16 WAYS TO SHAPE YOUR SNARE TONE

CHRIS DAVE THE GAME CHANGER

GUNS N' ROSES' FRANK FERRER

AT THE DRIVE-IN'S TONY HAJJAR • WEEN'S CLAUDE COLEMAN
JAZZ FIREBRAND JONATHAN BARBER • SUM 41'S FRANK ZUMMO
PAPA JO JONES' CLASSIC FILL • ALEX VAN HALEN GEARS UP

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34 Chris Dave
“I try whatever I can think of. There’s no limit on anything.”

The drummer refuses to commit to one kit setup—there are simply too many ideas he wants to explore. What he does commit to without fail is the music—just ask Adele, Robert Glasper, Meshell Ndegeocello, Kenny Garrett, or anyone else whose work he’s elevated sky high. by Ken Micallef

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Adapting to Change

While I worked on a piece in this month’s News section about the latest Radian record, On Dark Silent Off, MD editorial director Adam Budofsky dropped one of the band’s earlier CDs, 2004’s Juxtaposition, on my desk. Checking it out was somewhat surprising. Normally tons of albums come into the office, and there’s no shortage of music waiting in our emails from around the industry. It’s not necessarily the idea of getting a new record that’s unexpected. But checking out the physical copy of this particular CD, which was released over a decade ago, was a bit of a trip.

The CD’s art and marketing resembled the types of albums I probably would’ve randomly picked up after scouring record store bins back around the time it was released. Overcome with nostalgia, I thought of the countless hours spent searching at my favorite music stores, most of which are thankfully still around.

I also realized that I haven’t been to a record store with the frequency or unrelenting urge to search that I used to have in probably far too long. Today I can say that other than sampling physical albums that come into the office and the flood of advanced digital copies we receive, I almost exclusively check out new music by using a streaming service. And yes, although the service is much less expensive than picking up physical copies of albums, I still pay for it.

Thinking about the change in accessing music, questions arose that I haven’t necessarily been able to resolve. Music as an art form has been around far longer than some of the current mediums or channels that deliver it. What is considered music as an art form in today’s world? An album? Notation? A YouTube video? Are songs finished once they’ve been recorded? Or do they evolve? Or is music the live performance art that was around before the printing press, record companies, and the Internet? It seems as the changes occur, so come new ways of delivering, and monetizing, the art.

Regardless, in an artistic industry that has arguably taken one of the hardest hits by the relatively recent changes in technology, there requires a certain adaptation to survive as a musician. And this month’s issue features plenty of artists who’ve embraced change. Check out the story on Tony Hajjar, who had to make adjustments while getting back into the drum seat with At the Drive In. Or Ween’s Claude Coleman, who’s finding plenty of work and inspiration after a substantial move. And the constant search for change that drives this month’s cover artist, Chris Dave, arguably defines his career. Check out their stories, and much more this month, and enjoy the issue!

Willie Rose
Associate Editor
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October Issue
I was lucky enough to meet Shannon Forrest backstage with Toto a week before the October 2016 issue hit the newsstands. What a great show, and Shannon handled the entire Toto catalog like the seasoned pro that he is.

Billy Amendola’s article on Steven Wolf was on point as well. I’ve been a big fan of Wolf since his early days with the late Hiram Bullock. I found it interesting how he took to programming early in his career—a wise move, as we can all see. I also love Russ Miller’s Concepts articles. He always offers pertinent information, whether it’s about drumming, the music business, or general life skills.

It’s interesting that Forrest, Wolf, and Miller all talked about big recording studios becoming virtually nonexistent. All three drummers embraced this and took matters into their own hands by building home studios.

Finally, I’m so glad I grew up in an exciting time for music and drumming. I’m referring to Adam Budofsky’s awesome “Great ‘80s Drum Tracks” article. For drummers who aren’t familiar with drumming. I’m referring to Adam Budofsky’s awesome “Great ‘80s Drum Performances” article. For drummers who aren’t familiar with building home studios.

Metallica’s Ride the Lightning
When I looked at the cover of the September 2016 issue, I was very excited to see Modern Drummer reviewing the iconic Metallica album Ride the Lightning. To me, this album is Metallica’s big step into claiming what would become their trademark style and sound. I thought the article was very respectable until I got to this sentence: “Side one (remember those?) concludes with ‘Fade to Black,’ which was then considered a power ballad and was accompanied by cries of ‘sellout!’ by hardcore metal fans at the time.” I couldn’t disagree more.

I saw Metallica on their Ride the Lightning tour in early 1985 with Armored Saint and W.A.S.P. When Metallica hit the stage, they were so tight that it felt like bullets were hitting my chest. I’ve never experienced anything like that, before or after. Their stage image was also stripped down to just instruments, amps, and denim. Metallica proved to everyone then that you could have great metal without skin-tight leather, hairspray, and lipstick. They were nothing but raw power. They also proved that power doesn’t have to come from overblown distortion, and that you could have a good melody in metal too.

Some of the best riffs on this album, I believe, are at the end of “Fade to Black.” I don’t remember anyone crying “sellout!” to this song back then. Rather, I think metal fans saw what these guys were achieving, admired it, and welcomed the change.

Thanks for reviewing what is such an important album for Metallica. I look forward to more Encore reviews in the future.

Marc Churchill

Dropped Beat
On Page 57 of the October 2016 issue, Liberty DeVitto was incorrectly credited with the drum performance on the Billy Joel song “Captain Jack.” The drummer on this song is Rhys Clark.

I use both and teach both. Matched grip makes the most sense because it’s applicable for many percussion instruments, such as vibraphone or timpani. As a former student of J. Burns Moore, I started out with traditional grip. Some of us who began this way have successfully developed equal facility with either grip. I find myself using traditional grip for jazz, blues, and brushes. It also seems natural to use matched grip for Latin, funk, and rock.

John Lester

Both. Matched allows me to get more power and speed, and I use traditional when I want more finesse and musicality. I use traditional for rudiments and sparse playing. Matched comes in handy for hard-hitting rimshots and open-handed playing. For me, it doesn’t necessarily depend on the genre I’m playing, but rather the musical effect I’m going for and whatever makes the drum part comfortable. I’ve used matched for soft jazz and I’ve used traditional in heavy metal.

Ian Dubson

I use traditional about ninety percent of the time. I get a different timbre out of the drum and I play better. I wasn’t good at rudiments when using matched grip. When I switched, I could focus on each hand individually, and my rudiment skills skyrocketed. My kit playing also improved because my hands stay out of the way of each other.

Zach Ellingson

I use both. I learned traditional in the early ’60s while focusing on rudiments and jazz. I started developing matched grip as I was doing far more rock and funk gigs and my kit got larger. I still prefer traditional for concert snare and jazz playing. I teach matched grip to beginners, but if they want to learn traditional for a school drumline, I gladly teach them.

Pat Dilanni

Want your voice heard? Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and keep an eye out for next month’s question.

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Monte Yoho /// The Outlaws’ Legacy Live

Most self-respecting fans of Southern rock from the ’70s and ’80s could recall the Outlaws’ Bring It Back Alive fighting for space with the Allmans and Skynyrd cassettes in the glove compartment of their cars. The 1978 double album, featuring the quintessential twenty-one-minute version of the band’s signature tune, “Green Grass and High Tides,” was the ideal way to experience the Florida Guitar Army’s epic workouts and ear-worm choruses, and provided evidence as to why the Outlaws were chosen to open arena shows for the Who and the Stones. Today the band, which finds original guitarist/singer Henry Paul and founding drummer Monte Yoho joined by a serious group of genre vets, has returned to the winning format with the two-CD Legacy Live set, and has clearly lost none of its original charm.

One difference that owners of the earlier release will notice, however, is that Yoho is handling all the drum duties, whereas on Bring It Back Alive he was joined by the recently added second drummer David Dix. “At that time we seemed to be evolving almost on a nightly basis,” Yoho tells MD. “We were also being influenced by the groups we toured with that were using two drummers, like Charlie Daniels, the Allman Brothers, and the Doobie Brothers. David and I had to decide what songs to play unison on, what songs to write specific parts on, and what songs we would play individually while the other played some form of percussion. There was a lot of experimenting.

‘I can tell you this,’ Yoho adds, ‘when you look over at another drummer playing with you at full force, it’s like no other feeling in the world.’”

Adam Budofsky

Martin Brandlmayr /// Radian’s On Dark Silent Off

Since the late ’90s, the Vienna-based electronica pioneers Radian have been redefining the adaptation of digital music in an acoustic setting, thanks in part to the sonic explorations of drummer Martin Brandlmayr. The products of these curiosities abound on the band’s newest release, where in some cases one might hear the scratching of a snare head or the rattling of a marble on a crotale. To refine his sonic palette, Brandlmayr approaches the drumset from an unconventional mindset.

“I learned a lot from the architecture of analog synthesizers—breaking down sounds to their basic parts as white/pink noise and waveforms;” the drummer explains. “In the early Radian years, I thought of myself as something like a sequencer and the drums as a complex oscillator/effect/modulator unit. In Radian’s context, playing the drums is more like real-time programming and arranging than free-flowing playing—constructing sounds in time. How can I create white noise on the drums? How can I modulate a sound of a cymbal? Turning on and off a rattling screw on the cymbal or engaging the snares on the snare drum was like adding noise oscillators on a synth.”

And it’s not just electronic music that fuels this search for sounds. “I also took a lot from my experience as a cello player,” Brandlmayr says. “I played cello for eight years when I was a child. When I switched to the drums I missed the tonal possibilities of shaping the sounds—the possibilities that you have by bowing strings. So I started all this scratching and brushwork, and I searched for tonal aspects on the drums. This also brought me to all these microscopic and quiet territories where I was exploring all kinds of hidden tones and sounds.”

Willie Rose

More New Releases

The Band The Last Waltz fortieth-anniversary editions (Levon Helm, Richard Manuel, Ringo Starr, Dennis St. John)

The Neal Morse Band The Similitude of a Dream (Mike Portnoy)

Bon Jovi This House Is Not For Sale (Tico Torres)

Full Scale Riot Empower (Evan Rossiter)

Graham Bonnet Band The Book (Mark Zonder)

Anagnorisis Peripeteia (Cody McCoy)

Lettuce Mt. Crushmore (Adam Deitch)

Out Now
On Tour

Benny Greb is using Vic Firth drumsticks.

WHO'S PLAYING WHAT

James Rexrode

Jamiel Blake (Sam Smith), Derek Mixon (Chris Stapleton), Bob Knight (U.K. studio), Devon Taylor (Justin Bieber), Vinny Mauro (Motionless in White), David Chiverton (Cris Cab), Chris Reeve (Filter), and Joe Clegg (Ellie Goulding) have joined the Vic Firth artist roster.

JOHN SHERMAN WITH RED FANG

Red Fang, the hard-rock/metal powerhouse that, refreshingly, doesn't take itself too seriously, is currently touring in support of its new album, Only Ghosts. On stage, slammer John Sherman throws in blazing fills between pounding, no-frills beats to power the group’s driving riffs. And although each show would seem like a workout, the drummer finds that the best prep for a tour can sometimes be diving right in.

“No matter how hard I try to replicate a live show in a rehearsal setting, I’ve never been able to do it,” Sherman says. “There’s something about the adrenaline rush of being on stage in front of real people that pushes me to another level. So even though I try to condition my body, I only really get into the groove once we’re actually out there doing it. I’m pretty sore after the first few shows, but I get used to it pretty quickly. You have to stay hydrated and stretch.”

Red Fang’s fun spirit, exhibited by some of the group’s more ludicrous YouTube music videos, translates directly into Sherman’s playing. “I’m not a very ‘smart’ drummer—I don’t achieve maximum efficiency like the best drummers do,” John explains. “But for me it’s not about being the best drummer. It’s about having a good time, and I have a good time beating the hell out of my drums. I guess I’m a bit more primal than some drummers.”

Willie Rose

More with Monte Yoho, Martin Brandlmayr and John Sherman at moderndrummer.com

Also on the Road

Josh Null with Lord of War
Brandon Park with Allegaeon
Gonzo Sandoval with Armored Saint
Brian Zink with Battlecross
Jason Roeder with Neurosis

WHO’S PLAYING WHAT

Sammy Merendino (Cyndi Lauper) is playing Zildjian cymbals.

Jamiel Blake (Sam Smith), Derek Mixon (Chris Stapleton), Bob Knight (U.K. studio), Devon Taylor (Justin Bieber), Vinny Mauro (Motionless in White), David Chiverton (Cris Cab), Chris Reeve (Filter), and Joe Clegg (Ellie Goulding) have joined the Vic Firth artist roster.
Doug “Cosmo” Clifford Honored in Musical Instrument Museum Exhibit

Doug Clifford’s iconic 1969 Camco drumset is featured in a new exhibit at the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. Clifford played the kit at Woodstock, and it was used on every CCR album with the exception of the band’s first two records. Videos will accompany the exhibit, including vintage footage from the Johnny Cash Show, a clip of Clifford setting up the kit at MIM and discussing the state of drum hardware in the latter ’60s, and recent concert shots. The drums will reside in MIM’s Artist Gallery, sharing company with the piano John Lennon used on “Imagine”, guitars played by Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, and Carlos Santana; and many other notable instruments. The drumset will be on display through 2017.

Thomas Lang Online Drum School

Drummer and educator Thomas Lang recently debuted his subscription-based online school, Thomas Lang’s Drum Universe. Hundreds of transcriptions, video lessons, contests, and play-along tracks are updated and added to the site monthly, and the platform is compatible with all desktop and mobile devices. Drummers of all levels can communicate directly with Lang via forum, and Lang will react to students’ requests and respond with personalized content. Students can also upload their own videos for Lang to evaluate, correct, and critique. For more information, visit thomaslangsdrumuniverse.com.

Sabian Scholarship Winner

Sabian congratulates Yang Chen of Toronto on winning the 2016 Sabian/PASIC Scholarship. The award offers full-time Canadian percussion majors an all-expense-paid trip to the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, a ticket to the PASIC Hall of Fame reception, a PASICT-shirt, and a one-year membership to PAS. Chen, who has taught at Toronto’s Mill House School of Music, is currently a student at the University of Toronto.

Zildjian Promotes Neil Larrivee to Vice President of Education and Drumstick Product Development

The Avedis Zildjian Company has announced that Neil Larrivee has been promoted to vice president of education and drumstick product development. In this new role, Larrivee will bring the Zildjian and Vic Firth education teams together into a single, fully integrated department and will continue to lead product development for Vic Firth—and Zildjian-branded drumsticks. Larrivee has over thirty-five years of music teaching experience, most notably in marching with the Cadets drum and bugle corps. He was part of four Drum Corps International Championships and four High Percussion awards, resulting in his recent induction into the Cadets Hall of Fame and the Winter Guard International Hall of Fame. “I’m honored to take on this new position that will serve an enhanced base of educators, artists, and students,” Larrivee says. “With the great staff we have in place, I know we’ll move forward to new heights of achievement.”
Main Drag Music
Williamsburg, Brooklyn

In the ten years since the independent shop moved to its current location, partner/drum department head John Fell has seen the neighborhood go from hipster heaven to a study in the pros and cons of gentrification. But the unique floor vibe he’s maintained from the beginning has assured the store’s reputation as a must-see jewel of New York City drum retail. Here Fell shares the story of his unique business in his own words.

“I slogged at making a career as a drummer. One day I ruptured my eardrums and had to stop playing. So I started thinking about other things to do. Then my friend Carl, who started Main Drag in 1997, was moving the shop to its third location in Williamsburg, which at the time was a real crucible—a million good bands, some that were becoming fairly well known. It was common to see people with stick bags and cymbal bags walking around. And it was still cheap.

When we opened, vintage drums were plentiful and in demand, so we decided to focus on American drums like Rogers, Slingerland, Gretsch, and Leedy. Now we have Sakae on the floor and we sell a lot of Roland electronics. But the place was born on the idea of giving vintage American drums their due, and we’re still really behind lines like Ludwig and Gretsch. The Gretsch factory used to be down the street from here—in fact, we had Fred Gretsch in to do a walking tour of the neighborhood. When we got Gretsch drums here it was exciting for us.

At first we thought it would be all these proto-hipsters, but jazz guys came in as well. A lot of Latin guys from the south side came in too. And we weren’t a big-box store, which was really important to a lot of people.

