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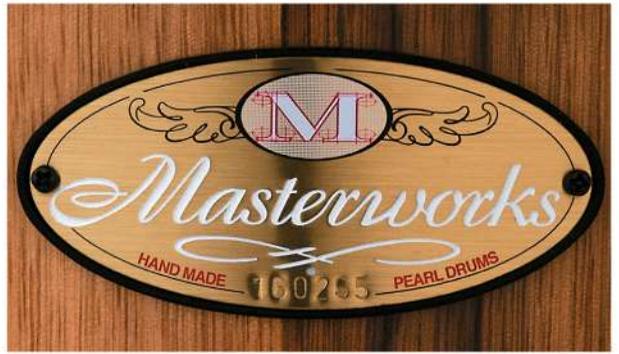
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# CONTENTS

## ON THE COVER

### 32 ST. VINCENT'S MATT JOHNSON

Nearly twenty-five years after recording Jeff Buckley's iconic *Grace* album on an acoustic kit, he's immersed in the digital realm of St. Vincent's live show. Is he a different drummer, or simply rising to the occasion?  
by Patrick Berkery



Volume 42 • Number 5  
Cover and Contents photos by Alex Solca

28 **UP & COMING: MAX PORTNOY**  
by Mike Haid

30 **ON TOPIC: ERIC CLAPTON'S  
JAMIE OLDAKER**  
by Bob Girouard

42 **GREAT '80s DRUM  
PERFORMANCES, PART 3:  
HEAVY ROCK**  
by Ilya Stemkovsky

48 **JOHN McLAUGHLIN'S  
RANJIT BAROT**  
by Ken Micallef

54 **PARAMORE'S ZAC FARRO**  
by David Ciauro

## LESSONS

- 58 **OFF THE RECORD**  
Travis Orbin on *Silly String II* Exploring the Session Guru's Latest Chops-Infused Labyrinth by Austin Burcham
- 62 **BASICS**  
Reading *Syncopated Rhythms* Part 2: 8ths and 16ths by Joel Rothman
- 64 **ROCK 'N' JAZZ CLINIC**  
Five-Note Phrasing Part 1: Creating Rhythmic Tension by Marc Dicciani
- 66 **JAZZ DRUMMER'S WORKSHOP**  
Up-Tempo Studies Part 2: More Exercises for Reflexes and Chops by Steve Fidyk
- 68 **ROCK PERSPECTIVES**  
How to Play Odd Time Signatures Part 1: 16th-Note Meters by Aaron Edgar
- 70 **CONCEPTS**  
Do You Need to Read Music? Weighing the Pros and Cons in an Age-Old Argument by Russ Miller

## EQUIPMENT

- 16 **PRODUCT CLOSE-UP**  
Yamaha Tour Custom drumset  
Zildjian K Sweet series cymbals  
101 Drums 5.5x14 Woodfiber snare  
Tune-Bot Studio digital tuner  
Bopworks drumsticks and brushes

- 26 **GEARING UP**  
311's Chad Sexton

- 72 **NEW AND NOTABLE**



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## DEPARTMENTS

- 8 **AN EDITOR'S OVERVIEW**  
Finding a Balance by Willie Rose
- 10 **READERS' PLATFORM**  
What's Your Favorite 1980s Metal or Hard Rock Drumming Album?
- 12 **OUT NOW**  
Santiago "Jimmy" Vela III on the Sword's *Used Future*
- 13 **ON TOUR**  
Rod Morgenstein with the Dixie Dregs
- 14 **MUST-HAVE GEAR**  
Smashing Pumpkins' Jimmy Chamberlin
- 74 **RETAILER PROFILE**  
Guitar Center Destination Drum Shops
- 78 **CRITIQUE**  
Terri Lyne Carrington with Lewis Porter, Blake Richardson with Between the Buried and Me, Virgil Donati with IceFish, and more
- 82 **IT HAPPENED ON THE ROAD**  
Belle and Sebastian's Richard Colburn
- 84 **BACKBEATS**  
PASIC 2017, Ray Lucas and Frank Capp remembered
- 88 **KIT OF THE MONTH**  
The Elf's Giant

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## Finding a Balance

Drummers often grapple with certain questions or problems that could be answered by simply finding the right balance between two choices. For example, a popular debate among drummers is the choice between using traditional or matched grip. Or some players might argue the merits of learning to read versus learning by ear, or whether they should teach themselves independently or take lessons. In each case, it might be advantageous to pursue a balance of *both* options, rather than feeling a need to choose one.



In this month's Concepts column, the renowned session drummer and educator Russ Miller examines one of the questions that students have repeatedly asked him over the years: Should I read music? Beyond Miller's article, a brief online search will reveal plenty of recent forum posts and educational videos on the subject, illustrating that it remains a popular question among the drumming community.

I'm a proponent of learning to read music in general, and I've certainly incorporated books in lessons with new students. I think this helps build drummers' flexibility, enhances their ability to learn, and could open doors to future opportunities. And, personally, I wouldn't have been able to pursue multiple publishing opportunities without being able to read. I also wouldn't have gotten certain gigs without being able to read charts and transcribe grooves and ensemble figures—though that's not to say another drummer wouldn't be capable of handling the gig without being able to read or notate music.

That said, at one point while I was in a practice funk, I decided to take my nose out of the books and charts and only listen to music, analyze it, and play along with it by ear. For one thing, I wanted to take a different approach and learn about players' creative tendencies without existing interpretations. Now, my ability to read certainly helped build the foundation to understand what might've been played. But to beat my inspiration lull, I found that it was useful to take a different approach to a method I felt somewhat tied to previously.

I'm not sure there's always one answer to some of drumming's longtime debates. Obviously everyone's path is different, as evidenced by the drummers and stories that fill these pages each month. But maybe finding the balance between two methods of learning could lead you to discover something you might not have pursued otherwise. And maybe one solution could be to frame these everlasting drum debates in a way that doesn't inherently limit progress from the start, no matter which side you pick.

**Willie Rose**  
Associate Editor



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Patrick Berkery, Stephen Bidwell, David Ciauro, Bob Girouard, Mike Haid, John Martinez, Rick Mattingly, Ben Meyer, Ken Micallef, Jeff Potter, Will Romano, Bernie Schallehn, Ilya Stemkovsky, Robin Tolleson, Lauren Vogel Weiss, Paul Wells.

**MODERN DRUMMER** magazine (ISSN 0194-4533) is published monthly by **MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc.**, 271 Route 46 West, Suite H-212, Fairfield, NJ 07004. PERIODICALS MAIL POSTAGE paid at Fairfield, NJ 07004 and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 2018 by **MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc.** All rights reserved. Reproduction without the permission of the publisher is prohibited.

**EDITORIAL/ADVERTISING/ ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES:**

**MODERN DRUMMER Publications**, 271 Route 46 West, Suite H-212, Fairfield, NJ 07004. Tel: 973-239-4140. Fax: 973-239-7139. Email: [mdinfo@moderndrummer.com](mailto:mdinfo@moderndrummer.com).

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** U.S. \$29.95, Canada \$33.95, other international \$44.95 per year. For two- and three-year subscription prices go to [www.moderndrummer.com](http://www.moderndrummer.com). Single copies \$5.99.

**SUBSCRIPTION CORRESPONDENCE:**

Modern Drummer, PO Box 274, Oregon, IL 61061-9920. **Change of address:** Allow at least six weeks for a change. Please provide both old and new address. Call 800-551-3786 or 815-732-5283. Phone hours, 8AM–4:30PM Monday–Friday CST, or visit Subscriber Services at [www.moderndrummer.com](http://www.moderndrummer.com).

**MUSIC DEALERS:** Modern Drummer is distributed by Hal Leonard Corp., 800-554-0626, [sales@halleonard.com](mailto:sales@halleonard.com), [www.halleonard.com/dealers](http://www.halleonard.com/dealers)

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Modern Drummer, PO Box 274, Oregon, IL 61061-9920.

**Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 41480017** Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: PO Box 875, Stn A, Windsor ON N9A 6P2

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**MODERN DRUMMER** welcomes manuscripts and photos but cannot assume responsibility for them.

**MODERN DRUMMER ONLINE:** [www.moderndrummer.com](http://www.moderndrummer.com)

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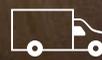
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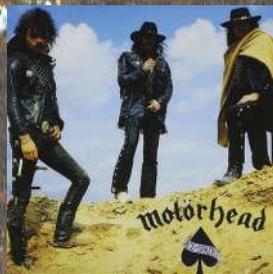


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## What's Your Favorite 1980s Metal or Hard Rock Drumming Album?

This month we dive into the third installment of our series on great '80s drumming performances with a focus on metal and hard rock tracks. As usual we asked MD readers and social media followers for their take on the subject at hand. Here's a selection of your responses.

Slayer's *Reign in Blood* with Dave Lombardo. That record blew everyone away. The drums were so wild, and there are moments in some songs where the time goes out the window. But they always came back together.

**Matty Owen**

Metallica's *...And Justice for All*. With that album Lars Ulrich made double bass famous. The song "One" has probably one of the most well-known double bass patterns that tons of drummers, including me, learned at some point.

**Stephen Cervantes**

Helloween, *Keeper of the Seven Keys: Part II*. Helloween was one of the pioneers of European power metal with their self-titled EP and studio albums *Walls of Jericho* and *Keeper of the Seven Keys: Part I*. When *Part II* was released the genre was in its infancy, and to me Ingo Schwichtenberg's playing on it foretells the power metal drumming that was to come after it came out. It had skank-beat variations, broken double bass drum patterns, double- or half-time double bass grooves, polyrhythmic fills, unison

ride bell patterns, and triplet-based double bass beats. For me this is the bible for European power metal drumming.

**Gandu Permana**

Fates Warning, *Perfect Symmetry*. Drummer Mark Zonder's use of odd time signatures and innovative fills in the context of very compelling songs provided a huge dose of inspiration for me. I still play along to that album.

**Kurt Ritterpusch**

Queensrÿche, *Operation: Mindcrime*. I basically learned to play drums by mimicking Scott Rockenfield's playing. His parts and the sound of his kit, with those China cymbals especially, were unique at the time. This record also introduced me to concept albums, so I think that added to its mystique. *Operation: Mindcrime* was quite an influence for me, drumming or otherwise.

**Keith Homel**

Nicko McBrain's drumming with Iron Maiden, especially on *Somewhere in Time*, blew me away as a young drummer. I couldn't believe McBrain was playing all the complex patterns with one foot. Not to mention that every song on this album is killer, and each has unique and difficult drum parts. To this day it's a fantastic album for working on single-pedal chops. McBrain really pushed the boundaries of what could be done with one foot. I grew

up playing along to all the Maiden albums, and it's really influenced my drumming and sound.

**Patrick Handlovsky**

One of my favorites is Metallica's *...And Justice for All*. That album features tons of heavy grooves and technical drum parts. Sonically, it served as a drum-tone guide for many metal drummers from back then to now.

**Justin Kitzmiller**

I'd pick *Creatures of the Night* by Kiss for that monstrous drum sound, heavy groove, and Eric Carr's immense pocket on "Keep Me Comin'" and "Saint and Sinner." I'd also say *Live After Death* by Iron Maiden for its excitement and groove.

**Shyam Prasad**

I think Dave Lombardo laid down the foundation for modern metal drumming on Slayer's *Reign in Blood*. The double-time thrash beats, the double bass 16th-note runs, the huge fills.... Every metal drummer in the modern era, Slayer fan or not, owes a debt to that performance.

**Ryan Alexander Bloom**

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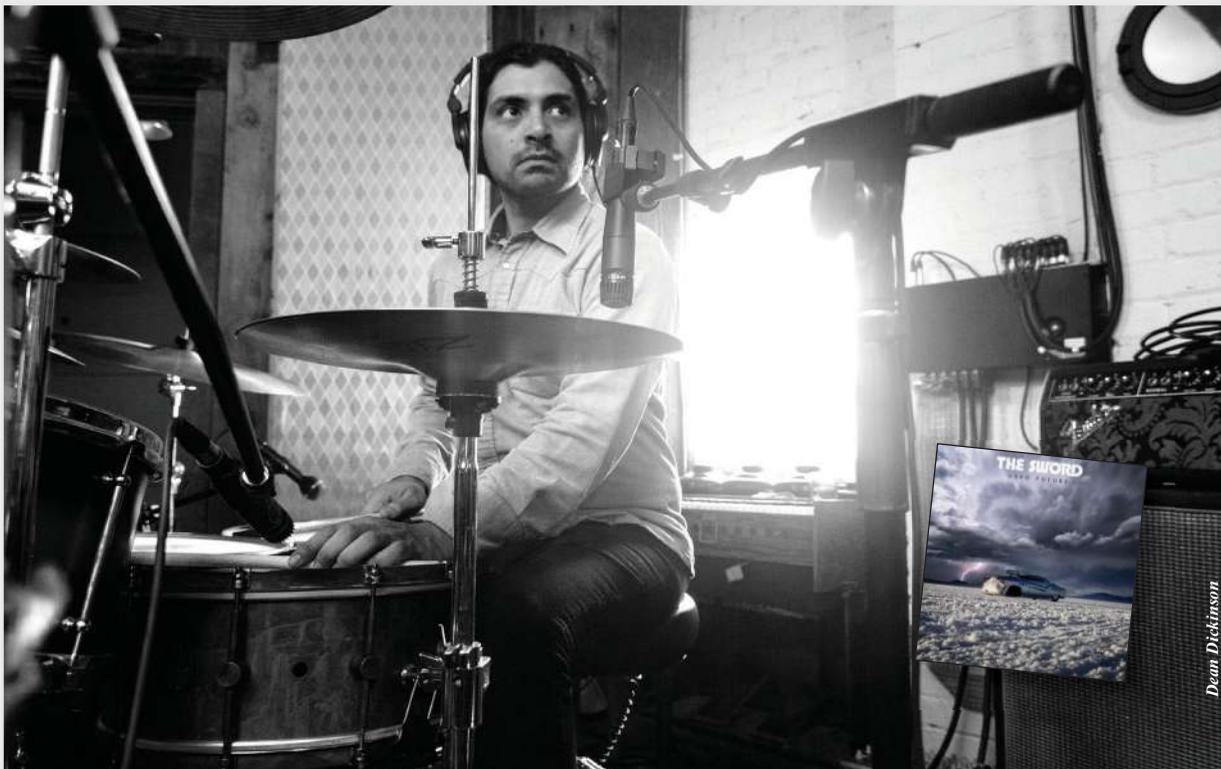
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# OUT NOW

## Santiago “Jimmy” Vela III on the Sword’s *Used Future*

Monstrous grooves underlie heavy riffs and Black Sabbath–inspired melodies on the group’s latest release.



On March 23, the Austin-based hard rock band the Sword released its sixth full-length, *Used Future*. The effort sees the group further augment its signature brand of crushing rock with a heavier synth and electronic presence. Santiago “Jimmy” Vela III, the Sword’s drummer since 2011, slams throughout with Bonham-infused patterns, a few funk surprises, and massive fills that amplify the record’s guitar-driven riffs.

Before hitting veteran alternative producer Tucker Martine’s studio in Portland, Oregon, to record *Used Future*, the group worked on the songs remotely. “We stash our individual ideas into a collective Dropbox,” Vela explains. “When someone gets inspired, they can record a quick demo and let the others hear it, add to it, or get inspired by it. When we rehearse we already know what we want to jam on. I’d record simple drum breaks and upload them for the guys to get inspired. I call it ‘riff ammo.’ We’d allow the ideas to marinate and let each other add more flavor to them.”

While Vela points out that incorporating synths and electronic tones has been a part of the Sword’s sound since 2010’s *Warp Riders*, he says that their increased use on *Used Future* opened doors for the band. “I’m a huge fan of all kinds of electronic music and synth-based arpeggiated patterns,” he explains. “It’s a fun

type of music to explore and play. I also love layering textural synth ambience to create a colorful palette. I’m glad that we’re able to explore some of these territories and create what I feel is a sound all our own.”

At the 2:00 mark in “Don’t Get Too Comfortable,” Vela lays down a slick funk pattern in the drum break that leads into the bridge. “That groove is a little nod to Clyde Stubblefield, Zigaboo Modeliste, and all the funky drummers of the world,” he says. “We wrote the majority of ‘Don’t Get Too Comfortable’ in the studio. In the middle of the song, it was thrown out there to have some sort of breakbeat cut into the bridge. I jumped at the opportunity to play a break inspired by Zig.”

Vela also slays a unique 6/4 shuffle reminiscent of Bernard Purdie or John Bonham in “Intermezzo.” “That track started with the 6/4 shuffle,” he explains, “which was then cut to create a loop for a mildly hypnotic feel. Bryan [Richie, bass and synths] came up with the music, which originally sounded more like a synth experiment. But Tucker loved it and asked if we’d be willing to revisit it. All the extra instrumentation the band added turned it into something we feel we’d not yet artistically expressed before, and we felt it had to be on the album. It ended up creating a nice interlude, hence the title.” **Willie Rose**

**Vela plays a mahogany Q Drum Co. kit with a 7x14 aluminum or brass snare, and he uses Vater sticks.**

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# ON TOUR



## Rod Morgenstein with the Dixie Dregs

The prog-rock flag bearers reunite their classic 1970s *Free Fall* lineup for a spring U.S. tour.

The Dawn of the Dregs tour—an early-2018 trek that lasts through late April—marks the first time that the lineup from the Dixie Dregs’ pivotal second album and 1977 Capricorn Records debut, *Free Fall*, has performed together in over forty years. To re-create the prog-infused fusion that defined the mid-’70s lineup, drummer Rod Morgenstein and guitarist Steve Morse—the band’s only consistent members throughout its recording career—reunited with bassist Andy West, violinist Allen Sloan, and keyboardist Steve Davidowski.

In keeping up with the progressive material more than four decades since the Dregs’ inception, Morgenstein feels fortunate that he’s maintained his health as he enters his mid-sixties. “I’ve taken the physicality of staying healthy as I age very seriously,” he says. “Even though I’m not always in the mood, I put on my layers of clothing and go out for a thirty-minute power walk or jog a few times a week. I also do a bunch of push-ups, sit-ups, dips, and stretches. There are so many things that befall drummers. I think part of it is that many rock drummers were not taught to play properly, meaning that they play with more tension than they probably should.”

**Morgenstein uses Sabian cymbals, Vic Firth sticks, Evans drumheads, Roland electronics, and Tama hardware.**

Along with prepping for the Dregs’ intense set on his own, Morgenstein joined the rest of the group to rehearse in January 2017. “The five of us convened at Steve Morse’s home down south to see what it would feel like and to see if it was even in the cards for us to put this together,” the drummer explains. “We played through some songs for a couple of days and had a wonderful time reconnecting with each other. Everything sounded great, so we decided to move ahead with the project. We have about a week of rehearsing together before the first concert of the tour.”

Over the tour’s more than twenty-five dates, the band plans to play material that spans its vast catalog, and tunes from *Free Fall* are sure to be included. As Morgenstein preps for the trek, he’s also experimenting with new instruments—and some familiar favorites—that are coming along for the ride. “I’m going to work with these two Roland SPD::ONE WAV and Percussion pads that I have on the way,” he says. “I’m hoping that I can have different percussion sounds in them to re-create some of the sounds from certain songs, and also to trigger a couple of loops that were intros to Dregs songs that I would play along with. I always use an array of Sabian cymbals, and I really love to use 6”, 8”, and 10” splashes and a cymbal disc. I also like stacking a 10” China with a 10” splash to get that quick, tight metallic sound. I’ll probably use two rack and two floor toms, and a 10” snare off to the right of my hi-hat. [Morgenstein sets up lefty.] And maybe some wind chimes—I haven’t used those in years!” **Ben Meyer**

## Also on the Road

Georgia Hubley with Yo La Tengo /// Jon Wurster with Superchunk /// Jim Macpherson with the Breeders /// Russell Gilbrook with Uriah Heep /// Simone Odaranile with the Go! Team /// Scott Crago with the Eagles /// Liam Manley with Uncured /// Bjorn Lebon with Amenra





# Smashing Pumpkins' Jimmy Chamberlin

**F**or the second incarnation of the Jimmy Chamberlin Complex, as heard on its new album, *The Parable*, the mighty drummer, who came to prominence in the '90s with the Smashing Pumpkins, gathered players from East and West Coasts to create a swinging free-for-all. Eschewing the fusion décor of his first Complex release, *The Parable* is a dark maneuver of jazz improvisations shaped by Chamberlin's elastic grooves. Bassist Billy Mohler, keyboardist Randy Ingram, guitarist Sean Woolstenhulme, and saxophonist Chris Speed bring quick reflexes and seasoned skills to bear.

"As I get older," Chamberlin says from Chicago, "it's more interesting for me to play the type of music where I create in real time, as opposed to a representation of something I've calculated and determined to be the best possible series of notes. I came from the jazz world originally."

Chamberlin plays a jazz setup featuring Sakae drums and Istanbul Agop cymbals on *The Parable*, bringing a refined, flowing familiarity to the album's six collectively written compositions. "At live venues," he says, "I like being forced to deal with the drums, but I do bring my own cymbals to jazz gigs—a couple different Agop 20" 30th Anniversary rides that I really like, a 19" crash, and my hi-hats. For the most part I like trying to create with tonal configurations that are different from what I have at home."

In between gigs, how does Chamberlin stay in shape, whether rocking with Smashing Pumpkins or swinging with the Complex? "I'm a big believer in minerals and hydration," he says. "On tour I make sure to bring lots of calcium/magnesium. Calcium enables your muscles to contract; magnesium allows them to relax. Often if I'm feeling stiff it's because I don't have enough magnesium in my system. I learned that from a nutritionist, and I've put it into practice over the past twenty years. I believe in mineral balancing, especially when playing Pumpkins shows, where it's more physical. I try to stay away from sugar or anything that will dehydrate

me before I play. I take calcium, magnesium, vitamin D, and a multivitamin."

Chamberlin adjusts his diet on the road accordingly. "When playing three-hour Pumpkins shows," he explains, "I try to eat more on the alkaline side, to keep my body from getting acidic and nervous. That means limiting my coffee intake and staying more with fruits and vegetables. I drink lots of water. No alcohol. When I was young I used to drink at shows, and I was always dehydrated. At fifty-three I'm more cognizant of what's going on in my body. Through that I can tell if I need to drink more water or if I'm low on magnesium or potassium, which means eating a banana."

Food and minerals nourish his body, while meditation calms Chamberlin's mind. "I like to meditate thirty minutes at night and thirty minutes in the morning," Jimmy says. "I use Dr. Joe Dispenza's Space Free Guided Meditation. Drumming is a physical thing, which is predicated somewhat on your bio-health. Dispenza's mediation is rooted in the idea that quantum physics can be replicated on the physical level. Like the contemplation of an experiment determines the outcome; Dispenza brings that forward and allows you to creatively visualize your circumstances and how you want to change your environment. I'm a believer that if you put that information out in the universe, [meditation] will give you a better chance of having it materialize."

"I've learned that for better or worse," Chamberlin adds, "as you get older the gear becomes less of a component. You bring your identity with you. It's not so much a byproduct of what you're playing, it's more why you're doing what you're doing."

**Ken Micallef**

**Chamberlin plays Sakae drums and Istanbul Agop cymbals, and he uses Vic Firth sticks, Remo heads, and DW pedals.**



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# Yamaha

## Tour Custom Drumset

An aptly named series designed to bring full, versatile tones to any stage and at an economical price.

**The latest addition to Yamaha's** acoustic drum catalog pays homage to the popular Tour Custom series that was released in the mid-'80s. But instead of featuring punchy, dark-sounding birch/mahogany shells, the new version is built from more popular and all-purpose maple. (Birch shells are still used for the high-end Recording Custom line and the competitively priced Stage Custom series.) The new Tour Custom kits are targeted towards drummers who need reliable, great-sounding drums that can be used for a variety of genres but aren't priced beyond the average budget. We received the TMP2F4 four-piece shell pack to review, which included 7x10 and 8x12 toms, a 15x16 floor tom, and a 16x22 bass drum. Let's check it out.

### The Specs

Tour Custom drums feature 6-ply/5.6mm maple shells with choice American veneer used for the inside and outside plies. The bearing edges are cut to forty-five degrees, and five satin lacquer finishes are available. We checked out the dark-brown Chocolate Satin. The other options are Caramel (honey), Licorice (black), Butterscotch (natural), and Candy Apple (red). Although the finishes are limited, Yamaha made a smart move in choosing these particular colors; there are enough options to appeal to different aesthetics, yet none of them look so extreme that they would be out of place in certain environments. The beautiful grain of the maple peeks through the satin lacquer just enough to give the shells a sophisticated, high-end appearance.

The rack toms feature Yamaha's slick, single-screw Absolute lugs and super-discreet Y.E.S.S. mounts, which are strategically bolted to the shell at null points so that the drums produce full, unencumbered sustain. The toms are mounted directly to the bass drum via a sturdy, easily adjustable double-tom holder that has a third slot for an additional cymbal arm. The floor toms have basic brackets and knurled legs, which feature retractable/removable rubber feet and spiked tips for

extra stability.

The toms have steel rims with an inward flange, which is a throwback to the type of hoops used by some manufacturers—including Yamaha—in the 1960s and '70s. These rims are said to help control overtones to make the fundamental note more focused. The bass drum has matching maple hoops.

The toms came with Remo Clear Ambassadors on top and bottom and the bass drum had a Clear Powerstroke 3 batter and a Smooth White P3 front with a Yamaha logo.

