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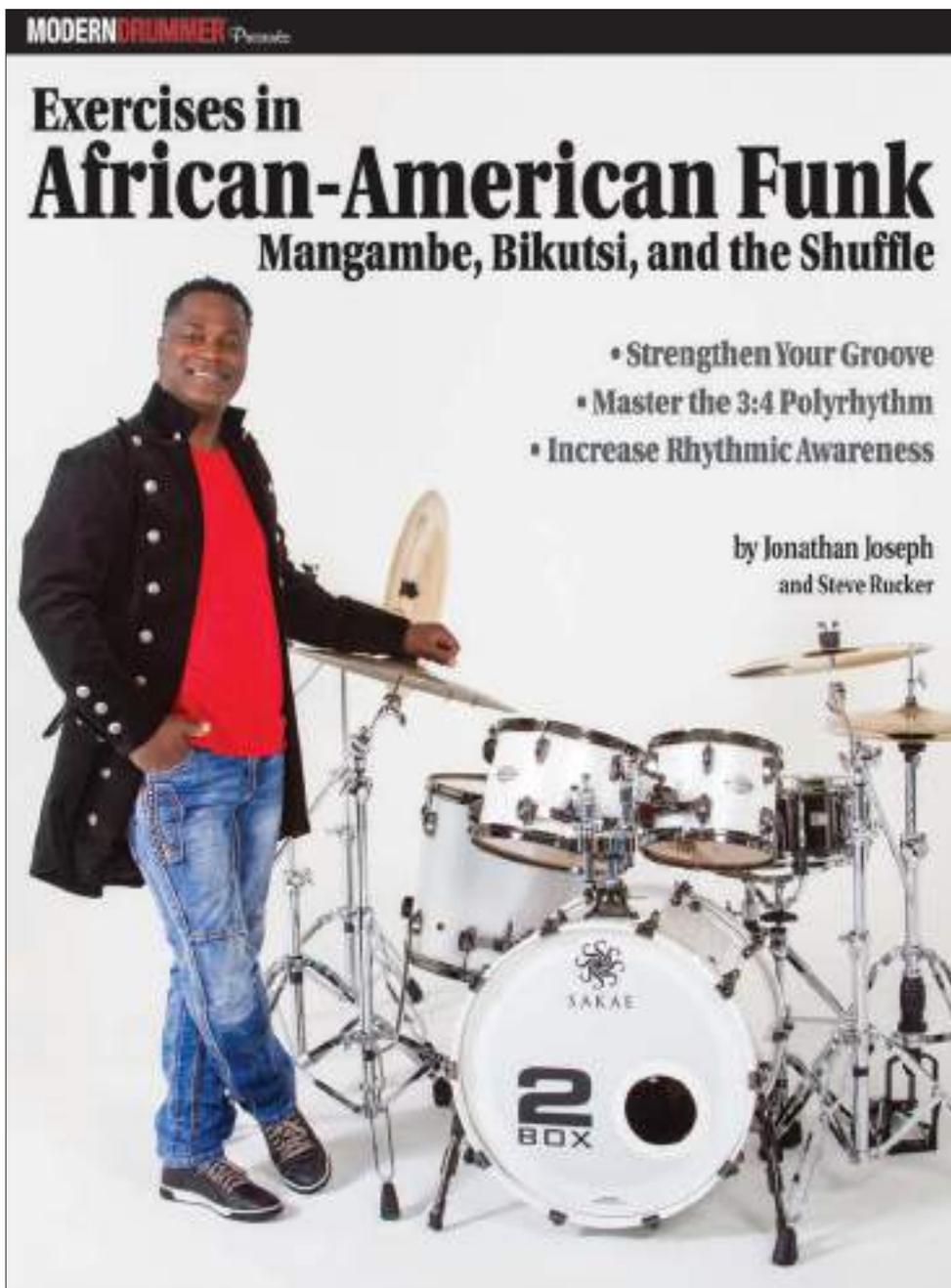


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# New from MODERN DRUMMER®

Written by renowned drummer Jonathan Joseph (Jeff Beck, Joss Stone, Richard Bona) and University of Miami director of drumset studies Steve Rucker, *Exercises in African-American Funk* is designed to introduce musicians who've studied jazz, R&B, rock, soul, and blues to a concept that applies West African rhythms to various genres.

The series of exercises contained in the book guide you through a fusion of African and American elements. On the American side, we have shuffle and shuffle-funk. On the African side, we have the rhythms from Cameroon known as mangambe and bikutsi. Mastering these exercises will strengthen your groove, provide you with an understanding of the three-against-four polyrhythm, give you an awareness of the second partial of the triplet, and introduce you to a fresh new way to hear and feel music.



**Chapter 4: Half-Time Shuffle-Funk**

In this chapter, we move the backbone of the shuffle groove over to beat 3. What this does is transform the shuffle into a half-time, triplet-based funk groove, which we'll call "shuffle-funk." The shuffle shuffle, made famous by the legendary R&B drummer Bernard Paganell, is one version of this type of groove.

The first hand pattern contains no ghost notes. The grooves become more and more dense as we add ghost notes, as in the previous exercises, the ghost notes should be played extremely soft. The primary focus of the groove is on the bass drum and the backbone.

As mentioned before, it's very helpful in your practice to alternate between a simple groove and the more difficult exercise. For instance, you can switch between each line of the exercises and this traditional mangambe groove.

Although these exercises are written with fifth-note triplets for consistency, you might also conceptualize them as sixth-note triplets. This interpretation would put the backbone on beats 2 and 4 of a bar of 4/4. So Hand Pattern 3 would look like the following.

As before, we'll start with a simple hand pattern and gradually add ghost notes. Practice the exercises between 70 and 130 bpm.

**Hand Pattern 1**

Here are some exercises that use Hand Pattern 1 with different bass drum variations.

**Chapter 6: Bikutsi**

In this chapter, we introduce the African rhythm known as bikutsi. Bikutsi is a musical genre from Cameroon that features the 3:4 polyrhythm. It has roots in the traditional music of the Baka people, who live around the city of Foumban, along with various elements of the pop rock & blues.

The characteristic rhythm of the bikutsi is a grouping of triplets in a four-note pattern. Elements of this chapter are directly related to Chapters 1 and 2. If you aren't clear on the 3:4 polyrhythm, please review those chapters.

Here's an example of a bikutsi pop-drummer rhythm.

By moving the snare accent to beat 3, we can create a simple bikutsi shuffle-funk pattern.

Here's a shuffle-funk variation with the bass drum on the first beat only.

We can also open the hi-hat where the accents occur.

Here's the same variation with the bass drum on the first beat only.

Check out a video of concepts and exercises included in the book at [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com), and order a copy today—for only \$14.95.

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*“There ain’t but one **Tony Williams** when it comes to playing the drums. There was nobody like him before or since.”*

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When Miles Davis invited the 17 year old Tony Williams to join his new Quintet, the music world would be forever changed ... and the art of drumming would never be the same. Not only did Tony set a new standard with this revolutionary group but the very sound of his instrument, in particular that of his cymbals, would set a benchmark to which, still to this day, all others would aspire.

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**On the Cover**

36

**Antonio Sanchez**

by Michael Parillo

"I'm in a very scary place right now, because I'm saying no to everything so I can do *my* thing. But I'm determined to get my product out because I believe in what I'm doing." Riding high on his *Birdman* score and sporting an inspired pair of new releases, this drummer is ready to soar to bandleader glory.



Cover and contents photos by Rahav Segev

**Features**

**16 Catching Up With...**

**Albert "Tootie" Heath /// Bryan Adams' Mickey Curry /// Blues Traveler's Brendan Hill**

**20 Get Good: Anger Management**

**Dealing with tough people without losing your cool.** by Juels Thomas

**54 Adam Christgau**

**The fine art of fine-tuning for the situation.** by Ilya Stemkovsky

**58 Dylan Howe**

**Deconstructing Bowie with an ear to jazz.** by Ken Micallef

**60 Jay Postones**

**Technique and transformation with Tesseract.** by Ben Meyer

**64 A Different View: Merrill Garbus**

**Tune-Yards' founder is led by the sound of drumming.** by Will Romano

**66 Setting Sights: John Tempesta**

**The rock journeyman takes Motor Sister for a *Ride*.** by David Ciauro

**Education**

**50 Jazz Drummer's Workshop**  
**Antonio Sanchez**  
*The Meridian Suite*  
by Terry Branam

**68 Basics**  
**Beware of the Chi-Ga-Da!**  
Exercises for Harnessing a Powerful Funk/Fusion Sticking  
by Rich Redmond

**70 Strictly Technique**  
**Pataflafla Hemiolas**  
Straight and Alternating Versions Over Half-Note Triplets  
by Bill Bachman

**72 Rock 'n' Jazz Clinic**  
**The Paradiddle Challenge**  
Unlocking Keith Carlock-Type Hand/Foot Interplay  
by Daniel Bédard

**74 Around the World**  
**Traditional Percussion on Drumset**  
Part 4: Cajon  
by Arturo Stable

**76 Rock Perspectives**  
**Progressive Drumming Essentials**  
Part 2: Demystifying Polyrhythms  
by Aaron Edgar

**Equipment**

**24 Product Close-Up**  
**Bone Custom Drums**  
Mineral Maple Drumset  
**Zildjian FX Series China Trashes,**  
Volcano Cup Zil-Bel, and Spiral Stacker  
**Fidock 6x13 Heartbreaker Series Snare**  
**Remo Powerstroke 77 and**  
Powerstroke 3 Black Dot Drumheads

**30 Electronic Review**  
**Ultimate Ears Pro UE-11 In-Ear Monitors**

**32 Shop Talk**  
**Get the Most Beat for Your Buck**  
4 Options for Building a Primo Snare Collection on a Workingman's Budget  
by Nate Bauman

**34 Gearing Up**  
Peter Erskine

**82 New and Notable**

**80 Concepts**  
**Nothing Happens When You're Comfortable**  
Setting Goals for Maximum Growth  
by Russ Miller

**Departments**

**8 An Editor's Overview**  
Grousers Anonymous  
by Adam Budofsky

**10 Readers' Platform**

**14 News**

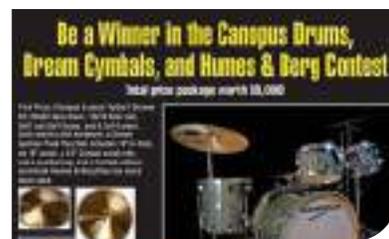
**22 It's Questionable**  
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# Grousters Anonymous

Most of us who spend a good amount of time on social media have, in the heat of some existential crisis, thought about taking to the Internet to blurt out an angst-ridden remark of one type or another. Usually we immediately remember that it's one thing to express some potentially offensive thought in front of our friends—they'll forgive us—and quite another to advertise to the entire universe how uncouth and closed-minded we can be in our worst moments.



Some people, however, seem to be missing that mechanism that springs to action whenever their basest instincts creep to the surface. Worse, they seem to court those moments. Something ruffles their feathers, they lash out mean-spiritedly, and then they bask in their righteousness, hoping for support of their viewpoint or, more likely, an irate reply, which in their mind actually holds more currency. In the digital realm, these people are called trolls.

Of course, I'm not saying anything new here; slinging mud from the safety of one's laptop has been around as long as some of us have been alive. But none of us has to condone the behavior, or allow our own platforms to be used for spreading comments that we feel step over the line of decency or plain old respect for our fellow man.

*Modern Drummer* is many things, but sensationalist is not one of them. It was never founder Ron Spagnardi's style, and to this day we at *MD* are proud of our reputation for being a thoughtful musician's forum, not simply another lifestyle magazine masquerading as one.

I bring this up now because I've read some particularly childish and even vulgar comments recently on our social media sites that just made me kind of...sad. This drummer's video stinks... This guy can't play his way out of a bag... That dude looks like he's on drugs... Now, I might be the proverbial boy trying to plug holes in a dike here—and my suspicion is that most people who play this game aren't actually regular readers of *Modern Drummer*—but I really do wish that people would take a bit of initiative to be more respectful and thoughtful. Gutter talk and loose commentary drag all of us down. Goodness knows that drummers have had a hard enough time of it, pushing against the prejudices of those who view the world of people who play instruments as being made up of musicians...and then drummers, as the old, not-so-funny joke goes.

We should all learn to respect ourselves more and, at the very least, respect the great artists and thinkers who aim to elevate our craft and the way we talk about it. No one's got the right to expect any of us to be a saint, but they certainly can expect us to make the attempt.

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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.

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## READERS' PLATFORM

### From Gretsch and DW

A news release on page 14 of your May 2015 issue carried the headline "Drum Workshop Purchases Percussion Companies." Gretsch Drums was among the companies listed in that release. Accordingly, we would like to offer a bit of clarification: Drum Workshop and Gretsch are now partners in the creation of Gretsch drums.

Drum Workshop is licensed to manufacture and distribute Gretsch drums. The brand name—and the preservation of the historic legacy of that name—remains firmly with the Gretsch family. Drum Workshop is also a family-owned company run by people who have a genuine understanding and respect for the art of top-quality custom drum manufacturing.

Together we are confident that this new partnership will generate continued expansion of the worldwide market for Gretsch drums, while honoring the time-tested design and unique legacy that are so much a part of "That Great Gretsch Sound." We are looking forward to a long and fruitful association.

**Fred W. Gretsch and Don Lombardi**

### 2015 Readers Poll

I want to say a special thanks to *Modern Drummer* magazine and the dedicated readers of the publication for voting me the number-three Studio drummer and number-five Clinician/Educator in the 2015 Readers Poll. I have every *Modern Drummer* magazine since 1983 in my library. I am always honored to be included in the poll, especially beside great friends and heroes of mine. Thank you all!

**Russ Miller**

### Hats Off to Roy Burns

I not only appreciate Roy Burns' take on why he stopped playing ("Why I Stopped Playing," First Person, May 2015) but applaud his courage to step down another avenue of diversity. This is a life worth living, and Roy Burns is living it!

**Lou Contino**

### Drummer Autobiographies

When I retrieved the May 2015 issue of *Modern Drummer* from my mailbox, I found Patrick Berkery's "10 Essential Drummer Autobiographies" wonderfully informative. I've read several of the books listed and now have more I'm looking forward to reading.

Another essential autobiography your readers should pick up is Joe Vitale's *Backstage Pass* (2008), an entertaining and informative account of his work with Joe Walsh, the Eagles, Dan Fogelberg, Peter Frampton, John Entwistle, Neil Young, Rick Derringer, Bill Wyman, and Crosby, Stills & Nash (together and solo), plus many others. Joe writes with a wonderful sense of humor and recounts highly amusing anecdotes with some of rock's most elite musicians, including John Lennon and Ringo Starr. Vitale's songwriting credentials include the classic "Rocky Mountain Way" by Joe Walsh and "Pretty Maids All in a Row" by the Eagles. Joe's stories and experiences with these legendary performers will keep any drummer fascinated from cover to cover, and the book also includes an absolutely amazing discography.

**Bill Morse**

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## Antonio Sanchez

Watch an exclusive Brazilian independence lesson with this month's cover artist.



Rathian Segev

## PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

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## BASICS

Rich Redmond shows how to harness the power of the funk/fusion sticking he calls the chi-ga-da.

## SHOP TALK

View demos of the four budget-conscious snares discussed in this month's column.

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New exclusive *Modern Drummer* online contests are being posted all the time. Visit [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com) often and become eligible to win the greatest drum-related prizes on the Net!

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Tag along as we take the mystery out of polyrhythms.

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## Mike Portnoy and the Winery Dogs Announce Second Annual Dog Camp

The Winery Dogs, featuring drummer Mike Portnoy, bassist Billy Sheehan, and singer/guitarist Richie Kotzen, are hosting the 2015 edition of Dog Camp this July 27 through 31 at the Full Moon Resort in Big Indian, New York. It's the group's second annual immersive program for aspiring musicians of all ages and levels. Campers attend instrument-specific clinics, learn songwriting mechanics, and enjoy intimate performances by the band. The "vacation" experience offers the opportunity to get up close and personal with the musicians. Guests this year include bassist David Ellefson (Megadeth), guitarist Alex Skolnick (Testament, Rodrigo y Gabriela), and the Ritchie Kotzen Band. For more information, go to winerydogcamp.com.

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#### *Songs We Like a Lot*

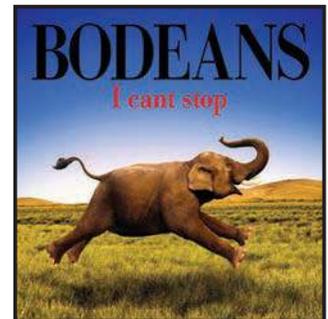
The drummer/leader's follow-up to his Grammy-nominated *Songs I Like a Lot* features several original compositions as well as covers like the 1967 Jimmy Webb/Fifth Dimension hit "Up, Up and Away" (itself a multiple Grammy winner) and the Burt Bacharach/Hal David-penned Carpenters classic "Close to You." His version of Daft Punk's "Get Lucky" is based, Hollenbeck says, "on what I think the Russian Police Choir should have sounded like when they sang it at the Sochi Olympic Games opening ceremony." Hollenbeck's Large Ensemble will be performing much of the album at the Newport Jazz Festival on July 31.



### Heartless Bastards

#### *Restless Ones*

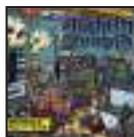
"We made the record with John Congleton down at Sonic Ranch, an amazing residential recording complex near El Paso, Texas," Heartless Bastards drummer **David Colvin** tells *Modern Drummer*. "All of my parts were pretty well solidified before we got down there, and we recorded all the rhythm-section tracks live to a click. Lately I've been tuning my kit pretty high, in a late-'60s, Mitch Mitchell sort of way. Like on records from that era, I wanted to capture a unified, more mono drum sound. The higher, less 'huge' drum sound of those records really gives space for the low end of the bass and guitar to sing."



### BoDeans

#### *I Can't Stop*

Says drummer **Kenny Aronoff**, "Recording and touring with Kurt Neumann and the BoDeans on and off for over twenty-four years is an example of how I 'can't stop' and neither can Kurt. I've always connected with the energy and perfectly written songs that Kurt composes for the BoDeans. He started playing drums when he was a kid but then became the primary singer-songwriter and lead guitarist of the BoDeans. Twelve records later, Kurt has once again written songs that are simple, to the point, melodic, and sound like you have heard them your entire life after the first listen. I recorded my drums in my studio [Uncommon Studios LA] and sent the Pro Tools files back to Kurt, and then he overdubbed all the other parts in his studio. I'm loving playing some of these new songs live."



**High on Fire** Luminiferous (Des Kensel) /// **Lorenzo Feliciati** Koi (Steve Jansen, Pat Mastelotto) /// **Mark Egan** Direction Home (Danny Gottlieb) /// **Metallic Taste of Blood** Doctoring the Dead (Ted Parsons) /// **Pat Bianchi Trio** A Higher Standard (Byron Landham) /// **Pat McGee** Pat McGee (Russ Kunkel) /// **Oded Lev-Ari** Threading (Matt Wilson) /// **Deb Ryder** Let It Rain (Tony Braunagel) /// **Joe Locke** Love Is a Pendulum (Terreon Gully) /// **Kurt Elling** Passion World (Kendrick Scott) /// **Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard** Django and Jimmie (Tony Creasman, Eddie Bayers, Lonnie Wilson) /// **Slightly Stoopid** Meanwhile...Back at the Lab (Ryan "Rymo" Moran)

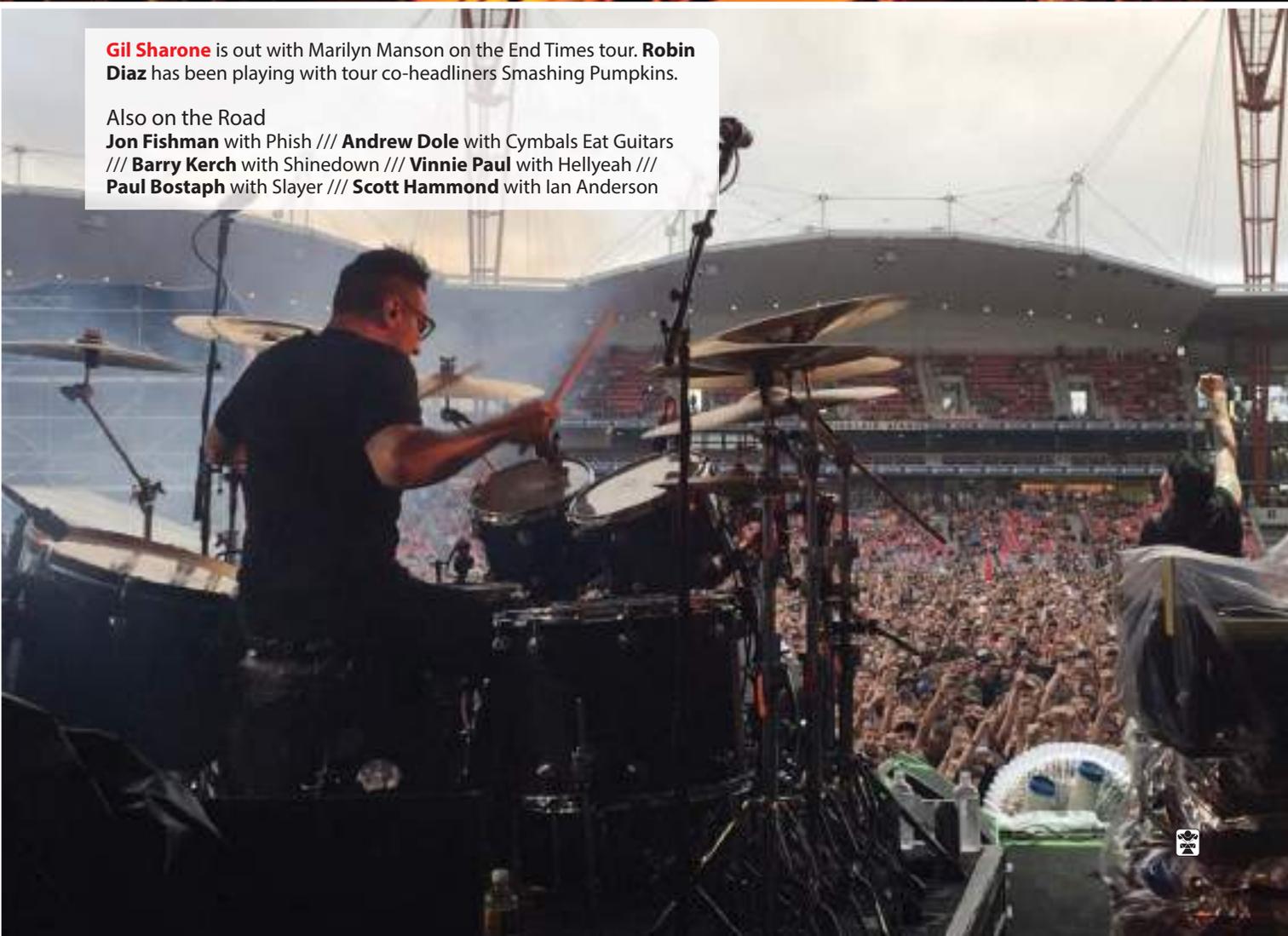
# On Tour



**Joey Kramer** is out with Aerosmith on the band's Blue Army Tour 2015.

**Gil Sharone** is out with Marilyn Manson on the End Times tour. **Robin Diaz** has been playing with tour co-headliners Smashing Pumpkins.

Also on the Road  
**Jon Fishman** with Phish /// **Andrew Dole** with Cymbals Eat Guitars  
/// **Barry Kerch** with Shinedown /// **Vinnie Paul** with Hellyeah ///  
**Paul Bostaph** with Slayer /// **Scott Hammond** with Ian Anderson



# Albert "Tootie" Heath

The essence of jazz is evident on his latest, *Philadelphia Beat*—and that means swinging *and* searching.



"Art Blakey always said, 'It's not what you play in between, it's how you start and how you end a piece.'" Albert "Tootie" Heath, one of the few drummers to know the legendary Blakey as a young big band player, has lent his graceful rhythms to the music of Wes Montgomery, Sonny Rollins, Herbie Hancock, Nina Simone, and other jazz greats in a career that spans fifty years. At a spry seventy-nine, Heath continues to evolve, as evidenced by his three records with Bad Plus pianist Ethan Iverson and renowned session bassist Ben Street. As with 2013's *Tootie's Tempo*, the recent *Philadelphia Beat* shows the trio following unusual paths as they swing down the house—from beat 1 to the final chorus.

"These guys play the same music I've been born and bred with, but they have a different approach," Heath says. "Ethan is unpredictable. You might think he's going to play something you know, then he adds something very different. Ben plays unexpected notes, but they're correct. These guys challenge me to not play the same old stuff."

Heath plays drumset, mallets, tambourine, and brushes on *Philadelphia Beat*, bringing his grand groove to bear on swing, ballads, bossa, and more exotic fare. "Pentatonic Etude" features his graceful mallet work; "Con Alma" is a lesson in tambourine technique. "I got that mallet thing from Brazilian surdo drummers," Tootie explains. "As they play a specific rhythm they mute the drum to stop it from vibrating. You're controlling the rhythm of the beat that way. Speed is popular now, but this is something else. It's to do with tone and rhythm."

"I learned tambourine in church," Heath continues. "That rhythm became the jazz cymbal beat. In the early days there was always a little gospel in jazz. The tambourine is played in many cultures. That particular technique I learned from John Bergamo at CalArts. It allowed me to be more explorative. You have to have confidence, whatever instrument you're playing." **Ken Micallef**



Michael Perez



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Catching Up With...

