

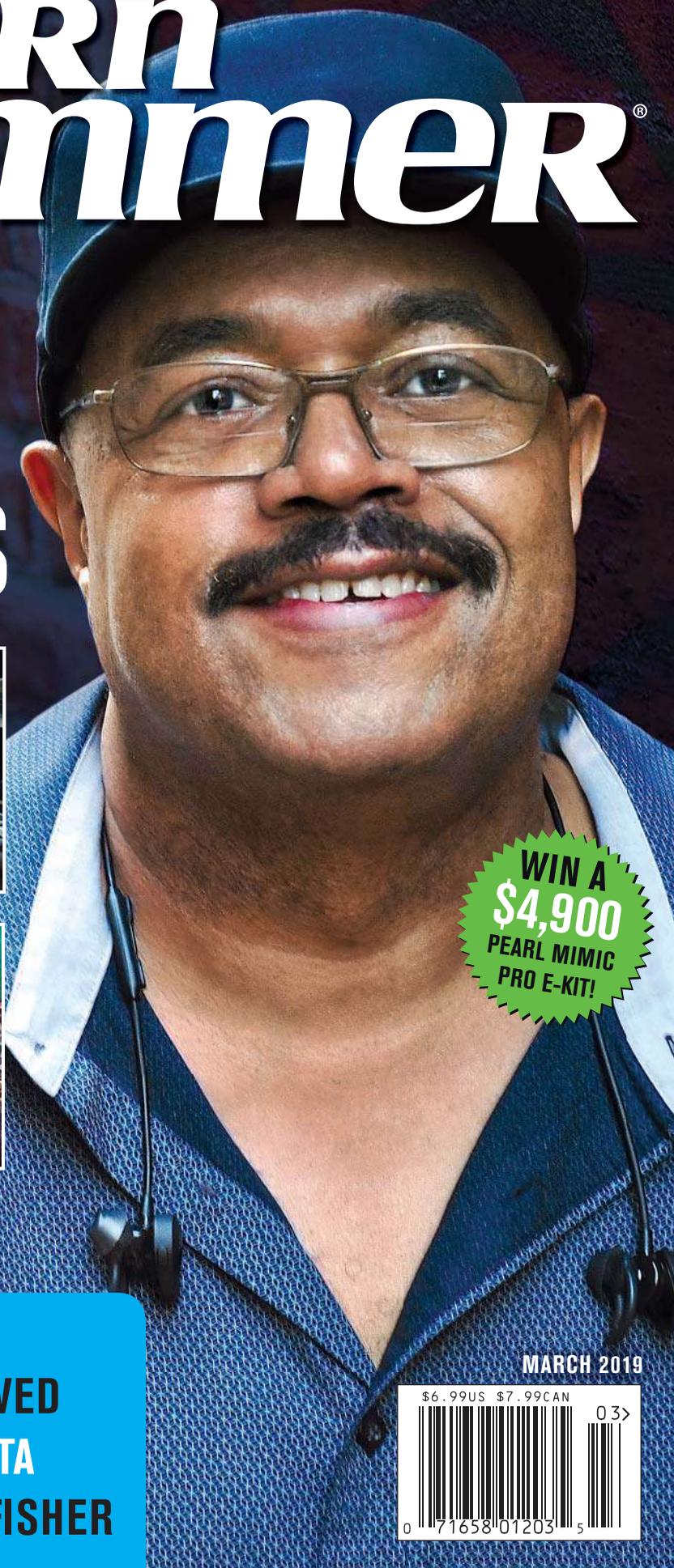
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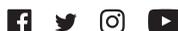
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## AN EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

# It Was Twenty Years Ago . . .

Hi, everyone, and welcome to 2019! This is the issue of *Modern Drummer* that's given out at the annual winter NAMM trade show, which is being held between January 24 and 27 at the Convention Center in Anaheim, California. That's where instrument manufacturers and related companies display their latest products. You can keep up with what's going on at NAMM by checking in at [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com) and at our social-media pages. And we'll be covering much of the best new gear in upcoming issues of the magazine—which, by the way, is now available at your local Walmart. Of course, to get the best deal on *MD* you should become a subscriber; details are available online.



On a personal note, this past October I celebrated my "official" twentieth year at *MD*. I'd like to thank each and every one of you for supporting and reading our magazine and for giving me the opportunity to speak with you all these years. I've actually been associated with this fine publication for even longer, as artist-liaison of the Modern Drummer Festival, beginning with the second one. I actually attended the first festival with my pregnant wife. I've always wondered if that was one of the reasons our son, Matty, became an amazing drummer himself.

It's been an eye-opening experience for me being on "the other side" of the business at *MD*. I spent most of my first forty years out on the road touring, and as some of you know, I've been blessed to have my fifteen minutes of fame, as well as being fortunate to do session work here in my hometown of New York City. It never gets old hearing songs I wrote and recorded on the radio. I never take any of it for granted, and I appreciate and thank the gods every day for making my life a happy one. Of course, as any musician knows, it's not always fun and games—there are as many disappointments as conquests in the biz—but it's the way you handle those challenges that will determine how far you get.

I was fortunate to have already known many of the players we subsequently covered in our pages, and since I began working at *MD* I've met many more who've become good friends. One of those is this month's cover artist, Dennis Chambers, one of the most influential drummers of our time. I've been a huge fan of Dennis's drumming for years; one of the many times I've seen him play was during an early *MD* travel assignment to Boston for a Buddy Rich Memorial Show. If you're unaware of Dennis's prowess—or perhaps just need a quick reminder—check out some of his highly influential recordings mentioned in this month's Readers' Platform.

Also featured in this issue is Clem Burke. Clem and I go back to the '70s, when his band, Blondie, and mine were part of the CBGB's scene. The Rock and Roll Hall of Famer is now the subject of the documentary *My View: Clem Burke*. Plug in its title at YouTube, and watch the trailer.

A few other gentlemen I've had the privilege of knowing for years are featured this month: Brendan Buckley, who's been with pop star Shakira for twenty years; Sterling Campbell, who tells us all about the rerecording of David Bowie's infamous *Never Let Me Down* album; and Larry Lelli, who's been driving the popular Broadway show *Come from Away*. One player who we cover that I've yet to meet is Aric Improta of Night Verses. Aric has been breaking new ground on record and online for several years now, and we'll no doubt be hearing about his fascinating projects for years to come.

Thanks again for all your support over the past twenty years—and for helping make *Modern Drummer* magazine what it is. I'll see you the next time it's my turn to say "hello." Enjoy the issue!

**Billy Amendola**  
Editor at Large



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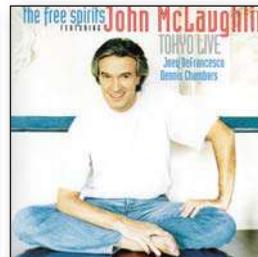
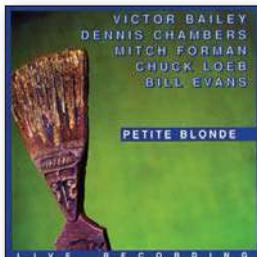
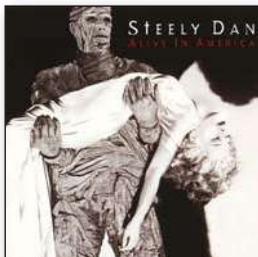
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# What's Your Favorite Dennis Chambers Performance?



This month, as we catch up with the fusion and jazz great Dennis Chambers, we check in with our readers and social media followers to find out what their favorite albums or performances are from the MD Hall of Famer's substantial career.

Steely Dan's *Alive in America* is amazing! [Chambers plays] the perfect groove for the perfect music. "Josie," "Peg," and "Babylon Sisters" are all awesome. I've always been a fan of Jeff Porcaro [who appeared on several Steely Dan albums], and not many can groove like he did, but Chambers can. But the way Dennis played "Aja"—that's where I fell in love with his style.

Also, once while I was practicing drums, my dad gave me a cassette and said, "Son, you want to hear this." It was [the saxophonist] Bill Evans' *Petite Blonde*, and it blew my mind. It's been one of my favorites ever since.

**Erik Smits**

The first time I heard or saw Dennis Chambers was on the *Buddy Rich Memorial Scholarship Concerts* video from 1989. I was absolutely blown away—then and still now!

**Chi Lee**

I'd say the track "Tipatina's" on the album *Play* by Mike Stern. That's Dennis at his finest for me: groove, feel, space, and authority.

**Hugh Cox**

I wore out Dennis Chambers' *Serious Moves* video on VHS, and I love the '90s John McLaughlin tunes like "Jazz Jungle" [*The Promise*] and "Mr. D.C." [*The Heart of Things*]. Groove and blistering fills.

**Kurt Ritterpusch**

During Drum Solo Week on the *Late Show with David Letterman*, Chambers played a bit of "Cissy Strut" with Letterman's band and then dived into a beautiful solo. I could imagine that this performance certainly inspired some young, aspiring musicians to pick up the sticks.

**Joe Tymecki**

John McLaughlin's *Tokyo Live* with Chambers and Joey DeFrancesco. With a lineup like that, there's as much instrumental firepower as you could ask for, but there are many sublime moments of deep pocket grooving that balance out the blowing.

**Rusty Aceves**

For me, it's his latest work with the Victor Wooten Trio on *Trypnotyx*. Chambers takes all of his previous experience and uses it on this album. Plus, I just saw the Victor Wooten Trio live at PASIC 2018, and it was epic. Chambers and Wooten were communicating on a level that seemed different from most groups. They had chemistry for sure, and you could tell that it was special.

**Warren E. La Fever**

Bill Evans' *Petite Blonde*. It's live, high energy, and has a mix of a lot of styles. There are some insane licks and fills in there.

**Tyler Ingersoll**

I'd say John McLaughlin's *Tokyo Live*. Chambers is on fire on that album. Also, I saw that group in Boston on that tour, and it was my first time hearing Dennis play. It was a life-changing experience for me.

**Mike Walsh**

I'd say both *Loud Jazz* by John Scofield and *Extraction* by Greg Howe, Victor Wooten, and Chambers. His grooves have an amazing pocket on both albums.

**Brian Carr-rollitt**

John Scofield's *Blue Matter*. I bought that album from Colony Records in NYC in the mid '80s, and it still sounds as fresh and innovative today as it did back then.

**Pete Cater**

Dennis Chambers' performance on the P-Funk All-Stars' *Live at the Beverly Theater in Hollywood* is Dennis being Dennis for real. That era of his playing is one of my favorites!

**Julian Goff**

I love his solo *Big City* EP. It's just Chambers laying it down in all different styles. And I'm so glad I got to go to one of his clinics. He's such an insightful guy to talk to.

**Danny Moore**

Bill Evans' *Petite Blonde*. The interaction that Victor Bailey and Chambers have with each other is just great.

**Micael Öberg**

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

## Dropped Beat

In the January issue, *Who's On That Song* was written by Patrick Berkery.





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## Hunt Sales on *Get Your Shit Together*

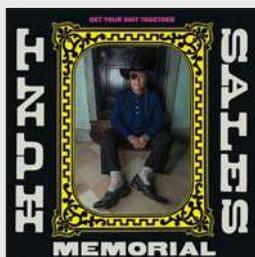
Todd V. Wolfson

**The rock 'n' roll survivor opens up about his brutally honest solo debut.**

Since beginning his career in the mid '60s with his brother Tony in the group Tony and the Tigers, Hunt Sales has had a storied career, playing with the rock hitmaker Todd Rundgren (at fifteen years old), the punk icon Iggy Pop, and David Bowie's experimental heavy rock outfit Tin Machine. Sales has also backed the blues artist Lowell Fulson, the funk legend Bootsy Collins, and the Tex-Mex group Los Super Seven. Now, at the age of sixty-four, under the banner of Hunt Sales Memorial, he's released his debut solo LP, *Get Your Shit Together*, on Big Legal Mess/Fat Possum records.

Recorded at the Delta-Sonic Sound studio in Memphis, the aptly titled album could be seen as a fresh start for the drummer, who openly discusses his past drug addiction and newfound sobriety. "I mean, there was a history to me," Sales admits. "But you know what? I'm into what I'm doing now. And really, all we have is right now. So it's the record, my band, this tour coming up, and the single that's out now. It's what I'm doing now."

The album, a mix of Southern, blues, and rock vibes, began life when Sales' longtime friend, guitarist Will Sexton, introduced him to Big Legal Mess head and Fat Possum label executive Bruce Watson. According to Sales, "Bruce said, 'Do you want to do some recording?' It started as a singles deal, but then he said, 'Forget it, I want you to do an album.' So he basically got to know me and saw my work ethic, and he believes in me. And he's there to put up the recording time, press the album, promote it—everything. There aren't a lot of people at sixty-four getting record deals. Before I met Bruce, I was content to write music, do sessions, and whatever else."



In addition to Sales' signature driving grooves, his kit tones stand out throughout *Get Your Shit Together*, from the explosive bass drum and snare on opener "Here I Go Again" to the shimmering, snappy backbeat of the album's first single, "One Day." "Bruce has a bunch of nice snares, and I brought my own, too," Hunt says. "I have an old Ludwig that I bought in Germany when I was with Iggy on the *Idiot* tour. I didn't have any drums, so I went to a music store in Berlin and bought a 6.5x14 chrome Ludwig snare. Now the chrome plating is falling off of it. But *Jesus* it sounds good."

Surprisingly, Sales tells *MD* that he didn't spend too much studio time getting tones dialed in. "We only used a couple of mics," he explains. "And I like to just slam the stuff with leveling amps and compressors. And if you listen to my drums on the Tin Machine records, my new record, and whatever else I've played on, you can tell it's *me* playing it. It's like any great drummer: you listen to them and they sound consistent because they have their own sound. And I have my thing. My snare tends to be a little bit

crisper. If you want to compare, it's like the sounds on the Motown records, where they're kind of noisy. But once you start throwing more instruments in there, it compensates and fills up those holes. You have that noise, and I like that open sound—like those Riverside records with Art Blakey, which is a great drum sound. To me, sonically this record is like a cross between the Stax records and a Motörhead album."

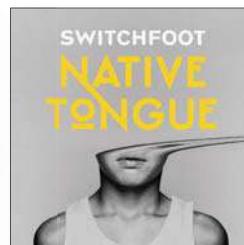
The Hunt Sales Memorial is planning an early 2019 tour in support of its debut release. **Willie Rose**

**Hunt Sales plays Zildjian cymbals.**

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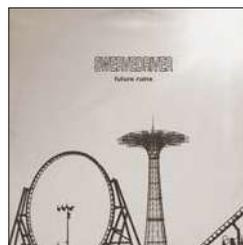
**Switchfoot**  
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*Why You So Crazy* (Brent DeBoer)



**Pedro the Lion**  
*Phoenix* (Sean Lane)



**Swervedriver**  
*Future Ruins* (Mikey Jones)

# ON TOUR



## Jake Bundrick with Mayday Parade

Vince Dwyer

The group's longtime drummer hits the road for a European trek in support of the band's latest release.

This past June 15, the alternative pop-punk group Mayday Parade released *Sunnyland*, the band's sixth full-length since their formation in 2005. A run on the final edition of the long-running summer Warped Tour festival followed, along with a headlining fall tour in support of the effort. Now, after taking a brief winter break, Mayday Parade is heading back out for a European trek that lasts through the end of February.

Jake Bundrick, Mayday Parade's founding drummer, says that though he follows the songs' basic structures, he's also "switched a lot of the parts up. Luckily, my band doesn't mind. I've just learned so much, and I always try to challenge myself by adding ideas into our set. I don't really play double bass on records much, but I'll add it tastefully live if I feel it. Again, I only add what the band will allow. If you don't, that's a good way to get yelled at or fired."

Back in the studio, Bundrick is also highly engaged with his bandmates' needs—as well as those of the producer. "Everyone in the band writes, and we tend to hash out the songs in the studio with a producer," Bundrick says. "Technology has grown so much that now our demos pretty much sound like the real deal. So you don't really have to play together to hear it, and you can make quick adjustments to the music without playing live together. Also, you have to know when you're needed and know when to just listen. Often we'll lean on the producer to hash out an idea on a track with one of the guys first before critiquing. That's what producers are there for, so you need to trust them."

None of this is to suggest Bundrick doesn't get to outright shred on *Sunnyland*. On "It's Hard to Be Religious When Certain People Are Never Incinerated by Bolts of Lightning," Bundrick launches into an explosive tom groove during the second verse before transitioning into the chorus with a blazing fill that's as bold as the song's title. "That

moment in the second verse was inspired by Steve Kleisath [of Further Seems Forever]," Bundrick says. "I grew up studying his playing for years. And part of that fill where it's heavy triplets was also inspired by Burke Thomas [of Vendetta Red]. It's also very John Bohnam-esque, in my opinion. I like to view it as a fraction system of 2/1, where there are two strokes in the hands followed by one kick note in triplets. Then I move that around the kit."

Live, Bundrick's rapid bass drum flourishes shine as precisely as they do on Mayday Parade's polished recordings—the result of the drummer's strict approach to practicing with a metronome. "I [do that] to make sure I know where I am in the learning process," he says. "One exercise is to start with another 1/1 fraction—one stroke in the hand followed by one kick. Set a metronome at a comfortable speed, and play 8th notes on the snare with your dominant hand, and then add 16th-note bass drum notes in between each snare stroke. Then work your way around the kit on different drums. Then only use your left hand. Once that's down, repeat the entire process with triplets and 16th notes. Eventually the goal is to freely switch between dominant and nondominant hands around the kit. Prepare for your calves to burn."

Considering the group's long run and rigorous tours, Bundrick reflects on what it still means for him to get onstage during long stretches. "It's the best part of the day for me, and it's definitely something I never take for granted," he says. "It's something I've always wanted to do, and I'm humbled to be in this position. It just took finding the right group to make it happen." **Willie Rose**

**Jake Bundrick endorses SJC drums, Zildjian cymbals, Vater drumsticks, Evans drumheads, DW hardware, Telefunken mics, and 64 Audio in-ear monitors.**

### Also on the Road

**Stanton Moore** with Galactic /// **Rob Wolfe** with Enter Shikari /// **Blake Richardson** with Between the Buried and Me /// **Greg Clifford** with White Denim /// **Matt St. Jean** with Astronoid /// **Tommy Clufetos** with Ozzy Osbourne /// **Jay Postones** with Tesseract



# Gretsch

## Brooklyn Series Micro Kit

Super-compact but full-sounding drumset for tight setups and modern jazz/fusion or breakbeat situations.

**The Brooklyn series** is one of Gretsch's most popular American-made offerings, largely due to having a more affordable price point without sacrificing the quality and timeless tones for which the company is known. Gretsch is able to keep the price of these handmade drums down by limiting the configurations and finishes. There is currently just one five-piece Brooklyn setup available, the GB-E8256, but the selection of four-piece offerings has recently expanded to five models, with the addition of the matte grey Micro Kit we have for review.

### The Series

While the Brooklyn series shell is similar to Gretsch's flagship 6-ply USA Custom, it's a little thicker and is made from a blend of maple and poplar rather than maple and gum. The bearing edges are the same as they are on all Gretsch USA drums (30 degrees), and the interiors are finished with the company's legendary Silver Sealer paint. These drums come with 302 hoops, which are 3 mm thick and are modeled after the double-flange design Gretsch employed until the mid 1950s, when it switched over to the thicker, firmer die-cast hoops that continue to be offered on USA Custom kits and on most of the company's snares.

The mounting hardware on the Brooklyn Micro Kit is simple and sturdy. The five-lug 7x10 rack tom has a diamond-shaped bracket attached straight to the shell, and the six-lug 12x13 floor tom has three sturdy G4825 brackets and thick 12.7 mm legs. The spurs are Gretsch's hinged, retractable G9013 model, and the tom mount is drilled directly into the eight-lug 12x16 bass drum shell. The GTH-SLC tom holder features a knurled L arm, a ball-and-socket angle adjuster, and an extra-long vertical post that can extend to place the rack tom about eye level when seated at the kit. The tom arm and post are locked into place with perfectly matched memory locks.

The six-lug 4.5x13 natural-finish snare came with Gretsch's classic Lightning throw-off system, which has a smooth and quick-releasing latch on one side and a large tension-adjustment knob on the other. The snare was outfitted with a single-ply, coated Permatone by Remo batter and a thin, hazy Permatone by Remo bottom. The toms also had single-ply, coated Permatone batters and clear single-ply bottoms. The bass drum had single-ply, coated Permatone by Remo heads on both sides. The natural maple bass drum hoops complement the unpainted snare to give the kit a complete and classy look. Retail price for the complete Micro Kit is \$3,165.

### Packs a Punch

As a huge fan of jazz legend Elvin Jones and modern master Ari Hoenig, both of whom have used a 16" bass drum to great effect, I was very excited to try the Brooklyn Micro Kit. The first thing I did was test the upper register of each drum by tuning it as high as it could go while still producing a full, open tone. This ended up being a G minor arpeggio in first inversion, with the 10" tom tuned to the tonic (G), the 13" floor tom tuned to the fifth (D), and the snare

tuned above the 10" to the minor third (Bb). The 16" bass drum tuned to Bb below the floor tom.

Even under a lot of head tension, each of the drums spoke clearly, fully, and with a pure pitch. The hefty 302 double-flange hoops controlled the decay of the toms and snare and provided a nice, cutting "crack" when used for rimshots. If you haven't checked out Gretsch's 302 hoops, they're an ideal middle ground between the tight, focused punch of die-cast and the softer and more resonant tones that accompany common triple-flange rims.

The 16" bass drum came with coated single-ply heads on front and back, which gave the drum the more open and ringing sound associated with a floor tom rather than a contemporary kick drum. For jazz and solo drumming, this little drum was great for inspiring more melodic ideas that incorporated the bass drum seamlessly within the phrases. Again, Elvin Jones and Ari Hoenig, as well as creative drumming great Jack DeJohnette, came to mind as I explored this kit at higher tunings.

To explore the rest of the Micro Kit's range, I backed off each drum by a minor third to achieve an E minor triad in first inversion (bass drum: G, floor tom: B, rack tom: E, snare: G). At this medium tuning, the snare took on an earthier quality, which is the sound that I most identify with the Gretsch drums used on my favorite Blue Note records from the '50s and '60s. The floor tom had a big, round, timpani-like tone, and the bass drum had more prominent low-end while still sounding very tonal. The rack tom wasn't quite as sonorous as the other drums; its sustain became a bit more truncated at lower tunings. Maybe this is a result of its size, or maybe it has something to do with the five-lug design Gretsch uses on rack toms. Either way, the drum still sounded great; it just didn't have the same fullness and openness as the snare and floor tom (both of which have six lugs).

Tuned a third lower, to a C# minor first-inversion triad (E, G#, C#, E), the Micro Kit became a lot punchier, with shorter sustain and a darker tonality. The bass drum had a more dissonant, papery tone,





which I actually enjoyed, especially when playing breakbeat grooves in the style of modern jazz/fusion drummer Nate Wood and the experimental rock band Soul Coughing. The floor tom had a nice, vintage-style thump while still producing a pure, full tone. The rack tom had a shorter note but still spoke quickly, and the snare packed a nice old-school punch without losing tone or articulation.

While I preferred the brighter and more melodic sounds the Micro Kit provided at higher tunings, it's a testament to Gretsch's world-renowned craftsmanship when a tiny setup like this can be coaxed to produce such deep tones.

**Michael Dawson**

# Vic Firth

## PureGrit and DoubleGlaze Drumsticks and VicWax Stick Wax

Specialty finishes and a tacky applique to enhance grip for sweaty or dry hands.

**For many drummers, Vic Firth's traditional** matte finish is a perfect middle point between the thicker, glossier coating found on old-school-style drumsticks and the coarser texture of those featuring raw-hickory grips. For extreme enhancement, the company introduced the antislip Vic Grip for a number of its most popular models. But for players who don't want to stray that far from a traditional drumstick feel yet need a little extra help keeping hold of the sticks, Firth created the PureGrit and DoubleGlaze 5A and 5B models, as well as a specially formulated Stick Wax that can be applied to any stick for extra tackiness. Let's check them out.