### The Sound

Yamaha drums are revered by touring drummers and backline companies because they're simply designed, durable, and easy to tune. The Tour Custom kit fell right in line with that reputation. They're also lightweight, which is another plus for drummers who cart their own gear.

The bass drum had a big but not overly boomy tone when tuned low and left unmuffled. Medium tuning produced a more focused note with a crisp attack, and high tunings had a rounder attack and a tighter, tom-like tone. You could utilize any of those sounds if you favor a more ambient bass drum sound, especially when playing in unmiked situations. But in most cases you'll want to swap out the solid front head with a ported version or cut a hole in it to increase the punch and to allow for more muffling and miking options. Tossing a towel or pillow inside the shell removed most of the reflective overtones, tightened up the resonance, and emphasized the meaty and useful low-end that was easy to mix. The attack was clean and snappy, and the punch hit hard and then got right out of the way, which left plenty of sonic space for the bass

guitar and other low-end instruments.

The Tour Custom toms had a wide tuning range that extended from high, bright, and cutting to low, fat, and thumpy. The clear single-ply heads gave the most resonant and pure sound possible, but they were more sensitive to tuning discrepancies. With these heads, I found that the Tour Custom toms had a sweet spot in the medium range that produced a full, resonant tone with a clean attack and long sustain. Higher





tunings had shorter resonance and a brighter attack, while lower tunings had a more papery punch and a rumbling sustain that may need to be controlled with a little muffling to keep it focused. I understand why clear single-ply heads were included on these toms; they provided a wide range of sounds based on how they were tuned and dampened. But for most gigging situations, you'll likely want to swap them out for a set of Coated Ambassadors or 2-ply Emperors

to control the overtones and fatten up the low end. Thicker heads will also increase durability, so you'll get more mileage out of them.

Through experimenting with different batter heads, I discovered how versatile Tour Custom drums are. You can get a wide range of useful and musical sounds from them solely dependent on the heads you choose, making them an ideal choice for gigging drummers who need a single set of drums

for different situations. In an era that's flush with overly customized drumsets, it's nice to see Yamaha continuing to focus on producing professional-sounding, versatile instruments that don't cost an arm and a leg and will maintain relevance as musical trends change. Both Tour Custom four-piece shell packs, including the smaller version with a 20" bass drum and a 14" floor tom, sell for about \$1,300.

**Michael Dawson**

# Zildjian K Sweet Series Cymbals

Larger, darker, and thinner cymbals with just enough transparency and brightness to sit comfortably in any mix.

**Zildjian's K line has comprised** some of the company's most popular models for good reason; they sound rich and warm without being overly dark or stylized. As a result, regular K hi-hats, crashes, and rides are relied upon by many working drummers to cover a wide range of applications.

For 2018, Zildjian developed a new line of K cymbals that's inspired by some of the ideas first implemented on the popular A Sweet rides. These new K Sweet cymbals are thinner and softer to make them even more expressive, and the crashes feature unlathed bells. The series consists of 15" and 16" hi-hats (\$474.95 and \$499.95), 16"–20" crashes (\$259.95–\$349.95), and 21" and 23" rides (\$389.95 and \$459.95).

### Crashes

All five K Sweet crashes feature raw bells on top and bottom. The rest of the cymbal is lathed and traditionally finished. These crashes are very thin, so they flex easily. Yet they're stout enough to withstand fairly aggressive playing. The bow shows a lot of random, subtle hammer marks, which contribute to the crashes' warm timbre and soft feel.

The 16" and 17" Sweet crashes are punchy and shimmering. They have a quick attack, a glassy but not harsh sustain, and a fairly quick decay. There's not a huge pitch difference between these two. I preferred the slightly slower attack and longer decay of the 17", especially when paired with larger crashes. The 16" would be a great choice if you need to play a lot of quick punctuations.

The 18", 19", and 20" K Sweet crashes were my favorites in the series. The 18" is destined to become many drummers' primary crash. It responded quickly, and it had a warm, sparkling sustain and an evenly balanced decay. It recorded beautifully, and it performed well in all genres and at all dynamics.

The 19" and 20" K Sweet crashes had more bellowing voices with more emphasis on the lower-midrange frequencies. The sustain was long and balanced, and the attack was a bit slower and softer, which made these larger crashes ideal for washy crash-ride patterns, dynamic swells, and dramatic accents. The 19" and 20" K Sweet crashes also paired well, especially when played in modern rock and country/pop situations.

### Hi-Hats

The 15" and 16" K Sweet hi-hats come with a medium-weight top and a heavy bottom. Neither cymbal has much flex, which gives both pairs a firm feel, woody attack, and super-crisp foot chick. The bells are unlathed. The 15" K Sweets have crisp, quick articulation, but they're pitched medium-low. They're not too bright and cutting nor are they overly dark and murky. They record wonderfully, and they have plenty of projection and power for louder gigs.

The 16" K Sweet hi-hats were surprisingly versatile. They responded a bit slower than the 15" pair, and their tone was deeper, chunkier, and throatier. They still had enough crispness to give them a clean and articulate attack, and they blended very well with the larger crashes, especially when used in conjunction with deeply tuned drums.

### Rides

The medium-weight 21" and 23" K Sweet rides are darker versions of the A Sweet models. The entire top and bottom surfaces are finely lathed and traditionally finished. The bow is randomly hammered, and the bell has a fairly large and slightly flattened profile. The bells sounded strong and clear without being overly piercing.

Standard 20" and 22" K rides have been perennial favorites for Zildjian players for many years because they sound at home in everything from light jazz to hard rock. However, we expect these 21" and 23" K Sweet rides to quickly move up the ranks. Both cymbals had a smooth, medium-low tone with a fine balance of stick attack and wash. Aside from extreme playing situations requiring exaggerated attack and super-dry sustain, the K Sweet rides proved to be all-around winners. The 21" was pitched a bit higher, and it had a more simmering sustain. The 23" had a deeper pitch, woodier attack, and a broader and more enveloping wash. The 21" might be a better choice if you use a more compact setup, or if you play an array of different styles and at a wide range of dynamics. But the 23" can do all that too. I can see many players using the 21" K Sweet ride for everyday use, and then pulling out the 23" for louder gigs or when using an oversized setup.

**Michael Dawson**



## PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

# 101 Drums

## 5.5x14 Woodfiber Snare

Lightweight and weather-resistant shell with a big, robust sound.

**101 Drums is a Swedish company** that specializes in making drum shells and snare drums out of a specially treated wood-fiber material. The shells are designed to be impervious to extreme weather changes and moisture. They're lightweight, yet can boast comparable sonic properties to a typical 6- or 10-ply wood drum. Snares are currently available in 4.5x14, 5.5x14, 6x14, 6.5x14, 7x14, and 8x14 sizes, but the shells can be custom ordered with 4" to 54" diameters. The raw shells are cured in an oven, which makes them very durable while also eliminating tension within the fiber. The resulting sound is intended to be deep and round.

### Our Review Drum

The drum we received had a 5.5x14 shell that's 2.5mm at the center and 5mm at the bearing edges. It came with a DW magnetic MAG throw-off. The edges are cut to a double-forty-five-degree profile with a rounded back cut. Hardware included black-nickel die-cast hoops, tension rods, and beavertail lugs. The

company offers custom wrap finishes, like the green-on-black 101 Drums logo finish seen here. The supplied heads included an Evans UV1 batter and a clear 300 on the snare side. Puresound wires come standard.

We tested this snare across the entire tuning range and found that it had a super-crisp and snappy attack with a dense, focused tone. Higher tunings had a quick, biting attack plus nicely balanced overtones that decayed quickly. Lower tunings elicited more smack and bark, but the drum never lost clarity or responsiveness. Very low tunings sounded super-fat, focused, and punchy, and the drum recorded exceptionally well in that register. This isn't a drum with a ton of character, but I don't see that as a detriment, especially if you're looking for an instrument with a lot of presence that hits strongly but then gets right out of the way. This unique drum would be a great all-around choice for just about any genre. List price is approximately \$900.

**Michael Dawson**



## PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

# Tune-Bot

## Studio Digital Tuner

A more accurate, user-friendly, and feature-laden version of the groundbreaking digital drum tuner.

The original Tune-Bot digital drum tuner was released in 2012 and quickly became a go-to accessory for drummers looking to tune their drums more accurately and consistently. We gave that version high praises in the December 2012 issue, and it's become a crucial tool for dialing in sounds in every drum review we've done since. A simpler version, Tune-Bot Gig, was released a couple years ago for players who wanted a basic option at a lower price point. In 2017, the company revamped its flagship tuner, now called Tune-Bot Studio, to offer more reliable readings, a higher frequency range (for snare drums), a four-color display, and improved kit-saving options. Let's give this new-and-improved tuner a closer look.

### Smart Upgrades

The first thing we noticed when we turned on the Tune-Bot Studio was the new four-color LCD display, which shows the frequency (Hz), note name, kit number, and filter frequency in blue, while the display labels are yellow. There's also a virtual tuning needle that swivels from left to right, and changes from yellow to red, depending on how flat or sharp the pitch is from the target frequency. When the head is perfectly in tune, the needle points straight up and turns green. It may seem ancillary, but having the color-coding goes a long way to expediting the tuning process. Once you determine the target frequency, simply tweak each tuning rod until the needle turns green. For players who use a lot of different drumsets, you can save up to five separate kits with up to ten drums per kit.

The Tune-Bot Studio borrows the sturdier clip of the Tune-Bot Gig, which clamps firmly and easily on any drum hoop. The new model also comes with a cylindrical plastic case to protect it from damage when it's thrown in a stick bag or cymbal case.

### In Use

Akin to an electronic clip-on guitar tuner, the Tune-Bot Studio is designed to take the guesswork out of drum tuning. It can be used to balance top and bottom drumheads by making sure each tension rod is producing the same overtone frequencies. You can also use it to target specific fundamental pitches to get a more cohesive overall drumset sound by tuning the different drums to musical intervals. And the kit-save feature allows you to dial in consistent sounds any time you change heads or play on an unfamiliar setup.

Like anything else, there's a bit of a learning curve to mastering how to use the Tune-Bot Studio. I've found the best results by first tensioning the drumheads close to where I want them pitched, and then sitting the drum on a stool or pillow to mute the bottom head. Then I'll lightly muffle the center of the head being tuned with a fingertip or a small dampening gel. Dampening the center of the head removes the fundamental pitch, which allows the Tune-Bot to more accurately distinguish the overtone pitches when you strike near each tension rod. Once I determine the target frequency, I press the Filter button so the Tune-Bot can zero in on that pitch as I fine-tune each lug.

It only takes a couple minutes to tweak the rods until each one reads the same frequency. Once one head is balanced, I flip the drum over and repeat the process with the other side. While I can tune a drum by ear and get great results, I've never been able to dial in completely pure tones until I started using the Tune-Bot. I can honestly say that my drums have never sounded better. I also love that I don't have to be afraid of a drum falling out of tune over time and not knowing which tension rods need to be retuned to bring the drum back into balance. There aren't many accessories that I feel every drummer needs, but the Tune-Bot is one of them. I won't do any gig or session without it. List price is \$99.

**Michael Dawson**



## PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

# Bopworks

## Drumsticks and Brushes

Faithful reproductions of classic models as well as contemporary designs with a vintage twist.

**Bopworks is an Austin, Texas-based** company that started in 2006 with an objective to provide accurate reproductions of the thin sticks used by top jazz drummers in the 1950s and '60s. There's the pencil-thin Birdland and more moderately sized West Coast and '40s Swing models, as well as signature Mel Lewis 7D and Art Blakey 8D sticks. The Bopworks catalog was expanded in 2017 to include two thicker models (Memphis R&B and Rhythm & Groovz) and a pair of vintage-style Spread-Lok wire brushes. We were sent a sample of each to review.

### The Originals

The thinnest Bopworks stick is the .500"x15.3125" Birdland model. According to company owner Chris Bennett, this is an exact duplicate of a stick from the 1960s. It has a long taper and a small, elongated oval tip. This stick is meant for players who require a super-light stick that won't produce a ton of overtones on cymbals. Despite its diminutive dimensions, the Birdland felt balanced and had very nice rebound. It's incredibly articulate; I could use it on a thin 16" crash and achieve clean, clear ride patterns with minimal buildup. Drum hits, rimshots, and rimclicks sound a bit thinner than they do with more modern-sized sticks. But when it comes to dynamic control, I've not come across a stick that allows me to be more expressive at super-low levels.

The Mel Lewis 7D is a bit shorter than the Birdland (15.125") but is thicker (.540"). It's an exact recreation of the big band great's signature stick from the '60s. The taper is shorter than on the

Birdland, and the tip has a teardrop shape. This is another great option for situations where you need controlled cymbal wash, but it provides a bit more fullness from drums and crashes. The short length increases quickness without adversely affecting rebound and helps the stick produce more articulate cymbal tones.

The West Coast stick, which is inspired by models used by prominent jazz drummers on the California cool jazz scene during the 1950s, measures .520"x15.8125", so it's longer than the Birdland and Mel Lewis 7D but has a diameter that's between them. Featuring a long taper and an oval tip that's slightly integrated into the shoulder of the stick, the West Coast model had the most familiar sound, feel, and rebound when compared to a standard 7A. But the longer taper gave it quicker rebound and a lighter feel. Of all the models, this would be my go-to for small-group jazz or other quieter situations.

The '40s Swing Classic is the second thinnest in the catalog (.515") but has a standard 16" length. This stick, which features a triangular tip and an extra-long taper, is a recreation of one that was available in the 1940s, at the height of the big band era. The rebound is enhanced, but the stick has a bit more reach and forward throw. The larger tip produces bigger drum and cymbal sounds when struck flat, but the articulation increases to a pinpoint if you strike at more extreme angles.

The Art Blakey 8D mirrors the model that the hard-bop great used in the 1960s. It's .530"x16", which is similar to most contemporary 5A sticks, but it has an arrowhead tip and a longer taper. Blakey was known for having a big, earthy tone and an intense buzz roll, and



Birdland



Mel Lewis



West Coast



40's Swing



Art Blakey



Memphis R&B



Rhythm & Groovz

these sticks are designed to achieve those sounds. They produce a fairly wide cymbal sound but still have excellent articulation. The large arrowhead tip elicits full tom tones and snare buzzes. The long taper increases rebound for more effortless rolls.

### Memphis R&B and Rhythm & Groovz Sticks, Spread-Lok Brushes

The new Memphis R&B model measures .570"x16", which is slightly thicker than a standard 5A. But the taper on this stick is longer than what's typically used, and the tip is thinner and more smoothly contoured from the shoulder. The result is a nimble stick that feels hefty in the hand but produces clean, balanced cymbal sounds and has great rebound. For 5A players who need an alternative that provides more bounce, clarity, and control, this is an excellent choice.

The Rhythm & Groovz drumstick has a 5B-style grip (.590") and extended length (16.25"), but the taper extends 7" and ends with a fairly small bullet-shaped tip. The result is a large-feeling stick that has exceptional rebound, response, and clarity. This would be the

ideal model for players who prefer big sticks but need to keep the cymbal wash and drum volume controlled.

Spread-Lok brushes have a textured-black handle and can be adjusted for a 2" or 4" spread depending on how far in the pull rod is extended. The wires are .012-gauge, which is the same size used on brushes in the '50s and '60s. These are very simple but sturdy brushes that have a light, wispy feel and produce a full, rich sound. The wires stay locked into place regardless of whether the pull rod is only partially pushed in for the 2" spread or all the way in for the 4" spread. The textured grip helps prevent the brushes from slipping out of the fulcrum, which made for a very comfortable, relaxed playing experience. The 2" spread was great for playing more articulate patterns, like samba or up-tempo swing, while the 4" spread produced lush sweeps. Every drummer needs a pair of versatile, dependable brushes, and the Spread-Loks fit the bill. The brushes are currently available via [bopworks.net](http://bopworks.net) for \$23.99. The Blakey and Lewis signature sticks go for \$13.75, and the other models are \$11.99.

**Michael Dawson**



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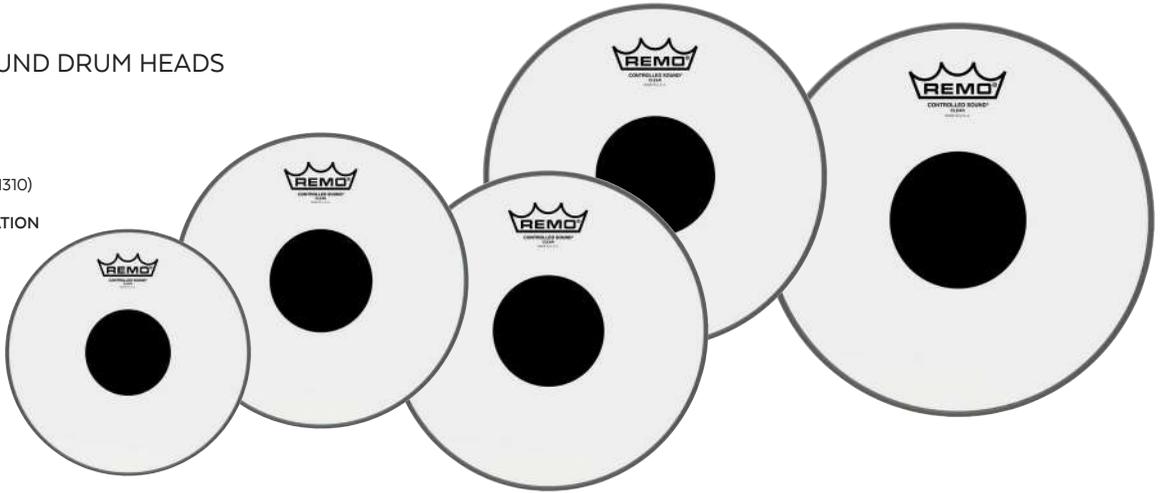


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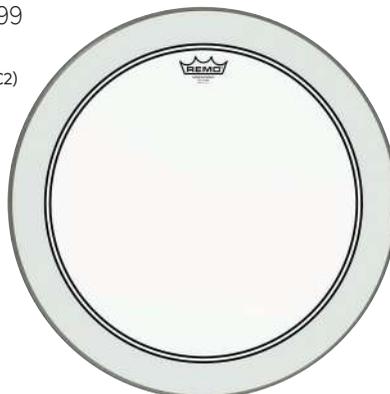
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# 311's Chad Sexton

**Drums:** Pearl Masters MCX in Natural Tamo Ash finish with blue stripes

- A. 5.5x14 snare
- B. 5.5x6 tom
- C. 7x8 tom
- D. 7.5x10 tom
- E. 7.5x12 tom
- F. 9x13 tom
- G. 14x14 floor tom
- H. 16x16 floor tom
- I. 14x18 gong drum
- J. 3x13 Primero steel timbale
- K. 12x6, 15x6, 18x6, and 21x6 aluminum Rocket toms
- L. 16" Remo Rototom with Rapid Tuning pedal
- M. 16x22 bass drum

**Drumheads:** Remo Smooth White Coated snare batter, Black Suede Ambassador tom batters, Ambassador Starfire Chrome on Rototom, Coated Powerstroke P4 on gong drum, Coated Powerstroke P4 kick batter, and Powerstroke P3 Fiberskyn on front of bass drum

**Cymbals:** Sabian

- 1. 15" Artisan hi-hats
- 2. 18" HHX Evolution O-Zone crash
- 3. 12" Chopper
- 4. 20" HHX X-Treme crash
- 5. 7" Vault Radia Nano Hats
- 6. 8" Evolution splash
- 7. 12" Evolution splash
- 8. 20" HHX Evolution O-Zone crash
- 9. 10" AAX splash
- 10. 20" HHX Evolution O-Zone crash
- 11. 22" Raw-Bell ride
- 12. 20" prototype crash with rivets
- 13. 18" HHX Evolution crash
- 14. 19" HH Medium-Thin crash

**Electronics:** Korg Wavedrum and Roland SPD::ONE WAV pad

**Hardware:** Pearl, including an ICON rack, Eliminator bass drum pedal, and D2000BR throne

**Drumsticks:** Vater Chad Sexton 3A

**311 recently released its twelfth** studio album, *Mosaic*. True to form, drummer Chad Sexton demonstrates his signature style and versatility throughout. "Even though we combine genres, 311 is first and foremost a rock band," he says. "I'm a rock drummer at heart, but my style reflects a combination of genres that I try to weave together seamlessly."

When Sexton is working on new material with the band, he considers how the songs will translate to a live audience. But he's not one to overthink the parts. "I'm a drum corps guy who's been trained to get things perfect," he says. "But as I've gotten older, I've learned to let it flow. I want to be natural...intuitive."

In regard to the gear he used on the record versus what he's taking on the road, Sexton explains, "On *Mosaic*, I used a Pearl Sensitone snare, but live I'm using the drum that came with this Masterwork kit. All of my snares sound great, but this one has extra crack and body. *Crunchy* is the word that comes to mind."

## GEARING UP ON STAGE AND UP CLOSE

Interview and photos by Sayre Berman



Part of Sexton's snare sound can be attributed to the choice of drumhead, which is a Remo model that's currently only available in Japan. "This drum came with something called a Smooth White Coated head," he says. "I had Remo send me a stack of them because it definitely contributes to that low-end crunch that I hadn't heard before."

One challenge of being a touring drummer is dealing with how drastically different the kit can sound depending on the room. "I've come to realize that sometimes the drums might just sound okay to me," says Sexton. "But once they're miked up, they're perfect. It isn't always about what sounds best to your ears. You have to hear it after it goes through the mics and [mixing] board."

Sexton adds gear to his kit on an as-needed basis. "I added a 3" timbale this year because our first new single, 'It's Too Much to Think,' has a break where I come back in with a timbale fill," he says. "I didn't want to [play] the fill on the snare. I tried it on one of my Rocket toms, but that didn't sound quite right, so up went a timbale! We found a place for it all the way to my left."



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UP & COMING

# Next to None's Max Portnoy

Story and photo by Mike Haid

Within the international drumming community, the name Portnoy is synonymous with progressive metal. Through his work with Dream Theater, Liquid Tension Experiment, Flying Colors, Transatlantic, and, most recently, Sons of Apollo, Mike Portnoy has garnered every award and accolade imaginable for his advanced drumming skills and musical explorations. But perhaps his greatest achievement is creating a second-generation Portnoy who's handily following in his footsteps.

At the age of eighteen, Max Portnoy has embraced his DNA and developed his drumming skills to a high level of proficiency reminiscent of his father, who burst on the scene in 1985—also at eighteen—as a young prog rocker fresh out of Berklee College of Music in Boston. And behind the kit Max strongly resembles his dad at that age—same physical profile, same long and curly locks, same fiery spirit.

Since 2012, Max has been honing his drumming skills with the Pennsylvania-based metal act Next to None. In 2017 the band released its second album, *Phases*, and toured with Mike Portnoy's Shattered Fortress, giving the young players a chance to fine-tune their live chops in front of a serious audience of shred fans.

At the 2017 ProgPower Festival in Atlanta, both father and son performed. When Mike was asked if he and Max were going to jam together, he replied, "Nope. He does his thing and I do mine." The junior Portnoy is certainly not hanging from his father's coattails, and he holds his own quite well. Watching Max perform, there's no hint of intimidation or apprehension when he takes the stage. When the soft-spoken drummer saddles up, he's cool, calm, and collected, unleashing the complex metal angst that drives Next to None's music.

Although Max cites his father as his biggest influence in drumming and life in general, he claims that most of his technical training has come from Todd Schied at the California Drum Shop in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. "Todd has been teaching me since I was about five years old," Max says. "He teaches me every style of music, from jazz to prog to metal to African and Brazilian rhythms. He wants me to know every style, and he's a great teacher. He always shows me challenging things to keep me growing. Early on he taught me the rudiments and how to read rhythms. We worked with several instructional books along the way, reading snare drum pieces and developing warm-up techniques."

## Tools of the Trade

Portnoy plays a seven-piece Tama Starclassic birch double bass kit in indigo blue finish. His cymbals are Sabians, and he uses Tama cymbal stands and Speed Cobra bass drum and hi-hat pedals, as well as Promark 420X sticks.

Max has also studied videos on foot and hand technique, but he says he's reached a point where he creates his own ideas based on his studies and influences. "One of my favorite drummers is [Lamb of God's] Chris Adler," Max says. "He has a lot of cool double bass ideas that are inspiring. But when it comes to creating my parts for Next to None, I focus on what's comfortable for me and what fits my playing style best. I'll sit down with the metronome and work on ideas that feel good to me. I use my leg muscles a lot in my double bass drumming. That's what feels natural. So trying to imitate other drummers isn't going to help me improve my technique."

One thing that Max says has helped him refine his footwork is paying extra attention to his pedal setup. "I use the Tama Speed Cobra pedal," he explains, "and recently I started focusing on spring tension, which has made a big difference. I keep the tension tighter than I used to, which was pretty loose before. Since I've tightened the tension, it's become much more comfortable and easier to play faster tempos. I also keep my foot placement generally in the middle of the pedal, with my heel up, and push from my thighs."

To keep up his skills, Max rehearses with Next to None two or three times a week and practices at the kit most days that the band is off. "When I have songs to learn, I'll spend time working on my parts at home," he says. "But a lot of times I'll just play for fun, jamming with songs I like and writing my own syncopated beats. I don't usually have a practice routine. I just go with the flow of what feels right at the time."

