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KENNY ARONOFF

CATCHING UP

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30 On the Cover

Peter Erskine

by Rick Mattingly

“Can we still keep getting better as we get older? It is possible. But art is definitely a two-way street, and a commitment.”

With the recent release of a new solo album, a big band app, and a Weather Report box largely made up of recordings from his own personal collection, Erskine is clearly as committed to furthering the art of drumming as he’s ever been.

Cover and contents photos by Alex Solca

QUIET-RECORDING AREA
OBSERVE RECORDING LIGHTS



FEATURES

18 Catching Up With...KENNY ARONOFF and Black Stone Cherry’s **JOHN FRED YOUNG**

42 JIMMY BRANLY His childhood in Cuba provided him with inherent musicality. Conservatory training and the experience brought by thousands of working hours gave him the rest of what he needed to become one of the most in-demand players in L.A. by Robin Tolleson

50 CLAUS HESSLER As long as there are players like him keeping the flame alive, the breakthroughs of legendary educators like Sanford Moeller and Jim Chapin will continue to live on. by Ilya Stemkovsky

54 CARTER McLEAN Driving a Broadway show as record- and rule-breaking as *The Lion King* is no small feat, and this drummer has proven more than up to the task. by Michael Dawson

58 Up & Coming: JONATHAN PINSON Still in his twenties, he’s already worked with the kind of players who have entire chapters dedicated to them in music encyclopedias. by Willie Rose

60 A Different View: JON ANDERSON As a founding member of Yes, prog’s most famous band, he helped push rock music well past its original borders—lyrically, melodically, and rhythmically. by Adam Budofsky

EDUCATION

- 64 Teacher’s Forum**
Those Who Can, Teach
Simple Tips for Making the Move From Player to Private Instructor
by Michael Vosbein
- 66 Basics**
Six-Stroke Success
Variations on a Classic Roll
by Rich Redmond
- 68 Strictly Technique**
Nine Over Two
Part 1: Accenting the Quarter-Note Triplet
by Bill Bachman
- 72 Rock ‘n’ Jazz Clinic**
Groove Construction
Part 2: More Snare Displacement
by Jost Nickel
- 74 Rock Perspectives**
Progressive Drumming Essentials
Part 11: Making Four Sound Like More
by Aaron Edgar
- 78 Concepts**
Organize Your Gear
Part 1: Cartage
by Russ Miller

EQUIPMENT

- 22 Product Close-Up**
Kumu Limited series All Maple and All Mahogany drumsets
Masterwork Jazz Master and Valena series cymbals
Doc Sweeny Midnight Edge and Narra King snare drums
Porter & Davies BC Gigster
- 62 Gearing Up**
Electronica Drummer/Producer Shigeto
- 80 Collector’s Corner**
1964: The Tribute’s Bobby Potter
by Harry Cangany
- 82 New and Notable**

DEPARTMENTS

- 8 An Editor’s Overview**
The Art of No Ego
by Michael Dawson
- 10 Readers’ Platform**
- 14 News**
- 20 It’s Questionable**
The Value of Learning Other Instruments
by Marko Djordjevic
- 84 Showcase**
featuring Drum Market
- 88 Critique**
Black Mountain, Glenn Kotche with Sö Percussion, Robby Ameen, and more
- 90 Inside Methods**
Denny Seiwell’s *What Not to Play!*
- 92 Backbeats**
2015 Guitar Center Drum-Off Grand Finals, *Scouts Honor* documentary
- 96 Kit of the Month**
Slingerland Radio King

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page 87



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The Art of No Ego

“If there’s a definition of heaven, I think it might be being in the minds, ears, hearts, and thoughts of others,” says this month’s cover artist, Peter Erskine, on the lasting impact jazz legend Elvin Jones has had on his life and career. That quote hit me strongly, and it resonates a bit deeper each time I read it.

I mean, here’s a guy who’s amassed hundreds of recording credits, was a member of some of the most important and innovative bands of all time (in several different genres), runs his own record label, has produced a number of benchmark instructional products, including some of the finest play-along apps in iTunes, and is currently on faculty at one of the premier music schools in the world. If there were someone who could be forgiven for being a bit egotistical, Peter would be it. Yet here he is, praising the work of others above his own in his first cover story since 1993. You can hear Erskine’s selflessness and reverence every time he sits down at the kit, which is no doubt the key reason why he’s so employable and so often employed.

One of the ironies of the drumming community, which often functions in contrast to the greater musical world, is that it’s often those with an approach to the drums in opposite of Erskine’s that garner the most immediate attention. There’s a reason why we don’t have a “world’s slowest drummer” contest or a global quest to discover who has the smoothest, softest buzz roll; those things just aren’t very headline-grabbing. But sit in a room with Peter and listen to him propel an ensemble with nothing more than quarter notes on the ride cymbal, à la Jimmy Cobb, and see if it doesn’t make the hair on the back of your neck stand up. *That’s* the stuff that stays with you.

Not surprisingly, two of our other featured artists this month, Cuban-born/Los Angeles-based master drummer Jimmy Branly and *Lion King’s* groove engine, Carter McLean, have direct ties to Erskine. Branly, who can rip on the kit with as much intensity, sophistication, and flare as anyone on the planet, had his eyes opened to the art of restraint during his formative years while listening to Peter’s recordings. “I learned to play with dynamics from listening to Erskine more than anyone,” he says. And McLean, who attributes his success in one of the most coveted seats on Broadway to his listening skills and strong, supportive groove, recalled to me via email, after he learned that Peter was on the cover this month, that he spent some time with the modern master when he was nineteen. And it was the “best lesson ever.”

Enjoy the issue!



Mike Dawson

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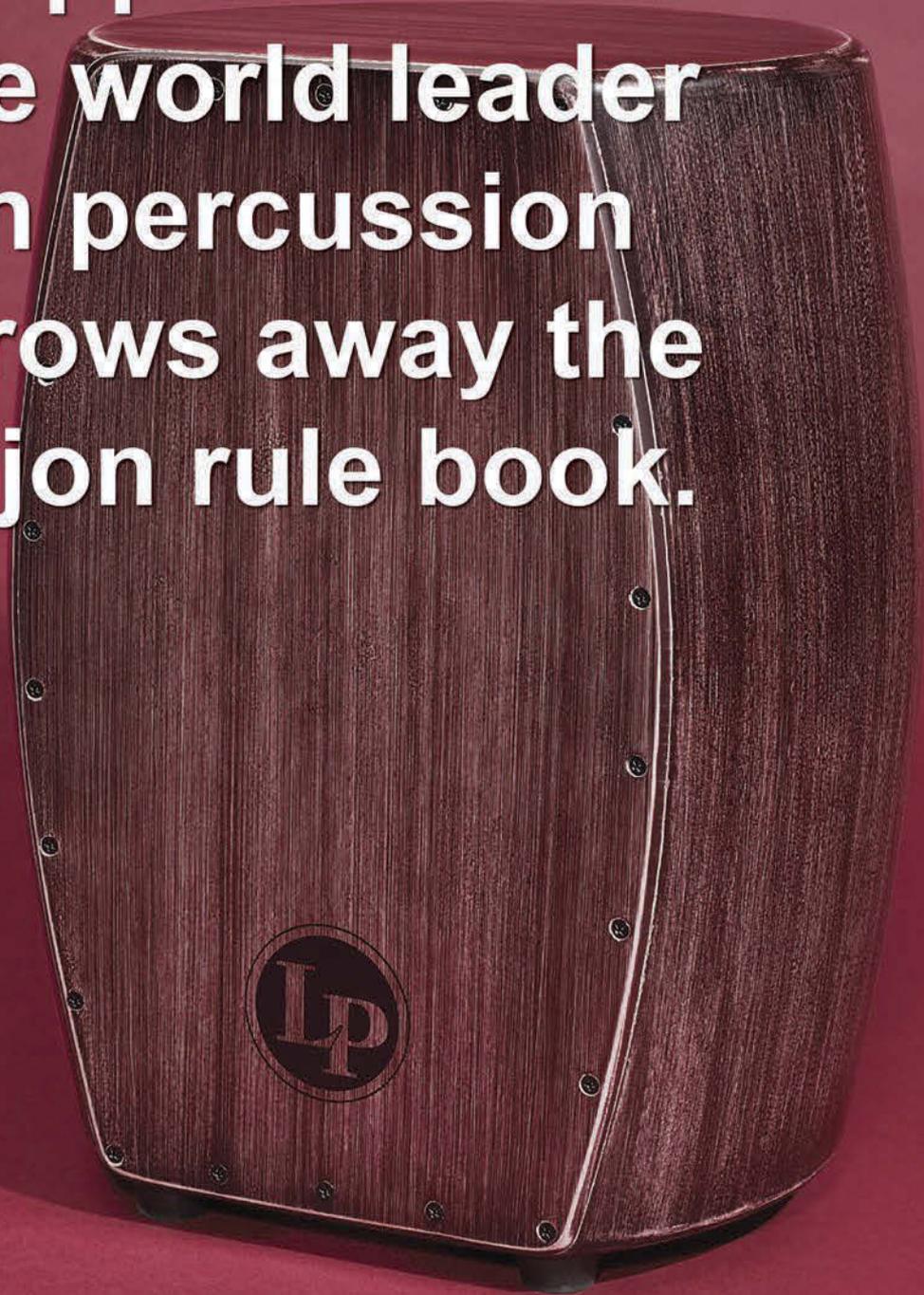
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S.D.	●	⊗	●		
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READERS' PLATFORM



Barry Kerch

When the March issue showed up in the mail yesterday, I had to chuckle because the cover artist was my old friend Barry Kerch. I came to know Barry when he worked in the drum department at Thoroughbred Music (prior to being bought out) in Orlando, Florida. Barry was a delightful drum brother and helped me with several snare drum collection purchases. I brought in a Noble & Cooley maple piccolo snare once and asked him to replace its heads, snares, and more. When I came back a few days later, he had taken the time to go to the guitar department to get some high-end wood oil, and he lovingly marinated the inside of the shell by hand-rubbing it into the interior.

That day he told me he had an upcoming audition that he was pretty excited about, and I of course wished him the very best. I stopped in a week or so later and asked how the audition went, and he said he'd gotten the drum chair in a band called Shinedown! We all know how that turned out, and it was really excellent being able to catch up on his much deserved success via Ben Meyer's article and interview. Bravo, Barry. Your O'Town Orlando peeps are very proud of you. Godspeed, break a leg, and if you come down to Miami I'll be there!

Timothy Lee Cromer

Playing Other Instruments

This month, drummer and educator Marko Djordjevic talks about the benefits drummers can get by learning other instruments on Page 18. We asked our Facebook followers if they've improved their drumming by playing another instrument, and here's what they had to say.

Playing and reading trumpet parts really made a difference when I read big band charts. I always tried to get the lead sheet because it had everything I needed. I would look at the supplied drum chart for some specific details, but usually drum charts had way too much detail and strange notations.

Randy Saunders

I play keys now and some trumpet. It has certainly helped my musicality in general and has gotten me really interested in songwriting. Having played [another instrument] on top of my own drumming, I can certainly better understand what melodic instrumentalists appreciate in a drummer. Singing is also great for drummers.

Patrick Robert

Immersing myself in the world of auxiliary percussion has been amazingly beneficial to grooving in Afro-Cuban and Brazilian styles. Why step on the conga player with your toms when you can lay down a cascara on the hi-hat?

Stephan Fess

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

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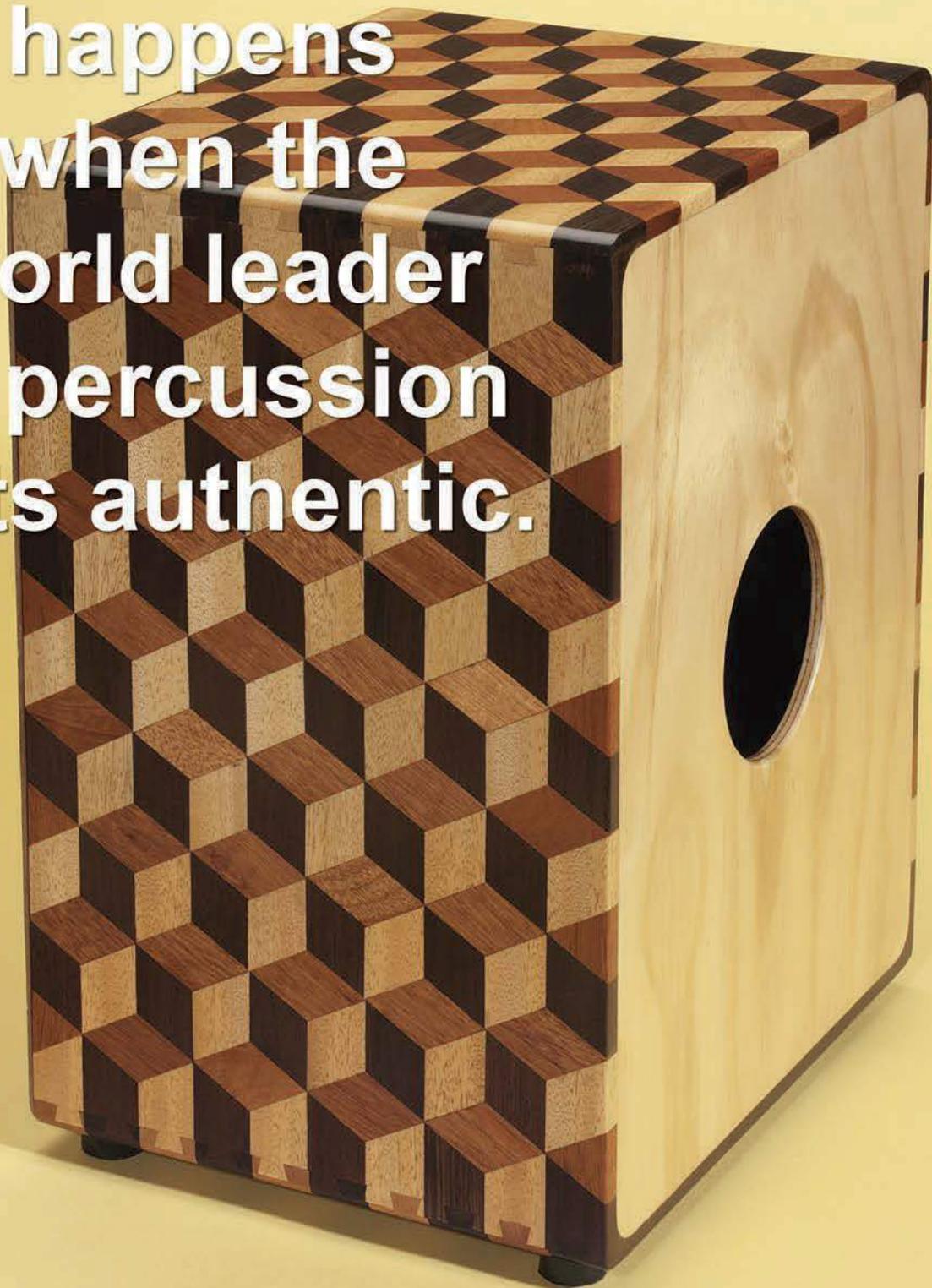
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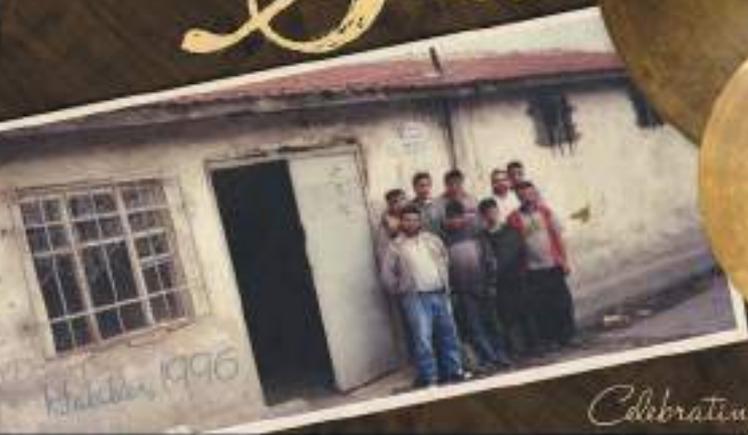
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PURPLE'S HANNA BREWER

"Making a good song powerful usually means taking parts out," says the drummer, singer, and songwriter whose band just released its anticipated sophomore album, *Bodacious*.

PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

Videos of Doc Sweeney Midnight Edge and Narra King snare drums, Kumu Limited Series All Maple and All Mahogany drumsets, and Masterwork Jazz Master and Valena series cymbals in action.

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ON THE BEAT

Dave Krusen of Candlebox, Jim 41's Frank Zummo, Simon of Squeeze, and many more check in.

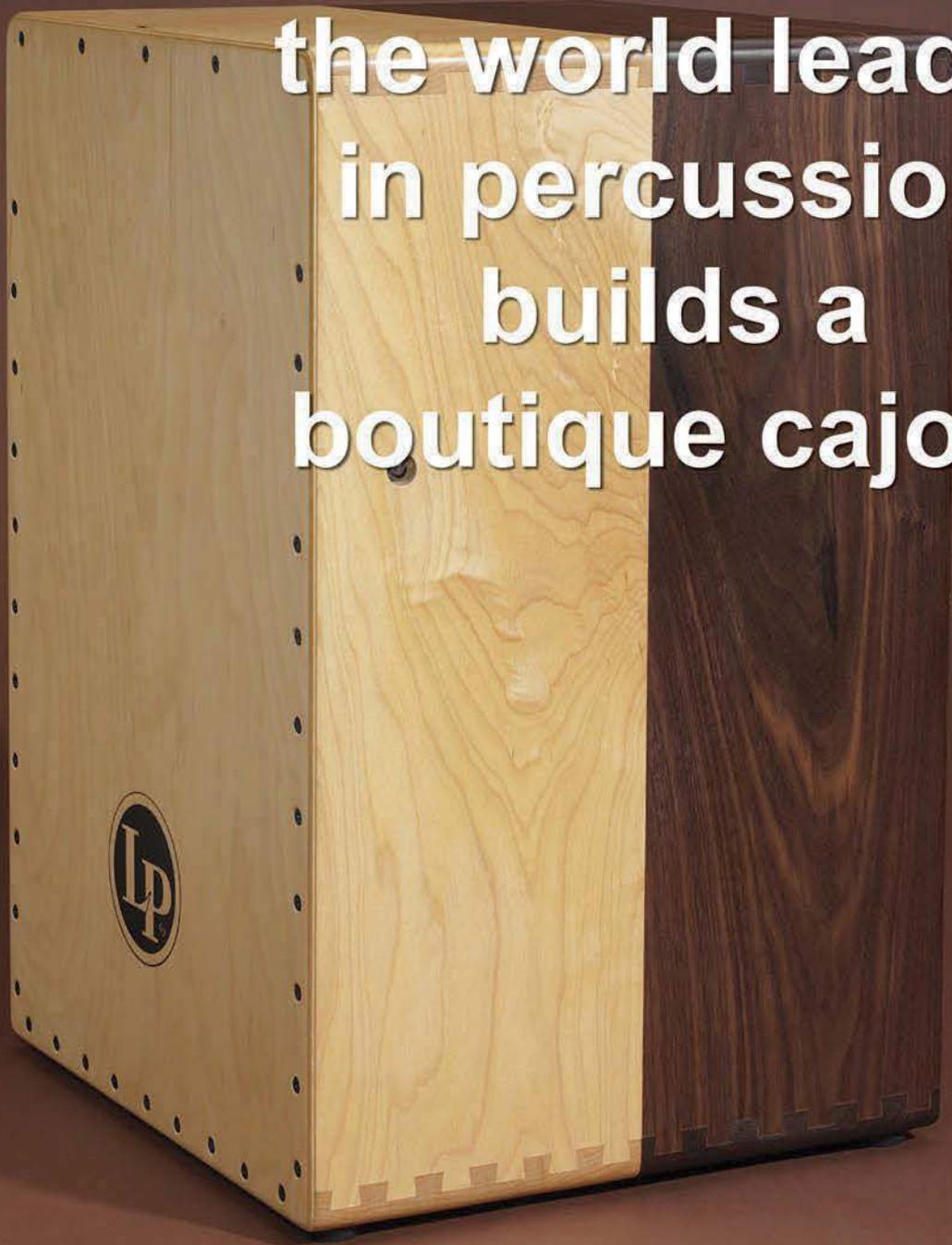
SNARE DISPLACEMENT, PART 2

Doc Nickel leads us further down the path of snare displacement in the second part of his latest Rock 'n' Jazz Clinic series.

Plus the greatest drum-related prizes on the Net, news from around the world of drumming, exclusive MD podcasts, and much, much more.



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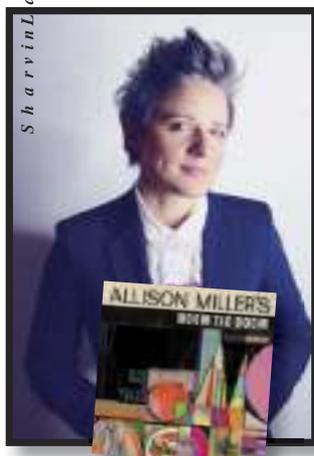


Purple

Bodacious

The Texas trio Purple's second album is a nonstop party out of bounds that comes off like a dream combo of *Licensed to Ill* and *Tragic Kingdom*. Drummer/singer **Hanna Brewer**, who counts the double-duty trailblazers Karen Carpenter and Andy Sturmer (Jellyfish) among her influences, is a revelation, oozing personality both on the mic and on the skins. Whether crash-riding her way through barnstorming songs like the sly title track and first single "Minivan," playing it authentically dubby on "Pretty Mouth" and "Money," or adding neat offbeat accents to the sincere pop-rock ditty "Bliss," Brewer always keeps it fresh and exciting. When asked about her musical ambitions, the drummer looks at the big picture. "My dream is to write an amazing album that you can listen to from the first song to the last song without skipping anything," she says, "an album that really touches people. *Morning View* by Incubus is one of those kinds of albums to me, or *Californication* by Red Hot Chili Peppers. If I can write an album on that level, I'll die happy." (Play It Again Sam)

Adam Budofsky



Allison Miller's Boom Tic Boom

Otis Was a Polar Bear

"I always try to stay in the moment as a composer," says Allison Miller, whose latest album features her remarkably pliable Boom Tic Boom ensemble (pianist Myra Melford, violinist Jenny Scheinman, cornetist Kirk Knuffke, clarinetist Ben Goldberg, and bassist Todd Sickafoose). The expansive tracks on *Otis Was a Polar Bear* betray an exuberance and playfulness that are somewhat in contrast to the music on Miller's 2013 recording, *No Morphine, No Lilies*. That difference, Miller allows, can be chalked up to the arrival of her first child. In fact, *Otis* is chock-full of moments that seem to come out of nowhere but still make charmingly perfect sense. The delightful shifts and unexpected tonal layers in "Shimmer," for instance, will strike a note of vague familiarity to any parent of a young child. But credit also must be given to Miller's continuously deepening compositional skills. "My drummer friends and I always say that drummers write the best music, because we have no limits," Allison shares. "With this album I feel like I'm starting to get to where I envisioned this band to be." (Royal Potato Family) **Adam Budofsky**

More New Releases

Rob Zombie The Electric Warlock Acid Witch Satanic Orgy Celebration Dispenser (Ginger Fish) /// **Entheos** The Infinite Nothing (Navene Koperweis) /// **Unwritten Law** Acoustic (Wade Youman) /// **Candlebox** Disappearing in Airports (Dave Krusen) /// **The Dandy Warhols** Distortland (Brent DeBoer) /// **Lush** Blind Spot (Justin Welch)

For much more with Hanna Brewer and Allison Miller, go to moderndrummer.com.

Who's Playing What

Marko Djordjevic (Sveti) and **Jason Smay** (JD McPherson, Los Straightjackets) have joined the Natal artist family.



On Tour

M e r e d i t h T r i x



Arnar Rósenkranz Hilmarsson is out with Of Monsters and Men in support of the group's sophomore effort, *Beneath the Skin*. To let the music breathe in a live setting, Hilmarsson prefers not to follow a click. "We only have a click track on two songs in our whole set," he says. "I think the main challenge is following something else. It's not hard to follow, but it doesn't feel natural to me. It feels almost robotic in a way. I prefer having the freedom to either slow down or speed up the song. But some songs ask for a super-steady feel, so you have to give it to them."

Hilmarsson's driving floor tom patterns propel many of the band's epic folk-pop songs. "When we started working on our last album, I decided to remove all of the cymbals from my setup to see what I would come up with and do differently," the drummer explains. "I was happy with what happened but started putting the cymbals back on in the end of the process." The band will be on the road through July, on a tour that includes co-headlining dates in June with Florence and the Machine. **Willie Rose**

Also on the Road Chris Adler with Lamb of God /// Reed Murray with Say Anything /// Rick Mazzotta with mewwithoutYou /// Matt Byrne with Hatebreed /// John Sankey with Devil You Know /// Patrick Hallahan with My Morning Jacket /// David Colvin with the Heartless Bastards /// Philip Peebles with the Old 97's /// Patrick Meese with Nathaniel Rateliff & the Night Sweats /// Ynaíá Benthroldo with Boogarins /// David Sandström with Refused

IN MEMORIAM

Jason Mackenroth



Jason Mackenroth—drummer for the Rollins Band from 1998 to 2004, solo artist, and Blue Man Group member—died in January. Mackenroth started on the drums in high school and played with DCI's Sacramento Freelancers. In 1989 he cofounded Mother Superior and, after two albums, joined the Rollins Band for seven albums and four world tours.

After leaving the Rollins Band and Mother Superior, Mackenroth took over songwriting and vocalist duties with his own group, Mack, releasing a self-titled debut in 2005 and *Pay to Play* in 2011. In addition to teaching private lessons, he spent more than eight years in the Blue Man Group's Las Vegas production, recorded with funk legend George Clinton, the Lovemakers, and Robert Bradley, and toured with Daniel Lanois and Wayne Kramer.

Joe Hibbs

This past February, Mapex and Sonor artist relations manager Joe Hibbs passed away. Hibbs was a veteran of the drumming and music-instrument community with a decades-long career that started in retail in Houston in the 1970s. Hibbs joined Promark in the early '80s as the drumstick maker's artist relations and sales manager before moving to Tama and then Premier. In 2003, KHS America recruited him to head artist relations, product development, and the rebranding of Mapex. While there, Hibbs signed artists such as Chris Adler, Matt Halpern, Rashid Williams, and Sean Fuller. In 2015, Hibbs was awarded with the KHS America President's Award and took over artist relations for Sonor when KHS America acquired Hohner Inc.

"I can't begin to express the impact Joe's passing has had on our KHS America and Mapex family," says Tabor Stamper, president of KHS America. "When we first shared the tragic news with our team, it was like somehow all the air was pumped out of the building. It goes without saying that Joe was such an integral part of our family, but we also know that his family was much larger—literally spanning the globe. As the news reached those outside of KHS America, we have been deluged with messages expressing shock, sorrow, fond memories, and condolences. We will miss Joe every day—his dedication, his expertise in all things drums, and, above all, his upbeat attitude toward life and work. He approached everyone he met with a smile, a handshake, and a 'How ya doin' today?' We'll miss that most of all."



