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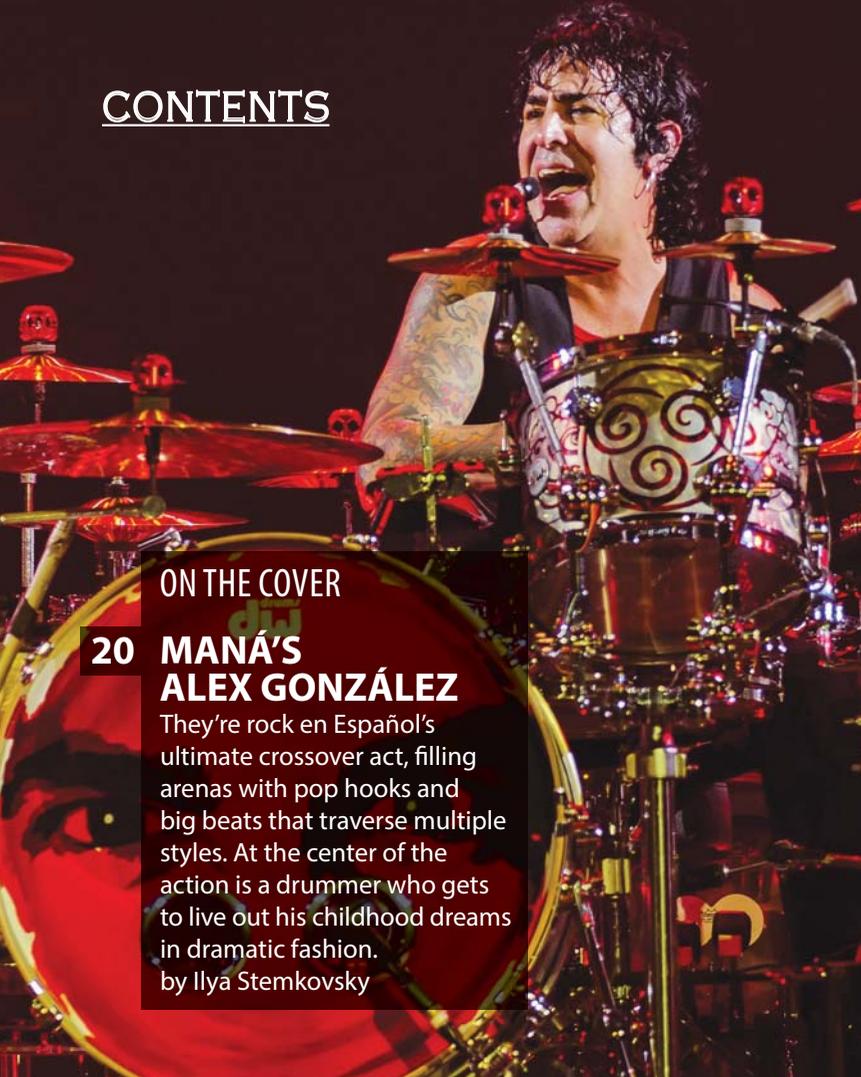


A close-up, high-angle photograph of a drum head, likely a snare drum. The drum head is a light, neutral color, and the surrounding metal rim is highly reflective and polished. The focus is on the central area where the drum head meets the rim. A prominent feature is a circular, chrome-finished dialtune tuner. The tuner has a white top cap with the 'dialtune' logo, which consists of a stylized 'DT' inside a circle followed by the word 'dialtune' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. Several other similar tuners are visible around the perimeter of the drum head, though they are out of focus. The background is dark, making the metallic surfaces and the white cap of the tuner stand out.

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### 20 **MANÁ'S ALEX GONZÁLEZ**

They're rock en Español's ultimate crossover act, filling arenas with pop hooks and big beats that traverse multiple styles. At the center of the action is a drummer who gets to live out his childhood dreams in dramatic fashion.  
by Ilya Stemkovsky

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# Sunshine and Love

Hi, everyone. It's that time again: the start of a new year, when many of you will be in sunny Anaheim, California, attending the annual National Association of Music Merchants winter convention. The NAMM Show is where dealers, manufacturers, and music enthusiasts gather for four days to introduce or check out new gear, make deals, network, and have a bit of fun. If you've picked up your first copy of *Modern Drummer* on the show floor, we hope you enjoy it. And if you're already a monthly subscriber—we thank you!



In this issue we feature, for the first time on our cover, the illustrious Alex González. Alex is the drummer and occasional singer/songwriter with the Mexican band Maná, one of the most popular Latin-American groups in the world. In thirty-plus years, Maná has earned four Grammy Awards, eight Latin Grammy Awards, five MTV Video Music Latin America Awards, and nineteen Billboard Latin Music Awards, and they've sold upwards of 40 million records. Read all about Alex's amazing career starting on page thirty-two of this issue.

Also in this issue we pay tribute to Ginger Baker, who passed away on October 6 at the age of eighty. Baker, who was inducted into the *Modern Drummer* Hall of Fame in 2008, was most known for bringing his influential double-bass rock drumming to the forefront with the '60s supergroup Cream, featuring bass player Jack Bruce and guitarist Eric Clapton.

We've all heard about Baker's reputation as a wild man who sometimes flew out of control. But as drummers we still admired him as a musician and recognized the fire and passion that he played with throughout his life. Those who got to know him personally were fortunate to experience a softer side of the innovative drummer. Not that he didn't sometimes lash out even at those he loved and cared for.

A few years ago I was fortunate to spend two days with Ginger and his daughter, Nettie, at the Rock and Roll Fantasy Camp, and I got to see that kinder side of his personality. Ginger had been a huge influence on me growing up. That period, in the late '60s and early '70s, was the only time I ever played double bass drums. The older guys in my neighborhood nicknamed me "Ginger" because I could play the "Toad" drum solo from Cream's double album *Wheels of Fire* at the age of twelve. Looking back now, I guess I faked it pretty good!

When news was announced of Baker's passing, many of his peers, like Ringo Starr, Brian Wilson, Steve Winwood, Stevie Van Zandt, Eric Clapton, Carmine Appice, and Paul McCartney, acknowledged him respectfully and immediately tweeted their condolences. For our coverage here, rather than present more memories from his peers, we decided to take a deep dive into the many diverse projects he was involved in over his sixty-year playing career. There's so much more to his art beyond the "Toad" solo and his famous "upside-down" beat on "Sunshine of Your Love." After Cream broke up in 1969, for instance, he worked with Afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti. And then there are his pre-Cream recordings with the Graham Bond Organisation. In this month's Part 1 of our Ginger tribute, we explore all of these chapters of his career.

