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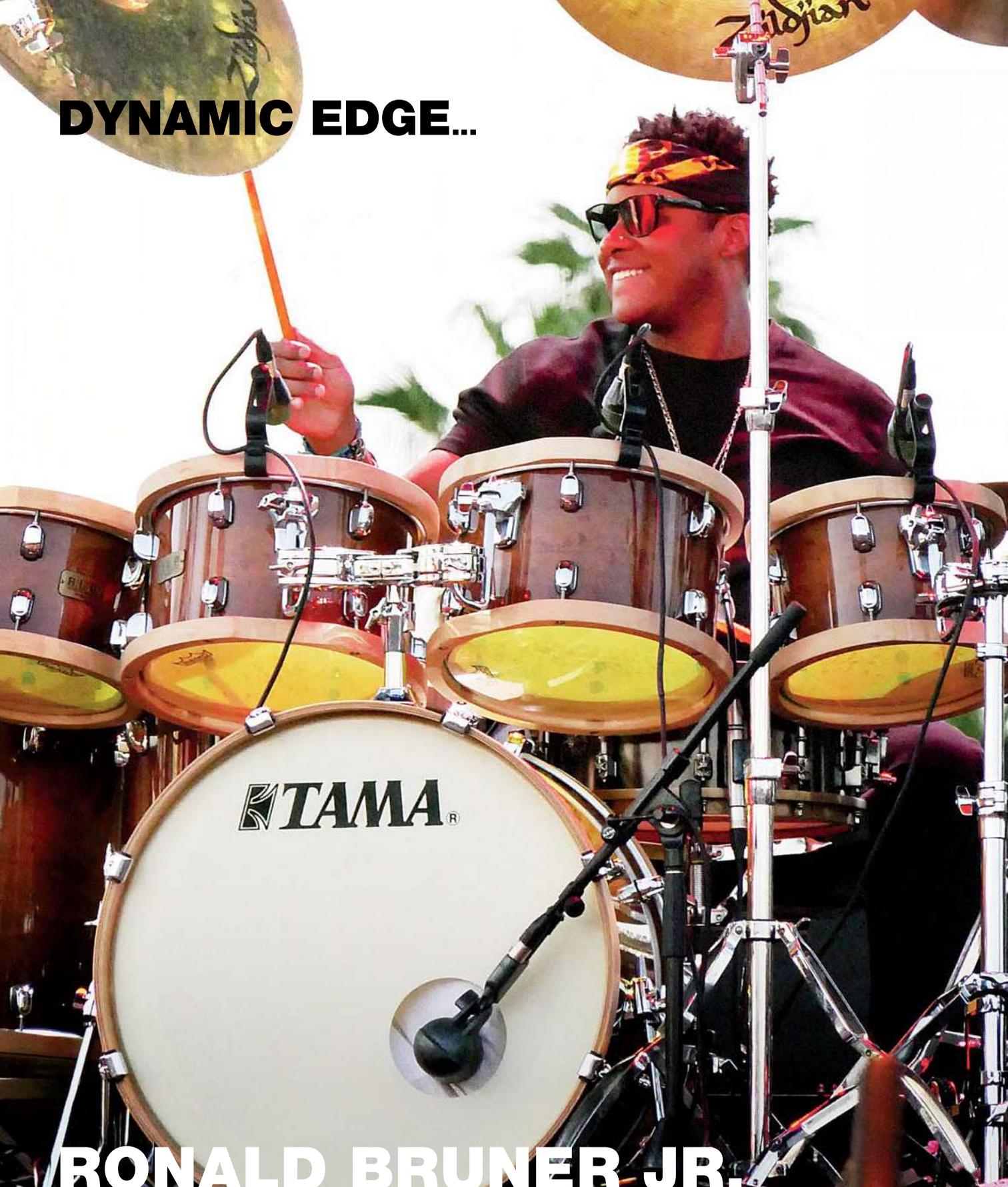
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Ronald is currently on tour with Jazz Saxophonist Kamasi Washington.

Coachella 2018

AN EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

The Boys Are Back in Town!

Hi, everyone. It feels as though I was just wishing you a happy New Year and we were all freezing in the cold—especially here in the northeast—and now I'm saying, "Happy summer!"

Since we last spoke, I've been finishing up writing and recording with the original band members of my '70s group, Mantus. We recently released a full-length album to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of our debut, which came out back in 1978. While we're very proud of that album—at the time it was a top-ten hit on *Billboard's* international dance charts—this time we went back to the pop and rock influences that we all grew up with. It's been fun (most of the time) working with all the new recording technology and, now that it's out, experimenting with the self-promotional power available through social media. It's a whole different ballgame, but we're adapting the best we know how. In a way, we've come full circle with this record, because our original engineer, Butch Jones, co-mixed the album, and my son, Matty, produced, played various instruments, and co-wrote with us. I'm happy to say that we're all thrilled with how it came out. Thankfully, it's being accepted pretty well so far. I guess you *can* teach old dogs new tricks.

If you haven't been playing as much as you used to, think about setting some time aside so that you can get back to it, even if it's just for fun (and if you're my age, exercise). Hey, you never know where it could lead. These days it's never too late to live your dreams. There were times over the past twenty years when I didn't touch my drums for months at a time. Once I slowly started getting back into it, I found myself enjoying it more and more. So get started!

Another thing I'd like to share with you is that *Modern Drummer* has recently partnered with drummer and sound specialist David Frangioni on his new book, *Crash: The World's Greatest Drum Kits From Appice to Peart to Van Halen*, which features photos and descriptions of iconic instruments used by drumming legends, going back more than half a century. Among them are Carl Palmer's stainless-steel kit (bought from Ringo Starr), Hal Blaine's famous multi-tom set, Alex Van Halen's 2015 Ludwig set, and one of Buddy Rich's Slingerland kits. Every kit was set up by longtime drum expert John Douglas and photographed by world famous rock photographer Mark Weiss.

Even cooler, many of the drums featured in the book are displayed in a brand-new museum housed at the Frangioni Media and Frangioni Foundation's nonprofit Hit the DEC Drum Experience Center in south Florida. We're especially honored that Hit the DEC brings the *Modern Drummer* Hall of Fame to life by displaying a number of Readers Poll plaques next to the recipients' drums. *Crash* hits shelves in August and will feature special video content only available via *Modern Drummer's* website and social media. Keep up with *MD* for more details and special upcoming events.

Finally, a bit of sad news. As many of you surely already know, this past February we lost Leon "Ndugu" Chancler, whose amazing career you can read all about in this month's Backbeats department, in addition to tributes to Mr. Big's Pat Torpey and solo-drumming pioneer Z'EV. Besides being a great drummer and teacher, Ndugu was a friend and a true gentleman. For me and many others, his drumming on Michael Jackson's mega-hit "Billie Jean" proved that a drummer could play as precisely as a drum machine and still groove like only a human can. We owe each of these gentlemen for their inspiration.

Until next time, hug the ones you love, play your music, and enjoy the issue.



Billy Amendola
Editor at Large



Jeff Smith

MODERN DRUMMER

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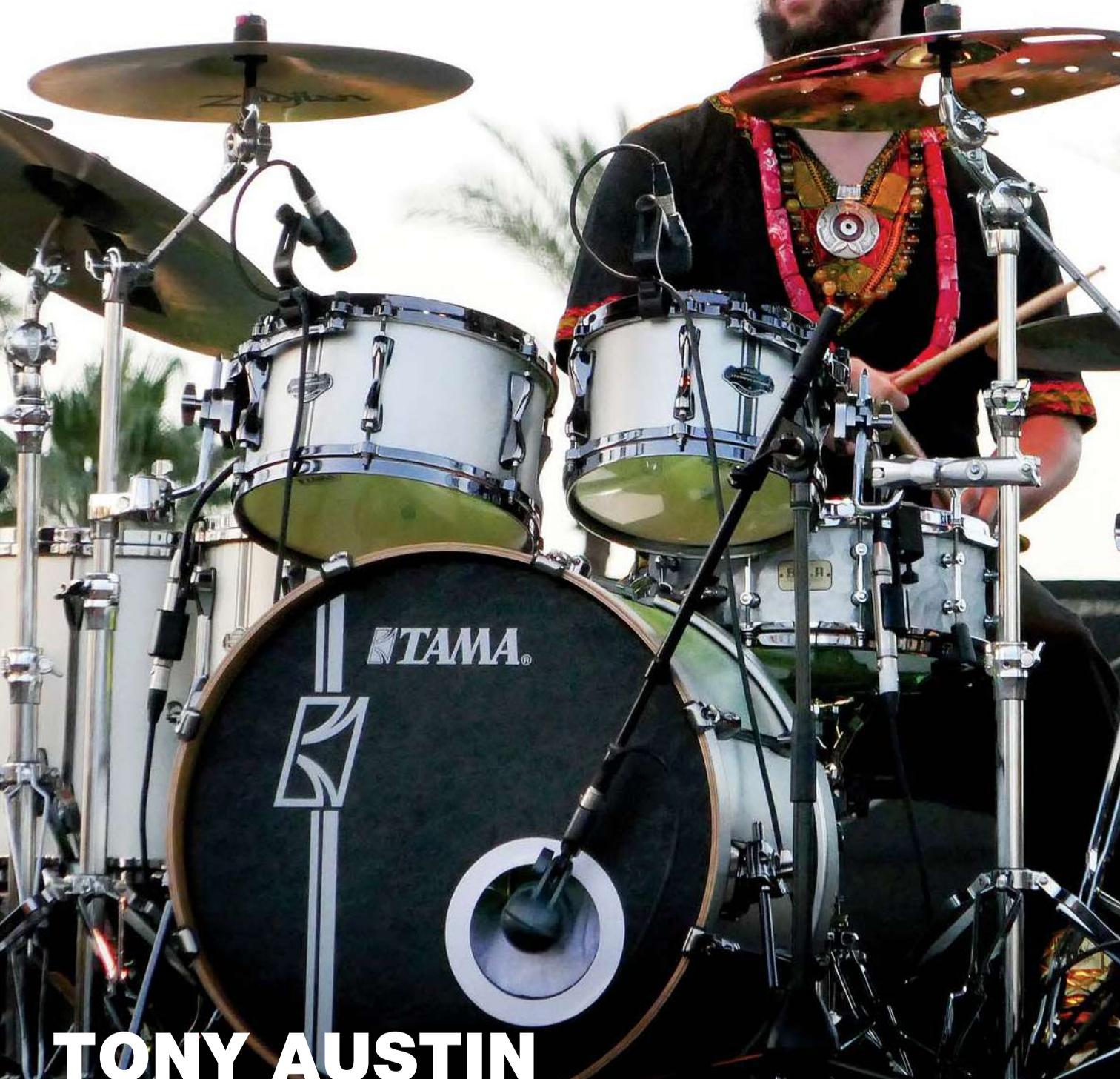
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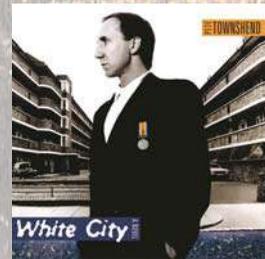
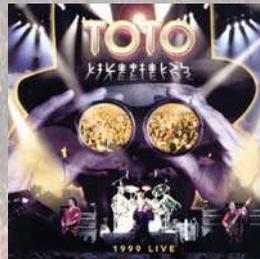
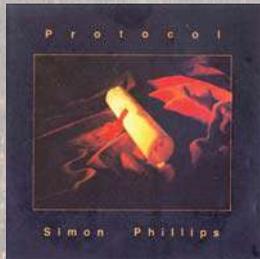
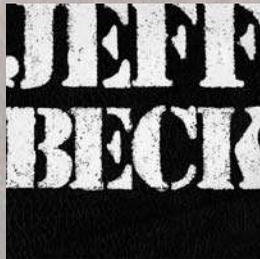
TONY AUSTIN

Is a drummer, producer, composer, and sound engineer renowned for his technical skills and versatility. It's this wide-ranging list of abilities that keeps Tony in high demand and a continual presence in today's music scene. Tony has been displaying his rhythmic prowess on his new **Superstar Hyper-Drive Duo** kit.

Tony is sharing the stage with Ronald on Kamasi Washington's Heaven and Earth tour.

Coachella 2018

What's Your Favorite Simon Phillips Performance?



This month we check in with Simon Phillips, the U.K. jazz, fusion, and rock monster and former Toto drummer, who's on the road in support of his latest solo project, *Protocol 4*. To find out which performances from the versatile master's extensive catalog are most celebrated among the drumming community, we asked our readers and social media followers to name some of their favorites from Phillips' output. Here are a few of the responses.

Derek Sherinian's *Black Utopia* [2003]. This is a great album with many outstanding players, and Phillips' drumming glues it all together. There's lots of variety—from full-on prog-metal to quieter, groovier songs. It's a lesson on what to play and when to play it.

Liam Archer

Phillips' playing on Pete Townshend's *Deep End Live!* [1986] is a monster performance of feel and groove. His interplay with the band is incredible, and his double bass riffs and grooves are so tasty. Stellar!

Joseph Lynch

"The Pump" for its groove and "Space Boogie" for its complexity and feel. Both are on Jeff Beck's *There and Back* [1980]. Also, check out the entirety of Phillips' first *Protocol* release [1988], on which he played every instrument. I have an iTunes playlist dedicated to him with over a hundred tracks that he appears on.

Bill Fleming

"Jake to the Bone" and the drum solo afterward from Toto's *Livefields* [1999] are amazing. Looking back, he's done wonderful things with Toto. It's quite the task to replace Jeff Porcaro and get Toto fans to love you.

Erik Smits

Pete Townshend's "Give Blood" from *White City: A Novel* [1985]. It has everything a rock song could have to make a drummer happy to play it—double bass, bell patterns, tom grooves, fills, dynamics...it's all there!

Kyle Denney

Pete Townshend's *Empty Glass* [1980], *All the Best Cowboys Have Chinese Eyes* [1982], and *White City: A Novel*, and Jeff Beck's

There and Back always top the list for me. I've been to many drum clinics, and Simon's was one of the only ones in which I've taken away valuable tools and concepts to practice and use—not that I'll ever be in his league!

Tony DeMagistris

The "V8" solo from Phillips' own *Protocol* album. *Modern Drummer* included it on a sound supplement in the December 1990 issue. Phillips plays a fantastic solo over a keyboard line. I love the way he incorporated all the elements of his huge kit, and his trademark drum sound. For me, he always had the biggest and best drum tones, in the studio or live.

Scott Apthorpe

"V8" from *Protocol*. I heard that track the day before I bought my first drumset, and I wondered how I'd ever play something like that. It really inspired me.

Carlos Leiva

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

Loyal Praise

I've been a subscriber to *Modern Drummer* since the very first issue, and I want to say that for more than forty years, *MD* has been a welcome arrival in my mailbox. It has been and remains the classiest drum magazine. Sometimes the original is the best! I really appreciate the diversity of coverage that builds bridges among drummers of all generations and all styles—pros and hobbyists, and classic and contemporary players. There's a dignity and elegance to the articles, interviews, and gear reviews that really underscores the beauty of percussion as an art form. Wonderful work, and thanks!

P.S., I love the *Modern Drummer* Podcast with Mike and Mike!

Richard Hirsh, Wynnewood, PA

Dropped Beats

In the Must-Have Gear piece with Brad Wilk in the April issue, we quoted Brad as saying that Paiste's Signature line has been discontinued. It has not.

In the photo caption on top of page 57 in the March issue, Paul Butterfield is pictured fourth from the left, not Charlie Musselwhite.

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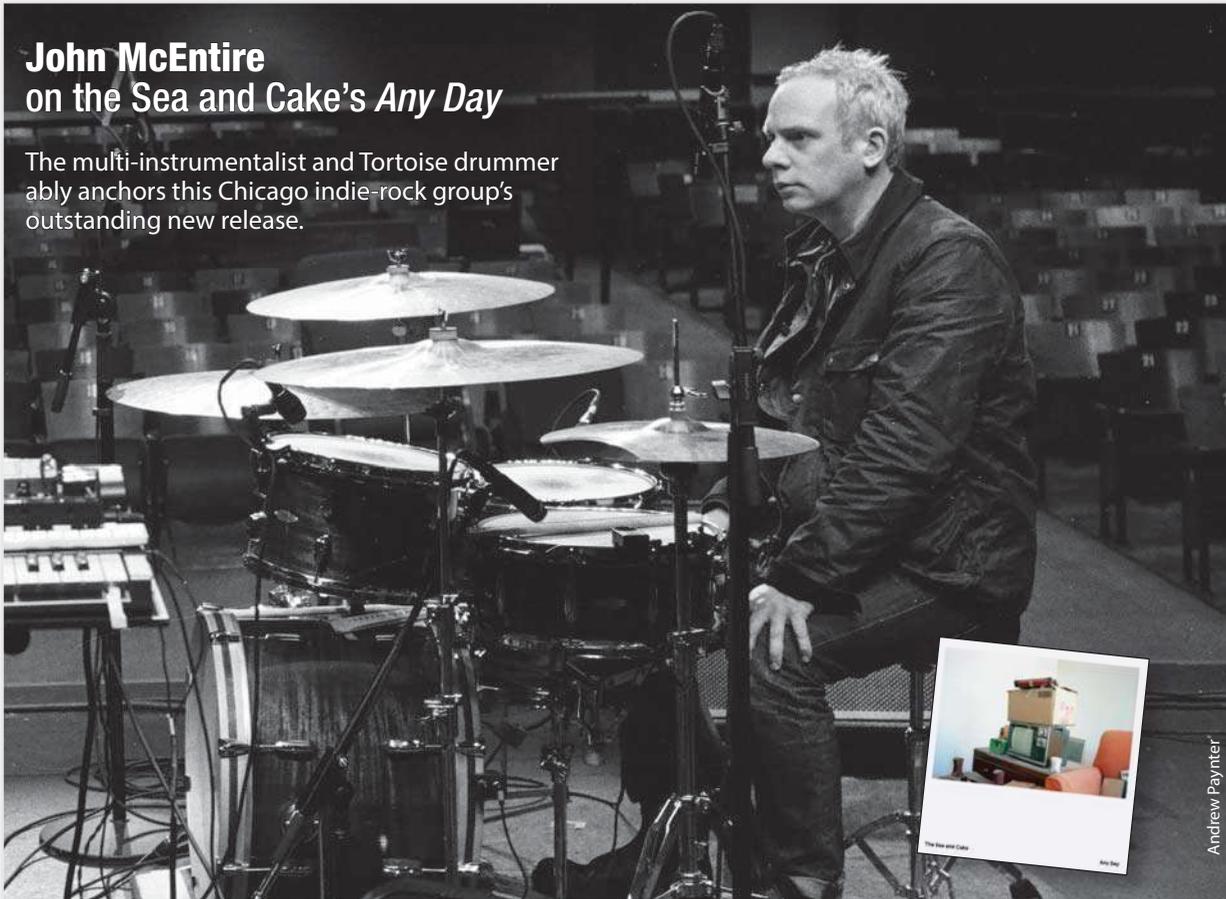
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OUT NOW

John McEntire on the Sea and Cake's *Any Day*

The multi-instrumentalist and Tortoise drummer ably anchors this Chicago indie-rock group's outstanding new release.



Andrew Paynter

Since emerging from the fertile '90s post-rock scene in Chicago, the Sea and Cake have consistently redefined themselves, exploring spacious, thoughtful rock to mellow bossa novas and analog-synth-drenched pop. On the careful craftsmen's eleventh release, *Any Day*, drummer John McEntire fulfilled kit duties as well as his typical engineering, producing, and mixing roles with the band. As the group acclimated itself to its new trio lineup following the departure of original bassist Eric Claridge, McEntire also found himself either playing or programming bass throughout the effort.

McEntire explains that the band's approach to writing evolved over years since its inception in the mid-1990s. "We developed this methodology whereby Sam [Prekop, guitar and vocals] basically comes up with the skeleton of the song," McEntire says. "Sometimes he and Archer [Prewitt, guitar, keys, and vocals] get together beforehand just to mold it a little more, but usually I'll get together with those guys at the tracking sessions. We'll start working out tempos and feels and capture everything as we go. Typically, four to six takes in, we'll get somewhere and think, *Okay, this is pretty happening now.*"

Tracked at various locations throughout Chicago and mixed during McEntire's relocation from the Midwest to Northern California, *Any Day* is devoid of the rich, analog synth textures commonly heard on the band's ten previous efforts, and features a more minimalist rock approach. Contrary to what one might expect from a band that takes a music-before-vocals approach to

writing, there's a compositional clarity that runs throughout the album's ten tracks. "That's the really interesting thing," McEntire says. "Vocals are the absolute last thing that happens. Sam writes all the lyrics and vocal melodies after we have all the basic tracking done. And he often picks up on rhythms in the drums, for instance, and mimics or uses them in different ways when he's writing the vocal parts."

Though McEntire's drum tones vary slightly from song to song, he generally used a consistent setup while tracking *Any Day*. "I don't think I really changed much aside from a few cymbals," he says. "I don't know if I changed the snare at all. As I was mixing the album, the overall sound of the drums was markedly different from track to track. There were different things I did with muting and stuff like that, but nothing outrageous, so I can't really attribute that to anything. I have to admit that I use samples from time to time, not as full-on replacements, but more for additional tones."

Any Day's standout moments include McEntire's soft touch and warm tones on "Paper Window," his straight-ahead rock drive on "Day Moon" and "Circle," and his drums' roomy ambiance and warm kick sound on "Starling." The Sea and Cake will be on a stateside and European tour that lasts through June. **Ben Meyer**

John McEntire endorses C&C drums and Cymbal & Gong cymbals. He uses Aquarian heads, Vater sticks, and DW and Canopus hardware, as well as Morfbeats and Keplinger accessories and Sunhouse, Nord, and Roland electronics.

More New Releases

Shinedown Attention Attention (Barry Kerch) /// **Spock's Beard** Noise Floor (Nick D'Virgilio) ///
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ON TOUR

Adam Levin with X Ambassadors

The group's founding drummer embraces hybrid roles in the studio and on the road with the alternative pop/rock stars.

Since its inception in 2009, the pop/rock group X Ambassadors has steadily amassed a substantial following, partly due to early standout tracks such as "Stranger" and "Unconsoled," from the 2013 E.P. *Love Songs Drug Songs*, and more recent chart-toppers "Renegades" and "Unsteady," from the 2015 debut full-length, *VHS*. In addition to having an uncanny knack for writing hooks, singer Sam Harris, keyboardist/backing vocalist Casey Harris, and drummer Adam Levin tour relentlessly, as evidenced by the hundreds of international shows they've played since their debut release. This spring the band hits the road in support of its latest album, *Joyful*, on a run that lasts through June.

Levin finds that he has to fill dual roles as a drummer and producer in the studio while writing the majority of X Ambassadors' electronic-infused material. "While we do use live drums when recording, I spend most of my time in the studio programming drums and producing," Levin says. "I believe that the modern drummer needs to not only be proficient on an acoustic kit, but also have production chops."

Levin explains that adapting those produced tracks to the group's live show can present an enjoyable challenge. "We tend to dissect the studio production and decide how we want to orchestrate the song in a guitar/bass/keyboard/drum setting," he says. "The songs change when we play them on tour. Our music has a lot of electronic elements, such as samples and loops that we trigger via Ableton Live. On *VHS*, there were a lot of songs that were heavily programmed and

had no live drums at all. It's fun because you get to almost rewrite the song live. And I love to mix the acoustic kit with the samples from the studio production. For instance, on "Unsteady," my live bass drum has the sample we used in the production, and I incorporate the trap hi-hat sounds. It adds a whole new element and makes the show more organic and exciting. For the *Joyful* tour, we're approaching the new songs in the same way."

In support of *VHS*, X Ambassadors spent the better part of two years on the road. Levin learned that maintaining a cool working relationship during long tour stretches comes down to good communication. "Being in a band is like being in a romantic relationship," he says, "and it's really important that everyone has a say in every business and creative decision. If there are disagreements, which there always are, we talk it out and come to an agreeable conclusion. Because we're constantly together on tour and in the studio, it's really important that we're all on the same page. If there's toxicity internally, it affects everything, and it doesn't take long to rear its ugly head. We've gone through those situations. I also think we get along so well because each of us knows and enjoys our role in the band. Neither Casey nor I, for instance, wants to be the lead singer, and there are really no power struggles." **Willie Rose**

Adam Levin plays Masters of Maple drums, Zildjian cymbals, and Vic Firth sticks.



Graham Fielder

Also on the Road

Dale Crover with the Melvins /// **Todd Sucherman** with Styx /// **Troy Luccketta** with Tesla /// **Thommy Price** with Joan Jett & the Blackhearts /// **Larry Mullen Jr.** with U2 /// **Robert Sweet** with Stryper /// **Gavin Wallace-Ailsworth** with Bent Knee /// **Zac Farro** with Paramore /// **Jim Eno** with Spoon /// **Paul Bostaph** with Slayer /// **Daniel Platzman** with Imagine Dragons



DW

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When DW's "wood whisperer," John Good, met with studio legend Russ Kunkel to discuss building one kit for touring and another for the studio, an idea was born. For the road, DW's Classic series was a no-brainer for Kunkel. However, he also desired something that offered a "crossover feel for diversity in the studio," according to Good. The result is the Contemporary Classic series. These drums possess similar sonic qualities to the Classic series, with a little something extra that would allow Kunkel to adapt to the ever-changing musical demands in the studio.