Hibbs on stage at the 2010 Modern Drummer Festival

Highlights of JEN 2016

The Jazz Education Network's (JEN) 2016 convention, which was held January 6 through 9 in Louisville, featured a wide range of clinics and concerts aimed at jazz teachers and students. Several prominent drummers participated as clinicians and/or performers, but a major focus of JEN is showcasing student groups along with name artists.

Among the drummers who performed were Ed Soph, with the LeJENDs of Jazz Education, a group of prominent teachers; Will Kennedy, with the Yellowjackets; Derico Watson, with the XO Trombone All Stars; Danny Gottlieb, with the University of North Florida Jazz Ensemble; and Arianna Fanning, with Monika Herzig's Whole World in Her Hands band.

For the most part the drummer-led clinics addressed concerns of general music educators and band directors. So there was more emphasis on educating non-drummers about what drummers do (or *should* do, anyway) than on technical issues. Clinics led by drummers and percussionists included a session by Henrique De Almeida that dealt with drumset etudes; one by Matt Wilson on the difference between keeping time and sharing time; Olma Piedra's session on enhancing a percussion section; a historical overview of Latin jazz by Bobby Sanabria; and Russ Miller's session on how to get the most out of a rhythm section. **Rick Mattingly**



Fanning



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Chris Coleman

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Nashville Drummers Jam 7: A Tribute to Alex Van Halen



Nashville Drummers Jam 7: A Tribute to Alex Van Halen took place this past December 14 at Music City's Exit/In. Twenty-nine drummers performed in front of a sold-out crowd, and, in a unique twist, played on Alex's 2015 touring Ludwig drumset, which was delivered and assembled by Van Halen's drum tech, John Douglas. The charitable event, organized by drummers David Parks (Southern Rock Revival, Jason Michael Carroll) and Tom Hurst (Tracy Lawrence), featured giveaways and auction items including Van Halen merchandise courtesy of Warner Music Group, a custom snare from Dunnett Classic Drums, an autographed Paiste Reverend Al's Big Ride cymbal, Ludwig snares, and two items donated by Eddie Van Halen—an EVH amp and an autographed guitar. The event raised its highest amount of donations to date, with proceeds benefitting Open Table Nashville.

Performers included Matt Billingslea (Taylor Swift), Nick Buda (Nashville studio), Mike Catone (Brian Davis), John Douglas, William Ellis (Montgomery Gentry), Sean Fuller (Florida Georgia Line), Dave Harrison (Edwin McCain), Tom Hurst, Ben Jackson (Sister Hazel), Lee Kelley (Nashville studio/touring), Wes Little (Robben Ford, Joe Nichols), Gregg Lohman (Kellie Pickler), Ray Luzier (Korn), Pat McDonald (Charlie Daniels Band), Travis McNabb (Frankie Ballard), Rob Mitchell (Sixpence None the Richer), Kevin Murphy (Randy Houser), Pete Parada (the Offspring), David Parks, Mark Poiesz (Tyler Farr), Rich Redmond (Jason Aldean), Jim Riley (Rascal Flatts), Jamie Rogan (Billy Currington), Ben Sesar (Brad Paisley), Keio Stroud (Big and Rich), Jason Sutter (Smash Mouth, Chris Cornell), Ed Toth (Doobie Brothers), and Russ Whitman (Craig Morgan).



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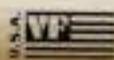
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Kenny Aronoff

He's played with everybody, but he doesn't get called just for his technique.

It's been more than thirty years since Kenny Aronoff first received national attention as the drummer on John Cougar Mellencamp's hits "Hurts So Good" and "Jack and Diane." After playing on numerous Mellencamp records, Aronoff became an in-demand studio and touring player whose credits range from Bob Seger and John Fogerty—the latter an ongoing gig—to Willie Nelson, Travis Tritt, Smashing Pumpkins, the BoDeans, Meat Loaf, Alice Cooper, and hundreds more. So how has he managed to maintain an active career for so long?

"I think the biggest thing that has kept me relevant is self-discipline," Aronoff says. "You don't achieve success through laziness, entitlement, and trophies coming to you with no hard work. To become and stay successful you need a foundation of self-discipline, hard work fueled by the love of what you do, and education.

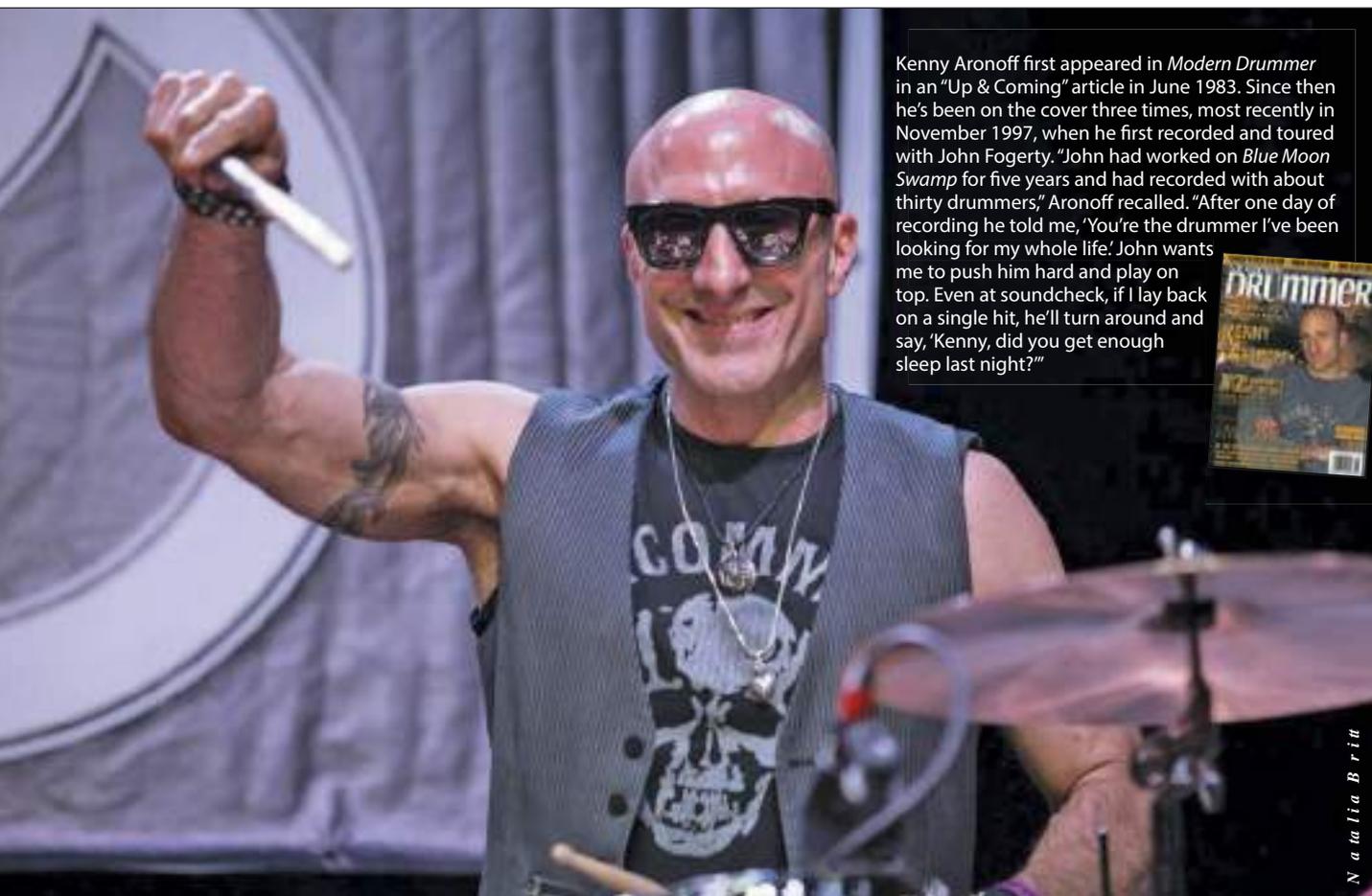
"No matter how many hit singles I've played on, no matter how many great tours I've done, I never believed that I had reached all my goals," Aronoff continues. "I create a goal, and then I make a plan and execute it. A lot of people want things to just come to them, but some goals can take a long time. There are technical things I might work on for a year before I can play them fluently."

The wide range of musicians Aronoff has been able to work with

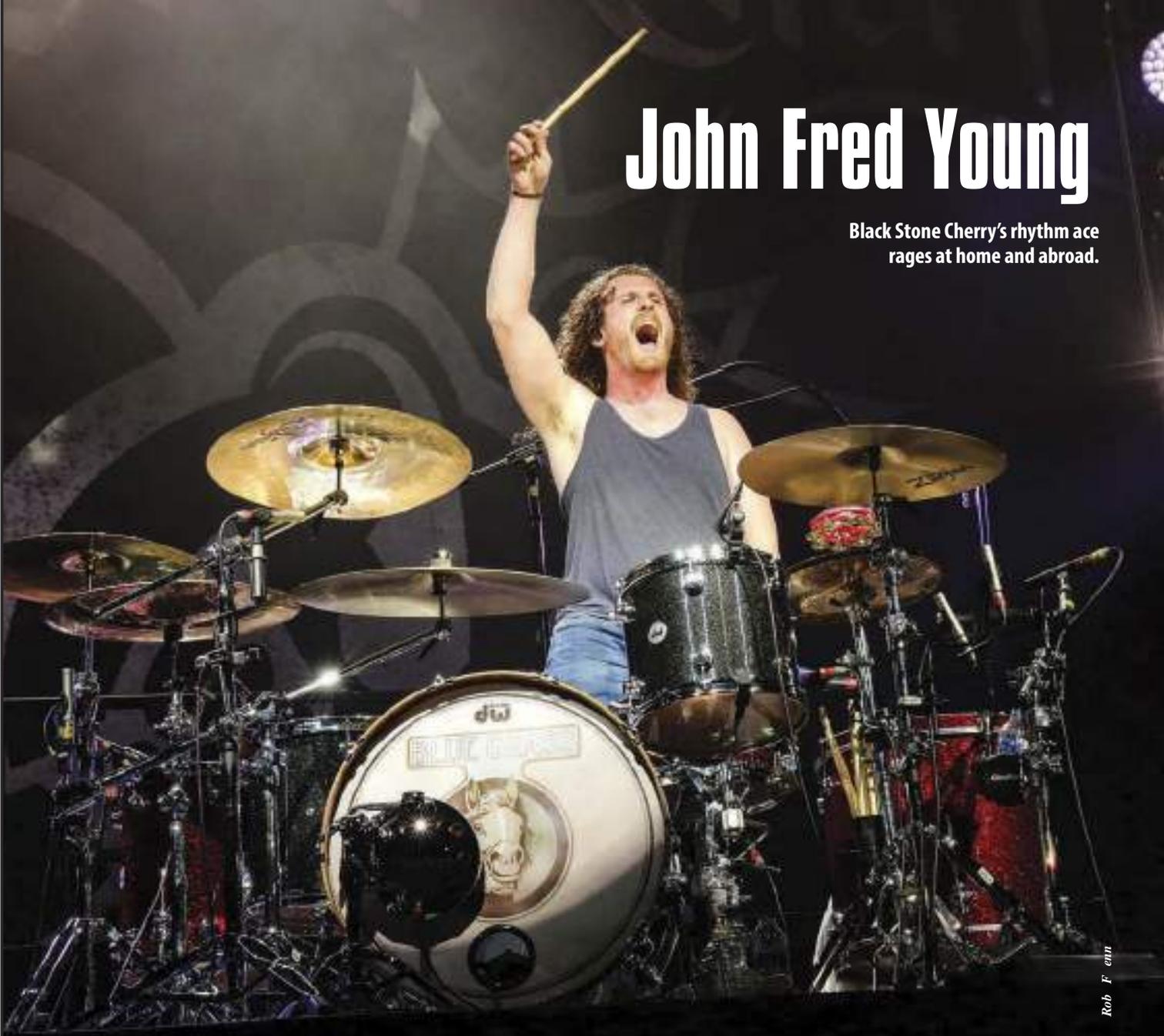
reflects his versatility—especially on shows like *The Kennedy Center Honors*, where he's backed artists from a wide variety of genres. But he says it's not just the playing that makes one successful. "I get hired because a producer or artist wants me in the room or on stage with them because of who I am as a person—my ability to get along, to follow orders, to be a team player. At this point, with most of the sessions and tours I do, I don't care how famous the artist or producer is—I've made more records than they have, and I have more experience and knowledge. But I'm a sideman; I'm not the boss. If I want to be the leader, I should start my own band."

A phrase Aronoff often uses is "a healthy life is a wealthy life," and part of his daily routine involves exercising to stay physically, mentally, and emotionally strong.

"The last thing," Kenny says, "is that I've adapted to the ways music has changed. When there were big budgets for records, I was recording several sessions a day at studios in Nashville, New York, and L.A. But all of that changed, so I realized that I would have to build my own studio, Uncommon Studios L.A., so I could record drums for people at an affordable rate. I didn't really want to do that, but that's what I had to do to keep being a recording drummer." **Rick Mattingly**



Kenny Aronoff first appeared in *Modern Drummer* in an "Up & Coming" article in June 1983. Since then he's been on the cover three times, most recently in November 1997, when he first recorded and toured with John Fogerty. "John had worked on *Blue Moon Swamp* for five years and had recorded with about thirty drummers," Aronoff recalled. "After one day of recording he told me, 'You're the drummer I've been looking for my whole life.' John wants me to push him hard and play on top. Even at soundcheck, if I lay back on a single hit, he'll turn around and say, 'Kenny, did you get enough sleep last night?'"



John Fred Young

Black Stone Cherry's rhythm ace rages at home and abroad.

Rob F. enn

Anyone who's checked out Black Stone Cherry's music videos might be surprised to learn that in conversation, the man who plays drums like a god of thunder is an absolute Southern gentleman. "We were very fortunate to be from a small town where family and friends count," the Edmonton, Kentucky, native tells *MD* after landing in London's Heathrow Airport for the start of the band's *Carnival of Madness* tour. "In the beginning we were playing small rooms of about a hundred capacity, and the promoters didn't even know we were on the bill." No such problem these days for the band, which continues to build upon its already significant fan base in America, Europe, and beyond.

After returning to the States in April and May, BSC heads to Australia for a handful of dates, where it will continue to introduce fans to tracks from its brand-new collection, *Kentucky*. The album leads with "The Way of the Future," which busts out of the gate with a distorted-sounding but cleanly executed press roll. "I grew up loving Buddy Rich, Gene Krupa, Max Roach, Louie Bellson...and I got all that from Fred," Young says, referring to his uncle Fred Young, drummer for the Kentucky HeadHunters. "Initially I wanted to play double bass drums, because I thought it was cool, but I wasn't really

that good. What I did do was take my right foot and right hand and build up single- and double-stroke rolls, which I eventually was able to do with either hand.

"John Bonham was one of my biggest drum heroes," John Fred adds, explaining the source of some of his favorite licks. "He hit hard, but he was also a groove machine."

Young can be heard burning it up all across *Kentucky*, which is Black Stone Cherry's fifth full-length. Home runs include "Soul Machine," which features some tasty horn lines; the killer power ballad "Long Ride"; a fierce remake of the Edwin Starr hit "War"; the rocker "Cheaper to Drink Alone," which was toned down from its original version to encourage crossover country appeal; and "The Rambler," a largely acoustic track that closes the record.

"This album is unique," Young says, "as we got to do it in our home studio. So we were able to develop new sounds, tones, and arrangements. Plus this was the first time we collaborated in the songwriting—not to mention the comfort of being with friends and family. In fact, I gave my daughter her first set of drumsticks [during the recording], which were handed down to me by my uncle. To see the look on her face was everything." **Bob Girouard**



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Ask a Pro

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Marko Djordjevic The Value of Learning Other Instruments



We recently asked the members of the *Modern Drummer* Education Team the question "How important is it to play another instrument besides the drums?" You can check out their responses at moderndrummer.com. Here we wanted to share some additional thoughts from one of the panelists, New York-based drummer/composer/educator Marko Djordjevic.

"Based on my experience as a drummer, composer, and bandleader," says Djordjevic, "I believe that it would be useful for all musicians to have some functional knowledge of the drums and the piano. Understanding the layout of the keyboard makes it easy to 'see' melody and harmony and their respective movement.

"On the other hand, the drumset is the cornerstone of rhythmic momentum, and I believe it is the instrument that's being explored and developed more than any other in today's music. Rhythm is the playground in which a lot of creative music is built upon these days, and there are a lot of possibilities left to explore as compared to melody and harmony.

"Now let's address how some basic piano skill can impact your life as a competent, functional drummer. The piano is perfect for seeing how music theory works and then finding out what it sounds like. It's important to spend some time sitting at the piano and getting to know what the different musical intervals sound like. I've been saved from getting lost on gigs by relying on my ears to identify where we were in the harmonic progression of the tune because I could hear the intervals of the bass part.

"Some keyboard-aided harmonic ear training will also make you more aware of the colors and vibes of different chord types. This comes in handy during improvisation, when the pianist or guitarist begins extending the harmony beyond what's originally written for the tune. If you can't hear how those changes are affecting the emotion of the performance, then you can become a bit disoriented and disengaged.

"My knowledge of the keyboard, as well as my interest in harmony, has been pivotal in allowing me to be expressive through

composing original music. It's easy for me to take an idea that I'm hearing in my head and explore where it could go without relying on the help of others. I can test the melody against different bass notes to find the harmony that I want to go with it. Once I have the tune fleshed out, I can record it in a sequencing program to send to my bandmates to check out. Doing that not only saves time in rehearsals, but it also promotes the idea of working more organically toward recreating the initial sounds you had in your head.

"If you're a bandleader, the more you know about each individual instrument, the better you will be at conveying your ideas to other musicians. Just think of the various times someone has tried to explain a drum idea to you but they lacked the proper lingo to articulate that idea effectively. Not being able to speak with another person in musical terms can derail a rehearsal, recording, or performance and cause a lot of frustration.

"Having a working knowledge of another instrument also allows you the opportunity to jam with another drummer. It allows you to experience music from another perspective, and you'll likely discover that some drum parts that you thought were cool are actually disruptive to the music. Time inconsistencies also become more obvious when you're trying to lock into a groove with a drummer. In a nutshell, playing another instrument with another drummer can be a great way to open your eyes to some of the weaknesses in your own drumming, which you can then begin to fix.

"The development of one's listening capacity is essential. After all, music is about communicating, with your bandmates as well as with your audience. Effective communication relies on your ability to articulate your ideas and also to hear what those around you are trying to express."

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Pekka Helanen, Kumu started out making acoustic and electric guitars and basses in addition to drums. A decade later, Helanen refocused the business to just drums. The company has its own molds and makes its own shells for its All Birch Custom and Original series drums. Limited series drums, which we have for review, have shells made overseas to Kumu's specs, but Helanen's team is responsible for drilling the holes, cleaning up the bearing edges, and assembling the final drums.

Limited series toms are available in 10"-16" sizes, bass drums are available in 18"-22", and snares come in 5x14 and 6.5x14. We

received two kits: All Maple in rock/studio sizes and All Mahogany in jazz/fusion sizes. Let's dig in!

All Maple Limited Kit

This kit came with a 16x22 bass drum, an 8x12 rack tom, and a 14x16 floor tom with legs. The shells are 5.6 mm thick and are made from 6-ply North American maple. The bearing edges are slightly rounded double-45-degree, and the deep reddish high-gloss finish is what Kumu calls royal brown. The unique-looking F-lugs make minimal contact with the shell. They are made from chromed solid steel, and they have a connecting piece that floats between

them that's shaped to resemble the F hole found on classical stringed instruments.

The toms have 2.3 mm steel rims, and the bass drum has matching maple hoops. The rack tom comes with Kumu's own Kumurim suspension mount. The toms were fitted with Remo Smooth White Emperor batters and Clear Ambassador bottoms. The bass drum came with a Clear Powerstroke 3 batter and a Smooth White PS3 front with a small port. List price is \$2,160.

These maple drums tuned up very easily and produced clean, pure tones at all tunings, from high and tight to low and loose. The bass drum only required a little bit of muffling (a rolled towel touching the



All Maple Limited Kit with optional 14" floor tom

batter head) to bring out the maximum punch and low end. The toms have the big, open sound you'd expect from high-quality maple shells, but they also have the extra articulation and responsiveness of a denser timber like birch. This clear, punchy attack helped the toms speak quickly and with plenty of projection. The bass drum had the perfect combo of clean beater snap and tight, chesty thump. This All Maple Limited would be a great all-around workhorse kit, both live and in the studio.

All Mahogany Limited Kit

This kit came in smaller sizes, with a 16x20 bass drum, 8x10 and 8x12 rack toms, and a 14x14 floor tom with legs. The shells are made with six plies of African mahogany. The toms are 5.6 mm thick, and the bass drum is 7.2 mm. The bearing edges are fully

rounded, and the drums are finished in high-gloss natural lacquer. The hoops and lugs are the same as on the maple kit, but this kit features a double tom holder on the bass drum (not shown). The toms came with Remo Coated Ambassador batters. List price is \$2,685.

Mahogany is a naturally darker sounding timber than maple, but it can also sound fuzzy and out of focus at times, especially at lower tunings. Not so with the Kumu Limited All Mahogany kit. These drums have the same clear, crisp attack and wide dynamic range as the All Maple, while also favoring the beefier low-end frequencies. The toms sound just as strong and full at tight tunings as they do with barely any tension on the heads, and they have great tone and controlled resonance that translated very well in the recording studio. The kick drum

sounds fat and punchy tuned low and has a nice round "thump" when tuned slightly higher.

Like the maple setup, the All Mahogany Limited Kumu kit, in these slightly smaller sizes, would be an excellent all-purpose option for drummers playing at more controlled dynamics. But they can stand on their own at upper levels as well.

Michael Dawson

TECH SPECS

Shells: 6-ply North American maple and African mahogany

Sizes: 8x12, 14x16, and 16x22 (maple), 8x10, 8x12, 14x14, and 16x20 (mahogany)

Edges: slightly rounded double-45 degrees (maple), fully rounded (mahogany)

Prices: \$2,160 (maple) and \$2,685 (mahogany)

All Mahogany Limited Kit



For video demos of these kits, visit moderndrummer.com.

Masterwork

Jazz Master and Valena Series Cymbals

A tribute to the tradition and a creative push forward.

Masterwork, an Istanbul-based manufacturer founded in 2002, specializes in making cymbals using ancient Turkish traditions combined with contemporary tools and techniques. The company offers fourteen different series made from B25 bronze (75% copper and 25% tin). We were sent a slew of samples from half a dozen series, but we're going to take a look at two lines that represent the wide range of sounds Masterwork offers: the dark, warm Jazz Master and the brighter and more aggressive—yet no less expressive—Valena.

Jazz Master

This is Masterwork's traditional line designed as a tribute to the classic dark, warm tones that helped define the sound of jazz in the 1950s and '60s. These cymbals have a subdued finish, wide lathing rings on top of a standard lathing pattern, asymmetrical hammering, and a modestly sized "M" logo. A full range of sizes and models is available, including 10" and 12" splashes, 13"–15" hi-hats,

16"–18" crashes, 19"–22" crash-rides, and 14"–22" Chinas. We were sent 15" hi-hats, a 21" crash-ride, and a 10" splash.

The Jazz Master 10" splash is paper-thin and super-light (210 grams). It opens up with a quick, flashy attack, and it has a clean, warm sustain and a fast but balanced decay. There's no trace of gonginess, and there's just enough complexity to prevent a clearly defined pitch. I don't need to use a splash cymbal very often these days, but when I do, the 10" Jazz Master gives me the exact sound that I hear in my head.

The 15" Jazz Master hi-hats have a medium-thin top (1,084 grams) and a medium bottom (1,290 grams). The bells are small but pronounced, and the bow has a moderately gentle, even slope. They have a deep, low-pitched tone, but they are thick enough to provide crisp stick definition and a strong foot chick. The open sound has a dark, complex hiss that can be used to roar like Tony Williams, or it can be controlled easily with varying degrees of foot pressure and playing dynamics for more subtle textures. Just as the 10" Jazz





TECH SPECS

Origin: Istanbul, Turkey

Alloy: B25 bronze

Sizes: 10" splash, 15" hi-hats, and 21" crash-ride (Jazz Master); 13" hi-hats, 14" crash, 17" Dark crash, and 20" crash-ride (Valena)

Check out
these cymbals at
modern drummer.com.

Master splash offers exactly what I look for in a quick accent cymbal, the 15" Jazz Masters possess a great balance of the dark, expressive, and powerful characteristics that I want from a set of big hi-hats.

Masterwork's 21" Jazz Master crash-ride is medium-thin (2,310 grams), with a fairly flat and wide (6") bell and a subtly sloped bow. It has a deep, warm tone with balanced and brilliant overtones, light yet clean attack, and a rich, musical, and partially integrated bell sound. The wash isn't overrun by complex, trashy overtones, so the decay is very balanced and even. Full crashes on the shoulder draw out big, deep, and washy tones, while more delicate and expressive tones can be coaxed with ease with lighter strokes on the bell and bow. This is a rare multi-purpose cymbal that produces a full spectrum of sound at any dynamic, whether swinging 300 bpm at pianissimo or bashing Bonham-style beats at triple forte.

Valena

The Valena series is a more contemporary looking and sounding line from Masterwork. These cymbals are brilliantly finished and have raw, unlathed bells. The bottoms are highly polished and traditionally lathed from edge to bell. The tops are lathed with a few different patterns to create a unique look comprising an inner circle of short, wide knife marks followed by a highly polished band, followed by a thin unlathed band and an outer band with a highly polished finish. There's no discernable sonic difference between the different sections, but they do give the cymbals a strong, striking appearance from the player's perspective.

The 13" Valena hi-hats are medium-thin (800 gram top and 900 gram bottom) and have small, pronounced bells and a gradual but fairly steep bow. They have a crisp and articulate closed sound, a clean and somewhat pitchy open tone, and a sizzly, bright, and

slightly complex half-open wash. The foot chick is fast and clean. I was able to articulate quick 8th notes with the foot very easily within a dense fusion-type groove, and the hi-hats respond very well to light double strokes and quick open/closed barks. They're a little chunky-sounding for straight-ahead jazz, but are a great match for fusion, contemporary R&B, and electronica.

The 14" Valena crash is medium-thin (760 grams), has a bright, flashy, fast tone, and opens up immediately with a full, spraying voice at any volume. It also has a hint of trashiness, which helps tame down a bit of its glassiness. Its sound is like a combination of the clean, bright attack of a large splash with the warmer and more complex sustain of a small hand-hammered crash.

The 17" Dark Valena crash (1,163 grams) is just as fast and sensitive as the 14" crash, but it has a significantly richer, warmer tone. It opens up very easily and has a big, explosive voice that decays slowly but evenly. This cymbal was a perfect choice for a low-to medium-volume gig where I wanted to be able to play full, washy crashes from a quick flick of the stick. You can also really lay into it for strong, impactful accents, and crash-riding it in a modern rock setting created a loud, seamless wash.

