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## Enduring Effort

I've been reading *Modern Drummer* since I was a teenager, and since first picking up the January 2001 25th Anniversary issue, I've managed to hang on to my copy of nearly every subsequent one. The first time I saw MD at a shopping mall bookstore in the early 2000s, I remember thinking, *Wait, someone makes a magazine for US?* I felt excited and grateful; many of you likely felt that same elation after picking up your own first copy.

It wasn't long after discovering MD that I became aware of this month's cover artist, Mark Schulman. It was in the Ask a Pro column of the March 2003 issue. Schulman was performing with the pop icon Cher then, and he was asked by a reader about his ability to achieve different drum tones at the kit without having to change setups. Mark's response was clearly worded, enthusiastic, thorough, and informative. In addition, his advice on technique, phrasing, and tuning still holds up.

Schulman's 2003 response feels particularly profound today due to the amount of effort he put into answering that one question. His reply filled an entire page, and not a word was wasted. In the time since that piece was published, Mark's lost none of that passion for informing drummers. For proof all you need to do is read this month's cover feature, which includes extended coverage on his journey and methods. Check it out on page 20. And if you'd like to read Mark's March 2003 Ask a Pro response, that entire issue is available digitally in our archive at [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com).

While I was revisiting that 2003 issue, I couldn't help but think about the technological and social changes that our industry and readership have experienced in the ensuing years, and how those changes relate to the artists we're covering this month. As social media became important in many of our lives toward the end of the '00s, Schulman followed right along for the ride while building an independent studio career via various online platforms. Among the topics covered in his interview this month, Mark digs into some of the specific steps he took on that path. Elsewhere in the issue, the pop drummer Kaz Rodriguez talks about building a successful career in part by utilizing YouTube and various digital outlets prior to landing a gig with the singer/songwriter Josh Groban. And in this month's Spotlight column you can read about the social media campaign that's recently helped the drum accessory company Spinbal achieve success.

And speaking of social media, we always appreciate your responses to our monthly Readers' Platform questions, and we value the feedback you share with us via [letters@moderndrummer.com](mailto:letters@moderndrummer.com). Keep those comments coming, and enjoy the issue!



**Willie Rose**  
Associate Editor



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**MODERN DRUMMER** magazine (ISSN 0194-4533) is published monthly by **MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc.**, 271 Route 46 West, Suite H-212, Fairfield, NJ 07004. PERIODICALS MAIL POSTAGE paid at Fairfield, NJ 07004 and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 2019 by **MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc.** All rights reserved. Reproduction without the permission of the publisher is prohibited.

#### EDITORIAL/ADVERTISING/ ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES:

**MODERN DRUMMER Publications**, 271 Route 46 West, Suite H-212, Fairfield, NJ 07004. Tel: 973-239-4140. Fax: 973-239-7139.

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

#### SUBSCRIPTION

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

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

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

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

**MEMBER:** National Association of Music Merchants, Percussive Arts Society

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

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

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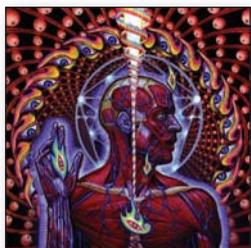
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# What's Your Favorite 2000s Metal Drumming Album?



Heavy metal underwent significant change between 2000 and 2010, as the genre continually split into new styles. While the popularity of nu-metal began to ebb, melodic metalcore, mathcore, and djent, among other subgenres, rose to prominence. Here we check in with our readers and social media followers for some of their favorite metal albums from this transitional decade.

*Temple of Shadows* by Angra [2004] with Aquiles Priester. The album features a perfect union of metal-style drums with many varied styles of percussion, all played by Priester.

**João Marcello**

*Allegiance* by As Blood Runs Black [2006]. Hector "Lech" De Santiago has great footwork as he navigates and complements varying tempos, awesome breakdowns, and sweet guitar harmonies throughout.

**Andrew Jordan**

Martyr's *Feeding the Abscess* [2006] featuring Patrice Hamelin is such a ridiculous album on all instrumental fronts, but the drum

performance is seriously next level. While this music could have easily been riddled with blast beats or tasteless speed, the groove and fills are executed with a human touch and intent, and Hamelin accents the intricate arrangements while elevating the music to a whole new plateau of technicality and musicianship. To be fair, this is music for musicians. But over a decade later I'm still floored by what Hamelin laid down.

**Brandon White**

*Train of Thought* by Dream Theater [2003]. It's the band's heaviest album, but it still features some of Mike Portnoy's most technical work. The first five seconds of "Honor Thy Father" say it all.

**Joe Lawson**

Vektor's *Black Future* [2009] is one of my favorites. Blake Anderson elevates the neo-thrash genre to a place it seldom sees with a vast expanse of drumming styles crammed into a tightly arranged package. He combines the odd times, polyrhythms, and syncopation of prog rock with the all-

out attack and merciless blast-note frenzy of black metal. Somehow, through it all he still retains a feeling of groove and head-banging pulse that results in a thrashy, old-school-feeling record. To top it off, Anderson plays completely open-handed, meaning he's leading with his left hand about half the time as a naturally right-handed player.

**Ryan Alexander Bloom**

*Constellations* by August Burns Red [2009]. To me, Matt Greiner is the ideal metalcore drummer. He's got power, speed, precision, and plenty of chops to throw in. You could put any of their albums up here, but *Constellations* happens to be my personal favorite.

**Isaiah Keller**

Tool's *Lateralus* [2001] is a masterpiece. Danny Carey's parts perfectly complement what everyone else is playing. He's extremely technical without over-playing. And the odd meters never sound odd. I can still listen to this album and enjoy it as much as I did the first time I heard it.

**Andrew Pace**

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

## John Bonham's First Drumset

As always, I enjoyed the article/history lesson in the January 2019 issue regarding John Bonham's first Ludwig kit [Shop Talk]. I'm a bit of a Rogers guy, and I just wanted to mention a few thoughts regarding the piece.

I noticed that there's a single Rogers Swivo-Matic mount on the right side of Bonham's bass drum, and what appears to be the male part of a double Swivo-Matic tom mount on the left side of the bass drum. As per past comments by Bobby Chiasson of the Jollity Drum Farm, this seems to be another example of a 1960s drumset where

non-Rogers tom mounts were ordered or switched out for the more advanced Rogers Swivo-Matic mounts. You might not see that type of combination today with high-end drum manufacturers, but the use of the Rogers Swivo-Matic mounts back then with non-Rogers drums wasn't unheard of.

Anyway, as a long-time *Modern Drummer* subscriber who's still using a vintage Rogers double bass kit in a black diamond finish that I purchased new in 1968, I just wanted to pass these thoughts along to you.

**Allan M. Tepper**



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## Navene Koperweis on Whitechapel's *The Valley*

The progressive-metal vet puts his unique stamp on the long-running deathcore titan's newest release.

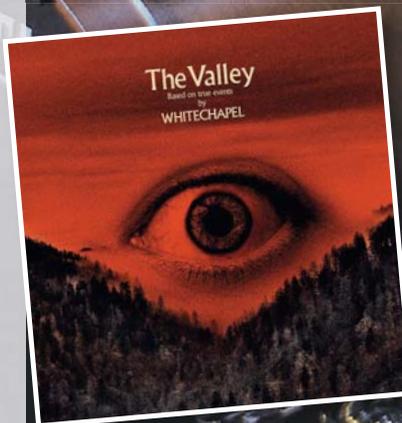
This past March 29, the Knoxville, Tennessee-based metal band Whitechapel released *The Valley* on Metal Blade records. The album—the group's seventh since 2007—features the multi-instrumentalist, producer, and drummer Navene Koperweis behind the skins. Throughout *The Valley's* dynamic swings, Koperweis displays his signature blazing double bass chops, fat single-stroke tom-laden fills, and blistering blast beats, all the while powering the group's darker direction with a deep pocket and wide-open studio tones.

Koperweis tells *MD* that a few months after his main group, the progressive metal outfit Entheos, opened for Whitechapel on a 2018 tour, guitarist Ben Savage asked him whether he'd be interested in playing on their next album. "I gave Ben an immediate yes," Koperweis says, "and after recording a few demos, I got the gig. I listened to the demo versions of the songs and made myself familiar with the material. But ultimately, I didn't want to have my parts too committed to muscle memory, as I knew that [producer] Mark Lewis and the band would like to have input on the fly in the studio."

The album's opener, "When a Demon Defiles a Witch," features a somber guitar intro that's broken by a tom-fill barrage from Koperweis. The drummer then blasts over 16th and sextuplet double bass figures while switching ride hands at whim. Koperweis's playing here foreshadows his performance on the rest of the album's ten tracks, as the drummer's speed, groove, and finesse shine throughout. To keep up his chops, Koperweis says he sheds his hands and feet every couple of months. "I practice timed sessions at a speed that's just above what I'm comfortable with," he explains. "Come to think of it, any speed becomes uncomfortable if you do it for long enough. I use a metronome app called MetroTimer. It's good for practicing double bass—you can set it for time blocks at any given speed. I'll usually do a few five-minute blocks around 180–220 bpm. I really think the best thing for developing speed is time under tension. You have to give yourself that stress to get better at it. It's the same as any physical activity—there are no shortcuts. Want to play faster? Play fast."

Koperweis's distinctly huge and open drum tone sings throughout *The Valley*, a rarity in a genre where you're more apt to hear controlled kit sounds or samples. As examples, check out the tasty, open march groove Koperweis plays around the 2:20 mark of the first track, or the machine-gun fill he plays on the opening to "We Are One." Koperweis says that he thinks his tone was an important part of the vision for the album, and that it was a big factor in the band's decision to bring him in. "I like that live, acoustic sound, and that's baked into my style," he says. "We spent about two days in the studio getting the drums and mics to sound right. Mark is super picky about that stuff, whereas I'm a little impatient with it all. But we all just wanted a lot of room mic and for it to slam. Goal achieved, in my opinion." **Willie Rose**

**Navene Koperweis plays Tama drums and Meinl cymbals, and he uses Evans drumheads, Promark sticks, Gator cases, and Direct Sound headphones.**





Bryan Kirks

## More New Releases



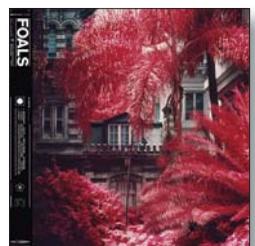
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**Queensrÿche**  
The Verdict (Todd La Torre)

# ON TOUR

## Jharis Yokley with My Brightest Diamond

The Berklee grad and tasteful up-and-comer  
backs the experimental savant on the road.





Jay Pinho

Following the release of the album *A Million and One* this past November, the innovative indie-pop act My Brightest Diamond embarked on a North American tour opening for the Canadian alternative group Stars. Now this spring the brainchild of singer-songwriter Shara Nova heads out on a run through mid May, with select dates opening for Death Cab for Cutie. Behind the skins on the trek with Nova is Jharis Yokley, an up-and-coming Berklee College of Music grad and a 2014 Guitar Center Drum-Off finalist.

As evidenced at a December show at New York City's Brooklyn Steel last year, from the start of the duo's live set, Yokley brings an explosive energy to the material while fusing the songwriter's tunes with occasional gospel licks and impressive technique. The drummer began the Brooklyn Steel show on his own with a fiery, chops-infused solo filled with wild tom fills and rapid one-handed 16th-note flourishes. "For that opening solo, I just try to get the audience's attention," Yokley tells *MD*. "I'm not trying to impress them; I'm just setting a mood for the show. In general, though, I usually try to develop a rhythmic motif in solos to tell the audience a story."

To maintain his facility, Yokley utilizes a few classic go-to drum books. "For technique and control, I try to run through Alan Dawson's rudimental ritual as often as I can," he says. "For one-handed phrasing, studying jazz really helped. I mainly practiced from three books: George Lawrence Stone's *Stick Control*, Jim Chapin's *Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer*, and John Riley's *Beyond Bop Drumming*—all essential reading material for drummers."

Before landing the MBD gig, Yokley tells *MD*, a mutual friend, the increasingly busy up-and-coming drummer Lenny "the Ox" Reece, gave Nova his number to ask him to play one show with her, and the relationship between the songwriter and drummer steadily grew from there. "I try to keep most of the drum parts similar to Shara's album versions," Yokley continues. "I do add a little bit live just to bring the songs to life. And our rehearsals are pretty standard—we just run through the set a couple of times. We don't rehearse as much as we'd like to because I'm in New York and Shara is in Detroit. But Shara wrote all of the music, so she knows what each song should sound like. She doesn't give me technical feedback so much, but instead will give feedback in terms of what my drum parts should make the audience feel."

The drummer, who started playing drums as a toddler, says that besides his organist father and vocalist mother, his biggest influences include Dennis Chambers, Chris Dave, and Tony Williams. "In some songs in the set, I use a left-foot open/close hi-hat technique that I learned from Dennis," he explains. "Certain beats are inspired by Chris Dave, and anything I play on the ride cymbal is in some way inspired by Tony."

Live, to achieve some of the unique percussive elements Nova incorporates into MBD's recorded material—such as the fat backbeat tones found on "It's Me on the Dance Floor" or the snare crack that permeates "Champagne"—Yokley says that he uses a minimal yet tailored setup. "I use two 14" snares, a 22" kick, and 14" and 16" floor toms," he explains. "I tune the main snare pretty tight while the side snare is loose for a deeper sound. And the floor tom is my favorite drum—that's why I use two!" **Willie Rose**

## Also on the Road

Jason McGerr with Death Cab for Cutie /// Arejay Hale with Halestorm /// Justin Ennis with Ulthar /// Michael Benjamin Lerner with Telekinesis /// Jason Sullivan with the Well /// B. J. Miller with Health /// Mikel Avery with the Joe Policastro Trio /// Aaron Hill with Eyehategod



# RBH

## Westwood Series Drumset

A more contemporary 5-ply mahogany/poplar shell from one of the premier vintage-style manufacturers.

**RBH Drums is a boutique** manufacturer in Virginia Beach, Virginia, that specializes in handcrafting classic-style drumkits and snares. Since being founded in 1998 by college-trained percussionist and master woodworker Bruce Hagwood, RBH has focused primarily on reviving and updating for modern-day players the thin mahogany/poplar plywood and steam-bent shell configurations utilized by top American companies in the mid-twentieth century.

The original RBH lineup comprised two offerings: steam-bent, single-ply Prestige snares and 3-ply mahogany/poplar/mahogany Monarch kits and snares. All Prestige and Monarch drums come with steam-bent maple reinforcement rings, so to mix things up in 2017, RBH developed a more contemporary 5-ply shell layup with no reinforcement rings that features two plies of mahogany on the inside, two plies of mahogany on the outside, and a center ply of poplar. These new drums are called Westwood in tribute to the street on which Hagwood grew up and where his love for drumming began in the late 1960s. In addition to a new shell configuration, Westwood kits are offered at a slightly lower price point than the Monarch series while still providing the deep, rich, and musical tones that define the RBH sound.

### The Same But Different

All RBH drum shells are handmade by Hagwood at the RBH shop in Virginia Beach, so there's no difference in quality or craftsmanship between the Monarch and Westwood series. In other words, the same grade of high-quality mahogany and poplar that goes into a Monarch 3-ply drum shell also goes into a Westwood 5-ply. The savings are largely in production time, hardware appointments, and size options. While the Monarch series boasts six 13" and seven 14" snares, nine bass drums, nine rack toms, and six floor toms, Westwood drums are only available in two shell packs (8x12, 14x14, and 14x20 or 9x13, 16x16, and 14x22). Finishes are limited to four classic wraps: champagne sparkle, ruby sparkle, dark blue sparkle, and white marine pearl. We received the smaller setup in champagne sparkle finish, which sells for \$1,875. (A similar Monarch configuration would cost \$2,600.)

Westwood 5-ply shells are 3/16" thick—the same thickness as the classic Jasper shell used by

Gretsch, Fibes, and others beginning in the late '50s. The bearing edges on the Westwoods are also cut to a Gretsch-like 30-degree angle with a slightly rounded outer cut. Hardware includes single-point solid-brass lugs, 2.3 mm chrome hoops, and vintage-style gullwing bass drum spurs, which provide less height adjustment flexibility than the telescoping spurs found on Monarch kicks but help keep down the cost and weight. Westwood rack toms do not include the Gauger RIMS suspension mounts offered on Monarch toms, so you'll need to employ an extra snare stand or add your own mounting hardware.

Drumheads supplied on Westwood models are consistent with all RBH offerings: Remo Ambassador Coated snare and tom batters, an Ambassador Hazy snare side, Ambassador Clear tom resonants, and a Powerstroke P3 Clear bass drum batter and Ambassador Fiberskyn front head.

### Deep Tones With a Soft Touch

The first comment I usually hear from drummers when they play an RBH kit for the first time is in reference to the drums' super-satisfying, buttery feel. Whereas some modern-style kits boast a lively rebound and snappy attack that can leave you flinching with each strike, RBH drums have a much softer response that entices you to employ more relaxed strokes to match the big, warm tones that these pristine mahogany/poplar shells produce.

Even when I had the 12" and 14" Westwood toms cranked as high as they could go, they still sang out with a deep, rich fundamental note. The attack was clean and articulate without any brittleness. The tone was full and round, and the decay was rapid but not choked. Medium tunings elicited similar results but with additional depth, punch, and sustain. Where I found the Westwood drums excelled, however, was at lower tunings. Even with the drumheads tensioned slightly above finger-tight, the drums continued to produce a beefy, pure sound with a punchy, guttural attack and warm tone. None of the Westwood drums—including the kick—required muffling to minimize sympathetic resonance, shorten the decay, or tamp down troubling overtones. Microphones loved the warm, dark sound of this modern-leaning/vintage-style Westwood series drumkit almost as much as my ears did.

**Michael Dawson**



# Pfeifer Drum Co.

## September and Generation Series Snares

Unusual nine-lug and 16" models from an innovative newcomer who's not afraid to buck conventions.



**Pfeifer Drum Co. is a Philadelphia-based** company owned and operated by former Hollywood Undead drummer, author, educator, Knock Box metronome app developer, and self-professed drum nerd Daren Pfeifer. Pfeifer launched the brand in 2017 with the September series, which features an innovative snare design with nine lugs and offset snare wires. Since then, Pfeifer has expanded his offerings to include a range of metal-shell Imperial series snares and a handful of standard and unconventional wood-shell Generation series models. For review we were sent a 6x14 September maple (\$649.99) and a huge 6.5x16 Generation mahogany (\$699.99).

### September Series

September series snares are available in one size (6x14) and two wood types (maple and ash). Both have ten-ply shells, ultra-precise 45-degree bearing edges, 4.5 mm steel straight hoops, small bass drum-style claws, brass tube lugs, nylon washers, a Trick three-position throw-off, Remo Ambassador drumheads, and high-quality German snare wires. The ash version has a natural finish, while the maple is solid black.

The nine lugs on September series drums are evenly spaced around the shell. But since there are an odd number of them, no two are aligned from one side of the drum to the other. This allows for more accurate and balanced tuning across the entire drumhead since there's less indirect impact between the tension of one lug and the tension of the lugs on the opposing side. The nonparallel lug array also causes the throw-off and snare wires to be mounted a couple inches off center. Standard 14" wires won't fit these drums, so a 13" assembly is used. The theory behind the benefit of the off-center wires is that by moving them away from the center, the bottom head will vibrate more freely, translating into increased sensitivity and a more open tone.

As intriguing as the science and physics behind this drum's design might be, it would ultimately be meaningless if the drum didn't sound good. Thankfully, it didn't disappoint. It had an incredibly sweet and balanced tone with an amazingly open but not overly resonant sustain, and it had a seemingly limitless tuning range that extended all the way up to a Chad Smith-like "crack" and down to a super-beefy '80s-style thud. The snare sensitivity was unreal all the way out to the edge of the head, yet the wires never buzzed uncontrollably. The wires could also be tensioned a bit tighter than



September maple



**Generation  
mahogany**

usual before the head started to choke; this was very beneficial for playing in a light and articulate symphonic style.

Other than having to be a little more careful in regards to how I positioned the hoop, so that I didn't smack tension rods when playing rimshots or rimclicks, this 6x14 September series maple proved to be one of the most versatile, easy-to-tune, and utilitarian wood drums I've ever played.

### **Generation Series**

The Generation snare line currently comprises workhorse 6.5x14 maple, solid-maple, and purpleheart models, as well as a more specialized 5x14 acrylic, a 5.5x12 FX maple with tambourine jingles in the shell, and the behemoth 6.5x16 mahogany we got for review. This snare is designed to produce a huge, fat backbeat with a warm, dry tone. It features a six-ply mahogany shell with three-ply maple reinforcement rings, vintage-style round-over bearing edges, a natural finish, ten beavertail lugs, 2.3 mm steel hoops, a Trick three-position throw-off, nylon washers, PureSound Custom series wires, and Remo drumheads (Emperor Coated batter and Ambassador Hazy bottom).

The first thing to consider when adding this oversized beast to your kit is whether or not you have a snare basket that can expand wide enough to accommodate a 16" shell. The heavy-duty DW 9000 series stand we had on hand in our studio worked. But that won't be the case with every basket, especially if you use lightweight or vintage-style stands. An alternative solution would be to hang the drum from a suspension mount, like the Pearl I.S.S. that clips to the

hoop. I was surprised how comfortable the Generation 16" drum sat in the primary snare position in my kit. It does take up a bit more real estate than a standard-size drum, so you might have to make a few adjustments to your setup if you like to keep everything super compact. However, I envision this drum being used more often as an auxiliary drum that's placed either to the left of the hi-hat or in the floor tom position. When used in those places, the extra 2" of diameter presented no placement issues.

This 16" Generation mahogany snare is tailor-made to provide deep, fat tones. Simply tune the batter head medium-low, throw on a generous amount of muffling, and adjust the snare tension until you find the desired balance of deep, compressed thump and bright, tight sizzle. Being 16" in diameter, this snare will produce a lower fundamental note than a 14" drum tuned with the same amount of head tension. As a result, the Generation mahogany had more rebound at lower pitches, which kept it from feeling like a sack of potatoes and thus limiting its playability.

Like the 14" September maple, the 16" Generation mahogany had a very rich, balanced, and open tone. This drum had longer sustain and more bell-like overtones, so some muffling might be required if you prefer a more focused sound. But the snare sensitivity was superb, and the tuning range was surprisingly vast. Obviously, I wouldn't rely on this giant drum for everyday applications. That's the September maple's role. But for those songs or gigs requiring a snare sound with otherworldly fatness, the 16" Generation mahogany is ready and able to deliver.

**Michael Dawson**

# Innovative Percussion

## John "JR" Robinson and

## Brooks Wackerman Signature Models

Extra-long options designed for more reach and power without sacrificing balance or tone.

**Innovative Percussion** is a Nashville-based manufacturer that first made its mark by crafting high-quality drumsticks and mallets for concert and marching percussion. In recent years the company began focusing on the drumset market, most notably by teaming up with some of the most respected players and educators in the world to design unique yet versatile signature models. Two of IP's latest signature designs are for legendary session drummer John "JR" Robinson (Rufus, Michael Jackson, Steve Winwood) and punk/metal great Brooks Wackerman (Avenged Sevenfold). These sticks are extra-long but boast unique tapers and tips to maintain even balance and quick response.

### John "JR" Robinson JR-1 Drumsticks

JR Robinson is a big man known for producing a big, powerful groove, so it's no surprise that his signature model drumstick is a hefty piece of hickory. It's .570"x17", which is just a bit wider than a standard 5A but a full inch longer. IP counteracts the front-heavy throw that would be typically characteristic of such a lengthy stick by employing a quicker and steeper taper. This increases the rebound of the JR-1 to give it a lighter-than-expected feel without sacrificing power. The taper flares back out a bit below the oval tip to increase durability.

Even with the extra length, we felt that the JR-1 was a perfectly balanced stick that produced bold yet clean drum and cymbal tones while also allowing for a lot of speed and dexterity. I was able to choke up on the grip for lighter dynamics without sacrificing balance, but then I could shift my fulcrum further back towards the butt end when I wanted to capitalize on the extra momentum provided by the additional reach. It's a tall order to try to deliver maximum power, mobility, and reach in a single drumstick, but the JR-1 succeeds on all fronts.

