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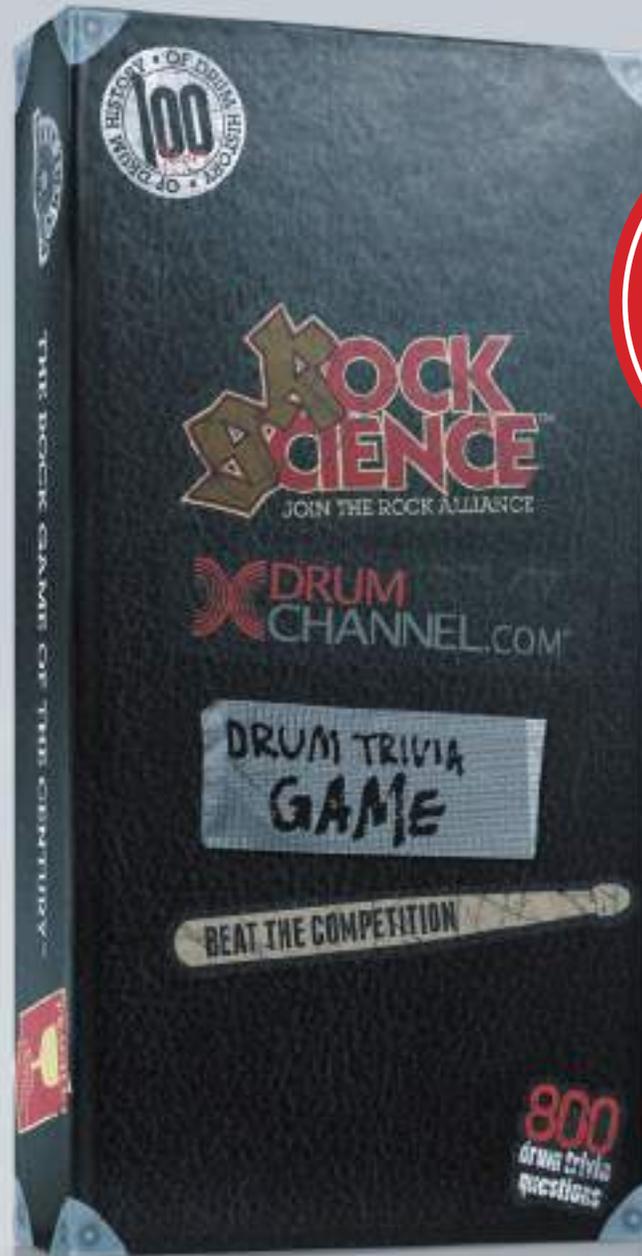
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On the Cover

36 Gregg Bissonette

by Miguel Monroy

He's got a new solo album, a headlining spot at this year's Percussive Arts Society convention, and yet another Ringo Starr tour under his belt. The time was right to reconnect with this part-time Winnie the Pooh voiceover artist and full-time drum hero.

Cover and contents photos by Rob Shanahan

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Leading by Example

Being a parent can make you feel like a superhero. It can also make you self-loathe like George Costanza. Most days it does both. I'm convinced that the universe takes perverse pleasure in this state of affairs, and for good reason: It forces us to understand that, as guardians of our kids' brains and bodies, it's not about how *we* feel that matters, it's about teaching them what's wrong and what's right. Sometimes that can make us very unpopular indeed. Sometimes it makes us seem nearly godlike. Always, it leaves an indelible impression.

Outside our parents, most of us would count a number of unrelated individuals among those who have taught us life lessons. Teachers, coaches, bosses—all of these people can guide us in profound ways. And then there are those influencers we may never even meet: athletes, writers, *musicians*. The big difference here, though, is that Iggy Azalea is far removed from responsibility for the way my daughter dresses, and Justin Bieber can't be sued if the teenager down the block mimics his dopey driving habits. This is why we should celebrate those influential figures who *do* lead by the example they set with their professional careers.

We often tell people that at *Modern Drummer*, it's all about the drumming. It's not our place to do a background check on the ethics of everyone we interview. Anyway, like they say, let the person who is without sin cast the first stone. Still, certain players seem to take a special interest in being good role models, and we do try to celebrate that.

Many years ago, before I had kids, I watched this month's cover artist, Gregg Bissonette, give one of the most powerful drum clinics I've ever seen. It wasn't that Gregg displayed inhuman chops in a ten-minute solo—frankly, I can't remember whether he even played that day. What I do recall vividly is the way he treated everyone in that master class, including a number of fairly young players who boldly volunteered to play in front of the group while Gregg stood watching over their shoulders.

Bissonette was already a rock star at that point, playing with David Lee Roth, but if you happened to wander off the street into that master class, you'd never have known it. He was so respectful with his commentary, so encouraging—but without sugarcoating anything. I filed away Gregg's approach in my memory bank, and to this day whenever I have to explain something important to my kids, I take a breath, *try* to remember who I'm talking to, and explain what needs to be explained, calmly and, if necessary, sternly.

Reading Gregg's cover story this month brought me back to that master class all those years ago. And I got to thinking that, as great a player as he is, the same composure, intelligence, respect, and humor that he exhibits with young drummers must also contribute to the success he's had working with L.A.'s top musicians and contractors.

My sense is that Gregg would behave the same way even if he weren't a world-famous musician. Perhaps it's that parallel-universe Gregg Bissonette that the rest of us should really be imitating. Because, even if we never play on a Grammy-winning album or appear on the cover of a magazine, the examples we set in our own tiny little corners of the world have weight, and the marks they leave are lasting.



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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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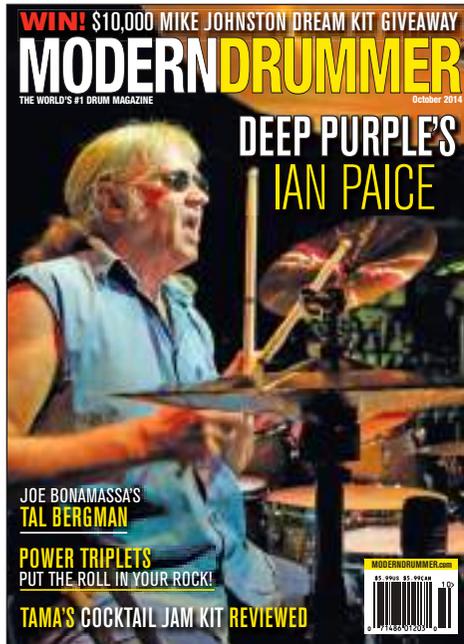
READERS' PLATFORM

Ian Paice

Thank you, *Modern Drummer* and "Pistol" Pete Kaufmann, for a great article (October 2014) on Deep Purple drummer Ian Paice. I was recently able to not only catch Deep Purple in concert in Ventura County, but also to stand next to the stage and observe this fantastic drummer. I have to tell you, he has still got it, and he's respected by everyone everywhere he performs. I was in awe as soon as they began to play "Highway Star." Deep Purple are cast in stone, and they're still the best, loudest, most perfectionist band in the world. I cannot thank you enough for this long-overdue article, giving us insight to the greatest drummer in my life and many, many drummers' lives. You rock, *Modern Drummer!*

Dave Betti

Great interview with Ian Paice in the October 2014 issue. The Tools of the Trade sidebar and photos confused me, though. You state that Ian plays Pearl Masters, with a 14x26 bass drum. I play a custom set of Masters too, and the largest bass drum available is 24". And in the photographs there seem to



be two silver sparkle sets. One has the same round-edge badge as my 2008 kit. The other has a rectangular badge. Is that an older kit?
Jim Hickman

Paice Responds

The answer is quite simple. I have four or five kits around the world, and although the drums themselves are fine, the amount of travel they do, change of climate, humidity, etc., means they won't stay as pristine as a kit that is under control of one person in one country. As the appearance of the kits gets affected by this wear and tear, I ask Pearl to replace them when I feel they are not looking the way Pearl would want. So it's possible that more than one kit could be featured in a set of pictures.

My stage kits are usually no more than three or four years old when I think they need replacing, either for cosmetic reasons or because I determine I need to change the size range of the drums. Also, in photographs, the date of the shot is usually not stated, so the kit you see may not have been used by me for quite a long time.

As for the 26" BD, the very fact that I have them means that Pearl produces them! As the demand for a drum this size is limited, they are probably a custom order from the factory. Cheers.

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As we work into our 23rd year since the launch of the Vater branded drumstick line, it gives me reason to reminisce about our journey so far and the early days of making drumsticks for my family business alongside my Dad, my brother Ron and our dedicated workers.

I think back to the times that we worked endless hours to innovate and develop the perfect manufacturing process. I remember making the decision in 1991, after many years of manufacturing for other major drumstick companies, to launch our own brand of drumsticks. Moving our operations from a barn in Weymouth, Massachusetts to our current factory, and all of the trials and tribulations that come along with doing business.

Today, we continue to improve the manufacturing process, while we maintain the great level of quality, care and detail that my grandfather, Jack Adams, established when he began hand-turning drumsticks in the mid-1950's. Vater's roots go back to that time when Jack was manufacturing sticks for his own customers at Jack's Drum Shop in Boston, Massachusetts, as well as for some of his close friends, who are now considered legendary... Buddy Rich, Philly Joe Jones and Elvin Jones, to name a few.

Along the way, we have always strived to meet the demands of the drumming community. In fact, many of Vater's products are a direct result of consumer input and demand. That being said, our efforts now exceed just making drumsticks as we offer dozens of accessory products along with more than 250 stick, mallet, brush and specialty stick models.

I have always enjoyed talking to drummers of all ages and hearing their personal stories, ideas, comments and views on all things percussive. This extreme sense of camaraderie that we all share together as drummers is uniquely special, rewarding and influential, and is something that we all should be proud of.

Finally, speaking on behalf of the entire Vater Family: Whether you recently thought about trying Vater sticks for the first time or have been using them for years, whether you're a sales rep for one of our distributors or stock our sticks in your store, whether you just played your first gig or have a platinum selling album, I'd like to thank ALL OF YOU for your support and interest in what we do here at Vater.

It's an amazing honor to have products bearing my family's name be a part of so much incredible music that is being created around the world.

Sincerely,
Alan J. Vater





Watch this month's cover star playing at soundcheck with Ringo Starr, the famed Beatles drummer who inspired Bissonette to refocus his approach in the studio. Plus, check out the chart Gregg created for the song "After All" from his new solo album, *Warning Will Robinson!*

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Product Close-Up

Watch as we put De Gregorio's innovative new cajons to the test.



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NEWS

Mayhem Drummers, Unite!



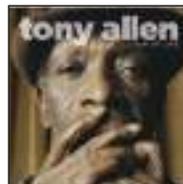
Back row, from left: Andrew Workman (King 810), Marshall Wiczorek (Wretched), Travis Orbin (Darkest Hour), Sam Applebaum (Veil of Maya), Adam Pierce (Emmure), Jerod Boyd (Miss May I), Eric Frazier (Islander), Skinny (Mushroomhead), Timmy Braun (Texas Hippie Coalition), Ksaos (Erimha), and Oscar Santiago (Ill Niño). Front row: Stitch (Mushroomhead), James Cassells (Asking Alexandria), Arin Ilejay (Avenged Sevenfold), Ray Luzier (Korn), Mat Madiro (Trivium), and Robert Diablo (Mushroomhead).

Sebastien

Ray Luzier hooked us up with this great shot of the drummers from this past summer's Mayhem Festival, taken by Korn's tour photographer, Sebastien. "This tour was very special in that all the drummers were watching each other almost every day," Luzier says, "showing massive support and geeking out way more than usual. I witnessed so many great moments. Someone would break a pedal on the side stage, and three other drummers watching would run and help, or they'd give another drummer sticks if he ran out. I even loaned a few of my Sabians to Wretched's drummer because he had nothing but cracked cymbals on his kit!"

"Each day before I would start press," Luzier continues, "I'd go to the side stages and check out the chaos going on, and later in the evening I would escort some of the musicians to the main stage to see Korn. I became a new fan of bands like Emmure, Islander, Mushroomhead, Wretched, Ice T's Body Count—just about all of them! Everyone was playing their asses off, and there was no ego or attitude crap, just encouragement and high fives all around. And most of the bands were playing in the scorching-hot sun from 1:30 to 5:30, some in masks or makeup!"

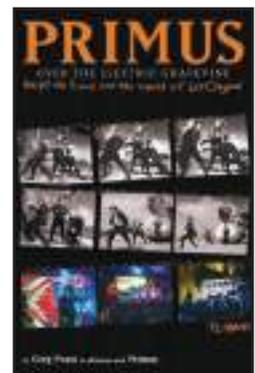
Out Now



Led Zeppelin IV and Houses of the Holy Deluxe Editions (John Bonham) /// **Flying Colors** Second Nature (Mike Portnoy) /// **Ani DiFranco** Allergic to Water (Terence Higgins) /// **Jackson Browne** Standing in the Breach (Don Heffington) /// **Bill Frisell** Guitar in the Space Age! (Kenny Wollesen) /// **Cavalera Conspiracy** Pandemonium (Igor Cavalera) /// **Deerhoof** La Isla Bonita (Greg Saunier) /// **Tony Allen** Film of Life (Tony Allen) /// **Pitch Black Forecast** As the World Burns (Gene Hoglan)

Primus Over the Electric Grapevine

"I think it's our extreme differences that make it work," drummer **Tim Alexander** says of his fruitful yet often uneasy rapport with Primus singer/bassist Les Claypool and guitarist Larry LaLonde in this new book. "I have never had a relationship like that. And I have never made such interesting music, either." *Grapevine*, by Greg Prato and the group, provides an unvarnished oral history of Primus, with plenty from Alexander, **Jay Lane**, and **Bryan "Brain" Mantia**, all of whom have held the throne for the band. And let's not forget **Stewart Copeland**, another Claypool friend and collaborator, who provides colorful stories and up-close insights as this appropriately lively chronicle unfolds.



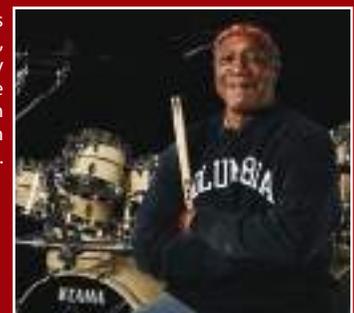
Who's Playing What



British session drummer **Tom Meadows** (Kylie Minogue) is endorsing Porter & Davies' BC Gigster tactile monitoring system.



Percussionist **Pete Korpela** (Josh Groban, Robbie Williams) has joined the Majestic/Mapex roster of artists.



Billy Cobham has returned to Tama, the drum company he helped put on the map in the '70s, when he pioneered fusion drumming.

On
Tour



Flo Schanze and Obliterations are playing dates on the west coast of the U.S. and Canada with Baptists and Torch Runner, then heading to Europe for several weeks.

Also on the Road

Adam Deitch with Break Science /// **Jon Moss** with Culture Club /// **Martin Axenrot** with Opeth /// **Patrick McGee** with Stars /// **Steve Clifford** with Circa Survive /// **Sebastian Thomson** with Trans Am /// **Gabe Mantle** with Gob /// **Jason Thomas** with Phillip Phillips /// **Randy Guss** with Toad the Wet Sprocket

Rick Rodney



Paul Blinov

Anne-Marie Vassiliou is out with White Lung.

Korey Horn Opens Drum Brigade School

Korey "Kingston" Horn (Suedehead, the Aggrolites, Western Standard Time) has opened the Drum Brigade School as a place for experienced and beginning drummers alike to expand their musical abilities in a spirit of camaraderie, rather than competition. "Our mission is to provide drum instruction in a fun and encouraging environment," Horn says, "and to help each student express creativity and develop a unique style while learning from seasoned professional drummers." The Drum Brigade School offers private, semiprivate, and group lessons, and is located at Studio 528 in Oceanside, California. For more information, go to drumbrigadeschool.com.



Old HC Dude



Fred Gretsch Leads Historic Gretsch Drums Walking Tour

This past July, twenty Gretsch drum enthusiasts joined company president Fred Gretsch on a walking tour through the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, where Fred shared personal stories and memories of the manufacturing origins of the iconic brand. "The company's history is interwoven in American music history," Gretsch product director John Palmer explains. "Fred made this event special by sharing a personal account of [that] history." Stops along the tour included the site of the original Gretsch Factory at 104 South Fourth Street, the company's former headquarters at 60 Broadway, and the location of the finishing factory, where a young Fred learned the fine art of sanding and applying lacquer to drum shells in the late '50s. The tour was hosted by two of New York City's most successful Gretsch dealers, Main Drag Music in Brooklyn and Steve Maxwell Vintage and Custom Drums in Manhattan. Guests visited both stores and got an opportunity to view new and rare Gretsch drumsets.

Musicians Institute Welcomes New Pro Instructors

Musicians Institute has added **Jason Sutter** (Chris Cornell, Foreigner, Marilyn Manson), **Brendan Buckley** (Shakira, Minnie Driver), **Bob Terry** (Eddie Money, the Beach Boys, Wang Chung, Yamaha consultant), and **Ryan Brown** (Zappa Plays Zappa, Black Belt Karate) to its drum program.



Brendan Buckley



Ryan Brown

Carlo Alberto Orecchia



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Zoro, *The Commandments of the Half-Time Shuffle* (book)

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Virgil Donati, *In This Life*
Mark Guiliana, *Mehliana: Taming the Dragon*
(Brad Mehldau and Mark Guiliana)
Taylor Hawkins, *The Birds of Satan* (the Birds of Satan)
Billy Martin, *Juice* (Medeski Scofield Martin & Wood)
Rudy Royston, *303*

RECORDED PERFORMANCE, VIDEO

Brann Dailor, *Live at Brixton* (Mastodon)
Zakir Hussain with Steve Smith, Eric Harland, and
Giovanni Hidalgo, *The SFJazz Sessions* (Zakir Hussain)
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Mind Matters

by Bernie Schallehn

Are Open-Mic Nights Worth It?

My band is split down the middle when it comes to performing at open-mic nights. The bass player and I think they're a total waste of time. The lead vocalist and guitarist believe they offer our group exposure and free advertising. To date, we haven't played any. The issue remains unresolved, and whenever the singer brings it up, a bad vibe descends on our rehearsal room. I'm afraid this has the potential to destroy my band. How do we resolve it? J.D.

For the uninitiated, let's first define what an open-mic night is. In most cases, it's when a club sets aside a time for musicians to sign up and then perform a limited number of songs in front of an audience. With the exception of money from a tip jar (allowed in some venues but not all), the club doesn't pay the musicians for their performances. Open-mic nights usually need a host or MC to run the proceedings, introduce the performers, and let musicians know when they've exceeded their allotted time. The host may be an employee of the club or a solo musician, or the venue might hire a house band to run the affair. Open mics can feature solo artists, full ensembles, or both. The simplest open mic is one that focuses on solo artists who play by themselves or with backup instrumentation provided by the host on guitar, keyboards, or percussion.

Another variety of open-mic night includes a full host band to support the performer or performers. The band usually comprises seasoned musicians who know a wide range of cover songs. They may also be proficient enough to

provide backing music for an original tune if instructed on the song's key and the type of groove needed. If a full band wants to perform, the hosts usually allow the guests to play on their instruments. A third type of open mic—although relatively rare—requires the guest bands to bring all of their own gear, which could even include a PA.

Advantages

For newbie bands and solo artists, open mics provide a relatively safe place to garner experience in front of an audience. For a seasoned musician or band, it's a place to test out the crowd reaction to new material. Why is it safe? Anytime you're compensated for your services, your accountability factor goes up. I once worked for a bandleader who reminded us before every gig that we were in *service* to our audience.

Some venues use open-mic nights as a way to audition acts for future paid performances. Should the establishment have decent house equipment, this saves you the hassle of lugging your gear, setting up, and tearing down. Open mics provide exposure to patrons who may one day become part of your fan base, and you also have the opportunity to network with fellow musicians. Lastly, and quite simply, you get to play your drums in public.

Disadvantages

There's a good chance that the house equipment will be junky. If the point of playing the open mic is to expose your band to an audience, why would you risk playing on inferior gear? Also, your



exposure may be only to the other musicians waiting to play. Another issue is that although you might be told by the club owner/booking agent that future gigs could be made after you perform at the open mic, that's not a guarantee. Some musicians feel that open mics are a rip-off for the musicians. The club basically gets a night of free music, while the guest performers end up spending money when you factor in a cover charge or drink minimum, transportation costs, and wear and tear on equipment.

Your Dilemma and Choices for Resolution

Here are my suggestions for your particular situation. First, accept that this issue isn't going to disappear. You and your bandmates hold strong opinions, both pro and con. The next time the topic arises—but only after informing your bassist that you plan to take action—propose that your singer and guitarist perform at an open mic as a duo. No harm, no foul, no drama. Or stop fighting and agree to perform unplugged at a less stressful open mic at a coffee-house in your area, on cajon or djembe. Another approach would be to take a proactive stance, scout out an open mic in a club that has decent house equipment, and inform your band that you're down for giving that place a try.

Staying in a proactive mode, you could also initiate an attempt at getting your group hired as a compensated host band. This would indeed give you the exposure you're looking for, as you'd be seen and heard consistently week after week, plus you'd be able to play your originals and favorite tunes on slower nights when there are fewer guests sitting in. Finally, you're always free to quit your band and search for one that absolutely, positively refuses to play any open-mic nights.



Bernie Schallehn has been a drummer and percussionist for over forty-five years. He holds a master's degree in counseling psychology and, while in private practice, held the credentials of a certified clinical mental health counselor and a certified alcohol and substance abuse counselor.

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MUST-HAVE GEAR

Foreigner's **Chris Frazier**

Over the years I've done a multitude of gigs and sessions, and I've become very reliant on a few pieces of go-to gear. Here's what gives me the sound I most enjoy in the studio and live on stage with Foreigner.

I have two Ludwig Black Beauty blue-and-olive-badged snare drums from the '70s that sound great for every musical application. Unfortunately, because they're vintage, they aren't very roadworthy, so I use a DW 6.5x14 Black Nickel Over Brass on tour. This is a great, versatile drum.

