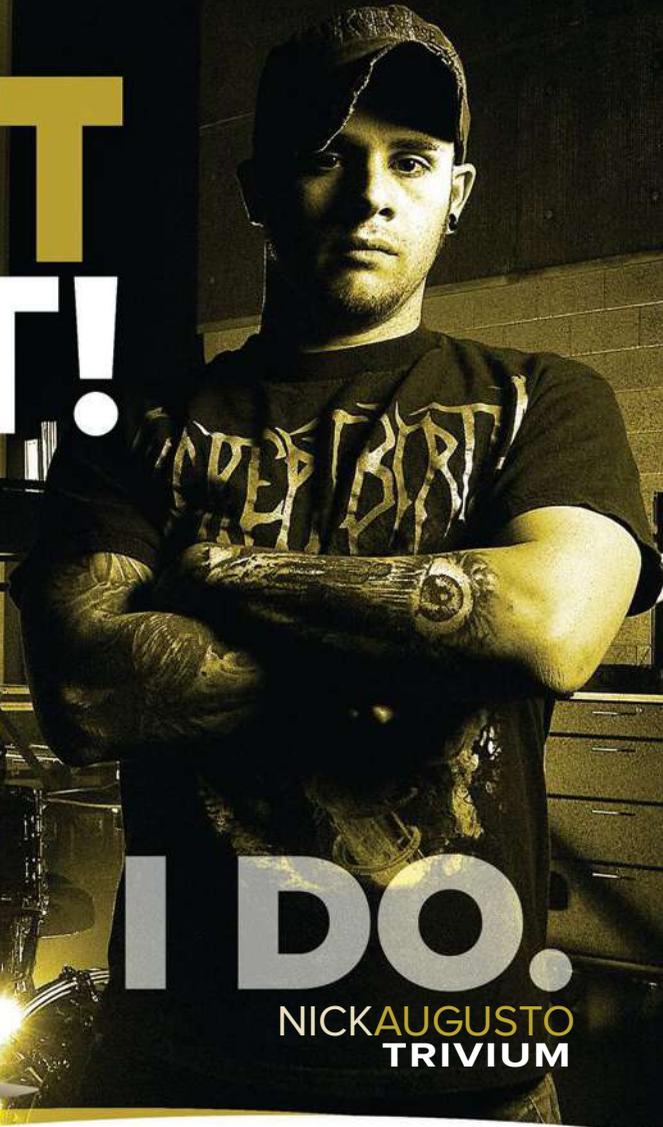
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**On the Cover**

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by Miguel Monroy

Back in the day—you know, like five years ago—you had to be doing world tours or making platinum records to influence as many drummers as this month's cover star does with his groundbreaking educational website.

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- Haim's **Dash Hutton**
- Moon Hooch's **James Muschler**

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### 42 SANDY GENNARO

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### 80 UP & COMING Stella Mozgawa

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After George Harrison blew his mind during the ex-Beatle's *Thirty-Three & 1/3* sessions, the drummer applied his newly expanded approach to an impressive list of hitmakers.

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# A Hero's Journey

We're taught in school that a good story needs a protagonist and an antagonist—a hero struggling to bring goodness to the world, and a villain doing everything in his or her power to stop that from happening. The reason we love a juicy good-versus-evil story is that we identify with it in some way, because each of us comes up against barriers in life. Our struggles might not play as well on the big screen as Rocky versus Apollo Creed or James Bond versus Dr.

No, but they're *our* struggles, and how we attempt to overcome them is central to our individual character.

You could argue that applying the word *hero* to a musician does a disservice to the brave or desperate people throughout the world who, each and every day, risk their own safety to protect others from oppression, or to simply put food on the table. Is drumming ever a matter of life or death? It's hard to imagine a scenario where that would be the case—though who knows, maybe they'll work a drumming story line into the next *Hunger Games* movie.

On the other hand, drumming can heal. We know this. Drumming can help us communicate, enlighten us, educate us, and entertain us. It can pay our rent, and it can bring us closer to one another. We know these things too. Maybe there *is* something to this drum-hero concept that we should unapologetically hold up as true. If by playing music we're able to bring tangible improvement to our own lives and to the lives of others—maybe you want to call that heroic, maybe you don't. But you do have to acknowledge it, and you have to show it respect.

The gentleman on the cover of this month's issue, Mike Johnston, describes in detail his early struggles with the most basic drumming coordination challenges. It might be hard to believe today, but the same guy who has guided thousands of drummers through significant improvements in their playing, via his hugely popular MikesLessons.com website, was once at a loss to figure out how to be anything better than the worst drummer in the room. Mike will have to tell you in his own words how he overcame his obstacles, starting on page 50. What I will tell you here is that his unique ability to communicate, his dedication to his students, and his relentless drive to conquer the physical and mental "villains" that will always be there to block our way have made him, by many measures, *the* most successful and effective drum teacher on the planet right now. And, around here at least, we call that a true hero.



*Adam Budofsky*

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The *Modern Drummer* Pro Panel is an open-ended group of professional drummers who contribute regularly to the magazine's content. It represents an unparalleled amount of musical experience, which members share with readers across the spectrum of the magazine's editorial mix. The Pro Panel was established in 2011, with multiple players added to its ranks during each of its first three years. Beginning in 2014, players are being added one at a time.

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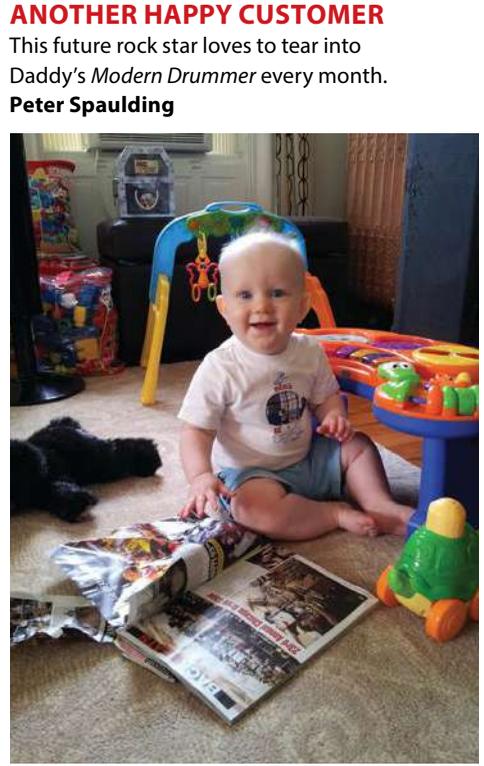
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# READERS' PLATFORM



**KAREN CARPENTER**  
 Thanks for the great "What Do You Know About...?" story on Karen Carpenter (December 2013). Although best known for her angelic voice, she had some serious drum chops, as the story noted. As a kid I remember seeing this beautiful girl seated behind the kit while singing lead vocals, and thinking, *That's so cool!* She and Levon Helm were the two singing drummers who inspired me to join their ranks. She was gone way too early, but her music lives on forever.  
**Lee Steitz**



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**JIM RILEY**  
 Just wanted to let you know that Jim Riley's last couple of articles were some of my favorite pieces in your magazine lately. The back-and-forth between two working drummers (Seth Rausch feature, January 2014) is great and does not seem like an interview at all—just two drummers talking business and shop. Would love to see some more articles and interviews from Jim. Thanks!  
**Adam Reszenski**

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## COLIN STRANAHAN

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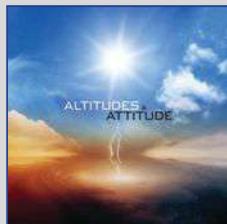
Colin Stranahan made an early splash on Denver's jazz scene, gigging steadily by age fifteen and making his impressive recording debut as a leader at seventeen with 2004's *Dreams Untold*. Since migrating to Brooklyn in 2006, the restless drummer has emerged as an in-demand force, playing on eighteen recordings in 2013 alone. But it didn't happen overnight. "As soon as you come to New York," Stranahan says, "you realize you're not the big fish—there are thousands of big fish everywhere. But I didn't see that as discouraging. It just inspired me to work harder, dig deeper, and not be afraid of taking risks and falling on my face. I think that's something people appreciate about my playing: I'm always searching.

"Being prepared was important too," Stranahan adds. "If there were people I really wanted to play with, I would just start learning their repertoire, in case there was a chance I might play or sit in with them."

The drummer's reputation has burgeoned with his own three CDs in addition to sideman gigs with Kurt Rosenwinkel, Fred Hersch, Jonathan Kreisberg, Terence Blanchard, and other notables. But Stranahan's heart belongs foremost to the collectively led Stranahan Zaleski Rosato Trio, which recently released its second CD, *Limitless*, on Capri Records. Featuring pianist Glenn Zaleski and bassist Rick Rosato, the group brings its challenging yet lyrical mix of traditional and progressive acoustic jazz to an even greater level of maturity with this second outing. The disc is sparked by Stranahan's formidable technique, fluid interactive musicality, and dazzling, uncanny ease with odd time signatures and metric modulations. "I've done a lot of studying music in a very mathematical way," Colin says. "But I've gone *through* that. Now I'm just trying to use those elements organically—to make it feel as good as if I were playing a simple 4/4 groove while using those metric manipulations as musical ideas.

"This new record has personal connections to our lives," Stranahan adds. "We're all gaining lots of life experience, and that's very important. The more we progress, the more honest our music becomes." **Je~ Potter**

### OUT NOW



**Frank Bello and David Ellefson** *Altitudes & Attitude* (Jeff Friedl) /// **Adrian Galysh** *Tone Poet* (Todd Sucherman, Charlie Waymire) /// **Dusan Jevtovic** *Am I Walking Wrong?* (Marko Djordjevic) /// **Dewa Budjana** *Joged Kahyangan* (Peter Erskine) /// **Oozing Wound** *Retrash* (Kyle Reynolds) /// **John Corigliano** *Conjurer/Vocalise* (Evelyn Glennie) /// **Living Sacrifice** *Ghost Thief* (Lance Garvin) /// **Michael Schenker** *Bridge the Gap* (Herman Rarebell) /// **Barry Danielian** *Metaphorically Speaking*

(Clint de Ganan, Bashiri Johnson, Ralph Rolle, Shawn Pelton, Buddy Williams) /// **Earl McIntyre** *Brass Carnival & Tribute!* (Vince Chericco, Vinnie Johnson) /// **The Puppeteers** *The Puppeteers* (Jaime Affoumado) /// **Adam Unsworth, Byron Olson, John Vanore** *Balance* (Danny Gottlieb) /// **William Fitzsimmons** *Lions* (Jason McGerr)

### ON TOUR

**Dean Butterworth** with Sugar Ray and SugarSmash /// **Mike Mangini** with Dream Theater /// **Navene Koperweis** with Navene K /// **Matt Garstka** with Animals as Leaders /// **Anup Sastry** with Intervals /// **Mike Portnoy** with Transatlantic



# DASH HUTTON

Climbing the rock 'n' roll ladder with Haim

Things have gotten very interesting very fast for the indie-pop group known as Haim (rhymes with "time"). After releasing two heat-seeking EPs in 2012, the band of sisters—bassist Este, guitarist/lead vocalist Danielle, and keyboardist/guitarist Alana—saw its debut album, *Days Are Gone*, enter the Billboard 200 at number six and subsequently appear on many critics' best-of-2013 lists. The sisters' goofy-cool vibe has landed them in dozens of magazine spreads, while anyone lucky enough to catch the band opening for Florence and the Machine, Ke\$ha, Mumford and Sons, or Phoenix, performing at SXSW, or appearing on *SNL* has seen firsthand that beyond its engaging persona, Haim is a real-deal rock 'n' roll outfit. "It's been a whirlwind from the very start," says Dash Hutton, who's been the band's live drummer since February 2012. "It's total forward momentum."

Check out Hutton on YouTube—in, say, Haim's 2012 iTunes Festival performance, or better yet the BBC's Maida Vale videos—and you'll witness a drummer with more than enough passion and flair to keep up with the wisecracking, spotlight-grabbing players up front. Hutton's job is largely about interpreting the multilayered drum parts originally recorded by Danielle—all three sisters were encouraged to learn their way around the kit by their drummer father—and to keep the intensity level up.

"Though I get help and guidance from the sisters," Hutton explains, "I don't think they've ever stopped me from interpreting things my way, which makes me feel that I'm contributing my style to the live performance. Generally I try to keep it as minimal as possible and only play what makes the track come across and be exciting, rather than attempt to cover everything that's on the original recording. But playing some of the syncopated grooves... it takes a lot of concentration. The best thing I can do is try not to think."

The son of Danny Hutton, one of the three lead singers of the legendary hitmaker Three Dog Night, Dash grew up immersed in '60s and '70s music but also loved '90s punk bands like NOFX. As such, he found immediate common ground with the Haim sisters, whose sound is informed by '90s R&B like TLC and Destiny's Child but who have also caught ears with their covers of the Fleetwood Mac nuggets "Hold Me" (from the tribute album *Just Tell Me That*



Edith Edwards

*You Want Me*) and "Oh Well." According to Hutton, that throwback attitude informs much of the band's approach. "Maybe one of the reasons the group has been fun to watch is because we never know exactly what's going to happen," he says. "A lot of times I'll play different fills—I try not to stick to one exact thing, because taking chances is what keeps us going. And we don't use a click. We've been trying to avoid Pro Tools and all that because we all grew up with classic rock and like that old-school mentality."

At the moment Hutton is content accompanying Haim on its meteoric climb, but he also says he's thrilled about what the future may bring. "The girls have been playing together for twenty years, and I've been with them for the last two," he says. "So as far as me possibly playing on their next album...I'd love that. When I get home, I want to keep busy, and I want to create."

**Adam Budofsky**

## WHO'S PLAYING WHAT



**Jack Lawrence-Brown** (White Lies), **Will Calhoun** (Living Colour), **Zigaboo Modeliste** (the Meters), **Pete Robertson** (the Vaccines), **Mike Wengren** (Disturbed), **Ben Thompson** (Two Door Cinema Club), **Stix Zadinia** (Steel Panther), **Matt Nicholls** (Bring Me the Horizon), **Richard Jupp** (Elbow), **Jamie Morrison** (Stereophonics), and **Neil Primrose** (Travis) are using Porter & Davies silent drum-monitoring systems.

**Arturo Stable** (Paquito D'Rivera, Dave Samuels) is playing Meinl percussion.



**Steve Gorman** (the Black Crowes), **Pip Mailing** (the Quireboys), **Nick Adams** (David Cook), **Larry Garrett** (J Collins), **Michael Hanf** (San Fermin), **Timothy Herzog** (Godspeed You! Black Emperor), **Channing Cook Holmes** (Capital Cities), **Dan O'Neill** (Cassadee Pope), and **Jazz Robertson** (Ludmila Stefanikova) are playing Paiste cymbals.

**Matt Walker** (Morrissey) has joined Taye Drums' artist roster.

**Mike Portnoy** has joined the Gator Cases artist family.



# JAMES MUSCHLER

Bridging EDM and jazz  
with Moon Hooch

"It's not house music—it's *cave* music," James Muschler says by way of explaining the sound of his unusual group, Moon Hooch. "We're striving to emulate the sounds of a DJ set while maintaining the kind of creative response, improvisation, and chemistry that can really only happen between a group of improvising musicians."

Muschler's lightning-fast hand/foot combos and forward-leaning time feel are integral to Moon Hooch's concept, which marries catchy melodies to hypnotic rhythms and actively seeks to broaden the way people think about dance music. Moreover, the ambitious three-piece is making its bid with quite an unconventional setup—drums plus two saxophones.

Moon Hooch's 2013 self-titled debut features a dizzying array of fast-paced music. Band members Muschler, Mike Wilbur, and Wenzl McGowen met while attending the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music in New York City but came together with diverse interests, including McGowen's focus on producing house music and Wilbur's immersion in avant-garde classical. Muschler, who has a fondness for Indian classical and drum 'n' bass, counts his exposure to the multidisciplinary monster Dan Weiss among his most lasting musical experiences. "I was super-inspired," Muschler says, "when I found out that the things Dan was playing that moved me he'd learned from studying Indian classical music with tabla player Samir Chatterjee."

Muschler subsequently began studying with Weiss and working on applying tabla concepts to his own drumset playing. "Tabla compositions inherently have a built-in anticipation of the future, a forward momentum," James says. "When I use tabla rhythms in Moon Hooch, I feel that they propel the music to a new level



of excitement."

Last year the trio toured with They Might Be Giants, treating the popular way-out band's audience to the Moon Hooch brand of eclecticism, developed from years of playing at New York subway stops. In fact, it was there, in the depths of Manhattan, that the group was discovered by former Soul Coughing frontman Mike Doughty, who, like so many New York commuters, was charmed by the unexpected music Moon Hooch was putting out. "Beauty happens when someone's expectations are manipulated," Muschler says, quoting an assertion by author Daniel Levitin in the book *This Is Your Brain on Music*. "I love stuff like that."

**Alex Fredkin**

## NEWS



Holmes



Wildoer

### THE 2013 MEINL DRUM FESTIVAL

Meinl's 2013 Drum Festival was held this past November 2 at the Svenska Mässan Exhibition and Congress Centre in Gothenburg, Sweden. The nearly sold-out show featured performances by Juan Carlos Mendoza (2012 Guitar Center Drum-Off champ), Morten Lund (Stefano Bollani), Dirk Verbeuren (Soilwork), Peter Wildoer (Darkane, James LaBrie), Rodney Holmes (Jim Weider), Per Lindvall (Bronk), and Benny Greb (Benny Greb Trio, Moving Parts).

### CRESCENT CYMBALS PRESENTS JOHNNY VIDACOVICH WITH LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The award, for sustained excellence in the field of drumming, was presented last December 14 by Stanton Moore at his Spirit of New Orleans Drum Camp, where Vidacovich was serving as an instructor.





## D'ADDARIO DONATES INSTRUMENTS TO MUSICIANS WITH DISABILITIES FOR HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

This past December 20, New York-based musicians with autism and other disabilities received a large donation of drum equipment from D'Addario as a holiday gift. The FREE drum line will use the drumheads, sticks, and other items while performing in an exhibition at the 2014 WGI World Championships. The presentation of the equipment, followed by a performance, was held at Family Residences and Essential Enterprises (FREE) in Bethpage, New York.



## SO, YOU THINK DRUMMING'S A GAME?

Well, actually, now it is. The educational site drumchannel.com has teamed with Nuday Games, a producer of digital and physical music-branded games including Rock Science, to market a drum-trivia board game called Beat the Competition.

The game, which can be played by between two and six players, explores the world of legendary drummers, drum history, and fun facts about today's top drummers of all genres. Fans are encouraged to submit their own trivia questions at drumchannelgame.com; valid questions will earn drummers a discount off the price of the game and a chance to win a DW Collector's series Aluminum snare drum with chrome hardware, a brick of Vic Firth Signature model sticks, and a Jawbreaker drum rug and Thomas Lang practice pad from Meinl. The best questions will also be included in the final printed game. Beat the Competition is distributed by Alfred Music.



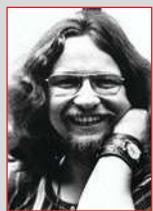
## 2013 KEROPE ZILDJIAN SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION WINNER ANNOUNCED

Zildjian has announced that Ethan Ahmad from the University of Southern California is the winner of the 2013 Kerope Zildjian Scholarship. Ahmad will receive a \$5,000 tuition award, an all-expenses-paid trip to the Zildjian factory, and cymbals of his choice. The two runners-up, Wai Chi Tang from the Manhattan School of Music and Michael Jopling from Carnegie Mellon University, will receive a special cymbal package. The scholarship was established to honor the memory of Kerope Zildjian, who presided over the company between 1865 and his death in 1909, and to encourage and reward percussionists in their pursuit of performing excellence.



## SABIAN VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING STACEY MONTGOMERY-CLARK JOINS PERCUSSION MARKETING COUNCIL

The Percussion Marketing Council executive committee has announced the appointment of Stacey Montgomery-Clark to its executive board. As Sabian's vice president of marketing, Montgomery-Clark has been an active member of the music industry for more than nineteen years and has contributed to internationally recognized marketing campaigns, events, and artist-relations development.



## ELTON JOHN DRUMMER ROGER POPE PASSES

Roger Pope, who played on several of Elton John's early albums, as well as with Harry Nilsson, Al Stewart, Seals and Crofts, Daryl Hall and John Oates, and the band Hookfoot, died late last year. Pope can be heard on classic Elton John songs like "Where to Now St. Peter" and "Island Girl," and on Kiki Dee's 1974 hit, "I've Got the Music in Me."



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Follow the URL or scan this QR code for trade-in details. The trade-in must be made within TWO weeks of the date of purchase. Proof of purchase copy required.

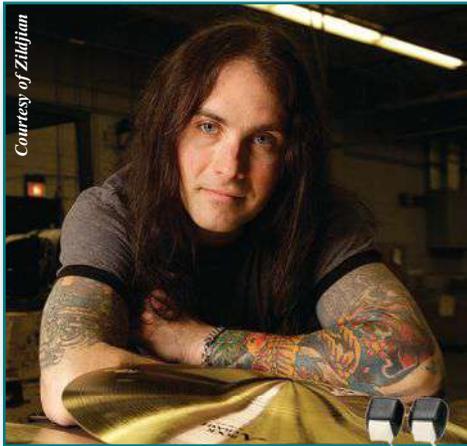
[www.mapexdrums.com/armory-snare-trade-in](http://www.mapexdrums.com/armory-snare-trade-in)



#PLAYMORE

# Must-Have Gear

Equipment the Pros Won't Leave Home Without



Courtesy of Zildjian

## This Month: **Shadows Fall's** **JASON BITTNER**

I have different criteria for what is absolutely essential, depending the gig. If it's a sit-in type of thing, all I really need is my trusty Promark 5BX Signature series sticks with some Promark Stick Rapp, and DW 9000 pedals for my feet, either a double pedal or two singles. If I'm heading into a situation where I have to use loaner gear but I want to sound as close to "myself" as possible, then I need to add my Pearl Reference 20-ply 5x14 snare and my Zildjian 21" A Custom Mega Bell ride cymbal. A clinic situation will add the need for percussion—an LP Jam Block, Mambo cowbell, Gajate Bracket, and Micro Snare, along with a DW 9550 remote hi-hat for multi-pedal exercises. No matter what situation I go into, though, the *real* must-have list starts with a carpet, a roll of duct tape, a pillow for the bass drum(s), a drum key, a solid throne, and level ground to set the drums up on. Without these, the show will not go on!



## BACK *Through the* STACK

In April 1992, **Mike Bordin** of Faith No More closed his cover story with these words of wisdom.

The longer you go playing with the same person, the better. If you really dig somebody that you're playing with, stick with it, because you can't buy that. You can't just assemble that chemistry. If you've got roots with a bass player, it's a mistake to just close your eyes to it. And I would recommend being very patient with playing drums. It's like golf or something. You can learn to get by in a passing way real quick and can go around a golf course in about two months of practicing. But that's not the whole end. Be patient and do it because you love doing it. Don't feel insignificant and stop doing it because you see Chad Wackerman or Steve Gadd doing it. Just make that purify your motivation, and do it because you want to do it. Drumming is an attitude. Once you get the muscle memory and routine of what you do down, then your fingerprint comes on it, and it becomes personal.

It's a great thing because anybody can do it, and you can spend as little or as much energy on it as you want and deal with it your way. It's therapeutic as hell, because it's satisfying and physical—much more physical than a lot of other instruments. Drums are not an elitist instrument, and the musician shouldn't be put up like a magician. Anybody can do it.



To read the entire Mike Bordin feature—and all the other great material from the April 1992 issue, go to [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com) and click on the App Store link.



TUNE LESS

PLAY MORE



## Introducing The Armory Series

All Armory Series drums feature the **SONIClear™ Bearing Edge**, which allows the drumhead to sit flatter and make better contact with the shell. The result is a stronger and deeper fundamental pitch, effortless and consistent tuning, and a significantly expanded tuning range. The Armory Series includes an arsenal of premium features and add-on options, including a range of pro-level snare drums, and a line of hardware available in chrome, black-plated, or a unique black and chrome hybrid finish.

**Experience The Edge of Innovation.**



**#PLAYMORE**

## What's This Snare?

I was wondering if you could help me identify this snare drum, which was recently brought to me for repair work. I ȳrst thought it was a Ludwig Standard, but could it be something else? A vintage Sonor, perhaps?  
J.D.

According to Collector's Corner columnist Harry Cangany, "That looks like a '30s Ludwig, made after the company stopped stamping its name in the shell, with later replacement Ludwig nickel hoops. The snare strainer and butt plate are more recent, and they look to be Sonor. This drum would have originally had single-flange hoops with clips and a Ludwig 338 strainer with a simple butt plate. It's pretty typical to see these drums changed over to triple-flange hoops, because single-flange hoops can cause a lot of stick damage and the clips can break over time. The 338 strainer is pretty bulletproof, but the arm can break and the rivets can wear out and snap. That's probably what happened with this drum."

A full-page advertisement for Peace Drums. The background features a drummer in a black t-shirt with 'EXPLORE' written on it, playing a drum kit. The kit includes a bass drum, snare drum, and several cymbals. The drums have a dark, textured finish. The background is dark with bokeh light effects.