Of the band's songwriting process, Max says, "Most of the time it's the riffs that come first when we get together, and then I write my parts to those. Though on the intro to 'Mr. Mime' I threw a random drum part that I wrote a while ago on top of the keyboard intro. And there's a really syncopated drum part in 'The Wanderer,' which is almost a twenty-minute song, that is sort of Egyptian sounding, and I brought that in. It consists of three rhythms—one on my right hand, one on my left hand, and one with my feet. So the bass follows my kick, the guitar follows my right hand, and the keyboard follows my left hand. It worked out pretty cool. Also, if I'm practicing and I come up with something I like, I'll record it on my phone. I've got a bunch of random beats and fills recorded that we might try and use if it fits the music."

Max is currently working on another project that's straight-up metal—perhaps taking another page from his father's multi-project playbook? "Growing up, I learned a lot from watching my dad on tour and in the studio," Max says. "Playing drums is what I've wanted to do my entire life, and my dad has inspired me more than anyone to follow my dreams."



# Jamie Oldaker

**After forty years, the famed Eric Clapton cohort's career is coming full circle.**

### **On what defines “the Tulsa sound”**

My take was in the late '60s/early '70s, when I started to play with [Tulsa legends] J.J. Cale and Leon Russell. As far as a collective “sound,” it comes from listening to all types of music. Instead of copying, we'd play it our own way. It's a combination of some blues, country, jazz, rock, and even Native American influences, combined into what we thought it should be. Many Tulsa musicians brought back with them different recordings and ideas. Drum-wise I took from everybody, and what came out in the end was me.

### **On whether there was an intimidation factor playing with Eric Clapton**

Well, of course there was! I mean, I was only twenty years old and still living with my parents. Carl Radle [Leon Russell, Derek and the Dominos, Joe Cocker] got me into Eric's band. Ironically, I was just about to go on the road with Leon and was working in Tulsa with the Gap Band. Carl said to me, “I got a call from a friend of mine, and he wants to do a record.” Apparently, Eric had been woodshedding at home in England with a demo tape that Carl had given him. Eric then called, saying, “I'm going to Miami to do a record with [famed producer] Tom Dowd; bring that kid from Tulsa with you!”

### **On recording Clapton's 461 Ocean Boulevard, featuring the FM staple “Motherless Children” and the hit single “I Shot the Sheriff”**

When we recorded “Motherless Children,” Tommy Dowd just kind of let us play. At the time the main concentration was on hit singles. My drum part was two or three different drum parts stacked, and it was influenced by Delaney & Bonnie's [arrangement of Dave Mason's] “Only You Know and I Know.” On “I Shot the Sheriff,” we took it off Bob Marley's record, which had never been released in America. Tom liked what he heard and suggested we cut it. Eric didn't like it, because he felt we didn't do justice to the original. Two takes and we were done. Not only did it hit number one, but it put reggae on the map in the U.S. and worldwide.

### **On working with the legendary bassists Carl Radle and Duck Dunn**

I'm fortunate to have played with those two guys, and I miss both of them tremendously. It doesn't get any better than Duck and Carl. They taught me a lot, like less being more. When I first began with Eric I was playing as many licks as I could, but then Eric would turn around and look at me with his glasses down and eyes peering above and say, “Where are you going? Settle down, youngster.”

### **On whether he expected lightning to strike again in 1994 with the Tractors' hit self-titled debut album**

No. Actually, the record label hated the band. The president of the label resented the fact that we weren't pure “cowboy hat” and that we recorded in Tulsa as opposed to Nashville. Radio, too, wouldn't play us because we didn't fit into a format. However, line-dance clubs were huge at that time, and when the dance-club DJs began playing “Baby Likes to Rock It,” their patrons went crazy for the song and began requesting radio stations to play it. It's the dance clubs who made the Tractors, and the fact that we won a CMA award didn't hurt either.

### **On giving back to his community via the Oklahoma Museum of Popular Culture and MOJO Fest**

The OKPOP Museum is in the process of being built here in Tulsa. I got involved through a friend who's in the Oklahoma Historical Society and helped raise building funds via some concerts I put together with Ronnie Dunn [Brooks and Dunn]. MOJO Fest is an outgrowth of my wife's and my wedding reception, which morphed into an annual block party solely designed to raise money for the homeless.

### **On the late Tulsa drumming legend Chuck Blackwell**

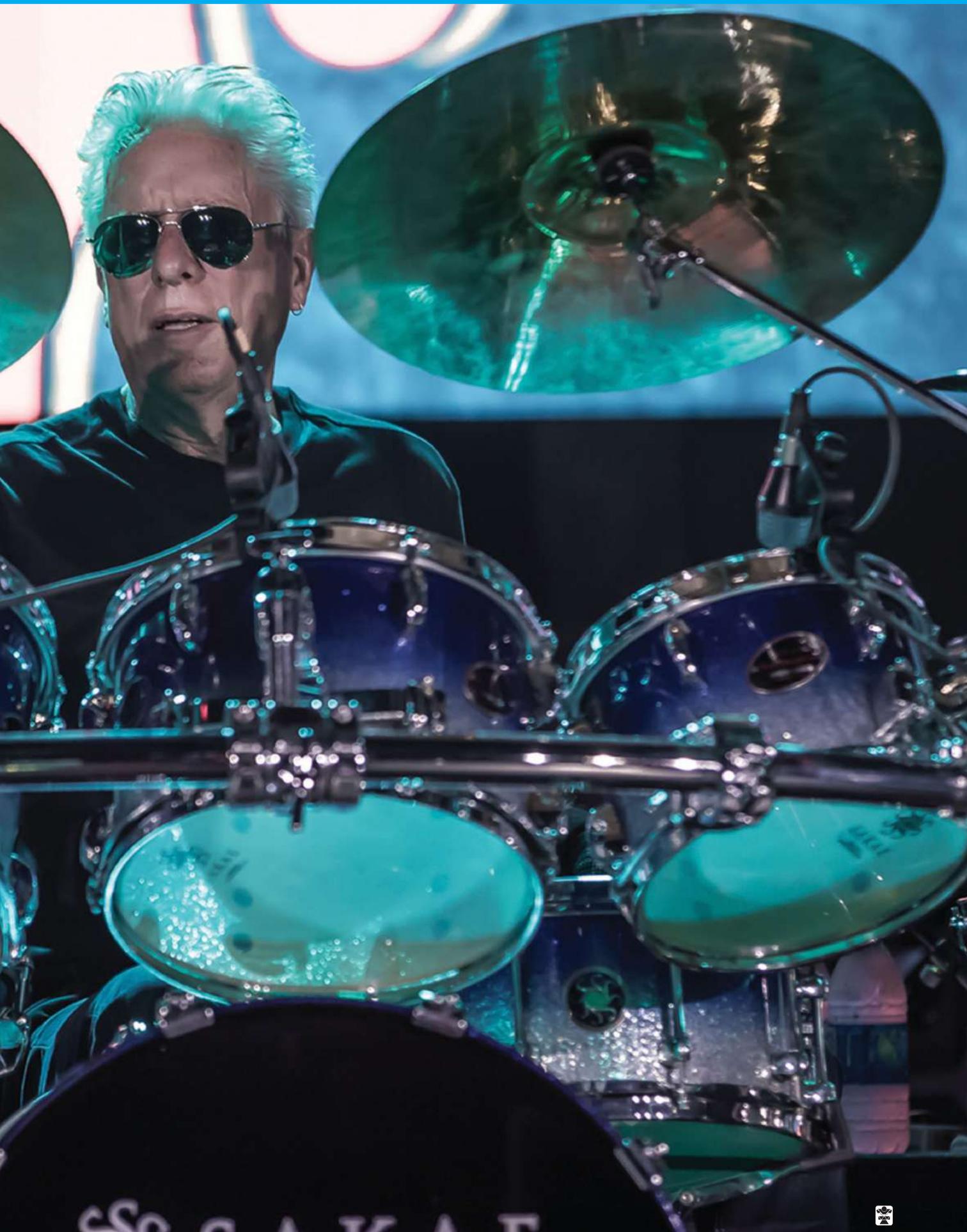
Chuck was one of my heroes. When I was a kid I was too young to get into the clubs, so I used to stand by the back door and put my ear up there and listen to him play. I wanted to either get next to him or try and meet him. To watch Chuck play was just phenomenal. Whenever I could see him play I would go, and there was always respect, especially after I began working with Leon Russell. That's one thing about heroes, they don't die...they *can't* die. He was a lovely guy, and the music he made will be here forever.

### **On his current projects**

I'm out playing eight to ten bluegrass fests a year with guitarist/singer Peter Rowan [Bill Monroe, Old and in the Way] and bassist Jack Casady [Jefferson Airplane, Hot Tuna]. And Eric Clapton and I are working on a new recording project of his. I did my drum tracks at Teegarden Studios here in Tulsa. I asked Eric if the parts I recorded were okay, and his response was, “Fantastic as ever!” I've been blessed and fortunate to do everything I've done. For one guy, that's a lot of stuff.

**Oldaker plays Sakae drums and Sabian cymbals, and he uses Vic Firth sticks and Remo heads.**

**Interview by Bob Girouard**



# St. Vincent's Matt Johnson

## A Profound Evolution

Story by Patrick Berkery

Photos by Alex Solca

**M**att Johnson was in the early stages of prepping for St. Vincent's current full-band tour when *Modern Drummer* first touched base with him late last year for this cover story. And we learned quickly how the initial preparations for a gig so heavily immersed in the electronic realm differed radically from the work he's done for tours with people like Jeff Buckley and Rufus Wainwright. On those gigs, it was basically learn the songs, rehearse with the band, hop in the bus, and off you go.

There's a lot more to it with St. Vincent. Johnson is tasked with replicating the hyper-treated mix of programmed beats, loops, and live drums featured on the albums

Annie Clark has been making under the St. Vincent moniker over the last decade, and he needs to make that future-shock rhythmic fusion breathe and groove. So before Johnson even sits down at his kit to work out that hiccupping kick drum part in the fourth verse of "Los Ageless," or to dial in the meditative pulse of "New York" (two standout tracks from the singer/guitarist's 2017 album, *Masseduction*), there's administrative stuff to do. Like file sharing and daily conversations with St. Vincent's keyboardist and "MIDI guru," Daniel Mintseris, as the pair try to settle on the array of sounds Johnson will be sampling and triggering live.



"He's in New York, I'm in my studio in L.A., so we're on a long Skype call each day," Johnson says of the duo's sonic quest, adding with a laugh, "I think we clocked in at about three hours and twenty-three minutes today. The initial stages are pretty slow a lot of the time, getting the instruments into the right physical place, then populating all the pads and bars and triggers with the right sounds at the right times with automation. It's quite involved. Once I've got the triggers in the right spots for me to be able to really do this show, and I've got the Abletons up and running really nice, then I start practicing, just learning my way around each song."

The electronic realm Johnson operates in these days—both with St. Vincent and at his own recently constructed studio, where he's able to interface with producers and artists on remote sessions via Ableton—is not terribly uncommon. But back in 1989, when Johnson moved from his native Houston to New York City to study music and academics at the New School, the thought of tracking drums on your own and sending it off digitally to an artist on the other side of the country, or having thousands of drum sounds at your disposal at a gig, must have seemed like

something out of *The Jetsons*. It was while attending the New School that Johnson hooked up with Buckley, appearing on the late singer-songwriter's classic 1994 album, *Grace*, and touring the world with him before leaving the band in 1996, citing strained personal relations and a lack of inspiration.

The risk of breaking ties with an artist on the ascent—which Buckley definitely was in mid-'90s—didn't really register with Johnson then, because he says he was hardly thinking long term. "I didn't know how to think that far ahead when it came to the music industry," he explains. "I was pretty naive. Being a drummer for twenty-five years...I didn't know what that *could* look like. I didn't know if there was enough work, or if I was good enough to get any of the work."

Thanks to a tasteful and thoughtful approach to both drumming and applying technology to his craft, Johnson *has* found plenty of work in the ensuing twenty-plus years. In addition to recording and touring with Wainwright and landing the St. Vincent gig in 2012, there have been sessions with Angus and Julia Stone, Jade Bird, Martha Wainwright, and many others; recording and touring with Beth Orton; a long-term stint with the band Elysian Fields; and his own series of instructional videos for the website Drumeo, along with lessons and clinics.

Sadly, there has also been profound tragedy in Johnson's life. In February 2016, his then sixteen-year-old son, Jasper, experienced a seizure that left him severely brain damaged. Jasper remains in a long-term care facility on the East Coast, where Johnson visits him each month. Nothing can prepare a parent for processing and dealing with something so traumatic, particularly when your chosen profession takes you away for weeks and months at a time. In the wake of such a tragedy, you can only hope you're able to put your career into something resembling proper perspective.

"Does it put music in a different place? It kind of does," Johnson says when asked about the role that making music for a living now occupies in his life. "It's important for me or anyone in my position, as the parent of a child who has become horribly brain damaged, to not fall into blaming myself. It isn't conventionally or reductively my fault. Although, emotionally, I feel very much culpable for the state my son now inhabits.

"I've been made to realize how I've changed through a very traumatic experience, and that some of the things I was living for when I was young, I'm too old to want those things anymore. I've grown out of them, I suppose."



**MD:** It's the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Grace* next year. We spoke about it around ten years ago and you said you felt that your playing on it was a little precious for Jeff's tastes at the time.

**Matt:** I think Jeff was evolving toward more of a punk rock aesthetic, a little bit more hard hitting. We were evolving in a parallel way, which was good. I think he was evolving toward a band sound. And I think in achieving that sound, he wanted me to relieve myself of all traces of jazz school and all the stuff I had been about, which is completely understandable.

The way I did it, when you come out of years of kind of being in music school, you're going to probably develop massive blinders about things like just music on a street level or music for the public—the subset of the population that actually wants to buy tickets and come to your shows. I think there's a lot of reasons why jazz school, which I spent a number of years in, really can potentially do more harm than good.

**MD:** It's interesting to think in the context of *Grace* about the conflict of your jazz background versus Jeff's desire to rock harder. I can hear the "jazzier," if you will, on things like "Mojo Pin," with all

**Q** ● Do you ever consider that what you're doing with St. Vincent could become too reliant on MIDI and triggers, to the point where it's lacking the mojo of a human being hitting drums and cymbals?

**A** ● That's something that we're definitely working a lot with—figuring out how to blend those two worlds. It's a very intuitive kind of game for me. I'm still learning about that game.

the swinging ghost-stroking around the kit. And it feels like you're tapping into a harder-rocking vibe when you hammer through the verses and choruses in "Last Goodbye." There's a naiveté to the way you play those parts that feels really great. Did that simplification feel like a compromise of your values or aesthetic?

**Matt:** I don't think so. What was difficult for me about that time was touring. If you come up playing in smaller clubs, there's a bit of a challenge playing a room of a different size. You might want to convey something that has a lot of subtlety—a lighter dynamic or something you played with brushes—like the way you did in the studio. And you get into a bigger venue and everything is murky and muddy and no gesture below a certain decibel level is counting for anything. It just sounds weak.

When you're playing in larger venues and for larger crowds, it does behoove you to oftentimes hit harder and simplify and



streamline gestures toward a larger scope of perception. And I think that's difficult for anybody who starts out touring on almost any instrument. You might be really happy with your show, but the sound person out front might be extremely disappointed in the way you played. It could be something as simple as your hi-hat cymbals are going into the vocal mic. I don't think, ultimately, any of them were challenges that I didn't overcome. It just took time for everybody to feel like the shows were going well.

**MD:** Your playing on *Grace* really holds up well. But to A/B it against the way you play with St. Vincent, it feels like a totally different drummer.

**Matt:** Oh, absolutely. I *feel* like a completely different drummer. The choices I would have made at that time were choices that were largely arbitrarily made really to the exclusion of any real experience—knowing what would happen. I would pull something



**MD:** What was your musical education growing up in Houston, and what drew you to the drums?

**Matt:** When I was a real little kid, I wasn't good at sports. I was kind of a dipshit in school. I was a typical young boy who was really antsy at his desk, tending toward misbehavior and just incredible boredom. When I'd get home it was a combination of watching TV, spinning records, and obsessively banging on pillows or playing air guitar. Then I moved up to Ohio for a couple years to stay with my dad. He had a drumkit there, and that was kind of the end of it. When I was ten, once I got my hands on a drumkit, everything changed. Once I started playing drums, all the misbehaving disappeared and I became a very good kid. Even though I wasn't a great student, I was very motivated toward playing drums. Bob McKee was my first drum teacher; he really got me hooked. He showed me *Stick Control* and he showed me *The New Breed*. He got me understanding how drummers need to control our bodies and focus our attention. That was definitely a life-changer in terms of the path of my life.

Then I moved back down to Houston when I was twelve, and I had a drum teacher named Joel Fulgham. He thankfully cracked the whip on me a bit in the tweenager years, reminding me not to waste my time. I went to regular school for a couple more years, then I went to an arts magnet school in Houston, the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. That's where I met Chris Dave—we were going to the same school. I got a lot of influence and inspiration coming off of Chris. He was coming from a different background. He had a lot of perspective to offer. A guy named Archie Walker was there too; he was like having Harvey Mason around. Sebastian Whittaker was another guy I met there, a great jazz drummer who died about a year ago. He was blind, and one of my most important mentors. We would play double drumset and improvise together. I wanted to be like him so bad, I used to go home and play blindfolded!

I moved to New York at the age of eighteen to go to the New School. I met a slew of people there and got into the whole bar scene downtown. It was a great prep for doing anything in music as a drummer. And that's where I met Jeff.

**MD:** A handful of years after leaving Jeff Buckley's band, you began playing with Rufus Wainwright, and one of the first things he did was get you singing harmony. How did that impact your playing and your relationship with songs?

**Matt:** Rufus was a really important person in my life musically. Really influenced by opera and classical tradition, and the songsmithery of both his parents, Loudon Wainwright and Kate McGarrigle. He got everybody in the band singing in a way, which is very much from that family-band tradition. His compositions sound very uniquely Rufus. The way he stacks harmonies was an incredible learning experience for me to learn how to find my harmony note and to oftentimes sing something that was incredibly different from what I might be playing on the drums. That really helped in a lot

out, throw it against the wall, see if it stuck. It's not like I had a bunch of records under my belt with which to say, *Oh, that's what happens when you tune the snare way down and then you muffle it or What if I don't hit any cymbals?* I made sound choices that I would *never* make now.

I'm happy with it. I'm lucky to have been able to make that record. That record could have been made with some kind of amazing, really experienced session musician. And it might have been a better record for that. But I know that what Jeff wanted was a record that really didn't have the imprint of that whole session, production-house industry. The type of record he wanted to make was idiosyncratic.

## Recordings

**Jeff Buckley** *Grace* /// **Angus and Julia Stone** "Baudelaire," "Heart Beats Slow," "Wherever You Are," "Get Home," "Little Whiskey," "Please You," "Draw Your Swords" /// **Dope Lemon** "Uptown Folks," "Marinade" /// **Angus Stone** "Broken Brights," "Wooden Chair" /// **Gabriel Kahane** *The Ambassador*, "Veda," "Griffith Park," "Slumlord Crocodile," "Musso and Frank" /// **Rufus Wainwright** "Go or Go Ahead," "Going to a Town," "Gay Messiah," "Beautiful Child" /// **Jade Bird** "Cathedral," "Something American" /// **Martha Wainwright** "So Many Friends" /// **Elysian Fields** "Shadow of the Living Light," "Chance," "Pink Air," 2018 album (untitled at press time) /// **Cones** "Later," "Echoes On," "Back in the Brain," "Whatever You're Into"



of ways with drumming. To actually make the connection between the world of the singing and the vocals and the song and the drumming. It really helped the way I hear music, the way I'm able to engage in music.

**MD:** At that point in your career, among other projects, you were going from Jeff Buckley to Beth Orton to Rufus Wainwright. All three are singer-songwriters, for lack of a better term, but quite different from each other. Could you feel your style developing into something that was adaptable to different pop and rock settings?

**Matt:** I tried to develop enough strategies that were useful in a professional setting to make myself useful to other people, and one of them is dynamic independence. I don't even know if that's a term people use. I use it as a term for something I've tried to extend and expand in my own playing. It's sort of like looking at each drum or cymbal as if it were on a fader, and being able to lift the fader up and down on a kick or on a snare or particularly on the cymbals. That's one form of independence that I found was really useful, sculpting the way a song feels to the other people in the band or to the singer or to the audience.

The content of what you play largely stays the same; the intelligence that you're using to play music is subsumed in the whole chess game of which parts of the kit are loud when and why, and how that gives you some type of a payout emotionally, or how it sustains tension. A lot of the stuff that's going on with St. Vincent doesn't really show up as drumistic independence, because a lot of the sounds that I'm using

## Matt's Setup

### Drums:

- A. 8x14 Star Walnut snare
- B. 8x12 Starclassic B/B tom
- C. 9x13 Starclassic B/B tom
- D. 16x16 Starclassic B/B floor tom
- E. 14x24 Starclassic bubinga bass drum

### Cymbals:

- 1. 15" OM hi-hats
- 2. 20" OM crash
- 3. 21" Special Edition Jazz ride (not shown)

**Hardware:** Tama Star and Starclassic, including Speed Cobra single and double bass drum pedals, Speed Cobra hi-hat pedal, Star snare stand, and First Chair throne

**Sticks:** Vater 5A, 52nd St. Jazz, Piccolo, and Ball models

**Accessories:** Reflexx practice pad, Big Fat Snare Drum on snare

**Heads:** Evans G2 Coated snare and floor tom batters, EMAD Heavyweight bass drum batter, and EC2 Clear batter on 13" tom; Remo Silentstroke batter on 12" tom

**Electronics:** MegaDrum trigger to MIDI converter; Roland BT-1 Bar Triggers, PD-8 pads, KD-7 and KT-10 kick triggers, single-zone RT-30H triggers on toms and bass drum, and dual-zone RT-30HR trigger on snare



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## Matt Johnson

aren't necessarily drum sounds. What I think is cool about using different pedals and triggers and stuff like that is that it's a bit like being a conductor—which is fun to think about, playing pop music in that way. The drum parts might be somewhat simplified, but what's fun about it is that it's relating to a lot of other things going on in the electronic domain.

**MD:** When you hooked up with St. Vincent, how did you apply your skills to what she needed from a drummer, particularly in the electronic realm?

**Matt:** We played entirely acoustically at first. I think she was looking for someone she knew instinctively could keep good time and would be willing to learn parts and pay attention to song structure and play for the vocal—someone who could reinterpret things a little bit and have enough flexibility to do that and build new parts. From there, when we got more into rehearsing for an actual tour, very quickly I figured out we needed to be building a MIDI instrument for each song, making each song a tailored experience with an electronic reality grafted on top of the acoustic drums.

**MD:** And this was your first time using electronics to this degree?

**Matt:** Absolutely. I felt like I had done enough tours playing acoustic drums. I didn't really want to play a Roland SPD-SX, because it puts everything in the same location. I knew that I wanted to be able to take on more roles. Electronics definitely answered one of the primary calls that I had in my life, one of the things I was very much reaching for but not knowing what I was

reaching for. It was basically like, *Yes, I want to play drums. But I want to be able to create more.*

That *more* is the infinite number of musical possibilities that you have in MIDI, and being able to bring those into the sort of milieu of what you're using to create an overall experience. That was it. And then I thought, *I'm going to need to be able to control my limbs really well in order to make that stuff work.* But that's really exciting for me. I'm really into it. I got really excited about the possibilities of it.

**MD:** What was the learning curve for immersing yourself into this new world—not just understanding what all the electronic tools did and how to integrate them, but developing the independence required to run triggers with all four limbs?

**Matt:** The learning curve was not terribly long. The thing about it is that, for better or for worse, I'm sort of addicted to puzzles when it comes to problem solving with drumming. That can be kind of a negative. Ostensibly it can take you away from music. I personally don't feel that it's doing that for me. I feel it's bringing me into a zone where, as I'm solving the puzzle, what I'm really doing is grooving. I'm addicted to going into the groove zone, and trying to figure out puzzles.

One of the ways I did that, and I had no real idea how I was ever going to apply it, because I didn't want to be like a failed Latin player, but I spent many years on "El Negro" Hernandez's book *Conversations in Clave*. It was such an incredible resource for just this type of problem solving—working out

the puzzles of rhythm. Watching him solve problems and learning the amazing things he does in order to develop how he got there—I feel like I'm kind of witnessing a bit of a genius. He has an incredible method. So there were definite moments where in the stage I was working with that book ten or fifteen years ago, certain things just clicked. *Okay, my brain just did something that it's never done, and now I feel like that door is open.* I didn't know how I was going to use this. I wasn't going to try to get any of those kinds of gigs. I just felt that book was a huge part of getting my four-way coordination going. And then when I hit these initial rehearsals with St. Vincent, it was tough, but the learning curve was not super-slow. It was like, *Okay, I've solved problems like this before. Let's work this out.*

**MD:** How do you go about breaking down the actual drum parts for songs with St. Vincent? You don't play on the records, so there's not that knowledge to fall back on. And some of the recordings, particularly on *Masseducton*, are very densely layered.

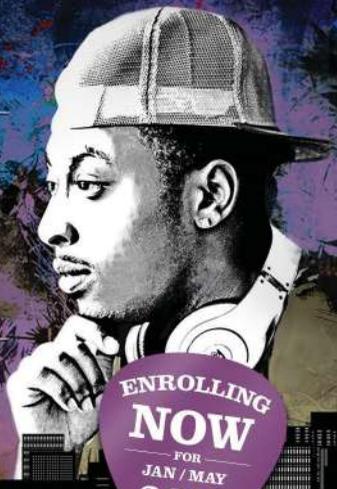
**Matt:** The studio stuff is largely a mystery to me. There's some processing, cutting things up and moving things around in Pro Tools, some live drumming—a combination of that. Usually what happens is Daniel gets handed all the stems from the record, and he distributes them so that we can try to break down what's in there and figure out how to play it and how to interpret it. We figure out if it can't really be played or if it *can* be played. Once we learn how to play something, maybe a degree of interpretation comes into it and you start

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to have fun with it. And Daniel and I are sitting there and basically creating MIDI instruments per song, and per section of songs.

