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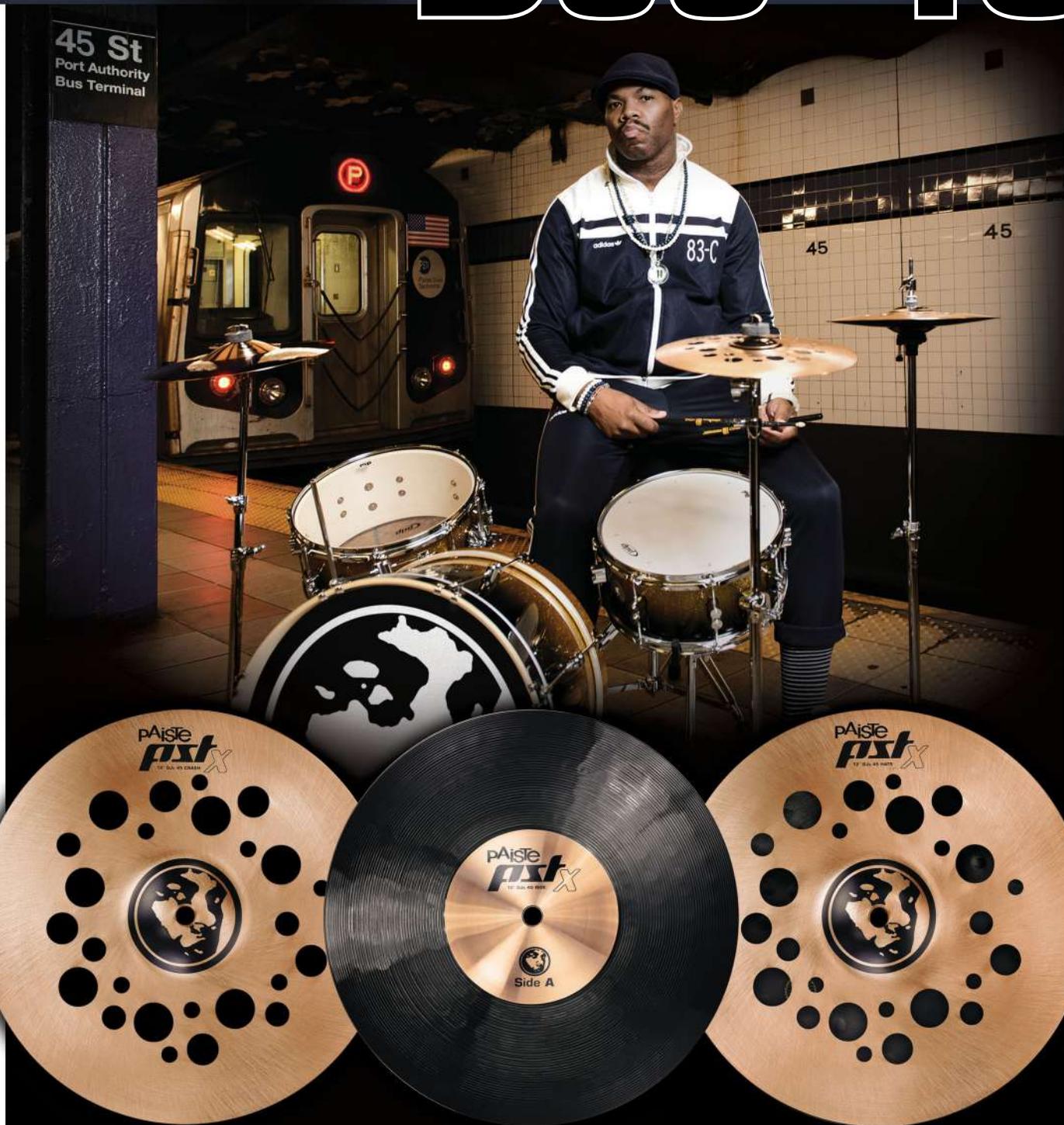
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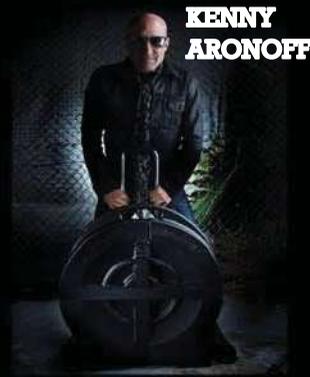


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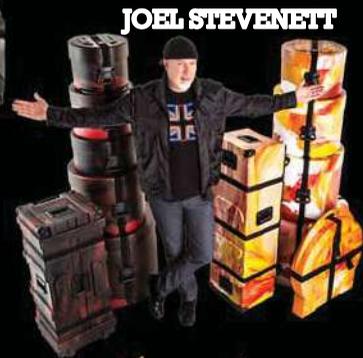
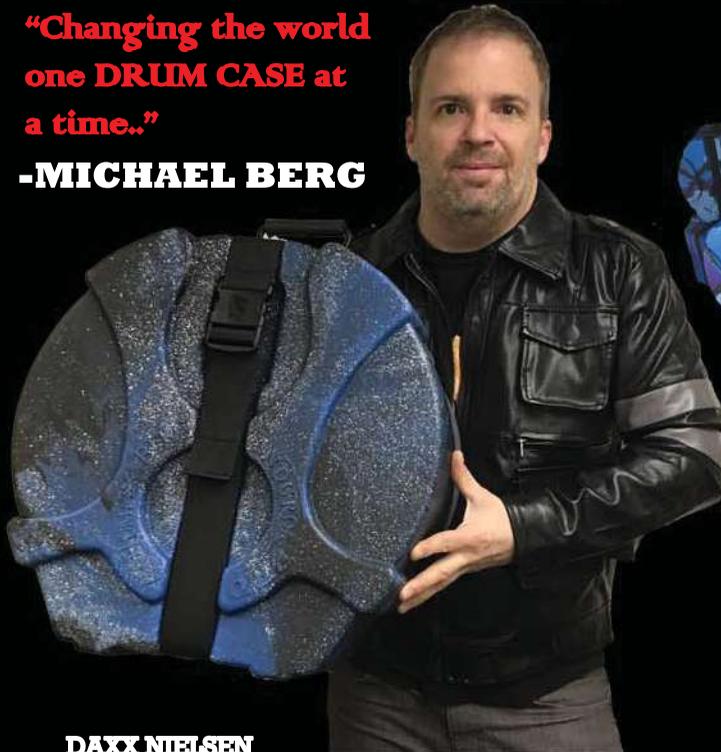
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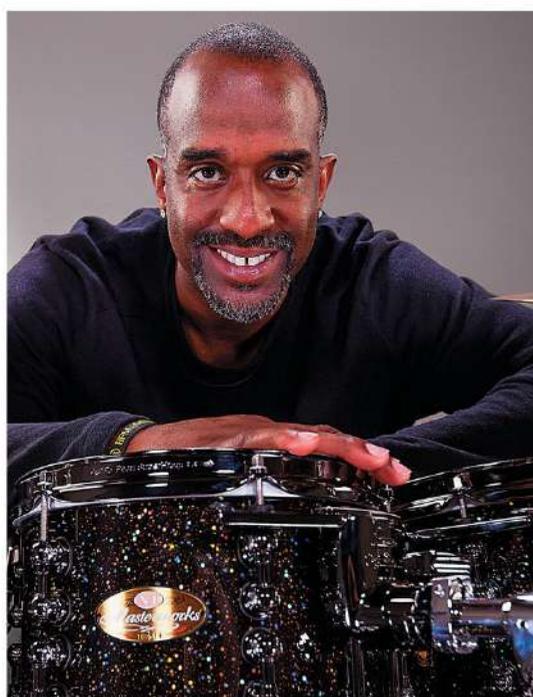
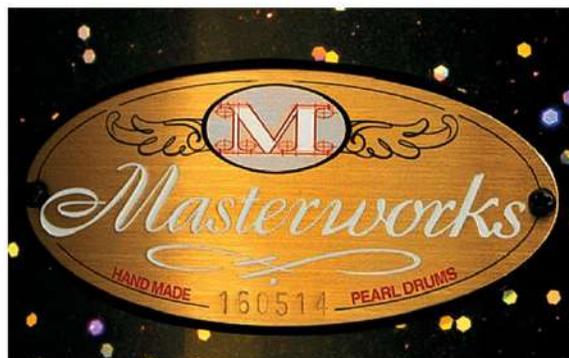
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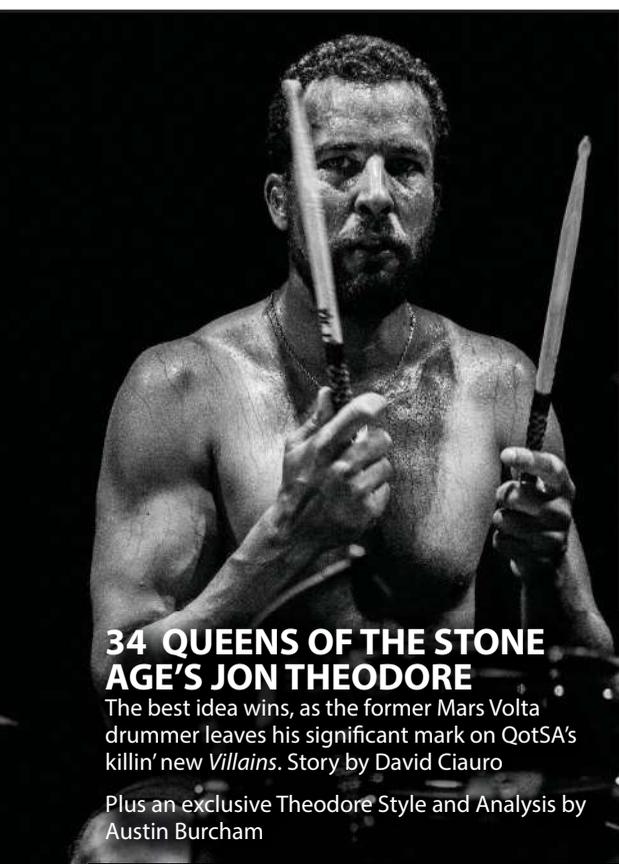
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AN EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

Learn to Love Easy

There's a folksy old saying that goes something like, "People sure do make things more difficult than they need to." We've all made that observation at one time or another about others—and, let's be honest, at times we even make it about ourselves. We should, at least.

Sometimes we'll ignore replacing an outmoded, high-maintenance piece of gear, perhaps out of some misplaced sense of romance, or willful ignorance: *Yeah, my bass drum pedal breaks a lot and squeaks something fierce, but I've been playing it forever and a new one is going to feel weird and.... Wait a minute—what am I thinking? I need a new pedal!*

On the other end of the spectrum, we can get so wrapped up in our ever-increasing ability to "improve" our beats with computer software that we find ourselves staring bleary-eyed at a monitor at 4 A.M., microscopically nudging backbeats in search of some perfect-yet-still-human-feeling groove. And then it hits us like a ton of bricks that one of the reasons we love real live players like Steve Jordan and Bernard Purdie is because of their perfect-yet-still-human-feeling grooves. *Wait a minute—what am I thinking? I need to practice with a metronome more!*

A third way we can fall victim to overcomplication is in our musical choices. Perhaps this is the drummer's curse. We've been gifted with a glorious collection of objects that go boom and crash, and when we throw ourselves at them in a coordinated way, the sensation for us is so physically gratifying, we have to essentially stop ourselves from hitting them more than the music calls for. At least that's the way it seems sometimes. I mean, just sitting here at my desk typing this makes me want to run home right now and thrash around for a good hour. It's like a true addiction—our bodies literally yearn for the source of the sensation in its absence.

But how does this drumming jones relate to contributing to a harmful tendency to overcomplicate? Well, one of the insidious parts of addiction is that the more you do, the more you want. *Whoa, that Bonham lick I finally figured out is sounding pretty slick—I should do it in every verse of this song.* No, no you shouldn't—at least not just because you *can*. Two or three drinks, and you're oh so charming. Four or five, maybe not so much any more.

Now, serious up-and-coming professional musicians, especially those who work a lot with songwriters, tend to learn early on that they can communicate musical maturity—and therefore increase their hireability—by exhibiting self-control while still offering creative musical solutions, and by showing that they're listening at all times to what their fellow musicians are playing. On the contrary, not-so-mature musicians tend to be the ones who pollute party conversations with statements like, "That guy? He's terrible! Fusion drummers X, Y, and Z can play rings around him." And you're standing there thinking, *Somehow this dude isn't noticing that I'm wearing a White Stripes T-shirt.*

While I'm happy to debate the relative merits of Meg White's famously unadorned beats some other time, my primary point here is that while busy or complex drumming can be the perfect choice in some musical settings, in others it's the absolute worst choice. The mark of a true professional is having the ability to do a lot but the wisdom to know when to do a little.



Adam Budofsky
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What's Your Favorite Prog Drumming Record?



To coincide with this month's feature on twelve heartland prog-rock drumming albums, we asked our readers and social media followers for their own favorite prog records. Plenty of choices featuring drum legends such as Bill Bruford, Neil Peart, and Phil Collins topped the list, along with albums backed by current trailblazers like Matt Garstka, Gavin Harrison, and Mike Portnoy. This month's cover artist, Jon Theodore, got plenty of love as well, in part due to his output with the Mars Volta. Check out some of the responses.

King Crimson, *Red*. The entire sound of Bill Bruford's kit was as revolutionary as his creative playing, from the ring of his snare to the trashiness of the Zilco cymbal he fished out of a rehearsal room's trash can. His work on that album has inspired everything I've played since I first listened to it.

Greg Myles

Rush, *A Farewell to Kings*. It's one of my all-time favorites. Neil used loads of percussion on the album without making it sound out of place within the context of the songs. No triggering back then—he played the real thing!

Russ Dodge

Emerson, Lake, and Palmer, *Trilogy*. The quality of the songs, the quality of the recording, and the musicianship are all top notch. And Carl Palmer's use of the cowbell in the title track is amazing.

Joe Tymecki

My nod goes to Phil Collins on Genesis's *Foxtrot*. When it was released there was very little prog rock around. From the opening tune, "Watcher of the Skies," through "Supper's Ready," there are so many compelling rhythmic changes. And Collins' execution is flawless.

Michael Brauning

Tool, *Lateralus*. Technically it's brilliant, sure. But that's not the point. The creativity, sound, and thought behind each drum hit have made Danny Carey stand out for years. On this album, he became an absolute master. The title track is proof as to why he's a genius.

Iwan Elzinga

Bill Bruford's drumming on U.K.'s debut album, *U.K.*, is amazing. His drumming is tight and funky, and he creatively navigates the odd time signatures and rhythmic changes. Also, Bruford's use of Rototoms in his drumset sounds so colorful and unique.

Jesse Guterman

Focus, *Moving Waves*. Pierre van der Linden performs the familiar "Hocus Pocus" brilliantly. But he also provides jazz-influenced drumming throughout the album, making it a must for any prog-rock aficionado.

Joseph Howard

I always liked Virgil Donati's playing on *MoonBabies* by Planet X. It's slightly obscure—it's no Rush or Yes—but Donati is such a monster player. He can do things that don't seem humanly possible.

Ryan Alexander Bloom

I would have to say *Lizard* by King Crimson. Andrew McCulloch plays the most amazing, syncopated, and unconventional parts that oddly fit perfectly into the music. Give it a listen with headphones.

Lawrence Underwood

The Mars Volta, *De-Loused in the Comatorium*, or any other album Jon Theodore played with that group. No one can mix soul and complexity while remaining as tasty as Theodore.

Logan B.

I used to come home from school and play through Rush's *2112* nearly every night. The dramatic changes within the title track were a great way to practice different tempos and styles.

Dean Benjamin

For me it's Dream Theater's *Metropolis Part 2: Scenes From a Memory*. The songs flow seamlessly together, and Mike Portnoy's drumming is solid throughout the record. There are tasty drum fills and awesome patterns, especially in the opening medley and on "Scene Six: Home." Portnoy also pulls out all the stops in the last section of the closer, "Scene Nine: Finally Free." There are plenty of odd time signatures for the die-hard prog lovers too.

Shane Loudon

Tool's *Lateralus* and *10,000 Days* are two of my favorites. Danny Carey's rhythmic creativity and technique, distinct drum and cymbal sounds, human feel and dynamics, and mastery of seamlessly blending acoustic and electronic elements are all so awe-inspiring.

Anthony Dio

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Matt Greiner on August Burns Red's *Phantom Anthem*

Pinpoint precision, burning chops, and odd time signatures abound on the veteran metalcore group's latest offering.

Matt Greiner, the drummer for the seasoned metal band August Burns Red, deftly charges his way through the opening of the group's latest record, *Phantom Anthem*, with a barrage of double bass hairtas and blast beats. And throughout the rest of the album—released on October 6—he easily handles odd time signatures while adorning them with unique tom orchestrations, inventive patterns, and his signature use of splash cymbals and bells.

Explaining the odd groupings that launch the album's first single, "Invisible Enemy," Greiner says, "The beginning is a seven-note sequence of 16th notes that's repeated eight times before resetting and repeating. I think of it as a measure of 7/8 followed by a measure of 8/8. The bass drum pattern matches the guitar, while the right hand plays quarter notes and the snare bounces around to accentuate the rhythm."

Greiner says that the idea to implement unique splash and bell orchestrations was born before he picked up sticks for the first time. "Growing up, I was drawn to drumming because of the challenges it presented. I was mostly interested in progressive styles that utilized odd time signatures, fast tempos, and linear

Matt Greiner plays DW drums, including a 6.5x14 brass snare, 10" and 12" rack toms, a 16" floor tom, and a 20" bass drum. Greiner uses Zildjian cymbals, Remo drumheads, and Vic Firth sticks.

patterns. A friend of mine named Joe Walmer played drums in a local band called Blind Influence. I'd drive to his house every Sunday to watch his band practice and observe everything he did. After practice he'd show me rudiments and ideas on a pad. He used several splashes, bells, and China cymbals, and the idea of having so many effects cymbals really caught my attention. When I started August Burns Red in 2003, I purchased an LP Ice Bell, a 12" Wuhan China, and a 9" Zildjian A Custom splash. When we started writing music together, I incorporated the effects cymbals into the parts, and I've been doing it ever since."

Greiner followed a fairly strict practice regimen in preparation for tracking *Phantom Anthem*. "I printed out a calendar and scheduled days for each song's completion leading up to [entering] the [recording] studio," he says. "I also taped pieces of paper—one for each song—to the wall in my studio. I'd notate parts I wasn't happy with or parts that I needed to practice in order to get up to par. Each day I'd study the 'wall of work' to reflect on what needed to be refined."

"My goal in preparing for the studio is to avoid any surprises," Greiner continues. "When it's time to hit 'record,' I want to be confident about every part. You can't eliminate the surprise factor entirely, however, and I learned that lesson the hard way. Two days before I was scheduled to start recording, I got food poisoning. For the next six days I was out of commission. As a result we tracked guitars first, and I tracked drums when I was feeling healthy again. In the end everything worked out, but I wouldn't wish that experience on anyone!" **Willie Rose**

More New Releases

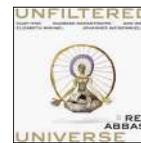
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ON TOUR



Roy Mayorga With Stone Sour

With the hot new album *Hydrograd* in hand and health issues put well behind him, the drummer is amped to be back on the road for Stone Sour's headlining tour.

With dates in Australia, Japan, Russia, the U.K., Europe, and the U.S., Stone Sour will be going nonstop well into the new year. During a recent recording session in New York City, Roy Mayorga told *Modern Drummer* that the stroke he suffered a few years ago prompted him to consider the task of touring differently. The incident—which seemed especially shocking considering how much energy and passion Mayorga exhibits on stage—forced him to reassess and adjust his technique, routines, and setup. “I lost a little bit of coordination and mobility for a moment,” Roy says. “I had to regain that and the feeling on my left side. It was a good learning process. I relearned how to play. Sitting up higher definitely helps. I’m not in as much pain as I used to be at the end of a show, and it feels better. [I have] more control. It’s kept me more focused, and I play more from the core. I don’t have any reminders that something’s wrong anymore.”

While his playing seems custom-made for the melodic metal of Stone Sour, “I don’t consider myself a metal drummer,” Mayorga says. “I’m a drummer that’s learned to adapt to a metal-band situation. Like with Soulfly [the raging tribal metal act he was in prior to Stone Sour], I adapted. I just basically assimilate and adapt to whatever is in front of me. That, to me, is the art—the art of adaption. That’s what I like to

Mayorga plays DW drums and Sabian cymbals, uses Promark sticks and Evans heads, and endorses products by D’Addario, Arturia, Samson, and Synthesizers.com.

convey to people. That’s what I’m about.”

Mayorga’s enthusiasm for drumming is undeniable. “Any time I get to play drums, I’m in!” Roy says. “I’m not the guy that lets someone else soundcheck for me, unless I can’t be there. I’m always the first guy on stage. I just love playing.”

That positivity extends to the entire band. Whether it’s during songwriting or recording sessions, performances, or behind-the-scenes hang time, it seems that ego issues between Stone Sour’s members are nonexistent. Fun, on the other hand, is a priority. “We joke all the time,” Mayorga says. “We make fun of each other, we laugh—all we *do* is laugh. Nobody in this band fights, which is really bizarre. I’d never been in a band where it’s been that way.”

Such camaraderie extended to the making of the new Stone Sour album, *Hydrograd*. Each member contributed to the writing, and the band recorded live together—the first time Mayorga has done that with the group. On the current tour, Stone Sour is slowly introducing the new songs into the set list, and Roy is excited to bring something different to fans. “By the end of next year, [the set] will probably be half songs from the record and [half] old ones,” he says.

With a hectic tour schedule lying ahead, health and well-being on the road is of the utmost importance to Mayorga. Sleep is a precious commodity, and the drummer reveals that his morning routine includes coffee and a high-power protein shake, with small meals spread throughout the day, which allows him to keep energy levels up. “I try to eat lean protein, lots of veggies, salads, and fruits, and drink tons of water throughout the day,” Mayorga explains. “You have to take care of yourself and be safe on the road. You only have one shot at being here on the planet, so make it count.” **Kim Kicks**

Also on the Road

Pat Mastelotto, Gavin Harrison, and Jeremy Stacey with King Crimson /// **Chris Turner** with Oceans Ate Alaska /// **Alan Cassidy** with the Black Dahlia Murder /// **Steve Clifford** with Circa Survive /// **Riley Breckenridge** with Thrice /// **Joe Magistro** with the Magpie Salute /// **Vinnie Signorelli** with Unsane /// **Jeff Plate** with Trans-Siberian Orchestra

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Mark Guiliana

Touring is tough. And the ordeal of modern flying has upped the headache factor. But Mark Guiliana has learned to deal: He's traveling ultra-light and loving it.

The Mark Guiliana Jazz Quartet is touring the U.S. and Europe in support of its latest disc, *Jersey* (Motéma). Following the group's previous release, *Family First*, the innovative drummer further explores an adventurous acoustic setting, while highlighting the rhythmic explorations that have made him a future-leaning groove messenger.

"I bring a cymbal bag with two 21" Sabian rides, both with rivets," Guiliana says. "I was at the factory a few years ago, and we collaborated on some beautiful prototypes. I also have a pair of 14" hi-hats. I squeeze the cymbals into a 20" MONO cymbal bag. I found that having that 20" bag—although it's just a little smaller—really does make a difference with airlines; it's a lot less intimidating for airline employees. And it fits in the overhead on the majority of planes. In that bag, I throw in two or three pairs of Vic Firth 85A sticks and a pair of Vic Firth [Dual-Tone] 5As with mallets on the end. And *that's* the gear."

The only other equipment toted by the quartet is Jason Rigby's saxophone. Pianist Fabian Almazan, bassist Chris Morrissey, and Guiliana use equipment provided by each venue. Though he must forgo the luxury of having his favorite drums, Guiliana transcends it all with a positive attitude: "I do love that challenge of sitting down at a kit that's new to me—trying to get to know it and communicate my own ideas."

When he has his druthers, Guiliana chooses Gretsch drums. On *Jersey*, he played a Broadkaster kit. "I'm intentionally playing on a traditional setup," he explains. "It's a bit of an homage to my jazz heroes. It's your basic 18" bass drum, 14" snare, 12" rack tom, 14" floor tom, and two cymbal stands."

One routinely packed accessory is a Reflexx practice pad. "It feels great and it's very quiet," Guiliana says, "allowing for hotel room practicing at any hour or a little warm-up in the greenroom before gigs."

Guiliana cites family FaceTime sessions as the most important salve for road survival. But he also travels with simple creature comforts designed to appeal to various



senses. Naturally, having cherished music handy is key.

"If I put on *A Love Supreme*, I'm good," he laughs. "Coltrane and Bob Marley are two guys that will always make me feel better. Adding to that, I bring incense that I like to burn at home. And visually, just closing my eyes becomes a 'familiar place'; it removes the distraction of all the new stimuli, and I can be *anywhere*. I also bring my own coffee. It's a bit of a passion. I roast my own beans

at home and travel with my grinder and portable kit."

Despite its travails, Guiliana does enjoy traveling. "I love getting to see these incredible cities," he says, "and I do my best to take inspiration from these places."

And, of course, there's always the love of playing: "I hadn't originally intended to make two jazz quartet records in a row. But I did because this band has just been euphoric."

Jeff Potter



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Yamaha

Rydeen RDP2F5 Drumset

An excellent entry-level option with quality sound and sturdy hardware.

In addition to producing some of the most consistent and reliable professional and mid-grade drumsets on the market, Yamaha also continues to up the ante in the entry-level price point by making smart, value-increasing upgrades. Earlier this year, the company replaced its GigMaker beginner's kit with the Rydeen, which is named for the Japanese god of thunder. These drums, according to Yamaha, are "designed to inspire drummers to keep playing on a kit that will last." Let's see how they fare.

Specs and Configurations

Rydeen drumkits are available in two five-piece configurations. The RDP2F5, which is what we received for review, includes a 16x22 bass drum, 7x10 and 8x12 rack toms, a 15x16 floor tom (with legs), and a matching 5.5x14 wood snare. The RDP0F5 includes a 16x20 bass drum, 7x10 and 8x12 rack toms, a 13x14 floor tom (with legs), and a matching 5.5x14 wood snare.

Both setups feature a double tom mount attached to the bass drum, and they come with two 22.2mm tom arms with Yamaha's infinitely adjustable ball mount. The bass drums sport black metal hoops with finish-matching inlays and simple yet sturdy telescoping spurs. Yamaha also throws in an adhesive-backed plastic hoop protector to prevent the paint from marring and to help secure the pedal in place.

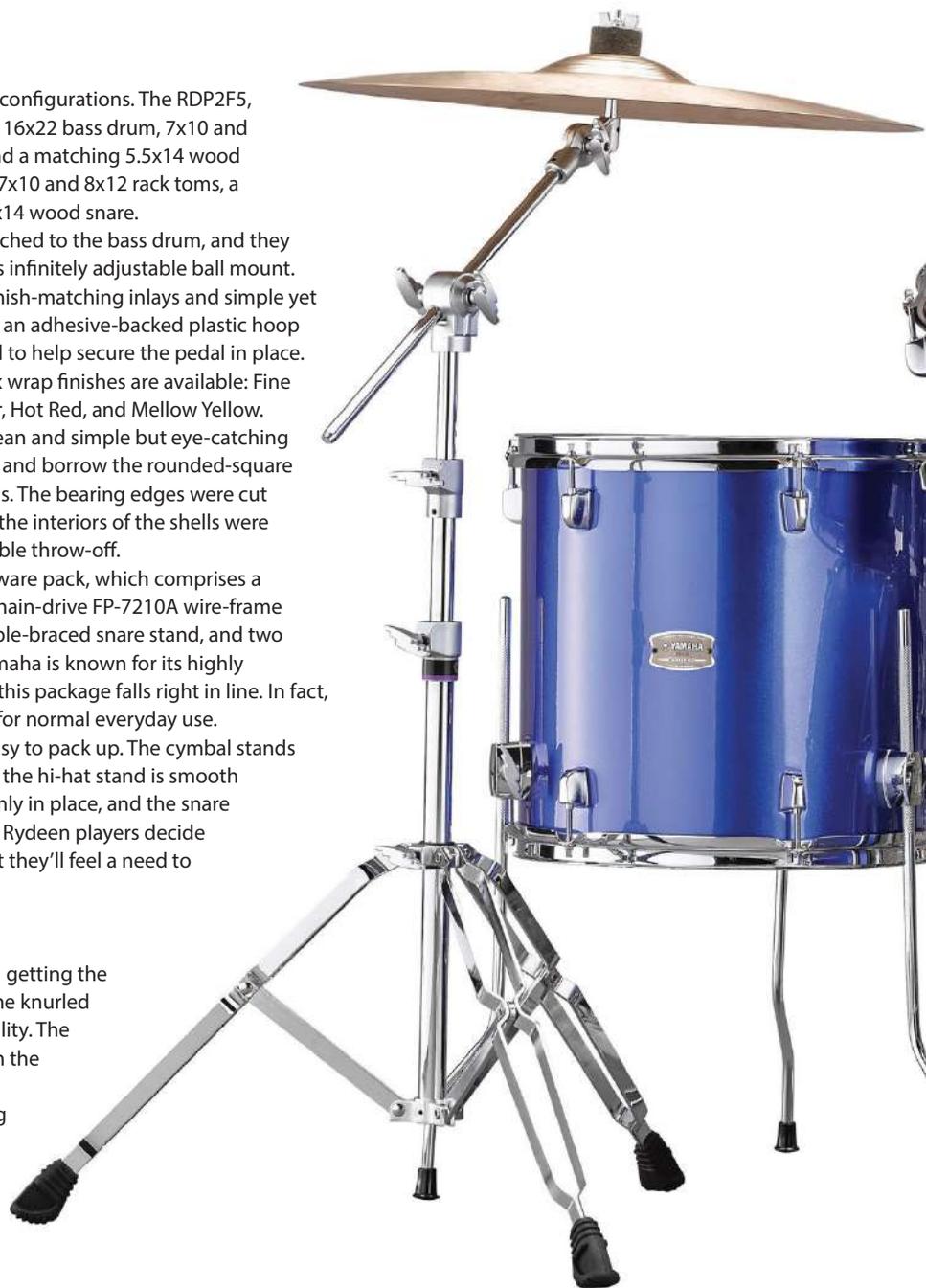
The shells are made from 6-ply poplar, and six wrap finishes are available: Fine Blue, Black Glitter, Silver Glitter, Burgundy Glitter, Hot Red, and Mellow Yellow. We received a kit in Fine Blue, which gave it a clean and simple but eye-catching appearance. The lugs are small and unobtrusive and borrow the rounded-square design used on Yamaha's professional-grade lugs. The bearing edges were cut cleanly, with no significant inconsistencies, and the interiors of the shells were unsealed. The snare drum has a simple, serviceable throw-off.

