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– Josh Freese



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# TRIBUTE TO THE MASTER

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

*Miles Davis*



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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*Pearl*

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**Ilan Rubin**

by Ken Micallef



Cover and contents photos by Alex Solca

**“From a young age I was taught to treat being a musician as a real skill. At twenty, when I joined Nine Inch Nails, I thought, ‘This is the kind of organization I want to be a part of.’”**

Trent Reznor isn't the only rock star who's seen the value of Ilan Rubin's mature approach to art and commerce; the members of Paramore and Angels & Airwaves have tapped his considerable skills as well. In his first *MD* cover story, the multi-instrumentalist talks about those gigs, as well as the latest album by the band he leads, the New Regime.

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# Tools in Technology

I recently read an article by a well-known musician who took a hard-line stance against technology in music, going so far as to compare the “destructive” results of the microphone to the actual catastrophic capabilities of dynamite. I concede that mics, amplifiers, and PA systems have elevated our overall stage volume to sometimes ridiculous levels. (There have been numerous times when I’ve had to scramble to put in my earplugs from having too much vocal in my monitor wedge.) And, sure, many drummers play as if dynamics exist only between loud and louder. But when it comes to music and technology in general, I’m no purist, and I welcome any advancement—analogue or digital—that allows me to do my job better, more efficiently, and, hopefully, more creatively.

One of the most hotly debated topics when it comes to the use of technology in our world is about drummers relying on triggers to fake performances. Maybe some people use triggers as a crutch for achieving super-consistent sounds, but there are a lot of imaginative things you can do with them too. I love being able to blend or replace my kick, snare, or tom sounds with anything I want or need. Two of my current projects require triggers because each song demands a different palette of electronic and acoustic samples in order to achieve the desired effect. Then, at a recent outdoor gig with a singer-songwriter where the PA system was less than stellar, I was able to kill a ton of troubling low-end feedback by unplugging the kick mic and hooking up a trigger to play a clean sample from my acoustic bass drum. In that case, technology actually helped prevent what could have been a sonic nightmare.

My latest technological obsession has been with video, specifically in how I can use it for self-analysis to make myself a better drummer. You don’t have to dump a ton of cash on a professional-grade camera these days. In fact, you can get really good results using just the built-in lens and mic on a smartphone or tablet. I use iMovie on my iPhone and iPad to record my practice sessions, and then I critique them as I would if I were working with a student. If you’ve never watched yourself play drums on video, it can be humbling, especially if you slow it down to half speed. That’s where I started noticing subtle inconsistencies in my subdivisions and stick heights that I’m now addressing with practice. Sure, my private teachers urged me to take things slower and more deliberately back in the day, but at that time I didn’t have a way to accurately monitor and analyze my own playing, and in my mind I sounded like Vinnie Colaiuta. If only iPads had existed back then....

There are some other great digital tools for your iOS device, in the form of free or modestly priced apps that can help you become a better drummer. We’ve gathered nine of our favorites, including high-powered metronomes, extensive video-lesson libraries, and great-sounding play-alongs, to give you a taste of what’s currently available. Check out our picks in this month’s Electronic Insights article on page 32, and feel free to let us know about some of your favorite apps by emailing suggestions to editors@moderndrummer.com. Enjoy the issue!



Wendy Pascechnick

Mike Dawson

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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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**MODERN DRUMMER** magazine (ISSN 0194-4533) is published monthly by **MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc.**, 271 Route 46 West, Suite H-212, Fairfield, NJ 07004. PERIODICALS MAIL POSTAGE paid at Fairfield, NJ 07004 and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 2015 by **MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc.** All rights reserved. Reproduction without the permission of the publisher is prohibited.

**EDITORIAL/ADVERTISING/ ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES:**  
**MODERN DRUMMER Publications**, 271 Route 46 West, Suite H-212, Fairfield, NJ 07004. Tel: 973-239-4140. Fax: 973-239-7139. Email: mdinfo@moderndrummer.com.

**MODERN DRUMMER** welcomes manuscripts and photographic material but cannot assume responsibility for them.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** U.S. \$29.95, Canada \$33.95, other international \$44.95 per year. For two- and three-year subscription prices go to [www.moderndrummer.com](http://www.moderndrummer.com). Single copies \$5.99.

**SUBSCRIPTION CORRESPONDENCE:**  
Modern Drummer, PO Box 274, Oregon, IL 61061-9920. **Change of address:** Allow at least six weeks for a change. Please provide both old and new address. Call 800-551-3786 or 815-732-5283. Phone hours, 8am–4:30pm Monday–Friday CST, or visit [Subscriber.Services at www.moderndrummer.com](http://Subscriber.Services.at/www.moderndrummer.com).

**MUSIC DEALERS:** Modern Drummer is distributed by Hal Leonard Corp., 800-554-0626, sales@halleonard.com, [www.halleonard.com/dealers](http://www.halleonard.com/dealers)

**INTERNATIONAL LICENSING REPRESENTATIVE:** Robert J. Abramson & Associates, Inc., Libby Abramson, President, 7915 Via Grande, Boynton Beach, FL 33437, [abramson@prodigy.net](http://abramson@prodigy.net).

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Modern Drummer, PO Box 274, Oregon, IL 61061-9920.

**Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 41480017** Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: PO Box 875, Stn A, Windsor ON N9A 6P2

**MEMBER:** National Association for Music Development, National Association of Music Merchants, Percussive Arts Society

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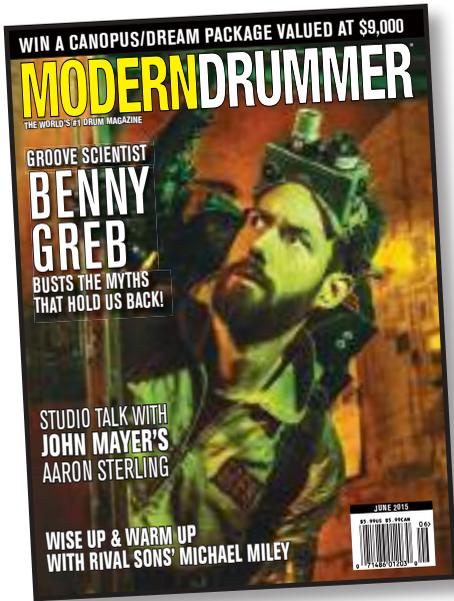
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## READERS' PLATFORM



### June Issue

Thanks for the wonderful issue featuring Benny Greb. The cover photograph (and the ones accompanying the article) was perhaps your best ever. I also really enjoyed the technique articles—they'll keep me busy for a while. And thanks

for tuning me into Dave King's YouTube channel. Hilarious! He's the Louis C.K. of drummers. Keep them coming!

**Reed Oslund**

### Jojo Mayer

Just a note to say your interview with Jojo Mayer in the May issue was without doubt the best I have ever read in *MD*. I cannot properly express the degree of depth and insight that Jojo brought to the reader—I want to say congratulations and thank you at the same time! Jojo is an inspiration to me and countless others. Thanks to *MD* for giving him this platform.

**Jim Pettit, Memphis Drum Shop**



The Jojo Mayer interview was *deep*. Being a simple man, I had to read it twice! What impressed me was not only Jojo's intellectual depth but Adam Budofsky's ability to play chess with him every step of the way. It's a good thing I didn't interview Mr. Mayer, because every third answer would have been, "What, now?" After a while I wouldn't even have known what questions to ask. Good job, Adam...wow!

**Danny Wyant**

### Russ Miller's Concepts

"Focus on Elimination" by Russ Miller (Concepts, June 2015) rocked my drumming world! I hadn't realized how much my failure to focus is the root of most of my mistakes. I have read the article nearly every day since I got the June issue of *Modern Drummer*. It is highlighted and underlined and dog-eared. Now when I practice I also practice staying focused. Russ's words have changed my drumming life. Thank you!

**Corinne Roberts**

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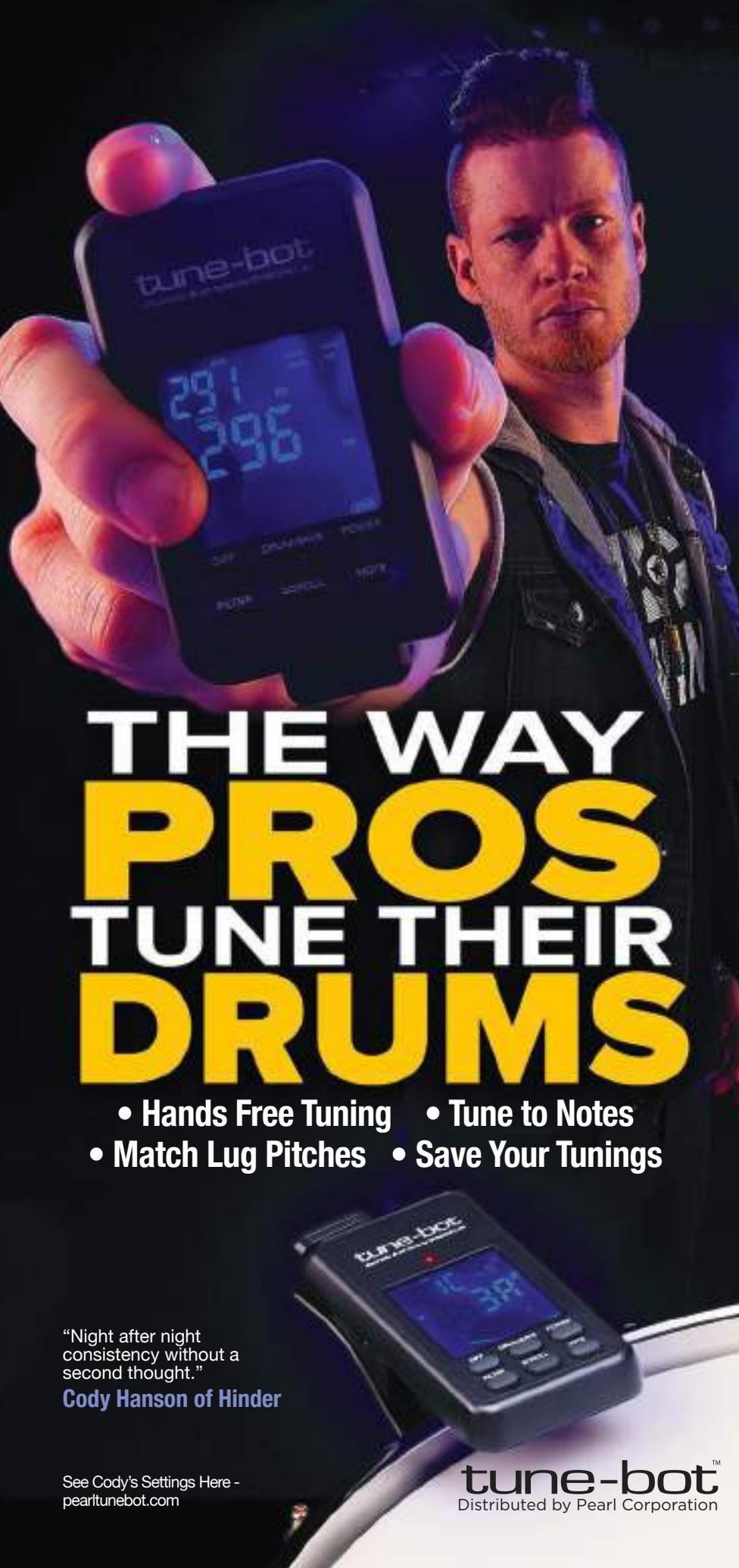


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### Drum Apps You Need to Know

Tag along as we delve into nine of the best iOS drumming apps on the market.

### PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

Check out demos of Angel's Black Wenge segment-shell kit; V-Classic hi-hats, crashes, rides, and jingle splashes; and the DTS 6.5x14 Oscar Seaton hybrid-shell snare.

### BASICS

You can make your grooves percolate by subtly employing ruffs and drags. Rich Redmond shows how.

### ROCK 'N' JAZZ CLINIC

Mike Johnston explores the five-stroke roll on the set.

### ROCK PERSPECTIVES

In part four of our "Progressive Drumming Essentials" series, Aaron Edgar lifts the veil on how to feel odd subdivisions.

### WIN!

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# NEWS

## Out Now

### Shai Maestro *Untold Stories*

MD readers might recognize pianist Shai Maestro from his role in the Mark Guiliana Jazz Quartet. *Untold Stories*, the third album by the trio that Maestro leads, which features Jorge Roeder on bass and



**Ziv Ravitz** on drums, includes studio tracks as well as live cuts such as "Painting," a tune the pianist included mainly because of Ravitz's solo. "Ziv and I were talking a lot about how the drum solo got stuck in a concept in jazz music," Maestro says, "usually in the shape dictated by trading or soloing over the form unaccompanied. We spoke at length about how not many people are questioning this concept anymore, and that drum solos can be treated [like a solo on] any other instrument, playing and reacting to harmony, melody, and space. It's a statement I wanted to make."

### More New Releases

**Soufly** Archangel (Zyon Cavallera) /// **Brad Allen Williams** Lamar (Tyshawn Sorey) /// **Buckcherry** Rock 'n' Roll (Xavier Muriel) /// **Lee Ritenour** A Twist of Rit (Dave Weckl, Ronald Bruner Jr., Chris Coleman, Paulinho Da Costa) /// **The Arcs** Yours, Dreamily (Homer Steinweiss) /// **Metal Allegiance** Metal Allegiance (Mike Portnoy) /// **Heads of State** Search for Peace (Al Foster) /// **Vintage Trouble** 1 Hopeful Rd. (Richard Danielson) /// **Donald Vega** With Respect to Monty (Lewis Nash) /// **The Dear Hunter** Act IV: Rebirth in Reprise (Nick Crescenzo) /// **Spock's Beard** The Oblivion Particle (Jimmy Keegan) /// **Iron Maiden** The Book of Souls (Nicko McBrain) /// **Slayer** Repentless (Paul Bostaph)

## Industry Happenings

**KHS America has announced the promotion of Michael Robinson to vice president of marketing.** Since his arrival in March 2011, Robinson has made significant contributions to the success of KHS America in the areas of leadership and team development, and in the establishment of customer-centric marketing principles. With KHS America's recent acquisition of Hohner Inc., Robinson will expand these efforts to include all the Hohner brands and team members moving to Nashville from their current home in Glen Allen, Virginia.



## Who's Playing What



Castillo



Clufetos

**Joey Castillo** (Scott Weiland and the Wildabouts) and **Tommy Clufetos** (the Dead Daisies) have returned to the Vater stick roster. In addition, **Greg Upchurch** (3 Doors Down) is now using the company's drumsticks, and **Marshall University's Marching Thunder** band is exclusively using its Front Ensemble, Concert Ensemble, and marching products.



**Melvin "Melly" Baldwin** (New Edition, Justin Bieber) has joined the Reunion Blues artist family.

**Audie Desbrow** of Great White and **Jimmy Schultz** of Sunflower Dead are now endorsing Red Six drum gear.



Desbrow

Schultz

## Woodstick Big Beat Event

The twelfth annual Woodstick Big Beat, held this past April at the Emerald Queen Casino in Tacoma, Washington, featured more than 500 drummers playing together at once. This year's event was sponsored by Groove Music for Youth, a charity program created by the nonprofit organization Crime Stoppers of Tacoma/Pierce County.

The lineup of celebrity drummers in attendance included Alan White (Yes), Michael Shrieve (ex-Santana), Brian Tichy (Bonzo Bash), Glen Sobel (Alice Cooper), Jason Sutter (Smash Mouth), Jeff Kathan (Paul Rodgers), Bryan Hitt (REO Speedwagon), Rich Redmond (Jason Aldean), Daniel Glass (Royal Crown Revue), Tony Coleman (ex-B.B. King), Ben Smith

(Heart), Eddie Mendoza (Aury Moore Band), and Woodstick cofounder Chris Kimball.

Coleman, Sobel, Shrieve, Redmond, and Glass gave clinics earlier in the day in a separate room. Afterward, the main part of the event began with introductions and solos by the special guests, followed by a simultaneous performance by all attendees under the direction of conductor Tim Benwell. Local band Apple Jam then took the stage and performed a set of pop, R&B, rock, and country hits, with Sutter, Coleman, Sobel, Hitt, and Redmond each taking a turn in the drum seat. The event raised \$15,000 to help purchase instruments for underfunded schools and underprivileged children.

**Text and photos by Alex Kluff**



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# On Tour

**Silas Utke Graae Jørgensen** is out with Mew on the Danish progressive pop band's first American tour in six years. The group is supporting its latest release, *+-*.

"Every one of our songs on the new album has its own life and personality," Jørgensen says, "and we took our time writing them. We don't like to force anything; we want our music to evolve naturally. And

we don't want to keep making the same album over and over. We like challenging ourselves, exploring new ideas, and experimenting with different sounds and arrangements, and we did that on the new album. I'm very much looking forward to our North American tour, playing our music live and getting the audience's feedback."

Courtesy of Mew





**Dash Hutton** is out with Haim, opening for Taylor Swift.

**Also on the Road**

**Chris Slade** with AC/DC /// **Bruce Smith** with Public Image Ltd. ///  
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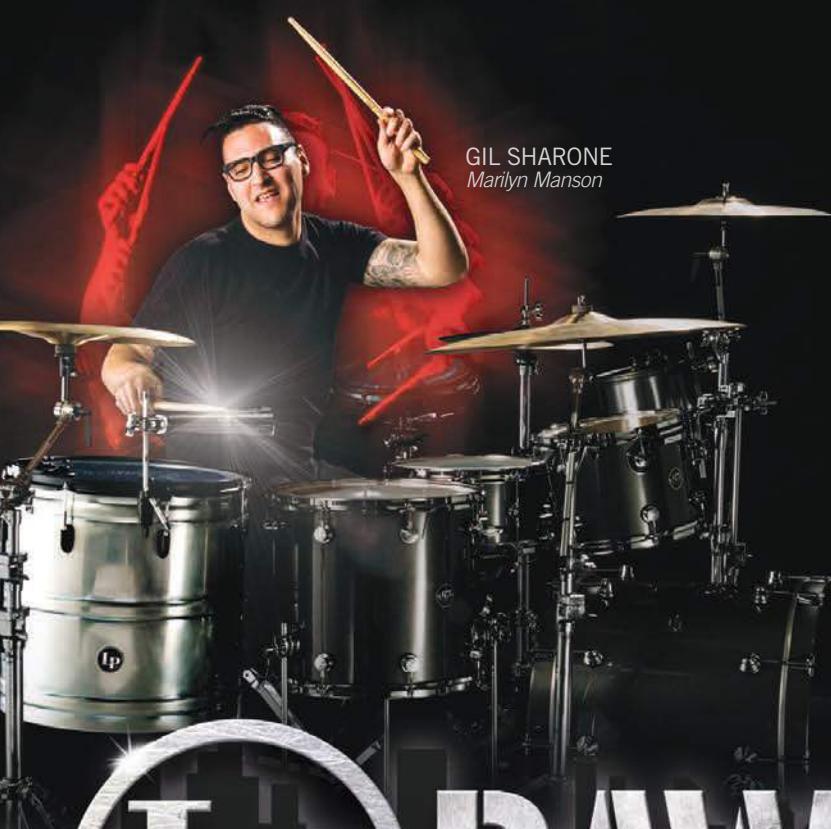
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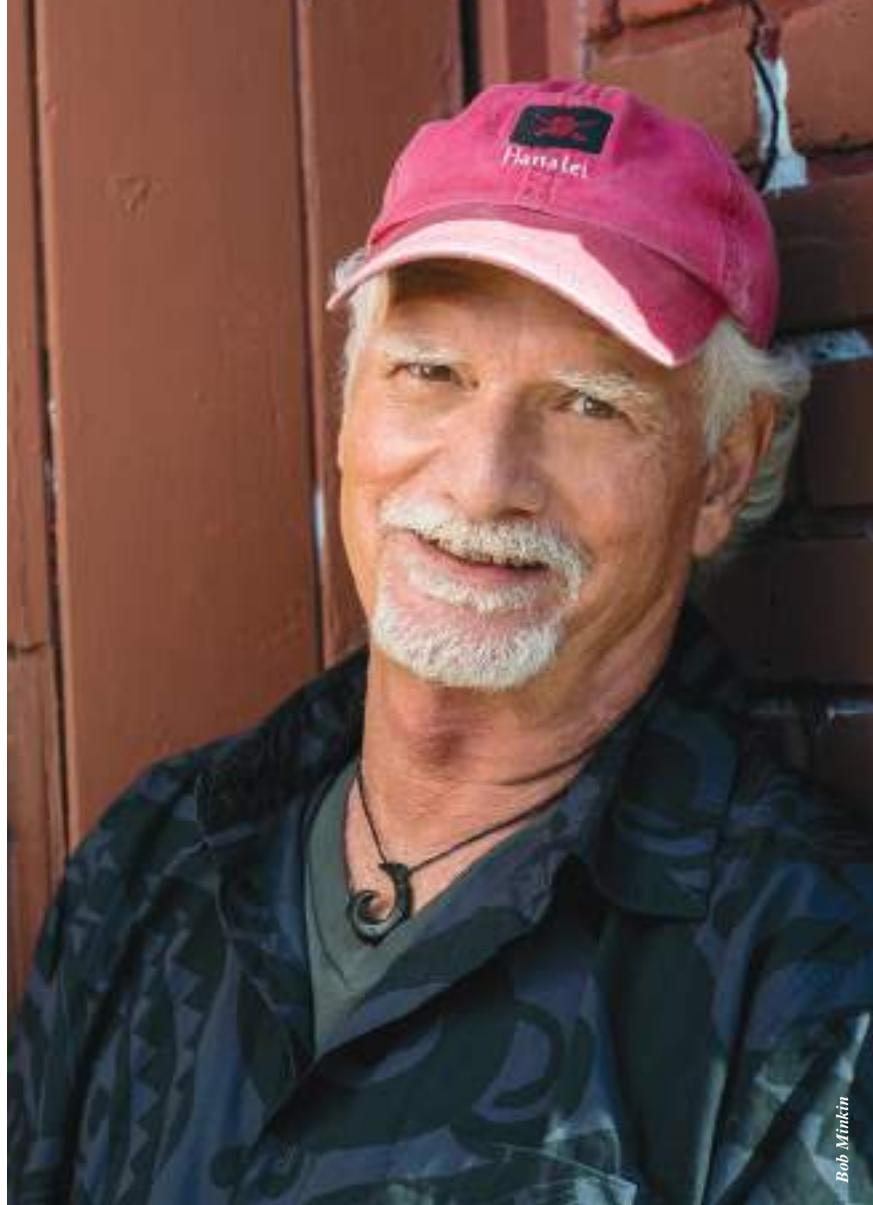
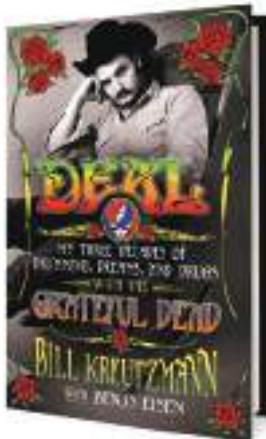
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# Bill Kreutzmann

**Fifty years after the birth of the Grateful Dead, the band's founding drummer reflects on a long career. Then, after one last big fling with his old group, it's back to business as usual: "playing a lot and loving it."**

When *MD* caught up with Bill Kreutzmann to discuss his 2015 book, *Deal: My Three Decades of Drumming, Dreams, and Drugs With the Grateful Dead*, the drummer was in New Orleans to play a couple of gigs during JazzFest. But the jam-happy Kreutzmann couldn't help adding stops to his itinerary. First he blew the minds of an unsuspecting young band that was playing the Dead's "Scarlet Begonias" in the empty backroom of a bar, by jumping in on the tune and only later revealing his identity. And then, the night before our interview, he played half an hour of double drums with Adam Deitch during a set by the Fantastic Four at the Blue Nile. Bill's summation: "I'm just down here doing what I know how to do: play drums as much as possible."