### PureGrit

Currently available in popular American Classic 5A (.565"x16") and 5B (.595"x16") sizes, PureGrit models are lacquer free and have been put through an abrasive processing that gives the raw wood a bit of grittiness and texture. These are meant for players with sweaty hands, and the perspiration and oil from the skin get absorbed into the wood, which softens the grittiness over time. I tend to get sweaty hands as I play, and while the regular Vic Firth finish has been fine for me in most situations, the PureGrit provided a nice, subtle alternative that grabbed my skin just enough to allow me to loosen my grip a bit without fear of the sticks flying across the stage as things started to heat up. Conversely, the PureGrit grip wasn't as abrasive as some other raw-finish options out there that have at times chewed away at the skin on my thumb and index finger when used for prolonged periods of time. If you're a standard 5A or 5B player and would like to have an alternative for especially sweaty situations (outdoor festivals, cramped clubs with hot stage lights, etc.), you might want to drop a pair of these in your stick bag. You probably won't notice a huge difference, other than fewer dropped sticks and mid-gig blisters. List price is \$16.25 per pair.

### DoubleGlaze

For drummers who want more lacquer on their sticks, Vic Firth created DoubleGlaze 5A and 5B models. These are meant for players with dry hands who enjoy the tackier feel of a thicker polish. The DoubleGlaze finish also adds a bit of mass, so these sticks feel a little heftier than the unfinished PureGrit version or models with the standard American Classic coating.

For my sweat-prone hands, the DoubleGlaze finish made the sticks a bit too slippery to maintain a comfortable and relaxed grip on live gigs. But when I used them in the climate- and humidity-controlled environment of the recording studio, I was able to experience the enhanced tackiness that the DoubleGlaze provides as it starts to heat up in the hand. The thicker finish also seemed to make the sticks more resistant to chipping and fraying from rimshots and cymbal swipes, translating into fewer dust particles on my studio floor. I can dig that. List price is \$16.25 per pair.

### VicWax

Now, if you inadvertently bring sticks with the wrong finish to the gig and need to mitigate grip-slip issues quickly, there's VicWax, which is a little blob of red wax that's specially formulated to be rubbed onto the drumstick to provide a tacky grip without excessive stickiness. While it's designed to stay mostly on the stick and not on your hands, VicWax is berry scented so there's none of the chemical odor that's sometimes associated with other stick grip sprays and appliques.

I tried the VicWax on PureGrit and DoubleGlaze sticks, as well as some regular-finish 3As, and it did its job well on all three. I found that the tackiness of the wax was most noticeable on the DoubleGlaze and was subtler on the raw PureGrit and standard sticks. Yet in neither case was the wax so sticky as to be distracting or disruptive to maintaining my normal relaxed grip. While there was a little bit of residual wax on my hands afterwards, it dissipated after a few minutes; alternatively, you can wash it off easily. While I don't typically struggle to maintain a solid grip of the sticks, it'll be nice to have this little 2"x1" container of VicWax on hand, especially when we transition into hot, sweaty summer festival season. List price is \$9.

**Michael Dawson**



# DW

## Collector's Series Pure Almond Snare

A super-limited drum built from wood harvested from California's T&P Farms.



**“Do I pick the hardest projects in the world?”** asks DW senior executive vice president John Good, rhetorically, in a promo video for the new Collector's Series Pure Almond series. “Yeah, I’m guilty.” The wood harvested for these drums—of which only fifty snares and fifty kits are being made—came from old trees found in the vast array of orchards at Arbuckle, California’s T&P Farms. Let’s find out if Good’s extra effort pays off.

### New Wood, New Shell Style

Almond is a difficult timber to work with, especially for drums, because the trees are thin—a maximum of 12" in diameter—and they rarely grow above 30 feet. The wood is also very dense, boasting a Janka scale measurement of 1,700, which is harder than rosewood, sugar maple, and most of the common species used in drum making. For these drums, DW had to create a new shell layup, which it’s dubbed “staggered tandem core.” The interior plies used in the Almond shells are formed from small rectangles of wood that are stacked vertically and offset horizontally to create a strong, stable core. The inner- and outer-finish plies are made from single laminates of almond and feature a gorgeous wavy and burl grain pattern.

### Sweet Specs

We got our hands on a prototype Pure Almond snare for review. It is identical in design to the fifty drums that are currently available. The finish is a luscious natural-to-toasted almond fade that goes from light to dark to light over the span of four lugs. The 12-ply shell measures 6.5x14 and features clean 45-degree bearing edges.

The turret lugs, heavy-duty 3 mm triple-flange True Hoops, MAG throw-off, and 3P butt plate have a classy nickel finish that’s not as shiny as chrome but still has a bright, crisp look. The heads are a Remo single-ply Ambassador Coated batter and an Ambassador Hazy snare side. The wires are DW’s twenty-strand TrueTone snappy variety. The True-Pitch stainless-steel tension rods have about 20 percent more threads than standard rods, translating into more exact and stable tuning.

### Tasty Tones

Out of the box, the Pure Almond snare was tuned right in the middle of its range, somewhere close to the shell’s resonant pitch of F, which is indicated on a sticker placed on the inside of the drum. The wires were at medium tension as well, providing a crisp response and just a touch of resonant rattle to complement the open, sonorous tone of the shell. Though plentiful, the overtones were balanced and controlled at low volumes, and they provided a strong, robust voice at higher dynamics.

To my ears, this unique drum felt most at home at medium and higher tunings, exhibiting impeccable range, projection, and articulation in the upper levels. Lower tunings elicited a punchier, chesty tone with an interesting downward pitch bend in the overtones shortly after the attack. If I had to use this drum at a lower tuning, I’d probably want to employ a touch of muffling to focus the pitch more in the midrange and to keep the shell from ringing out between backbeats. But the Pure Almond snare is really at its crunchiest and tastiest when put under a bit more tension. Check out a demo of the drum’s full tuning range at [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com).

**Michael Dawson**

# Yamaha

## Crosstown Advanced Lightweight Hardware

Half the weight without sacrificing stability.

**Like many gigging drummers,** I've been on a seemingly never-ending quest to construct the lightest setup possible. For the past month, I've been toting around the all-aluminum Yamaha Crosstown Advanced Lightweight hardware pack, which comprises two straight cymbal stands, a snare stand, a hi-hat stand, and a soft bag with protective sleeves. Each of the components is also available for purchase individually.

### The Hi-Hat

As I often do when testing hi-hat stands, I threw up a couple of 20" ride cymbals on the Crosstown Advanced to challenge the strength of the spring. The stand was a bit sluggish, but it held up the top cymbal with no sag. The spring tension isn't adjustable, but it's preset at a good point between easy to play and fast acting for crisp articulation. With my paper-thin 14" hi-hats, the pedal was super quick and responsive and felt very similar to Yamaha's standard HS650A single-braced stand. However, it weighs just 4.8 pounds, which is four pounds lighter than the single-braced steel version.

### Snare Stand

The Crosstown Advanced snare stand weighs 3.3 pounds, which is half the heft of Yamaha's single-braced steel offering. The features are otherwise very similar, and I felt no hesitation about putting my thick-shelled, die-cast hooped, 6.5x14 snare on this stand. It felt just as sturdy as the double-braced stand that has been in my hardware bag for many years.





### **Cymbal Stands**

The Crosstown Advanced cymbal stands are also remarkably light, at just 6.1 pounds each. A clever feature of these stands is the inclusion of interchangeable fittings that allow you to remove the middle tube if you don't need the extra height. Despite their ultra-light weight, the stands felt sturdy and didn't wobble or tilt more than any other lightweight stand. The only downside with these is that the uniquely shaped legs don't cozy up to the side of the bass drum as closely as flat-base stands do. Currently there aren't options for a boom or convertible boom in this series, but you could potentially Frankenstein boom arms from other Yamaha models with the Crosstown Advanced bases since the tube diameters are compatible.

### **Gig Bag**

The gig bag features a simple design, a lightly reinforced bottom, and small feet that elevate it off the ground about .5". The straps are long enough to throw over your shoulder and short enough to comfortably carry by your side. If you currently use a wheeled hardware case, don't fret—the Crosstown Advanced stands are so light that you won't miss having a bag with wheels. The bag seems sturdy enough, but time will tell how long it can withstand getting tossed into the trunk of a car and smashed into a closet. The protective sleeves will protect the aluminum from scratching and dinging when the stands are in the case.

### **Final Verdict**

These Crosstown Advanced stands are killer. When they were delivered, I couldn't wrap my head around how light they were. They're just as sturdy as steel, single-braced options, yet taken together have over ten pounds less heft. If you're looking to put together a super-lightweight setup, go check these out.

**Kyle Andrews**



# Agean

## R Series Low Noise Cymbals

Premium bronze cymbals perforated for minimal volume output.

**Agean Cymbals was established in 2002** by veteran Turkish artisans Mustafa Er and Halil Kirmizigul, who first started practicing traditional cymbal-making methods in 1978. Halil's son Samet manages the business side of the company, which boasts an extensive catalog of traditional and modern-style instruments. Agean also offers the unique R series cymbals, which are designed for low-volume practice and gigging situations. It's this line that we're taking a close look at this month.

### What Are They?

Like all Agean cymbals, the R Series Low Noise models are made from high-quality B20 bronze. Each cymbal is perforated with dozens of small holes across its surface, with several strategically placed bands—in the center, near the bow, and at the edge—that aren't drilled. This design brings down the overall volume output without completely eliminating the rich, musical tones of the metal. We received a pair of 14" hi-hats, 16" and 18" crashes, and a 20" ride. They're all medium-thin and have no significant hammering or lathing. Aside from all the holes, R Series cymbals have the same

profile and feel as conventional cymbals, so you won't need to change anything about your setup, hardware choice, or playing style in order to make use of them. Now let's move on to the bigger question....

### How Do They Sound?

Having plenty of experience with other low-volume cymbals currently being offered, I was curious to see how the R Series would fit in the mix—and if they would provide anything unique within this particular niche. Unlike the other options designed for ultimate volume control, the Ageans aren't coated with additional muting agents. Therefore they ring out more, produce fuller tones, and have a higher volume ceiling. But they do still have a limit that fell below that of Sabian's FRX models, which feature small holes placed to eliminate harsh frequencies.

The Ageans sat somewhere in the middle of those which I would call practice cymbals and the frequency-scooped FRX models. I wouldn't use the Ageans if I needed a near-silent practice/teaching setup; conversely, I wouldn't expect them to have enough cutting power for gigs that push into moderate volume levels. At dynamics





in between those two extremes, though, they worked very well. I really enjoyed using the R Series cymbals for practicing on my acoustic kit, for instance. They produced pleasing, balanced overtones with rich spread, clean attack, and smooth decay, but they caused less ear fatigue than regular cymbals do. And for recording situations where I was using a heavily dampened kit, the controlled volume of the R Series allowed for a more even dynamic balance between drums and cymbals without my having to sacrifice cymbal tone by taping them up or hitting them lighter than usual.

The 16" and 18" R Series crashes were my favorites of the bunch; they sounded nearly identical to the thin B20 crashes I use in most situations—just at about half the volume. The R Series ride had a nice blend of stick click and shimmer that was comparable to a medium-light ride, only quieter. The R Series hi-hats had the most

contrasting tone. The holes gave them a more compressed and digital-type attack, yet they still had a rich, warm, open sound.

I played a super-quiet blues gig in a concrete and brick room a few weeks back where I had to barely touch the cymbals to keep them from washing out. Had I had these Ageans on the kit, I would have felt much less restricted. They would also be a great option for drummers using electronic kits who want to incorporate acoustic cymbals without creating excessive stage sound. The R Series cymbals are offered in prepacks or as individual pieces. Check out [ageancymbals.com](http://ageancymbals.com) for more information.

**Michael Dawson**



**GEARING UP** ON STAGE  
AND UP CLOSE

# Larry Lelli

## of the Broadway Musical *Come from Away*

*Come from Away*, which was nominated for seven Tony awards in 2017, is one of Broadway's most popular shows. In-house contractor for the drum chair Larry Lelli tells us how his sonic decisions make an impact on the audience. "We really nerd out on this stuff, because it's important," he says. "Even if the people don't walk away saying, 'Wow, that guy used his ten-cymbal setup beautifully,' they know that they've had a full musical experience."

Lelli has been part of the show since the beginning. "During rehearsals, I worked closely with the music composer, orchestrator, and supervisor to make sure we had the right drum sound for what they were trying to deliver," he says. "The show is based in Newfoundland, so the music is a mix of Celtic, bluegrass, country, and pop. They wanted a warm, earthy, round tone from the drums with a modern punch. So we decided on a Yamaha Absolute Hybrid Maple kit. We went through at least twelve snares and ended up choosing the 5.5x14 brass because it reminded the orchestrator of Steve Gadd recordings, which he loved."

"After choosing the drums, I had an idea of what the cymbals should sound like," Lelli continues. "The Sabian Artisan series offers so many tones and colors, so they were the obvious choice. They are especially good for cymbal rolls and scrapes. Also, the O-Zone crashes are used in scary and suspenseful moments. I have several different sizes, and they bring a lot of character to the score."

Lelli is very conscious of supporting the music with his parts. "I'm constantly doing what I call 'text painting,'" he says, "to create a film-score presence underneath everything. Each song tells a story and is advancing the plot, so every sound we choose is for a specific reason."

Larry shares percussive responsibilities with a cast member who plays bodhrán, an Irish frame drum. "The producers were looking for ethereal sounds," Lelli says, "so that's where I pulled out the finger cymbals and various hand percussion. We brought in the LP Octo-Snare cajon because the low-end frequencies of a traditional cajon conflicted with the bodhrán. Because the bodhrán is covering a low-end rumble for most of the show, we wrote parts using Rutes, brushes, and rods to add some high-end frequencies to complement those rhythms."

Lelli's kit is isolated inside a soundproof booth so that the front-of-house engineer can give the audience a perfect mix. Larry views the cast and conductor through video monitors, and he relies on a pair of UltraPhones for his audio. "They provide the best monitor sound I've ever heard out of a pair of headphones," he insists.



### Drums: Yamaha Absolute Hybrid

Maple in red finish

- A. 5.5x14 Recording Custom Brass snare
- B. 7x10 tom
- C. 8x12 tom
- D. 13x14 floor tom
- E. 16x20 bass drum

### Cymbals: Sabian

- 1. 15" Artisan hi-hats
- 2. 15" HHX X-Treme crash
- 3. 20" HHX O-Zone crash
- 4. 16" HHX O-Zone crash
- 5. 10" HHX Evolution splash
- 6. 16" HHX X-Treme crash
- 7. 16" Artisan crash
- 8. 21" Vault Crossover ride
- 9. 17" Artisan crash
- 10. 18" HHX O-Zone crash

**Percussion:** Sabian 4" triangle, high and low suspended finger cymbals, and a pair of low handheld finger cymbals; 11" LP Galaxy djembe, Octo-Snare cajon, and Twist Medium shaker

**Hardware:** Yamaha Hexrack II system with 800 series booms, FP9500C chain-drive pedal, HS1200 hi-hat stand, and SS950 snare stand; Roc-N-Soc hydraulic throne with a backrest

**Sticks:** Vic Firth A55A sticks with ball tip, Split and Jazz wire brushes, 5ADT Dual-Tone sticks/mallets, Terry Gibbs Medium mallets, Rutes, and Tala Wands; homemade broom brushes

**Drumheads:** Remo 11" Nuskyn on djembe, Ambassador Renaissance on rack toms, Emperor Renaissance on floor tom, Ambassador Coated snare batter, and Powerstroke P4 Coated bass drum batter

**Accessories:** Kelly SHU bass drum mic mount, GK Music UltraPhones headphones, Big Fat Snare Drum dampeners, LP Aspire trap table, LP accessory tray, Vic Firth Stick Caddy and stick bag, Sabian triangle beaters, Remo HK-MUFF bass drum muffling system, and Moongel dampening pads

**Electronics:** Yamaha DT50S triggers on toms, DT50K trigger on kick, and DT-10 triggers on djembe and cajon

Interview by Dave Previ

Photos by John Fell



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# What You Need to Know About...

# Plywood Snare Drums

by Michael Dawson

It's been said many times over the years, by top drummers and producers alike, that the most sonically significant component of the drumset is the snare drum. This is why recording studios and cartage companies often boast extensive collections comprising all different types and sizes, and this is why manufacturers consistently add new models each year.



While there isn't a one-size-fits-all snare that will sound perfect in every situation, you really can't go wrong by basing your collection on a well-made wood-shell drum. As touring and recording great Kenny Aronoff explained in the September 1991 issue of *Modern Drummer*, "Start with a [shallow] metal drum and a [deep] wood. That will cover a lot of situations." We'll leave the discussion of metal options for a later date. Here, we'll focus on wood snares, specifically those featuring plywood shells, since they're the most cost-effective and readily available options.

## The Variables

Not all plywood shells are created equally, and there are many factors that go into the quality of sound that these types of drums produce. The most important piece of the puzzle is the timber being used.

Ply shells are crafted from thin laminates of wood that can be from one species of tree or combinations of different species. Oftentimes more expensive and visually/sonically pleasing timber is used for the inside and outside laminates, while cheaper wood is used for the interior plies. Back in the day, this was a way for companies to cut costs while still being able to advertise their products as featuring a high-quality maple shell, for example. But if you look closely at the makeup of any vintage 3-ply drum shell, you'll spot exterior plies of maple or mahogany and an interior ply of poplar or gum. That's not to say that those drums don't sound great. In fact, many would argue that they're actually superior sounding to some contemporary drums. It's just important to point out that simply because a drum is advertised as maple, birch, mahogany, bubinga, etc., it doesn't mean that the shell is 100-percent that species.

It's also important to point out that there are different types of wood that fall within a single category, such as birch, maple, and mahogany. Again, some due diligence on your part will go a long way when you're determining whether or not a particular drum is the right choice for you. For instance, Philippine mahogany (aka luan) sounds quite different from African mahogany and is considerably less expensive.

The profile of the bearing edges and the overall shell thickness, as well as the thickness of the individual plies, are also critical factors in how a wood snare sounds and performs. To a lesser

degree, the glue used to adhere the laminates together and the finish (lacquer, stain, or wrap) influence the final outcome as well.

## The Control Group

In order to compare the sonic characteristics of different wood types, Chris Carr at Bucks County Drums built identical 6x14 4-ply snare drums out of six different species: maple, birch, cherry, walnut, jatoba, and hickory. These were chosen because they provided a nice balance between some of the most popular options (maple, birch, cherry, and walnut) and two harder species (Brazilian jatoba and North American hickory). All the drums feature the same bearing-edge profiles (45 degrees with a slight round-over), triple-flange steel hoops, a Trick GS007 throw-off, and Evans drumheads (G1 Coated batter and 300 Series snare side).

We tested each drum across the entire tuning range to get a sense of where each timber sounded best. The heads were pitched-matched with a Tune-Bot digital tuner to ensure that the sonic similarities and differences we observed between the drums were due to the wood itself and not discrepancies in drumhead tension.

## Maple: Big, Warm Classic

If you're only going to own a single wood-shell snare, maple is a great place to start. It has a big, warm, balanced sound that works well at any tuning and in any musical style. Because maple has been the top timber choice for drum shells for nearly a century, it has a very familiar tone that can feel a little vanilla if you're looking for something with a more specialized flavor. But it's a mainstay for a reason: it works.



Maple

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Birch



Cherry

### Birch: Focused Punch

Contrasting the open, full voice of maple, birch-shell snares tend to have a shorter sustain, a snappier attack, and a more focused tone. Traditionally, birch drums are favored in the recording studio because they excel under microphones, producing fewer extreme frequencies and lingering overtones that can wreak havoc on a mix. I've always shied away from birch drums, mainly because they were often marketed as "budget" options. But a well-made birch drum is a strong contender for being "the one," especially if you prefer a quick, articulate, studio-ready snare sound.

### Cherry: A Happy Medium

More and more manufacturers are offering cherry wood, either blended with other timbers or as a single-species shell. Possessing a similarly focused, punchy attack to birch but with a wider frequency spectrum like maple, cherry snares are very versatile. If a maple snare has too much tone and the sustain of birch is a little too short

for you, cherry could be an ideal choice. It's not drastically different from either wood, however, so I'd caution against adding a cherry drum to a collection already containing high-quality maple and birch drums. Conversely, if you're looking to thin out your lineup, then you could ditch those and get a cherry to cover both roles.

### Walnut: Dark Yet Modern

Walnut is an interesting timber. It has a lot of the rich, low frequencies that you'd expect from a dark-sounding vintage drum, but the high end is crisp and snappy, and the midrange is scooped out a bit. The combined result is a satisfying earthy tone within a clean, contemporary context. If you play mostly acoustically—that is, without close mics or extensive processing—you'll likely prefer the deep, ear-friendly vibe of walnut. It's also an excellent choice if you want something that provides a stark contrast to a drum with a more biting tone.

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## Plywood Snare Drums



Walnut



Hickory

### Jatoba: Extra Bite

Speaking of bite, jatoba is a dense timber that has a similar hardness to more traditional drum-making woods like oak and bubinga. While it can be coaxed to produce a deep, fat tone—via tuning, head selection, and dampening—jatoba excels in the middle and higher registers, effectively bridging the gap between wood and metal. It



Jatoba

has a bright and clean tone, super-crisp attack, and a lot of projection. If you often steer away from wood snares for a lack of power, check out a drum made from a hardwood like jatoba. It's a beast.

### Hickory: Airy Snap

While not as dense as jatoba, hickory is one of the hardest timbers found in North America. Sonically, hickory has a unique tone. It has a lot of cut and projection, but its overtones are airier than those of any of the other timbers discussed here. This results in a drum with a strong and powerful attack, crisp and snappy articulation, and a more powdery tone. I think of hickory as the aluminum of the wood species. It hits hard and sits perfectly in nearly any mix, but it leaves plenty of sonic space for other instruments.

We've just scratched the surface here when it comes to the various types of woods being used to make snare drums. But hopefully this primer helps put you down the right path when it comes time to purchase a high-quality plywood snare drum. Just remember to always trust your ears. They will guide you right.



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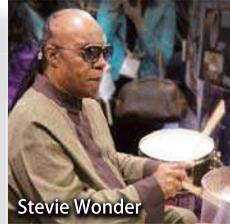
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# Fishbone's Philip "Fish" Fisher

He left the influential, explosive ska-punk-funk band, which he founded with his brother, to build a career as a high-caliber hired gun. When he returned to the fold after a decade and a half, he was that much wiser.

**MD:** What brought the band back together?

**Fish:** The members that are here today had a burning desire to hear the music played with an integrity that at a minimum was where we left it in the late '90s. [It might not have happened] if it wasn't for my brother giving me the call saying, "Hey, come take this chair back," and then after being back, reaching out to original members Chris Dowd and John Bigham, saying, "I can't make this thing do what it's supposed to do without you." We all grew up together, and therefore we all speak the same language, and that is what Fishbone is. Also, after playing with so many other artists, I realized that there is no other music in which I get to express myself as much as Fishbone.

**MD:** What caused you to leave Fishbone in the first place?

**Fish:** The band wasn't in a good place when I left. We were in between records, and it was difficult to get along much less write a three-and-a-half-minute song. The infighting in the band was more than I could endure. There wasn't a lot of income at the time, and I'm not the type of guy to do a job other than drumming. Drumming is how I take care of my family. I also had a fight with my brother Norwood, and no situation is more important than my relationship with my brother, so because of those things I left.

**MD:** Was it easy to jump back in the chair?

**Fish:** Hell, no! The band was in the middle of a tour where they were playing the music of our record *Chim Chim's Badass Revenge* when the drummer walked off the gig. That's when Norwood called me and asked me to get back with the band. Of all of our records, this is the one that I never really listened to, and after saying yes to filling in, I listened to it and thought to myself, *Wow, there's a lot of music in these songs!* There's so much "ear candy" that we put into these tunes that I really had to listen back to get it all right. The challenge was remembering the goals of my drumming and how the music was built and getting the parts to lock up, because I always try to make music with my drumming, not just for the sake of it but for the musical situation, and that becomes challenging to recreate.