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- PROVIDES WARMTH, VOLUME AND CLARITY
- MAXIMUM STICK ARTICULATION
- AVAILABLE IN SIZES 8" – 18"



remo.com

DW

## COLLECTOR'S SERIES CHERRY DRUMSET

by David Ciauro

DW's foray into making all-cherry shells aims to meet the needs of drummers who are fans of maple and birch but are looking for a union of the two that yields slightly darker results. DW executive vice president and drum designer John Good states in the

***Can't decide whether to go with the warm, open tones of maple or the focused punch of birch for your next kit? Try cherry.***

accompanying press release, "Cherry is a really resonant wood [with] some of the characteristics of maple and some of the characteristics of birch. It's an uncommon wood in the drum-making world, and that's one of the reasons I like it so much."

We were sent a four-piece bop-style kit, featuring 8-ply all-cherry HVL (Horizontal/Vertical Low Timbre) shells in satin oil finish with nickel hardware. The kit comprised a 10-lug 5x14 snare with a magnetic throw-off and three-position butt plate, a 6-lug 8x12 tom with no mounting hardware, an 8-lug 14x14 floor tom, and an 8-lug 14x18 bass drum with two DW BPD2 dampening pillows mounted inside, touching both heads. All of the drums were outfitted with DW's True Hoops, True-Pitch Tension Rods, and clear/coated Remo-made drumheads.

### TIMBRE NOTES

On the inside of each drum is a sticker displaying the shell's individual timbre note. This provided an optimal starting point for tuning each drum. We tapped on the shell, tuned to that pitch by ear, and cross-referenced it with a piano when done. The timbre notes were D for the snare, B for the tom, E for the floor tom, and G# for the bass drum. When tuned using this method, each drum sang beautifully. The tone was open and round, boasting a refined attack with a vibrant bite and dusky decay.

The snare was especially crisp and articulate. Adjusting the butt plate to the center position loosened the snares just enough to let the drum breathe without losing too much pop. The toms had a wonderful tonal relationship, and the bass drum was a respectable presence with an understated oomph that didn't overpower the rest of the kit.

### TUNING RANGE

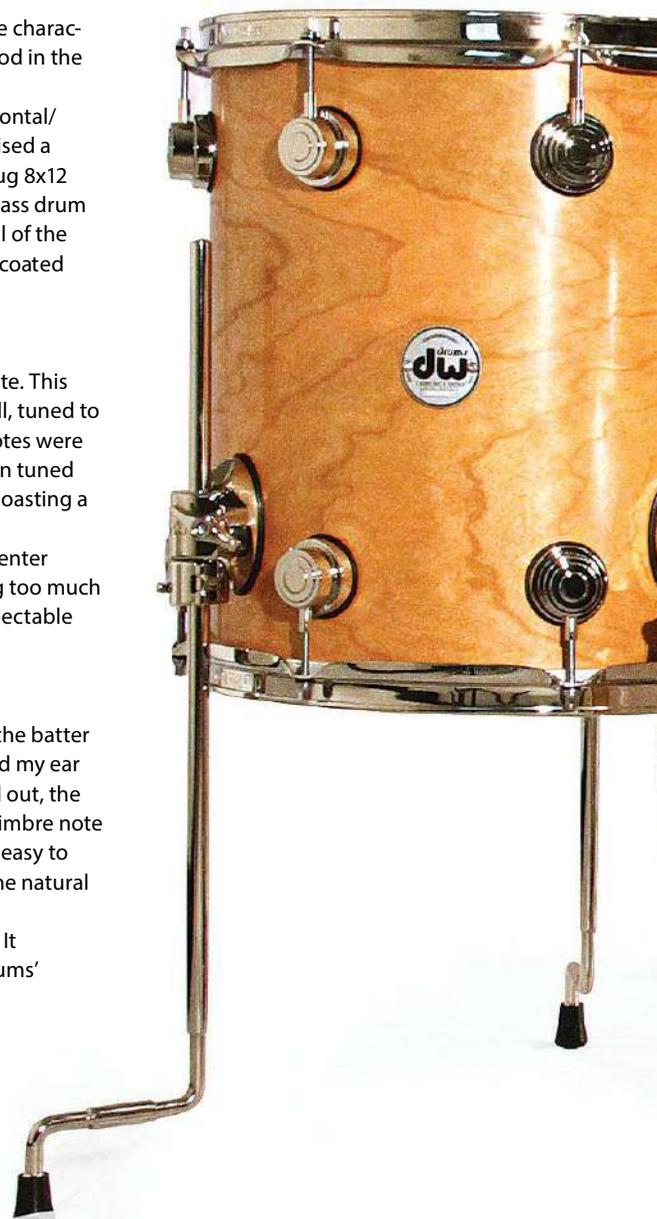
These shells had a tremendous amount of tonality that was present even when the batter heads were completely slack. Above the papery slap was a clear note that guided my ear when tuning. Once the tension rods began to feel taut and each lug was evened out, the drums sounded quite good. Although this may not have been at the identified timbre note (the heads were tuned to a much lower pitch than that), the kit turned out to be easy to tune, proving that the drums have a range that extends well above and below the natural pitch of the shells.

Impressively, on either side of the tuning spectrum, the decay never lingered. It was longest at the timbre notes, showing that these pitches were indeed the drums' sweet spots.

Cranking up the pitch above the timbre notes made for a much drier sound, but the drums remained melodic, with spicy warmth and an incredibly focused attack. Deeper tunings had a fair amount of body, with persistent clarity. The low end throughout the tuning range was very smooth, nicely complementing the drums' natural top-end bite.

### CANDID INSTRUMENTS

We found these drums to be impressively responsive at any dynamic level. Their forthright nature made them very humbling to play. For example, I have a heavy foot and tend to exaggerate my left-hand strokes. The kit reflected my energy with great honesty. My quirky

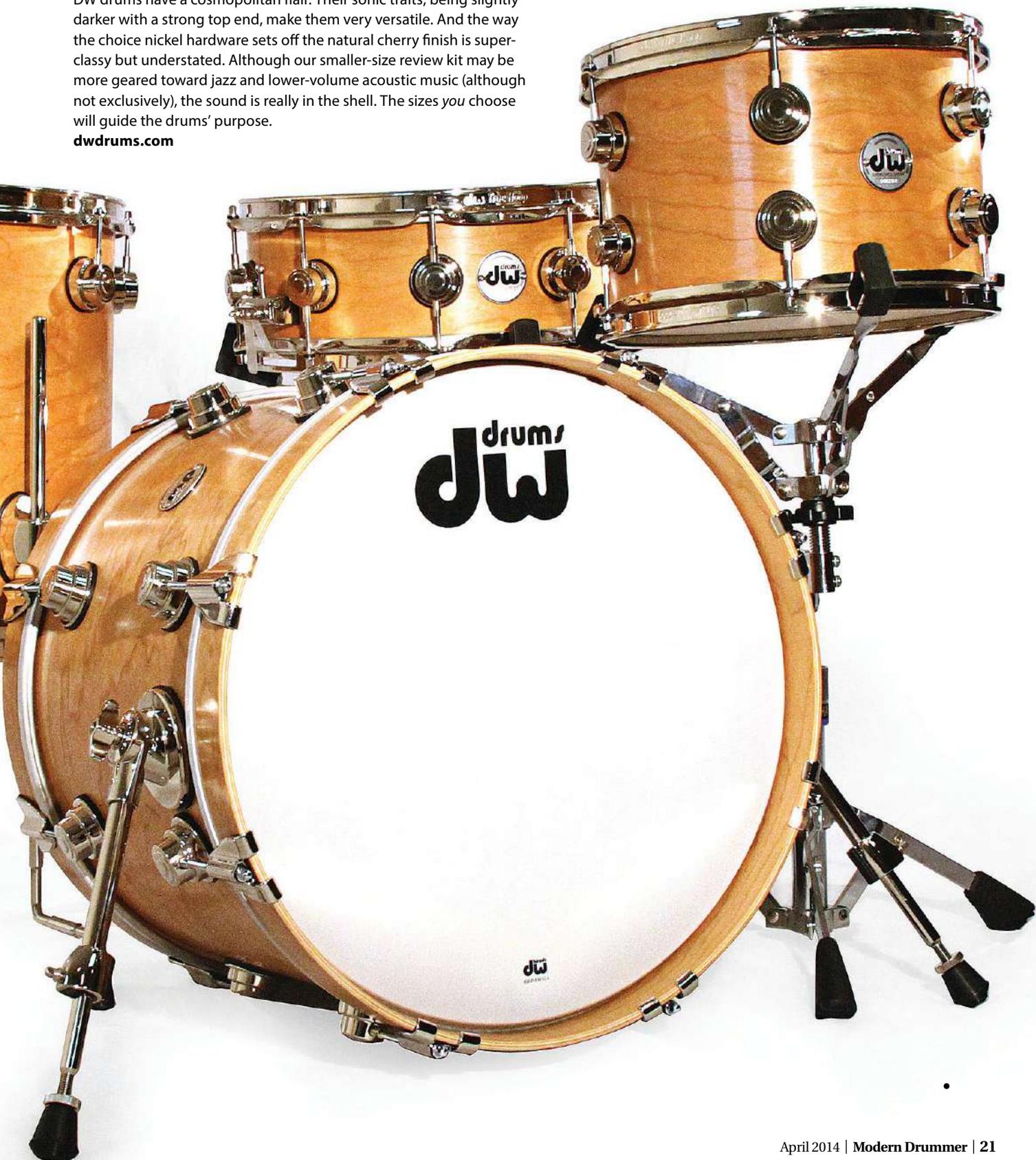


habits were made abundantly clear, much more so than they are on my regular kit, which has as many idiosyncrasies as I do. Finesse players will surely appreciate this quality.

### UNCOMMON SOPHISTICATION

Cherry shells may be less common than maple and birch, but these DW drums have a cosmopolitan flair. Their sonic traits, being slightly darker with a strong top end, make them very versatile. And the way the choice nickel hardware sets off the natural cherry finish is super-classy but understated. Although our smaller-size review kit may be more geared toward jazz and lower-volume acoustic music (although not exclusively), the sound is really in the shell. The sizes *you* choose will guide the drums' purpose.

[dwdrums.com](http://dwdrums.com)





# SABIAN

## 2014 CYMBAL VOTE WINNERS

by David Ciauro

As the hustle of the holidays slows and we're settled into 2014, we can now focus our energy on coveting all the new gear of the new year. Since being announced at Winter NAMM this past

***For this year's Cymbal Vote, Sabian fans settled on a set of fairly all-purpose, bright-sounding models to add to the AA and AAX series.***

January, Sabian's Cymbal Vote winners are no exception. They come from the AA and AAX series and include AA Raw Bell crashes

and AAX Iso crashes in 16", 18", and 20" sizes; 14" AAX Freq Hats; and a 20" AAX X-Plosion ride.

When popularity dictates outcomes, the results typically please a majority. In the case of this year's winners, the masses wanted traditional sounds with a modern twist. Sabian accomplished this by making subtle modifications in the manufacturing process to create conventional-sounding cymbals with more sharply defined characteristics.

### 14" AAX FREQ HATS

The combination of a raw bell and Sabian's exclusive dual-lathing process gives Freq (pronounced "freak") Hats an interesting look, with the functional benefits of a concise attack and crisp stick

definition. These are musical hi-hats with a confident chick sound and clear articulation. They made a very familiar first impression, as if they'd been part of my setup for years. There were no descriptive extremes to be heard. The pair possessed an excellent range of sounds that came together to create solid, all-purpose hi-hats.

### 16", 18", AND 20" AAX ISO AND AA RAW BELL CRASHES

AAX Iso crashes are medium-thin and feature six holes around the cup of the heavily hammered, raw bell. They had a brisk attack and fast decay, accented by a bright, flashy tone with good volume. The holes serve to isolate the bell from the bow of the cymbal, which allows for an independent bell sound, while also taking some weight off the wash for a smoother decay.

In a decent-size rock club, the 16" Iso cut nicely and created a pleasing white-noise wash when used as a crash/ride. The 18" was slightly more even-keeled, with a very balanced attack, volume, and decay. As a crash/ride, it had a full yet controlled wash. The 20" Iso had the most presence and body; it maintained all the tonal qualities of the smaller sizes, but it might produce more sound than is necessary in smaller venues.

AA Raw Bell crashes are thinner than the AAX Isos and had a more traditional sound. Although the clear high-frequency wash makes for great rock cymbals, these sounded sweet enough to easily blend into other genres.



When paired with the 16" Iso crash at a gig, the 16" Raw Bell had a more expansive attack, more attitude, and more volume, but the two worked well together. The same can be said for the 18" and 20" Raw Bell crashes when compared with the Isos. The bigger sizes meant more volume and swagger, but the cymbals were never overstated; they remained balanced, clear, and controlled.

## 20" AAX X-PLOSION RIDE

This 20" light ride is the boisterous new member of the AAX X-Plosion family. The stick definition was impressive, and near the edge the wash was light and smooth. When I played at a consistent velocity moving from the edge to the center, the crescendo was very natural, and the attack became clearer with an increasingly more defined ping before I arrived at the large raw bell, which had an icy brilliance that made a strong sonic statement in its own right. The explosiveness of this cymbal was akin to a racecar gracefully accelerating from zero to sixty miles per hour in seconds. The smooth transition from ride to accent resulted in a quaking crash that retained a glassy wash with a top-end growl, decaying quickly and not interfering with the clarity of subsequent ride patterns.

## IMPRESSIONS

After spending some time with these cymbals, I found it quite understandable why they won the popular vote. Their traditional vibe with a splash of sonic flavor makes them a gregarious bunch with bright personalities, yet each is easygoing enough to be integrated into an existing setup.

[sabian.com](http://sabian.com)



# RICH STICKS

## STOCK SERIES DRUMSTICKS

by David Ciauro



**R**ich Sticks is a new drumstick company out of Brentwood, New Hampshire, owned and operated by William Fitzpatrick and Joshua Mimms. The mission is to focus on hand-selecting the strongest American hickory with the straightest grain, using all sapwood, all heartwood, or a

***While Rich Sticks offers fully customizable implements, the company also makes great off-the-shelf models in the traditional sizes with a handful of tip shapes.***

combination. With an emphasis on feel as opposed to uniform color, Fitzpatrick and Mimms aim to provide sticks that are strong

and balanced. In addition, they offer drummers the chance to customize models with a number of design options, plus the ability to add custom artwork and a signature, all while keeping prices affordable.

## STOCK AND VARIETY

The Rich Sticks product line is divided into several categories: Stock, Signature, Custom Signature, Artist Signature, and Vintage. All are what the company refers to as "1st Quality." Also offered is a selection of lesser-quality sticks with custom artwork, called Merch, that are meant to be used for merchandising purposes.

We were sent an assortment of the Stock models, including 7A, 5A, 5B, 5B Rock, and 2B sizes. These sticks are available with four different tip shapes (acorn, ball, barrel, and oval), as well as with oval nylon tips. The models we reviewed had wood tips.

## SPECS

Starting with the lightest pair, the 7As came with a ball tip and measured .530"x15.5" with a .250" neck. There were four pairs of the 5A sticks (one

of each tip variety), measuring .565"x16" with a .270" neck. The 5B model was .590"x16" with a .290" neck and an oval tip. The 5B Rock measured .600"x16.5" with a .295" neck and an acorn tip. Finally, the 2B model is .630"x16.25" with a .300" neck and a barrel tip.

## IMPRESSIONS

All of the Rich Sticks we tested had a consistent feel. They were well balanced, with decent weight and without feeling too light. They're finished with a beeswax coating that's neither too waxy nor too slippery. The sticks felt very comfortable, regardless of the size. The best side-by-side comparison was with the four 5A pairs that had different tips. Each pair felt identical, but the tips offered

subtle differences in the way the stick rebounded and how it sounded on cymbals.

Even when I switched from the 5A to the beefy 2B, I felt a difference more in the change of diameter than in the overall weight. This made for a very dependable feel when I swapped models to suit certain styles. The sticks held up well over a week of woodshedding. None broke or frayed, but they did pit—as expected—in the part of the shoulder used to play rimshots.

All Stock Rich Sticks are \$4.95 a pair and can be purchased in bulk. Signature (starting at \$5.95) and Custom Signature (starting at \$6.95) models vary in price depending on how you want to customize the sticks, with a twelve-pair minimum order. [richsticks.com](http://richsticks.com)

# TnR PRODUCTS

## BOOTY SHAKERS AND LITTLE BOOTY SHAKERS

by Michael Dawson



The simplest solutions are often the best. Case in point is this month's choice accessories, TnR Products' Booty Shakers and Little Booty Shakers, which are designed to enhance tom and snare tones via specially formulated

**Simple but effective, these small accessories bring out the most tone from your drums with minimal fuss.**

polyethylene foam "booties" that affix to the feet of floor tom legs and to snare basket claws.

I know what you're thinking: *This is a great idea, but couldn't I just make my own out of some packing foam that I already have?*

While that might work, the folks at TnR are quick to point out that they "went through extensive research and development in creating the right formula of foam size, grade, and density, as well as design."

The Booty Shaker is a 4" cylinder with a patented slotted-foam top. The slot is slim enough that the Booty Shaker won't fall off when you lift or move the drum. The polyethylene base has a hard plastic disc, which not only stabilizes the drum on the floor but also prevents the legs from wearing through the soft foam over time. The top portion is made from the same high-end foam used in recording studios for sound absorption. We tested Booty Shakers on several different floor toms, from brand-new drums with special isolation feet already installed to vintage toms from the 1960s with straight metal legs.

On the newer drums, we did hear a difference in tone—the sustain lingered longer and the low end felt "bigger." But where the Booty Shakers really shined was on the vintage drums, which went from sounding constricted and a bit choked to seeming bigger and fuller with a rounder, more balanced sustain. I'll probably never again track on these drums without using Booty Shakers. The list price is \$40 for a set of three.

If you prefer to mount your rack tom in a snare basket, like I do, but you often struggle with getting an optimal tone from the drum because the basket arms restrict the shell's vibration, TnR offers Little Booty Shakers. These small foam devices attach to the basket claws via two hook-and-loop fasteners, allowing the drum to float a bit to provide a more open, fully resonating tone. While TnR suggests that these can be used on any manufacturer's stands, we found that they fit best on modern hardware with larger basket claws, like that offered by DW and Pearl. The Little Booty Shakers were too wide for our vintage Slingerland and Ludwig snare stands, so they ended up sliding out of place when the drum was removed. But on a double-braced DW model, they worked perfectly. The list price is \$25 for a set of three.

[tnrproducts.com](http://tnrproducts.com)



# MAGNUS OPUS

## FIBRO-TONE SNARE DRUMS

by Michael Dawson

DIGITALLY  
ENHANCED  
modern drummer.com

**M**agnus Opus founder and creative director Ron Adams has been fascinated by composite-shell drums since purchasing a Fibes Crystalite set in 1972. He

***Unique yet usable, FiBro-Tone hybrid-shell snares blend the big, focused sounds of synthetics with a touch of metallic bite.***

then went on to pursue a degree in metallurgy and materials engineering, and now he's putting that knowledge to work by manufacturing his own composite drums using fiberglass, carbon fiber, and hybrid shells, including the two FiBro-Tone snares we have for review: a 5.5x14 fiberglass with an inner core of stainless steel (\$440) and a 6.5x14 carbon fiber with an inner core of stainless steel (\$500). Adams, who makes the shells himself, says that what he was going for with the FiBro-Tone was "to create the pop of a metal snare but with the broader response range of carbon fiber and fiberglass."

### FIBERGLASS/ STAINLESS STEEL

This 5.5x14 snare has a thin steel core sandwiched between inner and outer layers of fiberglass. The outside layer is "metalized," which gives the drum a chrome-weave look. This model came with round center-point lugs, a DW MAG three-position throw-off, S-Hoops, PureSound twenty-strand wires, and Remo Ambassador heads (coated on top and clear snare-side on the bottom). The drum also features a custom internal muffler with a pyramid of foam on top of the traditional felt disc, so drummers can get "just a touch of muffling without sacrificing head response."

This drum didn't possess as wide a tuning range as the carbon fiber did—the batter head topped out at a lower tension—but it had a really cool dusty, snappy tone that matched well with a set of vintage Ludwigs. It didn't ring forever, like some all-steel-shell drums do, yet it wasn't lacking tone in any way. In fact, it sounded as if all the nasty overtones were pre-EQ'ed out, which proved especially pleasing when I miked the drum in the studio. This snare sounded best to our ears tuned medium-tight, but it also put out a great fatback sound when tuned low with the muffler engaged.



### CARBON FIBER/STAINLESS STEEL

The 10-lug 6.5x14 FiBro-Tone shell has an inner core of stainless steel sandwiched between layers of carbon fiber, and the outer layer is constructed using a colored resin to give the black carbon fiber a slight red tint. This model came with tube lugs, a Dunnett throw-off, PureSound twenty-strand wires, S-Hoops, and Evans heads (Genera pre-muffled batter and Hazy 300 bottom). Whereas the fiberglass/steel drum sounded best in tight funk grooves, the carbon fiber/steel model had a bigger, more robust sound that sat great in a more hard-hitting rock context, especially when tuned medium and lower. The Genera batter provided just enough muffling to focus the tone, and the S-Hoops allowed for huge, punchy rimshots. You could also tune this drum up very high without losing too much body; the tighter tensions bring out a bit more of the bright overtones from the steel core.

Both of these drums were a lot of fun to play, and it took no time to get good, usable sounds from them.

[magnusopusdrums.com](http://magnusopusdrums.com)





# LEWITT AUDIO

## DTP BEAT KIT PRO 7 DRUM MICROPHONE PACK AND LCT 240 CONDENSERS

by John Emrich

**D**irect from Lewitt Audio, we have a new entry in the drum microphone market, the DTP Beat Kit Pro 7, plus a pair of LCT 240 side-address condensers. Let's jump right in.

The DTP Beat Kit Pro 7 (\$1,699) includes seven microphones designed for the different instruments on a drumset: the DTP 640 REX for bass drum, the MTP 440 DM for snare, three DTP 340 TTs for toms,

***A rugged all-in-one drum microphone package to satisfy most of your recording/live sound needs, plus some high-quality side-address condensers for even greater sonic detail.***

and two LCT 340 overheads. The kit comes with clips and mounting brackets for the snare mic and the three tom mics, so all you need to add is a short stand for the bass drum mic and a pair of stands for the overheads.

### DTP 640 REX

This microphone is equipped with two

diaphragms inside the capsule, one being a dynamic and the other a condenser. It uses a five-pin breakout cable that allows you to plug the elements into different channels for independent mixing and processing. That alone is a very cool feature.

The mic has two switches. The first is a three-position pad for taming the overall level to 0 dB, -10 dB, or -20 dB. The second

switch is used for tone shaping. There's a flat setting, a setting that boosts 70–150 Hz on the condenser for a little bit more low end, and a position that boosts 3–5 kHz on the dynamic side for more punch and articulation.

I was very impressed with this microphone on the bass drum. The first tone position gave me the best results with

my 20" Dunnett Ti kick, and the fact that both elements are housed in one mic is a big plus, because it keeps the front of the kick from getting cluttered up with multiple microphones while you search for the perfect tone.

### MTP 440 DM

The clip that comes with the MTP 440 DM cardioid snare mic works fine, but it does place the mic well inside the rim. Personally, I am not a fan of clips, so I moved the mic to a stand to facilitate more placement options.

This model had a very nice sound that was comparable to that of other snare mics, so I would have no problem recommending it as a good choice. It captured a nice, balanced sound. My favorite placement for it was on the side of the drum, facing the shell. This gave me a nice tone and helped with hi-hat rejection. The MTP 440 DM also worked really well on vocals.

### DTP 340 TT

The three DTP 340 TT tom mics include clips that mount easily and stay put. As with the snare, these clips put the microphone well inside the rim. Drummers who use smaller toms might have an issue with that, but it doesn't take away from the fact that these microphones sound very smooth and natural, without a lot of hyped-up frequencies.

The polar pattern on this model is hypercardioid, which means the DTP 340 TT rejects unwanted sounds well when used in tighter spaces near other instruments. I found the mic to also be a good choice for percussion. Hand drums sounded natural, and because of its relatively small size the mic was easy to place within complicated setups. I liked the way the DTP 340 TT sounded on the snare as well. Because of its size, it was really easy to position around the hi-hat, which always seems to be a bit tricky with snare microphones.

### LCT 340

LCT 340 overheads are small-diaphragm condensers that offer the choice of a cardioid or omni polar pattern by changing the capsules. This is a benefit, because you can include more of the room signal by using the omni capsules, or you can focus tighter on the kit with the cardioids. I liked the sound of these microphones a lot. They were accurate and natural sounding when used with the drumset, and placing them as a stereo pair on a percussion setup yielded an even stereo image. Everything from a light

metallic "ding" on a chime to a loud strike on a timbale came through crystal clear.

This model also features a three-position pad and a three-position roll-off switch. The roll-off is useful on live gigs as a way to limit the amount of low-end bleed that often comes from other instruments, like bass guitar.

### LCT 240

Lewitt sent along a pair of LCT 240 side-address condensers (\$379 each) as well. These microphones feature .67" capsules and also have switches for the pad and roll-off.

A lot of people prefer to use a

three-microphone approach for capturing the complete sound of the drumset. I prefer this setup for most of my work, especially when I'm playing jazz. I tested the two LCT 240 microphones, in combination with the DTP 640 REX on the bass drum, and the results were excellent. I also tried using just the dynamic portion of the bass drum mic, which produced great results too. And I found that the LCT 240s sounded very nice on toms; they brought out a bit more top end, which I favor.

To accompany this review we've posted an audio file on [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com), so you can hear the results for yourself.