We're also honored to be featuring longtime *MD* favorites Horacio Hernández and Chris Johnson in this issue. We're sure you'll find some timeless advice and inspiration in those articles, too, as well as throughout the rest of the issue.

Until next time, may you all have sunshine and love.

**Billy Amendola**  
Editor at Large

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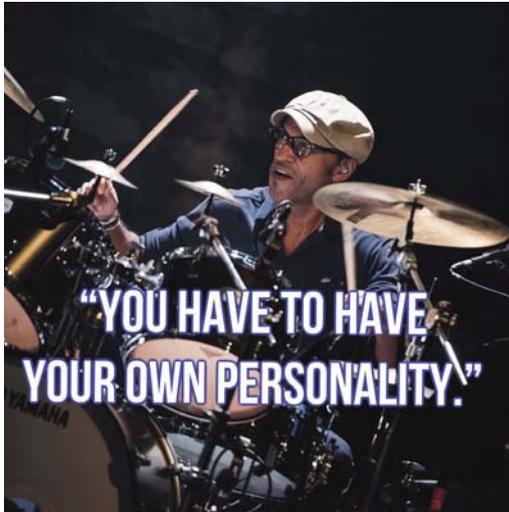


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**What's your favorite Manu Katché performance?**

His drum break in "Come Talk to Me" on [Peter Gabriel's] *Secret World Live* totally opened my mind ten years ago.

**Richie Henry**

"The Wild Wild Sea" by Sting. The man paints a portrait in that song.

**John L'Ecuyer**

His work on *Boys for Pele* by Tori Amos is so creative.

**@siadrumsuk**

"Badman's Song" by Tears for Fears. I've been listening to that track since it came out in 1989, and it blows me away every time.

**Jay Hayward**

"Animal" by Francis Cabrel. Amazing groove.

**Rudy Rosselli**

"Home" by Joe Satriani.

**Danny Moore**

"Somewhere Down the Crazy River" by Robbie Robertson.

**Tommy Benedetti**

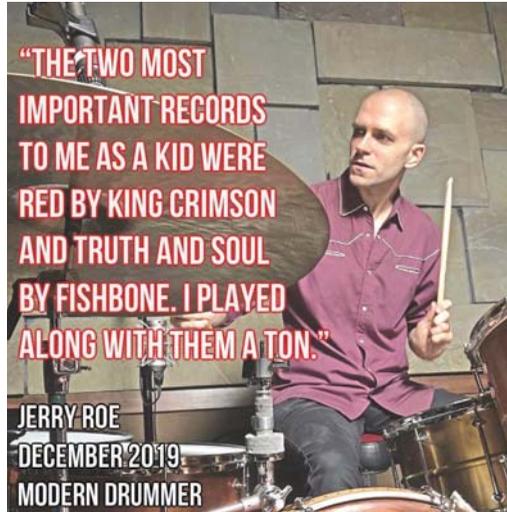
I love Manu's drumming on *I Took Up the Runes* by Jan Garbarek.

**Jon Mattox**

Tracy Chapman's *Matters of the Heart* album.

**Chris Hansen**

**First Play-Alongs**



**What records did you play along to the most?**

Death Cab for Cutie's *Transatlanticism*.

**Aaron Condon**

No Doubt's *Tragic Kingdom* and Dream Theater's *Awake*.

**@vegabob**

Mahavishnu Orchestra's *Between Nothingness and Eternity* and Return to Forever's *Where Have I Known You Before*.

**John Fell**

The Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*.

**Chris Carhart**

*Led Zeppelin IV*, Deep Purple's *Machine Head*.

**Robert B. Heyman**

Radiohead's *The Bends* and *OK Computer* and Nirvana's *Nevermind* and *In Utero*.

**Thom Mills**

Everything by Thin Lizzy.

**Myles Lally**

*Chicago at Carnegie Hall*.

**Darren Day**

Living Colour's *Vivid*.

**Marc van Hout**

Seaweed's *Four*.

**Andy Cernal**

Steely Dan's *Pretzel Logic* and Rush's *A Farewell to Kings*.

**Ross Vumbaco**

*Shogun* by Trivium, any Tool album.

**Mathew Sanchez**

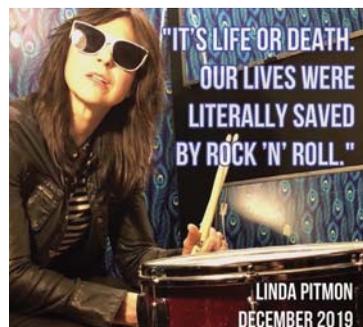
Little Feat's *Waiting for Columbus*.

**Brandon Allen**

The Police's *Zenyatta Mondatta*.

**Lucas Steuerwald**

**If Not for Drums**



**Where would you be if drumming and music weren't in your life?**

I'd be in politics, activism, or the judiciary, following the family.

**Doni Hagan**

Bored.

**Michael Samman**

Wait, not drumming was an option this whole time?!

**Myke Lewis**

I'd be in a much darker place without music. It's my love and my life.

**Brian Randall**

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**DROPPED BEAT** Photographer Nicola Ciccarone's name was misspelled in Eric Singer's January cover story.



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## Georgia's *Seeking Thrills*

The multitalented Brit may take a one-woman-band approach onstage, but her new album is a decidedly all-in affair, inspiring legions to think, feel, and dance in equal measure.



Georgia performing for Vevo DSCVR, shot by Jack Alexander.

North Londoner Georgia is a drummer through and through, a fact that's immediately clear upon watching the inspiring video for "Feel It," from her brand-new sophomore album, *Seeking Thrills*. Featuring jump cuts between a number of drummers—all women or girls, importantly—the video is practically a visual love letter to the thrill of playing drums.

But even a blind person would quickly pick up on the singularly

named musician's rhythmic prowess. *Seeking Thrills* is a relentlessly beat-heavy affair. Yet at the same time it explores some profound lyrical themes. If there is such a thing as a thinking person's dance music, this is surely it. We queried the drummer—who's recently opened for the Flaming Lips, collaborated with Warpaint's Stella Mozgawa, and completed a solo U.S. tour—about her worldly yet highly personal music.