### John "JR" Robinson BR-JR1 Brushes and BR-JR2 Martini Brushes

In addition to the JR-1 drumstick, Innovative Percussion also worked with Robinson to design a

pair of unique brushes: the BR-JR1 with telescoping wires and the BR-JR2 with nonretractable plastic bristles. The BR-JR1 comes with standard medium-gauge wires and a rubber handle that's 2.5" longer than the handle found on a traditional jazz-style brush. This extra length gave the BR-JR1 a more stick-like feel while still providing the sensitive, rich swish and tap sounds of a standard wire brush. The BR-JR1 also comes with a felt ball on the butt end that can be used for smooth mallet-like swells. And there's a nylon tip attached to the end of the pull rod for passages requiring cleaner drum and cymbal articulations. If regular brushes feel a bit too short and light for your playing style, the BR-JR1 is for you.

The BR-JR2 Martini brush is a nonretractable model that measures 16" and features an extended rubber handle (.5" longer than the BR-JR1's handle) and red heavy plastic bristles. Although it's longer than the BR-JR1, the BR-JR2 feels lighter and plays quicker, while producing a brighter and more articulate sound from drums and cymbals. While I wouldn't go to these brushes when playing delicate jazz ballads, they were an excellent choice for train beats and more percussive textures that blend the wider smack of brushes and the sharper, stronger attack of multirods.

### Brooks Wackerman A7X

A recent signing for Innovative Percussion, punk/rock great Brooks Wackerman set out to design a drumstick that would fulfill the intense speed and power demands of his current gig with Southern California-based metal band Avenged Sevenfold. This stick, dubbed the A7X, measures .626"x16.5", which is a touch thinner than a 2B at the grip but .5" longer. In addition, the shoulder expands slightly to .630" to reinforce the rimshot impact point before gradually tapering to a big barrel tip. While designed primarily for power and durability, the A7X felt much lighter than expected and was incredibly nimble. I had no problem executing double strokes and single-stroke rolls around the kit with the same clarity and quickness as I could with a standard 5A or 5B, and I experienced no premature hand fatigue after extended use. If you're looking for an ideal drumstick for rock, the A7X gets my vote.

**Michael Dawson**



# Ultimate Ears Pro

## UE 6 Pro In-Ear Monitors

The unmatched isolation and clarity of custom molds, but at a palatable price point.



**Ultimate Ears Pro established** the custom in-ear industry in 1995, after going to market with a design originally created for Alex Van Halen to help protect his hearing while providing high-quality monitoring audio. Since then, the company has shipped over 100,000 sets to musicians and general music consumers. Ultimate Ears is poised to redefine everyday earbuds with its new custom-fit CSX series wireless models, and we'll be checking out a set of those in the coming months. But this month we look at the company's UE 6 Pro custom molds, which were designed with gigging drummers in mind to provide high-quality, full-bodied sounds at a competitive price (\$699).

### Where They Fit In

The UE 6 Pro, the second-cheapest custom-mold in-ear in Ultimate Ears' catalog, is designed to provide the enhanced low-end required for drums. (The other bass/drummer-focused monitor is the top-of-the-line UE 11 Pro, which costs \$1,199.) In order to get fitted for a set of UE 6 Pro monitors, you'll need to visit an audiologist to get full impressions that include the second bend of the ear canal. UE uses those impressions

to create super-accurate molds using the latest technology in digital modeling and 3D printing to provide a comfortable but airtight fit.

The SuperBax cables are water- and sweat-proof, and they can be swapped out for replacements in seconds. The monitors come with a personalized hard case, a cloth cinch sack, and a cleaning tool. The outer shells of the monitors are offered in twelve translucent colors, sixteen solid shades, thirteen sparkles, and twelve specialty designs. You can also add your own custom art for an additional \$500.

### How They Sound

In terms of isolation, the cheapest custom mold in-ear will likely beat out even the most expensive noncustom bud. However, there can be a massive difference in audio quality between entry-level IEMs and high-end options. The UE 6 Pro is the first "affordable" custom-mold monitor I've tried that provides a full, rich, and clear frequency spectrum that rivals that of higher-priced professional models.

The low end of the UE 6 Pro is big and beefy, the midrange is crisp and warm, and the high end is clean and clear. For drummers, the enhanced low end provides a lot of punch and beefiness from kicks and low toms, while the accurate high



end makes cymbals sound articulate but not over-hyped. Full-band mixes were satisfyingly smooth and rich, similar to the rounder, saturated tones produced by analog tape. In some high-pressure playing/recording situations that had a lot of low-end information in the mix, I felt the need to roll off some of the bass going into the UE 6 Pros to prevent the sub frequencies from overwhelming the mids and highs. But unless you play in those types of scenarios often, or you require ultimate precision and clarity (which is where the more expensive UE 11 Pro IEM excels), the UE 6 Pro will likely deliver—and exceed—your audio-quality and sound-isolation needs.

**Michael Dawson**



## Slightly Stoopid's

# Ryan "RyMo" Moran

When we caught up with RyMo at a Slightly Stoopid show, he had already logged three tours with this setup. "I was using a standard five-piece kit for years," he says. "Then through touring with more reggae artists, like Sly Dunbar and Squidly Cole, who plays for Stephen Marley, I was influenced by how they use that higher tom sort of like a timbale, in terms of having that slight bit of twang."

The use of electronics and sampling has become the norm in many different genres of music. Moran says it's an important part of Slightly Stoopid's set because in a lot of songs he's triggering one-shot samples, like a dub snare with washy reverb or delay, from one of the auxiliary pads.

Moving on to his drumheads, RyMo says that he chose Evans Onyx batters because they were warm in tonality and very durable, usually lasting about ten shows without losing their round, dark tone. "With the toms, I want them to speak for their own size," he says. "The higher tom is cranked, so there are a lot of melodic possibilities. I have four toms, so I think of them as very high, medium-high, medium-low, and low. I like a fatter floor tom sound, so we use a kick mic on it." For tuning the kick, Moran gives each tension rod a couple of twists so that it has a note but still has a deep, chesty thud. There's also a pillow inside.

**Drums:** Pearl Reference Pure in Emerald to Black finish

- A. 6.5x14 steel snare
- B. 8x8 tom
- C. 9x10 tom
- D. 10x12 tom
- E. 16x16 floor tom
- F. 16x22 bass drum
- G. 13" brass timbale
- H. 6.5x14 20-ply maple snare (backup)

**Cymbals:** Istanbul Agop

- 1. 15" Traditional medium hi-hats
- 2. 17" Xist crash
- 3. 10" Xist splash
- 4. 18" Xist crash
- 5. 8" Xist splash
- 6. 8" Alchemy splash
- 7. 17" Xist crash
- 8. 22" Xist medium ride
- 9. 14" Alchemy medium hi-hats (closed)
- 10. 18" Alchemy China

**Drumheads:** Evans ST Dry or EC Reverse Dot snare batters and 300 Series snare sides, Onyx tom batters and Onyx Resonant heads, Onyx bass drum batter and logo front, G1 Clear on timbale

**Hardware:** Pearl Eliminator hi-hat stand and double bass drum pedal (blue cams), S1030 snare stand, and ICON three-sided rack with boom arms; Porter and Davies BC2 Gigster tactile throne on a Pearl Roadster base

**Sticks:** Vic Firth 5B

**Percussion:** Pearl high and low clave blocks and two percussion tables

**Electronics:** Roland SPD-SX multipad, PD-9 trigger pad, and BT-1 bar trigger pad

**Accessories:** Ultimate Ears Pro UE 7 in-ear monitors with a Shure hardwired body pack

Interview by John Martinez

Photos by Alex Solca





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Power and class  
Type 10  
Panda B

QC  
Guitar  
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# P!nk's Mark Schul



# man

As this issue of *MD* hits newsstands, Mark Schulman is happily out on tour again with global superstar P!nk. "Mark has been a special part of my band for twelve-plus years," the singer tells *Modern Drummer*. "During that time we've developed a super close-knit touring family. It's been a beautiful journey as our careers and families have grown together. Mark is the most positive person any of us know, and we're grateful for his spirit."

Lisa Skarell-Schulman

by Billy Amendola

To be sure, when you're in Schulman's presence, his enthusiasm and energy are contagious. If the atmosphere isn't positive, he'll lift the vibe right up. It's one of the many traits that for decades have kept him front-of-mind for solo artists and established bands alike who are in need of reliable, exacting drumming at the very top performance levels—even when there's extremely little time to prepare.

Schulman was born on September 4, 1961, in Los Angeles. Early on he found that he had a natural affinity for the drums. In the years since, he's played in nearly every type of musical situation, including sold-out shows across the world with artists like Brenda Russell, Richard Marx, Foreigner, Simple Minds, Billy Idol, Stevie Nicks, Sheryl Crow, Cher, and Velvet Revolver. He's recorded countless sessions as a drummer, producer, and engineer. He's also found success as an educator, with the instructional DVD

*A Day in the Recording Studio*, his book *Conquering Life's Stage Fright*, and the motivational lecture/clinics that he conducts in between tours. None of this should be surprising to *MD* readers, who likely recognize his name from the inspiring educational articles he's written for the magazine.

We spoke to the always-busy Schulman for this, his first *Modern Drummer* cover story, after he'd been touring with P!nk for the majority of 2018. He spoke at length about the value of networking (one of his favorite subjects), about his many achievements in the music business, and yes, about some of his failures, too. It was all in the spirit of passing along valuable drumming and career information, both of which Schulman is in great possession of. We begin our conversation at the very beginning, when he was just starting to absorb all that great wisdom....



**Mark:** Like so many, I saw the Beatles on *Ed Sullivan*, and something resonated deep inside. Then I saw Ringo, and I completely tripped out. I saw that big, beautiful smile and the way he was whisking the hi-hats back and forth, and that was it! It was like the calling came naturally to me, and the drums chose me. From that point on, I always wanted to play drums.

**MD:** How old were you when you picked up the sticks?

**Mark:** Once when I was five years old, I was at my neighbor's house, where his band rehearsed. The drums were vacant for a moment when they took a break, and I sat down and I could play. I knew what to do intuitively. I wouldn't call myself a prodigy, but I was so drawn to the drums and paid such attention to every detail that I could just play naturally. When I told my mom that I wanted to play drums, she said, "Can't you play a nice instrument like your brother Randy?" [laughs] My brother was playing violin, so I started playing cello. I grew up playing cello, but at nine years old my parents couldn't deny my passion any longer, and they got me my first drumset. It was a Slingerland Radio King kit from the '30s. I wish I still had it, but two years later I sold it so I could buy a Rogers kit.

**MD:** Who besides Ringo became an early influence?

**Mark:** I was always a big Buddy Rich fan. Another early influence was Bobby Colomby of Blood, Sweat, and Tears. I used to try to play

along with their records—it was a mix of jazz, rock, and early fusion. Mitch Mitchell with Jimi Hendrix influenced me, too—I remember trying to play "Manic Depression," which was in three, when I was nine years old, and I was able to play it. From there I tried to cop every single groove and fill that Mitch played.

**MD:** Did you start to take lessons at some point?

**Mark:** I started taking lessons around eleven years old, with Louie Bellson's brother Henry. He started me on the great drum books of the time, Louie's *Modern Reading Text*, Roy Burns and Lewis Malen's *Finger Control*, and George Lawrence Stone's *Stick Control*. It felt natural, as I already knew how to read music from playing cello.

**MD:** What was your practice routine like?

**Mark:** I always played in bands. I played in my first band when I was nine years old, and I was always playing along with music. So more than practicing rudiments or reading music, my biggest driver was just playing the drums and continuing to play. I went on a cruise when I was eleven and met a drummer, and I hung out with him for the entire weekend. He taught me how to play a six-stroke roll, which changed my life. And then some of the stuff that Buddy Rich was doing started to make more sense as I started using rudiments around the drumset.

**MD:** Do you remember your first "real" gig?

continues on page 26

David Phillips

## Schulman's Setup for P!nk's 2018/19 Beautiful Trauma Tour

### Drums: Gretsch

- 5x12 custom Mark Schulman signature snare drum
- 6.5x14 solid maple custom snare drum
- 6.5x14 Brooklyn hammered chrome over brass snare drum
- 8x10, 8x12, and 12x14 Broadcaster rack toms
- 16x16 and 16x18 Broadcaster floor toms
- 5x8 USA Custom concert tom
- 18x18 Brooklyn custom floor tom
- 18x24 Brooklyn custom floor tom
- 14x26 Broadcaster bass drum

"I have a philosophy about gear," says Mark Schulman. "I tell my students and everybody at my clinics, 'Don't play what I play; play what you want to play.' If you want to check out the kind of gear that I play, then check it out. But when I was doing a lot of sessions, particularly in the '90s, when I was touring so much, generally I would tell the producer or the engineer to bring in whatever drumset they preferred. And eighty or ninety percent of the time, they'd bring in a Gretsch kit.

"And I've loved Gretsch since I was little kid. I remember seeing the cover of the Rolling Stones' *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out!* record, with Charlie Watts carrying that Gretsch drum. I always thought that Gretsch was incredibly cool. Finally, after endorsing a variety of different drum companies, I realized that I loved the Gretsch drums so much, and I wanted to play what I love. So in 2002 I began endorsing Gretsch, and I've never been happier. And I'm very happy with the current relationship with Gretsch and DW."

### Cymbals: Sabian

- 15" Groove hats
  - 9" Radia chime
  - 10" AA splash
  - 18" Evolution O-Zone crash (inverted)
  - 18" Evolution O-Zone crash with rivets
  - 19" AAX X-Plosion crash
  - 20" AA Raw Bell crash
  - 20" AAX V-Crash
  - 22" AERO crash (prototype)
  - 18" stack: Evolution O-Zone crash on top of an AERO crash
- "Cymbals, like drums, vary immensely in the materials they're made out of, the thicknesses, the profile, the amount of hammering, the cup size, etc. But every cymbal company has their own unique sound. I started playing Sabian cymbals and grew attached to their sound, and I've been endorsing them for thirty years."

**Hardware:** Gibraltar, including G series double pedals and Brent Barnett custom-designed rack

"I've been using Gibraltar hardware since I started working with Gretsch, and I love their G series pedal."

**Electronics:** Roland TD-50 drum trigger module, two 10" PDX-100 mesh trigger pads, KT-10 bass drum trigger pedal, BT-1 drum trigger pad

### Percussion: Toca

"I've been with Toca for years. They not only have the perfect pitch of cowbells, but some other unique percussion that I've used in unusual situations."

**Sticks:** Vic Firth X55B sticks, T3 Staccato mallets, RUTE 505 Plastic multirods, and CT1 Corpsmaster Timpani mallets

"I've been playing Vic Firth since 1995. Sticks are our direct physical connection with the drums, so they're critical. And we can detect minuscule variations in weight, lacquer, wood type, etc. I use X55Bs generally for pop and rock playing, but I may use a lighter stick or a stick in one hand and a brush in the other, or dowel sticks, brushes, or mallets, depending on the musical demands of the song."

**Heads:** Remo Emperor X Coated snare drum batter and Ambassador Hazy snare side, Emperor Colortone Red tom batters, and Powerstroke P3 Clear Black Dot bass drum batter

"I started with Remo drumheads. I went through a lot of other companies, and I came back to Remo because, like my other gear, their heads feel like home."

**Accessories:** "I use Cymbolts, which are an attachment for the cymbals that keep them perfectly tensioned and straight, and you can break down your cymbals in seconds. I also use the Big Fat Snare, which is like a second drumhead you put on top of the snare drum. I use that live with P!nk a lot because I can make my main snare drum about a third lower in pitch by just throwing on the Big Fat Snare. I love Sennheiser microphones and headphones. And finally, the SledgePad for the kick drum: it's made out of light foam, and it muffles the drum slightly with some nice resonance and low end."



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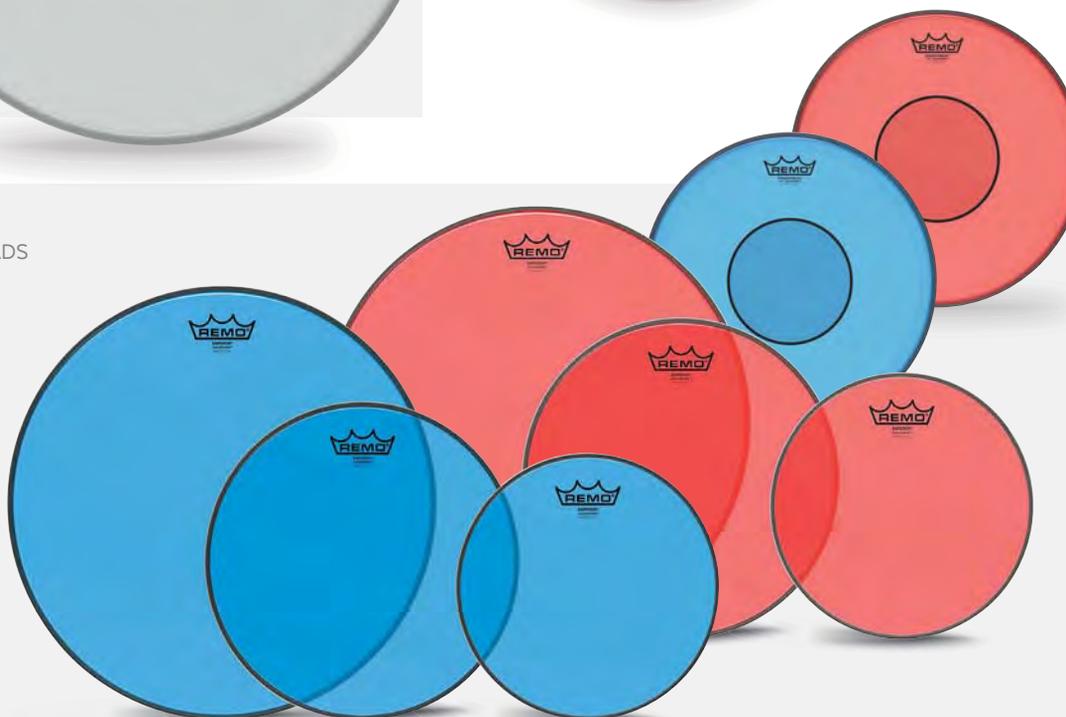
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## Mark Schulman

**Mark:** Yes! I played my first professional gig when I was twelve years old, and I started playing every weekend, from the age of fourteen to nineteen. I was playing weddings and bar mitzvahs and school dances—and I was singing while I was playing. We were playing everything from bossa novas, to as close to bebop as we could, to pop songs of the day, to oldies-but-goodies. I learned so much from playing with other musicians, and finally a guy that is *still* my teacher to this day, Bruce Becker, convinced me to study with Freddie Gruber.

me, got a record deal and was touring the world. His band, the Dan Reed Network, opened up for Bon Jovi, and he became friends with some famous musicians like Jonathan Cain and Neal Schon from Journey. They were about to put together a supergroup called Bad English with singer John Waite and bassist Ricky Phillips, and they decided that instead of using one of their contemporaries on drums, they wanted to find a young, hot, fresh drummer.

So Dan calls me one day and says, “Hey, Mark, I was hanging out with the guys from Journey, and I can get you an audition for their



David Phillips

**MD:** What did you work on with Freddie?

**Mark:** I took my first lesson with Freddie at seventeen years old, and I started to get real serious about technique and understand more about how the hands and feet truly function. That affected my playing very strongly. I studied with Freddie for a couple years, and then I moved out of California to Portland, Oregon, with my original band, Buster.

**MD:** Was this band your first big break?

**Mark:** Well, I'll start with my first “big failure.” [laughs] When I moved to Portland, my friend Dan Reed, who was about the same age as

new band—what do you think?” So, a week later, I was auditioning for the guys in Bad English. I was quite nervous, and I'll never forget Jonathan Cain said, “Okay, Mark, we're just going to play a little bit of a Bad English song, and we want you to just listen. Then we're going to stop and have you jam along with us.”

**MD:** Were you nervous?

**Mark:** Yes! But when they started playing, the nervousness melted away, and I was in heaven. I was surrounded by the best of the best. I loved it—until they stopped playing, and then butterflies in my stomach turned into bats! I was overwhelmed with anxiety. When

Jonathan counted off the band for me to start playing, I literally felt like I was being pushed out of a plane without a parachute. I was so nervous I couldn't even judge my own sense of time.

After about thirty seconds Jonathan stopped and said, "Man, you're rushing really badly. Dan said you were the dude." And then he counted off the band again, and we started playing, and I looked up. I just needed some support because I was still so incredibly nervous, and that's when I connected eyes with Ricky. He was literally moving his hips and moving his head to the meter to try to telegraph the tempo for me. He was being such a cool guy.

So I started to relax a little bit, thinking that I had a chance. But then Jonathan stopped the band again, and all eyes were on me as he reached down into his bag and took out something. It was a metronome. And he literally threw it across the stage and said, "Mark, watch the light." That was an incredibly embarrassing moment for me. But with sweat dripping in my eyes from anxiety, I stared at that light and tried to memorize the tempo. Cain said, "Okay, you count off the band." So without looking up, I counted off the band and just tried to keep my eyes on the light. After a bit I realized I should look up and connect with the band, but I was so insecure a voice in my head just said, "Stay down!" so I did.

The band kept playing, so I thought I still had a chance at the gig. And when the band stopped, I looked up at Ricky, and he was giving me a thumbs up! And then Cain walked over to the kit and extended his hand to me and said, "Thanks, Mark. We've heard enough. You can go now." I know my expression was motionless, but inside I was screaming. What do you mean I can go now? This was going to be my defining moment! This was supposed to be the rest of my life!

A few minutes later I was in my car with tears in my eyes, just pounding the steering wheel and thinking, *Doctor! Lawyer! Accountant!* Those were the careers my parents wanted me to pursue—why didn't I listen!

That was a defining day for me. It didn't go the way I'd hoped, but I knew that I was either going to quit from frustration or *really* get to work. Fortunately, I chose the latter.

**MD:** So a valuable lesson was learned.

**Mark:** Absolutely. That experience inspired me to work *very* hard to get my internal meter established very strongly, and I did work

"When I tell my students the importance of networking, and that your network is your net worth, it's because of my own personal experience."

on that for a couple of years. I found a course called the Rhythm Course, which was put together by a gentleman named Jamie Faunt. I was taught by Tom Mendola, who is still teaching the course. But what it did was inspire me to really solidify my internal clock. I was excited to practice for hours a day with my former nemesis and now my new best friend, the metronome. But for two months I didn't even touch the sticks. It turns out that the path to mastering my internal sense of time started with just clapping.

**MD:** Can you explain that process more?

**Mark:** I clapped every single tempo, from 120 bpm down to 30 and up to 240. The goal is to be able to clap for one minute and cancel out the sound of the metronome. When I got down to the really slow tempos, I started by subdividing them into 16th notes, then half notes. The idea was to feel all of that space, and that's when I realized that what we *don't* play is more important than what we *do* play, and to honor the space. That's what gives the greatest drummers their feel: they honor the space between the notes.



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**MD:** So what happened next?

**Mark:** I moved to Portland, Oregon, in 1984 and stayed until 1988, and during that time I worked with two original bands and in a few recording studios as an engineer and producer. Those were very formative years for me. As a bandleader of one of the bands, I learned how to appreciate the value of strong communication, empathy, and the perspective of the other instrumentalists. I'd grown up so drum focused, it was valuable to learn to assume the viewpoint of others and understand how my drum parts related to the overall sound. I began to really value the importance of simplicity in my playing.

When I moved back to Los Angeles, I got recommended for a gig from a gentleman I'd known many years earlier, Armand Grimaldi, who'd played with Clare Fischer and Don Henley. Armand had known me because when I was nineteen, I tutored him in English at a local college while working for my mother. He remembered my playing from seven years earlier, since we'd gotten together a few times to mess around on double drums. He knew I could play, so when he heard I was back in town, he recommended me for the Brenda Russell tour. They'd asked him, but he was unavailable at that time. So that was my first big break, touring the world for four

glorious months with Brenda Russell, opening up for Billy Ocean.

**MD:** You went on to play with so many top acts after that. How did you get the Cher gig?

**Mark:** Well, let me start by saying I'll probably go down in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for being the only drummer to audition for Cher three times. I auditioned the first time in the early '90s, and I had the gig for about an hour. Her old drummer, Ron Wikso, left and came back. When I auditioned again a couple of years later, there were twenty-five drummers. They narrowed it down to four, and then Bryan Hitt [now with REO Speedwagon] had the most compatible astrological sign with Cher, so he got it. And then Bryan ended up leaving the gig, and they brought Ron back to finish the tour. Incidentally, Ron and I became friends; I recommended him to replace me in Foreigner when I left to join Simple Minds. He played with Foreigner for a few years.

**MD:** So it's important to stay friends and network with everyone?

**Mark:** Absolutely! When I tell my students the importance of networking, and that your network is your net worth, it's because of my own personal experience.