Included with Rydeen kits is a HW680W hardware pack, which comprises a double-braced but lightweight hi-hat stand, a chain-drive FP-7210A wire-frame bass drum pedal (with round felt beater), a double-braced snare stand, and two double-braced hiding-boom cymbal stands. Yamaha is known for its highly functional, dependable, durable hardware, and this package falls right in line. In fact, professional giggers could rely on these stands for normal everyday use.

The bass drum pedal is smooth, quick, and easy to pack up. The cymbal stands offer plenty of stability and positioning options, the hi-hat stand is smooth and features a clutch that holds the cymbals firmly in place, and the snare stand does exactly what it needs to do. If young Rydeen players decide to upgrade to professional-grade drums, I doubt they'll feel a need to replace these stands right away.

In Use

Rydeen kits are built very well. I had no problem getting the toms into a comfortable playing position, and the knurled floor tom legs offered plenty of height and stability. The drums also tuned up surprisingly well, even with the stock heads (single-ply clear on toms, single-ply coated snare batter, and single-ply with muffling ring on bass drum). I personally would have preferred clear double-ply or coated single-ply batters on the toms to facilitate easier tuning by eliminating some of the higher, troubling overtones. But I was able to dial in a pretty pure



and resonant tone from the toms without making a ton of fine-tuning adjustments, and the bass drum had a nice, deep sound with both heads tuned low and no internal muffling. A ported front head would help beginning drummers achieve a punchier sound and would make it easier to toss in some muffling. The matching wood snare sounded best tuned tight for a cracking attack and short sustain. Medium and low tunings didn't quite gel as well; the overtones became a bit unruly and the tone lacked a bit of depth. But I was able to coax a useable fat sound from this drum by applying a muffling ring or a couple damper pads.

Overall, we found very little to criticize about the Rydeen series drums. They sounded really good with minimal effort, and they're built to withstand many years of woodshedding. I personally think Yamaha should consider replacing the wood snare with a more versatile and professional-sounding steel drum, but I appreciate the consistency of having a matching finish across the entire kit. And with a street price of less than \$400 for the shell pack, it's pretty much a no-brainer for the young, aspiring drummers among us.

Michael Dawson



PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

Paiste

900 Series Cymbals

Hand-hammered 2002 bronze with a special dark finish for a slightly warmer tone.

In an effort to provide warm, musical sounds at moderate price points, Paiste created the 900 series. This full range of cymbals is made from the company's classic 2002 B8 bronze (8% tin and 92% copper) and includes 10" and 12" splashes; 14", 16", and 18" Chinas; 16" through 20" regular and Heavy crashes; 20" and 22" regular and Heavy rides; and 14" and 15" regular, Heavy, and Sound Edge hi-hats.

All of the 900 series models are widely lathed and extensively hammered for more musicality and a softer feel, and they have a subtle dark finish that gives them a rougher, moodier aesthetic and slightly darker tone. Let's take a look at each model within the 900 series.

Crashes

True to Paiste form, all of the 900 series regular and Heavy crashes have a consistent and balanced mix of bright and warm overtones that activate quickly and decay with an even, sparkly shimmer. The regular-weight models responded with a faster attack and had a bit more complexity than the Heavy versions. The 16" had the highest pitch and quick splash-like attack, while the 20" swelled more gradually and sustained longer. With that said, I was amazed at how focused and consistent the five crashes sounded, with the pitch difference between adjacent sizes being either a half or whole step.

The 17" and 18" regular crashes had the most all-purpose tones. For harder-hitting situations, the 19" and 20" Heavy crashes had tons of punch, huge wash, and plenty of high-





end shimmer to cut through loud mixes without losing musicality. While the 900 series crashes felt most at home in rock and other aggressive playing styles, they had more warmth and richness than you'd typically find in cymbals designed for those applications.

Hi-Hats

The 14" and 15" 900 series hi-hats produced tight, bright open sounds, super-articulate closed tones, and a crispy foot chick. The 14" regular-weight hi-hats were ideal for quick Copeland-style stickings and fast barks, while the 14" Heavy version had more power and stronger stick attack. The 15" Heavy hi-hats had a denser, chunkier attack and a more roaring open voice. The 14" Sound Edge hi-hats were the brightest sounding of the series and had the cleanest foot chick. The regular 14" hi-hats were the most versatile, while the 15" Heavy model had the most heft and depth.

Rides

For general use ride cymbals, the 900 series includes 20" and 22" models that have a nice balance of clean articulation and warm but controlled sustain. The 20" had the most wash, while the 22" provided a bit more clarity and a darker tone. Both of the regular-weight 900 series rides performed well in a variety of musical contexts, from light ECM-style modern jazz playing to classic rock and pop. They tended to wash out a bit at high volume, which is why Paiste also offers 20" and 22" Heavy rides and the 24" Mega ride.

These three cymbals have strong but musical bells and powerful stick definition. The 24" Mega ride had a more complex-sounding bell and tons of volume potential while remaining focused and controllable. The 20" Heavy ride would be ideal for playing styles that demand utmost speed and precision. The 22" was my favorite of the three, however, as it had the best balance of depth, warmth, and power that worked great in the context of most modern rock grooves.

Effects

The 900 series includes two splashes (10" and 12") and three Chinas (14", 16", and 18"). The 10" splash was super-quick and glassy, while the 12" had a more classic tone with a bit more body and sustain. The 14" China hits fast and aggressively with a bright, trashy attack and dies down very quickly. The 16" China has a slightly deeper tone and longer sustain, but it still hits hard and decays rapidly. The 18" China had the biggest, trashiest, and—ironically—the most musical sound of the three. The dark finish and hand hammering help tamp down the harshness while retaining the aggressive attack desired in this type of hard-hitting effects cymbal.

Check out a video demo of the entire 900 series at moderndrummer.com.

Michael Dawson



Black Swamp

Dynamicx Sterling, Live!, and BackBeat Snares

Pristinely crafted wood-shell drums for any professional situation.

Black Swamp Percussion began in 1995, and its first two products were handmade tambourines and bamboo-shaft timpani mallets. Now a leading manufacturer of high-quality concert percussion instruments, mallets, and accessories, BSP also builds snares for drumset players, called Dynamicx. These drums, which are available with Unibody solid-wood, 9-ply maple, and titanium shells, are made in the U.S. and offer top-notch features and exceptional tones that work well in any application. We were sent one drum from each of the three Dynamicx lines: a Sterling series 6.5x14 solid cocobolo, a 5.5x14 Live! series solid ambrosia maple, and a 6.5x14 BackBeat series 9-ply maple.

Features for All

All Dynamicx snares come with Black Swamp's sleek and modern-looking Arch Tube lugs, the smooth and secure RCK strainer, which has a notched and knurled thumbscrew and silent side-action lever, proprietary twenty-strand steel wires, an additional set of symphonic-style Ballad stainless-steel cable wires, a padded bag, a microfiber cleaning cloth, a chrome drum key, a certificate of authenticity, and a quality guarantee. Drumheads include Dynamicx-branded Remo Coated Ambassador batters and Hazy Diplomat bottoms.

Sterling Series Solid Cocobolo

The Sterling series is the most luxurious of the three within the Dynamicx lineup. These drums are only available in 6.5x14 but can be ordered with a titanium or Unibody steam-bent cocobolo, bocote, or bubinga shell. The wood options also feature a subtle .032" sterling silver-plated wire inlay around the center of the shell. These ten-lug drums come with steel straight hoops and mini claws, and they have a matching wood air vent. The bearing edges are cut with a vintage-style profile and a 30-degree inner bevel.

Our review drum featured a cocobolo shell, which is a favorite timber for Black Swamp for its supreme sensitivity and versatility. Tuned medium-tight to very tight, this snare had a quick, biting attack, a thick and dense tone, and balanced but fast-decaying overtones.

Sensitivity was super-clean and precise and sympathetic snare buzz was minimal. This drum, tuned this way, would be exemplary for funk, fusion, jazz, modern rock, and even symphonic situations.

Medium and lower tunings produced a punchier attack with a deeper and richer tone. The overtones became stronger while remaining sonorous and controlled. Snare sensitivity stayed crisp, and no muffling was required, even when the batter head was nearly slack. For anyone looking for a classy, top-shelf snare with modern cut and clarity and workhorse capability, the Sterling series cocobolo delivers on all fronts. Price is \$1,047.99.

Live! Series Solid-Ambrosia Maple

Live! series snares feature 5.5x14 Unibody steam-bent shells in maple, bird's-eye maple, ambrosia maple, walnut, or cherry. They come with 2.3mm triple-flange steel hoops, vintage-style bearing edges with a 30-degree inner bevel, and the sterling silver inlay. Our review drum had the ambrosia maple shell.

Like the Sterling series cocobolo snare, our Live! series drum had an incredibly balanced tone and exceptional sensitivity across all tunings. The ambrosia maple sounded a bit warmer than the cocobolo, which gave the Live! drum a more vintage vibe, especially at medium and lower tunings. This drum would excel in the studio when you want a classic snare sound that sits within the mix instead of cutting through it, and it's a great choice for club gigs in brighter-sounding rooms. While the Sterling snare offered a super-clean, contemporary sound, the Live! ambrosia maple is like a new-and-improved version of the coveted solid-maple Radio King. Price is \$769.99.



Sterling Series



Live! Series

BackBeat Series Maple

The BackBeat series is designed for working drummers who need a professional-sounding instrument that records well and is built to withstand years of wear and tear on gigs. These drums are built from a 6.5x14 9-ply Keller Magnum maple shell, which features thicker maple veneers than typical ply shells. BackBeat drums are finished in the user's choice of durable, classic pearl wrap (azure blue, copper, cream, graphite, green, purple, ruby red, or white), and the bearing edges are cut sharper and have a 45-degree inner bevel. The hoops are 2.3mm triple-flange steel.

Our review drum came with the copper pearl wrap, which looked super-classy without having an overt throwback vibe. Consistent

with the other two Dynamicx snares we tested, the BackBeat had exceptional sensitivity and could be tuned high, low, or anywhere in between to produce a wide range of tones with a perfect balance of cut, punch, and control. It doesn't have as much bite as the Sterling, and it wasn't as fat- and warm-sounding as the Live! drum. It sat comfortably right in between the two without being denigrated as "middle of the road." In fact, I would likely favor the BackBeat over the others for more everyday applications that might require tracking keeper takes in the studio during the day and slamming rimshots in the clubs at night. And the price is quite affordable (\$469.99).

Michael Dawson



BackBeat Series



PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

Los Cabos

White Hickory, Red Hickory, and Maple Drumsticks

Top-notch products from a smaller Canadian company with big-time aspirations.

Los Cabos has been steadily climbing into the collective drummer consciousness since first entering the market a decade ago. The Canadian company's products are offered worldwide, and a recent deal with Big Bang Distribution makes them easier to find in U.S. drum shops. We were sent a sample of several models made from standard white hickory and maple, as well as a Los Cabos exclusive, red hickory, which is a denser timber native to eastern North America.

White Hickory 77A, Jazz, and 5A Yellow Jacket

White hickory is the most commonly used wood for drumsticks, and Los Cabos offers all of the standard sizes in this wood (5A, 5B, 2B, 7A, etc.), as well more unique sizes, like the elongated 77A and Jazz models, and the painted-grip 5A Yellow Jacket.

The 77A is .556"x16.29" and has a long olive tip. This stick is designed to provide the light, quick feel of a 7A but with a little extra reach. The olive tip allows for a range of cymbal tones, from warm and broad to bright and clear, based on the angle at which you strike. These sticks have great rebound and facilitated lighter playing styles very well. The extra length gave them a more substantial feel

without throwing off the balance, and it allowed me to choke up a bit for ultra-quiet playing without limiting reach. For quiet acoustic gigs, these are a great choice.

The Jazz model has a similar width to a 5A (.575") but is a bit longer (16.25"). It has a barrel tip to help increase punch and articulation. Despite its style-specific name, this is a great all-purpose stick. It's perfectly balanced to provide power and response, and the barrel tip produces clean, consistent cymbal tones. Aside from hard-hitting rock gigs, I could fill my bag with just these sticks and call it a day, regardless of whether I'm tracking basic beats in the studio or playing tons of notes on modern jazz, funk, or fusion gigs.

The 5A Yellow Jacket is a .575"x16" stick with an acorn tip and a lightly painted grip for a bit of tackiness. The paint doesn't inhibit rebound or resonance, but it does grab ahold of the skin just enough to prevent the stick from slipping. Regular Los Cabos models are lightly lacquered, so they have a soft, smooth feel. But if you have a hard time holding on to your sticks when your hands start to sweat, check out the 5A Yellow Jacket. It's a nice, unobtrusive option for additional grip control.



Red Hickory

The red hickory wood used in these sticks is harvested from the harder center portion of the tree. This increased density makes the sticks a bit more durable than their white hickory counterparts without adding weight or affecting their balance and feel. Again, all of the basic sizes and tip shapes (acorn, ball, barrel, olive, and oval) are offered, as well as more specialized models, like the jazz-style 77A and the oversized .626"x16.63" Rock. If you find yourself tearing through sticks quicker than you'd like, grab a pair of Red Hickory in your favorite size. They felt identical to their white hickory counterparts, but they didn't wear out as quickly, and they look super-cool. The .585"x16" 55AB is my top choice for hard-hitting situations.

White Maple

Maple is lighter than hickory, so it's an ideal choice for drumsticks when playing in lighter, subtler styles. In addition to typical 5A, 5B,

7A, 2B, 3A, and 8A sizes, Los Cabos also makes more specialized sticks with maple. The Swing model is similar to the 77A but features an oval tip instead of olive. It has lightning-fast response, and it allowed me to play up-tempo swing at low volumes with ease. The Jive is nearly identical to the Swing, but it has a small ball tip that produced bright, crystalline cymbal tones.

If you're a player who prefers the fat sound, added reach, and wider grip of big 2B-style sticks but want a lighter feel, check out the .626"x16.63" Rock maple. This is a surprisingly quick and nimble stick that produced full, loud tones with minimal effort. I grabbed these sticks whenever I needed to lay down big, meaty mid-tempo beats.

In addition to the handful of drumsticks that we tested here, Los Cabos makes an extensive range of brushes, rods, mallets, and other percussion tools. Check out loscabosdrumsticks.com for more info.

Michael Dawson



COLLECTOR'S CORNER

John Aldridge

The famed engraver, drum tech,
and vintage enthusiast helped start a movement.

There have been old drums floating around for decades, but when did some of them stop being relics and become venerated vintage instruments? And how did that happen?

I believe the year was 1987. There were a few outlets sending out photocopied lists of available drums, but in those pre-internet days, with no pictures to see, collectors had to develop a network of trusted sellers. While there was interest in classic drums in different areas of the U.S., there was one guy who brought us all together and became the point man. That's John Aldridge.

John is currently the drum tech for REO Speedwagon's Bryan Hitt. But for the past thirty years, he's been a top authority on the Ludwig Black Beauty snare and other vintage brass drums. Aldridge also spearheaded the movement to reintroduce ornate engraving on metal shells and hoops.

Back in 1987, John was a schoolteacher who played drums. He called me from Oklahoma one night to introduce himself and to find out what we had in common. I had been on a buying spree of old drums that I was going to showcase in a store I was about to open. John asked if I had bought any old Ludwigs. I said no and asked, "Why would I want to buy drums from a company that's still in business?" That was when he told me about his love for the Ludwig Deluxe, which is better known as the Black Beauty.

John's reputation grew. He went from being a teacher and drummer to becoming an entrepreneur. He published magazines and newsletters, which created a network for subscribers to connect with buyers and sellers of vintage drums and parts.

Aldridge also moved his family to Nashville, where he continued to build his engraving business, sold vintage gear, expanded his publications, and started a line of boutique drums called NSMD.

Aldridge engraved for Ludwig, Slingerland, Drum Heaven, DW, and Tama, as well as for friends who sent requests. It's not easy to be an entrepreneur, especially in the drum industry. John will tell you



about the rollercoaster ride he's been on. But along the way, he helped resurrect the nearly lost art of hand engraving, and drums bearing his work are as coveted as the old Ludwig Standards that inspired him to pick up tools in the first place.

As John was getting his businesses going, he decided to document his knowledge into the first book for vintage drum enthusiasts. The book, *Guide to Vintage Drums*, inspired a whole new group of drummers to learn about and preserve the great instruments of the past, like the Ludwig Black Beauty, the Slingerland Radio King, and the Rogers Dynasonic.

Aldridge eventually sold his publishing business and stopped making his tribute

to the Black Beauty so he could return to Oklahoma and focus on his family, his engraving business, and being the drum tech for REO. John and I reconnected recently during the band's 56 City tour, and looking over Hitt's kit made me realize how masterful Aldridge is at building drum racks too! It's obvious that even if he's scaled back on the number of ways he's influenced the vintage drum industry, he'll continue to influence the rest of us in profound ways.

Harry Cangany



RYDEEN



Make Your Own Thunder

You always remember your first drum kit. Bright. Shiny. New. You couldn't get it home fast enough. You set it up the way you wanted to. You just wanted to start playing. It was with that kit that you started to discover and create your own sound.

As a parent or drum teacher, you owe it to your budding musicians to give them those same memories. Inspire them. Spark their imaginations. Get them excited to play like their drum heroes. With a rock-solid build and fun, vibrant colors, Yamaha Rydeen combines all the features that drummers need for their perfect start.

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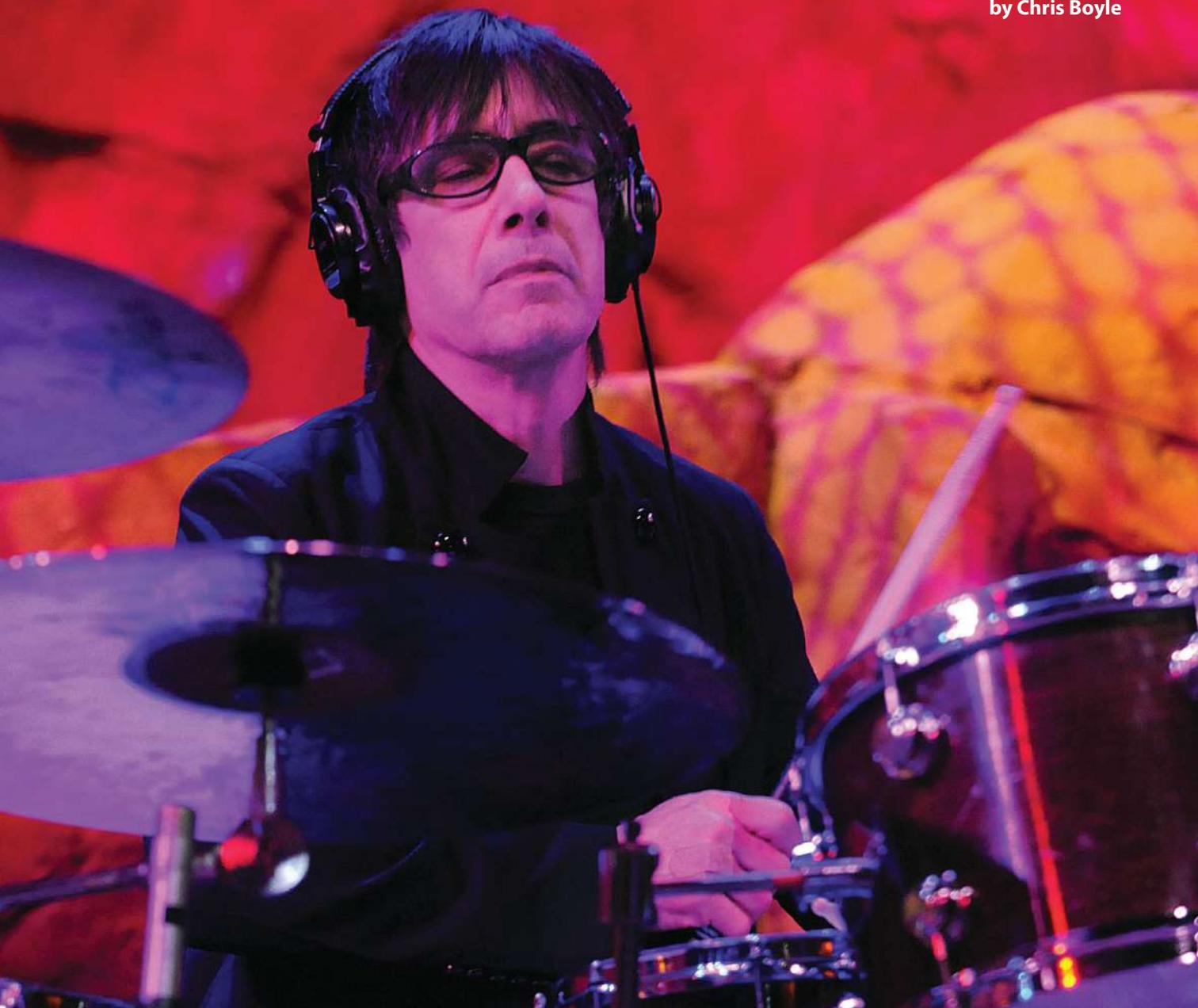
Recorded Performance

Matt Garstka, *The Madness of Many*
(Animals as Leaders)
Antonio Sanchez, *Bad Hombre*
(Antonio Sanchez)
Todd Sucherman, *The Mission* (Styx)
Matt Wilson, *Honey and Salt* (Matt Wilson)
Nate Wood, *Anti-Hero* (Kneebody)

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The Psychedelic Furs' Paul Garisto

by Chris Boyle



Paul Garisto was a member of the iconic post-punk band the Psychedelic Furs for five years in the late '80s/early '90s, coming into the fold in time to record 1987's *Midnight to Midnight*, which featured the smash hit "Heartbreak Beat." The following year he appeared on the Furs' number-one modern-rock track "All That Money Wants" and recorded the album *Instinct* with Iggy Pop, with whom he subsequently toured for nine months. Since then, Garisto has contributed to albums by Ryan Adams, Jesse Malin, Bree Sharp, and Depeche Mode singer David Gahan and performed with Clarence Clemons, Shawn Colvin, and Martha and the Vandellas,

among many others. It's been a varied and fruitful ride for the drummer, and a neat career path for the third-generation musician whose elders made their bones by filling a need for the many idiosyncratic players they backed on stage and in the busy New York recording studios.

Eight years ago Garisto rejoined the P-Furs, and his enthusiasm for the gig remains sincere and unabated. "My jaw dropped when I first heard the Furs," Garisto gushes to *Modern Drummer*. "They were doing something very creative. They had a sound early on that I didn't hear anywhere else."



Mike Thut

Garisto plays DW drums and Zildjian cymbals and uses Vic Firth sticks, a Porter & Davies amp and throne, a Soundcraft mixer, and a Roland SPD-SX sample pad.

MD: What was your original audition like for the Psychedelic Furs?

Paul: I was subbing for Billy Idol's drummer for two weeks, and the Furs decided they needed a drummer and held a cattle call of at least a hundred drummers in New York City. The band had just completed their *Mirror Moves* album. Keith Forsey—who's a great drummer and had played on a few tracks—was Billy's producer as well, and he passed my number to the Furs. At the auditions they played a mix of the record minus the drums, and the drummers had to play to these tracks they've never heard while the Furs sat in chairs watching. That was a first for me, but I love that kind of pressure. They had me come back, and Keith came down to that callback and said on the spot, "This is your guy." I played for them for about five years, left, and came back seven or eight years ago.

MD: Original Furs drummer Vince Ely played some unusual parts. Like many early new-wave bands, the Furs were fairly famous for making it up as they went along.

Paul: Vince had great ideas and sounded fantastic on the early records. They'd put the drum parts down first and then overdub the hi-hats and cymbals. So it was challenging for me, for instance on tracks like "So Run Down." I love that drum part. It's got this little tom roll and an upbeat hi-hat. I had to figure out how to pull that off live: I play open-handed, with my left hand playing the hi-hat and my right hand playing the snare drum. I'm a righty, so it's a little unnatural.

MD: How did you come to record and tour with Iggy Pop?

Paul: I was asked to play a benefit show. I wasn't in a good frame of mind, and I didn't feel I played very well that night, but a friend of mine came up to me after the show and said, "Iggy Pop is downstairs and he wants you to play with him." It was two sentences: "You wanna play with me?" "Yeah, I definitely want to play with you!" The next thing I knew, I was in the studio with Iggy Pop, recording the *Instincts* album with Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols on guitar. Goes to show how important it is just to show up.

You know, with all these musicians and friends we've been losing over the years, I can't stress enough how important it is to thank people. Iggy's one guy I'd like to thank, because I was relatively young. I have a tendency to say what's on my mind, and that can come back and bite me, especially when I was younger. I said some stuff in the studio that in hindsight it probably wasn't my place to say. But he kept me, toured with me, and allowed me to be my young, ignorant self—and he's a living legend. What else can I say but "thank you."

MD: In 1983 you toured with the late Bruce Springsteen sax player Clarence Clemons.

Paul: Mr. Springsteen showed up at a couple of shows. He brought his mother to our show in Washington, D.C., and they didn't know who he was at the door, so

he paid them. When the doorman found out he'd just charged Bruce Springsteen and his mother to get into the show, he tried to give him his money back, but Bruce wouldn't take it.

I didn't know it at the time, but he was going to come on stage and play with us. We were in the middle of our set and I was looking down, fixing my drum or something in between songs, and all of a sudden I hear a roar of the crowd like I've never heard before, and I look up and there's Bruce with his guitar on.

MD: Playing music is your family business, in a sense.

Paul: My grandfather Frank Garisto Sr. was a session violinist, guitarist, and banjo player who eventually became a rep for Local Musicians Union 802. My uncle Lou Garisto was a composer who wrote jingles. And my father, Frank Jr., was a studio session drummer in New York City. I didn't have a choice. [laughs]

MD: One of the benefits of being your father's son was that he introduced you, at a very young age, to many serious musicians, including Gary Chester. Besides being a successful session player, Gary wrote the highly influential drum method book *The New Breed*.

Paul: Gary was a session player who played on too many hits to list, and I was lucky to study with him for a couple of years. He was amazing. Gary taught me how to play to a click track, and he taught me about feel and playing in front of and behind the beat. I definitely needed to learn how to do that, because today 95 percent of the sessions I do, I'm playing to a click and trying to make it sound natural. And the way you do that is to push ahead in parts and get behind the click track in other parts, and try to let the music breathe.

MD: You have a great interest in restoring vintage drums. Has that had any unexpected effects on your career as a player?

Paul: It makes me want to play a different way, because each drum has a different feel. They all have positive and negative attributes, and I like the challenging aspect of getting an old drum into shape. I use them to record—I record for at least four hours every day when I'm home—and it excites me. I love the way they look. I think about the history, the people that made them and played them. I'm in awe of the craftsmanship. Restoring and playing vintage drums brought me back into playing on a much deeper level. I'm more relaxed, more independent, and looser as a drummer.