**MD:** What was your concept for the “Feel It” video? And do we recognize Debbie Knox-Hewson [July 2019 *MD*] in there?

**Georgia:** The director, Raine, is a friend of mine. We were away together on holiday, jokingly coming up with cool ideas for music videos, and we imagined a video full of female drummers of all ages and ethnicities playing drums to the song. We wanted them to look and feel so good playing drums to this song, even if we just shot them playing in their rooms or wherever, so that the song had a universal emotion and inspired women to pick up the drumsticks. Debbie being in the video was intentional—I know her from the drumming scene and thought she would be ideal for it. She’s such a great drummer, and her energy on screen was captivating and totally inspiring. We love Debbie... / love Debbie!

**MD:** The version of “Move Systems” that you did with Stella Mozgawa is killer. What was the creative process like on that?

**Georgia:** My manager, Jeannette Lee, was involved in this cool thing called Call This Number, where they invited musicians to a garage and got them to perform their songs in this eerie, intimate setting. Jeannette asked me to do it, and she knew that Stella was in town, so she invited her to join me. I’d been a massive fan of hers for a long time and always wanted to play drums with her, so it was exciting that she agreed to come and do it. We had no time to prep; it was completely improvised, but honestly I think that added to the rawness of the performance and recording. Sometimes with drumming you get so much out of improvising. We were literally communicating through the medium of drumming—how cool is that! For me, it brought a whole new energy to the song. And now Stella and I are close friends!

**MD:** Is it true that you studied ethnomusicology at the Soas University of London while simultaneously doing studio drumming gigs?

**Georgia:** Yes, it is. It was important for me to keep up performing whilst doing an academic degree. I’m glad I made that decision, because when I graduated I had a job—which is kind of unheard of for many when they graduate in London. [laughs]

**MD:** The worlds of “ethnic” music and high-tech studio production seem like polar opposites. What connections are there for you?

**Georgia:** I grew up listening to African, Indian, Asian, Latin, and other music from around the world, and I was always very interested in the rhythmic elements. Hearing all these different rhythms was what drew me to the music more

than melody. I wanted to learn more about these rhythms—their significance, and their history and development within the culture. This then became really useful to me when creating my own music.

I actually don’t see them as polar opposites at all. In my studio I use a lot of analog gear from the ’70 and ’80s, including drum machines and synths that were explored by musicians in those countries. I learned a lot about the recording industry in non-Western countries, and actually they were far more explorative than us, and sometimes way ahead of the game! This was fascinating to me. I guess I’ve always been like that: it’s not always about the finished product; it’s sometimes about the process.

**MD:** You do solo performances playing standup kit. It can be stressful enough as a drummer having to deal with electronics and acoustics at the same time, but you’re also having to keep the audience’s attention by yourself—not to mention singing at the same time. That’s the very definition of ambition.

**Georgia:** [Laughs] Yes, it is a challenge, but that’s what I wanted this time around. I know it sounds crazy, but it needed to be challenging in order for the audience to come into my world. It’s very important for me to learn and develop as a musician in this process, too. I wanted to present this new music in a fun and exciting way, and it became apparent to me that doing it as a one-woman show was connecting with people. So we stuck with it and have been developing the show ever since.

I was looking at past artists from the ’80s, like in the Chicago house and Detroit techno scenes, and how they performed live. I got inspired by the way it was often just one or two people with interesting equipment or just DJing, and how they could hold the dancefloor energy. I was like, *I want to do that, keep it minimal and make a statement.*

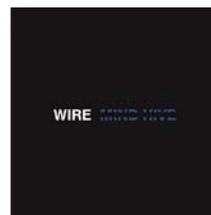
This new record is also inspired by Depeche Mode. During my developing the live show I came across a YouTube clip of them doing a TV performance somewhere in Europe, and one of them was playing a white Simmons kit. As soon as I saw that I was like, *I need to get a Simmons.* I became convinced that they were going to elevate the live show. As soon as I got hold of my red 1982 Simmons SDS-V kit, the dream of this elevated live show became real. Once I got it all set up in the positions I needed for standing up and playing, it looked so cool. It has honestly been such a treat seeing the audiences’ reaction to the setup. It’s made me so happy!

**Adam Budofsky**

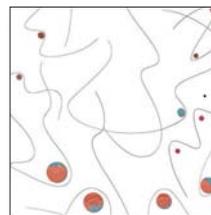
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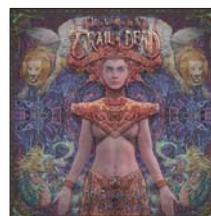
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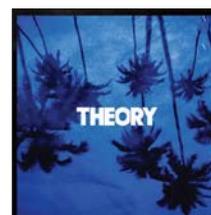
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(Jamie Miller, Cully Symington, Conrad Keely, Jason Reece)



**Theory** (Theory of a Deadman)  
**Say Nothing**  
(Joey Dandeneau)

## Ash Doodkorte with Voyager

The veteran Australian progressive band is aptly named, exploring musical worlds beyond the expected. They even shared one notable gig with bona fide astronauts.



Theodore Swaddling

Though the Australian quintet Voyager has been a staple of European progressive-rock festivals for nearly a decade, their sound isn't quite so easily defined. Melding syncopated djent guitar lines, '80s synth fizzle, cleverly displaced cymbal accents, and anthemic vocals, the band has much to offer followers of progressive metal, but also fans of electronica, mainstream rock, and other genres.

Not yet a household name in the U.S., Voyager has nonetheless earned a sizable following in Europe and Australia, with respectable streams on Spotify, views on YouTube, and reaction to their opening sets for Coheed and Cambria, Deftones, Opeth, Nightwish, Leprous, and Twelve Foot Ninja. Recently Voyager signed to the French metal label Season of Mist, which released their seventh album, *Colours in the Sun*, this past November.

"The writing process for *Colours in the Sun* was interesting," says drummer Ash Doodkorte, "because it was the first time we had to work to a deadline. After we signed on the dotted line, we had twelve months to deliver the masters for a new album. I think at the time of singing, we had half of one song written, so we had to really

get to work. It was a very different experience for us, and I think it was really beneficial, because everything came out of it leaner."

In order to promote the release of *Colours in the Sun*, Voyager embarked on a short tour of Europe and did several festival dates in Australia. According to Doodkorte, using a tour kit provided by Tama in Europe meant he only needed to carry his sticks and cymbals from Australia—a huge benefit. "Every time I go to the U.S., the U.K., or Europe," the drummer says, "the Tama guys are really good to me, and they always set me up with a kit. The one I used for this run was a Starclassic in a Black Cherry finish with maple shells. Normally I take my own snare, but we have the wonderful situation that whenever you're going anywhere from Australia, you're having to deal with excess baggage fees on the airline. It's always the drummer who has to give things up!"

