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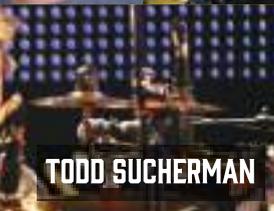
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Pearl

Andrés Forero

by Ilya Stemkovsky

“Andrés Forero is one of the most creative and versatile players of our time, and his participation in *Hamilton* solidifies his stature as one of the great drummers of Broadway.”

That’s a quote from the legendary Journey/Vital Information drummer Steve Smith. We couldn’t have put it better.

Cover and contents photos by Paul La Raia



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58 RON THALER’s credits include Alicia Keys’ megahit “No One,” speaking and drumming roles on NBC’s *Lipstick Jungle*, video game soundtracks, and clinics...and that’s just the tip of the iceberg. by Ilya Stemkovsky

66 PAUL WELLS defines the word *authentic* with the pre-swing jazz institution Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks—then turns around and backs the contemporary jazz and pop vocalist Curtis Stigers. It’s all in a day’s work. by Jeff Potter

70 Up & Coming LONIEL ROBINSON has spent many a night in the rock ‘n’ roll trenches. With the new album by the post-hardcore band Letlive in the can, the masses are about to get a clear idea of just how much he’s capable of. by Willie Rose

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Tour Realities

I grew up with a somewhat romanticized, if not ambitious, dream of becoming a touring musician. I wanted the life of the drummers I'd listened to every day, seen live and on TV, and read about in the pages of *Modern Drummer*. A month or so into my band's first tour some years ago, I learned what that truly meant.

We met the road green, with stars in our eyes, and it bit back with a humbling taste of reality. A virtually nonexistent budget barely made instant ramen affordable. Sleeping in the van, we were once woken up in the middle of the night choking on the exhaust of a tractor-trailer that pulled up next to us at a rest stop. (I can still almost taste the fumes leaking in.) Another time we tried falling asleep in a freezing-cold van under the lights of a Walmart parking lot—in Denver, in February. And we'd commonly drive hundreds of miles to play to ten people for a *half hour*—and a couple times we showed up only to have the show canceled at the last minute.

The biggest surprise was how little playing was involved. Somewhat jokingly, a professor of mine once suggested that to actually get an idea of a touring musician's life, students should rent a bus, pack it with equipment, drive it around a parking lot for eight hours, unload the gear, play a quick show, load back up, and head back to the bus to sleep. It'd be interesting to see *that* in a curriculum.

It was a passage in this month's cover feature with Broadway heavyweight Andrés Forero that got me thinking about my introduction to touring. Forero was on a national tour with another show when musical director Alex Lacamoire asked him to audition for a New York run of *Hamilton*. "Besides my three children," Forero says, "the greatest gift anyone has ever given me was Alex bringing me back to be home. I get to wake up in the same house as my wife and kids." Although Forero most likely wasn't fighting the same lower-level pitfalls of my novice experiences, some difficulties of the road—such as being away from family—are nearly impossible to avoid.

None of this is to say that I haven't enjoyed the tours I've been on. In fact, I still itch to go out. However, by acknowledging only where a drummer ends up—on the hottest show to hit Broadway in years, for instance—and not the long, hard road that led there, it can be easy to romanticize what can be a very grueling lifestyle, especially when you're starting a career from nothing. And Forero, along with the other drummers we cover this month, deserves credit for hanging in there, and making it work. Check out their stories, and enjoy the issue!



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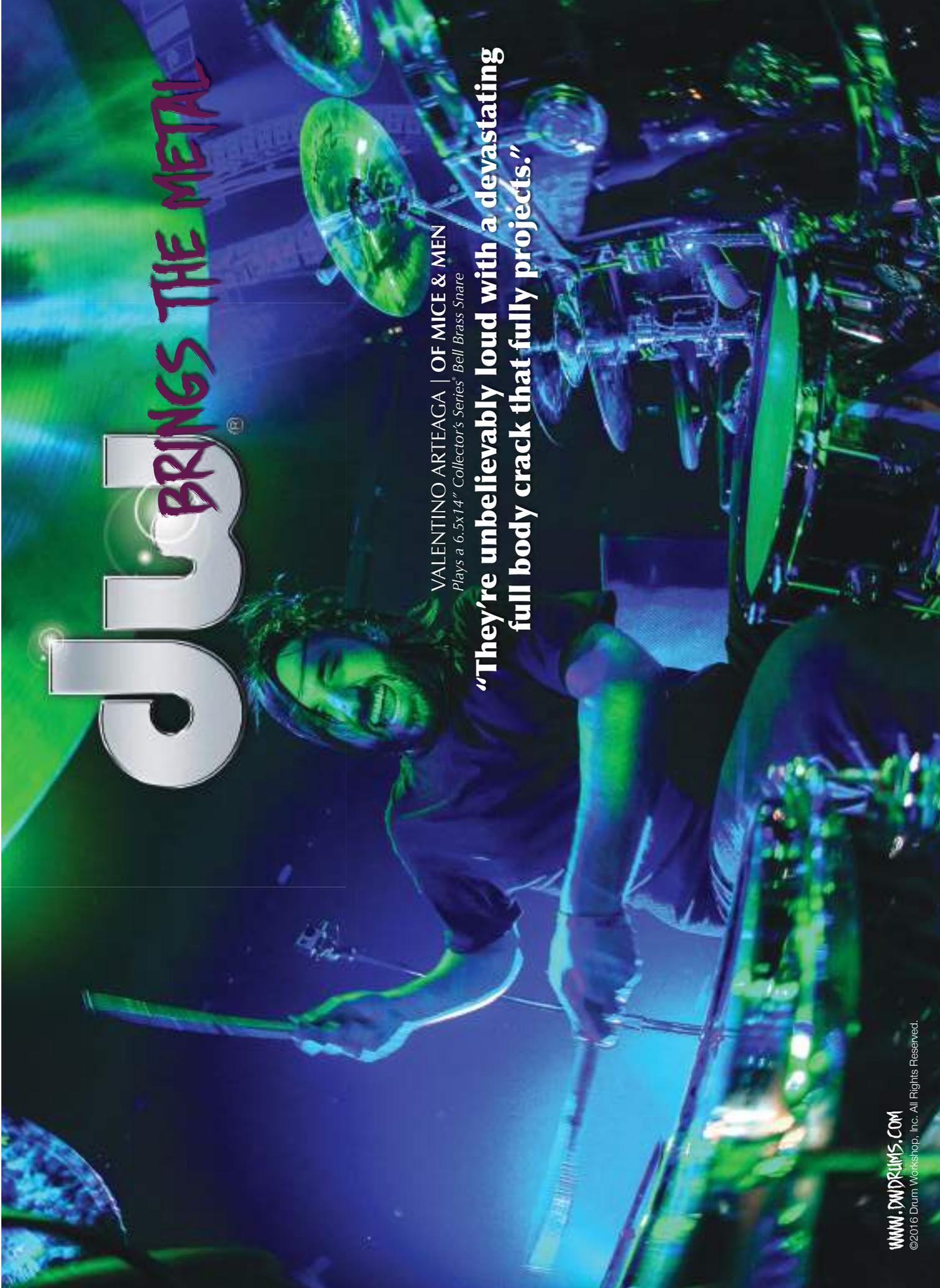
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READERS' PLATFORM

Modern Drummer, The First Decade

I needed to write and say thanks for the article in the January 2016 issue, "Modern Drummer, The First Decade," by Rick Mattingly. I started playing the drums in 1996, so I wasn't aware of the history behind the magazine. The article made me realize just how much of an impact on my life the magazine has had.

Obviously like many people, I read the magazine regularly and keep up to date with things. But it wasn't until reading this article that I recognized that I've studied from and own many of the books associated with the magazine: *Master Studies* by Joe Morello, *The Modern Snare Drummer* by Ron Spagnardi, *The New Breed* by Gary Chester, and the book that I feel had the biggest impact on me, *The Best of Concepts* by Roy Burns. The magazine has steered me toward information that has become part of who I am as a player, teacher, and person. Not only this, but I managed to make my own small appearance in the magazine in April 2008 when I released my own text textbook, *The Drummers Vade Mecum*, which was released as a second edition in 2015.

This article has made me realize that *Modern Drummer* plays a larger role in my own life, and thus the life of my students, and I needed to say thanks.

Gary McDonald

Dropped Beat

An incorrect photo of the GrooveScribe app appeared in the News section of the February 2016 issue. Here is the correct image.



Most Memorable Drum Clinic

Multi-platinum recording artist and educator Russ Miller discusses the current state of drum clinics in this month's Concepts column, so we took to Facebook to ask our followers about their most unforgettable clinics. Here's what they had to say.

David Garibaldi [at] Sam Ash Hollywood maybe fifteen years ago. His lesson about different volume levels for different limbs changed everything in my drumming world.

David R. Aldridge

Chester Thompson—last in line for autographs. My friend and I sat with him for a while, just playing for him while he taught us stuff. Pretty cool.

Scott Ineman

Mike Portnoy. I was in the front row, literally right in front of him, watching him open the clinic jamming to the song "The Glass Prison." Awesome experience!

Frank Sanchez

Stephen Perkins. He spoke about his approach to songwriting as "creating conversations" with the other musicians.

Shel Cooper

Want your voice heard? Follow us on Facebook and look out for next month's question.



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Everything we do comes back to the music. We learned that from the best, Vic Firth - fifty years with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and founder of the world's number one drumstick and mallet company. **Congratulations Vic** on winning this year's **Modern Drummer Hall of Fame** award. And to all the drummers out there doing what you love, we're right there with you.

Congratulations to all of this year's Modern Drummer Award Winners. We love what you do and are honored that you choose Vic sticks.

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Vic Firth
Sean Fuller
Matt Garstka
Matt Greiner
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Gavin Harrison
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Q&A: DRIVE LIKE JEHU'S MARK TROMBINO

"It had been almost nineteen years since I'd played drums. It was *all* muscle memory."

FIVE-STROKE GLUE

Rich Redmond on fortifying your grooves with a staple rudiment.

SNARE DISPLACEMENT

Jost Nickel guides us through the first part of his new Rock 'n' Jazz Clinic series on groove construction.

ON THE BEAT

MMW's Billy Martin, Filter's Chris Reeve, Squeeze's Simon Hanson, and many more check in to share news about their latest projects.

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NEWS

Out Now

Noladet *Dogs*

On *Dogs*, eminent New Orleans mainstay **Johnny Vidacovich's** between-the-cracks feel slips its way through pulsing waves of dynamic color in a set of largely improvised swing and funk. Although Nolatet's members have accompanied each other individually in the past, *Dogs* gathers the entire lineup as a group for the first time. "One Sunday afternoon, we went into the studio and played for a few hours," Vidacovich says. "And I think it just started to evolve like that. Some cats were thinking, *What we got here is a pretty good collection*. And everyone thought the sound was good enough to play it out there and see if we could make some sort of a living doing it."

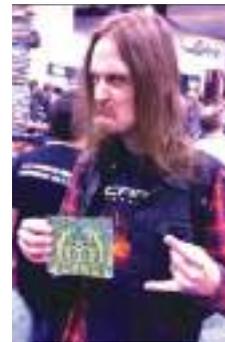
Vidacovich says the lineup liberates him. "My basic job is to play the music—to surround myself with music," he explains. "It's not to play something fancy because it's cool on drums. That's not playing music. That's playing drums. So it's more of a musical thing that I prefer, as opposed to a drum thing. That's what I use in this band, and that's what this band *allows* me to do. That would be one of the main reasons that I'm interested in this project and moving forward, because it actually allows me to be more of myself. The music comes first." (Royal Potato Family) **Willie Rose**



Nolatet, from left: bassist James Singleton, pianist Brian Haas, vibraphonist Mike Dillon, drummer Johnny Vidacovich.

Blind Idiot God *Before Ever After*

With double-kick articulation and an assortment of fluid open-handed grooves, drummer **Tim Wyskida** skillfully supports, while also seemingly being at war with, a deafening wall of sustained guitar chords and processed drones on the veteran instrumental noise band's fourth studio effort. It's the group's first since 1993's *Cyclotron*, and it was coproduced by the famed Bill Laswell along with BIG guitarist/cofounder Andy Hawkins. "I used to lower the pitch of my drums, but things got cluttered [in the mix]," Wyskida told *MD* during a recent chat at the Sea Witch Tavern in Brooklyn. "The bass and the huge rig Andy uses eat a lot of the low-end-frequency spectrum. We've had some back-and-forth on this issue—it was a battle—but now there's a comfortable space for the drums to sit." (Indivisible Music) **Will Romano**



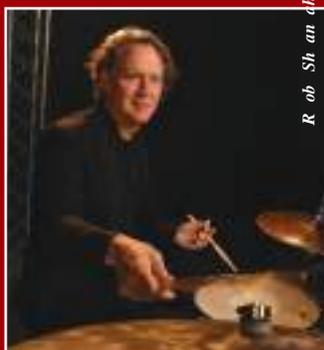
Dirk is down with BIG: Soilwork's Dirk Verbeuren shows his love for Wyskida and the new Blind Idiot God album at the 2016 NAMM Show.

Other New Releases

Hiromi Spark (Simon Phillips) /// **Damien Jurado** Visions of Us on the Land (Richard Swift) /// **The Thermals** We Disappear (Westin Glass) /// **Leslie Pintchik** True North (Michael Sarin) /// **Switchfoot** Nothing Is Sound vinyl release (Chad Butler) /// **Metal Church XI** (Jeff Plate) /// **Explosions in the Sky** The Wilderness (Chris Hrasky) /// **CFM** Still Life of Citrus and Slime (Charles Moothart) /// **Weezer** Weezer (Patrick Wilson) /// **The Joy Formidable** Hitch (Matt Thomas)

Who's Playing What

Matt Chamberlain has joined Sabian's artist family.

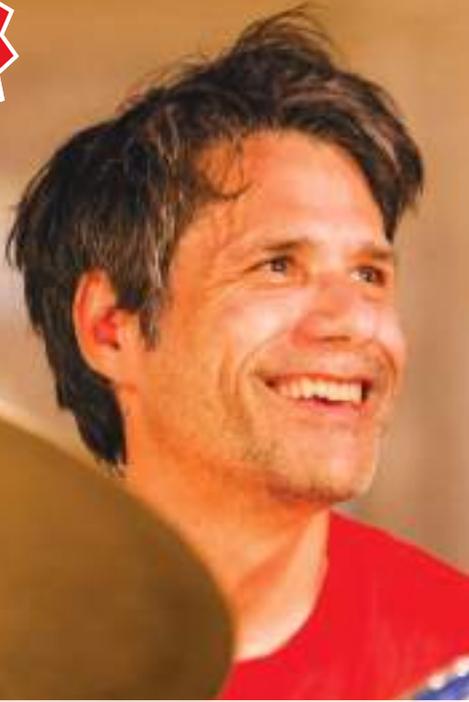


Townsley



New Innovative Percussion artists include **Nathaniel Townsley** (Alejandro Sanz), **J. Reid Maxwell** (Simon Fraser University Pipe Band), **Carlos Maldonado** (Arturo O'Farrill's Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra), and the **Sacramento Mandarins Drum & Bugle Corps**.

On Tour



Mark Trombino with Drive Like Jehu

San Diego post-hardcore pioneers Drive Like Jehu had understandable reservations about performing their first show in almost twenty years, but according to Mark Trombino all it took to quash them was getting in a room and playing. "When we started rehearsing," Trombino tells *MD*, "it was immediate that we were going to be able to pull it off. Then there was the response from the show, and the turnout, and the fact that we did okay...and it was fun."

After a hometown reunion show in 2014, Drive Like Jehu hit the festival circuit to rave reviews. Founding member Trombino was back in the saddle, though many are more familiar with the drummer for his production and engineering work with bands like Jimmy Eat World and Blink-182. After Jehu's 1994 breakup, Trombino got so busy producing that he hadn't played the drums much in the time since. "The surprising thing to me was how all the familiar stuff came back," he says. "All the old stuff is better than ever."

Drive Like Jehu is curating the All Tomorrow's Parties festival, which will take place in Wales in April of 2016. For more with Trombino, visit moderndrummer.com.

Stephen Bidwell

Also on the Road Jonathan Schang with District 97 /// Paul Seidel with the Ocean /// Pat Mastelotto with Stick Men /// Larry Herweg with Pelican /// Zbigniew Robert Promiński with Behemoth /// Mike Marsh with the Avett Brothers /// John Herndon, Dan Bitney, and John McEntire with Tortoise /// Isaac Teel with Tauk /// George Daniel with the 1975

Chris Valle

Industry Happenings



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Jordan

The late Al Jackson Jr. of Booker T. and the MG's was inducted into the Memphis Music Hall of Fame last October. Drummer Steve Jordan and MG's guitarist Steve Cropper performed the group's classic track "Green Onions" as well as Al Green's "Let's Stay Together," one of many songs that featured Jackson and the famous Stax house band. The event, held in conjunction with the Memphis Music Hall of Fame, Memphis Drum Shop, Soulsville Foundation, and Willie Mitchell's Royal Studios, spanned an entire weekend and featured special appearances by, among others, the Rolling Stones' Keith Richards and drumming legend Jim Keltner.

Drummer Steven Wolf Remembers

Berklee Educator Ed Uribe

Ed Uribe passed away last November 20. A world-class musician and an exceptionally gifted teacher, Uribe was known primarily for work in the Latin and Latin-jazz genres, but as anyone who studied or played with him knows, his virtuosity behind the kit wasn't limited to any specific style.

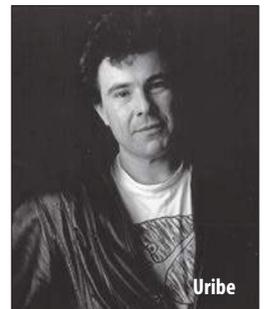
Not only did Ed play every genre authentically, but he also blended them all, creating his own unique sound and style. Whenever he played, you could hear the best elements of Changuito, Tony Williams, David Garibaldi, Zigaboo Modeliste, and John Bonham. All together, it still sounded like Ed.

Uribe's passion for drumming was equaled by his love of teaching. Considered by many to be among the best drum educators ever to have taught at Berklee, he was a wealth of information; he was also articulate, kind, generous, and very funny. Ed had his own specific teaching methods—his drum method books are legendary—but he was flexible, and he'd adjust his educational approach in a way that allowed him to bring out the best in each of his students, me included.

Like many others, I was shocked to learn that Ed had passed. I think there's no better testament to Ed's teaching than the countless Facebook tributes by his former students, some of whom are now among the world's top drummers, in multiple genres—including quite a few who have graced the cover of *Modern Drummer*. All of the posts share a sense of gratitude and reverence, and they all communicate, each in its own way, what an invaluable role Ed played in our development as drummers.

They say that a person should strive to leave the world a better place than they found it. Ed Uribe did just that, and he did it on a grand scale—via the hundreds, if not thousands, of drummers he helped. Many will miss him, but his spirit lives on through our music.

Steven Wolf is a session drummer, programmer, producer, writer, and remixer whose credits include Katy Perry, Alicia Keys, Miley Cyrus, Kelly Clarkson, Pink, Beyoncé, Chaka Khan, the Bee Gees, and Johnny Cash.



Uribe



Jack DeJohnette

Jazz supergroups don't come along often, but when they do—and especially when they include this legendary drummer—*kaboom!*

The fireworks created by Jack DeJohnette, saxophonist Ravi Coltrane, and bassist Matt Garrison are based in the trio's collective twenty-year history, but their shared lineage goes back even further. DeJohnette played with his mates' fathers, John Coltrane and Jimmy Garrison, who worked together in Coltrane's innovative 1960s quartet that also featured McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones. The DeJohnette/Coltrane/Garrison trio's ECM debut, tentatively titled *In Movement*, is set for spring 2016 release.

"We've been developing a loose concept of playing compositions and spontaneous improvisations," DeJohnette explains. "Matthew utilizes his mastery of electronics along with his outstanding bass qualities. Ravi plays his three saxophones. I use electronic percussion, modules, and acoustic piano as well as drums. We have a sound; each one of us has our own voice on our own terms. That's a great thing."

Playing Sonor Hilite Exclusive drums and his signature lines of Aquarian drumheads and Sabian cymbals, DeJohnette also employs a Roland HandSonic and a Korg Wavedrum with the trio, and he and Garrison expand the music's palette electronically in ways few contemporary jazz musicians can match. The group's zeal recalls another ECM trio, heard on 1974's *Timeless*: DeJohnette, keyboardist Jan Hammer, and guitarist John Abercrombie.

"We really like to do a lot of improvising in this trio," DeJohnette says. "Sometimes we only have loose arrangements. And we like to approach written compositions from the outside, improvising and playing over the melodies, then going into the arrangement so things have a liquid flow."



J am es Ad am s

Aric Improta

Jack DeJohnette last appeared on the cover of *Modern Drummer* in June 2012, in an exclusive group interview with Terri Lyne Carrington and Roy Haynes. At one point in the discussion, he responded to Carrington's recollection of playing with Herbie Hancock, which she described as sort of an out-of-body experience. "That's like being at home when you're in that space," Jack said. "I get like that sometimes, to where I feel like I can levitate. I wish I could take the drums up with me sometimes! I feel weightless while playing the drums."



In addition to this relatively new trio, DeJohnette recently recorded a solo piano album, *Return*, on which he also accompanies himself on drums. *Return* is available by subscription from the vinyl-only label Newvelle Records, and it features, among other tracks, Miles Davis's "Flamenco Sketches" and "Blue and Green"; Earth, Wind & Fire's "Serpentine Fire"; the original composition "7th D"; and an interpretation of Erik Satie's "Gymnopédies."

With new projects increasingly filling his schedule, DeJohnette is also embarking on a tour with tap dancer Savion Glover. "He's like the Coltrane of tap dance," Jack says. "Tap and drumming are the same. Savion and I do call-and-response. Sometimes I comp for him; sometimes he comps for me. He's a solo artist, like a tenor player or a piano player or a drummer. Savion and I do duets together, then my trio plays. It's very challenging and a lot of fun."

Ken Micallef

The Night Verses drummer has masterminded a multi-player video whose variety of styles, setups, and sounds make it one of the most compelling percussive productions in recent memory.



As fans await the new Ross Robinson–produced album by Night Verses, the band's quirky drummer, Aric Improta, is keeping his many followers entertained with his video "Drum Chain: 9 Drummers, 1 Song," which at press time had amassed more than 330,000 views since first being posted last August. "The objective was for each drummer to compose his own section of a song," Improta says. "The only rules were that they would get eighteen bars at 140 bpm and that they had to match a similar fill at the end.

Once they sent me their compositions, I tried to tie it together and order it in a way that felt cohesive. I then sent the full track to Nick DePirro and Reilly Herrera of Night Verses to compose a song around it. This video is the final result. None of the drummers were aware of what anyone else was playing when they wrote their section."

Featuring up-and-coming and established players that Improta met while touring in support of Night Verses' 2013 album, *Lift Your Existence*, the video captures not only a

taste of the participants' musical identities but also the reality of their practice spaces, offering an intimate peek into each drummer's unique creative environment. In addition to Improta, the featured timekeepers include Anup Sastry of Monuments, Mike Ieradi of Protest the Hero, Matt Lynch of Trioscapes, Loniel Robinson of Letlive, Billy Rymer of Dillinger Escape Plan, Garrett Henritz of HRVRD and Fol Chen, Alex Bent of Battlecross and Arkaik, and Joseph Arrington of A Lot Like Birds and Sianvar. **Ben Meyer**

For more with Aric Improta, go to moderndrummer.com.





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JOJO MAYER | NERVE

DW

Collector's Series Pure Oak Drumset

Crisp attack, booming tone, and ultra-rich aesthetic.

With all of DW's experiments in drum shell construction, you may be surprised to learn that it wasn't until recently that the company began to explore the bright, clean timbre of hard oak. The journey started in 2015, when DW vice president John Good purchased logs from a 1,500-year-old Romanian River oak tree to use for a few limited drumsets in the Timeless Timber series. Good enjoyed the sound of those kits so much that he decided to develop the Pure Oak series, which are made from red oak timber. We were lucky to get our hands on one of these new oak sets, so let's check them out!

The Shells

Our review kit included 8x10 and 9x12 rack toms, 12x14 and 14x16 floor toms, an 18x22 kick, and a 6.5x14 matching snare. The rack toms are 7-ply, the floor toms and kick are 8-ply, and the snare is 11-ply. The plies are thicker to cut back on the total number of plies per drum, and the glue has been reformulated to be twenty times stronger and harder, which DW says helps increase resonance.