MD: What are your thoughts on being a drum teacher in addition to a performer?

Paul: I get so much more back from my students than I seem to be giving them. Teaching keeps me in check and forced me to dive back into educating myself. I decided to expand my horizons by getting back into some old technique books—*Syncopation*, *Stick Control*, *The New Breed*, Billy Martin's book on Afro-Cuban rhythms [*Riddim: Claves of African Origin*], Colin Bailey's *Bass Drum Control*. I'm really pushing the envelope on my independence.



ON TOPIC



Roy McCurdy

On playing on the classic 1963 album *Sonny Meets Hawk!*

I'd been working with Sonny Rollins for about a year prior to recording that album. Sonny was such a strong player that he made *me* play strong. He loved Coleman Hawkins and always wanted to do an album with him.

I believe we were playing at the Five Spot in New York City, and Sonny set up a session at RCA. Right after the gig we'd go record, and it was a beautiful thing—no sheet music, just Sonny calling out the tunes and him and Hawk brilliantly playing off each other.

On breaking new ground in 1966 as a member of the Cannonball Adderley Quintet with the soul-jazz smash “Mercy, Mercy, Mercy.”

We were at Nat Adderley's house, rehearsing, and Joe Zawinul came in, as he often did, with bits and pieces of paper. He asked us to play some of it, and it had a real good feeling to it—Cannon loved it. It turned out to be “Mercy, Mercy, Mercy.” It became a huge hit [reaching number two on the *Billboard* soul chart and number eleven on the Hot 100 chart, and receiving a Grammy for best instrumental jazz performance, group or soloist]. No matter where you went, you'd hear it. After the Buckingham's remake [number five on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart], Buddy Rich did it with his big band, and after that just about everybody was recording it.

On opening the door for funk and fusion by emphasizing the backbeat and employing a definitive bass drum pattern.

It was just a natural thing. I was listening to a lot of different music at that time. Being from upstate New York, I used to play with a lot of blues bands, so a backbeat was nothing new to me. I don't know if we realized it, but Cannon wanted to explore different directions. We were one of the first jazz bands to use a Wurlitzer electric piano, then a Fender Rhodes, which brought that funky thing into it.

On being prepared to play with a diverse range of artists, from Count Basie to Herbie Hancock to the jazz-rock group Blood, Sweat & Tears.

Well, I studied with Bill Street from the Eastman School of Music. We worked on rudimental drumming all the time, and I was also involved with marching corps. It's those things that got my chops up for playing and soloing, and I still teach them to my students today.

On teaching jazz studies at the University of Southern California and the Pasadena Conservatory of Music.

My cousin Ron McCurdy, who's a trumpet player, was the chair of the USC jazz department. He was looking for a drum instructor and asked me if I was interested. I was unsure at the time, but I eventually accepted the position. Fortunately, all the guys that work there are jazz musicians, so if one of us had a road gig, we would send somebody in to cover. It's been rewarding, because the kids I teach really appreciate what I'm showing them. They keep in touch and even come back to visit. It's the best feeling.

On what separates the living legends of jazz drumming, including Roy Haynes, Harold Jones, Redd Holt, and Louis Hayes, from the current crop of jazz drummers.

I think mainly it's experience. We've played with so many people, which [allowed us to] develop the know-how to do almost everything, from drumming behind singers to playing with big bands or small ensembles. We've accumulated all that knowledge over the years, and we've all used it to stay around for a while.

Interview by Bob Girouard

Roy McCurdy plays DW drums and Istanbul cymbals and uses Remo drumheads and Regal Tip sticks.

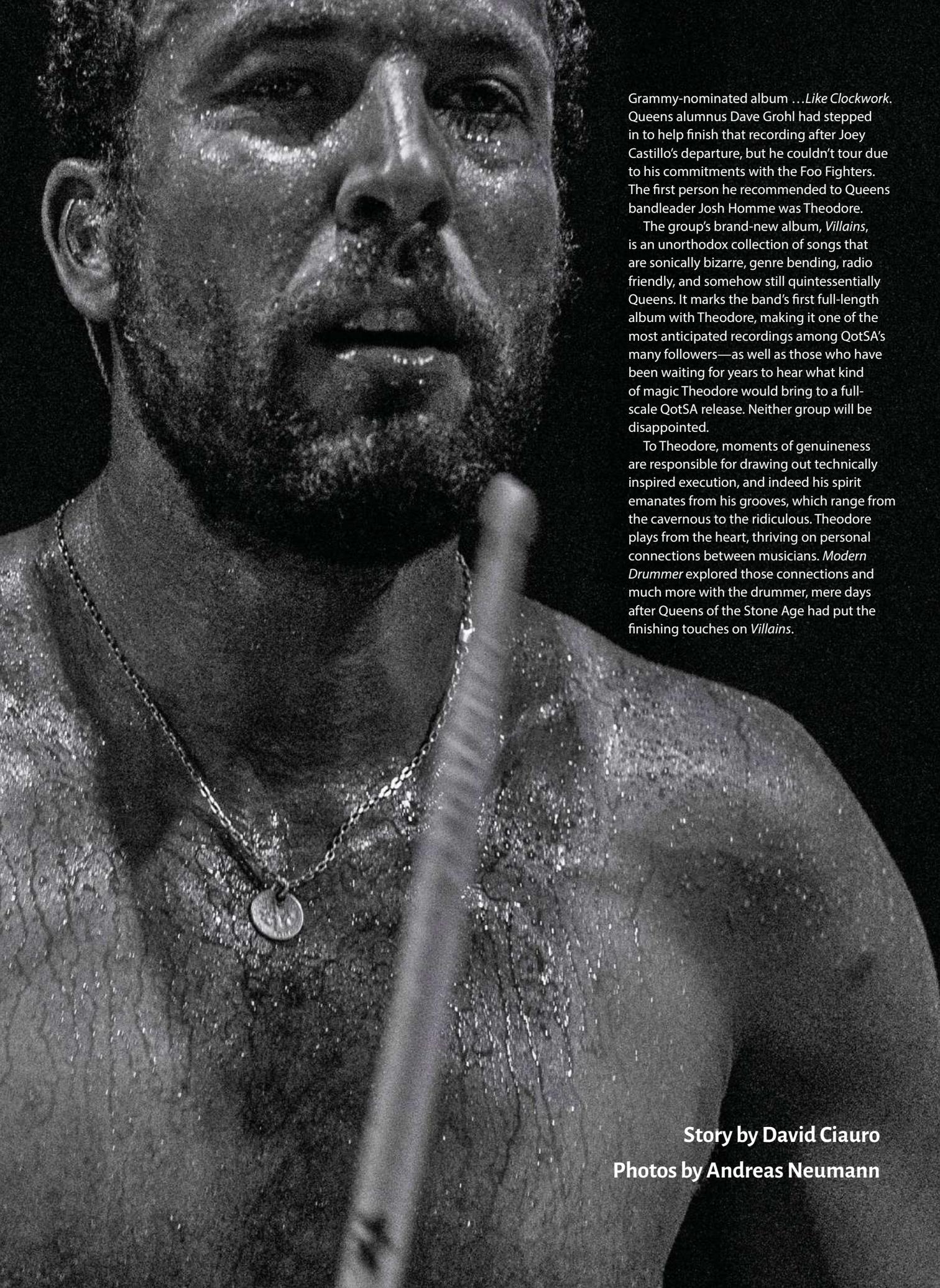


Queens of the Stone Age's Jon Theodore

It's been four years since the esteemed ex-Mars Volta drummer began playing in QotSA. Now we've been gifted with the multifarious *Villains*, and at long last we get to hear what he sounds like on a full-length record with the group. What's immediately clear is that drummer and band push each other to new heights of artistic expression. Perhaps less obvious is the sheer amount of time, effort, dedication, focus, and outside-the-box thinking involved in getting there.

In the mid-2000s, Jon Theodore made a tremendous impact on the drumming community with his playing on the first three studio albums and pair of live releases by the Mars Volta, a progressive-minded heavy rock band that consistently challenged the status quo while establishing global audiences. For many observers, *De-Loused in the Comatorium* (2003), *Frances the Mute* (2005), and *Amputechture* (2006) represented the epitome of modern heavy music at the time—wildly diverse, technically astounding, and emotionally explosive—and Theodore's drumming was a source of widespread praise.

In 2008, after Theodore and the band had reached the end of their creative rope and parted ways, the drummer joined forces with former Rage Against the Machine vocalist Zack de la Rocha in One Day as a Lion, whose self-titled EP balanced fuzzed-out garage-rock keyboards with bombastic beats and de la Rocha's intense rap-style vocals. Recordings and live work with Giraffe Tongue Orchestra, Puscifer, and Incubus frontman Brandon Boyd followed, and in 2013, the self-proclaimed "unpigeonholeable" drummer found brotherhood with yet another unclassifiable band, Queens of the Stone Age, entering the fold shortly before the band hit the road in support of the multiple-



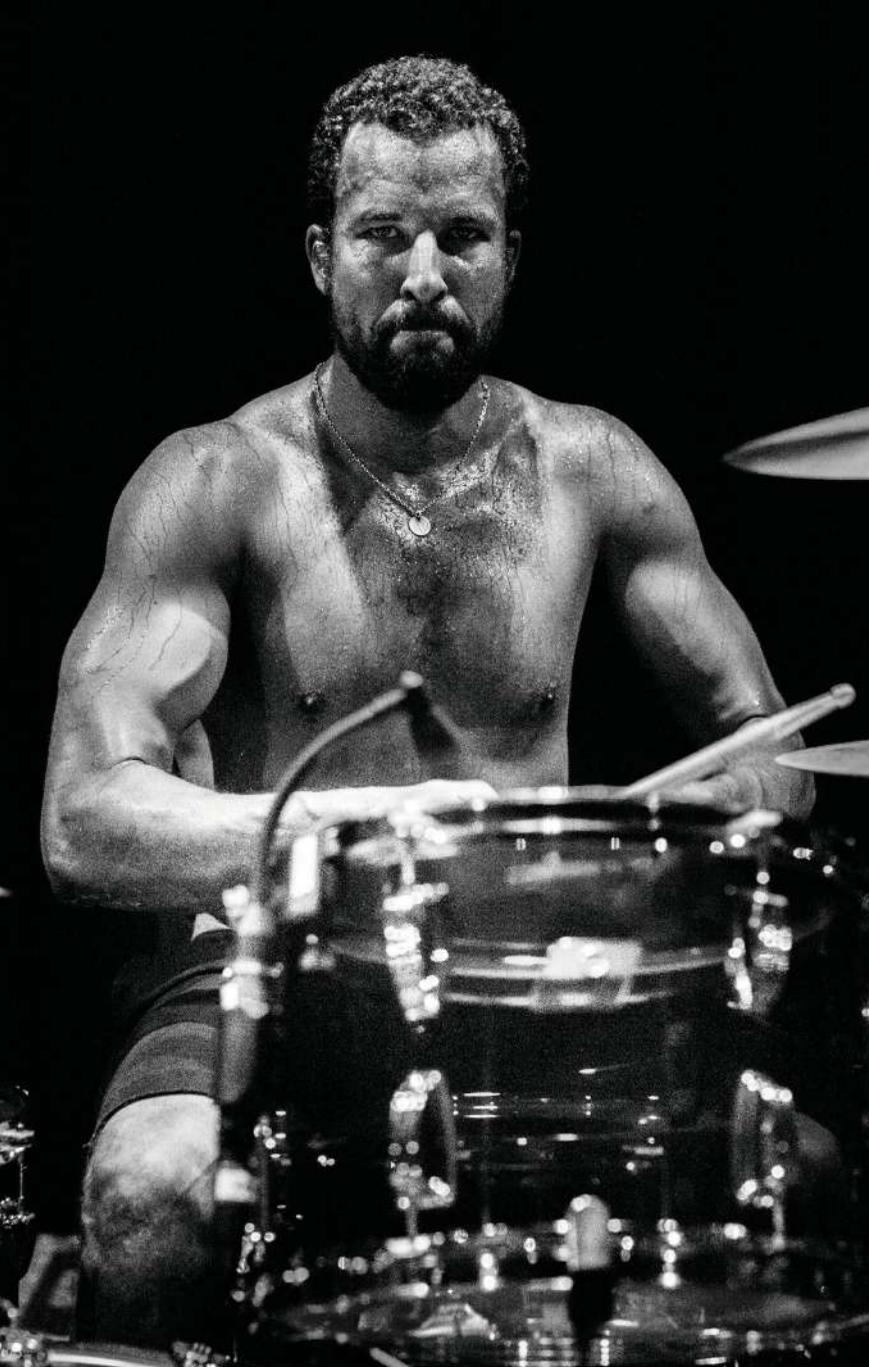
Grammy-nominated album ...*Like Clockwork*. Queens alumnus Dave Grohl had stepped in to help finish that recording after Joey Castillo's departure, but he couldn't tour due to his commitments with the Foo Fighters. The first person he recommended to Queens bandleader Josh Homme was Theodore.

The group's brand-new album, *Villains*, is an unorthodox collection of songs that are sonically bizarre, genre bending, radio friendly, and somehow still quintessentially Queens. It marks the band's first full-length album with Theodore, making it one of the most anticipated recordings among QotSA's many followers—as well as those who have been waiting for years to hear what kind of magic Theodore would bring to a full-scale QotSA release. Neither group will be disappointed.

To Theodore, moments of genuineness are responsible for drawing out technically inspired execution, and indeed his spirit emanates from his grooves, which range from the cavernous to the ridiculous. Theodore plays from the heart, thriving on personal connections between musicians. *Modern Drummer* explored those connections and much more with the drummer, mere days after Queens of the Stone Age had put the finishing touches on *Villains*.

Story by David Ciauro

Photos by Andreas Neumann



its inception, and Josh being both a bandleader and a drummer, how open was he to you doing your own thing?

Jon: There's a long legacy in Queens. Josh is incredibly hands-on and has a vast knowledge as a producer, drummer, and songwriter. He's completely present for every step of the process. Every note in the history of Queens has been considered. In terms of production, Josh has very specific ideas, and he's a great bandleader. He realizes that even though you set goals and have intentions, at a certain point you have to allow the natural process to take its course. He points the ship, but at the end of the day you almost have to release your expectations in order to be successful.

No two ears or brains are the same. So even if you want to dictate something to someone note for note, it will still be perceived and played somewhat differently. I love working with someone who has such a commitment to excellence, because it presents a challenge to deliver. When I normally sit down at the drums, I try to find these expressive places where I'm reacting to the music and to the universe. With Queens, someone else's ears reframe my natural frame of reference, which inspires me to grow and find places in my own playing that I wouldn't naturally go toward. And that's not for everyone, but for me it's kind of like the difference between a field of grass with a breeze blowing through it versus a bonsai tree.

MD: Drum sounds and drummers play a big part in the Queens legacy too. Dave, Joey, and you are all very physical players, but if the listener doesn't have that visual frame of reference, the drum sounds are deceptive, because they're often very dry and direct as opposed to open and boomy. Did you have to tone down your physicality in any way in order to achieve the "Queens" sound on record?

Jon: There's a clarity in Queens records that's reminiscent of early ZZ Top records, where it sounds like you're literally standing right next to the drums. It's misleading, because without that standard, super-hyped "rock 'n' roll" drum production, it sounds like a really light touch. But that's the essence of all the best players—John Bonham comes to mind and certainly

Dave Grohl—there's still headroom. In a live setting, it can be animated and aggressive, but in the studio, it's not really about how hard you hit. The performance is only audio. Only the microphones are listening. No one's watching. Precision on record is a fine line between being exact yet fiery and inspired.

The uniqueness of the Queens drum sound comes down to three things. First, it's the intention in the patterns that develop. This is dance music, so the focus ends up being between the kick and snare. It has to be body rock. That's the focal point. The second thing is the production of the drums: how they're mixed and recorded.

The third thing is the actual technique. Josh is the first person I've met that overdubs cymbals. I'd never done it before, and it certainly proved to be a great challenge. When you overdub cymbals, you can take the same care over getting a cymbal sound, hi-hat sound, or crash sound that you do to get the right kick or snare sound. You experiment with mic placements and even where the cymbals are placed in the room, so it becomes this heavily considered process. Doing the drums and cymbals separately removes that ocean of white noise that overheads create, allowing the drums to be pushed

MD: Before we dive into *Villains*, let's talk about how you first became involved with Queens. Did you know any of the guys prior to joining?

Jon: Yes, Troy [Van Leeuwen, guitarist] and I were neighbors. We had run into each other one time and talked about what we were up to musically. Neither of us had much going on at that particular time, so we started jamming a lot and wrote a bunch of music for the band he has with his wife, Sweethead.

Dave Grohl had recommended me to Josh Homme when Joey Castillo bailed, but I'd been friends with the guys from Queens for a long time, and I've always loved to hang with them, so that foundation was already there. When Josh called, I was literally getting off a plane from tour, and he asked me to come down to the studio. He was working on a tune with James Lavelle (UNKLE) down at Pink Duck Studios. We jammed for about a half hour, and it became the song "Like Clockwork." The record was basically done when we first started talking, so for that to actually make the record was great.

MD: With *Villains* being the first record you were involved with from

up to the very front of the mix so they are dense and powerful. Then you have the control to slide the cymbals into the mix to a point where they make sense musically.

MD: How would you describe the drum sounds on *Villains*?

Jon: I would say it's like a maxed-out drum machine that's short-circuiting because it hasn't slept for two weeks, some beer has spilled on it, and some parts are missing. [laughs] It's really stripped down, punchy, present, and bizarro. The drums have this dead, low punch that's really hi-fi but also a little bit busted.

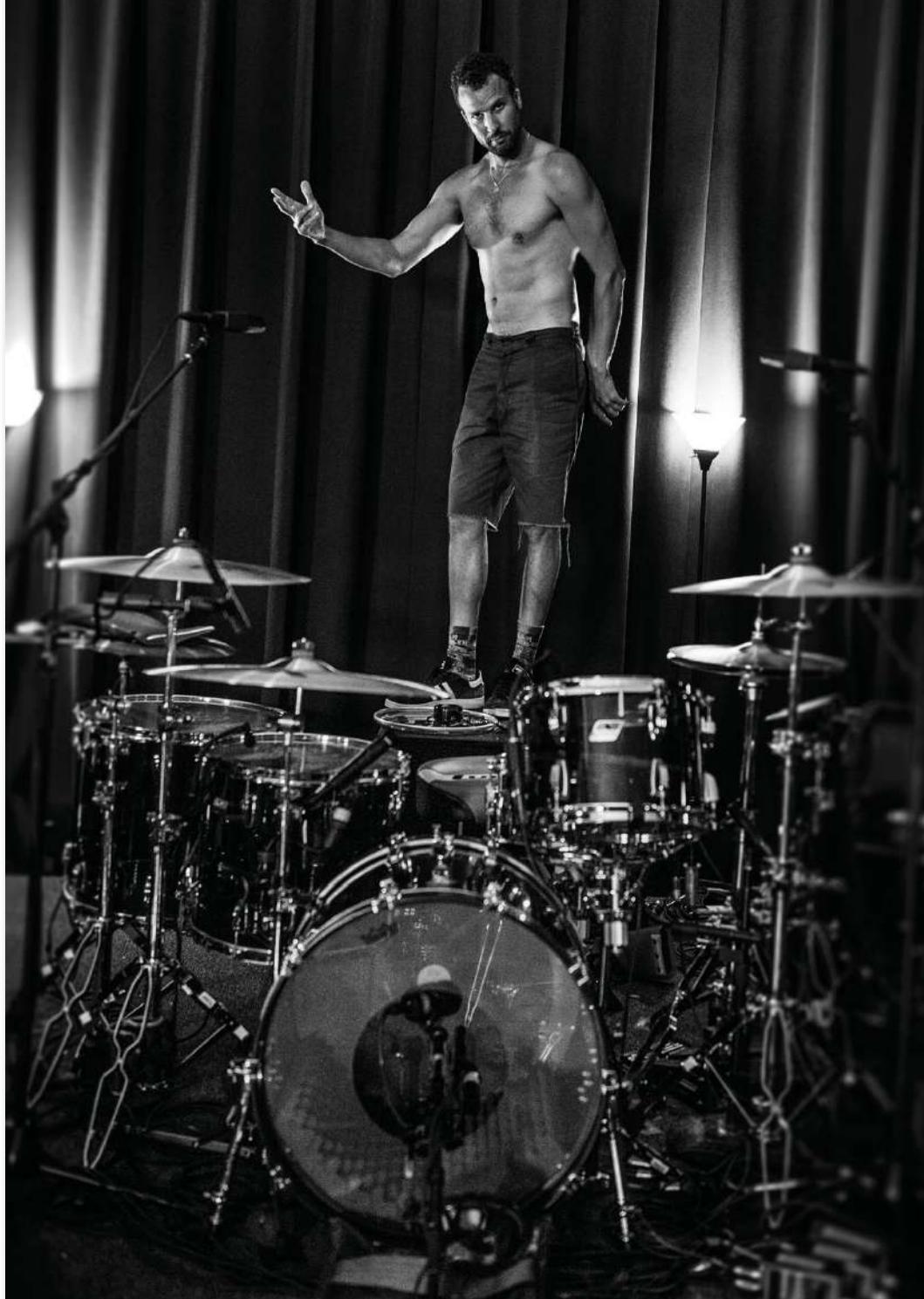
MD: Intention seems to be a recurring theme in how the band writes—musicians composing for other musicians—but the songs always remain accessible.

Jon: We all grew up listening to records, when listening to music was an experience. Sadly, listening to music these days often means holding up your iPhone a few inches from your face and giving ten seconds of your attention to something. All Queens music, if you're not really paying attention, kind of glides right by, and your brain is tricked into assuming that you've categorized what it is. *Oh, this is a simple rock song.* But on subsequent listens you'll notice that these songs have oceans of depth. There are a lot of moves in these tunes; subtle shifts in the arrangements and intricate playing that will glide right by if you're not paying attention.

Villains is the result of blood, sweat, and tears. This is what it's like when people cut off all other aspects of their lives for a given time and go into the crucible together—constructing, developing, and refining. The songs may feel narrow on the surface, but they're incredibly deep, sprawling multi-episodic epics. These are carefully curated compositions that we poured our hearts and minds into. You can have a casual listen and get into the tune, but the real reward is listening in the full spectrum hi-fi scenario.

MD: To your point, the album sounds like you avoided most conventional recording techniques too, which might surprise some people when they see that Mark Ronson was involved in the production.

Jon: There's no copy and paste,



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- 16x18 floor tom
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Cymbals: Zildjian

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- 19" A Medium Thin crash
- 22" K ride
- 19" A Medium Thin crash
- 17" K China/14" Trashformer stack

Heads: Remo, including Clear CS Black Dot snare batter, Clear Emperor tom batters, and Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter

Sticks: Vic Firth 5B wood-tip with Promark Stick Rapp

Percussion: LP Aspire bongos, Cyclops tambourine, and Chad Smith Ridge Rider cowbell

Hardware: DW, including 5000 series bass drum pedals, hi-hat stand, snare stand, and rack tom stand, and 9000 and 6000 series straight stands

Electronics: Roland SPD-SX sample pad and KD-7 kick trigger pad, Pintech RS-5 triggers, Dauz pads

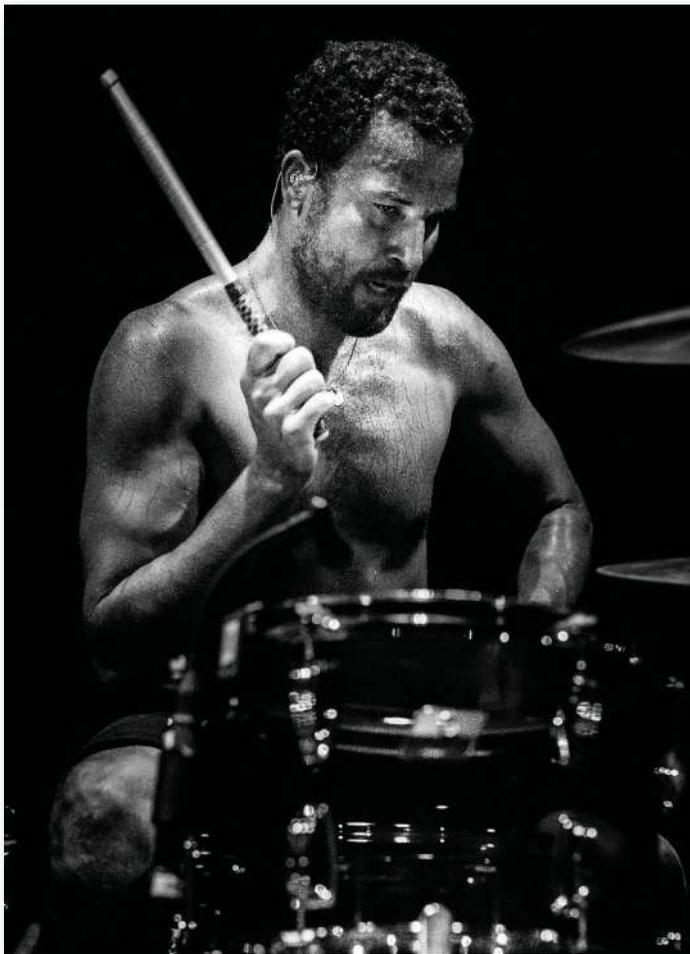
Drum tech: Tim Ward

Jon Theodore

there were no plug-ins, and there was no click! It's easy to go down the wormhole of perfection and create a click map and put everything on the grid. We're all from a time before that, and I'm proud to claim the ownership of our way. I have no problem admitting that we overdubbed the cymbals, that we carefully designed this cockamamie drum sound, or that we spent the time in the room crafting the songs so that when it came time to record, we could just concentrate on doing takes. This is what happens when the expression of music and the collective group experience is given the chance to flourish in a protective environment, which is the most magical part of being in this band. I'm surrounded by these cats who are as good as anyone I've ever heard musically, and we're not constrained by any external pressure for how things should or shouldn't be. All bets are off, best idea wins, let's have at it!

MD: What do you feel were the advantages of recording the cymbals separately?

Jon: When you do take the time to overdub the cymbals, it gets away from this idea of just throwing up whatever your go-to cymbals are and placing some overheads. When we were writing the songs, I had my usual cymbal setup, but when it came time to record, our thoughts shifted to *What's the perfect sound for this part?* and we chased it. Every cymbal was hand-chosen for its particular sound and auditioned using different mics and mic placements. For example, on "Un-Reborn Again," the hats we used were two 6" cymbal scraps that were the result of a friend taking a torch to two crashes.



MD: I'm guessing that means you used a variety of drums too?

Jon: I just got this kick-ass set of Vistalites for the tour from my man Uli at Ludwig, but because of the whole "all bets are off, best idea wins" mentality, we had a pile of different drums in the studio. There was my personal stash, Homme's kits, Ronson's magic kit that he's used on a bunch of records. My man Sahir from Masters of Maple teched the record, so he brought in a whole bunch of stuff as well. We jelly-beaned kits for each song, and Sahir made sure everything was tuned right.

MD: With Josh, Ronson, and Mark Rankin involved in the production, did it ever feel like too many cooks in the kitchen?

Jon: No, because they all shared the desire to do something new. Josh never wants Queens to become a parody of itself. And that's the beauty of Queens—the only thing that's for sure is that it's always going to be different from the last thing you heard.

MD: What criteria or elements need to be met for you in order to say yes to a project?

Jon: There's no real equation for it. It's just a feeling. I've done things with people that I didn't have a heavy personal connection with, but I loved the music. I've also played music I really didn't like with people I really loved.

Ever since I was a little kid, music has been an opportunity for me to communicate on a deeper level than just with words. Playing drums is a great way for me to make sense of the universe and have fun in a particular way and stretch my brain, my heart, and my soul. I've never had the mindset that a gig's a gig. I'm too emotional for that, and that's not what I love about music.

Sound Matters

Villains drum tech and Masters of Maple mastermind Sahir Hanif on the making of QotSA's latest collection.

With the current state of music, I think sound is sometimes overlooked. However, with Queens the sound is everything. In addition, [Villains producer] Mark Ronson has incredible taste—how could this get any better? I knew we were going to push the envelope, and I was ready to do my part.

We recorded drums and cymbals separately, which magnifies the sound of the drums more than usual. This process can be challenging,

and microphones don't lie. However, having Jon Theodore on drums made my job easy. He's unlike any player I've ever seen or heard.

Kit-wise we tried numerous combos but ended up using Masters of Maple gum/rosewood toms, Ronson's Ludwig kick—which was used on "Uptown Funk"—and Josh Homme's 18" bubinga kick I had built for him. For snare drums we used the Masters of Maple bell brass (6.5 and 5.5 depths), 7x14

Brazilian rosewood, and bronze prototypes (5.5 and 6.5). For heads I put Remo CS Dots on all the snares, and on the toms I used my favorite recipe of Coated Emperor batters and Coated Ambassador resonants. The title track featured no bottom heads for a '70s essence.