We wanted to do it our own way. I’d designed exhibits for museums like the Smithsonian for a while. It’s similar to retail in that it’s about the display of objects in a way that people will enjoy and pay attention to. The ceilings here are twenty-two feet high, so we built a big drum wall, which is something that virtually everyone who comes in has something to say about.

When I came into this business I’d done a great deal of wood and metal work. I’d modify my own drums and cut bearing edges for me and my friends. So when I set up the shop, I made space to do repairs. Eric Kalb [Deep Banana Blackout] and Homer Steinweiss [Sharon Jones and the Dap Kings] trusted me with a lot of their gear, and I prototyped stuff with Jojo Mayer, who’s brought some incredibly interesting projects in here, high-level engineering projects that have been a real test.

The one thing that we knew would set us apart was a very specific, personal, relaxed sort of service. We’ve had guys come to work here who’ve started off too pushy, and we’ve had to dial them down a bit.

In the ten years since we opened, many people have gotten priced out and moved east to East Williamsburg and Bushwick. Most of the people who move in now have money, so we’ve seen more hobbyists, fewer career musicians. We haven’t lost many of our pro customers, but we’ve gained a new crowd looking just to have fun.

Opening a music shop is not your big meal ticket. It’s a hard business to be in. Low margin, staggering overhead—especially in a neighborhood like this. But you get to help a lot of likeminded people with something that they can’t get in other places. And that’s a hugely rewarding feeling.

Interview by Adam Budofsky.
Photos by John Fell.
THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT.

And Every Length in Between.

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PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

DW
Collector’s Series Cherry/Mahogany Drumset
Deep, pure tones and ultimate clarity.
The Collector's Series is DW's flagship line, comprising a variety of single-species shell types (maple, cherry, and red oak) and hybrid mixtures, such as the poplar/maple Classics, the maple/gum Jazz, and the bamboo/birch Eco-X. Adding deeper- and darker-sounding mahogany to the mix, DW has created new shells that combine it with maple and cherry. We were sent a gorgeous glossy lacquered Collector's Series Cherry/Mahogany kit to review.

Art Lies in the Details
DW stands out in its attention to every detail of the drum-making process, from thoroughly researching how the grain direction of the wood plies affects timbre to developing some of the slickest and sturdiest hardware in the world. The result of such extensive R&D gives DW drums an incredibly high-end look as well as a very polished and pure sound.

Collector's Series Cherry/Mahogany shells are made with inner and outer plies of vertical-grain mahogany. Mahogany is one of the softer species used in drum building, so it tends to have increased warmth and a lower fundamental. DW accentuates those properties by cutting the laminates with the grain going vertically, which puts less tension in the wood and thus lowers the pitch even further. The cherry inner plies counterbalance the mahogany by providing additional volume headroom, increased attack, and a shorter sustain, while also complementing the warmth of the mahogany with a dark yet dense tone.

Collector's Series drums can be custom-ordered to any sizes from 8" to 28" in diameter, but our set came in a standard six-piece configuration with 8x10 and 9x12 rack toms, 12x14 and 14x16 floor toms, an 18x22 bass drum, and a 6.5x14 snare, all featuring standard chrome hardware. The toms and snare came with DW's True Hoops (2.3mm for the toms and 3.0mm for the snare). These hoops are a variation of the standard triple-flange variety with a fully rounded top edge that increases durability and produces denser-sounding rimshots. The rack toms have DW's STM mount, which is a low-profile design that suspends the shell from the lug casings to minimize choking and facilitate tuning and head changes.

The snare came with the super-smooth MAG magnetic throw-off, which releases silently from the side of the shell and features a knurled tension knob that's easy to adjust from either the on or off positions. The 3P butt plate has a three-position lever that allows you to toggle between different degrees of wire tension (very tight, medium, and very loose).

Each piece of hardware on Collector's Series kits is of DW's design and provides great durability and flexibility without being overly engineered or cumbersome. My favorite tweak is one that would likely go unnoticed without sitting down at the kit and making your first tuning adjustment, and that's the True Pitch 50 tension rod. These rods have a much tighter threading than more commonly used varieties (fifty per inch), which provides more precise tuning and expands the drum's range. True Pitch 50 rods also have a smooth and effortless feel, which helped make tuning these drums a quick-and-easy process.

Sound Is King
I've played a number of cherry and mahogany drums over the years, but never drums that feature both woods within the same shell, so I was quite curious to hear the results. From my experience, mahogany drums usually produce a deep, woofy, vintage-like tone, while cherry provides a denser and more focused (i.e., contemporary) sound.

The first thing I noticed about the Cherry/Mahogany toms was how much deeper and purer the fundamental notes sounded—at any tuning—when compared with other all-maple and maple/poplar drums. Even when I tuned the heads super-tight, the Cherry/Mahogany toms produced clean tones with a rich, focused pitch and no dissonant overtones. When I detuned the heads close to the wrinkling point, the drums sounded big and fat while retaining a clear, distinct note. This extended tuning range allowed for each drum to perform at least 2" larger than its size would suggest.

DW's Cherry/Mahogany toms also have a short but unencumbered sustain, which gives them exceptional clarity and cohesion from drum to drum. Tuning these toms was as easy as it gets. As long as I adjusted the lugs up or down evenly, every place I landed on sounded sweet.

The 18x22 Cherry/Mahogany bass drum fell right in line with the toms, offering a ton of low-end thump coupled with incredible punch and a relatively fast decay. Although capable of a wide range of sounds, the 6.5x14 Cherry/Mahogany snare shined brightest at high tunings, where the naturally deeper note of the mahogany and that's the True Pitch 50 tension rod. These provided some great low-end support beneath the incredibly articulate and dense "crack" of the cherry. DW has hit on something special with the new hybrid Cherry/Mahogany shell, one that provides a ridiculous amount of focused low-end, as well as all the clarity, consistency, and cutting power that a contemporary drummer could need.

Michael Dawson

Video Demo
moderndrummer.com
The Istanbul cymbal company was originally established by veteran cymbalsmiths Mehmet Tamdeger and Agop Tomurcuk to provide traditional-style Turkish cymbals that were made using centuries-old processes. When Agop passed away, the company split into two separate entities: Istanbul Mehmet and Istanbul Agop. Each boasts a dense catalog of top-quality instruments for a wide range of sounds, whether echoing classic designs or pushing the envelope with more contemporary concepts. Mehmet recently added two 22" rides to its Signature series, the Sahra and Kirkor, which balance the dark, nuanced sounds of traditional Turkish cymbals with the control and clarity required by today’s drummer. Let’s check them out.

**Sahra**

The 22" Sahra ride cymbal is medium-thin and has a dark, unlathed finish. The bow is randomly hammered with multiple layers of 1cm-wide marks. The bell has a slightly conical shape. This ride is designed to provide a low-pitched, dry, and controlled sound, which translates into clear, dark stick articulation and a pleasantly warm but contained wash. The bell has a rich, deep, and slightly integrated tone.

The Sahra ride is named after a famous desert in the Middle East, so we expected that this cymbal would have a super-dry sound. What surprised me, however, was how musical and versatile it proved to be. Yes, the decay is controlled, but it’s not a lifeless ride that’s all attack and no body. The Sahra has tons of personality, with rich, dark overtones, a woody attack, a very musical, deep-sounding bell, and decent crash capabilities.

I ended up using the Sahra as a primary ride on several medium-volume club gigs that required me to play everything from “Manic Depression” to “Tenor Madness,” and it sounded simply incredible in every style. I especially liked that I could crash it on the edge for a puff of impact, and then go right back to riding the bow without losing any clarity. The bell has a pleasingly clear but dark and integrated tone, and it was easy to control. Matt Chamberlain’s distinctive ride sound came to mind as I was testing the 22"
Sahra, which has a rare combination of dark, complex tones, clear articulation, and controlled sustain.

**Kirkor Küçükyan**
The 22" Kirkor Küçükyan ride is Istanbul Mehmet founder Mehmet Tamdeger’s tribute to one of the master craftsmen who taught him the ancient art of Turkish cymbal making in the 1950s. (Mehmet worked under the tutelage of Küçükyan as well as Kerop Zilcan at the Zildjian factory in Istanbul, Turkey.)

Like the Sahra, the Kirkor ride is medium-thin and has a dark, raw finish. It also features wide bands of lathing, which increase the wash and give the cymbal a very cool appearance. The randomly applied 1cm hammer marks on the Kirkor are a bit softer than they are on the Sahra, but the bell is identical.

The Kirkor ride is designed to provide dry, dark stick definition, warm, complex overtones, and a warm, smooth sustain. The raw bell provides a clearer tone for a touch of extra cut. The Kirkor isn’t as dry as the Sahra, but it has a similarly dark, rich, and articulate tone. It has additional sustain, which makes it less controlled while also allowing for a more fully developed crash.

The Kirkor and Sahra worked very well together in a simple two-cymbal setup for jazz, fusion, and classic funk/R&B situations, as well as for moderate-volume club dates and recording sessions. I preferred to use the Sahra as the primary ride, and the Kirkor was positioned in the crash position so I could hit it on the edge for big, bold accents or shift over to it when I needed a slightly wider ride sound with more dramatic undertones.

**Michael Dawson**

[Video Demo](moderndrummer.com)
DrumLite
LED System
Quick installation, easy connection, and huge visual impact.

Drummers Jeff Sevaldson and Joey Nesbitt established DrumLite in 2011 in an effort to pump up the visual appeal of the drumset. What they created is an easy-to-install LED system comprising RGB light strips with 3M foam-backed adhesive and a preconfigured plug-and-play cable snake that has connectors that fit through the vent holes.

The cable connects to a simple controller that allows you to select between eight static colors and six flashing and fading modes. You can also adjust the rate of the flash/fade, and the overall brightness can be dialed in from soft and subtle to bright and bold. A wireless remote is included so you can control the system from off stage or while sitting at the kit.

DrumLite custom builds each system to match the dimensions of your drumset. Rack toms from 6” to 13”, snares from 10” to 14”, floor toms from 14” to 18”, and bass drums from 18” to 28” can be accommodated. For our review set, we used a ’70s Ludwig Vistalite kit with 12” and 13” rack toms, a 16” floor tom, a 14x22 bass drum, and a 5x14 snare.

Installing the system took under an hour. All I had to do was remove one head on each drum and stick the two LED strips around the inside of the shell. I chose to place them near the seams in the Vistalite shells, but you could position them closer to the edge or center as desired. The connector fit easily through the vent holes, and the XLR snake was preconfigured to provide just enough slack to reach each drum without having an excess amount of cabling strewn around the shells. The 3M adhesive is designed to hold the LED strips in place very securely so that they won’t detach as you play the drums. But that also means that the adhesive is meant for one-time use, so be sure you know exactly where you want to place the strips before you remove the backing paper and stick the strips to the shell.

The DrumLite controller has twenty buttons. These include on/off, start/stop, brightness up/down, and speed up/down. Color options are red, green, blue, white, orange, yellow, cyan, and purple. Modes include auto switch, flash, and options for jumping between three or seven colors and three- or seven-color fades. Orange was the perfect color for conjuring the classic look of my Vistalite kit, which originally came with Tivoli incandescent rope lighting inside. The flash mode could be adjusted to turn the lights on and off as slowly as once every few seconds or cranked up to create a fast strobe-like effect. The fade mode provides a much smoother and less visually jarring transition between colors. The wireless remote worked great for easily changing the look of the kit between songs, and it allowed for some additional drama leading up to show time, where I could turn on the lights at a low brightness a few minutes prior to taking the stage and then increase the intensity right before counting off the first song.

Prices range from $15 for a single LED strip for a 6” tom to $90 for a strip for a 28” bass drum. The controller lists for $49, and DrumLite offers add-ons such as a bass drum trigger system ($349.99) that allows you to sync the lights to your real-time playing. For more information, visit iwdrumlite.com.

Michael Dawson
RBH
6x14 Poplar Prestige Snare
A solid, steam-bent beauty with a fat, old-school sound.

The Prestige series is Virginia Beach–based custom shop RBH’s line of single-ply, steam-bent snares that are crafted by hand out of premium North American lumber. These drums are finished in hand-rubbed oil and wax to preserve and accentuate the natural, unique grain pattern of the timber. (Decorative inlays and exotic veneers are available for an upcharge.)

For the Prestige series, RBH uses solid-brass single-contact tube lugs, which connect at the lower third of the shell, as well as a Truck GS007 multi-step throw-off, 2.3mm steel triple-flange hoops, Puresound wires, and Remo heads. Bearing edges can be cut round, to forty-five degrees, or a combination of both, and the shell is reinforced with solid-cherry rings. Each RBH snare comes with a soft case.

Prestige drums were originally offered in maple, cherry, walnut, and ash, but RBH recently added poplar to the mix. We were sent a 6x14 poplar to review. (Other size options include 4x13, 5x13, 6x13, 4x14, and 5x14.) North American poplar is less dense than most other hardwoods used for making drums, which often results in a deeper sound with a softer feel. This drum thrives in the medium-to-low tuning range, where it produces a big, fat tone with open, even, and controlled overtones, and has a dense snare response that’s reminiscent of the darker sound you get from an old colonial marching snare. While it’s designed primarily for drumset applications, I could see symphonic percussionists making great use out of the Poplar Prestige as well. With a touch of muffling, it transforms into an excellent classical snare, with great articulation, dynamic response, and musicality. And for studio drummers looking for the perfect snare to provide a big, deep sound for mid-tempo roots rock or down-tempo moody tracks, this is one to put near the top of the list.

Michael Dawson

Video Demo
moderndrummer.com
LP’s catalog of cajons and accessories has become quite expansive over the past few years. New additions have been arriving in various shapes, sizes, and materials. We received a couple new cajons to check out, one of which is shaped like a mini conga, as well as a couple new accessories. Let’s dig in.

**Americana Exotic Cedar Wire Cajon**
With a cedar body and a varying-ply soundboard, the Americana Exotic Cedar Wire Cajon ($299.99) sounds just as beautiful as it looks. Non-adjustable, Adamas phosphor bronze strings are used to help deliver an authentic Spanish flamenco sound. The body of the drum projects a warm, resonant bass tone, and the edge offers a crisp attack.

The bottom of the cajon is stabilized with four heavy-duty, pivoting feet with thick rubber pads. Sonically, the Americana Exotic Cedar Wire Cajon was very responsive to light playing and gave us a wide tonal range when we applied pressure to different parts of the soundboard with our feet to change the pitch.

**LP Matador Stave Tumba Cajon**
Shaped like a mini conga, the LP Matador Stave Tumba Cajon ($229.99) is constructed with a poplar soundboard and mango staves. The conga-like shape delivers the consistent attack of a standard cajon but with slightly enhanced resonance and bass tones. With a wider belly and a narrow, tapered top, this cajon provides a great range of tones, from low to high. Our review model came in the Rustic Brown finish.

The Matador Stave Tumba Cajon has four rubber feet on the bottom and a lightly textured top for sitting. We found this cajon to be very comfortable to sit on and play because its rounded shape gave our legs and feet a little more room to rest in a more natural position.

**Cajon Saddle**
LP developed the Cajon Saddle ($41.99) as a companion for any standard-sized cajon. Attached via adjustable straps, the saddle provides a padded seat for extra comfort and long panels that lay on the left and right sides of the cajon. Two pockets are included in the panels to hold brushes and other accessories. The padded seat was much appreciated after longer bouts of playing. The side panels are lined with hook-and-loop fasteners, so you can attach castanets and other accessories to them, rather than attaching them directly to the body of the cajon.

**Cajon Saddle Percussion Pack**
For players looking to accessorize the Cajon Saddle, LP offers the Cajon Saddle Percussion Pack ($43.99), which includes the company’s Cajon Castanets, Cajon Brushes, and a Vari-Tone Shaker. The Cajon Brushes are similar to thin nylon brushes. I was able to play subtle, quiet beats with them, or I could use them to dig into the cajon to drive the groove more aggressively.

The Vari-Tone Shaker was a perfect accessory for a stripped-down setup because it allowed me to play more interesting shaker patterns that had multiple pitches.

The Large Cajon Castanet attaches to the side of the cajon via hook-and-loop fasteners, so it can be played without having to hold it. This opened up some fun new musical opportunities, as I could move one hand from playing the cajon to the castanets with ease. The Cajon Saddle Percussion Pack is a great addition for percussionists looking to expand their musical palette.