[lewitt-audio.com](http://lewitt-audio.com)



LCT 240

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## JOHN'S SETUP

### Large drums: LP and Yamaha

- A. LP Classic Top Tuning conga in vintage sunburst/black
- B. LP Classic Top Tuning tumbadora in vintage sunburst/black
- C. LP Generation II bongos in vintage sunburst
- D. 8x28 Yamaha marching bass drum with ddrum trigger
- E. 5x13 Yamaha Super Sensitive maple snare (low tuning)
- F. 14" LP Prestige series brass timbale

### Cymbals: Zildjian

- 1. 20" Wind Gong
- 2. 9.5" Zil-Bel with 8" Trashformer stacked on top
- 3. 15" K Custom Hybrid Trash crash
- 4. 18" A Custom crash
- 5. 12" Special Recording hi-hats
- 6. 18" K Custom Hybrid crash
- 7. 6" A Custom splash
- 8. 9" Oriental Trash splash
- 9. 18" Oriental China Trash

### Hand/mounted small percussion: CP

sleigh bells, LP Rock shaker (gold), LP Pro maracas, LP Live One Shot shaker, LP Cricket, Meinl Waterfall, small Middle Eastern bells, LP Cluster chimes, LP Mounted Cyclops tambourines (white with steel jingles and black with brass jingles), LP glow-in-the-dark handheld Cyclops tambourines (steel jingles), LP Pro 5" and 6" triangles, LP low (purple) and medium (red) Jam Blocks, LP pin chimes, LP Rock Ridge and Black Beauty

cowbells, Zildjian 6" Zil-Bel, LP Concert series bar chimes (with custom mute), suspended finger cymbals, LP Multi guiro, LP fiber maracas, LP cabasa, LP One Handed triangle, Zildjian finger cymbals (thin), LP Mini shaker, LP Deluxe Vibra-Slap II, LP King Klave, LP Ching Chok, LP Jim Greiner shekere, and Black Swamp headed tambourine

"Being that we are mostly playing rock 'n' roll and pop ballads," Mahon says, "I am quite lucky to get to use a lot of different acoustic percussion instruments. Tambourines, shakers, and congas are the heart of the parts, thanks to Ray Cooper's creative percussion on the recordings. I'm playing plenty of cymbal swells and accents, and sometimes I use the mini hats and snare to enhance the grooves. I love playing the large LP Jam Block on 2 and 4, and of course we must have more cowbell!"

"The concert bass drum was Elton's request after he recorded with T Bone Burnett and Leon Russell. Elton asked for some double-drum grooves using that big boy. Nigel plays such fat, open grooves that it's a pleasure to slide into that pocket with him. And he leaves a lot of holes for me to play in."

**Electronics:** Yamaha DTX900 series system with five XP100T 10" tom pads, one XP80 trigger pad, and a Motif XS rack; Alternate Mode MalletKAT Express controller; ddrum bass drum trigger

"My setup is definitely a hybrid kit, and the DTX electronics are a big part of what I play. They cover timpani parts, big drums,

sound effects, and electronic drum sounds. I might put a delayed tambourine sample on the kick pad. Elton's music spans decades, so I can get any sound I need with the DTX. I like [the electronics] center in my rig, because I sing on every song and I'm not a fan of headset mics. Background vocals are a large part of my duties in the band."



**Heads:** Remo Fiberskyn 3 conga and bongo heads, Smooth White Ambassador bass drum batter with custom-logo front head, Coated Ambassador snare batter and Hazy Ambassador bottom, and Smooth White Ambassador timbale head

**Hardware:** Yamaha HexRack II and 800 and 900 series stands, including cable hi-hat and FP9500D bass drum pedal

**Microphones:** Shure SM56 on congas and bongos, AKG 460 condensers for the hi-hat and tambourine, AKG 414 overhead for chimes and large shaker, Audio-Technica 6100 for vocals

**Sticks:** Vic Firth custom-logo CT4 mallets and SAA2 timbale sticks, Steve Gadd wire brushes, Rute 505 and Original bundle sticks, Kenny Aronoff drumsticks, and Ralph Hardimon Chop-Out practice sticks (for warm-ups)



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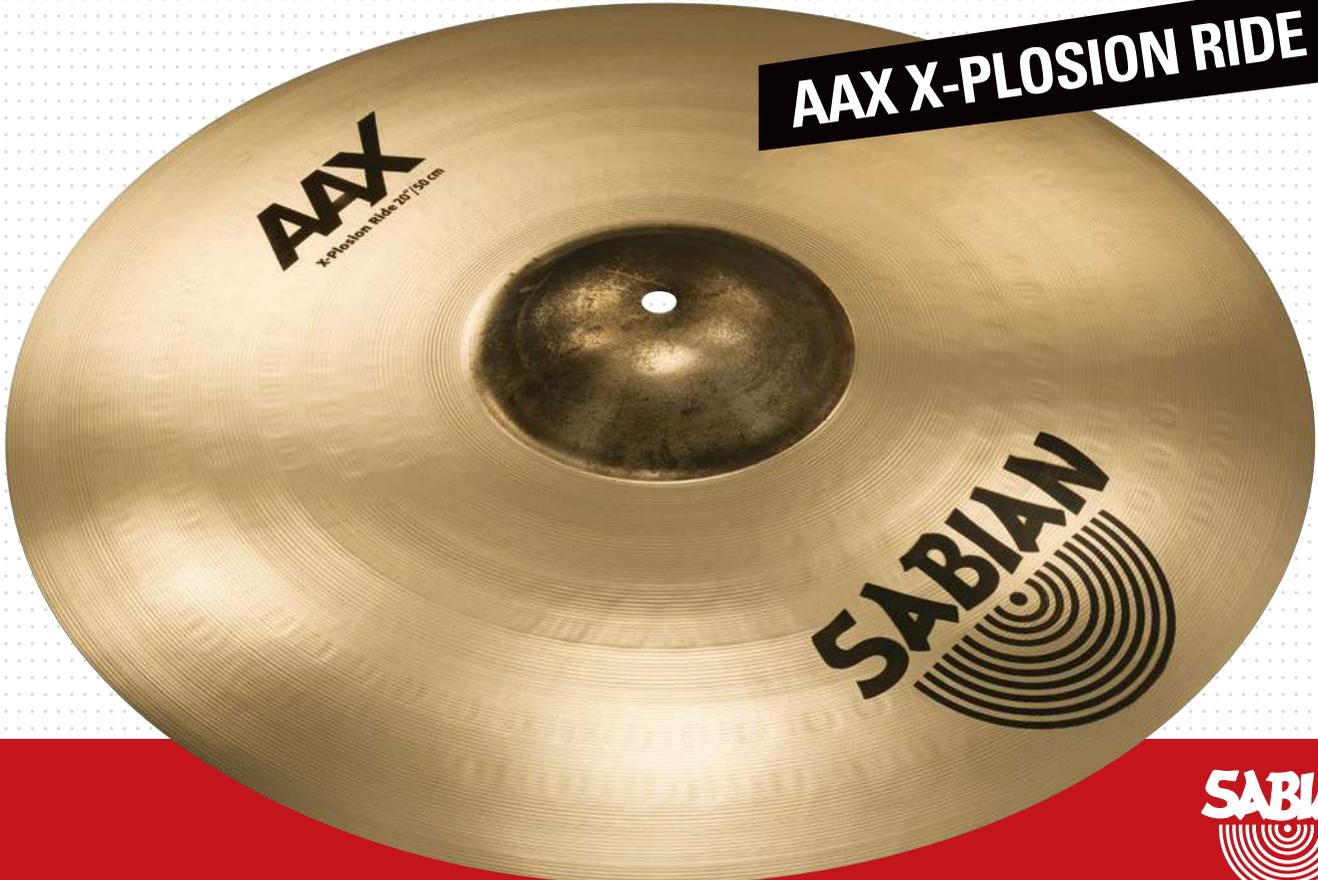
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# AAX X-PLOSION RIDE



# Travis ORBIN

**The tech-metal phenom has made tsunami-like waves on YouTube and continues to lay down mind-bending tracks for artists the world over. Now, with the extreme-metal goliath Darkest Hour's upcoming album, his artful drum science is about to blow away anyone and everyone within earshot.**

**T**ravis Orbin is a true standout among the growing ranks of talented players to emerge from the teeming depths of the Internet. The difference between Orbin and most others is that he attracts attention not just with speed but with ideas as well. Orbin plays with a level of musicality that is sometimes missing from extremely technical music, and his dedication to the craft is nothing short of epic.

The DIY spirit is certainly strong in this new generation of tech-metal prodigies, as you can see and hear from the quality of work that Orbin and his contemporaries crank out of their humble home studios. The sheer volume of recorded material that Travis is able to produce is staggering, as are the outstanding tones that he and producer/engineer Taylor Larson achieve, considering the amount of preparation that must go into making the music happen.

The game has changed, and Orbin has changed right

along with it, shining through the information overload of the digital age and using technology to his advantage, while writing and recording some seriously challenging music. In addition to his busy recording schedule, Orbin has been sweating it out since 2011 on the road and in the studio with the Washington, D.C., metal heavyweights Darkest Hour. After signing a worldwide deal with Sumerian Records, the band toured North America supporting Killswitch Engage last summer and is now putting the finishing touches on its latest album.

Outstanding natural drum tones, superhuman execution, and a work ethic that an Olympian would envy have made it possible for Orbin to live the dream that began the very first time he laid stick to skin at age thirteen. With stints as a member of Periphery, Sky Eats Airplane, and Of Legends, plus sessions for extreme-metal artists around the world, Orbin has rightfully earned his rep as a trailblazer on the sizzling D.C.-area metal scene and an esteemed journeyman in the tech-metal universe.

by Ben Meyer



**MD:** YouTube seems to be an effective way to disseminate your playing.

**Travis:** It certainly is! It's a wellspring of inspiration, and it's very effective for promotion. There are people who have hundreds of thousands of subscribers.

**MD:** With the YouTube thing, though, it matters less where you are in terms of finding bands to play with and recording projects to do.

**Travis:** Right. The session thing just kind of grew out of having a

as well. It just kind of grew from that.

As far as the band thing, that's been more of one door leading to another. When I joined Periphery, the singer of Sky Eats Airplane at the time was a fan, and that's basically how I ended

**“The first time I played drums, I had two revelations: I knew that I was going to do it until I was no longer physically capable, and I knew that I wanted to be in a band and try to derive income from that.”**

I'm just doing my thing. It's really cool how you can reach so many people with it.

**MD:** Where are you from?

**Travis:** I'm from southern Delaware, a stone's throw away from the Maryland border.

**MD:** It's been interesting to see how much progressive metal is coming from that area.

**Travis:** Yes, it has. It's been a bit of an explosion, I guess. There's Periphery and Animals as Leaders, and my new band, Darkest Hour, is from there. I tell people there's something in the water around here. [laughs]

friendship with Taylor Larson, who operates a studio called Oceanic Recording. Darkest Hour's new album was recorded there. Taylor also did Periphery's second album there. He got turned on to recording because he developed a disinterest in touring and being in bands and such. He just started learning it on his own. Then he got me turned on to it, so I started buying up some gear. I made my early Periphery play-alongs and my Sky Eats Airplane interpretations, and eventually I started getting gigs to record out of my home studio. In the meantime I was doing session work out of Oceanic

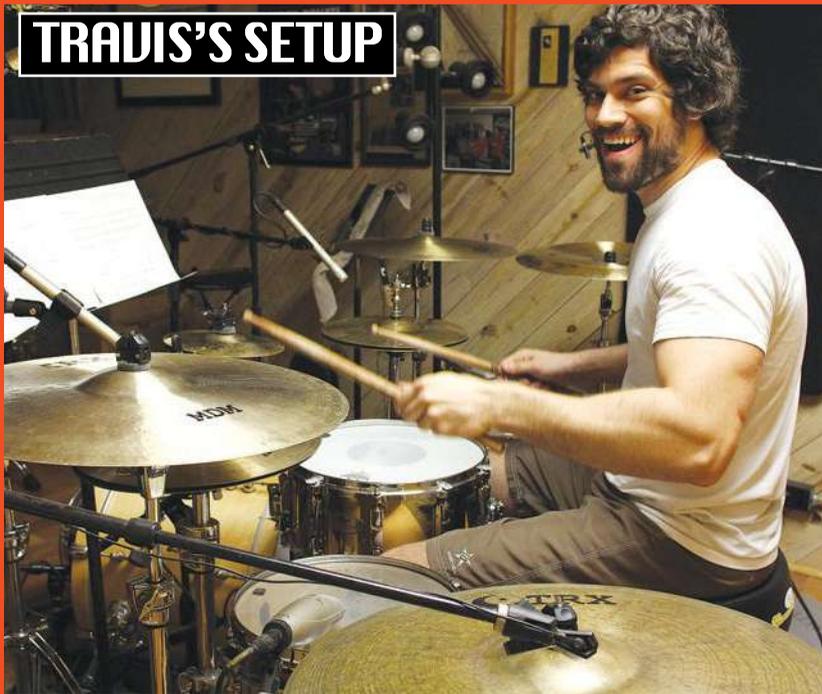
up with Sky Eats Airplane. And then with Darkest Hour, they just started renting a space out of Taylor's studio to rehearse. They were working with a fill-in drummer at the time, and he was like, "You've got to check out my friend Travis."

**MD:** And now you're an official member of Darkest Hour.

**Travis:** Yeah. I started jamming with them in late 2011, and last March we began writing the new album. I did my first tour with them last summer, opening for Killswitch Engage, and that was the most fun I've ever had on tour. So I'm even more confident



## TRAVIS'S SETUP



**Drums:** Pearl Reference Pure series, including 8x12 and 16x16 toms and a 16x20 bass drum, with a 6.5x14 Reference Brass snare

**Cymbals:** TRX, including a 21" DRK ride, a 19" MDM crash, 14" MDM hi-hats, an 8" BRT splash, 13" BRT/DRK hi-hats, an 18" MDM crash, and a 19" LTD China

**Hardware:** Pearl, including Eliminator Demon Drive P-3002D double pedal; Gibraltar legless hi-hat stand

"I play the Demon Drive pedal in the longboard configuration," Orbin says. "My spring tension is maxed out, with the 'power' and 'heavy' settings engaged. I utilize Pearl QuadBeaters, either the plastic or felt side, depending on the music. They rest about six inches from the head, hitting close to the center of a 20" bass drum, and I have the BW-100 beater weights attached at the top of the shaft. I only use the body of the weights, though; the black and silver add-on weights are left off."

**Heads:** Remo, including Vintage Emperor coated or clear tom batters and Clear Ambassador bottoms, a Controlled Sound snare batter and Hazy

Ambassador bottom, and a Coated Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter and Ebony Powerstroke 3 front head with a port

"I tune my drums depending on the genre of music that I'm recording. I try to match the pitch of each lug, and generally the overall tuning of the batter and resonant heads, for maximum resonance. I control said resonance with a sliver or two of Moongel on each drum."

**Sticks:** Vic Firth Ralph Hardimon SRH2 "Hammer" model

**Percussion:** Pearl low clave block and 7x13 Primero steel timbale; LP fiber maracas, Cuban-style guiro, egg shakers, Soft Shake shaker, grenadilla wood clave, and brass Cyclops jingle tambourine

**Accessories:** E-Pad! 12" practice pad, Gibraltar GBDP bass drum practice pad, Power Wrist Builders PWB28-795 solid brass practice sticks

**Electronics:** Boss DB-90 Dr. Beat metronome, Direct Sound Extreme Isolation EX-29 headphones

about my decision to join them.

**MD:** How long have you been posting your videos on YouTube?

**Travis:** I posted three videos back in 2006, and I didn't start filming and getting paid to do session work out of my home studio until the spring of 2010.

The first videos were really bare bones. I had a Fostex multitracker, and I didn't even have a camcorder. I just had a digital camera that had the option to capture video. I made a drum solo video, a Jay-Z cover, and a thing

that was just a compilation of grooves. I was playing it all on a Mike Mangini-style setup, with crisscrossing cable hi-hats, and I was demonstrating the grooves that I wrote but playing them completely lefty, basically.

Those were my first three videos, and then there was a bit of a lull because I moved to Rockville [Maryland] briefly to pursue Periphery with a bit more tenacity. Then I moved back home, made a few more videos, and then started snatching up some nice recording gear via Taylor's interest. I



## INFLUENCES

**Metallica** ...And Justice for All (Lars Ulrich) /// **Tower of Power** Soul Vaccination: Live (David Garibaldi) ///

**Screaming Headless Torsos** 1995 (Jojo Mayer) /// **Pantera** The Great Southern Trendkill (Vinnie Paul) /// **Miles Davis** Milestones (Philly Joe Jones) /// **Frank Zappa** Joe's Garage (Vinnie Colaiuta) /// **Dapp Theory** 'All Just Don't Know (Mark Prince, Sean Rickman) /// **On the Virg** Serious Young Insects (Virgil Donati) /// **Various** The Colors of Latin Jazz: From Samba to Bombal (Ray Barretto, Pete Escovedo, Tito Puente, Poncho Sanchez, Mongo Santamaria, Sheila E, Duduka Da Fonseca) /// **Dream Theater** Metropolis Pt. 2: Scenes from a Memory (Mike Portnoy) /// **Mr. Bungle** California (Danny Heifetz, William Winant) /// **Spastic Ink** Ink Complete (Bobby Jarzombek) /// **Opeth** Blackwater Park (Martin Lopez) /// **Faith No More** all (Mike Bordin) /// **Herbie Hancock** Head Hunters (Harvey Mason)

## RECORDINGS

**Adam Edgemont** "Dreamer's Axiom," "Fall Back Into Our Lives," "Velvet City" singles /// **Andy Gruhin** World Out There, Let the Darkness Grow!, Cobwebs /// **Arizona Lives** The Pictures We Pose /// **Cartoon Theory** Cartoon Theory /// **Cyclamen** Dreamers 2010, Senju /// **Dyed in Grey** The Abandoned Part /// **I Am Abomination** "Hangin' On" single /// **I Am King** I Am King, Onehundred, "Without Fear" single /// **In It to Win It** To the Top /// **ItsTeeth** Divided /// **JudaBlue** Forty Days /// **Mocean** How We Grew /// **Nick Johnston** Public Display of Infection, In a Locked Room on the Moon /// **Of Legends** Stranded /// **Pete Peterson** Transitional Farms; Songs, These Are Songs /// **Set Apart** Fear & Trembling /// **SIKES!** Thank You for Your Cooperation /// **Simbelmynë** Trillium /// **Sky Eats Airplane** The Sound of Symmetry /// **Star Monarchy** Volume 1 /// **The Countdown Starts Now** The Countdown Starts Now /// **The Gabriel Construct** Interior City /// **The Twelfth Amethyst** "J-Wagz the Alpha Male," "Get Saved or Go to Hell" singles /// **This War We Live** "Flood the Hollow," "To the Lost Ones" singles /// **Travis Orbin** "Pixieprog," "Cookies & Scarves," "Project 15," "Watchpork" singles /// **Us & Them** Adventures Into the Dark

made a couple other cover videos and a few more free play-along Sky Eats Airplane interpretations. All that stuff was back in 2009, then at the tail end of 2009 I posted my first session video, which was the first Cyclamen session. Cyclamen is a Japanese tech-metal band, and I actually did that session out of Oceanic. When Hayato from Cyclamen contacted me, I was like, "I could do what I've been doing out of my home studio and sync it to the final mix," and he was like, "Yeah, that's a great idea!" I hadn't thought about it at the time, but in retrospect I realized that I hadn't seen that done

## TRAVIS ORBIN

before. I'd seen drum-cam videos and DVD extras and such, but never the final mix synced up to the footage.

**MD:** Talking to [Orbin's friend and former student] Alex Rudinger of the Faceless about his home studio [March 2014 *Modern Drummer*], it's clear he's got a real ethic as far as his tones being

again, it depends on the session. If it's more groove oriented, I'm not going to pin it to the grid. I rarely pin it to the grid anyway. It depends on the music, but I don't beat detect, so nothing's straight-up quantized. I only have so much time in the day, because I still work a side job, so if I get a good take

that's great, but you can definitely see it.

**MD:** What software are you using to edit video?

**Travis:** Just good old iMovie.

**MD:** Are there any audio plug-ins that you're particularly fond of?

**Travis:** This is the side of home recording that I kind of leave up to Taylor and

**“A symmetrical setup definitely draws out a different sort of creativity. You have to be more clever with your stickings. And it forces you to think more musically in a minimalistic sense.”**

as natural as possible and not doing very much sound replacement or adding samples. Do you feel the same way?

**Travis:** Yup. The recordings out of my home studio feature natural sounds. I've done a couple sessions where they've blended the kick with a sample, but the vast majority are sample free.

**MD:** Do you edit the material before you submit it, or do you leave that to the mix engineer?

**Travis:** I do a little bit of editing, though,

and the sounds are there, if there are a couple flubs, I'll fix them.

**MD:** There are interesting ethical issues that the YouTube thing has brought up. For one, it's a way for guys like you, who are creating some amazing stuff, to sort of say, “Look, I'm actually *doing* this.”

**Travis:** Yeah, there's a lot that goes on behind the scenes that people aren't privy to, so I try to demystify some of that. Also, sometimes the mixes themselves don't turn out so hot, so it's like: This is what I played. If you can hear it,

whatever tickles his fancy. He sets me up with templates, and I'll mess with the levels and maybe change up the EQ a little bit. Obviously, a lot of the sound is in the tuning, since I don't use samples or anything. I know he's fond of the SSL 4000 collection.

**MD:** The Waves SSL plug-ins?

**Travis:** Yeah. We've got some API stuff, Focusrite Red, and something called Smack! [Avid] that he puts on the drum buss, I believe. That covers most of it.

**MD:** What mics do you favor at home?

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**Travis:** Right now I'm using Shure KSM32s on my toms, a Shure Beta 56A on the top of my snare, and a vintage AKG C414 on the bottom. My overheads are Blue Baby Bottles, and I mike all my cymbals individually—my China and my ride have Shure Beta 98 mini condensers and my hi-hats have a Shure SM81. My room mics are Neumann TLM 103s.

**MD:** That's not something you see a lot, having detail mics on every cymbal.

**Travis:** Yeah, it's great. You can automate stuff, so you can make a cymbal pop out more in the mix, or if you hit it kind of lightly you can boost it a little bit. It's great to have that kind of control. It brings a sense of clarity and also widens the stereo image.

**MD:** What are you using on the kick?



**Travis:** Inside is a Shure SM7B and outside is a Yamaha Subkick.

**MD:** I wouldn't expect the SM7B in the kick.

**Travis:** Yeah, that's another Taylor thing.

**MD:** When you do a session for someone new, how do you deal with submitting the WAV files, payment issues, and all that?

**Travis:** If it's a remote session, I write all the parts in Guitar Pro. I'll send them the MIDI, and then they can provide critique or give the okay to track it. Before I write the parts, though, I get a down payment

of half of my rate. After they okay the parts, I get the other half. Once I have payment in full, I rehearse it, track it, and send them either a wet stereo mix or the individual stems so they can mix it.

**MD:** So you're writing the parts away from the kit?

**Travis:** Yup. I started using Guitar Pro in 2007. I was turned on to it by former Periphery vocalist Jacob Tull. He would use it to write wacky solo music. Initially I used it to write drum grooves, and then I started composing with it as well. It's a great time-saver to write all the parts and have them okayed, rather than putting all the time and effort into getting what you think is a great take, but it's not congruent with the artist's vision. This way I can take on more projects than if I had to track

and retrack.

**MD:** So after you've written the parts, then it's a matter of learning to physically execute what you've created?

**Travis:** Sure. When I write the parts, I obviously bear in mind my current facility on the kit. It's rare, but occasionally I'll write something that might be impossible or is just too far ahead of my abilities, so I'll substitute a different component of the kit or change something minute.

**MD:** When did you begin playing drums?

**Travis:** Right after I turned thirteen.

That's when I received my first kit as a

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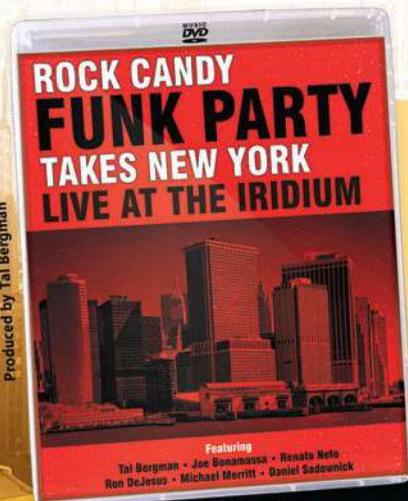


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## TRAVIS ORBIN

birthday/Christmas gift, since my birthday is dangerously close to Christmas. The first time I played, I had two revelations: I knew that I was going to do it until I was no longer physically capable, and I knew that I wanted to be in a band and try to derive income from that.

**MD:** That's a rather lucid thought at that age.

**Travis:** It was quite lucid. It was a pretty powerful initial experience.

**MD:** Did you participate in marching band at some point?

**Travis:** Strangely enough, I didn't. The band program was during marching season in the fall, and then in the winter you had a Christmas concert. Then you started rehearsing the material that comprises the spring concert, so it's kind of an all-encompassing thing. I was in band between tenth and twelfth grades. Aside from that, I started taking private lessons in ninth grade. I started with a man named Honey Voshell. He resides in Felton, Delaware, and runs a shop called the Drum Pad, and he's been giving lessons for a long time. I took lessons from him for several years. After that, I continued on my own path of autodidacticism. I took two more lessons, one with Bill Meligari and one with Mike Mangini.

**MD:** Had you already started on the ambidextrous thing before working with Mangini?

**Travis:** Yes. I was obviously inspired by him, and I think I had his books at the time. I went to him with questions, some technique related and some business related. On the technique side, he told me that everything looked good and to just keep going down the path I was headed down, which was pleasant to hear.

