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BY NEIL PEART
PHOTOS BY ROB SHANAHAN

THE HEART AND SOUL OF A DRUMSET
[CHAPTER THREE IN A SERIES: “THE WOOD WHISPERER”]

While I was rehearsing for Rush’s Snakes and Arrows tour in April, 2007, the long-awaited new drumset arrived. The look we had developed so painstakingly was stunning, in Aztec red, gold leaf, satin gray metallic, and black nickel hardware. Louie Garcia and his fellow artists in the DW factory had done a beautiful job once again.

By the time the drums arrived, I had been working in a Toronto rehearsal room every day for two weeks. I was beating myself into good touring shape by playing along with our CDs for hours, rehearsing old songs and new ones we were planning to play live. Along with smoothing out parts, transitions, and tempos, I was building strength and stamina (painfully).

Because I was playing to recorded tracks on a little CD player, through my in-ear monitors, the drums I was actually playing were necessarily muffled and indistinct — felt more than heard. While waiting for the new drums to be finished, I had been using what we called the “West Coast kit,” a recording set DW had made for me, which I used for the Snakes and Arrows sessions. I already thought those drums sounded just about perfect, so I wasn’t expecting any big changes in the sound of the new ones — just a more “stageworthy” look (it’s a bling thing).
However, the first day I sat behind the *Snakes and Arrows* kit, playing along with the CDs as I had been doing all those other days, I found myself hitting, say, the 15-inch tom on my left, and thinking, “Wow, that makes a lot of noise!” The “noise,” of course, was the radical increase in tonality, resonance, and timbre that John Good and his artisans at DW had built into those drums. John is a restless and demanding craftsman, obsessed with the endless promise of his beloved wood. For these drums, he had carefully selected what he considered the ultimate construction for each shell. Apart from variations in wood plies and reinforcement hoops from small to large shells, the biggest innovation, and the biggest payoff, would be John’s experiments in laying the laminates in alternate directions.

For centuries, drum shells had been made with the grain of the wood following the circle, running around the circumference. John had other ideas, starting with placing some of the laminates across the circle, vertically — hence “Vertical Low Timbre,” because that is the result. John made me a believer in the Vertical Low Timbre principle during a visit to the factory several years ago. Up in John’s “tuning loft,” above the factory floor, where he continues to timbre-match each drum to every drumset that leaves the plant, he held up two 13-inch shells of bare wood. He gave them his special “timbre matching” knock, with the side of his fist, and the difference in tone and depth from the VLT shell was truly unbelievable.

Since then, John has taken that concept even farther outside the conventional — outside the shell, you might say. John’s latest innovation in his visionary progress as a Wood Whisperer is the “X” shell.

Like many fine ideas, this one was easier to imagine than to accomplish. In order to create laminates that would run across the circle like that, in a spiral, rather than around or across it, John’s team needed larger pieces of raw wood — the typical four-by-eight foot sheet was too small. Somehow, John managed to talk his suppliers into doubling that size, and soon eight-by-eight foot sheets of carefully selected hardwood began to arrive at DW’s shipping dock, piled high on huge pallets.

All of that makes a good story, but for a drummer, “The proof is in the pounding.” When it comes to that proof, for a drummer and his drums, I believe the ultimate test is the concert stage. Throughout 2007, and now into 2008, my own performances have been enhanced and inspired by an incredible drumset that includes innovations like the 23-inch bass drum, the VLT snare, and the X-shells on my lower toms.

As uncompromising artists of drum-making, the people at Drum Workshop continue to explore the frontiers and expand the horizon, on a ceaseless quest to create the finest expression of the heart and soul of drums. I am proud to play their instrument, to be a small part of their research and development circle, and to write about the results with such sincere enthusiasm. Like I told the guys at lunch the other day, “You can’t make this stuff up!”

"LIKE MANY FINE IDEAS, THIS ONE WAS EASIER TO IMAGINE THAN TO ACCOMPLISH."
A Time To (Inter)Act

After reading this month’s insightful cover story with modern jazz great Brian Blade, who happens to be one of my all-time favorites, I started thinking about ways to spread some of his magic to what we do here at the magazine. The one thing that’s always amazed me about Brian’s drumming is his uncanny ability to play something fresh and unexpected, without sounding forced or unnatural. Everything he plays seems to fit perfectly with what’s going on around him. He’s always listening, always aware, and always interacting.

There are a lot of opportunities to strike up a similar give-and-take conversation with all of us at MOD. We’re not here to dictate to you what beats to play, or what drums to use, or which drummers you should listen to. Rather, we’re here to offer up whatever information we can gather about what’s currently hot that I hopefully inspire you to become a better musician. So if you feel like we’re overlooking some your favorite players, or there’s a particular piece of gear that you’re interested in, or if you’d like to ask your favorite drummer a question, let us know. We’ll take all your suggestions into consideration.

Along those same lines, we’ve been making a big effort to expand Modern Drummer beyond words on paper. Between the MD Festival Weekend (which is fast approaching!), the annual Readers Poll, our Undiscovered Drummer Contest, and our ever-growing network of MySpace friends, there are now tons of ways to get more involved.

Also, in case you aren’t yet aware, we’ve been improving on the value of our product reviews and educational columns by including sound files on our Web site. So as you’re reading this month’s Product Close-Up and Latin Symposium, log on to moderndrummer.com. On the Multi-Media page you’ll find audio samples of Sonor kits, Zildjian cymbals, Meinl percussion, and a Gretsch snare drum, while on the Education page, we have audio for a couple of fun Latin-hybrid timba-go beats. (There are archived files from previous issues, too!)

Most of the PCU files were recorded in our in-house studio, which is built entirely out of consumer-grade equipment that’s widely available at most music stores. So if you’re looking to put together your own home studio and would like some advice, we’d be happy to share with you what mics, recording software, and other gear we are currently using. All you have to do is ask!
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Levon Helm

Thanks for the cover story and other articles on Levon Helm. I especially enjoyed the insightful interview by Levon’ s friend Steve Jordan. Congratulations are also due to Levon and friends for winning a Grammy for Dirt Farmer.

Vince Sperrazza

I first discovered Levon Helm at age ten, when I saw him in The Band’s Last Waltz DVD. (I’m now seventeen.) Starting with Levon’s first downbeat, I knew that I needed to learn to play the drums. Six years later, I can’t imagine how different my life would be if I had not seen Levon Helm behind those drums on that DVD. Thanks for a wonderful article featuring a true legend.

Arianna

Thanks so much for the story on Levon. It’s refreshing to see 100% pure joy and love in an article.

I have always been a huge fan of both Levon and Steve Jordan, and this article was like sitting and listening to them talk. While at Slingerland in the mid 90s, I had the chance to spend some time with Levon and Rick Danko in Memphis. Neither one of them had any hint of arrogance. We spent the bulk of the night on the back of the bus talking about our love for rockabilly and Gospel. Out of all of the great drummers that I have had the pleasure of spending time with, this was the highlight.

As drummers, we can all learn so much about playing for the song—and not for ourselves—from Levon Helm. God bless you, Levon. And thanks for the positive influence and inspiration.

Josh Touchton, southern regional sales manager

D’Addario & Co.

Gil Sharone

The April issue was great! Dillinger Escape Plan’s new drummer, Gil Sharone, is amazing. I saw them with Killswitch Engage, and I’ve never seen playing like that before. Gil’s interview answered things I wanted to ask him about. Thank you, MD!

Justin (via myspace)

The Grip Weeds’ Kurt Reil

Thanks for recognizing Kurt Reil of The Gripweeds. After seeing Kurt play with Mark Lindsey (of Paul Revere & The Raiders fame), I became aware of his main band, The Grip Weeds. Kurt’s drumming is fantastic: like a young, sober Keith Moon mixed with Mitch Mitchell and Ginger Baker. He’s absolutely kinetic, yet still tastefully plays to the song—those songs just happen to rock! Plus he can sing.

Bill W.

Ricky Sebastian

Thanks for the inspirational article by Ricky Sebastian in your April ’08 issue. Ricky is truly a master drummer. His article of hope and determination will help so many of us carry on. Your magazine is equally encouraging. You not only focus on some of the world’s greatest players, the latest technique, and the coolest gear, but you are also willing to highlight all of the facets of life that make us “modern drummers.”

Ted Cobena

Mastelotto’s Tribute To Buddy

When I was about ten years old my dad blew my mind by taking me to Don Weir’s Music City in San Francisco to buy me my first drumkit. Don asked me if I would like to play the floor model. But having never even sat at a real drumkit, I was too shy. So he yelled across the room, “Hey Buddy!” A huge man came over, sat at the kit, flipped the sticks to the butt ends, and went “blatta-blatta” around the kit. He ended with a bass drum/cymbal crash that broke the bass drum pedal. That was my first up-close look at a professional rock drummer, and it was the lesson I took home with me as I started playing along with my radio.

A few years later, when I was about fifteen, I went to see Jimi Hendrix. There were several opening acts, and one was The Buddy Miles Freedom Express. I remember how clearly I heard Buddy’s drumming (and voice) in comparison to when Hendrix came on with Mitch Mitchell.

Last year I participated in a Hendrix tribute show in an old church in Austin, Texas. At rehearsal, it was mentioned that Buddy might come to sing and drum. But he never did. However, as we came out for an encore, a big man with a limp and cane came up from the audience. It was Buddy. With a big smile he said, “How proud Jimi would be at this show. Hearing his tunes in the ‘Electric Church’ was one of his dreams.”

A few months ago several Austin musicians organized a benefit for Buddy, and I played with my M-P-TU project. After we played, I spent a few minutes backstage with Buddy, introducing myself and relating these stories to him about how he affected and influenced my drumming life. It was very moving.

Pat Mastelotto

Editor’s note: See our tribute to Buddy Miles on page 158.
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Jason McGerr’ s

Giant Beats And Rudimental Death Cab Groove

I’ ve been a fan of Death Cab For Cutie since I first heard We Have The Facts And Are Voting Yes years ago. I love your drumming with the band. It’ s very inspirational, tasteful, and extremely well executed. I’ m wondering about your cymbal selection for Plans. Are the Paiste Giant Beat line, or did you use something else? Also, would you mind sharing the pattern you play on ride and snare towards the end of “What Sarah Said”? Congratulations for your success, both as a drummer and as a member of such a gifted band!

John In Virginia

Thanks for all your praise, John. And thanks for being a long-time fan. I always try to sneak in a little something from my rudimental past, and you’ve obviously picked up on that in the end of “What Sarah Said.” And yes, that was a Paiste Giant Beat 24” ride. I used the Giant Beats for most of the record, although sometimes I switched to Dark Energy crashes. But that particular 24” ride made it possible for me to articulate the pattern you’re asking about.

It’s actually very simple to play this pattern between the ride and snare once you get the basic rudiment together. So begin by practicing on a pad. Be sure to emphasize the rebound factor to obtain the speed. If you get a chance to check out my Modern Drummer Festival DVD performance, I demonstrate what I like to call the “Flam Series.” I start with a flam three (also known as a Swiss triplet). Then I move to a flam four (windmill), flam five, and flam six. The flam six is a reverse double paradiddle with a flam at the beginning of each side. This is what you’re hearing in the end of “What Sarah Said.”

The only additions to the pattern are quarter-note heal splash-es with the hi-hat foot and a downbeat with the kick at the start of every measure. The trick is to be able to fade it out in real time by playing lighter and lighter until it slips away. My hands create the mood, while my feet provide the anchor in time.

Death Cab For Cutie’ s new album, Narrow Stairs, is out now. Hopefully you’ ll find a lot more to inspire your practice.
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Travis Smith

On Double Bass Precision

I’m fourteen years old and have been playing double bass for about three years now. I completely respect and idolize your double bass drumming with Trivium. It’s so powerful, and you have complete control over your feet. How did you get to be so precise with your double bass? How did you get complete control over your feet? And how much do your pedals affect your playing?
Dan Voltz

Double bass is a very effective way to make a part in a song feel heavy and thrashed out. I know it can be frustrating to practice something over and over. And I know it can feel like you’re getting nowhere with it. But take it from me that practice does make perfect. I still practice my double bass technique and am still learning how to make myself a better player. So I’ll tell you the same thing that someone else told me: Play things slowly and repeat them until you’ve got it nailed. Pay attention to your technique. The speed will come in time. And before you know it, you’ll be rippin’ it up!

As far as what pedals to use, you have to use whatever feels comfortable to you. Keep rockin’ bro!
Def Leppard’s Rick Allen

Place of birth: Dronfield, England
Hobbies/interests: Home studio recording
Favorite album: Led Zeppelin
Favorite drink: Homemade vegetable juice, water, tea
Favorite food: Indian
Favorite movie: Lord Of The Rings
Vehicle I drive: Jeep
Other instruments I play: Djembe
Place I’d like to visit: Egypt
I wish I’d played drums on: Anything on U2’s Joshua Tree
Person I would like to talk to: the scientist Tesla
Most prized possession: My wedding ring
Most memorable performance: Darlington, England, 1985. This was my first show after my accident.
Most embarrassing moment on stage: Park City, Utah. 1999. I banged my head on the lighting rig and fell back 8’.
Most unusual venue played: In the middle of the track at a NASCAR race in Phoenix, Arizona in 1993.

Check out Rick on Def Leppards latest release, Songs From The Sparkle Lounge.

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Simon Phillips
It’s Festival Time!

Drumming legend Simon Phillips will simply not slow down, and his star-studded drumming career continues to grow and evolve. Since Simon joined Grammy-winning, LA-based rock band Toto fifteen years ago, the group has toured relentlessly, refining their classic material while continuing to record new songs.

Toto has just released a blistering live two-CD set and separate DVD called Falling In Between Live. It features their classic hits along with high-powered, heavy-hitting material that spans the group’s amazing thirty-year career. Phillips took on the role of director and mixing engineer for the bonus footage of the DVD, but not the entire project. “I produced and mixed the sound for the last Toto DVD, Live In Amsterdam,” Phillips says. “But it was too difficult to get involved in mixing the new release because we were still touring at the time.”

Simon has been traveling the world with Toto using a new Tama Mirage acrylic drumkit. “I tried the Mirage kit on a short tour with Toto and was astounded at how great they sounded in a live setting,” he enthuses. “I then had some clear Octobans made for the kit, so now my entire live kit is clear acrylic.”

Simon is currently working on a long-awaited solo CD that he plans to release later this year. The music will feature a New York group that includes guitarist Mike Stern, bassist Anthony Jackson, saxophonist Bill Evans, and keyboardist Jim Beard. Simon will also recruit a Los Angeles group for some tracks, as well as an international world percussion group.

Phillips also recently reunited with The Michael Schenker Group to record a new release that featured original MSG lead vocalist Gary Barden. It was more than twenty years ago that Simon recorded his groundbreaking drumming on the original MSG LP, which featured the classic instrumental track “Into The Arena.”

When he’s not on the road with Toto, Simon spends most of his time as owner/operator of Phantom Recordings studio in Los Angeles, where he has recorded and mixed several projects. This year will see Simon on the road as a clinician, traveling through Europe and then Japan to take part in the Hoshino 100th-anniversary celebration.

To top it all off, Phillips will be headlining the Modern Drummer Festival in September, performing with his fusion band, Protocol. Simon fans rejoice!

Mike Haid

Simon’s Mirage kit
Matchbox Twenty’s
Ryan MacMILLAN
Mainstream Grooving

Over the past ten years, Matchbox Twenty sold over 28 million records, including three multi-platinum albums and a string of hit singles. Their new two-CD collection, Exile On Mainstream, contains their greatest hits plus six brand-new songs featuring recently arrived drummer Ryan MacMillan. (Ryan fills the space left by Paul Doucette, who’s now playing guitar and keyboards with the group.) MacMillan and Doucette, along with frontman Rob Thomas, bassist Brian Yale, and guitarist Kyle Cook, are currently finishing up touring the US before heading off to Australia and Europe.

The stars aligned for the former Push Stars drummer, as MacMillan says landing the gig with Matchbox Twenty is a dream come true. “I basically hit the lottery,” he says, excitedly. “It’s awesome!”

How did MacMillan land the Matchbox gig? “I met the guys through my former band’s producer, Greg Collins, who sent our album to Rob [Thomas]. Greg had just engineered the Matchbox record. They all liked it and asked us to do a three-week tour with them. During that time, I got to know Paul [Doucette], and he told me he was going to be making a solo record and wondered if I would play on it. I was like, ‘Yeah, sure, I’d love to!’

One of the first tracks recorded for the Greatest Hits package, the single “Look How Far We’ve Come,” features both Ryan and Paul on drums. Ryan explains, “That’s the only new track Paul played drums on. It was fun. I’ve never recorded a track with two drummers. He played the tribal tom groove and I played the hi-hat and groove beat.”

So what’s next for MacMillan? “After this Matchbox tour, Rob, Paul, and Kyle will be making solo records. I’ll be touring with Paul, and I might be recording new records by Push Stars and Red Car. As for Matchbox, we’re planning on recording a full-length studio album after that.”


Billy Amendola

Breaking Benjamin’s
Chad SZELIGA
Drumming From His Soul

Making grooves “pop” is Chad Szelig’s purpose. The drummer joined Breaking Benjamin for 2006’s Phobia, and his experimentation with jazz, bebop, and fusion helped him pepper a huge modern rock record with incredibly tasty nuances. “Listen to Vinnie Paul,” says Szelig. “He swings. There’s a bounce to his groove. Or check out Danny Carey with Tool—he’s not just a rock or metal drummer, he’s a fusion drummer.”

Szeling grew up learning jazz from his grandfather, who played with Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and Buddy Rich. “Learning bebop is hard,” he says. “The style is about finesse and playing melody.” Szelig learned early on that, as a player with diverse chops, he could still be the right guy for a modern rock band. “Look of Stewart Copeland’s finesse,” Szelig says. “He was creative on the hi-hat and would throw something in a song and never do it again. He just knew how to make a kick, a snare, and a hi-hat sing.”

With Breaking Benjamin already having gone through three drummers, Szelig knew that he had to deliver the goods immediately and make the right impression. “When I auditioned for the band,” he recalls, “I was twirling sticks and I didn’t look lost in their music. I added to the stage show. I was only supposed to play five songs with them, but I learned twelve, over and beyond the call of duty.”

With Breaking Benjamin, Szelig takes a working man’s approach in the studio and on stage, giving each song the right nuance. “I like to play dynamically,” he says. “Keep it under control in the verse. Then, when the chorus hits, blow it up like a fireworks show. You don’t want to see the grand finale right away; you have to build up to it.”

With Phobia containing four major singles and the group touring nonstop with acts like Nickelback and Three Days Grace, Szelig feels his drumming is continuing to evolve and grow deeper. In fact, he’s already looking forward to the challenge of coming up with interesting parts for their next record. “I want to keep writing great drum hooks,” he says. “Drumming comes from your soul. The truth is, everyone has a rhythm. It’s just each individual drummer’s flavor that makes the beat their own.”

Steven Douglas Losey
Mary J. Blige’s Rexxell HARDY Jr. Bringing The Church Vibe

Rexxell Hardy Jr. came up in Chicago’s Gospel scene and started out playing drums in his grandfather’s church when he was just five years old. By age six he was playing around Chicago with his father’s Gospel group, The Hardy Brothers. “As I got older,” the drummer explains, “I began listening to other Gospel drummers from Chicago, like Teddy Campbell, Oscar Seaton, and a friend I grew up with, Calvin Rogers. I really wanted to follow in their footsteps. Whatever they did, that’s what I wanted to do.”

Rex’s career took off in 2003, when he landed the gig with Mary J. Blige, with whom he’s currently on a worldwide tour in support of her most recent release, Growing Pains. “I think I bring energy to her gig,” he says. “That’s always a good thing on an R&B/hip-hop gig. Mary’s an artist who performs off the vibe, so if you have a great vibe going, that makes her more comfortable with what she’s doing. She can feel that you’re into what’s going on and that you’re not acting. It’s pretty much a good deal from then on. So I play with a lot of energy, but I try not to get carried away. Playing in church, you have to have chops, but I know to stay in the pocket without playing over her.”

Rex plays a ten-piece DW kit with a Roland SPD-S, surrounded by nearly a dozen cymbals—a much more elaborate setup than you’d expect from such a groove-oriented player. “I do have a lot of stuff,” Hardy laughs. “But the way I play, it doesn’t sound like it. I understand that you can overdub it when you have a kit this big. If you don’t have the right mindset. When you come up in the church, your dream is to have all these drums around you. But you still have to be conscious about having what you want on stage without taking advantage of it.”

Gail Worley

Chris “Gartdrumm” Gartmann The Prog Power Of 3

The resurgence of progressive rock has opened the door for younger drummers to rediscover the more technically challenging aspects of this classic art rock culture. The Woodstock, New York–based prog-pop group 3 is on the rise, and has tapped into the old-school vibe of such iconic progsters as King Crimson, Yes, and Pink Floyd.

Drummer Chris “Gartdrumm” Gartmann explains the basis of his drumming technique with 3 as a “Bonham meets Bruford” approach. “I grew up listening to all of the great English classic rock drummers,” he says, “like Bruford, Bonham, and Ginger Baker. Then I got heavily into the American jazz-fusion drummers like Billy Cobham, Tony Williams, and all the Zappa drummers. That’s where my drumming sensibility comes from.”

Double bass drumming is a big part of Gartmann’s technique, as is evident on the title track to 3’s recent CD, The End Has Begun. “I love tasteful double bass playing,” Gartmann plainly states. “Why would you ever want to completely shut that door on your technique? Playing broken triplets or duplets with two pedals sounds totally different from trying to do it with one foot. And double bass is always a great way to kick the music up a notch while still keeping a groove.”

Gartmann also has impressive hand technique, which he credits to his early studies. “I had a great teacher who taught me the rudiments,” he says, “which opened all the expressive doors for me so that I could figure out ways to creatively play what I heard in my head.” Gartmann tastefully blends the pocket with the chops, creating sweet, sophisticated grooves within 3’s music.

The band has picked up steam over the last few years, touring with Coheed & Cambria, and more recently with Porcupine Tree. But they’re about to make a quantum leap into the spotlight as they head out on Mike Portnoy’s Progressive Nation Tour 2008 with Dream Theater, Opeth, and Between The Buried And Me. “We feel we’re a modern-day classic rock band trying to create good melodic pop with more sophisticated arrangements,” Gartmann insists. “We’ve paid our dues, and we are so ready for this tour.”

Mike Nold
Mal Taylor is on UK band Your Vegas’s debut, A Town And Two Cities.

Gregg Bissonette is touring with Ringo Starr in his latest All-Star band. For tour dates, visit www.ringostarr.com.

Check out Oscar Seaton with his rock trio on their self-titled debut, 13 Curves.

Brian Tichy is on Steve Stevens’ latest, Memory Crash.

Carl Allen is the new artistic director of jazz studies at the Juilliard School.

Willie Leocox is on America’s concert DVD Live In Central Park, 1979.

Vinnie Colaiuta and Abe Laboriel Jr. are on Michael McDonald’s latest, Soul Speak.

Eric Valentine, who has toured and performed with Patti LaBelle, Erikah Badu, and Mindi Abair, is currently working on a CD with former Dave Weckl Band keyboardist Steve Weingart.

Larone “Skeeter” Miller has joined The Last Goodnight. Jeff Blue is on the band’s debut, Poison Kiss.

Red Hot Chili Pepper drummer Chad Smith has recently released a new two-DVD set, Eastern Rim, which includes performance footage, drum clinic material, touring diaries, and interviews.

Jazz greats Peter Erskine, Paul Kreibich, Joe La Barbera, and Roy McCurdy are all on singer Janis Mann’s latest CD, A Perfect Time—Drummers And Other Friends.

Dido’s Alex Alexander is touring as part of the James Brown tribute show featuring The JB’s and Bootsy Collins.

Chad Taylor is touring with Iron And Wine.

Chris Frazier is on Whitesnake’s first new studio record in eleven years, Good To Be Bad. The band will be embarking on an extensive tour in support of the CD, including a UK co-headlining trek with Def Leppard (with Rick Allen on drums) in June and July.

Liberty DeVitto is on singer/songwriter Sandy Zia’s debut, All That I Am.

Roberto Quintero and Joe McCarthy are on the new release by Dave Samuels’ Caribbean Jazz Project, Afro Bop Alliance.

Drummer Marilyn Mazur’s new ECM album, Elixir, features Jan Garbarek.

Rich Scannella is on the new Buddahhead CD, Ashes, which was recorded at New York’s Clinton Recording Studios. Rich is currently on tour with John Eddie.

Joey Heredia and Glen Sobel are on Earth Tones, by Adrian Galysh.

Shout! Factory has reissued five Mickey Hart solo projects, including the classic 1976 release by The Diga Rhythm Band, Diga.

Two early releases by the influential avant-heavy band Today Is The Day, featuring drummer Brad Elrod, have been reissued, 1994’s Supernova and 1996’s self-titled album. Meanwhile, Mike Rosswog is doing double duty on the current TIDT tour, also playing with openers Complete Failure.

This month’s important events in drumming history

Philly Joe Jones was born on 7/15/23, Alan Dawson on 7/14/29, and Eric Carr on 7/12/50.

7/6/36: Benny Goodman records “Sing, Sing, Sing,” featuring a historic performance by Gene Krupa.

7/21/38: Benny Carter arranges and plays on an all-star session for Lionel Hampton, featuring trumpeter Harry James and drummer Papa Jo Jones.

7/31/66: Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce, and Ginger Baker (not yet referring to themselves as Cream) perform at their first major concert, the Sixth National Jazz & Blues Festival in Windsor, England.

7/1/83: New Jersey rockers Bon Jovi (with Tico Torres) sign their major-label deal with Phonogram’s Mercury records in New York City.

7/28/86: The Eurythmics (featuring Glen Burton on drums) reach number-15 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart with their Grammy-winning hit, “Missionary Man.”

Louie Bellson (jazz legend): 7/8/24
Joe Morello (jazz giant): 7/17/28
Rushied Ali (free-jazz great): 7/1/35
Ringo Starr (The Beatles): 7/7/40
Denny Seiwell (Wings): 7/10/43
Butch Miles (big band master): 7/4/44
Jai Johnny Johnson (The Allman Brothers): 7/8/44
Dino Danelli (The Rascals): 7/23/45
Mitch Mitchell (Jimi Hendrix Experience): 7/9/47
Don Henley (The Eagles): 7/22/47
Michael Shrieve (Santana): 7/6/49
Roger Taylor (Queen): 7/26/49
Simon Kirke (Free, Bad Company): 7/28/49
Andy Newmark (studio great): 7/14/50
Tris Imboden (Chicago): 7/27/51
Leon “Ndugu” Chancler (R&B great): 7/1/52
Stewart Copeland (The Police): 7/16/52
Marky Ramone (The Ramones): 7/15/56
Chet McCracken (The Dooble Brothers): 7/17/52
Bobby Previte (jazz independent): 7/16/57
Bruce Grump (Molly Hatchet): 7/17/57
Bill Berry (R.E.M.): 7/31/58
Jack Irons (ex-Red Hot Chili Peppers/Pearl Jam): 7/18/62
Jason Bonham (Foreigner): 7/15/68
Tomas Hohe (Meshuggah): 7/13/71
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Getting Into Electronics

I’m interested in purchasing some electronics to be used as an in-ear metronome and to trigger loops (via drum pads). Can you provide any information on how to get started with such a project? I need to keep the cost down, but I’m also looking for something that will be reliable.