*Deal*, cowritten with Benjy Eisen, took the better part of three years to complete. "It was a great experience," Kreutzmann says. "I used to sit around the campfire, so to speak, with friends; I'd get in a good mood and start telling these stories, just on down the line, and people would say, 'Hey, you should write a book.' And so I did. Basically Benjy took a timeline from '65, which is the inception of the Grateful Dead, and went all the way up to now. The last three words are 'To be continued.'" The book contains honest reflections on Kreutzmann's band-mates, along with copious touring anecdotes, including an evocative recap of the Dead's 1978 trip to



Bob Minkin

perform near the Great Pyramids in Egypt—with Bill revealing that he played those shows with a broken left wrist.

Kreutzmann traces the evolution of the Dead's psychedelic jamming style, inspired in part by John Coltrane's jazz explorations. ("I remember when I listened to Elvin [Jones] for the first time," he writes. "I thought, *This is legal? You can do that?*")

He also discusses teaming with Mickey Hart in one of rock's most famous drumset duos. Kreutzmann, who preceded Hart in the Dead and was the sole drummer during Hart's early-'70s hiatus, admits in the book that he wasn't sure he wanted Mickey to return after his break ("I enjoyed being the only drummer and I didn't want that to change"). Ultimately, though, Kreutzmann acknowledges all he's learned from his mate over the years and shows a genuine appreciation for their partnership.

When we ask if Kreutzmann has any double-drumming tips, he says, "It's kind of not worth having two drummers if you play the exact same part. If you mimic one another, which is hard to do, it's hard to lock together. Mickey has an uncanny way of locking up with me. You have to really listen to the other drummer and make it feel good. Ideally, if he's playing a backbeat on the snare, try to play something that complements that, instead of having two snare drums that flam unintentionally. Flams on the 2 and 4 never sound that great anyway."

At the time of our interview, Kreutzmann, who's been active in several bands of late, including his new group Billy & the Kids, was looking forward to the Grateful Dead's fiftieth-anniversary reunion shows, touted as the last hurrah for the surviving members. "It's exciting to be able to play again with everybody," he says. "I'm having a great time—my playing is really good right now, so it'll be fun to go in and play." **Michael Parillo**

# Mike Bordin

**Faith No More has always followed its own rules. So if the band wants to wait until it's half a decade into its "comeback" to finally release a new recording, you can bet there's a good reason for it. And that said album will melt your face off.**

**"T**oo weird to live, and too rare to die." Hunter S. Thompson describes his drug-guzzling attorney in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* thusly—though it's also a characterization eerily befitting of the hard-rock alchemists Faith No More, who expired after crafting some of the most unconventional and extraordinary major-label music of the '90s. Thankfully, the inimitable Bay Area quintet proved to be only *mostly* dead, having recently completed an improbable Lazarus act with the arrival of *Sol Invictus*—its first new record in nearly two decades.

Boasting the confidence and maturity of a band in middle age—without sacrificing the sardonic teeth or genre-bending ambition for which Faith No More is synonymous—the taut ten-song set nails that sweet spot between fresh and familiar, thanks in large part to drummer Mike Bordin's brontosaurus-size sonic imprint. Even at fifty-two years of age, Bordin is still the hardest hitter in all the land, and he's

quick to credit a patient approach and a protracted reunion tour (with dates beginning in 2009) when discussing how he and his cohorts have managed to return in such fine form.

"We have our own language, and it's not just musical—it's emotional and physical as well," Bordin explains. "It's a unique thing, and we had to give it time to work. When the band started getting pretty strong [live], we were like, 'Okay, now either we're done, or we're going to have something else to say.' Because if you don't have something new to say and you just keep carrying on, it becomes nostalgia. No one was here to re-create a time when we had less gray hair and more brain cells, you know? So some music came. It came gradually, it came honestly, and in my opinion it came *correctly*."

Supporting this earnest claim is the fact that *Sol Invictus* is a near-100 percent DIY effort. The album was released on FNM's own label, Reclamation Recordings, and

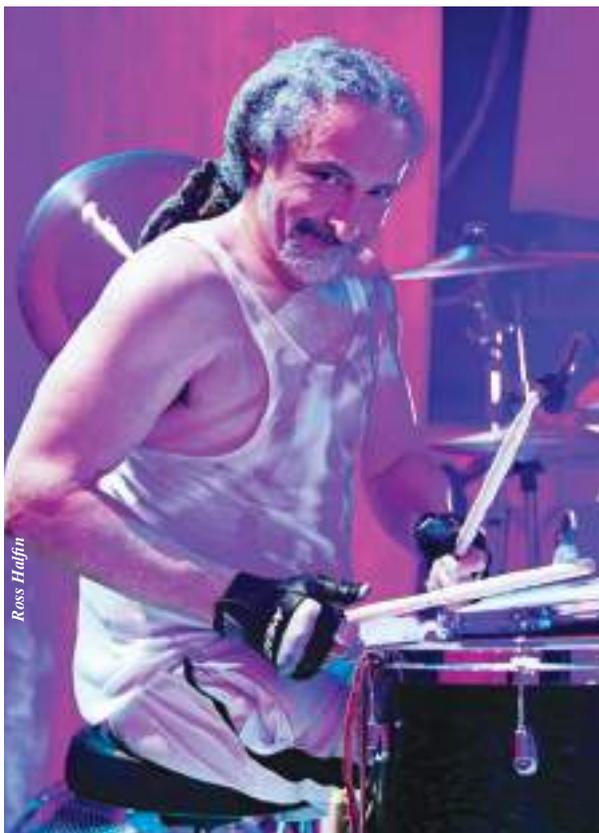
produced and engineered by bassist Billy Gould in the band's rehearsal space. (Vocal savant Mike Patton recorded his parts in his own studio.) "It was an evolutionary process in the best sense," Bordin says. "If Bill added a section or Mike altered a melody, I had the opportunity to rerecord a part that was sympathetic to those changes. It wasn't like back when the studio cost us three grand a day, and everyone's saying, 'We're going to need you to do all of your drum tracks in three days—*hurry*.'"

The dreadlocked southpaw (who plays a righty kit, but with the ride on his left) shines on the driving single "Superhero," as well as *Angel Dust*—era throwbacks "Separation Anxiety" and "Matador,"

both of which are built on vintage Bordin/Gould gut-punch grooves. Other standouts include the soul-sprinkled "Sunny Side Up," which calls for nimble odd-time navigation, and the sinister "Cone of Shame," which simmers along to an execution-style snare march before erupting into a devastatingly heavy swing. "I feel like there's good pop on my tracks—they sound fluid and natural," beams Bordin, who, after playing sideman with Ozzy Osbourne and others for a decade-plus, describes his approach in FNM as "instinctive" and "extremely comfortable."

"I'm super-proud of [*Sol Invictus*]," the drummer says. "I'm proud of my guys. It's been a crazy, cool gift to have a second chance to do this with more experience and more perspective under our collective belts. I really treasure it."

**David Jarnstrom**



Ross Halfin



## Nickel and Chrome Plating: What's the Difference?

I am looking to buy a nice 6.5x14 brass snare to use as my primary drum for studio and live applications. I really like the clean, shiny look of chrome, but I notice that a lot of studio drummers prefer nickel-plated brass snares. Is there a sonic difference between the two, if everything else is the same (shell thickness, hardware, drumheads, etc.)? And what about natural brass or black nickel plating? Do they sound different as well?

**Mike**

We sent your question to Joyful Noise Drum Company founder and president Curt Waltrip, who specializes in re-creating classic metal snare drums in addition to innovating new designs. He studied physics at UC Berkeley, and he's been a professional drummer and drum design researcher for over thirty years, building drums for fifteen years. Here's his take on the metallurgy behind snare drums.

"In musical instrument design, the magic recipe is the marriage of mass and density," Waltrip explains. "The greater the density of the material and the lower the mass, the more efficient the energy transfer. In electronics, this is referred to as impedance. Brass is used in wind instruments because it transfers vibration more efficiently than any other metal. In other words, it has the lowest impedance. The physical and mechanical attributes of brass result in a strong fundamental tone and a vibrant array of overtones, or partial frequencies, which results in a very musical instrument.

"Now let's move on to the mystery of plating. Back in the 1920s, nickel was the plating material of choice for something bright and shiny, but then along came chrome. Chrome's claim to fame was that you didn't have to clean it regularly to remove fingerprints or polish out oxidization. Because of that convenience, chrome replaced nickel as the preferred finish by the '30s.

"For drum design, using chrome instead of nickel was an economic and aesthetic decision. However, it did introduce subtle sonic differences. Many people will argue that .01" or .001" of plating material doesn't change the sound of an instrument, but it does. For example, trumpet manufacturers will silver-plate a brass bell to brighten the sound, or they'll solder a pure silver bell to the brass body for an even more pronounced effect. Saxophone manufacturers sometimes nickel-plate entire instruments to darken



**Top to bottom: black nickel over brass, chrome over brass, and patina brass**

the tone in addition to changing the aesthetics.

"So what are the sonic implications of plating a snare drum? The answer goes back to mass and density. If a material has a lower mass and higher density, then the transfer of energy is more efficient, which results in more apparent frequencies above the fundamental. The opposite applies for a material that has higher mass and lower density: fewer frequencies above the fundamental.

"Silver's density is high on the scale of other metals, in relation to its mass. This means silver plating will produce more overtones and partial frequencies. In short, plate any metal-shell snare drum with silver, and you'll make it sound brighter.

"Now that we've covered the science, here are the general sonic differences between the three most popular types of snare plating—nickel, black nickel, and chrome. Nickel subtly darkens and focuses the overall sound. Plating black nickel correctly requires copper, nickel, and black nickel, plus clear lacquer, and the result is that it darkens and focuses the tone even more. A black nickel finish on a brass shell delivers a very articulate response. Plating a chrome finish on brass can be done several ways, but brass loves chrome placed directly over the base material.

Some manufacturers, like my company, Joyful Noise, use triple-plating techniques. That method requires copper, nickel, and then

chrome. The result is a brighter tone, due to the higher density of the chrome.

"Once I understood these subtle differences through my research, I discovered that drums with no plating were more vibrant and true to their base metal, which is why I pursued patina finishes with Joyful Noise. Patinas adhere with the base metal through heat and molecular bonding. This process differs from plating, as the materials added to the base metal have very little mass and density and are not distinguishable to the human ear.

"With all of that said, I firmly believe that the 'best' drum is whichever one works for the track. If it's a coffee can, then that's it! Don't overthink it. But also make it a point to pursue the nuances of tone so that you can gain a deeper understanding of your instrument. Don't let marketing focus you on what you see, rather than what you should hear."





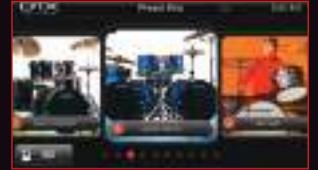
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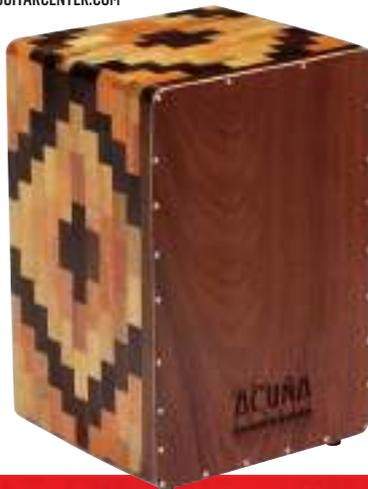
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Angel

## Black Wenge Segment-Shell Drumset

Rare African hardwood meets Eastern European ruggedness.

**A**ngel is a Hungarian company that prides itself on taking no shortcuts and making no compromises when it comes to the quality of its drums. It's very careful with its selection of responsibly harvested timber, which includes European maple, oak, ash, acacia, and walnut, as well as hard-to-obtain exotic species from around the globe, like red oak, rosewood, meranti, and black wenge, which is what was used to create the kit we have for review.

### In-House Hardware

Before we dig deeper into the build and sound of the black wenge shells, let's take a look at the hardware, which Angel makes as well. The tube lugs (mini versions for the toms and bass drum and full-size for the snare) are hand-machined from high-quality brass, which the company says results in improved tone and durability.

The simple cylindrical snare strainer is hand-machined from solid bronze and features two locking points that allow for tight or looser wires without adjusting the snare-tension thumbscrew. The throw-off operated smoothly and held tension very well, thanks to the small nubs protruding from the bottom of the thumbscrew to lock it into place. That feature is great for preventing the loss of tension, but it also makes it nearly impossible to adjust the snare wires while the throw-off is engaged. It's a minor point of concern for those of you who often fiddle with the snares in the middle of a song, but trading split-second adjustability for supreme stability is more than worth it. Plus the two locking points offer enough flexibility for most situations.

Angel also makes its own floor tom brackets, which fall in line with the strong, sturdy, and simple aesthetic of the rest of the kit. They comprise two large, round machined pieces, and the top knurled portion rotates to lock the legs into place. The brackets were super-sturdy but also super-heavy, so they added quite a bit of weight to the already hefty 14" floor tom. But I doubt they'll ever wear out or strip, which I can't say is the case with the majority of the thumbscrew-operated leg brackets I've used over the years. Again, the trade-off in weight is made up for with a lifetime of durability.

The centerpiece of the company's hardware design is the hand-rolled 303 stainless steel straight Angel hoop, which is used on the toms and snare and features welded "ears" for the tension rods. The hoops were polished to a nice shine, but they retained a rugged, industrial vibe that suggested strength and stability.

### The World's First

Wenge is a tropical African timber that's dark in color with a distinctive grain pattern. It's a very dense hardwood, with a 1,630 rating on the Janka hardness scale, putting it above the most common drum-shell timbers (maple, birch, oak, cherry, walnut, and mahogany are listed under 1,500 and closer to other exotics, like rosewood (1,780), purpleheart (1,860), and bubinga (1,980). (For a point of reference, basswood, which is often used in entry-level drumsets, has a rating of 100, and ebony, one of the hardest woods used in drum making, is 3,220.) Drums have been made from different types of wenge before, but Angel is the first company to create a solid-shell kit made entirely from the type known as black wenge.

Our review kit came in bebop sizes: 16x18 bass drum, 14x14 floor tom, 8x12 rack tom, and 5.5x14 snare. The shells are made from blocks of wenge, 1 centimeter thick, as opposed to other popular "solid" constructions that use steam-bent single plies or vertical staves. The blocks are staggered for greater stability, and because they're sanded into round, rather than being bent into shape, the drums produce a pure, true representation of the wenge. The interior surface of the shells is left rough and raw, which helps to break up the higher overtones. The outer surface is sanded smooth and lightly finished with an oil/gloss mixture to protect the wood without masking any of its beautiful grain structure and dark, rich color.

Each shell, with the exception of the bass drum, has small pinpoint vents drilled just below each lug, rather than a single larger vent, which Angel claims facilitates rapid air movement for improved response and power. We can confirm that statement, as the kit proved to be incredibly responsive at any tuning, from super-tight to completely slack, and at any dynamic level.

Some drums sound great under microphones but are lackluster when played acoustically, while others can cut like a knife in unmiked situations but don't play nice in the studio. This black wenge kit from Angel thrived in both situations, producing clean, dense, rich tones with remarkable cut and pre-EQ'ed clarity, whether miked or not. When recorded with just two microphones (a large-diaphragm condenser overhead and a bass drum mic placed a few inches from the front head), you could hear so much nuance, from the sharp transient of the attack to the round, fat note of the sustain, that you'd swear every piece was close-miked.

I assumed that drums made from such dense, thick shells would have a limited range that favored higher tunings, but I was able to get some huge, powerful low tones from them with little coaxing. They sounded tremendous cranked up as well, never choking out or losing power. Check out a video demo of this kit at [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com) to hear the unique combination of crystal clarity, powerful presence, and rich fatness that these super-rare Angel black wenge drums possess.

**Michael Dawson**





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

# V-Classic

## Hi-Hats, Crashes, Rides, and Jingle Splashes

Steeped in history and tradition while keeping an eye on the future.

**V**-Classic is a Turkish company, founded by eighteen-year-veteran cymbalsmith Torab Majlesi, that specializes in bringing the warm, dark tones and soft, buttery feel of cymbals made in the 1960s into present-day applications. These new designs stay true to the classic aesthetic, while being updated for use in most soft to medium-loud musical styles, including jazz, fusion, classic R&B, Latin, and light pop/rock. They're also excellent for recording situations, where you want to keep the cymbals from overpowering the microphones and washing out the mix.

Helping to explain their old-school tone and worn-in feel, V-Classic cymbals are made from ancient-formula B25 bronze, which has 5 percent more tin than the more common B20 alloy. They were just as expressive and rich sounding when played at lower volumes as when hit with full strokes, and they responded very well to brushes, mallets, and even bare hands. Aesthetically, they had an antique appearance that was developed via a proprietary maturation and coating process. The coating also helps to improve stick definition and squelch excessive overtones and sustain for a slightly drier voice.

Our review batch of V-Classics included more conventional models (15" Light hi-hats, an 18" crash, and 20", 22", and 24" rides), as well as more adventurous and innovative options

(20" Light sizzle crash, a 22" ride with three 2" holes, and 6" and 8" jingle splashes).

The 15" Light hi-hats are very thin and soft, yet they had a pleasing "sticky" response and a warm, dark tone. Had I not known they were brand-new cymbals, I would have sworn they had spent decades chomping away in dark, smoky jazz and R&B nightclubs. The same is true of the 18" crash, which had a husky, explosive voice that hit strong (but not harshly) and got out of the way very quickly. Over the years my ears have become very sensitive to the brighter overtones associated with most crash cymbals, to the point where I'll often forgo crashes entirely, but the V-Classic sounded just as fantastic when hit aggressively to punctuate phrase endings as it did when struck with a light, glancing blow for delicate bursts of color.

The three rides on review (20", 22", and 24") matched perfectly with the hi-hats and crash, and they sounded, looked, and felt as vintage as any truly vintage cymbal I've ever encountered. The 20" has a very small bell, which helped to give it a tighter overall sound with clear articulation, a warm and balanced sustain, and a rich, bellowing crash. The 22" has a larger bell, a bigger crash sound, and a stronger stick attack. Of the three, this was the most versatile and the most reminiscent of the coveted tones heard on classic jazz





records from the '60s.

The 24" has an even broader bell, which brought in slightly more metallic overtones when hit with the shoulder of the stick. Its crash was thunderous and larger than life, but it still opened up easily. The stick sound was clean and sparkling, and the sustain was even and tamable. This extra-large ride provided a ton of surface area for dancing and tipping all over, à la modern jazz great Brian Blade.

Also in the Brian Blade vein is the 20" Light sizzle crash, which is a paper-thin cymbal with twelve rivets that had a super-cool, snarling attack, while remaining incredibly balanced and controlled. Again, there wasn't one iota of harshness here, even when hit with my best karate chop. The aggressive/expressive spirits of Elvin Jones and Art Blakey live on in this bad boy.

Unique pieces in V-Classic's catalog are the 22" ride with holes and the 6" and 8" jingle splashes. As Majlesi explains, "holes are generally used to break the sound waves and create a new sound. In my rides, they decrease the crashing sustain and give a bit of trashy lows." Our review cymbal had three 2" holes in the bow,

equidistant from one another. Its tone was a bit trashier and more complex than the regular 22", which translated into a funkier and more modern sound. It still had a clear stick attack, a musical bell, and an expressive crash; it was just a bit more raw and aggressive.

The two jingle splashes have sets of tambourine jingles riveted to them (the 6" has three sets, and the 8" has four). These models had a very short sound that was a combination of a tiny, throaty crash and a jingly rattle. They provided an interesting short, noisy effect when hit by themselves, but I found that they also worked very well when placed on the snare drum to create a layered, electronica-type tone for jungle, EDM, and hip-hop grooves. The 6" had a subtler effect, while the 8" added a more prominent jingle. Both showcased the more creative side of V-Classic's designs, while the hi-hats, crashes, and rides demonstrated the company's passion, skill, and dedication to re-creating some of the most venerable cymbal sounds of the twentieth century.

**Michael Dawson**

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



# DTS 6.5x14 Oscar Seaton Hybrid-Shell Snare

Marrying birch with maple for ultimate clarity and depth.



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

**D**TS, or Drum Tech Services, was founded in 2011 by acclaimed tech Steve "Steevo" Morrison, who has worked with Tommy Lee, Stephen Perkins, Teddy Campbell, Joey Jordison, and Nate Morton. (Morton uses DTS snares on *The Voice*.) Morrison's mission, as stated on the company website, is to "provide handcrafted instruments at reasonable prices."

The options DTS offers are nearly endless, starting with premium Keller shells of various wood types and including any choice of stain, custom paint job, veneer, inlay, or lacquer finish. DTS uses PureSound Custom Pro snare wires and Remo drumheads (Evans and Aquarian heads can be used on request), and it offers many bearing-edge profiles and hardware options and finishes, including powder coating. All DTS snare drums are made to order.

Our review drum is a unique 6.5x14, 10-ply hybrid built especially for renowned R&B/pop/fusion drummer Oscar Seaton, featuring a top half of birch and a bottom half of

maple, plus a checker-pattern maple inlay. It's outfitted with black nickel tube lugs and die-cast hoops, black tension rods, a Trick GS007 throw-off, twenty-four-strand PureSound Custom Pro wires, and Remo heads (Coated Ambassador top and Hazy Ambassador bottom). The edges are 45 degrees with a rounded back cut, and the snare beds are fairly flat.

Since birch drums tend to have a focused, cutting voice and maple drums are known to have a more open, broad timbre,

we expected this drum to feature a blend of the two, which it did. But it definitely leaned more toward the birch side of the spectrum, offering supreme pop, punch, and precision at any tuning. Part of that was also due to the die-cast hoops, which helped to tighten the overtones and add a bit of bite to rimshots.

Tuned tight, the Seaton snare was super-articulate and responsive, with a clean, focused "snap," but there was depth and roundness to the tone that you don't always get from drums at higher tensions. (I assume this is where the maple comes into play.) Medium tension sounded bigger and throatier, while still remaining focused and controlled. A lower tuning brought out even more fatness and a wider, deeper "smack," without getting muddy or sloppy. No muffling was needed at any tuning, which is a testament to the quality of the build as well as to the smart combination of contrasting wood types and the tone-focusing die-cast hoops. The list price is \$699.

**Michael Dawson**



# Stellar

## 3-Ply and Walnut/Bird's-Eye Maple Wood Hoops

Superbly built options for achieving drier, warmer drum tones.

The folks at Stellar sent us two pairs of wood hoops to review. Out of the box, the first thing I noticed was the great attention to detail given to the construction. The hoops were very cleanly made, with smooth joints and no gaps or bumps. I found it difficult to even feel where the seams were located.

The first ones I checked out were 14", 3-ply bird's-eye maple, with hoop claws, and I put them on a 5x14 mahogany snare.

The hoops immediately gave the drum a fuller, richer tone, with a fatter backbeat, thicker-sounding rimshots, and a very sweet, pleasing rimclick sound. They're extremely light, which reduced the overall weight of the drum, and their hooks added an old-school, vintage look. The hoops caused the tension rods to sit a bit higher than they usually do, so care must be paid in positioning the drum on a stand so that rimshots don't strike the top of a rod.

The batter-side hoop dented slightly during use, so I wouldn't put it through a hard-hitting session of endless rimshots. But for a lower-volume situation where finesse is the order of the day, these hoops would be a great choice. They dried up the sound of my



3-ply bird's-eye maple

drum in a very appealing way, eliminating the need for excessive dampening. I can also see them working well for drying and warming up the tone of toms.

The second set of hoops was thicker and made from walnut and bird's-eye maple, with holes for the tension rods. I tried them on a 6x14 cherry snare that already had a thick, throaty tone, and they did well to enhance the natural sound of the drum, while also reducing its weight and drying up the overtones. The thicker construction of these hoops meant less marring overall, and I was able to put the top hoop through a night of rimshots with very

little visible wear. The drum felt more enjoyable to play with the Stellar hoops installed; it had a satisfying, spongy give, and rimclicks produced a sweet, full "knock."