**MD:** Is working in the studio with St. Vincent something you hope to be doing at some point? Or do you take the approach that Annie has her creative process, and you're happy to be involved with her music to the degree that you're involved?

**Matt:** Working in the studio is something I love doing. However, people have a creative process that may not involve me or involve having a drummer at all, preferring programming. Artists draw from the wider pool of musicians, mixing it up to get novel results. Though I might be touring with a band, I might have recently recorded with other artists and forgone involvement with their tour. So, weirdly, I might tour music I didn't record, while going to watch a buddy play songs with another band with whom I did record. It's a topsy-turvy world.

I must say, learning songs that I didn't create drum parts for has been a good education for me. I definitely get schooled by drummers and producers. I try to take what I've learned from them and bring it forward into new projects. I'm reliant on this influx of ideas.

**MD:** Besides drums and percussion, are you triggering other things and other instruments?

**Matt:** Sometimes. In the past I've triggered small amounts of things like bass, or guitar chords, where it's needed. If you ever heard an acoustic guitar in previous St. Vincent shows, I would be triggering those on pedals and pads. But in general I stick to percussive sounds, drum sounds. They're usually layered up on each other, especially on the new stuff.

**MD:** Typically how much of your St. Vincent drum sound has been triggered and how much has been organic?

**Matt:** In the past when I hit an acoustic kick or snare, I'd say about 85 percent of the time there was a trigger on it. The number of acoustics I'm actually going to physically be playing on this tour is going to go down. The percentage of electronics is going to go up. I design the St. Vincent kit with a specific principle in mind, which is that underneath it all there's a real four-piece drumkit. I basically design it where I never violate that basic principle of having kick, snare, floor tom, and a cymbal. I might do a rack tom, or a second kick, or a second snare—that doesn't matter. Wherever I need old-fashioned, traditional dynamics, I'll focus particularly on a snare drum, or really drumistic flurries of strokes on a snare

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## Matt Johnson

drum. We'd make sure the trigger was off for those passages.

Sometimes when you're playing a cymbal and a snare, music can be so squishy and physical. And, of course, when you're playing within the realm of electronics, things become more discrete and quantized, almost vectored. Like things are either on or they're off. There's clearly a trade-off there. I think this band definitely tends to lean heavy on the side of the triggers and the soundscapes and

the individual sounds created for songs. But underneath it there's usually a dummy drummer playing a dummy drummer part. I'm not disparaging drummers. I mean I've tried to design it so that, at bare minimum, you have "boom-crack, boom-crack." You have acoustic drums underneath whatever is happening.

**MD:** So when you play something like "Digital Witness," which is pretty spare in the verses, you have to really bring that 1 and 3 on the kick and 2 and 4 on the snare. Then

the 16th notes on the hats and all the other sounds can push it forward in the choruses.

**Matt:** That's absolutely right.

**MD:** Do you ever consider that what you're doing with St. Vincent could become too reliant on MIDI and triggers, to the point where it's lacking the mojo of a human being hitting drums and cymbals in a live setting?

**Matt:** That's something that we're definitely working a lot with—figuring out how to blend those two worlds. It's a very intuitive kind of game for me. I'm still learning about that game. When you start adding samples [to acoustic drums], and you're triggering samples within a popular-music context, there's a thing that starts happening, which is that the acoustic instruments start to appear in a new light. I think that's a lot of where music is going to be played in the future. I don't know if I see people dispensing with acoustic instruments altogether in live settings. But certainly there's been a lot of that going on with [studio] production.

**MD:** Understood; it's a balance. But going down that sonic rabbit hole first—chasing down sounds, and *then* working on the parts—is there concern that the groove or the feel could get a little overlooked in that method? Like decisions could be made at the expense of the drum part?

**Matt:** I've been working on that. What you're getting at is a very real, possible problem. Which is that if you're going really, really far into the textural realm, and the soundscape aspects of it, it might actually bring your mind away from being tethered to this primal core of the pulse, and the very human, carnal feeling that needs to be in that pulse. One thing that I'm learning and really trying to work on and work through is the need to anchor things, to tether things to the deepest, most common denominator, root level—wherever that is. One of the ways I've been trying to find that now is through working a lot with my feet with a click, and with my feet with a double pedal, and trying to really make the click disappear behind the beats that I'm playing and relax my body while playing, hopefully very powerfully and with a lot of conviction. And sinking into each beat and releasing into each beat.

**MD:** Has that forced you to alter your approach on the kit, your stickings and such?

**Matt:** Years and years ago I was really fascinated with trying to reverse my patterns and my stickings. I spent several months turning the kit around backwards

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and just trying to play completely lefty. I did a lot of that. And that kind of fundamentally shifted my orientation. I'm still a righty lead. But it shifted my perspective. And then I realized that being able to lead with either hand is a tremendous advantage in this idiom of working with electronics. I play open-handed where I need to, or if I want to. I do a lot of righty lead. But in terms of playing in this new idiom of all the MIDI triggering, not being able to reverse patterns or not being able to be flexible with how you stick things seems like a real blind spot to me.

**MD:** When you're working on a project that uses zero electronics following a St. Vincent tour, does it take time to get back in that purely acoustic headspace? Is it as simple as letting the music guide you, sonically and stylistically?

**Matt:** I definitely try to be led by the singer. At the same time I realize that it isn't always the job of the singer or the artist to lead the dance. I'm not saying I know when to be in charge or when not to be in charge. I'm asking that question: Where's the place to be receptive? Where's the place to be assertive? Sometimes, if I'm using the same kit [from a St. Vincent tour], the way they're tuned I'll realize, *I'm not really tuned for this right now*. I'll need to do something a little different or get some different drums. Sometimes the tuning takes a minute. Sometimes finding the volume range takes some adjustment. When you're playing purely acoustically in a rock or pop scenario, sometimes you have to hit a bit harder because the drums open up, which is something you don't have to do when you're using triggers.

**MD:** The way you've embraced and utilized technology and electronics really underscores what a new age it is for drummers. There are so many possibilities with what you can do and how to do it. But what would you say to the drummer who has no experience using electronics—they've never used triggers live, they've never used a Mac or any plug-ins for home recording—and might be intimidated by both the cost and the learning curve involved with integrating electronics and technology into their world?

**Matt:** What I would say to people is that the financial expenditure per sort of unit of capability is more favorable to you than ever. You can spend fewer dollars than ever and get more for your money. That's the same with almost all technology. When you think about the fact that you can get reasonably good microphones for about

\$100 or less apiece, and you only need about four to twelve channels to record drums really well, and the interfaces now have the mic pre's in them, the financial burden is getting into a place where you shouldn't be so intimidated by it. And there's great information out there on how to do things, especially for home and remote recording. Really, all you need is an internet connection to access great trade secrets about doing this kind of stuff.

If people are intimidated by home

recording and using electronics and investing in stuff like that... I would be more intimidated by *not* having that stuff. The tools that are available are tools with which you can really study your own blind spots and your own handicaps as a player. Invest in a small recording setup and practice recording yourself a bit so that you can be in the know about what you can do better. That's a reasonable justification for such an investment.



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The advertisement features a black and white photograph of Mike Hansen, a drummer with long blonde hair, holding two Techra carbon drumsticks. The sticks are blue with red and yellow accents. The background is dark, making the drummer and the sticks stand out. The text is in a mix of bold, white, and orange fonts. At the bottom, there are social media icons for Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.



# Great

Tommy Aldridge

# 80s Drum Performances

## Part 3: Heavy Rock

by Ilya Stemkovsky

Hard rock, heavy metal, and punk can trace their roots to the 1960s, when brave, searching bands decided to increase the volume, expanding the possibilities of what rock music could sound like—and at first appealing to a select but dedicated few. The '70s saw the emergence of many classic groups that would invent and develop powerful new styles of heavy music, and that led the way for the explosion of popularity the genres would experience in the '80s. As things got faster and louder, drummers needed to keep up with their guitar-shredder bandmates. Sometimes 2 and 4 was just what the doctor (and the radio) ordered. But sometimes a double bass tornado at 280 bpm was necessary, as the technical

proficiency of drummers rose to higher and higher peaks.

The first two parts of this feature series focused on the work of new-wave and classic-rock drummers (October 2016) and jazz and fusion players (March 2017). The tracks featured this month are all about the heavy dudes, ranging from straight-ahead rockers laying down time to extreme metal drummers blowing the doors off what was previously thought possible on the instrument. The diversity of the examples proves that hard rock and metal were performed and embraced across the globe, and that the tributaries that resulted from the splintering of heavy styles saw no boundaries. Thrash, hardcore, death metal... the list was endless, and it all started in the '80s.

## Judas Priest "Screaming for Vengeance"

The adrenaline rush that is the title track from Judas Priest's 1982 record is a study in how to propel a band forward from the drums, without overplaying or drawing attention away from the changes.

**Dave Holland** brings the thunder with an insistent uptempo part using a cool kick pattern that's busy but not messy, and locks in with guitar and vocals with precision. Check out the wild, tumbling fill before the second verse that arrests the music before everyone somehow comes back in together. Holland whips out some hip tom and kick fills before a very brief guitar breakdown, but for the most part this is a pedal-to-the-metal performance from one of the genre's tightest bands and a drummer in total control.

## Iron Maiden "The Number of the Beast"

**Clive Burr**'s time with Iron Maiden was brief, but he played on the band's first three records, including its breakthrough, 1982's *The Number of the Beast*. The title track is pure new-wave-of-British-heavy-metal urgency, and Burr's opening 10/8 hi-hat flams ramp up the anticipation, before vocalist Bruce Dickinson's scream brings the band in with explosive power. The drums have a propulsive punk energy throughout the song, and Burr cleverly syncopates his snare on the "&" of 3 of every other measure when the structure evens out into common time in the verses, giving everything an off-kilter jolt. Burr played trickier patterns on other tunes, but none are more quintessentially Maiden than this lightning bolt. Who said heavy metal drummers had no feel?

## Jane's Addiction "Mountain Song"

"When you're going to a guitar solo, you *want* to speed up; it's just natural," **Stephen Perkins** told *Modern Drummer* in June 1991 when discussing Jane's Addiction's style. "If Perry Farrell says something heavy, I want to accent it." Not much is heavier than the bass line supporting this massive track from the band's 1988 major-label debut, *Nothing's Shocking*. Perkins lays down the perfect accompaniment in the form of a titanic tom pattern that's as big as a rumbling train, serving the purpose of keeping time in a nontraditional way but also grooving so hard that you could dance to it. Dig how Perkins colors the ends of the transitional bars with a four-note kick-and-crash phrase and a rapid-fire snare triplet lick that locks in with the guitars.



## Anthrax "Caught in a Mosh"

There's no pumping the brakes on this seminal Anthrax cut from 1987's *Among the Living*. As one of the originators of thrash, Anthrax was quite adept at the speedy side of metal. Things start deceptively, though, as **Charlie Benante** plays quarter notes on just the hi-hat, before a gnarly bass line comes in and we're off to the races. But even that doesn't last too long, as Benante whips out a spastic double bass/cymbals fill that signals another drag-race part that raises the hair on your neck. The track then moves back and forth between tempos, with Benante executing the varying beats proficiently and throwing in tight, quick rolls. Check out how the drummer changes things up with some pounding toms under the guitar solo. This mosh is a fun one.

## Mötley Crüe "Kickstart My Heart"

Mötley Crüe may have worn more makeup than its female audience members, but the band hammered home aggressive rock riffs and **Tommy Lee** steered that ship with big beats and great chops. "I can't learn enough," Lee said in the September 1986 issue of *Modern*

*Drummer*. "My drumming will never be as good as I want it to be, and I hate that." Lee must have learned some new tricks, because this monster tune from 1989's *Dr. Feelgood* has everything from an unconventional snare flam groove in the verses that really moves the song along to his trademark four-on-the-floor kick drum thump in the choruses. There's also some fun syncopated accenting during the guitar solo and coda tom flurries where Lee lets it fly. Mascara or not, Lee kills on this.

## Slayer "Raining Blood"

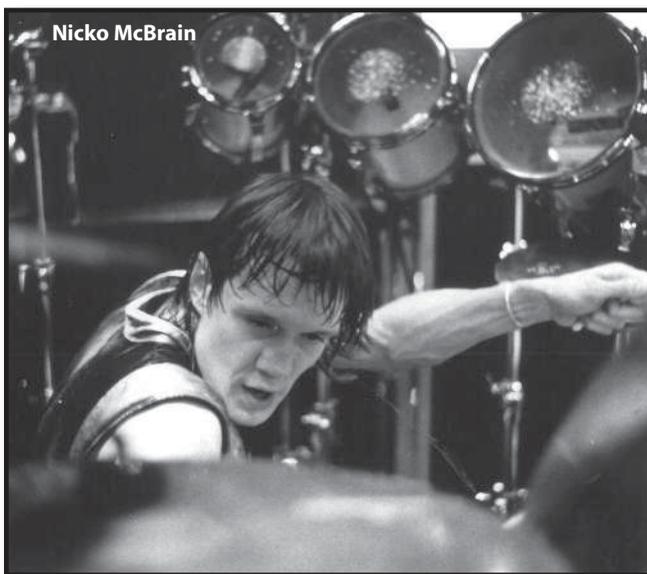
Thrash, a new form of '80s heavy metal characterized by aggression and lots of speed, was championed by the



"Big Four": Metallica, Anthrax, Megadeth, and—the most sinister-sounding of the bunch—Slayer. *Reign in Blood*, from 1986, benefited from Rick Rubin's cleaner production and lean-and-mean songs that were over in a flash. **Dave Lombardo** attacks "Raining Blood" with a fury, laying down the law with a double bass barrage that gives way to a manic double-time beat that's not for the faint of heart. More kick drum madness follows, before Lombardo breaks it down to a heavier half-time feel bringing in some space, until a final, even faster return to double time complete with insane fills.

## Iron Maiden "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

At almost fourteen minutes, this 1982 multi-section prog-metal epic is Iron Maiden's longest song from that era, and it has all the traits that make **Nicko McBrain** a beloved heavy metal drummer. McBrain plays a nifty open hi-hat lick in the verses and later moves into a tourniquet-tight triplet section with cymbal accents. After a drumless middle segment, McBrain comes back in with some two-handed hi-hat work and later drives it home under the guitar solo with an insistent ride attack and polyrhythmic bass drum fun. "I always knew that I would be a drummer; it suits my character," McBrain said in the December 1985 issue of *Modern Drummer*. "I'm a lunatic. You've got to be a little crazy to want to bash things all the time." Indeed.



## Aerosmith "Love in an Elevator"

"Anybody can play fills," **Joey Kramer** said in the 1988 issue of *Modern Drummer*. "But to lock into that groove and really make it say something is the secret." Kramer certainly proves that on this funky hard-rock classic from 1989's *Pump*; his spacious, driving beat holds it all together. The drummer throws in the occasional kick double followed by a snare and crash for a unique flavor ending the verses, and leans in tough on his bell during the choruses. But it's the dotted ride pattern underneath the guitar solo that's the special ingredient he spoke about in the magazine, swinging like crazy and so well executed that you can't listen to anything else. Kramer proved that heavy isn't in the volume, but the conviction.

## All "Check One"

Rising out of the ashes of the punk godfathers Descendents, the group All featured intricate material performed by musicians

who could play anything. At a mere forty-four seconds in length, "Check One," from 1989's *Allroy's Revenge*, is a double-time hardcore avalanche of laser-like precision. "Punk rock is supposed to be about playing music, not something you spend four years fixing with Pro Tools," **Bill Stevenson**, who served time in both Descendents and Black Flag, said in the June 2004 issue of *Modern Drummer*. Here he barrels through the changes at ludicrous speed, switching from ride to hi-hats, syncopating crashes, and putting in bizarre stop/start accents. All was as influenced by Mahavishnu Orchestra as by the Sex Pistols, and the Stevenson-penned "Check One" is Exhibit A of an accomplished drummer completely in the driver's seat.

## Metallica "One"

When addressing the topic of developing speed in the March 1988 issue of *Modern Drummer*, **Lars Ulrich** mentioned a warm-up routine that he did right before hitting the stage, running as fast as he could for twenty seconds at a time, to "get the legs moving." And those legs sure are moving on this game-changing Metallica track from 1988's ...*And Justice for All*. Ulrich takes his time in the first half of the tune, bringing in snare backbeats and melodic tom fills. Ultimately the mood changes, and the machine-gun guitars are matched with those famous double bass 16th-note triplets, as killer a drum part as there had ever been in heavy metal. Things climax with double-time drums and rat-a-tat snare bullets under the guitar solo. With "One," Metallica and Ulrich set a new bar.

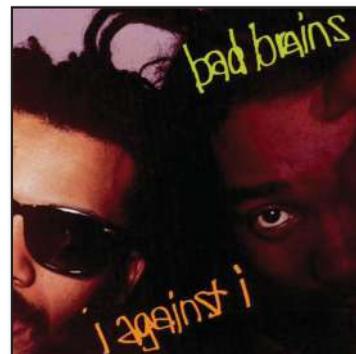
## Bad Brains "I Against I"

As thrash upped the ante on standard heavy metal tempos, hardcore did the same for punk rock, and no band did it louder, faster, or earlier than Bad Brains. In under three minutes, **Earl Hudson** switches between sections and feels in "I Against I," from the quick pulse and big cymbal crashes starting the track

to the straightforward 8th-note hi-hat groove that follows to an almost-funky hats-and-kick thing in unison with the bass guitar part. Hudson later rocks out again, filling with speedy snare rolls that remind you that some punks had chops in addition to attitude. And though Bad Brains was equally adept at reggae and other styles, it's these ballsy tracks of bursting energy that influenced a generation of future bands where music sees no color.

## Deep Purple "Perfect Strangers"

*Perfect Strangers*, from 1984, was Deep Purple's first studio album in nine years, and the title track featured elements of the band's earlier eras, as well as a straighter, melodic songwriting approach that fit in with the pop-metal radio fare of the time. **Ian Paice** strips away everything that's unnecessary, plowing forward on the mid-tempo title track without budging. It's the simplest of patterns, hats open, big kicks underneath, and snare coming down strong, but it wouldn't feel quite so right in lesser hands. Then things veer off into a middle section of alternating bars of 4/4 and 5/4 (or 9/4 if you wish to count it that way) with Paice keeping it locked in with minimal adornment. The ultimate "less is more" tutorial.



## Dio "Holy Diver"

"Finesse in heavy metal is not playing the average stuff," **Vinny Appice** said in the September 1985 issue of *Modern Drummer*. "It is being a bit more clever...playing with a bit more feel." It's all about space and pocket on this classic track from Dio's 1983 release, *Holy Diver*. Appice lays down an anvil of a galloping beat, syncopating kick drum licks and crashes but never playing anything to distract from Ronnie James Dio's legendary vocal. Dig Appice's creative tom rolls throughout the track and the wise decision to ride his closed hats underneath the guitar solo, keeping everything clean, tight, and direct. Throw on a pair of headphones to hear all the brilliant outro drum fills as the song fades out.



## Ozzy Osbourne "Crazy Train"

The first single from Ozzy Osbourne's post-Black Sabbath solo debut, 1980's *Blizzard of Ozz*, is grade-A guitar-rock glory and is still featured as television bumper music and in sports arenas almost forty years after its release. Ex-Uriah Heep drummer **Lee Kerslake** enters with some spacious tom-tom timekeeping before bringing in a four-on-the-floor kick pattern in the verses that wouldn't be out of place on a disco record from the era. A bridge allows Kerslake some room for rumbling tom fills, before Randy Rhoads' guitar solo takes to the sky. The drum recording and overall production is of almost demo quality, but it doesn't diminish Kerslake's rock-solid contributions to Osbourne's earliest solo career material. The drummer's stint with the band was short lived but iconic.

## Guns n' Roses "Welcome to the Jungle"

Guns n' Roses crashed the Los Angeles hard-rock scene in the mid-'80s, bringing in melodic songs laced with a punk swagger to upend all the Spandex and hairspray that was the norm. The leadoff track from the band's 1987 debut, *Appetite for Destruction*, is kick-ass rock 'n' roll and features **Steven Adler** working through several different sections with controlled power and skill. Whether he's riding hi-hats or a cowbell, Adler puts in space to let things breathe, keeping time and working the dynamics. He throws in some tribal toms and overdubbed percussion for the trippy guitar section before returning to more cowbell and snare flams at song's end. *Appetite* would make Guns huge, thanks in part to the solid work from the drum chair.

## AC/DC "You Shook Me All Night Long"

AC/DC didn't miss a beat after replacing singer Bon Scott, and the band's turn-of-the-decade long player, *Back in Black*, helped it gain mass appeal. "Drumming has always come down to push, shove, and attitude," **Phil Rudd** told *MD* in the August 1996 issue, and there are plenty of those on "You Shook Me All Night Long," the album's rocking first single. Rudd's workmanlike 2-and-4 groove sounds simple but swings like mad, and it's a fine example of how to ride slightly open hi-hats for maximum effectiveness—not too tight and not too loose. And dig those slick kick syncopations during the guitar solo. "It's just a pocket thing," Rudd said in *MD*, "and when I hit the snare drum I want something to happen. All my energy goes into that."

## Napalm Death "Lucid Fairytale"

England's Napalm Death is credited with laying the groundwork for the metal subgenre grindcore, characterized by growled vocals, down-tuned guitars, and blistering tempos. "Lucid Fairytale," from 1988's *From Enslavement to Obliteration*, is over in one minute, but in that span **Mick Harris** explodes with outrageous blast beats and a double-time pattern complete with ride cymbal sticking and fills that whiz by. The recording is not the clearest, and the overall style needed room to develop, but even at this early stage heavy metal was being dragged and pulled into extreme corners. Harris probably wasn't the first to play the blast beat, but he and Napalm Death raised its profile. This was the rock your parents warned you about.

## Motörhead "Ace of Spades"

The quintessential Motörhead song, "Ace of Spades," from the group's 1980 album of the same name, is pure rock bedlam, a double-time adrenaline shot straight to the head. **Phil "Philthy Animal" Taylor** puts a brick on his gas pedal here but also manages to play some very quick 32nd-note-triplet snare fills that increase the urgency of an already incendiary track. Dig the fill Taylor returns to throughout the song, a syncopated crash-and-snare combo that breaks up the smoothness of the beat but brings the drama. Taylor never relinquishes his stranglehold on the velocity, and his move to the ride during the brief guitar solo is one of the only changes in his approach over the course of three jam-packed minutes. Minimal fluff, maximal sneer.

The advertisement features a close-up of a drum head with two Moongel damper pads. One is a vibrant blue and the other is clear. The brand name 'MOONGEL' is prominently displayed in a bold, sans-serif font, with 'DAMPER PADS' underneath. A 'NEW' badge is placed near the clear pad. The slogan 'LET'S MAKE IT CLEAR' is written in large, white, block letters. Below this, text describes Moongel as the #1 most effective dampening gel. A list of features includes availability in blue and clear, a 6-pack container, and ease of cleaning. The distributor, Big Bang Distribution, is listed at the bottom with their address and phone number. The RTOM logo is also present in the bottom left corner of the ad.

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## Living Colour "Cult of Personality"

"My bandmates tease me and call me 'the jazz musician,'" **Will Calhoun** said in the January 1989 issue of *Modern Drummer*. "I love rock 'n' roll and all that, but I don't want to approach this band or this music with a 'rock 'n' roll' technique." Calhoun's accomplished fusion chops and mammoth fills are on full display on the slamming lead track from Living Colour's 1988 debut album, *Vivid*. Calhoun brings a straight-8th-note groove to the verses, keeping the attention on that gargantuan riff, then opens up on his ride before attacking his open hi-hats with fervor during the wild guitar solo. There are also jazzy, syncopated crash fills and a double-time coda where Calhoun brings the noise, so it's obvious that these guys are not interested in the old metal instructional handbook.



surfing the wave—he's causing it. The song breaks down a couple of times, allowing the listener to hit the oxygen mask and Peligro to play gentle cymbal swells, before returning to the abrasive urgency of the driving snare. If ever a beat was the perfect complement to the DKs' sociopolitical lyrical snarl, this is it.

## Whitesnake "Still of the Night"

"If you want to make a song a hit record, it's got to be clean, crisp, and to the point," **Aynsley Dunbar** told *Modern Drummer* in the May 1982 issue. "You can't have million-note fills all over the place, because people can't understand it, and so they won't want to buy it." Dunbar is familiar with hit records, amassing an impressive résumé of sessions with the cream of the rock crop over a long career. The monolithic "Still of the Night," from Whitesnake's self-titled 1987 crossover record, finds Dunbar riding quarter notes on his sloshy hats and playing huge backbeats. But the drummer throws in some unorthodox snare/kick combos during guitar breakdowns and a trippy "Whole Lotta Love"-style middle section with light cymbal play. *Whitesnake* would go on to sell 8 million copies.