Brian Brugger

According to MD electronic specialist Rick Long, “The setup you’re working on has two separate issues, but they can be taken care of with one device. Most electronic drum modules have an internal metronome that can be routed to a headphone jack. These modules also allow you to make adjustments to tempo and volume from the top of the control panel. The metronome tones can also be triggered from a MIDI source (laptop, sampler, etc.) if your band is running audio tracks to supplement your live sound.

“To trigger loops, you’ll have to determine if a given electronic drum module has the ability to store samples/loops. [Yamaha’s DTXTREME III module, for instance, allows you to store up to 64 MB of audio.] If you already have a sampler, you can set it to accept MIDI input from your drum module. Program your sampler so that the MIDI note number you’re sending out from the module when you strike a pad is linked to the sample you want to play.”

Beyond Rick’s suggestions, you might consider a multi-pad device that’ll allow you to trigger multiple sounds from one piece of gear. Good options are Alternate Mode’s drumKAT, Alesis’ ControlPad, or Roland’s SPD-S. The ControlPad is great if you want to trigger sounds stored in a laptop, since it has USB connectivity. The SPD-S comes with preset sounds and allows you to store samples/loops directly to the unit or to a CompactFlash memory card."
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Die-Cast Hoops: Pros & Cons

I’m thinking about replacing my 2.3-mm tom hoops with die-cast ones. What are the pros and cons of die-cast versus standard hoops on toms? Is there a difference in sound?

Rory Faciane

With all factors being equal (drum size, shell composition, bearing edge cut, head choice, tuning, etc.), die-cast hoops tend to give a drum a slightly drier overall sound [less resonance]. Rimshots generally have a dry crack, rather than a ringy “clank.” Also, because die-cast hoops are very rigid, they hold tuning extremely well. Drummers have described situations in which a tension rod has backed out entirely, and the drum remained relatively in tune.

On the flipside, because of their rigidity, die-cast hoops are less forgiving of an imperfect bearing edge. This can create tuning problems on drums with less-than-perfect edges. In that case, rolled-steel hoops are a better option because they are a bit more flexible.

Vintage Zildjian A Constantinople Cymbal

I have a question about an old Zildjian crash. The company stamp reads, “A ZILDJIAN & CIE, Constantinople cymbals.” I haven’t seen Constantinople stamped on anything but old Ks. Could the cymbal have been made in Turkey? Any info would be much appreciated.

Justin Dobbins

Zildjian product communications manager John King responds:

“ The origin of that particular trademark is shortly after 1909. That’s when Aram Zildjian, then the keeper of the secret process of making Zildjian’s famous cymbal alloy, needed to flee to Bucharest after a failed attempt to assassinate the Sultan of Constantinople. The Bucharest factory started producing cymbals as ‘A Zildjian & Cie, Constantinople Cymbals’ and continued to do so until 1927, when Aram approached Avedis Zildjian III to take over the family business.

This particular trademark was resurrected in the early 1970s, when it was applied to A Zildjian Brilliant models that also had a ‘half moon and star’ design attached to its text, rather than the traditional Arabic writing. ‘Made in USA’ would also be present just under the half moon and star stamp.) A Zildjian Brilliant models continued to use this particular trademark until the mid ’90s, when all A Zildjian models utilized the famous ‘Avedis Zildjian Co.—Genuine Turkish Cymbals’ trademark.

“Since you haven’t described your cymbal as being ‘old,’ we will assume that your instrument falls under the latter category. But if it doesn’t have ‘Made in USA’ within the trademark, you’re looking at a cymbal made in a much earlier time.”

More information on the history of Zildjian cymbals can be found at www.zildjian.com.
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To commemorate Steve Smith’s thirtieth year as an official Sonor artist, the company has produced a limited-edition signature kit based on the legendary drummer’s personal specifications. In addition, Sonor has expanded their ultra high-end SQ2 line to include a striking high-gloss Stratawood finish with a Tiger-striped inner veneer. Each of these new releases is sure to whet the appetite of those still searching for that perfect “dream” drum kit.

Steve’s Special Order

For this review we intercepted an anniversary kit as it was en route from this past winter NAMM show in Anaheim, California to Steve’s pad in New York City. So not only were we checking out a special limited-edition kit, but this was also the kit that would ultimately end up on stage with Steve for many of his upcoming clinics and performances.

As expected, everything about this drumset is top-notch. The bass drum, toms, and aux snare’s bearing edges are perfectly smooth, and the subtle bird’s-eye amber finish gives a very classy, professional look. The Special Edition badges, featuring Steve’s autograph, add to the kit’s “rich” aesthetic.

The hardware on all of the
drums is very solid, the chroming is superb, and many of the points where metal meets metal or wood are padded with Sonor’s A.P.S. (Advanced Projection System) rubber insulators. With the exception of the cast-steel snare, all of the drums are outfitted with TuneSafe lugs, which prevent tension rods from loosening under heavy playing.

The T-bar tom mount attaches directly to (and through) the bass drum. The vertical post is very long, so you can position the toms anywhere from flat against the bass drum up to eye-level. The 10” and 12” toms attach to the mount via hex-shaped L-rods. The 8” tom has the same mounting setup, only it flies from Sonor’s CBS 672 combo cymbalboom stand. These L-rods are held in place by a ball & socket joint. Although this system allows for a wide range of positioning options, we found that it will slip over time if the wing nut is not clamped down tightly. After a couple hours of play, the 12” tom had drooped by about 1”. But after retightening the mount with a little extra “oomph,” the tom never budged again.

The rack toms also feature Sonor’s T-shaped T.A.R. (Total Acoustic Resonance) mounting bracket, which contacts the drum at three points: under two adjacent lug casings and 2/3 of the way down the shell. This well-engineered bracket (with APS insulators) allows the drum to resonate fully, while minimizing the “bounce” that can occur with other suspension-type systems.

**Big Snare, Little Snare**

The 30th Anniversary kit comes with two snare drums: a 5 1/2 x 14 cast-steel and a 5x12 beech. The smaller drum shares the same shell composition, finish, lugs, and triple-flanged rims as the toms. The eight lugs on the top head are offset slightly from the bottom in order to compensate for the long TuneSafe lug casings. This drum also comes with an eighteen-strand strainer and a simple, smooth parallel throw-off.

Since it’s designed to be used as an auxiliary snare sound, we began testing the 5x12 at a fairly high tuning. With the snares off, the drum had a cutting timbale-type attack, with pure, round, and pleasant-sounding overtones. With the snares on, the warm tone and cracking attack was complemented with fat and super-quick snare response. As we lowered the tuning, the overtones become more prominent. But the drum continued to sound very balanced, smooth, and musical.

In terms of construction, the 5 1/2 x 14 cast-steel snare is the odd man out in this kit. While the other drums are surprisingly lightweight, this thing’s a beast, weighing in at 15 1/2 lbs. In addition to being made of solid steel, this drum also features die-cast hoops, a twenty-four-strand strainer, one-piece lugs from Sonor’s classic Phonic line, and a Fibsryn FD batter head (Steve’s preference).

The first thing we noticed when we started hitting this snare was that there’s not a lot of “tone” to it. But that’s not a bad thing. In fact, it’s almost as if all of the sour overtones had been scooped out. What was left was a super crisp, articulate sound with a strong attack and chesty punch. Rimshots were sharp, but not harsh. And there’s a moderate amount of high-end ring. But instead of being a nuisance, it actually adds to the drum’s overall musicality. This is a very versatile drum that would excel in just about any situation.

**Sweet Toms With A Bite**

As impressed as we were with this kit’s snare drums, the true highlight is its toms. All five toms had a similar sonic character: sharp, cracking attack (thanks to the clear single-ply heads) followed by a very pure, round, and warm tone. It’s the quintessential fusion tom sound—so much so that I couldn’t help but launch into over-the-barline fills every chance I got. Each drum tuned up instantly, going from a flappy sound to a pure pitch with a couple 1/4 turns of the tension rods. In fact, these drums were so easy to tune that I never felt the need to fine-tune the individual lugs or to make adjustments to the bottom heads.

The anniversary kit sounded amazing when mixed up in the studio.
To test the tonal range of these toms, we began by tensioning the 8” to the highest point that retained a full, resonant tone. Using a chromatic guitar tuner, we found that this drum sang best at the note “G.” We tuned the remaining rack toms down in 4ths. For the floor toms, we went down in 5ths. Even when using such a wide range, the drums sounded totally unified and harmonious. The quick, pointed attack and round pitch of the top two rack toms was complemented by the deep, punchy feel generated by the larger drums. The resonance of all five drums was long enough to allow the tone to project with a full voice, but short enough to keep multi-tom fills from blurring together.

**SQ2 STRATAWOOD BIRCH**

In addition to producing one of the best contemporary drum sounds I’ve ever heard, Sonor’s new SQ2 Stratawood birch kit also takes the award for being one the most inspiring **looking** kits we’ve ever come across. Everyone who saw this set commented on how great it looked—whether it was in our in-house studio or at a recent recording session. The engineer at the session even pulled out his camera phone to snap a couple pictures.

On the outside, these drums have a striking blue/black/grey/natural-striped finish. It’s radical looking, but it’s also super sophisticated. For the interior of the drums, the designers at Sonor added an extra touch of “cool” by choosing a black/orange tiger-striped veneer. When outfitted with clear heads on top and bottom, these drums ooze with style.

Sonically, there’s little to complain about with this kit. The heavy birch shells give off a super deep and punchy tone. Like the Steve Smith kit, the toms were killer. And the 20x22 bass drum sounded enormous. In addition, I was surprised at how controlled and thick the 5½x14 snare sounded, even with a clear single-ply batter head.

If there had to be one thing to change about these drums, it would be the choice of single-ply tom heads. Although we did enjoy the sharpness that they added to the attack in pop/rock styles, they might be a little too pointed for more subtle applications. In those cases, double-ply heads would be the way to go.

**Minimum Advertised Price (for the reviewed seven-piece setup):** $7,494.75

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**A Kick For All Occasions**

If there’s one part of this kit that didn’t completely blow us away, it’s the 16x20 bass drum. Because of the huge sound of the toms, I found myself wanting something a little bigger to punctuate my fills. But since Steve needs a versatile kick that can handle the funky fusion of Vital Information as well as the swing/bebop sounds of his Jazz Legacy band, this drum strikes a perfect compromise. Tuned low, there’s enough punch and low-end rumble to allow it to be heard within syncopated electric bass patterns. Then when tuned up high, you have a boomy yet controlled sound that would be great on any acoustic jazz session.

**THE NUMBERS**

**Steve Smith 30th Anniversary Drumset**

**Finish:** Satin lacquer in bird’s-eye amber  
**Sizes:** 16x20 kick; 8x8, 8x10, 8x12 rock toms; 14x14 and 16x16 floor toms; 5½x14 and 5x12 snares  
**Shells:** Bass drum, toms, and auxiliary snare are 9-ply beechwood (bass drum is 6.1 mm thick; toms are 8.1 mm); main snare is cast steel (from the S Class line).  
**Heads:** Clear Roto single-ply medium heads on toms; clear Powerstroke 3 on bass drum batter, coated single-ply with muffling ring on front (one felt strip on underside of each head); Fiberskyn FD on main snare, coated single-ply medium on auxiliary snare.  
**Price:** $13,729.99  
**More info:** [www.sonor.com](http://www.sonor.com)
Istanbul Agop Lenny White Signature Cymbal

by T. Bruce Wittet

Manufacturing a cymbal “to order” is a challenge loaded with difficulties, chief of which is capturing the artist’s vague notions of sound, feel, pitch, and presence. Plus, one man’s thick is another’s thin, one’s dark is another’s bright, and so on.

Fortunately, Return To Forever drummer Lenny White brought more than words to the table when designing his signature Epoch ride. White brought the original 22” ride that jazz legend Tony Williams used to stretch out on the classic Miles Davis track “Nefertiti.” Lenny also had with him two replicas of Tony’s ride that were manufactured by an American company. Lenny liked those cymbals and used them on many gigs, but he wanted something a little closer to the original. So the drummer began working with Turkish company Istanbul Agop to build some prototypes.

After many months of test runs, Lenny was finally satisfied with the model that has become his signature 22” Epoch ride. Let’s see how it fares in the testing room.

Unpacking The Holy Grail

I’ve been fortunate to have played three Tony-replica prototypes. And thanks to meeting Miles’ protégé Wallace Roney (who was given the original Nefertiti ride by Williams), I’ve played the one and only. Although I felt a little nerdy at the time, I recorded myself riding the revered cymbal and took some photos. The recording and photos proved valuable references for this review.

When I lifted Lenny’s Epoch cymbal from its crate, a familiar puzzlement set in. Although the ride had some flex, it was heavier than you’d imagine. (I remember having the same reaction when I touched Tony’s ride.) In contrast, the Epoch seems much flatter than the original. The Epoch bell is also significantly smaller, which would limit full-crash potential. The body is extensively hand-hammered, resulting in a very cratered surface. The lathing is cursory. The craftsman took a quick pass on the top and bottom, scratching away some of the crust to create shiny expanses against blotchy brown patches.

The edges of the Epoch have a downward flange that’s sometimes found on old Turkish cymbals like the Nefertiti. That dipping “hook” deepens the cymbal’s flat profile, thus raising the fundamental pitch somewhat while adding a little trash to the tone. (Think of the outer flange on a China cymbal.)

To The Test

I first played the Epoch with a stick in the 7A–8A range. Then I asked a student to play it with a 5B. The 5B proved to be the preferred stick for this cymbal. This bigger stick brings out a cleaner ping with more dark “Tony-like” undertones. When I interrupted a rapid jazz ride pattern with push crashes—coming down on the flat of the cymbal with the stick almost parallel—the cymbal erupted quickly with short, dark, guttural rasps that didn’t clutter the ride pattern with unnecessary splash. This was a crowning characteristic of the original Nefertiti.

For my final test, I envisioned the classic Tony/Miles record _Live At The Plugged Nickel_ and rode a galloping 8th-note figure followed by five consecutive shanks: “Caw, Caw, Caw, Caw, Caw!” This experiment proved that Lenny White’s patience had paid off. A good portion of Tony Williams’ sound lives on in this cymbal.

Crashing the Epoch doesn’t give you a typical fast “whoosh,” nor does the bell scream out, “Let’s mambo!” But if Tony’s tip-and-shank tone is in your blood, you’ll appreciate the extra weight, the many sweet spots, and the stability of this ride. (It won’t wobble off the stand!)

Lenny told me that of the initial batch of twenty-five cymbals, he rejected only two. That says that the manufacturing is consistent. I grew to really like this cymbal, so I thought about shelling out some cash to keep it. That wouldn’t be possible, I was told. This particular test model was none other than Lenny’s “LA ride,” to be kept safe at the Istanbul Agop California outlet.

List price is $789.

www.istanbulagop.com
Zildjian has recently expanded their K line with some models that are rather extreme, in terms of their large sizes. But, as you’ll soon find out, these new additions turned out to be more mainstream than expected.

Crash Rides

Over the years, I’ve frequently expressed my distain for “crash ride” cymbals. Although some of them do a passable job of serving as both a crash and a ride, most of the ones I’ve encountered have been mediocre overall. This is because the qualities that I look for in a crash cymbal are very different from the qualities I want in a ride. So in all honesty, I didn’t unpack the new 21” and 22” K Crash Rides with very high expectations. But after just a few minutes of playing, I was impressed.

These new crash rides were designed with Zak Starkey to provide the “wall of sound” that he needs when playing with The Who. These cymbals are also the only KS offered with a Brilliant finish, which is said to “offer additional sparkle and smooth out the sound.”

When played as rides, these cymbals provide a lot of wash. However, like most KS, the stick sound is somewhat dry and clicky. That characteristic provides enough definition for straight-8th rock or fast jazz ride patterns. If you need pinpoint articulation, look elsewhere. But if you want a ride with a good blend of a big sound and reasonably clear stick definition, you should check these out.

I don’t typically think of 21” and 22” cymbals when searching for a crash, because it’s usually hard to get a fast response when trying to move that much metal. But again, I was impressed with how these giant “crashes” performed. They speak more quickly than I expected. And they have some high-end sparkle. But that sparkle lives in the context of a dark, low-pitched sound. These are not crashes that will cut through a band’s sound. Instead, they’ll reinforce your music from within. Crashes such as these will add power to a key moment in a song without calling attention to themselves.

22” Light Ride

I’ll always remember legendary jazz drummer Mel Lewis telling me that a ride cymbal should form a “cushion” for a band’s sound. Mel’s cymbals created a blanket of sound that helped smooth out the time of whatever group he was playing with, whether it was a trio or a big band.

Mel advised me to look for older cymbals if I wanted to get his sound. It wasn’t the age, he said. It was the fact that older cymbals were thinner. And thinner cymbals tended to produce fatter, warmer tones.

I imagine Mel would be happy to see that lighter, thinner cymbals—like the K 22” Light ride—are being produced again. According to Zildjian, this model has the same smoky sound and stick definition as the previously introduced 24” Light Ride but is more controllable.

I’ll agree with that claim, adding that the pitch of this cymbal is a bit more mainstream than that of the 24” model. The 22” Light ride still has a lower pitch than an average medium ride. So it isn’t designed to cut through a band. Its rich sound will form that cushion that Mel liked, with the addition of a dry stick articulation.

The bell of the 22” K Light ride is fairly small for a cymbal this size. And although the bell sound is reasonably clear, it doesn’t produce the bright, cutting tone you’d usually want for Latin patterns.

Overall, this cymbal is about blend more than projection. I didn’t find it any more difficult to control in an acoustic situation than a typical 20” ride. It’s certainly capable of more power if you lay into it, but when played with a medium or lightweight jazz model stick, it produces a good blend of overtones and stick definition.

15” And 16” Light Hi-Hats

I used to assume that people used bigger cymbals (and drums) just to be louder. While that can be true, I came to realize that bigger cymbals are sometimes preferred for their low pitch and dark timbres. Large cymbals also aren’t always that much louder than small cymbals,
The K Light ride and over-sized hats provide a warm cushion of sound.

because it takes a stronger stroke with a larger stick to move the additional metal enough to get the extra volume. If you play on a bigger cymbal with a lighter touch, it can actually be softer than a smaller cymbal.

Those theories bear out with the 15” and 16” Light hi-hats. I didn’t sense that the foot “chick” sound was any louder, only faster and lower in pitch. As with the 22” Light ride, this is a sound that blends rather than cuts. Both sets of hats were nice complements to the 22” Light ride when playing jazz patterns, and I liked the way the fat chick sound blended in with brush patterns on the snare.

When playing the hats closed with sticks, the sound was very controllable. Because the pitch is lower than standard 14” hats, the sound didn’t have a lot of cutting power. But if I wanted a louder sound, I could easily get it with a bigger stroke and/or bigger sticks.

I especially liked the “bark” sound achieved when quickly opening and closing the hats as they were being struck. These cymbals have a lot of overtones, so that technique produced a meaty sound. Likewise, riding on them when held slightly opened produced a sloshy, rich sound reminiscent of John Bonham’s playing on Led Zeppelin’s “Rock And Roll” or Ringo Starr’s playing on early Beatles tracks.

When comparing the two new hi-hat models, the 16” Light hats were a bit too dark for my taste. I would probably go with the smaller ones, which are a little more versatile.

To hear these cymbals, log on to the Multi-Media page at www.moderndrummer.com.

THE NUMBERS
21” K Crash Ride (Brilliant): $589
22” K Crash Ride (Brilliant): $644
22” K Light Ride: $644
15” K Light Hi-Hats: $722
16” K Light Hi-Hats: $798
www.zildjian.com

SNARE DRUM OF THE MONTH
by Michael Dawson

GRETSCH 41/2x14 VINTAGE USA MAPLE LIMITED EDITION

HOW’S IT SOUND?

After messing around with this limited-edition 125th anniversary drum, which was built from decades-old Jasper shells, I now know why many top studio drummers and jazz aficionados are always on the lookout for a vintage Gretsch snare—there’s simply nothing else out there that has that same creamy tone and chunky presence.

This drum arrived at M.O.’s office just in time for a session in which the producer wanted a “classic, ’50s rock feel with a modern edge.” So I immediately put the Gretsch to the test. To replicate that classic jazzy rock vibe, I tuned the batter head up fairly tight (but not choking) and loosened the snare to allow the tone of the wood to speak and the snares to rattle. This sound proved to be the perfect match for the track’s driving Chuck Berry–meets–Jimmy Eat World groove.

Even though it’s fairly shallow, I wanted to hear how much tonal variety I could get out of this little beauty. Surprisingly, just about any tuning, from fatback to piccolo “pop,” sounded sweet and convincing. So if you need a top-notch drum that’ll sound great on any gig or session, grab one of these. But don’t wait too long. Only 125 have been built, and they’re only available for a limited time through Guitar Center.

Round-badge logos, classic lugs. Silver Sealer interior, and “Lightning” throw-off are in keeping with Gretsch’s traditional design.

WHAT’S IT COST? $599.99 www.guitarcenter.com/platinum

To hear this drum, log on to the Multi-Media page at www.moderndrummer.com.
The latest editions to Meinl’s extensive percussion catalog are inventive items designed to add new colors and textures to your collection. Let’s take a look at each one to see what rhythmic and sonic possibilities are waiting to be explored.

**Foot Cabasa**

When left-foot clave became popular a number of years ago, just about every company put out some sort of pedal bracket that allowed cowbells, blocks, or other mounted percussion to be played with the feet. Meinl has expanded on that concept with their Foot Cabasa, which consists of a large cabasa attached to the axel of a foot pedal.

The Foot Cabasa looks like a standard bass drum pedal with a cabasa mounted to its side. However, this isn’t something you could retrofit to hardware you already own. This unit consists of a mountable cabasa and a specially-made pedal that has a few unique design concepts, like a wing nut–controlled cam that allows you to play the cabasa on downstrokes or in a continuous up-and-down motion. When the wingnut is tightened, the cabasa follows the path of the pedal, creating non-stop rhythms that mirror the exact motions of your foot. If the wingnut is loosened, the cabasa only moves during downstrokes, which allows you to play rhythms in a similar way as you would on a bass drum. These two settings open up a world of playing possibilities.

With the wingnut loosened, I found it very easy to play clean, precise patterns with my left foot while playing grooves on drumset or hand percussion. The metal beads of the cabasa add a crisp yet subtle sound that’s much more tolerable than honking cowbell or ear-splitting woodblock strokes.

It takes a little more practice to get a comfortable rhythm going with the wingnut tightened all the way, since you now have to be aware of the rhythm that your foot creates when it lifts off the pedal. Eventually I was able to establish a bed of pulsing 16th notes that would add a nice shaker-like texture in softer playing situations. My only gripe is that the pedal itself was a little noisy, especially when playing heel-up and press-
Russ Miller Multi-Bell

Russ Miller’s latest creation, the Multi-Bell, is a self-muffling cowbell that has a metal rod threaded through the bottom of the bell. On top of that rod sits a thick cymbal felt. By turning the rod, the felt moves into contact with the upper lip, which muffles the sound. In theory, this simple, logical design should allow you to control the tone of your cowbell without having to resort to tape or other muffling methods.

In practice, we were a little surprised by the results achieved with the self-muffer. When compared to most other cowbells, this model sounds much more controlled. So it doesn’t give off a honking bongo-bell tone, even when the muffer is disengaged. As a result, there wasn’t much of a difference between open and muffled tones, as far as resonance is concerned. But what the self-muffer did do was bring up the overall pitch of the bell as it was tightened. So what sounds like a low-pitched mambo-type bell when left open becomes more like a bright cha-cha bell when the muffer is fully engaged. These weren’t the results we expected, but they did allow for a variety of sonic options.

Helix Bowl And Liquid Triangle

These two bizarre auxiliary percussion items immediately caught our ears. The Helix Bowl consists of a steel spring welded to a resonating cup. If you strike the helix with the included steel beater, you get a complex sound that’s part chime, part triangle, and part industrial noise. Then when you run the beater up and down the spring, you get a bell tree—meets—mouth harp sound that’s very intriguing. Add to that the wacky wah-wah berimbau effect you get when you experiment with opening and closing the resonating cup against a drum or your body, and you have one of the more original metal percussion sounds we’ve ever heard.

The first time I hit the Liquid Triangle, I couldn’t help but laugh. I just didn’t expect something so industrial looking to sound so...strange. Unlike the Helix Bowl, which has an open-ended resonator, the Liquid Triangle’s semi-sphere chamber is sealed off and filled with liquid. So when you suspend the triangle and strike it, the water is set into motion, creating rippling, warbled overtones that bend through a range of pitches. This unexpected effect is even more pronounced if you move the triangle after hitting it, or if you play traditional open/closed Brazilian patterns. This was the most surprising-sounding instrument of the bunch.

Hi-Hat Tambourine

After experimenting with the bizarre sounds of the Helix Bowl and Liquid Triangle, it was nice to get back to normalcy by checking out Meinl’s hi-hat tambourine. Like similar models on the market, this instrument mounts to a hi-hat stand’s pull rod, allowing you to play tambourine hits with your foot. What makes this device a little more unusual is its rubberized striking ring, which allows the tambourine to be hit safely with sticks. The steel jingles produce a bright sound, which helped it cut through in loud situations. The jingles also settle down very quickly, so it’s easy to play clean, articulate rhythms with your foot or with sticks.

Conclusion

We applaud Meinl for continuing to step outside the box with their latest product launches. Obviously, not all of us are going to scramble to the nearest drumshop to pick up a Helix Bowl or a Foot Cabasa. But if you already have a decent collection of standard shakers, triangles, and bells, and you want something a little out of the ordinary for your next project, these are some interesting options to consider.
Reviewing drumheads presents several challenges. With the objective obviously being to get a “good sound” with the heads, two of the most important factors in achieving that—the tuning of the head and the shell that it’s slapped on—have nothing to do with the drumheads themselves.

I personally enjoy tuning drums, and I can usually get the sound I’m looking for without too much stress. I generally start by seating a new head and getting the lugs as tight as possible with my fingers, then giving each a half-turn with a drumkey. Then I let the batter head sit for a few minutes while focusing on the bottom head. My experience has shown that the tuning of the bottom head is more important than most think. After making sure that the heads are tuned consistently all the way around, I usually tune the bottom heads higher than the batter heads. That seems to center the sound.

For this review, I was sent a variety of sizes of batter heads. Fortunately, I have several kits to use while testing the new heads. And I could play them in live situations as well as in my studio.

Black Suede Powerstroke 3

I mounted the 22” Black Suede Powerstroke 3 bass drum head on a four-year-old Gretsch American maple kick drum. I started by tensioning it as loosely as possible without being floppy. This head immediately delivered a commanding yet tuneful subsonic tone that you feel throughout your body. There was also a nice attack. After the head had stretched out, I adjusted the tuning up a quarter turn. Here, the drum had more pitch, which added tone to the beefy bottom end. These heads have muffling rings built into them, so to my ear there was no need for any other muffling.

I then put the 20” Black Suede Powerstroke 3 bass drum head on a 1970 Ludwig kick. This drum also delivered a beautiful tone, with a sweet pitch tucked inside the low end that had just the right amount of decay. I took this kick to a gig with a soul band, and was pleased with the way the big tone sounded in the group.