The 3-ply Stellar hoops with claws sell for approximately \$100, and the bird's-eye maple/walnut models cost around \$200. (Regular all-maple hoops are also offered, for roughly \$135.) If you're looking for well-made wood hoops to change the tone of your existing drums, you'll find that Stellar deserves your attention.

**Nick Amoroso**



Walnut/bird's-eye maple



# 9 iOS Apps Every Drummer Should Know

## Metronomes, Play-Alongs, and More

by Miguel Monroy

In recent years, the use of technology has become increasingly important for musicians. With the advent of the iPhone and the iPad, we now have access to a whole new world of opportunities to better ourselves in the craft of drumming. But with the App Store being saturated with options, how do we pick which apps to check out? *MD* sifted through the choices and found a handful of the most useful ones for drummers.

### Tempo (\$2.99)



This is one of the most robust metronome apps currently on the market. With an interface that's as elegant as it is functional,

the app offers many options. Highlights include thirty-five different time signatures (including compound and complex meters), the ability to customize accents and turn off specific beats to create more complex patterns, fourteen different sounds (including a voice counting option), multiple display modes, panning capabilities, vibration mode, and customizable themes. One additional feature that we loved was the ability to create custom set lists with different tempos for each song, which could then be used for live shows and rehearsals. The set lists can also be shared with bandmates.

### Tempo SlowMo (free)



Although there are several available in-app purchases to enhance Tempo SlowMo, it's still a powerhouse in its free

form without any upgrades. Imagine being able to slow down any song in your music library without changing its pitch; it's an incredibly valuable learning tool.

In addition to its functionality in slowing down music, the app also offers the ability to export the slower version via email or Dropbox if the track was imported using Dropbox, a Wi-Fi upload, or an email attachment. You can use any of the music from your iTunes library in Tempo SlowMo with no problem; to prevent illegal sharing, however, you won't be able to export slower versions of tracks that come from iTunes.

### Drum Tuning Calculator (free)



This app is built to operate in conjunction with a Tune-bot electronic drum tuner (\$99). But you don't need to own the device in order to utilize

the app; any pitched instrument (such as keyboard or guitar) or app that offers exact pitches to reference against your drumheads' tuning will suffice.

After opening the app, you're given several options for what you can tune. It can be anything from a single drum (bass, snare, or tom) to a full kit. If you open the Drum Set Calculator, you have the ability to select every drum size in your setup, the amount of resonance you'd like, and which head you'd like to be tighter (top or bottom, or they can be pitched the same). After you finish selecting your options, the app presents you with a list of drums and the exact Hertz and fundamental tone needed to achieve your desired tuning. It's much easier to dial in the tones if you own an actual Tune-bot, but even if you just use a reference pitch from another source, the results will still be a pure, consistent tuning across the entire kit.





### theDrumDictionary (free/\$3.99)



The name of this app says it all. The paid version is a nicely organized list of the forty standard rudiments and more than a hundred drumset grooves in a variety of styles, plus a metronome. The free version includes the forty rudiments and a small selection of grooves. Each rudiment/groove includes a brief description, notation, and example audio that can be sped up or slowed down. If you're looking for a resource to develop and maintain your beat vocabulary and rudimental proficiency, this is a great place to start.

### Drum Guru (\$2.99–\$3.99 per lesson pack)

The Drum Guru app offers lesson packs from a long list of prominent players. Highlights include Antonio Sanchez, John Blackwell, Aaron Spears, Peter Erskine, Stanton Moore, Russ Miller, David Garibaldi, Mike Mangini, Steve Smith, Chad Smith, Mike Portnoy, and Steve Gadd.



Each pack includes anywhere from four to ten separate videos. This is a great place to learn classic grooves and drumming concepts from the artists who made them famous.



### Jammit (\$4.99–\$5.99 per song)



Jammit is a good app to use in conjunction with Drum Guru or all by itself. Where Drum Guru teaches you classic beats from well-known players, Jammit

allows you to actually be the drummer on your favorite songs. The play-along app features a list of classic and contemporary tunes. The thing that sets Jammit apart is that it contains the original master recordings of the songs, breaking out the instruments into separate channels with their own faders.

You can purchase versions of a song focused on whatever instrument you play. In our case, the drums are put in one channel of the included mixer, the band is put in another, and a metronome goes in a third. As you practice along with your favorite songs, you can fade the original drummer into and out of the mix as you please, as well as control the metronome for the track. You can also view a transcription of the drum part.

Another notable feature of Jammit is an integrated recording ability that lets you document your drumming along with the track. It's a fantastic practice experience that makes hitting the woodshed about as fun as it could possibly be.



**Groove Freedom**  
 (\$4.99 per month, \$26.99 for six months, or \$49.99 for a year, iPad only)



This subscription-based service from online educator Mike Johnston is the most innovative drum app on the market today. The concept is

to present material from Johnston's *Groove Freedom* book in a totally interactive way. The app capitalizes on the latest technology of the iPad to give you complete control over the volume and stereo pan of each limb, as well as tempo control, auto tempo increase, repeat-measure customization, and more. New exercises are being added regularly to keep the content as fresh and current as possible.



**PercussionTutor (\$4.99)**



This is the only app in our list that's dedicated solely to global percussion education, and it does its job wonderfully. It offers a well-organized list of rhythms from all over the world, grouped by country of origin, and there are multiple instrument options for each.

For the one-time fee you'll get unlimited access to more than sixty rhythms, which include full transcriptions for every part, a live recording of the patterns, info about each rhythm, a metronome, and a Time Stretch feature that lets you speed up or slow down the audio examples.



Many of the rhythms also include a percussionist video demonstration. Once a specific rhythm is chosen, you're taken to another screen that shows each instrument used to play the pattern. You then have the ability to turn the instruments on and off as you listen to the example audio. The simplicity and functionality of the PercussionTutor app is the result of a lot of work from the creators. This is a must-have for anyone wanting an encyclopedia of world percussion rhythms at their fingertips.

**Peter Erskine App Collection (\$9.99-\$11.99 each)**



Jazz great Peter Erskine has produced several apps that offer a similar practice experience to Jammit. But you get a lot more songs with every purchase, plus

the ability to email or print a lead sheet or drum chart for each song. Included in Erskine's collection is *Jazz Essentials 1*

and 2, *The Code of Funk*, *Afro-Cuban Essentials*, and the *Joy Luck Play-Along*.

Just like Jammit, Erskine's apps include a recording function that lets you document your drumming along with the track as you practice.



For demos of these apps, visit [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com).



# Jam Packed

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The Audix DP7 Drum Pack is the standard for capturing the unique sound of your drums in studio and for live sound. The DP7 is jam packed with our popular D6 for kick drum, an i5 mic for snare, two D2s for rack toms, a D4 for the floor tom and two ADX51s for overhead miking. With a sleek, foam-lined aluminum case to keep the mics safe, the DP7 is truly everything a drummer needs in a single package.



# DP7

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*Photo of Anthony Jones, Pink Martini*

# GEARING UP

ON STAGE  
AND UP CLOSE

Interview by Dave Previ • Photos by Heather Courtney

## Every Time I Die's Daniel Davison

**Drums:** Gretsch Brooklyn series (6-ply maple/American poplar) in satin mahogany finish  
**A.** 6.5x14 chrome-over-brass snare  
**B.** 8x12 tom  
**C.** 14x16 floor tom  
**D.** 18x22 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Sabian

1. 14" AA Rock Sizzle hi-hats
2. 19" HHX Power crash
3. 21" AA Dry ride
4. 18" HHX Chinese

**Hardware:** DW 9000 series stands and double pedal, 5000 series hi-hat stand

**Heads:** Evans Level 360 G2 Coated snare and tom batters and Gretsch by Remo bottoms, Gretsch by Remo Coated Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter with Falam Slam patch

**Sticks:** Promark 747 Shira Kashi oak Neil Peart model

**Earplugs:** Sensaphonics molded model with 15 dB filter

Daniel Davison has been dishing out heavy-hitting metalcore beats for more than a decade, with bands such as Norma Jean and Underoath. He was recently recruited by the Buffalo group Every Time I Die. We caught up with him while on tour in Brooklyn, to get the scoop on his new rig.

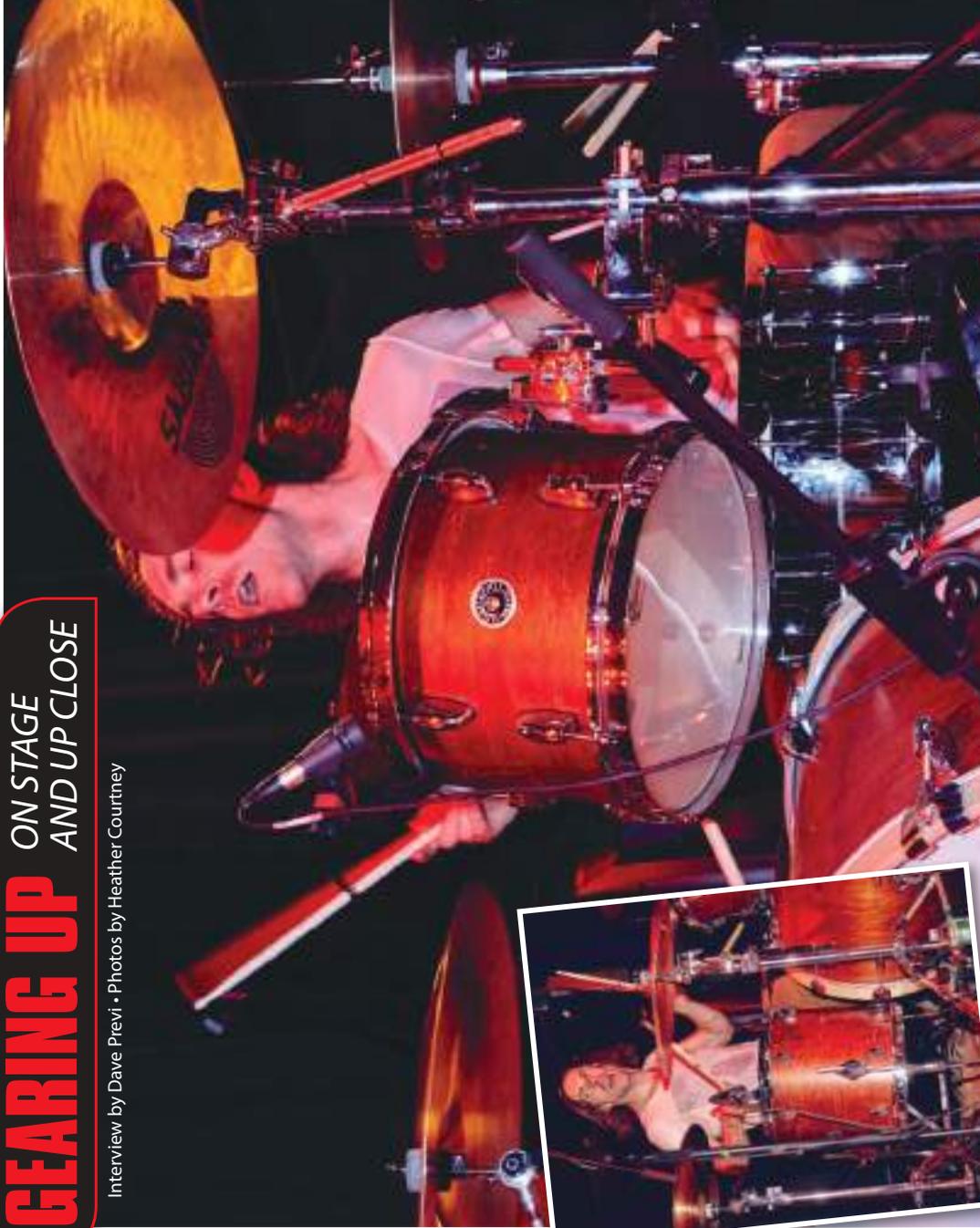
"I'm not a very showy drummer; I like simplicity," Davison explains. "It's more important to groove than anything else. While touring with DIY bands with a minimal crew, I never

found it necessary to set up an extra cymbal that I might hit a few times during a set. I've always just figured out what I need to get the job done, and that's it.

"Fresh out of the boxes for this tour, this is my favorite kit to date," Davison continues. "These drums have been the easiest to make sound good. They have a very warm tone. Normally I play a wooden snare, but the Brooklyn series comes with a brass one. It's super-loud, has a nice crack, and really cuts through. Overall, I'm looking for a punchy,

big sound. I like them dry and a little bit dead, yet boomy.

"As for cymbals, I need a lot of projection and for them to be durable. My current ride has lasted the entire tour without cracking, even after I use it as a crash for those super-loud moments in the show. I use a 19" crash for its beefiness, and I've used these hats for ten years and love the extra sizzle. However, I'm looking toward getting something thinner just to change it up."





4

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1

# ILAN RUBIN

**It's tough to tell where his aesthetic as multi-instrumental leader of the New Regime ends and his highly involved support in Nine Inch Nails and Angels & Airwaves begins—this complete musician brings a panoply of talents to bear on every gig he graces.**

If you've seen Ilan Rubin with Nine Inch Nails, Paramore, or Angels & Airwaves, you know this twenty-seven-year-old drummer is a beast, creating bludgeoning rhythms that are also beautiful in their shape, eccentricities, dynamic range, and sheer onslaught of energy.

Rubin plays with the power and passion of his hero John Bonham, but with a sophistication and exacting approach borne of his own imposing intellect. When performing—hair flying, head swaying, limbs punching, and rhythms propelling from every part of his 5-foot-11 frame—Rubin is

totally caught up in the drums while focusing equally on everything around him.

With Nine Inch Nails, Rubin must perform on drumset to a click, trigger samples from electronic pads, and gel with the band; occasionally he'll also play keyboards, bass, and guitar. In Paramore, his slamming assault comes from his left-hand hi-hat figures and a monstrous right-hand 2-and-4 snare drum smash. A significant collaborator in Tom DeLonge's Angels & Airwaves, where he can sometimes be seen backstage working on his classical piano



technique, Rubin brings it all together: composer, colossal drummer, and savage interpreter of all things rhythmic.

Not surprising for a musician who cites Led Zeppelin and Ludwig van Beethoven as equal influences, Rubin is a multi-instrumentalist who plays everything in sight as effectively as he demolishes his Q Drum Co. kit. His musical alias, the New Regime, is treated with the same intense zeal that he brings to each project he plays on. Following *Coup* (2008), *Speak Through the White Noise* (2011), and *Exhibit A* (2013), Rubin released *Exhibit B* this

past March. A stylistically diverse EP that posits Rubin the drummer as part Bonham, part Stewart Copeland, and part Jojo Mayer, *Exhibit B* moreover presents the New Regime in the grand tradition of David Bowie, Queen, the Police, and Trent Reznor. It's classic rock for 2015.

*Modern Drummer* has been with Rubin from the start, declaring him Best Undiscovered Drummer Under the Age of Eighteen when he was only eleven years old. It was clear then, and it's only truer today—no matter what he plays, Ilan Rubin makes the drums sing.

**Story by Ken Micallef • Photos by Alex Solca**



### Tools, Tones, and Time Well Spent

**MD:** You recorded the New Regime's *Exhibit B* while on the road with Nine Inch Nails. How and why did you do that?

**Ilan:** I like to be as productive as possible. I'd always have a guitar, bass, and MIDI controller with me on the road so that I could add music to preexisting tracks I'd recorded at home. I like to record big drum sounds in a larger room, so I recorded drums at the Angels & Airwaves studio in San Diego or at my home studio, where most of the vocals and other instruments are recorded with my brother Daniel engineering.

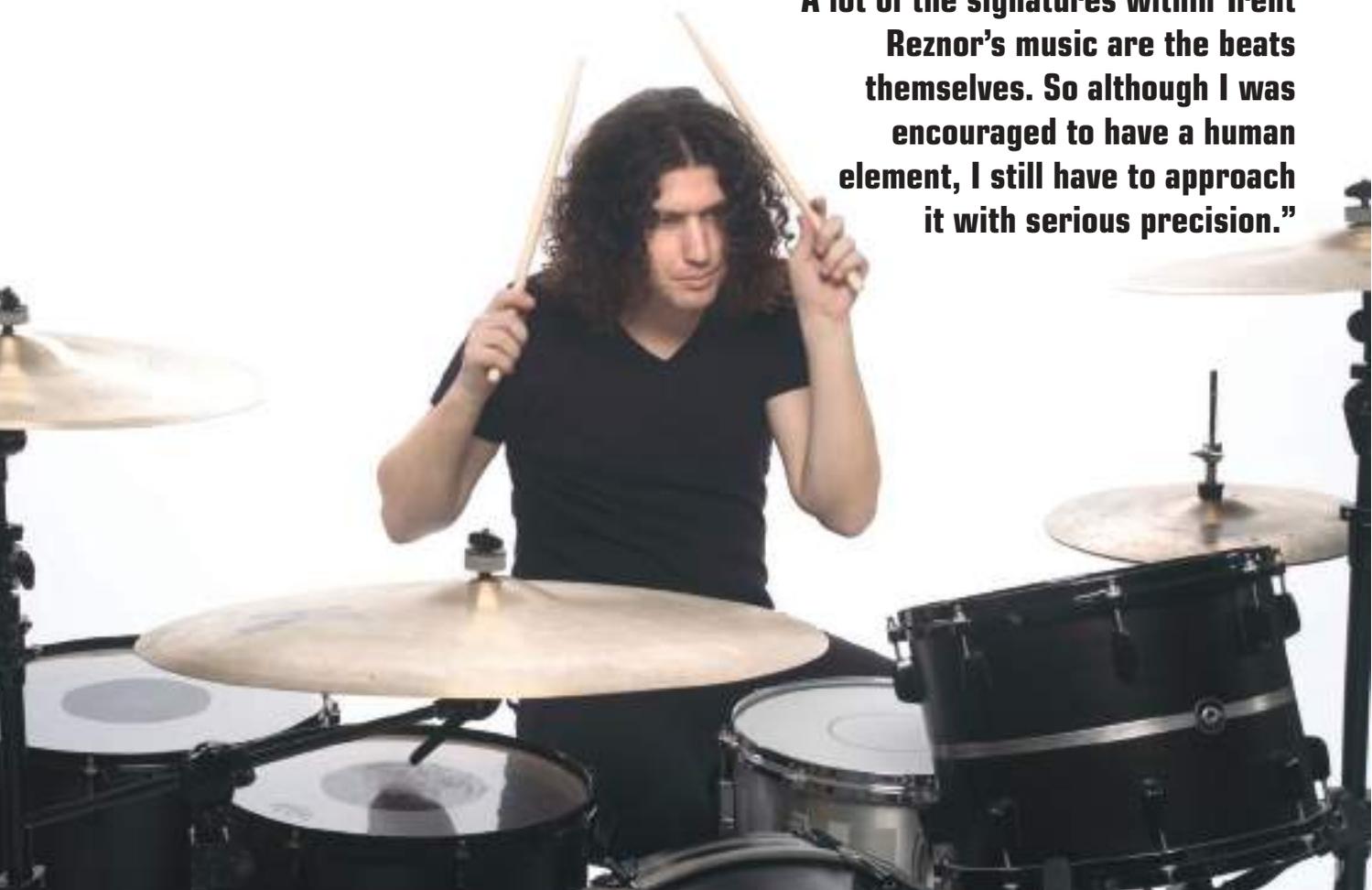
**MD:** Did you record *Exhibit B* with your Nine Inch Nails touring set?

**Ilan:** I used my black-stained mahogany Q set on tour with Nine Inch Nails, but on the record I used a copper Q set with an assortment of snare drums from Q's Plate series, which are very thick drums, as well as some aluminum snares and Ludwig Supraphonics.

**MD:** What are the benefits of recording with copper drums?

**Ilan:** Q Drum was started in 2010 by Jeremy Berman, who was a builder at Orange County Drum and Percussion when I joined them at the age of twelve. I joined Q as a player and on the business side

**“A lot of the signatures within Trent Reznor’s music are the beats themselves. So although I was encouraged to have a human element, I still have to approach it with serious precision.”**



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of things. What sets Q apart are the different materials we use to make drums, including galvanized steel, cold-rolled steel, brass, and copper, as well as mahogany, maple, and acrylic.

What makes the metal drums sound extra good are the maple reinforcement hoops. That allows the head to sit on a proper bearing edge, so you're getting that attack and warmth. The tone of the drum comes from the shell material. Copper makes for a very dynamic and sonically interesting sound that I love. A copper kit was the first metal set I used, when I toured with Paramore.

**MD:** How do other metals differ from the tone of the copper set?

**Ilan:** Brass would be brighter and louder; cold-rolled steel has a slightly darker presence but a nice open quality. The metal kits resonate well and are livelier than maple. Every drummer has his or her preference. If I could I wouldn't have a hole in the front bass drum head, because I like the boom and the response from the drums when playing live. In terms of playing an instrument that is resonant and boomy and very lively, I get that from the metal drums, regardless of room acoustics.

**MD:** Are Q metal drums more expensive than traditional wood drums?

**Ilan:** They're not as much as you think...they're within reach. Q Drum has a unique perspective in having a respect for craftsmanship and that affinity for vintage sound and feel, but done with a more modern, rugged perspective. Jeremy has built drums for twenty years and has teched for many bands, including Queens of the Stone Age, Muse, and Nine Inch Nails. He has his finger on the pulse of live drummers, and that's priceless.

## Rubin's Reznor Regime

**MD:** How has working with Trent Reznor influenced you?

**Ilan:** When I started with Nine Inch Nails in 2010, I realized that everything you hear about Trent in terms of his iron work ethic is true. From a young age I was taught to treat being a musician as a real skill, and if I wanted to make a business out of it I had to be smart about it. Even at fourteen I felt a lack of professionalism with some bands I played in. At twenty, when I joined Nine Inch Nails, I thought, *This is the kind of organization I want to be a part of.*

**MD:** What has that gig taught you in terms of your drumming?

**Ilan:** What is unique about Nine Inch Nails' music is that it's electronically based, so as a drummer you have to approach it with a certain discipline. It's not enough to know the structures. A lot of the signature parts of Trent's music are the beats. So although I was encouraged to have a human element, I still have to approach it with serious precision. The beat for each section of the song is that specific beat. The leeway comes when I get to improvise.

There's a song called "Piggy" where every [Nine Inch Nails] drummer has taken a solo at the end. You play in and out of time and have a chaotic thing happening. So it was approaching music with a different kind of precision and discipline, but all the while being encouraged to play like me.

