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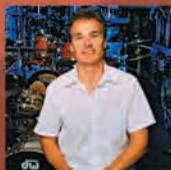
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Battery Recharge

Greetings! Man, what a crazy ride these past few months have been. But the future is looking bright, and as “they” say, life goes on. The comfort for me, no matter what happens and regardless of where life leads, is that music is and always has been my salvation. Sometimes we have to step back and reflect on what it is that gives us the inspiration we need to get back on track. It could be a new piece of equipment, a mind-blowing concert.... Me, I slap on my headphones and fire up the iPod, and I’m relaxed and feeling good. It recharges my batteries.

I recently had the opportunity to play on a track for one of my favorite R&B singers, Walt Williams of The O’Jays. Hopefully the cut will make it onto his upcoming solo record, but either way, it was fun to be a part of the project. I was in excellent company, as Buddy Williams and Shawn Pelton also recorded drum tracks. Thinking back, I remember playing countless one-night stands around the States and performing the O’Jays classic “I Love Music”—and that was back in the day when it was a hit on the charts, so it’s nice to come full circle. Batteries recharged!

Speaking of “back in the day,” I spent my younger years touring, playing, and writing hundreds of songs (some that have seen the light of day and others that have disappeared into the ozone). But as I get older and other responsibilities take

priority, I haven’t been playing or writing nearly as often as I used to. After speaking with the multitasking superstar songwriter/producer Marti Frederiksen for this issue’s Different View column, I was inspired by his words of encouragement. He helped me realize how much I miss being more involved in making music, and how much I need to *make* the time to get back to what I love. Again, batteries recharged! If you’re a songwriting drummer, you’re really going to dig what Marti has to say.

There are other great articles and features in this issue as well. For all you jazzers, our cover story is an interview with the fantastic Lewis Nash. And for the heavy hitters out there, we have a special Jason Bittner/Charlie Benante piece, with a sidebar from the great John Tempesta. To make it even more special, JB and CB stopped by the MD office one afternoon and we captured their conversation on film. You can check it out now at moderndrummer.com.

In closing, I have to say that many of you have recharged my batteries, and I’d like to thank you. After my last editorial, so many readers wrote me to share favorite-drummer stories. I really appreciate it. This time, think about what recharges your batteries, and if you like, drop me a line at billya@moderndrummer.com and tell me about it. Till next time....

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MODERN DRUMMER magazine (ISSN 0194-4533) is published monthly by **MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc.**, 12 Old Bridge Road, Cedar Grove, NJ 07009. PERIODICALS MAIL POSTAGE paid at Cedar Grove, NJ 07009 and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 2009 by **MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc.** All rights reserved. Reproduction without the permission of the publisher is prohibited.

EDITORIAL/ADVERTISING/ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES: MODERN DRUMMER Publications, 12 Old Bridge Road, Cedar Grove, NJ 07009. Tel: (973) 239-4140. Fax: (973) 239-7139. Email: mdinfo@moderndrummer.com.

MODERN DRUMMER welcomes manuscripts and photographic material, however, cannot assume responsibility for them. Such items must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: US and Canada \$34.97 per year; \$56.97, two years. Other international \$59.97 per year. Single copies \$5.99.

SUBSCRIPTION CORRESPONDENCE: Modern Drummer, PO Box 274, Oregon, IL 61061-9920. **Change of address:** Allow at least six weeks for a change. Please provide both old and new address. Call (800) 551-3786 or (815) 732-9004.

MUSIC DEALERS: Modern Drummer is available for resale at bulk rates. Direct correspondence to Modern Drummer Retail Vision, 2 Maple Street, Suite 6, Middlebury, VT 05753, (800) 381-1288.

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING REPRESENTATIVE: Robert Abramson & Associates, Inc., Libby Abramson, President, PO Box 740346, Boyton Beach, FL 33474-0346, abramson@prodigy.net.

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

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

MEMBER: National Association Of Music Merchants, American Music Conference, Percussive Arts Society, Music Educators National Conference, Percussion Marketing Council, Music Magazine Publishers Association

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Louie Bellson is a legend; he was a true innovator of drumming, an outstanding composer and arranger. He gave us a lifetime of music and endearing friendship that we will cherish forever. Our sympathy and love go out to the Bellson family. We will miss this True Gentleman.

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READERS' PLATFORM

Keep Up The Great Work!

I would like to thank all who are involved in putting together such a great magazine. I've been away from the drumming scene for a while due to my service in the United States Army. About three years ago, after returning from Iraq, I had problems adjusting to being home, and my counselor suggested I go back to something I loved to do when I was younger. I wanted to play again but didn't know what was out there. So I picked up a copy of *Modern Drummer* at our PX and found a wealth of resources and knowledge that helped me choose the equipment I wanted. Now my garage has been converted to a practice room where my son and I play. He took an interest in drumming when I started up again. I'll bring the newest issue of *Modern Drummer* home, and we'll read it together. I am now retired and have plenty of time to learn what's new. Again, thanks to all at *MD* who have brought me back to what I love—playing the drums!

Stephen C. Foster

I recently bought a set of Sonor drums, and I'm very pleased with them. The resonance is truly superb. But what I'm really contacting you about is the quality service I've received from Hohner USA. I contacted the company about a replacement part for the T.A.R. tom mounting system, and Jimmy Zednik got back to me the next day. He said they didn't have the specific part but that instead he would be sending a *new* T.A.R. system. I was really impressed with this terrific service, and I thought you'd like to know. I've been an *MD* reader for many years, and you guys and

gals do a great job. Thank you for showcasing women as well—there aren't many of us out there. And again, thanks to Sonor.

Carolyn Dorn

MD Online And Digital

I just had to write and tell you that the interview series Liberty DeVitto hosts on the *MD* Web site is one of the very best things I have ever seen. Liberty is the perfect cat for the job. He comes across as such a fan and seems not at all impressed with himself. He asks the questions we would want to ask if we were in his place. The Dino Danelli series was out of this world, and the Carmine Appice one is great as well. Thank you for making these interviews available. Whatever you're paying Liberty, triple it! What a drummer, and what a guy.

Wayne Dent

Modern Drummer Digital is awesome! I travel a lot, and usually a long trip gets pretty boring. With the existence of *MD Digital*, however, I can basically take all my magazines with me everywhere I go. Suddenly traveling doesn't sound as bad as it used to—another reason why I stick with *Modern Drummer*.

Arie Salim

Critique

I was a bit disappointed by the February issue's review of Steve Fidyk's book/CD/DVD package *Inside The Big Band Drum Chart*. The review starts off with the implication that big-band

drumming is not difficult to master. Being a big-band drummer myself, I can attest that it is something that requires just as much practice and study as any other style.

I understand that Will Romano has a right to his opinions, but I feel he did not even begin to describe the book to your readers. *Inside The Big Band Drum Chart*, which I use in my teaching practice, has 248 pages packed with examples, transcriptions, and interviews with top big-band drummers. It also contains an MP3 CD that contains many examples from the text, and there are play-along charts in various styles, presented on both CD and DVD. These are some reasons why Ed Soph, John Riley, Louie Bellson, and many others endorse the book. I hope this letter allows *Modern Drummer* readers to get a better idea of what this new resource is all about.

Jeff Johnson



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BECAUSE SOUND MATTERS

WILCO'S GLENN KOTCHE

ON COMPOSING SOLO DRUM MUSIC

Hi, Glenn!

I'm a huge fan of your drumming with Wilco and Loose Fur. You always take a unique approach to creating parts for each song. I'm also very inspired by your solo work. I'd love to start composing solo drum music myself, but I don't play piano and can't read music. Do you have some suggestions on how I could start composing drumset pieces without having formal training?

David Hubble

First of all, thanks for the nice words. They're very much appreciated. I think it's great that you're interested in creating solo percussion music (as opposed to "drum solos"), since it's a vastly under-explored medium. It's long been an interest of mine to open people's minds to the fact that the drumset can be much more than just an accompanying instrument in groove-based music.

As for whether formal musical training and the ability to read music are prerequisites to composing solo drumset music, I say no. Someone who has an interest in writing and really has something to say can do it well regardless of formal training. We already know that you don't need formal training to be an amazing drummer—look no further than Buddy Rich, Maureen Tucker, or countless other drumming greats who either don't read at all or read at a rudimentary level. Also, consider how many incredible songwriters and producers don't have formal training. It's just not a necessary skill for many professional musicians in certain styles. The important thing is to know the language of your instrument. That's a quality that great songwriters, producers, and successful musicians share.

That being said, I highly recommend that every drummer learn how to read music at least at a basic level. Even though I've rarely been required to read in my professional drumming experiences, it's a skill that I utilize all the time. Because I can read, I'm able to memorize parts and songs, and visualize variations, much easier and faster

than if I didn't have this resource. I can't overstate how many times this skill has expedited a recording session or saved me on stage.

There are many ways to approach writing solo drumset music. Since I have a passion for this topic, I collect solo percussion recordings. I've noticed general patterns or categories that many of the various recordings fit into. These include studio collages, pure improvisation, structured improvisation (improvising within a predetermined form or concept, soloing over an ostinato, etc.), and composed pieces (either with recurring sec-

of music through looping. I find that taking a general idea like any of these and starting simply with one basic component is a great way to begin. I like to develop simple ideas through trial and error and slow repetition. Eventually interesting elements arise that can lead to further development and new ideas. After several of these mechanical or technical aspects come to light, a meaningful shape usually starts to emerge with a clear picture of what should happen, when it should happen, and for how long. These are obviously personal decisions that end up making your music sound like you.



Gene Ambro

tions like a pop song or "through-composed," meaning the music continually develops and sections don't repeat).

Ultimately, the approach you take will be determined by what you're trying to say—the reason behind a certain composition. To begin with, think about something you're interested in and would like to explore further. This could be anything from playing a melody and a drum part at the same time to playing over an ostinato to creating a piece

Another method of composing might be to pay homage to another work of art. This is a common technique used by playwrights, screenwriters, and musicians. I've embraced this approach in my version of the *Monkey Chant*, which is a form of Balinese performance art set to a religious text. For this piece I incorporated thematic and melodic elements of the original, and I garnered inspiration from the overall architecture or formal structure, which is based

on the text. I also looked outside of music for my piece "Where The Wild Things Are," which was inspired by the children's book of the same name. For this one, I simply borrowed the general trajectory of the story line—basically two cycles of an active peak descending into a static trough—while trying to give an overall impression of place.

Another approach to composing a piece might simply be to explore a technical idea. For instance, finding a way to voice paradiddle combinations melodically with your left and right hand on different drums or surfaces, or to play various ideas in odd time signatures, could be the basis for a composition. Max Roach was the father of solo drumset performance, in my opinion, and he utilized this approach in several instances.

These examples are just the tip of the iceberg of potential motivations for writing music. I've even been motivated to write or arrange certain pieces just to balance out the other pieces in my repertoire. For example, if my set list would benefit from having a purely melodic piece on pitched percussion with no drums, or perhaps from a high-energy, in-your-face, all-drums piece, then I'll focus on writing something to fit those concepts. My point is that if there's a solid reason behind a piece, then there's a better chance that others will connect with it and that it will resonate more deeply with you, making your performances of it that much more powerful and dynamic.

In creating quality solo drumset music, you'll need to consider the same issues that a traditional songwriter or composer is faced with. The tone or mood you're going for will dictate many of your musical decisions. You'll also have to consider several compositional aspects, such as the overall formal structure, or the shape that your piece will take. You'll have to decide if there is a main voice at any given moment. This is traditionally the melody, but in drumset music this could mean a tom pattern, a main rhythmic theme, etc. You might just focus on one or two voices (or pieces) of the drumkit for a certain time, causing the other voices to play a more supportive role, much like the harmonic bed underneath a melody in an orchestral piece or the guitar or piano chords underneath the vocal melody in a rock song.

There's one final consideration I'd like to address. I personally view the drumset as a collection of various percussion instruments with a broad variety of tonal colors. I call this a "multiple percussion approach to drumset," meaning that we can incorporate varied percussion instruments, striking implements, and playing ideas from other (non-drumset) areas of percussion and apply them to the set. When incorporated intelligently and supportively, these different percussive textures add freshness to the music. This is the original conception of the drumkit and is a view held by many drumming legends. On the other hand, some of my

idols, such as Elvin Jones, viewed the drumset as a single instrument with the various sounds and musical textures acting more as different notes or pitches. Each outlook is valuable, and you should consider both when you're composing your own music.

I hope these points help in at least providing an overview of the possibilities and challenges of solo drumset music. By considering these ideas, you'll be able to get a decent start in your explorations, whether you have musical training or not. Best of luck!

HOW TO REACH US
adamb@moderndrummer.com





FU MANCHU'S **SCOTT REEDER** STILL GOING FOR IT

Talk about trial by fire: Several years ago, when drummer Scott Reeder landed the gig with the heavy rock quartet Fu Manchu, his first release with the band wasn't a proper studio album where he could punch in parts and run several takes. Rather, thousands of Fu Manchu fans were left to decide on the drummer's qualifications while listening to the aptly titled live recording *Go For It*.

Reeder, who was raised on a diet of Stewart Copeland, Neil Peart, Bill Stevenson, and John Bonham, first came to prominence with the band Smile on their 1994 Atlantic release, *Maquee*. Though Smile's more pop-based 1998 album, *Girl Crushes Boy*, found Scott exploring new territories, sliding into Fu Manchu's heavy groove meant playing smart from the start. "My approach was pretty much about playing just what's needed,"

recalls Reeder, who learned more than fifty Fu Manchu songs in four weeks and then hit the road with the band for seven months.

These days Reeder's comfortable enough with his gig to throw down solos at shows. "You've got to arrange a solo to have a definite

beginning, middle, and end," Scott says. "But don't make it too long, because there's definitely a propensity for people to go get a beer during that part of the show!"

Waleed Rashidi

DRUM DATES THIS MONTH'S IMPORTANT EVENTS IN DRUMMING HISTORY

John Bonham was born on May 31, 1948.

On May 2, 1964, **Keith Moon** made his first appearance as drummer for The Who, known at the time as The Detours. Fifteen years later to the day, upon Moon's death from an overdose of anti-alcoholism medication, Small Faces drummer **Kenney Jones** stepped in as his replacement.

On May 3, 1980, **Clem Burke** and Blondie had the number-one record with the single "Call Me."

Jazz legend **Elvin Jones** (John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, Joe Henderson) passed away on May 18, 2004.

On May 2, 2005, thirty-seven years after playing their farewell show, Cream, featuring Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce, and **Ginger Baker**, reunited for a performance at London's Royal Albert Hall.

TWISTED SISTER'S

AJ PERO

THE MAJESTY OF ROCK

It's been twenty-five years since Twisted Sister released its career-defining *Stay Hungry* album, which featured the massive hit anthems "We're Not Gonna Take It" and "I Wanna Rock." *Stay Hungry* established the band as one of the 1980s' most popular and successful metal acts, while the ubiquity of the songs (including "The Price" and "Burn In Hell") gave Twisted Sister a staying power that's endured to the present day. In late 2008, the group released the CD/DVD *Live At The Astoria*, recorded in London in 2004. To anyone who might accuse the quintet of being a celebration of style over substance, drummer AJ Pero is confident *Live At The Astoria* proves that as their showmanship remains first rate, so does their musicianship.

AJ's performance on the entertaining DVD features his signature attack, spot-on timing, and tight, blistering fills. "That show was our first in England in seventeen years, and I think it was one of my best performances as a drummer," Pero says proudly. He adds that when Twisted Sister plays live, "We won't give the crowd anything less than the high-energy show we've given in the past. It's going to be a full onslaught; otherwise we're not going to do it."

Last year saw AJ expand the scope of his creative talent and step out from behind the kit to act in two independent feature films. In the crime drama *Priceless* (which also features drumming legend Bernard Purdie in a supporting role), Pero plays a Russian mobster. He also costars in Robert Stock's film adaptation of the play *Red Right Wrong*, which is slated for theatrical release this spring. Pero has even started his own film



Hakon Gray

company, Orris Productions.

With 2009 marking *Stay Hungry*'s silver anniversary, Twisted Sister is rereleasing the album and embarking on a forty-date tour of the U.S. and Europe, playing the LP in its entirety each night. But despite his packed schedule, Pero finds time to teach privately, encouraging his stu-

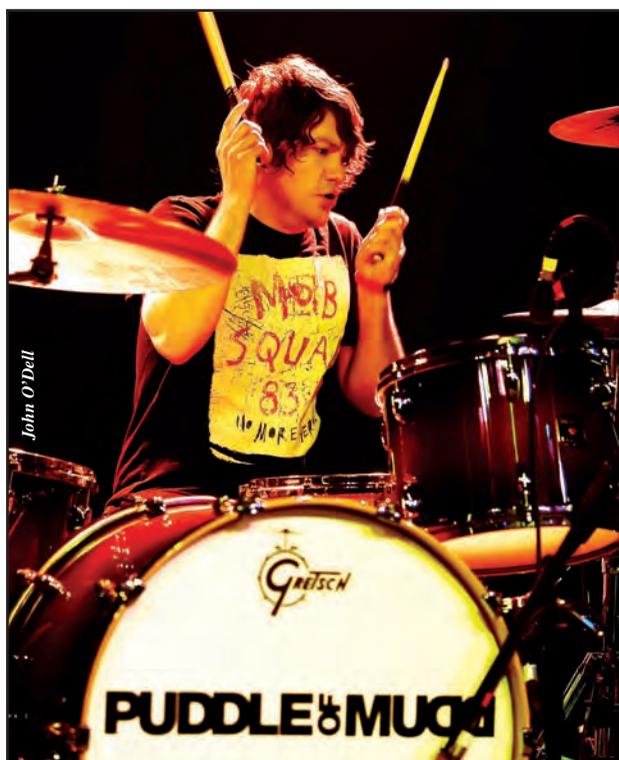
dents to maintain their individuality behind the kit. "No two drummers are exactly the same," AJ says. "Drummers have a footprint that's unique—like DNA. My drumming *is* my DNA. That's the best way I can put it."

Gail Worley

PUDDLE OF MUDD'S

RYAN YERDON

GETTING ANIMALISTIC



John O'Dell

It turns out that Puddle Of Mudd drummer Ryan Yerdon was once quite in touch with his sensitive side. Surprised? Well, before joining the band, which is famous for its ballsy, riff-laden rock epics, Yerdon played with the more indie-minded vocalist Carina Round, whose style demanded far more laid-back drumming. "It was really subdued and spaced out," Ryan recalls. "I'd play fat snares that were somewhat detuned, and I'd use different kinds of heads. There were samples in every song, and I would experiment and put different things on my snare, like pieces of paper or my wallet."

Shift to Yerdon's current gig with Puddle Of Mudd, and you'll find that the two approaches couldn't contrast more. "The Puddle gig calls for an animalistic, bashy headspace," Ryan says. "There's a punk attitude, and it's about a conviction, a passion that you either have or you don't. And drumming at this level and volume is a very physical thing. It's a sport, and I have to keep my stamina up.

I give up a bit of sensitivity, but when we have breaks in touring and I do a session, I'll notice that I always sound better because I've been playing to a click five nights a week."

In addition to gigs with Puddle Of Mudd, Yerdon has worked with Weezer, Gavin Rossdale, and Dweezil Zappa, among others. "Being versatile is important," he figures. "I've pulled things from jazz, Latin, fusion, rock, and hip-hop, just trying to emulate those beats and determine why they're grooving. Versatility helps the library inside your head grow bigger and allows you to incorporate ideas from other types of players."

There's one other weapon Ryan is thankful to be able to draw from. "I think it's *crucial* for drummers to play the guitar," he says. "When you do, you can tell instantly if a beat is wrong or right, or if it's too busy or not busy enough. There's something about being a guitar player that just helps me know if the drumming's right."

Steven Douglas Losey

BIGELF'S STEVE "FROTH" FROTHINGHAM NOT SO VINTAGE DRUMMER

The L.A. psychedelic revivalists Bigelf are so dedicated to accurately replicating the sound of '70s European prog rock, they use vintage equipment exclusively. For drummer Steve "Froth" Frothingham, whose primary influence is Guy Evans of the British prog pioneers Van der Graaf Generator, that means switching between two prized old kits.

On Bigelf's latest album, *Cheat The Gallows*, Froth uses an original Hayman kit purchased through the classifieds of the vintage-gear publication *Not So Modern Drummer*. "That's the kit I want to go to my grave playing," he proclaims. "It's a four-piece with a 26" bass drum, a 9x13 rack tom, a 16x16 floor tom, and a 6 1/2x14 snare—very similar to Simon Kirke's kit from Isle Of Wight—era Free. The Haymans have a very resonant wood sound—almost paper-like. They just sound so good!"

Live, the drummer favors his early-'70s green Ludwig Vistalite kit. The five-piece set features slightly larger drum sizes than the Haymans, including a custom 8x14 Vistalite snare. "I like the sound of a deep snare, so I had this one made," Steve says. "I found a 14" Vistalite concert tom and brought that to the Pro Drum Shop in L.A., along with a '70s chrome Ludwig snare to use for the hardware. They made this new Vistalite snare with the correct bearing edges and everything, and it sounds even better than my original snare!"

Froth admits it's a challenge to get his preferred



drum sounds within the context of a Bigelf recording session. "I like it when I can hear the voice of the drum *and* get that decayed pitch," he explains. "A lot of that can get lost because the Bigelf sound is big and there's so much stuff going on in the

mix. But as long as the attack and punch are there, much of the tone can be salvaged with compression and other studio techniques."

Gail Worley

UPDATE NEWS

Sean Dalton is on The Trews' third and latest CD, *No Time For Later*.

Brian Young and Fountains Of Wayne have a new DVD out, *No Better Place: Live In Chicago*.

Eric Tribbett and **John Lawson** are on Musiq Soulchild's latest, *OnMyRadio*.

Nick Oshiro is on Static-X's new album, *Cult Of Static*.

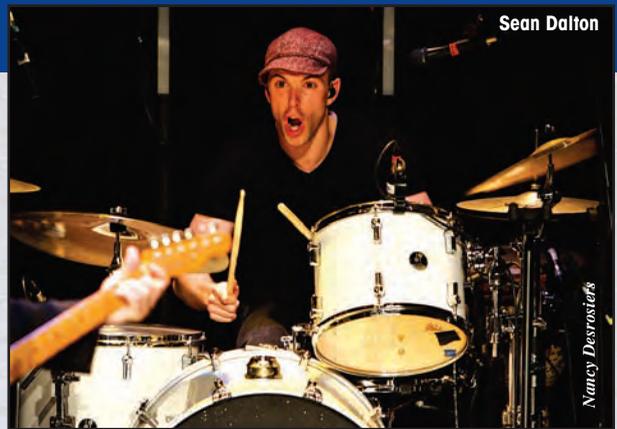
Russ Miller recently did live dates with Andrea Bocelli and recorded former Journey lead singer Steve Perry's first album in eighteen years. Russ also has a new instructional DVD out on Hudson called *Arrival: Behind The Glass*.

Ray Grappone plays drums on The Alexis P. Suter Band's CD *Just Another Fool*, which he coproduced.

Carl Allen is on Benny Golson's recent release, *New Time, New 'Tet*.

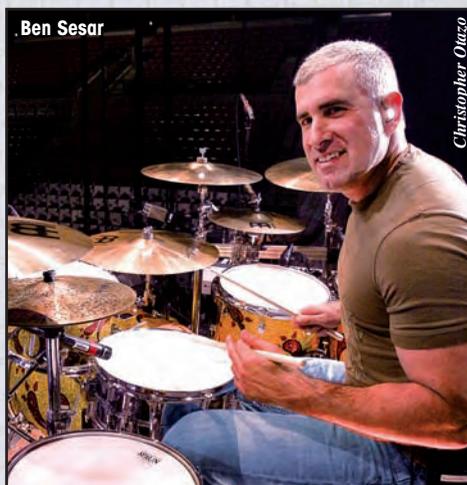
Ben Sesar is on Brad Paisley's latest CD, *Play (The Guitar Album)*.

Mark Chipello, **Graham Ward**, **Kristoffer Sonne**, and **Matt Laug** are on Tyrone Wells' latest, *Remain*.



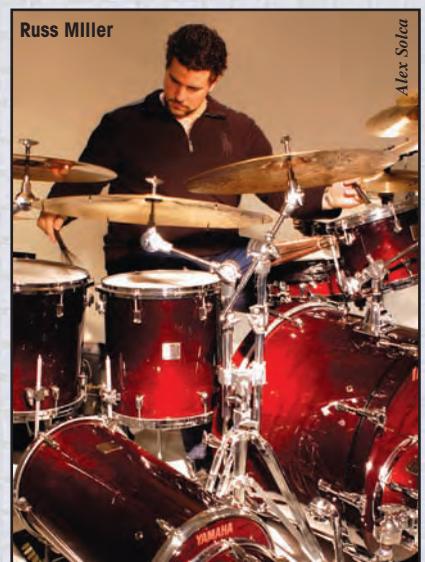
Sean Dalton

Nancy Desrosiers



Ben Sesar

Christopher Otazo



Russ Miller

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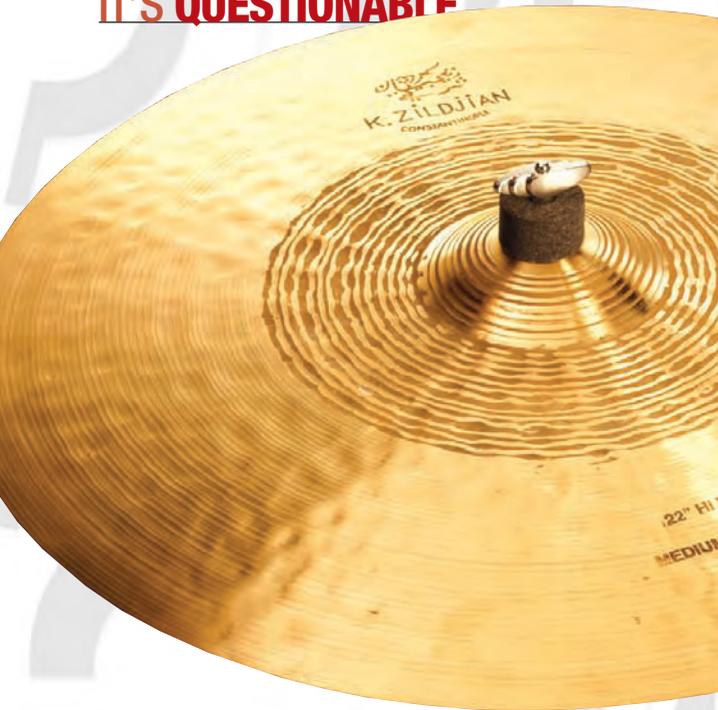
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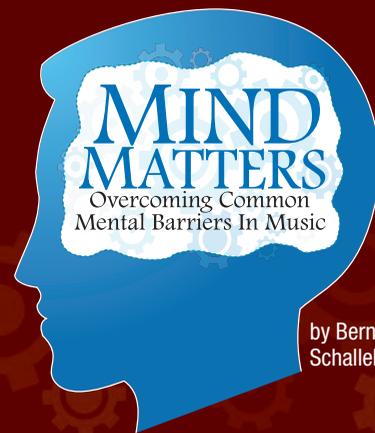
I recently became the owner of a Zildjian K Constantine ride cymbal. I'm interested in discovering any processes that would encourage the instrument to develop a patina look as quickly as possible. I know that some cymbal manufacturers finish their products with a thin film or wax that keeps the cymbals shiny while on showroom racks. Does Zildjian prepare its cymbals in this manner, and if so, is there a way to quickly remove or degrade this finish? The best thing I've come up with so far is to leave the cymbal out in the garden for a couple months.
Jeff Shoup

This question was sent to Zildjian product communications manager John King. Here's his response: "It's amazing how many players are anxious to place their cymbals in a time machine to achieve an aged-patina look. For those more concerned with a cymbal's sound, time will indeed cause a cymbal's molecular structure to slow down and release much of the tension that a cymbal alloy has at the beginning of its life. This may happen within six months, or it may take as long as three decades, depending on how the cymbal was made and how it was played. The patina look has little to do with this change in sound.

"For those who are concerned only with a cymbal's appearance, then sending the instrument to Florida or a Caribbean island will help it achieve a much faster rate of oxidation (rust), due to the high humidity levels and the salt content in the air in those regions. When rust permeates a cymbal's surface, it will tend to dry up some of the cymbal's overtones and create a slightly faster decay time.

"You are correct in stating that some cymbals have a wax, lacquer, or polyurethane coating to keep them looking new for a longer period. Zildjian uses a water-based polyurethane coating on many A and K models, but this coating can be removed quite easily. Your K Constantine received no coating whatsoever, as is also the case with K Custom and brilliant A Custom and Z Custom cymbals. So models in those series would be the best candidates for acquiring an aged-patina look at an accelerated rate."

Editor's note: This new column has been developed to offer creative advice, strategies, and solutions for mental issues that are common among aspiring musicians. It is not meant to solve severe psychological and/or psychiatric problems that would be better addressed through counseling with a qualified mental health practitioner.



A+ Practice, C- Performance

In the past year I got a chance to play with two different "name" performers. The rehearsals went well, and I thought I was prepared. But during the actual performances I felt my drumming was barely adequate. Moments before going on stage, I was psyched and I didn't have stage fright, but I just couldn't turn it on. The artists seemed satisfied with my playing—no negative comments—but I walked away believing I'd turned in a C-minus performance. I'm trying to figure out what happened. Can you help?

Sure. You're just not good enough. Does that nail it? If you had an instant visceral reaction to that statement—like a punch in the gut—then my guess is probably spot on.

See, there's a part of you that had the self-confidence to accept the gig; you believed in your abilities enough to say yes. You also sailed through the rehearsals with these known musicians using that same part of your brain. But when it came time to play the gig, another part of you was operating. We'll call that self-doubt.

First, as I always recommend, try to recall any inner dialogue that you were aware of just before the gig. You mentioned that you were psyched, so that inner-speak was probably quite positive and powerful. But were snippets of any other words or phrases in your mind expressing self-doubt?

If you're in your late teens to late twenties, this self-doubt is a result of what some psychologists have termed "the imposter syndrome." You think you've got the world fooled into believing you're a good drummer. You may have spent 10,000 hours woodshedding (which is known to be the minimal amount of practice time required to "master" a particular skill), but some part of you still insists on believing that

it's not enough and that you're a fraud, eventually to be found out.

If you got the call to play with two well-known artists, I'm guessing you have a pretty good reputation and will have other opportunities to dazzle your audience while backing up a "name" performer. You've obviously prepared yourself physically—through practice and rehearsal—so start to incorporate some techniques that will prepare you mentally. Try these:

1) Close your eyes. Picture a screen. On that screen, place memories of all your "sizzling" drum performances—times when you played great. Make the images big, bright, and in colors that really pop. Imagine stepping into at least one of those experiences, and relive the glory. See what you saw, hear what you heard, and feel what you felt at the time.

2) On a 3x5 index card, write the following sentence: "If I can do it in practice, I can do it in performance." Keep the card with you until these words are committed to memory.

3) Check your physiology as you walk on stage at your next gig. Keep your shoulders back and your head held high, and wear a smile—not a phony one. If you get in touch with your love of drums and drumming and you appreciate your hard-earned chops, that smile should come naturally.

4) If you end up tuning in to a scared inner voice that doubts your ability, reassure it with a confident, knowing voice. If the scared voice persists, refute it with facts—facts based on real-life experiences that prove you're a good player.

Regarding your C-minus gigs, give yourself credit for getting the job done. Granted, you didn't strut your best stuff like you had hoped. But it wasn't a disaster either. You probably just played it safe.

Bernie Schallehn has been a drummer and percussionist for over forty-five years. He holds a master's degree in counseling psychology and, while in private practice, held the credentials of a certified clinical mental health counselor and a certified alcohol and substance abuse counselor. Bernie is also skilled in the therapeutic arts of hypnotherapy and neuro-linguistic programming. He has worked with hundreds of clients in achieving their peak performance goals.



OLD SLINGERLAND BASS DRUM

I'm hoping you might be able to help me find some information on an old 24" or 26" Slingerland bass drum. It has brass hardware, so I'm assuming it was made before World War I. The heads (one is broken) are calfskin, and it appears there may have been a white marine pearl finish on the drum at one time (some of it is stuck in the plies at the seam). It also appears there was a heater in the drum at one point, since there's a plug in it. Can you tell me how old the drum is and what the approximate value would be in its current condition?

Matt A.

MD drum historian Harry Cangany answers: "That's a late-'20s/early-'30s Slingerland Artist model bass drum.

Twenty-four-inch drums weren't common until after World War II, so it's most likely a 26" white pearl on a walnut shell, with Artgold hardware (gold lacquer on polished brass). This would have been a dance-band drum, not a marching drum. A school may have gotten it as a gift at some point. I wish we could have seen it new. The value today, as is, is probably around \$200."