I've been using Zildjian cymbals for thirty years, because they sound amazing and are very consistent. My favorite crash is the 20" EFX. It's a hybrid with tonal similarities to a China and a dark crash. My 15" A Custom hats are crisp and warm, and the 21" Hybrid ride is the perfect mix of ping and wash. For live shows, I switch to 16" K hats and a 24" ride.

For softer grooves, I use Vic Firth Rute sticks. I love the cool percussive, ethnic feel you can get with them with the snares turned off and incorporating the toms into the groove.

An advertisement for Tycoon Percussion's Dancing Drum 12" Pro Series Djembe. The ad features a large image of a djembe drum on the right and a circular inset on the left showing a man playing the drum. Text on the left identifies the man as "Ahmad Mobley, Tycoon Percussion Artist" and another man as "Maliwan Wongsarat, Tycoon Percussion Builder". The top right corner has social media icons. The bottom section contains the product name, material, and features.

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Tycoon Percussion Builder

Ahmad Mobley
Tycoon Percussion Artist

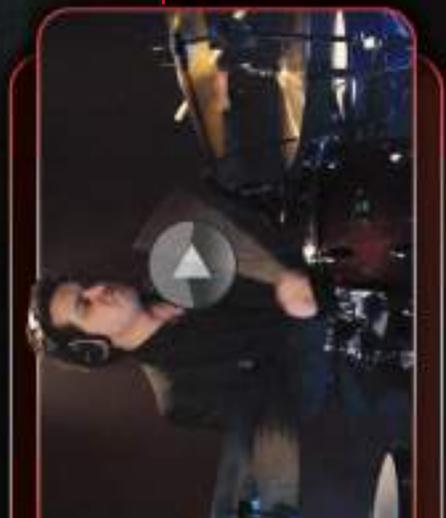
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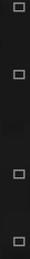
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12 /

DTX
DRUMS



Gretsch Catalina Ash Drumset

Revived and revised, the latest mid-price offering from one of the most historic names in drums just got that much better.





After exploding into the mid-price market with the introduction of the Catalina series back in 2001, Gretsch recently revamped a few of its more popular offerings within the line, with upgraded hardware, badges, finishes, and shell and bearing edge design, plus new heads and a hipper overall appearance. (The current-day Catalina line is the rebirth of a series of the same name made by Gretsch in the late 1930s, which consisted of only the Elite and Stage models.) The retooled kit we have here is the Catalina Ash.

Never Heard of It

Though ash is a common tone wood for electric guitars and basses, the species is fairly uncommon in drum construction, and ash kits are currently offered by just a few manufacturers. Featuring a pore structure similar to oak, ash is known to be an aggressive, dynamic-sounding wood and is the standard body material for Fender's Telecaster models. Gretsch says that the new Catalina Ash kits "produce a focused tone that has a strong attack, balanced low end, and loud dynamic range." Given this description, I expected the kit to like low tunings and to prefer a heavier hand.

It Sounds Like...

Though I had some idea of what to expect from these drums, having played oak and cherry kits before, I found that they produced a unique sound that's best understood as somewhere between the warmth and balance of maple and the shorter, more precise sound produced by birch. These drums liked to be loud. They spoke with deep, punchy authority when hit hard but didn't really express that character fully at softer dynamics. Though Gretsch lists coated single-ply tom batter heads in the specs, the review kit arrived with clear single-ply heads, made by Remo, on top and bottom. I'm generally not a fan of clear batters on toms, but after changing out the 14x16 floor tom top head with a coated single-ply, I missed the added attack that the clear head added to the aggressive sound these shells naturally produce.

The 18x22 bass drum and 8x12 rack tom had a big and satisfying sound with a lot of body when played loudly. The kick had a fat and relatively short voice with minimal muffling. The 7x10 rack tom and 5.5x14 matching snare exhibited the same general tonal characteristics as the other drums in the kit. The 14x16 floor tom, however, seemed to lose some of its unique character when tuned anywhere over a floor-rattling, just-above-wrinkling tension.

Owing to the relatively thin 6-ply shells and Gretsch's newly designed lower-profile GTS suspension system, the rack toms rang freely. Another cool feature is that the floor tom feet feature a shock-absorbing cavity. This helped ensure that the floor tom would ring unimpeded by the usual

dampening caused by solid metal legs. Still, the Catalina Ash didn't ring for days.

The 5.5x14 matching ash snare had a wider effective tuning range than I expected, and it tuned up in no time. I tensioned it to super-tight Chad Sexton territory, and it managed to retain its character. Then I tuned it way down and added a few strips of gaff tape and Moongels, and it sounded fat and dirty. The snare exhibited the most character at a medium tuning with a single Moongel, producing a versatile sound that was bigger and warmer than what I expected from a drum of these dimensions.

I appreciated the inclusion of shallow rack toms, as they proved easy to mount and position on the included dual-L-arm tom mount. Thicker, 12.7 mm L-arms are among the list of hardware upgrades that make the new Catalina Ash feel sturdier than its predecessor.

The Cool Factor

Along with a new 6-ply shell design and 30-degree roundover bearing edges, the Catalina Ash kit comes with some retro finishes and redesigned lugs. The new lugs are smaller and lower in mass, to limit the amount of material that comes in contact with the shell. I didn't experience any alignment or construction issues with the hardware while assembling the kit, and all the bearing edges were smooth and even.

Catalina Ash kits feature a unique open grain with satin lacquer exteriors and natural, unpainted interiors. Finishes include walnut/natural/walnut, black/natural/black, and red/black/red burst. The satin finish and textured open grain make for beautiful instruments that feel as if they breathe a bit more. (A black pearlescent wrap is currently in the works and should be available soon.)

Nuts and Bolts

The included dual-tom mount features thicker L-arms, room for an extra cymbal arm, and a unique retro "bottle cap" design on the bass drum side of the mount. The snare throw-off and butt plate, now Gretsch branded along with the rest of the hardware, are classic and functional. Rubber-lined bass drum hoop claws, round badges, updated floor tom leg brackets, 2 mm triple-flange hoops, and rounded T-handles on the tom mounts, spurs, and floor tom leg brackets round out the new features and make for a solid though not excessively heavy package.

With a street price of \$699.99, some great new features, and a totally redesigned vibe, the updated Gretsch Catalina Ash five-piece kit is a great value and offers a unique voice to players in search of a loud, classy-looking kit.

Ben Meyer

Soultone Wave Hi-Hats and Mega Bell Gospel Ride

Tweaked timekeepers for more articulation and a bigger personality.



Check out audio demos of these cymbals at modern drummer.com.

Soultone recently added two new styles to all of its exiting product lines: 14" Custom series Wave hi-hats and a 22" Gospel series Mega Bell ride. Both were developed to answer the requests of drummers who wanted a little more edge and character from their hi-hats and rides.

14" Custom Series Wave Hi-Hats

Wave hi-hats were designed to offer a more aggressive chick sound. The scalloped design of the bottom cymbal aids in reduced coupling, thus providing a pronounced, bright "clap" when closed with the foot, with a fast attack and quick decay. These hi-hats had an even-keeled top-end bite and brisk articulation. The overall sound was slightly thinner but had more of an immediate presence that cut through nicely with direct projection. If clarity and articulation matter to you more than having a deep, chunky sound, these hats will get the job done.

22" Gospel Series Mega Bell Ride

Soultone aimed to create models that break the pattern of many traditional large-bell rides. The company wanted to make a more musical cymbal featuring a larger bell, rather than having the bell become overpowering. Although the raw bell on this ride is indeed massive, it balanced nicely with the body of the cymbal. The bell sound was certainly pronounced, but the raw finish gives it a drier tonality to prevent it from being too piercing. Instead of clanging out a never-ending symphony of overtones, hits on the bell transitioned well into playing on the body. The brilliant finish of the body of the cymbal provided bright stick articulation, which made the definition the focal point. The result was a surprisingly musical giant-bell ride with a broad range of musical applications.

David Ciauro

Outlaw Weathered Heart Pine Snares

Taking recycling to the extreme by converting reclaimed nineteenth-century wood into gorgeous stave snares.

Outlaw Drums came about in 2006, when Albany, Georgia, furniture maker/drummer Michael Outlaw rescued a batch of centuries-old pine that was headed for the dump. The wood had previously served as timber for a home built by Civil War veteran Charles Edward Wilder in the early 1880s. Outlaw was so enamored with the weathered pine that he decided to make a snare drum out of it.

Since building that first drum, Outlaw has continued to gather up unique wood from deconstructed tobacco barns, plantation houses, mills, and bridges built before 1900 to make his drums. Each instrument comes with a certificate verifying the source materials, as well as a photo of the original structure and a vial of sawdust collected during construction. For Outlaw, each drum is not only a high-end, professional-sounding instrument but also a piece of American history. "Many drum builders travel to the ends of the earth for exotic wood," he says on the company website. "We believe the best wood in the world, heart pine, is right here in the American South."

We were sent two Outlaw snares to review, an eight-lug 6x13 in "chestnut glaze" finish, built from the Wilder timber, and a ten-lug 5x14 in "reborn blueberry," reclaimed from a nineteenth-century home that was torn down in 2013. (Each lists for around \$850.) Both drums feature chrome tube lugs, triple-flange chromed steel hoops, a Dunnett three-position roto-style throw-off, an Evans G1 Coated batter and Snare Side 300 bottom, and PureSound snare wires (twenty strands on the 13" drum and sixteen strands on the 14"). The stave-style shells of these drums are thick and cut with sharp bearing edges. The exteriors of the shells are painstakingly finished to maintain a rustic look and textured feel that harken back to the buildings from which the drums are built.

The 6x13 has one of the original nails in the shell, and the vent



Chestnut glaze

is actually a 1" bolt hole. The 5x14 drum has a cool-looking blue/chestnut finish on the inside and outside of the shell that was applied meticulously by hand to match the weathered look of the building from which it was built. Outlaw's .125"-thick "forest guard" metal badges are modeled after the shield worn by the U.S. Forest Service, which was established by Theodore Roosevelt in 1905 to preserve the country's natural wonders. All of these features combine to give Outlaw snare drums a world-class appearance with a lot of history and vibe.

Sonically, both drums were bright and snappy with strong articulation and nice snare response. The 13" turned out to be the more versatile of the two. It sounded very lively and popping tuned very tight, while a medium tuning brought out an open, all-purpose voice. Lower tunings produced a fat and punchy sound with a nice pitch bend in the sustain. The 5x14 had a similar overall tone, but it performed best at medium and lower tunings, where the natural brightness of the thick pine shell was counterbalanced by the depth and punch created when the heads were at a lower pitch. Even detuned all the way, this drum still had a strong, sizzling presence. No muffling was required on either snare during our testing.

Outlaw also uses smaller pieces of reclaimed timber to make wooden bass drum beaters, and custom snare racks are available. Drum collectors, take note!

Michael Dawson

Check out audio demos of these snares at modern drummer.com.



Reborn blueberry

Canopus New Yaiba Bop and Groove Drumsets

Although they've been updated to be more affordable, these two Japanese-made kits sacrifice nothing in sound and performance.



New Yaiba Groove

We reviewed the original Yaiba Bop and Rock series drumsets from Canopus in the August 2010 and May 2011 issues and were thoroughly impressed with their clear, musical, versatile sounds and ultraprecise construction. The series was conceived to offer a more affordable option than the company's flagship lines,

without sacrificing strength and performance. Canopus recently revamped the Yaiba series, rebranded as New Yaiba, in an effort to bring the price down and to differentiate the sonic characteristics of the two configurations, which are now called Bop and Groove. We were sent a set of each to review.



New Yaiba Bop

The New Yaiba Bop kit (\$1,500) comes in traditional jazz sizes, with a 14x18 bass drum, an 8x12 rack tom (with suspension mount), a 14x14 floor tom, and a 5.5x14 snare outfitted with Canopus Vintage wires. The toms and snare come with the company's popular Bolt Tight washers, which are designed to minimize tuning slips. The finish on our review kit was a dark red sparkle lacquer, which the company states is applied in a less-time-consuming manner than the nitrocellulose it uses on its more expensive lines. While this decision was made largely for cost savings, the drums still look gorgeous, and the lacquer is applied flawlessly.

The bass drum had a tom mount installed, and the kit includes a single-tom holder. The toms and bass drum come with Remo USA Coated Ambassadors on both sides, and the snare has a Coated Ambassador batter and a Clear Ambassador bottom. The shells are all maple without reinforcement rings.

As we discovered with the original Yaiba Bop kit, these revised drums are absolutely top-notch instruments capable of a much wider range of sound than their sizes would suggest. At any tuning, the attack was precise, the pitch was clear, the sustain was clean, and the decay was long and even. In short, this was a no-fuss, great-sounding kit that projected beautifully in acoustic situations and also recorded very well. The highlight for me was being able to take the drums from an ultra-tight Max Roach tuning down to a tubby Al Jackson Jr. vibe with very little effort and zero lag in performance.

New Yaiba Groove

To separate the New Yaiba Groove kit (\$1,500) from the Bop set in greater ways than simply by increasing the dimensions, Canopus decided to make these drums out of birch, supplying them with Remo UT Clear Ambassadors on both sides of the toms, a UT Coated Ambassador snare batter, and a Clear Ambassador bass drum batter. The sizes include a deep 18x22 bass drum, 8x10 and 8x12 rack toms (with suspension mounts), a 16x16 floor tom, and a 6.5x14 matching snare (with Canopus Vintage wires). As with the Bop kit, the Groove setup comes with Bolt Tight washers on the toms and snare. Unlike the Bop kit, there is no tom mount included on the bass drum, so the rack toms have to be hung on stands. Our review kit came in another gorgeous sparkle lacquer finish, which Canopus calls Yaiba gray. (Two other lacquers, white and ebony, are available on either Yaiba kit.)

Whereas the Bop outfit had a classic, all-purpose sound with a great balance of highs, mids, and lows, the Groove kit catered slightly more toward contemporary applications where greater emphasis on attack, punch, and power are required, thanks in part to the birch shells and clear drumheads. That said, they were still extremely versatile drums with crystal-clear response at all volumes and tunings. The kick drum could punch or boom, the snare could whisper and pop, and the toms could be tuned for thunderous lows or crackling highs. What can I say? I'm a fan!

Michael Dawson

Check out an audio demo of the New Yaiba Bop kit at modern drummer.com.

De Gregorio Cajons and Ahead Armor Cajon Bags

Innovative, great-sounding instruments plus some of the finest protective cases on the market.

The Spanish cajon maker De Gregorio has been producing handcrafted instruments for the European and Japanese markets, and in the process has attracted artists such as Dave Weckl, Hamid Drake, Evelyn Glennie, and Sheila E. Founded in 2002 by percussionist Paolo De Gregorio, the company recently made an appearance on the U.S. scene through Big Bang Distribution, which sent *MD* four distinctive models and an Ahead Armor padded bag for review.

All four De Gregorio cajons share some basic similarities, including dimensions of approximately 18.75"x11.625"x11.25". They also feature four plastic feet on the bottom to protect the floor while increasing tone and projection. Handmade in Spain, these are flamenco-style cajons with guitar strings on the inside of the front plate acting as snares. The strings are adjustable, and overtone-control tape is included to alter snare response and tone. The company takes great pride in its environmentally conscious manufacturing and ethical labor practices, using only water-based lacquer finishes and Forest Stewardship Council-certified woods throughout its product line.

Kanyero

This is De Gregorio's brand-new flagship cajon. The body is constructed of single-ply mahogany, and it comes with a tunable carbon-fiber front plate. The wires and six tone-control strips, which are heavy-duty hook-and-loop fasteners that mute the snares inside the front plate, are individually removable and adjustable. There's also a 10"x2"x1.5" foam muffling block inside the cajon, placed against the front plate. The block can be adjusted up and down (or removed altogether) to affect resonance.

The Kanyero had the widest frequency range of the four models we tested, with a round, full low end (almost an 808-style bass sound) and short, bright slaps that projected mostly attack with little tone. The muffling block worked nicely to control the resonance from the extremely vibrant-sounding front plate. This cajon

responded beautifully at all volume levels and was my favorite of the bunch due to its extended low end, warm and open tones, and crisp attack.

Bravo

The Bravo cajon is from De Gregorio's semiprofessional line and is currently the company's top-selling model. The body is constructed of top-grade birch plywood and has a thin 2 mm, 4-ply birch front plate finished in a gorgeous red Makassar veneer. The snare strings are adjustable but not removable, and the snare action is controlled by adhesive tape, which is not adjustable.

The Bravo is a straightforward, nice-sounding workhorse cajon. The frequency response wasn't as extended as on the Kanyero model, so the low tones inhabited more of the low-mid territory and the overall sound was a bit more dry and contained. New York City-based percussionist Matt Teitelman, who checked out the cajons with me, preferred this model because he felt the overall tone and sensitivity of the Bravo would fit nicely in the nuevo-flamenco groups he performs with. Both of us found this model to have good projection and a nice, clear tone.

Siroco

Produced in collaboration with the Spanish manufacturer Leiva Percussion, the Siroco is a collapsible cajon. The top and bottom plates unscrew, and then both sides fold down against the front plate. Setting up and collapsing the Siroco were a breeze and took just a few minutes. When disassembled and stored in the included travel bag, the Siroco measures just 20"x12"x4", which is small enough to fit in an overhead compartment on an airplane and possibly even small enough to slide under the seat in front of you.

The snares on the Siroco are individually adjustable and removable, as are the tone-control strips. The front plate can also be removed and swapped out for tonal variety. (A second front plate was included.) The body is first-grade birch plywood with solid pine



Kanyero



Bravo



Siroco

supports. The main front plate is 2 mm birch with an alpi veneer, and the second front plate is 3 mm birch with a natural finish. Swapping out the front plate took us about forty-five minutes the first time around. The second time, it took around twenty minutes, which made us confident that we could do it even quicker with a little more practice. (Just don't plan on making changes between songs on stage!)

Sonically, the Siroco featured a warm and controlled low end and crisp slaps, with a fairly dry overall tone. The dryness was accentuated once we swapped in the 3 mm front plate, which had less low end and snare response. The Siroco was the least resonant of the four models, but it still had a very musical and usable sound. Argentinean multi-instrumentalist Tomás Shannon, who was visiting my studio at the time of the review, was most impressed with this model due to its combination of good sound quality and extreme portability.

DrumBox Cajon and DG Direct-Drive Cajon Pedal

Also produced along with Leiva Percussion, De Gregorio's DrumBox combines the top-of-the-line Maestral cajon with a second playing surface on the side and a proprietary DG direct-drive pedal with a foam rubber beater. The interior of the DrumBox is outfitted with a series of wooden braces and straps that allow the pedal to be securely stowed within the cajon, and the instrument comes with a mat to keep the entire assembly from sliding around on the floor when being played. The DrumBox is like a portable drumset, throne, trap case, and carpet, all contained in one box that you can carry on your back.

The DrumBox is constructed of Baltic birch plywood, with a 2.5 mm front plate of 5-ply birch and an alpi lignum veneer. The side surface is 3 mm birch. The back plate removes with six wing screws to allow access to the foot pedal and carpet stored inside. The snare wires are individually adjustable and removable, as are the tone control strips inside the front plate. Assembling the pedal is an eighteen-step process, so be sure not to lose the included instruction manual until you have it all down pat.

The DrumBox cajon had a sound along the lines of the Bravo model, although it was a little thinner on



Ahead Armor Cajon Bag

DG's U.S. distributor, Big Bang, provided us with an example of the Ahead Armor cajon bag. It's constructed from sturdy nylon with a padded core and a fleece-lined interior. The bag features padded adjustable shoulder straps with a clasp to connect the straps, plus a carrying handle on top. A small accessory pouch on the front rounds out the specs.

We found the Armor bag to be great. It provided excellent protection, and the center clasp on the shoulder straps did a great job of distributing the weight for travel. We took the various cajons through the subway system to gigs in New York City, and the bag received high marks for protection, portability, and comfort.

De Gregorio has done some exceptional work here, creating gorgeous handcrafted cajons with innovative designs that function beautifully and sound great, while Ahead offers some extremely useful protection for the instruments. Hats off to all involved.

the low end of the spectrum. The ability to add a foot pedal opens up the capabilities of an already nice-sounding instrument. The side plate had a higher pitch than the center of the front plate, so the notes I got from the pedal didn't cover the lowest end of the spectrum when the DrumBox was set up in the standard position. However, the beater can be easily rotated 90 degrees to strike the front plate if more low end is desired.

The cajon pedal is available separately, so foot capability could be added to almost any existing cajon. This got us thinking of adding a second foot pedal for unprecedented double bass cajon action—the sky's the limit!

Dylan Wissing



Check out a video demo of these cajons at modern drummer.com.



DrumBox Cajon and DG Direct-Drive Cajon Pedal



Siroco folded

Get the Sound You Want From Your Drums!

Part 1: Pitch Relationships

by Dave Ribner

Like many drummers, I could spend hours tuning my kit and still not be satisfied. Even with quality drums and new drumheads, I'm often disappointed by the sound. Tuning can be a difficult and time-consuming process of trial and error.

As an electronic circuit designer with a background in acoustics, I thought it was possible to develop something like a guitar tuner that worked for drums. What I learned was that the sound of a drum is much more complex than that of a guitar, so measurement techniques used in guitar and instrument tuners don't work for drums. In 2009 I left my day job, started analyzing drum sounds, and succeeded in developing a tuning product that worked for drums. I went on to found Overtone Labs and brought the tune-bot electronic drum tuner to market in early 2012. In the process, I gained some insights into drum acoustics and tuning that I would like to share in this series of articles to help you get the most from your instruments.

The tune-bot allows you to accurately measure the pitch of a drum as a frequency, in Hertz, or as a musical note, and it can help you quickly match lug pitches. When we introduced the device, we were hesitant to tell anyone exactly *how* to tune his or her drums, since so much of this is a matter of personal preference. But we started getting a lot of email from customers, asking questions like, "How should I tune [insert drum brand here]?" or "How do I get a sound like [insert famous drummer here]?" To save time responding to these questions individually, we decided to develop a tool for drummers to use themselves.