**MD:** Fishbone's music is so fun to listen to, and the drumming is always interesting. Talk about your process of creating parts.

**Fish:** Sometimes it just happens, and then there are the times when we say, "Let's go ahead and make some fun ear candy." We're always working from some riff or idea and thinking about how we want the drums to fit along with the other bits and pieces. But once you learn it, it's got to breathe at some point, it's gotta live at some point, and we gotta find what the spirit of the song is and always be

able to evoke the spirit of that song. And then we try to milk it and add those little things that will help you remember that section of the song or the sound in that section, the nuances. I did a Hendrix tribute gig recently and was listening back, and I'm still hearing new things! We're just trying to do that with our records.

**MD:** You started out with a band, and then you became independent. What does it take to be an independent drummer?

**Fish:** I'm not a guy who plays a single genre of music. I would encourage drummers to be as diverse as possible, because that's going to increase your ability to work. But if you're setting yourself out to do one genre, you've got to learn the full parameters of what that is and milk it for what it's worth. It's not something I would recommend. It will eventually limit your longevity, because creators are looking outside their genre for influence and inspiration.

In my experience, nobody only listens to one thing. I'm always practicing, and whatever I'm listening to, I'll get right in and just play it, and it's always something different. Today it's Fela's "Lady"; tomorrow it's some math metal. Take all the gigs you can get, because you never know who's going to be there or what it's going to lead to. Just make sure you do the preparations and know your records. I live by the phrase "Stay ready so you don't have to get ready." You gotta dream big and head in that direction, without doubt. Also, study the history of genres, because that will add depth to what you play.

**MD:** What's your main goal for your students?

**Fish:** I want to teach them and empower them to creatively fly fearlessly in their purpose and actualize their fullest potential. I'm trying to open people's minds to the beauty of music from all around the world. I want to prevent them from ever having callused hands, tendinitis, or carpal tunnel.

**MD:** How about bettering yourself as a drummer?

**Fish:** I looked at as much footage as I could find, from the oldest to the newest, to see what the greats looked like when they played soft dynamics or loud dynamics, and what techniques they were using. I tried to see how they were breathing and what their composure was. I did nothing in [the three years] between [1988's] *Truth and Soul* and *The Reality of My Surroundings* except study and practice.

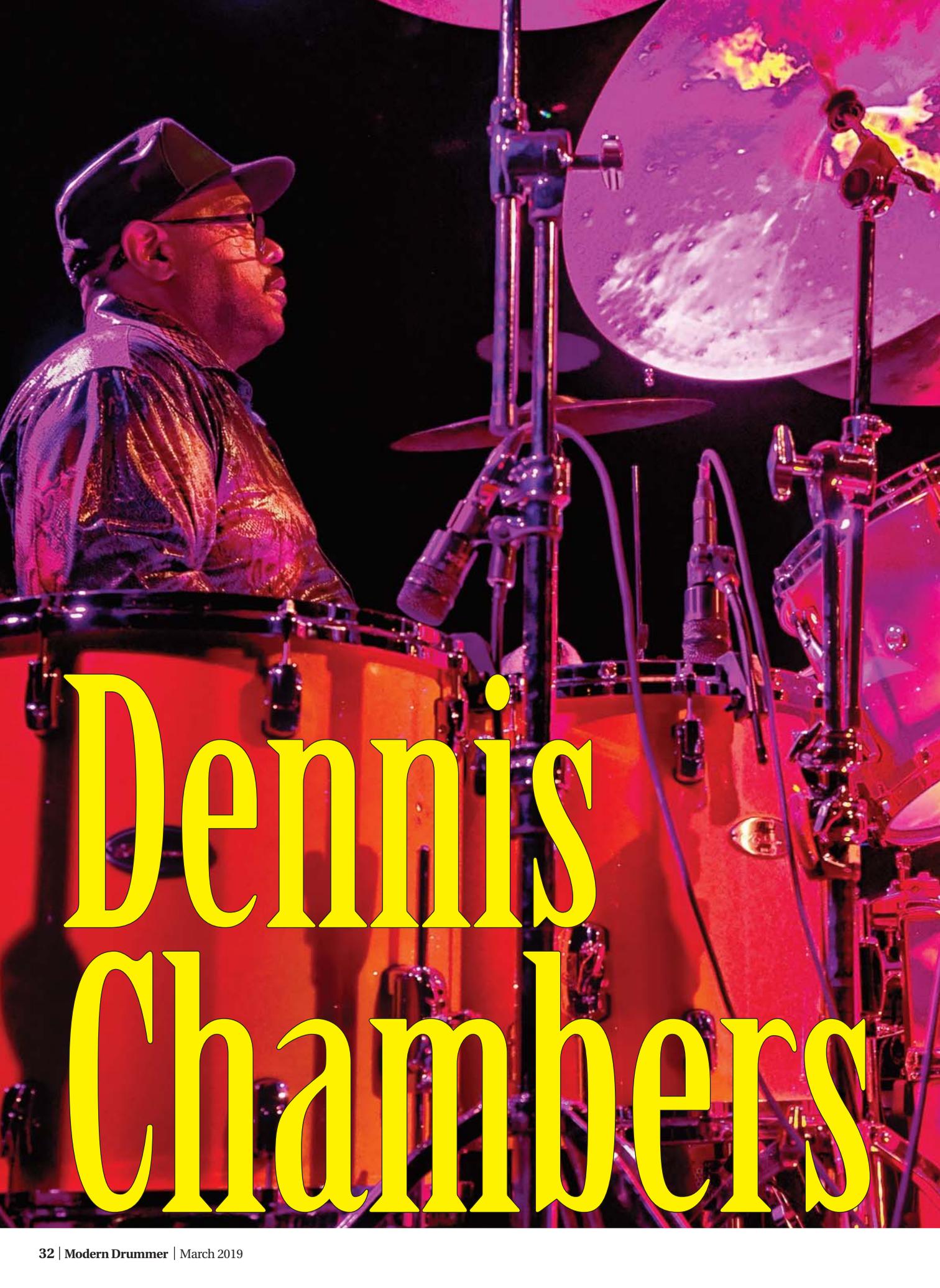
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**Philip "Fish" Fisher plays DW drums and Zildjian cymbals. He uses Promark sticks, Remo heads, and DW hardware.**



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# Dennis Chambers



**Dennis Chambers has Victor Wooten** on the ropes. With a gleam in his eye, DC takes control of the out vamp and thrills the Blue Note crowd with a flourish of sweeps and displaced beats, as Wooten furiously nods his bass along to the drummer's spatial modulations. Dennis the Menace is back, for sure, and in this heightened musical moment with Wooten's trio, it's hard to imagine that less than five years ago he lay near death in a hospital in Alicante, Spain. Waking from a coma, Chambers didn't know if he would ever play drums again. First he had to think about staying alive.

One of the most influential drummers of his generation, Dennis Chambers has been thrilling and confounding listeners almost since he began playing at the age of three. His mother sang in nightclubs in the Baltimore area, so Dennis got an early look at the musician's lifestyle. He began soaking up sounds like a sponge, studying bebop drummers when other kids were reading Dr. Seuss. He became a Sugar Hill Records session drummer, and at the age of eighteen took a gig with George Clinton's Parliament-Funkadelic. Seven years later, in 1986, he joined guitarist John Scofield's band, turning the fusion world on its ear with the *Loud Jazz* and *Blue Matter* albums. Gigs with Mike Stern, Maceo Parker, Bill Evans, the Brecker Brothers, John McLaughlin, Niacin, and Steely Dan would follow, as well as Tone Center Records dates with Bunny Brunel and Tony MacAlpine (CAB), Uncle Moe's Space Ranch, Greg Howe and Victor Wooten, Boston T Party, Scott Henderson and Jeff Berlin, and Steve Khan.

Chambers took over the drum chair in Santana in 2002 and stayed with the band for a dozen years, playing on 2005's *All That I Am*, 2010's *Guitar Heaven*, and 2012's *Shape Shifter*. Chambers' last appearance on a Santana album was 2014's *Corazón*, on which he shared drum duties with

Cindy Blackman-Santana.

The drummer has recorded a handful of solo albums as well, most recently 2013's *Groove and More*, featuring Brian Auger, Patti Austin, Stanley Jordan, Dora Nicolosi, Scott Henderson, and Gregg Kofi Brown. "I wanted to make the most that I possibly could out of the music on the album," Chambers says. "To tell you the truth, I was really surprised how it turned out, but I had two great producers that I learned to trust."

The following July, while on a European tour with Mike Stern, Chambers suffered massive bleeding from the lining of his esophagus. With the support of his family and friends like Lenny White, Billy Cobham, and the late Alphonse Mouzon, Dennis recovered his health. And now he's back playing shows and recording with Mike Stern—2017's *Trip* is named for the guitarist's own recent physical mishap—and for the last two years he's been part of bassist Victor Wooten's trio with woodwind player Bob Franceschini. The trio has been touring widely behind the highly entertaining *Trypnotyx* album; the long, syncopated flow of "Dc10," the face-puckering funk of "Liz & Opie," the cross-stick conviction of "Cruising Altitude," and the flawless flourishes closing "A Little Rice and Beans" are all evidence of a curious, dedicated drummer back at the very top of his craft.

Story by Robin Tolleson • Photos by Steve Parke



**MD:** Michael Shrieve, Graham Lear, and you have had the longest runs of all the drummers in Santana—and there are a number of other great players who’ve also worked with the band.

**Dennis:** Yeah, twelve years with Santana—I don’t know where to start with that. It was a very interesting ride when I was there, and it was pretty cool. But I always said to Carlos, “You know, you’ve got to be happy.” And it seemed like the way it ended, he wasn’t happy with me being there. So I took it upon myself to remove myself, because at the end of the day he’s got to be happy.

**MD:** The *Guitar Heaven* covers album is interesting—did you listen to the originals for inspiration? “Sunshine of Your Love” is way different from the original, and “Back in Black” with Nas is ripping.

**Dennis:** Yeah, some of them I did listen to, and other songs I didn’t because Carlos wanted to change them a bit.

**MD:** *Shape Shifter* has some beautiful instrumentals.

**Dennis:** It was typical—Carlos had us all in at the same time, and we all played live right to the track. No overdubbing or anything like that. He called a song, and we just played it.

**MD:** Had you been playing those songs live?

**Dennis:** We’d been working them up. And there was some stuff that he brought to the studio. He would play and he’d say, “Hey, check this out.” And then we’d learn it and record the pieces. With Carlos, every day we performed there was a rehearsal. And some

stuff he would bring to the gig and say, “Hey, I need you to learn this.” The day of the gig, he would bring two or three songs into soundcheck—which was also our rehearsal, by the way—and say, “Learn this.” We’d learn the songs, and sometimes we’d play them, and sometimes we wouldn’t. I’ve got about sixty CDs of music from over the years that I had to learn but that we didn’t play.

You know, Carlos always wanted to keep it moving. He wanted to keep the band sparked, I guess. He never wanted to sound boring. Sometimes you’d be getting ready to count a song off, and he’d wave you

off and play something else. So he always kept you guessing. The first three songs on the set list were etched in stone, but after that you didn’t know what was going to happen—which is good.

**MD:** On “Macumba in Budapest” and “Erin la Luz,” it sounds like you’re playing kick, hat, and cymbals, leaving it more open for the percussion.

**Dennis:** When I join a unit, the first thing I want to do is to figure out how it’s going to work. With [percussionists] Karl Perazzo and Raul Rekow it was very easy, because basically we’d just play, trying to leave



spaces and holes. It was pretty easy for me because all I had to do was sit and listen. Play, of course, but sit and listen, and then pick where you can do certain things. All three of us have got chops, but sometimes Carlos wants certain things from the drum chair, and it was kind of hard to do at first because I was still learning the music and trying not to step on Karl and Raul's toes. I learned later that they were doing the same thing for me.

It's like working with Don Alias, rest his soul. You could throw Don into any situation, and he'd just make it work. His history ran deep with drummers—Tony Williams, Elvin Jones, Billy Cobham, Jack DeJohnette. It doesn't get any deeper than that. Plus he played mad drumset. You find other guys that are genius percussionists, but they can't play with a drummer because they're too busy trying to do it all. They're trying to be a percussionist and a drummer at the same time, and that's where it becomes a problem.

**MD:** You and Raul and Karl were like one person.

**Dennis:** Well, that's the way the music had to present itself. Despite what they thought they knew about me—which was that I was a guy with mad chops, a total groovemaster or whatever—my thing was like, "Let's throw that aside and figure out how we're going to make this work." The answer was very clear: you've got to listen to each other. That's a problem with a lot of young guys now—they just don't listen. They walk into a room and it becomes their show—but it's not. You're hired to deliver a certain quality of music, of percussion, and you can't do that if you're back there soloing all over the place. That's when you're not listening. Or you're listening for how to make it work for *you*, when you can do the craziest drum fill so other drummers in the house can go, "Oh my God, that was crazy." It wasn't like that for us. Carlos Santana's name was on the bill. He's paying us to play his music, and that's what we did.

**MD:** The track "Oye 2014" on the *Corazón* album features Pitbull, and you do some nice snare work on it, with more of a straight-up feel than the original.

**Dennis:** That's all a big blur to me now. The only thing I remember from those recording sessions is it was the last time I recorded with Raul Rekow and Karl Perazzo and my first time recording with Herbie Hancock. But I really miss Raul, man. There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about that guy. He left us too soon.

**MD:** We almost lost *you* in 2014.

**Dennis:** Yeah. It was interesting waking up

in the hospital in Spain, not knowing how I got there. I was like, "Where am I? *Who* am I?" Everybody was moving in slow motion, speaking broken English, and they were trying to tell me how close to death I was. Because what they'd told Mike Stern and Bill Evans was that they couldn't do anything else for me, that it was up to me whether I wanted to live or die. I didn't know. So I came out of the coma, looked around, and tried to figure things out.

Mike was telling me that they found me on the floor in my hotel room, in my blood. So I was bleeding out. I had holes on my

esophagus and didn't know it.

**MD:** They thought that they'd treated you for that, right?

**Dennis:** Yeah, it all came from acid reflux. I suffered with it in my teenage years, and it just got worse and worse. It got to the point where I couldn't eat anything with tomato sauce or apple juice—even orange juice would get me. If I wanted to eat pizza it would have to be at a certain time of day. Sometimes at night I would wake up running to the furthest bathroom in the house, so nobody could hear me. I'm in there throwing up, and I'm thinking that's



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## Dennis Chambers

how they're going to find me, slumped over a toilet, because I couldn't breathe. It would just come up and go down the windpipe, and the next thing, you're choking. They cured me of it, but the damage was done. I had all these holes in my esophagus lining because of the acid reflux.

**MD:** All of us fans appreciate Mike's persistence in looking for you.

**Dennis:** Yeah, normally he worries a lot. But on this one he nailed it right. Hotels don't normally give you the key to somebody's room, but he got them to open the door, and there I was, lying there. And by the time they found me, they said my skin was turning grey.

**MD:** And there was a good bit of recovery involved.

**Dennis:** I didn't play drums for a year. In fact I didn't even know if I was going to play drums again. I had no desire to play. Pearl sent me this yellow see-through Crystal Beat kit. I had them set up in my living room, and every morning I would walk right past that room, look at that drumkit, and not play it. I'd call friends over to play it, just so I could hear what it sounded like. And then one day Mike offered me the gig to play at Blues Alley down there in Washington. I took the gig, played it, and Mike, Bob, and everybody else was saying that I sounded better than ever. And that's after not even touching the drums for about a year. The only thing I can say is maybe it's because I had all that time to just think about—or clear my mind of—rhythms. So therefore when I sat down I had a fresh approach.

I had another look at how to play the drums, actually. Or what I was hearing, I just heard it in a different way. I had a lot of time to think about it. I would sit there and listen to somebody like Nate Wood, just to try to hear where he was—or Steve Jordan. Chris Dave, too. Listening, it makes me think of it differently, and I'm going to play differently. I hear something, I go with it, and whatever happens, happens. If it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen, but most likely it does.

**MD:** How did you know that you were ready to get back to playing?

**Dennis:** Well, I was going to just play and let the hands fall where they may. You know, to see if they were ready. If they weren't then so be it. But it worked. The place was packed. People knew that I hadn't played in a year. They wanted to find out if I still had it. Some people came to see me fail! [laughs] It was really weird.

**MD:** Was it a challenge endurance-wise?

**Dennis:** Yeah. My hands felt rubbery at first. The first three songs felt strange—then they would just come back.

**MD:** You used to play long shows, like with P-Funk. Have you ever had to think about pacing yourself before?

**Dennis:** No. When [P-Funk leader] George Clinton came to town, I would go see him, and I kind of imagined myself doing that gig again. He would go out and play everything they know, six-hour shows, and [eventually] I was like, "Man, I can't do that anymore." Although Santana was some long gigs. But you know, when you're doing it, eighteen, nineteen, twenty pieces of music goes by really quick. Every night, as soon as we finished, someone would bring me the CDs of the gig to listen to. So I've got quite a big collection of Santana's live music.

**MD:** Did everybody get one to check out?

**Dennis:** No. Carlos wanted me to hear them, just to tell him what I thought of the mixes.

**MD:** That shows respect.

**Dennis:** Yeah, and it's vice versa. I've got a lot of respect for him, too, as a bandleader, a guy who's been doing this since the '60s. And he's still moving, although I haven't seen the band with Cindy yet. But I can imagine that's going to be interesting. I would like to see it just to see what spin she's got on it.

**MD:** Longevity isn't guaranteed in this business. Is it a challenge to

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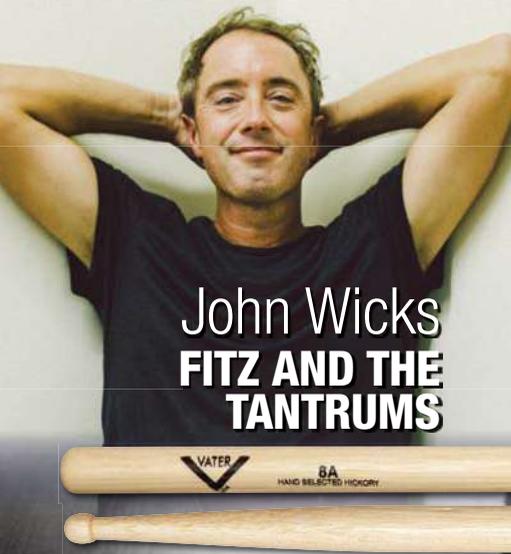
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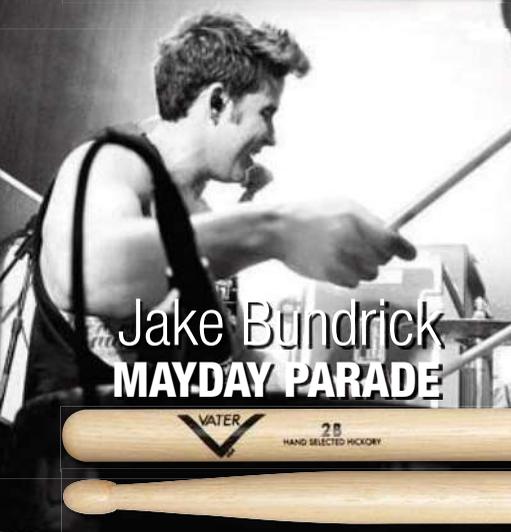
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## Dennis Chambers



stay busy and relevant?

**Dennis:** Well, a gig is a gig. I mean, I remember even Tony Williams would say to me, "Hey, man, if you need me to sub, call me up." And I was playing with P-Funk then—imagine that! I just try new things, man, try to keep it going. There's nothing new about any of this; even the styles come around every twenty years. So I listen to people that capture my ear, like that group Kneebody with Nate Wood on drums. Nate's a bad man—he's kicking butt. There's a video where he's playing drumkit, bass guitar, and keyboard, all at the same time. I like Nate. Really interesting. People like him and Steve Jordan—Jordan always captures my ear because he's thinking way outside the box. And then you have Chris Dave, who's another interesting guy.

**MD:** Your drumming keeps expanding. Are there other people that you enjoy hearing?

**Dennis:** Yeah, there's Mike Mitchell, who used to play with Stanley Clarke. He's a bad boy, and I like listening to him. And of course Lenny White will still catch my ear. He's got this record that I'm in love with called *Anomaly*. There's a lot of great stuff on it. Then there's Thomas Pridgen out there on the West Coast, and Ronald Bruner. I like to check out those guys. Mike Mitchell's band played the second show at the Blue Note when we were there, and they were killin'.

**MD:** What do you mean when you use the term "linear playing"?

**Dennis:** It goes all kinds of weird ways for me. Sometimes I don't even think of what

time I'm in. I hear a melody, and I'll go with it, but it may not be in the same tempo as what's going down at that moment, you know. Sometimes I think in terms of splitting the hands up, playing a dotted 8th note on the ride cymbal and all kinds of crazy things with the left hand going totally against what's on the right hand. And my feet are doing different things.

Sometimes I test myself just to see how far I can go, and sometimes it'll fall apart. But when it falls apart, I'm learning from this. Like I'll play seven on the right hand, five on the left, maybe nine on the bottom half, to, you know, see where the cycles would go, how far the thing would go before it lands on 1. Sometimes I try it and it works; sometimes it doesn't.

**MD:** Are you talking about beat displacement and time modulation?

**Dennis:** Yeah. It's funny to watch the other band members when you're going through it—how they've got to keep it together. Sometimes, playing with Victor, he's looking, and then he can't look. He's got to look away and concentrate on where he is.

**MD:** You and Victor must have a great musical bond.

**Dennis:** Yeah, you can't pull it on just anybody, you know. You've got to be very careful who you play with when you're doing this. I mean, I've played with some guys, and they'll just stop.

**MD:** When you're presented with a piece of music by Victor or Mike that's challenging, would you ask what the time signatures

and arrangement are, or just find the pulse yourself and work it out?

**Dennis:** No, if it's a new piece they'll tell me what it is, and then I've got to figure out what to do with it. When I played with John McLaughlin, he would throw some stuff on you; a song would be in like nineteen or twenty-one, whatever. He's going to tell you what it is, but you've got to figure it out. That's one guy I really miss playing with, because he just kept your mind constantly going.

**MD:** And then you've got to make it sound relaxed.

**Dennis:** Right. Well, after a period of time with John, people would say that everything that I played sounded like it was in 4/4, even though it wasn't. It just felt good to them. It's like they weren't thinking about counting anything; they would sit there listening to it and grooving to it. And I'm not counting. I remember one night he said, "Purple Haze" in fifteen." And I'm thinking, "Okay, well, there's a lot of different ways you can play fifteen." I let him start it [and I listen for] where he played the melody, so I could hear where he was dropping the 1.

Fifteen is easy anyway. It's just three fives. But the song is in four. So I look at him, forgetting that John counts everything straight out. He doesn't subdivide anything too much. His foot is constantly moving, and what you're hearing and what you're seeing are two different things. So when he gets into these weird time signatures, like a lot of those Mahavishnu pieces... that one song that was in twenty-one, he didn't subdivide it, whereas everybody else was subdividing all over the place.

One night we played "You Know, You Know," and I'm trying to play it the way Billy [Cobham] played it. John says to me, "Why are you doing that?" I'm like, "What do you mean?" He says, "Yeah, he never played that song right." I'm like, "Well, on all the tapes I have, it sounded to me like he played it right." He said, "Well, the song is in four." I'm like, "In four?" The way Billy played it, it didn't sound like it's in four. I thought it was in another time signature. But when John told me it was written in four, it all made sense.

**MD:** I see you switching back and forth between matched grip and traditional grip—mid-song sometimes. Is that a conscious thing?