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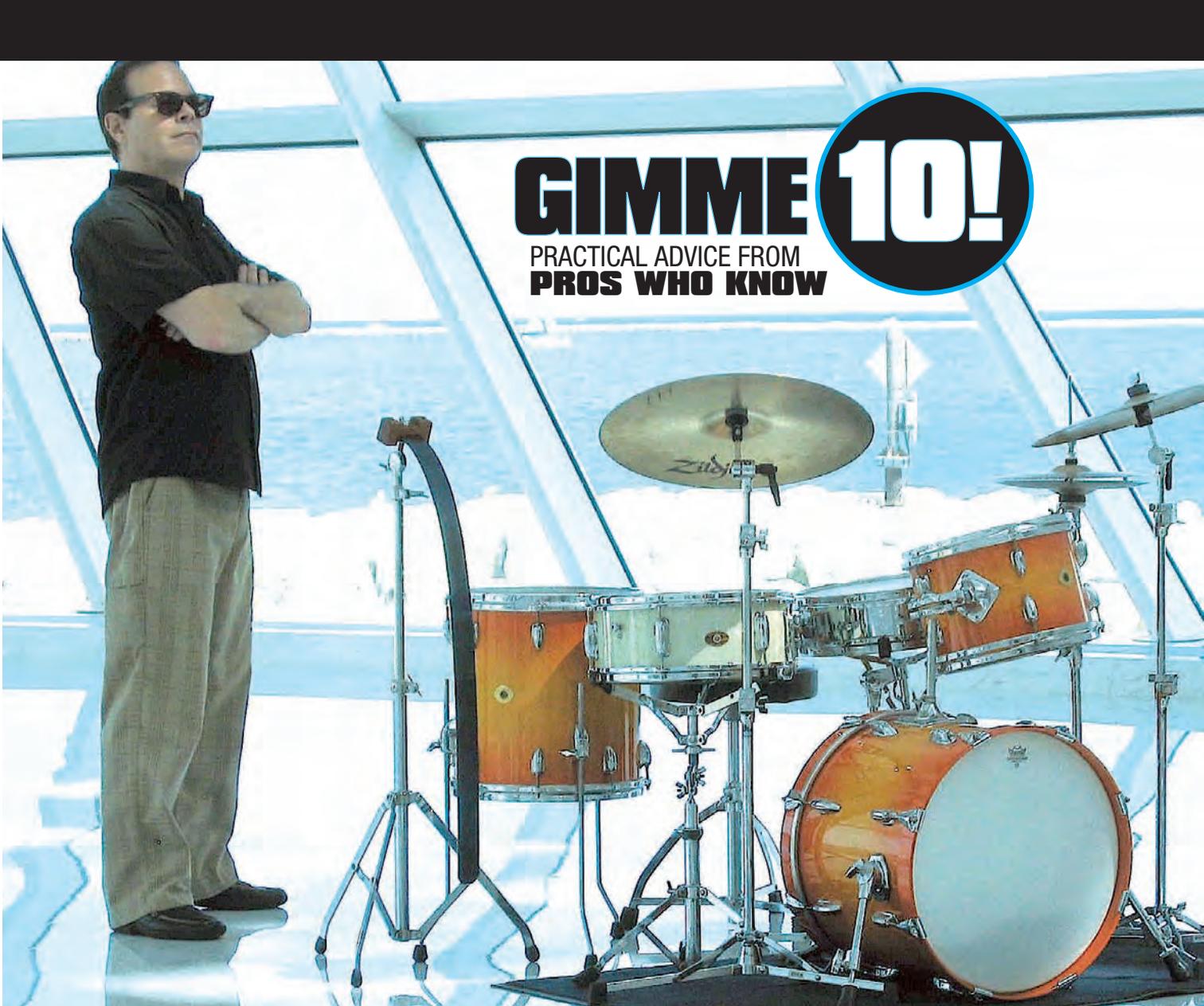


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PRACTICAL ADVICE FROM
PROS WHO KNOW

THE VIOLENT FEMMES' **VICTOR DELORENZO**

by Adam Budofsky

You learn a lot playing in a band like The Violent Femmes for the better part of three decades. After wowing members of The Pretenders outside one of their gigs—and being asked to open for them *that night*—The Femmes quickly became a bona fide cultural phenomenon. Famously suggestive sing-alongs like “Blister In The Sun,” “I Held Her In My Arms,” and “American Music” fueled many a voyage across the globe, and founding drummer Victor DeLorenzo had a particularly good seat at the instant party that Femmes concerts would invariably turn into. Well, in this case “seat” is a misnomer; the image of Victor, front of stage, stand-up drumming on a snare, a cymbal, and his unique “tranceaphone,” is iconic within indie/college-rock lore.

These days The Violent Femmes are on hiatus, but anyone familiar with Victor knows that he’s incapable of sitting still. (Maybe *that’s* the reason for his stand-up routine?) Whether it’s flexing his

acting muscles—the longtime thespian is currently working on a musical/dramatic duet with his daughter Kiko—recording one of his idiosyncratic solo albums, or playing in a more “exploratory” environment such as his new group, Prestige Atlantic Impulse, DeLorenzo is ever curious, ever busy, ever interesting, and *always* happy to share a funny road story or a bit of valuable advice.

Victor’s enthusiasm and love for the arts is clearly contagious; each of his three children is very much involved in creative pursuits, including his son, Malachi, a multi-instrumentalist who’s spent the past few years behind the kit for soul/folk rocker Langhorne Slim. A recent appearance on *Letterman* inspired Dave himself to comment on Mal’s brushwork on camera, a fact that you *know* made Victor proud. We’re equally proud to give Mal a few column inches here to share five of his own “What I’ve learned” nuggets. But first, let’s hear from Pop.

1 PRIVATE SOUND SOURCE. It's truly amazing what's available today to pass the long days of travel and waiting around for someone or something. Whether it's on a computer, a CD player, an iPod, or a cell phone with MP3 storage, your personal music library can now accompany you anywhere in the world. I can't even put a number on how many times my iPod has saved me from the boredom, anxiety, and stress of the road. Music can soothe the savage beast, and it works on musicians as well (maybe they're the same thing?). So don't leave Coltrane, Mingus, Emmylou, Ringo, Muddy, or any of your other musical guideposts at home. Bring 'em along!

2 FOOD THAT HELPS. Being on the road doesn't mean the road will automatically have the power to dictate how we live our lives while on it. The choice is ours. The human body is an exquisite machine that needs proper nourishment in order to operate at full potential. Sure, fast food is quick and available anytime, day or night, but taking shortcuts and not eating a well-balanced diet will catch up with you and start to diminish your accuracy and strength as a drummer and performer. Fresh fruit and vegetables, organic foods and juices, vitamins, and plenty of water help make the body run trim and fit and prepare us for any musical question that may come our way.

3 ROAD EXERCISE. Traveling from town to town in any kind of touring vehicle can take its toll on the mind and body. Try to make time every day for some kind of exercise to relieve stress and anxiety and to maintain muscle flexibility. The way we use our body to play the drumset is already quite a physical workout, but don't let that be your only form of exercise. Yoga, deep stretches, walking, hotel or dressing room workouts, and gym visits can help to combat the stresses we submit ourselves to because of our gypsy lives.

4 SEE THE WORLD. As the song goes, "What good is staying alone in your room? Come hear the music play..." The temptation on the road is to become isolated from normal everyday activities—our lives—which in turn breeds the possibility of having an unhealthy and boring routine lifestyle. When arriving somewhere new, make the time, even though you're tired from nonstop road work, to get out and see and experience all the world has to offer. Visiting famous landmarks, strolling along picturesque avenues, shopping for things that can be found only in that part of the world, and seeking out museums and unique places of worship all help to break the sameness of constant travel. You'll probably learn something new and make new friends in the process. The TV will do just fine without you.

5 NEVER NUDE. Always pack an extra pair of socks and underwear and an extra T-shirt in your carry-on luggage, as you never know when the airline will send your bag to Cleveland while you're on the way to Milwaukee. And of course this always happens when you least expect it and have no time to buy anything new. So play it safe—or play in dirty clothes, which always makes for a great first impression.

6 TWO PAIR. I always travel with at least two pairs of quality shoes. Rotating between a soft pair (gym shoes) and a hard pair (dress shoes) assures me that my feet—the bottom half of the drumset system—will stay in good shape. Give your feet a break and they'll take you wherever you want to go. Trust me on this, as I'm an old shoe dog who's seen many a pair come and go.

7 WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE SOMEPLACE YOU SHOULDN'T BE, YOU PROBABLY ARE.
Enough said.

8 READ THE BOOK, FOR THERE IS NO MOVIE. I love what reading does for me. It gives me a feeling of private calm and lets me time-travel to great literary worlds created by hundreds of wonderful writers past and present. Get lost in a book and you'll never walk alone.

9 SLEEP-DRIVING. I know that routing and time considerations don't always make for safe highway travel, but please be aware that driving while asleep just plain doesn't work! Try to plan for the long hauls and always have someone stay awake with the driver. If everyone is too tired to drive, pull over and rest for a while. Always use caution when cars and vans are involved. Getting to the gig is good; crashing a car is bad.

10 NICE WORKS BEST. It's always better to work with joy on your face and in your heart. You're at the mercy of many people while you're traveling to earn a living, so why not try to make things a little easier for yourself and those around you by approaching life with a little more "yes" and a lot less "no." SMILE. It won't cost you anything but your reputation.



5 FROM MALACHI

Victor's son, Malachi DeLorenzo, has earned his own stripes as a road dog with Langhorne Slim. Here's what he's learned.

1. GET ON THE GOOD FOOT. When you arrive at a club, make the extra effort to get in the good graces of the soundman. Sometimes sound engineers hold the key to a good show (but more often to a bad one). They have a tough, thankless job and see hundreds of bands every year, but if you're respectful to them, more than likely they will be good to you.

2. DON'T GO DOWN THE LAZY RIVER. After a long night and a long drive, it's easy to be careless during soundcheck. Take the time to make sure all your stands and drums are in the correct position, no matter how badly you just want to get to the dressing room and have a drink. A few inches can be the difference between breaking a stick and holding down a song.

3. AS THE BOY SCOUTS SAY, BE PREPARED. We all know that luggage handling is not an exact science. Bags frequently get lost or misplaced. If you keep your sticks with you at all times, you'll be able to avoid racing to the music shop before the show. You can always borrow another band's drums, but will they have your standby sticks and brushes?

4. THE MONITORS ARE YOUR EARS. We've all been through horrendous soundchecks where all we want to do is get off the stage. But no matter the cost, make sure you get what you need out of your monitors. The worst thing for a live drummer is not being able to hear the rest of the band. This can ruin a show.

5. NO 3 A.M. PIZZA. Sometimes it's hard to resist, but if at all possible, avoid ordering late-night food in your hotel room. Gorging yourself and then going to sleep is bad for the body. You'll feel it tomorrow—and how quickly tomorrow becomes today.

For more information on Victor and Malachi DeLorenzo, please go to myspace.com/prestigeatlanticimpulse and myspace.com/langhorneslim.





MARTI FREDERIKSEN

Megastar Singer/Songwriter/Producer/Engineer/DRUMMER!

by Billy Amendola

Marti Frederiksen is blessed with a career that every musician dreams of. I've been a fan of this producer, multi-instrumentalist, and songwriter since I first heard Aerosmith's 2001 single "Jaded," which Marti cowrote and produced. Since then he exploded onto the music scene and fast became a highly sought-after producer and songwriter. Marti continued his collaboration with the legendary boys from Boston, and he's writing for their upcoming album, which is due to be released later this year.

Frederiksen was born in California in 1962 and began drumming at age five. In his teens he started a band in which, besides playing drums, he sang and started writing songs. Years later he picked up a guitar, but he never put his sticks down. According to Marti, it all came pretty naturally: "I'm completely self-taught. I never took lessons. My son is the same—he's eleven and he's just got it."

As the years crept by and Marti waited for his break, he worked odd jobs and continued to play in different bands as a drummer, guitarist, and vocalist—basically he did whatever he needed to do. He always believed that sooner or later the big break would come. "I'd be painting houses," he says, "thinking to myself, *When?*"

Well, Frederiksen's time has come. The

list of artists he's engineered, produced, or penned hit songs for includes Faith Hill, Bo Bice, Eminem, Pink, Mick Jagger, Def Leppard, Jonny Lang, Black Lab, Mötley Crüe, Scorpions, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, The Cult, Ozzy Osbourne, Sheryl Crow, The Jason Bonham Band, Meatloaf, Paul Stanley, Brother Cane, Clay Aiken, and

"AS A PRODUCER AND A MIXER, LET ME TELL YOU THAT DRUMS ARE EVERYTHING ON A RECORDING."

Buckcherry. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. Marti's done movie soundtracks, and he was the voice for the imaginary band Stillwater in Cameron Crowe's blockbuster movie *Almost Famous*. Despite such high-profile career highlights, what really

intrigued us about this behind-the-scenes superstar is that he's first and foremost a *drummer*. "I have a drumset in my living room, all miked up and ready to go," Marti says. "So when I cut drum tracks, I run the snake out to the studio and I'm up and running in minutes."

Before you assume Marti's drumming skills lag far behind his other well-noted chops, check this out: I've spoken with Joey Kramer (Aerosmith), Brian Tichy (Billy Idol), and Xavier Muriel (Buckcherry) about working with Frederiksen, and they've all said the same thing: "Marti is a *great* drummer!" Obviously this is a man we want to talk to....

MD: Let's go back to the beginning.

Marti: One day my dad came home with drums from a swap meet, and that was it! My brother actually played first and was really good. Then I kind of took over and he started playing bass. Once I got hooked, I

A young Marti learning his craft



couldn't stop playing. I drove everyone crazy—I was always pounding my desk at school. Then a few years later I put my first band together. I was a drummer, but I was also writing the songs. I still didn't play guitar at the time, so I sang all the parts and played drums. I did learn to play guitar later, and it came easily as far as rhythm because of my playing drums. Let me tell you, a lot of singers play drums. I recently worked with Pat Monahan from Train, and he plays drums. And a few years ago I worked with [Journey's original lead singer] Steve Perry, and he told me his first instrument was drums. And of course there's Steven Tyler.

MD: Who was the first drummer you really noticed?

Marti: It was one of the guys from a band down the street; I don't recall his name. They were playing Hendrix songs, and I learned about Mitch Mitchell from that. Mitch's style of drumming is what got me. It was more of a free-for-all. And then I remember going to the drive-in as a

MARTI ON... RECORDING AND GEAR

I like to put mics on every drum, just in case. I've been in circumstances where I'm mixing and wishing I could hear the ride cymbal more. If I push the overheads up, I've got to ride the faders on every crash hit. So I mike the kick, the bottom and top of the snare, the hi-hats, ride cymbal, overheads, mono room, stereo room, and the toms obviously, because if I want to trigger with samples, it's easier.

My studio is very simple. I have an Onyx digital mixer that I run most of the drums through, and I've got a couple Neves for the kick and snare. But a lot of it is going digital, and I'm happy with the sound. I love all the plug-ins, the new SSL Wave; it's really great stuff. I'm slowly getting rid of older outboard gear.

Right now I've got two little Ludwig kits: a '68 jazz kit—20" kick, 12" tom, and 14" floor tom—and a '65 one like the Ringo swirl. But I think Ringo played a 22" kick, and I have a 20". That's all I'm using. I'll trigger toms if I want bigger sounds.

I've also been using that Drumagog plug-in. It's awesome for drums. I've been doing some remixing on some of the songs I did in the past and triggering new sounds. And I always like to blend it with the original. You want to keep that original smack on the snare—every hit is different. But Drumagog has up to fifty samples, so it triggers all those different hits.



Jeff Darr

teenager and seeing the Who documentary *The Kids Are Alright*, with Keith Moon—somewhat more of the same as Mitch, just all over the place drum-wise. I was way into both of them, and that's how I approached drumming.

Later I got into Zeppelin and heard Bonham laying it down, and I started getting that "less is best" approach—which came in handy, especially for playing on pop songs. In 1983 I was in a band called Drop In The Gray and we got a record deal

with Geffen. It was like a new wave, Duran Duran kind of band. I was into rock all the way up until I got in that band—I even cut off my hair. [laughs]

MD: Growing up, what was your practice routine?

Marti: I'd turn my headphones up loud with one of those old record players and just play to Kiss, Ted Nugent, The Who—I wanted to be a rocker!

MD: Do you remember your first experience playing drums in the studio?

MARTI ON... DRUMMERS



MD: Tell us the first thing that pops into your head when you hear the name Joey Kramer of Aerosmith.

Marti: Kramer, man, he's just a freight train, very solid.

MD: Rick Allen.

Marti: Rick is amazing! I've obviously never seen anything like it, and I don't know if I ever will. I had the privilege of working with him in the studio on Def Leppard's *X* record, and I threw out some crazy things for him. I said, "Dude, we're going to use real drums on this." And they hadn't used real drums in, like, eighteen years—even before his accident. I had him play snare, kick, and tom fills, then I had him overdub the top kit. He was awesome.

MD: Xavier Muriel of Buckcherry.

Marti: Xavier reminds me a lot of Joey, but he's got a little more Mitch Mitchell in him. Joey's got some Earth, Wind & Fire—the funk—and *X* has more of the '70s style, even though Joey *is* from the '70s. *X* is also very solid.

MD: Jason Bonham.

Marti: Bonham, he's another amazing drummer. I think he's underrated. I love working with him in the studio. I just worked with him on a Foreigner song. I would love to see Zeppelin tour with him. He'd be perfect.

MD: Tommy Lee.

Marti: You just want to watch him play. He looks so cool playing the drums. He's a great solid rock 'n' roll drummer, one of the best!

MD: Brian Tichy.

Marti: I can't say enough about Brian. I'm his biggest fan. I've had Brian play on a lot of my recordings, and he makes it look so easy.

MD: Kenny Aronoff.

Marti: Kenny will do anything you want, and he won't ever say, "Hey, man, I don't know, I'm kind of tired." Kenny is the best; he's just so good.

MD: Matt Chamberlain.

Marti: Oh, man, he's the grace-note king. He's really got that touch. The recordings he's done have been a huge influence on me.

MD: Vinnie Colaiuta.

Marti: Vinnie is the most musical drummer I've ever worked with. He just knows exactly what to do. And like Kenny, he'll do whatever it takes. Speaking of great drummers, I got a chance to work on a Mick Jagger record with Jim Keltner. Now *there's* a great drummer!

MARTI FREDERIKSEN

Marti: I sure do. It wasn't really a studio, it was a mobile truck. This guy who was interested in the band came down with a real nice studio on wheels. He miked up the whole rehearsal room, and we played live and then did overdubs. I was sixteen or seventeen at the time. I remember being in the truck listening to how everything was isolated.

I was always into recording drums. I would record drums, bass, and guitar on a two-track cassette and then sing along with the player onto another tape deck and bounce it back and forth. So I was always into multitracking—I just didn't have [a multitrack machine]. So this guy came with his two-inch sixteen-track machine and it was amazing. We did five songs and I was hooked. I was like, *This* is what I want to do.

MD: Did singing come naturally as well?

Marti: Yes. I always had that gift of being able to sing on key. Drums are so important to singing—the phrasing and the pocket. And drums are amazing for songwriting because when you're phrasing vocals it's all timing.

MD: Have you written songs from behind the kit?

Marti: Many. Even though I started playing drums when I was five, what really got me into this business was programming drums on demos for hire. I was able to make the drum machine swing. And then eventually I started playing more live drums on recordings.

That's where it all started, before I learned how to play guitar. Now I'll write

on an acoustic and then work up beats. I'm using BFD with different samplers and Drumagog and all that cool stuff. I love the technology. I've been working and recording on the computer with Pro Tools for about ten years, so I got on it early. I always wanted to learn engineering. And that was still back in the day with tape.

MD: How have you seen drums change since you started playing?

Marti: Obviously a lot of it is all tightened up and perfected on the computer now. But I find there's nothing like real drums—unless you're doing pop stuff where you really don't want it to *sound* like drums. I've tried not having real drums, and I always end up putting them down at the end. As a matter of fact, that's when I usually do the final drums, because a lot of what I do right now is on the grid and pretty chopped up.

With Buckcherry we tracked the band old-school. We cut up some drums for certain songs that we wanted to make real tight. But a lot of it is live; X is a pretty solid drummer. I love working with guys like him and Joey Kramer.

It's great to be a drummer and producer because I can throw out legitimate drum parts—not something that somebody wouldn't want to play, or couldn't play. And if they're not getting it, I go, "No, like this." I can actually sit there and play it. I've had the privilege of working with some amazing drummers—Kenny Aronoff, Jason Bonham.... It's all drum based. I write my songs around the drums.

MD: Can you give us an example?

Marti: "Jaded" by Aerosmith. It has the "Ticket To Ride" beat. And I did a song with Faith Hill called "Cry"—it's a real twisted drumbeat that took a lot of finessing. I had Vinnie Colaiuta play on that. We were throwing out beats trying to figure out what was going to work for the song.

MD: I've been a fan of your work and know just about everything you've produced, and much of what you've written. But I didn't realize the extent of your hit list as a writer.

Marti: That's where it all started, from songwriting. Producing came later on—I started producing a lot of the songs I was writing. That's how I got with Buckcherry. I worked with them on their last record, *15*, as a writer.

I have a song out now with Gavin Rossdale called "Love Remains The Same." I just produced a song for *Hannah Montana* that I also wrote. I work with Kara DioGuardi; she's the new judge on *American Idol*. Then there are pop jobs like Jesse McCartney, Katharine McPhee, and Bo Bice. I ended up playing on Bo's record. I did two songs with him, and I played drums on "Remember Me." I just *had* to play on it, I loved the song so much. I had a friend play on the single "The Real Thing," and I played everything else and wrote and produced it. I'd like to start playing more drums on recordings—I miss it!

Recently I've been mixing Aerosmith for *Guitar Hero*, and I played the drum pads for the first time on *Rock Band*. The only thing it doesn't have is an open hi-hat,



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but everything else is a real drumset. You could definitely learn how to play drums on it. I think a lot of kids are going to start buying real drums because of this, and you're going to start seeing drumsets in more stores. Aerosmith is playing a tour right now based on that game. You could call it one of their biggest records ever; it's already sold a few million. And they've got thirty songs on it. That's a huge success.

MD: When a band is going to work with a producer, what should the drummer be prepared for?

Marti: First of all, be prepared for anything. Listen for anything you can possibly learn that you may think you already know—but you might not know. My first experience with a producer was just to keep it real straight, solid, and simple, because I was kind of all over the place. And in the end that really helped me.

A new drummer going into the studio should lay a real simple track without too many fills. A lot of guys will do fills and fall right out of time. Don't worry about fills—just play the song. And playing to a click is awesome for every drummer. A lot of drummers are even playing to clicks live. I'm not saying you've got to cut up every drum performance, I'm just saying the click really keeps it together.

MD: Do you record the drums with a click at all times?

Marti: I can't remember the last time I didn't, other than times when I was just jamming around.

MD: When you're producing a record with a solo artist, do you have the drum sound

in your head and know which drummer is going to be right for that project?

Marti: In most cases, yes. It's more about knowing what the drum parts will be. If I want the drums to be hit a certain way, then I'll bring in Kenny Aronoff because he never misses, or Brian Tichy—they're smacking that snare like nobody's business.

Lately I've been working with this up-and-coming drummer named Ryan Brown. He's been playing on a lot of my pop recordings. He played on the *Hannah Montana* song and on a Suzie McNeil record I did. He's awesome; you will definitely be hearing more about him. He's one of the best drummers right now. Like I said, I'll do drums last because I like to program the parts and then have a drummer come in and replace them, and Ryan sits and listens to it once or twice, writes out every note, and goes in there and lays it down like the band is playing to him.

As a producer and a mixer, let me tell you that drums are everything on a recording. If the drums don't sound good, the recording's going to sound like shit—I don't care what else is on there. When I mix, if all those drums are slamming and in your face, everything falls into place. You can talk to [mix masters] Chris Lord-Alge or Andy Wallace—believe me, drums are everything in a mix.

I'm a drummer, but guess what? It is all about the drums, and I'll always believe that and I'll say it to anyone, I don't care who it is. The best instrument to learn first is drums. Everything else you can learn later. It's all about tempo, it's all about

timing, placement, and the groove. The beat makes the song. So for anybody, even if you want to be Eddie Van Halen, learn how to play the drums. It's just going to make you that much better at any instrument you play.

If I weren't a drummer, I wouldn't be a producer. I'm really glad that I got to do this interview with *Modern Drummer*. This is the first time I've just talked drums, and it's my love. I could go teach songwriting courses at UCLA, and if I had to give any advice, it would be to learn drums—but don't just be a drummer, be everything.

And don't ever give up. I didn't start making money until twelve years ago. I never gave up. Little things fell in place and the next thing you know I got a chance to write with Aerosmith. I was like, Whoa, finally. But getting the chance to be in a room with them doesn't mean you're going to get a song on the record. If I get in the studio with somebody I've never worked with, I've got to prove myself all over again. There's no "paying your dues." It's about paying them every day you get up. If I knew what I know now when I was twenty, it would have been ridiculous, but that's just the way it is. I feel like it's all just starting for me, and it's exciting.

MD: You have a wonderful career. We wish you continued success.

Marti: Thank you very much. This was fun!

For more on Marti, visit his Web site, martifrederiksen.com.



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JUST INTRODUCED

Here's a sampling of the COOLEST items released this past month.





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1. MAPEX's Meridian series is now available with a striking exterior veneer of bird's-eye maple. This limited-edition set comes in a six-piece maple Studioease configuration and is finished with a high-gloss transparent black lacquer. Only a hundred sets are being sold. Each kit includes an 18x22 bass drum, 8x10 and 9x12 toms, 14x14 and 16x16 floor toms, and a 5 1/2x14 snare, plus a full array of new 700 series hardware. Retail price: \$2,489.99.

2. MPX snares were introduced to complement the Mapex Black Panther series of premium snare drums. The MPX Maple line features two popular sizes: 5 1/2x14 and 6x13. The drums are finished with a high-gloss clear lacquer and chrome hardware. The MPX Birch line features two sizes: a 6x13 drum in a glossy natural-lacquer finish with chrome hardware, and a 5 1/2x14 model that's available in natural gloss with chrome hardware or transparent-gloss black lacquer with black hardware. MPX Steel snares, which have mirrorlike stainless steel shells, come in three sizes: 5 1/2x14, 5 1/2x13, and 5 1/2x10. All MPX snares retail for \$239.99.

mapexdrums.com

3. ZION DRUMS' acoustic/electric handmade cajons have built-in ZPx-PS (Zion Preamp Extreme Pickup System) electronics for amplification, so they can be plugged into mixers, recorders, loopers, and effects pedals for unique sounds. All Zion cajons are constructed without screws, nails, or hardware and consist of hand-selected maple for exquisite tone, touch, and feel.

ziondrums.us.com

4. MEINL kalimbas are African-inspired melodic instruments that feature plated steel keys you pluck with your thumbs. The small KA5-S model has five keys and lists for \$70. The medium-size KA9-M has nine keys and costs \$79.

5. Mb8 Effect and Mb8 Heavy cymbal sets contain cymbals made from the B8 alloy that are formed into shape using high-tech computerized hammering methods. The alloy and the advanced construction techniques combine to deliver a cutting, explosive, crystal-clear sound. The Effect set (\$538) includes a 10" splash, an 18" China, and a free cymbal attachment. The Heavy set (\$1,338) includes a pair of 14" heavy hi-hats, an 18" heavy crash, a 22" heavy ride, and a free professional cymbal bag.

meinl.com

6. BOSPHORUS's exotic Master Vintage rides feature a dark, dry fundamental sound with precise articulation and an organic, earthy response. These cymbals come in 19", 20", 21", and 22" sizes.

bosphorus.com

7. BLACK SWAMP PERCUSSION's Titanium Elite series snares feature either Multisonic or SoundArt strainers and are available in 5 1/2x14, 6 1/2x14, and 7x14 sizes. The 5 1/2" and 6 1/2" drums are offered with die-cast hoops, while the 7" model comes with 8-lug, triple-flange hoops for a more robust sound. List prices range from \$1,318 to \$1,553.

blackswamp.com

8. REMO Black Suede snare-side heads consist of one ply of textured Ebony 4 mil film. The result is a unique-looking drumhead that offers focused warmth and enhanced tonal control for snare drums. A 13" head retails for \$31; 14" models are \$32.

remo.com

9. SABIAN's AAX X-Plosion Fast crashes are faster variations of the company's popular X-Plosion crashes. These extra-thin, responsive cymbals offer a glassy timbre, a high pitch, and a concentrated sound. They're available in 14", 15", 16", 17", 18", and 19" sizes.

sabian.com

10. AKG K 702 around-the-ear headphones feature a detachable input cable with a locking three-pin mini-XLR connector. The high-performance, low-loss detachable cable makes transportation and storage easier. These are the world's first headphones with flat-wire coils for unparalleled signal tracking accuracy. The 702s also feature a comfortable leather headband and ergonomically shaped velour-covered ear pads. List price: \$539.

akg.com

11. SPAUN DRUM COMPANY has introduced an intermediate line of drums called the TL series. These models feature 8-ply maple shells, solid-brass tube lugs, and double 45° bearing edges. The production-style drumsets offer exceptional quality and sound at an affordable price. TL kits are available in four shell-pack configurations and with five different finishes. Prices range from \$1,299 to \$1,999.

spaundrums.com



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PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

ORANGE COUNTY DRUM & PERCUSSION

NEWPORT SERIES DRUMSET by Anthony Riscica





Southern California's Orange County Drum & Percussion is known for its super-hip custom configurations. Just take one pass through the company's Web site (ocdrum.com) and you'll see that this is not your father's drum manufacturer. OCDP now offers its unique setups in more affordable shell packs, known as the Newport series (available exclusively through Guitar Center and Musician's Friend). A five-piece set sells for \$1,599.99; a four-piece is \$1,499.99.

THE LOOKS

We received a five-piece maple shell pack (no snare) in what OCDP calls "blue glass sparkle." (The company also offers silver sparkle Newport drums.) The lacquer on top of the sparkles was of high quality, so it would likely take more than a minor bump to chip or scratch the surface. The triangle badges and beefy sound-hole inserts added to the drums' pro look.

All Newport toms come with die-cast hardware. The OCDP standard lugs have a low-profile triangle shape and are offset on either side of the drum to create a "boutique" look. The bass drum claws are also die-cast, with a plastic insert to keep the metal from touching the hoops. The floor tom legs and their hinged mounts are heavy duty. The leg mounts come with a memory lock and "plastic-impregnated" wing screws that look and feel great. These same wing screws are found on the rugged, sturdy bass drum legs. A thin rubber gasket

AT FIRST GLANCE...

It's already obvious that this set sits slightly above typical entry-level/midrange shell packs. After a romp around the drums, it's even more evident that they're a serious contender for working drummers and anyone looking to upgrade from a starter kit.

prevents the hardware from making direct contact with the shell.

The rack toms come with OC's V-mount suspension system, which attaches to two lugs on the batter side of each drum and one lug on the resonant side. It's a great design that complements the offset lugs and provides a sturdy hold with minimal shaking. OC also provides two tom holders that mount on cymbal stands.

THE SOUND

First off, the kick was a cannon! At 20x22, it was a big drum—and it delivered as such. The shell depth provided extra low end and punch, due to the additional amount of air that's pushed through the drum with each stroke.

The kick came with a Remo Powerstroke 3 batter head, which suited the drum perfectly, as it helped control the attack and sustain. I swapped out the standard black resonant head with a resonant head that had a hole, and I threw in a pillow for muffling. This made the sound a little more articulate, which I felt was necessary. The drum really boomed in a way that would be ideal for rock or punk settings.

The rack toms (8x10 and 9x12) projected well and had an overall pleasing sound, but they lacked some of the warmth you normally get from a maple shell. As with the kick, the toms seemed perfect for a rock or punk setting where you need some extra volume, even if this means sacrificing a bit of tone. The toms responded well to different tunings, although I ended up keeping them tuned medium-low, with half a Moongel dampening each head. This touch of muffling rounded out the tone a bit and brought out some of the warmth of the shells. When cranked up tightly, the toms sounded good, but they seemed to be most at home with looser tension. The relatively heavy weight of the drums, in conjunction with the sturdy mounting system, gave the toms a super-solid feel—and feel can be hit or miss with a set in this price range.

The floor toms (12x14 and 14x16) were solid as a rock too. The beefy legs and mounts provided a pro-quality feel. As with the rack toms, the sound projection was superb. Yet the floor toms sounded noticeably warmer than the rack toms. They didn't have the same wide tuning range, but that's fairly normal with bigger drums. Again, I settled on a medium-low tension with a little muffling. Both floor toms rocked, but I felt the 16" had a better feel and gave me more of what I like from a floor tom in a rock setting—a nice round "thud" that hits you almost like a bass drum but provides a bit more tone. (If you aren't in need of a 14" floor tom, OCDP also offers this shell pack without one.)