The Specs

DW's Classic series kits boast a deep, dark bottom end with short sustain and feature 3-ply shells configured with a thick ply of poplar sandwiched between two thin mahogany plies and 10-ply maple reinforcement hoops. The Contemporary Classic series have a 7-ply shell construction consisting of one horizontal mahogany outer ply, five cross-laminated plies of poplar, and one vertical mahogany ply on the inside. The shells also have 1"-deep reinforcement hoops constructed of six plies of maple and a ply of vertical mahogany. The cross-laminated poplar plies allow the drums to maintain a deep fundamental pitch and short sustain while also providing an articulate attack. The bearing edges are DW's rounded "butter" edges, which promote a warm, full tone.

We were sent a stunning Grey Oyster five-piece Contemporary Classic kit with 10x13, 14x14, and 16x16 toms, a 14x24 bass drum, and a matching 6.5x14 snare. All of the drums were outfitted with DW heads made by Remo. The drums came with chrome hardware, and the bass drum's black hoops were finished with a Grey Oyster inlay.

The toms were outfitted with DW's 2.3mm True Hoops. The snare had 3mm True Hoops, True-Tone custom snare wires, a MAG throw-off, and a 3P three-position butt plate. The bass drum had a coated/clear batter head with an inlay ring and an ebony vented resonant head. DW also included its two-piece bass drum muffling system that features two internally mounted pillows that lay flush against the batter and resonant heads.

The Sound

My studio was built to serve more as a soundproof rehearsal room than as a space to record great drum tones. That being said, these drums sounded beautiful from the get-go. As with most DW drums, the fundamental note is printed on the inside of each shell. I first tuned the kit by ear to where I felt the drums began to sing, and then used a Tune-bot to discover the pitch. I ended up tuning the drums fairly close to their marked pitch, which supports DW's efforts to combine components that have sweet spots that work well together. As Russ Kunkel stated about his kit, "It felt like they came from the same father. If the kick drum is the father, then the other drums are its children, and right out of the box it sounded like that."

Each drum had a nice tuning range extending above and below the fundamental notes. Unless you're often tuning to extremes, a Contemporary Classic kit would be a great studio workhorse. They have lovely, rich low-end that's offset by a slight mid-range scoop that keeps them from sounding boxy and maintains clarity in the top end. Their succinct decay doesn't abruptly gate the tone, which will please drummers and engineers alike. Kunkel's son Nathaniel, who is an acclaimed engineer,



said that Contemporary Classics are versatile “because there’s so much more tone coming off these shells.”

The outfitted batter heads provided a short attack that quickly gave way to the tone of the shells, which had a naturally succinct decay. I swapped out the batter head of the 16x16 floor tom with a Remo Clear Pinstripe, Coated Ambassador, and Coated Emperor, as well as an Evans Hydraulic. Regardless of the head selection, the drum maintained its character while also allowing space for the head choice to become an effective piece of the final sonic mix.

The 14x24 bass drum was truly magnificent. The two-piece pillow system offered just the right amount of dampening, so the drum could breathe and maintain tone while packing a serious chesty attack. The snare drum overtones were pleasant, and the drum offered a nice variety of tunings from slushy to snappy. The toms were balanced and harmonious. Although the tuning range of this Contemporary Classic kit covered a wide spectrum, the tones remained fairly dark yet lively. And it felt great to play.

David Ciauro



Symrna

Neoclassic and Araf Series Cymbals

Modern-sounding yet traditionally handcrafted Turkish instruments.

Over the past few decades, the cymbal-making process has become mostly automated. While automation has its advantages, some still favor the more one-of-a-kind nature of handcrafted instruments. Symrna is one of a handful of Turkish companies that strive to uphold centuries-old manufacturing traditions.

Symrna's mission is to produce consistent-sounding cymbals using traditional Turkish methods. In addition to consistency, Symrna aims to offer a variety of cymbals that balance sound and style to complement modern music across genres. For review, we received a sampling of models from the Neoclassic and Araf series, including 14" hi-hats, 18" crashes, 20" rides, 17" Chinas, and 10" splashes. We tested them with Vic Firth 5B and Benny Greb signature sticks, which have a slightly smaller tip for more definition. All of the cymbals were used in a live setting with an alternative rock band with multiple electric guitars and vocals.

Neoclassic Series

The Neoclassic series is described as a "renewed interpretation of traditional Turkish cymbals." They're completely lathed on both sides and have a traditional finish. The line is bright and cutting, making it suitable for rock, metal, funk, and fusion.

The 14" hi-hats sounded crisp when played with sticks or when closed with the foot. When struck in the open position, they produced a washy, pleasant midrange tone. We'd put these up against any other medium-weight, general-purpose hi-hats.

The 18" crash was medium-light and produced a glassy tone. Its decay was a little quicker than what one would normally expect from an 18" crash. The 20" ride had a bright, even sustain with some moderate crash capability and a pleasant wash. Stick definition was articulate with both stick types we used. The bell was low in pitch yet had a strong tone.

The 10" splash was bright and very quick, although I had to smack it fairly hard to get it to sing. (Its tone wasn't as nuanced at lower volumes.) The 17" Neoclassic China was my least favorite cymbal of the group. Its tone was harsh in the high end, and it felt a bit stiff despite its medium weight. However, it was still suitable for loud situations, as it had plenty of cutting power.





Araf Series

According to Symrna, the Araf series is the embodiment of “balance developed by contrast.” All cymbals in this line are heavily hammered and are only lathed at the edge. The 14” hi-hats were a pleasure to play and had a light, buttery feel. Their closed sound was crisp, yet a bit trashy. Their open sound was very complex and dry. Since these hi-hats are on the lighter side of the spectrum, they were best played in low- to medium-volume settings.

The 18” crash was explosive and had a quick decay. It had a dry character overall, but there was a bit of shimmer in its sustain, and it had a very buttery feel with a lot of visible flex when I laid into it. The 20” ride was my favorite of the entire test group. It felt great, and striking its body and bell produced a dry, articulate sound. The cymbals I enjoy the most are the ones that seem to play back at you. This ride had that characteristic. It also had

a great crash sound.

The 17” Araf China wasn’t as harsh-sounding as the Neoclassic, but it lacked volume, performing best at lower volumes. The 10” Araf splash was enjoyable to play. It wasn’t particularly dry, and it opened a lot easier at lower dynamics than the Neoclassic. I also tried placing the splash on top of the 18” crash, which resulted in an appealing stack option.

Overall, Symrna has accomplished its goal to produce unique cymbals that have a distinctive, handcrafted vibe but with more modern looks and sounds. The Neoclassics would be a good choice for rock and funk situations, and the Araf series has a more complex character that could work in almost any gig. If you have the opportunity, don’t pass on trying these out.

Christopher Kozar

Tempest

8x14 Bell Bronze Snare

A massive German-made beast with a big, beefy voice to match.



Tempest is a small custom shop in northern Germany that recently began offering its own versions of the highly coveted cast-bronze snare. A 6.5x14 drum was released back in 2014, but last year the company went all-in with an enormous 8x14 model. We were sent one of these beautiful monsters to review, so let's check it out.

The Specs

The shells of Tempest's Bell Bronze snares are cast exclusively for the company in an old, traditional German bell foundry. The metal is GBZ 12 bronze, which is known for being incredibly tough and resistant to corrosion. The shell is seamless and 3mm thick. The drum is outfitted with a polished chrome Trick three-position GS007 throw-off, solid chrome-over-brass tube lugs, stainless-steel tension rods with plastic washers, triple-flange steel hoops, and twenty-strand phosphor bronze wires.

Our review drum came with an Evans G1 Coated batter head and a clear Snare Side 300 on bottom. The bearing edges are shaped to forty-five degrees with rounded counter cuts. The bottom edge is cut a little sharper and has less counter cut than the top, to increase snare response. The snare beds are carved fairly wide and flat to ensure that the wires sit flush with the drumhead.

The drum is super hefty, weighing in just shy of twenty pounds. (For a point of reference, a 6.5x14 3-ply walnut/mahogany drum we had at the office at the same time weighed only seven pounds.)

The Sound

Contrary to what you may think, 8"-deep snares tend to produce more focused and controlled tones when compared to shallower drums, while providing a lot of headroom for higher volumes. Thick bell-bronze shells are revered for producing the dense, thick "smack" often associated with modern rock and metal snare tones. Marrying those two characteristics into one drum, Tempest has produced something very special with the 8x14 Bell Bronze.

This drum had incredible sensitivity from the edge to the center, and it had nearly limitless tuning capability. The shell rang out with a big, pure, open voice, but the overtones were perfectly balanced and died off quickly and evenly. The attack was super punchy and powerful, which gave the drum a very modern, pre-processed sound.

While capable of producing a wide range of useful sounds, I felt that the Tempest 8x14 Bell Bronze outrivaled many others when tuned medium-tight and higher. It was in those registers where we found a near-perfect blend of snappy attack, rich overtone, and chesty punch. While Tempest's 8x14 Bell Bronze might be best suited for hard-hitting, aggressive playing styles, it also did the dark, moody thing very well when detuned and hit dead center. We didn't need to use any muffling to tame overtones, even when the batter head was tensioned in the often troubling medium-low and low registers. While it carries a hefty price tag (approximately \$1,890), Tempest's 8x14 Bell Bronze is about as good as it gets in its class and could potentially absorb the workload of several metal-shell snares.

Michael Dawson

Soundbrenner

Pulse Metronome

A wearable, vibrating device designed to eliminate the distractions of an audible click.

If you've done any practice with a metronome, you've likely used something that emits a beep or light that you follow. Now imagine that metronome being something that you can feel instead.

A New, Tactile Option

The Soundbrenner Pulse is a wearable metronome that vibrates in tempo. The metronome comes with a charging station, instructions, and two bands (one large enough for a wrist or forearm and a larger one for an ankle, calf, or bicep). The metronome easily snaps into either band, and it charges wirelessly. Battery life is six hours of continuous use. Pairing the free Soundbrenner app with the Pulse via Bluetooth is quick and painless, and you can sync up to five units from one iOS/Android device. I tried using two at once and noticed no latency or connection issues.

The app has all of the features we've come to expect from any high-quality metronome. Need different time signatures? No problem. Need to create a set list of tempos for a gig or rehearsal? That's easily done in the app, which includes a lot of other great features as well. One great feature of the app is its ability to change the vibration intensity of each beat. If you want the Pulse to vibrate 8th notes in 4/4, you can change the intensity of any of those beats to create whatever pattern you need.

While abundant in features, the app is not a requirement to use the basic settings of the Pulse. Through a series of tap functions on the metronome itself, you can set it to vibrate at any desired tempo. You can also make fine tempo adjustments by turning the dial on the Pulse left or right. The app is required, however, to access advanced functions, such as the ability to connect with other apps via Ableton Link, assign foot-pedal inputs, and link with additional Pulses.

Making Adjustments

While practicing at light volume on a mesh-headed kit or practice pad, I found it easy to feel the Pulse vibrating when it was set at its lowest intensity level. At higher volumes, however, I needed to raise the vibration and volume level. (The Soundbrenner app can play an audible click as well.) At its highest setting, the Pulse vibrated with more intensity than any mobile phone I've used. I found no latency between the app's click and the device's vibration.



It took a little while for me to get used to the Pulse, since I'm accustomed to referencing a click sound for tempo. As I continued working with it, I was able to reduce the click volume and focus more on the vibration, depending on where I had the metronome placed on my body. I found that the Pulse was easier to feel when I wore it somewhere on my body that wasn't constantly in motion, such as my calf, upper forearm, or bicep. You might consider wearing a wristband just below the Pulse to prevent it from slipping down your arm or leg as you play. You can also forego the band altogether and keep the Pulse in your pocket.

One other thing to keep in mind: If you play on a big stage or riser that shakes under you, the Pulse might not provide enough vibration on its own, so you'll likely want to use it in conjunction with the audible click in your ears. The app also works great without the Pulse, making it a powerful standalone product.

Although not included with the basic package, Soundbrenner has released a body strap that allows you to wear the Pulse around your chest (\$29). The street price for the Pulse is \$99 for one and \$449 for a five-pack.

Nick Amoroso



Seether's John Humphrey

To translate the heavy, hard-hitting drum sounds on modern-rock band Seether's seventh studio album, *Poison the Parish*, to the stage, longtime drummer John Humphrey has returned to the brand that he started with as a child. "My first drumset was a 1966 silver sparkle Ludwig kit with mahogany shells," he says. "I loved that kit, and I wish I still had it. My new kit is the Keystone X series. The shells are composed of maple and American red oak. That combination produces a wonderful mix of warmth without sacrificing attack. Our engineer is blown away with the kit. It mikes up easily and sounds great coming through the PA."

Poison the Parish was recorded at Blackbird Studios in Nashville, Tennessee. "Paul Simmons, the Blackbird drum tech, tuned the kit," says Humphrey. "There's an art to tuning, particularly when everything is under a microscope in the studio. We always have a special tech come in to tune and pick out snares and other gear. We were in the studio prior to my reconnecting with Ludwig, so on most of the album I'm using an old Tama 6.5x14 Bell Brass snare that I borrowed from a friend. It really adapted to each song's sonic texture. It could sound like a gunshot, or it could be sensitive and pick up every ghost stroke."

"In the live setting," Humphrey continues, "my tech, Mike Buchholtz, tunes the kit. We tune the top heads slightly higher than the bottoms. All toms have a sweet spot. I tune to that and then go slightly lower. My drums aren't tuned jazz-tight, they're looser with a bit more body to them. We tune high to low, starting with the rack toms."

The centerpiece of Humphrey's live setup is a 22" Sabian AAX Metal ride. "That's a killer cymbal," he says. "The bell is heavily featured on our single 'Let You Down.' I also love my 19" AAX X-Plosion crash for its bright sound and great sustain. Another wonderful addition I made several years ago is the Chad Smith Holy China. It doesn't have that brash overtone that some Chinas have.

"One thing I can't live without is my cup holder," the drummer continues. "It holds a concoction that's a mix of Gatorade G2 and Pedialyte. I'm pretty physical when I play, and I sweat a lot, so this is a great way to replenish those liquids. The cup holder is welded to a stand, so it's a permanent fixture on the kit and has been around the world with me several times."



Hardware: Ludwig Atlas Pro series cymbal stands, DW 9000 double pedal and hi-hat, Carmichael drum throne

Sticks: Vic Firth 3A

Heads: Aquarian Hi-Energy snare batter and Evans Hazy 300 Snare Side; Evans EC2 Clear tom batters and EC Resonants; Evans EMAD2 Clear kick batter and linked by Evans custom logo front head

Mics: Sennheiser e901 and e902 on bass drum, e609 on bottom of snare, e904 on toms, e614 on hi-hat and ride, and MK4 overheads; Audix 15 on top of snare

Interview and photos by Sayre Berman

Drums: Ludwig Keystone X

in Red Swirl finish

A. 6.5x14 Supraphonic snare

B. 9x13 tom

C. 16x16 floor tom

D. 16x18 floor tom

E. 16x24 bass drum

Cymbals: Sabian

1. 15" Paragon hi-hats

2. 8" AA splash

3. 18" Saturation crash

4. 20" AAX X-Plosion crash

5. 10" AA splash

6. 21" AAX Metal ride

7. 22" AA Medium crash

8. 19" AA Holy China

9. 19" AAX X-Plosion Fast crash



Drum Wisdom

Susie Ibarra

The highly regarded player/educator, who as usual has a number of fascinating new projects coming to fruition, shares her priorities on and off the bandstand.

by Ken Micallef

During the 2000s, multi-instrumentalist Susie Ibarra could be heard throughout New York City performing her very specific, very musical, and very original drum style within the creative music groups of bassist William Parker, trumpeter Dave Douglas, pianist Matthew Shipp, and saxophonists John Zorn and David S. Ware, as well as leading her own unique ensembles, like Mephista.

Ibarra's sound is like no other's. Incorporating the unique percussion and musical approach of her Filipino heritage with her flowing jazz drumset style, Susie plays with enormous attention to touch, space, intent, attack, mood, and what she calls "vibe." In recent years, Ibarra has expanded her work into multiple modes of ethnic and formalized percussion, playing drumset for dancers, artists, and percussion troupes, along with solo drumset pieces performed everywhere from museums to concert halls to sound installations.

Teaching for the past six years on faculty at Vermont's Bennington College and its Center for Advancement of Public Action (CAPA), Ibarra returns to drumset (augmented by various percussion) on her new release, *Perception*, by her Dream Time Ensemble. Performed by a group of guitar, keyboards, electronics, drums, vocals, and violin, *Perception*, released by the Decibel Collective label, is a colorful, nearly psychedelic journey. The music unfolds slowly, almost dreamlike, the instruments defining often surreal palettes above Susie's drum- and percussion-led grooves. Afro-Cuban rhythms abut exotic funk forays; winding violins and itchy guitars create mysterious messages; hand drums, percussion, and solo drum pieces illuminate and drive the music further.

"This record was inspired by and titled after our sensory experiences, and how we can perceive things," Susie tells us from her home in New Paltz, New York. "I'm looking at these different concepts; we have our senses in how we interact with the environment and people. But perception is ever-changing. In some of my work, that deals with music and technology and dance: Where does that line blur, how do we interact with our environments, and what does that tell us? This album is also personal. When I wrote this music, I was coming out of a time of grieving. That also will heighten your senses and awareness, and how you interact. If we're lucky there's grace that comes with that."

Ibarra is ever-busy. Another album that she's featured on is *Flower of Sulfur*, with multi-instrumentalist YoshimiO (Boredoms, OOIOO, Saicobab), and multidisciplinary artist Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe. The album, which was recorded at Roulette in Brooklyn in front of an audience, is one continuous improvisational work. And in addition to her schedule at Bennington, she's currently composing music including rhythmic studies for the world-renowned Kronos Quartet; a commission for Asia Society developed in partnership with Pioneer Works, New York, titled *Fragility: An Exploration of Polyrythms*; and a new work for trio,

Talking Gong, co-commissioned by SUNY New Paltz and the Look & Listen Festival, featuring concert pianist Alex Peh and flutist Claire Chase. A piece for Prism Quartet with percussion is also in the pipeline.

"One of my classes is modeled after the record *Pieces of Time* by Andrew Cyrille, Don Moye, Kenny Clarke, and Milford Graves, who also taught at Bennington," Ibarra explains. "I have eight drumset players in a room, and I'll move around that record. Sometimes I teach the history of jazz through drumset, depending on the level of the students and what they need. I also teach Southeast Asian and South Asian percussion and a world percussion ensemble. That might include Brazilian music, Arabic music, Filipino and Nepalese music, different things. But it's all percussion. Sometimes I teach Creative Music Ensemble, where I teach the work of composer/performers. I also have the students compose and perform, and I'm teaching Women Improvisers in Music this semester.

I teach the Polyrythms Ensemble at Bennington, which includes instrumentalists beyond drummers. We have piano, bass, guitar, mandolin, and saxophone. We're looking first at three-against-two and three-against-four polyrythms. The students listen to music with polyrythms, transcribe things, and practice techniques, and we try some specific piano things. Now we're listening to blues music from Mali and a Chopin piece to hear how he scored three-against-four. I want them to research and understand many different polyrythms and how they're used as tools in music, because we all use them differently. And they're in all kinds of music.

Teaching polyrythms is very intuitive. To play them, it's very physical in the body. When you grasp polyrythms intuitively, it's like an immediate understanding without having to intellectualize it. We don't think about it but we're all doing polyrythms every day, then once we're aware of it, that changes our ability to play them. It's fascinating that we're always moving in polyrythms.

Students have varying abilities in a liberal-arts college. We work on technique in large classes of up to eight drummers per class. I ask them to transcribe pieces, phrases, and solos. Teaching jazz drumset, [I have them] transcribe Max Roach or Philly Joe Jones. I'll teach who can lead on a piece. When I did the History of Jazz Drumset [course], we went through the different styles and rhythms, and they had to learn them. They also have to individually come to the kit and play something specific for me. Play it down. This is aside from their ensemble concert performance. If they're studying rhythms and transcribing pieces, they have to be able to come in and play down each piece or rhythm consecutively,



Tony Centicola

one after the other. It has to be fluid in their body. And they have to deliver a fully written transcription and play it. I let them choose what to transcribe.

If they're beginners and they want to understand free jazz, I might give them handlebars to hold on to. So if we're learning certain vocabulary, I might let them use [free jazz] as a palette. I want them to learn how to create in the ensemble. If they're more advanced, I can talk to them about it and offer suggestions about tuning or approach, which I've done at the New School. Regardless of their level, it's good to have musicality and musicianship, otherwise it can be quite frustrating to improvise. But if they're advanced I can instruct individually on feel, how to deconstruct something and open it up, or add certain colors or try polyrhythms, for instance. Or we play with tuning. Although the drums are an indeterminate pitch, I like to tune them certain ways for certain pieces.

Listening is important. I have students listen to all sorts of things. Sometimes I ask them to transcribe something from *Pieces of Time*. I think the listening and transcribing is helpful. It helps to understand how musicians from the past have done things. That gives the students material from which they can move forward. We listen to all the greats: Max Roach, Philly Joe Jones, Louis Hayes with Horace Silver, Elvin, Roy Haynes. If they're transcribing, I ask them

to choose a record. It could be something from Lee Morgan, Bud Powell, Coltrane, Miles Davis....

I have them play together as drummers. I'll give out parts. I might reduce the parts. I also ask them to create a short piece for the ensemble. They each have to create one. All percussionists in all other cultures learn how to play with each other as an ensemble. I think it's really important that drummers play together.

For touch, I talk about technique as far as they can take it with technical approaches and questions. We cover ways to hold sticks and brushes and mallets, and where to get tone, likewise where to attack on each of the drums and what tone that will bring. We also cover foot technique, which they often come without. We have to prep all these limbs.... I feel like I want to practice now! [laughs]

The sound you create is very important. I'd rather hear somebody play one note that's really beautiful than a lot of notes that don't sound that good. Similarly, how do you teach musicality or vibe? I asked my students that recently, and they all looked at me. *Vibe? Oh, she gives us easy things to play.* But playing a simple exercise with all your musicality and all the genuine integrity of each note—that's not that easy. It depends on where you are in the present and how you deliver it.

Tools of the Trade

Ibarra plays Yamaha Maple Custom Absolute drums, including a 5x14 snare, an 8x12 tom, a 14x14 floor tom, and either an 18" or 20" bass drum. She uses three different Paiste cymbal setups: from the Traditional Series, 13"* or 14" Medium Light hi-hats, a 16" Thin crash, and either an 18" or 20" Medium Flat ride* or a 20" Masters Mellow ride; from the Masters Series, 14" Dark hi-hats, a 16" Dark crash, a 20" Mellow ride, and a 20" Dark crash; and from the 602 Modern Essentials series, 14" or 15" hi-hats, a 16" or 17" crash, and a 20" Classic Medium Flat ride. She uses Vic Firth sticks, mallets, and wire brushes, Remo heads, and eight-rowed Philippine kulintang gongs.

* discontinued models



Simon Phillips

The famed drummer, who's continuing his burning Protocol recording and touring project, recently lost his home to a California wildfire. We ask how he's faring artistically and personally.

On leaving Toto

I left Toto in 2014 because it wasn't the same band that I joined in 1992. I needed to move on creatively. I wasn't enjoying it anymore. Towards the end, Luke [guitarist Steve Lukather] and I were the only players left from our original lineup. I didn't feel like I was a part of it anymore. The moment I left Toto, great musical opportunities opened up, and I was playing with all the people I wanted to play with.

On touring with the Hiromi Trio

Since leaving Toto I've kept an active touring and recording schedule, including traveling the globe with Japanese-born pianist Hiromi and the phenomenal bassist Anthony Jackson. The Hiromi Trio gig was absolutely fantastic. It was such a musically creative project for me. It was a shame how it ended, with Anthony and I both getting sick and having to leave the band.

On other recent projects

I thoroughly enjoyed my collaboration with master percussionist Trilok Gurtu, 21 Spices. And, more recently, I've been working with fusion guitarist Mike Stern and jazz saxophonist Bill Evans.

On the devastating wildfire that took his home

Last December, the Thomas wildfires completely destroyed our Ojai home, near the Los Padres National Forest, burning it to the ground, along with many of my personal possessions and my home studio. The outpouring of love and support from the international drumming community has been overwhelming for me and my fiancée, Billie Rainbird, who barely escaped the fire. I was in New York performing at Iridium when I received several frantic calls from Billie that the fire was rapidly pushing our way, and that she was quickly packing some things and leaving. A few hours later, the fires had completely consumed our home. All that remains where our house once stood is a charred piece of land, filled with debris.

The heat was so intense, the alloy wheels on my car melted. All of my studio mics were destroyed. One of my classic Ludwig Octaplug bass drums totally melted. I couldn't find a single lug from that bass drum. I also lost one of my favorite Ludwig Acrolite snare drums. My set of studio cymbals were completely destroyed by the heat. Cymbals are forged at 1,400 degrees to capture a rich sound. Anything above that temperature destroys the metal.

On touring

After having to cancel our U.S. tour supporting the recent *Protocol 4* release, we're getting back on the road. We just finished a very successful tour of Japan and China and are preparing to hit the U.S. again to make up the shows canceled because of the fire. We have a busy touring schedule ahead. I'd like to get a couple more years of touring from this new release.