We analyzed thousands of acoustic measurements to gain a better understanding of how drums behave. That led to the discovery of a very important property of two-headed drums: the mathematical relationship between the fundamental pitch of a drum and the pitches of the batter and resonant drumheads. Once we figured that out, we were able to precisely determine the lug pitches to use for any desired fundamental pitch and drum resonance.

We incorporated this information into a tool called the Tuning Calculator, which is free for everyone to use at tune-bot.com. There's also a free iPhone and Android app, Drum Tuning Calculator, that's a bit more comprehensive than the website. In this article we'll explain how to use the Tuning Calculator and will discuss some basic techniques to improve the sound of your drums. (Pitch measurements discussed here can be made by comparison with a pitch pipe, keyboard, or guitar if you don't own a tune-bot.)



How a Drum Works

Drums produce a unique sound that's a combination of several individual pitches. The lowest pitch, known as the fundamental, arises from the resonance between the batter and resonant heads. The higher pitches in a drum's sound are the overtones. Hitting near the center of the head emphasizes the fundamental pitch, and hitting near the edge emphasizes the lowest-frequency overtones, also known as "lug pitches." A little-known fact is that the fundamental is the same for the batter and resonant heads. You can verify this for yourself by comparing the pitch of the two heads of a tom when you tap in the center. If you tap near the edge, you'll be listening to the lug pitches, which will normally differ between heads.

In tuning a drum, the three lowest pitches are the most important. These are the fundamental and the lug pitches of the batter and resonant heads. The three pitches are interrelated, and changing the lug pitch of either head will also change the fundamental. If you tighten one head and loosen the other, you can keep the same fundamental pitch. But that changes several other characteristics of the drum sound, including resonance (sustain), timbre, attack, and stick feel. Resonance tends to increase when the batter and resonant lug pitches are close together, and is maximized when the top and bottom lug pitches are the same.

Manually tuning a drum to a specific fundamental and resonance is time-consuming and tedious. The process involves numerous trial-and-error steps. If you use the Tuning Calculator, you'll know how to adjust the batter and resonant lugs for the specific fundamental pitch and resonance you prefer.

Pitch Isolation and Tension Adjustment

While you're tuning a drum, you need to distinguish between the fundamental pitch and the lug pitch. To hear the fundamental, place the drum on a stand so that both heads are free to vibrate, and strike the center of the batter head. To hear the lug pitch, tap near the edge of the head. The lug pitch can be difficult to hear clearly, so it's helpful to mute the fundamental. Do this with the drum on a stand; lightly press the center of the head with your index finger while tapping near the edge. Another way to mute the fundamental is to place the drum on a stool or on a towel on the floor to prevent the resonant head from vibrating.

To match lug pitches, work with pairs of lugs that are opposite each other across the center of the drumhead. The pitch near any lug depends mainly on the tension of that lug as well as the tension of the opposite lug. Once the lug pitches are matched, you can raise or lower the overall drumhead pitch by uniformly adjusting all of the lugs in small increments.

Varying the Sound

Start by experimenting with the different fundamentals you can get from each of your drums. Every drum has a range of pitches that sound good, depending on the diameter of the shell, head thickness, shell depth, and composition. Work with your instruments to find the lowest and highest pitches where they sound good and have decent stick response. Try this experiment on toms with both heads at similar lug pitches to give you the loudest and most prominent fundamental.

Once you have a fundamental pitch that you like, you'll find that a wide range of sounds is possible, depending on the difference in lug pitch between the top and bottom heads. Tuning the batter head lower than the resonant maximizes bass response. This is a very popular option because it produces a sound with less attack and has a softer feel.

Alternatively, tuning the batter head higher than the resonant will provide more treble response. With the widest interval between the top and bottom lug pitches, the attack becomes pingy and the drum has a harder feel.

Tuning both heads to the same pitch will produce maximum resonance and sustain with more midrange frequencies and a moderate stick attack. This is a popular option for live performance but can be too boomy for recording. Try taking a tom through some of these relationships to become better acquainted with the range of sounds it can produce. Try to keep the fundamental from changing significantly as you vary the resonance by adjusting the interval between the two drumheads.

Drum Tuning Calculator

With the Drum Tuning Calculator app, it's easy to get great sounds right away, without the time-consuming trial-and-error process, although I still strongly urge you to spend time getting to know the limits and sweet spots of each of your drums. (Figure 1 shows the main menu of the app.)

The Drum Set Calculator (figure 2) shows recommended fundamental pitches and corresponding lug pitches based on the number and sizes of toms in the kit.

To use the calculator for a single tom, simply select the drum size, the amount of resonance you want, and the head you want higher in pitch. After the calculate button is touched, the recommended fundamental pitches and lug pitches are displayed, as shown in figure 3.

By default, the calculator selects a fundamental pitch from the midpoint of a range of pitches appropriate for the selected drum size. This is usually a good choice to start with; however, the pitch can be moved up or down by up to three semitones, using the Pitch Adjust slider, as desired. If you know the exact fundamental pitch you're after, you can use the Single Tom function to select the note and octave.

In terms of resonance, don't be afraid to try more extreme intervals between the top and bottom drumheads. Many drummers keep the heads close in pitch, meaning they haven't explored the range of useful sounds that result in larger pitch differences.

In the next article we'll go into tuning a set of drums using intervals and other pitch relationships. We'll also discuss snare and bass drum tuning.





Ginger Baker

A recent documentary on the legendary drummer warns us to beware of Mr. Baker. But the latest record by this unsinkable, grooving, global bohemian delivers a more positive and powerful message: Behold Mr. Baker!

by Jeff Potter

This past June, legendary Cream and Blind Faith drummer Ginger Baker released his latest album as a leader, *Why?* Featuring his group Jazz Confusion, with Pee Wee Ellis on tenor saxophone, Alec Dankworth on upright and electric bass, and African hand percussionist Abass Doodoo, the disc is a vital hybrid of jazz and African styles, which have been at the core of Baker's aesthetic for his entire professional life.

The release follows on the heels of *Beware of Mr. Baker*, a 2012 documentary film profiling the music career and impulsive exploits of the freewheeling drummer. It's known that Baker is less than enamored with doing interviews, which often pique his notorious irascibility. But that's partly because his

artistry effectively springs from a visceral, intuitive core. "I just play drums," he says. In addition, Baker is enduring formidable ailments.

Although the more flamboyant, sensational aspects of Baker's life, as seen in *Beware*, can be readily found smeared across the Net, the more rewarding choice is to search for the many amazing performance videos from the Cream days and well beyond. Or, better yet, check out the great drumming Baker is still delivering today on *Why?*

MD was pleased to speak via Skype with the indomitable Mr. Baker, who chatted with us from his home in the south of England.

MD: Congratulations on the new record. It has a nice, raw, open sound.

Ginger: I like it. I think it's great. It's the band "live." We did it in two days. We're old time travelers—we play time. [laughs] Pee Wee is a good player. They all are. Alec is amazing. His playing is really f***in' cool.

He really enjoys me and Abass; he's got that same time thing.

MD: The spontaneity pays off.

Ginger: That's because people take too long doing records. They've got all these silly things they play with.

MD: Was your decision not to include a

chordal instrument in the band a conscious choice so that the drumming would be more prominent?

Ginger: Nooooo, no. It just *happened*. It's not the first time it's been done, for Christ's sake. I was playing in my jazz days with a tenor, bass, and drums lineup.

Modern Drummer: How do you manage the pain when playing?

Ginger: I feel it before and after. I don't notice it when I'm playing.

MD: It lets the two drummers become more central, though.

Ginger: Well, yeah. African drums and Western drums—it's a mixture. That's why I use Abass. He and I have been working together six years now. We just enjoy playing together, you know. It's that West African feel.

MD: There are a lot of feels overlapping—the swing and African feels straddling each other.

Ginger: Jazz music is really all 12/8. They write it in 4/4, but it's really 12/8, isn't it?

MD: Back in the '60s, Art Blakey felt it was necessary to go to Africa to fully absorb African rhythms. How did your own long period of living and playing in Africa change your idea of drumming and rhythm?

Ginger: It never changed it at all. It's just something that I naturally felt.

MD: No influence at all?

Ginger: No, no, no. I was listening to African stuff in 1960. I didn't get to Africa

until 1970. I was hanging out with [Ghanaian percussionist] Guy Warren in the 1960s. There's lots of Africans in England. I just always wanted to go to Africa, and I had a very good time there. So I wasn't going there for a specific musical goal.

MD: On "Twelve and More Blues," you play swinging, fun, melodic phrases, answering the rest of the band. It's like a nod to Max Roach.

Ginger: That's Pee Wee's song. I think it's very humorous. But I always played like that.

MD: Several of your own compositions are featured. How do you write?

Ginger: I use the keyboard.

MD: That's interesting, since you don't use a chordal instrument once you perform those tunes. It must make for a special approach.

Ginger: Oh, does it? [laughs] You analysts drive me up a wall—trying to analyze things. It doesn't really happen like that at

all. Ornette Coleman didn't have a piano player. He just had Billy Higgins and Charlie Haden. So it's nothing new.

MD: Any future projects possible beyond your current band?

Ginger: I don't know. I'm getting old. I don't know how long I'm going to be playing, to be honest. We don't do a great long set now, because I can't handle it.

MD: The drumset is a very physical instrument. It takes a toll.

Ginger: Yeah, it is for an old bloke like me. I hate traveling; it's a nightmare for me. It's my arthritis, that's the problem. My whole spine is f***ed, and all my joints—it's a very painful situation.

MD: Ho do you manage the pain when you're playing?

Ginger: I feel it before and after. I don't notice it when I'm playing.

MD: How old are you?

Ginger: Too f***in' old, seventy-four. [Baker turned seventy-five this past August 19.]

MD: Your drumming still sounds young.

Ginger: Yeah, it's a miracle I can still play. But it seems I can.

Arctic Monkeys' Matt Helders

It's been said that it's lonely at the top, and for Arctic Monkeys' Matt Helders, isolation has certainly affected his drumming. The group's 2006 debut, *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not*, was the fastest-selling album in British music history, sending the band on numerous global tours. The cocoon of touring life impacts the best of players, but far from phoning it in for the band's latest, *AM*, Helders made drumming his sole focus.

"I did have a lot of irons in the fire," quips Helders, who also has his own Supremebeing clothing line. "But with the new record I put all that on the backburner. When you're on tour, you don't live anywhere. This was the first time since we recorded our first record that the band members all lived in the same city, and that's all we focused on. We ignored the outside world. And we're better at being in the studio now."

In addition to his Premier Series Elite drums, Helders recorded *AM* using a 1961 Ludwig black pearl kit, a massive Gretsch bass drum, and a '60s-era Rogers Dynasonic snare. The twenty-eight-year-old musician says that maturity has been key to his continued growth as a player. "My style has become simpler as I've gotten better. I can play the complicated things that I wanted to do in the first place, but playing simpler actually works better for the songs. It's not important to do a stupid fill every four bars. It's about being more musical. I've always found that, as with John Bonham, leaving a gap is often more exciting than playing a mad fill. It requires



restraint, but leaving that pregnant pause is cool. The way we write has always been collaborative, so everyone gets their moment on the record to show off just enough to be tasteful."

From the robo-mechanical grooves of "Do I Wanna Know?" to the funky live slapping of "R U Mine?" to the tub thumping of "Fireside,"

Helders' drumming on *AM* is an immersive, full-body experience. "It's mostly live drumming on the album," Matt explains, "but we did want it to sound like loops at times. A lot of the beats are quite repetitive, but they're all played. I was too stubborn to actually loop my own beats. I played them all with a click, which I used to hate but now I like. For the beats that sound like loops, I almost daydream and lock it in. The band has to tell me to stop, or I get carried away." **Ken Micallef**

"Leaving a gap is often more exciting than playing a mad fill. That pregnant pause is cool."



Tom Schwartz

Toto/Steely Dan's Keith Carlock

When drum legend Simon Phillips announced recently that he was ending his twenty-plus-year run with Toto, guitarist Steve Lukather immediately called Steely Dan drummer Keith Carlock. "They had some dates coming up, and they needed to do something quickly," Carlock says. "Steve asked if I was available to work with them. I was excited and honored to do it."

Carlock learned the show and headed to Japan for a series of concerts before returning to the States to record eleven new songs at Capitol Studios in Hollywood for Toto's upcoming release. "I wasn't involved in the writing process," Keith explains. "They brought in tunes that were basically finished, and wanted me to replace the loops or machine parts."

"The new music definitely reminds me of the older stuff with Jeff Porcaro," Carlock continues, referring to the group's late, much-heralded original drummer. "It's a typical Toto blend of groovy R&B, rock, and ballads. I channeled Jeff pretty hard on some of the tunes." Among Porcaro's skills was a magical approach to shuffles, one of a number of grooves Carlock's new bosses let him go to town on. "They really let me play," Keith says. "I didn't feel like I was handcuffed in any way. It was a lot of fun, and I'm looking forward to touring with the band next year."

"Toto's new music definitely reminds me of the older stuff. I channeled Jeff Porcaro pretty hard on some of the tunes."

And what about Carlock's longstanding gig with Steely Dan? "I hope to continue with Steely Dan as well," he says. "My intention is to juggle them both and make it work. I've been doing this type of thing for a long time. What's cool is that both bands are friends and fans of one another, and they both have a history with Jeff Porcaro. It's a very cool situation, and it seems that I've been

walking in Jeff's footsteps for some time now."

Carlock also recently recorded new music with Christopher Cross, who took the music industry by

storm in 1979 with his multi-Grammy-winning, self-titled debut album ("Sailing," "Ride Like the Wind"). "I've always loved his voice and his songwriting," Carlock says. "It's interesting that so many of the artists that I work with come from the lineage of the great pop artists of the late '70s and early '80s, where players were top notch and the sounds and the studios were amazing. To me, it's the best era of pop music that ever was."

Fans of Carlock's more acrobatic musical feats will be happy to know that the drummer still finds time to tour and record with three of the best fusion guitarists in the business, Wayne Krantz, Oz Noy, and Mike Stern. "I like to keep these instrumental gigs going," Carlock says. "I really need that creative, improvisational side of music in my life." **Mike Haid**

Robin DiMaggio

"There are 120 heads of state at the UN General Assembly Gala, and you have to pay homage. It's a position I protect and value."

With a résumé that includes albums and/or tours with Paul Simon, David Bowie, Diana Ross, Steve Vai, Ravi Shankar, Johnny Cash, and Dr. Dre, production credits on Don Felder and Stephen Bishop recordings, an ongoing position as musical director for the United Nations, and numerous sessions on which he's created loops for major hip-hop releases, Robin DiMaggio is unusually well suited to the demands of



playing in the house band of TV series like *Lopez Tonight* and *The Arsenio Hall Show*. DiMaggio (born in Paris, based in Los Angeles, and, sure enough, related to Yankees legend Joe DiMaggio) has serious kit chops but, perhaps more important, can react to every kind of musical demand in a flash.

"A drummer in this position has to be able to fire off a fill and bring in the band in like a split second," Robin says. "There will be a countdown from ten, and I'll have between two and one to bring the band in. Sometimes they'll stop at two and say 'Holding!' because there's some delay. The adrenaline is pushing. It's stressful. Also, Arsenio or George might say, 'Hey, Robin, give me the beat from that song....' It could be a Ray Charles or Mel Tormé song, some mariachi stuff, old-school Ohio Players—anything. It keeps me on my toes, and it's experience you can't buy."

The skills DiMaggio has honed on TV also serve him well on his United Nations gig. "I've done the UN General Assembly Gala in New York City for the past few years," he says, "and we get incredible talent from Bangladesh, the Caribbean, and the West Indies. The music is so global, and my band has to handle the different rhythms. There are 120 heads of state there, and you have to pay homage. It's a position I protect and value, and it's a learning situation. When you're [playing walk-on music for] President Obama, it's an honor."

DiMaggio is now helping to create the United Nations School of Art, Culture, and Music in Los Angeles and preparing his role for yet another major TV show

currently in development, for which he'll once again act as drumming musical director. "It's great to be a phenomenal drummer, but nowadays you have to be much more than that," DiMaggio says.

"Think outside the box, and open doors nobody else has thought about opening."
Ilya Stemkovsky



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GREGG BISSONETTE

STORY BY MIGUEL MONROY • PHOTOS BY ROB SHANAHAN

Sure, he can floor you with chops. And his lightning-fast ability to understand and play exactly what the song needs is legendary. But it's his heart and soul that always seal the deal.

It's no secret that the music industry has changed immensely over the past several years. The reality that full-time musicians face now is tighter budgets, less work, and a market saturated with players. Despite this, there is still a select group of people who have persevered through the changes and remain the most sought-after players around. Among this group of seasoned veterans is Gregg Bissonette.

You've been hearing Bissonette's work for years, whether you know it or not. TV shows like *Friends*, *Mad About You*, and *King of the Hill*, and feature films including *The Muppets*, *Superbad*, *The Devil Wears Prada*, and *The Bucket List*—Gregg's musical fingerprint is there. The depth of his catalog and experience, combined with his passion for educating drummers all over the world, makes him an invaluable resource for the drumming community. In fact, Bissonette is as skilled at sharing his knowledge and wisdom as he is at playing drums, a fact born out by his regular appearances on the international clinic stage and on DrumChannel.com.

Bissonette got his start as a pro in the early '80s with trumpeter Maynard Ferguson's band—though he might argue that his introduction to the drumming world really came when he was in fifth grade, subbing in his

father's jazz group. After establishing his rock credentials in the mid-'80s with former Van Halen frontman David Lee Roth, with whom he recorded and toured for years, Bissonette became an L.A. ringer, playing with greats like Steve Vai, Joe Satriani, David Garfield, Andy Summers, and Steve Lukather. He can even be heard on Robert Downey Jr.'s 2004 solo album, *The Futurist*.

In 2000, Bissonette hit a career high when he won a Best Pop Instrumental Grammy for his work on Santana's *Supernatural* album. Since then he's remained consistently busy, including more than six years of touring with Ringo Starr's All-Starr Band. And late last year he released his third solo album, *Warning Will Robinson!* Besides serving as a powerful document of Bissonette's multifaceted musical vision, it's a practical extension of his passion for education, employing a play-along disc featuring a mix with the drums removed.

When *Modern Drummer* asked Ringo what it's like to have Bissonette in his band, the former Beatle replied, "As I say on stage at every show when I introduce him: 'Gregg Bissonette, holding us all together.'" It's a theme that, one way or another, has accompanied Bissonette throughout his career.



Los Angeles

MD: You've thrived as a touring and recording drummer for more than thirty years. What do you attribute your longevity to, and what advice would you give an aspiring drummer in terms of what it takes to succeed in this industry?

Gregg: It's a whole different time from when I first started playing. When I was at the University of North Texas, I played gigs that were five or six nights a week. There aren't too many gigs like that anymore. That's how I learned to transcribe. When I do clinics or camps for college-age drummers today, if they can play any drum lick I show them, I say, "Here's a Sharpie. You get two or three times to listen to a track, and you have to know exactly what the drum loop is playing. You have to know where the fills are and whether you're playing a hi-hat that's slightly open, crashing on a ride, or riding on a crash. You have to be able to exactly replace the fake drums with your real ones."

That's what I learned to do by playing five or six nights a week in Texas. I was playing in R&B, country, and rock bands in Dallas, and I put myself through school by playing at night. But for me to give advice for people to do the same thing now is not realistic. New drummers don't have as many opportunities to play five or six nights a week to cut their teeth.

MD: What challenges do you face today?

Gregg: One of the big challenges for me right now is super-fast speed-metal double bass. I've done a few sessions where they show me the chart and tempo, and it's like this [mimics the sound of blistering double bass]. I'll have no idea if I can even play it. So first I pray, and then I remember that I have my pals Thomas Lang and Virgil Donati on speed dial. [laughs] I don't have their feet, but I'm working on it.

If you're willing to work on your weaknesses, then you can be in a constant state of growth as a drummer. Try to embrace and appreciate all styles of music. A lot of people say that they just want to play one genre of music for a living, but all you're doing is limiting yourself. It's already really hard to make a living as a drummer in 2014, and the last thing you need to do is *decrease* your opportunities to work.

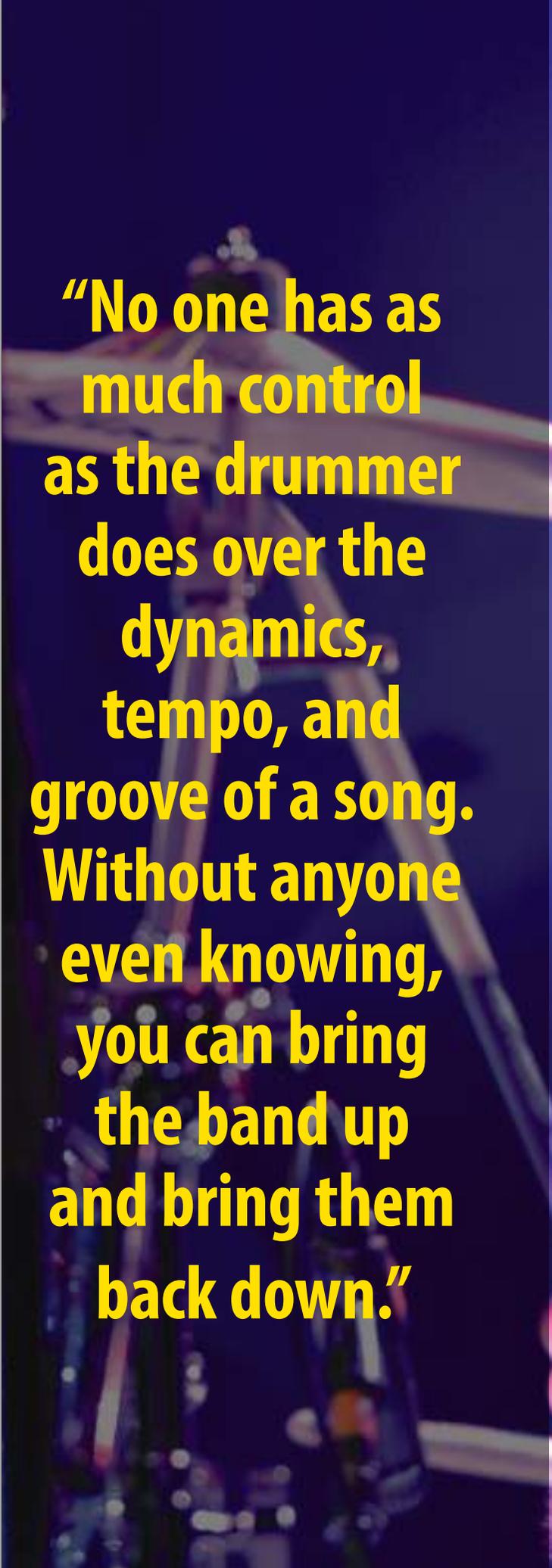
It's also really important to remember that this is a people business. If you're somebody that has an ego or that brings everyone down around you, nobody is going to want you in their band. You can be the most incredible drummer on the planet, but if you can't sit on the tour bus for hours on end with a bunch of other people and lift them up, you're not going to get the gig. Abe Laboriel Jr. is one of the best examples of this in the industry. Not only can he play and groove like a monster—he lifts people up and makes them feel good about themselves.