**MD:** Have you worked out of Gary Chester's *The New Breed*?

**Travis:** Yeah, that's one of the books that my instructor put me through. There's another book that's comparable but a little more straight ahead, *Four Way Coordination* by Marvin Dahlgren and Elliot Fine. It's pretty much a nightmare! [laughs]

**MD:** At what point did you move away from a traditional right-handed setup? Are you right-handed?

**Travis:** Yes, I'm a righty. I always gigged on a conventional four- or five-piece kit with a standard cymbal setup and the

rack toms up front. But sometime in late 2003/early 2004, I was in a kind of techy metal band with Taylor. We arrived late to a gig and didn't have time to set up the whole kit and kaboodle. On a whim, I just played a three-piece kit—kick, snare, and floor tom, and I rather liked it. It was challenging and stimulating. I thought maybe I was on to something. It was a very efficient and quick setup, but I wanted to add something to promote more left-hand movement.

At first it was a 12" side snare, and that basically evolved into a rack tom, but I was still playing a standard, simple setup. Once my interest in Mangini's playing flourished, I started doing the symmetrical-cymbal-setup thing. Prior to that, in late 2004/early 2005, I'd started developing more of an interest in double bass. I thought that to give my left foot a fighting chance to catch up to my right, I needed to use it more, so I added the legless hi-hat stand to the right. First it was a very mechanical decision—I just wanted to stress the left foot. Then, as my interest in Mangini's playing grew, I got a pair of 14" hi-hats and put those on the left, so I had all my low-pitched cymbals on the left and my high-pitched cymbals on the right. My ride cymbal and bigger crash are on my left, and my China and smaller crash are on my right.

A setup like this definitely draws out a different sort of creativity. You have to be a bit more clever with your stickings. And it forces you to think more musically in a minimalistic sense. Eventually it graduated into something that I began to use musically to complement certain parts of songs. If the chorus needs more energy, maybe I'll ride on my open 13" hats on my right side, which usually means I'll use my left foot to play the bass drum parts. And if the chorus is already strong and ballsy, I might use the 14" hats on my left side, which forces me to use the right foot.

**MD:** Your videos show you changing feet for the bass drum parts. Is there a set structure for that? If you're playing a right-hand ride, would that generally mean using your left foot for the bass drum? Would you ever play right-hand ride and right-foot bass drum?

**Travis:** Sure. It still feels more comfortable to play doubles with my right foot, so

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if there's a pattern with a lot of doubles in it, I may rely on my right foot for that. A lot of little things dictate which foot I use or how I arrange the sticking of the feet—the "footing," if you will. Depending on the cymbal I'm riding on, it may be easier to lead with the left or to use more left- or right-foot strokes.

Also, where the backbeat is could make a difference, depending on the tempo or if the pattern is kind of weird, or if I'm playing the snare and kick drum in unison. If a part is coming up where I play my rimshot and my foot on the same side, my hand can sometimes hit the top of my leg, and it won't produce as loud of a rimshot. So sometimes little stuff like that can dictate which foot I use.

**MD:** What is your general approach to foot technique?

**Travis:** It's all heel-up. When you get to the higher tempos, it's mostly ankle driven. I try to use more of my hip flexor, which is a new technique I've been focusing on. I used my ankles and a low spring tension for so long that it's hard to work that out of my muscle memory, but I'm trying. It also depends on the movement. Doubles are all ankle, and sometimes I like to interlace quick double strokes with each foot, and that's entirely ankle driven.

**MD:** Your hand technique is very relaxed. Are you sometimes playing French grip?

**Travis:** It may look that way, especially if I'm on the ride, but it's all entirely from the wrist. It could be the camera angle fooling you. I don't use my fingers whatsoever. I'm independent of rebound as well.

**MD:** How come?

**Travis:** I spent a very short period of time invested in the Gladstone technique, utilizing the rebound to the fullest extent. I've got nothing against it. It definitely has its purpose. But from a playing standpoint, and acoustically, I like using my wrists.

**MD:** So even when you're playing double strokes, those are pretty heavily stroked out from the wrist?

**Travis:** Yup.

**MD:** What tips do you have for developing independence? You've previously mentioned spending a good deal of time working through method books

completely left-handed.

**Travis:** I went through *The New Breed* and some of *Four Way Coordination* lefty. I would just try to re-create everything that I played conventionally with my weaker limbs. If you want to get into ostinatos and all that really challenging stuff, I'd say *The New Breed* is where to start. As soon as I hear the couplet "extreme interdependence," though, I think of Marco Minnemann. [laughs] I worked on some of his concepts and some of Virgil Donati's stuff back in the day. Now, if I write any of that kind of stuff to be incorporated into a song, it's the same as when I shed through any other session—I start at about half of the performance tempo and work my way up in five- or ten-bpm increments.

I wouldn't be able to play the stuff that I play without doing that. It's a process that I adhere to for several days, until it feels good under my limbs. I don't just do one practice session and then I'm ready to track. I let it simmer for a few days so it feels good and so that when I'm tracking I'm not completely reliant on the chart.

**MD:** About how long of a process would that be for one song?

**Travis:** It depends on the length of the song and the difficulty of the parts. It can take anywhere from twenty minutes to two hours to rehearse one song.

**MD:** When you're writing a part from scratch, how long does that process typically take?

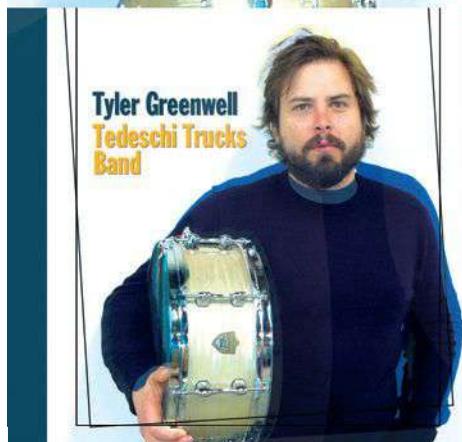
**Travis:** As far as creating the parts, I usually try to write about thirty seconds to a minute of parts per day. I just hack away at it every day until it's done. It usually takes three or four days to write parts for a whole song.

**MD:** How do you view the comments people leave on YouTube about your playing? Do you read them?

**Travis:** I do, because they pop up in my email. [laughs] I'm not *forced* to read them, but there's an intrinsic curiosity. Most of them are very kind and convey a sense of appreciation of my playing and acknowledge that I'm a source of inspiration. That's powerful for me to read. The stuff that's negative, 99 percent of the time I brush it off. It's not going to change what I do.

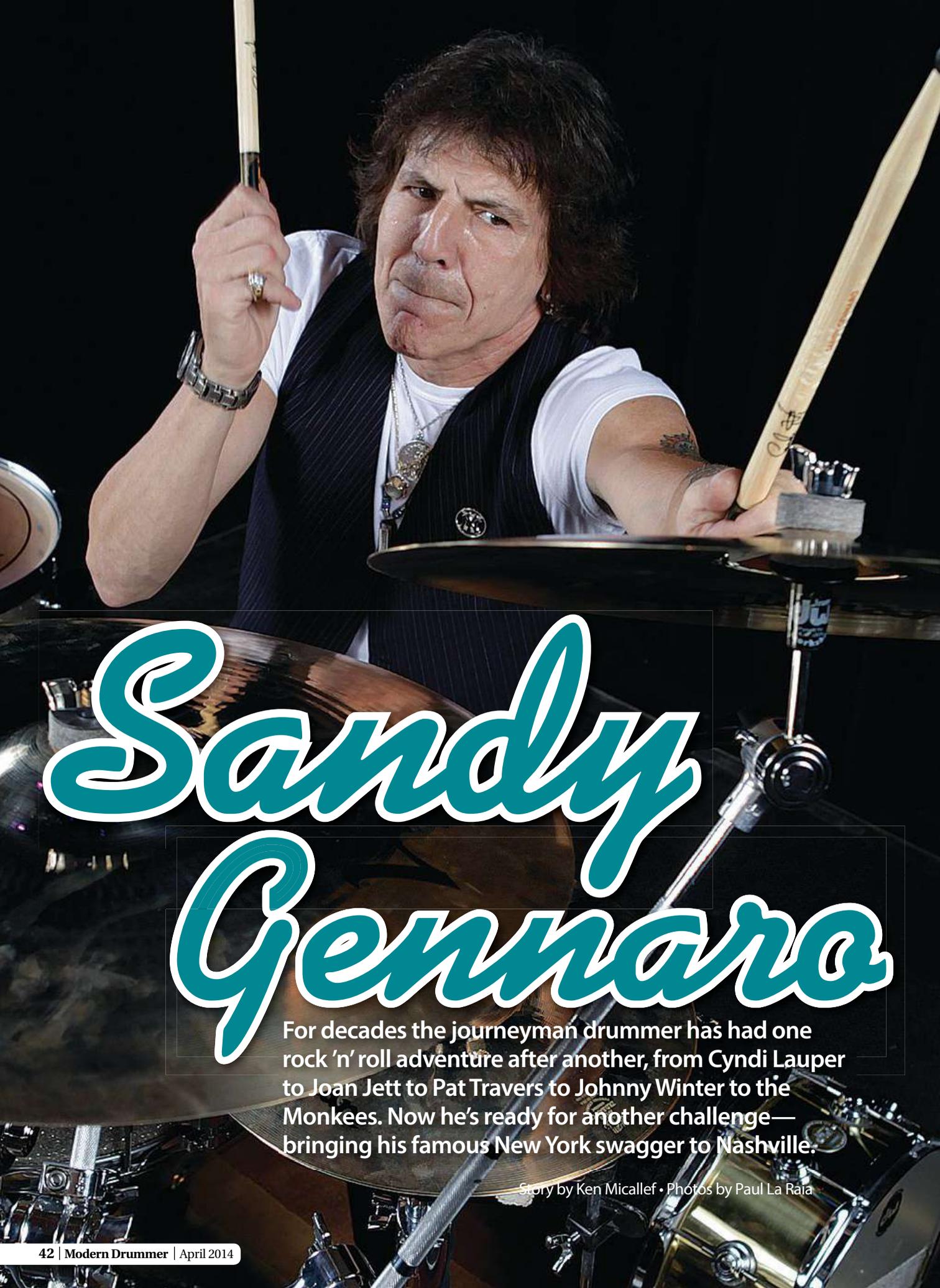


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## SAKAE

THE ART OF SOUND CREATION



# Sandy Gennaro

For decades the journeyman drummer has had one rock 'n' roll adventure after another, from Cyndi Lauper to Joan Jett to Pat Travers to Johnny Winter to the Monkees. Now he's ready for another challenge—bringing his famous New York swagger to Nashville.

Story by Ken Micallef • Photos by Paul La Raja



S taten Island's own Sandy Gennaro has enjoyed a career spanning nearly forty years of rock 'n' roll mayhem. His ability to play all styles, his signature backbeat, and his cymbal-wide smile have enlivened the bandstands of artists as diverse as Joan Jett and the Blackhearts and blues-rock guitarist Pat Travers.

The rock love affair began when Gennaro attended legendary shows at New York's Fillmore East in the 1960s. By the age of sixteen he was touring the New York/New Jersey/Pennsylvania circuit. After a stint in California, he cut his first hit single, "Into the Night," with the New York-based singer Benny Mardones. Around this time Gennaro recorded two albums

with the rock quartet Blackjack, featuring Michael Bolton, future Kiss guitarist Bruce Kulick, and future Yellowjackets bassist Jimmy Haslip; he also began his long association with torrid rocker Pat Travers and joined forces with a quirky singer named Cyndi Lauper, whose debut album, *She's So Unusual*, became a triple-platinum monster. Lauper hired Gennaro for multiple global sold-out tours, where his big beat and

Everything" brought Sandy's smiling persona to the small screen, making a lasting impression.

In the late '80s Gennaro began a twenty-year association with the Monkees and also found a home playing Joan Jett's raunchy rock. In the '90s and early 2000s he returned to his roots with seminal rock 'n' roll showman Bo Diddley and with legendary blues guitarist Johnny Winter. Since the

*"It takes strength to hold your tongue in some situations. Be true to yourself, speak your mind, but always be professional."*

trademark exuberance made him a star of every show. The concert video for the singer's single "Money Changes

late '80s he's enjoyed a reputation as a fine instructor at Drummers Collective in Manhattan and has released two



popular multimedia instructional packages. More recently, in addition to touring and recording with the reunited Pat Travers Band, he's appeared several times at Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy Camp, performing and instructing students alongside Aerosmith's Steven Tyler, the Who's Roger Daltrey, and Grand Funk's Mark Farner.

One of the most insistent road dogs of all time, Gennaro has begged, borrowed, and (usually) stolen the room keys of every hotel he's visited since he started touring. In fact, his collection—at 2,500 and counting—was on exhibit last year at the Snug Harbor Cultural Center on Staten Island, and the drummer plans to have it inhabit the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as well as the *Guinness Book of World Records* when he retires.

Not content with resting on his laurels, Gennaro is still on the go. By the time this issue hits newsstands, he'll be working the stages and recording studios of Nashville, Tennessee, no doubt making all kinds of new friends and alliances, initiated with his bearlike handshake and upbeat personality.

"I'm happy playing with the Pat Travers Band," Sandy says, "but at this point in my life, with my experience and track record, it's going to be fun meeting and playing with different musicians, reuniting with old friends, making new ones, and exploring the many opportunities that will undoubtedly present themselves in Nashville."

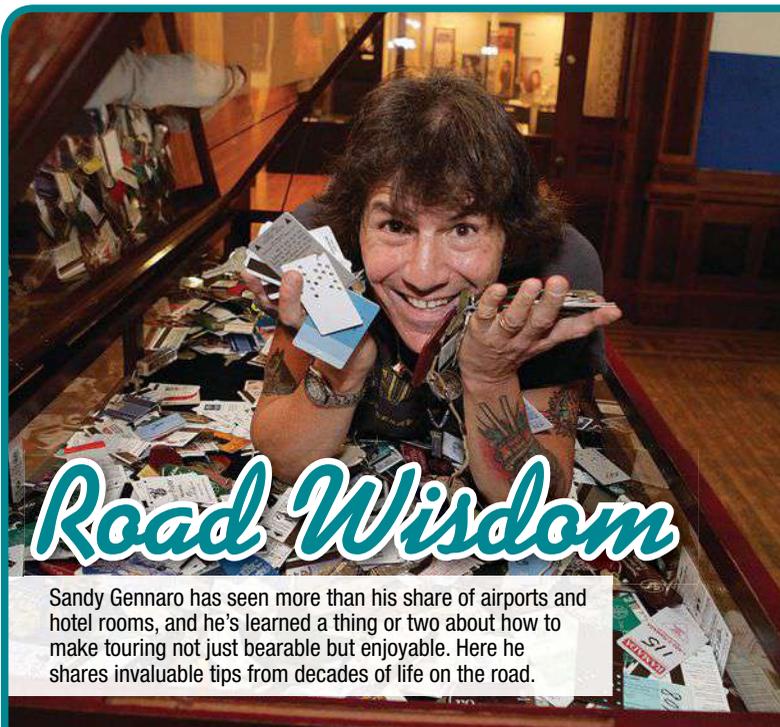
**MD:** What essential qualities do you bring to every gig?

**Sandy:** Consistency, staying in the moment, staying within the song, and paying attention to detail. You want to fulfill your purpose within the music. And always be thankful for your gift. That opens the doors to more opportunities.

**MD:** Why do some drummers who play great disappear from the scene?

**Sandy:** It's a combination of different things that allows you to sustain a career. You have to be a people person. While touring, besides the two hours on stage, you have to live with the band for another twenty-two hours—many of those on a tour bus or van—or spend ten or twelve hours a day in the studio. You're only playing for a relatively small amount of the total time you spend with the band. You share living space. Have the ability to take direction with a smile, be considerate and flexible, and realize that it's not all about *you*. Besides what you bring to the table musically, you have to be able to get along with people. That aspect is critical.

**MD:** I saw you at Drummers Collective in the early '90s, and you were always upbeat and positive. How has that attitude figured into



## Road Wisdom

Sandy Gennaro has seen more than his share of airports and hotel rooms, and he's learned a thing or two about how to make touring not just bearable but enjoyable. Here he shares invaluable tips from decades of life on the road.

### TRAVEL SMARTS

Do everything possible to book, reserve, and, most importantly, confirm all of your travel arrangements as far in advance as possible. If you don't yet have a planning tool such as a Day-Timer, smartphone calendar, or "to-do list" app, get one and *use* it. As soon as your flight is confirmed, go online to choose your seat and, if applicable, enter your frequent-flyer number. Check in for your flight online, within twenty-four hours of the departure time, and print out your boarding pass. If you're driving to your destination, confirm your route and travel time the night before you leave. Program your GPS, or download MapQuest directions and a map and print them out. Confirm your hotel-room reservation prior to arrival, and ask them to have your key ready upon check-in.

When flying alone to another city, be sure you have the contact info for the person or company responsible for picking you up at the airport. As soon as the plane touches down and you're permitted to use your electronic device, call the number and confirm your arrival and meeting place. Also let them know whether or not you have to retrieve checked luggage. This simple call can significantly reduce the amount of time it takes to get to your hotel or venue, not to mention the real possibility of them missing your pickup entirely—which has happened to me.

Whether you travel as an independent musician or as a band member, in most cases your transportation will be booked and paid for by someone other than you. Because these arrangements could be made using any airline or hotel chain, you need to join all of their frequent-traveler programs to get credit for the miles flown and hotel stays. It takes a bit of time, but it reaps dividends. I was able to accept a fairly high-paying gig on the West Coast where transportation was not provided, because I used my frequent-flyer miles for the flight. When you reach priority or premier status with an airline, where you fly a minimum number of miles in a year, you enjoy perks such as two checked bags for free and flying first class when there's a seat available. And don't forget hotel-chain award programs. You can designate your points to be credited as miles to an airline award program. One night's stay is usually worth 500 miles!

### PACKING SMARTS

Don't over-pack. You can usually find washers and dryers in most budget and midline hotels and in venues like theaters, civic/convention centers, and arenas—though not in clubs. Pack about a week's worth of stage and street clothes, if possible made of permanent-press fabric. And don't pack to the max; it's always a good idea to leave a little extra room in your suitcase for gig T-shirts and other souvenirs you acquire on the road. Better yet, pack a small carry-on bag to use on your return home. Be aware of the airline's checked-baggage fees, though.

### ROOM SMARTS

To lessen the possibility of leaving something behind in a hotel, refrain from putting anything in drawers or stashing valuables or money in unlikely places. Use the Do Not Disturb sign to keep the maid out, if desired. Do all your packing the night before, and when you're about to leave the room for the last time, walk around it and visually check all surface areas including couch cushions, bathroom and shower, closet, desk, and nightstand. For additional security, when you temporarily leave your room during your stay at the hotel, put the Do Not Disturb sign on the door and leave the TV on with the volume up to make the room seem occupied. Settle up your hotel charges the night before checkout, and get a zero-balance receipt.



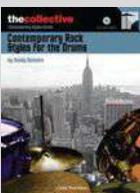
## INFLUENCES

**The Beatles** Meet the Beatles!, Revolver (Ringo Starr) // **The Dave Clark Five** Glad All Over (Dave Clark) // **The Rolling Stones** Beggars Banquet (Charlie Watts) // **The Young Rascals** The Young Rascals (Dino Danelli) // **Led Zeppelin** Led Zeppelin (John Bonham) // **Vanilla Fudge** Vanilla Fudge (Carmine Appice) // **Cream** Disraeli Gears (Ginger Baker) // **The Jeff Beck Group** Beck-Ola (Tony Newman, Micky Waller) // **The Jimi Hendrix Experience** Electric Ladyland (Mitch Mitchell, Buddy Miles)



## RECORDINGS

**Benny Mardones** "Into the Night" from Never Run, Never Hide // **Cyndi Lauper** "Money Changes Everything" (live single version), "What a Thrill" from the soundtrack to the film The Goonies // **The Pat Travers Band** "I La La La Love You" and "Amgwanna Kick Booty" from Black Pearl, "New Age Music" from Radio Active, "Armed & Dangerous" from Can Do // **Blackjack** "Without Your Love" from Blackjack // **Joan Jett and the Blackhearts** "Pretty Vacant" from The Hit List // **Jon Paris** "The Boogie" from Blue Planet // **Craaft** "You're the Best Thing in My Life" from Craaft



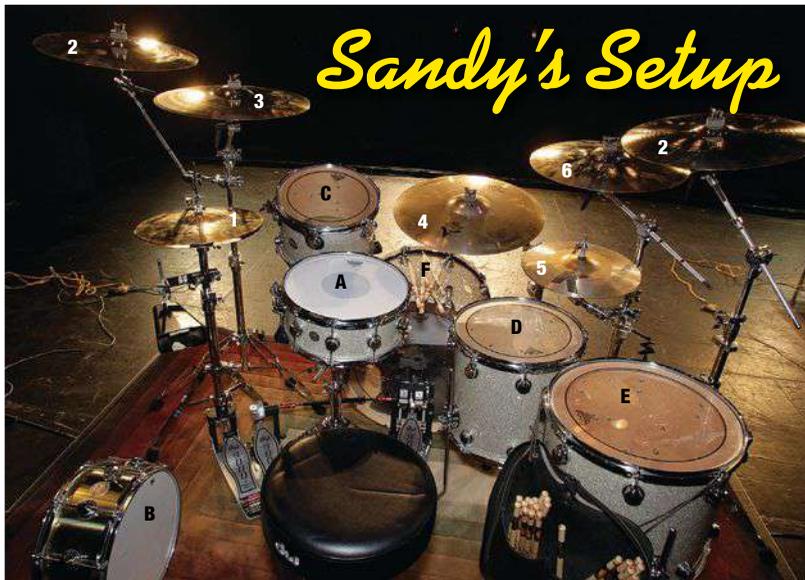
## EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

**Drum Basics Steps I and II** book/CD/DVD (Alfred Music) // **Contemporary Rock Styles for the Drums** book/CD (Hal Leonard)

your success?

**Sandy:** It can be difficult to be upbeat all the time, but it's the key to longevity in any career. You can't live by talent alone; you also need to utilize that talent in a professional way. Does reading music help my longevity? You bet it does. Does playing with a click? Of course—but a lot of guys can read and play with a click. What is of utmost importance is your attitude as well as your technical ability, and musically knowing what *not* to play. The more mature I became, the less drums I needed to play to express myself. I didn't need to legitimize my drumming by playing a lot of unnecessary stuff in a song. The number-one thing to remember is that you should play for and serve the song at all times.

**MD:** Why did you decide to strip down your drumming?



**Drums:** DW in broken glass finish

- A.** 6.5x14 snare
  - B.** 6.5x14 bronze snare
  - C.** 9x13 tom
  - D.** 14x14 floor tom
  - E.** 14x16 floor tom
  - F.** 16x22 bass drum
- Sandy's usual rig features a 6.5x14 or 5x14 brass, bronze, or chrome main snare, with a 6.5x14 or 5x14 brass, bronze, or chrome auxiliary snare set up to the left of the hi-hat.

**Sticks:** Hot Sticks ArtiSticks signature series model SG003

**Heads:** Remo, including Coated CS snare batters and Hazy Diplomat bottoms, Clear Pinstripe tom batters and Clear Ambassador bottoms, and Pinstripe bass drum batter and Ebony Ambassador front head

**Cymbals:** Zildjian

- 1.** 14" New Beat hi-hats
- 2.** 17" A Custom Projection crash
- 3.** 19" A Custom crash
- 4.** 22" A Custom Projection ride
- 5.** 13" K Custom Hybrid (or New Beat) hi-hats
- 6.** 18" A Custom crash

**Sandy:** I don't need to play every chop I know to be credible as a drummer. It's about having a quiet confidence. People say they can tell if it's me from outside of a rehearsal room or venue, just from hearing my backbeat. How do you differentiate a 2-and-4 backbeat as your own? It's that quiet confidence; you can't be insecure about your playing, your timekeeping, your knowledge of the arrangement. You have to go in as prepared as possible so your attention is on the feel and overall sound and not on the arrangement or what beat to play.

**MD:** You've worked with some giant acts. What do they typically expect of the drummer?

**Sandy:** All the artists I've worked with want to hear their songs like they were recorded. When I play with an artist for the first time, I not only research the live recordings they give me for beginnings and endings of songs, I always refer to their original recordings.

If the artist wants it faster or slower, or wants something different, I can do that, because I know the original recording and the original drum part. In preparation, once I know the song I put it at the correct tempo on my click, then play the song from memory, along with the click, humming the melody and playing the drum part exactly as it was recorded. If you can do that, it's safe to say you know the tune.

**MD:** What was your introduction to the Joan Jett band like?

**Sandy:** When I began with Joan she was opening for Robert Plant on his *Now and Zen* tour in 1988. I took over the drum chair while she was on the road. I was sent the live recording, and I learned the songs. I auditioned on their day off after having a month to prepare. I learned all the tunes, got the exact bpm's. Joan asked me what songs I knew, and I answered, "The whole set." She said, "Fine, count it off." I counted off "Bad Reputation," and we ran through the

## SANDY GENNARO

first four songs of the set. Then Joan said, “Everything you played sounds like a hit record.”

**MD:** When did you discuss your fee?

**Sandy:** I didn't talk money with her manager for a week. I wanted Joan, the band, and management to see what they were getting. They saw that I was easy to get along with, played consistently night to night, was on time for the lobby call, and didn't get high when I performed. I never complained and always had a good attitude, and Joan saw that. Her manager called; we discussed money. The check was always on time.