When we started each song, Josh and Mark would play me their ideas—once Josh coughed and said, "I want this to sound like someone clearing their throat." From that point they

trusted me to get the vibe and adjust the drums accordingly.

My tuning is very drummer- and song-specific. Each song was like an album within itself, and the drums were the focal point.

Cymbal-wise, we needed to fill space with the loosest precision possible. I made Jon a wall of cymbals, he made his own stackers, and I even brought in a gong. You name it, we did it.

I think this is the best-sounding record I've ever heard.

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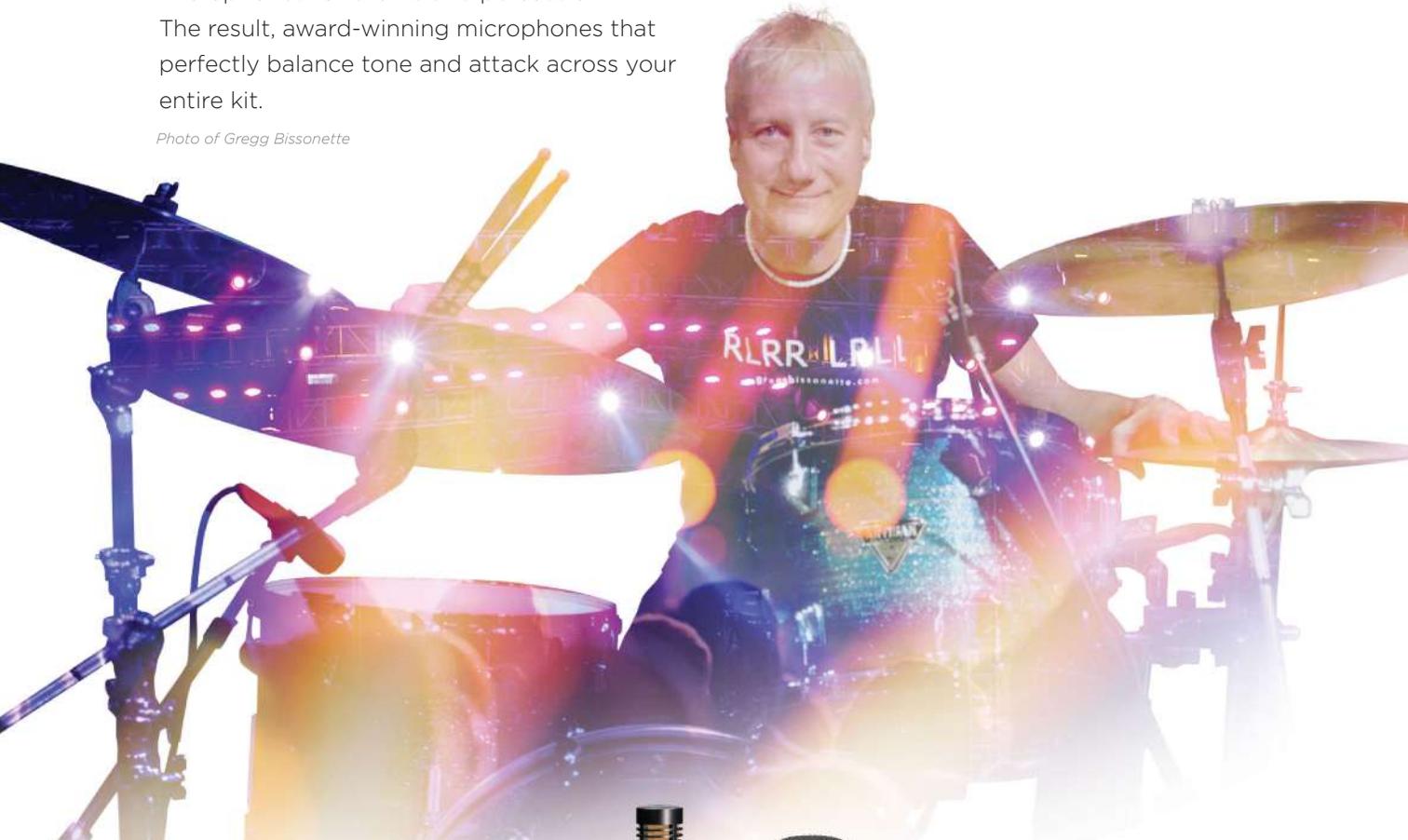
Pictured: Damon Grant

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Jon Theodore

I never minded having a job, so I never felt I needed to be "gigging." I actually can't say that word without cringing a little bit, because I never looked at drumming as what I needed to do to make a living. For me, music and drumming was just always a function of my life. It was a way for me to have fun, be creative, and do something I thought was wonderful and made me feel good. With that perspective, I feel you end up creating what you desire.

Although I've been involved in a lot of projects, I've never been one of those guys that does a lot of stuff just to work. I'm not necessarily a hired gun. That's not really me, and that's okay, because there are a ton of guys and gals that are perfect for that. I'm like a nice bottle of wine—you really want to have it. [laughs]

MD: You're not the house wine.

Jon: I appreciate that. And to clarify, fine wine not in the sense that it's better, but that there's only so much of it. It's actually not about how good it is; what's important is that it's an appropriate pairing.

I feel that there's this line in the world that has to do with intention and creativity and the way you want to organize the world around you and the people you want in your life. For me, I have a network of people I know or have known my whole life, and that's an automatic yes when it comes to [considering] a project. I'm open to new opportunities and new people, and I've had lots of experiences with people I didn't know. But if it can't be something that enriches my life, I'm not necessarily drawn to it. I'd rather surf or go to the mountains than cultivate some sort of empty or unfulfilling musical experience that doesn't sustain me emotionally or musically.

I love the drums, I love playing drums as much as I possibly can, and I also love being social. I'm a social cat. I love to learn about people and their worldviews and experiences with music and art

to enrich my own life. So it puts me in a place where I'm constantly seeking out that dynamic connection, and more often than not it's with a musician, because we share so many common experiences.

MD: That being said, do you identify more as a drummer or a musician?

Jon: I guess it depends on who's asking. [laughs] From the first time I picked up a pair of sticks, drums were something I felt incredibly passionate about. To be honest, in terms of my personality and ethnicity, I'm someone who's pretty unpigeonholeable. I've never been the kind of person that could just put on the jacket or have the haircut. I've never been able to embrace any kind of ethos or ideology based on appearance, because I don't ever appear to be one thing or another. Playing drums was the very first time in my life that I felt singular. I felt whole and powerful, and all aspects of who and what I am went down the same funnel and were channeled to this one particular gear of life.

MD: When and how did you first start playing, and was there a particular defining moment that first made you pick up a pair of sticks?

Jon: My friend Gavin McCarthy and I both played piano when we were kids. Eventually he managed to talk his parents into letting him quit piano and start playing drums. I was so jealous, because I was burning on the inside for the same thing. I credit him for showing me it was possible to throw off the shackles of parental supervision at the age of twelve or thirteen. I didn't start playing drums, though, until I was about fifteen or sixteen. And there's absolutely a defining moment: the first time I heard "Fat Bottomed Girls" by Queen! There's this fill in the middle of the song where Roger Taylor plays this monstrous coast-to-coast fill right before the refrain comes back in. I'll never forget hearing it. It was so unhinged that it totally liberated

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Jon Theodore

me, because I was this pubescent maniac with no outlet for raging hormones. I don't know why, but that song hit me right in my soul-hole and opened up the doors of possibility for me.

MD: So when was the first time you got to sit down behind a kit?

Jon: They had a drumset at this summer camp that I went to, so I started knocking around there playing "Mony Mony" and "Louie Louie"—you know, the only songs you can play when you don't know how to play. [laughs] Then I got into the high school band, but there was already another drummer, so I had to play timpani, marimba, and sleigh bells, which was cool, but I would always sit behind the drums when the other drummer wasn't there.

MD: What was your first band experience?

Jon: Two of my friends were already playing guitar, and we were all listening to Zeppelin, Hendrix, and Neil Young. I was also really into Rush and Yes. Maybe I just had some mental or emotional proclivity for more technical music, because I always liked things that were intricate and challenging as much as I liked the more straightforward stuff. So the three of us were separately all playing in our basements and we finally had the bright idea to actually jam together. We sucked real bad, but it was a great moment in time where the world became ours and we suddenly had this sense of autonomy.

The basement was our world, a world that only we knew about. We spent hours of our time exploring these new realms, working out ideas to the point where we truly were able to intertwine our individual approaches to find these collective group-mind moments. It was these first luminous steps into this world of cosmic exploration together. Soon we started playing high school dances, house parties, and renting out the student union at the local college to play shows.

I remember somebody telling me that we won't make any money if we don't play Top 40, and I didn't even understand what he was talking about, because that had no bearing on me.

MD: Your approach to music and drums in general seems so much more spiritual or personal than technical. Yet you're a very technical player. Where's the balance for you?

Jon: I'm an older guy now, and my experiences have served to balance my youthful utopian view of the world, and my musical world as well. Within everything that's good, there's still positive and negative. This is an analogy for larger life themes, but it's apparent in the world of music and drumming too: The world is filled with people that can blast anything at any time and have refined their skill sets to such a degree that they are dazzling and fantastic. But when you meet them, you realize you're not actually having a conversation with them—it's like being at a lecture. Musicians can play that way too, and it's completely unbearable to me. Technique is unquestionably respectable and requires a tremendous amount of time to develop, but it means nothing to me.

MD: I think I know what you mean. I've been in experiences listening to or playing with some amazing technicians that could be best labeled as "doesn't play well with others." There's no spirit of collaboration.

Jon: That's exactly it. Now, I consider myself a musician as much as a drummer, because I think the distinction is that you can't say that every drummer is a musician, because drummers who are solely focusing on blasting their skills out and aren't really listening to other people...that's not really music. It's acrobatics or something. That's where I would draw the distinction. To me, there's a difference between excellent drumming and excellent music. I'm old enough now to want excellent music. There are a few guys, like Chris Coleman—man, that guy is music to me! I can't fathom how on earth one guy on a drumset can sound like a waterfall or a babbling

brook. I'm amazed how he creates these landscapes that are so musical. He clearly represents a dynamic understanding of the nature of music and what makes it great. He is top of a short list.

I, too, can admit to wanting to be dazzling, but I also want to be musical at the same time. I'm lucky that I'm in a position that I can acknowledge the situation and do what's required. I guess it's based on my vision of music as being a part of life. I don't feel any push to prove myself in the world of drum skills. I can't compete. That's not part of my world of playing. My thing is a function of the music all the time. Without musicality, drums can be hollow and empty, regardless of how smoking your chops are.

MD: Did you ever develop a practice routine, or did you mainly develop your technique and style from playing along to records?

Jon: Well, I definitely had to practice for the high school band, and I did take some lessons from a couple of dudes. I practiced the fundamentals using *Stick Control* and *Syncopation* to develop muscle memory. I guess I looked at it more as an excuse to keep sticks in my hands all the time. But, even from the beginning, there was a disconnect for me between the lessons I was learning, because I didn't feel I could apply it to what I was playing when I sat down at my drums. The lessons seemed rigid, but when I sat down at my drums, that was all open-ended, raw-nerve stuff, simply reacting to what was happening between me and my friends. It was never about me bringing forth any sort of learned technique. We were more into creating our own sound.

I developed my style mostly by playing with friends and along to records, and used my lesson practice as a way to warm up. I still use warm-up exercises that I've gathered over the years. Those are invaluable, but for me the important thing about any form of practice is unlocking the potential in your mind and body. Maybe this is presumptuous, but I never felt I needed to get past, like, the first page of *Stick Control*, because that one page was enough of a challenge for my brain. Leading with the left and making your weaker hand as strong as the dominant hand, the general multi-limbed equalizing approach, tends to be enough for me to create what I want to create, and I don't normally get to a place where I don't feel that I can't do something. Clearly, there's a million more things I can learn about drums that would make me a better drummer, but I'm motivated primarily by the people that I'm creating music with. When I'm particularly inspired, those moments come from inside; they're not regurgitated practiced ideas.

MD: It sounds like you're saying your technique is almost inspired by the physical and emotional reactions you have in the moment to the musicians you're playing with. Queens, however, seems to employ a more methodical approach. Was that an easy adjustment for you to make?

Jon: Well, Queens is a unique situation, because I came into the fold as a slightly fanatical fan of the band. First I had to learn their entire catalog, because we toured long before we wrote an album together. Having to figure out all the past tunes first made me aware of how deep and intricate the songs are. Every song is like an equation. There's nothing intuitive about it, so when I started learning the tunes, I was immediately struck by the overwhelming feeling that I suddenly had to learn all these math problems. Now it's been long enough that I can internalize them, and I don't have to think my way through them as much. I've become hip to the band's tendencies and their idiosyncrasies, which helps me stay in the body more than the mind when I play.

Being in at the ground floor for making an album allowed these parts to come from within, so for me it was about being physical and nimble—being able to react in the moment, remaining solid but supple enough to flow. Now my priority is balancing the physical



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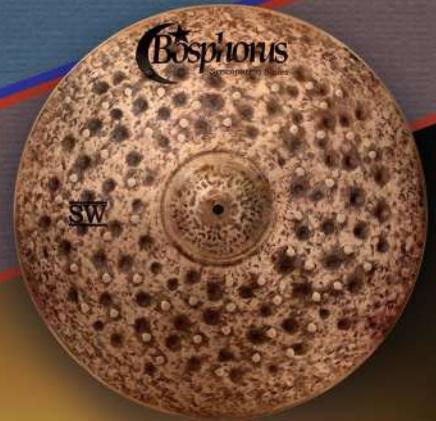
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Jon Theodore

and mental equally.

MD: What do you feel is your role on stage to keep the liveliness and intensity?

Jon: Every show has to feel like it's special and that it's the only time it's going to happen this way. There's some kid in the audience at their first show, and a strobe light is going to blow their mind, and they are standing next to a die-hard that's seen every iteration of the band and wants to not have it be the same show they saw last time. It's a real privilege and a big responsibility to go on stage, bring the heat, and create what brought us all here in the first place—an experience between the band and the audience.

MD: As the bandleader, how does Josh approach playing live, and how do you interact on stage?

Jon: There are a lot of situations where people will claim to be bandleaders, but they don't really fit the role. It's like a dog pack. When the alpha is weak or unsure when making a decision on the behalf of the pack, the pack gets uptight, starts fighting, and the order of the pack gets destroyed. Josh is a true alpha and follows the law of the universe that the best idea wins. That

creates this level of openness where anyone can call an audible. There's something very liberating about it, and it creates a really harmonious pack mentality where words almost don't need to be spoken.

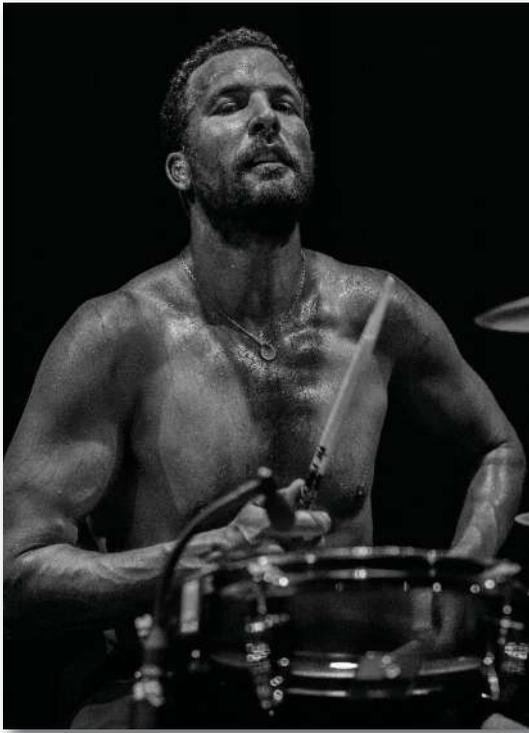
My number-one role is something I've learned both from being on stage over the years and by watching people like Chad Smith. When you go to a Chili Peppers show, everyone in the front row to the very back row is dancing, and that's because of Chad. He's focused on making sure that everything stays in the pocket and feels great. So my primary role is to make the music feel good, which means I have to be concerned with my dynamics and consistency. I have to be able to facilitate any form of set change, stay present, and be ready for an audible or to catch a cue at any time. I'm there as part of the entire experience and making sure everyone is locked on the same wavelength. I make sure people can dance and have a good time, while trying to breathe new life into all of the older songs and also honor all the different drummers, their different styles and feels. I'm there to tie it all together into this cohesive unit that we present.

My job is made easier in Queens

because everyone has *really* solid time and command of the space between notes. I'm pretty sure everyone else in the band also plays drums too! Therefore, I never have to pay attention to my sense of time—all I have to do is listen. Once I count a song off, we function like pistons in a motor.

MD: What is the best lesson you've learned lately?

Jon: I guess that the train is going down the track and there's nothing you can do to stop it, so you might as well just rip in and give it all you got, taste everything and just go for it. I've been through a lot of stuff in my life where I was reluctant to make a decision or say yes to something because I didn't want to make a mistake. A good friend of mine once said, "Unless you're in jail, you're not in jail." So, might as well try everything, and if you make a mistake, then you made a mistake. Live and follow your bliss, because it will all be over before you know it. You'll never look back on your life and say, "Man, I'm sure glad I didn't try that, because maybe I would have messed that up." It's quite the liberating revelation, musically and personally. That's become a mantra.



Jon Theodore

Style and Analysis

by Austin Burcham

From his days playing mind-melting Mars Volta compositions to his current gig with the rock giants Queens of the Stone Age, Jon Theodore has inspired drummers with powerful grooves, explosive fills, and rock-solid time. His ability to craft the perfect parts for the song while driving the music forward with energy and emotion sets him apart from the pack. Let's check out some of Theodore's playing with the Mars Volta and QotSA.

"Cygnus...Vismund Cygnus" (The Mars Volta, *Frances the Mute*)

At 3:33, Theodore erupts into this ear-jerking groove. The phrasing could be interpreted in multiple ways, but we'll organize it into a three-bar pattern of 9/16, 3/4, and 2/4. The quick open hi-hat accents, kick and snare figures, and unusual time signatures define this unique groove. (90 bpm)

"The Widow" (The Mars Volta, *Frances the Mute*)

At 1:24, this 6/8 fill creates plenty of anticipation and energy before the huge chorus that follows. This pattern demonstrates Jon's ability to write parts that amplify the song's emotion and give the changes in the music more impact. (68 bpm)

"Feet Don't Fail Me" (Queens of the Stone Age, *Villains*)

Now we'll check out some examples from the latest QotSA album, *Villains*. This opening groove comes in at the 1:48 mark of "Feet Don't Fail Me." This funky pattern drives hard and sets the tone for the entire album. The upbeat accents on the hi-hats contrast nicely with the strong downbeats in the guitar riff. The hi-hat phrasing also gives the groove a fluid feel. (110 bpm)

"Domesticated Animals" (Queens of the Stone Age, *Villains*)

At the 1:09 mark in this track, the drums enter with a sparse 7/8 groove that matches the guitar's accent pattern. Quarter notes ride over the barline to latch the listener on to a steady pulse. (117 bpm)

"The Evil Has Landed" (Queens of the Stone Age, *Villains*)

This groove comes in at 0:35. This is a super-funky phrase with a busy kick pattern and an open, Bonham-type sound. The snare pattern may seem unusual, but it matches the guitar parts and builds interest. The bass drum complements the guitar part while filling in the spaces when the guitar drops out. (86 bpm)





"My own rule has always been that I would never endorse any product that I wouldn't buy myself, if endorsements weren't an option. That's exactly how I ended up with Vater in 1992.

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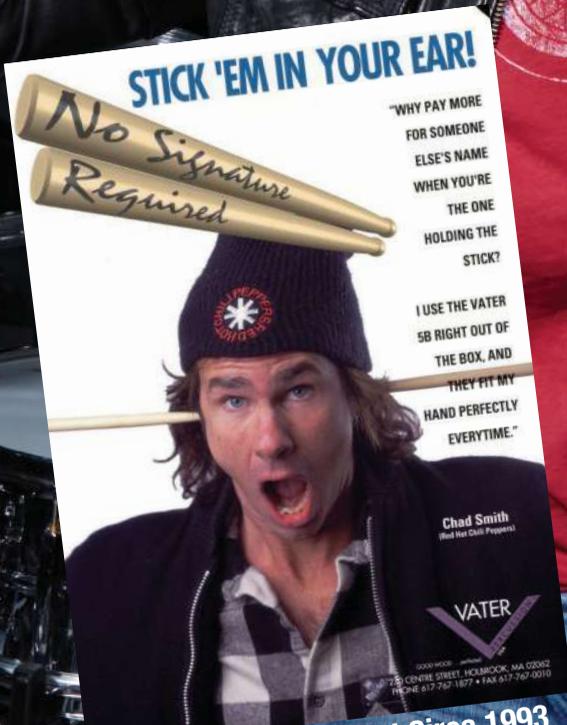
I just love how it's still a family business, starting with grandpa Jack, then going to Clary, and down to Alan and Ron. No corporate sell-outs here, folks. These guys live, sleep, breathe, eat, and dream of drumsticks. They get good wood about good wood, and are totally obsessed with making the best sticks possible.

Over the years we've had some pretty outrageous fun and the Vater's have always treated me like their brother. Together, we have celebrated life milestones like birthdays, weddings and the births of our children. They have always made me feel like a member of their family.

Together we developed the Funkblaster model, which today is still my stick of choice. Vater combines both kick-ass production techniques with a "work hard, play hard" attitude. It's always been an easy decision on who to stick with (pun intended!). They never let me down.

The Vater staff enjoy their work and I enjoy hanging with them whenever I can. They better keep it up, 'cause I plan to keep playing until the wheels fall off!!!"

Chad Smith



Early Chad Smith Ad Circa 1993



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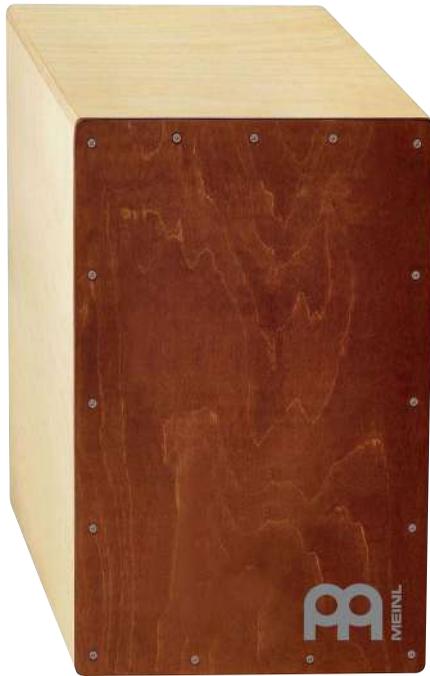
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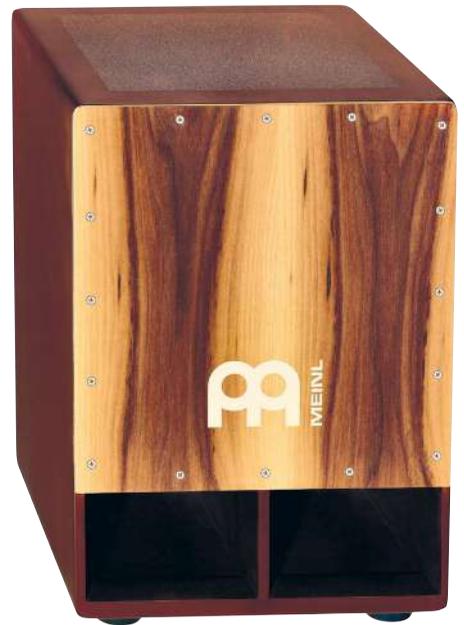
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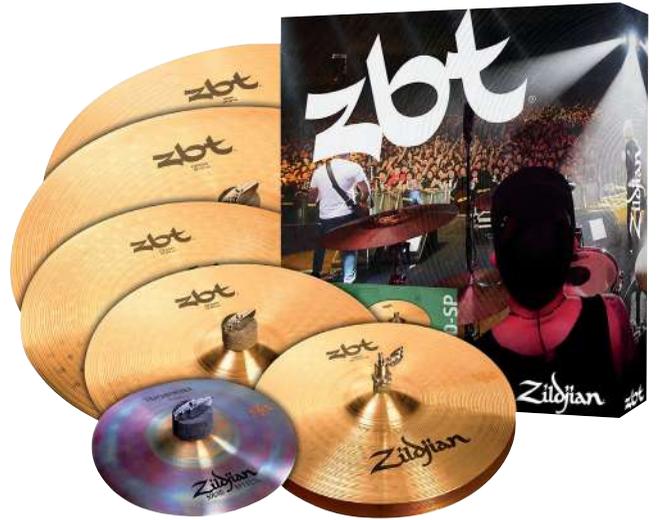
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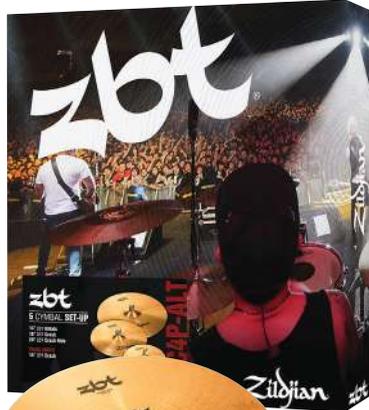


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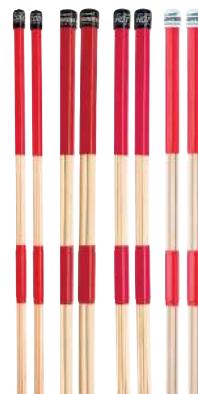
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Justin Brown



By immersing himself in the music, history, and lifestyle associated with multiple genres—and leaning hard on good-ol’ values like shedding rudiments and improving reading skills—the drummer with Thundercat, Ambrose Akinmusire, and his own band of modern greats, Nyeusi, has become one of the most in-demand contemporary players of the day.

Story by Ken Micallef
Photos by Paul La Raia

Thirty-three-year-old Oakland, California, native Justin Brown is an extremely busy bicoastal musician whose drumming with Thundercat, Gerald Clayton, Christian McBride, Stefon Harris, Kenny Garrett, Esperanza Spalding, and Vijay Iyer is simply a foretaste of his brilliant debut album as a leader with his band, Nyeusi.

On every Nyeusi gig, Brown's cathartic drumming and '70s-inspired funk/fusion material are thoroughly earth scorching. But within his kinetic rhythm brew are incredible groove reserves, a refined touch, and a deep knowledge of jazz history.

Part of a California-based crew that includes best friends Thomas Pridgen and Ronald Bruner, Brown is grace and fire to their pummel and power. Seeing Brown and Nyeusi perform at New York City's Le Poisson Rouge recently was both mental flashback and contemporary jazz-funk psychedelic mind-bender. Nyeusi—which also features keyboardists Jason Lindner and Fabian Almazan, bassist Burniss Travis, and EWI wind-controller player Mark Shim—ties together past, present, and future, with Brown helming the group with musical invention and drumming wit.

A chat with Brown reveals his influences and favorite albums, including the Tony Williams Lifetime's *Turn It Over*, Elvin Jones' *On the Mountain*, CAB with Dennis Chambers, Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers' *Free for All*, and Jeff "Tain" Watts' *Bar Talk*. But revealing his cosmic soul, Brown also notes Astroid Power-Up!'s *Google Plex* with drummer Deantoni Parks, Mint Condition's *Definition of a Band* with drummers Stokley and Chris Dave, and Slum Village's *Fantastic Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2*, featuring the groundbreaking programming of J Dilla.

Brown's own body of work exists more in jazz terrain, and includes Chris Dingman's *Waking Dreams*, Flying Lotus's *You're Dead!*, Gerald Clayton's *Tributary Tales*, Linda May Han Oh's *Walk Against Wind*, *Revive Music Presents Supreme Sonacy Vol. 1*, Yosvany Terry's *New Throned King*, and trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire's *Prelude to Cora* and *A Rift in Decorum: Live at the Village Vanguard*.

Brown began drumming in church when he was two and eventually joined UC Berkeley's Young Musicians Program. In 2002—the year in which he also played in the Grammy All-Star Band—he won a full scholarship to the Dave Brubeck Institute; two years later he was awarded a full scholarship to Juilliard. Upon arriving in New York, though, the drummer dropped out of Juilliard on day one and hit the circuit.

MD: What are some of the musical influences on your debut Nyeusi album?