## Dead Kennedys "Trust Your Mechanic"

*Plastic Surgery Disasters*, from 1982, was the first Dead Kennedys full-length to feature **D.H. Peligro** on kit, and the drummer wasted no time in bringing a hyperkinetic approach to the San Francisco hardcore punk band's ever-evolving sound. Peligro spends the majority of "Trust Your Mechanic" playing a charging martial snare beat that sounds like things are going off the rails, the drums (and overall mix) distorted to up the intensity factor. Peligro isn't just

## Pat Travers "Snortin' Whiskey"

The subject matter of this rock blues is indicative of a freewheeling time in the music biz, when excess was the name of the game. **Tommy Aldridge's** drumming, however, is no-frills power playing, enhancing and supporting with enough minor embellishments to keep the track appealing. Aldridge is known for his feet, and he

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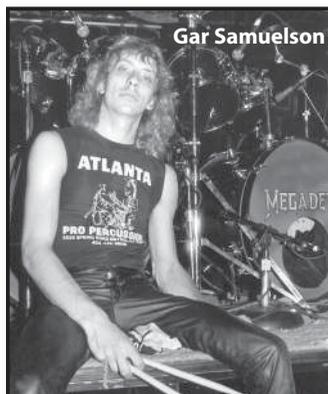


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quickly lays a foundation of fancy footwork while leaning in on his ride. Snappy tom fills get thrown in at just the right times, but for the most part Aldridge is trucking through. That is, until the track takes a left turn, leaving the blues progression behind with a funky little bridge featuring a ripping offbeat cowbell part and ending with a big cascading fill that brings the song back to where we started. Rock Drumming 101.

### Megadeth "Killing Is My Business...and Business Is Good!"

Megadeth wasn't limited to just playing "thrash" music, because the band was made up of musicians who could handle a wide variety of styles, sometimes within the same song. **Gar Samuelson** had a jazz and fusion background, so his playing wasn't restricted to just speed and volume.



The title track from 1985's *Killing Is My Business...* hops back and forth between a grooving section with sweet double bass fills and a blazing double-time section that blows your hair back and assaults your eardrums. The extended up-tempo outro brings Samuelson's dazzling chops to the forefront, with an awesome combination of colossal cymbal crashing, kick drum mayhem, and airtight fills. Fans of the human, non-mechanical touch in metal drumming should check out this scorching performance.

### Faith No More "Surprise! You're Dead!"

Along with Jane's Addiction and others, Faith No More was part of the alternative metal scene of the late '80s, and this exciting track from 1989's *The Real Thing* continued the group's streak of incorporating diverse styles into eclectic arrangements and writing songs where the musicians could really express themselves. **Mike Bordin** rocks a tight polyrhythmic pattern over the verses using his trademark snare flams, moving from hats to ride before straightening it out underneath vocalist Mike Patton's rapping. Then check out how he navigates a proggy section filled with odd times and tricky turnarounds. "I try to play pretty much as hard as I can," Bordin said in the April 1992 issue of *Modern Drummer*. "It's exciting to really hit 'em and get that explosive sound." The rules for metal, however, were bending.

### Dark Angel "The Burning of Sodom"

If you're not out of breath after simply listening to this searing track from Dark Angel's 1986 album, *Darkness Descends*, you're not paying attention. The breakneck pace of **Gene Hoglan's** drum part is a study in hanging on for dear life, and it's almost as if the band can't keep up with him. This is insanely fast stuff, and the drummer still finds room to whip out over-the-top fills that up the intensity to code-red levels. The track breaks down for only a brief spell, as if Hoglan needs a few seconds to recharge, before things surge once again. Dark Angel was never as well known as its more famous contemporaries in the thrash scene, but Hoglan threw down the gauntlet here, and all metal drummers took notice.



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# John McLaughlin's Ranjit Barot

## Drumming in the 4th Dimension

Story by Ken Micallef

Photos by Paul La Raia

**A**fter spending eighteen years in the vast Indian film industry, including longtime work with the Oscar-winning composer A.R. Rahman, Ranjit Barot returned to his performing roots and fulfilled his dream to drum with the legendary fusion guitarist John McLaughlin and his band the 4th Dimension. Along with Gary Husband (keyboards, drums) and Etienne Mbappé (bass), Barot recently completed McLaughlin's final U.S. tour. Barot also appears on the guitarist's recordings *Black Light*, *Now Here This*, *Floating Point*, and the recent *Live at Ronnie Scott's*.

Drumming in the footsteps of Billy Cobham, Narada Michael Walden, Dennis Chambers, and Mark Mondesir is no easy feat, but Barot has truly made the McLaughlin chair his own. Yet even that hasn't quenched his thirst for all things drumming.

Barot opened the Quarter jazz club in Mumbai this past October, which will bring little-seen Western musicians to Indian audiences. Joined by drummer Jeff Sipe, Barot is also working on a joint Indo-U.S. project with the aim to bring together Indian classical and Western musicians under one roof to create a percussion-centric ensemble. A project with Shakti violinist L. Shankar is also planned, as is an online drum instruction channel where Barot will give viewers insight into his kit approach, focusing on the Western jazz and rock systems of the drumset, as well as exposure to North and South Indian drumming and the South Indian verbal rhythm delivery system known as *Konnakol*. *Modern Drummer* spoke with Barot as the 4th Dimension was on the East Coast leg of its Meeting of the Spirits tour.



**MD:** You're unusual in that you're both a renowned film composer in India and the drummer with one of the world's greatest jazz guitarists.

**Ranjit:** I began as a drummer. In India, at sixteen, I played in a local rock band. Then I replaced Trilok Gurtu in a progressive band he played in, Waterfront. I thought that was my life—I'm a drummer. But in the mid-'80s all the gigs dried up, and film production became the dominant work. All the guys I used to play with were doing film scores. I got a break working in a studio and realized I could produce, and I taught myself harmony. I began composing and arranging film scores. I didn't play drums for eighteen years. I was producing soundtracks and jingles in my own studio. Then Zakir Hussain said, "You're wasting your talent." He put me in different playing situations, but my chops were not up to standard.



**MD:** You'd played with Zakir before.

**Ranjit:** Informally. My first exposure to the Indian rhythmic system was through his father, [legendary tabla player] Alla Rakha. But I wanted to play drums. I met John McLaughlin in 2006 and we jammed. He said, "I didn't know somebody in India could play drums like this. Let's record an album." So we did *Floating Point*. But I had to wait a few years before joining the band, because Mark Mondesir was his drummer then.

**MD:** You're also the music director for the Oscar-winning composer A.R. Rahman. You've drummed in many different situations.

**Ranjit:** I don't know what that means:

"Someone is a drummer." I want to make music, give you an idea of melody and poetry, and tell you my life story. My instrument happens to be the drums, but I don't think of myself simply as a drummer. I want to contribute to creating a wonderful, beautiful, joyous sound. How does that happen? What part of the kit do I play? How soft? How loud? I love music and poetry. Jon Christensen's drumming on Keith Jarrett's *My Song* was such a big influence, as well as Billy Cobham and Tony Williams and Elvin Jones. Michael Walden for his intensity. But Jon Christensen is like a painter; he played *My Song* so beautifully.

**MD:** You make playing with John

McLaughlin and the 4th Dimension look so easy.

**Ranjit:** They gave me a very conducive environment in which I could grow. It's like my life was engineered to play with them, and they looked after me musically and spiritually. My brother Gary Husband is with me on stage every day. He's one of the drummers I've admired and still do. We get to play together, and we respect each other. There are not many bands like this. John always had this idea to have two drummers. When I joined we expanded and Gary got a drumkit. John is coming from John Coltrane, the idea of having two drummers, as he had Elvin and Rashied Ali. And Gary and I

have similar roots in our influences, and we complement each other really well. We lay in each other's pocket.

**MD:** When playing a repertoire that was established by all these great drummers before you, how do you find your voice?

**Ranjit:** You come to a place where you've absorbed so much of their music that it becomes part of your DNA. When I play "Eternity's Breath" [from Mahavishnu Orchestra's *Visions of the Emerald Beyond*],

I remember what Narada Michael Walden played. But that's just the inspiration; the rest of it is that I hear the music in a certain way and I approach it with my own sensibility and sense of syncopation. That comes from India. My muscle memory steers how I'd like to play the song. What Billy and Michael played are starting points; I tip my hat to both of them when playing those songs.

**MD:** You play with a beautiful sense of flow.

**Ranjit:** That's what I learned from Jon

Christensen. The way he flowed was rhythmically compelling, but he wasn't trying to define or stress any one point of the bar too much at any one time. It was a beautiful wave. That sense of flowing I got from *My Song*. With the human mind, when you meld anything and put it all together, you create a hybrid language. It contains the DNA of many influences, but it's also part of your own evolution. Once you put that into your own expression, you have a unique identity



## Barot's Setup

**Drums:** Sonor S Classix with birch shells

- A. 5.5x14 Artist series snare
- B. 16x16 floor tom
- C. 7x10 tom
- D. 8x12 tom
- E. 9x13 tom
- F. 14x14 floor tom
- G. 4x12 Artist series snare
- H. 17.5x22 bass drum

**Hardware:** Sonor, including Giant Step double bass drum pedal and 400 and 600 series cymbal booms, hi-hat stand, snare stand, and tom stands

**Sticks:** Vic Firth American Classic Hickory 5A wood-tip

**Cymbals:** Meinl

- 1. 16" Byzance Extra Dry Thin hi-hats
- 2. 18" Byzance Dual crash
- 3. 18" Byzance Extra Dry China
- 4. 20" Byzance Jazz Medium crash
- 5. 7" Byzance Traditional splash on Gen X China Filter stack
- 6. 8" Classics Custom Bell mounted on 18" Classics Custom Trash crash
- 7. 22" Byzance Mosaic ride
- 8. 10" Byzance Dual splash mounted on 22" Byzance Zen China ride

**Heads:** Remo, including Controlled Sound snare batters, Clear Ambassador tom batters, and Clear Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter



as a musician. On stage, you surrender. You have to take risks, and if you make a mistake, that's okay. In that risk-taking lies a new thought, a new sentence, a new syllable. That only comes from pushing through that fear of failing. It's only this band and John McLaughlin that have encouraged this sort of behavior in me.

**MD:** You studied tabla with Alla Rakha, then switched to drums?

**Ranjit:** Yes, then I learned to play drumset from records. I studied Billy Cobham and developed his six-stroke roll, playing it my way. I did the same with the paradiddle. I had no books; I learned from records. We didn't have these drum books growing up in Bombay. I created a sonic image in my mind. I knew what I wanted to sound like. I practiced what I knew and what I didn't know. I developed a vocabulary. I played with records by Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Deep Purple, Cream, Led Zeppelin.

**MD:** How did you learn to handle odd meters within McLaughlin's blazing arrangements?

**Ranjit:** You have to make numbers your friend. It's mathematics in its most beautiful state. My exposure to South Indian percussion music, the Carnatic system, and Konnakol enabled me to become

very comfortable with odd times and angular phrasing. It's a process you have to familiarize yourself with, the rhythms and numbers and how you approach time.

My phraseology changed when I began attending [South Indian percussion] concerts performed by the masters; it impacted the way I thought about time and rhythm. But I never let it change my drumset language—just the way I think. Like the way Horacio

“El Negro” Hernandez plays behind the beat but he's so full of intent, that's a very cultural thing. It's not just a studied thing—it's cultural. If I wanted to play like Horacio I would hang with him and meet his family and eat their food and go to concerts and see what it is that makes him speak and feel the way he does.

**MD:** Are Western drummers improving at playing and understanding Indian-based



## Gary Husband on Ranjit Barot

**The keyboardist with the 4th Dimension—a world-class drummer in his own right—is in a perfect position to describe Barot's contributions to the music of John McLaughlin. So we asked him to do just that.**

**Gary:** Ranjit sir, from the very beginning, invested this most personal, intense, and passionate improvisational spirit straight from his core into this band and into its music, revolutionizing it completely from that point on. And there could be no turning back! And this, in a huge way to me—particularly in a band like this—fundamentally determines the drummer's power, his or her success or failing, so to speak. And in line with the best, most successful, and most beautiful participation, it appeared right from the outset a rather effortless, natural endeavor and achievement on his part. The day he joined, it was completely evident from the first moment to all of us that with the addition of Ranjit this could and would be a truly great band, and one that will be counted and remembered for being so.

Ranjit's an old soul to me, like an old-time movie icon with this immense character. You get it in how he addresses you. You see it in the elegance of his dress sense, you sense it in how inspired he constantly is, and you feel it when you play with him. All connected. Plus there is how unique he is, bringing forth a discipline and theoretical aspects of rhythm rooted in India via this singular personalized voice on a Western drumkit. His Konnakol abilities, for me, far exceed the level he admits to them being. He's a composer of uncommon breadth, a producer—and what a conceptualist. Aside from the movement revealed on his excellent *Bada Boom* recording, Chingari's *Bombay Makossa* [the trio album featuring U. Srinivas and Etienne Mbappé] is a revolution! He's a one-off man! There was no one like him before, I'm convinced.

And John sir [McLaughlin], in his infinite wisdom, in his greatness and via his always impeccable intuition and vision, has of course been the catalyst in bringing him to us, and bringing all of us together in the 4th Dimension.

**MD:** Ranjit said you sometimes have a kit next to you, as was the practice with Mark Mondesir, I believe. When do you and Ranjit double drum? What's your language with him about?

**Gary:** Well, firstly, I believe we play truly as we are. And all that we reveal as we begin to play corresponds to our respective innate character, our

personal convictions and values. How open we are, how benevolent we are, how loving we are, how stubborn, how disciplined, etc. You know, the whole gamut! And our respective, resulting vocabulary, to me, is transmitted perfectly in accordance with all of that. In fact, I feel it's fundamentally governed by that. And as a direct consequence of how Ranjit and I are as individuals, I believe we found an instant, effortless conversational musical rapport, just as I believe we did with each other as people. And to me it's that simple.

Of course, our business in this band, and our utmost priority, is the music. And in that, Ranjit goes from his heart and soul, *then* to his intellect. He goes from his heart and soul and *then* considers technique or physical methods—if at all! And that's the way it is with him. Everything's about the musical impulse and intent ahead of absolutely anything else. In terms of the drumkit itself, I don't believe we've ever had—as two drummers—a discussion about technique or physical methods in the whole time we've been working together.

**MD:** Is there a shared 4th Dimension sense of rhythmic simpatico? How does it express itself?

**Gary:** I have to say, while soundchecking the two drumkits ahead of a concert, we will invariably just begin playing together and simultaneously falling upon truly intoxicating spontaneous ideas with one another. These come completely out of the blue, are totally different every time, and they've been regularly so eventful that we both stop and wish they'd somehow been recorded. And I think that's the measure of the simpatico. And how that blends into the whole band participation is really joyous to me. Because we're nothing if we're not inspiring, nothing if we're not permeating, meeting head on, in as many and various stimulating ways we can muster, the impulses arising and manifesting from John sir and Etienne. So in this way, it's about the total four-way simpatico in this band ultimately.



## Ranjit Barot

music and drumming?

**Ranjit:** Americans are the most open-minded people on the planet. But I urge drummers to go to India. There's nothing like firsthand experience. It's cultural, like hip-hop or rap. It started on the street corner.

**MD:** But Indian rhythms are very complex.

**Ranjit:** They can be. Western musicians have built a great mental barrier and fear about Indian music. Once you get into it, it's beautiful. Concepts like quintuplets and septuplets, Stravinsky and Zappa were exploring that. It's not alien; it's just that we formalized it and have it as an integral part of our music. It's like eating something that's good for you, though [at first] it doesn't taste good. You have to keep doing it. Keep exposing yourself to the music and one day you will push through. Then you're addicted, man!

**MD:** How do you achieve this floating feel in your drumming?

**Ranjit:** The way South Indian percussionists play and approach a groove, it's all mixed up in my head. It's partly Elvin Jones with Coltrane. Listen to them on "Impressions." The way Elvin plays with Coltrane, he's pushing all these accents; he's never static. I want to groove but never settle into a pocket. It's got to evolve. That's what John



likes. If I play 2 and 4 for more than four bars, John will look at me. You don't want John looking at you! My mental game has to be very sharp in this band.

**MD:** Do you maintain a practice regimen on the road?

**Ranjit:** No, but I'm playing all the time in my head. MIT did a study [and concluded that] mental practice creates the same neural pathways in your brain as physical practice. I do a lot of mental playing; it really works for me. At soundcheck I will warm up, and if I have something new I work it out then. Later

I'll introduce it on the gig.

**MD:** What's the status of your various projects?

**Ranjit:** The Quarter opened last year; we have access to a 600-seat opera house where we book international artists. We're trying to elevate the standard of music in India. I want kids to experience a steady inflow of important musicians from around the world to play for our audiences and get local musicians informed on how things should be done. Kids have to be exposed. That's the future.



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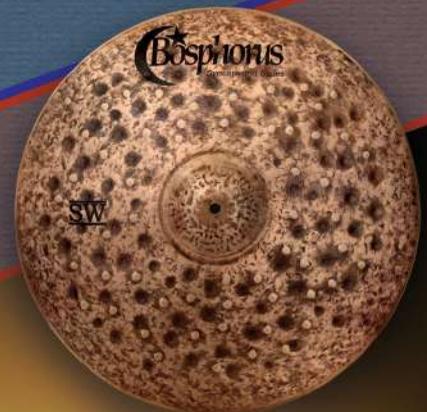
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# Paramore's Zac Farro

Spending your teenage years making records and touring the world on a rocket ship to stardom is every young musician's fantasy. Choosing to jump off that rocket while it's still on a steady ascent may seem like madness. For this drummer, it was reality. The now-twenty-seven-year-old's voyage of self-discovery reads like an epic poem, complete with otherworldly landscapes, a long journey home, and a triumphant return to his roots.

In 2004, just twenty minutes outside Nashville in a town called Franklin, four starry-eyed teenagers formed a band and had big dreams. Paramore has since become a mainstay in modern rock, racking up hundreds of millions of audio streams. The band's critically acclaimed new full-length, *After Laughter*, debuted at number one on *Billboard's* Top Rock and Alternative charts, and was its third consecutive release to debut in the top ten of the album charts. The recording is a vibrant celebration of rekindled friendship, boasting a colorful new direction while staying true to the band members' energetic spirits.

Zac Farro's return marks the beginning of a new chapter in his life. After spending his formative years away from the spotlight, honing his skills as a songwriter, producer, and director with his own project HalfNoise, he's returned wiser and primed to explore the road ahead.

Story by David Ciauro

Photos by Lindsey Byrnes



**MD:** Before we talk about your return to Paramore, let's go back to the beginning. When did you start playing drums?

**Zac:** I was nine. My mom thought I was bored over the summer, so she signed me up for this summer class called Bach to Rock. The instructor asked if anyone in the class wanted to try to play the drums. I should note that I'm the type of person that hated hearing their name called in school. Yet I found myself with my hand raised like some miracle against my will. The instructor demonstrated a beat, and I was able to play

playing to a huge festival crowd, you have to check yourself. I needed to rethink my life. So leaving the band and going to New Zealand allowed me the time and space to figure out what inspired me.

**MD:** What drew you to New Zealand?

**Zac:** The landscape is insane, but really I was drawn to simply having a different pace of life. Living in New Zealand was a transformative experience. I see the world so differently now, and I grew up in many ways. When I left the band, I wasn't sure if music was something I would keep doing. I

full time, I began to pursue HalfNoise. I did a few tours, but I still hadn't made up my mind yet if it was something I wanted to pursue fully, like I had done with Paramore.

**MD:** When HalfNoise plays live, you're the frontman. Has that experience altered how you approach drumming in any way?

**Zac:** Yes. It's weird for me to be out front, because as a drummer you get used to literally hiding behind everyone else, which creates this comfort zone. Being forced out of my comfort zone really helped my drumming, however. I actually didn't realize

## Tools of the Trade

Farro plays a Gretsch Broadkaster kit in rose marine pearl finish, featuring a 9x13 tom, a 16x16 floor tom, and an 18x22 bass drum. His snare is a 6.5x14 Gretsch Brooklyn chrome-over-brass model. His Zildjian cymbals include 15" hi-hats made up of a New Beat bottom cymbal on top and a K top cymbal on the bottom, a 22" Constantinople Medium Thin Low crash, and a 22" Constantinople Medium crash. He uses DW hardware, including 9000 series pedals. His Remo heads include Vintage Coated Emperor tom batters, a Controlled Sound snare batter, and a Clear Powersonic bass drum batter, and his sticks are Promark TXR5BW.



it fairly well. From there, I went home and did the whole pots-and-pans thing. I hated the idea of drum lessons and sitting down to practice, though. I felt that I was a very auditory learner. If I heard it, I could play it, but I struggled to read music.

**MD:** You were a founding member of Paramore when you were just becoming a teenager, and you left in 2010, while the band was still on its meteoric rise. How hard of a decision was that for you to make?

**Zac:** I had hit a wall. I didn't want to go out and play, and if as a musician you're not getting stoked to play in front of 40,000 people, then something is wrong. When the thought of driving to the grocery store back in Nashville seems more exciting than

knew I'd keep coming back to it, but I wasn't sure in what capacity. I mostly worked on living life. I'd spent my teenage years making records and touring, which was awesome, but I felt the need to regroup.

**MD:** When did HalfNoise begin?

**Zac:** I split my time between New Zealand and Nashville for three years, and during that time I discovered my love for writing music. HalfNoise started in Nashville right when I left Paramore, spawning from all these loops I'd written. Creating more electronic-sounding music seemed to satisfy a different part of my brain. Songwriting and producing was new territory. Then I moved over to New Zealand and started to live that life. Once I moved back to Nashville

that until Taylor [York, guitarist] and Hayley [Williams, singer] asked me to drum on the new record. The last time I'd played on a Paramore record was 2009, and I was a completely different musician then. The old songs like "Misery Business" that we still play live are very much representative of teenage Zac. But six years of songwriting, cowriting, and producing has opened up my mind and ears, which allowed me to approach *After Laughter* in a much more musical way.

**MD:** How so?

**Zac:** My drumming is more subdued, but there's space for me to open it up a little bit when we play live. I also wanted to get the best tone out of the kit, which meant not slamming the drums all the time. When

learning how to produce, I realized how hard it is to mix drums well when you're constantly slamming them and playing fills everywhere. Even as far as drum parts, I learned that there's more to the band than just the drums, which is something I didn't consider as a teenager. Less is more. I listened closely to Hayley's melodies and her lyrics and what they meant, and played to that.

**MD:** The drumming on *After Laughter* is very linear. The patterns are thoughtful, certainly not simple, and yet always complementary to the guitar, bass, and vocals.

**Zac:** My coming back to the band was a very organic process. I wasn't asked to rejoin the band until halfway through the making of the record. From the start, it wasn't even so much about playing with them again; it was more about getting reacquainted as friends. That was way more important to me than anything else. We seemed to still be on the same path in regards to music and fashion and art, even though a lot of time had passed. As friends we didn't skip a beat, but we had a lot of life that we hadn't lived together to catch up on. We'd been listening a lot to Talking Heads, Blondie, as well as Afrobeat music from the '70s. We were enamored by the repetitive patterns and how locked in they were. One thing that stuck out the most to us was how much energy there was without it being heavy rock.

**MD:** That's interesting, given the absence of overdriven guitars on the record. It could be described as sounding more vibrant and vivid.

**Zac:** Thank you! We knew we couldn't do a complete 180 musically as a band. Paramore songs are full of energy and life, so we wanted to maintain that, but at the same time it felt like the right time for a bit of a facelift. So we introduced more of what we've been listening to and inspired by recently into this new record. It's a different type of energy. It's not the energy of distorted guitars and smashing crash cymbals. The energy comes from the polyrhythmic beats. They don't "rock out" as much as they move and have an entrancing effect.

**MD:** How did working with producer Justin Meldal-Johnsen [Beck, Nine Inch Nails, M83] shape your performances?

**Zac:** JMJ is one of the best bass players alive. We set up together in the big live room and laid down every song. There was still some editing done, though—the album isn't all live takes. But he's such a badass bass player that it made me be better. I focused on doing my job properly and not

screwing up the songs by playing fills all over the place. It was somewhat stressful for me, but we got there.

I'm still growing and learning. One thing that was really cool that we couldn't get the drums right for was this one song called "Caught in the Middle." We had tracked all the drums at RCA Studios in Nashville, which was really cool. We'd never done a record in Nashville before, even though it's where we're from. At the tail end of the recording process, we went to JMJ's studio in L.A. to put some finishing touches on the record, but we couldn't get the drums right for this song. I asked him if we could try to redo the drums at his space. I set up a very tight, snappy-sounding kit in this tiny room, and it ended up being some of my favorite drum sounds on the record. The rest of the record was done in this massive studio space. Even where the song is placed on the

*After Laughter* I asked to try one, and I did "Told You So." People seemed to like it, so they asked me to do another one. But for "Fake Happy" I wanted to explore a more cinematic approach to a video instead of the traditional band performance. It was also the first video I got to shoot on 35-millimeter film. Art and music have always been a huge thing in my life—it can take you places. I always want to see life in a different way and examine different perspectives. I'm learning that I'm a lot more of a visual person than I ever thought I was.

**MD:** Recent performances by Paramore feature a bunch of musicians on stage, and everyone looks like they're having a blast.

**Zac:** The nucleus of the band now is Hayley, Taylor, and I, but Paramore is really the community around us. There are seven people on stage when we play live. Taylor's brother Justin plays rhythm guitar and



record introduces this fresh sound, which makes a nice impact to the arc of the record.

I think just playing to the song and making sure the drum sounds and drum parts worked perfectly for each song was important. For example, the drums in "Idle Worship" are big and fat. "Forgiveness" has only one crash hit in the entire song, so I wanted it to be more about the kick/snare/hat/tom relationship.