**MD:** Has that been your approach, from the Monkees to Johnny Winter?

**Sandy:** Every situation is different on the business side. The Monkees was a ten-piece horn band and the salary was set, no negotiations. With Johnny everyone was paid differently based on your track record and experience.

**MD:** What was your toughest audition over the years?

**Sandy:** The toughest ever, which I didn't get, was for Lenny Kravitz. This was after Zoro left and before Cindy Blackman joined. It was a cattle-call audition in

the '90s, fifty drummers in a hallway practicing on their pads. I go in and a cloud of smoke is surrounding Lenny. There's a drumset, but with no carpet underneath, sitting on a linoleum floor. So I sit down and Lenny asks me, “Do you know ‘Fire’ by Hendrix?” I say, “Sure.” I was about to ask, “Where's the carpet?” But Lenny says, “Count it off.” We start playing “Fire,” and by bar two the bass drum is two feet away from me! I wasn't surprised when I didn't get the gig.

**MD:** Who has been the most demanding artist to work with?

**Sandy:** Cyndi Lauper wanted everything exactly like the record. My first day, she tells my roadie, “Lose the ride cymbal. The drummer in my band does not use a ride cymbal.” Her record was a mixture of drum machine and Anton Fig playing live drums. So I added an auxiliary hi-hat to my live kit to take the place of the ride. Pulling in the reins and keeping the clutch in was challenging but rewarding; I had to simulate a drum machine, playing simply but effectively just what the song needs and nothing more, concentrating on the feel.

**MD:** Johnny Winter has praised your shuffle. Why?

**Sandy:** For years I was intimidated by shuffles. I could only do a basic rock shuffle, what I respectfully call a Tommy Lee shuffle—quarter-note ride, 2-and-4 backbeat, with a syncopated bass drum part. I was inspired to finally do something about it. So I got a bunch of Little Walter, Muddy Waters, and Buddy Guy records, blocked out studio time at Drummers Collective, and listened to the drummers on those records.

I realized that for the most part they were shuffling from the top down, with both of their hands playing a shuffle and the bass drum playing quarter notes on 1 and 3. I put the metronome at 45 and played a straight shuffle with no crashes for five minutes, both hands shuffling and accenting 2 and 4—a Texas shuffle. No crashes, no fills, no nothing. I moved the metronome to 50 bpm, played for five more minutes, then to 55 bpm, etc. I repeated this until I reached a tempo where I could no longer play cleanly for five minutes. Now I felt confident that I could finally play an authentic shuffle.

Three weeks later the bassist in



Johnny Winter's band called me and asked me to audition. I get there, and Johnny starts a slow blues riff with a 12/8 feel, but he wanted a shuffle groove at this super-slow tempo. I was thanking God that three weeks earlier I had followed His inspiration and worked on that traditional shuffle. I got the gig.

**MD:** How have you dealt with the lean times that every musician faces?

**Sandy:** Don't put all your eggs in one business. In 1987, when I was prepping for the Monkees tour at Drummers Collective, [co-owner] Rob Wallis asked me to teach. That started twenty-seven years at the Collective. I had to develop a teaching system. I taught myself how to read charts, and I started doing oldies gigs with Lou Christie and the Tokens. That work is all reading, all charts. You get paid that night, and often you never see the band again, though you may see the artist again. I was Lou Christie's musical director in the early '90s. What better way to deal with lean times than to teach your instrument—you make some dough while you sharpen your own skills!

**MD:** It's important to maintain all your contacts.

**Sandy:** Never burn a bridge. Once I was trying to leave a club after a Pat Travers gig. This bass player asks me to listen to a cassette of his playing in order to recommend him for some gigs. I gave him my card and told him to send it to me. He called me eventually and said, "Why don't you come out and hear this singer I'm managing?" I went down and played with her. It was Cyndi Lauper. Her career was just beginning. That became the next three years of my life. It would have been so easy to blow that guy off that night in New Haven. But you can never burn a bridge. "Nice" works. It takes strength to hold your tongue in some situations. Be true to yourself, speak your mind, but always be professional.

**MD:** What do you think is the biggest misconception about having a successful drumming career?

**Sandy:** That you have to have a ton of technique. If your motivation is to be the fastest, most technical drummer in your neighborhood, you will be a

legend on your own block. Less is more.

**MD:** How do you keep the faith when you don't have a gig and opportunity isn't there?

**Sandy:** Always be ready—and keep networking! What's the alternative? Being miserable? Whine, whine... nobody wants to be around somebody

who complains. I've seen guys bounced from tour buses because of chronic complaining. They could be great players, but you can't stand the other twenty-two and a half hours being around this guy. And my other advice? Shower at least once a week when you're on a tour bus. And don't leave your dirty, smelly socks in the aisle.

**MD:** What's more important for you, feel or technique?

**Sandy:** Well, this whole idea of technique-driven drumming bothers me. It has its place in drum solos and drum contests, but you have to play what's necessary for the song and, more importantly, leave out what's not. [Producer/engineer] Tom Dowd told me early on to "Save the chops for your clinics." When you have arguments like "Who's the best drummer, Neil Peart or Ringo Starr...?" to me it's just silly. You can't compare. If Neil Peart auditions for the Beatles, I got news for you: Neil ain't getting the gig. If Ringo auditions for Rush—sorry, Ringo. Each famous drummer became famous because of his association with his respective band and its music, and no other drummer can fill that role. You can *like* one drummer more than another, but to say he is *better* is ludicrous. There is nobody who can be the drummer in the Beatles other than Ringo, or Bonham with Zeppelin.

**MD:** What is your most valuable technique tip?

**Sandy:** To be comfortable playing basic variations of beat/simple fill combinations with a metronome in the



widest tempo range possible. Be sure to do this in both the straight-8th and -16th rhythms as well as triplet-based rhythms—slow blues and shuffles. And always make playing along with recorded music part of your rehearsal. That is the skill set. That's the bottom line, then you grow from there.

It surprised me to learn that all music as we know it came from swing and shuffles. The straight-8ths feel wasn't played on any record until the early-to-mid-'50s. Make friends with that shuffle! To be comfortable playing basic straight-8th *and* shuffle beats in a wide range of tempos with the metronome is much better than learning, say, dozens of 16th-note-triplet bass drum patterns or spending hours trying to play a paradiddle at 200 bpm. It's all icing and no cake!

**MD:** Is your drumming an extension of your personality?

**Sandy:** My drumming *is* like my personality, straight ahead and in your face—but not when it doesn't have to be. I know when to sit in the backseat and when to be the driver of the car. When to be a fly on the wall or the center of attention. The most important thing is to blend in and be part of the team. It's not, "Look at me play my favorite Dave Weckl lick"; it's about being part of an ensemble and supporting a vocalist. If the song don't need it, don't play it. Drummers were put on the planet to supply the heartbeat of the song, to be the engine of the car, and to be the backbone of the band.





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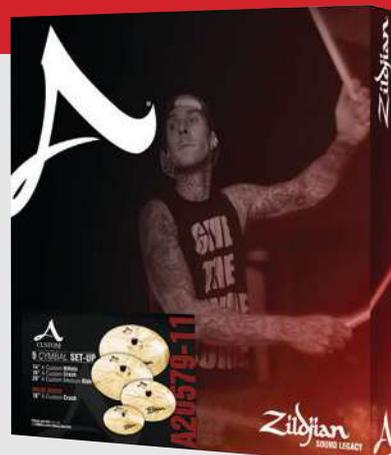
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Story by Miguel Monroy  
Photos by Elle Jaye

# MIKE JOHN

**There are all kinds of drumming role models—jazz forefathers, rock gods, flashy young fire-breathers. This one has become a modern-day hero by devising an entirely new way to inspire and serve a generation of players with a never-ending hunger for information.**



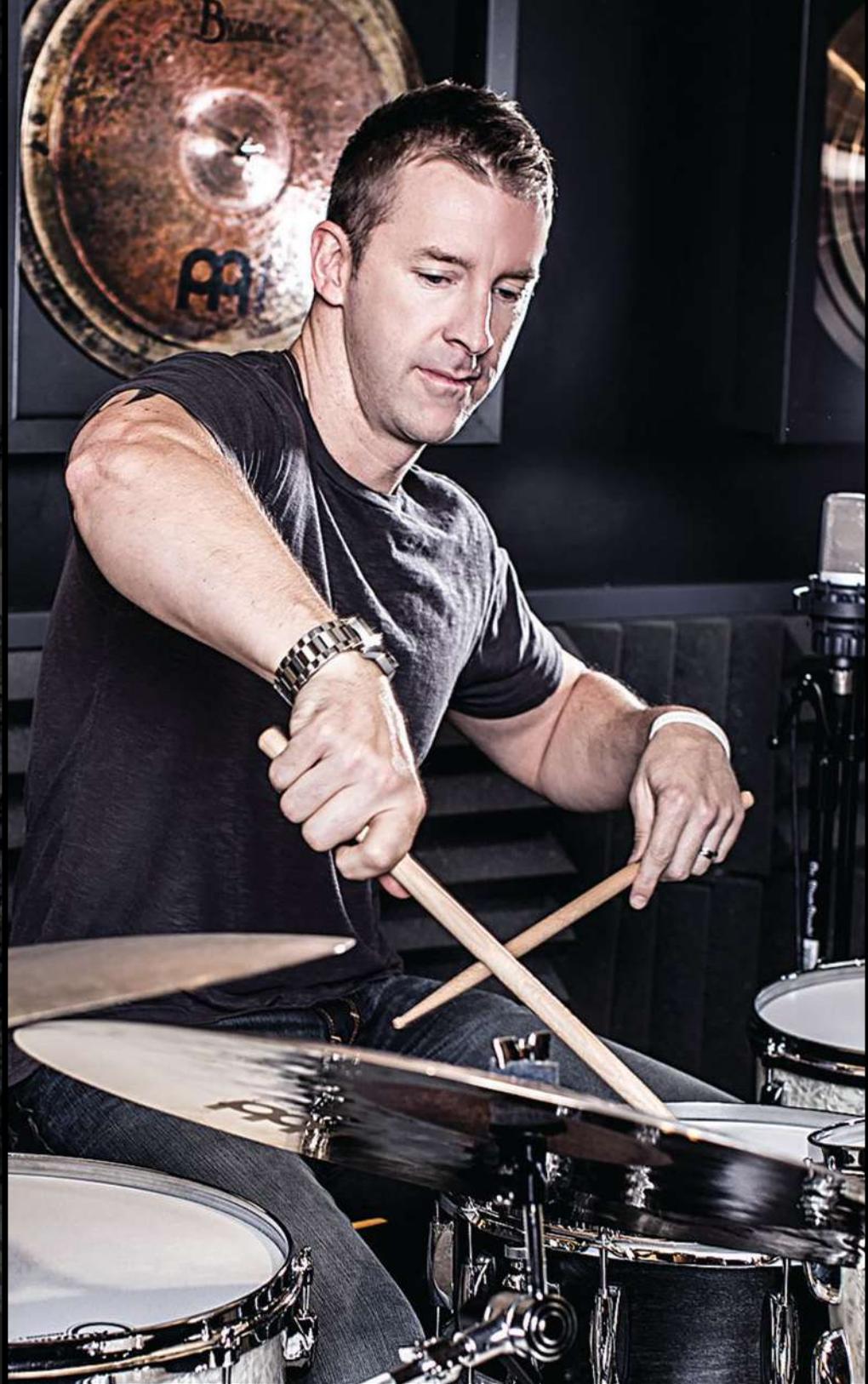
# STON

It's no secret that drumming education is undergoing some major changes, as more and more instructors are beginning to offer online lessons in addition to traditional one-on-one private instruction in local drum shops and music schools. Mike Johnston, creator of MikesLessons.com, was one of the first teachers to capitalize on the wide-reaching power of the Internet, after videos he uploaded to YouTube for his private students went viral and gained more than a million views. Seeing that unexpected response as a sign of demand for high-quality educational content online, Johnston created a website where students could purchase and download pre-recorded video lessons and watch them on their computers or iPods. Two years later, in 2008, Mike went space age and launched the world's first live-stream drum-lesson service, which remains the preeminent one of its kind.

But was it always a goal to revolutionize music education through the Web? Not even close. Johnston started out teaching drums in a music store in his hometown of Sacramento, California, while playing in the alternative-rock band Simon Says. As the group's popularity began to grow, Johnston realized that he was more excited about teaching than about playing on stage to thousands of people. He eventually chose to leave the touring life to focus on his true passion: educating others. MikesLessons.com was just a natural progression as Internet technology became more powerful and video production tools became more readily available. The operation has since expanded to include weeklong camps at Johnston's facility in Folsom, California, and Mike continues to crank out top-notch prerecorded video lessons between his regular three-times-a-week live streams.

Now with more than 9,000 MikesLessons.com students and nearly 70,000 YouTube subscribers, plus thousands of followers on Facebook and Twitter, Johnston is undeniably one of the most watched and devotedly supported personalities in modern drumming education. Yet despite all of his success, he

remains incredibly humble and gracious, and his passionate, sharing spirit continues to permeate every lesson he teaches, every clinic he conducts, and every video he records. And when approached for his first cover story, Mike wanted to be sure to give something back to you, the readers of *MD*, for all of your support, in the form of the five-step Practical Independence Challenge included as this month's Rock & Jazz Clinic. Before we get to that lesson, however, let's take a few minutes to talk shop with the man himself.



**MD:** How did your own educational journey begin?

**Mike:** I started taking lessons when I was about five years old, and I never stopped. I'm still taking lessons, from Will Kennedy, the drummer for the Yellowjackets. Music education played a huge role in my growth as a young drummer. I did school band, but I wasn't learning very fast, and I was always making fifth chair. My private instructors just assumed I didn't practice because I wasn't growing, but I was actually practicing four or five hours a day.

It was really frustrating in the beginning. It almost felt like I had a learning disability for the instrument. But I didn't know what sucking was, and I didn't know what being "bad" at something was. I just knew that I loved it. It wasn't until junior high that I realized how far behind my peers I really was.

**MD:** So what were some of the things you did to try to catch up?

**Mike:** Mainly, I started teaching myself. I would take lessons with my private teacher and pretend that I understood him, but I didn't. It wasn't his fault; he was a great teacher. But I would go home, put all the music on the floor, and think: *What is he asking me to do here? What's the difference between quarter notes, 8th notes, and 16th notes?*

My instructor would give me a one-measure 16th-note groove, and I would just look at the first four notes for an hour. Eventually, after four hours of practicing, I would try to play the entire one-measure groove. Then my friends would just sight-read it down, and I realized even more how far behind I was. I'd have to work ten times as long on my lessons as my peers would have to.

At the time, I didn't know how to say, "I don't get this." But that's also what really shaped me as a teacher. I struggled so hard, and I still do. If you gave me something brand new right now, I would have to dissect it, and it would take me four times longer than anyone else to learn it. But when I'm done, I *really* know it. And I can teach it and break it down to anyone, because I've had to work through every crack

and crevice of it for myself.

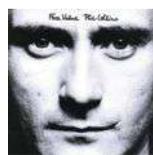
**MD:** So it seems that reading music was more of an obstacle for you than playing was.

**Mike:** Yeah, man. I couldn't figure out what it meant, as far as the duration of each note. Being in school band made it a little confusing, because I was hearing the explanation to the wind instruments, and I could understand why they played a whole note for four beats. But why did I just hit the drum once? It wasn't computing. Now I would just

over into your method of teaching?

**Mike:** Before I had my first professional drum teacher, Pete Magadini, I had a few teachers that would say things like, "That's not how you play the hi-hat with your foot," or, "That's not how you do this," and it just seemed so absolute. I remember thinking: *I'm never going to do that with my students.* My students are going to have a clear picture of the desired result in their head. I will show them the technique I think will help them get there, but I will encourage

## MIKE'S FAVORITES



**Phil Collins** Face Value (Phil Collins) // **Barkmarket** L. Ron (Rock Savage) // **Billy Cobham** Spectrum (Billy Cobham) // **Bobby McFerrin** Bang! Zoom (Will Kennedy) // **Faith No More** Angel Dust (Mike Bordin) // **Brotherly** One Sweet Life (programmed) // **The Cinematic Orchestra** Every Day (Luke Flowers) // **The Dear Hunter** Migrant (Nick Crescenzo) // **John Scofield** Up All Night (Adam Deitch)



ask, but as a kid I was too afraid to ask someone to explain it. That experience really contributed to my teaching too. Anything that I teach now, whether it be a rudiment, a chop, or an exercise, I usually have four or five explanations of that exact same thing so that when I see in students' eyes that they're confused, I can say, "Okay, think of it like this...." And if that doesn't work, I'm like, "Okay, let's write it out on the board." And so on. I just keep going through each possible way to teach it until I see their eyes click, and then I know they've got it.

**MD:** Do you remember a turning point when it finally clicked for you?

**Mike:** Yeah. In my early twenties, I learned my own system and stopped being ashamed of it. I started embracing the way I learn. I realized that I had to see it, hear it, and then learn it one limb at a time. First, I would write out what I was learning, so I could see it. Then I'd program it with a drum machine and listen to it at about 50 or 60 bpm. Then I would play one limb at a time. Then, slowly, I'd add in one note of the bass drum part at a time, and then the snare, and so on.

**MD:** Was there anything else you learned as a drum student that carried

them to experiment. And if they get to that desired result, I'm not going to bug them about the technique they're using. I care more about the finished product than having students with perfect technique that can't communicate their sound.

**MD:** Even now, as a successful educator, you're still taking lessons. Why is that?

**Mike:** I got to the point where I felt good about my delivery of education, that I could explain things fairly well, but I wasn't happy with my personal drumming. I felt like it was missing a key ingredient, which was a pulse. The drummers that I love, whether it be Dave Weckl, Steve Gadd, Benny Greb, or whoever, even when they play their flashiest chops it still has a pulse. I didn't have that. So I asked myself, *Who has this pulse more than anybody in a fusion setting?* Because that's the direction I was heading as a player. To me, it was Will Kennedy. Anything he's ever done, with the Yellowjackets, Bobby McFerrin, or anyone else, there's always a great pulse.

I didn't know Will, and we didn't share a single endorsement, so I didn't have an "in" with him. I just contacted him and told him what I was looking for. He didn't know who I was or what I did, but

# MIKE JOHNSTON

he was totally cool about working with me. It started by sending him videos of me playing along with tracks that he had sent. He would critique it and say, "Okay, do it again and send it back with these new corrections."

Our lessons slowly morphed, and he'd say, "Okay, this is a Yellowjackets tune called 'Freedomland.' This is the A section, and this is the B section. You've got a month." I would work endlessly on

The army has to defend the pulse at all costs. The first time he said it, I had to sit down and soak it in. He would say that the pulse was defended by the ride, the kick, the snare, or whatever, and it just blew me away.

## THE INTERNET REVOLUTION

**MD:** How did MikesLessons.com begin?

**Mike:** About seven or eight years ago I was in a signed major-label band

called Simon Says. We sounded like Rage Against the Korn Tones. [laughs] I left that band so I could come home and teach full time at Skip's Music in Sacramento. That was going to be my future, and I was really happy about it, because I knew that teaching is where I should be. I would go on little three- to four-day tours to help bands out. And at that time, there was this brand-new website called YouTube that hosted videos. So I figured, "Wow! I can film a video of my students' lessons, put them on this new website, and tell them when I'm going to be out of town to work on the stuff in that

was good enough for my students at the time, so I kept making more, and eventually it got to the point that there were about a million views total between all of my videos.

Finally, I thought, *Man, if I charged for this, I would value the content more, and the people purchasing it would value it WAY more.* Sometimes, when you get free educational content, it's in one ear and out the other. But when you pay, you want to get your money's worth, so you practice it. I think I had about 20,000 subscribers at the time, and I thought maybe I could get 10 or 20 percent of these people to follow me over to a site that would take education a bit more seriously than my YouTube videos. The videos I make for YouTube are tips and tricks—the fun stuff. I wanted my website to be filled with legit education that was worth charging for.

The way I did the site was by asking myself, *What's the website I wish Dave Weckl and Vinnie Colaiuta had built for me?* And I just built it. The distance between myself and Vinnie—which is vast—is probably similar to the distance between myself and some of these students who are just starting out. So I made a website that I would have wanted.

**MD:** What led you to choose the life of an educator as opposed to continuing to perform in a band setting?

**Mike:** When I was with my band, I never knew that a record deal was possible. It just kind of happened, and it was a big deal. We were touring with some of the biggest bands in the world, like Limp Bizkit, Korn, and Foo Fighters. I'm really lucky that I got a chance to see that side of the industry. The crowds were getting into the tens of thousands, but I felt almost nothing on stage. Actually, all I thought was that I couldn't wait to get off the stage so I could take the other drummers onto the bus and explain this thing I'd just thought of. All of a sudden, it started to click, and I realized: *Wait a minute. I'm in the middle of most drummers' dreams, and all I'm thinking about is explaining things to other drummers.*

I started sharing this with my teacher at the time, Pete Magadini. Pete was the

## MIKE'S KIT



**Drums:** Gretsch USA Custom in vintage marine pearl finish, including a 7x10 tom, a 14x16 floor tom, an 18x22 bass drum, and a 5x12 side snare, plus a 5.5x14 Brooklyn series main snare in satin dark ebony finish

**Cymbals:** Meinl Byzance series, including 14" Extra Dry Medium hi-hats, an 18" Extra Dry Thin crash, a 21" Mike Johnston Transition ride, an 18" Sand crash, and a 20" Extra Thin Hammered crash

**Heads:** Aquarian Response 2 Coated snare batter, Super 2 Coated tom batters and Classic Clear bottoms, and Force I Clear bass drum batter and Force I Coated front head

**Sticks:** Vater Mike Johnston 2451 hickory model

**Hardware:** DW, including 9000 series stands and 5000 series bass drum pedal and hi-hat stand; custom seat by Rooster Thrones

it and then send it back. Then he'd say, "Why did you contact me?" And I'd say, "To have a pulse." Then he'd say, "Then why are you worried so much about the chops, the fills, and the execution of the groove? You're not focusing on the whole reason you contacted me." Then I'd have to go back and make sure that everything I played had this push to it, this quarter-note pulse.

Any time he described the pulse of a specific song, he would say, "The pulse is defended by..." That phrase told me how important pulse was to him. It was like there was an army in front of a castle, and the castle was the pulse.

video at no charge. Then when I come back, we can work on it together." I literally had to spell out the website to the parents, because YouTube was still so new.

Well, I would come back, and the video, which I only showed to a few students, would have 10,000 views. I was like, "That's got to be a mistake—that can't be right." Then I'd do it again, and it would get 15,000 views. And the next one would have 60,000 views. That kept happening, but I was horrible. I couldn't speak to a camera. My sound was bad. And I didn't know how to work a mixing board and microphones. But it

# TWO GENERATIONS TWO PIONEERS

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one that pushed me into the world of teaching as a profession. He's the one that said, "Look, you're a good drummer, but when you explain something to me your eyes light up in a totally different way. I think you really have a talent for explaining things to people, and more than anything you have a passion for it."

So I went to my band and was like, "Guys, I've got you lined up with four drummers that are far superior to me to audition for the band. I want to go home and be a teacher for the rest of my life." And at the time I wasn't planning on going home to start this new thing that was going to influence drumming education on a global scale. I just thought I was going to quit my band and go home to teach in a local drum shop for the rest of my life. And I was really excited about it.

## THE VIRTUAL AND THE PERSONAL

**MD:** What exactly do people get as members of MikesLessons.com?

**Mike:** There are two different services that the website offers. There's downloadable prerecorded content, and then there's a live-streaming service. It's a monthly subscription that gives you live-streaming lessons at 11 A.M. and 6 P.M. PST on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Monday is beginner, Tuesday is intermediate, and Wednesday is advanced. Each lesson is about twenty-five to thirty minutes of instruction, and then we do questions and answers, which is also live. So when you're logged in, you can ask me anything you want. We have a chat screener keeping track of all the questions, who happens to be my awesome wife, Amber. She reads the questions, and then I answer them live on camera. Those accounts can merge, so you can have downloadable content and the live-streaming service.

**MD:** You also offer drum camps throughout the year. What do those entail?

**Mike:** Drum camps happen every summer, and they are actually the reason I opened the MikesLessons.com facility. The website used to be run out of a spare bedroom in my house, but I wanted to expand it into something that was more personal. So we found a building that was in the same parking lot

as a hotel, on the river in Sacramento. People can fly in, stay here for a week, and just wake up in the morning and walk to the building. There are ten camps per summer, either intermediate or advanced, and they're six days long.

Most of the camps are coed, but we do two camps per year that are all female, so they can share stories with each other that most male drummers wouldn't relate to. And I wanted more than anything for them to look around the room and realize they're not alone in this. We limit all the camps to eight people, because I want to know everyone's first and last name. I want to know what they do for a living, their weaknesses and strengths, and I want everything to be very personal.

**MD:** One of your camps focuses on educating other educators. What do those camps look like?

**Mike:** All kinds of teachers come to that. Some people have been teaching for twenty years, and they think their teaching is getting a little stale, or they're looking for a fresh take on how to teach certain things. Others are only sixteen or seventeen years old and thinking about becoming teachers. It's a really fun camp, because it's my passion, and I love being surrounded by people that share that passion.

Every morning they walk in and there are about ten drumming topics on a board. Each teacher has to pick a topic and try to teach it to everyone in about five minutes. Or sometimes we'll have one topic, and we'll each get up and give a small clinic on it so we can see the different ways that people explain things. We really explore the delivery of education, branding, promoting, and what it's like to be an educator nowadays. To be an educator now, it's important to have great video content so parents can see you before they meet you. You should at least have a decent website that shows your contact information, teaching ability, and playing ability. You also need to be on top of social media and know how to approach it professionally.