Another interesting way that DW tweaks the tone of its drums is by combining veneers with long and short grains. The Pure Oak drums have a 3-ply core with a long-grain center sandwiched between two short-grain plies. The 7-ply rack toms are finished with 2-ply short/long laminates on the inside and outside of the core so that the outermost ply is long and the innermost ply is short. The short-grain interior is said to create a lower timbre due to there being less tension in the wood. The 8-ply drums have an extra short-grain veneer on the inside, next to the core. The shell layout used on these drums is called HVL (horizontal/vertical laminate technology). The bearing edges are cut to be fatter on the outside, which also helps emphasize the lower frequencies.

The Hardware

The Pure Oak kit came with all the standard Collector's Series appointments. This includes the True Pitch 50 tension rods, which have fifty threads per inch. This tighter threading allows for great fine-tuning and more stability.

The rims are DW's True Hoops design, which are triple-flange with a fully rounded top for greater durability and a stronger rimshot sound. They are also guaranteed to be perfectly flat and round for better tuning. True Hoops are graduated in thickness, so the 10" tom hoops are 1.65mm thick, the 12" are 2mm, the 14" and 16" are 2.3mm, and the 14" snare hoops are 3mm.

The snare has twenty-strand True-Tone snappy wires and a magnetic MAG three-position throw-off that allows you to switch between three degrees of wire tension with the flick of a lever.

The rack toms feature DW's STM suspension system, which is a sleek design that connects to four of the lugs with minimal visual obstruction while allowing the shell to vibrate as freely as possible. The floor toms came with the company's standard steel legs.

All of the hardware on this kit, from DW's signature turret lugs to the bass drum claws and spurs, is nickel-plated to give the drums a very sophisticated, classy look.

The Sound

The Pure Oak kit tuned up very easily, and little fine-tuning was necessary to get the drums to sing with a clear, open tone. DW paired these dense shells with 2-ply Smooth White batter heads to introduce some top-end brilliance while also enhancing the low-end resonance. I absolutely loved the way these toms sounded tuned high and medium. The attack is super-clean, so everything you put into them is articulated perfectly. The sustain is very even and decays nicely.



There's also a good amount of heftiness in the tone, which makes them sound big and powerful, even at higher tunings. Unlike with some birch drums, where you end up sacrificing a bit of depth and breadth for an increase in cut and snap, the Pure Oak toms possessed a full, balanced tone with a ton of volume potential.

The bass drum has a big, boomy tone with a sharp attack that

can be reined in easily with additional muffling and alternate beater types. The snare sounds chunky, articulate, sensitive, and powerful, and can be tuned high or low to great results. DW makes a lot of great drums, but the Pure Oak might be its most definitive offering yet.

Michael Dawson



TECH SPECS

Shells: 7-ply rack toms, 8-ply floor toms and kick, 11-ply snare

Finish: hard satin

Drumheads: 2-ply Smooth White by Remo

For a video demo of this kit, visit modern drummer.com.

Paiste

Signature, 2002, 602, and RUDE Additions

Specialty/artist-designed models and a ride for all occasions.

Swiss cymbal maker Paiste does a commendable job of balancing its catalog of creative, specialty products with more general offerings for all types of drummers. This month we have a small collection of cymbals to review, two of which were designed in collaboration with top Paiste artists Stewart Copeland (12" Signature "Rhythmatist" Combo Crisp hi-hats) and Dave Lombardo (22" RUDE Reign Power ride). We also have the 10" 2002 Mega Bell and the Formula 602 22" Medium ride.

22" RUDE Reign Power Ride

Legendary drummer Dave Lombardo pioneered speed metal drumming with his aggressive, caffeinated style in Slayer. The cymbals that Lombardo and many other hard-hitting drummers relied on for the past thirty-five years are the heavy, cutting, and

durable RUDE series. These cymbals are made from CuSn8 bronze and have a unique unlathed finish. Lombardo's new signature cymbal, the 22" Reign Power ride, is based on the ride the drummer used on his debut recording with Slayer, *Reign in Blood*. It is very heavy and produces a cutting, metallic "ping" that cuts through loud and clear at any volume. The bell is large and also produces a strong, commanding tone. What impressed me most about this ride was not just its power but also its musicality. It doesn't have the gonginess that plagues many other "rock" rides, and its ping is pitched a bit lower, which makes it sit better in the mix without losing power and without assaulting the ear.

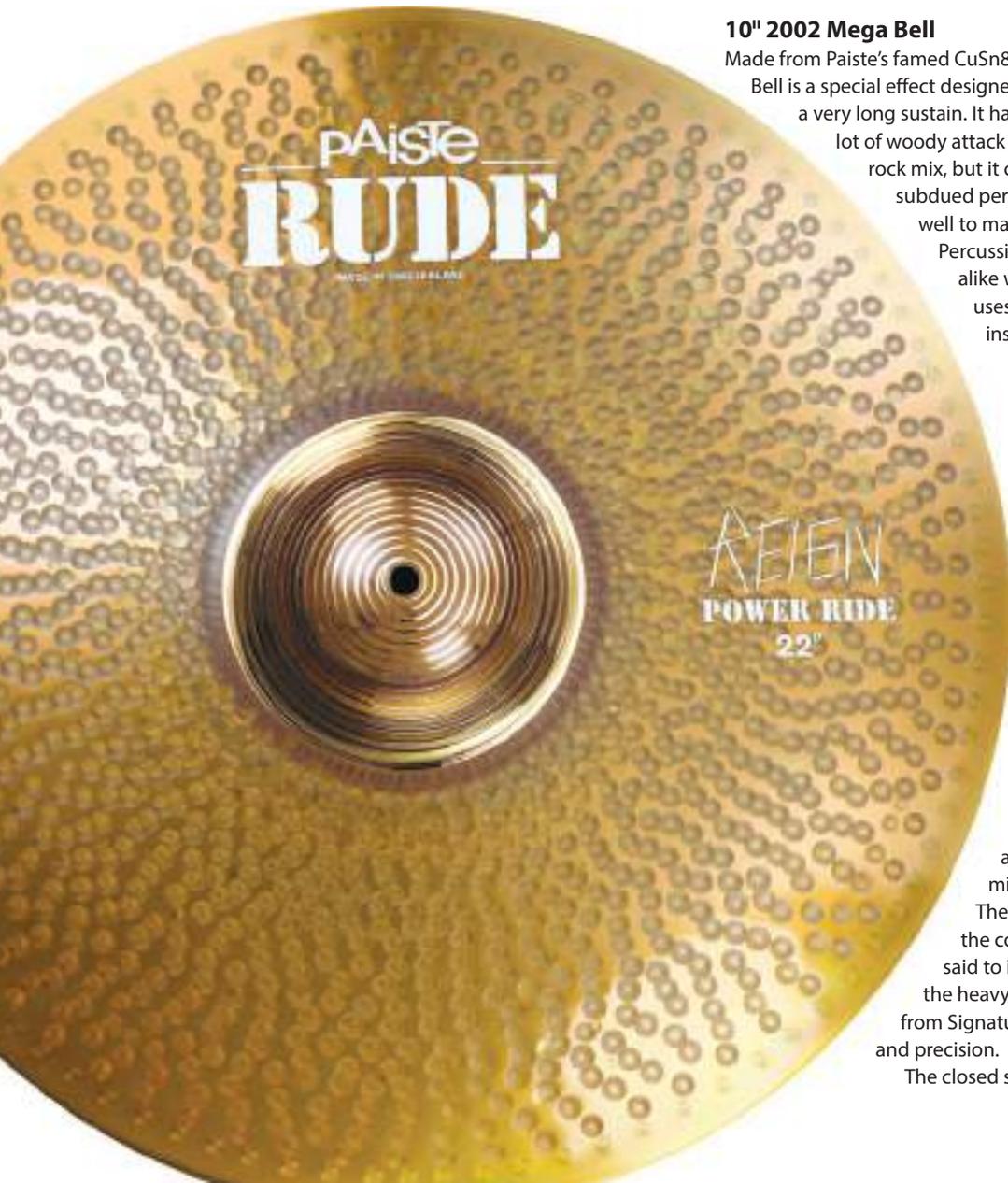
10" 2002 Mega Bell

Made from Paiste's famed CuSn8 bronze, the heavy 10" Mega Bell is a special effect designed to deliver a piercing tone with a very long sustain. It has a bright yet warm tone with a lot of woody attack that can cut through the loudest rock mix, but it can also be played more subtly for subdued percussive effects. And it responds well to mallets, eliciting a meditative timbre. Percussionists and heavy metal drummers alike will no doubt find some interesting uses for this unique, clear-tone instrument.

12" Signature "Rhythmatist" Combo Crisp Hi-Hats

Since taking the drum world by storm with his impassioned, reggae-inspired drumming approach with the iconic new wave band the Police in the late-'70s and '80s, Stewart Copeland has gone on to become a successful classical and film composer. He still plays the kit, though, and his trademark sticky, tricky hi-hat technique remains intact. These cymbals, the 12" Combo Crisp duo, are designed to emphasize articulation and to cut through at all volumes. Interestingly, Paiste mixed bronze alloys for these hi-hats. The medium-weight top is made from the company's CuSn20 bronze, which is said to increase warmth and fullness, while the heavyweight bottom cymbal is made from Signature bronze for added brilliance and precision.

The closed sound of the Combo Crisp hi-hats





is very dry and articulate, so double strokes spoke clearly at all tempos. (Peter Gabriel's "Red Rain" came to mind.) The foot chick is fast, chunky, and strong, and the open sound is bright, focused, and powerful. Funk, fusion, reggae, and contemporary pop drummers will love how these hi-hats speak quickly and then get out of the way, while metal, rock, and progressive drummers will enjoy using these as an auxiliary sound for playing fast, syncopated figures.

22" Formula 602 Medium Ride

Contrasting this collection of unique specialty items is the 22" Formula 602 Medium ride, which is designed to be an easy-to-control, clean-sounding, all-purpose cymbal. Formula 602 cymbals are handmade from CuSn20 bronze with the same methods the company has used for since the 1960s. Every drummer needs to own a general-purpose ride cymbal, and the 22" Formula 602

Medium fits the bill perfectly. It has a warm, musical tone with clean, sparkling articulation, a full, rich wash, and a clear but unobtrusive bell. You can swing it, rock it, crash it, or brush it, and it responds with aplomb. If you need a bit more control, a 20" version is available. And if you desire more wash, there's a 24". But for my money, the 22" is the one that fits best for everything.

Michael Dawson

TECH SPECS

Alloy: proprietary recipes of B8 and B20 bronze

Price: 12" Combo Crisp hi-hats: \$710; Mega Bell: \$244; Reign Power ride: \$642; 22" 602 Medium ride: \$975



Listen to these cymbals at modern drummer.com.

Canopus

Solid Brass and Harvey Mason Signature Snares

Need extreme power or utmost clarity and control? These have you covered...and then some.

Canopus has been hand-building high-end drums in Japan since 1977, with the primary focus being on replicating and updating the most coveted sounds of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The company also experiments with unconventional shell compositions to offer drummers an ever-expanding sound palette. For review this month are two of Canopus's latest snare drums: a beefy 6.5x14 Solid Brass modeled after the famous Tama Bell Brass and a 5.5x14 8-ply walnut/birch hybrid shell designed in collaboration with legendary fusion/studio drummer Harvey Mason. Both are built with the utmost care and precision to maximize their sonic potential, whether that's for power and presence (Solid Brass) or control and articulation (Harvey Mason signature). Let's give both a closer examination.

Solid Brass

Heavy, cast snares are very popular these days, especially with hard-hitting drummers who demand a drum that can cut through the loudest mix while also providing a hefty, fat tone. These drums are also quite popular with session drummers because of how well they interact with microphones in various styles and tunings. Canopus's version of this "holy grail" snare comes with eight or ten lugs (we received one with ten), and has a 3mm brass shell, black nickel-plated die-cast hoops, black nickel-plated solid-brass tube lugs, Canopus thirty-strand Backbeat wires, a basic side-throw strainer, and Remo drumheads (Coated Ambassador over Hazy Ambassador).

The designers at Canopus tweaked the shell and bearing edges to ensure unlimited power as well as supreme response and a full, rich





tone. I've played quite a few cast-brass, bronze, and steel snares, and while some have sounded ridiculous, others have been a bit dull and lifeless. Canopus did a great job with the Solid Brass to make sure that the density of the 3mm shell doesn't make the drum sound unruly or boxy. It has a ton of crisp high-end, so quiet buzz rolls articulate as cleanly as on a symphonic drum. And there's no perceivable dynamic ceiling, where the tone maxes out and starts to choke.

You can tune the Solid Brass super-high for a tight, biting Deftones vibe, or you can back it down into the lower register for a larger-than-life Nirvana-style smack. The overtones are clean and musical, so you don't need to muffle them. But the drum responds well to muffling, especially when going for a fat, dark, pillowy tone. I wouldn't lug this massive beast around for everyday gigging, but it would make an incredible first-call drum for all types of session work and for full-production live shows.

5.5x14 Harvey Mason Signature

In stark contrast to the Solid Brass, the Harvey Mason signature snare is designed to provide a dry, dark tone with short sustain

without sacrificing response or projection. It features a 5.5x14 6.4mm, 8-ply walnut/birch shell (seven plies of white birch and an outer ply of walnut) finished in walnut oil. The triple-flange hoops are 2.3mm steel, and the wires are Canopus's fourteen-strand non-plated Vintage model. Designed with Mason's articulate, precise playing in mind, this drum excels in jazz and fusion styles, providing a crisp, pleasing tone with a short sustain and controlled overtones. The bearing edges are sculpted to maximize the response and increase musicality. This drum favors high tunings, but its range is vast. It records beautifully and is quite pleasing to the ear in all-acoustic situations. If you play a lot of ghost notes, or if you favor a tight, contained snare with a lot of body and richness, check this guy out. He's a beauty.

Michael Dawson

TECH SPECS

Size: 6.5x14 (Solid Brass), 5.5x14 (Harvey Mason signature)

Shell: 3mm brass and 8-ply walnut/birch
Hoops: die-cast (Solid Brass), 2.3mm steel triple-flange (Mason)

Lugs: solid-brass tube

Price: Solid Brass: \$1,500; Mason: \$750

Shure

PGADRUMKIT7 Mic Pack

A professional-quality microphone kit at consumer-level pricing.

It's become increasingly common for drummers to bypass professional recording studios as they acquire the skills and tools to record from home. Shure has made a name for itself by providing some of the most reliable microphones available, especially gold standards like the Beta52 for the bass drum and the SM57 for the snare. Recently, Shure launched a new line of mics in the PG Alta series that's bound to make a lot of home-recording enthusiasts quite happy. The series includes eleven new models that, according to Shure, offer "professional-quality audio for practice, performance, and recording."

We were sent the PGADRUMKIT7 (\$499) microphone kit for review. It includes a PGA52 for the bass drum, three PGA56s for toms, a PGA57 for the snare, and two PGA81 overheads. Also included are three microphone clips, three drum mounts, seven XLR cables, and a soft carrying case. All of the microphones in this series feature a black-metallic finish. The PGA52 and PGA56 mics also feature a quick-release latch for easy positioning on the kit. Let's take a look at each microphone and see how a couple of them compare to the gold standards that we referred to earlier. Be sure to check out our audio examples of each test at moderndrummer.com.

PGA52 Bass Drum Mic

This cardioid dynamic microphone has a cartridge that's tailored for low-frequency clarity, with a frequency response of 50–12,000 Hz. We used the PGA52 on a 24" maple kick drum and also ran a comparison against a Beta52A. The PGA52 displayed a strong presence in the mid- to low-frequency range and had less attack than the Beta52A. Where the Beta52A captured a thick, crisp attack, the PGA52 was slightly boomy and had flatter high-end response. Even still, the PGA52 worked great for capturing the low-end punch of the 24" kick, and it captured just enough of the high-frequencies so the attack could cut through without any EQ.

PGA57 Snare Mic

Also a cardioid dynamic microphone, the PGA57 features a cartridge that's tailored for snare drums. It has a frequency response of 50–15,000 Hz and has a slightly rounded screw-on grill. When tested against an SM57, the PGA57 displayed the same type of mid- to low-frequency boosts that we heard in the PGA52. When using the PGA57, the overall tone of the snare was thicker. When used on a 6.5x14 maple drum, the PGA57 helped capture some of the depth of the tone while also providing a flatter attack. The SM57 delivered a more even representation of the snare, while marginally favoring the mid to high frequencies.

PGA56 Tom Mic

These cardioid dynamic snare/tom mics are designed for close-miking applications and have a frequency response of



TECH SPECS

Mics: PGA52, PGA56 (3), PGA57, and PGA81 (2)

Accessories: clips (3), mounts (3), XLR cables (7), and carrying case

Price: \$499

50–5,000 Hz. With the quick-release swivel latch and drum mount, positioning the PGA56 was quick and easy. We mounted the mics on three maple toms and had great results. The PGA56 captured the warmth and tone of the maple shells clearly without

favoring any particular frequency range. Whether we were playing heavy, thunderous tom patterns or light, articulate fills, the PGA56 captured everything flawlessly. They also delivered a true, accurate representation of the toms.

PGA81 Overheads

The PGA81 cardioid condenser microphone requires phantom power and is ideal for use as an overhead. It's designed to be sensitive, and it has a flat response from 40–18,000 Hz. We tested a pair of PGA81s in a configuration that included the bass drum and snare mics, and we tried them in conjunction with all of the other mics. In both setups, the flat response of the PGA81 delivered an authentic representation of the natural sound of the kit. Depending on how the PGA81s are positioned, you can capture more depth from the toms or more subtle articulation from the cymbals. For those with limited inputs or a preference for minimal miking techniques, the four-mic configuration was more than satisfactory. For those who will be close-miking the toms, the PGA81 will serve well for focusing more on the cymbals. The PGA81 is a reliable condenser that will accurately capture any sound source on which it's focused.

Conclusion

For \$499, you'll be hard-pressed to find a better option that features this many quality microphones, plus cables, clips, mounts, and a carrying case. If you're thinking about getting into home recording or need an affordable set of mics for live applications, the PGADRUMKIT7 is a great place to start.

Miguel Monroy



MUSIKMESSE

INTERNATIONAL PRESS AWARD

2015 WINNER

Tony Williams
TRIBUTE CYMBALS
— The 60's Era —

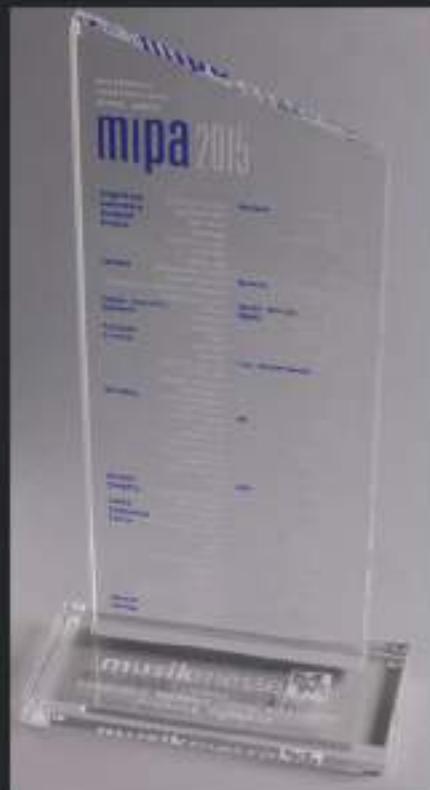
istanbul★
Mehmet Handmade Cymbals from Turkey

TONY WILLIAMS TRIBUTE CYMBALS

RECEIVED THE 16TH MIPA AWARD 2015
(MUSIKMESSE INTERNATIONAL PRESS AWARD 2015)



Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals Company is happy and proud to announce that Istanbul Mehmet Tony Williams Tribute Cymbals received The 16th MIPA Award 2015 in Cymbals category at Musikmesse Frankfurt 2015.



WHAT IS MIPA AWARD?

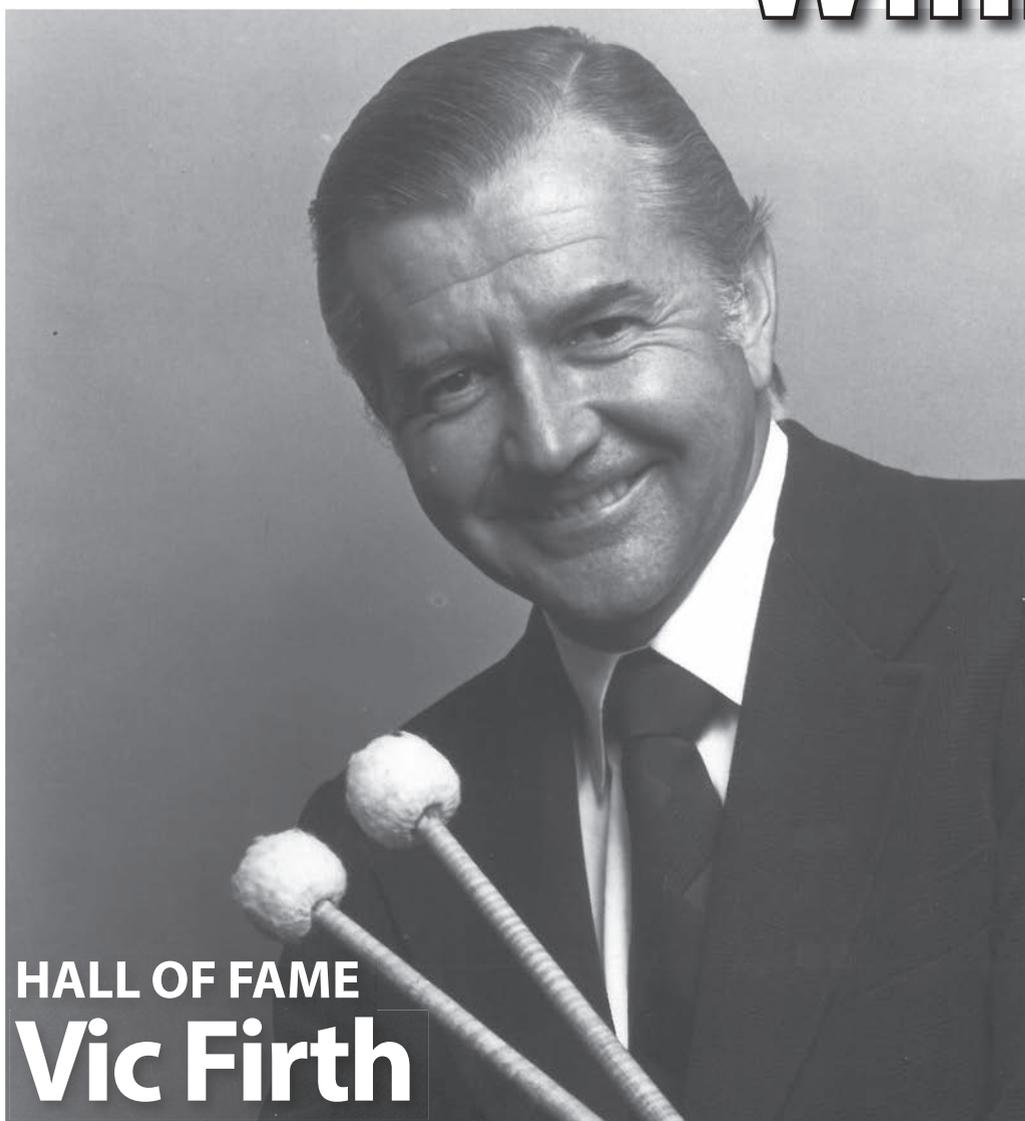
Journalists of more than 100 dedicated special interest magazines from all over the world (96 magazines from 24 countries) were called upon to nominate and vote for the best musical instruments and audio equipment of 2014/2015 in the 37 categories of the prestigious mipa/pipa Musikmesse/Prolight + Sound International Press Award.

istanbul★
Mehmet Handmade Cymbals from Turkey

Introducing...the 2016

MODERN DRUMMER

Readers Poll Winners



HALL OF FAME Vic Firth

"Vic was a very charismatic figure," legendary drummer Peter Erskine shared in *MD's* recent tribute to the late, great percussionist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, who also founded the hugely successful manufacturing company that bears his name. "Everybody wanted to talk with Vic and be with him. He was as gracious to the beginner as to the seasoned pro, the famous rock drummer, the jazz guy, that old friend of his, the weekend warrior, or the guy who owned the music store."