On selling his Phantom Recordings studio

I sold my recording studio to pursue my musical ambitions. I still do occasional engineering work, but my first love and passion is playing music. I'm much better at making music than selling it. Trying to run

the studio and play music was becoming too stressful, so I decided to let go of the studio. *Protocol 4* is the last project I recorded there before I sold the studio to a young producer.

On his new Protocol band

Guitarist Andy Timmons and keyboardist Steve Weingart had been part of Protocol for a while and wanted to pursue other projects. The Protocol material is very demanding instrumental fusion music. It can become exhausting for some musicians playing this type of complex music night after night. Ernest Tibbs is still on bass, and I love his approach to this music. Guitarist Greg Howe has been a great addition. Besides being an incredible soloist, his time and groove are impeccable, which I picked up on instantly when we started playing. I couldn't be happier with the new band and the new recording. And the tour has been very well received.

I'm really pleased with the *Protocol 4* release for many reasons. It's a big step forward for me compositionally. It's the first time I've written all the music, which was mostly composed on the road, straight into my computer. Once I heard how great the band sounded together, the ideas came quickly. The tune "Pentangle" came together in a day. "All Things Considered" came quickly as well. I tried some new things sonically and technically, and I'm very pleased with the outcome. I feel musically rejuvenated after making this record.

On using 15x24 bass drums

I've been using 15"-deep bass drums since Tama created my Monarch Signature kit. If I had my way, I'd use 14"-deep bass drums. But with the design of the tom holders, the rack toms would end up in my lap. The shallower bass drums have more bottom end than the deeper shells because the front head reacts much quicker. When you get the resonant [front] and batter [back] heads to react in sync with one another, then you'll get all the true bottom end out of the bass drum. Deeper double-headed bass drums cannot push the air efficiently enough to get both front and back heads to resonate in sync.

On tom-tom shell depth

I get a better tone out of my toms by having them one inch deeper than most standard-sized toms. I used the power toms for a while. But again, because of having to push too much air through them, they ended up sounding too thin. And the shallower shells don't produce the proper tone for my playing style. Standard-size toms work well, but adding an inch to the depth gives me the perfect tone for my style of tuning.

On art versus commerce

My entire career, I've always chosen the risky, more musical route. It was probably not the wisest financial decision at times. But, frankly, I'd rather play great music than make lots of money.

Phillips plays Tama drums and Zildjian cymbals, and he uses Tama hardware, Promark sticks, and Remo heads. A fund has been established to aid in Simon's post-fire recovery. Go to gofundme.com and search for Simon Phillips.

Interview by Mike Haid





Kris Wyle's

Toasting its twentieth anniversary this year, Umphrey's McGee is at the height of its powers, delighting fans with new music, raging shows, and an innovative approach to online outreach. That goes double for its ever-evolving drummer, who brings big beats and cool ideas whenever he sits down at the kit.

Umphrey's McGee has so many songs—so many *kinds* of songs—that its shows can feel uncommonly different from night to night. Underscoring this multidirectional potential are the detailed, far-reaching improvisations that the sextet weaves into every performance. With a multitude of styles and attitudes in play, plus a range of covers from the Beastie Boys' "Wow" to King Crimson's "Red" to Steely Dan's "Peg," you're looking at a band that can pretty much do anything.

Working on this story, I saw the group twice in New York City in a span of three months, first at Brooklyn Bowl in October 2017, then at the Beacon Theatre this past January, just as the album *it's not us* was being released. Although the two shows touched on some similar ideas—both had funky pockets, real metal crunch, and instrumental fireworks—the overall feeling of each was distinct from the other. The Brooklyn performance was looser, bluesier, more open; the one cover was Led Zeppelin's "The Song Remains the Same." At the Beacon the vibe was tighter and funkier, with more emphasis on pulsing percussion; the cover that night was Talking Heads' "Making Flippy Floppy." Umphrey's didn't sound like two different bands but rather offered two very different looks.

One of the challenges here is pulling everything off exactly right. To blend styles properly—in a progressive setting—a group can't just flirt with accuracy but must go much deeper. Enter the versatile virtuosity of drummer Kris Myers, who says the group wanted the heaviness on *it's not us* to be as hard as Deftones, the funk to be as grooving as Lettuce. It would be easy to fall short in one of those areas, yet Umphrey's nails it all with undeniable skill, adding dance-floor thump ("The Silent Type"), Talking Heads/Adrian Belew-type exoticism ("Looks"), anthemic rock ("Piranhas"), and prog-metal chaos ("Dark Brush"). Myers brings his firm touch, fat sound, and quick mind to each track.

Meanwhile, the drummer continues to strengthen his bond with the band's percussionist, Andy Farag. As the pair will explain, they took their partnership to a new level by overdubbing orchestral percussion for *it's not us* at the Attic, engineer/coproducer Greg Magers' studio in Nashville. On stage, Myers and Farag are locked in yet unpredictable, chatting amiably through their instruments and finishing each other's sentences. This is the kind of musical banter that's so fun to hear; the conversation can go anywhere, and it's never dull.

Umphrey's McGee, which took shape at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana, is celebrating its twentieth anniversary in 2018. (Myers came on board after original drummer Mike Mirro left in 2002.) The members, rounded out

by guitarist/lead vocalist Brendan Bayliss, lead guitarist Jake Cinninger, keyboardist Joel Cummins, and bassist Ryan Stasik, have over the years spread out from Venice Beach to Charleston, which means that Myers, who recently moved to Nashville, relies on digital file sharing to keep the fires burning with his mates when they're off the road. Beyond Umphrey's, Kris is involved with Goodnight Nurse, a partnership with drummer/producer Brian Abraham and guitarist Dylan Jones (Gallant) that writes and licenses music for TV and film, among other media.

Still, Myers' main gig keeps him plenty busy, with around eighty-five performances a year. Over its two decades Umphrey's has grown to the point of booking multiple nights at popular venues around the country. This summer, for instance, the band will play three shows at Red Rocks in Colorado for the second year in a row. I first wrote an *MD* feature on Myers back in 2006, and in both instances I witnessed a well-run organization—band and crew alike—where people take their job, but not themselves, seriously, and have gotten the complicated act of touring down to a science.

The group's welcoming attitude on stage and off is clearly felt by its fervent fans. Umphrey's is in fact a trailblazer in the way it's nurtured a close relationship with its audience, taking full advantage of social media and its multifaceted website. "We have to be creative with the engagement part," Myers explains. "We're willing to learn things beyond just writing that hit song."

Fans get to vote on set lists, and even on which live improvs should later be developed into full songs; the wild ride "Remind Me," from *it's not us*, is an example of the latter. "We've taken it to the geekiest level," Myers says, "where we have the All Things Umphrey's website where you can get your stats algorithmically analyzing how many times we've played a song." And fan buzz helped the band decide which of its live mashups to bring into the studio for the you-gotta-hear-it-to-believe-it 2016 album *Zonkey*, where, among other gems, AC/DC's "Highway to Hell" meshes seamlessly with Eddy Grant's "Electric Avenue"—complete with production elements from the original versions—to form "Electric Avenue to Hell!"

"Younger people like that," Myers says. "They're bored with the old idiom: *We have to wait for the band to give us what they want*. We've gotten fan mail from parents of sons and daughters who say, 'They're crazy about your music.' And we're like: 'Why are they so crazy about us—we're in our forties! We're, like, from the '90s!' But I think it's because they know we're out there really trying to share things and have them be a part of it."

Part One: Kris Myers at Brooklyn Bowl, October 2017

MD: On *it's not us* I'm struck by the diversity of not only the songs but the sounds.

Kris: Thanks, man. I'm glad to hear that. We were going for variety. We recorded a lot of songs and ended up with these particular ones, and it covers a lot of bases and represents what we are now.

MD: The first three tunes all sound different from one another. Were they recorded in different environments, on separate days?

Kris: Same studio—IV Labs, in Chicago—probably in consecutive days: one day one song, one day another. But in the editing process, maybe to tighten up for a drier drum tone, I would work with Greg Magers, who's one of my favorite guys to work with, along with [engineer/mixer] Manny Sanchez, of course. I'll tell him what I'm looking for. We'll stick with the live drum take, but we'll mess with the sound of some of the songs—make the mics a little tighter; less room

mics on some sections, a little more open on others. And "Looks" was one where we overdubbed a lot of percussion. Andy is really featured.

MD: Were the tunes tracked live, with the whole band playing?

Kris: We did a lot of live takes, but some guys would change things or overdub later. The thing with us is we move fast. We can't keep drawing out the recording process in addition to touring. So we just have to be quicker with recording.

MD: Is that because of your schedule, or it's just the way inspiration works?

Kris: That's a good question. I'd say both—but mostly because of our schedule. [laughs] We recorded in November of 2016, and that was a week-or-two process. That's usually what we allot ourselves for any recording projects per year. A couple weeks, tops.

MD: That's enough time to get something done, or realize you have to move on.

Kris: For the tracking process, yes. I think we're all creative enough and experienced enough to home in on and craft these songs the way we want 'em months later, within reason. And we stay true to our live sound. We've figured out a way to do this and keep expenses reasonable. To me music today needs that—it needs to break away from being "perfect," because everybody sounds kind of like a Pro Tools session. It's nice to have some of those elements, but it's also nice to balance it with actual human elements and playing on the spot.

MD: Like on "Whistle Kids," there's the unadorned, unadulterated sound of a drumset. It's strange to say, but it's refreshing in this day and age.

Kris: That was what we were going for, and that's a good example of a song that started out in the big open room with tall ceilings. But I was like, *Eh, that's not the vibe I'm looking for here.* So Greg figured out a way to make the drums super-dry, without having to retrack it.

MD: Did you use your live setup for the album?

Kris: Yeah. The same setup you see tonight, you hear on the recording—same





kit. It's the Reference series by Pearl. I switched up ride cymbals on this record depending on the song, but I kept things very consistent.

MD: Are you that way in general? Like when you set up at home, do you try wacky stuff?

Kris: I'll experiment, but I generally set up the way I do live. And I have a separate setup for jazz and smaller side gigs.

You treat your drums based on the context of what you're doing. If it's appropriate, cool. Even if you don't go way out in left field with your ideas, that's fine too. Sometimes it comes down to just the playing and how you work with what you have. I live by that philosophy more than anything, because I see players surrounding themselves with so many bells and whistles, and it's great, but it can distract you from what you're supposed to be doing. Which is being as *musical* as possible with the least amount of things. Your creativity will come out more than you realize.

MD: Umphrey's has a wide stylistic range to cover, so you have to make it all work.

Kris: When you play with a band that's kind of like a Frank Zappa approach, where you're switching genres from something very articulate to something kind of open, you've got to find the middle

ground. You've gotta have definition on your drums. If I tried to play a big old 1970s or '60s vintage drumset on this gig, it wouldn't work. Because we go from playing classic rock and funky rock to playing something really syncopated and tight. So I choose the middle ground, and Pearl seems to give me all those things. And the key to my cymbal sound is clarity and articulation.

MD: Do you have a pretty different experience from room to room, in terms of sound and feel on different stages?

Kris: Yeah, I'd say so. You have the old and the new. People sometimes keep famous, classic venues going that have a larger capacity, and they sound kind of cavernous. You can feel that energy where it's not the greatest acoustics. Then you go to a more modern place with all the right paneling and everything else. And then you play outdoor festivals. Sometimes you even play a big arena; in certain cities where your market is really high, you can play those bigger rooms. You experience a considerable difference in your in-ear mix, for sure. You'll definitely hear it even without the in-ears.

MD: Do you have to make adjustments, or is it something where you just trust your body and your microphones?

Kris: You gotta do a little of both. You gotta trust your crew, the front-



Myers' Setup

Drums: Pearl Reference series in Music City

Custom Ice Blue Oyster finish

A. 6x14 Hybrid Exotic snare
(or 6x14 Reference Brass)

B. 5x10 Popcorn maple snare

C. 8x10 tom

D. 10x12 tom

E. 14x14 floor tom

F. 16x16 floor tom

G. 18x22 bass drum

Sticks: Vic Firth 55A and (for jazz) AJ3 sticks, Heritage brushes, and T1 General mallets

Cymbals: Zildjian

1. 14" A New Beat hi-hats

2. 14" A Custom crash

3. 19" K Custom Hybrid crash

4. 10" S Family Mini Hats
(closed, on boom stand)

5. 20" A Custom crash with 10" K splash (not visible) and 12" FX Spiral Stacker on top

6. 21" K Custom Hybrid ride

7. 20" A Custom crash

8. 20" A Custom EFX crash

Cases: Humes & Berg

Hardware: Pearl, including hi-hat stand, snare stands, boom stands, tom mounts, throne, and Powershifter Eliminator double bass drum pedal

Heads: Evans, including G2 Clear (live) or G2 Coated (studio) tom batters and Genera Resonant bottom heads, and EQ3 bass drum batter with EQ Pads; Remo Coated Ambassador snare batters

Electronics: Roland SPD-SX, Sensaphonics 3DAA-2 dual-driver in-ear monitors

of-house engineer. I like to be proactive with him: "How does this sound? What can I do?" Any drummer shouldn't be shy to do that, in a respectful way, of course. And the guy that we have, Chris Mitchell, is incredible. He's really great to work with, and he loves different microphones and trying things that are a little unorthodox in the rock realm. So it's a team effort. [Chris Mitchell suddenly enters, and introductions are made.]

MD: We were talking about making adjustments depending on what you find in a given room.

Chris Mitchell: Oh—a snare check.

Kris: Yeah, that's literally all you have to do.

Chris Mitchell: Kris has a couple snares. He A/Bs them, I tell him which one sounds better, and that's really about all we do. Everything else, I let him play the way he wants to play, and the rest of it's up to me.

Kris: He's done articles discussing how he's taken the approach of not putting too much on the mix.

Chris Mitchell: There's no EQ; there's almost no compression. Just good mic placement—and [speaking to Myers] you.

Kris: Which is great, because then you really capture the truth of the dynamics of what the drummer's playing and how he hits the cymbal, how he strikes the drum. From a ghost note and a snare roll to a big rimshot. I've always found that overheads pick up that enough anyway. Instead of just getting the heavy arsenal of mics on the drums individually, sometimes just overheads do a good job. [Mitchell exits.]

MD: When you A/B the snares, are they different models?

Kris: Since they don't make the Ultracast nowadays, they've switched over to the Hybrid Exotic. That's a great drum, because it's got all the elements of the Ultra Cast. It's my favorite. It's Pearl's prototype of the Black Beauty design, with lighter lugs, not the real thick and stiff kind



of lugs. The drum has a little more flex to it. And then I continue to use the brass Reference, which is a very expensive drum [laughs], but it sounds that way. It sounds deep and rich and beautiful, and bright and brassy and bossy. It can fit right in the mix, though, if you do the right dampening. I like to have something that cuts through the amplification.

MD: In this band you're being asked every night to create

Kris Myers



spontaneously, as well as redefine parts from old songs.

Kris: It's true—there's a good balance. With Umphrey's we have a lot more flexibility than your average pop gig. Improv is great; it's kind of missing in rock 'n' roll these days. I think younger players need to understand that even though you're building up a beautiful arrangement with your video clips on your socials and doing all this flashy stuff, when it comes down to the moment, playing the right shit with other players and creating a conversation, that's what's key.

MD: You need to have quick communication between your mind and body, because you're in the moment, not just playing parts that you've memorized. Do you ever physically lag behind the ideas that occur to you?

Kris: Absolutely. Sometimes you can't physically do what your mind is telling you, and that's where the fundamentals—the physical coordination exercises—come in. You have to be tenacious in pinpointing what those mechanics are. Like, for example, reverting back to your rudiments and how to connect a phrase from one to the next, like from an unaccented drag or flam to an accented figure. And how to use it sparingly and put some space and editing between your fills, instead of just a constant run-on sentence, which drummers can do. That's how you improve your grammar as a drummer.

MD: It's great that you mention grammar, because I wanted to ask about the related concept of vocabulary. You know the correct idioms for the genres that you're playing, but you're also assembling them in real time and mixing and matching.

Kris: Yup, you're mixing and matching—that's a good way to describe it. Umphrey's has an evolving progressive nature, and that nature comes from mixing and matching, with all instruments.

MD: When you're away from the kit for some time, does it take a while to get back in shape?

Kris: When I'm off the road I do have to warm up. I revert back to certain exercise books, like I did back in my jazz studies with Joel Spencer, who was a DePaul teacher, and Bob Rummage. Those guys taught me to work with the Charley Wilcoxon snare books and the George Stone book, *Stick Control*. There's an exercise that's kind of a little secret for the jazz players, on how to apply those exercises to a whole drumset and all four limbs. You do phrases from the exercise for four or eight measures, and then they would have me improvise at the same tempo for four or eight measures and then go to the next line. So you're not only building up your objective chart reading, you're also improvising equally. To me it's gotta be 50/50, improv and technique.

Sometimes, honestly, when you're spending more time just fighting traffic and getting your rental car and trying to get to the space to do your session, you won't have time to practice. So I'll listen to music a lot, and internalize. One of the things I've been told by other players that drummers do really well—and maybe I do too—is have a photographic memory of the form of the songs, without charts. That's why we're quarterbacks, so to speak, and the guitar players usually rely on us: You're the heart and soul of the whole thing. My opinion is that everyone has to know where everything is. But you know that you have that leadership role, and it's something to embrace, for sure.

MD: You guys are playing three shows in the New York area this weekend, and then three at the Beacon Theatre in Manhattan in just a few months. That's impressive. Is New York one of your

strongest regions?

Kris: Yeah, it's always been one of the larger markets for us. And they've always been good to us. I'm amazed by the amount of people that are totally stoked and fun to be around out here. I love the energy in terms of the fan base—I mean, I probably wouldn't live here. [laughs] It's a big-city energy. The fans are very loyal and very grateful. There's no judging in our scene, which is great.

MD: What are some of your other major cities?

Kris: One that's pretty amazing is Asheville, North Carolina. This nice little hippie town. It's one of the few places where we play a small arena, Explore Asheville Arena. And then in Kalamazoo, Michigan, we play Wings Stadium, where they have hockey, not NHL but a smaller division. Of course Chicago's gonna always be big. And then you've got Indiana and Wisconsin and Minnesota. Those places will always take care of us. We're very grateful to have the hardcore fans from those regions continue to come out every year.

Denver is very exciting right now. The music scene is big and vibrant, and it's growing. Bands that go out there are being supported by all kinds of fans. So the Red Rocks shows are growing, which is amazing. The best West Coast region for us I would say is San Francisco.

MD: You've been in the band around fifteen years now. Have you seen your audience change at all? Do they get younger as you get older?

Kris: That's a good question. I think we're still attracting a younger demographic. I don't know how we are, but we are. A lot of the older fans still come around, but less of them, because they have responsibilities.

But it's pretty consistent, with college-age and younger people being aware of who we are, and we've done a good job catering to them. If you're giving out enough to people and not being afraid about record sales, the payoff is that younger people will keep following you. Someone will get their son or daughter aware of who we are, and what we give them will be exciting to them, like if we give them signed hats and shirts, or whatever. Not a lot of bands put that much time and thought into the offerings they've given to their fan base, in a creative sense.

Part Two: Kris Myers and Andy Farag at the Beacon Theatre, January 2018

MD: Last night was really cooking. Did it feel pretty good to you?

Andy: It did.

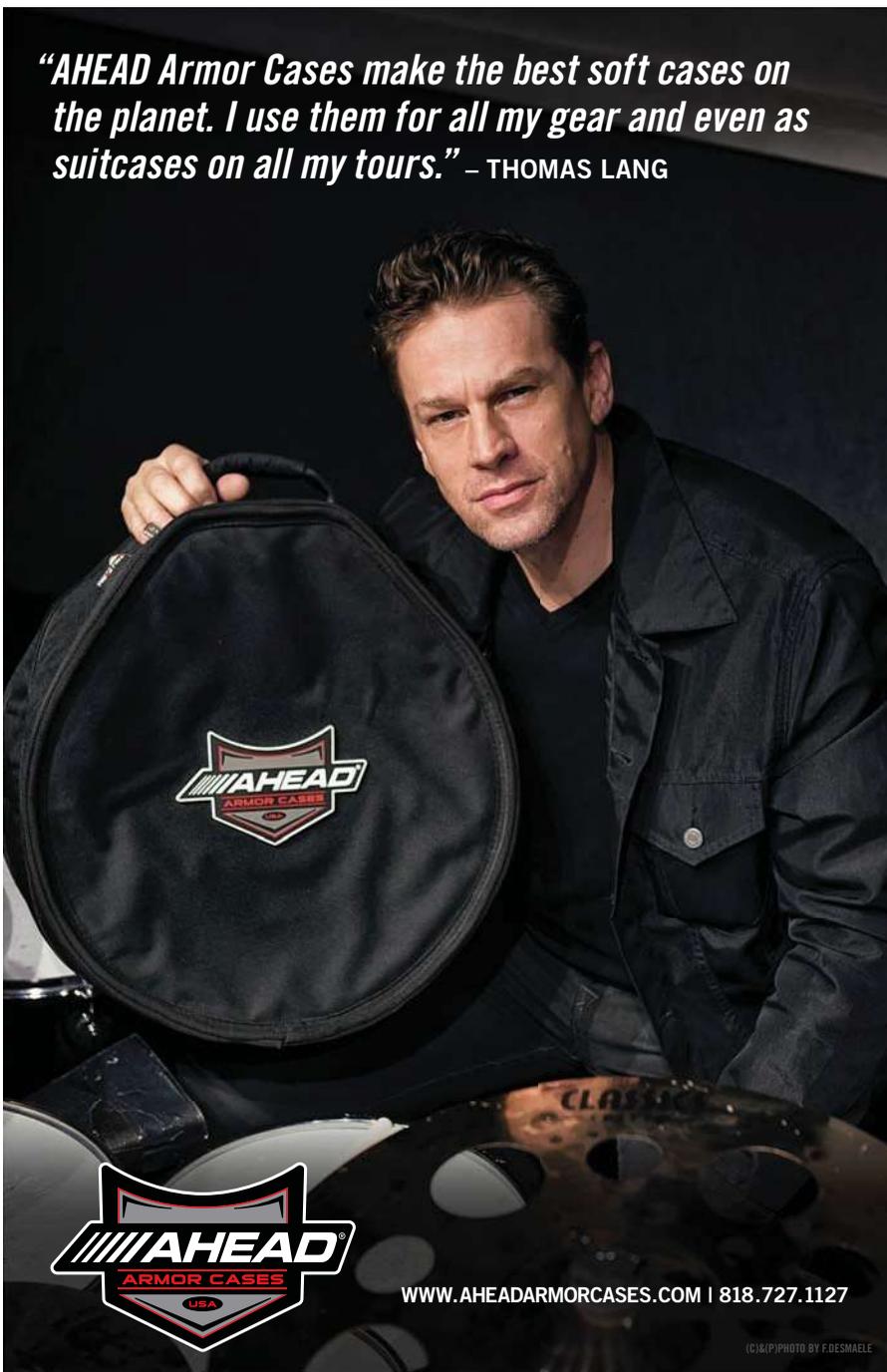
Kris: It felt pretty good. I honestly felt like I was overexerting myself. I was sweating profusely. It didn't look like it on stage, which is good, but I was getting off the stage hurting. I think it might have to do with the [fact that the] energy expended here [in New York City] is almost twice as much as anywhere else. I don't know why. Maybe because you're thinking all day about the ADD world we're in, and so you end up a bit fried. But that brings better

playing sometimes, because you kind of play through it.

MD: I never would have guessed that. You were killing it.

Kris: I gotta say, Andy has been stepping it up a *ton*. I'm trying to cater more to his sound. Seriously, the drummer/percussionist roles, for so many bands, are a bit elementary, in my opinion. Working with him now, we're talking about things a little more. We're excited about this year—the twentieth anniversary—and we want to make it real,

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Kris Myers

you know?

I'm trying to hear him out when he wants to go to a conga section, or play airy cymbals, or a big floor tom—we're trying to work that out now.

MD: You were picking your spots and naturally staying out of each other's way. It takes years of being comfortable with not playing—but, when you listen back, you're like, *That sounds great. That sounds musical.*

Andy: Yeah. That's what you're always looking to do. Especially as a percussionist, you don't want to be stepping on the drummer's toes, muddling up fills and stuff. It takes years of being comfortable with not playing—but, when you listen back, you're like, *That sounds great. That sounds musical.*

MD: Kris, when you mention Andy going to the congas, for instance, are there things that you do in response?

Kris: Yeah. Sometimes the band wants to vamp these crazy long sections in the same key. And we always do a lot of improv, so we have to stretch out that feel with some kind of intention. When I'm searching for what to do, if there's some world-music-y idea where he's doing a Latin rhythm, like a guaguancó feel on the congas, then I'll play it with him. And if we're not doing that, we're doing something a little more like an Arabian feel; I know a couple basic ideas from a doumbek pattern that he naturally gets into. I'll be catching that, and we'll build on it, which helps me get away from the simple backbeat, which drummers are always searching for. So I learn from him.

And then, if he's playing cymbals or lighter stuff, I've been trying to listen and not react

like a fusion drummer would and just assume that's my role all the time—to do all the bells and whistles. He has it covered sometimes, so now I need to play more streamlined, maybe accompany more.

MD: Similarly, Andy, how do you react to Kris?