MD: What was your musical upbringing?

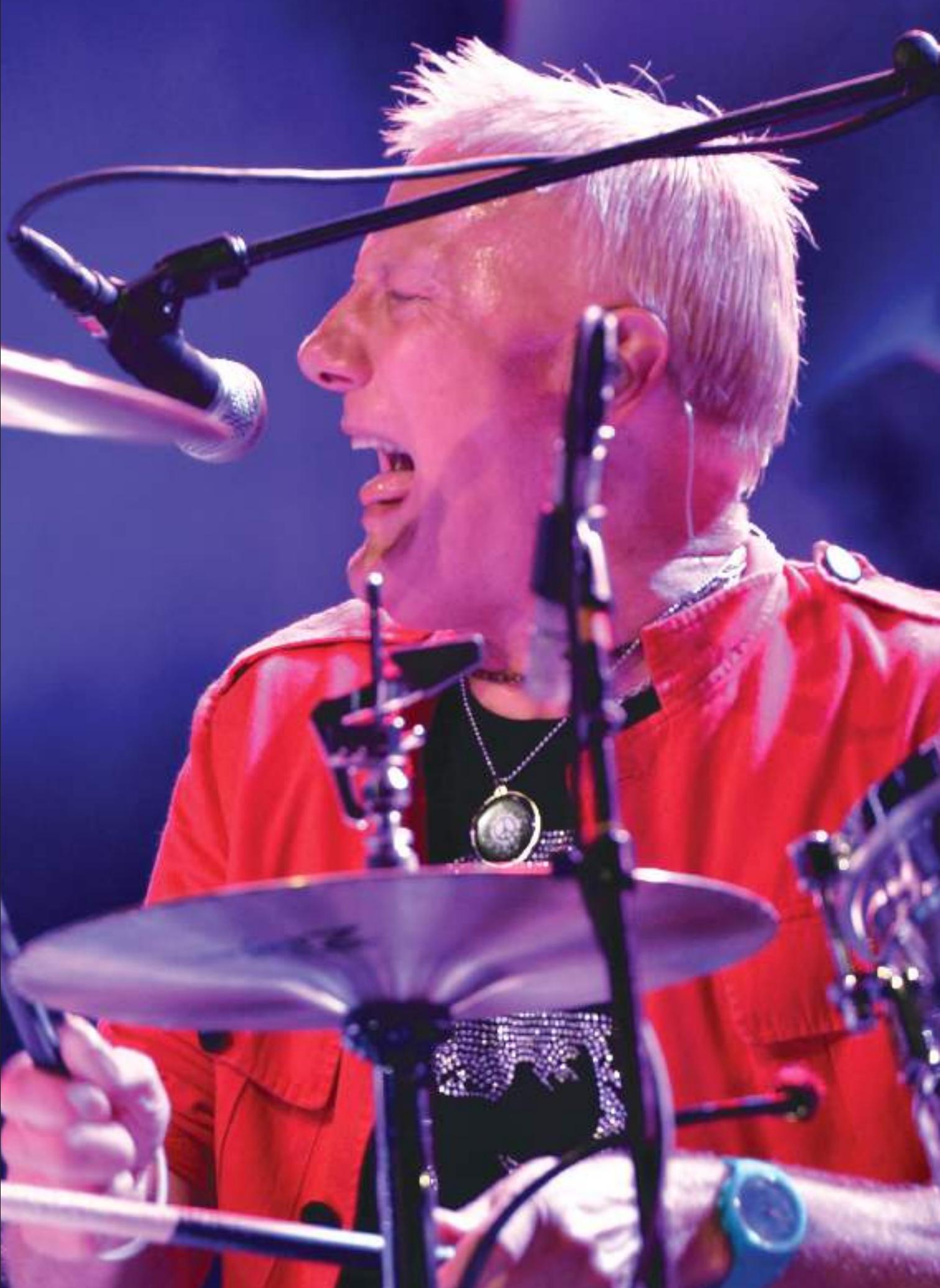
Gregg: I grew up in a super-musical family in Detroit. My dad was a drummer. My mother was a vibes player in his band. My brother, Matt, who now plays with Elton John, is a bass player. And my sister, Kathy, plays violin.

I started playing in my dad's band at a very young age. He thought that the Buddy Bissonette Band was too long of a name, so he called it the Buddy Blair Band. I would sit in with his band from about the fifth grade on. My brother would play too, and it was just a really great experience growing up. Eventually my brother and I started a band called Grand Circus Park. We played Chicago tunes mostly, but we also played music by the Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and Aerosmith and R&B dance songs.

After I graduated high school I made one of the biggest decisions of my life, to leave Detroit. I remember being eighteen years old and driving my red Starsky and Hutch 1972 Grand Torino with a white stripe and chrome mags all the way to the University



"No one has as much control as the drummer does over the dynamics, tempo, and groove of a song. Without anyone even knowing, you can bring the band up and bring them back down."

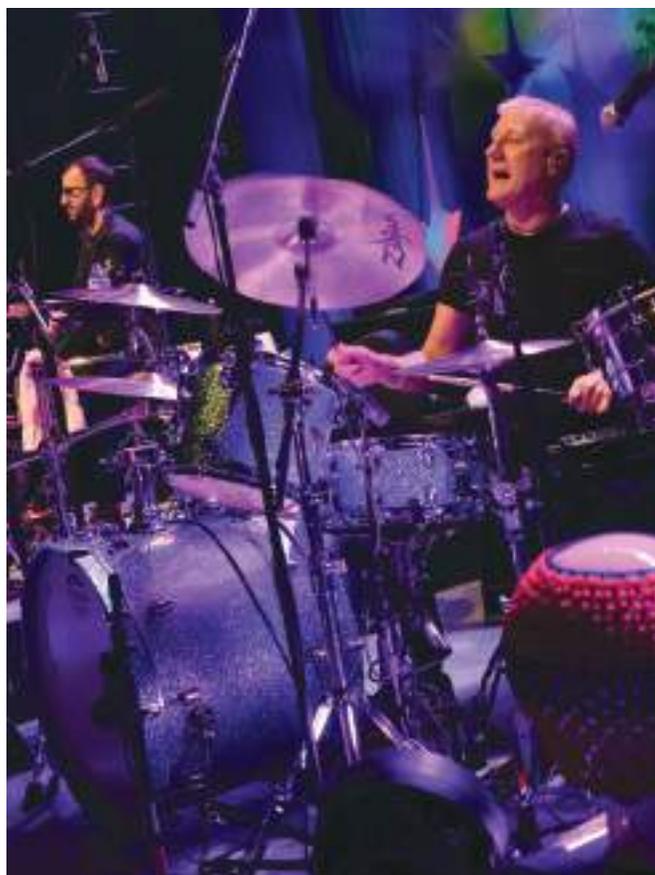


of North Texas; it was called North Texas State back then. There were well over a hundred drumset players there, and you just learned so much from the teachers and all the other students. Sitting in practice rooms and sharing ideas with tons of other drummers was just incredible. Also, playing in the One O'Clock Lab Band at North Texas really helped prepare me for my career after school. I played in the Buster Brown Band in Dallas, and we did originals and tunes by Stevie Wonder and Earth, Wind and Fire, and all kinds of soul music.

MD: What led you to move to L.A.?

Gregg: One time we did a gig with a band that Alex Acuña was in, and I was telling him that I felt kind of stuck with my playing and that I really wanted to grow more musically. Alex told me, "If you really want to grow musically, move out to L.A., and three nights a week go hear my favorite drummer, Vinnie Colaiuta, play at the Flying Jib." So I quit my band, moved out to L.A., and fell in love with Vinnie's playing and so many other drummers in the area, like Jeff Porcaro and Carlos Vega. Right after I moved to L.A. my brother was playing bass for the Maynard Ferguson band, and he got me the job playing drums. It was my first touring band. We went all over the world and did a cool live album called *Live From San Francisco*.

After I played with the Maynard Ferguson band, David Lee Roth left Van Halen and started his own group, and by the grace of God I got that gig. In the beginning it was Steve Vai on guitar and Billy Sheehan on bass. Billy eventually left, and my brother came on board to play bass. I ended up recording and touring for seven years with Dave, and it was just a blast. After that my brother and I went on to play with Joe Satriani for a while, and I also got to fill in



Gregg's Ringo Tour Setup

Drums: Dixon Artisan Ultra Maple in sea foam green lacquer sparkle, featuring 4-ply, 4 mm North American maple shells and 2.3 mm triple-flange hoops

- A. 6.5x14 snare
- B. 10x12 tom
- C. 16x16 floor tom
- D. 18x24 bass drum

Cymbals: Zildjian

- 1. 14" A Mastersound hi-hats
- 2. 18" K Medium Dark crash
- 3. 21" A Sweet ride
- 4. 18" A Medium crash

Hardware: Dixon K series stands and throne, DW Gregg Bissonette signature Tambourine Pedal and 5002 series double pedal

Sticks: Vic Firth Gregg Bissonette signature Backbeat model

Heads: Remo, including Coated Ambassador snare batter with white coated dot, Coated Emperor tom batters and Clear Ambassador bottoms, and Coated Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter

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Bonus Bissonette!

To thank all of his supporters over the years, Gregg is making available to *Modern Drummer* readers a free, exclusive play-along track and transcription from his album *Warning Will Robinson!* Visit moderndrummer.com for more information.



FAVORITES

The Beatles Help (Ringo Starr) /// **Buddy Rich Big Band** Big Swing Face (Buddy Rich) /// **Chicago V** (Danny Seraphine) /// **Billy Cobham** Spectrum (Billy Cobham) /// **Miles Davis** Four & More (Tony Williams) /// **Chick Corea** Friends (Steve Gadd) /// **The Police** Zenyatta Mondatta (Stewart Copeland) /// **Gino Vannelli** Brother to Brother (Mark Craney)

for Simon Phillips and go on tour with Toto. A fun career moment for me after that was the time that I got booked to play an Andrea Bocelli concert in Tuscany one night and then play with Spinal Tap in front of 80,000 people the next day at Live Earth.

One of the coolest sessions I've ever done was getting to play a song with Santana on *Supernatural*. The album went fifteen times platinum in the U.S. and won nine Grammy awards, including Best Pop Instrumental for the track I played on, "El Farol." Vinnie Colaiuta was originally asked to play, but he wasn't available, and I was honored that he recommended me for the gig. Every time I see Vinnie I thank him for recommending me for that fun two-day session. [laughs]

MD: When did you begin working with Ringo?

Gregg: I got the call to work with his band Ringo and the Roundheads in 2003. We promoted his album on late-night television and on talk shows, and we ended up filming a live DVD as well. Then in 2008 I got the call from Ringo to be in his All-Starr Band. Since then I've had the most amazing gig I've ever had, playing double drums beside my favorite drummer in the world.

MD: What's one of the most memorable experiences you've had with Ringo?

Gregg: One of my favorite Ringo moments was when Paul McCartney came out to our show at Radio City Music Hall and we surprised Ringo for his seventieth birthday by having Paul come on stage and play "Birthday" by the Beatles. I was crying tears of joy while we were playing, and thanking God for that moment. Paul came and rehearsed with us during a secret soundcheck that day, and Ringo had no idea that it was going to happen. For me to look over and be double drumming with Ringo five feet to my right and Paul up front—the two remaining



Beatles—was an unreal experience.

MD: You recently began endorsing Dixon drums and hardware. Why the change?

Gregg: Well, I'm a huge fan of great-sounding maple drums, and I discovered that Dixon makes just that, great-sounding maple drums. Also, Dixon is a company that supports my dream to educate drummers all over the world. I've got several Dixon kits from the Artisan series here in L.A. and on tour with Ringo. I've got an Ultra Maple kit that I keep at a local studio, then I have a Maple/Bubinga kit at the DrumChannel.com facilities that I use for my online drum school. And last but not least, I have a prototype kit that I use on tour with Ringo. I'm also heading over to the factory soon to work with the Dixon team to develop my own signature drums.

I've always had a love for drum gear. With Dixon I have the rare

RECORDINGS

Gregg Bissonette Warning Will Robinson!, Submarine, Gregg Bissonette /// **Maynard Ferguson** Live From San Francisco /// **David Lee Roth** Eat 'Em and Smile /// **Andy Summers** The Last Dance of Mr. X /// **Electric Light Orchestra** Zoom Tour Live (DVD) /// **Ringo Starr** Live at Soundstage

Gregg Bissonette

opportunity to be fully engaged not just as an artist but also as a member of the development team. I really believe in what they're doing, and I'm excited to represent Dixon's full line of drums and hardware.

MD: We recently went back and watched some footage from your performance with the Buddy Rich Big Band. Your drum solo on "Time Check" had elements of jazz, fusion, rock, and metal. What influenced you over the years to become such an eclectic player?

Gregg: It all started when I was about twelve years old. I was practicing drums in my basement, and my uncle Larry was over. He came downstairs and listened to me play what was probably a fifteen-minute solo. Now, he wasn't a musician at all. He was an electrician in the air force and also worked on computers. I thought he was going to compliment me and say I was so great for a twelve-year-old, but instead his comment afterwards was something that I have thought about every time I've sat

down to play a solo since then. He clapped and then said, "That was great, and I really liked it. But you know what would be really interesting for me?" "What, Uncle Larry?" "Well, it would be really interesting for me if you changed it up and played different kinds of beats. Or if you just took it to different places. You know, there are lots of different kinds of music. What if you just switched gears from one to the other sometimes?"

I thought that was a great suggestion, and from that day on I got really big into learning different styles and studying guys like Buddy Rich, Danny Seraphine from Chicago, Ringo, Bobby Colomby from Blood, Sweat, and Tears.... I also studied guys like Bill Bruford from Yes, especially albums like *Fragile*. And when Billy Cobham hit the scene, my mouth was on the floor.

Then another heavy hitter came on the scene in the mid-'70s and turned everything upside down for all of us. He sounded kind of like my heroes David Garibaldi and Billy Cobham, but also kind of like another hero, Tony Williams. He could play funky, and he totally rewrote the book on soloing. It was Steve Gadd. He was one of those guys that changed the way people played drums. There have been several people who really changed the way people play—John Bonham, Ringo, Tony Williams, Terry Bozzio, Stewart Copeland, Elvin Jones, Billy Cobham, Vinnie Colaiuta....

MD: You studied for a while with Tony Williams, correct?

Gregg: I got to study with him for a year before he passed away. I saw a dinky little ad in the back of *Bay Area Music* magazine that said, "Tony Williams, now accepting a limited number of students." I immediately called and left a message, and the next day I came home and had a message on my answering machine that said, "Hey, Gregg, this is Tony Williams. I'm all filled up with my quota for students, but my wife said you were a good guy because she knows a friend of yours, Mark Craney. He told her what a good guy you were, so I thought I'd make a spot for you." Mark Craney was a great friend; we used to play in the Woodland Hills Drum Club together, along with our amazing pals Myron Grombacher, Doane Perry, Steve Smith, and many others.

So every two weeks I would fly from L.A. to San Francisco and study with Tony. One time I'd been working on an album for Joe Satriani in that area, so I had a few drumkits close by. I kept bugging him and saying, "Man, can we play double drums

The advertisement features a central photograph of Gregg Bissonette, a man with a goatee and sunglasses, wearing a black beanie and a dark jacket. He is holding a large, black, oval-shaped drum case with the Ahead Armor Cases logo on it. The background is a dark, textured wall with red and white horizontal stripes. In the top left corner, there is a large Ahead Armor Cases logo. To the right of the logo, the text reads "THE NEXT LEVEL IN PROTECTION". Below this, it says "AHEAD ARMOR PROUDLY WELCOMES" followed by a signature and "TONY ROYSTER JR.". At the bottom of the advertisement, the website "A-HEADARMORCASES.COM" is listed, along with the text "DISTRIBUTED BY BIG BANG DISTRIBUTION | 818.727.1127".

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sometime?" He finally gave in and said, "Go get your kit." So he went inside and smoked a cigar while I set up my drums. Then we played together for over an hour, and afterwards he said, "Man, that was fun. I haven't played double drums since the '60s, when I played with Max Roach." I almost fell on the floor! Getting to sit with him and ask him questions, it was just so cool.

MD: In a broad sense, how have all these great players influenced you?

Gregg: To me, one word that sums it all up is *vocabulary*. If you're talking about grooving, fills, or soloing, it's all about having a vocabulary.

MD: Can you elaborate on that?

Gregg: If you only have ten words in your vocabulary and you're trying to give a speech, it's going to be pretty hard. But we as drummers have thousands of "words" at our disposal. We have thousands of grooves, fills, styles, and ideas that we can add to our drumming vocabulary.

I remember one of the first times I gave a clinic. It was at PASIC in 1986. A bunch of drummers came pouring into the room, and I was freaking out, thinking, *What am I going to play?* So I got a piece of paper and wrote down a bunch of different styles of music that I knew how to play. Then as soon as I started running out of ideas during my solo I would look over at my sheet of paper and think, *Oh, samba!* And then I'd transition into a samba groove. Then I'd look over again and see "reggae" or "fast bebop," or any number of grooves that I knew. It was a really big help.

MD: Today when you're in the studio playing with an artist for the first time, what kinds of cues are you looking for to help you craft your drum parts?

Gregg: Well, you have to remember that sometimes new artists have been saving up for a year just to have enough money to hire musicians for their project. That's a lot of work, and that's a lot of money. By the time they see me they've probably already got what I call "plastic drums," which is an

artificial drum track. That's there to show you what the artist was thinking when they wrote the song. A lot of drummers don't realize that a songwriter's demo is really special to them. They've lived with it, and there is such a thing as demo love. Even though they want to replace the plastic drums with you, they're still used to what they've had.

Now, I say all that to emphasize that the first thing I do is take a black Sharpie and transcribe what the plastic drums are doing in the demo. Then I'll go and play that, with a human feel, for my first take. Afterwards I'll sit with the artist and listen through that first take. Naturally they'll begin to say things like, "Feel free to add a little something here" or any number of suggestions, like going to the bell of the cymbal on a certain part, putting my own fills in on certain parts, etc.

So with a different-color Sharpie I'll add notes to my transcription from that conversation with the

artist, and that will be my second take. Then for my third take I always go in and do a "wild take." What I mean by that is not going wild behind the drums, but simply playing more off-the-cuff fills and grooves. You may even change the feel of the song entirely. The point of all three takes is that it gives the artist and the producer three takes to chop up and use what they want. It's also important to remember to respect the song and respect the artist. It's really an honor every time someone asks you to play on their project.

MD: Do you react or respond to some instruments more than others?

Gregg: Yes! Bass guitar, without a doubt. My foot and the bass player's fingers are my top priority, always. And it doesn't hurt that I grew up with my favorite bass player—my brother, Matt. After that it really depends on the style of music. For rock, funk, and any kind of heavy music, I listen in to the electric guitar a lot too. And for Latin and jazz stuff I'm listening in to the piano.

Ever since I started playing with Ringo, though, I've been listening in to the lyrics

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Gregg Bissonette

and vocals more, and now I always ask for a lyric sheet. I used to turn vocalists down a lot in my headphone mix. Sometimes they'd be on top of the beat or behind the beat, and I just thought it would be better to have the click, bass, guitar, and piano in my mix instead. But now more than ever I'm listening to the phrasing of the vocalists.

Ringo taught me something. He said, "When John, Paul, or George was singing a part, I never wanted to get in the way of the vocals. Their vocals and the melody are what the song is about, and if you're playing over that, you're doing the song a disservice."

MD: What else have you learned from Ringo over the years?

Gregg: Ringo has taught me so much about drumming. He taught me that fills should help the band transition from one section to another. You can communicate so much with your fills. No one has as much control as the drummer does over the dynamics, tempo, and groove of a song. Without anyone even knowing, you can bring the band up and bring them back down. That's why lyric sheets are crucial when you're playing, so you know what to play and when to play it.

MD: In addition to touring and recording, you've been an active educator for years. What kinds of projects are you currently involved with?

Gregg: I've got a couple big things going on right now. The first is my drum school on DrumChannel.com. It's all about playing musically, building vocabulary, and playing all styles of music. We work on beats, fills, soloing, and grooving in every style, from blues to funk to big band to rock to jazz.... I'm also doing clinics all over the world. Dixon and a lot of my cosponsors, like Zildjian, Remo, Vic Firth, DW pedals, Latin Percussion, and Gator Cases, sponsor me to go all over the world to do clinics. I'm actually getting ready to start an Asian clinic tour in a couple weeks, and then I have a U.S. clinic tour planned for later in the year.

In my clinics, one of the main themes that I try to communicate is that if you want to make a living playing drums, you need to be stylistically diverse, and you need to have the biggest vocabulary possible. Another theme I try to get across is the personal side of the business.