# Mickey Curry

It's thirty years and counting, tracking and touring with hitmaker Bryan Adams.

By his own admission, Mickey Curry's career has been close to idyllic. The New Haven native's résumé is, to say the least, sturdy: learning the ropes in the '70s with the Scratch Band, featuring future *SNL* musical director G.E. Smith on guitar; backing Daryl Hall and John Oates during the duo's early-'80s megahits period; and then expanding his recording work with Bryan Adams into a role as full-time drummer for the hugely popular Canadian rocker. These days Curry is supporting Adams on a tour celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the hit album *Reckless*. "Beginning the day Bryan and I met," Curry tells *Modern Drummer*, "we were thinking alike as to how he wanted his records to sound, particularly the drums. From the first day of rehearsals his songs were the kind of thing I wanted to play on."

*Reckless* is one of a dozen Adams LPs that Curry has contributed to, a collection that includes pop-rock staples like "Run to You" and "Cuts Like a Knife." On last year's covers album, *Tracks of My Years*, Curry got the opportunity to interpret some of popular music's most familiar tunes, like Smokey Robinson and the Miracles' "The Tracks of My Tears," Eddie Cochran's "C'mon Everybody," and the Association's "Never My Love." "I grew up listening to these songs," Curry says. "That's how I learned to play. 'Never My Love,' for instance, features one of my all-time favorite



Curry with Bryan Adams circa 1992

Hal Blaine drum tracks. When he comes in at the top with the riveted cymbal, it's so beautifully done, impeccable."

Notably, *Tracks of My Years* was coproduced by David Foster, who had a hand in some of the most successful pop albums of all time. "I love David," Curry says. "He's a great musician, and [as a producer] he has no preconceived notions—he lets you play what you feel."

After four decades in the music business, Curry has learned a thing or two about having longevity as an artist, and as a healthy human. "First, I'm really careful about how I eat," he explains. "Also, I don't drink or smoke, and I walk a lot. I just make sure that during those two and a half hours on stage every night, that's where my energy is focused. And when I'm home, I'm home—it's all about my wife, Susan, and my nieces and nephews. I'm the luckiest guy on the planet. I'm so grateful that I can go out, still play drums, and have fun." **Bob Girouard**



# Brendan Hill

**Blues Traveler has helped define the jam-band aesthetic since well before the genre existed. The group's latest foray, however, is down a road previously untraveled.**

**B**lues Traveler's sound is so closely tied to John Popper's harmonica playing that it's easy to take drummer Brendan Hill for granted. But Hill provides the sturdy foundation under the harp virtuoso, and that balance has never been clearer than on the band's latest effort, *Blow Up the Moon*. It's a musical relationship that has existed since well before the New Jersey-bred



blues-rock band's breakout 1994 album, *Four*, and Grammy-winning single, "Run-Around," fueled a decades-long career of regular recording and near-constant touring.

"Nowadays you have to play live to survive," Hill says. "You need to entertain people and perfect your craft. We developed our sound on the New York City club scene, and we would gauge our songs by how our audiences reacted. We used that same premise while making our albums. *Blow Up the Moon* reflects the influence of some of the bands that came after us, and we found it cool just to talk to them and write together with them—sort of a reverse-influence kind of thing."

The fourteen songs on *Blow Up the Moon* feature collaborations with acts as diverse as Thompson Square, Plain White T's, 3OH!3, Hanson, and Jewel. "Our management put out feelers to different artists, and we got about thirty-five responses," Hill says. "With us, the writing process had been a closed-ranks kind of thing, and entering this new zone was kind of scary. It was completely collaborative, plus we utilized studios from across the USA, from Los Angeles to Nashville to Oklahoma."

Hill's playing style is the perfect combination of schooled and street, and though many would be tempted to go lick for lick against a player like Popper, Brendan is supportive throughout. Still, with bebop and big band influences like Max Roach, Art Blakey, and Buddy Rich sitting alongside inspiration from rock gods like John Bonham, Ginger Baker, and Bill Ward, Hill isn't shy to whip out the jazz chops when the spirit moves him. In fact, the controversial film *Whiplash*, he says, "was loosely based on my studio jazz band instructor, Anthony Biancosino, and my experiences with him at Princeton High School. Yes, the movie exaggerates, but I was *that* drummer, and Dr. Tony was a huge influence." **Bob Girouard**



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# Anger Management

## Dealing With Difficult People Without Losing Your Cool

by Juels Thomas

**A**s musicians and support staff, we work in an environment with so many different personalities and egos constantly swerving around. It's impossible to avoid a crash sometimes. We've all had to deal with a club manager, front-of-house engineer, guitarist, etc., who seemingly always just woke up on the wrong side of hell. Even chronically nice people can have bad moods.

The first thing to remember when you're caught in a tense situation is to not immediately take it personally. All people have triggers that they can't control. Maybe they didn't sleep well last night, or they're hungry, or they just sat in three hours of horrendous traffic. (Trust me—you do *not* want to witness the wrath that is me inside a car on a Southern California freeway after a sleepless night and no lunch.)

Another hard lesson I've had to learn is that verbally attacking the Cranky McGrouchersnarks of the world (in a direct or a passive/aggressive way) *doesn't* work. If you automatically come at someone all defensive and amped up, that person will not respond well. Think about when people approach you like that. Would you rather punch them or calmly help them? Right. So it's pretty unlikely that someone will want to be a sweetheart to you if she's being screamed at or degraded. In fact, that's a sure way to make life harder for yourself. You're going to end up beating your head against the wall and staying pissed off all night, and the next day, and the next day....

The only person trapped in this cycle is you, by the way. I guarantee that 99 percent of the time the other person has moved on from your encounter and is out having a lovely time at the beach with the family, while you're stuck ruminating in your head, kicking the dog, and being so certain that your undying anger is somehow teaching this other person a lesson. Nope. You're actually only giving him the power to invade and ruin your personal time.

So, obviously it sucks, but what can we do about it? Well, think about what you want to accomplish. Do you really just

want to tell this person that he's a complete idiot and he's doing it all wrong? Yeah, I know, I do too sometimes. But I have bad news for you: No one is ever going to say, "You're right! I *am* an incompetent douchebag! Thank you for pointing that out."

If you think you're going to get them to suddenly see the error of their ways by berating them, you're never going to

gig and things go off script. A piece of gear might not work (or someone forgot it), or the other band takes too long for its soundcheck. But it doesn't help to fixate on who or what caused the problem. Yelling at the keyboardist for twenty minutes about how he was five minutes late and therefore what a loser he is doesn't get you on stage faster. Yes, address that there is a problem, but focus

on the solution. Then, as soon as possible, when the time is appropriate, calmly have that band meeting and ask, "What can we do so that this doesn't happen again?" In general, simply asking someone who is struggling what you can do to make his job easier will make your job easier. Believe me.

Some people think that showing aggressiveness and anger is a sign of authority. Did you know that you can still be super-badass and "metal" and "ballsy" and be a nice person at the same time? It's true! Think about how many times you've heard someone say, almost surprised, how so-and-so in some hardcore band is "actually

the sweetest person I've ever met!" And no one ever loses respect for that person just because she's kind and levelheaded.

But other times we run into people who have constant or disproportionate anger, believing it proves they are in charge or "too cool for you." It really only proves that they don't have adequate coping skills to deal with even minor frustrations. They're basically feeling helpless inside, so all they know how to do is scream outside. Try to remember this when someone is angry at or around you. That's not to say you should tolerate someone demeaning you. Absolutely not! But understanding a little bit about where people are coming from can help you in your approach.

Say someone you have to work with has a notorious reputation for being horrible. Most people would likely just avoid that person. But I once saw an artist do something incredible. All day we had been working with this particular grump who

**"Slowing down in the moment to remember that you have a chance to make or break the situation is pretty empowering. It's called grace under pressure."**

reach your goal. But if your goal is to work with people without tearing your hair out—and it should be—there are more effective options. If you can slow down in the moment to remember that you have a chance to make or break the situation here, you'll realize that's pretty empowering. It's called grace under pressure.

More times than not, we show up to a

### 7 Ways to Stay Cool

1. Don't take a negative vibe personally.
2. Don't return aggression with aggression.
3. Don't try to change them—work with them.
4. Address the problem but focus on the solution.
5. Proactively approach the troublemaker with positivity.
6. Be genuine in your desire to work together.
7. Take stock of the positive.

was making life unbearable for all of the bands setting up. So, by the time the opening act got there, the drummer had heard all the horror stories about this guy. Instead of rolling his eyes and accepting the hostility that was sure to ensue, our hero went straight up to the problem child and simply said, "Hi! I'm looking forward to working with you!" The snarling beast instantly transformed into a snuggly pussycat before our eyes. It was unbelievable.

If you anticipate a conflict, the best tactic can sometimes be to immediately defuse the situation by ignoring negativity. Tell the irate venue owner, "Man, I love playing this place. We're going to do an awesome job for you tonight!" Empathize with the bitter audio tech, "Hey, I know you handle a lot of people constantly coming at you with all kinds of crazy demands. You're the expert. So if I let you know the overall sound we're going for, can you let me know what you need from me in order to get there?" Just make sure you're being genuine and not condescending. The point is to work together, not against one another. You'll be amazed at how you can turn people's attitudes around. And so will your friends. They might even start calling you "the douche whisperer."

Calming people around you is a very valuable skill in this business. It's hard, but the encouraging news is that each time you successfully deal with challenging people, the more confident and prepared you'll be the next time. Which makes it less likely that you'll let them drag you down into your own anger again.

This is all much easier to write than to actually put into practice. I am far from awesome at managing anger all the time (or most of the time, depending on who you ask). Some days are better than others. We all have bad days. That is certainly allowed. On the whole, though, the aim should be to not let anger—ours or anyone else's—ruin the experience by focusing on the minutiae. You'll only end up missing the good stuff right in front of you. Stuff like the fact that, in this blink of an eye that you spend on the planet, you're playing music for a living.

That people dropped whatever they were doing, hired a babysitter or took off from work, and came to see you. That rather than being anywhere else in the world, whatever city or club you're in, you are here making people dance.

Appreciate that!  
And be nice.

**Juels Thomas** is the education and events manager for Drum Workshop.



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## Mind Matters

# Why Am I Avoiding Practice?

by Bernie Schallehn

I'm the drummer in a Top 40 cover band, and we have a rule that all members must come to rehearsal with their parts prepped. The last month or so, I've been dragging my feet and have arrived at practice a bit unprepared. We work up new material at every rehearsal, so I know I'm holding things up. Do you have any advice on how I can get myself motivated to woodshed again?

**John**

Maybe you're just a lazy slug. Only kidding! My first thought is that this type of music really isn't to your liking, or you've grown tired of it. When you're not learning your parts, how are you spending your time? Are you crashed on the couch, watching TV, playing with your phone, or perhaps listening or jamming to music that really appeals to you? Our tastes in music often change over time.

Ask yourself why you became associated with your current Top 40 band. Were you attracted to a better pay scale and ritzier venues? Perhaps those two motivators have fizzled out. More money and nicer places to play are great, but an emotional attachment—a love of the music—will often win out over a few more bucks and cleaner bathrooms.

Do this exercise. At your next gig, perform what I call an eco-check. Tune in to your internal self-talk and your feelings and emotions. What is your head telling you when you perform this type of music? How about your body? Is your internal monologue speaking to you in a happy, upbeat,

**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.

excited, warm-and-fuzzy fashion, or do you hear a droning inner voice saying that you're bored to tears? Run the same check with your body. Do you feel psyched, passionate, joyful, light, energetic, or even electrified? Or do your arms and legs feel heavy and lethargic, and you'd rather be stretched out on a cot than perched on your throne? Basically, do you feel "blah," or are you fired up?

If your band is constantly learning new material, there must be some challenging or at least new beats and fills in the songs. Are these elements fun to master, or are they more of a bother to you? Lastly, are you playing with an eye toward improving your skills, or are you just falling back on tired rhythms and fills?

### The Power of Words

World-class percussionist Taku Hirano played a lengthy run with Cirque du Soleil. He told me that his fellow performers—musicians, aerialists, gymnasts, contortionists—would refer to their daily practice time as training. Taku liked the term and started to incorporate it into his lexicon, instead of the word *practice*. Rather than dutifully practice his instruments, he would go *train* in his chosen profession.

The word *practice* is heavy with negative connotations. How many of us were forced as kids to "go practice the piano" or another instrument for which we held little to no interest? In school, many teachers hammer away at us to practice our times tables or spelling. When we're lax, there's the

dreaded accusation from the teacher or parent: "Well, it's obvious that you didn't practice your blah, blah, blah...." Basically, practice often feels like drudgery.

Now consider the word *train*. Elite athletes train in their chosen sport to refine their skills. Going to train, rather than practice, on your drumkit just sounds cooler and more exciting. For Hirano, it's strongly associated with physical fitness and mental training as well.

As an experiment, try thinking of your prep sessions as training rather than practicing. You may be pleased with the outcome of this simple but potentially powerful change in terminology.

### Become a Rat

In conditioning experiments, scientists work with rats to shape their behavior. They put a rat in a cage with a bar. Eventually, intentionally or unintentionally, the rat will push the bar, and out pops a pellet of food. The scientist will then adjust the bar so the rat may have to push it multiple times to get the treat. The treat is a positive reinforcer—a reward. Do the same thing with your prep sessions, and reward your efforts with something meaningful.

To summarize, if you don't like the music you're playing, find another band. This avoids the drama of being fired because you're consistently unprepared. If you enjoy the music but don't like practicing, think of your time spent learning the songs as training on the kit. Then, when you've learned what you needed to learn for the next rehearsal, reward yourself!

## Dashboard Practice Pads

My husband is a drummer. He always has music going in his head, and he taps out the beat with his fingers. Even in the car, he carries a set of sticks and plays on the dashboard. (He usually makes me drive, so he can drum.) My last car had a padded dashboard, and the sound wasn't too bad. But my new car's dash is solid plastic and sounds awful. I'm wondering if there are any drum pads out there that can mount to the dashboard so he can continue to play in the car, or do you have any creative suggestions?

**Deb**

While we don't know of any drum pads made specifically for dashboards, there are plenty of portable practice devices that would work for you. There's the Remo Putty Pad, which is a glob of malleable nontoxic material that can be flattened to create a



From left: Remo Putty Pad, Vic Firth Universal Practice Tips, and Ahead knee pad

portable practice pad. Sabian also recently released the 6" Grip Disc pad that adheres to hard surfaces. Another option would be a small practice pad that's designed to strap to the thigh. Check out models by Ahead, Meinl, Gibraltar, and Wincent, among others. For on-the-go drummers, we highly recommend Vic Firth's Universal Practice Tips, which are molded rubber balls that pop onto the ends of sticks so that you can get a drumlike rebound from any hard surface. Good luck!



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# Bone Custom Drums Mineral Maple Drumset

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**A**lthough most North American drummers are likely not too familiar with Slovenia's Bone Custom Drums, the company has been making high-end specialty instruments that marry striking design with world-class sound since 2005. Punk legend Marky Ramone even signed on to have a signature snare built for him, which is a 6.5x14, 20-ply maple drum with a black glitter finish and pink/black powder-coated tube lugs. Our curiosity about Bone was piqued at Winter NAMM 2015, where the company displayed some unique-looking drums, including the six-piece Mineral Maple setup we have for review. Let's take a look!

## Every Little Detail

Bone builds fully customizable drumsets, but a few things are consistent across most of its offerings. These include tube lugs (either mini or full-size versions), Trick GS007 three-position throw-offs, 2.3 mm triple-flange steel hoops, and Evans-made drumheads.

The Mineral Maple kit we received for review comprises an 18.5x22, 10-ply bass drum with matching hoops (the front hoop is twice as wide as the batter hoop); 7x10 and 8x12 rack toms, both 7-ply; 15x14 and 16x16 floor toms, also 7-ply; and an 8x14, 7-ply snare that has a center ply of wenge. All of the drums feature brass hardware, rectangular wood badges, and chunky 1.25" black aluminum vent-hole covers. The rack toms feature Gauger RIMS suspension mounts in a gold-colored alloy, and the snare has a set of PureSound's wide thirty-strand wires.

The bearing edges are meticulously cut to 45 degrees, with a slightly rounded back cut. The lugs, spurs, floor tom leg brackets, hoop claws, and tension rods are insulated with plastic gaskets to minimize metal-to-metal and metal-to-wood contact, and the bass drum batter-side hoop comes with a plastic protector installed to keep the pedal from chewing away at the wood.

Drumheads include clear-G2-type batters and clear-G1-type

bottoms on the toms and a pre-muffled EQ3-style system on the bass drum (clear 2-ply batter with two muffling rings—one permanent and one removable—and a black single-ply front head with a permanent muffling ring and a 4" port). The snare has a double-ply coated batter with a 1" muffling ring and a thin, clear resonant head.

## Clean, Powerful, and Precise

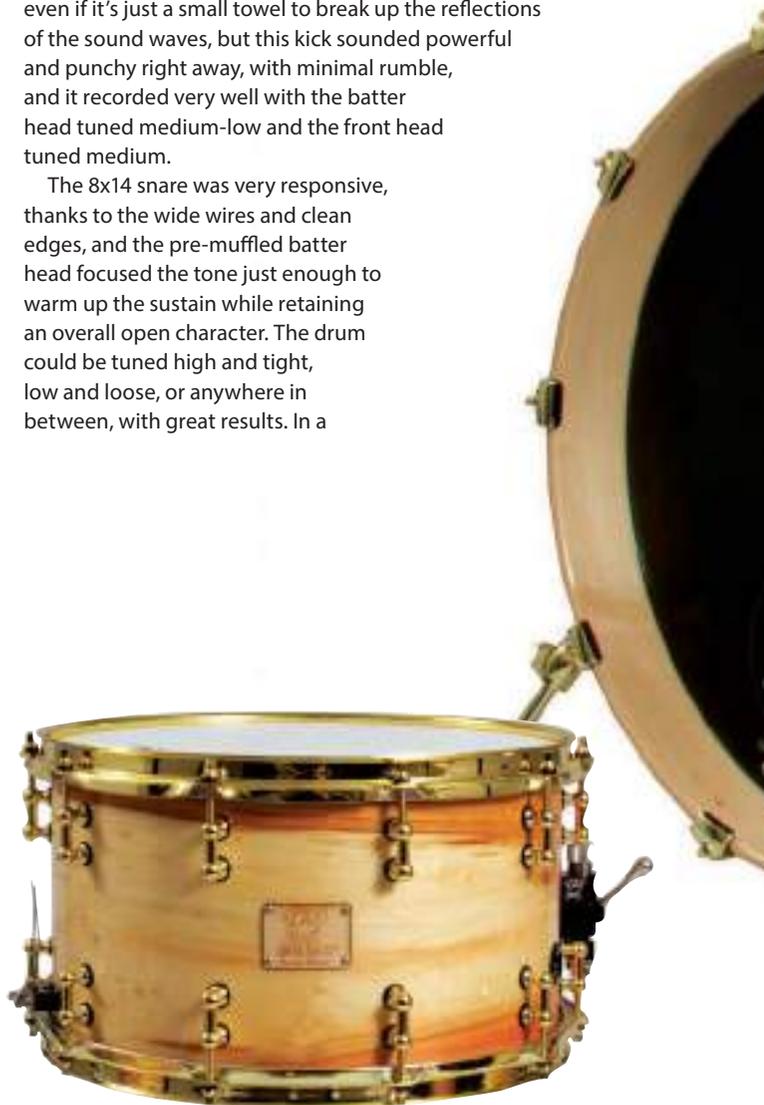
While the rich appearance of these drums is enough to garner serious attention from players on the lookout for something distinctive, the kit also proved to boast strong, cutting contemporary tones and a wide tuning range. None of the drums, including the kick, required muffling to focus the sound and tamp down overtones; that's a testament to the quality of the shells, which Bone makes itself, the precision of the bearing edges, and the strategic choice of heads.

Very rarely do I forgo muffling inside the bass drum, even if it's just a small towel to break up the reflections of the sound waves, but this kick sounded powerful and punchy right away, with minimal rumble, and it recorded very well with the batter head tuned medium-low and the front head tuned medium.

The 8x14 snare was very responsive, thanks to the wide wires and clean edges, and the pre-muffled batter head focused the tone just enough to warm up the sustain while retaining an overall open character. The drum could be tuned high and tight, low and loose, or anywhere in between, with great results. In a



Bone's big, bold aluminum vent-hole cover and branded Trick throw-off



blindfold test, I doubt anyone would guess that the shell is 8" deep.

We tested the toms at high, medium, and low tunings, and they were right at home at each. The high tuning was reminiscent of the bright, cutting, and snappy sound heard on classic '70s fusion records featuring Billy Cobham and Simon Phillips, while the medium tuning was a bit fuller but had just as much presence, making it great for all-around applications. The low tuning produced my favorite sounds, which were consistently clear, fat, and punchy, allowing me to articulate intricate modern-rock tribal beats that were perfectly balanced, from the satisfyingly clean tone of the 10" rack tom all the way down to the clicky thump of the kick.

**Michael Dawson**



Check out a short video demo of this Bone Mineral Maple kit at [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com).

# Zildjian FX Series China Trashes, Volcano Cup Zil-Bel, and Spiral Stacker

Inspiring, funky sounds delivered in compact sizes.

Seizing on the current trend toward drummers incorporating small, trashy stacks and effects into their setups, Zildjian has added 8" and 10" Oriental China "Trash" models and created 10" and 12" versions of the coiled Spiral Trash, called Spiral Stacker. The company also expanded its thick, piercingly tonal Zil-Bel lineup to include a 7.5" model with the inverted Volcano Cup. Each cymbal can be played on its own, or you can combine and stack them in different configurations.

## 8" and 10" Oriental China "Trash"

These two splash-size effects cymbals are identical to the versions Zildjian has been making since the '90s, only smaller. Each is made from B20 bronze, has a semi-flat and pronounced bell, and features an upturned outer edge that creates the short, brash tone associated with China-type cymbals.

The 8" model had a super-fast and explosive attack, a quick decay, and an evenly pitched sustain. It possessed a bit of pitch bend, similar to that of a Chinese hand gong. The 10" also had an explosive attack, but the sustain lingered a bit longer for a more "crash-like" effect, and the pitch bend was more apparent. Neither was as trashy as a traditional China, but they weren't gongy or glassy either. They can be stacked on top of one another for shorter, noisier effects or stacked with other cymbals for additional trashy tones.

## 7.5" Zil-Bel Volcano Cup

On the opposite side of the tonal spectrum is the 7.5" Zil-Bel, which features the unique inverted Volcano Cup that Zildjian originally introduced on its Z3 Ultra-Hammered Chinas. Like the 6" and 9.5" Zil-Bels, the 7.5" model is super-thick, is made from B20 bronze, and has a bright, pure pitch. You can strike it near the cup for a short, articulate triangle-like sound, or hit it near the edge for a long, dinner-bell-type tone. When used tastefully, this specialty cymbal provides a cool contrast to the sharp, trashy vibe of the Oriental China "Trash" and the washy, warm sounds of regular crashes.



# Fidock 6x13 Heartbreaker Series Snare

The crème de la crème of one of Australia's finest tonewood connoisseurs.





### Spiral Stacker

The FX addition that allows for the greatest tonal variety and creativity is the Spiral Stacker, which is a paper-thin cymbal cut in a semicircular fashion and designed to be stacked on drums, crashes, rides, and Chinas for a wide range of sounds. It's made of more affordable B8 bronze and is available in 10" and 12" sizes. We were sent a 10" version.

Our first experiment was to put the Spiral Stacker on top of a set of 14" hi-hats. This created a really funky, layered sound that retained the expressiveness and open/closed texture of the hats while adding a flanger-style effect. You could also strike the Spiral Stacker for a whip-like response. Next we placed the Spiral Stacker on top

of 16" and 18" A series crashes. The basic bright, clean tones of the crashes remained intact, but the sustain was shortened and the fluttery flanging effect caused by the Spiral Stacker was very pronounced. On a 20" A series Medium ride and on a thinner and darker 22", the Spiral Stacker provided a strong rattlesnake-like hiss while also making the ride much more articulate.

For very short, trashy sounds, the Spiral Stacker worked great when placed on top of smaller Chinas, like the 10" Oriental. That configuration added a unique visual element; each time I struck the Stacker, it uncoiled several inches toward me and then recoiled back onto the China. The Spiral Stacker is also a much better option for creating industrial, trashy, metallic backbeats when placed on the snare. In that application it was more stable than a regular splash (it didn't jump off the drum as easily), and there was a greater variety of usable sounds, depending on whether I struck the bell, the spiral section, or just the drumhead. You need one of these.

**Michael Dawson**

Check out a video demo of these cymbals at [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com).

**F**idock ("fye-dock") is a boutique manufacturer from Australia that specializes in handcrafting high-end stave-shell drums with rare Aussie species like blackwood and myrtle. Part of the company's Limited Edition series is the Heartbreaker lineup of snares built from premium-grade, air-dried figured blackwood (called fiddleback) that's hand-selected in the temperate rainforest of Victoria and cured over a period of five years.

These unique drums feature standard Fidock specs, including slightly rounded 45-degree bearing edges, sculpted reinforcement rings, a 6–7 mm shell wall, eight tube lugs, a Trick multistep throw-off, a Remo Coated batter head (either Ambassador or CS black dot) and Ambassador Hazy bottom, and matching blackwood hoops. The drums are carefully finished with hand-applied orange-flake shellac to ensure that the natural look and open tone of the timber remains intact.