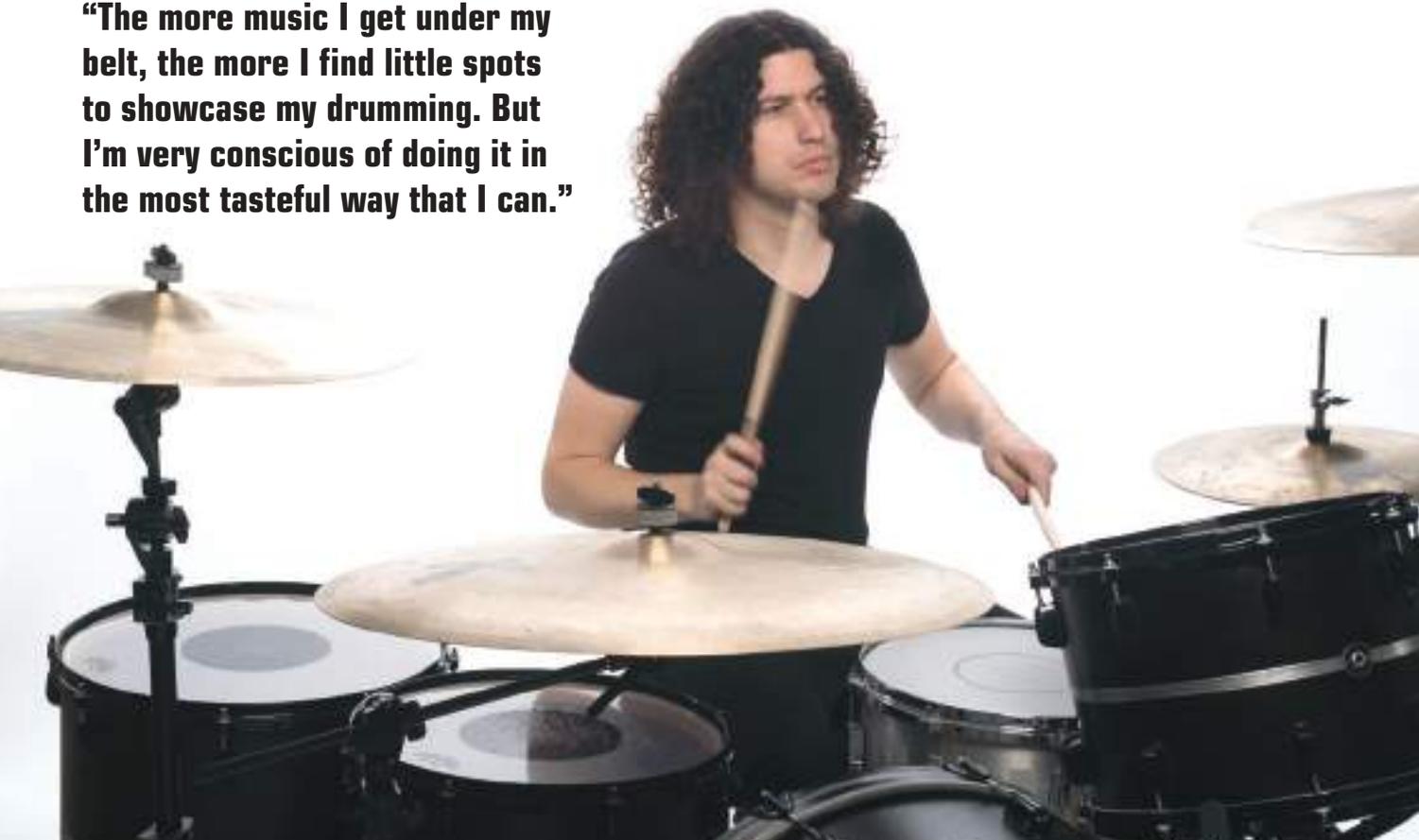
**MD:** In the instances when Trent has said to make a song your own, which ones have you changed the most in terms of your drum part?

**Ilan:** One song that comes to mind is "Suck." It has a very distinct and solid groove throughout the verses and choruses, but the live intro had a bit of a solo or improv section. I showed up playing

## INFLUENCES

Led Zeppelin I, II, IV, Houses of the Holy, The Song Remains the Same (John Bonham) /// the Police Live!, Zenyatta Mondatta, Ghost in the Machine, Reggatta de Blanc (Stewart Copeland) /// the Dave Brubeck Quartet At Carnegie Hall (Joe Morello)

**“The more music I get under my belt, the more I find little spots to showcase my drumming. But I’m very conscious of doing it in the most tasteful way that I can.”**



exactly what [Jerome Dillon played] on *And All That Could Have Been*, the live album from the Fragility tour. I recall Trent saying, “That sounds like something Jerome played. Do something else, something *you’d* play.” So I did. And as I said earlier, every Nine Inch Nails drummer has made the end of “Piggy” his own, so I always had a great time changing that up when it was in the set.

**MD:** Are you playing with a lot of electronics on tour with NIN?

**Ilan:** A fair amount. I have two electronic pads on either side of me. The samples they trigger change from song to song. I’m also playing on top of a lot of sequences, and everything is to a click. The drums are driving the show, but I’m playing to sequences and other things that need to be right on the beat. For example, “March of the Pigs” demands an intricate beat, but it’s exactly what it is—there’s no deviating from that. Learning fifty to seventy songs



**Drums:** Q Drum Co. black-stained mahogany with aluminum stripe inlays  
**A.** 7x14 Aluminum Plate snare  
**B.** 10x14 tom  
**C.** 16x16 floor tom  
**D.** 16x18 floor tom  
**E.** 14x26 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Zildjian  
**1.** 15" K Light hi-hats  
**2.** 20" K crash/ride (or A medium crash)  
**3.** 24" K Light ride

**Hardware:** DW, including 5000 series bass drum pedal

**Sticks:** Vater Nude 1A

**Heads:** Remo Coated X14 snare batter, Controlled Sound dot tom batters and Clear Ambassador bottoms, and Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter

**Electronics:** Roland KD-7 bass drum trigger (on pedal) and PD-8 drum pads, Apple MainStage app with apulSoft apTrigga2 plug-in for sampling, Native Instruments Maschine groove production studio

# ILAN'S SETUP

## RECORDINGS

**The New Regime** Exhibit B, Exhibit A, Speak Through the White Noise, Coup /// **Paramore** Paramore /// **Angels & Airwaves** The Dream Walker /// **Nine Inch Nails** Hesitation Marks /// **M83** Oblivion soundtrack /// **Lostprophets** The Betrayed /// **Denver Harbor** Scenic

over a year and a half, I'm learning all these beats that have to be played note for note. Nine Inch Nails is the only gig where I've had to approach it that way, and it's been great.

**MD:** How did you initially meet the challenge—practice, memorization, charts?

**Ilan:** I'm very quick to pick things up, so I pride myself on adapting. Memorization comes into play when you're learning the initial batch of songs to rehearse, which could number in the fifties. The only time I

ever made a chart was for a song called "Demon Seed." It had very intricate editing on the album, so I charted it out and memorized it. It was a lot of effort to play it only once, but at least I got it!

**MD:** What are the hardest songs to play with Nine Inch Nails?

**Ilan:** "The Collector" is a song that we played only a handful of times. It was a lot of fun, but with its time signature being 13/8—or a bar of six followed by a bar of seven, however you want to look at it—it could very easily fall off the tracks. I wouldn't call it difficult per se, but I would really focus on making sure that beats were never dropped or skipped. It took a lot of mentally blocking out other people's rhythms as well.

**MD:** How do you maintain such a high level of energy live?

**Ilan:** I suppose I build up stamina during rehearsals, but it's really just the way I play. If I don't feel like I'm putting my all into a



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## Ilan Rubin

performance, I feel like I'm short-changing the audience.

**MD:** What's your pre-show warm-up routine?

**Ilan:** Stretches for forearms, wrists, legs—getting the whole body ready to go. Warming up on a pad is fine, but for the way I play I really benefit from my entire body being loose, not just my wrists and forearms. It's a very physical performance.

**MD:** What is essential in every tour rider for you?

**Ilan:** Nothing is essential, but I'd always ask for a bar of milk chocolate and some Cokes. I'm easy!

## Rubin's New Regime

**MD:** How do you generally track with the New Regime?

**Ilan:** My writing process includes making scratch tracks. I lay them down, and then I rerecord the instruments. I might lay down a song fast with everything in the computer, including programmed drums, or I might record a fast live drum track. Then I'll rerecord the drums to the backing tracks. Once the drums are set, I replace each element, one by one. I like to experiment a lot. Ideas will come from that.

**MD:** "Where I've Headed All Along," the opening track from *Exhibit B*, sounds like two different drum machine rhythms. There's the main, meaty rhythm, and another that sounds like music from the '70s computer game Pong playing over the top.

**Ilan:** I had a sequenced loop in mind. I created that on a Dave Smith Instruments Poly Evolver, using its sixteen-step sequencer. Then I started twiddling knobs to create the pitch. It needed a gutsier sound, so I programmed a loop using a kick drum sound, and on each step I changed the tuning of the bass drum so it has that melody. That's the main loop rhythm. Then the ping-pongy sounds are from the original synth demo track, which I cut out and inserted into a new loop.

**MD:** At the song's halfway point it sounds like there are separate programmed hi-hats and stick clicks.

**Ilan:** Those all came from an Elektron Machinedrum. It's great for creating those signature electronic drum sounds, and the tweakability is great. You can take something very standard like an 808 drum sound and mutate it into something completely different. The hi-hats are from the Machinedrum, and the stick-click thing is actually another hi-hat sound that I decreased the decay on. Decreasing decay gives you a punchy sound. I liked doing that to get different percussive elements.

**MD:** "Smokescreen" is a great song; you're playing those big groove accents on 2 and the "&" of 3, and you play lots of ghost notes. The groove sounds like it's based on a drum corps cadence.

**Ilan:** I wrote the song on guitar, so the snare drum is accenting the guitar line. All the verses are both hands rolling on the Q Brass Plate 7x14 snare drum with that marching quality. I'm keeping time with my left foot on the hi-hat.

**MD:** "The Longing" starts with what sounds like the classic drum 'n' bass loop from "Amen, Brother" by the Winsons.

**Ilan:** No, that's me. We set up a very trashy microphone off to the left side of the kit. It was further EQ'ed and compressed to get that old, crackly sound. It runs throughout the song. I liked the quality of the beat, and we recorded it quickly. That's the only song I've written that started with the drums.

Then we added other elements, many of which I did on tour.

**MD:** Are you playing the same pattern on the live drums in that song?

**Ilan:** Yes. But I thought of the primary drum pattern as more of a jazz thing than drum

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## Ilan Rubin

'n' bass. That's why I'm playing ride cymbal. The bass is not walking as in jazz, but the notes are holding down the foundation while the drums are playing a more up-tempo thing.

**MD:** Later in the song you play drum breaks that recall big band swing triplets around the kit.

**Ilan:** That kind of tempo and style allowed me to play those sorts of fills, which I otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to play.

**MD:** How did you achieve that spacey drum sound in "Let the Space Remain"? Were plug-ins used?

**Ilan:** That's the Elektron Machinedrum put through a tape echo. I wanted that to sound like a mechanical accompaniment to the strummy acoustic guitars.

**MD:** The last cut, "Voices Calling," sounds like Pink Floyd with Nick Mason on drums. Is that a correct stylistic reference?

**Ilan:** Absolutely. That's one where I specifically wanted that dry, dead, in-your-face drum sound. When you have nothing but a slow pulsing piano and deep bass, you have all that space to fill in. It's a Ringo, Nick Mason thing going on there. Pop structures are there for a reason, and I wanted to approach this from more of a classical perspective than, say, verse/chorus. I wanted it to be very haunting and atmospheric—pulsating dynamics that fall and rise and then fall apart and explode with the piano-concerto-style playing.

## For Every Job a Description

**MD:** "The Longing" has such mad drum fills—why aren't there more moments like that on *Exhibit B*?

**Ilan:** It's tough. People often expect me to write drum-centric music. But the New Regime isn't a showcase for my drumming. It's a place to write songs and do everything else. The more music I get under my belt, the more I find little spots to showcase my drumming. But I'm very conscious of doing it in the most tasteful way that I can.

**MD:** How do you change hats from band to band?

**Ilan:** I play what's required. I really do my homework and go in there knowing the songs like the back of my hand and the way [the demo or original track] was recorded. I go in playing exactly what was recorded, and if they ask for more of my own thing, then I'll spice things up. As a hired gun you're there to provide the backbone so the band can do their thing. I wait for them to ask if they want me to spice things up.

**MD:** You have a great touch on the drums, no matter the style or artist. What advice can you give on getting great tone through touch?

**Ilan:** It comes from paying attention to consistency. If you're playing heavy music or rock, focus on your dynamic consistency. And if you're playing something softer and more dynamic, really focusing on staying within that dynamic zone makes you more aware of how you're actually playing. Dynamics and touch hang side by side for me. Paying attention to consistency leads to more control.

**MD:** You always play with broad dynamics on record. That's rare in rock music today.

**Ilan:** I agree. Bonham is a legend, and he's my favorite drummer. People always discuss his power and hard-hitting attack, but they completely miss his incredible finesse and dynamics. They think of him as a gorilla, but that ignores all the other stuff that made him great. I do think dynamics get lost in a lot of modern recording, and that's just the taste of the times. There's a lot of editing and sound replacement happening, and I don't know if I can attribute that fault entirely to drummers.

**MD:** What do you practice now?

**Ilan:** I love playing drums, but when I'm on tour I'm playing drums every night for hours at a time. When I'm at home I play piano or guitar, so drums are the last thing I do. I don't get rusty. I can play at any time.

**MD:** How do people discover the New Regime?

**Ilan:** I'm constantly surprised by people who comment on a video or tweet, "Hey, man, I had no idea that you sang. I really like this song." Everyone finds the music in their own way. Many people have no idea that I play other instruments or write songs. On the flip side, when I tour with the New Regime, I love it when people have no idea of my other affiliations. It's great when people judge the music on [its own merits].

**MD:** How can a drummer who wants to lead a band overcome the stigmas?

**Ilan:** Whew! I'd say be prepared for an uphill battle. I don't mean to sound dramatic. I've had people who've supported me from the beginning, but there are those who need to be convinced to pay attention to my other projects. So if you want to lead a band, do it at one hundred percent. Anything less doesn't work for anybody. If it's something you want to accomplish, then a hundred percent is the only way.



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# Oscar Seaton

Playing with unbridled freedom and being a faithful servant to the groove might seem like two opposing goals. But for this long-revered multi-genre monster, it's all about the same thing—putting in the time, and acquiring the tools.

**A**t a recent Blue Note NYC performance with renowned jazz trumpeter Terence Blanchard, Oscar Seaton rewrote the rules of groove, the rules of roaming freely over the barline, of interpreting ahead-of-the-beat and behind-the-beat drumming, while always playing for the music.

Seaton is perhaps best known for his decades-long touring experiences with George Benson, Lionel Richie, and Boz Scaggs. He's a groove king who also plays with stupendous freedom when the music allows. Performing music from Blanchard's latest release, *Breathless*, Seaton's main mission at the Blue Note was his uniformly deep pocket, his 2-and-4 placement a ceaseless wellspring of forward-motion energy that was mysterious in its silken feel, perpetual motion, and unerring tone. His pocket was a thing of beauty.

And when Blanchard and the E Collective—keyboard player Fabian Almazan, electric bassist Donald Ramsey, guitarist Charles Altura, and Seaton—played such incendiary *Breathless* tracks as "Tom & Jerry," "Breathless," "Everglades," and "I Ain't Got Nothing but Time," the forty-six-year-old drummer, generally mild by nature, became a fire-breathing beast. Over his ceaseless groove, Seaton performed amazing subdivisions, stretching his ideas to the edge of the songs' limits but never losing the feel. His drumming was a whirling vision of complexity, imagination, freedom, subdivision and flow, groove and feeling.

Seaton plays with similar openness on the studio recording of *Breathless*, but the groove is paramount. And so it would be, coming from the drummer's history of playing in church and gospel-chops settings. A self-taught musician, Seaton grew up playing for the Lord, and when Lionel Richie and George Benson called, his friendly personality and professional demeanor gained him endless touring work, which continues to this day. (He's been with Richie for seventeen years and with Benson for twelve and counting.) Seaton has also toured with Queen Latifah, the Winans, Yolanda Adams, Bruce Hornsby, and Ramsey Lewis.

"I played in church from when I was ten to twenty years old," Oscar recalls. "Then I worked with international artists like the Winans and Yolanda Adams. The Soul Children of Chicago too. And Ramsey Lewis for four years in the mid-'90s, including three records. I toured with Boz Scaggs for two years, then Lionel called, and now Terence Blanchard."

Seaton shows that perseverance, innate talent, and knowing your path are as important on the road to success as technique, networking, and timing.

Story by Ken Micallef  
Photos by Alex Solca



**“Jazz is a feeling and an instinct. And when it’s authentic and not from your ego, your honest instincts will tell you what works for the song.”**

**MD:** You’re one of the few drummers I’ve seen who plays with so much freedom and over-the-barline energy yet has such a seriously deep pocket. What’s the essence of handling those two things simultaneously?

**Oscar:** It’s really important that everything begins with the pocket and the groove. The foundation has to be about groove. When you’re young it might take a while to understand that. The guys in the band can help you out sometimes. But I was also intrigued with playing bebop and jazz. I wanted to understand that authentic feel. That opened me up. I had the concept of groove, but I was fascinated with other types of music, especially jazz, and that world is different from the pocket world. It’s a creative world. To create, you have to have the tools to create. So when I was young I

learned all my rudiments. And I really began vibing with different combinations of stickings from listening to bebop.

**MD:** How did growing up in Chicago influence your drumming?

**Oscar:** When I came up in Chicago, myself and Gerald Heyward and a few other guys, we started gospel chops. We began playing over the barline. I got a feeling of different

time signatures, but bebop really got me, because it’s so free. So I would deal with Elvin Jones every day for a month to understand his concept. I did the same with Tony Williams and Roy Haynes. But I like to be mysterious so that people don’t know everything about my playing.

**MD:** Tell us more about playing freely.

**Oscar:** To be able to play freely around the

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Seaton plays a Yamaha Maple Custom Absolute kit with Terence Blanchard, including a 5.5x14 main snare; a 6.5x14 auxiliary snare; 8x8, 9x10, and 10x12 toms; 14x14 and 16x18 floor toms; and an 18x22 bass drum. His Zildjian cymbals include 15" A Custom Mastersound hi-hats, a 22" Medium Thin Low Sound Lab prototype, 13" A Light auxiliary hi-hats, a 21" K Custom Dark Complex ride, and a 20" A Custom EFX. His Remo heads include Coated Ambassador snare batters and Ambassador snare-sides, Coated Ambassador tom batters and Clear Ambassador bottoms, and a Clear Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter. He plays Vic Firth brushes and 5A sticks and uses an LP Mambo cowbell.

“It’s not the downbeats you play, it’s the in-between-the-notes stuff you *don’t* play that makes it funky.”

groove is just knowing how much space there is between 1, 2, 3, and 4. No matter how you subdivide it, it’s still 1, 2, 3, 4. The downbeat is still 1. So how do you interpret the groove—the most important thing—but still play freely around it? You have to understand the value of 1, 2, 3, and 4. I never compromise the groove. If I let any openness or feel compromise the groove, it’s lost. I can play a groove in any time signature, within the concept of 4/4. It’s not free to me. As long as the 1 is returning, I can come up with concepts within the groove.

**MD:** How did you apply Elvin to your drumming?

**Oscar:** Elvin played a lot of triplets. So I found every way possible to play triplets, which opened my vocabulary. I played triplets around the hi-hat to the bass drum to the snare. But just because I *could* play triplets didn’t mean I *should* play triplets. That doesn’t help the music if you just play something because you can. Even though I understood Elvin’s triplet thing, I still had to know where it made sense to apply it. I did the same thing with Tony Williams, Jack DeJohnette, and Roy Haynes. I tried to

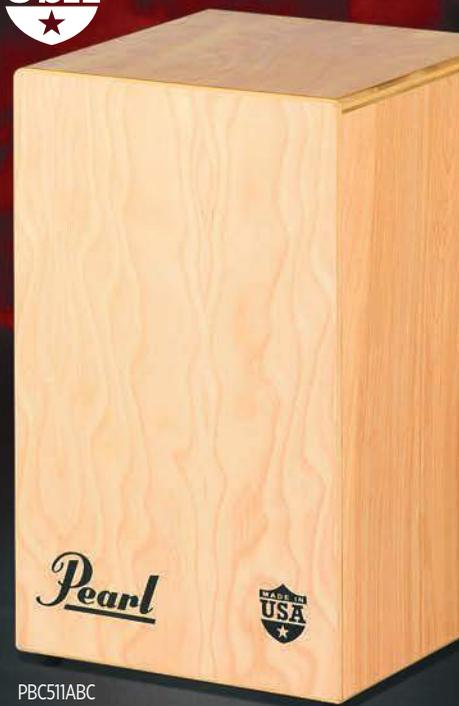


## INFLUENCES

**Miles Davis** Kind of Blue (Jimmy Cobb) /// **Branford Marsalis** Crazy People Music (Jeff “Tain” Watts) /// **Ambrose Akinmusire** When the Heart Emerges Glistening (Justin Brown) /// **Stevie Wonder** Songs in the Key of Life (Stevie Wonder, Raymond Pounds, Greg Brown) /// **Sly and the Family Stone** Fresh (Andy Newmark) /// **D’Angelo** Voodoo (Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson) /// **Donny Hathaway** Live (Fred White) /// **Bill Withers** Live at Carnegie Hall (James Gadson)

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## Oscar Seaton

understand their concept. But the music is the spotlight, not the drummer.

**MD:** You're self-taught. Did you work with a metronome or counting systems?

**Oscar:** That's all I did. I started playing with the original Dr. Boss metronome. I played a gospel gig in my early twenties where I thought I had killed it. Then a guy came up and said I needed to work with a metronome. And I was crushed. So I began practicing day and night with a metronome. I told Teddy Campbell to do the same; he used to come to my house after school when he was thirteen.

My goal was that when I played with it I never heard the metronome. If I can hear it, I'm not on it. I would practice hi-hat, snare, and bass drum with the metronome for hours, until I never heard the metronome. Until I was so locked with it that it became invisible. I'd seen an Omar Hakim video where he talked about stripping your set down to the basics. I did that with a metronome, and it just opened me up. I would practice with it to the point where I would forget it was on. So I told all the other guys who followed my playing to play with a metronome.

**MD:** Did you play more freely over the metronome?

**Oscar:** Years later. The metronome was about everything I played being in time and being even. All about 2 and 4. I didn't start learning to play more freely until 2000.

**MD:** So what went into your freer playing? I hear Omar's bell work, and Manu Katché, Dennis Chambers, and Vinnie Colaiuta in your style.

**Oscar:** I loved Vinnie's phrasing, but I wasn't a Vinnie fanatic. His phrasing on Allan Holdsworth's *Secrets* was too much too soon for me. I enjoyed his concepts more when he really began to groove. But people thought I sounded like Omar, and I loved the way he grooves. He would hit a ride cymbal bell as a fill. His time feel was amazing. And Harvey Mason. I saw him with Herbie Hancock; he did one fill I play to this day. Those guys grooved.

So I would play jazz, play groove, practice rudiments—I had to get all of it. And now most people don't even know who I am.

They don't know my essence, because I do different things.

**MD:** In your videos online it appears that you use a lot of finger technique more than wrists. If true, how did you develop that? I'm wondering if the finger technique enabled the great detail in your playing.

**Oscar:** The older guys I studied use a lot of grace notes. Omar, Harvey, they played tons of grace notes, just to make the groove even more round. You can play a one-shot on a snare and some grace notes underneath it that really make it. It's like a bus that keeps rolling. Their time was impeccable then, but it was more about how their groove felt. Steve Gadd was the same way. He played a lot of grace notes.

**MD:** How do you develop the low dynamic level required of a grace note so it doesn't sound like a marching-band exercise?

**Oscar:** It can't interrupt the groove. The 2 and 4 is still the heartbeat of the groove. After one strike most people just lay the stick on the head, waiting for the next strike. I put the stick on the head and it will bounce anyway. So I began using it in the pocket. It can't be too loud or too dynamic. It has to be underneath, and then it feels so good. George Benson hated drummers that felt like they were “chopping wood,” he would say. He wanted the groove to be round.

**MD:** On some songs on Terence Blanchard's *Breathless*, your beat is broad, like you're intentionally laying behind.

**Oscar:** Definitely. Anytime you do a recording, everything is to a click. But I learned that the more you lay back on the click, the better it will sound. It goes back to practicing to a click. I got this from the older guys. Practice different ways with the click: on top where you can't hear it, then on the backside of it, then on the topline of it. So you understand what songs need. Then you'll understand when guys ask, “Can you play that on top?” There are fine gradations to be on top or slightly behind the beat.

**MD:** How did you learn that?

**Oscar:** I learned to lay back on the groove. I would write on my snare drum: “lay back, relax.” Actually, in the studio, if you're right on the click, you're probably a little ahead.

## RECORDINGS

Yolanda Adams Live in Washington, Save the World /// Ramsey Lewis Dance of the Soul, Between the Keys /// Lee Ritenour Overtime, Smoke 'n' Mirrors, Rhythm Sessions /// Lionel Richie Live in Paris, Encore /// George Benson Guitar Man /// Dianne Reeves When You Know /// Will Downing Euphoria /// Terence Blanchard and the E Collective Breathless /// David Garfield The Retro Jazz Quintet /// Walt Whitman and the Soul Children of Chicago This Is the Day

You can hear it during playback. It's milliseconds' difference. So you have to lay back a little bit, so when you hear it back it's right *there*. The songs on Terence's record were all about pocket and grooving. But I laid back a millisecond, and that gave the songs air between the notes. It's not the downbeats you play, it's the in-between-the-notes stuff you *don't* play that makes it funky.