CONCLUSION

Overall, the OCDP Newport series lends itself to heavier styles but could also work in some not-so-hard-hitting environments. The sound quality and craftsmanship are in the pro range. Orange County has done a lot to keep its "custom" image intact, even as it ventures into the mass-produced, mid-price market. So whether you're a working drummer looking for a cool gigging kit or you'd like to upgrade to a pro-sounding kit at an affordable price, the Newport series could be the solution you're looking for.

guitarcenter.com





TRX OVERSIZE BRT SERIES CYMBALS

by Stephen Bidwell

Pardon the cliché, but for many drummers working today, regardless of genre, bigger really *is* better when it comes to cymbals. I've seen many players resort to crashing on ride cymbals when a crash bigger than 18" is hard to find without placing a special order or settling for a cymbal that feels half an inch thick. TRX ("Turks") Cymbals, a three-year-old newcomer, has stepped up to fill the missing mega-cymbal niche with some unique plus-size offerings in its BRT series—24" rides, 22" and 21" crashes, and 15" hi-hats.

The BRT series is built to cut in high-volume situations but also to have the rich character associated with hand-hammered cymbals. The line has a brilliant, shimmering appearance that would look great under stage lights. In my opinion, TRX is filling some long-ignored gaps in cymbals marketed to heavy hitters.

MONSTER RIDES

We were sent two giant 24" rides (\$550 each), additions to the existing 20" and 22" rides in the BRT series. One was simply stamped "Ride" on

slightly odd—overtones. But any questionable sounds quickly disappeared when the rest of my band showed up and plugged in their guitars.

The bells on the 24" models were a bit smaller than I would expect with cymbals this large. They produced proportionately smaller sounds but were cutting and clear nonetheless. If you're looking for a washy Bonham-esque ride to bash, these might be a bit too much on the gongy side. But laying into either model with the shank of a big stick could certainly cut through the wail of a sizeable guitar rig. The decay from this kind of bashing was understandably long—these *are* 24" cymbals. On the other side of the spectrum, playing the cymbals with a smaller acorn-tip stick would suit a drummer who, say, swings a big band with a heavy K Zildjian or similar ride.

A CRASH, NOT A RIDE

TRX's press release on the BRT crashes calls these new cymbals oversize, but for some players they'll be a perfect fit. After all, for quite a few years, hardly any companies offered crashes larger than 18" or 19". If you wanted a bigger sound, you had to resort to crashing on a ride,

which doesn't always provide the right explosive sound or offer the proper "give" when you strike the cymbal. The 21" (\$475) and 22" (\$500) BRT crashes didn't feel like rigid ride cymbals when I gave them a strong whack. The first time I laid into the 22", it felt like I was playing a medium-weight 18". The 21", oddly, felt a little heavier under the stick. But

that's a welcome inconsistency with regard to hand-hammered cymbals—no two sound or feel exactly alike.

The 22" was a bit faster to open up than the 20" ride I normally use in a similar spot in my setup. Both BRT cymbals were a joy to play with

mallets at all volumes. While they worked well as huge, bright crashes, they still maintained some of the personality and warmth associated with hand-hammered cymbals.

Given the size of these crashes, I wondered how they might function as rides in jazz or Latin styles. Both were a bit too bright and shimmery for my jazz tastes, but drying them up with a Moongel pad on the edge made them sound great for bossa nova and samba grooves.

NOT-AS-HUGE HI-HATS

Though I've seen some drummers use 16" and larger hi-hats recently, 15" counts as oversize for TRX. The pair I received for review were thick, and they produced a clunky but effective "chick" sound when played with a pedal. If you like hats that have some flexibility and bend to them, these are probably not for you. But they sounded great when played half open and washy within a big backbeat groove. They also offered clean, glassy stick articulation when played closed. List price: \$550.

WHAT'S IT WORTH?

Out in the field, these cymbals fit best with the louder of my current projects. In an instrumental post-rock band, they worked very well for loud bashing as well as for dynamic mallet swells. I admit I've had a thing for larger crashes lately, so I enjoyed making the BRTs work in any situation, including an African-funk context.

One thing you should keep in mind is that these cymbals will add extra weight to your cartage. The five review models collectively weighed forty-one pounds, so you'd better *really* want that big sound if you're lugging such cymbals around town or through airports. Still, with the release of these oversize additions to the BRT series, TRX has succeeded in adding some unique—and uniquely big—sounds for today's modern drummers.

trxcymbals.com

WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

With new boutique drum companies and high-end cymbal makers surfacing each year, drummers have an ever-growing array of sonic options to accommodate our individual musical personalities. TRX aims to fill a gap in the marketplace with the BRT line, which is made with the B20-Plus alloy and designed for hard-hitting drummers who want high volume plus the complex sound of hand-hammered cymbals. The newest BRT models push that seemingly contradictory combo further, with even bigger possibilities for rides, crashes, and hi-hats.

the underside; the other was marked as a Heavy Ride. They occupied sonic territory somewhere between the thick, loud sound of most "heavy metal" cymbals and the dark, nuance-rich colors jazzheads go for. When I played the cymbals by themselves, they produced some complex—if

FORD SNARE DRUMS

LIL' BUDDY, STARS AND STRIPES, 220 BRONZE

by David Ciauro



Ford Drums' tag line, "the Ferrari of drums," immediately caught my attention. Last summer I accompanied my father on an automotive "dream tour." We got the chance to drive six different exotic cars, including the Ferrari F430 Spider. I'm by no means a car aficionado, but the experience was exhilarating. It was impossible not to appreciate the sheer power, otherworldly aesthetics, and meticulous engineering that went into building these precision

are Ford's lightweight solid aircraft aluminum "true axial alignment" design. Die-cast hoops add a subtle dryness to the sound, and a Trick throw-off rounds out the hardware composition.

Tuned high, the drum had immense power and projection. It offered a crystal-clear snap, crisp tone, supersensitive snare response, and focused attack. Tuned lower, the drum produced a fat, round sound without sacrificing snare response and clarity. At any tuning, the drum cut through a

mix like a Ginsu knife.
List price: \$1,895.

the rim took the edge off the overtones without really modifying the sound. Tensioned tightly, the drum choked a bit, but it sang beautifully in the mid-tuning range. Once again, the snare response remained consistent through the tuning spectrum, and the projection was impressive. Like the Stars And Stripes, the 220 Bronze has 2.3 mm triple-flange Super Hoops, solid tube aircraft aluminum lugs, and a swiveling Dunnett throw-off. List price: \$1,895.

OUT OF THE BOX

Each of the three Ford snare drums I test-drove outshined every other snare I've owned in my twenty-seven years behind the kit. The snares even made the rest of my kits sound lackluster. Of course, it's unfair to expect mass-produced drums to reach the same performance level as high-end custom drums—it's like comparing my reliable but standard Honda with a souped-up Ferrari.

machines. Afterward, it was difficult not to feel disappointed by my SUV's 156-horsepower four-cylinder engine, having just experienced six 450-plus-horsepower beasts. Well, playing Ford's new snare drums proved to be the drumming equivalent of taking that dream tour.

Ford is a three-man custom drum manufacturer based in Santa Ana, California. Its mission is to produce elite drums that are sonically harmonious and allow drummers to truly "drive a band." The snare drums are designed to deliver pristine sound with unmatched projection. The hardware is made from solid aircraft aluminum, which is designed to never pit or rust. Each snare bed is beautifully cut, and the heads sit perfectly on the smooth bearing edges. To allow the drum to be heard in its natural state, without muffling or extra plies, our test models came equipped with twenty-strand snare wires and Aquarian single-ply batter and snare-side heads.

LIL' BUDDY

Looks *can* be deceiving. This little 4x14 snare (which was designed for prog-rock legend Carl Palmer) weighed as much as my two-year-old daughter and had a range unmatched by any piccolo I'd ever heard. A 24-karat-gold-plated $\frac{1}{8}$ " carbon-steel shell gives the drum its weight, and the lugs

owbox-style star vent gives the drum a slightly drier sound that enhances the stick "crack." This dryness was particularly evident at the center of the head. The drum opened up and produced warm overtones when played off-center and toward the rim. A wide tuning range and sensitive snare response made the drum very diverse and my favorite among the three.

It was hard to tune the thing badly. Loose tensions provided fat backbeats, and when the top head was tight a thunderous crack rang out, with no annoying overtones. At a medium tuning, there was a balance of crack, warmth, and robust tone. Equipped with 2.3 mm triple-flange Super Hoops and a Dunnett throw-off, this drum had a lot of projection, and its rigid design only enhanced the sound. The tube lugs are made of solid aircraft aluminum. List price: \$990.

220 BRONZE

Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin that balances strength with resistance to wear and corrosion. Ford's 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ x14 220 Bronze snare has an 80 percent copper content, which produces a significant amount of high, brassy overtones. Yet the overall tone remained surprisingly warm. A small piece of Moongel or gaffer's tape placed about $\frac{1}{4}$ " from

STARS AND STRIPES

The people at Ford firmly believe the sound of a drum comes before the looks. But this patriotic 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ x14 maple drum was superb both aesthetically and musically. The 1"-deep shad-

EXPENSIVE TASTES

After our exotic-car dream tour, my father and I shared a laugh when we caught ourselves uttering ludicrous statements such as, "I liked the Lamborghini Gallardo more than the Murciélago." This conversation took place in a Honda, mind you, and the reality of our ever owning one of those dream cars isn't happening unless we pull off a Vegas heist à la *Ocean's Eleven*. So, along those lines, I'll say the 200 Bronze snare was my least favorite of the three—but I'd be more than satisfied using it for just about any gig. The Lil' Buddy proved to be the most impressive, with its unexpected tuning range and crystal-clear response. But the Stars And Stripes was the one that, if given the opportunity, I'd prefer to "drive" daily.

As my tests proved, Ford makes beautiful high-end custom drums. But the company's greatest strengths may also be its greatest detriment: These snares project *so* well, they might be overkill for smaller venues, akin to a guitarist using a Marshall stack when a modest combo amp would suffice.

Also, the prices—although justified by the drums' expensive premium materials and labor-intensive fabrication—could make Ford snares a luxury purchase for the everyday gigging drummer. They're more suitable for professional drummers and aficionados who insist on playing the cream of the crop. Again, Ford's comparing itself to Ferrari is apropos, since it's pretty likely that drummers who hear these snares and compare them with their own drums will be sure to covet them.

forddrums.com



HQ REALFEEL BASS DRUM PRACTICE PAD

by Rick Mattingly

The problem I've had with most of the bass drum practice pads I've tried over the years is that they're either unstable or they take up so much space that they're not practical to carry around for pre-gig warm-ups.

So I was happy to see that HQ has found a way to combine stability and portability with its new RealFeel bass drum practice pad.

The foam striking section of the pad is about $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick, and its feel is pretty realistic. The foam pad is removable, so it can easily be replaced when it eventually wears down. To get a louder sound, you can remove the pad and let your pedal beater strike the metal backing plate. But after I tried that for just a few minutes, I could feel the shock of the impact in my shin. You're better off keeping the pad in place.

The foam pad is about 3" tall and is positioned where a beater would typically strike the center of a 22" bass drum head. I often play a 20" bass drum, so I had to extend my beater a bit when I used the practice pad.

But I didn't detect any noticeable change in the feel or response of my pedal. The impact surface is $4\frac{3}{4}$ " wide, which will accommodate two beaters if you want to use the unit with a double pedal.

The pedal attachment plate can be adjusted up and down by about $\frac{5}{16}$ " to account for different pedals' mounting brackets. Setting up and taking down the unit requires only a couple of drum key adjustments and the removal and reattachment of a single screw. (Don't drop the screw in a dark room; it's very small!) When folded up, the RealFeel bass drum practice pad fits into a $16 \times 7\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{3}{4}$ space, which is small enough to be accommodated by most hardware cases.

The HQ RealFeel bass drum practice pad retails for \$79.99.

hqpercussion.com



STURDY AND PORTABLE

The RealFeel bass drum practice pad's sturdy collapsible metal frame should stand up to pretty heavy practicing. You can place it against a wall for stability, or you can extend two spring-loaded, pointed spurs for freestanding practice. For medium-force playing, I found the spurs on the unit held the pad in place sufficiently. But when I played heavily, I had to engage the spurs on my pedal as well or use a pedal that had Velcro-type material on the bottom.



DEE JAY DRUMS

6X14 RIVER RED GUM



Ian Travis

This unique stave-constructed drum is made of river red gum, a native Australian timber that can be found along the vast Murray-Darling river system. Dee Jay Drums uses this wood for three reasons: 1) It's hard and dense, so it gives drums extra projection and attack. 2) It's readily available as recycled timber. 3) The beautiful and prominent grain patterns vary depending on the location of the trees that are used, giving each drum a one-of-a-kind appeal.

The wood for this particular drum came from

old fence posts on a farm in the mostly dry and cold southeastern section of Victoria. The conditions in the region caused a mottled effect in the grain pattern, which is visible in the shell and the rims.

The snare came with a pair of custom rims that were made from segments of river red gum of varying lengths. These are claimed to enhance the resonance of the shell because they're built using the same type of wood. Whether or not that's true, the thick hoops produced throaty woodblock-sounding rimclicks and added a

chunky "clack" to the attack of rimshots.

Fusion fans would really like this drum, as it gave off a tight, articulate, and fat sound (with some very rich overtones) that was close to what the legendary Billy Cobham captured on many of his classic '70s solo albums. Billy even used this exact drum when he visited Australia to play a series of concerts with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

deejaydrums.com.au

GREAT LEATHER PERSONALIZED STICK BAG

by Michael Dawson

I've probably worn through nearly a dozen stick bags since taking up the drums in the late '80s. Sometimes a zipper broke or came off track, preventing me from ever closing the bag again. Other times the bottoms of the pockets tore (always at the most inopportune times), causing my sticks to spill all over the floor. Once I even went so far as to duct tape the bottom of a broken bag, just so I could make it through a couple sets without having to scramble to grab a 5A before it rolled off the stage. The tape didn't hold up, of course, and the bag looked pretty ridiculous, especially considering I was playing a formal "tuxedo" wedding gig.

Dena Hamilton of Great Leather—a company that also makes custom purses, pillows, guitar straps, and other leather accessories—heard similar stick-bag

three sections: The two 4" side compartments can hold roughly six pairs of 5B sticks each (more if you use thinner models), and the 6" middle section is ideal for larger mallets, multirods, brushes, and other abnormally shaped implements. When stuffed to the gills, this bag will hold well over a dozen pairs of sticks. So unless you habitually hack through lumber every five minutes, you should have more than enough room to accommodate your needs.

The bag closes by way of two 1"-wide leather straps that are lined with fabric hook-and-loop fasteners. These are used instead of zippers. Throughout our two-month testing period, the straps showed no signs of wear and kept the bag closed tightly. The soft leather handle was very comfortable in the hand, which made it easy to lug the bag (along with my cymbals and pedal) a few city blocks from my car to my band's rehearsal studio. For reinforcement, the handle features a strong $\frac{5}{8}$ " cord on the inside.

All in all, this is an awesome bag that I feel any drummer would be proud to use. The leather is top notch, the construction is solid, and the look is very elegant. If you

want to attach the bag to your floor tom so you can have access to your sticks during a gig, Great Leather supplies two thin leather straps and a pair of gold-plated S hooks that you can tie off through eyelets in the upper corners of the bag. Each bag also comes with two extra S hooks, which can be used to hang drum keys or brushes from the eyelets.

Great Leather stick bags are handmade to order and are currently available in black, red, and wine. Each bag costs \$219 and includes a personalized leather label.

greatleather.com



MADE FOR A PRO

Great Leather designed its first custom stick bag in 1990 for former Reba McEntire drummer Gary Sullivan. Gary had certain things that he wanted to see in his "ultimate" stick bag, and those specifications became the basic blueprint for what the company offers today.

woes from the notable drummer Gary Sullivan, so she and Gary decided to collaborate on a high-end version that's designed to last a lifetime. In our opinion, they've succeeded.

Each Great Leather stick bag is made from ten square feet of top-grain leather. This material is used on the inside and outside of the bag, with a light filler between the layers. The typical stress points—corners and joints—are reinforced with extra stitches of bonded nylon thread. The bag features two flapped pockets on the outside to hold drum keys, earplugs, jewelry, and other small items. The inside pocket is divided into

To hear a selection of the products reviewed this month, go to the Multimedia page at moderndrummer.com.



Chris Coleman
New Kids On the Block



Jon Rice
Job For a Cowboy



Felix Pollard
Everlast



Chris Adler
Lamb of God



Brann Dailor
Mastodon



Trevor Lawrence Jr.
Dr. Dre



Jason Bittner
Shadows Fall



meinlcymbals.com

Simmons

SD9K Electronic Drumset

by Will Romano



When I heard that the Simmons electronic drum brand had been resuscitated, I wondered how this '80s percussive peculiarity would be updated for the 21st century. A lot of technological developments have become industry standards in the years since Simmons disappeared, including the advent of mesh heads and the rise of high-quality digital sampling. What evolutionary strides would be incorporated into this resurrected brand? Let's find out.

A NEW KIT FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Ironically, I'd dug up my old Simmons MTX9 electronic pads a few years ago—they'd been collecting dust in my equipment closet for well over a decade—and began gigging with them. The MTX9 didn't have an extensive sound-sample library in its brain, nor was it sophisticated, even by late-'80s standards. But for a time it was all I needed to add the occasional charming and exotic sample, which translated into sometimes brilliant and sometimes lug-headed and clunky percussive noises. I was expecting, even hoping, that the difference between playing the new SD9K system



The Simmons SD9K Electronic Drumset comes equipped with ten pads: an 11" snare pad, an 11" floor tom pad, three 9" tom pads, a 14" ride cymbal pad, two 12" cymbal pads, a 12" hi-hat cymbal pad (and accompanying hi-hat foot controller), and an 11" kick pad secured to a metal tower frame.

SD9K pads from behind

and my MTX9s would be the equivalent of cruising the high seas in the *QEII* after fishing for tuna in a rowboat. So I kept the vintage Simmons nearby while testing the SD9K to see how the two compared.

REGAINING CONTROL

The SD9K system's control module is smaller, more advanced, and more user-friendly than my old MTX9 brain. But I had my doubts about this module's durability. For one thing, I couldn't attach the SD9K control console to the rack as securely as I would have liked, and it seemed a little wobbly. I was also concerned about such a sophisticated piece of equipment being placed so dangerously close to my striking zone. After I played with the module in that spot for a while, however, I had to concede that it's the most logical place for it. Despite my fears, the module never came loose, even during heated play. It was neatly tucked into its own spot, yet the module's keypad was easy to access.

PADS AND GHOSTING

Unlike the classic hexagon-shaped Simmons drum pads, the SD9K playing surfaces are compact and round, and each pad features a raised rim. While it wouldn't be accurate to say that the SD9K pads are as vulnerable as their '80s counterparts to being set off by sympathetic vibrations, there were a few moments when I detected the classic Simmons ghost-in-the-machine effect, or cross-talk. In other words, sometimes when I struck one of the pads—most frequently the snare—a nearby pad would be triggered by the vibrations, as if a second set of hands were competing for control of the kit. This didn't happen very often, but when it did, it was totally unscripted, a bit bizarre, and kind of comforting, in an unusually familiar way. Still, the pads were more responsive than their older cousins. (I eventually discovered that the cross-talk could be eliminated by tweaking a few settings in the module.)

The soft playing surface of the SD9K pads made virtually no sound when tapped, absorbing the shock (and contact noise) of the stick hitting the head very nicely. This is a sharp contrast to the horrendous clacking noise a nylon-tip stick produces when striking the unforgiving face of the MTX9 pads. And by using headphones instead of an amp or PA, I could play freely late at night without worrying too much about who (or what) I might wake up with my mishmash of bird chirps, rifle shots, dog barks, and stadium cheers.

SOUNDS AND SETTINGS

The SD9K's control module has a deep library of sounds—725 to be exact, with fifteen subgroups, including electronic tom, electronic kick, acoustic snare, DJ FX (needle scratch “wiki-wiki”), melodic instruments (glockenspiel, marimba, vibraphone, steel drum, etc.), guitar FX, loops, and sound FX (“boing,” helicopter flutter, church bell, etc.). The forty factory-programmed kits in the SD9K module cannot be fundamentally changed,

but I was able to edit and assign samples to the pads in order to customize a kit.

The SD9K is capable of storing nearly sixty custom kits. I spent hours fiddling with the mix of each sample by changing the panning (left, center, right), reverb, EQ, and decay levels. If I was ever dissatisfied with a sound or the way a particular sound fit within the context of the overall kit, I simply went to the edit function, changed the voice assigned to a given pad, and saved the new setting.

It should be noted that the SD9K control module has MIDI in and out ports and SD card reader capability, so you can save and load kits, expand your sound library, and use the control module for MIDI sequencing.

QUICK AND PAINLESS

What initially impressed me about the SD9K was its lightweight yet sturdy and efficient four-legged rack system, which made setup very quick and easy. I was relieved to find that the cables connecting the pads to the control module were color coded, labeled, and bundled to avoid confusion. No spaghetti bowl of unnamed cords here. So in no time the pads were set up and plugged into the sound control module, and I was ready to play.

RED-LIGHT FEVER

I found the recording function of the SD9K to be especially easy and user-friendly. When I pressed the record button on the control module, a “Ready!” signal flashed on the LCD screen and the record button lit up red. The moment my sticks hit the pads, recording began. After I assigned the session a number under the USong menu heading (I had access to a hundred user-performance sequencers), that information was saved in the memory of the module.

One song I created, titled “Jmz'44,” included such voices as a woman's laugh, a car-tire screech, a tabla loop, and so on. I hit the play button and listened back to my humble (and quite strange) creation, stoked by the system's simple sophistication.

While the control module provides a click track and allows you to play along with 110 preset sequences or songs in a plethora of genres (including rockabilly, new wave, fusion, reggae, and 3/4 jazz), I found exploring the depth of the custom settings much more fascinating than relying on the presets.

CYMBAL SOUNDS

Should electronic drums merely attempt to ape an acoustic kit? Some might argue that electronic and acoustic drums have completely different functions. Simmons seems to offer a happy compromise, even going as far as incorporating a “choke” feature for the cymbal pads.

Each cymbal pad is wired to produce two different voices. So when I hit the main playing surface of one of the 12” pads, using the Kit 30 setting (dubbed the “Cartoon” drumkit), it generated the sound of a glass shattering. When I struck the edge of the same cymbal pad, it triggered a human scream. This dual-voice feature

was not only exciting to play, but I found it also helped to improve my phrasing and thinking. I ate up hours of time flipping through the sample library to find two sounds that worked (or intentionally didn't work) well together.

All the Simmons pads are velocity sensitive (the harder you hit them, the louder the noise they generate, and, in some cases, the lighter the touch, the higher the pitch). The cymbal pads responded best to a harder touch, more so than with the drum pads. When I dug into the ride pad, for instance, I could hear a clearer “ping.” But even this response was a bit inconsistent. (Again, these issues can be resolved by adjusting parameters in the module.)

SNARE AND HI-HAT

The snare sounds generated by the SD9K sound bank were better than I had expected. But despite having nearly 130 sounds to choose from, including both “acoustic” and “electronic” snares, I seemed to return to a handful of favorites, including the Studio Maple Snare Mid and the Room Snare.

As is the case with the cymbal pads, the snare has dual-tone capability. It was fun to generate a “creaky door” effect when I struck the center of the snare pad and a “stream” (running water) sample when I hit the rim.

When I used the spring-activated hi-hat pedal controller, there seemed to be a very slight lag between striking the pad and hearing the accented splash sound. This lack of continuity tested my concentration and I became more aware of where and how I placed my accents. The kind of sonic sensitivity and responsiveness typically associated with acoustic cymbals just wasn't available with the Simmons pads. But to be fair, this is an issue with many hi-hat controllers, including some that cost much more.

Ironically, the “chick” sound I achieved via a number of hi-hat settings was rather satisfying. And when I lifted my foot from the pedal to obtain a thrashing half-open wash—*there* was an authentic cymbal sound.

CONCLUSION

Simmons has embraced modern technology with the Simmons SD9K, even as it nods to the past. Given the finer capabilities of the kit and its \$1,665 price tag, the SD9K is a serious choice for drummers on a budget who want to investigate—or rediscover—electronics.

simmonsdrums.net



Lewis Nash

JAZZ'S MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

Story by Ken Micallef • Photos by Rahav

Swing, swang, swingin'! Splang-a-lang! Snap, crackle, pop! These well-worn words go a long way toward describing this thing of ours we call jazz, but they also illustrate the style of one of the idiom's modern masters: Lewis Nash. Nash has consistently proven why he's the first-call drummer in a myriad of splang-a-lang-driven situations. If the rhythm is swinging, chances are Lewis is providing the pulse.

Nash can boast one of the lengthiest discographies in jazz. He's appeared on more than 400 recordings, with contemporary stars and historical trailblazers alike. Among the masters the fifty-year-old Phoenix native has been recording with since the early 1980s are Betty Carter (Lewis's debut New York gig), Clark Terry, Joe Henderson, Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Carter, J.J.

Johnson, Tommy Flanagan (as a ten-year member of his trio), Joe Lovano, Oscar Peterson, Sonny Rollins, Milt Jackson, Ron Carter, Jackie McLean, Wynton Marsalis, Gary Burton, McCoy Tyner, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Don Pullen, and Diana Krall.

The drummer has also recorded three solo albums, *Rhythm Is My Business* (1989), *It Don't Mean A Thing* (2004), and *Stompin' At The Savoy* (2005). As you can guess from those titles, Nash is all about tradition. But he insists that he is no "museum piece," that the style of jazz drumming he purveys is as modern as any great art form can and should be. He believes you don't have to search for something "new" to create great drumming and great jazz.





An excellent example of this belief is The Blue Note 7's *Mosaic: A Celebration Of Blue Note Records*, featuring Nash with such heavy jazz hitters as tenor saxophonist Ravi Coltrane, guitarist Peter Bernstein, and pianist Bill Charlap. Performing standards from the Blue Note catalog, the septet supercharges Cedar Walton's "Mosaic," Joe Henderson's "Inner Urge," and Thelonious Monk's "Criss Cross," among other tunes. Befitting his trademark, Nash performs here with a sonic ID that owes its essence to the music itself, not to any pre-meditated calculation. And therein lies the rub.

As is so well proven on Branford Marsalis's 1988 recording, *Random Abstract*, Nash always evaluates the situation at hand to supply what's needed. While some may think of Lewis as simply a refined example of classic drumming swingmanship, his work on *Random Abstract* is powerful, voluble, rambunctious—anything but polite. And his drumming on *Mosaic* (and his arrangement of the song bearing that title) is expertly lithe, yet it can also take your head off. Nash's skills are many: the ability to illustrate a song's melody so as to ultimately strengthen it, excellent dynamic control, a popping ride cymbal beat that recalls Billy Higgins and Max Roach, superb rudimental solos and fours trading, an almost supernatural sense of relaxation, and an overall attention to detail and musicality that is a joy to hear. And his Sonor kit *sounds* great.

In the weeks prior to this *Modern Drummer* cover interview (his second, after a dual cover with Roy Haynes in the 1990s), Nash recorded a new album with country legend Willie Nelson, played a week at New York City's Village Vanguard with pianist Cedar Walton, toured Japan with his own all-star sextet, and recorded a forthcoming CD with his quintet (which includes pianist Renee Rosnes, bassist Peter Washington, trumpeter Jeremy Pelt, and saxophonist Jimmy Greene) for his Happy Beat label.

In addition to engagements with his trio, sextet, and quintet, Nash has in his date book a performance of *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* at Chicago's Symphony Hall. He's also continuing on in his roles as a music director for Lincoln Center and as an instructor and artist in residence at The Vail Jazz Workshop, The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, and Switzerland's Generations Jazz Workshop. And he's recording an album of duets with saxophonist Steve Wilson and will be touring in support of *Mosaic*.

In all his endeavors, whether it's playing live or teaching a class of laymen about the essentials of rhythm, this perpetual sports fan always keeps his eye on the ball. Where some see a complicated chart, he hears the music of the spheres. Where some mean to express themselves, he means to express the music. Lewis Nash: jazz's MVP.

MD: You are known for your urbane, polished swing feel and great attention to detail. Yet you can absolutely burn in a more rambunctious style, as on Branford Marsalis's *Random Abstract* or The Blue Note 7's

adjust to play different styles of music while maintaining my identity. You do that by thinking *music first*. I don't think about my approach consciously; I'm thinking about the music first.

"SOME SOLOS ARE HEAVY ON TECHNIQUE, SOME ARE HEAVY ON JUST VIBE. YOU HAVE TO DECIDE WHAT WORKS IN THE CONTEXT YOU ARE IN."

Mosaic. There is a dichotomy in your playing that many drummers may not be aware of.

Lewis: It's all about context: the musical environment, the other players, the music itself. Considering all that, I always look at what's required to make the music work. I

MD: Given that, it seems you gravitate toward performing with jazz masters more than toward playing on some young lion's latest recording.

Lewis: It is true that I've appeared in a lot of situations with the classic jazz players:



LEWIS'S SETUP

Drums: Sonor Designer series, bubinga finish

A. 6 1/2x14 wood snare
(alternate: 6 1/2x14 1940s Leedy Broadway Parallel chrome)

B. 8x10 tom

C. 8x12 tom

D. 14x14 floor tom

E. 14x18 bass drum

Cymbals: Zildjian

1. 14" A New Beat hi-hats

2. 20" Constantinople ride

3. 20" late-'50s A ride

4. 20" Armand ride with rivets

5. 18" dark crash with multiple 1" holes

Sticks: Regal Tip Lewis Nash Signature sticks, Regal Tip wire brushes and mallets

Heads: Remo. Snare: coated Ambassador batter, Ambassador snare side. Toms: coated Ambassador batter, clear Ambassador bottom. Bass drum: coated Ambassador batter or Powerstroke, Fiberskyn front.

Hardware: Hamilton cymbal stands

am a huge NBA fan. When a player, in basketball or music, changes environment, you have to make adjustments; then styles or approaches to the music can be different. I

Sonny Rollins, Tommy Flanagan, and McCoy Tyner, for example. But I have learned as a musician how to be a chameleon. Take *Random Abstract*. I've heard that record

Lewis Nash
and his favorite cymbal the
20" Armand Ride

"I've been enjoying the clarity, response and versatility of the Armand Rides. They work beautifully in so many different situations. Combined with my K Constantinoples, I have a wide range of colors right at my fingertips!"

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marko djordjevic
and his favorite cymbal the
20" Constantinople Flat Ride

"Sophisticated, subtle and soft spoken, this beautiful cymbal is a true musical instrument! The magical combination of stick definition and natural spread and the low overtones makes it one of a kind. I have been looking for this sound for years."

Zildjian

SINCE · 1623

zildjian.com/20armandride
zildjian.com/20conflatride



played on the radio and the DJ announce the drummer as Jeff “Tain” Watts. People get fooled by the context; they hear the way someone is playing in that context and they assume it must be this person.

I’m not trying to sound like different people when I play. My goal is to keep a consistent thread of musicality. I come to the gig as prepared as I can be: I’ve practiced, I’ve worked on my technique, and I have a lot of experience to draw from, so when I arrive at a situation I am immersing myself in that music. I don’t worry if I’m going to sound like myself. When I play with McCoy Tyner, there are certain things I have to do to make his thing work. Then when I play

with Hank Jones, I can’t play the same way I play with McCoy. I’m looking for the threads that run through their music and give it a certain essence.

Personality, Pacing, And The MVP Mindset

MD: Is your musical personality more about refinement than about taking an extroverted approach?

Lewis: A general thread runs through your personality. I’m not an introvert or an extrovert. But because I’m more apt to pay attention to detail and clarity, I’m probably less inclined to play a whole lot of stuff that may be technically impressive. I don’t put

down guys who play a lot; it’s just a different approach.

MD: You traded very extroverted fours with Cedar Walton at The Village Vanguard.

Lewis: That was my chance to express all these things I’ve been practicing—or just how I felt at that moment. Some nights I might feel real chopsy and play a lot of stuff in my fours or solos. Other nights I’ll be in a different mood and leave more space. I like to come with a clean palette every night.

MD: Also, you typically make the head in a jazz composition stronger by really illustrating the essentials.

Lewis: The melody and the phrasing. I listen really carefully to where the nuances

BASS DESIRES

Legendary Stand-Up Man RON CARTER On Lewis Nash

Lewis’s gifts are his ability and willingness to make anyone who hires him sound better than they would if they hired somebody else to play the drums. Also, the sound of his drums—the way he tunes them doesn’t interfere with the bass notes or the range of the piano. And he has a willingness to play a wide dynamic range, he’s able to read the parts you write for him, and he plays them exactly as you wrote them. He doesn’t get upset if he doesn’t play a solo on every song. He’s on time for the gig and makes sure all his tools are in better-than-working order. He brings ebullience and humor to the bandstand, even when he isn’t playing. And he’s able to play

like Lewis Nash, but playing *your* music.