**Dennis:** No, it's something that I feel in the moment. I do know the difference between those two grips and what it does for me and how it feels to me. When I'm playing with traditional grip, it's more of a focused sound, and I have more control. If I'm playing matched grip, it's more for power. If I've got

## Chambers' Setup

**Drums:** Pearl Masterworks Series with maple shells

- 6.5x14 Dennis Chambers Signature snare or Masterworks Series Maple model
- 8x10 tom
- 8x12 tom
- 9x13 tom
- 14x14 floor tom
- 16x 16 floor tom
- 14x20 gong drum
- 16x20 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Zildjian

- 13" Mastersound hi-hats (two bottom cymbals)
- 16" K Custom Dark crash
- 17" K Custom Dark crash
- 18" K Custom Dark crash
- 13" Mastersound aux hi-hats (two top cymbals)
- 22" Custom ride
- 20" Oriental Crash of Doom or 20" K Prototype China

**Hardware:** Pearl, including Icon straight rack and P2002C double pedal

**Heads:** Evans G2 Coated snare batter and Clear 300 snare side; G2 Clear tom batters (for rock and fusion gigs) or Coated (for jazz) and Genera Clear resonants; EMAD Clear gong drum batter; EMAD Clear bass drum batter

**Sticks:** Zildjian Dennis Chambers Signature wood-tip model

**Mics:** DPA

**Accessories:** PureSound B1420 Blaster series snare wires, Evans EQ Pad bass drum mufflers, Evans magnetic drum key

to play hard then I'll play open handed, or matched grip. You shouldn't notice that I'm using the two different grips, though. The sound doesn't change.

**MD:** You have good posture. Does that help you relax in your playing?

**Dennis:** When I come out, I always approach the kit slowly. I sit there and get a feel for where the kick is and where the hi-hat stand is. And from there I sit straight, because I believe there's a center of that drumkit. Like if I sit there and that bass drum pedal is off to the right or the left a little bit, I'm going to feel that. Or if the hi-hat stand is too far to the left, I'm going to feel that. So when I sit there, even though I did soundcheck already, I make sure the pedals are where they're supposed to be, and I look at the center of the bass drum where the rack toms are, making sure that my 12" and 13" toms are in a certain spot where there's an easy flow to the kit.

Sometimes when guys get a rack system, their tom-tom, either a 12" or a 13", is in the

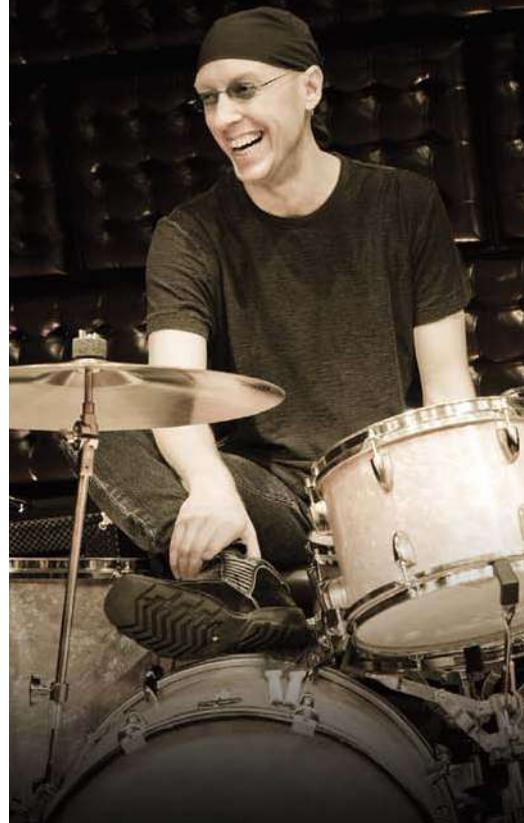


Photo credit: Rob Shanahan

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## Dennis Chambers

center of the bass drum, and I don't think they know that that's a bad habit. For me, wherever that snare drum is, that 12" has got to be right up in front of it. Therefore when you roll around, there's a flow to it. If you've seen videos of me from above, it almost looks effortless. It just looks like I'm sitting in my living room, because of the flow of the drumkit. I'm sitting there looking like I'm reading the newspaper or something, because the kit is easy for me to play due to the way it's set up. I know where everything is, and I don't have to stretch to hit things. The only thing I have to stretch for is that 18" floor tom.

**MD:** Do you ever hear drummers and think, *Hmm, that sounds familiar.*

**Dennis:** Yeah, I've had that experience, where I heard somebody play something and I'm like, *That's interesting; I did that twenty years ago.* There's this one thing called the Baltimore Sweep, or the Sweep, or whatever they call it now. It's two beats on the bass drum, one beat on the snare and floor tom, and you go back and forth. It sounds like a paradiddle.

Especially with the gospel players, I hear it. I just have to chuckle. That's how it goes. I'm sure that Billy Cobham probably hears

things from me that I got from him. He's probably sitting there chuckling, too. I'm not afraid to say it. I learned a lot by listening to people like him and Tony Williams, Jack DeJohnette, Lenny White. Those are my favorite guys, man. Alphonse Mouzon. But Billy Cobham and Tony Williams: they really pushed the envelope. I mean, people still can't...drummers don't play like that now. I've got tapes of Billy with Mahavishnu, and some of that stuff I listen to and think, *This guy was on another planet.* Same thing with Lenny White.

**MD:** *Trypnotyx* is great. "Caught in the Act" reminds me of Herbie Hancock's "Actual Proof."

**Dennis:** I always wanted to play "Actual Proof." I brought the song to the band and they shot me down, but Bob Franceschini said he had a song that sounded like "Actual Proof," and that's "Caught in the Act."

**MD:** I can hear the Clyde Stubblefield and Jabo Starks influence on "Liz & Opie."

**Dennis:** Victor doesn't come up with any drum parts. He just says, "Here's the music—play." So I'm there sketching stuff out like a painter. We recorded that album in pieces. Victor had come up with this idea of having bass, drums, and saxophone—I mean, who

would have thought of that? When he told me about it, I was thinking, *I don't know about this*, not knowing what he had in mind, you know, what he was going to do with this unit. Bob is a bad boy, he can *play*. And watching Victor every night, where he goes through all of these different things, flying stuff in with a foot switch. While you're hearing bass you're also hearing organ or flute or strings.... They're really deep people; they think outside the box.

**MD:** Are you referring to the Wooten family?  
**Dennis:** Yeah. Regi, Roy, Joe—they all think outside the box.

**MD:** You can make odd times, like on "Dc10" from *Trypnotyx*, sound like 4/4. And not like an exercise, but like music.

**Dennis:** I don't count it; I just feel it. After playing with John McLaughlin, nothing with odd time signatures fazes me. Gadd's like that, too. I'll never forget this: I was in New York one night, and I went to see Gadd play with Michael Urbaniak and Anthony Jackson. These guys played everything *but* 4/4, and it was really amazing. But everything sounded like it was in four, even though we knew it wasn't.

**MD:** Anything with Anthony Jackson and Steve Gadd is going to be good.

**Dennis:** Anything with Anthony and *anybody* is going to be good. Anthony, and Steve Ferrone.

**MD:** I hear that you're doing clinics again.

**Dennis:** I kind of took myself off the clinic scene, because I noticed that drummers had the wrong idea of what drumming is about. Some guys look at this like a sport, like who can burn who. And some of the stuff that they'd say about other drummers...it showed a lack of respect.

So I kind of took myself off the clinic scene, mainly because I saw where it was heading. But then somebody told me that what they're [seeing played in clinics now] is coming from people like Billy Cobham, Steve Gadd, Vinnie Colaiuta, and me, as far as the chops and the speed. So I've put myself back on the clinic scene to explain it.

The first thing that I like to talk about is the role of a drummer. I didn't pick this instrument to pull girls, or to turn it into Dennis Chambers Day every time I walk into the studio. It's not that. And I try to explain to them that if you're a reader and somebody throws a chart in front of you, it doesn't have your name on it. And the reason is that anybody can play that music. It doesn't say Steve Gadd, it doesn't say Vinnie Colaiuta, it doesn't say Dennis Chambers or Billy Cobham. You know, nobody's name is on the chart. It's just...drums.

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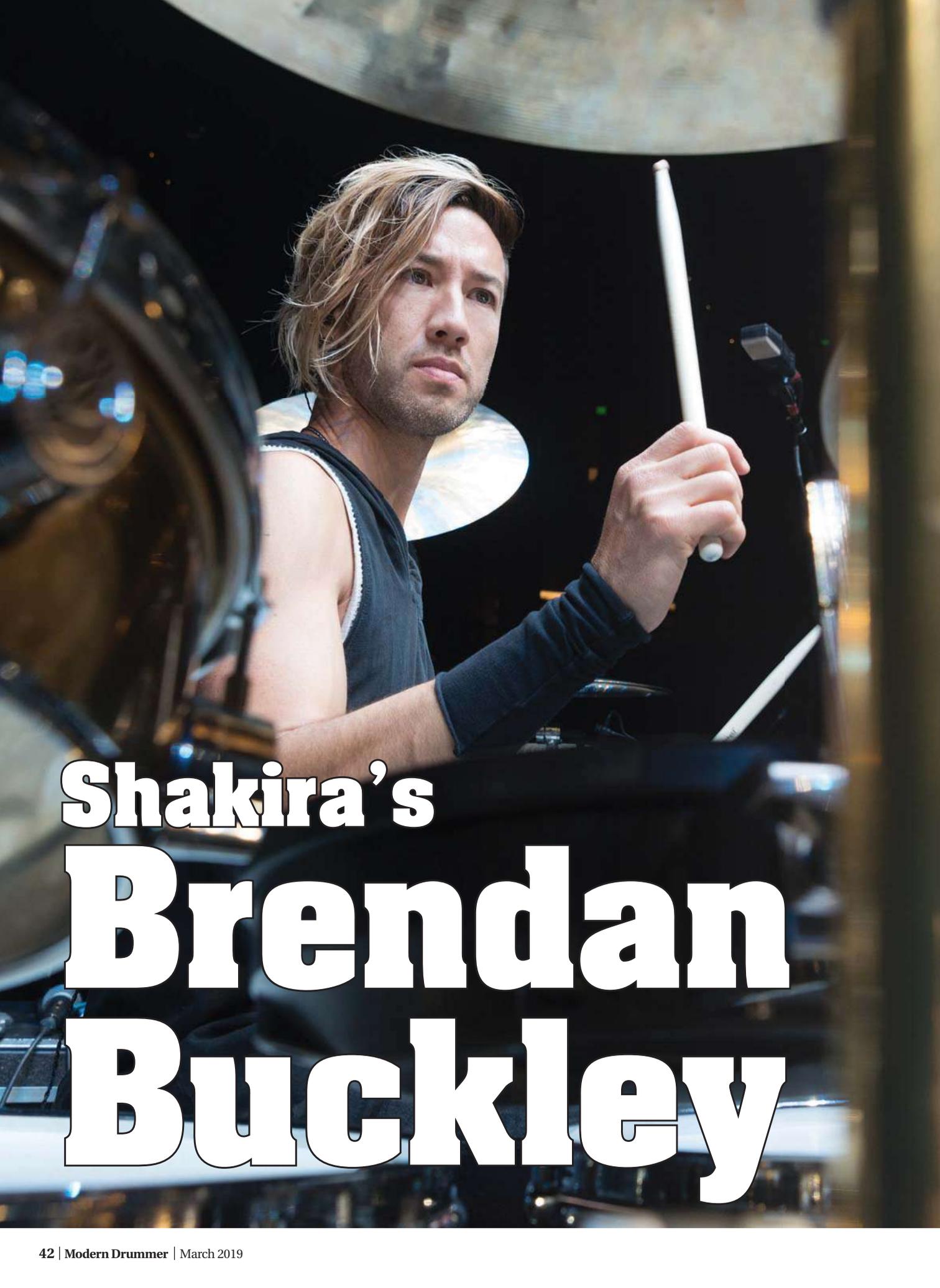
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It's tough to keep up with Brendan Buckley. One glance at his social media and you're presented with a wide variety of what interests the L.A.-based drummer: idiosyncratic photography of everyday life, random posts about artisan coffees, shots of him training in martial arts. Photos of his family. There's also a slew of video clips of him onstage with the artists he's most associated with. And with a deep pocket and an innate sense of playing just the right thing with perfect time, he's *killing*.

While Buckley's been at it with Latin pop singer Shakira for twenty years, he's also recorded and toured with a number of other rock and pop luminaries, from Miley Cyrus to Melissa Etheridge to BoDeans. In recent years he's been seen backing up huge Asian pop superstars. You can also find him on the road with indie pop duo Tegan and Sara, a gig that allows him to use different artistic muscles but still bring his highly developed sense of groove and thoughtful arrangement.

So what's the secret to staying in it as long as Buckley has? YouTube has countless examples of young, fiery players looking to make their mark on the drumming world. But listening to Buckley's thoughts on touring and session work, it's clear that there's more to being an artist's choice to support their vision than just blazing across a kit, or sporting the latest fashions.

"A bassist friend of mine recently told me that I play drums like a conductor," says Buckley. "At first I had no idea if that was supposed to be a good thing or a bad thing. He elaborated that he never gets lost when he plays with me, and that I tend to keep everyone onstage in the same place. At music school, I took four years of conducting class, so I guess it makes sense that I would approach the drums in a similar way. In music there are a whole lot of breakdowns, tempo changes, angular arrangements, cued endings. Be a leader. Make sure that everyone is in the same ballpark. If they're not, do something visually or musically to help them along. Everything will magically sound better."

**Story by Ilya Stemkovsky • Photos by Alex Solca**

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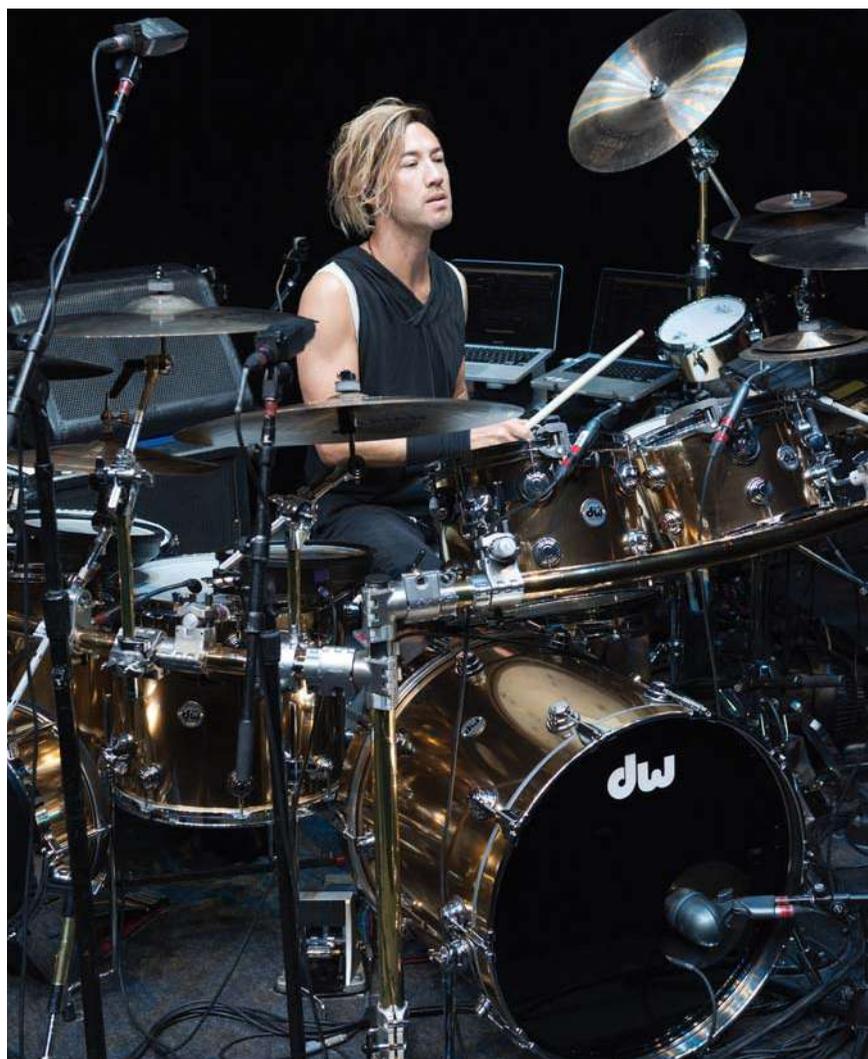
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**MD:** Let's talk about achieving longevity in this business, and specifically your long-standing gig with Shakira. What's the key?  
**Brendan:** Two things come to mind when you mention the word "longevity." The first idea is "longevity in the career of music." Sustaining an extended career in music, whether it be as a band member, a freelance musician, or an educator, is extremely challenging. As a creative artist, you're basically being given reasons to quit on a daily basis, and you have to constantly muster up the passion and persistence to overcome these hurdles. It's not fair, and it's

not easy, but it is fun. There's an expression in the martial art of jiu-jitsu: "A black belt is a white belt that didn't quit." The most successful people around me are usually the ones that simply did not give up.

The second thought regarding the concept of longevity is my long-lasting relationship with multiple artists and musical directors. I've been in Shakira's band for over twenty years now. But along with her, I've also been working with my friend Elsten Torres for twenty-three years, Minnie Driver for fourteen years, and several musical directors for more than a decade. I

## INFLUENCES

**The Police** Ghost in the Machine (Stewart Copeland) /// **Led Zeppelin II** (John Bonham) /// **The Cure** Disintegration (Boris Williams) /// **Miles Davis** Four and More (Tony Williams) /// **Van Halen** Fair Warning (Alex Van Halen) /// **Fiona Apple** When the Pawn... (Matt Chamberlain, Jim Keltner) /// **Jimi Hendrix** Axis: Bold as Love (Mitch Mitchell) /// **David Bowie** Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps) (Dennis Davis) /// **Soundgarden** Superunknown (Matt Cameron) /// **Michael Landau** Live 2000 (Toss Panos) /// **Bob Marley** Legend (Carlton Barrett) /// **AC/DC** Highway to Hell (Phil Rudd) /// **Pat Metheny** Trio 99>00 (Bill Stewart) /// **Nine Inch Nails** The Fragile (Jerome Dillon, Bill Rieflin) /// **Al Jarreau** Breakin' Away (Steve Gadd, Jeff Porcaro) /// **The Meters** Look-Ka Py Py (Zigaboo Modeliste) /// **Jane's Addiction** Nothing's Shocking (Stephen Perkins) /// **Andrés Calamaro** Alta Sociedad (Steve Jordan) /// **Joshua Redman** Spirit of the Moment (Brian Blade) /// anything with Hal Blaine

tend to maintain friendly, positive working relationships with all of my employers and musical buddies.

Of course, the first order of business for me is to play the drums at the highest level that I can. But on top of that, I try to also be a problem-solver—a person you can count on to fix things. You need a drummer to play beats? I can do that for you. Oh, you also want to hire three percussionists? I know some great people; let me give them a call. You can't remember how fast we play this song? No worries, I have all the BPMs written down here in my phone. You don't remember how we ended this song on our previous tour? It's all good—I have a recording of the old show in my computer. You're unsure about where to come in during the intro? It's

cool: just watch me, and I'll give you a cue. You want to add some electronic elements to this musical segue? Leave it to me; I'll handle it. The more you can offer and the more comfortable you make others feel, the more they'll want you around and appreciate your presence.

**MD:** Sounds like you're a one-stop shop.

**Brendan:** So, think about what you offer. Is your time very good, both with a click and without one? Can you lock with sequences seamlessly? Can you interpret songs well? Do you also produce or compose music? Do you have the organizational skills to be a musical director? Can you play any other instruments? Do you understand various styles of popular and folkloric music? Can you perform a song precisely the same way

over and over again? Conversely, can you give dozens of different vibe options for the same song? Are you independent enough to get yourself to and from gigs in almost any country? Do you have good working relationships with drum manufacturers and backline companies to provide gear to venues? So on and so forth.

**MD:** So being a "fixer" is as important as mastering those rudiments.

**Brendan:** If you can walk around with the aura that says, "If you have an issue, I will take care of it—no worries," this will help with the psychology of everyone around you. When I think back to my days at the University of Miami's School of Music, besides playing with guitarists and saxophonists and piano players, I spent a lot of time working



## Buckley's 2018/19 Shakira El Dorado World Tour Setup

**Drums:** DW Stainless Steel with Custom Gold Wrap on DW Rack

- A.** 5.5x14 DW Design Series Black Nickel snare (main)
- B.** 6x13 PDP Concept Series Black Nickel aux snare (with Canopus Vintage snare wires underneath)
- C.** 8x12 tom
- D.** 9x13 tom
- E.** 14x16 floor tom
- F.** 16x18 floor tom
- G.** 18x22 bass drum
- H.** 8" PDP timbalito
- I.** SPD-30 sample pad
- J.** Roland V-Pad PD-128-BC
- K.** Roland BT-1 Bar Trigger
- L.** Roland PDX-8 V-Pads
- M.** 10" PDP timbalito
- N.** Metal doumbek on stand

**Cymbals:** Sabian

- 1.** 19" Paragon Chinese
- 2.** 16" HHX Evolution crash/8" B8 Pro splash (inverted) stack
- 3.** 14" HHX Groove Hats with hammered nickel jingles and bells on top (Big Fat Snare Drum)
- 4.** 18" HHX Evolution crash
- 5.** 10" HH splash/8" HH Max Stax splash/8" HH Max Stax China Kang stack
- 6.** 21" HHX Dry ride with 12" HHX Evolution splash on top
- 7.** 19" Vault V-Crash
- 8.** 14" AAX Mini Chinese (inverted) with a nickel six-jingle strip inside/12" AA Mini Hats top/8" AAX splash stack
- 9.** 19" HHX X-Treme crash
- 10.** 19" Paragon Chinese

**Other Percussion:** LP Patato Black Fiberglass congas (quinto, conga, tumba) on triple stand; LP Black Fiberglass bongos on stand; LP 12.5" Mechanical Grey djembes on stands (2); Bolivian bombo leguero on stand; 20x24 DW Gong Drum in Black Lacquer with Custom Gold Wrap stripes on rolling rack

**Other Electronics:** MacBook Pro computers with Native Instruments Battery 4 (2); MOTU UltraLite-mk3 interfaces (2); Radial SW8 MK2 switcher; Roland TD-50 used as MIDI interface; Roland V-Kick KD-140-BC; Roland KT-10 Kick Triggers (2); T-30H Acoustic Triggers (on snare drums) (2); RT-30K Acoustic Trigger (on bass drum); Boss DB-90 metronome with FS-5U pedal

**Sticks:** Vic Firth Brendan Buckley Signature 5A White sticks, Heritage wire brushes, T1 timpani mallets

**Heads:** Remo, including Controlled Sound Coated Dot batter on 14" snare; Ambassador Coated batter on 13" snare; Emperor Coated tom batters and Ambassador Clear resonants; Powerstroke P3 Clear bass drum batters and Ambassador Ebony front heads

**Accessories:** JH Audio in-ear monitors; Reflexx drum pad; Drumdots and gaffer tape; coconut water; Nag Champa incense

## Brendan Buckley

with singers. I played on tons of peoples' recitals and school concerts. I think these experiences helped me gain the empathy needed to be a team player and assist others in feeling comfortable and reaching their goals. This has been invaluable for me over the years.

**MD:** Everyone talks about simply having the right attitude and working the hang right, because so many people can already play. But is it as simple as that?

**Brendan:** Well, of course it goes without saying that you have to be able to play well. But you also have to be able to play

*appropriately.* And you have to be able to play *consistently.*

For a moment, think about the concept of being "hireable." On a planet with thousands and thousands of drummers, what can make you stand out? How can you be considered valuable? What would make someone say, "I want that specific guy in my band," or "I want that specific girl to play on my record," or "I think this person would be a good choice for our upcoming tour?" Put yourself in the employer's shoes for a moment. If you were a singer, or a band leader, or a manager, or a producer, what qualities would you look

for? Good time? Of course. Decent gear? Check. Gets along with others? Yep. Creative? Bingo. Doesn't get arrested? Absolutely. Communicates well without throwing temper tantrums? Sure. Excellent memory skills? Bonus. Precision? Yes. Can play with a click? Done. Knows electronics? Uh-huh. Has a look—any look at all? Cool. Can be a showman if necessary, but won't overdo it? Perfect.