**MD:** Do some people in the teacher camp want to do the same thing as you? Is the MikesLessons.com business model something you'd like to see other people doing as well?

**Mike:** Yes, I think it's awesome! Teaching isn't just something you do when playing doesn't work out. It can be your Plan A instead of Plan B. It was for me. I mean, I left a signed touring band so I could come home and teach, and I love it more than anything. And I love that other people want to do what I'm doing. The thing that makes MikesLessons.com unique is not the delivery of video content or the live streaming—it's me. And what would make your lessons unique is you.

**MD:** Some people are skeptical of online education because they're worried about losing the one-on-one relationship between student and teacher. How do you maintain a sense of community on such a global scale?

**Mike:** I'm aware that the big knock with online education is the loss of the one-on-one relationship, so one thing we have is student reviews on Tuesday nights before the live lesson. As a member of MikesLessons.com, you get access to a private YouTube channel where you can upload your stuff. No matter how many get uploaded, I review every video live. So I'll say, "Okay, this video is from Chris Hancock, and he's working on song variations." Then I roll the clip of Chris, come back on camera, and critique it. My students are given a heads-up that their video will be reviewed on a specific night, so they can log in and watch the review.

The other thing we have is the Mike's Lessons Family Facebook page, which you get added to when you sign up. It's a collection of some of the greatest personalities and attitudes in the drum community. If someone puts up a post saying they're bummed and thinking maybe drums isn't for them, within five minutes there will be a bunch of posts talking them off the ledge. So between the student reviews and the Family Facebook page, we're able to close that gap.

The other thing is I do my homework. When we get a new student, I check out what kind of drumset they have and what their drum room looks like. I want to know everything about them so that when my wife, Amber, tells me, "Okay, Cole Paramore has a question," I instantly know that he lives in Juneau,



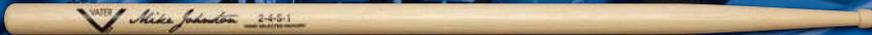
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Alaska, has a DW kit, and his father made his snare. And on the right side of his ride, he has the 18" Sand crash. I have to know all that about my students, because *that* can close the gap, and I can give them better advice.

**MD:** How do you prepare for lessons and keep things fresh?

**Mike:** I'm still a student. I'm not done learning, and as soon as I learn new things I can't wait to pass them on to my students. The other thing is there are standards that have to be taught over and over again. Time signatures weren't only explained to me once. The samba wasn't only explained to me once. Sometimes I'll teach an intermediate lesson on something that I've already taught, like samba, because we have a lot of new students who didn't see it before. Then I'll teach samba variations in the advanced class, which will be content that I know I've never taught before.

**MD:** You mentioned your own personal development as a drummer. How much time do you get to practice these days?

**Mike:** I get up early, around 6:30 A.M., and try to get to work by 8 A.M. That's when I make the PDFs and MP3s for that day's live lesson. We broadcast the lesson at 11 A.M., and that goes until about noon. The next five hours are either practice time or time to record new content. For the five months leading up to PASIC this past fall, I spent that time preparing for my clinic.

Right now, my practice time is spent on whatever Will Kennedy gives me to work on or something I'm trying to work through on my own. For example, I'll pick a subdivision and just improvise on that for about twenty minutes. Then I'll pick a second subdivision and improvise between the two for another half hour. Then I'll tackle some physical weakness, like singles between my hands and my feet or up-tempo swing, for ten minutes.

My biggest focus for the past six or seven months has been on drum solos. They used to scare the crap out of me. But I took the Michael Jordan principle, where he says, "Make your weakness your strength." I decided that I was sick of hiding from drum solos, and I started tackling them. I recorded myself every

night and listened to the solo on my way home, and then did it again the next day. The entire time I'm paying attention to the process, so I can pass it off to my students.

After PASIC, which was where I performed my first real drum solo, I couldn't wait to tell my students about my journey, what was going through my head, how I created the solo, and the people that helped me create it. JP Bouvet, Benny Greb, Jost Nickel, and Will Kennedy were so important in the development of my solo. Will was all about pulse. My solo was in 15/8, but my left foot was playing quarter notes throughout, so no matter how weird it got, the audience always had a pulse to follow. JP Bouvet told me to pick four or five "scenes" that I was very comfortable playing. When you have those scenes, all you have to do is create the connecting dots to get from one to the next. Jost Nickel, who is one of my favorite soloists, told me to find tempos, or just one tempo, that I enjoyed playing. Everyone has a "home tempo." If I asked you to just tap your foot to quarter notes, what tempo would that be?

Benny Greb told me to "Play the hits." What he meant by that was that we all have things in our drumming repertoire that are our number-one singles. He told me not to be scared to play something that I've already played in front of other people. When you go see your favorite band, what's your favorite part of the concert? It's when they play their hits. So play the things that you love to play, and it will show through.

## ONLINE SUPPORT

**MD:** At one point during your clinic at PASIC, you discussed how drummers should encourage and support one another. You've also promoted similar philosophies online with ideas like the Positive Post Campaign. What message are you trying to get across, and why is it so important?

**Mike:** We know why a lot of people are so negative: It makes them feel better about themselves. It's just not necessary, though. I think one thing that's hard for people to do sometimes is to remember their own personal time line.

I have a friend, Chris Robyn, who

drums for the band Far. He's only a year older than me, but he's like twenty years wiser. He took me under his wing, and I really look up to him. We would go to shows and see drummers that in my opinion at the time were not very good. After we'd leave, I'd be waiting for Chris to go off and talk smack about the drummer, but it would never happen. So finally I would ask, "Dude, what did you think of the drummer?" And Chris would say, "Man, his hi-hats were crisp," and then he'd stop talking.

I didn't understand. I remember thinking, *You must have heard the same thing I did. It was terrible!* This went on for a while, and eventually I got it. What's the point of saying something negative? Do I know his story? Is he bad, or is he just early on his drumming time line? Early on my time line I was terrible too, but I was as good as I could have been at the time.

I don't know people's circumstances. I don't know how much time they get to practice or if they take lessons, so who am I to judge what they're doing? As that philosophy grew and I became more involved in the world of YouTube, it became even more important. I would see people just tearing each other apart. But we're all trying to do the exact same thing, which is to be great at our instrument, so why would you make fun of somebody or say that they suck?

**MD:** Speaking of which, you have a slogan that you often use: "Embrace the suck." What does that mean?

**Mike:** "Embrace the suck" is written on a bracelet that we give to everyone at our drum camps. I was watching so many people beat themselves up about their weaknesses. To me, weaknesses have nothing to do with talent; they have to do with what you focus on. The things that people are weak at are the things they haven't put enough focus on. I say let's find your weaknesses, and instead of getting bummed out about them, let's get excited about them. Once we know what they are, we can work on them together. And the chances are that your weaknesses were probably my weaknesses too, so I can tell you how I overcame them and walk with you, step by step, to help you do the same. Embrace the suck!





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# PRACTICAL INDEPENDEN

## A 5-Step Workout for Building Coordination Over a Pulse

by Mike Johnston

Complete independence is something that we all strive for, but it can be very confusing and frustrating to practice. This workout/challenge will focus on what I would consider to be “practical independence.” In other words, it’s designed to build the type of drumset independence that’s required in common situations. I heard Dave Weckl say something recently that really stuck with me: “Even though you may hear the pulse inside your head, that doesn’t necessarily mean the crowd hears it, so it might be a good idea to give it to them.” What I believe he was saying is that sometimes we play things in which the pulse seems obvious, but that’s because what we’re playing

is based off a pulse that we hear inside our head. The crowd might not always hear what we’re playing the same way we do, so it’s sometimes good to give the listener a bit of help by keeping a steady pulse with our hi-hat foot.

In this workout, we’ll build toward complete freedom over four different hi-hat pulses. Our options will be quarter notes, upbeats, 8th notes, and splash/closed 8th notes. Each section of the workout focuses on building a specific facet of your drumming, including subdivisions, rudiments, accent permutations, and grooves, against these pulses.

Here are the hi-hat foot options.

The image shows four musical staves, each representing a different hi-hat pulse pattern. Staff 1 shows a quarter-note pulse. Staff 2 shows an eighth-note pulse. Staff 3 shows a dotted quarter-note pulse. Staff 4 shows a half-note pulse. Each staff includes a 4/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat.

### PART 1: BASIC SUBDIVISIONS

Begin by playing the basic subdivisions on the snare over the four hi-hat pulses.

We’ve notated the exercise using the quarter-note pulse.

The image shows three musical staves illustrating snare drum subdivisions over a quarter-note hi-hat pulse. The first staff shows quarter notes with accents on beats 1, 2, 3, and 4. The second staff shows eighth notes with accents on beats 1, 2, 3, and 4. The third staff shows sixteenth notes with accents on beats 1, 2, 3, and 4. Each staff includes a 4/4 time signature and a key signature of one flat.



<p><b>Nine-Stroke Roll</b> RRLRLRLRLR      LLRRLRLRLR</p>	<p><b>Thirteen-Stroke Roll</b> RRLRLRLRLRLRLR      LLRRLRLRLRLRLR</p>
<p><b>Single Paradiddle</b> R L R R L R L L R L R R L R L L</p>	<p><b>Inverted Paradiddle</b> R L L R L R R L R L L R L R R L</p>
<p><b>Double Paradiddle</b> R L R L R R L R L R L L</p>	<p><b>Paradiddle-Diddle</b> R L R R L L R L R R L L</p>
<p><b>Flam</b> I R r L I R r L</p>	<p><b>Flam Tap</b> IR R rL L IR R rL L</p>
<p><b>Flam Accent</b> IR L<sub>3</sub> R rL R<sub>3</sub> L IR L<sub>3</sub> R rL R<sub>3</sub> L</p>	<p><b>Flamadiddle</b> IR L R R rL R L L IR L R R rL R L L</p>

## TIPS FROM FAVES

For additional insight into independence, I asked three of my favorite drummers—Will Kennedy, Todd Sucherman, and Nathaniel Townsley—a few questions on the topic. Here's what they had to say.



Kevin Behpour

### WILL KENNEDY

**What genres of music did you draw from to develop your independence?**

My first love coming up was funk. Sly and the Family Stone, James Brown, and some of the Motown stuff, along with all the offshoots from those funk kingdoms, provided attention to independence, whether I was recognizing it or not.

Later, as my playing opportunities started to broaden, the exposure to African and Latin rhythms and grooves started to become very important. The importance of feel in a funk groove had such a profound effect on me that my desire to find that similar level of feel in African and Latin genres was life changing. Before you can make a Mozambique or songo groove feel good, you must master the independence required to play it. Once you arrive at that place where you're comfortable with a pattern and can perform it confidently, you can further discover the feel, emotion, and spirit behind the groove. *That's* when you cross over from being a drummer to becoming a musician.

**Do you think that there's a relationship between independence and feel? In other words, does having excellent independence allow you to have a more relaxed feel?**

Yes, independence is completely related to your feel behind the kit. Often I have a student play something as simple as 8th notes on the hi-hat along with a basic funk groove and try to apply different accents in the hat pattern. The student works out the independence for a time, and once they get comfortable with it they graduate to the

feel, and *then* the real music begins to appear. Sometimes it happens in a moment, and other times it takes a while for it to get there. But when it arrives, it's the most rewarding experience for both the student and the teacher.



Ronni Drumett

### TODD SUCHERMAN

**How much of your practice time do/did you devote to developing independence?**

Sadly, I don't have the time to practice that I would like, due to being on the road most of the year. But when I have completely free practice time, I'll try to be organized and have some ideas that I wish to explore or improve. One of the keys to independence is to rely on one rhythm and then play other ideas over that. I had a lesson with Jim Chapin many years ago, and after I got the left-hand Moeller triplets down he said,

"Now play other ideas with the right hand while sustaining the triplets." So I let my left hand cruise and focused my attention on the right hand to play different rhythms and motifs. That was a great launching pad, and those types of ideas are still a fun landscape for me to explore. I'll always be sound driven: What am I looking to hear? Then I'll figure out where everything falls. I'll play very slowly to ingrain the motions and sound into my muscle memory, and I'll play very quietly and maintain relaxation. This is the best way to get something firmly in your wheelhouse so you can play it at all tempos and volume levels.

**Does having excellent independence allow you to have a more relaxed feel?**

I don't think so. It just allows you to play more advanced ideas or have better command on the instrument. You can make a simple groove feel relaxed or stiff and



## PART 4: BASS DRUM PERMUTATIONS

Using the same progression that we used for the accent permutations, let's begin to incorporate the bass drum, starting with single notes.

12

Exercise 12 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The top staff features a sequence of four eighth-note patterns, each starting with a different bass drum accent: 1, 2, 3, and 4. The bottom staff continues with another sequence of four eighth-note patterns, each starting with a different bass drum accent: e, a, a, and a. The patterns are: 1) eighth notes on 1, 2, 3, 4; 2) eighth notes on 2, 3, 4, 1; 3) eighth notes on 3, 4, 1, 2; 4) eighth notes on 4, 1, 2, 3. The accents are placed on the first note of each pattern.

Now the double-note permutations.

13

Exercise 13 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The top staff features a sequence of four eighth-note patterns, each starting with a different double-note bass drum accent: 1 e, 2 e, 3 e, and 4 e. The bottom staff continues with another sequence of four eighth-note patterns, each starting with a different double-note bass drum accent: e &, e &, e &, and e &. The patterns are: 1) eighth notes on 1, 2, 3, 4; 2) eighth notes on 2, 3, 4, 1; 3) eighth notes on 3, 4, 1, 2; 4) eighth notes on 4, 1, 2, 3. The accents are placed on the first two notes of each pattern.

And the triple-note permutations.

14

Exercise 14 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The top staff features a sequence of four eighth-note patterns, each starting with a different triple-note bass drum accent: 1 e &, 2 e &, 3 e &, and 4 e &. The bottom staff continues with another sequence of four eighth-note patterns, each starting with a different triple-note bass drum accent: e & a, e & a, e & a, and e & a. The patterns are: 1) eighth notes on 1, 2, 3, 4; 2) eighth notes on 2, 3, 4, 1; 3) eighth notes on 3, 4, 1, 2; 4) eighth notes on 4, 1, 2, 3. The accents are placed on the first three notes of each pattern.

## PART 5: GROOVE FREEDOM

To begin getting comfortable playing grooves over the hi-hat pulses, start with 8th-note patterns. Here are four to get you going.

15

Exercise 15 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The top staff features a sequence of four eighth-note patterns, each starting with a different hi-hat pulse: 1, 2, 3, and 4. The bottom staff continues with another sequence of four eighth-note patterns, each starting with a different hi-hat pulse: e, a, a, and a. The patterns are: 1) eighth notes on 1, 2, 3, 4; 2) eighth notes on 2, 3, 4, 1; 3) eighth notes on 3, 4, 1, 2; 4) eighth notes on 4, 1, 2, 3. The hi-hat pulses are placed on the first note of each pattern.

Now try 16th-note grooves.

16

Exercise 16 consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The top staff features a sequence of four 16th-note patterns, each starting with a different hi-hat pulse: 1, 2, 3, and 4. The bottom staff continues with another sequence of four 16th-note patterns, each starting with a different hi-hat pulse: e, a, a, and a. The patterns are: 1) 16th notes on 1, 2, 3, 4; 2) 16th notes on 2, 3, 4, 1; 3) 16th notes on 3, 4, 1, 2; 4) 16th notes on 4, 1, 2, 3. The hi-hat pulses are placed on the first note of each pattern.



For more linear-style grooves, try some ideas using paradiddles.



Inverted paradiddles also work very well for developing grooves over the hi-hat pulses.



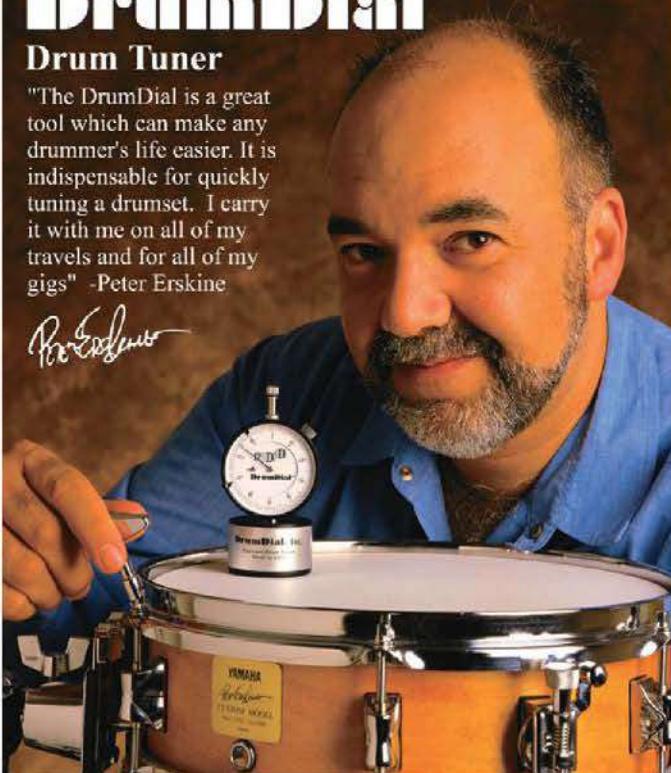
To check out a video demonstrating some of these ideas, log on to [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com).



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*Peter Erskine*



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# RHYTHM AND TIMING

## Part 2: Two-Note 16th Groupings by Bill Bachman

This month we're going to focus on the six different two-note 16th-note groupings. We'll begin with "1-e," and then we'll move it to "e-&," then "&-a," and finally "1-a." After those first four variations, we'll do a separate exercise for the last two two-note groupings: "1-&" and the ever-tricky "e-a." As in part one of this series (March 2014), the exercises will first focus on playing the rhythms as accents among taps, and then we'll play the rhythms with the spaces between them left open.

The first exercise, with the accents and taps, will most likely be easier to play than the three-note exercise from part one, but the second exercise will most certainly be harder this time, since there's more space between the notes. As always, play the exercises with perfect rhythmic accuracy, great dynamic contrast, and a smooth, musical feel, which can be especially challenging at very slow and very fast tempos.

Be sure to use your metronome and tap your foot while playing the exercises. Begin by counting all of the notes out loud, and then count just the quarter notes. Be sure to use the correct stickings, as they will flow naturally and make it much easier to play with rhythmic accuracy. Play the exercises with the left hand leading as well, to help maintain balanced hands and to build confidence with the weaker hand. It'll take thousands of perfect repetitions to program the rhythms into

your musical vocabulary so that you feel them comfortably. If there's any thought or math going on in your head while you play, then keep drilling the exercises. If you're not totally comfortable playing something, you can't expect anyone else to be comfortable listening to you play it.

The first exercise has an accented check pattern leading into the first four broken-up rhythms, played as accents, with all of the subdivisions filled in as taps. The key to playing this first exercise well is mastery and control over the four basic strokes (full, down, tap, and up). We've labeled the stroke type over each note (F = full, D = down, T = tap, and U = up).

Don't be afraid to practice each pattern individually and extremely slowly in order to train your hands to play the appropriate stroke types. If your hands don't know what's coming next, they'll get "tongue tied," and you'll end up playing with either too much tension or a lack of accent/tap clarity. Exaggerate the high and low stick heights for maximum dynamic contrast, and avoid pounding the downstroke accents; they need to relate to the flowing stream of accents in the check patterns. (Remember that a downstroke becomes a downstroke only *after* you hit the drum.) The exercise is in a 4-2-1 format, where you play each variation four times, then twice, then once, before repeating the entire exercise.

Check:

1

Check:

Check:

Check:



Check:

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

Check:

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

Check:

2A

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R R R R R R R R R R

Check:

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

R L R L R L R L R R R R R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

R L R L R R R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

The hard part with these exercises will be keeping the rhythms accurate in the middle of the bar as you negotiate the space while your hands stop and start. Learn how to “play the space” in your head by subdividing the partials, which were played as taps in the first exercise.

I recommend playing these exercises in such a way that the free strokes flow up to the greatest stick height that is comfortable and easily sustainable. These continual, large motions will make the rhythms flow better, so use that to your advantage initially. Later, play the exercises at lower dynamic levels, where more finesse is required.

It’s a good idea to play through the exercises on a regular basis. Just as with your more technical playing chops, your rhythmic perception needs to be trained and maintained. Plus, these exercises are downright therapeutic!

**Bill Bachman** is an international drum clinician, the author of *Stick Technique* (Modern Drummer Publications), and the founder of [drumworkout.com](http://drumworkout.com). For more information, including how to sign up for online lessons, visit [billbachman.net](http://billbachman.net).



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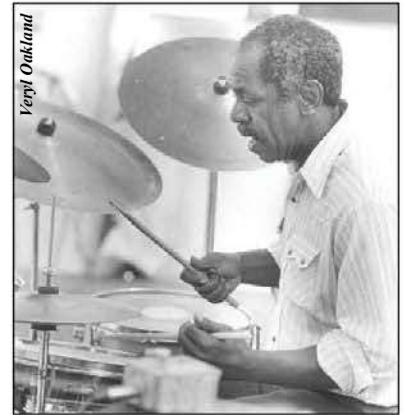
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# MICKEY ROKER

## Style and Analysis

by Steve Fidyk



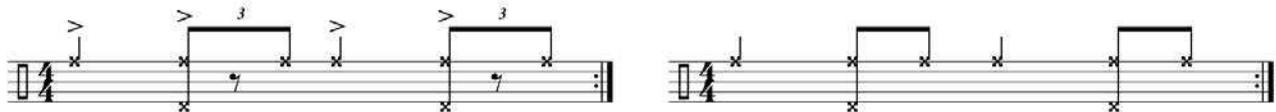
Mickey Roker was born in Miami in 1932, and at age ten he moved to Philadelphia, where he still resides today. Throughout the 1940s and '50s, Philadelphia was an epicenter for aspiring musicians, including John Coltrane, Stan Levey, the Heath brothers, and Benny Golson, who wanted to play new forms of improvisational music.

As a teenager, Roker received rudimental training in drum and bugle corps, and at seventeen he got a set of drums from his uncle. After serving two years in the army, Roker began working around Philadelphia in a variety of R&B groups. Then, in the '60s, he became part of the elite stable of studio musicians for Blue Note Records. "Each record date we did was fun, but it was also serious business," Roker says in *MD* founder Ron Spagnardi's book *The Great Jazz Drummers*. "We'd rehearse for two days first. Engineer Rudy Van Gelder really knew how to get a good sound from people. He made it sound like you were listening to jazz live in the clubs. It was a beautiful experience for me, and I got to play with a lot of musicians." From 1969 until 1971, Roker also played in Duke Pearson's big band and with trumpeter Lee Morgan.

### THE PULSE

Known for his sense of propulsion and adaptability, Roker is regarded as one of the hardest-swinging drummers in history. His main sources for timekeeping are the ride cymbal and crisp-sounding hi-hats, while the snare and bass drum are reserved primarily for riff-based patterns.

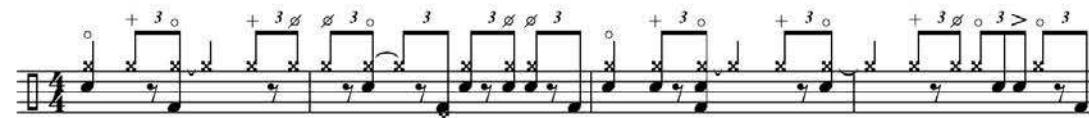
Roker's ride beat has a loose feel with an emphasis on the quarter note (Example 1), while his up-tempo pattern is more dynamically consistent (Example 2).



Two of my favorite recordings featuring Roker are Herbie Hancock's *Speak Like a Child* and Lee Morgan's *Live at the Lighthouse*. The open, airy ride cymbal that Roker uses on the Hancock record is reminiscent of the sound of Roy Haynes. Below is a time-playing solo example from the tune "Riot," which acts as a conduit to move the composition from the piano solo back to the melody.

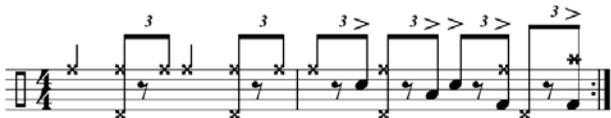


On the tune "First Trip," also from *Speak Like a Child*, listen to how Roker frames the melody by playing the A sections on the hi-hat, with a transition to the ride cymbal for the bridge. "Toys" features Mickey playing the hi-hat with sticks, getting an extremely articulate yet loose sound. Here's the last eight-measure phrase from the opening melody.





Roker uses brushes, cymbals, and space to create the perfect texture in the trio setting of the ballad “Goodbye to Childhood,” and on “The Sorcerer” he picks and chooses points within the phrase to resolve tension. Here are two examples, beginning at 3:00 and 4:05.



Lee Morgan’s *Live at the Lighthouse* features a set of original compositions, and the rhythm section can be heard taking a lot of chances. Check out Roker’s fiery up-tempo feels on “Beehive,” “Aon,” and “416 East 10th Street.” Notice the lift he gives the band with an intense yet relaxed ride beat and insistent hi-hats.

### GROOVE ELATION

On the slinky, medium-tempo tune “Peyote,” Roker negotiates the seventeen-measure form, which is divided as 10+3+4, with ease. The center section of the form is in 5/4, and as the tune develops Mickey interprets this part with a slick Afro-Cuban bell pattern.



On “Nommo,” Roker swings hard in 7/4. What follows is a transcription of where the drummer enters in the introduction. Listen to how his beat has elements of the composition inside it, in particular the piano and bass comping rhythms.