**MD:** Musically and visually, *After Laughter* is certainly a well-executed artistic concept. You also directed the videos for "Told You So" and "Fake Happy." Where did the director side of you come from?

**Zac:** I directed a few videos for HalfNoise. When we were looking to do videos for

sings backup; then there's my roommate, Logan [MacKenzie], who plays keyboards and guitar. Joe Mullen, my drum tech, plays all the percussion. And there's a bassist. It's rad, because it fills everything out. We also set up on stage like a seven-piece band. It's not the three of us out front and everyone else behind us. We're all out there together creating this huge sound. It should be organic and it should be different every night, because that's what people connect to. Playing in a band again, I realize that the ebbs and flows created between musicians is what's truly special. I can be really locked in with the bass player and we can be tight, but we still all move together as a unit.



# Travis Orbin on *Silly String II*

## Exploring the Session Guru's Latest Chop-Infused Labyrinth

by Austin Burcham

**Few drummers dare to venture** into the depths of progressive metal quite like Travis Orbin. His seemingly effortless ability to perform mind-bending compositions with flawless execution has landed him plenty of session and touring work. On *Silly String II*, Orbin's debut solo long-player, the drummer continues to forge ahead. "I set out to write a full-length album with half of the tunes being instrumental and the other half containing vocal parts," explains Orbin. "Before I knew it, I'd amassed more material than my initial goal. So I decided to do two full-lengths. The instrumental portion was more akin to *Silly String*, my second EP. Because of this, I sought to insert quotes from that EP into this album to tie it in as a conceptual sequel."



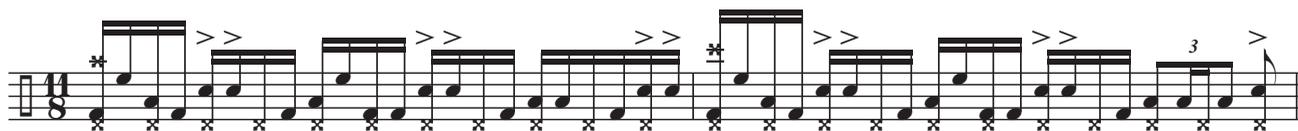
Orbin says that he employs a variety of approaches for writing music. "But after that first spark that commences song composition," he says, "generally it all rolls along in a stream-of-consciousness fashion. I also tend to obsess over small details as I go, but sometimes I'll notate placeholder ideas before fleshing them out later. After the song is complete, I'll usually make a custom click track that makes it easier for me to navigate any labyrinths of odd meters or subdivisions. If I have time, I'll print out a chart and begin rehearsals. I usually start at half of the performance tempo and work my way up incrementally until I can play the piece with relative ease. After adhering to this process for several days, I'll track the song." Let's check out some of the album's highlights.



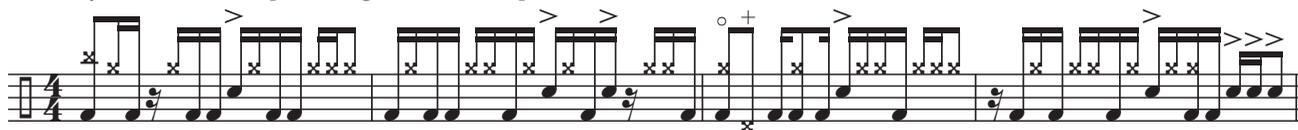
Orbin plays Pearl drums, Zildjian cymbals, and Remo heads.

### “Hand of the Giant”

The record opens with a soft guitar intro that slowly builds up to this driving 11/8 groove. Note the 8th-note triplet toward the end of every other bar. (1:04, 112 bpm)

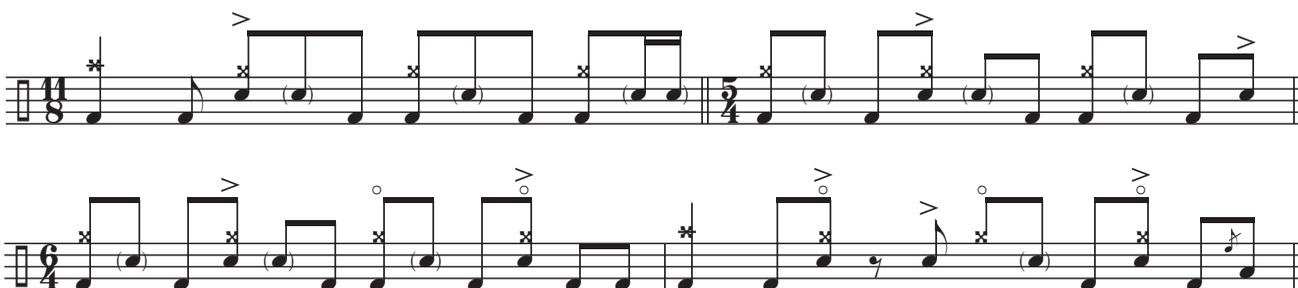


The song eventually drops into this aggressively funky drum and bass riff, which is a stark contrast to the heavy, chaotic section preceding it. (4:02, 140 bpm)



### “Overreacting Bad-Karma Boy”

“I set out to write a bluesy song, and this track came out instead,” Orbin says. “The time signatures and implied feel lead the listener to believe it’s based in triplets, but that’s not the case.” The opening groove features a four-bar cycle of 11/8, 5/4, and 6/4. (0:22, 140 bpm)



Orbin says that the B section of this track was largely improvised. At the 1:07 mark, he erupts into blazing six-stroke rolls that perfectly complement the guitar solo runs. The phrase ends with some huge triplet flams between the floor tom and snare. (1:07, 140 bpm)



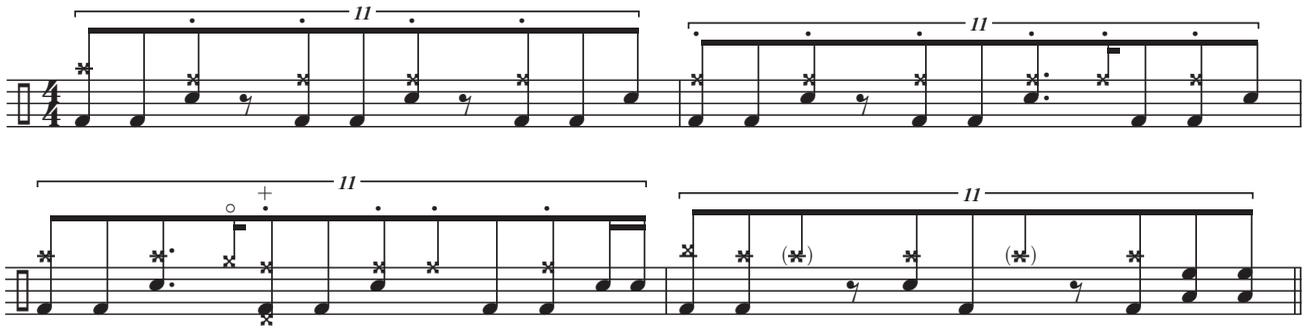
### “Inextricable”

This track features an interesting groove with a quick 16th-note hi-hat pattern in a cycle of 6/4 and 13/8. Orbin composed “Inextricable” toward the end of 2014 and says that it represents one of the more outlying moments on the album. “Everything on this song was written pretty linearly and in a stream-of-consciousness fashion. I was also listening to some Maudlin of the Well, so perhaps that trickled into it.” (3:24, 137 bpm)



### “The Adventures of Nerd Wolf”

The D section of this track morphs into this mind-bending groove based on eleven-note tuplets. It sounds like the tempo increases and the time signature shifts to 11/8, but in reality it remains in 4/4 at the same tempo. (1:11, 112 bpm)

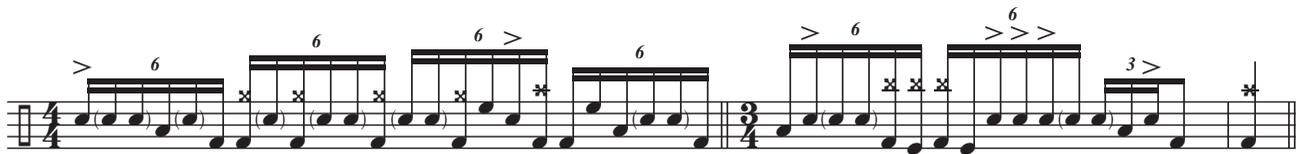


**“The End of an Error”**

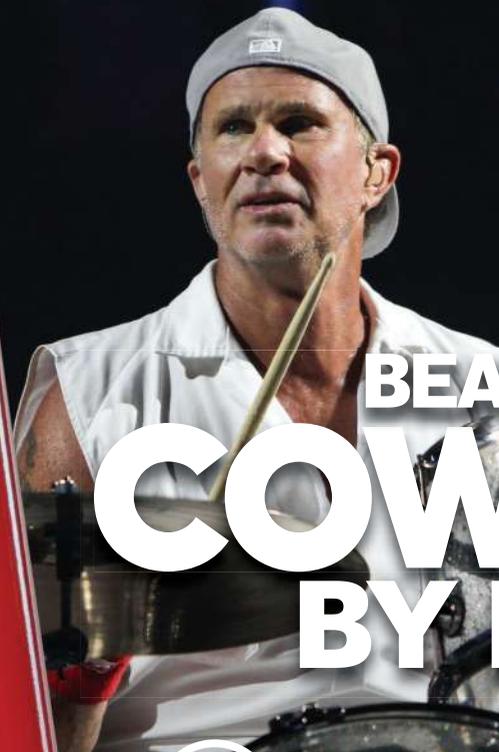
The album's closing track begins with this tricky groove featuring short bursts of double bass and an elusive backbeat placement. “I enjoy the A section's playful rhythmic pattern,” Orbin says. “The snare placement seems like it's on the downbeat, but it's actually on the 8th-note upbeat.” (0:07, 110 bpm)



Orbin closes the album with a blazing run of 16th-note triplets. (4:29, 110 bpm)



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# Reading Syncopated Rhythms

## Part 2: 8ths and 16ths

by Joel Rothman

**Last month we took a look** at syncopated rhythms that incorporate quarter and 8th notes in quarter-note-based meters. In this lesson we'll go a step further and focus on syncopated phrases with 8th and 16th notes.

An 8th note typically falls on the beat or on an upbeat. However, when considering a 16th-note subdivision, the 8th, dotted 8th, or 16th note can fall on the second ("e") or fourth ("a") partials of the beat. Here are six basic syncopated rhythmic patterns that incorporate 8th and 16th notes.

As written:      As played:      As counted:      As written:      As played:      As counted:

1 

As written:      As played:      As counted:      As written:      As played:      As counted:

3 

As written:      As played:      As counted:      As written:      As played:      As counted:

5 

The following 2/4 etude utilizes the previous syncopated 8th- and 16th-note figures within a musical format.



**Joel Rothman** is the author of nearly one hundred drum and percussion books, which sell worldwide through his company, JR Publications. For more information, visit [joelrothman.com](http://joelrothman.com).



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## Five-Note Phrasing

### Part 1: Creating Rhythmic Tension

by Marc Dicciani



**Marc Dicciani** is the dean of the College of Performing Arts at Philadelphia's University of the Arts. He's played with Randy Brecker, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Jon Faddis, Pat Martino, Stanley Clarke, and Christian McBride, among others. Marc endorses Yamaha, Vic Firth, Remo, Zildjian, LP, and Mono. For more information, visit [dicciani.com](http://dicciani.com).

The concept of **tension and release** is fundamental to any style of music. Creating moments of musical conflict followed by resolution, either through compositional or performance devices, can be satisfying and interesting both for the listener and the performer. Incorporating syncopated rhythms, dynamic changes, busier subdivisions, or dissonant harmonies are some of the many ways to create musical tension. In this lesson, we'll explore methods to create tension and release by using five-note phrases.

Highlighting beat 1 of every measure can make the music sound predictable. To create interesting variations, you can play phrases that take more than one measure to complete or that don't begin or end on the first beat.

To become fluent with these groupings, you need to internalize where the five-note phrase begins and ends. Exercise 1 demonstrates a four-measure pattern of continuous 16th notes played using a sticking that allows us to easily hear the accents and five-note groupings. To begin, alternate between the first two measures of paradiddles with accents on each quarter-note pulse and the two measures of the accented five-note sticking. Play a foot pattern that helps you keep track of the pulse and barline.

1

RLRRLRLLRRLRRLRL RLRRLRLLRRLRRLRL RRLRLLRRLRLLRRLR LRLRLLRRLRLLRRLRL

Now play the five-note phrase over four measures of 16th notes. You can alternate between this four-bar exercise and four measures of paradiddles with quarter-note accents.

2

RLRLLRRLRLLRRLRLLR LRLRLLRRLRLLRRLRL RLLRRLRLLRRLRLLRLLR LLRLRLLRRLRLLRRL

Try the following pattern while aligning the bass drum with the start of each five-note phrase and playing quarter notes with the hi-hat. You may want to isolate the first two bars before practicing the full pattern.

3

RLRLLRRLRLLRRLRLLR LRLRLLRRLRLLRRLRL RLLRRLRLLRRLRLLRLLR LLRLRLLRRLRLLRRL

Now we'll break up the continuous five-note groupings by only playing parts of each phrase. In the next three examples, the beginning of each five-note figure is indicated with an accent.

Here are the first three notes of each five-note grouping repeated for four measures. Play quarter notes with your hi-hat foot.

4

Here's a rhythm composed of the first, third, and fourth 16th notes of the five-note phrase.

5

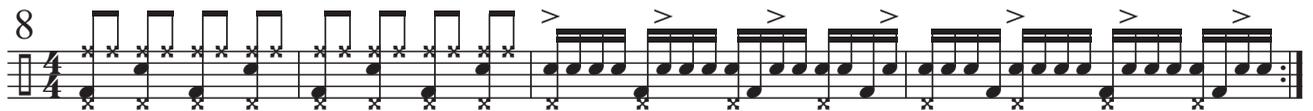
Exercise 6 isolates the first four notes of the phrase.



Let's play two measures of a simple groove, and then play two measures of each of the previous rhythms as a fill. You can develop flexibility with these exercises by starting the fill at different places within the phrase. As you get comfortable with the rhythms, try varying the sticking, orchestration, and accents, and incorporate the bass drum.



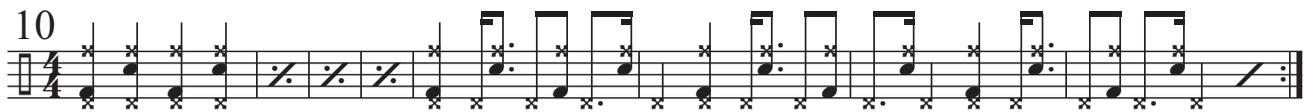
Let's try another fill that includes the bass drum. Once you're comfortable with playing two measures of this phrase, repeat it for four measures to create more musical tension and variety.



Now we'll explore some four-measure over-the-barline grooves. Start by alternating between an easy quarter-note groove and the first two measures of the five-note phrase.



Now we'll alternate between a straight quarter-note pattern and the entire four-measure phrase.



Repeat each of the previous rhythms until you've internalized how the five-note groupings feel over a quarter-note pulse and within a four-bar phrase. Next time we'll explore more challenging patterns based on these ideas.



The Dead &amp; Company album cover for 'Burn It Down'. The background is dark with a field of daisies. A large, flaming skull is the central focus. Text includes: 'THE DEAD DAISIES' at the top left, 'THE NEW ALBUM OUT APRIL 6TH' at the top right, 'ALDRICH LOWY CORABI MENDOZA CASTRONOVO' in the middle right, 'ON TOUR IN AUGUST/SEPTEMBER' at the bottom center, and 'BURN IT DOWN' at the bottom left. Logos for Spitfire Music, SPV, and eOne are at the bottom left. Social media links 'FB.COM/THEDEADDAISIES' and 'WWW.THEDEADDAISIES.COM' are at the bottom right. A smaller version of the album cover is shown in the bottom right corner.

## Up-Tempo Studies

### Part 2: More Exercises for Reflexes and Chops

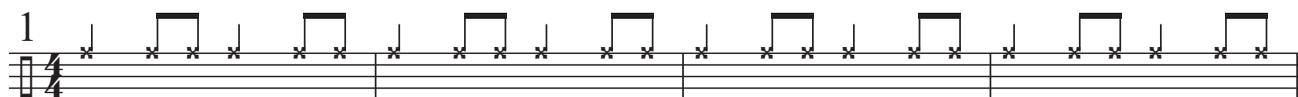
by Steve Fidyk

In this second installment on up-tempo jazz endurance exercises, we'll focus on comping with dotted half notes and dotted quarter notes. I've had great results with these exercises while teaching at Temple University, and I hope you experience similar outcomes. To gain the confidence and language necessary to play faster tempos, it helps to have specific goals and work toward them gradually, patiently, and systematically.

As with the whole- and half-note comping material from last month, find a tempo where you can complete each example without becoming fatigued. Organize your practice sessions by keeping a log of your initial tempos and timing yourself to see how long you can sustain them. As your endurance improves, increase the tempo and see how long you can sustain it in a relaxed manner.

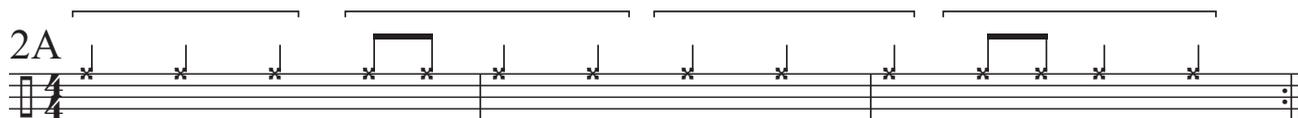
Practice the kick, snare, and hi-hat-foot comping examples in this lesson with the standard jazz ride pattern notated in Exercise 1.

1

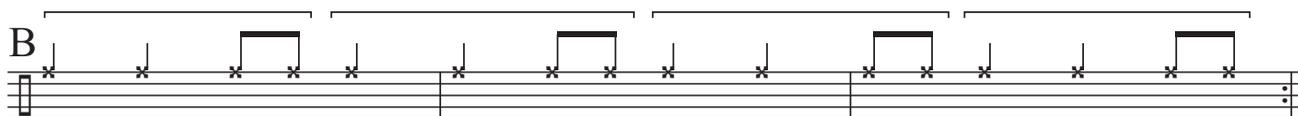


Also try practicing each comping example with these ride variations.

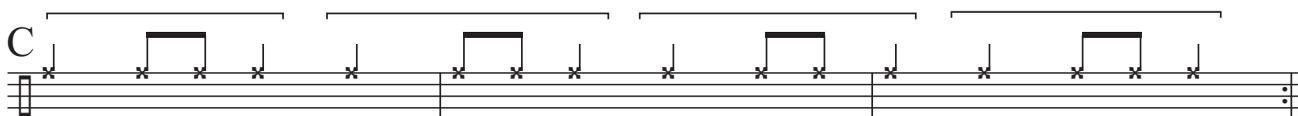
2A



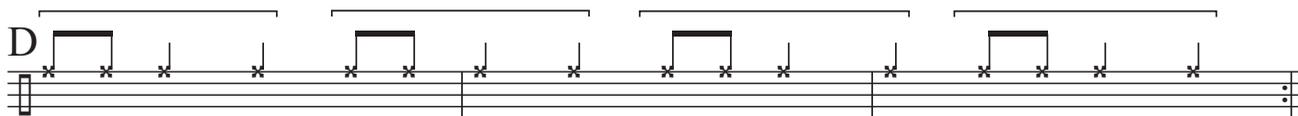
B



C



D



Here are the comping exercises to practice with the previous ride patterns.

3



4



5





## How to Play Odd Time Signatures

### Part 1: 16th-Note Meters

by Aaron Edgar



**Any odd meter based in 16th notes** can be felt as a 16th note longer or shorter than a more common meter based on 8ths or quarter notes. Once you become comfortable with that concept, you can start to internalize any 16th-based meter. The first meter we're going to explore is 15/16. Let's start by relating it to a bar of 4/4, as shown in Exercise 1.



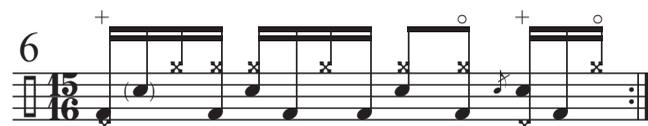
By cutting the last 16th note from the previous example, you now have a bar of 15/16. Go slowly and count out loud. Try to make the first three quarter notes have the same pocket as they had in Exercise 1. If you have trouble feeling the downbeat, try crashing loudly on beat 1. Once you get the hang of that, try alternating between four bars of the 4/4 groove and four bars of the 15/16 version.



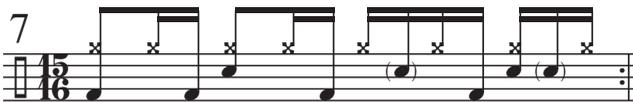
You can also perceive 15/16 as being one 16th note longer than a bar of 7/8. Exercise 3 demonstrates a 7/8 groove. In Exercise 4, there's a 16th note added on the hi-hat to turn Example 3 into a pattern in 15/16. It's a subtle difference, but thinking of 15/16 in this way can influence how you feel and phrase odd-time patterns.



Odd meters based on 16th notes can feel strange because we're used to feeling a quarter- or 8th-note pulse. When that pulse is cut short or extended by a 16th note, it can feel like a rhythmic hiccup. To combat that glitchy feeling, think of a larger rhythmic grouping. Exercise 5 demonstrates a funky 3/4 groove with a heavily accented quarter note. In Exercise 6, three 16th notes are added on the hi-hat to create a flowing groove in 15/16.



To further smooth out the glitchy feel of 16th-note odd meters, you can pull the listener's attention away from a quarter-note pulse. Exercise 7 demonstrates this by placing the kick on the "a" of each beat, which feels like it resolves more naturally when beat 1 rolls around on the repeat.



The next step is to break from 8th notes on the hi-hat. Fifteen is divisible by both five and three. Exercise 8 embellishes the accented kick and snare phrase from Exercise 7 by adding a hi-hat pattern that's grouped in five 16th notes. The five-note hi-hat figure repeats three times within the bar, making the transition back to beat 1 feel more natural.



Exercise 9 utilizes the previous kick and snare pattern with a repeated three-note hi-hat figure. The resulting hi-hat pattern creates a shuffle feel that resolves naturally within the bar of 15/16. Be careful not to perceive the groove as having a triplet feel. It's still based in 16th notes.



Since five and three fit evenly into fifteen, Exercise 10 explores what it sounds like when we combine both of those groupings into a groove. On the hi-hat, we'll play the first, third, and fifth partial of a repeated five-note grouping of 16th notes. The bass drum plays every third 16th note.

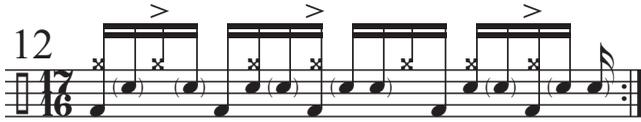


Not every odd 16th-note meter is evenly divisible by three or five. We'll add one 16th note to a 4/4 groove to create a measure of 17/16. Let's start by breaking it into combinations of smaller groups such as threes and twos. Exercises 11–13 explore three of those options.

Exercise 11 places seven groups of two 16ths and one group of three 16ths on the hi-hat.



Next we'll play four groups of two 16ths and three groups of three 16ths in this order: two, three, two, three, two, two, three. The kick and snare follows the hi-hat groupings. Once that's comfortable, mix up the sequence to come up with your own combinations.



This last example incorporates one grouping of two 16ths and five groupings of three 16ths.



You can apply these ideas in infinite ways. Try applying them to your own odd-time grooves.

**Aaron Edgar** plays with the Canadian prog-metal band Third Ion and is a session drummer, clinician, and author. His latest book, *Progressive Drumming Essentials*, is available through Modern Drummer Publications. For more information, visit [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com).





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# Do You Need to Read Music?

## Weighing the Pros and Cons in an Age-Old Argument

by Russ Miller

**This month I want to address** a question I've been asked many times: "Should I learn to read music?" The answer may seem obvious, since any skill can be considered an asset. However, there's an ongoing debate about the negative side effects of learning to play an instrument primarily through method books. After all, music is a language, and you can learn to speak any language without being able to write it. Let's explore the three arguments I hear most often against studying reading.

"Ah, mastery...what a profoundly satisfying feeling when one finally gets on top of a new set of skills... and then sees the light under the new door those skills can open, even as another door is closing."

—Gail Sheehy (American writer)

### People Who Read Music Aren't Creative

I understand the thought process behind the belief that a musician who relies on notation is a "rule follower" with confined creativity. But take a look at the actual definition of the word *notes*. In music, we define them in reference to pitches and rhythms. But there's

another definition: "a brief record of facts, topics, or thoughts, written down as an aid to memory."

Thinking of musical notation as a notepad to aid your memory puts things in a different perspective that's not about limiting creativity but is allowing for more efficient creative expression. If I have an idea, I can write it down in music notation to clarify and log for reference. I have a very detailed lesson book that I carry everywhere. It contains a combination of text and musical notation.

Both serve the same function; they're brief records of thoughts that help me remember new ideas.

### Reading Inhibits My Ability to Memorize

A while back, I asked Steve Smith what he was working on, and he told me he was transcribing a piece in 22/8 for a gig he was playing with Japanese pianist Hiromi. He

was writing a chart to help him memorize the piece. Memorizing something in 22/8 by ear can be very challenging, but being able to write it out can help you analyze and internalize the patterns more efficiently. You can learn to be a high-level player without reading any music, but you won't be able to learn or communicate new or complicated information as easily.