And yes, a good attitude is practically essential, because as studio and touring musicians, we spend countless hours of spare time hanging out with one another, and in dressing rooms, tour buses, airports, hotels, and soundchecks. Funny, easygoing people just make the day better. The squeaky wheel does not always get the grease. More often than not, it gets replaced.

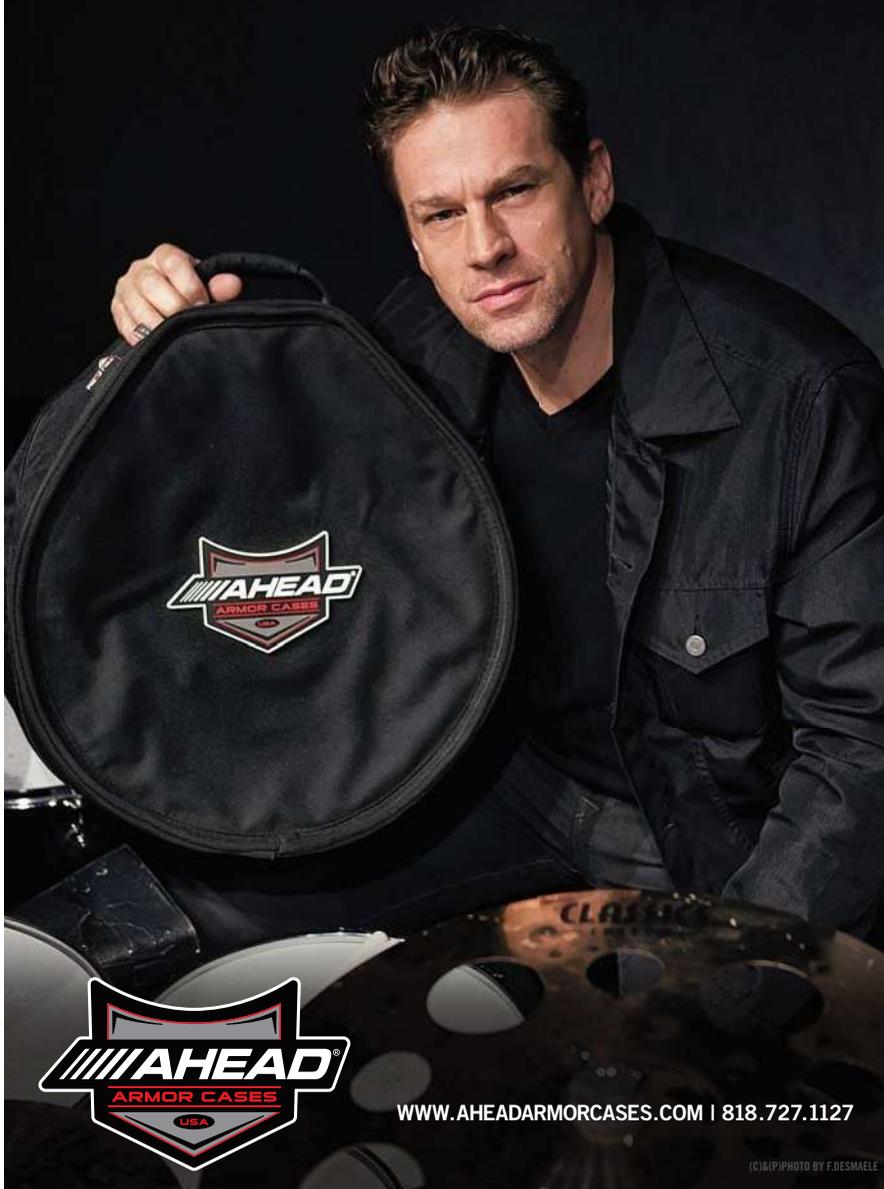
**MD:** After so many years, and material that's pretty set, how do you keep your playing fresh without resorting to showy stuff to entertain yourself or your bandmates? Is there ever any room for that?

**Brendan:** Well, I have to admit, soundchecks do get a bit wacky with the alternate versions and the extended jam sessions. But apart from that, I make sure to schedule time to practice, either onstage after soundcheck, or backstage on a drum pad and kick pad, or even on off days at a rental rehearsal space. Plus during the actual show, I focus on concepts like technique, time, subdivisions, vocabulary, posture. It might not seem like it from the outside, but I do play the show slightly differently each night; new fills, added ghost notes, different accents, various grips, improved kick pedal techniques. But I make sure that the people in charge do not notice a difference from their perspective. Yes, you can practice on a gig. Just don't *sound* like you're practicing on a gig!

**MD:** You've seen quite a bit of change with gear and the technical side of your kit. How have you navigated that world?

**Brendan:** I do my best to stay hip to the new innovations in the percussion world, especially from my endorsement companies—DW, Sabian, Remo, Vic Firth, Roland, LP, etc. I like to know what inventions have come out every year, and what each new thing does and does not do. But most of my kit designs actually come from brainstorming sessions with the artists and musical directors. We normally discuss how they want to approach each arrangement for a song. What will be played acoustically? Drumset, or maybe some percussion? What will be sampled and triggered electronically? What loops will be left in the computer sequences? Then we design a stage setup that will be both functional and fun,

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sonically, visually, emotionally. I go through the same process with almost every artist with whom I work.

**MD:** Can you suggest the use of different sounds, either electronically or acoustically? Do you take Shakira's or someone else's direction regarding alternate sounds?

**Brendan:** The electronic sounds normally come from one of three sources: the actual Pro Tools sessions from the artist's albums, the musical director's sound libraries, or my own personal collection of sounds and effects. For example, we could start a programming session by sampling and labeling all of the drum sounds from a song on Shakira's new album. I can spread them around accordingly on the various trigger pads of my kit and play the song like so. But then the musical director could say, "I'd like to try a different snare sound for this tune. Let me email you one of my favorite samples during our next break." Then I'd swap that out and see how it sounds.

Next, Shakira could ask for some collage of funky hand claps or noises during a new sing-along section of the tune. I would quickly pull them up from a sound library on my hard drive and throw them on a trigger pad. The good thing nowadays is that I can blend sounds, too. So we could use a little bit of the old and a little bit of the new. And the particular software sampler Battery 4 by Native Instruments has a built-in effects engine, so I can also mangle the sounds in the program. And our front-of-house engineer might give feedback, like, "Hey, guys, that electronic kick drum is cool by itself, but it's just not cutting well while everyone is playing at the same time." So we'll switch it up for something else that has more attack, or try to carve it up a bit using EQ filters. After all, for a live concert, although it's cool for everything to sound and feel good coming through your in-ears, it's actually more crucial that drums sound incredible coming through a giant PA system.

**MD:** For your Asian pop-star gigs, is it a matter of naturally playing different stuff because the music will not have a Shakira-esque, Latin flavor? Or is your role of timekeeper and bringer of drama pretty much the same no matter who you're playing with?

**Brendan:** Good question. I feel as though it's not as much a matter of Latin pop music versus Asian pop music. My approach to each gig is going to be relatively similar. I try to play the best, most appropriate grooves possible for their music. However, what differs more is the taste of each artist and musical director. Some people want things to sound exactly like the record. In that case, it's all

## RECORDINGS

**Michael Miller** I Made You Up /// **Pedestrian** Ghostly Life /// **Volumen Cero** I Can See the Brite Spot /// **Shakira** Dónde Están los Ladrones? /// **Miyavi** Fire Bird /// **Shakira** Laundry Service /// **Minnie Driver** Ask Me to Dance /// **Roberto Carlos** Primera Fila /// **Aleks Syntek** Romántico Desliz /// **Elsten Torres** Waiting for Clouds /// **Beto Cuevas** Miedo Escénico /// **Fulano** Individual /// **Alejandro Sanz** Sirope /// **Emmanuel** Acústico en Vivo /// **JJ Lin** Genesis

about precision and execution. Other people want a lot of input and creativity from the drum world. They're bored of their albums, and they want you to reinvent the drum parts. That's fun and challenging in a different way. Draw from all of your sources and influences. Remember, you're an artist, too.

**MD:** For the Tegan and Sara gig, do you find yourself thinking differently because there are harmonies involved?

**Brendan:** Ah, that was such a fun gig! In preparation for that tour, we weren't too concerned with the vocal harmonies per se. But we did spend a bit of time talking

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## Brendan Buckley

about the stage layout, and specifically the proximity of the drums to the lead vocal mics. The way they designed it, I was basically set up directly behind Tegan. So to avoid interference with her singing, I went with very thin, dark cymbals that had quick decays, and my drums were tuned warm and tubby. The frequencies stayed out of the way of her lead vocals. We also spent quite a bit of time getting a good blend between the acoustic and electronic drums. The acoustic drums were tuned very low and punchy, and that helped a bunch when switching back and forth between real versus sampled kicks and snares. We wanted the hybrid blend to be seamless from the audience's perspective.

**MD:** In relation to keeping your playing eclectic, is it easy to slip into a rut when you're playing the same set list every night? Do you practice or keep limber in preparation for when you play with friends at home?

**Brendan:** Oh, yeah! There's a term out there called "tour chops." That's the medical condition in which, as a musician, you can play your fifteen-song set perfectly night after night, but you can't play anything else well. For this reason, I've always made a point to do plenty of local gigs with my friends when I'm home from tour. It helps me both technically and emotionally. You have to stay tapped in to the reason you started playing drums in the first place. For me, it was to jam with friends. To this day I'd be happy playing

music seven nights a week. I wonder if that will ever change.

**MD:** How has your practice changed over the years? YouTube is filled with young blazers who are impressive to watch, but they don't have the Shakira gig.

**Brendan:** When I was younger, I spent a lot of time "getting my shit together." I needed to learn countless styles of music: rock, metal, bebop, fusion, classical, Afro-Cuban, Brazilian, odd meters, etc. And I had to get my time together. And my tones. Fast and slow tempos. Dynamics. There was a mountain of stuff to learn just to begin working. I'd sometimes practice thirteen hours a day. And it was great!

But nowadays I hardly have the luxury to shed for that amount of time. So I have to be surgical about my practice time. A tactical assault. I try to calibrate my body to the music that I'll be playing for my next upcoming gig or session. Also, I love practicing the fundamentals. I work on my time, my subdivisions, my swing/shuffle. But I'm still a student of the drums, and I love the chopsy stuff, too. So I'm still finding ways to better my technique, biomechanics, double-kick drumming, soloing, hand/foot combos, and on and on.

Due to the encouragement of a few of my drum students, I've started compiling a curriculum of practice exercises that have personally helped me out over the years. Most of this material actually deals with

the concept of improving your pocket and simply moving your limbs in time. But there are other wacky subdivision things in there, too. I'm currently working on the best way to release this.

**MD:** Where's the future of the business? Sure, Shakira isn't selling the records she once did, and streaming is another can of worms in terms of revenue. But the live business seems to be as busy as ever. She and you are relatively young, but is there life after the road?

**Brendan:** Well, I've witnessed the business of music change over the past couple of decades. YouTube, file sharing, and streaming services have altered the way people consume music. And the masses are just plain different from how they were in the '80s and '90s. We all spend our money differently, and we distract ourselves differently. The monetization of this new wild west of music consumption has thrown everybody for a loop. I'm quite certain that even *Modern Drummer* magazine has to think about these concerns from time to time.

For the most part, my career is divided into live drumming, studio music, and teaching. Maybe it's 50 percent live, 40 percent studio, 10 percent teaching. Up until this point, this business model has worked for me. But who knows what the future will bring. I'll probably have to make a few adjustments over time. Check in with me in a couple of years!



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# Blondie's Clem Burke

## About the Playing

by Patrick Berkery

It's about ninety minutes before Blondie's set at the Sea.Hear.Now festival in Asbury Park, New Jersey. It's a beautiful early fall afternoon, and being at the Jersey Shore has put Garden State native Clem Burke in a reflective mood.



**Burke is recalling** the strange-bedfellow support slots Blondie occupied back in the day opening shows for Rush and Genesis in Philadelphia; Blondie's first and only time (before today) playing Asbury Park in 1978; and his own adventures as a young man in the storied town located about fifty miles south from his hometown of Bayonne.

"As a teenager I would come here a lot, sleep on the beach," Burke says. "I saw a lot of shows at the Sunshine Inn, the Wonder Bar, and the Stone Pony. I didn't know Bruce then, but all the stuff that he wrote about early on, I could relate to."

The Bruce he's referring to is, of course, Bruce Springsteen, who cut his musical teeth on the Asbury Park club circuit in the late '60s and early '70s. Burke will catch up with the Boss the next day, when he turns up at the festival unannounced to sit in with Social Distortion. "Bruce told me I looked good," Burke says with a chuckle over the phone a couple of weeks later. "I take that as a compliment. I told him I was trying to keep up with him."

Since Springsteen has spent the past year telling stories on Broadway while seated, not traversing the globe at a whirlwind pace to play the drums seemingly every chance he gets, maybe it's him that should try to keep up with Burke. When Blondie takes the stage at Sea.Hear.Now, the sixty-four-year-old drummer leads the charge, rolling and smashing his way across his kit, twirling his sticks, and still looking every bit the youthful mod before the band launches into a revved-up "One Way or Another." For the next hour, Burke provides an unflinching pulse as the Debbie Harry-fronted band pivots from the disco groove of "Heart of Glass" to the tropical rhythm of "The Tide Is High" to the sleek, sequenced shuffle of "Call Me" to the hip-hop flirtations of "Rapture." For good measure, Burke also whips metronomic heat into "Atomic" and delivers power-pop histrionics on "Hanging on the Telephone."

After watching Blondie tear through a sixty-minute set, we're reminded of two things. First, as genre-bending iconoclasts go, few have enjoyed the success and lasting influence that Blondie has. And second, precious few drummers are bringing the heat after forty-plus years in the game like Clem Burke is bringing it.

Chalk it up to an unrelenting schedule so chock-full of gigs and sessions that Burke can't help but keep his skills razor sharp. We get an intimate glimpse of that workload in *My View*, the recently released documentary chronicling Burke's career, from his roots in New Jersey, to international superstardom with Blondie, to post-Blondie stints with the Eurythmics and Ramones in the '80s, to the multiple gigs he currently juggles. The cameras capture Burke in near-constant motion, working at a pace that would leave some

drummers one-third his age gasping for air: pounding the drums with Blondie in front of 80,000 people at London's Hyde Park; jogging in the streets of New York City to keep fit; playing club gigs; in the taxi on the way to the airport to catch a plane to the next gig; recording; and woodshedding with a pick-up band in a cramped rehearsal room for a one-off show.

The legendary rock photographer Bob Gruen says in *My View*, "Whenever you see Clem, he's on his way somewhere, or he just got back from somewhere and he's going somewhere else tomorrow." That's about right. In 2019, that "somewhere" could be a Blondie-curated festival in Cuba or the Cayman Islands, or a gig in a tiny club with one of several side bands Burke plays in, like the Split Squad, the Empty Hearts, or the Tearaways. Or it could be a U.K. theater tour, like the one he just completed as the guest drummer with the Blondie tribute band Bootleg Blondie. (Clem was donating his proceeds to charity.) "I enjoy the dichotomy of playing to a hundred people in a club," says Burke, "then all of a sudden I'm playing to 80,000 people at a festival. It makes you appreciate each thing individually."

"I also go back to Earl Palmer," Burke adds. "He was my role model. He played across from NBC in Burbank every Tuesday at a place called Chadney's. He played in the lounge. Jim Keltner and Charlie Watts would come in and purposely sit on the side to watch him work. There'd be a lot of kids from PIT. I saw Carol Kaye sit in. Here's a guy that played with Frank Sinatra and Little Richard, did the Ritchie Valens stuff like "La Bamba," did all the stuff in New Orleans, the "Flintstones" theme, and he's playing in a club to fifty people, really enjoying it and passing the baton in a way. Earl was a big, big learning curve for me. And such a gentleman. I think about him doing that in relation to what I do. And I say, *Why not?* As long as I can do it, I might as well keep doing it. As long as it's fun and the people are my friends. I love it. It's about playing."





Dave Phillips

**MD:** Was there any self-consciousness about being the subject of a documentary, giving filmmakers that kind of access? Everybody shares so much of themselves today. Whereas the players you loved—Dino Danelli, Carmine Appice, Hal Blaine, Earl Palmer—no one knew really knew much about them. There was something cool about that air of mystery.

**Clem:** I was going back and forth with it. I had the luxury of deciding on the final edit. I let my wife, Ellen; my tech, Rick; and my best friend, Merwin, watch it before I watched it. I asked them what they thought, and they thought it represented me. I had to resign myself to the fact that these guys were going to follow me around and film me. I had to forget, as much as I could, the self-consciousness of it all and just go for it. And I like how it came out. It's kind of like my "Behind the Music" without the sex and drugs, or the rise and fall.

**MD:** Were there sex and drugs left on the cutting-room floor?

**Clem:** I suppose there were references made to such things. It's been a long career.

**MD:** But you've always seemed to have your stuff together, best as I can tell.

**Clem:** Yeah, I've always been very wary of falling off the edge. Everybody needs a role model. People like Keith Moon and John Bonham, they're role models on multiple levels. It shows you what *not* to do. Your amazing talent and your amazing band and your amazing luck in the music business—to not really realize what that's all about and go over the edge is very sad. Then you have people like Hal Blaine and Earl Palmer. Hal's still thriving. Earl thrived into his eighties. Enjoyed life, enjoyed playing.

**MD:** It's hard to think about you and *not* think of Keith Moon—your look, your style, you played a Premier kit for so long. You owned that influence. I always thought you would've made a great drummer for the Who. Had anyone suggested that to you when Keith died, or in the ensuing years?

**Clem:** People have said that. I was actually at the party in London when Kenney Jones officially joined the Who. So I was around. But that was the heyday of Blondie. I was asked to join up with various other bands during the heyday of Blondie, but I was always about trying to start my own band. I've done it now, with the Empty Hearts, for instance, and I did it with Chequered

Past. At the height of Blondie I was trying to form a band with Eric Faulkner from the Bay City Rollers and Glen Matlock from the Sex Pistols, and the missing link was always Paul Weller. We were always trying to get Paul Weller.

In the end it finally worked out for the Who. Zak Starkey is absolutely the perfect drummer for them. I've known him a long time. I thought Simon Phillips was a little over the top. A great drummer, but maybe a little too technical for the Who.

**MD:** Your love of classic bands and classic drummers has always been very palpable, and it comes across in the documentary. What are some new bands and new drummers you're into?

**Clem:** I think the Struts are a really good rock 'n' roll band. There's a band from L.A. called Prima Donna that I like. I think Ronnie Vannucci from the Killers is an amazing drummer in the style that I like. And I like Fabrizio Moretti from the Strokes. I think his simplicity is great. And he's obviously not new, but I like Jeremy Stacey. I saw him play with King Crimson when I was in Stockholm recently, with the three drummers—that was amazing. He's one of my favorites.

**MD:** The documentary covers how you were playing out when you were fourteen and played Carnegie Hall after winning a battle of the bands. What else were you up to before you hooked up with Blondie? I know you had auditioned for LaBelle at one point.

**Clem:** I was going to college and living at home in New Jersey; I was eighteen-ish. I started at Jersey City University and transferred to NYU. I was perusing the "Musicians Wanted" ads in the *Village Voice*. I auditioned for LaBelle, I auditioned for Patti Smith, and I auditioned for Beatlemania. My look was kind of reminiscent of that period. I'm not a singer, but I went down and sat in with the band. At the time I was studying electronic music, acting, media, modern dance. I never thought, *I'm going to become an actor or a dancer*. It was just a way to stretch a bit, creatively. I think that's what made me really drawn to meeting [Blondie guitarist and singer] Chris Stein and Debbie Harry. I sensed their creativity. They were artistic, and they had charisma, but they weren't fully formed. There's something to that.

**MD:** The Lower East Side artistic community seemed to be a real hot house for creativity in the early to mid '70s, for writers, actors, and bands like Blondie and Talking Heads and Television.

**Clem:** It was a workshop at CBGB, and you could make your mistakes in public. That's how we developed. We were rough and ready. That's lacking a lot now with musicians. People expect things to be fully formed, on both ends. Record companies expect demos that are release-quality. Performance-wise, they think they want to see something from, like, *Star Search* or *Pop Idol*, whatever those shows are.

**MD:** Blondie was the old-school archetype. You were able to woodshed in the clubs, you got a record deal, and it took a few records for everything to really click and take off. And even when it did, you didn't follow a formula; you kept on experimenting.

**Clem:** It's hard to believe we've had four number-one singles [in the U.S.], and each

one is different from the other. None of them had to do with what people would think of as "CBGB's Blondie." "Heart of Glass" was a disco song. "The Tide Is High" was reggae. Then you had "Call Me," which is a rock/dance song or something. It was the first time we went in and played with pre-programmed synthesizer tracks.

**"I've always been very wary of falling off the edge. People like Keith Moon and John Bonham, they're role models on multiple levels. It shows you what *not* to do."**

**MD:** Are those 16th-note hi-hats on "Call Me" overdubbed?

**Clem:** The 16th notes are overdubbed. I basically played the shuffle first, with the fills. Then I overdubbed the 16th-note hi-hats.

**MD:** That makes me feel better. I've tried to play that groove with the 16th-note hats many times, and it's *hard*.

**Clem:** It's also difficult for people to play it the way I play it, being left-handed and leading with my left hand. My tech's a great drummer, but when he tried to play the "Call Me" beat he couldn't get it quite right because of the [sticking]. The one thing I do try to practice is leading with my right hand. I try to practice that *a lot*.

**MD:** You mention "Heart of Glass," and then

"Rapture" came a couple of years later. A lot of rock bands were dabbling in dance music and disco around that time, but I don't think anyone did it as well as you guys. And I think it all came down to the drums. You played like a rock drummer that seemed pretty conversant in dance music. Were you out in the clubs soaking it up?

**Clem:** Club 82 was kind of the spawning ground for the whole New York rock scene after the Mercer Arts Center closed. I'd be there. That place was essentially a gay disco. They would have bands one night a week—Wayne County, the Backstreet Boys, the New York Dolls, the Magic Tramps.... The music that they would play when the rock 'n' roll bands weren't playing was disco—"Rock the Boat," "Shame, Shame, Shame"—the whole litany of great dance records from that era. And Bowie was already experimenting with dance music around then with the *Young Americans* album. That's a prime example of the type of dance music I liked. "Fascination" on *Young Americans* was incredible. I saw that tour. That was pretty inspirational. That was stuff that was influencing all of us in Blondie. And that whole *Saturday Night Fever* album was so inspirational. I always say that's where I finally figured out how to play "Heart of Glass" properly. Though it's debatable how that happened. The producer, Mike Chapman, claims it was his idea, but I know I was listening to that stuff.

We weren't listening to Journey, we weren't listening to Rush—although, we did open for Rush, but that's not what I aspired to. I wanted to be like the drummer in Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars [Mick Woodmansey], I didn't want to be like Neil Peart.

**MD:** One would think that with a career-spanning documentary, you've given some consideration to your legacy. What would you want your legacy to be?

**Clem:** The legacy of Blondie is the music. And, as cliché as it may be, Debbie's iconic image. My legacy alone? It's something I never did think about until lately. Over the last handful of years with Blondie, we've gotten all these awards. It started with the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and I got inducted into the Bayonne High School Hall of Fame. When you start looking at it, you do start thinking about your mortality and legacy and things like that. How I'd like to be remembered is that I really didn't [screw] people over. That I was a quote-unquote "good guy." I've tried to be that way as much as possible. But I've got a long way to go yet. I'm gonna live forever, ya know?

## Clem's setup

**Drums:** DW Collector's series  
• 6.5x 14 brass aux snare  
• 6.5x14 Ludwig Black Beauty main snare (with 30-strand wires)  
• 10x14 tom  
• 16x16 floor tom  
• 16x 18 floor tom  
• 18x24 bass drum

**Electronics:** Roland Octapad

**Cymbals:** Zildjian A Custom  
• 14" hi-hats  
• 10" splash  
• 18" crash (two)  
• 18" China  
• 16" crash  
• 20" ride

**Hardware:** DW 9000 series stands, 5000 series bass pedal and hi-hat stand

**Sticks:** Vic Firth 5B wood-tip

**Heads:** Remo Emperor Coated tom batters and Ambassador Clear tom resonants; Controlled Sound Coated main snare batter; Ambassador Coated aux snare batter; Powerstroke P3 Clear bass drum batter and DW Coated White front head



# Night Verses' ARIC IMPROTA

The world's most energetic drummer had his busiest, wildest year yet in 2018. Our heads are spinning just thinking about it.