But back to Cher...it's now 1999, and I get a call from Gregg Bissonette, and Gregg says, "Hey, Cher's auditioning. I'm unavailable

to do the tour, so you should go down." So I went down, and finally the universe acknowledged all the time and energy I'd spent, and I got the gig. I've continued to play with Cher on and off for the past nineteen years.

**MD:** In between you were also playing and touring with Foreigner.

**Mark:** When I joined Foreigner for the third time in 2011, I replaced Jason Sutter. Jason and I became friends, and when P!nk started up again last year, I brought Jason in to play with Cher. And he's still doing that gig as we speak.

**MD:** How did you come to play with Velvet Revolver?

**Mark:** I'd been friendly with their drummer, Matt Sorum, for many years. Matt had also seen me play with Cher. One day I got a call from him saying, "I broke my hand in a water skiing accident, and Velvet Revolver is scheduled to do a six-week Ozzfest tour, coheadlining with Black Sabbath. Slash has been talking to Brian Tichy about doing it, but Brian can only do a week." Brian is a fantastic drummer who replaced me in Billy Idol. He also replaced me in Foreigner—and then I rereplaced *him* in Foreigner! [laughs]

Anyway, I went down to audition for the rest of the band, playing along with a CD of Velvet Revolver songs. It was kind of strange but fun. Tichy did the week and then I came out, and my first gig was Ozzfest! We had no time to rehearse except for an acoustic run-through in the dressing room. The next thing I knew, I was walking onstage with Velvet Revolver about to play in front of about 20,000 heavy metal fans. I don't think I had ever played harder in my life!

**MD:** And how did the P!nk gig come together?

**Mark:** Cher's manager is also P!nk's manager. And when P!nk's drummer couldn't do a couple of weeks of gigs in the summer of 2006, I did them. After that two-week period they offered me the gig, and then I did my first big tour, behind her *I'm Not Dead* album.

**MD:** Besides her enormous talent, is she fun to work with?

**Mark:** Yes! She's one of the most fabulous singers, an incredible lady with very high integrity, and arguably the greatest performer on the planet. The whole band is brilliant and includes some of my best friends. I'm the luckiest man in the world to be playing with her.

**MD:** How do you maintain your energy every night for live shows?

**Mark:** I have a philosophy that every single note I play matters. Where I hit each drum, when I hit each drum, how I hit each drum,

the technique I use, the combination of rhythms, the dynamics, every ghost note, the relative placement of every limb, all the infinite possibilities, every single nuance matters. And because every note matters, I play every one with purpose. And the more purpose I give to every note, the more passionate I am about every note. That's how I can play "So What" with P!nk six hundred times and have every single performance be as passionate and purposeful as the very first time.

I played with Foreigner on and off for twenty-five years, and I used to joke that I played "Feels Like the First Time" over a thousand times. I also realized that when I'm playing the show, it's not about me. Even though I might have played a song a thousand times, most of the audience has never seen the show. So I tap into their excitement, I look into their eyes, and I realize that I'm there to be of service. It's all about supporting the artist, supporting the other musicians, and giving the audience the time of their lives.

**MD:** Since you don't play on P!nk's albums, how do you adapt from the recordings to the live shows? Does she leave that up to you?

**Mark:** I love this question. Nearly every P!nk song that has been recorded in the last few years has a programmed rhythm track. What's fun about playing these songs live is we actually get to expand upon them and do our own interpretations of the original songs. What happens is, we get all of the Pro Tools files, and we start by eliminating everything that we will be playing live, only leaving in the other parts that we will play along with. I can usually expand upon the original drum tracks, because most of those drum parts are repetitive loops. Of course P!nk has final say.

Here's a great example: when we learned "What About Us" off of the new album, *Beautiful Trauma*, Roger, her manager, asked us to learn it and play like the recording, because P!nk had made a comment that she wanted to hear the songs sound more like the record. When she came in, we'd rehearsed that song in two ways. On the version just like the recording, I was playing very simple parts that didn't even involve much drums, just a little bit of electronics. It was very repetitive sounding, and that's how she heard it during the first run-through. We'd also created a version with crunchier guitars and really big toms, and a very dynamically expansive drum performance. After we played her the original version, she said,

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## Mark Schulman

"Okay, cool," but she didn't seem thrilled. I stood up and said, "We have another version that we expanded upon," and when we played her the expanded version, she loved it! So that's the version that we do.

That's a perfect example of trying it both ways, and of course her having final say and knowing what moves her emotionally. Although she's not a trained musician per se, she knows exactly what she wants to hear. If something isn't right, she'll call us

out. If something's right, it's wonderful, and she's very happy.

**MD:** Let's talk about your DVD, *A Day in the Recording Studio*.

**Mark:** In that DVD, I talk about every component of recording drums. I include tuning, my approach to creating parts, miking techniques, signal processing, and my charting system. I'm very proud of it because it's a lot of fun and has a lot of content. And it's *my* method. Everyone has

his or her own approach. It's available on the Hudson Music website.

**MD:** What advice would you like to pass on in terms of handling the changes in the music business since you first started?

**Mark:** The music business has changed dramatically because there are two generations of people that now believe music isn't a resource one should pay for. That's unfortunate for many reasons. When I was starting out, we would tour to promote selling our music, and now we give away music to promote the tour. The revenue stream and the focus are so much more about the live show than the recording. Of course, an artist like P!nk will still sell a lot of music, but where she might sell one or two million copies, that's relative to selling ten or fifteen million copies fifteen or twenty years ago.

These days it really is about generating revenue through the live show. I tell my students, "You're going to make your money through a variety of things." Everybody needs to be able to teach and to be able to support an artist live. It used to be common for musicians to make a living by doing sessions, but now it's a hybrid of playing live, doing some recording sessions, teaching, and selling merchandise.

**MD:** Tell us about your motivational lectures.

**Mark:** I've cultivated a corporate speaking career in which I use music as a metaphor. I bring drums onstage, and I talk about top performance. I'm actually cowriting my second book based on my primary keynote-speaking topic. I'm writing that with Dr. Jim Samuels, who's one of the most brilliant thinkers I know. He created a concept called ABC—Attitude, Behavior, and Consequence. The concept of ABC is based on the fact that we can't always control what happens to us, but we always have the power to change, shift, or choose our attitudes about it.

This relates to everything from personal and business experiences to how we approach our practice time and our live and studio performances. Your attitude is what generates your behavior, and your behavior is what determines the consequences of your life, your business, your drumming, and everything else that matters to you. This is a very critical formula, and I utilize ABC every day of my life. And that's why I believe that I'm still playing in the realm of world-class musicians after thirty years. There are no accidents to success.

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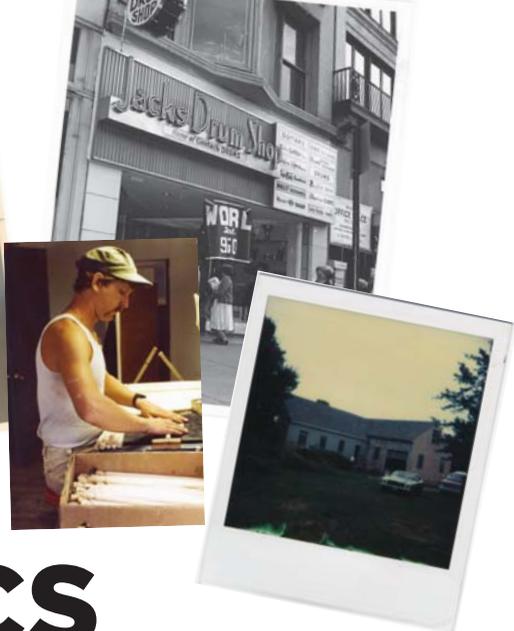
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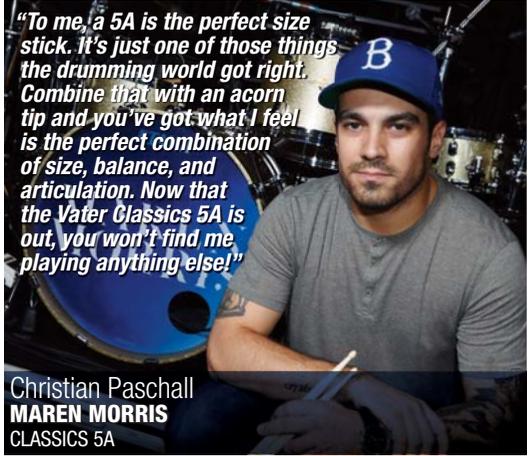
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**Classics 5A**  
 L 16" • 40.64cm  
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 Wood VHC5AW Nylon VHC5AN  
 5A with an acorn tip for a nice and full sound from drums and cymbals. Solid and responsive model that practically plays itself.



**Classics 5B**  
 L 16" • 40.64cm  
 D .595" • 1.51cm  
 Wood VHC5BW Nylon VHC5BN  
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# Mark Schulman in the Studio

While juggling an extensive touring schedule and a heap of corporate speaking engagements, Mark Schulman has maintained a prolific career as an independent studio musician. Here the drummer explains his modern take on recording and dives into “Just Breathe,” a track he recently laid down for the up-and-coming Swiss indie-pop duo Sinplus.

## The Current State of the Business

The whole recording industry has been turned upside down. It used to be that to record drums, you'd first have to not only rent a studio, but you'd also need to have an engineer present. So before you'd even played a note, it could cost \$1,200. Now it's become a lot more of a self-generated business. Just about every studio musician and drummer I know has their own studio. With artists' budgets, they're just not willing to pay a lot to record drums. So you want to be self-sufficient. That way you remove the cost of the studio. And you may bring in an engineer—I have an engineer who I hire sometimes, depending on the size of the studio and the budget.

My DVD, *A Day in the Recording Studio*, is about being able to do the entire process by yourself. If you want to charge \$200 or \$400 a track, it all goes into your pocket because you already have drums set up, and you've got a reasonably quality setup that's going to produce a high-enough quality recording and separate stems, depending on how many mics you use. That's going to enable you to upload that recording back to the client, because everything is mobile.

Most of the tracks I do, the other musicians aren't there. Such was the case with the band Sinplus and their song “Just Breathe.” Oftentimes I get emailed, or people find me online through Facebook or Twitter. And now I have a recording studio. But before I had a studio, I was just doing it in my house. And I know that now a lot of musicians only have laptops and really basic audio interfaces.

People ask me all the time, “How can I become a session drummer?” I say that I think that's kind of a thing of the past. I'll still record in big studios sometimes. But I even recorded a track for P!nk at my studio. It was just about cost. So if you look at every session drummer—Kenny Aronoff, Josh Freese, Abe Laboriel Jr.—nearly all of these guys have their own recording setups, because it's gotten too expensive. It's not the same industry that it used to be.

But I've gotten to the point where a client will contact me, give me their budget, and I rarely turn people down. Usually I charge \$350 to \$450 or \$500 per track. But if somebody only has a couple hundred dollars at that time, I try to group their tracks together. I might record twelve to fifteen tracks in one day. So the more I'm doing, the less I can charge. And that's also contingent on if I can do it myself without hiring my engineer. But all of that money goes into my pocket.

## Before Tracking

An artist will send me an MP3 of a song, and almost everybody has some sort of drum programming or idea for drum tracks. When I listen to the MP3, I learn a lot from what they programmed. I learn the basic feel and style that they want, the basic sound that they like, what type of drum sound, whether it's ambient or modern or retro....



[Regardless of] what they've done with their programming, they're relying on me to take it to another level and put my own signature on it. So I don't play exactly how they want it, unless they send me drum programming and tell me they want it exactly that way.

In the case of “Just Breathe,” they sent me a demo. My goal with a typical pop song, or something that isn't too complex, is to receive it, listen to it, chart it, play at least two takes of it, provide alternative verses and choruses that the artist can edit in, and upload it to them within an hour per track. I'll keep the click going after tracking, and I'll do a whole other batch of fills. I'll play the entire track a few times from start to finish, but I also want to give them options. My goal is for them to have more than they need.

And again, they're hiring me for my signature. So I'll listen to the style in which they programmed it, and I'm going to try to emulate the style of drums that they do, but still with the Mark Schulman signature. Because if they're hiring me as opposed to Josh Freese, Abe Laboriel, or Kenny Aronoff, I'm assuming they're doing it because they want my style. So I'm going to do things that are characteristic of my own playing. And that's critical, because I'm

not afraid to go for it. And when I do the alternative fills, it's funny, because I'll start with simple fills, and then I'll put some crazy stuff in as well. You'd be amazed how many times a client says, "Oh, that's wild. I like it; let's put it in." But more often than not, when it's a pop song, they're going to err on the side of simplicity, because that's the current trend.

In this example of "Just Breathe," it's a pretty simple song. I opted to make a few musical changes to the original part, but they did some pretty extensive drum programming on the demo. So I always listen to the MP3 once so I can hear it from start to finish and get the continuity of the entire song. Then I know what I'm up against. Are there going to be any flips or turns? Are there any time changes? Is it going to get crazy? Are they going to go into some weird Indian rhythm? You never know with kids these days....

So I listen to this entire song and I'm looking for phrases and anything that might trip me up, because my goal is to write down as little as possible so I can be as in the moment and as musical as I can. I'm able to move away from the chart a little bit and just pay enough attention that I'm hitting the figures that I need to.

### "Just Breathe"

In the intro to "Just Breathe," there's nothing happening drum-wise. So I wrote "Tacet x4," which means I don't play for four bars. In Verse 1 of the demo, there's some sort of rimclick or percussion on beats 2 and 4. So I did two different versions. In one, I played 2 and 4 with a rimclick, and on the other, I took an old washboard, put it on a music stand, and I hit it on beats 2 and 4. I like to have as much fun as I possibly can. And then I added in the kick drum on the fourth bar on the "&" of beat 4 into the second half of the verse.

The B section has a march groove. I emphasized the song's rhythm and played my own version of the march, but I tried to keep it consistent so I wasn't just fully improvising from bar to bar. So there's seven bars of that, and one long sustained break for a measure, and then it goes into the chorus.

I also wrote out their basic chorus pattern. If you notice in the chorus, there are parentheses around the "&" of 4 on the bass drum. That tells me to play that note every other bar. I also assumed that Sinplus was going to want to open it up, so I added an open

hi-hat on the "&" of beat 3 in this pattern. I try to make big dynamic differences between sections, so that was just a natural way of doing it. Also, I recorded alternative choruses with all open hi-hats, as well as choruses on the ride cymbal. So they had choices.

In Verse 2, it's kick only for four measures. So I went back to that same kick drum pattern that I previously played in Verse 1, and I could remember it by just looking back to the top of the chart in Verse 1. So I played the kick drum on "&-1" of every other bar. Then I increased the amount of bass drum notes, because I was also thinking consciously of how I could open this part up.

If you look at the second B section, it's another march, but it comes down in dynamic level. So I added that decrescendo right before the marking for letter "B" in my chart. That's why I brought it down when I played. And I also noticed that it's a six-bar phrase. That's always the stuff that I want to pay the most attention to. There's a six-bar phrase with a pause or just a long sustained note on the fifth bar.

Next is a four-bar chorus, and it shifts to the tag, which is an

MM = 97      *Breathe*      *Sinplus*

① Tacet x4

②  $\text{q} \downarrow \text{q} \downarrow \text{x3} \mid \div \text{q} \mid \dots \mid \dots \mid \dots \mid \dots \mid \dots \mid \dots$

③ <sup>march</sup>  $\text{. . . . .} \mid \times 7 \mid 0$

④  $\text{. . . . .} \mid \times 7 \mid \dots \text{Fill}$

⑤ KICK only x4 | add march x4

⑥ x5 | 0

⑦ x4

Tag 8

⑧ Tacet 4 | 7 (maybe light time)

⑨ 8

⑩ Tag 8 ||

## Mark Schulman

extension of the chorus. Whenever I see a tag, I change up the groove from the chorus. I might open the hi-hat or move to the ride cymbal. And again, I'll do a few different versions and open it up differently. If I do four bars of open hi-hat, they can cut that into the chorus, bridge, or tag—wherever they want. I noticed that they did use some of the alternative performances that I provided.

After the tag we go into the bridge, which is tacet for four bars. And then for seven bars, I wrote, "maybe light time." So that's me actually relying on my own instinct, and it comes over. I don't even know exactly what I'm going to do while recording, and that's when it gets exciting. I was using the sidestick on the snare, and I played this samba-like groove, but it was just a straight 16th-note pattern, almost like this Steve Gadd sort of thing. And they liked it. Again, it's just something that I'd typically do, and that's what I was feeling. And that's the beauty—sometimes the first take just has magic. And then I think I did something even simpler on the second take, and that gave them more options to choose from. And again, the most important thing is that this section is a seven-bar phrase, so I have to make sure I'm able to set up a build into that last chorus on the seventh bar.

The last chorus is just a standard eight-bar chorus, and then there's another eight-bar tag. And then we're out! That's it.

### After Tracking

Here's my secret: I've gotten confident enough in what I do that I know if I'm on with a track. I go back and listen to it and only check the sounds. If I'm doing four, six, or ten tracks, I don't even listen back to them. I listen to them briefly to make sure that the sounds are good, and I just send them off to the artists. I figure that if there's going to be a problem, they'll get back to me.

But I just want to be efficient when I'm in the studio. When I

get home at night, I love listening back to what I do. When I do a take, I send clients all the stems and an MP3 of my mix with their music so they can hear it right away. And I lie in bed that night and listen to every MP3 that I sent so I can enjoy it. I love the process of recording, as much as I'm known for being a "live guy." The truth is that I absolutely adore the recording process and listening back to a take and analyzing it and seeing if something was a good choice or if something could've been better. I always want to improve. But I never want to sound like I'm careless and that I don't care. I care about every nuance, and I work so hard to make sure that my time is locked in with the click. But I spent years doing that, so I don't worry about it now.

While recording, sometimes I'll just stop and start the tape over again if I feel like something wasn't right. If I want to play multiple takes of the same song, I will. I'm not charging by the hour. I want to make the artist happy. But generally speaking, with a song like "Just Breathe" that's a bit more straightforward; I can do it in two takes and give them options, and I don't need to do anything more than that.

Having said that, sometimes I'll hear a track and think, "This would sound good with a metal snare drum, and it could also sound good with a medium or low wooden drum." So I might do a couple of takes with a few different sounds, because I'm hearing both sounds. So I'm not rushing through. I'm just indicating that I can do all of this quickly because of my experience. If I want to spend two hours on a track, and I think the track warrants spending that amount of time on it, I will.

### Getting Clients

I don't have personal representation. When I was building this business, I created a website and I advertised using AdWords and Facebook. I'd promote certain keywords, like "producers," "engineers,"



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Intro Tacet

V1

B March groove:

Chorus

V2 Kick only x4 Add march x4

B

Chorus Tag

Bridge Light time:

Chorus Tag

"artists," and "live music recording." My ads would then appear on the Facebook pages of those people who had those keywords in their descriptions or in their metadata. That might be the best way to go about this, because it's difficult for people to find out about you unless you're doing something to promote yourself.

But I haven't advertised now in years, and I don't do that many sessions, because I have so much on my plate. But I do get called by a lot of the same clients, which is nice. So I may work with the same producers, who may be in Australia, Germany, Spain, or L.A. And word of mouth travels far. When people know about the quality of work you do, the kind of person you are, how easy you are to work with, and what you can produce for them, then it makes a big difference in your continued success.

If you live in a community of a lot of musicians or producers, and you can record at home and save them that money, get on the phone. "Hey, I have this recording setup, and I can send you some examples of my work. I'd love the opportunity to record a drum track. Send me a track; I'll do it for free."

Head to [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com) to listen to the original demo of "Just Breathe" and Schulman's final take, and follow along with the chart to the left.



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# Drum Wisdom

# Bruce Becker

"If you want to learn technical stuff," says this month's cover artist, P!nk drummer Mark Schulman, "he's the guy." **Jacob Slichter**—a fellow student and respected pro drummer in his own right—takes us inside the career and concepts of one of the great drum educators.

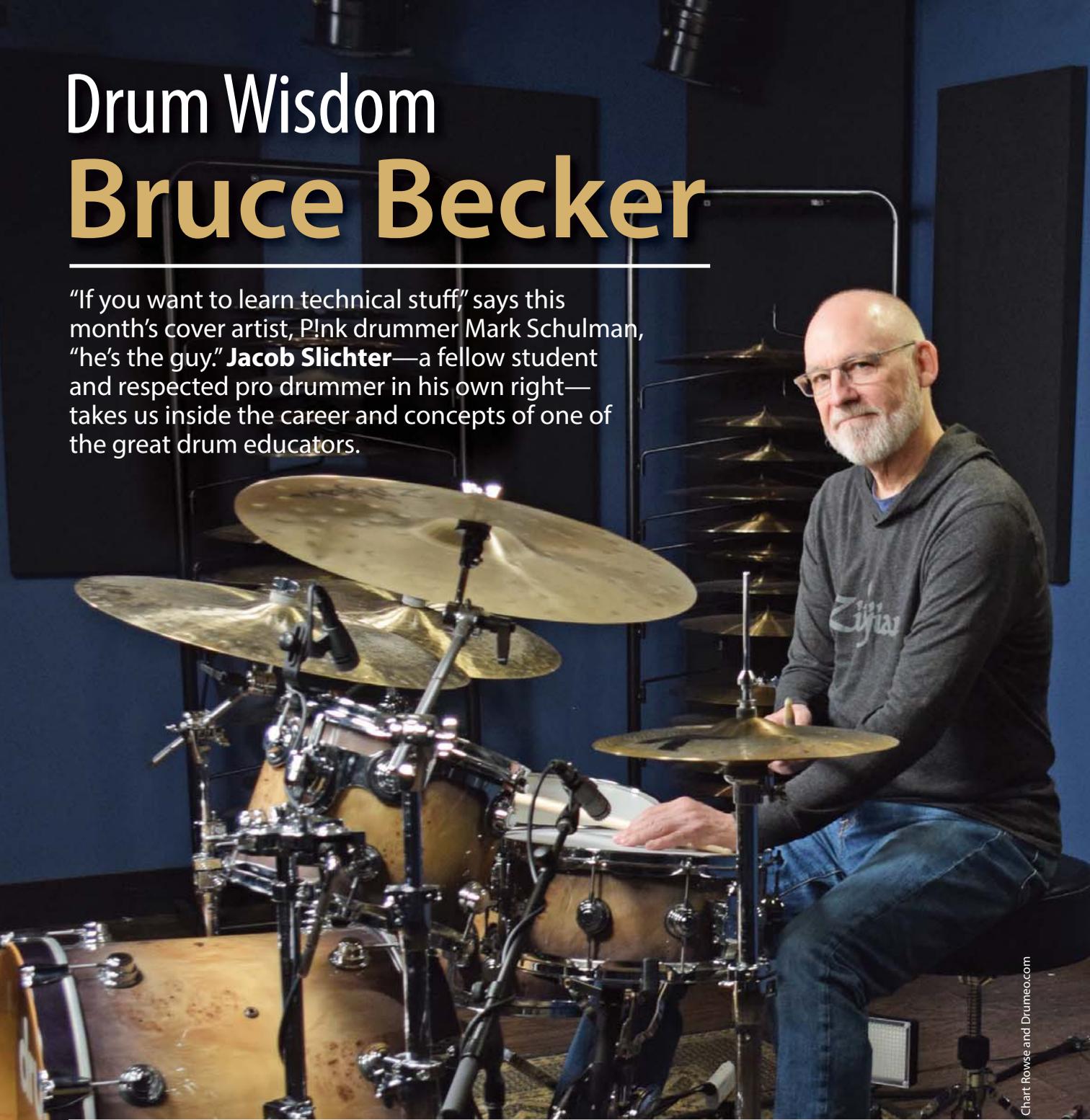


Chart Rowse and Drumeo.com

In February of 2018, I began studying with Bruce Becker, an L.A.-based drummer and teacher regarded as a guru, perhaps *the* guru, of the mechanics of drumming. His colleagues refer to him as "Yoda," "the Master," "the Technique Guy." His roster of students includes genre-defining artists, Grammy winners, members of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, drummers on hit songs, session and touring pros, teachers and authors of drum-method

books, and lesser-known but equally dedicated players who want the best possible instruction. They're scattered across North and South America, Europe, and Asia. (Most of Bruce's lessons are conducted via Skype.) Some have come to Bruce to address physical difficulties—hand pain or recovery from an injury—while others, like me, want to expand the range and musicality of their playing. Over the past month, I spoke with Bruce and several of his

students and colleagues about the strange magic of his method and how, as one of them put it, "He makes the seemingly impossible, effortless."