*Miguel Monroy*
MR. MEHMET TAMDEĞER'S TRIBUTE TO ONE OF HIS ESTEEMED MASTER KIRKOR KÜÇÜK YA

Mehmet Tamdeğer learned his art from Mikhail Zilcan, the grandson of Kerope Zilcan. In the 1950s, at the age of nine, Mehmet Tamdeğer started to work for Mikhail Zilcan in the K. Zilcan factory in Istanbul. Mikhail Zilcan and Kirkor Küçükyan taught him every aspect of this ancient Turkish art, based on a history that stems back to the early 17th century.

SAHRA

This cymbal offers you a low sustained, dry and a controlled sound. It has a unique stick definition and a great warm bell.

AVAILABLE SIZE | 22” Ride

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The snare drum could be viewed as a drummer’s most important voice and has helped define some of the drumming community’s most revered performances. Consider John Bonham’s deep, throaty snare on Led Zeppelin’s IV, which dominates tracks such as “When the Levee Breaks.” Or Steve Gadd’s dry tone pulsating throughout Paul Simon’s “50 Ways to Leave Your Lover.” Or the monstrous crack from Elvin Jones that prods and stabs its way through Wayne Shorter’s Speak No Evil. With these classic tones inhabiting such an important place in drum lore, it’s easy to see how players would spend much of their attention, and budget, collecting snares to help define their sound.

Recently a slew of products have been introduced that allow you to quickly modify your existing snare sound without having to break the bank on a new drum. Using these accessories, it’s possible to slash through a band, dry out your sound while adding beef, alter the drum’s pitch, finely attenuate frequencies and sustain, or enhance the snare with specialized effects, all within a matter of seconds.

Let’s dig in!
The **Sabian Hoop Crasher** features two B20-alloy cymbal rings fastened together with a set of screws. Thirty-two holes are cut into the top ring, and the bottom ring's ribbed grooves are said to prevent airlock as the cymbals sit on the drum. Three plastic clamps are included to ensure the hoop stays in place, and adjusting the tightness by moving the clamps' placement on the rim deadens the sustain of the drum while providing a tighter crack.

The Hoop Crasher greatly shortens the drum's sustain, providing a quick, dry tone when playing in the middle of the head. The Crasher is most noticeable when hitting rimshots, and its tone is brash yet bright, almost like adding a distorted clap or “chik” sound to your snare. Ghost notes and stronger strokes in the middle of the drum don’t engage the cymbals, so you can still get a fairly normal yet dampened tone in between trashier backbeats.

Like the Hoop Crasher, 10” and 14” **Dream Re-FX Crop Circles** add a trashy, distorted effect to the snare. These single-layer rings, which are built from other manufacturers’ recycled cymbals, each feature four sets of replaceable jingles. Brackets aren’t included to hold the cymbals in place, but they weren’t necessary in the case of the 14” version. Occasionally the 10” Crop Circle would creep toward the bottom edge of the drum when played, but a quick adjustment or a piece of tape remedies this.

The 14” Crop Circle had a darker tone compared to the Hoop Crasher. The jingles and lighter weight added to the effect’s distorted sustain, and more of the drum’s higher overtones were present. The 10” version’s loose placement added movement when playing, which almost resembled a natural delay effect to the distorted sound as it bounced on the drumhead. The trashiness of both cymbals presented itself at very light playing volumes and opened up the most during accented backbeats.

The 6” stainless steel **Meinl Ching Ring** also adds a brash effect to your snare. Its sound kicks in slightly at very soft playing volumes but is most effective with harder strokes. Like the 10” Crop Circle, its small design can lead to greater movement around the snare, but again, adjustments can be made to keep it still. The Ching Ring doesn’t mute the drum as much as the Crop Circle or Hoop Crasher does, so more of the snare’s natural overtones persist. In terms of tone, this was among the trashiest of the bunch.

**Meinl’s Generation X 8” and 10” Drumbals**, splash-size cymbals outfitted with a handle, add a bright, trashy enhancement at each dynamic level. By controlling the cymbal with one hand and playing the snare with another, you can alter the effect’s sustain and the pitch of the drum.

There was a slight drop-off in volume when the Drumbal was placed flat on the snare, so in a live situation you’ll want to make the sound engineer aware that you’re using the cymbals.

The Drumbal’s handle opens the door to a lot of creative playing techniques. Quickly lifting the splashes up and down while playing the snare creates a vibrating tremolo effect. Turning the cymbal on its side and pressing the edge into the drumhead produces quick pitch shifts. And hitting the cymbal itself on the snare results in a bright and quick clap-like sound, while rimshots and backbeats replicate a distorted crash.

Big Fat Snare Drum produces multiple head add-ons, including its Original model, a 14” Mylar skin surrounded by a rubber ring, designed to quickly deaden and beef up your snare while effectively lowering its pitch. Along with the Original, we tested out two other models: the Donut, which features a
center cutout, and the Snare-Bourine, which is outfitted with four pairs of tambourine jingles.

With its controlled overtones and beefy tone, the Original responded well in the studio and could fit perfectly into groove-based, rock/pop, or electronica settings, among others. The head also brought out the bass-driven throatiness of the drum without bogging it down with overtones. This sound was reminiscent of Steve Gadd’s dry ’70s snare tone. The Donut controlled overtones and sustain the most, and it provided more of a natural rebound because of the center cutout. The Snare-Bourine resembled the Original’s throaty tone yet added a clear, jangly addition to each backbeat, and it could work well in a pop, funk, hip-hop, or Motown setting. Because of the added denseness of each of the BFSD heads, rimshots required a little extra power to achieve a crack.

Aquarian offers a 12” adhesive Kick Patch in its accessory lineup that’s meant to be a quick fix during a gig for a split bass drum head. However, without peeling off the adhesive, you can place the pad on a snare drum to get the same dried out, pitch-lowering effect as a BFSD. The patch doesn’t cover the entire drum, and it’s lighter than the BFSD, so more of the drum’s higher overtones carry over, and the patch shifts around more when playing. The overall pitch variation was comparable, though, and we were able to get more of a distinct crack out of rimshots.

Aquarian Dura-Dots feature 4.5” clear and 5.5” coated adhesive pads that dramatically reduce overtones and bring out a bass-heavy, lower-pitched thud when placed in the center of the drumhead. The pads offer slightly less rebound, so playing became a little more of a workout. But the change in feel wasn’t as drastic as with some of the other products in this category, and rimshots cut through with a crack. Dura-Dots are removable and are said to increase the drumhead’s durability.

**Percussive Add-Ons**

Latin Percussion Sound Enhancers include three clip-on effects—a tambourine-like Jingle, a Snare wire add-on, and a Shaker. The Jingle features three sets of tambourine jingles that lie flat on the drumhead. The tambourine engages at very soft dynamics, and there’s a slight reduction in resonance when it’s placed on the drum. These are great for adding a fast, bright attack, and could be useful in pop, funk, or Motown settings. The tambourine’s sustain is fairly short, so unwanted jingles shouldn’t be a concern when playing live.

The Snare add-on clips a 4.5”, 16-strand snare wire to the top of the drum. Although it could seem redundant to add wires to a snare batter head, this placement proved to be surprisingly effective. The wires dried out the drum’s sound and added extra snap and clarity. With the Snare’s resonant wires engaged, the accessory dampened overttones while enhancing the drum’s natural, snappy tone. It could be a useful and quick alternative to loosening up your snare wires to get more buzz.

The Shaker features three mini plastic shakers that lie flat on the drumhead. This effect dampened the drum’s sound more than the other two products in the Sound Enhancer collection. With the snare wires on, the effect was somewhat hard to hear, as the wires...
This is what happens when the world leader in percussion builds a boutique cajon.

THE AMERICANA 2-VOICE CAJON
Created in the U.S.A. from select Black Walnut and Hard Rock Maple, featuring a versatile, adjustable wire system. The Art of Rhythm is LP.

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overpowered it. However, turning the snare wires off produced a deep and dirty rattle. All three Sound Enhancers were quick and easy to put on and remove. The plastic mounts slip easily over the snare rim, and there’s a magnet beneath the LP logo that works exceptionally well at keeping each product in place.

Meinl offers two size variations for its Backbeat Tambourines—one for 10” and 12” drums, which holds four pairs of stainless steel jingles, and one for 13” and 14” drums, with six pairs of jingles. Both require a small, Velcro-like fabric fastener to be affixed to the drumhead, which is included. Without the tambourine, the adhesive fastener didn’t noticeably affect the drum’s tone in terms of frequency reduction. Unlike the LP variation, the jingles on the Backbeat sit on the top of the tambourine’s mount and don’t press against the drumhead. Mounting the tambourine shortens the drum’s sustain slightly. The add-on’s jingles start becoming audible around a mezzo-forte dynamic, so you can get away with quiet, natural ghost notes without necessarily engaging the jingle effect. And louder rimshots blend well with the Backbeat, adding a clear, bright jangle without the need for a percussionist. The Backbeat Tambourines could fit well in a pop, funk, Motown, or drum ‘n’ bass setting.

**FINE-TUNE YOUR TONE**

RTOM Moongels, self-adhesive rectangular gel pads that can be placed on the top or bottom of drums and cymbals, attenuate overtones and shorten sustain. Depending on each pad’s placement on the drum, pitch shifts were also attainable—placing gels closer to the center of the drumhead, for instance, lowered the fundamental pitch. In the studio we were able to cut out higher frequencies by placing the pads closer to the edge of the snare, while still dampening the drum’s resonance. Cutting the gels also allows you to get a smaller, more specific amount of overtone control. Live, these pads proved to be a quick, simple, and efficient way to control ring.

Like the Moongels, Vater Buzz Kill dampening pads attenuate high frequencies and control resonance. Two models are available: the standard Buzz Kill and the Buzz Kill Extra Dry, the latter of which features more weight and a larger diameter for greater frequency dampening. The smaller pads let slightly more ring through and produced more of a snap while playing backbeats, while the Extra Dry gels produced a beefier, throatier sound with less sustain. The gels can also be cut down to a smaller size to fine-tune frequencies.

Aquarian T-Tabs offer a set of coated and clear adhesive plastic pieces that control ring and sustain. Removal of the T-Tabs’ backing reveals adhesive that allows them to stick to drumheads, and they can be moved once placed on a drum. One advantage is the product’s ability to be placed and played anywhere on the head, including directly in the center, where it enhanced the stick’s attack while attenuating the drum’s overtones. Compared to the gel pads, slightly more ring was present when using a single T-Tab, but finer control can be achieved as more pieces are added.

**Video Demo**

moderndrummer.com
The SONOR team, in cooperation with artists and collectors, worked tirelessly to bring the Vintage Series drums as close as possible to the look, feel, and sound of its predecessor from the 1950's and 60's. SONOR then combined this with its knowledge of modern drum building to create an instrument that will hold up to today's modern playing.

SONOR.COM
The iconoclastic rhythm auteur is readying his hotly anticipated new album. *MD* contributor Ken Micallef got an early listen, and, transfixed by its contents, presses its creator for explanations and looks for clues to his self-expression.

Photos by Alex Solca
Is Chris Dave the world’s most wanted drumming superweapon? From populist recordings with Justin Bieber, Lady Gaga, Keith Urban, and Ed Sheeran to jazz grooves with Kenny Garrett and Robert Glasper to formative rule-breaking days with Meshell Ndegeocello and Mint Condition, Dave has transformed how we think about the drumset and the beat-making maneuvers that follow.

Chris “Daddy” Dave is a product of Houston’s church scene and Howard University in Washington, D.C., and his greatest contribution may be his mad-merriment beat. Taking a cue from the late producer J Dilla, when freed to his own devices Dave plays musically demented patterns that shake up notions of contemporary time, timekeeping, and drum tonalities. Of course, one drummer’s notion of where the time lies is another’s idea of chaos and metamorphism. Dave embraces it all.

And artists have embraced him: Adele, Maxwell, D’Angelo, Beyoncé, Terence Blanchard, Wynton Marsalis, Bilal, Lupe Fiasco, Sonny Rollins, Toni Braxton, Mos Def, Erykah Badu, Common, Talib Kweli, Jill Scott, A Tribe Called Quest, Michelle Williams, Dianne Reeves, Geri Allen, Mary J. Blige, Blue Man Group, Cat Stevens, Derrick Hodge, and many more have enlisted Dave’s “four-way brain way” on tour and in the studio.

On Nihil Novi, the 2016 album by saxophonist Marcus Strickland’s Twillife, Dave plays time that flows like a restless river. Seemingly pulling ahead and dropping behind the conceived center pulse, Dave measures out syncopated bass drum bumps and hyper snare drum spurs while projecting forward-flying cymbal pulses and explosive tom fills. Dave scorches Strickland’s grooves like a pilot pushing the ejector-seat button and laughing while his million-dollar jet explodes in a fireball.

When asked what constitutes his main work these days, Dave replies, “Drumhedz, Drumhedz, Drumhedz!” Chris Dave and the Drumhedz is Dave’s epic dissertation on the state of the funk/jazz/R&B/hip-hop groove, circa 2017. It’s a soulful, beat-heavy pleasure, start to finish. Dave, who’s joined by core Drumhedz Isaiah Sharkey on guitar, Marcus Strickland on sax, and James Poyser and Cleo “Pookie” Sample on keyboards and electronics, plus Pino Palladino on bass and Keyon Harrold on horns, also enlisted a fifty-member cast of cowriters, instrumentalists, and vocalists to document his surreal sonic ideas. The album is designed as an outer-space journey turned radio station, with the Drumhedz as your guide through their universe of musical pleasures.

Chris Dave and the Drumhedz begins with countdown to liftoff, the band landing on a planet that recalls a P-Funk-style movie soundtrack. Strings sway, Dave’s drums groove like bossa nova bumblebees, and rhymer KRNDN speaks though a megaphone. The album matches weird interludes with serious music making. “Black Hole” launches a thrilling African pulse adorned with muted trumpet blasts, heavy riffing guitar bleats, and an irresistible drum groove that percolates like a nimble panther. It recalls the Temptations’ “Papa Was a Rolling Stone” transported through modern sensibilities. Dave’s arsenal of drum sounds continues in “Sensitive Granite,” a deep snare drum firing sparks of bongo rolls, cracked cymbal interplay, dancing rhythms, and playful effects.

Dave bam-bams more deep snare drum tones on “Clear View,” its pitter-patter pattern dancing under spoken-word vocals and reverberating instrumentation, the song quickly turning into a full-throttle rock bash. “Job Well Done” rages like punked-out Muppets for a moment, then backsteps into romantic territory, with Dave’s popping snare drum as sweet as a Nestlé Crunch. “Lady Jane” features a clattering jazz cymbal pulse, segueing to an arrangement that’s equal parts Canterbury progressive rock, metric-modulation experiment, samba sendup, and drum solo madness. “Trippy Tipsy” closes the album with a watery ambience, as hooting tenor saxophones and herky-jerky rhythms lead us into the unnamed planet’s sunset.

It’s all in a day’s work for Chris Dave’s inventive drumming head and the band that bears his name.
MD: What tools, be they mental or physical, do you take to every recording session?
Chris: Just making sure the music feels right, that I’m prepared and that I know the material, or whatever the session calls for, and go from there. It depends on the music—EDM, country, hip-hop, rock....
MD: What are the misconceptions about studio work at your level?
Chris: The studio is a lot of hard work, and it can be very detailed. There’s a misconception about how long you have to rehearse with an artist to get it right before you actually record, the process of getting a song perfect for what the artist is looking for. There are many misconceptions.

Snare, Toms, and Cymbals...and More Snare, More Toms, and More Cymbals
MD: You play an assortment of setups. And you endorse only three brands: Sabian, Remo, and Vater.
Chris: I don’t endorse drums, because I like the variety of being able to play whatever I choose to play when I want to. I have a lot of drumsets, and I could never find one company that could give me everything I wanted.
MD: For the MD cover shot you set up Fibes, Tamas....
Chris: And Firchie Drums—they’re like vintage drums. And Innovation Drums, they’re a custom manufacturer from Detroit. I use a lot of Innovation drums.

MD: Do you always set up in the same way?
Chris: Nah. I experiment all the time. If I’m at a festival, then I’m not really traveling with my stuff, so I make up a kit from the backline. But as far as my personal setup, it changes every day. Me and my tech are still trying to figure stuff out.
MD: If you’re using three snare drums on different days, will they always be in the same place within the kit?
Chris: No. Even on the last D’Angelo tour, I had five snare drums, but I used them in different ways every two or three days. Just to switch things up I put them in different positions. I might use one for a floor tom, then the next day I will use them in other positions.
MD: Is that to make you approach the set differently?
Q: If some of your cymbals are set at standard angles, how are the other cymbals positioned?