Story by Ben Meyer  
Photos by Alex Solca







**Keeping a schedule** that would quite possibly kill a less intrepid soul, twenty-nine-year-old Southern California drumming savant Aric Improta is now living out his childhood dreams. His relentless dedication to practice and personal growth, and his unwillingness to take any other path in life, is paying dividends during what has been the busiest period of the backflipping, dyed-in-the-wool drummer's life. In addition to recording an EP and touring the globe with exciting new rap-punk act Fever 333 and filling in for pop-punk legends Goldfinger for much of 2018, Improta recorded *From the Gallery of Sleep*, the third album by his band Night Verses, who recently took the bold step of continuing on as an instrumental trio following the exit of singer Douglas Robinson.

"Douglas had to do some other stuff with his life," Improta explains, "and we didn't want to slow down. We tried to be very careful about it, and we were initially going to do a side project, but then it just seemed to make sense that we keep going. That was fun, because I think it was the first time that Nick [DePirro, guitar] and Reilly [Herrera, bass] had to replace the melody that we

were used to supporting. It was exciting for me to see them both step up in a way that I've never seen them do over the last fifteen years of playing with them. And they were very patient. There were times when I was pushing to try things for a twentieth and thirtieth time—a different mix or approach. It's just amazing to have three people who are so trusting of each other that we know if one of us says we can do something better, we all just go for it and don't really question it."

With instrumental bands enjoying a renaissance on the heels of the hard-earned success of groupss like Animals as Leaders, Intervals, Chon, Scale the Summit, and Strawberry Girls, Night Verses is basking in the light that now shines on the music they've dedicated themselves to since their teenage years. "This is the first time in my life that there's been any kind of scene for instrumental-heavy bands," Improta says. "I think you always kind of long for being part of something new, and it's hard because a lot of music that's based around a singer and a formulaic structure seems to be repeating itself right now. With instrumental music, you kind of have to come up with

your own way to satisfy the listener and yourself, because you don't have that [vocal] melody to rely on."

The music on *From the Gallery of Sleep*, which was produced by East Coast heavy-music heavyweight Will Putney (Body Count, Thy Art Is Murder, the Acacia Strain, Stray from the Path), stretches the boundaries of what three musicians can reproduce live. But Improta, DePirro, and Herrera do exactly that—without the aid of backing tracks. They take this as a matter of philosophical pride.

"I need to stress that Will was huge in convincing the label to continue with us as an instrumental band," says Improta. "They were open to it, but Will was really all about doing the record. I have a feeling that we'll keep going back to Will because he has this amazing sense of getting organic tones that don't feel over-produced or synthetic. At the same time, he has a vast knowledge of modern recording technology, so nothing sounds dated. He's the best producer I've ever worked with when it comes to recording drums. I love our last record, and I know we couldn't have gotten those results from anyone other than [producer] Ross

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**"I don't know that I'll ever compose and perform a forty-minute solo again, but I felt like I needed to say that I could do it. Everything you do after that seems a little easier!"**

**“Every time I get up to do a 360 on my drum throne, I look and Stephen is hanging from a truss forty feet in the air, while Jason is in the middle of the mosh pit rallying the crowd. It’s the first time that I’ve been the least energetic person on a project.”**

Robinson. But for me, it’s so rewarding to get to work with people who are drastically different from each other. It adds to the Rolodex of recording techniques that I can pull from when I’m working on different types of projects. If I’m working with a different artist, I can make suggestions that I’ve seen first-hand can completely alter the sound of a record.”

Speaking of “different,” Improta recently recorded *Ivory* by Gin Wigmore, a New Zealand transplant now based in Los

Angeles. It’s a collection of songs that couldn’t be more different from Night Verses’ sound. “That record was very organic,” says Improta, who’d recorded an earlier album with the singer/songwriter. “We had T-shirts on the kit, and Gin always asked me to play what she called ‘dumb’ fills, like where one hand was going from the snare to the rack to the floor in quarter notes. It was a lot of fun.”

Also on the drummer’s very full plate in 2018 was his role in *Fever 333*, which

features guitarist Stephen Harrison of the Chariot and vocalist Jason Aalon Butler of *letlive.* He also worked on projects with rapper Vic Mensa—and with fellow drummer Travis Barker. That project was produced by L.A. playmaker and Goldfinger lead vocalist/guitarist John Feldmann. According to Improta, “Jason called me and said, ‘Hey, I talked to John about you coming in to drum on the project, and he wants you to cruise up to his studio.’” Before entering Feldmann’s studio, Butler sat with Improta in a parking lot to listen to the song and said, “I just want to let you know, John can be pretty intense when he’s working.”

“I thought I was just going to meet him,” says Aric, “and I hadn’t heard any of the songs until that moment. Then when we got into the room, the engineer says, ‘Hey, John’s not feeling so good, so he’s not coming down.’ Jason says, ‘Then why did we have Aric come?’ and the engineer goes, ‘Oh, we want him to record.’ [laughs] My brain was saying, *Uuuuuuhhh*, but my mouth was saying, ‘Cool, sounds good.’ And then, as if it was set up to be a reality show, John bursts into the room with a camera guy and says, ‘I totally forgot that I’m shooting part of my documentary today. What’s your name?’ I said, ‘I’m Aric,’ and he goes, ‘Awesome, are you ready to record?’ I was being asked this *on video*. I said, ‘If we have time, yeah,’ and he says, ‘We’ve got time. What song do you want to do?’ So I named the only song I remembered the title of. He goes, ‘Do you know it?’ And I said, ‘I’ve just heard it once.’ He goes, ‘Okay, go in there and adjust Travis’s kit. We’ll play it for you once, I’ll tell you what I want, and then we’ll record you and send the video to Travis to see what he thinks.’

“So I just went in and did it,” Improta says. “Honestly, there were no nerves at the time, because I’ve practiced so many hours of my life to be ready for those kinds of situations. It’s been pretty insane, because this year the *Fever 333* has done three or four tours, Download Fest, Fuji Rock Fest, most of the major rock festivals, and a tour with the Used. And we’re booked through March—Japan, Australia, we’re playing the Forum.... It’s been crazy because it’s so fast-paced. But it’s really exciting, because for all of the chemistry that I have with Night Verses musically, this band feels like that when it comes to performance. It’s the first time that



## Aric Improta

I've been the *least* energetic person on a project. Every time I get up to do a 360 on my drum throne, I look and Stephen is hanging from a truss forty feet in the air, while Jason is in the middle of the mosh pit rallying the crowd. It's amazing, because I get to play with Night Verses, doing all of the music that I grew up loving with the people that I grew up playing with. And then I go to the Fever 333, and I'm trying every day to step up my performance, bring more energy, and build more endurance."

As if recording three albums and relentlessly touring wasn't enough, Improta also composed and performed a forty-minute solo at the Meinl Drum Festival. Inspired by the loss of a close family member, Improta worked for months to create something unique that would distinguish him from fellow performers Benny Greb, Alex Rüdinger, and Chris Coleman. "They gave me a forty-minute set," says Improta, "and I thought, *I need to do something to stand out*, because I was playing alongside people who I couldn't just do a lesser version of. I had to do something that was as much 'me' as possible."

With that in mind, Improta spent five months composing a nonstop, forty-minute drum solo. "It has looping and effects pedals like what Tom Morello from Rage Against the Machine would use," Improta explains, "and

**Drums:** Tama Superstar Classic Maple in Transparent Black Burst finish

- A.** 6.5x14 SLP Super Aluminum snare
- B.** 8x10 tom
- C.** 12x14 floor tom
- D.** 14x16 floor tom
- E.** 18x22 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Meinl

- 1.** 14" Byzance Medium hi-hats
- 2.** 10" Byzance Traditional splash
- 3.** 19" Classics Custom Dark crash
- 4.** 22" Pure Alloy Medium ride
- 5.** 20" Classics Custom Dark crash
- 6.** Bullet Stack (16" Byzance Trash crash/12" Classics Custom Trash splash)
- 7.** 18" Classics Custom Dark China

**Sticks:** Vic Firth American Classic 5A, 5B, and Extreme 55B wood-tip

I do a back flip and all this other stuff. I kick my cymbal over and then bring it back, like James Brown did with his mic stand. On top of all of that, I later found out that of all the solos that were performed that day, mine was the only one with a corrupted video file. So I had to relearn the entire solo and re-record it at Meinl Studios in Nashville. We did the whole recording in one take, just like the solo. I don't know that I'll ever have another year

where this much stuff happens."

Viewed more than 90,000 times on YouTube at press time, Aric's solo, titled "Blur-Lights in the Videodrome," was partly inspired by his love for sci-fi films. "That solo might be the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life," says Improta. "It was also one of the heaviest, because I had a lot of stuff happen during those five months. When I do something like that, I try to put in as much of

## Improta's Setup

**Hardware:** Tama, including Iron Cobra 900 Power Glide double bass drum pedal, Iron Cobra Lever Glide hi-hat stand, and Roadpro snare, tom, and cymbal stands

**Heads:** Remo, including Emperor Coated, ArtBEAT, or Controlled Sound X Coated on snare batter, Emperor Coated or ArtBEAT tom batter; Powerstroke P3 Clear with Dot bass drum batter

**Percussion:** Meinl, Spinbal, Woodland Percussion, Morfbeats, Remo ArtBEAT Artist Collection Djembe (with Night Verses)

**Electronics:** Roland SPD-SX sample pad, Roland SPD-30 Octapad, Strymon BigSky reverb, EarthQuaker Devices Data Corrupter, Line 6 DL4, DigiTech Whammy pedal

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ZIGGY MARLEY  
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very interesting process. I don't know that I'll ever compose and perform a forty-minute solo again, but I felt like I needed to say that I could do it. Everything you do after that seems a little easier!" [laughs]

Somehow, amidst all of this activity Improta found the time to create a new line of artistic drumheads with Remo, among other art-oriented gear projects. "The people at Remo were super cool," says Improta. "They did this thing called the ArtBEAT campaign, where they wanted an artist to do signature tom and snare heads. Since I spend all my extra time on tour illustrating, they were open to my input. We released the line at NAMM and also did a djembe and a cajon.

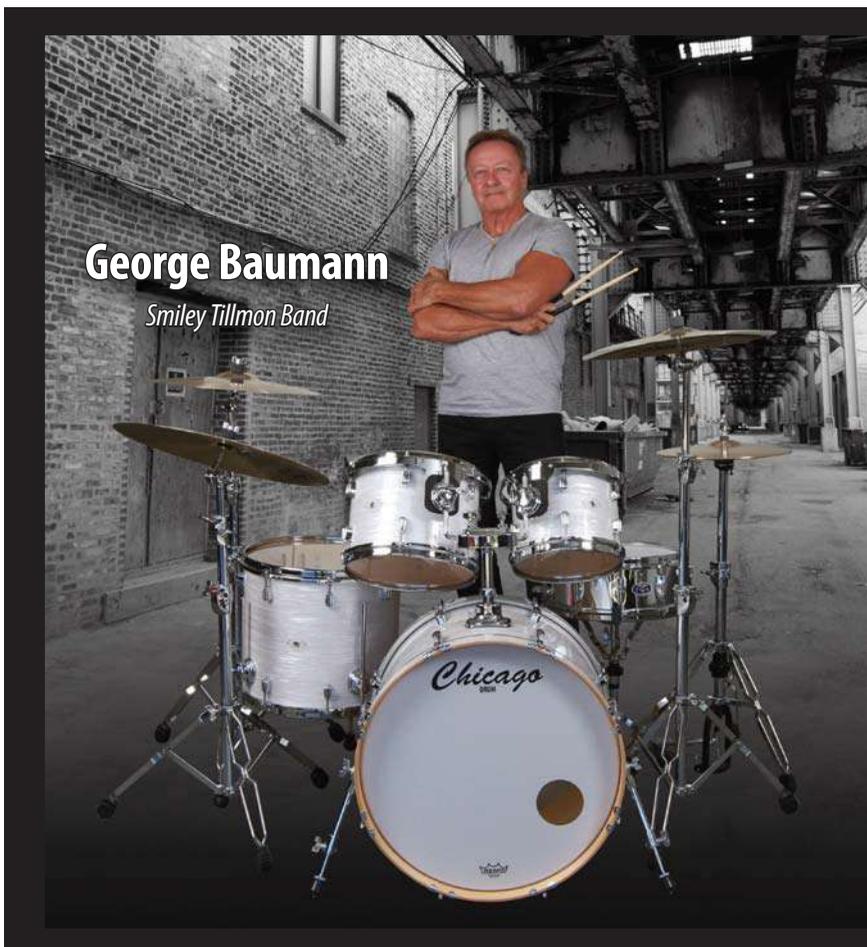
"It's just been a fast-forward year," Improta says. "Everything I'm doing is stuff I've seen other people do—it's just that I'm doing all these things that I've wanted to do at one time. I just feel very lucky that everything has lined up in this way, and that these people believed in me enough to bring me along, and have stuck with me. I don't know a lot of bands that do what Night Verses has done—sticking with me and practicing as much as we have since we were fifteen years old. I feel super fortunate that I'm surrounded by people who are as passionate about this as I am."



my personality as I can, because I'm locked in a room for so many hours.

"My aunt passed away from this super-aggressive cancer," Eric continues. "At the time, she was trying to find an outlet, something to believe in as she was passing. I'd taken some meditation courses, and I gave her these mala beads and talked to her about some of the stuff that I'd learned. I found out that that's what she was practicing

on when she passed, so I used those mala beads in the solo to make white noise while I was spinning the cymbal. The solo includes a lot of vocal samples, and there were some quotes in there that were inspired by her. Of all of my family members, she was the one who was the most comfortable with being different. I tried to put in everything that would represent the five months that I spent putting the solo together. It was a



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# The Modern Drummer Guide to Reading Rhythms

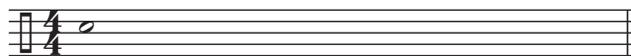
## Part 4: 16th Notes

by Miguel Monroy

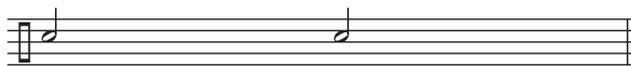
In the last installment of this series we explored reading and playing 8th notes and 8th-note rests. We learned that one 8th note lasts half as long as a quarter note, and we counted 8th notes out loud by saying, “1-&, 2-&, 3-&, 4-&.” We also combined 8th-note rhythms with the previous material covered in this series. In this article we’re going to work on the next rhythmic subdivision, 16th notes.

A 16th note’s duration lasts half as long as an 8th note’s, meaning we can fit two 16th notes in the same amount of time as an 8th note. Since we can fit two 8th notes in the space of one quarter note, that means that we can fit four 16th notes in the space of one quarter note. Likewise, sixteen 16th notes can fit into one measure of 4/4. Let’s take a moment to review each level of notation and its corresponding duration.

Whole note:



Half notes:



Quarter notes:



8th notes:



16th notes:



### Counting 16th Notes

With the addition of more notes per beat comes the need to count and subdivide differently. The most popular method of counting 16th notes is by saying, “1-e-&-a, 2-e-&-a, 3-e-&-a, 4-e-&-a.” With this method, the “e” is pronounced like “bee” without the “b,” and “a” is pronounced “uh.” Remember that you’ll count four subdivided notes in the space of one beat, meaning “1-e-&-a” will all be in the space of beat 1, “2-e-&-a” will fit within the space of beat 2, and so on. Let’s practice this by counting quarter notes, 8th notes, and 16th notes

consecutively. Be sure to tap your foot on the beat or count along with a metronome. A great place to start is around 60–65 bpm.



### Playing 16th Notes

In each of the exercises below, you should practice counting the rhythms out loud first, and then play them while continuing to count. As always, be sure to tap your foot on the beat and use a metronome. The first set of exercises focuses on getting you comfortable playing 16th notes with quarter notes and 8th notes.



7

1 2 e & a 3 e & a 4

8

1 e & a 2 3 4 e & a

9

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 &

10

1 e & a 2 e & a 3 & 4 &

11

1 e & a 2 & 3 & 4 &

12

1 e & a 2 & 3 e & a 4 &

13

1 & 2 e & a 3 & 4 e & a

14

1 & 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 &

15

1 e & a 2 & 3 & 4 e & a

Now let's practice combining 16th notes with the material we've covered so far in the previous lessons.

16



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# Dennis Chambers' Half-Time Shuffle

## The Fusion Legend's Take on a Steely Dan Classic

By Daniel Bédard

If you're not familiar with the Steely Dan album *Alive in America*, I'd highly encourage you to get a copy. The release, which was recorded during the group's 1993 and 1994 tours, features two modern drumming legends: Dennis Chambers and Peter Erskine. In this lesson, we'll focus on variations of a groove that Chambers plays on the song "Babylon Sisters."

### The Dennis Idea

Chambers mostly plays a classic half-time (or "Purdie") shuffle throughout "Babylon Sisters." But if you listen to the recording carefully around the 1:12 mark, you'll hear a cool little 16th-note phrase, which sparked my interest. Here's a transcription of this figure.

Chambers uses a 16th-note double stroke on the snare to create an interesting push in the groove. To build on that, I figured that we could also play this idea as 16th-note triplets, as demonstrated in Exercise 2.

### Developing Precision

To play both of these ideas correctly, you have to be very precise with each note's placement. I created the following exercises to help develop that phrasing. Be especially careful with how you phrase the 16th notes and the 16th-note triplets. They have to sound different, even though they're closely related.

Next, I practiced those rhythms while adding a bass drum on the last triplet partial of every beat. Again, be very precise about how you line up the notes on the bass drum and hi-hat.

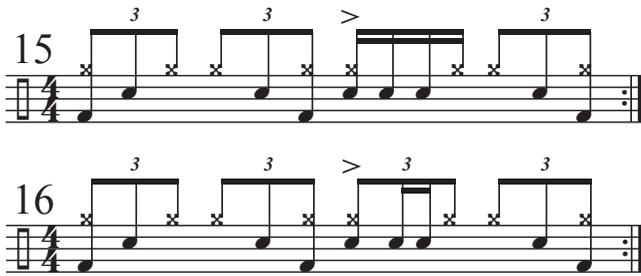
### Varying the Main Groove

Now that you're more comfortable with these new ideas, let's insert them into the main half-time shuffle groove. This creates some cool variations that you can use at various opportunities when you're grooving your way through the pattern.

Let's try this figure on the first beat.

And now we'll play it on beat 2.

And finally let's move the phrase to the third beat.



Once you've made your way through all the variations, play them along to the *Alive in America* version of "Babylon Sisters" while trying to match Chambers' feel. This will work wonders for your groove playing, note placement, and precision. I also suggest that you check out the rest of the record, as there are plenty of other rhythms from both Chambers and Erskine that will make your jaw drop to the floor. Have fun practicing!



**Daniel Bédard** is a Montreal-based drummer, educator, and clinician. For more information, visit [danielbedarddrums.com](http://danielbedarddrums.com).



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# Contemporary Coordination Exercises

## 8 Challenging Independence Ideas

by Mike Alfieri

The exercises in this month's lesson are meant to challenge your concentration, coordination, and independence. Traditionally, each voice of the drumset plays a specific role. In a typical jazz context, usually the snare and bass comp while the ride propels the time and the hi-hat foot anchors the groove on beats 2 and 4. Standard coordination techniques are built around this framework and these sound sources.

To break this traditional mold, begin to shift your conception of ideas from the instrument to your body so that any limb is free to play any part. This approach can expand your palette so that you'll start to hear and execute different sounds in different places. This is similar to how a classical pianist might cross the right hand over into the left hand's territory to play in the bass register. These ambidextrous (or ambipedal) approaches can be observed in the playing of many of today's top jazz drummers, such as Marcus Gilmore, who has set up his kit in both left- and right-handed configurations.

Exercise 1 takes a familiar snare and bass drum combination under the swing ride pattern. In this case, the hi-hat foot fills the role of the lead comping voice. The hi-hat plays a rumba clave pattern, but you can try playing the rhythms of standard melodies such as Sonny Rollins' "Oleo" or "Pent-Up House." You can also improvise your own ideas with your left foot over the other voices' parts.

The next example takes this concept a step further by employing a 12/8 bembé pattern on the ride.

To expand on these ideas, we can switch the responsibilities of the bass drum and hi-hat feet, as demonstrated in Exercise 3.

The triplets are now played between the snare and hi-hat foot while the bass drum becomes the comping voice. To build up this independence, first play static quarter notes on the bass drum on each beat (Exercise 4) and each offbeat (Exercise 5). The right hand can keep time with quarter notes, the swing ride pattern, or the bembé figure.

The triplets can also be divided between the kick and snare in a few different ways. Here are some examples.

Any of the parts can be played with any limb, so mix and match to create your own puzzles to work out. Happy practicing!



**Mike Alfieri** is a Brooklyn, New York-based drummer and educator. He has a bachelor's degree in music education from the Crane School of Music and a master's degree in jazz studies from SUNY Purchase. For more information, visit [mikealfieri.net](http://mikealfieri.net).



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# “Golden Measures” and Fibonacci Rhythms

## Exploring Mathematics in Music

by Aaron Edgar

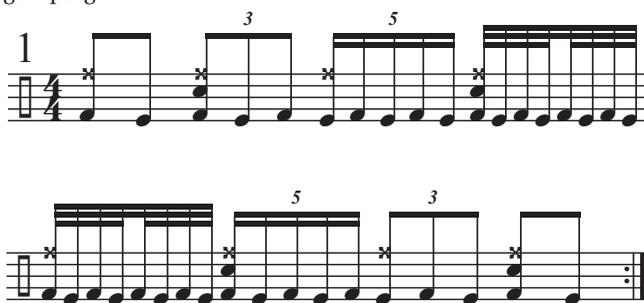


The **Fibonacci sequence** is a series of numbers that commonly begins with 0 and 1, and every following number of the sequence represents the sum of the previous two. If starting with 0 and 1, the next number in the pattern would be 1, and the following number of the series would be 2. The sequence goes on infinitely, but for the sake of this article we won't explore past the Fibonacci number of 34. Here's a longer version of the series.

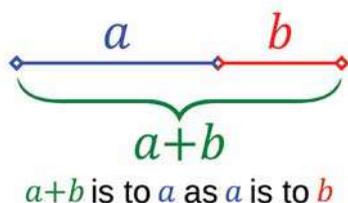
0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, etc.

The Fibonacci sequence has fascinated cultures for centuries. It's been identified throughout nature and geometry, and many people have applied its pattern to music and visual arts. A modern example can be found in the first five verse sections of the Tool song “Lateralus.” (Note that 5 is a Fibonacci number found in the previous sequence.) Count the vocal's syllabic groupings while listening to the “Lateralus” verses, and you'll find Tool front man Maynard James Keenan ascending and descending his way through the sequence within his vocal melody.

A great way to start applying Fibonacci's series to the drumset is to employ the same concept Keenan used to a bass drum pattern. Exercise 1 applies the numbers 2, 3, 5, and 8 from the Fibonacci sequence as subdivisions (two 8th notes, one triplet, one quintuplet, and eight 32nd notes) in a double bass groove that ascends and descends through those groupings.

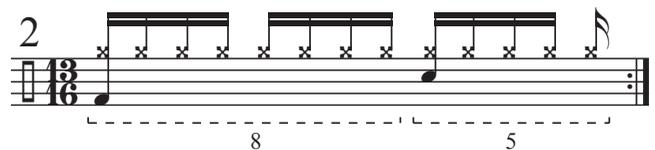


Closely related to the Fibonacci sequence is the golden ratio. In mathematics, two separate quantities are considered to be in a golden ratio if their ratio to each other is the same as the ratio of their sum to the larger of the two quantities. This relationship can be visualized in the line segment in the following diagram.