The key to Bruce's approach lies in his extraordinary attention to detail and his ability to cultivate this awareness in his students. "I want to empower people with a different perspective of how things can work," he says. He does this through an ingenious series of exercises with names such as "Drop

and Turn," "Pivot Catch Up," and "Kick Up to Fold," in which various drumming motions are stripped down, thereby enabling players to notice small but vital points of execution. In the first such exercise he gave me, you simply let the stick drop to the pad and bounce to a stop. Simple as it sounds, it requires attention to no fewer than ten elements—the relationships of the bones and joints, the balance of the stick at each point of the stroke, the particular bend of the fingers and their pressure points, the exact placement of the thumb, and so forth. As I practiced at his prescribed tempo of five strokes per minute, my mind raced.

Bruce's method builds on the work of his former teacher, the legendary Freddie Gruber. From the 1960s until his death in 2011, Gruber accumulated a star-studded roster of students that included, at various points, Vinnie Colaiuta, Steve Smith, Dave Weckl, and Neil Peart. As a number of Gruber's former students have told me, however, studying with him meant enduring a fair amount of chaos. "Freddie didn't abide by time."

As Bruce describes it, you could arrive on time for your lesson, and "there'd be a guy on the throne, and another guy waiting on the couch. If you didn't know what you were doing, he'd send you down to CVS for a pack of Marlboros." So, as he sat through Gruber's instruction of other students, Bruce sat on the floor and watched. "I wasn't the most gifted, but I had a recording mechanism in my head."

Between his own lessons and his observations of Gruber's instruction of others, Bruce gained a unique grasp of the teachings. "Bruce was his shining star," one of Gruber's students recalled. He studied with Gruber on and off from 1977 into the early 1990s. Meanwhile, as the drummer for the David Becker Tribune, a jazz group he still co-leads with his brother, Grammy- and Emmy-nominated guitarist David Becker, his career as a recording artist and touring musician picked up. When he relocated to Antwerp and Vienna in the mid 1990s, Bruce helped host Gruber's European drum clinics, often called to the drumset by Gruber to illustrate various points. His playing had now come to embody Gruber's precepts so perfectly that when Bruce returned to L.A., Gruber would ask him to drive over and play for other students to showcase what lessons with Gruber might do for them.

Tris Imboden recalled such an occasion.

In 1994, when his career as the drummer for Chicago as well as a recording and touring drummer for such artists as Kenny Loggins and Richard Marx was well underway, Imboden had his first lesson with Gruber. "Rather than play himself, he brought Bruce over to demonstrate what technique would do. *Perfect hands.*"

Becker, however, did more than master Gruber's drum technique. According to a number of Gruber's former students, Bruce teaches it far better than Gruber ever did. According to Mark Schulman, who previously studied with Gruber, "Bruce has taken over the crown and then some. He's actually expanded upon what Freddie has done."

Steve Smith, who does not study with Bruce but has endorsed his DVD, *Concepts and Philosophies*, echoes those thoughts. "Studying with Freddie required patience and the ability to interpret the meaning of what he was saying or demonstrating," he says. "It was not a straightforward approach. Bruce has distilled a lot of Fred's concepts and is able to teach and demonstrate them in a straightforward manner."

Imboden, who now studies with Becker, agrees. "Man, I'm telling you, to my mind, there is *nobody* better at being able to break down and verbalize and demystify the undefinable things that go into perfect hand technique."

"Bruce is like some kind of Yoda dude," says Tower of Power's David Garibaldi, whose first lessons with Bruce were in 2012. "A hand whisperer... he has an incredible level of knowledge. So much detail."

"He's really eloquent," Drumeo founder Jared Falk says. Falk produced a twenty-six-week video class led by Bruce, *Drum Technique Made Easy*. "Bruce is known as 'the Technique Guy' because technique is really hard to communicate. He does it in a concise way that really simplifies it. Students have these lightbulb moments."

One of Bruce's distinguishing attributes as a teacher is his willingness to keep students working on the same exercise for weeks, perhaps months, until they get it right. Grammy winner Jiro Yamaguchi of Ozomatli jokes, "Sometimes I think, *It must be so boring for him.* He'd break it down into something basic, and we'd do it for six months. [But] he gets fulfillment over time seeing his students' progress, even miniscule progress."

Gabe Ford, who has drummed with Little Feat since 2009, has had similar experiences with Becker. "There's been a time when I'm

like, *I can't wait to show him*, and then I'm practicing it for the next couple of weeks. But I trust him. That's why I work with him." Indeed, for the past two months, Bruce has been tweaking my turns and drops in German grip. Or, as I've come to realize, he's been building my attention to little things—the slight but crucial shift of the fingers and thumb between the drop and the turn, the angle of the wrist, the extraneous motions I sometimes make with my elbows. Such fine points, I am discovering, make all the difference.

Much of what one learns from Bruce comes simply by seeing him play. Between lessons, I consult some of the seventy-plus teaching videos he's made for me. As I listen and watch, I connect the clarity of his narration to the ease, fluidity, and yogic balance he projects from the drums. And the depth of his musicality! I find it refreshing that this master of technique has no interest in "drumming for sport." For Bruce, technique is a means of listening. "The more flexible you become in your technical approach, the more it starts to serve your ear," he says. "You hear more subtle nuance."

Multigenre drummer Paul Davis, a student of Becker who performed on the original cast recording of *Newsies* and tours with major national shows, says it well. "I'm interested in technique, but to help me be creative and help me flow more."

I used to imagine a finish line, a point at which my drumming would be ready for some final unveiling, but working with Bruce and talking with his students has reframed my thinking. "I don't care what you think you know—you don't know all of it," Ralph Johnson of Earth, Wind & Fire reflects. "The study of a musical instrument is a lifetime study." To hear this from a creator of such iconic music humbled me, as did the knowledge that we share the same teacher. "He finds a way to break it through to you so you can get it. I'm working on my hands. I see him every two weeks."

Likewise, it was instructive to hear Garibaldi, a widely recognized funk master, say of his work with Bruce, "I'm learning how to relax from the waist down as I play, and it's really changed everything."

"We're all in our formative years," Imboden, a multiplatinum artist, observes.

Which is why, as I practice for my next lesson, I hold on to Bruce's mantra: "Everything's a work in progress."



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# Josh Groban's Kaz Rodriguez

Whatever you may know about the drummer and composer, it's probably only a fraction of the story.

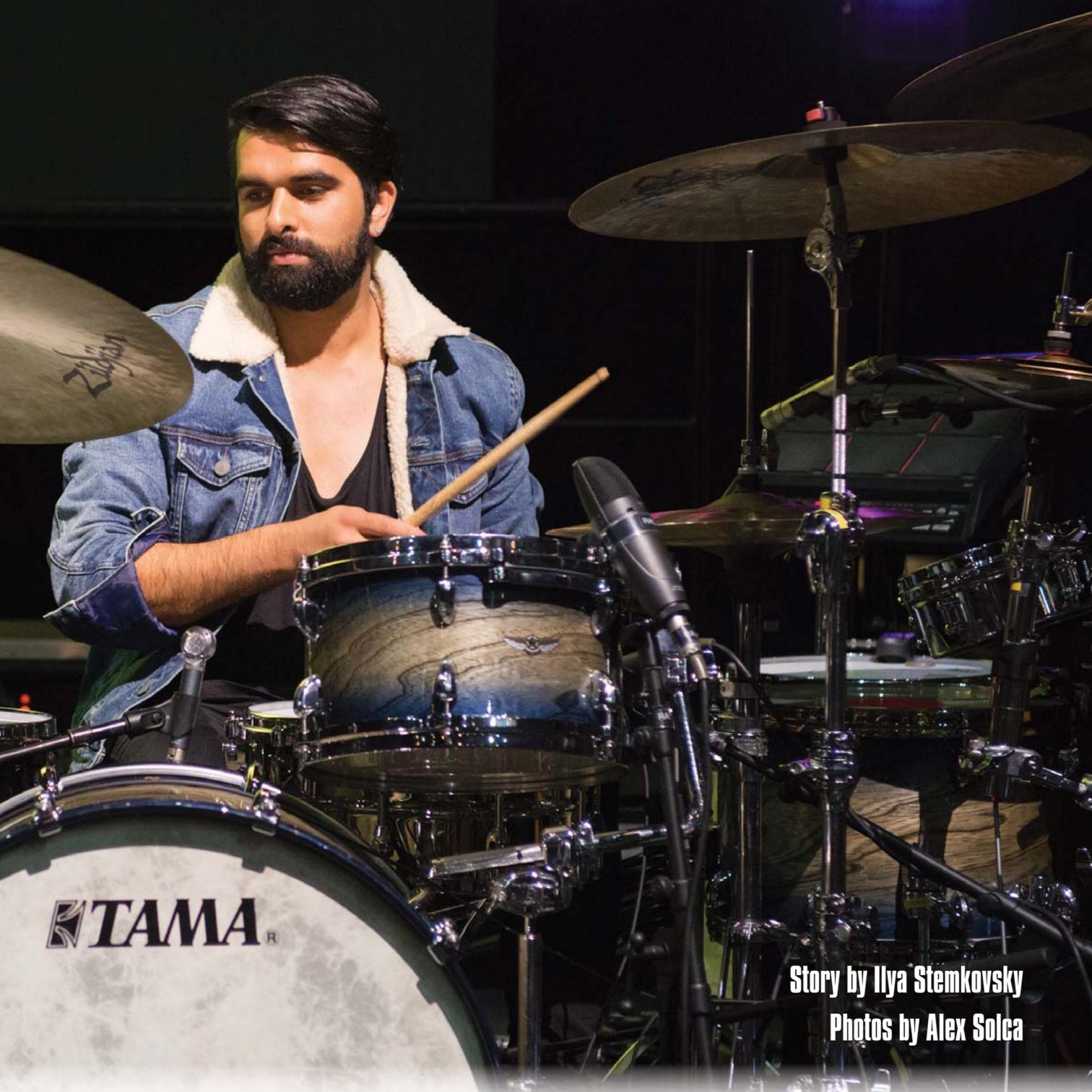
Take a perusal of London-based drummer Kaz Rodriguez's social media videos, and it quickly becomes evident that he cannot be easily pigeonholed. On one hand, there are multiple photos and clips of his beautiful electronic/acoustic hybrid drumkit adorning arena stages around the world for singer Josh Groban's tour. Then there are a slew of videos showing Rodriguez blowing some serious chops over prerecorded tracks. The music is of the heavy fusion variety, full of odd times and tricky turnarounds, and puts

the drummer's developed sense of groove and burning hand speed on full display.

But delve deeper, and you realize that there are many other drummers showing their goods over these same tracks all over YouTube, from an unknown kid in his bedroom recording his best effort onto his phone, to big-time drumming luminaries like Aaron Spears and Chris Coleman using Rodriguez's ultra-useful compositions at their clinics. That's because *everyone* loves Kaz's tracks, and he's released several albums of drum-less

play-alongs that seem to hit the right spot for players of all levels.

"Everyone wants to have fun when they're playing to a song," Rodriguez says. "I had this idea of wanting to feel like I'm playing in an arena with an array of sound that complements and cushions my playing. And I wanted everyone to have the opportunity to feel like they were doing that. Other stuff felt too 'MIDI' to me. This was more a wall of organic sound. And we can do our own little clinics or do a concert and play just to a track."



Story by Ilya Stemkovsky

Photos by Alex Solca

Rodriguez came up through U.K. schooling and spent time in everything from a Muse tribute band to tours with Jessie Ware and the dance-oriented Disciples. He might have stumbled onto a side career of creating tracks for other drummers to blaze over, but it could also be because Rodriguez opens himself up to be inspired by a variety of unorthodox elements, including the perceptual phenomena known as synaesthesia. Defined as “the production of a sense impression relating to one sense or part

of the body by stimulation of another sense or part of the body,” synaesthesia affects Rodriguez in unexpected ways. He “sees” certain colors when hearing certain sounds; this allows him to map out Groban song arrangements into different colored sections, write music based on simply speaking to a person, and collaborate with his manufacturers to invent out-of-this-world hybrid drum tones and funky, synthetic cymbal flavors.

Rodriguez has made nice with electronics, and thinks you should as

well. And though he brings a sensitive touch to Groban’s ballads, he’s featured on his own fiery composition “Marrakech” during nightly Groban performances. As the singer moves from one end of the arena to the other, the drummer captivates the audience with percussive excitement. *Modern Drummer* caught up with Rodriguez on one such night, when Groban was passing through New York City to play at a little place called Madison Square Garden....

**MD:** Talk about growing up playing in London. Did your Indian background influence you? Was there pushback against rock music in your home?

**Kaz:** I don't come from a musical background. My roots are actually Portuguese, Iranian, and Indian, so we were a mixed-up bunch. I learned how to play drums naturally. I took a tabla lesson when I was younger, but I just couldn't hack it. It's a language within itself, and I just didn't have the attention span.

In London I was brought up listening to fusion cats. My idols. I was in love with Toto and listened to Jeff Porcaro a lot, and then later with Simon Phillips. And Jonathan Moffett—I was into Michael Jackson, listening to pop—but also Billy Cobham. At about age ten, I was busking on the streets, just to make a buck, or a pound. And that really changed my life, because when I started gathering crowds, I knew there was something there. I learned the value of earning something, and it was rewarding to make people happy. My parents never let me go to play music, though, because they said it wasn't a proper job. So I rebelled against what they were saying, and by fifteen I'd saved enough money for a drumkit. They didn't know where that money came from.

**MD:** And you had experiences with synaesthesia then as well?

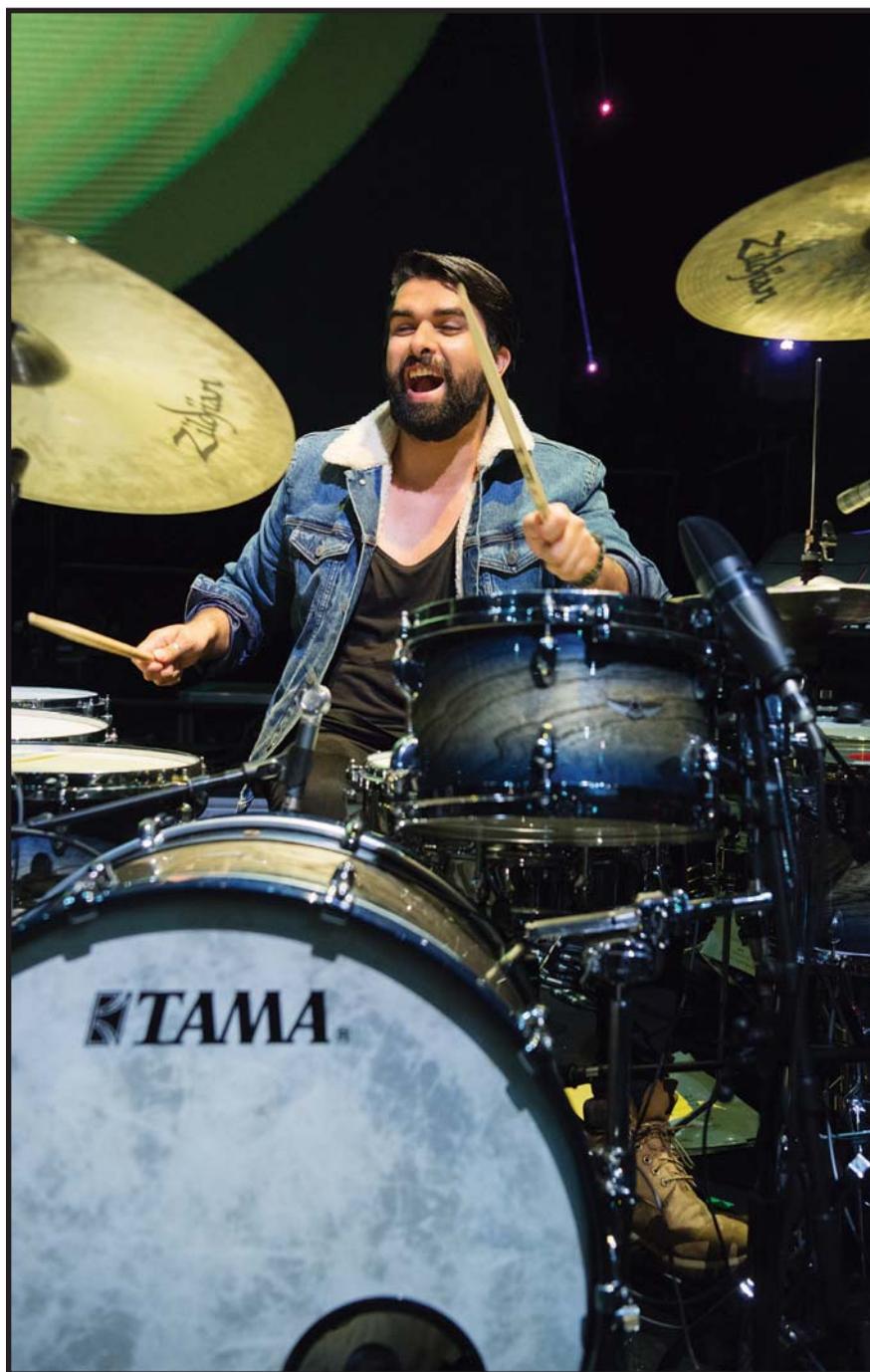
**Kaz:** I have it stronger now, but when I was younger, it wasn't tapped in as well. At the age of twenty-one, I was in a short coma after being stabbed. I woke up listening to music, and I actually saw an array of colors. Before that, I could explain what color a song was, and people thought I was just weird.

**MD:** You believe the next level of it was triggered by that kind of traumatic experience?

**Kaz:** I think it was definitely a trigger, but I looked more into it and realized we're all kind of born with it. When you're a child and you look at something bright or colored, you react to it. And you'll see a newborn baby react to a sound as well. When you get older, you lose sight of that. And for me, it unlocked this thing.

**MD:** If you hear music with a lot of notes, are there lots of different colors happening? How does it work for you?

**Kaz:** If I hear Steve Gadd play a triplet and then John Bonham play a triplet—same sticking—I'll hear different colors. And it's not just with music; it works for conversation and people in general. I end up writing a lot of music based on conversations or interpretations or listening



to a crash cymbal.

**MD:** What inspired you to create your play-along tracks? Aaron Spears was the first to use them publicly, but other prominent names followed.

**Kaz:** I originally did it for myself. I was a fan of watching someone like Vinnie Colaiuta or Dave Weckl or David Garibaldi play to backing tracks. And I couldn't read music. For me it's a sonic thing. I hear something and think, *That sounds right to me*. And I don't have perfect pitch. I just know when a sound doesn't seem right. The first album I put out was on iTunes in 2011 or 2012.

**MD:** That's just backing tracks with no official version of you playing drums over them?

**Kaz:** Yes, just backing. There are some tracks with me playing on YouTube, just to let people know. The blessing in disguise was that I left it a mystery, because a lot of people would hear this canvas, this painting, this sketch, but I let the drummers add the color to it. If I play it, I'm only playing my interpretation of the song. Does it sound the same if Steve Gadd or Keith Carlock is playing with Steely Dan? Different movements. What about if Steve Jordan was

playing with Steely Dan?

I never thought that there were enough people in the drumming community creating backing tracks that people genuinely enjoyed, with challenging time signatures, but not so challenging...to learn time signatures without reading music.

That's how Aaron got connected with it. I sent him my song "7 to the Power of 6." He loved it, and I never even knew he would reply. He was playing that track [during his clinics] all over the world. He's a major inspiration to me and now one of my best friends. He still pushes me.

Years ago, I asked him if this was good enough to keep doing, and he told me I should continue. And over the course of my albums, I began to grow because I started to tap more into my synaesthesia and tried to understand what a drummer would like. Originally I made things that I would like. But eventually I made a song for Aaron based on the way he plays. And later I met Chris Coleman, who somehow knew me, and he asked me to make him a track.

**MD:** And your newer stuff is a bit more compositional and cinematic.

**Kaz:** Yes, it's more open, with infinite possibilities. People ask me what genre my music is, and I can't answer that. Alex Rüdinger covers my song "Storm," and he's a metal guy, an amazing player. And then you have someone like Adrian Bent, who plays for Drake. There's an array of stylistic players who can do this music, because it has all those influences on it.

**MD:** It must feel great for you to go on YouTube and see all these other drummers at home playing along, not just more well-known names.

**Kaz:** That is so satisfying for me. Some six-year-old in Indonesia. It's growing, and it makes me so happy to know the drum community is building through my music. And it's so nice to meet people who say my music has helped them so much. People at Berklee doing it for an exam. And it inspires me to keep writing and progressing, because I'm always learning. I was in Nashville, in the middle of writing a song for Calvin Rodgers, and Steve Jordan came up and said hello. I was like, *Wow, this is crazy*. I was so inspired by his presence that I wrote a song. I meet really lovely people through this.

**MD:** Is it lucrative?

**Kaz:** Surprisingly it is. I was a bit shocked. At the start it wasn't. Now it's become kind of like a business. I don't rely on just that. But because of it, I'm given tons of opportunities for drum festivals and clinics and videos.

**MD:** How did the Josh Groban gig come up? Was it strange that your videos on YouTube

were fusion-y, but you got a call to play this type of music?

**Kaz:** Groban's MD, Tariqh Akoni, found me on Facebook. [At the same time] Josh was looking for a drummer and had a few come through, and then he saw one of my Drumeo videos and sent that to Tariqh.

I got the gig with no audition. It was an amazing opportunity, and I'm still grateful for it. And it's nice to know that I was brought into the band as a contributor. Everyone in the band is creative, and we all have respect for Josh. I was asked to write a composition for the set that I get to play every day. I wrote "Marrakech" during rehearsals in L.A. Josh and Tariqh approved it, and we play this instrumental while Josh moves from the A stage to the B stage. It starts all cinematic, and I get to go a bit crazy.

**MD:** How do you overcome the nonreading

learn the parts. Tariqh always says, "You bring the people you trust, and you trust them."

**MD:** Is the Groban show a challenge, in terms of sensitivity?

**Kaz:** It's being in the emotion of the songs. I've always heard this term, where you could be a bit too "L.A." They'd say, "We don't want this L.A. feel." And I'm asking, "What does that mean?" [laughs] It means it's too right on the money. It's too much like a session. With Josh, there's a song called "River," which is a slow ballad. And it's a really important song to play, one, because Steve Jordan produced it and he's playing drums on the album original. So I had to learn to play those songs being me. Being right on the click is usually great, but in certain songs it isn't. Sometimes you need to be kind of loose, on top of it or ahead of it. And if

**"Over the course of my albums, I began to grow because I started to tap more into my synaesthesia. If I hear Steve Gadd play a triplet and then John Bonham play a triplet—same sticking—I'll hear different colors."**

aspect, when you've got twenty-five songs to learn with minimal rehearsal before going into arenas?

**Kaz:** I've always been able to learn songs really quickly. It's important to be able to do that. You see Teddy Campbell have short periods of time to learn songs for *American Idol*. I've always found a way to chart stuff in my head, but I do it through color. When I hear a song, I think, *This section is blue, this section is green, this section is yellow...* I just remember it in a partially...I'd say...autistic way. You have a way of seeing groupings. Not saying that reading isn't important, but if I have a piece of music in front of me, I don't find it useful. I want to take the feeling away from the music, that you're actually in the music, rather than looking at the pages. You might be missing some special things that aren't on the page. And I feel like I have that musical freedom on this gig, as long as I

I'm on the drums, a hundred percent of the show is on the click. And when you're playing with an orchestra, you can't afford to be laid-back or too in front. You have to be in this fine sweet spot where you're driving the orchestra and also bedded safely with the band. And dynamics are important. I've got three differently tuned snares. And you hear why in the show. If I used only one, it wouldn't work.

**MD:** And this is where your knowledge of electronics comes in.

**Kaz:** On certain songs I have to enhance the main snare. I use Roland electronics, and they work perfectly for me. I can program a kick and snare on the Roland SPD-SX, and I can have a gigantic kick and this white-noise clap, and you can't get that from an acoustic snare. To change that very quickly is important, to stay on the same snare but have it in this tuning range where I can feel

## Kaz Rodriguez

like it complements the electronics.