A: I don’t know how to think like that anymore. I don’t know what a drummer would or wouldn’t do.
Chris: Just to keep me thinking. I’ve always been like that. I’m still trying to figure it out until I get completely comfortable, so I keep switching things up.

MD: You’ve added multiple floor toms to your setup, when initially you didn’t use floor toms.

Chris: I’ve always played toms on all the records. Live, it began with Erykah Badu; her gig called for a lot of different snare drums. I didn’t want to use triggers, so I would tune the five different snares to replicate the album sounds. I like to collect snare drums, so it all went together.

MD: Are you playing any mounted toms on the new Drumhedz album?

Chris: On some tracks, one of the interludes maybe, but it’s sporadic. There’s not so many toms, more like deep snare drums used as floor toms.

MD: What snares did you play on the new Drumhedz record?

Chris: Everything from old Rogers to custom prototypes. I went through everything on the album.

MD: You get many different sounds from each drum. How did you tweak the various drums used on the album?

Chris: That’s part of studio finesse, just understanding the tones that the song needs. Certain snares might sit better or sound better in a particular song. Maybe a certain wood or metal snare drum will sound better with brushes on a particular track, depending on how hard you have to hit the drum. It depends on the room and so many different factors. All that plays a part in the sound, especially in the studio.

MD: Do you modify the drumhead with tambourines, metal pieces, or rings cut from old drumheads?

Chris: We’ve done all those kinds of things. Those ideas began with gospel drummers fifteen or twenty years ago. It’s not new, it’s just things that people forgot about or they didn’t know how the sounds were made. It’s trying to add more sounds so you can sound bigger and fuller.

MD: In the cover shot for your previous MD cover story, one of the cymbals was set at an extreme and odd angle.

Chris: I try whatever I can think of. There’s no limit on anything. We used six cymbals for this MD cover shoot: two Zildjian Spirals, a cracked Sabian Fierce ride, and the rest were prototypes that don’t have names.

MD: If some of your cymbals are set at standard angles, how are the other cymbals positioned?

Chris: I don’t know how to think like that anymore. [laughs] I don’t know what a drummer would or wouldn’t do. I don’t play ride cymbal on the right-hand side, and I’m a right-handed drummer. Between all my friends we’ve tried all kinds of weird shit. I’ve done shows with a regular

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Recordings

**Mint Condition** From the Mint Factory, Life’s Aquarium

/// **Meshell Ndegeocello** Comfort Woman, The Spirit Music Jamia: Dance of the Infidel /// **Maxwell** BLACKsummersnight /// **Robert Glasper** Double-Booked, Black Radio /// **Adele** 21 /// **Eric Roberson** Mister Nice Guy /// **Chris Dave and the Drumhedz Mixtape** /// **Lil John Roberts** The Heartbeat /// **D’Angelo** Black Messiah /// **Anderson Paak** Malibu /// **Kenny Garrett** Standard of Language
**Chris Dave**

drumset where I’m also playing timpani simultaneously. Or I will split the brain to get in a creative vibe, like, *Maybe I should put the second bass drum off the stage*, because they have that new DW pedal where you can extend it or double extend it. It can get insane.

**MD:** Drummers throughout history have placed the ride cymbal on the right side and tilted it, but you’re trying to find a different way.

**Chris:** Right. Jack DeJohnette worked with singers a lot, so he would angle the cymbal and use his pinkie and forefinger so he could control the stick when it’s right on the cymbal. I used to play like that as well, using a four-piece kit with two cymbals. I did that with Kenny Garrett. Going through all the styles, you get to a point where you want to do your own thing within what you’ve learned through massive amounts of study and listening to all the different drummers.

**MD:** You’re still playing cracked cymbals?

**Chris:** More prototypes now; I’m designing cymbals with Sabian. They’re just different cymbals that sound nice and messed-up at the same time. The cracked ones… I was in the office and they had all these cracked cymbals, a ton of cymbals. Drummers had returned them. So I hit a few and took some. I liked the sound. I was with Zildjian when I played with Mint Condition, then Sabian made prototypes for me. That’s when we started getting into 16”, 17”, and 18” hi-hats. I want to experiment with sounds.

**MD:** What do you like about Fibes drums?

**Chris:** Fibes were really loud drums. The attack on them is really cool for that loud, fast, aggressive, powerful sound. I could
Dixon Artist John Blackwell

“Becoming a Dixon artist is a real honor for me. I love the sound and look of their kits, and they bring an element of renewal to what I do. That kind of inspiration is important and I found it in Dixon.”
play those on a D’Angelo gig.

**MD:** What drums did you play with Kenny Garrett?

**Chris:** I would call out different sets every day from the backline. Like, “What’s the oldest set you have in stock? I want that one.” That’s the fun part about playing from the backline. I never wanted to play the same set every night, because I never got used to it. Back then it wasn’t about endorsements. I wanted custom gear. Then I never thought about having a drum endorsement.

**MD:** Some European drummers, like Paal Nilssen-Love, don’t have or pursue drum endorsements. He’s playing the same drums his dad played.

**Chris:** Exactly. If you went to Wallace Roney’s house and he gave you one of Tony Williams’ old sets, you’d play that. You probably wouldn’t want another drumset. Maybe you would, but maybe you wouldn’t. I understand why drummers want endorsements. I guess they’re chasing something. I just don’t know what it is.

**MD:** When it looks like you’re playing three floor toms, one is usually a snare?

**Chris:** Usually a couple of them are snare drums. Some of my snares are 10x14, some are deeper. If I had a gig that needed twenty snares, I would use twenty snares.

**MD:** Is one snare tuned to replicate an Akai MPC and another to sound like a drum machine?

**Chris:** Nah, an MPC is a sampler, so that could be a million sounds. I tune the snare drums based on the songs we will perform that night. Sometimes they’ll switch the set list, which allows me to use different...
drums. I’ll use the Craviotto snares we have, for instance, just trying stuff. For D’Angelo I literally had something new or different for every show.

**MD:** So playing multiple snares broadens your sonic viewpoint?

**Chris:** I’ll have the snare drum that matches the sound of a particular song. Then I might place the snare drums to make me think differently. Not in terms of what I’m going to play, but what I’m looking at visually when I’m playing the drums. If something is closer to a certain hand, you can get to it quicker. It’s like theoreticians of how you want to execute certain things, and if the setup changes, how do you execute the same things sonically?

**MD:** Do you ever trigger sounds?

**Chris:** No, I tune the snare drum to the song. I like tuning, and I have a good soundman. It’s like a package—it comes with the tuning and the house engineer and the monitor guy. If you’re on the same page, it’s a win-win situation. I’m usually really close with the house engineer, because I’m a studio guy so we’re usually on the same page sound-wise. If I’m playing with an artist and I’ve recorded their album, more than likely I’ll bring the snare drums from those sessions. What’s a better trigger than using the actual drums used to record the album?

**Technique**

**MD:** As a student you played along with Tony Williams on Miles Davis’s “Footprints,” among other records. Did you ever try to sound exactly like Tony or clone yourself after a drummer?

**Chris:** I just did the regular things. I bought all the albums, tried to learn all the stuff I liked about the album. I memorized it and tried to take little things I was trying to figure out. I was more of a fan of those drummers at first, then I would study, but I was never in the position to sound like them. I had ADD when I was young. [laughs]

**MD:** But you transcribed Tony Williams?

**Chris:** I did, but I was trying to understand how he and Ron Carter or he and Herbie Hancock related on those Miles Davis records. I would listen for hours and try to understand. I would get into the vibe of emulating, but I really wanted to use it in ways that I liked, personalize [the influence] to what I was playing at the time. Sometimes you might not be with a group of friends who are playing a Tony Williams type of song; you’re just trying ideas to learn.

**MD:** How did you incorporate your influences? I’ve seen you play left-hand ruffs, which Bill Stewart also plays, coming out of Roy Haynes’ concept.

**Chris:** It’s more paying homage. Certain stuff, it’s just part of who you are. I grew up playing a lot of jazz, and that comes from drummers like Roy Haynes, Max Roach, and those cats. They are very technical musicians. You need some technique to play that stuff, like really fast swing for a long period of time. At some point you have to learn about endurance and breathing and all these other things that come with playing relaxed. It’s a journey.

**MD:** How did you apply J Dilla’s beats to the drumset? Was it like transcribing a drummer?

**Chris:** Nah, I could hear what he was doing because I was friends with Karriem Riggins and all those cats, and I love the shit out of his beats. I was always good at playing breakbeats or any beat I can hear, kind of like Ahmir Thompson, who can play breakbeats. I’m coming from the same vibe.
Chris Dave

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Chris Dave

I don’t know a lot of drummers who can’t play like that who are hip-hop heads. But if you’re not, then you might not understand certain things as far as beats. It’s cultural, I guess.

MD: Are syncopated or delayed snares and bass drums a J Dilla trademark?
Chris: Nah. For me it started with four-way coordination and playing two or three different rhythms in my head at the same time in different tempos. I’ve loved messing with rhythms since I was little. When a drum machine quantizes, sometimes, depending on the person who’s doing the beat, they don’t hear that it’s not perfectly quantized. Like the E-mu SP1200 [sampler], it loops right, but it has a little space in [the beat] sometimes. I began emulating that. At that point we were heavy into hip-hop. People tried to figure out J Dilla: Is this ahead and that behind the beat? Or vice versa? It’s taking that apart and playing with it. J Dilla was influential, but he wasn’t the only one. A lot of people listened to his music because it was beat driven. It was so concise, and it had a Motown feel so the pocket was cool.

MD: Is Tony Williams’ concept of blurring the time similar?
Chris: Sometimes. The delay thing for me is more like seeing Elvin Jones playing something slow in 3/4, then when he comes around to the 1, and whenever he hits the 1, that’s where the 1 is. If you’re a stickler sitting there counting, you know they’re half a second off. I listen from both perspectives. So I’m thinking, This would be crazy if I’m playing a beat and it’s a half second behind and this is over here and this is over there. It’s beat placement. Drummers have been doing it forever.

MD: Does your placement of the beat depend on the artist and the recording? Sometimes your time feel is right down the middle.
Chris: Depends on what the song calls for. Some songs want a nice feel-good groove; some things are more hip-hop. Everything can’t be the same style, so you try to make it appear like an orbit of sonic shit! [laughs] So when they call you they don’t have to worry what you’ll sound like—they know it’ll sound right for the song with your [style] on it. That was always my goal.

MD: Did you study four-way coordination from the Marvin Dahlgren book?
Chris: Yeah, but more so from watching Jeff “Tain” Watts and people like that. Tain can take a Monk song and play the solo with his left hand while playing all this other shit, and it’s still swinging. You meet Brazilian drummers, Cuban drummers. Everybody hears things on different beats. It gets in your head and you’re hearing rhythms over rhythms that might not necessarily go together, and you focus on that.

MD: There are a few constants in your drumming, one being your touch. You get a beautiful, consistent sound on the snare drum when playing 2 and 4. Was that a focus for you?
Chris: It’s just a natural thing. Touch is part of your alter ego, your personality, whatever happens when you get on the drums. I think about sound, and touch and sound go together. After a while, it’s subliminal. I’m thinking like a producer sometimes, so when I get in that mode, I want the snare to sound consistent each time I hit it. And I want the hi-hat to be consistent because I want to get this groove across.

MD: Some drummers aim to sound like a drum machine.
Chris: That is part of transcribing too. I transcribed everything from drum machines to the Time’s “777-9311.” I thought that was a drummer, but it’s a drum machine. I transcribed that and hip-hop beats, all the way back to Tony Williams. Certain beats are drum machines, and if you can play that song just like a drum machine, that crowd will be amazingly happy.

MD: When you play a drum solo, are you thinking of song form?
Chris: Whatever comes. With the Drumhedz, I play the song form or a special form for the solo. It depends on the music. But I don’t like to solo.

MD: Why?
Chris: I don’t know. [laughs]

In the Studio

MD: How do you typically get session work?
Chris: I’m Rick Rubin’s studio drummer at Shangri-La Studios, so that leads to a lot of session work. That gives me the freedom to do whatever I want, because Rick is like that. I’m not trying to sound arrogant, but I only work with five or six producers. They have a lot of work, and these projects actually get released. I just finished a lot of stuff with Blake Mills; he produced Alabama Shakes. We’re finishing up a John Legend album.

MD: Are you called in to replace drumming?
Chris: Sometimes they may only have a demo, and the artist or producer tells you what they don’t like about the demo or what they want to change. They usually want to make it more exciting. Sometimes the demo is old but the song is good. You start chipping away from there.
Chris Dave and the Drumhedz

MD: Is your new Blue Note album, Chris Dave and the Drumhedz, all live drumming, no loops?

Chris: It’s all live takes; I didn’t loop myself. Some of it has punch-ins, like if someone wasn’t there they added their part later. But all the bass and drums were recorded together live.

MD: Some songs have more than one drum track.

Chris: Yeah, like on “Lady Jane.” It’s like three different drumsets. There I played the whole song on one set and then did the next take on another drumset. I have a lot of drums at Shangri-La; we had the place for a month when we did the album, so I was able to have five setups miked in one room. I had my jazz set, my trashy-sounding set, my experimental set.

MD: How did you compose material for the new album?

Chris: Sometimes at the keyboard coming up with ideas, messing around with bass or guitar. Might start with a beat. A few tracks I was messing around in the studio with Pino Palladino. He’d start playing, and if we got into a vibe we’d start recording. “Let’s put a click up. Let’s map it out. Gimme a minute to come up with a bridge.” Just a real organic process, but still with form. We wanted it to be a cool vinyl album that sounds good. It’s like back in the ’70s: DJs would play the best parts of an album because it sounded so good. You might spin that part at a party. It draws you in to the different sound aspects of the music. It’s a fight for the musicians to be heard (now), instead of only the artists.

MD: Did you go for a unified drum sound on the record or more diversity of sound with the drums?

Chris: Just having the drums prominent and showing the different sounds the drums can be. There doesn’t have to be a drum solo; this album is more a feel-good introduction to the Drumhedz. The concept is that the music doesn’t take place on Earth. It’s like a space trip, like you’re going through a portal with us into our world. The music on the album is our radio station of the music we like. The ambience of the drums is not all my drums but a core sound of what I do.

MD: “Sensitive Granite” has a muted, dark, splatter-sounding snare drum.

Chris: A lot of that sound is outboard gear used during the mixing phase with Benjamin Kane. No plugins, all hardware. We had the analog gear—why use the plugin?

MD: On “Atlanta” you’re blowing over the top, and again it sounds like more than one drum track.

Chris: Just one drum track, and I’m playing with a lot of outboard gear again.

MD: “Clear View” eventually kicks into a groove, but it opens with a lot of interesting drum sounds.

Chris: That’s us having fun. We start quiet, then go to the moon. In the middle I switch to another drumset. I have the drums set up in the studio, so I don’t have to get up from the drum throne. I just swivel over. So in the middle of that song, instead of going for the big rock sound, what if it’s the same tempo but the stuff we play is a darker side of the
same tempo? Some people might think it's slowing down, some might think it's a different song. All that is part of the art for us. But the tempo never changes. Then the beat goes into half time. But you're still nodding. It's two sides of the coin. We're showing what musicians can do in creating moods.

**MD:** “Lady Jane” opens with what sounds like a four-way coordination exercise.

**Chris:** It starts with more of a Jack DeJohnette/Tony Williams type of thing. I guess it's four-way, but I don't hear it like that. I wanted the snare drum to rattle away from the cymbal—if that makes sense. I don't even hear the split in the rhythms; I only hear the sounds. You get to a point where you can feel the rhythms without counting. Eventually it clicked where I could hear that. You just have to know where it is.

**MD:** Eventually it clicked?

**Chris:** It's just a feeling. Once it locks in to your body or your soul, you just know how to play over the beat. You know where you are within the time frame. It becomes more of an expression than trying to figure something out. Why can't you do something that has nothing to do with the other thing? The four-way brain way.

**Today, Yesterday, Tomorrow**

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

**Chris:** I'm still practicing rudiments, four-way coordination, and trying to play the things I hear in my head but I can't play. That keeps you going. It's an internal drive.