The medium-thin Valena crash-ride (1,874 grams) has a smooth, clean sustain that builds up nicely, but it lacks the articulation and control that it needs to be used as a primary ride cymbal. Conversely, the bell produces a clear, strong sound that sits nicely over the sustain. With that in mind, I'd tend to use this cymbal primarily for big, washy crashes and for an alternative bell sound. It's not nearly as quick as the 14" and 17" crashes, but it has a similarly bright and expressive voice.

Michael Dawson

Doc Sweeney

Midnight Edge and Narra King Snare Drums

Custom single-ply and hand-painted stave-shell drums.

Doc Sweeney is a high-end custom drum company whose mission is “to create works of drum art that will enhance the experience of drumming enthusiasts for years to come.” The San Diego-based company just wrapped up its freshman year of business and boasts the exquisite work of drumsmith Steve Stecher. The current lineup of options from Doc Sweeney includes one-of-a-kind single-ply and stave-shell snares constructed from countless types of wood, hardware, lug, and finish options.

We were sent two snare drums for review: a 5.5x13 single-ply elm in “midnight edge” finish (\$750) and a 6.5x14 with a shell constructed from three different types of wood (figured narra with bubinga and maple accents) and featuring bubinga wood hoops with bird’s-eye maple inlays. This drum is called the Narra King and sells for \$1,250.

Midnight Edge

This beautiful drum has a finish that has a subtle tribute to Van Gogh’s masterpiece painting *Starry Night*. The deep, rich blue color is accented by the prominent wood grain and black-nickel hardware. The drum includes a Trick three-position throw-off, Puresound snare wires, and a Remo Coated Controlled Sound batter.

Sonically, this drum is a workhorse. At a medium-high tuning, it has a crisp, woody Vinnie Colaiuta-type crack. Pushed into higher tunings, it provided a beautiful tone, gorgeous resonance, and an aggressive bite with each rim shot. Tuned low, it produces a nice, fat sound when hit in the center of the head, with a long, deep sustain. This drum would be a great choice for live or session work, as its wide tuning range makes it ideal for all types of music.





Narra King

The .5"-thick stave shell on this drum is big and beautiful. It came equipped with a Trick three-position throw-off, chrome-plated solid-brass tube lugs, Sabian snare wires, and a Remo Renaissance batter head. The wood hoops add just enough width so that not every snare stand will be able to accommodate the drum, but what they add to the aesthetics of the drum is worth it. The maple inlay in the hoops transitions perfectly to the body of the drum, providing a timeless look.

When cranked high, the Narra King projected a deep, resonant "ping" with each rim shot, but there's a lot of meatiness in the tone as well. Tuned low, the drum had less projection, and the timbre became darker and thicker, evoking the sound of a tribal drum designed to prepare ancient warriors for battle. Although this snare wasn't created to be as versatile as the midnight edge, it was our favorite because of how well it excelled in the lower frequencies.

Miguel Monroy

TECH SPECS

Shells: single-ply elm and stave narra/
bubinga/maple

Sizes: 5.5x13 and 6.5x14

Prices: \$750 and \$1,250

For video demos of these drums,
visit moderndrummer.com.

Porter & Davies

BC Gigster

Easy-to-use, silent, and portable bass drum monitoring system.

Porter & Davies is a UK-based company whose silent bass drum monitoring systems are being used by many top touring drummers, such as Ray Luzier (Korn), Billy Cobham (fusion legend), Gavin Harrison (Porcupine Tree/King Crimson), Jojo Mayer (Nerve), and Tomas Haake (Meshuggah). The company's initial offerings included the BC2 and the BC2rm, and now there's the more compact/portable Gigster.

All three of P&D's systems are designed to thump the underside of the seat each time the bass drum is struck, via a throne top with built-in tactile generator, an external engine, and a microphone (not included). The BC2 amplifier is housed in a 10" flight case, and the BC2rm is designed to fit within two spaces of a standard audio rack. The Gigster, which we have for review here, has a smaller, lighter amplifier so that working drummers can experience the same powerful, precise low-end "thump" provided by the BC2 and BC2rm without having to lug around extra cases.

Simple Setup

The Gigster has two parts: a throne top with built-in tactile generator and an engine containing all of the electronics (amp, mic preamp, mic/line inputs and outputs, and controls for level, volume, and tone). The system also comes with a 6.5' cable to link and lock the throne top to the engine. Not included is a microphone and the mic cables needed to send the signal from the kick drum to the Gigster and then out to the PA system (when required).

To dial in the best response, adjust the mic input on the Gigster, while playing the bass drum, until the level lights are activated but not peaking, turn the master volume up until you feel the generator activating, and then adjust the low-end tone control until you get the desired punch and sustain. You can use dynamic or condenser mics with the system, as long as the output of the Gigster is fed to a mixing console with phantom power if you're using a condenser.

In Use

We tested the Gigster in the studio, where we were recording acoustic drums with in-ear monitors, and on live gigs with different-size PA systems that included full-production setups with subwoofers and monitor wedges as well as smaller configurations with no drum monitoring.

In the studio, the Gigster is indispensable. Not only does it bring the exciting, powerful experience of playing through a huge PA with subwoofers into the controlled environment of the studio without adding any additional sound, but it also helps you to settle into the groove better because you can literally feel how your bass drum is fitting into the track.



TECH SPECS

Size: 14.5x14.5x9.5 (seat), 13.5x6.5x4 (engine)
Weight: 12.5 lbs. (seat), 7.5 lbs. (engine)
Cable: 6.5' connector from seat to engine
Price: \$999
Website: porteranddavies.co.uk

The Gigster responds to the tone of your bass drum naturally, so if you bury the beater, the generator vibrates for a shorter amount of time. Conversely, if you let the beater bounce off the head and the drum is unmuffled, the Gigster sustains longer. This super-accurate response is a great way to get immediate feedback on how your touch on the kick is affecting your tone.

On gigs with big PA systems and monitor wedges, the Gigster is great for cleaning up your monitor mix and the overall stage sound because you won't have to have the bass drum cranked through the wedge. And on gigs without monitors, where I often get the false feeling that I have to overplay the bass drum to be heard, the Gigster allowed me to settle into the groove and play with a more relaxed and comfortable touch.

The Gigster throne top is firm but very comfortable. We were sent a round top, but saddle and extra-wide options are also available. The top is a bit thicker (9.5") and heavier (12.5 lbs.) than regular thrones, so you may need to accommodate if you pack your seat in your hardware bag or floor tom case. My recommendation is to transport the top and the engine together in a separate 14x16 hard-shell floor tom case, which can then be used as a stand for the Gigster engine. The Gigster seat top and engine sell for \$999.

Michael Dawson



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Peter Erskine

Playing With Intent

Former *Modern Drummer* senior editor **Rick Mattingly** has probably spent more time in the legendary drummer's presence than any other journalist. To this day, their conversations are illuminating, surprising, and, above all, inspiring.

Peter Erskine's career has been like a highway that is constantly under construction, with numerous detours, side roads, bridges, sharp curves, hills, and intersections. That road has traversed a wide, scenic landscape, and while jazz has always been the primary itinerary, Erskine has traveled into other areas as well, reflected by his discography of more than 700 albums also encompassing pop, film scores, and classical projects. He's savored every twist and turn, and for those of us who've been following that journey for over forty years, it's been a fascinating ride.

Consider some of the landmarks. After studying at the Interlochen Arts Academy, Erskine began his professional career at age eighteen, when he joined Stan Kenton's big band. After three years on the road with Kenton, Erskine reenrolled at Indiana University to continue his studies with the legendary percussion teacher George Gaber. A year later Peter left school to join Maynard Ferguson's band, which was a logical follow-up to the Kenton gig. But then he joined the electric fusion group Weather Report, which astounded those who had typecast him as "just" a big band drummer. During breaks with Weather Report, Erskine appeared on several small-group acoustic jazz albums, and then moved to New York to join Steps Ahead, which started out as an acoustic jazz combo but soon moved into the world of MIDI and electronics. On the side he did some studio work ranging from film soundtracks to commercial jingles to jazz dates, and he began releasing solo albums with various personnel and instrumentation.

After moving to California, Erskine continued recording with a variety of artists and began leading his own trios, which recorded for the ECM label. Much of that music was the antithesis of his earlier loud,

energetic drumming, featuring a very nuanced and spacious way of playing. But in between work with his own groups, he performed and/or recorded with such pop artists as Steely Dan, Boz Scaggs, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Elvis Costello, Kate Bush, and Joni Mitchell. He also began playing drumset in orchestral settings, notably in compositions by Mark-Anthony Turnage, including *Blood on the Floor* for jazz ensemble and orchestra; *Scorched*, dedicated to guitarist John Scofield; *Fractured Lines*, a double concerto for drumset and percussion (the latter handled by Evelyn Glennie); and *Erskine: Concertante for Drum Set and Orchestra*.

Apart from playing, Erskine wrote several drumset method books for Hal Leonard and Alfred, made some instructional videos, authored a book titled *No Beethoven*, which uses Weather Report as a framework for his life, and started a record label, Fuzzy Music, on which he's released solo albums, projects by others, and innovative play-along apps. He's received two Grammy Awards, plus an honorary Doctor of Music degree from Berklee College of Music. And since 2000 he's been teaching at the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music.

I first met Erskine in 1977, when he was with Ferguson, and over the years we've done several interviews and worked on some other projects together. I've always found it stimulating to spend time with Peter, because he's always excited about the new music he's doing, or the new way he's approaching music he's played before, or the new cymbal he's added to his setup, or the book he's just read that has offered a new perspective on music—even if the book had nothing to do with music per se. He has the depth that comes only from a wealth of experience and a lifetime of exploration, yet in terms of enthusiasm he's still the same guy I met in 1977.

Photos by Alex Solca



MD: Some things seem to be coming full-circle in your life. You recently did a big band album with Patrick Williams called *Home Suite Home*, and you've released a big band app. On your new solo album, *Dr. Um*, you do a lot of groove playing, which you did plenty of in the past in a variety of settings. And a four-CD set, *Weather Report: The Legendary Live Tapes*, which documents much of the time you were in the band, was released recently.

Peter: About three quarters of the *Weather Report* set came from my own cassette collection, which has been digitized. I used to give our soundman my portable cassette deck and ask him, "How about recording tonight's concert?" I wanted to document that stuff.

The thing I like about *Dr. Um* is, I've done the funk thing, I've done the fusion thing, but never as cool as the way I now seem to be playing. I've never had more fun playing than I'm having now. And it's odd, because, as I talk about in the *No Beethoven* book, we tend

to think of ourselves as our young selves. We're always in the "now," and I don't realize until I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror that I'm not in my twenties. So it's nice to feel creatively relevant and vital. I've been very busy, traveling and recording. It's as if I'm harvesting all the planting and growing I've done over the years. It's almost overwhelming.

MD: On many of your solo albums over the past few years, you were playing very sparsely; you weren't necessarily playing "time" in some tunes, yet there was always a sense of a time feel and forward motion.

Peter: That's playing with intention.

MD: How did the groove stuff that you'd played inform your ability to do that?

Peter: The job of the drummer is to provide rhythmic information to the band and the listener. How we do that is a matter of choice.



Sometimes that choice is dictated by the stylistic demands of the music; other times it's an intuitive response to what you hear from the musicians you're working with. A musician who spends enough time playing time is then able to play with the time in such a way that forward motion can be clearly felt even if you're not playing, for example, a steady quarter-note pulse, because each note you play is informed by that experience. If you're just imitating free playing without understanding it contrapuntally—which is how I used to play free—then the foundation isn't there, and it doesn't take much of a breeze to come



along and blow the house down, as it were.

So playing with intention became the thing that I needed to learn, and that became the guiding principle of what I called "anti-drumming." I was inspired by a film documentary called *Light & Shadow*, which is about directors of photography. At one point they interview the director of photography for the film *Rosemary's Baby*. He describes a scene where you're looking down a hallway into a bedroom, and Mia Farrow is sitting on the bed talking on the phone. The director, Roman Polanski, told him, "I only want to see the back of her head with the phone on her ear; don't show her face." During the premiere, that scene came on, and they saw everyone in the audience lean their heads to try to look around the corner to see her face.

To put that in more concrete musical terms, in James Brown's "Mother Popcorn," there's an open beat on 4, and you can't help but shake your booty to fill that vacuum. Nature abhors a vacuum, right? So the genius of James Brown, or of filmmakers or poets, is leaving things unsaid. What you don't play makes it an interactive listening experience for the other musicians and your audience.

That became kind of the cornerstone of my "anti-drumming" thing. It wasn't really "anti" drumming, but I was trying to figure out how to create those same kinds of moments by not being so implicit to where there is no role for the listener's imagination. If I do that with a firm grasp of the subdivisions, that stuff is all implied. If things get too explicit, the music loses a lot of charm. That's why I think space is a dynamic and interesting thing. But you have to respect it and not treat space like it's something to rush through as quickly as possible.

I don't know how concerned a lot of fast drumming is with space. And, of course, when you think of fast drumming you think of Buddy Rich. What does everyone still talk about as being his most incredible break? It's the one on "Love for Sale," when he plays this startling single-stroke roll on the snare and *stops*. And then the band comes in. It's thrilling. You've just been taken to the edge of the abyss. You hear the audience react in delight. He took everyone's breath away for a second.

So that's the kind of thing that fascinated me. But when you play the drums, people want to hear you play the drums. I explored the "anti-drumming" thing as far as I could figure out how to take it, and I was even beginning to regard myself as less of a drummer. I would listen to Tony Williams or

Erskine's Setup

Drums: Tama Star Bubinga

Snares: 6x14 Solid Zebrawood, Solid Mahogany, Solid Maple, and Stave Ash; 6x14 Starphonic Aluminum and Bell Brass; 6x10 Stave Ash auxiliary (prototype)

Toms: 8x10 and 8x12

Floor toms: 14x14 and 16x16

Bass drums: 14x18, 14x20, or 14x22

Cymbals: Zildjian

- 8" and 10" A Flash splashes
- 14" New Beat or Keropé hi-hats
- 19" Armand Sweet ride with three rivets or Keropé crash/ride
- 22" K Constantinople Medium or Keropé ride
- 22" A Swish Knocker
- 18" K Dark Thin crash
- 16" K Custom Session crash

Erskine also uses a "two ride cymbal" setup consisting of the new A Avedis '50s replica cymbals with matching 14" or 15" hi-hats.

Hardware: A variety of Tama Star, Roadpro, and Classic series stands depending on the gig and setup, including an Iron Cobra hi-hat stand and Rolling Glide bass drum pedal, a Star series snare stand, two Star combo stands or one Star single-tom stand, three Classic stands (lightweight, flat-base cymbal stands that Erskine helped develop), Cymbal Stacker, and Ergo-Rider Hydraulix throne

Heads: Remo, including Coated Ambassador snare batters and Ambassador snare-sides; Fiberskyn Diplomat tom batters and Clear Ambassador resonants; Coated Ambassador batter on 18" bass drum with Fiberskyn Diplomat resonant, Coated Ambassador batter on 20" bass drum with Fiberskyn Diplomat or Tama Star resonant, and Powerstroke 3 batter on 22" bass drum with Tama Star resonant

Sticks: Vic Firth, including SPE3 Big Band signature model, Heritage brush, Split brush, and T1 General timpani mallets

Percussion: Meinl, including Foot cabasa, Slap-Top cajon, hand-brushed gold 8" cowbell, Luis Conte shakers, Tampeiro (mounted), handheld tambourines (brass and aluminum jingles), mounted Super Dry tambourine, wood bongos, and various wind chimes

Electronics: Roland V-Drums, Shure microphones, Zoom H5 handheld recorder

Accessories: Protection Racket bags and drum carpet, XL Percussion/Gator hard cases, Auralex HoverMat, Gruv Gear V-Cart Solo

Jack DeJohnette and find myself thinking, *THERE'S a drummer. I'm an accompanist.* I wouldn't even dare put myself in the same category as "drummer" with those guys. But now I'm feeling more and more like a drummer.

MD: I remember a John Scofield CD in the '80s where you played a funk tune, and I was impressed with how flowing it was. The pulse was steady, but there was looseness in the subdivisions. With so many drummers then, every 16th was metronomically perfect, but it often sounded stiff.

Peter: When I was with Steely Dan, the bassist, Tom Barney, once said, "Hey, you're swinging the 16ths." I wanted to raise my hand and say, "Guilty as charged," but for Steely Dan's music, he was right. I tried to get it more stylistically correct, but swing is pretty hard for me to get away from.

Swing is not so much a triplet feel—it's more of a legato thing. If we listen to a fast bebop line, like a Charlie Parker melody, it swings, right? But you'd be hard pressed to find a triplet in there. Now think of the

Lawrence Welk theme song. That was explicit triplets—and that ain't jazz; that's Squaresville. So the phrasing becomes essential, because what we're really doing is accenting the offbeat, and more importantly the notes are connected in a legato sense. It's the legato phrasing that really makes something swing.

Now, the ride cymbal pattern is going to be closer to a triplet: ding, ding-a-ding, ding-a-ding. Here's where everything comes together in this beautiful full-circle moment. The rhythm is from Africa through the Afro-Caribbean portal, where the two and the three start to rub, and that rub is what swings. So the two/three interrelationship is the mystery, the thrill, the excitement, the beauty of this music. It's what makes anything feel great. That gets us into the areas of intention: how we are conceiving of the music, and then what's played and what isn't played.

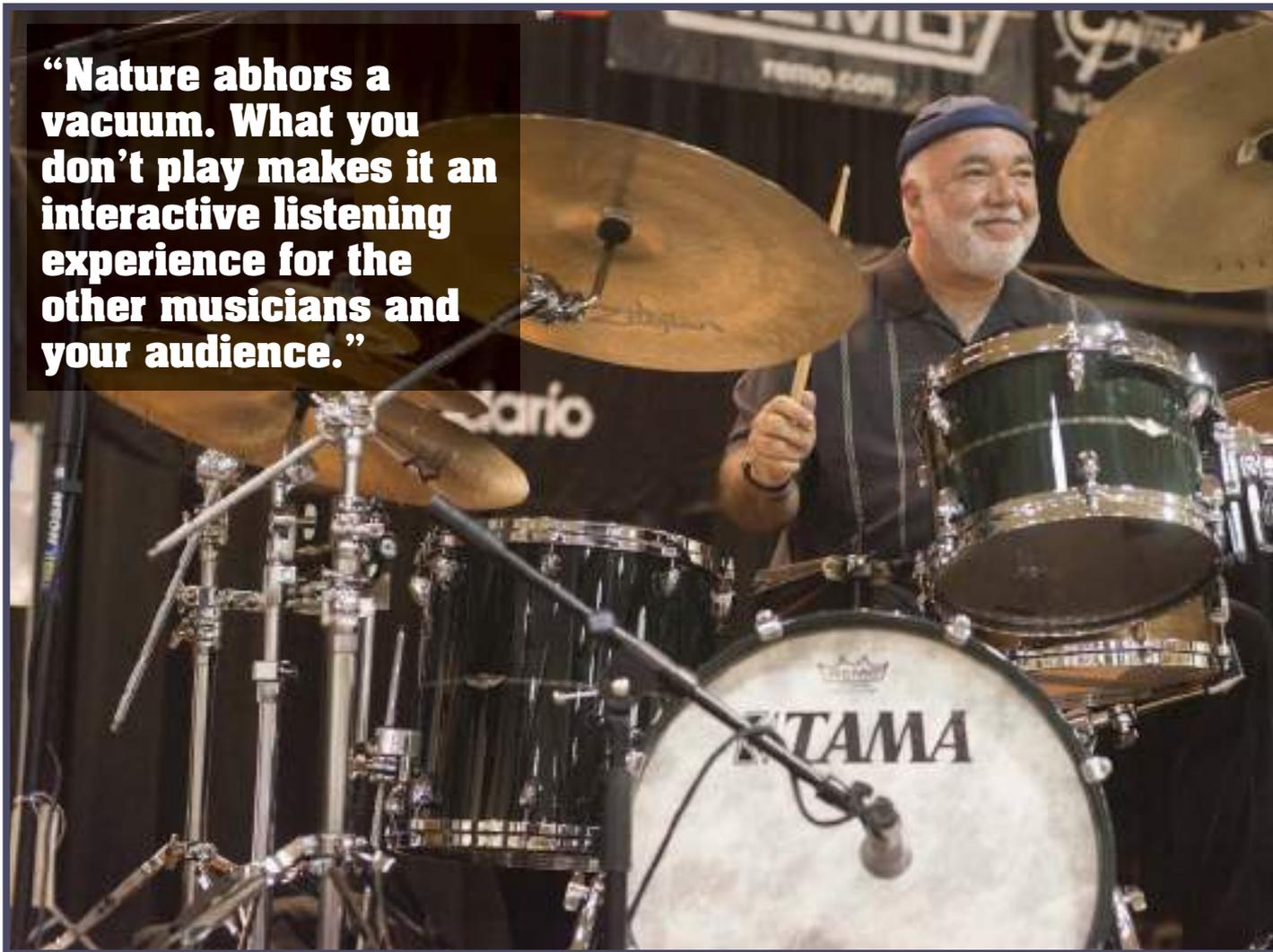
I've been having my students play melodies just on the snare drum, either with brushes or sticks, and make it swing—

oftentimes reducing it to one hand on the hi-hat. If you can swing a band with one hand on the hi-hat or with just brushes on the snare drum, you can swing. That takes me back years ago, seeing Jeff Hamilton. The music was swinging like crazy, and Jeff was just playing on a snare drum. We're the same age; we went to college together, but I remember thinking, *I want to be able to do that when I grow up.* I could see that this was a very mature way of playing.

MD: The first time I heard Jimmy Cobb live, I'd never heard anything swing so hard, and he was mostly playing quarter notes on the ride with just an occasional "swung" note.

Peter: We did "The Music of Miles" with Gil Evans a number of times at the Hollywood Bowl, and Jimmy Cobb played some of the *Porgy and Bess* stuff—quarter notes on the ride with that fat cross-stick on beat 4. It blows your mind because it swings so much. About three years later we're playing it at Disney Hall, but Jimmy Cobb isn't on that concert. One of the *Porgy and Bess* things is "It Ain't Necessarily So," and

"Nature abhors a vacuum. What you don't play makes it an interactive listening experience for the other musicians and your audience."



Terence Blanchard is dealing—he's playing. It would be very tempting to start tangling with that because it's so cool, but I only played quarter notes on the cymbal with a cross-stick on the snare. It was a long improvisation; Terence was soaring. We finish the tune, the place goes nuts, and what does Terence do? He walks back to me and pulls my hand up like I'm a champion boxer. I was just doing what Jimmy Cobb did, but it worked so great—that intuitive, magical brilliance of Jimmy Cobb.

I've worked a lot with Seth MacFarlane, who everybody knows from *Family Guy*. But he's a great singer and puts on a good show, and he always talks about the great arrangers and refers to the time when music was more than someone dicking around on a laptop. I did a record with Seth, *Music Is Better Than Words*, and we were recording direct to analog tape, so we either got a good take or we did it again. The first take was pretty much for running the tunes down, so I'm just playing quarter notes on the ride cymbal, hi-hat on 2 and 4, and I



The Motivation Was Musical

Erskine on his Switch to Tama

Peter Erskine was as surprised as anyone when he switched to Tama drums. "For years, I paid no attention to Tama," he admits. "Tama drums seemed to be designed for a segment of the drumming population that I felt had no relevance to what I do."

But a couple of years ago, while attending a NAMM Show, Erskine walked by the Tama booth and saw Terry Bissette, at that time the sales manager for the company, whom he had known for years. "Terry asked if I would like to try out the new Star drums," Peter recalls, "so I sat down, but with all the noise I didn't get much of an impression. Then Terry contacted me a few months later and asked if I would like to try out the drums for real. He told me, 'We respect your relationship. We would just like your feedback on the drums.' I suggested that if they would pay my cartage guy for the use of his space and his time, we could do it at his warehouse and compare the Tama kit to several other drumsets. Hearing the Tama drums next to all the others, they sounded more musical."

That night, Erskine took the Tama kit to his gig at a jazz club, and he asked his wife to come by. "She came up to me at intermission and said, 'I really like the way these drums are making you play.' So I spent some more time with the Tama kit in various playing situations, and it seemed to bring out something in my playing that had been absent for a while.

"When I was with my previous company, I realized something was missing," Erskine explains. "I didn't know what it was, but I bought some vintage Gretsch, Rogers, and Slingerland drumsets, and it was like, 'Yeah, this is what I remember; this is what I like.' The Star kit is doing all that, and I don't seem to have to work as hard with it. Also, when I traveled, it was sometimes difficult to get one of the kits I was endorsing wherever I went, and I was running into some pretty nice drumsets here and there. So I was unfaithful in that relationship. And if you're unfaithful, relationships are going to change."

Still, Erskine didn't take the idea of a new endorsement lightly. "Any switch from one product to another has to be based primarily on sound, playability, and feeling a rapport with that ecosystem a drum brand has in terms of how the hardware works with the drum sound," he explains. "Along with that is the interpersonal factor and how you get along with everyone at the company. Without going into too much detail, it seemed like everything came together, and combining that with the fact that I was sixty years old, which is a bit of a turning point, my wife and I agreed that I should play what I want to play from here on out. I'd even toyed with the idea of withdrawing from all product relationships and just mixing and matching different brands of cymbals and drums. But I believe I've found home in terms of drums. I'm taking chances; I'm playing things I haven't played in a long, long time, along with things I've never played."

How, specifically, are different drums affecting what Erskine plays? "Drumming is all about making choices," Peter replies. "So an instrument that is immediately responsive and joyful to play prompts you to play more... er... joyfully. You experiment, your touch changes a bit, you're exploring. At first it might be the newness, but I've been playing Tama drums for over a year now, and every time I play these drums it feels like Christmas morning.

"There's always a lot of cynicism when you change an endorsement, and I get it. People think there is some sort of compensation when you move to a different company. My only compensation is that I'm getting to play a really remarkable instrument."

Erskine is also excited about some new Zildjian cymbals. "Paul Francis has come up with this new line that replicates A Zildjian cymbals from the 1950s," he says. "It's a mind-blower. It's like being given the gift of youth and time travel."



Peter Erskine



have a pencil in my left hand so I can mark certain brass figures on the part.

We listen back, and I notice the chart is swinging like crazy. So we do the next take. I had all the rhythms marked, and I was doing my perfect Alvin Stoller imitation with a bit of Shelly Manne, with all the setups and little fills, and we finish the take and everyone's like, "That's it—a perfect take!" But then we were listening back, and I turned to the bass player, Chuck Berghofer, and I said, "This doesn't swing as much as that first run-through," and he said, "Yeah, you're right."

So I went up to Seth and the arranger/producer, Joel McNeely, and I said, "Hey, guys, can we do one more?" Seth was having fun singing with a big band, so he said, "Sure!" Joel said, "Okay, but why?" I said, "I think we can get it to swing more." The trumpet players were not happy about having to do it again, but we did it, and with the exception of a couple of spots here and there, I just played quarter notes on the ride and hi-hat on 2 and 4. No cross-stick, no setups, and it was that idea of not providing all the information, which invites the listener in and it becomes a participatory experience, as opposed to playing everything. That, to me, is not very interesting. This final result swung like crazy.