Black Suede Ambassadors

I fitted all of the toms on my Gretsch Catalina Elite kit (8”, 10”, and 13”) with Black Suede Ambassadors. The 13x13 floor tom sounds larger and more open with the Black Suede head, but the decay was controlled. The Black Suede head also added a focused and organic tone to the 7x10 rack tom that was missing when I played the drum using the factory head.

An even more noticeable change occurred in the 6x8 rack tom. The Black Suede head really brought this drum to life. The pitch was high and clear, but now it blended beautifully with the other drums.

The sound of the Black Suede Ambassadors might be compared to that of an old Fiberskyn head. They sound warm, and they have a nice natural decay. You do sacrifice a little attack, as you lose some of the “plastic” sound. But they have a great response and feel. I used the heads on a restaurant gig with a flamenco jazz trio. I added muffling rings on the bigger toms to focus the sound a bit. But overall, they sounded awesome. I could lay into the drums even though people were so close I could see what they were having for dinner.

At first I was a little reluctant to take the coated Ambassador off of my 5½x12 Gretsch wood snare to test one of the Black Suede heads, because I had the sound just where I wanted it. And I was somewhat dismayed when I first put the Suede head on and it sounded a bit on the papery side. But after the head settled, it brought into focus the crisp attack and big body of the drum’s wood shell.
Black X Black Dot Snare Batter
I mounted the 14” Black X Black Dot on a 4 1/2 x 14 1970 Ludwig Acrolite aluminum snare. This is a very sensitive drum, so it took some extra tweaking until I got it completely in tune with itself. The open, unmuffled sound was a bit bright, so I slowly dialed in the internal muffling device. That softened the high end a bit, which helped give the drum a crisp, fat sound.

Vintage Ambassadors
The Remo Vintage Ambassador heads have a traditional white-coated finish. I mounted them on the 9x13 and 14x14 toms from my 1970 Ludwig kit. These heads effectively brought these old drums back to life. These heads sounded great unmuffled and unmiked. I could really slam them, and they maintained a tuneful and controlled sound.

I put the Vintage A 16” on a Yamaha floor tom that already sounded very large with a Pinstripe head. The Vintage head delivered no less sound, just a warmer and more rounded voice. You hear less of the head and more of the drum. When I used a Black Suede Ambassador on the same drum, the sound was more open and a little “boingy.” There was more high-end in the attack, and a little less low-end rumble than with the Vintage A head.

If you’re looking to warm up your sound or you’re trying to get a studio-quality old-school vibe, it might be worth investigating these new heads.

THE NUMBERS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
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www.remo.com
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PROG: Virgil Donati, Mike Portnoy, Neil Peart
R&B/HIP-HOP: AHMIR “?UESTLOVE” THOMPSON, Aaron Spears, John Blackwell, Teddy Campbell, Gerald Heyward
TRADITIONAL R&B / FUNK: STEVE JORDAN, David Garibaldi, Stanton Moore
POP: KEITH CARLOCK, John Blackwell, Kenny Aronoff, Stewart Copeland, Teddy Campbell
JAM BAND: CARTER BEAUFORD, Stanton Moore
TRADITIONAL JAZZ: Roy Haynes, Lewis Nash, Jeff Hamilton
CONTEMPORARY JAZZ: Jeff “Tain” Watts, Billy Kilson
FUSION: DAVE WECKL, Jojo Mayer, Vinnie Colaiuta
STUDIO: Vinnie Freese, Matt Chamberlain, Kenny Aronoff
COUNTRY: Paul Leim, McAfee, Chris Eddie Bayers McHugh, Trilok Gurtu
WORLD MUSIC: Luis Conte, Lenny
PERCUSSIONIST: Gil Sharone
CASTRO UP & COMING (Dillinger Escape Plan)
ALL AROUND: Vinnie COLAIUTA, Steve Smith, Keith Carlock, Gregg Bissonett
CLINICIAN: THOMAS LANG, Jojo Mayer, Virgil Donati
EDUCATIONAL BOOK: Pat Petrillo: Hands, Grooves & Fills, Casey Scheuerell: Stickings And Orchestra-tions For Drumset
EDUCATIONAL DVD: JOJO MAYER: SECRET WEAPONS FOR THE MODERN DRUMMER (Hudson Music), Mike Portnoy: In Constant Motion, Steve Smith / Adam Nussbaum: The Art Of Playing With Brushes

Congratulations 2008 Poll Winners.
There was less than two months between this year’s Winter NAMM music trade show and the Musikmesse in Frankfurt, Germany. Even so, there was more than enough new gear to check out. Here are some highlights.

**Kirchhoff** displayed an interesting acrylic set. The multi-bass drum setup featured a textured bottle-green sparkle seamless shell. The entire drumset was suspended from a rack made out of acrylic tubing. All Kirchhoff drums feature a new lug design.  
*www.kirchhoff-schlagwerk.de*

**Phidrums** are beautifully made Italian stave drums that have lugs incorporated within the shell. The drums are constructed from ten staves made from the same piece of wood. The snare strainer is a patented model that has no screws or springs in its construction.  
*www.phidrums.com*
The one-off spider web finish on this Masterwork kit proved to be so popular that Pearl decided to make it available for order. The graphics are printed on a specially made material. After applying the graphics to the shells, the drums are finished with a layer of clear lacquer.

www.pearldrums.com

Meinl used the time between NAMM and Musikmesse to expand the Mb10 range with 16” Fat Hat hi-hats.

www.meinlcymsals.com

Rotodrum showed seamless acrylic drums at their booth. The company offers matching or colored acrylic lugs, as well as custom graphics.

www.rotodrum.com

Tempus paid homage to the company’s roots with this Carbon/Kevlar Milestone reissue.

www.tempusdrums.com

Tama showed off their top-of-the-line Starclassic Bubinga and “Diamonds” kits (shown).

www.tama.com

DW is now making two very hefty snare drums, both with a shell that’s about an inch thick. The first snare is constructed out of staves. The second is made from a single, solid ply of wood.

www.dwdrums.com
Swiss drumstick manufacturer Agner surprised last year’s Musikmesse with a line of snare drums. The snare drum line has now been expanded to feature full-range drumkits.
www.agner-sticks.com

Dixon has teamed up with master craftsman Chris Brady (of Brady Drums) to construct some beautiful ply snares. Brady hand-selected all of the wood used in these drums. The snares feature heavy-duty hardware, die-cast hoops, and a Dunnett strainer.
www.playdixon.com

This all-in-one compact drumset contraption from GigPig produces exceptional-quality sounds.
www.gigpig.org

Istanbul Agop displayed their new 25th Anniversary and Collector’s Series cymbals.
www.istanbulcymbals.com

Italian cymbalsmiths UFIP have expanded their Experience series with a line of extra-thin and large rides. The rides are available in lathed and unlathed versions.
www.ufip.it

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14" x 5.5" Maple

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Welcome to MD’s 2008 Readers Poll awards. We asked you to vote for your favorite drummers, and you did—in huge numbers. In fact, this year’s poll received more votes than any other poll in Modern Drummer’s history. (We received literally tens of thousands of votes.) Thanks for your input. HERE ARE YOUR WINNERS:

**HALL OF FAME**

**GINGER BAKER**

2007: Jack DeJohnette
2006: Charlie Watts
2005: Stewart Copeland
2004: Mike Portnoy
2003: Simon Phillips
2002: Steve Smith
2001: Dennis Chambers
2000: Dave Weckl
1999: Roy Haynes
1998: Ringo Starr
1997: Terry Bozzio
1996: Vinnie Colaiuta
1995: Elvin Jones
1994: Larrie Londin
1993: Jeff Porcaro
1992: Max Roach
1991: Art Blakey
1990: Bill Bruford
1989: Carl Palmer
1988: Joe Morello
1987: Billy Cobham
1986: Tony Williams
1985: Louis Bellson
1984: Steve Gadd
1983: Neil Peart
1982: Keith Moon
1981: John Bonham
1980: Buddy Rich
1979: Gene Krupa
2008 READERS POLL RESULTS

ALL AROUND
Vinnie Colaiuta
2. Steve Smith
3. Keith Garlock
4. Gregg Bissonette
5. Dennis Chambers

STUDIO
Vinnie Colaiuta
2. Josh Freese
3. Matt Chamberlain
4. Steve Gadd
5. Kenny Aronoff

ROCK
Neil Peart
2. Chad Smith
3. Stewart Copeland
4. Alex Van Halen
5. Jason Bonham

METAL
Tomas Haake
2. Jason Bittner
3. Chris Adler
4. Derek Roddy
5. Joey Jordison

PUNK
Travis Barker
2. Josh Freese
3. Tre Cool
4. Brooks Wackerman
5. Gil Sharone
TO ALL THE
READERS OF MD
THANKS FOR HAVING SUCH GOOD TASTE

= Zildjian Drumstick Artist

zildjian.com
PROG
GAVIN HARRISON
2. Virgil Donati
3. Mike Portnoy
4. Danny Carey
5. Neil Peart

R&B/HIP-HOP
AHMIR “QUESTLOVE” THOMPSON
2. Aaron Spears
3. John Blackwell
4. Teddy Campbell
5. Gerald Heyward

TRADITIONAL
R&B/FUNK
STEVE JORDAN
2. David Garibaldi
3. Bernard Purdie
4. Stanton Moore
5. Zoro

POP
KEITH CARLOCK
2. John Blackwell
3. Kenny Aronoff
4. Stewart Copeland
5. Teddy Campbell

JAM BAND
CARTER BEAUFORD
2. Stanton Moore
3. Billy Martin
4. Kris Myers
5. Joe Russo
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KENNY ARONOFF
john fogerty/sessions
POP – STUDIO

STEWARD COPELAND
the police
ROCK – POP

MIKE PORTNOY
dream theater
EDUCATIONAL DVD – PROG
– RECORDED PERFORMANCE

DOMINIC HOWARD
muse
UP & COMING

JOHN BLACKWELL
justin-timberlake
POP – R&B/HIP-HOP

JASON BITTNER
shadows fall
METAL
TRADITIONAL JAZZ
PETER ERSKINE
2. Roy Haynes
3. Lewis Nash
4. Jeff Hamilton
5. Carl Allen

CONTEMPORARY JAZZ
BRIAN BLADE
2. Jeff "Tain" Watts
3. Bill Stewart
4. Antonio Sanchez
5. Billy Kilson

FUSION
DAVE WECKL
2. Jojo Mayer
3. Dennis Chambers
4. Billy Cobham
5. Vinnie Colaiuta

COUNTRY
PAUL LEIM
2. Jim Riley
3. Dave McAfee
4. Chris McHugh
5. Eddie Bayers

WORLD MUSIC
HORACIO "EL NEGRO" HERNANDEZ
2. Dafnis Prieto
3. Airtó
4. Antonio Sanchez
5. Trilok Gurtu
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DANNY CAREY
Runner Up
Prog Rock

STEWART COPELAND
Runner Up
Rock & POP

PAUL LEIM
Winner of
Country

JIM PAYNE
Runner Up
Educational Book

JOEY JORDISON
Runner Up
Metal

ALEX VAN HALEN
Runner Up
Rock

DAVE McAFFEE
Runner Up
Country

JOSH FRESEE
Runner Up
Funk & Studio

LENNY CASTRO
Runner Up
Percussion
PERCUSSIONIST

ALEX ACUña
1. Zakir Hussain
2. Luis Conte
3. Giovanni Hidalgo
4. Lenny Castro

UP & COMING

THOMAS PRIDGEN
(The Mars Volta)
1. Gil Sharone
(Dillinger Escape Plan)
2. Benny Greb
3. Dominic Howard (Muse)
4. Dan Weiss

CLINICIAN

THOMAS LANG
1. Jojo Mayer
2. Dom Famularo
3. Virgil Donati
4. Billy Ward

EDUCATIONAL BOOK

RICH LACKOWSKI:
On The Beaten Path
(ALFRED)
1. Pat Petrillo:
   Hands, Grooves & Fills
2. Carmine Appice:
   Realistic Rock 35th
   Anniversary Special Edition
3. Jim Payne:
   The Great
   Drummers Of R&B, Funk & Soul
4. Casey Scheuerell:
   Stickings And
   Orchestractions For Drumset

EDUCATIONAL DVD

JOJO MAYER: Secret
Weapons For The
Modern Drummer
(Hudson Limited)
1. Mike Portnoy:
   In Constant Motion
2. Marco Minnemann:
   The Marco Show
3. Billy Ward:
   Voices In My Head
4. Steve Smith/Adam Nussbaum:
   The Art Of Playing With Brushes

RECORDED
PERFORMANCE

NEIL PEART—Rush:
Snakes & Arrows
1. Gavin Harrison—Porcupine
   Tree: Fear Of A Blank Planet
2. Mike Portnoy—Dream Theater:
   Systematic Chaos
3. Jack DeJohnette—
   Michael Brecker: Pilgrimage
4. Roy Haynes: A Life In Times
CONGRATS TO OUR ARTISTS THAT PLACED IN THE MODERN DRUMMER READERS POLL

Derek Roddy
Serpent’s Rise

Billy Kilson
Chris Botti

Jim Riley
Rascal Flatts

Chad Smith
Red Hot Chili Peppers

Josh Freese
Nine Inch Nails / Sting

Virgil Donati
Planet X

John Blackwell
Justin Timberlake

Chris McHugh
Keith Urban / Studio

Thomas Pridgen
Mars Volta

Jim Payne
Educator / Clinician

Stewart Copeland
The Police

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for consistency

HAND ROLLED
for straightness

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for weight and pitch

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THANK YOU VOTERS.

Congratulations winners.
Brian Blade has performed and recorded with some of the greatest musicians of this or any era. His explosive jazz drumming with tenor saxophonist and composer Wayne Shorter is documented on two amazing live albums, *Footprints Live!* and *Beyond The Sound Barrier.* Meanwhile, Blade's more groove-based work with everyone from Joni Mitchell (*Shine*) and Bob Dylan (*Time Out of Mind*) to Daniel Lanois (*Belladonna*) and Norah Jones (*Feels Like Home*) further prove his chameleon bona fides.
ALWAYS BE REACTING

Story by Ken Micallef
Photos by Paul La Raia
But while Blade currently mans stage and recording studios with the upper echelon of music royalty, he cites an ordinary hotel gig as the real turning point in his passionate style. “I was fired,” Blade recalls from the New York offices of Verve Records. “I cancelled one night of a six-night engagement with my hero George French [bass, vocals] and Emile Vinette [piano], playing at the Sheraton on Canal Street in New Orleans. It was 1990; I was nineteen. I wanted to be downtown playing ‘modern jazz’ at Snug Harbor. In that instant when George said, ‘We’re going to get somebody else,’ I realized what the deal was. People would make requests, from ‘Green Green Grass Of Home’ to Monk tunes to Lee Dorsey’s ‘Working In A Coal Mine,’ and George and Emile could play it all and everything else. I was trying to play those songs and I realized I wasn’t prepared. These guys were teaching me and I didn’t see it then as something that I really needed. But looking back at it, I know now that it was special, that all-encompassing view of how to make music. No matter what it might be, it’s about serving the song.”

Blade got that gig back, but in that instant of rejection he learned a truism that has served him throughout his still burgeoning career. On Seasons Of Change, the drummer’s third release as a leader with his band, Brian Blade Fellowship, he’s all about the songs, from brooding grooves to high-flying Americana to sublime straight-ahead. Following the band’s 1998 self-titled debut and 2000’s Perceptual, Seasons Of Change continues to position Blade as drummer-cum-leader, maneuvering his large ensemble with majestic drumming and passionate songs. Blade’s more explosive, kinetic style can be heard with a wide variety of artists, including organist Sam Yahel, saxophonist Joshua Redman, guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel, and producer Daniel Lanois.

Blade’s amazing drumming on Wayne Shorter’s Beyond The Sound Barrier shows him to be ferocious, quick-witted, pliant, and always reacting. Like Alec Baldwin in Glengarry Glen Ross shouting “ABC! Always be closing!”, Blade’s motto seems to be “ABR! Always be reacting!” At times, barely able to compose himself, Blade will abruptly stand up to smash a cymbal or “round robin” his toms. He can as quickly lay way back in the cut to propel a groove, or tip his ride cymbal at triple-time to cut the edge of a jazz improvisation. Blade’s drumming conversation is as animated as Tony Williams’, as expansive as Elvin Jones’, and as magically quirky as Jim Keltner’s.

Blade never discusses the drums in isolation. The groove is always part of the music, part of the interplay between musicians, never a separate element existing in its own lonely space. With a vocal album in the works, the Shreveport native describes its music as a “Sunday record…maybe if you didn’t pray all week you might think about it today. It’s where I’m standing now, where I’ve been, and where I think I’m going.”

If you love Blade’s beautiful “ABR” drumming, you know where he’s going. In his second feature as a Modern Drummer cover artist, we attempt to trace Brian Blade’s future trajectory while understanding his everyday approach.

“I’m always trying to tune in to what the other musicians are sending out, and then reacting to that as quickly as possible. If I’m thinking when I’m on the bandstand, I know I’m in trouble.”
MD: Seasons Of Change is very thematic, almost as if it was written in suites.
Brian: My songwriting partner, Jon Cowherd, and I think conceptually as a whole. The world now is very "micro-tised," but we think in terms of an album’s entirety. Even without composing that way, that is the foundation of where our music is coming from.
MD: Do you enjoy listening to an entire album rather than single songs?
Brian: Yes. I like the idea of The Beatles’ White Album: You might just love one song, but the whole record takes a trip. I want to take the whole trip, so hopefully our records will have that and you’ll want to go through it. With the drumming as well, I love just being a part of the music, much more so

“I want to make sure that the band makes a statement, collectively. My part within it is just that, a part of the whole.”
than thinking I’m the leader. I want to make sure that the band makes a statement, collectively. My part within it is just that, a part of the whole.

**MD:** You’ve kept the members of Fellowship intact through three records. Is that the goal, a band of players who grow together? That must be hard to do today.

**Brian:** It is, but it’s hard for me to see it any other way. We’re friends, we’ve known each other for so long. But when I write, these are the people that I hear. I hear their voices. I want my emotions and my heart to be wrapped up in that, otherwise I can’t take stock. I want Fellowship to develop over as long a period of time as possible.

**MD:** Your music has always referenced jazz, Americana, New Orleans, a little Coltrane, Pat Metheny...

**Brian:** The influences in our music are pretty wide: Al Green, Staple Singers... We’re talking about a long distillation, a huge funnel that is dripping drop by drop. It might not be so obvious, but those are the threads that run through it for me.

And there’s definitely John Coltrane, Joni Mitchell—these things that I take in daily. It keeps feeding me too. Once I like something, I want to stick with it. Even if it was a record that really touched me ten years ago, and perhaps the latest one from the same artist didn’t touch me as much, I know there’s still something there that will speak to me.

**Live ABR**

**MD:** In live performance, you’re often all over the kit: arms flying in different directions, your body leaning into or around the drums—you even get up from the throne to crash cymbals. You do things that a lot of drummers wouldn’t or couldn’t do. What does that

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**Brian’s Kit**

**Drums:** Canopus Custom
(Brian occasionally uses vintage Gretsch drums as well)

- A. 5½x14 snare (Ludwig or Canopus, or 6½x14 vintage)
- B. 8x12 mounted tom
- C. 14x14 floor tom
- D. 14x18 bass drum (or 14x20)

**Cymbals:** Zildjian

1. 15” hi-hats (60s era)

2. 15” K Constantinople light ride
3. 20” A (60s era)
4. 22” K Constantinople light ride (with rivets)

**Heads:** Aquarian American Vintage medium on snare, tops and bottoms of toms, and bass drum

**Sticks:** Vic Firth Bolero model, mallets, Regal Tip brushes
Tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter is arguably the most important jazz composer since Miles Davis, his music (including such classic albums as Night Dreamer, Speak No Evil, and JTYJ) and mighty tenor playing having influenced multiple generations of musicians. Shorter speaks highly of Brian Blade, who has been working with the sax legend over the past few years.

“I first heard about Brian around the end of the ‘80s,” Shorter says. “Then I was home one day, and Christian McBride and Brian Blade showed up—Christian had his bass, Brian came with his cymbals. I said, ‘Let’s do something.’ Jim Beard was also at my house. So we just started messing around, and that was enough to tell me, ‘This is the guy.’

“Brian was different,” Shorter insists. “He wasn’t locked in; his attitude was open. There was nothing closed. He didn’t run away from things; sometimes you might run away from something that you think is beneath you. He wasn’t judgmental. He didn’t come to the house with a whole bunch of rules, like ‘I don’t do this or that.’ He isn’t a complainer, either.

“Brian places importance on rhythm and the kind of storytelling that takes you away from the technique of drums,” Wayne continues. “Brian is like Sonship [Reggie Theus] and Eric Gravatt, these kinds of drummers who aren’t stuck in method books. You’re supposed be like a diving board, a launching pad. But some people hang on to the launching pad because they want to perfect what somebody else has done. When Brian and I perform with an orchestra, they all say that he is the best full-set drummer to play with. He’s a pointer.

“Brian is youthful. Every day is the first moment. He doesn’t sound like he’s working on something today that he was doing two months ago. You have to take chances. You can’t make an almighty god out of music. You can defray your instrument and what you do. Even Charlie Parker was locked into his own demise, but he did say he wanted to play the valleys and the trees: he wanted to play life.”

Ken McCalfe

kind of full-body drumming give you?

Brian: Hopefully it gives me flexibility and interpretation. It’s hard for me to see it any other way. As I’ve developed I’ve come to my own processes of how to get a sound. When I would watch my teacher, Johnny Vidacovich, play, I watched his whole physicality and animation. His sound was connected with the way he would move his arms and the way he would sit. I had to come to it on my own.

Watching Elvin Jones was the same thing. His economy of motion... I feel like I have to sometimes stand up to get that sound that Elvin got, because there was so much power and density and beauty in his playing. He almost looked like he was sitting in an easy chair; he flowed. So I’m just trying to achieve a sound, and that’s what happens.

MD: So jumping up to crash a cymbal gives you a different sound as opposed to if you were sitting down?

Brian: I couldn’t see it any other way. I feel like I’m all wrapped up in it. I never practiced posture so much...or how to economize my movements. It’s more like I saw a video of myself and noticed that my shoulders were up by my ears for fifteen minutes and I had to think about that. Okay, relax! Don’t tense up, even though you want to be intense. I’m finding a way to let myself be free and not tied to a stool. If I have to get up to hit the cymbal, at that moment it must be needed.

MD: So you’re feeling so passionate that you have to really smash it.

Brian: I’m so amazed at the privilege of
playing with someone like Danilo Perez or Wayne Shorter—not thinking that consciously at the moment. It really drives you to move in a way. It makes me emote something that isn’t tame.

The drums naturally embody this wild element. Not that I’m trying to be provocative, but the nature of hitting things must go way back. Just the primal aspect or sensibility in that and how to achieve a sound by hitting something, there are so many degrees within the subtlety. I’m always trying to get closer to what’s needed at that instant as the music moves.

MD: You have incredibly fast reflexes. It goes beyond technique; you’re always reacting and expressing something with great detail. How did you develop your reflexes?

Brian: I think it’s come from all my experiences, playing with great musicians, musicians so much better than me, and getting to see other musicians do what they do. The reflexes develop when trying to totally focus and be in the moment rather than thinking ahead—just trying to let music happen. I can’t even say it’s from within; it’s at the tips of your fingers, and you’re constantly trying to grab it and probably never will. It’s like you touch it, and then it pushes away from you again.

MD: Is it something that can be taught, those quick reflexes and that responsive attitude?

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**Batch O’ Blades**

**BRIAN’S BEST RECORDINGS**

**ARTIST**
- Brian Blade Fellowship
- Brian Blade Fellowship
- Edward Simon
- Dave Binney
- Wayne Shorter
- Wayne Shorter
- Joni Mitchell
- Joni Mitchell
- Daniel Lanois
- Yayo
- Sam Yahel
- Mike Holober
- Bob Dylan

**ALBUM**
- Perceptual
- Seasons Of Change
- Unicity
- Oceans
- Beyond The Sound Barrier
- Footprints Live!
- Travelogue
- Shine
- Balladonna
- Yayo
- Truth And Beauty
- Wish List
- Time Out Of Mind

**HIS FAVORITES**

**ARTIST**
- John Coltrane
- Magma
- Hank Mobley
- Art Blakey
- Miles Davis
- Miles Davis
- Paul Motian
- Stevie Wonder
- Herbie Hancock

**ALBUM**
- A Love Supreme
- Magma Live
- For Away Lands
- Ugetsu
- My Funny Valentine
- Bitches Brew
- It Should Have Happened...
- Innervisions
- The Prisoner

**DRUMMER**
- Elvin Jones
- Christian Vander
- Billy Higgins
- Art Blakey
- Tony Williams
- Jack DeJohnette
- Lenny White
- Don Alias
- Paul Motian
- Stevie Wonder
- Albert “Tootie” Heath

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Recorded Performance

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Carmine Appice
Educational Book

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Brian: I can’t say that it can be taught, but by experience and doing it you get to your own pace of reaction and action. That comes from playing gigs. There’s no way around it. You can be in a room by yourself and work out certain physical fundamentals—okay, I want to get around the drumset with ease, or I want to be able to play a single-stroke roll for thirty minutes and not have it waver. But eventually when you’re trying to make music and combining other people’s passions and feelings for time with your own—when it all meets and mingles—you have to come up with something else.

MD: Is it also about being emotionally fearless enough to bare it all?

Brian: I was recently listening to Tony Williams, and the first thing that came to mind was his willingness to take a chance. I don’t know if I’m that guy; I’m more fearful than not. But if there is a time when I am fearless, it’s when I’m playing music and I’m able to just take a chance. Wayne always instills that. He allows that liberty and wants that from us.

MD: What does he say?

Brian: He wants you to take your direction, whatever it might be. To be safe in interpreting a song as it’s been played—that is so far from his ideal. He almost wants to deconstruct music that is perfectly constructed. But he wants to find another doorway every time.

MD: Wayne Shorter tells you to push it all the time?

Brian: Oh, man, totally, even if that means being silent. He uses that space to see the music develop and crawl along at the edge of something and then dive in.

Maintaining The Burn

MD: YouTube has a great video of you playing “Ja Head” with tenor saxophonist Kenny Garrett. It’s pure uptempo burn. What are some tips on playing with that level of intensity, which you seem to do so effortlessly?

Brian: Kenny Garrett always pushes the envelope in a way that challenges me. Through his experiences with Miles Davis, Kenny would always challenge me to go to another level. The only way that I can explain that is trying to maintain a certain intensity or playing with a certain stamina. Six nights a week at a hotel will do that.

MD: Was there a point when you broke through to playing faster tempos?

Brian: Not really. Playing with Sam Yahel helped, and playing familiar songs and standards at [NYC jazz club] Smalls, you get better at those things when you sit in and jam. You have to learn those kinds of songs and challenge yourself to get comfortable with playing fast or playing a tempo for a long period of time. Again, I don’t know any way around it other than doing it.

Also, it’s important for drummers, once you’ve had that time alone, to have another person that you can communicate with so you have a human barometer, somebody to tell you if your tempo is falling or rushing. I did that a lot with Chris Thomas and Jon Cowherd [from Fellowship]. That experience is invaluable, equal to playing gigs. You can record yourself—that’s important too—but the kind of scrutiny that comes from a friend is immeasurable.

MD: Did you practice full set with a metronome?