Justin: My upbringing is in gospel and jazz. My mother is a pianist, so I was always really into voicings. It's like a directional chain. I've drawn inspiration from J Dilla, Herbie Hancock, Mozart. The 1960s is my favorite period for jazz, and the 1970s for fusion, including Weather Report, Tony Williams Lifetime, Return to Forever, and Mahavishnu Orchestra. I'm trying to keep my head in the future and in the past. The most important thing is to live in the now.

MD: You placed second in the 2012 Thelonious Monk Competition.

Justin: Yes. There are political things involved with the Monk Competition, but I was very blessed to make it that far while being true to myself. It was a great honor. It wasn't about winning at that point; it was about being honest. I was swinging, but not doing it in the traditional sense to where I was holding back. I was trying to react to what I was hearing instead of laying in the cut and playing it safe.

MD: Did you use any triggering for the Nyeusi album?

Justin: Not at all, it's all live drums. I wanted to have the element of sounding like an MPC or an electronic

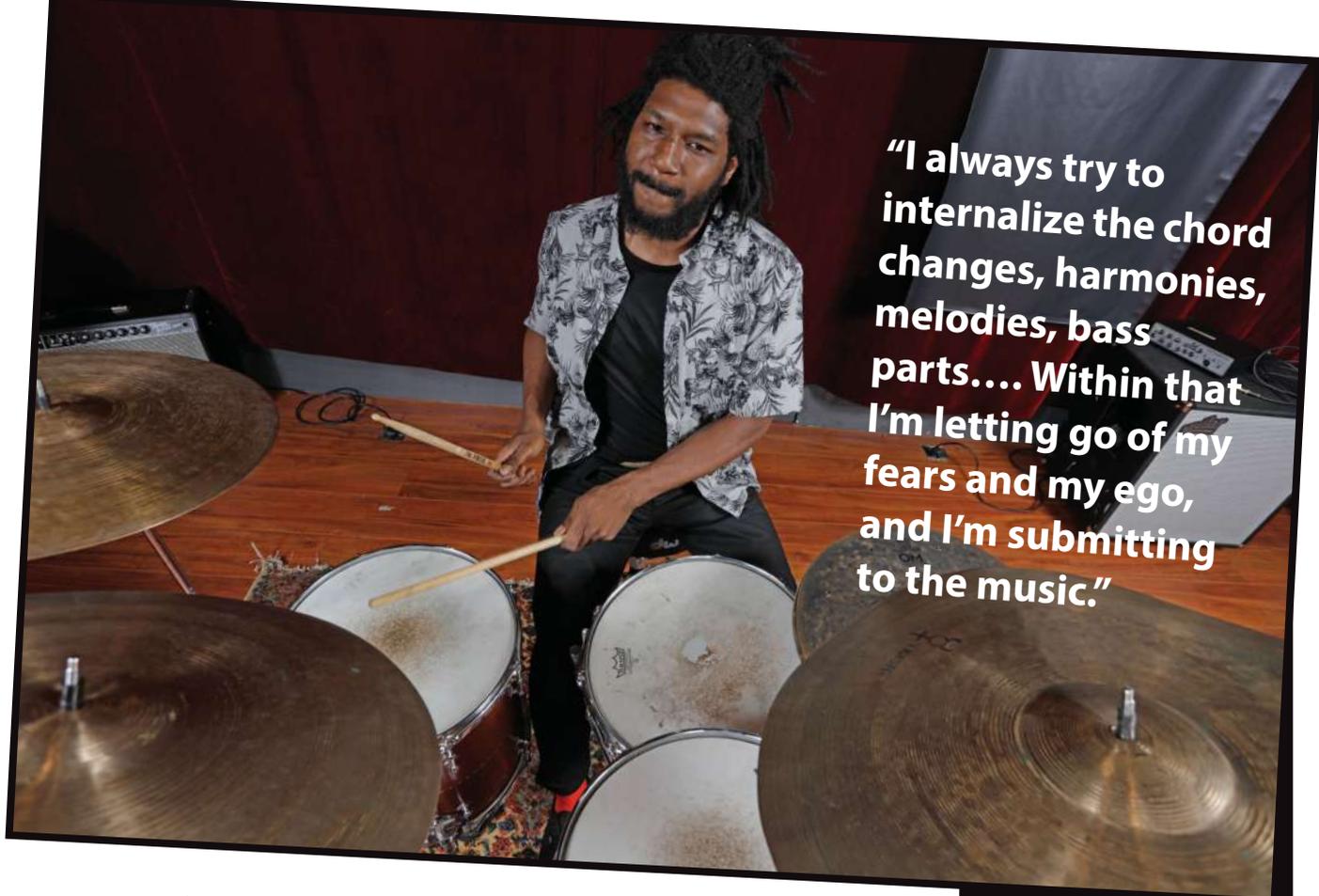
instrument at times, and I like this idea of man versus machine. Whether it's hip-hop or drum 'n' bass beats, I wanted to emulate those styles on a live instrument. There might be elements in the mixing process that give an electronic-sounding boost, but all the drums and percussion were recorded live. I also used stacked cymbals and put cymbals on snare drums, as well as dampening the drums and adding low end to the bass drum in the mix. But it was all recorded live.

MD: Did you change tuning for different tracks?

Justin: I used three snare drums, and sometimes tuned them differently. My main snare is a brass/copper Craviotto, which is amazing for its high end. It cuts through. I also used an old 7x15 Ludwig and a Ludwig Supraphonic. On the record I played two left-hand snare drums and one main snare; that main drum changed for different songs. On "Lots for Nothing," for instance, it's an old 15" Leedy.

MD: How do you generally compose?

Justin: Sometimes I'll start at the drums. I hear the songs in my head first, then I compose and record in GarageBand or Logic to make a sketch, then I translate it to sheet music. I work out harmonies on the piano. I'm influenced by electronic music and software as well. But



"I always try to internalize the chord changes, harmonies, melodies, bass parts.... Within that I'm letting go of my fears and my ego, and I'm submitting to the music."

I'm still a stickler for live instruments. I emulate electronic sounds with live instruments.

MD: On your album's first track, "Lesson 1 DANCE," it almost sounds like two rhythms are happening at once.

Justin: There I'm thinking of Marvin Gaye and that spirit of letting go and being free. Drum-wise, I wanted that fatback, Bernard Purdie sound. I wanted that danceable thing, and a little J Dilla. So you hear four on the floor and some extra action from the combination of the hi-hat and ghost notes on the snare drum.

MD: "Lots for Nothing" has these staccato rhythms and pointed drum fills, and a recurring melody, all within an odd meter.

Justin: The meter is interesting. The guys in the band heard it different ways. I think of the main vamp as being in fifteen. You can think of it as two different systems, a bar of 7/4 and a bar of 8/4, or a seven-bar phrase with one bar of 6/8 and six bars of 4/8.

MD: "Lesson 2 PLAY" opens with what sounds like phasing cymbals.

Justin: I used stacked cymbals to create that effect. The song is dreamlike and ethereal but moving forward. Within that song you can hear the hip-hop and J Dilla influences.

MD: When first presented with another composer's new music, what's your focus?

Justin: I try to internalize the music first. I don't like to have my face buried in the sheet music. I want to create in the moment. So I try to internalize everything, to get it in my memory as fast as possible. I always try to internalize, whether it's chord changes, harmonies, melodies, bass parts—committing it to memory so it will be easier to focus on the music. Within that I'm letting go of my fears and my ego, and I'm submitting to the music. I want to help create this thing with the band that portrays the story the composer is trying to tell.

MD: What are your approaches to the music of Chris Dingman versus Ambrose Akinmusire versus Thundercat?

Justin: I think of it as all the same thing musically. Within that these guys allow me to still be myself. They put the music in my hands to help orchestrate. They have confidence in what I will bring. The only differences are physical things. There are periods when I'm laying in

the cut, but sometimes the music can be more aggressive, and that takes a toll on the body. I've learned to build stamina, drink more water, and eat healthy. I always knew I could play the kind of music I do with Thundercat, but there was something to finally getting the opportunity to go on the road and do it. It's completely different, but in more of a physical way than a musical way.

With all the music I play, I always want to learn its history. When I studied rock music, I lived with those musicians. Same thing with hip-hop—I went to the clubs and spoke with the producers, asking questions and living that lifestyle. Once you learn how to live each genre of music, it's easier to understand it and tell your story.

MD: Is being a good sight-reader important?

Justin: Reading music will enhance your ability on the instrument. There are many great musicians who don't read music. But it's a requirement for the

Brown's Setups

With Ambrose Akinmusire

- Drums:** Craviotto
- 6.5x14 walnut/curly maple/walnut hybrid wood snare
 - 7.5x12 mahogany tom
 - 14x14 mahogany floor tom
 - 14x18 mahogany bass drum

Cymbals:

- Istanbul Agop
- 15" OM hi-hats
- 22" Trash Hit
- 22" 30th Anniversary ride
- 20" 30th Anniversary ride

With Thundercat

- Drums:** Craviotto
- 5x15 ballad snare floor tom
 - 6.5x14 brass/copper hybrid snare
 - 7.5x11 and 8x13 mahogany toms
 - 16x16 mahogany floor tom
 - 14x20 and 14x22 mahogany bass drums

Cymbals:

- Istanbul Agop
- 22" Trash Hit/20" OM crash stack
- 18" Xist hi-hats
- 22" 30th Anniversary ride
- 15" OM hi-hats (stacked)
- 20" 30th Anniversary ride

Heads: Remo Coated Ambassador snare batters and Clear Hazy snare-sides, Clear Emperor tom batters and Clear Ambassador resonants, and Clear Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter

Hardware: Tama and DW

Sticks: Vic Firth 5A barrel-tip

composers I play with, and it definitely helps me to internalize music faster. Thundercat doesn't hand me sheet music, but Ambrose and Chris Dingman give me lead sheets.

Sometimes they'll include specifics they want to hear, or directions in regards to dynamics or to make a section looser or more grooving.

MD: You play a lot of odd meters with Ambrose Akinmusire. Jack DeJohnette has commented on your skill in that regard.

Justin: That's great! Hopefully I play odd meters that people feel they can dance to. It helps to be deeply rooted in groove. I think about James Brown and Clyde Stubblefield and Jabo Starks, and how deep their groove was. My conception of odd meters is influenced by African, Asian, and Indian music, but within the idea of being deeply rooted in groove. When it comes to R&B, it's all about the funk. I'm constantly thinking, *How do I make it feel good?*

MD: You're incredibly fast. And you have a great touch on the drumset. How did you develop your speed, and is it mostly fingers or wrists?

Justin: It's a combination of both. I'm a stickler for the Moeller technique and relying on rebound, but I also used to play on pillows to build speed and endurance. Moeller, Alan Dawson's Rudimental Ritual, and Charley Wilcoxon's *Modern Rudimental Swing Solos* helped me develop speed. It's a combination of utilizing rebound and using the wrists and fingers.

It also depends on the volume you're trying to get. I use more wrist strength with Thundercat because I'm digging in a little more. With jazz, I rely on rebound and fingers because I need a lighter touch and lighter sensibility. It also depends on what I'm trying to play in the moment.

MD: How did you develop your refined touch on the drumset?

Justin: That comes from working on dynamics, learning how to play at really quiet dynamic levels but with intensity. Art Blakey could dig in and play loud, but when he was tipping he had this relaxed thing going while continuing to keep the intensity. Jack DeJohnette has that thing as well. I used to practice playing fast at all dynamic levels. Your muscles change at different dynamic levels, so you should practice at different dynamics and tempos. Find the threshold, stop there, and relax and work on controlling the dynamics.

MD: Your drumming has a great sense of forward motion.

Justin: Elvin Jones and Roy Haynes have that forward motion in their playing; it's like a flowing stream of water. Within that I try to have a mindset of patience. Intense

things can happen on the bandstand, but I'm constantly thinking of flowing like a river, being relaxed and letting things come naturally and not forcing anything. I always keep my mind and my ears open.

MD: You used exercises from *Modern Rudimental Swing Solos* as warm-up routines?

Justin: Yes, I played those every day in college. There was something about the feeling of the double-stroke rolls and displacing the accents [in the bar] to where it felt like the movement of a rubber band. That helped me develop my fingers and get a

relaxed rebound to the sticks.

MD: You've spoken of working with a metronome to make the time sound "lazy or less accurate."

Justin: Yes. You have metric, perfect time, but being lazy or ahead of the time is [adjusting to] the foundation of time; that's the element that never changes. Say I wanted to play lazy, behind the beat. Maybe I would displace the bass drum a 16th behind the quarter note. Or move it an 8th note or a triplet behind the quarter note. It's not necessarily dragging the beat, but investigating where each note falls

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Justin Brown

within the foundation of time.

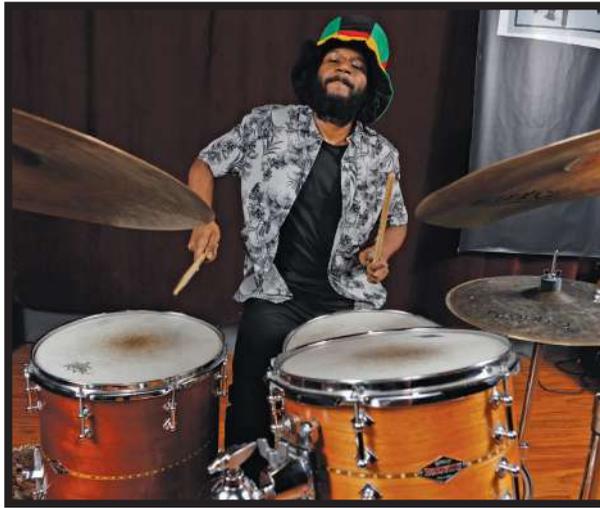
I also like personality and stank! So it's the lazy feeling you get from that [attitude]. The technical side versus stagnant, nonflexible time. It's up to you how far ahead or behind the beat you place [the emphasis]. That comes from playing to drum loops or a metronome. I'd transcribe drum grooves and then dissect them and place them ahead of or behind the beat. Playing behind the beat is still playing in time.

MD: You flow easily between matched and traditional grips.

Justin: I'm trying to get better with matched grip. But when it comes to jazz and getting ghost notes, matched grip produces a different sound from traditional grip. I'm also trying to get better at playing a pocket with traditional grip, like Steve Jordan does. But with jazz, if I want ghost notes on the snare drum, it's easier with traditional grip.

MD: Why do you hold your sticks back on the butt end?

Justin: I try to let the butt of the stick be at the edge of my pinky finger. That gives me better control of rebound. [To build control



and strength] I used to play series of 8ths and 16ths on each finger. Jojo Mayer's *Secret Weapons for the Modern Drummer* DVD is great for technique. I used his methods to develop each finger, whether playing 5A or 8D sticks. That gave me more control of the sticks and rebound. And then you have the option of gripping the stick with the pinky and ring finger and playing off the back end of the stick. It's about options and control.

MD: What are the general requirements to work in the New York jazz scene?

Justin: Be open to information and be open to music. If you want to do this, you can't be narrow-minded, because there's so much to choose from and be inspired by. Do the homework. Investigate and learn the history and the lifestyle of the music. Work as hard as you can. Create practice regimens. And check your ego. Music is a team effort.

MD: What's been key to your success?

Justin: Never settling and always wanting to grow. I could have easily settled on being an R&B drummer. But I always felt I had to keep going, that there was something to always get better at. It's important to let go

of the ego; the music is not about you. Music is a tool to speak to the [people].

I learned playing in church as a kid that music is a spiritual thing that heals people. Music is not about getting likes on Instagram. There's a bigger picture. Be a vessel to speak in the now, [translating] the energy of the room or the energy of the world. I thank God every day for this gift. I try to remain humble and keep God first and do the work. I try to pray in every moment. Be a vessel to spread love. That's my goal.



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Eli Keszler

The multidisciplinary artist has dedicated much of his career to exploring the solo drumset's expressionistic capabilities. That pursuit has led him to the fringes of the visual art and music scenes. But it's also helped him discover venues where he can perform his avant-garde compositions, audiences who appreciate them, and a range of unique sonic textures few musicians imagine when thinking about the instrument.

Story by Keith Carne
Photos by Brendan Burdzinski

When the Brooklyn-based performer and composer Eli Keszler settles in behind a drumkit, it's likely that he's given as much thought to the space he's playing in as the notes he's filling it with. "As a composer it's essential that I know the space I'm writing for," Keszler says. That's because his surroundings are as much a part of the piece as the sounds themselves: To experience one of Keszler's pieces in person is to become aware of your surroundings.

It's doubtful that you've heard music or experienced visual art quite like his. In performance and on solo releases such as last year's double album *Last Signs of Speed*, 2015's *Oxtirn*, and 2012's *Catching Net* (another double), Keszler scratches, scrapes, taps, and bellows his way around his unassuming four-piece kit, and those particles of sound coalesce to form extended, yawning phrases that morph over time. His playing is original and virtuosic—yet its most jarring quality is the way it invites listeners to consider

concepts beyond drums, or even music. Keszler's performative art installations pose questions about life, art, and our relationship to environments.

One could frame Keszler's work as new music or site-specific, interactive installation art. His dizzying drumset compositions often incorporate wire sculptures that stretch across the performance space, and together these elements interact and reverberate, ultimately animating spaces we may notice but never really consider. Keszler's novel approach has made him stand out in a city overflowing with musicians and artists of all types, which is why his work has been featured at Lincoln Center, the Kitchen, and museums and universities around the world. He's worked with So Percussion and the Icelandic Symphony and Brooklyn String Orchestras, among many others. His performance pieces and recordings open doors to expressive and dialogical possibilities we rarely associate with drum-centric music.

Keszler's playing is imagistic, and his pieces convey a spectrum of emotional dynamics that range from the epic (think gamelan with tribalistic tom explosions) to the intimate ("house noises" you might hear while lying in bed). A player of polyglot inspiration, Keszler takes cues from almost everything that surrounds him—drawings, buildings, other drummers, rocks, machines....

"Looking at and listening to the world around me gets me very excited, and I often say to myself, *Oh my God... I have to figure out how to reflect this in my own way*," Keszler explains. Maybe that's why you're as likely to hear in his playing compressed bebop chops that sound like a tape of Art Blakey played in fast-forward as you are Morton Feldman-esque melodies that are equally haunting and dulcet. Regardless of any of his phrases' origins, after hearing Keszler play you'll definitely agree that he is fluent in the languages that have helped create contemporary music's lexicon.

"I thought about ways I could create the sense of sustain on the drums, rather than using the cymbals as a wash of sound."

Sheets of Sound

Chance, improvisation, preparation, and variation all inform his approach, so it's tempting to describe Keszler as one of John Cage's musical descendants. Yet his skill as a drumset technician makes his music distinctly accessible for drummers. Keszler's sound is built from many components, but the one that will likely floor percussionists first is the flurry of strokes that he orchestrates across every reachable surface of his kit—rims, stands, shells, cymbals, crotales that he plops on top of his snare, not to mention the drums themselves (which he texturizes with folded cloths). He often begins pieces by introducing phrases built from impossibly rapid taps across two or three textures (the snare drum, its rim, and the hi-hat, for example), then follows that original phrase with variations on those same surfaces, broadening his palette to new textures only after he's explored a mind-bending slew of rhythmic inversions.

These exploratory and organizational systems suggest something structural, almost in the way that a building constructed from bricks uses parallel and overlapping repetition to create not only its foundation but its very form. Each brick may appear identical to its neighbor, yet divots, discoloration, nicks, and clots of mortar give every building block a variation all its own. Keszler's compositions stretch in a similar fashion, and each of his brick-like phrases is imprinted with its own sort of variation that modulates vertically across the textures of the kit as the piece unfolds.

Keszler address the instrument in a way that many drummers likely wouldn't: through phrasing and melodic contour. Contemporary composers like Tony Conrad and Phill Niblock—musicians who work with long, sustained tones—helped him form

that approach. "About ten years ago I got really interested in that kind of music," Keszler says. "I thought about ways I could create the sense of sustain on the drums, rather than using the cymbals as a wash of sound. I wanted to see if I could play phrases on the drums that are so fast they form long shapes of tiny shards...where one sound morphs, but that one sound is made up of 200 individual hits."

Keszler goes on to describe this sort of playing as forming "sheets of sound," a concept he first encountered with British saxophonist Evan Parker and in John Coltrane's later music. "I'm really into the idea that the drumset can create a wash of tones, where you stop hearing individual hits. Schoenberg had this idea called the Klangfarbenmelodie, which is basically a 'noise melody,' where there are multiple sounds going on at once and you don't hear the individual pitches—you only hear [makes a groaning, wailing sort of sound that modulates]. That [sound] is how I imagine the shapes on the drums, that it comes more from my voice than from the drums themselves."

Next Exit: The Road Less Traveled

The early parts of Keszler's development followed a path familiar to that of many musicians: He played in bands with friends and took private lessons. It was his first exposure to live jazz that made Keszler focus on his instrument. "I saw all these jazz drummers at Scullers and Regattabar in Boston," Eli says. "I was just blown away and would think, *This is so heavy... THIS is drumming. What I'm doing is, like, nothing*."

Keszler points mostly to jazz drummers like Ed Blackwell, Paul Motian, and Elvin Jones when he talks about his early influences.

Eli Keszler

"Elvin Jones and Tony Williams said they practiced five to ten hours a day. So I said to myself, *At the very least, I can practice that much.* I don't know if I'm as talented as they are, but I can try as hard as they did."

Yet as indebted as Keszler is to traditional heavyweights, he owes a great deal of his sound to composers who helped define modernism. "Han Bennink, Lee 'Scratch' Perry, composers like Morton Feldman... they really influenced the way I think about phrases, in terms of repetition and variables," Keszler says. "I'm interested in creating micro-variables within a repetition until it morphs into something else."

As Keszler began to take playing more seriously, he started composing his own music, and ultimately that became his primary area of focus. It led him to the New England Conservatory of Music, where he studied composition with Ran Blake and Anthony Coleman.

Inside-Out, Outside-In

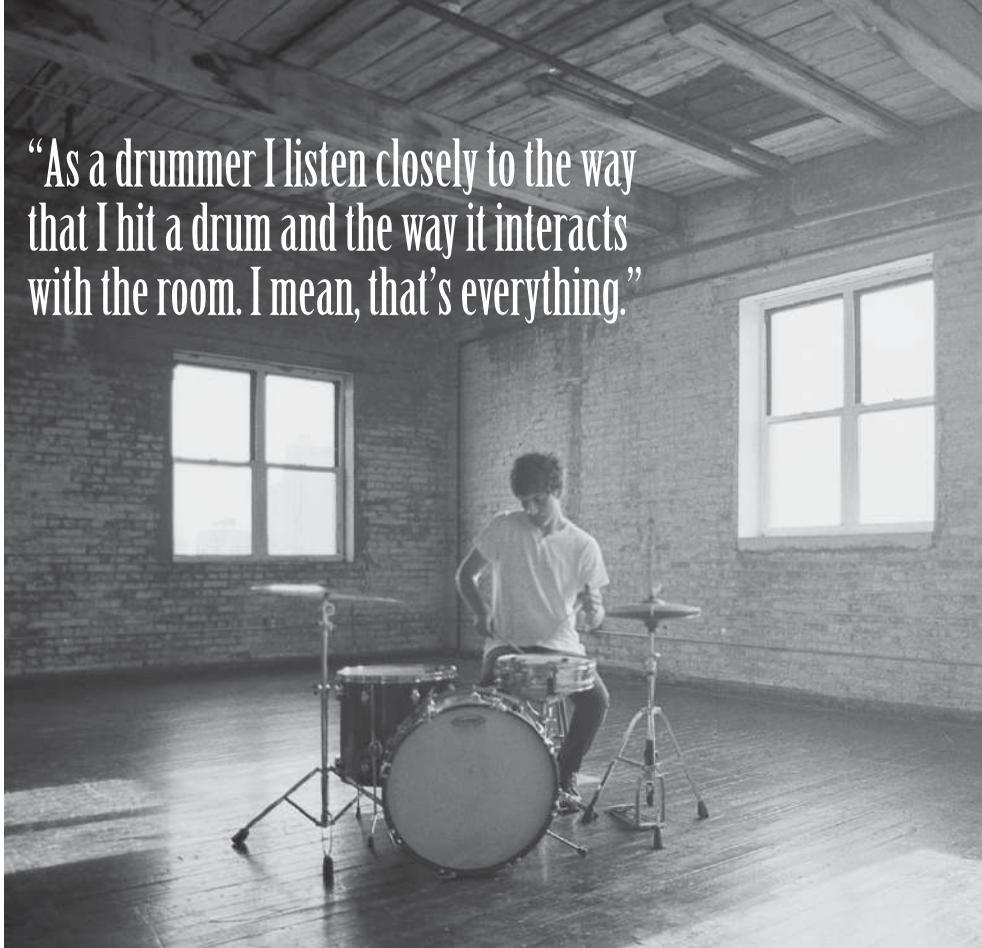
Keszler has funneled those years of practice into a tornado of sound that is all his own. His shows feel more like multidisciplinary performance art pieces than concerts, and in those performances Keszler shatters the traditional notion of the drumkit's role in a piece or ensemble. His work communicates curiosity about the instrument and the space that surrounds it, and it becomes obvious that his stacked and mortared phrases are only one way in which architecture is important to his music. Keszler says that he works with architecture "in very literal ways," and that he often uses the space itself.

Commissions allow Keszler an opportunity to engage with a space's acoustic and social significance. At a recent concert at Boston City Hall, Eli addressed the fact that many designers love the Brutalist building's aesthetic boldness, but those who work there

find that the space has many practical difficulties. This complicated development history became a central aspect of his performance. Keszler recounts that when he scouted the location he understood why people find the building problematic. "There's not very good light," he discovered. "There's problems with ventilation. But when I went inside I saw these long vertical windows, and eventually figured out they could open."

With that in mind, Keszler built a piano-wire installation that ran from the open windows to a plaza 300 feet away, and transmitted sound recordings he made of the building's boiler-room machines (located in the basement) across the wires. He then played a drum

"As a drummer I listen closely to the way that I hit a drum and the way it interacts with the room. I mean, that's everything."



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TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Keszler's approach to equipment is almost as novel as his approach to playing. Every working New York drummer has to learn how to wrangle a jury-rigged house kit, and Keszler uses accessories like Zildjian crotales and Low Boy leather and Vater Vintage Bomber beaters to help him achieve his sound on an otherwise unfamiliar kit.

"I love Yamaha and Gretsch drums," Keszler says, "but I rarely use single-source drumsets. I have a [Gretsch] round-badge kit from the '60s [8x12, 14x14, 14x20] that I use pieces from. I almost always use a 3x13 Pearl piccolo snare that I've had since I was about sixteen. And sometimes I use a 5x14 metal snare drum in place of the rack tom. I try to treat my drumset the way a drummer would in the 1930s, the way those sets just sort of look like something they put together in a garage."

Keszler's current cymbal setup includes 14" Dream Dark Matter hi-hats, a 20" Dark Matter Energy ride to his left, and a 22" Zildjian Constantinople Armand ride to his right. For sticks, Keszler favors Vater BeBop 500s for their lightness and thin tip. He'll often change sticks from piece to piece, however, and it's not uncommon for him to use everything from his fingers to bass bows to achieve the right sounds.

solo in the plaza, accompanied by the recordings. By sending sounds created in the basement to the public plaza outside, via the upper floors' open windows, Keszler figuratively connected the building's bottom to its top and invited those who gathered in the plaza into areas of the building that are typically closed off.

One could argue that every drummer works with architecture in ways that don't require any figurative extrapolation, and that—like it or not—structures play an important role in how we approach our instrument. Keszler addresses this relationship head on. "As a drummer I listen closely to the way that I hit a drum and the way it interacts with the room. I mean, that's everything. If you hit a snare drum one way in a dampened studio, and then you hit it the same way in a cathedral, it's not even going to sound like the same instrument. That's because of architecture."

Exploration for Fun and Profit

Musicians often talk about how difficult it can be to carve out a performance-oriented career, and the prevailing wisdom suggests that the less mainstream your music, the tougher it is to make a living. Yet Keszler's experience suggests something else: He's found job opportunities because of the specificity of his vision and his willingness to explore diverse, nontraditional venues.

Keszler says that glimpses into Boston's noise scene and New York's visual art community led him to explore performance opportunities outside the typical club-scene-for-hire racket. This is largely how

he found his path writing applications for grants, which led to other job opportunities, like writing for new music ensembles. Ultimately, it's how he's found liberation from a gig circuit that many working players find oppressive. "You can ask yourself, *What would be a really interesting thing to do with this street, bridge, or public space?* Then all of a sudden the world becomes much bigger. It becomes much more than just the 'jazz scene' or the 'experimental music scene.'

"I don't think about it like I'm tapping into a market," Keszler adds. "It's more, 'I go to art shows and I want to start doing things in that context—maybe they'll let me.' That's what happened. I was able to convince some people to give me a chance."