MD: There's a tune on *Dr. Um* called "Hawaii Bathing Suit" that features a sax-and-drums duet, and your playing in that section reminds me of Elvin Jones. Were you consciously thinking Elvin, or is that just part

of your vocabulary that comes out in certain situations?

Peter: I was aware of it as I was playing. Tenor sax and drums—of course you're going to think of Elvin, and there is some specific Elvin vocabulary. But the beginning of the tune is the way I would play it, albeit you can hear the Tony Williams, Mel Lewis, and Jack DeJohnette influence as well. That's the fun thing: All those guys are in there. But without denying their influence, it sounds like me at this point. Elvin is going to be part of my drumming no matter what I do—the profound spirit of the man and the impact and influence his drumming had on me since I was eight or nine years old. He's like a drumming father, and while I can't claim that we had that close of a relationship, we were good friends, and I adore his drumming. I wish I understood it better, but that's part of why I like it so much. I'm only willing to study it so far, because I love having the mysterious relationship in terms of having to do it by ear. Nobody will ever play the way he did, but the magic of Elvin is still with us. Even though we can't hug him and get soaking wet from one of his sweaty embraces...

MD: And come away drenched in the aroma of his aftershave...

Peter: [laughs] But he's as alive as at any time. He's always available, thanks to recordings. If there's a definition of heaven, I think it might be being in the minds, ears, hearts, and thoughts of others.

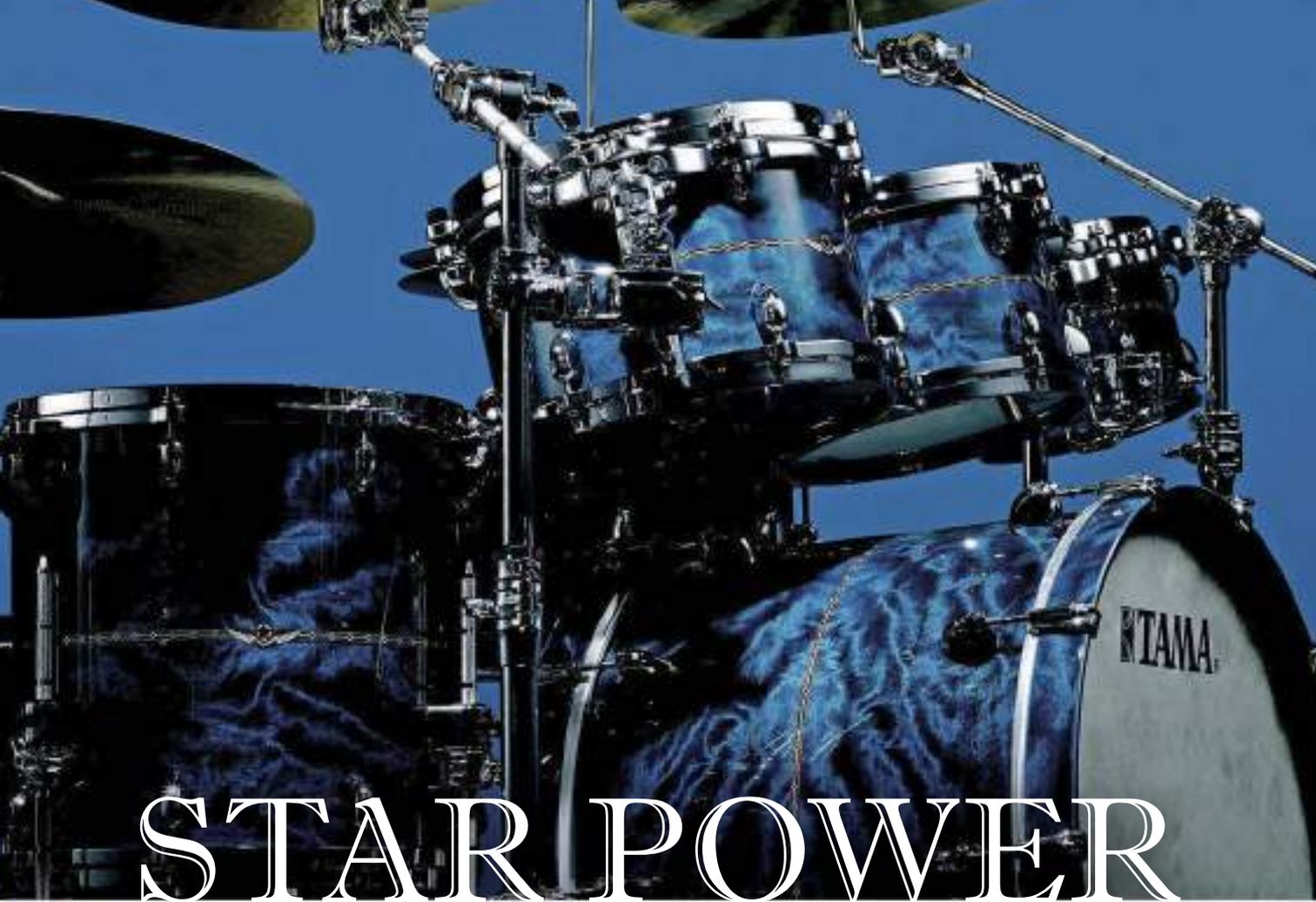
MD: On the Patrick Williams *Home Suite*

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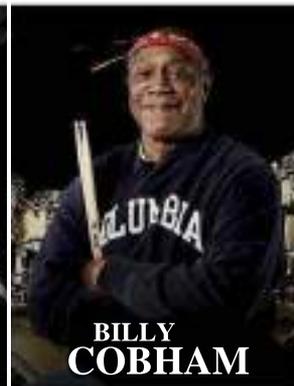
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Peter Erskine

Home album, "That's Rich" is dedicated to Buddy Rich. You told me that you asked if he could make it a tribute to Mel Lewis instead. Meanwhile, on the third movement of "Home Suite Home" there are a lot of open spots for drums, and your fills are very simple—more in the spirit of Mel than of, say, Buddy or Louie Bellson.

Peter: Playing like Buddy has always been "out of my wheelhouse," as they say. Every time I hear Buddy I love it, and it's thrilling, and I appreciate him more and more the older I get. But I was really struggling to figure out how to do "the Buddy thing." Pat told me to just play what I wanted, but I felt a responsibility to the intent of the piece, so I felt I had to try a little bit of the Buddyisms. I was kind of smearing lipstick all over myself on that.

But yeah, my general instincts are to play more simply. A couple of years ago Pat's band played a gig in L.A., and the woman who booked the band kept offering us glasses of wine. I had a bit too much wine and was playing a bit more gregariously than normal. I realized that I had overplayed. The next night I played the way I would normally play. After the first tune, I heard the lead trumpet player say, "Heeee's back!" The band noticed it. The night before, they had to deal with a drummer who was fighting them and the music. Normally I serve it up on a silver platter and try to make it as easy as possible.

MD: There is an energy on some of the *Dr. Um* tunes that is comparable to a lot of the tracks on the new live *Weather Report* set. But with *Weather Report*, you were beating your brains out, and now you're playing with much less physical force but still achieving energy and momentum. Did you have to hit the drums that hard with *Weather Report* to generate that kind of energy, or was it just a matter of matching the volume of the keyboards and bass?

Peter: The stage volume was very loud. But I also played hard with Maynard's band, and when I look at video from that time period, I was hitting the drums pretty emphatically—and stiffly too. I didn't realize at the time how much it was preventing me from playing what I was hoping to play. Things were coming out choppy than I was imagining. I went into the *Weather Report* gig as I've gone into a lot of things, with a wide range of combined influences, and I think I was still trying to sort some of them out.

If we compare the recording of "Speechless" on *Dr. Um* with the one on the album titled *Weather Report*, which was the last one [bassist] Jaco Pastorius and I made

with the band, the drum part on *Dr. Um* is a little better measured, and there's only one moment where the drums kind of break out of this stoic quarter-note character. It just seemed the time to play something like that, and it was kind of a magical moment in the *Dr. Um* version. Because of the time stretching that happens, you almost catch your breath, and then all is well again. But I play those kinds of things differently now from the way I did when I was younger. Back then it was more a flurry of punches, and now the sleight of hand is more subtle.

MD: You've been teaching at USC for a while. What do today's students know that we didn't know, and vice versa?

Peter: In general, the level of playing ability I see is astonishingly good across all genres and styles. I see drummers doing things that none of us dreamt of doing when we were young, whether it's gospel or speed metal or whatever. So the boundaries have been pushed, and the equipment is better and helps players do things. For instance, we didn't have double pedals back then.

The on-demand access that students have to finding just about any recorded performance—audio or video—is beyond *Star Trek*. When we were young, we had to be lucky enough to be in front of the TV when someone would broadcast jazz. But there were a lot more jazz clubs back in the day. I got to see Art Blakey when I was a kid, as well as just about every drum hero I was hoping to see. Those opportunities are harder for young people to come by.

They also establish a different kind of relationship with the music they listen to than we did. For example, when you and I were growing up and we bought an LP, we bonded with that record. We read the liner notes, we studied the photos, we got to know every note of that album. We had a deeply personal relationship with that recording. That's not possible when you have an iPod or an iPhone with 10,000 tunes in it. You've got so much availability, but some of the intimacy is gone.

MD: So instead of having relationships with albums, kids today are just "hooking up" with songs?

Peter: [laughs] Exactly! I sense that a lot of students haven't bonded with any particular style. We're really in mishmash land right now. So I'm trying to direct their listening. It's very subjective, but I try to get them turned on to finding specific things and digging deeper and deeper. And the beauty of today is that they can find stuff that we would have had a hard time getting our hands on.

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Peter Erskine

MD: Nancy Zeltsman told me about students who come to Berklee to major in marimba, and they've never heard a live marimba concert. They've only seen people play on YouTube.

Peter: Today's students don't know what it was like to sit in front of Art Blakey's drumset and hear him do a press roll into a bass-drum/crash-cymbal downbeat. There was something about hearing Blakey do that in person that was life changing. The same with hearing Elvin or Mel Lewis play in person. Today's students don't get to hear as much music live as we did—that turn-on

of seeing people who did this for a living. Even if you didn't like something, it helped you form a sense of discrimination: "That's not as hip as this other thing." I think young students today are as talented or more talented than we were. But we were lucky that we got to hear so much stuff live. Other than that, we didn't enjoy any "secrets"; we got to hear the stuff played live and then we tried to get that same effect when we played. And you can't get that through a computer screen or an iPod.

MD: You've done a lot of work with symphony orchestras over the past twenty

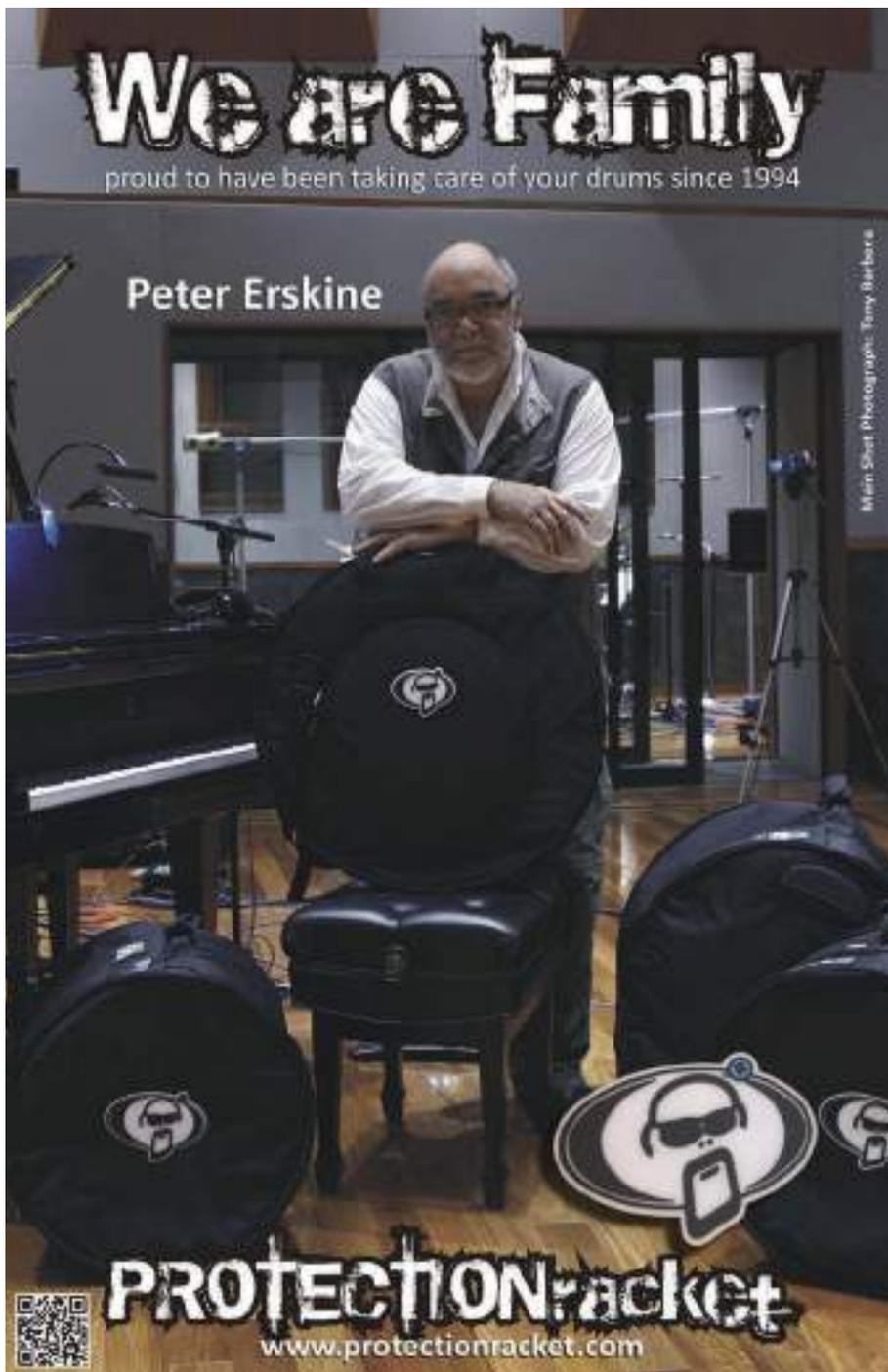
years. When you went back to Indiana University and studied with George Gaber, did you feel that learning classical percussion would ever become relevant to your career as a jazz drummer?

Peter: I imagined that I might get to use that knowledge in the studio, and in New York that's what broke me into the jingle scene, because I could play orchestra bells. But when I went to IU, I felt that the primary benefit would have to do with touch. Oftentimes in my lessons, George Gaber would hand me a triangle beater or a bass drum mallet, point to the instrument, and say, "Mezzo-piano. You've got one chance. Play the best note you can—the most accurate dynamically, with the best tone." That was fascinating to me, the idea of being able to know your touch and your instrument so you could get the right sound immediately and it wasn't left to chance.

For too many years my playing was defined, as far as I was concerned, by a lot of good musical ideas and good intentions that never really saw the light of day because of things that got in the way, like my lack of touch, my lack of understanding the instrument, or my lack of technique. Now I'm feeling a lot closer to the intention being realized. One would hope that by the time you're sixty you have gotten a little bit closer to that.

I talk about this in *No Beethoven*: Can we still keep getting better as we get older? I can't help but look at the careers of many of my drumming heroes and compare which ones managed to stay relevant and grow, which ones stayed on a certain strata, and which ones just signed drumheads after a while. Then you see Steve Gadd, who's like a young kid again. I'm hearing new stuff coming out of Steve that's thrilling. He's playing with that same spark that I associated with him years ago when I first saw him play. I saw Wayne Shorter recently, and it blew my mind how masterfully he commanded the musical moments with his quartet. He's still evolving.

So it is possible to keep getting better, and there is a responsibility, I think, because we get a lot out of this—a lot of joy, we get to make a living—but art is definitely a two-way street and a commitment, and we have to stay healthy and vital and involved and interested and caring and compassionate and open and all the things that artists are supposed to be: idiotic, selfish, crazy, sane, giving. You can't just sit back. It's too boring, and nobody cares.



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Jimmy Branly



He blends the best of Cuba's intricate and colorful percussive tradition with a North American sense of swing and a firm command of 2 and 4—like Walfredo Reyes Sr., David Garibaldi, and Dennis Chambers all rolled into one, with the spacious feel of Steve Gadd. And then there's his ever-present smile, which tells everyone in the house that there's nothing in the world he'd rather be doing than carving up that tasty beat.

Jimmy Branly grew up in Cuba, where he studied at the Conservatory of Music in Havana and at the National School of Art. After working with the famous Afro-Cuban jazz pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba and the influential timba group NG la Banda, in

1998, at the age of twenty-two, he moved to southern California, where he began playing with *Tonight Show* bandleader Doc Severinsen. Now married with two children, the drummer packs a lot of music into each day, including work with the Otmaro

Ruiz Quartet, bassist Jimmy Haslip, famed keyboardists Keiko Matsui, David Garfield, and Oscar Hernández, and singer/pianist Carol Welsman, with whom he's been playing for more than fifteen years. He's also excited about a new Cuban-jazz trio featuring pianist



Story by Robin Tolleson
Photos by Alex Solca

Iván "Melón" Lewis and Chick Corea bassist Carlitos Del Puerto.

After writing the well-regarded book *The New Method for Afro-Cuban Drumming* for Hudson Music in 2004, Branly, who holds a doctorate in music, began teaching at Shepherd University in

Glendale, California. For the past eight years he's taught drums and Afro-Cuban group performances at the university's Cornel School of Contemporary Music. Jimmy is currently working on his debut solo album, and he regularly engineers projects for other artists

out of his home recording studio, where he's produced, mixed, and/or mastered more than eighty albums encompassing a wide variety of styles. *MD* recently spent some time with the busy drummer to get to the heart of his cross-cultural musical identity.

MD: How did you develop your interest in drums?

Jimmy: In Cuba you have to have talent recognized by someone in order to do what you want. They run a test and decide if you're good for what you want to do. They might say, "Yeah, you want to play drums...let me see... sit on the piano. You've got a better technique for the piano. Do piano for four years and then we'll see."

In the beginning I started doing sports, like water polo, and then I moved to art and painting. I started playing drums around eleven or twelve, though I was still doing sports and art. I had a friend who played guitar, and he made me start playing drums. I took it seriously and went to school. I did five years at two different music schools, which in Cuba meant the Russian program. Everything was classical. I never sat on the drums at school. I had to create my own drums, using drumheads made from X-rays or the plastic they used to make film for cartoons back in the day, using shoe glue.... It was very difficult back then to get instruments. Now it's much better.

MD: Were you discouraged from playing certain kinds of music?

Jimmy: Well, they always had something against Americans, you know. But actually it's not about that. Mainly it's because no one was supporting Cuba other than the Russians, and the only thing the Russians were sending was snare drums and books to learn classical music. So it was really difficult to find a drumset. You'd have to build it yourself or find people that had parts [from] before the revolution.

We were independent. Musicians had to make it on their own. No drum stores, and there wasn't YouTube or videos to learn things from, so you had to learn on your own from tapes. I had friends who traveled a lot, and they'd bring tapes of Chick Corea or Elvin Jones or Coltrane or Miles Davis, copies of tapes that a lot of people shared. So you listen to a really bad copy of music, you share that information with your friends, and that's how you learn.

You'd go to school to learn what you want, but you didn't really learn what you wanted to. So I had to learn on my own, in my little room in Cuba, playing to tapes with whatever I found when I was a kid. When I started playing more professionally, I was



able to find some instruments, not good but a little better than just made-up stuff.

But it was a great experience. I don't think I ever said, "I wish I didn't go through that." I'm really proud of all the stuff I had to go through. It made me appreciate everything that I have now. I open my bag of sticks and remember when I had to wrap them with electrical tape or whatever I could find just to be able to finish my concerts.

MD: Many great percussionists have come from Cuba.

Jimmy: I don't know what it is, but there's a certain ingredient that people grew up with, and almost everyone can play percussion. In Cuba it's very hard to find bad musicians, you see, because the people who go into music do it because they're good at it, and they're kind of born with [the skills]. Even if they don't learn it in school, they just play on top of boxes and stuff. I guess it's in the blood.

The most important thing about the whole Cuban thing is the syncopation, which is very different from a lot of places. When we move to the States, we understand that it doesn't really work with American music, so you have to adapt. People in Cuba play this like drinking water. For them it's so easy—even the dancers understand all the syncopation.

In Brazil and those countries where the rhythm's so rich, it's incredible to see the kids—you know, they've got it. Then you go to school and you refine it, of course, you

make everything a little more defined. But definitely you need that grease, you need to have that street-learning thing that we can only get in certain places.

MD: Were you able to apply what you learned in your classical training?

Jimmy: I'll be honest with you, when I started school I already had a certain technique that I liked. I always liked to play traditional with my left hand, but at the school they didn't let me. You had to play matched. So I learned having a classical technique.

But I definitely feel that the reading was very important, and the hang. So, we don't care, we go to a class, we have fun, we do our homework stuff, but the hang is amazing. The hang with musicians and other talented kids is where the school is, you know.

MD: Do you think drummers who come from countries that are traditionally rich in percussion think more colorfully on the kit? Some of your hi-hat stuff sounds like a shaker.

Recommended Recordings

Rebeca Mauleón Descarga en California
/// **Sandro Albert** The Color of Things ///
Otmaro Ruiz Sojourn /// **Cuarto Espacio**
Reencuentro /// **Jimmy Branly** self-titled
debut album /// **Lia Branly** Se Feliz

Influences

Elvin Jones various recordings /// **Vinnie Colaiuta** self-titled solo album /// **Deep Purple** all (Ian Paice) /// **Rush** all (Neil Peart) /// **Led Zeppelin** all (John Bonham) /// **The Beatles** all (Ringo Starr) /// **Pat Metheny** various recordings with various drummers /// **James Brown** various /// **Chick Corea** various /// **Irakere** (Cuban jazz) various /// **Yoruba Andabo** (Cuban rumba) various /// **NG la Banda** (modern Cuban music) various /// **Orquesta Aragón** (traditional Cuban music) various /// **Kenny Garrett** Triology (Brian Blade) /// **John Scofield** Time on My Hands (Jack DeJohnette) /// anything featuring drummers Ignacio Berroa, Enrique Pla, Changuito, Walfredo Reyes Sr., Guillermo Barreto, Giraldo Piloto, and Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez

Jimmy: In Cuba, percussion becomes part of you. Drumset wasn't really a Cuban thing. It came later. That's why it's sometimes difficult for a Cuban to sound like a drumset player. They have to put a big effort into learning how Americans play drums and how to get that sound. The Cuban drummer [commonly] plays like a percussionist at a drumset. But it's been evolving. Over the years you see more drummers now sounding like a drummer, because there's more information coming in. When I left Cuba in 1998, I was already listening to American drummers and was already into it, but because you don't have direct contact and information, you always lack something.

When you come to this country it's like you're going through a filter, and that's where you purify everything that you do. And if you're smart enough and you really want to make it—and not just make some money, but have a career—then you definitely have to listen and understand what's happening around you before thinking that what you do is the best. Some people just think too much of themselves. My theory is to be aware of your surroundings all the time.

Drums is something I learned on my own, but I always wanted to make *music* with the drums. I wasn't too interested in making sport out of it. I always wanted the comment from people, "Man, you sound musical" or "I loved your phrasing." That stuff I like more than, "Man, you play fast," or "I love what you do with the double pedal." For me that's extra.

I don't practice much these days, because I'm really busy in the studio or teaching or gigging—though that's practicing too. But you have no idea how many hours I listened to Steve Gadd, Dave Weckl, Elvin Jones, Art Blakey, Dennis Chambers, Vinnie Colaiuta.... You know what you do when you're a kid—you imitate, until you start making music. I used to listen not only for what Steve Gadd was doing, but *why* he was doing it, and it was beautiful.

I always loved listening to and playing jazz, but being in Cuba and playing Cuban music all the time, clave and the

syncopation, it's a different thing for us. You have to be able to understand both sides and then put it together in a way that works for the American people. Because when I play with American musicians and I start throwing in my syncopation, some of them get lost, and it's not their fault. I used to be very careful with that, but now I'm *super-careful*, because I don't like to make the music be the loser just because I want to do my things. I have to make sure everyone is comfortable. And that's something that we are learning, and the music is getting more and more interesting when it comes to that.

MD: What was your plan when you came over from Cuba?

Jimmy: When you come you have that hunger of coming here and having things that you never had, like Coca-Cola, like meat, things you can't have in Cuba. So from that to the music, you want to have

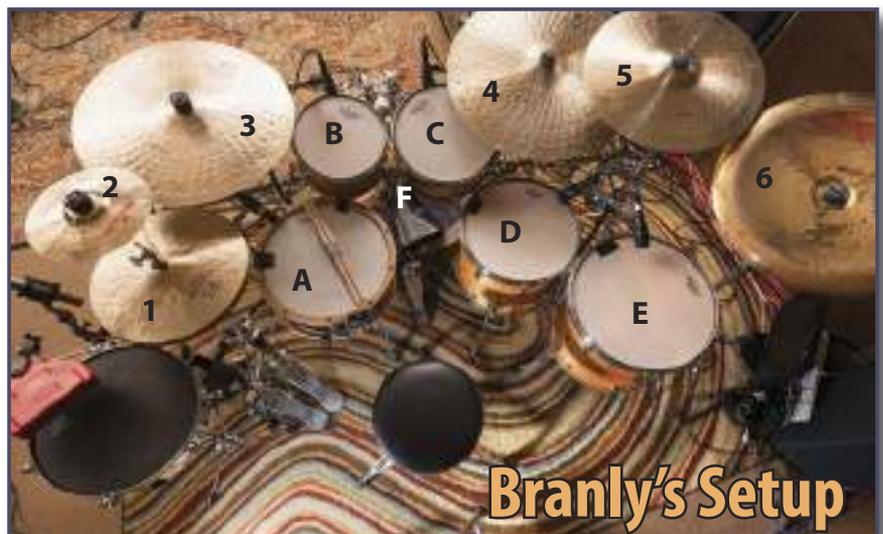
everything. I came here with the desire to let people know about me and to share with musicians from here. I loved jazz, and I could do it in Cuba—there are a lot of great musicians in Cuba—but if you want to do it the right way you have to come here. There's no other way. So I was young, and I came with all my ideas.

MD: What surprised you about the scene here?

Jimmy: You have to be super-professional here. You have to be able to socialize and to adapt to anything that's going to come to you, because you never know who you're going to play with and what kind of music you're going to play.

When I get a call, I always ask, "What are we doing? What's the style?" First of all, I need to know what drums and cymbals and sticks to bring—or heads, because I don't just go to every gig with whatever. I want to bring the right stuff to get the sound that applies to the music I'm doing at the moment, and who I'm playing with.