Brian: I did, though I haven’t in a long time. But I also tried to gravitate towards things that I thought had a great feel and tried to learn those things, like listening to Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, or Tony Williams, and...
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are you in?
BRIAN BLADE

trying to understand how they played within the time. My teachers, Johnny Vidacovich and David Lee, emphasized that feeling of the time being something not so rigid but always moving, something more elliptical and circular. So I try to find my place in that round thing.

MD: Is playing straight-ahead ultimately about forward motion?
Brian: Hmm...yes, I tend to leave a lot of space—to a fault. The music always has to have that flow forward. Part of my responsibility as a drummer is to do that and to keep the dance alive. I don’t get to that all the time.

Developing A Sound

MD: You switch back and forth between traditional and matched grip. But regarding your traditional grip, your left hand looks very loose on the stick. Your fingers are almost straight off the stick at times. Does that allow the stick to do all the work?
Brian: That’s also something that has just developed and that I learned from watching my teachers and seeing Elvin. I never hold a stick tightly. It’s always loose. While trying to develop a sound, I noticed Elvin didn’t have a tight hold on it either, but the power was still there. There are times when I do grab the stick, if I know I’m going to come down on a cymbal with all I’ve got, for example. I need to hold on!

MD: Are you letting the stick use all the rebound off the cymbal?
Brian: To a certain degree, yeah. I’m trying to keep that sound almost floating in my hand. But then again, I’ve seen Jimmy Cobb holding the stick with a slightly tighter grip and, man, his beat is so beautiful. So it’s just something that I’ve developed for me.

MD: Is that true for the drums as well, that you’re using the rebound of the heads as with the cymbals?
Brian: Definitely. I want to bring the sound out more than put it in. Hopefully I’m drawing it out. And hopefully there’s not so much stress in my arm and I can let my wrist use the rebound. But when you need it again, you can grab hold.

MD: Someone like Cindy Blackman plays every stroke; she models herself after Tony Williams.
Brian: It’s interesting that you bring that up. I was just listening to some Tony, as I mentioned, playing with his band. It seems his intention was that everything had purpose and focus, like when he was quite young playing with Miles Davis, but with a different sensibility. His evolution was still beautiful, but somewhere in the middle lies that balance of playing every stroke. Initially you’re playing every stroke, but I understand about the stick bouncing. There are so many subtleties in every approach.

MD: Do you ever use the very exaggerated left-to-right ride pattern stroke on the cymbal for slower tempos, or do you always play the cymbal in the same spot?
Brian: I tend to stay within the same area. But it’s also just a variation of the swing beat. I loved how Elvin always sounded like he was playing in three. That’s a great influence on me. That beat was the internal dance, and only the cymbal can make that groove happen. Roy Haynes is like that; he rarely plays the hi-hat. He likes comping with it.

Drum/Body Architecture

MD: You have positioned your snare drum very low at times, almost down between your thighs.
Brian: As I’m changing and growing as a
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BRIAN BLADE

person and as a drummer, my kit is evolv-
ing. Back in the early ’90s, I would sit pret-
ty high, above the drums. But over the years I’ve gotten lower and lower, to the point now where I’m almost sitting in a regular chair. I don’t know why that happened, but the snare is still pretty low.

MD: Is that setup just because you’re a tall fellow?
Brian: As I’ve sat lower and lower, the snare drum has also come down, to where it meets just above my legs. That just feels comfortable for me now.

The Thing That Music Is

MD: Your drumming is very passionate, at all times.
Brian: I guess it comes from wanting more out of the experience. If I ever feel like I’m in a situation where there isn’t the greatest chemistry or that for an instant I might not be invested completely, then that’s not a place for me. I just want to keep taking chances at the drums and not always play what I know.

MD: Sometimes with Wayne Shorter you’ll be silent and then you’ll explode. It’s like the Tony Williams mindset. Are there ways to practice that kind of mental focus?

Brian: It’s part of this consciousness of who you’re with. I’m always trying to tune in to what the other musicians are sending out and then reacting to that as quickly as possible. If I’m thinking when I’m on the bandstand, I know I’m in trouble. Within those instances it’s an emotional trip; you kind of bury yourself in a way.

MD: Are there nights when even Wayne Shorter doesn’t have a lot to say?
Brian: Oh, sure. There’ll be times when Wayne won’t play much at all. But without fail, every night, there’ll be something that is just priceless. Some nights there will be two hours where we’re all in tune from the beginning and we’re all improvising. There has to be a certain amount of fearlessness in that process, just to walk out on a wire together with no net. Perhaps we’re each other’s net. If I’m feeling a little empty one night, I look to them and they feed me.

MD: When you first began playing with Wayne, did the ghosts of Night Dreamer or Speak No Evil hang with you?
Brian: Absolutely. Wayne has adapted some of that material to orchestra, and we’ll also play it with the quartet. I have to forget quickly about those records, because I know I will never come up to the staying power of Elvin on those recordings. But hopefully in the here and now we can create something in the process.

Dynamic Control: Blakey To Bonham
MD: Is there anything one can practice to increase their dynamic range?
Brian: Record yourself all the time. I used to record everything. Then listen back and scrutinize what needs work. Listen for balance and sound. How did Art Blakey get that sound? He was playing hard, but somehow the music stood on top of it. Also, play all sorts of gigs. That bar mitzvah at the Holiday Inn—take the gig! Keep playing, put yourself in situations, and listen.

MD: Your drumming is never static and it can be very textural. Do you use different cymbals for each gig?
Brian: Actually, I use essentially the same cymbals, except I change to a 24” from time to time, which I own a couple of. I like larger cymbals. One of my 24s has a density but an essential tone that I love. I play a more dense 24” with Daniel Lanois, and then a lighter one with Fellowship and Wayne Shorter.

MD: Were there things that you focused on for your cymbal touch?
Brian: My teacher Ellis Marsalis said the groove is in the ride cymbal. Think Papa Jo Jones, Paul Motian, or Elvin. You can hear just a beat or two and know who’s playing.

With that in mind, I focused on getting around the drums while also having that essential sound in the cymbal be a strong identity. I tried to take it all in from the recordings as well as seeing my heroes play live. I would sit down and just play ride cymbal with Chris Thomas, my bass player in Fellowship. We would play blues, rhythm changes, song forms, where I would just play the ride cymbal. It was the two of us playing through songs and connecting the beat. That was one of the most important experiences in my life in terms of development and getting a cymbal sound.

MD: You have the cymbal-tipping thing down cold.

Brian: That comes from playing in intimate environments. When someone in the audience is sitting a foot away from you, it challenges you to have a sound that has power but also has subtlety. I am always trying to find that balance between the two, like John Bonham. Within the thickness of his groove, there were all these internal subtle things he was doing. It wasn’t just this vertical boom-bam.

MD: Your drumming is full of detail, color, and commentary. How do you do that without sounding busy?

Brian: Wayne always speaks of that: “Do you know when to stay there?” Miles would say that to him. Stay there. To know when not to let something go and when there is no variation needed. I’m constantly trying to find that place of “staying there.” I’m also painting a lot and changing textures, but I’m hoping that in the way I interpret music there will be a thread that is created, my own composition within the composition.

MD: You always speak of the drums in relation to the other instruments.

Brian: ‘Yes, and that’s why I have a hard time doing drum clinics. I’m not that guy. I could never go up there and play with a track. No one would want to see that! [laughs] In context, I might have something to say.

MD: How do you feel about drummers who present clinics showing off their incredible technique?

Brian: I admire that and wish I could do it. Seemingly, I should be able to, but maybe it’s just a mental block. The fundamentals are one thing, but the music-making, how to make that into musical sense, is what I’m hoping for.

Phrasing, Timekeeping & Trust

MD: Your solos are always very melodic. Are you thinking melodically, or leading from what came before you within the song?

Brian: Sometimes I work from what has just happened, but not always. Sometimes I enjoy the absolute contrast of a wash of sound. In the rhythm of the drums there is a harmonic force in itself. Just to have a wash of your own groove and harmonic rhythm can be important.

Practice and study is very real, but I don’t want to sound like a student my whole life. Now I practice ideas that I think are challenging, things that challenge my independence. Ed Simon writes music that is metrically challenging, so I’ll practice his music, playing within meters that constantly change and that force me to find the thread.

I might take a section from a piece of music that goes from 6/8 to 7/8 to 5/8, and try to make sense of it so I’m not thinking in numbers. I’m just playing through that cycle for four bars and trying to make it feel natural. If I don’t get it, that could go on all day.

MD: What advice can you give for playing over the barline?

Brian: Play guitar, play piano, learn as many songs as you can. Then you start to realize that the lines are just a suggestion, and you can play throughout a phrase and make it more of a shape than a box. Take familiar things and make them unique to yourself, extending within those boundary lines while realizing they’re really just softly drawn chalk lines that can be moved around. Pulse just as you have no restrictions. What chance can’t you take musically?

MD: Finally, what would you say it is about your drumming that makes you so in-demand?

Brian: I can’t say; I’m just thankful that people trust that I’ll bring what’s needed. I try not to bring baggage to a situation, and I try to meet every situation with a newness and not impose anything on the music. Hopefully that’s all a part of it.
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4 piece
dark desert burst (right)
The Flavor Of WUV

P.O.D.’s Stickman Shines On The Band’s Latest

Story by Steven Douglas Losey
Photos by Alex Solca
In an industry that is fond of burning out young bands and tossing out their ashes with the trash, P.O.D. has been through the fire and come through purified and forged like a soldier’s blade. In 2008 the band has new vigor, a reignited passion, and a faith as strong as a ball-peen hammer.

Despite record company politics, the loss of members, and, at times, self-doubt that they should even continue, P.O.D. soldiered on. On their latest opus, *When Angels And Serpents Dance*, they toss together a stew of styles and grooves with enough tasty riffs to bring hit singles to the masses.

Drummer Wuv Bernardo has been with the band during their entire career, originally founding P.O.D. with guitarist Marcos Curiel in the early ’90s. No doubt, Wuv has seen the good times and the bad. He’s enjoyed triple-platinum success with the release of *Satellite*—and felt disappointment with 2004’s *Testify*, when his band could barely get out of the starting gate. He’s also witnessed his old friend Marcos Curiel return to the fold after a four-year absence. Today Curiel is not only injecting new life into the band’s groove, but helping to add purpose to their master plan.
MD: What has influenced your drumming the most?
Wuv: Everything from reggae to classic rock, like The Police’s Stewart Copeland and Phil Rudd from AC/DC, and Steve “Grizzly” Nisbett from Steel Pulse. I love the sound of drums and making music, and there have definitely been a lot of diverse people that have inspired me over the years, especially in my early days.
MD: You don’t hear a lot of drummers cite Phil Rudd and Stewart Copeland in the same sentence.
Wuv: As far as Phil Rudd is concerned, I appreciate the art of being simple and just doing what makes the song sound better. If that’s just playing straight, then that’s what you need to do. A lot of AC/DC songs are timeless. They have that straight-ahead rock ‘n’ roll groove without trying to overdo it, but at the same time the drumming is exactly what it needs to be. I appreciate that.
Time and time again I find myself coming back to those records because it’s so easy to enjoy those songs. Sometimes less is definitely more, and you can’t really argue about simplicity.
MD: What did you learn from Stewart Copeland?
Wuv: For me, Copeland is one of the guys who, when I listen to his stuff, I’m reminded again and again of all the cool things that he does. I love his style so much. The way he works his hi-hat is incredible. It’s tasteful, and it really spices up the songs. I’ve always tried to remember that when I’m going into the studio, even when we’re writing songs.
MD: How does P.O.D. put a song together?
Wuv: We started out as a garage band. Our songwriting style has never changed. We just start to jam. Marcos [Cariel] will come with a riff or I’ll come with a riff. Normally we don’t have any lyrics, choruses, or anything at that point. What we come up with is the start of our songs, and we just take it from there. That’s always been our formula. Everyone puts their two cents in, whether it’s Traa [Daniels] on the bass or someone telling me to play a certain beat. Everyone’s an open book in our band, and it makes it a smooth and fun process.
MD: All of that jamming has to make it a satisfying experience for you.
Wuv: It does. And we jam onstage as well. Sometimes we’ll end a song and I’ll just kick into a beat or Marcos will end a song with a riff or a noise and it takes off from there. That’s something we’ve always brought to the table, a spontaneity that really makes jamming fun. We never know what’s going to come out, and that’s the way it’s always been with us. I’ve always felt like it’s one of the things that’s made P.O.D. unique.
MD: Talk about recording When Angels And Serpents Dance.
Wuv: This record was a lot different for me drum-wise. We worked with Jay Baumgardner [Evanescence, Three Days Grace, Papa Roach]. His style of producing was something that we’d never encountered before. When we came into the studio, we didn’t have that many lyrics written. Because Jay didn’t know what the lyrics were
DRUMS, IT’S LIKE BURNING INCENSE TO GOD.”
supposed to do, he had me play four or five different tracks to each cut. Some were more or less busy, some were basic. I would play one track straight, one track busy, and one track with a totally different kick pattern. He wanted three or four different kick patterns for almost every song, just because he didn’t know what the lyrics were going to be. That was really weird for me. Some of the takes weren’t as natural for me, but it made for some really cool beats.

MD: So that stretched you?
Wuv: It was really frustrating in the beginning, but Jay assured me that he had all of my takes and that when the lyrics arrived I could come back into the studio and take the style that worked best for each cut. When it was all said and done, the tracks we chose perfectly fit each song.

MD: How do you approach recording in terms of your mental process?
Wuv: When I go into the studio, I’m usually very relaxed. I typically freestyle it. I’ve never been the most technical guy, and I’ve

WUV’s Drums

Drums: Pearl Masterworks
A. 6x14 maple snare (10-ply)
B. 7x8 rack tom
C. 8x10 tom
D. 16x18 floor tom
E. 18x22 bass drum

Cymbals: Zildjian
1. 14” hi-hats
   (A Quick Beat top, A New Beat bottom)
2. 9” K Custom Hybrid splash
3. 11” K Custom Hybrid splash
4. 21” A Sweet ride (used as crash)
5. 19” K crash
6. 20” K Heavy ride

7. 18” EFX crash
8. 18” Oriental Classic China

Hardware: all Pearl, including an Eliminator double pedal (hard side of factory beater, medium spring tension, blue sprocklet cards)

Heads: Remo coated Emperor snare batter with Ambassador snap-side (no muffling. top tuned medium-high, bottom tensioned just above wrinkle, snares set loose), clear Emperors on toms of toms with clear Ambassadors underneath (no muffling except for floor tom, toms tuned somewhat high, no pitch bend, bottom head tighter than top), clear Powerstroke 3 on bass drum batter with Ebony P3 on front (batter loose, Falom impact pad, light-weight internal muffling, front slightly tighter than batter, two 6” Holz rings)

Sticks: Vic Firth Wuv signature model (similar to a 7A)
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always let it go on the fly. I play the same way on every record and try to have the same intensity when I lay down the groove. I always go for the best beat for the song, no matter what, while also trying to have a lot of fun doing it.

**MD:** Let’s talk about the new record: “Addicted” is the first single.

**Wuv:** That’s a very cool drum groove. I really like the way I broke up the beat in the verses. It’s flavorful and all chopped up. Instead of playing a straight beat, I thought of it as more of a “riff beat,” if that makes any sense. We just shot the video for it, and the director asked me what part of the song I wanted them to shoot on me, and I immediately said the verses.

**MD:** “Kaliforn-Eye-A” is a cool track.

**Wuv:** That features Mike Muir from Suicidal Tendencies. I dropped a soulful, funk type of beat on that one ‘cause Mike’s really down with that style. I loved that band because they were masters at mixing the heavy with the funk. That’s definitely one of the coolest grooves on the record.

**MD:** “God Forbid” sounds like old-school metal.

**Wuv:** Paige Hamilton from Helmet was our guest on that cut. That song really takes us back to our hardcore roots. I put double bass in it, and we have a Black Sabbath–type of breakdown in the middle that’s especially cool. That’s one of those songs that I know it’ll really be smashing live.

**MD:** I notice you switch up the grooves a lot live.

**Wuv:** Playing live is completely different for me. Sometimes it takes the guys some getting used to, but that’s the fun part about it. That’s why I enjoy laying down more basic tracks in the studio—it gives me room to open up live. It’s really important for me to be able to cut loose and put in my “flavor” when we’re playing a show.
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**WUW**

**MD:** Talk about that “flavor.”

**WuV:** I use a lot of reggae influences. I like to skip beats. I like to do a lot of one-drop things. For example, I’ll be playing the heaviest song ever, and just out of left field I’ll drop in a crazy reggae one-drop for a measure or two. That’s what people seem to dig about my vibe, just playing hard and dropping nuances in all over the place. For the most part, if I’m doing something, it’s gonna work. Honestly, that’s how a lot of ideas really get spawned in P.O.D.

**MD:** What’s changed in your playing over the years?

**WuV:** I think I’ve gotten a little more technical and a little more flavorful. When we started, it was all about having fun. I listen back to stuff I was playing in ’91 and it’s like looking back on our hairdos from back then, like, “Man, that’s ugly.” Now I listen to what we do and I realize with age came quite a bit of refinement in my playing. I used to try to stuff a lot more licks into the space, but now I’m a lot pickier about what I’m doing and when I’m doing it.

**MD:** P.O.D. has always dropped several styles into each record.

**WuV:** Well, Marcos and I started the band and developed our “style” together. We were listening to mariachi music in Tijuana, going to the old reggae clubs in San Diego, and going to see Metallica and Bad Brains—that all inspired us. Bands like 24-7 Spyz too—they were heavy but at the same time had an ethnic flavor to them. It’s always been our goal to put that type of flavor in our music.

**MD:** How do you exude flavor?

**WuV:** There are a lot of ways. In P.O.D., I can come into the studio with a guitar riff. It doesn’t always have to be something from the drums. I actually played guitar on a lot of our last record. That helps me to step out of the box.

I’ve always thought that drummers who played guitar come up with some of the best riffs. Every time I’ve written a guitar riff, I’ve thought about the drum part.

**MD:** Could another drummer play in P.O.D.?

**WuV:** It wouldn’t be right. It’s the...
chemistry of the band and the style of the music and the influences that we’re drawn to. It really goes much
deeper than that, though; it’s also the reasons why we started playing.
When it’s time to sit down to write a song, we all draw from the same
things that we grew up on—and it’s an unusual mix. It also includes our
surroundings and our lives; that all comes out in P.O.D.’s music.

When you listen to P.O.D., you hear hip-hop, reggae—and we always have
the heavier stuff. Plus we have a unique background. It’s all about the
way we mesh it all together. And I think the reason it all sounds cool is
because we’ve experienced a lot as a band, from growing up, to recording,
to being friends and playing live.

MD: You’ve always been able to shift styles effortlessly.

Wu: Bad Brains is a group that did that really well. They played punk rock but could go straight into a bomb-
ass rock groove. No other band has been able to do it like that, and their
style and feel definitely affected me when I was growing up. Again, I go back to everything I’ve experienced and everything I’ve listened to in my life.

**MD**: What’s your biggest strength as a drummer?

**Wuv**: It’s probably being able to add a lot of different feels and flavors to the songs, whether it’s something completely outside of the box or something straight up.

I think that one of my biggest strengths is performing live. I love to play live, and I hit as hard as I can. But at the same time, it’s not exaggerated; there’s a feel there. People tell me often that I bring a lot to the table in that way. I may not be Danny Carey, dropping in all the licks, but people seem to feel that I really love playing our music and playing with my bandmates. When I get a chance to do that live, the joy comes out. It’s the same way for Sonny, Marcos, and Traa. When you truly enjoy it, it’s going to shine.

**MD**: When you were coming up as a young drummer, what was the most important thing you feel you did to improve your playing?

**Wuv**: Listen to old records mostly. When I was a kid, my dad used to buy me Cozy Powell records, which I always thought were the coolest things.

In my drumming, I’ve always been able to do almost anything I’ve wanted to. It’s just that sometimes I’ve forgotten the cool riffs I’ve already heard before. There’s nothing new under the sun; I like going back to the old stuff that inspired me when I was a kid. Some of those licks from my heroes are what I try to revisit when I’m looking for inspiration.

**MD**: What do you pull out?

**Wuv**: Definitely all the Rush stuff, especially “Tom Sawyer.” I would listen to that and not believe what I was hearing. I also love listening to reggae players who take it to the next level. That usually gives me a lot of inspiration. When I do that it seems to really help me put the flavor back in.

**MD**: What kind of relationship do you have with your bass player, Traa?

**Wuv**: Playing with Traa has always been extremely comfortable, but more importantly, very fun. He makes it incredibly easy to
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lock up with him and his funk style. I’ve always thought he brings a lot of diversity with his chops, which perfectly meshes with my style. He’s also a real tasty player and brings a very cool style to his instrument.

**MD:** What does having Marcos back in the band bring to your groove?

**Wuv:** I’ve always thought that Marcos is one of the most flavorful guitar players around. I’ve only ever played with two guitarists, Jason Truby and Marcos. Before Marcos left the band, I was with him for twelve years. Without him it wasn’t really P.O.D., but we had to keep on moving and do our work.

**MD:** When he returned, did you lock in right away?

**Wuv:** It was like an old shoe, man. It had been four years since we’d even seen each other. When we got back together, we had lunch as a band with our manager and then went straight into the studio the same day. Marcos said he had a couple of cuts he wanted us to hear, so we decided to head over there. We started jamming, and it didn’t feel awkward at all. We actually started to write songs immediately. I thought it was really cool that, after four years, it was still completely comfortable. But what felt more important than the groove was that our friendship was intact again.

**MD:** Let’s talk about gear for a minute. You’ve always been a Pearl guy?

**Wuv:** I’ve been playing Pearl drums since I was a young lad in South Town, San Diego. They’ve always been one of the best endorsements I’ve ever had. There’s really nothing I can say about Pearl that hasn’t already been said by hundreds of great drummers around the world.

**MD:** And didn’t Vic Firth make you a custom stick?

**Wuv:** They sure did. It’s similar to a 7A, but with a little more weight to it and an enlarged tear drop tip for a light feel. The stick feels really natural for me to play, and it helps me be versatile.

**MD:** One other important part of your music is your faith. How does your Christianity influence your music and your groove?

**Wuv:** When I’m playing my drums, it’s like burning incense to God. It’s like a sacrifice of my soul, just to give back everything good that God has done for us. It’s an overwhelming feeling to know that every time I play, people get inspired from the fact that P.O.D. chooses to believe in God.
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Wallman Rink in New York City was not a safe place for families one humid night in the summer of 1975, when superstar band Return To Forever appeared there on a makeshift stage that carpenters had cobbled together. Wallman then was a far cry from the trumped-up Norman Rockwell picture it’s become in recent years. Back then it hosted an ambitious summer concert series. But Return To Forever just about sealed its short-lived fate.

The venue accommodated 7,000, give or take. But that summer night, an estimated 10,000 fans were on hand. No one knows what started it, but a surge of fans brought down the house, trampling the makeshift plywood concert barriers, which cracked like gunshots and shot up shrapnel-like shards into the air. The cosmic rain of debris soon included bottles, garbage, and lit cigarettes. Foot and mounted police were put to the test containing the outbreak. It was one great mosh pit — punk rock destruction in the extreme.

Except for one small detail: RTF wasn’t a rock band. They were a jazz band — one that played intricate instrumental arrangements over which legends Chick Corea, Stanley Clarke, Al Di Meola, and Lenny White improvised at length. To be sure, sometimes it was as loud as any rock band, but it frequently contrasted light with shade, pulling levels down to a pin-drop. Unfortunately the sea of people there for RTF were not to be hushed and made quick work of Wallman, a major reason the concert series died an untimely death. Shakespeare In The Park it was not.

Who could have forecast that a jazz band would spark a brush fire of collective behavior? Who’d have predicted that Lenny White, a jazz drummer anointed by the likes of Roy Haynes and Philly Joe Jones, would have made a slamming rock drummer, a true hero among press and populace, and a man praised by no less than John Bonham? Lenny White, the drummer on *Hymn Of The Seventh Galaxy* and several more RTF hit releases, was as big as big gets. Whole neighborhoods were split between allegiance to Lenny White and another fusion giant, The Mahavishnu Orchestra’s Billy Cobham.

For a taste of what Lenny and RTF were all about, witness the group’s magnificent epic “After The Cosmic Rain.” It features White’s impressive roundhouse single-stroke rolls and amazingly fast single bass drum technique.
It’s important to point out that Lenny has never been a slammer. You’d have been forgiven if you thought that he was waiting to get out those Tony Williams–inspired flams, such was the nature of his wide-open, articulate sound. But the truth is, Lenny never wounded; he always had a deft touch and played with a lot of grace.

Jazz endowed Lenny with imagination, tonality, and control known to a few rare drumming souls—Haynes, Philly Joe, Art Blakey. But the musician who gave Lenny a reason to live, the great one Lenny affectionately refers to as “God Drums,” was Tony Williams. “When I heard him play,” reflects Lenny, “I heard the past, present, and future of drumming, all combined into one person.”

There are those who hold Lenny in similarly high esteem—and not just fans. Take Wallace Roney, the acclaimed trumpet player, friend of Miles Davis, and custodian of a couple of Miles’ unique horns. Speaking through a cracking cell phone while en route to an all-star night at New York jazz club Iridium, Wallace didn’t miss a beat when we mentioned Lenny. Roney doesn’t mince words, and he places him at the end of a royal lineage that starts with Max Roach, Philly Joe, and Tony.

It might all hinge on Lenny’s sensitivity and refined swing. It doesn’t matter if he’s playing jazz or funk; his swing has cross-ed genres and floated the groove for too many albums to mention. A cross-section includes Freddie Hubbard, Joe Henderson, Azteca, Gato Barbieri, Stanley Clarke, Jamaica Boys, and Twenny Nine. Of course, even if Lenny White had only recorded Miles Davis’s era-defining Bitches Brew, he’d be a star by anybody’s standards. But Lenny kept going, making jazz albums and even racking up top-ten funk and rock singles.

Unquestionably, though, Lenny is best known for Return To Forever, where he juggled jazz, rock, and Latin without making any stylistic sacrifices. But by the ’80s, the band was long gone.

Ordinarily in life, the saying holds true: You can’t go back. But a happy exception in 2008 is the return of Return To Forever. The original lineup is appearing somewhere near you as we speak. Once you hear the wailing chorus of “After The Cosmic Rain” or the driving “Captain Sérionate Mouse,” you’ll discover what a previous generation discovered—that jazz could meet rock halfway and give birth to something more vital than either.

So you buy your ticket and watch Lenny—although something might not look right. He plays a regular kit with two rack toms and three floor toms. But his ride is on his left (he can play it the other way, too), and works it with his left hand. No, it’s not quite “open handed,” because his right hand, unless he’s playing backbeat, is held with traditional grip.

One more point: The best suffer like the rest. Recently Lenny experienced a frustrating loss of muscle stability and stamina from his right shoulder down his arm. Turns out it was a result of a nerve impingement in the upper spine, something this writer—and maybe hundreds of other drummers—knows all too well. Rather than take a year off, Lenny launched into therapy with single-minded zeal. He’s well on the route to recovery, and MD found him in great spirits.