**MD:** There's a lot of space in the title track of *Breathless*. How do you decide whether to play in that space or just leave it open?

**Oscar:** That's just instinct at this point. You can teach that, but back in the day guys would watch Weckl and Vinnie record, just to understand what they did. You have to put in the time. When Terence gave us those songs, there were no demos; we heard the song and came up with the groove. You know when it feels good to add grace notes or fill the space. It's instinct and experience.

**MD:** As "Everglades" unfolds you play tremendous staggered fills around the kit. It's almost like slow-motion drumming. Is it three over two?

**Oscar:** It's a feeling. What's different with me from some other guys is that I don't look at it as numbers, because I'm from church. I didn't go to music college, and I taught myself how to read music. I don't know the mathematics, and it doesn't matter to me. It's just a feeling that you get. There is so much space in "Everglades," so it wouldn't make sense to play everything on the downbeats, because they're so far apart. I'm doing everything from grace notes, speeding it up, slowing it down—expressing myself.

**MD:** When you first began stretching, did you count it out or sing to yourself?

**Oscar:** All feel. I learned how to count and read music as I went along. To me feeling it is the most honest expression. I learned to play odd times when I was seventeen. And I just felt it. My body can feel how much space I have until the next 1 comes. Your heartbeat will never lie. Everything you do is to your heartbeat, so use that. Now I can count it, but I don't like counting. It's not real to me.

**MD:** "Tom & Jerry" is like a drum-solo track. Tons of great ideas, over-the-barline fills, the Omar bell accents, and what sounds like a snare sample at one point.

**Oscar:** That was called "Oscar's Groove" at first. I played a weird groove pattern and Terence couldn't find the downbeat. It was 4/4, but it felt different. He added a bass line and everything around it, then it opened up to being "Tom & Jerry." Everything is

chasing one feel to the next. It's a short track with a lot of chaos.

**MD:** Can you break down the pattern in "I Ain't Got Nothing but Time"? It sounds like 16th-note triplets within the groove.

**Oscar:** There is so much space there—what would you do? Most people would follow their instincts. You got a long downbeat before the next downbeat. When you talk about people buying a record, you got to keep them interested. When you add some grace notes, it makes the next downbeat really interesting. Jazz is expression. You get the expression from learning, listening...there's nothing new. I learned from other players, who would come up with this great shit at the club. They just felt it. Jazz is a feeling and an instinct. And when it's authentic and not from your ego, your honest instincts will tell you what works for the song.

**MD:** Can you recommend some chops-builders?

**Oscar:** A simple thing I always do...I got it from Simon Phillips. Singles, doubles, and paradiddles before you play a gig or before you do a record. Everything you can play is from those three rudiments.

**MD:** What do you practice now?

**Oscar:** When you're younger you have more time. I would practice seven hours a day. And I would examine what and how the drummers played what they did. Now I'm older and I don't have all that time. Now I have two hours. I practice development. I practice what I'm playing with Terence, and to be more open. I don't want to be the guy who just has a ton of chops. I want people to hear my drumming as thoughtful and tasty. Placement is what I practice now.

We all know what we need to practice. It's where you are now that counts. Don't live in the past. How can you better yourself now? The only way to get better is to know where you are now.

**MD:** What is your goal at this point?

**Oscar:** To be in tune with the universe. Pay attention. It will come. When someone calls with a gig I consult the universe and ask if this is something I should do, if it's my path. When you follow your path, things go easy. Things go the way they're supposed to go. You are following your path. I just want to be in tune.



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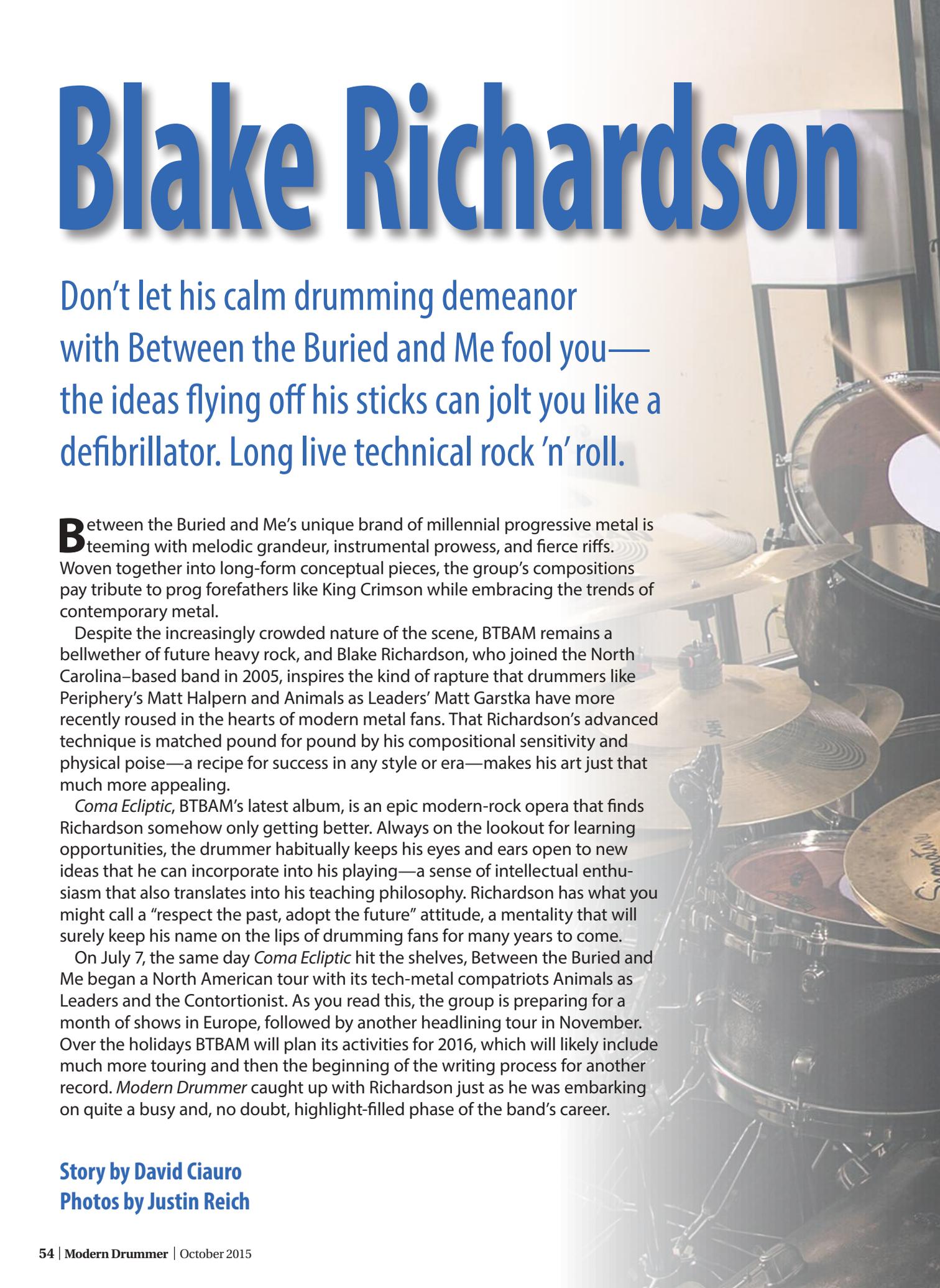
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# Blake Richardson



Don't let his calm drumming demeanor with *Between the Buried and Me* fool you—the ideas flying off his sticks can jolt you like a defibrillator. Long live technical rock 'n' roll.

**B**etween the Buried and Me's unique brand of millennial progressive metal is teeming with melodic grandeur, instrumental prowess, and fierce riffs. Woven together into long-form conceptual pieces, the group's compositions pay tribute to prog forefathers like King Crimson while embracing the trends of contemporary metal.

Despite the increasingly crowded nature of the scene, BTBAM remains a bellwether of future heavy rock, and Blake Richardson, who joined the North Carolina-based band in 2005, inspires the kind of rapture that drummers like Periphery's Matt Halpern and Animals as Leaders' Matt Garstka have more recently roused in the hearts of modern metal fans. That Richardson's advanced technique is matched pound for pound by his compositional sensitivity and physical poise—a recipe for success in any style or era—makes his art just that much more appealing.

*Coma Ecliptic*, BTBAM's latest album, is an epic modern-rock opera that finds Richardson somehow only getting better. Always on the lookout for learning opportunities, the drummer habitually keeps his eyes and ears open to new ideas that he can incorporate into his playing—a sense of intellectual enthusiasm that also translates into his teaching philosophy. Richardson has what you might call a “respect the past, adopt the future” attitude, a mentality that will surely keep his name on the lips of drumming fans for many years to come.

On July 7, the same day *Coma Ecliptic* hit the shelves, *Between the Buried and Me* began a North American tour with its tech-metal compatriots Animals as Leaders and the Contortionist. As you read this, the group is preparing for a month of shows in Europe, followed by another headlining tour in November. Over the holidays BTBAM will plan its activities for 2016, which will likely include much more touring and then the beginning of the writing process for another record. *Modern Drummer* caught up with Richardson just as he was embarking on quite a busy and, no doubt, highlight-filled phase of the band's career.

**Story by David Ciauro**  
**Photos by Justin Reich**



## Relaxology

**MD:** Today's metal drumming is more analytic and complex than it's ever been. It seems even more important, then, to maintain composure. You seem very relaxed when you play.

**Blake:** When it comes to playing relaxed, there's this duality. Part of me realizes that if I'm into playing drums for the long haul, the more relaxed I play, the better my joints are going to feel thirty years from now. Playing tense will wear the body down. But for me it's like you have to turn on a switch. There's moments when I'm playing some laid-back, Pink Floyd-type groove, and then right after that I'm going into some crazy-intense metal section. So I had to train my body to know how to tap into that adrenaline and be able to control the flow of that energy.

**MD:** Is it harder to harness your adrenaline in a live setting than in the studio?

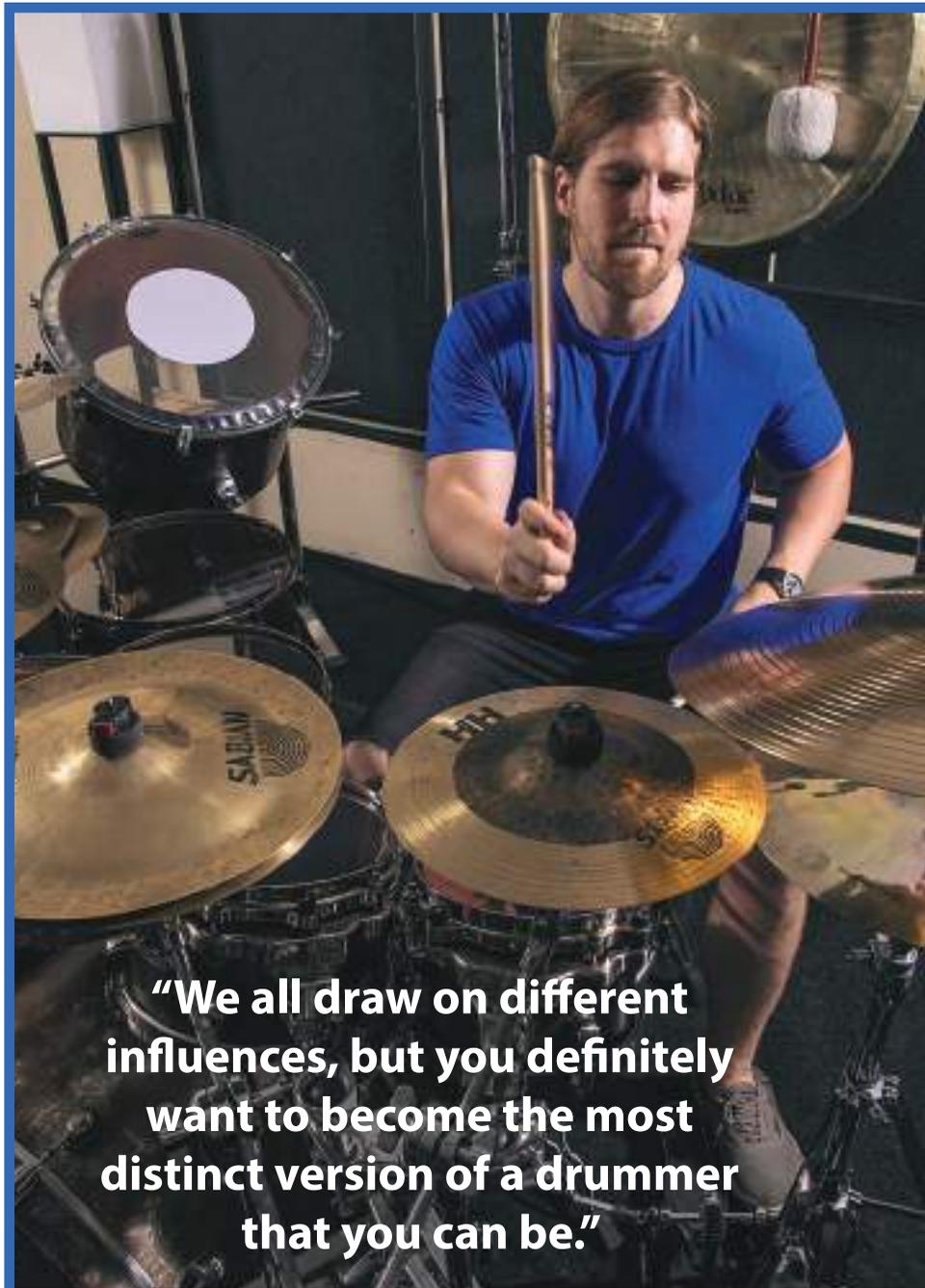
**Blake:** In the studio, across the board, I'm more relaxed when I'm playing, because it's a controlled sound environment—you can hear everything really well, and you don't have to hit as hard as you do in a live setting. In truth, you don't have to hit that hard live either, especially when using in-ears. But there is something that takes over when you play live, and the adrenaline does make you hit a bit harder. What's good about practicing relaxed is that you're not only developing good technique, you're developing [muscle memory] so your body knows how to properly execute the technique.

## Prog of Future Past

**MD:** In the '80s, drummers like Charlie Benante, Dave Lombardo, Gene Hoglan, and Pete Sandoval were known for their speed and technique. Today, players like George Kollias seem to be breaking barriers on a daily basis. Is this at least partially the result of living in the digital age?

**Blake:** Yeah, totally. There is just a wealth of information out there on drumming technique alone. You can find old videos on Moeller technique that were made decades ago, but I didn't have access to that sort of stuff when I was eleven years old and just playing drums for the first time. Now kids starting out have access to an incredible wealth of information right off the bat. They don't have to figure it out for themselves; it's all right there for them.

It's definitely interesting, and I don't know if it's a positive or negative thing, but what I do know is that I can't relate to it, because I didn't have access to it when I was starting out. I just put a stick in my hand and started playing. What you were



**“We all draw on different influences, but you definitely want to become the most distinct version of a drummer that you can be.”**

saying about Charlie Benante and Dave Lombardo...they just went for it! They just hit hard and played as fast as they could. People like George Kollias, he figured out the technique to comfortably play

super-fast for prolonged periods of time.

**MD:** Do you feel that the abundance of information can actually hinder younger drummers from developing an identity, that there's more time spent aping other players

## Tools of the Trade

Richardson plays a Tama Starclassic Bubinga kit with 6x8, 6.5x10, and 7x12 toms; 14x14 and 14x16 floor toms; a 14x20 gong drum; and a 14x22 bass drum, with a 6x14 Starphonic brass snare. His Sabian cymbals include 14" HHX X-Celerator hi-hats, an 8" HHX Evolution splash, a 10" HH Duo splash, a 12" Max Stax China Kang on top of a 12" AAX O-Zone splash, a 14" HHX Evolution China on top of an 18" HHX Power crash, an 18" AA Metal-X crash, a 20" AAX X-Plosion crash, a 20" HH Rock ride, and a 19" AA Holy China. He plays a Tama Iron Cobra double pedal and Vic Firth 3A wood-tip sticks, and his Remo heads include a Coated P77 snare batter, Clear Emperor tom batters, and a Clear Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter.

than developing a unique personality on the instrument?

**Blake:** Yeah, I definitely think that. When you have so many influences to pull from, it can distract you from developing your own personality as a drummer. We all draw on different influences, but you definitely want to become the most distinct version of a drummer that you can be.

Nobody should want to be a carbon copy of another drummer. Growing up, I had a VHS tape compilation of three drummers playing solos—Bobby Rock, Simon Phillips, and Dennis Chambers. Those three dudes are completely different, but as far as drum solos, that's what I drew from. For me, just those three styles were overwhelming in a way, because they were so different.

**MD:** What types of drummers have you been listening to lately for inspiration?

**Blake:** I don't really listen to a whole lot of metal these days. A lot of what I listen to isn't in the realm of what we play. I like to watch the gospel-chops dudes, the jazz cats, Mark Guiliana, Jojo Mayer, Russ Miller, Chris Coleman...all these guys would just *kill it* in a metal band. If Tony Royster Jr. got up with a metal band, he'd be the sickest metal drummer ever!

#### How to Teach

**MD:** In addition to playing with BTBAM, you also teach. How do you juggle your

hectic schedule?

**Blake:** Teaching is pretty small scale [for me]. I have a few kids that I work with while I'm at home. I don't keep anything too regularly scheduled, because I do often have to leave for tour. I'm lucky that the students I have are cool with the fact that I have to leave town, and we just pick up when I get back.

**MD:** Do you teach while on tour?

**Blake:** I don't really do lessons on tour, although it's been highly requested. I know it's convenient for kids that can't travel to North Carolina for lessons, but on tour I'm very hands-on with setting up my kit and the production aspects, so there's not a ton of downtime. Once that load gets a little lighter, I might toy with the idea of doing a few lessons a day while on the road. It's kind of hard to do that, though, because what can you really teach someone in thirty minutes?

I've asked advice from other drummers that give lessons while on tour, and they say the same thing. I don't feel like I'm doing anyone justice by just teaching them a lick or answering questions about my drum parts; I don't feel I can truly *teach* them something that way. However, a Q&A-type lesson could be cool. If Bozzio had come through my town when I was a kid, and I could have sat down with him and asked questions and maybe got to play on his kit,



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**PROMARK**  
BY D'ADDARIO

that would have been awesome! You have to put yourself in the mindset of a fan, I guess.

**MD:** In those instances, do you think that focusing on a philosophy or approach as opposed to a technique may have more of a lasting impression?

**Blake:** Yeah, exactly. You can decipher a lick to a certain extent just by listening to it, and at the end of the day, if you're playing what I'm playing and it sounds the same, it doesn't really matter if you're playing it exactly the same way as I do. I want to get a feel for how a kid plays, and I think it's difficult to help someone develop as a player in a one-time brief lesson. I'd rather give them something to strive for as drummer.

### Obeying Traffic Signals

**MD:** When the writing cycle begins for a BTBAM record, how do you shift your focus from the techniques you're practicing into songwriting mode?

**Blake:** I approach a section or a riff from the mindset of, *This song reminds me of Queen, so what would Roger Taylor do? Or This riff sounds like King Crimson, so what would Bill Bruford do in this situation?* But I make my

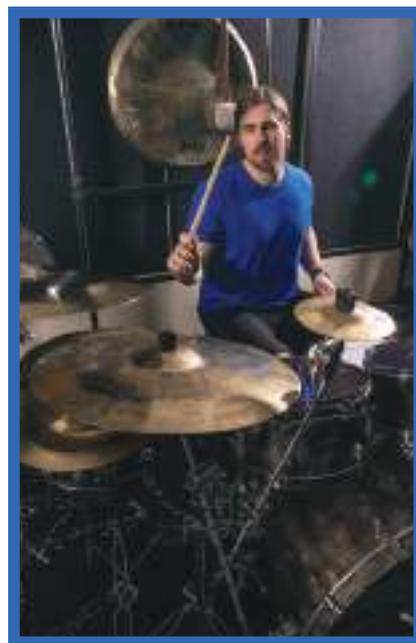
own version of that. If I feel a part requires me to lay back, I lay back; if I feel it could benefit from something flashy, I'll go for it.

**MD:** Even at their most complex, your parts always complement the music. On the song "Option Oblivion" from *Coma Ecliptic*, from around 1:00 to 1:30 you play busily, but in a way that you're not stepping on the vocals.

**Blake:** You have to find that balance where you're having fun while staying in your lane. You're the drummer; your job is to hold down the beat. For that section I knew that although there were vocals and guitars present, what they're doing is relatively simple, so in a way they're holding down the rhythm and I'm halfway holding a backbeat while also playing fills.

**MD:** As a progressive metal band, have you ever written as complexly as possible to feature the amount of technique you possess? Or do you find yourselves trying not to stray so far into the technical stratosphere that it alienates your audience?

**Blake:** As we've gotten older and progressed as a band, we're approaching songwriting more and more from a compositional standpoint. We want everything to flow naturally and make



sense. If you listen to some of our older material, there were constant key changes and meter changes, just for the sake of fitting a cool section in. We weren't mindful of meter, key, or anything—it was all about cramming as much chaos as possible into one song. I still like that kind of stuff and it's fun to listen to, but as we've progressed as a band we're definitely trying to write good songs—albeit they're still a little long for my taste. [laughs] But we're trying to make one cohesive statement as opposed to five guys trying to play respective solos.

**MD:** Was the concept for this record conceived before the material was written?

**Blake:** I think this one's a little more concept-based lyrically. The record is somewhat musically conceptual; there are a couple themes that are reprised throughout the record. About midway through the writing process, [vocalist/keyboardist] Tommy [Rogers] was trying to find some lyrical inspiration, and he came up with a cool idea about a guy that's stuck in a coma and going through his past lives.

**MD:** Since it's a concept record, are you planning to play the entire album front to back on tour?

**Blake:** We might do that—I feel that we're somewhat obligated to. [laughs] I think we'll play bits from the new record during these first couple tours, and then maybe at some of the later shows we'll start playing the whole thing through, just to knock it out of the park.

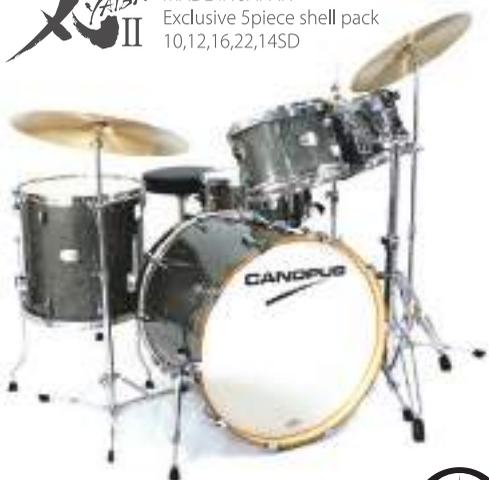
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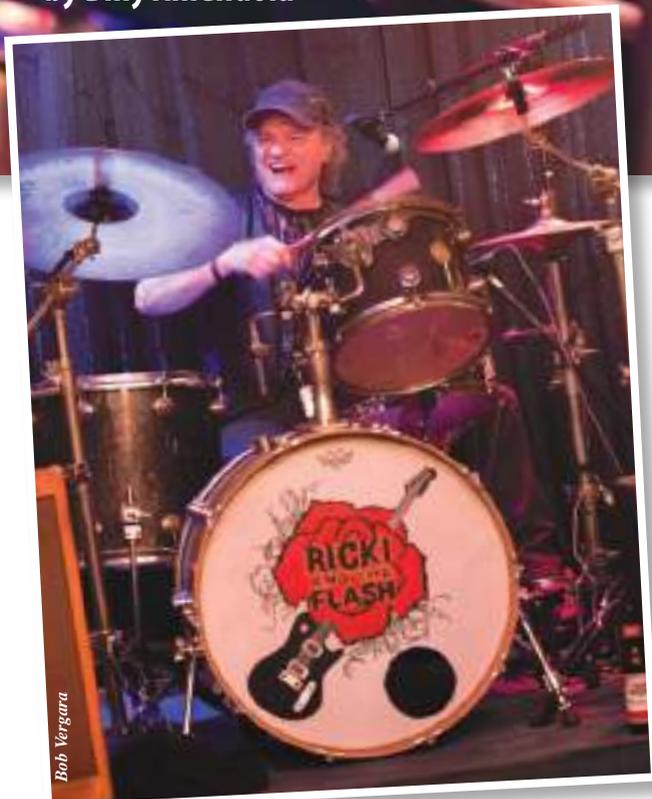


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# Joe Vitale

For nearly half a century, his drumming has been heard in the music of rock icons like Joe Walsh, Rick Derringer, Dan Fogelberg, Peter Frampton, John Entwistle, Zakk Wylde, and Crosby, Stills & Nash. But his talents extend well beyond the drumset, and even onto the silver screen.

by Billy Amendola



**T**he title track of Joe Vitale's 2008 solo album, *Speaking in Drums*, is an explosion of rhythm and full-set fills that perfectly communicates the joy and excitement Vitale has felt deep in his bones ever since he began playing the instrument at six years old. Vitale has had no trouble relaying that feeling to millions of people since the early '70s, when he began appearing on records and on stage with legends like Joe Walsh and Crosby, Stills & Nash.