On the selection of material for the tour, Doodkorte says, "We played a smattering of tracks from *I Am the ReVolution* [2009] and *The Meaning of I* [2011]. But most of the songs were picked from *V* [2014] and *Ghost Mile* [2017], along with about three tracks from *Colours in the Sun*—which is great for me, as those are the ones I



was involved in writing.”

When asked about tour highlights, Doodkorte cites one particular U.K. gig. “We played in one of the rooms at London O2,” he recalls, “which is cool to say. The event is called Space Rocks, and it’s organized by the European Space Agency. It’s a conference where they bring in astronauts and astrophysicists to talk, and then at the end of the event it turns into a gig in the same venue.” Other highlights for Doodkorte were ProgPower Europe in the Netherlands—the band’s fourth appearance there—and the Euroblast Festival in Germany. As you read this, Voyager will be in the midst of another U.K./E.U. tour.

To deal with his stage volume on recent club shows, Doodkorte had to find a solution to keep the peace with the band’s front-of-house audio engineer. “In the middle of the tour,” he recalls, “our sound engineer was getting cranky with me because I ride my crashes a lot in Voyager, and he was sick of them bleeding into the vocal mics. I ended up switching to Sabian FRX cymbals, which are designed to be lower-volume. Some of the bigger crashes have a ring of a couple of hundred small holes maybe two inches from the

edge, and a couple more around the bell. Because we do a lot of club shows and there’s no riser, the cymbals project right into the vocal mics. For the rest of that tour we’d use the FRX cymbals on the club shows and my regular crashes for the bigger shows.”

**Ben Meyer**

**Ash Doodkorte plays Tama drums and Sabian cymbals.**



## Also on the Road

**John Boecklin** with Bad Wolves

**John Convertino** with Calexico and Iron & Wine

**Shaun Foist** with Breaking Benjamin

**Stanton Moore** with Galactic

**Andy Stack** with Wye Oak



# Tama

## S.L.P. New-Vintage Hickory Drumset

A classic bebop-style setup with modern-leaning tone and appointments.

I recently got to test drive the newest addition to Tama's Sound Lab Project (S.L.P.) line of drumsets: the New-Vintage Hickory. The three-piece shell pack comprises fairly thin hickory shells in standard bop sizes. There's a 6-ply, 5 mm 8x12 rack tom, a 6-ply, 5 mm 14x14 floor tom, and an 8-ply, 7 mm 14x18 bass drum. Also available separately is a 6-ply, 6 mm 5x14 snare.

The drums sport a light, natural stain to show off the striking hickory wood grain. Dark-lacquered bass drum hoops with vintage white marine pearl inlays provide a nice additional visual accent. The toms and snare ship with Evans G1 Coated batters. The toms have G1 Clear bottoms, and the snare has a 300 series resonant. The bass drum has an EQ4 Clear batter and an off-white logo front.

### The Hardware

The lugs are a short, sturdy tube design that paired well with the 2.3 mm Mighty Hoops. These hoops are heavier than standard triple-flanged models but offer a more open sound than thick, zinc die-casts. As a result, the Mighty Hoops reduce some of the high overtones without stifling the pitch and tuning range of the drum, which proved to be important with these hickory shells.

The rack tom connects directly to the bass drum with a ball-and-socket mount, which has an extra port for a cymbal arm. The rack tom uses what Tama calls the Direct Flexi-Mount, which is a flexible hinge attached to a plate on the shell. When I first set up the rack tom, I was concerned the drum might bounce around too much. But the movement was minimal, and the mount didn't seem to muffle the resonance in any noticeable way. The Direct Flexi-Mount is an unobtrusive answer to bulkier suspension systems.

The bass drum spurs are heavy-duty and functional. They feature retractable spikes and strong drum-key height adjustment screws, meaning the drum is going to stay put as long as you're set up on a stable, carpeted surface.

The snare has a simple but functional throw-off with an adjustable butt plate that works smoothly and complements the overall look. The hardware on the entire kit embodies the New-Vintage aesthetic, as all of the components look modern but have clear references to vintage designs.

### The Sound

As we explored the various sounds available

with the S.L.P. New-Vintage Hickory drumset, we discovered that the tone of the thin hickory shells wasn't drastically different from that of maple. The drums were similarly warm and tuneful but were also a little punchier. The toms were very articulate at all tunings, and the length of the note was shorter than what you'd get from thicker 8-ply drums.

At low tunings, the hickory toms felt buttery and had all the impact you could want. In the higher range, the drums don't sing for very long after the attack; therefore you won't need to muffle them. The controlled decay would be ideal for folks who prefer wide-open sounds. If you're reaching for ultra-high Max Roach-type tunings, these drums will choke out before you get there. But if you favor low to medium-high tunings and like open sounds, you'll be able to achieve an excellent mix of articulation and tone without any need for muffling.

The bass drum had a lot of impact and body at all tunings. In the low range, it had a strong slap that could easily work for acoustic rock or lower-volume funk. And in the high range, it can speak tunefully, like a floor tom. I found it easy to dial in a variety of tones on this drum. When tuned medium-low, it provided plenty of volume and didn't make me regret bringing such a small bass drum to kick a full big band. Tuned high for a jazz trio gig, it was easy to play at a soft volume, and the tone was open without being too ringy. In both of those situations, no muffling was used.

I usually expect matching snare drums to be the weak link of a shell pack, but the

S.L.P. New-Hickory 5x14 was a highlight of the kit. Like the bass drum, it was easy to tune to a variety of pitches and seemed to like them all. Despite its thin and shallow shell, this drum produced plenty of volume and attack. It will cut through almost any acoustic or semi-acoustic setting you put it in. Snare sensitivity was excellent from





edge to center, and any sympathetic ring generated by the rack tom could be easily mitigated with small tuning adjustments. This snare was also fairly easy to detune for a fat sound. And at high tunings, rimshots crack and every ghost note speaks clearly.

These S.L.P. New-Vintage drums proved to be excellent for many gigging situations.

The sizes are compact yet versatile, making the kit easy to transport while also being able to cover a lot of musical territory beyond traditional jazz. The hickory shells provide a stunning visual, and the sound can be summed up in one word: impact. They had all the tone and warmth of maple drums but with a little extra punch and

shorter decay. The price point lies in a happy medium that reflects the quality of the instrument but also won't make you too nervous about throwing them in the trunk of your car multiple times a week. The three-piece shell pack sells for about \$1,500, the matching snare for \$350.