I learned to play with dynamics from listening to Peter Erskine more than anyone. When I joined Gonzalo Rubalcaba's band, at the first rehearsal he said, "Man, you're playing too loud—it's too strong. I like what you're doing, but it's too aggressive." You learn you've got to play at the dynamics of the other instruments. If you play with an



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- B. 8x10 tom
- C. 9x12 tom
- D. 14x14 floor tom
- E. 16x16 floor tom
- F. 16x20 bass drum

Heads: Remo Coated

Ambassador snare and tom batters and Coated Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter

Cymbals: Zildjian

- 1. 14" K Constantinople hi-hats
- 2. 9" Oriental Trash Splash
- 3. 20" K Constantinople Renaissance ride
- 4. 22" K Constantinople Medium Thin Low ride
- 5. 18" K Constantinople crash
- 6. 22" Oriental China Trash

Hardware: Yamaha single bass drum pedal

Percussion: Meinl, including

Medium Dark cowbell attached to foot pedal, 13" Mini Drummer timbale, Low Pitch Percussion Block, and Hand Hammered cowbell

Sticks: Vic Firth

Accessories: Beato bags

Jimmy Branly

acoustic piano and the piano has no mics, you can't play above it, because then you're not playing for the music, you're playing for yourself. And I realized that not only is the control in your hands, but also the instrument helps. The right cymbal and the right sticks help you to play in different ways.

MD: Some players like to specialize in just one thing, like studio or road drumming. You're showcasing a variety of talents, even engineering.

Jimmy: Well, if you want to make a living—not just a living but a *good* living—there are two ways. Either you have to be the luckiest guy and be in the right place at the right time to get one gig that's going to save your life, or you're going to be smart and say, "I'm going to learn everything I can to be able to conquer as much as I can."

I have to be able to do whatever they ask me to do, especially in the studio. Producers can be intense. Sometimes you have to come up with a lot of ideas. So you have to be prepared for all those things and be able to play all kinds of music. I listened to a lot of jazz, and the first music I heard was from my father. He used to play me Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin and Rush. Before I ever played any clave or anything, that's what I had in my head, and I was playing to it. Then I moved to the streets, where you don't hear

that music—you play Cuban music—but you have that in the back of your head.

Ian Paice of Deep Purple was my favorite drummer. My dad played me "The Mule," from the *Made in Japan* record, and Ian does a solo. That's the song that really made me want to play drums. I love the fact that this guy was a rock drummer, but he was playing kind of like Buddy Rich—a jazzy rock style—and the sound for me was killer back then. So now I love to play jazz today, rock tomorrow, Brazilian, studio work.... And I love teaching. It makes me feel good to give the things that I know to young drummers, to help them be better musicians.

MD: The joy in your face when you play is fun to watch.

Jimmy: I love playing drums, but more than that I love to see the people around me liking and enjoying what I do. That's what I go home with. I like getting out of the gig and knowing that the music felt good. When it's your moment to erupt, you should just go for it. It's not always your moment, though. But I just enjoy all of it.

MD: Many of us have seen El Negro playing left-foot clave, but I've never seen someone do the left-hand clave like you do it.

Jimmy: Well, it's easier. [laughs] What Negro does is more complicated. It requires some study and time, and I'm the kind of drummer who believes that if I have to put

time into learning independence, then I'm not making much music with it. So I do what my brain lets me do, you see. I don't put time into doing something that I'm not capable of—unless it's a style of music that I need to learn. But technique-wise I don't really go too far.

I'm blessed that I was born with... I guess with a technique, because I never really practice it that much. I can't explain it, but for me and for most Cubans, you go to Cuba and everyone can play the clave with the left hand or the right and improvise with the other hand. It's something very common in Cuba, very easy for people. So we all applied that in different ways.

I like doing it sometimes with the cross-stick and then working around the drums with my right hand. But if I have a jam block on the left side next to the hi-hat, that gives me more room around the drums with the right hand, so I could go back and forth from left to right instead of just being on the right side if I'm on the snare with the left.

Ignacio Berroa likes to play it on the right hand and then he moves around the drums with the left. Everyone's got their own beautiful way of doing it. Also, the way you phrase and the way you tune the drums to make those phrases more musical—or not—is what makes it interesting.

MD: What was the goal with your book, *The*



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Jimmy Branly

New Method for Afro-Cuban Drumming?

Jimmy: When I say, "Let's play Afro-Cuban," we're going to play all kinds of stuff. We're going to go from salsa to son to cha-cha-cha to eleguá to some kind of 6/8 or 3/4—straight 8ths always. Nothing swings in Cuban music. It's an influence of everything, all kinds of phrasing you can do analyzing 6/8 rhythms blended with 4/4. So it's like a box full of rhythms called Afro-Cubans, and you grab a groove from there and you use it for a song or for a jam. Could be a rumba, could be a yambú, could be a Columbia,

a guaguancó, a son, a cha-cha-cha, a contradanza, a danzón, a bolero...

The way the kick follows the bass is not like in pop music, where the drummer's playing basically 2 and 4 or some other rhythms that are basically locked with the bass. In Cuban music the drummer works *around* the bass. Sometimes it's together with the bass, but it's like counterpoint. Every instrument is floating around in time, and at the end it's just one big solid groove.

So we drummers sometimes want to play as much as we can from the percussion

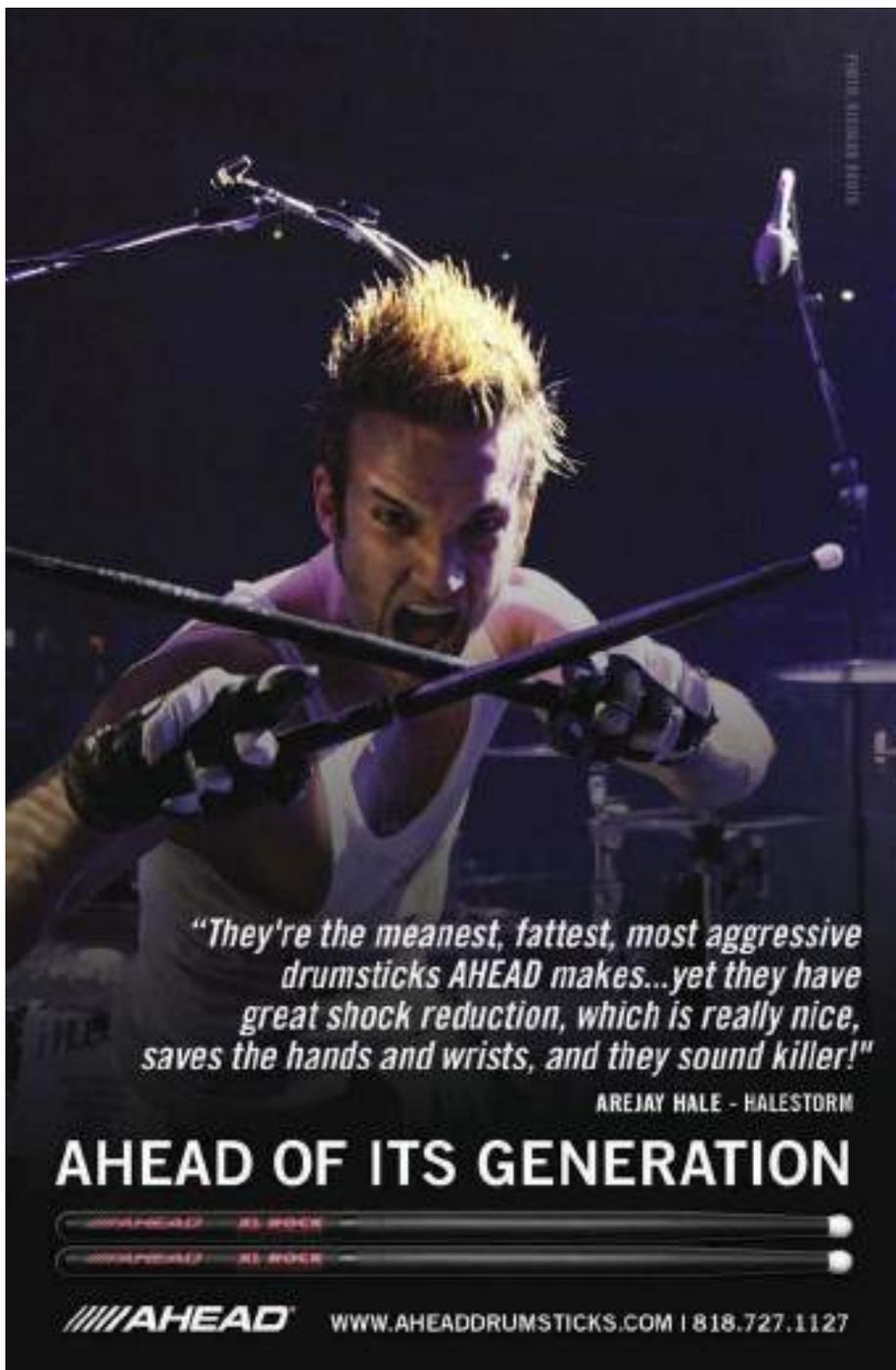
ideas that we have. Blend it into the drums and make it sound full. That's why you see the cowbell in the right hand, keeping another cowbell on the left foot, with a lot of ghost notes that are kind of imitating what the conga plays on the left hand, kind of muffling. What Changuito calls "the secret hand," which is, you know, you have the under-groove on top of your groove, and that's what makes the whole thing full.

I always tell my students, something we need to remember is that Cuban music is all about the "&" of 4, the 4, and the 1. If you've got those three, you can understand what's happening. So that's rules, because some people do the drum fill, and normally we land on 4 rather than on 1—this is the crash. One-two-three-*bop*. If the other musicians are not aware of that, they're going to think that's the 1, so what happens is that the whole thing shifts and is interpreted in a different way.

So I teach students to understand what other people do, rather than just working on their own stuff all the time. A lot of Cuban bass players have put time into learning and understanding what's happening. It's a never-ending learning experience, because people add more and more to their playing. And just as they need our support for the music, we need their support so that we can express ourselves.

Cuban music has a lot of heart and a lot of syncopation phrases that could be interpreted different ways, so that's something I'm careful with, that the people who are listening can just have fun with it. That's why sometimes I keep my bell on the left foot and play 1 and 3. When I do solos sometimes I keep it so that people can really hear where the 1 is and actually enjoy the solo. If I don't play that bell and don't play any time at all, it sounds like you're throwing a barrel down the stairs. It can sound like a bunch of notes, because the syncopation is crazy. It's accents all over the place.

I'm telling you, I listen to myself and sometimes I go, *Where's 1?* Because you could be doing crazy stuff. But it works better when the music is supporting. I love being able to stretch, what I call slow-motion soloing. You know, you take your time between one note and another, and the space in between is what really counts. If that kind of soloing is supported by good timing and a good groove behind, then people can really understand. If it's just you by yourself, then you've got to do as much as you can to make people understand what you're doing.



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Remember the Future

Claus Hessler

In his most recent method book, the highly regarded player/educator wades into the murky waters of military rudimental drumming. It's only his latest attempt to search for historical clues to futuristic rhythms.

by Ilya Stemkovsky

German drummer and educator Claus Hessler didn't learn his advanced concepts from just any teacher. The study of the mysterious but awesome Moeller technique was passed down to him by the guru Jim Chapin, who himself learned the ways of the whipping-motion force from its originator, Sanford Moeller.

Hessler has cowritten method books on open-handed playing with Dom Famularo, released a cool title on the history of rudiments, and helped develop some interesting smaller cymbals that have

multiple applications. And his latest DVD, *Drumming Kairos*, distills his principles in a digestible and clear way, so that students of all levels can be inspired to take from the past and drive straight toward wherever drumming is headed.

On top of all this, Hessler maintains a busy clinic, recording, and gig schedule. *MD* caught up with the drummer to discuss, among other things, how he's carved out a special niche for himself in the industry, and why the Moeller method is still so important.





J o e h e n H e c k

MD: Let's talk about *Camp Duty Update*, your book on rudiments that's being translated into English. What made you interested in this subject?

Claus: When you ask drummers about the absolute basics of drumming, everyone says "rudiments." Now, when you're learning a new style, the first advice a serious teacher would give you is to listen to the music. If you're studying jazz, you listen to all the jazz masters. If you're studying Latin music, you listen to all the Brazilian and Cuban masters. But when we talk about rudiments, there has been a separation between the drumming and the music. Somehow we feel that if we have the Charley Wilcoxon book and a poster by a big American stick manufacturer, that'll hopefully do the job. Today, we don't seem to have a clear idea of what the music was like that rudiment-based patterns were [originally used in]. I've always been a fan of history, so sooner or later it was obvious that I'd get into it.

MD: How did you go about finding out more about this?

Claus: I had to go to Switzerland and do research in some of the libraries there. But mostly it was investigating the Swiss, French, and English sources from the Renaissance and medieval eras, and trying to find the European roots that were later exported to the U.S. I wanted to present a history of rudiments in a compressed form, but I also wanted to give a history about the pieces that were played in the camp duty. [Various activities in early military encampments were signaled by different drumbeats.] What was the breakfast call like? It helped me understand the different connections and the issue in a detailed way.

MD: Can you weigh in on the debate about whether traditional grip is necessary today?

Claus: The field drums in the Renaissance and medieval eras were



very big, sometimes 18" in diameter and the same depth. They were carried by a sling and hung on the side, so the only way to play them in a comfortable way was with traditional grip. In the same era, the timpani players were using matched grip. [The drums] were suspended on a horse's neck, one on the left side and one on the right.

"If you understand how the Moeller technique works for you, you'll be so much closer to realizing your musical visions and bringing them into the real world. That was the case fifty years ago, and it will be the same in fifty years."

So today when we sit behind a drumset, it's very much like that, drums to our right and left. Using matched grip for that situation makes sense. I don't see a clear argument for using traditional grip for jazz. But it's pretty much your choice. I'm not that orthodox about it.

MD: It's said that the Jim Chapin torch has been passed to you regarding Moeller

technique. Where do we go from here?

Claus: It's just a way to play in the most comfortable way. I wouldn't say there needs to be something done with the technique in the future. If you understand how this tool works for you, you'll be so much closer to realizing your musical visions and bringing them into the real world. Jim knew so much about it, and he wanted to make people aware of its advantages. That was the case fifty years ago, and it will be the same in fifty years.

MD: So on the gig you're not thinking about it, but it makes life easier in a practical application?

Claus: Absolutely. If you take a close look at drumming, it's always a mixture of [automated] motions together with a reflection of what you're doing in the moment and comparing it with what you want to say on your instrument. The more intuitive and correct and effortless way of playing is in your movements, so the easier it will be to create the music you want to create. After internalizing Moeller technique and making it second nature, you don't have to think about the obstacles you have to overcome to realize a musical idea. It's in you. You just press the button and it's there. People always say it looks so easy and fluid, and I say it's just about playing things

over and over again and collecting all this mileage on your technical car.

MD: Your open-handed playing is impressive, and you've written books on the subject. Is the traditional layout of a drumset limiting? Is the modern ability to move the hats or ride to a different spot better for musical expression?

Claus: I'm not sure if it's better. Drummers look at me or people like Dom Famularo or Billy Cobham as the ones who brought open-handed playing to the forefront. Playing in that way makes so much sense if you have an instrument where you use two hands and two feet, so you don't cross any of them. There are so many more ways to express yourself without the limitations of crossing.

Now, I've seen people play cross-handed and say beautiful things. But the bottom line is that if you play open-handed, you can play certain things that aren't possible cross-handed. It's where the future of drumming will go. Maybe not in the next two or three years. Maybe it'll take *fifty* years. The way Gene Krupa used to cross his left hand over his right, that's been forgotten. So the way we cross right over left today, maybe that will be forgotten one day as well. Who knows? But open-handed playing makes sense, because you're not limiting the way

you move.

MD: How does it affect your feet when you lead with your left?

Claus: Being right-handed does not automatically make you right-footed. There are a lot of statistics that show how left-handed players are right-footed. I would say three out of five lefties are right-footed. There are a lot of gray zones. Lots of righties and lefties are close to being ambidextrous.

I use a double pedal, and I use my left foot on a third pedal as well. When we think of a groove, we think in sounds, but our brain automatically translates that into movements. We don't think in movements, like *left hand, right hand, right foot, right foot*. I'm trying to not have an exclusive link between a certain sound and a movement. So when I think of a hi-hat sound, I try to discipline myself to realize that sound with the left or right hand. And the same goes for the bass drum.

MD: Do your students come to you for exclusive open-handed instruction, or do you get into different ideologies?

Claus: I've learned not to be religious about a certain position or a way to hold the sticks or whatever. If a student wants to stay with the cross-handed way of playing, no problem. Some people come to me and make a change for good to open-handed playing. And for some it's just a way to improve their weaker side. And now with the Internet, all the information is there. Years ago we had trouble finding information, but now the job of the teacher can be to say to try this and try that, and

Tools of the Trade

Hessler plays Mapex Saturn V drums and Sabian cymbals. He uses Mapex Falcon series hardware; Vic Firth sticks and accessories; Evans Level 360 G1 Coated or G2 Clear batter heads, J1 or Reso 7 Coated resonants, and EQ4 and EQ3 bass drum heads; Drumsigns custom drumhead art; Gon Bops percussion; and Drummer Shoe products.



avoid this and avoid that—it's more about giving direction about what sources to use, or to stay away from, because the information is everywhere.

MD: You've helped to develop an 18" ride cymbal. Why that size?

Claus: There was already a 20" Sabian HH Garage ride, but I needed an 18" on my left side, mostly to save space. I didn't want it to sound like a crash cymbal. Not too thick or too gong-y. And I didn't want it to sound like a ride cymbal that was too small.

Many years ago I did a clinic with Jim Chapin, and I asked him what sort of cymbals he'd like to have. And he said, "Just give me a good 18" and I'll play the whole gig." He explained that many good drummers would use an 18" for all kinds of jobs. They'd crash it and ride it. They weren't necessarily crash/rides; they were more on the ride side of things. So the HH Garage

ride is about giving you stick definition—you can crash it, but it's definitely a ride cymbal. And the 20" is just as beautiful as the 18". Very controllable. When you play it with the [stick's] shoulder, it changes sound, not volume. It doesn't bury the whole band in a cloud of cymbal sound.

MD: Talk about your *Drumming Kairos* DVD. Where did the concept and idea come from?

Claus: I look at it as a book that's been filmed. There's an extensive PDF that comes with the DVD, so it gives you a lot of work to do. Also, I still consider Jim Chapin's DVD *Speed, Power, Control, Endurance* to be the source for studying Moeller technique in the traditional sense. The challenge was that Jim knew almost too much about it. Whenever you got close to understanding him, he'd go off and leave you behind in a cloud of dust. You wouldn't always be able to follow Jim's concepts. With *Drumming Kairos* I wanted to make things a little clearer but still look through the Chapin lens.

MD: What's the freelance scene like in Germany and Europe? You're able to play a lot of different styles. Do you have more of a reputation for being a live player, a session musician, a clinician, or an instructor?

Claus: Things have never been as busy as they are now for me. I'm putting out books and DVDs, doing clinics, teaching at universities and privately, and playing in a couple of bands. Playing live for many people is difficult. It's hard to get jobs and get your band on the road. So it's important to stay flexible. Giving students the tools to be able to play the drums for a lifetime and being able to make a living with it is a very satisfying experience. I'm just trying to give back what my two most important teachers—and, later, friends—Dom Famularo and Jim Chapin, passed on to me. Without them, I would not be what I am today. It creates a special kind of obligation to continue in that tradition as a teacher.





THE LION KING'S **CARTER MCLEAN**

All eyes are transfixed by the constant action taking place on stage between Simba, Scar, and the other classic characters from this record-breaking musical. But all ears are locked into the heavy, earthy grooves being stoked by one of the best pit orchestras in the world, including this multi-talent.

STORY BY MICHAEL DAWSON
PHOTOS BY EVAN FELTS

As the third-longest-running show ever and the highest-grossing stage production of all time, Disney's *The Lion King* remains a top draw on Broadway, packing 1,700 seats at the Minskoff Theatre in midtown Manhattan eight times a week, just as it did for its highly anticipated premiere at the New Amsterdam Theatre in November of 1997. The show is a true spectacle, featuring giant puppets, elaborate stage designs, and actors dressed in amazing animal costumes. The lasting appeal of *The Lion King*, however, is the luscious Afro-pop-inspired music written by legendary singer-songwriter Elton John, lyricist Tim Rice, film composer Hans Zimmer, and arranger Lebo M.

Although he's one of the newest full-time members of the orchestra in the production—which also features master bassist Tom Barney, marimbists Thomas Brett

and Valerie Naranjo, and world percussionists Rolando Morales-Matos and Junior Wedderburn—the thirty-eight-year-old McLean has racked up nearly 2,500 *Lion King* performances since making his Broadway debut as a sub for original drummer Tommy Igoe in 2002. When it came time for Igoe to move on in 2012, Carter was an obvious choice to take over the position—and not just because he was already a regular sub, but also because of his dedication to the groove, locking in the pocket with Barney and the other musicians to create the dynamic, driving feel that's required in the *Lion King* songbook. We recently sat down with McLean, who is also running the subscription-based lesson site fourhandsdrumming.com with St. Vincent's Matt Johnson, to dig a bit deeper into how he got the gig, how he keeps himself inspired, and how other drummers can practice to improve their own feel.



MD: How did you get involved with Broadway? Was it a lifelong goal?

Carter: I wasn't seeking to be a Broadway musician. When I moved to New York City in 2001, like every other drummer I wanted to play with Sting, Peter Gabriel, or Paul Simon. [laughs] After about four months of living in New York and working at Manny's Music on 48th Street, I got a call from soul-jazz guitarist Melvin Sparks, who one of my favorite drummers, Idris Muhammad, had played with for a while. That music was right up my alley; it was groove stuff that I love to play.

MD: How did Melvin find you?

Carter: I think [guitarist] Charlie Hunter recommended me, who I knew in college because I had opened up for him with my brother's band, the Jamie McLean Band. Melvin called, I went to his house in Mount Vernon to audition, we played about a minute of a groove, and he was like, "Cool. You got the gig." Then about a month later we did a record.

While I was working with Melvin, my good friend from Drum Workshop, John Van Ness, suggested that I call Tommy Igoe, who was drumming for *Lion King* at the time, to try to get on his sub list. I didn't pursue it for about a year, because I didn't want to play on Broadway. Then someone called me to do an off-Broadway show that sounded like a lot of fun. I didn't know what the bread should be, so I called Tommy to ask him. Then he asked me to become one of his subs.

I started learning the book [to *The Lion King*] while I was on tour with Melvin. I recorded the show and followed along with the sheet music until I had every note memorized. I was subbing three or four times a week for about ten years. My first show was the day after Christmas in 2002.

MD: What did you learn on the Melvin Sparks gig that helped when you started on Broadway?

Carter: They're so opposite. When you're playing with a band, you're interacting and trying to make the music interesting. When subbing on Broadway, you're basically cloning someone else. There's not a lot of room for being creative. The only thing you can infuse is your feel, and I think that's a big reason why they asked me to take over the book. Anybody can learn to play the parts, but it's making them feel good with the bass player, who's a world-class musician named Tom Barney. He's played with everybody: Ricky Lawson, Dennis Chambers, Sonny Emory, Peter Erskine.... His bar is very high, so I made sure to come correct.

MD: What are the biggest challenges of playing the show?

Carter: Learning the book wasn't a technical thing. The patterns came pretty natural to me. "Circle of Life" has a very similar tom groove to Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes," which was something I had practiced my whole life. But it was putting together the choreography of switching between all the different sticks and mallets that was the hardest part. I might start off playing with my hands, but halfway through I have to pick up some bundle sticks. Then right after that I have to pick up a bass drum mallet and a shaker.

It was important for me to memorize the entire show so I could focus on locking in with the other musicians and following the conductor. You have to be hyper-aware of everything. You have to keep one ear locked on the bass player and one locked on the click, when it's used. And you have to keep your eyes on the conductor in case there's something that needs to shift a little. Those are the things you can't practice; you just have to learn them on the gig.

MD: How much of the show is played to a click?

Carter: There are about six tunes on a click. A lot of it is conducted, but having the click is nice because you know the tempos aren't going to move and there's no question whether you're rushing or dragging.

MD: How do you stay inspired to play the same show night after night?

Carter: I'm not just playing a basic beat all night. The patterns are interesting, and you have to be aware of what's going on. But I'm always working on technique and trying to play as relaxed as possible and getting as big and warm a sound as I can. I'll be practicing that until I die. I'm always working on my time too. It's microscopic stuff, but it's what separates the guys with really good feel.

It would be easy to just go in, play the notes, and leave, but I approach the show like I'm on stage. There are 1,700 people there every night, so I'm playing for those who've never seen it.

MD: Do you have a consistent routine to get yourself prepared for the show?

Carter: I don't warm up, because there aren't any blazing chops right out of the gate. The first thing I hit is a kpanlogo drum with my hands, so that gets the blood flowing. But I've never had a crazy warm-up routine. I never did drum corps or any of that stuff. I taught myself how to play by playing along to records.

MD: Is there anything a drummer can do to develop feel?

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Carter: The first thing is to be aware of what you're listening to. If you're listening to stuff that's programmed and doesn't have an inherent feel in it, you might not ever get to a place where you have a great pocket. It's similar to eating. If all you do is drink Coca-Cola and eat cheeseburgers, you're not going to be super-healthy. But if you're eating the right stuff, you're going to feel a ton better and you're going to perform better.

It's the same when you're listening to good-quality music. It gets into your brain, and that's the stuff you're going to draw from when you're playing the instrument. For me, that's guys like Jim Keltner, Tony Williams, and John Bonham. I learned every Led Zeppelin record, and I still hear that influence when I'm playing rock gigs. Other big influences for me are Manu Katché, Brian Blade, and Bill Stewart.

MD: How did you absorb their feel? Did you play along to the records and transcribe them note for note?