As a kid, Vitale played in a polka band with his brother and father—until he was fourteen, when, like so many others who witnessed the Beatles for the first time on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, he left to pursue his rock 'n' roll dreams. "My dad was not happy about that decision at all," Vitale recalls today.

The elder Vitale might not have gotten the rock, but he did prepare his son well for a career in music. "My dad insisted that I learn piano," Joe says. "It was some of the best advice I ever received. I learned so much about melody and arrangement, which helped my songwriting." It's a knowledge base that still serves him well today, fifty years later.

Joseph Anthony Vitale was born in Canton, Ohio, in 1949. In 1965, while still in high school, he formed a band called the Echoes. That group, renamed the supposedly more “British” (and therefore hip-sounding) Chylds, got a deal with Warner Bros. and did well regionally, even reaching the *Billboard* charts with the single “Psychedelic Soul.”

In 1971 Vitale was offered a national tour with Ted Nugent and the Amboy Dukes, who’d hit big a few years earlier with the heavy-psych cut “Journey to the Center of the Mind.” Soon after, Vitale got a call from his former Kent State University classmate Joe Walsh to join the singer/guitarist’s band, Barnstorm, which recorded two albums before breaking up in 1974. Vitale has remained a collaborator and a friend of Walsh’s to this day, however, appearing with him live and on record, and alongside him in concert with the Eagles, playing double drums with Don Henley.

It’s not just Vitale’s drumming skills that Walsh and others have relied on for years. An accomplished songwriter and

multi-instrumentalist, Joe cowrote the 1973 Walsh hit “Rocky Mountain Way” as well as the Eagles’ “Pretty Maids in a Row,” from the blockbuster 1978 album *Hotel California*. In fact, Vitale’s full artistic voice has been on display since the mid-’70s, when the drummer began releasing solo albums like *Roller Coaster Weekend* and *Plantation Harbor*, which include contributions by famous friends like Walsh, Rick Derringer, Stephen Stills, and Graham Nash.

“You don’t have to be a virtuoso on another instrument,” Vitale says, “but the value of [having a working knowledge] is unmeasurable. As a drummer, if you can play a few riffs on a guitar or piano, or even sing out front, you learn what it’s like to play with a drummer. If the drummer plays a weird fill, making it hard to find 1, you learn not to do that. Likewise, when he drives the tune and plays a fill that leads you perfectly into the next section, it shows you exactly why that drummer has the gig. The same applies to songwriting. When I start to write a song, I always think of the groove first. What tempo,

feel, style, and energy do I want the song to have? Many songwriters will already know this and express it in the studio or rehearsal. There are also cats that are open to ideas and input—in these situations, by all means, show them what you got.”

In 2008 Vitale released his autobiography, *Backstage Pass*, cowritten by his wife of forty-two years, Susie. That same year he produced his son Joe Jr.’s debut album, *Dancing With Shadows*. Projects like this suggest that there are few creative challenges that Vitale won’t take. And his willingness to stretch continues today; as you read this, you can see him on the big screen in the Hollywood feature film *Ricki and the Flash*, which stars such heavyweight actors as Meryl Streep and Kevin Kline, as well as another gentleman who’s at home in front of the camera, Rick Springfield. In this exclusive interview, Vitale shares his personal account of this unusual gig—but first we ask him about what went into many of the classic recordings he’s had a hand in shaping.

### “Rocky Mountain Way” by Joe Walsh

This track had such a deep groove that you just had to sit back and let it flow. All the fills I played had to maintain both the energy and the pocket. It would have been easy to get crazy and hit a bunch of stuff, but the magic of the song was the backbeat just being lazy enough but not losing the support of the massive guitars that Joe had played. Really there’s only one way to play this song. It’s not just a slow shuffle, it’s a dotted pattern on the foot with 6/8 trips on the hat. There’s your pocket! I’m a cowriter on this song and very proud that it’s become such a classic radio hit. After all these years I still get excited when I hear that signature guitar intro and then I bring the band in.



### “Life’s Been Good” by Joe Walsh

Another Joe Walsh classic. This was a drummer’s dream track and also quite challenging. Just the fact that the drums start on 2 right out of the gate is so different. You can start on 1 with your foot, but it’s just cooler not to. And when the guitar riff comes in, the magic begins! That song had so many different grooves. Those albums had a lot of thought and creativity but also spontaneous magic. I can’t begin to tell you how exciting it is to hit that first snare [live] and see the reaction from the crowd. They know immediately what song you’re playing.



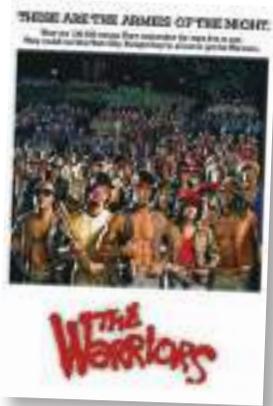
### “Southern Cross” by Crosby, Stills & Nash

I recorded many songs with CSN. The common thread with these guys, especially with Stills, is “less is more.” We captured the perfect pocket on this one. Smooth, flowing groove and incredible vocals. I get so happy every time this comes on the radio. The late, great percussionist Joe Lala, bassist George “Chocolate” Perry, and I laid down a beautiful feel as the trio sang their hearts out. On this track I played a 1967 Ludwig Hollywood kit with a 6.5” Black Beauty snare, the same one I played on “Rocky Mountain Way.”



### “In the City” by Joe Walsh

We recorded this song for the movie *The Warriors*. It’s become one of Joe’s classic live tunes. It’s tons of fun to play—huge guitars, big pushes, and a slow-grind pocket. The original recording for the film had two drummers, the great Russ Kunkel and me. We had done a lot of work together, and Walsh liked how we played as a team. The Eagles liked the song enough to rerecord it, and their version is awesome as well. Don Henley nails the feel that Russ and I originally laid down.



## “Too Late the Hero” by John Entwistle

This is the title track from the late John “the Ox” Entwistle’s 1981 solo album. What a joy it was to record with such an amazing artist. We cut this in London. I played drums, piano, and flute on it. John invited any and all creative ideas, so bringing in the flute parts was an on-the-spot suggestion. That mindset makes for great records. I was honored that such a fabulous musician as John would give me so much space to try things. He gave as much respect as he received. I love this cut and the memory of recording it.



snare with the other hand. We all thought we were just running it down, but the tape machines were rolling. At the end of the song Neil says, “Great!” And that was it—loose, funky...beautiful. It felt amazing. Neil and Stephen at their best. “Long May You Run” became the title track of the album and the only hit on it.



## “Long May You Run” by the Stills-Young Band

We were in Florida’s Criteria Recording Studios in 1976 recording the Stills-Young album, and Neil Young starts playing this song. The entire band was set up in the same room—leakage, but who cares; we grooved hard being so close to each other. Feel is so important. I remember I was only holding one stick and was tweaking my

## Eagles Live

I was part of the Eagles’ touring band when we recorded this album. I was a multi-instrumentalist on the tour—I played some drums, keys, percussion, and flute. The reason I love this record so much is that it was recorded live, with no fixes, repairs, or overdubs from anyone. Bravo, Eagles!



# Rocking “Ricki and the Flash”

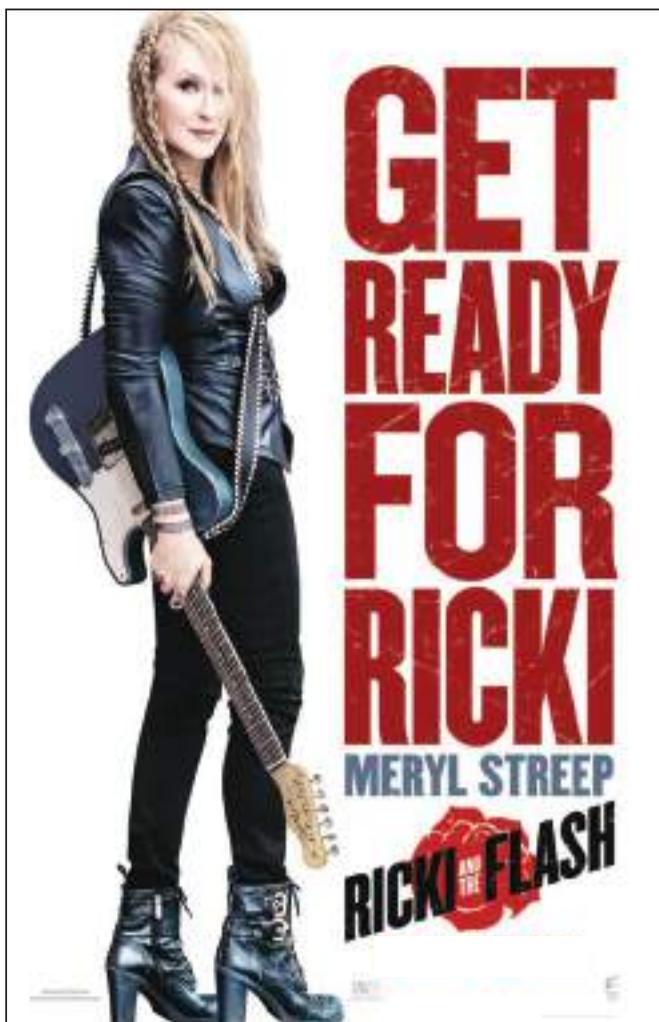
**Joe Vitale has experienced some spectacular rock ‘n’ roll highs in his time. But creating a band out of thin air—with one of cinema’s true legends, no less—was something else altogether.**

**T**he thing I hate the most about the music business is that you never know what’s happening next. And the thing I love the most about the music business is that you never know what’s happening next! There’s certainly security in a routine, but it’s completely dwarfed by the raw excitement of an unexpected late-night phone call or email.

It was July 2014, and I was woodshedding tunes, preparing for the Rock & Roll Fantasy Camp—which I’m a counselor at when my schedule allows—and I get a call from Rick Rosas. I had worked with Rick the Bass Player, as we all knew him, many times, touring with Joe Walsh and Buffalo Springfield. Rick said a film director by the name of Jonathan Demme was going to contact me. I knew that Demme was an iconic director, and Rick said it was about a movie with Meryl Streep. *WHAT?* Rick assured me that it was true—he’d worked with Jonathan before on a Neil Young documentary and suggested using me.

Two days later the phone rings. My caller ID said “unknown,” so I didn’t know who it was. “Hi, this is Jonathan Demme, and I’m looking for an Italian drummer named Joe.” I laughed and said, “I know one!” What I didn’t know was that the writer of the film, Diablo Cody [*Juno*, *Young Adult*], had already written into the script that the drummer was an Italian guy named Joe! Jonathan went on to tell me about the film and said he wanted to meet with me in New York.

So I fly to New York and go to Telsey & Company casting. This is *all* new to me—casting? I could see Jonathan Demme through the slightly opened casting-room door. This is a room where dreams come true or...well...you know. I wasn’t



nervous—I didn't have to read lines or even play the drums—but still, this was heavy. I was asked to come in, and Jonathan gave me a big hug like a good friend would. We sat and talked for about half an hour about music, artists, and live performances. Jonathan said the band was going to play live with no overdubs and no fixes. I said, "Great—we can do that." We shared our musical likes and heroes and discovered that we love a lot of the same music. Then we said our goodbyes and I was off to the airport. At this point I really didn't know where this was going, but it was an honor just to chat with such a wonderfully brilliant director as Jonathan.

A few days later, while I was at home getting ready for a Las Vegas trip to the Fantasy Camp, I get an email from casting, saying, "We'd like to offer you the part." Now I'm getting nervous—not about the drumming, but now I have speaking lines. I'm not an actor, but fortunately what was written in the script was drum and music talk, all the stuff we chat about every day anyway. So I was a bit relieved. I was asked to come back to New York for a reading session, and the following week I was back in that same casting room, where there was now a huge table set up with our names at each setting.

I go in and look for my seat. I'm reading the names, and there's Meryl Streep, Kevin Kline, Rick Springfield, Diablo Cody, producers Gary Goetzman and Marc Platt, execs from Sony/TriStar.... At this point I'm feeling so excited, honored, and humbled to be part of this—and a bit nervous again!

Now we're all in the room, saying hi to each other and shaking hands, and I'm introduced to our keyboard player, the great Bernie Worrell of Parliament Funkadelic. I'm on cloud nine.

Next Jonathan Demme comes in, and what a great vibe he brings. He was calm,

collected, totally focused, totally in charge, and totally loved. "Hi, everyone, let's get started." So we all open to page one of the *Ricki and the Flash* script and begin the reading.

It was quite an experience. I'd never in my life imagined sitting in this room, with these people, doing *this*. We finished, and everyone applauded and said goodbye and see you next month for band rehearsals. I go to the airport, get on the plane, have a private laugh, and tell myself, *Okay, let's do this!*

After a few days I received a list of potential songs that they had in mind. I was familiar with all of them. The premise was that we were to be a cover band in a bar, playing rock 'n' roll tunes. The song choices were good and quite diverse—everything from Tom Petty to Lady Gaga. Production sent us MP3s, so we all downloaded them and started woodshedding. We were going to stick with the original arrangements but make them our own as well. This was really fun.

To prepare for this new adventure I did what I always do, which is to make a CD,

## Tools of the Trade

Vitale plays a DW Collector's series maple kit in black ice finish, featuring 12" and 14" toms, 16" and 18" floor toms, and a 22" bass drum, plus a 5.5" chrome or brass snare. His Sabian cymbals include 14" AA hi-hats; 16", 18", 19", and 20" Medium Thin crashes; and a 21" Raw Bell ride. His heads include a Remo Coated Powerstroke 3 snare batter, Remo Coated Ambassador tom batters, and an Evans EQ4 Clear bass drum batter. He plays Vic Firth 5B nylon-tip sticks with Vic Grip.

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stick it in my player next to my practice kit, and get started. Even though I knew most of the tunes already, I wrote out charts. It's a great way to learn a song. You can do it in any form that you're comfortable with, then, at rehearsal, if there are any changes, you can just edit your original copy. And as you write a chart, you're actually learning the song before you're even playing it.

The tunes were straight-ahead rock and soul grooves. I worked real hard with all the tunes, until I felt good about the pocket and the arrangements. The band was to be

a typical club band: Meryl and Rick on guitar and vocals, Rick Rosas on bass, Bernie Worrell on keys, and me on drums and vocals. I figured a five-piece kit would do the job, although per producer Gary Goetzman's suggestion I made it a tight little four-piece, which worked great. So I put together my DW black ice kit, and off we went. Of course I brought an array of snares and cymbals. This was like a normal gig, but then again, *not*—I'm drumming in a film behind Meryl Streep!

We were all excited when we arrived in

New York for rehearsal. What a great moment it is when you all plug in for the first time, start a jam, and it sounds great right off the bat. It's the type of confidence you long for in any band. Rick and I had worked together and had been friends for so many years, so we fell right into a great pocket. And though I'd never played with Rick or Bernie or, of course, Meryl, we immediately sounded like a band that had been playing together for a long time. I knew this was going to be great.

Gary Goetzman started us off with Tom Petty's "American Girl," which has a fun double-time drum groove. Meryl killed it, the band was smoking, and it seemed like a normal club-band rehearsal. It was relieving to be in that setting, because for us musicians it didn't seem like a movie set with props, just a bar with band gear, like a regular gig. It was really cool to be that comfortable on such a high-profile project. None of us took it lightly, though—we knew how important it was to be as good as we could be, but to also have fun and just do what we do. It was nice to see Meryl rocking out like the best of them and killing it every time. This went on for two weeks. We were ready for "action"!

We moved over to the set and started filming. We filmed every day with weekends off for about a month, and it just got better and better. The band got loose and funky, and we were all having a great time. The film crew and extras became our "loyal fans," and I think we made it fun for everyone to come to work each day. I couldn't have been more blessed—incredible artists, amazing director, brilliant producers...the best of the best.

When the last day of filming came, it was hard to say goodbye. All these wonderfully talented people had become my new friends, and I knew I would really miss them. I would also miss coming to work each day, because Jonathan Demme and company made it such a pleasure. What a great team.

Sadly, very shortly after we finished filming, Rick Rosas passed away. It was such a shock to the entire music community and to this wonderful film company. We'll all miss you, Rick. I'm honored to have shared your final stage. RIP.

It was an amazing experience to be a part of this film. I learned so much about the other side of the big screen. An enormous amount of work and heartfelt effort goes into making a film. The next time I go to the movies, I'll sit there with my popcorn and appreciate every frame that goes by.



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# Ben Thatcher

by Ken Micallef

**Royal Blood's percussive half avoids excess at all costs—and the payoff has been handsome indeed.**

Who said the blues is dead? British power-rock duo Royal Blood has earned success on both sides of the Atlantic with its blues-drenched thunder grooves, with a bass-and-drums attack so mercilessly heavy that rock god Jimmy Page told the British magazine *NME*, "Absolutely riveting. They play with the spirit of the things that have preceded them, but you can hear they're going to take rock into a new realm—if they're not already doing that. It's music of tremendous quality."

Comprising bassist/singer Mike Kerr and twenty-seven-year-old drummer Ben Thatcher—that's right, no guitar—Royal Blood performs with a deadly lead-footed interplay that draws on Led Zeppelin as often as Queens of the Stone Age. On the band's self-titled debut album, head-bashers like opening track "Out of the Black," bluesy monsters "Come on Over" and "Figure It Out," the tom-thudding driver "You Can Be So Cruel," and the

skull-submersing "Ten Tonne Skeleton" reassert rock music as a potent force thankfully not resigned to the dustbin of history.

Thatcher cites John Bonham, Dave Grohl, Chad Smith, Chris Dave, John Blackwell, and Jon Theodore as influences. Drumming since age six, he's largely self-taught, with long bouts of playing to the Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* cementing his love for pummeling a beat into submission. Thatcher also studied the twenty-six rudiments and graduated from Chichester College in West Sussex, England, where he majored in music. "A diploma in music is about as useful as a book with no pages," Thatcher laughs. "It doesn't mean you will get a job in music, necessarily." Still, it seems not to have hurt; at press time *Royal Blood* was in the top ten of *Billboard's* albums chart and the duo was looking forward to Grohl recovering from a severe onstage fall in time for the duo's scheduled opening spot on the Foo Fighters' upcoming U.S. tour.

**MD:** On "Out of the Black," you and Mike Kerr are in lockstep. It's like one musician with five arms. The unison riffs are so tight. What's essential to being rhythmically as one when performing as a duo?

**Ben:** Mike and I have been playing together for ten years now. We know what each other will play before we play it. Just through a lot of rehearsing you naturally become better at playing together.

**MD:** Your sound is huge, but you're playing smaller-than-average drums. An 8x12 mounted tom is unusual for rock drumming. Conventional wisdom might dictate that bigger drums equals bigger sound.

**Ben:** For the album we recorded the drums first without any cymbals. That helped us achieve those big, fat rounded

tones. We could turn the drums up in the mix without the cymbal spillage you would normally get when recording drums and cymbals together.

**MD:** Maybe that accounts for a couple songs that are very tom-driven and feature a thick, powerful groove.

**Ben:** Mike noticed that Dave Grohl had recorded his drums that way with Queens of the Stone Age. But you really have to know what you'll be playing and rehearse your parts. When recording the cymbals, you have to play the exact same thing that you did in the drum takes. So I played the songs twice through, once hitting all the drums and having sponges in place of the cymbals, and then once with the cymbals but with cushions replacing the drums.

Alex Solica



**Q:** "Are you playing more, or less, in a duo setting?"

**A:** "I think there's room to play more, but I don't. I have plenty of freedom, but I still play to the song. Songwriting is the point, not a lot of drumming."

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## Ben's Setup

**Drums:** Gretsch Renown maple  
**A.** 7x13 Ludwig Black Magic snare  
**B.** 7x14 Morgan Davies Bespoke snare  
**C.** 8x12 tom  
**D.** 16x16 floor tom  
**E.** 16x22 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Zildjian  
**1.** 15" hi-hats (A New Beat top and K Light bottom)  
**2.** 19" K Dark Thin crash  
**3.** 23" A Sweet ride  
**4.** 20" K crash/ride

**Heads:** Evans G2 Coated snare and tom batters, EC Resonant tom bottoms, and EMAD2 Clear bass drum batter

**Percussion:** LP Stealth Jam Block (not shown) and mounted black Cyclops tambourine with nickel jingles, Meinl Professional series hi-hat tambourine

**Hardware:** Gibraltar stands, DW 9000 series bass drum pedal and hi-hat stand

**Sticks:** Promark TX5BW

**MD:** That sounds like a maddening process.

**Ben:** It was a good experiment, and it gave us a great drum sound. When you're playing the cymbals without the drums it's really a strange sensation. It feels disjointed when you're actually playing it, but when you hear it back in the control room everything comes to life.

**MD:** Your drum parts sound composed.

**Ben:** I am very OCD with drum parts. I look at them as if they're

guitar riffs with different parts—holding back at some points and taking the forefront at others.

**MD:** How does drumming in a two-man band differ from playing in a typical four-piece?

**Ben:** Though Mike and I have been together for ten years, Royal Blood is only two years old. Before then we were in a ten-piece wedding band playing indie covers like Foo Fighters as well as ABBA and Madonna songs. So when it came to writing for a two-piece, it was freeing. We only had each other to listen to. We could each do our thing and the other would follow.

**MD:** Are you playing more, or less, in a duo setting?

**Ben:** I think there's room to play more, but I don't. I have plenty of freedom, but I still play to the song. I didn't want to have it as this huge drum album. Songwriting is the point, not a lot of drumming. There's a lot more space to be creative, but we always play as a team. You've got to make the best sound you can. And we don't discuss our parts or songwriting more—we just play. We know very quickly if something is not working.

**MD:** You play a larger-than-average ride cymbal, but the other cymbals are fairly standard dimensions.

**Ben:** I like bigger cymbals because they're louder, but you need a little range. These cymbals work well in the music we play.

**MD:** In "Better Strangers" it sounds like you're playing behind the beat. Is that conscious?

**Ben:** Definitely. I really like the drum sound there. And I wanted it to sound quite laid back and lazy.

**MD:** Can any drummer play in a duo and make it work?

**Ben:** Probably not. Some drummers rely on a bass groove, where I obviously don't. Mike plays the bass more like a guitar. I can relate to it as a guitar or a bass.