**MD:** Do you take students?

**Chris:** I will in the future. I wouldn't know what to say, though. Just practice and figure it out, because I'm still trying to figure it out. It's about having the technique to play whatever you hear in your head. The journey is all the music you're going to partake in, which at some point is going to develop into your sound and your style. It's all a reflection of you.

**MD:** You attended Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts and Howard University—you have a legit music background. Is that necessary for all drummers who want to achieve your level of success?

**Chris:** I don't know a correct way to do it. Go with your gut. I had to read music at Howard, because I played with Geri Allen. Her gigs are hard. But with sessions today they don't ask you to read unless it's jingles. They want the feel. Or they might have the idea, and then you have to be on it so you can listen to the song once or twice and have the feel, hop on it, and knock it out.

**MD:** Can you set your pay rate now?

**Chris:** You can negotiate, for sure. But I'm also a producer; that was the point of this album, showing more of our production skills on a bigger scale as a group. We will tour the record, and we'll be producing artists and playing on their records as the Drumhedz.

**MD:** There are still things you can't play?

**Chris:** Of course. Man, I am inspired by my friends like Thomas Pridgen and Ronald Bruner. I might catch Bruner with Thundercat one night and he's having one of those crazy gigs. You get excited. I never thought of that—that's insane! What just happened? Maybe only three people heard it, but I'm always getting inspired by listening.
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It’s tough to know where the fan ends and the musician begins with Guns n’ Roses’ drummer—who, some might be surprised to learn, has been happily perched atop the band’s drum riser for a decade now. 

MD got the chance to climb right up there with him during GNR’s current world tour, and immediately understood why he’s the perfect man for the job.

Story by Jamie Blaine  
Photos by Leslie Tubberville
It’s 98 degrees at Music City’s Titan Stadium, and *Modern Drummer* has been invited on stage to sit behind the kit of the world’s most dangerous band, the reunited, unrepentant group of misfits known officially as Guns n’ Roses. “Let me get your picture, my man,” drummer Frank “Thunderchucker” Ferrer says, snapping iPhone shots from Slash’s station on stage.

Ferrer’s lighthearted attitude is a bit surprising. Here’s the guy keeping time for one of the most legendary American rock acts ever, and he’s laughing and letting a relative stranger goof around on his drumset. Apparently, the Not in This Lifetime tour is a far cry from the pressure-cooker situation that GNR was rumored to be in the *Chinese Democracy* days.

“A couple more!” the Thunderchucker says, handing over a set of his signature Vater Power 5Bs.

Ferrer’s laid-back and gracious vibe just goes to show that he hasn’t forgotten his modest roots growing up in Manhattan’s Chelsea neighborhood. Since those days he’s served as a member of the Psychedelic Furs and Love Spit Love and worked with a long list of other top acts. We begin our conversation looking back at those early days in New York City, and Ferrer’s first kit....
Frank: It was this old put-together thing my father found somewhere. Multicolored, made from spare pieces. I remember it had a red-sparkle tom, a Ludwig bass drum, cracked cymbals…. I might have had a rack tom as a floor. I worked that thing over until I finally got my first real kit. I was in a band called the Beautiful, and we got signed to Warner Bros., so I was able to buy a GMS set, which I had for over twenty years before I started using Pork Pie.

MD: You played that same GMS kit through all those bands?

Frank: All those years. It had a 24” bass drum and 8”, 10”, and 12” toms, and I kept my old Slingerland 14” tom. I did Love Spit Love, Psychedelic Furs, Robi Rosa, Frank Black. I toured and recorded with that set until I started working with Guns about ten years ago.

MD: What got you started in music?

Frank: My father was a Latin percussionist, so we always had drums in the house. I joined the New York City Youth Chorus and couldn’t sing a lick, so the director, Mr. Gomez, had me play percussion. That’s when I was ten. And the next year my father took me to see Kiss.

MD: Latin was a big influence for Peter Criss as well.

Frank: Really? I didn’t realize that. I was so naïve about rock music that I thought the opening band and Kiss used the same drumset. So the lights go out, the crowd goes nuts—and I got scared! I had no idea what was going on. And Kiss literally explodes onto the stage. Me and my buddy sat in our seats totally freaked out. My mind couldn’t process it. I remember thinking, I don’t know what they’re doing—but that’s what I want to do!

MD: Did you experience the show as a drummer or just a fan?

Frank: Believe it or not, drums were the last thing on my mind. I couldn’t take my eyes off [guitarist] Ace Frehley. The way he was all wobbly and slow, it’s like he was in slow motion while everything else was going regular speed. I just loved Ace, man. So at first I played guitar. Drums were the last thing on my mind.

MD: Obviously there was some epiphany along the way.

Frank: Eventually, yeah, but it was a few years down the road. My parents bought me this crappy little electric guitar, and my friends and I put a band together. We were working up songs, and as it turns out, I was always having to show the drummer what beats to play. Finally I sat down at the set and didn’t get back up. So somewhere around fourteen I fell in love with the drums and realized they were my thing.

MD: Who were your earliest drumming influences?

Frank: Peter Criss, of course. Peter rocks, man. I mean, listen to “Strutter.” John Bonham, sure. He was probably the greatest lead drummer ever. I spent a lot of those early days grooving to “Kashmir.” But you know, I’ve been thinking more lately that the sign of a great drummer is if you don’t even think about the drums when you hear them. When you hear an AC/DC song or the Stones, you’re not focused on the drums. Kiss is the same thing. There’s a foundation you can stand on and enjoy the rest of the song. You can listen to the melody. You’re not necessarily thinking, What a great drum fill. You’re thinking, What a great song.

MD: Like Ringo?

Frank: Exactly! I had someone ask, “Don’t you think Zak Starkey is a better drummer than Ringo Starr?” It’s impossible! Ringo played on immortal songs, and part of the reason they’re so great is that his style and restraint let the music shine. There are a lot of incredible drummers who can’t pull that off. So I like to think I come from more of a song approach. The Motown guys, Charley Drayton, Charlie Watts, Bun E. Carlos, Phil
Rudd—those are the guys I listened to. But not only drummers. Keith Richards, Malcolm Young—even Celia Cruz with her percussive phrasing—they were a big influence on my drum style too.

MD: Hey, doesn’t your lead singer also play in Phil and Malcolm’s old band?

Frank: I know! How cool is that, right? I play with the lead singer of Guns n’ Roses and the lead singer of AC/DC. I’m playing a show the other night and I look down and there’s Angus Young and Slash. It’s like the Mount Rushmore of guitarists, and I’m jamming “Whole Lotta Rosie” with them. It’s insane, dude.

MD: You mentioned listening to AC/DC drummer Phil Rudd.

Frank: When I was a kid, I got to see Phil play Madison Square Garden on the For Those About to Rock tour, and that was a huge education for me. He had a simple kit—one rack, two floors, a ride cymbal…. Phil Rudd, man. Just find that groove and sit there. Roger Taylor from Queen is another guy I saw perform live about that same time. Amazing drummer that never comes up much in conversation. He’s a musician. He played the song. Roger Frickin’ Taylor, bro. Mighty. And we’ve been playing Pink Floyd’s “Wish You Were Here” in the shows, and Nick Mason, he’s another underrated guy. He’s tasteful. A drummer shouldn’t be selfish. The music comes first. You have to serve the song.

MD: What’s your advice to young drummers in terms of serving the song?

Frank: First, if you’re playing in a band with a singer, figure out where his or her vocal tempo lies, where they breathe or sing full power. Some singers can’t think fast and others can’t think slow, so the place for you as a drummer is to sit with your click and find where you fit comfortably so the singer can best sing the song. Second, find the hook and make it the meatiest, baddest part of the tune. Drums are important. We lay the foundation. But the most important thing is the song. So keep that in mind.

MD: Did growing up in New York City give you a musical advantage?

Frank: For sure. Great shows, daily. I could walk to the Limelight, to CBGB or SNAFU. Also, all my local heroes, like Steve Jordan and Zack Alford and Sterling Campbell—who played with Bowie and Springsteen and Duran Duran—those guys were my mates, and I got to know them personally. So I was mad lucky growing up in New York.

MD: Was it rock first, then punk? Or Latin first?

Frank: I rebelled against the Latin influence at first. Every kid goes through that. So it was hard rock and punk, and then later in the ’80s hip-hop. Punk was CBGB on a Sunday afternoon. Leeway…the Cro-Mags with Mackie, another local guy who also played with Bad Brains…the Ramones—Marky’s

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Frank Ferrer

hi-hat, crazy. My neighborhood was poor and Latino, and of course all the punk rockers and artists move into the poor Latino neighborhoods.

**MD:** How did hip-hop influence your drumming?

**Frank:** We only had one record player, and my older sister was into Funkadelic, so that music was always in the background too. Sugarhill Gang, Kurtis Blow—all those great records with the pocket groove. The Beastie Boys of course started as a hardcore band and then went hip-hop. Anthrax and Public Enemy. Public Enemy was as punk as any punk band. Everything falls into a groove. That’s the soundtrack of New York City, punk rock on one side, hip-hop on the other. And Latin uptown? That’s me.

**MD:** What current drummers do you like?

**Frank:** Abe Cunningham from Deftones, Danny Carey from Tool, Mike Miley from Rival Sons—slamming band, man. Steve Kiely from Monster Truck. They’ve got that good, classic-rock drum feeling. And Ilan Rubin from Nine Inch Nails—love that guy.

**MD:** Steven Adler came out last night and played with the band for the first time in twenty-six years. As GNR’s drummer for over a decade now, how do you feel about that?

**Frank:** Loved it. I’m a Guns fan from the start, so it was very, very cool. We took an extended musical break after “Better” and set up my drums for Steven, and he slid right in and did his thing on “Out Ta Get Me” and “My Michelle.” The fans went ape, and it was so great to see him up there. Nothing but love from me, man.

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Frank: From the very first time we played together, we knew we were cut from the same cloth. In Duff’s heart of hearts he considers himself a punk rocker, and I do too.

MD: Duff said that “Rocket Queen” came from jamming to Cameo’s “Word Up.”

Frank: It did, man! Crazy, right? That rock-funk stuff in Guns kinda reminds me of what the Stones were doing in the ’80s. We play “Rocket Queen” for like twenty minutes now. Duff and I sit in the pocket, and Slash does his talk-box thing, and it’s a lot of fun, man. I love that funky groove of “Mr. Brownstone” too. For a drummer, it doesn’t get much better than that. In a rock band, you gotta play stuff girls can dance to.

MD: How did you create your parts for Chinese Democracy?

Frank: I did a few tracks with Brain and he told me to just make the songs my own. It wasn’t so much conscious writing as focusing on how the music made me feel and not overthinking it. And then on the song “Chinese Democracy”—which was written by drummer Josh Freese—I play that whole track by myself. But the rest of the record is me and Brain. We already had Josh’s arrangements and there was a lot going on, but I found room to express myself.

MD: Axl’s scrutinizing all this?

Frank: Yeah, yeah. There were a couple things he loved, like in the middle section of “Better,” Brain was crashing on the hi-hat, and I played it more on the crash cymbal to keep the neck-breaking down to the hi-hat. If Axl pointed something out I would definitely keep doing it every night.

MD: Do you think you’ll be on the next Guns record?

Frank: Man, I’m just hoping that if Guns continues in whatever form, I’ll be part of that recording process as well.

MD: What sorts of changes have you made for the stadiums and larger venues of the reunion shows?

Frank: I just got a new drum tech, Imy James, and he’s got me sounding better than ever before. Imy worked with Prince, man! Plus Tommy Aldridge, Thin Lizzy, Trans-Siberian Orchestra, Faith No More… He tunes my kit to the song now and weighs all my sticks.

MD: So you tune to the song instead of the room?

Frank: Right. Everybody likes a different feel. Some like their heads more spongy, and others like them really tight so there’s a lot of response in the progressive stuff. Most of the Guns songs are in E-flat, so we work with the sound guy to find notes that work best with the set list. Back in the day you would never do that. What felt good sounded good. But now we’ve got the technology to go beyond that, and the only thing that changes is the venue; the toms sound the same pretty much every day.

MD: Explain why you weigh the sticks.

Frank: There might be a difference in weight from stick to stick, say 40 to 60 grams. You’ll notice the difference. So Imy will weigh each stick and write the weight on the butt, and I’ll only use sticks in the same spectrum. It’s more comfortable. It might be in the middle of the show before I notice it, or maybe on a high-paced song the stick will break if it’s too light. I always start with heavier sticks and work lighter towards the end.

MD: What are your thoughts on using a click?

Frank: I love click tracks. My biggest concern as a drummer is tempo and making sure that the pocket is as deep as possible. Once you’ve got the tempo locked, you’re free. There’s a lot going on live, so we play the newer songs to a click. But I’m in and out. I use some clicks for groove, to get into the song, to get out, even the middle.

MD: You’ve been playing professionally for more than twenty-five years. How do you stay healthy and loose?

Frank: Lately I’ve been battling arthritic stuff in my wrists and ankles. More my hi-hat foot than my kick. Practicing keeps everything well oiled. I don’t get much practice in on the road, but I have a drum room in my basement at home and I get down there every day. I try to play live two or three times a week, and I play drums daily. Playing actually relieves the stiffness and pain. We soundcheck every single show now, and I really enjoy that. You can play with a practice pad in your hotel room, but it’s not the same. I get a good half hour to forty-five minutes of warm-up in before the show. I need to play as much as possible and hit as hard as I usually hit.

MD: What’s your practice and warm-up routine?

Frank: My all-time favorite groove is Bonham’s version of the Purdie shuffle, so I might play along to “Fool in the Rain” three times in a row. Or maybe I’ll find some crazy Dennis Chambers video on YouTube and go with that. As far as basic rudiments go, everything I do is rooted in the paradiddle. So I might work around that between the hands and feet. But I’m not a super-technical drummer, and I try hard not to overplay.

MD: Thanks for your time, Frank. A lot of us have been looking forward to these shows for a long, long time.

Frank: Me too, and I’ve got a front-row seat, man! Seriously, I’m thankful every day. I get to do what I love. How many people can truly say that?
Times have changed, and so has his address. For the longtime member of one of America’s most beloved left-of-center rock bands—reunited after several years apart—it’s all for the better.
Getting divorced from your wife soon after the band you’ve been playing with for twenty years breaks up is the kind of one-two punch that can drive a person to a pretty dark place. Or it can inspire a total uprooting. In the case of Ween’s ace drummer, Claude Coleman Jr., making a major move proved to be a way forward, personally and creatively.

“I’ve defected out of Yankee territory into the South,” says the New Jersey native of his relocation to Asheville, North Carolina, the formerly sleepy mountain town that’s become a gentrified haven for creative types over the last fifteen years. “It’s been the greatest thing I’ve ever done for myself. I had a bunch of friends who’d been living there and loving it. I actually subleted [drummer] Eric Slick’s house for a little bit when he was on tour with Dr. Dog, to test it out. It’s a perfect fit across the board, and it’s an amazingly creative environment. There’s a lot of music and a lot of great players here.” So much music and so many great players, in fact, that Coleman’s breaks from the reunited Ween’s touring commitments hardly seem like breaks at all, as he cites one respite where he played “like, six gigs in five days.”

“There are so many musical things going on in Asheville,” Coleman explains. “I have to kind of pick and choose, and for the first time in my life I’m actually saying no to some things. I have a couple steady gigs. I play with an incredible organ trio called the Digs. I play with a band led by a great lap steel player, Scott Murray—we do a live-band honky-tonk karaoke. And I play with this band called Skunk Ruckus, which is like a punk, hillbilly, mountain kind of thing.”

That all seems about right, given Coleman’s day gig with the impossible-to-categorize Ween. Claude’s many years with the group, which is based in New Hope, Pennsylvania, trained him to dash between genres like an Olympian. And after a four-year split, he’s making those mad dashes once again, holding it together live as the band shifts from the calypso groove of “Bananas and Blow” to the scatological swing of “Mr. Richard Smoker” to the leaden rock of “Roses Are Free” and slamming guitar freak-outs like “Buckingham Green.”

“You’d think it would take Coleman and the reunited Ween weeks, maybe months, to remember how to straddle that fine line between absurdity and stone-cold seriousness with such power and taste. Not the case at all. “Generally we barely rehearse; we kind of just meet each other at the airport,” Coleman says with a laugh. “I’ve been doing it with them for twenty-two years or so, so my muscle memory is pretty strong. We have to finesse some of the tunes and reacquaint ourselves with some of the subtleties. But most of our music is second nature to us.”