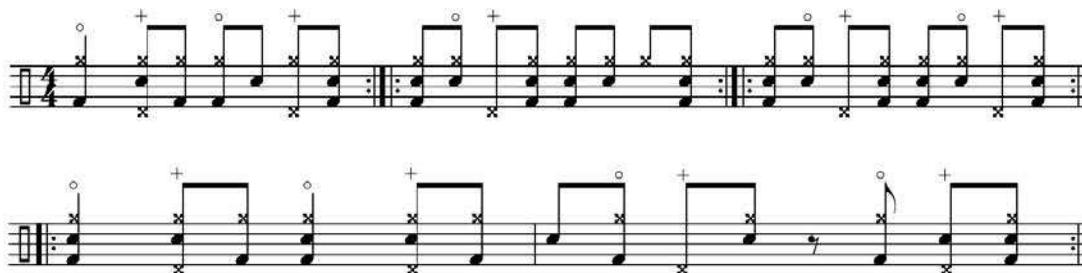
The tune “Neophilia” features Roker playing in 3/4. Here are five of his beat variations.



Roker's jazz-mambo feel on "Something Like This" reminds me of ideas that Art Blakey played, but with a funkier vibe. To hear this beat isolated, go to 10:29 in the track. I've included bell-pattern variations for you to experiment with once you have control of the basic beat.



On "The Sidewinder," Mickey integrates ideas from the beat Billy Higgins played on the original recording, but he voices the groove on the hi-hat rather than on the ride. The tempo is also brighter when compared with the original.



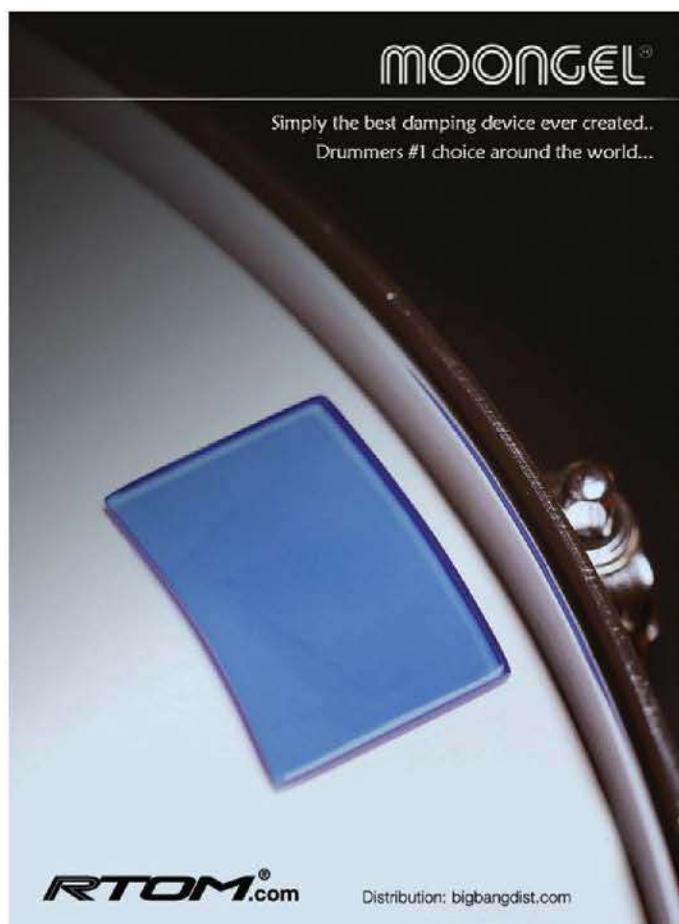
### SOLO VOCABULARY

"Beehive," the opening track from *Live at the Lighthouse*, features Roker from the onset. His swing feel throughout this tune is fierce, and his ideas, which suggest Buddy Rich, Philly Joe Jones, and Art Blakey, are simply remarkable. His extended solo begins at 12:45.

As you practice the transcription, which we've posted at [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com), listen for the way Roker centers ideas on the snare drum, with right-foot bass drum substitutions used throughout like a third hand. Mickey often resolves phrases by playing the crash cymbal or by crashing the ride cymbal with the shoulder of the stick. His command, control, and time feel are extraordinary.



**Steve Fidyk** has performed with Terell Stafford, Tim Warfield, Dick Oatts, Doc Severinsen, Wayne Bergeron, Phil Wilson, and Maureen McGovern, and he's a member of the jazz studies faculty at Temple University in Philadelphia. For more info, including how to sign up for lessons via Skype, visit [stevefidyk.com](http://stevefidyk.com).





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[groverpro.com](http://groverpro.com)



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[promark.com](http://promark.com)

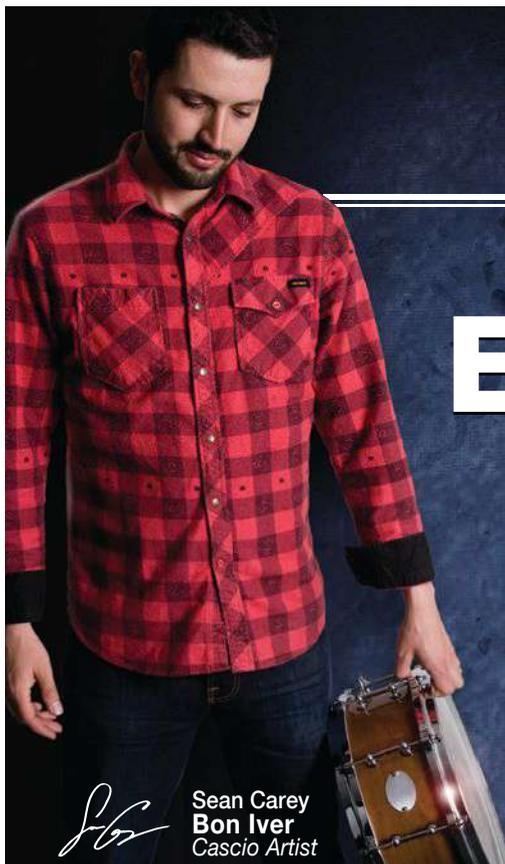


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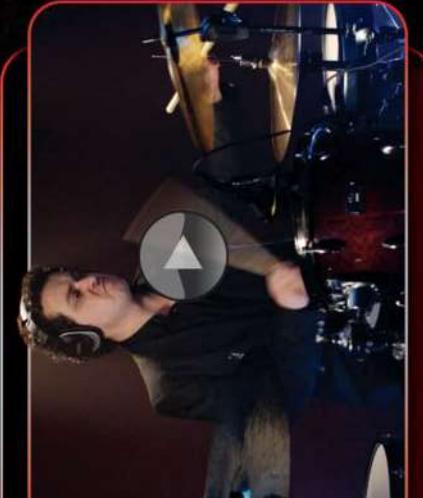


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# Stella Mozgawa

by Adam Budofsky

Her thoughtful yet exuberant playing with Flea, Kurt Vile, Tom Jones, and especially L.A.'s dreamy groovers Warpaint reveals a sophisticated attitude toward songcraft—and an ability to just plain *rip*.

Even without knowing whether Stella Mozgawa is a fan of the session drumming masters Matt Chamberlain and Joey Waronker, it's kind of a no-brainer to ask her about them. Like the work of those brilliant musicians, Mozgawa's slithery beats are at once endlessly groovy and completely sympathetic to whatever song Stella's playing on. Her parts are devoid of excess yet full of interest. They have intensity, even at low dynamic levels. And they have oodles of style.

"Joey and Matt have both had a pretty big influence on my drumming," Mozgawa confirms by phone, while spending the winter holidays at her parents' home in Australia. "They're session drummers that approach everything in such an integrative way—they're part of the band, not just technicians. I admire that philosophy. It's really soulful."

Repeated listening to Mozgawa's drumming suggests a player with a

well-developed artistic philosophy. But according to Stella, there's no pervasive concept that she adheres to. "I think every song suggests the appropriate mood and approach, if you listen very carefully to what's missing," she explains. "It's the most challenging and satisfying aspect of making music, but I wouldn't say I follow any particular formula. If anything, I always ask myself, 'What would I enjoy hearing as a listener?' I can't just shit all over a piece of music because the beat I'm playing feels good. It has to complement what's already living in the song."

Warpaint, whose latest, self-titled album arrived in January, is the ideal vehicle for Mozgawa's fresh but grounded style. Like the drummer's playing, Warpaint's music is multidirectional yet retains an appealingly strong sonic personality, tying together influences as diverse as new wave, dream pop, and dance rock. "I think that comes from the creative constitution that we



Mia Kirby

have as a band," Mozgawa says. "All four of us are involved in most every aspect of the music. We also tend to get bored easily, which contributes to the light sprinkle of schizophrenia in our sound. When we all agree that something works, that's the Goldilocks moment. We are one another's barometer of taste."

Warpaint's "sprinkle of schizophrenia"

extends to the sounds the band works with. On the new album, for instance, "Hi" has a dry electronic feel, "Go In" features cool Tom Waits-ish percussion and a jazz vibe, and "Feeling Alright" sounds like towels were placed on the drums. "A few of the tracks were recorded in different spaces," Mozgawa says. "Go In" was done in our temporary living-room



Mia Kirby

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Mozgawa chooses from various drumsets, including a vintage Slingerland jazz outfit and a Pearl wood/fiberglass kit from the '70s. She plays Istanbul Agop cymbals ("I've kept relatively the same setup since joining Warpaint—two 16" Agop crashes as hi-hats, a 24" Turk ride, and a 22" Agop ride used as a crash"), Promark 5A Japanese oak sticks, and Remo Vintage heads ("or the Aquarian vintage equivalents, which match well with the drier tone that I'm fond of").

*stella mozgawa  
warpaint*



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**AKG**  
by HARMAN



## STELLA MOZGAWA



studio in Joshua Tree, 'Feeling Alright' in our rehearsal space—different spaces with their own sounds. I've got a few different kits too, including a smaller old Slingerland jazz set and a standard-size Pearl wood/fiberglass kit.

"Both of those songs were tracked as demos that made the album," Mozgawa continues. "It's really difficult to re-create a space and a feeling when it sounds satisfying to you. 'Son' is another one like that; we had to do some audio trickery to re-create a sound that I had accidentally created on a demo, which was later stolen with my computer a few months before we started tracking the album with [producer] Flood. That was one of the great advantages of working with Flood—he was really open to keeping demo parts and full recordings, in the understanding that some of these sounds, accidental or conscious, cannot be simulated, no matter how good you are as players or how good your engineer is. It's a moment in time—it may be ropy as all hell, but it has a spirit that is essential to that song's character.

"'Hi' was a really interesting song to track," Mozgawa adds. "The demo had a blend of MIDI drums and live kit. When we tracked the version on the record, I played the drum machine part live on my SPD-S so that it had a natural feel to it—we could ebb and flow as a band while recording. We weren't just playing to a glorified click track. I'm really proud of the weird litter of mutts we created sonically on this album. There's a lovely little story for every track."

On record, Warpaint really shines when working at a "cool burn" dynamic level, allowing the cymbal sounds to be especially clear in the mix. You can tell just by listening that Mozgawa's choices are well considered. "I'm *all* about cymbals," Stella enthuses, "especially since I was turned on to Istanbul Agops a few years back. It completely changed the way I play drums. I always viewed cymbals as an auxiliary element to the drums—until I played a friend's set of 30th Anniversary jazz rides. Holy smokes! It was like aurally eating the creamiest cupcake ever made. They're constantly making unbelievable cymbals, so I'm always willing to experiment."

Mozgawa's open-mindedness is evident not just in her tones but in her approach as well. She can pull off slick and silky dance



beats that could have rocked Studio 54 circa 1979, as evidenced on “Disco//Very,” from the *Warpaint* album—and then play an atmospheric tom tap-dancer on the very next cut, “Go In.” And before you get the idea that she’s happiest in a mellow mode, check out “Everybody’s in a Band” from Andy Clockwise, all garage-rocking floor-tom toughness, Cheap Trick cymbal wash, and Mitch Mitchell-like snare boldness.

Mozgawa’s eclecticism has roots in her early musical experiences. Stella was born in Sydney, Australia, in 1986 and started out on piano at age six, picked up guitar at ten, and began drumming at twelve. “My parents were both musicians,” she explains, “so I grew up in a very musical environment. My early drumming influences were sometimes subliminal—Purdie, Gadd, Keltner, Marotta... anyone who

played with Steely Dan, really. In terms of technique, I learned a lot from listening to Danny Carey. Then, of course, there was John Bonham and Levon Helm—the classics. And there are so many incredibly inspiring drummers out there today too—an endless pool of ideas.”

Mozgawa doesn’t point to a specific time when she made significant leaps in her playing, but says she experiences musical epiphanies to this day. “I don’t realize I’ve learned anything until I listen back to a song and notice that something has gotten under my skin. But I feel revelations happening all the time. I remember when I moved to the States to play music, my MO was to learn as much as I could. I’m always the student, never the expert. So playing drums is a constant internship for me—music in general is. I find it the most satisfying way to approach what I’m fortunate enough to do every day.”

Though her focus is *Warpaint*—she joined the band after recording the debut album by Flea, whose former Red Hot Chili Peppers bandmate John Frusciante was an early supporter—Mozgawa continues to work with other artists. “It’s always a joy and a great learning experience,” she says. “I love being privy to the different ways people approach recording and writing. It’s never the same, and it’s invaluable. I was lucky enough to record with Kurt Vile on his last record—I think he’s a bona fide genius, the real deal. I also worked with Tom Jones a few years ago, and what I’ve learned from these two legends from seemingly disparate worlds is that more often than not, everyone is willing to trust the choices you make.

“So you need to go with your gut, however ephemeral and vague that may sound. Even if you’re ‘just playing drums’ on a record, you are collaborating. You’re influencing the sound as much as anyone else. I think the moment I made that realization, I completely chilled out. I always thought I was going to lose the job. Someone was going to eventually inform whoever was in charge that they had made a grave mistake. It’s nice to have lost a little of that rather crippling neurosis.”

Check out MD’s Spotify playlist at [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com) to hear Mozgawa’s confident, creative work with *Warpaint*, Flea, and others.



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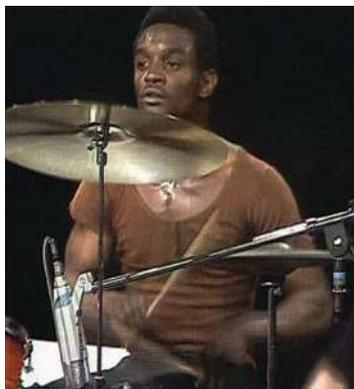
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# AKG

by HARMAN





# ALVIN TAYLOR

One good deed by a legendary session player was all he needed to kick-start a prolific recording career.

by Billy Amendola

George Harrison liked what he was hearing. Poking his head into the home studio where Billy Preston, a friend from back in the Beatles days, was coproducing the *2nd Resurrection* album by the Stairsteps, aka the Five Stairsteps ("O-o-h Child"), Harrison decided on the spot to sign the group to his Dark Horse label. He also offered drummer Alvin Taylor the chance to record his next album, *Thirty-Three & 1/3*, at the studio he'd set up at his Friar Park mansion in Henley-on-Thames, England.

Taylor was already a seasoned vet before that fateful meeting, having worked with rock icon Little Richard since he was a teenager and racking up credits with ex-Animals singer Eric Burdon and famed Latin pianist and bandleader Eddie Palmieri, among others. But getting to play on *Thirty-Three & 1/3* was undoubtedly a huge break. It allowed Taylor to contribute to two of the former Beatle's hit singles, "This Song" and "Crackerbox Palace," and it provided the drummer with what he describes as a life-altering learning experience.

Soon Taylor's résumé would be filled with world-famous names such as Elton John, Tina Turner, Bob Dylan, Bob Welch, Stevie Wonder, Natalie Cole, Diana Ross, Barry White, Sly Stone, Bill Withers, and Andraé Crouch; top producers like Richard Perry, George Martin, Frank Wilson, and Norman Whitfield; and popular TV shows including *The Midnight Special*, *In Concert*, *Solid Gold*, *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert*, and *Soul Train*.

Taylor remains active as a drummer, musical director, and producer, and he's currently in the process of writing his autobiography. We began our

conversation at the chapter that could be titled "Thirty-Three & 1/3."

**MD:** Tell us about your experience working with George Harrison.

**Alvin:** I had never played with George before, and I have to say that my entire drumming technique changed from working with him. I learned things that I'd never thought about, just by working with and watching him in the studio. It literally revolutionized my life. He gave me a different perception altogether about playing the drums.

**MD:** How so?

**Alvin:** The first thing George did was sit me down, pick up a twelve-string guitar,

for as if we were going over a script. I began to see that music was more than playing sounds; it had a lot to do with taking on a "character," as if I was an actor in a movie—becoming familiar with my role and inserting myself into it. Being a drummer *is* like being an actor—you must really know your lines. I wrote drum parts that I thought would be best for the character of the songs and for what he was looking for.

**MD:** The album has so many legendary players on it, including Gary Wright, Richard Tee, David Foster, and Billy Preston on keyboards, Tom Scott on sax, Emil Richards on marimba, and Willie Weeks on bass.



and start strumming the rhythms to the songs that we were going to be playing. He never told me what to play. Rather, he would express to me what he was looking

**Alvin:** I loved working with Willie. Playing with him, I learned to be a good listener. Being a good drummer, to me, means keeping a strong backbeat while listening

to what the bass player is playing. That way it becomes easy to interact and slide in the proper turnaround leading into a chorus, and to do proper pickups while going into the next section, whatever it may be.

Willie Weeks plays some things that sound complicated, but as you listen

**“It’s always fun and exciting in the studio. To hear parts that seemed incomplete be completed is a feeling of great achievement.”**

carefully, you hear how uncomplicated they actually are. And there is no greater joy for me as a drummer than to assist and interact with that type of bass player. I’ve worked with a lot of great bass players, but he’s *the* greatest I’ve ever worked with.

**MD:** How did you get started playing drums, and who influenced you early on?

**Alvin:** I started playing when I was around seven. My mother and father took me to a parade. I was born and raised in Palm Springs, California, and each year we had two annual parades—the Desert Rodeo Parade and the Desert Circus Parade. I recall sitting there, anticipating what the parade was going to be like. All of a sudden, it seemed like from miles away I could hear this thunderous, roaring sound coming closer and closer. Finally it got to the point where I could see what that sound was. It was a big huddle of drummers marching together, playing these songs that I thought were great.

I was fascinated by the drum major, who wore a tall, white, fuzzy hat with tassels hanging from it, swinging a baton from left to right, with a whistle in his mouth that he blew in time with the rhythm of the drummers. I’d never seen or heard anything like that before. I knew from that moment what I wanted to do for the rest of my life—I wanted to be a drummer!

At eight I got a chance to hear Buddy Rich, who I liked very much. But, to be honest, for me Buddy was a little too technical, and that scared me. I couldn’t imagine ever being that good. My saving grace came when I saw Gene Krupa, who had lots of feeling but didn’t seem as technical. He made it look easier. I liked the way he moved, with his hair flying all over the place, and I liked the things that he did on the drums.

**MD:** What was your practice routine then?

**Alvin:** I would practice about six hours a day. When I got out of school at three o’clock, I’d go directly to my garage and

play until nine or ten at night, with very few breaks in between. I had my girlfriend do some of my homework for me. That was my basic routine. And on Saturdays and Sundays I would play eight hours a day. I’d listen to the latest records and songs on the radio and imitate everything I heard.

**MD:** How would you describe your playing style?

**Alvin:** The only thing I can say is that it’s very unorthodox—I have my own creative style. Growing up, even though I liked soul and R&B, I favored listening to British rock bands like the Who and Led Zeppelin because of their drummers, Keith Moon and John Bonham. There seemed to be such freedom in what they were playing. They were never limited by what they played or how they played it—unlike the drumming on certain R&B songs, where you had to do turnarounds before the bridge and the beat had to be straight. You couldn’t take risks. The songs I liked are what helped me be versatile enough to play all *kinds* of music.

**MD:** How did you get started on the session scene?

**Alvin:** I’m grateful to have had great role models in my life—other drummers and musicians that I looked up to who helped me. For instance, on my first session with Little Richard, he wanted me on his album so that my name could begin to circulate in the industry. But the contractor for the session had something different in mind and hired James Gadson. Well, of course Little Richard wasn’t going to tell James that he couldn’t do the album. So instead what Richard did was talk with James. I overheard the conversation: “James, I have a little fourteen-year-old wizard from Palm Springs, California. He’s a great drummer, but he doesn’t have any experience

recording. Would you please do me a favor and let him sit in on this session with you?” I heard James say, “No problem, Richard—you got it.”

So I ended up in the studio, playing together with James Gadson. James would lean over and say to me, “Play the tom-toms like you hear the Indians play on the reservation where you live.” So I would get this tom-tom rhythm going on, and Gadson would cover it with a good backbeat on the snare, 8th notes on the hi-hat, and a strong four on the bass drum. Playing with him really made me sound good. Thanks to James, who I call my godfather, that built my strength and prepared me for sessions.

Another person that helped me get in on the session scene was Billy Preston. He had tons of connections with various producers, artists, and arrangers. And he had a special connection with Motown. Billy and I played in Little Richard’s band together, and when Richard would go on hiatus, that put both of us in a position where we had to try to find work. And through Billy I ended up recording with Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder, the Jacksons individually and collectively, the Originals, Rick James, Teena Marie, and the Temptations. That pretty much got the ball rolling for me as an established session musician.

**MD:** What are some lessons that you learned doing sessions?

**Alvin:** Think your parts through thoroughly, but be prepared for any changes that might come up. Learn how to read, and study hard. Don’t try to call the shots; just play the part. And always be on time.

**MD:** Which do you prefer—live or studio drumming?

**Alvin:** Even though I consider myself equally good at both, I favor the studio. It’s always fun and exciting to be able to fix something after hearing it back in the control room. To hear parts that seemed incomplete be completed is a feeling of great achievement.

But you shouldn’t limit yourself to only wanting to be a session drummer, because during a session you might need to provide that live feeling on a track. Likewise, it’s never good to limit yourself to being just an R&B, rock ‘n’ roll, or jazz drummer. It’s good to be able to do it all—commercials, videos, movies, jingles, records, as well as performing live. To be good at all this requires an experienced mind that’s open to versatility.

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Taylor plays Gretsch Catalina Maple drums in mocha fade finish, including 8", 10", and 12" toms; 14" and 16" floor toms; a 24" bass drum; and a 14" snare. His Zildjian cymbals include 14" hi-hats; an 8" splash; 12", 16", and 18" heavy crashes; 14", 16", and 18" thin crashes; 16" and 20" Chinas; and a 22" ride. He uses 5A and 7A drumsticks by Vic Firth, Promark, and Regal Tip, plus a DW bass drum pedal and Jan-AI custom cases.



# Drums Don't Lie

by Brant Bjork

The former Kyuss and Fu Manchu drummer, who's currently with Vista Chino, tells it like it is, was, and always will be.

**D**rummers have to understand the sound the way a surfer has to understand the ocean. Sonically speaking, no two days are ever the same. Whether you're a session dude or a touring drummer, you start at zero every day.

Sun, heat, rain, clouds, smoke, wood, metal, concrete—it all affects sound.

## "Muscle and volume don't make music rock. It's the *feel*."

Drums never lie. Only drummers lie. Don't blame bad sound on the monitor guy. If the monitors suck, don't use them. Great drummers walk into a room and know what the sound is.

You win some and you lose some. That's the beautiful romance a touring drummer experiences. Sometimes the room is flat and dead. How are you going to play with life and fire? Sometimes the room is huge and beautiful, and when you sit down at the kit, beats roll out of your hands like nothing and for a second you think you're John Bonham. But can you check your ego and still be part of the band?

You don't hear dynamics in rock drumming these days. At least I don't. It's physical. There are no volume knobs on drums. They're acoustic. At least mine are. Guitar players can turn up their amps, and a lot of them do. Drummers turn up their fire. We burn more wood. The acoustic harmony of the jazz quartet in the '40s had sonic balance, understanding, intelligence, and focus. A great rock band will have the same character regardless of all the amplification. The principles are the same.

Don't sacrifice focus to be heard. Let the sound system project what you're doing so the listener comes to you. About a year ago I was performing at a festival in Europe when right before my band went on, a stagehand complimented me on being the only drummer of the day who didn't use a computer. I didn't know how

to respond to this, so I simply said thanks and went about my gig. Trippy. I'm down with computers and drums. I'm also down with wine and whiskey. But not together. Dig?

The best drummers are the best listeners. The art is listening to the

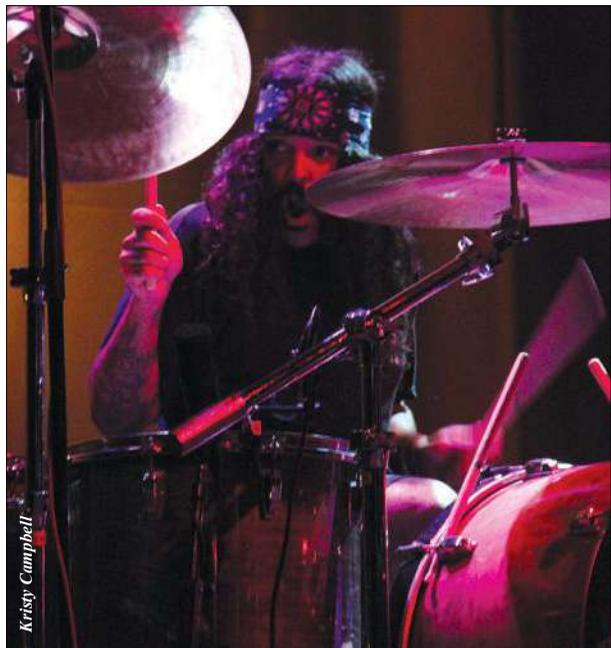
sound and the song and pushing, pulling, gambling, and negotiating with it. Drums is what made the rock roll. It's what made the jazz swing and the funk funky.