As an artist in the post-recession economy, Keszler isn't familiar with the cliché of "waiting for the phone to ring." If he wants to make the rent, he spends time creating opportunities—usually a mix of commissions, concerts, teaching, grants, selling of his own visual art—and occasionally doing "something I don't really want to do," he laughs. "It's a constant struggle. But I'm doing what I want to do, so I've been very lucky. You have to apply for grants, write music, perform, stay open. For me it's about following my interests, and that takes you in different cultural areas, which brings about possibilities.

"We live in a really open time, and we can all work in unconventional ways and across fields. It's not easy. You have to be determined. You have to be crazy."



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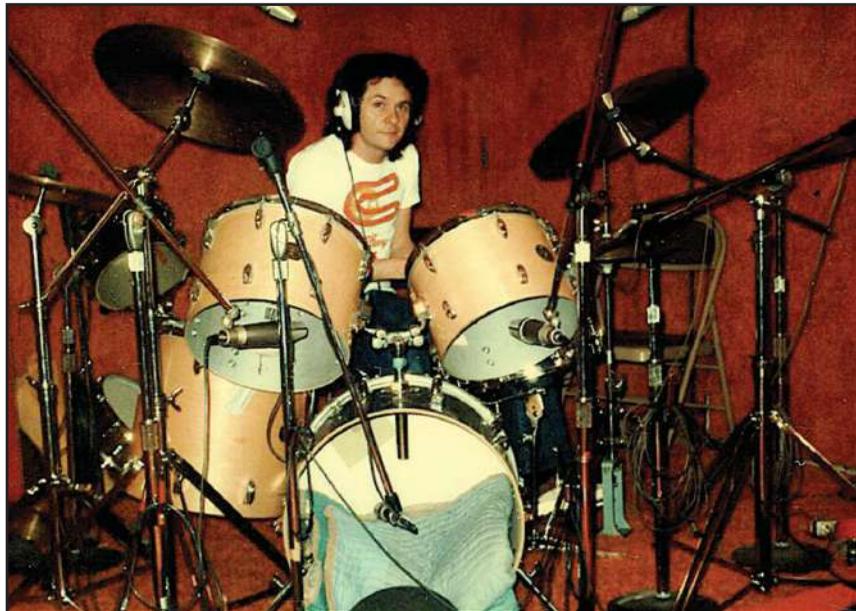
Dennis Bryon

You've listened to his grooves a thousand times—perhaps even more than those of some of the drummers on your own personal top-ten list. But you might not have known his name, or his backstory, before now. Drummer, educator, and writer **Zoro** wants to change that....

Since the mid-'70s, Dennis Bryon's hypnotic grooves have been responsible for luring most of the civilized world's population onto the dance floor. Bryon accomplished this feat by playing with one of the most successful groups of all time, the Bee Gees, who, with worldwide sales of more than 220 million records, are the sixth best-selling musical act in history. Throughout the '60s and '70s the brothers who made up the core of the group—Barry, Robin, and Maurice Gibb—penned some of the most iconic songs in pop music history, songs that endure to this day.

Though you may not have been familiar with his name, to underestimate Dennis Bryon's contributions to drumming and pop culture would be a grave mistake. Bryon played on some of the biggest hits of all time, including the iconic soundtrack to the film *Saturday Night Fever*. Released in 1977, the double LP received a Grammy for Album of the Year, and the music on it became a worldwide cultural phenomenon, securing a place in music history for the drummer.

I had the privilege of writing the foreword to Bryon's memoir, *You Should Be Dancing: My Life With the Bee Gees*, and recently I sat down with this groove-drumming hero of mine to learn more about his remarkable career.



MD: Where are you from, Dennis, and what was your first big break into the music business?

Dennis: I grew up as a young lad in Cardiff, Wales. My first introduction to success in Great Britain came from my soul band, Amen Corner. This put me at the heart of the London music scene in the late '60s. During our four-year run the band released two albums and six singles, all of which charted, and one ["(If Paradise Is) Half as Nice"] that climbed to number one.

MD: Besides your tenure with Amen Corner, what were some of the highlights of your career during that fertile period in the London music scene?

Dennis: I once got to jam with guitar legend Jimi Hendrix for forty-five minutes at the Speakeasy, a hot members-only club in London at the time. I also received a personal telegram from the Beatles congratulating Amen Corner for winning in the Best Group category on a TV show from Manchester, England, called *First Timers*.

MD: That's pretty awesome—what did the telegram say?

Dennis: The Beatles had come in

first place in the same category as Amen Corner in the past, so the note said, "From one first to another, congratulations and great success in the future, John, George, Paul, and Ringo." I still have it!

MD: How did you end up hooking up with the Bee Gees?

Dennis: Amen Corner performed alongside the Bee Gees on many TV shows in those days. This eventually led to me auditioning for the Bee Gees after Amen Corner had run its course. I landed the gig and started my first North American tour with them in January of 1973.

MD: You were an integral part of the Bee Gees' sound, and instrumental in their decision to move toward more of an R&B style—a sound that helped catapult them to enormous worldwide success. Which albums exactly did you record with them?

Dennis: The first album I recorded was 1974's *Mr. Natural*. I recorded every album they made from that time until 1979's *Spirits Having Flown*—six albums in total. Anyone interested in hearing my body of work with the Bee Gees should

pick up the recently released five-CD box set called *Bee Gees 1974–1979*. I played on every track of that collection.

MD: One of my all-time favorite grooves of yours is on “Nights on Broadway,” from the 1975 album *Main Course*. You play this incredibly infectious one-handed 16th-note pattern. What was your inspiration for that groove?

Dennis: My main man Bernard Purdie inspired that groove, but it was a real tough groove to nail because it was a double tempo, so I had to really practice it to get it to sit in the pocket.

MD: What was it like working with legendary producer Arif Mardin on *Main Course*?

Dennis: Arif brought the best out of me, the band, and the Bee Gees. He was like your favorite uncle, a mentor who was always rooting for you. He introduced me to the click and made it my friend, which helped to build my confidence. Working with him was magic and one of the highlights of my career.

MD: During the bridge of “Love You Inside Out,” you play this wickedly hip and fast 32nd-note groove on the hi-hat. Can you offer any insight on that groove?

Dennis: I have no idea what inspired me to come up with that part, but it was fun and challenging. “Love You Inside Out” reached number one on the *Billboard* charts in June of 1979 and was just one of the many musical gems that sprung from *Spirits Having Flown*.

MD: Other great grooves you played with the Bee Gees are on “You Stepped Into My Life,” “Jive Talkin’,” and “You Should Be Dancing.” What are some of your favorite Bee Gees tracks you played on?



Dennis: I liked all of those, but my all-time favorite Bee Gees song is “Fanny (Be Tender With My Love),” from the *Main Course* album, and one of my favorite drum tracks was “Baby As You Turn Away,” from the same album. It’s also worth mentioning that we cut “You Should Be Dancing” with just me and Barry Gibb playing rhythm guitar to the click. My hi-hat and Barry’s rhythm guitar were always locked, and that was the key to a lot of our grooves. Barry was an awesome rhythm guitar player.

MD: Where did you record the tracks for the legendary *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack?

Dennis: We recorded most of the basic rhythm tracks at Château d’Hérouville in France. We overdubbed a lot of the strings and horns at Criteria Studios in Miami.

MD: Can you tell us about the drum track for “Stayin’ Alive”?

Dennis: While we were recording tracks for the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack,

my mother was taken ill and I had to fly back to Cardiff. When I returned Barry greeted me with this big hug and smile and said, “While you were gone, Dennis, we wrote this new song you’re going to love called ‘Stayin’ Alive.’ We didn’t want to bring in another drummer, so we took your drum performance from ‘Night Fever,’ slowed it down, and made a loop.”

MD: Whose idea was that?

Dennis: The Bee Gees’ producer Alby Galuten came up with the idea of taking the best two bars of my drum groove from “Night Fever.” Engineer Karl Richardson took that twenty-foot piece of tape, which contained the very best two bars, gaffered some empty tape hubs to the top of mic stands, and ran the tape between the 4-track machine and an MCI 24-track deck to create a physical tape loop. They recorded that groove onto two tracks of the 24-track recording machine, and thus the “Stayin’ Alive” drum loop was born.



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MD: What did you think of it when you first heard it?

Dennis: When I went into the control room to listen to “Stayin’ Alive” for the first time, I was blown away. Barry said, “If you want to rerecord the drums or play the whole track with us, you can.” I said, “Man, I don’t want to touch that groove, but I will overdub some hi-hats.” Barry was thrilled I didn’t want to mess with the track, because he knew what they had. So the next day I went in and did some cymbal crashes and hi-hat overdubs.

So, oddly enough, I played on the basic drum track of “Stayin’ Alive” without actually having been there—and it became one of the most popular dance tracks in history to use a drum loop. They later used that same drum loop of mine on both the Tavares and Bee Gees versions of “More Than a Woman” on the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack and on “Woman in Love” by Barbra Streisand.

MD: What was it like to tour with the Bee Gees at the height of their popularity?

Dennis: The last tour I did with the Bee Gees was for *Spirits Having Flown*, which was their biggest. We flew on a private fifty-five-seat Boeing 720 jet to sold-out stadium crowds in thirty-eight cities all across the U.S., from summer through fall of 1979. There were many notable celebrities that came to the shows, like John Travolta, Olivia Newton-John, Rod Stewart, Cary Grant, Barbra Streisand, and Jack Nicholson. The stage was a replica of the one from the *Saturday Night Fever* movie. The stage design manager thought my Gretsch kit wasn’t flashy enough and approached Ludwig for a chrome kit. Ludwig agreed and made me a chrome-over-wood set to match the extravagant stage design. It was an awesome experience.

MD: Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of?

Dennis: Well, I share the honor with Ringo Starr of the Beatles of being one of only two drummers in history to have five songs on the top ten of the *Billboard* chart simultaneously. I also played on nine number-one records with the Bee Gees that spent 188 weeks on the *Billboard* Top 100.

MD: What special moments in your career particularly stand out?

Dennis: Watching the screening of the

Tools of the Trade

Bryon has played Zildjian cymbals and Remo drumheads throughout his entire career. With Amen Corner he played Premier drums. With the Bee Gees he began with a Ludwig kit and then switched to Gretsch, which he played between 1975 and ’79. Today Dennis plays DW drums and uses the Drum Muff muffling system. He plays Promark 5B Natural sticks.

Saturday Night Fever movie in New York and hearing our music and my drumming coming through the amazing sound system. That was one of the most special times in my life!

Also, seeing how the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack blew up around the world. When I first moved to Miami after we finished recording it, I really didn’t have any idea how huge the album had become. But I got a clue when I got into my car that I had shipped out there and turned on the radio and started flipping through different stations. One station was playing “Stayin’ Alive.” Then I’d flip it to another one and I’d hear “Night Fever.” Then another would be playing “Jive Talkin’,” and another “You Should Be Dancing,” and another “How Deep Is Your Love,” and another “More Than a Woman.” It was an unbelievable and surreal feeling that every radio station I turned to was playing a song that I’d played drums on. I couldn’t believe it! It was epic, and with the small royalty I was given on the soundtrack—a quarter of one percent—I bought a castle on Miami Beach!

MD: Besides playing drums on all those classic Bee Gees tracks, I heard you played those funky rhythms of the wah-wah guitar pedal as well.

Dennis: Yes, that’s right. I played the wah-wah guitar pedal with my hands on the studio floor while Alan Kendall played his guitar parts.

MD: Tell us a little bit about your memoir.

Dennis: It’s called *You Should Be Dancing: My Life With the Bee Gees*. In it I give readers an all-access pass to what it was like to be the drummer in one of the world’s most popular bands during their heyday. It’s basically my life story and how I got my start in music.

Zoro has played with Lenny Kravitz, Frankie Valli & the Four Seasons, the New Edition, and Bobby Brown and is the author of *The Commandments of R&B Drumming* series, *Soar! 9 Proven Keys for Unlocking Your Limitless Potential*, and *The Big Gig: Big-Picture Thinking For Success*. For more, go to zorothedrummer.com.





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I N M E M O R I A M

JOHN BLACKWELL JR.

BY DREW SCHULTZ

On July 4, the drumming world suffered a heavy blow with the passing of John Blackwell Jr. Known for his deep pocket, powerful playing, and visual flash, Blackwell was a renowned performer and educator whose work included tours and recordings with Justin Timberlake, D'Angelo, P. Diddy, Bootsy Collins, and many other stars of pop and R&B. John was propelled to international stardom as a touring and recording member of Prince's New Power Generation band, recording multiple Grammy-winning albums and touring the world for more than a decade with the musical icon.

I was fortunate to study with Blackwell when he was a teacher at Berklee College of Music, playing in an ensemble that he led during a five-week summer session. I was already a huge fan of his playing, and I hoped to glean any bit of wisdom I could. I quickly realized that John had an equally large drive to learn from the masters who came before him, a drive that pushed him to continue to practice and grow as a performer and a professional.

John's father was a successful drummer in his own right who played with R&B stars like Mary Wells, King Curtis, the Drifters, and the Spinners. When John Sr. began teaching the instrument to his three-year-old son, he stressed the importance of playing in the pocket above all else.

While attending Keenan High School in Columbia, South Carolina, John Jr. was an active part of jazz and marching band programs under the direction of a progressive director named Willie Lyles, who went on to develop a School of Funk at Keenan. John was educated early in groove, creativity, and the legendary drummers who paved the way for his career. His first big-name gig, at the age of seventeen, was backing up the iconic jazz singer Billy Eckstine. After high school, John chose to further his studies at Berklee, studying under the accomplished jazz drummer John Ramsay.

"He loved Art Blakey," Ramsay says, recalling his time with Blackwell in the classroom. Blackwell was fascinated by Blakey, and he wanted to soak up as many of his licks—and stories about him—as possible. "It's not surprising," says Ramsay, who came to Berklee in 1982 after having been the second drummer in the Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers Big Band and subsequently Blakey's road manager.



Miguel Monroy

"If you think about Art and John, they were both the kind of players whose whole thing was really *feel*. Art would frequently say, 'I don't care how many ratamacues you play on a paddle—people only know what they feel.' I think that's probably what John felt as well. All these years after, whenever we would see each other, John would still talk to me in the 'Art Blakey voice.'"

Blackwell's diligence and groove landed him his first touring gig in 1995, with the pioneering funk band Cameo. Cameo was the brainchild of Larry Blackmon, himself a successful drummer and former student at the prestigious Juilliard performing arts school. In a situation foreshadowing his role in Prince's band, John found himself playing grooves and beats originally recorded by his bandleader. "I was so into Larry Blackmon, who is an excellent drummer," John once said in a *Modern Drummer* feature story. "I knew all the beats."

Even though he may have been playing grooves and fills that started with Blackmon, John added his own flair using his signature

SAYING GOODBYE TO A BROTHER IN DRUMS

John was a dear friend who had an unbelievable love for music, as well as for his family and friends. He was a great musician and a great family man who loved his kids and wife, Yaritza. I'm going to miss him dearly, because we spent a lot of time on the phone talking to each other whenever we could. He was my brother from another mother, and may God bless him. —**Dennis Chambers**

John and I were students together at Berklee in the early '90s. Everyone around him could hear and see that he was headed for great musical accomplishments. He was a special person and an inspiring musician. His spirit and energy will be missed. —**Fred Eltringham**

My friend John Blackwell was always a kind-hearted man that wanted to keep the drum community together by any means necessary. He was a fearless tiger! I'm going to miss him. —**John Roberts**

The few times I saw John play I was completely bowled over. He was obviously incredibly gifted as a drummer, but from what I've heard from those who knew him well, he was a thoroughly good guy. After I read about his little daughter drowning, I called him. I have a grown daughter, and if anything bad had happened to her when she was a baby, I don't know how I would have gotten through it. I was torn up while talking with him, and he ended up consoling me—he was that kind of guy! I love the idea, though, that he's together again with his little baby girl. Fortunately his playing is very well documented, so he will be studied for a long time. —**Jim Keltner**

John was such a talented and warm person. I loved his playing and his groove, and his showmanship was awesome. I first met John at a NAMM Show many years ago, when he came up to me and said he loved my playing and my stick twirls in the "Do Ya Think I'm Sexy" video with Rod Stewart. He said he copied my twirl from watching that video. I told him his twirl was different and that I loved *his* twirl even *better*. From then on we became friends. What a talent! He always had a great big smile under that hat he always wore. Rest in peace, my little drum brother. You were loved. —**Carmine Appice**

Thank you, John Blackwell Jr., for your friendship and brotherhood. Your heart was always pure, and your willingness to help others was immeasurable. I'm proud to call you my brother. Rest in peace, and know that your legacy will live forever. —**Brian Frasier Moore**

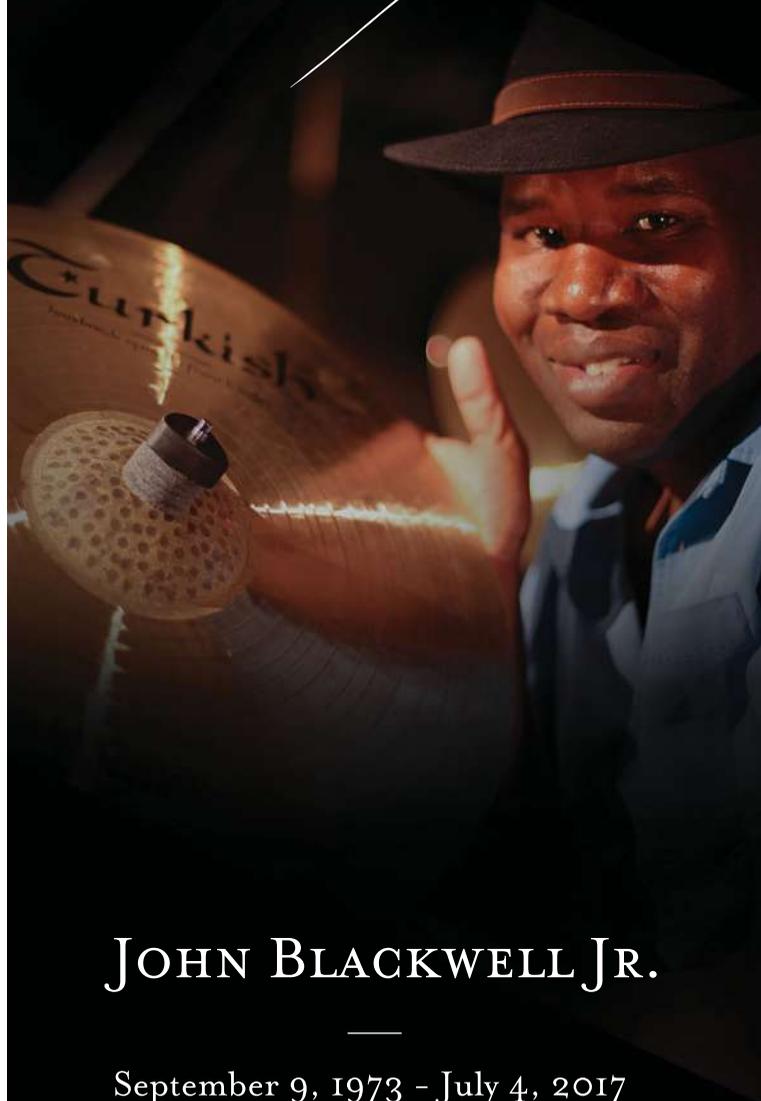
Like so many of John's friends and family, I was devastated to hear of his illness, and then his passing. He was very special to my family and me, and we will miss him and that infectious smile. I'll never forget all the amazing times we shared. Rest in peace, John. —**Billy Amendola**

The first time I saw John Blackwell play, his talent blew me away. Afterwards, when I met him, he told me that he had a poster of me on his wall when he was a kid. I was so honored. I count myself blessed to have known him. You are missed, my friend. —**Liberty Devitto**

I first met John Blackwell and his drumming father, John Sr., at a clinic of mine at Sims Music in South Carolina, when he was twelve years old. He followed me the next day to Atlanta to ask more questions. I clearly saw the spark in his eyes for drumming. He then studied with me, and very early on in the lessons I realized it was *me* who became the student! John inspired everyone with every stroke he played. Now he continues to inspire everyone in heaven. —**Dom Famularo**

"John Bwell," as I sometimes called and referred to John Blackwell. Other times, I'd call him my friend and little brother. In heart, spirit, soul, and mind, that's how I saw him. John was a passionate sweetheart of a guy with an open heart to people and fellow players he loved, admired, and respected. He was a deeply sensitive soul, and that was reflected in his playing. With all his knowledge that he garnered throughout his studying years, and even the recent years before his graduation to heaven, he patterned his own style for drummers young and old to learn, follow, admire, and inspire. The body of work he leaves behind will stand the test of time. I send my prayers to your personal mailbox up there in heaven for you, my little brother. May you have found the rest you so deserve. Your name is etched in the tree of life here on this earthly planet for all drummers to know that you were here and you lived and were not a myth—you were the real deal. I love and miss you. Your big brother. —**Jonathan "Sugarfoot" Moffett**

John Blackwell



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John Blackwell Jr.

stick tricks and dramatic swipes at a China cymbal placed high above his head. The Cameo gig was the first step on his journey as a globetrotting musician, the second being Patti LaBelle, with whom John toured and recorded a Grammy-winning live album.

Blackwell was building a résumé, and he had the business sense to get his name out there. "He was just getting the gig with Patti LaBelle," *Modern Drummer* editor at large Billy Amendola remembers, "when he called our office, wanting to talk to an editor. I took the call, and he started to tell me that Prince had come to see him play. He was excited about his work."

Over the years, Amendola and Blackwell cultivated a friendship, sharing stories, advice, and even family holidays. "During one period, I think he called me every single day," Billy says, "and we would speak at all hours of the night. He had so much enthusiasm for what he was doing. He wanted to be on the cover!"

Blackwell eventually did land the Prince gig, and that cover story he'd dreamed of for all those years finally came. The piece included a sidebar with Prince himself, who described what he looked for in a drummer, namely "a sense of timing and spirit [and an] ego that doesn't ruin their playing." Indeed, John always proved that his visual flair was never exhibited at the expense of the groove.

While Blackwell was touring with Prince in 2004, tragedy hit at home when John's daughter, Jia, drowned in the family's swimming pool. Jia would be a continual source of inspiration for John, who titled his solo album *4ever Jia* and named his Sabian signature China cymbal after her.

I remember him as an encouraging teacher. In his ensemble, he advised us to "own our vocabulary." I didn't have the most impressive chops of the drum students there, but John made me feel comfortable improvising, soloing, and leading a group with the tools I had. I would often skip my class following John's ensemble to grab lunch with him, and he would teach me as much about the business of music as the craft of it. As he wrote on his Berklee faculty page, he wanted students to not only be able to play, but to be able to negotiate fees to ensure that they're paid what they're worth. John said that he wanted "to be able to buy their signature drumsticks or snare drum someday."

Fortunately, John Blackwell Jr.'s music has been preserved on numerous recordings and instructional videos. Although the drumming world mourns his loss, his legacy will live on for many, many years.





Farewell, John Blackwell. We were as inspired by your character as we were by your musicianship, which brought joy to all of us every time you sat behind the kit. It was our honor to call you a friend and partner and play a small part in your musical legacy, which touched generations.



Janet Jackson's John Roberts

GEARING UP ON STAGE
AND UP CLOSE

Interview and photos by Sayre Berman

Drums: Tama Starclassic Bubinga in

- Piano Black finish
- A.** 5.5x14 snare (with ddrum trigger)
- B.** 6.5x14 maple snare (with ddrum trigger)
- C.** 8x10 tom
- D.** 9x12 tom
- E.** 12x14 floor tom
- F.** 14x16 floor tom
- G.** 18x22 bass drum (with ddrum trigger)

Drumheads: Remo Coated Powerstroke 77 snare batters, Clear Emperor tom batters and Ebony Ambassador resonants, and Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter

Hardware: Gibraltar custom rack, Tama Iron Cobra Lever Glide hi-hat stand, Iron Cobra Power Glide bass drum pedals, and 1st Chair Wide Rider throne with a backrest

Cymbals: Meinl

1. 15" Byzance Vintage Pure hi-hats
2. 18" Byzance Vintage Trash crash
3. 10" Byzance Vintage splash over a 12" Classics Custom Trash splash
4. 18" Byzance Medium Thin crash
5. 10" Byzance splash
6. 22" Byzance Dark Raw Bell ride
7. 19" Byzance Medium Thin crash
8. 12" Classics Custom Trash splash over a 16" Byzance Trash crash
9. 20" Byzance Vintage Trash crash

Electronics: Yamaha DTX900 module and DTX-Multi 12 pad, DrumKat kick pedal, and ddrum triggers

Sticks: Vater "Lil' John Roberts" Philly Style 5A and 55BB

"I've been a Tama artist since 2002," says Roberts, who's back on the road with Janet Jackson after the singer took some time off to tend to personal matters. "I especially love bubinga drums because of the warm tones that they produce. My drumset is pretty consistent; I use the same gear in an arena or an open amphitheater. I always try to go for the same sound. My snare sound isn't too high-pitched or too low. It's right in the middle—cracking with a lot of body. That's the Clyde Stubblefield and John 'Jabo' Starks influences coming through. I like to hear bigger sounds out of the drums and cymbals. Maybe my tastes are maturing, but I've learned to appreciate more smoky, warm tones from my gear."

About two years ago Roberts made a switch to Meinl to employ its extensive range of choices. "I like darker cymbals," he says. "I played a lot of jazz in my earlier years, so I'm always attracted to dark jazz rides and dark crashes. I'm very impressed with how Meinl has grown. I went to the factory and got a chance to play a whole bunch of cymbals. I like my ride cymbals to be not too bright or too dark. I need them to cut through the music, so I also need them to have some bite." The electronics are a key component of Roberts' setup with Jackson. "The electronics are the most important thing because I'm triggering all of the sounds from her albums. For example, when we play 'Nasty' and 'What Have You Done for Me Lately,' you're hearing those big, sampled

snare sounds. I'm using the Yamaha DTX-Multi 12 pad with the DTX900 module along with several triggers and some extra pads. I pull up the electronics for the next song by hitting a switch pedal that's next to my hi-hat."

When playing a show as demanding as Jackson's, Roberts likes to be prepared for anything. "Down next to the bass drum pedal is an electronic pedal," he says. "That's an emergency pedal just in case my bass drum goes berserk or if I bust a head. There's no time to stop to fix anything; we're moving non-stop. So if something were to happen, I have that to keep the bass drum sound going."

Although his signature Vater "Philly Style" stick is sized like a 5A, Roberts has also been carrying a bigger stick, the 55BB. "When I was on tour with my friend Stanley Randolph, Stevie Wonder's full-time drummer, I happened to give his sticks a try. They were like tree trunks, but Stanley said, 'Yeah, but bigger sticks means bigger sound.' He suggested that I move up a few sizes. I did, and I immediately noticed my drums had a much bigger sound. I probably wouldn't be able to use them on a jazz gig, because they might be too heavy, but for my current gig, the 55BB is where I'm at."



Dressing Up Your Fills

Fresh Ideas to Kick Off the Band

by Powell Randolph

In this lesson, we'll embellish some basic fills for song intros in order to create something a bit more interesting. Adding notes before or after the fill, experimenting with orchestration, and using rudiments such as rolls, flams, and ruffs are just a few ways to make an intro figure more dynamic. Keep in mind that sometimes the simplest ideas work best, but occasionally you may want to spice things up.

Let's start with a basic fill.

1

Here are some variations.

2

R L R

R L R

R L R

R L R

R L R

R L R L R

Here's another basic intro fill.

3

R L L R L R L

Let's add some variations.

4

R L L R L R L

R L R L

R L

R L R L R L R L

R L R L R L R L

R L R L R L R L

R L R R L R L R L

R L R L R L R L L

R L R L R L R L

R L R L R L R L

You can also try these ideas within a groove. Here's an example. Experiment, and have fun.

R L R L R L R L



Powell Randolph is a drum teacher at Alpha Music in Virginia Beach and plays rock shows with orchestras around North America for Windburn Music Productions. Randolph, a tongue cancer survivor, can be reached through powellrandolph.com.



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Flowing Diddles, Triple Strokes, and Paradiddles

Essential Motions for Smoother Transitions

by Bill Bachman



These three exercises focus on transitioning into diddles, triple strokes, and paradiddles without changing the hand motions. We'll use flowing free strokes to go into these rudiments, and we'll strive to maintain a relaxed and rebounding stroke on the first note of each diddle and triple stroke. It's also important to avoid slamming the downstrokes in the paradiddles.

Let's start with diddles and triple strokes. I often see drummers attack the diddles and triple strokes by applying additional pressure into the drum. The idea behind that approach is that if enough downward force goes into the first note then there will be plenty of energy left over for the second or third bounces. This is a good way to get started with these rudiments, but ultimately that method will lead to weak diddles and triple strokes that can also end up being rhythmically crushed.