**LENNY’S RTF KIT** *(Not Shown In Photos)*

**Drums**: Innovation Drums in robin’s-egg blue finish  
A. 5½x12 auxiliary snare (30-ply maple)  
B. 5½x14 CP-1 snare (titanium shell with 10 lugs)  
C. 8x12 rack tom  
D. 9x13 rack tom  
E. 14x14 floor tom  
F. 16x16 floor tom  
G. 16x18 floor tom  
H. 18x22 bass drum (with DW slide tom base combined with Yamaha ball & socket stem holder)

**Cymbals**: Istanbul Agop  
1. 14” Epoch hi-hats (prototype)  
2. 22” Epoch ride  
3. 17” Epoch crash (prototype)  
4. 19” Epoch crash (prototype)  
(Lenny occasionally uses a prototype China to the left of his hi-hat.)

**Hardware**: various, including an old Gretsch Floating Action pedal (converted from strap-to-chain-drive)

**Heads**: Remo Black Suede or coated Emperors on snare and toms, clear Ambassador on bottoms of toms, clear Ambassador on bass drum batter, Innovation 1-ply logo head with hole on front

**Microphones**: Shure, internally mounted using the May EA system

**Sticks**: Vater Lenny White model  
(between a 55A and 56)

“I don’t like the generic drum sounds you hear today. I want to put a personal stamp on the music.”
MD: Worst-case scenario, what can happen if you feel the onset of this condition?

Lenny: You’re tired; you have no strength. When your arm doesn’t have strength, it tends to lock up. To demonstrate, hold out your hand palm down; turn it to palm up. That’s my problem; I can’t do that. Since I play traditional grip with my right hand, it’s a problem I have to overcome. But by the time this is published, I’ll have gone to Germany for an experimental procedure involving injections, which might handle it. The doctor has worked on a lot of sports people—soccer players in Europe.

MD: You’re talking about people who need extreme endurance.

Lenny: Yes, but while I might have seemed to be, I was never really an athletic-type player. I saw the movie Enter The Dragon twenty years ago, and it Bruce Lee said something that I adopted. He described his style as “the art of fighting without fighting.” He would place a one-inch punch that would knock somebody down. I adopted that in the sense of making the most sound with the least amount of movement.

MD: I think that’s evident on some of the classic RTF clips on YouTube. You can see that you really generated volume without a full swing of the bat.

Lenny: You can maximize your sound by the way you hit the drum and where you hit it. You don’t have to raise your arm up over your head to get maximum sound. There are people who do that really well and get a great sound, but that’s not my concept.

When I was with The Jamaica Boys doing videos, the director would say, “You need to move around more,” and I would say, “Hey, this is my style!” I try to make the most sound with the least effort.

MD: You’ve always played a right-handed kit but rode with your left hand. I don’t think I’ve ever seen you play any way but thumbs-up with your left hand.

Lenny: Well, here’s the thing: When I play brushes, I play right-handed and I play matched grip. I play the sweep with my left hand and the pattern with my right.

There’s a tune that Stanley Clarke did on his first solo album called “Lopsy Loo,” which Tony Williams played on. When Return To Forever played that tune live, it would be the only tune where I played right-handed, snare drum with my left. That’s what felt the best.

MD: Why would it feel better to play “normally” on just one tune?

Lenny: It’s a quirk, a right-brain/left-brain thing.

MD: Easy for you, but the rest of us aren’t ambidextrous!

Lenny: A friend of mine suggested that I play right-handed as part of my therapy, and I do. But I’m still working on traditional grip, especially when I play straight-ahead.

I started taking lessons again in 2000 in order to understand what I already know. I know that sounds crazy, but I wanted to explore the proper stick technique for what I was doing. In doing that, my hands began to look better. I still hate to look at them, but they are getting better.

I played for years with a traditional grip like Elvin used—with a thumb grip. But with my muscles being weak, that’s becoming a problem. You know how the Queen waves—it’s not really a wave but a motion from the wrist? That’s the problem. If you were to take a stick and put it between your thumb and forefinger, and you’re waving like the Queen, that’s what gives you the stroke, and that’s where I’m having the problem. Because of the weakness in my bicep, I turn my wrist but I don’t get a 90° stroke; it’s more like a 45° stroke. But I’m working on it every day.

MD: You’ve told me that you switched to matched grip, at least as a temporary measure.

Lenny: Correct, and when I’m playing matched grip I tend to play with the thumb on the side of the stick in my right hand, as opposed to the thumb-up position of my left hand. I have to turn the thumb on the right hand to the side; that movement is the problem.

Fortunately, the way I play is not just with the thumb and the wrist but with the fingers, and my fingers are not affected at all.

MD: Jack DeJohnette told me about switch-
ing full-time to matched grip. I asked him if it affected his triplet swing, in the sense that holding right and left hands differently creates a lil'. Some players say that holding the right and left sticks differently is integral to swinging. Jack told me, "I wouldn't buy into any of that."

**Lenny:** I wouldn’t either. Miles Davis lost his chops, and he got them back and played again. There are lots of stories of people who’ ve had injuries and who have found alternate ways to do what they do.

**CHICK COREA**
**On Lenny White**

"Lenny helped define this quartet version of RTF with his innovative concept of drumming for this particular music. The way he applied the flavors of jazz drumming tradition to rock and funk beats made the music swing as well as rock. Totally unique—and totally Lenny."

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LENNY WHITE

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LENNY WHITE

MD: Do you notice any difference in the figures you play when you play matched grip?

Lenny: I don’t think so. When I used to play with Return To Forever, I used matched grip exclusively, but not when I started. Eventually, because of the volume and “mass” of the music, my hands would hurt. Switching to matched grip worked.

MD: When Hymn Of The Seventh Galaxy came out, it sounded as if you were really slamming. But you don’t play extraordinarily loud. When you first heard the album, did you consider it an accurate reflection of the way you played?

Lenny: It’s interesting… There’s going to be an anthology released. Stanley was in the studio remixing all those albums, and I was in Russia and Stanley called me and said, “Man, you’re not going to believe it. I can hear all those little things you were playing. I never heard that stuff before!”

To be honest, the reason I got into record producing was that I didn’t like the way the drums were mixed.
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LENNY WHITE

Someone was always telling me the way I should play and sound. I did a lot of research and learned to make the drums sound how I wanted.

**MD:** Is the final sound you were getting more a result of the mix or of tuning and muffling?

**Lenny:** That’s a twofold question. I look at my drumkit as one instrument. I tune drums to notes so that there’s a spectrum and I can play melodies. If your instrument speaks well within the music, but you don’t hear it, the mix is bad. Now, if they tape the drums up and get a muffled sound, then it’s not a matter of the mix; they’re going to mix it so that the drum presence has nothing to do with melody. It all has to do with rhythm. But I want to play melodic statements that rise above the mix when I need them to—and not just in terms of volume.

**MD:** Will you be hampered in doing that by your muscle problem? Maybe it will necessitate changing your current drum setup.

**Lenny:** No, I’m going to have the same configuration I had when I was doing Return To Forever originally: two mounted toms, three floor toms, and a single 22” bass drum, but one that’s 16” deep.

I was telling Steve Badalamenti of Innovation Drums that I was thinking of taking out my old robin’-s-egg blue Gretsch kit. He said, “Nah, I’m going to make you an Innovation kit in the same color and it’s going to be the best drumkit I’ve ever made. It’s going to have a titanium snare drum, a special, thicker one.” And he’s making me three bass drums—I ain’t gonna be playing three bass drums, but I’ll have a choice.

Getting back to my muscle problem, it doesn’t affect my reach. When I get tired, my singles “flatten out” and I lock up. I don’t cheat with my drumming, especially now that I’ve gone back and studied stickings. I want everything to be right. When I play the ride cymbal, every beat should be articulated. That said, I might have to revert occasionally to playing doubles.

**MD:** I bet you can inspire many drummers out there with your story and your attempts at discovering drumming habits that may have contributed to your strength issues. Any tips regarding that?

**Lenny:** Posture. Piano players and drummers sit down to play, and that causes spinal compression. Now when I sit in my practice room, I’m straight up against the wall. And I set up and play with a great deal of confinement. My students come over and it’s like a labyrinth getting into this confined, tight setup. I have it like that for practicing—it’s sort of like doing isometrics—so that when I play a gig with my kit in its normal position, I’m relaxed and my posture is correct. I have to get my head to stop leaning forward, though; that’s a part of my rehabilitation. This health issue has actually helped me in terms of conditioning and learning proper technique.

**MD:** The way you played the second tune on one of your productions, Organic Grooves...that edgy straight-ahead jazz is masterful swinging.

**Lenny:** Let me tell you where I come from, and what influences all my jazz drumming. My six heroes are Max Roach, Art Blakey, Philly Joe Jones, Roy Haynes, Elvin Jones, and Tony Williams.

**MD:** Wallace Roney suggested we ask you where you fit stylistically in that group of drummers.

**Lenny:** Here’s how it goes: There’s the Max school and the Art Blakey school. Philly Joe and Tony come from Max. Elvin comes from Art Blakey. Roy Haynes has his own take on it. Tony Williams had Roy Haynes, Philly Joe, and Max in him. Elvin and Art Blakey were African kings—there’s no doubt about it. Max Roach was the brains of the music. Philly Joe made rudiments sing like Max did. Art Blakey was the groove master, and Elvin is the closest thing to him. Tony Williams incorporated every one of those guys.

When I was seventeen, I heard Tony play “Seven Steps To Heaven.” He was only seventeen when he made that record! When I heard Tony, I heard every one of the drummers we talked about, plus others, like Kenny Clarke. It was unbelievable: Tony took the past, combined it [with the present], and told us about the future.

Tony would play a five-stroke roll, but he wouldn’t play it on the snare drum. He’d play the first beat on the bass drum and three beats on the snare drum and the last beat on the hi-hat. Plus he had this ride beat where I heard every note that he played. So for years, I’d take a cymbal and sit in the corner of a room so that I could hear every note clearly.

**MD:** Coltrane used to do that, practice against the angle of two walls so the sound came back to him immediately.

**Lenny:** That’s right. For me, I wanted to hear the sticking of every note. When you listen to Tony on Four And More, you can hear everything.

To me, Tony’s the guy who created fusion. Lifetime was the same time as Bitches Brew,
LENNY WHITE
and he had already done Miles In The Sky. Miles was listening to Jimi Hendrix. Tony Williams’ Lifetime was the sum of all that. It was an organ trio on steroids! He’d play these rock beats with an 18” bass drum. He was the man.

MD: You’ve still got a lot of Tony in your bass drum, and you’ve retained that over the years.
Lenny: It’s a note. When I play a small drumkit, I tune my bass drum and snare drum to a G. If you were to play the toms in this order: three, two, three, and one, the melody would be “A Love Supreme.” I use that tuning for traditional jazz drumming, and I’m debating whether to use it for Return To Forever.

MD: To me that open bass drum sound comes as much from John Bonham as from jazz.
Lenny: I’m glad you say that, because I’m definitely influenced by John Bonham, and Led Zeppelin is my favorite rock band. It was open tuning and no pad in the drum to muffle it. Speaking of Bonham, he mentioned Tony Williams, Billy Cobham, and me as influences.

MD: Your bass drum technique has always been impressive—so fast and precise.
Lenny: I play feet up, meaning I lead with the bass drum. You can hear that in the drum solo on my record Astral Pirates. I start off the tune with a bass drum pattern. Part of that is while I practiced the bass drum separately, I practiced it in coordination with all my limbs. I practice coordination with all four limbs, which gives me the control necessary to play jazz, and not just focus on bass drum control. Jazz music is my heritage, handed down to me directly by the guys I mentioned before.

I’m not a guy who blows his own horn. But the best compliment I ever got was when I was in Paris playing with Stanley Clarke. An African guy in the audience said to me, “When I hear you play, I see my people.”

MD: Growing up in my own musical community, the drumming ranks were divided between Billy Cobham and you. You must have been aware of all that.
Lenny: I’ve been told that the difference between Mahavishnu and Return To Forever is that we were approachable and played music to the people, related to the people, and we even spoke to the audience through the mic.

Stanley, Chick, and I all came from jazz: Joe Henderson, Freddie Hubbard, Miles Davis, and Horace Silver. When we played with Return To Forever, we played all these notes at high volume, but when it came to the rhythm section, we phrased like we would in a jazz band. With Mahavishnu, there were great compositions, but it wasn’t set up like a jazz band in terms of phrasing or form.

MD: When you play breakneck tempos, really fast tempos, it’s frustrating to figure out, because you seem so relaxed—it’s almost hypnotic. How do you achieve that blinding speed without tensing up?
Lenny: Everything is about one. The music around me might be going [quickly] “One, two, three, four, one, two, three, four,” but I’m thinking [at half-speed] “One, one, one, one.” It’s all based on the ride cymbal. I listened to Tony and how he played really fast, and that was my model. Probably the fastest I’ve played on record is on Woody Shaw’s Blackstone Legacy. That was unbelievable.

When playing fast, I still articulate every beat. I’m not bunging anything. The ride pattern is spread out on all four beats. I hear a triplet modulation, a triplet division. It’s how you feel the quarter note that will make you play the ride pattern the right way. That feel doesn’t translate to the “finite” classical notation—or to a magazine article. Some things have to be interpreted instead of written.

When I listen to Elvin play on record, he sounds behind the beat, but when I’d see him play, he’d be right in the center of the beat. Art Blakey was the same way. Recordings don’t necessarily give the true nature of what’s going on. You’re playing through a microphone and little inklings of tardiness give a false impression.

MD: The reunion of RTF: What happened, the phone rang out of the blue?
Lenny: No, man, we’d talked about it for years, but I had given up on it. My pat answer was The Beatles will get back together before Return To Forever will...and two of them are dead!

Then someone made us an astronomical offer. We refused it, but it got us talking again. Stanley and I talked regularly about this. And Stanley had played with AI, and they talked about it. Then Chick and I spent five days together a few years back and sorted out whatever problems existed between us. We realized that this is as good a time as any to reinvestigate this music.

I’m happy that we’re getting the opportunity to revisit this music in a new space and time—and you’ll get a chance to see it on DVD, too. We’re doing a cross section of tunes from the four records we did: Hymn Of The Seventh Galaxy, No Mystery, Romantic Warrior, and Where Have I Known You Before.

Just to be able to play instrumental music on a grand scale is really going to get to the people who don’t normally listen to jazz. And Return To Forever is a “man band,” not a boy band. There’s talk of doing a studio recording as well, and maybe in 2009 going...
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beyond North America and Europe to Japan.
MD: You and I connected at NAMM last winter, and I was impressed with your new Istanbul Agop cymbal. [See the review on page 37 of this issue.] It really helped me do my best Tony imitation—that shank of the stick sound. It’s especially fascinating for me that, as you know, I’ve had the opportunity to play Tony’s original “Nefertiti Ride” at Wallace Roney’s place, plus various prototypes Zildjian has created.

Lenny: Wallace has a bunch of Tony’s cymbals, and that one sticks out. I played it for a long time. Wallace and I deduced that it was the cymbal Tony used on Nefertiti. If you go on YouTube and see the videos of the ‘60s tours, it’s the cymbal that has the rivet holes.

There’s a picture on the wall at the Zildjian headquarters in Boston that shows Tony with that cymbal. Just to be sure, Wallace and I took Tony’s cymbal to the Zildjian factory and compared it with the photo, and it’s exactly the same. Zildjian then made five cymbals copying the cymbal Tony had. I kept playing the original for a while, but it cracked, so Wallace retired it. But the cymbals modeled after it are some of the best Zildjian has made in the past thirty years. I played them forever.

Anyway, four years ago at NAMM, I heard cymbals from three companies that sounded like old Ks: Istanbul, Buzin, and Bosphorus. I was working on a cymbal with Buzin, but something happened and it fell through. Vince Wilburn [Miles Davis’ nephew/drummer] told me to check out Istanbul Agop. They sounded pretty good.

Istanbul Agop contacted me, and I told them that if they couldn’t make a cymbal that sounded better than the one I was playing, forget it. Well, they came up with stuff that was okay. They tried again and again, and I thought they were going to give up, but they didn’t. One day, Scott Liken at Istanbul phoned and said, “I think we’ve got it.” They sent the cymbal to me. I told him, “I think we can work with this.”

I didn’t want the cymbal to be exactly the same as Tony’s, but I needed similar characteristics. You see, when you hit the right cymbal, there’s instant credibility. Jazz musicians are particular because the sound of their instruments authenticates their music.

This one’s legit; it’s a jazz cymbal. In actuality, it’s not a 22” but a 22½”, and there’s an aspect of the manufacturing process that’s totally different from other Istanbul Agops. Now that they’ve got the ride right, they’re making crashes and hats for me. The line is called Istanbul Agop Epoch. It’s my signature line, but I didn’t want “Lenny White” printed on each cymbal. I think these cymbals are going to appeal to far more people with a name like Epoch on them.

MD: In an early Modern Drummer interview, you said that you used a 24” A Zildjian brilliant because your Ks were soft and were cracking. Will you be able to use your new Epoch cymbal in a similarly electrified environment and get the articulation—without breakage?

Lenny: I’m going to see. The thing is, I don’t like the generic drum sounds you hear today. I want to put a personal stamp on the music again, and the way I’ll do that is to play my sound, my distinctive ride cymbal and drums. For drums, I used clear Remo Ambassador with the original Return To Forever, but for jazz I now use coated Emperors. It’s closer to a traditional sound. I’m going to try the new Remo Black Suede heads in Emperor thickness. The black coating ought to warm up the sound.

MD: We talked about the bass drum and your preference for open tones and tuning to notes. With RTF, you’re playing large venues. Will you muffle the bass drum?

Lenny: No, it’ll be an open sound. But because they’re miking, I’ll use a little hole in the front head so they can get a mic inside. The kit that Innovation is making for me is the closest thing to an old Gretsch sound available, but this kit will be extra-special. It’s called the Virtuoso series. As I said earlier, the color will be an exact copy of the robin’s-egg blue that I have on my old Gretsch kit, and the snare drum will be a 5½x14 titanium drum. Everything is meticulously designed and manufactured, right down to the extra lacquer on the inside of the shells.

MD: You’ve seen the record industry go through massive changes. Is it still possible for you to produce CDs?

Lenny: Yes, it’s changing but it’s possible. I did a Polish artist last year and the record went gold. I’m still writing music and producing, and if I don’t do it later this year, I’ll put out one of my own CDs next year. Like my last one, it’ll be eclectic in terms of material. But my heart is in jazz, and that’s the approach I take to every sort of music I play.

To see many top drummers comment on Lenny’s influence, check out the video on the Multi-Media page at www.moderndrummer.com

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Chick Corea’s Return To Forever ranks with Mahavishnu Orchestra and Weather Report as one of the preeminent ‘70s fusion supergroups. Since the band’s most popular lineup (Corea, bassist Stanley Clarke, guitarist Al Di Meola, and Lenny White) has reunited this year, we decided to take a look back at Lenny’s explosive drumming from RTP’s peak years.

A self-taught player well-versed in jazz, funk, and rock styles, White was a perfect fit for Corea’s move from straight-up jazz to electric fusion in the mid-’70s. Lenny’s heavy funk groove provided solid grounding for the band, while he handled its rhythmic challenges with sound rudimental technique. Here’s some of his best moments with this stellar quartet.

**Where Have I Known You Before (1974)**

“Vulcan Worlds”

When nineteen-year-old guitar phenom Al Di Meola came on board for RTP’s fourth album, the band’s firepower multiplied, as the licks flying throughout this album demonstrate. Here’s one of Lenny’s groove & fill combinations from the album’s lead-off track. (0:14)

The song also features several sections where White stretches out on two-bar solos. Notice the flam-accident rudiment he employs in this ‘round-the-kit fill. (1:00)

“**The Shadow Of Lo**”

Lenny’s composition for the album begins as a light, ethereal jazz piece, and then launches into a funky groove. The offbeat open hi-hats and ghost notes add depth to this head-bobbing beat. (5:49)

“Song To The Pharoah Kings”

Embellished by a drag and an open hi-hat, the double paradiddle provides a perfect pattern for the 6/8 sections in this long Corea composition. The emphasis on the “&” of the second and fifth beats in the measure brings out a four-against-six polyrhythm in the groove. (3:31)

**No Mystery (1975)**

“Flight Of The Newborn”

The quartet’s second album together earned them a Grammy award. This Di Meola song provided Lenny with the chance to explore some serious funk patterns, including the splashy hi-hat work here, which is another of his trademarks. (0:00)

“**Sofistifunk**”

The title of this Lenny White composition perfectly describes the type of beat he’s laying down. Check out the rhythmic twists and turns in this sequence. The interweaving hi-hat work is especially cool. (3:32)

“**Celebration Suite Part 1**”

Lenny deftly handles the album’s closing piece with this Afro-Cuban groove in 6/8 time, employing toms to simulate the hand percussion roots of the rhythm. (2:06)
Romantic Warrior (1976)  
“Medieval Overture”

Now we arrive at the creative and commercial pinnacle of this version of Return To Forever. Romantic Warrior ‘s combination of densely complex arrangements and white-hot musicianship gave the band its first gold record. Here’ s a sequence containing Lenny White’ s burning solo groove and his fills from early in the opening track. Note the outrageous tempo. (1:09)

“The Romantic Warrior”

As Chick Corea embarks upon a lengthy piano solo late in this tune, White’ s up-tempo funky groove lays the bedrock. An open hi-hat accent once again plays a key role. (7:33)

“Duel Of The Jester And The Tyrant”

Near the end of the album, Clarke, Di Meola, and White trade speedy solos. Lenny’ s backwards up-the-kit quads and brief super-fast funk groove make this one a standout. (8:21)

“Sorceress”

Here’ s another groove-oriented tune that Lenny wrote for the album, with a great bass line from Stanley Clarke. As the song nears its conclusion, White whips off this solo around a funk riff from the band. The offbeat open hi-hat stabs, snare drags, and sweeping tom moves are vintage L.W. (6:43)

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As a groundbreaking drummer, clinician, author, teacher, magazine columnist, and drum industry mogul, Roy Burns has had one of the most amazingly diverse careers in drumming history.
o most drummers today, Roy Burns is best known as the head of Aquarian Drumheads. But in a career that has spanned more than fifty years, this latest chapter is really only the tip of the iceberg. Burns began his career as a remarkable jazz drummer, working with such legends as Woody Herman, Benny Goodman, and Lionel Hampton. He went on to become the house drummer for The Merv Griffin Show, an enviable drum seat. Roy then became the first American drummer to perform clinics not only in the States but on an international level. He was a true pioneer in the field, and his work set a standard.

Burns has also been very successful as an author, writing several instructional books, many of which are considered classics to this day, including Finger Control, Elementary Drum Method, Advanced Rock Drumming, New Orleans Drumming, and One Surface Learning. And let’s not forget his remarkable twelve-year run as a columnist for this very magazine. Roy’s articles were filled with wonderful advice that drummers still speak of and reference to this day.
Somehow in his vast list of accomplishments, Burns found the time to be a teacher. In fact, he taught some notable drummers, including John Mottox, Josh Freese, Evan Stone, and Nick D’Virgilio. According to Burns, “My whole point of view about teaching was to give drummers the tools so they could play any way they wanted to. Everyone has to find their own way.”

Burns began his way in Emporia, Kansas, by playing pots and pans in his crib. In 1940, at the age of five, he was imitating the college drum line he heard practicing a couple of blocks from his home. The young drummer began “disappearing,” sneaking over to the college to walk alongside the drummers rehearsing at the stadium.

One day, during a break, one of the drummers asked Burns if he could play the drums. He handed him a parade drum and sticks and, miraculously, Roy began to play. That unknown young man, to whom Burns feels indebted to this day, visited Burns’ mother to tell her it would be a crime if the little boy didn’t receive training.

Burns’ mother, his greatest supporter, started him on lessons over at the college when he was seven with master conductor Ormond Daly, who would say to him, “Roy, you have very good hands, but you must learn to use your noodle.” That lesson has stuck with Burns throughout time.

By the time he was thirteen, Roy was in a band with college kids playing dances and country clubs, performing the popular dance music of the day. He recalls buying his first record, the Benny Goodman Orchestra’s Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert album. The young drummer loved that record. And how amazing must it have been that, eight years later, he was actually performing with Benny Goodman in New York. According to Roy, “It was like the Twilight Zone.”

Jump ahead fifty or so years, to 1997, when Burns, at sixty-two, performed at the Modern Drummer Festival. He still wowed the crowd with his beautiful touch and tremendous technique. Roy hung up his sticks after that performance, but says he doesn’t miss drumming because he got to play with all of his heroes throughout his wonderful career—Ray Brown, Barney Kessel, Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Roy Eldridge, Benny Goodman, Woody Herman, and Lionel Hampton. Besides, Roy loves what he’s doing today—running Aquarian Drumheads.

“I really enjoy what I do now at Aquarian,” Roy enthuses. “I love it when I get to talk to some of the famous drummers who endorse our products. They’ll say things like, ‘Gosh, I get a great sound with your head.’ For me, that’s like playing a drum solo, because I’m helping them play music.”

No question, Burns does seem to be enjoying this stage of his career. “I didn’t leave the drum business,” he insists. “I’m just in a different part of it, a very satisfying part.”
MD: Let’ s start early in your career, when you first came to New York and started studying with [famed drummer/educator] Jim Chapin.
Roy: I contacted Jim, and then he took me to a little place in the Village called The Riviera to hear me play. They had a house piano player there named Eddie Wilcox, and they would let different people sit in. Jim played for a while with various horn players and then he said, “Okay, I want to hear you play for a while.” Eddie Wilcox started smiling like crazy at the piano when I started to play because he said I was the only guy who had sat in that night who could play four to the bar on the bass drum. I could feather the bass drum, so it wasn’ t too loud, and it took the place of the bass to some degree, as there was no bass player on the gig that night.
MD: Where did you learn that?
Roy: I learned that when I was fourteen, playing with a dance band. At that point it was second-nature; I didn’ t even think about it. Playing

“My last public performance was at the Modern Drummer Festival in 1997. It was Ron Spagnardi, Herb Brochstein, Vic Firth, Don Lombardi, and me—The Originators, they called it—to let the kids know that the guys who owned these companies were all drummers. We pulled it off.”

with older people was the secret to my career from the very beginning. On that night I sat in, a young woman came up to Eddie and said, “Gee, I’ ve been coming in here for six weeks, and it’ s the first time I’ ve seen you smile.” He said, “It’ s that young drummer—he knows what to do.”

That young girl came up to me and said, “You play very well,” and I said, “Thank you very much.” I didn’ t want to talk to any girls—I was into my career. She said, “No, I mean it, I know something about music, and you really played well.” I said, “Thanks very much,” and I fluffed her off. Oddly enough, I eventually married that girl, and we’ ve been married now fifty-two years. I owe Jim Chapin that much—he took me to the place where I met my wife.
MD: How long after meeting her were you married?
Roy: Six months. I had to get permission from my parents because I was only twenty.
MD: She was your first love.
Roy: Still is. But back then I was struggling around New York, playing any kind of gig I could, playing dances and club gigs. Anything that paid, I would play it.