The main difference between the Heartbreaker series and Fidock's standard blackwood snares is that Heartbreaker staves are cut from a single tree, and only the first 1.6 meters are used, so the wood is denser and the grain is much tighter. This



Fidock's "slotless" hoops minimize excessive stretching of the snare wires for a crisper response.

results in a more focused sound with fewer overtones and a slightly higher note.

Our review Heartbreaker snare is 6x13, which in our opinion is the ideal size for a Fidock drum, for a couple of reasons. First, the wood hoops add about 1.5" of width to the diameter. Having reviewed the company's 14" offerings in previous issues, we found that not every snare stand can expand wide enough to accommodate that size with the wood hoops, whereas the 13" Heartbreaker fits any stand.

Secondly, Fidock's drums tend to have a very open tone that accentuates the mid and lower-mid frequencies. If you favor a warmer, woollier sound, as well as lower tunings, then the 14" models are a great choice. They have an earthy, *Love Supreme*–

meets-rope-drum quality that's very satisfying to a "vintage" aesthetic. The 6x13 Heartbreaker, however, possessed all of that natural, tuneful goodness, plus the ability to produce a stronger and more deliberate pop at higher tunings. The denser blackwood used in this drum has a good balance of slightly pingy highs, barking mids, and punchy lows, which are naturally EQ'ed as you go from tight to loose tunings. We didn't have to use any muffling on this drum, even in the often-troubling low-mid tuning range.

The matching wood hoops, which are designed to withstand powerful strokes, elicited rich, thick rimshots. Very loud rimshots did cause minor denting, but, as the company suggests on its website, "to correct any indentations from stick hits, heat a domestic iron to very hot, place a wet clean cloth over the area, and press the iron down to generate a good amount of steam. The steam will swell the fibers back into place."

For a video demo of the entire tuning range of the 6x13 Heartbreaker series Fidock snare, visit [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com).

**Michael Dawson**

# Remo Powerstroke 77 and Powerstroke 3 Black Dot Drumheads

Extra-durable additions to the ubiquitous pre-muffled batters.

**E**xpanding the sound palette of its Powerstroke line of drumheads, Remo recently introduced a black-dot version of the hugely popular P3 bass drum batter and a new ultra-durable snare batter, the Powerstroke 77, which features two layers of 7 mil film, a 7 mil underlay muffling ring, and a 5 mil clear center dot on top. We checked out a coated and clear version of each and tested them on a 24" bass drum and a 14" snare.

## Powerstroke 77

Our choice for testing the PS77 heads was a 5x14 fiberglass snare with triple-flange hoops. We chose this drum because of its inherent neutral tone, meaning the synthetic shell doesn't impart much timbre, so we were able to really hear the differences in frequency response and overtones between the stock head (a single-ply Coated Ambassador) and the PS77s. Also, because the test drum is on the shallower side, we were able to compare snare response between the heads down to the lightest strokes possible.

With the stock single-ply coated head tuned medium (around 85 on a DrumDial or a lug pitch of D), the snare sounded very open, semi-bright, and crisp. There were no discernable low-end frequencies below 200 Hz, but there were strong spikes in the midrange (750 Hz) and high-mids (2 kHz). The overtones also had a fair amount of high-end ring that created a bit of bite.

Swapping out the single-ply head with the Clear PS77, tuned medium, the first thing I noticed was that the high-end overtones were tamped down considerably. The low-frequency range was also extended a bit (180 Hz), and there were now peaks in the low-mids (338 Hz) and midrange (500 Hz). The drum still sounded open and crisp and had an even sustain, but the overall tone was fuller and darker than with the coated single-ply. The Coated PS77 performed nearly identically as its clear counterpart, with more emphasis on the lower tones (150 and 295 Hz) and a slightly shorter sustain.

Snare response on both PS77s was surprisingly detailed, although the clear dot did cause the heads to lose a bit of rebound at the center, and the muffling ring lessened the heads' sensitivity at the outermost edges. Those two issues shouldn't cause any concern, however, given that the PS77 is designed primarily for harder-hitting situations. The heads also produced fantastic

focused, chunky tones at high tunings (great for pop and contemporary R&B applications) and could be detuned for a fat, triggered-type sound without any additional muffling (my favorite application). The PS77 is currently available in 13", 14", and 15" sizes.

## Powerstroke 3 Black Dot

Whereas both PS77 snare heads—coated and clear—feature a 5 mil center dot on top, the Clear PS3 Black Dot bass drum head has the dot on top, while the coated version has the dot on the bottom.

These heads were inspired by MD Hall of Famer/fusion great Steve Smith, who has recently been using black-dot heads on all of his drums. Combining the underlay ring of the Powerstroke 3 with the large black dot in the center is said to provide deeper lows, a more focused attack, and extra durability. We weren't able to test

the durability factor during our short review period, but we can attest that the heads did, in fact, produce lower lows and more pronounced high-end spikes around 2 and 6 kHz, which translated into a cleaner, clearer attack.

We compared the 24" versions of the PS Black Dot with Remo's hugely popular Clear Powerstroke 3 batter, with a Falam Slam impact pad. While the new black-dot versions performed similarly to the PS3, which is revered for its fat and punchy lows, controlled overtones, and moderate sustain, they had a low-frequency response that peaked between 65 and 85 Hz. This was about 10 Hz lower than the standard PS3. Both the Clear PS3 and the Clear PS3 Black Dot had another peak in the midrange, around 625 to 675 Hz, while the Coated PS3 Black Dot had more even mids.

The coated version also had a less clicky attack that peaked around 4 kHz, which gave it a slightly mellower tone, while the clear model had more presence and a more open sustain. Our test drum, a dark-sounding vintage WFL 3-ply mahogany, fared best with the Coated PS3 Black Dot, but for a more contemporary sound on a modern drum, I'd definitely go with the clear version. I'd also highly recommend the clear model for acrylic drums and for drummers using regular black-dot heads on their snares and toms (like Smith) who want a similar look and sound from the bass drum, but with a more focused, deeper tone. Powerstroke 3 Black Dots are currently available in 18" to 24" sizes.

**Michael Dawson**





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# Ultimate Ears Pro UE-11 In-Ear Monitors

Using Star Trek–type scanners and 3D printing for out-of-this-world delivery and performance.

Ultimate Ears Pro, one of the world's premier makers of custom in-ear monitors, got started when rock legend Alex Van Halen and his monitor engineer were trying to find the best way to have superior ear protection and the highest-fidelity sound while performing. After a few prototypes, Ultimate Ears Pro was born, and the pair began selling in-ear monitors out of the back of their tour bus. Several years later, the company has grown exponentially and revolutionized the in-ear-monitor industry with the use of 3D-imaging technology, a plethora of options, and an incredibly quick turnaround time. We were sent a pair of UE-11 in-ear monitors (\$1,150) for review.

## From Process to Product

We had the luxury of visiting the Ultimate Ears Pro booth during the 2015 Winter NAMM Show. While we were there, company representatives used a 3D-imaging scanner to map the inside of our ear canals. The process was completely painless and incredibly accurate, and it took only a few minutes. For those who aren't close to UE Pro's California-based facility, you can use the searchable database on the company's website to find an audiologist in your area to get an impression of your ear canals. The audiologist will create a mold of your ear that will then be sent back to UE Pro and scanned into a computer, where the 3D model will be detailed before moving to production.

The UE-11s that we received were fine-tuned specifically for bass players and drummers. They eliminated 26 dB of stage noise and had two balanced armatures dedicated to the lower frequencies. They also had a subwoofer with its own passive crossover and an overall frequency response of 5 Hz to 22 kHz. The final result was a tight, punchy bass tone with crystal-clear middle and high frequencies. When we miked up a 24" bass drum and ran the signal through the UE Pro monitors, the depth and punch of the kick came through so that we heard *and* felt it.

Everything about this product is elegant, yet the monitors display extreme durability. UE-11s come in a rugged hard-shell case with your name laser engraved on the lid. Our monitors also included a 48" cable and a stunning cherry-wood faceplate with the UE Pro logo.



## Options and Accessories

In addition to the UE-11s that we received, Ultimate Ears Pro offers several other in-ear monitors at a variety of price points. A couple of custom models worth mentioning are the UE-4 (\$400) and the UE-5 (\$600). UE-4s are tailored toward session musicians and home-recording enthusiasts and have an overall balanced sound, while UE-5s offer a dual driver, which can be a great option for drummers as well.

Most Ultimate Ears Pro monitors are available in several translucent and opaque colors, and some models can be made with specialty materials and custom logos. The company also offers notable accessories, including an iOS-compatible cable that adds an inline remote and microphone, and the UE Pro Sound Guard, which enhances sound quality and dynamic range and protects your hearing from microphone drops, audio feedback, and other sound hazards that can occur while you perform or record.

**Miguel Monroy**



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# Get the Most Beat for Your Buck

## 4 Options for Building a Primo Snare Collection on a Workingman's Budget

by Nate Bauman

**A**s a single man in my late twenties with few commitments and even fewer resources, I spent a great deal of time and energy this past year recommitting myself to the drums and improving my skills. This meant way more practice hours, but it also meant putting more thought into the gear I was using. The first question I asked myself: What snare drum should I be playing?

### The Scenario

I'd spoken with a number of drummers on the topic of gear selection, and the common denominator in all of the conversations was that there was a clear lack of variety in my personal collection, specifically in terms of snare drums. I'd been using only a 1984 Yamaha 8x14 Recording Custom for the past fifteen years, but now it was time to branch out and expand my sonic palette.

It's easy to be envious of guitarists. With the click of a pedal, they can change the entire sound of their instrument. I would argue that picking a different snare is the closest thing we have as drummers to changing our tone like a guitarist can do with pedals.

The difference, though, is money. A guitarist can spend as little as \$40 on a pro-quality pedal. Snares, on the other hand, cost much more than your average stomp box. If I wanted to build my

collection without destroying my bank account, I'd need to learn as much as I could about the snare drum in general and about the various options out there.

### Find a Sensei

Living in Chicago, my first thought was to head to Chicago Drum Exchange and start asking questions. Enter Rob André. He has a fantastic résumé in the Midwest for opening and operating drum shops, and this particular store may be his finest yet. I'd be at his counter after hours during the week, and I'd camp out all morning on the weekend. Our discussions of snare drums went back to basics, as if I were a brand-new drummer just entering the world of music. Some questions we addressed: What's the difference between the various types of metal and wood shells? What's the relationship between the weight and size of a drumstick and the attack and response of a particular snare? How do I properly tune a drum? Should I use a Remo Vintage Emperor head or an Ambassador X? The list went on and on.

André coached me on discovering the answers to these questions, while letting me try his 150-plus snares in order to build a mental database. After a few months of taking it all in, I had



Jim Trank

narrowed down my “dream collection” to a handful of drums that I knew were a bit out of my price range: a 6.5x14 DW smooth brass (\$550), a 6.5x14 Brady jarrah ply (\$799), a 6.5x14 Ludwig Black Beauty (\$749), and a 6.5x14 Craviotto solid cherry (\$1,500).

### Imitation Is the Highest Form of Flattery

The best thing about today’s drum market is that there are always affordable alternatives built to replicate the sound and shape of top-shelf instruments. (Guitarists have been enjoying replica models for decades.) After I had determined my top four ideal snares, André helped me locate some of the closest affordable equivalents, which ended up being a 7x14 ddrum Vintone nickel over brass (\$349), a 6.5x14 Dixon Artisan Chris Brady rose gum (\$499), a 6.5x14 Taye MetalWorks brushed black nickel over brass (\$359), and a 6.5x14 ddrum Vintone solid cherry (\$750).

### ddrum Vintone Nickel Over Brass

Each situation can call for a different snare, but sometimes all you need is simplicity and consistency. When my band, Royale, is working on new material, the guitarist and I often flesh out arrangements in the rehearsal space. My job there is to serve as a glorified metro-nome. The ddrum 7x14 nickel over brass has just enough attack, with a healthy dose of warmth, to work well with our truncated two-piece outfit. It has a mellower sound than a traditional nickel-over-brass snare. When working out ideas or getting your practice reps in, this is a perfect choice.

### Dixon Artisan Chris Brady Rose Gum

Acquiring a boutique-quality snare for a reasonable price is feasible. In fact, you can get one for less than \$600. Dixon teamed up with master drum maker Chris Brady to offer a beautiful 6.5x14 Australian rose gum drum, which I was initially drawn to because of its beautiful brown finish and vintage-style tube lugs. After a closer look revealed a swiveling Dunnett throw-off, I was sold. I assumed this snare would put me into the mindset of Dave Weckl–esque late-night swing, but instead I found myself ripping through a bunch of classic Smashing Pumpkins–type riffs. The drum nailed the warm, open tone that was a signature of Jimmy Chamberlin’s sound through the mid-’90s. Arrangements and situations that would normally call for the power and bite of a metal snare can be handled easily with this affordable wood model.

### Taye MetalWorks Brushed Black Nickel Over Brass

The Taye 6.5x14 brushed black nickel over brass is the working-man’s Black Beauty, and it’s about as close as you’ll get to the real thing for under \$400. It has ten vintage-style tube lugs and triple-flange hoops. To get the most out of it, throw on a Remo Coated CS black dot or an Ambassador X drumhead and start hitting like Bonham. This drum has great attack and a wide range for tuning, making it easy to achieve whatever sound you’re looking for when recording or playing live. When it comes to competing with other instruments that take up a lot of the low, middle, and high-end frequencies in the room, this snare has great, usable overtones that allow it to cut through while still sitting nicely in the mix.

### ddrum Vintone Solid Cherry

I once overheard someone joke that people buy ddrum because they mistakenly think they’re purchasing DW. But there are no mistakes here. The ddrum 6.5x14 Vintone solid cherry is the prettiest-sounding snare I’ve ever owned. It has an astounding amount of tone with a healthy blend of body and warmth. When I sit behind this drum, I envision myself playing fusion arrangements with the house band on a late-night talk show. I always walk away with a handful of beats and fills I didn’t know I had in me. This is the priciest of the bunch, but when you factor in that it has a premium solid-cherry shell and is about half the price of its dream-drum counterpart, it’s pretty much a steal.

### The Moral of the Story

The main reason why drummers often own a vast assortment of snares is because different drums bring about different sounds and styles in your playing. And with all the great instruments out there today, thankfully you don’t need to be rich to start putting together your own collection. The models discussed here are just a few examples of the outstanding options available at prices accessible to most working drummers. There are plenty more, so be sure to do your own research when the time comes to make a purchase. It’s never too late to add variety to your sound and see where it leads you with your drumming.

From left: ddrum nickel over brass, Dixon rose gum, Taye brushed black nickel over brass, and ddrum solid cherry snares



Check out a video demo of these drums at [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com).



Interview by John Martinez • Photos by Alex Solca

## Jazz great Peter Erskine

- Drums:** Tama Star Bubinga in sunshine yellow/lacquer finish
- A.** 6x14 Star Stave Ash snare with forty-two-strand wires
  - B.** 6x10 Star Stave Ash snare (prototype)
  - C.** 7x10 tom
  - D.** 8x12 tom
  - E.** 14x14 floor tom
  - F.** 16x16 floor tom
  - G.** 14x18 bass drum (also uses 14x20 or 14x22, depending on the gig)
  - H.** 6x14 Star solid zebra wood snare (alternate)
  - I.** 5x14 solid maple snare (prototype)

**Cymbals:** Zildjian

- 1.** 14" New Beat hi-hats
- 2.** 9" Oriental Trash splash (alternate: 16" K Custom Session crash, 17" A crash, or 18" K crash)
- 3.** 19" Kerope with three rivets (or Armand Sweet ride)
- 4.** 22" Kerope (or Constantinople Medium ride)
- 5.** 22" A Swish Knocker
- 6.** 18" K Dark Thin crash

**Heads:** Remo Coated Ambassador snare batters and Hazy Ambassador bottoms,

Fiberskyn Diplomat tom batters and Clear Ambassador bottoms, and Fiberskyn bass drum batter (Coated Ambassador for 20" bass drum and Coated Powerstroke 3 batter for 22") with Fiberskyn Diplomat Powerstroke 3 front head

**Hardware:** Tama Iron Cobra Lever Glide hi-hat stand and Rolling Glide bass drum pedal, Star stands (snare, cymbal, and tom/cymbal), and 1st Chair Ergo Rider throne; Protection Racket rolling hardware bag and drum mat (with numbered markers)

**Percussion:** Meinl Foot Cabasa (set to single-stroke mode), Luis Conte series shakers, shaker holder (MC-SH), accessory table, low-pitch red block, 8" hand-hammered gold cowbell, Ching Ring (lies flat on cymbals), and wind chimes

**Recorder:** Zoom H5

**Sticks:** Vic Firth SPE3 Peter Erskine Big Band sticks, Heritage brushes, and Split brushes

**“F**or anyone thinking that my move was financially motivated, Tama was not on my radar at all,” Erskine explains regarding his recent switch of drum companies. “I was asked to do an A-B test, in a quiet setting, with the Star kit. I was just curious. I invited a colleague at USC, professor Aaron Serfaty, who’s a real drum geek. He can take any drums and make them sound like they do on records. I’ve become dependent on him as a tuner. When he found out the kit was bubinga, he said, ‘We have to get Fiberskyn Diplomats.’ We put them on, and I’m astonished by the sound. I used the Star kit at a gig that night, and my wife says she really likes the way these drums are making me play.”

“What I found with Star is that I could tune them up or

down without fear,” Erskine continues. “The drums have a wider tuning range. I feel freer, like I can fly on these drums. I didn’t realize it, but I was working harder and starting to experience some arm ache with other drums.”

As for his ever-evolving cymbal setup, Erskine says, “I’m coming around to Mel Lewis’s dictum that every cymbal is a ride and every cymbal is a crash. I still like to use my 20” Left Side ride, but more often than not I’m playing a 19” Sweet ride or Kerope. And I’ll use the Constantinople with a big band or an orchestra. The clarity is just gorgeous, with all the darkness that one dreams about.”

For tuning, Erskine usually goes for a classic high but open jazz tone. “My drums aren’t tabletop tight; each one sings,”

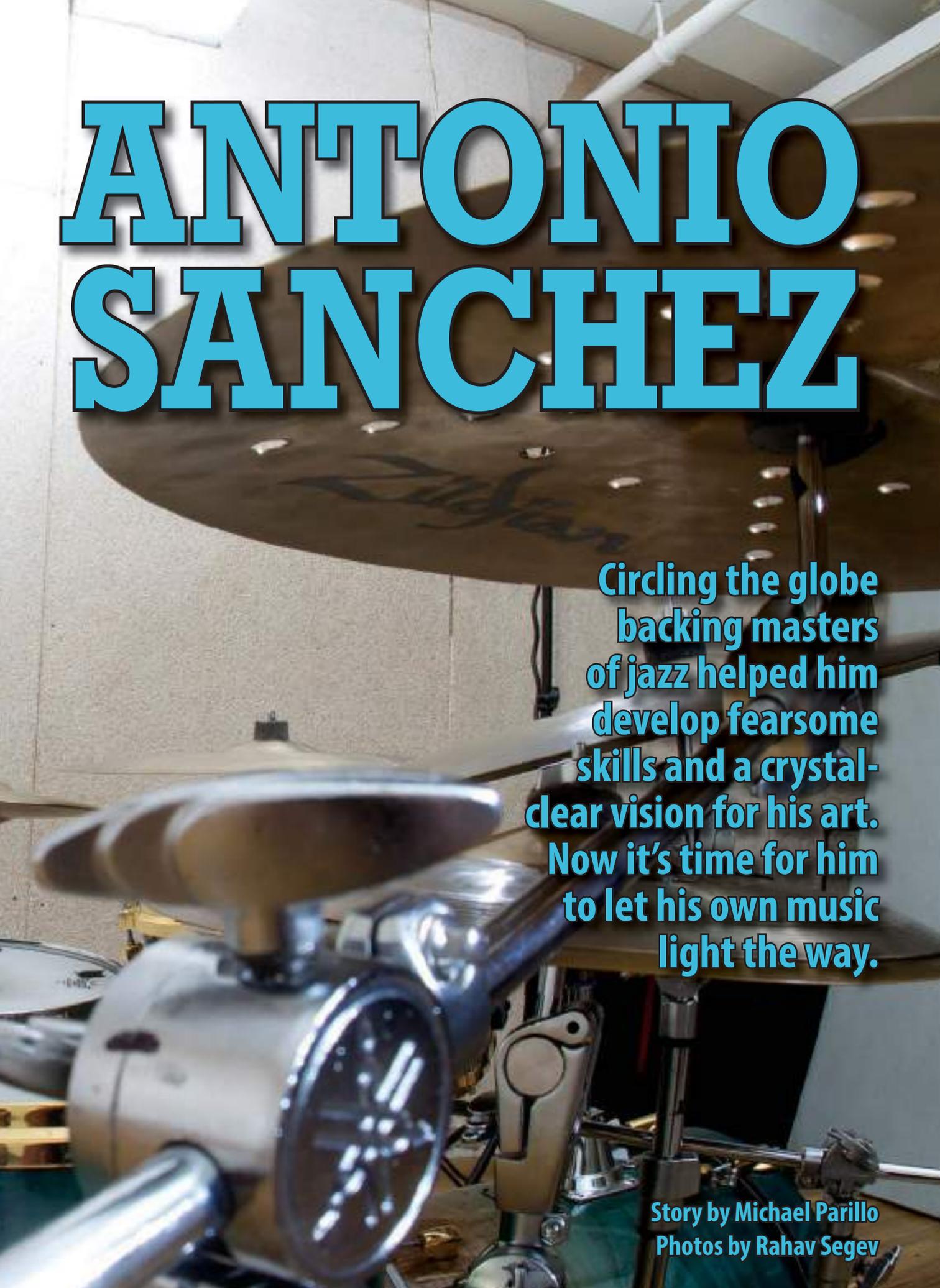
he explains. “It’s a give-and-take process, where you get the top head to respond how you like. Then the bottom head is where you can really play with the pitch of the drum. The formula seems to be having the bottom head about a minor third tighter than the top. For the bass drum, you can tune the front lower to get a nice low end. Or you can do what Tony [Williams] was doing in later years, which is similar to the John Bonham tuning method, where the batter is tuned very loose and the front head is very tight. I recommend to set aside some time and experiment. Find a combination that works, but try to make sure the head’s in tune with itself.”







# ANTONIO SANCHEZ



**Circling the globe backing masters of jazz helped him develop fearsome skills and a crystal-clear vision for his art. Now it's time for him to let his own music light the way.**

**Story by Michael Parillo  
Photos by Rahav Segev**

At the March album-release show for singer Thana Alexa's debut, *Ode to Heroes*, at SubCulture in New York City, Antonio Sanchez was called on to do a little bit of everything. Anchoring the band, Sanchez played airy swing beats, odd-time fusion rave-ups, slinky rimclick grooves, tasty 16th-note funk, a bluesy 12/8 with a bit of Bonham in the bass drum. He dropped to a whisper, with sticks, brushes, mallets, or just his bare hands. He soloed with fire, searing the stamp of the tune into his phrases, and offered a taste of his potent clave-based, full-body rhythms. He steered the other players with a firm rimshot or a casually authoritative glance. He simmered and, in short, intensely powerful bursts, he exploded. Sanchez was just doing his thing—supporting Alexa and her group above all, as he does as drummer and coproducer of *Ode to Heroes* as well—but he showed his mastery on every song.

Things got off to a wicked start. During the opening number, "Take Five," after singing the lyrics by Dave and Lola Brubeck, Alexa turned around and faced Sanchez. She breathed fire of her own by improvising wordless scat-type vocals as the two traded phrases back and forth, pushing each other up, up, and away. Even if you didn't know that Alexa and Sanchez are engaged to be married, you'd have felt the heat between them.

Alexa gushed over every one of her players in her introductions, but it was only of Sanchez that she said, "He's so *fine*." She dedicated a couplet of songs to the drummer, including her lovely ballad "Siena," and the two had a cozy onstage rapport, with Sanchez playing a sort of straight man, making the crowd laugh with a raised eyebrow or a finger-rolling "get on with it" gesture as Alexa spoke. At one point she called him "Mr. Birdman."

Ah, yes. This is where our story of the well-traveled contemporary jazz drummer takes a bit of a turn. As a teenager in Mexico, Sanchez was a fan of the radio show *Magic Nights*, on WFM 96.9; through that program he got his enchanting introduction to the Pat Metheny Group, courtesy of DJ Alejandro González Iñárritu. Much later, in the mid-2000s, a few years after Sanchez joined Metheny's band, he met Iñárritu, now a film director (*21 Grams*, *Biutiful*), after a show in L.A., and the two hit it off. When Iñárritu had the idea of fitting a drumset score to *Birdman*, his latest wild ride of a movie, he knew who to call. It's tempting to wonder if the director would have hatched such a brilliant/crazy concept in the first place, if not for his friendship with Sanchez.

This collaboration led to a truly unique moviegoing experience, a 2015 best-picture Oscar, and a good bit of controversy. From *Birdman*'s opening credits, as words appear on screen set to the sound of Sanchez detuning a

drum, the score crackles with life, building in intensity as fading film star Riggan Thomson, played by Michael Keaton, becomes gradually more unhinged while working on a play in a Broadway theater. The drumming, sounding rich yet rough—Antonio's trademark lush tones mussed up a little, quite deliberately—is a lot of things all at once: groovy, tickling, abstract, *heavy*. Sanchez's trailblazing score won the Critics' Choice, Satellite, and Hollywood Music in Media awards and was nominated for a Golden Globe. But, in a questionable move by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, it was disqualified from Oscar contention for being "diluted" by the licensed classical music in the film.