Past Hall of Fame Winners

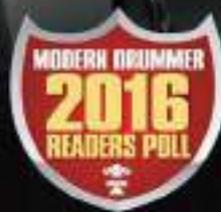
- 2015: Ian Paice
- 2014: Carmine Appice
- 2013: Bernard Purdie
- 2012: Phil Collins
- 2011: Jim Chapin
- 2010: Hal Blaine
- 2009: Mitch Mitchell
- 2008: Ginger Baker
- 2007: Jack DeJohnette
- 2006: Charlie Watts
- 2005: Stewart Copeland
- 2004: Mike Portnoy
- 2003: Simon Phillips
- 2002: Steve Smith
- 2001: Dennis Chambers
- 2000: Dave Weckl
- 1999: Roy Haynes
- 1998: Ringo Starr
- 1997: Terry Bozzio
- 1996: Vinnie Colaiuta
- 1995: Elvin Jones
- 1994: Larrie Londin
- 1993: Jeff Porcaro
- 1992: Max Roach
- 1991: Art Blakey
- 1990: Bill Bruford
- 1989: Carl Palmer
- 1988: Joe Morello
- 1987: Billy Cobham
- 1986: Tony Williams
- 1985: Louie Bellson
- 1984: Steve Gadd
- 1983: Neil Peart
- 1982: Keith Moon
- 1981: John Bonham
- 1980: Buddy Rich
- 1979: Gene Krupa

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR ARTISTS WHO WON...

Photo by Christie Goodwin

Gavin Harrison*
Porcupine Tree / King Crimson
#1 PROG
#5 MVP

*Gavin endorses Tama Speed Cobra pedals only!



John Tempesta
The Cult
#1 ROCK
#4 RECORDED PERFORMANCE, AUDIO
Ride (Motor Sister)

...AND PLACED IN THE 2016 MODERN DRUMMER READERS POLL!



Matt Garstka
Animals As Leaders
#3 PROG



Blake Richardson
Between The Buried And Me
#2 METAL
#5 RECORDED PERFORMANCE, AUDIO
Coma Ecliptic (Between the Buried and Me)



Jason Rullo
Symphony X
#3 METAL



Jonathan Schang
District 97
#5 PROG



Robert 'Sput' Searight
Snarky Puppy
#2 RECORDED PERFORMANCE, VIDEO
Sylva (Snarky Puppy)
#4 FUSION



Dirk Verbeuren
Soilwork
#5 METAL

TAMA.COM



MVP Jojo Mayer

2. Benny Greb
3. Keith Carlock
4. Antonio Sanchez
5. Gavin Harrison

"As I exposed myself to more programmed music," Jojo Mayer told *MD* in his May 2015 cover story, "I became more aware of the contrasts between electronic media and real-time playing. The contrast creates the tension. And I understood that this is something that we should cultivate and be aware of." It's difficult to think of a drummer who thrives more than Jojo does in the space where the mental and the mechanical meet. While his long-awaited DVD *Secret Weapons for the Modern Drummer, Part II: A Guide to Foot Technique* kept drummers busy and inspired last year, his band Nerve's *Live in Europe* recording provided a sterling example of the type of art that can result from a combination of outside-the-box thinking and good old-fashioned woodshedding.

Rob Strahan

STUDIO Matt Chamberlain

2. Aaron Sterling
3. Chris McHugh
4. Nir Z
5. Greg Morrow

"Hi, my name is Matt Chamberlain. I play drums, engineer, compose music, produce, and have had the privilege of touring and making records with some of the most amazing musicians...." Taken at face value, these words from the bio section of Chamberlain's website sound impressive enough. But it's when you read down his session credits elsewhere on the site—*whoa, now that's* when you begin to really understand how heavy he is on today's scene. Last year alone Chamberlain contributed to recordings by (among many others) Keith Urban, Steven Tyler, Chris Isaak, Chris Cornell, and Meg Myers, and played on the soundtracks to *Trainwreck* and *Sons of Anarchy*. Nearly thirty years into this, Matt remains among the busiest and most emulated musicians on the planet.

Rob Strahan



ROCK John Tempesta

2. Gil Sharone
3. Ilan Rubin
4. Daru Jones
5. Tony Palermo

"This is rock 'n' roll!" John Tempesta enthused in his August 2015 feature in *MD*, describing Motor Sister's killer *Ride* album, which he contributed drum tracks to. "It's not rocket science. That's the beauty of this record. We recorded the whole thing in two days—all twelve songs—all live, no click or anything. I love being spontaneous. All our favorite bands from the '70s recorded like that." And indeed, few players today combine the seat-of-the-pants excitement of classic-era rock with the precision of modern performance standards as fully as Tempesta does. It's what's made him a perennial favorite among *MD* readers, and what will surely keep him close to our heart for years to come.

Stephan Lee

POP/R&B Brian Frasier-Moore

2. Chris Dave
3. Adam Marcelllo
4. Nikki Glaspie
5. Mark Stepro

"In my early years Philadelphia had a huge affect on me," Brian Frasier-Moore told *Modern Drummer* in his November 2015 cover story. "Growing up around legends such as DJ Jazzy Jeff, James Poyser, and Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, who were responsible for creating the Philadelphia Sound, had such an amazing effect on how I took music in at that time—listening to everything that's going on in a song, feeling the mood and the way a particular song moved...being unselfish with what I add or contribute to that piece of art." And it's exactly that kind of generous, big-picture thinking that's made the drummer so popular with superstars like Madonna and Justin Timberlake.

Alex Solca

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R. Alt av. Seg ev

PROG Gavin Harrison

2. Todd Sucherman
3. Matt Garstka
4. Marco Minnemann
5. Jonathan Schang

How cool was the recent King Crimson reunion, featuring the fearless drumming trio of Pat Mastelotto, Bill Rieflin, and Porcupine Tree's phenomenal rhythmist, Gavin Harrison? And, we should add, how fearlessly complex? "Surely one of [band leader] Robert Fripp's greatest skills is picking people," Harrison suggested in *MD*'s February 2015 cover story on the Crimsoid front line. "You've got to be a good casting agent and know what the personalities can bring to the band. You could easily get it wrong." As most prog fans are aware, though, Fripp rarely "gets it wrong," and in choosing Harrison for this historic KC lineup, he gave drumming fans one of the best presents they could hope for.



FUSION Dave Weckl

2. Jojo Mayer
3. Benny Greb
4. Robert "Sput" Searight
5. Oscar Seaton

"We wanted to see if our fans would invest in us," Dave Weckl said in his January 2015 *MD* cover story, regarding his recent collaboration with longtime keyboard cohort Jay Oliver, *Convergence*. "So we tried this crowd-funding direction. That idea snowballed into all the things that we could do beyond making the CD. I had to stop booking myself and stay home to do this thing. It turned into a mega-project beyond my wildest expectations."



Alex Salca

METAL Matt Greiner

2. Blake Richardson
3. Jason Rullo
4. Ryan Van Poederooyen
5. Dirk Verbeuren

The drummer with August Burns Red epitomizes the modern metal rhythm machine. "I treat writing my parts like it's a job," Greiner told *MD* in his September 2015 feature. "It's a lot of work. The first thing I do is get to know every part of the song. If I can memorize each part before writing my parts, I'll have a better feel for the flow of the song and where it's going. Then I can write accordingly." The process has certainly proven successful, as it's helped ABB remain one of the most revered acts on the contemporary metal scene.



ALTERNATIVE Dave Elitch

2. Chloe Saavedra
3. Adam Christgau
4. Greg Saunier
5. Jamie Miller

"Something that I drill into people," Dave Elitch said in his July 2015 *MD* feature, "is that you work really hard in the shed, and when you play music, just play music. Be in the moment. If you think about technique while you're creating something, it defeats the purpose." Those who've been mesmerized by Elitch's work with Antemasque (featuring members of the Mars Volta) and Killer Be Killed (another all-star act, this time featuring metal heavyweights) will find familiarity in that quote, as the drummer/educator possesses some of the most enviable technique on the scene and can also crank up a rock 'n' roll storm like precious few of his peers.



Mike Bordin
 YAMAHA ARTIST '80
 - Nominee - RECORDED PERFORMANCE, VIDEO



Oscar Seaton
 YAMAHA ARTIST '98
 - Nominee - FUSION



Mike Johnston
 YAMAHA ARTIST '16
 - WINNER - CLINICIAN / EDUCATOR
 - Nominee - EDUCATIONAL PRODUCT



Dave Weckl
 YAMAHA ARTIST '83
 - WINNER - FUSION



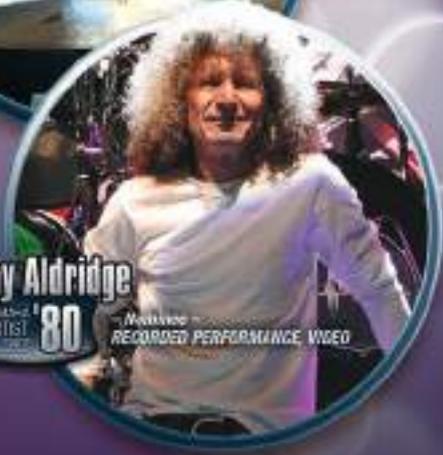
Nikki Glaspie
 YAMAHA ARTIST '06
 - Nominee - POP/ROCK



Vince Cherico
 YAMAHA ARTIST '04
 - Nominee - JAZZ



Antonio Sanchez
 YAMAHA ARTIST '01
 - WINNER - JAZZ
 - Nominee - RECORDED PERFORMANCE, AUDIO MVP



Tommy Aldridge
 YAMAHA ARTIST '80
 - Nominee - RECORDED PERFORMANCE, VIDEO



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Congratulations from all of us to all of you.



COUNTRY Rich Redmond

- 2. Chris Tyrrell
- 3. Ben Sesar
- 4. Sean Fuller
- 5. Seth Rausch

"Over the years," Jason Aldean drummer Rich Redmond said in his September 2015 *MD Basics* column, "my experiences as a teacher have taught me to always start simply. I like to build a strong foundation before increasing the level of complexity. After all, you have to bake a cake and make it taste great by itself before adding the frosting or sprinkles." And Redmond should know. The drummer, who authored a well-received method book last year, has become hugely popular for his ability to break beats down to their basics—as a player and an educator—and then add a unique twist to make them memorable. It's a recipe for total success.



JAZZ Antonio Sanchez

- 2. Mark Guiliana
- 3. Kenny Washington
- 4. Henry Cole
- 5. Vince Chericco

"I felt that this was the perfect vehicle to be unapologetic about anything I wanted to do, because the flow could take me places where I would not necessarily allow myself to go on a regular record." In this quote from his August 2015 cover story, Antonio Sanchez, who left the comfort of his long-held post with superstar jazz guitarist Pat Metheny to focus on his own art, is referring to his wonderful album *The Meridian Suite*. But he easily could be describing his unique score to the groundbreaking film *Birdman*, another recent career highlight. Either way—and despite a controversial snubbing at the Oscars—drummer and audience still came out winners.

Rick Malkin

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TOMMY ALDRIDGE
Recorded Performance,
Video



MIKE BORDIN
Recorded Performance,
Video



MATT CHAMBERLAIN
WINNER: Studio



DAVE DiCENSO
Clinician/Educator



MATT GARSTKA
Progressive



NIKKI GLASPIE
Pop/R&B



MATT GREINER
WINNER: Metal



BENNY GREB
MVP, Fusion
Educational Product



TOMAS HAAKE
Recorded
Performance, Video



PETE LOCKETT
Percussionist



MIKE MANGINI
WINNER: Recorded
Performance, Video



RUSS MILLER
Clinician/Educator



RICH REDMOND
WINNER: Country



BLAKE RICHARDSON
Recorded Performance,
Audio,
Metal



ILAN RUBIN
Rock



ANTONIO SANCHEZ
WINNER: Jazz
MVP, Recorded
Performance, Audio



OSCAR SEATON
Fusion



BEN SESAR
Country



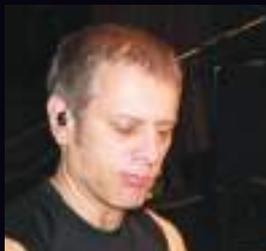
GIL SHARONE
Rock



TODD SUCHERMAN
Progressive



JOHN TEMPESTA
WINNER: Rock
Recorded
Performance, Audio



DAVE WECKL
WINNER: Fusion

BILL BACHMAN
Clinician/Educator

GREG MORROW
Studio

DAVE ELITCH
WINNER: Alternative

TONY PALERMO
Rock

ADAM MARCELLO
Pop/R&B

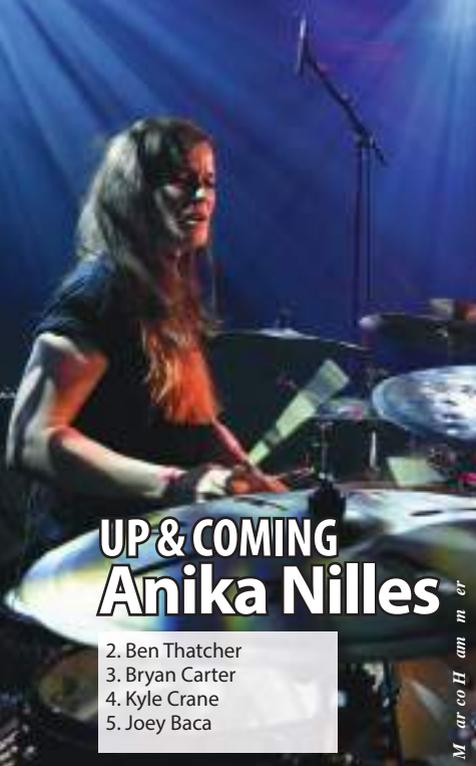
MARK STEPPO
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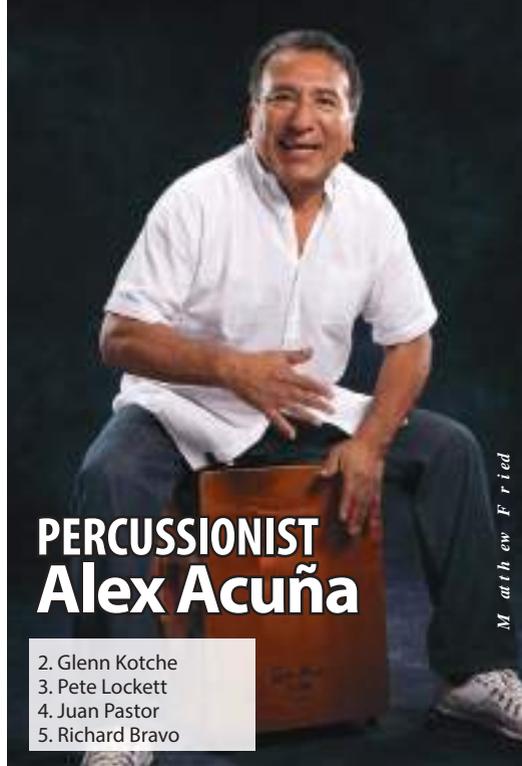
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UP & COMING Anika Nilles

- 2. Ben Thatcher
- 3. Bryan Carter
- 4. Kyle Crane
- 5. Joey Baca

Matthew Fried



PERCUSSIONIST Alex Acuña

- 2. Glenn Kotche
- 3. Pete Lockett
- 4. Juan Pastor
- 5. Richard Bravo

Matthew Fried



CLINICIAN/EDUCATOR Mike Johnston

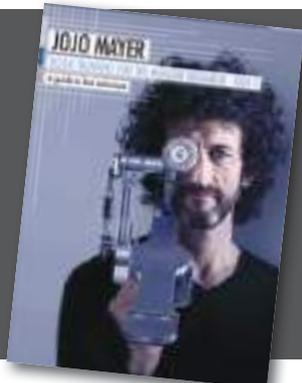
- 2. Dom Famularo
- 3. Russ Miller
- 4. Dave DiCenso
- 5. Bill Bachman

EDUCATIONAL PRODUCT

Jojo Mayer

Secret Weapons for the Modern Drummer, Part II (DVD)

- 2. Benny Greb, *The Art & Science of Groove* (DVD)
- 3. Mike Johnston, *Groove Freedom* (app)
- 4. George Kollias, *The Odyssey of Double Bass Drumming: The Beginning* (book)
- 5. Dave King, *Rational Funk* (Web video series)



RECORDED PERFORMANCE, AUDIO

Questlove, James Gadson, and Chris Dave

Black Messiah (D'Angelo and the Vanguard)

- 2. Keith Carlock, *Toto XIV* (Toto)
- 3. Antonio Sanchez, *The Meridian Suite* (Antonio Sanchez and Migration)
- 4. John Tempesta, *Ride* (Motor Sister)
- 5. Blake Richardson, *Coma Ecliptic* (Between the Buried and Me)



RECORDED PERFORMANCE, VIDEO

Mike Mangini

Breaking the Fourth Wall (Dream Theater)

- 2. Robert "Sput" Searight, *Sylva* (Snarky Puppy)
- 3. Tommy Aldridge, Mike Bordin, Randy Castillo, Deen Castronovo, Tommy Clufetos, and Lee Kerslake, *Memoirs of a Madman* (Ozzy Osbourne)
- 4. Tomas Haake, *The Ophidian Trek* (Meshuggah)
- 5. John Wackerman and various others, *Drum Duets, Vol. 2*



THE PDP NEW YORKER BY DW



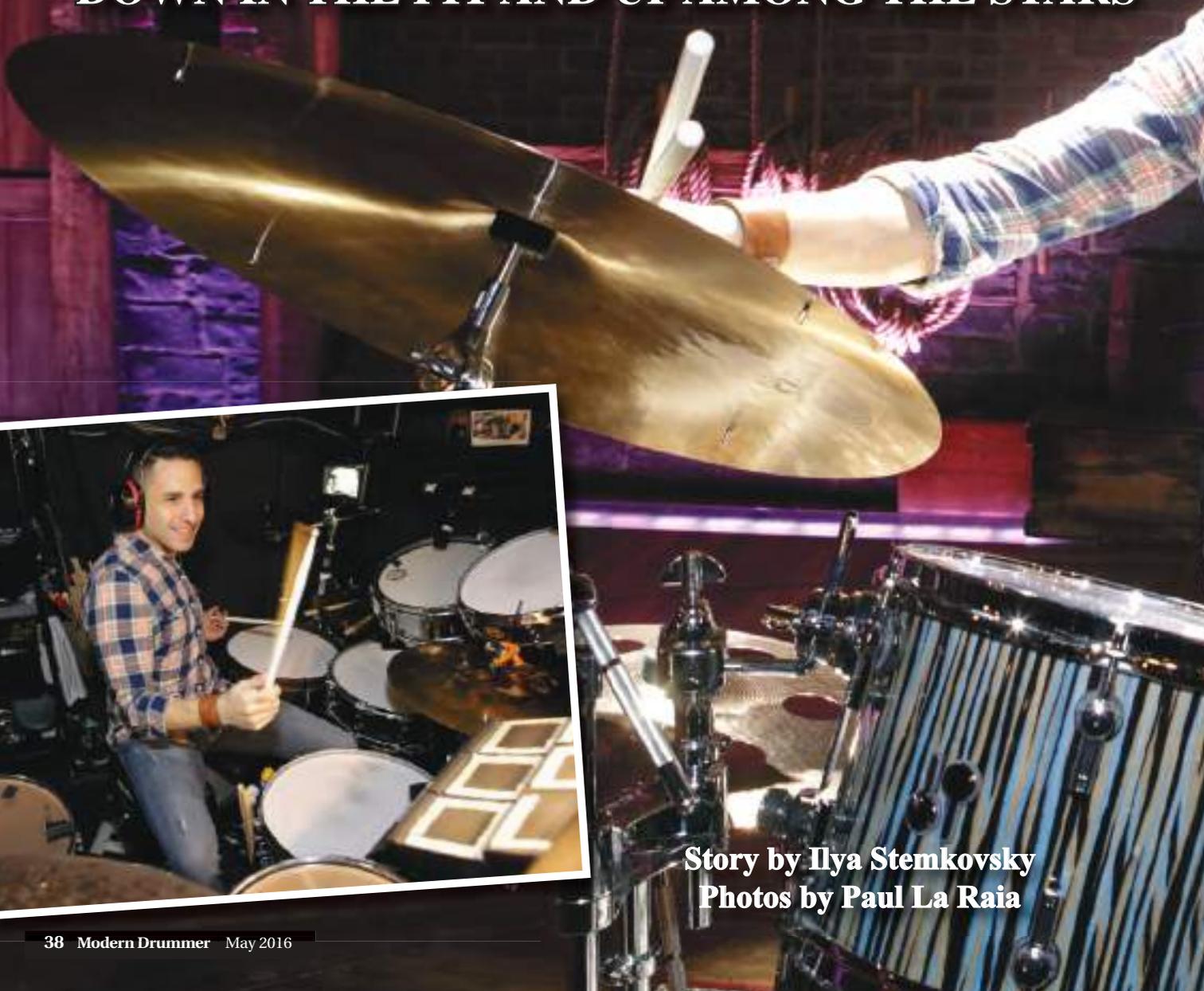
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HAMILTON'S ANDRÉS FORERO

DOWN IN THE PIT AND UP AMONG THE STARS



Story by Ilya Stemkovsky
Photos by Paul La Raia



Andrés Forero is booked. And it's not just any old steady gig that's keeping him working. It happens to be the hottest ticket in town, the critically acclaimed Broadway hit musical *Hamilton*. And by "booked" we mean for the foreseeable future, as in for the next few years.

Aside from recording with several jazz artists and doing some TV work, Forero has led a charmed performing life throughout his burgeoning Broadway career, having been involved with *Hamilton* creator and star Lin-Manuel Miranda and musical director Alex Lacamoire on the previous successes *In the Heights* and *Bring It On*. And though those productions pushed the boundaries of what theater musicals are supposed to look and sound like, it's *Hamilton* where it all comes together, especially in Forero's eclectic and imaginative drumming.

There's nothing traditional about the show, with its use of hip-hop and urban flavors and its cast of African-Americans and Latinos playing the roles of the country's white forefathers. The music is funky and flat-out rocks, and that takes a special drumming hand. "It's predictable and it's unpredictable," Forero says. "It's creative because there's a flexibility written into the show where the emotion dictates the flexibility. It can feel like a rock concert. At the end, I feel exhilarated."

Forero, who is a humble family man, faced a major obstacle along the way, in the form of a serious car accident a decade ago, which was severe enough that he had to learn to walk again, not to mention remember how to play. But he was determined to prevail, and after a road stint in the national touring production of *The Book of Mormon*, the drummer got the chance to come home and apply his incredible dedication and commitment to learn the *Hamilton* drum book as the show moved to Broadway, and take the whole thing up a notch with his own creative offerings. The results? A Grammy-nominated cast recording, coproduced by Questlove and Black Thought of the Roots, on which Forero shines. The release even peaked at number one on the *Billboard* Rap Albums chart.

Hamilton is a bona-fide phenomenon, but it's still hard work, as Forero maintains a grueling schedule of eight shows a week, with the occasional sub giving him a breather. If you're lucky enough to score tickets, you'll hear what so many others have heard—the drumming future of Broadway.



MD: Does anyone set out to be a drummer in a Broadway pit orchestra?

Andrés: I was interested in piano and guitar before drums. The first person I was exposed to was Glenn Gould, who served as an inspiration above anything. My mom said I was glued to the TV. My father had an organ in the house, so I'd try to figure out "Prelude" and "Fugue" at an early age. Growing up, I was exposed to R&B music, Sly and the Family Stone, and the Commodores in my house. I also listened to Rush, who were my favorite band, and Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, and Pink Floyd.

I never really listened to drummers until seventh or eighth grade, which is when I got into jazz drummers and that style. My high school music teacher in Rochester, New York, Ned Corman, was instrumental in bringing a lot of famous jazz musicians to our school, like Paquito D'Rivera, whom I'd later play with, and Max Roach, Ron Carter, and Steve Gadd. And we, the high school band, would perform with them. Ned wanted to help nurture my talent, and he and his wife bought me a set of Gretsch drums because I was so poor.

MD: How'd you go from jazz to the theater?

Andrés: I was in college still, and it wasn't something I intended on doing. Eli Fountain was a member of Max Roach's ensemble M'Boom. He called and asked me to sub on *Jelly's Last Jam* for a few months. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. But I heard it was this amount of money and I said I'd do it. I was nineteen years old.

MD: Why did Eli ask someone like you, who had no experience?

Andrés: Part of it was luck on my part. Part of it was exhaustion on his part, because he couldn't find anyone else. And he knew me from some jazz summer camps. He knew I was hungry and that if I wanted to do something, I was going to figure it out, no matter what. And Max Roach was a big part of my life. Musically

he was a mentor to me, and he was the same for Eli. Maybe Max recommended me. I'm not sure exactly how that happened. But I had written a piece of music for Max and he performed it when he came to my school. And he told me that after I graduated, if I came to New York, I should call him.

So one day when I was at the Manhattan School of Music I did call him and went to his house, and he asked if I wanted to work for him. He had boxes of old reel-to-reels that hadn't been heard before, and it was my job to transfer those reels to DAT, CD, and cassette. Eventually some of that stuff ended up in the Smithsonian. What an education for me. He was very generous and sweet. I was very blessed to have that.