**Kyle Andrews**

# Zildjian

## K Cluster Crashes

Strategically hammered for more explosive, trashy tones without veering all the way into special effects.

**T**he Zildjian cymbal catalog can be split into two lanes: A and K. The A lane comprises all the subseries that were born from the original Zildjian USA “Avedis” sound. These series (A, Avedis, A Custom) provide clean, bright, and expressive tones and can be heard on recordings dating back to the big band era of the '30s and through the peak of Motown, the birth of rock 'n' roll, and much of today's modern genres.

The sounds within the K lane (Constantinople, K Custom, K, and Keropé) date back much further, to the company's origins in 19th-century Turkey, and feature warmer, lighter, and lower-pitched tones. Recently the standard K series was expanded with the introduction of the K Sweet line of extra-thin, raw-bell hi-hats, crashes, and rides. The latest addition is the K Cluster crash, which starts as a 16", 18", or 20" K Sweet crash but features eight tight pockets of deep under-hammering to give the cymbals a shorter, trashier tone. (Zildjian aficionados might recall that the cluster hammering technique was first employed on the 22" Constantinople Bounce ride to replicate the smokier, grittier tone of a well-worn Turkish-era K ride owned by jazz great Kenny Washington.) We were sent a sample of all three K Cluster crashes to review, so let's check them out.

### The Specs

The K Cluster crashes are categorized as being “paper-thin,” which is the lightest demarcation in Zildjian's catalog. They bend pretty easily in the hands while retaining a fairly firm, stable feel. Their large bells are unlathed and feature a multicolored patina finish. The rest of the cymbal is lathed lightly and tightly and is hammered extensively from the base of the cup to .5" from the edge. The eight pockets of additional hammering are strategically positioned so that there's an inner group of four clusters placed evenly around the cymbal and close to the bell and an outer group located nearer the edge and offset from the inner clusters. Offsetting the clusters in this way provides maximum sonic effect with minimal impact on the integrity of the cymbal itself.

### The Sounds

If you were to categorize the sounds of different types of crash cymbals on a sliding scale from ultraclean and lush to super fast and trashy, the K Cluster crashes would be positioned just one step to the right of the K Sweet models. They're not nearly as explosive, aggressive, and trashy as an Oriental China Trash or even a perforated K EFX cymbal. Rather, they sound much more like a beautiful, rich K paper-thin crash that's been perfectly broken in after years of use.

The attack of the K Cluster crashes is a bit quicker and flashier than that of a brand-new K Sweet crash, and the decay is a bit shorter. Likewise, the body of the tone has more complexity and “dirt” but not so much as to overshadow the warm, lush overtones. Imagine that bittersweet sound of your favorite, well-worn crash cymbal when it's right on the verge of giving out and cracking...yet it never does. *That's* the sound of these new K Cluster crashes.

As expected, the 16" K Cluster crash had the fastest attack and quickest decay, while the 18" and 20" had more robust impact and longer and more saturated sustain. All three sizes have taken over as my first-choice crash options for all recording sessions and live dates. List prices are \$274.95 for the 16", \$324.95 for the 18", and \$364.95 for the 20".

**Michael Dawson**





# dialtune

## Cable-Tuning Snare Drum

Independently adjust top and bottom heads using a dial for lightning-fast tuning.

There's often a fine line between innovation and gimmickry. The latter is often thrilling and captivating at first glance, but inevitably there are one or more shortcomings that render the product impractical at best and utterly useless at worse. Innovation, on the other hand, often changes the landscape of what's possible, ultimately rendering its predecessors obsolete. (Think

about what the modern hi-hat stand did to all other foot-operated cymbal holders, like the low-boy.) Now, on paper, the new dialtune cable-tuning snare drum could easily be cast into the gimmick list. That is, until you actually try it. This thing works...like, *really* works. Let's take a closer look.

### What Is It?

The dialtune snare comprises a 6.5x14 maple shell, in natural or Espresso finish, outfitted with super-precise cable-and-pulley systems attached to it in place of standard drum lugs. There are two cables, one for the top head and one for the bottom, that are operated with large twist knobs on opposite sides of the drum. As the tension is increased, the pulleys steadily lower the quick-release hoops towards the center of the shell, therefore raising the pitch of the drumhead.

The adjustment knobs operate very smoothly, but also maintain a necessary amount of friction to keep the head from losing tension while being played. The uniquely designed hoops require no screws or threading, making drumhead changes much simpler, quicker, and easier than with traditional rims and threaded screws.

Simply loosen the cable until the head is slack, and rotate the hoop so that it unlocks from the small vertical posts on the sub-hoop. From there, the drumhead can be popped off the shell and replaced with a new one. Batter head changes can be executed in under a minute, while bottom head changes take a little longer due to having to remove the wires from the strainer first.

### How Does It Sound?

With your eyes closed, the dialtune snare sounds as good as any other high-quality 6.5x14 plywood maple drum. While the cable system and quick-release hoops do add bulk to the drum, we were surprised by how little impact they had on resonance, projection, sensitivity, and tone. When cranked as tight as possible, the drum sounded very funky, articulate, and focused.

And everything down from there sounded full, warm, rich, and open.

Even when tuned super low, the cables maintained a consistent tension. I didn't need to use muffling at any point, nor did I have to retune the drum between songs or takes to keep it at a consistent pitch. And yes, you can change the tuning—either by a little or a lot—in a matter of seconds, even while playing a groove with the other hand. For recording purposes, the dialtune makes it super easy to get the snare pitch to sit perfectly within a track. And on gigs, this one drum can transform from a super-tight Steve Jordan-esque “pop” to a chesty Don Henley “thump” in less time than it takes for your guitarist to retune. Make sure you check out our real-time tuning demo posted at [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com).

**Michael Dawson**



# Craviotto

## Heritage Series Snare

Top-notch, collector-level quality for the working drummer.

The Craviotto brand hardly needs an introduction to snare drum fans. The company has long been associated with craftsmanship, tone, and collectability, even to those of us who haven't seen or played one in person. Each Craviotto drum is handcrafted to exact specifications to achieve the highest quality, and the prices of their Custom Shop drums often reflect this. However, the new Craviotto Heritage line of snares delivers this same quality at a more affordable price point—around \$795.

### A Fitting Tribute

The Heritage series snare is directly inspired by the 2017 Tribute series drums that were made in honor of company founder Johnny Craviotto, who passed away in the previous year. The Heritage drum uses the same 6x14 one-ply maple shell, Johnny C cast lugs, triple-flange hoops, Trick GS007 throw-off, twenty-strand snare wires, and natural satin oil finish. The Heritage snares feature 45-degree bearing edges and a subtle and classy red diamond inlay. The sharper bearing edges make the Heritage drums sound a bit brighter and more open than the Tributes. This provides access to a range of musical tones and overtones, which can be easily muffled if desired.