I do the same thing as Steve when preparing new music. I write charts to help me remember arrangements. And taking the time to figure out a phrase well enough to write it out helps me internalize specific figures. However, if you read all the time, your memorizing chops can diminish. I spoke to Kenny Aronoff about this, and he mentioned that it's hard for him to memorize things because he reads charts so often. But I believe writing music into notation helps the brain process and remember things more easily.

### Reading Is a Distraction

This final train of thought is that your listening abilities are hindered when you're reading music. I agree that if you're reading a note-for-note transcription on a gig, then your ability to listen and react is diminished. But your job is to play exactly what's written, so improvising and interacting isn't expected. This is different from reading a chart. A chart is a framework with important details for you to interpret in your own way. When I'm reading charts, I keep my ears open for opportunities to communicate and improvise with the other musicians.

While I can see both sides of the argument, I believe that having proficient reading and writing skills will ultimately make you a more efficient and employable drummer. Just remember to keep all of your other musical tools sharp as well.

**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](http://russmiller.com).



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# NEW *and* NOTABLE

## Tama

### Superstar Hyper-Drive Duo Drumkit

Tama's new Superstar Hyper-Drive Duo features maple shells with black nickel hardware, die-cast hoops, and the aluminum Star-Cast mounting system. The 10x14 Duo snare drum doubles as a floor tom and an extra-deep snare. The drumkit is available in two configurations and in Flat Black, Satin Blue, and Satin Silver Vertical Stripe finishes. List prices for the drumkits are \$1,399.99 and \$1,999.98.

[tama.com](http://tama.com)



## Remo

### Artbeat Artist Collection

Remo's new Artbeat Artist collection features original artwork by drummer Aric Improta of the band Night Verses.

The Artbeat cajon features Aric's Aux Moon graphic. The Quick Wedge coil springs can be removed to achieve a pure bass tone without the snare sound. The djembe comes with a Black Suede drumhead. The Artbeat tambourine features a Skyndeeep head with Improta's New Sun graphic and has a hand-painted Acousticon shell with a single row of jingles.

Artbeat drumheads are available in sizes 10" to 16". The tom heads are constructed with two plies of 7-mil Clear Emperor film for added durability. The snare head is constructed with a ply of 10-mil Skyndeeep Suede film and has a 5-mil clear reverse dot for overtone control.

[remo.com](http://remo.com)



## Rogers Dyna-Sonic Snare

This new ten-lug snare is based on the design of the original model. The shell is constructed of North American hardwoods and is finished in White Marine Pearl, Black Diamond Pearl, or Silver Sparkle with cast, chromed hardware. The floating snare rail system is said to provide sensitivity and control. Dyna-Sonic snares are available in 5x14 and 6.5x14 sizes.

Rogers has also introduced a complete selection of Dyna-Sonic replacement parts that are created to the original specifications.

[rogersdrumsusa.com](http://rogersdrumsusa.com)

## Etymotic Research ER4SR In-Ears and MusicPRO Electronic Earplugs

The ER4SR in-ear monitors (\$349.99) are designed to deliver the increased accuracy and sensitivity required by professional audio engineers and musicians. The right and left channels are matched within 1 dB across frequencies from 100 Hz to 10 kHz, and the monitors have a sleek, anodized-aluminum body and a reinforced, detachable cable.

The MusicPRO battery-powered earplugs (\$299) feature adaptive noise-reduction circuitry that gradually changes the output level as the input volume exceeds safe thresholds. The plugs have a switch that toggles between 9 dB and 15 dB reduction, and they're designed to respond immediately to loud, percussive strikes. The MusicPRO can also be used to enhance soft sounds by 6 dB, if desired.

[etymotic.com](http://etymotic.com)



## Ahead Wicked Chops Pad

The super-compact Chops Pad features a soft gum rubber surface that provides natural rebound and response. Constructed of black anodized aircraft aluminum, the pad mounts to any 8mm cymbal stand.

[aheadrumsticks.com](http://aheadrumsticks.com)



## Vic Firth Matt Garstka Signature Stick

The Matt Garstka signature stick is halfway between Vic Firth's 55A and Buddy Rich signature models and is 16" in length. The profile blends seamlessly from the shoulder to the tip.

[vicfirth.com](http://vicfirth.com)



## RETAILER PROFILE

# Guitar Center Destination Drum Shops



**Guitar Center's Glenn Noyes, at the chain's Sherman Oaks, California, location.**

With more than 280 stores from coast to coast offering just about everything in the way of musical instruments, accessories, and audio gear, you'd think that the retail giant Guitar Center could easily rest on its laurels. "No way," says GC director of category management for drums and percussion Glenn Noyes. "With retail outlets' bottom lines affected by increased competition from online purchasing, innovation is the key. We at Guitar Center wanted to enhance the professional drummer's personal shopping experience. Hence, the inauguration of a new concept in high-end buying, the Destination Drum Shop." Initiated in July 2017 in ten major markets, Destination Drum Shops have now expanded to more than thirty cities. (See the sidebar.)

"DDS aims to reacquaint customers to the look, feel, and sound of the very best in drums and percussion," Noyes continues, adding that the concept has attracted the participation of manufacturers nationwide, including DW, Gretsch, Ludwig, Mapex, Pearl, Roland, Sabian, Sonor, Tama, Yamaha, and Zildjian. "The advantage of an in-store purchase of a coveted instrument clearly personalizes the shopping experience for the individual, and DDS provides that."

MD recently spoke with Noyes to learn more about Destination Drum Shops, and about his own career in drumming and retail.

**As far back as age ten I knew I had the passion for drumming.** In fact, my whole family was musical. My father was a professional trumpet player and my mother a pianist. Luckily I chose drums and my brother picked guitar. In 1976, at age thirteen, I played my first show, in front of 5,000 people at a Fourth of July festival in San Diego.

As I was getting out of school, I began working as a full-time shoe salesman. The day came when my girlfriend suggested I try selling something I was passionate about—like drums! A Guitar Center had recently opened near my home. I applied and got the job on the spot.

I spent six years at GC and sixteen years at West L.A. Music. In 2007 I was asked to return to GC. Now I run the entire drum division of the company.

**I think [the key to my ability to transition to retail] is the fact that I still play professionally,** and I remain passionate about each GC store.

I'm in constant contact with our store associates, because without them there's nothing. It's important to have that balance and satisfaction of both understanding the retail side and continuing to play the instrument.



### Destination Drum Shop Locations

Fountain Valley, CA /// Sherman Oaks, CA /// Rancho Cucamonga, CA /// Pasadena, CA /// Cerritos, CA /// Las Vegas, NV /// Phoenix, AZ /// Denver, CO /// Salt Lake City, UT /// Austin, TX /// Detroit, MI /// Edina, MN /// North Houston, TX /// Oklahoma City, OK /// New Orleans, LA /// Nashville, TN /// Boston, MA /// Orlando, FL /// Gwinnett, GA /// Brooklyn, NY /// Towson, MD /// Arlington, TX /// Austin, TX /// Atlanta, GA /// Chicago, IL /// Hallandale, FL /// Hollywood, CA /// Houston, TX /// La Mesa, CA /// San Antonio, TX /// San Jose, CA /// Manhattan, NY



**Over the past several years the drum industry has become a little bland.** As far as pricing and selection, it's been kind of a race to the bottom. When I went into any store, including GC stores, I really noticed a lack of selection. I remembered that back in the day you could walk into any drum shop and be mesmerized by top-of-the-line sets, colors, and shells. Drummers used to dream about owning one of those kits someday. Conceptually, Destination Drum Shop wants to bring that same experience back to the individual drummer. They can now go into a shop and see an incredible selection of all levels of drums. Moreover, they can feel, touch, and play them all in one location. Initially, it began with drumsets and snare drums, but it's growing into other categories as well.

**You can't ignore the online experience, and we've created a DDS online as well.** Many consumers don't live near a major metropolitan area, so they rely on online for their purchasing purposes. We aim to provide superior service either way.

**The drum "champion" who will serve as the point person at a DDS location** is an experienced, long-term associate who's gone through a great degree of training. In other words, the total answer person for anything and everything drums and accessories. Our vendors have been great at facilitating this, and in many cases the drum champion is visiting the manufacturers' factories and seeing how the products are made. On the consumer side, there will be clinics, seminars, and in-store promotions. They will also be able to interact with factory reps and artists.

**The assortment of gear will vary slightly in each location.** A good example is the Manhattan store. You can't fill that store with "big" or double bass kits. What sells there are smaller jazzette and bop kits that are portable. Conversely, some of the Texas stores will carry larger kits with 24" bass drums, because that's what sells down there. Each store will be stocked with a lot of exclusive products that can't be found anywhere else. In addition, we can custom-design a limited run of high-end kits, and also give the customer a selective choice of five to ten drumsets fully loaded, thereby allowing them to make an educated decision.

**From day one the response has been great from stores, drum companies, and consumers.** When we launched the Destination Drum Shop initiative last July in the first ten markets, we were confident it would be well received by the drumming community. It didn't take long for us to see that this was something that we needed to bring to more Guitar Center stores, so we expanded the shopping experience to an additional twenty-five locations in January. From California to the heart of the South, we're reaching more passionate drummers than ever before, giving them an opportunity to touch, test, and play some of the best-quality gear. We're excited to be one of the few retailers that offer drummers that option. I also definitely see Destination Drum Shops expanding into subcategories like cymbals, percussion, drumsticks, and drumheads in the future.

*Interview by Bob Girouard  
Photos courtesy of Guitar Center*





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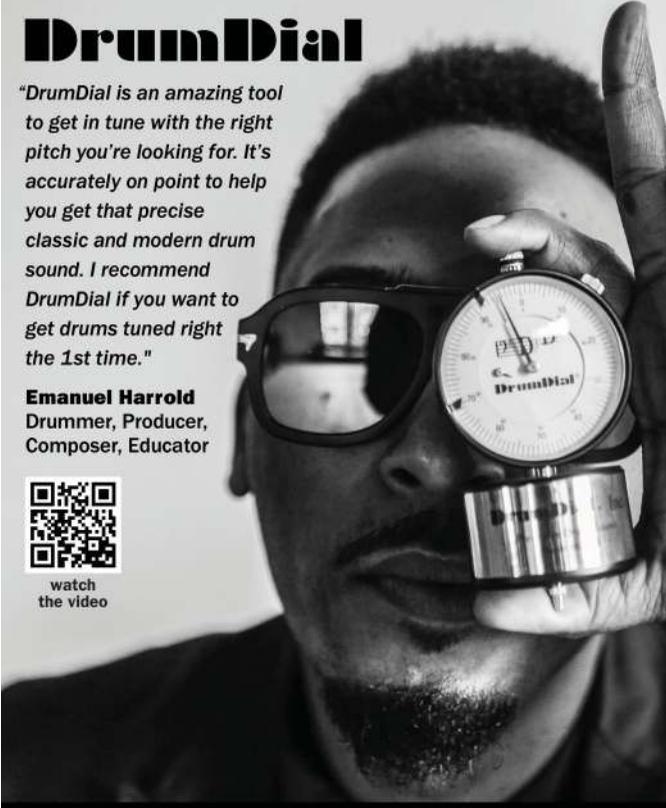
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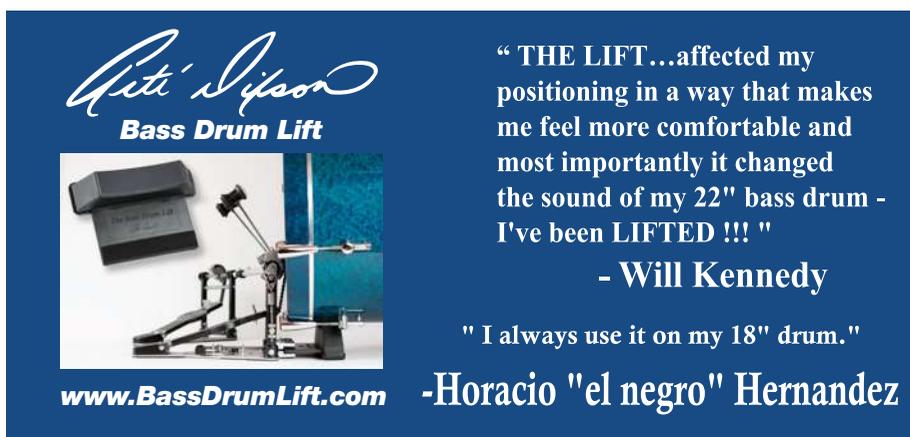
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# CRITIQUE

## RECORDINGS



### Between the Buried and Me *Automata Part I*

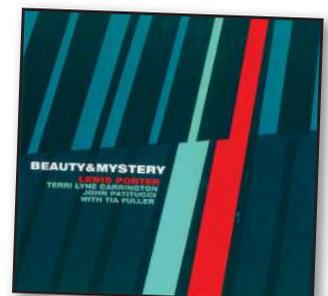
The progressive metal veterans release their highly anticipated eighth full-length album. Drummer **BLAKE RICHARDSON** somehow takes it up a notch.

Once again Blake Richardson's fluent, musical playing is rendered brilliantly by producer Jamie King, a mainstay since *Between the Buried and Me's* 2005 album, *Alaska*. The first of a two-volume conceptually themed work, *Automata Part I* sparkles with crisp acoustic guitar and lush synth textures mixed with the band's typical grinding, odd-time assault. Richardson's powerful tom grooves throughout "Yellow Eyes" stick to the shifting guitar punctuations like glue, and his melodic use of tightly tuned toms on "Blot" stand out—though, really, his playing shines on all of the album's six tracks. *Automata Part I* will quite possibly be considered the band's—and Richardson's—finest work to date. Look for *Part II* midyear. (Sumerian) **Ben Meyer**

### Lewis Porter *Beauty & Mystery*

Let's not mince words: **TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON** sits firmly among the world's greatest jazz drummers. Here's proof.

Journalist/jazz musician Lewis Porter plays piano with an American flair; one imagines Aaron Copland and Bruce Hornsby duking it out in some retro neon bar. His trio compadres of John Patitucci and Terri Lyne Carrington make the most of this meet-up, with Carrington being particularly expressive. She's a chameleon here, recalling the combustible fury of Jack DeJohnette on "Birthplace" and "Bye Bye Blackbird" and the loping punctuations of Frankie Dunlop on "Blues for Trane and McCoy," and dishing out her own pure speedball swing on "Chasing Lines." *Beauty & Mystery* is yet another highlight in the tremendous drumming arc of Terri Lyne Carrington. (Altrisuoni) **Ken Micallef**



To celebrate the reintroduction of Ddrum's Dios drumkit, Ddrum, Zildjian, Evans, and Promark are teaming up with *Modern Drummer* to offer this incredible prize package worth over \$4,990!



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The Zildjian cymbal setup consists of a pair of 14" K hi-hats, a 16" K Dark Thin crash, an 18" K Dark crash, and a 20" K ride. Also included are twelve pairs of Promark Firegrain drumsticks in the winner's preferred size. The kit features Evans UV1 batter heads and Reso 7 bottoms.

\*Snare pictured is not included with the prize. Actual prize snare matches the Dios Satin Gold kit.

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Consumer Disclosure: 1. To enter, visit [www.moderndrummer.com](http://www.moderndrummer.com) between the dates below and look for the Ddrum/Zildjian Contest button (one entry per email address). 2. ODDS OF WINNING DEPEND ON THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE ENTRIES RECEIVED. 3. CONTEST BEGINS MARCH 1, 2018, AND ENDS MAY 31, 2018. 4. Prize Drawing: Winners will be selected by random drawing on June 4, 2018. Winners will be notified by phone or email on or about June 7, 2018. 5. Employees, and their immediate families, of Modern Drummer, Ddrum, Zildjian, Promark, Evans, D'Addario, and their affiliates are ineligible. 6. Sponsor is not responsible for lost, misdirected, and/or delayed entries. 7. Open to residents of the U.S. and Canada, 18 years of age or older. Void in Quebec, Canada; Florida; New York; and where prohibited by law. 8. One prize awarded per household per contest. 9. Prizes: 1st Prize - One (1) winner will receive 5-piece Ddrum Dios drumkit, 5-piece K-Zildjian cymbal set, 12 pairs of Promark Firegrain drumsticks, and Evans drumheads. Approximate retail value of contest is \$4,999. 10. Sponsored by Modern Drummer Publications, Inc., 271 Route 46 W, H-212, Fairfield, NJ 07004, 973-239-4140. 11. This game subject to the complete Official Rules. For a copy of the complete Official Rules or the winner's name, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Modern Drummer Publications/Ddrum/Zildjian/Official Rules/Winners List, 271 Route 46 W, H-212, Fairfield, NJ 07004.

## IceFish *Human Hardware*

A new band project by prog monster **VIRGIL DONATI** is always something to look forward to.

Funded largely by a successful PledgeMusic campaign, *Human Hardware* features plenty of Virgil Donati's signature fireworks fused with sensitive and solid grooves in support of his Italian bandmates, Marco Sfogli (guitar), Alex Argento (keyboards), and Andrea Casali (bass and vocals). Born out of the sessions for Donati's 2013 solo album, *In This Life*, IceFish's material is the perfect setting for the drummer to apply his masterful grasp of odd time signatures and subtly textured yet muscular playing. Donati's deft navigation of the twisting riff in the intro of "It Begins" and clever metric modulation on the title cut are standout moments among the album's nine polished tracks. IceFish's first tour commenced in February with several dates in India and Italy. (icefishband.com) **Ben Meyer**



## Tal National *Tantabara*

The popular band from the West African nation of Niger will appeal to world-music fans and shredders alike.



An African band with international appeal, Tal National recorded its fifth album, *Tantabara*, at its home studio in Niger's capital city of Niamey with returning Chicago-based engineer and drummer Jamie Carter (Psalm One, Chance the

Rapper). The group melds, among other elements, rolling 12/8 rhythms from Nigerian Fuji music, traces of Tuareg blues like that of Bombino, who also hails from Niger, and Malian griot guitar in the vein of Vieux Farka Touré. Fifteen musicians are credited, but **OMAR OMARIS** appears to be the main drumset player, with **KELEGUE** on talking drum and three other performers credited on drums. The drumset grooves are some freakish meeting of Tony Allen and Thomas Pridgen in his Mars Volta years, urgent and aggressive with lots of intricate snare work. The raw production gives the drums a punchy attack on the opening title track and the frantic "Entente," both in multilayered 12/8 time. A rapid-fire guitar intro on "Akokas" melts into a lilting soca-esque groove that develops a shuffling subdivision as the guitar solo builds. Experienced African music scholars and neophytes alike would be wise to check out this record; beyond the brilliant drum performances there is a mountain of music to excavate on repeated listens. (FatCat) **Stephen Bidwell**



## Ivo Perelman *Scalene / Live in Baltimore / Heptagon / Octagon*

Four approaches to free improvisation highlight individualism on the drums.

For those unfamiliar with him, Ivo Perelman is a prolific tenor sax player operating in the avant-garde and free-improvisation realm. His playing can range from sensitive to pointillistic to fiery as he explores moods, shapes, and patterns. Late in 2017 he released a series of CDs in which he engaged in new collaborations. Four of these albums feature drummers versed in exploring the possibilities of texture, color, and abstract rhythms. What makes the explorations special is hearing the individualism that each player brings to the set.

On *Scalene* **JOE HERTENSTEIN** plays with a driving, chattery approach incorporating rubato elements in his delivery. **JEFF COSGROVE**'s performance on *Live in Baltimore* exhibits a subtler, lighter approach, incorporating crisp playing with the use of space while navigating a single fifty-one-minute improvisation. *Heptagon* presents a special treat, featuring **BOBBY KAPP**, who first emerged in the late 1960s as a free-improv drummer. Here he plays with time and space, dancing at the kit with brushes and a bright kinetic energy. Last but not least, *Octagon* finds **GERALD CLEAVER** working magic with his dynamic reactions. An experienced player in both free and more straight-ahead jazz, Cleaver inventively blends the abstract with groove, color with drive.

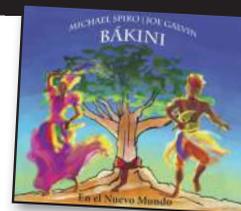
Individually these are all solid releases, but taken collectively, hearing the approach each drummer takes to free improv provides an added reward. (Leo Records) **Martin Patmos**

## TAKING THE REINS

### Michael Spiro/Joe Galvin *Bákini: En el Nuevo Mundo*

Dynamic Afro-Cuban styles from Indiana University.

Traditional Afro-Cuban drumming is rich with rhythm and sound, having developed over decades while drawing on even older sources. Typically, various drums, cowbells, shekeres, and more can be found crossing each other under vocal refrains. Here, percussionists **MICHAEL SPIRO** and **JOE GALVIN**, faculty members at the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University—who actually met as students of drum master Daniel Alfonso Herrera in Matanzas, Cuba—bring together some of these folkloric music ideas within the context of a suite. Much of this works very well, sounding authentic in the percussion and vocal sections, and in later tracks when adding a chorus of horns. As for the arrangements, while the setting does allow for a variety of rhythms and styles to be explored, for some listeners it might diminish the trancelike energy that develops over time in such traditional music. That said, this is all very well played, and the listener seeking inspiration can find many moments to draw on. (IU Music) **Martin Patmos**



## Other Drummer-Leds to Check Out

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# Belle and Sebastian's Richard Colburn



For a touring band, life can imitate *This Is Spinal Tap* in any number of ways, from getting lost backstage to prop and gear malfunctions to, of course, drummers spontaneously combusting.

And then there are predicaments that not even the star-crossed celluloid headbangers in *Spinal Tap* endured, like the jam that Belle and Sebastian drummer Richard Colburn found himself in last August after he was left behind at a Walmart in Dickinson, North Dakota.

The veteran Scottish indie-pop band was making an overnight hop to Saint Paul, Minnesota, where they had a show the following evening. On their way out of town, they decided to swing by Walmart to get supplies. Colburn was the last one in the store, by which time some of his bandmates were already back on the bus and in their bunks for the night. Greeting singer Stuart Murdoch as he exited the store, and then seeing the tour manager inside, Colburn assumed everyone was aware he was still shopping and that they wouldn't leave without him. But what's that old saying about what happens when you assume? That's right: You get stranded in Dickinson, North Dakota.

We'll let Richard take it from here. "I leave the store, it's about 1 A.M., and I think, *This is interesting: The bus doesn't seem to be there. I think, Okay, maybe they've gone round the corner.* I look. No bus. All I have is my credit cards, and I'm in my pajamas. That's it. Cell phone is on the bus.

"I'm walking around with a packet of pistachios and some cheese. I figured I'd wait for an hour or so, and hopefully someone would realize I'm gone. Now it's 3 A.M.—no one's coming back. I'm outside eating nuts in my pajamas. All these cars pull up and stop, look at me, and figure, *No, we're not stopping here.*"

With no cell phone to contact his bandmates or crew, and no

phone numbers committed to memory except a few back home, Colburn tried to use a phone inside the Walmart but was told that international calls weren't allowed. So then he wandered around town looking for a pay phone. No dice.

Colburn finally checked into a motel across the street from the Walmart around 4 A.M. Later that morning, he got online and tried to contact Belle and Sebastian's travel agent. By that time, the band realized the drummer had been left behind, so they took to Twitter in hopes of finding a way to get Colburn to the airport in Bismarck, North Dakota, for a flight to Saint Paul.

A shuttle driver got Colburn to the airport, but there was yet another hurdle to clear. With his passport, like his cell phone, on the bus, the still pajama-clad Colburn had to rely on the kindness of TSA agents to grant him a travel waiver. Once he cleared security, he again had to rely on the kindness of strangers to borrow a fellow passenger's cell phone and arrange pick-up at the Saint Paul airport.

Luckily Colburn made it to the gig with time to spare, his sense of humor intact (telling his bandmates upon arrival, "Guys, I'm back from Walmart, and I picked up a few things for you") and a valuable lesson learned: "I'll be taking my cell phone everywhere I go from now on."

Look for Colburn—and his phone—back in North America this year, touring behind Belle and Sebastian's new triple-EP collection, *How to Solve Our Human Problems*. Touring extensively two years in a row isn't something the band did early on. At the time, Stuart Murdoch sang softly, and often off mic. To compensate, Colburn played with rods and brushes exclusively, but the band still struggled with how to present what was then a very delicate sound in a live setting. Eventually, and with the help of in-ear monitoring, Colburn says the group became more comfortable with performing live.

"We were predominantly a studio band for the first four or five years," he explains. "We weren't really prepared as a live band. Stuart sang very quietly. So for the first couple of records I never used sticks. And I learned to play behind his vocal and sit beneath it. When we started to play bigger venues, we had to learn to play as a live band with a bit of production and so on. And then I started to hit the drums harder and use sticks, so the songs took on a slightly different dynamic. I definitely had to learn quite quickly how to re-approach things." **Patrick Berkery**



## Road Gear

"On tour I usually play a HighWood Custom Mahogany exotic kit with wood hoops," Colburn says. "It has a 10x12 rack tom, a 14x16 floor tom, and an 18x20 bass drum. In our rehearsal room I play a 1976 Legacy Beech kit with a 13" rack tom, a 16" floor tom, and a 14x22 bass drum, with a 14" matching snare in blue sparkle. And I have an old Modern Drum Shop NYC kit that I mainly use in the studio, and occasionally for the odd live show. I bought it twenty-odd years ago, and it's got a 10" rack tom, a 12" floor tom, and an 18" kick drum."

Colburn also employs Paiste cymbals ("a mixture of Signature Traditionals and Signature Dark [Energy], depending on the music"), Vic Firth X55A American classic sticks, DW 5000 hardware, Remo heads, and Protection Racket cases.