MD: What was the *Jelly's Last Jam* experience like?

Andrés: It was uncharted territory for me. There was a lot of jazz in that show. The show started with me and Gregory Hines! He's one of my biggest influences to this day. Freda Payne and Savion Glover were both on that tour. Some huge people, and I didn't know who any of them were. I was just this naïve kid. I had to go pick up the book and learn it literally on the plane ride to the first show. And it was both percussion and drumset. I worked hard to get it together because I didn't want to let Eli down.

The first few shows were kind of rough, maybe *really* rough. [laughs] But then it got better. That was my intro to theater music. I went back to playing jazz and world music and Latin jazz to make

R E C O R D I N G S

William Cepeda My Roots and Beyond, Live at Montreux Jazz Festival, Unity /// **Luis Bonilla** Terminal Clarity /// **Various** In the Heights Original Broadway Cast Recording, Bring It On: The Musical Original Broadway Cast Recording, Hamilton Original Broadway Cast Recording /// **Adam Ray** The Clown Parade /// **Rolando Morales-Matos** Forward /// **ChapterFive** Primitive /// **Christopher Jackson** In the Name of Love

money, and really began theater music a few years later. And school didn't teach you about theater music. They taught you about trying to make it as a "legit" player or jazz musician. I could have been subbing in New York shows, but I just didn't know.

MD: Was *The Electric Company* a challenge?

Andrés: Again, I had no idea what I was getting into. One of the co-orchestrators for *In the Heights*, Bill Sherman, was the new executive in charge of music at PBS. He was kind enough to ask me to play in it. I just knew it would be for a kids' TV show.

In that show I played drums and all the ethnic percussion. You'd show up to a session and sometimes there was no music, so you'd create the part on the spot. And it's not like you had all day to do it. Time is money. When you're in the studio and it's someone else's money, you have to get in your brain and recall genres galore. One week it would be with Ne-Yo and the next with Katy Perry. It was very relevant. But you'd dial back for a '60s feel and then hip-hop and then rock and then calypso. And you have to learn how to get along and be patient and stay light-hearted. There was a lot of waiting while other people did their takes. I also learned about equipment, how they sync music to time code. And I learned how to play for the scene and make that [priority] number one. It was a selfless situation. And I loved working with Bill and that band so much. I did that for about three years.

MD: So what brought you back to Broadway?

Andrés: Alex Lacamoire. He's been a huge driving force in my career. Like a muse and a little angel in my life. I started with *In the Heights*

back in 2002, before Alex did. That was before my car accident. That was a very different show. It was a piano player, bass player, and me. I was also playing buckets and a conga. Everything was in the early stages.

Fast-forward to after my accident; I wasn't doing so well, but they got their backers and Alex was hired to MD. They asked me to audition, and he hired me. The show did off-Broadway and then went to Broadway and had great success. I built a really great relationship with Alex. Eventually he'd go on to be this huge, important person in the Broadway community. So when he went on to do *Bring It On*, he asked me to be a part of that. Then they were developing *Hamilton* while I was on a national tour with *The Book of Mormon*. I had no idea about the show at all. Anything Alex touches turns to gold, so of course I'd be there.

MD: How did you prepare? Was hip-hop in your bag?

Andrés: I studied a lot of different styles, so I could hold my own. Every situation is different. But in this one, I saw the notes, I saw what the feel was, and sometimes there's a hint. "D'Angelo-like" is one of them. Alex doesn't leave one inch for you to question. Not in his writing, not in his conducting, and certainly not in his playing. So if you're not prepared, why bother? So I wanted to over-prepare. I videotaped myself studying the show. Every night for six weeks, after *The Book of Mormon* would end I'd go into a studio from midnight to 5 A.M. to monitor my progress. But I didn't know what *Hamilton* was. I was listening to it and practicing it, but it was very innocent. I was just dead set on owning this book. I wasn't eating.

COLLEAGUES ANDRÉS

Lin-Manuel Miranda (creator and title role, *Hamilton*)

It's almost impossible to overstate the importance of the role that drums and rhythm play in this score. I had the good fortune to work with Andrés on my last musical, *In the Heights*. We were playing with every type of Latin music on that score, so we drew on Andrés's versatility in many different genres. That's also true on *Hamilton*, but we get to let Andrés just rock out a lot more. I can literally feel Andrés going to town on the drums underneath us in the orchestra pit. It's an energy that is so fun to harness. You can throw anything at Andrés. He's the best in the business.

Alex Lacamoire (musical director, *Hamilton*)

Andrés is all about giving a thousand percent at every performance. He's a "leave it all on the floor" type of player. *Hamilton* is an extremely intricate show, and every department relies on the drums to be there when we need them, to fuel the choreography, to give the boom-bap under all the raps. Andrés is our anchor, and he's always on point.

Andrés is able to take my charts and add his own style in a way that's respectful, inventive, and exciting. There's an amazing fill that goes over the barline and crashes on 2 near the end of "Satisfied"—that was purely Andrés's flourish. He improvised it once mid-show and I nearly fell off my piano bench with glee. I live for moments like that.

Andrés is one of my favorites because his musical influences resonate with mine. He plays busy without being distracting, he plays powerfully without bashing, and he plays creatively without begging for attention.

Steve Smith (Vital Information, *Journey*)

Hamilton is entertaining, fun, exciting, and politically insightful, and it drops historical knowledge and exudes a gravitas that is breathtaking. The musical score requires a vast command of grooves, from ultra-modern, hard-swung hip-hop to classic shuffles to drum corps to ballads and more, with constantly changing drum sounds and extremely precise parts. Andrés rises to the occasion and plays parts that will live on as the definitive drum performances that perfectly realize the incredible songs of *Hamilton*.



FORER O'S HAMILTON SETUP

Drums: Sonor ProLite in Nussbaum finish

- 5x14 snare
- 8x10 tom
- 9x12 tom
- 16x16 floor tom
- 17x22 bass drum
- 5x14 Sonor Phil Rudd signature snare with RimRiser
- 5.5x14 Sonor Steve Smith cast steel snare
- 12" Calderwood Percussion custom soprano snare
- 16x15 Calderwood Percussion custom rope-tension field drum with gut snares

Cymbals: Sabian

- 17" prototype hi-hats
- 24" HH King ride with four rivets (or 24", 2,184-gram HH Remastered ride with four rivets)
- 19" HHX Evolution crash
- 18" O-Zone stacked on top of 12" prototype China
- 18" Iso (or 18" Aero) crash
- Prototype mini hi-hats with 7.5" top and 9" bottom
- 12" HH Remastered splash mounted on Cymbolt stacking device

Percussion: Gon Bops 14" Alex Acuña signature timbale, Rhythm Tech Hat Trick G2

Electronics: Yamaha DTX-MULTI pad, Roland KT-10

Hardware: DW

Heads: Remo, including Weatherking Vintage A snare batter, Vintage Emperor Clear tom batters and Coated Ambassador resonants, and Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter

Sticks: Vic Firth Extreme 5A and B sticks, M3 marimba mallets, Split brushes, and SD12 Swizzle G

Accessories: GK Music UltraPhones



I was going to give him every note ten thousand times over. When I got to New York, I was so ready and confident and in love with this music that at the first show I felt like I was home. Besides my three children, the greatest gift anyone has ever given me was Alex bringing me back to be home. I get to wake up in the same house as my wife and kids.

MD: The demographic of the *Hamilton* band is pretty young and multicultural. Is that important to present this kind of music?

Andrés: Alex is thinking about who is right for the part. It doesn't matter if they're black or white or Asian. It's about who will interpret the music that he's written. That's what's great about what we do. It breaks those barriers. It only matters that you understand what the music being played is. And the genius of *Hamilton* is that you have several different ethnicities that are portraying these forefathers who were all white. It's a great time for that because of all the racial tensions now, and the climate of the world is murky.

MD: Are you technically approaching this show differently from *In the Heights* or *Bring It On*?

Andrés: For *In the Heights* I had a humongous drumset—two bass drums, five toms, two timbales, Rototoms, electronics, cowbells, four or five pedals on the floor.... I had to physically adjust the way I played to the number of drums I had, but I still set them up so they were comfortable for me. For *Bring It On*, the drumset was very similar to the one I use in *Hamilton*. Five snare drums. And there's a lot of the *Bring It On* DNA in this show. For *Bring It On*, I tipped the snare drums quite a bit and played traditional grip the entire show. On the road with *The Book of Mormon*, I controlled the click, because that's how that book was written. It was a challenge with another set of responsibilities. Not only was I playing the drums and a lot of heavy djembe playing, I would start and stop the click for the entire band. It was a little scary.

MD: How much input did you have in the *Hamilton* drum book?

Andrés: Alex and Lin wrote the book, but they rewrite things when a show goes from off-Broadway to Broadway, and you make that book yours by bringing your personality and emotion to it. I might have changed a part or played something that felt better, and Alex is great about allowing that. If he hears something and loves it because it makes musical sense, it stays. There's one part of the show with these great triplets that I just felt one day and played them, and it became part of the thing. Now Alex plays them and the bass player plays them. I just did it spontaneously and it stayed with the show.

MD: And why the five snare drums?

Andrés: Stylistically it gives you a different flavor for all the hip-hop tunes. I'm with Sonor, and I use the ProLite series. The kit is augmented with two beautiful snare drums made by Calderwood Percussion out of Massachusetts. One is like a pre-Civil War drum on floor tom legs with a Ronn Dunnett snare throw-off and real gut snares. I believe it's the voice of the show. It opens the show and I play it throughout the show. And I have a Steve Smith snare drum that's really heavy and tuned very low.

I reached out to Sabian and told them it's a different show with different sounds, so they sent me some things that weren't available, as well as some from their HH Remastered line. They've been amazing. And I'm using 17" hi-hats, but the bottom is really the top of a custom-made set, and the top is a crash. It works. The sound is perfect for the show.

I also use a ton of different Vic Firth mallets. I'm experimenting with the sticks for the show. I needed something longer, because the cymbals are farther away from me. And they sent me a bunch of sticks to try out, and a Split brush. I use Remo heads, all tuned to notes. I also use the incredible Cymbolt, which allows me to quickly pull my splash off to put on my snare. I can't use the splash without that. That thing is super-essential for the show.

MD: Generally hip-hop has a lot of programmed stuff going on, but there seems to be very little prerecorded music in this show.

Andrés: The genius of what Alex did for *Hamilton* is that he made the loops be in real time. So he hired a percussionist [Benny Reiner]

BENNYGREB

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Made in Germany

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ANDRÉS FORERO



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Forero at Hamilton Park, Weehawken, New Jersey, the site of the famous Alexander Hamilton/Aaron Burr duel. The Richard Rogers Theater where *Hamilton* the play is being performed stands a mile due east across the Hudson River.

who is an outstanding drummer first. So he's playing those loops in real time. Some of those hi-hat patterns are very machinelike. And no one is resting in the show. It's a challenge every night to be consistent. When you set the bar, you can't drop from that. You have to at least meet that. And if you really have your shit together, you'll exceed that for your own musical joy. We do eight shows a week, but not every show is the same.

MD: What changes?

Andrés: So many things. The people on stage. We feed off their energy and they feed off ours. Someone can have an insanely great night, and when they're on fire, we feel it. And maybe I'll drive it really good one night, and they up their game as well. That's what makes this show wonderful. We end the show with a guitar solo, a piano solo, and a drum solo. This is Broadway! This is awesome. Who does that? Alex wrote in solos. So it takes a special human being to infuse that element into something, Broadway, that's known to be very traditional. [Usually] you use brushes, play a woodblock, and hit a splash.

MD: The *Hamilton* click is constantly moving. It speeds up, slows down, and disappears. Is that a challenge?

Andrés: I have a great relationship with the

click. Either you make friends and you make peace with it and respect it, or you learn to hate it. There are a lot of guys who hate it.

MD: On Broadway?

Andrés: Maybe not on Broadway, but not every Broadway show has a click. But I love playing with it, because there's no question of anyone saying something is slowing down or speeding up. The click doesn't lie. At some point you've worked with it so much that now you've learned how to bend the click. That's a funky concept, because that's a machine. Now you're manipulating the click with how you're interpreting the emotion of it. Everything has emotion, even a machine like that. It's what you make of it.

So one day I just stopped hearing the click. It was just part of the music, part of what I was playing, and I loved it. And it keeps you honest, and it helps. And if the click dies, you get emotional, you get nervous. At that point the most important thing is communication.

On the *Book of Mormon* tour, sometimes we'd be in a town and the band wasn't the best. Being in a Broadway pit orchestra teaches you how to be more thoughtful. Sometimes someone isn't prepared for something or someone had a rough night's sleep. It could be anyone. But it teaches you how to help a person through a moment

F A V O R I T E S

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Andrés Forero

they might not be feeling super-strong in. On the *Mormon* tour, I felt like I was playing 16th notes the whole time. Whether ghost notes or whatever, it was providing a bed. It made me a better musician, conscious of other people.

MD: Let's talk about recording the cast album. What was Questlove's involvement?

Andrés: He and Black Thought from the Roots were coproducers. They went in after it was all recorded and Quest would say something like, "Why don't you turn the drums up here?" Typically cast albums for Broadway shows have the vocals prominent, the band a little bit less. So those guys pushed to bend the rules. Quest does get a credit on the album. On one song he plays a hip-hop groove on a table and it's ridiculous, it sounds so good.

Their thought process was to make it more like a pop album. Most cast albums are done in one day. This one took about six days. There are fifty-one songs in the show and forty-eight on the album, so that's different. It was thoughtful the way they grouped recording the songs [on specific] days. It played into the emotion and how much energy you might be able to bring. And, oh, by the way, you have to play a show after you record!

Bill Sherman was behind the board. He's a marvel to me. He can control a session with comedy and keep everyone calm. And this was my third cast album. So when we were listening back [after the Roots' involvement], you could hear the drums and the bass—you heard everything.

MD: Any advice on how to break into the Broadway scene?

Andrés: I'm a true believer in investigating all styles of music and working avenues. Theater is an important avenue to explore if you want to be a working musician and have a steady paycheck, have health benefits, and be part of a union. It's like having a normal job. You can have a retirement plan and a 401(k). It's an incredible source of stability for anyone who wants to play. And there are so many styles of music.

If you're afraid that it's going to be boring or you're going to have to play soft and it's all brushes, there's nothing wrong with that, but on my show we're *playing*. Broadway has changed. The concept of what Broadway is has morphed into something else. It hasn't ignored what came before, but it's incorporated it into something more modern. And it's evolved beautifully, I think. So I urge young students: No matter what instrument you play, join a union, sit in a pit,

work on your reading, and figure out how you can get yourself to sub on a show. There are first national tours, second national tours, regional tours—get on it. And if your aspiration is to be a pit musician, it's so much easier once you've followed those steps.

And an important part of having success is having great subs. You can't dial *Hamilton* in. You have to play the parts but be emotionally prepared. All the subs have learned the "choreography"—and picking things up and putting things down.

MD: So what's next? This show is sold out

for a while. We know you want to be home.

Andrés: I do. My first job is being a father and a husband. But I want to make a solo record of my music that I've written. I have a lot of music that I wrote pre-car accident. It's a mixture of jazz, pop, and old R&B. So there are a lot of singers, and a string quartet, and a woodwind quintet. I'm a different person from eleven years ago, and I got a second chance at life. I have such a huge array of music in my head. I want to get it out.



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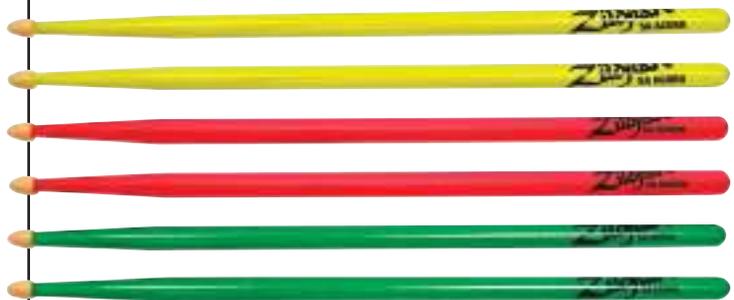


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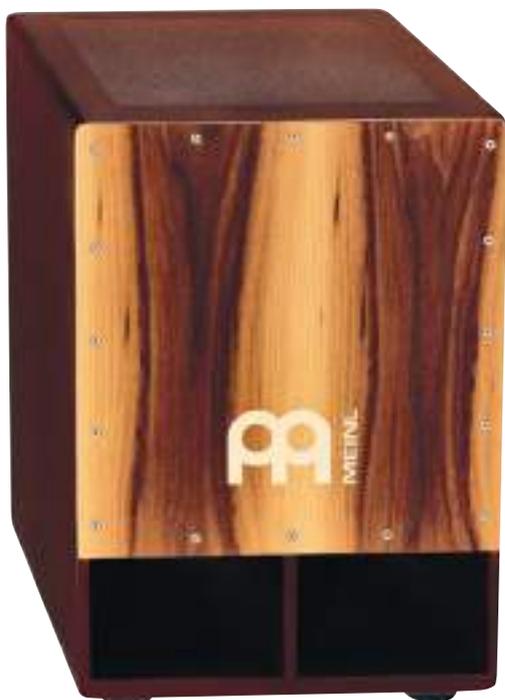


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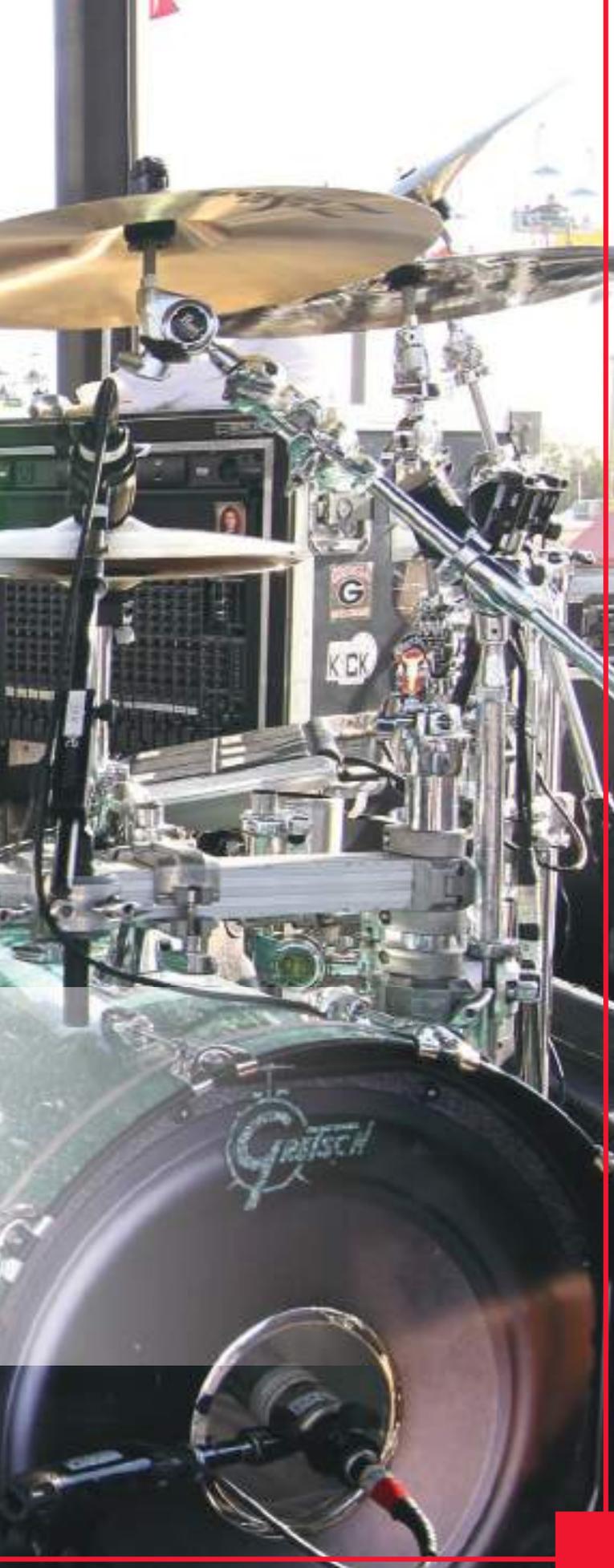
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The devil may have gone down to Georgia, but he hasn't gotten in Pat McDonald's way. The drummer's journey began in the small town of St. Simons Island, Georgia, but for the past seventeen years McDonald has been the backbone of the rhythm section that powers the Charlie Daniels Band, one of the most internationally recognized groups to burst out of the 1970s Southern-rock scene, alongside iconic peers the Allman Brothers, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and the Marshall Tucker Band. A technically proficient, powerful, and tasteful drummer whose gifts make him ideal for his gig, McDonald has nonetheless been on a path that one might say is made up of more than a little luck and good fortune.

McDonald took up the drums at the age of twelve. Early on, his life seemed typical enough—he was just a kid with a passion for an instrument. He took music classes and lessons in junior high and high school, and excelled. But just after high school graduation in 1983, Pat was diagnosed with cancer. The youngster accepted the news and began treatment. His determination and drive wouldn't let him sit still, so he joined a club band and burned the midnight oil traveling the roads of Georgia and Florida. His cancer went into remission, but in 1985 it resurfaced. Pat once again underwent successful treatment.

McDonald then attended a year of school at Georgia Southern College, where he further honed his marching band and jazz chops, and his talent eventually led him to the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston. While there, he studied privately with the legendary instructor Gary Chaffee. After Berklee, McDonald moved to Florida and dove headlong into the music business, weaving in and out of various club, Top 40, cruise-ship, and jazz bands.

The drummer decided to push the envelope further by relocating to Nashville. His rearview mirror fell off somewhere along the way. Shortly after arriving in Music City, McDonald landed the gig with his first legendary boss, singer Tanya Tucker. Sessions and live work kept his schedule full. Then, in 1999, Pat got the call to audition for another household name, Charlie Daniels. He nailed it. Eight years later, after twenty-two years of being cancer free, McDonald found that the disease had returned. Short breaks in touring for treatment led, once again, to remission. Today McDonald maintains a full schedule of more than a hundred dates a year with Daniels, does session work, teaches private students, and plays with his new instrumental prog-rock side project, Fluxu8ers.

MD caught up with McDonald at the Georgia National Fair in Perry, one week prior to the release of Daniels' *Live at Billy Bob's Texas* CD and DVD. The band recorded it in February of 2015, a little more than a month after McDonald went through hip-replacement surgery—one more bump in a road that, despite some serious dips, continues on a decidedly upward trajectory.

Story by Aaron Strickland
Photos by Joey Tanner

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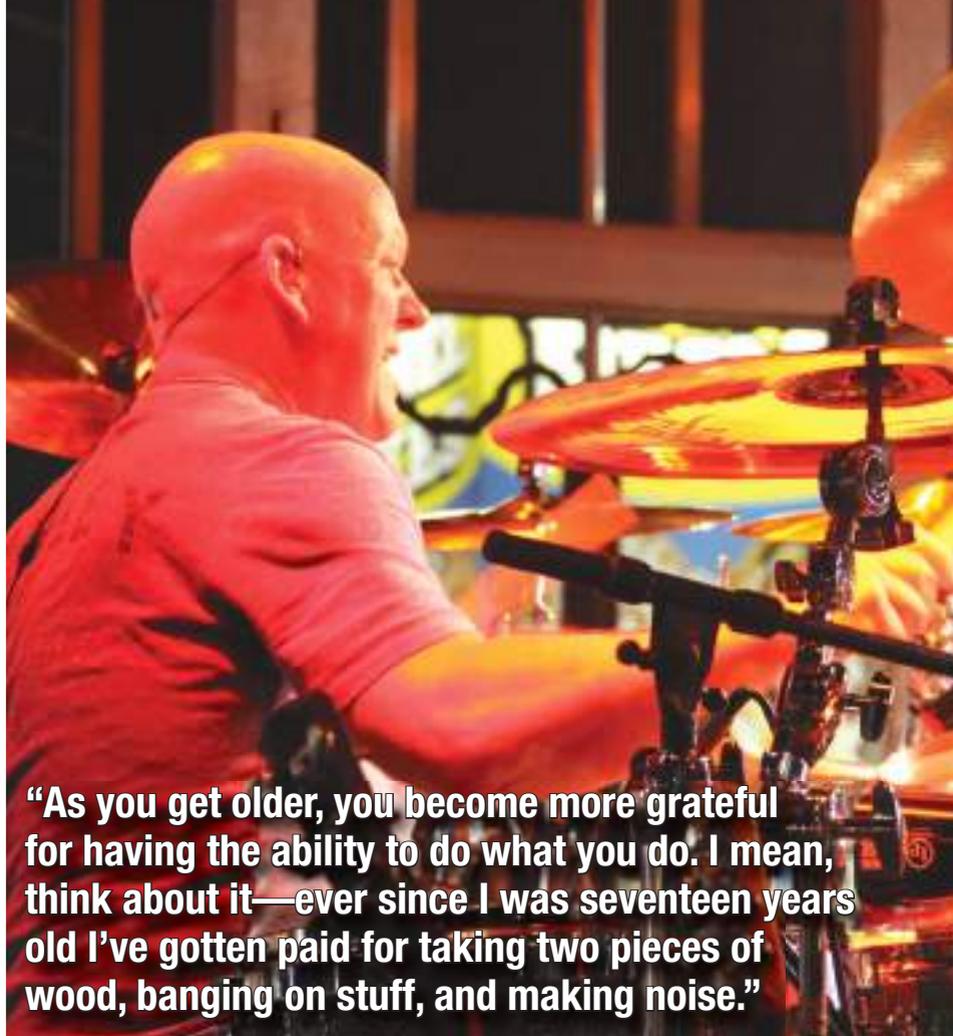
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“As you get older, you become more grateful for having the ability to do what you do. I mean, think about it—ever since I was seventeen years old I’ve gotten paid for taking two pieces of wood, banging on stuff, and making noise.”