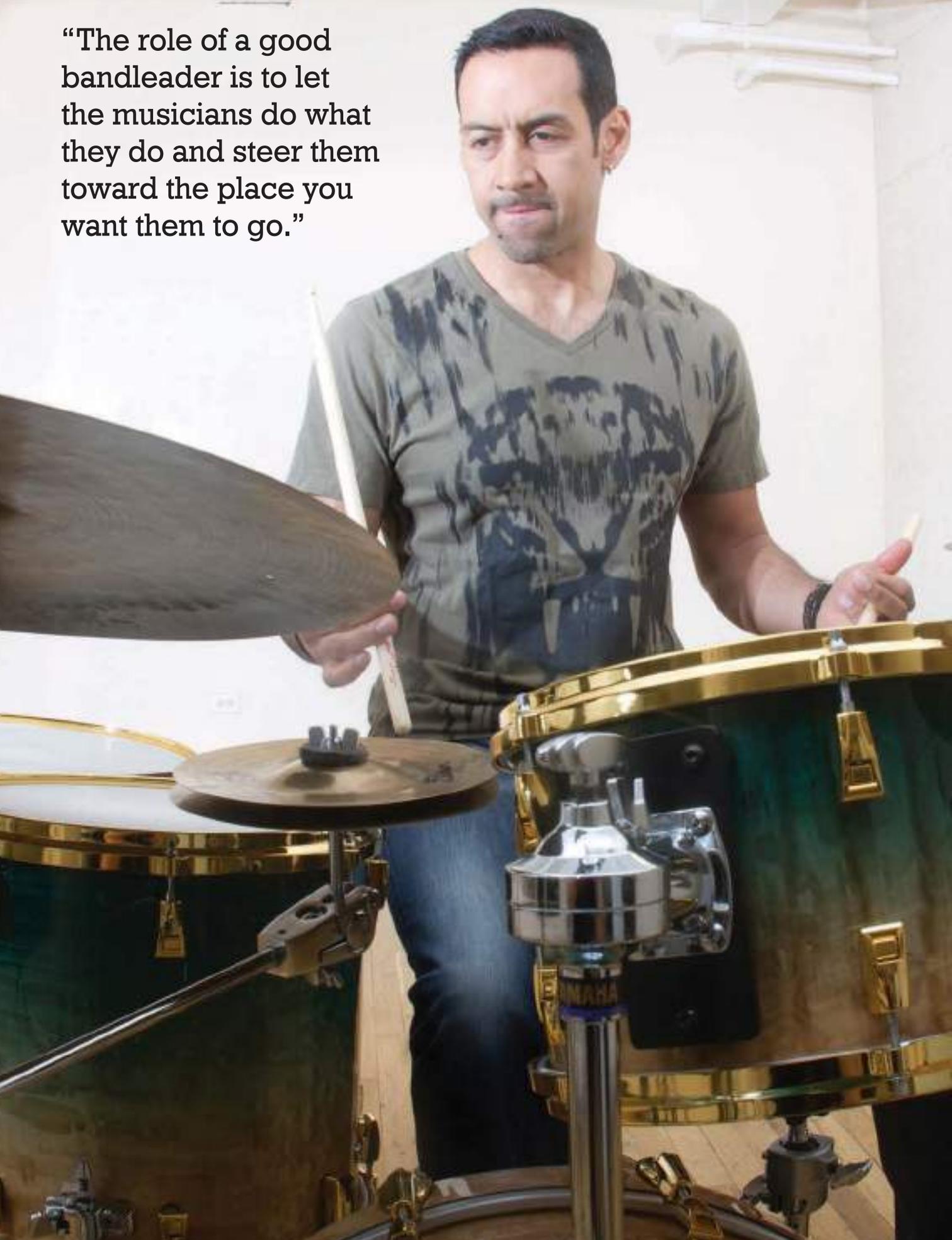
Of course, by then Sanchez was on to something new—something life altering: After many years as a sideman, with Metheny, Gary Burton, and countless others, he was gearing up to make the jump to full-time bandleader, with his own compositions at the fore. Two 2015 projects mark this fresh phase in high style—*Three Times Three*, which was released in April, and *The Meridian Suite*, which is brand new. Sanchez describes the rollicking *Three Times Three* as "a blowing record." For it he formed a trio of trios, each with a different lead instrument. First we have pianist Brad Mehldau and bassist Matt Brewer, then guitarist John Scofield and bassist Christian McBride, and finally saxophonist Joe Lovano and bassist John Patitucci. These partnerships pulsate with the thrill of newly spawned alliances.

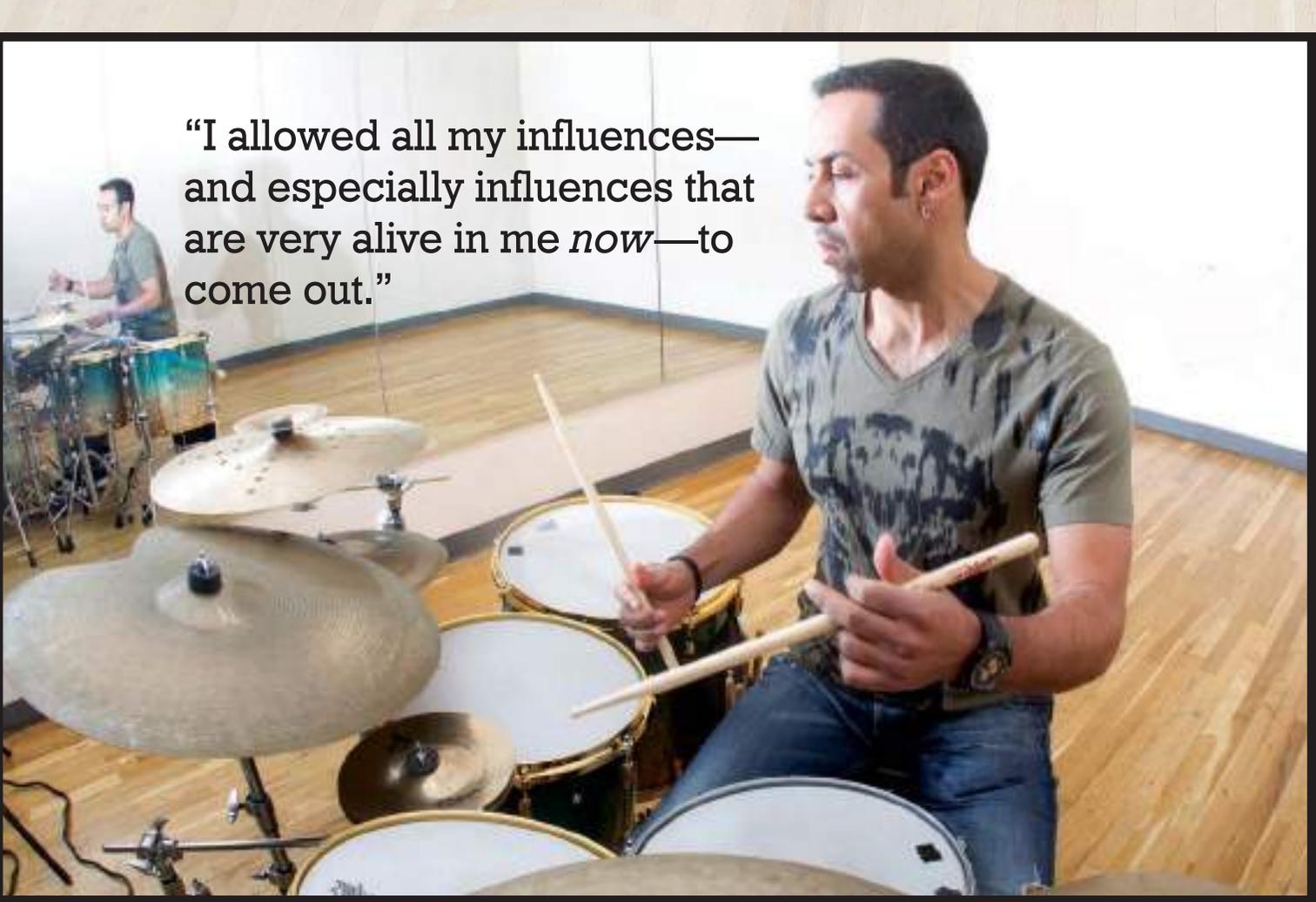
*The Meridian Suite*, the third release by Sanchez's Migration group, on the other hand, is a tightly composed, highly ambitious work of great complexity, with rhythmic and melodic themes woven throughout a dynamic and unpredictable mix of acoustic and electronic sounds. With John Escreet on keyboards, Seamus Blake on saxophone and EWI (electronic wind instrument), and Brewer on bass, plus guest guitarist Adam Rogers and vocalist/muse Alexa (singing lyrics and wordless melodies), Sanchez takes a leap forward as a writer and also digs in deep on drums; despite the demanding through-composed nature of the piece, he and the band really let it fly. The five-part suite finds Antonio trying new concepts in the studio. His kit sounds enormous, and his soloing in the "Channels of Energy" movement rockets the track through the North Pole and into the celestial sphere. As always he tosses out little gifts of surprise, with, say, a scratchy cymbal-stack figure that cuts across the time feel, or an impossibly quick and precise roll to fill a space. Yet, again, the quieter sections reveal supreme sensitivity and pinpoint control.

Sitting down with Sanchez at his light-filled Queens apartment, we get started with the suite, chatting about, to reference the title of the first movement, its "grids and patterns."



“The role of a good bandleader is to let the musicians do what they do and steer them toward the place you want them to go.”





“I allowed all my influences—  
and especially influences that  
are very alive in me *now*—to  
come out.”

## Prime Meridian

**MD:** How did *The Meridian Suite* come about?

**Antonio:** It's got an interesting backstory. I was touring with Metheny in 2012, with the Unity Band, and I was in Meridian, Mississippi. After the show we usually have like four hours from the time we get back to the hotel until we get on the bus. Sometimes I'll just veg out in front of the TV, but that night I kept hearing this thing in my head. I always bring a keyboard with me, so I started playing that thing. It sounded like a really cool intro, very rock-y.

I come from rock and fusion and all these things, and of course jazz is my life now, but I have those influences. So I started programming this thing, and I named it “Meridian” in my computer. I did the *Three Times Three* project in the meantime, and I never heard that thing again. Then, last year, when I was out on the road with Pat, I was thinking that I wanted to tour with my band for most of 2015, and in order to do that I needed to put something out.

I remember I was in Copenhagen, on the European leg of the tour—it must've been April 2014 or something like that—and I took out my keyboard. I started trying to come up with something, and nothing was

happening. I felt horrible. The next day I remembered that intro. I took it out and I liked it again—which was a good sign, because sometimes I'll listen to it two years later and think it sucks. So my question was what would happen after this intro.

I found something I liked and started developing that. There was more than four minutes of written material, and still no solos or anything. But I thought I'd keep going and see what happened. The first part, with solos, ended up at like twelve minutes. It needed to go somewhere else, and I started coming up with a completely different vibe. Now it was too long to be just a piece and too short to be a suite or a more complex long-form composition.

I'm a big fan of well-produced records. And the best-produced records are usually rock and pop, R&B and neo soul, and the production value is really cool. They'll even have different producers on different tunes. So this music sounded to me like it could explore completely different sonic possibilities and still be one thing. That's something I always wanted to try, but I didn't know how to do it, to have a very acoustic, jazzy sound on one thing and then a completely balls-out rock, fusion, whatever-you-want-to-call-it drum sound

with electronic instruments. It was the equivalent of writing a novel instead of short stories; I could develop my characters over an hour instead of over seven, eight minutes—which is not easy either. To write a concise tune is not easy at all.

I felt that this was the perfect vehicle to be unapologetic about anything I wanted to do, because the flow could take me places where I would not necessarily allow myself to go on a regular record. Of course, I didn't just want to write and write without having any kind of cohesiveness, so I wanted to have things that you heard in the beginning come up in the middle, and later treat them differently. I was very lucky to be a part of the *Way Up* project that Pat put together a few years ago, and that was a great learning experience.

**MD:** That was tightly written, more so than usual.

**Antonio:** Very, yeah. It was not called a suite, but there were parts that intertwined throughout the composition. So I wanted to achieve that.

And then I started thinking of the “Meridian” title—it had a ring to it. I love the word *meridian*. I knew what meridians were, but I started doing more research, and I realized how these things are part of

our everyday life even though they're intangible. But they have to do with how you calculate time, how you calculate geographical positions, the stars, the sun, and then the new-age approach, which is the meridians of the body and chakras and the flow of energy. So the meridian concept seemed appropriate, because of how the motifs, the melodies, the grooves intertwine.

I think I just allowed all my influences—and especially influences that are very alive in me *now*—to come out. I'm into different bands nowadays that have brought different ideas; I don't know how closely related they are to what I actually wrote, but for example I love Hiatus Kaiyote, which is a really cool band. Brotherly, that's another band I like. Meshell Ndegeocello, I love.

I think it's going to be interesting for drummers to hear me doing something they've never heard me do before. When I started getting more of a name, it was attached to this kind of sound that I developed, and here, in the third movement, for example, I completely changed the tuning of the drums and compressed everything. And I had my double bass drum pedal, which I *never* use.

**MD:** I thought I heard double bass, but I doubted myself: "No, he wouldn't, he couldn't, he didn't..."

**Antonio:** I did! [laughs] Completely unapologetically, yes, I brought it out. I just heard it in that section. I've never used it on a jazz record, but for that part it seemed appropriate.

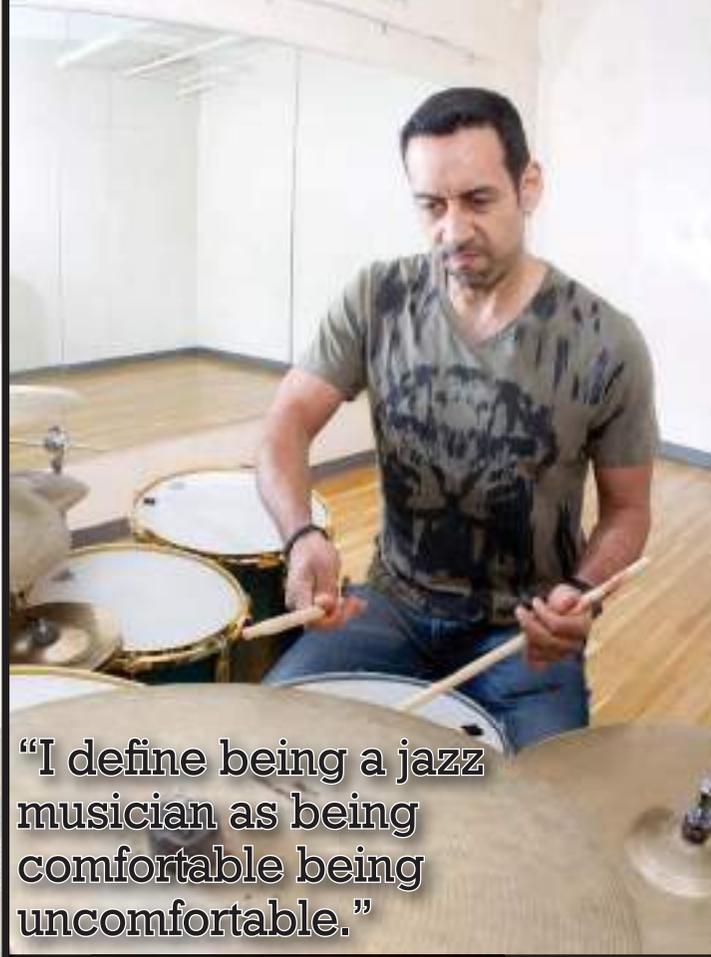
**MD:** It's a very dramatic moment,

especially coming out of the spacious "Imaginary Lines."

**Antonio:** The interesting thing is that I do little flurries during that "Channels of Energy" section with that very rock-y, fusion-y sound, but they're just teasers. When the actual drum solo comes later in that section, it's very sparse and with a different drum sound—a lot jazzier, more acoustic. And then it goes back to that fusion-y sound at the tail end, before going into the free section.

**MD:** What was the idea behind that free section, "Magnetic Currents"?

**Antonio:** The third movement ends up so high that for some reason it didn't seem right to go low again. So when I finished that part I could just hear chaos for a while. It's been very loud and very powerful, but it's been very organized up to this point. So I wanted to break out of that and just go completely insane, ballistic, and have that be an interlude and find a way to go from that chaos to the most delicate part of the suite. And then the suite ends up as epic as I've tried to do

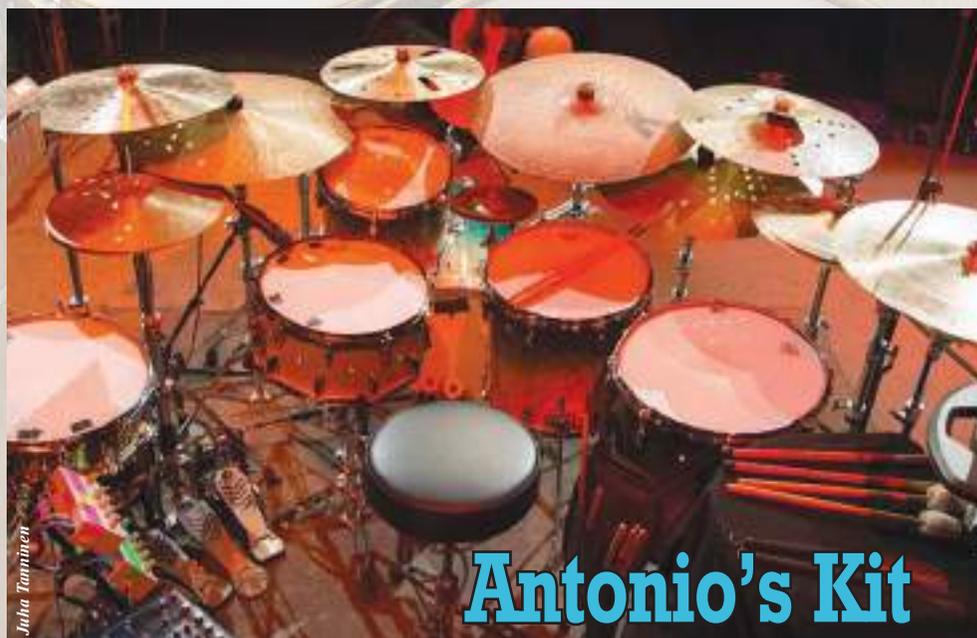


**"I define being a jazz musician as being comfortable being uncomfortable."**

anything. [laughs]

**MD:** Overall it feels like a good balance between being written out and providing freedom to improvise. How precisely mapped out was it?

**Antonio:** It was very mapped out. One thing that I find incredibly helpful is to map out and program things to the smallest detail. I like to program it, then remove the



## Antonio's Kit

**Drums:** Yamaha PHX in turquoise fade finish, including 7x14 Loud series or 5.5x14 Maple Custom Absolute snare, 4x14 brass piccolo snare, 8x12 or 10x12 tom, 13x14 and 15x16 floor toms, and 16x20 or 14x18 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Zildjian, including 14" Constantinople or vintage A hi-hats, 14" and 16" K EFX crashes, 22" Constantinople Medium Thin Low ride, 6" A Custom splashes (inverted and stacked), 22" K Left Side ride or 21" vintage K, 22" A Custom Flat ride, 18" prototype crash, 12" Hybrid splash stacked on 14" Trashformer, and 22" Swish with ten rivets

**Heads:** Remo Coated Ambassador or Fiberskyn batters

**Sticks:** Zildjian Antonio Sanchez Signature model

**Percussion:** LP cowbells, wood-blocks, and tambourines

drums and play with it. That way, and this happened with *Three Times Three* as well, when I get to the studio, we basically don't change anything, because I've already heard the whole thing a million times.

I'm really good, actually, at programming drums with my fingers on the keyboard, and that helps me inform myself of what kind of grooves I might be playing. And something really interesting has been happening. All those drum flurries, I programmed with my fingers, just to get a sense of what the tune was gonna do. A lot of the things that ended up on the record are things that I programmed—things I would have never thought of playing. So that got me out of my normal kind of thinking.

**MD:** So recording would be more along the lines of a rock album, because you're changing your sound and your gear for the different movements?

**Antonio:** Yes, way more than any record I've ever done. I'd detune the drums to their lowest, or I'd tune them higher. I put a lot of padding on the bass drum on one section and removed it for the other sections. It was the same drums, but with a completely different treatment, and also a bunch of different cymbals, different heads. I had a lot of fun with that.

And then in the mix we did even more. Compression here, less compression there; more room here, less room there. That proved very useful to make the different sections do exactly what I intended them to do.

**MD:** Did you use a bunch of different snares on the album?

**Antonio:** I had my regular 5.5x14 Yamaha maple drum—that's the main one I've been using for a while. Then I had what they call the Loud snare. It's 7" deep. I put a towel on top. In the second section, that's what you hear. And then the third section I used a

piccolo and a soprano, as tight as they would go.

**MD:** It's really effective to go from that pillowy sound to that cracking sound.

**Antonio:** Yeah, I love that contrast.

## Doing the Work

**MD:** How would you rate your piano playing?

**Antonio:** Functional. Everything I write, I can play—slower, a lot of times, than I want it to be. But it's enough to get around. I really like spending time investigating chords. If I like the sound I go with it, and then I find the next chord. After I program the whole thing, I start writing it down. And then I start analyzing.

**MD:** So both the computer and the piano come into play a lot in your process.

**Antonio:** Completely. The piano is where I get all my ideas, but then the computer is so useful and necessary for me at this point, because I can really hear it with the piano and the bass and the drums. I can have Thana record the voice on top of that, and I'll program the guitar as well. It's a very long and obsessive process, but I think if you don't do all that, then you regret the results.

**MD:** It seems there's a measure of obsessiveness within you that helps you do what you do.

**Antonio:** There has to be. And the thing is, working with some of the people that I've worked with, I'm not *that* obsessive. [laughs] But a healthy dose of obsession, I think, is very good for these kinds of projects.

**MD:** Were you that way when getting your drumming skills together? You've talked about periods as a student where you went through some humbling experiences, even though you'd gotten together lots of facility.

**Antonio:** Yeah, I mean, if you ask my mom

## More Beef, More Trash

### Antonio on gear and the evolution of his sound

If you hear records from seven, ten years ago, I was tuning my drums a lot higher, like the 18" bass drum, and I was playing the kind of music that fit well with that. Since I've been doing my band-leading thing, I've been hearing beefier sounds from the drums. I hadn't used a 20" bass drum in years, but when we did *Three Times Three*, for Scofield I thought I'd bring the 20" and see what happens. And, man, I love how that sounds, because it still has resonance and body, but it's so much beefier. Then I tuned the drums a little lower, especially the floor toms. The rack tom I can leave relatively high—not too high. That combination started feeling really good, because I can play all the jazz stuff that I was playing before. Adding the second floor tom, really low, when you need that extra meat, I love that feeling. And it's even more apparent now, in *The Meridian Suite*. The whole thing is with a 20", but sometimes I would tune it higher, depending on the section.

Then I started realizing that the only dry sound you have coming from cymbals is the hi-hat. A lot of people have been experimenting with this, but I started stacking different kinds of cymbals and seeing what they do. Immediately it became part of my sound. To do a gig without those, I feel like I'm missing out on a big chunk of sonic information that I have at my disposal.

My kit in terms of the number of drums is more or less steady, but the cymbals vary from session to session. I love the Flat ride. I was lucky that when I started playing with Metheny back in 2001, Zildjian made me two 22" A Custom Flat rides; usually a 20" is the biggest. Those things have been a godsend, and I play them on recordings all the time. I go to them for bass solos or more delicate stuff; I love comping with those.

For *The Meridian Suite* I used a few sets of hi-hats for different sections—I used Constantinoples, and I also asked Zildjian to send me something that has a lot of bite and attack. I used a Flat ride for some sections, a Left Side ride for some, an old K. In the third section I put a splash under the main ride on the Rhodes solo, which gives it a trashy sound. It vibrates a little bit—sounds like it's almost broken—but it still has the resonance of the ride.

Man, if I could have five ride cymbals and eleven crashes, I would. But that's just not practical.



Sanchez with singer Thana Alexa, at the release party for Alexa's *Ode to Heroes* album at SubCulture in New York City on March 23, 2015. Ben Flocks is on sax.

about my obsessive/compulsive thing when I was a kid, it's actually pretty funny. I believe her. Drums was the thing that stayed with me the whole time, but when I discovered gymnastics I got completely obsessed with that. I was on the Mexican national team for a little bit. Everything I picked, I got really obsessive with.

So now that I'm writing and I'm a bandleader, I'm obsessive with that. But yes, that obsessiveness helped me a lot when I was getting my stuff together. And, you know, back then there was no YouTube, and in Mexico we were isolated in terms of material you could get your hands on in order to improve. If a friend had the Weckl video, everybody would be like, "Please, just let me have it for a day..." And you would borrow somebody else's VCR just so you could make a copy.

It was not about piracy; there was *nothing* you could get your hands on. Imports were very rare. So I obsessed about a few little videos and worked on my technique. When I got to the States, I had a fair amount. With technique, you don't need that much guidance—by imitation I think you can get to a pretty decent level. Musically, that's a different thing altogether. And those were most of the humbling

experiences I had when I got to Berklee. My technique would impress a lot of people; my musicality, not so much. [laughs] Those experiences were a catalyst for me to change my way of making music, my ego too.

**MD:** You mean you'd been like, "Hey, I'm great"?

**Antonio:** Exactly. Coming from Mexico, I was one of the best guys over there, and I felt very confident in my abilities. But that was out of ignorance. I didn't know how well I stacked up against the *real* guys. And when I saw what the real guys could do, I was like, *Okay, let me think this through and work on my ego problems and my priorities.*

**MD:** And you realize art is so different from sports—you've got Charlie Watts and you've got Neil Peart, and they're so different but they're both sublime.