One guy who really helped me in New York was Sonny Igoe, the great big band drummer. I had met him when I was sixteen, when he was with Woody Herman’ s band and they played in Kansas. He spent his whole intermission of about half an hour talking to me backstage, which was very nice of him. When I got to New York, I contacted him after I studied with Jim for a while, and he gave me some lessons. Then one day he said to me, “You don’ t need any more lessons.” I thought, “He doesn’ t want to tell me the secret.” He said, “You need to go out and play more.”
Sonny recommended me for an audition for Woody Herman’s band, and I got the job. After three months, I got a call from Benny Goodman’s manager. He said, “Benny wants to hear you play.” I said, “I’m already with Woody.” He said, “Come on up and just play a little bit for Benny.” I went up to Carnegie Hall Rehearsal Studios and there was Mel Powell, about 6’4”, the genius piano player/arranger. Benny said, “Okay, let’s play ‘Lady Be Good.’” So I started playing brushes, and then we played one tune after another. At that point I was wondering what in the heck was going on. After two hours, Benny put the clarinet down after not saying a word to me the whole time. Then he turned to me and said, “Be at the Waldorf tonight, wear a dark suit.” I didn’t know where the Waldorf was—and I only had one suit! Fortunately it was dark. The band was playing a dance set and a concert set, and Mousey [Elmer] Alexander was the drummer. The manager came up to me and told me that Benny
wanted me to play the concert set. I met Mousey, who was very nice and said, “You know, kid, I’m leaving the band anyway. Let me help you go through the charts. This is a hell of a way to audition, in front of a live audience, sight-reading and playing somebody else’s drums. But I’ll talk you through the arrangements and help you as much as I can.”

I played the show pretty well. When I came off the stage, Mel Powell grabbed my hand and said, “Congratulations, young man,” and Mousey said to me, “Boy, you played that show just like I did, and on my drums. You really listen.” I later found out that the manager went up to Benny and said, “What did you think, Benny?” and Benny said, “I don’t know.” The manager said, “Mel thought he was great, everybody liked him,” and Benny said, “Okay, you can hire him.” If I had known that at that time, I would have been crushed.

MD: We’ve all heard that Benny had some quirks.

Roy: Interestingly enough, he was always very nice to me. The manager said, “Benny wants you to hang around town and play with the band.” I said, “What am I going to do about Woody?” And he said, “Benny will take care of that.” And he did. I finished my last night with Woody the next night, and the following night I started with Benny at the Waldorf Astoria. We played there for two and a half weeks and the manager said, “I want you to hang around, Benny likes you.” I said, “Well, I can’t hang around, I have to make some money. I have a family.” He said, “You have a family?” I said, “Yes, I’m married and my wife is pregnant.” He said, “Okay, what do you need?” I said, “I need at least $100 a week.” He talked to Benny and said, “Okay, you’ve got your $100 a week, just be available.”

In the meantime, I got my first record date with Teddy Wilson, which Arvell Shaw, the bass player, recommended me for. I was getting out of a taxi cab on 7th Avenue and I saw Teddy Wilson getting out of a silver chauffeur-driven Bentley, wearing a grey suit that cost more than my drumset. I had never met him. I got into the studio—it was Arvell, Teddy, me, and an engineer—but there was no music, no rehearsal, and I’d never played with the guy before. Teddy said, “Arvell has told me a lot about you, Roy.” I said, “What do you want me to play?” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Sticks, brushes, any particular style?” He said, “Hmmm, I have it, just play whatever’s appropriate.” That was the best music lesson I ever had.

We did an album that night and he said it was one of the best albums he had made in a long time. It was called The Touch Of Teddy Wilson, on Verve, which has been reissued as part of a collection. I asked Arvell, “How come you recommended me?” He said, “I knew you could make Teddy’s tempos.” I could play fast. Then Teddy offered me $350 a week to go on the road, which was a lot of money in 1957, so I told Benny’s manager, I had this offer to go with Teddy Wilson to do nine weeks. He asked, “How much are they paying you?” I said, “$450.” He said, “Don’t do anything, let me get back to you.” He came back to me and said, “Benny will give you a raise to $150 to not work.” I stayed with Benny three and a half years. When I played with him, I got paid more. It was a dream job.

Then we went to Brussels to the World’s Fair, which was sponsored by Westinghouse, and they got a promotional record from the concerts that they sold to everybody in America for $1. Benny Goodman At The World’s Fair. That had “Sing Sing Sing” on it with my drum solo, and they played it on the radio all the time.

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— Jojo Mayer
(January 2008)
ROY BURNS
William B. Williams, who was a famous disc jockey in New York at the time, said, “Listen to this drummer with Benny Goodman, he’s only seventeen.” Of course, I was older than that, but I looked fifteen. It really got my name out there.
I’ve often been asked who was the best musician I ever played with, and I have to say it was Benny Goodman. We played a two and a half-hour concert every night. He played on every tune, never looked at a sheet of music, ran the band, got it to sound like he wanted it to sound, and never raised his voice. He was also the greatest at counting off tempos. With every other bandleader I worked with, it was a guessing game as to what the tempo was going to be. With Benny, the tempo was always on the money, every time, and that’s a great benefit to a drummer when you have eighteen guys sitting there waiting for “1.”
MD: Why do you think Benny wanted to work with you so badly?
Roy: First thing was, you had to know how to play the brushes. If I hadn’t passed that first two-hour brush audition, I never would have seen the big band. With Benny, you had to know how to play the brushes, and you had to be able to make fast tempos. You had to be able to play with a big band, play good time, play the style, and be able to play a drum solo.
MD: Speaking of brushes, can you offer some tips?
Roy: I used to take a record album jacket and practice on that, because it was a slick surface. I learned to play the beats on there and just pick the brushes off the jacket, rather than digging into it, which is the general tendency. I would put on the record and then play time on the jacket. I learned to pick the beats off and lift them out so it got a real silky sound.
MD: Who told you to do that?
Roy: Nobody. I learned how to develop my technique by using my ear, not by the general rudimental approach. When I was a young kid, I was practicing, going through quarter notes to 8th notes, to triplets, to 16ths, all single strokes. I noticed each time I went to the next note value to go faster, the sound would change a little bit, but I didn’t know what was making it change. I realized each time I went from 8ths to triplets to triplets to 16ths, I would tighten up and that would cause the sound to change, so I learned how to play through all those note values at various speeds without developing any tension. I used my ear to figure that out. I learned to do that with brushes the same way.
I notice that a lot of guys playing brushes push too hard and dig into the drum. I would just skim over the surface of the head, which is what I learned from playing on the back of record albums. I developed a better touch that way.
MD: Why did you leave Benny?
Roy: He wanted me to sign a contract that said I couldn’t quit, but I could still be fired at any moment. I had enough business sense to know that this wasn’t a good deal. I refused to sign the contract and we parted on kind of icy terms.
MD: During your time with Benny, what was one of the musical challenges you faced?
Roy: When I first joined Benny’s band, I had trouble playing “Sing Sing Sing” because of the endurance. I went back to Sonny Igoe and said, “I’ve got an endurance problem here.” And he said, “You should take some lessons with Henry Adler.” And I said, “That old guy? Why

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don’t you give me some lessons?” He said, “No, I think you should take some lessons with Henry. I think he can help.”

So I met Henry, went to his little studio—which was a room with two practice pads—and he said, “Okay, kid, play some paradiddles.” So I played some paradiddles. He said, “Okay, can you double that?” I said, “Sure.” I doubled it and he said, “That’s as fast as you can go, you can’t double that.” I said, “Yes, I can.” He said, “No, you can’t.” I said, “Yes, I can.” He said, “Let me see.” So I doubled it again. And he started laughing, almost falling off his chair. He said, “That’s fast, I’ve got to admit it, but you don’t have any leverage. You need more power.” I said, “That’s why I’m here.”

So he showed me these strange-looking wrist exercises. I said, “Henry, is this it? I’ve been playing a long time.” He said, “Just do these exercises the way I’ve shown them to you for two weeks. If you don’t feel an immediate improvement, I’ll give you double your money back.” Again, it was Sonny who steered me in the right direction.

MD: Can you explain those exercises? Roy: They’re just wrist-turning exercises that Henry has in his famous book The Buddy Rich Book Of Drum Rudiments. It’s a firm grip on the stick and a kind of stiff-looking wrist turn, so you turn your wrist all the way and squeeze to develop strength. You don’t play that way, but you practice that way.

I weighed 119 pounds soaking wet at the time, and my hands weren’t very big. So I needed to strengthen them, and these exercises worked. In six weeks, I had no more problems. Then when I left Benny’s band after the contract dispute, I went to see Sonny play in the Village. He said, “Hey, I’m doing The Merv Griffin Show in the afternoons, do you want to sub for me?” I said, “That would be great.” Then Sonny left to be a staff musician at CBS and play for The Jackie Gleason Show, so then I became the drummer for The Merv Griffin Show. Sonny was my guardian angel.

When I did Merv’s show, we played with all of these famous bands: Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Sammy Kaye, Guy Lombardo. We would play one song with each of them, each day, for five days.

MD: Any funny stories? Roy: Guy Lombardo wasn’t going over too well, so on the last day, he brought in a Dixieland arrangement of “South Rampart Street Parade,” which you can only imagine—a Guy Lombardo-style Dixieland number. He couldn’t get this chart off the ground if he set fire to the music. Keep in mind, this show was live. I played the four-bar drum break at the end, the band hit the chord, and much to everybody’s surprise, it was greeted by wild applause. Guy was so thrilled. He walked off stage to talk to Merv while we were still holding the note. I looked over to the horn players, and their eyes were going back and forth like crazy, so I hit the crash cymbal as hard as I could and there was a giant sucking sound in the brass section—they gasped for air. He forgot to cut the band off!

MD: How long did that gig last? Roy: I did three different series with Merv Griffin, and then when he went to syndication, I had a chance to do clinics for Rogers Drums. I was an endorser, and my Finger Control book had gotten a lot of notoriety because it was the first book of its kind. But the clinic tour coincided with the first six
weeks of The Merv Griffin Show. I went to Merv and asked if I could take off the first six weeks and he said, “Roy, I’ve had so many guys ask if they could do things like that, but you’ve got to decide to stay here or give up the show. Whatever you decide, we’ll still be friends.”

So I went to Henry Adler and said, “What should I do?” And he said, “Kid, you play great, but not enough people know about you. You need exposure. Take the tour. You’ll always get another job.” So I walked away from a TV show, and my friends thought I was crazy. I then did my first clinic tour, which turned out to be the right decision. I was the first American drummer to do clinics in England, Scotland, and Ireland. My wife, who was Irish, was so thrilled that I was going to Ireland. And it ended up being a huge success. There were eight hundred people at the clinic in Ireland.

MD: When did you find time to write the book, and what inspired it?
Roy: I worked at the Metropole in the afternoon with my own trio for four or five hours, forty-five minutes on, fifteen minutes off. And then at night I would work with Saul Yaged’s group, and we would get half-hour breaks. I would write drum books during my break in the musician’s room or give lessons between sets. I was playing twelve hours a day.

MD: You were motivated!
Roy: A fanatic. I didn’t think so at the time. I was just doing anything to make a living.

MD: What made you know you had a book in you worth writing?
Roy: I didn’t know. But when I went up to see Henry Adler with Lew Malin, who contributed to the book, I told my wife, “He’s going to turn me down.” I showed the book to Henry and he said, “Great idea, we’ll take photographs, we’ll get angles, we’ll do this and that,” and I thought, “My God, I’ve got to write this thing now!” I would write a bunch of material, take it up to Henry, and he’d look it over and make suggestions. He helped me quite a lot with it. When it came out, it was a moderate success.

Then came my Elementary Book. Rogers wanted a drum book that was an elementary teaching method but that wasn’t associated with another drum company. So Henry helped me put that together, and it really led me into the clinic field. I was so young-looking in those days that people wouldn’t believe that I wrote the book.

MD: How did you end up moving to California?
Roy: I went to Hawaii with Joe Bushkin in 1966 to play a benefit for the Honolulu Symphony with his trio. My wife was anxious to go to Hawaii, and when they created a nightclub for Bushkin and the trio, we moved to Hawaii. We lived in Hawaii for about a year and a half, until Joe Bushkin decided to stop working.

Then Rogers contacted me and wanted me to become a full-time clinician. They paid our way back to Ohio in 1968, and that was culture shock. My wife really couldn’t stand it. Within the year, though, they moved the operation to Fullerton, California, so we moved again, and we’re still living in the same house that we moved into in 1969.

I worked for Rogers, doing clinics, working in their R&D department, and writing catalogs. After about ten years, they decided to see if they could replace chrome hardware with a powder coating. So I came to this building where I am now sitting to meet Ron Marquez from the Aquarian Coatings Corporation about [using their] powder coat-
ROY BURNS

ing. Rogers decided not to do it, and one day I got a call from Ron asking, “Am I getting any work out of that place?” I said, “Well, it’s going south and I’m going to quit,” and he said, “Well, I’ve got an idea for another company. Come on over when you get off work and we’ll talk about it.”

So we decided to start this company [manufacturing instrument accessories], and he said, “What are we going to call it?” I said, “Let’s just call it Aquarian Accessories. That way whenever we answer the phone, whichever business it is, Aquarian Coatings or Aquarian Accessories, we can just say Aquarian.” I had had a mentor in New York who had been an Aquarian, and he had been killed in a plane crash, so the name had a personal appeal to me. We started Aquarian Accessories in 1980. Twenty-eight years later, we’re still kicking.

MD: Where does playing fit in?
Roy: My last public performance was at the Modern Drummer Festival in 1997. That was my swan song. It was [MD founder] Ron Spagnardi, [Pro-Mark’s] Herb Brochstein, Vic Firth, and [DW’s] Don Lombardi—The Originators, they called it—to let the kids know that the guys who owned these companies were all drummers. We pulled it off. I haven’t played, except here at the office, since then.

MD: I understand you recently recorded a solo for Ron Spagnardi that is up on Modern Drummer’s Web site.
Roy: Yes. I had a great relationship with Ron. I called him up one day with the idea for doing a regular column for the magazine, which went back to that idea of my using my noodle. That’s how I started writing for Modern Drummer. Ron and I talked about how you have to have a vision. There have been two significant Ron’s in my life—Ron Spagnardi and Ron Marquez, my partner.

MD: Tell us about the solo.
Roy: We were testing some Aquarian drumheads, and I did a bunch of solos for a mic test. One of the solos made me think about Ron—I think he would have liked it—and it made me think about our experience performing together at the Modern Drummer Festival. So I talked to Bob Berenson at the magazine, and said, “I have a solo I’d like to dedicate to Ron,” so I sent it.

MD: What to you is a tasteful drum solo?
Roy: It has to have a musical theme to it. It can’t just be exercises or, “Here’s my best trick.” It has to have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and a theme.

I developed my understanding of drum solos when I was in my early teens, from playing in the city band in Emporia, Kansas. I began to notice these overtures as I played, how they were constructed, because I studied piano and timpani as well, so I could tell how these overtures were put together. When I played a long drum solo, I tried to lay it out just like a symphony would.

When I worked with John Lewis at the Monterey Jazz Festival, he told me he enjoyed listening to my long solo, and asked why I thought that was. I told him about playing these overtures in the city band in Emporia, and he said, “Ah, you think like a composer.” And that made sense to me—if you sound like you’re composing something, rather than just playing rudiments or licks that you’ve memorized, then you’re really playing some music.
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Ringo In Liverpool

Documenting The Legendary Beatle’s Triumphant Return

by Rob Shanahan

For a photographer, getting the call to fly to Liverpool to spend four days photographing Ringo Starr, as part of the city’s European Capital Of Culture celebrations, is as exciting as it gets. I’m also a drummer, so the thought of spending time with Ringo in his hometown, the birthplace of The Beatles, was beyond anything I could ever imagine.

I began my trip by flying from LA to London, and then to Manchester, where I was picked up by car for the forty-minute drive to Liverpool. Upon entering the city, the signs that I was entering the birthplace of The Beatles were everywhere: The Beatle Museum Tour, The Magical Mystery Tour, Beatles Pub Crawl, Hard Days Night Hotel, etc. But there were no signs, no billboards, and no travel brochures for the kind of tour I was on. I was to get the most amazing tour of Liverpool imaginable, four days in the birthplace of The Beatles with Ringo.

The driver took me to the hotel where we were all staying. Upon arriving, I met up with Ringo, his wife, Barbara, his attorney, Bruce, his publicist, Elizabeth, and film maker, Brent, for dinner. It was warm hugs all around, and I thanked Ringo for asking me to be a part of the tour. I couldn’t help but tell him how amazing I thought it was that I was in Liverpool with him. His response was classic Ringo humor: “It’s amazing they’ve asked me back.”

For the music portion of the tour, Dave Stewart of The Eurythmics, who co-produced Ringo’s new album, Liverpool 8, as well as Ringo’s “promo” band (with Randy Cooke on drums) were along for the live shows. The first day, we taped the Early Show live feed to New York City, and that evening there was a rooftop performance for 40,000 people in the town square. The following night was a show in the brand-new Liverpool Arena; prior to that performance, there was a private backstage party for Ringo’s family and friends still living in Liverpool. Ringo also had his handprints set in wet cement for the Walk Of Fame leading into the arena entrance.

Between shows and rehearsals, we visited Ringo’s old high school, as well as the newly renamed “Starr Fields.” We also went by the two flats he lived in during his childhood, on Madryn Street and Admiral Grove.

The four days I spent in Liverpool with Ringo were even more exciting than I had imagined, and made for one of the most memorable experiences of my life.

Traveling with Ringo in Liverpool was highly choreographed and quite efficient. Of course, having a police escort parting traffic on the way to the gigs helped. Everywhere we went, people would come to the window seeking autographs or to take a photo. Having Ringo as your tour guide while riding around Liverpool: priceless.

This was on the first day during the taping of The Early Show, which was broadcast live in New York. Being that it was network TV, there was a lot of down time, which we spent in this dressing room overlooking the city, with Ringo sharing stories from Liverpool past. Ringo is one of the smartest and funniest musicians you could meet, always highly entertaining.
I shot this at soundcheck, literally from two feet in front of the kick drum. As a photographer, this is one of my favorite angles to shoot a four-piece kit. And as a drummer, this is my favorite spot to hear the kit from—nice and punchy and boomy. If we drummers could only hear our kit from the drum throne as it sounds from this spot. It’s a lively, raw sound that is hard to duplicate going through a monitor. This was a fine-sounding set of Ludwigs from a local backline company. Because Ringo’s longtime drum tech, Jeff Chonis, was not on this trip, Ringo took a very hands-on approach to getting his own drum sound. His tuning and dampening advice for the local drum tech was right on.

Another shot during rehearsals. This is in St. George’s Ballroom, built in the 18th century. That’s Dave Stewart on guitar and Randy Cooke on the other set of drums, during Ringo’s turn at the mic.

The audience arrives, ready to start the show. In the middle front of the stage, you can see the live feed monitor from New York City.
A quick soundcheck on the roof of the St. George. The chilly outdoor performance that evening was attended by 40,000 people in the streets below. This stage was approximately 5x12 feet, and as you can see by the size of the automobiles in the street, it was quite high!

We took a drive to visit Ringo’s old school, the Shorefields Technology College & City Learning Centre—and the newly renamed soccer fields.

Naughty boys. Ringo couldn’t figure out why I wanted this shot, and then laughed when he saw it. He hadn’t noticed the sign.

Hands in cement for the Walk Of Fame in the new Liverpool Arena entrance.

Michael McCartney, Paul’s brother, visits in the dressing room before the show.
Liverpool loves Ringo. This shot was taken during the arena rehearsal, and it’s my favorite from the trip. Later, minutes before the show was to start, the second “L” in the “LIVERPOOL 08” sign starts blinking, and then blacks out all together. Much to the chagrin of the 15,000 people in attendance, the sign now reads “LIVERPOOL 08.”

Out to the rescue comes a group of stagehands with an enormously tall ladder, which has to be placed at the far end of the sign because of the location of the gear on stage directly below it. One brave stagehand has to tightrope across the top of the sign to reach the malfunctioning “L.” About halfway across, and after a few near falls and loud gasps from the audience, he gets down on his hands and knees to crawl the remaining ten feet. Finally he makes it and starts wiggling the wires to no avail, so he proceeds to bang on the sign, first with his bare hands, then with a shiny tool. The lights start blinking, then finally the “L” comes back to life, and the crowd goes wild as he stands with his fists raised high in victory.

Suddenly, with a loud snap, the cables attached to the “08” end of the sign give way, swinging the sign like a huge pendulum. The stagehand frantically holds on to the sign and swings full speed ahead to the stage below. The crowd at this point is frantic. The other stagehands grab the swinging sign as it passes by and they too go for a ride on the wild swinging sign. Finally, they get the sign to stop swinging and take a bow to the cheering audience. Only then did we all realize it was part of the show; the “stagehands” were from a local acrobatic team.

This is the first flat Ringo lived in as a child in Dingle, at #9 Madryn Street. It starts at frame left, and ends at the brown door. As I walked the neighborhood and breathed the air, I really got a sense of how far Ringo had come. Humble beginnings indeed. Backstage at the arena show I met an old schoolmate of Ringo’s and had a good chat. Later, Ringo told me about this friend and how as young lads they were inseparable, growing up in this very neighborhood and ready to take on the world with this band they were going to put together. His friend eventually decided working the day shift and going to the pub every night was the life for him, and he ended up marrying the girl down the street (who I also met—they’re still married today) and have a lovely daughter. Life for him turned out just fine, and we all know how Ringo’s turned out. It was interesting to see how two people’s lives evolved so differently despite coming from the same place. Like the two trees in this picture—same roots, different branches.
Master rhythmic illusionist Gavin Harrison recorded Fear Of A Blank Planet with progressive rock group Porcupine Tree in 2007. The album is full of emotive lyrical content, complex arrangements, outstanding musicianship, and explosive drumming.

Gavin’s precise grooves on this disc serve the songs in an unobtrusive way. But when it’s time to kick the music into high gear, Harrison has plenty of headroom. Porcupine Tree is reaching legendary status with Gavin in the driver’s seat. Let’s take a look at some inspiring moments from Fear Of A Blank Planet.

“Fear Of A Blank Planet”

During the intro of the title track, Gavin lays down a tight pattern that flows through the cross-rhythmic guitar riff. His ghost notes and hi-hat embellishments add a sense of forward motion. (0:28)

Later in the song Gavin unleashes the following tricky fill to transition the band into the heavier instrumental section. (5:01)
“My Ashes”

The haunting mood of this song is enhanced by the wide space between the chords. When Gavin comes in, he plays a descending melody on the toms harmonized by three cup–chime hits. Grace notes and drags on the snare are complemented by the use of pedaled hi-hat notes. (2:06)

“Anesthetize”

This epic number largely revolves around Gavin’ s compositional drumming. In the intro, he plays a driving 16th-note tom beat that accentuates the overdubbed orchestra bell part. (0:00)

After a mellow breakdown, Harrison unleashes this incredible polyrhythmic assault at fortissimo. (1:06)

“Sentimental”

The intro to this song features an interesting rhythmic illusion. The keyboard player starts with a dotted 16th–note figure implying a four-over-three feel. However, with no supporting rhythm outlining the tempo, the listener hears a different pulse. When the filtered drums enter in 4/4, the sound really takes you by surprise. (0:22)
“Way Out Of Here”

Gavin gets plenty of room to stretch out on this tune. He takes full advantage of the time signature by using clever spacing concepts. The structure of the keyboard and guitar parts lend themselves to some interesting rhythmic inventions. When the drums enter, Gavin creates a 3/4 feel over the 6/8 time signature by using a spacing of two on the cymbal. He calls this technique "overriding." (1:22)

The song eventually builds to a short drum solo over a guitar riff. Here we can see Harrison’s multi-dimensional rhythmic approach come to life. He effortlessly shifts from the 3/4 override, to a quasi-shuffle feel, to five-note groupings interlaced with quick double bass ruffs. He even gives a nod to the great Tony Williams with the flam/cymbal combinations in measure 10. (5:15)
Performance is everything to me, that’s why I play Mapex.

Tony Coleman | B.B. King
The Grid

Taking Rudiments To The Next Level
by Terry Branam

Drum corps drummers have been using the grid system for years. Conceived by the instructors of West Coast drumlines, the grid has opened new doors of possibility for rudimental drummers. In fact, many new rudiments have been inspired by the permutations of this system.

The basic concept of the grid is rather simple. We’ll begin by moving accents through all partials of a triplet. In order to work on quick transitions, we’ll implement the “4–2–1” system. Here’s how it works:

1) Play accents on the first triplet partial four times, the second partial four times, and then the third partial four times. Play through this line once.
2) Play accents on the first triplet partial two times, the second partial two times, and then the third partial two times. Play this line twice.
3) Play an accent on the first partial once, the second partial once, and the third partial once. Play this line four times. Since we’re working with triplets, the third line will create a 3/4 feel. Also, you must start the second and fourth repeat on the opposite hand when using alternating sticking.

The first example shows the basic outline of the grid using triplet accents with the 4–2–1 system.

Once you have a basic understanding of the 4–2–1 system, you can use it as an exercise template. The first way to “grid” a rudiment is to keep the rudiment in the same place while moving the accents through the partials. The rudiment will feel different as you accent in different places. Your technique will be put to the test as you work through these permutations.

In this next example we will double the first triplet partial. Try to keep your stick heights as low as possible on the unaccented notes.
The next example uses flam accents. Placing accents just before or after a flam will force you to refine your control. Always strive for strong, consistent accents.

When you feel that your flam accent grid is up to par, try more involved rudiments such as the flam drag. The combination of flams and doubles will be more demanding on your technique. Pay attention to the volume of the unaccented flams.

Finally, here’s a grid using the flamed five-stroke roll. This is an extremely challenging exercise. When an accent lands on a double stroke, you would typically accent both notes of the double. Start very slowly. Be sure to keep the interpretation of the rhythm in check. And note how different tempos require slight changes in technique.

Now that you understand the grid concept, a door to a world of new possibilities has been opened. Your overall technique will improve, and best of all you will enjoy the benefits of some new vocabulary. Experiment with different rudiments, and be creative.

Terry Branam is a freelance drummer, private teacher, and clinician in the Chicago area. He can be contacted at terrybranam@gmail.com.
Simon Says
Mind And Limb Twisters, Part 2
by John Riley

In my last article (January 2008), we looked at fresh ways to create across-the-barline phrases. This time we’ll expand on those phrases by getting the hi-hat in the game and adding some fill-in notes. Then we’ll scramble things further by building ideas off of a more complicated initial phrase.

First, take the original dotted-quarter note phrase from Part 1 and outline the rhythm between the bass drum and hi-hat. Once that flows, add swing 8th-note fill-ins with your snare. (All examples are to be played with a swing feel over a basic jazz ride pattern.)

Now play the foot pattern while playing only the fill-in 8th note immediately after each foot note.

Next, play only the fill-in note immediately preceding each foot note.

Now let’s change the bass rhythm to something a little more syncopated. Play all the rights with the bass drum and the lefts on the snare.
Example 5 shows how this system unfolds using the RRL pattern, with the hi-hat on 2 and 4.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Example 5} &= \begin{array}{cccc}
\text{R} & \text{R} & \text{L} & \text{L} \\
\text{R} & \text{R} & \text{L} & \text{L} \\
\end{array}
\end{align*}
\]

Finally, play the rhythm and sticking in Example 5 with your feet, and with your snare drum fill in all the 8th notes not played by the feet. Example 6 employs the RRL sticking. The resulting phrase has a very modern, Jack DeJohnette-like flow.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Example 6} &= \begin{array}{cccc}
\text{R} & \text{R} & \text{L} & \text{L} \\
\text{R} & \text{R} & \text{L} & \text{L} \\
\end{array}
\end{align*}
\]

Next time we’ll adopt five-beat phrases using the same approach.
Afro-Latin Hybrid Grooves For Drumset
by James Dreier

The drumset is a relatively new arrival in the Cuban rhythm section. Because of that, there’s often confusion as to what the drumset player can do that will add to, but not get in the way of, the other instruments and patterns.