As for Ween carrying on past its current touring commitments, it’s wait and see, according to Coleman. “Right now we’re just focused on doing a lot of shows and reconnecting with the fans,” he says. “Just going out and having fun with it. There might be some things on the horizon I’m not even aware of. These worlds collide however they collide. I imagine there’ll be some recording and some new music at some point in the future. But it’s got to come in its own time.”

Patrick Berkery
Sum 41’s Frank Zummo

The journeyman drummer’s enthusiasm never wanes. It’s an infection that prospective employers are all too happy to catch.

Frank Zummo endorses SJC drums, Zildjian cymbals, DW pedals and hardware, Remo heads, Ahead sticks and cases, Roland electronics, and products by Latin Percussion, Snare Weight, Ultimate Ears, Porter & Davies, and Kelly SHU.
Frank Zummo has always been a team player—whether performing with his drum brothers in Street Drum Corps, filling in for an injured Tommy Lee in Mötley Crüe, or joining existing lineups with Dhani Harrison’s thenewno2, Gary Numan, the late Scott Weiland, or Krewella. It’s easy to see why Sum 41 singer, rhythm guitarist, and leader Deryck Whibley reached out to the drummer to tour, record, and become a band member on the occasion of the group’s latest album, 13 Voices, which even finds Zummo cowriting one song.

The platinum-selling band—which released its debut album, All Killer, No Filler, featuring the number-one Billboard Modern Rock single “Fat Lip,” in 2001—has been on sold-out tours for most of 2016, in Europe, the U.S., Asia, Mexico, Canada, and South America. Zummo will be driving the beat well into 2017.

So how did the New York native, who’s now living in Los Angeles, wind up in a band from Ontario, Canada? “I’ve been with Sum 41 for about a year and a half now,” Zummo says, “but I’ve been friends with Deryck for many years, and I’ve always been a big fan. In 2013 Street Drum Corps was performing our Vegas residency at the Hard Rock, and he was our special guest on opening night. It was the first time we’d ever played together, and it really clicked. He invited me over to his house a few times, and after a week spent hanging and jamming with the band, they asked me to be their full-time drummer.

“The shows and the fans have been amazing,” Zummo adds. “The Vans Warped shows and touring Europe for a three-week festival run were great, and the energy was insane. And we played the Sziget Festival in Budapest for 50,000 people, which was the biggest and most amazing show of my career, hands down.”

Adding to Zummo’s excitement on tour was the attendance of Brixton, his first child. “This summer he came out to four of the Warped Tour shows,” Zummo says. “They were his first concerts. The feeling the first time I walked on stage and my son was right by my side with my wife…that was something I’ve dreamed about. It’s hard leaving, but technology has made it easy to see him each day via video chat.”

Never one to slow down, during a short Sum 41 break Zummo is getting back to work with his Street Drum Corps partners Bobby and Adam Alt and playing shows with Krewella. Billy Amendola

For more with Zummo, including a track-by-track discussion of 13 Voices, go to moderndrummer.com
Tony Hajjar
The post-hardcore veteran explores new vistas with Gone Is Gone and retools his technique for an album and tour with the rejuvenated At the Drive-In.

After spending a few years building his résumé as a film composer, Tony Hajjar is back at home with the post-hardcore favorites At the Drive-In.

The El Paso, Texas, band released three full-length albums and several EPs before calling it quits in 2001. But its influence would be felt long and wide, not least via outfits that were subsequently begun by its former members.

While Hajjar, guitarist Jim Ward, and bassist Paul Hinojos achieved success in the somewhat more accessible Sparta, singer Cedric Bixler-Zavala and guitarist Omar Rodriguez-Lopez founded the wildly progressive Mars Volta.

But rekindled friendships among the original members resulted in a series of ATDI reunion shows in 2012, which led to further bookings a couple years later and planted the seeds for a new recording.

Story by Ben Meyer
Photos by Paul La Raia
According to Hajjar, closeness among the bandmates was as key to At the Drive-In’s comeback as it was to its original success.

“In 2009 we started hanging out and talking more than usual,” the drummer says. “That was an exciting time for us. We were letting go of a lot of old skin and just remembering what we loved about each other. In 2012 we had the privilege of doing ten shows, which were really fun. Around October of 2015 we met and decided that we don’t just like this band, we love it. It’s where we all cut our teeth. We’ve all been lucky to do a lot of different projects and be successful in them, but this is family. This is home.”

The band members insist that they’ve found a new creative fire in their strong, time-tested relationships. Says Hajjar, “When people ask me, ‘Are you enjoying the reunion?’ I say, ‘I’m enjoying the re-ignition,’ because that’s what it feels like. We’re starting over. People who’ve seen our recent shows can feel it. [Fans] are smart, and they know if you’re cashing in. They’ve seen our shows and say, ‘Oh my God, these guys are all in. And we are.’

In recent years Hajjar has focused much of his creative energy on composing music for the film industry, working with multi-instrumentalist Mike Zarin of the production company Sencit Music. The two have collaborated on several projects, including trailers for Game of Thrones, Star Trek: Into Darkness, and Zero Dark Thirty. “Mike and I met in 2008,” Hajjar says, “and back then I didn’t even know that music was created specifically for movie trailers. I thought it was just taken from the score. Mike showed me that there’s a whole industry around that, and I started getting into it when he first began writing material with that use in mind. I played drums on all the songs, and our relationship quickly expanded into composing together. We were lucky enough to have a lot of success in that world, and now we’re taking it to another level. This

“During the last At the Drive-In tour, I was getting a cortisone shot every few days and a steroid shot in my right arm just so I could play. I had to make changes.”

our teeth. We’ve all been lucky to do a lot of different projects and be successful in them, but this is family. This is home.”
all happened after Sparta; it was kind of a time when I needed to stop touring for my mental health. It was the perfect time for me to be locked up in the studio and then go home every night, but still be artistically active.”

Today Hajjar’s artistic voice is being expressed in numerous settings. Besides writing material for the next At the Drive-In release, the drummer has been producing and tracking drums for the West Coast band New Language’s forthcoming debut album, and he and Zarin have founded the powerhouse modern-rock unit Gone Is Gone, featuring Queens of the Stone Age guitarist Troy Van Leeuwen and Mastodon singer/bassist Troy Sanders. While the band’s self-titled eight-track debut EP finds Hajjar slamming as passionately as ever, it also features a couple of instrumental tracks that would sit comfortably on a documentary or feature-film soundtrack.

“This project includes members of three

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hard-touring bands," Hajjar says, "so the goal was never to tour for six months out of the year. The idea of the band is to be able to play a show or a festival and then go back into the studio and work on a score for a film, a video game, or a documentary. And we have a lot of new ideas that will hopefully show off our work outside of music. The band needs to live in every kind of format. And that's the most exciting part for us. Everyone composes, and the EP is just the beginning. There's a lot more from this band that we're looking forward to announcing."

Recently Hajjar undertook the daunting task of overhauling his technique to help heal the physical repercussions of years of touring and self-described poor technique. Attacking his kit with reckless abandon night after night with At the Drive-In took its toll. "I used to play like a caveman," Tony says, "so I have a lot of tendon issues in my right arm and shoulder. It's mostly on my right side. I'm left-handed, but I set up like a right-handed player. My right side has really taken a beating over the years. One of my friends saw us recently and said that I was still hitting as hard but I'm mostly using my wrists now. I was glad that someone finally noticed! During the last At the Drive-In tour in 2000, I was getting a cortisone shot every few days and a steroid shot in my right arm just so I could play the shows. I learned my lesson, and to have any real longevity I had to make changes."

"Last year I made the recording of the New Language album my challenge to play full-throttle, as hard as I always do, but to do it with my wrists," Hajjar continues. "It was a hard adjustment, especially in the studio. You're trying to be you. But because I was at the helm, I could kind of do it at my own speed. It ended up working out great. I actually began thinking about this in 2008, but I wasn't [fully] doing it. Now I feel like I've finally achieved it. I'm still in pain, but a lot less."

This, of course, is good news, especially with At the Drive-In once again in working mode. According to Hajjar, the band has fallen easily into its well-established pattern of writing together collaboratively. "The process is like it always was," he says, "which is go, go, go! Everyone has ideas. I've been lucky as a drummer in that I've always been in bands where my ideas count. I purposefully
Janey put myself in situations like that. Everyone is writing. Sometimes one of us takes the lead. It could be Paul or it could be Omar. It bounces around depending on who has the vision, then everyone throws in their thing. We have the same respect now for each other that we did back then, if not more. When you have respect for each other when you’re writing, it can only go great.

With genuine excitement for their current material, the members of At the Drive-In are committing to supporting a new album properly—and reasonably, in terms of accommodating the players’ family commitments—but they aren’t taking anything for granted. “The touring that we’ve been doing is to earn our stripes again,” Hajjar says, “and we’re going to do a whole record cycle. We’re ready to give a lot every night to make sure that each show is special.”

**Tools of the Trade**

Hajjar plays a Tama Starclassic Bubinga kit in a custom flat black finish, including a 9x13 tom, 16x16 and 16x18 floor toms, and an 18x24 bass drum, with a 6.5x14 S.L.P. Black brass snare. His Zildjian cymbals include 14” K Custom Dark hi-hats, a 22” K ride, a 20” K Dark crash, a 19” A Custom Medium crash, and a stack composed of (from the top down) a 6” FX Zil-Bel, a 6” Rezo Pang, a 10” EFX splash, and a 16” A Custom EFX crash. His Tama hardware includes a Camco single bass drum pedal, an Iron Cobra HH905 hi-hat stand, an HTS108W Star single tom stand, four HC83BW Roadpro boom cymbal stands, and an HS80LOW snare stand. He uses JH Audio JH 11 custom-molded in-ear monitors and a ButtKicker LFE transducer, Remo heads, and Vater Nude 5B sticks.

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Back in 2011, this writer saw a then twenty-two-year-old Jonathan Barber performing as part of a workshop held in Norwich, Connecticut, by world-renowned jazz guitarist Pat Metheny. Working with Metheny, drummer Antonio Sanchez, bassist Larry Grenadier, and a large student ensemble, Barber was required to learn and perform a twenty-minute original Metheny composition, with only three days to master the Herculean task. Whether reading or improvising, playing time or soloing, Jonathan stood out as a musician with a sharp mind, keen abilities, and an unerring sense of musicality, all of which defied his age. Here was a young man with a future.

Fast-forward five years to today, and Barber’s time has come. At Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola in New York City during the summer of 2016, performing with saxophonist Kris Allen’s quartet, Barber drummed with authority, creativity, dynamics, and heat. His maturity on the set was a revelation. For one song he summoned the Afro-Cuban spirit of Elvin Jones, for the next a tumbling tom figure reminiscent of Jeff “Tain” Watts. Barber’s trademark, a fiery time feel augmented by considerable technique, supercharged the music.

Adding to a busy performance schedule, Barber has tracked considerable recording time, including for Kris Allen’s Beloved, JD Allen’s Bloom and Grace, Jovan Alexandre’s Collective Consciousness, Andy Jaffe’s Arc, Mimi Jones’ Feet in the Mud, and Nat Reeves’ State of Emergency! More recently the drummer recorded albums by trumpeter Jeremy Pelt and by Terrace Martin, renowned producer of Kendrick Lamar’s Grammy-winning To Pimp a Butterfly.

Barber runs his own night at Smalls Jazz Club in Greenwich Village, gigs with the Hartford Legacy Jazz Orchestra and with Jimmy Greene’s big band and quartet, and recently toured the Pacific Rim with the Japanese jazz singer Juju. And he’s feverishly writing material for his debut recording.

Is there one tried-and-true method for establishing yourself in the epicenter of the jazz world, New York City? Jonathan Barber may be writing the book.

MD: You’ve hit New York like a storm. You’re already running a session at Smalls and recording and gigging all over town. How did you begin playing the drums?

Jonathan: Seeing my father play the drums in church was my introduction to the instrument. The drums were always set up in the living room as if they were furniture. So I played drums as much as anything as a kid. Then in high school I played in the jazz band. I immersed myself in the drums after that. In my junior year I entered the Artists Collective in Hartford, Connecticut, Jackie McLean’s after-school program. After Jackie died, his son René took over the program, and he became my musical father. He helped me get into the Hartt School at the University of Hartford, where I met Eric McPherson, who became my main drum instructor. [Barber graduated from Hartt in 2011 with a degree in jazz studies.]

MD: What was your focus with Eric?

Jonathan: Elvin is definitely an influence, for his intensity. Tony Williams, Max Roach, Billy Higgins, Philly Joe Jones, Art Blakey as well, and I’m a huge fan of Papa Jo Jones. His phrasing was wonderful; he doesn’t waste a note. His technique was great; he played the brushes like no other. He was ahead of the curve as far as his solos, the way he used his hands, and his dynamics. And the drummers I’ve rubbed elbows with are a big influence: Eric McPherson, Nasheet Waits, Lewis

by Ken Micallef

Jonathan Barber

“In New York you always have to bring your ‘A’ game,” says the rising jazz star. So far, his report cards would make the elders proud.
Nash, Ralph Peterson, Gregory Hutchinson, Gerald Cleaver. I would commute to New York to hear them play when I was in school. That alone inspired me motivationally.

**MD:** What surprised you about the New York music scene once you arrived?

**Jonathan:** That I had to constantly push and play at a high level. In Hartford, some gigs are meaningful, others are not. But in New York you always have to bring your ‘A’ game. You never know who's going to be there. Even playing Smalls at 1 A.M., I’ve had Kamasi Washington, Kurt Rosenwinkel, and Peter Bernstein come by to hang. The intensity you feel in New York City every day grows on you. Moving here made me a better musician.

**MD:** One of your gigs is the Generations in Jazz trio with Eric McPherson and saxophonist Abraham Burton. Do you and Eric play simultaneously in the trio?

**Jonathan:** It's give and take, push and pull. Eric and I often play drums together in lessons and at sessions. We'll play off a melody or an idea and create this whirlwind. Or we might play a polyrhythm off each other using different time signatures. Or one of us will play an ostinato while the other solo. It's a drum ensemble approach. When you add a melodic instrument it brings clarity to that approach. It's definitely a lot of listening and melodic phrasing. Most of it is based off compositions, from McLean to Monk.

**MD:** Like Marcus Gilmore and Kendrick Scott, you're playing Sunhouse Sensory Percussion? You summon different drummers at will. Is that a conscious tool?

**Jonathan:** Yes. Trevor Lawrence, who plays with Herbie Hancock, hooked me up with them. I was hearing drum triggers but without using pads. The Sunhouse rep came to the studio in L.A. while I was recording with Terrace Martin. It sounded so great, we added it to the record. It creates a different flavor. It's not a drum loop or drum machine, but it gives you this other sound. It can sound like a droplet of water, or a timpani with a lot of reverb on it, or a door slamming…. I can incorporate it into my playing without the rigidity of electronics. It's very subtle.

**MD:** You feel in New York City every day grows on you. Moving here made me a better musician. In your short time in the city, what have you learned about 1950 to 1960.

**Jonathan:** At school I went through the different drummers in sections, from Tony to Elvin to Roy to Art. Over time I took bits and pieces of each of them, using different bags. I was really inspired by Eric McPherson. He has one foot in the past and one in the future as far as influences. I'd like to do the same, honor the tradition but also push and inspire younger drummers to do the same. It seems like a lot of drummers today are stuck in one dimension, even within jazz. They play straight bebop and shun the evolution of music. Jazz isn't all about 1950 to 1960. Jazz always changes.

**MD:** I first saw you when you were twenty-two, playing in a Pat Metheny workshop. What has been your road to developing as you have?

**Jonathan:** I've always improved the most when put on the spot. Church developed my ears. College was about improvising: improvising on the form, with a concept, and searching out other drummers. Experiencing Tony Williams, Max Roach, and Roy Haynes for the first time was life-changing. Then in New York, there's a certain energy and a standard you have to maintain if you want to work and be noticed. I played a gig with Jimmy Greene, Kurt Elling, and John Patitucci. That's not something you can prepare for—you just work the tools you've accumulated over time and go for it. That's part of the continuum of jazz; it gives people the chance to put the new guys on the spot. That's the best lesson and the best way to learn. You find those moments that are bigger than you are.