A lot of people are afraid of it, but I actually love it. I do a lot of hybrid clinics around the globe, and it makes the old-school cats go, *What was that?* That's the mission. It's important to play both electronic and acoustic. Even Josh's gig is heavily influenced by electronics. Our fantastic percussionist, Pete Korpela, has a lot of electronics as well, triggering samples from the record. They're timed sequences. There aren't a lot of tracks. We are primarily the guys who have to emulate the sampled sounds. We have to make it sound like the record. There's something more endearing with that because you're not playing to a static record, and it just sounds like the album. If you're coming to a live show, you want to hear a live show but with the record sounds. We try to give the audience the sounds they're familiar with.

**MD:** The live drums are otherwise conventional?

**Kaz:** My main kick is a 24", and being a fusion guy, I've never used one that size. So I have a 24" and another one that's 20".

**MD:** What about the future of Logic and the way software is developing and changing? What do you see happening in drum-centric electronics?

**Kaz:** Logic is what works for me. There are other things, like Ableton and Pro Tools. But Logic is my vice. It makes me feel satisfied. Logic is a template, a canvas I can understand. I helped design the Roland TM-6 PRO drum trigger module. And we designed and sampled our own sounds onto the module in my studio. If you look online, I explain how I recorded one of the sounds, a hi-hat sound, by just rubbing my hands together. I also made a bass drum sound out of a door shutting.

But everything is changing. Even with cymbals, people are using stacks more and more. I go to the people at Zildjian, and they want my input. Because of my synaesthesia, they're drawn to sounds that are undiscovered. We've made some crazy cymbals, and I just hope they can come out for people. All these things are white-noise-y, and to me those are sounds of turquoise, and turquoise is electronic.

Twelve years ago I was just a guy who played lots of notes. Now I understand what the future could be. I believed in it. It's an honor to now be asked to be involved. I want to make sure other drummers out there have the ability to understand electronics as well.

**MD:** Your play-along tracks require a different muscle from the Groban gig. Do you do anything to keep in shape?

**Kaz:** When I go back home, I make sure I'm still warm to a balance of things. A lot of people think of me as a chops guy, because they see more of that on my social media. And then they'll see me playing something like this gig, and I'm playing songs. But that's from my roots.

Also, I originally started playing a left-handed setup, and that didn't feel right. I play ambidextrously. I can lead with my left or right foot. I mostly play a right-handed setup, but I sometimes play open-handed. When I play more "chops" music, it's hard to explain what I'm doing. You're doing the left- and right-hand way, and that's quite a good way of doing it. It's like Billy Cobham or another big influence on me, Gary Husband. But I practice both playing grooves and chops. All the technical rudiments—paradiddles, flam-taps, all that stuff. But I'm not trying to be the fastest, just as musical as I can be. I like to keep warm, but I don't like to over-practice.

**MD:** So the future is bright?

**Kaz:** I play with jazz groups and this DJ/house group called Disciples. I just want to keep composing and doing more drum clinics and more Josh and more projects with fantastic musicians. I'm looking forward to getting home and seeing my girlfriend and taking walks and being inspired. We talk about life. And talking about life brings you back to music. You have to have a balance and recharge. Like just now, because of our genuine conversation, I've gotten two ideas about a song. It's nice: we're sitting down, relaxed, and I'm already seeing colors. But it's been a great run so far. I'm just riding the wave. I'm grateful every day for everything that happens.



### Rodriguez's Setup

**Drums:** Tama Star (Walnut)

- 6x14 Starphonic chrome over brass snare
- 7x13 snare
- 10x15 floor tom/snare
- 6.5x10 tom
- 7x12 tom
- 14x20 bass drum
- 14x24 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Zildjian

- 16" K Sweet hats
- 18" K Dark thin (prototype)
- 19" K Constantinople crash-ride
- 12" A Custom EFX stack with 10" Spiral Trash
- 23" K Sweet ride
- 24" Light ride
- 22" Oriental Crash of Doom prototype

**Hardware:** Tama Roadpro stands, remote cable hat, Speed Cobra bass drum pedals, and 1st Chair throne

**Heads:** Remo, including Emperor Vintage, Powerstroke P3 Clear, and Emperor Black Suede batters

**Electronics:** Roland SPD-SX sample pad, RT-30 triggers, and TM-6 PRO drum trigger module

**Percussion:** LP Micro Snare

**Mics:** Earthworks DK7 kit

**Accessories:** Protection Racket AAA cases







# ANI DIFRANCO'S TERENCE HIGGINS

He somehow manages to balance projects with Ani DiFranco, Don Was, George Porter & Ivan Neville, John Medeski's Mad Skillet, Tab Benoit—a seemingly endless string of fascinating and utterly unique recordings, tours, and special appearances. What makes him able to handle such a wide range of gigs? The answer lies at least partly in the city of his birth.

**I**t was November 2018, and Terence Higgins was calling *Modern Drummer* from Macon, Georgia. It was the first night of a three-week run with Ani DiFranco that would take her band to the West Coast, and Higgins had the kind of problems that most of us only dream about. The drummer was trying to balance tours with DiFranco, Don Was, George Porter & Ivan Neville, John Medeski's Mad Skillet, and Tab Benoit. "Yeah, I'm trying to do at least two right now," he said, "maybe even four. During the Ani DiFranco tour I have a couple of shows with Don Was, and then I'm slotted in the *Take Me to the River Tour* with George Porter and Ivan Neville to promote this new film. I'm flying to Texas to meet John Medeski for a tour with a new band he started, and then I join Tab Benoit for his December tour. When they all bookend and line up perfectly, it's amazing, but when the gigs start to overlap and conflict, then it becomes a nightmare."

That's when priorities kick in. "I'm Ani's drummer, so she takes precedence over all the other gigs," Higgins later explains. "And Tab Benoit understands that when Ani's got a tour, I can't make his gig. So it's just a matter of lining up the dates on the calendar, trying to prioritize, and saying, 'Yes, I can do it,' or 'No, I have a conflict.' I manage to make it work like that."

Higgins was born in New Orleans in 1970 and grew up in the suburb of Old Algiers. His great grandfather introduced him to drums when he was a toddler, and by high school he was chosen to represent the state of Louisiana in the McDonald's All-American Band.

Afterwards he enrolled in music studies at Southern University. Legendary bassist George Porter Jr. took the up-and-comer under his wing and made sure he was listening to giants of New Orleans drumming like Baby Dodds, Earl Palmer, Smokey Johnson, Charles "Hungry" Williams, Shannon Powell, James Black, Herlin Riley, Zigaboo Modeliste, Joe Lastie, Idris Muhammad, Ricky Sebastian, Herman Ernest, and Willie Green. Higgins was equally inspired by an amazing group of drumming peers including Adonis Rose, Brian Blade, Gerald French, Donald Edwards, Troy Davis, Stanton Moore, Russell Batiste Jr., Jeffery "Jellybean" Alexander, Doug Belote, Alfred Salvant, and Raymond Weber. He also counts Billy Cobham, Phillip "Fish" Fisher, and Matt Abts among his many influences.

Higgins came to national prominence as part of the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, appearing on 2002's *Medicated Magic*, 2004's *Funeral for a Friend*, and 2006's *What's Going On*. Later he played with John Scofield's Piety Street Band, and in 2011 he toured behind Warren Haynes' *Man in Motion*, appearing the following year on double-CD/DVD package *Live at the Moody Theater*.

With his own band, SwampGrease, Higgins recorded the albums *In the Bywater* (2004) and *Swampgrease II: Rage 'Til Sunrise* (2013), amplifying his talents as songwriter and music producer, and showcasing his ability to make any style of music swing like mad.

Story by Robin Tolleson

Photos by Michael Alfred

For the past seven years Higgins has been playing with Ani DiFranco, appearing on her studio albums *Allergic to Water* (2014) and *Binary* (2017) as well as on a number of her live “Bootleg” releases. “I started working with Ani right after I finished up with the Warren Haynes Band,” he recalls. “I had the option of going back with Dirty Dozen Brass Band or just kind of winging it and seeing whatever else was happening. And then Ani called me, so it kind of lined up. I toured with her for about a year, and then she got pregnant and took a year off. Tab Benoit called, so I worked with him for a year, and then Ani came back. I still play with both bands regularly. It works out beautifully sometimes.”

DiFranco, who launched her career in New York City, relocated to New Orleans about ten years ago. “I knew of Ani,” says Higgins, “and I was familiar with her music, but I didn’t know her. I dug her stuff, but it really wasn’t on my radar that I would be playing with her. I think

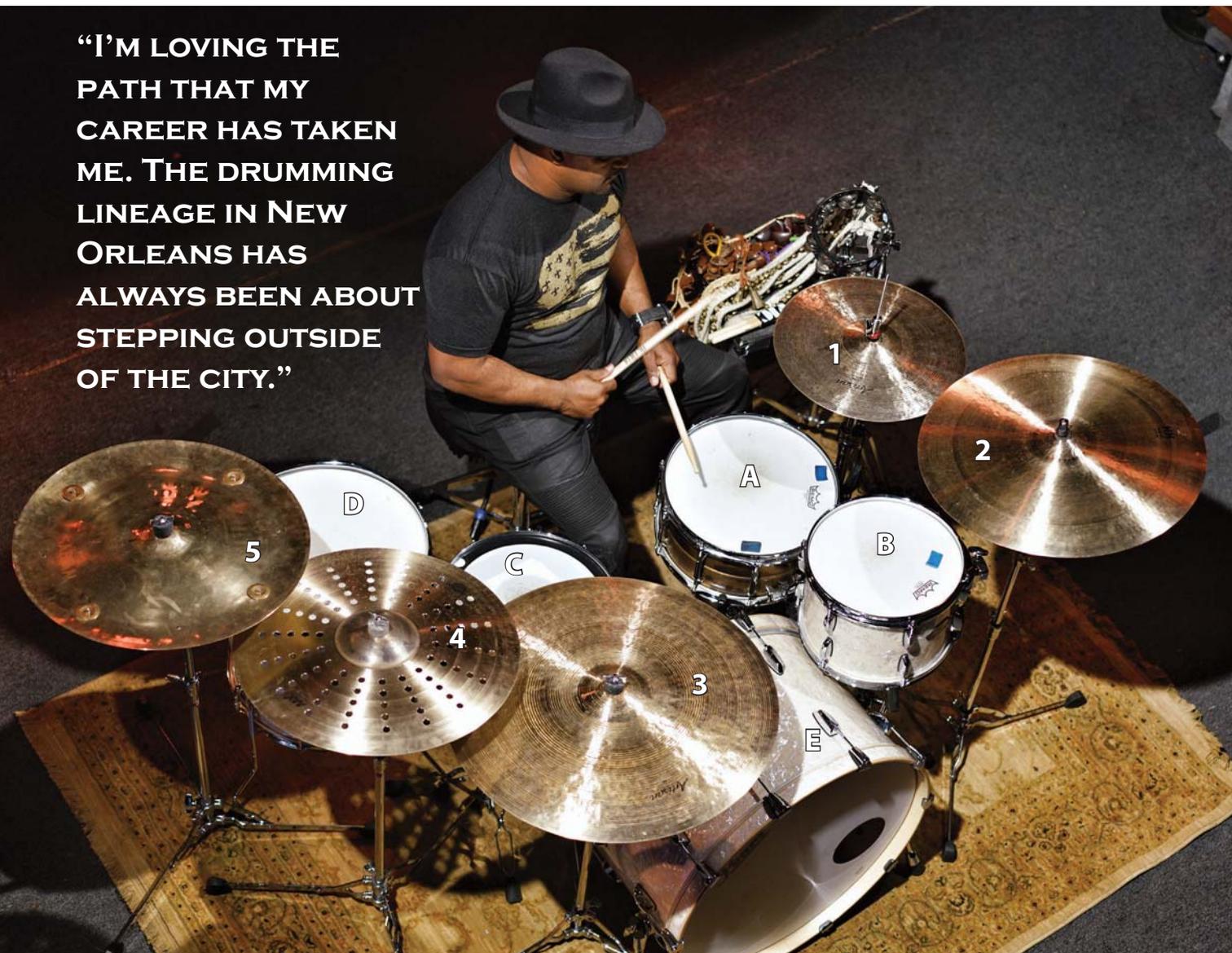
Ivan Neville recommended me for the gig. She was looking for a drummer from New Orleans, you know, so my name came up. Then I played with her, and it was magic.”

Higgins isn’t merely a sideman with DiFranco; his energy and playing has a big impact on her music. “I just draw from the roots of all the music, the source of it,” he says. “Because it’s all got DNA that’s based off of what I’ve grown up in and was taught, being from New Orleans. For me it’s just interpretation and getting on the inside of whatever genre that I’m dealing with. It’s fun doing that. And I love Ani’s stuff, because from a drumming perspective it’s totally different from any other gig that I’ve done. It’s not so much about me, or playing loud, you know. It’s about the spirit and just playing the song, interpreting her music. And she loves it—we connect on so many levels. It’s almost like telepathy going on up there, you know. We communicate really well,

without speaking. Then being in tune with bass player Todd Sickafoose, it’s like, *Wow, what’s going on?* He’s a monster. There’s just a great chemistry that we have with her band.”

As Higgins says, growing up in New Orleans helped prepare him for all the different styles he’s playing now. “Yes, that is my foundation,” he affirms. “But early on in my career I played with singer-songwriter types that weren’t from New Orleans. I was in this band in college, like a progressive rock band. The singer-songwriter really showed me the ropes and just how to listen and play songs. That’s a different aspect, outside of, you know, the basic rootsy New Orleans thing. So I got that foundation of understanding arrangements and how to apply dynamics and timbres to different songs, and I think when I started working with the Warren Haynes Band, right before I played with Ani, all of those sensibilities were brought forth. He noticed the way I

**“I’M LOVING THE PATH THAT MY CAREER HAS TAKEN ME. THE DRUMMING LINEAGE IN NEW ORLEANS HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT STEPPING OUTSIDE OF THE CITY.”**



play songs and the way I interpret music and arrangements. And it was like second-nature for me because I had all of those things fundamentally.

"When I started playing with Ani," Higgins continues, "I'd already been exercising all of that information, so it was kind of easy for me to jump into that. But then playing with Dirty Dozen Brass Band for all of those years, they allowed me a certain sense of freedom when I was playing. They didn't restrict what I was doing to any one thing—as long as it was grooving and fun. So it opened up my world to being free and understanding limitations and boundaries. All of that information just stuck with me, and that's just how I fit in."

"I work well with a lot of different artists because I'm so open-minded about the music," Higgins insists. "I don't really think of it as one thing; I just think of it as a continuation of something else. I find myself in some really peculiar places in terms of gigs, when you think about my career and where I came from. Recently I've been doing these tribute shows with Don Was. A couple years ago Warren Haynes recommended me to do the *Last Waltz* fortieth-anniversary tour with Taj Mahal and Dr. John, and it was amazing. They did a tribute to Little Feat, and then they did a tribute to Bob Marley with Ziggy and Stephen Marley. That turned into a tribute to the



### Higgins' Ani Difranco Setup

**Drums:** Pearl Session Studio Select in Nicotine White Marine finish

**A.** 6.5x14 Sensitone Premium Beaded Brass snare

**B.** 8x12 tom

**C.** 8x14 Free Floating Mahogany snare

**D.** 16x16 floor tom

**E.** 14x24 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Sabian

**1.** 16" Artisan Elite hi-hats

**2.** 22" HH Remastered thin crash

**3.** 24" Artisan Elite

**4.** 18" AAX Aero crash

**5.** 20" Paragon Diamondback Chinese crash

**Percussion:** LP mounted tambourine, African seed rattles, various shakers, Indian ghungroo bell string

**Hardware:** Pearl, including Eliminator Redline hi-hat and bass drum pedal, and trap table

tom batters and Ambassador resonants, Powerstroke P3 Coated bass drum batters

**Heads:** Remo, including Controlled Sound Coated snare batters, Emperor Vintage Coated

**Sticks:** Vic Firth 5A and 85A sticks, mallets, beaters, and brushes

### With John Medeski's Mad Skillet

**Drums:** Pearl Vision VBL Bop Kit  
• 6.5x14 Sensitone snare  
• 8x12 tom  
• 14x14 floor tom  
• 16x18 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Sabian

• 13" HHX Manhattan Jazz hi-hats

• 22" HH Remastered thin crash

• 22" Vault ride

• Stack: 17" HHX X-Treme

crash/12" AAX Aero splash/10" AA Mini Holy China

• 18" AAX Aero crash

**Electronics:** Audix D series mics, Ultimate Ears in-ear monitors with Shure 600 MHz belt pack

**Percussion:** LP salsa cowbell, Peter Engelhart Snail

Rolling Stones, and now this NBC special that celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of Elvis Presley's *Comeback Special*.

"I find myself playing these gigs that culturally wouldn't be on my radar, but with my musical abilities, I'm able to handle it. It's pretty amazing, when you think about the drummers that played those gigs—Levon and all those guys. I get to jam off all that energy and inside of their style. As I listen to the music, I'm figuring out that it lends itself to what I do, because they were all checking out New Orleans stuff. So it's like, I get it."

In the fall of 2018, Higgins joined the *Take Me to the River—New Orleans LIVE!* tour in support of the acclaimed Martin Shore—produced music documentary of the same name. On it, the drummer got to play with the Neville Brothers, members of the Meters and Dirty Dozen, and Snoop Dogg. "They got together a bunch of New Orleans musicians, we collaborated on songs in the studio, and they filmed it," says Higgins. "It's about the different generations of the music and the musicians. It's pretty incredible that it all lined up like that and I was able to confirm every tour. It's a lot of music, and a lot of miles."

Within days of that tour ending, Higgins joined up with John Medeski's Mad Skillet, recording an album and doing a month-long

## Terence Higgins

tour. "I met John Medeski back when he produced Dirty Dozen's [1999 album] *Buck Jump* in New Orleans. We brought him in to recapture the magic that they'd had from the old days. He brought a certain kind of energy, and we really hit it off. Years passed, and John had always wanted to work with me and Kirk Joseph, the tuba player, based on that session. He would come to New Orleans, and we would throw together these late-night shows for Jazz Fest with [guitarist] Will Bernard. John Medeski just kind of kidnapped the band and called it Mad Skillet. It's an amazing little quartet."

Higgins says he enjoys using the different chops for different tours. "It's just different muscle memory," he explains. "With Ani it's not so much about big beats and improvisation, you know; it's also about what I *don't* play, and about listening to her. Even though her songs are

structured, we don't necessarily have to play the same exact thing. There's still room for different inflections in her music. So it's super

interesting every night. Because we don't anticipate anything, we just let it flow.

"The Medeski thing is way more improvisational in terms of soloing," Higgins continues. "The song is structured, but we get into these different vibes throughout every song. It's like we don't know what's going to happen either, so it's kind of cool. It's two totally different muscles for me, two trains of thought. I love switching gears like that. Switching those gears is good exercise for me to grow and perfect what I do, mentally and physically.

"I'm loving the path that my career has taken me," Higgins says. "I was with Dirty Dozen for fifteen or sixteen years, and that's a lot of time. I finally started branching out. All of those musicians that I've worked with heard the Dirty Dozen or heard me in some capacity, but once I started working with them it was like, *Oh, wow, he's got*



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way more stuff happening than we might have thought. But the drumming lineage in New Orleans has always been about stepping outside of the city. Smokey Johnson, Earl Palmer, Count M'Butu, Zigaboo—they all got out. They opened the door for this kind of thing. It's just like falling in line with the lineage.

"George Porter was my first gig, before Dirty Dozen," Higgins continues, "and for me that was like the Library of Congress in terms of who to check out in New Orleans. Because he actually had me playing with a lot of those older guys, like Snooks Eaglin and Earl King and Johnny Adams. I played with him through that, and then once I got with the Dirty Dozen, that was a different side of the coin. He would do shows with Allen Toussaint and Dr. John, and Alvin Rogers was turning me on to Fats Domino, so it's like I got the whole scoop of New Orleans, you know, from the streets to the stage."

Higgins designs his drumkit specifically for each tour. For instance, with Ani DiFranco he's using a second, deep snare in the usual first floor tom position. "With Ani I've actually been using a couple different kits," he says. "I use a Session Studio Classic set, and I use a wood fiberglass kit because it has that darker, more vintage sound. I recently got

the Session Studio Select, and they're even more vintage and vibey than the kits that I've previously used. So now I'm in the process of making the swap and integrating the newer kit into the fold.

"My gear changes constantly," Terence goes on. "I use a different cymbal setup with Ani because of her style, and the quiet. I need more washy and bright cutting stuff. On other gigs I use more stacks and bigger crashes. And with Ani I barely use drumsticks. I use a lot of different implements, like Blasticks, brushes, and mallets, as opposed to the other gigs, where I'm using 5B sticks and playing really loud.

"I bring out some extra vintage snare drums here and there," Higgins adds, "but when I'm touring I try to be brand sensitive, because people are always taking pictures and video, and I like to be seen with the gear that I'm endorsing. They do a good job with accommodating my vibe, so I don't have to go to a different company to get a certain sound. I don't necessarily have to have a 1950s Leedy snare drum on tour. I can get the sounds that I need. I've been with Pearl for nineteen years, and Sabian, of course, master cymbal makers."

Higgins says he takes steps to keep his chops and his mind fresh while on the road.

"I have a practice set that I'm able to tour with, and I've always got a pad," he says. "I'll bring my computer and my MIDI keyboards, because I like to document musical ideas and try to write songs for projects that I do outside of my touring gigs. So I keep pretty busy when I'm on tour. I've always got something to do or study or read, including learning more about New Orleans history. I recently did a history class at the New School about New Orleans drumming, and it was really cool. Sometimes when I'm presenting a class, I've got to go back and refresh my own thoughts on that. It's like, you're teaching these kids in college, and they already know something about music, so you've got to be extra on. There was an educational component to the *Take Me to the River* tour, and we did different university classes in between the tour dates."

And those tour dates just keep coming. "You never really unpack," says Higgins. "I always have a bag packed with some clothes and things like multivitamins. And I'll take my electronic gear—my iPad, laptop, mini-keyboard, hard drive, a couple of digital cameras.... Plus my gym clothes, because I'm living out of it for the next month. I'll go home a couple times. But it won't be for long."



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Yeah Yeah Yeahs

# Brian Chase

Widely lauded as the drummer with the iconic indie-rock band, he's recently released a career-spanning box set focusing on his revolutionary *Drums and Drones* project. Can we get micro for a minute?

Students and drum aficionados: Brian Chase should demand your attention. He is the rare musician who's as much at home drumming behind the ecstatic yawp of punk legends the Yeah Yeah Yeahs as he is jousting with the cream of New York City's improvising coterie. Perhaps less well known is his revolutionary work in the world of drum tuning.

Utilizing concepts of just intonation and mining the drum's elemental sounds for compositional inspiration, Chase has generated a new acoustic map of the drums' resonances and capabilities. He's harnessed this work into a decade's worth of recordings on the three-volume set *Drums and Drones*, recently released with an accompanying book on his own Chaikin Records label. Adventurous listeners should pick it up right away.

As a child, Chase learned to read music at the same time he was learning to read books. Stints with local youth orchestras and individual study with John Miceli and Justin DiCiccio followed. At the Oberlin Conservatory of Music he worked closely with Michael Rosen and Greg Bandy. After college, employment at the Carroll Music percussion department and volunteering at La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela's Dream House sound and light installation cultivated his growing interest into more esoteric realms of tuning drums.

"Brian's technical excellence doesn't hamper his intuitive

playing," Yeah Yeah Yeahs singer Karen O tells *Modern Drummer*. "I think that's the holy grail, when you can be both insanely skilled and free as a player." Bandmate Nick Zinner adds, "Brian is the most unusual and versatile drummer I've played with, able to crush any style and do as much or as little as is required for the music."

Chase's dedication to the instrument does not end with his extraordinary kit playing. His Ashtanga yoga practice feeds directly into his posture and body awareness at the drumset. He's also rekindled his Jewish spirituality in the last decade, and we talk a little bit about how it has influenced his life and playing in the following interview.

These elements of serious study might suggest a man at odds with the good-humored person familiar to his friends and bandmates. Says Karen O, "Brian's an eccentric, an altruist, a patient man, a silly man, a holy man, a loyal friend, and of course the greatest drummer of all time."

Chase also has a heroic sweet tooth. I've seen him eat a meal of desserts more than a few times.

This article is the result of a few wide-ranging discussions that occurred over the course of a few months in person and over email. Chase is open but typically laconic, so this interview was a special opportunity to hear about his playing and compositional philosophies.

Story by John Colpitts

Photos by John Fell





CHAIKIN  
RECORDS

**MD:** Let's start with the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. When the band began in the early 2000s, you were playing a couple of shows a month. How often did you rehearse, and what were those rehearsals like?