**Antonio:** Exactly. And to me a real artist must be a combination of a healthy ego and total insecurity. I'm always second-guessing myself, but then I'm like, *Well, I like it.* If I don't like it, I don't record it, I don't put it out. If it makes the record, it's because I like it. And I hope it will resonate with people. That's the only thing you can hope for. If you're trying to write for an audience, you're on the wrong track.

**MD:** Some drummers think faster than they're able to play, but you seem able to execute things exactly as they occur to you, as if time is slowing down.

**Antonio:** On a good day that's what happens. But then there's many nights where it's the other way around. On a good night you really can see everything in slow motion: *Oh, I can get my snare in between these two notes, and then I'll hit something that's answering what the bass player just did,* and it's all so clear, so easy. Then, on other nights, everything is going so fast and you have no idea where to put your stuff, and you're struggling with your own self and your technique feels clumsy and the sound is not flowing. So, yeah, sometimes you have to go to your meat and potatoes, because nothing else is working. But hopefully your meat and potatoes will be so good that nobody will be able to tell the difference.

**MD:** Do you ever like to have a little struggle, a little tension, in executing an idea?

**Antonio:** I define being a jazz musician as being comfortable being uncomfortable. Because you put yourself in these uncomfortable situations constantly—you don't know what's gonna happen, yet you do it

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## Antonio Sanchez

for years and you're comfortable with not knowing. And you know you have enough experience and enough reflexes and enough facility to be able to react to whatever comes your way. And the uncomfortable side is very healthy. But unless you trust your abilities, you're *really* going to be uncomfortable, and that's not so good. [laughs]

**MD:** With *Three Times Three*, you had played with everyone except Brad Mehldau before, right?

**Antonio:** Yes, that's correct. There had been times where Brad and I were about to play, but it never happened. I've been listening to him for years, and I'm a huge fan. I was lucky to play with everybody else. With Scofield, just one time; with Lovano, a couple of times. With Patitucci, Christian, and Matt, a lot. It was the "main chair" of each trio that I wanted to be people I hadn't played with that much but that I deeply admired.

That's another thing that got me out of my comfort zone, because when you start writing with somebody in mind.... For example, the tune "Nooks and Crannies," the funkier tune in five, I would have never in a million years written that for anybody except Scofield. It was custom-made for him.

**MD:** When I first heard that one, I was *sure* he'd written it.

**Antonio:** [laughs] I've been listening to him for a long time, since I was growing up in Mexico. I was like, *He's gonna tear this up*. I wanted to write something for each group that would be challenging but would be just a vehicle for them to kill it, basically.

**MD:** And you played a Monk tune, "I Mean You," with Joe Lovano, who played so much Monk in his trio with Bill Frisell and Paul Motian.

**Antonio:** It was a tribute to his personality and his *huge* sound, this let's-see-what-happens approach. But you know, all those guys are like cats: Throw them up in the air and they're going to land on their feet. "I Mean You" was one take. At the end you can hear Lovano and Patitucci laughing. They're like, "That's it—why do another one?" [laughs]

**MD:** Those sessions must have just been pure fun.

**Antonio:** Yeah, because it was just three tunes each, and I didn't do it on consecutive days. The first one was Brad. That was the most stressful, because Brad was traveling from Boston and we didn't start until like three, four in the afternoon. And it was the hardest music too. "Constellations" ended up being like sixteen pages. I got carried away. But he's such a badass player. With

the other two sessions we had time to spare. I wish I had brought more tunes, but at the same time it was such a different experience to not be completely stressed out of my mind in the studio just because of time constraints, which usually happens.

**MD:** Really?

**Antonio:** Yeah. I love listening back when it's all said and done, but recording is not a process that I enjoy. It's very hard for me to get past the headphones and the sound and all those technical issues that affect your playing so much. And I'm not a rock or pop musician that's used to recording drums by themselves and then they add all the stuff later. I'm used to being in the same room with a bunch of people reacting *constantly* to one another. So when you don't hear it the way you want to, that makes it so much harder. I know my drums and my sound, and then I hear them through the cans and I'm like, *Man, that doesn't sound like me*. It would be the equivalent, I think, of putting an individual mic on each key of the piano—it would drive the piano player crazy.

Obviously the solution would be to have just two overheads and kick and snare [mics], but then you regret it sometimes in the mix. So if you see pictures of my sessions, there's so many mics; it's just insane.

**MD:** We did a story on Migration's previous album, *New Life*, with photos from the actual sessions, and there's a shot of you at your kit. Now that you mention it, you don't look as comfortable as usual.

**Antonio:** Oh, no—I'm miserable. [laughs] It's a lot to think about; it's like throwing your own party. If you have a bunch of guests at your place, you're going to be concerned with how well everything is going, instead of just having fun. But I know ahead of time that I'm going to be stressed out for two or three days, and then in a few months I'm really going to enjoy what I did.

**MD:** Plus you're clearly able to bear down and pull good results out of yourself under those circumstances.

**Antonio:** It's something that, luckily, I'm kind of used to by now. My first session [as a leader], for *Migration*, was so stressful. And, you know, it was with Chick [Corea] and Pat and Chris Potter and David Sanchez—all these ridiculous musicians—and I'm bringing my little tunes. *I hope they like them!* I was so insecure. I really like that album, but I've done a lot of growing since then. Also, watching all these years how people record in the studio, especially Metheny—he's meticulous in organizing his recording sessions. I've learned a lot from

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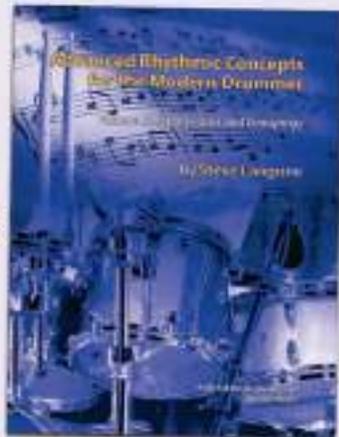
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## Antonio Sanchez

that...except he's got like two weeks to record and I have three days. [laughs] But I've learned how to organize those three days to the best of my ability.

**MD:** When you're the leader working with these great musicians, what kinds of things do they need from you?

**Antonio:** I think the role of a good bandleader is to let the musicians do what they do and steer them toward the place you want them to go. I want to tell them, "Okay, this is the story I'm trying to tell, and I need you to accommodate that—but do your thing. You're in my band because I love what you play."

I'm in a very scary place in my life right now, because I'm saying no to everything, just so I can do *my* thing, which I've never done. But I'm determined to get my product out because I believe in what I'm doing. And I think it's becoming clear from *New Life, Three Times Three*, and *The Meridian Suite* that I have a wide range. As a drummer I think I proved that, but as a writer and bandleader I want to prove it too. I've been trying to put on a great show and leave the audience as positively impressed as we can every single night. At the end of the day it's your product and your brand, and at this point in my life that's the most important thing.

## Taking Flight

**MD:** A big part of your brand now is your work on *Birdman*.

**Antonio:** Absolutely. I'll forever be the *Birdman* guy. [laughs] Which is not a bad thing.

**MD:** Did the idea of a drum score come from you and Alejandro González Iñárritu?

**Antonio:** Actually, it was Alejandro. He knew exactly what he wanted. He's such a music lover; he's in awe of what we do as musicians, just like I'm in awe of what he does. When we were recording for *Birdman*, he would look at me and go, "You're so

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lucky." [laughs] I was like, "You're lucky too!" He's just fascinated with music.

**MD:** Is that your voice at the very beginning of the credits, speaking Spanish?

**Antonio:** That is my voice, at the beginning and end of the movie. There's so many interesting things.

**MD:** How did the score take shape once you'd signed on?

**Antonio:** My first instinct was to write little rhythmic themes for the main characters, so every time you'd see Michael Keaton you would hear this beat to accompany him. And then I'd have, like, a comedic theme and a softer theme with brushes. I sent Alejandro some demos, and he wrote back, "Man, this is great—but it's exactly the opposite of what I'm looking for." He wanted something very spontaneous, very spur of the moment, very jazzy—almost improvised. When he said that, I totally relaxed instead of freaking out.

When they started shooting, here in Kaufman Studios in Astoria, I went to the set, and that informed me a lot about the character and color of the film. One day Alejandro and I went into Avatar Studios to work on some stuff, but there was no film to show me. Basically he started describing every scene, in great detail. "In this scene Riggan Thomson is in his dressing room; his mind is all over the place, and he's thinking very heavy, dark thoughts, and he gets up and opens the door and walks through this long hallway; he turns a corner and a few people talk to him, and then he gets to the stage door and waits a second and knocks on the door; then he's on stage and starts the scene."

These are really long scenes; you don't even know when they start and end. So he would be sitting in front of me imagining the scene with his eyes closed and I would be playing something, and then, when it was time for the next phase, he'd raise his hand and I'd play something else. We must have done sixty, seventy takes of different scenes. He knew more or less where he wanted the drums, so it was just a matter of getting different approaches. Then they rehearsed and shot with some of those tracks. I think Alejandro wanted to see if it would actually work, because it was such a weird experiment. I remember he sent me a note: "We rehearsed with the tracks yesterday. It's gonna be great."

Once the rough cut was finished, they spliced those demos and put them on their respective scenes. They brought me to L.A. and showed me the rough cut with the drums, and they wanted me to redo everything, looking at the film this time. We

went into a studio, and now we were really homing in on dialogue and cues, movements—"When he hits the wall the third time, do something there," that kind of thing.

Alejandro didn't know exactly how to express it, but he was like, "Your drums sound too clean on the demos." I said, "I know what to do." So I put Fiberskyns on and I put tape on most of the drums. I detuned them in weird ways, and I put a really hard beater on the bass drum and tuned it way low, just to kind of make it sound older, because the movie happens in

the bowels of this run-down theater, so he wanted something that sounded old and beat up. The kit was amazing—it was a Phoenix [PHX] and it sounded unbelievable in the studio—but it sounded kind of dirty at the same time.

The interesting thing is that they used things from both sessions, and sometimes they mixed the new kit with the old-sounding kit. And sometimes I'm playing the older-sounding kit and they would superimpose a fill on the other kit.

**MD:** There's a dynamic arc to the drumming. It gets denser and seems to grow.

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## Antonio Sanchez

**Antonio:** Definitely. Because, you know, the plot thickens, and it gets more and more chaotic and frantic—that's what we wanted to portray.

I saw the movie for the first time way after it opened, because I'd been on tour in Asia and it hadn't opened over there. When I saw the finished thing, with the effects and the sound, I was just in shock. I could not believe what they did. I've heard my drums a million times in different situations, but never in a surround-sound movie theater, with those images. It was just mind-boggling.

Alejandro is such a creative genius. That was one of the most fun parts of the project, just to hang out with him and see how crazy his mind is. When I started detuning the drums [while recording], he was like, "Ah, maybe we'll leave that in!" I was like, *Yeah, sure...* And then I see the movie and I hear my voice and then the detuning of my drum. I was like, *Man, he actually did it...and it works!* You have no idea where it's going, and then all of a sudden the credits start.

I come from a family of actors. My grandfather is like the Laurence Olivier of Mexico. He's ninety and he's still acting. He's like Roy Haynes. And my uncle's an actor and my mother was in the film industry for a long time, not in front of the camera, but she was a critic and a teacher. So all of that stuff is completely fascinating to me.

**MD:** Your family must have been thrilled.

**Antonio:** Man, they were beside themselves. They loved the film. I could have done the same thing in an okay movie that didn't go anywhere, but this movie won the

frickin' Oscar, you know? When it did, I jumped out of my seat and started crying. It was so emotional. To be part of that piece of pop culture—for a jazz musician, especially—it was just bizarre. And also the fact that *Whiplash* was around, all this drummer stuff. It was a crazy year.

**MD:** It would have been nice if they'd had a drumset on stage at the Oscars.

**Antonio:** Well, the Oscars were *definitely* not going to have me, because they'd disqualified me. But they could not get rid of me in the end, because the movie won, and that score is going to be there forever and a lot of people will check it out. So that's a nice redemption.

What pissed me off about the whole thing was that first it got disqualified on a technicality. Originally it was thought that there was more licensed music than original music. It's got to be more than 50 percent original music for it to qualify.

**MD:** Which it clearly was.

**Antonio:** Which it clearly was. So we were all like, "Great—let's resend it." I wrote a letter to the academy describing the process, Alejandro wrote an amazing letter, Fox wrote a letter, the producers wrote letters. We thought we were on very solid ground. And they wrote back saying they had another meeting and decided that the use of licensed music dilutes the effectiveness of the score. So that seemed a little fishy to me. And it's completely subjective.

**MD:** The word *dilutes* strikes me as ridiculous.

**Antonio:** Yeah, because if something is diluted, it means it has less of an impact. Man, the scores that were up for Oscars were all amazing, but not one comes close

in terms of how easily you can recognize it. That's why they kept using [clips from the drum score] at the Oscars, the whole night. But I think the controversy actually helped, because so much was written about it. And everybody was on our side, even the composers that were nominated for different things. I think good composers like it when there's a completely different kind of work being done, because that opens the door for them to do different stuff.

If I had participated and I didn't get nominated, that's fine—the people spoke. I'm not pissed because I didn't *win* the Oscar, which I probably wouldn't have won; I'm just pissed that they didn't give people the chance to vote. To me that just seemed bad for music, bad for jazz, bad for drums, bad for Hollywood, because they're saying this new proposition that we have, let's kill it right off the bat. It also makes me feel like my instrument is not taken seriously, as an orchestra would be. The fact that it's just a one-man show playing an instrument that many don't consider worthy of a film score, I think that had a lot to do with it.

**MD:** I've read about numerous examples of licensed music that might have diluted an original score but did not lead to disqualifications.

**Antonio:** They have their rules, and they're very keen on enforcing them when it's convenient, and then they bend them when they want to. It's not that their standards are so high; it's just that their standards change from year to year. But the redemption was that the movie itself got the recognition and won so many Oscars. [sits back and smiles] I'm happy. I'm not bitter.



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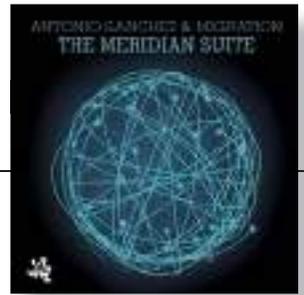
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# Antonio Sanchez

## *The Meridian Suite*

by Terry Branam



Contemporary drumming giant Antonio Sanchez's *The Meridian Suite* takes the listener on a spectacular journey through a nearly hour-long composition that's divided into five parts. This epic long-form piece features some of Sanchez's most refined yet most adventurous playing to date. In this article we'll put some of the many exciting moments from the album under the microscope and take a close look at the masterful drumming.

### "Grids and Patterns"

The aptly titled "Grids and Patterns" starts with an angular 5/8 piano intro that leads into syncopated ensemble figures. Sanchez sets it all up with some well-placed fills. (0:11)

$\text{♩} = 225$

This transitions to a quarter-note override pattern with the hi-hats opening and closing as the 5/8 beat is established with the kick and snare. Antonio catches the band figures in a way that doesn't interrupt the flow of the groove. (0:32)

MUSIC KEY			
open	○	R.C. Bell	China Stack
H.H.	⊗	C.C.	⊗
T.T.	⊗		
S.D.	⊗		
F.T.	⊗		
B.D.	●		
H.H. w/foot	⊗	Rim Click	Add'l F.T.

### “Imaginary Lines”

Sanchez’s lyrical approach to this ballad uses space and dynamics to create atmosphere behind the wide-open piano chords. The very subtle and deliberate spacing between the hi-hat and snare notes adds dimension and interest to the backbeats. Check out the fadeout effect of the decrescendo flams at the end of the phrase, in bar 7. (0:37)

♩=55

Musical notation for 'Imaginary Lines' in 4/4 time, tempo 55. The notation consists of two staves. The first staff shows a series of notes with accents and dynamic markings (> and <math>\text{ff}</math>). The second staff continues the pattern, including triplet markings (3) and a change in time signature to 6/4 at the end. A double bar line with a wedge-shaped dynamic marking (<math>\text{ff}</math> to <math>\text{f}</math>) is placed between the two staves.

### “Channels of Energy”

“Channels of Energy” is the fiery drum feature of *The Meridian Suite*. Sanchez’s unexpected snare shots in the opening measures give the impression of an accelerando, before morphing into quick rolls down the toms. Antonio then uses double bass ruffs between the over-the-barline snare accents to connect the next phrase to an explosive conclusion to the intro. As the band transitions into a funky riff in 6/4, the drummer dances around the rhythms with some crackling snare and hi-hat accents. (0:00)

♩=138

Musical notation for 'Channels of Energy' in 7/4 time, tempo 138. The notation consists of four staves. The first staff shows a series of notes with accents and dynamic markings (> and <math>\text{ff}</math>). The second staff continues the pattern, including sextuplet markings (6) and a change in time signature to 6/4. The third and fourth staves continue the complex rhythmic pattern with various accents and dynamic markings.

RLRLL RLRLL RLLRLL RLLRLL R RLL RLRLL RLRLRLRLRL

Later in the track, Sanchez lets it rip with an extended solo that begins over the 6/4 riff. He switches up the subdivisions to evoke a 12/8 feel before launching into a dazzling four-over-three passage. (4:43)

### “Pathways of the Mind”

The closer of the album is this twenty-one-minute epic. Near the end is a section that revolves around groupings of five that the band cycles through a fifteen-beat phrase. We’ve chosen to notate it as three bars of 4/4 and one bar of 3/4. Sanchez suddenly evens out the odd accents from the five-note groupings and metrically shifts with the band into a laid-back 6/4 feel. Note the subtle swing in the 16th notes when they reach the new tempo (measure 9). There’s a tasteful cymbal-swell overdub added to the mix that crescendos through the 3/4 measure. (13:27)

♩ = 115

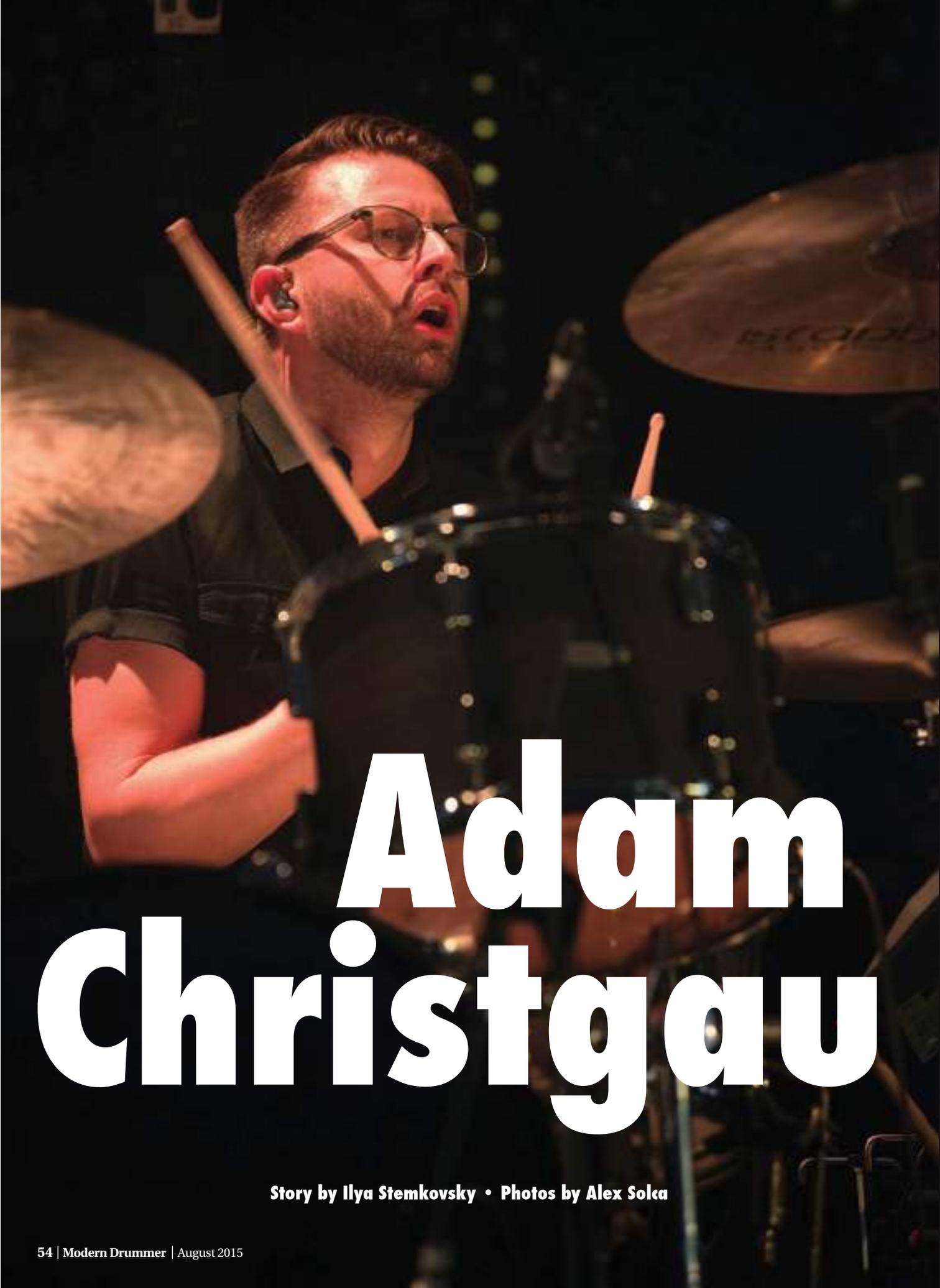
$\text{♩} = 90$

After an extended fadeout and a subsequent fade back in, the band makes another astonishing gear shift back to the original feel. Sanchez patiently introduces one element at a time, first by breaking the straight 8th notes of the ride cymbal into a lopsided quintuplet feel. Next he fleshes out the quintuplet groove with more subdivisions (measure 5). Eventually he pulls the band back through the time portal into the original 4/4 feel with the five-note pattern cycling through the bars (measure 7). Check it out! (16:38)

$\text{♩} = 90$

$\text{♩} = 115$





# Adam Christgau

Story by Ilya Stemkovsky • Photos by Alex Solca

**Whether he's focusing on pianissimo in intimate club settings, slamming home the backbeats in arenas with Tegan and Sara, or replicating the studio sophistication of Joey Waronker in every type of room in between, this Los Angeles–based drummer studies the situation, decides what needs to be done, and does it *good*.**

**A**dam Christgau is a rare breed. His résumé boasts film, TV, and soundtrack work and commercial jingles, and he's a versatile studio and road dog, lending his skills to all sorts of indie pop, hard rock, and electronic weirdness. But he's also got a remarkable jazz feel, which isn't something the "rock" guys are supposed to have. It's obvious he's studied, because he can really swing. Usually players who grow up playing jazz stay on that path, but Christgau moved organically into the pop and rock world like he could simply will it.

Of course, you'd never really know any of this by watching

him at work at his day job since 2013, laying it down for the Canadian indie-pop duo Tegan and Sara. (You might know them from their Oscar-nominated version of "Everything Is Awesome" from *The Lego Movie*.) With Tegan and Sara, Christgau takes an unassuming approach, never drawing too much attention to the drums, supporting the vocalists, and making everything feel right with minimal flash. Hang in long enough, though, and you might get a taste of his rock power, his well-developed chops, and a maybe a bit of that jazz magic seeping in.



**MD:** What kind of music were you listening to growing up?

**Adam:** Both of my parents were musicians, and my dad studied guitar with John Scofield and Chuck Loeb. He'd bring home Loeb bootlegs from Seventh Avenue South in New York, with Peter Erskine or Zach Danziger on drums. Zach was only sixteen or seventeen at the time. I was around six and would listen to him, thinking, *Oh, my God, he's a teenager*, and that's when I really decided that I wanted to play drums. If he could do that when he was sixteen, then I could too. Zach was a huge influence.

**MD:** So you're six years old and listening to Erskine and Danziger? Not whatever was on the radio?

**Adam:** If the radio was on, it was my mom playing the Police or Stevie Wonder or Neil Young. [Discovering] Stewart Copeland was another defining moment, specifically a live Police video. Later my dad would play me Elvin Jones and Tony Williams, and at around fifteen I discovered Mahavishnu Orchestra, so Cobham became a big thing. Will Kennedy was in there too.

**MD:** What about the Beatles or Zeppelin or normal kid music?

**Adam:** [laughs] By the time rock came around for me, it was Dave Matthews Band in high school, along with Nirvana, Stone Temple Pilots, and Soundgarden. When I finally got my ears together, it was everything across the board. I was a huge Ol' Dirty Bastard fan and also freaking out over the Meters.

While at Purchase College I played singer-songwriter gigs and studied jazz with John Riley and played around town in many groups, including Ray Vega's Latin Jazz Quartet. Eventually I got to play straight-ahead bebop with Scofield in a trio setting, and it all seemed to click for me then. But after that I decided to focus on playing with singers and touring. I wanted to travel and play for bigger crowds.

**MD:** Was your jazz touch essential in your being able to play sensitively behind singers?

**Adam:** One hundred percent. I was playing a lot at Rockwood Music Hall in New York. One show every couple of months turned into four to six shows a week, with a bunch of different artists. I always joke that somebody at Rockwood heard that I could play quietly. So I kept getting hired to play behind singer-songwriters, which I loved doing at the time. Whatever you could do



to not blow up their monitor—putting towels on drums, playing with brushes or broomsticks or with your bare hands...