Visually, the Heritage series drum is gorgeous, as the satin oil finish showcases the grain of the maple. The red diamond inlay gives the drum a subtle yet distinctly

Craviotto look. The eight Johnny C cast lugs are contoured to a diamond shape, which reflects light in a way that really brings the snare to life onstage.

### Suitable Sounds for All Applications

Musically, the Heritage drum did exactly what we expected from a Craviotto. It had loads of tone, clarity, and sensitivity. And you'd be hard-pressed to find a tuning that doesn't work well. Tuned low, it sounded warm and punchy without losing focus. Medium tunings provided cracking rimshots while retaining plenty of warmth. High tunings gave all the cutting brightness and volume you could need without choking the tone. Snare sensitivity was phenomenal at all tunings and dynamics, and the drum didn't lose body when the wires were tensioned tight and snappy.

The Heritage drum offered plenty of

volume, thanks to the quarter-inch-thick single-ply maple shell. Rimshots cut through, and the drum produced a stunningly solid rimclick. In fact, on a super-quiet bossa nova gig, I had trouble playing rimclicks softly enough when using this drum. But across the entire dynamic range, from super-soft playing near the edge to dead-center full-volume accents, you'll get a very uniform tone and snare response.

Simply put, the Craviotto Heritage series 6x14 single-ply maple snare is a beautiful workhorse. It's hard to imagine a setting where this drum wouldn't fit in and excel. So if you're in the market for a beautiful, handcrafted instrument that you can take out on any gig or session, this could be the ticket. Check out a video demo at [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com).

**Kyle Andrews**



**GEARING UP** ON STAGE  
AND UP CLOSE

# Steve Hackett's Craig Blundell

We recently caught up with Steve Hackett's touring drummer, Craig Blundell, at the historic Orpheum Theater in Los Angeles. "The rig I had [on the road with Steven Wilson] was a similar kit to this, with two kicks and a gong drum," he says. "When Mapex came out with this Versatus kit, the gong drum doubles as a floor, and it can be a bass drum as well. So it's three drums in one."

When asked about his inspiration for this drumset, Blundell says, "I got a call while I was on tour asking if I would be interested in the Genesis Revisited tour. I said of course—Steve is a legend. I was on the same rig the past four years and wanted something different. We're playing the iconic progressive albums, and a lot of Phil Collins' parts were on a clear kit. I wanted something that looks good under lights but is also very natural and traditional. I decided to go with the Versatus series because they're pure and wide open; there's no muffling on any of the drums.

"Size-wise," Craig continues, "I wanted to go for everything so that all the top-end and low-end stuff is covered. Same thing applies with the cymbals."

If you notice, the 13" rack tom is placed outside of the floor toms. "That was placed there to perform some of Phil Collins' riffs," says Blundell. "And they work really nicely with the hands in that triangle. The bigger-sounding drums complement each other well over there."

**Drums:** Mapex Black Panther Design Lab Versatus in natural lacquer  
**A.** 6x14 Cherry Bomb snare (backup)  
**B.** 13x18 aux drum (bottom head removed)

**C.** 5x13 custom side snare

**D.** 6x14 Black Panther Wraith 1.2 mm brass snare with RimRiser

**E.** 6.5x8 tom

**F.** 7x10 tom

**G.** 7.5x12 tom

**H.** 15x16 floor tom

**I.** 8x13 tom

**J.** 16x18 floor tom

**K.** 16x22 bass drum

**Drumheads:** Aquarian Hi-Impact coated batter on main snare (with SlapKlatz dampener gel), Hi-Energy Clear batter on side snare (with SlapKlatz dampener gel), Force Ten batters on toms, Super Kick 10 Clear bass drum batters

**Cymbals:** Paiste with Cympad felts

**1.** 18" 2002 Novo China

**2.** 21" 2002 Big Beat crash

**3.** 6.5" 2002 cup chime

**4.** 10" 2002 Mega Bell

**5.** 8" 2002 accent

**6.** 14" 602 Modern Essentials hi-hat

**7.** 8" 602 Modern Essentials splash

**8.** 20" Modern Essentials splash

**9.** 10" 602 Modern Essentials splash

**10.** 10" PST X splash

**11.** 14" PST X Flanger stack

**12.** 22" 602 Modern Essentials crash

**13.** 24" 602 Modern Essentials ride

**14.** 12" Rude (prototype) stack

**15.** 20" 602 medium flat ride

**16.** 24" 2002 Big Beat crash

**17.** 22" 602 Modern Essentials China

**Drumsticks:** Vater 2B, Splashstick rods, and T6 mallets



**Hardware:** Mapex Falcon single bass drum pedals and hi-hat stand with legs removed, saddle top throne on a customized riser, and custom Roland rack with Randall May Magnetic Air Adjusted Tom Suspension system