If I’m playing with Lewis and I play a particular rhythm, he will play it two bars later. He has this ability to remember a phrase and duplicate it at any point in the tune. That is a rare thing indeed.

I wish that more drummers would listen to how Lewis tunes the drums; his snare drum is bright and crisp, and I love that. And he gets a really great recorded sound. I would play for free with him if I had to! Well, not exactly free—price is not a consideration if Lewis is not on the gig. And I’ve turned down gigs if Lewis wasn’t on them.



LEWIS'S HIT LIST

RECORDINGS

ARTIST

Lewis Nash
 Lewis Nash
 Lewis Nash
 The Blue Note 7
 Mulgrew Miller
 Branford Marsalis
 McCoy Tyner
 Oscar Peterson
 Tommy Flanagan
 Tommy Flanagan
 Joe Henderson
 Joe Lovano
 John Lewis

ALBUM

Rhythm Is My Business
 It Don't Mean A Thing (M&I Jazz, import)
 Stompin' At The Savoy (M&I Jazz, import)
 Mosaic: A Celebration Of Blue Note Records
 Hand In Hand
 Random Abstract
 Illuminations
 The More I See You
 Sea Changes
 Beyond The Blue Bird
 Big Band
 Quartets: Live At The Village Vanguard
 Evolution II

FAVORITES

ARTIST

Count Basie
 Art Blakey
 Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers
 Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers
 John Coltrane
 John Coltrane
 John Coltrane
 John Coltrane
 Miles Davis
 Miles Davis
 Miles Davis
 Miles Davis
 Dizzy Gillespie Big Band
 Wynton Kelly Trio/
 Wes Montgomery
 Oscar Peterson
 Max Roach
 Clifford Brown/Max Roach Quintet
 Sonny Rollins
 Wayne Shorter
 Wayne Shorter
 Wayne Shorter
 Horace Silver Quintet

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 A Night At Birdland
 Moanin'
 Ugetsu
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Oscar Peterson Trio Plus One
 Drums Unlimited
 Study In Brown
 Saxophone Colossus
 Speak No Evil
 JuJu
 Native Dancer
 Doin' The Thing
 (At The Village Gate)

DRUMMER

Sonny Payne
 Art Blakey
 Art Blakey
 Art Blakey
 Philly Joe Jones
 Elvin Jones
 Elvin Jones
 Jimmy Cobb
 Tony Williams
 Philly Joe Jones
 Charli Persip
 Jimmy Cobb

Ed Thigpen
 Max Roach
 Max Roach
 Max Roach
 Elvin Jones
 Elvin Jones
 Robertinho Silva
 Roy Brooks



are. Different guys play different melodies in their way. Let's say Tommy Flanagan and Cedar Walton share a similar arrangement of a tune; they'll still have different conceptions. So I am listening to how they've decided to phrase the melody, where the dynamic emphasis is, where they get softer, where there are legato or staccato phrases. I make it my business to embellish and bring out those things clearly. If I as the drummer can spell out the melody more clearly, then it will strengthen the music. I also try to make their ideas come across more clearly when they're soloing.

MD: Your pacing is very unhurried. Again, it really aids the melody.

Lewis: I'm striving for a certain kind of relaxation that is a part of the best swinging jazz. That's a big goal. A lot of it is experience, and a lot of it is playing with the kind of players who bring that sensibility to the stage. People think of McCoy Tyner as being one of the more

powerful piano players in jazz—he has a strong left-hand style and he can play hard. There is a lot of energy there. But it's a misconception that, because of that energy, McCoy pushes, that he's on top of the beat. The first time I played with McCoy I realized how wide his beat is. I had to really relax my approach to the beat so that everything felt comfortable. With some players that play really on top, you almost feel like you're holding on. It's like a runaway horse carriage. But with McCoy I had to take a deep breath and relax more.

MD: So you're always gauging the musicians you play with.

Lewis: Absolutely. That's a big, big thing. If you're going to make them sound like the best version of themselves, then you're going to have to really check out what they do and how they do it.

When I do drum clinics, I have a theme I call the MVP mindset. The MVP on a team isn't

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Lewis Nash

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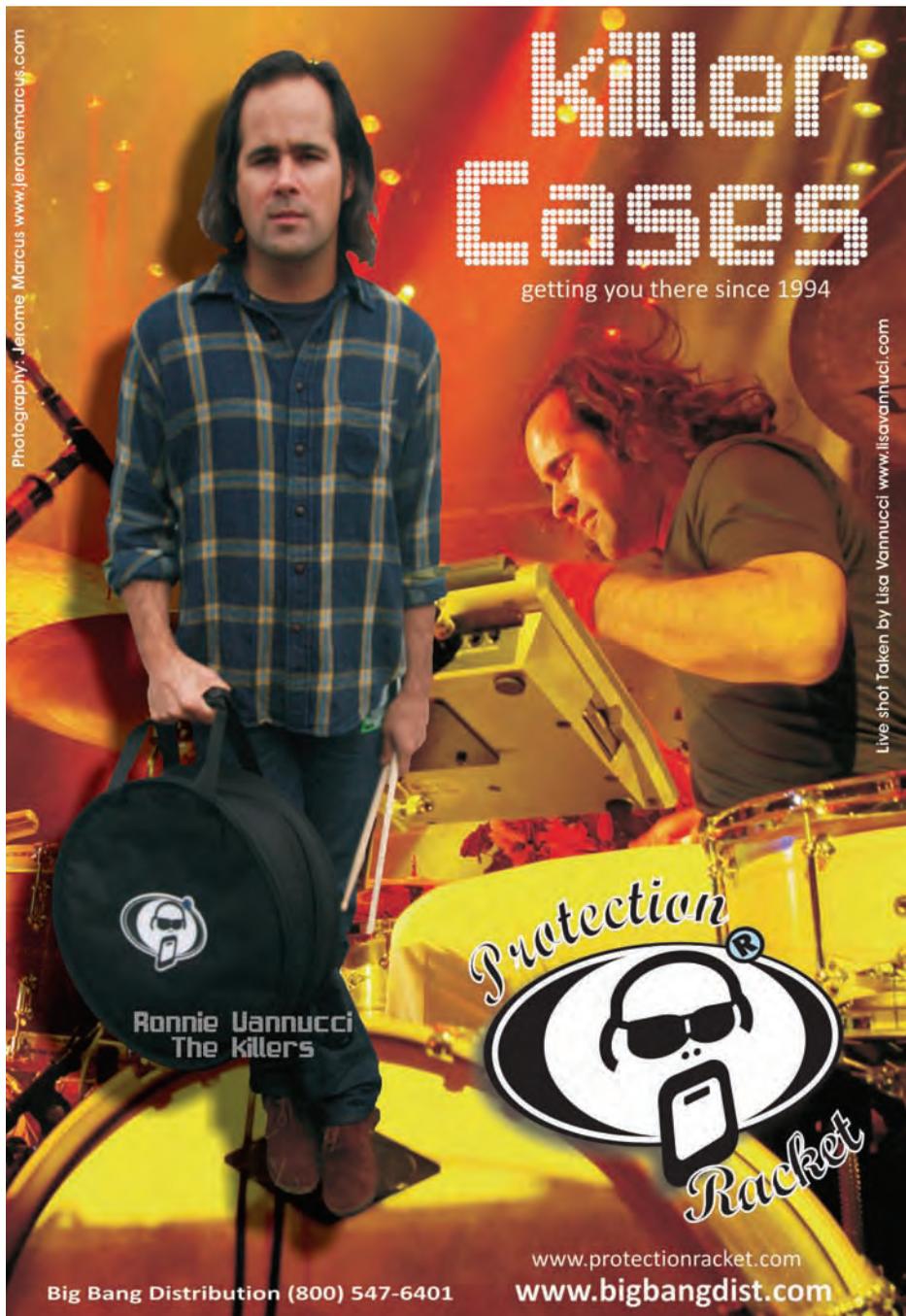
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necessarily the person who scores the most points or is the most exciting on the floor; rather, he or she is like the glue that makes everything else work more smoothly. I try to bring the MVP mindset to the drumset. I hear different things going on around me from the musicians on the bandstand, and I try to enhance that—which in turn helps the whole band and the soloists shine even more. You can't be selfish; it's a team concept. I try to be that person who makes the team click on all cylinders.

MD: It takes experience to recognize all those principles, but from the day you arrived in New York you began working with the masters. They must have heard something in your playing.

Lewis: I'm always thankful to have had the experience of playing with those guys. When I think of the elder statesmen I've had a chance to play with who aren't here anymore...I played with Milt Hinton, for example, and you can't find that style of slap bass playing anymore. To have had a chance to play with Ray Brown, Oscar Peterson, Milt Jackson—those are the guys who created what it is that we're playing. They heard something in this kid from Phoenix that they liked.

Nash Takes New York, 1981

MD: So when you came to New York in 1981, you knew you wanted to work with the senior jazz masters?

Lewis: Yes and no. In '81 I was listening to more "modern" music: Jack DeJohnette, Tony Williams, Wayne Shorter, and Herbie Hancock. And I was checking out the free scene and the loft scene. There was a lot of thought about what it meant to be creative in jazz. I was open to a lot of things. But I knew that if I didn't get the information that these older musicians had to offer before they were gone, I wasn't going to get it. You have to get that kind of information from the source.

MD: And in '81 you were still able to hear all the great drummers play in New York's clubs.

Lewis: All of them, except Kenny Clarke, who was living in Paris. The guys who set high standards on the drumset showed me that jazz is like a big family. If you've got the right stuff, they will embrace you and show you the stuff you don't know. Guys like Clark Terry and Harry "Sweets" Edison are unique individuals—and Betty Carter, who was my entree onto the international jazz scene.

MD: Were you prepared when you arrived in New York?

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LEWIS NASH

Lewis: I studied with Freddie Waits before coming to New York, and he recommended me for the Betty Carter gig. Freddie and I worked on a lot of technique things, and we talked about clarity and taste, knowing when to do what and how long to do it and with how much emphasis and how much subtlety. He told me to check out Jo Jones and drummers like that, and to be aware that there is a wide dynamic range—don't just play at one level, one volume, one way. Make your dynamic palette wide and deep.

MD: What did you woodshed during your formative years with Betty Carter?

Lewis: I would have been working on odd-meter exercises or four-way coordination. One of Freddie Waits' four-way coordination lessons was to, within a 4/4 pulse, play six beats on the hi-hat, three beats on the snare, and twelve beats on the ride cymbal, all designed to enable you to execute what you hear. Four-way coordination, metric modulation, three-against-four things, you want them to be seamless and musical in a

performance situation.

MD: What were some good chops-builders you used during your formative years?

Lewis: My formative years continued after I moved to New York in 1981, and even though I may not be able to say I'm still in my formative years, I do not feel "fully formed." The learning and growth process continues! That being said, from the late '70s through the '80s I spent a lot of time working on various exercises from George L. Stone's *Stick Control* and Ted Reed's *Syncopation*. I still use some of those exercises for warm-ups, particularly the accented triplets toward the end of *Syncopation*. I also found benefit in practicing Alan Dawson's rudimental ritual. And seeing and hearing Alan do it himself several times remains a source of inspiration.

MD: How did Freddie focus on your ride cymbal beat?

Lewis: Freddie talked about the steadiness of it; he put a lot of emphasis on the ride cymbal having a legato flow—making it sound not too irregular, having an even feeling that would allow other things to happen around it.

MD: Who mostly influenced your ride cymbal playing? Billy Higgins? Max Roach?

Lewis: It comes out of Klook [Kenny Clarke]. Max Roach came out of Klook. Early on, it came out of Jimmy Cobb, Philly Joe Jones, Art Blakey. All those guys have subtle differences in their approach to the ride cymbal. As I've gotten older, my feel has become more akin to the Kenny Clarke/Connie Kay/Billy Higgins school. Cobb and Blakey are a little more visceral.

MD: Did you play with their records?

Lewis: I played along with *all* of their records. But it came to me more from playing with the other musicians who those drummers played *with*. I got a chance to play with a lot of those same guys. That's when I would understand why a tune would feel a certain way. If I'm onstage with Ray Brown or Milt Jackson or Cedar Walton or Tommy Flanagan, then I'm sitting in the drum chair where guys like Billy Higgins and Philly Joe Jones and Max sat years ago, establishing what this music is. So I'm able to feel for myself how these guys played. They're not the same age they were then, and their playing may have evolved, but they basically have the same feeling. All those things helped me

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be who I am today.

MD: How did you develop your concept for soloing?

Lewis: I drew heavily from Max Roach, Roy Haynes, Philly Joe Jones, Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, and Tony Williams. I transcribed Elvin's solo from "Africa" on John Coltrane's *Africa/Brass*—from the LP! I wore that record out. Same thing with Tony on Miles Davis's *Four & More*. I put Tony under a microscope. I transcribed Max, Art Blakey, and Philly Joe, and I learned the solos; I memorized them. You have to memorize the nuances, the phrasing, where it's loud and where it's quiet, what kind of stickings you think they're using. Some solos are heavy on technique, some are heavy on just vibe. You have to decide what works in the particular context you are in.

Brushwork, Visualization, Soloing, And Clinic Concepts

MD: On the title track to your CD *It Don't Mean A Thing*, you play a very slow brush pattern. Can you offer tips on playing brushes that slowly and with authority?

Lewis: Record yourself and listen back all the time so you can hear that the pattern is legato and smooth. You don't want to hear a lot of breaks or changes in the direction of the brushes. You might notice that on ballads I play an even ssssssssss. You don't hear me changing direction. I spent a lot of time making my slow-tempo brushwork even and smooth.

I use different patterns. Sometimes I'm playing the time stroke with my right hand and just sweeping with the left. Other times I'm sweeping with both hands. I might tap with the left hand in time while playing the ride pattern with the right. But you have to listen back to your sound, because what makes brushes really work is their sound. How much pressure do you use for each sound? What does one speed sound like against a different speed playing the same circumference? The kind of head you're playing on makes a difference as well.

MD: How do you warm up before a gig?

Lewis: I like to start out with gentle stretches of my back, shoulders, fingers, hands, and arms, which also helps to get the blood flowing to those areas. As far as warm-ups, I like to do a combination of single strokes, doubles, accented triplets,

and flams on a practice pad. I start slowly and gradually increase speed. I spend maybe ten to fifteen minutes total on everything.

MD: What is your current practice routine?

Lewis: I don't really have a current practice routine! I'm extremely busy with all my various commitments performing, teaching, and recording—and then, of course, having a personal life too. I do practice a lot in my mind, visualizing and hearing things I might do at the instrument or in a given musical situation.

MD: What do you stress in your clinics beyond the MVP theme?

Lewis: I always come out and play first, because the young musicians may need something to excite them so they'll listen to what you have to say later. I might play a historically minded solo, starting with something taken from New Orleans, then chronologically show the advancement of the drumset. I might begin with Baby Dodds, then go to the hi-hat in the style of Jo Jones, then possibly demonstrate how that moved to the ride cymbal, and so on.

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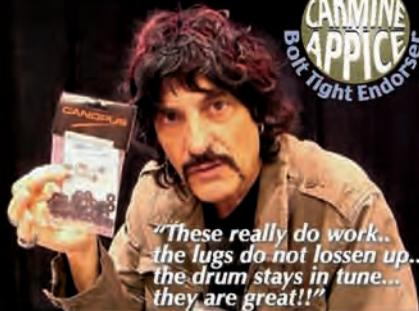
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In the course of that I will incorporate Latin rhythms and other things that are a part of the jazz tradition.

Mining The Masters

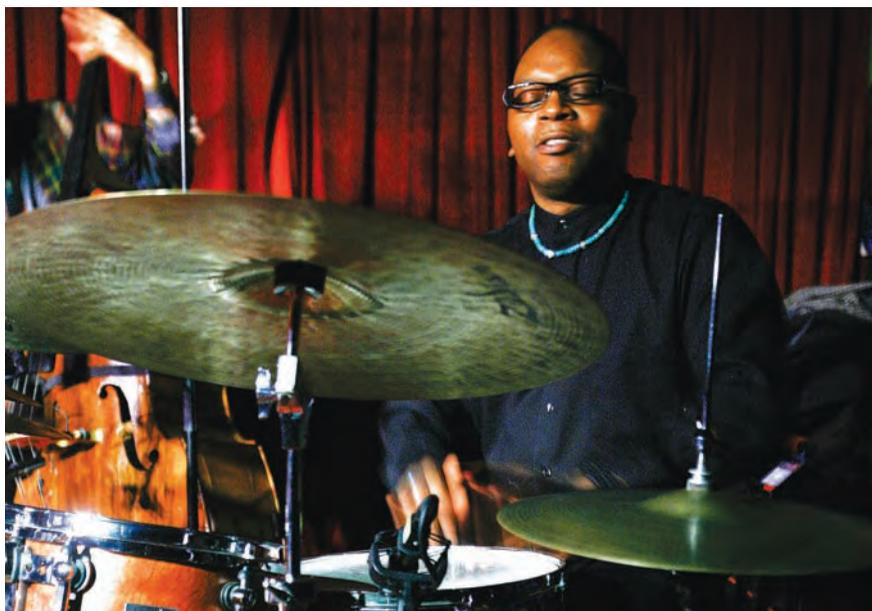
MD: You've worked with so many of the great jazz masters. What did you ask them beyond purely musical concerns?

Lewis: You learn a lot from these guys not always by asking questions, but by just being around them. I would often ask about their experiences, like Tommy Flanagan's experiences playing with

Charlie Parker. You realize that they started somewhere too, and they had to get the information and learn and wait a few years for the light bulb to go off over their head: "That's what it's supposed to feel like!" It takes a while sometimes.

MD: Were they all forthcoming?

Lewis: Some were, some weren't. John Lewis of The MJQ was extremely detailed in his compositions and what he notated. If he wanted to hear a "ting" on the bell with the back end of the brush on the third 16th note of beat 3 of bar 24, he



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Drummer/Historian Kenny Washington Gives Props



Andrew Lepley

Lewis is able to play with *anybody*. He's a nice man, and he has a very even temper. He can make the worst bass players sound good. He's able to make everybody sound good, even when he doesn't have much to work with; I've seen him do it many, many times. I don't have that kind of patience, but he does! And he knows how to work with any bass player and get them to do what they are supposed to do, even when they're not.

Nash's drumming reminds me of Al Harewood; Lewis can play a Saturday-night feeling on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday. He can set the beat down in the middle and make it feel good. Every time I hear him I think of Al Harewood, who is coming out of Kenny Clarke. Harewood plays on Grant Green's *Idle Moments*, on the track "Jean De Fleur," and that always reminds me of Nash, the way he sets the beat right down in the middle, in the pocket, and grooves his ass off.

Coleman Hawkins or Ella Fitzgerald. More than something to be practiced, you would get a conceptual idea of what playing [in that era with those musicians] was like, what it required, or how it felt. Just to hear the awe in Tommy Flanagan's voice when he would talk about Coleman Hawkins, or when one of the other guys of that era talked about Dizzy Gillespie or

was listening for it. Whereas someone like Sonny Rollins, he can talk as deeply about music as anybody, but like playing with Tommy, we didn't rehearse much.

MD: Bassist Ron Carter was one of your mentors. What did you learn about playing time from working with him?

Lewis: One thing I do recall him saying often is, "The beat has to start some-



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LEWIS NASH

where." This is his reference to the initial attack, and it was said mainly in reference to bass players. As a drummer, though, I realized that a clearly defined "point" on the beat from a bassist works hand in hand with the attack and the just as clearly defined point of the stick on the ride cymbal. Feeling the start of each primary pulse beat together is key in helping a bassist and drummer establish the feeling of a solid, well-grounded, in-sync groove, whether it's swinging jazz or any other feel.

As far as playing time with less experi-

elder statesmen. But I guess you could say that, yeah. There are only so many drummers who know how to play this style. There are drummers out there trying to learn the style, though there are more drummers not pursuing it. But looking at history, there are always enough guys who are interested in the development of the jazz drumset and furthering the art form without discarding all the elements that occurred to this point. There is a way to sound eternally modern. Why do you think Roy Haynes sounds so modern? This is someone who was playing in the



enced players who may be a bit unsteady, the thing to do is remain as relaxed as possible. Listen for clues and tendencies in the inexperienced player. Does he or she tend to rush, drag, or a combination of both? Do certain figures or phrases tend to be unclear, or is there a general unsteadiness of the overall time? If he or she is pushing the time, then playing more downbeats and longer tones like floor tom, open bass drum, and cymbal crashes might help hold it back. If the tendency is to slow down, then shorter, more staccato sounds like snare, closed hi-hat, higher toms, or rimshots, as well as upbeat accents—especially "&" of 4 leading into the next bar—can help push and prod the time, keeping it from lagging. In the end, remember to trust your own experience and not get rattled by another musician or rhythm section whose time is unsteady. **MD:** With the passing of so many of the great jazz drummers, have you found your cachet has risen? **Lewis:** Well, we still have Roy Haynes and Chico Hamilton, of course; they are the

'30s! He came with Luis Russell's big band, he played with Charlie Parker, Louis Armstrong. C'mon now! And when he plays you can hear all that. Roy is a good example to follow in terms of seeing that longevity can occur and you can remain valid.

Playing And Politics

MD: Drummers often think, *I am a great drummer. Why don't I have that gig?* Beyond the ability to play well, there must be some political aspect to entering certain cliques. How do you view that? **Lewis:** That is a difficult question. I have good friends who aren't necessarily in the clique that I'm in professionally. They may be good musicians, and they might ask me that same question. To be honest, I don't think there can be an answer to that. That gets into interpersonal relationships and social dynamics. Once you enter those waters, so much depends on the individuals themselves: how they are perceived, how they perceive themselves, their comfort level in dealing with other people...it's

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a major thing.

You can't just say there is a secret to getting into certain work situations. I truly believe my abilities and my musicianship and my playing have been the real key to whatever has happened for me. I don't know how much of my being an agreeable person plays into it. Sometimes people don't *want* an agreeable person; they might want somebody who they're not even sure is going to show up on the gig, but they know that person brings intensity and excitement to the bandstand. They will put up with the unknown to have that person on the gig.

MD: It sounds like you're saying that if your friend asks why he isn't on the gig, it's because he's not playing well enough.

Lewis: I didn't think I was saying that! [laughs] I was trying to say that even though someone does play on a high level and should be on these A-level gigs, I can't say with certainty what characteristics are needed to remedy why he is not getting the calls. It's too much in the realm of personal-

ity; he might just turn people off.

MD: You'd think that if someone was a great player but was truly strange and weird, that couldn't help him.

Lewis: But it *could* help him! As long as that strangeness and weirdness does not inhibit the music from where it's going to go or if that weirdness doesn't negatively impact the rest of the band. In other words, if no one feels intimidated by the person, then people can deal with craziness.

"That Is When You Go To Work"

MD: Ultimately, will your lasting influence be one of upholding the tradition of jazz drumming or of establishing a particular drumming style?

Lewis: I don't particularly want to be remembered as one who upheld the tradition of jazz drumming. I don't want to be considered a museum piece. I think what I'm doing is current and modern. And I say that not in the sense of style—I'm speaking of creativity, energy, musicianship, clarity, good technique, spontaneity, daring....

Those things apply no matter what kind of music it is. I would like for my legacy not to be that I upheld the tradition stylistically, but that I maintained and helped to advance the art of drumming in jazz by having those things that I just mentioned as a part of my playing.

We have a tendency to not see the continued relevance of something if it's stylistically not brand new. For instance, there are a lot of greats in basketball today, but the basic way the game is played hasn't changed. Today's great players know the basics, they know the rules. They are grounded in the game itself. I am saying that jazz is the game itself. You get new generations, but if you're going to play the game, you have to know something about the guys who made the game what it is. You have to have a link. When I go to work I am an artist, but I am going to work. Sometimes it doesn't come so easily, and you have to keep trying for the magic to appear onstage. That is when you go to work.



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IF BRYAN MANTIA, AKA BRAIN, DIDN'T EXIST, DRUMMERS WOULD HAVE TO INVENT HIM. BECAUSE THE IDEA OF A RHYTHMIC MIDPOINT BETWEEN GUNS N' ROSES, TOM WAITS, AND PRIMUS IS JUST TOO CRAZY-COOL TO IGNORE.

Brain gets asked to do a lot of interesting things these days, like playing time on a wagon wheel while recording with Tom Waits in an abandoned country church, or keeping a drumkit set up for six years in a haunted Masonic hall while working on Guns N' Roses' long-awaited latest album, *Chinese Democracy*. "Those situations are kind of opposite, but in a sense they're the same," the drummer suggests. "They're different scenarios, but they're both overblown. Somehow I feel comfortable in those situations. I don't do too many studio sessions where I just show up with my set and read a chart. I'm used to getting involved and being part of the production and the ridiculousness of whatever it is. I just gravitate more toward that."

Mantia was born in 1964, grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area town of Cupertino, and was first alerted to the skins by stickmen like John Bonham and the drummers of James Brown. He got serious in high school and cemented some chops at PIT in Hollywood, and in the late 1980s he played in the popular San Francisco party band Limbomaniacs. In the '90s he hooked up with producer Bill Laswell for several interesting projects and did a stint with his longtime pal Les Claypool in Primus. Brain now lives in the Oakland hills with his wife and two-year-old daughter, near his recording space at Studio 880, where he spends time on turntables and traps.

Today Brain is developing a new funk project called Socialibrium, and he hopes to be on the road this summer with Guns N' Roses in support of *Chinese Democracy*.



MD: I've never heard anything quite like Tom Waits' *Real Gone* album.

Brain: Yeah, it was Mark Ribot, me, Larry Taylor, and Tom. We recorded in this old...it was kind of a cross between a church and a barn. Tom says, "Show up at this place, this is where we're going to do

me, "Don't bring a drumset, don't bring anything that you can buy at Guitar Center." So I went to some pawnshops and some junkyards, grabbed whatever sounded cool, and brought it. And he has his own stuff. We'd make a drumkit out of, like, a manhole, a carburetor, maybe a tra-

made me realize that you can make it happen pretty much anywhere, and actually doing it in that kind of environment and using the ambience was so much hipper than going into one of those posh studios built by experts to make it sound "pro," whatever that means. In that sense

"I'M NOT JUST A ROCK DUDE. I GET THE ROCK GIGS, BUT I LISTEN TO EVERY STYLE, AND I'M ON TOP OF WHATEVER'S HAPPENING IN HIP-HOP AND R&B."

it." I'm like, "Okay, is there a studio there? Should I call the studio owner?" He says, "Aw, no, nobody's really there, there's no phone service." "Okay, is there a bathroom? A kitchen? *Anything?*"

Basically he just brought the studio in there. The producer kind of set it all up and made it pretty comfortable. We sat around and just started jamming. He'd come in with an idea and go, "Okay, so maybe it goes like...." He basically told

ditional cymbal that was broken, a 1930s Ludwig 26" kick drum.... The snares were old, vintage, whatever was lying around.

The other thing was, Tom asked me to bring hard leather-sole shoes. There was a bathroom that had a really nice-sounding ambience, and the tile on the floor sounded really good when you stomped on it. Most of the backbeats on that album were done by stomping on the bathroom floor.

Real Gone was a pleasure because it

it's a great experience every time I work with Tom.

MD: It definitely doesn't sound like a traditional kit on *Real Gone*.

Brain: Tom had given me a cassette of him making all of these percussion sounds in his bathroom at like four in the morning. I took the cassette, blew it into Peak, which is a two-track editor, chopped it all up, and exported the WAV files. I have this program called MPC Maker, which allows you to create the programs on your Mac to put onto your MPC 3000. And so I just grabbed them, dragged and dropped them, threw them on the Zip drive, and put them in my MPC. So when you hear [makes beatbox sounds] and all those weird vocal sounds, that was Tom.

Next to the kit—which could have been me playing a log with a piece of metal in one hand and a mallet in the other—I also had the MPC 3000 with all those sounds set up. So that hip-hop-based beat stuff was me playing the MPC live—no programming—just live on the pads with Tom's voice cut up from the cassette. All those whistle sounds or cowbells, those are all samples I made of him. We did the same thing live. We did a tour of Europe and some dates in the States, and on half the songs I just played his samples on the MPC, next to my hi-hat. So the jamming was done like that. It was kind of just like, Make the weirdest, most "gone" setup you can think of, and then just start.

Tom has an interesting way of working. I was sitting there one time and I asked Marc Ribot about a song that he and Tom had worked on the day before. And he was saying, "Well, it goes like this, with this kind of feel...." Then Tom walks in and goes, "Hi, what are you guys doing?" Ribot goes, "Oh I'm showing Brain the song," and Tom goes, "Aw, don't ruin it."



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Cymbals: Zildjian

- 1. 15" K hi-hats (two bottoms)
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Hardware: DW

9500D hi-hat stand, 9300 snare stand, 9700 cymbal boom stands, 934 cymbal holder for tom mount, 9100M throne, 9000 bass drum pedal



RECORDINGS

Godflesh Songs Of Love And Hate /// **Tom Waits** Real Gone /// **Primus** The Brown Album /// **Praxis** Transmutation (Mutatis Mutandis) /// **Guns N' Roses** Chinese Democracy

FAVORITES

Frank Zappa Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar (Vinnie Colaiuta, Terry Bozzio), In New York (Terry Bozzio) /// **Miles Davis** Get Up With It (Al Foster, Billy Cobham, Bernard Purdie), Dark Magus (Al Foster) /// **Glenn Gould** Bach: The Goldberg Variations (no drumset)

That's the whole album in a nutshell. He doesn't want you to know it. He wants it to just be whatever it is at that moment. "The tape's always rolling" type of thing. It's pretty interesting. Totally opposite

from Guns N' Roses, you know. [laughs] **MD:** The tune "Shake It" on *Real Gone* is a cool rhythm track, starting with the quarter-note feel and then going to that crazy rumba with the cowbell.

Brain: Tom has this beat-up cassette player that he always keeps on him, and he's always playing old cassettes. He had recorded this house band live in Tijuana playing a kind of rumba. And he's going, "Yeah, man, I want this kind of vibe, like this." I could hardly hear the recording, but it sounded like "ush-kash-ush-dosh."

I'm like, "Oh, okay, yeah—that sounds cool." So we just set up in this little closet, and I put a cowbell on the kick drum. I think he was trying to restage the scene in this hot Tijuana bar. It was like a hundred

degrees and there was no air conditioning in this place, so I'm sweating like a pig. But I just start jamming on the cowbell and playing this beat, and then Tom comes running in, like, "Yeah, that's it. That'll work, let's do that." I think he spliced that part together with this weird straight quarter-note part to make it feel like something. It's always such a learning experience with Tom; he's the real deal.

MD: *Real Gone* strikes me as a backwoods version of D'Angelo's *Voodoo* album, the way the rhythms are kind of funky and messed up.

Brain: Yeah, that album always freaked me out too, the way everything was kind of displaced a little bit, the hi-hat and snare like twenty milliseconds behind, and the kick drum five milliseconds ahead. It ended up being this quirky feel. I figured it was something tricky they did with that. With *Real Gone* it was done by nobody really knowing the songs, so they always

kind of got that feel. Tom definitely knows what he wants, and he'll sit there and work you until he gets it. It's usually within the first two or three takes, but to get those first two or three takes, the setup time is like a day. "Oh, hit that with that. No, okay, try that with that." And when you start the song, within the first two or three takes he either feels it or he just says, "Okay, well, let's just go on." He doesn't wear it out.

MD: How did you get the gig with Tom?

Brain: Les Claypool is a neighbor of his, and he said Tom was asking around about drummers. Les said, "Oh, you should get old Brainer, he can play some stuff." I kept hearing that Tom was going to call, and I was like, "Yeah, okay, whatever, dude." And then I remember the phone ringing one night at 11:30. I didn't recognize the number. It was Tom, and the session was the next day. He goes, "Can you come tomorrow?" I'm like, "Yeah, I guess." "Okay, I'll just see you there. Do you know the area?"

I had to be there at ten in the morning. That's pretty good. Never heard from him, never talked to him on the phone, never met with him, never talked with management, didn't know what I was getting paid—nothing. I just showed up. He's like, "Just bring some stuff." But he's usually there three hours before you, loading in stuff—just tons of percussion, weird crap, stuff he's gathered throughout the years. **MD:** You toured with that group too.

Brain: Yeah. We rehearsed at the place where we recorded the album. Then on the last day, everybody was packing up and getting ready to go. On one song we had used this old wagon wheel. It's about five feet across, rusted as it can be—orange. We're hitting it and I'm sampling it. So Tom walks in and says, "Well, umm...we've got to take that." Everybody's looking around, like, "We're going to take this thing to Europe?" So they expedited a

custom case and shipped the wheel to Europe. It was insane, but he was like, "What do you mean? That's the sound; we bring it."

my drums being set up for the longest time in any studio. I think they were set up at Village Recorders in Santa Monica for six years. *Six years.* That was another

then Josh Freese did it for four or five years, and then Josh quit. Then [guitarist] Buckethead got in there, and he and I have been friends forever. He told me that Josh had quit and said, "Axl's an awesome dude. You should come check it out." So I went in there, and I didn't hear back from them for a while. And then one day I remember Axl calling me and saying, "You know, if you want the gig you can have it, and you can still be on other stuff. You can still do Primus or whatever you want to do."