Andy: Well, obviously I'm listening to him more than anybody in the band. Over the years I know certain fills that he plays a lot—his vocabulary—so I'll jump in maybe in the last part of that fill, just to double it up. If we go into the beginning of the fill and I try to play something and he's playing something... That does happen, but I try not to do that. Because he is the drummer, and those quintessential tom fills, you gotta let him do those. Being a percussionist, I have all this other stuff I can be doing.

And in certain instances where Kris drops a stick, or something goes wrong—something breaks—I can cover him with cymbals or certain things so everything doesn't just drop out.

Kris: That's recently been happening a lot. My girlfriend talked me into doing this salt scrub in the shower... I'm regretting it now. Sticks are flying out of my hand—but when I shake your hand, it feels nice. [laughs]

MD: Last night I was hearing a lot of pulse-oriented cymbal work and little embellishments from both of you. Bursts and trills, weblike between you.

Kris: I think the key with this gig is it's fun, and it allows us to stretch and be eclectic. There doesn't have to be a very specific origin of rhythm; it could be our own universe of ideas. When you learn things

and repeat in your practice studies what has been done before, that's how innovation comes—you assimilate that and then you create your own thing. In a deeper sense, it gives us the trust and freedom to work on each other's role together—the layers of the rhythms. Because our music has several layers. It's not just cookie-cutter pop. It's pretty complex.

If I'm playing, like, a Bill Bruford-esque pattern, with some kind of metric modulation or odd time signature implied over four—it might have to do with what the soloist is doing, and I play to that for a while—Andy knows, *Well, I'm not gonna come in yet, because he's branching out from "contrived groove land" to stretching.* And he'll come around and work with an inner lining of blending patterns, his and mine. It's not in unison now—it's more a "role" thing.

And then we switch the role. When I'm trying to push him to solo—and I'll point at him, so that Ryan and Jake and them are looking—I'm going to take a backseat, and [speaking to Andy] I let you express. We're trying to do that more.

MD: Your shows include so many musical styles. Andy, have you studied traditional percussion from different countries?

Andy: I have, a little bit. When I first started out, I wanted to get into traditional Latin percussion, listening to Santana and all those people who incorporated Latin music into rock 'n' roll. And I went to Berklee for a percussion festival that introduced me to all kinds of other styles of drumming. But within Umphrey's McGee, it's its own

Under. One. Roof.



country of drumming.

I was a beginner, basically, when I joined this band. You say we play so many different styles...that's why my rig is so big. [laughs] There's the Latin setup, with the congas and timbales. Then I have the rack toms, and the Rocket Toms, and a floor tom—just trying to incorporate more actual drums. Whatever my setup is, it's trying to reflect all those styles.

MD: Let's talk about your monitor mixes.

Andy: Our monitor engineer, Bob Ston, says that my mix is probably more balanced than anybody else's. I don't have a lot of vocals. Definitely more drums than anything, and bass, and obviously all my stuff.

Kris: Mine is pretty much the same. Bob has told me that as well; I think we're closest to being the most balanced mix.

Andy: Kris also has basically a PA subwoofer behind him.

Kris: Just to mix in the low-end part. The most important thing is that we're trying to reduce the amount of noise back where we're at. We have a plethora of microphones everywhere on the stage, facing *right* in the direction of the cymbals and the drums, and there are phase issues with that. We're a little hypersensitive, because we also have a whole other business of releasing the recordings, every show, on UMLive, and it has to sound controlled for our engineers to mix it after the show and crank it out there.

MD: I want to ask about the two days of percussion overdubs for *it's not us*.

Kris: Andy and I had a similar vision to do overdubs, because some of the songs lent themselves to the potential idea of having orchestral percussion—not just Latin or world-music percussion but heavy, big floor toms, big concert bass drums....

We rented a great assortment of orchestral percussion, and we decided to write things on the spot. We just had to figure out how to get more conceptual with the drummer-and-percussionist role.

Andy: We had concert toms, and we were tuning each drum to the track, to Kris's toms. There's one track, "Forks," where Kris had the idea of me doubling up all his drum fills. I was like, *Oh, this is gonna be real easy*. [laughs] It was great, though, because it was very quick and spontaneous. Our engineer Greg would play the fill and I'd practice it once or twice, and then I'd just lay it down. It was like Simon Says: Hear it, play it. The more I was thinking about each fill, it was just making it harder. And it turned out really cool.

Kris: The idea was to get really big accents on some of the progressive songs that Jake

wrote. "Looks" and "Dark Brush" were the biggest focus. "Forks," of course, we ended up deciding to do that more Peter Gabriel/Phil Collins approach, overdubbing one-headed drums over the drumset, which brings more color.

Andy: On "Dark Brush" we were accenting kick drums with these huge drums. The most simple things, but man, it just sounds so good. We set up these huge drums in Greg's garage.

Kris: For big, heavy, Mastodon-like guitar riffs, for those accents we're hitting big caveman drums—18" to 20" floor toms and bass drums, all together. Live it's gonna be tricky, but we'll figure it out.

Greg is *the* fastest ninja editor on Pro Tools I've ever met. He is the best. He knows and gets what you want. And he's not pretentious; he's not like some engineers or producers where they're very particular about *their* thing. It's like, *Great*, but for us it's more about: What can this person do to cater to us a bit?

MD: And for a lot of the other tracks you guys played live in the studio?

Andy: We were doing multiple takes of each song, first and foremost to get Kris's take. I'm laying down real simple stuff, so maybe the first take I'll lay down a shaker. The next one I'll lay down something else, and the next one something else. Not that we're going to use every one, but then we'd have a choice, just going back and listening.

MD: Would you also overdub percussion on every track?

Andy: Normally I would. This was the first time where I've actually recorded with the band live for the tracking part. Most of the time in the past I've come in at the end and laid down my stuff, even after vocals.

MD: To be clear, on some of the songs you didn't need to add more later?

Andy: That's true. And there's some songs I don't play at all.

Kris: And there's a song I don't play at all, "You & You Alone," which is all Andy. I was like, *Yeah, man—you go, buddy*. It was perfect just the way it was, having him doing that sort of two-beat, folkier feel on hand drums, as opposed to me on brushes. I'm going to do that live, but, I mean, I would rather not even play on the song, to be honest. It's beautiful as it is. But everyone feels like we have to play....

MD: They don't want you to have time to get up and go to the bathroom.

Kris: [laughs] No, apparently!

Andy: You don't get to rest at all, buddy. Sorry.



Photo credit: Tony Cenicola

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Stanley Clarke's

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Never Lose That Feeling

While most aspiring players spend hours working on hand technique, studying the music of favorite drummers from recordings and videos, and poring over *Modern Drummer*, all in the hopes of one day landing a spot with an artist of choice, other drummers take a less formulaic approach to achieve positive end results. Fort Worth, Texas, native Mike Mitchell has held the drumming chair with jazz bass wizard Stanley Clarke's band since 2013. His career path, like the music he makes under the name Blaque Dynamite, follows no formula.

Mitchell began playing drums in Fort Worth's St. Matthew's Baptist Church at two years old, and by age eleven he'd already landed several drum endorsements. He attended Dallas's renowned Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, but before graduation day, Stanley Clarke whisked him away for a world tour, the first of many.

Mitchell has also toured with R&B queen Erykah Badu, as well as such prominent jazz stars as Christian McBride, Christian Scott, Derrick Hodge, and Antonio Hart—he's even performed with Herbie Hancock.

Mike Mitchell is *twenty-three years old!*

For *Killing Bugs* (Ropeadope), his second release as Blaque Dynamite, the drummer/producer follows his avant-garde instincts. Though he's accompanied by vocalist/keyboardist Jon Bap (with whom he has recorded extensively) and a large cast of musicians, Mitchell plays many of the instruments himself, and equally well. Spanning rock, hip-hop, jazz, EDM, future-funk, and more, *Killing Bugs* is an uneasy and startling listen. Atmospheric guitar and Latin cowbell derange the flowing fusion groove of "Hypegun." A lone drum solo directs the mad electronic onslaught of "Clapidgea." Return to Forever-style funk spins into frenzied hyper-speed in "Frilly." Prog rock morphs into a gooey robotic drone within "Ayo." A frenetic drumming free-for-all within a chest-pounding love song barely guides "Dear 5/29/94." It's like Chris Dave and the Drumhedz permeating the old-school styles of Frank Zappa, Curtis Mayfield, and Aphex Twin, accompanied by an overworked sample army.

Mike Mitchell's drumming is deadly and deep, yet inextricably entwined with the album's intense production.

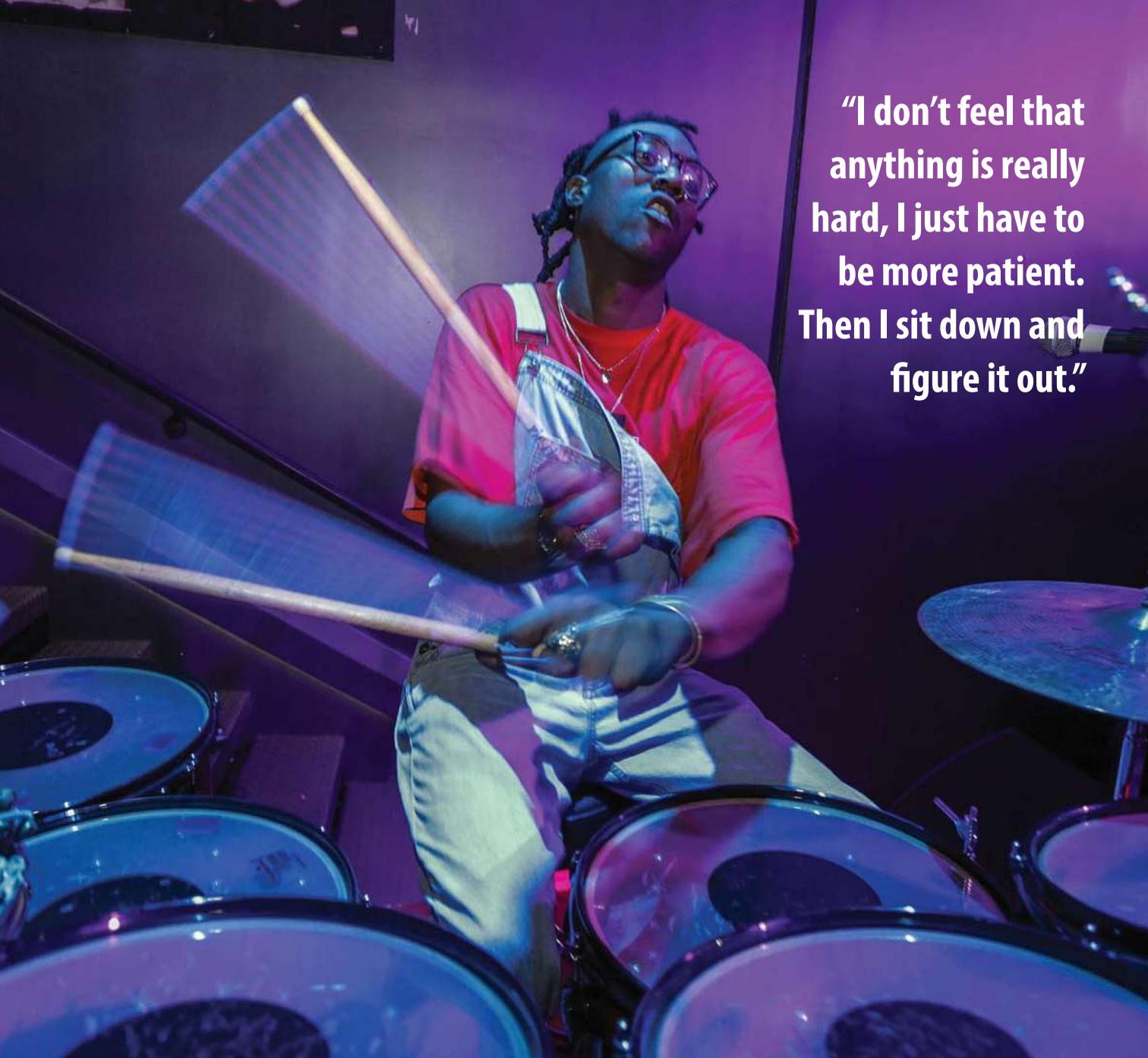
It's in concert and in the resulting YouTube videos where Mitchell's drumming creates sensations of shock and awe, the drummer himself often seemingly as in awe as the audience. In one, "Mike Mitchell Stanley Clarke 'Brazilian Love Affair' Live," the drummer opens the George Duke tune after a fill with left-hand rimclicks, a stylized Brazilian bass drum pattern, the hi-hat pedal on the "&" of each beat, and an alternating call-and-response pattern between the tom rim and cymbals with his right hand. Mitchell's playing is graceful, his groove contagious. His playing is exquisite to watch, like a gazelle at full speed. His touch is lightning quick, his textural inflections perfect. During the piano solo, his left hand switches from matched to traditional grip, slowly ramping up the heat with snare and ride bell accents. Hi-hats go into overdrive, pumping eight to the bar before Mitchell wallops a three-floor-tom combination figure around the 5:20 mark while the pianist creates further agitation by breaking up the measures. Mitchell pushes even harder in response, playing full-set figures over the barline and skull-crushing crashes. Like Vinnie Colaiuta, Mitchell's long arms act as whips, erupting in snare drum flurries and cascading cymbal accents. The crowd goes nuts.

At the 6:41 mark, the groove turns to funk, and Mitchell switches to a left-side hi-hat stack and snare drum. Finally, around 9:38, he solos over a vamp, blistering his total set in what sounds like triple-speed groupings. His playing is absolutely ferocious, his ideas complex and remarkable, yet he's grooving hard. Accented figures fly between toms and bass drum, and blazing groupings ricochet from his snare. Then he drops back, with only his bass drum keeping the groove. Playing the song's form, Mitchell grins mischievously, and then alternates between a full-on funk phrase and manic full-set fills, ultimately coalescing in a barrage of Brazilian rhythmic fury complete with cross-sticking patterns and bar-hurdling illusions. Clarke is smiling, the crowd is whipped, but Mike Mitchell is just getting started.



Story by Ken Micallef

Photos by Paul La Raia



“I don’t feel that anything is really hard, I just have to be more patient. Then I sit down and figure it out.”

MD: In your YouTube videos, you seem to surprise yourself with what you’re able to play.

Mike: I want to know what’s possible. That’s why I consider myself a jazz musician, because that’s what jazz is—it’s about surprising yourself all the time.

MD: Why do you play such long solos?

Mike: In Stanley’s band he expects that. This band is about the

Q: In your YouTube videos, you seem to surprise yourself with what you’re able to play.

A: I want to know what’s possible. That’s why I consider myself a jazz musician, because that’s what jazz is: It’s about surprising yourself all the time.

players, not the music. You learn the music, then express yourself and give the guys a heads-up, so the next guy can express himself.

MD: Do you lean on specific stickings or combinations in solos?

Mike: I play singles, double paradiddles, triple paradiddles, flams, flam taps. If I look at a video, I can explain it, but when I’m playing it’s an out-of-body experience. I’m somewhere else.

MD: Is it easy to enter that state of mind?

Mike: Yes, as soon as I sit down. When I’m playing music I’m not paying attention to what I’m doing myself, I’m more of a reactive player. I’m hearing what the other musicians are playing first. I give a natural reaction without thinking. My playing is about what I’m feeling and what’s going on around me. I’m about supporting the music.

MD: What was your goal for your *Killing Bugs* album, which you’ve released under your alias, Blaque Dynamite?

Mike: There wasn’t a real goal. The way my friends and I create music, we just try to see how creative we can be. On a lot of the



songs, I played instruments other than drums, including keyboards, guitar, and bass, and I sing all of the songs.

When we were making the album we just wanted to create something that we hadn't heard before. We wanted to make music with the jazz mentality that we can create anything and play over it. It doesn't matter what style it is, but the whole purpose of being a "jazz guy" is creativity. That was the goal, to be creative and make music we hadn't heard before.

MD: "Dear 5/29/94" is a love song within a blow-out fusion track. That's a first.

Mike: I wrote that song about a ridiculous ex-girlfriend who has to stay away from me for the rest of my life. That

Mitchell's Drums

"I'm ADD and ADHD," says Mike Mitchell, "so my setups change every day on tour. Sometimes I'll have a left-handed and right-handed kit put together. Or a Billy Cobham-style: four racks on top and two bass drums. Sometimes I do the Tony Williams two [toms] up/three [floor toms] down setup. Then I might play a couple snare drums and a floor tom with a couple cymbals for hip-hop. It depends on the band and the type of music I'm playing." The following is the setup Mitchell was using at the time of our interview.

Drums:

- 6.5x14 snare
- 8x12 tom
- 9x13 tom
- 14x14 floor tom
- 14x16 floor tom
- 16x18 floor tom
- 18x24 bass drum

Cymbals:

- 16" K Special Dry hi-hats
- 19" K Special Dry crash
- 22" K Constantinople Thin ride
- 20" K Special Dry crashes (2)

Heads:

Remo Clear Black Dot batters

Sticks:

Vic Firth Blaque Dynamite Signature model



song is literally about a journey of hatred. Very toxic. Then I have a song called "Ayo," which is about my actual girlfriend.

MD: You went to a music and arts high school. But you didn't study music in college?

Mike: I didn't have the chance. I did the audition for New England Conservatory and was accepted, but then I began touring with Stanley Clarke. I was seventeen. And even before that, I was playing with Christian McBride. When I graduated high school I did a couple gigs with Stanley, and he wanted me to go on tour in South America. I got back home literally in time to walk on stage for my high school graduation.

MD: You've played the drums since the age of two; drumming must be like talking for you. But did you spend hours practicing at some point?

Mike: Definitely. I started playing drums at two but I didn't really begin intensive practicing until I was four.

MD: At the ripe old age of four. How did you even reach the ride cymbal at four?

Mike: I had a Yamaha kit: a 12" snare, a 10" rack tom, a 13" floor tom, a 16" bass drum, and a couple cymbals. It was small and



actually my size. I practiced on that set for years. I would get off school at 3 o'clock and play on the drums until 8.

MD: What did you practice? Did you take lessons?

Mike: I didn't have any lessons until high school. From age three to thirteen I would practice four to five hours a day, every day.

MD: And what did you practice?

Mike: I'd play to records by artists that I liked. I'd learn their whole catalog. I'd practice Mint Condition, which is Chris Dave and Stokley Williams on drums. Or I'd practice Earth, Wind & Fire, which at the time was Sonny Emory. I was shedding a live Gap Band concert record; the drummer had a double pedal, and that made me want to get one and figure out how to play that.

I also played to a lot of gospel albums. Calvin Rodgers' records were a huge influence on me. He's the drumming face of many current gospel records. And gospel musician Myron Butler—his musicians went on to play with Snarky Puppy. That was my childhood.

MD: You eventually met your childhood drumming heroes?

Mike: Yes, I began meeting these drummers, such as Chris Dave and Robert "Sput" Searight. They said I was good and recommended music I should listen to. Sput gave me a tape of Tony Williams Lifetime and then tapes of Elvin Jones' different bands. Hearing that at fifteen, I hated it. Didn't understand it at all. [laughs] But I kept listening to it because I knew there was something there that I needed to learn, [even if] I didn't know what it was. The older I got, the more I listened, and by the time I got to high school, those records were still boring, but I was beginning to get it. They eventually became some of the most

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beautiful brushwork records I'd heard in my life. But at twelve I didn't want to hear brushes, I wanted to hear somebody rip!

MD: Whose brushwork?

Mike: Elvin Jones.

MD: Did a high school teacher show you the rudiments?

Mike: In high school I was a troubled child. I didn't want to do anything except go to my jazz classes. But a teacher outside of Booker T., Chris Knox, became my mentor. Another teacher showed me the rudiments, but Knox explained the science behind musicality—like the emotions people feel when you play the ride cymbal, or what the side stick will do for a song. And he taught me how to read music. Chris taught me to play freely and not overthink or overcompensate for things that felt awkward.

MD: Did playing swing and jazz come naturally to you after having played gospel?

Mike: At fourteen, everything is natural. The technique was there since I was eight. Understanding musical etiquette came at around thirteen. I started recording when I was eleven.

MD: What's been hard for you to grasp on drumset?

Mike: Honestly, it all came very naturally. Even now when I'm uncomfortable with something, if I sit with it for five minutes it becomes more comfortable. It's not because I'm that good or something, it's just my state of mind that "this is obtainable." I just have to be patient with myself. I don't feel that anything is really hard, I just have to be more patient. Then I sit down and figure it out.

MD: What do you practice now?

Mike: I practice rudiments for fluidity, for my wrists. It's not that I need to sharpen up on new rudiments, but certain things keep my wrists warm. I have a regimen. For sixteen bars I play singles, doubles, and paradiddles, then I'll do flam taps for sixteen bars, and then repeat. It works out all my wrist kinks and fingering. I do that on my lap or on a pillow or a drum pad. I usually do it with a metronome. I listen for evenness. If it's uneven, I'll bring the tempo down.

MD: Are you always confident? Are you always ready to sit down and burn?

Mike: Yeah, I'm ready to burn all the time. Even when I know I shouldn't be playing—if my hands hurt, or if I'm really tired—when I sit at the drums, I'm there.

MD: Are you ever at a loss for what to play in a certain section of a song?

Mike: Nah. One thing I practiced the most is being responsive. I'd learn tunes from *The Real Book*. I'd know the form of the song, and then I would find the recorded version of it and practice to it. Sometimes I knew the song, but I hadn't heard the record. Or I'd practice my responsiveness on something I knew. Or I'd read the lead sheet, and the new ideas from the other musicians around me would inspire me, and I'd just jump in and start playing.

MD: What did you practice for independence and maneuvering around the kit so well?

Mike: One of my teachers gave me a regimen where I'd play an ostinato on the left foot, a different pattern on my right foot, another pattern on my left hand, and a different pattern on the ride cymbal. I practiced that for a really long time.

MD: What's your warm-up routine?

Mike: I stretch—leg stretches, arm stretches. If I need a warm-up with sticks it's just singles, air-drumming.

MD: How do you tune your drums?

Mike: It depends on the music. I naturally tune high. If I'm playing with Derrick Hodge, I'll tune my toms really low but my snare really high.

MD: Has Stanley Clarke offered any advice?

Mike: He just says, "Play something that matters. Never stop." His whole thing is to play how you want to play, but communicate it to the band. So however I play is fine with Stanley, but I have to communicate with the band. It needs to be clear for the band. It doesn't matter what it is—as long as it's clear, it's cool.

MD: What are your long-term goals as a musician?

Mike: I have many. I want to play the drums for the rest of my life, and I want to create with people, whether it's on the drums or in a mic booth or on guitar. Drumming is my first love and my last love, but the drums are also a gateway to other things. My ultimate career path is to make records, tour with my band, and tour with other bands. Drums are my life right now, but later I will have other people in my life. So I want to be able to serve both of them properly. I want to play every night, make great money on TV—or maybe I'm not playing on TV at all, maybe I'm playing at a cafe that I own. The older I get, the more family-oriented I become. But right now I want to tour the world.

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A Perfect Circle's Jeff Friedl

by Ilya Stemkovsky

Watching and listening to Jeff Friedl play drums is like studying a veteran chess grandmaster. All the moves are deliberate, nothing is about speed or rushing to execute ideas, and there's a thought-out intelligence to every decision.

As the drummer in A Perfect Circle since 2011, Friedl takes his time with drum patterns that *mean* something. The beats are big, heavy, spacious, and full of drama, supporting Maynard James Keenan's emotive vocals with power and weight. Hold the flash, please. But that doesn't imply Friedl can't whip out some blinding fill or show you that there are different sides to his approach and the music he's cradling. And it's precisely this well-rounded skill set that makes the drummer such an in-demand player, having toured and recorded with Keenan's other side project, Puscifer, and his own electronic/rock band, the Beta Machine, not to mention Devo, Eagles of Death Metal, Filter, Tears for Fears, and Shadow Party.

"There's a weird dichotomy with me," says Friedl. "I really enjoy playing with a lot of bands, and I love meeting and hanging with new people and experiencing new things. It keeps me sharp. But at the end of the day, I'm just a small-town boy that likes playing in one band and giving it my all. I'm kind of just an old rocker in that way. The push and pull of going day to day and not knowing what's around the corner keeps me going and excites me."

And there's certainly a push and pull to Friedl's kit work with A Perfect Circle. Check out his determined playing on APC's live 2011 show at Red Rocks, found on *A Perfect Circle Live: Featuring Stone and Echo*. Then take a listen to his unusual yet thunderous



approach to "By and Down," from the band's greatest-hits compilation, *Three Sixty*, which features the snare on the downbeat and then some cool ping-ponging hi-hat flourishes.

Besides working on releasing a new Beta Machine record sometime in 2018, Friedl is also busily working on some other projects, juggling a schedule of playing and teaching that would set most drummers' calendars aflame.





Melinda Oswandel

MD: What was your involvement with the new A Perfect Circle record?

Jeff: I did some sessions for the record in late 2017 and some in early 2018. I'm not sure what the final outcome will be, but I'm excited to tour behind the record.

MD: You're actually in several different bands, and there are many styles that you enjoy playing. How do you keep your parts fresh?