Here are some keys to playing even and balanced doubles and triple strokes.

1. Play the initial note as a free stroke without adding any extra force.
2. Let the first stroke rebound as high as possible.
3. Use your fingers to add velocity to the second stroke when playing triple strokes.
4. Finish with a powerful downstroke that points down toward the drum. (I refer to these combinations as the "alley-oop" technique for diddles and the "alley-oop-oop" for triple strokes.)

The first stroke will start at a higher stick height at medium and faster speeds, but the greater velocity of the secondary strokes will enable them to match the volume of the first stroke.

Even when practicing at slower tempos you want to utilize the faster tempo's technique, so the last stroke should be played as a strict downstroke. I recommend using the American grip (with the palm positioned at about a forty-five-degree angle to the floor) so that you can play the downstrokes by pulling the back end of the stick into the palm with the fingers while holding the front end of the stick down with the thumb. Finally, don't squeeze the fulcrum too hard.

1

R R R R L L L R R R L L L L R R R L L L R R R R R R R R R L L L R R R L L L R R R
2nd X: L L L L L R R R L L L R R R R R L L L R R R L L L L L L L L R R R L L L R R R L L L

2

R R R R R L L L L R R R L L L L L R R R R L L L R R R R R R R R R L L L R R R R L L L R R R
2nd X: L L L L L R R R R L L L L R R R R R L L L L R R R L L L L L L L L R R R L L L R R R R L L L

In this variation, try to flow into each paradiddle's downstroke without changing the initial movement of the stroke. A downstroke starts out like a free stroke and only becomes a downstroke after you hit the drum. So avoid adding velocity, stick height, or inertia by hitting the downstrokes harder. Strive for consistent timing and volume on each 8th-note count, and always count out loud. When played accurately, this exercise should sound like a simple eight-on-a-hand exercise with a few low 32nd notes tucked in between.

3

R R R R L R R L L R L L R R L R R L L L L R L L R R L L R R R R R R R L R R L L R L L R R L L R R R L L R R R
2nd X: L L L L L R R L R R L L L L R R R R R L L L L R R R L L L L L L L L R R L R R L L L R R L R R L L L

Bill Bachman is an international drum clinician, the author of *Stick Technique* and *Rhythm & Chops Builders* (Modern Drummer Publications), and the founder of drumworkout.com. For more information, including how to sign up for online lessons, visit billbachman.net.



Fill Displacements

Deepen Your Vocabulary

by Dave DiCenso



Drummers often experience periods in which they're unable to think of new fill ideas. In this lesson we'll explore what I call the last-to-first method, which enables you to turn any sticking into multiple useful fill applications.

We'll take a four-beat fill and start it on the offbeat of beat 4, then beat 3, then beat 2, and finally beat 1. Practicing in this way opens up new fill possibilities at multiple places within a groove. We also end up with different-length fills in our arsenal.

Let's start by mastering the following one-measure 16th-note-triplet sticking. Try counting a swung 16th-note subdivision ("1, e, &, a") while practicing, and set your metronome to 30 or 40 bpm to start.

Once you can play Exercise 1 comfortably, apply it in the context of a groove. Play the sticking as a fill, but start it on the last two accents of beat 4. The backbeat of the groove is omitted here, which gives the fill a syncopated feel. You should also try incorporating the backbeat when practicing. Insert the fills within a four-bar phrase, with three measures of time and one measure of the fill.

Now we'll start the fill on the offbeat of beat 3.

Now start the fill on the offbeat of beat 2.

Here's the fill starting on the offbeat of beat 1.

In Exercise 6, we'll start the fill on the offbeat of beat 3, and we'll resolve it with a left-hand crash on the last 16th-note-triplet partial of beat 4.

Try continuing the previous fill over the barline and resolve it on the "&" of beat 1.

Now we'll add the bass drum on every fifth and sixth 16th-note-triplet partial of the original fill.

Let's start the fill on the offbeat of beat 3 within a groove.

Now try starting the fill on the offbeat of beat 2, and resolve it on the last 16th-note-triplet partial of the measure with the crash.

Continue the fill over the barline and resolve on the "&" of 1.

In this lesson we've created nearly a dozen different single-sticking applications. The possibilities are endless, so be sure to experiment using the last-to-first method with other stickings.

Dave DiCenso has played with Josh Groban, Duran Duran, Carole King, Hiromi, the Steve Morse Band, John Petrucci, and Cro-Mags, among others. He's the co-leader of the soul-funk organ duo DiCenso/Clark Expedition and a professor at the Berklee College of Music.



Rhythmic Conversions

Part 5: Brazilian Grooves and the Half-Note Triplet

by Steve Fidyk

In this lesson we'll superimpose a new tempo over an existing pulse using a half-note-triplet subdivision. We'll then manipulate the subdivision to create Brazilian grooves in the new tempo. I recommend that you practice these patterns with a metronome and work through them slowly until you gain control of the rhythm.

Accenting every fourth 8th note in the following two-measure triplet pattern creates a three-against-four polyrhythm over the quarter-note pulse. This accent pattern outlines a half-note triplet.

Once you can feel the half-note-triplet accent pattern, omit the 8th note that precedes each accent.

Now move this rhythm to the ride, and play the accents on the bell.

Next, try orchestrating the rhythm with your feet.

Now we'll combine the hands and feet in unison. This pattern creates a Brazilian samba ostinato superimposed over the half-note triplet.

You can also try orchestrating the rhythm on the hi-hat, which produces a guiro-type sound when you open the cymbals on each accent.

In order to resolve these superimposed rhythms, it's important to be able to feel the triplet subdivision confidently. As you practice, keep in mind that repeating Exercises 2–6 once creates a three-measure phrase in the new implied tempo.

Now we'll add snare and tom rhythms to create more intricate Brazilian grooves in the superimposed tempo. Exercises 7 and 8 are two options.

Exercise 9 has a samba rhythm orchestrated between the tom and rimclick.

Here's a groove with a superimposed partido alto rhythm.

Exercises 11 and 12 contain surdo variations voiced on the floor tom.



These are just a few Brazilian-style possibilities. Experiment and superimpose your own patterns using these concepts. Have fun, remain patient, and always use a metronome. Next time we'll explore ways of superimposing funk grooves over half-note triplets.



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



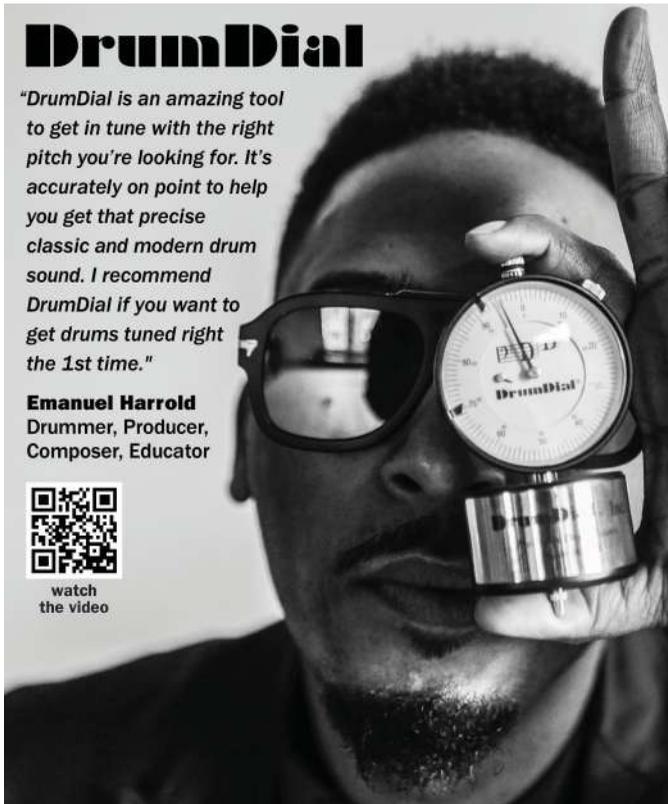
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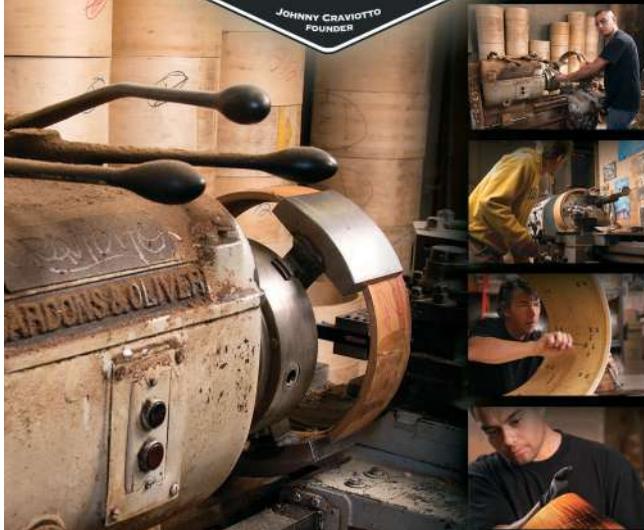


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The Circuit

An Ambidextrous Routine for Ultimate Control

by Aaron Edgar



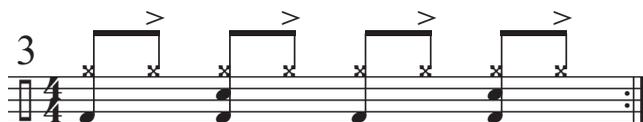
This month we'll check out a challenging coordination study. The goal of this routine is to become comfortable playing any pattern leading with either side of the body.

Right-handed drummers typically play with the right hand on a cymbal, the left hand on the snare, and the right foot on the bass drum. However, we can explore four variations of this orchestration. If we lead with the right hand, we can play the bass drum with the right or left foot. Likewise, if we lead with the left hand, we can also play the bass drum with either foot.

Let's start with a four-on-the-floor groove. Begin by playing the beat with your right hand on the hi-hat, your right foot on the bass drum, and your left hand on the snare. Once you're comfortable, swap your hands so that your right hand is on the snare and your left is on the hi-hat. Alternate between those two variations until they sound identical. Then try playing the bass drum with your left foot using right- and left-hand lead. Pay attention to the dynamic balance between the limbs in each variation.



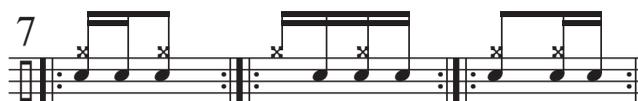
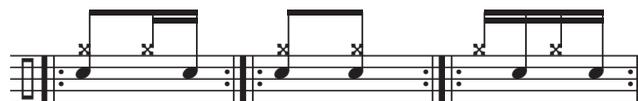
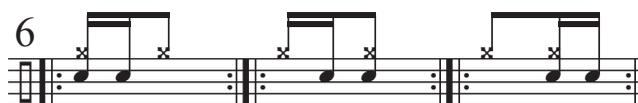
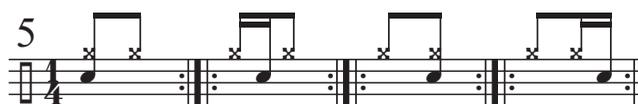
Exercises 2 and 3 add accents on the quarter notes and 8th notes. Try to make the accents sound the same in each limb variation.



Let's try another groove before we dive into a more thorough method of practicing this concept. Exercise 4 has a syncopated bass drum pattern and ghost notes. Practice it using all three hi-hat variations (unaccented, accented quarter notes, and accented upbeats) and all four limb variations.



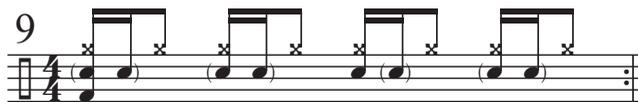
Now let's dive into more focused exercises for developing complete limb independence. Examples 5-7 contain one-, two-, three-, and four-note permutations of 16th notes. Practice these with just your hands at first. Keep the hi-hat fairly quiet, and play ghost notes on the snare. When you can loop each one for an extended period while leading with either hand, add in the hi-hat accent variations on the quarter notes and upbeats.



Once you're comfortable with those rhythmic building blocks, practice them in the context of a groove. Exercise 8 will be our framework. Play the bass drum on beat 1, the snare on beat 3, and straight 8th notes on the hi-hat.



Now apply the first building block from Exercise 6 by playing the first two 16th partials of each beat as ghost notes. Play a strong backbeat instead of the first ghost note on beat 3.

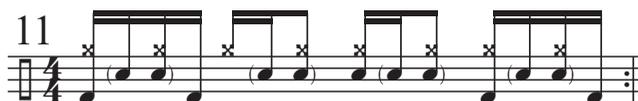


Exercises 10 and 11 explore the building blocks further by adding some slight embellishments. Don't forget to practice the hi-hat accent variations once you're comfortable with the coordination.

Here's the fourth building block from Exercise 5.



And here's the second variation from Exercise 6.



Work your way through the rest of the building blocks in this fashion. Some may be much harder than others, but don't worry about speed. Concentrate on the dynamics and your comfort level while practicing.

Next we'll play the building blocks with the bass drum. Approach these as you did with the hands. Work them with each side of the body, and when you're comfortable, add in the hi-hat accents. Exercises 12–14 demonstrate a few variations of our initial framework.

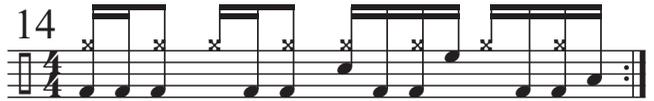
Here's the first building block from Exercise 6.



Here's the fourth variation from Exercise 5. Play the "a" of beat 3 with the snare hand on the hi-hat.



Here's the second variation from Exercise 6.



This last example incorporates a variety of ghost notes from our building blocks, and it spaces five bass drum notes equally across a bar of 15/16. Practice switching your lead hand every bar, and switch your lead foot when you get back to the original lead hand.



This system is one of my favorite ways to build coordination and independence. Have fun, and see you next time!



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



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Drum Design Knowledge

Part 2: Shell Types and Thicknesses

by Russ Miller

Last month we discussed hoops. This time we're discussing the thickness of the shell and what you can expect sonically from the various designs. Drum shells have been made in different thicknesses over the years, from a single half-inch piece of wood to thicker versions comprising up to forty plies.

Drum shells are most commonly created from plywood, which is made by gluing together thin layers of timber into

"If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail."

—Abraham Maslow (American psychologist and author)

a large sheet. Some companies stagger the wood grains vertically, horizontally, or diagonally for increased stability. But more than the grain direction, a drum shell's overall thickness is the crucial variable that affects the sound of the instrument.

It's important to understand what your instrument is designed to sound like before you buy it. Otherwise you could end up struggling with your drums if you're trying to use them in a manner that's too far from their intended application. Of course, a skilled player can coax good sounds from any drumkit, but there are attributes of different shell types that can make it easier to get the sounds you're looking for. For example, if you need to get a lot of power and projection from the drums in order to cut through distorted guitar tones in a metal band, using thin-shelled, small-diameter drums will cause you to work much harder than you would if you used larger drums with thicker shells.

Drum Shell Thicknesses

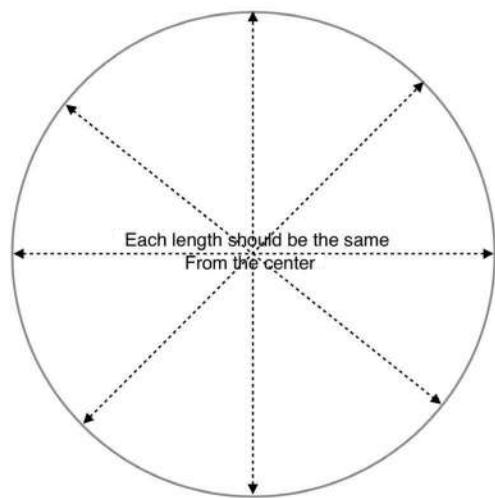
Here are some of the most common shell thicknesses and their intended applications. Keep in mind that these are basic and generalized analyses of drum sounds based upon shell thickness only.

Single-ply (very thin). Thin single-ply shells are most commonly made with synthetic materials, such as carbon fiber, acrylic, and steel. A very thin wood shell will go out of round or crack easily. Contrarily, carbon fiber is very stable when used for thin shells. The thinness allows for the most resonance, but acrylic and carbon fiber usually produce very dry drum sounds. Metal materials are the opposite and have a lot of overtones, so drums made from them can cut through easily at high volumes. Metal shells also have relatively defined pitches. Drums made from metal, such as the venerable Ludwig Black Beauty snare, usually incorporate design elements that help to control the excessive ring of the shell.

Three- to five-ply shells. Shells with three to five plies are usually considered thin. Most shells of these thicknesses will have reinforcement rings installed to help keep them in round, which is paramount to maintaining a pure tone. When

a drum is out of round, you can't tune it evenly, and you often get odd growling overtones. Sometimes you can see wrinkles in the head even when there's some tension applied to it.

A simple method to check the roundness of a shell is to remove the bottom head and place the drum on a piece of poster board or drawing paper. Lightly trace the bottom of the shell onto the paper. Remove the drum, and draw four evenly spaced lines that extend from one edge of the image to the other and cross the center. Measure each line from the center to the edge. If the lines are all the same length, the drum is in round. If not, the shell has warped.



Thinner shells allow for a resonant, "puffy" sound. The reinforcement rings not only help with the stability of the shell, but they also supply more wood at the top for the bearing edge. Thinner drums don't usually project as much as thicker drums, and many vintage drums are made from thin, three- to five-ply shells.

Six- to eight-ply shells. These are the most common shell thicknesses used in modern drums. They offer the most versatile sound in a design that will remain stable and round. Most manufacturers use two-ply sheets when they make shells, so using drums with a ply count in multiples of two is the most cost-effective option. These drums may or may not include reinforcement rings. When they are utilized, it's most often to add additional wood at the top for more bearing-edge profile options. Six- to eight-ply thicknesses add projection and bottom end to the sound. They also offer the widest range of tuning.

Nine- to eleven-ply shells. These thicker shells have the most projection and produce some of the lowest fundamental pitches (depending on the wood species being used). Usually larger-diameter drums have thicker shells for these reasons.

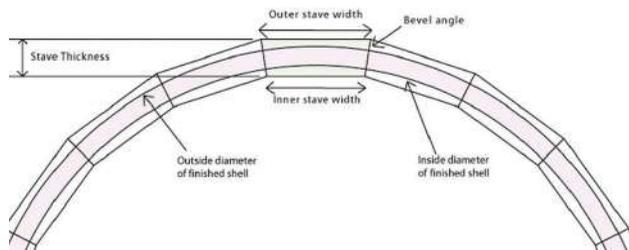
A thicker shell can have a drier sustain because it takes a lot of energy to get that much wood to vibrate. Bass drums and floor toms usually sound good with thicker shells.

Twelve- to forty-ply shells. Again, it takes a lot of energy to move a very thick-ply shell. Drums made from these types of shells project boldly but don't usually resonate very well. This characteristic can be used to good effect in bass drums because they'll require less muffling. Thick-ply drums are typically very dry and respond best when hit very hard. A super-thick shell doesn't work for shallower or smaller-diameter drums because there's too much wood in a small area to resonate freely.

Steam-bent shells. The true sound of the wood being used in a drum comes through best when the shell is created from a single piece of timber. But steam-bent shells have a few drawbacks. First, they're often quite expensive because of the labor involved in their construction. The wood has to be heated, bent into forms, and then cured for a long time. Also, the shell will be seamed at a single point, which can lead to the drum bending out of round over time.

Stave and block shells. Stave shells comprise blocks of wood cut at specific angles and then glued together to make the shape of the drum. The staves have to be cut into a round

shape, which is a very difficult job. Stave and block drum shells are usually more expensive than ply shells, and they are often very thick (1"-1.5"). On the positive side, they tend to have a lot of sonic character and great projection, especially at louder volumes.



I hope this overview of shell types helps you better understand how each is designed to be used. Choosing the right type of shells for your drums can help you discover your unique voice on the instrument. Next month we'll discuss snare beds. See you then!



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



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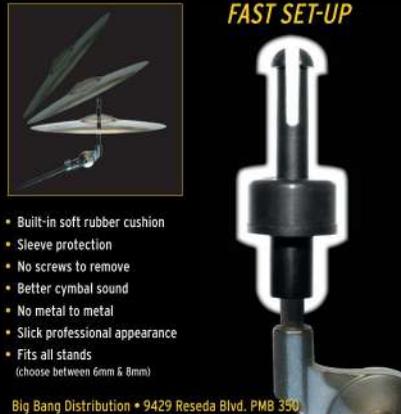
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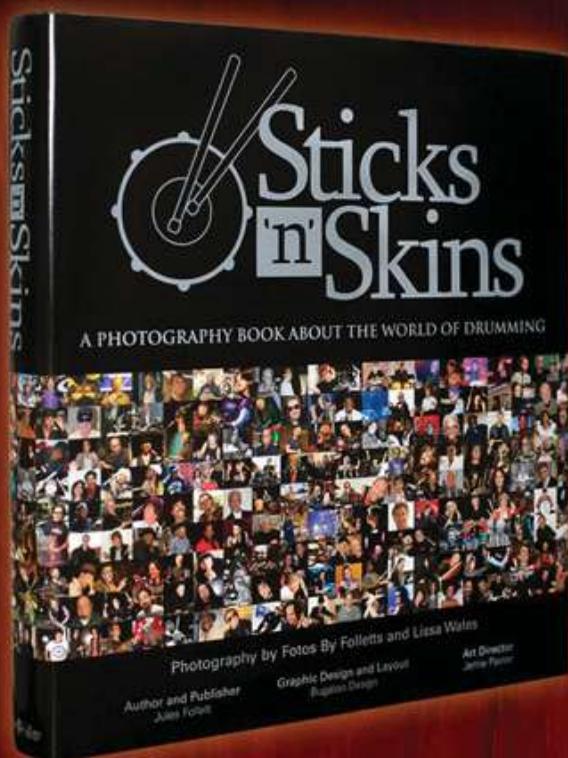
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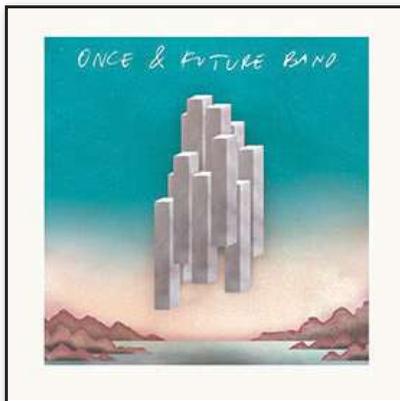


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Prog lovers can rejoice—this slew of new releases keeps the torch lit with excellent songwriting and craft.

The Oakland-based **Once and Future Band** doesn't shy away from the influence of progressive rock's legendary forefathers throughout its self-titled debut, with a heavy emphasis on sunny harmonies and ELO/Yes-inflected song structures. Drummer **RAJ OJHA** navigates the ever-shifting arrangements with a steady hand, rocking out when called upon and even throwing in a half-time shuffle on "Hide & Seek." Ojha's understated groove sits perfectly in these tunes (check out his beautiful touch on "Tell Me Those Are Tears of Joy"), and when it's time to let loose some fills, he surprises you. The drum tones are lively and open as well, so it actually sounds like a live band tracking. (Castle Face)

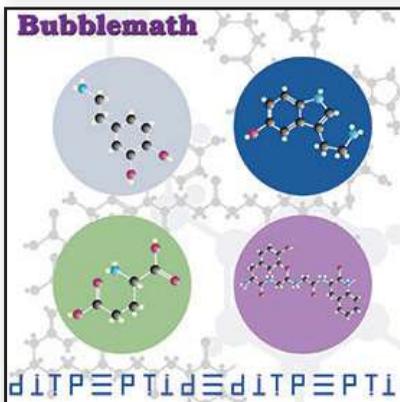
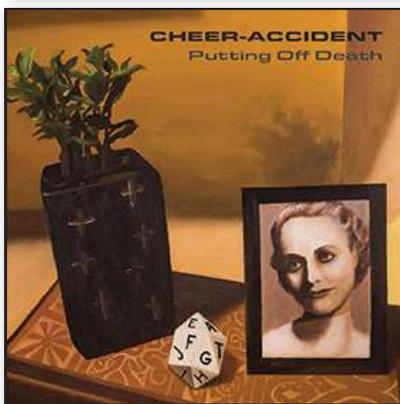
The Illinois-based band **Cheer-Accident** has been upending the meaning of progressive rock since the late '80s, and its eighteenth album, **Putting Off Death**, is yet another eclectic collection of compositions that defy category. "Language Is" shifts from sullen piano balladry to King Crimson-flavored odd-time dissonance over the course of eleven minutes, while "Wishful Breathing" finds drummer **THYMME JONES** dishing out a hip syncopated snare and kick pattern straight out of the Can cookbook. Also dig Jones' playful cymbal work and snare ghosting on "More and Less" for a good idea of how varied the drumming gets. This music is not going to cause any seismic waves on the mainstream charts, but as thinking-person's fare, it succeeds mightily. (Cuneiform)

Perhaps the most overtly prog-sounding record of the bunch, **Edit Peptide** finds Minnesota's

Bubblemath straddling the line between aggressive, Dream Theater-style guitar riffage to stuff that hearkens back to ex-Zappa guitarist Mike Keneally's mid-'90s writing. Drummer **JAMES FLAGG** owns the million changes of mood and texture in "Routine Maintenance," whipping out huge tom fills and intricate hi-hat licks without stopping to breathe. The odd-time flam groove opening "Perpetual Notion" gives way to more manic drumming and some double bass, always in service of the song. Flagg has chops galore, but his performance here is a study in how to play complicated music without being over the top...well, most of the time. (Cuneiform)

Carl King's Grand Architects of the Universe is a concept record that super-prog-heads can geek out to, and there's no shortage of sci-fi TV-show narration and cartoon lunacy. Ex-Periphery drummer **TRAVIS ORBIN** provides the main kit work brilliantly throughout the record, keeping everything together in what must have been some *long* charts, and there are special guest drummers who handle solos on random tracks. With song titles like "Into the Inky Black Nostril of Zorbon" and "The Unexpected Techronicity of the Network Galaxy's Most Evil of All," you immediately have an idea of what you're in for here, and Orbin, plus **DAVE ELITCH**, **MARCO MINNEMANN**, **MORGAN ÅGREN**, **VIRGIL DONATI**, and **MIKE STONE** all take turns being wild men, throwing down big rolls and elasticizing the music with metric modulation. (carlkingdom.com)

Ilya Stemkovsky



TURN THE PAGE
to learn about twelve U.S.-bred
progressive acts that made a mark in the
era of the British giants.



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12 Heartland Prog Albums

In the 1970s, defiant artists native to America's erroneously labeled "flyover country" developed thriving and idiosyncratic music scenes far from the media glare of the coasts, in cities as unlikely as Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Louisville, Kentucky. Here we present a dozen classic heartland prog releases that, while often exhibiting the influence of famous British originators like Yes, Genesis, and Emerson, Lake & Palmer, proved that Americans could contribute to the new, exploratory rock scene in their own valuable ways. Of course, the drummers appearing on these recordings had to be extremely well equipped to tackle the material, which could be as demanding as that found on the classic releases from across the pond.

by Will Romano

1. **Kansas** *Song for America*

(Phil Ehart, 1975)

The Topeka band's ability to generate massive radio airplay with the perennial favorites "Carry on Wayward Son" and "Dust in the Wind" has long overshadowed its more mystical and sprawling efforts. Records such as Kansas's self-titled debut, *Masque*, *Leftoverture*, *Point of Know Return*, and former guitarist/songwriter Kerry Livgren's early 1970s material (immortalized in a Cuneiform Records collection titled *Proto-Kaw*) dazzle with their compositional complexity.



Recorded in 1974 at Wally Heider Studios in Los Angeles under the auspices of coproducers Jeff Glixman and Wally Gold, Kansas's second studio effort is distinctly American, from its flying-by-the-seat-of-the-pants epics and boogie rock to Peter Lloyd's cover illustration depicting an eagle-like bird of prey extending its sharpened (metallic?) talons.

The title track, the paranormal timpanistic "Lamplight Symphony," and the twelve-minute closing song (reportedly cut in one take), "Incomudro—Hymn to the Atman," which includes a studio-effected drum solo, present a wide spectrum of sonic textures, tempo changes, and lyrical concepts. Drummer Phil Ehart's "ghosting" protocol guides the spirit of these fan favorites. "Groove is important to me," Ehart tells *Modern Drummer*. "I'm not schooled, not trained—not anything. I don't know where stuff came from, and I couldn't notate it. I had to look up the term *ghost notes*."

Ehart continues, "I would listen to a ten-minute song, like 'Song for America,' and I

would say, 'What the heck time signature is that?' [Livgren] said, 'Just play whatever you feel!' Most of the time it was figuring out where we were going. We didn't know any differently."