MD: What are some of the more memorable things you recall about that session?

Brain: [Producer] Roy Thomas Baker drove us around L.A. in his Rolls Royce to try to find the exact drums that we wanted for the recording. We went to every company, and it wound up being a mash-up of all the best drums we could find around L.A. We pretty much gathered the most ridiculous kit you could ever have, to rerecord Josh's parts. Josh had come up with some pretty good parts for the album. Axl was like, "Hey, I like what Josh did, so could we start out by you doing his parts, but with your feel? Because your feel's different." So I went over to Sony Music and found the dude who did their orchestra-



MD: It must have been quite a switch going from doing two takes per song with Tom to the Guns N' Roses album, which took ages to make.

Brain: [laughs] I think I have the record for

process entirely.

MD: How did you get into that situation, and what was that process like?

Brain: The Guns album was in the works for fifteen years. Matt Sorum started it,

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tions for films and asked if he could transcribe the drums on the thirty songs. He's like, "All right, yeah, I'll let you know when they're done." He would do about six a month—literally these six-page drum transcriptions of what Josh had played.

So we brought all those drums into the main studio at Village, where Fleetwood Mac recorded *Tusk*. I set up and started playing, and I was like, "Wait a second, man. We're doing Guns N' Roses here."

I talked to Jeff Greenberg, the owner, and said, "Jeff, man, we gotta have something better than this. I mean, the room sounds great and this is cool, but you just had, like, Kenny G in here. I can't have my shit sounding the same as a Kenny G album." So he's like, "Well, what are you saying? Is it the drums? We can have any drum put in here." I say, "No, it's not the drums. The drums sound good and the room sounds good. But we gotta get a vibe."

He tells me there's an old haunted Masonic temple upstairs where the Masons would give their speeches, and nobody ever goes up there. It was a theater. So we go up, he opens the door, and it just felt like, Okay, now we're talking. I'm thinking, *We've got to set up here*. We found the sweet spot in the room and I set up the drums there...and that's where they stayed for six years. This was a Guns N' Roses album—it *had* to be overblown.

I wasn't going to just sit in the studio. I was kind of coming from the school of Tom Waits. One of the best studios I ever recorded in was Bill Laswell's Greenpoint Studio, just an open cement building, and the only baffling that he had were these little foam pillars, and it sounded amazing. We recorded the first Praxis album there, with Bernie Worrell, Bootsy Collins, Bucket, and AF from The Jungle Brothers, and it was the best—the drums sounded killer. I was using Steve Jordan's Yamahas, and they just sounded incredible. It sounded so much better than the studios I had worked in, which were built for acoustics. So going into the Guns thing, it just felt like we had to do something better than what you'd normally get in a studio that's built to sound good. All of a sudden there was a vibe, and it clicked. *I got* the album then. I started getting what the drums should sound like. Josh's drums were kind of tight and

precise, and we loosened it up. The sound became a little bigger, a little sloppier. And that became more of what the album is now.

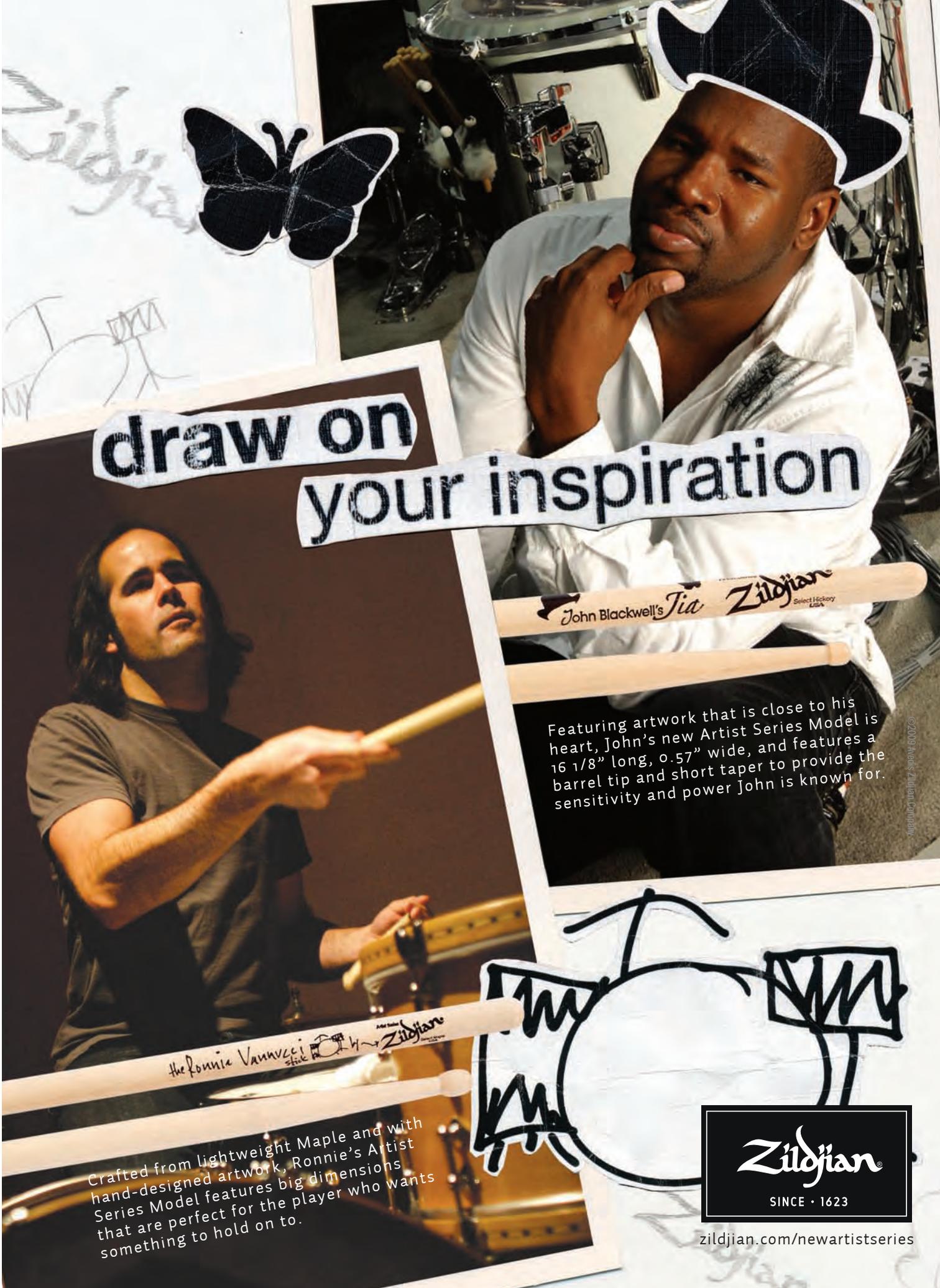
MD: What were you guys listening to while you recorded your stuff?

Brain: We listened to some prerecorded tracks that Josh had already played on. Sometimes we did some stuff all together, but most of it was done when there were already bass and guitar tracks. And whatever feel that we put on it, maybe they'd go back and rerecord to that. I took one song at a time, learned each as an orchestra piece—literally note for note, every fill, every crazy thing. I replayed it with my feel and the new sound in the new building. And that process happened for a few songs, so it took a while. After that was done Axl said, "Okay, that was cool, now do your thing." So I went in, forgot all of what I'd just done, and did my thing, and I think it became a combination of both. In the end I redid it again by kind of doing half my thing and some of what I remembered from Josh's original drum parts. We were also writing as a new band with me and Bucket. We had some songs that we started from scratch, where I just recorded myself without charts.

MD: It sounds like some different kits were used on *Chinese Democracy*.

Brain: It was a constant sound thing. Each song started from scratch, so it was like, "Okay, here's 'Madagascar.' This DW 13" tom—a Timeless Timber model that my drum tech had—sounds huge. And it sounds really great with this Gretsch floor tom. And this aluminum DW snare sounds great with this particular setup...." Then, next song... "Okay, this is a tighter kick drum, let's use this one." And every cymbal would change. That was fun. Like I said, I'm kind of a studio tweeker, and it was fun to be able to do that. We had the budget, so I was like, Let's just do this. When am I ever going to get a chance to do this again?

At one point I probably had forty snares lined up on the ground...twenty different kick drums...cymbals just thrown all over the place—it was insane. But then I've got pictures of the Tom Waits thing, and it's the same thing, but it's just junk. All of the great albums that I've been lucky enough to play on have always had that kind of overblown type



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of tweaking. I feel comfortable and at home when it's like that. I was a chameleon on every song, just like on the Tom Waits stuff. Every song I was like, Okay, now I'm this, now we're in this situation.

MD: And like you said, by nature a Guns N' Roses recording has to be over the top.

Brain: Yeah, it's that rock 'n' roll thing, which I guess everybody wants to live at one point. I figured that was my chance to live it. But I'm a studio geek, so I had to live it in the studio. I'm not really a rock star in that way, you know. I'm not going

to go pose in front of a plane—I'm just going to tweak on fifty different snares.

MD: You must have recorded to a click with Guns N' Roses.

Brain: Oh, yeah, we definitely used a click, and even live on some of the new songs I'll play to a click. We don't really have any backing tracks—though if there's something that we can't re-create they might add that. "Riad N' The Bedouins" and "Madagascar" are done with clicks live because they start with loops. In the studio I think everything was done to a click.

Now, with Tom Waits, if you even mention that, I don't think he'd be in the room. There's no such thing, ever. And if they're going to splice something together, it's done by a guy with a razor blade. I don't think Pro Tools is allowed with him.

MD: You always manage to make a groove swing, even on a driving rock tune like "Shackler's Revenge" off *Chinese Democracy*.

Brain: Yeah, I've always been a fan of Mitch Mitchell and John Bonham. Then there's Bernard Purdie; I'd listen to a lot of R&B, a lot of Stax recordings. My dad was heavy into Curtis Mayfield and Shuggie Otis when I was growing up, and he'd play those records all the time. He took me to the Keystone Korner to see Tony Williams when I was really young, and I think I gravitated toward that kind of swing and groove. I think Josh [Freese] is the precise, technically proficient, perfect kind of punk drummer—I saw him with Nine Inch Nails recently and it was incredible. He was killing it. But my style is a little looser, and I've always had that kind of swing to my feel, even if it's rock. I just hear music that way. I think that's what Axl heard and thought, *Okay, Brain puts the pocket in a different slot, a different place.*

"Shackler's" was a song that Bucket and I wrote a long time ago, just jamming. Axl asked if anybody had any songs or grooves, so we brought that in. It was a riff that we'd been jamming on since the Praxis days with Bill and Bootsy and Bernie. Axl loved it and put some lyrics to it, and it became "Shackler's." That one might have more of a swing because it came more from me.

MD: The tune "Better," and several others, list you and Frank Ferrer as the drummers. How did it come about that you now share the drum chair in Guns N' Roses?

Brain: I was having a baby girl at the beginning of a tour in '06, and I told them before I started that I would have to leave early. I got Frank Ferrer, who had played with [Guns guitarist and bassist] Richard Fortus and Tommy Stinson, to fill in, and that was cool. When I got home, I was kind of diggin' being home. The album wasn't out yet, and Frank was doing a great job and I was getting a lot of production gigs just staying home. I'm really into computers and music, and I have my own

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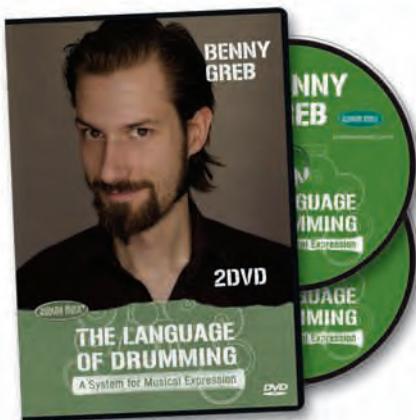
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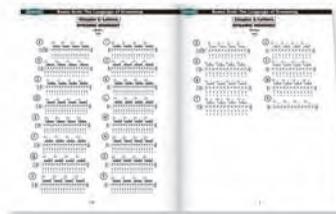
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studio. I rent a room at Studio 880, and I built this MIDI studio with all these MPCs and outboard gear, and I just started doing production—commercials for TV, that kind of stuff. And I kept getting more and more gigs and making almost as much money doing that as I was from touring and being a drummer. I also started taking theory lessons, piano lessons, ear training, computer and music lessons, going that route.

When I left I was only supposed to be gone for two weeks, and then that turned into a month, and then that turned into three months, because I was getting a lot of studio work: "Hey, can you do this Gatorade commercial?" "Hey, we've got this Best Buy commercial." "Write the music or make the beat for this...." I do a lot of work with Bootsy Collins on that side of things—the commercials and stuff. "Hey, Brain, can you put a beat to this?" We're working on a Gatorade commercial right now. I've been a Bootsy fan for years, so I'm just honored to be working with him on any level. Anyway, I started doing more of that, so I was like, "Hey, Frank, I'm kind of doing this and they're digging your playing. Would you mind hanging out and staying?"

He was thrilled—"Oh, man, this is the

greatest gig in the world. I'm so happy, this is awesome." And nobody else in the band was complaining, though they were like, "Well, are you ever coming back?" I told them, "Well, yeah, we'll see what's going on, but right now let Frank do it." Frank is more rock. He's more like the original Guns N' Roses drummer [Steven Adler], which is more like straight-up rock—open hi-hat, bashing, hitting as hard as you can.

So I think Axl was like, "Hey, Frank plays this way—let him play the chorus to 'Better,' because that's supposed to be open. Let's see what it sounds like." So I think it's me playing all the way up to the chorus, then it's Frank in the chorus, and then it goes back to me. We never actually played together. It was all done after the fact. I asked the engineer how much Frank is on it, and he said, "It's mainly you, with Frank playing a chorus here or a bridge here." So that's why I'm listed first on those tracks.

MD: I like the way it goes to the toms on the chorus.

Brain: That song was brought in after Josh and was written by the band. It was Robin Finck's song. We jammed it for a couple

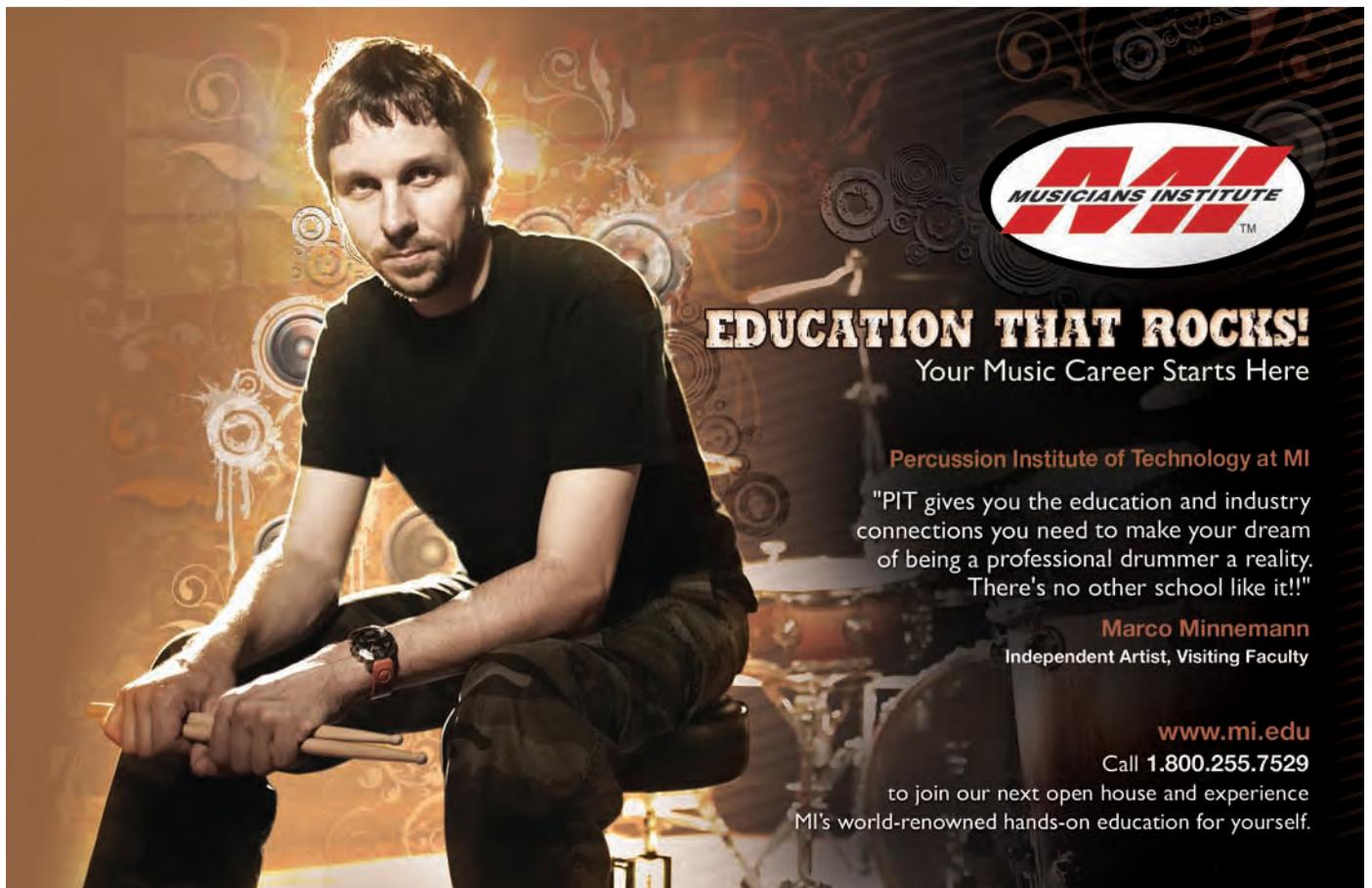
weeks and then went into the studio and recorded it. So that tom part was kind of written by me more than Frank, but it could be Frank playing it because he plays more bombastic. Or...oh, who knows.

MD: The tune "Scraped" is a vicious groove, and it sounds like you're playing off the guitar a lot as well as staying with the bass.

Brain: That's another Buckethead song. I was keying off the guitar riff—we've been playing that style for years, so when he came in with the riff I knew what to do. Bucket and I have been playing for twenty years now. Before I was even in Primus, Joe Gore, the editor of *Guitar Player*, turned me on to him. We've been playing together since Bill Laswell and Praxis. So to get into that song was so simple—right away I hear his style and know what to play and what to feel.

MD: I love the groove where you're playing quarter notes with your right hand and there's other stuff going on with your other limbs. It feels slow but fast at the same time.

Brain: Yeah, that's based off some Zeppelin-type licks. I noticed with Bonham that he'll play something straight up top



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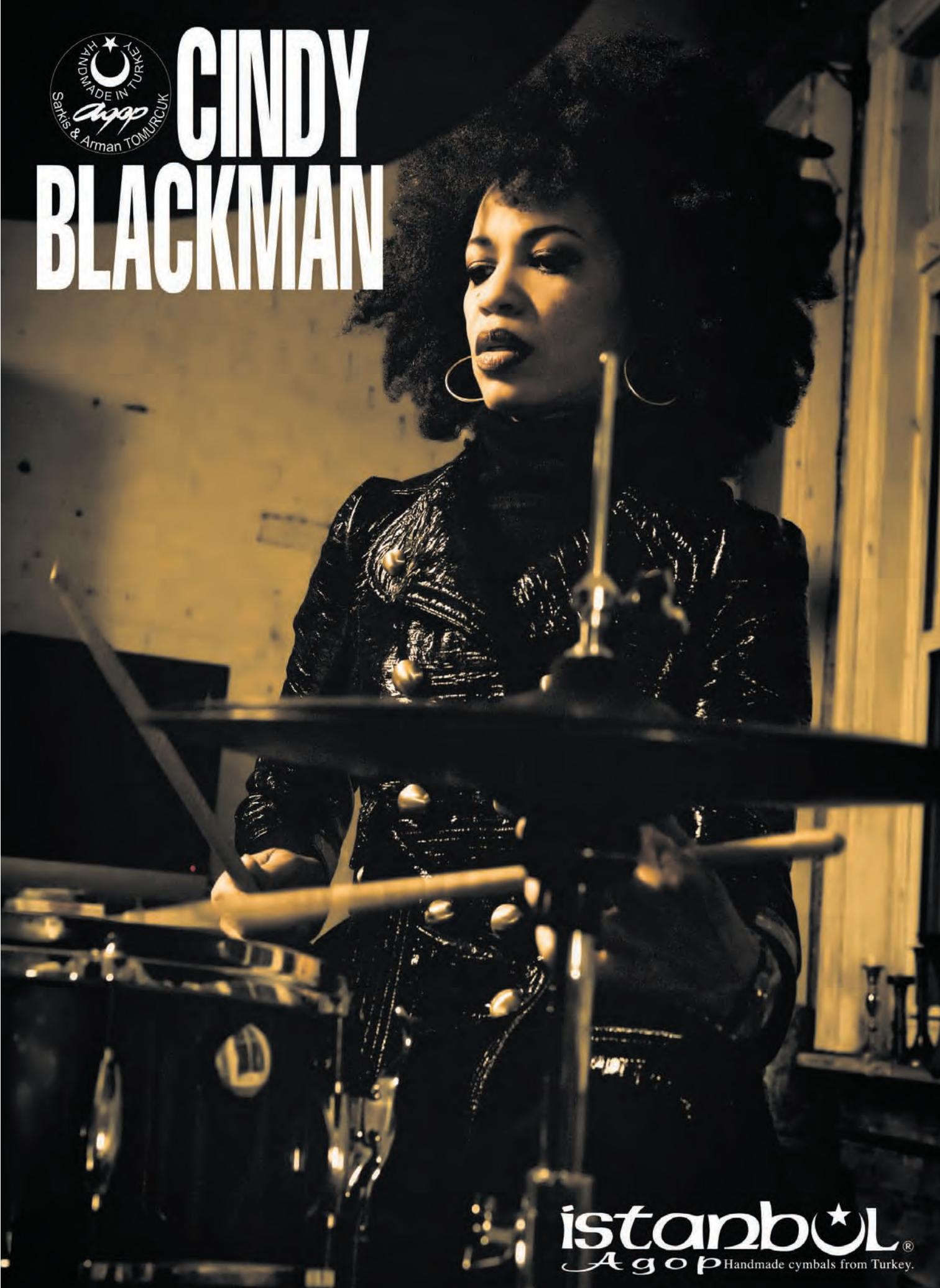
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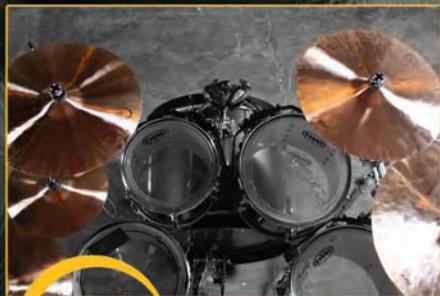
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and then it'll be kind of busy underneath. But that straight thing in the hi-hat kind of keeps it together, holds it back and makes it bigger sounding than it really is. From the beginning the reason I played music was from watching [the Led Zeppelin concert movie] *The Song Remains The Same*, and that Bonham style was one of my first influences. And that song in particular and that feel are kind of based on that.

MD: "Madagascar" is another tune with some great grooves.

Brain: Yeah, it's got that Bonham thing too, the big long fills. The loop at the beginning I just created from the MPC. Then we went into the main parts where Axl comes in, and that's when we added the drums, played live. It was the first time we had the drums set up in that theater, and it just sounded really Bonham-esque. In the spoken-word section we took away the baffles and had it completely opened up because we wanted it bigger. That's totally my style and the way I like to play; I was just biting off Bonham the whole time on that track.

MD: You've brought Guns N' Roses up to the minute with these drum tracks, like the break-beat intro before the big groove comes in.

Brain: Axl is really interested in having everybody bring what they do into the picture. I just did a remix of "Shackler's," made it kind of more club. And I think he wants to put out a remix album of some of the other songs we did. The great thing is he lets you do what you do. He still has the final say and wants it to work as a Guns N' Roses cut. But he definitely will let you stretch it out in that way, and I think that's where my influences come in. I listen to a lot of hip-hop and R&B. I listen to all of Questlove's productions. Every time a Roots album comes out I'm in line at the store; I'm still a fan that way.

MD: I've never seen three people credited for a drum arrangement before on an album.

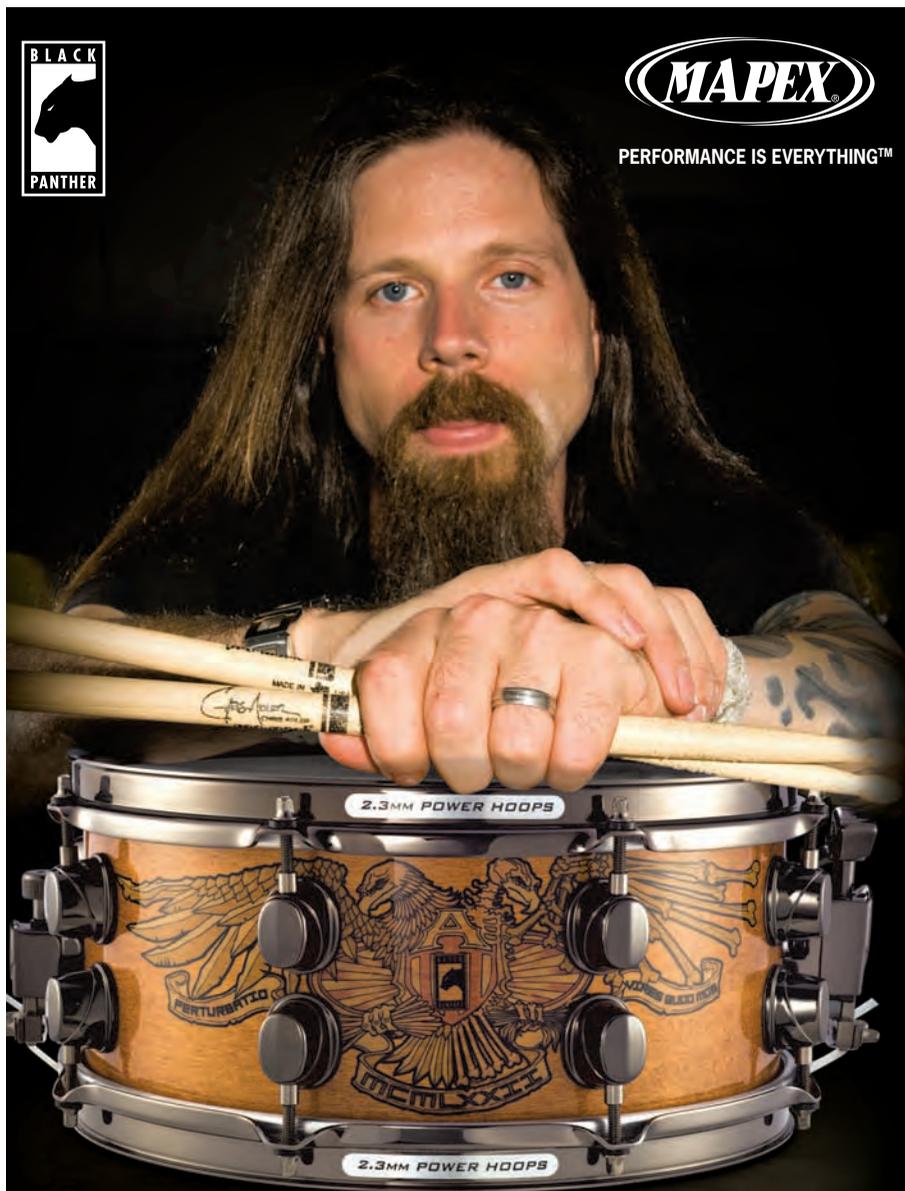
Brain: I think Axl really went back and thought about who added what where, and gave people credit for it. It's incredible. He wants me to add what I know about modern music and what I'm into. I'm not just a rock dude. Somehow I get the rock gigs, but I really listen to every style, and I'm on top of whatever's happening in hip-hop and R&B.

MD: That leads to the topic of your new funk band, SocialLibrium, with Bernie Worrell, T.M. Stevens, and Blackbyrd McKnight.

Brain: Blackbyrd is the closest thing to Jimi Hendrix that you're going to run into. And Bernie is the Jimi Hendrix of the keyboards. I



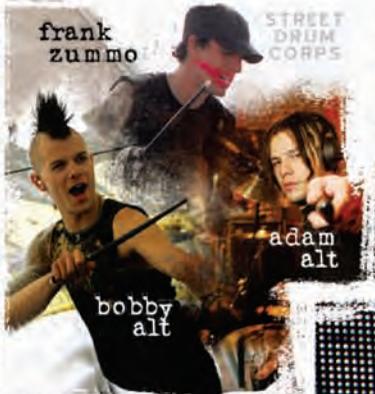
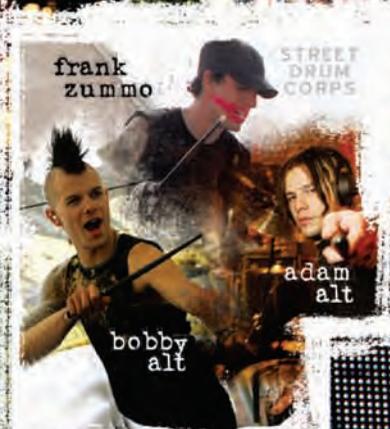
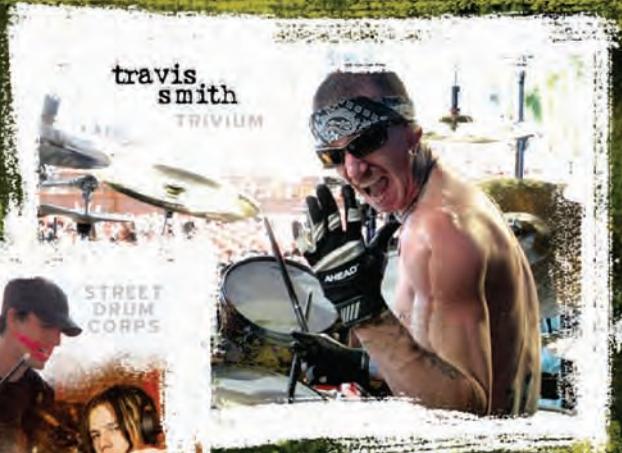
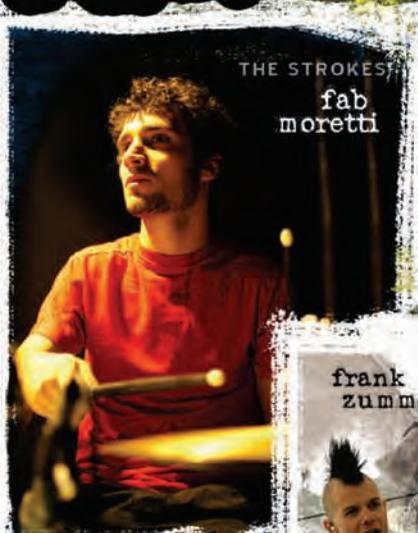
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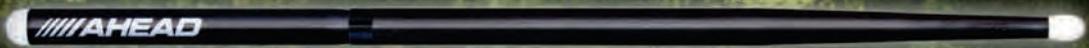
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BRAIN

don't know who's heavier than Bernie as a musician, or anybody that I could pick right now other than Prince that I'd like to play with. We did a gig in San Francisco and we were learning some old songs and revamping them. Everybody brought in some jams that they had played before, some Praxis ones that Bernie and I had played, T.M. brought in some, Blackbyrd brought in some of his stuff. We listened to it very quickly and decided: Let's make this a band. Don't copy...don't learn "Super Stupid" or "Red Hot Mama" the same way

they were played on the albums. It would be more about, Which way would you play it, what is your favorite beat right now, or what are you listening to? Just play a beat.

So we just made up new grooves, and then those started morphing into more jamming—almost like the jam-band thing, but more Miles-y. I love the '70s Miles stuff. *Agharta*—I'm a huge fan of that. Al Foster—I love the open hi-hat rawness, and the fact that it's these jazz people trying to play rock and twisting it in a weird way. So anyway, it started to get more into that, and I can't

tell you how awesome it's been. Musically I've been so happy...I hope we can make an album and continue it. Because I really see this thing stretching into that Miles side, and that's my favorite stuff.

MD: You're also into selling your own beats these days.

Brain: I started the Web site BrainBeatz.com, and before that I made a beat DVD with Big Fish Audio, Pro Tools 24-bit. I just went to a studio, played all my grooves, and did a deal just selling it for producers, people who want to have the tempo. Now with time stretching and stuff, it can pretty much be any tempo, but back when I made it I had specific tempos and specific grooves. Now I'm trying to do that on my own through my site, just because I have a whole HD Pro Tools rig in my studio and a place to play the drums. So every time I get bored I just make a new beat. I flip it, do some weird stuff to it, and then try to sell it. I'll probably make another DVD set, hopefully through Big Fish, and try to sell that to producers and stuff. I'm really trying to get more into the production side.