**Brian:** We rehearsed just enough to be able to do the show. [laughs] The most important thing was the spirit of the music and preserving that. I mean, it's rock 'n' roll. Any technical concerns or sloppiness

ways, but then when we combine, it feels really powerful. It was there at the beginning, and we still honor it. At the same time, the songs are unusual, but they're really catchy. Karen as a front woman is of course very distinctive and really powerful. She carries a great spirit with her.

**MD:** I'd love to talk about how you create beats.

**Brian:** A lot of the early songs started as

In some ways it's like counterpoint in terms of composition or harmony or layers of instruments. It's orchestral. Sometimes that layer can be another beat, or sometimes there could be additional rhythmic layers. They all trace back to this fundamental beat.

**MD:** Can you give an example of a song where this might happen?

**Brian:** There are a few hi-hat patterns that come to mind. In "Maps" there's a left-foot



take a major back seat to energy and fun. It comes from growing up as a fan of punk and rock 'n' roll and appreciating that spirit and seeing it as completely credible. Amateurism is a good balance to perfectionism.

**MD:** Was that consciously approached or discussed as a group?

**Brian:** Not overtly. But I'd say we all shared a love of New York punk rock—the Ramones, the New York Dolls, the Velvet Underground, and others. We felt the power of that music.

**MD:** Seeing you live at the Governors Ball Music Festival a few months ago, the performance was just as exciting as those early shows. To what do you attribute that?

**Brian:** There's definitely a spark that all three of us share that we light up when we get together. We have it individually in our own

demos from Nick and Karen. Nick would often add a drum machine, and I would use that as a starting point. "Bang" and "Maps" were like that. I would adapt according to the song.

**MD:** I always found that while technically your beats are really challenging, I never thought that your ego was dictating them.

**Brian:** The music would dictate the parts in a lot of ways. I've developed my drum parts by thinking in simultaneous rhythmic layers. To give an example of what I mean, let's say I'm playing a basic beat that goes with the song. At the same time, I'll hear a subsidiary beat that will complement it. Sometimes it's a counter rhythm; sometimes it's a reinforcement. I'll hear that rhythm in my head, and it's directly related to the original beat. I'll often refer to those counter rhythms as a way to offer variety and difference.

hi-hat pattern that comes in on the second verse. It's an addendum that adds color. Also in the song "Pin" from *Fever to Tell*, the way the hi-hat pattern comes in with that main beat, it sounds more like a layer to me than a normal straight hi-hat pattern.

Another way I think of writing parts relates to jazz. In a jazz setting, the pianist is responsible for the comping behind the soloist. It's the same thing with drums when we use the left hand to "comp" behind the soloist. The pianist is there to complement the soloist. We find the spaces and support the solo as it builds or a composition as it develops.

**MD:** In the context of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, are you comping behind Karen's voice?

**Brian:** Primarily. If a basic beat is being played, then there's a whole layer of rhythmic

possibilities that are existing at the same time that aren't being played. So if there's a pianist playing on top of the basic beat to support what's happening in the vocals, the pianist would be doing these other variations—more complex and subtle things. I'm hearing drums perform that kind of function.

A lot of my instincts come from my jazz background and improvising. The drummer has to support the soloist as things are building! That opens another world of accents and variety that are not based off of a straight beat.

**MD:** Can you expand on that thought?

**Brian:** I feel like in rock music there are a lot of established rules that put people in a box sometimes. Kick on 1 and 3, snare on 2 and 4, cymbals play 8th notes.... That's okay, it's a good starting point, but often times it doesn't serve the music in the best way. As long as the rhythmic ideas are based on supporting and complementing the music, they'll work more often than not.

**MD:** That reminds me of Junior Kimbrough's drummer, Kent "Kinney" Kimbrough. On the tune "You Better Run," he's crashing on the 2, on the 4, on the 3, but never on the 1. It's

insane, but it works.

**Brian:** Totally. In jazz it's pretty common to extend a phrase over the bar line or end it short. Not ending a phrase on 1 can be really effective. In the Yeah Yeah Yeahs' song "Zero," coming out of the bridge, there's a moment where I hit the crash on the 2, with the snare. What that does is extend the phrase into the next measure. It keeps the momentum building rather than stopping square on the 1.

**MD:** Let's talk about *Drums and Drones*. Why has it been such a fruitful path for you?

**Brian:** The move to Drums and Drones was as an extension of the way I was hearing the capabilities of drums. Due to my background as an improviser and jazz musician, I've often heard the drums as a melodic instrument as well as a rhythmic one. In jazz, drums also have the responsibility of expressing melody. But the way melody works with the drums is very different from the way it does with another instrument. To give an example, with a piano you play a melody by playing different keys, but in drums you just have one drum. So how is melody expressed by playing one drum? It's completely possible.

One typical way in the jazz world has been through phrasing—rhythmic phrasing that

suggests melody. Papa Jo Jones and Philly Joe Jones were masters of rhythmic phrasing. Papa Jo started playing multiple tones on one drum. He did a lot of hand muting stuff back in the '50s and earlier. In my own playing I would ask myself, *How do I express melody through one drum, or through a four-piece kit?*

**MD:** So there's a matter of creating solutions for the "problem" of playing melodies on a four-piece.

**Brian:** Yes. A lot of it is through creating or suggesting different tones and playing with shading and dynamics. As an improvising musician, I was hearing all these different tones within one drum. If I hit the drum in the middle I get one sound, if I hit it towards the end I get another one, and if I do a rimshot I get another set of tones. I would use that for my expressive palette. Then when I started working at the Dream House and getting into just intonation, the tuning theory gave me a framework for understanding how overtones functioned in the resonance of a drum. Now all of a sudden I had an understanding of all the different tones that exist within the sound of a drum and all the degrees in between. The *Drums*



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**B.** 9x13 tom  
**C.** 16x16 floor tom  
**D.** 16x22 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Zildjian  
**1.** 15" New Beat hi-hats  
**2.** 20" K crash ride  
**3.** 22" K Custom Medium ride  
**4.** 18" A Thin crash

**Sticks:** Vater 5B and Cymbal Sticks with teardrop tip

**Hardware:** Yamaha and Gibraltar

**Electronics:** Yamaha DTX-MULTI 12 sample pad

**Heads:** Remo Ambassador Coated snare batter and Ambassador Snare Side bottom, Emperor Clear tom batters and Ambassador Clear resonants, Emperor Clear bass drum batter and Emperor Coated front (with logo)

## Brian Chase

*and Drones* project began as a way to investigate all of those subtle tones. I started to develop compositions that explored these different areas of that tonal color.

**MD:** The definition of experimental music!

**Brian:** Totally. A lot of trial and error. But then I would find the pieces and capture it in a recording or use it as a basis for performance.

**MD:** A close focus on drum overtones and acoustic sound doesn't seem to have been done in quite this way before.

**Brian:** It was pretty fun because it felt so fresh, but it also required a lot of work and experimentation to develop my techniques and methods. The only way to do it was to just start doing it and figure it out.

**MD:** What does your creative practice related to the drums involve these days?

**Brian:** Well, it's a lot different from how it used to be. Especially with having a kid, regular practice is almost nonexistent. But I'm working on music in some form pretty much every day. Music is still engrained in my life.

A lot of it is being with my son, and a lot of it is conceptualizing new material and ideas for *Drums and Drones* and drumming in general. It's just bringing my life lessons to the drums. I'm changing and growing as a player based on my values and experiences as a person.

**MD:** So maybe it doesn't involve so much direct practice, so to speak?

**Brian:** Yes—but I feel it! The Yeah Yeah Yeahs are playing pretty sporadically, but every time I go back to the kit and play, it's like, *Maybe I need to warm up more*, but as a player I'm still there and I feel like I'm doing different stuff. If I do an improv gig, it's like, *Oh, wow, there's actually new stuff coming out!* Maybe in some ways I'm lagging, but in other ways I'm ahead. I think a lot of it comes from the energy I put into conceptualizing music and the kind of musician I want to be.

**MD:** What do some of those conceptualizations look like?

**Brian:** Being with my son, Isaac, there's obviously a heavy supportive and nurturing role that I'm developing in myself. So with Yeah Yeah Yeahs I have a better sense of knowing what that means—to

## Brian Chase with his mentor Susie Ibarra:

“Susie is deeply caring about people. She uses that sense of love and passion to fuel the music, and it gives it that intensity. These personal human qualities are essential for the music.”



Barry Chase

nurture and support the other players onstage in a deep way. A lot of being with Isaac is loving, but it also comes with a lot of sacrifice. It's understanding what it means to be devoted in another way—to really be there in a loving way and be there in a way that sometimes is more of a challenge personally but is best overall. That can come out technically, in the sense that I'm really going to make this music feel good! I'm going to keep it simple and keep the feel great. I give time towards conceptualizing the project and the different directions it could go, and that clears a path for the blossoming of new ideas. So the compositional strength is growing, more so than the technical side of things.

**MD:** So this process of releasing this box set and engaging with the audience feeds back into the project in a pretty robust way?

**Brian:** In many ways, definitely. I think that's a good way to make the whole thing enjoyable. If I enjoy writing about it or thinking about the project or expressing it to different people, it still feels meaningful.

**MD:** This is a good way for us to segue into talking about your new record label, Chaikin.

**Brian:** I never expected to start a label. I do find the administrative aspect of music to be kind of a drag. But I was really encouraged to do it by [composer and musician] John Zorn. He saw it as a possibility for me, and he felt it would be good. He had a perspective that I didn't have. It was taking the advice of a mentor.

**MD:** How did you come to see it as a viable path?

**Brian:** It was mostly faith. It was really daunting, and there were times when I thought it was crazy and didn't think it was going to be possible for me. But I just said to myself, *Alright, this is a big job, but I'm going to get it up and running, and we'll see what it's like.*

**MD:** How has it evolved?

**Brian:** The first several months were really rough. All the admin required to set it up and get the releases registered properly and get a distributor required a lot of work—and it still does. But now that I'm past the first phase of legwork, it feels really awesome. There's an outlet for my music and for other people's music. I feel like it was a good decision for me to pursue this. We'll see where it goes.

One thing that's important with Chaikin Records is that it sees itself as part of a community. I think that's essential for labels today. It's about being a drop in the ocean and feeling connected to everybody else. Everybody has to work together, and there needs to be support and success all around. Doing a solo venture, it's important to hold hands with everyone and feel the warm embrace of community.

**MD:** One of your other mentors is drummer and composer Susie Ibarra. How have your mentors helped you to find your voice?

**Brian:** It's a great question. Zorn always valued community. That's his big one. He's such a genius in that he can embrace community in himself, the way he sets up his own projects in terms of the Stone [Zorn's music venue, now located at the Stern Center at the New School] and with his record label, Tzadik. When he does a concert of his music, twenty-five or more people take part in it. He casts a wide net; he's tapped into a wide music community. There are very few artists who can embody that range of diversity. Most people have their own style and inclinations, and you know what to expect. So he's always reinforced that idea to me in our discussions.

**MD:** How about with Susie Ibarra?

**Brian:** Susie has been a drumming mentor to me and also a personal mentor. She reinforces this very human aspect of the music and is deeply caring about people and humanity. And she uses that sense of love and passion to fuel the music, and it gives it that intensity. It's like a flame of flames. Again, it's going back to the personal aspects of music and seeing music as not just notes on a page but as really reflecting human qualities. What does it mean to be nurturing and loving to my bandmates onstage? And using that as an opportunity

for musical growth. These personal human qualities are essential for the music. A big part of my learning from her is just hanging out and hearing her describe how she handled situations and what her values are.

**MD:** Can you talk a little about how your Ashtanga yoga practice feeds into your music?

**Brian:** Through Ashtanga yoga, I've nurtured a deep sense of body and "self" awareness. On a physical level, yoga has helped my attention to posture and arm mechanics: I know what it means to sit straight and how it feels when I don't. I know what it means to play with minimal tension in my shoulders, arms, and hands, and how it feels to play with much tension in these areas. Most importantly, yoga has taught me what it means to "connect to my breath," and to rely on the breath as a foundation upon which all movements, thoughts, and feelings can be anchored.

**MD:** Along the same lines, I understand that you've nurtured your Judaism in the last ten years.

**Brian:** I grew up in a Jewish household, but it wasn't until my early thirties that I started relating to it on a deeper level personally. My love for getting deeper into Judaism came in conjunction with my growing yoga practice, and when I starting learning the multiple layers of interpretation that can be applied to its fundamental texts.

In regards to spirituality, a basic premise of Judaism is connecting to an awareness of eternity. This means that there is a thread that unifies people throughout time and space: that this thread exists now, has existed before us, and will continue to exist after us. Simultaneously, this thread functions as a link between all humanity, and there is no individual that exists independent of it. As a musician, this type of perspective is an inspiration to somehow convey this generational and humanitarian interconnectedness.



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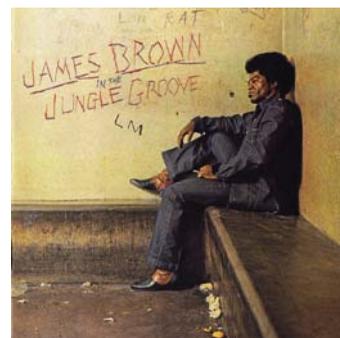
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# Funkify Your Swing Feel

## Part 1: Clyde Stubblefield Interpretations

by Steve Fidyk



**Fusing rhythms from one style of music** to another can help a player develop new ideas and fresh rhythmic approaches that might not have yet been previously explored. In this lesson we'll apply the classic drum break that the late, great funk pioneer Clyde Stubblefield played on "Funky Drummer" within a swing feel. To hear this groove, check out the tune on the 1986 James Brown compilation album *In the Jungle Groove*. The break begins around the 5:21 mark.

When experimenting in this manner, I find that my jazz accompaniment patterns sound more direct and purposeful, partly due to concentrating on the groove-oriented nature of each funk rhythm. Practicing and applying these linear rhythms can also be helpful for players looking for ways to break away from the layered coordination approach that most jazz drummers typically practice. These converted rhythms provide a special flow to the pulse that swings, is funky, and has a spatial quality.

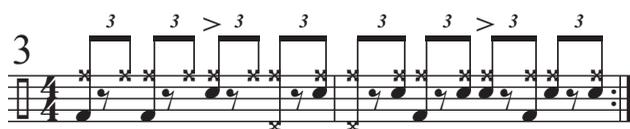
Let's begin with the original Stubblefield drum break. Work on this pattern first before attempting the variations that follow. As you practice, focus on your dynamic balance and consistency between your hands and feet. Work on this groove slowly at first with a metronome, and be patient with your progress.



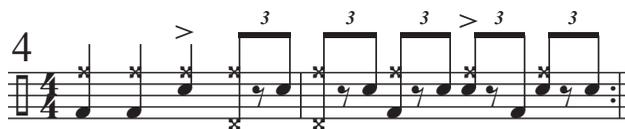
This first variation utilizes a Renaissance- and Baroque-period technique called augmentation, in which an original rhythm or melody is restated with a lengthened value of each note's duration. In this case, we'll take the Stubblefield break and double each note's value. With this technique applied, the one-measure groove becomes a two-measure, 8th-note phrase that we'll move to the ride.



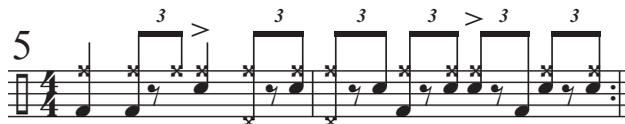
Exercise 3 illustrates the two-measure phrase interpreted with a swung shuffle feel.



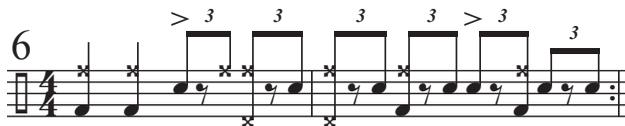
This next variation applies a Jimmy Cobb-style ride cymbal quarter-note pulse on top of the rhythm, providing more space within the feel.



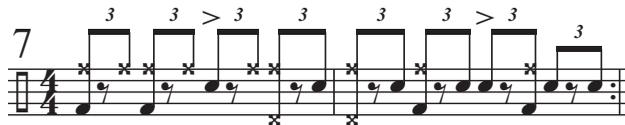
Exercise 5 demonstrates the phrase with a standard jazz ride pattern.



Exercise 6 breaks up the rhythm of the ride cymbal beat in between each written snare note, creating more of a linear sound with the hands.



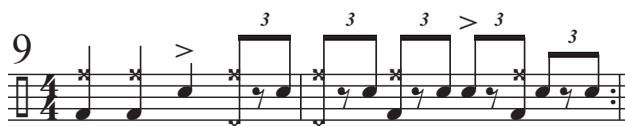
This next variation splits the shuffle rhythm between the ride and snare.



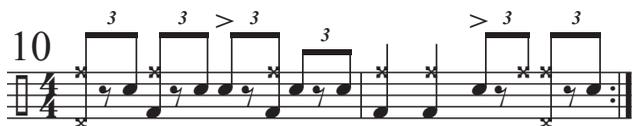
Exercise 8 places the ride cymbal in unison with each written snare rhythm.



In Exercise 9, the ride cymbal is played in unison with each bass drum and hi-hat figure.



You can also try re-ordering the phrase by playing the second measure followed by the first. In the following example, Exercise 6 is re-ordered in this manner.



Return to the previous examples, and try re-ordering each phrase. These are but a few variations on this classic Clyde Stubblefield drum break. I encourage you to use your imagination and come up with examples of your own and apply them to your own music.



**Steve Fidyk** leads the Parlour Project quartet, featuring his original compositions and arrangements. He is a member of the Jazz Orchestra of Philadelphia under the direction of Terell Stafford, and a former member of the Army Blues Big Band of Washington, DC. He is also an artist in residence at Temple University and the University of the Arts.



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# The Duality of 16th-Note Meters

## A Method for Internalizing Odd-Time Grooves

by Aaron Edgar

**Time signatures such as** 15/16, 17/16, and 29/16 can bring out anxiety in drummers who aren't familiar with them. The truth of the matter is that they're only slightly different from quarter- or 8th-note meters, which are far more common. What's cool about realizing this is that every single 16th-based meter can be felt as either one 16th note longer or shorter than a meter based in quarter notes.

For instance, there are sixteen 16th notes in 4/4, so 17/16 can be felt as a measure of 4/4 plus one 16th note. On the other hand, a phrase in 15/16 can be felt as a 16th note shorter than a bar of 4/4. Every 16th-note meter can be related to a time signature based in quarter notes in this manner.

That's great on paper, but actually feeling these meters easily is another story. We're used to feeling the quarter-note pulse as what our heads bob to in most music—it's the foundation. This is still the case in 16th-based meters, but as they roll over to beat 1 of the following bar, we skip into it by offsetting one 16th note that either precedes or follows the downbeat. The trick is making beat 1 still feel like beat 1 within this context.

Let's tackle this idea by setting up a groove in 4/4. In the second half of **Exercise 1**, we'll play offbeat 16th notes on the bass drum. This isn't just a funky pattern—we can use this bass drum figure to set up beat 1 in the off-time examples that follow. In 15/16, which is demonstrated in **Exercise 2**, the final note of the previous 4/4 example becomes beat 1 on repeat. In **Exercise 3**, which is in 17/16, we play that last even 4/4 bass drum pattern for one more 16th note on the hi-hat.

We can use this same idea with less dense grooves. Because 15/16 is one 16th note shorter than a bar of 4/4, we can phrase our kicks on the "a" of each beat within a bar to help feel beat 1 on repeat in the same way that we did previously. **Exercise 4** sets up our kicks in this fashion within a bar of 4/4, adding a bell or splash cymbal on the final 16th note of the measure to help beat 1 feel more natural in the related 15/16 example (**Exercise 5**). Alternate between Exercises 4 and 5, and try to make the final note of beat 4 feel just as solid as the first note of beat 1 on repeat.

Just as 15/16 and 17/16 are either one 16th note shorter or longer than a bar of 4/4, 19/16 and 21/16 relate in the same manner to 5/4. An embellished 5/4 groove is notated in **Exercise 6**, and we'll cut that pattern one 16th note shorter to create a groove in 19/16 in **Exercise 7**. The last bass drum note in Exercise 6 becomes beat 1 in Exercise 7 when repeating this example.

**Exercise 8** demonstrates a pattern in 21/16, which is longer than a measure of 5/4 by one 16th note. Once this phrase feels comfortable to you, work on it until the last bass drum played into the downbeat feels like a typical spacing of two 8th notes. **Exercise 9** embellishes the previous 21/16 beat slightly with a double bass turn around.

Another great way to internalize these ideas is by using a solid 16th-note subdivision within your groove. In the next three examples we'll play straight 16th notes over the barline on the hi-

hats. You can use the same pair of hi-hats or two separate sound sources, and you'll achieve the best results for feeling this concept if the sound sources are tight and at least similar.

**Exercise 10** is in 5/4, and we'll use it to jump into a pattern of 19/16 in **Exercise 11** and a groove in 21/16 in **Exercise 12**. Play the left-hand hi-hat notes in the same way you'd normally play ghost notes in between the pulse. Also, feel free to experiment with different sticking patterns, as long as the rhythm stays solid. With two cymbal sound sources, sticking patterns can really make these types of grooves come alive.

Longer 16th-note meters can really drive home the single bass drum ideas we explored in Exercises 4 and 5. **Exercise 13** demonstrates a groove in 23/16, which is one 16th note shorter than a measure of 6/4. Concentrate on the bass drum, which plays the "a" of each beat, to transition back to beat 1 on repeat. In this way, when beat 1 enters early by one 16th note (compared to a measure of 6/4), that kick placement already feels natural.

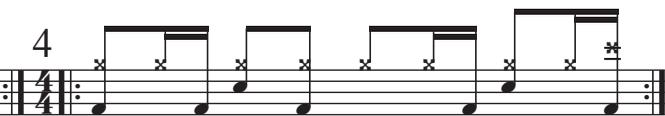
Varying the offbeat bass drum phrasing can maintain this effect even in much busier patterns, as demonstrated in **Exercise 14**. We can group the offbeat kick drum 16ths on the "e" and "a" of a beat, or we can space them out by four 16th partials by playing either the "e" or "a" of each beat. In this way, you can tailor a pattern of offbeat 16th notes to fit any type of meter.

**Exercise 15** further explores our varied offbeat phrasing in somewhat of a half-time, 29/16 feel, which is one 16th note longer than a measure of 7/4.

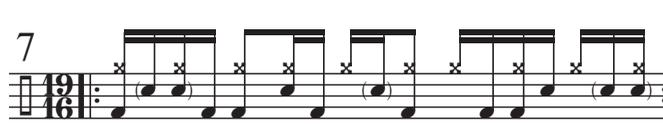
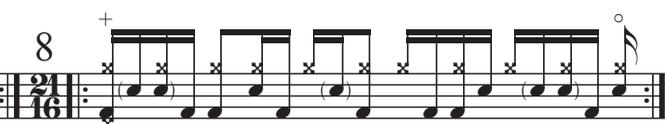
When you're practicing these or any 16th-based meters, you want to feel like beat 1 doesn't catch you off guard. Perceiving each phrase as either one 16th note shorter or longer than a quarter-note meter is an effective way to make the turnaround work. The more you practice, the more you'll be able to hear that difference. The real key is to internalize how beat 1 feels when repeating these phrases.

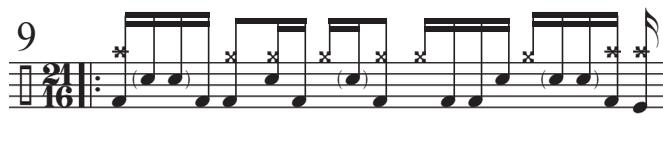
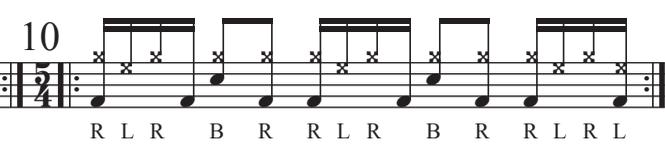


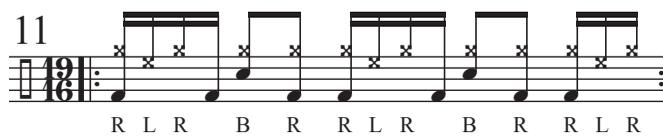
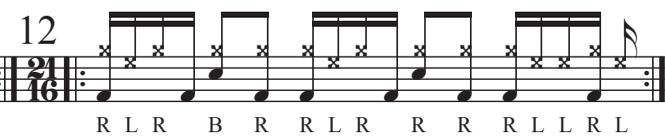
1  2 

3  4 

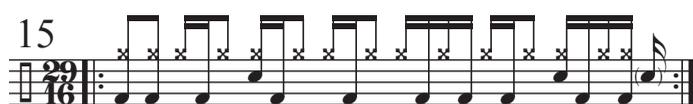
5  6 

7  8 

9  10   
 R L R B R R L R B R R L R L

11  12   
 R L R B R R L R B R R L R R R R L L R L

13  14 

15 

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 5: Drumset Applications

by Brandon Green

**We're going to conclude this series** with some warm-up strategies you can employ with drumsticks in your hands. As with the exercises from the previous articles, I want you to focus on feeling the muscles that you're recruiting to play the drums. When you can feel the muscles engage, you'll have a better connection with them.