Carter: I've never transcribed everything, because I feel you have to take an omni

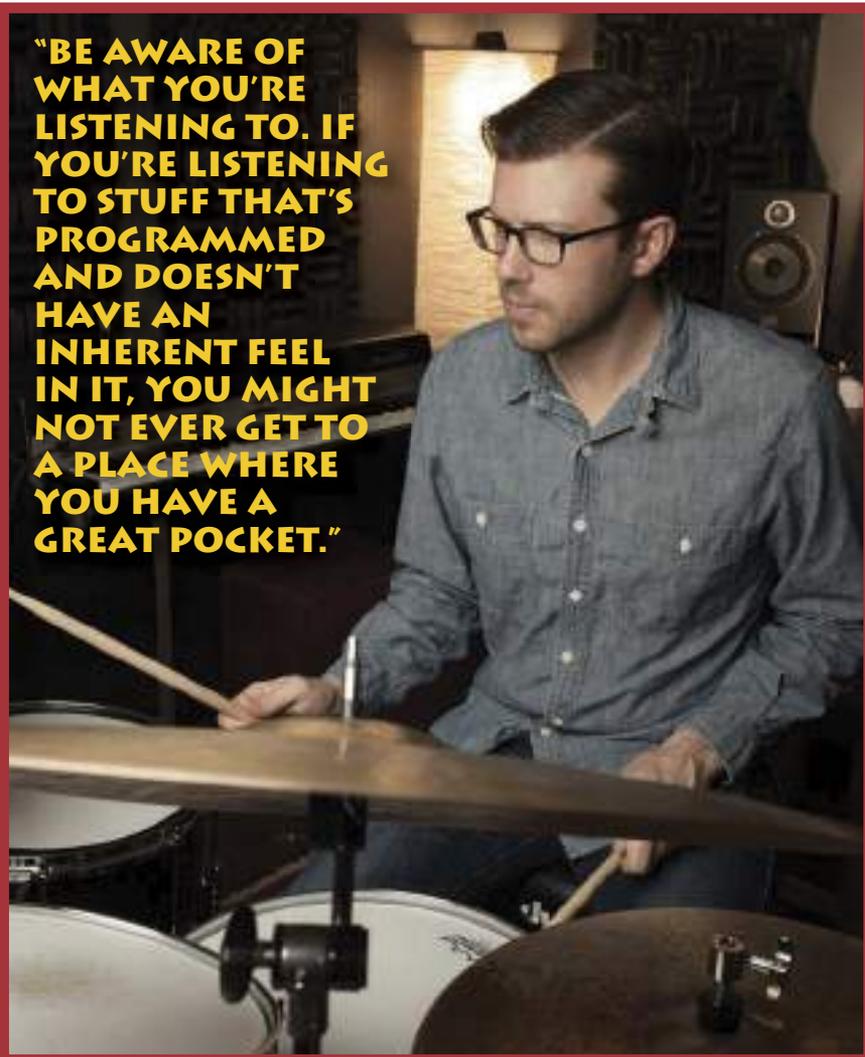
view of what happened. It's like eating a salad that has fifty-two ingredients. You can't just eat the raisins or pine nuts. You have to try the whole thing and process it as a complete dish. It's through that omni view where I get an understanding of the feel of different guys. If someone asked me to play like Tony [Williams], I know what I would play. It may not be *exactly* what he played, but it'll be in that vein because I have those references in my head.

MD: What comes after listening when developing feel?

Carter: You have to have decent technique. It's not a chops festival for feel, but you need to have enough facility to play the Purdie shuffle or a 16th-note James Brown thing. And your independence between your hands and feet needs to be at a certain point.

Then you get into adding subtle things, like ghost notes on the snare. It's also good to be able to morph from straight 8ths to a heavy shuffle, like you're slowly turning a dial. Somewhere in the middle is that New Orleans groove, which is super-funky.

"BE AWARE OF WHAT YOU'RE LISTENING TO. IF YOU'RE LISTENING TO STUFF THAT'S PROGRAMMED AND DOESN'T HAVE AN INHERENT FEEL IN IT, YOU MIGHT NOT EVER GET TO A PLACE WHERE YOU HAVE A GREAT POCKET."



MCLEAN'S LION KING KIT

Drums: Dunnett Titanium

- A. 6.5x14 2N SS snare
- B. 7x10 tom
- C. 7x12 tom
- D. 14x14 floor tom
- E. 16x16 floor tom
- F. 14x22 bass drum

Cymbals: Istanbul Agop

- 1. 15" Mantra hi-hats
- 2. 19" Xist crash
- 3. 12" China
- 4. 22" Mantra ride
- 5. 20" Traditional China

Heads: Remo Clear Vintage Emperor tom batters and Clear Ambassador bottoms, Clear Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter and Black Emperor front head, and Coated CS Reverse Dot snare batter and Clear Ambassador Snare Side bottom

Sticks: Vic Firth 3A sticks, Rute 202 and Rute 505 dowel bundles, 5A Dual-Tone stick/mallet, CT1 mallet, and Tom Gauger TG08 bass drum mallet

Percussion: LP triangle, shaker, cowbell, and granite blocks; 10" kpanlogo hand drum; 26" Pearl orchestral bass drum

Electronics: Roland SPD-30 Octapad, Westone ES5 in-ears

Hardware: DW 9000 series stands and rack

Not shown: Dunnett Carter McLean flamed walnut signature snare and Reflexx Conditioning Pad



Soul and funk music is where the feel really shines. Rock stuff is typically straighter. Of course, Bonham had a really happening feel, but he swung a lot of stuff in the kick drum and in his fills.

MD: How does your gear choice and tuning affect the feel?

Carter: A couple years ago I met Ronn Dunnett and tried some of his drums, and they just resonated with the way I played. They have a clean, pure, open sound and can take any tuning I throw at them.

The gear you use also affects your touch and the way you interact with the music. If you were to sit down at an old Gretsch kit with calfskin heads, those sounds might push you in a direction that you've never gone. That type of inspiration is important, because if you always use the same setup, you're going to get into a rut. Try playing just kick, snare, and one cymbal, and vibe on that for a week. Or set up every drum and cymbal you have and see how that makes you think differently.

MD: What's your daily practice routine?

Carter: I get up pretty early with my wife, have breakfast and a cup of coffee, and then start practicing. Every day is different, because I don't like sticking to a regimented schedule. I feel you should be practicing things that you're terrible at. If you just blow chops or play songs you've known your whole life, you're just stroking your ego. It might be fun, but it's not really practicing.

To practice time, I use an app called Figure that lets you make loops with bass lines, keyboards, drums, and percussion. Playing to a metronome is fine, but it's a little uninspiring. I'd rather practice in a more musical context. I'll program things in

different tempos and styles, and I'll practice playing different subdivisions, from the slowest possible to the fastest, making sure everything is locking in and feeling good.

I'll also grab something other than sticks so I have to approach the kit a little differently. I might play with a shaker in my right hand and a bundle stick in the left.

MD: Are you able to do gigs outside of *The Lion King*?

Carter: Yeah. You're allowed to take off up to half of the shows every quarter. I have a bunch of great subs. They're on call and know the book really well, so they can cover whenever I'm gone. I'll do a few days here and there, but I don't like to split for long periods of time anymore. I like being around for the show and being home at night. It's a lucky situation, because most musicians have to tour and are never home. But there is life outside of playing, and this gig allows for that.

MD: Do you have any advice for drummers looking to make music a career?

Carter: I think the feel and groove element is getting overshadowed by chops. We're losing touch with what the heart and soul of the instrument is, which is to keep time and make the music feel good. I would love to see drumming get back to that, as well as being more creative. That's why Jim Keltner is one of my favorites. Every time I hear him on a record, I have no idea what he's doing. He's like a magician. That's more inspiring to me than seeing some guy break the record for having the fastest hands. There's a place for that. But sitting in the pocket, making the groove feel amazing, and having the discipline to not leave it—there's real beauty in that.



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Jonathan Pinson

For this twenty-six-year-old drummer, backing jazz legends such as Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, hopping around the world with vibraphonist Stefon Harris, vocalist Carmen Lundy, and the ensemble Holophonor, and graduating from arguably one of the most elite music programs in the country all boils down to one thing—being himself.

by Willie Rose



C H O E s p i n o z a

“Music is totally my playground,” Jonathan Pinson says. “I try to provide that for the people I play with and try to have fun with them as well. I think those types of elements make me who I am as an individual—right now at this moment.”

Pinson burns. Evidence can be found on Holophonor’s self-titled 2014 debut, where snare cracks cast complicated arrangements into shape, bass drum flurries easily tackle rapid three-note groupings, and blazing cymbal rushes bring the group to a boil. But it’s Pinson’s attitude—a hearty laugh and a warm, supporting disposition—that keeps his phone ringing. And this smiling enthusiasm was partly cultivated from a venerable list of mentors.

Pinson’s hometown neighborhood, Leimert Park in Los Angeles, houses the World Stage, an educational and performance-arts gallery founded by the late, great jazz drummer Billy Higgins and the poet Kamau Daáood. Here, under Higgins’ guidance, a young Pinson’s enthusiasm brewed. “Billy Higgins’ spirit, in terms of what he did for the people in my hometown in Los Angeles—and in particular Leimert—really made an impact on me when I was young,” Jonathan says. “The one thing I noticed about Higgins is that he had this ability to bring people together when he was at the World Stage. And I saw that immediately when I was young. He kind of got me out of... I used to have stage fright. I remember one

day he put me on the drumset and let me play at a jam session. He literally picked me up and just threw me on the drumset. That memory still resonates with me. Billy was a beautiful spirit.”

In 2014, Pinson graduated from the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz at UCLA—a master’s program that could be considered one of the most exclusive in the country. The program accepts a single ensemble composed of six to eight students once every two years. Once in, students study with such jazz luminaries as Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, and Lewis Nash.

“I loved Lewis,” Pinson says. “He’s a very spiritual person and very in the moment with music. One of the things that he talked about was being *in it* when playing. You can’t be thinking about what happened with the girl you’ve been talking to that day or be thinking about some text message. You can’t be distracted by your surroundings. Just be in the moment with the people that you’re playing with.”

Pinson’s audition for the program led to a gig subbing for Brian Blade on a tour with Wayne Shorter. “When I auditioned,” Pinson recalls, “Wayne was one of the people there. Shortly after I did the audition he gave me a call and said, ‘Listen, Brian can’t do this gig. I want you to do this tour in Japan.’ He said I reminded him of Art Blakey. And I was like, *Wow*. It was a high honor, because Blakey

was the first drummer that I really listened to—other than Billy Higgins. So of course I said yes to the tour. I was twenty-three at the time, and I was nervous as hell.”

Pinson credits Shorter for helping him open up. “The first thing that Wayne did to make me feel really relaxed on that tour was tell me that he wanted me to sound like myself,” Jonathan says. “It was really reassuring, because Brian, for my generation, was one of the guys that you look up to in terms of the artistry of drumming, and just as an artist in general. I already looked up to him. So to sub for somebody like that was really a high honor. But Wayne made me feel comfortable to be able to just be myself.”

A recommendation from Shorter led to a tour in Canada shortly afterward with Herbie Hancock. “That was another one where I was peeing my pants,” Pinson says with a laugh. “But what Herbie and Wayne have in common is that they both have a youthful, childlike personality. And it’s contagious in terms of how it allows other people to latch on and feel good when they’re around you—to carry on their own inner-child-like personalities.

“Herbie was very warm,” Pinson continues. “The way I look at that experience [is that] I was just a fly on the wall. I just wanted to take in what was happening, and take in the moment, not only with Herbie but with James Genus and Lionel Loueke. So I was subbing for—again, another scary situation—Vinnie Colaiuta. But both of those experiences were unbelievable.”

This year finds Pinson releasing a second record with Holophonor, a group comprising some of the drummer’s Monk Institute classmates. This time around, the ensemble recruited Shorter as a producer. “Wayne was an awesome producer,” Pinson says, “because it was easy to know when we needed to keep a take and when not to keep the take. He really got us out of our heads. You know when

you’re in the studio it’s almost never going to be exactly how it is performing live. So with him being there, it really helped us be in the moment in the best possible way that we could.

“We’re a band that really feeds off of a live performance,” Pinson continues. “So one of the things that he asked—because Wayne knows how we play and has heard us for two years—was, ‘Why don’t you guys do a full-on set and don’t stop, and have segues, like you do in the live performance. Do that three times so that you’re not wasting a lot of time.’ And we did that. By the time we finished, the last day, we had so much time to choose from the takes. So it was definitely efficient having him in the studio.”

These days Pinson splits his time between Holophonor, his main gig with Stefon Harris, and work with artists such as jazz vocalist and composer Carmen Lundy. “In general, I try to feel out what the energy is from each type of ensemble,” the drummer explains. “But I also try to continue to be myself in the process of whatever type of ensemble I’m doing. With Carmen, she’s a super-dynamic vocalist. And for me as a drummer, it’s fun to play behind her. She actually asks drummers to push the music forward.”

And with Harris, Pinson continues his pursuit of learning. “I’ve been playing with Stefon for about a year now,” Pinson says. “He was the reason that I decided to make the move to New York. I was thinking about staying in Los Angeles, but a friend, the bass player Josh Crumbly, told me that if I made the move to New York he would get me in the band. So I gave him a call, literally took a leap of faith, and that’s why I’m in New York now. Stefon’s one of those cats where his music reflects who he is as a person. I’m twenty-six now, and I look at him as a good role model in terms of music and in terms of how to carry yourself as a person through life, business, and music. It’s always a fun time playing with him and sharing life with him.”



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Jon Anderson Sound Chaser

by Adam Budofsky

Jon Anderson is worried about his stained glass. “There’s a storm coming,” he says, gently letting me know that the time has come to wrap up our interview. “They’re flying around in the wind, so I better go out and take them down.” I never found out what exactly the glass in danger was—with an artist as well traveled as Anderson, you immediately visualize some kind of rare art objects acquired during the years he lived in France in the early ’80s, or while on tour in Japan with Yes in 1973, the period during which he was concocting the band’s ultra-ambitious double studio album, *Tales From Topographic Oceans*.

Anderson’s music tends to do that—set your mind free to imagine traveling to far-off lands, exploring distant solar systems, even existing in some other dimension. As the vocal, lyrical, melodic, spiritual, and, in the early years, practical instigator of Yes—the most successful of the original progressive rock bands—Anderson helped create an adventurous tone that for decades has echoed through the many hallowed halls of rock history, from the second-wave prog of Styx and Kansas through the modern art-rock of Porcupine Tree and Muse.

Anderson’s latest project is the group he leads with the famed fusion violinist Jean-Luc Ponty. The drummer in the

ensemble, which this month is taking its combination of new and reimagined Anderson and Ponty material across America, is Rayford Griffin, whose skills Anderson describes as “from another planet.” And this from someone who, between 1968 and 1973, had a front-row seat to the emergence of prog’s most unusual and influential drummer, Bill Bruford.

Here Anderson speaks about that sometimes contentious pairing, as well as about his working relationship with Alan White, who has held Yes’s drum chair for more than forty years. First, though, we ask the multi-instrumentalist about his long and active connection with all things percussion.

MD: When did you initially play any kind of percussion?

Jon: My first band, when I was nine or ten, was the Little John Skiffle Group, and I played washboard. The thimbles kept falling off, so I got a hammer. It sort of swelled up my fingers. [laughs] But man, I had the best time. I was also a big Gene Krupa fan. My oldest brother, who was six years older than me, would buy all these late-’40s, early-’50s jazz records. Then there was [Sandy Nelson’s 1961 instrumental hit] “Let There Be Drums.” My first band, the Warriors, had a great drummer,

Derek Thornhill. Ian Wallace [later of King Crimson] joined that band around 1965, and he opened up my world by playing me records by the great jazz drummers.

I remember going to Manchester to see the Buddy Rich Big Band, and that was an incredible moment in my life. And then we would play in Germany and go down to the jazz clubs and see Wes Montgomery and all these incredible talents. I’d do my show in the local GI place—top-ten stuff—and then we’d go downtown to hear these guys. It was a little out of my reach at that time. It was only later, when I listened to Rahsaan Roland Kirk, that I started to connect with some of the people who he’d played with.

MD: You were quite young when you began performing complex music with Yes.

Jon: I was twenty-three. I was still just a singer; I didn’t play guitar yet. But I was always looking for a band to play with, and that’s when I bumped into Chris [Squire, Yes bassist]. I joined his band, Mabel Greer’s Toyshop, and when we were looking for a drummer, we saw an advert in the local music press, *The Melody Maker*, and this guy Bill Bruford was advertising himself. We saw he had a Ludwig kit and thought, *He must be good—quick, get him in the band!* And of course he actually had a Sonor

kit painted to look like a Ludwig kit. [laughs]

There again, Bill was a jazz-rock drummer, and very inspiring, because what he brought was this never-ending dancing on top of the rhythm. And working with Chris, who wasn't your obvious bass player—he was very melodic—they just wouldn't do R&B for twenty minutes; they went into musical tangents. And I had my table full of shakers and maracas, tambourines.... Bill would scowl at me most of the time. [laughs]

I remember doing a show in Edinburgh, and we were good. I believe we were touring *Fragile* at the time. And I was banging a tambourine and doing the shakers. After the show Bob Fripp from King Crimson comes backstage, and the only thing he says to me is, "Jon, why don't you learn to play the tambourine correctly." [laughs] We'd just done one of the best shows of my life, and he says, "Why don't you play the tambourine better!"

But one of the things that I think really worked was when Alan White joined the band. He came in with a sort of bigger-sounding drumkit, and he was pushing the band like crazy. If you listen to those early recordings, Bill is brilliant. But Alan was more...rock, if you like. And at the time he really welcomed me into performing next to him. We'd get ahold of old cymbals and jump on them to make them sound [trashier]. There were these long sections of the music where I was either going to stand around and look stupid or play percussion, and Alan was very helpful with that.

MD: Live, you'd play shakers and sing during fairly complex passages. This was no ordinary singing gig.

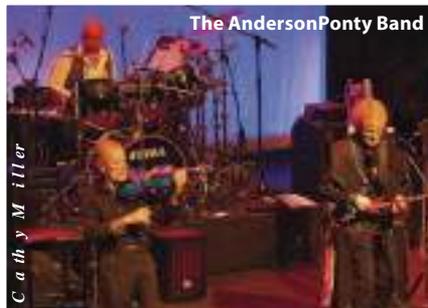
Jon: Ever since I could remember, I was the singer in the band, not a "musician." It was sort of drilled into me early on: "You're the singer—drive the van and lift the amps and set up the PA." Eventually you realize that, yes, I'm the singer, but I'm also writing some of this music. And what I discovered in the early times of Yes was, instead of sitting around thinking what the band should do next, I *knew* what to do next. And I pushed the band here, there, and everywhere musically.

MD: Was there a time when you particularly focused on what you could do with percussion?

Jon: I was at one show, and this guy gave me a record by the Burundi drummers of Africa. That led me to start collecting different kinds of ethnic rhythms, so I would inject them in the band and suggest ideas. It was this wonderful to-and-fro. And it was wonderful to work with musicians who were so open.

MD: What other kinds of percussion music have you been drawn to over the years?

Jon: Google water drumming and the Baka people, who do it. I've recorded a song over a recording of it for a project that I'm doing. I'm a big Sibelius fan—he uses the timpani so well, and percussion so subtly. I also got into the composer Harry Partch. He designed these ten-foot marimbas and giant glass domes, and I just loved all that. And with electronic music... back in the '60s there was a guy called İlham Mimaroglu. Talk about percussive music. It blows your mind, and he did all that on two Revox reel-



to-reel machines. And the sounds! Unbelievable stuff.

MD: *Tales From Topographic Oceans* has some great percussion on it.

Jon: I saw the track "Ritual" as a metaphor and a way for the band to perform together on drums. At first they said, "Not gonna happen!" [laughs] You know, they valued their hands, especially Steve [Howe, guitarist]. But lo and behold, when we toured and did "Ritual," we were all playing this drum pattern that came from the guitar solo. Not many people realize that. Any band can actually do this—do you play percussion with a band?

MD: Sure.

Jon: Good. You can say to everybody to think of a song, like, let's see, "New York, New York" [sings pattern without melody]. People will say, "How did you learn that?" "We're not telling you."

[laughs]

MD: The next Yes album, *Relayer*, features a wall of percussion on "The Gates of Delirium."

Jon: I just did "Awaken" [from the 1977 Yes album *Going for the One*] at a concert in Iceland with an orchestra and choir. We're planning on doing more, and they want to do "Gates." The recording of that song wasn't what I dreamed it would be, but it was very good on tour. It got pretty wild. War is an evil event, and that was the idea of the music—to create devastation, and most nights on tour we did. And then you have to come out of that devastation into the light of "Soon the Light."

MD: That transition is one of the great moments on a Yes record.

Jon: And you can imagine it on stage. We had this incredible Roger Dean-designed set. I'd be thrashing the drums all the way through the chaos and the big evil theme, and I'd be exhausted and stagger to the front of the stage, take the deepest breath, and try to sing, "Soon, oh soon, the light..." I remember we had these Slinkys that we'd stretch and put mics on—they make this incredible sound, like thunder.

MD: How did the AndersonPony Band come together?

Jon: I was lucky to see Mahavishnu Orchestra's first show, and I met Billy Cobham. They were opening for Yes and the Kinks at New York University. Actually, my favorite percussive moment was when I played cowbell once along with Billy at a jazz club in Paris. My claim to fame! [laughs] But I could not believe Mahavishnu, and I wanted to sing with them over the years, because Billy Cobham is the man.

MD: Did they ever feature vocals?

Jon: No, I just loved the idea of playing with that kind of jazz-fusion band, and that's what I'm doing now in a way. Jean-Luc played with them, and when he and I were thinking of working together, we thought of Billy. But he was busy with another project, so Jean-Luc said, "The drummer in my band is this guy Rayford Griffin," and I YouTubed him and thought, *This is the guy!* Rayford's got everything. And we're very interested in the adventure of this band. The musicians are so open, humble, and thankful. With Jean-Luc and myself, I feel like I'm looking into a mirror of what I'm thinking. It's very special.



Electronica Drummer/Producer Shigeto

Drums: Precision Drum Company

- A.** 5x12 Pork Pie snare
 - B.** 13x14 floor tom
 - C.** 15x18 bass drum
 - D.** 14x20 bass drum
- Cymbals:** various
 - 1.** 14" 1955 Zildjian A hi-hats
 - 2.** 18" Meinl Byzance Sand Thin crash
 - 3.** 18" Zildjian A ride
 - 4.** 19" Crescent Vintage ride
 - 5.** 18" ride (Swiss-made)
- Shigeto also uses 8", 9", and 10" Dream gongs and Treeworks chimes.

With multiple solo albums under his belt and a recent appearance, alongside modern jazz drummer Mark Guiliana, on acclaimed trumpeter Dave Douglas's most recent album, *Dark Territory*, Zach "Shigeto" Saginaw has seen his profile grow significantly in recent years. Here, the drummer/producer brings us into his studio space in Detroit to share some insight into the unique hybrid electronic/acoustic setup he uses when performing as a solo artist.

"My kit is small because I always felt hidden behind a 20" or bigger kick," Shigeto says. "I'm only 5' 5", so I wanted something that was more my size. I got this kit at the time when I lived in New York City, so I also needed it to be portable. The kick has a massive, warm sound, and it can be diverse. You can use it for jazz or rock, and it's really lightweight. I don't use padding in the kick, and the front head has a hole. It has a bit of ring, but it isn't too overwhelming."

"I like my drums to sound compressed, and I don't like a lot of reverb. I prefer a dead, '70s drum sound, so I use Moon Gels and coated heads. The toms are tuned low and are pitched about a fourth apart. I like the toms to be in sync with the key center of the song. I got the 20" bass drum because I needed something a little more powerful at times."

"I love old cymbals. Mine are thin, dark, and dirty, like something Elvin Jones would use that has a thunderous but gentle roar. I like cymbals that sound like they're melting when you play them. My most prized possession is this pair of hi-hats from 1955. They feel

GEARING UP ON STAGE AND UP CLOSE

Interview by Dave Previ
Photos by Michael Hacala



like butter. I also have a bunch of weird no-name cymbals that I found in discount bins. Those have so much character, and I can do a lot with them for recording and samples. I often sample those cymbals and use them for snare sounds or for completely different percussive textures. I might tape them up and put some screws in them."

When asked about how he got into producing electronic music, Shigeto says, "Growing up as a drummer, I was always dependent on my friends to create music, and we had to find specific time slots in the day where we could get together to make noise and not bother anyone. Electronics gave me the chance to create music on my own. I could write a song, render out a mix, and then play along to it."

"I use the Roland SPD-SX mainly for traditional drum machine sounds, like the 808, 909, and 707. I also use it to play long samples of chimes and atmospheric textural sounds. I'll trigger those and then play drums over the top. I also like to sample chords from a synth and play them from the SPD-SX."

"My MIDI controller talks to Ableton Live in my laptop. The pads are assigned to the on/off switches of effects or they are linked to samples that I play with my fingers. I also use the faders on the controller to affect the parameters of the effects. And sometimes I'll run my drums through the delay pedal and use the timing of the delay to determine the tempo."

"All of the electronics are used in an effort to make the drums a more well-rounded instrument, where rhythm and percussion are the vessel but the outcome can be much more melodic."





Those Who Can, Teach

Simple Tips for Making the Move From Player to Private Instructor

by Michael Vosbein

Drummers today face increasingly difficult circumstances trying to earn a full-time living playing music. To make ends meet, many turn to instruction. I've outlined here some of the things I've learned over decades of teaching to help you if and when you decide to start taking on students.

Location, Location, Location

Once you take the plunge, the first consideration may be location. Are you set up to teach in your house or apartment? Even if you are, you may be better off teaching in a music store. Consider that parents may be understandably uncomfortable dropping off a child at the home of an adult they don't know. Stores offer students and their families an established central location with credibility and accountability. Sure, the store keeps some of the money, but it also provides the space and the drums. Management handles scheduling, deals with the accounting, and provides advertising that attracts new students. And it will usually carry the drums, cymbals, sticks, pads, and books the students need.

Put on Your Teaching Hat

While we all like to work with more advanced students, the bulk of teaching in a store setting involves working with

beginners. Many will be young children or preteens. If you don't genuinely love working with kids, don't take the job. If you do, be prepared to remove your pro drummer hat. A ten-year-old is not ready to explore the primal urgency of Elvin Jones or the metric modulations of Tony Williams. Start slowly, and keep things simple. I used to think about my teaching practice as though I were coaching a little-league baseball team. Coaches know that the chance of any kid on their team eventually becoming a professional athlete is near zero. But when kids are coached correctly, the chances of them having a positive, life-enriching experience are great. The reciprocal can also be true; *you* stand to gain as much from the lessons as the student does.

Meet the Parents

Don't let the first time you meet a student's family occur as the result of a problem. Establishing an inclusive and positive relationship with parents from the beginning usually results in far fewer problems in the long run. Take the time to introduce yourself to the parents or whoever brings the student to the lesson and encourage them to maintain an ongoing dialogue with you. I always make it clear that a parent is welcome to sit in during the lesson, especially for the younger ones.

Be sure to have an attendance policy in place, and give the student and his or her family a copy. Let them know that your time is valuable and that you expect their children to show up for their lessons. Be very clear about what kinds of absences, with proper notice, will be acceptable and what your policy is on make-up lessons. If you're teaching out of a shop, make sure this is consistent with store policy.