My heroes in drumming have been the John Bonhams, the Keith Moons, the Tony Williamses. But in terms of longevity and having a career it's been more about Stewart Copeland and Narada Michael Walden—the people that have gone from drumming into production, and into doing soundtracks and writing songs. So during that whole Guns period I was studying up on technology, reading every music magazine that I could get my hands on that had to do with Logic, taking private lessons, and just learning everything I could about that stuff.

I'm just starting to do what Questlove is doing, but I really enjoy that. I enjoy tweaking on a kick drum for six hours, playing with sounds and synths and learning how synthesis works. After taking the two years off from playing live since my kid was born, I kind of miss playing now. The SocialLibrium thing was kind of like, "Man!"—you know, getting that rush, that kind of Zen feeling of being on stage and just being comfortable in what you're doing. I don't know if I want to just be a road dog the rest of my life. Doing a little bit of both is where I'm trying to head.

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The XS20 series is pure B20 bronze design, with 20% tin for maximum sound and durability, plus sounds that cut in any style of music. Includes 14" hi-hats, 16" crash, 20" ride, 10" splash, and 18" China.



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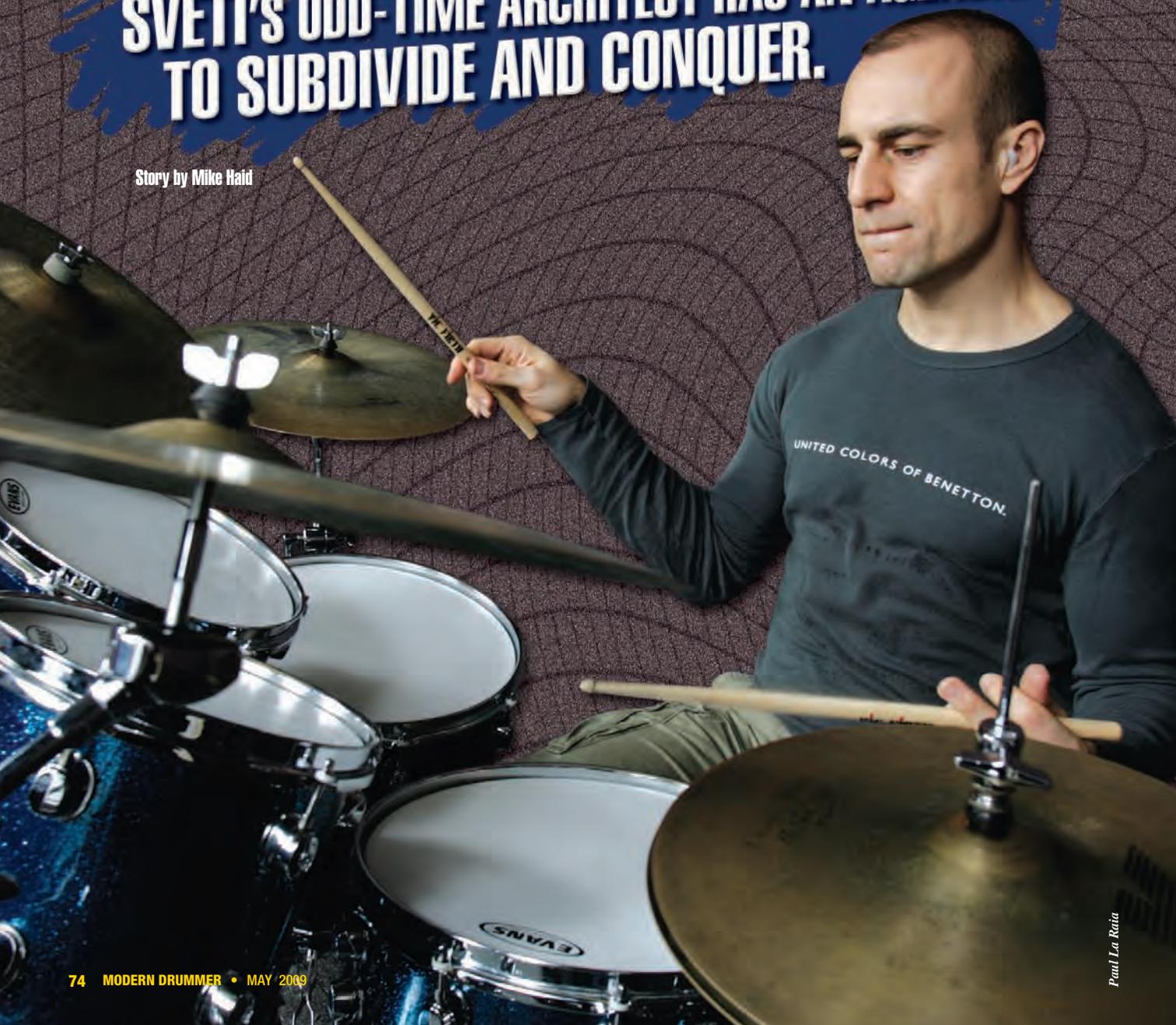
Ten-lug steel-shell snare in black nickel finish with 2.3 mm power hoops and an Evans G1 coated batter head.

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MARKO DJORDJEVIC

SVETI'S ODD-TIME ARCHITECT HAS AN AGENDA:
TO SUBDIVIDE AND CONQUER.

Story by Mike Reid



For Serbian-born drummer Marko Djordjevic, playing in odd meters has never been... well... odd. At an early age he assimilated the ethnic rhythms and melodies of his homeland. It wasn't until he began to write music several years ago for his jazz-based group, Sveti, that Marko realized how deeply he'd absorbed Southeastern European rhythms into his musical subconscious.

Today Djordjevic is a resident of New York City, where he's a highly respected jazz drummer/bandleader/sideman, and where he teaches odd-meter drumming at famed music school The Collective. Marko's no one-trick pony, though; his chameleonlike ability to convincingly play many styles has landed him prestigious gigs with Wayne Krantz, Jonah Smith, Eli Degibri, Gary Willis, The Itals, Eric Lewis, Herbie Hancock guitarist Lionel Loueke, John McLaughlin bassist Matt Garrison, Aaron Goldberg, The Mason Brothers, Clarence Spady, Lucky Peterson, Chris McDermott, and Carolina Brandes.

At age sixteen Djordjevic was accepted at Berklee School of Music in Boston. It was there that he was able to put in the playing and practice time he needed to refine his already advanced rhythmic skills and to apply them to his unique jazz style. A veteran soccer player, Marko is an athletic, soft-spoken gentleman who speaks articulately in English, displaying a deep passion for music and drumming.

On his outstanding instructional DVD, *Where I Come From* (Firma Video Ent./Alfred Publishing), Djordjevic stresses the importance of musicality in drumming and breaks down his musical concepts in terms of the mechanics required to achieve his advanced level of polyrhythmic expertise. When you watch him perform several Sveti pieces with bassist and

fellow Berklee alum Janek Gwizdala, it's interesting to note the contrast between his athletic physique and his sensitive and dynamic touch. (Think burly Aaron Neville singing a tender "Ave Maria.")

For another glimpse of his world-class musical approach and individualistic style, check out the YouTube clip of Marko's duet with Lionel Loueke. The playful, ever-smiling drummer dances around the melody with a sophisticated musical approach reminiscent of the early bebop greats. Rebound is king and balance is essential for Djordjevic. When it comes to his advanced technical abilities and musical approach on the drumkit, he credits his first Serbian drum teacher, Miroslav Karlovic, for all the good habits he's developed. He also acknowledges David Moss, a drummer from Chicago who came to Serbia, for opening his mind to a wider scope of music and musical ideas on the kit.

A major buzz surrounded Marko following his 2008 performances at the Percussive Arts Society convention and the Montreal Drum Festival. And, after listening to his recent Sveti CD, like his video titled *Where I Come From* (myspace.com/svetimarko), it's easy to see why he's fast becoming a sought-after clinician on the international drumming scene and an in-demand player in the Big Apple.

Djordjevic is currently organizing his thoughts for a future instructional book on internalizing subdivisions, which he believes is at the core of great drumming technique. Where he comes from geographically and musically has informed Djordjevic's discipline, dedication, and love for his instrument. It's also what has set him on the path to where he is today: a true innovator in melodic drumset technique.

MD: How did you develop your musical concepts on the drumkit regarding traditional Serbian music, which, as opposed to Western music, is mainly based in odd meters?

Marko: Traditional Serbian drummers use the drums to re-create the melodies by playing them in unison with the rest of the band. The traditional Serbian bass drum is called the *tapan*, and it's played with a mallet on one side and a twig on the other. This gives you the variation of a deep tone on one side of the drum and a funky high-end tone on the twig side. They use their discretion to interpret the melody, but rhythmically they play in unison with the band.

There's an interesting parallel to this in contemporary music with great composers like Frank Zappa on songs like "The Black Page" and "Mo 'N Herb's Vacation," where the drummer interprets the melody in unison with the lead instrument. What interested me about this concept was how the drummers would play interesting variations of the melody and freely improvise around it. This began my quest to develop the ability to play freely over the barline, regard-

less of the time signature.

MD: Do you sing the melodies in your head while playing?

Marko: Yes, I believe you have to be able to internalize the melody and then externally create rhythmic concepts over the melody. A good example of this would be to internally count in 4/4 and then play a five-note grouping over the four in your head. What sparked my interest in this concept was when I heard the Sting song "The Lazarus Heart" from his *Nothing Like The Sun* CD. In the middle of his solo, the sax player plays a three-over-four grouping and the entire band shifts to this rhythm, which suddenly makes the straight quarter-note dance groove sound like a shuffle. This sounded magical to me, and I had to figure out how this rhythmic shift was created.

MD: You use this concept extensively in your compositions for your band, Sveti. Can you explain the time shift in the track "Dundjer," from the CD *Where I Come From*?

Marko: "Dundjer" is in 17/16 and was constructed from the bass line. I wrote this in 1992, when my drum technique was not

as advanced as it is now. So, fifteen years later I'm able to create more interesting drum concepts over this time signature by singing the bass line in my head while I base my melodic drumming structure over the concurrent 16th-note pattern that flows throughout the song. Knowing that the 16th-note structure is constant allows me to subdivide the patterns freely while I internalize the 16th-note pulse. Subdividing the pulse into thematic motifs is the key to my current playing style.

MD: Does your drumming inspire your writing, or vice-versa?

Marko: Halfway through my time at Berklee, I took about a year-and-a-half-long break to tour with a reggae band called The Tribulations. This helped me break away from the studying and put me in the real world of gigging, touring, rehearsing with a band, and recording. This was an invaluable experience as my first real touring gig, which allowed me to finally express musically many of the things I had learned and studied over the years. When I left the band, I returned to Berklee

and had a burst of inspiration to begin writing music. My writing usually begins with a bass line or melody. The drum parts are usually the last thing I create. Music is all about melody. Once I create a melody or

David Moss, who taught me many different concepts about the art of drumming and opened my eyes to many great drummers that influenced my playing style. Once I left Berklee, I spent many years develop-

Uribe, John Ramsay, Steve Wilkes, Jon Hazilla—who taught me to play brushes—and Ed Kaspik, a master of polyrhythms.

MD: Who are your jazz drumming influences? And have you developed your

"WE DRUMMERS STRIVE TO FIND SOMETHING THAT WILL SEPARATE US FROM THE CROWD. FOR ME IT'S THE ABILITY TO FIND DIFFERENT SOUNDS THROUGH CREATIVE SUBDIVISIONS."

bass line, if it sticks in my head for a while, then I know it's worthy of composing a song around. I feel that too many artists use music as a vehicle for blowing chops as opposed to creating a memorable melody and then an interesting rhythmic backdrop behind it.

MD: Was your facility on the drumkit fairly developed when you entered Berklee at age sixteen?

Marko: Yes, and I credit that to my first teacher, Miroslav Karlovic, whom I stumbled upon in a classified ad at age eleven. He is a master of mechanics on the drumkit. I also studied with American drummer

ing my musicality on the drumset, and I learned that creating rhythmic motifs and themes around the drumkit is the ultimate musical adventure.

MD: What did attending Berklee do for you in terms of your career?

Marko: It gave me the opportunity to play with great musicians on a daily basis and develop lasting relationships within the music industry. All of the contacts that I have in the music business are a direct result of the relationships that I established at Berklee. And let's not forget about the great teachers I studied with, including Ian Froman, Skip Hadden, Ed

sound based on these influences?

Marko: I had a Survey Of Drumming Styles class at Berklee with the great teacher/drummer Joe Hunt. He introduced me to the history of jazz drumming in chronological order, from Baby Dodds and Zutty Singleton to the great Papa Jo Jones. Young drummers need to check out what Papa Jo was doing back then in terms of musicality and showmanship. He was a master. Then came Buddy Rich, Max Roach, and Elvin Jones. Elvin changed everything about drumming at the time. Then came Tony Williams. All of these guys influenced me in some way. As far as my drum sounds, I love Roy Haynes' cymbal sounds, especially his flat ride. I'm always in search of the perfect flat ride sound, and my quest has led me to a Zildjian Constantinople 22" flat ride with three rivets. It's the most beautiful-sounding cymbal I have ever played.

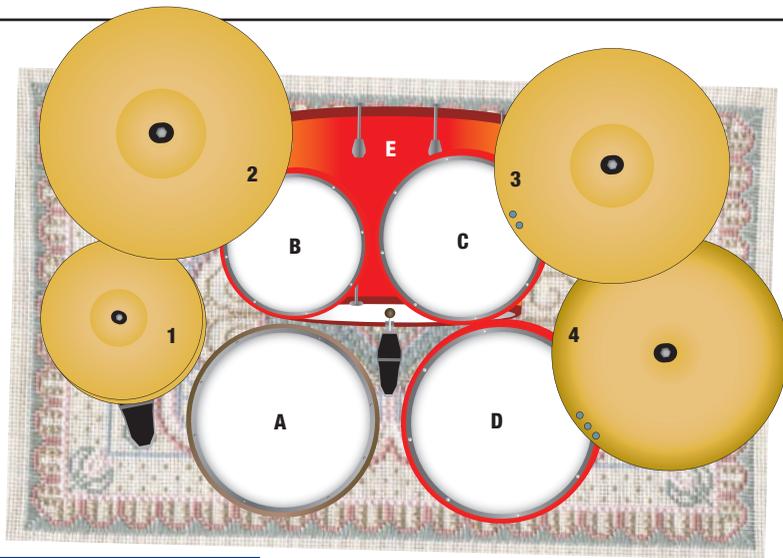
MD: What about heads and drum sizes?

Marko: I played at PASIC 2008 and used the new Evans G-Plus heads. I fell in love with the sound. It's a thicker 12 mil single-ply head with lots of punch and tone. I've played various Evans heads for almost ten years and have not heard anything as beautiful as these G-Plus heads. They are the perfect complement to my sound and style.

My drums are Mapex. I use a larger Saturn kit for pop and rock gigs and a smaller Mars Micro-Kit, which is their short-tom-size kit, for more jazz-oriented gigs. I love the Micro-Kit; I used it on the DVD and the latest Sveti CD. Vic Firth is also designing a signature stick for me, which is based on their AJ1 jazz stick.

MD: Have you found that there are particular rudiments that work best in terms of building your odd-meter concepts?

Marko: My concept of orchestrating odd meters is much more unorthodox than the traditional basic rudiments. You will find the essential rudiments in my playing style, but I strive to go beyond the basics



MARKO'S SETUP

Drums: Mapex Saturn Pro in "liquid amber" finish

A. 14" Black Panther snare drum

B. 10" tom

C. 12" tom

D. 14" mounted floor tom

E. 20" bass drum

Cymbals: Zildjian

1. 12" Remix hi-hats

2. 20" Sound Lab (prototype)

3. 20" Constantinople medium ride with two rivets

4. 22" Constantinople flat ride with three rivets

Hardware: Mapex

Heads: Evans G-Plus on snare and toms, EQ3 on 20" bass drum

Sticks: Vic Firth prototype Marko Djordjevic custom stick (based on the AJ1), Steve Gadd model wire brushes, Maraca Mallets, American Custom Mallets, Steve Smith Tala Wand rods

(Marko also gigs with a Mapex Mars Micro-Kit with an 18" bass drum, 5x10, 6x12, and 7x14 toms, and a 13" snare.)

RECORDINGS

Sveti Sveti, Kolach, Where I Come From /// **Marko Djordjevic** Where I Come From: A Fresh Approach To Drumming (DVD) /// **Jonah Smith** Industry Rule, Jonah Smith /// **Chris McDermott** Got It Made, Trippin' Out /// **Bree Sharp** A Cheap And Evil Girl /// **Don DiLeGo** The Lonestar Hitchhiker /// **Nenad Gajin Kec** /// **Billy Voss** Lucky Driving Buddha /// **Jonas Tauber** Free Time /// **Amit Heri** Amit Heri Group

FAVORITES

Azra Azra (Boris Leiner) /// **Lala Kovacev** Balkan Impressions (Lala Kovacev) /// **John Coltrane** Interstellar Space (Rashied Ali), A Love Supreme (Elvin Jones) /// **Elvin Jones** Live At The Lighthouse (Elvin Jones) /// **Allan Holdsworth** Secrets (Vinnie Colaiuta) /// **John McLaughlin** Live At The Royal Festival Hall (Trilok Gurtu) /// **Tony Williams Lifetime** Believe It (Tony Williams) /// **Tony Williams** The Story Of Neptune (Tony Williams) /// **Goran Bregovic** Time Of The Gypsies soundtrack (no drumset) /// **Idoli** Odbrana I Poslednji Dani (Kokan Popovic) /// **Frank Zappa** Joe's Garage (Vinnie Colaiuta) /// **The Police** Regatta De Blanc (Stewart Copeland)

and include triple or quadruple strokes and overlapping strokes that will cross in unison during a groove or orchestration. As drummers, we strive to find something that will create our identity and separate us from the crowd. I hope to achieve that goal by finding different sounds and sound combinations through creative subdivisions and motifs.

MD: You're primarily a matched-grip player, but when you use brushes you play strictly traditional grip.

Marko: I learned to play brushes using traditional grip, and I just can't get comfortable playing with matched. I do play traditional grip with sticks sometimes, but for me matched is more comfortable with sticks.

MD: Your technique is such that you seem to immediately pull the stick from the playing surface after each stroke.

Marko: My first teacher would be glad to hear you say that! [laughs] It's all about coaxing the sound out of the drum. Playing into the drum is counterproductive in two ways. First, if you're pressing the stick into the drum, you're not allowing the sound to ring out of it. And second, it keeps you from being in the proper position for the next stroke. Anyone familiar with martial arts knows that when you throw a punch to strike, a part of that technique is the pull-back. You don't leave your fist in the throwing position. You pull back immediately to protect your face and prepare to strike again. It's the same with striking a drum.

MD: Let's talk about your concept of economy of motion.

Marko: One of the first things I learned was developing close control—moving only my

wrists and fingers, and using the rebound. Most of the movement of my arms is strictly an emotional reaction to the music and to pull the stick up to prepare the next stroke. It all has to do with the mechanics of controlling your technique at a very close distance to the kit. I still practice a lot, and I continue to practice the concept of complete physical relaxation surrounding my drumset technique to relieve all negative tension in my body.

MD: On your DVD you talk about the importance of balance on the kit, and about achieving it through the use of a linear four-way coordination exercise. Can you elaborate on that?

Marko: The body parts that are relevant to playing are constantly moving. The point of this exercise is to be able to keep all four limbs in balance so that you're not leaning from side to side or back and forth. This will also help you develop a consistent sound around the set, because you'll be applying equal pressure to all four limbs without leaning your body weight into any particular limb. This is excellent mechanics training for good, comfortable, centered posture behind the drumkit.

MD: Talk about the stick technique you used to create the blazing up-tempo drum 'n' bass groove in the intro of the Jonah Smith track "Tone Of Your Voice."

Marko: Again, it's about economy of

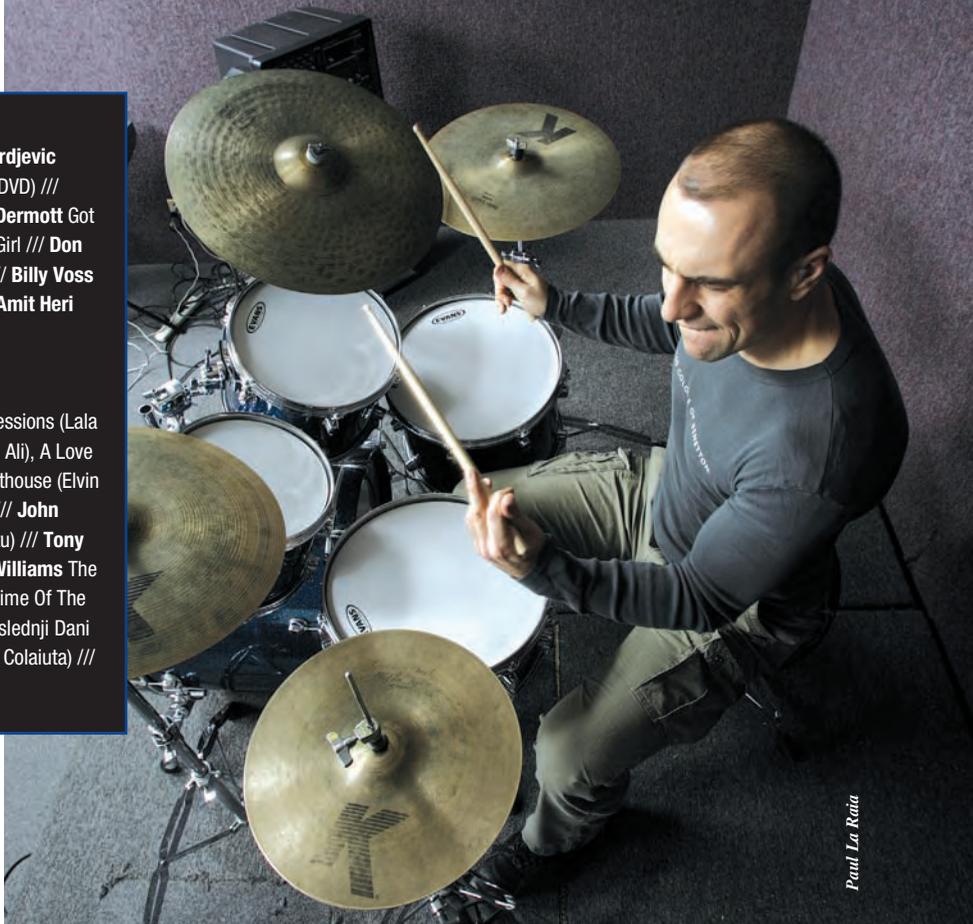
motion, wrist control, finger control, using the rebound, and keeping the limbs relaxed and close to the surface of the snare and hat.

MD: Your foot technique is fast and fluent. How do you achieve that?

Marko: I have my seat height where my thighs are parallel to the floor, and I sit up on the front two-thirds of the cushion. My foot pedal is at a medium tension. I prefer a flat-sole shoe so I can feel the pedal more. My stroke is basically heel-toe, but the fulcrum, or the power and control of the stroke, comes from the middle of the foot. At faster tempos I'll slide my foot slightly back and forth on the pedals to absorb the velocity of the stroke. The key to perfecting this technique is eliminating tension from the upper leg muscles, using your lower leg muscles, and focusing on your feet. Miroslav Karlovic taught me this technique as well. My entire drumset mechanics have come from his early teachings.

MD: What's the focus of the instructional book that you're working on?

Marko: The concept is based on the development of subdivisions. Being in control of subdivisions is key to everything in drumming. From accurate, "feel good" time playing and grooving, to the ability to interpret various musical styles in an authentic way, to musical phrasing in improvisation—it all stands on shaky



Paul LaRuina

MARKO DJORDJEVIC

ground if our understanding of subdivisions is shaky and our ability to interpret them accurately isn't at a high level.

MD: You're also a soccer player. How does that relate to your drumming career?

Marko: I've been playing soccer as a goalkeeper for twenty years. I've reached the semipro level. One common problem with goalkeepers is injury to the fingers. In all my years as goalkeeper I've never suffered a finger injury. I've finally realized that the reason is because I've spent so many years developing finger technique for the drums—my fingers have become so strong and flexible that they won't easily break.

I also look at the roles of the goalkeeper and the drummer as very similar. In soccer, it's the goalkeeper's sole responsibility to keep the other team from scoring. If you make a mistake, everyone knows and it affects the entire team. As with drumming, if you drop a beat or screw up a song, it affects the entire band, and the audience knows it. The drummer and goalkeeper also have a unique perspective on their surroundings that no one else has. So, in a sense, the drummer and goalkeeper share a major responsibility and are ultimately in control of the outcome of each situation.



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A System For Improving Your Practice And Your Playing

Many drummers practice regularly and put in enough time to see gradual improvement. Often, however, progress comes very slowly. Why is this? The cause is most often one of two factors: You're not practicing enough, or you're not practicing correctly. No one can help you find more time to practice, but you can learn ways to improve your woodshed sessions, regardless of how long they are, so that you can achieve the desired results. There are also ways to find hidden time to work on your drumming without having the sticks in your hands.

What follows is a practice method I've developed from working with hundreds of students over the years. It's built on a few simple concepts, the most important of which I call cross-training. This means developing your overall musicianship by rotating your practice topics through several general categories, with each section reinforcing and helping to improve the others.

Set Some Goals

Whether you're practicing two hours a week or eight hours a day, it's important to set goals and stick to a regular routine so that you can practice as smartly, efficiently, and productively as possible.

I ask my students to consider the two major objectives of practice: maintenance and development. Maintenance practice allows you to stay in good playing condition and sustains your current level of play by keeping your muscles, tendons, ligaments, strength, endurance, tone, and touch in performance shape. Developmental practice is what you do to improve on your existing skills and to add new ones.

On days when I can practice for only thirty minutes or less, I work on maintaining and maybe slightly improving my current skill level. But it's during longer practice sessions—ninety minutes or more—that you really grow as a player. To develop rapid growth, you should practice for

at least three to four hours a day, six days a week, with the minimum being two hours a day, five days a week.

The Cross-Training Method

To get the most out of your practice time, you should work on each of the following five categories every day: technique, styles, improvisation and musicality, reading, and "other."

Technique refers to the physical and musical ability to execute the ideas that you hear, imagine, or would like to imitate, synthesize, or create. Specific things to work on in this category include control, accuracy, sticking patterns, accents, hand/foot coordination, and brush technique.

The styles category involves studying, learning, listening to, and practicing all styles and genres of drumming and music—rock, funk, jazz, metal, Afro-Cuban, Brazilian, drum 'n' bass, etc. Don't limit your potential by referring to yourself

ESSENTIAL PRACTICE TIPS

1. Be sure to listen. It's one of the most important ways of learning the drums and developing your own voice. Listen to recordings of the greats to understand the drums' role and rich tradition. Listen to the musicians you're playing with, to ensure you're communicating effectively, and to the music you're playing, so you know its form and structure. And record and listen to yourself playing so you can hear what sounds good—and what doesn't—as you develop your personal style.

2. The drum pad can be a valuable tool for improving certain aspects of your playing, but you should try to spend most of your time on the drums, especially when you're working on skills where musicality, touch, tone, timbre, feel, balance, and dynamics are essential. When you do practice on the pad, keep your feet moving. Those muscles need maintenance and development too.

3. Contextualize. You need to practice and study in a musical setting whenever possible. For example, when you're working on a funk groove, you should try to do so with a band or a bass player, or at least with high-quality play-along recordings or CDs by your favorite bands. If you have no option but to practice alone, sing or hum a melody or bass line while you practice.

4. Practice at many different tempos, to stretch your comfort zone and to recognize that different tempos require different playing approaches.

5. Wear ear protection, and take breaks frequently to give your hearing a rest. Your ears will become fatigued long before your hands.

6. Plan your practice routine carefully and change it up every couple of weeks to avoid working on the same thing for too long, which may slow your development. And remember to take breaks when you're trying to achieve a particularly difficult goal. When you get back to work, you may be surprised to see that you've made real progress.

7. Good practice sessions should be both fun and frustrating. Fun because you're playing the drums, and frustrating because you're working on things you don't do well—yet. Always practice with purpose and a goal, and seek out the advice of a good teacher when necessary.

8. Practice every day, even if it's just for a short while.

9. Concentrate and focus while you practice, and eliminate distractions (television, cell phones, etc.). You'll develop much faster, and improved concentration and focus will come in handy when you perform as well.

10. Be patient. Becoming the drummer you want to be requires hard work, and drumming skills develop over many years—a lifetime, in fact.

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It may not be in an extended solo, but whenever you're at the kit you're making countless spontaneous decisions

about how and what to play, and those decisions are made with more conviction when you practice improvisation and interpretation. There isn't a single way to play something; there are many. So be creative and trust your imagination. Other musical concepts that fall into this category include improving feel, touch, tone, and balance between sounds. Be sure to pay as much attention to *how* you're playing as you do to *what* you're playing.

Reading includes sight-reading charts as well as poring over snare drum/drumset literature. Good reading skills are cultivated by recognizing basic rhythmic patterns—quarters, 8ths, 16ths, and triplets. Depending on your career goals, your ability to read a drum chart accurately—and to play it musically the first time you see it—may be critical to your future success. It's certainly a good skill for all of us to have, as it enables us to think and express our ideas visually. There are many ways to dramatically improve this skill. Practice reading pieces written for solo drumset, complex single-line rhythms, snare drum etudes (not exercises), transcriptions of grooves and solos, and longer excerpts from various method books.

The "other" category focuses on ways to gain skills and knowledge without having the sticks in your hands. Examples include reading *MD*, practicing and experimenting with various tuning methods, transcribing recorded performances of grooves and solos, watching drum DVDs, writing music for snare drum or drumset, reading biographies of famous drummers and musicians, listening to CDs, and even checking out drum manufacturers' Web sites.

The Practice Chart

During your practice sessions, you should move between each of the five categories above, spending about the same amount of time on each one. To organize your time, create a master list of things you want to learn or improve. Write the categories across the top of the page so that you have five columns. In each column, include everything you want to work on in that category. The lists should be

PRACTICE CHART

TECHNIQUE	STYLES	MUSICALITY/IMPROV	READING/LITERATURE	OTHER

fairly long. And be sure to prioritize—at the top, include topics that need the most work or that you'd like to develop quickly. Your list will change frequently as you discover new concepts to work on.

Once you have a complete list, create a table that looks like the chart above. Write our five categories across the top of the page, with four blocks underneath each one. Fill in each block with an item from your master list that fits in that category.

Put It Into Practice

Now you're ready to start your session. Each topic, or block, should be practiced for at least twenty but no more than thirty minutes. When you've finished practicing one concept, move directly to the block in the next category. In other words, after practicing technique block #1, move directly to styles block #1. Continue across the page until you've finished the reading/literature category. Then go down to technique block #2. Note: I usually skip over the "other" category until I've put down the sticks, whether I'm taking a break, riding the train to work, or relaxing late at night.

Each day's practice session should start where you left off the day before. When you get to the bottom of the page, return to the top. Keep practicing the items in these blocks until you notice some improvement. Then create another blank practice chart and fill in the blocks either with items from the last sheet to continue working on or with some new items. Depending on how much time you spend practicing, each chart should last between two and four weeks. Make sure you date and save each routine so that you can track your progress.



Marc Dicciani is the director of the School Of Music at The University Of The Arts in Philadelphia. He's performed and toured with countless renowned musicians and entertainers and has conducted drum clinics around the world. For more info, visit dicciani.com.



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Top 10 Rudiments

Part 2: The Double-Stroke Roll

by Bill Bachman

This month we're working with the second rudiment on my top-10 list: the double-stroke roll. Doubles are extremely useful, and not just in a roll context. Isolated double strokes can be played around the drumset to produce musical effects or to give you a little extra time to prepare for your next drum or cymbal hit. In addition to those obvious applications, being able to play a good-quality double-stroke roll will likely improve your drumming in ways you wouldn't expect.

Define The Diddle

Proper double strokes (or "diddles") aren't simply bounced off the head. Nor are they played with two individual wrist strokes. At a midrange tempo, doubles should be played as flowing full strokes (aka free or legato strokes) where the first stroke is played mainly with the wrist and the second is played mainly with the fingers. I call this the "alley-ooop" technique.

Think of the first stroke (with the wrist) as the setup and the second stroke (with the fingers) as the slam-dunk. Immediately after playing the second stroke, the hand should relax so that the stick rebounds to the "up" position by itself. Remember that with full strokes you never pick up the stick, you only throw it down—just like dribbling a ball.

Almost all rudiments require different techniques for different tempos, so you won't be able to play double strokes the same way at every rate. Some amateur players push the limits of their

double stroke-roll speed without adding forearms. But the speed benefits are dubious, and the result is often muscle tightness, which can lead to injury as the wrists get overworked.