Jeff: I'm inspired by the people that are around me. If you're in the moment and being creative with the people around you, then you're focusing on the styles and the personalities everyone is bringing to the table. In the Beta Machine, Matt McJunkins [vocals, bass, keyboards], Mat Mitchell [producer], and I basically work on all the material, and they have their own particular backgrounds, their own influences. And those guys are wicked great musicians and writers,

so they inspire me to craft my drum parts in the most musical way possible.

I also indirectly feed off the people I used to or currently listen to. The human mind is a crazy thing, you just retain this information. Some things you let go of, while some things just stick with you and inspire you for years to come.

The syncopation of Cuban rhythms is something that's stuck with me over the years. Samuel Formell from Los Van Van is probably my biggest Latin influence. He plays drumset, but he also incorporates timbales and plays three or four percussion parts all in one. I've mainly been a drumset guy my whole life, so when I got into Latin music, I was into timbales at first and listening to Latin jazz—Cal Tjader, Mongo Santamaría, Tito Puente. When I discovered the modern salsa music that the Cubans and Puerto Ricans were

playing, that's when I discovered Los Van Van, and it changed my life. Formell's playing style is aggressive—almost funk, almost rock—but he has these traditional, folkloric rhythms embedded in his playing too, and it just freaked me out. And when I was living in Tuscon, I happened to be playing in a Cuban band, and we went down to Cuba and played in the jazz festival there. So that's one of the ways I'm inspired, and those syncopations and rhythms carry through to the way I approach songs in general.

MD: Do any of your bands get that Latin influence and syncopation more than others?

Jeff: I guess Puscifer and the Beta Machine. The blistering tempos, the feels, and the funky syncopation kind of carry over into those bands. There's a ton of space. Every note counts. I take a spacious, less-is-more approach with those bands, leaving space for guitars, synthesizers, and vocals. That way, there's a purpose behind what I'm playing.

I try to lay off crash cymbals as much as I can, and that way when you hit them, it's memorable, instead of just splashing your way through songs. There's a time and a place for that, don't get me wrong. In *A Perfect Circle*, I might crash-ride the whole damned way through, depending on the song. The Beta Machine specifically is very tom-oriented. And Puscifer has some interesting kick/snare patterns that bounce off the guitars and vocals, or vice versa. I love playing in both those bands. They're representations of where my mind goes when I'm writing parts.

MD: Are you on a click with both of those bands?

Jeff: For the most part, both bands are on a click. There are moments when certain musicians aren't on a click, so it lets things have an organic feel, but for the most part we're on it, like if there's a certain delay created on a keyboard. In the Beta Machine we're triggering everything live; there are very few things on tape. In Puscifer there's multimedia stuff going on, so things have to be synced to that, or we get to a part of a song and the click dies and we ride it out.

MD: Besides being a necessity for the songs, do you like how the

“Some drummers care too much about what other drummers think of them. Ultimately, the thing that's going to get you respected and keep you working is playing musically.”

click keeps everyone honest? Some drummers feel a restriction, while others know they're not going to get a “you're dragging” look from the bassist.

Jeff: I agree with both sides of that equation. I'm right down the middle. Some bands I play in don't care about playing with a click, but others do. In Devo, the first six songs of the set are on a click because they're new songs from the last record the band put out, and we have a video wall, so that content is syncing up and changing as we're playing. But the rest of the show is off the click; the songs are from the first two Devo records, and it's electro-punk madness.

There's something

to be said for throwing the band on your shoulders and just ratcheting through the set and doing your damndest to make sure the tempos are as locked in as possible. The rest of the band doesn't wear in-ears, they've got blasting wedges and they demand that I lace into the drums and relentlessly plow the beats through to the bitter end.

Playing drums in Devo is a crazy, out-of-body experience. You have to get to a Zen place and stay there in order to keep those tempos locked in, but to also push and pull with the rest of the band and properly pay homage to each of those songs. But I don't have a preference. It makes sense that some bands have a click and others don't. I like practicing stuff with a click and then throwing the metronome away. If I'm playing with a band that's not on a click, I'll write the metronome markings down, and if the singer is talking to the crowd, I'll stare at the light blinking and get the feel for the next tempo. And then when we're ready to go, I'll tap the metronome off, count it off, and I'll see you at the end. So at least we're starting at the appropriate tempo, and I can feel the push and pull from the band depending on how much sleep we did or didn't get the night before. But a click is also insurance in case someone is hung over or sick and is going to play slow that day.

MD: Talk about your relationship with bassist Matt McJunkins. You guys share a lot of stages together.

Jeff: In 2007 I subbed for a random band he was in, and it was fun. A year later we were both auditioning for [*A Perfect Circle's*] Billy Howerdel's band, *Ashes Divide*. We got randomly paired up as the rhythm section. We enjoyed each other's company and each other's playing. We went in and did a good job together, and we landed the gig. Then Billy recommended Matt and me to Maynard as a rhythm section for Puscifer, when he was putting that band together. By

Friedl's A Perfect Circle Setup

Drums: Ludwig Classic Maple

- 6.5x14 Black Beauty snare
- 1940s WFL auxiliary snare
- 5x14 Supraphonic auxiliary snare
- 9x13 tom
- 16x16 floor tom
- 16x18 floor tom
- 18x22 bass drum

Cymbals: Zildjian

- 15" A New Beat hi-hats
- 19" K Dark crash
- 20" K Dark crash
- 24" A Medium ride
- 21" Avedis crash/ride
- 20" Oriental China
- 22" Avedis crash/ride

Hardware: DW 9000 series, including lefty double pedal, two-legged hi-hat stand, Heavy Duty

snare stands (for snares and tom), and Heavy Duty straight/boom cymbal stands; Roc-N-Soc throne

Heads: Remo, including a coated CS black dot batter and a clear Ambassador snare-side on main snare, coated Ambassador batters and clear Ambassador snare-sides on auxiliary snares, coated Emperor tom batters and clear Ambassador resonants, and a clear Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter

Sticks: Vic Firth 5B wood-tip

Miscellaneous: Q Drums, Cymbals, LP percussion, Protection Racket cases, Razer Nabu X smartband



Melinda Oswaldel



working on that music together, that's how we created music for the Beta Machine. We realized through playing with each other that we have a really cool thing here, a real symbiotic relationship. We like writing music together, touring, and hanging out. Over the years, we became one of those go-to rhythm sections for people, like Eagles of Death Metal and Tears for Fears.

MD: When you're presented with other people's programmed drum stuff, what's your process for interpreting what you'll do for the keeper takes?

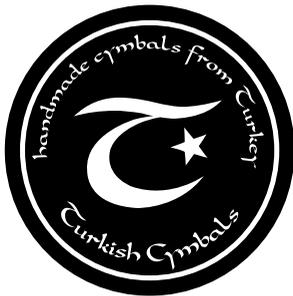
Jeff: Sometimes it's cool not to hear any programming whatsoever, and just hear a bass, guitar, synth, or vocal part and let your mind gravitate to what you think will be best for the song. I like that process a lot. I also like when a producer sends a demo over and says that he likes what's programmed, but I can do whatever I want to it as well. So at least I can hear what the writer or producer's mind is gravitating towards. And then I can enhance or expand upon it. I always learn something from the process, whether drums are handed to me or not. And things always change. That's one of

the things that excites me about playing in multiple bands. Every situation is just a bit different, and you learn and grow from it.

MD: There are lots of odd times in Puscifer, the other bands as well. How do you come up with creative odd-time drum patterns?

Jeff: I'm trying to evoke the proper feeling, so my mind goes right to the underlying feel of the song, whether it's a kick/snare pattern or a tom pattern. With odd meters, there's a tendency for some people to overplay. But I generally try to make things feel even. If I can come up with a kick/snare pattern that transcends these shortened or elongated measures and people can still bob their heads to it—for instance, making a beat sound like it's in four when an 8th note or quarter note is shaved off at the end of the measure—then I've done something right. Puscifer's "Telling Ghosts" [from 2011's *Conditions of My Parole*] is a good example of when I'm floating over the barline when the song is in seven. I'm always trying to come up with a way to make things sound simple, hypnotic, and funky, so people can move to it.

MD: How do you juggle all these bands? How do you keep your



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Jeff Friedl

schedule manageable?

Jeff: Sometimes it just works. Sometimes you play Tetris and you have a good game, and sometimes the game is over before it even starts. For example, I went from being on tour with Devo in Australia, and on the plane ride home I put on my headphones and started absorbing A Perfect Circle and Puscifer music again, because the following morning at 10 A.M. I had double rehearsals starting with both bands, back to back, morning to night. If I can work it out, great. If I can’t, I graciously pass the baton on to someone else.

MD: Are there any cool new toys or gear you’re excited about using?

Jeff: For Beta Machine’s last tour, I had these Jenkins-Martin/ Blaemire fiberglass concert toms. They’re replicas of Hal Blaine’s concert toms. And through geeking out on Blaine and Phil Collins, I’ve gotten into using that vibe. They just poke out and serve an amazing purpose. They provide this initial attack that’s unique, and they’re warmer than you think. I mix them with my Ludwig Mahogany Legacy kit and some Yamaha DTX electronic pads. With A Perfect Circle, I’ve got a couple cool 1940s WFL side snares I’ll use on the song “Counting Bodies Like Sheep to the Rhythm of the War Drums” [from 2004’s *Emotive*].

MD: You posted on Facebook about your Beta Machine setup, saying, “Sometimes certain setups make you play differently.” Elaborate on that.

Jeff: It could be anything, like bass drum size; if you’ve got a big, open 26” bass drum, you might feel reluctant to play a ton of notes on it. If you’ve got something punchier and easier to play on, maybe that influences you to paint the page a little bit more.

But I guess it just depends on the music, right? If I’m using Rototoms like in Puscifer, or concert toms like I do in the majority of my Beta Machine setups, the way those drums project feels and sounds to me the best if I play less. There’s a certain sound that’s created when you strike those drums that fills the air in a certain way, the attack of them.

And if I have fewer cymbals in my setup, I’m less likely to bash away on them. I could probably get away with one crash cymbal in both the Beta Machine and Puscifer. I’ve been using the new Zildjian Avedis 16” hi-hats in the Beta Machine, and those things are so versatile, you can make them sound like 15s or 16s. But really just having two crashes and hi-hats makes me play less.

There’s a lot more meaning behind it when you’ve got less in front of you, instead of hiding behind a bunch of gear. There’s a time to have a bigger setup, but it doesn’t mean a drummer is going to hit all that shit, especially if he or she is a good musician.

MD: Are there any trends you’re seeing in your teaching world?

Jeff: Some drummers care too much about what other drummers think of them. Ultimately the thing that’s going to get you respected and keep you working is playing musically, and the only way to keep playing musically is to play in as many bands as you can. I respect all the drummers that are sculpting interesting careers with social media and YouTube, but if they want to get a gig, they have to put themselves out there a little bit more. Every day you’re not meeting new people and playing in new bands, you’re wasting that time. And don’t try to impress people with your chops.

MD: Do you ever see a reason to stop playing?

Jeff: I can’t blame anyone who wants to do something else, or who’s tired of dealing with the bullshit of the music industry. You really have to love it to keep pushing through it year after year and play club circuits over and over. There’s something really magical about it, though. As long as you continue to love it and do your best to avoid the politics of it all, then it can remain fun your whole life.





THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO DRUM

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La Luz's Marian

Story by John Colpitts

At the time of this interview, Marian Li-Pino of L.A.-based-via-Seattle psych-surf band La Luz had just returned from finishing their new album, *Floating Features*, at Dan Auerbach's Nashville-based Easy Eye Studio. Li-Pino was riding high and excited about the creative experience and the amazing studio. Auerbach was also suitably impressed. "Marian is one of the best drummers I've ever recorded. She has a very even touch on the drums—perfectly suited towards recording. She comes up with great parts, and she always listens to the rest of the band. She's basically a producer's dream."

For a young musician, who just moved from the smaller Seattle scene to the vast L.A. music landscape, this advocacy points to huge things on the horizon. For the time being, though, Li-Pino is a talent who is slightly under the radar.

I was introduced to the drumming of Li-Pino and her band when I asked one of my students to bring in some beats to work on. While the garage/psych/surf attack of La Luz was undeniably catchy, I was immediately drawn to Li-Pino's crisp syncopations, powerful groove, and taste. Here was a drummer who achieved that elusive balance between accessibility and complexity. Her playing can appeal to students of technique and songcraft in equal measure, all the while remaining transparent for the average music fan. La Luz's albums *It's Alive* (2013), the Ty Segall produced *Weirdo Shrine* (2015), and the just-out *Floating Features* highlight Marian's creativity and growth as a musician.

Not only is Li-Pino a great drummer, she's a very generous person, agreeing to work with my student via Facetime so we could pinpoint the subtleties of some of her trickier beats. We spoke recently about her influences and drumming approach.



Li-Pino

MD: I'd like to begin by asking about your musical upbringing. Your family is Chilean, and you've previously spoken about your love of Arturo Sandoval, Astrud Gilberto/Antônio Carlos Jobim, and Juan Luis Guerra.

Marian: Yes! What Latin music did was open my eyes to the idea of a percussion section rather than a singular drummer, and how, pulled apart, each person's rhythm is simple. But when put together, the end result is complex and nuanced and filled with depth. I want each limb to effectively be a part of a percussive group.

MD: I understand that you studied percussion as well as drumset. When did you start playing?

Marian: I grew up in Seattle and began drum lessons at around age ten or eleven, continuing them throughout middle school and high school with different instructors. At the time I focused mainly on percussive training—everything from triangle to timpani. I played in a drum ensemble and also band orchestras, with a couple jazz classes here and there. Throughout all this, I was using the techniques I learned to play around on the kit.

MD: I know that you have a daily practice regimen. What are you working on these days?

Marian: My practice regimen consists of working on my weaknesses. My kick drum foot is basically at a beginner level, so I've been steadily working on exceedingly boring exercises at the kit that take forever but have to be done. Each time I reach a milestone I use it as a short warm-up for the next time and then move on to a new exercise to continue my progress. I've also been bored with my fills and found that my body has fallen into a routine, so I'm trying to build my arsenal with different voicings and syncopations. All of this is done to a click. Then, of course, I allow some time at the end of rehearsal for me to use the



Photos by Alex Solca



new things I've learned with music I like playing to. That way I let out some steam in a more productive way. I practice between two and three hours at a time and try to go every day or every other day.

MD: Do you have any advice on keeping a consistent practice routine? Any resources that we might be interested in?

Marian: Lately my focus with practice routines is to have extreme patience. Patience to not only learn a fill or groove, but also to live within it and tweak it and push it and make it feel natural within every setting. To find or create variances and move freely between them. That sort of thing can take days or weeks, and it's often tempting to simply nail something and forget about it. So my advice is: Don't just learn something, really internalize it and make it your own by changing where the accents are, or how you voice the phrase. As for tools, lately I've been spending thirty dollars a month to look up instructional videos—shout out to Mike Johnston at mikeslessons.com—and grow myself that way. If you do it right, there's a lot to pull from it.

MD: There feels like there was a huge technical jump in the drum parts between *It's Alive* and *Weirdo Shrine*. For instance, on the tune "With Davey" your snare pattern is complicated but doesn't distract from the tune.

Marian: I think that, possibly, with *Weirdo Shrine* I started to break out a bit more and take more creative liberty. Shana [Cleveland, La Luz's guitarist and songwriter] has specific things she wants to hear, and I try to hit those but also add a little more sauce to fill up the songs. The problem is making sure not to overplay—which I am pretty bad at!

MD: Are there any tunes where your complicated sensibilities snuck through?

Marian: Oh, my gosh, in those first two albums I was always trying to sneak in more complicated stuff. Poor Shana just wanted a simple surf beat for pretty much every song, and I completely distorted that vision. You'll notice that there is always a 2 and 4 snare, but I'm adding the percussion section around it. Examples are "With Davey," "I Wanna Be Alone," "Sunstroke," "Morning High"... the list goes on and on. I'm making a mess of everything! [laughs] And live it's even worse—I screw around so much on "Call Me in the Day." But I don't do it to distract, I do it to have fun and to keep it interesting and add

MD: Are there any tunes where your complicated sensibilities snuck through?



some flavor.

MD: Can you give me a rundown of your current live kit?

Marian: Currently I'm playing on a custom C&C kit that is made from African and Luan mahogany, and poplar. The snare is a maple C&C. My hi-hats are from Dream cymbals, 14" Bliss. My ride is a 19" Istanbul Agop. All together everything sounds dark and washy.

MD: Can you talk about your new album a bit—the writing sessions, the recording?

Marian: This new album felt like it went through a really different process from the rest. Shana did a good job of coming to us before she began writing and asking us to provide her with parts or influences so that she could sort of mold her process around that. We co-wrote some grooves, and it was fun just kind of bouncing ideas around, messing with arrangements, really thinking about transitions and sort of trimming the fat. I didn't feel the need to overplay. The songs were strong, and I wanted them to have the space they deserved. You won't hear as many Latin grooves, it's a bit more straight rock, but still weird and psychedelic. This was a really deep collaborative effort, and what we have now is an album that is, in my opinion, the best one we've written.

We spent about two weeks recording. We produced it with Dan Auerbach at his studio in Nashville; Allen Parker engineered it. I can't speak for the band, but to me, the biggest difference between *Weirdo Shrine* and this album was having a state-of-the-art studio to work with. Everything was set up and ready to go at all times, there was no waiting around, every concept we had was immediately put into action. Dan had some cool ideas for extra parts, and Allen just worked constant magic to tie it all together cohesively.

MD: What kinds of advice would you give about executing parts in the studio?

Marian: It's hard to give advice for the studio environment; everyone has their own hang-ups or fears. I think the best way to prepare is to practice a ton before going in. Make sure to have all your fills and transitions smoothed out, and record yourself so that you can tell if you're repeating an annoying phrase, or if you tend to speed during a certain section, or if something just isn't working with the song. It gives you confidence when you know you've heard it through a listener's perspective and adjusted your playing to better suit the song.

MD: Along these lines, you have a great feel for accompaniment. A lot of drummers don't seem to be able to find that balance. Can you talk about how that developed?

Marian: Listening to your fellow musicians, building on what they're playing, supporting it, or challenging it, all through sound and feel, is very important. On the flip side, it's key to know when to keep your voice down. If we all spoke at once you'd never be able to follow the topic. Dynamics are essential as well; controlling your sound level at key times can turn a good song into a great song.

In the end, nobody really cares if you're playing a sick samba rhythm on the ride cymbal with a surf backbeat and an offbeat hi-hat that alternates between splashing and closing. They just want you to shut the hell up so that they can hear what the singer is saying. I'm into the idea of playing stripped down and hitting the deepest pocket I can find and staying there and letting the songs speak for themselves.



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OFF THE RECORD

Ben Koller on the Armed's *Only Love*

The constantly engaged metal-drumming madman gets conned into recording one of the year's most brutally raw albums—with a few surprises.

by Willie Rose

On April 27 the Detroit-based hardcore/experimental band the Armed released *Only Love*, the group's second full-length since its inception in 2009. For the new effort, the Armed recruited metal-drumming vet Ben Koller [Converge, Mutoid Man, Killer be Killed, All Pigs Must Die] to handle the album's ruthless parts. After *Only Love's* split-second synth intro, Koller and the band launch into a distorted barrage that endures throughout the record's eleven tracks. On the effort, the group coaxes a chainsaw-like cacophony through time shifts, melodic breaks, and well-tempted resolutions—all with a clever grace.

Koller explains to *MD* that some surprising circumstances led to his involvement on the Armed's newest release. "Kurt Ballou [Converge guitarist, owner of GodCity studio, and *Only Love's* producer] had known the Armed for a while," explains Koller, "since he'd recorded a previous album of theirs. I was sort of familiar with them and knew they were mysterious and total weirdos, which is right up my alley. Kurt informed me that they were doing a new record and that they'd love me to track drums for it if I had time. I was skeptical at first—it was short notice, and the recording would take place right in the middle of tracking drums for a new Converge album, which seemed [like it would be] pretty stressful. The selling point for me was that at one point I'd heard that Rob Trujillo from Metallica would be playing bass. This seemed weird and farfetched, but I believed it since another friend of mine had jammed with him for a project recently.

"It turns out," Koller continues, "Rob was never involved in any capacity. When I showed up for the session asking, 'Where's Rob?' Kurt looked at me like I was crazy. Also, the Armed had sent Kurt demos for the record and made him tell me they were Converge songs so that I'd start learning them. So essentially, I was conned into playing on this album. I was so taken aback by these weird tactics that I just went with it."

Over the course of two days, the Armed threw thirty songs at Koller in the studio. "Honestly it was such a blur that I don't really remember doing it," the drummer says. "They were really into this mishmash approach to assembling parts. It was a lot of punching in and tracking one part at a time, and they told me they'd piece it all together later. They also kept insisting that certain fills feel 'more like Chad Smith.' They'd play all these deep cuts from newer Red Hot Chili Peppers records. It was surreal. Sometimes the references were so seemingly disconnected from the parts of the songs that we were recording. Once again, I'm unsure if they were joking or not.

"It was very rapid-fire and stressful," Koller continues. "It was just me with the bassist playing a scratch track



in the control room. I'm not even sure if the bass lines were relevant to the song we were recording—they sounded confusing and *very* different from the demos I'd heard previously. I just tried to stay in my own head and ignore what the scratch bass was doing. I even told Kurt to turn the bass volume way down in the headphones because I could've sworn there were some Primus licks going on in some of the tunes. And I think a suggestion at one point was to 'do the Converge thing you do, but faster and less shitty.'"

Koller had to make some adjustments to his usual recording setup for the session as well. "This kit was a little different from what I'm used to," Koller says. "They were insistent on using an actual gun loaded with blanks to use as a sampled snare sound. The logistics of this were a nightmare, and Kurt really freaked out. Luckily, they didn't carry out that plan. I think we ended up using one of Kurt's GodCity Instruments snares for most of the session and a combination of random pieces for the rest of the drums. They kept changing out cymbals in the middle of songs, and Kurt and I were worried that the sounds weren't going to match up. But the band kept telling me, 'This is art, and you wouldn't understand.' Good point, guys."

Well, then...let's dive in.

“Witness”

After two brief quarter notes of arpeggiated synth, Koller bursts into *Only Love's* intense opener with a barrage of fills and accents in 7/4. "I was counting it in 14/8, subdivided into '123, 123, 123, 123, 12,'" Koller explains. "I was trying to increase the intensity on a simple theme." Here's the simplified rhythm that Koller embellishes on throughout this section.

At 0:21, the cacophony abates—slightly—for a two-measure drum break in 13/8. "This fill follows the same accent pattern of the previous part, but it's very stark, with no intermediary notes," Koller says. "It's split up with such a heavy kick that it sounds a bit like a tempo shift. Then it drops a 16th note at the end, so the downbeat of the next blast beat almost sounds like a pickup note." Here's the basic rhythm Koller plays during this break.

“Role Models”

At 1:22, Koller drives a chorus with brash crashes, sparse snare accents, and persistent quarter notes on the bass drum before the band modulates to a new tempo based on the previous section's quarter-note-triplet subdivision. For Koller, sometimes tempo shifts such as these go by feel, and sometimes he works out the math. "I'm generally into the feel approach when it comes to parts like this," he says. "If it feels right, I'm generally not going to worry about math and modulation. I choose to go by feel first and foremost. Then if something seems weird and needs to be charted out or organized, I'll take care of that after the fact." Check out the rhythmic shift, which happens around the 1:40 mark. Set to a metronome, both sections maintain a pulse of 155 bpm.



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Must-Know Grooves

The Blues Shuffle

by Jim Riley

Although the blues is considered an American art form, it's a genre of music that resonates around the world. With that in mind, if you're a drummer trying to connect with new musicians, there's no better opportunity to do so than at a local blues jam.

The style is so accessible because most blues tunes follow a specific chord structure known as a "12-bar blues." The following illustrates a condensed chart of a typical 12-bar blues form. Each number represents a chord that's played for one measure. In the key of C major, for instance, "1" would represent a C chord (CEG), "4" would represent an F chord (FAC), and "5" would represent a G chord (GBD). You can check out a clear example of this form while listening to Muddy Waters' recording of "Kansas City" from *Live in Chicago, 1979* and following along with the chart.

1 - 1 - 1 - 1
4 - 4 - 1 - 1
5 - 4 - 1 - 5

Although there are many feels associated with blues music, the shuffle is certainly one of the most important. This groove is based on a triplet subdivision, which in a measure of 4/4 can be counted as "1-&-a, 2-&-a, 3-&-a," and "4-&-a." In the patterns we're focusing on in this lesson, each note will fall on the first and/or third partial of each triplet. We can verbalize these partials as "1-a, 2-a, 3-a, 4-a" while leaving a rest on the "&," or the second triplet partial, of each beat.

Let's begin with a shuffle ride-cymbal pattern. Try counting triplets while playing the following example.

Now let's add the snare. Initially we'll practice a shuffle variation called the "double shuffle." In this groove, the snare plays the same rhythm that the ride or hi-hat plays. Drummer Clifton James can be heard playing an excellent version of this pattern on "The Seventh Son" from Willie Dixon's album *I Am the Blues*.

Next, add the bass drum. In this lesson we're going to be playing what's generally referred to as a "four-on-the-floor shuffle." That simply means that the bass drum will play all four quarter notes in a measure of 4/4 underneath our hand pattern.

In This Lesson

- What's a typical 12-bar blues form?
- What's a "double shuffle" drum groove?
- Which songs feature the classic blues shuffle?