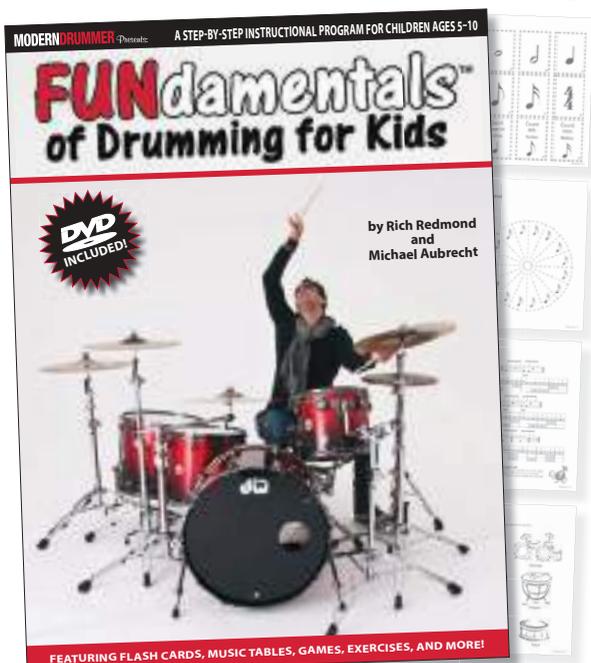
**MD:** How has Royal Blood achieved success at a time when pop music and hip-hop rule radio?

**Ben:** We've found a space in time where we can bring something to the table that is quite refreshing to people, especially in the U.K. The radio here plays a lot of pop music, but we've come on the scene as well, which is an amazing opportunity for us to play rock music in more of a commercial sense.

**MD:** What's your biggest challenge as a drummer?

**Ben:** I don't find anything too challenging. I enjoy drumming and I like pushing myself to do different things. It's all about enjoying the shows and seeing people go crazy when we perform these songs.

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# Necessary Ruffness

## Make Your Grooves Percolate With Subtle Doubles

by Rich Redmond

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

The ruff is an essential rudiment that's directly related to the double-stroke roll, or buzz roll. The ruff can be played open, as we have it here, with both notes clearly articulated, or closed, which utilizes a buzz stroke before the primary note. Both techniques allow you to color the music by adding more subdivision, aka percolation, to the groove or fill.

Start by playing a simple beat and sprinkling in a few ruffs in strategic parts of the bar. By adding bass drum variations and open hi-hat notes, you can create a unique dialogue among the limbs.

The ruff can also be executed as part of a sextuplet (16th-note triplet) subdivision. That gives you yet another option for "ruffing up" any groove. I'm a huge fan of having a massive cracking backbeat with simmering ruffs placed in delightful spots between the accents. It makes for a groove that has swagger, earthiness, and forward motion. Have fun!

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

L L L L L L

8

9

10

11

12

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

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









# The Flexible Five

## Exploring the Five-Stroke Roll on the Drumset

by Mike Johnston

**MUSIC KEY**

H.H.	×	
T.T.	●	
S.D.	●	×
F.T.	●	×
B.D.	●	
H.H.	×	
w/foot		Rim
		Click

One of the most common questions I get from students is about applying rudiments on the kit. They want to know how to use these combinations of notes that they've put so much time into, and how to create something interesting with them instead of just playing them on a rubber pad—and I don't blame them.

One mistake that's often made when applying a rudiment to the drumset is thinking that it has to be played in the exact same way you were playing it on the practice pad. Yes, in the beginning you'll want to transfer the rudiment verbatim from pad to kit. But after you become comfortable with it, you need to go deeper. Explore new sounds and textures. Allow the rudiment to become an inspiration for creativity rather than a set-in-stone rule that can't be broken.

In this lesson we start with one of my all-time favorite rudiments, the five-stroke roll. We'll use it in a groove with its normal sticking, and we'll play it on one surface, the way you would on a practice pad. Then we'll start to change it up by moving the sticking to different surfaces, and we'll even change the sticking. I know—technically speaking, when you change the sticking, it's no longer a pure five-stroke roll. But who cares? This is art! Let the five-stroke roll be an inspiration to create something new, and don't let it box you into a situation that doesn't allow for growth. Have fun with it!

Let's begin by playing a five-stroke roll on the hi-hat, starting on the "&" of beat 2.

1

R R L L R

Now let's try a different orchestration by starting the roll on the snare and finishing on the hi-hat.

2

R R L L R

Once you have the sound of the five-stroke roll embedded in your body, explore alternative stickings and orchestrations that achieve the same effect. The next example is based on the inverted five-stroke roll.

3

R L L R R

Let's add some spice by dropping a kick drum on the last 32nd note of the roll.

4

R L L R R

Here's a variation that brings in the hi-hat foot and a rimclick to create a new texture.

5

R R L R

Finally, here are two examples that create a pseudo double bass effect. The five-stroke variations are moved to the "&" of beat 3 as well.

6

R R R

7

R R L

Mike Johnston runs the educational website [mikeslessons.com](http://mikeslessons.com), where he offers prerecorded videos as well as real-time online lessons. He also hosts weeklong drum camps at the [mikeslessons.com](http://mikeslessons.com) facility each year.

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

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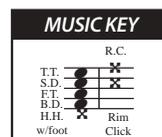
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# Swing Style 101

## Part 2: The Other Half

by Justin Varnes



One of the main reasons why it can be so hard to make jazz sound and feel right is that here the basic time-keeping elements of the drumset are the opposite from most other styles of music. In rock, hip-hop, country, and pop, we rely on the bass drum and snare to provide the pulse. We often don't even use the hi-hat foot to do anything but hold the cymbals closed. That creates balance and dynamic issues when all of a sudden the left foot and right hand (our "other half") get called into action in jazz. Couple that with the snare hand and bass drum foot needing to play a more subordinate role, and it can feel even more awkward to play a swing beat after decades of favoring kick/snare-heavy grooves.

So how do we train our limbs to switch roles? Here's an exercise to gain more control over your limbs so that you can keep your balance while adjusting the emphasis on each limb according to the style you're playing. It's a variation of an exercise Jojo Mayer taught me. In this case we're going to play a basic jazz groove that uses all four limbs, but the concept can be applied to *any* pattern.

Play the following groove with a metronome and start at a medium volume. Slowly raise the volume of all four limbs until you're playing as loud as you can. (Note: Be mindful not to get so loud that the groove suffers or the sound of the instrument is compromised.) Now slowly lower the volume of all four limbs until you're playing as softly as you can. Finally, slowly raise one limb at a time, all the way up to as loud as you can play, and then bring it all the way back down without the other three limbs changing dynamics. Play the 8th notes straight or with a swing feel.



Now let's practice the snare/bass drum comping figures from part one of this article series, but with some specific dynamics to adhere to. Play the ride cymbal loud (*forte*), the hi-hat moderately loud (*mezzo forte*), and the snare and bass drum moderately soft (*mezzo piano*).



Experiment with different snare/bass drum orchestrations of the following figures using the same dynamics as before (ride = *f*, hi-hat = *mf*, snare and bass drum = *mp*).

Once you get the hang of the new dynamic hierarchy of jazz, you should start to feel the ride cymbal and hi-hat drive and push the time, while your snare and bass drum sound like subtle syncopation against the pulse of the "other half."



### Troubleshooting

It's natural for your brain to want to keep your top half (hands), bottom half (feet), left side, or right side together. So don't be surprised if your bass drum starts getting louder while you're trying to make only your hi-hat louder. This is normal, and it's one of the things you'll be much better at controlling after you conquer these exercises. Also, the hi-hat has the narrowest dynamic range, so don't worry about trying to play it as loud as you can play the snare, for example. Remember that we don't always play jazz using the specific dynamics listed here, but it's a great place to start.

### Practice Tips

When done correctly, the four-limb dynamic exercise with a single groove should take about five minutes to complete. If you're finishing in two or three minutes, try taking longer to crescendo and decrescendo through the dynamics. Using a metronome is crucial, because our tendency is to rush as we get louder and drag as we get softer.

Most important, play along with great jazz records to get a sense of the different dynamic levels of various drummers. If you're like me, you didn't learn how to make a rock or funk groove feel good by seeing it written out; you did it by playing along to James Brown, Led Zeppelin, the Roots, and other legendary artists. The same goes with learning to swing, except now the names you should be checking out are Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Oscar Peterson, and so on.



# A Yogi's Approach to Learning Drums

## Awareness Exercises for Developing a More Fluid Connection With the Instrument

by Nicholas Schlesinger

One of my drum students is a yoga instructor, and recently during a lesson where we were focusing on relaxing the wrists and hands and understanding rebound, she mentioned something that caught my attention. While going through some hand exercises, she seemed almost hypnotized as she performed each stroke and tried to generate rebound. I remarked on her focus, which she replied had to do with meditation. She pointed out that she'll often stand barefoot for hours to feel the ground beneath her and to become more aware of herself—a technique borrowed from her training in yoga.

This got me thinking that part of learning drumming technique effectively coincides with being deeply aware of your body, muscles, and movements. In other words, you need to be able to understand, isolate, visualize, and feel your muscles and their movements in order to work them to their fullest potential. The goal is to achieve physical and mental liberation—to remove our limitations. We want to be able to freely express what comes from our mind and into the instrument in real time, without our body saying “no.”

How does all of this relate to drumming? Let's start by going back to the beginning and defining the word *percussion*. According to the dictionary, percussion is “musical instruments played by striking with the hand, a stick, or a beater, or by shaking.” When it comes to playing the drumset, our body uses external tools (drumsticks and pedals) in order to produce the desired sounds. So shouldn't we become intimately acquainted with these tools in order to get the best results? What follows are some questions to ask yourself, or to have your students ask themselves, to develop a better connection with the instrument.

How do the sticks feel in my hands? What can I note about their weight, thickness, surface, material, and vibration? How do the sticks rebound on different surfaces, and how does that feel to my hands? What's happening at the fulcrum? Are all of the fingers engaged in each stroke? How do my feet feel against the pedal's footboard? Can I feel the tension of the springs? How does the pedal rebound after my strokes? Are my shoes inhibiting movement? Would I have better control without wearing them?

Consciously examine how you use your tools, how they currently react and function, and how you *want* them to react and function.

### Achieving Openness

Yoga aspires to instill oneness/harmony, which leads to freedom. Here are some thoughts to consider, as identified by the London-based yoga teacher Charlotte Carnegie, in an effort to achieve a state of effortless flow while practicing and performing:

**Take notice of the ground and how it feels beneath you.**

Drop and relax into it.

**Softness is strength.** Let go and soften your body as much as you can, asking yourself, *How much can I let go?*

**Embrace laughter, joy, curiosity, and wonder.** The experience of learning new things should be joyful.

**Listen intently,** and do so with your entire body. Be aware of the sounds and vibrations of your surroundings.

**Open up and free your chest and ribcage** to focus on the

physical sensation of playing.

**Connect the pieces to achieve fluidity.** Your body parts should be working as one.

**Flow.** Relax through your hips, pelvis, chest, and shoulders.

**Create space.** Attend to the spaces between the notes when refining your timing. Or attend to the space between the drum-head and tool (stick or pedal) when refining dynamics.

### In Practice

Removing limitations from our body opens doors to creative freedom. By utilizing all of our senses in the development process, we will achieve a more complete experience between our mind, our body, and the tools we use. For instance, when explaining the principles of rebound to my students, I refer to the basics of how the grip should flow freely with the stick's movement, without intruding on its natural trajectory and force. This means the student needs to have a relaxed fulcrum and a fluid cradle.

For that to happen, the body needs to be soft, and we need to be aware that our arm, wrist, and finger movements are interconnected. The fingers must become accustomed to feeling how the stick moves, adjust to that movement, and provide the space required. The trick is in visualizing and focusing on each finger so that it lets the stick flow in order for rebound to occur freely.

The same principles apply to our feet on the bass drum and hi-hat pedals. We want to drop into the ground and feel the surface underneath our feet, and notice how these surfaces react to our movements. The more intimate the relationship with the tool, the more limitations we can overcome.

Taking the heel-toe hi-hat technique as an example, it's important to understand that the initial stroke doesn't come directly from the heel but from the sole of the foot. This happens as we drop—not push—our foot onto the pedal with a relaxed motion. The toes should remain on the pedal board the entire time to provide a constant connection.

One form of yoga practice is based on the basic sun salutation sequence, known as *surya namaskar vinyasa*. Different positions can be added to the vinyasa once it's mastered, like building blocks. We should apply that same principle when developing technique, where we add new exercises one at a time while remaining fully aware of our mind, body, and tools. For instance, revisit the basics, such as your grip and single strokes, and focus specifically on the muscle groups involved, along with the way your tools interact with your anatomy.

### ...and Repeat

As boring as it may sometimes seem, repetition is necessary in order to get better at any practice. But it shouldn't be a drag if you also work toward achieving freedom and peace by focusing on your movements and making a connection with the instrument.

Learning should be a joyful experience. Give yourself to your practice, and be at one with the process to achieve better results. This will in turn bring you greater inner peace, which can then be applied not only to your playing but to your everyday life as well.





This time, try accenting the fourth septuplet note, “ah,” with crashes and bass drum hits.

Go through the rest of the quintuplet and septuplet variations in a similar fashion. Experiment with ways to voice each note. You can use doubles, rimshots, flams...the list is limited only by your imagination. Don't forget to play the variations into and out of grooves. It's easy to lose sight of how these rhythms work musically if you don't put them into context.

### Double Bass Options

Another great way to internalize any subdivision is to play it on double bass. As with the previous examples, make sure to continually switch back to a common subdivision, such as 16th notes, every two or four bars for all of the following double bass patterns.

Let's see what happens when we apply different quintuplet and septuplet spacings over double bass. Example 8 has the snare hitting on the last quintuplet while the ride outlines the quarter-note pulse.

In Example 9, the ride pattern is embellished beyond simply playing quarter notes. Pay careful attention to which foot lines up with the ride on the first, fourth, and fifth septuplet notes.

The previous examples are incredibly effective for feeling the subdivision. Hit hard, and bob your head to the quarter-note pulse. It may take many hours of practice, but eventually the patterns will feel natural.

If you want to bring polyrhythms into the fold, you can use different spacings to create some interesting and twisted patterns. Here's one that includes a five-over-six polyrhythm between the ride and snare. The snare lands on every sixth quintuplet note, which gives you five equally spaced strokes across a bar of 6/4. That's the five part of the polyrhythm. Make sure you're feeling the quarter note ride as your pulse.

You can do a similar thing by playing the septuplet spacings in a row to create a pattern with a seven-over-eight polyrhythm. This will give you seven equally spaced snare hits across two bars of 4/4. The additional ride notes introduced in Example 9 are included in Example 11 to help give the pattern a more syncopated feel.

Experiment by playing more than one accent in each subdivision. For example, play both “ta” and “ah” on the toms within a quintuplet. There are thirty-two different quintuplet rhythm variations and 121 variations of septuplets. That may seem overwhelming, but remember that every one of those is made from combinations of the note placements we've covered in this article.

**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 [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com).

# The Responsibility Is Ours

## Calls to Action to Combat the Current State of Affairs

by Russ Miller



This month I want to discuss one of the biggest concerns facing the drum world: the fact that fewer and fewer people are playing drums and supporting drumming. More important, I want to discuss *our* role in helping with this issue.

The biggest hurdle the drumming industry is facing is the diminishing number of people who play. I hear statements like, "The market isn't getting bigger, so all we can do is take each other's market share." I believe this is due to a few things. First, our attention span is shortening dramatically. This is surely due to the fact that we can acquire things more quickly and easily than ever

**"You can't just give someone a creativity injection. You have to create an environment for curiosity and a way to encourage people and get the best out of them."**

—Sir Ken Robinson,  
English author and education advisor

before. The Internet is a perfect example. If a website doesn't load in fifteen seconds, the viewer gets frustrated and moves on.

Another example of the "I want it now" philosophy is the *Guitar Hero* video game. Young people have happily invested money and hundreds of hours in playing (and becoming amazing at) the game. They could have spent the same amount of money and time on an actual guitar and lessons...and then become real guitarists! But *Guitar Hero* lets people experience being a part of music instantly. This feeds directly to our ever-shrinking attention span.

These days people have a hard time investing in any long-term endeavor, like playing an instrument. When you decide to learn an instrument, you can't squeak through without investing a lot of time. Similar to sports, just having the information isn't going to get it done.

Also, people have begun to think they don't have to invest in something for it to become successful. Social media have helped to create a lot of false celebrities. Before Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, you needed to do something exceptional to gain recognition on a global level. Now you can record your little brother picking his nose and have 20 million people watch it. This instant recognition with no investment has started to create a culture of mediocrity and a lack of ambition to work on something in order to excel at it.

As amazing as the exposure outlet of YouTube is, it has confused the issue of music presentation, removing value from performance. YouTube also gives mediocrity the same visibility as greatness. We hope that greatness rises to the top, but having the ability to work the social media outlets can be an asset with which performance greatness cannot compete. This confuses new players' ideas of what great is, thus affecting their long-term inspiration. And we have an issue with suffering arts programs in

schools, which leads to fewer students being exposed to playing an instrument at an early age.

### Manufacturers and Retailers: Inspire!

Instrument dealers are often the first connection that people have to the inner workings of the music industry. A retailer gets someone to invest in the dream of playing an instrument. Rather than focusing on advancing players' abilities and interests, some instrument retailers have adopted a "sell them the highest-yielding drums we can and get them out of here" mentality. This is a very damaging approach for a retailer. A new player needs to be constantly fed information, inspired, and pushed to further the investment in playing an instrument. This is why it's so important to support great drum shops that create an atmosphere of development with lessons, clinics, and expertise.

The companies that make the instruments often lose sight of what they're selling and to whom they're selling it. I've had conversations with marketing departments about a five-piece drumset in an ad campaign where the drums are sitting in a room by themselves. This loses the human connection to playing the instrument.

It reminds me of something my friend Abe Laboriel Sr. once said. We were on a gig together and someone commented to him on a break, "Abe, your bass sounds great." Abe looked back at the guitar, which was sitting on the stand, and said, "How does it sound now?" A great player's touch and musicality are 75 percent of the sound coming from the instrument. I want to be influenced by great players, and I'm interested in how the instrument relates to their presentation and prowess. It makes me think of what might be possible for me if I had that same instrument. In my opinion, retailers and manufacturers need to stay focused on inspiring the players in addition to selling them gear.

### Players: Support and Be Supported

Players need to inspire other players, not just with great drumming but with support as well. One of the most popular live music clubs in L.A. recently closed after thirty years in business. It was an upscale restaurant that had bands five nights a week. I played there once or twice a month for years. It was a small venue, and there was never a cover charge. Usually local musicians were on the bill, because the gig didn't pay very much. But because it was in Los Angeles, you would also catch world-class musicians there between tours and sessions. You could go see many of the greatest players for no cover charge.

In the weeks preceding the venue's final shows, many of my friends were saying, "It's a drag this place is closing. I could always go see somebody play for free." My immediate thought was: *Are you sad the venue is closing, or that you might have to pay a few dollars somewhere else?* This attitude from fellow musicians, where they don't want to invest in other players or their music, is disturbing. Yet these same players want everybody to pay them top dollar for what they do.

I've also talked to several younger musicians about Spotify. They tell me how awesome it is and that they haven't had to buy a CD or

download for years. These same people are striving to work in the music business. If those of us who are educated in music, involved in its creation, and focused on it daily don't support our industry, how can we expect anybody else to? We need to buy music, DVDs, CDs, and downloads, and we should pay to see our peers and students play, to help create commerce surrounding music and its creation. Don't foster the "music has no value" mindset. Support and be supported!

### There's No Substitute for the Real Thing

Nothing can compare to seeing a great musician play the drums, right in front of you. YouTube videos and Facebook posts don't get it done. Even going to a big concert and seeing a band doesn't always do it. Although you will get something from seeing a fantastic show, you really need to experience the power of a great player firsthand. Only smaller environments such as clubs and clinics will get you face to face with great drumming. Depending on your location, going to a clinic at your local drum shop might be your only chance of experiencing high-level playing up close. Remember to support the companies that sponsor those clinic programs. These are the manufacturers investing in your inspiration, and they should be acknowledged for it.

### Get the Right Info—From the Right People

YouTube has created an awesome outlet for exposure to performance and education. The issue, as with everything on the

Internet, is that there's no filter for accurate, well-advised information. Anybody can start an online lesson series, talk about concepts, and demonstrate a form of playing. But where does this information come from? What gigs, tours, records, movies, or sessions have they done? Do they have any more information and experience than you do, or just the money and/or brashness to film themselves for the world to consume? There's great information splattered about on YouTube, but don't forget that the order in which we learn things is crucial. There needs to be guidance and direction in our studies. We can get frustrated just as easily as we can get inspired.

The point of this whole discussion is summed up in the quote from Sir Ken Robinson. Our industry needs to foster inspiration for new people to become drummers and to keep playing. In this current state of affairs, we all need to step back and reflect on the big picture. The key is to educate players of all levels, pushing the envelope of instruments to foster artistry, and staying focused on the reasons we became drummers in the first place—for the love of it!

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



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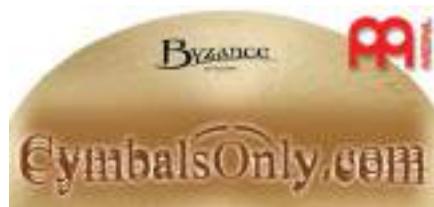
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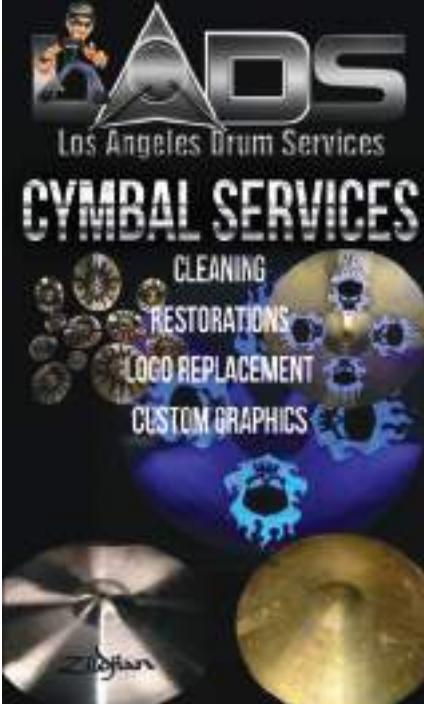


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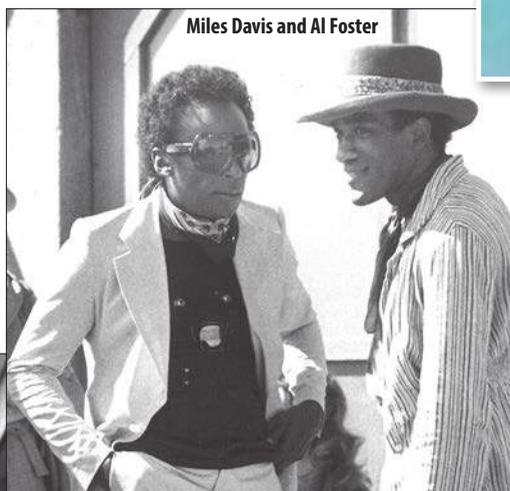
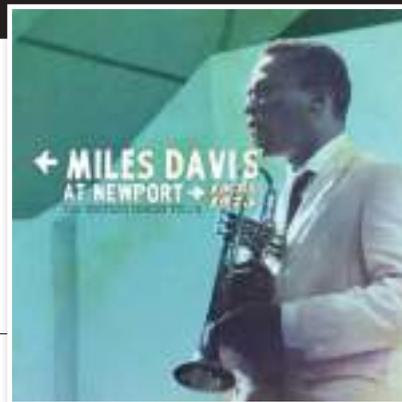
# CRITIQUE

## RECORDINGS

**Miles Davis *At Newport 1955–1975: The Bootleg Series Vol. 4***  
A new collection provides a unique way of tracing the changes that modern jazz drumming experienced over two turbulent decades.