Here are my technical guidelines for playing double strokes at various tempos.

Slow: Play two strokes using mostly wrist strokes.

Medium: Play the first stroke with mostly wrist and the second stroke with mostly fingers.

Fast: Play with forearms pumping and use mainly the first two fingers to play the second strokes. (Give your wrists a break!)

Practice the following exercises using a metronome (or play them along with your favorite tunes), and don't go faster than you can play comfortably. Every other exercise inverts the double strokes so that the stronger beat is on the second stroke of the diddle.

When you play these inverted phrases, it may be helpful to put a slight accent on each diddle's second stroke. Keep in mind that as you push your technical limits, it's better to loosen up and play a bit weakly and bouncy than it is to stroke out the doubles. Be sure to avoid holding on to the sticks tightly and forcing out both strokes of the doubles.

In addition to playing the exercises provided, be sure to practice double-stroke rolls going evenly from slow to fast to slow over one minute, gradually changing your technique in correlation with the speed. If you practice for only five or ten minutes a day, you'll be amazed at how much your hands improve by the time next month's rudiment comes your way. Good luck!

1

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

2

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

L R
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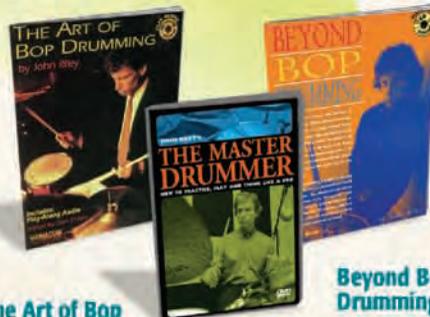
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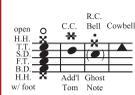
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Grand Funk Railroad's Don Brewer

Greatest Hits

by Ed Breckenfeld

MUSIC KEY



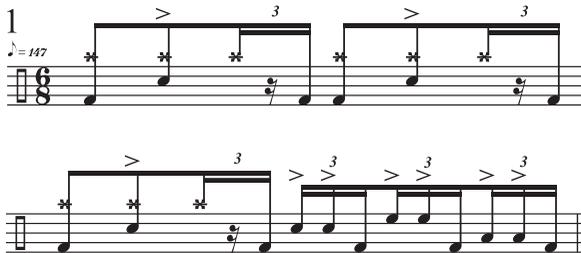
Grand Funk Railroad came out of Flint, Michigan, in the late '60s with a sound that crossed English-influenced blues-rock with classic Motor City soul. The band overcame savage reviews and early indifference from radio by developing a powerful and passionate stage show that helped it earn a string of gold- and platinum-selling albums.



From the very start, a key element to the power trio's success was drummer Don Brewer. Brewer was a solid timekeeper who regularly flashed his speed and energy. He also sang harmony and occasional lead vocals, notably on the group's first number-one hit, "We're An American Band," which also includes one of rock's most memorable drum intros. Here's a look at Don's fine stickwork on several of Grand Funk's most famous tunes.

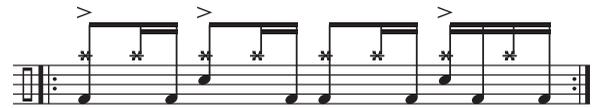
"Heartbreaker"

This bluesy ballad from the band's first album, *On Time*, features an up-tempo groove in the intro and choruses. Brewer plays these sections like a rock version of a jazz waltz, pounding out the time on a crash cymbal while his bass drum pattern supplies the swing feel. Notice the R-L-kick triplet fill at the end of the second measure, one of Don's favorite licks. (0:10)

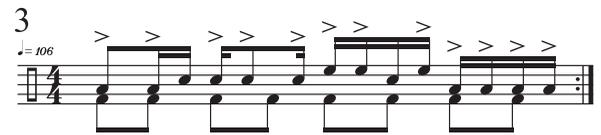


"Inside Looking Out"

Grand Funk's second, self-titled album includes this extended jam, which would become a dynamic part of the band's live show. Here, Brewer's quarter-note snare beat gives way to a funkier groove via a 16th note-triplet fill. (0:43)

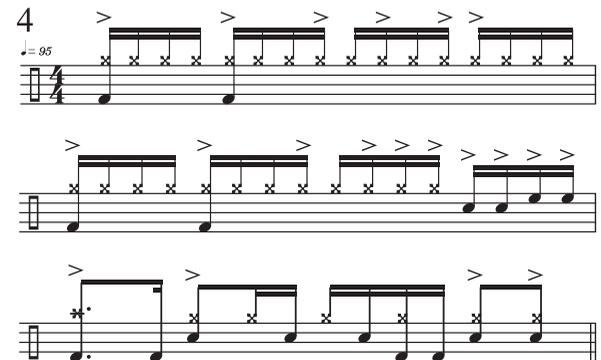


Later in the song, Don cycles around the toms, which lays a vigorous foundation for Mark Farner's harmonica solo. (6:50)



"I'm Your Captain"

This song from Grand Funk's third album, *Closer To Home*, became an anthem for soldiers fighting in Vietnam. In the sequence below, Brewer's two-handed 16th-note hi-hat pattern launches into a syncopated beat that cranks up the energy of the song's second verse. (0:56)



"Footstompin' Music"

Brewer and bassist Mel Schacher are locked in like a rhythmic machine on this up-tempo rock shuffle from Grand Funk's

fourth disc, *E Pluribus Funk*. It's a great example of how critical the drummer/bassist relationship can be to the groove of a song. (0:18)

5
♩ = 169

"Rock 'N' Roll Soul"

Brewer demonstrates skillful cymbal work throughout "Rock 'N' Roll Soul," off Grand Funk's 1972 album, *Phoenix*. The beat from the intro contains interesting movement in the snare and bass drum around the quarter-note bell pattern. (0:00)

6
♩ = 119

Brewer's energetic paradiddle cymbal pattern feeds Farnier's guitar solo. (2:07)

7
♩ = 125

"We're An American Band"

Here's the famous drum intro mentioned at the beginning of this article—the licks of choice for countless thousands of air drummers. After his opening cowbell/drumbeat setup, Don combines melodic moves around the kit with fast, precise double strokes on the bass drum. Notice the change from unison snare/tom strokes to flams around the drums in the two-bar fill. (0:00)

8
♩ = 128

Brewer's kick drum double strokes are a theme throughout the tune, showing up at the end of each chorus before an extended drum fill. (2:19)

9

"Shinin' On"

By 1974, Grand Funk had dropped "Railroad" from its name and added a keyboard player. *Shinin' On* produced a couple of hits, including a cover of Goffin & King's "Loco-Motion" and this title track. Brewer employs a range of rhythms in his solo section, including speedy single strokes on the snare, sweeping tom triplets, and quarter note-triplet flams. Each fill ends with a single bass drum note that sets up an offbeat snare/crash combination. (3:38)

10

You can contact **Ed Breckenfeld** through his Web site, edbreckenfeld.com.



Samba De Partido Alto

MUSIC KEY

open	○	R.C.
H.H.	⊗	⊗
S.D.	●	●
B.D.	⊙	⊙
	⊗	Rim-click

The syncopated Brazilian rhythm known as samba de partido alto, sometimes referred to as “funk samba,” is one of many samba variations. As with other samba styles, the partido alto rhythm is in 2/2 (cut time) and is a two-bar phrase. The rhythm is often played during a section of a bossa nova or samba song (the intro or bridge, for example).

In this article, we’ll build variations on the partido alto using ride cymbal or hi-hat ostinatos and two-bar kick/snare phrases. Examples 1–7 are the hi-hat and ride ostinatos, and Examples A–F are the partido alto rhythms.

Hi-Hat Ostinatos

1 R R R R R R R R

2 R L R L R L R L

3 R R R R R R R R

4 R R R R R R R R

Ride Cymbal Ostinatos

5 R R R R R R R R

6 R R R R R R R R

7 R R R R R R R R

Partido Alto Rhythms

The following partido alto variations can be played on the snare drum or as rimclicks.

A

B

C

D

E

F

Now let’s combine the hi-hat ostinato in Example 1 with the partido alto figure in Example A. The consecutive 8th notes on the hi-hat require a loose feel. This can be achieved by accenting the hi-hat along with the snare and bass drum rhythms.

1A

Once you’ve mastered the previous rhythm, explore all of the possible ostinato/partido alto combinations. Start at a slow tempo and concentrate on making each phrase groove with ease. In the next section, we’ll combine the partido alto with bossa nova and samba grooves.



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The Partido Pickup

The partido alto is often played with a pickup bar, which makes the rhythm even more syncopated and interesting to the ear. In the pickup measure in the following example, the snare/bass drum figures are in unison with the ride cymbal. (Note: The melody of the tune you're playing will dictate which partido alto rhythmic phrase fits best. Sometimes the partido alto can even begin with the second bar played first.)

The following exercise utilizes the ride cymbal ostinato in Example 6. Begin by counting one bar of half notes. Then play the pickup bar and play and repeat the two-bar phrase.



Now use the pickup bar with all of the ostinato/partido alto variations.

In A Bossa

Once you're comfortable with all of the variations, try playing partido alto in conjunction with a bossa nova. Begin with the pickup bar and play eight bars of a partido alto pattern, then play eight bars of a bossa nova. Continue going back and forth

between the two grooves. (The bossa nova is in 4/4, so you must also think of the partido alto in 4/4, rather than in cut time.)

Repeat each two-bar phrase four times before switching.

In A Samba

Now let's play partido alto in conjunction with a samba. Begin with the pickup bar and play eight bars of a partido alto groove, then play eight bars of samba. Continue going back and forth between the two grooves. Each two-bar phrase should repeat four times.

I encourage you to listen to the different ways of interpreting this musical style. Toninho Horta, Clementina de Jesus, João Bosco, and Martinho da Vila are some of the artists who have made partido alto popular in contemporary music. Familiarize yourself with the feel of the music, the traditional percussion instruments used in the style, and the parts that are typically played on those instruments. Once you understand the history and origins, you'll be able to create your own interpretations of the samba de partido alto.



The examples in this lesson are excerpted from **Maria Martinez's** book/CD/DVD *Brazilian Coordination For Drumset*, which is published by Hal Leonard. Used with permission. For more information, go to worldbeatrhythms.com.



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In The Studio

A Challenging Session Leads To A Breakthrough

by Ian Froman

In today's musical climate, there are many opportunities to record yourself—whether you're playing in a professional studio, tracking a live date at a club, or self-producing an album at home or in a rehearsal room. Regardless of the situation, one thing we all have in common is the desire to produce our best work. And when you play with other musicians, as most of us do, you'll find that sometimes your collaborators can lead you in a direction that makes the whole group sound better. I'd like to tell you about a session I had where I truly learned that the group is more important than the sum of its parts.

Setup

For most sessions, I try to arrive a little early in order to load in and set up the drums. Many studios can provide a house kit if you like, but on this particular session I really wanted to use my new Sonor SQ2s. Some studios require that the kit be set up in a drum room or isolated booth. This facility had two large rooms—one was given to me, and the other was for the rest of the group.

I began setting up my drumset in an exacting fashion, with each piece positioned precisely where I wanted it. I rarely have this kind of time on a gig. But since it was the start of a two-day recording session, I took advantage of the extra time and set up my drums perfectly. When I finished, the studio staff started positioning microphones. I made sure I was sitting behind the kit during this process, because often an engineer will place a mic in a spot where it can get hit during a cymbal crash. For example, if a microphone is placed close to my snare drum, the cymbal above my hi-hat stand could tilt and hit the mic when I play a cymbal accent. After a little trial and error, the placement was complete.

Rehearsing The Tunes

Once the other musicians arrived and set up, it was time to rehearse the music for the recording. This session consisted of original tunes brought in by the leader. It was the first time any of us had seen the music, so we needed to spend some time

rehearsing so we could shape the material and decide what to play. We began with a quick chat, discussing the feel and mood of the piece along with some specifics for each instrumentalist. Then we read down the chart, which was followed by suggestions for how to improve the vibe of the tune. Luckily, this band respected drums and took my ideas seriously. Some musicians feel that the drummer can't participate in musical discussions, mainly because the language of our instrument is foreign to them. In this instance, we all had equal say. So after making a few changes to the music, we rehearsed the tune again.



Doing A Take

We ran through the tune a couple of times, and then we decided to record a take. During the recording process, you must concentrate and be very focused—*everything* makes its way to the tape (or hard drive). I was careful to notate each change that had been made while we rehearsed so that I

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wouldn't forget anything when we were recording.

It's not uncommon to do at least two takes of each tune. Sometimes after the first take you can go into the control room with the rest of the group and listen to what you've just recorded. During this playback, you'll check your part and see how it fits with the composition. It can be helpful to ask the leader of the session if he or she likes what you're doing. In some cases, musicians make suggestions to each other in order to change things up a little. Be careful not to take these criticisms personally. It's not about you or your drumming, per se; it's about getting the most out of your performance. After all, you wouldn't be at the session in the first place if your musicianship wasn't valued. And others' thoughts on your playing can be very insightful.

During a day of recording, you rehearse, play, and record over and over again. Maintaining your focus is of the utmost importance. Studio work can be very draining, but if you stay consistent and keep up your stamina, you'll continue playing at the top of your game.

The Suggestion

On the second day of our session, there was a little problem that I was forced to grapple with. We rehearsed a difficult tune that had a very open feel to it. The idea was that the drums would blow freely over the track while the other instruments played a little straighter. I thought I had the perfect vamp feel to match the music. We recorded a take and listened to it immediately afterward. Everyone seemed pleased, but the consensus was that a better take was possible. That was fine by me. Still, by the end of the fourth take, I was *done*. Playing open and loose take after take had tired me out, and I really didn't want to record a fifth version. I hoped we'd finished the tune, but I was confronted with the reality that one of the musicians didn't feel comfortable with what I was playing. He didn't like *any* of the takes. I was mortified.

Not only did I believe I had found the perfect feel for the tune, but I was also sure that one of the four takes was good

enough to make the CD. Much to my chagrin, though, I was forced to face the fact that "so and so" didn't like the drum part. Now, I know I said earlier that you shouldn't take things personally, but *wow!* I had never been in such a situation. This name player—who I respect and who appears on many of my CDs—didn't like what I played. How do you get over that? Mental toughness is the answer. I asked him what he was thinking, and we rehearsed the tune a few more times. I came up with a feel that was similar to the first but a little more subdued and controlled.

Just before we recorded another take, my colleague said something that will stick in my mind for a long time: He praised my open-mindedness and said it was a testament to my commitment and professionalism to try something new and different. He gave me examples of drummers he had recorded with who wouldn't budge from their original idea for a piece. The people he mentioned are friends of mine, and they're great players. I wasn't aware of their unwillingness to try something new when other musicians wanted them to. I always considered their recorded parts to be perfect for the music, and I never once imagined that other players might have preferred something different.

Well, we recorded the fifth take, and sure enough, it was the one. This guy was right. The new feel had improved the tune because the group felt more comfortable, and as a result everyone played better.

In Conclusion

Honestly, I would have preferred to avoid this incident altogether. But I was careful not to take things personally and to keep an open mind about the music—which of course comes first. I'm proud of the fact that I was able to come up with a new feel by taking suggestions and incorporating them into my drumming. After all, playing music is a team game. I'm not recording as a solo drummer, and if it takes a "heavy" musician to tweak something in my playing, so be it. I'm just glad I could rise to the challenge and succeed.

Keep your head up!

Ian Froman is a New York-based jazz musician who also teaches at Berklee College Of Music, The Collective, City College, and New School University, and in his home studio.



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Polyrhythmic Creativity On The Drumset, Part 3

MUSIC KEY

open	○	C.C.	R.C.
H.H.	●	●	●
T.T.	●	●	●
S.D.	●	●	●
F.D.	●	●	●
B.D.	●	●	●
H.H.	●	●	●
w/ foot	●	●	●

My previous two articles (October 2008 and April 2009) covered triplet and 16th-note applications of a six-against-four polyrhythm. I'd like to move on to explore half note-triplet phrases, which create a three-against-four polyrhythm when played in 4/4.

The Basic 3:4 Polyrhythm

To create half-note triplets, omit every other note in two sets of quarter-note triplets.

So...

...becomes:

It can be difficult to hear and to play this polyrhythm properly. To avoid confusion, begin by playing the underlying 8th note-triplet subdivisions while accenting every fourth note to outline the half-note triplets.

You can also group the previous example in fours to reinforce the half note-triplet feel.

Half-Note Triplets On The Kit

Jazz/fusion legend Tony Williams played many half note-triplet ideas on his classic album *Believe It*. Here's one way

that Tony voices the triplets between the hands and bass drum foot.

You can also create a polyrhythmic three-against-four funk groove using an inverted paradiddle sticking.

Here's an idea I came up with that's in the style of hard-bop pioneer Philly Joe Jones. The buzz roll leads to a stick-on-stick hit.

In this three-against-four pattern, you'll play a broken double stroke between the snare and open hi-hat, followed by a double on the bass drum. The right hand plays a swing ride pattern.

Triplets Within Triplets

Now we'll move on to playing the three-against-four polyrhythm with triplet subdivisions. To understand how this advanced subdivision works, apply the following accents to the polytriplets we looked at in the first installment of this series.

JASON BITTNER ON

CHARLIE BENANTE

Today, Shadows Fall drummer Jason Bittner is a hero to thousands. But back in the day, it was Charlie Benante who ruled his world. Here's Jason's take on his early fave.



We drummers gravitate to certain players more than others over the years, and we soon realize that their influence has forever changed our approach to the instrument. It could be the way they construct their drum parts that grabs us. Or it could be their technique, the gear they use, or the band they play in. Or maybe it's the cool shorts and Freddy Krueger T-shirt they wear onstage. The bottom line is, once you find that inspiration, it makes a permanent impact on you as a player.

In my case, as far as metal goes, that inspiration came—and still comes—from Charlie Benante of Anthrax. Charlie has been the drummer (obviously), the principal songwriter and visual artist, and sometimes the guitar player for the NYC-bred metal band for over twenty years. His speed, power, and relaxed technique have been influencing young metal and rock drummers for years, and continue to do so into the millennium. I recently sat down with my good friend at the *Modern Drummer* offices in order to pick his brain and see how he feels about his career and his place as one of metal's greatest.

CB: The Inspiration

I first heard about Anthrax in early 1987. A friend of mine had a tape of *Spreading The Disease*, and he kept saying, "You gotta hear this drummer." And I just kept saying, "Yeah, okay, but I'm listening to *Reign In Blood* right now." Soon, though, I realized my buddy was right. At the time I was enthralled with Slayer for the sheer speed aspect. (Remember, I was seventeen and all I wanted to do was play fast, as all naive kids do.) But Anthrax had something Slayer didn't: melody and groove. It was almost like mixing the metal aspects of Slayer and Metallica with the complexity and musicianship of Iron Maiden—BRILLIANT!

What drew me in was Charlie's amazing ability to play fast

double bass with the utmost of ease, his phrasing, his fills, his signature push/pull between the verses and choruses, and his giant Tama/Paiste setup. Not to mention his cool Jams shorts. (He's gonna kill me for that!)

I went to see Anthrax for the first time in the summer of 1987 on the *Among The Living* tour, and that was it. That show changed the way I approached drumming from there on out.

The Early Days

As I was saying before, in 1987 there were three reigning kings of double kick: Lars Ulrich, Dave Lombardo, and Charlie Benante. All three of these guys had their own signature style, but when I sat down with Charlie, I wanted further explanation of exactly what was going on in his head at that time—his approach to the drums, the band, and its music.

"In the early days," Charlie recalls, "I was right out of high school and I was in art school. Then the band had a chance to go on tour, so I had to leave school to do that. At the time I was just thinking, *I'll be right back*, but then I never went back to school. But I got my art education through record company art departments, because I would work closely with them, designing the covers and learning about what colors work best. I got to do my art within the band and design T-shirts and covers. Back in those days, everything was just *new*."

With the 1985 release of *Spreading The Disease*, Charlie says, "I took on more of the role of the songwriter, and [guitarist] Scott Ian took on more of the role of the lyricist." On leadoff cut "A.I.R.," Benante helped set a precedent for bombastic double bass in the thrash metal world. Because of that song and the album's other bookend, the insanely fast "Gung-Ho," I cursed Charlie in my basement for years.



Paul La Roca

A TESTAMENT TO HIS INFLUENCE

RARE INSIGHT FROM JOHN TEMPESTA, THE STAR DRUMMER WHO ONCE CALLED CHARLIE BENANTE "BOSS."

Among The Living And Double Bass

In 1987 Anthrax released their thrash metal classic, *Among The Living*, and with this record not only did drummers take notice, we stopped in our tracks. There were so many great moments on the album, both in general and drum-wise. Standouts to me are the title track, "A Skeleton In The Closet"—your feet will fall off trying to play along—"N.F.L.," "I Am The Law," and the ever-popular "Caught In A Mosh." The drum fill at 3:47 in "Caught" will cause you to hit repeat over and over again. I still don't play it right.

"Kids were starting to ask me how I played so fast," Charlie reported to *Modern Drummer* in the May 1988 issue. "I'd say, 'I don't know, it just happened.'" Just happened? Are you kidding me? I wish it "just happened" for me. When I ask Charlie, twenty years later, if he still feels this way, he answers, "It's one of those things where you just know you've been blessed with something. It did just happen—from listening to records. The speed, enthusiasm, and energy from the band made me play at that pace—it wasn't from sitting in my basement going *dugga dugga dugga!*"

At this point in our conversation I interject a question via my cell phone from bpm master Derek Roddy. Derek asks Charlie, "Given that there's so much competition among drummers today about speed, can you flash back to 1986 and tell us how important it was to make the fast songs on that album fast?"

"We just had this NYC type of vibe that was influenced by the hardcore scene," Charlie explains. "That's why we kept up with the speed so much: There was this ball of energy, and when we played together it just naturally happened. I guess it worked like that with Slayer too; of course they were one of the fastest bands at the time."

Charlie reemphasizes that he played so fast because the songs called for it, not because he was racing the other metal drummers of the era—a very important point for the kids out there who spend too much time worrying about who's the fastest gun in the west.

S.O.D.

Not only was Benante intimidating with Anthrax, but his work in the side project S.O.D. was equally amazing. "That band was very influential and a lot of fun to do," Charlie recalls. "We did the first album in three days."

The song "Milk" was my introduction to the blast beat. "I remember [bassist] Danny Lilker just watching me," Charlie says, "making sure the kick and snare were together at all times. I think that's the first time that beat ever appeared on record, and then it just evolved." Once again, the man was years ahead of his time.

The End Of An Era And New Horizons

The two albums that followed *Among The Living* feature some amazing songs. Check out "Finale" off 1988's *State Of Euphoria* for the most ridiculous double kick ending ever. *Persistence Of Time*, from 1990, includes crushing tracks like "Time" and "Keep It In The Family."

Charlie describes the subsequent Clash Of The Titans tour as "the end of an era." He's right; metal was changing, and so was Anthrax.

You might know John Tempesta as the unstoppable drummer with White Zombie, Helmet, Exodus, Testament, and The Cult. But what you might not know is that he used to be Charlie's tech *way* back in the day. I thought it would be a good idea to call up my friend to ask him a few "insider" questions about Mr. Benante.

Jason: Was Charlie always "the king of double bass"?

John: Yes, for as long as I can recall. I remember going to his house for the first time in high school. He had his drums set up in his bedroom. It was a mixture of Gretsch bass drums and CB-700 toms. I also remember he had Slingerland Yellow Jacket pedals and the bass drums were tuned so tight. I recall playing it and going, "How the hell do you play this?" But once he got behind the kit, it was like, "Holy shit." I'd never seen anything like that before—it was unbelievable! He's such a great musician, period.

Jason: How did he influence you as a player?

John: I was always the hard rock/metal drummer, but watching him as his tech, I learned a lot about speed and flexibility—he helped open my eyes. Plus I learned a lot from him on the business side of things.



Jason, John, and Charlie

Jason: Could you see the impact he was having at the time on kids like me?

John: Oh, absolutely. I mean, kids would be blown away, especially then, around the time of the *Among The Living* tour. The drumming on that record is extraordinary. It was pretty cool at that time to see that. You had the Bay Area scene, the L.A. scene, the East Coast scene. Obviously I was the biggest Benante fan because he was my friend and my boss. Charlie was always spot on!

I'd like to thank Charlie for everything he's done for me. If I wasn't working with him, who knows where I'd be at this point. I definitely owe a lot to Charlie.

John Bush came in to replace Joey Belladonna on vocals, which signified another growth spurt for the band. *Sound Of White Noise*, if not the fastest Anthrax album, revealed a new direction and a new sound, and it did extremely well after its 1993 release. "I didn't have to write so fast all the time," Benante says. Charlie's drumming here was definitely more song based and less ego driven. "You gotta play for the song—you can't just play for yourself," he insists today.

Twenty Years Later And Still Going

Three more albums with Bush out front followed (check out "Nobody Knows Anything" and "What Doesn't Die" off *We've Come For You All*), and when the singer left the fold, Anthrax had a short reunion with Belladonna. Yours truly played two shows in my hero's seat during that tour, while the Benantes had their baby—yes, it was very intimidating!

Fast-forward to 2009. The Thrax is still going strong with new singer Dan Nelson, and the band plans to release *Worship Music* this year. It's plain to see that Charlie still enjoys what he does after twenty-plus years of playing, and that's a good thing because he continues to inspire new fans as well as the die-hards. I myself would not be the player I am without his influence, and his friendship. Thanks, Charlie.

Visit moderndrummer.com to see video clips of Jason's interview with Charlie.

Jason Bittner is the multi-award winning, Grammy-nominated drummer for Shadows Fall and, on very rare occasions, the fill-in drummer for Anthrax.



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by Waleed Rashidi



Roger Kisby



ASK CO-FRONTMAN/CO-SONGWRITER JASON REECE, AND HE'LL TELL YOU THAT HE FORMED THE GROUP WITH FELLOW VOCALIST AND WRITER CONRAD KEELY PRIMARILY TO ESCAPE THE STEREOTYPES AND EXPECTATIONS OFTEN ASCRIBED TO INDIE ROCK AND PUNK STYLES. REECE AND KEELY, BOTH DRUMMERS, WANTED TO PERFORM WITH A DISTINCT RHYTHMIC SENSIBILITY AND FOUND TRAIL OF DEAD TO BE THE PERFECT OUTLET FOR SUCH EXPANSIVE, EXPERIMENTAL EXPRESSION.

EVEN BEFORE THE ACT LANDED ITS INTERSCOPE DEAL, REECE AND KEELY—WHO'D BEEN SWITCHING BETWEEN THE KIT AND OTHER INSTRUMENTS—EXPANDED THE TRAIL OF DEAD LINEUP. MEANWHILE, THE BAND WAS GAINING A REP FOR ITS DESTRUCTIVE ONSTAGE BEHAVIOR AND WAS EVENTUALLY BANNED FROM PERFORMING AT CERTAIN CLUBS. "THEY DIDN'T HEAR THE MUSIC," REECE SAYS. "THEY JUST SAW A BUNCH OF FREAKS ON STAGE SMASHING STUFF."

DESPITE ALL THE DEMOLITION, TRAIL OF DEAD HAD A DISTINCT SENSE OF PIONEERING AMBITION, WHICH WAS JUSTIFIED AND FURTHERED BY THE ACCOLADES THE GROUP RECEIVED IN THE PRESS. THE UNIT WOULD CONTINUE TO RELEASE ALBUMS, LAND MAJOR TELEVISION APPEARANCES, EMBARK ON LENGTHY TOURS, AND FIRMLY ESTABLISH ITS PRESENCE IN A TYPICALLY FICKLE MUSIC SCENE.

FAST-FORWARD TO 2007, NEARLY A DECADE AFTER THE RELEASE OF TRAIL OF DEAD'S SELF-TITLED FIRST LP, AND ENTER AARON FORD, WHO'D BEEN RECOMMENDED BY A FRIEND TO FILL THE VACANT ROLE OF "PRIMARY" DRUMMER. THE GEORGIA-BRED MUSICIAN MADE THE CUT AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR, AFTER AN AUDITION THAT CONSISTED OF PLAYING ONLY TWO TRAIL OF DEAD SONGS PLUS A HOST OF COVERS. "THEY WANTED TO SEE IF I REALLY LIKED MUSIC, OR IF I JUST WANTED TO PLAY IN A BAND," FORD RECALLS.

TODAY, BOTH REECE AND FORD ARE AT THE KIT FOR TRAIL OF DEAD, AND THEY APPEAR ON THE GROUP'S SIXTH ALBUM, *THE CENTURY OF SELF*, WITH A WHOLE NEW LIST OF FIRSTS. IT'S FORD'S DEBUT RECORDING WITH THE BAND. IT'S THE FIRST TIME IN A WHILE THAT THE CLICK TRACK HAS BEEN SCRAPPED. IT'S THE ONLY TRAIL OF DEAD RECORD WHERE TWO KITS HAVE BEEN TRACKED SIMULTANEOUSLY. AND PERHAPS IT'S THE FIRST TIME THE BAND TRULY RECORDED, WELL, LIKE A BAND. WITH *THREE* DRUMMERS NOW CALLING THE SHOTS, THE RESULTS CAN BE PERSUASIVELY PERCUSSIVE.

MD: There's so much happening on *The Century Of Self*. Tell me about writing the album.

Jason: We had ideas that we sketched on Logic. We'd throw riffs and drum and vocal ideas on there and use that as a template to get a rough idea of what to do next. Then we'd go to the practice space and see what worked and what didn't. It was trial and error for a lot of the record.

As far as the drum parts, we definitely didn't know what would stick, so we tried certain ideas that were forceful and others that were softer and more subtle. It wasn't frustrating, it was more fun. The last couple of records were more studio oriented, starting with a drum track, but this was like starting with a full band and seeing

what it would be like live.

MD: Aaron, how involved were you in writing the drum parts?

Aaron: When Conrad commits an idea to tape for a demo, he already has a pretty good sense of how he wants everything to go. The demos I was receiving, although somewhat skeletal, were pretty well mapped out. The specifics of certain things were left to me. But the recording is just

one part of it. When we go and play live, it kind of morphs into its own thing. And that's when I think all of us get to put our own stamp on things a little bit more.

They told me that the last couple records were very orchestrated before the band set foot in the studio. They spent months doing click tracks and mapping out tiny modulations in time, and everybody played to that. I think that served its purpose on those records. This time, they wanted to make sure we took a step back and didn't do anything to a click.

When it comes to drumming or writing a part, I kind of start with the busiest thing I can do. As we go, I whittle it down and find where the happy medium is. The first thing's always the craziest with me: "All right, here goes the Keith Moon fill!" That's the way I've come up working, and it's the most comfortable for me. It's throwing everything but the kitchen sink at it first and then seeing what's the least you can do. Then you see if you want to do something in between, which is usually the case with Trail Of Dead, because it's pretty bombastic.

With this band, I'm doing a lot more fills than I usually do anyway. It's not my normal mode of thought. It's like, Here come 32nd notes for the next few minutes! They were always telling me, "You can do more. It's fine." And I'd say, "Are you sure?"

Other people are always like, "Now, don't you step on anyone's toes." And with this band, it's: "Well, we don't really have any more toes left!"

MD: You had many other gigs before Trail Of Dead, such as Bluetip and Bobby Bare Jr. How did they prepare you for what you're doing in this band?

Aaron: The main thing is listening. Well, there's a dual importance: listening and preparedness.

Anybody who wants to start in music wants to start a band with their bros and take it from the ground up and go all the way to the top. That whole thing is awesome when it happens, but a lot of times it

"WITH THIS BAND, I'M DOING A LOT MORE FILLS THAN I USUALLY DO. IT'S NOT MY NORMAL MODE OF THOUGHT. IT'S LIKE, HERE COME 32ND NOTES FOR THE NEXT FEW MINUTES!" —AARON



Roger Kisby

doesn't happen. And in all honesty, I wasn't getting any younger, and I really wanted to keep playing music.

It became apparent that I could still do what I love and play for a number of people without selling out. A lot of people think they're just the hired gun. But no—you're doing what you love, what you want to do. Once I figured out that there seem to be a lot of people who need drummers, if I found out about anybody, I'd try to get in touch with them.

MD: What was recording this album like?

Aaron: It was really challenging to record, because we didn't have a click, so we didn't have a strict map. And Conrad's songwriting, in a way, is very orchestral, because it has these legato moments where time seems really suspended and fluid. He wants things to push to give it a little extra intensity. He'd say, "No, I really *do* want you to

speed up here." That's almost against your nature as a drummer. You're told every day that you need solid time, and all of a sudden someone's telling you to speed up. So now you've got another drummer with you, and you're like, "We've got to go against our nature, but we've got to do this together. So you count off and go."

MD: This is the first time you've tracked two kits at once.