**MD:** How did the Tegan and Sara gig come your way?

**Adam:** I was touring with Australian singer Sia, and her guitar player called me to sub for a gig with the Killers' Brandon Flowers. I did a short few weeks with him. Sia's bassist, Jasper Leak, put my name in the hat for Tegan and Sara. Jason McGerr was drumming for them before I was on the gig, and was also recommending people. I must have answered the right questions, because I got the audition and the gig. And I had been listening to Jason with Death Cab for Cutie quite a bit coming up through college, so I was very familiar with his playing. To take over the gig from him was a huge honor.

**MD:** Talk about playing parts live that were recorded by studio guys.

**Adam:** The bulk of the record [2013's

*Heartthrob*] was recorded with Joey Waronker. Ironically, he played on Sia's record too. I was pretty familiar with Joey's playing, through the Beck era, and Atoms for Peace at that point too. But a lot of it was heavily programmed by producer Greg Kurstin. Other tracks were done with Victor Indrizzo. I haven't met Joey, but I want to so badly, because this is the ninth record that I've had to learn his parts for. The challenge for me was to figure out a way to blend this new pop record with the old, more indie-sounding records. Joey plays so quietly on record and his sound is very tight and dry, and Jason hits really hard. So finding that blend between the two guys was pretty rough at first. I think I've finally dialed it in.

**MD:** How'd you prepare for the tour?

**Adam:** They gave me close to a month to learn the tunes, and then we had two or three weeks to rehearse in New York. I had to pick drum sizes that would best reflect all

# Adam's Setup

**Drums:** C&C with maple/poplar/maple shells

**A.** 6.5x14 chrome-over-brass snare

**B.** 9x13 tom

**C.** 16x16 floor tom

**D.** 16x18 floor tom

**E.** 14x24 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Istanbul Agop

**1.** 15" OM hi-hats

**2.** 20" Alchemy Sweet crash

**3.** 22" Traditional Dark ride

**4.** 20" Traditional Medium crash

**Hardware:** DW

**Sticks:** Vic Firth 55A wood-tip sticks and T1 mallets

**Heads:** Evans Genera HD Dry snare batter, coated G2 tom batters, and EQ3 bass drum batter

**Electronics:** Roland SPD-SX sampling pad



the recordings, hoping the front-of-house guys would be able to do some after-effects live on the board to create a couple of different sounds on the record. And then I needed to figure out how to play everything and make it all congruent.

**MD:** What sizes and materials worked in the end?

**Adam:** Initially I thought it would be better to go with a slightly more vintage sound, because I know Jason was probably tracking older drums on the earlier Tegan and Sara records. And I know Joey was probably playing older drums. So I decided to go with mahogany drums with coated heads for more of an older Ludwig sound, but, to compensate for the deadness, I also went with bigger sizes than I normally had. So it was C&C 24", 13", 16", 18", with a 6.5x14 snare. The snare was an aluminum shell, like an Acrolite but in a 6.5" format.

Eventually, though, the set was so electronic heavy that about eight months into the gig I thought I needed something more punchy, so I switched over to maple/poplar/maple shells for the last year of touring, with a chrome-over-brass snare, all in the same sizes, and that was the move. The conclusion was that the vintage-sounding kit wasn't cutting in the larger venues. We were opening for Fun and Katy Perry, and if I'm hitting those types of drums really hard in a 10,000-seat venue, they'll just start to choke. They weren't singing as much or punching through the mix.

**MD:** Are you into the throwback, 1970s muffled thing?

**Adam:** I'm into it. The LCD Soundsystem record is a super-dead, concert-tom, one-mic-in-a-tiny-room kind of sound.

Whatever suits the music best is fine with me. I love Deerhoof, and Greg [Saunier] plays whatever is available and makes it work. That exploration of showing up to a kit that should sound horrible, and then that fight of trying to make it sound good, is one of the most fun things to do.

**MD:** Is playing TV a challenge?

**Adam:** I've played the *Today* show a couple times, and that's brutal, because the call time is four in the morning and you can barely function, and then the light goes on and before you know it the song is over. I'm generally good with stage fright, but there's been a couple times where there's no feeling in my hands until the second verse. That's the struggle: How can I feel the most normal on TV? Trying to be as present as possible. You do some camera blocking and then you'll have a six-hour break in between rehearsals and taping. Now I've done it enough where it feels like just another gig.

**MD:** What about playing the big gigs? Are you changing anything up in these arenas?

**Adam:** Absolutely. I never considered myself a loud player, but I noticed some hand and arm issues happening because I was overextending. I sat down with my buddy Michael Iveson [Gotye], and he explained that I wasn't using my Moeller technique at all. The arm was going straight up and down, no whipping, no shoulder, so of course I was overworking. So every night with Katy Perry in these arenas, my main goal was to put my bass drum through the back wall of the arena and produce the biggest sound possible with the least amount of energy physically, and to play with power and volume but still have some

musicality attached to that. Which notes to simplify. Turn 16th notes into 8th notes. There's a tune where I feather a lot of ghost notes with my left hand, but it's still an integral part. It's meant to sound like a shaker is happening over the snare part. In the arena, I had to almost play full-on 8th notes with my left at forte and play 2 and 4 at fortissimo. I really noticed it when we went back to club shows and my drums were louder than they've ever been, and I was confused.

**MD:** So, is everything actually awesome?

**Adam:** When we would play that song every night, Katy's audience would freak out and realize who we were. I've never even seen the movie.

**MD:** What's been happening since the last Tegan and Sara tour ended?

**Adam:** I'm basically employed full time by an artist named Joy Williams now. She was half of the duo the Civil Wars and has just begun her solo endeavor. It's a completely different headspace, playing-wise. The record is definitely adult contemporary, and I'm playing basically half electronics, half acoustic drums. Not nearly as much freedom as the Tegan and Sara show, but I'm finding my way around it.

**MD:** Is a life of rocking and swinging possibly in your immediate future?

**Adam:** Cindy Blackman and Brian Blade are toeing that line, playing jazz and also being in the pop and rock worlds. I'd like to get back into playing jazz and fine-tune that muscle. Some movie work is in the future. But upward mobility is the key. I don't want to stop until I get a McCartney kind of gig. Maybe it won't happen, but it doesn't mean I'm not going to keep trying.





Gary O'Brian

# Dylan Howe

He's spent years simultaneously developing his jazz drumming concept and accompanying a lively selection of rock artists. Now he's found a unique way to marry both aesthetics.

by Ken Micallef

In 1976, rock chameleon David Bowie escaped the public eye by moving into a small apartment in West Berlin. Peering out the window of the nearby recording studio where he worked, Bowie could see the infamous Berlin Wall, its armed sentries and barbed wire reflecting Cold War animosities. When not writing or recording, the singer spent his days listening to such nascent German acts as Neu!, Cluster, and Harmonia, groups then in the vanguard of analog synthesizer technology that channeled the country's violent past into space-rock sounds. Often referred to as Bowie's "Berlin trilogy," the resulting albums, *Low*, *Heroes*, and *Lodger*, have proven vastly influential. Consisting of churning rock and darkly ambient, synth-drenched minimalism, the trilogy is the sound of self-appointed solitary confinement.

Nearly four decades later, drummer/composer Dylan Howe frees these eerie Krautrock visions in *Subterranean: New Designs on Bowie's Berlin*. Covering such tracks as "Neuköln—Night," "Warszawa," and "Art Decade," Howe follows an expansive approach set aloft by spiraling, Roy Haynes-inspired playing. *Subterranean* frames Bowie's Berlin in metallic guitar, woozy synths, free-ish drumming, and wide-open arrangements.

*Subterranean* is the latest effort by Howe, who has worked as a session player with Paul McCartney, David Gilmour, Nick Cave, Roger Daltrey, and his illustrious father, Yes guitarist Steve Howe. Following multiple hard-bop and experimental recordings, *Subterranean* has put Howe on the map, drawing praise from new fans and the Thin White Duke himself.

**MD:** Your solo work is generally in a jazz vein. How did you come to cover music from Bowie's Berlin period?

**Dylan:** When I first heard those albums they seemed austere and spooky. But then I realized I could arrange the songs and turn them into something else. With some tracks, like "Warszawa," we played it as a Coltrane, modal thing. It's atmospheric and very dramatic. Bowie got flak when he did those records originally; he was ahead of the curve. And everyone thought I was crazy to do this. After we released it, Bowie sent me a message that he really liked it.

**MD:** Bowie contacted you?

**Dylan:** After the album was out a few months, I got an email with the subject line "from David Bowie." He wrote, "Dylan, that's a top-notch album you've got there. Really.

David Bowie." I was ecstatic. It was really important to get his approval. Then they shared the record on Bowie's website, and suddenly we sold thousands of albums. It's incredible. It's totally new territory for me.

I wanted to change the grooves from the original songs and go into other areas. The source material is simple, melodically and structurally; it's very malleable. And it's comfortable to solo with because it has that openness.

**MD:** Did you extend Bowie's melodies for soloing?

**Dylan:** The more you listen to these Bowie tracks, smaller themes and underlying motifs appear. Some of our tracks are faithful to the originals, as with "Subterraneans"—we used an orchestral score of that as our template. Other tunes are essentially AABA, but we might go into double time or change the feel. The music is faithful architecturally in some ways; in other ways it isn't. All of the melodies are quoted, and the keys are the same. We went for a cinematic approach, a kind of landscape where it feels like you're going somewhere in the music. We've been performing it all over England, with a movie about Berlin in the '70s playing behind us on a scrim. Everyone gets transported.

**MD:** Bill Bruford was your first teacher.

**Dylan:** I took my first lessons from Bruford; he's been a mentor. He wrote the liner notes on one of my albums.

**MD:** What jazz drummers have you focused on?

**Dylan:** I was a Tony Williams freak for years. Elvin Jones, of course. Latterly I was into Roy Haynes on Chick Corea's *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*. Elvin took a lot from Roy and adapted it for himself. You can hear that with Tony as well. Roy didn't get his due until recently. And he is so advanced with Charlie Parker and Lester Young. He played quite avant-garde drum stuff in the '40s and '50s. He adapted to everyone he played with because he has his own beat, his own feel, and all of his language is so unique. That's why everybody wanted to play with him. He has such a buoyant beat. Such an

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Howe plays a '60s-era Gretsch kit with an 8x12 tom, a 14x14 floor tom, and a 14x18 bass drum, with a 5x14 Ludwig Supraphonic Ludalloy snare. His Zildjian cymbals include 14" K Constantinople hi-hats, a 21" K Custom Special Dry ride, a 20" K Constantinople Flat ride, an 18" K Constantinople crash, and a 22" '60s-era K ride, and he plays a 20" '60s-era Zyn crash/ride with one rivet. His Remo heads include a Coated Ambassador snare batter and Hazy snare-side, Fiberskyn 3 tom batters and Clear Ambassador bottoms, and a Coated Ambassador bass drum batter and Smooth White front head. He plays Zildjian Bill Stewart signature or Vic Firth American Jazz 5 or 8D sticks, Vic Firth Jazz wire brushes and T1 timpani mallets, and Chalklin MS22 hard sewn-felt timpani mallets.

important drummer.

**MD:** Who did you study with after Bruford?

**Dylan:** I'm self-taught, really. I had a series of lessons with other teachers, but that didn't last. It took me until my twenties to learn how to practice properly. I got by on feel and enthusiasm. I didn't go to school for drumming. I studied different books, including *The Jazz Drummer's Workshop* by John Riley, Buddy Rich's *Modern Interpretation of Snare Drum Rudiments*, and George Lawrence Stone's *Stick Control*.

I also played along with records. Playing along to your favorite albums is such a good way to learn. You get to know how it's supposed to feel, and you learn the ride cymbal beat. I played with all of the Blue Note albums with Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, and Roy Haynes. I began with Philly Joe Jones and Jimmy Cobb—that's a good way in. Jimmy and Philly Joe's right-hand rhythms are quite immovable time centers. Then I got into the modal era and the mid-'60s Blue Note stuff, which is a lot more open. I found that really inspiring. I focused on understanding that feel and thinking, *How do I do that?*

**MD:** Did you work on the twenty-six rudiments and Ted Reed's *Syncopation*?

**Dylan:** I did that all the time, especially after I got my own practice studio. I gradually found all the connections between the books. And practicing Alan Dawson's Rudimental Ritual was important. That's good because it has everything in this musical four-bar looping pattern.

One book that really turned me around was Peter Erskine's *Time Awareness*, where he breaks everything down into understandable chunks. He covered a lot of

styles. Finding my way from that into John Riley's books was good...understanding how to propel a group with the ride cymbal and that it's all about the quarter note. I spent untold hours in the practice room. It's not really about playing drum solos—everything is about your time feel. If that works, everything will work.

I saw Buddy Rich when I was thirteen, and that was really inspiring. And all that music from the '60s, that's what I go to for inspiration. Also, all the great session drummers of the '70s who were coming from a jazz thing but applying it in the backbeat era. [I got from them] how to make the time feel good and how to be tasteful—hundreds of subtleties that come from those guys.

**MD:** What's made the biggest difference to your drumming?

**Dylan:** It sounds stupid, but I remember in my early twenties reading the Erskine book and understanding the value of the quarter note. It sounds basic, but Erskine made that understandable in such a powerful way. The quarter note is going through everything, and the moment you count a song off, that's the train track that everything has to wrap itself around, and it's up to you to keep that clear and steady. That hit me. Then understanding how to phrase properly with the ride cymbal beat and on to soloing.

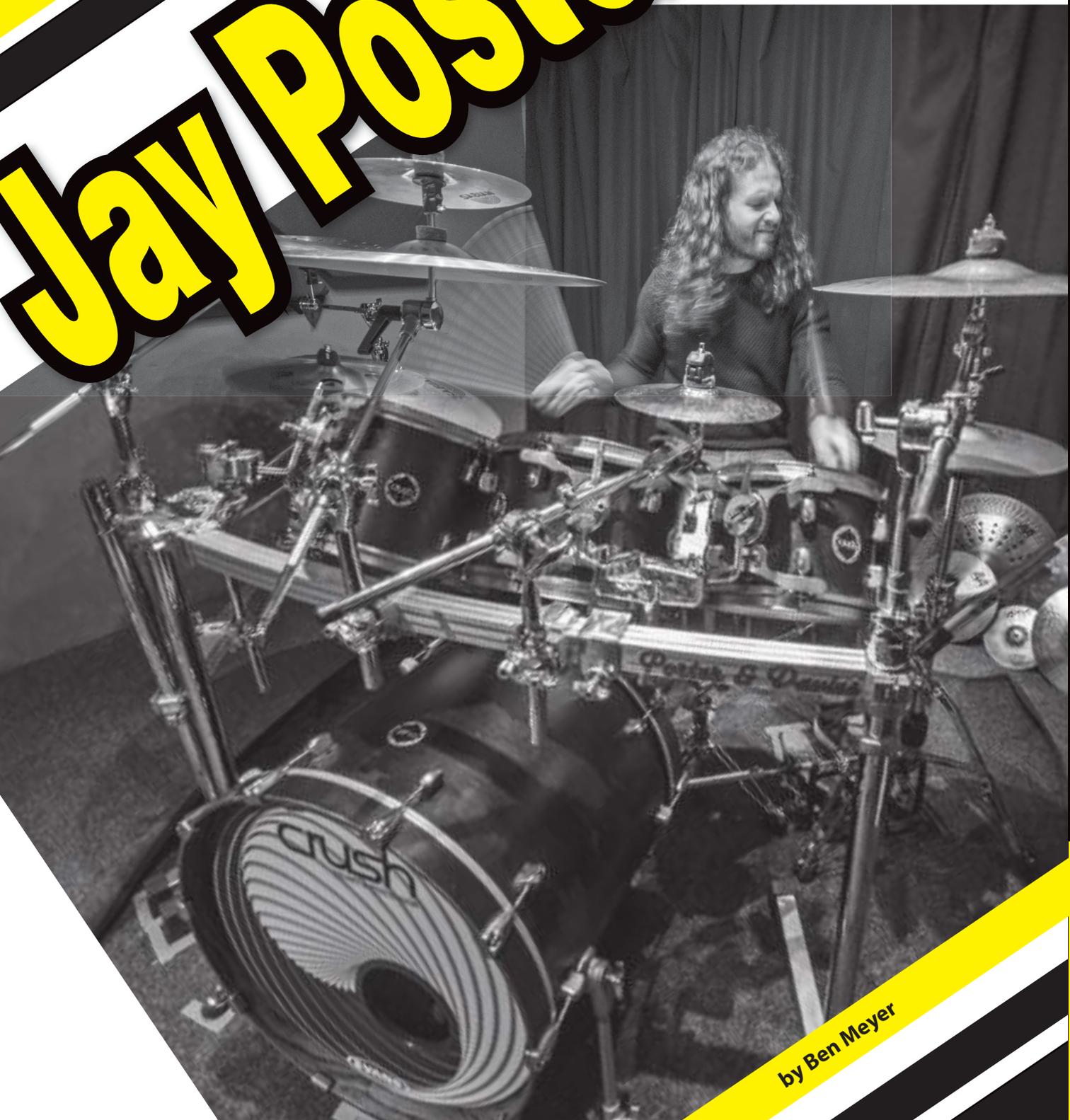
Now I'm working on three or four books at the same time. I have Danny Gottlieb's *The Evolution of Jazz Drumming*, which has history and transcriptions and comping studies. That's helped me understand Mel Lewis's playing and the way he glued everything together. Also, John Riley's *The Art of Bop Drumming and Beyond Bop Drumming*. Everything is about improving the fundamentals. I set the metronome low, at around twenty-five, and subdivide up and down. And I do the same with the rudiments—soloing over ostinatos and trying to get really comfortable with all the language. Just trying to get better!

## RECORDINGS

**Dylan Howe** *The Way I Hear It, This Is It, Subterranean: New Designs on Bowie's Berlin* // **Dylan Howe Quintet** *Translation: Recorded Live in Soho Volume 1, Translation 2: Standards & Previews* // **Dylan Howe/Will Butterworth Duo** *Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring Part 1* // **Steve Howe** *The Grand Scheme of Things, Quantum Guitar, Natural Timbre, Spectrum* // **Steve Howe Trio** *The Haunted Melody* // **Steve Howe's Remedy** *Elements* // **Wilko Johnson/Roger Daltrey** *Going Back Home* // **Ian Dury and the Blockheads** *Ten More Turnips From the Tip* // **The Blockheads** *Staring Down the Barrel*



# Jay Postones



by Ben Meyer

## The drummer with the progressive metal band **Tesseract** will happily turn to technology to help him realize the ambitious ideas in his head. Then he jumps on the drums, and the *real* fun begins.

**T**esseract was formed in 2007, when the British group emerged out of guitarist and principal songwriter Acle Kahney's solo studio project. A rapturous response to Tesseract's recordings and opening sets with Devin Townsend, Protest the Hero, and Between the Buried and Me have resulted in the band's unassailable place at the forefront of the buzzing European tech-metal scene. Last year was a banner one for Jay Postones and the group, who toured practically nonstop in support of their lauded sophomore album, 2013's *Altered State*.

As Tesseract completes work on *Altered State*'s follow-up, fans have been keeping busy absorbing every note of the new live audio/video package *Odyssey/Scala*. The video portion of the release was filmed at an epic show at London's popular Scala club—one of Postones' favorite performances from the band's many months on the road.

Postones is an active educator and owns and operates a set of successful rehearsal studios in the U.K. Having recently moved back to England's Midlands, the thirty-one-year-old drummer continues to grow and find fresh challenges in Tesseract's complex new work and that of his progressive instrumental rock project, Heights.

Postones grew up in Wolverhampton, outside Birmingham, and began his musical life as a keyboardist before being urged to take up drumming at age thirteen. He remembers the exact moment when the change came: "My buddy Steve, who I was in a band with, said to me, 'We haven't got the technology to make this keyboard any louder, and we don't need a keyboard player.'" What the group *did* need was a drummer. There was already a vintage Premier kit in the room, so "I just got on it," Postones says. "I've drummed ever since."

The music Postones grew up with was largely what his dad listened to, including Steely Dan, Neil Young, and Pink Floyd. "To be honest, I kind of missed the whole metal thing," Jay says. "Even though Tesseract is kind of a metal band—we're accepted in that world as well as the prog world—I was never into Metallica or Iron Maiden or anything like that. I just went

straight from what my dad was playing to Dillinger Escape Plan and Meshuggah. I found that stuff really interesting, mainly because the musicianship was so incredible and the ideas were unique. And that's when I started to fall in love with weird time signatures and that kind of thing. Now I listen to electronic music like Jon Hopkins and Trentemøller, though I still love the stuff I grew up listening to. But what I listen to most is the music that I'm learning."

Due in part to the ease of digital collaboration for writing, the members of Tesseract have not found the need to live near one another. "The band is from all over," Postones says. "We have a base in Reading, though, where I have some rehearsal rooms. We keep all of our gear there and we come together to rehearse. But because of the nature of the music and because we're all in the future now, we can rehearse in the places where we live. And then we get together two days or so before a tour. We really only rehearse together three or four days a year. It's a weird thing. Our bassist lives in Shanghai, for God's sake. He flies over when we have work to do."

Tesseract's recording process is equally impervious to geography. "Acle will write a riff and put a drum part to it with Superior Drummer," Postones explains. "Then he sends that around to us. Sometimes it's perfect and nothing needs to change. Sometimes I'll hear it and think, *Yup, that's something I can't play—I've got to learn how*. [laughs] Other times I can hear that I will be able to play it. Occasionally we'll get together and play through a couple of ideas, and sometimes ideas spawn from that. But for the most part I like trying to re-create the ideas he's had. I don't try to overstep the mark, because Acle has got a very clear vision of what he wants it to

sound like. It's just us interpreting his music. It's a fun thing to do."

Writing both on and off the kit, Postones employs Superior Drummer in Cubase 7 to preserve patterns that come to him and to help work out complex material created by Kahney. Professional endorsements with Toontrack and Steinberg, the creators of Postones' preferred software, have helped to make the technology available when he needs it.

"I'm not one of the recording guys," the drummer says. "I don't know a lot about it—but I know enough to get by with what I do. Obviously I prefer to sit behind the kit and jam it out. But if I get an idea for a pattern, like putting fives and fours together, or sevens and nines and elevens, I might end up having to put it into a computer first to really hear it. I'm quite comfortable with putting odd numbers to even numbers; I can generally hear where it's going to come around. Occasionally, though, something will be quite tricky, and if I want to turn it into a triplet feel or whatever, I'll need to put it into a computer so that I can hear it played back perfectly first. That's the benefit of the technology these days. You can slow it down to a tempo that makes sense, digest that, and then try to get it to a stage that you're not counting things—you're just kind of feeling it. When you're not having to think about anything, you can probably play it."

As if an unrelenting performance schedule weren't enough—Tesseract had thirty-five back-to-back dates on its most recent European trek—Postones occupies his "spare" time on tour by teaching lessons at each venue the band plays throughout Europe and the U.S., arranged entirely through advertisements and messaging on social media platforms. Postones uses grooves from Tesseract's most popular songs and provides students

### TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Postones plays a Crush Sublime Bubinga kit with 7x10, 8x12, and 9x13 toms, a 14x16 floor tom, and an 18x22 bass drum, plus a 7x14 Hybrid Hand Hammered snare (as well as various other snare models). His Sabian cymbals include 14" Rock hi-hats, a 16" O-Zone crash, a 17" Legacy crash, an 8" AAX splash, a 10" AA Metal splash, a 19" AAX X-Plosion crash, a 21" HH Raw Bell Dry ride, a 21" AA Holy China, and a 14" HH Thin crash/10" O-Zone splash stack. He uses Crush M1 series hardware, including a chain-drive double pedal, plus a Porter and Davies BC Gigster with a motorcycle throne. He plays Vic Firth HD9 sticks, and his Evans heads include a Power Center Reverse snare batter and Hazy snare-side, EC2 tom batters and G1 bottoms, and an EQ3 bass drum batter.

## Jay Postones

with pad kits on which to work out ideas. "When I'm on the road," Jay explains, "I just put out an advert on Facebook, and people respond to it. I tend to get three or four people coming down to each of the shows."

"I've got a load of stuff that I prepare for the lessons. I probably spend more time preparing that than I do with the drum parts for the tour, because I know the music like the back of my hand. The last tour we did, I focused on our song 'Nocturne.' I broke it down into as many of the grooves as I could isolate. Then I broke down those grooves to

**"My students start to realize what you can do with all these silly numbers when you stop thinking about them."**

a rudimental level and worked out what everything was. Because I don't read or write music, I put it down as my own notes. To someone that can read music, it's probably like hieroglyphs or something. [laughs] But I explain how I read it and I try

to turn it into a little drum circle. It's really beneficial for me, but hopefully it's beneficial for the students as well, because they start to realize what you can do with these silly numbers when you stop thinking about them."

When the lights go down and the curtain comes up, though, Postones and crew are happy to keep a bit of mystery to the proceedings. "There's a whole behind-the-scenes thing with Tesseract," Jay says. "We have a computer that's running Cubase and sending synth sounds to front of house, and there's a couple of [backing vocals] that we put low in the mix as well, because none of us apart from Dan [Tompkins, vocalist] can sing, and people expect to hear those harmonies. The computer also controls the switching of our Axe effects units. It does everything. If we're told, 'You've got a seventy-minute set,' we make a seventy-minute set so we know that we can't overrun it. We hit play and that's the whole thing. Everything is automated. It means we've got a clear stage as well, with no amps—the guitarists have just got a tuner on stage."