**TOOLS OF THE TRADE**

Barber plays a Canopus Neo-Vintage kit with black sparkle finish and gold lugs. It features a 5.5x14 snare (6.5x14 birch alternate), an 8x12 tom with an 8x10 alternate, 14x14 and 16x16 floor toms, and a 14x18 bass drum with a 14x22 alternate. His cymbals include circa-1960s 14” A Zildjian hi-hats, a 20” Istanbul Agop Special Edition ride with three rivets, and a circa-1950s 20” A Zildjian ride with five rivets. His Evans heads include a G1 Coated snare batter and 200 Hazy snare-side, G12 Coated tom batters and Black resonants, and either a G1 Coated or EMAD Coated bass drum batter and G1 Coated front head. He plays Promark Select Balance Rebound .550”-diameter hickory Teardrop sticks, TB3 Jazz Telescopic wire brushes, H-Rods Hot Rods, PMBRM2 Small Broomsticks, and PST1 Performer series maple timpani mallets. And he's recently become a Sunhouse Sensory Percussion artist.

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Percussion: LP Bongo cowbell in chrome

Miscellaneous: Vater drink and stick holders and JH Audio in-ear monitors

GEARING UP
ON STAGE AND UP CLOSE

Alex Van Halen and drum tech/visual artist John Douglas have worked together since 1998. John was at the 2016 Winter NAMM show displaying the kit Alex used for Van Halen’s 2015 North American tour. “It still has the heads that were used on the last show of the tour,” says Douglas.

One of the most frequent questions John got asked at NAMM had to do with the stacked bass drums, which were used to provide isolation for the mics. “Many drummers thought they were woofers,” says Douglas. “There’s a microphone inside those outer kick drums, but there’s no batter head on them. The mics are pointed at the primary kicks.

“Al always wanted to have microphones on the resonant side of the kick drums,” John continues. “But in live situations, particularly in arenas, the guitars bleed into them and make them unusable. The extra kicks in front allow us to have mics up against the resonant head.

“Al and [his brother and Van Halen guitarist] Ed are constant tone chasers,” Douglas adds. “They’re always looking for interesting sounds. From what I can remember about the first rehearsals back in ’98, when I walked in there were probably thirty snares lined up along the wall behind the drumkit. We’d try a different snare every day. Back then he was using Ludwig Silver Dot drumheads, sometimes with and sometimes without gaffer’s tape underneath.”

According to John, the most common question he gets asked is in regard to recreating that classic Alex Van Halen snare sound. “Since I’ve been working with Al,” John says, “he’s played every snare drum imaginable—metal, aluminum, bronze, hammered bronze, carbon fiber, maple…. He’s played them all, with every head combination imaginable, and they always sound like Al. Other drummers get frustrated because they can’t get it, but I’ve uncovered the secret—you have to be Alex Van Halen.”

Alex has been on Paiste’s roster since 1983. Like many drummers who play that brand, he and John Douglas appreciate the consistency that Paiste offers. “That’s the beauty of Paiste,” says John. “If you get a new 18” 2002 Power crash, it will sound like the old 18” 2002 Power crash. There’s no guesswork.”

And speaking of keeping the guesswork to a minimum, Douglas and Van Halen have labeled Alex’s cup holders “Salvation Sauce,” “Liquid Redemption,” and “Reverend Al’s Holy Water,” respectively, for black coffee, water, and fresh-squeezed watermelon juice.
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The Swampy Double Groove
Grease Up Your Phrases
by Rich Redmond

With double grooves, the left hand plays every 8th note using unaccented strokes in between accented backbeats. I refer to these unaccented notes as “taps.” Combining this snare pattern with a standard 8th-note hi-hat figure results in a locomotive groove with a lot of energy.

This concept thrives comfortably in multiple genres, such as Americana, rockabilly, country, and various types of music from New Orleans and Memphis. Any time I need to grease something up or get “swampy,” I’ll pull this idea out of my bag of tricks. Crafty drummers can also use this concept in many other styles. The examples included here are just the beginning. Try playing the right-hand pattern on hi-hats, rides, crashes, rims, or cowbells. Get swampy!

10

11

12

Rich Redmond drums for country star Jason Aldean, is an award-winning clinician, and is an active session drummer in Nashville and Los Angeles. His recent book/DVD, FUNdamentals of Drumming for Kids (coauthored with Michael Aubrecht), is available through Modern Drummer Publications.
In the third installment of our series on Swiss drumming, we’ll continue exploring the European roots of rudiments. In the last lesson we introduced Tagwacht pieces—music that’s typically used to awaken soldiers. The piece “Three Camps” could be considered an American military equivalent to a Tagwacht. In this article, we’ll focus entirely on Tagwacht rudiments.

Most of the terminology in this series originates from the methods of respected educator Dr. Fritz Berger. In this lesson we’ll use a style of notation developed by Berger. The second line in the following exercises demonstrates how these figures should be phrased using a quintuplet subdivision, and dynamics apply to both lines. These patterns would traditionally be notated in 6/8, however, the quintuplet interpretations are written in 2/4.

In the previous installment of this series, we introduced the reveille stroke (known as the double drag tap in the U.S.) and the reversed reveille stroke. Our first exercise this month introduces another inverted version of the reveille stroke sometimes referred to as a three-stroke-roll combination. A nine-stroke roll is played at the end of the phrase. Drags should be played somewhat softer than the single strokes.

Exercise 2 demonstrates the similarities between the Maermeli stroke and the reversed reveille stroke—only one note is missing between the two. Although it’s not traditional to present these two strokes together, combining them here demonstrates their similar structure.

Exercise 3 incorporates a combination of the single reveille stroke in the first measure, the doubled reveille stroke in the first ending, and the triple reveille stroke in the second ending. The double reveille has a doubled stroke on the second 8th note of the figure, while a triple reveille incorporates a triplet in the same position. Follow the interpretation guide, and make sure that ghosted double strokes are played softly compared to the other notes.
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Here’s the intro to a famous piece by Dr. Berger called “Radac Tagwacht.” Tagwachts usually consist of three parts and feature a typical compositional method and stroke combinations that are strictly and logically presented. Most Tagwacht intros use similar structures, and “Radac” is no exception. It may be helpful to refer to the interpretation guide given for the reveille stroke in part 2 of this series [November 2016]. Remember that the whole piece is played and interpreted using quintuplets.

Claus Hessler is an active clinician in Europe, Asia, and the United States. For more, visit claushessler.com.
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Groove Construction
Part 9: Split Grooves
by Jost Nickel

This month’s groove workshop introduces split patterns. In these phrases, the right hand alternates between two voices, the hi-hat and ride. The arm should hardly move; the motion should originate from the wrist. This concept is especially effective with patterns that contain broken 16th notes, such as Exercise 1.

1

I often stress the importance of focusing on dynamics each time you play, especially in a few key areas. Ghost notes should be played very softly, as opposed to accents, which are much louder. Correct dynamics are achieved by maintaining the proper distance between the stick and the drumhead. When playing ghost notes, I suggest striking the snare from about one to two centimeters above the drumhead. Accents are played at a substantially greater distance, and using rimshots can amplify their impact. I also suggest playing ghost notes with your wrist as opposed to your fingers. Attempts to play softly with the fingers can result in inaccurately placed ghost notes.

When playing two strokes in a row with one hand, I usually accent the second stroke, as shown in Exercise 2. The single strokes on the hi-hat in this pattern are accented as well. If I orchestrate these grooves on the ride, I play the accents on the bell and the unaccented strokes about one to two inches to the left of the bell. The alternating motion originates from the wrist without shifting the arm.

Now we’ll apply the split concept to Exercise 1. The sticking remains the same while we alternate the right hand between the ride and hi-hat. Right-hand accents are omitted from the following exercises, however, you should incorporate them into the patterns.

Next we’ll apply the split to only part of the pattern by starting it on the “e” of beat 2 and ending it on the “e” of beat 4.

Here’s a two-bar groove that combines Exercise 4 (measure 1) with a new phrase that splits the orchestration from beat 3 through the “e” of beat 4 in measure 2.

In Exercise 6, the split starts on the “a” of beat 4 and continues to the “&” of beat 2.

Here’s another two-bar groove. We’ll play Exercise 6 in the first measure and introduce a new split that starts on the “&” of beat 1 and ends on the “&” of beat 2 in the second measure.

Instead of learning tons of new patterns, I usually vary grooves with different orchestrations and dynamics. I hope this lesson encourages you to check out some new possibilities for your favorite patterns.

If you’re interested in more groove concepts, check out my book Jost Nickel’s Groove Book.

Jost Nickel is a top session and touring drummer in Germany, as well as an international clinician endorsing Sonor, Meinl, Aquarian, Vic Firth, and Beyerdynamic.

ONLINE LESSON
modern drummer.com
In this lesson we'll explore a versatile and great-sounding fill from jazz legend Papa Jo Jones. The basic pattern is notated in Exercise 1. Pay close attention to the sticking—it's essential to start and end the fill with your lead hand.

Let's use this fill to set up three common big band figures. Each of the following examples demonstrates how the figure would appear as written in a chart followed by how it would be played when using the fill. Here's our first figure.

Here's how the figure would be interpreted using the Papa Jo fill.

Here's a figure that accents the “&” of beat 1 followed by an interpretation using our fill.

This final phrase starts on the “&” of beat 3. Exercises 10 and 11 demonstrate the figure's written and interpreted versions.

John Xepoleas has written two drum books, Style Studies for the Creative Drummer and Essential Drum Lessons With the Greats. He is also an active online educator. For more info, visit johnxdrums.com.
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This month we’re going to vary the basic phrasing of polyrhythms. Typically, both sides of a polyrhythm begin together on the first note of the rhythm. We can vary this by displacing one or both sides of the rhythm. We’ll focus on a two-over-three polyrhythm in 3/4. Dotted quarter notes comprise the two side of the rhythm, and quarter notes comprise the three side.

Exercise 1 displaces the two side by starting it on the “&” of beat 1. Notice that we still have two- and three-note groups of equally spaced notes within the same time frame.

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
1 & \text{&} & 2 & \text{&} & 3 & \text{&} \\
\end{array}
\]

The two side can be displaced by one more 8th note to start on beat 2. We can also displace the three side by an 8th note so it starts on the “&” of every beat.

Increasing the subdivision makes this concept especially interesting. If we double the subdivision from 8ths to 16ths we can create the same polyrhythm, but with the added option to create versions that have no point in which the two sides occur simultaneously. Exercise 2 demonstrates this concept by starting the two side on the “e” of beat 1 to create a linear polyrhythm.

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
1 & \text{e} & \text{&} & a & 2 & \text{e} & \text{&} & a & 3 & \text{e} & \text{&} & a \\
\end{array}
\]

I try to practice unique concepts like these within the context of a groove. This allows me to really feel how the rhythms work with or against the pulse, which is imperative if you want to apply what you’re practicing musically. In the next few examples, we’ll play 8th notes on the hi-hat, the two side of the polyrhythm on the snare, and the three side on the bass drum.

Exercises 3 and 4 demonstrate the two other positions for the two side in which it doesn’t occur simultaneously with the three side.

Exercise 5 displaces the three side by a 16th note to the “e” of each beat.

Exercise 6 displaces both sides of the polyrhythm. For an interesting variation, try accenting the “&” of each beat on the hi-hat.

In Exercise 7, we’re going to embellish the groove slightly. We’ll start the two side on the “&” of beat 1 and our three side on the “a” of beat 1. There’s also one additional bass drum note on beat 1. Accenting the “&” of each beat with the hi-hat adds an upbeat feel.

In the next example, we’ll use the ride bell to represent our three side while playing the two side on the snare starting on the “a” of beat 1.

We can also take a New Breed–style approach by using the three side of this polyrhythm in an ostinato and leaving one limb free to play variations of the two side. In Exercise 9, the bass drum plays the three side on the “a” of each beat with an additional note on beat 1. With your right hand playing the ride cymbal and your left foot playing the “&” of each beat, your left hand is free to play each displacement of the two side. Here’s the ostinato.
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Here are the six placements of the two side of a two-over-three 16th-note polyrhythm. Exercise 10 demonstrates the fourth placement.

Beat 1 and the “&” of 2.
The “e” of beat 1 and the “a” of 2.
The “ah” of beat 1 and beat 3.
The “ah” of beat 1 and the “e” of 3.
Beat 2 and the “&” of 3.
The “e” of beat 2 and the “ah” of 3.

Next we’ll apply the rhythm to a more challenging pattern. We’ll use an ostinato that includes a snare on the “&” of beat 2 played with the right hand. The left hand plays the two side between a pair of bells or other small effects cymbals, as demonstrated in Exercises 11 and 12.

Going Beyond

We can also create unique variations with this polyrhythm by using 16th-note triplets. In 3/4 time, this subdivision contains eighteen 16th-note-triplet partials. The dotted quarter note is equivalent to nine 16th-note triplet partials, while the three side takes up six partials (which equals a quarter note).

Exercise 13 places a basic two-over-three phrasing over a 16th-note-triplet double bass pattern. The three side is played on a China cymbal as quarter notes, and the two side is played on beat 1 and the “&” of beat 2.

Exercise 14 places the snare on the third partial of the 16th-note-triplet on beat 2 and the last note of the 16th-note-triplet on beat 4.
Also try displacing the three side within the 16th-note triplets. Exercise 15 moves the three side to the “&” of each beat while starting the two side on the second 16th-note triplet partial on beat 2.

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{15} & 6 & 6 & 6 \\
\end{array}
\]

As daunting as these examples may seem, always try to make them groove. Don’t lose sight of musicality when diving into the polyrhythmic rabbit hole.

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.
A New Year, A New You?
Reviewing and Renewing Your Goals, Part 1
by Russ Miller

Every New Year we look back on the previous twelve months and set resolutions for the next. According to statisticbrain.com, the percentage of people who completely achieve their resolutions is 8 percent. The percentage of people who keep a resolution past thirty days is 64 percent, but the number drops to 46 percent at six months. We’ve discussed before how the ability to finish something is much more valuable than the ability to start something. Most people are starters, but the most successful people are the finishers.

Finishers set and achieve many short-term objectives in the journey towards completing long-term goals. You need to get the feeling of finishing something to inspire you to continue in your development. It’s great to say, “I want to play this,” and be able to do it a week later. Some people never recognize the value of short-term goals and solely focus on the long-term. You need long-term goals, of course. But you also need to validate your efforts with short-term achievements, and you should regularly review the legitimacy of your long-term plans.

I try to reassess my goals around the beginning of January. This past year was a particularly intense one for me in regard to year-end assessment. In this and next month’s installment, we’ll take a look at my personal renewal project to demonstrate how it relates to the three methods of wisdom contained in the Confucius quote.

Who Am I Now? And Who Do I Want to Be?
I’ve been a sideman for most of my career, with the exception of my time in the Psychedelic Furs and when I lead my own band, Arrival. Being a sideman is a utilitarian position, which means that you’re hired to be the drummer and not a member of the band or a featured artist. I’ve built up this part of my career to what could be called a “featured sideman,” meaning that many times the artist or musical director specifically wants me on the gig. In that type of role I’ve been treated very well, and everyone appreciates what I bring to the table. But ultimately, if I can’t be there, the show will go on.

I’m thankful to be working in any capacity, but after thirty-one years as a...
sideman, I’ve decided to focus more on artistic work. My first renewal goal is to develop musical situations that are artist-based. To do that, I had to ask myself, “What situations am I currently in that fit with that goal, and what situations do I want to be in?” My Arrival trio is an example of a project I’m currently working on that fits my renewed focus. We’ve made four albums and one live DVD, and it’s finally—after nearly eight years—starting to branch out globally.

Finding other artistic situations where I can really dig into the music is important. As a sideman, I usually only get to play songs a few times. I would love to see what I could say with material that evolves a bit more. This is the main reason for me trying to change my balance of work. I believe I can deliver more to the music, but extended time spent with the material is necessary to do this. I encourage you to dream for something you want to achieve, and get moving on it—today. Like the old Chinese proverb says, “A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.”

Making Tweaks

In 2009 I contacted my friend and mentor Peter Erskine. I asked him if I could schedule some lessons with him. He didn’t think I was serious and asked, “Why?” I told him that my touch, time, and tones are somewhat aggressive, and I wanted to play more beautifully. I finally talked him into giving me lessons, and I’ve been taking notes on our discussions for the past several years. I’m still working towards my goal, but I can hear and see changes taking place. I’ve received a lot of feedback affirming this as well. I’m not trying to toot my own horn, but I believe it’s important to confirm that my work is paying off.