**Electronics:** Roland SPD-SX with FS-5U footswitches and an iPad with PDF sheet music

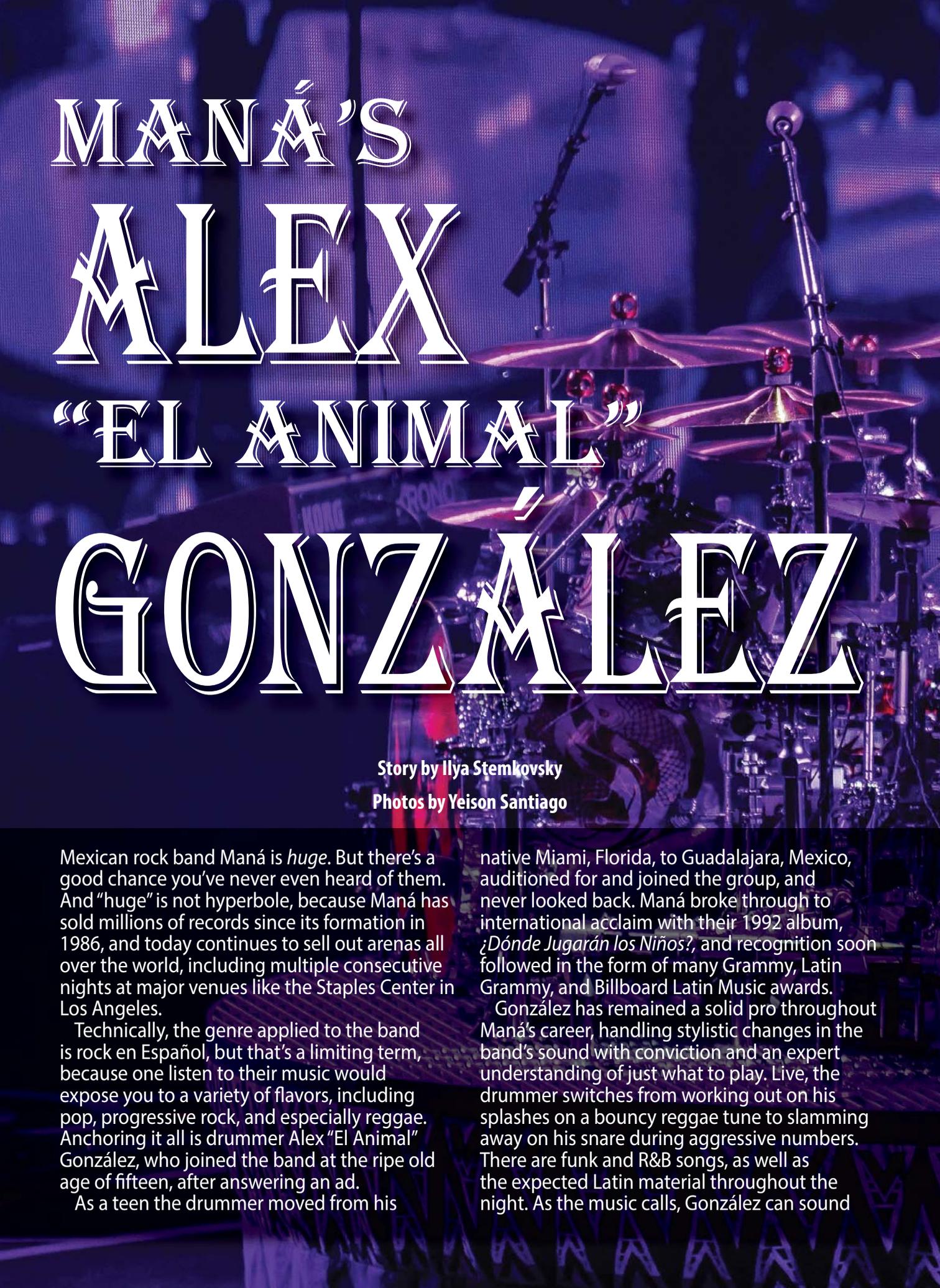
**Percussion:** KEO Percussion woodblock-güiro and Jingle sticks

**Interview by John Martinez**

**Photos by Alex Solca**



- 1 Cymbal
- 2 Cymbal
- 3 Hi-hat
- 4 Tom
- 5 Cymbal
- 6 Cymbal
- 7 Cymbal
- 8 Cymbal
- 9 Cymbal
- 10 Cymbal
- 11 Cymbal
- 12 Cymbal
- 13 Cymbal
- 14 Cymbal
- 15 Cymbal
- 16 Cymbal
- 17 Cymbal
- A Tom
- B Bass Drum
- C Tom
- D Snare Drum
- E Tom
- F Tom
- G Tom
- H Tom
- I Tom
- J Bass Drum
- K Stool



# MANÁ'S ALEX "EL ANIMAL" GONZÁLEZ

Story by Ilya Stemkovsky

Photos by Yeison Santiago

Mexican rock band Maná is *huge*. But there's a good chance you've never even heard of them. And "huge" is not hyperbole, because Maná has sold millions of records since its formation in 1986, and today continues to sell out arenas all over the world, including multiple consecutive nights at major venues like the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

Technically, the genre applied to the band is rock en Español, but that's a limiting term, because one listen to their music would expose you to a variety of flavors, including pop, progressive rock, and especially reggae. Anchoring it all is drummer Alex "El Animal" González, who joined the band at the ripe old age of fifteen, after answering an ad.

As a teen the drummer moved from his

native Miami, Florida, to Guadalajara, Mexico, auditioned for and joined the group, and never looked back. Maná broke through to international acclaim with their 1992 album, *¿Dónde Jugarán los Niños?*, and recognition soon followed in the form of many Grammy, Latin Grammy, and Billboard Latin Music awards.

González has remained a solid pro throughout Maná's career, handling stylistic changes in the band's sound with conviction and an expert understanding of just what to play. Live, the drummer switches from working out on his splashes on a bouncy reggae tune to slamming away on his snare during aggressive numbers. There are funk and R&B songs, as well as the expected Latin material throughout the night. As the music calls, González can sound



like Stewart Copeland one minute and John Bonham the next. When it's time for González's solo, he shines brightly, keeping things rhythmically and musically fresh for himself while also keeping the crowd from heading for the bathrooms.

"This band has given me an opportunity to have my moment within the show to do a drum solo," says González. "It's a chance to express myself. And I always admired those drummers who had that duality where they can play whatever the song needs, but when they have to do something cool and creative or play a drum solo, they have that edge to them." Maná even allows the drummer to sing lead vocals on several songs; González can be heard as the main voice on tracks like "Me Vale."

Though González gets to work out on different styles in his main band, he further spreads his wings with projects like De La Tierra, a Latin American heavy metal "supergroup" made up of members of Sepultura and other South American bands. González is also reflective about the success he's enjoyed and the ever-changing musical and commercial roller coaster Maná continues to ride. He's experienced first-hand how technology has affected everything, and he's as quick to point out his influences as he is to give out timeless advice on the role of a working drummer. And after more than thirty years of laying it down for thousands of screaming fans night after night, González and the band show no signs of letting up.

**MD:** You've mentioned your early years discovering the instrument when you spoke to *MD* in 2008. But now that you look back, isn't it incredible that your mom let you move to Guadalajara when you were fifteen?

**Alex:** It's crazy and I don't think many parents would do that nowadays. When I moved from Miami to Mexico, it was a huge change culturally and musically, but as a little kid, I always dreamed about being a famous rock drummer. It was embedded in me, and it has to do with the people I grew up admiring, starting with Ringo Starr and getting into the whole classic-rock scene—John Bonham, Keith Moon, Phil Collins, Stewart Copeland, Peter Criss, and Neil Peart. So when you have that inspiration, no matter where you live, you're going to try to achieve that.