Postones is proud of all the gear he uses, and he's quick to sing its praises. "Crush drums sound and look fantastic," he says. "I had one of their very early kits. Because it's a relatively new company, I can send them an email and say 'Hey, I've spotted something with this drum,' and the feedback is helpful for them. They also look after all of our stuff in the States, so at the end of a tour we stick it on a pallet and it goes back to them. They're a great bunch of guys who make some really great kits."

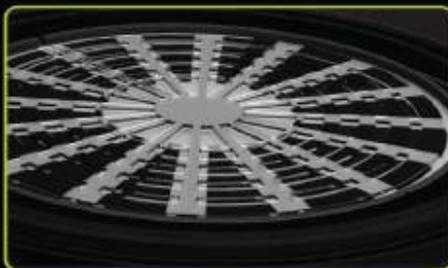
"Sabian makes fantastic cymbals," Postones continues. "Their reps are brilliant, and to have their level of support is something that I'm very grateful for. I'm working with Vic Firth sticks as well—another great team—and I'm with Evans, which makes fantastic heads. I've used them forever. They're just consistent. They take very little tuning, actually. I've got this combination of the Crush bubinga shells and this head combination really dialed in now. I know how I want the drums to sound."

"I also use Porter and Davies, who make the seats with transducers in them. That thing makes every show incredible. I don't have a monitor now, because this thing gives me the feedback I need in the seat. It uses your body to create this sound in your head. It's way too scientific for me to try to explain, because I'll get it wrong [laughs]. But it really does make a show feel incredible."

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**A DIFFERENT  
VIEW**

# Merrill Garbus

by Will Romano

Kyle Gustafson

She describes her band as “a three-person rhythm section where two people are making up the drumkit for a lot of the time.” The leader of **Tune-Yards** is obviously willing to go pretty far out to realize her unique musical vision. We wanted to find out why, and how.

**M**errill Garbus, the founder and leader of Tune-Yards, is nothing if not eclectic. In one moment Garbus stitches carefree, singsong lyrical tapestries reminiscent of children’s nursery rhymes. In the next she’s belting it out like a blues survivor or an R&B diva, as if her life depended on it.

Part songwriter, part griot, part rhythm sorceress, Garbus is a ukulele-plucking, genre-hopping compositional hunter and gatherer whose songs are an amalgam of non-Western styles such as African and Haitian music, twentieth-century classical minimalism, rock, folk, electronic dance, melodic pop, and hip-hop. In concert, Garbus is just as musically mobile—she multitasks by simultaneously singing, interacting with rhythmic loops she’s constructed on the spot, and playing an assortment of drums while sidling up to the microphone.

Although unabashedly lo-fi, Tune-Yards’ songs nonetheless recall the precision of a

well-rehearsed alt-classical ensemble, the complexity of sub-Saharan communal chanting, and the sweep of a grand symphony. Meticulously choreographed for the stage by bassist/synthesizer player/songwriter Nate Brenner, touring percussionist Dani Markham, and two backing singers, the rhythm and vocal patterns heard in Tune-Yards’ material frame Garbus’s pop sensibilities and fuse seemingly disparate musical worlds.

A former puppeteer and member of the Canadian band Sister Suvi, Garbus issued Tune-Yards’ first album, *Bird-Brains*, in 2009; she recorded it entirely on her own. Soon after, she moved to Oakland, California, where she teamed up with Brenner. *Whokill* followed in 2011, garnering critical praise from the *Village Voice* and *Rolling Stone* magazine, among others. Last year saw the release of Tune-Yards’ most accessible and perhaps most robust work, the playfully titled *Nikki Nack*.

*Modern Drummer* caught up with Garbus

to discuss the fusion of different rhythmic styles in her music while she was commuting from Oakland to San Francisco, on her way to producing an undisclosed artist for Beggars Group.

**MD:** What you’re doing with Tune-Yards, fusing non-Western rhythms and music with Western rock and pop, shares a connection with other artists of the last several decades, including Paul Simon, Peter Gabriel, and Joni Mitchell, even Traffic.

**Merrill:** I sometimes feel old, and I’m at the ripe old age of thirty-five. [laughs] I’d been exposed to jazz at a pretty young age. Joni Mitchell’s collaborations with jazz musicians make me think of artists who may be jumping out of their comfort zone because they know there’s a lot of incredible material in another genre. Some of those kinds of experiments and collaborations don’t work well, but others, like Peter Gabriel, Paul Simon, and Joni Mitchell, work. I’m wary of it not working well.

**MD:** You play the Hawaiian ukulele on stage, and apparently you're attracted to rhythms from locations such as South Africa and Haiti. Why?

**Merrill:** I thought a lot about that question. I should start by saying that my parents are both musicians and brought us up with folk music. I think their old-timey fiddle music, which my dad performed and taught me how to play when he bought me my own fiddle in high school, is derived from African music. Going to New Orleans in the past few years, I've gained an understanding as to how African rhythms entered this country.

Also, my aunt and uncle traveled to Africa when I was about ten. It was one of those "wow" moments. It was like listening to Paul Simon's *Graceland* for the first time. Suddenly there was a tangible connection to a world so different from my own in Connecticut, where I was growing up. From then on there was an overwhelming curiosity about other cultures.

**MD:** Inevitably, naysayers will criticize someone like you for what they perceive as cultural imperialism.

**Merrill:** I think the sticky territory is when we get into what the music is being used for, who's making money, and who's not making money. In so many instances I think people

had formal music training, but Nate studied upright bass for years. He transcribed in a way that worked for us. When we hired Dani we knew she was an accomplished percussionist and she had chops like I will never have. It's really a three-person rhythm section [Garbus, Brenner, Markham] where two people are making up the drumkit for a lot of the time. It's very pleasurable when it works, but we have to push and pull a whole lot in order to find where we are going to sit [in the rhythmic framework].

We had recordings where I played most of the drums and percussion parts on the album. I knew exactly what I had done, and I could say, "I'm going to play this part and you can play that part." Dani has a Roland SPD sampling pad as part of her setup, to recall some creative sounds on the album that I was excited about. She's got so much going on. It's incredible. She has a triangle, floor tom, conga, snare, the SPD pad with a foot trigger and tons of options, and multiple metal objects. All that and she sings too. We desperately cling to her as part of this live band.

**MD:** Would you say you're influenced by specific rhythmic patterns, and have you followed the careers of specific drummers?

**Merrill:** Absolutely. Haitian rhythm and

twenties influenced me as well.

**MD:** You mentioned that you're producing these days. What do you contribute to a production? Do you help compose songs, offer rhythmic ideas...?

**Merrill:** It's kind of everything. I always hesitate to say songwriting, because unless specifically requested from a producer, the songwriting really belongs to the band and artist.

As a producer I'm trying to discern and underscore the rhythmic emphasis of a song. When an artist says, "I want this song to be driving," I have to know what that means and how to translate that rhythmically. Also, a band may like dragging [the time], because it's the specific feel they want, but sometimes I have to tell them, "I think you want 156 bpm here."

The truth is, some of my rhythmic ideas are for the world of pop music and are pretty weird and out of place in other musical settings. As a producer I try not to impose that on anyone. Recently I worked with Jason Slota, a Bay Area drummer who is so solid and so versatile. He's absolutely the kind of drummer you want when you're producing a project, because you can say, "Can you give me more of a breakbeat?" or "I need this to sound like you're at the bottom



## Finding a New Way Translating Tune-Yards' Percussion-Heavy Tunes Live

"If there's a specific clap or electronic sound that Merrill overdubbed," says Dani Markham, the university-trained percussionist who could be called Tune-Yards' secret weapon on stage, "I play that on the SPD. In order to reproduce the snare and high-pitched metal sounds in a song like 'Hey Life,' I would play around with different tins, different metals, to try to make as much of the song acoustic as possible while also emulating what I'm hearing on the album. In fact, [multi-instrumentalist] Nate [Brenner] did a lot of production on the album and played some metal parts and percussion. While I'm using these metal sounds, Merrill is playing snare drum. When you slow things down you hear how everything is supposed to fit together. It's all been worked out to the tiniest, tiniest minute detail. Basically, we're intertwining one drum part with two people."

perceive African music as being something that's so exotic and removed, instead of it being, "This is the sound of contemporary African music."

I'm honored to have a career as a musician. A part of the job I love is that I can meet with musicians from all over the world and there's a common bond. We're all here as musicians—and equals.

**MD:** It seems Tune-Yards' live performances have been highly choreographed, especially in terms of the interaction between you and percussionist Dani Markham. How do you coordinate live acoustic drumming with the looping patterns you've created?

**Merrill:** There isn't a lot written out. I never

Haitian drumming is ingrained in me. I would say that hip-hop, soul, R&B, and anything that's derived from that tradition of drumming is where my head goes. Generally that means that I prefer playing behind the beat a bit. As far as individual drummers, I would say Tony Allen is probably the first drummer that I really knew by name and knew he was an influence on me. That meant spending as much time as I could with the Fela Kuti records, but also [Allen's] solo records, which combined new technology or new sounds with his style of drumming. Then there's my dear beloved Questlove. I think that hearing so much of his drumming when I was in my teens and

of the ocean," and somehow he knows how to tune his snare appropriately.

**MD:** Since you're so nontraditional, we saved this one, usually an opening question, for last. When did you pick up a pair of sticks and start playing?

**Merrill:** I was wondering when you were going to get around to asking that. I dropped out of drum lessons in middle school, because I didn't want to play straight quarter notes for hours. I started by looping drums live when I was around twenty-six, twenty-seven years old, right at the start of Tune-Yards' existence. I started playing live drums a couple years later. That's my experience.





# John Tempesta

The heavy-rock journeyman takes Motor Sister for a *Ride*.

by David Ciauro

**J**ohn Tempesta has been a constant presence on the hard rock and heavy metal scenes since the '90s, playing with the iconic thrash bands Exodus and Testament, as well as with Rob Zombie, Helmet, and the Cult. Earlier this year Tempesta appeared on Motor Sister's debut album, *Ride*. The band is the reincarnation of Mother Superior, the unadorned bluesy roots rock outfit led by singer/guitarist Jim Wilson that broke up in the early 2000s.

Motor Sister played its first show last February at Saint Vitus in Brooklyn. *MD* was fortunate to be in attendance and can confirm that the band absolutely crushed. "I'm excited to play these songs live and have a blast," Tempesta says. "What's really cool is that my best friend, Dante Renzi,

plays drums in Static Summer, the band that's been opening for us. We met when we were teenagers, and they opened for Helmet ten years ago when I was playing with them, so it's kind of a reunion of sorts."

Motor Sister's story is a unique one. Among Mother Superior's longtime fans was Anthrax guitarist Scott Ian, and for his fiftieth-birthday party Ian decided that all he wanted was to jam on his favorite Mother Superior songs with Jim Wilson at the helm. Ian's wife, Pearl Aday, had been working with Wilson for years on her solo material, so the wish was granted easily enough. Ian enlisted fellow Mother Superior fans Tempesta and bassist Joey Vera to round out the group.

Tempesta plays with fury on *Ride*, which

features remakes of twelve Mother Superior tunes. The drummer stays fairly true to the original recordings played by drummer Matt Tecu but spices up each song with well-placed, creative chops, giving the album a fresh intensity that lifts the tracks into the stratosphere. "The Mother Superior songs didn't have double bass, so I tried to use it tastefully," Tempesta says. "Jim was excited about it. When you use double bass to escalate a section of a song up to this giant crescendo, it's powerful."

The music has the classic appeal of Thin Lizzy or Humble Pie, with a newfound impassioned ferocity, care of the metal-rooted rhythm section. The result is a loose and lively album. "This is rock 'n' roll!" Tempesta says. "It's not rocket science.



Tempesta in the studio with, from left, Scott Ian, Jim Wilson, and Joey Vera

That's the beauty of this record. We recorded the whole thing in two days, all live, no click or anything. It's not perfect, but that's why I love it.

"I had only played with these guys one time before, at Scott's party," Tempesta adds, "and we agreed how amazing it felt to play together and that we should do a record. Two weeks later, we're tracking in the studio with only one rehearsal the day before. I love being spontaneous. All our favorite bands from the '70s recorded like that. It's a great way to make a record, and I hadn't done anything like that in a long time."

Tempesta used his Tama 7x14 signature brass snare drum for the entire recording. "I used a Remo Coated Emperor X head, and I didn't change it once," John

explains. "There are twelve songs on the record, so figure about thirty-six takes to get the drum tracks done. Our producer, Jay Ruston [Anthrax, Steel Panther], was like, 'Don't touch that head!' You can hear that it sounds really warm and broken in on certain songs.

"The kit I used on the record is a maple Tama Starclassic in burgundy sparkle, with 13", 16", and 18" toms and a 16x24 kick. My old drum teacher had a '60s Ludwig kit in burgundy sparkle, so I always wanted one."

Tempesta understands more than most how to adapt sonically when playing with bands from different genres—though he's continually adding tools to his arsenal. "Usually I like a big sound, like Bonham or Cozy Powell," he says. "I like a crackin'

snare that's also meaty, and a punchy, open kick. For the more metal projects, I tighten up the kick sound a bit with a pillow or something. The Cult's been in preproduction with producer Bob Rock, and he's taught me some cool techniques, like holding the stick up higher while playing the hi-hat to not choke the sound, and not necessarily having to hit the drums so hard in order to have the energy come across on the recording."

Due to the band members' hectic schedules, Motor Sister shows will likely be few. A guest spot on Motörhead's late-September/early-October Motörboat Cruise, however, should prove to be many a hard rock fan's highlight this year.



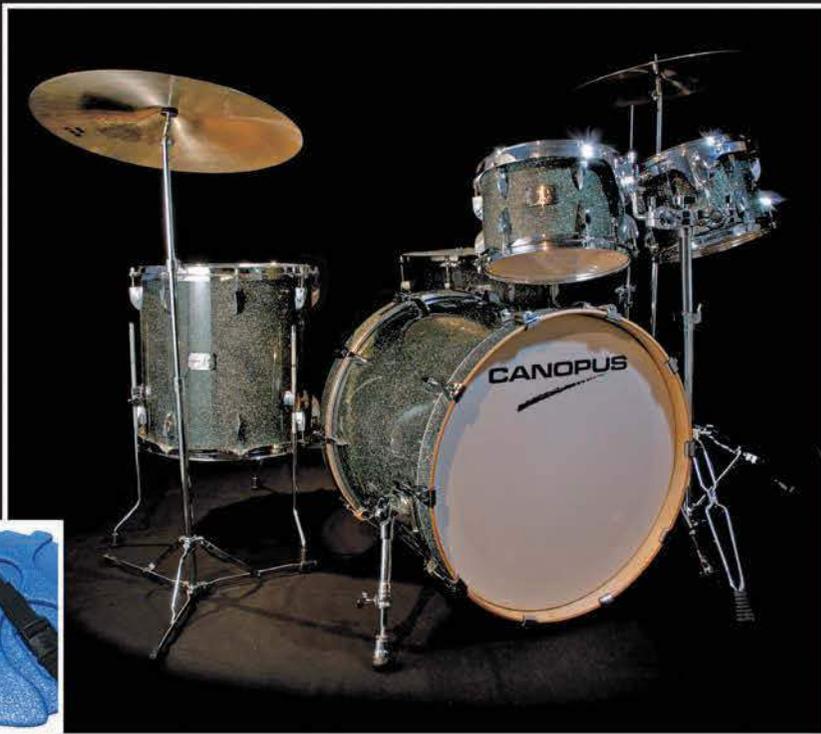


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# The Paradiddle Challenge

## Unlocking Keith Carlock-Type Hand/Foot Interplay

by Daniel Bédard

MUSIC KEY

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

I came up with the idea for this article after hearing Keith Carlock's playing on guitarist Oz Noy's track "Chillin'," from the album *Ha!* I was amazed by the interplay between his bass drum and snare, while he kept 8th notes going on the hi-hat with his foot most of the time. Carlock's rhythms are reminiscent of paradiddles and their various permutations, which is the basis of these exercises.

### The Basic Groove

Start by playing the paradiddle in its basic form between the bass drum and snare, while keeping 8th notes on the hi-hat with the foot. First, play the pattern with 8th notes on the ride cymbal, and then switch the ride so that it's playing in unison with the bass drum. The challenge is to keep the paradiddle between the kick and snare steady and confident while your right hand changes. This helps in developing freedom with the right hand and sounds great as a funk/fusion groove.

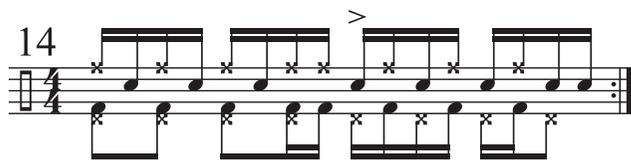
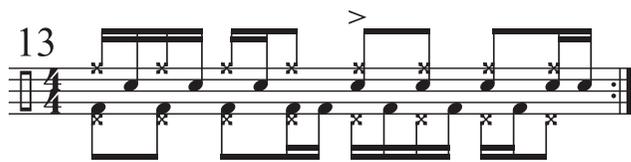
### The Permutations

Once you have those first two exercises under control, start displacing the paradiddle by one 16th note at a time. This process will create some cool variations and will give you a lot of vocabulary. Here are the six variations.

### Hi-Hat Foot Options

For an added independence challenge and for groove variety, practice the previous examples with the following hi-hat foot patterns, which include quarter notes and offbeat 8th notes. Carlock tends not to keep a steady hi-hat foot pattern when he improvises. To get to that level of creative freedom, practice the paradiddle variations with many other hi-hat foot rhythms.

You can expand the challenge by using double and triple paradiddles. Below are a few of the permutations. You can continue to move the patterns by one 16th note to create other interesting-sounding grooves.



To make these patterns more musical, mix them in with more standard grooves and then create longer phrases. These exercises are designed to help you develop facility, but they are not meant to be used only as written. Once you master them, try finding phrases that sound good to you, and improvise with them as Carlock does. Have fun!



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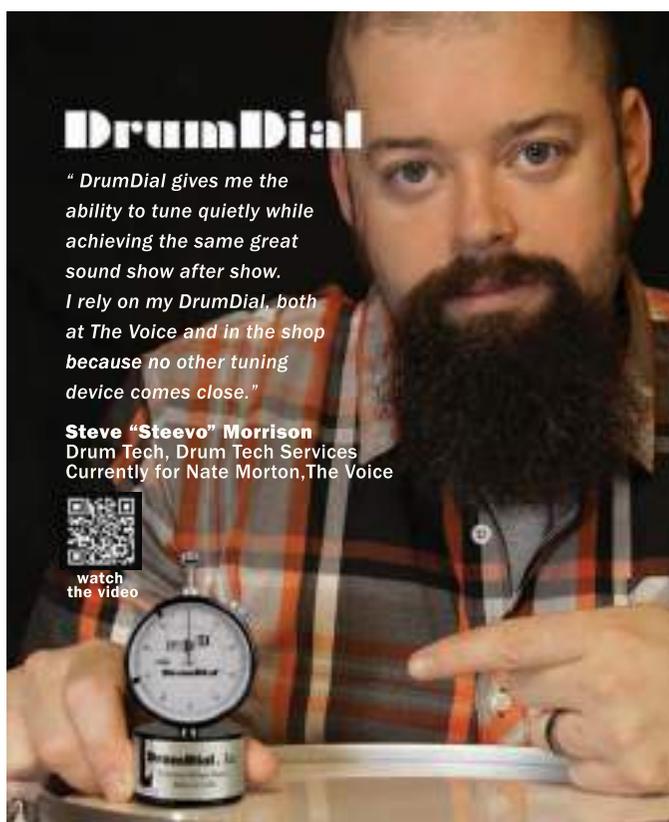
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# Traditional Percussion on Drumset

## Part 4: Cajon

by Arturo Stable

MUSIC KEY	
H.H.	⊗ Rim Click
S.D.	● ⊗
B.D.	●

Living in New York City can be quite a rewarding experience for any artist. One of the things I love the most is the fact that I don't have to travel very far to enjoy direct contact with cultures and traditions from all over the world. A few years ago, bassist/composer Edward Perez introduced me to the wonderful cadences of Afro-Peruvian music, and I have been hooked on them ever since.

There's a vibrant Peruvian population in New York, especially around Queens, and if you visit Terraza Jazz Club, chances are you'll hear some of these wonderful sounds. In this article I would like to share some ways to apply Afro-Peruvian cajon rhythms to the drumset, as well as some adaptations of Spanish flamenco (▲ = open stroke, ● = bass tone).

### Lando on Cajon

2

### Lando on Drumset

3

### Festejo on Cajon

4

### Festejo on Drumset

5

### Vals on Cajon

6

### Vals on Drumset

7

There's a very deep musical tradition in the flamenco rhythms of southern Spain. These styles contain dozens of

complicated variations. Here are some flamenco cajon patterns and their applications on the drumset.

### Tango on Cajon

8

### Tango on Drumset

9

### Buleria on Cajon

10

### Buleria on Drumset

11

### Solea on Cajon

12

### Solea on Drumset

13

### Tanguillos on Cajon

14

### Tanguillos on Drumset

15

Cuban-born percussionist **Arturo Stable** has performed with Dave Samuels, Esperanza Spalding, Paquito D'Rivera, David Sánchez, Giovanni Hidalgo, Miguel Zenón, and the Caribbean Jazz Project. For more info, visit [arturostable.com](http://arturostable.com).



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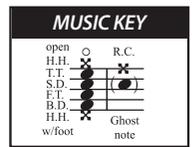
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# Progressive Drumming Essentials

## Part 2: Demystifying Polyrhythms

by Aaron Edgar



**P**olyrhythms, which are two contrasting subdivisions played simultaneously, can create beautifully hypnotic, entrancing patterns that dance around the pulse. They can also weave themselves into complete and utter chaos. Sometimes, when hidden subtly enough, polyrhythms enhance the music more subliminally. In recent years, bands like Meshuggah, Animals as Leaders, and Tool have played a major role in keeping these patterns popular. For progressive drummers, learning polyrhythms is a rite of passage.

When you're beginning to learn polyrhythms, you need to have a handle on independence, and your time has to be solid. You also must be ready to work your mental muscle—the brain. The best way to begin mastering polyrhythms is to break them down into their most basic form. Whether you're already a polyrhythm ninja looking to fine-tune your skills or you're simply poly-curious, working through the following steps will put you well on your way to twisting rhythms like never before.

### Polyrhythmic Formula

We're going to focus on a very precise method for determining, notating, and playing polyrhythms. At the core of this approach is what I call the polyrhythmic formula. It's a three-step process that takes the top and bottom numbers from your polyrhythm and spits out exactly what you need to know to master them.

The first polyrhythm we're going to break down is four over three.

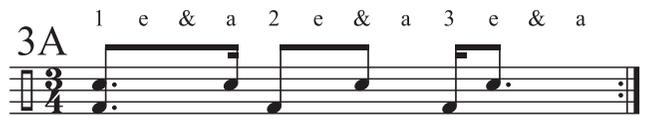
**Step 1:** Take the bottom number, which in this case is three, and use that to create a quarter-note-based time signature. For four over three, this would be 3/4 time. Play quarter notes on the bass drum to outline the time signature.



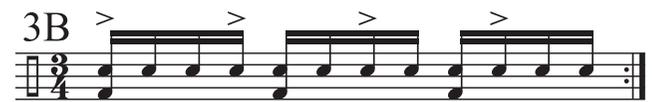
**Step 2:** Now use the top number, which in this case is four, to determine your subdivision. Four means 16th notes. (In other polyrhythms, three will mean 8th-note triplets and two will mean 8th notes.)



**Step 3:** Take the bottom number again, and use it to determine the spacing you're going to use within the subdivision. For our four-over-three example, hit the snare on every third 16th note. This gives you the complete polyrhythm, with the snare outlining the four and the bass drum outlining the three.



That process can be used to break down any polyrhythm into its essential parts. To begin practicing the polyrhythm, start by hitting quarter notes with the bass drum, and play all of the 16th notes on the snare while counting out loud. Then accent every third note (1, a, &, e).



Once you have that mastered, remove the unaccented notes, leaving only the four notes of the four-over-three polyrhythm. Counting out loud might seem hard in the beginning, but you will form a deeper understanding of the rhythm, and you will internalize the polyrhythm more easily.

It's also vital that you feel the quarter note as your pulse throughout the exercises, so make sure to really put some leg into it. Don't let yourself start to feel the snare rhythm as the pulse; your rhythmic perspective is just as important as the notes themselves.

Go as slowly as necessary to count and coordinate the pattern. If you have trouble, start with only the snare part. Then add the bass drum notes one by one. Once you have the polyrhythm committed to muscle memory, turn on a metronome to help you refine and perfect the rhythm.

It's important to note that once you've internalized four over three using quarter notes, you can begin to use the polyrhythm on smaller subdivisions, such as 16ths over 8th-note triplets, which is the same rhythm, only played over a single quarter note instead of three.

Now let's see what happens when we reverse the numbers and work with the three-over-four polyrhythm.