To me, all clinics should have a few important elements. The first is great playing demonstrations, so that people can hear how drums and song drumming

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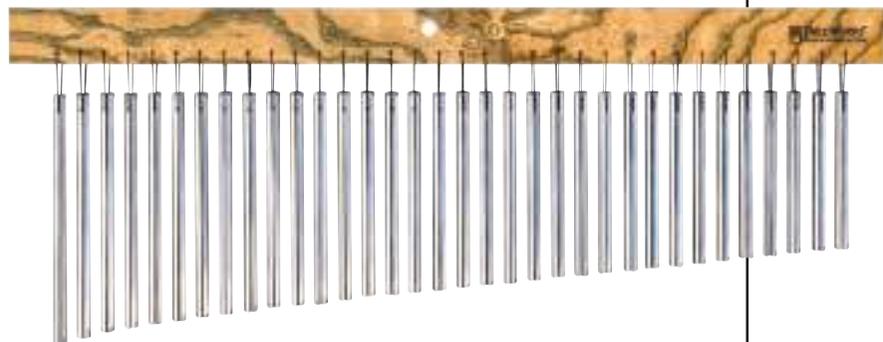




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Gregg Bissonette

should sound. The second thing is talking, both in terms of the clinician educating people about what they do and the audience being allowed to ask anything they want. The last thing is that clinics are a time when I can explain why I play the gear that I play. It's a chance to show people that these are really great products and to give them an in-depth look at why I chose them.

MD: Another side of your career is doing voiceovers. It's been said that when we hear the voice of Winnie the Pooh in films today, we're in fact listening to Gregg Bissonette. Is there any truth to this?

Gregg: Yeah, man! It started back in the early 2000s. I was playing a version of "Somewhere Beyond the Sea" with my brother for a remake of *Finding Nemo* for some other countries. The chart we had really wasn't working, so I yelled to my brother in the bass booth, loud enough that the room mics picked me up, "Hey, Matt, that letter B doesn't have a DS sign, and where's the coda? I don't see a coda!" All of a sudden from the talk-back mic I hear, "Gregg, come to the control room, please."

I remember thinking, *Why do they want me in the control room—are they going to bust my chops for not finding the DS sign? I'll bring my chart!* When I walked in, though, Rick Dempsey, the senior vice president of character voices for Disney, introduced himself and said, "I overheard you from the control room, and you've got that rasp in your voice that's kind of rare. It reminds me of Sterling Holloway, who did the original voice of Winnie the Pooh." He continued to tell me how Jim Cummings, who's also a drummer, had been doing the voice for Winnie the Pooh ever since Sterling passed away, but that they needed a sub for when Jim wasn't available. I learned that the voiceover AFTRA scale was actually about seven times more than the AFM musicians union scale. Count me in!

MD: So how did you approach it?

Gregg: I worked really hard to get as close as I could to the original voice of Winnie the Pooh. It was a lot like transcribing drums. I would watch DVDs and write out the words, and then I'd write out accents and dynamics by each word to help me get the phrasing just right. I worked for months and months on it. My kids helped me a lot. I remember finally going in and doing a reading, and Rick brought a lot of people from Disney in. They gave me a few things to work on and told me to come back. The next thing I knew I was subbing for Jim Cummings.

I would do a lot of [voiceovers for] toys,

laptops, and video games. Then eventually through that I started working with a voiceover agency called CESD Talent Agency. Through them I've had lots of cool guest experiences too. One time I got to do a voiceover with a group of people for *The Simpsons*. Another time I got to do a voiceover for *Mad TV* that was a spoof of *Finding Nemo* and the movie *Taken*, with Liam Neeson. It was called *Taking Nemo*, and I played the role of Nemo's dad, the clown fish.

MD: In the midst of looking for Nemo, you released your solo album *Warning Will Robinson!*

Gregg: That was my brother's idea. He said, "I'll be the label, fund the album, write all the songs, engineer it, produce it, play bass, and sing background vocals, and you can play drums and sing lead vocals." Then we got a couple of friends of ours from our old band the Mustard Seeds, Doug Bossi and George Bernhardt, on guitar, along with some other great musicians. We wanted a kind of tuned-down, heavy Beatles vibe with a mixture of Skrillex-type dubstep, and of course drum solos on every song. It's a double album; the first disc is the record, and the second has all the songs with the drums removed so that you can be the drummer.

MD: Looking back at your career, are there any consistent obstacles that you've faced?

Gregg: Well, first I'd like to say that the biggest blessing of my life is being a father to my two amazing children, Noah and Mary, sixteen and thirteen, who are both really good drummers. The joy I get from them can get me through any of life's obstacles.

I think the most difficult goals are trying to always groove, pick the right tempo for every song, and keep the tempo steady. It sounds easy, but it is not. I remember Jeff Porcaro telling me once that he was always working on his time—and he had the best time ever!

A lot of young drummers will sit in with more experienced players and throw in all their college chops and get nothing but dirty looks from the other players. Musical taste is so important.

Remember that anyone can work on their double paradiddles at warp speed. Get out of your practice room and play with other musicians. Play in a band. Make people dance! Without playing with other musicians, it's hard to really know what kind of musical challenges you will face.



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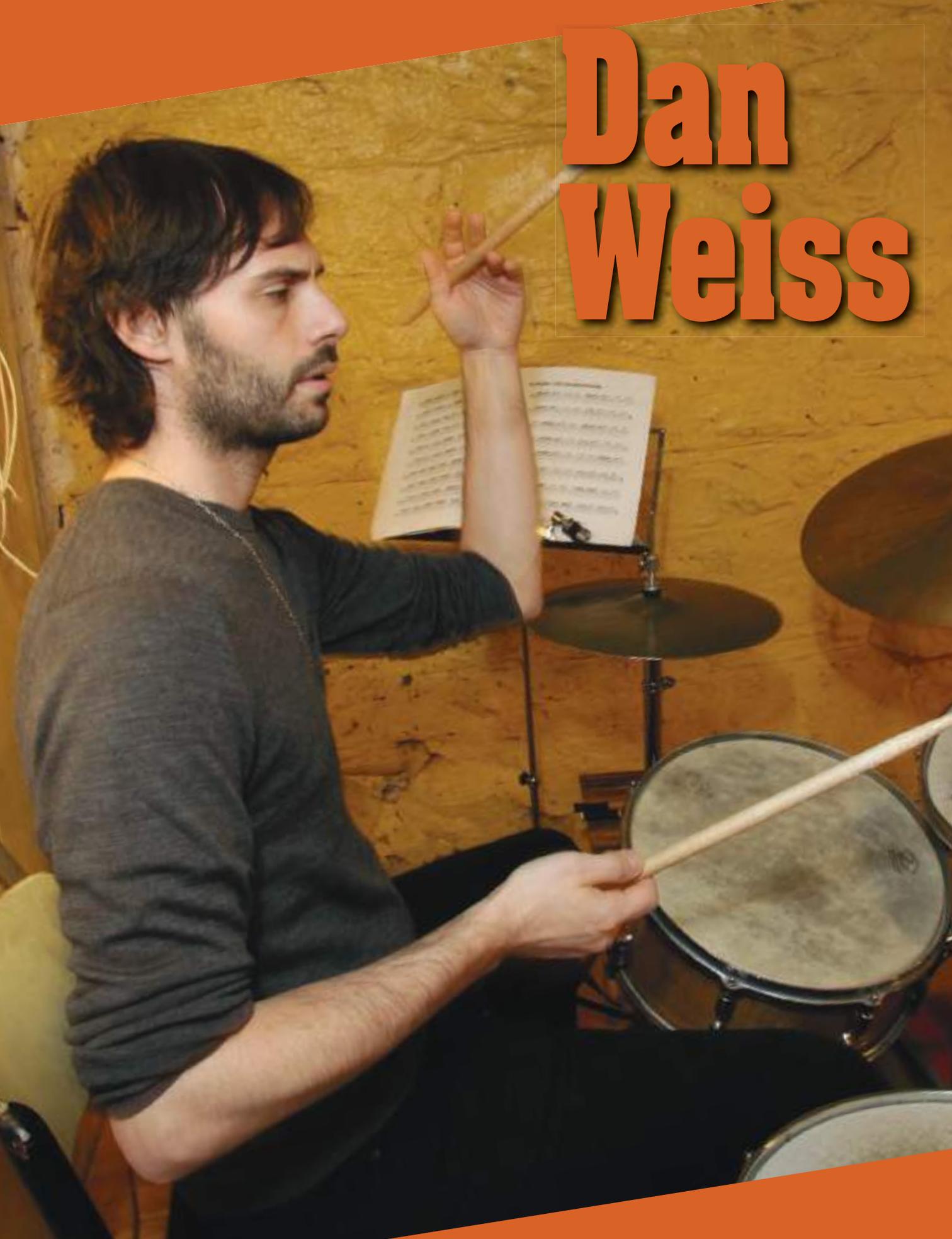
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Dan Weiss





Oh, he knows his jazz history, and his rock as well. But by immersing himself in concepts far afield of traditional Western drumset approaches, he's developed a pure musical voice, a highly sensitive ear, and a world of ideas to communicate.

It's typical to hear the influence of master musicians in the drummers we admire, whether it's Vinnie Colaiuta expressing Tony Williams, Bill Stewart suggesting Roy Haynes, or Chris Dave channeling J Dilla. But the converse is more unusual, when a drummer's style sounds free of influences, when his playing is pure, articulate, and singular.

New York-based kit and tabla drummer Dan Weiss, whose graceful, powerful, and direct drumming can be heard with a dizzying cast of jazz luminaries including Lee Konitz, Miles Okazaki, David Binney, Amir ElSaffar, Rudresh Mahanthappa, and Miguel Zenón, has mastered the style of *himself*. Of course, if you look at Weiss's list of influential albums, drum heroes from Max Roach and Tony Williams to Lars Ulrich and Tomas Haake figure prominently. But Weiss's studies of both Western and Eastern traditions have enabled him to create his own inimitable style.

One environment in which the source of Weiss's drumming is totally transparent is his exploration of tabla playing. On his albums *Jhaptal Drumset Solo* and *Tintal Drumset Solo*, Weiss transposes tabla patterns to the kit, accompanied by his own complex Indian vocal cadences (using the Konnakol sung-syllables system) and the guitar of Miles Okazaki. Clear, pinpoint, and expressive, Weiss's playing can storm with heavy-metal thunder or dance like an English military march. Exhibiting demanding independence skills, metric shrewdness, and a cerebral approach to note groupings, Weiss brings West and East together as a literal time traveler.

As a sideman Weiss has played straight-ahead jazz, New York-centric fusion, doom metal, and rock. His latest album, *Fourteen*, is a culmination of all of it. A largely through-composed recording featuring—you guessed it—fourteen musicians, the collection comprises a suite written in seven parts that is both a chamber music piece and a noisy avant-garde adventure. The music features more of Weiss's tabla patterns on the drumset, as well as three singers, piano, bass, guitar, saxophones, trombone, tuba, electric guitar, harp, glockenspiel, and organ.

Fourteen isn't easy listening, but it is rewarding. As instruments slide and shift, working into place as you hold on for the ride, Weiss plays drum solos that tilt and collide like a Ferris wheel motoring down a city street. The music recalls the cyclical scenarios of Steve Reich and the noisy rock of King Crimson, or, more pastorally, the layered tones of Canterbury innovators Hatfield and the North. The female vocalists sing long-voweled tones, the guitarist creates classical-like complexities, saxophones twirl and honk, and the drumming is broken up by Weiss's spoken/sung utterances.

For an encore, Weiss's next album transposes familiar drumming phrases from Max Roach, Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, Philly Joe Jones, and Kenny Clarke into a larger ensemble scenario. Hold on, Dan's coming.

MD: Your new album is very broad. What was the goal?

Dan: Like my album *Timshel*, it's basically a song cycle, one long piece. My other two Indian-based records are also about a broader concept. The instrumentation is larger than I've written for in the past; I wanted something on a grander scale. I wanted something super-intense juxtaposed with meditative qualities. The rest of the compositions took care of themselves.

MD: Your drumming is free of directly heard influences. It's also clean and at times delicate. You're a minimalist.

Dan: I don't really have a thing. It depends on the situation, on the circumstances, on the lighting, on the audience, on that day in the studio. Along with rock and metal influences, I'm a huge advocate of the jazz tradition. I love metal, free jazz, rock—it depends on the situation.

MD: Does tabla drumming affect all of your music?

Dan: It affects everything, and not just musically. Tabla influences sound production, clarity, how to accompany, how to deal with developing themes and rhythms, a certain respect, and a certain restraint. A lot of aspects that come from studying with my teacher have infiltrated my playing.

MD: The tabla also seems to influence your touch on the drumset. You've transferred that hand-on-skin sound and approach of tabla to the set.

Dan: There's definitely an awareness of sound and a certain sensitivity. I practice drums and tabla every day. It took me seven months just to get a passable sound on the tabla. It's very difficult.

Every stroke you play in the beginning requires a certain amount of effort. If you hit a drum with a stick, you can get a sound. The sound might not be pleasant, but you can get a sound. When you start playing tabla, if you drop your hand on it, nothing's going to happen. Every time you

Story by Ken Micallef

Photos by Paul La Raia

INFLUENCES

Miles Davis Nefertiti (Tony Williams), Milestones (Philly Joe Jones) // **John Coltrane** First Meditations (Elvin Jones) // **Keith Jarrett** Standards Vol. 2 (Jack DeJohnette) // **Sid Catlett** The Chronological Classics 1944–1946 (Sid Catlett) // **John Coltrane and Don Cherry** The Avant-Garde (Ed Blackwell) // **Led Zeppelin IV** (John Bonham) // **Rush** Exit...Stage Left (Neil Peart) // **Metallica** ...And Justice for All (Lars Ulrich) // **Meshuggah** Chaosphere (Tomas Haake) // **Yes** Close to the Edge (Bill Bruford) // **Nikhil Banerjee** Live in Amsterdam (Kanai Dutta, tabla) // **Samir Chatterjee** Teental Solo (Samir Chatterjee, tabla) // **Squarepusher** Feed Me Weird Things (programmed)

practice tabla, that's always there—trying to get a nice sound and trying to get a sound. That attention to sound and tonal quality has influenced my drumset playing.

MD: Your drumming sounds different from someone who has studied only the jazz tradition.

Dan: I also love hip-hop, punk, Motown, rock, Brazilian and Cuban and African music—it's all had a big effect on me. I try to expose myself to as much different music and as many drummers and drumming traditions and composers as I can. I did get hit hard with the jazz bug when I was

thirteen, and later I went to the Manhattan School of Music and devoted eight years to jazz. I majored in performance and minored in classical composition. I studied with John

Riley for four years and learned from everyone from Baby Dodds to all the present-day drummers.

MD: How has metal influenced your playing?

Dan: I like Steve MacDonald with Gorguts, Gene Hoglan, Tomas Haake with Meshuggah, Flo Mounier from Cryptopsy; I take their through-composed approach to drumming and songs. [I'll focus on] the way they orchestrate certain beat cycles. You can hear the composition in their drum parts. Also, the way they return to certain themes, and the way they embellish, is very orchestral. Tomas Haake is like John Bonham; his groove is in another league compared to most metal drummers. It has real weight.

MD: How else has Indian drumming influenced you?

Dan: I like to think in larger chunks of sound, as far as a way to wrap my head around and understand things. If someone brings in a tune, I'll try to learn the melodic shape rather than try to read it, or I'll learn the biggest pulse I can. That might come from the tabla tradition.

MD: How do you apply tintal or northern Indian drumming to trapset?

Dan: Tintal is one of the beat cycles in northern Indian drumming. It's basically equivalent to four measures of 4/4, a sixteen-beat cycle. It's different time cycles, like we have different time signatures. In terms of repertoire I would try to match the sound, the flow of the rhythm, and the essence of the composition. I would try to [play] something on the drums that sounds like the composition I'm playing on tabla. It would have to flow, so I would align the stickings or footwork to flow in a drumistic way. The resonant and non-resonant drums would have to match in some way to the tabla.

And the essence of the composition would have to stay true. So if I'm playing [sings pattern] on tabla, which might be a very demanding one-finger rhythm, I will try to maintain the integrity of the rhythm, maybe play it all with the right hand. That's how it relates to orchestrating the composition. I'll perhaps try to maintain the highs

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and lows of the tabla, so the lows might be the bass drum; the highs or dead sounds could be a hi-hat or a rimshot; and the resonant sounds could be a cymbal or a floor tom or mounted tom. If I'm playing a common tabla phrase on drumset, I'll play it the same way every time. That helps develop a language and also [enables me] to challenge myself in ways I normally wouldn't play.

Transferring the tabla to the drumset has helped me break habits; I have to make a conscious effort to play counterintuitively.

The drumset figures have to adhere to the same tempo. You have to find stickings that will allow you to play at those certain tempos.

MD: How has tabla technique affected your hand-to-hand drumset technique?

Dan: Especially with my brush playing, now I'm able to use more fingers. I really like gracefulness in drummers, guys like Jo Jones, Frankie Dunlop, Philly Joe Jones, and Max Roach. I love Keith Moon, who's not so graceful, but I've always been attracted to graceful drummers. Someone like Bernard

RECORDINGS

Dan Weiss Tintal Drumset Solo, Jhaptal Drumset Solo, Fourteen
 /// **Dan Weiss Trio** Timshel, Now Yes When /// **Miles Okazaki** Mirror, Figurations /// **David Binney** Cities and Desire /// **Rudresh Mahanthappa** Gamak
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MD: On David Binney's "Dignity," from *Barefooted Town*, you're locked in with the bassist, playing three-over-two phrasing and layering different meters. Was that written or improvised?

Dan: That's improvised. I grew up in Tenafly, New Jersey [just outside New York City], so coming up I was able to see all the guys—Jeff "Tain" Watts, "Smitty" Smith, Bill Stewart, Adam Nussbaum, Elvin, Max, Philly Joe, Joe Chambers. I made an effort to see everybody and pick their brains.

MD: Did that make it easier to break into the New York scene?

Dan: I think so. I was so lucky. I was always searching and trying to get as much information as I could. That was huge for me. Also, my high school had a good music program. I was taking harmony, sight singing, ear training, and counterpoint there. And all those schools have good libraries. I was getting CDs out all the time.

MD: Did you begin with rock or jazz?

Dan: Rock, when I was very young. *Led Zeppelin IV* was my first record. Then Cream, Jimi Hendrix, Steely Dan. Then progressive rock and metal.

MD: What was your first name jazz gig?

Dan: Joel Frahm. I played with Kenny Werner a bunch.

MD: When did your interest in Indian music begin?

Dan: I bought a Ravi Shankar album, and then I saw a video of him at the Newport Jazz Festival. Even before I started playing tabla, I was transcribing the rhythms and trying to understand them. I would just play what I thought the rhythms were on the drums.

MD: Was learning tabla similar to learning drumset for you?

Dan: The actual learning process is more intense. You have a guru; it's a very deep relationship. There's nothing close to that in the West. Basically, you put your life in his hands. He takes responsibility for you. It's that deep.

MD: Your life? Why not just your hands?

Dan: It's a really deep tradition. When your teacher accepts you as a disciple, he is taking responsibility for you. It's a spiritual relationship, and the music then takes on a spiritual approach. My guru is Samir Chatterjee, who moved from Calcutta to New Jersey in 1994. You can study the music without a guru, and technically it may not mean less, but this is how this music has been passed down and taught. It's a very sacred and spiritual thing, and it's definitely made music more of a spiritual journey for me.

MD: What is a way into that music for Western ears?

Dan: Try to listen to some different kinds of instruments and different vocalists to see what attracts you, be it male or female vocalists or sitar, flute, tabla. Try to learn a basic overview of the main ragas, and listen to recordings of two or three versions of each of those. One raga is a yaman, the bhairav is another, marwa is another—those are parent ragas. There are ten parent ragas in the northern style of music, and all of the ragas come from those ten parent ragas. They all have different feels. You might look for Amir Khan, Nikhil Banerjee, or Ali Akbar Khan.

MD: When working with Rudresh Mahanthappa, how do you play such complex music? You've said that you don't rely on understanding the meter beforehand.

Dan: I think of the phrases—the melodic phrase, the bass line. Sing the melody and the rhythm. Although I am a very good reader, I try to get away from the chart as soon as possible. I try to memorize everything I play; I don't like to read music. It could be a result of the oral tradition in tabla, where nothing is written. You write to document what you have, but the way you learn the music is the teacher sings you a phrase and you either play it or recite it.

MD: What is the first thing you learn when studying tabla?

Dan: One syllable at a time while alternating hands. Then it's like letters turn into phrases turn into sentences turn into paragraphs.

MD: When you record with Rudresh, is there sheet music or a rehearsal?

Dan: We've rehearsed and played some gigs, and then we'll go into the studio. By then I know the music. But playing with Lee Konitz is more challenging. You constantly need to adapt to what he's feeling. From second to second it's a different kind of energy, and you're trying to make it feel comfortable. A lot of the tempos I play with him are right behind or right above mid-tempo, and it can be very difficult if you're playing that same tempo to really get it to sing. That's challenging not because of the technique involved—that's a hard tempo! You're more restricted in that setting. When I play with Dave Binney or Rudresh, anything goes.

DIG DEEPER

Interested in learning more about how you can incorporate Indian rhythmic concepts into your own drumming? Look out for next month's issue of *Modern Drummer*, where we continue the discussion with Weiss and chat with Eric Harland, Sameer Gupta, Steve Smith, and Pete Lockett.



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Omar Tavarez

Story by Robin Tolleson • Photos by Mike Jachles

Miami is the quintessential melting-pot city, where no one blinks when a country-hip-hop ditty like Pitbull's "Timber" tops the charts.

But simplicity can be deceiving, and the drummer/musical director in charge of making the rapper's multicultural style sound perfectly natural calls on years of experience to make it happen.