2. **Styx** *The Grand Illusion*

(John Panozzo, 1977)

The title track trumpets forth from our speakers with the impassioned intensity of a military march. Or, as former Styx lead singer Dennis DeYoung once told this writer: "Hannibal taking the elephants across the Alps." Despite the lyrical content cautioning us on the pitfalls of fame, such musical pomp and circumstance was nonetheless a fitting salutation for the Chicago-area band's breakthrough effort. Not only did *The Grand Illusion* soar into the U.S. top ten, boasting two bona-fide hits in "Fooling Yourself (The Angry Young Man)" and the sci-fi nautical adventure "Come Sail Away," it also earned multiplatinum status.



The Grand Illusion highlights Styx's level of deceptive sophistication. Drummer John Panozzo, who passed in 1996, complemented the subtle complexity of the music. "Play 'Fooling Yourself,'" current Styx drummer and August 2017 *MD* cover artist Todd Sucherman says. "There's a lot more there than meets the ear. The keyboard solo has that perfect 7/4, like Peter Gabriel's 'Solsbury Hill.' You may have no idea that it's in seven, because you can clap your hands right through it. Actually, the song has a 12/8 intro, a 4/4 body, a 7/4 solo section, and kicks that are in 5/8 that go into 12/8. That's hardly a radio song, and yet it became a hit."

3. **Crack the Sky** *Crack the Sky*

(Joey D'Amico, 1975)

Once dubbed the Baltimore-area band's "resident psychopath," drummer Joey D'Amico was, in fact, a steady-handed player underscoring comical elements of guitarist/keyboardist/vocalist John Palumbo's songwriting style while also bolstering Joe Macre's articulated bass lines.



"[D'Amico] had four other band members breathing down his neck all the time," says Terence P. Minogue, coproducer and arranger for the early Crack the Sky albums, including the group's self-titled first release, which took *Rolling Stone* magazine's Debut Album of the Year award. "They all felt they knew how to play the drum part as well as, if not better than, he did. D'Amico had to be diplomatic and never really ever had to do any retakes. 'Surf City' was done live. We hardly changed anything on that whole basic track."

The string-laden "A Sea Epic," the faux-rhapsodic "Robots for Ronnie," and the driving and romantic "Sleep" demonstrate D'Amico's ability to ply his trade for the good of the song. "Listen to 'Ice,' in 6/8," Minogue says. "[D'Amico] is playing a very sparse part. He made those jerky rhythm changes more accessible to the listener."

4. **Yezda Urfa** *Boris*

(Brad Christoff, 1975)

Although this demo by the Chicago-based band, unreleased digitally until 2004, failed in its intended purpose of securing a major-



label deal, it's nonetheless a bold musical statement. The very busy and often swingin' Brad Christoff navigates jagged compositions including "To-Ta in the Moya," the uber-aggressive "3, Almost 4, 6 Yea" (both of which appear on the 1976 studio recording *Sacred Baboon* and the *NEARfest 2004* live set), and the blazing bluegrass fusion of "Texas Armadillo."

5. **Ethos Ardour** *Ethos Ardour*

(Mark Richards, 1976)

Recorded in 1975 at the Hit Factory in New York City, the Fort Wayne, Indiana, band's self-titled debut bristles with a variety of percussive sounds, from clanging bells to popping temple blocks to twinkling glockenspiel. As the musical palette expanded, drummer Mark Richards grew more inventive behind the kit, even tapping Moog's synth-drum technology for added textures. "I used to duct tape the Moog drum to the top of my kick and trigger it by turning up the sensitivity level [on the controller]," Richards says. "I'd add bass effects, which you can hear in 'The Spirit of Music.' Near the end Mike [Poncsek, keyboardist] and I are trading riffs, and I'm bending the pitch."



6. **Starcastle** *Fountains of Light*

(Steve Tassler, 1976)

The first wave of British progressive rock inspired countless musicians from Maine to Marin County. Although Starcastle, from Champaign, Illinois, was labeled a Yes clone, the band moved hundreds of thousands of units with its exuberant Tommy Vicari-produced debut. No surprise that expectations ran high for 1977's *Fountains of Light*, recorded at Le Studio in Quebec with Roy Thomas Baker (Queen, Cars, Yes).



"[Baker] was at an interesting point in his career," says Starcastle drummer Steve Tassler, now a medical physician. "He was stepping out to capitalize on his fame, which he deserved. I can't say we hit it off real well. I mean, he was a rock 'n' roll star and we were just kind of poor."

The tracking was done expeditiously, Tassler recalls, but the band was not thrilled with the mix. But because of its efficiencies rather than its deficiencies, *Fountains of Light* is often considered the group's most artistically successful release. "We recorded the songs all the way through," Tassler says, "except for [the ten-minute] 'Fountains,' which we did in two segments. Never used a click track."

7. **Easter Island** *Easter Island*

(Mark Hendricks, 1979)

Having been bitten by the British prog bug in the early 1970s, guitarist Mark Miceli, formerly of the proto-Southern-rock outfit Elysian Field, formed the Louisville-based Easter Island as an outlet for his more esoteric musical visions. "The rhythms on the debut album are broken up so much that it takes someone special to go from one time signature to another without the listener knowing that it's happening," Miceli says. "Mark [Hendricks] was a natural at this."

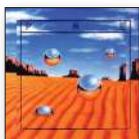


Miceli notes that "the oddest beat on the record is in 'Telesterion,' the middle section of 'The Alchemist's Suite.' I had just spent the New Year's Eve before with fifty traveling Sufi drummers. I wrote the song that night. I think we recorded several of us hitting different pieces of Mark's kit. I remember I played a Gato drum, a slit drum."

Released on a limited basis at the tail end of the 1970s (literally on December 31, 1979), El's debut was once considered a Holy Grail collectible. Reissued with new material and titled *Now and Then*, the album can be downloaded directly from Miceli's page at bandcamp.com.

8. **Pre Pre** (Dwight Dunlap, 1973)

Recorded at Cardinal Studios in Lexington, Kentucky, Pre's debut was once a lost gem, escaping transfer to CD for twenty years.



Drummer Dwight Dunlap unleashes rolling thunder on "Ascetic Eros," one of two major centerpieces of the record. In the other, the nineteen-minute "Ballet for a Blind Man," Dunlap grooves through a few different time signatures.

9. **Gypsy** *In the Garden*

(Bill Lordan, Joe Lala, 1971)

This ambitious outing from the Minneapolis band that included future Robin Trower drummer Bill Lordan and Blues Image/CSNY percussionist Joe Lala juxtaposes layered harmonies with psychedelic blues and vaguely folk- and classical-rock vibes. The first installment of the two-part, quasi-multicultural track "Here (in the Garden)" features a Latin-esque drum solo that recalls Michael Shrieve's iconic Woodstock workout.



10. **Robert Bensick Band** *French Pictures in London* (Scott Krauss, 1975)

This recently unearthed gem is a fine reflection, even a microcosm, of the diversity of artists inhabiting the mid-'70s Cleveland music scene. The depressed industrial climate of the region undoubtedly contributed to the hothouse weirdness of the city's musical underground, which nurtured rare strains of experimental rock, from Pere Ubu to the Genesis tribute artist Paul Fayrewether.



The postmodernist mash-up of jazz,

Happy the Man's Mick Beck

In the Cage With One of America's Great Prog Acts

Happy the Man was formed in the Virginia/D.C. area, but founding member and percussionist Mick Beck, bassist Rick Kennell, and early lead vocalist Cliff Fortney were originally from Indiana, and it was their good ol'-fashioned Midwestern determination that helped this largely instrumental group secure a deal with Clive Davis's Arista Records in the mid 1970s.

On stage Beck fused his drumming craft with performance art via the mechanics of negotiating his so-called drum cage. Beck was a visual focal point of the band, leaping from his hanging percussion pieces and timpani at the back of the cage to the front "room" containing his kit. He collected percussive pieces from everywhere. "People would appear at our shows and bring me instruments," Beck tells *Modern Drummer*. "They had more meaning because these were gifts. The cage was my home."

Before recording HTM's second album, 1978's *Crafty Hands*, Beck exited the group amid creative (and other) disagreements. Drummer Ron Riddle (later of Blue Öyster Cult) assumed the drum throne. HTM broke up in the early 1980s but reunited some twenty years later behind the power and finesse of drummer Joe Bergamini (Dennis DeYoung).



Heartland Prog

art-rock, and spoken-word mysticism on *French Pictures in London* coalesces around a narrative arc. "That whole album was about people I lived with in [the historic east Cleveland apartment building] the Plaza," says Robert Bensick, who thought he'd left the arts forever when he became a Wall Street executive. "The building was gorgeous, although it was run down, because we were in the red-light district. It was a very romantic period."

Scott Krauss, later the drummer for Pere Ubu, was at the top of Bensick's "players to get" list. Bensick, himself a drummer, says, "Scott and I were both in the Bridge, a famous underground band. I became obsessed with synthesizer and got into playing guitar. I needed a drummer, and because Scott was so damned good, he was the obvious pick."

11. **Pavlov's Dog** *At the Sound of the Bell* (Bill Bruford, 1976)

This is a great example of the cross-pollination of British recording artists and blossoming North American prog rockers

in the 1970s. Despite not being a full-fledged band member, former Yes and King Crimson drummer Bill Bruford takes a commanding role on the St. Louis group's sophomore album. His playing is dynamic, even dramatic. Bubbly tom work injects excitement into the droning/hypnotic "She Came Shining," and Bruford's knack for detail kicks into high gear for the knotty "Did You See Him Cry?" "I asked [Bruford] how he kept track of all the time-signature changes in King Crimson," bandleader/vocalist/guitarist David Surkamp told this writer in 2008. "He said, '[Crimson leader] Bob Fripp expects we can all count.'"

12. **The Load** *Praise the Load*

(Tommy Smith, 1976)

Led by keyboardist Sterling Smith, this Columbus, Ohio, trio of serious-minded musos signaled more than just a nod and a wink to the slightly absurd. Drummer Tommy Smith, Sterling's



brother, never lacks wit while laying down a triple-time feel in "Fandango," channeling his inner Carl Palmer for the classical-rock "The William Tell Overture," or bringing da funk to the shuffling "Dave's 'A' Song." Owl Intermedia, the band's own label, pressed *Praise the Load* to vinyl in 1976, but the New Jersey-based the Laser's Edge eventually released the album on CD in 1991, with two bonus tracks.

Further Progging From the Heart of America

Syzygy *A Glorious Disturbance* (Paul Mihacevich, 2012) /// **French TV** *The Violence of Amateurs* (Bob Douglas, Brian Donohoe, Chris Vincent, Kirk Davis, Mike Sary, Dean Zigoris, Greg Acker, 1999) /// **Thinking Plague** *In This Life* (Bob Drake, Mark Fuller, 1989) /// **Glass Harp** *Glass Harp* (John Sferra, 1970) /// **WhiteWing** *WhiteWing* (Norm Curtis, 1975) /// **Tin Huey** *Contents Dislodged During Shipment* (Stuart Austin, 1979)



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Peter Magadini's Polyrhythmic Life

by Martin Patmos

Given that rhythm is the playground of drummers, polyrhythms seem to have a particular resonance. The possibilities of two against three, three against four, and beyond are continually explored in jazz, rock, and other styles. For many a drummer across different genres, discussing polyrhythms often brings to mind Peter Magadini. "Polyrhythms occur when two or more parallel meters—polymeters—are played at the same time, sharing the same basic tempo," Magadini explains. "Then when the polymeter itself is subdivided, those subdivisions become polyrhythms."

Magadini wrote the book *Polyrhythms: The Musician's Guide* in 1967. The fiftieth anniversary of the book, long considered a classic among drum methods, offers a chance to reconsider its influence—and that of Magadini's subsequent offerings. *Polyrhythms for the Drumset* followed his first foray into the subject, then came the *Jazz Drums* DVD and two *Learn to Play the Drumset* instructional books; the latter have been reorganized and expanded as a complete text in the recently released *All in One: Learn to Play the Drumset*.

Yet there's more to the author than his academic works. As a drummer Magadini has toured and/or recorded with Diana Ross, Mose Allison, George Duke, Bobbie Gentry, John Handy, and Don Ellis, among others. In addition, he's released critically acclaimed albums under his own name. Just as a polyrhythm layers multiple rhythms against each other, Magadini's career involves multiple layers as well: The roles of author, student, teacher, drummer, and producer are all interlocking aspects of Peter's polyrhythmic life.

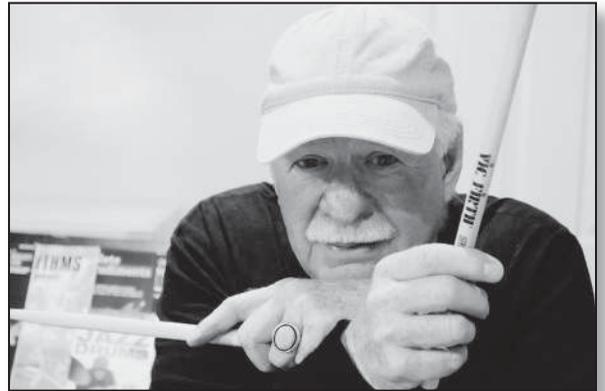
Like so many players, Magadini began drumming as a student. "I started in fifth grade," he says, "and never stopped." Growing up, he first studied with Don Bothwell in Phoenix before relocating to New York City and studying with Roy Burns at the Henry Adler Drum Shop. "My wrist and finger control really developed with Roy, who also taught me the Moeller system," Magadini says. Other influential

teachers included master timpanist Roland Kohloff of the San Francisco Symphony and the New York Philharmonic, and Jon Wyre of Nexus Percussion and the University of Toronto, where Magadini obtained his master's degree. Studies with tabla master Pandit Mahapurush Misra at a UC Berkeley summer program provided much of the groundwork for Magadini's polyrhythmic explorations.

Collectively, these lessons provided the roots for Magadini's drumming and teaching careers. Though he's now considered a master drum instructor, Magadini says humbly, "What we learn from students is just as important as what we already know. Goals are different for different people, and I enjoy seeing people being creative at a musical instrument. One thing teaching does for me is keep my playing young. Before I teach something, I need to know about it, and I have to understand a concept backwards and forwards in time." Thus Magadini examines both the roots and branches of an idea, an approach that permeates his drumming knowledge.

Magadini began teaching drums early in his career, a pursuit synchronized with performing. Some students were taught from the ground up, while others sought him out for specifics as his reputation grew. *All in One: Learn to Play the Drumset* captures Magadini's overall approach. "I once had a tough student that just couldn't get it," Peter recalls. "I said to myself, *I can't let this kid fail*, and I was forced to think about teaching differently. I broke everything down and built it up, and that became the basis for *Learn to Play the Drumset*. So *All in One* is about playing the drums and contains what I teach students 90 percent of the time. Only one page is devoted to polyrhythms."

Yet prior to this experience, Magadini



authored *Polyrhythms: The Musician's Guide*. "When I was attending the Indian music class, I would stay after with Mahapurush Misra," Magadini says. "He would show me polyrhythmic ratios, putting three against four, six against four, nine against four, and so on. We'd play together—me on the drum pad and him on the tabla—and go into other time ratios and improvise."

"I didn't invent this stuff," Magadini continues. "East Indian rhythms and West African drumming were where it was at with polyrhythms. Everything to do with the concept could be found in [those genres]. The problem was how to get there—there's nothing notated in Indian music. So I thought, *What if I forget about the sounds of the [tabla] and focus on the polyrhythms?* We learn rhythms in a monaural way, so the goal was to let go of the basic pulse and hear both rhythms at the same time. Elvin [Jones] was just doing it naturally, but the rest of us have to work at it."

Taking the ratios and applying Western notation, Magadini developed a system "so we can all get there, so we could explore polyrhythmic expression without trying to master instruments of other cultures. I saw that with [Western notation] I could translate polyrhythms by introducing the five basic 'polymeters' first—three, five, six, seven, eight, over four beats—and then subdivide those ratios into combinations of 8ths, triplets,

Study Suggestions

"As a chart-reading drummer," Magadini says, "there are three things you have to do: Play time, catch figures, and improvise drum fills. You can't lose the time when

you do any of this. I have a whole section devoted to just that in *All in One: Learn to Play the Drumset*. The goal is to try to have everything be spontaneous. The one thing

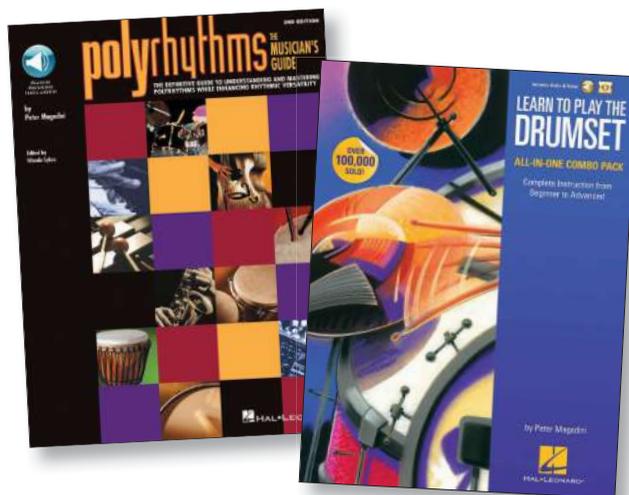
I stress with my own students, before we seriously get into polyrhythms, is that they concentrate on just being good musicians first."

and 16ths, which become polyrhythms.”

While publishing his now classic book, Magadini continued teaching and playing. “What I found out was that when I was teaching and practicing polyrhythms,” he explains, “all my students—myself included—could now play basic 4/4 time, or odd meters, with a deeper groove and better feel, because the time playing is now backed up with this understanding. I mean *all* of it: jazz, rock, punk, funk, metal, Latin, and symphony hall percussion. It doesn’t matter—play what you like; you will just be better at it.

“The most important thing with polyrhythms is that it expands the way you hear time. It’s like being able to shift into other lanes on a highway. It opens and expands your rhythmic comprehension to a much wider perspective.”

Indeed, Magadini has long put his philosophy into practice with his playing career. From 1964 to 1968, he worked with keyboardist George Duke. Moving to Los Angeles in the ’70s, he became



Diana Ross’s first tour drummer and played with the John Handy Quintet and the Don Ellis Band, before settling in Canada for seventeen years. There he worked on his master’s degree before becoming a university instructor, while also playing and recording in Montreal’s vibrant music scene. Then, when Magadini recorded his album *Polyrhythm* in 1975, Duke, by now with Frank Zappa, brought those keyboards along. The result is a classic

that demonstrates Magadini’s rhythmic abilities in polyrhythms and metric modulation. And his more straight-ahead playing benefited as well, with the drummer’s 1978 follow-up album gaining much critical acclaim.

Meanwhile, Magadini’s working relationship with singer/pianist Mose Allison—beginning with early gigs at the Lighthouse in L.A. and ending with the drummer producing and playing on Allison’s final live album, *American Legend: Live in California*—lasted forty-five years. “Mose used different guys in different regions,”

Magadini says, “depending on what area of the country he was in.” This album captures Allison in concert, always the epitome of cool, with Magadini framing and supporting the songs throughout.

The multidimensional Magadini covers a lot of ground. As a teacher, performer, producer, and author, he influences the careers and development of musicians, and continues to lead a truly polyrhythmic life.



JOHN BLACKWELL, JR.

1973 - 2017

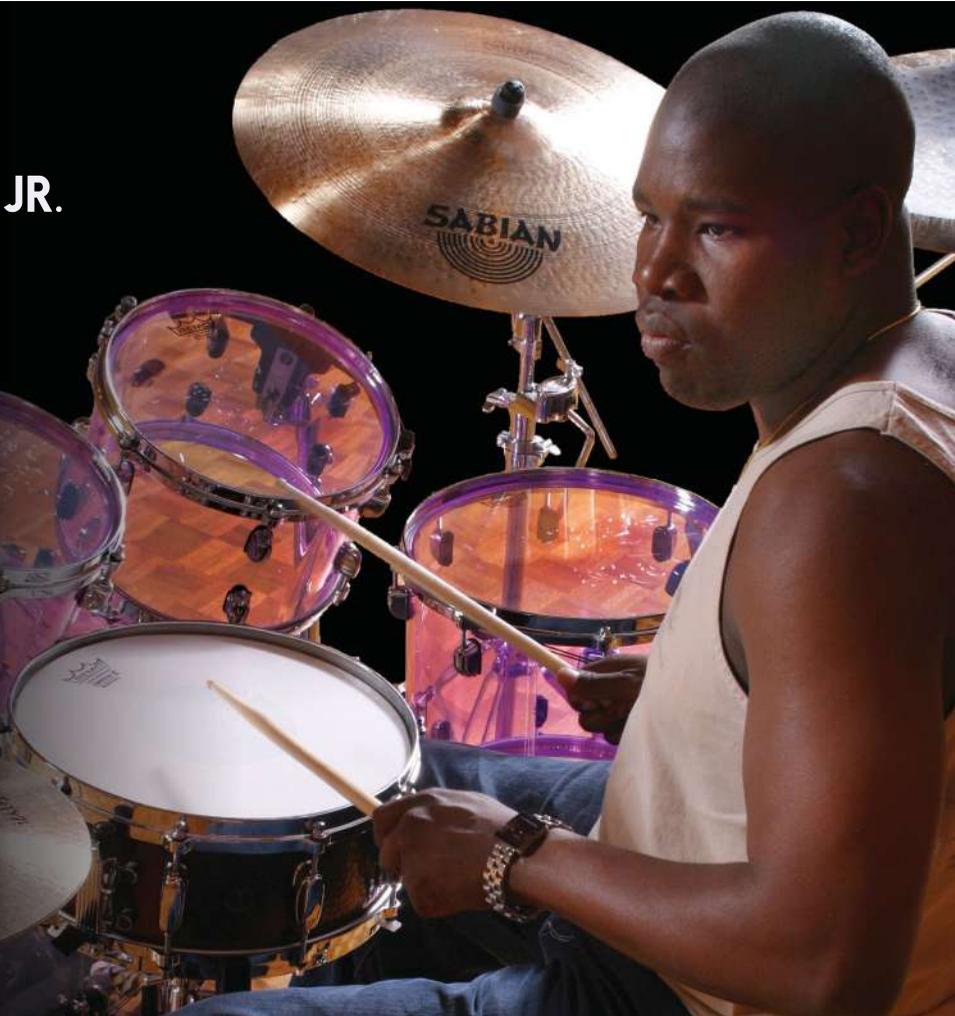
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2017 DCI World Championship Results

Capping the seventh undefeated season in their sixty-year history, the Blue Devils, based in Concord, California, won a record-breaking eighteenth title this past August 12 at the Drum Corps International World Championships at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, Indiana. Coinciding with DCI's forty-fifth anniversary, the Blue Devils commemorated their long run with a spectacular production of *Metamorph*.

"Our show represented the past, present, and future of drum corps activity," Blue Devils director of percussion Scott Johnson said after the performance. Johnson, who's been a part of the Blue Devils organization for thirty-eight years, has been involved with all eighteen of the corps' championships, including three that he participated in as a marching member before joining the staff.

The Blue Devils earned a season-high score of 98.5375 in front of a record-breaking crowd of more than 23,000. The *Metamorph* program featured original music by Blue Devils music director and arranger David Glyde, as well as Peter Graham's "The Triumph of Time," Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee," Benard Ighner's "Everything Must Change," and Simon Dobson's "Crystal." Drum corps aficionados may have recognized excerpts of Chuck Mangione's "Legend of the One-Eyed Sailor," which was performed by the Blue Devils in the mid-'70s, as well as Rihanna's "Diamonds," which alluded to the corps' anniversary.

"We began on the old starting line and marched onto the field with a slower-tempo cadence to represent the past," Johnson said. "We used sixteen snare drummers that played the groove Steve Gadd used on 'Legend of the One-Eyed Sailor,' which was based on the rudimental vocabulary of 'Crazy Army.'"

"The most fun part of the show was depicting the future—where we think this activity is going," Johnson continued. "The vocabulary that Dave Glyde wrote for the drum line is *insane*. There were seven-over-threes-over-sixes-over-fives—not your basic triplet diddles or 16th notes. We went way outside the box on purpose."

The California-based Santa Clara Vanguard finished in second place with a score of 97.60. For the second consecutive year—and the third time in four years—



The Santa Clara Vanguard won the Fred Sanford Best Percussion Performance Award at this year's event.



Zack Hudson of the Blue Devils took home three Individual and Ensemble honors, including Best Individual Multi-Percussion for his drumset solo, "The Five Second Rule."

the Vanguard won the Fred Sanford Best Percussion Performance Award. "We came out really prepared in June and played aggressively all season," SCV percussion caption manager Paul Rennick said. "One of the things that made us strong was our returning members, who had experience working together."

The Vanguard, which is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary this year, presented

Ouroboros, featuring music by David Gillingham, Peter Graham, Zhou Long, Amin Bhatia, and Stephen Melillo. "One of my favorite parts was 'Song of Eight Unruly Topsy Poets' by Chinese-born composer Zhou Long," Rennick said. "It's a cool, quirky piece with lots of variety, and it always gets an enormous response from the audience. We incorporated many samples and electronic sounds this year, and also used a



The Blue Devils, while celebrating their sixtieth anniversary, were crowned champions of the 2017 DCI finals.



The Santa Clara Vanguard's Bryce Gardner captured Best Individual Snare for his solo, "Release the Kraken."

Moog Theremini [an electronic instrument controlled by the performer's hands via antenna]."

Rennick explained to *MD* that he takes a somewhat unconventional approach when trying out prospective corps members. "Our audition is probably quite a bit different from other groups," he said. "I ask players to bring their own exercises and audition pieces. I want to see that player at his or her best. It says a lot when somebody can just stand up and make music."

In addition to earning his sixth High Drum Award—three with the Vanguard and three with the Phantom Regiment—Rennick was inducted into the DCI Hall of Fame this past August. "To be included on a list like that is humbling to say the least," he said. "It inspires you to live up to that honor and continue to earn it every year. The Hall of Fame ceremony was definitely a highlight of the week for me." Rennick also credited his wife and co-arranger, Sandi Rennick, for her support throughout his long drum corps career.

For the second consecutive year, Carolina Crown, from Fort Mill, South Carolina, took the bronze medal; this year the corps performed a program titled *It Is*. The Cavaliers, from Rosemont, Illinois, took fourth place, bumping last year's champion, the Bluecoats, from Canton,

Ohio, to fifth. And the Madison Scouts, from Madison, Wisconsin, returned to the top twelve with their *Last Man Standing* program.

Several events lead up to the Championship Finals each year. On August 8, at the DCI Open Class World Championship Finals in Michigan City, Indiana, Santa Clara's Vanguard Cadets swept all scoring categories. On August 9, at the Performer's Showcase, individual percussionist winners included Santa Clara Vanguard snare drummer Bryce Gardner, Blue Devils tenor player Miles Kenobbie, Blue Devils drumset performer Zack Hudson, Troopers timpanist Kaleb Hascall, and Blue Stars marimbist Michael Kern. Best-ensemble honors were awarded to the River City Rhythm bass drum section and the Legends cymbal section. And on August 12 at the DrumLine Battle, held at the Pan Am Plaza in Indianapolis, eight international drum lines competed in the tournament-style bracket. For the third year in a row, the 7th Regiment, from New London, Connecticut, was crowned overall champion, besting Colombia's Medellín Gran Banda and the New Jersey-based Raiders to win the national division.

Text and photos by Lauren Vogel Weiss





Sonor Swinger



When the indie rock group **Faux in Love** went into the Guilford Sound studio in Guilford, Vermont, to record its latest record, drummer Bruce Black decided to bring this vintage, late-1960s Sonor Swinger setup. According to Black, and confirmed to *MD* by Sonor artist relations manager Thomas Barth, the entry-level Swinger was constructed from the same German beech that defined the company's higher-end sets during the '60s. Black explains how the beech produced a smooth, controlled sound in the studio. "The Sonor kit had the warmest, purest tone," he says. "It lacked the punch and cut of some other kits, partially because I use a medium tuning. But it's almost as if the Sonor could EQ itself—it gives you a pure quality without any overtones."

Black credits the cost-saving plastic lugs for the drums' distinctive tone. "Shockingly, the lugs on these drums are intact and still in good working order," he explains. "I've always seen the lugs as a potential liability, but they're also a huge asset in terms of tone and

sound. They're a mere fraction of the weight of steel or chrome lugs, and I feel that they allow these shells to really resonate."

While recording with Faux in Love, Black rounded out the setup with a DW 5.5x14 Bell Brass snare, a custom-made walnut and zebrawood solid-shell block snare, and a variety of Zildjian, Sabian, Dream, and Wuhan cymbals.

"When you play the right gear for the gig, it really helps to capture the right vibe and totally affects the way a cat plays," the drummer says. "During this entire recording session, I felt like James Gadson—I was constantly cheesing and just thrilled to be making music and playing the drums."



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