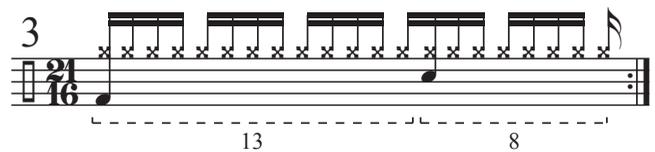


Like the Fibonacci sequence, the golden ratio has been used in architecture, painting, music, and other disciplines. Pearl Drums once even based the placement of air vents on a select series of drums on the golden ratio.

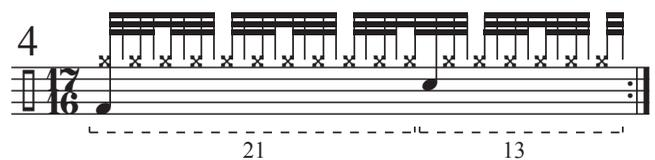
To rhythmically relate the golden ratio back to the Fibonacci sequence, we can create what I like to call “golden measures” by using three consecutive Fibonacci numbers. For example, let's take a measure of 13/8. If we cut that bar into groupings of 8 and 5, we've split our measure by approximately the golden ratio, as demonstrated in the following example. We'll play a measure of 13/16 and voice the bass drum on beat 1 to represent the 8-note grouping, and a snare on beat 3 to represent the 5-note grouping.



Exercise 3 explores the golden ratio in a measure of 21/16 with a kick on beat 1 to represent 13 and a snare on the “e” of beat 3 that outlines an 8-note grouping.



The next number in the Fibonacci sequence is 34, which we can express in Exercise 4 with a measure of 17/16 by using 32nd notes that are cut into 21- and 13-note groupings.



The three previous examples each phrased the golden measures with the larger of the two Fibonacci groupings occurring first. However, these rhythms can sound equally interesting in reversed order. In Exercise 5, we'll attack this idea in a succession of measures that ascend the Fibonacci sequence, alternating from starting each Fibonacci grouping with the bass drum to starting with a snare.



Another way we can apply sequential Fibonacci numbers to create “golden rhythms” is within subdivisions. We can explore 8- and 5-note groupings quite effectively in this way. In Exercise 6 we’ll check out a short 2/4 groove that’s constructed of 32nd notes, and we’ll accent a group of 3 notes and a group of 5 notes within each beat.

In Exercise 7, we’ll try the previous idea in a quintuplet subdivision by accenting a group of 3 and a group of 2 to naturally give us a drunken shuffle feel.

If we take the same 8-note rhythm from Exercise 6 and split the 5-note grouping another level deeper into its Fibonacci pair of 3 and 2 on beat 2 of the 2/4 measure, we get an extremely common rhythm, as demonstrated within a 16th-note subdivision in Exercise 8.

In Exercise 9 we’ll explore how these rhythms interact by stacking our 8-note bass drum pattern (playing the first, fourth, and seventh partials of the 8-note grouping) underneath a quintuplet subdivision to create another drunken shuffle in 4/4.

Let’s continue to cut the pieces within our golden measures into further Fibonacci splits in a measure of 21/16 by using the same framework that we checked out in Exercise 3. This time, we’ll split 13 into 8- and 5-note groupings, and then we’ll split the grouping of 8 into 5- and 3-note groupings. We’ll begin the second, smaller layers of groupings with a double-stroke on the hi-hats.

So far, we’ve mostly voiced each split of the Fibonacci sequence by playing the larger of each grouping’s subsequent division first. (For instance, in Exercise 10, when we split 13 into 8- and 5-note groupings, we played the 8-note grouping first. Likewise in that same exercise, when we split 8 into 5- and 3-note groupings, we played the 5-note grouping first.) In Exercise 11, we’ll build from Exercise 10 but play the smaller of both divided groupings first in that same measure of 21/16. This time we’ll add another bass drum note in our grouping of 13, which is voiced with a 5-note grouping first, and an additional snare in the 8 section, which has a division that begins with a grouping of 3.

Notice how in each section this results in another Fibonacci split. In our initial grouping of 13, the 8s have been split into 3- and 5-note groupings, and in the second part of the bar, each grouping of 5 is split further into 2- and 3-note groupings.

Let’s try stacking even more Fibonacci splits into a bar of 4/4. In Exercise 12, we’ll play straight 16th notes on the hi-hats to keep solid time. Our bass drum line descends groupings of 13, 8, 5, 3, 2, and 1 in a 32nd-note subdivision. This will be our initial framework.

Finally we’ll add a snare drum and split each of the pieces by one layer deeper of Fibonacci pairs until it collapses in on itself with a final single-note grouping.

These represent just a handful of ideas for applying the Fibonacci sequence and golden ratio to rhythms. To learn more about this fascinating set of numbers, check out Mario Livio’s book *The Golden Ratio*.



**Aaron Edgar** plays with the Canadian prog-metal band Third Ion and is a session drummer, clinician, and author. His latest book, *Progressive Drumming Essentials*, is available through Modern Drummer Publications.



# Warm-Ups and Mobility Guidance

## Part 3: Bass Drum and Lower Body

by Brandon Green



**In my opinion, bass drum warm-ups** are the most beneficial exercises you can do. I've received many emails asking about hip flexors and other aches and pains in the thighs resulting from playing the bass drum. The better you can prepare these body parts for the work they're about to do, the better you can avoid pain.

### Warm-Ups to Protect Your Back

Playing the bass drum intensely for extended periods of time results in high-level fatigue, which is when your muscles lose the ability to perform efficiently. When muscles can't function optimally, we also experience a limited range of motion. In other words, your flexibility temporarily decreases as your muscles become fatigued.

When you lose range of motion at the hip but continue to play or practice, your spine and midsection muscles will become activated in helping pick up your legs. Over time, this can lead to back pain. Similarly, excessive motion on one side of your body can cause a lateral flexing of the spine, which can lead to very uncomfortable sensations that are commonly diagnosed as SI (sacroiliac) joint back pain.

### The Internal Components

While all the joints below the waist are involved in playing the bass drum, we're going to focus on two areas. The hip flexors around the coxofemoral joint are responsible for lifting your leg up to help perform more powerful bass drum strokes, and the plantar flexors and dorsiflexors around the ankle joint are responsible for the up/down (talocrural sagittal) motion of the foot.

### The Guidelines

There are some basic rules that we've been following each month of this series, and that bear repeating. First off, always stay within your active range of motion. Don't extend any motions into a position that causes pain, and avoid fatiguing your muscles. Focus your attention on the muscles being used in each exercise, and contract those muscles like a bodybuilder when they're being used.

### Isometric Exercise for Hip Flexion

From a seated position on your throne, lift one leg as high as you can without moving your back. Focus on contracting the front of your hip (hip flexors). Repeat with the other leg.



### Isometric Exercise for Dorsiflexion

I suggest placing your feet just off to the side of your pedals, although you can perform this movement with the feet on your pedals. Lift your toes towards your shins as high as you can, contracting the muscles on the front of your shins.



### Isometric Exercise for Plantar Flexion

From the same position as above, plant your toes on the ground, and lift your heels as high as you can, contracting your calves. If you find that your calves start to cramp when doing this exercise from a seated position, try it while standing. If cramping still occurs, try to perform the motion in a squatting position. Experiment until you can contract your calf muscles without any cramping.



### Pre-Gig/Practice Session Routine

Here's how you can perform these exercises before a gig or practice session. Sit behind your drumset, and perform the isometric exercises in succession. Then, if possible, play some bass drum and hi-hat strokes. After thirty seconds, repeat the isometrics, and play the pedals some more. Altogether, this routine should only take a minute or two to get your lower body efficiently warmed up for performance.

Next month we'll discuss posture and midsection exercises to help protect your back. See you then!



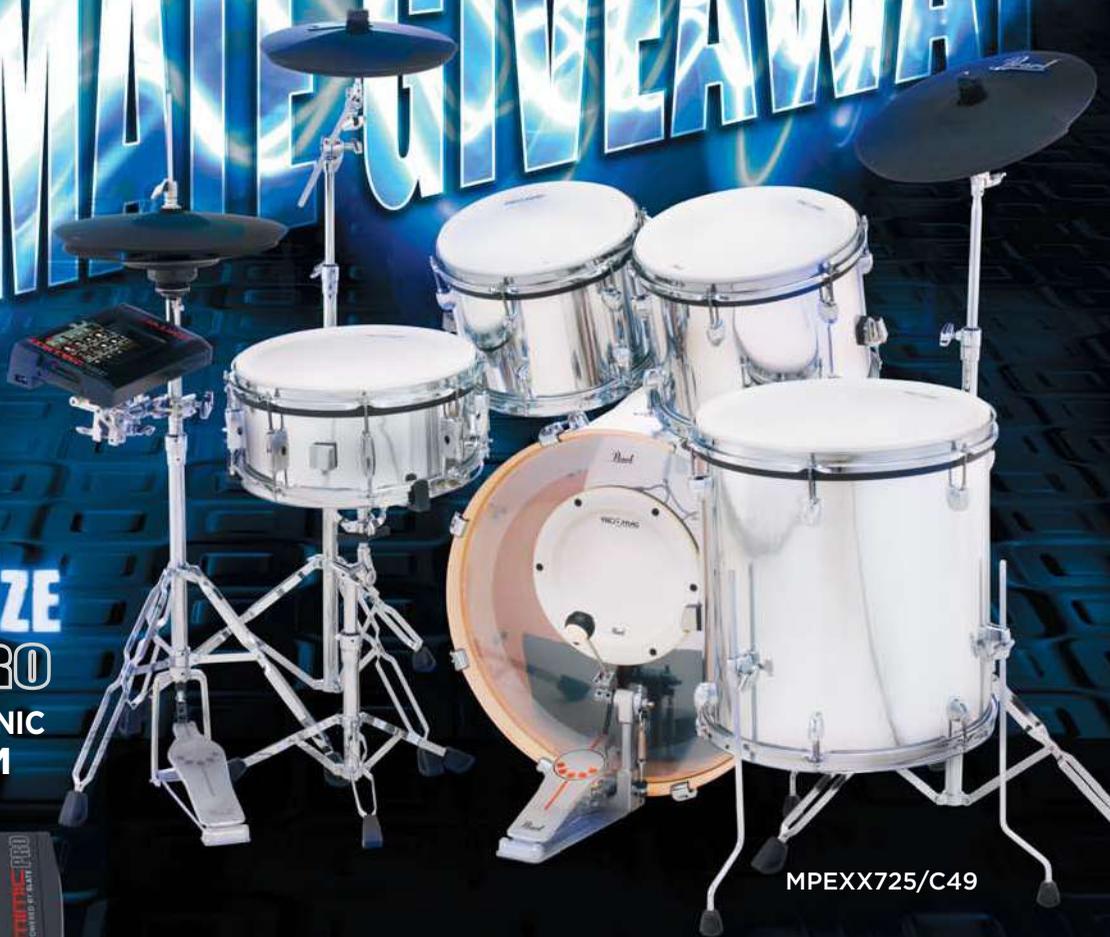
Muscle and exercise specialist **Brandon Green** is the founder of Strata Internal Performance Center, and is the owner of the drummer-centric biomechanics and fitness website [drum-mechanics.com](http://drum-mechanics.com).



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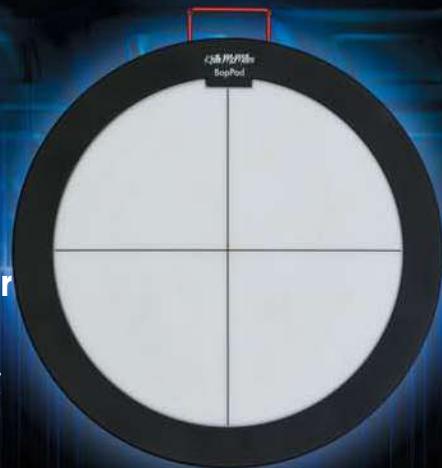
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# Craviotto Drum Company

## The Current State of Affairs

by Brandy Laurel McKenzie

Johnny Craviotto repaired and restored drums for decades before the Craviotto Drum Company became official in 2004. But the player, collector, and one-time boat-maker's apprentice is best remembered for handcrafting exquisite single-ply drums using the classic steam-bending technique. Although Craviotto unexpectedly passed away in 2016, the group of craftsmen he had thoughtfully assembled continues to uphold his precision, standards, and artistry.

### The Team

Craviotto Drums are admired worldwide, but the team behind the name is modest in number. Under the leadership of president/co-owner Steve Maxwell and co-owner Elizabeth Cabraser, the company's five employees—all hired before Johnny's passing—are devoted to preserving the unique and expert drum-making methods Craviotto established fifteen years ago. "Johnny took his art and craft very seriously," says David Victor, who has been the company's vice president of operations, sales, and marketing since 2010. "And although many times he wanted to do things his way and by himself, we were fortunate that he shared all that information and knowledge. Still, we had to ask ourselves, *What are the next steps? How do we continue the business? Are people only going to want drums that Johnny made?*"

There are twenty-one steps involved in handcrafting a Craviotto solid shell, and the team has stayed true to that intricate process established by the founder. Eric Gunn, who's in charge of quality control and assembly, was with Johnny Craviotto from the beginning, when the two first set out to develop the bending process. "While Johnny eventually left the heavy lifting to the younger guys," says Gunn, "he passed along his knowledge and kept a watchful eye on us as we learned, grew, and mastered those skills. Johnny loved to bend wood, and he took great pride in how many shells he'd bent over the years. But he was proud to pass that art to the team. Though Johnny is no longer with us, Craviotto Drums still has the mojo; that has never left."

Production coordinator Saul Rocha misses working closely with Johnny but says he's determined to maintain his mentor's high standards. "People expect quality when it comes to Craviotto," he says. "That quality starts at the beginning, with the wood selection and cutting. I took the knowledge that Johnny passed down and all

the lessons I've learned from working next to him for so many years. We spent many days working side by side. Now it's only me. It's so important to start the process right, and I take pride in continuing that."

Shortly before Johnny passed, David Lopez was brought on board to help oversee production and manufacturing. With his extensive woodworking background and familiarity with the drum

trade, Lopez ensures that every component is constructed perfectly for drummers, no matter what genre of music they play.

### Carrying the Torch

Craviotto wasn't just the founder and head of his company; he was integral to the artistic decisions and the physical assembly of the drums. "Even though he was older, Johnny was doing a lot of the finish work, so it was difficult being a man down,"

says Victor. "His spirit lives on, but not having his physical presence is tough. Lead times take longer, and we're still addressing that. But he left us in a good place where the guys have the skillset and knowledge."

Vice president of production and manufacturing Greg Gaylord adds that another obstacle is the perception from current and prospective customers that without Johnny, the drums won't be the same. "This is simply not the case," he says. "We have the same team in place making the drums as we did before Johnny passed. We've taken the information Johnny taught us and have continued with the formula he developed and applied that to new and exotic woods, always striving to find a new voice. I believe he would be pleased knowing that we are continuing to make art for other artists to be inspired by."

Another test the company faced was the potential loss of the



**The Craviotto production team, from left: Saul Rocha (production manager), David Lopez (production), David Victor (vice president), Greg Gaylord (wood expert), and Eric Gunn (assembly and quality control).**



close relationships Craviotto cultivated with a multitude of artists. “We don’t have a dedicated artist relations guy, and Johnny loved reaching out to artists and interacting with them, so that role is unfilled,” says Victor. “But we’ve retained a family of artists that Johnny developed and cared so deeply about. That says a lot. And our artists are still acquiring new drums because they believe in the process, the products, and the team of people who make them.”

Along with maintaining relationships with professional musicians, the Craviotto team strives to reach out to a younger generation of drummers who are just discovering their drums. “These drummers may not have known Johnny,” says Victor, “but they’re keenly aware of the product he developed and how Craviotto solid shells perform. He enjoyed making drums but also loved hearing comments from those who could hear the difference in his instruments, even if they didn’t own one. As Johnny would say, ‘They get it!’ These musicians hear the passion and dedication that’s put into each drum. That’s what drove Johnny and continues to drive us.”

### **Tribute, Heritage, and Other New Offerings**

To honor the late founder’s life and career, in 2017 a limited run of twenty-five Tribute snare drums was made available featuring components that Johnny Craviotto was particularly fond of using. These aptly named drums feature a single-ply maple shell, 30-degree bearing edges, chrome-over-brass hoops, and a three-point strainer. An abalone inlay was added to reflect Johnny’s love of fishing. In 2018, the Craviotto team developed the Heritage series for players who weren’t able to acquire a Tribute drum. Victor notes that they didn’t want to undermine the value and significance of the Tribute drums, but rather provide a more affordable option. Heritage snare drums feature single-ply 6x14 maple shells, eight Marquise lugs, 45-degree bearing edges, and a special new inlay.

Two new metal snares are available for those looking for a non-wood option from the company. Solitaire series drums are constructed from premium aluminum and are available in 5.5x14 and 6.5x14 sizes and in Matte Black or Aged Pewter finishes. The

aerospace-grade Titanium Solitaire is perforated in the middle and has a walnut inlay. These distinctive drums come in 4.5x14 and 6x14 sizes.

Craviotto is also expanding its focus to include handcrafting more drums from exotic and rare wood species for its Private Reserve collection. Ambrosia, curly walnut, and bird’s-eye maple are some of the current offerings. Additionally, Stacked Solid snares and drumsets that utilize two or more woods offer players a completely customizable look and tone. The custom shop also remains in place for those who want to choose the wood type, inlays, bearing edges, and lugs of built-to-order drumsets and snares.

### **Where It Goes from Here**

David Victor acknowledges that pressure exists any time a company founder—and a beloved one at that—passes. “We’re building drums as good as [we did before], if not better,” he says. “We’re pushing the envelope on new ideas and sounds. We’re continuing to be creative and build on the legacy [that Johnny] left us. We’re not stagnant. We talk about him almost every day in one way or another. I think he would be proud.

“Quality, detail, and passion are the cornerstones on which we were built,” Victor adds. “I love to spread the word about what we do, how we do it, and how we’re different, and to expand on the foundation Johnny laid.” Adds Elizabeth Cabraser, “We’re very proud of the continuity of the tradition and legacy, [while] keeping it fresh and relevant now and for the future.”

Three years after its founder’s passing, the Craviotto team is dedicated to upholding Johnny’s passion and fine craftsmanship for future generations. “All Craviotto drums are built to be both reliable workhorse drums and timeless collectors’ instruments,” says Steve Maxwell. “Sound, function, and classic beauty are the hallmarks of every Craviotto drum. Thanks to what Johnny created, the Craviotto Drum Company has shipped more than 800 sets and 5,000 snare drums to date, which is clear evidence that he got it right.”



# NEW *and* NOTABLE

## Mapex

### Black Panther Design Lab Drumkits

The Black Panther Design Lab Versatus drumset features hybrid maple and mahogany shells. Plies get progressively thicker, depths graduate by .5", bearing edges change, and the size of the SAS reinforcement rings are modified as the drums get larger in diameter.

The Cherry Bomb drumset offers a unique sound using 1 mm plies of cherry. High toms descend in .5" depths to retain drive and punch. This kit is said to create a hybrid of the classic sounds of vintage drums with modern hardware and designs. [mapexdesignlab.com](http://mapexdesignlab.com)



## Ahead

### Armor Rolling Hardware Sled

This 38"x16"x14", heavy-duty rolling case, designed by Ogio, is constructed with a reinforced bottom section built to withstand the rigors of the road. Additional features include weather-resistant and double-stitched 600-denier polyester fabric, oversized wheels, double-locking adjustable straps, and a fully retractable handle.

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



## Alesis

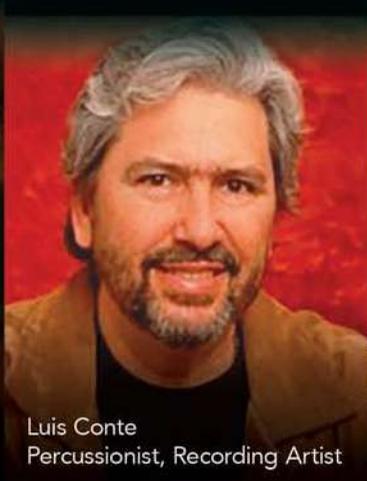
### Strike MultiPad

The Strike MultiPad is designed to allow users to sample any sound or effect and create loop-based recordings. The module includes more than 8,000 samples and loops, 32 GB of storage, and a variety of melodic instruments, while the 4.3" display makes editing easy. Additional features include a two-input/two-output USB audio and MIDI interface, nine velocity-sensitive pads with customizable RGB lights, five built-in effects processors, three kit effects, one master effect, a compressor, and an equalizer. Pro Tools First and Ableton Live Lite software are included. [alesis.com](http://alesis.com)

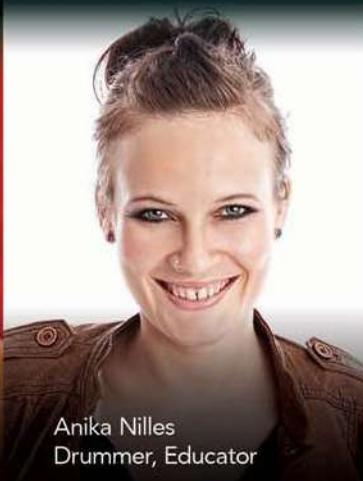
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## NEW *and* NOTABLE

### Tama Star Reserve Snare Drum Vol. 5

This 7x14, 10 mm snare is constructed of sixteen stave pieces of hard and dense jatoba wood. The three large vent holes are designed to make the drum's attack more open and promote projection. Star series die-cast hoops and hi-carbon snare wires add sensitivity and also enhance projection.  
[tama.com](http://tama.com)



### Soundbrenner Core Music Tool

This wearable four-in-one smart music tool includes a vibrating metronome that can be used alone or in synchronization with up to ten devices worn by other musicians. The Magnetic Twist Tuner allows the Core to twist off from its base and magnetically attach to a guitar. The decibel meter monitors the surrounding volume levels and alerts the user when they become potentially harmful. The Core can also receive push and call notifications from a smartphone.  
[soundbrenner.com](http://soundbrenner.com)



### Mr. Muff MiniMuff Drum Damper

The polyester MiniMuff external damper mounts to a drum's rim via a clip. The amount of damping is variable by adding or removing weight, and a concealed magnet powers the on/off function. No permanent modification to the drum is required.  
[mistermuff.com](http://mistermuff.com)

### Innovative Percussion A7X Brooks Wackerman Signature Stick

The 16.5" A7X Brooks Wackerman signature stick was designed specifically for the needs of today's modern rock/metal drummer. The .626" diameter expands slightly to .630" at the shoulder to promote a powerful sound while allowing the user to maintain speed for faster passages. The stick has a mild taper from the shoulder to the bead to keep the stick evenly balanced. The barrel-shaped bead provides a bold yet clear cymbal sound.  
[innovativepercussion.com](http://innovativepercussion.com)



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# Lone Star Percussion

## Dallas, Texas

In today's Amazon-obsessed world, ordering a drumstick or cymbal is only a click away. But forty years ago, trying to find a pair of signature sticks or specialty mallets was more challenging. Lone Star Percussion made it possible for percussionists all over the United States to get their musical supplies in just a few days, and at discount prices.

In 1978, Harvey Vogel founded the percussion mail-order business in Dallas, Texas, located in a 400-square-foot storefront with a showroom just large enough to hold one six-foot counter. The shop originally only stocked sticks and mallets, but soon the shelves overflowed with drumheads and cymbals. In 1982 the ever-expanding business relocated to northeast Dallas, and three years after that moved across the street to its current 25,000-square-foot office/warehouse/showroom. Known for its large inventory of heads, cymbals, marching and concert percussion instruments, and drumsets,

Lone Star shipped most orders within 24 hours. Four decades later, the business is stronger than ever.

Jeff Nelson is the current president and CEO of Lone Star Percussion. Nelson joined the company in 2006, along with a partner—his sons' percussion teacher—who left the business in 2016 to pursue other ventures. In March 2017, Lone Star added a second location in Fullerton, California.