For any lesser artist, a series of multi-disc packages featuring mostly unreleased live tracks would whiff of scraping the bottom of the barrel. But the so-called Miles Davis “Bootleg Series” has upheld quality, consistently unearthing hours of incredible performances. While previous volumes concentrated on specific tours, this fourth release is perhaps the most satisfying because it highlights several bands, spanning a wide arc from 1955 to 1975. It portrays the progression of an artist synonymous with not only restless transformation but the momentum of jazz itself. In doing so, it also encapsulates some of the most significant shifts in modern jazz drumming.

The collection compiles eight Newport Jazz sets from the festival’s Rhode Island home base, plus New York and Europe. Nearly four hours



Miles Davis and Al Foster

of the 296 minutes are previously unreleased. The four discs are evenly split between acoustic and electric Miles eras (divided fans, fight among yourselves).

The earliest set documents Davis’s historic festival debut, when he joined a jam session including Thelonious Monk and a hard-swinging **Connie Kay** on kit. The trumpeter’s stellar showing prompted an immediate Columbia Records signing, wooing him away from Prestige and into his greatest recording years. From

there, the box set traces a trajectory of increasingly progressive performances.

Drumming treasures abound. In a 1958 set featuring the *Kind of Blue*–era sextet, **Jimmy Cobb** favors an aggressive hard-bop approach that he would later coolly temper for that upcoming watershed disc. Initiating a seismic shift, **Tony Williams** shakes jazz from its safe pedestal with Miles’ oft-dubbed “second great quintet,” as heard in sets from 1966 and 1967. This unit is particularly intense during the latter, with Williams drumming feverishly from the downbeat, pushing Davis to his soloing limits on “Gingerbread Boy.”

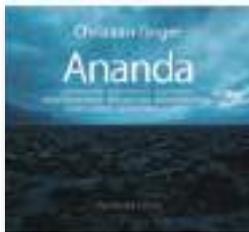
**Jack DeJohnette** is a muscular, free-flowing force on the 1969 “Miles Runs the Voodoo Down,” propelling a stripped-down version of the electric band that would record *Bitches Brew* six weeks later. **Al Foster** is captured in 1973 and 1975 with the *Dark Magus*–era band, unleashing a powerful, intuitive whirlwind that’s simultaneously grounded and free. And a rewarding surprise is the 1971 set driven by **Ndugu Leon Chancler**, who’s previously undocumented on any Davis disc. A nineteen-year-old college student at the time of his European touring stint, Chancler is a grooving asset, bridging the bedrock funk lines of bassist Michael Henderson and the soloists’ cosmic excursions.

With each successive appearance, Miles’ units planted their flag, leaving the festival stage forever changed. (Columbia/Legacy) **Jeff Potter**

Wayne Shorter, Jack DeJohnette, Miles: muscular, free-flowing



## TAKING THE REINS



**Christian Finger** *Ananda*  
Euro-jazz, strings, and worldly compositions combine on this eye-opening disc.

Reflecting drummer/composer Christian Finger's globetrotting history, *Ananda* jumps from lush ballads to noise guitar while still managing to

project a unified, almost modern-day third-stream vision. The straight-ahead swing and drum breaks on "For Now" almost seem out of place next to the bouncing tom support on "Nights Beyond, India" and multiple tracks featuring a string quartet, but Finger challenges the listener with variety and occasional percussive drama. Jeff Ballard appears on "African Skies, Drumming Lives: Boubacar's Sons," a drumming showcase that finds him and Finger laying down African patterns and incorporating deep melodicism in a nine-minute exchange. This is the kind of record where the intent isn't to dazzle but to show how the drums can be woven into the overall tapestry. (Strikezone) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



**George Kollias** *Invictus*  
Death metal is saved from the doldrums when the man behind the kit is in charge.

"Give the drummer some" isn't really a choice here, as Nile sledgehammer George Kollias takes it by brute force on his solo debut, writing all the music and

lyrics and playing every instrument except lead guitar. The title track blows the lid off, beginning with a half-time section where Kollias adds relentless double bass coupled with fills that sound like they're from a tune that's three times faster. "The Passage" opens with incredibly intense blast beats that return just when you've caught your breath, while "Voices" mixes things up with a cool kick pattern using some—gasp!—space in the groove. Kollias does his best Cookie Monster vocal growl through each track, and the guitar solo guest spots are equally scorching. But none of that really matters as Kollias possibly sets a new metal drumming standard. (Season of Mist) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



**Scott Amendola** *Fade to Orange*  
When a drummer writes with others in mind, the focus shifts to the greater picture.

The seventeen-minute "Fade to Orange" isn't so much an exercise in fancy sticking as an indulgence in orchestration and color through the use of a larger strings-

and-brass ensemble, with the musicians all working toward the same goal. Alongside musical mates Nels Cline on guitar and Trevor Dunn on electric bass, drummer/composer Scott Amendola lets things take shape over time, bringing in a backbeat and busier fills at the eight-minute mark, as he and Cline engage in some tumbling chatter over a melodic string backdrop. Things turn menacing as the drum action heats up before cacophony morphs to light amid

more contemplative violins and William Winant's seductive tuned percussion. Amendola isn't out to knock you back with anything other than mood here, since his kit makes only a brief but effective appearance. Four remixes round out the disc, though the main track is the real study in patience and craft. (Sazi Records)

**Ilya Stemkovsky**

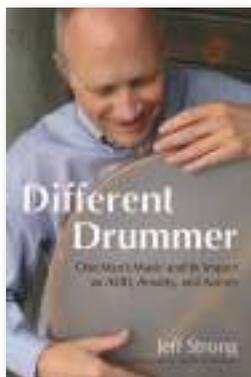
## MULTIMEDIA



**Gulli Briem and Szilard Banai** *Drum Emotion*

*Drum Emotion* is basically a music video with the kit taking center stage. Filmed in a 200-year-old castle in Hungary, it features Icelandic drummer Gulli Briem and Hungarian drummer Szilard Banai engaged in solos, duos, and play-alongs to rock/fusion tracks. Impressive hand chops and overall musicality from both players are on display, and the production is top notch, though

the artsy lens flares and action-movie-style jump cuts to shots of nature or Japanese sword fighting mean the intended focus here is not on education. That's a missed opportunity, since it's tough to imagine popping this in to watch time and time again, though the modern elements would probably resonate with younger viewers. Philosophical interviews with the drummers are also included, but Briem and Banai say what they need to say best when behind their instruments. (€15, szilardbanaimusic.com) **Ilya Stemkovsky**

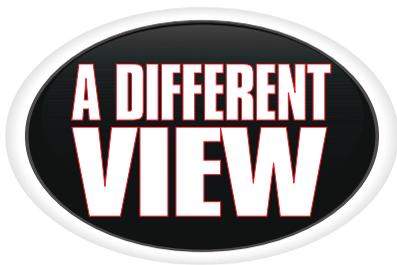


**Different Drummer: One Man's Music and Its Impact on ADD, Anxiety, and Autism** by Jeff Strong

Much has been made of the healing effects of drumming, typically involving participation in a drum circle or the like. But the author of *Different Drummer* has made a career out of studying the benefits of simply listening to drumming. A formally trained drummer, Jeff Strong first

used the concept of rhythmic entrainment in confronting his own ADHD, then began finding other opportunities to play for the purpose of behavior modification. Keeping thorough notes, Strong developed conclusions about the effects of drumming on the mind and therefore the body. This book chronicles a number of his experiences using "rhythmic entrainment intervention"—isolating patterns to help establish calm and to attain focus, in the service of helping people with sleep or mood issues. Those interested in the therapeutic side of drumming might want to look into this book (you can read portions of it at amazon.com) and the work of the Strong Institute. (\$18, stronginstitute.com) **Robin Tolleson**





# John Tropea

The New York-born, Berklee-trained guitarist is part of a small circle of musicians who basically owned the Manhattan studio scene in the '70s, and whose influence is still being felt today. Drum gods? Yeah, he's known a few.

by Billy Amendola

**J**ohn Tropea has collaborated with such legendary figures as bassists Will Lee and Anthony Jackson, guitarist David Spinozza, horn players David Sanborn and Randy and Michael Brecker, and keyboardists Don Grolnick and Richard Tee. He appears on recordings featuring a truly heavy list of drummers, including a pair of bona fide classics with Billy Cobham—the fusion star's debut album, *Spectrum*, and Deodato's *Prelude*, which features a hit arrangement of “Also Sprach Zarathustra” from Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Other career highlights include work with the Three Degrees, Ashford & Simpson, Bo Diddley, Peter Allen, Roberta Flack and Donny Hathaway, Paul Simon, Alice Cooper, Laura Nyro, Paul Simon, Eric Clapton, Dr. John, and George Benson. As a leader, the guitarist has released eleven albums whose tracks run the gamut from rock and pop to jazz, funk, and fusion.

Tropea's latest solo album, *Gotcha Rhythm Right Here*, is graced by the cream of the crop of New York drummers. It's a theme that runs throughout his vast catalog. In fact, Tropea has



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always seemed intent on getting the most out of his percussive friends. Scan his early solo recordings, and you'll hear not just one certified drum god, but two—Steve Gadd and Rick Marotta—panned hard left and right. And Tropea's live performances offer a whole *other* level of drumming magic. In the mid-'70s, for instance, any musician who frequented clubs like Mikell's would get an instant education upon paying the cover charge (or, like this writer, occasionally sneaking in!) to witness a set by Tropea, who would always have heavyweights like Gadd, Marotta, and Chris Parker backing him up. The guitarist recently took time out of his busy schedule to share some of the wisdom he's picked up over the years from these groundbreaking drummers.

**MD:** You've played with so many great drummers. What lessons have you learned from them?

**John:** I've learned about good time and feel, and how to pace the music. I remember the first time I heard a drummer play a fatback beat. I was in Boston at an R&B gig, and the drummer was a cat named Crockett. After the first song, I turned to him and asked, “What's that feel?” He said, “Fatback.” After that, I met and got into Bernard Purdie, and the fun began. I believe musicians who are exposed to great drummers can only become better musicians themselves. I believe it's who you play with that shows who you are.

**MD:** Do you play drums at all?

**John:** I don't—but I like to think that I *am* playing drums when I'm playing rhythm guitar parts.

**MD:** How do you explain to drummers what you're looking for when you're in the studio?

**John:** I look for the drummer to take the outline of the arrangement and get acclimated to all of the important hits and figures. Then let the band play. It's very important not to tie his or her hands. Too much in the drum chart can result in that.

I remember doing a date a long time ago with Bernard Purdie where the arranger had written a very complicated drum part for him. Although Purdie read the chart fine, in the end the arranger had written pretty much what he would have played anyway. This resulted in tying Purdie's hands and the session taking longer.

It's also important that the drummer is highly aware of what others are playing and knows when—and when not—to respond to it.

**MD:** Let's talk about some of the great drummers you've worked with, beginning with Shawn Pelton.

**John:** First let me just say that *all* of the drummers I've had the pleasure to work with are highly professional musicians whose fortes overlap—every one of them would do a great job on just about anything the music might need.

Regarding Shawn, he's one of the most innovative drummers around. He always seems to put something a bit different in the feel. Of course his time is great and he has all the chops anyone would ever need. Simply, he's got a special thing going for him.

On my latest album, Shawn cowrote two songs with me and [keyboardist] Chris Palmaro, "Soul Surfin'" and "Chili Wa Man," which is actually named for Shawn. He played live for our CD release party, and needless to say he sounded terrific.

**MD:** Steve Gadd.

**John:** Playing with Steve is always special. His musicality is of the highest order. Everything he plays is meaningful. Steve can play so light and simple, yet it's burning. Then he'll play an intricate fill that makes everyone in the band look up and smile. In addition, his brushwork is absolutely unique and respected by all.

**MD:** Rick Marotta.

**John:** Rick always has a killer laid-back groove—so laid back that we used to joke around that Rick's snare sometimes arrives the next day. [laughs] The

first tour I did with Deodato in the early '70s was with Rick. We had loads of fun. On my first three solo albums in the '70s and one live CD in the '80s, I had double drummers, Marotta and Gadd. They had a special way of playing together—completely respecting each other and never a competing moment. Rick and I also share a birthday!

**MD:** Billy Cobham.

**John:** The first time I met and played with Billy was back in 1972, on Deodato's *Prelude* album, which had the hit "Also Sprach Zarathustra." His playing was and is to this day so unique and intricate. At that point I hadn't played with any drummers like Billy. The combination of the musicians and the difference in their styles was a genius move on Deodato's part.

Talking about Billy leads me to a funny yet humbling story. After meeting and playing with him on *Prelude*, he called me to play on his record *Spectrum*. The session was at Electric Lady Studios in New York City. Billy

**John:** I met Cliff in the mid-'90s, when I did a year with the Manhattan Transfer. Cliff is another vastly talented drummer in the studio and on stage. In addition to recording with me on my last few albums, he's been playing live on and off with my band as well. I especially love his work with Michel Camilo. He's also terrific playing big band music. Cliff is funky and always fun.

**MD:** Clint de Gannon.

**John:** The first thing that comes to mind when I think of Clint is great time. He's tight and precise. And he has great instincts in the studio and on stage. Clint and I have played a lot together in the Tropea Band over the last ten or twelve years. I love the fact that he always listens to where I may be going with my playing, both in terms of feel and intensity.

**MD:** The late, great percussionist Rubens Bassini.

**John:** Rubens was the percussionist with the Deodato band when I started with them. His feel was unique, and it

## "It's important that the drummer is highly aware of what others are playing and knows when—and when not—to respond to it."

passes out [the music to] a song and tells me, "Do your rhythm thing on this, Tropes." I of course nod my head *yes*. I look at the music and it's in 7/4 time. Now I'm like, *Oh boy...* It was the first time I'd played 7/4 on a date—especially with a drummer like Billy. After a run-through or two, he and the rest of the cats caught on that I was struggling a bit and came to my aid with some suggestions on how to look at 7/4. After a few more run-throughs I came up with a rhythm part and we pressed *record*.

Needless to say there was some ribbing, but it was actually the best thing that could have happened to me. It opened my eyes to what I needed to work on if I wanted to be a well-rounded studio musician. Not long after that I recorded my first solo album for TK Records with Gadd and Marotta, and I recorded two tunes in seven: David Spinozza's "The Bratt" and Don Grolnick's "7th Heaven."

**MD:** Cliff Almond.

was always a blast to work with him. Playing with Rubens and Deodato was an education in Brazilian music. Rubens was a sweet, gentle man. There was no one who didn't love Rubens. I miss him dearly.

**MD:** Charley Drayton.

**John:** Back in the mid-'70s, when my first record was released, I used to work a lot with Charley's father, Bernie. After the record came out he asked if I could meet his young son, who was a budding drummer. I believe he was around thirteen at the time. Bernie had mentioned that Charley had learned most of the record and loved it. So we got together between studio dates and he proceeded to play a couple of the tunes on the album. He played one of those songs in seven that I mentioned, "The Bratt." He not only had the song completely down, he had all the nuances that both Gadd and Marotta had played throughout the tune. Of course today he's one of the most prominent drummers around.

## A Different View

**MD:** Steve Ferrone.

**John:** *Amazingly* solid drummer. Never overplays. Always has perfect time. And all that with a big smile on his beautiful face. Steve's a special cat and simply a ball to be around and to play with.

**MD:** You played on Ringo Starr's 1977 album, *Ringo the 4th*. How was that experience?

**John:** Ringo is an amazing talent in so many ways, not the least of which is his drumming. He is so solid, innovative, and clean. We recorded at Atlantic Studios in New York, and the producer was Arif Mardin. Gadd played drums on the album as well. The rest of the rhythm section was David Spinozza, Tony Levin, Don Grolnick, and me. I remember looking at the double drummers behind the gobo and thinking to myself, *This is an amazing moment in history*. I couldn't believe I was a part of it. We recorded four full days in the studio and it went by like it was ten minutes! No smartphones to document any of it. [laughs] Bummer.

**MD:** Lee Finkelstein.

**John:** Aside from playing with my band and other various gigs, Lee and I have been playing together for the past twelve

years with the Original Blues Brothers Band, along with Steve Cropper, Lou Marini, and others. His nickname in the band is Funkytime. He also has his own five-horn killer funk band, Funk Filharmonik. Along with being one of the funkier drummers around, he can play anything.

**MD:** With the Blues Brothers you also got to work with Keith Carlock, during a tour of Blue Note clubs in Japan.

**John:** What an amazingly unique drummer's drummer Keith is. I can't say enough good things about what he has done in his career—and continues to do.

**MD:** Chris Palmaro.

**John:** Chris is highly proficient on drums, Hammond B3, piano, synths, arranging, writing, producing... He and I have been working together for years in the New York area—he's been the music director of my band since 2002—but the first time I experienced working with him as a drummer was on my new album. Chris is invaluable to me. He's one of those cats that is so multitalented and deep into music.

**MD:** Yogi Horton.

**John:** I loved working with Yogi. He was

as solid as anyone and was a cool cat to be around. To this day I can't understand his untimely death. I cherish the fact that we had time together. I believe the last studio gig we did together was Yoko Ono's second record. He's missed to this day.

**MD:** Chris Parker.

**John:** The first thing I think of when it comes to Chris is that he's a true musician in every respect. He's a drummer, but he also composes and arranges, and he's a truly "happy to be here" cat. He's always listening and responding. In addition, his solos are constantly interesting and musical.

**MD:** Bernard Purdie.

**John:** I don't have to say much about Bernard! All you have to do is hear him and you know it's Pretty Purdie, the one who in many ways defined and led the way with his funky, distinctive playing. The first time I heard him was back in Boston at an R&B club. He was performing with Richard Tee, Cornell Dupree, Eric Gale, and Chuck Rainey. Loved them all from the downbeat—and to this day!



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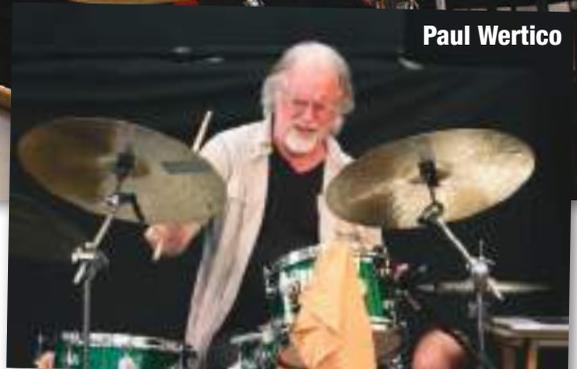
## The 2015 Chicago Drum Show



Daniel Glass



Paul Wertico



Bob Henrit



Steve Smith



Will Calhoun

In May, to commemorate its twenty-fifth anniversary, the Chicago Drum Show expanded from a two-day event to a three-day celebration, with even more vintage collectors, custom builders, and major manufacturers displaying their prized wares at the Kane County Fairgrounds in St. Charles, Illinois, for thousands of attendees to ogle, try, and buy.

Special events included an extensive display of the drums of big band great Buddy Rich and a roundtable discussion,



"The British Beat Boom," with Kinks/Argent drummer Bob Henrit, drum tech Colin Hilborne, Abbey Road session ace Pete James, and Fairport Convention's Dave Mattacks, focusing on what it was like to be a part of the English rock scene of the '50s through the '70s. There was also a "little-known facts" presentation, conducted by Gary Astridge, on Ringo Starr's gear with the Beatles.

Clinics, master classes, and presentations were scheduled throughout the weekend. Friday, May 15, included a history lesson by Nick White on the various percussion instruments used for sound effects in film and stage produc-

tions during the early twentieth century, open discussions with famed drum



builders Adrian Kirchler and Gregg Keplinger, an insightful clinic by Daniel Glass on Gene Krupa's legendary drum part to the swing classic "Sing, Sing, Sing," and a rousing solo performance by Living Colour's Will Calhoun.

On Saturday, May 16, session great Mattacks discussed drum tuning and cymbal selection for live and studio situations, and Paul Wertico and Todd Sucherman wowed everyone with their masterful soloing abilities and deep drumming insight. The final day included limited-seating master classes with Glass, Sucherman, and Wertico and main-stage clinics by Henrit and modern master Steve Smith.

The 26th Annual Chicago Drum Show will be held on May 21 and 22, 2016, at the Odeum Expo Center in Villa Park, Illinois. Featured clinicians will include June 2015 *Modern Drummer* cover artist Benny Greb, R&B great John Blackwell, and jazz/pop powerhouse Kim Thompson. For more info, visit [rebeats.com](http://rebeats.com).

**Text by Michael Dawson**  
**Photos by Michael Hacula**

# DrumPhest 2015

This past May 17, the Philly Drum Project, in partnership with the University of the Arts, presented the first DrumPhest, a daylong festival and equipment expo held at the downtown Philadelphia campus of UArts. The day featured top artists including Jojo Mayer, John Roberts, Mark Guiliana, Pablo Batista, and Jason Gianni. In addition to the clinics, Tré Lambert hosted an open jam with the Philadelphia band Ode to Omni that allowed attendees to come up and play alongside Lambert and Marcus Myers, Ode to Omni's drummer.

Some regional drum companies, including MCD, Dale's Drum Shop, Gaither Custom Drums, and Bucks County Drum Co., showcased their gear, and raffles and giveaways were held throughout the day. In addition to the main clinics, former Ween drummer Claude Coleman hosted Philly Drum Project's free monthly event, Beats, Brews, & Banter, which gives local players a chance to network, share ideas, and learn from some of the best drummers in the Philadelphia area.

The main-stage festivities began with John Roberts jamming along to several Janet Jackson tracks and talking about playing what the music calls for and leaving chops out of it. Percussionist Pablo Batista was next, and his clinic focused on Afro-Cuban rhythms. Batista invited Roberts up at the end to improvise a duet. Drummers Collective and UArts instructor Jason Gianni then delivered a comprehensive presentation on how to develop polyrhythms using different hand/foot ostinatos. Electronica/fusion legend Jojo Mayer's clinic focused on performing, with Mayer playing along to several tracks by his band, Nerve.

One of the highlights of the day was the clinic by jazz/electronica drummer Mark Guiliana, who, along with bassist Chris Morrissey, discussed listening and reacting to other musicians. Guiliana also demonstrated ways to improvise within contexts and boundaries, including developing a solo using one rhythmic rate and timbre for an extended period of time.

The First Annual DrumPhest drew more than 350 attendees, many of whom came from outside the Philadelphia region. Support for DrumPhest was provided by the University of the Arts, *Modern Drummer*, Sonor, Drumtacs, Steve Weiss Music, Yamaha, Sabian, Tama, Evans, Remo, Vic Firth, Dale's Drum Shop, Gretsch, Hudson Music/Drum Guru, Hansenfütz, Gaither Drums, Bucks County Drum Co., LP, Bosphorus, Paiste, Meinl, MCD, Gibraltar, and Vater.

**Text by Conner Saltzer**

**Photos by Amy Benninger**



Mark Guiliana and Chris Morrissey



Tré Lambert



Jojo Mayer



Pablo Batista



Jason Gianni



Claude Coleman



John Roberts





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# Silver Sparkler



“This is my 1973-ish Ludwig kit finished in silver sparkle,” Danny Hommes of Saint Charles, Missouri, says. “I purchased the 14x22 kick and 9x13 and 16x16 tom-toms around 2001 from Drum Headquarters in St. Louis. The kit had recently been re-covered by Marty Monson. Feeling the need to expand it slightly, I created a ‘Ludwig silver sparkle’ eBay search, which led to adding the 18” floor tom and the incredibly fun-to-play 8x8 small tom. The snare is a 6.5x14 Pork Pie Big Black, which I simply love. I’ve got a finish-matching 8x14 Ludwig Coliseum that I bought with the kick and toms, but that Pork Pie is my go-to.

“The Meinl bongos match the silver sparkle well enough. The cymbals are mostly Sabian, including that thing on the drummer’s far right, which is made from two severely destroyed 18” crashes.

The custom stick holder on the hi-hat stand is a repurposed fire extinguisher tube.

“Sometimes even this ‘slightly more than average’ kit just doesn’t fit with my band Karate Bikini’s seven-piece band lineup. Many nights I’m getting it done with just four drums and a few cymbals. There’s a voice to these drums that is similar to most everything else Ludwig made during the early ‘70s. People really love it, and the kit always gets nice compliments.”

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



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