MD: Not only have you beaten the odds by achieving a great deal of success in the music industry, but you’ve also survived cancer *three* times.

Pat: Drumming and music has always been my focus. Maybe it’s just blissful ignorance, but I never got hung up on the cancer thing. It was a pain that I had to go through. But I never really thought about it as something that could stop me. I just did what I had to do, because it was getting in the way of me playing drums. Maybe that was the motivation. And I’ve done that every time. As you get older, you become more grateful for having the ability to do what you do. I mean, think about it—ever since I was seventeen years old I’ve gotten paid for taking two pieces of wood, banging on stuff, and making noise. I just kept hitting stuff. One thing led to another, and I’ve ended up here.

MD: Did you ever imagine that you would one day play for not one, but two country-music legends?

Pat: Not at all, because I wasn’t a country guy. Country was always around, but it wasn’t something that made me think, *One day I’m going to play in that band.* I was more of a rock fan. I do remember going to my buddy Phillip’s house with a cassette copy of [the *Full Moon* album with] “The Legend of Wooley Swamp.” Charlie was big then. “The

Devil Went Down to Georgia” had hit. The “Wooley Swamp” riff was really cool. It kind of had that dark, sort of metal-like sound. It was a rock thing. And then there was that little rhythm figure—that upbeat Bernard Purdie thing. It really grabbed my ear.

I remember doing a gig with Charlie on St. Simons, actually a private gig on Sea Island—sitting on stage, playing with Charlie, looking across the water to the dock where my grandfather used to take fishing charters out. I grew up on that dock, and I’m 300 yards from it. Over my shoulder, about a mile away, is the house I grew up in, where I would sit in my bedroom and play “The Legend of Wooley Swamp” on my drumset along to the record. And here I am, a mile away, playing that song with Charlie. It was like full-circle, really weird—goose-bump kind of weird. A cool moment.

MD: You received your first cancer diagnosis just after high school graduation. How did you cope with that news?

Pat: I was seventeen. There again, I was probably too naive to know any better. I wasn’t, *Oh, woe is me—my life is just starting and now it’s going to be snatched away.* I had about five minutes of that, and then I went, “Okay, enough. What do we have to do?” Well, we’re going to do radiation treatments. We’re going to do surgery. I got diagnosed



on a Thursday, and Monday morning I was in a hospital with my guts cut open. Two weeks after that, I did a frat gig with my band at the University of Georgia. I couldn't even stand up. They had to set up my drums for me. I had a big white bandage on my stomach. I broke a snare head and didn't have a key or spare head. I had to use a pair of pliers to change it with my 14" floor tom head while the singer was BS-ing with the crowd. To this day, I carry a toolbox with enough spare parts to build four drumsets and a helicopter.

MD: What thoughts went through your head when cancer returned two years later?

Pat: It was more of an annoyance. The first time, I did surgery and radiation. The second time, they said I would need to do chemotherapy. That's not a club you want to have to join. It's not a picnic. Some people just tolerate it better than others. At that point I was nineteen, so I was real strong. My hair didn't fall out. It fell out more from just

genetics than it ever did from chemo. It was rough, but we got through it.

MD: The cancer once again went into remission and you continued your education. What were some of the most valuable lessons that you learned from Gary Chaffee during your college years?

Pat: The overall experience was great. I wish that I could go back with the knowledge that I have today and redo it, because conceptually I wasn't evolved enough to get what he was trying to show me. I'm always behind the curve. But I do remember one thing when I was getting ready to leave Berklee. I mentioned to him that I was thinking about stopping in New York and checking out Drummers Collective. And—this I remember more than anything—he said to me, "You've had enough lessons. You just need to go and gig. Go play."

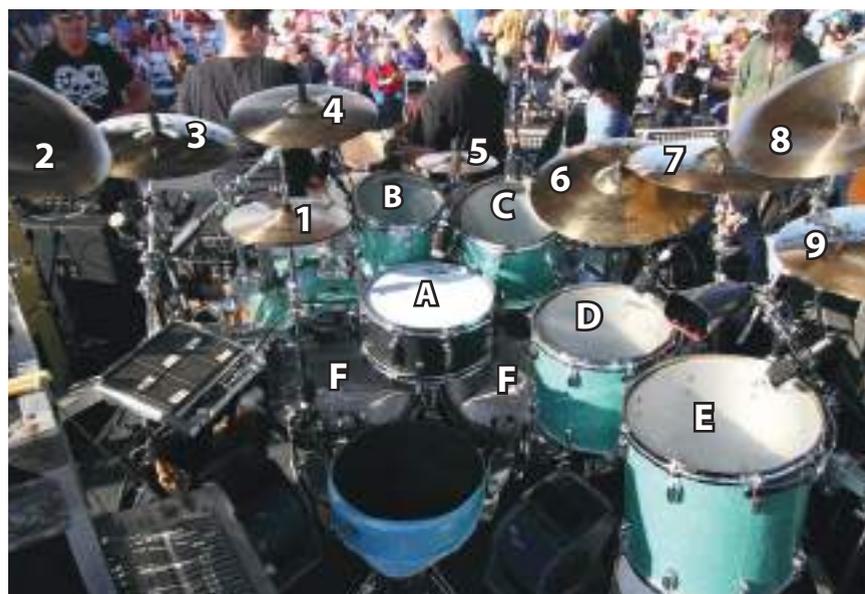
So I went home and I got a gig with a Top 40 cruise-ship band. It was probably nightmarish to everybody I played with, because I was trying to figure out how to inject all of this Berklee-chopsy Chaffee stuff into Paula Abdul tunes. I know it was horrible. It *had* to have been. But you've got to go through that. You've got to figure out what works and what doesn't. I just took the long way around.

MD: How difficult was it to break into the Nashville scene?

Pat: Not difficult at all. I got very lucky. I'd heard that it was tough, but Nashville is so different from most other major music cities. Nashville is just about being cool. It's about the hang. I'm now considered kind of an old-guard guy in Nashville, but it's still about the hang. A lot of us moved there at the same time, and you did what you could do to help your buddies. Everybody would sub and help each other out. It's a much smaller scene than most people think. Everybody knows each other. If you get a reputation for being one of those guys who'll screw somebody over for a gig, you don't last very long there.

MD: As a teenager, you listened and woodshedded to Charlie Daniels' music. What was it like to get an opportunity to play for him?

Pat: When I came to town, I was thinking I wanted a Tim McGraw-type gig. At that point, it was all the girls—I was thinking I wanted a Martina, Trisha, Reba kind of gig. You know, one of those big-tour kind of things—how Luke Bryan, Toby Keith, and Brad Paisley are now. I got the gig with Charlie, and I thought, *Should I do this? Because if I take this gig, then I'm not going to be available when Keith Urban is looking for*



Drums: Gretsch USA Custom (maple)

- A. 6.5x14 Beier Drums steel-shell snare
- B. 8x10 tom
- C. 10x12 tom
- D. 12x14 floor tom
- E. 16x16 floor tom
- F. 18x22 bass drum

Cymbals: Zildjian

- 1. 14" A Mastersound hi-hats
- 2. 17" K Custom Dark China
- 3. 16" A Custom crash
- 4. 17" A Thin crash
- 5. 10" K Custom Dark splash
- 6. 20" A Custom Projection ride
- 7. 18" A Custom crash
- 8. 19" K China
- 9. 19" A Custom crash

Heads: Evans, including G2 Coated snare batter, Level 360 Clear tom batters, and EQ2 Clear bass drum batters

Hardware: Pearl, including ICON rack, Eliminator P-2000C single bass drum pedals, Eliminator H-2000 hi-hat stand, and cymbal and tom holders

Sticks: Vic Firth Extreme 5B wood tip

Accessories: LP Rock Ridge Rider cowbell, Heil microphones, Pork Pie Percussion throne, ButtKicker low-frequency audio transducer, Westone ES2 custom in-ear monitors

Electronics: Roland SPD-S trigger pad with custom samples written by McDonald and Nashville keyboardist Dane Bryant, Furman power unit, Yamaha 01V digital mixer (drum inputs), Roland M-16E mixer (band input submix), Crown Macro-Tech 2400 power amp (for ButtKicker), 24-channel Whirlwind snake with quick connects and fan-outs for monitor return split

somebody. Keith Urban wasn't even around then, but you know what I mean. Still, should I stay in the Broadway [Nashville] scene and look for that big audition, or should I take this? The smarter part of me said, *Take the gig.*

MD: How was Charlie supportive during your third bout with cancer, in 2007?

Pat: Like a parent. Seriously. It's a family thing here. He pulled me aside and told me, "This is your gig. I don't want anybody behind me but you. Whatever you've got to do to get well, let's do it. Whatever you need, you tell me. If you need money, you tell me. Get healthy." I'd do two weeks with him, and then they would fly me home. They would fly a

sub out to meet the band. Two or three days after chemo, you're typically run down, but I could have done a show. I might not have been 100 percent, but I could have done it. I talked to him a couple of times and told him I could do it. He said, "No, you stay home and you rest. Don't worry about it. I don't want you to overdo it."

So I'd sit for the weekend and then go back out and play. I'd do two weeks and then go back and do another treatment. I can't describe how far above and beyond he went for me. He's the real deal. There's a lot of artists out there that if you ran into them at the mall, would they even know your

name? Yeah, you play for them and you kind of hang out, but you don't *know* them. If you want to talk to your boss, you have to call management and make an appointment. I've got Charlie's phone number, and we talk all the time.

MD: So this gig might not have been what you perceived to be the biggest, but it has certainly turned out to be the best.

Pat: I've heard from so many guys over the years that I've got the best gig in town by far—musically, financially, personally. He takes care of us. Now I've been here seventeen years. I've never had any gig for seventeen years.

MD: Are you able to inject your jazz and fusion experience or some of the skills that you learned at Berklee?

Pat: Yes, a lot. When most people come and see Charlie, if they're not die-hard fans, they assume that it's going to be an hour of "Devil Went Down to Georgia" with a lot of fast bluegrass fiddle. But that's just one of many things that he does. He's always been diverse. He writes what he calls these Spanish tunes, like "El Toreador" and "Caballo Diablo," with a kind of Latin 6/8 feel. I can incorporate all of the Latin stuff that I learned, and it works. He does rock stuff like "Wooley Swamp." Then there's the bluegrass stuff like "Devil" and the train-beat stuff. And there are solo features during the show. We do this Latin-esque instrumental thing where everybody blows. That started off with everybody taking little solo breaks, but a few years ago he came to me and said, "I want you to do an extended drum solo. We'll just leave the stage and let you have it."

MD: You're also a single parent to your daughter. What challenges do touring and parenthood present?

Pat: It's really, really tough. The hardest thing is being away and missing stuff like school plays, games, birthdays—things that she wants you to be there for. That's the part where you just wonder, *What am I doing?* She's only going to turn seven once, and I'm playing a gig in Iowa 2,000 miles away, and I really want to be home for her birthday. But I've got to be out here to do this. You just buckle down and do it. She gets it and understands it, but I still get the sad and dejected look. But the cool thing is, in today's world, thank God, there are cell phones, FaceTime, and Skype. You can still kind of be there. It's not like you're gone and you don't see them for months.

MD: What advice would you give to a touring musician, either on a regional or national level, who is also a new parent?

Pat: Stay in as close contact as you can. Make time every day to touch base with

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Pat McDonald

them. If you can't Skype or FaceTime, at least make a phone call. I usually talk to her in the morning and then at night before she goes to bed. So I get the beginning of the day where I get to tell her to have a good day, to be strong, and to have fun. And then at the end of the day I get the recap of what happened. That keeps me going.

MD: What would you tell someone reading this article who may be struggling with a health issue?

Pat: You know the reason why you picked up the drums or guitar or whatever else you might do. You know the joy it gives you. At some point you said, "I like this." If you use that as fuel to fight whatever you've got, it will help you get through it. It did for me. Don't let that medical issue drag you down. If you look at it like, "I've got music to play; I want to be a better player," whatever issues you're dealing with are just weight that you have to carry. Eventually, you may get to a point where you can drop it. It's hanging on your back. You'll shake it. It'll fall off. Let music be your focus, and it'll keep your attitude straight. And if you keep your attitude straight, then that keeps your mind and your body straight.

I'm saying this because it's the only thing that I know, and it seems to work for me. Just look at everything like it's a bump in

the road. A long time ago, I told somebody a diagnosis like that is kind of like you're walking down a path and there's a big pile of dirt blocking it, and there's a shovel lying there. What do you do? You start digging. One scoop at a time, get it out of the way. You've got to keep going forward. Keep practicing and picking up the instrument every day. Don't focus on the bad. Focus on the stuff that makes you happy. A positive attitude makes all of the difference in the world.

MD: Final thoughts?

Pat: One of the coolest things anybody's ever said—and it's a cliché, but I kind of have a little different perspective because of the health stuff I've been through—is "Don't sweat the small stuff. It's all small stuff." Just let it happen. If you get sick, plow ahead. You're not on a timeline. Every day is a gift. If you can make a living doing what you love to do, then you don't have to work. You're totally successful. As long as you're getting to do what you love to do, then you've succeeded. It's not like if it doesn't pay off one day, then you've failed. No, you haven't. You're still alive. You're lucky to have a freakin' heartbeat. You get barraged with bad stuff, but there's still good stuff out there. Drums help me stay in touch with it.



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Ron Thaler

Blond Ambition

“Adapt or die,” the busy New York–based drummer and producer says, adding, “I don’t have two days that are the same.” Welcome to the new normal.

Story by Ilya Stemkovsky

Photos by James Dittiger

With his striking blond locks, and “Blondie Boy” nickname to match, Ron Thaler stands out in a crowd. But it’s his skills on both sides of the glass that have kept his phone ringing and mind sharp. That’s Thaler playing drums on and winning a Grammy for Alicia Keys’ megahit “No One.” Thaler’s well-rounded credits also include a speaking and drumming role on NBC’s *Lipstick Jungle*, tracking for video games, presenting clinics that show off his deep pocket, and teaching at New York City’s Drummers Collective.

Thaler has also been nominated several times for the Producer of the Year Grammy, so he’s got a unique perspective on what’s hot in the business and how to make it happen in a rapidly changing musical world. “We’re currently living a new Renaissance age,” Ron says. “It’s a result of exploding new technologies and shifting sonic and political paradigms, just like during the turn of the century in Paris and the 1960s in America. Future generations will look back and stamp this generation’s skinsmen as drumming’s Renaissance men.” The multitasking Thaler could indeed be leading that movement. Let’s get deeper into this and related topics with the globetrotting polymath.





MD: What's the difference between live energy and studio energy?

Ron: For me, the energy factor, irrespective of whether I'm in the studio or playing live, has to be tangible and understandable.

In the studio, the way you create and transmit energy, there are so many more degrees of separation between when you actually play and record your part and when the fan finally hears what you played. Live, there is zero separation. It's them and you. They're right in front of you, so they have to feel every intense nuance that you're hoping to make a fan feel.

When I go on the road, I have certain kit-specific elements that tonally allow a stronger connection to the audience. In my time working with Sarah McLachlan, I learned that she hates ride cymbals. And then I discovered just how *many* artists hate ride cymbals. There are frequencies in a ride that demolish vocals. You have to mitigate the way your ride will find its place in the totality. So depending on who I'm playing with, I'll be excessively judicious with my ride cymbal. There are lighter, more elegant rides that work great behind female singers.

Also, on tour I tend to use more drums than cymbals. Cymbals tend to be more conflicting with an artist's comfort zone, whereas drums tend to be more wide, chunky, and tribal to push the music along. Artists love when you ride on a floor tom, because you're out of that frequency range that interferes with them. To me it's about the vibe, and, truthfully, the front-of-house guy. He's going to be your best friend and protect your ass for the benefit of the music. The benefit of playing live with different types of acts is that it teaches you how to be on a huge stage and play brushes, or be in a small club and play with sticks at triple piano and give the same energy.

MD: So you have to just hope that the front-of-house guy has taste?

Ron: [laughs] When the front-of-house guy is building the snake for the tour with eighty feet of cable, you go and you help him. Then he shares with

you the things that he's thinking and feeling. These guys are pros and super-intelligent. They're musicians. They know the album inside and out, and you want to get their perspective. And in a very informal way you share yours. And then that kismet happens. You're never going to hear the way you play your show out front. You have to hope that he protects what you discussed as the important features of the music. Then it's up to him. You have to trust him.

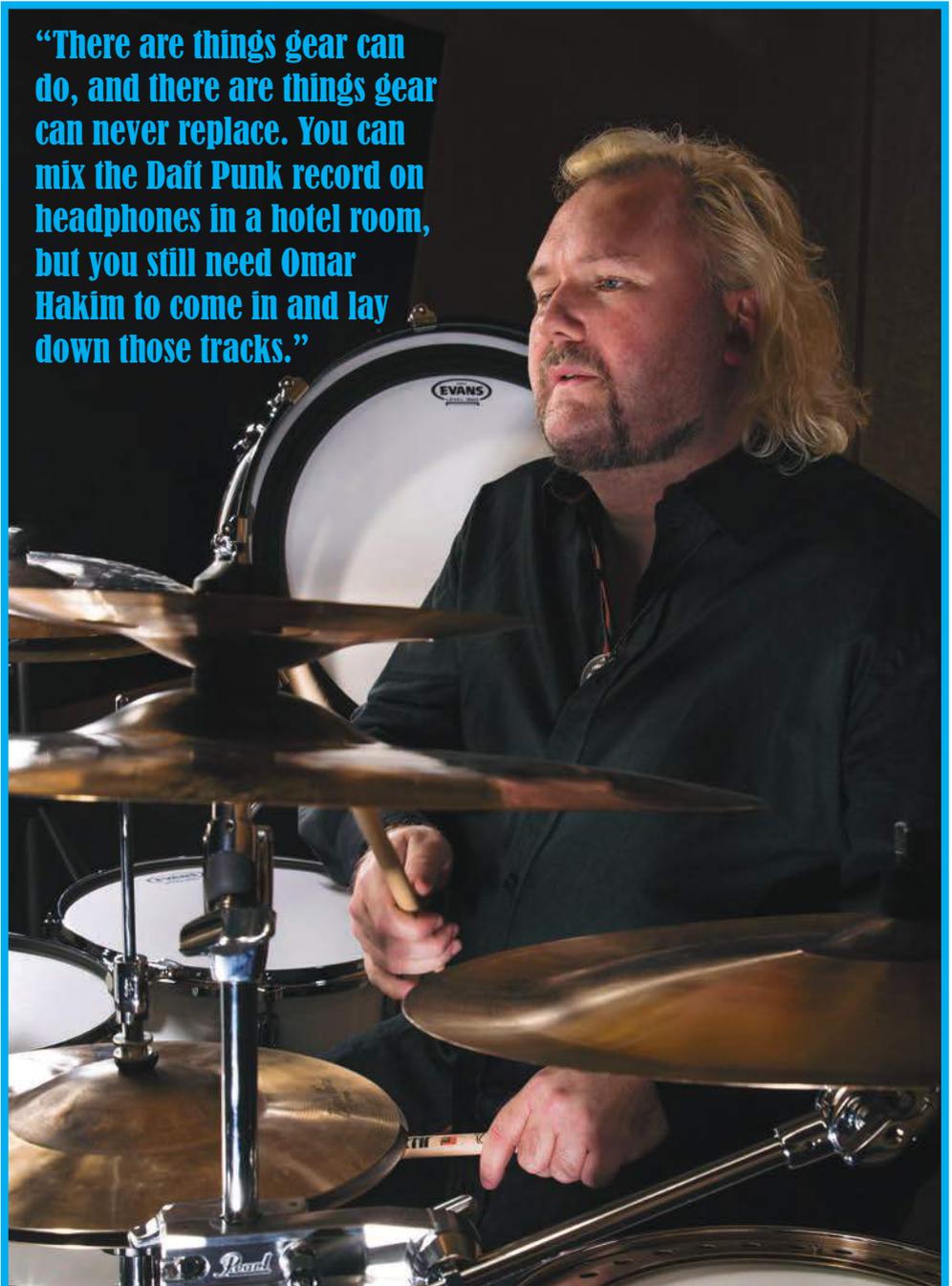
MD: As a producer, are you building from the drums up? Or do you have to see the big picture?

Ron: When people ask me the styles that I produce, I tell them "music that doesn't suck." I had the benefit of working with some of the best producers and watching them. But I got started when artists would come up to me in the middle of the thing and ask me what I

thought of the drum sound. And then they'd ask me what I thought of the bass sound. And it would keep going that way until eventually the next time around they just started asking me to produce.

So how I build things with an artist is not always linear, like, "Let's track the drums and bass first, and then build on that," blah blah. Back in the days of tape, you'd build that way because it was easier. But today, with all the editing features, you can start with a leaf hitting the ground as a sound and just build around that. The beautiful thing about modern music is that there aren't as many rules that need application. The only thing I care about as a producer is if I'm vibing with the music and if the world will as well. I have an old-school belief in preproduction and spending time with the artists and getting to know them.

"There are things gear can do, and there are things gear can never replace. You can mix the Daft Punk record on headphones in a hotel room, but you still need Omar Hakim to come in and lay down those tracks."



MD: When producing kit sounds, is there sometimes a tendency to get creative and manipulate drums, but the artist might want something more organic, or vice versa?

Ron: I've done some wacky, crazy, inhumanly bizarre things, mostly out of necessity. I did a session where I needed a timpani and there was none. So I took all these old, weird marching drums, put them ass to face, put mics in a few places, and created this thing. You play it a certain way and it has the feeling of a timpani. I like throwing sand on toms and seeing what

happens. If you play quietly with close mics, you get a beautiful texture.

Drums are amazing. You can go miles with the colors you get from them. But sometimes I have to break an artist from being married to his demo. When I'm asked to produce, people are paying me for my opinion and, in particular, my help. Nobody wants to hear the word *no*. What's wrong with "Let's try it"? Anybody with an open mind will get a lot more out of a situation. And people come with me because I'm attached to things that have sold really well. My Grammy win has simply bought me the fact that maybe an artist will shut up a teeny bit more than before. That's about it. [laughs]

For artists, their songs are their children. The last thing you want is someone coming to you and saying that you're not raising your kid well. If you think of the producer as kind of a teacher or life counselor, I have to be sensitive but not invisible. But a parent has to be willing to understand that not every piece of music should be home-schooled. So I frame it that way, and then maybe an artist will be more open to suggestions that I make, which are all to their benefit, their goal. And the goal isn't my personal ego, because by the end of it, no one is going to know who I am.

MD: But people do know you for Alicia Keys' "No One."