Nelson's percussion background began in middle school, when he joined a small drum corps in northern Kentucky. While attending the University of Kentucky, Nelson joined the Spirit of Atlanta Drum and Bugle Corps, where he marched for three seasons (and met his wife, Judy). In 1982, Nelson followed future DCI Hall of Fame percussion instructor Tom Float out to Concord, California, where he joined the Blue Devils, first as a marching member and then as an instructor.



Some of Lone Star's thirty-two employees on the front steps of the Dallas store.

After earning an electrical engineering degree and spending two decades in the telecom world, Nelson was ready for a career change. "Lone Star wasn't on my radar during my drum corps days. But when I was shopping here for my kids, I thought, 'Wouldn't it be cool to have a place like this?' We found out the business was for sale [from interim owner Bobby Roundtree] and thought we could make something out of it—I would be the business guy, and my partner, with his connections in the teaching community, would handle sales."

**When we acquired the business, one of the first things we did was increase our walk-in presence.** It was still mainly a catalog business, but we wanted to put more products into people's hands. We expanded the showroom with band and orchestral items, because those were the roots of Lone Star. But one Christmas we decided to try drumsets, and lo and behold, they did really well. So now the [nearly 2,000-square-foot] showroom is dedicated to the combo/drumset market. It's a very small piece of what we do at Lone Star, maybe about 10 percent, but compared to other drum shops, it's quite large. Approximately 90 percent of our business is still driven by schools, but many students are getting into drumset.

**When we decided to expand the drumset market, we focused on Dallas/Fort Worth.** To a lot of local gigging drummers, Lone Star was a school shop. To change that perception, we had to treat them almost like a different customer, with a completely different marketing strategy. We felt we needed to have some clinics to bring them in the door, so we've hosted artists like Kenny Aronoff, Ignacio Berroa, Terry Bozzio, and Todd Sucherman. We built a stage in the back warehouse, including sound-proofing curtains and lighting. The room served two purposes: it was the only place that was large enough to [hold clinics], and walking through it let people see just how much inventory we have!



Jeff and Judy Nelson with some of the awards that manufacturers have presented to them for outstanding achievements.



Robert Anderson manages Lone Star's school bid business.

Shawn Schietroma, director of e-commerce, with a special "Lone Star" snare drum made by DW.





Lone Star's expanded showroom.



In the warehouse, shelves hold cymbals, hardware, and sticks and mallets organized by brand and model number.

**What we offer drumset players that other stores don't are salespeople who truly know the drums.** Other shops tend to have high turnover, but our employees stick around. Most of our guys have either a bachelor's or master's degree in percussion performance or education, and many are gigging drummers. We had eleven employees when we acquired the business in 2006, and we're up to thirty-two now, including one [Dave Rieder, warehouse manager] who's been here almost thirty years. One important thing is that no one works on commission. We tell everyone to take care of the customer and make sure he or she is happy. We use more of an educational approach with our customers. We certainly hope you buy at Lone Star, but you'll never get pressured here.

**We also offer smaller, unique brands that aren't found in chain stores.** We carry high-end, handmade drums from Q Drum Co., Canopus Drums, Noble & Cooley, Craviotto, and A&F Drum Co.; snare drums from Dunnett and Cooper Acoutin; and Red Rock Drums from Australia. Of course we offer drumsets from the big companies as well—DW, Mapex, Pearl, Tama, and Yamaha. We also have a large cymbal display in the showroom featuring Zildjian, Sabian, Paiste, Meinl, and Dream, with even more in the warehouse.

**Most of our customers come through the school band programs.** Students hear about us from their percussion teachers—it's very word-of-mouth. We've made a big effort in recent years to attend numerous trade shows. We spend a lot of time supporting the arts, supporting Percussive Arts Society [Nelson currently serves on PAS's board of directors], giving scholarships, sponsoring drum corps shows and WGI events—giving back to the community. We found that the older crowd knew Lone Star because they'd bought everything here when they were in college, but the young kids had no idea who we were!

**When we bought the business, we had very little web presence, so we put a big investment into our website.** We also got rid of the iconic "discount price list/catalog." We were scared to do it because it was the identity of the business to so many people, but we had to make that leap. Now the website features our own customized product descriptions. Customers either discover us on the internet or via word-of-mouth. You may buy your first drumset at a big-box music store, but we hope you'll buy every drumset thereafter from us.

Story and photos by Lauren Vogel Weiss



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# CRITIQUE

## RECORDINGS

### Donny McCaslin *Blow*.

Still riding the massive spurt of creativity he uncovered on David Bowie's *Blackstar*, the saxophonist channels a similar gritty spirit on *Blow*.

Mark Guiliana, Zach Danziger, and Nate Wood share drumming duties on what is largely a rock record, bringing their kinetic, madly inventive drumming to the music when it allows.

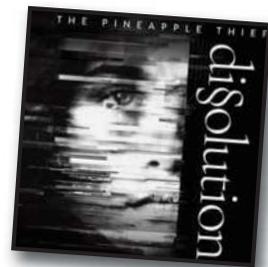
Nate Wood's lo-fi drums in "New Kindness" recall a shortwave transmission of sputtering beats. "Exactlyfourminutesofimprovisedmusic" opens with a complex ten-second solo drum groove from Danziger that will send drummers to their transcribing machines. "Beast" percolates on a patented NYC jungle groove via Guiliana, all locomotion and smoke; Mark rips further on "Tempest," which recalls Soundgarden by way of a punk-rock bonfire. All in all, some amazing, state-of-the-art creative fusion drumming framed in rock songs with open space to burn. (donnymccaslin.bandcamp.com) **Ken Micallef**



### The Pineapple Thief *Dissolution*

GAVIN HARRISON returns for another round of bright ideas and faultless drumming.

For his second outing with English modern progressive group the Pineapple Thief, and this time collaborating on writing sessions with leader/vocalist Bruce Soord from the jump, Gavin Harrison again delivers his trademark perfectly executed drum parts and lifts the proceedings to new heights. Everything Harrison touches seems to turn to gold; the record features great production, a weighty and clear kit sound, and inventive drum patterns that cradle the vocals but never descend into predictability. Check out "Threatening War" for a slick, syncopated sidestick beat in the verses that opens up into a double-time section where Harrison adds tasty toms without deviating from the insistent pulse. Then he throws in an intricate 7/4 groove that itself builds dynamically into the song's big climax. Later, dig on the eleven-minute, multipart "White Mist" for some of the drummer's subtle ghosting work and ride cymbal propulsion under a guitar solo. Technically beautiful performances aside, it's Harrison's undeniable feel that makes him *the guy* for this genre of rock. (Kscope) **Ilya Stemkovsky**

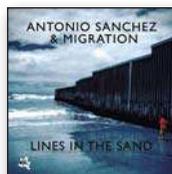


## TAKING THE REINS

### Antonio Sanchez & Migration *Lines in the Sand*

Like his 2017 drum-solo-meets-electronics watershed, *Bad Hombre*, Antonio Sanchez's latest release is a passionate protest.

An artist who emigrated to the United States from Mexico, Antonio Sanchez focuses on President Donald Trump's immigration policies on his new recording. Expanding upon his previous disc, *Bad Hombre*, Sanchez's quintet, Migration, create a canvas marked by epic-length cinematic compositions. The centerpiece, "Bad Hombres y Mujeres,"



references the previous disc's title track with its stuttering, syncopated bass line enhanced by Sanchez's dazzling groove/soloing featuring myriad kit textures and ultra-syncopated beat displacements and subdivisions. Migration adds layers of harrowing rapid runs above it, doubled by wordless vocals. In contrast, "Home" lingers in an eerie calm while "Long Road" exudes strife with an aching buildup guided by Sanchez's fractured, ultra-slow groove. And the title track, peppered with snippets of spoken poetry, eventually bursts into a furious rocked-out assault. The eclectic, dazzlingly performed future-fusion compositions are heady in their complexity. But foremost, the album is a righteous gut-punch. (CAM Jazz) **Jeff Potter**

## MULTIMEDIA

### *Time/Manipulation* by Alain Rieder

Originally published in 1992, this classic method book garnered praise from top drummers and educators. Now the author has updated it with additional exercises and online audio examples.

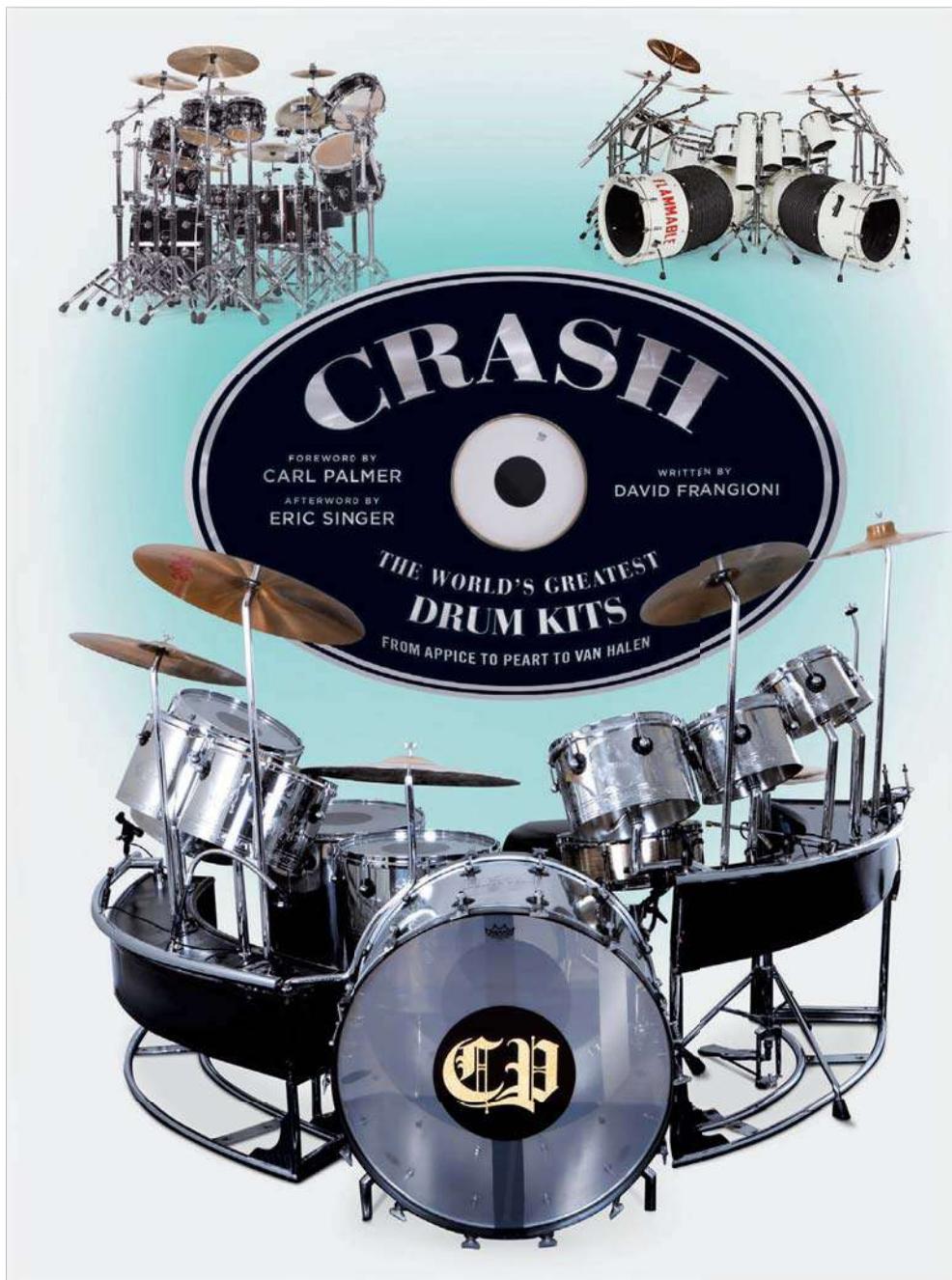
Designed to develop coordination in a groove context, *Time/Manipulation* features an open format that favors exploration. The bulk of the exercises consist of sets of one-bar beats, where a simple groove builds in complexity. What's special is the relationship between the simple and complex grooves, and the related patterns in between them. They can be mixed and matched, ostinato ride patterns can be swapped in, bass drum phrasing can be altered, and more, allowing for a lot of creative exploration. The collection



of phrases in both 4/4 and 12/8 develops a solid foundation in groove, along a spectrum from simple to complex.

Later there are sections that delve into 4:3 and 3:2 polyrhythms, ideas like three-bar patterns, beat displacement, and more. Each of these more advanced concepts quickly brings things back to how they might function within a groove. Such an approach works to strengthen rhythmic awareness, leading to a deeper overall understanding. A welcome update to a classic, *Time/Manipulation* remains an excellent single-book introduction to these concepts. The open format sparks ideas and creativity while getting a drummer thinking about new ideas. Fun, inspiring, and educational. (\$38.58, timemanipulation.com) **Martin Patmos**

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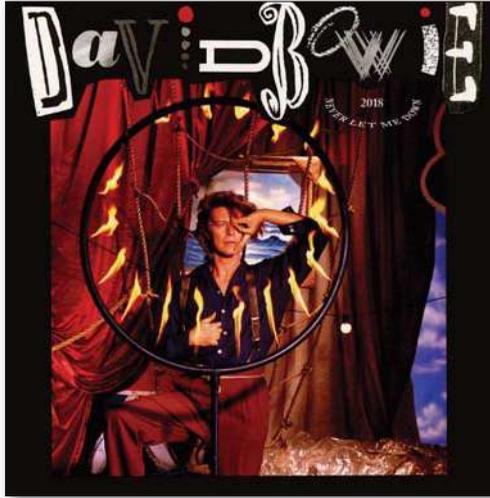
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# David Bowie's *Never Let Me Down 2018*

David Bowie so despised his 1987 studio album, *Never Let Me Down*, that he didn't play a single song from it live after wrapping the tour behind it. And on the rare occasions when he discussed the record publicly, he hardly looked back on it fondly. "Oh, to redo the rest of that album," he wrote in the liner notes to the 2008 *iSelect* compilation, which featured a rerecorded version of *Never Let Me Down's* "Time Will Crawl," where Sterling Campbell's steady pocket mercifully replaces the bombastic programmed drums that dominated the record.

Sadly, Bowie died before he could have another crack at the album. But some trusted Bowie associates, including Campbell—who had recorded and toured frequently with Bowie from the early '90s up until sessions for his penultimate studio album, 2013's *The Next Day*—took it upon themselves to undertake a project they were sure the iconic artist would have



gotten around to had he lived long enough. Campbell, engineer/producer Mario McNulty, guitarists Reeves Gabrels and David Torn, and bassist Tim Lefebvre retracked *Never Let Me Down* from the ground up, working with little from the original apart from Bowie's vocals. The rerecorded *Never Let Me Down* is included in last year's box set *Loving the Alien [1983 to 1988]*, and it represents a massive improvement over the original.

Campbell's role cannot be overstated. He adds a sorely needed human touch to songs that deserved a much better treatment than what they received thirty-plus years ago, when David Bowie pulled the very *un*-David Bowie-like move of doing what everyone else was doing at the time, like using programmed drums slathered in gated reverb, synthesized horns, gang vocals, and slap bass. By

chipping away at the original's wall of artificial sound, Campbell and crew reveal some very strong songs and typically sublime vocal performances from Bowie that were previously obscured by utter sonic confusion.

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"Time Will Crawl" (left intact from its 2008 reboot) is a good example of Campbell using addition by subtraction to find a song's sweet spot. Where the original opens with a pounding fill that sounds like someone programmed the drum machine to the "Tony Thompson on the Power Station Album" setting, Campbell lays out until the song is well along here, letting the guitars, strings and Bowie's mournful vocal build at a measured clip before settling into a groove. On songs like the title track, Campbell doesn't stray far from the original part; instead he humanizes the feel by

tapping out the stuttering programmed hi-hat pattern with his own two hands, and breaking at the top of the choruses to give the hook room to breathe.

Campbell's most drastic alterations come on songs like "Shining Star (Makin' My Love)" and "Bang Bang," both recast in half-time. The original "Shining Star (Makin' My Love)" bopped along like a lost A-ha song, its sunny feel and melodies at odds with Bowie's tale of addicts and hookers. Campbell lays down a weighty, strutting backbeat that still fits perfectly with Bowie's vocal cadence and gives the song an edge it lacked in its

previous iteration. "Bang Bang," an Iggy Pop cover, is transformed from a generic '80s rocker into something more menacing that wouldn't have sounded out of place on a later Bowie record.

It'll be interesting to see if the rerecorded *Never Let Me Down* inspires other artists to revisit work they felt got away from them. At the very least, Campbell and company have transformed an album that represented Bowie's creative nadir into something rock's great chameleon likely would have been very pleased with.

**Patrick Berkery**



## Sterling Campbell on Retracking *Never Let Me Down*

**MD:** Did you have demos to use as blueprints?

**Sterling:** I did. But there just wasn't anything that was making me want to do anything with them [in advance]. It just felt like a natural thing to wait until we got into the studio. Everything I've ever done with David was always flying by the seat of my pants. I never knew what I was going to play.

**MD:** So you went in cold?

**Sterling:** I really didn't have a plan. The plan came once we started getting rid of stuff from the original tracks. Once things got stripped out and I had room to play, I could really hear what David was doing. Then I could go, *Okay, I need to get out of the way or I need to change this part.*

**MD:** How much time did you spend tracking the drums?

**Sterling:** We had three days to rethink this thing. We *had* to fly by the seat of our pants. It wasn't really super thought-out. And I'd had a layoff from playing drums for a month or two, and I remember just being so tired because I hadn't played. And the first day I don't know if we kept anything. I was just trying to get back in the mechanics of playing.

**MD:** How involved was David when it came to tracking drums?

**Sterling:** It'd be, "How about this?" That's about as intellectual as it ever got between me and David over the years. He'd throw up something—sometimes it'd just have chords, no vocals—and we'd track. He could tailor completely around what you do. He was a genius at that.

**Sterling Campbell plays DW drums and Zildjian cymbals and uses Vic Firth sticks, Evans heads, and Roland products.**

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# INDUSTRY HAPPENINGS

## George Strait Drummer Michael Kennedy Passes

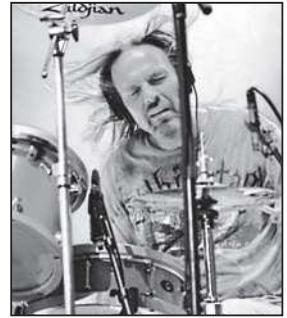
He backed the country superstar for more than thirty years.

Michael Kennedy, the longtime drummer with George Strait and the Ace in the Hole Band, passed away last August 31 at the age of fifty-nine.

In a 2015 video posted to YouTube by Zildjian, Kennedy explained that after picking up drums around the age of seven, he played with his dad's band into his mid-teens. The drummer would go on to play professionally with the country and gospel singer Barbara Fairchild, as well as the country and bluegrass singer Ricky Skaggs. After his five-year tenure with Skaggs, Kennedy landed a gig with Strait that he would remain in for nearly three decades.

Shortly after Kennedy's passing, Strait released this statement on

social media: "[It's] hard to put into words how much Mike's passing has affected us all. Our hearts are broken. It's going to be very strange not being able to look over and see him there in his spot onstage, and very emotional as well, I'm sure for all of us and also his fans. The band will never be the same. A part of us is gone forever. We all loved Mike and will miss him terribly. He was just as solid a friend to us all as he was a drummer, and that was damn solid."



## The 2018 Montreal Intensive Drumming Day

The event was packed tight with top Canadian drum educators and enthusiasts.

The fifth edition of the Montreal Intensive Drumming Day was held this past September 30 at the Studio LaTraque in Montreal. The event was hosted by the drummers, clinicians, and educators Daniel Bédard and Stéphane Chamberland, and the Canada-based drummer Mark Kelso was featured as a guest artist and clinician.

Chamberland opened with keyboard player Mathieu Fiset by demonstrating songs from their progressive drum 'n' bass project, Robojazz, and explaining how the parts came to fruition. Daniel Bédard followed and played songs composed by Tommy Igoe and Oz Noy. Bédard shared some technical insights on stick technique



and natural body movement using paradiddles. He also discussed ways to get mileage from simple linear ideas by using a few different motion concepts.

Kelso closed the day by playing an inspiring musical solo that showcased why he's such an in-demand sideman and leader. He then talked about how one could become a more musical

player by diving deep into topics such as laid-back grooves, click displacements, the art of listening, and more. Concepts like those can be found on Kelso's DVD, *Musician First, Drummer Second*, which is available on his website, [groovydrums.com](http://groovydrums.com).

Plans are in the works for the sixth edition of the Montreal Intensive Drumming Day.

## Los Angeles Musician's Union Honors DW Founder Don Lombardi

A new rehearsal room is named in recognition of the innovator and industry vet.

After opening their new headquarters in Burbank, California, this past May, the American Federation of Musicians, Local 47, recently honored DW founder Don Lombardi by dedicating a rehearsal room to his legacy. Local 47 vice president Rick Baptist presented the acknowledgement to Lombardi in recognition of his contribution to the drumming community.

The union's new Burbank facility boasts 10,000 square feet of modern rehearsal rooms that are equipped exclusively with DW drums, pedals, and hardware. It replaces the Local 47's location on Vine Street in Hollywood, California.

"We're thrilled to offer our members a state-of-the-art space with plenty of room to grow," Baptist says. "Future plans include a performance-ready theater venue and even more amenities. The fact that we can offer musicians a comfortable place to hone their craft is a dream come true."

Lombardi also praised the L.A. chapter, which he had joined when he was fifteen years old. "When I had the opportunity to purchase

the Camco tooling in our early years, the first place I went to get the financing was the Musicians' Credit Union," Lombardi said. "I hold the Local 47 near and dear to my heart." Baptist added, "When we needed drums, every drummer here wanted DW. It was unanimous. And when we reached out to the good folks at DW, they didn't hesitate to serve these musicians the way we do. It's not just that they make a superior product—it's also the people that make DW what it is. Our renewed relationship with DW is really something special!"





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# A Compact Flyer



**The Iceland-based drummer** Jón Óskar Jónsson uses this month's featured setup with singer, multi-instrumentalist, and songwriter Sóley. Jónsson played this compact C&C kit on a summer 2017 tour with the artist, who he's been performing with since 2010.

"It's a C&C Super Flyer," Jónsson says, "with a 7x13 maple/poplar/maple snare, a 16" concert floor tom, and an 8x18 bass drum. I have a matching 12" tom, but I don't need it for this gig."

The setup includes a Roland TM-2 trigger module and BT-1 pads, and a mix of cymbals. "The hi-hat top is a 12" splash paired with a flat bottom cymbal from the 12" Sabian Jam Master hi-hats," Jónsson explains. "Since I don't need a ride for this music, my biggest cymbal is a very dry and dark 16" Bosphorus Turk series crash, which I ride on occasionally. Then I have two cymbal stacks and various percussion instruments."

Jónsson says that the kit's comparatively small drum sizes allow him to play at the very low volumes the Sóley gig requires. "Another big plus," he says, "is that I can fit the whole kit—everything except the stands and my mixer—inside a bass drum case. I open up the bass drum head and put the snare inside, the floor tom goes into a bag, and inside the floor tom I have another bag with my electronics, pads, and percussion. This all goes on top of the bass drum. The floor tom legs, old-school cymbal stand, and stick bag go vertically alongside the bass drum. The cymbal bag, which was designed by my wife and sewn by my mom, sits on top of everything."

"Since I live in Iceland, we always need to fly everywhere," adds Jónsson. "So with this setup I can easily fly to most places, at least in Europe, because it's only one extra bag. I just close the bass drum case, and I'm ready to go."

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



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Karl's Brooklyn Kit is a Deep Black Marine Pearl shell pack (GB-RC443-094) which includes a 14" x 24" bass drum, 16" x 16" floor tom and a 9" x 13" rack tom, plus add-on components which include a 14" x 22" bass drum and a 5" x 14" snare drum.

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