Jason: Yeah, on [2005's] *Worlds Apart*, we had two drum parts going at once, but we overdubbed those parts. It's more of a studio experiment. For "Fields Of Coal" and "Halcyon Days" on *Century Of Self*, we just tracked two drumsets live to see how it would sound. One drummer would do a main meat-and-potatoes beat, and the other drummer would play the flourishes and embellishments. It's like that live too—sometimes I'll play the heavier kick

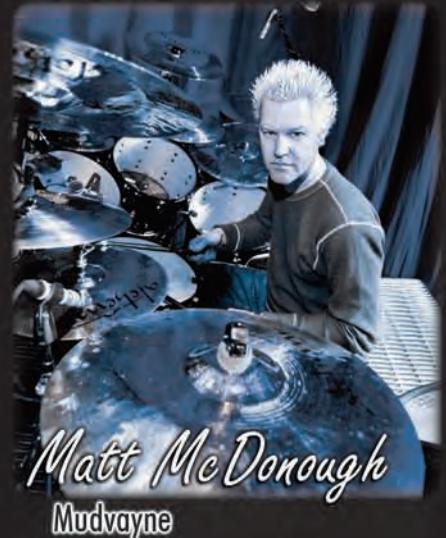
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and snare beats and Aaron will do cymbal flourishes and embellishments.

MD: "Fields Of Coal" and "Pictures Of An Only Child" are a pair of terrific drumming examples.

Aaron: For "Fields Of Coal," Conrad brought the song in and we had this folky, sort of hyper-Bob Dylan idea. I came up with a basic pattern that was originally just snare and kick. The idea was to leave out a big backbeat and just let the shuffling single strokes on the snare fly through everything and hold down the rhythm.

When we recorded it, we played an old '60s Ludwig kit, a black oyster pearl deal, and we turned the snares off and even taped the snare head down to make it more tom-ish. We tuned the drums to make them sound more relative to the song.

As we started to record, we needed that backbeat, so we put it in. The bridge section needed a drum corps feel, so I took a 5 1/2 x 14 Supra-Phonic, put an Emperor on it, and cranked it. I played the part seven times on each section—four times straight along with the pattern, and three times varying the pattern a little bit, which makes it sound like it's split up among multiple drummers. That was the only section where Jason and I would match up and do the same thing.

While we were doing overdubs, Conrad wanted more percussion. That's another thing I've learned with this band: I come from a less-is-more approach, but with Trail Of Dead, more is definitely more. I came up with the craziest thing I could, and we wound up overdubbing the very first thing I had ever done with that song, which is a crazy tom-and-kick pattern, over the last half of the song. The boys were big fans of it.

"Pictures Of An Only Child" was a lot of fun to record because it was hard to nail the right feel. When the guitar line comes in and Jason comes in with 16ths on the hi-hats, I mimic that on two giant rides and follow his pattern. My idea was to lay out for the entire first verse and not have a strong presence with the drums, because it was going to be huge in the chorus.

The chorus is what became termed the "elephant beat." We're both playing a massive tom pattern, but we're playing it slightly differently and alternating our cymbal hits. It's really cool because you can tell what's farther away and what's closer, so it has a ping-pong effect. And the second

verse is just me injecting funk into Trail Of Dead. I have these real dry 16" hi-hats that I love, and I accent only certain parts of the pattern. At the end of the day, there are like five drumsets' worth of drums on each of those songs.

MD: Sometimes the band gigs with one kit and other times with two kits. How do you decide which gigs get two kits?

Jason: It's more about if we can pull it off or not. If we're on tour, it's easier. But if it's an in-store and there's not too much time and it seems like a hassle, we do one kit.

For the remaining part of the year, I think we'll do the double-drum thing, because it sounds bigger, louder, more chaotic. People seem to like it—they're always telling us less keyboards and more drums. There was a tour where we had one drumset and two keyboards, and that seemed to fall flat.

MD: So why double drummers in the first place? What does it add to the band?

Jason: It's nothing new, but it adds to the sound, makes it more powerful. That was the point of the double-drum idea. When Aaron joined us—and Conrad and I were talking about how we wanted three drummers at once—we decided to bring that double-drumkit sound back to the music.

MD: What are the challenges of having two drummers?

Jason: Setting up! [laughs] Soundchecks are longer, and you definitely have to play in time and play together. It's like drum corps—you have to be in line and also be free. There's a lot of freedom with two drummers. The good part is that if someone drops out, someone else will carry the beat. When someone's kick pedal explodes, you look at the other guy and say, "Hey, can you carry the beat?" And the song goes on. That's a benefit.

MD: It sounds like there are other percussive elements besides the regular drumkit on this new record. What else did you use?

Jason: We had a rain drum, we used shakers. And goat's hooves—Aaron had that, and it sounds like a shaker. We used timpani and whatever we could get our hands on. Tom Waits is really good about using everything around the barnyard, so we kind of had that approach. Whatever pipes sounded good, or metal, or anything, we'd put it on. We'd tape it and turn it into something.





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Ken Micallef



★★★★★ **JEFF BECK** PERFORMING THIS WEEK... LIVE AT RONNIE SCOTT'S JAZZ CLUB

Highlighting material ranging from Jeff Beck's days as a tone-bending '60s guitar hero to the present, this live album, recorded in '07, presents Beck and **Vinnie Colaiuta** as a muscle-bound tag team intent on high-flying self-expression.

Vinnie spurs Beck on throughout, from the heavy-metal blitzkrieg of "Led Boots" to the badass 32nd-note flurry of "Scatterbrain" to the Mahavishnu-esque thunder-quakes in "Space Boogie." The group, rounded out by keyboardist **Jason Rebello** and bass player **Tal Wilkenfeld**, plays like their careers depend on it; Colaiuta in particular sounds like a musician reborn. (Eagle) **Ken Micallef**



★★★★★ **RUSS KUNKEL** RIVAGE

Rivage (Chateau Beach) is a collection of soft-rock classics that drummer Russ Kunkel played on in the '70s with the likes of James Taylor, Jackson Browne, and Carole King, reworked in an ambient/smooth-jazz format. Keyboardist **Jay Oliver** is behind the lush arrangements,

which blur the lines between live and programmed sounds. What many drummers loved about Kunkel's playing on the originals was the grit he put into a slow groove, his rockin' brushwork, his exquisite taste, and the way he could spread a fat beat over several measures. Here there's no bass player and too few choice drum sounds. And apart from some galloping toms on "So Far Away" and a few big fills during the guitar solo in "Doctor My Eyes," there's too little emotion from the drums. (Mailboat) **Robin Tolleson**



★★★★★ **SUPERSUCKERS** GET IT TOGETHER

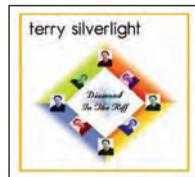
Even on a straightforward, four-on-the-floor rock 'n' roll record, Supersuckers drummer **SCOTT "SCOTTZILLA" CHURILLA** finds ample room to breathe. On cuts like "What It Takes" and "Something Good For You," Churilla provides solid fills that mesh effortlessly with the other instrumentation. When the band plays three-chord rock, Churilla crashes when he's supposed to, and when it's time to pour on the punk he stays in the pocket while giving everyone else the spotlight. (Mid-Fi) **Steven Douglas Losey**



★★★★★ **PIT ER PAT** HIGH TIME

High Time showcases a fleet of instruments both acoustic and electronic, both traditional and more esoteric, in a group conversation that's like a mellow, slightly spooky party. Or a circus full of sad clowns. **BUTCHY FUEGO**, who also engineered the sessions, blends a restrained, gently grooving cross-stick with percussion goodies such as cuica. Occasionally, like at the end of "Evacuation Days," he upshifts into a more aggressive pattern that reveals a deep, round kit sound. (Thrill Jockey)

Michael Parillo



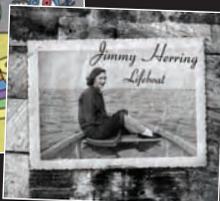
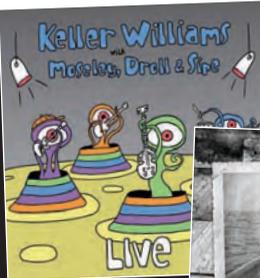
★★★★★ **TERRY SILVERLIGHT** DIAMOND IN THE RIFF

Drummer Terry Silverlight's latest smooth-jazz/contemporary fusion album showcases some excellent drumming and creative grooves. "Boulevard" is a particularly strong tune, with a hip, strutting beat befitting the song's title. While certain songwriting elements hold the album back, it's worth a listen for how Silverlight locks up with bassist **Will Lee**, and for some great drumming chops. (terrysilverlight.com)

Martin Patmos

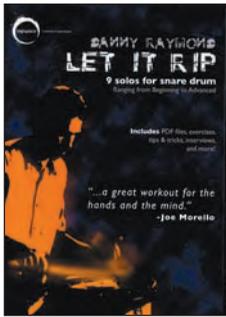
SIPE SHOW

Jam master Jeff Sipe flexes his musical muscles on new releases by Jimmy Herring and Keller Williams.



Southern six-string fusion ace Jimmy Herring recently released his first solo album, *Lifeboat*. The music smacks joyfully of The Dixie Dregs, and it boasts a Wayne Shorter tune featuring **Derek Trucks** as well as the overture from *The Jungle Book*. It's progressive yet accessible, and at every turn Sipe does exactly what needs to be done, whether it's providing subtle phrasing on "Lost" or slamming to the straight-up Southern-fried funk of "Only When It's Light." (Abstract Logix)

Loop-happy guitarist Keller Williams lets things build organically with his quartet, providing another perfect landscape for Sipe. Jeff sure knows how to play behind a vocal, with great instincts for when to follow and when to make a bold move. *Keller Williams With Moseley, Droll & Sipe: Live* shows this unit to be playful and pointed but not overly serious. (SCI Fidelity) **Robin Tolleson**



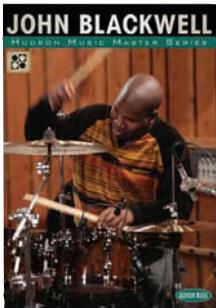
★★★★★

LET IT RIP: 9 SOLOS FOR SNARE DRUM BY DANNY RAYMOND

DVD LEVEL: BEGINNER TO ADVANCED \$19.95

Danny Raymond's drum corps heritage (his dad played with and taught several Northeastern corps) is evident in this entertaining and educational DVD. Here the two-time DCA snare drum champ (backsticks.com) plays and explains nine two- to three-minute solos ranging from easy to competition level. Also included are exercises that benefit from overhead and side camera angles, as well as tips on

topics from backsticking to tosses to the "disappearing brush" trick. Also cool: the rudimental brush solo "Clean Sweep," and the ability to print out the music by loading the disc into your computer. (tapSPACE.com) **Andrea Byrd**



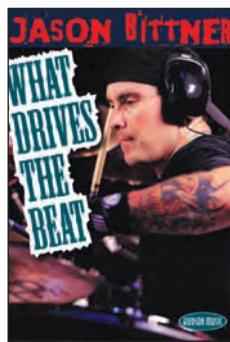
★★★★★

JOHN BLACKWELL HUDSON MUSIC MASTER SERIES

DVD LEVEL: ALL \$29.95

Despite his down-to-earth personality and adherence to the groove, John Blackwell (Prince, Justin Timberlake) has another side, that of a flashy, show-boatin' drummer—stick twirling amid the heat of play and working one-handed rolls, stick-on-stick split-triplet patterns, and exaggerated Billy Cobham-esque arm sweeps. These seemingly opposite traits make Blackwell an excitable drumming

boy wonder. On this two-and-a-half-hour DVD, he's eager to demonstrate his open-handed sticking approach and the rhythmic wisdom he's amassed by studying the styles of greats such as Billy Cobham, Omar Hakim, and Cameo's Larry Blackmon. Blackwell might be a better player than lecturer (bassist **Gary Grainger** and Blackwell mentor **Marcus Williams** help to expand on some of the drummer's concepts, including employing double-stroke kick drum patterns). Still, the intensity and surprise quotient in his groove-based drumming communicate volumes. (Hudson Music) **Will Romano**



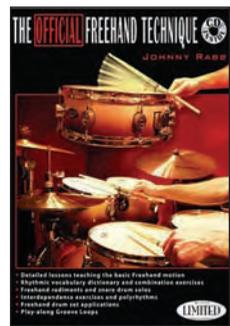
★★★★★

JASON BITTNER WHAT DRIVES THE BEAT

DVD LEVEL: BEGINNER TO INTERMEDIATE \$29.95

Here metal machine Jason Bittner shares his advanced concepts and techniques for developing double bass grooves and fills. The personable drummer performs examples from several Shadows Fall tracks (as well as some from his band Burning Human), breaks down his musical approach, and explains his predominantly rudiment-based patterns. This well-produced DVD features excellent split-screen views of Bittner's

hands and feet, plus a very comprehensive e-book of all the performed examples. A great place for beginning metal drummers to start, and for intermediate players to learn to advance their double bass skills. (Hudson Music) **Mike Haid**



★★★★★

THE OFFICIAL FREEHAND TECHNIQUE BY JOHNNY RABB

BOOK LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED \$24.95

The freehand technique is Johnny Rabb's name for an advanced single-handed playing method whose closest relative is the one-handed roll. Rabb's thing is different, however, as it offers more control, allowing drummers to play rapid 16th-note patterns with one hand. Sound crazy? Well, read through Rabb's well-written book and try out the basic idea.

Critics might call this a trick, but after some woodshedding, I found it to be a sophisticated technique with unforeseen potential. It will take some practice to get the mechanics down, but once you have the hang of it, the challenge becomes perfecting and incorporating it. Add this tool to your bag and see where it takes you. (Hal Leonard) **Martin Patmos**



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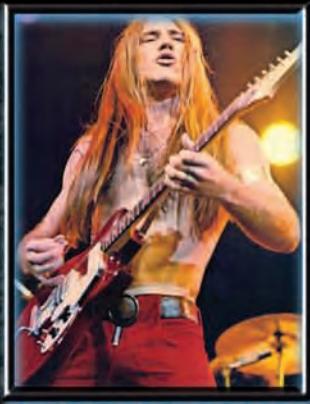
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It's hard to fathom that even after two decades of Drum-Off events, Guitar Center is still finding ways to improve the world's largest drumming competition. But such was the case with the Drum-Off 2008 Grand Finals, held at the Henry Fonda Theater in Los Angeles on January 10. The stakes were higher, the excitement was stronger, and the competitive field was simply that much better. In fact, with drummers such as **Thomas Pridgen** (The Mars Volta), **Thomas Lang**, **Jason Bittner** (Shadows Fall), **Nicko McBrain** (Iron Maiden), and eventual winner **Jerome Flood II** putting on mind-blowing displays of percussive exploration—and explosion—the Fonda never sounded sweeter.

Once again, drum great **Stephen Perkins** hosted the Drum-Off in his typically engaging and personable way. The event's players wasted no time in wowing the audience, as Bittner brought his Shadows Fall bandmates on stage to perform an assaultive set of double kick-oriented metal instrumentals. The drummer was quick to reveal his ambidexterity, switching between left-side and right-side rides while maintaining his pum-

meling bass drum patterns. Bittner also took several minutes to solo without his backing ensemble, turning off the snares and even breaking into a swinging jazz pattern at one point—a very pleasant surprise.

Next up was the powerhouse pair of Thomases—Pridgen and Lang—whose kits were set up side by side. While Pridgen played a traditional acoustic set, Lang opted for a fully electronic rig and wielded blue-tipped sticks for added visual flair. But the drumming provided the fireworks as the duo locked into immensely rich grooves and traded eights with unrivaled fury. Lang's electronic kit was no cheat; his feet were visible, and Thomas used all four of his pedals in synchronized action during parts of his performance. As the drummers' groove became dizzyingly complex, there were points when it seemed unlikely that Pridgen (a former Drum-Off Grand Finalist himself) would be able to land his out-of-the-box fills and patterns. Yet he did so consistently, proving that nothing is impossible in the right set of hands.

Then it was time for the finalists to strut their



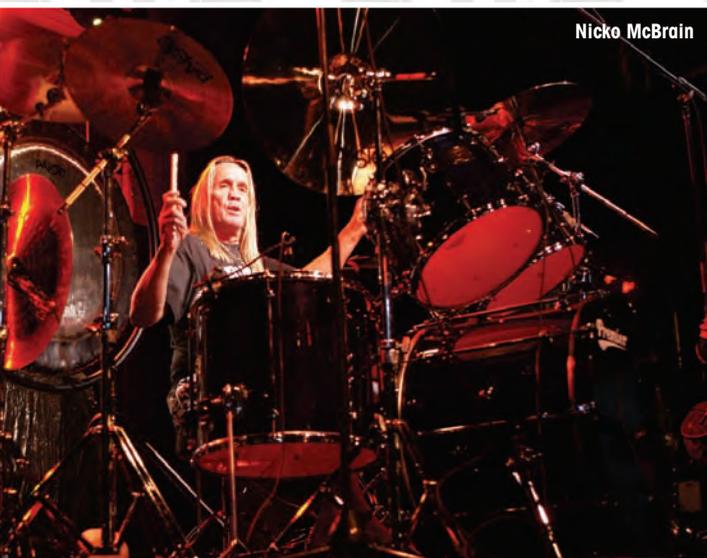
Danny Carey



Carmine Appice



The final six



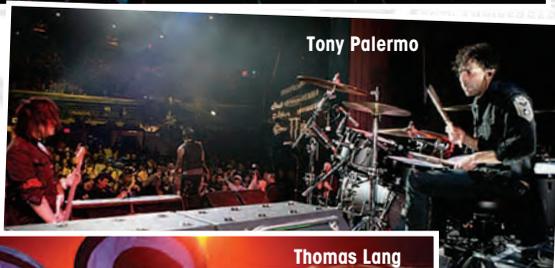
Nicko McBrain



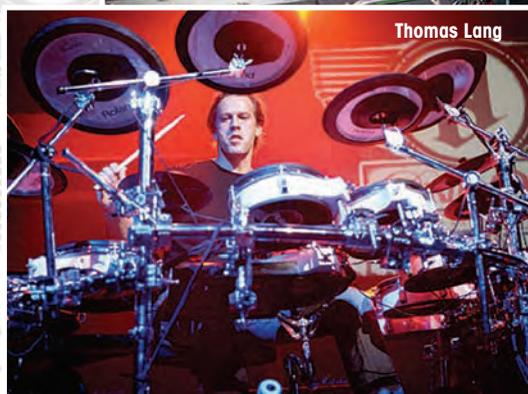
Papa Roach



Thomas Pridden



Tony Palermo



Thomas Lang

stuff. (Prior to this event, more than 5,000 entrants had been narrowed down to the top six.) Scoring the performances was a panel of celeb judges that included **Taylor Hawkins** (Foo Fighters), Pridden, **The Rev** (Avenged Sevenfold), **Alan White** (Yes), **Danny Carey** (Tool), **Kenny Aronoff**, **Atom Willard** (Angels & Airwaves), **Drew Hester** (Foo Fighters), **Trevor Lawrence Jr.** (Alicia Keys, Eminem), and **Frank Zummo** (Street Drum Corps).

Anthony Burns was the first contestant to play. His massive dynamic shifts eventually gave way to Latin and funk grooves, and he featured tom interplay patterns and nifty stick twirls. Burns's single-handed funk beats were topped only by his two-footed kick work. The drummer's top-notch talent was a great indication of the high caliber of playing that would run throughout the Grand Finals.

Launching a thunderous performance was **Tim Newton**, whose beautifully intense tom runs found his hands crossing over at near impossible speeds. Although he based some of his soloing around a bold and heavy rock groove, Newton brought the intensity down to soft snare strokes for his finale—the perfect capper.

Playing burly funk beats with the lightest of touches, **Ramon Sampson** showed impressive dynamic control in a groove that featured a left-foot cowbell. His transitions from the floor tom to the hi-hat wowed the crowd, and his single-kick

bass patterns were a full-throttle workout. Sampson even tossed in a couple of deft visuals—including drinking out of a water bottle while he soloed—that were totally trick.

“This has been a long time coming; I’ve been praying every day for this to happen,” said **Jerome Flood II**. He started by orchestrating on the kit the signature theme of the 20th Century Fox company—the entire tune, not just the introductory drum cadence. With his snares turned off, Flood tickled the cymbals and began a series of runs around the toms. He then switched on the snares with his foot (“I saw someone do that in New York, and I thought, *That would be so sweet, I’ve got to do that*,” he said) and even scratched the snare wire, mimicking a DJ scratching a record. (“I took that too, from a girl; it’s just a little hip-hop thing.”) His creative stick clicks led to strong kick/hi-hat interplay, and Flood brought the house down when he twirled his hat on a stick while soloing. It was a routine he said he’d been working on for several months, and it was a mind-blowing show indeed. Flood left little doubt as to why he deserved to be crowned 2008 champ.

Next, **Juan Carlos Mendoza** began with a one-handed roll on the snare drum, using his elbow to change the pitch. With his left foot on a woodblock pedal, Mendoza engaged in cross-stick patterns that launched into a one-handed solo. Steady funk grooves were the foundation of his fantastic performance.

Four previous showings in the Grand Finals clearly weren’t enough for **Sherman Arnold**, who made another appearance at the Fonda for a shot at the top. Starting with a simple phrase, Arnold mutated his solo to include a bit of jazz and some creative melodic passages that took full advantage of his toms. Arnold’s playing was light and fast at times, and the drummer ramped up the speed with plenty of one-handed figures. He even reversed his patterns at one point.

As part of the event, a trio of true percussive powerhouses—Nicko McBrain, **Carminie Appice**, and the late **Mitch Mitchell**—were inducted into Guitar Center’s Drum Legends Hall Of Fame. McBrain’s performance was the final solo attraction of the night. The metal great first played without accompaniment and later highlighted his parts from two classic Iron Maiden cuts, including his famed tom runs in “The Trooper.”

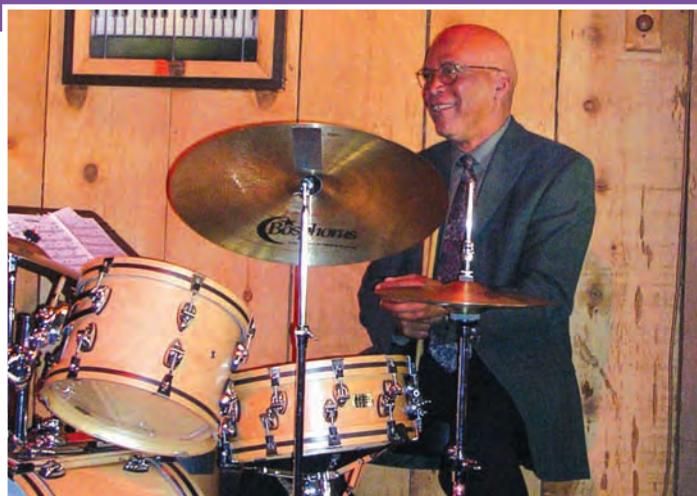
Closing out the evening was a set by the multi-platinum alternative rock band Papa Roach, which showcased its hits with drummer **Tony Palermo** in the driver’s seat. Together with his energetic bandmates, Palermo (who has also performed in the notable rock band Unwritten Law) played like the seasoned veteran he is—all brawn and brains. His tough-handed attack was contrasted by a number of intricate moments, which brilliantly buttressed the Papa Roach repertoire and sent a night of drumming worshippers out flying high.

OMAR CLAY

Omar Clay, a well-respected jazz drummer and teacher whose impressive list of credits includes playing with John Coltrane, Horace Silver, and Charles Mingus, died last December 4 in San Francisco, of complications from Lou Gehrig's disease. He was seventy-three.

A versatile musician, Clay was an original member of Max Roach's groundbreaking M'Boom percussion ensemble, in which he played marimba, timbales, xylophone, and timpani. At the kit, he was as adept at swinging subtly behind vocalists like Sarah Vaughan as he was at playing hard bop with David "Fathead" Newman.

Clay also collaborated with Elvin Jones, Bob James, Ernestine Anderson, Gene Harris, Randy Weston, Marlena Shaw, Marian McPartland, Dionne Warwick, and Roberta Flack, among others.



MICHAEL LEE

If filling the tall order of drumming behind Jimmy Page and Robert Plant fazed Michael Lee at all, he never showed it.

During his 1990s tenure with the Led Zeppelin principals, which included two albums and two world tours, Lee was a dynamic force. He played his oversized Ludwigs with a fluid style, a deep pocket, and a perpetual grin plastered on his face. But the union between the rock legends and the powerhouse drummer lasted a relatively short while. And sadly, so did Lee's life. Michael died of a seizure at his home in Darlington, England, last November 24, at the age of thirty-nine.

Steve Albini, who recorded Page and Plant's 1998 album, *Walking Into Clarksdale*, remembers Lee as "a very likable, easygoing guy" and a "quick study" behind the kit.

"Robert would be singing while the takes were going down," Albini recalls. "He'd sometimes make offhand comments during or between takes about what Michael ought to try. And Michael was able to incorporate the ideas on the fly, flawlessly. He kicked ass while handling sometimes hard-to-interpret instructions."

Lee, born Michael Gary Pearson, also commanded a great deal of respect in the drumming community. "I remember talking to Dave Grohl and Taylor Hawkins while I was working on *Clarksdale*," Albini says. "Everyone had been asking me, 'What's it like working with Jimmy Page and Robert Plant?' When I saw those guys, they said, in unison, 'What's it like to work with Michael Lee?'"

Lee also worked with Plant on the singer's 1993 album, *Fate Of Nations*, and the subsequent tour. Michael's other gigs included touring and recording with Little Angels, The Cult, Echo & The Bunnymen, Thin Lizzy, Ian Gillan, The Quireboys, and Jeff Martin.

Find more about Lee at myspace.com/michaelledrummer.



JIMMY CARL BLACK

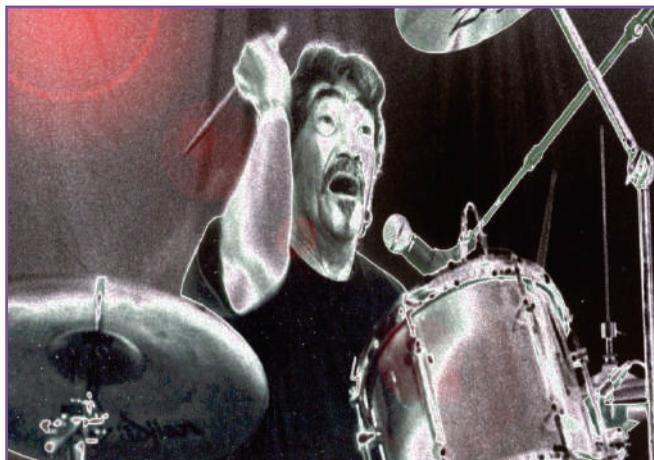
Mothers Of Invention drummer Jimmy Carl Black, "the Indian of the group," as he introduced himself on Frank Zappa & The Mothers' 1968 album *We're Only In It For The Money*, died of cancer last November 1 in Siegsdorf, Germany, at the age of seventy.

Black was born in El Paso, Texas, and in 1964 moved to Los Angeles, where he formed The Soul Giants. Zappa later replaced the band's departing guitarist, eventually taking over the group and calling it The Mothers.

Black played on all of The Mothers' genre-defying albums before Zappa dismantled the band in 1969. Jimmy's post-Mothers work with Zappa included a role in the 1971 film *200 Motels*, in which the drummer sang lead on the country song "Lonesome Cowboy Burt."

Black also toured with Captain Beefheart and played in the bands Geronimo Black and The Grandmothers with other Mothers Of Invention alumni. In recent years Jimmy sang with the English group The Muffin Men.

Find more about Black at jimmycarlblack.com.



DONALD HAHER

The MD staff would also like to send condolences to the family of our very own office assistant, Denise Haher, on the passing of her father, Donald, at age sixty-eight. Donald, an active player on the NYC-area scene for many years, played drums on the 1962 hit "Remember Then" by Larry Chance & The Earls.



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KIT OF THE MONTH



HANGIN' HEAVY

The hard rockers of the '80s were never known for practicing restraint, in drum rigs or anything else.

William Adams, a teenager during this golden age of hair-band excess, took notice, and now he's done something about it. "My setup was inspired by the kits of Tommy Aldridge and the late Randy Castillo," Adams says. "I always wanted a rack like my heroes had, with the kick drums suspended and the cymbals hanging from a halo."

One day, while Adams was surfing the Web, he came across Level Custom Drum Rack And Riser Systems (levelrack.com) and emailed owner Tony Ramirez. The duo then fine-tuned a design; this was to be the first halo Ramirez would construct on a rack. "It's a masterpiece!" William says. "And Tony is one of the nicest, most professional people I've dealt with. He really cares about his customers."

"As for the drums themselves," Adams continues, "they're a red-sparkle DW set obtained from eBay. I've got 10", 12", 14", and 16" toms, two 18x22 kicks, a 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ x14 DW brass snare, and a 6x12 DW maple snare. My cymbals include a Sabian ride, crashes, hi-hats, and effects along with a Wuhan gong and Chinas. I also use LP percussion and Evans drumheads."



Photo Submission: Digital photos on disk as well as print photos may be sent to: Kit Of The Month, Modern Drummer, 12 Old Bridge Road, Cedar Grove, NJ 07009-1288. Hi-res digital photos and descriptive text can also be emailed to billiya@moderndrummer.com. Show "Kit Of The Month" in the subject line of the message. Photos cannot be returned.

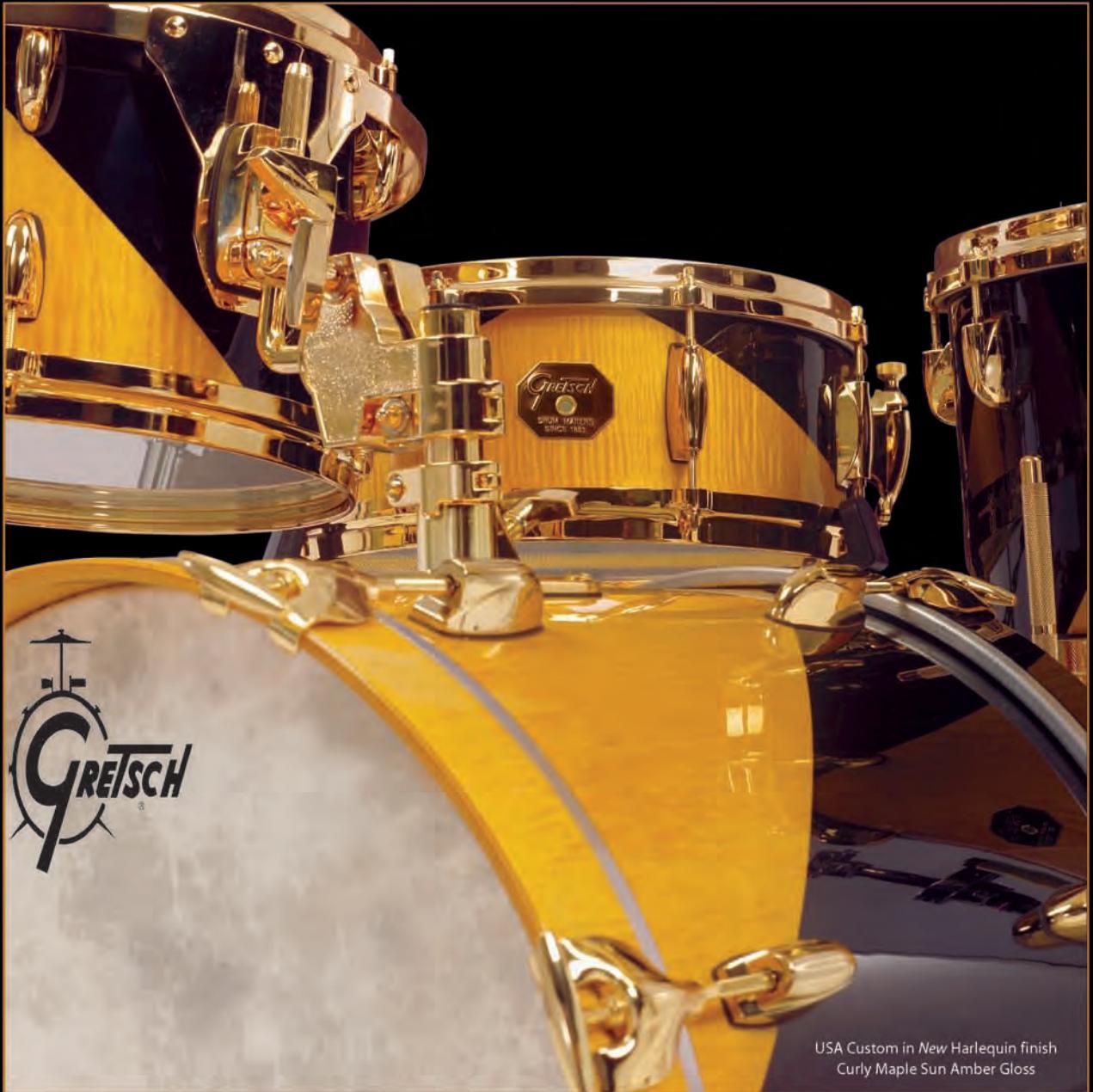


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