The presence of the drumset is even more relevant in contemporary Latin styles like timba, rockasón, Cuban hip-hop, and other Afro-Latin hybrids. This article will provide some solutions to help you incorporate the drumset into such musical situations.

Timba-go is a timba/songo-based pattern that I came up with after studying in Cuba. This rhythm is a great substitute or variation for the common songo pattern, which has become a bit overused. This pattern differs from tradition by using the snare drum instead of the bass drum to play the ever-important “bombo” note. There is also a heavy influence of David Garibaldi funkiness in the groove. David has had a big influence on contemporary Cuban drummers.

Cuban drummers are also great at finding “rhythmic holes.” They’re always putting together parts that provide a sense of counterpoint and that fit into open rhythmic spaces within the ensemble. Timba-go works nicely when orchestrated around the drumset because it will stay out of the way of the typical conga and timbale patterns.

Playing “in clave” is critical with this groove, as it is in songo, conga, Mozambique, or any clave-based pattern. All musicians must be aware of the direction of the clave (2:3 or 3:2) and play the patterns accordingly. For example, if the clave in a tune is 3:2 rumba, all the patterns in this article would be reversed (start in the second measure). Playing in clave is what makes all the diverse patterns fit together and function as one.

Below is the basic sticking pattern for timba-go, using the right hand on the cowbell and the left hand on the snare drum. Note that the 2:3 rumba clave pattern is written above all of the figures for reference.

As you’re learning the groove, pay close attention to the accents. They will help the overall feel of the pattern. All unaccented snare strokes should be played very softly, or “ghosted.” Also note that on beat 4 of measure 2, the right hand can play a ghost note on the snare (as notated), on the bell, or not at all.

The example on the following page contains a suggested bass drum and hi-hat pattern. In this style, the bass drum should not be in exact unison with the bass guitar line. It should be played in counterpoint to the clave. Various bass drum patterns can be used with this groove.
Now let’s add a bass drum note. This gives the pattern an even funkier feel.

Next we’ll add yet another note on the bass drum.

The following example combines the previous two examples, omitting the bass drum on beat 1 in the first measure. This gives us a nice four-bar pattern.

Now let’s start moving the basic timba-go pattern around the set. Moving the sticking pattern around the kit in different ways creates new and interesting sounds that will usually fit in with the rest of the percussion parts. Here’s one example. You can also try any bass drum pattern that works in counterpoint to clave.

Here’s another orchestration of the pattern around the set.
**TIMBA-GO**

Example 8 orchestrates a nice four-bar melody on the toms by moving the right hand to the floor tom in measure 3.

```
<table>
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<th>R</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
```

Our final example incorporates the previous elements to create a four-bar pattern where the bass drum is varied and the hands are orchestrated around the set.

```
<table>
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<tr>
<th>9</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>R</th>
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<th>R</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
```

Now take these ideas and run with them! Come up with your own bass drum variations and drumset orchestrations. The possibilities are endless. Just remember that creating parts and improvising should always come from a position of knowledge, whether it’s in Latin, jazz, or any other style of music. Spend time listening to the music you’re trying to play, and study those who have paved the road for the rest of us. Having the sound in your ears is critical to making it all happen!

James Dreier is a lecturer at the University of Iowa and an adjunct instructor at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, where he teaches courses in drumset, jazz cultures, and hand drumming. Dreier is also an educational artist for Sabian and LP. For more information, visit www.jamesdreier.com.
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“It’s a great pleasure and honor to speak to Modern Drummer,” says guitar pioneer John McLaughlin by phone from his home in Monte Carlo. “Because I don’t play drums... Well, I’m a refugee drummer. It’s like I’ve just come out of the Third World.” McLaughlin agrees that there are some terrific drummers in the Third World but adds, with a laugh, “Don’t count me among ‘em!”

Since 1969, when he joined Tony Williams’ Lifetime and soon went on to play with Miles Davis, McLaughlin’s life has been one of nearly nonstop, all-over-the-map creativity. Recent years have seen a steady flow of releases both past and present: the 2006 electronica experiment Industrial Zen; the Mahavishnu Orchestra Live At Montreux 1974/1984 DVD, with Narada Michael Walden and Danny Gottlieb in ’74 and ’84 respectively; the Trio Of Doom album, which documents the sole Cuban performance and New York City studio session of the guitarist’s 1979 group with Williams and Jaco Pastorius; and last year’s Official Bootleg, a limited-edition live LP from The 4th Dimension, McLaughlin’s current working ensemble, which includes drummer Mark Mondesir and keyboardist/drummer Gary Husband.

Finally—for now—there’s the Gateway To Rhythm DVD, in which McLaughlin and percussionist Selvaganesh Vinayakram explain the South Indian system of Konokol to a Western audience. This is a way of singing any rhythm while clapping a basic pulse, and it can be used by all musicians and practiced without an instrument. “It’s a wonderful way to communicate rhythmically to your colleagues,” McLaughlin says. As the rare Western master who’s also reached deeply into the exotic realm of Indian music, he should know. Konokol, in fact, has inspired some of McLaughlin’s most enduring compositions, going all the way back to the original Mahavishnu Orchestra.

MD: Let’s talk briefly about your own drumming.
John: I got my first drumkit in ’71 or ’72. If I wasn’t a guitar player, I’d probably be a drummer. It’s a wonderful instrument.

“You can of course play with drum machines, sequencers, metronomes—and I do. But I had to have live drummers, too. Otherwise it’s always perfect, and for what?”
Playing two years with Tony [Williams] really marked me for life. And I got myself a yellow Gretsch kit. [laughs] But I did have my own take: I had a metal Slingerland snare. I like the snare crisp. And K Zildjians, of course. It’s such a lovely sound.

**MD:** Who was the first drummer you really connected with?

**John:** Philly Joe Jones.

**MD:** How about playing with?

**John:** Tony Oxley, who I had on my first recording, Extrapolation. He was totally influenced by Tony Williams. He stole everything from Tony, except being Tony himself. He had wonderful colors. The whole concept of drums got turned around by Tony [Williams], and Tony Oxley absorbed everything he was doing and did it in his own way. But I played in a lot of bands without drummers prior to coming to New York, simply for movability and adaptability.

**MD:** Did that help you create a strong rhythmic concept?

**John:** Well, if you’re not playing with a drummer, you’ve got to all be in the pocket together. By that time I was already experimenting with strange time signatures. I was always attracted to them. Even on Extrapolation, there are things in eleven, there’s a piece in nineteen. In this period I also did a lot of playing with R&B bands. Georgie Fame—he had a nice drummer named Red Reece. And I’d be doing James Brown covers with another band called Herbie Goins & The Nighttimers. Funk was a revolution for me. When I first heard James Brown in the mid-'60s, whoever it was on drums, it was funky. He turned music around, too. He put the rhythmic thing in everything—the horns. It was deep, beautiful.

So between playing these jazz experiments with Hammond organ trios and different groups, I was trying to make a living playing R&B. And you’ve got to have that groove going with a Hammond organ trio. That’s one of the reasons I invited [organist] Joey DeFrancesco when I did After The Rain with Elvin, because Elvin just sits on that so beautiful. And Joey’s got a swing that’s irresistible.

**MD:** You also played with DeFrancesco in a group with Dennis Chambers.

**John:** I’m gonna see Dennis in a couple of days. He’s coming through here with Mike Stern. I’m looking for a jam! I want to play with Dennis. What a great drummer. He’s really special. There are some wonderful drummers around. It’s a real pleasure to hear them.

**MD:** You’ve played with so many of them.

**John:** I’ve really been lucky. It’s funny, because I got the gig with Tony from a jam recorded with Jack DeJohnette in London. He was there with The Bill Evans Trio. It must’ve been 1967, maybe early 1968. Jack’s a very fine pianist, too, incidentally. In any event, he recorded our jam, unknown to me. He was hanging with Tony when he got back to New York. Tony asked play with him with one day. He’s outstanding. But those years with Tony, that was one of the best schools I could ever have gone through, in terms of playing with a drummer.

**MD:** Can you put your finger on what you learned from him?

**John:** Yeah, I learned to stay on my toes! The way he felt time was wonderful. His groove was just amazing, but he had a sense of dynamics that was revolutionary. And he taught me a lot about phrasing. He wouldn’t hit a phrase that ended on the “1.” It might

“I started to speak to Billy [Cobham] about getting double bass drums. He said, ‘Come on. No way.’ I said, ‘Billy, go for it.’ He played it that first night, and it was like thunder.”
thing. This is “no compromises”—this is real art, you know? Another great thing about playing with Lifetime is that Tony really encouraged me to write music.

Having got the gig with Tony, I just as incidentally—which was not incidental at all; it was earth shaking—was doing a concert with Miles. I met Billy [Cobham] directly on account of Miles, on one of the sessions he called. The [A Tribute To] Jack Johnson thing did it for me with Billy. Miles was in the cabin talking to [producer] Teo Macero, and we were in the studio waiting. So I started this R&B thing, a shuffle. For anyone who’s interested, those harmonies are what [Mahavishnu Orchestra’s] “The Dance Of Maya” was later based on. Billy jumped in right away, then [bassist] Michael Henderson, and then the light went on and Miles ran into the studio and proceeded to play, for the next twenty minutes, the most unbelievable trumpet I’d ever heard in my life. I’d never heard Miles play like that in the studio, or on stage for that matter. It was just killing. What was amazing was Billy’s playing and the way I was able to hook up with him. It was very different from the way I’d been hooking up with Tony. [Editor’s note: this became “Right Off” from the Jack Johnson album.]

To bring that to a resolution, I was playing with Miles—this must have been 1970—and we were chatting away in the band room in Lenny’s On The Turnpike, outside of Boston. It was just Miles and me. All of a sudden he turned to me and said, “It’s time you formed your own band.” And The Mahavishnu Orchestra came from that statement, believe it or not. Because Miles didn’t mince his words, ever. If he said it, he really meant it.

Right off, I thought of Billy. In fact, Billy and I were already rehearsing, somewhere down near Bond Street in lower Manhattan. He was the first guy I wanted to play with. I wasn’t going to think about violins, or keyboards—I was gonna think about the drummer. Because that’s the heart of the band, isn’t it? Even the guitar player, he’s not the heart of the band; the heart of the band is always the drummer.

MD: You really do seem to be a drum-orientated guitarist.

John: I love drums. Would I do this Konkol thing if I didn’t love rhythm? Rhythm is a wonderful mystery to me.

I have to tell you a little anecdote. Within about six months, I started to speak to Billy about getting double bass drums. He said, “Come on. No way.” I said, “Billy, go for it. With double bass drums you’re just gonna destroy.” It took me about four months to convince him, but he finally did it. He played it that first night, and it was like thunder. He got it down right away.

MD: There’s a great looseness with Tony and Billy’s playing—do you think drummers today are more concerned with precise placement?

John: I think this has been a movement, generally speaking, that applies to all musicians. When the first drum machines came out, around ’78 or so, it was a watermark to have this kind of precision. It was more in pop and rock—not so much in jazz—where it was required. The greater precision in a way could be equated with greater rhythmic integrity. But you can have the most wonderful mathematical subdivisions, and if it doesn’t swing, then it doesn’t mean too much. Listen to Zakir [Hussain]. He’s got some of the most unbelievable subdivisions, but it’s got such a sensuality about it. It’s the same thing with jazz. Jazz was born in the bordello. It’s a pretty sensual place, the bordello. Music from Africa—the Olatunji group, or whatever, real ethnic drums—those guys are rocking, they’re swinging. Without
that, we’re missing an essential element, the human dimension. You can
course play with drum machines,
sequencers, metronomes—and I do, like on
Industrial Zen. But I had to have live drum-
ners, too. Otherwise it’s always perfect, and for what?
I don’t think we should be precision
obsessed. In a way you need to master your
instrument, or you get in the way of your
freedom. This is permanent work; it’s not
like getting a diploma and nailing it to the
wall. Of course we all get caught up in the
technicalities, but the whole point is: How
real is it? How honest is it? How inspired is
it? When you play, you’re telling the story of
your life, and you have to tell it clearly and
with the passion you have in your heart and
soul. So your technique has to be able to
translate that.
In a way, perfect freedom equals perfect
discipline. It’s a tricky little psychological
thing you’ve got to come to terms with.
Which is hard, because the way to the
unknown is through the known—we have to
play what we know in order to get to that
special place where it’s brand new.
MD: Do you talk to your bands about what
you’re looking for?
John: Absolutely. Pieces I’ve written might
be open ended, but I have particular
demands. I do this for two reasons. One, to
satisfy my musical aesthetic, for want of
another word. Second, to give them some-
ting that they can get their teeth into and
that will provoke them. Because I don’t
want them to have it easy. I don’t have it
easy. Who has it easy? Did anything good
come easy, Michael? [laughs]
And I need a combination of provocation
and stimulation. So I will speak to the drum-
mer about maybe looking at the rhythms
from a different degree, which could be a
subdivision degree, as opposed to just play-
ing, like, four in the bar. If you get people to
play in different degrees—like a 10/4 with a
20/8, but subdivided differently, which came
from the first Mahavishnu Orchestra—it’ll
work only if you’re in the pocket. To impro-
vise on that—it really puts its foot on your
behind. [laughs] Once you’ve got it moving,
you get this gravity happening: It pulls you, it
attracts you. If you set up a different subdivi-
sion of the same rhythm, it’s got the same
gravity but pulling in a different direction.
It’s a wonderful feeling. The whole thing
works together in cycles. And because of
Konokol, I can sing the rhythms. This is why
I had to bring the Konokol system to the
West. It’s Indian, okay, but it’s global in its
implications. It’s to do with every rhythm,
whether you’re from Latin America or from
Greenland. It’s mathematical, and it’s subdivision—that’s all it is. So I’ll get a thing
going and I’ll sing it to the drummer: “You
hear this? This is how it goes against the
groove.” Once you sing it, they know what it
is right away. This is why it’s such a won-
derful system.
MD: Do you recommend practicing Konokol
slowly to get the clapping down?
John: Sure. You have to. But anybody can
catch it. Ravi Shankar, who’s North Indian but
knows the South Indian system perfectly,
would tell you: Do it in the shower, do it in
the plane, do it on the toilet, just do it! Just
sing these little simple exercises and keep
the rhythm cycle to keep yourself in time,
that’s all. I can recommend it anywhere,
anytime! [laughs]
MD: Let’s talk about a few drummers
you’ve played with. I had the good fortune
of speaking with Zakir recently.
John: Isn’t he unbelievable? He is without
any doubt the greatest tabla player today.
I’ve lost count of how many hundreds of
times we’ve played together. And every

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JOHN McLAUGHLIN

time...outstanding is not the word. He’s really a great artist. Here’s a guy who knows Western music inside out, but he knows North and South Indian music inside out, too.

MD: Mark Mondesir.

John: Oh, Mark, he’s beautiful. He’s wide open to whatever concepts I’m ready to give to him. Anything I throw at him, he can play. He swore to me that he’s gonna write a little Konokol composition and sing it for me. He’s very sweet. He’s the eternal student—every day is a new day to learn something.

MD: Trilok Gurtu.

John: Trilok is a revolutionary. I regret that he hasn’t continued, really, in the way he was going—that we were going together—when I met him. I remember seeing Dave Weckl at a gig. His jaw just hit the deck. He got his video camera out and filmed Trilok so he could check him out at home. And Dave’s an amazing player. It’s Trilok’s concept—Indian, but with Tony, a little Elvin, and some rock. What a combination. I’ve been disappointed, I have to say. I’d tell him myself; it’s not something I’d try to hide. Because I love him. He’s such a wonderful musician and human being. I think he was listening to his manager, who wanted him to maybe try to reach a bigger audience. I’ve seen his group a number of times, and he was doing about ten percent of what he’s capable of on this amazing little drumkit that he built. But hey, maybe I’m just unaware. I haven’t had the chance to see him for a while.

MD: It’s great to hear Narada Michael Walden and Danny Gottlieb on the new Mahavishnu DVD.

John: Those two together—unbelievable. Basically, any band I have, I want the drums in my face. Narada, God bless him. And Danny, what an outstanding drummer. Joe Morello, one of the greatest, was his teacher. I remember seeing Joe Morello in the early ’60s with The Dave Brubeck Quartet. I must’ve been sixteen or seventeen. They did “Take Five,” and he did that drum solo in five. It blew my mind. Danny got everything from him, plus he’s got the R&B and the rock thing. He’s played with Pat Metheny, and he knows this kind of smooth-jazz thing. Anyway, I’m glad I got it on tape. As for the ’74 band—the original tape we had was terrible. It’s not even that good now, but it’s the best we could do.

MD: From your liner notes, I was expecting bad sound on Trio Of Doom, too, but that was cleaned up nicely.

John: I don’t know why, but [recording engineer] Stan ‘Tonk’ didn’t open the [drum] overheads. Can you imagine, those K Zildjians? My [current] engineer had a brilliant idea. He doubled one of the audio tracks—I think it was the snare or hi-hat—and EQ’d it to death to bring the cymbals out. And he got ‘em. It’s not how I wanted, but it’s amazing. I got an email from Colleen, ‘Tony’ s widow, when she got a copy, and she said, “John, I have to thank you from the bottom of my heart, because it’s wonderful. Tony would’ve been delighted.” It was a real labor of love. That was for Colleen and Tracy [Pastorius], the two widows. That email from Colleen brought tears to my eyes. And Tracy came to see [The 4th Dimension] in North Carolina when we played. That made it all worthwhile.

MD: Okay, last question, because no one seems to agree: What’s the proper pronunciation of your last name?

John: Well, it depends. If you’re from Ireland, it’s “McLUGH-lin.” If you’re from America, it’s “Mc-LOCK-lin.” I don’t really care. [laughs] Don’t let it bother you.

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Good gigs are hard to find; great gigs, even harder. Professionalism dictates that every gig can be a good one, if we conduct ourselves appropriately. But what happens when a gig isn’t just bad, but impossible? What happens when you find yourself in a situation that is not only counter-productive, but unhealthy?

There are times when a musical situation is simply unworkable. If you find yourself depressed just thinking about playing a particular gig, it might be a gig you don’t need.

Amen, Brother

A couple of years ago, I took a job playing in a church praise band. Church music is always fun for a percussionist—that’s what I play—because of the colors required; our drummer looked forward to it, too, if only because the two of us would get to play together. In the beginning things seemed very open musically, and we were encouraged to come up with our own parts and be a more visible part of the band. The guitarist/bassist player was a good friend, too, so we knew we’d have a solid rhythm section.

To make a long story short, what seemed like a fun gig rapidly became a disorganized, off-key nightmare. (It really helps when the people in charge play in the correct key and the right time signature!) It got to the point where I didn’t enjoy playing anymore. I made excuses to not show up some days, and gritted my teeth on others. Feeling bad about going to church is a rotten thing, especially in the South. So I decided to be the first one to leave.

I agonized for weeks over how I could have handled it better. I essentially just stopped showing up.

I told the guitarist/bassist (who was sort of the unofficial “musical director”) that the small amount we were being paid just wasn’t worth hauling my gear. What’s worse, a political struggle erupted between the titular leader of the group and an acoustic guitarist who also wanted to be the music minister.

I agonized for weeks over how I could have handled it better. I essentially just stopped showing up. My head rang with what I’d always believed—“Don’t burn bridges”—and I felt pretty rotten. But then I thought about how I’d be feeling if I were still playing in the midst of poor musicianship and a power struggle. I also realized that this gig would not lead to other work, because they didn’t know anybody. In the end, short a little pocket money, I was the one who was better off. Plus, the church didn’t have a disgruntled percussionist to deal with.

Promises, Promises

Following this situation, I ended up in a group with the acoustic guitarist I mentioned earlier. I was promised more of a hand percussion situation—“light percussion” was the term bandied about—which I warned to. I play drums, but I’d rather play percussion when I can. I was also promised lots of gigs, plenty of money, and an open working environment where I could suggest songs and maybe even sing a little. I should have known better.

After a few months with no gigs in sight and an oppressive amount of practice time, during which we got maybe one song done, I began to wonder what I’d gotten myself into. Then the leader got us a gig—in about two weeks. We had maybe a half-dozen songs ready to go for a wedding that would require three sets. Plus, now I had to drag a kick and snare to every rehearsal to try to “dance up” the few songs we knew; percussion flew out the window. Again, I found myself in a situation I knew I needed to get out of. None of us was a full-time musician—there was no way we could learn enough songs to play the gig. There was no discussion about the gig beforehand, either; it was accepted on our behalf.

I tried to talk to the leader, to no avail. All the professionalism I could muster came to the fore, but it was irrelevant; the plans were made, we weren’t ready, and we were supposed to pull off a miracle. That wasn’t going to happen. Again, though, I had nothing to lose by quitting. Against everything I’d been taught, I quit then and there. I got a nasty email from the leader and responded with one that was far, far nastier. (I am a writer by trade, after all.)

Unprofessional? Without a doubt. I still feel bad about the way that gig ended, but some people simply will not accept the truth when it’s staring them in the face. In this case, a “hobby band” can’t become a professional outfit overnight. The question is, what options did I have?

There are good ways to quit a situation that isn’t working; often, quitting one situation professionally can land you work later, simply because of the way you handled yourself.
Be Honest—Up To A Point
Lying is never good, if for no other reason than because lies are too hard to keep up with. However, you also don’t want to tell a bandleader or contractor that your stomach hurts every time you play with a certain group of people or under certain circumstances. Tell them the truth—at almost every situation you need to quit will probably be because you don’t have adequate time for rehearsals and performances, because you don’t feel like you fit into the environment presented, or because what you were promised is not what actually happened. Be tactful, but be honest.

Keep A Cool Head
Part of being professional is being able to roll with punches. Sometimes a playing situation just doesn’t work. Treat your need to leave as just a part of the process of playing; after all, it is. Don’t blame yourself, or even the people who might be causing all the problems. Sometimes you’re causing the problems because you’re unhappy. Regardless, take this experience as an opportunity to learn what doesn’t work and to acquire lessons that will help you get the next gig.

Stand Up For Yourself
When an unprofessional bandleader is faced with a bandmember leaving, he or she will often try to appeal to your emotions to keep you around. They might “guilt trip you,” make you mad, or make you feel bad for being such a lousy team player. Let them try. In the end, if a situation is unhealthy for you, it’s not likely to get better. And an unhealthy situation makes for an unhealthy, unhappy you.

If all else fails, tell them you’re sure they’ll get a replacement who’s far more into the gig than you are. If the problem is just an incompatibility issue, you might even suggest someone else you think could handle the gig.

“Musical Differences“ Happen
The short-lived “hobby band” I mentioned earlier began with a collection of American and Irish folk songs and some Christian standards arranged for acoustic guitars, flute, vocal, and hand percussion. The results were very eclectic, and a really nice departure for me. By the end, we were trying to learn tunes by The Everly Brothers and The Eagles, and I was tapping out time on a kit.

There’s a huge disconnect there. If you find a gig morphing into something different and you don’t like the change, don’t feel too badly. These things really do happen. If the rest of the group is moving in a different direction, that’s fine; if you’re not willing to go with them, you’re not obliged to. Wish them the best and look even harder for a group that plays the kind of music you want to play.

Quitting a musical situation is never pleasant. Americans live in a culture that encourages us to stick around, hang in there, and try to make the best of things. But by doing that, you’re denying yourself growth as a musician, as well as happiness. Everyone has horror stories about bad gigs and horrible bandleaders; the trick is not to avoid them, but to know when to get out when it’s unhealthy for you. You’ll be better off for it, and so will your playing.
In the fifteen years since Modern Drummer first became acquainted with Brian Reitzell, the musician has pointed his creativity and industriousness in multiple and fascinating directions.

Back in 1994, Reitzell had begun to garner notice as the drummer in latter-day Redd Kross, the infamous LA psych-punk band fronted by genius pop culture–obsessed brothers Steve and Jeff McDonald. Today Reitzell is a film music producer who collaborates with cutting-edge directors like Mike Mills, Sofia Coppola, and David Slade, and with alternative music icons like Air’s Nicolas Godin and Jean-Benoit Dunckel, My Bloody Valen-tine’s Kevin Shields, and Spoon’s Britt Daniel.

After playing drums on Air’s score to Sofia Coppola’s directorial debut, The Virgin Suicides, and then acting as music supervisor on CQ by Sofia’s brother Roman Coppola, Reitzell refined his role of soundtrack “auteur” on Sofia’s hit Lost In Translation, starring Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson. That’s when Reitzell’s phone really started ringing, as producers and directors took note of his thoughtful juxtaposition of tracks by artists like Squarepusher and The Jesus And Mary Chain, as well as his own original compositions with long-time associate Roger Joseph Manning.

Soundtracks to the films Friday Night Lights, Thumbucker, Marie Antoinette, and Stranger Than Fiction followed, leading us up to his most recent release, the score to David Slade’s modern-day vampire film 30 Days Of Night. On 30 Days Reitzell was able to fully indulge all of his disparate passions—deep research, musical invention (literally—see the photos), prepared percussion, mixing experimentation—in the service of making completely unique and utterly horrifying auditory statements.

Reitzell’s Through The Park studio, located in the Griffith Park suburb of LA, is so-named because of its hop-skip-and-a-jump proximity to his home in Silver Lake. While in Anaheim for the winter NAMM show, Modern Drummer made the hour’s ride north to visit Reitzell’s den of musical invention.

Like most working studios today, Through The Park is sensibly sized, with efficiently laid-out “dead” and “live” rooms, an iso room, and a comfy lounge. The control room is the largest space—in fact, it’s probably bigger than it looks, when you take into account the abundance of old-school and contemporary gear Reitzell will have set up for any given project. It’s all meticulously arranged, though, as Reitzell explains, because he needs to be able to access any sound, any effect, when inspiration hits. So, yes, it’s a veritable museum of coveted gear, but it’s a living, breathing museum, capable of producing almost any idea that comes into Brian’s always-searching musical mind.

For a full interview with Brian Reitzell, in which he expands on his idiosyncratic studio concepts, go to moderndrummer.com. In the mean time, check out these shots, along with Brian’s commentary. It’s inspiring stuff.
**Equal Parts Home Depot And Pro Drum Shop**

With *30 Days Of Night* I needed to do a lot of experimentation. I just felt that if I was running away from someone who was trying to kill me, in my head I wouldn’t be hearing Mozart or an orchestra; it would be such a new and frightening experience, so I decided I needed to create sounds that were new, or, rather, unfamiliar.

I’m obsessed with things spinning. I love effects like vibrato and tremolo, and glass harmonicas. One day I thought, Well, a pottery wheel spins, and it’s got a foot pedal. So I did a couple days of research and found one called “The Whisper,” whose motor is completely quiet. The thing sat in the corner of my studio for three months, and then one day I got an idea and ran off to Home Depot. I bought a length of corrugated black tube that we fastened together into a circle. Then we cut holes at twelve and six o’clock and shock-mounted Shure SM-57 microphones to it with foam. Then we affixed the tube to cymbal stands using bungee cable, so that it would kind of float above the pottery wheel. We mounted a mallet in the center of the pottery wheel and let it rest on the tube, and as it spins around the tube, because the tube is corrugated, it creates this really interesting sound. The faster it would spin, the higher the pitch would be—the perfect Doppler effect. We call it “the black death tube.”