**Step 1:** The bottom number is four, which gives us 4/4 time.



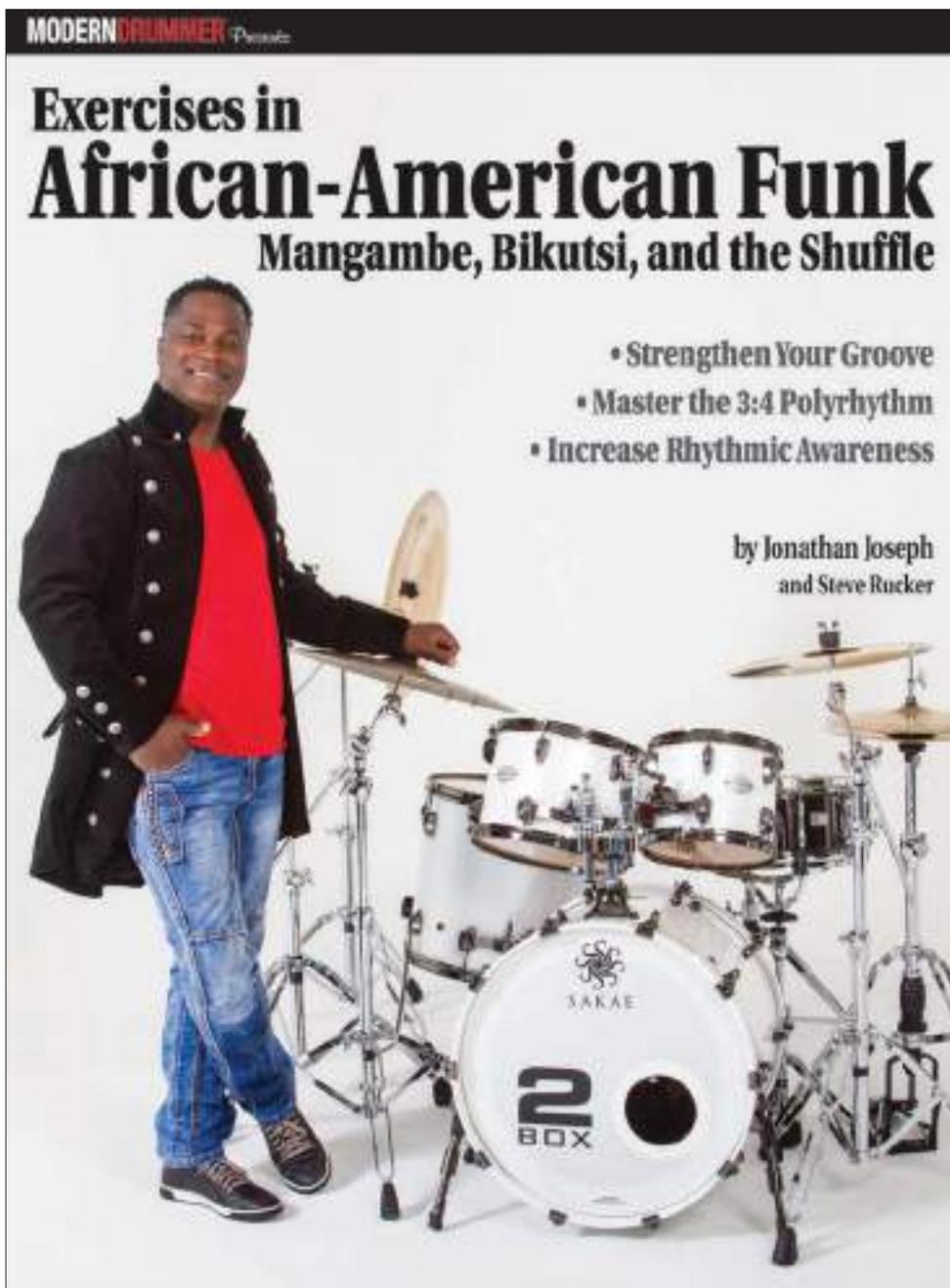
**Step 2:** The top is three, so use 8th-note triplets as your subdivision.



# New from MODERN DRUMMER®

Written by renowned drummer Jonathan Joseph (Jeff Beck, Joss Stone, Richard Bona) and University of Miami director of drumset studies Steve Rucker, *Exercises in African-American Funk* is designed to introduce musicians who've studied jazz, R&B, rock, soul, and blues to a concept that applies West African rhythms to various genres.

The series of exercises contained in the book guide you through a fusion of African and American elements. On the American side, we have shuffle and shuffle-funk. On the African side, we have the rhythms from Cameroon known as mangambe and bikutsi. Mastering these exercises will strengthen your groove, provide you with an understanding of the three-against-four polyrhythm, give you an awareness of the second partial of the triplet, and introduce you to a fresh new way to hear and feel music.



**Chapter 4: Half-Time Shuffle-Funk**

In this chapter, we move the backbone of the shuffle groove over to beat 3. What this does is transform the shuffle into a half-time, triplet-based funk groove, which we'll call "shuffle-funk." The shuffle shuffle, much favored by the legendary 1940s drummer Bernard Paganell, is one version of this type of groove.

The first hand pattern contains no ghost notes. The grooves become more and more dense as we add ghost notes, as in the previous exercises, the ghost notes should be played extremely soft. The primary focus of the groove is on the bass drum and the backbone.

As mentioned before, it's very helpful in your practice to alternate between a simple groove and the more difficult exercise. For instance, you can switch between each line of the exercises and this traditional mangambe groove.

Although these exercises are written with fifth-note triplets for consistency, you might also conceptualize them as 16th-note triplets. This interpretation would put the backbone on beats 2 and 4 of a bar of 4/4. So Hand Pattern 3 would look like the following.

As before, we'll start with a simple hand pattern and gradually add ghost notes. Practice the exercises between 70 and 130 bpm.

**Hand Pattern 1**

Here are some exercises that use Hand Pattern 1 with different bass drum variations.

**Chapter 6: Bikutsi**

In this chapter, we introduce the African rhythm known as bikutsi. Bikutsi is a musical genre from Cameroon that features the 3:4 polyrhythm. It has roots in the traditional music of the Baka people, who live around the city of Foumban, along with various elements of the pop rock & blues.

The characteristic rhythm of the bikutsi is a grouping of triplets in a four-note pattern. Elements of this chapter are directly related to Chapters 1 and 2. If you aren't clear on the 3:4 polyrhythm, please review those chapters.

Here's an example of a bikutsi pop-drummer rhythm.

By moving the snare accent to beat 3, we can create a simple bikutsi shuffle-funk pattern.

Here's a shuffle-funk variation with the bass drum on the first beat only.

We can also open the hi-hat where the accents occur.

Here's the same variation with the bass drum on the first beat only.

Check out a video of concepts and exercises included in the book at [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com), and order a copy today—for only \$14.95.

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**Step 3:** Accent every fourth note of the triplet to give you three equally spaced notes over the four quarter notes.



### The Evil Twin

What's especially interesting about the two rhythms you just learned is that without any musical context, they sound identical. If you were to hear someone play these rhythms individually, you wouldn't be able to tell one from the other. In most cases, when you're dealing with these equal yet opposite polyrhythmic pairs, you'll find that one will be drastically more challenging to internalize than the other—that's the evil twin.

### Five Over Four

Let's use the polyrhythmic formula to break down one of the most commonly misinterpreted polyrhythms: five over four.

**Step 1:** The bottom number is four, which gives us 4/4 time.

**Step 2:** The top number is five, so our subdivision is quintuplets (five 16th notes in the space of one quarter note).

**Step 3:** Accent every fourth note of the quintuplets to create the five-note part of the polyrhythm.



Unless you've been playing quintuplets for a long time, the notation in Example 7 probably looks terrifying. This is the "evil twin" version. Now let's break down the opposite polyrhythm: four over five.

**Step 1:** The bottom number is five, which gives us 5/4 time.

**Step 2:** The top number is four, so we'll use 16th notes for the subdivision.

**Step 3:** Accent every fifth 16th note to create the four-note part of the polyrhythm.



Because it's based in the more familiar subdivision of 16th notes, four over five is drastically easier to play than five over four. But it's easy to lose your perspective with these polyrhythms, even if you're working with a metronome. To get the most out of the exercises, make sure you take each polyrhythm in and out of your favorite grooves so you learn how to apply it in a musical context.

Repeat each bar 4x



Repeat each bar 4x



Don't forget to try the formula with other polyrhythms as well, like five over three, five over two, seven over four, and so on.

Aaron Edgar plays with the Canadian prog-metal band Third Ion and is a session drummer, clinician, and author. You can find his book, *Boom!!*, as well as information on how to sign up for weekly live lessons, at [aaronedgardrum.com](http://aaronedgardrum.com).

For a video demo of these exercises, visit [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com).



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## CONCEPTS

Nothing Happens When  
You're Comfortable

## Setting Goals for Maximum Growth

by Russ Miller

This month I want to discuss one of my primary driving forces. Many years ago I wrote this Wayne Gretzky quote in my personal lesson book. The concept affects just about everything in life. I refer to it all the time, and it's helped me get through many long days and huge projects.

may hinder your creative freedom, but that's exactly what this period of development is meant to do. You're acquiring the tools with which you'll build your palette of artistry.

Before you assimilate all of this information, you might be a more "free"

"You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take."

—Wayne Gretzky

A lot of people talk about things they want to do but never move in the direction of making them happen. I like to work a little bit toward my short- and long-term goals every day, even if it's just a small thing. I want to know that I'm closer to the goals today than I was yesterday.

Most people like being comfortable. It's much easier than working hard to achieve something new. It's more comfortable to play Xbox than to shed physical independence studies on the drums. It's easier to just sit on the couch than go to school, study hard, and work toward a better future. Don't get me wrong—I'm all for recreation, but it has to be in balance. If that time could be used to help you reach your goals, then you're doing yourself a disservice, and you have no one to blame but yourself for not reaching those goals. People make up a lot of excuses to explain why they don't do things, but in reality they simply aren't willing to get out of their comfort zone. Let's take a look at some of the top excuses that impede progress for a drummer/artist.

**Studying music makes you play mechanically. I want to be free!**

I've heard this one a lot. I do believe there are times in your development where you're a better musician than in others. In periods of intense study (college, music school, etc.), you're sifting through mounds of information daily. This is also a time of figuring out what works for you and what doesn't. So much studying

and reactive musician. For instance, you may be a great listener because you've spent years learning to play things by ear. But by avoiding studying music, you're intentionally limiting your perspective, and you will remain ignorant of all the skills you would accrue by pushing yourself to learn new things.

Once you've utilized the information from your studies, you can get back to focusing on artistry. Everybody is better off with more insight, sharper tools, and improved musical fluidity. I think of drum studies in relation to communicating with speech. Sure, you can learn a few sentences in a foreign language simply by hearing them a few times, but your conversational skills will be limited to those words you understand. If you study the language until you speak it fluently, you'll be free to express yourself on any topic.

**I'm comfortable with my routine.**

This one is very dangerous. One of the definitions of *routine* is "a procedure." So you've developed a procedure of not doing anything new? Some people get thrown off when they have to do something outside their usual routine. But if you can develop a routine of non-productivity, then the opposite must be true: You can develop a routine that involves productivity. Begin with short-term goals, and work just a bit each day. Having short-term goals is important.

Many goals in life are long-term. For



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instance, if your goal is to be a doctor, then you'll have to spend a decade studying and passing the required tests. The quest to master an instrument involves more short-term goals. For instance, if you want to learn a challenging groove from your favorite song, you can work on it for a few days or weeks, and eventually you can play it.

Working toward short-term goals is a main ingredient in effective practice sessions. It forces you to achieve something each time. I know people that couldn't read music fifteen years ago, and they still can't! They haven't taken certain jobs or expanded their facilities because of this inability. Reading music can be learned with a few months of work. For instance, the short-term goal for the first week could be to memorize all of the different types of notes and rests. Then, the next week, you could work toward memorizing things like dynamic markings and basic song forms. Before you know it, you'll be reading anything you want.

Be aware of when you're becoming too comfortable. There are definitely times when I'm invited to hang with other players at shows but I'll choose to stay home instead. It's just easier to stay home, but going to shows and networking with other players is what brings the work in.

### Been there, done that.

This is a great excuse to not get better. Just because you've had some success at something, that doesn't mean you've learned all there is to it. As jazz legend Tony Williams once said, "Don't confuse experience with mastery." You can always get better. Take lessons. Or spend more time listening to great music and make notes of things you could incorporate into your practice time. Stretch your limits, experiment, and let your artistry thrive. Also, review past recordings of your performances to see what you could have done better.

### What am I ever going to use that for?

This is my favorite one. It speaks to arrogance and complacency. When I hear someone speak dismissively like this, it's often a reflection of how that person approaches life. This attitude runs rampant in the Facebook generation. Every minute you spend speaking negatively about somebody else, you could be making yourself better. Most of the people who dog players online would never say those things to a person face to face.

No, you don't have to work on everything you see being done by others, but there are valuable lessons to be learned by watching other players—even if it's what *not* to do. Let it inspire you to explore something about what they're doing. You might find a great place to use those ideas while expanding your facilities at the same time.

When I go through my day, I try to take notice of when I could follow something through to completion. Finishing specific tasks on a consistent basis is essential to reaching goals. When you get into the habit of seeing things through, you will progress very quickly and begin to envision the infinite possibilities for further growth. Work on achieving your short-term goals, but also set your long-term goals into the stratosphere. Don't limit yourself by rationalizing what you think is possible. To end, here's a quote from the great speaker Cavett Robert: "Any person who selects a goal in life which can be fully achieved has already defined his own limitations."

**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](http://russmiller.com).



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### Steve Gadd Band *70 Strong*

**Age is only a number when you're grooving sky high with the maestro.**

Not many septuagenarians are as eager to record as the illustrious Mr. Gadd has been of late, but the excellent group he fronts (or is it backs?) just makes it so easy to produce hip and funky jazz that simply pleases. At seventy, Gadd still brings initiative to whatever he decides to lay down, from the silky, behind-the-beat brushes of "Freedom Jazz Dance" to the syncopated accents of "Sly Boots." Following 2013's *Gadditude*, this outing is generally more of the same classy fare, although the who's-who band of James Taylor sidemen is now even tighter, even more assured. And maybe you've heard Gadd play these light rimclick backbeats, samba-esque twists, and slow blues patterns a thousand times before, but it doesn't make them any less special. Eighty could be when things really come together for him. (BFM Jazz) **Ilya Stembkovsky**



### Jeff Hamilton Trio *Great American Songs Through the Years*

**Wonderful arrangements and joyous swing will make you fall in love again with these standards.**

The front and back covers of this limited-edition release show each member of Jeff Hamilton's trio pictured alongside a

black-and-white boyhood photo. (If you're wondering, Hamilton was a fine-looking, well-scrubbed lad.) The message is clear: These are the "great American songbook" tunes they grew up with—if not literally, then most assuredly as a journey of musical maturation. Hamilton's superlative longtime trio, featuring pianist Tamir Hendelman and bassist Christoph Luty, continues to be the drummer's ideal forum, with collective precision cushioned by an elegant ease. Reaffirming his place as one of the most swinging brush players since the Big Bang, Hamilton grooves hard on "It Could Happen to You" and cracks off a flooring solo on "You Took Advantage of Me." Using sticks, he's a master of dynamics, phrasing, and expressive sound. Hamilton doesn't just swing, he *sings*. (Capri) **Jeff Potter**



### Jack DeJohnette *Made in Chicago*

**Musical reunions don't always hit the bull's-eye; this one gets pretty darn close.**

This inspired 2013 live recording unites original members of Chicago's

Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, one of the experimental jazz powerhouses of the 1960s. Nothing has been lost to the years as a group of masters—saxophonists Henry Threadgill and Roscoe Mitchell, pianist Muhal Richard Abrams, bassist Larry Gray, and drummer Jack DeJohnette—plays with real fire and abandon. Opener "Chant" is like a ride across Egypt, all circular melodies and hypnotic rhythms, and is followed by the drum-solo-infused "Jack 5," the somersaulting "Leave Don't Go Away," and the madhouse free ride "Ten Minutes." The extremely well-recorded *Made in Chicago* features some of DeJohnette's most energetic and driving drumming in years. (ECM) **Ken Micallef**



### E.J. Strickland Quintet *The Undying Spirit*

**There's ample swing in this drummer's funk—and plenty of funk in his swing as well.**

Jazz drummer E.J. Strickland has consistently impressed as a sideman.

(Check out Manuel Valera Trio's recently released *Live at Firehouse 12*.) But this focused and assertive self-produced sophomore release best defines the artist as drummer, composer, and leader. Opening with a muscular statement on "Ride," Strickland launches a stunning one-minute solo setup, delivering complex, funky rhythms that unravel into longer swinging phrases. It's a quality found in his accompanying and compositional style as well. Drum solos play a greater role on this outing, even on slow ballads. Strickland employs impressive chops, but his solos are never flagrant displays. Instead, he imbues each spotlight moment with individual character, ultimately serving the song's trajectory and structure. Driving his superb quintet with a lean, intense two-sax front line, Strickland is steadfastly band supportive while staking out a strong individual drumming voice. (Strick Music) **Jeff Potter**



### Steve Johns Family

**In a long, luminous career, this jazz drummer's debut as a leader is an overdue pleasure.**

The title of this disc is literal: *Family* features Steve Johns' up-and-coming eighteen-year-old son, Daryl, on bass,

as well as his wife, Debbie Keefe Johns, on tenor and soprano saxophones. Longtime friend Dave Stryker produced and also performs, sharing the guitar chair with Bob DeVos. It works—the family that swings it together *brings it together*. Plus, unlike most families, they really *listen* to each other. (Ouch!) The up-tempo, bopping "Shadowboxing" proves why Johns is in high demand. His powerfully swinging drive is visceral while remaining controlled and dynamically exacting, and he exudes a crisp yet warm sound, always serving good taste. Switching gears on "Chunk," he lays down smooth-grooving linear funk alternating between 4/4 and 5/8, and allows himself some knockout solo space. The whole affair has an uninhibited, in-the-room aura. Clearly everyone is at home with each other. (Strikezone) **Jeff Potter**

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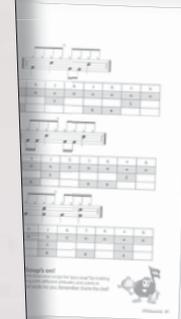
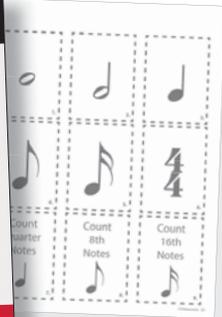
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## Critique continued

**Reggie Quinerly** *Invictus*  
From ballads to hot bop blowouts, this drummer's sophomore album solidifies his rep as a keeper of the flame.

Carrying on tradition like a younger Kenny Washington, Reggie Quinerly makes a forward-looking jazz statement with *Invictus*,



accompanied by vibraphonist Warren Wolf and a killer band. Quinerly offers swirling brushwork and simmering mallet interplay on "Variation 24"; a funky, Jimmy Cobb-like bossa beat on "My Blue Heaven"; and a steamrolling brush march on "The Star, the Crescent, and the Police Captain," revealing precision technique and a fondness for cymbals and brushes, perhaps the most sensitive sources of the drumkit. "Light Work" could be an outtake from Gary Burton's 1977 album, *Passengers*, while "Lester Grant" and "That Right There" expose Quinerly's in-the-pocket groove goodness. (Redefinition Music) **Ken Micallef**

**Ernesto Cervini** *Turboprop*  
The Toronto jazz drummer and composer takes a sonic step up on his fourth disc with an expanded front line.

Augmenting his working drums/piano/bass/tenor quartet with trombone and alto/soprano sax, Ernesto Cervini offers a thicker



sound and, more important, arranges the brass trio with imagination. The drummer's probing originals achieve suite-like qualities, while the disc's diverse covers span a ballad from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* to an ethereal take on Debussy's "The Engulfed Cathedral," with the latter likely inspired by the leader's classical piano background. Cervini frequently cites Art Blakey as an inspiration, and that's implied in his buoyant, multilayered cascades. "Red Cross" reveals his straight-ahead strengths, while "Fear of Flying" finds him urgently guiding the ensemble through complex hairpin turns. Cervini's roaring solo on

that highlight tune brilliantly exploits the groove's quirky overlapping duple/triple tension. Swinging and spirited, Cervini turbo-propels this tight and spontaneous sextet. (Anzic) **Jeff Potter**

**Duduka Da Fonseca Trio** *Jive Samba*  
This three-piece group is more intuitive and spontaneous with each successive release.

The third outing from the Duduka Da Fonseca Trio is something of a full-circle affair for the Rio-born New York drummer: a set of ten well-loved Brazilian-inspired



tunes penned by American jazz greats. Featuring pianist David Feldman and bassist Guto Wirtti, Da Fonseca's superlative unit lends a breathing, interactive openness to the spirited rhythmic undercurrent of its members' roots. On McCoy Tyner's "Peresina," Da Fonseca revs it up, grooving and soloing with spreading cymbals and elastic kit work in a nod to the famed McCoy/Elvin fellowship. In contrast, his silky brushwork on John Scofield's "Sco's Bossa" pulses with sexy subtlety. And on Keith Jarrett's ever-popular "Lucky Southern," the drummer percolates the ecstatic samba while infusing straight-ahead layers. Throughout, Da Fonseca's grooving touch and painterly coloring artfully exploit the mutual chicken-or-egg influences between Brazilian sounds and American jazz. (Zoho) **Jeff Potter**

### Other Drummer-Leds to Check Out

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## Nashville Drummers Jam Takes on Neil Peart

David Parks' Nashville Drummers Jam 5 took place last December 22 at the Exit/In club. Presented by NDJ cofounder Tom Hurst's Loud Jamz, the show paid tribute to Neil Peart of Rush and was reportedly the best-attended event of its kind thus far. Previous performances were held in honor of Led Zeppelin's John Bonham, studio legend Jeff Porcaro, and Jerry Gaskill of King's X.

The show included more than twenty-five tunes from the Rush songbook, performed by many of Nashville's top drummers, including Rich Redmond (Jason Aldean), Kevin Murphy (Randy Houser), Sean Fuller (Florida Georgia Line), Jim Riley (Rascal Flatts), and Pat McDonald (Charlie Daniels Band). Genres outside contemporary country were represented as well, by players including

Troy Luccketta (Tesla), Ed Toth (Vertical Horizon, the Doobie Brothers), Wes Little (Robben Ford), and Mike Marsh (the Avett Brothers). The house band included musical director/guitarist (and NDJ partner) Chris Nix and bassists Tony Nagy and Trip Wamsley.

Among the show's many highlights were Kellie Pickler's Gregg Lohman slaying "Freewill," Dustin Lynch drummer Billy Joe Freeman's note-for-note rendition of "La Villa Strangiato," and Mike Marsh playing *and* singing "Vital Signs." Of course, it wouldn't be a Neil Peart-related event without an impressive drumset, and Ludwig, in support of longtime endorser David Parks, provided a kit replicating the finish and configuration of Peart's late-'80s *A Show of Hands/Hold Your Fire* setup for all the NDJ5 participants to perform

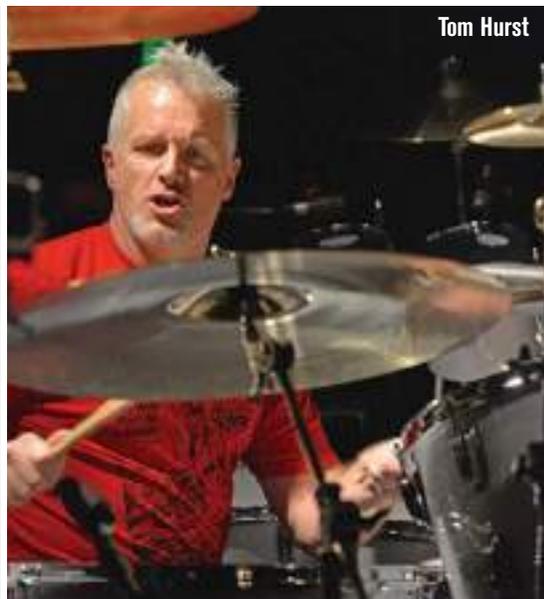
on. (Peart played Ludwig during that era.) In addition, Sabian provided a full set of Paragon cymbals, Evans sent drumheads, Promark pitched in sticks, and, as it's done for earlier NDJ shows, Vintage Logos came through with one-of-a-kind custom bass drum heads.

Also like previous Nashville Drummer Jams, proceeds from ticket sales and raffle items were donated to various charities, including ALS research, St. Jude's Children's Hospital, the W.O. Smith Music School, and Nashville-based musicians whose families are in need. Raffle items were provided by Ludwig, Promark, Evans, Vintage Logos, Kelly SHU, and Pearl, and the grand prize of the night was a Sabian Paragon splash cymbal autographed and personalized for the winner by Peart himself.

Photos by Rick Malkin



Troy Luccketta with the NDJ house band



# Carlos Vega Memorial Birthday Concert

The seventeenth-annual Carlos Vega Memorial Birthday Concert was held last December 7 at Alvas Showroom in San Pedro, California, honoring the first-call Los Angeles session drummer, who passed away in 1998. Fusion keyboardist David Garfield, whose band Karizma featured Vega, rallied another stellar group for the event. Top L.A. players Gregg Bissonette, Gary Novak, Jimmy Branly, and Jeff Olson shared double-drumming duties as the band performed some of Vega's favorite tunes by Toto, Steely Dan, Al Green, and Miles Davis, among others. The winner of the Musicians Institute 2006 Carlos Vega Memorial Drum Scholarship, Gianluca Palmieri, also performed with the group. The highlight of the evening was a performance of Garfield's "Tune for Tony" that included a blistering exchange between Bissonette and Novak.

Vega, whose notable gigs included recording and touring with James Taylor for thirteen years, worked with a who's who of artists from across all genres of music. "Carlos knew how to play for the song and make the music come alive," Garfield tells *Modern Drummer*. "He had a great sense of humor and a very professional attitude. He was proactive in the studio and always had great ideas to enhance the music. Karizma was inspired by Carlos. The music was written with his groove in mind." **Mike Haid**



Gianluca Palmieri



Gregg Bissonette



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