Ron: I saw recently it had like 3 billion listens. Not many things you can say have 3 billion listens. I didn't produce it, but people would have heard my playing on it. It was just a session where I played real drums and we started messing around with stuff. It was a

Thaler's Setup



Drums:

- A. 6.5x14 Reference cast steel snare (with RimRiser)
- B. 5x14 Sensitone snare
- C. 10x12 tom
- D. 14x14 floor tom
- E. 16x16 floor tom
- F. 6x22 MMX gong drum (custom made in purple craze color)
- G. 18x24 (or 20x22) bass drum

Cymbals:

- Sabian
- 1. 12" HHX Banda Turca (used as hi-hats)
- 2. 14" HHX Hoop Crasher
- 3. 18" HHX Chinese
- 4. 10" AAX Air splash
- 5. 18" HHX Evolution crash
- 6. 16" HHX Evolution (or 16" AAX Studio brilliant) crash
- 7. 22" XS Monarch (or 20" AAX Dry) ride
- 8. 18" Vault V-Crash
- 9. 9" Alu Bell
- 10. 14" Artisan hi-hats
- 11. 16" AAX Iso crash stacked on 18" HHX Evolution O-Zone crash

Hardware: Pearl PowerShifter P-2000 Eliminator bass drum pedal, Duallist D4 Dual (or D1 Single) bass drum pedal

Percussion: Foot-activated tambourine (off Duallist pedal), mounted tambourine (on top of 18" Vault V-Crash)

Heads: Evans G1 Coated snare batters and Hazy 200 snare-sides, G2 Coated or G2 Clear tom batters and G1 Clear resonants, EQ4 Clear batter and EQ3 Coated white front head on 24" bass drum, GMAD Clear batter and EQ3 Black front head on 22" bass drum, and 22" EMAD Coated gong drum batter and EMAD Clear resonant

Sticks: Vic Firth SD10 Ron Thaler Signature model

Accessories: RimRisers (standard and electronic); Evans Min-EMAD dampeners, AF Patch, and RealFeel Practice Pad; PureSound 13" and 14" Equalizer and 12", 13", and 14" Super 30 snare wires

Electronics: Pintech Critter triggers, Carbon Fiber Phoenix snare, 10" mesh pads, DB12X ProX Tube pad, RS5T external triggers, and TP external bass drum trigger

Assorted snare drums used for recording:

- A. 7x14 Jon Cross Custom Purpleheart/Bubinga
- B. 5x14 Pearl Sensitone
- C. 3x13 Pearl Masters Limited Edition Japanese Tamu/Maple
- D. 6.5x14 Pearl Reference Cast Steel (with RimRiser)
- E. 6.5x13 Dunnett Trussart Titanium
- F. 5x14 Noble & Cooley Maple
- G. 7x14 Dunnett Steel with gold lugs (with RimRiser)
- H. 5x14 Ludwig Supraphonic
- I. 12x14 Ludwig marching snare
- J. 5x14 Leedy & Leedy (1924) Copper Over Brass (with E-RimRiser)



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Ron Thaler

time when a movement toward combining organic and inorganic elements to create a new thing started. It's the most basic drum part in the history of drum parts. It's like the thing you teach a kid on the first drum lesson. [laughs] It's the groove and the pulsation and the tone of the hybrid, EQ'd cymbals that get cut off as part of the sound. Plus the snare and bass drum. That's all there is to that groove.

MD: How do you curtail the mad-scientist, kitchen-sink availability you have as a producer? Is having so much too much, in terms of gear?

Ron: There are definitely mindsets of too many options, not enough direction. There are so many freaking plugins that can do every freaking thing. That has sterilized a certain kind of creativity. A lot of major commercial facilities are disappearing. There

of good for the technical basis upon which certain drummers have evolved, going back to Dave Weckl's videos up to today.

There are way more people doing music than there ever were. In sheer numbers, there are more great players than there were twenty years ago. But as a percentage, it's much smaller. And in the last few years, acoustic drum sales have gone down. Everybody is buying into electronics. But those of us still playing acoustic drums have oddly guaranteed our sustainability into the future, because though we might be a dying breed, when artists want to hire an acoustic player, they're going to come to us. So watch what happens over the next ten or fifteen years. Everyone will have their broken-glass snare sound on a pad off to the left, and no one will be able to hit consistently for an entire song. I'm just thankful I came up



are things gear can do, and there are things gear can never replace. You can mix the Daft Punk record on headphones in a hotel room, but you still need Omar Hakim to come in and lay down those tracks.

MD: So what's really happened and changed since you've been in the game?

Ron: Back in the day, as a drummer I had to be able to play an entire song, top to bottom, flawlessly, because it would go down to tape. The last thing anyone wanted to do was cut tape. It's a lot of work to get to that point as an instrumentalist. It's not only shedding, but ear shedding. Today it's like *Guitar Hero* for drums. Any dude can go in, try to play a bar, and have it replicated for an entire song. Or he can have his snare drum that's 37.5 milliseconds late pushed ahead so it has the right vibe. And drum videos have done a lot

in an era where if you didn't play up to the level, there were fifty guys right behind you waiting to take your place. That's a motivator.

MD: And the line between what is acoustic and electronic has been blurred. It's tough to even tell nowadays.

Ron: Yes. In the past I was double- and triple-booked for sessions. People used to love acoustic players. Now you don't have to phone Steve Gadd. You go online and download the cells and you use them. It's as if you hired them. And it's a business thing. You can pay someone \$2,000 to go into the studio to lay down some tracks, or you can pay them \$49.99 a hundred thousand times. Plus there used to be something called parallel compression, where you would take the original thing you recorded and then double it to create a compressed, whacked-

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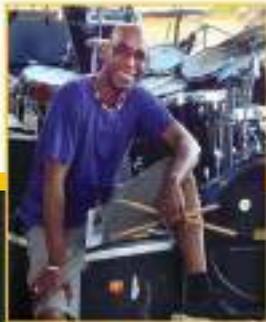
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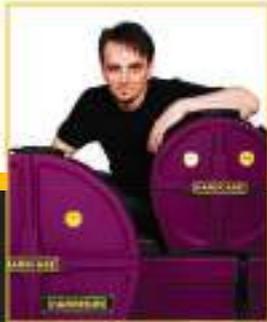
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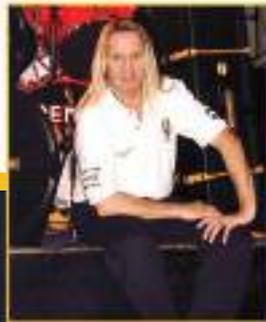


Omar Hakim



Gavin Harrison

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Nicko McBrain



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Ron Thaler

out, manipulated variant. They used to do it with guitars and strings as a thickening agent. Eventually, as more drummers played less well, they started to replace and use a form of parallel compression with tonal additives. Sometimes they're replacing from a sound library, or it can add a consistency factor to the way players play if they're not on point. And sometimes they're completely replaced by it.

I'm an acoustic player. I love my drums. There's nowhere my ass feels more comfortable or centered or joyous than when I'm sitting at a kit. I'm super-thankful to my parents to make me go through the grind of it, to learn and take lessons and be honorable about it. When I was developing as a player, the idea that I could go into a studio and slice and dice myself never entered my mind. I wanted to play it top to bottom, in one take. In the studio, there's so much nervous energy and beauty and craziness and perfect imperfection in those first takes. That's a mentality, and not something you're just born able to do. So much work goes into that, and those are the kinds of things I protect. I believe great music is written in intimacy, not ones and zeros.

MD: You teach about the business of music. What's the most important thing for aspiring drummers to learn and know?

Ron: The reason I was asked to teach at Drummers Collective was to impart what a drummer needs to be viable in this modern business world. Music is a business. We play for artistic reasons because we love it and have no choice. I didn't plan to be a drummer. It chose me. The business part is among the hardest things to learn. You can learn networking and building relationships and putting yourself in the right place to deal with people. But what happens once you get the gig? That's *never* spoken about.

There's a lot you need to be prepared for. Most of it is contract based. You need to understand the contract you're signing and how the good work you do today will benefit you, almost like a retirement plan, in the future. Why do you need to sign a sync agreement with all the TV content being asked for? You have to know what it means for your bottom line. It's wonderful if they give you a check for \$300,000 this month and you go and buy an apartment. But next month they give you nothing and you have nothing and you're locked into them forever, because you signed something away stupidly. It's got to be part of your tool kit, or you're going to get pulverized.

MD: This comes from experience, I'd imagine.

Ron: Oh, yeah! [laughs] How do you put a value on what you do? There are economic

principles and sociological principles. And when you sign a contract, part of that notion is the value someone has placed on what you do. Why is a musician in North America not as valued as a doctor? We bring well-being to people. Some people are brilliant at making artists feel like they're worth nothing and don't have anything to contribute to society, and that one is replaceable with another. But in France they pay unemployment insurance benefits to musicians. It's deeply respected and valued when you're in a creative field there. To them, the arts matter.

I'm a big believer in music and people. I've been doing this a long time. But if you hold on to your principles and believe you can do it, you will. You can't be scared of a lot of work or dealing with a lot of crap. But I believe in where we're headed in this world musically. We're just about to turn a corner of remarkably interesting creative things, because the new generation sees music in a way that's never been seen or thought of before. And hopefully I'm right at the center of it, hireable and blond and silly like I am. You have to evolve deeply in what you do. You never know what's going to take you where, and you never know why you're going to end up where you are. But if you stay true to the course, you'll find remarkable things along the route.



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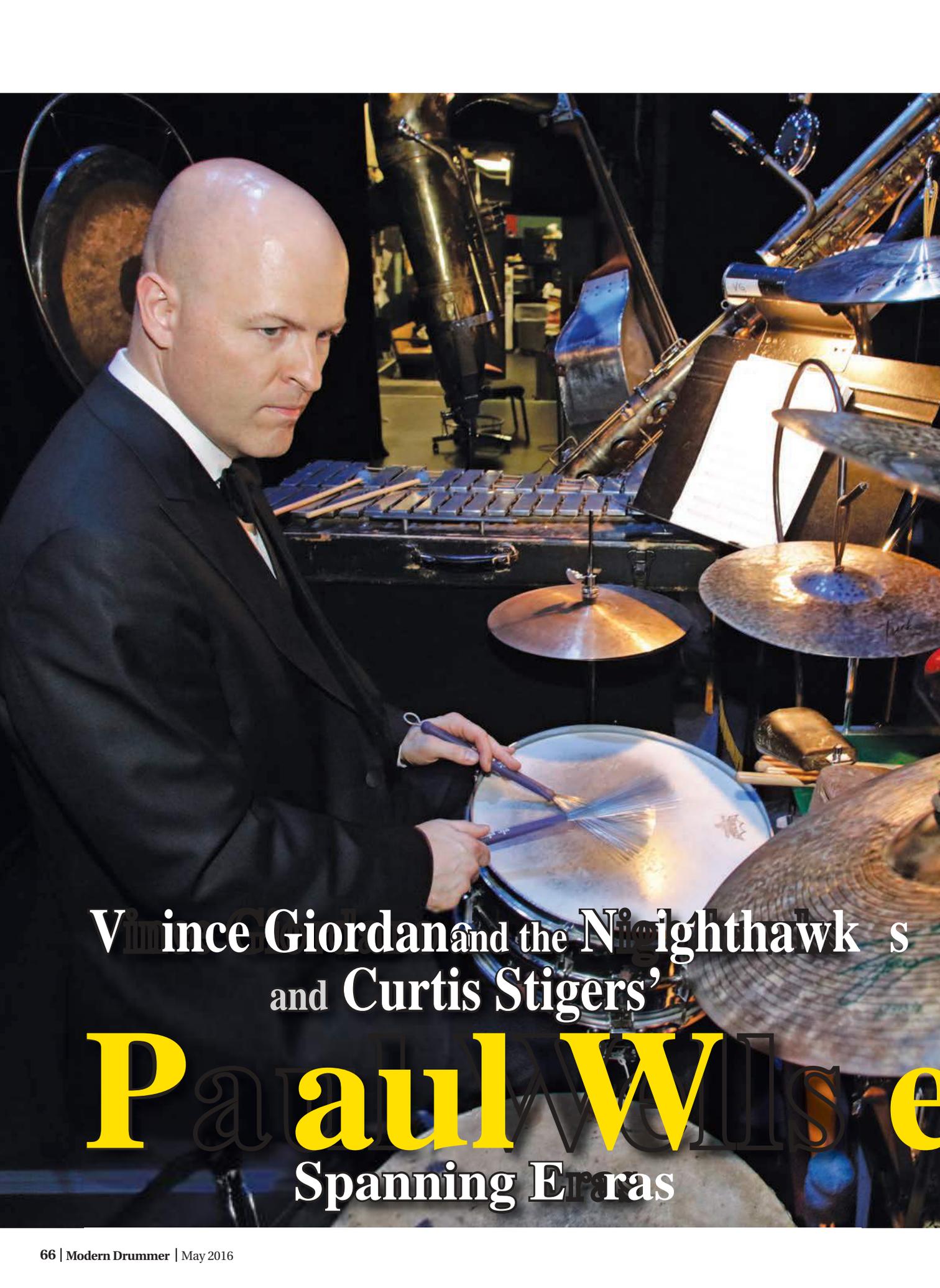


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Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks
and Curtis Stigers'

Paul Wells

Spanning Eras



Smartly tuxedoed and bow-tied, Paul Wells is perched behind a large antique drumkit dominated by a huge calf-skinned bass drum, its painted head lit up with a mountain lake tableau. An arc of red temple blocks is mounted above it, flanked by flamboyantly curved cymbal arms.

Wells kicks an eleven-piece band into an urgent, throbbing two-beat and audience heads start bobbing, followed by couples Lindy-hopping to the dance floor. It's another night of Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks' residency at the midtown Manhattan club Iguana.

A New York City institution, Giordano's ensemble is dedicated to the faithful rendering of pre-swing jazz from the '20s and early '30s, with an ear—and eye—for authenticity. In addition to its busy concert and club schedule, the band has been regularly recruited for feature films, and its re-creations of classic recordings have served as the signature soundtrack for the HBO smash *Boardwalk Empire*.

On his other steady gig, Wells sheds his tux and also makes a huge hat change, leaping to the modern era as a member of Curtis Stigers' band. The jazz vocalist's robust road schedule takes Wells on frequent European tours.

Growing up in Pittsburgh, Wells was mentored in high school by drummer Roger Humphries, a Horace Silver alumnus. While attending William Paterson University, Wells and his swinging talent were noticed by pianist Norman Simmons, who hired the drummer on the spot for a job with the great vocalist Joe Williams.

Wells' ever-growing résumé now includes gigs with the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Houston Person, Mark Murphy, the Duke Ellington Legacy, Marion Raven, and Nellie McKay. And as a member of the rock unit Spirling, Wells was recruited along with his bandmates to be the backing group for Blondie singer Deborah Harry's 2007 *Necessary Evil* tour.

Influenced by players from Chick Webb to Elvin Jones to Neil Peart, Wells has a wide-spanning love of drumming history, and his diverse career reflects that open-minded enthusiasm. *MD* recently spoke with the on-the-go, affable drummer about his time-tripping timekeeping, finding that sometimes the more things change, the more they really do stay the same.

MD: Vince Giordano is known as being a stickler for authenticity, right down to the bow ties. Even much of the equipment is vintage. How have you approached the gig for maximum historical accuracy?

Paul: I had been interested in the entire history of drumset and jazz music for a long time. Also, a big part of my education was the Mel Lewis radio interview tapes. Mel was an authority on the history of jazz drumming. He was interviewed on the New York radio station WKCR for a series that encompassed about twelve interviews. Loren Schoenberg, another jazz authority, sat Mel down and played landmark jazz recordings [for him], and they'd talk about specifically what the drummer was doing.

MD: Once you immersed yourself in that early music, what did you discover to be the challenge for nailing the style?

Paul: This is where it ties into other music I play: Vince is *extremely* sensitive to beat placement. I'm referring to being on top of or behind the beat—the ways a drummer, in particular, can

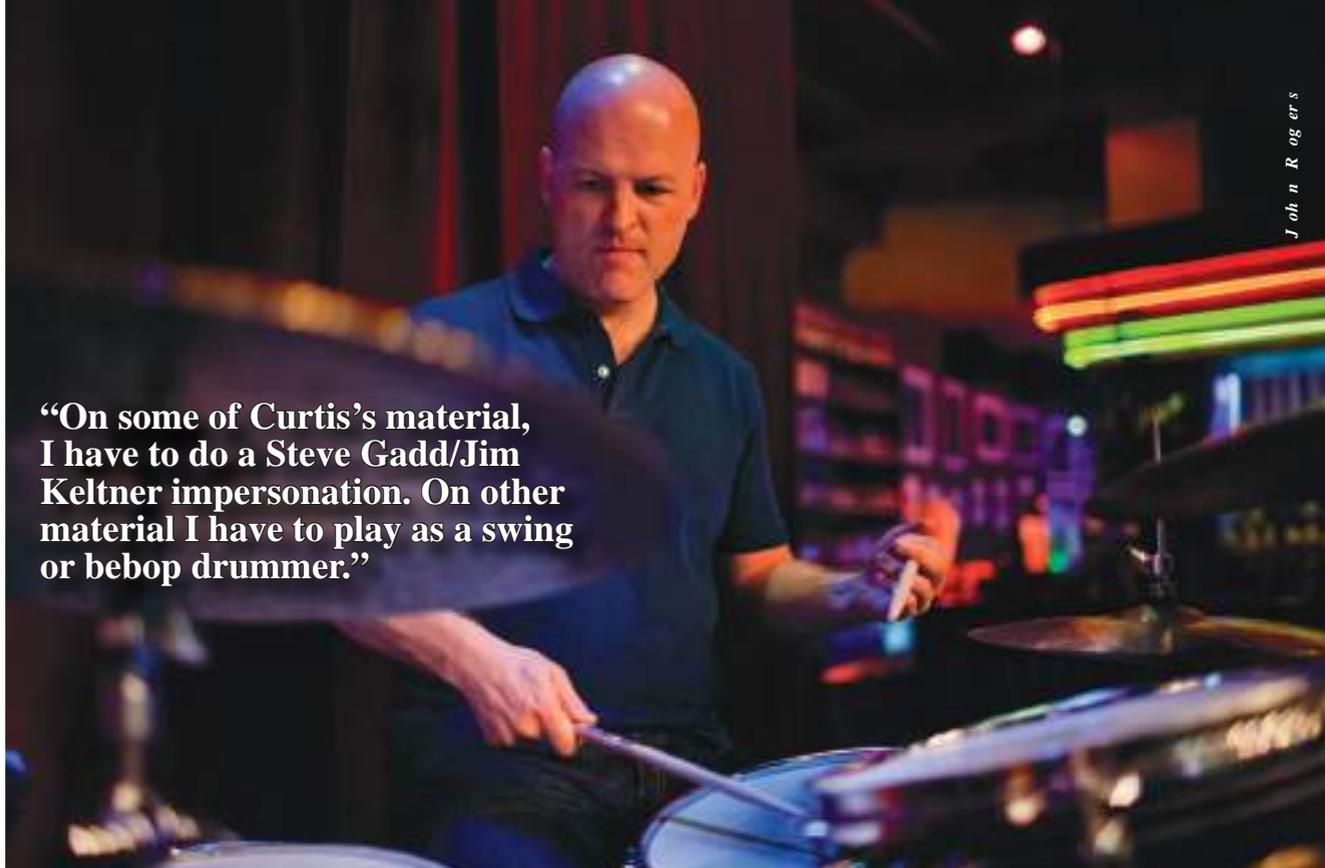
affect the feel by playing with more of a sense of urgency or of relaxation. The jazz of the '20s and '30s, especially in those faster tempos, had an incredible precision. The musicianship was insanely high in those days. These bands were probably playing three or four shows per day, every day. There was so much work for them, and they developed an incredible way of playing together. And Vince is trying to re-create that.

MD: How did you target that placement?

Paul: A lot of it comes from Vince, because he plays all of the bass instruments: upright bass, tuba, and bass saxophone. The time feel is different for each of those instruments. The tuba, being a brass instrument that you have to put wind into, tends to sit a little more in the middle of the beat, whereas the upright bass has a more urgent, on-top sound and feel. So I have to make sure that I keep things consistent when he switches between those two instruments.

We do a little bit of swing, but the main focus is on pre-swing-era jazz, which has a very different feel from swing-era music. In the swing

by Jeff Potter



“On some of Curtis’s material, I have to do a Steve Gadd/Jim Keltner impersonation. On other material I have to play as a swing or bebop drummer.”

era, the tempos slowed down a little and the feels, the beat, got wider and a bit looser. The changeover for the time feel from the snare drum to the hi-hat had a lot to do with that. The Jo Jones hi-hat style was sort of a trademark of the swing-era sound. It made the feel very different from press-roll time on the snare drum, which is the way drummers mostly played time in the ‘20s and early ‘30s.

MD: What was required sonically, both from your touch and equipment choices?

Paul: Generally, with the early jazz, I play softer than I would on swing-era material, or in a modern group, partly because I play on the snare drum a lot, which sits in a different sonic space than a ride cymbal. So I have to be very careful; it can be really ponderous if the snare drum’s way too loud.

As far as gear is concerned, all of the equipment that I use with that band actually belongs to Vince. He’s been going to yard sales, flea markets, and antique shops for a long time, collecting drums

and cymbals as well as horns and other instruments. He’s amassed a huge collection that’s a big part of what the band uses.

MD: You also worked with some of the elder masters, including Houston Person. And drumming with Joe Williams, a man who fronted the Basie band, must have been serious swing schooling.

Paul: They both played tempos that you don’t hear a lot of younger musicians playing. There are certain tempos that I’ve heard musicians call “grown-man tempos.” They’re in-the-cracks tempos coming out of the R&B/blues crossover with jazz that a lot of younger musicians avoid or aren’t aware of.

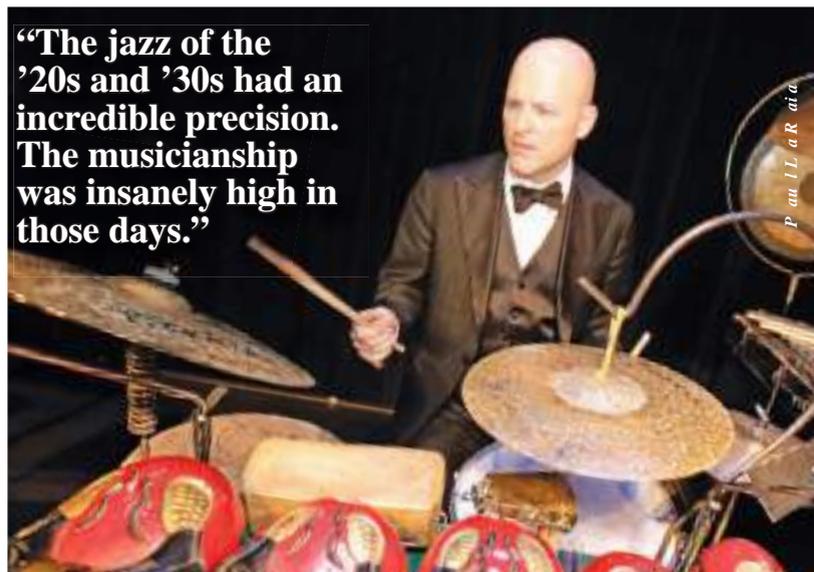
They counted off those tempos, and it had to be right. Sometimes they were a little slower than you were expecting. With Joe, you really had to know how to play shuffles. Also, there were lots of ballads and I had to come up with different ways of playing them, besides just the sweeping brush on the snare with 2 and 4 on the hi-hats. His musical director, Norman Simmons, sometimes told me

to play brush time on the snare, but he just wanted to hear the sweep; he didn’t want to hear any time definition from the brushes—just definition coming from the hi-hat.

One time we played a really light bossa nova and he said, “When you do your rimclick, turn the stick around and use the thin end to get a lighter sound”—things like that that I would never have thought of.

MD: How did absorbing early styles inform your modern playing?

Paul: In a lot of jazz, especially bebop, there is an emphasis on playing the “&” of 4 or 2. But playing early styles made me aware of the power of playing downbeats. There are times—even in modern styles—when there’s nothing more effective than a downbeat. But you have to know when it’s appropriate. Sometimes an offbeat might not be the right thing; it can put things off-kilter. That’s definitely true with big bands, when you’re responsible for a lot of musicians.



“The jazz of the ‘20s and ‘30s had an incredible precision. The musicianship was insanely high in those days.”

P a u l L a R o s e

MD: You studied with John Riley while attending William Paterson University. In the ultimate compliment, he later asked you to be a sub for him on the hallowed throne of the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra.

Paul: I fell in love with that band's music and Mel Lewis's playing around the end of my high school years, so that's been a thrill.

MD: Lewis could control the band in such a minimal way.

Paul: It's unbelievable. It takes me so much effort to control the band in that way. And Mel did it in a way that sounded and looked so easy. I always loved Mel and had the highest respect for him. But now, having played in that band, my admiration is even higher.

MD: Your gig with Curtis Stigers taps into multiple styles.

Paul: He works within the jazz world, but he became famous as a pop singer in the early '90s. So, besides being a jazz singer, he also loves singer-songwriter music and groove music. So we do a variety of styles. On some material I have to do a Steve Gadd/

Jim Keltner impersonation, while on other material I have to play as a swing or bebop drummer.

Lately we've been doing shows with orchestras, playing arrangements of his tunes. And we've also been doing orchestral Sinatra tribute shows—due to the Sinatra centennial—playing adaptations of the classic Nelson Riddle and Billy May arrangements.

MD: It's certainly a gear switch from the Nighthawks.