Get to Know the Students

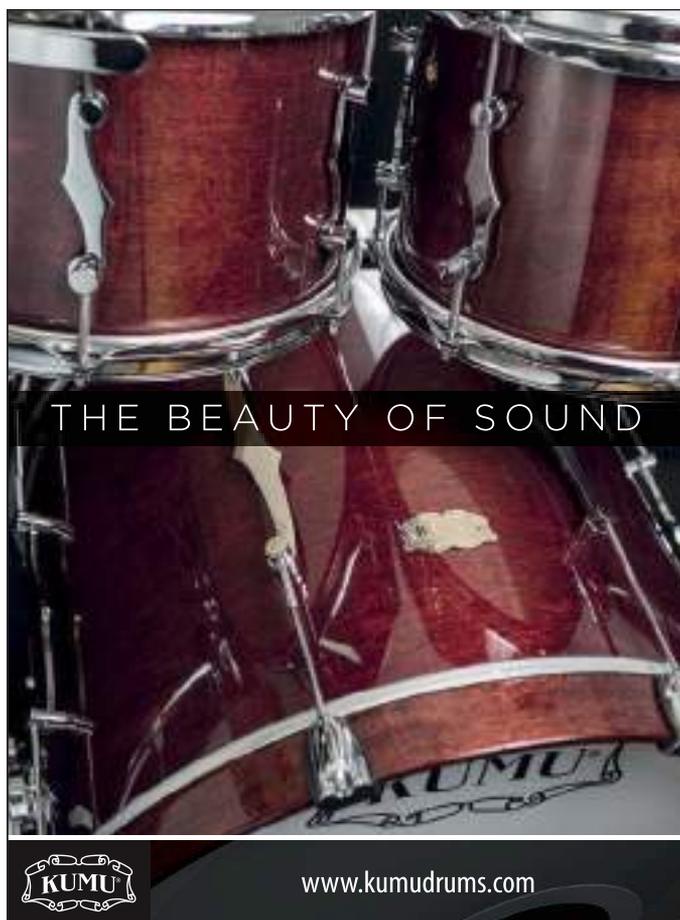
Thirty-minute lessons go quickly, but over the months you will get to know the students very well. I often ask them about school, sports, or whatever else they're involved in besides drumming. This lets them know that I'm genuinely interested in them, which helps to build a long-standing relationship.

Maintain a Positive Environment

Despite the success of the movie *Whiplash*, using insulting language or an intimidating demeanor is never appropriate. The lesson studio needs to be a safe, welcoming, and encouraging place at all times. While striking a student is always off limits, don't underestimate the importance of touch. I always ask permission before touching a student and explain to them that it's sometimes more effective to physically position their fingers and hands in the correct position than to try to describe it with words alone. I've never had a student refuse, but my asking permission confirmed to them that I was to be trusted. I also think occasional appropriate touch is an important aspect of mentoring, whether it's a high five, a fist bump, or an old-fashioned pat on the back.

Define Expectations

A student doesn't have to be an accomplished player to be



a good student. A good student is one who's interested in the instrument and dedicated to improving. Make sure that you communicate this to your students.

Positive reinforcement is a must. Performance mistakes are to be expected in the learning process and should not be criticized. It's more important to show students how to concentrate and remain focused on what they're doing even when they mess up. Teaching them the necessary skills to stay in the moment can also help them improve with their schoolwork and other activities.

Embrace New Ideas

One day I arrived at my teaching studio at the local music store to find that the drumset had been replaced with an electronic kit. The volume of the drums had been interfering with the lesson quality of teachers in adjacent studios. With a large library of play-along media available from most publishers and the new e-kit, I soon realized that I had a new way to incorporate audio recordings into my daily teaching practice.

The students work on the music at home, and when they're ready I record them during our lesson. I play the tracks on an iPhone or tablet, run a stereo cable from the device into the module of the electronic kit, and balance the output volume of the track to that of the drums. From there, a simple and inexpensive audio interface allows me to route the sounds from the kit into a digital audio workstation (DAW) on my laptop. I record the students playing their assigned songs, and then I burn their performances to CD or transfer them to a portable hard drive. Over time, students end up with an album's worth of recorded material to share with friends and family.

Build a Community

Some teachers choose to use the Internet and social media to foster a sense of community with their students. It can be a great place to store lesson policies, holiday schedules, inclement-weather updates, scanned versions of your handwritten exercises, and audio and video recordings of yourself and your students. If you want to post pictures and performances of your students, be sure to get written permission first. Write up a simple form explaining what you intend to use and in what manner, and if the

student is under eighteen have it signed by his or her parents. Don't post anyone's last name or contact information, and never make participation mandatory.

Enjoy Your Job

Anyone coming to you for drum lessons is probably pretty happy to be there. As teachers, we want to mirror that. Let your students see that you share their passion and excitement for playing drums, and

they will respond in kind. I tell them that by choosing to play the drums, they are joining the hippest club in the world, and that my unbreakable rule was that we had to have fun. That always gets a smile!

Michael Vosbein is the former CEO and president of Cymbal Masters and is a freelance drummer, teacher, social media consultant, and video producer in the Atlanta area.



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Six-Stroke Success

Variations on a Classic Roll

by Rich Redmond

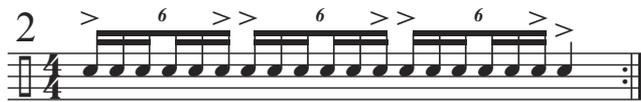
The six-stroke roll is easily one of my favorite rudiments. I was hooked on it after hearing the first few bars of the Temptations' "My Girl." This popular lick has crept its way into all types of music—from big band to soul, classic rock to fusion, and beyond. Adding more to its credentials, the six-stroke roll can be used in grooves, fills, and solos.

For this lesson, we'll use a six-note grouping that begins with an accented stroke, continues with two sets of unaccented (tapped) double strokes, and closes with another accented stroke. This grouping has a powerful sound and really swings. At first, try playing the rudiment on the snare, and play the accents as rim shots. Also, practice these with a variety of ostinatos on the kick drum.

Halfway through these examples, we'll place the accents on toms, cymbals, and bass drum, and we'll mix up the sticking. There's no end to the possible sound combinations you can create. Drummers have been using the six-stroke roll for decades. Now it's your turn!

1 

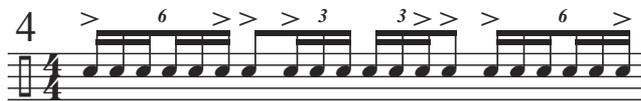
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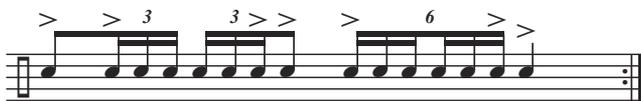
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3 

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4 

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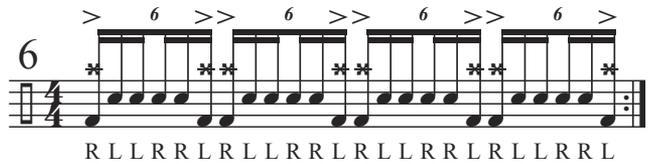


R R L L R R L R R L L R R L R

5 

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



6 

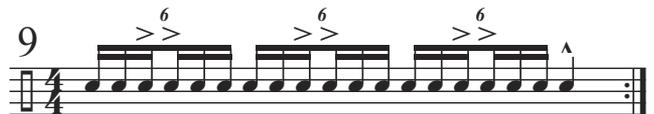
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7 

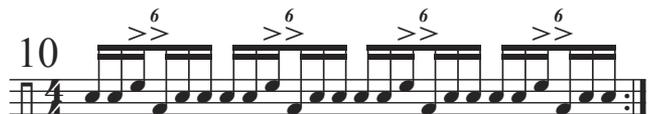
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8 

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

9 

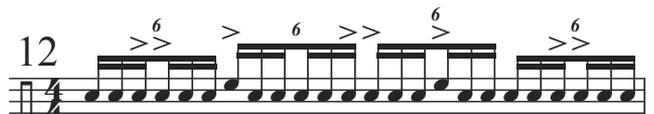
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10 

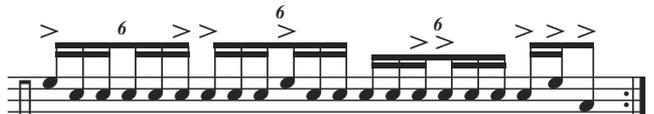
R R L R L L R R L R L L R R L R L L R R L L

11 

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

12 

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



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

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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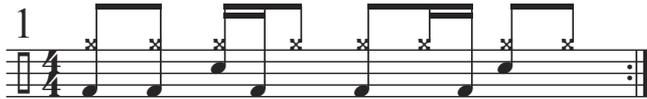
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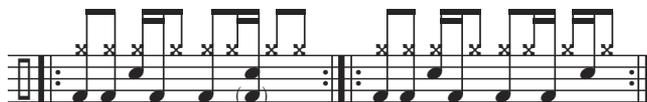
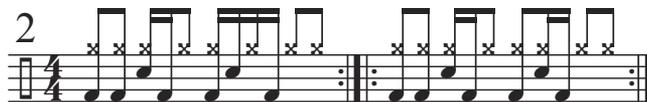
Part 2: More Snare Displacement

by Jost Nickel

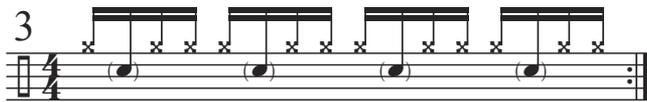
In the second part of this series, we'll continue to create new grooves by displacing the snare drum. We'll start with a basic pattern that consists of 8th notes on the hi-hat, snare hits on beats 2 and 4, and a funky bass drum phrase. Here's the main groove.



In the following exercise, we'll displace the snare on beat 4 to different positions in the second half of the measure, while the rest of the groove remains unchanged. In measure 3, the snare and bass drum play simultaneously on the "a" of beat 3. When that happens, the bass drum can be omitted.

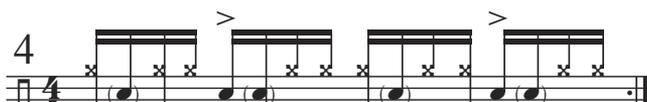


Here's an interesting way of adding ghost notes to these grooves (or any others). Using alternating 16th notes, the right hand sticks to the hi-hat while the left hand alternates between ghost notes on the snare and the hi-hat.



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

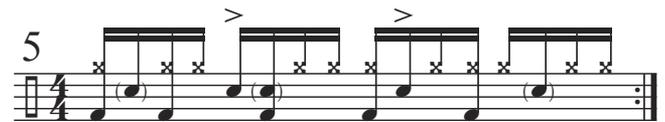
Now apply that idea to Exercise 1. The sticking remains the same, so the accents on beats 2 and 4 will be played with the right hand.



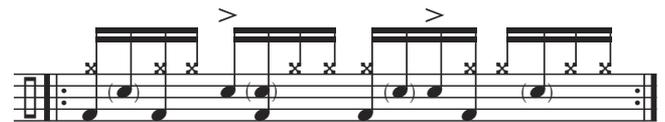
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L



When we add the ghost-note idea to the displacements in Exercise 2, any accent that falls on an offbeat 16th note will be played with the left hand. Exercise 5 shows all six snare displacement grooves with the ghost-note pattern.



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



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



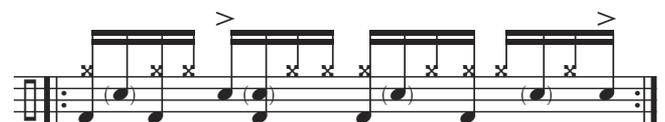
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L



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



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



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

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 7-9 and continue as described. Each measure in the following examples can be used to create six displaced groove variations.

6

7

8

If you're interested in these ideas and want more groove concepts, check out my 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.

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



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Progressive Drumming Essentials

Part 11: Making Four Sound Like More

by Aaron Edgar

I'll never forget the first time I heard Meshuggah. I only had a single track at the time, and I was mesmerized by the amount of pocket that they were able to get from what I assumed was an odd time signature. For a couple of weeks, I was completely obsessed and decided to transcribe it. To my surprise, nearly the entire song could be written out using over-the-barline rhythms in 4/4.

"Stengah," from Meshuggah's album *Nothing*, showcases this odd phrasing technique perfectly. The opening guitar line takes up the space of eleven 8th notes and is repeated until it fills eight measures of 4/4. There are sixty-four 8th notes in eight bars of 4/4, so the 11/8 riff repeats five full times. Then the band fills the remaining 8ths with the a portion of the riff before cutting back to the top on beat 1 of the ninth bar.

Example 1 contains the 11/8 "Stengah" guitar line. Example 2 shows the eight-bar 4/4 drum pattern with the guitar line notated on top so you can see how the phrases interact.



There's a lot to remember to make this eight-bar phrase work, especially since every measure differs from the one before. Pay attention to where the pattern lines up with the quarter note, which is played on the China. Every two passes of the 11/8 riff will line up on the quarter note (beat 4 of measure 3 and beat 3 of measure 6). Focusing on this can help you internalize the pattern so that you don't need to think too much about it.



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Now let's focus on some shorter odd-note phrases. Example 3 has a funky bass drum figure in 5/8.

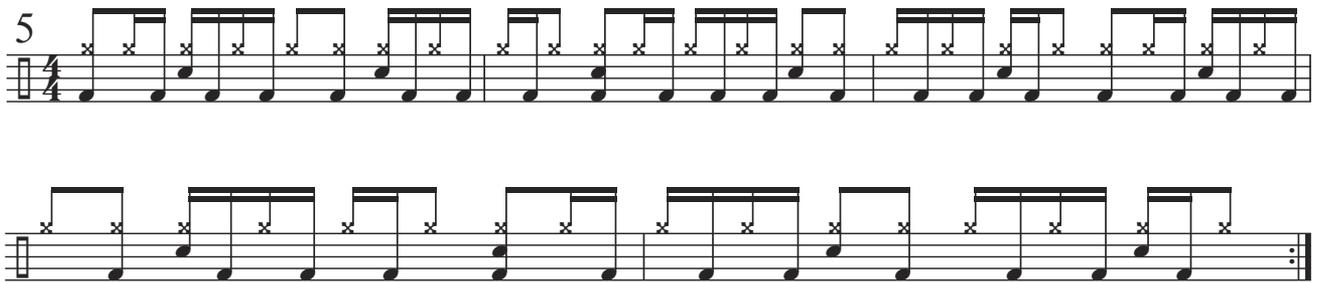


Example 4 loops the 5/8 bass drum pattern across four bars of 4/4 time, with a standard hi-hat and snare groove on top. You can think of the hand pattern as being the length of two quarter notes. With that in mind, the 5/8 bass drum rhythm lines up at the beginning of the hand pattern on beat 3 of the third measure. Playing through the 5/8 pattern twice more will leave a single quarter note at the end. You can play part of the 5/8 pattern within that space, or you can smooth over the transition with a fill.

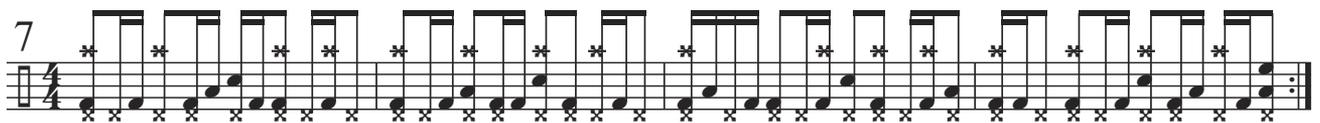


Experiment with how the 5/8 rhythm works across different numbers of measures. For instance, try a shorter two-bar pattern. You'll have to cut off the 5/8 rhythm at the end to make it fit.

To make the rhythm resolve naturally in 4/4, add one measure to the end of Exercise 4. The result is a five-bar phrase of 4/4 in which the 5/8 rhythm loops uninterrupted.



Now try phrasing a 13/16 bass drum and floor tom pattern across four bars of 4/4. The left foot anchors the time by playing 8th notes with the hi-hat foot, and there's a backbeat on beat 3 of each bar to create a half-time feel. Adding crashes that alternate between quarter notes and the underlying rhythm creates an intense progressive metal groove.



If you're having trouble phrasing the crashes, try working through the pattern and only adding the crashes that line up on quarter notes. Gradually add in the missing crashes as you get more comfortable.

I find phrasing odd-time patterns within 4/4 compelling because it allows you to highlight the quarter-note pulse to create a stronger groove and pocket. Spend some time trying this concept with your own rhythms.

For a video demo of these examples, visit modern drummer.com.

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





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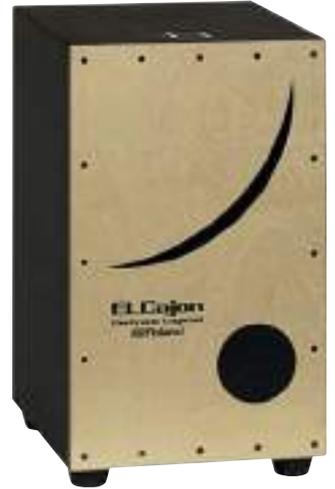


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Organize Your Gear

Part 1: Cartage

by Russ Miller

I've had many requests to discuss selecting, organizing, and maintaining equipment, so this is the first part in a short series on those subjects. I'm starting with the organization of gear and how to take it to jobs so that you never end up missing a crucial piece at the gig. This system can be used whether you personally handle everything or if you hire a cartage company to move your gear.

"No business can succeed in any great degree without being properly organized."
—James Cash Penney (J.C. Penney retail store founder)

In future columns I'll cover things like choosing gear, managing inventory, balancing what you want with what you need, drumhead selection, and general maintenance. I previously discussed the importance of presenting yourself as a professional and that having the right gear at the gig is important. (See the November 2014 issue for a refresher.) It's also important that nothing goes missing and that everything makes it back home with you.

Over the years I've developed my own system that combines some of the better methods I've seen implemented by some of the best cartage services and drum techs. I use my own company to handle my cartage. I hire the techs, and I own the vehicles. I do this to make sure I know exactly how much money is being charged to my clients for my services. I combine the fees for my drumming and cartage, and this approach has proven to bode well for my business. Let's get more into the specifics of my cartage system.

I created a "cartage work order" for my company, R.M.I. Music Productions. This sheet is generated for every event where my drums leave the warehouse, and it provides a great review of the necessities of the gig.

You should create a labeling system for your cases. Every tour I've been on required labeled cases. This is so that the drums are placed in the correct locations in the trucks and on stage. Labeling also helps when doing a case count for venue load-in and load-out.

The cartage work order contains a checklist for the gear being transported, so you can keep track of everything going to and from the gig. The sheet also includes a space to write in details about the

load-in, contacts, and timeframes for the event. It's always nice to have all of that information in one spot.

Having the work order forces me take a few minutes to review everything about the gig. For instance, do I need to bring microphones? Is there a loading dock? Who's the contact in case I can't find the room? What time do we start?

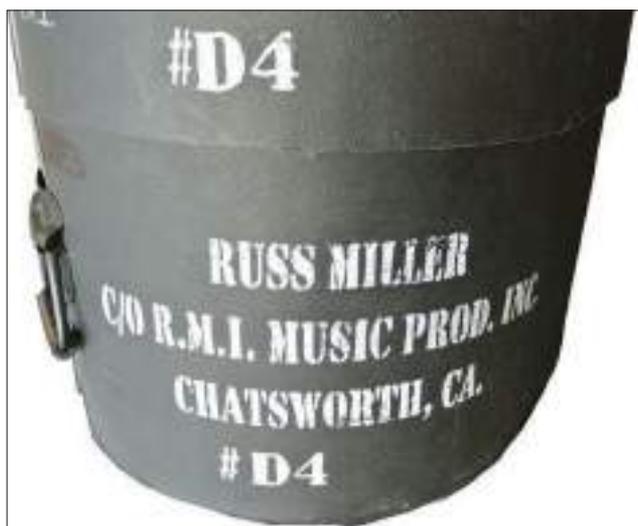
I use three levels of cartage, depending on the size of the venue



From left: gig bags for small venues, standard cartage with hard cases, and touring gear in flight cases

and kit. Small venues or small jazz setups are carried in gig bags and a small hardware case. My standard cartage rig comprises individual drum cases and a hardware trunk. My touring gear is housed in flight cases to consolidate the equipment into the fewest pieces possible for the most efficient shipping and load-ins. I indicate the cartage level in the “gear list” section of the work order sheet.

In the “case inventory and checkout” section of the work order, you’ll see that each case has a number that starts with the letter D. The D indicates to the production crew that the case includes drums. Each case has a number that corresponds to what is inside. D1 is the kick, D2A is the primary snare, D2B is the backup snare, D3 is the smallest rack tom, and so on. The main kit parts that go to every gig are listed first, in the larger middle section of the work order. The box to the left gets checked when that piece goes from my warehouse and into the vehicle. The circle on the right gets checked when that piece goes back into the vehicle at the end of the gig. This system ensures that everything I need shows up and leaves the venues. (The smaller section labeled “optional” includes the pieces that are gig-relative, such as microphones and electronics.)



For labeling the cases, I had a custom stencil made for my name and company info. The letter and number stencils can be bought at any crafts or home-improvement store. I suggest that you apply the stencils with a paint pen. Spray paint is too sloppy and can make a mess of your cases.

I hope these simple ideas help you get your gear better organized. See you next time, when I’ll discuss creating a drum rider.

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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COLLECTOR'S CORNER



1964: The Tribute's Bobby Potter

by Harry Cangany

One of the thousands of drummers who were inspired to start playing drums after seeing Ringo Starr on *The Ed Sullivan Show* was Bobby Potter, who now holds down the drum throne for the amazing early-era Beatles' cover band 1964: The Tribute. Potter's set (and throne) is a period-correct Ludwig Super Classic in Ringo's finish: translucent oyster black.

Bobby invited me to come visit him at a concert that was held on the 50th anniversary of the Beatles' show at Shea Stadium. In honor of that anniversary, the members of the band played the first set in replica Mao jackets before changing to the English Chesterfield suits.

Bobby's a righthanded player, but he made a point to learn Ringo's moves as he played them, with the fills often starting with the left hand. Sitting high behind the 20" bass drum, Potter's look is very reminiscent of Ringo on the Beatles' February 9, 1964 television appearance.

Ludwig drum shells from the '60s sound darker than their newer counterparts. The bearing edges are rounded, and the shells are made with African mahogany. Bobby tours with the kit shown here, but he also has a pristine oyster black four-piece that stays at home.

Potter was born in Vincennes, Indiana, but now resides in Illinois. He

has been a professional drummer since high school and has spent time living in Atlantic City, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas. He's been in 1964: The Tribute for the past six years. The group leader, Mark Benson, picked Bobby from fifteen possible candidates. Potter looks and sounds the part, and he sings on three songs, including "Boys," which was Ringo's vocal debut.

1964: The Tribute plays one hundred concerts a year, performing the Beatles' original material that was released from 1963 to 1966. I sat in the packed theater and watched 1,500 enthusiastic Beatles fans of all ages have the time of their lives. It's quite amazing how much staying power lives in those songs. Everybody in the audience was a drummer that night, tapping their feet, clapping to the backbeat, and smacking their knees when their favorite Beatles tunes came up in the set.

1964: The Tribute put on a great performance, complete with the Fab Four's distinctive mannerisms, gestures, and humor, as well as their incredible musicianship. That night, we saw and heard vintage Zildjian cymbals, a Hofner bass, and Rickenbacker, Gretsch Country Gentlemen, and Gibson guitars. But nothing says "the '60s" more than a great set of Ludwig drums. And Potter drove that Ludwig set to perfection.

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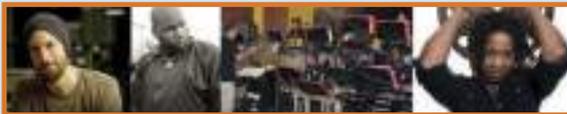
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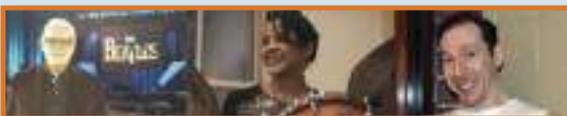
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The Jen Ledger signature stick is crafted from hickory and features a shaft diameter that feels similar to a 3A or 5B. It is 16.5" long and has a medium-length taper that flanges into a teardrop tip for clear, powerful sounds on drums and cymbals.

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sonorusa.com



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CRITIQUE

RECORDINGS



Black Mountain *IV*

The *Billboard* Hot 100 might not be bothering itself with rock 'n' roll these days, but those who don't bother with the charts will be just fine—as long as bands like Black Mountain, featuring drummer Joshua Wells, keep it coming.

For a decade now, the Vancouver-based rock band Black Mountain has taken cues from iconic forays into the dark side of the arts like AC/DC's *Back in Black*, Pink Floyd's *Animals*, and the Cure's *Disintegration*. The group's (appropriately titled) fourth studio album improves upon this already highly appealing amalgam, which Black Mountain has been developing slowly but assuredly with each new release.

IV's modern-analog production style makes the most of the clean but heavy guitars, dreamlike male-female vocals, deftly applied retro keyboard swoops, and punch-in-the-gut drums. The songs, generally unhurried and skillfully constructed, still gaze long and hard through the looking glass of riff rock's glory daze, but are more striking than ever, seemingly due to the band members' understanding each other, and where they're naturally heading musically, more fully with each new recording opportunity. This has become a truly great ensemble.

Drummer Joshua Wells is clearly a student of the genre and of his instrument, and he gets that rock drumming is largely about placement. In other words, where you put that cool part is as important as the part itself. It certainly doesn't hinder Wells that main Black Mountain songwriter Stephen McBean so artfully exploits the basic building blocks of long-form rock music, like repetition, light and shade, and tension and release, giving the drummer lots to work with. When the massive, Sabbath-worthy riff of *IV*'s opening number (and first single), "Mothers of the Sun," finally kicks in after a gripping three-and-a-half-minute intro, Wells is there with a simple "1, 2-&3" across the toms. The fill is as old as the hills, but it's played perfectly, smartly (as flams), and with swagger.

As he does at various points across the album, on "Mothers" Wells keeps straight 8ths on the hi-hats while funk'ing it up in the bass drum at well-timed moments, à la Led Zeppelin's John Bonham and

Bad Company's Simon Kirke—another classic approach perfectly rendered. Track two, "Florian Saucer Attack," appropriates a common krautrock groove, with incessantly driving, parallel 8th notes on the bass drum and hi-hat or ride. Wells' dynamic snare punctuations are pristine. Next, "Defector" features a groovy "a-1, a-2" feel, with the drummer again keeping steady 8ths on the hats.

Track four, "You Can Dream," takes a bit of a drumming detour. Live, Wells keeps a multipad sample unit to the left of his hi-hat, and one could imagine him accessing the song's new-wavey tones via that type of source. The cold, calculated vibe is perfectly appropriate—and striking—and it's indicative of the kinds of artistic choices that guard Black Mountain from being pigeonholed, no matter how much they wear their influences on their sleeves.

The rock returns on "Constellations," followed by the album's first true ballad, "Line Them All Up." This track begins with hushed acoustic tones, then glides neatly to a waltz section featuring cavernous drum fills reminiscent of Bonham's on "Thank You." It's a great "now you see me, now you don't" moment for Wells, and an understated but emotional centerpiece of the album.

Track seven, "Cemetery Breeding," finds Wells channeling the Cure's great mid-period drummer, Boris Williams, with a soulful "2, and-4" backbeat and tasty trills on the hi-hats. He then kicks the Neanderthal Bo Diddley beat of the nearly nine-minute "(Over and Over) The Chain" with thundering toms, makes another brief but effective mid-song appearance on "Crucify Me," and offers a loosey-goosey beat on album closer "Space to Bakersfield" that shows off his adeptness with ghost notes and a sweetly independent hi-hat foot. It's a nine-minute groove of spaced-out sonic bliss, and a perfect ending to such a fulfilling hour-long trip, which simultaneously looks back down memory lane and forward toward rock's healthy future. (Jagjaguwar)

Adam Budofsky



Taking the Reins

Glenn Kotche and Sô Percussion *Drumkit Quartets*

Wilco's drummer puts out another decidedly non-rock release, providing further insight into his aesthetic and far-flung influences.