Then I got the idea to create the world’s most ridiculous drum machine or step sequencer. So I took a bunch of cymbals and set them up around the pottery wheel, replaced the mallet with a stick, and created sort of a cymbal machine. In the picture you can see some Kepplinger cymbals and some bronze Hammerax Hell Bells that are made by a genius in Florida, John Stannard. The effect sounded great in the movie, and I was able to play things with the cymbal machine that are physically impossible.

Of course these effects can be made artificially with all sorts of plug-ins, but I find it so much more interesting and so much deeper an experience creating the real thing.

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**Getting Prepared**

The “prepared” kit I’ve set up here is the bass drum from a vintage ’60s Sonor kit, a clear Ludwig acrylic tom, an amazing Radio King 13” tom that looks like it’s been at the bottom of the ocean for a hundred years but that sounds unbelievable—just a thuddy boom—and the snare drum is an old Ludwig 15” marching drum with a beautiful wood hoop on the bottom.

I’ve always been interested in creating different sounds: what a drum sounds like struck a certain way or treated a certain way, and then how it’s recorded. So I spend quite a bit of time preparing the drums. In this particular setup I mostly had off-skin heads on single-headed drums. Those drums were so quiet that I couldn’t even sit on a drum stool because it would make little creaky sounds. So I had to sit on a horrible white chair with a blanket on it. I was playing as softly as humanly possible and then cranking the mic and cranking the compression. You end up with the world’s biggest drum sound, like a Phil Spector record times twenty. If I want a big sound, I won’t just tune the drum wide open and play it in a live room. There are all sorts of things you can put around the drums, like gongs and cymbals, that will resonate within the whole ambience of the room.

So that’s what I mean by “prepared” drums. And it’s not all retro; I’m not trying to do Abbey Road. I’m just trying to get different emotional qualities out of the drums.

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**We’re All Connected**

The patch bay is the most expensive thing in the room, and it allows me to patch MIDI, video, all the rooms, every piece of gear, turntables, the Fleximix, the tape machines, the computer—everything. It’s very sophisticated.

The stacks of records tend to be soundtracks or things that I either like or that I’m trying to avoid. And then the other ones are for research. On the very top right is a turntable, so I can play my records into the computer.
Pet Sounds?

All these drum machines were set up for a particular project I was working on, a remix of a TV Eyes track. [TV Eyes is Reitze’s band with Roger Joseph Manning and Jason Falkner.] Most of them are integrated, they’re able to talk to each other. And all of them go into the console, so each has a fader, and in some cases two faders. What I can do is program all these different machines to create one extremely complex beat, and then as it’s playing I can mix it in real time. That way it’s not like I’m just sitting there, hitting “play” and the machine is going straight into Pro Tools or whatever. I can actually play like I would as a drummer. Then there are Simmons and the Cwezman modular synths in the rack to the right, and under the console are some Moog Taurus bass pedals. So I can pull up a chair, sit at my console, and create and perform music.

The red “suitcase” on the floor is a mini Simmons kit. It’s one of my favorite pieces, but it’s actually extremely impractical. It’s the first-generation Simmons material, which is the riot shield material that Bill Bruford used to great measure. New Order used to use one of those on stage, too; bass player Peter Hook would play drum fills on it. I use it to play the same way you would use an Octapad or any sort of trigger. That is active while I’m playing with drum machines, in case I want to play along. I can sit on the floor with my drumsticks and play fills or whatever.

But this equipment is not always set up like that. For the next project there might be a Hammond B3 organ there, or there might be a refrigerator that’s sending out electric charges to animals. Who knows.

Old World/New World

The shot on top is my prepared piano in the live room. The piano isn’t actually prepared in this shot but is about to be, which is why I leave all the wood panels off of it. This allows me to bow the strings, tap them with mallets, pluck them, or whatever. The piano is my favorite percussion instrument.

All the rooms are wired, meaning there are patch panels so you can plug into the wall, or I can send something back the other way.

In the bottom shot the piece of gear on the right that looks like a giant hat box on a cymbal stand is a Maestro Rover. It’s like a Leslie: It has a speaker in it that revolves. But a Leslie only has two speeds—fast and slow. The Maestro has a foot pedal that allows you to go from zero to very fast.

The wooden box to its left is the world’s first drum machine, the Wurlitzer Sideman. It’s from 1952, and was designed to sit next to your organ. It’s a large, hundred-pound beat box, and it’s got the most insane low end you ever heard. There’s no snare drum sound, just wood blocks and bass drums, maracas, cymbals...though there is something called a “brush,” which is kind of like a snare, I guess. Mechanically, it’s made up of cylinders that spin around, and each has its own vacuum tube, so the sounds are just massively fat. Why someone doesn’t make a new version of something like this….
Exploding onto the scene

Introducing Elite Pro, Toca’s new line of Congas and Bongos. A must have for up and comers looking to step up to the next level, just like these talented new Toca artists. They’ll shatter sound waves on any stage. For more hot instruments, visit tocapercussion.com
Buddy Miles and Jimi Hendrix were both part of the cultural revolution that swept the nation in the ‘60s in an attempt to create some peace on the planet. The music that they helped create has captured several generations of fans and shows no signs of diminishing in influence around the world. This past March, after a career marked by shining highs and excruciating lows, Miles succumbed to health issues that had plagued him for years.

Miles and Hendrix had a lot in common. They both started out as sidemen on the R&B “chitlin’ circuit,” playing traditional soul and blues, in bow ties and shiny tuxedo band uniforms. And they both ended up superstars playing a whole new genre of psychedelic blues/rock to huge audiences around the world, wearing rainbow-colored psychedelic duds...in Buddy’s case, made out of actual American flags, with a drumset to match!

Buddy Miles developed a powerful, straight-ahead style that reminded one of a Mack truck cruising down the interstate—strong, immovable, and in the groove. “I don’t have any special drum technique,” he once modestly said. “My drum technique has always come from the heart.”

by Jim Payne
Beginnings

George Miles—nicknamed Buddy after “the world’s greatest drummer,” Buddy Rich—was born in 1947 in Omaha, Nebraska, and got an early musical education listening to the jazz that was played at home. (His father was a bassist who had played with Count Basie, Dexter Gordon, and Duke Ellington.) Chick Webb, Cozy Cole, Buddy Rich, Louie Bellson, and Gene Krupa were his early influences.

At the same time, Buddy was listening to the R&B sounds of drummer Al Jackson Jr., who was the house drummer at Stax Records in Memphis, and to Bernard Purdie, who played with Aretha Franklin.

Miles’ self-taught routine began with the usual spoons and forks on trash cans in the back yard. Then one night when he was thirteen, the drummer in his father’s band, The Bebops, showed up late. Buddy took over and his career began.

When he was still a teenager, Buddy left high school and went on the road with established R&B acts The Ink Spots, Ruby & The Romantics, and The Delfonics. This was the era of smooth vocals, sharp suits, choreographed dance moves, and boy-meets-girl love songs—soulful music that ignored social issues and instead offered solace and a good time. But “them changes” were already starting to happen.

First Meeting

Buddy met Jimi Hendrix in Montreal in 1964, when Miles was with The Delfonics (“La-La Means I Love You,” “Didn’t I Blow Your Mind This Time”) and Hendrix was with the high-energy R&B group The Isley Brothers (“Shout,” “Twist & Shout”). The two jammed and traded phone numbers, but soon after Jimi left for England and formed The Jimi Hendrix Experience.

Wilson Pickett And The Electric Flag

Buddy went back on the R&B circuit with “The Wicked” Wilson Pickett, playing the shouters’ hits “Mustang Sally” and “In The Midnight Hour.” One night, while he was hanging out with Cream drummer Ginger Baker at the Brooklyn Fox Theater—at a show that also featured The Who, Smokey Robinson, and Mitch Ryder—a young, wooly-haired, white guitarist came over and introduced himself as Michael Bloomfield.

Bloomfield and keyboardist Barry Goldberg invited Buddy to jam with them at Café Au Go Go on Bleecker St. and then asked him to come to San Francisco to join their new band, The Electric Flag. Suitably awed by the budding guitar genius’ energy and chops, Buddy made the trip west, joined the band on drums, and sang lead. “Otis Redding was a god to me when it came to singing,” Miles recalled, “and my main mentor at the time was Al Jackson. Those two guys were really what I was all about back then.”

Buddy would also credit Roger Hawkins of Fame Studios, as well as Ray Lucas, an under-appreciated drummer who played with King Curtis, as being particularly influential on him.

Monterey Pop Festival

A lot happened at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival, including the Electric Flag receiving three standing ovations for their debut set. But it was The Jimi Hendrix Experience that stole the show. After his sojourn in the UK, Jimi had returned to the US with a white, British rhythm section. To quote James Brown’s “Get On The Goodfoot,” “The long-haired hippies [Mitch Mitchell on drums and Noel Redding on bass] and the Afro-black [Hendrix] all got together across the tracks, and they partied.” They also set the music world on its ear.
Presumably Buddy was in the wings at Monterey when Hendrix sacrificed his beloved guitar by setting it on fire, smashing it to pieces, and throwing what was left of it out to the fans. Buddy and Jimi jammed afterwards, reestablishing their connection. But again they went their separate ways.

The next year The Electric Flag recorded the tight, well-arranged album A Long Time Comin’, on which Buddy sang and played some very solid grooves in a variety of styles. Shortly thereafter, however, Bloomfield quit his own band.

**The Buddy Miles Express And John McLaughlin**

Buddy responded by founding The Buddy Miles Express, whose first two albums, Expressway To Your Skull and Electric Church were co-produced by Hendrix.

Buddy then played “some amazing ‘boogaloo’ drums,” recalls John McLaughlin, on the Miles Davis guitarist’s Devotion album. McLaughlin had just recorded Emergency with The Tony Williams Lifetime, and would shortly form The Mahavishnu Orchestra with Billy Cobham on drums. Buddy was in good company.

Meanwhile, Hendrix’s career was skyrocketing. Mitch Mitchell’s fluid, rocking, Elvin Jones-ish drumming style was the perfect complement to Hendrix’s music on the powerful and original Are You Experienced and Axis: Bold As Love albums. But on Jimi’s third album, Electric Ladyland, Buddy took over for Mitchell on “Rainy Day, Dream Away”/“Still Raining, Still Dreaming,” on which Buddy laid down a strong, tasteful shuffle beat.

**“Rainy Day, Dream Away”**

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**Band Of Gypsies**

Following Electric Ladyland—which, besides Buddy, featured several other well-known musicians such as Traffic’s Steve Winwood and Dave Mason and Jefferson Airplane’s Jack Casady—Hendrix decided to change personnel. “I think Jimi wanted a more simplified version of drums after a while,” Miles recalled later. “And I think that’s the reason he wanted me to be the drummer in Band Of Gypsies.”

The music on Band Of Gypsies’ lone album—essentially a distillation of the group’s two 1969/70 New Year’s Eve sets—is widely considered to be the highlight of Buddy Miles’ career. Featuring powerful groove-oriented tunes, like the Miles-written and -sung “Them Changes,” offset by slower, longer workouts, such as the famous anti-war song “Machine Gun.” Band Of Gypsies represents Jimi’s exploration of a more soulful direction. Unfortunately, the guitarist’s untimely death in 1970 put an end to this promising phase of Buddy’s career.

**“Machine Gun”**

![Musical notation]

**“Them Changes”**

![Musical notation]

**Guitar/Bass Riff**

![Musical notation]

**Verse**

![Musical notation]
In 1972 Miles co-headlined the album Carlos Santana & Buddy Miles: Live!, which was recorded inside an extinct volcano in Hawaii. Buddy sang and played drums on his set, and also performed during Santana’s set—playing some searing blues guitar! Like Hendrix, Buddy was a lefty playing a conventionally strung right-handed guitar upside down. So, in a sense, Buddy was actually a lefty playing drums set up for a righty. (Lenny White has this same “problem.”)

**“Them Changes” Again**
Between 1976 and 1978, and again from 1982 to 1985, Buddy ran into some bumps in the road, spending time in the San Quentin and Chico, California correctional facilities for drug-related thefts. While in jail he taught music and percussion, led and toured with the prison band, and then came out and reinvented himself yet again with his usual energy and perseverance.

In 1988 he formed a new Buddy Miles band and recorded Back On The Tracks, at the time saying, “I’ll probably destroy my drum-set from over-excitement the first time we play out.”

**“Buddy Raisin”**
While playing again with Santana in the ’80s, Miles got the call to sing lead on a series of TV commercials featuring animated characters called The California Raisins. The spots were wildly popular, and Buddy—now nicknamed Buddy Raisin—was off and running again, recording two albums of classic R&B and Motown songs, his first love.

**The Future?**
Buddy once said, “A young drummer today has to have determination; there are good days ahead for young drummers.” When it’s all said and done, he recalled, “You think about drumming and singing your best, and that’s it.”

Jim Payne is a drummer/bandleader performing and teaching out of NYC. He’d like to thank Robert Santelli for the use of several quotes from his 1988 interview with Buddy Miles for Modern Drummer. For more on Jim, go to www.funkydrummer.com.

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RECORDINGS

PAT METHENY DAY TRIP ★★★★★
Every now and then, in addition to fronting his own group, guitarist Pat Metheny puts together a trio. Past ones (Bob Moses/Jaco Pastorius, Bill Stewart/Larry Grenadier) have contained strong musical personalities, lending each trio its own characteristics, and Metheny’s latest lineup is no exception. With ANTONIO SANCHEZ on drums and CHRISTIAN McBRIE on bass, this trio has a transparent sound, focusing on touch and nimbleness. While McBride keeps things grounded harmonically and rhythmically, Sanchez deftly peppers the groove with accents for Metheny’s fret-board flights. Sanchez’s drumming is fast, inventive, and propulsive throughout, and this format offers an excellent opportunity to hear him. (Nonesuch) Martin Patmos

PAINT IT BLACK ★★★★★
NEW LEXICON
Fronted by vocalist Don Yemin, also of revered punk act Lifetime, Paint It Black kicks the melodic hardcore foundation of that band to the next level with a barrage of aggressive guitars aided and abetted by drummer JARED SHAVELSON’s immensely powerful patterns. Shavelson’s hard-hitting, up-tempo punk blasts mean war, barreling down the speakers like sonic rounds of ammo, while his half-timed, tom-laden breakdowns explode with enough ferocity to register on the Richter scale. (Jade Tree) Waled Rashidi

THE KEEPNEWS COLLECTION

BILL EVANS TRIO PORTRAIT IN JAZZ ★★★★★
THELONIOUS MONK BRILLIANT CORNERS ★★★★★
MILT JACKSON AND WES MONTGOMERY BAGS MEETS WES! ★★★★★
Tapping a mother lode of classic jazz, the ongoing “Keepnews Collection” reissue series honors producer Orrin Keepnews’ legacy. Spruced up with crisp 24-bit mastering from original masters, the discs also include bonus alternate takes and informative notes from the honoree. The Riverside catalog of the ’50s and ’60s is the series’ gold vein. Bill Evans’ classic Portrait in Jazz teams PAUL MOTIAN with bassist Scott LaFaro, creating a collaboration that would forever imprint the sound of the jazz piano trio. Motian’s sensitivity and ease is stunning. The amazing Brilliant Corners is a quirky, hip funhouse and one of Thelonious Monk’s finest recordings. MAX ROACH finds elegance and grit within the group’s angular, fractured approach to swinging while Sonny Rollins’ tenor is endlessly inventive. And dig Max’s combined timpani/kit surge on “Barsha Swing.” Still fresh today. In a more rootsy affair, PHILLY JOE JONES lays down smooth, hard-swinging blues behind co-leaders Wes Montgomery and Milt Jackson on Bags Meets Wes! With Wynton Kelly (piano) and Sam Jones (bass), it’s a dream team match-up. Swinging feel for miles. Expect the entire series to capture masters at their peaks. (Riverside) Jeff Potter

Ratings Scale
★★★★★ Classic
★★★★ Excellent
★★★ Good
★★ Fair
★ Poor

M•P•TU ★★★★★
M•P•TU’s debut combines the guffural with the technological for a sound that’s like tossing your laptop into a swamp. The swamp dominates, but the laptop makes some cool noises as it sinks to the bottom. PAT MASTELOTTA is largely responsible for both M•P•TU’s deep groove and its more experimental knob-twiddling impulses. His drum tone is big, yet soft around the edges, which suits the bluesy mid-tempo vibe of the songs. He sticks to tasty, accessible patterns and folds in some nifty production tricks for a distinctly modern touch. Guitarist Phil Brown responds in kind with wacky but wonderful Jeff Beck–like trills. (ATCO) Michael Parillo

MY MORNING JACKET ★★★★★
EVIL URGES
My Morning Jacket don’t just carry a torch for primo classic rock; they wave a tattered freak flag woven from disparate threads linking them to Zeppelin, Neil Young, Santana, and The Allman Bros. And as with most great classic rockers, MMJ has a tasteful drummer holding it down and navigating the sharp turns. PATRICK HALLAHAN’s playing on Evil Urges proves he’s a big reason the band comes across as more than revisionists. The drummer’s machine-like meter and accents give an oddly effective pulse to the weepy strains of “Smokin’ From Shootin.” And the minimalist hip-hop thump he puts to “Highly Suspicious” makes you take notice of the otherwise disposable track. (ATO) Patrick Berkery

MUSICAL DISTRY

BROOKE SOFFERMAN ★★★★★
FINE WHINES
New England Conservatory Of Music alum (and current faculty member) BROOKE SOFFERMAN displays formidable technique, musicality, and compositional skill on his newest neo-jazz recording, Fine Whines. All are evident on “Metric Monikulation,” where Sofferman alternates fast waltz-time and odd-metered patterns over a ’60s post-bop melody and supports an inventive sax solo from Jerry Bergonzi. The reggae/Latin hybrid “Some Beach” contains some impressive side-sticking, and Sofferman’s loose snare is given the ultimate second-line treatment over a wild 7/4 take on the “Star Wars Imperial March” theme. With one eye on tradition but noticeably pushing forward, Sofferman is a player to watch. (www.summitrecords.com) Ilya Stemkovsky

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BRUFORD BORSTLAP IN TWO MINDS ★★★★★

Freed from the typical band format, BILL BRUFORD is allowed to ramble, bang, and pounce as he hasn’t in years on In Two Minds. Bruford is joined by keyboardist Michiel Borstlap here, and the drummer stretches like mad, exploring practically every aspect of his multifaceted style. Bill clangs Chinese percussion with subtle tom drops in “Kinship,” plays Omar Hakim to Borstlap’s Joe Zawinul on “From The Source,” and even drops more funky skank bombs on “Flirt.” Bruford sounds playful and joyful throughout, whether playing pointillist snare riffs or pouncing his toms to the breaking point. Bruford’s been surprisingly prolific of late, and In Two Minds is the best of his recent batch. Ken Micallef

GAVIN HARRISON & 05RIC DROP ★★★★★

From the technically challenging, sonically powerful opening drumset patterns of “Unsettled,” master drummer Gavin Harrison makes a serious statement that he is a major driving force in today’s modern prog drumming movement. Harrison’s melodic, in-your-face drumming outshines the less-rememberable vocals of 05ric on this odd meter-laden material, making it a showcase for Harrison’s highly musical, commanding feel and spot-on, advanced technique. (www.myspace.com/gavinharrison05ric) Mike Haid

JAZZ DRUM SET INDEPENDENCE: 3/4, 4/4, AND 5/4 TIME SIGNATURES BY STEVE FIDYK ★★★★★

BOOK LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE $14.95

Jazz Drum Set Independence covers a nice cross-section of topics related to independence at the set. Author Fidyk of course stresses swing, groove, and musicality while intending to help students develop their balance, feel, coordination, and reading ability on the kit. Basically a collection of ostinatos, the book tackles each of the respective time signatures, applying rhythmic warm-ups, single-measure motifs, and 12- and 32-measure phrases, which get gradually more advanced along the way. Want to get inside Joe Morello’s playing on Time Out? Take five (years) and check this out. (Mel Bay) Ilya Stemkovsky

AFRO-CARIBBEAN GROOVES FOR DRUMSET BY JEAN-PHILIPPE FANFANT ★★★★★

BOOK/CD LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED $25

Afro-Caribbean Grooves For Drumset makes up in authenticity what it lacks in heft. Having laid down such grooves on hundreds of dance discs, Fanfant offers a modern survey of island rhythms as applied to drumset. The usual favorites (meringue, bomba, songo) are here, but we’re also treated to plenty of Caribbean gems unfamiliar to average “mainlanders” (bouyon, chaval bwa, konpa). On the CD, Fanfant demonstrates grooves with irresistible feel, both alone and with bass. Unfortunately, there are no band tracks to illuminate the various styles, so extra homework is required via the included discography. Still, this package is concise, fun, and quite usable. (Sher Music) Jeff Potter

KOSA ELEVEN/LIVE 2006 DVD LEVEL: ALL $29.95 ★★★★★

There’s a wealth of information dispensed on this DVD. The diverse collection of artists is striking and presents a “no borders” approach to drumming, rhythm, and music in general. The varied percussion clips include expressive, masterful solos from world percussion maestro GLEN VELEZ and conga superstar GIOVANNI HIDALGO. Drumset instruction is handled by a rich roster as well: a motif exercise by ANTONIO SANCHEZ, a time/groove solo by a singing BERNARD PURDIE, and an informative how-to of uptempo brush technique by the estimable CLAYTON CAMERON. Highly re-watchable. (Hudson) Ilya Stemkovsky

PETER ERSKINE TRIO STANDARDS ★★★★★

Dually released on Peter Erskine’s Fuzzy Music label, Standards and Worth The Wait feature swinging material performed in the drummer’s glistening, occasionally minimalist style. Erskine has been consciously paring back his style ever since his bombastic Weather Report days, to where he now resembles a highly skilled dancer—the Nureyev of the skins, if you will. Standards is a compelling trio outing, but Erskine really cuts loose on Worth The Wait, a big band blowout accompanied by trumpeter Tim Hagans. Kick-butt solos abound (“Drum Row”) as does stupendous ensemble playing (“Plan B,” “Worth the Wait”). A modern master at the top of his game. (Fuzzy Music) Ken Micallef

LOUIE & CLARK EXPEDITION 2 ★★★★★

LOUIE BELLSON shines here as both big band composer and kickin’ drummer. Teamed with another great elder statesman, trumpeter Clark Terry, the ageless Bellson delivers a sparkling, swinging session with seventeen-piece band. One highlight features a traps trio with guests Kenny Washington and Sylvia Cuenca. Upbeat vibes beam throughout. (Percussion Power) Jeff Potter

THE WEAKER SIDE ★★★★★

BY DOM FAMULARO AND STEPHANE CHAMBERLAND BOOK LEVEL: BEGINNER TO INTERMEDIATE $10.95

At first glance this book seems aimed at building the left hand, bringing it in line with the right. This assumption is correct, but the approach of this book goes further. The exercises are written with notes above and below a line, for a visual strong/weak limb reference that can be used with hands, feet, or hand/foot combinations. The exercises move through 8ths, triplets, 16ths, and flams with enough material for you to work through a page a week, for a year. Though it features good chops-builders somewhat reminiscent of the material in Stick Control, it’s the book’s focus on developing balanced technique among the limbs that is noteworthy. (Widom Media, distributed by Alfred) Martin Patmos

STICK TRICKS BY CHIP RITTER DVD LEVEL: ALL $24.95 ★★★★★

A drummer’s life is filled with difficult rudiments and complicated rhythmic patterns. Chip Ritter’s Stick Tricks DVD gives us a well-needed break from all that. The DVD is filled with thirteen separate tricks/chapters, all of which include step-by-step instruction, both at normal speed and via a slow-motion view of stick and hand movement. Tricks vary from simple (“Raise Your Hand On The And”) to fairly difficult (“Juggle Three Sticks”). Either way, it’s all about adding a little flair to your performance and having a whole lot of fun. (Mel Bay) Fran Azzarto
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Indy Quickies

This year, the annual MEINL DRUM FESTIVAL is expanding into a two-day event. On Saturday, September 6, world-class drummers Benny Greb, Jost Nickel, and Thomas Lang will conduct ninety-minute masterclasses. Greb will lecture on "universal drumming vocabulary for every situation." Jost will discuss "phrasing and orchestration," and Lang will focus on "the left side." All three drummers will also participate in an interactive panel discussion with festival attendees. Sunday’s festivities will include concert performances from Greb, Nickel, Lang, Jaska Raatikainen, and Chris Coleman.

www.meinldrumfestival.com

The KOSA INTERNATIONAL PERCUSSION WORKSHOP will take place July 30–August 3 at Castleton State College in Vermont. Attendees are treated to lessons, clinics, and masterclasses in a diverse range of styles and techniques, including drumset, classical percussion, Brazilian, Arabic, and Indian hand drumming, Latin and Afro-Cuban rhythms, and Japanese taiko drumming.

The faculty at this year’s workshop includes Memo Acevedo (Afro-Columbian, Brazilian percussion), Chester Thompson (fusion), Ignacio Berroa (Cuban-jazz), Jason Bittner (heavy metal), Rajna Swaminathan (South Indian percussion), Cyro Baptista (Latin percussion), Glen Velez (frame drumming), Nancy Zeltsman (marimba), and Emil Richards (jazz vibraphone).

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In Memoriam

John Sherman Fowler
Connecticut-based drummer John Sherman Fowler died this past March 21 after a sudden, brief illness. He was forty-two. Fowler was best known for his tenure with hard rock band Steelheart, whose Top-20 hit "I'll Never Let You Go (Angel Eyes)" went gold in 1990. The drummer also performed with many other bands across several musical genres, most recently The Voodoo Jets, Smoke, and Hipnotic. In addition, John taught drums at Eastcoast Music in Danbury, Connecticut.

Donations on behalf of John’s son, Sebastian, can be made to The Sebastian Fowler Rocks Memorial Fund, P.O. Box 819, Orange, CT 06477.

Stu Nevitt
Stu Nevitt, co-founder, composer, and drummer/percussionist of the eclectic world beat band Shadowfax, died this past March at his home in Rio Rancho, New Mexico of complications from diabetes and heart disease. He was fifty-six.

Nevitt and his bandmates in Shadowfax won a Grammy award in 1988 for their album Folksongs For A Nuclear Village, and they were nominated again in 1992 for the album Esperanto. The group stopped recording and touring in 1995.


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Replicating The R30

Rather than shelling out $30,000 to buy one of the limited-edition Neil Peart R30 commemorative drumkits, Missouri drummer Steve Noonan decided to put together his own version of the legendary Rush drummer’s setup.

All of the drums in this kit are maple DW Collector Series in hard satin cherry finish with 24K gold-plated hardware. (Neil used a similarly finished drumset while touring in support of Rush’s 2002 album, Vapor Trails.) The kit consists of 7x8, 7x10, 8x12, and 9x13 rack toms, 12x15, 13x15, 16x16, and 16x18 floor toms, 5½x14 and 4x13 snare drums, and an 18x22 kick (“For a little added depth,” says Noonan).

Steve’s Sabian Paragon cymbal setup consists of an 8” splash, two 10” splashes, a pair of 13” and 14” hi-hats, two 16” crashes, 18” and 20” crashes, 19” and 20” Chinas, and a 22” ride. All of the hardware and pedals are DW 9000 series, including the remote pedal for the 14” hi-hats.

Steve would like to thank Jim Uding and the crew at Drum Headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri for their help in putting this kit together.

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