As musical director for the Miami rapper Pitbull, Omar Tavarez understands the unique perspective that being behind the drumkit brings. "We're already thinking patterns in our heads, and we apply that to melodic music—and it's great," he says. "I think drummers understand form faster than most other instrumentalists, because we're the foundation."

Tavarez is also well aware of the value of versatility, and formative years in Miami were spent sharpening his multifaceted drumming skills to a point. Omar was born in New York City in 1983, and when he was three years old his parents, Frank and Lelia, moved the family to Florida. In middle school Tavarez played French horn and drums, and at eleven he began studying with University of Miami grad Jack Ciano, a no-nonsense teacher and veteran of Grammy-winning pop singer Jon Secada's band. "Jack's a great musician," Tavarez says, "and he's the one who basically explained to me, 'You want to survive in this city? You need to learn a lot of styles of music.'"

Studies with Jazz in America cofounder JB Dyas at Miami Dade Community College prepared Tavarez for the vaunted music program at the University of Miami, whose instructors included Bee Gees drummer Steve Rucker, famed symphonic percussionist Ney Rosauero, and award-winning Icelandic jazz drummer Einar Scheving. In 2008 Tavarez was recruited by Pitbull's manager to be the foundation of the style-melding rapper's first live band, and he's held that chair ever since. Omar has also developed a presence in the studio, recording with the rappers Lil Wayne and T-Pain. He's branched out into production and artist development as well, founding the Dirty Southaners team with fellow South Florida musician Aaron Fishbein. We begin our conversation with the drummer by tracing the path of his multidirectional career.





"If there's no music director on your gig, you need to take control and seize that opportunity."

MD: Did you grow up hearing a lot of music in your house?

Omar: Absolutely. I think that's the reason I became a musician. Mom and Dad grew up with great music. And because my parents are bilingual—they're Dominican-American—they were playing all styles of music. My dad was playing Miles records, Thelonious Monk. At the same time he was hip to what was going on in pop, which at the time was disco. And I grew up with my mom singing in the car—and not really singing the melody; she would sing the harmony. Her ear was trained. My parents don't play instruments, but they're really into folkloric music. My ears were fed so much music, which was really cool.

MD: Why do you think you initially gravitated toward drums?

Omar: When we moved to Miami, my next-door neighbor was an eighteen-year-old Colombian kid who had a drumset, and he would play along with recordings, like Metallica. He was a big metalhead. I'd hear him practicing. He gave me a snare drum as a birthday gift when I was four or five years old, and I was banging the heck out of that. Mom was like, "I don't know what's wrong—the kid just doesn't stop." So my parents figured, "Let's get him a drum instructor and maybe he'll just calm down and focus."

MD: When did you begin to think of drumming as a career?

Omar: It was two things, actually. It was my drum teacher getting pissed off at me when I walked into a lesson unprepared, sending

me home and saying, "Look, your dad spends money for you to be here. You don't want to waste your dad's money. That's not cool, so this lesson is done." I was like, "Man, this cat just reamed me out; I have to step it up." So I came back to the lesson a week later, had all the stuff prepared, and said, "Look, I really want to be serious about this." I was about thirteen.

Two years later I started gigging around town with my friends from school, and I was encouraging them to play jazz. And then my dad told me about a cool program called dual enrollment. Miami Dade Community College had a great jazz program for college-age students, but if you were a talented high school kid, you could go to the program and they'd give you college credit to play drums or whatever other instrument. I ended up working with a great jazz educator for about a year, a bass player named JB Dyas. He really got me ready for doing gigs. He was like, "Whoa, man, when you're trading fours you sound like you're throwing your drums down a flight of stairs." And I never took that as an insult. I took it as tough love. He just wanted me to learn form and how to interact and improvise.

MD: Have your jazz studies proven helpful in your career?

Omar: Absolutely. It's a great foundation to become a well-rounded drummer. Your versatility is your greatest gift; that's how I see it. I love all styles of music. Put me in any style and I'll do my best to murder it. I just recorded with Arturo Sandoval in L.A.,

and it was awesome. My edge to playing drums is not completely jazz—it's fusion, it's reggae drumming, one-drop. It's a mix, because Miami lends itself to that.

MD: You have a lot of intensity, but you don't overplay.

Omar: All those cool licks and chops that you play, there's a time for that. But when you're playing the song, keep it simple. I love the drum-hero stuff—I want to be one of those guys too. But what's the longevity of my career in the music business if I'm just a chops guy? No one's going to call me. So I keep it simple and tight in the live show. If we're in the verse, if we're in the hook, we just lay it down.

MD: Was Miami a fun scene to grow up in?

Omar: Man, what a melting pot. You've got people from Haiti, Cuba, Trinidad.... Quickly you learn that Latin drumming is not the same as Brazilian drumming, and music for calypso is not the same as kompa, which is from Haiti. You start grasping at a young age not to fuse these styles, because that's kind of going against the grain, and you lose gigs that way. You have to understand what region of the Caribbean or the world the style of music is coming from. And reggae is huge—a lot of us here in Miami grow up listening to Bob Marley's music.

Even Colombian music, which cumbia is...the rhythm is kind of the same between Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, and a few other South American and Central American countries. There's two really dope patterns for cumbia, and if you don't know how to play them, they call some other guy. Miami forces you to learn more than five different styles of drumming. You have to grasp the different grooves. Miami pushes you to do that, and the learning curve is fast. You have to have stuff *down* on your first gig.

MD: Were you hearing hip-hop rhythms as well?

Omar: The whole eastern seaboard was into freestyle in the '90s. I have a sister who's six years older than me, and whatever she was listening to, I was listening to. Early Biggie Smalls, early Nas, like *Illmatic*. The Miami scene for rappers was just growing, and Uncle Luke was the guy cultivating it. Trick Daddy was coming out of that, Piccolo, even Pit. At a very young age Pit was already rapping and getting involved with heavy people in the Miami hip-hop scene.

MD: Part of your degree at UM was in studio production. Was that always an interest?

Omar: Definitely. I want to leave my mark, whether writing or producing a hit song, something that I've contributed to the



music business. The producer thing is always a growing experience, still growing as we speak. I think drummers make great music directors and are great visionaries for what they want to do in music, as far as production, drumming, and arranging parts: "All right, guys, this is the form, and we're going to try this and this, and it's going to sound great."

We hold it together, and I think that's why a lot of artists like to have the drummer as their music director. If you're a good drummer, the artist will definitely lean toward the drummer and say, "Yeah, what he's saying is right—we need to do this and that." Then the drummer is like the MD by default. If there's no MD on your gig, you need to take control and seize that opportunity. And it's not about making more money or whatever, it's just that it's a job title that drummers should have. You can put that in the magazine.

MD: How did you get into that role with Pitbull, and what does it entail?

Omar: Pit just saw a characteristic in me. I have a very strong demeanor, and it's something that I've worked on to calm a little, because I don't need to be so aggressive. But he just saw me as kind of a leader.

The MD thing has a few aspects. Number one, I'm not the guy that gets in there and arranges music and tells everyone what to do. My role has to do with getting in a room with a bunch of talented guys that I put together, learning the parts to the tunes, and coming up with ideas together. I grew up playing with these guys, and I trust them



the same way that Pit trusts me with his show and with the sound of his music.

I'm really more the point person, like, "Hey, X, Y, and Z needs to get done." We record it and send it over to Pit, and he approves it or he'll put in his two cents: "Go back to the drawing board. Do this over. Let's try this." Then I get in there, and thankfully I have a DJ who is very talented. We program together, do the edits, and figure out what's going to happen, then send it over to Pit via email.

MD: Are you mostly interpreting tracks that have already been on albums?

Omar: We test everything out on radio first to see if it works, if people like it. Pit's more popular now than he's ever been, and we're proud of that, but at the same time we're still gaining new fans, so we have to be

careful not to scare them away. [In concert] we want to play the songs that they know, and maybe, if we're going to premiere a new song, we won't play the entire song; we'll only do a verse and a chorus and out. A lot of what we do is medley based. Pit's got two number ones, and for those two we'll play the entire song, because people know them from top to bottom. Other songs that weren't big hits, we don't play completely through. We just try to keep it simple so that no one gets impatient.

MD: What's your approach to translating Pitbull's studio tracks to the live setting?

Omar: We don't try to play exactly like the album. Let's say the drum pattern is one of these house patterns that has open hi-hat on the "&" of every beat. I'm not doing any of that. I just open the hi-hat and play a rock beat over the thing, with the bass drum still four on the floor, like a house track. I just rock it out.

The majority of our live show is like a rock concert. You're hearing Pit's backing tracks from the albums, but the way that we're mixed out front, we're like a rock band out there. It's like you just watched Guns n' Roses for an hour and a half. I love it, and Pit loves it because the energy is so much bigger. I'm not saying every song has that type of feel, but the ones that call for that energy, we definitely rock it out, and it sounds *awesome*.

Tools of the Trade

Tavarez plays a DW Collector's series kit in black sparkle finish, including a 7.5x13 Edge main snare; a 7x14 maple side snare; a 7x10 maple auxiliary snare; 7x8, 7x10, and 7x12 toms; 14x14 and 16x16 floor toms (with the 14" to the right of the 16"); and two 18x22 bass drums. His Sabian cymbals include 14" Groove Hats, a 6" and two 8" AAX splashes, a 12" HH splash, a 14" HH crash, 17" and 18" AAX X-plosion crashes, an 18" O-Zone crash, a 19" HHX Aero crash, a 22" Raw Bell Dry ride, 10" and 12" HH Signature Max Stacks, an 18" AA Brilliant Chad Smith Holy China, 10" and 12" Choppers, and an inverted 6" AA splash. He uses Remo heads, including Black Suede snare batters and Clear Ambassador snare-sides, Black Suede tom batters and bottoms, and clear Powerstroke 3 bass drum batters with Falam Slam pads and 8" KickPorts in the front heads. His stick model is Vic Firth's X5A, and he uses Gibraltar hardware and DW 9000 series hi-hat and bass drum pedals. He also plays Gon Bops percussion and uses a ButtKicker Concert low-frequency audio transducer, a Roland SPD-SX multipad, and ddrum snare and bass drum triggers.



Brian Reitzell

by Adam Budofsky

In L.A., they do everything in their cars. This drummer and composer figured it was time someone provided an official soundtrack.

Los Angeles has been pretty good to Brian Reitzell. In the early '90s Reitzell moved from his home in northern California to audition for the L.A. pop-punk institution Redd Kross. He got the gig and spent the next eight years with the band, touring the world and appearing on a couple of major-label albums. Around the end of his tenure in Redd Kross, Reitzell was asked by director Sofia Coppola, who had dated the group's bass player, to be the music supervisor for what would become her breakout film, *The Virgin Suicides*. This kick-started a successful career of composing, performing, and overseeing the soundtracks of highly regarded Hollywood features like *30 Days of Night* and *Marie Antoinette*, television series such as *Boss* and *Hannibal*, and, more recently, soundtracks to the video games *Watch Dogs* and *Red Faction: Armageddon*. Now Reitzell has released his first proper solo album, a concept record of sorts called *Auto Music*. It's a title, and a theme, that would carry less weight if Brian were based in, say, New York or London.

"Los Angeles is the greatest motor city—it's built for cars," says Reitzell, who sees strong connections between taking a journey through physical space, especially in an environment as changeable and dramatic as Los Angeles, and taking an auditory one, such as immersing oneself in a song or an album.

"On the trip from my house to my studio," Reitzell says, "I drive through Griffith Park, and it's super-peaceful. I see coyotes every night, people on horses. I go by a golf course, tennis courts. And the park has been in various stages—there have been several fires, and we've had droughts, road construction. But sometimes I have to drive to the west side of the city, to Santa Monica, and I'm going ninety miles an hour on the freeway toward the ocean. The sun is shining, and you're going through the tunnels. There's all these textures. And you're never driving in circles—you're always starting from somewhere and going somewhere."

With his soundtrack work, Reitzell had already proven his skill at creating sonic textures to support onscreen action. In the album format of *Auto Music*, though, where each song has to stand on its own, Reitzell gets to more fully explore the concept of the journey, where the existence of a clear beginning and end and various events in between are of equal priority. Generally the tracks don't conform to typical verse-chorus-type trajectories;

the compositions are more abstract, favoring subtle evolutions of sound and mood over clear shifts of direction. It's hypnotic stuff, but not static.

Opening track "Last Summer," for example, unfolds like a time-lapse video of a field of sunflowers opening to the sun, the peace eventually disturbed by the soft intrusion of two hard-panned, dovetailing drumset grooves—two trains simultaneously passing in the distance, perhaps, one to the east and one to the west. "Gaudi" establishes a pensive tone with long, open piano chords and brushes on a distant snare, a wandering, spacey diversion that recalls the work of some of Reitzell's favorite '80s post-punk mood-makers, like Talk Talk and Japan. On these songs and throughout the album, Reitzell includes endless subtle details that clearly differentiate one track from another and make *Auto Music* the kind of listening experience best heard through headphones—or better yet, in the private confines of your car.

"A car is like a soundproofed sonic haven," says Reitzell, who long ago learned of the unique powers of an in-dash audio system. "I've been using the car as the premier listening environment since I was twelve. I played with a guy whose father was a surgeon, and his parents had two nice Mercedes-Benzes. We'd always record our jams onto a beatbox and then go and sit in the car to listen to it. And I'm still doing that!"

Back when Reitzell was starting out, his favorite car songs would be the kind of thing he could whale along to on his seat while playing hookie from school—he figures he spent a couple hundred hours alone banging away to the Icicle Works' drum-tastic single "Whisper to a Scream (Birds Fly)." These days he's more likely to spend his drive time submerged in an interstellar '70s-era Miles Davis jam, an early musique concrète piece by Pierre Schaeffer, or a collection of rare BBC Radiophonic Workshop experiments—strange, unique sound worlds that reward adventurous listening habits.

The song might not remain the same, but the venue, for the most part, has. "With *Auto Music* I wanted to make music that was great to listen to in the car," Reitzell says. "But, really, *all* music is great to listen to in the car." To learn more about Brian's favorite in-transit soundtracks and current projects, listen to Episode 1 of the new Modern Drummer Podcast, available at iTunes and Stitcher, and at moderndrummer.com.

“I’ve been using the car as the premier listening environment since I was twelve—and I’m still doing that.”



Slick Hop

Machinelike Beats With Multiple Kicks

by Rich Redmond

MUSIC KEY	
open	○
H.H.	⊗
S.D.	●
B.D.	●

Many hip-hop records feature programmed drums. As a result, some producers—especially the ones who aren't drummers—may place three fast bass drum notes together. These rhythms are usually played with a swung triplet-based feel. To get an idea of the style, check out some go-go music, such as the Marcus Miller song “Da Butt.”

Strive to make all of the bass drum notes speak clearly. These exercises are designed to give your foot a workout. Practice them slowly at first, and then gradually pick up steam. Practice the beats with the designated cymbal variations, and also experiment with hi-hat openings. Shoot for machinelike consistency, but play with the heart of a human. If you can do that, bands will compete to have you, and you'll be hoppin' your way to the bank!

1

2

3

4

5

6

For a video demo of these beats, visit moderndrummer.com.

Rich Redmond drums for country star Jason Aldean, is an award-winning clinician, and is an active session drummer in Nashville and Los Angeles. His recent book/DVD, *FUNDamentals of Drumming for Kids* (coauthored with Michael Aubrecht), is available through Modern Drummer Publications.

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Consecutive Flams

Part 1: Spaced Out

by Bill Bachman

This month we're going to kick off a challenging three-part series on flams. All of these exercises will consist of single flams followed by sets of two, three, and four flams. Then we'll reverse the order to end up back where we started. There will be different flam placements and transitions to navigate, as well as some rudimental ornamentations for additional challenges. These are really fun to play, and your mind has to stay engaged as you cycle through the progression. The

patterns also apply well to the drumkit if you place the inner beats (unaccented notes) on the snare while moving the accents around to toms and cymbals.

The exercises we're using this time have a tap played between each flam when there are sets of two flams or more, and flam accents are used to switch hands. This will make more sense after you have a look at the exercise.

1

3/4

5/4

I R L R r L R L I R L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L

7/4

I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R

9/4

I R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R r L R L r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R

7/4

I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R

5/4

I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R

The two hands play distinctly different parts. One plays the accents, while the other plays a continuous stream of taps and grace notes. The accented hand plays a downstroke when there's only one flam, and a combination of free strokes and downstrokes when there's more than one accent in the series. (The last accent in a series will always be a downstroke, in order to set up the hand for the forthcoming low notes.) The real challenge lies in the low hand as it dribbles a smooth stream of grace notes and taps. This exercise will test your single-stroke control at low stick heights. Normally, grace notes are placed ahead of the primary note they're tied to and are played lower than taps. But in this situation there's no practical way to make quick rhythmic shifts and alter the stick heights, so all of these notes will flow evenly. The flams will be

created by placing the accents just *behind* the grace notes. (The low hand is in charge!)

Make sure that the last accent per hand is played with a concise downstroke so that the stick freezes pointing down toward the drum. Doing this sets you up for a clean attack of low taps and grace notes.

To develop this exercise with accurate flow, rhythm, and feel, it's a good idea to separate the hands and isolate each section of the exercise. Try putting your practice pad on a quieter surface, such as a couch cushion, and then play the accents on the cushion and the inner beats (taps and grace notes) on the pad. Doing this will allow you to isolate and analyze the stream of low notes. When you play the exercise perfectly, you should hear low and even 16th notes on the pad.

From there, I like to use a four-part system to isolate the hands and develop control. First, play the pattern with both hands on the pad. Second, move the accents to the cushion. Third, air-drum the accents to either side of the pad. Finally, air-drum the accents directly over the playing area of the pad. (These are called ghost flams.) Repeat these steps, striving for a smooth flow of 16th notes on the pad that are unaffected by the accents.

While it makes perfect sense to think of each piece of the exercise in bite-size chunks, you'll be better off feeling the

quarter-note pulse that runs throughout. Use your metronome, tap your foot, and count quarter notes out loud. Focus on making the "e" and "a" syncopations on either side of the quarter note feel comfortable.

Once you master the basic exercise, try adding rudimental variations such as flam drags, cheeses (flammed diddles), and flam fives (flammed five-stroke rolls). Whenever there's an accent on a diddle, make sure to accent both beats of the diddle and play them accurately—don't crush them. Start slowly, and have fun with these!

2

I R L R r L R L I R L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L
r L R L I R L R r L R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L
r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L
r L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L
r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R
r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R

3

I R L R r L R L I R L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L
r L R L I R L R r L R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L
r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R r L R L
r L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L
r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L
r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R

I R L R r L R L I R L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L
r L R L I R L R r L R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L
r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R r L R L
r L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L
r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L I R L R

I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L
r L R r L R L I R L I R L R r L R r L R L I R L I R L R

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



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All Together Now!

Focus on Unison Exercises

by Steve Fidyk

MUSIC KEY	
R.C.	
S.D.	
B.D.	
H.H.	
w/foot	

Practicing unison exercises is an excellent way to determine the accuracy and precision of your four limbs as they function together. Like links in a steel chain, the sturdiness of your groove depends on the strength of your weakest limb. Working on exercises like the ones contained in this column can help alleviate very common tendencies, such as unintentional flams between the limbs.

In order to play accurate unisons, each limb should move with a natural, flowing motion and from a consistent stroke height. To analyze the motion of your limbs, try placing a mirror to the left of your drumset so that you can clearly see how your hands and feet are interacting with one another. Practice these exercises with a metronome or drum machine so that you can focus on keeping your timing, while also making sure the stroke velocity remains consistent from measure to measure. The goal is to strive for a balanced blend between your limbs.

Let's begin with the following ride cymbal and hi-hat accompaniment pattern.

1

Next, add the bass drum and then the snare to the mix. Remember to focus your attention on keeping the quarter notes completely in sync.

2

Now let's continue playing unison quarter notes with the ride cymbal and hi-hat while alternating between the following nine patterns on the snare and bass drum.

3

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Once you have control of those exercises, vary the ride pattern using these six rhythms.

To develop total dynamic control, practice each of the exercises using stroke levels that progress from very close to the instrument (1" to 2" stick heights) to 18" off each surface. Then repeat each example four, eight, or sixteen times, incorporating the following crescendo and decrescendo approaches.

If this is your first time working on unison exercises, be patient with your progress. Most students spend a great deal of time working on layered ostinato-style exercises but often neglect unisons. Also try experimenting with your own patterns. You can substitute just about any rhythm for each written quarter note and work through the exercises using the same methodology. Have fun!

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.



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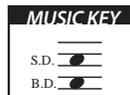
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The Paradiddle Polyrhythm Pyramid

Sharpen Your Rhythmic Awareness and Control

by Peter Magadini



The following exercise was going to be called the Paradiddle Polyrhythm Rudiment, but I felt that it was too long to be just one rudiment. Instead, it makes for a formidable polyrhythm exercise in paradiddles. As you practice, keep time with a metronome and tap quarter notes with your bass drum.

If some of the polyrhythms are too difficult for you at first, skip them and come back to them later.

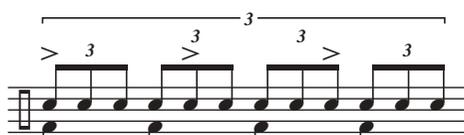
Note that although the exercise is written with only one repeat at the end, I suggest mastering each measure individually before attempting to connect them as a complete study.

♩ = 82 - 88

(suggested metronome tempos)



R L R R L R L L



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



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



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



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



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



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

Sticking is reversed on repeat

You can also try different sticking patterns with the exercise, including inverted paradiddles (RLLR LRRL) and double strokes (RRLL or LLRR).

Peter Magadini has played with George Duke, Mose Allison, Chet Baker, and Diana Ross. He is also the author of the award-winning book *The Musician's Guide to Polyrhythms*.



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The Commandments of the Half-Time Shuffle

Part 2: Hi-Hat Openings by Zoro

MUSIC KEY	
open	○
H.H.	⊗
S.D.	●
B.D.	⊙
H.H.	⊗
w/foot	⊗

Since the hi-hat is such a predominant voice in R&B music, I thought it would be fun to explore some really cool patterns that make good use of it within the half-time shuffle.