Accents give this groove some additional sonic depth. Let's add accents to both the ride and snare on beats 2 and 4.

For a variation, drop the snare on beats 1 and 3. Make sure to play the accents on beats 2 and 4 with both hands.

If you're having a hard time with Exercise 5, try playing quarter notes on the ride. You can drop the accents on the ride, but keep the snare accents to maintain a great shuffle feel.

The next pattern varies Exercise 6 slightly by adding a drag on the last triplet partial of beats 2 and 4. The drag should flow smoothly into the quarter-note kick. To practice this, let's break it down by playing only the snare and bass drum.

Now let's add the quarter-note ride pattern. This can also serve as a useful groove variation on its own.

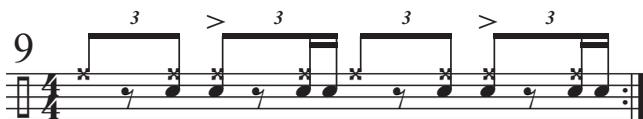
This final shuffle variation is by far my favorite. I learned this groove while listening to the great Chris "Whipper" Layton playing with Stevie Ray Vaughan. Layton plays this pattern on "Cold Shot" from Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble's album *Couldn't Stand the Weather*. It's a great-

The Blues Shuffle: Essential Listening

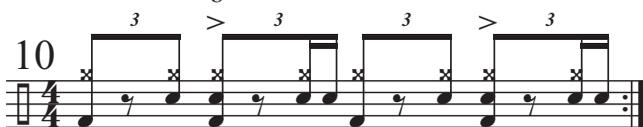
- Willie "Big Eyes" Smith** on Muddy Waters' rendition of "Kansas City" (*Muddy "Mississippi" Waters—Live*)
- Clifton James** on Willie Dixon's "The Seventh Son" (*I Am the Blues*)
- Chris "Whipper" Layton** on Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble's rendition of "Cold Shot" (*Couldn't Stand the Weather*)
- Al Jackson Jr.** on Booker T. & the M.G.'s "Green Onions" (*Green Onions*)
- Fred Below** on Little Walter's "My Babe" (*My Babe*)

sounding recording that gives you a clear picture of Layton's drumming.

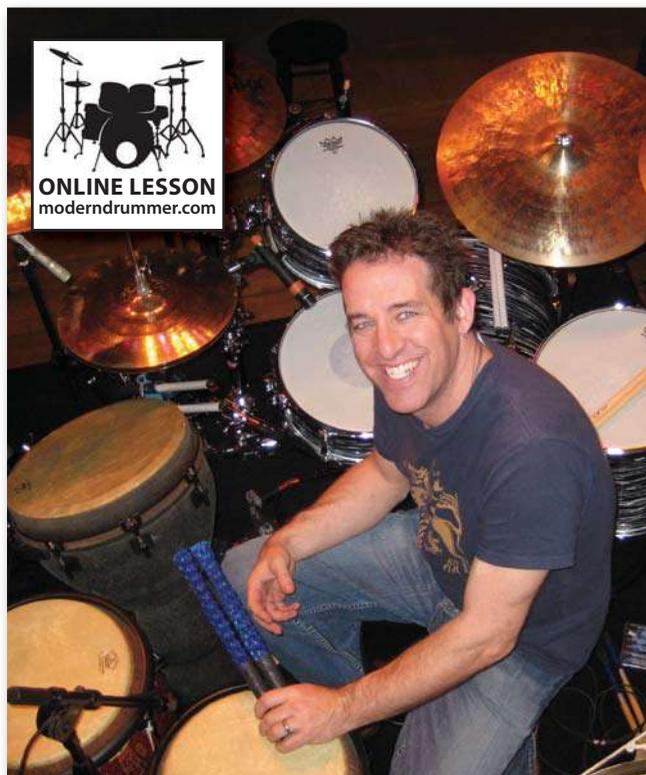
Layton employs the drag with a shuffled ride pattern. This could create a challenge for the hands. Let's work on the hand coordination slowly before working it up to speed.



While Layton's pattern on "Cold Shot" has slight variations, here's the main groove between the kick, hi-hat, and snare. You can also move the right hand from the hi-hat to the ride.



By employing the multiple variations in this lesson, you can give each section of a song its own character. Head over to modern drummer.com to check out the blues shuffle and demonstrations of the previous examples. See you next time!



Jim Riley is the drummer and bandleader for Rascal Flatts. His book *Survival Guide for the Modern Drummer* is available from Alfred Music. For more information, visit jimrileymusic.com.



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Developing the Weaker Hand

Exercises to Balance Your Technique, Part 1

by Albe Bonacci

Often in lessons I'm asked, "How do I develop my weak hand?" I usually suggest that students focus on the weaker hand more and begin leading with it. Although the concepts I give them may not end up being employed on a gig, students do begin balancing their hand technique. In this lesson we'll explore some exercises to develop our weak hand. If you normally lead with your left hand, practice these examples with a reversed sticking.

Generally for right-handed players, the left hand takes care of diddles, drags, and buzzes when playing grooves. Meanwhile, the right hand carries the weight of playing cymbal crashes and leading phrases around the kit. When these roles are reversed, it quickly reveals the ineptness of the right hand. I first started noticing this with some students when playing an exercise like the following:

1

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

Often when the left hand reached up to play the crash, it resembled trying to throw a ball with your weak hand. The ball may not even leave your hand, but even if it does, it doesn't look or feel comfortable. The right hand, even though obviously stronger, also looked befuddled when playing, especially when moving around the kit like so:

2

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

A paradiddle-diddle sticking works well when practicing the left-hand-lead idea.

3

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

Also practice these smaller triplet cells for more variation. Repeat each figure to create four-beat phrases.

4A

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

B

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

C

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

D

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

We can also orchestrate the paradiddle-diddle around the kit. Remember that the left hand always plays the cymbal.

5A

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

B

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

C

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

In this next exercise, all of the right-hand strokes start on the snare and subsequently move around the toms on each beat.

Five-Note Bop Groupings

Developing Independence with Odd Phrases

by Joe Bergamini



Jazz drummer and educator John Riley's book *Beyond Bop Drumming* is full of concepts that are extremely challenging yet musical. Recently, in addition to digging into many of the advanced four-way coordination concepts in John's book, I attended multiple clinics by Steve Smith, who's renowned for musically incorporating Indian rhythms and odd groupings into his playing. A combination of these two influences inspired this article's concepts. We'll focus on playing a five-note grouping in a jazz context, taking a figure and varying it several different ways against a typical jazz ride pattern.

It takes a lot of practice to become comfortable with five-note groupings, especially as they begin to cycle over the barlines. Benny Greb's book, *The Language of Drumming*, provides a great introduction to playing three-, five-, and seven-note figures in more of a rock and pop groove context by fitting the groupings into one-measure phrases. This approach makes the rhythms digestible and removes some of the rhythmic illusions that these phrases can create. In these examples, however, to challenge and strengthen our phrasing and pulse over longer stretches of time, we'll explore these concepts in four-bar phrases.

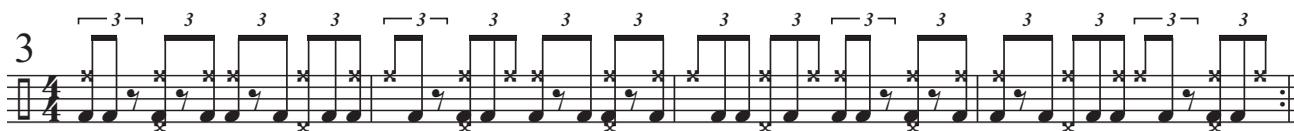
Here's the grouping that we'll be using in this lesson.



Now we'll apply this grouping to the full kit. At first, leave out the bass drum and play only the snare. This creates an interesting tension and allows us to hear the five-note grouping in a different way. It's also a good place to start developing the necessary coordination. Play the hi-hat with your foot on beats 2 and 4 throughout this lesson, unless otherwise notated.



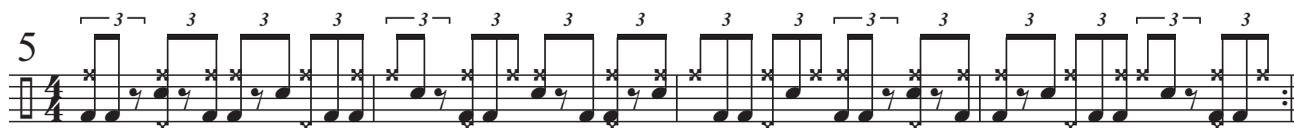
Next, try the same grouping with the bass drum.



Now we'll split the previous rhythm between the snare and bass drum. The first two partials of the five-note grouping are played on the snare, and the fourth partial is played on the bass drum.



The next example reverses the previous orchestration. The bass drum plays the first two notes of the original figure, and the snare plays the fourth. These two examples create an interesting rhythmic tension, and to my ears they make it harder to identify the five-note grouping as the source of this phrase.



Introduction to Polyrhythms

How to Play Odd Groupings, Part 2: Making Them Musical

by Aaron Edgar

Last month we created polyrhythmic contrast by using odd spacings within even subdivisions. This month we'll explore ways to apply these rhythms musically. Since our goal is to create a rhythmic phrase that contrasts with the pulse, we need to focus on the spacing within our subdivision. This raises the question, "How can I voice this polyrhythmic layer?"

Let's start by voicing the contrasting rhythm on the bass drum. Maintaining a simple hand pattern, such as a typical hi-hat and snare rock groove, is a great way to maintain the pulse against the kick. You can highlight both sides of the polyrhythm by accenting quarter notes on the hi-hat or by playing quarter notes with your hi-hat foot underneath the groove. Exercise 1 demonstrates a three-over-four polyrhythm with the contrasting layer, or three side, played by the bass drum.



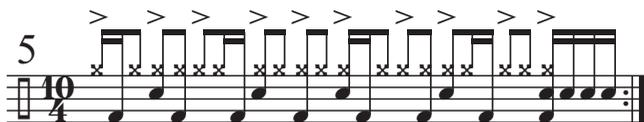
Exercise 2 demonstrates a four-over-five polyrhythm. We'll play a straight 4/4 backbeat through the measure of 10/4.



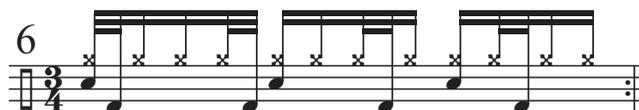
To make these patterns more musical, we can embellish the contrasting layer of each grouping. Exercise 3 varies the seven side of a four-over-seven polyrhythm, and Exercise 5 embellishes the six side of six-over-five. Each example ends with a left-hand variation.



Another extremely useful tool is permutation. A common misconception regarding polyrhythms is that both sides of the grouping should start together on beat 1. This is untrue—in fact, each side of the rhythm doesn't need to be played simultaneously at any point throughout a phrase. Exercise 5 displaces the four side of our four-over-five bass drum figure from Exercise 2 forward by one 16th note.



Exercise 6 displaces the four side of a four-over-three polyrhythm forward by one 32nd note. Because we're playing a 16th-note hand pattern in this example, neither side of the polyrhythm is played simultaneously. You can explore these types of linear polyrhythmic phrases further in my new book, *Progressive Drumming Essentials*.



Next we'll play the contrasting layer with our other limbs. Exercise 7 places the four side of a four-over-five polyrhythm on the ride cymbal. Exercise 8 demonstrates a linear four-over-three polyrhythm with the four side played on the snare.

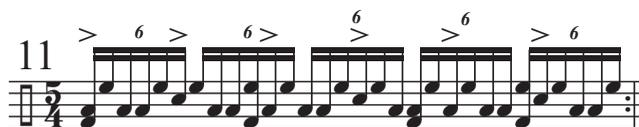


Exercise 9 moves the four side of a four-over-three polyrhythm to the hi-hat foot. Pay particular attention to its interaction with the bass drum pattern.



Combining your limbs can create interesting rhythmic phrases. Alternating one side of a polyrhythm between two voices, such as the bass drum and snare, creates somewhat of an implied metric modulation. The accented polyrhythmic layer makes the main pulse feel like it's either faster or slower.

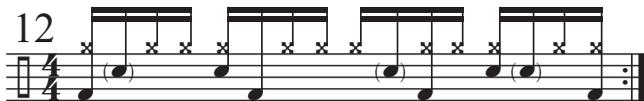
Exercise 10 explores this concept within a four-over-five polyrhythm by alternating the four side of the phrase between the bass drum and snare. Exercise 11 alternates the six side of a six-over-five polyrhythm between the floor tom and snare within a funky 16th-note-triplet tom groove.



There are a few ways to handle polyrhythm resolutions. Because we're making these concepts musical, the semantics of what's actually a perfect polyrhythm aren't necessarily important, and neither is allowing the figure to resolve completely on repeat. The point here is to explore polyrhythmic theory in a way that's conducive to expression and creativity. To do that, after we solidify our core understanding of how the polyrhythmic rules work, we need to examine which rules we can break.

Using only part of a rhythmic phrase can be very musical. For example, a four-over-five polyrhythm takes a bar of 5/4 to resolve, but we don't need to finish the full figure. We can fit 80 percent of the rhythm within a measure of 4/4 quite effectively. Combining this fragment with permutation and varied phrasing can result in a flexible way to create unique, syncopated feels that contrast with the underlying pulse.

Look back at Exercise 2 to review a basic four-over-five grouping. Exercise 12 takes the first four quarter notes of this phrase and embellishes it slightly. Exercise 13 varies the last four quarter notes in a similar fashion with one additional bass drum note and paradiddles in the hands.



Bar length doesn't need to affect your rhythm, though. You can play polyrhythmic phrases in 4/4 (or any time signature) while allowing the grouping to continue over the barline. You can resolve naturally, where the polyrhythm perfectly restarts on beat 1 after however many bars the particular rhythm takes. Or you can force it to resolve at any point, such as four, eight, or sixteen measures later, by cutting straight back to beat 1. This can be done by cutting the rhythm short or embellishing the end for a less choppy transition. The progressive metal band Meshuggah employs this concept in a lot of their phrases.

You also aren't limited to a single contrast layer. This lesson's final example utilizes many of the previous concepts while layering multiple polyrhythms.

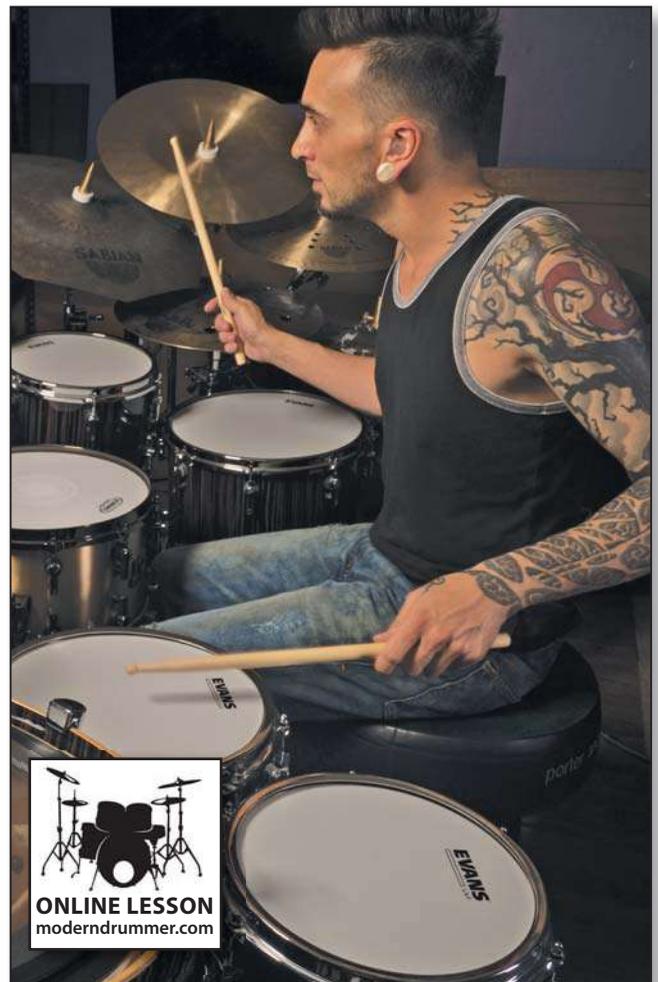
Exercise 14 is in 7/4, and each limb represents a separate rhythmic layer. Your hi-hat foot voices the quarter note on the "&" of each beat to give us the pulse of each of the following polyrhythms. Your left hand plays every seventh 16th note starting on beat 1, which gives us a four-over-seven polyrhythm over the hi-hat pulse. Your right foot plays every third 16th note for a four-over-three rhythm that resolves twice in the measure with one extra beat left over. Finally, your right hand plays a four-over-five rhythm on the ride starting on the

second 16th note for a grouping that also doesn't completely resolve.

To practice this, start with your feet alone. Next add your right hand while making sure each layer is solid before adding in the snare notes individually.



Next time we'll explore multi-layered polyrhythms in more depth. For now, work on creatively applying polyrhythmic layers to the kit—and make them musical!



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.



Do I Need a Fallback Plan?

Part 2: What to Do When Things Aren't Working

by Russ Miller

Welcome to Part 2 of a miniseries that focuses on the reasons for and against making music a full-time career. Maybe you've been doing all of the things I suggested in Part 1 (June 2018), but you're still not seeing the results you want. If that's the case, then it might be time to reassess your location. You ultimately have to go where the industry you want to work in exists. Almost every city has some music business in it, but not every place has enough work to yield high-level success, whether that's financially or artistically.

"Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm."

—Winston S. Churchill (former prime minister of the United Kingdom)

Where Do You Live and How Good Are You?

Think about the market you're trying to reach. Does it exist where you live? Major cities like New York, Los Angeles, and London have larger pools of opportunities for gigs. But if you're living in a town with a smaller population, then you're going to have a much more difficult time finding steady work.

The second—and much more difficult—issue to address is that maybe you aren't as good as you think you are. You have to be honest about your artistry. Is it effective? A sure sign that you're headed in the right direction is that your fan base is growing organically. Sometimes the issue isn't that you're not that good, but rather that you've created a skill set that's not versatile or practical. Do a lot of people need your services? Are you the most proficient player in town at playing in 17/16? If you're more of the latter, then you have two choices: You could form the best band around that plays in 17/16 and other tricky time signatures. Or you could work on some skills that more people can utilize. The most successful players in history did one or both of those things to very high levels.

The Money Situation

Now let's touch on the financial/business component. There comes a time in every artist's life when he or she realizes that it takes a certain level of income to maintain a comfortable adult existence. That being said, I know several amazing middle-aged players who still live like impoverished college students. These players are more than likely guilty of one or two things. First, they're not progressing as an artist; they've stayed at the same level for twenty-five years. Second, they're probably still relying on the

business plan they implemented at the beginning of their career.

No business can really thrive without a healthy revamp now and then, and it's important to stay current. I was part of a speaking event at PASIC 2017. In my speech, I talked about how technology forces us to constantly reassess our business plan. Even Apple, one of the most successful companies in the world, doesn't have the same strategy that it had fifteen years ago.

You can't use one model for a long time and then complain when it's no longer working. Take a look at the status of the music industry, and then evaluate what you've done to keep up and compete in the marketplace. Maybe you need to step up your home recording capabilities, knowledge of electronics, social networking presence, or all of the above. Start now!

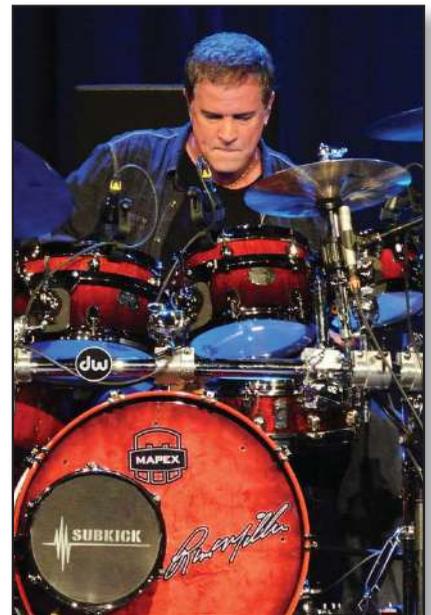
There will be times when life's demands begin to outweigh what our work can supply. Being a professional musician can often feel like an uphill battle. You have to decide what makes you feel comfortable and how you want to live. Learn to weather the storms and also be open to re-inventing yourself. It's a constant journey, but it's

important to find a balance between artistry and commerce.

A Final Thought

The only time I feared my career wasn't working was when I wasn't playing very well. Either I had failed during a gig, or a dissatisfied musical director chewed me out after a lackluster performance. Those were highly discouraging experiences, but as my dear wife always reminds me, things like that are really just opportunities to fix the issues, get better, and push forward.

Most people aren't driven to achieve excellence, but I want to encourage everyone to drive forward. If you never stop growing by building and adapting your business plan, and playing music to your highest possible level, then you won't need a safety net to fall into. Like the great design coach Tim Gunn often says on the hit show *Project Runway*: "Make it work!"



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



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Drumset Ergonomics

Part 1: An Introduction

by Brandon Green

Hello, *Modern Drummer* readers. My name is Brandon Green, and I'm the owner of a muscle system health and fitness studio in Newmarket, Ontario, called Strata Internal Performance. I'm also a drummer. My mission is to help people move better and continue to do the activities they love for their entire lives, such as playing drums.

My team at Strata helps professional athletes and everyday people of all ages overcome joint-related issues that make it hard for them to get the most out of life. We come up with strategies to help them feel stronger and able to move without limitations created by annoying aches.

As a spin-off of my work, I've developed a series on ergonomics specifically targeted towards drummers. This was born out of my observation that far too many drummers have had to give up playing because of pain and injury caused by a lack of understanding of body mechanics. However, if you can apply some very basic rules of physics and biology to your drumming, then you can create a setup that's unique to your body and will allow you to play in the most efficient way possible with minimal long-term side effects.

If you try to set up a drumkit just like your favorite drummer, it's likely not going to work well for you from a biomechanical perspective. Each one of us has different limb lengths, ranges of motion, degrees of flexibility, and so on. In order to help us understand this idea, let's take a look at some examples of the variables in human anatomy.

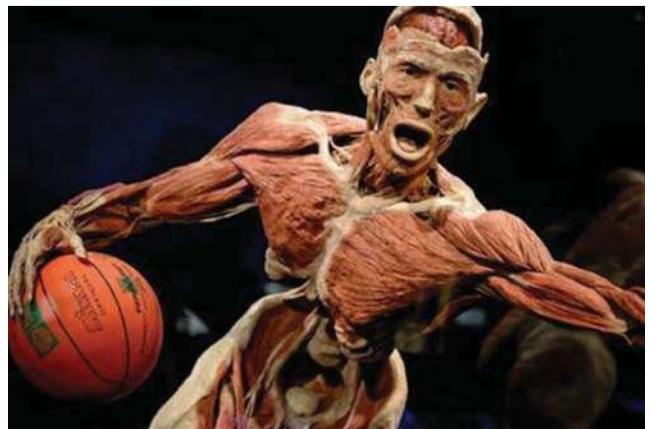


Pictured above are six different femurs and two different pelvic systems. It's easy to recognize that none of the bones are identical. Why does this matter? Imagine test-driving six different cars. Each of them has a slightly different turn radius. Some of the differences are minor, but others are dramatic. In order to drive those cars safely, you have to adapt how you move the steering wheel.

Each human body has a similarly unique mechanical system. We are all different from one another, and we instinctively adapt our physical experience around the best way to sit in a chair, climb a set of stairs, or reach for a high object. A 6'4" person will do these things differently from a person who is 4'9". Now consider how that relates to being a drummer. How could everyone sit at the same height or hold sticks the same way?

The Muscle Component

Now that we've addressed the fact that no two skeletons are identical, the next step is to take a look at what role our muscles play in moving the body.



When you visualize a muscle in your body, how would you describe it? Most people think of muscles as something that stretches, like an elastic band. And it's understandable why you would believe that. Gym coaches are notorious for instructing "stretch your muscles" before an activity. And many personal trainers echo that same message. However, the word *stretch* merely implies a compliance and return quality. In other words, you deform the tissues with a little effort, and then they return to their original shape.

To oversimplify, muscles are made up of two types of tissue: collagen and elastin. Ligaments are collagen-based and are rope-like in nature, meaning they have a defined range of motion. Elastin is just as it sounds: elastic. Most muscles are composed of a small percentage of elastin (less than 1%). What does that mean? Muscles aren't very elastic. They are much more like rope.

Drummers often give little consideration to the development of their muscles because they fear that having bulky muscles will lead to slower performance. We will dispel that myth in greater detail in a later article, but let me assure you, there's a great deal of scientific evidence supporting the argument that well-developed muscles do anything but slow us down.

The External Device: The Drumset

The modern-day drumset is a fascinating instrument. It's composed of multiple smaller instruments that were once

played by different players in a marching band. At some point, those instruments were pulled together into a formation that one person could play. One of the more challenging things about the drumset is that it wasn't designed to conform to the structure of the human body, but rather to provide convenient access to each component.



As discussed earlier, every human skeleton is different. Yet, drummers often cling to dogma-based guidelines about how to set up a drum kit: "Your legs should be parallel to the ground when you're seated on your throne," "You should hold your sticks exactly this way in the German grip," and so on. But how could there be a one-size-fits-all rule for drummers?