Paul: On the surface they seem like very different gigs, but I learned they were quite

connected, because I was having the same problem with both of them, repeating the same bad habits. So I had to develop my hearing—listening while playing—to a higher level at the same time with both gigs.

Like Vince, Curtis is also very sensitive to beat placement and to tempos being spot-on correct and not moving within the song. They both have unbelievably well-developed ears. For them, the song is not possibly going to feel right if it's not exactly in the right pocket. So it's heightened my awareness, because in order to keep these gigs, I have to do this correctly.



Tools of the Trade

With the Nighthawks, Wells plays a 14x28 1920s Ludwig bass drum with calf heads, a 7x14 Slingerland Radio King snare or a 6.5x15 Leedy Broadway Standard brass snare, a 12" or 16" Chinese-style tom-tom, and a 27" Ludwig timpani. His Istanbul Agop cymbals include 12" 30th Anniversary hi-hats, a 12" Turk choke cymbal, a 16" Agop Signature crash/ride, an 18" Agop Signature Chinese with rivets, a 14" Trash Hit stacked with a 14" 30th Anniversary cymbal, and a 16" vintage gong. His percussion rig includes a Deagan vibraphone or Premier glockenspiel, orchestra chimes, temple blocks, a woodblock, a cowbell, pop cymbals, and a ratchet.

For other gigs Paul plays a Gretsch USA Custom set including an 8x12 tom, a 14x14 floor tom, and a 14x18 or 14x20 bass drum. He uses a 6.5x14 Craviotto solid maple snare or various vintage Ludwig snares. His Istanbul Agop cymbals include 14" 30th Anniversary hi-hats, an 18" 30th Anniversary crash/ride, and a 20" or 22" 30th Anniversary ride with two rivets.

Wells uses Remo Coated Ambassador heads and plays Vic Firth sticks, brushes, and mallets.



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Letlive's Loniel Robinson

From salesman to drum tech to backing one of the wildest vocalists on the hardcore scene today, his budding career is a textbook study in motivation.

by Willie Rose

A late start didn't hinder Loniel Robinson from landing a gig with Letlive, a post-hardcore band that has spent ten-plus years touring with the likes of Rise Against, Underoath, and Taking Back Sunday, among others. With his first Letlive record in the can and multiple tours lined up for 2016, the drummer shows no signs of slowing down.

Robinson joined Letlive on a 2013 Warped Tour run, quickly adding his Aaron Spears–infused style to the band's aggressive sound while still respecting the original parts. On live versions of songs such as "27 Club," fills don't just cross barlines—triple barreled through them before landing assuredly on the other side.

The band initially had to warm to Robinson's approach, one that's atypical in hardcore. "A lot of what I play, luckily, everyone's gotten really comfortable with,"

Robinson says. "I've definitely found out how far I can go, how far I can stretch it out. Your rhythm section is supposed to be super-tight, and you should never lose them. Even things that I would think of on the fly [might] flip the beat completely. I'll know where it is because I'm in the process of doing it, but I might lose a couple people. I'll have to bob my head to get them to catch back on. But over time, [I've learned] where I can let loose. We've definitely gotten our comfort down."

Though Robinson didn't start playing until he was seventeen, he made up for lost time by practicing on the clock while working in a music store. "I was supposed to make seventy-five phone calls a day," he says. "And there was no possible way that you could get seventy-five people to come in. So I would just sit on a practice pad and watch YouTube or a bunch of different drum videos—like John Blackwell's, Marco

Minnemann's—to try to figure out all the stick tricks and stuff that they were doing."

Robinson eventually landed a gig as the drum tech for Of Mice and Men's Valentino Arteaga, and while on a 2012 tour he got the chance to sit in for August Burns Red drummer Matt Greiner. "Over the course of that tour—that was the last third or so—I guess Matt had been noticing that I was always practicing," Robinson says. "Even when they were soundchecking, I'd be playing along. He came up to me one day and asked me why I wasn't in a band, and I told him I couldn't find anything. I had the feelers out but no bites."

Greiner asked if Robinson wanted to try out the song "White Washed" during ABR's soundcheck. "I was like, 'Uh, yeah, I'll try it out,'" Robinson says. "So I played it during soundcheck, and he's jumping all around the venue, doing jumping jacks and cartwheels and stuff like that. He was so

excited. After the soundcheck was done he goes, 'Alright, cool. Looks like you're going to be playing it tonight, so get ready, buddy.' And I'm thinking, *Oh, shit.*"

That night, after loading out Arteaga's gear, Robinson had to immediately hit the stage. "It's freezing cold," he continues, "and I have to warm up and listen to the music at the same time. I was sweating, but I also had cottonmouth. I went up there and he goes, 'Alright, man, you ready?' And I'm like, 'No!' and he goes, 'Alright, cool. You got it.'"

Despite some nerves and a forgivable stumble, Robinson nailed it, and word started to spread. In 2013, while on the road with Of Mice and Men, the drummer was asked to audition for Letlive. "I got the call while ending a tour in Florida," he says. "In fact, we were on the bus ride back to Los Angeles. I started listening with headphones, just trying to absorb as much as I could. I had almost two weeks to learn both albums, and I didn't know any of the music at all. I only had my marching stuff—a pair of Ralph Hardimons and a practice pad. That's literally all I had. So I was air drumming for two weeks.

"I went to the audition, and I actually kind of bombed it because a lot of the songs were blending together. The intro, chorus, and verses would all be fine, and then as soon as I got to the bridge, I'd play the bridge from a different song. The guys would just look at each other, like, *What the hell was that?*"

Thinking quickly, Robinson pulled out his laptop and asked to play along to the tracks for the vocal cues. "We went through it again and it was fine, and they asked me if I'd be able to come back. That's when I had time to sit down at the kit and actually play it. I was more comfortable, and it worked out."

Robinson says backing Letlive's frontman, Jason Aalon Butler—who's been seen dangling off a railing two stories high on the Warped Tour, surfing a crowd in a garbage can, and diving head-first through Robinson's kit—can add stress to the gig. "When I can expect him to jump into me, it's cool," Robinson says. "I can have that half-second or so to prepare. But there have been a lot of times where I'll close my eyes and play

through a part, and then the next thing I know I've got my snare drum being jammed into my thigh or crotch. Or instead of hitting my crash with my sticks, I'm punching it because it's so much closer to me. Or if I close my eyes while playing a shuffle and then I hear my floor tom going off, and I turn around and Jason's getting in behind me, kind of beating on this thing, I'm like, *Wow, that really threw me off for a second.*

"It's stressful, but then again, if I know

it's coming it's really exciting, because we can definitely have fun with it. If I know he's going to jump and hang out on my kit, I'll push him off sometimes. Or I'll hit him with drumsticks if I really don't want him there. I just try to have fun and kind of put my heart into it and just do the best I can."

Letlive's *If I'm the Devil...* will be out this summer, and the band will be touring throughout the year.



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Tools of the Trade

Robinson plays a Truth Custom Drums kit featuring an 8x14 birch snare, a 16" rack tom, an 18" floor tom, and an 18x22 bass drum, plus Meinl cymbals, Vic Firth X55B sticks, and DW hardware.

Interview by John Martinez
Photos by Alex Solca

Deftones' Abe Cunningham

Drums: Tama Starclassic Bubinga in satin bubinga finish

- A.** 6x14 Abe Cunningham signature 3mm brass snare with four 2" vent holes
 - B.** 7x13 S.L.P. G-Maple snare with tamo ash veneer
 - C.** 9x12 rack tom
 - D.** 8x10 rack tom
 - E.** 16x16 floor tom
 - F.** 16x18 floor tom
 - G.** 18x22 bass drum
- Not Shown:** 6x14 Starphonic brass snare (spare)

Cymbals: Zildjian

- 1.** 15" A Custom Mastersound hi-hats
- 2.** 19" Z3 medium crash
- 3.** 8" K splash
- 4.** 21" K crash-ride
- 5.** 10" A Custom splash
- 6.** 22" A Custom Ping ride
- 7.** 19" K China

Electronics: Roland SDP-SX

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Drumheads: Remo Black Max (or Falam II) on main snare batter and Hazy Ambassador bottom. Coated Controlled Sound white dot side-snare batter and Hazy Ambassador bottom, Clear Emperor tom batters and Clear Ambassador bottoms, Powerstroke 3 Black Dot bass drum batter and Fiberskyn front head (muffled with Fried Chicken Dinner pillow by Kick Pro)

Hardware: Tama Star stands, Iron Cobra Power Glide double pedal (felt beaters), Speed Cobra hi-hat stand, Tama throne with Butt Kicker attached, and a generic fan

Sticks: Promark Abe Cunningham signature with Promark stick wrap, and Promark mallets

MD caught up with Cunningham at Irvine Meadows Amphitheater in California to chat about his gear. "I used to play a four-piece and always had the ride tucked in at the perfect spot," Abe says. "I added another rack tom and had this dilemma of not being able to get the ride close enough. I eventually started having my ride really high, but that was uncomfortable. So I flipped the toms, à la Kenny Aronoff. That lets me get the ride a little lower, and it's fun when you do a basic around-the-world fill and it sounds like you're playing something crazy."

"We don't trigger anything," Abe explains in regard to his use of electronics on stage. "But when we're recording the songs, I might mess around with something, and then it becomes something that I have to have live."

Explaining his approach to tuning, Cunningham says, "John Tempesta turned me on to bubinga years ago. The pitch is fundamentally low, so

it's pure beef. My floor toms are tuned pretty loose, and my rack toms are in the middle. On the song 'My Own Summer,' from *Around the Fur*, I played the world's simplest fill: boom pop. I've repeated that fill everywhere as a joke, so it's somewhere on all of our records. As far as tuning goes, the 10" has got to sound like it does on that record."

Tama recently released Cunningham's signature snare, which is an attempt to combine two of the drummer's favorite sounds in one drum. "I've always played vented maple snares, but I also love brass drums too. So it has the best of both worlds. The main snare is tuned for more crack for some of our older material, while the side snare is tuned really low. I use a marching head on the main snare, and the front-of-house engineer loves it. It gives the drum a lot of crack, but you lose a lot of the subtleties. It's like hitting a plank, but it sounds great live."





Five-Stroke Glue

Fortify Your Grooves With a Staple Rudiment

by Rich Redmond

The world's greatest drummers have often laid the foundation of their grooves and fills with the five-stroke roll. It can act as a connective tissue that binds musical ideas together. Think about Steve Gadd's hypnotic marching rhythms, Carter Beauford's slick linear drumming, and the grooves of any session drummer since the Motown era—the five-stroke roll was omnipresent.

This lesson starts off with the five-stroke roll on the hi-hat as it dances around these “money-beat” feels. The rudimental cornerstone also sounds great on the snare after a strong backbeat. As the exercises progress, we'll voice the five-stroke roll between the hi-hat and snare drum, experiment with hi-hat openings, and apply bass drum variations. The five-stroke roll is the super glue of the drum world, so make it stick!



1 R R L L

2 R R L L

3

4

5

6

7

8

Exercises 1 through 8 are musical notation for the five-stroke roll on the hi-hat in 4/4 time. Each exercise shows a sequence of notes on a single staff, with various rhythmic patterns and accents. Exercises 1 and 2 include the notation 'R R L L' above the final notes, indicating the right and left hand strokes.

9

10

11

12

Exercises 9 through 12 are musical notation for the five-stroke roll on the snare drum in 4/4 time. Each exercise shows a sequence of notes on a single staff, with various rhythmic patterns and accents. Exercises 9 and 10 include the notation 'R R L L' above the final notes, indicating the right and left hand strokes.

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.

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



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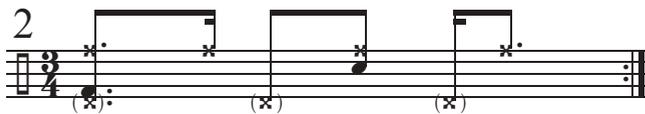
by Aaron Edgar

One of my favorite rhythmic tools is implied metric modulation. This trick can make music appear to change tempos dramatically. The modulation is implied because the tempo doesn't actually change. The bpm will stay the same, but the pattern will feel faster or slower by changing its subdivision.

People commonly hear music with a bass drum on beat 1 and backbeat on beats 2 and 4. Using different subdivisions, we can spread out the backbeat spacing to imply that time has slowed down or compress it to suggest a faster tempo. In these first examples, we're going to slow down an 8th-note rock groove by trading our 8th notes for dotted 8th notes, which are equivalent to three 16th notes.



Optional H.H.

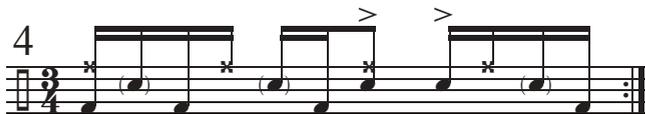


If you have trouble making Exercise 2 feel solid, try counting 16th notes out loud ("1e&a 2e&a 3e&a"), and start with the ride cymbal only. When you feel comfortable with that pattern, slowly add the bass drum and snare.

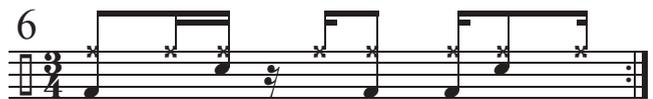
You may have noticed that your ride cymbal in Exercise 2 creates a four-over-three polyrhythm. Metric modulation is a great tool for exploring polyrhythms, and we'll examine this application more at the end of this lesson.

Once you get the hang of it, try playing Exercises 1 and 2 back to back for eight bars each. If you play quarter notes with your hi-hat foot, it will reinforce the original pulse and can be beneficial if you're playing these ideas with other musicians. When I'm learning new modulations, anchoring time with my left foot helps me internalize the rhythms.

It gets interesting when we embellish this type of modulation. We can create the same effect of slowing down when modulating a 16th-note triplet groove into 16th notes.

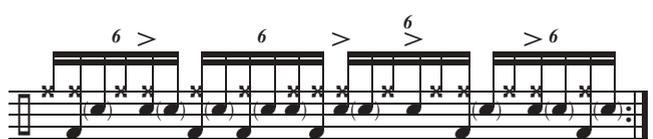
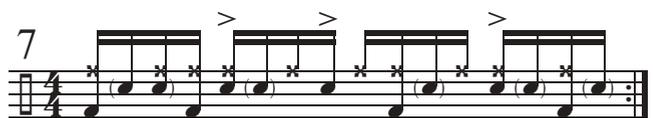


Now that we've experimented with a modulation that sounds like it's slowing down, we'll speed up an 8th-note-triplet-based shuffle groove into 16th notes.



Next, try a less ordinary pattern. Exercise 7 is a funky, syncopated groove with an irregular ride pattern. Applying this phrase within 16th-note triplets yields a hypnotic two-bar phrase in 4/4.

This modulated pattern could sound like its own triplet groove. It's a perfect example of how we can use modulation as a writing tool, and we might not have come up with this using any other concept.



The Polyrhythmic Connection

I mentioned earlier that you can use implied metric modulation to create grooves based on polyrhythms. In Exercises 9–11, we'll go through the process of writing an implied metric modulation groove starting with a polyrhythm.

For Exercise 9, we're going to use a four-over-five

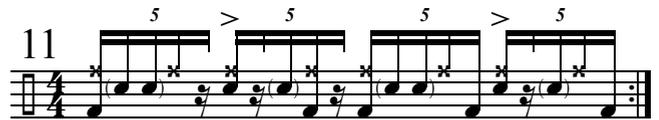
polyrhythm. We'll space four notes evenly across a bar of 5/4 time by playing every fifth 16th note. Playing quarter notes with your hi-hat foot will accentuate the polyrhythm.



The next step is to fill in the spaces with the bass drum and ghost notes. I've phrased our ride cymbal to sound like a drunken shuffle by playing the first and fourth note in each of the five 16th-note groups.



Finally, we'll modulate this groove into 4/4 using quintuplets. This gives us a backbeat on beats 2 and 4 again. Both rhythmic variations of this beat create interesting shuffle-style grooves.



Make sure you try modulating a handful of your own grooves. Take a groove you play all the time, or transcribe a beat from one of your favorite bands and modulate it into something new. I often find that there's something inspiring hidden within a new subdivision.

Don't forget that you can also apply other rhythmic tools. Think about displacing the modulations, cutting pieces out, reversing sections, and reordering parts. You are limited only by your imagination.

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.

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



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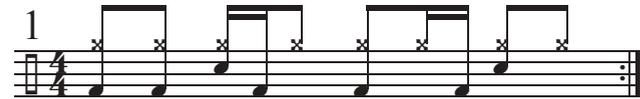
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Groove Construction

Part 1: Snare Displacement

by Jost Nickel

In the first part of this series, we'll create new grooves by displacing the snare drum. Our basic pattern consists of 8th notes on the hi-hat, snare on beats 2 and 4, and a specific bass drum phrase. Here's the main groove and bass drum rhythm.

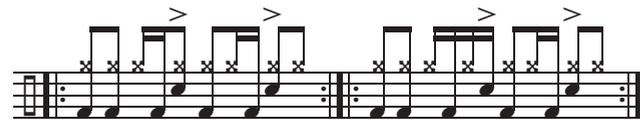
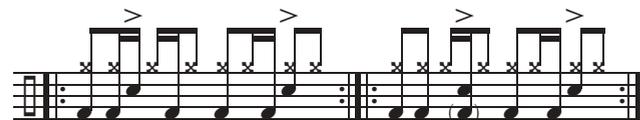
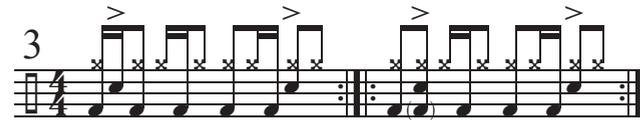


Bass drum pattern:



In the following exercise, we'll displace the snare on beat 2 to different positions in the first half of the measure while the rest of the groove remains unchanged.

In measure 2, the snare and bass drum play simultaneously on the "&" of beat 1. If this happens in these variations, the bass drum can be omitted. This also occurs in measure 4 on the "e" of beat 2.

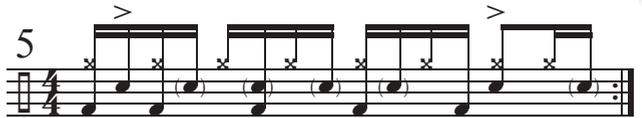


These grooves are crying out for ghost notes. We'll use two steps to find ghost-note patterns that go well with all of the grooves we have covered so far. First, we'll play ghost notes on every offbeat 16th note. Here's an example using measure 1 from Exercise 3.

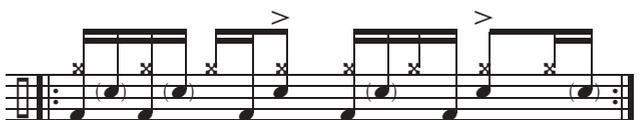
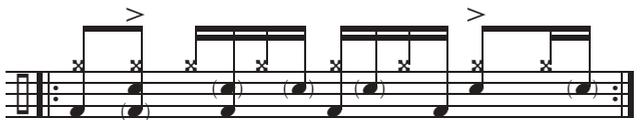
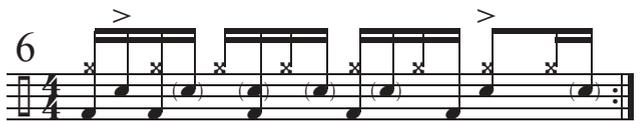


1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a

Next, we'll omit the ghost notes that occur before and after the snare accents. Looking at Exercise 4, we'll drop the ghost notes on the "a" of beat 3 and the "e" of beat 4. This makes the groove easier to play.



In the following example, ghost notes are added to the patterns in Exercise 3.



All of the grooves in this lesson have the same bass drum pattern. If you feel like creating more variations, choose a different one-measure bass drum rhythm from Exercises 7 through 9 and continue as described. Each measure in the following examples can be used to create six displaced groove variations.

7

8

9

If you're interested in these ideas and want more groove concepts, check out my new book, *Jost Nickel's Groove Book*.

Jost Nickel is a top session and touring drummer in Germany, and he endorses Sonor, Meinl, Aquarian, Vic Firth, and Beyerdynamic.

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Rhythmic Conversions

Part 1: Modulating Accented 8th-Note Phrases

by Steve Fidyk

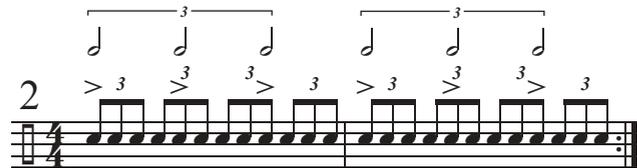


For Part 1 of this series, we'll focus on accented 8th-note phrases and convert them into triplet patterns. I find this concept beneficial for students who struggle to create an even and consistent drumset flow when trading fours and improvising over tunes.

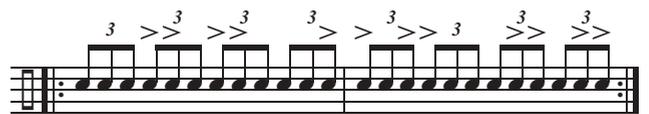
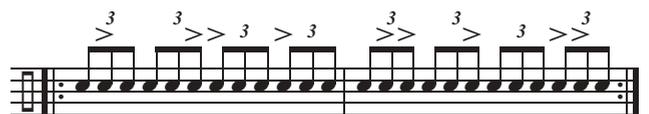
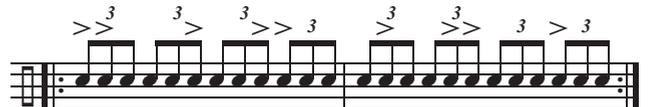
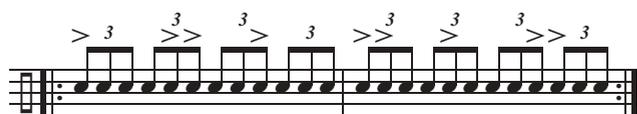
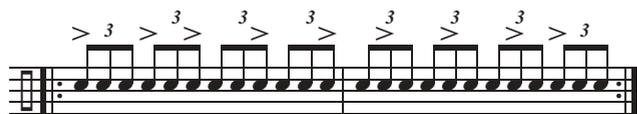
Let's begin by reading an accented two-measure phrase. As you play, focus on keeping the accented and unaccented notes consistent.



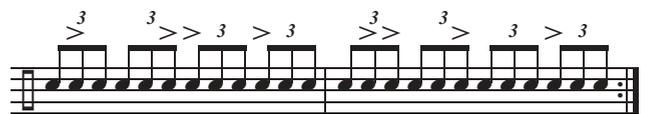
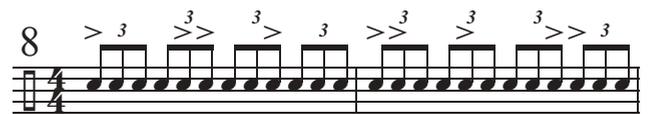
Once you have the accented 8th notes under control, try reading the pattern as 8th-note triplets. Repeating two measures of the 8th-note phrase three times is equal to four measures of triplets. When converted, the accents create a three-against-four polyrhythm over the quarter-note pulse that outlines a half-note triplet.



Here are five two-measure 8th-note phrases that are converted to triplets. Keep each rhythm's flow consistent as you coordinate the accents.



Once you have control of each two-measure conversion, try combining phrases. This four-measure example mixes Exercises 4 and 6.



Try applying this concept to accented 8th-note reading material from your personal library. I also encourage you to write or transcribe your favorite 8th-note patterns and try converting them to 8th-note triplets. In our next lesson, we'll explore ways of orchestrating these ideas with accompanying bass drum and hi-hat foot variations. Have fun!

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

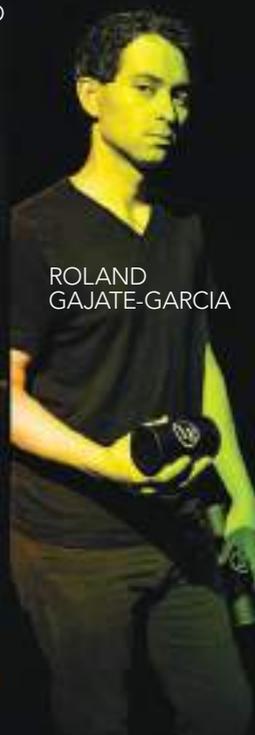


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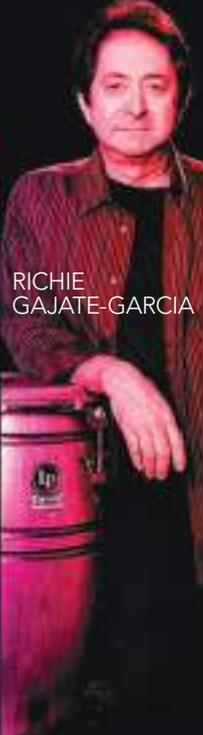
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The Collapsing Concept in 6/8

Crushing Stickings to Create Odd Afro-Cuban Ideas

by Steve Fidyk and David Garibaldi

The legendary drummer and long-time member of Tower of Power, David Garibaldi, emailed me last year with variations on a lesson I wrote for *Modern Drummer's* March 2015 issue. The concept I presented was rooted in the teaching tradition of the late author and educator Jim Chapin. It deals with collapsing rhythms—omitting one note from a rudimental pattern and creating a new odd-note grouping. If you've immersed yourself in David's recorded work, checked him out live, or practiced his pieces in *MD* throughout the years, you're very aware that he has applied this odd-grouping/linear concept in a modern and creative way. The following material comes from David, and thanks are owed to him for inspiring us to remain musically curious and creative.