The hi-hat has so many beautiful possibilities when it comes to being able to embellish ensemble figures in an interesting but nonintrusive manner. The following exercises are among my all-time favorites and will really add color and character to your shuffles. Think of them not merely as exercises but as a way of playing the hi-hat through certain sections of songs that can bring some magic to the groove.

In these patterns your lead hand plays a continuous shuffle, while you play the snare lightly on the second partial of the triplet. You open the hi-hat on the last partial of the triplet, and then your hi-hat foot closes immediately on the next downbeat. Be careful to make the timing between your hi-hat foot and your lead hand as precise as possible.

After you work out the hand part, add the nine essential bass drum patterns. Mastering these will help you play the shuffle with more fluidity. What you're after is a buttery-smooth sound from the hi-hat.

Zoro is an award-winning drummer, author, educator, and motivational speaker. He has toured and recorded with Lenny Kravitz, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, Bobby Brown, New Edition, and others, and he teaches at Belmont University in Nashville. For more information, visit zorothedrummer.com. The contents of this article were adapted from *The Commandments of the Half-Time Shuffle* by the permission of Alfred Publishing, © 2013. All rights reserved.





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Solid Soloing

Part 1: Connecting Ideas With Glue Stickings

by James Murphy

MUSIC KEY	
H.H.	✗
T.T.	✗
S.D.	●
FT	✗
B.B.	✗
H.H.	✗
w/foot	✗
Add'l	✗
T.T.	✗

Welcome to the first installment of a short series on gaining freedom and flow while soloing. Many of us have struggled with the ability to play a solo freely and musically without the constant burden of thinking about which idea to play next. In these articles we'll discuss my "glue" method of soloing, which I developed to connect ideas at fast note rates without hesitation.

To begin using this method, you'll need to come up with two set ideas that can stand alone as fills, have clearly defined start and end points, and utilize a resolution. Then you'll need a glue sticking that can be looped easily and that can be played using different dynamics and orchestrations on the kit, to bridge the two set ideas so that they connect smoothly.

Practicing the glue method of soloing will be very structured and mechanical at first. However, this structure transforms into spontaneous freedom as you add more set ideas and glue stickings. Through muscle memory comes the freedom to mix and match figures into a seamless flow of ideas. When you're practicing the steps outlined below, it's important to spend quality time on each section in order to develop muscle memory.

Developing Set Idea #1

Set your metronome to 60 bpm. Play 16th-note triplets on the snare as single strokes. It's important to develop the note rate using a simple sticking, which strengthens your connection to the rate. Keep quarter notes with your left foot on the hi-hat.

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

Now apply a sticking pattern to the 16th-note triplets. The left foot continues to keep quarter notes on the hi-hat. (70 bpm)

R L R F R L F R L F R L

Next, apply a dynamic shape and a voicing pattern on the kit. The left foot continues to keep quarter notes on the hi-hat. To develop muscle memory, it's important not to change the chosen dynamic and voicing throughout the exercise.

R L R F R L F R L F R L

Condense the set idea from a looped exercise down to a two-beat fill. Keep quarter notes with your left foot on the hi-hat. This step helps distinguish your set ideas from the glue stickings you'll be using later on. Set ideas resolve (crashing on 1), while glue stickings do not. (90 bpm)

R L R F R L F R L F R L

Developing Set Idea #2

Play 16th-note triplets on the snare as single strokes. Keep quarter notes on the hi-hat. (60 bpm)

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

Apply a new sticking pattern to the 16th-note triplets. Keep quarter notes on the hi-hat. (70 bpm)

R L R F R L R F F L R F

Now apply a dynamic pattern and voicing to the second set idea.

R L R F R L R F F L R F

Condense the set idea from a looped exercise to a two-beat fill. (90 bpm)

R L R F R L R F F L R F R F

Once you're comfortable with the two set ideas, it's time to develop the glue sticking.

Glue Sticking

Play 16th-note triplets on the snare and quarter notes on the hi-hat with the foot. (60 bpm)



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1

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

Apply a sticking pattern to the 16th-note triplets between the kick and snare. Continue to keep quarter notes on the hi-hat. (70 bpm)

2

R L R L L F R L R L L F

Apply dynamic and voicing patterns to the glue sticking.

3

R L R L L F R L R L L F

Now it's time to put it all together. What follows is a practice routine to create a seamless transition between the two set ideas with the glue sticking.

Combining Ideas

Play one bar of set idea #1, one bar of the glue sticking, one bar of set idea #2, and then one bar of the glue sticking again. It's important to keep the voicings consistent with what you used in the previous steps. (100 bpm)

R L R F R L F R L F R L

R L R L L F R L R L L F

R L R F R L R F F L R F

R L R L L F R L R L L F

After you've worked through the previous steps, you will have developed the ability to transition seamlessly from one set idea to the next via a single glue sticking. In the next installment, we'll explore two new set ideas and another glue sticking that utilizes note-rate changes. The possibilities are endless. Have fun!

James Murphy is an assistant professor at the Berklee College of Music and a drumset player for the Blue Man Group in Boston. He also gives online drum lessons at peaceanddrums.com.

For a video demo of these exercises, go to modern drummer.com.



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The Journey of Self-Discovery

Thoughts on Developing Your Own Musical Voice

by Russ Miller



One of the things I mentioned in last month's column was how I feel there are way too many drummers who sound alike in the field today. Of course, this is nothing new. Each musical era has a wave of common approaches to playing the instrument, like when the Beatles hit and everybody had to have a Ludwig black oyster pearl kit so they could look and sound just like Ringo.

Your unique musical voice can be developed in many different ways. You could be recognized for the specific sound of your kit, or a certain playing style could become your calling card. Or maybe it's a unique drumset setup and stage antics. Just keep in mind that the great drummers are recognized primarily for their approach to playing music. Developing a "sound" that's uniquely yours, simply from the way the music feels when you're at the kit, is very difficult.

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

—Mahatma Gandhi

Some players just seem to be blessed with originality from birth. But very few things are truly original; rather, they're a combination of one's experiences and influences. Great drummers mix up their study of what came before them to create their own musical stew. So how do you develop your musical voice? Let's take a look at a few ideas.

Don't let your thoughts be too much the opinion of someone else. I have gone through these phases myself. You get really excited about a record or a band with a great drummer, and you think, *I want to do that!* You set up your kit like the guy, buy the same cymbals and drumheads, and maybe even cut your hair similarly. This is an awesome part of discovering your own identity. Be excited, and let your passion influence your development. But understand that you are not that drummer, and you will never be that drummer. Make sure that you draw from many musical opinions and directions. Don't get too hung up on one vision. Research that drummer's influences, and go back and see where he or she came from, to help you form a deeper opinion on that particular approach to the instrument.

Find your pulse. The idea of having a strong presence at the kit can be broken down into one word: pulse. Having a pulse is different from playing with unwavering time. A drum machine keeps great time but has no pulse. This is why it often feels sterile when you hear a quantized programmed beat. Producers started cutting loops from actual recorded performances, instead of sequencing parts on drum machines, because performances have a human pulse. To me, an effective pulse is a combination of timing, dynamics, note lengths (articulation), and good musical decisions.

You need to have solid time, or the pulse can break down. Your time doesn't have to be perfect, but it must be relative to the target tempo. This means that if you start at 110 bpm, you don't want to be

rushing to 120 during fills and dragging down to 100 in the bridge. A key component of solid timekeeping is controlling subdivisions. You need to be able to keep the subdivisions consistent and not rush the smaller/faster notes. Inconsistent subdivisions will create a weaving feeling that never settles into a solid pulse.

You also have to play with contrasting and effective dynamics. You shouldn't yell at people through your instrument in every song. You don't speak like that, so don't do it on the drums. Communicate through small- and large-sounding notes and phrases. You should also be able to control the sustain of your notes and apply energy and relaxation in the feeling behind what you play. Think about articulating patterns like a horn player would articulate a melody. Finally, learn how to make appropriate musical decisions through listening, playing with others, and studying.

Document yourself. We know the great drummers because we've *heard* the great drummers. Documentation is a large part of creating an identifiable voice; great drummers who've played on many records are easier to recognize. For instance, I've heard Phil Collins play many times on the radio and in concerts. As soon as I hear his roomy, compressed drum sound and his open time and fills, I know it's him.

That said, there are also well-documented drummers who don't have anything particularly unique happening. They blend into the music so much that they're hard to recognize. Their execution could be perfect, but their musical voice just doesn't seem to surface. This is the challenge of a session drummer: to play what is correct for the situation while stamping it with your signature. Great actors, like Robert De Niro and Dustin Hoffman, do this. The way they deliver the words puts a unique stamp on the scene.

As drummers, we need to know how we want to deliver our script, which is the song. Think about the "why" behind what you're being asked to play, and ask yourself, *What am I bringing to the music?* Then get out there and make yourself heard! The more gigs, records, and videos that exist with you playing drums on them, the easier it is for people to hear "you" in them. I own about a hundred records that Steve Gadd plays on, and I can tell within a few bars that it's him. Of course, Steve has a very personal and unique approach to music. But part of the reason I know his sound so well is because I've heard it so many times.

As the Gandhi quote implies, to lose yourself in the service of others is relevant to developing your own musical voice. To do that, simply play what's correct for the situation. Through continual study, experience, listening, working, and always attempting to make good musical choices, you'll find that your sound begins to develop. Understand what you have to offer, and deliver the "script" of the song with your unique stamp on it. Use what came before you to support your decisions, but don't rely on that as a template. Discover who you are today, but ask yourself, *Who will I be in the future?* Keep studying, practicing, and working toward becoming the musician you want to be. Create often, and let the world hear it!

Russ Miller has played on recordings with combined sales of more than 26 million copies. His versatility has led him to work with a wide range of artists, including Ray Charles, Tina Turner, Nelly Furtado, and Andrea Bocelli. For more info, visit russmiller.com.





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Buddy Rich's WFL Drumset Restored and Revisited

by Harry Cangany

A couple years back (December 2012), I wrote a story about a WFL Super Classic drumset from the early '50s that found its way to eBay. I had the chance to talk to the owner, and I looked at pictures of the white marine pearl set (13" rack tom, 16" floor tom, 24" bass drum), along with the snare, cymbals, seat case, hardware, and calfskin logo head.

The drums had belonged to Buddy Rich, but they were confiscated at the Roseland Ballroom in Taunton, Massachusetts, when Rich quit the Tommy Dorsey Band and owed money on an advance. Dorsey's manager had a young local drummer, named Duke Belaïre, grab Buddy's set off the band bus and take it to a repair shop that sold used gear. The repair shop sold the drums, and sixty years later they were back on the market, in relatively good shape with some expected marks and a few not-so-perfect pieces. These WFLs had been used but not abused.

We reported on the condition, the backstory, and the provenance of this wonderful old set of African-mahogany-shell warriors when they first resurfaced. In order to get the kit looking new again, the new owner sent them to Matt Sinyard at the restoration shop Bonzo Drums in Atlanta. That owner, a diehard fan from Texas who believes Buddy's legacy needs to be preserved for future generations, has another of Rich's kits, a pristine Rogers setup that Buddy played in 1966 for a



CBS Tony Bennett Singer Sewing Machine television special. Those drums were passed from the producer's son to another collector and then to the current owner a few years ago.

As far as I can tell, the WFL drums seen here comprise the oldest known drumset owned by Buddy Rich. Rich had been with WFL a few years before our restored beauty was built, and he was a Slingerland endorser for about a decade before that. And as a child performer he endorsed Ludwig & Ludwig's snares and bass drums. But none of those older drums have surfaced yet.

Look at the condition of this WFL set, with its gleaming chrome and correct pieces. The wrap is original, and nothing has been replaced. New chroming was done on the holders, but the lugs were in terrific shape. The owner wanted to honor the drums and Buddy's memory by getting all

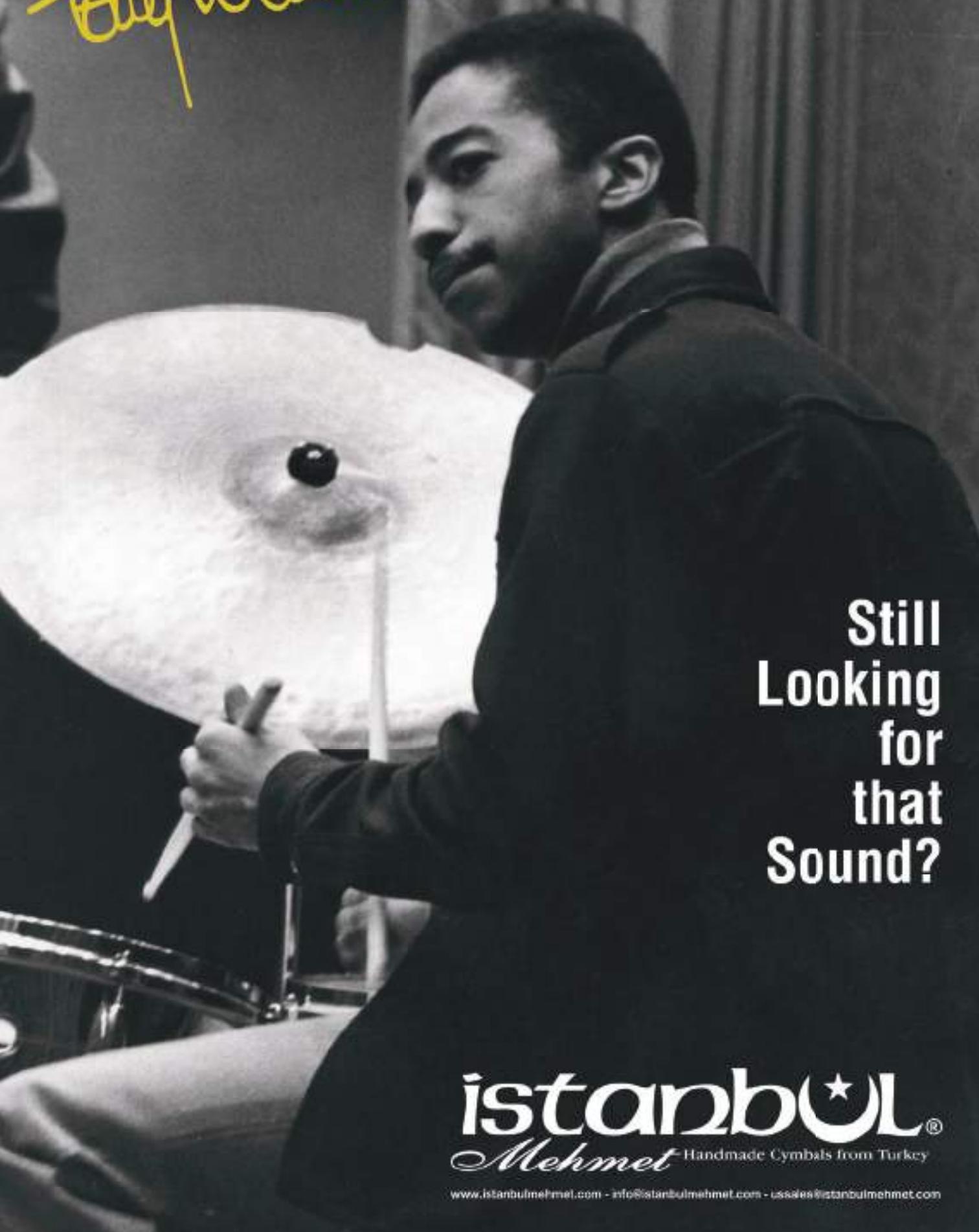
the details right. While the kit looks like a museum piece, I have been assured that it's being played.

When I consider the good condition of the set before the restoration, and certainly when I see the drums now, I can't help but remember something Bill Ludwig II told me two decades ago when I asked him how long he thought the drums would last when the factory was building them. His response: "One year." Isn't that amazing? We collectors discuss and drool over drums built up to ninety years ago, and they weren't supposed to last even nine!

I'm so glad these WFL drums exist, and I'm amazed by how good they look. Thanks to all the people along the way who built and protected them, and special thanks to the new owner and Matt at Bonzo for their efforts to make the pieces look and sound as if they just rolled out of final assembly at the old plant on Damen Avenue in Chicago. Let's hope they can stay preserved for another sixty years.



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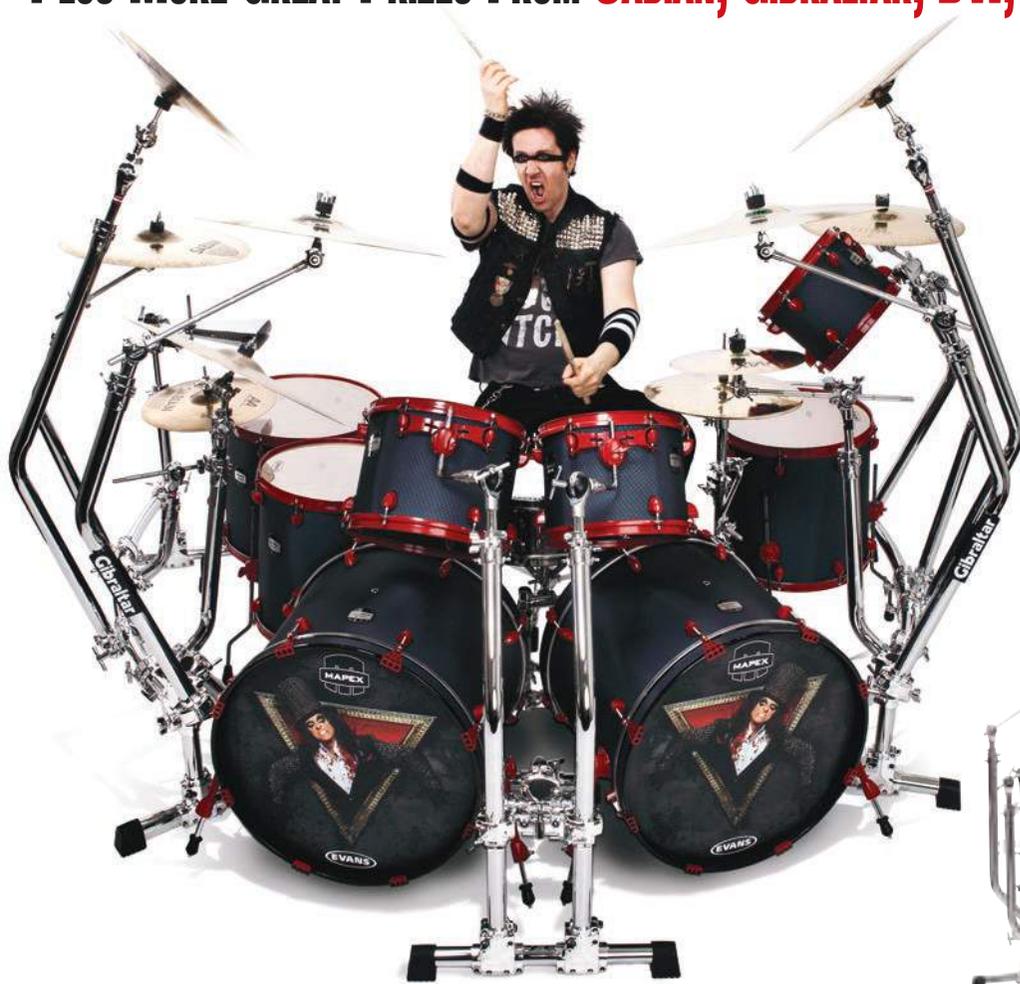
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Aric Improta

by Ben Meyer

It's all in the work. When Night Verses' firebrand isn't touring the world, he and his bandmates are holed away for hours and hours, refining, improving, refining, improving....

When we spoke with Aric Improta, his band, Night Verses, had just come off the month-long Wrongdoers tour of Europe with Norma Jean, Liferuiner, and Branson Hollis. The group was beginning the writing stage for the follow-up to its highly regarded 2013 debut full-length album, *Lift Your Existence*, and was in the midst of shooting a mini documentary. "We asked different people around the world what they listen for in music," Improta says. "Some people say lyrics, some people say beats. There really is no right answer."

Perhaps not, but passion and precision must certainly be at the top of the list for many of the post-hardcore band's fans. Few acts embrace these two pillars of contemporary rock as fully as Night Verses does, and live and on record, Improta is the ever-charged battery at the core of the band's impassioned yet meticulous music.

Night Verses seemingly jumped into the spotlight overnight, following the addition in 2012 of vocalist Douglas Robinson, previously a member of the popular East Coast band the Sleeping and the missing ingredient to Improta and his mates' rock 'n' roll dreams. Aric, bassist Reilly Herrera, and guitarist Nick DePirro had been sweating it out in the drummer's childhood bedroom since they were in middle school together, under the moniker the Sound Archives. "We'd been through four different lineups, with us as the core of the band," Improta explains. "As you continue on, the people who still want to do this with their lives kind of surface, and everyone else moves on to becoming adults and getting jobs. After playing together for as long as we did, you begin to think, *When is this going to kick in?* And then all of a sudden this one piece joins the group and everything makes sense to everybody."

The same year that Night Verses debuted, Improta turned heads as a finalist in Guitar Center's national Drum-Off competition. Now the twenty-five-year-old Fullerton, California, native is an official Meinl cymbal endorser,



with international tours with the likes of Intervals, Letlive, Norma Jean, and Protest the Hero, among others, under his belt. All the while, Night Verses has never stopped composing new material—and lots of it.