### Pad or Kit?

Shortly after publishing the first article in this series, I was asked, "Should I warm up on a pad or a drumset?" The answer is yes to both. Just make sure to avoid exercising to the point of pain or fatigue, and always stay within your active range of motion. If you follow those basic guidelines, any warm-up exercises you do will be beneficial.

### Potential and Dynamics: Greater Force Exposure Equals Greater Results

If you've done any research on the post-activation potentiation phenomenon, you may have read that the greater the force you can expose your muscles to without causing fatigue, the better your muscles will operate.

One of the simplest ways to experiment with this concept is to practice rudiments with a metronome. Pick a simple rudiment, like singles, doubles, or paradiddles, and assign them to a basic subdivision, like 8th notes. Begin by performing the rudiment on the snare. When you feel comfortable, start to move the rudiment around the kit. Keep your dynamics low at first, and try to maintain an even volume as you change to different instruments. Focus on feeling the muscles being used while also engaging your ears. Pay attention to the sounds you're creating as your body orchestrates the notes.

As you shift your focus to the quality of sounds you're creating, you'll naturally prepare—or potentiate—your joints for increased mobility around the drumset.

### Changing Dynamics

While continuing to orchestrate the rudiment around the kit, keep your technique in check and gradually crescendo the strokes until you're hitting as hard as you comfortably can. Pay attention to how much more your hands and forearm muscles have to work to accommodate the greater intensity. Are you feeling fatigued? If you are, dial back the dynamics a bit.

### Changing Subdivisions

Now use the same low-to-high dynamic shape while transitioning smoothly through different subdivisions. Start slowly with quarters or 8th notes, and then increase the subdivision to triplets, 16th notes, and so on.

### What About the Feet?

I like to perform the exercises outlined previously while playing quarter notes or 8ths with my left foot on the hi-hat. You can also begin to incorporate the bass drum by interjecting the right foot



within the rudiment being played with the hands. For instance, if you're playing singles with the hands, you could play two bass drum notes after each pair of singles (RLKK). This gets a bit more challenging, especially when you start changing the dynamics and shifting between them, but it's a great way to make sure all your limbs are equally warmed up. It can help you develop better control of subdivisions with either limb and at different dynamics.

### Full-Kit Mobility

I've been involved in numerous conversations about how to best practice mobility around the drumset. News flash: There's no secret code. Anything that helps you get better at moving from one side of the drumset to the other is going to improve your mobility.



One of the things that I do is orchestrate single strokes as three-note groupings between two instruments that are placed at extreme locations of the drumkit. I have floor toms set to my far left and right, so I'll often use those. Following the same procedures as before, practice transitioning between those instruments using progressively faster subdivisions (8th notes, triplets, 16ths, 16th-note triplets, etc.).

### Customize Your Own Routine

The exercises included here are just a few tried-and-true options. But don't be afraid to change things up to find practical movements that work best for you. Just keep in mind that the goal with any warm-up routine should be to stimulate your body, not to exhaust it.

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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# Spinbal

## MD chats with the inventor of the world's first cymbal spinner.

by Brandy Laurel McKenzie

A lot of times a new and innovative drum accessory piques curiosity but is quickly set aside due to a lack of clear purpose. Spinbal is not one of those superfluous add-ons. Rather, this unique ball-bearing-based washer allows for nearly endless sonic and visual possibilities and offers the benefit of extending the life of the cymbal itself. The inventor of Spinbal is Guy Juravich, a super-enthusiastic and charismatic drummer, voice-over actor, entrepreneur, and self-proclaimed cymbal-art fanatic.

### How Did Spinbal Start?

After graduating from Bishop's University in Canada, Spinbal inventor Guy Juravich played in reggae, goth, tribute, and cover bands. While backing up a traveling burlesque show, he discovered the value of the kinetic vibrato offered by revolving cymbals. During performances, Juravich began spinning cymbals to emulate the show's lasso artist, but he noticed that the cymbal would only rotate for about thirty seconds. In a quest to extend that time, he looked into how other objects spun. Says Juravich, "I was taking apart record players, Lazy Susans, toys, and everything else so I could figure out how to spin cymbals easily."

Juravich had his eureka moment when a skateboarder accidentally knocked into him on South Street in Philadelphia. The center hole in 8 mm skateboard bearings is the same size as the threaded rod on many cymbal stands. "After I saw that bearing," he says, "I grabbed a skateboard wheel at a local skate shop, put it on a cymbal stand, and it worked." Juravich

then took his find to Sleepless Sound Studio in Philly and recorded the vibrato caused by the cymbal's rotation in hi-fidelity. "We really noticed a dramatic sound when recording the cymbal in stereo," says Juravich, "and that's when I knew I had something."

### Some of My Friends Are Scientists

Launching a new percussion product requires more than just a clever concept, and Juravich admits he needed to reach out for help. "I have no history of engineering, I'm terrible at math, and I have no product development knowledge whatsoever," he says. Fortunately, a former classmate and musical contemporary of his, Dr. Ilana MacDonald of the University of Toronto, is also an astrophysicist. MacDonald and Juravich worked through the physics of the gadget, discussing friction,



angular momentum, and sonic shifts. The two concluded that a cymbal sleeve mount would theoretically work, and Juravich proceeded to design a prototype using a free CAD program. "I took the general concept of a cymbal sleeve and put a bearing in the bottom," he recalls. "You could see the bearing on one side, but the other side needed to spin freely. So I made a space for that to happen."

At NextFab, a shared "maker space" in Philadelphia, Juravich used a 3D printer to make the first Spinbal. "It spun for ten minutes, which completely shattered what I thought it would do," he says. "I thought it would be a minute." Juravich also

discovered how to achieve varying sounds and effects depending on where and how he hit the spinning cymbal. "You could hit into [the rotation] to keep it going, hit against it to slow down the momentum, drag the stick, or hit the bell or side to produce cool overtones."

The initial search for an affordable injection molding company to manufacture Spinbal proved difficult. Through Juravich's press releases and email blasts, Graham Bradfield of Maxonix, another innovative accessories manufacturer, heard about the product and assisted Juravich in finding a more reasonably priced source. "He said it shouldn't be thirty dollars a Spinbal from the injection molding company," Juravich recalls. "He worked with me to find a company here in the U.S. that mostly makes aeronautics and medical equipment with incredible precision but that specializes in things measuring less than one cubic inch."

### Collegiate Connections

As with many start-ups, procuring funding was the next necessary step to get Spinbal off the ground. "I looked into nonprofit lending and spoke to a couple of wealthy investors I had access to," Juravich says. "But no one really wanted to take a risk on a cymbal-spinning product. It was too far out of left field for a lot of investors. So I asked myself, *Who are the people who would be interested in this?* As a voice and screen actor, I reached out to a casting director and asked about how films get funded." That inquiry led to a meeting with a movie producer, who also works in the music industry, who then introduced Guy to investors more amenable to taking risks in the creative arts.

An angel investor guided Juravich to La Salle University's business incubator and innovation lab, which is a cutting-edge collaborative workplace ideal for a modern start-up. There Spinbal received seed-round venture capital from multiple investors, and with additional funding acquired from local Philadelphia investors, an LCC was



formed. Next, an Allentown, Pennsylvania, company was contracted to manufacture the felt at an affordable price point, and a student at La Salle designed the retail packaging. Juravich concedes that he might not have gotten Spinbal launched, nor continued its momentum, without the support that the innovation lab provides. "Currently the students, staff, and director handle the books, accounting, taxes, the fulfillment of orders, the assembly of the product, the assembly of the packaging, and the shipping," he says. "That allows me to do something that I know I'm good at, which is promoting."

### Building the Buzz

Juravich's aptitude for promotion is evident with just a quick search of Spinbal's

social media platforms. "As a drummer, I did a lot of promoting and booking of shows, and I knew how to make a website," he says. "I launched an Instagram account, and Spinbal was immediately a hit. I've used social media primarily for grassroots and free guerrilla marketing, advertising, and promotion. And by sending samples to drummers I knew and liked, I started getting great feedback. Instagram is also where we primarily do our business development, in terms of forging new relationships with international dealers and partners."

Even with such savvy social promotion, success isn't a guarantee if the product isn't seen as more than an optical novelty item. But Spinbal also allows drummers to explore more creative and inventive sounds. "Although we have sizzlers, rivets, venting, and all kinds of cymbal preparations to produce different tones, there are very few that I would consider proper sound effects," says Juravich. "Stacks, for example, are mostly focusing on attack, but it's still stationary. A sound effect should take something you're used to hearing and have it become something different. Spinbal is a way to elicit new sounds from a cymbal. And every time I think I've figured them all out, another drummer on Instagram has discovered a new way of using it. I think we're just on the tip of the iceberg with what can be done with employing kinetic sound effects to the entire drumset—not just the cymbal."

### Longevity: The Added Benefit

Aside from its creative visual and sonic possibilities, Spinbal also offers a practical benefit in that it randomizes the drumstick's striking location, which extends the life of the cymbal by varying the impact point. "I was initially so obsessed with the tone and mesmerizing visuals that I failed to grasp this concept," Juravich says. "It wasn't until other drummers reminded me of this that we fundamentally

changed our message. We're now transitioning our communications from just sound effects and visuals towards cymbal protection."

### Converting the Critics

Juravich says that the number-one obstacle for the company is combatting the criticism Spinbal gets from skeptical drummers who've never tried it.

"Some first impressions are that it's a toy," he says, noting that Spinbal was launched around the time that fidget spinners were immensely popular. "I needed to remind people that it's a tool for a craft and a tool for creativity.

And it's not just for one thing; it's for anything you might come up with that we don't know yet. I don't believe Spinbal is something everyone needs or something that is going to make or break a good drummer. But what it can do is inspire someone to think about the drumkit differently. Trying to open minds to a fundamental shift in how we use cymbals has been a challenge. But when someone finally gets it, it's a wonderful moment."

### The Next Steps

Although Spinbal is currently available on five continents and in more than forty countries, Juravich is eager to collaborate with larger and more established brands and manufacturers in an effort to add new features to Spinbal. "I'd love to see Spinbals with wing nuts, so you can put the cymbal upside down or do more extreme angling," Juravich says. "One limitation is that you can't angle it past 40 degrees if you want to continue spinning." He also sees potential in a motorized version that could be used to time the vibrato effect created by spinning the cymbal to match a tempo, or to incorporate light fixtures for more dramatic visual effects.

Two drum gear manufacturers have already developed products to complement Spinbal. Maxonix's SizzleARM, a hanging, ball-chain sizzler that creates a sustained white noise effect, was designed to pair with Spinbal, and Sweet Spot Clutches offers a custom stacker that allows multiple cymbals to spin freely from one stand. Still, Juravich would like to add resources, including a creative team, to facilitate further expansion. "We designed the company to be welcoming to new ideas," he says. "There are a lot of possibilities of what can be done, and I know I'm not the guy to run with it because I'm not an engineer or professional product developer. I'm just someone who had a fun idea, and I'd love to see this idea grow."



**"We're just on the tip of the iceberg with what can be done with employing kinetic sound effects to the entire drumset—not just the cymbal."**

### The Creatives in the Community

Juravich feels a lot of gratitude toward those who were instrumental in the company's development. Makaya McCraven, a high school classmate and now a highly lauded jazz bandleader, was one of the first drummers to experiment with Spinbal, offering constructive feedback and providing a quote for the packing: "New possibilities in sound and color using motion as its own effect."

John Convertino of the band Calexico received prototypes in 2016 and utilized them on his 24" Zildjian rides while recording tracks with his band. Progressive drummer Aric Improta has been an enthusiastic supporter of Spinbal, often showcasing the product's creative possibilities in his own viral drum videos. "Without [Aric], I would still be trying to convince people that it's not a gimmick," says Juravich, who also credits his friend Zack Austin for being a constant source of support. "I'm not sure I'd have the gusto to continue with all this without these guys."

Juravich also acknowledges how important the Instagram drumming community has been for Spinbal. "I want to thank each drummer who has spun a cymbal and posted about it," he says. "The micro communities that have attached themselves to Spinbal are what keep it going. I really lean on the online community of drummers for their creativity and ideas. I enjoy the role of being in a noncompetitive niche of the industry that's all about collaboration and pushing the boundaries of what we can do with the drumset. Music is supposed to be a full-on experience. If you can improve that experience sonically and visually by engaging with the environment in a way that the audience hasn't seen before... that's the real joy of this experience for me—seeing others get creative with it."

For more information, visit [Spinbal.com](http://Spinbal.com) and follow the company on its various social media pages using the handle @spinbal.



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The Catalina Maple series is now available in a five-piece shell pack featuring a 22" bass drum, 10" and 12" rack toms, a 16" floor tom, and a 14" snare. A new Black Stardust lacquer finish has also been added to the line. List price is \$1,416.99.

Finally, all six Catalina Club configurations are now available in Bronze Sparkle lacquer finish. List prices range from \$999.99 to \$1,499.99.

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



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

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The Raul Pineda Signature 7" Songo cowbell and 8.5" Foot Bell are manufactured in the USA from single pieces of steel and are finished in an Antique Bronze coating. A patented vice-clamp mount fits rods from 9 to 12.5 mm, and a memory lock is included. The Songo cowbell lists for \$84.99, and the Foot Bell is \$92.99.

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



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Consumer Disclosure: 1. To enter, visit [www.moderndrummer.com](http://www.moderndrummer.com) between the dates below and look for the Yamaha/Paiste Contest button (one entry per email address). 2. ODDS OF WINNING DEPEND ON THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE ENTRIES RECEIVED. 3. CONTEST BEGINS MARCH 1, 2019, AND ENDS MAY 31, 2019. 4. Prize Drawing: Winners will be selected by random drawing on June 5, 2019. Winners will be notified by phone or email on or about June 6, 2019. 5. Employees, and their immediate families, of Modern Drummer, Yamaha Corporation, Paiste and their affiliates are ineligible. 6. Sponsor is not responsible for lost, misdirected, and/or delayed entries. 7. Open to residents of the U.S. and Canada, 18 years of age or older. Void in Quebec, Canada; Florida; New York; and where prohibited by law. 8. One prize awarded per household per contest. 9. Prize: One (1) winner will receive one (1) Yamaha Tour Custom five-piece drumset that includes 10x7 and 12x8 rack toms, a 16x15 floor tom, a 22x16 bass drum, and a 14x6.5 Tour Custom snare drum. The Paiste cymbals included are a pair of 15" Signature Dark Energy hi-hats, a 19" Signature Fast Crash, and a 22" Signature Full Ride. Yamaha HW3 Advanced Lightweight Hardware Pack includes hi-hat and snare stands, two cymbal stands, and a carrying bag. Approximate retail value of contest is \$5,700. 10. Sponsored by Modern Drummer Publications, Inc., 271 Route 46 W, H-212, Fairfield, NJ 07004, 973-239-4140. 11. This game subject to the complete Official Rules. For a copy of the complete Official Rules or the winners' names, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Modern Drummer Publications/Yamaha-Paiste/Official Rules/Winners List, 271 Route 46 W, H-212, Fairfield, NJ 07004.

## NEW *and* NOTABLE



### DW 5000 Series Single-Chain Bass Drum Pedals

DW now offers a single-chain Accelerator cam bass drum pedal that includes the original 5000 series footboard shape. Features include a Tri-Pivot toe clamp, a lightweight aluminum bass plate with rubber grip, a dual-bearing spring rocker, and a two-way beater. List price is \$349.99 for a single pedal and \$749.99 for a double pedal.

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



### 64 Audio Custom In-Ear Monitors

A6t and A4t in-ear monitors feature 64 Audio's proprietary technology that eliminates sound-altering tubes and dampers while yielding a smooth frequency response. The A3e in-ear monitor is designed to provide clarity and warmth from all instruments and within all genres. All three models feature 64 Audio's patent-pending vent that reduces listening fatigue by releasing air pressure.

[64audio.com](http://64audio.com)



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



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



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# Bentley's Drum Shop

## Fresno, California

Take a short four-hour drive north out of Los Angeles up I-99, and you'll find yourself in the little big town of Fresno, California. It's the fifth largest city in the state, with a population of more than half a million, and it's where Dana Bentley decided to set up shop and start his drum and percussion business.

**I grew up in Arroyo Grande, California,** and started playing drums in the fifth grade. I was in the concert band, jazz band, and the marching band through elementary and high school. I was into playing, but also into the gear and how it worked, tuning the drums and fixing the drums for the junior high and the high school bands. After college I was able to [work at] my first drum shop, Drum Circuit in San Luis Obispo, and then I went to Mike's Drum Shop in Santa Barbara.

**I was always in love with vintage drums** and the history of them. So I was out looking, buying, and trading, trying to upgrade my gear and acquire things. I had a regular day job, but I also helped Steve, who owned the Drum Circuit, as his business was growing. About a year and a half later, in 1992, I made the decision to move to Fresno to open up my own store. At that time, Fresno was among the top ten cities in the nation in terms of growth, and based on what the other music stores were doing in town—and more importantly what they weren't doing—it led to the natural decision to open a store in Fresno.

**Getting *Modern Drummer* magazine** and seeing famous drummers playing kits from the '60s and '70s as their main kit, I was curious: how do those sound, and how do they work? So I'd find something at a garage sale and take it apart to figure it out. And there were people advertising vintage drums in the back of *Modern Drummer*, so that got me more interested. The wave of interest in old drums, and communicating with people across the U.S. about them, started in 1986, 1987. I had to back away from playing and really focus on my goal in the next year and a half to move here.



**Bentley's staffers Jeff Bergen, owner Dana Bentley, Ethan Foster, and Mark Temple**

At that point, I was buying, selling, and trading, but then I decided to keep buying but stop selling, to accumulate some inventory. When I moved here, I had eight drumsets, only one of which was new, fifteen used cymbals, a couple of sets of congas, a bunch of hardware and pedals, and some used cowbells. Then I got a small loan from my mom and put some money into some new gear. If you saw the pictures, you would think that was barely anything, but it was the second largest inventory in town. And away I went.

**Our first location was 2,200 square feet.** I bought half carpet because I didn't have enough money to carpet the whole thing. Four years later we added a small warehouse that was 1,200 square feet;



**"I always wanted to incorporate a museum into my store,"** says Dana Bentley. "Ours has a variety of drums from the early teens to the '70s. You can see a really nice lineage of how this instrument has evolved over the decades. A lot of the items I've had for more than thirty years—and some I've only had for thirty days, including a '60s-era Slingerland kit in Mardi Gras finish. Some things we sell and trade, and some we don't. There are several items that will be passed on to family members as time goes on. They have sentimental value."

Among the items in Bentley's museum is the Silver Sparkle Rogers set that Ed Shaughnessy played on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* when he started with the band.



three years after that we added a second warehouse. In 2008, I started looking for a larger location—we only had two teaching studios so we were turning away students, and the back-and-forth between warehouses was becoming a burden. A location became available, we got the keys in July of 2010, and we opened our doors in September. This was during the recession, but it was a great deal, we needed the space, and the business was still growing, though not by much. Now we have 11,000 square feet, with five lesson rooms, ample parking, a loading dock, and a warehouse.

**I started this business because it was an extension of a hobby.** If I could take my love for the instrument and make that my day job, how much better could that be? And it is fantastic, really. But no matter how much you love something, you need to get away from it for a bit to recharge. So after ten years we took our first family vacation. Now we take a family trip once a year.

**Our motto is “modern retail and historical retail for drummers.”**

We do lots of repairs, customization, modifications, and bearing edges on vintage drums, but we also have new drums starting at \$299 and going up to \$10,000, so we have something for everybody. I take what I saw at drum shops when I was growing up and combine that with modern retail, and have the best of both. And this shop was never about “buy a drum and leave”; it’s always been a place where drummers can come and hang out. I’ve been very fortunate in that all of our employees and customers are our friends. It’s really rewarding to see customers who now have children who are playing drums as well, so we have second generations coming in. That’s really rewarding.”

**Interview by John Martinez**  
**Photos by Dean Kasparian**



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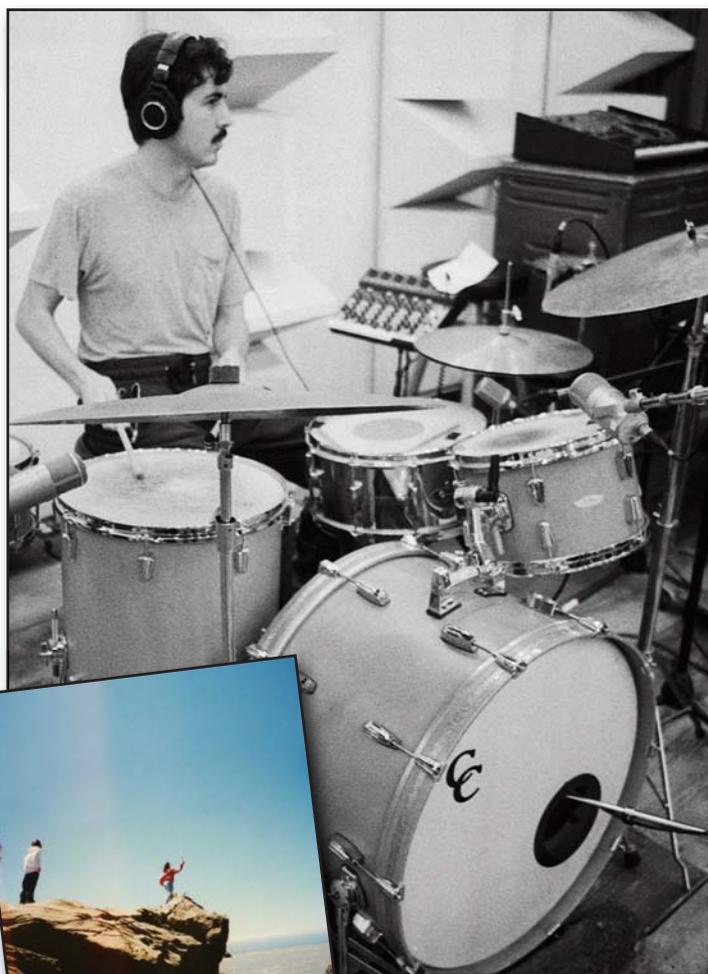
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# CRITIQUE

## RECORDINGS Taking the Reins



### Crane Like the Bird *Crane Like the Bird*

**The Neko Case touring drummer and collaborator with Daniel Lanois and M. Ward focuses on his songwriting and arranging skills.**

Kyle Crane's drumming acts as a core arranging device throughout the self-titled debut album by his Crane Like the Bird project; on much of the material he emulates a drum machine, and his only soloistic moment comes during a series of Ringo-esque fills in album closer "The Painter" (with M. Ward on vocals). The album straddles a world between the indie songwriters who regularly employ Crane, and a jazz realm not unlike Brian Blade Fellowship albums. The latter approach is most clearly heard when guitarist and Fellowship alumnus Kurt Rosenwinkel takes a lead alongside Daniel Lanois' pedal steel on "When I See," which features Conor Oberst on lead vocals. More than just a testament to Kyle's networking abilities, the track is a gorgeous bit of folk jazz with carefully chosen layers of acoustic guitar and mandolin accompaniment over a bed of Crane's understated cymbal swells and ride time. Another standout, "Kaleidoscope," features Sabina Sciubba of Brazilian Girls singing over an ambient intro and a world-pop bridge, and then speaking over a cinematic section; this is followed by a lengthy outro that finds Brad Mehldau playing piano over a string section and Crane's kinetic jazz comping. Elsewhere, "Now" features a lush Beach Boys vibe with brass arrangements, vibraphone, and timpani along with stacked vocal harmonies handled by Crane and some friends. While perhaps not what one would expect from a jazz-trained drummer with a Berklee pedigree, *Crane Like the Bird* is a diverse collection of thoughtful songs with refined arrangements and impassioned playing from a top-flight cast. (bandcamp.com) **Stephen Bidwell**