Glenn Kotche and Sô Percussion's *Drumkit Quartets* features marimba, hand-cranked sirens, hi-hats, tape noise, triangles, individual drums, and electronics, but not much of what most people would recognize as traditional drumset playing. We've long expected well more than traditional approaches from Wilco's drummer in his solo projects, of course, and Kotche consistently delights and surprises. Sô Percussion's straightforward approach here benefits from Kotche's imaginative compositions and inventive conceptions. Glenn blends time-delayed hi-hat figures in "Drumkit Quartet 3 Movement 2," creates a calming bell symphony in "... Movement 3," and layers drum rolls against chattering foot rhythms and swelling cymbals in "Drumkit Quartet 6." The album's most interesting moments occur when the focus isn't on the drums but on pure sound, erupting from every source possible. (Cantaloupe)

Ken Micallef



Thomas Strønen *Time Is a Blind Guide*

The cofounder, along with ex-Earthworks sax player Iain Ballamy, of the experimental jazz band Food has appeared on dozens of out-jazz releases but has released only a handful as a leader. This one's a doozy.

Thomas Strønen is one of those multidisciplinary European artists for whom music is an open palette from which to steal, swing, and bend. Strønen does so here accompanied by two percussionists, piano, cello, violin, and upright bass. The ensemble produces atmospheric music that references jazz but also African and Irish rhythms, northern European folk, gamelan, and chamber esoterica, like a romantic music ship sailing the high seas of sound and structure, where improvisation over sparse melodies is the rule, destination unknown. And that's the joy of this ethereal cabaret, as Strønen's stellar, shimmering drum work carefully creates nuance and magic at every turn, particularly in the hand drum and drumset centerpiece, "Everything Disappears II." (ECM)

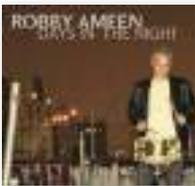


Ken Micallef

Robby Ameen *Days in the Night*

The latest from an Afro-Cuban ambassador with Lebanese roots—and molten lava pouring from his sticks.

Robby Ameen epitomizes a true connection between the fire of Afro-Cuban and the urban swing of jazz. Every track on *Days in the Night* bores a sanctified Latin assault through the brain. As clave spills forth from Ameen and his percussion troupe, the drummer lays down exciting, tension-filled grooves within fevered arrangements. Though Ameen's drumset language is incredibly modern, his arrangements draw on the complicated tug-of-war established in the greatest Afro-Cuban bands. Through tumultuous ensemble playing, scalding accents, and riotous grooves, Ameen slaps the music like a maniac in "Crowded Hour," "Up Jumped Spring," and the sax/drum battle "Funkguanco." (Twoandfour)



Ken Micallef

Román Díaz *Ló Dá Fún Batá*

An exuberant celebration of living roots from a master of batá drums.

Although percussionist Román Díaz has frequently explored progressive Afro-Cuban jazz sounds, this U.S. solo debut is a no-frills gem grounded in deep tradition. It's a wise choice, as Díaz is revered as a performing archivist of the rhythms of Yoruba sacred drum ceremonies and their diasporic manifestations. The Cuban master (a New Yorker since 1999) was a mentor to star percussionist Pedrito Martínez, who produced the disc and plays batá throughout the set. Additional batá artists include Diego López, Clemente Medina, and Sandy Pérez. The percussionists are accompanied by interpretations of Yoruba chants from a wonderful five-piece female choir. Díaz introduces tracks with spoken "oracle poetry," ushering in songs of praise for the orishas (spirits) of sacred Yoruba practices. Batá were intended to imitate the human voice, and that quality lilts through these drummers' expressive phrasings, loping rhythms, and overlapping feels. It gets in your bones. (Motéma)



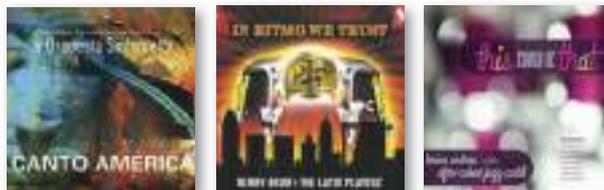
Jeff Potter

More Afro-Cuban Jazz Sounds

Michael Spiro and Wayne Wallace *Canto América* Henry Brun and the Latin Jazz Player

In Ritmo We Trust

Brian Andres and the Afro-Cuban Jazz Cartel *This Could Be That*



Ace percussionist Michael Spiro and trombonist Wayne Wallace continue their longtime collaboration with the inception of the large ensemble La Orquesta Sinfonietta. Their sweeping and gorgeous *Canto América* is a highly ambitious tapestry weaving together Afro-Cuban rhythmic/stylistic history. The core band is augmented with strings, woodwinds, and vocals as well as expanded brass and percussion sections. Never unwieldy in its largeness, the music is focused, unpretentious, and heartfelt. Highly rewarding. (Patois)

San Antonio institution Henry Brun and the Latin Jazz Player celebrate their twenty-fifth anniversary with *In Ritmo We Trust*. Percussionist Brun and company wield a melodic, big-brass sound grounded in classic Latin dance-floor styles. Expect curve balls too, like a raucous cover of "Honky Tonk." (RER)

From the San Francisco Bay Area comes the third release from Brian Andres and the Afro-Cuban Jazz Cartel. Drummer Andres launches *This Could Be That's* mambo opener, "Amyable," with a blistering solo, setting the tone for the throttling energy ahead. The tight unit frequently spices its pan-Caribbean grooves with a funky edge. Andres's fiery drumming is bolstered by a percussion dream team: the core octet features Javier Cabanillas and Omar Ledezma Jr., while special guests include Alex Acuña, Michael Spiro, Louie Romero, John Santos, and Calixto Oviedo. Stratospheric grooving. (Bacalao)

Jeff Potter



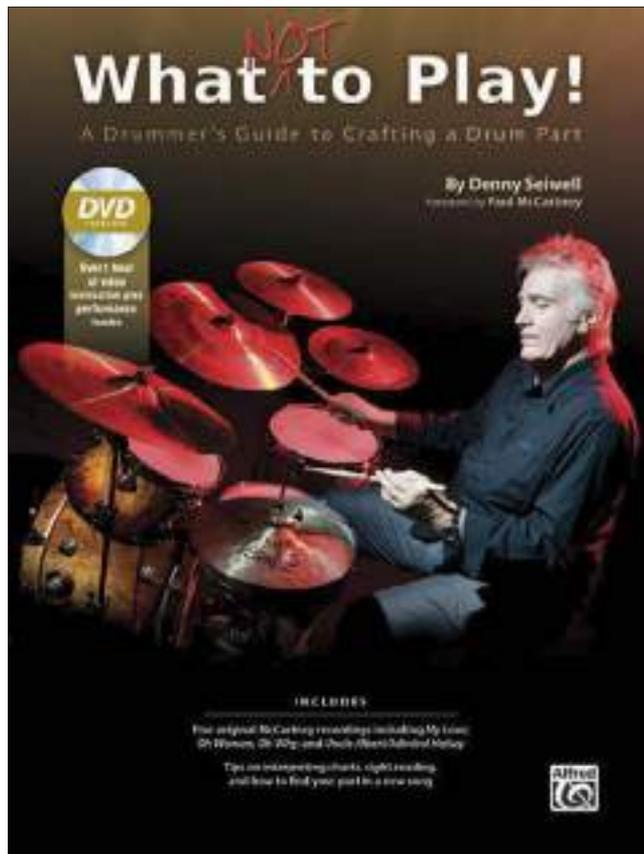
Denny Seiwell's *What Not to Play!*

by Bob Girouard

In retrospect, Denny Seiwell might not seem like an obvious choice to be Paul McCartney's drummer at the dawn of the ex-Beatle's solo career. After all, in the '60s Seiwell cut his teeth in New York City studios and jazz clubs, rather than in the typical haunts of Swinging London. But McCartney had his reasons for bringing Seiwell into his new band, Wings. "Not only was Denny a red-hot drummer," McCartney told this writer in 2009, "he could play anything. Plus he had a positive attitude." Seiwell subsequently appeared on the McCartney albums *Ram* (1971), *Wild Life* (1971), and *Red Rose Speedway* (1973), as well as on the famous title track to the 1973 James Bond film, *Live and Let Die*. In 1975 Denny relocated to Los Angeles, where he worked on TV commercials and movie soundtracks and backed Astrud Gilberto, Deniece Williams, and Billy Joel, among others. More recently he's played with the Beatles tribute band the Boys That Knew the Lads, as well as the Texas-style blues-rock horn group Route #66. "I've had a pretty glorious career," the drummer says, then adds with a chuckle, "and for a guy who's seventy-two, I'm busy enough."

Seiwell recently authored the instructional book *What Not to Play!* (Alfred Music, \$19.99), which he calls his legacy statement. "Everybody knows what to play," he explains, "but when you graduate to the studios, it's knowing what *not* to play that makes you popular. I wanted to get drummers to think a little more about really getting inside the music and not playing so ordinary. In other words, understanding how to play outside the box, but also musically. Some of the students and professionals I've shown this method to have come away astounded by the quick results—they were flying!"

The book begins with the twenty-six essential rudiments broken down into nine fundamental stroke groupings. With emphasis on strengthening the nondominant hand, it offers ways to ease execution, allowing drummers to play what comes to mind more quickly and accurately. An accompanying DVD features Seiwell running through hit tracks as well as some lesser-known gems, all of which he originally recorded. "It's always about the song and the music," he says, "and never about what I can play to make myself look good. Every song has a pulse, and this is where the rhythm sits. Your job is to find it and create a rhythmic accompaniment that enhances the song."



Watching Seiwell smoothly transitioning through the verses, bridges, and choruses of McCartney staples like "Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey," "My Love," and "Another Day" provides valuable insight to players who are serious about optimizing their capabilities in the studio or live. Selections are preceded by brief intros in which Seiwell describes how he approaches each section, with particular emphasis on musicality. "Many times your job is to let the music breathe," Denny stresses, "meaning stay out of the way."

Study Suggestions

Tempo: Of the multi-sectional "Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey," Seiwell says, "Contrary to popular thought, we didn't break up that song into three different tempos and then edit it together; we did it in one take. The key is remembering what the tempos are going to be, and when the change comes you have to have your stuff together and play it with authority."

Dynamics: "My dynamic concept comes from thinking musically rather than in

terms of grooves. Yes, the groove is what makes my drumming musical, but it's walking a fine line if that's all you've got. There are some guys who are technically great but sound like a machine. If you have a musical background, you approach it from a different angle."

Transitioning from open to closed strokes: "When you start out with an open roll, as it gets faster, what usually happens is you hear the downstroke and

the bounce. Good drummers, especially classically trained ones, play this so evenly it sounds like a machine gun. There is a point where the open [double-stroke] roll becomes closed. That point is where it goes into a press roll. But if you can manage to not break it up, you can hear it without a break in it. When I teach a new student that has difficulty with rolling, I will have them go soft-loud, soft-loud, alternating hands, and as it gets faster it evens out."



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—Matt Halpern of Periphery

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2015 Guitar Center Drum-Off Grand Finals

Text by John Martinez
Photos by Alex Solca

This past January 16, Guitar Center held its twenty-seventh annual Drum-Off Grand Finals at Club Nokia in downtown Los Angeles. Competitors laid down plenty of flashy fills, blurred beats, and limb-stretching independence, but it was Tony Taylor Jr., an eighteen-year-old from Matteson, Illinois, who took the crown. "I'm shocked, overwhelmed, super excited, and ready for what the future holds," Taylor tells *MD*. Runners-up included Jonathan Burks from North Little Rock, Arkansas; Luis Burgos Jr. from Brooklyn, New York; Hilario Bell from Miami, Florida; and Brandon Zackey from Murrieta, California.

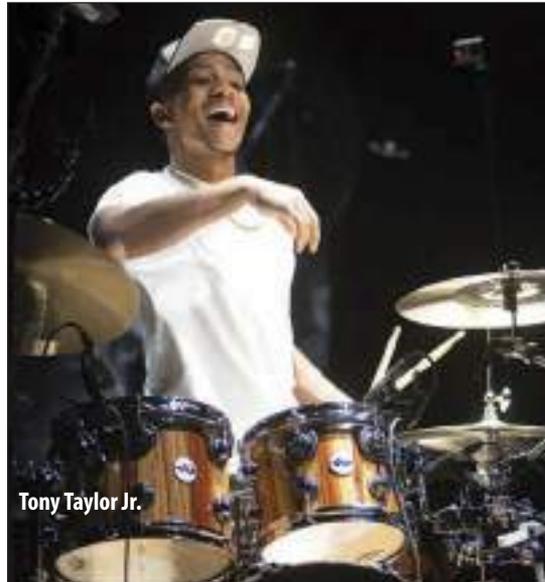
The five finalists were chosen from more than 5,000 drummers who competed in over 1,000 local competitions. Prize packages included cash, gear, endorsement deals, and more. Finalists gave a five-minute performance for a who's who panel of celebrity judges that included Steve Ferrone, Matt Garstka, Nisan Stewart, George "Spanky" McCurdy, Ced Mitchell, Dave Elitch, Mike Reid, Jim Riley, Gerald Hayward, Cora Dunham, Tony Royster Jr., and Glen Sobel. Gregg Bissonette hosted the event.

"I always refer to this as the Grammys for drummers," Hayward tells *MD*. "No other instrument does this. The drum community is very together and powerful. It's like a fraternity. This always feels like it's at a grand scale, even though it's at the club."

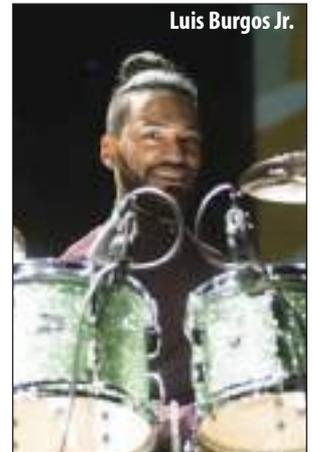
Dunham adds, "The camaraderie and the continuous building of relationships—that's what the drum world is about. Communication is what drumming is about, globally. It's the universal language. As a former winner and now a judge, it's different to be in that seat and have that many sets of eyes looking at you and to still perform excellently and say something in a short amount of time."

"It's funny we're standing here," Hayward continues, "because the year I performed was the same year that Cora won. She had a system. To watch everything go from then to now, it's a whole different dynamic. They didn't have the pads and stuff back then, it was just playing drums. You had to be creative with your drums."

Royster offers advice for future competitors. "For the drummers competing, or for any up-and-coming drummer—stay calm," he says. "You have the opportunity to see so many contest winners and what they did to win, it's great to have it right in front of you so you can learn from it. [Beyond that]



Tony Taylor Jr.



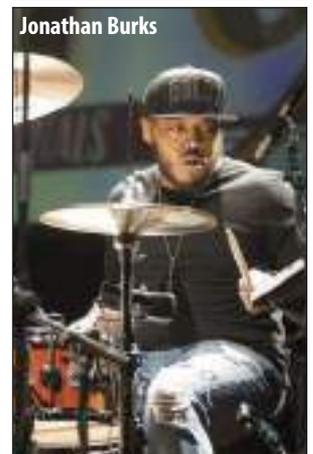
Luis Burgos Jr.



Hilario Bell



Brandon Zackey



Jonathan Burks

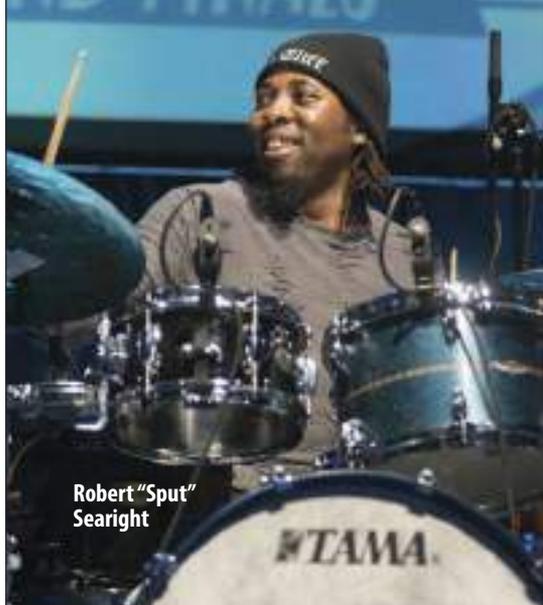
try to be as versatile as possible. Sometimes less is more. A clean presentation and your showmanship really help you get points. And remember to stay focused and have fun."

Sobel, a former Drum-Off winner, explains the feeling of competing under such high-stakes. "I always tell this to people—it's the most high-pressure gig I've ever done," he says. "You're not warmed up, you have to play on a kit that's not yours in a room full of very judgmental drummers, and then you have judges assessing you. I remember thinking, *If I don't win, I'm never doing this again because this is too much*. Fortunately, I did win. It's become a much bigger event now. They'll perform under even higher pressure because of the filming. It's become a bigger deal, and

millions of people watch it on YouTube. I have to hand it to the five guys tonight."

Gil Sharone opened the performances with members of Team Sleep and help from Miguel Happoldt (Sublime, Perro Bravo). "We did two standards that I love—'Poor Man Dub,' and the 'Cuss Cuss' riddim," Sharone says. "We dubbed it out, and there were a lot of varieties of grooves and lots of influences. I wanted to tailor this set to feature different aspects of my playing. And only having twenty minutes to do it in, I didn't want to spread myself out thin. I knew when I put this group of musicians together, what [could] happen *would* happen. I wanted to focus on what's unique to me and do me."

Both studio legend Jim Keltner and the



Robert "Sput" Searight



Mike Mangini



Gil Sharone



Clyde Stubblefield

late percussionist and drumstick manufacturer Vic Firth were inducted into Guitar Center's RockWalk at the event. Remo Belli of Remo Percussion spoke and presented a short video on Firth. "He was genuine and sincere," Belli says, "and if anyone was going to write the book about doing it right, that was Vic Firth."

Next up, Mike Mangini played along to half of the Dream Theater song "Illumination Theory" and a track from heavy metal band Annihilator, and closed with an improvised eight-minute solo. Then Taylor Hawkins and the Coattail Riders loosened up the crowd



Taylor Hawkins

with originals and a few of Hawkins' favorite covers that feature singing drummers, including Phil Collins' "Easy Lover" and the Eagles' "Witchy Woman." Robert "Sput" Searight and Nate Werth closed out the performances with a twenty-five minute set that featured an expanded version of their Ghost Note duo. For a finale, Searight introduced legendary James Brown drummer Clyde Stubblefield. "I wanted to do a tribute to him," Searight explains. "A lot of us wouldn't be doing what we're doing today if it wasn't for him. Break beats and all of that stuff came from his one groove."

Among the prizes Tony Taylor took home for winning this year's Drum-Off were \$25,000 in cash, a Roland TD-30KV drumset and SPD-SX sampling pad, a set of cymbals of Taylor's choice, and a high-end drumset from either DW, Tama, Pearl, Gretsch, or Yamaha. Past Drum-Off winners have gone on to play for artists such as Beyoncé, Jay Z, the Mars Volta, and Alice Cooper.

Scouts Honor

A new film takes viewers deep inside the life, and craft, of a marching brotherhood.

Drum corps flies somewhat below the pop-culture radar, but it enjoys an international audience of devoted followers. Among the things that make the activity unique is its character-building component. Beyond the requirement of incredible musical facility, corps drumming presents the real challenge to every participant to become a better person, due to its financial, physical, and mental demands. Those who participate give up their summers and pay tuition to be part of a grand, and grueling, tradition. And those who accept the challenge have only a small window of opportunity to succeed, as players on the competitive DCI (Drum Corps International) circuit must be between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one.

First-time filmmakers Mac Smith and Tom Tollefsen have issued an acclaimed, award-winning documentary that offers a rare behind-the-scenes glimpse of what it takes and means to be part of a top drum corps. In the process they capture the sonic intensity of drum corps and some of the most stunning live footage of corps performances to date. And by focusing on an individual from each of the three sections of the corps—battery, horn line, and color guard—the film puts a human face on an activity whose goal of military precision by definition places the performance of the group above all else.

Smith and Tollefsen first met in 1995 during their time as marching members of the Madison Scouts, one of two all-male DCI corps, along with the Cavaliers. (The Scouts were founded by a Boy Scouts troop in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1938.) In the film they address this fact, stating that teaching young men how to become proper gentlemen is integral to the purpose of the corps. The theme of brotherhood is a constant throughout, as the chief characters, Joe, Hunter, and Brandon, face their share of trials and tribulations, testing the bonds of camaraderie.

The movie offers enough sonic vignettes to whet the appetite of the musically minded, but the individual stories connect a broad audience on an emotional level and enhance the appreciation of those who can endure the rigors of the drum-corps lifestyle. Just as not all sports fans are athletes, there's something that even laypeople can easily appreciate about the amount of hard work, dedication, and determination necessary to achieve a certain

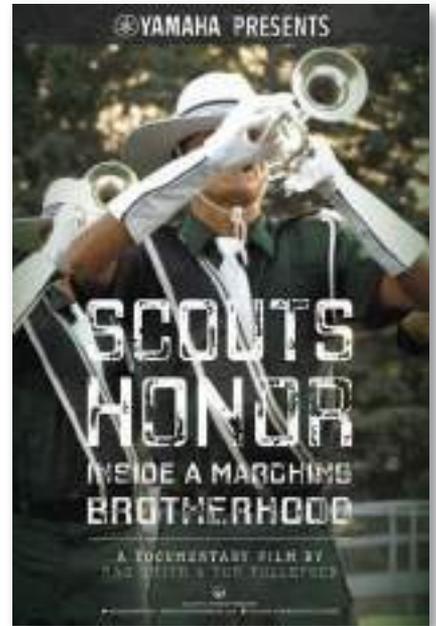
professionalism in drum corps. "I don't think it takes a musician to understand that these guys are performing at a level that's a lot higher than your average marching band," director/producer Tollefsen says. "Beyond the music, there's both an athletic and competitive aspect to drum corps."

When you watch the performances and listen to the insights of the three main characters, it's hard not to conclude that they're wise beyond their years, to the degree that you often forget you're watching a collective of people just entering adulthood. And the activity certainly does seem to prepare an individual for the challenges of "real life" after school. "I don't think I would have ended up where I am in my career if it wasn't for my drum corps," Smith says. "Drum corps teaches you how to work with people. You'll have such an upper hand on life challenges after coming out of drum corps."

"The [participants] are all hard workers," Tollefsen adds, "driven, disciplined, and goal oriented. You have to have that mentality in order to succeed in that world. You sacrifice a lot, and it's a commitment. Drum corps helped me realize I could accomplish things I didn't think I could. You find out what's deep down inside you. The lessons you learn are ones that you're going to take with you for the rest of your life. It may seem like lip service when you're twenty-one, but you realize later how true it is."

The wonderful recordings of the Scouts' performances are also stars of the film. Smith and Tollefsen turned to coproducer John "JT" Torrijos to be the official recording engineer for the film. Shotgun mics were used to track zones of the field, and surround microphones captured the crowd. The front ensemble of percussion instruments was miked as well. And postproduction included more than a year spent mixing the footage to ensure that audiences feel that they have front-row seats for the events on screen.

"It's an incredibly dynamic activity to capture, and it took a lot of trial and error to get it right," Smith says. "We like to think they're some of the best audio recordings of the activity that have ever been captured, which is why we're pushing so hard for people to see the film in a movie theater. It provides the ultimate experience sound-wise, leaving audiences feeling like they were sitting on the fifty-yard line and making the hair on the back of their necks stand up." **David Ciauro**



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Slingerland Radio King



For Tucson, Arizona's Glenn Velardi, a complete rewrap shaped this vintage Slingerland into a fresh setup with a sixty-year-old tone. "I got this kit from another drummer who loved it but traded it to me so that the drums would be played out," he says. "I work with a blues and swing band, and we play two to four times a week. So these drums are used and seen. I believe it to be a 1947 Radio King set. There are no dates stamped anywhere, but I estimated the date by looking up the badge online and in *The Slingerland Book* [by Rob Cook].

"The kit is a 14x24 bass drum, 9x13 rack tom, 16x16 floor tom, and 7x14 snare," Velardi continues. "Besides the one extra hole for the bass drum cymbal mount, the drums are untouched. When I received them, they'd been recovered in white marine pearl, but the job was poor, so they were looking a little rough. After using them for about a year, I decided to rewrap them. I'd already settled on vintage white marine pearl, but while ordering the finish on the phone with Andrea [Weyant] at Precision Drum Company, I happened to mention sea green pearl. I believe it was available from Slingerland from the late '20s to early '30s. When Andrea heard me mention it, she said she might be able to track some down. Lo and behold, she did! Thanks to Andrea and all the folks at

Precision—they were very helpful."

Velardi took care with the wrap in order to preserve the kit's vintage sound. "I used the glue method instead of tape, and I'm very happy with the results. The glue method is a process whereby the covering is completely glued to the shell; the tape method just seals the wrap at the seams. Although it's much more labor intensive and challenging, it produces a far better result in both sound and looks. It'll also last a lifetime if done correctly.

"The drums sound wonderful!" Velardi continues. "The sound is big and warm with just the right overtones. Nothing sounds like sixty-year-old wood. That's why all the new manufacturers are making retro-sounding kits these days. It gets lots of compliments and sounds as good as it looks."

Velardi dove into this kit's makeover as a novice. "I've worked on many kits before but never did a complete rewrap," he explains. "There is a great YouTube series that was very helpful. The job took about forty hours, and it was very challenging. I really enjoyed the process. I've since been approached by two other drummers to rewrap their kits. Who knows, maybe I have a little cottage industry right under my nose!"

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



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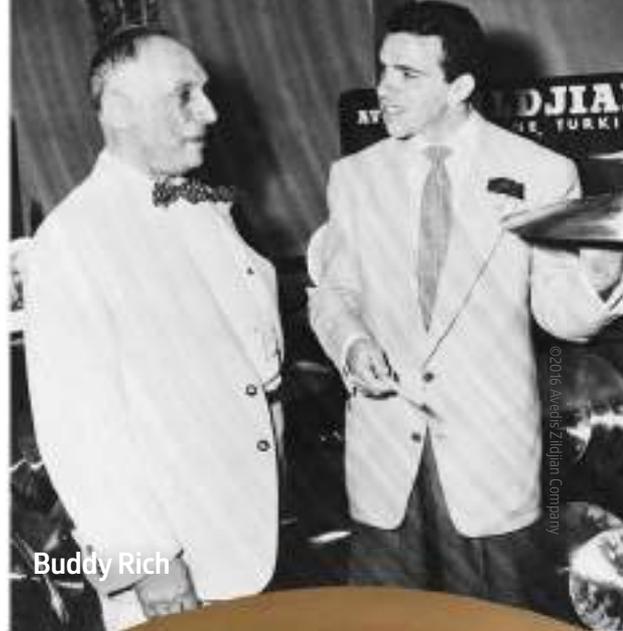
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