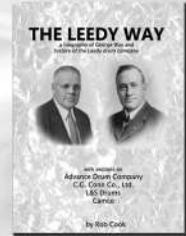


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A and F Drum Co. (72), AE Drums (29), Alternate Mode (160-161), Amedia Cymbals (31,32), Anderson, Ken & Tony Sellers (127-128), Andy and Frank (105), Atelier Drums (111-112), Baker, Billy (34,35), Beat Boogie Drums (139), Beatbox Drums (15), Beato (73), Black Swamp Percussion (37), Bopworks Drumsticks (125), Bum Wrap Drums (85), Bun E Carlos & Randy Rainwater (101,109), Byrne Cymbals (92), Carrington Restorations (124), Chicago Drum (2,3), Chicago Drum Exchange (141-142), Chicagos #1 Drum Lessons (88-89), CooperGroove (51), CrashBamBoom (67), Craviotto Drums (9), Curotto, Campbell & Cooper (41), Custom Tank Drums (151), Cympad (27,36), Les DeMerle (158), Derek The Barber, Doc Sweeney Drums (26), Drugans Drums & Guitars (1,46,47), Drum Factory (115-116), Drum Supply House (61), DRUM! (202), Drummer's Mind, The (138), Dunnett Classic & George Way Drums(140), Ellis Drum Co. (134,135), Eric Binder's Vintage Drums (143), Explorers Percussion (40), Farmer Foot Drums (42), Freestyle Vintage Drums (100), Goodman Drum Co (136), Grandt, John (48), Guitar Center (95-96), Hawthorne Drum Shop (87), Helensson (152), Hit Drum (65), Holland Drums (70), Holloman Custom Drums (68), Humes & Berg (38-39), Independent Drum Lab (74-75-76), Infinity Drumworks (79), JC's Drum Center of Detroit (19), JamTec (49), Jenkins-Martin Drum Co. (52), Johnson, Jim (108), Joe Luoma (117-118), Joey Boom Drums (119), Kbrakes (71), Kelly Shu (43), Klash (12,13), Krutz, Jim (69), KUMU Drums (14), LA Backbeat (20), Larsen, Keith (130-131), Liverpool Sticks (28), Lowboy Beaters (4), Ludwig Drum Co. (44,45,53,54), Luoma, Joe (117,118), LykaStore, Made In Chicago Project (162-163), Matt Nolan Custom (164), Matthews, Larry (97), Mattoon Vintage and Custom Drums (120), Matt's Vintage Drums (93-94), MaxHeads (114), Maxwell Drums (8), McB Drums LLC (98), McCourts Music (80,81,82), Modern Drummer (200), Mothertone (57-58), Murray, Jim (121-122), Music Dojo (30), Ninja Kick Percussion (137), NotSoModernDrummer (159), O'Hara, Tim (66), On The Ropes (203)One Up, One Down Vintage Percussion (83-84), Paiste (33), Palmetto Drum Co (132,133), PAS (201), PinchClip (27), PLAYDRUMS (150), Poradzisz, David (106), Predator Percussion (111-112), RB Drum Sticks (169), rbh Drums (86), RCD Vintage Drums (148,149), Remo (102), Rickman, Bob (24), Rogers (7), Ruff, Lee (55-56), Sabian (104), Scalia, Chuck (59-60), Sharp, Bob (62-63), Side Kick Drums (11), Skins N Tins (103), Sonor (90-91), Squires, John (64), Standard Drum Co. (110), Stellar Hoops! (111-112), Stick Stuff Grips,XCEL (145), Sticks N Tones (126), Stone Drum Company (22,23), Sully's Custom Drums (113), The Kelly Shu (43), Texas Vintage Drums (93,94), TRX Cymbals (27,36), Three On The Floor (20,21), ThunderEcho Drum Company (25), Trick Percussion (77-78), Unix (144), Vic's Drum Shop (152,153,154), Vintage Cymbals (10), WFLIII Drums (16,17), White, Chris (63), Wilson, Phil (129), Wood and Weather Drum Co (123), Yamaha (50), Zildjian (5,6)

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## The 42nd Annual Percussive Arts Society International Convention

Clinics and performances abound as the industry's biggest names gather for drumming's largest event

This past November 8–11, thousands of drummers and percussionists of all levels gathered at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis to participate in four days of nonstop clinics, concerts, lectures, master classes, workshops, and panel discussions. The drumset portion of the event was rebranded as Drumfest with the help of a new lead sponsor, the educational website Drumeo.com.

The drumset artists were presented in clinic/performance and master class formats. The clinic/performances occurred in a ballroom with a full stage and a large-scale audio-visual production. The master classes were given in a more intimate setting so that attendees could interact more closely with the performers.

Thursday's clinicians included hybrid electronic/acoustic drummer Kaz Rodriguez, August Burns Red's Matt Greiner, funk/hip-hop great Adam Deitch, and renowned soloist Eric Moore II. Nashville-based drummer/educator Keith Dudek and University of Texas faculty member Wayne Salzman II conducted master classes; the latter presented concepts from his book *Developing Melodic Language on the Drums*. Thursday's events concluded with an evening concert by fusion great Chad Wackerman and his trio.

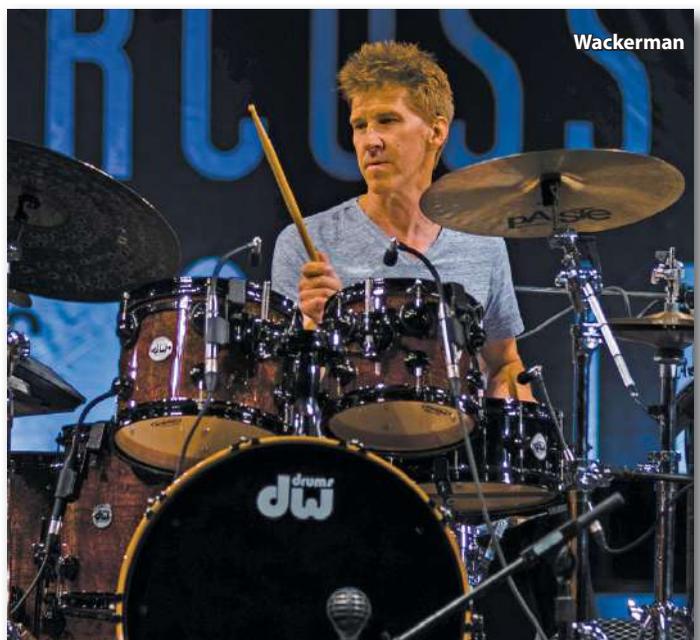
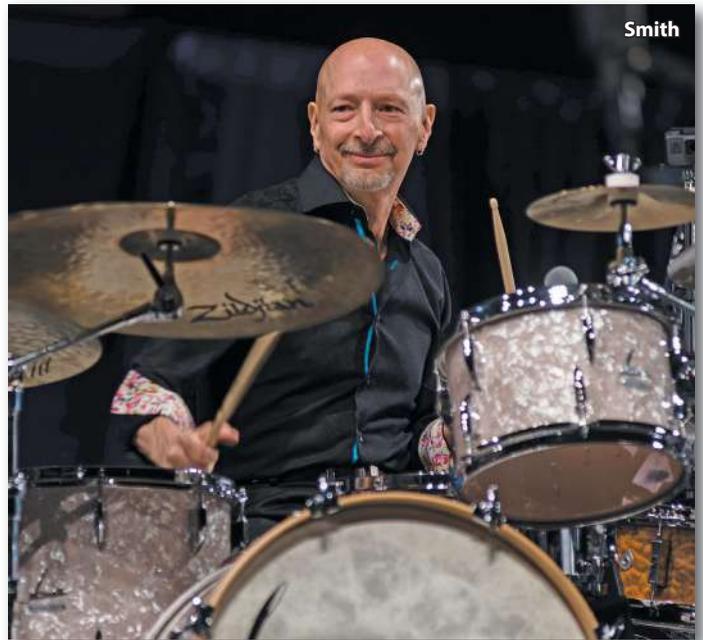
Friday's clinicians included Broadway drummer Andrés Forero, swing specialist Bernie Dresel, rock/hip-hop innovator Daru Jones, and rock/fusion legend Steve Smith. The master classes featured a technique-focused presentation by former Freddie Gruber student Bruce Becker, as well as a re-creation of the traps style of drumming used to accompany silent-film-era productions, by drum historian Daniel Glass.

The final day of PASIC included clinics by New Orleans jazz great Johnny Vidacovich, pop/R&B drummer Hannah Welton, funk/rock drummer Nikki Glaspie, and Stevie Wonder's Stanley Randolph. Sergio Bellotti conducted a master class on drumset fundamentals, and Rio de Janeiro-born percussionist Christiano Galvão dug into ideas from his book *Creative Brazilian Drumming*. Austin-based drummer Brian Ferguson gave the final master class of the convention and focused on serving the song with tasteful ideas and an impeccable feel.

PASIC 2017 concluded with an evening concert by the Airmen of Note big band with Steve Smith on drums. Organizers plan to bring the convention back to Indianapolis this November 14–17. Check [pasic.org](http://pasic.org) for more information.

**Text by Michael Dawson**

**Photos by Warren LaFever**





Jones



Glaspie



Greiner



Welton



Randolph



Deitch



## Ray Lucas: 1939-2017

The loyal NYC drummer had the music in him.

Ray Lucas was an unsung hero of the dynamic New York City R&B/soul scene of the '60s and '70s, recording with Aretha Franklin, Roberta Flack, George Benson, and many others. A self-taught drummer who didn't read music, his motto was "If I can hear it one time, I got it."

When King Curtis auditioned Lucas in the basement of Smalls Paradise, Curtis asked jazz great Roy Haynes to come along and help him check out the nineteen-year-old prospect. Haynes gave his stamp of approval, and Lucas went on to perform with Curtis for five years as a member of one of the most famous rhythm sections of that era, which also featured Chuck Rainey on bass, Cornell Dupree on guitar, and either George Stubbs or Richard Tee on piano.

When a young Jimi Hendrix—who'd also played with Curtis—offered to take him to the U.K. to form the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Lucas turned him down. He didn't want to leave New York. As Ray said later, "In less than two years Hendrix was the biggest thing out there."

But Lucas's natural talent couldn't be hidden. Reflecting on his performance with Dionne Warwick and the Lincoln Center symphony, the non-reader said, "I was scared, but I *knew* the music. That's when I realized that it goes both ways. I had something that [more schooled drummers] didn't have, or I wouldn't be there."

"Ray was absolutely phenomenal," Bernard Purdie says. The secret to his success? Lucas modestly said it was "being with good musicians. And I'm not talking about name musicians. I'm talking about *listening* to good musicians and being very conscious of what they're doing.

"With me," he added, "if the music's good, that's good enough for me. There's nothing like playing in a good live band." **Jim Payne**

## Frank Capp: 1931-2017

Drummer and friend Gerry Gibbs remembers the life and career of a giant of L.A.'s golden age of music making.

This past September the legendary drummer and big band leader Frank Capp passed away in Los Angeles, at the age of eighty-six. Many of Capp's fans knew him for his work with some of the most legendary big bands of all time. Others knew him as one of the most swingin' small-group drummers who'd accompanied the world's great soloists. Truth is, Frank was one of the last of the legendary drummers who was known for being able to do it *all*, a reputation built on a lifetime of experiences working with the most revered bandleaders of all time.

Capp hit the scene as a teenager in the late 1940s and in time began working in a number of well-known swing bands. In the '50s his musical journey deepened as he began working with the finest beboppers on the scene. And in the '60s, as a result of his well-honed ability to play anything and everything correctly the first time he attempted it, he became an in-demand studio musician for everything from blockbuster Hollywood film sessions with orchestras to jazz dates to rock and pop studio recordings—and not just on the drums, but on whatever percussion instruments were needed.

In the '70s Capp branched out even further, becoming a first-call drummer for all kinds of television work, playing steadily with Terry Gibbs, my father, on *The Steve Allen Show*, in addition to many other television jobs. Several decades after he'd begun, in the '80s, Frank began a second career as one of the busiest and most respected music contractors in all of Los Angeles, entrusted to put bands together for important Hollywood projects and concerts due to his ability to inherently know who was the right person for any job.

From the '90s right up until his passing, Capp was able to use all of his varied skills, essentially doing whatever he wanted to, whether it was performing in top big bands, tracking a Hollywood



studio session, playing with a little jazz group, or contributing to a big-budget rock session, even if that meant simply playing a tambourine part.

The world has certainly lost a one-of-a-kind player with the passing of Capp. Just take a look at a partial list of his credits and try to think of more than a handful of other players who could possibly have covered them all—Ben Webster, Sonny and Cher, Frank Zappa, Dinah Washington, Stan Kenton, Frank Sinatra, the Wrecking Crew, Peggy Lee, Chet Baker, the Monkees, André Previn, Sarah Vaughan, Dizzy Gillespie, Joe Pass, Steve Allen, Neal Hefti, Shorty Rogers, Glen Campbell, Phil Spector.... I'll stop there, though I could easily add another hundred names.

Whether you're aware of it or not, there's an astounding amount of music that you've most certainly heard featuring contributions by Capp, from hit records to national commercials to TV show themes. Remarkably, however, in the heady days of the '70s and '80s, his proudest musical accomplishment was the Nat Pierce/Frank Capp Juggernaut Orchestra, which recorded three albums that remain well known among big band lovers today.

As a kid growing up in L.A., I saw many big bands that were either all white or all black; Capp's sixteen-piece group was the only one I knew of that featured an even number of white and black musicians.

"We've lost a true keeper of big band drumming. Frank was a friend, a golfing buddy, and a real character. I remember that he was proud of a remark he made after I hit a golf ball into a grove, ricocheting off five trees and dropping into the weeds. 'It sounds,' Frank announced, 'like I'm out here with Chick Webb!'"

—Jeff Hamilton

Frank helped so many musicians—black, white, Hispanic, Asian.... If you were a great player, he helped you get into the scene. That tells you the kind of person Frank was.

I knew Frank my whole life; he hooked *me* up a lot too,

whether lending me drums or recommending me for prime gigs with SuperSax, Lalo Schifrin, and others. He was a huge part of my life, a great musician, and a wonderful friend—and not just to me, but to so many musicians from all over the world. We all loved and will miss you, Frank. Thank you for the music you made, which we will listen to for the rest of our lives.

## INDUSTRY HAPPENINGS

### Cascio Music Drummerfest 2017

The instrument retailer's celebration gathers some of drumming's best and brightest stars and brands.

This past October 14, the music retailer Cascio Interstate Music hosted its seventeenth annual Drummerfest, in New Berlin, Wisconsin. The free event featured performances by Daru Jones (Jack White), Joe Saylor (*The Late Show With Stephen Colbert*), and Will Kennedy (Yellowjackets). After their performances, the artists met with fans and offered insight into their playing. Representatives from DW, Tama, Pearl, Yamaha, Zildjian, and Paiste were also on site, showing their latest drum gear and offering exclusive discounts.

Jones performed first, on his DW/PDP New Yorker drumset along with his signature Paiste PSTX DJs cymbals. "Daru's playing featured 'un-quantized' grooves—[patterns that are] slightly off time yet in the pocket at the same time," Cascio drum and percussionist specialist Scott Thayer explains. "This results in an extremely fat groove, which delighted the crowd and the other artists."

Saylor performed in a trio setting with an upright bassist and saxophonist. The group played a unique set that comprised music influenced by Latin and New Orleans styles. "Joe also did one of his famous tambourine solos, which was an amazing display of hand work,



Jones, Saylor, and Kennedy

foot work, and voice," Thayer says. "It brought the house down."

Kennedy closed out the individual performances with an energetic set. "His solos were smooth, fluid, powerful, creative, and flamboyant all at once," Thayer says. "He talked with the crowd with great enthusiasm and humor, and his stories and insights were inspiring and entertaining." The day concluded with a jam session in which the three performers traded solos and played each other's kits.

"Events like this are happening less and less around the country, especially events that are totally free for the public," Cascio Music CEO Mike Houser says. "We're proud to continue the tradition, and look forward to Drummerfest 2018."

### Who's Playing What



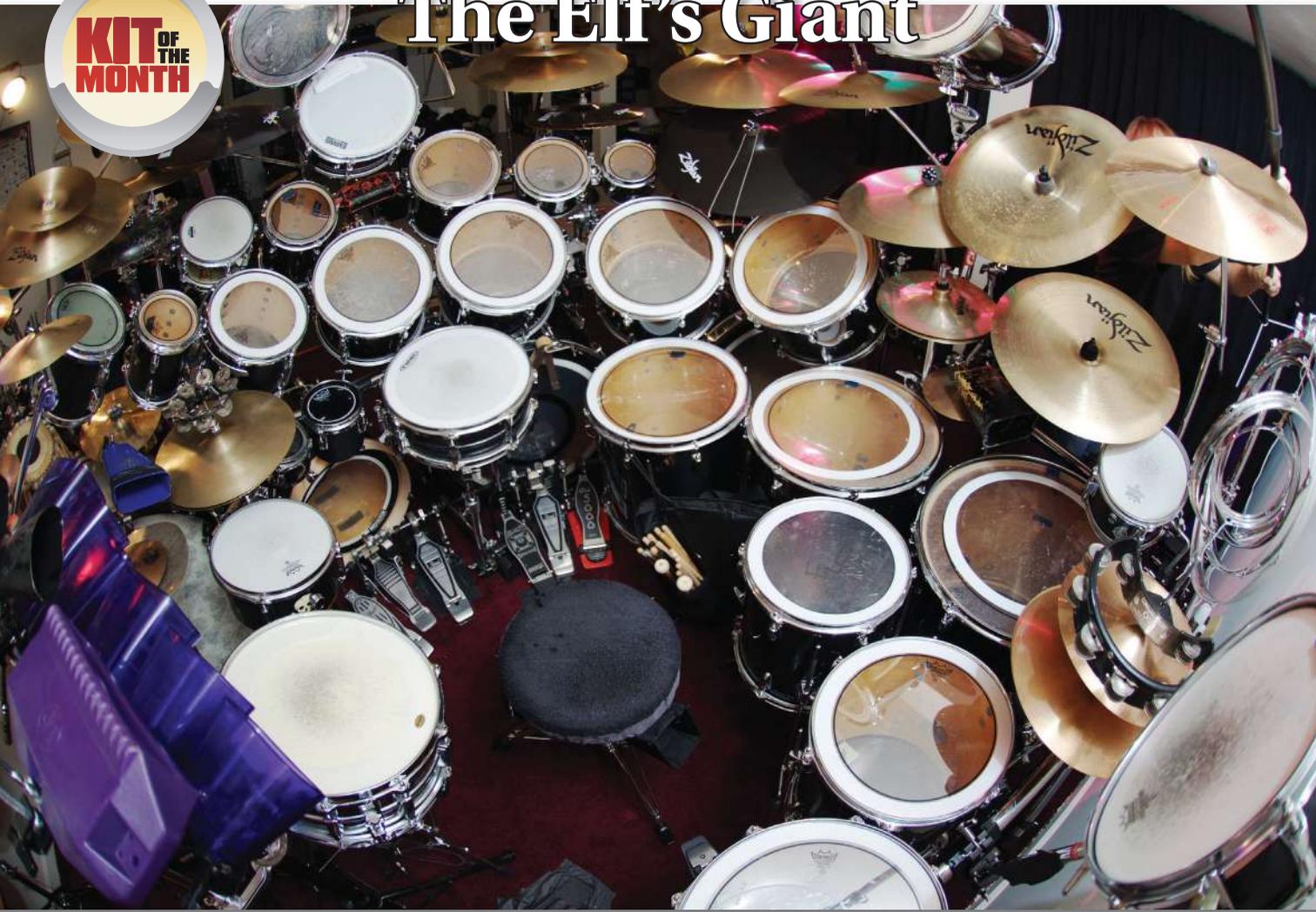
Jared Kneale (Hunter Hayes) is playing Doc Sweeney drums.

Florian Alexandru-Zorn (author/educator, right), Christopher Smith (the Internet), Sean Friday (Dead Sara), Jordan Harvey (Mason Grace), and Michael Kelton (Zane Williams) have joined the Paiste artist roster.





# The Elf's Giant



For Eddie "the Elf" Piotrowski of Edison, New Jersey, it took more than ten years of collecting and assembling to build this month's monster setup. Piotrowski explains that his extensive collection of individual drums and reclaimed sets, which includes a vintage 1978 Slingerland kit in a Blakrome finish, originally formed the foundation for his current massive rig.

"I have a storage locker filled with various kits of different sizes that are appropriate for various gigs," says Piotrowski, a drummer, producer, and collector with a passion for refurbishing and customizing equipment. "I wanted to create a set where I could be surrounded and experience every possible drum and percussion sound."

The outfit features fifty-eight drums—including ten bass drums in sizes from 16" to 32", with twelve foot pedals; seven floor toms

from 6" to 15"; thirty-three toms from 6" to 15"—and various timbales, bongos, a conga, and a cuíca. Surrounding the drums are nearly eighty cymbals, with eight sets of hi-hats. Various percussion instruments adorn the set, including nine cowbells, eight woodblocks, two fire bells, a saw blade, and a 32" gong. Piotrowski ties it all together with a Gibraltar rack, memory clamps, and plenty of boom arms.

"This set has been a labor of love that embodies my dedication to my art," Piotrowski says. "It's developed a life of its own and will continue to live and grow as I find and customize new, inspiring pieces."

A video series created with the producer and photographer Riki B. offers an in-depth look at the set. To see the complete setup and explanatory videos, search for "Elf's giant drumset" on YouTube.

**Photo Submission:** Hi-res digital photos, along with descriptive text, may be emailed to [kitoftthmonth@modern drummer.com](mailto:kitoftthmonth@modern drummer.com). Show "Kit of the Month" in the subject line.



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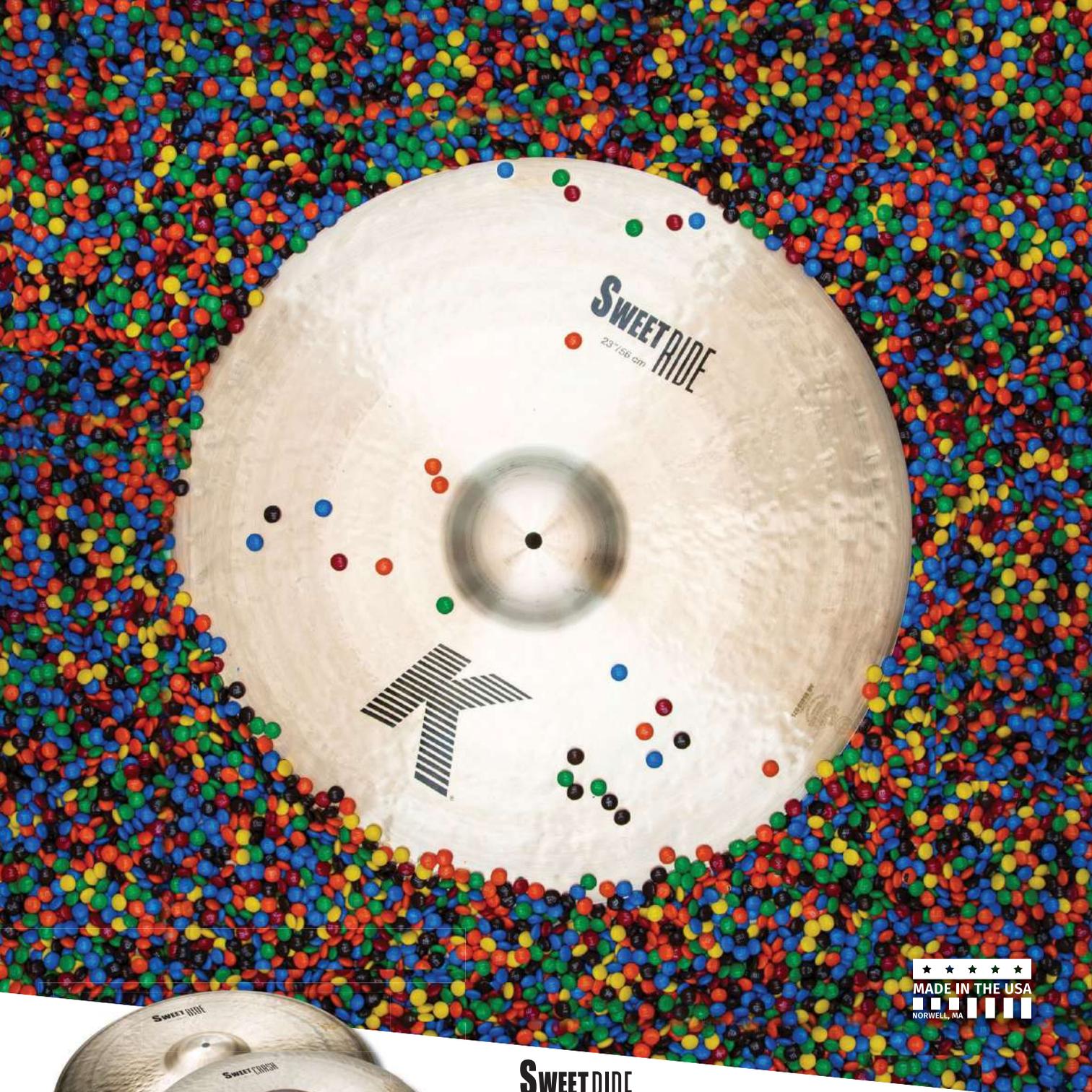
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