"We're so into writing," Improta confirms. "It's really our favorite thing. We write fifty to sixty songs for our albums and then cut them down. And the songs are all equally detailed—it's not us just getting rough ideas down. It's always hard if we have to do anything that pulls us away from that, even touring. We love touring, and the performance part is fun, but there's this constant underlying effort to remember all these ideas. As soon as we get

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Improta plays a Thrust custom kit with maple shells, including a 6.5x14 snare, a 10x12 rack tom, 15x14 and 16x16 floor toms, and a 22x24 bass drum. His Meinl cymbals include 14" Byzance hi-hats, a 20" Mb10 crash (occasionally a 19" model as well), a 10" Byzance splash, and a 22" Soundcaster Fusion Powerful ride. He uses a DW 5000 series hi-hat stand, double bass drum pedal, and cymbal stands, and either Vater or Promark 5B sticks. His drumheads are Remo, including a Coated Controlled Sound Reverse Dot snare batter, Coated Ambassador tom batters and Clear Ambassador bottoms, and a Clear Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter. His electronics include Roland SPD-20 and SPD-30 Octapads and an SPD-SX multipad controller, along with a Line 6 DL4 digital modeling delay pedal (with the SPD-20).



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ARIC ON TUNING

"I tune my toms fairly low and my snare super-bright. I love having as much depth and fullness as possible when it comes to toms, but my snare needs to pick up every minute detail and always cut through whatever else I'm playing. I like the kick tight as well, so the 24" gives me a happy medium between picking up detail and still sounding super-low and satisfying."

home, we have to go back in my room, put all this stuff together, and then get it out there."

Working feverishly nearly every day, Improta and his fellow instrumentalists obsessively craft new material before presenting it to Robinson. "[Writing] usually starts between Nick and me," Aric says. "We'll come up with two or more sections at first, and most of the time it either starts with a riff or I have a rhythmic idea that I haven't heard within our genre. So it's usually just two sections, and then, at the next practice, Reilly comes in and helps us figure out where it should go to tie it all together. Then we work on the song for maybe a month while we're also working on other songs, usually rewriting it four or five times. Once we're all happy with it, we send it to Douglas and he records his ideas, and then we meet up and finish it. So the process takes two or three months."

Improta began to take drumming seriously after participating in band programs throughout elementary and middle school. "My parents both played in a cover band for fun along with their day jobs," Aric recalls. "They loved to sing whenever they could, and both played guitar. I had drumsets growing up, but as a kid I had such a short attention span that I'd grab two Lego towers and jump on the kit for five minutes and then not touch it again for a week. But once I started playing in bands and being inspired by the musicians around me, even at that basic level, that's what really

made me want to do it. I also had an amazing teacher from seventh to twelfth grade, Jorgen Ingmar Alofs, who totally opened my eyes and made me realize that you don't just need to do double kick and play as fast as you can. Having those two things—friends to play with over the years and that teacher—really made it all make sense to me."

Today Improta still practices an average of five hours a day, in addition to attending writing sessions with his bandmates, and continues to draw inspiration from the drummers he's toured with in the two years since Night Verses began. "When you meet somebody as nice as Anup Sastry [Intervals, Skyharbor] or Joe Arrington [A Lot Like Birds], you think they're just regular people, because that's how you meet them. Then, when you see them play, you realize that there's no possible way they could be doing this without [putting in] hours and hours of practice. It's an interesting quirk to all of these people's personalities."

Employing a one-up, two-down five-piece drumkit configuration plus his trusted Roland SPD-30 Octapad, Improta does his part to help make Night Verses "sound like a bigger band than we are," weaving samples and melodic parts into his drumming to fill out the sonic texture of the band, which features a spartan drums/bass/guitar instrumentation. Insisting on performing without backing tracks or even a click, Improta says, "We play every single part of our songs live. We make sure that we can re-create everything that's on the CD live, because that's what all of our favorite bands do. We grew up with Thrice, Tool, and Deftones, and that's just what we're used to. We found enjoyment in trying to solve the challenge of making everything sound full. For us, it's like, if it sounds empty, let's find a way to fix it that other people wouldn't think of. A big thing for us is trying to create what we haven't heard or seen."



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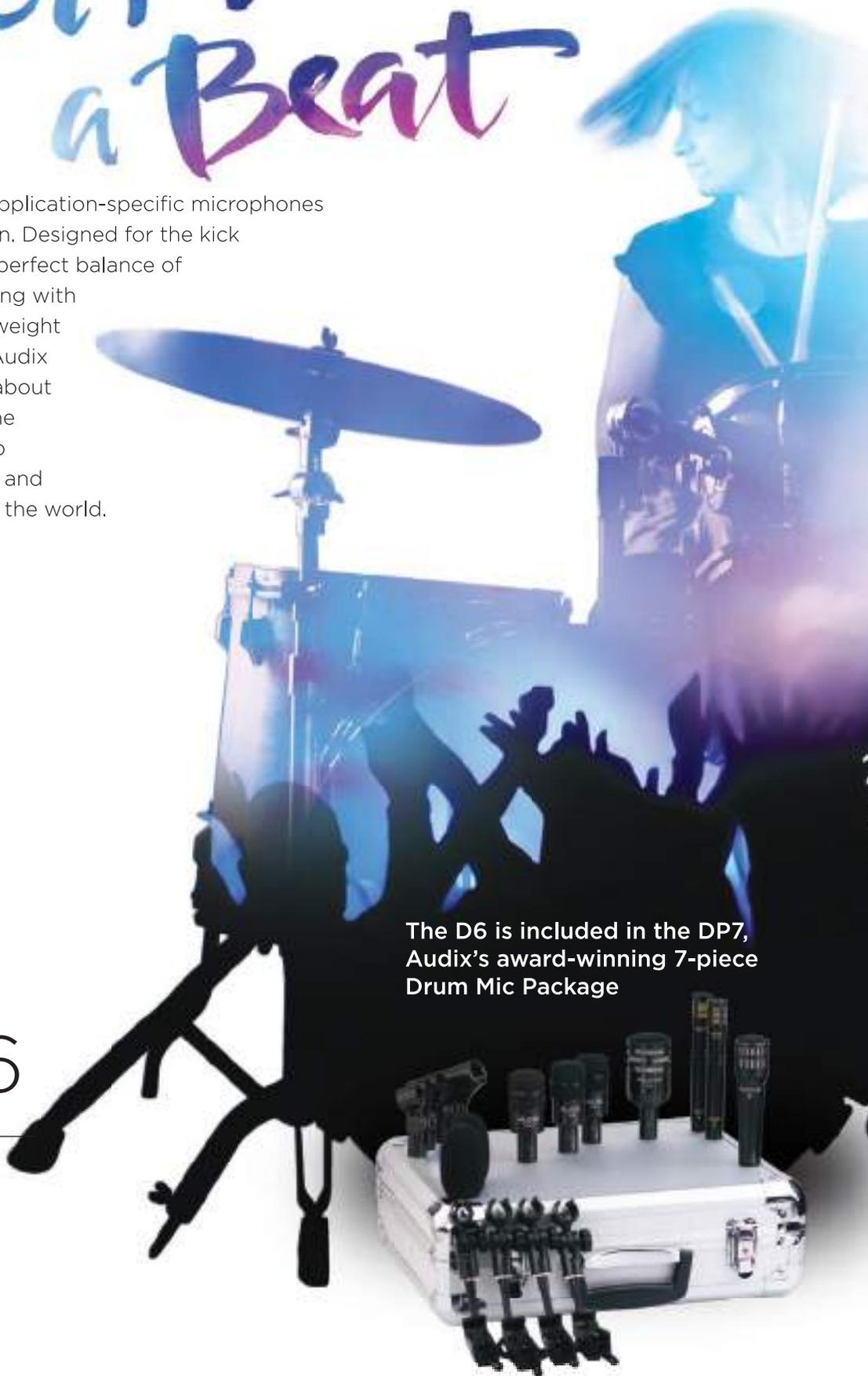


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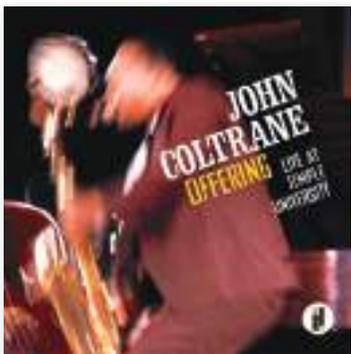
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Recorded only nine months before Coltrane's death, this lo-fi, two-CD document of a 1966 concert by the tenor great features his new working band with **Rashied Ali** on drums. The recording is reflective of the searching spiritual climate of the times. (Poet Allen Ginsberg gave a reading elsewhere on campus that night.) Coltrane is pushing further out at this point, and the various twenty-minute-long excursions of honking, squealing, and even singing must have tested the fortitude of an audience that might have expected a more swinging affair. Ten minutes into "Crescent," Ali and pianist Alice Coltrane engage in a lively conversation of chatter, abetted by some local sit-in percussionists. Ali takes a six-minute solo in "Leo," focusing on waves of rhythmic intensity and free playing. He works his toms and snare into rolling blasts of thunder, not unlike his more celebrated predecessor, Elvin Jones. Approach with caution, but find treasures within. (Universal) **Ilya Stemkovsky**

Medeski Scofield Martin & Wood *Juice*

Hip jam stars MMW reunite with guitar icon John Scofield for one of their most fun, concise, hook-powered outings to date.



The record cover might as well have sported a retro, chubby-letter blurb exclaiming, "Soul Jazz for NOW People!" As usual with Medeski Martin & Wood, the grooves are chasm deep. Afro-Latin influences abound, largely defined by **Billy Martin's** hybrid kit rhythms. But at the core are echoes of Booker

T., the Meters, Ramsey Lewis, and subtle psychedelia. The originals are winning, but the real surprises are fresh covers of tunes that should be dog tired. How about a slow, dub-ish reggae slant on "Sunshine of Your Love"? John Medeski's organ (occasionally piano) solos are infectious, fueled by the slinky, breathing pulse of Martin and bassist Chris Wood. With his dynamically varied grooves and open, woody drum sound, the adventurous Martin once again proves that a sensitive, sculpting touch is mightier than the sword. (Indirecto) **Jeff Potter**

Tim Bowness *Abandoned Dancehall Dreams*

The No-Man cofounder's second solo release is richly symbolic without being heavily "cymbal-ic."



Although not as nihilistic as, say, David Bowie's *Low* or as suicidal as Iggy Pop's *The Idiot*, the beautifully morose *Abandoned Dancehall Dreams* is reminiscent of the greatest of the late-'70s recording efforts that sought to combine pop, art rock, and sonic experimentation with heavy doses of

paranoia and melancholia. Icy aural atmospherics and percussion/programming elements are vital recurring characters in this song cycle, and their combined impact creates a near-visionary musical monster that preys on listeners' vulnerabilities. (Think "Gloomy Sunday" for the ambient/prog crowd.) Tim Bowness's sonic lab assistants include, among many others, longtime collaborator and mixing engineer Steven Wilson (Porcupine Tree, No-Man) as well as drummers **Pat Mastelotto** (King Crimson) and **Andrew Booker** (No-Man), whose sparing use of cymbals on tracks such as "The Warm-Up Man Forever" and "Beaten by Love" suggests the percussive rumblings of Peter Gabriel's 1982 album, *Security*. Bowness's record stalks with a similar unnerving pulse, underscoring the subliminal nature of rhythm and its ability to drill down to our deep-seated phobias. An accompanying second disc features outtakes and alternate mixes. (Inside Out) **Will Romano**

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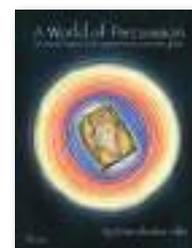
With the recent announcement that **Simon Phillips** was leaving the band after twenty years, to be replaced by Keith Carlock, the *Live in Poland* Blu-ray DVD turns out to be a fitting final concert statement from the drumming legend. Phillips simply owns all the classic Jeff Porcaro drum parts, from the slinky half-time shuffle of "Rosanna" to the deliberate chug of "Hold the Line." His open-handed approach looks effortless, left hand on the ride while the right crashes cymbals, and all the composed marching snare hits and tom fills in "Hydra" are executed with a graceful precision that makes ergonomic sense. The rhythm section is a dream, with bassist Nathan East filling in for an ailing Mike Porcaro, and the video and audio production bring out every nuance of the spectacular musicianship on stage. There's even some cool footage from a lipstick camera that looks like it's mounted on Phillips' shirt, so drummers can feel as though they're right in the driver's seat. (\$19.98, Eagle Rock) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



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Frankie Dunlop

Francis “Frankie” Dunlop, a great jazz drummer of precision, sensitivity, inventiveness, and deep swing, passed away this past July at age eighty-five, after a long struggle with illness.

Born December 6, 1928, into a musical family, Dunlop possessed determination that revealed itself early. As his former wife, Laura Dunlop, retells the tale, “His mother didn’t want him to go into show business. She was a religious person; he could play drums in the church, but she didn’t want him to do otherwise.”

When a gig opportunity arose, the twelve-year-old yearned to participate, but his mother forbade it. Recruiting a friend, Dunlop snuck his drums out his bedroom window, loaded them onto a wagon, and rolled ahead to the venue. But mothers just know. “She went right down there, pulled him off the stage, and marched him home,” Laura says. But Dunlop ultimately won out. By age sixteen, he was playing professionally around western New York.

Although steeped in jazz—Gene Krupa was his earliest influence—Dunlop cited his studies with Buffalo Philharmonic percussionist Johnny Roland as providing the key to his expansive technique.

After extensive freelancing, Dunlop jumped on a tour with sax star Big Jay McNeely that deepened his groove. In a 1985 interview with Scott K. Fish for *Modern Drummer*, Dunlop said, “[McNeely] took me under his wing and showed me the rhythm-and-blues approach to the drum, because I wasn’t giving him the right beat.”

But just as his career momentum



began rolling, Dunlop was drafted into the army, serving in the Korean War with an anti-aircraft unit. He managed to find a drumming outlet while in the service, touring throughout the Far East with the Seven Dukes of Rhythm.

Following his duty, Dunlop moved to New York City, where he quickly regained momentum. At a jam session, Thelonious Monk took note of the impressive newcomer and hired him for a steady engagement at the Five Spot with a dream band including bassist Wilbur Ware and emerging tenor giant John Coltrane. But a startling roadblock interfered. A musicians union

representative yanked Dunlop off his breakthrough gig due to a three-month residency requirement, sparking a shouting match between Monk and the misguided rep.

Again rebounding, Dunlop subsequently toured with Charles Mingus, joined Sonny Rollins’ trio, and then settled into a three-year residency with Maynard Ferguson. With Ferguson, Dunlop honed his hard-driving big band chops, as heard on the trumpeter’s LP *A Message From Birdland*.

Following a stint with Lena Horne, Dunlop played a 1960 tour with Duke Ellington, and the following year he was

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asked to rejoin Monk's group. That quartet, featuring tenor saxophonist Charlie Rouse and bassist John Ore, became one of the classic lineups of Monk's late career, yielding a significant string of Columbia LPs from 1961 to 1963, including *Monk's Dream*, *Big Band and Quartet in Concert*, *Criss-Cross*, *Monk in Tokyo*, and *Miles & Monk at Newport*. The group's extensive European tours were also documented on several later releases, including *Thelonious Monk in Italy* and *Monk in Copenhagen*.

With this unit Dunlop made his defining mark. Wielding crisp yet fluid technique in the service of a forward-moving, swinging pocket, Dunlop created an ideal balance of precision and openness. His quirky, unexpectedly placed fills served as both swinging links and responsive commentary to Monk's angular and playfully fragmented phrases. And he intuitively understood Monk's idiosyncratic swing feel, which sometimes straddled a bouncing 2 and a hard-swinging 4. Monk allowed Dunlop

ample space to develop his thematic, melodic soloing.

Thelonious S. Monk Jr., chairman of the board of trustees at the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz and a drummer who also played with his dad, tells *MD*, "Frankie Dunlop was the ideal drummer for my father. Their combined understanding of time, and particularly space, made for one of the greatest and perhaps the most unique rhythm section in the history of jazz."

In his heyday, Dunlop was on the road between seven and nine months of the year. "I have a whole collection of postcards from around the world," his daughter, Robin Dunlop, says. "I would bring them to school for show-and-tell, to show the class where my dad was and what he was doing."

Following his three and a half years with Monk, Dunlop reunited with Sonny Rollins, worked on several Broadway shows, and toured frequently with Lionel Hampton from 1975 through 1981. In addition to the recordings the drummer cut with his steady bandleaders, Dunlop generated a long discography with various artists, including Randy Weston, Ray Crawford, Richard Davis, Johnny Griffin, Joe Zawinul, and Mose Allison.

Friends and family knew Dunlop as a sociable person with the gift of gab. Robin recalls, "My dad loved connecting with people, talking to people wherever he went." And Laura adds, "He was the first one to give insight or a lesson to someone, always helping young people that wanted to get into drumming."

Also a quick wit, Dunlop possessed uncanny talents as an impersonator, a skill he employed intermittently throughout his career with his own jazz, comedy, and pantomime act, including a 1968 Fillmore East date where he shared the bill with Bill Cosby.

In 1985, Dunlop contracted the debilitating Guillain-Barré syndrome, a rare disorder attacking the nervous system. The protracted illness was later complicated by Alzheimer's dementia, leading to Frankie's death in July.

Citing Dunlop's pure love for his art, Laura recalls, "He didn't play for money necessarily. I knew many a night when he'd be out until four or five in the morning, doing somebody a favor, playing for twenty-five dollars. And of course he and all the musicians would go up to Minton's after work and play all night for nothing."

Jeff Potter



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Marching in Place

“I enjoy restoring drums and putting different configurations together,” Karen Kraker of Greenville, New York, says. Indeed, Kraker, who plays in the group onKor, is also the owner of our December 2010 Kit of the Month, which makes efficient use of multi-clamps in order to cut way back on floor stands, resulting in a full rig with a small footprint.

This time Kraker had a different goal, although she’s still avoiding tripod clutter. “I wanted a set that looks patriotic and sounds like a marching band,” Karen says. “I purchased a Pearl Competitor 18” marching bass drum



and 13” snare drum, and a set of Yamaha quads; I’m using the 8”, 10”, and 12” drums on the kit. I ordered an American flag drum wrap and recovered four of the drums.

“I added lightweight spurs to the bass drum and placed them more toward the bottom of the shell so they’re not overly noticeable,” Kraker continues. “I also attached a cymbal arm and fabricated two L-shaped brackets with a U shape on the top. The marching toms rest in the brackets by the spacers between the toms. The brackets are held on the rim of the bass drum using Tama cowbell clamps. And I added floor tom legs to the snare, so the look of the kit has more open space.”

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



Coming Up in Modern Drummer

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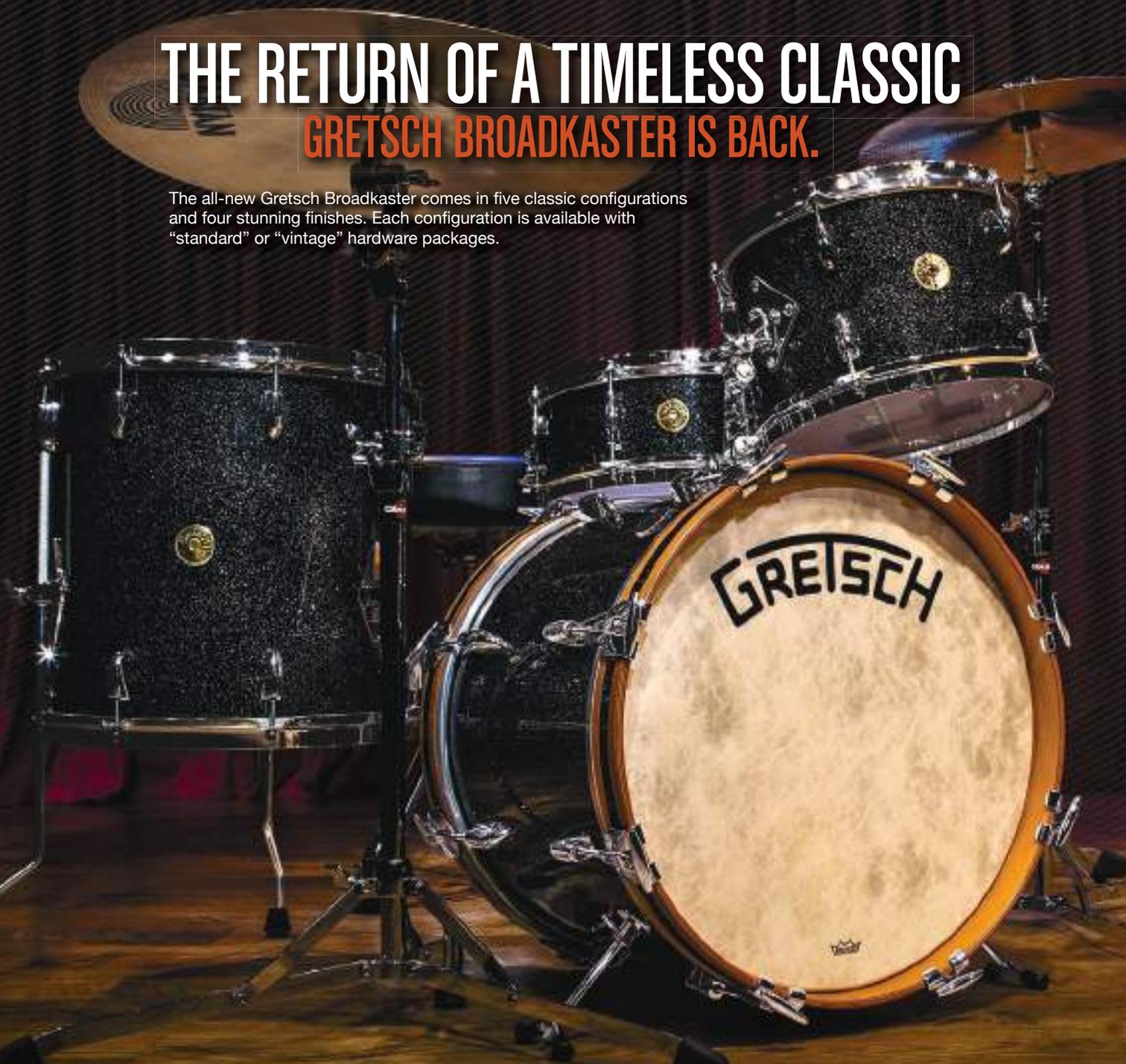


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