### The BBB Featuring Bernie Dresel *Bern Bern Bern*

**Bernie serves up hard-swinging, ultra-tight big fun on his orchestra's first studio release.**

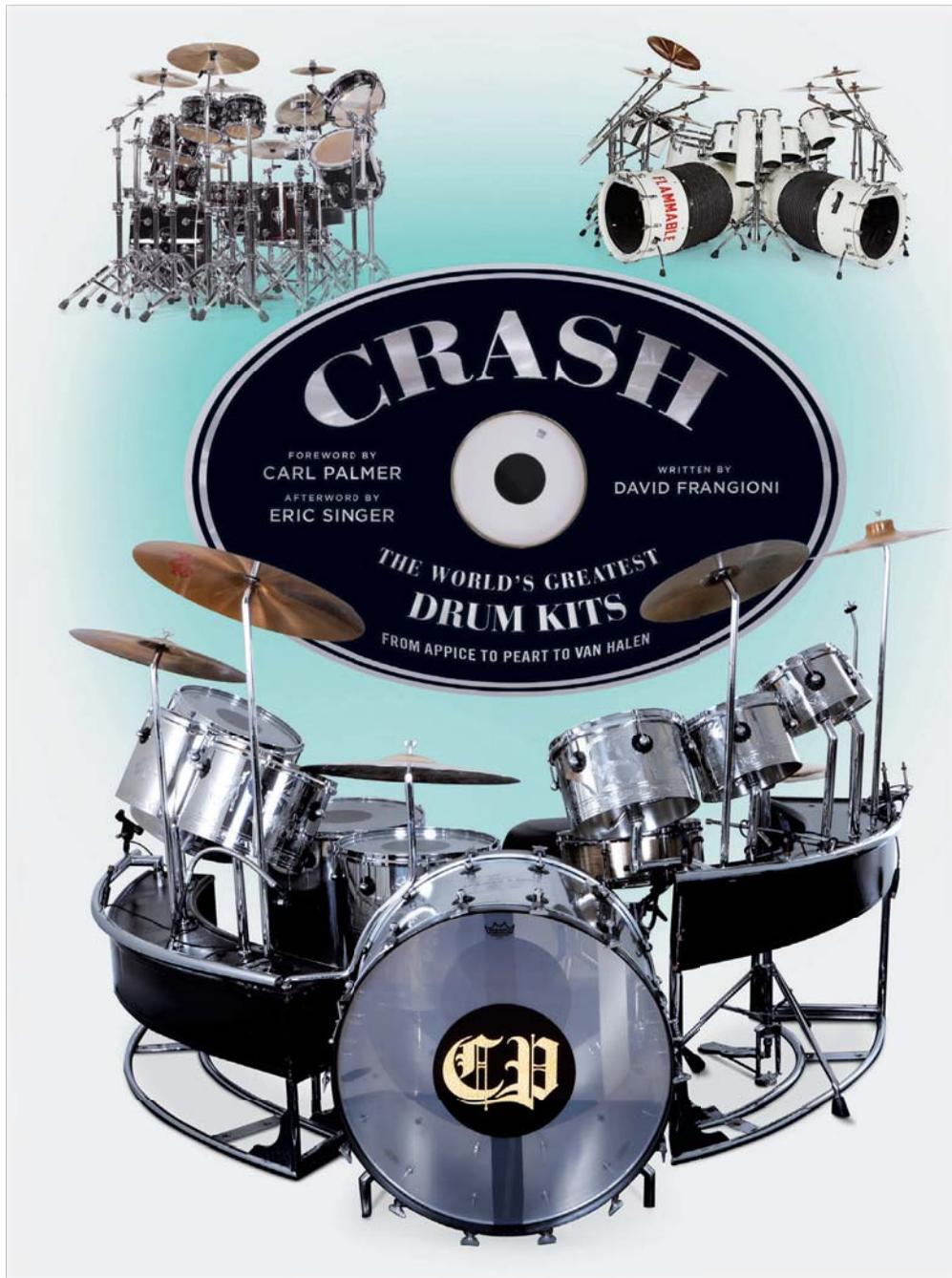
There is perhaps no better forum for Bernie Dresel's exuberant drumming than his own seventeen-piece L.A. jazz orchestra, BBB. Their second album is a big, brassy knockout of swinging (and sometimes rockin') sophistication seasoned with humor. Consider "BBB Opener," a sort of audio Bernie autobiography that starts with pots and pans drumming and segues to drum pad, snare drum, and then full kit. And "Anything Goes" appropriately features percussion breaks ranging from drum corps snare to 55-gallon metal drum to tap dancing. The thoroughly modern unit engages myriad grooves, but their traditional big band roots are also paid homage, most notably via Bernie's fevered Krupa-esque floor tom excursion on the title track. Audiophiles take note: the high-tech recording features a "surround sound with height" staging, while the drum tracks were cut separately before the orchestra's—an unorthodox method for jazz, yet the sonic results dazzle. Feel the Bern! (berniedresel.com) **Jeff Potter**



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## Critique

### Flav Martin & Jerry Marotta *Soul Redemption*

**JERRY MAROTTA teams up with old and new friends to bring pocket perfection to world-pop.**

Fans of the classic Peter Gabriel rhythm section of bassist Tony Levin and drummer Jerry Marotta will be giddy to hear the tandem's slinky flavors all over this soft-rock album. Along with guitarist/vocalist Flav Martin, Marotta locks into groove after understated groove with Levin, always playing with taste and the deepest sense of time developed over decades. Not one to just settle for standard 2 and 4, Marotta brings signature delayed snare syncopation to "Coffee Song" and adds full but incredibly light percussion to "I Knew It Was You," elevating the track to higher planes. These are masters at work, grooving like mad, playing just enough as to not overpower the vocals and melody, but exerting considerable influence on simple songs. There have been tight bass/drums duos in the past, but this collection of tunes proves there's no music that doesn't sound better when Levin and Marotta put their collective stamp down. (jerry-marotta.com) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



### MewithoutYou *[Untitled]*

**The seventh full-length release from this post-hardcore outfit finds the band once again exploring the heavier side of their sonic palette.**

The career of Philadelphia-based band MewithoutYou has seen them meld delay-drenched guitars with everything from dub and klezmer to literary folk-rock in the tradition of Bob Dylan. While the relatively straightforward rock of *[Untitled]* may not provide drummer **Richard Mazzotta** with as much musical space to flex his considerable chops as the band's past efforts, the hallmarks of Mazzotta's impressive playing are still present here: a remarkable ability to build tension with altered backbeats, fills that wander over the bar line to accent vocal lines in thrilling, unexpected ways, and patterns that lend themselves to screaming and distortion without sacrificing dynamic musicality. (Run for Cover) **Keaton Lamle**



### The Neal Morse Band *The Great Adventure*

**MIKE PORTNOY returns to crush (and gently caress) more Neal Morse epic proggy.**

No one can accuse singer/keyboardist Neal Morse of lacking ambition. How do you follow 2016's expansive double CD set *The Similitude of a Dream*? With an even more expansive new double CD set, *The Great Adventure*. Mike Portnoy has been involved in Morse-related projects for years, and his sensibilities are just what the doctor ordered, from blazing odd-time chops showcases to Beatles-esque meat-and-potatoes drumming that sits nicely beneath multipart vocal harmonies. But fear not, he brings the rock as well. Check out Portnoy's sloshy hats and ascending/descending toms underneath the guitar solo in "Welcome to the World" and galloping drums and double bass work on the title track. There are plenty of Portnoy's signature syncopated hi-hat and splash combos in "Dark Melody" and some pseudo odd-time drum 'n' bass action in "The Element of Fear." Portnoy's kit mix is killer, and the heavily conceptual collection means you'll hear drum motifs and melodies returning, so strap yourself in for multiple listens. (Radiant) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



### Alex Skolnick Trio *Conundrum*

**A jazz bag offering from the Testament guitarist, aided by wonderfully supportive drumming.**

Guitarist Alex Skolnick will always be most associated with metal veterans Testament, but his jazz chops are formidable, and his lean and mean fusion trio can and will play anything. Drummer **Matt Zebroski** is a perfect foil for Skolnick, throwing down some slinky ride cymbal and hi-hat work on opener "Unbound" and exhibiting some good hand speed and overall musicality. But the varied flavors on the disc are what sets things apart, with an understated "Django Tango" and an odd-time reworking of Satie's "Gymnopédie No. 1" allowing the drummer to whip out super-dynamic brush work. Later, Zebroski contributes his own composition, "Dodge of Bambula," which begins with Moroccan street rhythms before opening up into a light, jazzy waltz. Zebroski also lays down a convincing straight-ahead swing on "A Question of Moral Ambiguity." This is not nonstop shredding from all instruments, so those looking for a different kind of instrumental power trio will find much to appreciate here. (Palmetto) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



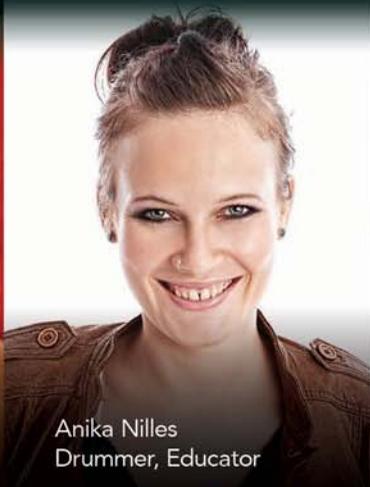
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# Talking Heads' Remain in Light

In the early '70s, when Rhode Island School of Design student Mark Kehoe resolved to make a short horror film, he asked two of his peers to provide the score. Though it was the musicians' first meeting, their music, an ominous cacophony that rose and fell in volume, was successfully recorded in one take. That success would mark the beginning of an illustrious, almost two-decades-long collaboration between drummer Chris Frantz and guitarist David Byrne.

"David had this great guitar," says Frantz, who *MD* caught up with this past November. "It was like a Fender Telecaster, but he'd covered the body in leopard-skin contact paper. I thought, *Oh, I like his style.*" The duo soon invited two musician friends to start a band, which they called the Artistics.

When Byrne and Frantz moved to New York to start a new group, finding a third member proved troublesome at first. Frantz's then-girlfriend (now wife), Tina Weymouth, reluctantly joined them on bass. "She came home one day with a Fender Precision bass that she'd purchased on layaway," says Frantz. "I just thought to myself, *Hallelujah.*" The three of them formed Talking Heads in 1975, and in 1977 brought in the former keyboardist for the Modern Lovers, Jerry Harrison, to play keys and rhythm guitar.

Talking Heads quickly dove into a remarkable career that resulted in eight studio albums, the well-known 1984 concert film *Stop Making Sense*, numerous side collaborations, and years of touring, fearless creativity, and stardom. The members' art-school roots—Weymouth originally met Frantz and Byrne at RISD, and Harrison had attended Harvard University for architecture—greatly influenced their music. And each brought his or her own personality, musical instincts, and chops to the table, in the process challenging the very definition of rock 'n' roll by incorporating international styles with relentless eccentricity.

A hybrid of rock, funk, African, and dance music, their fourth studio album, 1980's *Remain in Light*, has often been cited as the pinnacle of their musical experimentation. Its laudable artfulness can undoubtedly be attributed to the band's highly collaborative writing process. "Every Talking Heads album, and *Remain in Light* in particular, was a real collaboration between the four band members and producer Brian Eno," Frantz insists, adding with a chuckle, "it wasn't the brainstorm of some egghead somewhere."

Frantz—whose memoir, *Remain in Love*, is scheduled for a

2020 release from St. Martin's Press, coinciding with the fortieth anniversary of *Remain in Light*—remembers the writing process for the album well. He describes it as organic, stemming from jam sessions conducted while the band was at Compass Point Studio in the Bahamas, where the band had recorded their sophomore album, *More Songs About Buildings and Food*. Even to the brink of booking studio time to record the album, the group didn't have any songs written. "In retrospect, some people—I'm not going to name any names—but they tried to give the impression that there was some grand concept from the very beginning. There wasn't. It was just a band sitting around playing.

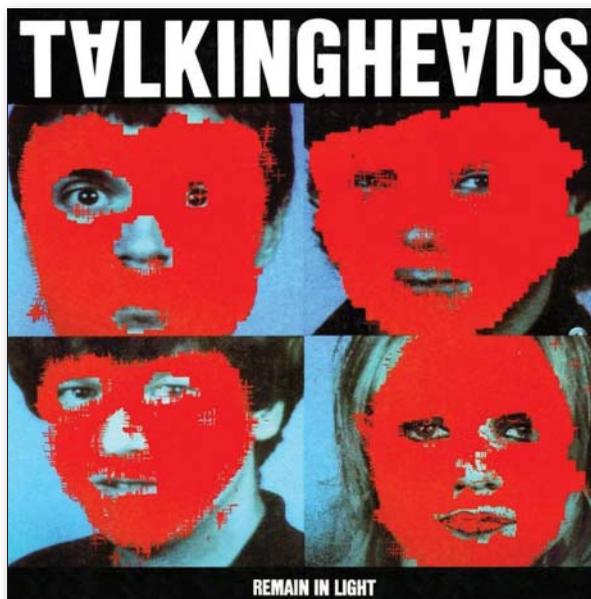
"So we went down to Compass Point," Frantz continues. "Brian came, David and Jerry came, Tina and I came, and an engineer named Rhett Davies, who'd worked on *More Songs* with us, came. And we just started laying down rhythm parts. Now, it's true that we were very much into dance music and African music at that time. We were veering away from sort of the more predictable elements of rock music. There were no lyrics. There were no songs to go by—what we had to do was create it layer by layer from the bottom up: 'the bottom' meaning the drums and bass."

To ensure that no two songs on the record would sound the same, Frantz and Weymouth aimed to have each track be rhythmically engaging but unique from the next. Frantz's job was especially demanding. "Everybody else, even Tina, could change their parts as

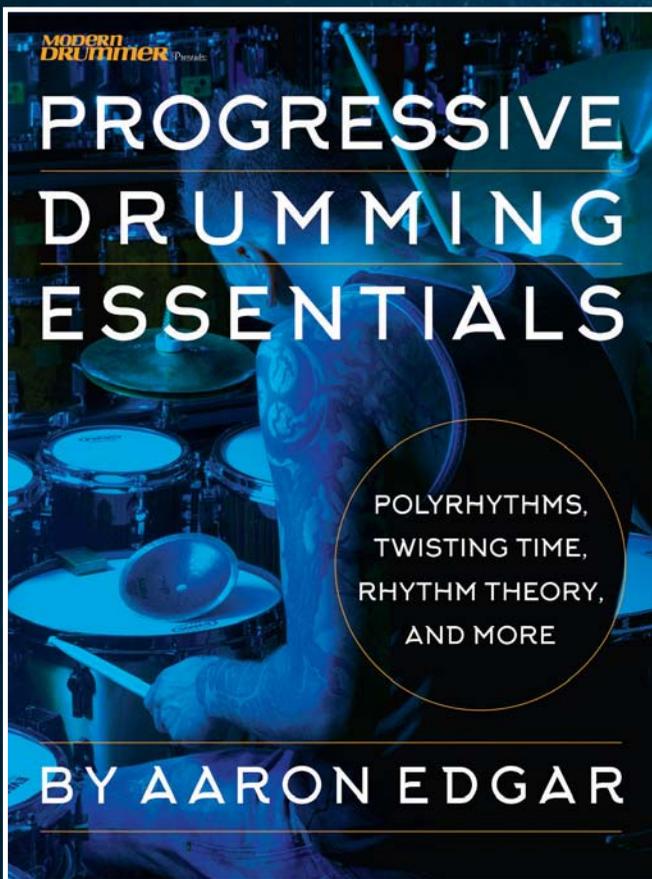
time went on. But the drums—once you record them, you can't really change them. This was the days of analog, before Pro Tools editing. But we [Frantz and Weymouth] rose to the challenge, and I think most people would agree that we did a pretty good job."

Undeniably, Frantz shines on the album by owning his role as timekeeper with unwavering confidence. Playing a Mojave Red Rogers kit that he bought from Manny's Music with his first recording contract advance, along with a 7" Ludwig snare, he sets the foundation for the band's multilayered parts. On the opening track, "Born Under Punches," the drummer performs a direct, four-measure loop in 4/4; the snare hits on the downbeats of the loop's last measure are especially effective, establishing a break for the ears as well as a simple guide for counting.

Frantz delivers an equally strong presence in even busier songs on the album. "Crosseyed and Painless" features a driving beat that, when married with the guitar and other overdubs, results in something that recalls if not outright mimics an Afrobeat groove.



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## Remain in Light

And “Seen and Not Seen” incorporates a repeating two-16th-one-8th rhythm in the toms and kick drum that offers cohesion for the web of rhythm instruments. Tastefully laying back on slower tracks, Frantz provides sparse but bold accents on the snare in the slow-building song “The Overload” and on the bass drum and toms in the single “Once in a Lifetime.”

While providing the rhythmic backbone for *Remain in Light*, the drummer helped Talking Heads break ground in the rock idiom; from the first days of recording the album, when Frantz and Weymouth’s parts were being tracked, the musicians were noticeably playing outside the norm. “After the third day,” recalls Frantz, “Rhett Davies quit. He said, ‘I can’t stand it—every time you do something that sounds cool, Brian says it sounds too commercial and rejects it.’”

A young Jamaican producer, Steven Stanley, was brought in to record the basic tracks, and eventually rock producer Dave Jerden, who’d been working with Eno and Byrne in California on their collaboration *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, took the reins. “Dave Jerden was really cool to work with,” says Frantz. “He was into the project—the artistic nature of it, and the idea of doing something that was pretty radical for a rock group to be doing.”

Frantz and Weymouth recorded twelve rhythm beds, eight of which made the official album. Byrne and Harrison also tracked guitar and keyboard sketches that, according to Frantz, would later change. “Once we had [the rhythm bed], then David and Jerry could take as much time as they wanted to perfect their parts,” Frantz says. “So their parts were added, and everybody was really happy.”

Byrne’s vocals were recorded at Sigma Sound Studios in New York when the band returned from the Bahamas. “David said, ‘Well,

I haven’t got any lyrics,’ because it was time for him to start singing. But we said, ‘That’s fine, David; you take your time. These are really special kinds of tracks—they deserve a special kind of lyrics.’ He came up with some great stuff.”

In New York, the band also recorded auxiliary parts, including Adrian Belew’s guitar solos and José Rossy’s percussion. “The parts [Rossy] added are just fabulous—very colorful—and they made it even more dancey, which is what we were looking for,” explains Frantz. Rossy’s brilliance shines particularly strongly on “The Great Curve” and “Listening Wind.”

Once *Remain in Light* was released, Talking Heads recruited a powerhouse group of performers to cover the additional parts onstage, including “Busta Cherry” Jones on bass, Bernie Worrell on keys, Dolette McDonald on vocals, and Steve Scales on percussion. “We rehearsed just for a week, I guess it was,” recalls Frantz, “and then we played this big festival outside of Toronto called Heatwave. Let me just say that we blew everybody else at that festival off the stage. First of all, nobody was expecting it. And second of all, it was really good.”

Today *Remain in Light* is considered one of the most important albums in rock history. The Library of Congress recognized it in 2017, and artists ranging from Angélique Kidjo to Phish have paid tribute to the band by covering the record in its entirety. “It was an album that didn’t really sell as well as our previous ones did,” notes Frantz. “But in the long run, it’s the winner.”

**Rajasri Mallikarjuna**

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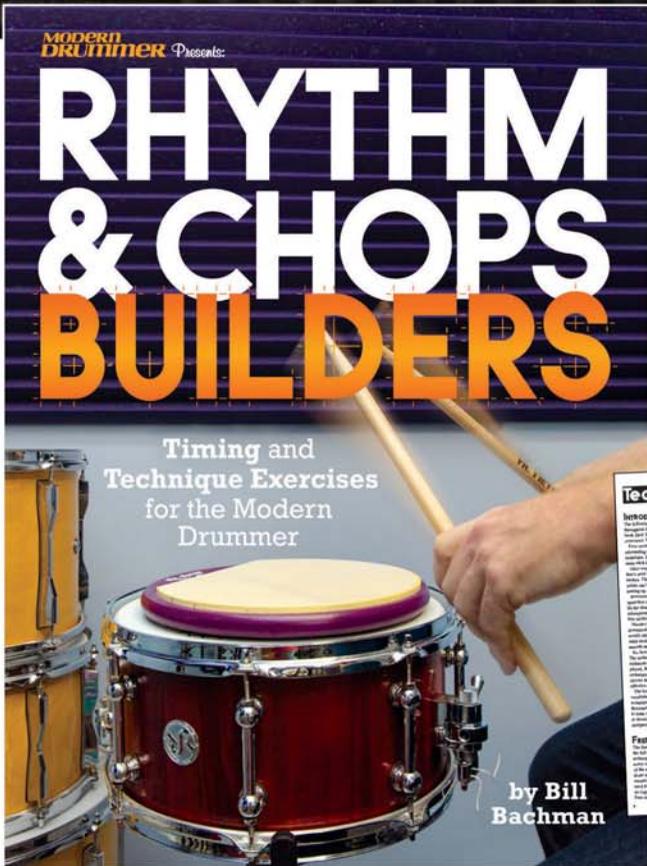
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# INDUSTRY HAPPENINGS

## PASIC18

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The **Percussive Arts Society** held its annual international convention this past November 14–17 at the Indiana Convention Center in downtown Indianapolis. Featuring over 120 concerts, clinics, master classes, labs, workshops, panels, and presentations given by the finest artists and educators from around the world, PASIC18 showcased all areas of percussion, including drum corps, symphonic, world, and drumset.

Drumset clinics took place every hour of the event and were spread between several medium-size and large ballrooms. Clinicians on day one included Berklee professors Henrique De Almeida and John Ramsay, online educator Emmanuelle Caplette, *Modern Drummer* managing editor Michael Dawson, R&B great Calvin Rodgers, electronica/fusion master Zach Danziger, Spin Doctors’ Aaron Comess, and pop/gospel powerhouse Aaron Spears.

Day two started off with an energetic performance by Loop

Doctors’ Peter Szendofi, followed by a mesmerizing one-man-band showcase by Nate Wood. Alice Cooper’s Glen Sobel, Santana’s Cindy Blackman-Santana, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert’s* Joe Saylor, and world drumming legend Alex Acuña also presented clinics.

Drumset clinicians during the final day of PASIC18 included modern jazz vet Paul Wertico, classic jazz great Jeff Hamilton, Ringo’s All-Stars’ Gregg Bissonette, groove expert Nate Smith, and Styx’s Todd Sucherman. The convention concluded with a fiery performance by fusion legend Dennis Chambers with the Victor Wooten Trio.

PASIC19 is scheduled for November 13–16. More information can be found at [pasic.org](http://pasic.org).

**Story by Michael Dawson**  
**Photos by Miguel Monroy**



Smith



Sucherman



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# Vintage Potpourri



**David Levit, a drummer, educator, and sound engineer** based in Mount Prospect, Illinois, pieced together this month's featured kit from various vintage drums he collected throughout his career. The kit consists of a 1929 Ludwig 14x24 bass drum with DW clamp-on spurs, a 1936 Leedy and Strupe 7x14 snare, a 1953 Slingerland 13x15 marching snare converted into a floor tom, and a 1970 Werco 8x12 rack tom. The setup is outfitted with Yamaha and DW hardware.

"The Ludwig bass drum was picked out from the garbage of a music store that I worked at that was closing down," Levit says. "I literally crawled into a massive dumpster to get it—I almost had to be rescued to get out! And the L&S snare was in horrible shape,

with most of its original finish scraped away. A grade school had the snare under a pile of other broken gear and gave it to me as partial payment for repairing their sound system. The band director was thrilled to get rid of his 'garbage' to get a reduced price for the job."

Levit says that he had to recently retire the kit's Werco rack tom. "It has internal plies coming loose that cause a rattling sound," he explains. "But it has sentimental value, as it was a part of my very first drumset—although it's certainly not a drum with any monetary value." Levit says that he's hoping to work with Jim Moritz of the Chicago Drum company to either rework or refinish the tom to complete the set.

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



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Cindy's Brooklyn Kit is a Gold Sparkle Nitron shell pack (GB-RC444-022) which includes a 14" x 24" bass drum, 16" x 16" floor tom, a 9" x 13" rack tom and a 6½" x 14" snare drum, plus add-on components including an 8" x 12" rack tom, a 14" x 14" floor tom and a 16" x 18" floor tom.

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