Trying to achieve peak performance while using dated guidelines that don't maximize your specific body structure can only lead to discomfort and injury down the road. The more you learn about your anatomy, the more you can decrease the risk of injury, increase your performance, and enjoy playing drums for the rest of your life. We will dig deeper into various ways to conform your drumkit to your unique physique and playing style over the next few issues. See you next time!



Muscle and exercise specialist **Brandon Green** is the founder of Strata Internal Performance Center, and is the owner of the drummer-centric biomechanics and fitness website drum-mechanics.com.



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Thumb Thang Percussion Accessory

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Paiste Masters Dry and Extra Dry Rides

Paiste's 20", 21", and 22" Masters Dry rides are said to have a short harmonic decay to allow the cymbals to remain articulate at all dynamics and tempos. The responsive stick sound is supported by a dry, dark, warm wash.

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DW's new LowPro Travel Kits are designed to be lightweight, durable, and portable. The four-piece configuration includes 10" and 13" toms, a 12" "snom," and a 20" bass drum, and it weighs less than twenty-nine pounds. Also included is a modified DW 6000 series Ultralight snare stand and accessory percussion arm for additional snare-to-tom setup options. The three-piece configuration includes 10" and 13" toms and a 20" bass drum, and weighs just over twenty-two pounds. The ultra-shallow drum shells feature 9-ply, all-maple VLT construction and come in White Marine and Black Diamond FinishPly options.

Sold separately, the LowPro Travel kit transport bag is crafted from a reinforced canvas-like material and features a zipper top, a retractable top handle, side handles, dual smooth-rolling wheels, and a compartmentalized interior.

dwdrums.com

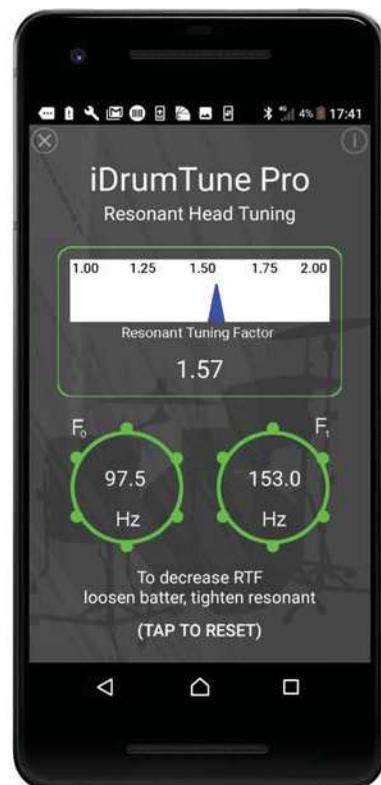


iDrumTune Pro

Drum Tuner App

The iDrumTune Pro, which was designed to enable accurate and repeatable drum tuning, is now available for Android devices. The tuner features a Spectrum Analyzer, which offers more detailed analysis and evaluation of higher overtones, as well as Pitch Tuning, Lug Tuning, and Resonant Head Tuning modes, the latter of which allows users to tune batter and resonant drumheads relative to each other.

idrumtune.com





Spaun Designer Series

This new series allows drummers to choose from more than a dozen woods, or combine various woods to create unique configurations. Number of plies, reinforcement rings, exotic faces, sizes, finish, hardware color, and signature badges are all customizable.

Also available is a pre-configured Designer Series kit that's modeled after finely crafted acoustic guitars and features spruce and mahogany shells with SBR (solid-brass resonator) lugs. The deep, rich voice of mahogany is said to complement the responsive and resonant characteristics of spruce. List price for the three-piece shell pack is \$2,499. An optional 6.5x14 snare is \$499. spaundrums.com



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2nd Prize: Wicked Chops practice pad and a pair of Silver Anniversary Limited Edition laser-engraved Ahead drumsticks.



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RETAILER PROFILE

Revival Drum Shop Portland, Oregon



The Revival staff, from left: “Manager of goodness” Jake Endicott, “hacksaw specialist” Keary Ortiz, and owner Jose Medeles. “I work on things that I enjoy in my core to do, like branding and buying,” Medeles says. “Jake is amazing with the books and keeping things on track. Keary is amazing at repairing and taking photos. I have a great crew. It’s just made it that much better. I’m happy where I am.”

If ever there was a drum shop suited to a city, it’s Revival, which embodies Portland’s independent spirit, dedication to community, and allegiance to small-batch craftsmanship. Its two floors (including a wing dedicated to lessons, clinics, and performances) are heavy on vintage kits and snares from well-known manufacturers. But among the name-brand gear is a wide selection of artisanal cymbals from the Portland-based company Cymbal & Gong, snares and all manner of accessories from Pacific Northwest-based Keplinger Drums, one-of-a-kind percussion by Morfbeats, and so much more you usually don’t see, even at the most independent-minded drum shops.

“We wouldn’t be able to do this if it wasn’t for Portland’s spirit and belief in a shop like Revival,” says owner Jose Medeles, who worked at Professional Drum Shop in Hollywood and spent years recording and touring with the Breeders, Ben Harper, and Donavon Frankenreiter before getting off the road and settling in Portland with his wife and son in 2008. Medeles opened Revival the following year, and has seen its reputation as a truly unique shop grow. He talked with *MD* about what he’s learned during nearly ten years in business.

All I’d done was tour and play drums and work at a drum shop.

So it made sense to open a shop, but there were no guarantees. I knew I had to figure something out to stay home. I kind of put my ego aside. It’s odd to reinvent yourself. Now someone’s calling you for your drums, not for your drumming. But I made that decision. It wasn’t easy, but it got easier. And I was home for a lot of firsts, and when my friends and family needed me. As long as I’m being true to myself, the shop is going to thrive.

What I love about being small is that we can pivot in a millisecond.

We’ve stumbled along the way. I’ll think, *Maybe this will work*, and it doesn’t work. You have to be open. You have to be okay with being vulnerable. The customer will tell you if it’s going to work or not. We haven’t hit a home run every time, but it’s been a neat journey. Always learning.

It doesn’t feel like you’re walking into a casino when you walk into Revival.

Not only do we care about what’s in there, we care about how it’s presented. What does the shop feel like when you walk in? What’s it like when someone looks up the stairs? When they walk around that corner, how are they going to feel when they see this or that? What music is playing? To me, all of that is about the experience. And I think that’s why people venture to Revival. There are still enough drummers that appreciate that. I feel like this is what we as drummers deserve. We love our drums, we love our instrument.



Even after nearly a decade in business, Jose Medeles still finds it difficult to part with certain pieces of vintage gear. “That will never get easier,” he says with a laugh. “But my mantra has always been, the shop comes first. The pieces always find a great home—the right person will care for them, rock them, and really appreciate them. That helps a whole lot.”





A-list drummers stop by Revival all the time when they're in Portland, such as recent visitors Mark Guiliana and Chad Smith. But it was a visit from Dutch free jazz legend Han Bennink that left Jose Medeles pinching himself. "I couldn't believe it," Medeles says. "He was in town playing an event for the Creative Music Guild. They brought him by, and he loved it. The next time he came, he played at the shop. It was really beautiful."

We've done great collaborations with companies big and small. Ludwig pitched a collaboration to us—the Revette kit (12/14/18). I was super flattered. They're the first corporate we ever did something like this with. We do a custom stick with L.A. Backbeat, and we've done a Revival line of cymbals with Cymbal & Gong. It's all stuff that we really believe in. But you have to be smart about it. We're not going to collaborate with someone to put out something that's just sort of *ish*. It's got to be something that's really well thought out. Love is in the end result—for this kit, this cymbal, this bag, whatever it is.

I made a commitment to myself to pump the brakes on my involvement with Revival. It took me about seven years until I was like, *I have to figure this out, because it's so out of whack*. It was twenty-four/seven. It was a beautiful thing, but I feel like I was putting too much pressure on myself to keep it going. I took time off and found that balance. I was able to do that with the support of my Revival crew, and of course the support of my family. I needed to learn how to let go, not to micromanage. It's been a really good process for me. It's made everything better. I'm home when my son gets home from school. I'm at the shop when I need to be there spiritually for myself, when it's good for everything. I feel fortunate that I'm able to step away from the shop, think about what we need, try something, and to be able to execute that without the day-to-day stuff in my face. That's what you want as a business owner, to have that type of freedom.

Interview by Patrick Berkery
Photos by Jason Quigley



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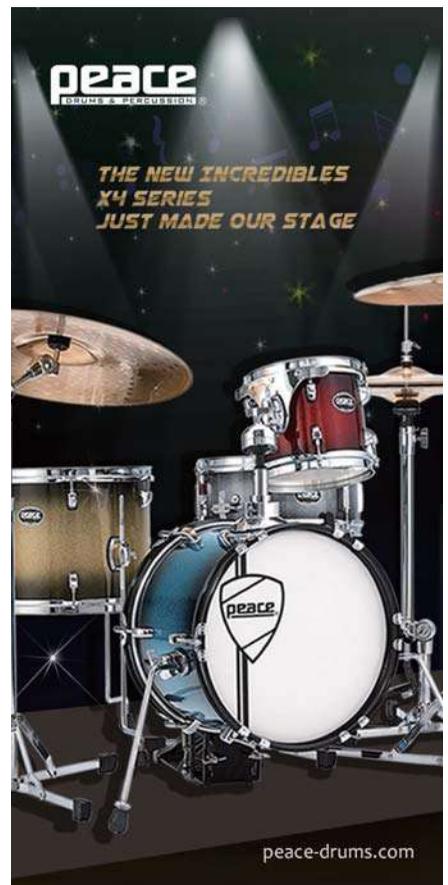
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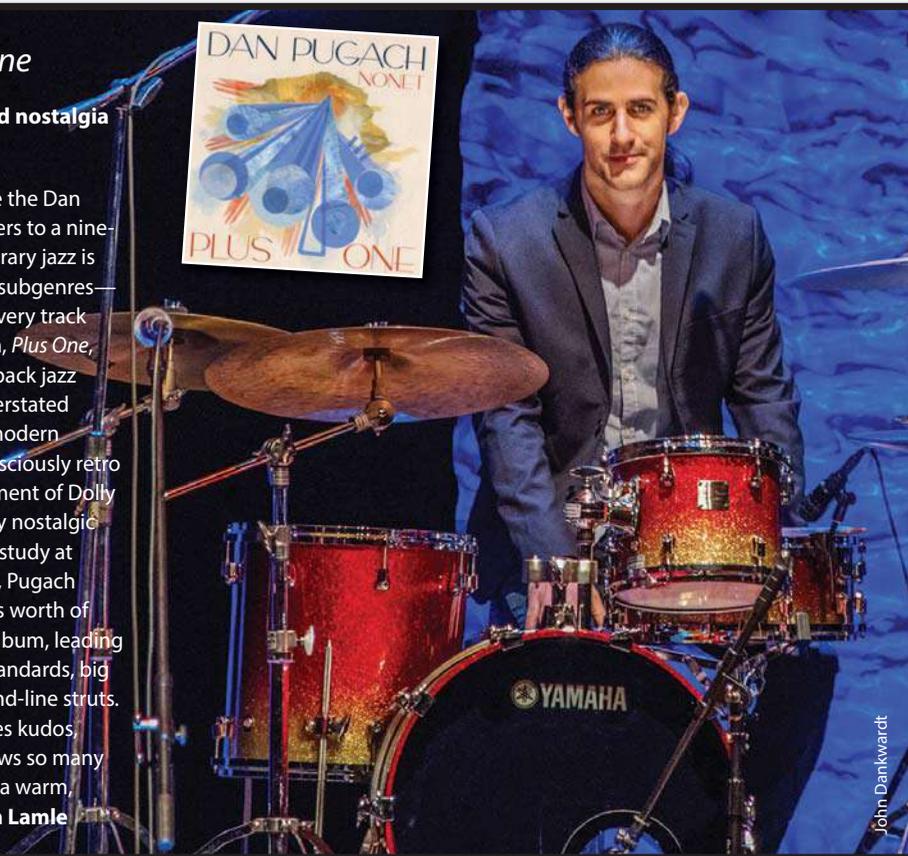
CRITIQUE

RECORDINGS Taking the Reins

Dan Pugach Nonet *Plus One*

Playful throwback jazz nudged beyond nostalgia by its drummer/leader.

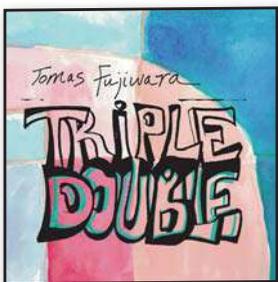
The primary factor that seems to separate the Dan Pugach Nonet ("nonet" in this context refers to a nine-piece collective) from so much contemporary jazz is Pugach's grasp that jazz—and its various subgenres—should be *fun*. This principle permeates every track of the drummer/composer's debut album, *Plus One*, which is populated with energetic throwback jazz numbers in which Pugach's capable, understated drumming bubbles with an indefinable modern quality that keeps even the most self-consciously retro moments (like the sultry vocal rearrangement of Dolly Parton's "Jolene") from feeling like a purely nostalgic exercise. Having emigrated from Israel to study at Boston's Berklee College of Music in 2006, Pugach displays a knack for navigating a century's worth of American music in the space of a single album, leading his ensemble effortlessly between pop standards, big band confections, and New Orleans second-line struts. While the versatile band certainly deserves kudos, it's Pugach's dynamic drumming that allows so many seemingly disparate styles to cohere into a warm, singular sound. (danpugach.com) **Keaton Lamle**



Tomas Fujiwara *Triple Double*

The drummer/leader gets a lot of unique music out of his bass-less sextet, providing a lesson in texture and tone.

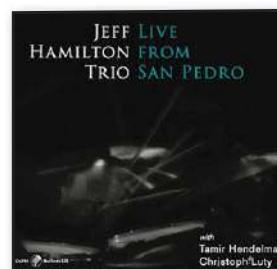
For some musicians, one of something is never enough. Drummer Tomas Fujiwara makes that clear on *Triple Double*, using two guitarists, a similar-sounding trumpet and cornet, and drummer Gerald Cleaver to augment his own sticks-manship. It's an exhilarating ride. The material is composed, but creative improvisation is the modus operandi. The 8th-note semi-ballad "Diving for Quarters" is lent a semblance of order by Fujiwara and Cleaver, bashing drumsets in near unison, while tremulous groover "Blueberry Eyes" takes a freer approach, as the cornet and bracing guitar are pilloried by combustible double drumming. The solo-drums-and-spoken-word piece "For Alan" blends sticks rattling rims and rolling on toms, followed by a gentle double drumset passage that ripples like a mountain stream. (Roadhouse 12) **Ken Micallef**



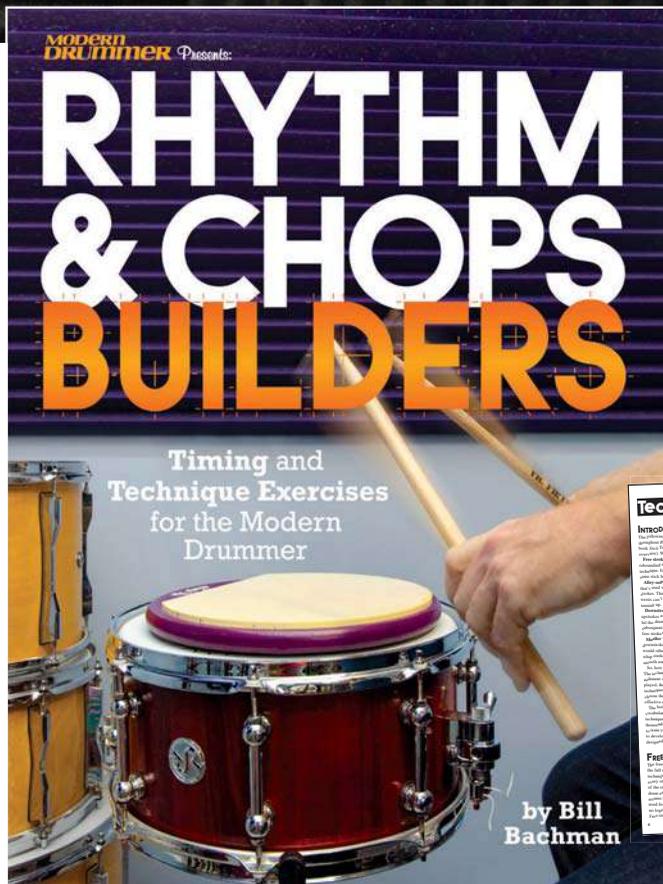
Jeff Hamilton Trio *Live from San Pedro*

The drummer's working trio is pure class.

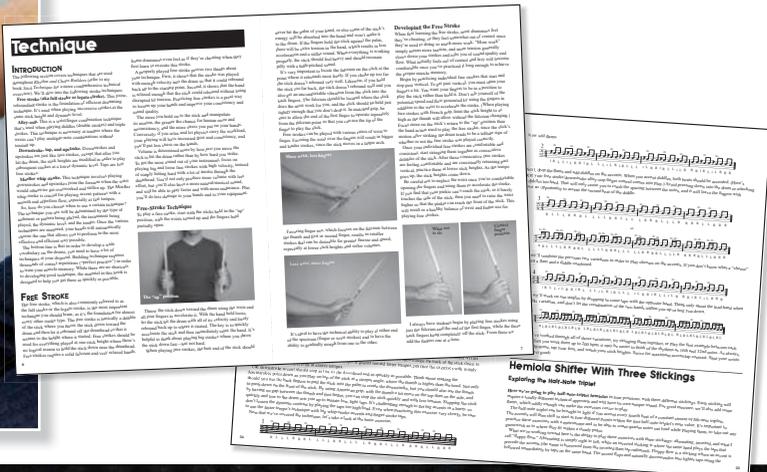
Jeff Hamilton can't "shred." He "can't" because he simply has too much taste. Make no mistake, the master drummer delivers ample solo passages of dazzling technique. But it's all in the service of musicality and arrangements. Consider the must-hear vehicle for his famed brush prowess, "Brush This." Rather than being the typical setup for an open-ended blaze-fest, this arrangement skillfully slots drum soloing space between ensemble lines, which Hamilton navigates with compositional flair. Another highlight is the delightful roller-coaster take on Monk's "In Walked Bud," with its shifting keys and time signatures. The trio, featuring pianist Tamir Hendelman and bassist Christoph Luty, elegantly handles originals and standards framed in tight, imaginative arrangements. Along the way, Hamilton schools us with killer up-tempo shuffles ("Gina's Groove"), gorgeous colorations ("I Have Dreamed"), driving swing ("Bennissimo"), and his reinterpretation of the classic, lilting groove of "Poinciana." "Gary Indiana" in a Brazilian groove? Trust me, it works. (Capri) **Jeff Potter**



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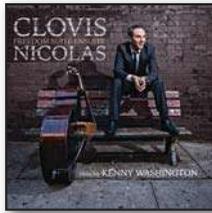
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Clovis Nicolas *Freedom Suite Ensuite* (Featuring Kenny Washington)

A jazz bassist/leader enlists the absolute right drummer to update a vintage approach.

Assimilating the piano-less trio of Sonny Rollins' 1958 classic, *Freedom Suite*, bassist Clovis Nicolas features a trumpet-tenor-bass-drums lineup on his *Freedom Suite Ensuite*. **KENNY WASHINGTON** gets a prominent shout on the CD cover, befitting his status as today's greatest proponent of "spang-a-lang," Philly Joe Jones-meets-Max Roach styled drumming. This music is cool, direct, and swinging, like a missile soaring through a clear blue sky. Kenny kicks off "The 5:30 P.M. . . ." with one of his patented tumbling tom/bass drum figures, leveling out into medium-tempo swing. "Freedom Suite 1" dances, as Kenny rolls on cymbal bells then pops the cut-up rhythms—*hard*. "Freedom Suite Part III" picks up the pace, with Kenny alternately executing flashy flams and piston-like hi-hat figures, all the while slamming the group—*gracefully*. "You and Me" is another showcase, Kenny's perfect reading of the upbeat chart complete with scorching ride cymbal and beautiful fours trading. *Sublime*. (Sunnyside) **Ken Micallef**



Gleb Kolyadin *Gleb Kolyadin*

GAVIN HARRISON provides light, shade, and his usual otherworldly chops to a brilliant pianist's debut.

There's more going on in the first thirty seconds of Russian pianist Gleb Kolyadin's debut solo release than there is on most full albums, but the complexity and thickness of the compositions still make for an enjoyable listen. It helps that the musicians assembled for the mostly instrumental tunes here are a who's who of prog masters, including Porcupine Tree/King Crimson virtuoso Gavin Harrison. On opener "Insight," Harrison locks in with Kolyadin's acoustic piano with beautifully dynamic and precise snare work, followed by a smooth 6/8 pattern where the drummer throws in tons of fills that take the music into serious dramatic territory. Harrison never sounds like he's not in complete command of what he wants to lay down, and he revels in the structure Kolyadin provides with changing time signatures and thematic surprises. "Kaleidoscope" is reminiscent of pianist Hiromi's exceptional work, and Harrison eats the tune alive, with amazing linear hi-hat work and defined tom placement. By now, it's common knowledge that Harrison's presence on these types of dates elevates a record into the must-hear category. (kscope.com) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



MULTIMEDIA

Bauhaus Undead: The Visual History and Legacy of Bauhaus by Kevin Haskins

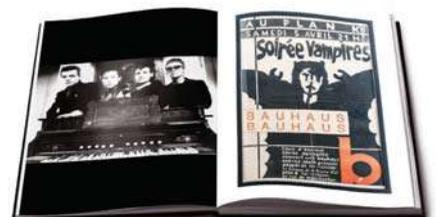
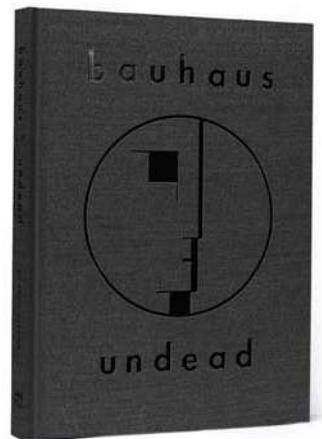
All great bands deserve publications as bold and exhaustive as this one, and so do their fans. Step right up.

The musical era and style known as post-punk refers to the years immediately following the 1976 ascendance of the Ramones and the Sex Pistols—the ground-zero bands who tore rock 'n' roll back down to its basic elements in response to what they felt was the over-sophistication and selling out of its biggest acts. In no time, Joy Division, Television, Wire, Cabaret Voltaire, and others began building rock back up in new and fascinating ways.

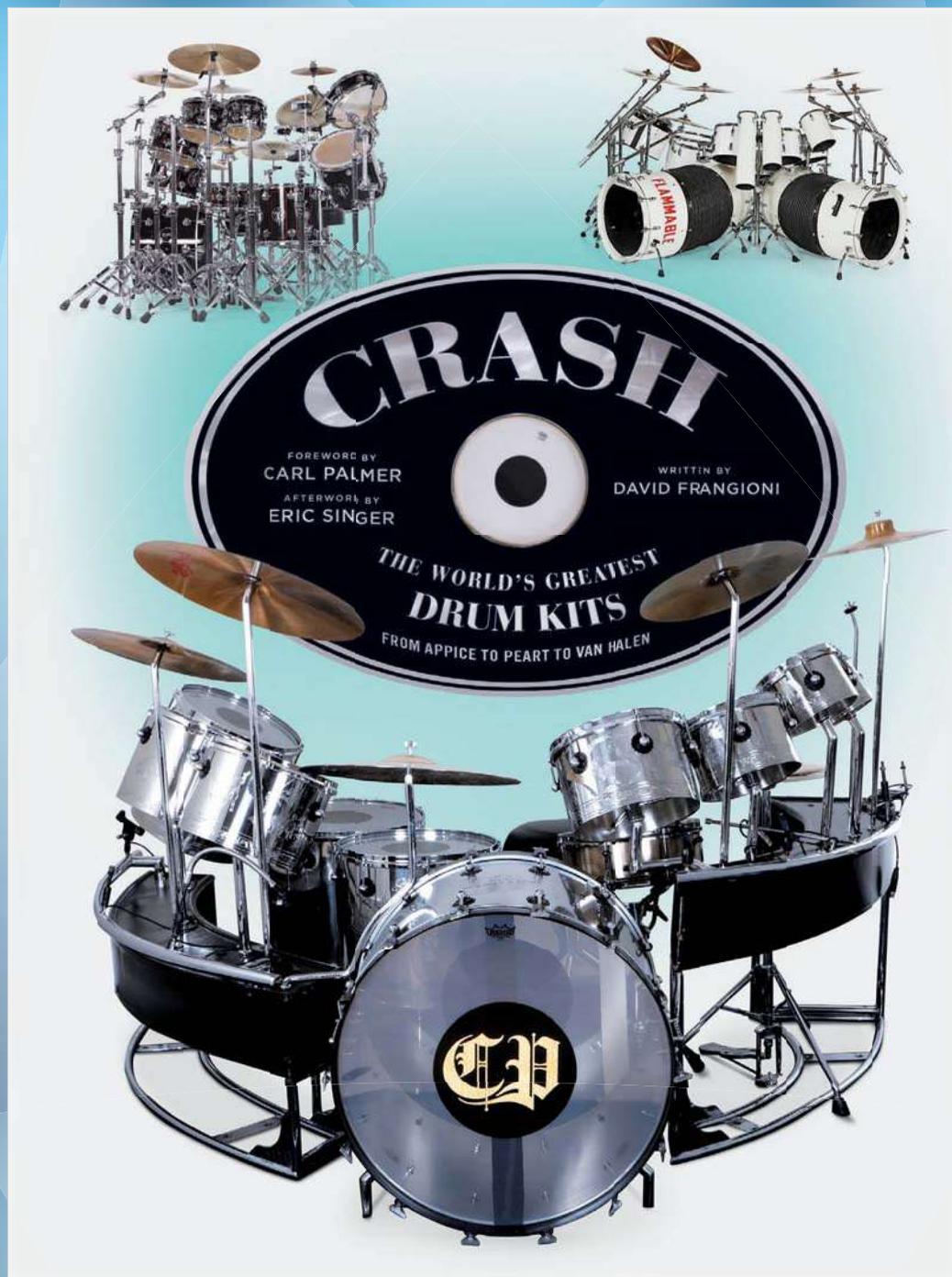
Northampton, England's Bauhaus, featuring singer Peter Murphy, guitarist Daniel Ash, bassist David J, and his brother, drummer Kevin Haskins, filled the new blank canvas of rock with reverb-drenched guitars and vocals, "tribal" tom-driven beats, spacious dub-like passages, and high drama. Haskins avoided cliché at every turn, steering clear of unnecessarily florid commentary, and instead fully committing to the hypnotic power of repetition and subtle variation. Listening to tracks like "Double Dare," from the group's 1980 debut album, *In the Flat Field*, or "She's in Parties," from '83's *Burning from the Inside*, you hear a drummer who squeezes the most out of simple mechanisms like offbeat cymbal crashes, faux-delay snare hits, and four-on-the-floor steppers beats.