Steve Fidyk

I've been working on Steve Fidyk's excellent article in the recent *MD*. It's always amazing to me that many concepts we use have been around for such a long time—although named differently as they evolve—and we're often developing these same ideas independently of each other. I stumbled upon this concept a number of years ago but had never given it a name or developed it. I had no idea that Jim Chapin taught this, although it doesn't surprise me. He was way ahead of us in many areas—a brilliant man.

Here's a lesson that's based on this collapsing concept. When I had my percussion trio, I found many of these kinds of combinations while exploring ideas for our music. The attached lesson is inspired by both Steve's lesson in *MD* and what I was learning about the Afro-Cuban rhythmic tradition.

My idea involves playing one time signature inside of another (in this case, 5/8 or 7/8 inside of 6/8). I took a sticking, orchestrated it, collapsed it, and then applied that material to 6/8 time using a dotted-quarter-note pulse, as is often found in Afro-Cuban music. The feet supply the pulse throughout this lesson as the hands apply the concept. Enjoy!

David Garibaldi

1 L R L L R R

2

3

4

5

6

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8



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CONCEPTS

Drum Clinics

What Happened?

by Russ Miller

I had a conversation with an employee of one of the drum companies the other day. In this conversation, he said, "Drum clinics are a waste of time and money, and they don't work anymore." This struck me as very sad and frustrating. I felt I had to discuss this in the column.

In the Beginning...

Bear with me while I reminisce about a simpler time, when a drum clinic was an honest and pure event motivated by the drum shop and company's desire to further

introduced me to new playing ideas and current equipment trends. I've purchased many pieces of gear after hearing them at drum clinics. Getting to hear the gear played at a high level sparked a "gotta have that" response for me. These clinics were win/win situations for everyone involved. So when a company representative says that drum clinics are a waste of time and money, my first reaction is that they're using the wrong guys and are doing them for the wrong reasons.

"The best teachers are those who show you where to look but don't tell you what to see."

—Alexandra K. Trenfor

inspire and educate the customer base by showcasing new products and top-level playing. Attendees often left in awe, thinking, "I want to do that!"

When I first started going to drum clinics, it was an opportunity to meet drummers like Roy Burns, Bernard Purdie, and Louie Bellson, whom I had only heard on a record, seen at a concert, or watched perform on TV. Clinics were a chance to learn and be inspired, and to ask somebody who was doing what he or she wanted to do an important question for my musical growth. I asked Purdie if the groove in "Rock Steady" was something that he came up with, or if it was suggested by the composer/producer. I asked Roy Burns about his approach to the Papa Jo Jones/Max Roach fanning motion on the hi-hats. And I had the once-in-a-lifetime chance to sit beside Louie Bellson while he demonstrated a double-stroke interleaved roll, voiced between the rack tom and snare, which was something I saw him do in a drum solo with the Oscar Peterson Trio. (A clip of this solo has surfaced on YouTube. Search for Oscar Peterson "Cute" featuring Louie Bellson.)

All of these experiences were life changing for me. These men were super-classy, gracious, extremely giving, and astoundingly educated about their craft. Their drum clinics not only inspired me to further my development, but they

Welcome to the Gig

Sometime in the early 2000s, the drum clinic dramatically changed. It was no longer an opportunity to get up close to a musical star, but rather it became a drumming spectacle. I would attend events where the player would play seemingly impossible feats of drumming mayhem for fifty minutes and then talk about themselves for another thirty. It became more of a concert performance than a drum clinic. There was little interaction with the audience, and at the end of the event, little gear was purchased and little knowledge was gained that could be applied to my own playing. That's not to say that I don't appreciate extreme facility on the instrument. Anyone who has seen my clinic knows I speak a lot about having extra facility for those times when you need it. But I always want to leave a drum clinic having learned something. I believe the failures of some drum clinics can be summarized into five issues.

Not every great player is a great teacher.

Some players can be awesome at this instrument but lack the delivery skills to teach a crowd of people effectively. You have to have an organized curriculum in place. You must have strong public speaking skills, time management, and the ability to keep people's attention. And one of the toughest things to accomplish

is to be able to deliver content that gives everyone in the audience (beginner to pro) something to chew on.

Not every great teacher is a great player. Conversely, some teachers can break things down to a simple and easily digested packet of information. But not every great teacher has had enough real-world playing experiences to display the practical use of what they're teaching. The best drum clinics are often given by artists/teachers who have significant playing and teaching experience.

"Self-taught" only works when you're teaching yourself. I know some of the greatest drummers in the world were self-taught through years of playing experience. But the people attending drum clinics aren't all of the same musical background. A good clinician needs to deliver information in an effective and deliberate way so that everyone can understand it.

Clinics have become gigs. Even though many endorsers want to do clinics, only certain players have the skill set to do them effectively. A high playing level is just one piece of the puzzle. The other component is experience in the music business. In addition to ability, you need the knowledge to answer any question that comes to you. What if the question is about playing brushes in 3/4 at 250 bpm? What if the question is about overdubbing drums on top of a programmed loop, or about advanced double bass? I've been asked everything from extremely detailed playing questions to, "How much money do you make?"

Becoming a drum clinician is sort of like entering the medical field. Doctors are required to assimilate a ridiculous amount of information before they're legally allowed to practice. They also have to pass the medical proficiency test and complete a residency to finally start their own practices. Obviously, as drummers we're not making life or death decisions every day, but doing one successful tour, getting an endorsement deal, or having a million views on YouTube doesn't necessarily qualify you to "coach" the masses.

Lack of effort. I've been doing clinics all over the world for over twenty-five years, and I have attended countless drum events. Some had a great turnout. Tons of information was being passed on, and a lot of products were sold. I've also seen terrible events with no promotion, bad locations, unprofessional setups, unqualified artists, and overall bad attitudes from everyone involved.

An effective drum clinic really boils down to two things: an effective artist, and diligent promotion and production from the host. Proper planning and execution by all parties involved is what leads to a successful event. The store needs its student base to be involved, and it should invite all local teachers to attend. The artist, his or her sponsors, and the hosts need to promote the event through all avenues months in advance of the clinic date. It's also important that the proper gear is there for the artist to play, and that the appearance is properly presented with adequate PA and lighting systems.

The sponsoring companies should hand out artist information, catalogs, and promotional materials, and they should provide prizes for giveaways. The store should be prepared to stock the artist's

books, DVDs, and signature instruments, and plan special sales on the gear that the player is using. The artist should talk about the gear he or she is using and help promote the store's teaching facilities.

The clinic itself should have a balance of performance, teaching, and interaction with the attendees. I strive to give the audience 90 to 120 minutes of playing, education, and practical knowledge.

I believe that a properly executed clinic is still the most effective form of inspiration, education, and sales in the drumming business. It's okay that not every drummer is a clinician. Companies need to understand that and be more deliberate in their efforts. If we can start putting all the right pieces together, drum clinics will flourish again!

Russ Miller has recorded and/or performed with Ray Charles, Cher, Nelly Furtado, and the Psychedelic Furs and has played on soundtracks for *The Boondock Saints*, *Rugrats Go Wild*, and *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*, among others. For more info, visit russmiller.com.



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How Time and Circumstance Gave Rise to the King of the Mylar Drumhead

Interview and photos by Miguel Monroy



Remo is one of the most well-known brands in the music industry. Its logo can be found in concert halls, school band rooms, recording studios, late-night venues, and even therapy sessions and hospital rooms. Remo Belli, founder of Remo, Inc., got his start in music by sneaking into small Indiana clubs as a child to watch his favorite drummers play. He was gigging by the time he was sixteen, but his career took a detour when he entered the Navy as World War II was ending.

After his time in the military, Belli moved to Hollywood and began touring with different acts. He also partnered with a friend and opened Drum City. The shop would serve the needs of the booming Hollywood music scene, including drum greats Buddy Rich, Shelly Manne, and Jack Sperling. But then something happened that would forever change Remo Belli's life: the invention of the synthetic resin known as Mylar. Belli, now eighty-eight, recently sat down with *Modern Drummer* to tell his story.

MD: When did your love for music begin?

Belli: I grew up in Mishawaka, Indiana, and I had an uncle that played trumpet at an Italian club. My parents went to the club, and I would hang out and listen to the drummer. The drums attracted me, so I told my dad I wanted to play them. You wouldn't believe the drumset my uncle helped my parents buy me. I think it was a 26" bass drum with a hanging Chinese tom and cymbal. My first snare was a Gretsch, and we paid fifty cents a week for it.

My first experience playing in a collective group was in school, when I was twelve years old. When I went into high school, World War II broke out. All the local musicians were drafted, so our high school jazz band was the only group left. We entertained the workers. Sometimes we'd play from seven o'clock in the morning until we went to school. We played victory shifts when they were done, too. By age sixteen, I was already gigging.

There was a local drummer named Ralph Kester. He played at the two spaghetti joints in town. My mom worked at one, and my aunt worked at the other. So I used to go to the window and

watch him play the drumset. He taught me the spang-a-lang brush pattern.

By the time I was a senior, I would frequently hang in Chicago for the weekend. My friends and I would sleep at a dumpy hotel and go listen to jazz.

MD: You spent some time in the Navy, right?

Belli: That's an interesting story. The Great Lakes naval station was in Chicago. One of the guys I used to gig with in South Bend joined the Navy and was in charge of the band in Chicago. He told me, "Join the Navy, because you're going to get drafted anyway. Then you can be in the band with me." So I went to Indianapolis to take the physical and joined the Navy. Everything went great, with one exception: Great Lakes was quarantined. So I went to the naval training station in New York. The first thing I did was find the band barracks and introduce myself.

They couldn't get me in the band, but they got me doing other things for them. When I finished with boot camp, I was sent to Newport, Rhode Island. I found the band barracks there, and

introduced myself to them. There was a gig that night, so they said that if I could get there they would give me a chance to try out. The next day, I was peeling potatoes in the kitchen when they walked in with papers that said I was transferred to the band.

The war ended while I was in boot camp. During my stay in the band, I literally did everything. I was the principal drummer, and we played at all the bases. I played bass drum in the marching band, and I played timpani in the concert band. I eventually went to my chief band director and asked if I could get out to pursue music. About a month later, I was served with papers for an honorable discharge. The director wrote me a check for twenty-five dollars and told me to go to New York to pursue my dream.

MD: It sounds like you've been around drums nearly your entire life.

Belli: I've been a drummer for seventy-six years. And in those seventy-six years, I've been privileged to do a lot in the field of drums, including being a professional since the age of sixteen, serving in the Navy, coming out to Los Angeles and establishing a professional career, and then getting involved with a drum shop. I toured with Billy May, Anita O'Day, and Nelson Riddle. My life was complete up to that point, and then came along the development of the synthetic drumhead. That changed things completely.

MD: What prompted you to get into the drum shop business and then transition into making drumheads?

Belli: I was living in Hollywood and working at the Lighthouse in Hermosa Beach. I was the original drummer there. I used to shop with Roy Harp, who had a little drum shop in town, and there were about five other shops where we could buy sticks, cymbals, and so forth. In those days, everyone was making the transition from 26" and 24" bass drums to 22" bass drums. Roy and I decided to start Drum City. We opened about three doors away from the Lighthouse, on Santa Monica Boulevard.

The motivation at the time was to serve the drummers in the musicians union, which had about 1,200 members. I really enjoyed running the shop because it wasn't unusual to have Shelly Manne, Buddy Rich, Jack Sperling, and any number of Hollywood studio musicians in the room. And when Count Basie's band came through, Sonny Payne stopped by.

Roy and I started off with almost nothing, and within three years we were the predominant supplier in the area. It had nothing to do with discounts; it had to do

with ambiance.

We became the main dealer for the American Rawhide Company. I became an expert in rawhide drumheads. The San Francisco Symphony would send down its timpani, and I would put new heads on them. Drum City was a great hang and a meeting spot for drummers.

Dupont developed Mylar in 1953. They went to Slingerland, Ludwig, and Gretsch and showed the resin to them because within their patent was an application for Mylar to be used as a drumhead. Bob Slingerland didn't know what to do with it, Bill Ludwig didn't know what to do with it, and Fred Gretsch didn't know what to do with it. At that time, I toured through Chicago with a Hollywood act named



Betty Hutton. I went to the drum factories of those companies during the day, and Bob Slingerland showed me the piece of Mylar and asked my opinion on it. I said, "I wouldn't know what to do with it!"

I had an accountant who knew a chemist named Sam Muchnick. Each year at Drum City, we would have a percussion fair. There was no NAMM on the West Coast at the time, so the manufacturers would send us their latest products so we could show them to everyone. One year I decided to staple some Mylar to a flesh hoop to get people to try it. But eventually it was Sam Muchnick who developed the technique of creating the synthetic drumhead, on which we received a patent. This included the bending of the Mylar and the holes in the Mylar. Now every drumhead is made in that style.

MD: What kind of impact did the synthetic drumhead have on the music industry?

Belli: If Dupont had not developed Mylar to accommodate the social things that happened, like the arrival of the Beatles and Elvis, the industry would not have grown as it did. The advent of the synthetic drumhead could accommodate the growing demand for drums. Out of a

hundred animal-skin heads, you might find twenty that are really good and about fifty that are passable, but the rest just won't make it. The synthetic drumhead made everything possible.

MD: What was it like pursuing a new idea like the synthetic drumhead?

Belli: It was myself, a drum shop owner, a chemist, and an accountant. We had to invent from day one. I went to my neighbor and asked if he wanted to come work for me. He knew how to pound a nail and make things happen. We also had a secretary at Drum City that was going steady with a Hungarian, so then we hired him and some Hungarian refugees. We lasted in that first facility for a year, and then we moved down the block to a 3,000-square-foot place. We

"When people say, 'I want to play drums,' the question we have to ask is, 'Why?' What are you going to do with it? Where are we going as a group of drummers?"

—Remo Belli

lasted there for a few years, and then we went to a 6,000-square-foot facility. We started buying the properties next door, and eventually added seven buildings for a total of over 144,000 square feet. That's where we stayed for a long time before moving to our new facility in Valencia, California.

MD: How did the product evolve in those first years?

Belli: For those who haven't used animal-skin drumheads...the availability and selection of them was a challenge. And playing in outside venues was hard on animal skin. Dupont only offered Mylar in limited thicknesses at the time, and a thin head wouldn't last after being subjected to a marching drummer. So we had to put together different combinations of the head.

The center dot, which is now black, started off as a clear dot for Buddy Rich's bass drum. He was always breaking his head because he played with a wooden beater. Then we decided to try it on a smaller head. The dot took off the high frequencies, and we liked that. We made it black, and all of a sudden all these drumsets had heads with black dots on them. That all started with us

helping Buddy Rich. If you can't improvise, you've got a problem.

MD: What kind of changes have you observed in the world of drumming?

Belli: We're an industry that's socially motivated. So when people say, "I want to play drums," the question we have to ask is, "Why?" What are you going to do with it? Where are we going as a group of drummers? I think we're on a plateau now. There are always going to be drummers, but at this point the supply is much more than the demand.

MD: How has your company evolved in light of these changes?

Belli: I've spent the last twenty-five years and a considerable amount of money investigating. What else is there? Where are we going to go from here, and what's it going to take to get there? I'm really pleased that science is willing to support that music, and rhythm, more specifically, is a part of the human condition. Our target demographic is everyone that's alive. The drum can be used everywhere. You just have to think in terms of which drum works best. I think the message to everyone who's interested in drums is that the uses for rhythm, whether it's on drumset, world percussion, or anything else, are going to continue to grow. Our company uses the

slogan "We want you to *use* the drum."

MD: What made you think of promoting the use of the drum, as opposed to playing the drums?

Belli: I'm married to a physician, so I was privileged to attend many medical conventions. I was very intrigued with the papers that were delivered and the discoveries that were made. It opened my mind to say, "What else?" I began to notice that the drum circle is social. And group activities that involve drums can be effective in many different areas.

What we're talking about is general music making for fun. It works because it gets over the initial concern of people saying, "I can't do it." One source told me that there were twenty-five million tennis rackets sold in the United States. Why do you buy a tennis racket? You probably aren't going to want to play at Wimbledon. Yet you buy a tennis racket because at some point you heard that playing tennis can be fun. You don't buy one to become a professional tennis player. Drumming is another healthy thing that you can get involved in.

MD: What does the company do to promote the use of the drum?

Belli: We go into schools with behavioral modification programs that are designed to create an ambiance that allows general teaching to happen more easily. We're not interested in interfering with music education. We go in and take care of the entire population of the school. We have one program that's in 24,000 schools at the secondary level. We also deal with a lot of special needs students.

We've also developed an instrument that sounds like amniotic fluid that goes in the NICU wards for premature babies. And we have options for military veterans that are coming back with trauma.

We have people that run schools that deal with people affected by autism, and we work closely with the care-giving community that deals with Alzheimer's disease. There's a lot that can be done with group experiences, and there are a lot of things that can be done in school systems everywhere.

MD: Has this focus on science redefined the purpose of Remo, Inc.?

Belli: I believe that purpose supersedes money, and my life has been spent in the care-giving business. We have a great company because we're not totally motivated by money. We know that if we do what we want to do, and do it well, money is automatic. That's what keeps us motivated—knowing that we're doing good work.

Check out a short documentary on Remo Belli at moderndrummer.com.



Joe Hibbs

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The Joyful Noise Drum Company has made ten limited-edition TKO snares to celebrate its tenth anniversary in 2016. The TKO model features a seamless 6.5x14 brass shell, 2.5mm solid-brass triple-flange hoops, ten Corder tube lugs, bell-flange bearing edges, vintage-inspired crimped snare beds, a JNDC One Touch Classic strainer, and a patina finish. The tenth-anniversary TKOs will also feature a hand-engraved logo by John Aldridge. List price is \$1,495.

joyfulnoisedrumcompany.com



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solomonmics.com

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Spinal-G Drum Thrones

Ahead's Spinal-G drum thrones are said to eliminate tailbone compression and to support more natural movement of the spine and shoulders. The Round Spinal-G features a 14" velour top, black sides, a thick memory foam cushion with a split seat, a three-leg base, and threaded height adjustment. The Saddle Spinal-G has an 18" velour top and a removable, self-adjusting back support.

aheaddrumsticks.com



RICH STICKS Twist Rods and Brushes

Twist Rods feature loosely held dowels, an adjustable ring, and a rubber mallet butt end designed for cymbal swells. Made from North American birch dowels, the Twist Rods are available in four sizes.

The Rich Sticks retractable wire brush offers a wide wire spread and has a .555"-thick rubber handle. The .555"x14.25" Rich Sticks nylon brush features a fixed spread, extra-long nylon bristles, and a lacquered hickory handle.

richsticks.com



PROTECTION RACKET Compact Hardware Bag

Protection Racket's new compact hardware bag is ideal for a drummer with a small setup and can comfortably carry a hi-hat stand and three booms. It is 30" long, 11" wide, and 7" high and comes with a 19"-long, 9"-wide, 2"-deep pocket on the lid. The zippers open almost all the way around, and the two internal straps prevent stands from rattling during transit. The bag comes with a top handle, padded side handles, and a padded shoulder strap.

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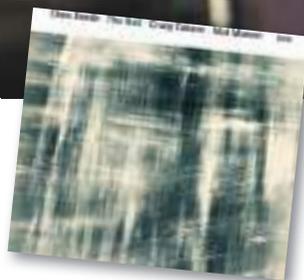
RECORDINGS Taking the Reins



Ches Smith *The Bell*

The drummer has made numerous recordings that wonderfully straddle avant-jazz and out-rock. His latest might just be his greatest yet.

Drummer/composer Ches Smith has worked with '60s electronic maestro Terry Riley, Marc Ribot's Ceramic Dog, and his own groups Congs for Brums and These Arches. But his trio with violinist Mat Maneri and pianist Craig Taborn is his most ambitious project



to date. These musicians prefer the vibes to rise and fall organically. When eruptions pour forth, the racket is intense. The opening title track creeps along until Smith begins attacking his timpani to the point where you expect Wagner to appear. Soup gets stirred in "Barely Intervallic," as Smith whips the brushes with extreme power. "I'll See You on the Dark Side of the Earth" includes squealing cymbals, a crashing thunder sheet, and jabbing drums. A mad musician with a beautiful mind, Smith nearly does it all. (ECM) **Ken Micallef**

Randy Gloss

The Ayes Have It, Vol. 1: Self Portraits in Percussion

A ride through rhythm, texture, and mood.

Essentially a solo percussion record with few overdubs, Randy Gloss's debut works as a study piece for the different instruments he uses as well as a soothing collection of music to relax to. His technical skill with a frame drum is evident on "Suburban Desert Oasis," on which he works the seven-beat pattern with lyricism and control. On the multipart "From McBean to Hasley Cyn," Gloss employs a pandeiro (Afro-Brazilian tambourine) to great effect, mimicking the kick drum and backbeat and using the jingles to fill the space orchestrally. There are improvisations for electronic drumkit ("Experiment on the Nature of Water #1"), hypnotic gong pieces ("Warmer Waters"), and an extended tabla performance ("In a Cycle of Nine"), so you get to experience diverse styles and Gloss's accomplished execution. And if the one-man percussion vibe isn't your thing, you can simply chill to this on Sunday morning.

(Orenda Records) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



Chris Parker Trio *Blue Print*

No stranger to the hip stuff, the eternally cool New Yorker returns with more attitude and interplay on his latest record.

Veteran jazzier and session ace Chris Parker knows a thing or two about groove, so his new trio disc gives him ample room to lay down his pocket and swing across a set of pleasing, well-played material. Whether it's the lilting Latin brush pulse of "First Days" or the New Orleans flavors on "Filthy McNasty," Parker plays with precision and concision, letting his bandmates shine until it's his turn. Dig the laid-back funk of "Opus de Toph," where the drummer floats over the barline, takes some hip breaks, opens up on his ride for the piano solo, and comps with sensitivity and big ears underneath the bass. The decision to pan the drums to mostly one side is a curious one, but it does give the sound field a vibe like you're watching a live show from three tables back.

(NuNoise Records) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



Other Drummer-Leds to Check Out

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The Green Machine

"I've always loved the concept of the cocktail drum set because of its simplicity and portability," says Andy Graham of Slaperoo Percussion. "However, the main drawback to these kits is that because one stands up to play, they never include a real, foot-operated hi-hat. I'm a Neil Peart and Stewart Copeland fan, and I must have a hi-hat—an auxiliary hi-hat attachment only goes so far.

"Adding a normal hi-hat would mean awkwardly jumping between two pedals with one foot, greatly limiting what I could play, and I'd likely lose my balance in the process. My challenge was to invent a single-pedal system that keeps the playing foot in place while doing both jobs. The Green Machine is a special cocktail kit I built from scratch using such a system.

"The secret is to operate the hi-hat using a secondary pedal that sits over the heel section of the existing bass drum pedal," Graham continues. "I play normally with my heel down and hi-hat closed. To open it, I lift my heel (or whole leg if I want to close the hi-hat on a bass drum stroke). The learning curve has been surprisingly easy so far.

"Almost the entire pedal system is made from the salvaged tripod of a hi-hat stand. Everything is attached to a wooden base. I wanted to make the Green Machine have the classic, one-piece look of a '40s-era cocktail kit, but I wanted to avoid the kick-induced snare buzz that can happen from having the bass drum and snare in the same shell.

"A standard 6x14 snare sits inside the top section on three supports, while the 18x16 bass drum comprises the lower portion. A thin sheet of plywood divides the two sections, and holes on the outside let the sound escape from both chambers." The kit is rounded out by a set of 10" Sabian AA Mini Hats, an 8" Sabian B8 Pro splash, a Meinl cowbell, a Latin Percussion Blast Block, and a Craftsman saw blade.

What's the best part, according to Graham? "The entire kit can be moved in one trip." You can check out the Green Machine's pedal mechanism by searching for "green machine cocktail drum" on YouTube.



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



Alex Solera



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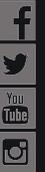


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