You ever try playing a mid-tempo beat at a voice-level volume for at least forty-five minutes without stopping or even doing any fills? Try it. It's a great exercise. I call it drum meditations, and it's my belief that this is where great drumming comes from. Listen to that room too! Be one with the natural sound. Don't think you're above it. You're not. You're in it.

Nowadays, everything is amplified. *Everything.*

Musicians are the shamans of sound. We have a natural gift and contribute magic to the principles and laws in this dimension we call music. We celebrate that which can't be seen but can be felt and heard. Muscle and volume don't make music rock. It's the *feel*.

Led Zeppelin wasn't one of the greatest rock bands of all time because John Bonham was the loudest drummer of all time. No question, John could put a stick on the drum. But it was his feel and his dynamics that made Zeppelin great. Nobody understood this more than Jimmy Page. If you listen closely you can hear and feel Bonham's unwavering loyalty to the band. He plays like a proud cop, out on the beat. He doesn't screw around, make



deals, or cut slack. His job is to protect and serve.

Passion and fire are always at the center of great drumming, but the ability to keep your wits about you and not get bucked off the horse is *true* power. It's a wisdom, and it comes with experience. Thousands of songs, thousands of recordings, thousands of gigs, thousands of rooms. Big rooms, small rooms, medium rooms, filled rooms, half-filled rooms, empty rooms, famous rooms, unknown rooms, and even outdoors where there is no room—or, I should say, nothing but room. Drumming is a philosophy. It's a religion. It's a science. It's an art. You gotta think without thinking. You gotta be present yet contemplate the near future without dwelling on the past (the past being eight beats ago).

Years back I knew a dude who tried telling me one night that Charlie Watts sucked. We hadn't even started drinking yet, and this embarrassing statement fell out of his mouth. I haven't spoken to him since.





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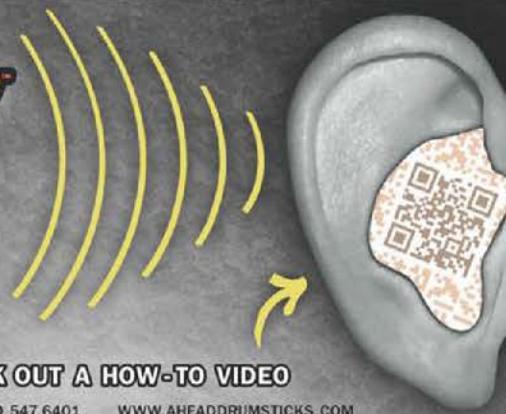
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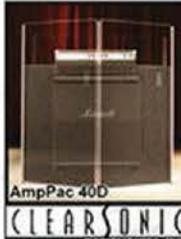
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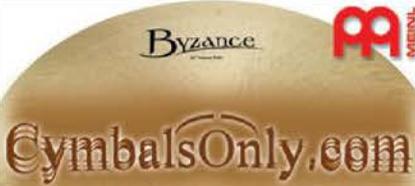


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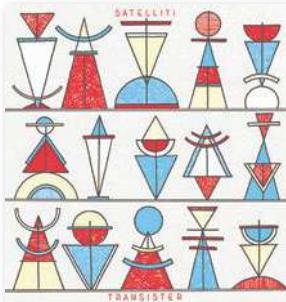
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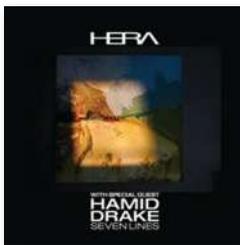


## SATELLITI TRANSISTER

**Italians got progressive rock earlier than most; this release suggests they still get it.**

Imagine Emerson, Lake and Palmer inspired not by cobwebbed classical and gold lamé but by *Bitches Brew*-era Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock's *Thrust*. Throw in some Neu! and you have the marauding Italian duo Satelliti. Exhorting a ceaseless, thoroughly combustible groove, the band's lineup of drums, effects-treated Fender Rhodes, and

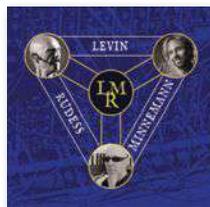
various synths can come at you in the form of *kosmische* free jazz ("Voltage"), fairytale funk ("Little Princess"), *Hymn of the Seventh Galaxy*-like deep-space excursions ("Esprit de Corps"), and techno-mongrel workouts ("Bright Tunnel"). Drummer **Andrea Polato** and keyboardist Marco Dalle Luche create a manic, beautifully hypnotic vision, which began with 2010's *Im Magen des Kosmos*. Listen, forget, then listen again. (Cuckundoo) **Ken Micallef**



## HERA WITH SPECIAL GUEST HAMID DRAKE SEVEN LINES

**On this group's latest, a fascinating combination of harmonium, clarinet, guitar, saxophones, bass, drums, and hurdy-gurdy gets a further shot of percussive adrenaline.**

The inspired Polish ensemble Hera spins a fire-breathing web of Polish folk and Jewish klezmer intertwined with blues, Afro-funk, and music from the Far East. Adding to the levitation-ready ensemble is **Hamid Drake**, whose expertise in Afro-Cuban, Indian, and African drumming only deepens Hera's combustible wanderings. (Drake's frame drum fires up "Temples of Tibet.") While Hera never swings in any way similar to John Coltrane's "Impressions," there's a similar consciousness of exploration, improvisation, and Zen-like movement at play. Drake joins drummer **Pawel Szpura**, and the two merge into a four-armed rhythmic adventurer rattling various drums and percussion into a mighty storm cloud that never dissipates. (multikulti.com) **Ken Micallef**



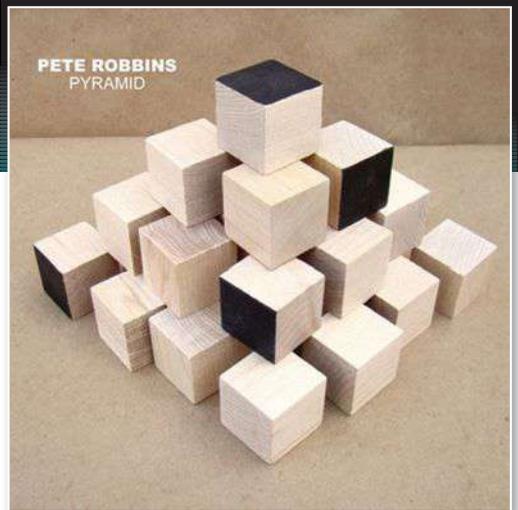
## LEVIN, MINNEMANN, RUDESS LEVIN, MINNEMANN, RUDESS

**A match made in prog heaven featuring bassist Tony Levin, drummer Marco Minnemann, and keyboardist Jordan Rudess.**

Combining a special blend of artistic ingredients, this trio of prog vets serves up a spicy instrumental dish with its own unique flavor, different

from but not unrelated to the members' main musical outlets. If you're aware of the backgrounds of these multitalented artists (King Crimson, Peter Gabriel, Steven Wilson, the Aristocrats, Dream Theater), you'll nod in recognition, but the collective nature of the material demands its own consideration. Aside from his usual stratospheric drumming, Minnemann also contributes impressive guitar work—though his "Ignorant Elephant" certainly allows him ample room to get funky and throw some chops around. The compositions here are strong, with minimal extended soloing. It's inspiring to hear seasoned virtuosos creating something musically dense beyond the typical one-off fireworks fest.

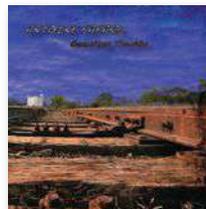
(levinminnemannrudess.com) **Mike Haid**



## PETE ROBBINS PYRAMID

**Alto saxophonist Robbins returns with compelling originals plus a surprise departure: Half the disc features pop covers spanning Jimmy Webb to Nirvana.**

Pete Robbins doesn't apply a forceful rock *attitude*, as, say, the Bad Plus might. Instead, he slyly reimagines melodies and harmonies, then feasts on the possibilities. You certainly won't immediately recognize "Sweet Child o' Mine." It's undeniably messed with, but the band somehow successfully realizes the song's intentions through an alternate jazz back door. Robbins' warm sound and purposeful soloing are supported by the top-shelf Vijay Iyer (piano) and Eivind Opsvik (bass). **Tyshawn Sorey** applies his mega chops meaningfully. Here's a drummer who continually surprises and thrills—without stealing the spotlight. If there's a "rock" suggestion in his playing, it's the pure hugeness of his swirling pulse. Check out his catalyzing interplay on "Sweet Child" and the funky Elvin-style surge of his solo on "Intravenous." The mighty Sorey *builds* this *Pyramid*. (Hate Laugh Music) **Je Potter**



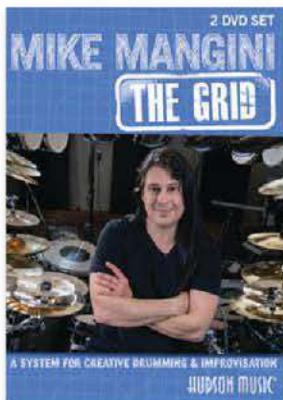
## ANTOINE FAFARD OCCULTUS TRAMITIS

**Composer, bassist, and classical guitarist Fafard offers a gift to drummers worldwide.**

Composing a suite of meaty prog-rock tracks that

incorporate concepts from jazz and classical music, Antoine Fafard brings fresh ideas to the progressive genre while crafting excellent vehicles for drummers **Dave Weckl**, **Gavin Harrison**, **Simon Phillips**, **Chad Wackerman**, and **Terry Bozzio**. Not since these players performed with [fill in the blank] have they sounded so inspired, delivering fiery grooves and great solos throughout. Here Fafard also brings to light several drummers little known in the U.S., including the funky **Martin Maheux**, the graceful pocket mover **Emmanuelle Caplette**, and the Canadian linear wizard **Magella Cormier**. (Unicorn)

**Ken Micallef**

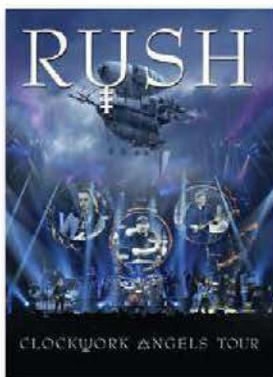


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### MIKE MANGINI *THE GRID*

**DVDS (2)** LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED \$29.99

Dream Theater drummer Mike Mangini articulately explains his unique system for developing creative drumming and improvisational skills. The Grid, as he describes it, breaks down into categories that include time signatures, subdivisions, dynamics, sounds, limbs, phrases, and styles. A former Berklee instructor, Mangini is entertaining and highly detailed in his examples and explanations as he discusses the human attributes of technique, speed, and coordination. He's matter-of-fact yet passionate in defending the relevance of learning and understanding subdivisions, polyrhythms, ostinatos, and odd-time playing in order to advance on the drumkit. No one delivers the goods quite like Mangini, and his humble sincerity comes across with conviction and true concern for the student. He also explains, in detail, why each aspect of his kit is important for the orchestral-based drumming concepts he creates with Dream Theater. This info gets a bit cerebral at times but offers valuable insight into developing the major components of a meaningful, purpose-driven vocabulary on the drumset. (Hudson) **Mike Haid**



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### RUSH *CLOCKWORK ANGELS TOUR*

**DVD (2) OR BLU-RAY** LEVEL: ALL \$24.98

This year marks Rush's fortieth anniversary. Judging by the energy the band puts forth on its latest live release, another forty

doesn't seem out of the question. Okay, maybe another *ten*—the point is, the power and glory that is Rush remains, even this late in the game.

Rush mixed it up on the *Clockwork Angels* tour by working from different set lists each night, and this thirty-one-song, nearly-three-hour-long marathon includes every title the trio played during the trek. The band was also accompanied by a string ensemble on stage, a first in its history. The majority of the first "set" of the video is made up of a healthy dose of songs from the mid-'80s, including "Subdivisions," "The Body Electric," "The Analog Kid," "The Big Money," "Grand Designs," and "Territories." The bulk of the second set is a daring ten-song representation of the *Clockwork Angels* studio album.

The stunning live footage was shot in HD video, and the audio is available in 5.1 HD and 2.0 formats. The disc also contains a documentary showing a glimpse of daily life on a world tour, a nice treat for hardcore fans. Having just celebrated his sixty-first birthday, a focused **Neil Peart** displays an incredible amount of stamina behind his beautifully crafted DW Time Machine Tour drumkit. Peart is known for his solos, and this marks the first time since 1974 that his traditional spot is split up, in this case into three short but powerful parts, thoughtfully placed as segues throughout the set. Clearly Neil and his mates aren't worried about changing the formula—but longtime fans have nothing to worry about, as *Clockwork Angels Tour* proves that, four decades in, Rush is still performing at the top of its game. (Anthem/Zoe Vision/Rounder) **Asif Khan**



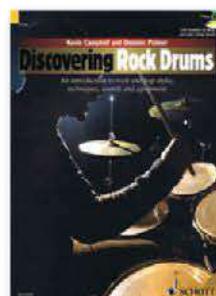
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### MUSIC ALIVE'S *PERCUSSION* BY DANIEL GLASS

**BOOK** LEVEL: ALL \$19.99

Daniel Glass's thoroughly researched and well-illustrated guide outlining the history of drums and percussion is the kind of thing you'd present to aliens when they visit our planet, assuming they'd be interested in acquiring a wealth of information on the many facets of instruments that help musicians make rhythm. Sure, Glass touches on rudiments and

proper grip, but probe the sections on orchestral percussion, drum machines, or African shekeres, and this tome becomes a page-turner with interesting tidbits you never knew. The chapter on the history of the drumset alone is worth any kit player's time, and Glass provides wonderful photos alongside notations of everything from rock fills to blues shuffles. He even doles out some real-world advice about being a professional and conveniently presents assorted career options. The package includes a DVD-R with nicely produced footage from Glass's clinics, a printable PDF of the rudiments, and MP3s. (Music Alive/Hal Leonard) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



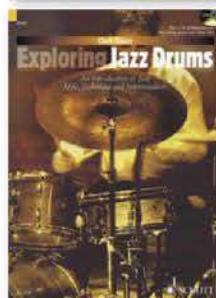
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### DISCOVERING *ROCK DRUMS* BY KEVIN CAMPBELL AND DOMINIC PALMER

**EXPLORING JAZZ DRUMS** BY CLARK TRACEY

**BOOKS** LEVEL: ALL \$19.99 (*Rock Drums*), \$27.99 (*Jazz Drums*)

These two books, taken in tandem, provide a thorough overview of assorted rock and jazz styles, focusing on key developments and major players that have shaped contemporary music and drumming over the last century. *Rock Drums* is divided, textbook style, into convenient chapters like "Disco" and "80s Funk," and offers a short-but-sweet background, a recommended listening list, several notated examples, and a "Getting the Sound" entry with suggestions such as placing a pillow against the bass drum batter head to achieve that '70s studio "thud." *Jazz Drums* is a bit different in that the chapters focus on topics such as brushwork, soloing, and keeping time, so there's more of an emphasis on technique and what made some of the legends (Max, Elvin, Tony) tick. There's also advice on equipment and



a "Woodshedding" chapter outlining essential rudiments. Both books are user-friendly, with lovely photos and accompanying CDs of play-along tracks and demos, providing encyclopedic reference guides for beginners learning about these styles and vets looking for it all in one place. (Schott Music)

**Ilya Stemkovsky**



## Ronald Shannon Jackson

“As you know, this is only about having fun,” Ronald Shannon Jackson told the audience in his warm Texas drawl at the 1991 Skopje Jazz Festival, a performance archived on YouTube. “We’re here to have a little pleasure and bring a little peace to you.”

Read about the drummer/composer, who died this past October 19 at the age of seventy-three, and you might perceive Jackson as a forbidding avant-gardist. And he did participate in his share of harsh, seemingly chaotic music making: the gritty doom-blues exorcisms of Last Exit, the hyperactive polyphony of the 1978 Cecil Taylor Unit. But watch clips of the Decoding Society, his longest-running, most fully realized creative venture, and you’ll find that his will to romance an audience shines through.

At Skopje, during “Sunday’s Bells,” Jackson eases into a march pattern on the snare, punctuating each bar with a lively bass drum thump. He moves his right hand to the ride, shaking his rock star’s mane, and leads his band into an ecstatic swing breakdown. The medium might be experimental, but the presentation reveals a desire to commune and connect.

Growing up in Fort Worth, Jackson pursued a full-spectrum musical education. As a child, he studied piano and joined drum and bugle corps; in high

school, he performed in blues, dance, and marching bands and played timpani in the orchestra. Speaking to *Modern Drummer* in 1984, Jackson recalled attending informal jam sessions in Fort Worth’s Greenway Park. “Man, there was so much joy released in those situations,” he said, “because people could be themselves without

having to worry about the police coming and locking everyone up, or cats coming in with guns shooting, or requesting ‘Polka Dots and Moonbeams’ when you felt like just playing. Greenway Park is where I first learned to hear music as communication and the expression of exuberance in life.” Those experiences would fuel Jackson’s work with the jazz avant-garde. In 1966, the drummer moved to New York and recorded with both Charles Tyler and Albert Ayler, abetting the saxophonists’ raw, celebratory approach to collective improvisation. Jackson detoured into heroin addiction but righted himself in 1974 with the help of Nichiren Buddhism. He joined up with Ornette Coleman just in time for the saxophonist’s electric reinvention; the polyphonic groove of Coleman’s Prime Time group, gloriously documented on *Body Meta*, is unthinkable without Jackson’s sprightly, turbulent bounce. Jackson even brought an undercurrent of funk to Cecil Taylor’s surging modernism, anchoring the pianist’s tight-knit 1978 sextet.

Jackson founded his Decoding Society the following year, building on compositional wisdom from Coleman and Taylor, along with his own eclectic tastes, which ranged from Alexander Scriabin to the Ohio Players. With its blend of wailing free-form fusion, Asian-sounding rubato themes, rubbery dual-bass grooves, and Jackson’s inimitable caffeinated pulse, the band’s early output suggested surrealistic party music. In later years, the drummer’s work as a leader took on a darker, earthier cast, as heard on the 1990 three-guitar art-blues triumph *Red Warrior*. During his ‘84 *MD* interview, Jackson handily summed up the mission of his principal project: “Living in the present and knowing about the past so that we can anticipate tomorrow is what I’m trying to do with the Decoding Society.”



Bob Stramis

Like his band leading, Jackson’s drumming was unmistakable. On the 1984 solo album *Pulse*, he juxtaposes stream-of-consciousness exploration with a deep-pocket groove. He revels in dynamic tension, flammily thunderously on his snare and signature taut, piercing toms or ramping a press roll down to a whisper. Depending on the setting, he could be a painter or a punisher. *Strange Meeting*, his exquisite 1987 collaboration with guitarist Bill Frisell and bassist Melvin Gibbs under the band name Power Tools, features Jackson at his most coloristic; on Last Exit’s 1986 self-titled debut, the drummer recites fragments of Wallace Stevens’ “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” as a prelude to a stomping double bass and China shuffle. “Often I’m not even thinking in terms of being a drummer,” he told *MD*. “I’m thinking about orchestration, flow, and the organic concept that has to be completed.”

Living Colour guitarist Vernon Reid, a former Decoding Society member, summed up the drummer’s aesthetic in a 2003 interview with *Fort Worth Weekly*. “Shannon wasn’t an ideological avant-gardist,” Reid said. “He made the music he made from an outsider’s view, but not to the exclusion of rock and pop.” Even at its most fervent or abstract, Ronald Shannon Jackson’s work embodied a sense of play. Pleasure was this artist’s chief objective, and in it, he succeeded brilliantly.

**Hank Shteamer**



Chase Roe

school, he performed in blues, dance, and marching bands and played timpani in the orchestra. Speaking to *Modern Drummer* in 1984, Jackson recalled attending informal jam sessions in Fort Worth’s Greenway Park. “Man, there was so much joy released in those situations,” he said, “because people could be themselves without



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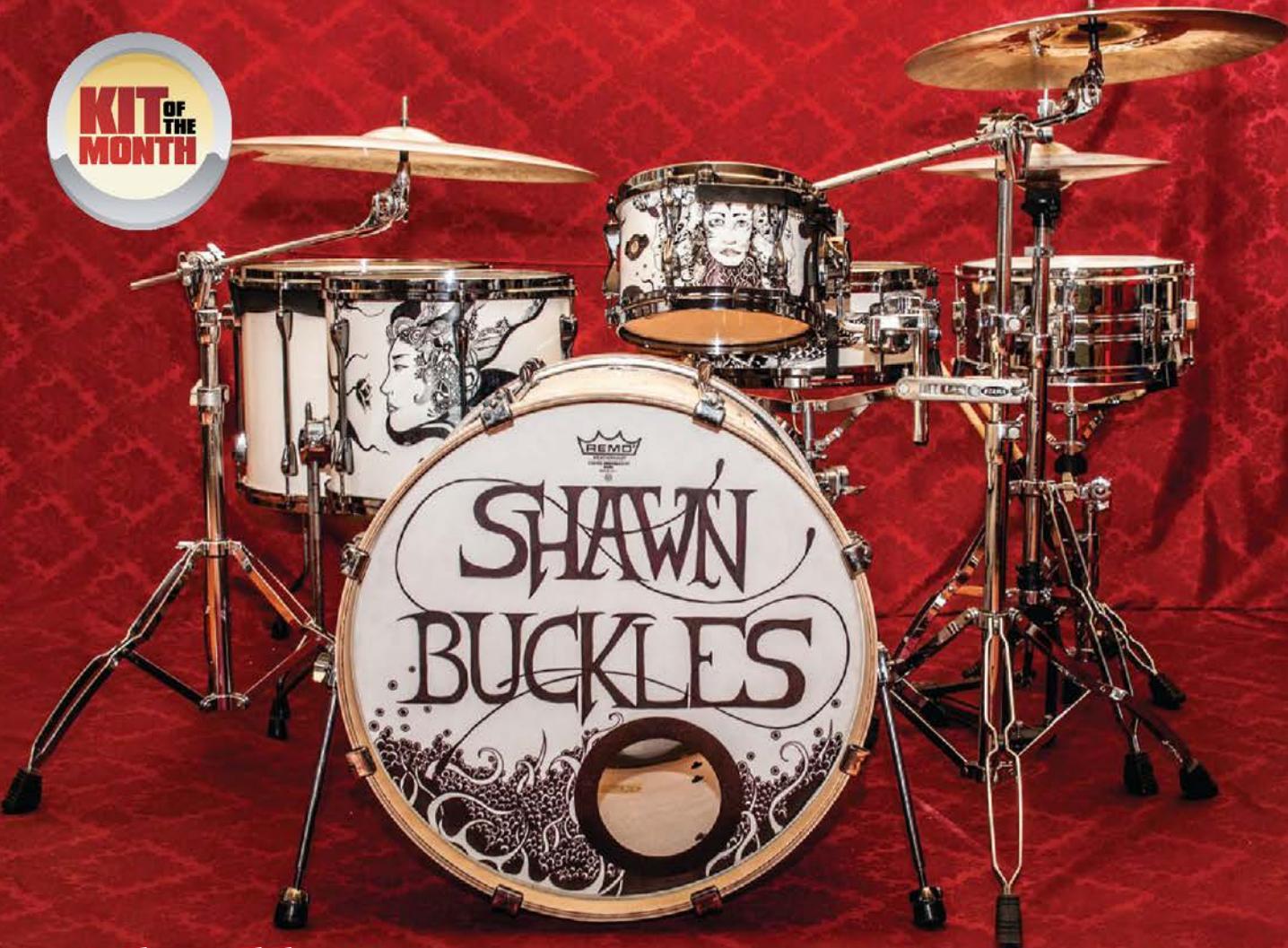
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# Shell Game

This eye-catcher, made with Tama Superstar Hyper-Drive maple shells in sugar white finish, is a joint effort between a couple of young friends from the Netherlands—Shawn Buckles, a drummer, artist, and writer, and Melanie Marsman, an illustrator and rock photographer. The two met as students at the Academy for Popculture, and Buckles plays with Smack the Apple and Stuart Mavis.

“Shawn had his practice pad lying around,” Marsman says, “and I couldn’t control myself from drawing on it. This created the idea to do a paint job on the whole kit. Shawn started by abrading the shells. We bought a bunch of cheap markers and fine liners, and I did the whole kit within two days, freehand—outlines first, and the bits that had to be all black were marked by an X, so Shawn could fill them in.

“There was nothing more than an idea, a style, a feeling about how it was going to look. We had a couple of Aubrey Beardsley

and Brandon Boyd drawings, with some tattoo books and Google images on standby. Everything was based on loose elements, but they all fit together. After a layer of varnish the kit was done, and nearly six months later we added the reso head.

“The kit is completely hand-drawn, so it’s the only one in the world that looks like this,” Marsman (melaniemarsman.com) adds. “There are a lot of hidden details in it. It was a dream come true to work on—it’s wonderful not to be restricted to only paper. Everything I do, in photography as well as in illustration, is a way of sharing my perception on all I see and think.”



**Photo Submission:** Hi-res digital photos, along with descriptive text, may be emailed to [kitoftthemonth@modern drummer.com](mailto:kitoftthemonth@modern drummer.com). Show “Kit of the Month” in the subject line.



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