For four years or so, to many Bauhaus was the coolest band on the planet. Without warning, though, they broke up in 1983, with Murphy starting a solo run and the others playing under the Love and Rockets banner for more than a decade. Haskins then began a successful career as a soundtrack composer, and he's recently been working with Ash in the group Poptone, which also features Kevin's daughter Diva on bass. But Bauhaus's subsequent reputation as the forefathers of "goth-rock" has only increased their following, and now Haskins has released *Bauhaus Undead*, a coffee-table book that its army of followers will surely covet as the ultimate publication about the band. The hardcover, oversized, 300-plus-page book presents photos and memorabilia from throughout the group's history, as well as Haskins' reminiscences of its final '83 and 2004 Coachella reunion shows, run-ins with rock icons David Bowie, Nico, and Iggy Pop, and various famous and infamous gigs played over the years.

While it's clearly aimed at the super-fan, the treasure-trove of materials presented in *Bauhaus Undead* make it recommended to anyone interested in learning more about the post-punk scene, and the elements that go into the making of a truly beloved rock 'n' roll band. (Cleopatra Press, \$69.98) **Adam Budofsky**



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Home Studio Drum Recording with Blair Sinta at ProMixAcademy.com

by Ilya Stemkovsky



If you want a dose of reality, answer this question: When was the last time you recorded in a big-time studio with a generous budget and the freedom to experiment with drum sounds to your heart's desire? The sad truth is, even for the cream of the studio crop, those days are largely over. If your amazing, buttery snare sound hasn't been replicated with the latest software, you're still working against the clock, recording a month's worth of takes in only a few hours.

Adapt or fail, they say. Well, Blair Sinta will help you with that, as he offers a brilliant and practical home recording video course at promixacademy.com that can help you get great sound fast and relatively cheap. Sinta will guide you along as you take the next

step into the unknown technological future.

Many top players have had home recording setups for a while now, but their secret methods on how to do it have usually been hush-hush. Sinta has been recording and touring with artists like Alanis Morissette, Melissa Etheridge, James Blunt, and Josh Groban for years, so getting his insight into what works and what doesn't is like witnessing him pull back the curtain. "It's a modern-day reality that to know how to do this is of importance," says Sinta. "I had friends already making music in their home studios in the mid-'90s, and it was something I was intrigued by. The plan was always to be 'out on the town' in studios, but I started small and it grew. I never really knew that it would become a main source of income for me."

Study Suggestions

With individual chapters titled "Drum Arrangement Considerations" and "Tweaks and Refinement," you can absorb this course at your own pace. Maybe the technology is your obstacle, as opposed

to figuring out where the kick drum should be placed in the bar. Either way, the different aspects of home recording can be separated for easy and pertinent digestion.



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LIBERTY DEVITTO



Legendary Drummer & Recording Artist (Billy Joel)

PAUL QUIN



Entertainment Attorney & Music Business Consultant

Inside Methods

Watching Sinta at work here is inspiring. Even if you don't have a decent drum room in your one-bedroom condo, Sinta goes over all the basics to get a killer final product, from drum and cymbal selection to tuning and playing choices. He begins with a track he receives from a client, charts it, picks out the right microphones, deals with the signal flow and recording chain on his digital audio workstation (DAW), and then tracks several takes with varying musical applications. Sure, he's got some great gear, including multiple snares and different rides, each changing the vibe of the song. But knowledge is power here, not the fancy equipment. When asked about the daunting nature of having to learn Pro Tools, Sinta is sensible. "You have to start somewhere, and I think this is a good spot," he says. "The most important thing you can do as a drummer is get your drums



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to sound good. If they don't, you're fighting an uphill battle. It gets much easier, and the software becomes second nature as you do it more."

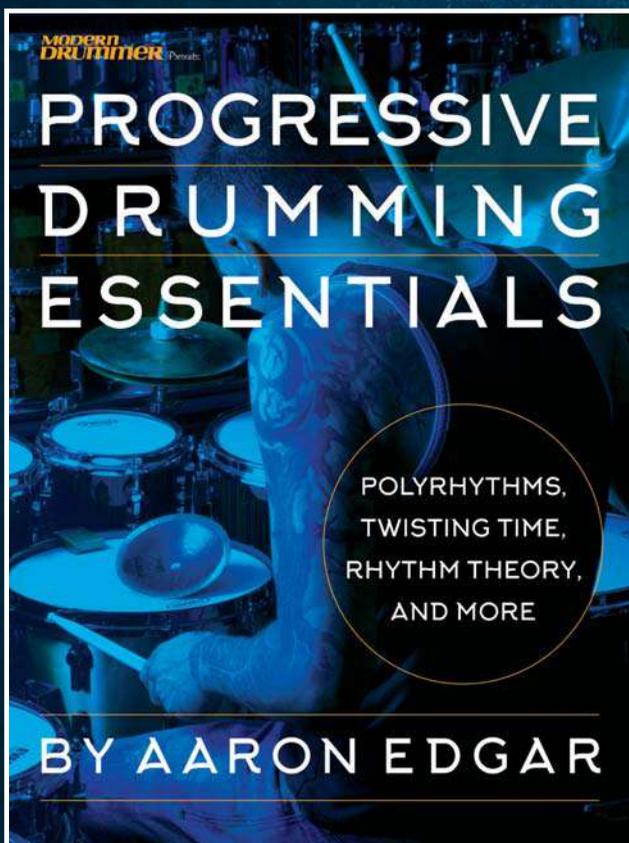
Sinta lets you inside his head, and demonstrates how to make choices about what pattern to play without the input of a producer in the room. "On this tune, I really don't want to step on the vocal," he'll offer. Or he'll be unhappy with a certain fill and you witness him determining how to change it up, spur-of-the-moment. The fly-on-the-wall feeling here allows you, as a viewer, to witness the kinds of problems that will arise when you get to work on your own project at home. When Sinta talks about playing fills that match the phrasing of the vocals, he's speaking from experience, having supported some amazing singers, and also because he knows the artist on the other end is probably unwilling to go back and forth for too long about how a performance isn't quite there yet. "I try to get as much info from the artist/producer as I can up front, such as references on drum sounds, approach to feel and beat, and how they want the song to sound overall when it's produced," Sinta says.

Included in the package are .wav files of Sinta's drum takes, the final Pro Tools session, and a play-along of the song, so you can be hands-on with Sinta's tracks, editing them or comparing your own work with his. Production and camerawork are bare bones, but likely mirror what your home studio arrangement would be.

"This video provides an overview and a step-by-step guide for beginners, while also giving professionals some insight into how I approach what I do," Sinta says. "So for those serious about getting their home recording career off the ground, this could be the place to begin your journey."



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Nashville Drummers Jam 11

Music City's Finest Pay Tribute to Mr. Big's Pat Torpey

The Nashville Drummers Jam, a fundraising gathering that honors prominent artists of the drumming community, held its eleventh production at the Mercy Lounge's Cannery Ballroom in Nashville, Tennessee, this past December 4. At the event, the organization's founders—drummers Tom Hurst and David Parks, and guitarist Chris Nix—honored Mr. Big drummer Pat Torpey, who would pass away two months after the show from complications of Parkinson's disease. Proceeds from NDJ11 were donated to Torpey's choice of charity, the Wounded Warrior Project, which is a nonprofit organization that benefits military veterans and active-duty service members.

"Folks always talk about their favorite drummers," Parks told *MD* at the event.

"When I sat down to think about who influenced my playing, one man's name rang out loud and clear: Pat Torpey. His fills and phrasing were always original and exciting." After inviting Torpey to the show, Parks got a bit of a surprise. "Not only did Pat agree to be here, but his former bandmate, bassist Billy Sheehan, asked if he



Torpey

could come as well."

Torpey's career spanned several decades, including work with, among others, Robert Plant, Belinda Carlisle, the Knack, John Parr, and the band he's most known for playing with, Mr. Big. "While he might be best known as Mr. Big's drummer, he's much more than



Luzier



Parada



that," explained William Ellis, a Nashville-based drummer and NDJ regular. "Pat has solo albums too. He played other instruments, and he had a wonderful voice."

Many top drummers clamored for a spot on the show, including the Offspring's Pete Parada. "Pat is one of my favorite drummers," Parada said. "I wore out the first two Mr. Big cassettes. Those were some of the first records I played along to, so Pat taught me how to groove." Parada played "Bad Motor Scooter" by Montrose, a rock group Torpey played with in the early 2000s.

Korn's Ray Luzier, who performed at the event, is also intimately familiar with Torpey's work. "I first discovered Pat at Mates, a rehearsal facility in Los Angeles," Luzier said. "I'd hear this amazing drumming coming out of one of the other rooms, so [one time] I asked the owner who was playing. He told me it was Torpey tearing it up. Pat would play Latin, rock, and crazy four-way coordination phrases. It was very inspiring, and it made me step up my game." During his performance, Luzier played a double bass shuffle along with Mr. Big's "Colorado Bulldog."

Tracy Broussard (Blake Shelton) performed Mr. Big's version of Humble Pie's "30 Days in the Hole." Sean Paddock (Kenny Chesney) played "Hangover," a selection from Torpey's solo album *Odd Man Out*. "It's a linear funk pattern," Paddock explained, "very Garibaldi-esque with some ghost notes."

While touring with Mr. Big, Torpey customarily performed a drum solo while singing a Beatles tune. Nashville drummer David Black (Easton Corbin), who's also known for his singing skills, paid homage to that aspect of Torpey's legacy during his performance at the event. "I didn't feel as though I could pull off a solo exactly the way Pat did and get the reception he did," Black admitted. "So I decided to do my own solo and sing the Beatles' 'A Day in the Life' while bringing up some of my favorite drummers to each perform a sixty-second solo of their own." Black recruited Nashville-based drummers Marcus Finnie, Angela Lese, Billy Freeman, and Donnie Marple for the homage.

Mark Poiesz (Tyler Farr) performed one of Torpey's favorite Mr. Big songs, "Take Cover." "That song was familiar territory for me," said Poiesz. "Pat and I shared a love of David Garibaldi's linear grooves, but Pat made this song really rock. Instead of having the right hand on the hi-hat, it's on the floor tom, which creates a double kick vibe. He added hi-hat foot splashes in the verses, which is a great four-way coordination exercise."

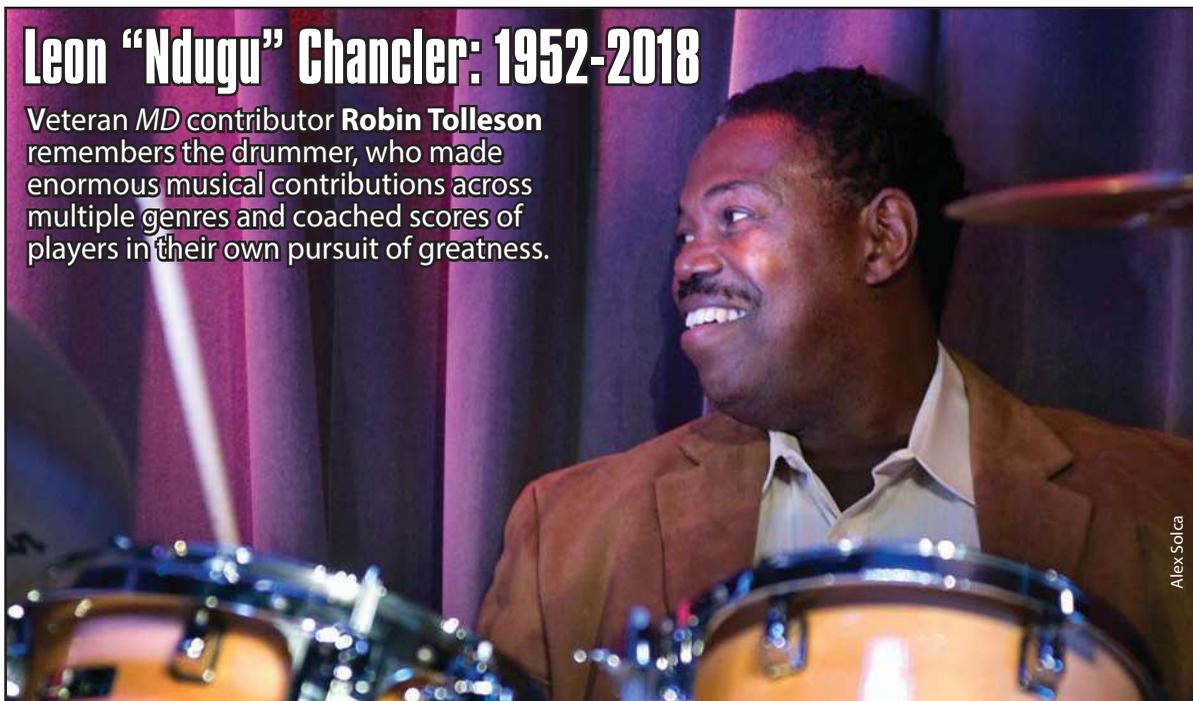
This event also marked the first time that an honoree had participated in one of the NDJ gatherings. Torpey, although weakened from Parkinson's, played with Parks on "Just Take My Heart."

Billy Sheehan commented on how the event impacted Torpey. "Pat's a humble guy," Sheehan said. "I know the event was incredibly gratifying for him. All night people were telling him what his playing meant to them. It was quite touching to see. Pat was very much like a brother to me. He's probably the closest musician friend I had. I was thrilled to be a part of this tribute."

Story and photos by Sayre Berman

Leon “Ndugu” Chancler: 1952-2018

Veteran *MD* contributor **Robin Tolleson** remembers the drummer, who made enormous musical contributions across multiple genres and coached scores of players in their own pursuit of greatness.



Alex Solca

“I’m an orchestrator,” Ndugu Chancler told me when we spoke for his first *Modern Drummer* feature, in 1983. “The drums are just the instrument I use to orchestrate and paint the picture.” Chancler, who passed away on February 3 at the age of sixty-five, “orchestrated” not only the music of top jazz artists, he backed pop stars, country legends, funksters, and rock icons alike. He was a man of many hyphens: a producer-composer-arranger-drummer-percussionist-vocalist. He studied the business side of the industry, and started a production company. He raised his cymbals high to set himself apart visually. He played drums on the biggest-selling album of all time. And he spent the last twenty-three years sharing his knowledge in the Popular Music program at the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music.

“All my life there’s been like a show biz air around my personality,” Ndugu said, and there was no reason to dispute the contention. Chancler was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, moved with his family to Los Angeles when he was eight, and attended Locke High School, where he was a classmate of famed keyboardist Patrice Rushen. While studying music at California State University, Dominguez Hills, the drummer was already playing gigs with Gerald Wilson and Freddie Hubbard. He adopted the Swahili name Ndugu (“Earth Brother”) while playing in Herbie Hancock’s trailblazing *Mwandishi* sextet. Stints followed with Miles Davis (Chancler was still in his teens at the time), Weather Report, Hugh Masekela, Frank Sinatra, Jean-Luc Ponty, Stanley Turrentine, Kenny Rogers, Thelonious Monk, James Brown, Eric Clapton, Santana, and Stanley Clarke.

Later, Chancler was called to work on high-profile film soundtracks including *The Color Purple*, *An Officer and a Gentleman*, and *Indecent Proposal*. And most famously, Ndugu teamed up with Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones on the *Thriller* and *Bad* albums. His drumbeat opening on Jackson’s hit “Billie Jean” was described by Roots drummer Questlove in a tribute to Ndugu as “the greatest example of something so simple that you take it for granted. But if you truly dissect it, it’s a complex, compelling performance... [that] literally gives MJ his DNA.”

The same year that *Thriller* was released (1982), Chancler and his production company partner, Reggie Andrews, received a Grammy

nomination for writing the Dazz Band’s hit “Let It Whip.” Chancler penned “Sister Serene” and “Reach for It” for George Duke, and co-wrote and produced “Dance, Sister, Dance” and “Take Me With You” for Santana. “As human beings we all have talent,” Ndugu told me. “We’re not always aware of what our talents are when it counts. The ones that end up being successful are the ones that are aware of their talent and develop it enough to a point that when the opportunity comes for them to show that talent, they can utilize that space.”

Chancler joined the Popular Music Program at USC in 1995. According to his drum students, Ndugu often talked about becoming a complete musician. He taught them how to listen to music, insisting that they know what all the instruments in the band were doing, not just the drums. “We shouldn’t just focus on what the drums are doing—that would be very one-sided,” senior drum student Kelly Cruz said in a tribute the school posted on its website. He expected much of his students, and, according to alum Ian Wurfl, “He had the ability to interact with any kind of music, and enlighten it and raise it up. I can say that for every week of the four years I studied with him, I got better.”

Professor and program founder Chris Sampson said Chancler was an inspiration to the teachers as well as students. “Ndugu kept us all at such a high standard of accountability,” he wrote on the school website. “Every year we would come together as faculty and [discuss] how we could continue to do things better, how things could be improved. Ndugu was at the center of that belief that we could always work better for the students.”

In a letter to those students following Chancler’s passing, his long-time friend (and chair of the Popular Music Program) Patrice Rushen wrote, “Ndugu truly cared about you—not only as students, but as gifted, creative spirits and talented musicians, capable of moving the music forward and ready to receive his years of knowledge, experience, and insight with which to create your own vibrant, professional careers.

“Your teacher was tremendously respected and loved worldwide by musicians and fans,” Rushen went on, “across all genres of contemporary music! There is no area of popular music or jazz in

which he did not play with the best of the best. Let his tremendous body of work bring you joy. Joy truly describes what it was like to know and play with Ndugu.”

“As drummers, we realize we all need to keep going like he would want us to do,” Kelly Cruz said. “He wouldn’t want us to sulk forever. Now we have to carry on his legacy.”

Chancler is survived by his son, Rashon Chancler, and his common-law wife, Brenda Curry. In a letter from the family, Rashon gave insight

into the nature of Leon “Ndugu” Chancler. “As most know, I am his only child,” he wrote. “However, as the sharing, caring person that he is, he took in many kids and individuals, and treated them as if they were his own. He sponsored and funded kids for percussion and education trips, offering his own home. Through his humanitarian nature, I have gained many non-blood relatives who I consider family. Although he was a well-traveled working musician, he put family first and instilled God, life values, and humility in me that I will always hold dear.”

INDUSTRY HAPPENINGS

Legendary Blues Drummer Sam Lay Inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame

This past May 9, the Blues Foundation, a Memphis-based nonprofit organization that preserves and celebrates blues heritage, inducted their thirty-ninth class of Blues Hall of Fame members at the Halloran Centre for Performing Arts & Education in Memphis, Tennessee. This year’s thirteen honorees collectively represented all five of the organization’s qualifying categories: Performers, Non-Performing Individuals, Classic of Blues Literature, Classic of Blues Recording (Song), and Classic of Blues Recording (Album).

The organization’s 2018 inductees included both the legendary blues drummer Sam Lay and one of Lay’s main influences, the late sticks-man Fred Below of the blues group the Aces. Both players became the first Chicago-based blues drummers elected into the Hall of Fame.

Lay earned crossover fame in both the blues and rock worlds, beginning with his work with the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. But his résumé includes blues credentials both before and after he played on Butterfield’s historic 1965 debut, *The Paul Butterfield Blues Band*. He’s the fourth member of the band to enter the Blues Hall of Fame, following Butterfield, Mike Bloomfield, and Elvin Bishop.

Lay—who developed his drumming trademark, the “double shuffle,” after listening to the double-time rhythms of handclaps and tambourines he heard at his hometown church in Birmingham, Alabama—began performing professionally with various artists after a move to Cleveland. Later, the drummer relocated to Chicago to play with the blues harmonica player Little Walter. Lay left Walter’s combo to begin a long stint with the blues legend Howlin’ Wolf’s band, and he played on Wolf’s classics “Killing Floor” and “I Ain’t Superstitious.” After his tenure with Wolf, Lay switched bands again when Paul Butterfield offered him a pay raise to play Chicago clubs for twenty dollars a night.

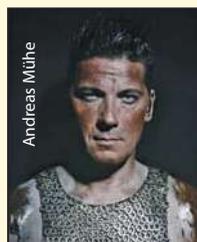
During his time with Butterfield, Lay also accompanied Bob Dylan

at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival and on one studio cut, the title track of Dylan’s *Highway 61 Revisited* album. Soon after, Lay joined the blues songwriter, singer, and harmonica player James Cotton’s new band while also beginning a long association with the Chicago-based Siegel-Schwall Band.

As he established his name, Lay launched a career leading his own band while continuing to play for others in the studio, in Chicago clubs, and on the road. In 1969 he played with Muddy Waters, Butterfield, and others on Waters’ historic *Fathers and Sons* album, which comprised studio performances and live recordings.

Lay sang “I Got My Mojo Working” on the *Paul Butterfield Blues Band* album and followed that with leading performances on the 1966 Testament Records compilation *Goin’ to Chicago*. The drummer released his first full album as a leader, *Sam Lay in Bluesland*, in 1969. Lay also played on sessions by Bob Riedy, George “Wild Child” Butler, Carey Bell, Eddy “the Chief” Clearwater, George “Mojo” Buford, Jimmy D. Lane, Hubert Sumlin, Rockin’ Johnny, Sunnyland Slim, Barrelhouse Chuck, and Easy Baby, among many others. His group, the Sam Lay Blues Revival Band, toured the U.S. and Canada with Butler, Jimmy Rogers, Eddie Taylor, and others featured in the traveling revue. Lay also developed a talent as a blues guitar player.

In addition to his musical accomplishments, Lay earned a reputation for his cordiality and for silent home movies he shot in Chicago clubs that captured rare footage of Howlin’ Wolf, Little Walter, and others. He was elected to the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame in 1992.



Andreas Mühle

Christoph Schneider (Rammstein) is playing DW drums.

Who’s Playing What



Jimmy Chamberlin (Smashing Pumpkins) has joined the **Yamaha** artist family.

Tony Nuñez (educator, clinician, and D.C.I. instructor) has joined the **Promark** family of artists.



Bashiri Johnson (Beyoncé, Aretha Franklin) has joined the **Gig Gear** artist roster.





Four-Foot Fiend



Mike Eaton, the drummer for the Colorado-based Christian rock band Renewed, assembled this month's featured set with the goal of minimizing his touring kit's overall footprint onstage. "I'd always imagined mounting several cymbals and drums using a very minimal amount of floor space," Eaton says. "With this custom rack, I'm able to set up eight drums and ten cymbals using only four square feet of floor space."

Eaton built a custom chrome rack with various Gibraltar parts to optimize his set's onstage presence. The rack toms, cymbals, and legless snare stand are mounted on two 36" horizontal bars that stand 6" off the ground.

Eaton explains that the kit's DW drums were purchased after

being used by "Queen" Cora Coleman-Dunham during a Prince show at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles. It features DW's Black Galaxy FinishPly wrap and Coleman-Dunham's autograph on each of the set's Remo heads.

The set's drums include 7x8, 8x10, and 9x12 rack toms, 14x14 and 14x16 floor toms, an 18x22 bass drum, and 5.5x14 and 7x14 snares. Eaton outfitted the kit with Sabian cymbals, a DW 9000 series hi-hat pedal, and a DW 5002 double bass drum pedal. The cymbal arms are made by Pearl.

"The entire set fits into two Anvil road cases," Eaton says. "I love to see the look on stage managers' faces when I tell them that the drums only need four square feet of stage space!"

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



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A close-up photograph of a Vic Firth VKB5 beater. The beater has a light-colored, spherical head and a tapered wooden shaft. The shaft is inscribed with 'Vic Firth' and 'VKB5'. The beater is positioned diagonally across the frame, with its head pointing towards the top left. The background is dark and out of focus, showing the metallic components of a drum pedal.

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Introducing the new VicKick® Wood Shaft VKB5 Beater

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