The other thing I’ve been working on is my presentation of the instrument (sound, tone, and positioning). This was the catalyst for my switch to Mapex in 2013. My kit positioning is still evolving, and the effects of these changes will be revealed more over time.

Reflection

Let’s look back on what we’ve accomplished this year. Which of your goals were reached, and which were not? What were some of your achievements, as well as some of your failures? As our perspective changes, the legitimacy of our dreams is revealed. I achieved life-long goals that I thought were going to be different from what they were. It’s important to review your dreams, set new short-term goals, and adjust your long-term objectives.

As I looked back on my career, I realized that even the biggest gigs in the world could still stifle creativity. So I added “artistry” to my long-term goals. That includes restructuring my touch, feel, and sound on the instrument. Taking an honest assessment of your talent level can be difficult. Remember that no one is perfect. Accept your flaws, and embrace the journey!

Next month we’ll cover the ideas of imitation and experience as they relate to achieving your new goals. See you then.
Saving Some Club Dates
Reviving a Rare Burgundy Sparkle Ludwig Kit
by Chris Lee

There’s no shortage of pre-owned entry-level drums in music stores, secondhand shacks, and yard sales waiting for new homes. These are often the best sets to customize, especially since the resale value of an entry-level drumkit isn’t typically very high. And sometimes you can find some rare used treasures—drums manufactured during an era when the major companies didn’t have “economy” lines.

One afternoon I stopped by a local music store, and just inside the door were some garbage bags filled with old drums. I investigated and found a neglected Ludwig Club Date drumset in burgundy sparkle. The owner had almost thrown them out with the trash, but thankfully decided to try selling them on consignment instead. The salesman threw out a price, and I started thinking.

There’s always an element of risk when buying used drums that aren’t in pristine condition, especially if there’s a no-return policy. Forgotten drums are often stored in dark, musty places. Metal parts can survive long-term neglect, but wood can’t. If exposure to excessive moisture has caused the inner plies to separate, the drum is doomed. So when first looking at a used drum, gently feel around the shell and make sure there isn’t any give or movement in the wood. The shells on these Club Date drums were tight, so I knew they had a chance.

You should also examine the hardware and make sure that everything is there and is in working order. Imperfections or missing parts can provide an opportunity to negotiate on the price. But if you’re unsure of the value of vintage drums, then I recommend not risking more than you can afford to lose, in case they end up being worth less than you expected.

Do No Harm
My personal philosophy for restoring vintage instruments is to avoid any drastic modifications. A radical customization of a rare set is out of the question for me because that would destroy a valuable piece of history. Removing an original factory finish from a vintage drum is also generally a bad idea. Vintage drums were made during an era when things were built to last, so the finish is not going to come off easily. Plus, shards of the outer ply will probably pull off with the wrap. Painting over the old finish is also not recommended. A much better plan is a complete disassembly followed by a thorough cleaning. But even cleaning the drums can destroy the value if you're not careful.

Seek Advice
Before breaking out your toolbox, do some research and learn more about what you have. There are numerous online groups dedicated to the preservation and restoration of various types of drums, and typically the people in those groups will be happy to share what they know. The best information I received when I first posted a picture of my Club Date kit pertained to its authenticity. I was asked if there was a date stamp, and I replied that there was. It read “September 26, 1966.” The stamp confirmed that the drums were made during a brief two-year period when this finish was available. I also learned that this particular finish was extremely delicate and had a tendency to fade. Now that I was armed with a little knowledge, I was ready to begin the restoration.

Stay Organized
Before you disassemble your drums, take some steps to ensure that you’ll be able to reassemble them in the exact same way. I take several close-up pictures of each drum and all of the mounting hardware. I keep everything organized by placing the parts for each drum on separate plates. Reusable plastic bags also work.

Large bolts and tension rods will probably unscrew easily, but use caution when removing small screws that have been in place for forty-plus years. Corrosion can sometimes weaken them. In the event that the head of a small screw breaks off into a lug, it can usually be removed with extractors. But that can be time consuming and frustrating.
Clean the Metal

Drum parts plated in chrome or nickel are dishwasher safe, so I run the lug casings and mounting hardware through a cycle before cleaning them with steel wool. Be sure to remove small bolts, springs, or anything else small enough to go down the drain. Tension rods and lug casings should be put in the silverware basket.

After running the lug casings, mounting hardware, and rims through a cycle, I cleaned each part under hot water with steel wool pads. The steel wool had a profound effect on the metal. Aside from some minor pitting, the parts looked close to brand-new. If some lugs have more pitting than others, then select the best-looking lugs for the sections of the drums that are going to face the audience.

Once the hardware dried, I treated everything with chrome polish to give the metal a lasting shine.

Cleaning the Shells

If the finish on the shells needs a basic cleaning, use glass cleaner followed by a layer of petroleum-based wax. On my kit, the previous owner had applied electrical tape to the bass drum, and the adhesive wasn’t coming off easily. Not wanting to harm the shell with abrasive cleaners, I posted a picture of the tape residue online and asked for suggestions. Some people suggested using various chemical-based solvents, and then others warned that those solvents could be dangerous and that I should use natural substances such as olive oil or mineral oil.

I tried the natural oils first. But four applications did nothing to remove the adhesive. The next option was to use a chemical-based substance intended as a lubricant for metal. If you ever need to use a chemical solvent on a drum shell, be sure to clean the area with glass cleaner afterwards. The tape adhesive on my drum came off fairly easily with the solvent, and the finish was undamaged.

The inner shells will probably need some attention as well. I advise against painting them, as that can hurt the value. Instead, clean the interiors with warm water and chlorine bleach, or use chlorine wipes. Let the shells dry thoroughly before you replace the drumheads.

The Hunt for Missing Parts

Unless you’re lucky, it’s inevitable that your vintage drums will be missing parts or something will be broken. My kit was missing tension rods for the bottom of the toms, as well as bass drum claws, spurs, and parts of the mounting tom hardware.

If you’re restoring the drums with the intention of selling them, you’ll get the best price if the kit is in pristine condition and is reassembled with authentic parts. But if you’re planning to keep the drums and don’t mind using modern parts, there are numerous alternatives. I had no problem locating new tension rods at the right length and thread size for each drum. The modern bass drum claws I purchased didn’t match the originals, so I put them on the bottom of the batter side.

Although I’m a huge fan of vintage drums, I’m not always a fan of vintage hardware. In the past, the only alternative to replacing old hardware was to drill new holes to accommodate new mounts. Today, this can be avoided with numerous modern designs that are durable and non-invasive. For my kit, I utilized clamp-on bass drum spurs, and I mounted the rack tom on a separate stand.

Enjoy the Fruits

It will be a memorable moment when you finally set up your newly restored vintage kit for the first time. Many hours of meticulous work have finally paid off, so sit down and whale away. You’ve earned it!
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The new Access Tool for the Zildjian Gen16 acoustic/electric cymbal system is said to improve the user experience by incorporating drummer-friendly terms and simpler, easy-to-use controls. Drummers can create personalized sounds within the Digital Cymbal Processor with ninety-nine tone presets for each individual channel and ninety-nine total kits. Additional improvements were made in the Editor Mode, using simplified graphics and language that enables easier customizing of the DSP effects.

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**The Jelly Jam** *Profit*

The latest full-length from the supergroup is high on riffage, melody, and topical lyrics.

Busy prog superstars Ty Tabor (King’s X), John Myung (Dream Theater), and Rod Morgenstein (Dixie Dregs, Winger) come together for a fourth full-length, once again putting pop vocals alongside memorable guitar riffs and deep rhythm-section grooves that pull the listener into the evolving storyline. Morgenstein’s tight pocket on “Memphis” draws comparisons to Soundgarden’s rhythmic approach, while his playing on “Ghost Town” pays homage to Ringo Starr’s musical drumming on the Beatles staples “Ticket to Ride” and “Tomorrow Never Knows.” The jam thickens on “Permanent Hold,” the only instrumental track here, which allows Morgenstein to stretch and explore during the fade. His power-pop sensibility, developed with Winger, brings rhythmic focus to the Jelly Jam, combined with a pure acoustic drumming style that feels organic and centered while leaving room for subtle nuance to satisfy the prog lover’s appetite. This is the sweetest Jelly Jam yet. (thejellyjam.com)  

*Mike Haid*

**Black Crown Initiate** *Selves We Cannot Forgive*

After raising sweaty metal eyebrows with a debut EP and full-length, this Reading, Pennsylvania, quintet serves up another healthy plate of progressive death metal.

Building a loyal fan base through relentless touring with acts including Born of Osiris, Veil of Maya, Volumes, and Deicide, Black Crown Initiate combines the aggressive, growling vocals and prog elements typical of progressive death metal with soaring clean vocals and a more diverse set of influences than one might expect. Drummer Jesse Beahler’s precise, relentless playing shines through the brutality thanks to stellar production by Carson Slovak. Beahler’s natural drum tones and razor’s-edge precision on the title track and double bass wizardry on “Sorrowpsalm” stand out, and a faithful yet crushing cover of King Crimson’s “Fallen Angel” accompanies the vinyl edition as an extra tasty treat. (eOne Music)  

*Ben Meyer*

**Jimmy Eat World** *Integrity Blues*

Zach Lind brings the power to the emo kings’ pop one more time.

Popular-music fans who came of age in the late ’90s and early 2000s more than likely have a favorite anthem by Jimmy Eat World. And many more will recall the band’s single “The Middle,” from *Bleed American*, being ever-present on MTV during the emo craze of 2001. But the group has been continuously active since its beginnings in 1993. Zach Lind has held down the drum chair the whole time, and on Jimmy Eat World’s ninth album he’s once again heard making mature timekeeping decisions using a varied palette. On the LPs the group made with producer Mark Trombino over the years, Lind always enjoyed great, natural drum sounds, and that continues here. For the most part, the drummer takes a serve-the-song approach on mid-tempo rockers like “You Are Free,” “Through,” and “It Matters.” The independent hi-hat dynamics in the verses of the 12/8 ballad “The End Is Beautiful” may very well make the song. And though “Pass the Baby” begins with a programmed loop and the live drums don’t creep in until after the two-minute mark, a heavy mixed-meter riff after a distortion-laden breakdown gives Lind a chance to really stretch out. (Sony)  

*Stephen Bidwell*

**The Fred Hersch Trio** *Sunday Night at the Vanguard*

Eric McPherson has developed an amazing empathy with the pianist/leader, amply on display here.

Eric McPherson, pianist/composer Fred Hersch, and bassist John Hebert demonstrate group improvisation at the highest level on *Sunday Night at the Vanguard*. McPherson brings a sweet flow, intertwining threes and fours on “A Cockeyed Optimist,” and five and a half minutes into it he’s still remarkably deep in the conversation as he enters into a rhythmic joust with Hersch. McPherson makes interpretive, out-of-time playing sound cohesive and musical on Hersch’s “Serpentine,” and he plays “The Optimum Thing” with knowledge and interest in the most subtle of kicks, the ones that simply make it magical. Elsewhere the group successfully takes on one of the less-requested Beatles tunes, “For No One.” And McPherson corrals the spirit of Monk’s “We See,” getting cute with time and intention. He double-times, straightens out, superimposes, and keeps it swinging with beautiful ride cymbal and hat work and terrific ghost notes on the snare. (Palmetto)  

*Robin Tolleson*
Swag Drumming
by Jan “Stix” Pfennig and Jacob Przemus

This book/MP3 package peeks behind the curtain of hip-hop drumming, at the swagger and skill required to play a deep groove while creating the rhythmic illusion of instability.

It’s not surprising that “broken beats,” once the domain of producers, are being analyzed and increasingly played live—drummers are now effectively messing with their own “quantize” feature. And the influence of J Dilla as are real on young drummers as that of Clyde and Jabo is beginning to be used by many drummers. To accurately represent and break down their “swag shuffle,” authors Pfennig and Przemus use a quintuplet, rather than triplet, feel. After you get comfortable with that, the fun starts in inserting, translating, and displacing the correct corresponding accents. Tips for conversion from 16th notes to the “in between” feel are included. Attention is paid to the sound of each part of the drumkit and its general mix, and the extra layering of sounds is covered. Not to forsake the flam, the authors demonstrate the beautiful brokenness of several different varieties of “flam beats” and “limping beats,” which give a groove the feeling of a stumble even when the 8ths are staying right there. (£24.95, swagdrumming.com, ama-verlag.de) Robin Tolleson

Terry Silverlight Even Grooves and Swing Grooves

In a pair of online-accessible videos, a veteran freelancer tackles some commonly covered areas with clarity, ease, and useful tips.

Terry Silverlight’s two companion videos offer plenty of practical, gig-ready knowledge. Part one, Even Grooves, focuses on straight patterns found in pop, rock, and R&B, while part two, Swing Grooves, focuses on jazz feels. The versatile Silverlight is well qualified to instruct on both topics, having worked with top artists including George Benson, Billy Ocean, Natalie Merchant, Phil Woods, Mel Tormé, and Stephanie Mills. Granted, the material is not new to instructional videos. But the well-organized curriculum makes it smartly accessible. Playing over tracks, Silverlight demonstrates and breaks down various beats while an overhead cam, combined with an inset showing his feet, captures his every move. An upper screen banner posting transcriptions of one-bar variations is especially handy for play-alongs. In a casual manner, Silverlight offers solid tips on execution and interpretation. Both segments are available either as downloads or five-day streaming rentals. ($17.99 download per part or $29.99 for both, $8.99 rental per part, mymusicmasterclass.com) Jeff Potter

Tuatara Shamanic Nights: Live in the City

The Seattle-based instrumental collective, which has featured members of R.E.M., Screaming Trees, Luna, and Critters Buggin’, celebrates twenty years of genre-crossing heaviness with a new multimedia package.

Since its founding in 1996, Tuatara has covered a lot of stylistic ground: earthy funk, electric-period Miles Davis, and percussion and melodies clearly inspired by Africa, India, and many points between. On this new CD/DVD package, the group appears in sextet form, with longtime drummer Barrett Martin (Screaming Trees, Mad Season) holding it all together. Like Kenny Wollesen’s role with Bill Frisell or John Zorn, in Tuatara Martin represents a veteran player of diverse experience, comfortable in his sound and working in the moment to create a cohesive set of grooving pieces.

This release captures a 2015 outing at Seattle’s Nectar Lounge and includes over two hours of audio and ninety minutes of video. The mood of the night leans toward hypnotic and danceable funk, with an Afrobeat undertone suggested by percussionist Thione Diop’s setup choices (djembe, sabar, and talking drums from West Africa). Indeed, a grooving cover of Fela Kuti’s “Water Get No Enemy” is a highlight, as are the 12/8 bembe excursion “The Procession” and the lengthy percussion duet in the middle of “Dueling Shamans.” Given Martin’s role in the birth of grunge and the presence of multi-instrumentalist Skerik, who has been known to play his tenor sax through a full guitar stack, there is no shortage of rock-out moments. The end of “Street Walkin’ and the album-closing, thirteen-minute reading of Led Zeppelin’s “No Quarter” give some high-volume counterpoint to the laid-back groove of the rest of the set. ($14.99, Sunyata) Stephen Bidwell
This American-made, fourteen-piece monster comes to us from percussionist, educator, and collector Mike “Mickey” Jones of Birmingham, Alabama. Jones commissioned the kit more than four years ago from Bridgeport, Connecticut, drum manufacturer RCI Starlite. The kit, which was inspired by the Ludwig Octa-Plus drumsets of the 1970s, features acrylic shells and retro Ludwig parts and accessories.

The drumset conveys a message of both patriotism and nostalgia. “[RCI’s] Romano Cotone and I have been friends for many years,” says Jones. “We felt like there was no better time than now to share this kit at such a crucial point in American history. We all have to admit we’ve seen change, but I’d like audiences to reminisce back to a time when there was a garage band in every bar, skating rink, and bowling alley. We’d like to encourage musicians to remember what the country is all about and what it can be again for up-and-coming drummers.”

Jones says the kit also pays homage to fallen soldiers and their families. “This kit is a tribute to those who’ve known and loved someone who gave their life to keep America free and to keep this the greatest nation on earth,” he adds. “[It’s] in remembrance of those who sacrificed their greatest gift for our freedom.”

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

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