**MD:** How did you handle developing your own voice while thrust into a band at that young an age?

**Alex:** I never had any formal drum classes. I wish I did. I always tell younger drummers, if you have the opportunity, take advantage of someone to teach you technique or hand positions. I come from a generation where we learned from the records. When it was time for my moment to present my ideas, all those drummers would help my ideas come to the table. But at the same time I would always try to be myself.

When you're in a band, it's important to lay the foundation as the beat or the pulse of what the song needs, no matter what type of music you're playing. I was never concerned with playing the craziest fills

or the weirdest or sickest beats. The great thing about Maná is that we're a pop-rock band, but we have a lot of fusions in our music: reggae, ska, Latin, a whole bunch of things that we throw into the mix. So as a drummer, you have to have an open mentality to bring what the song requires. And live, I have the freedom to throw in things that I didn't on the record. It's fun to improvise.

**MD:** How often do you get to improvise at Maná shows?

**Alex:** All the time. The band has always given me the liberty to do that. I never play exactly the same thing. The songs are the same structurally, but I never throw in the same fills, and I always try to do something different. I'll even mess with the band and switch the beat around or bring the tempo down. When you see a band and everything sounds like the record, it takes away from the experience of it being live.

I'm a huge Rush fan. You'd see them play "Tom Sawyer" live, and everyone would air drum exactly how the song is. I understand that, and that's awesome. But it's great when a band is playing and the fill that's supposed to be like the record is totally different. It brings an excitement and keeps fans on the edge. Alex Van Halen, who's another huge influence, wouldn't do the same fills even though he would play the beat of the song. He would go off and do some other amazing thing.

**MD:** Why do you think the band's mix of reggae and rock appealed to Mexican ears? Is reggae popular in that part of the world?

**Alex:** Mexico is the United States' neighbor,

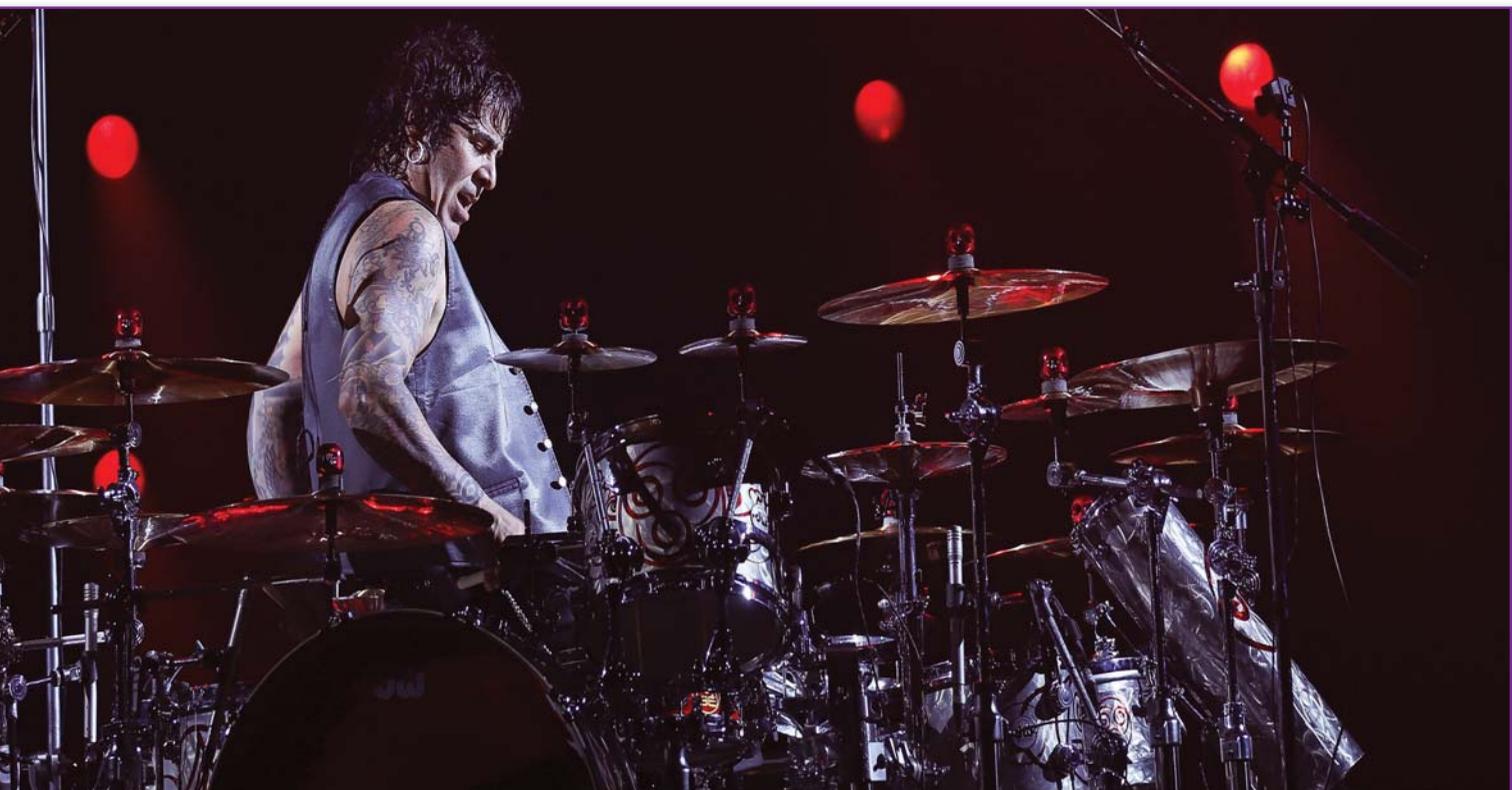
so we've always had access to all types of music, especially rock. Mexico has an amazing culture, and it's not always the typical Mexican music. We get stuff from Central America and South America and even Spain. It's a melting pot, and reggae is one of those types of music. Mexico has amazing beaches, so there was always reggae music coming from the Pacific or Atlantic or Caribbean. In our case, we were influenced by the Police and Bob Marley and other bands that were doing fusions of reggae and rock. Maná also has salsa and mariachi. I respect bands who want to play just one type of music, and that's fantastic, but in Maná we wanted to make it more diverse, and that's fun.

**MD:** Your last album, 2015's *Cama Incendiada*, had more modern flourishes. After so many albums, do you relish doing something different in regards to programming and sounds and production?

**Alex:** That record was the first one that wasn't produced by us. The previous records were produced by Fher Olvera and me. It's important to try new things out. Fher, who's our lead singer and main songwriter, just wanted to step out of the box. It's valid, as long as everything you're doing is authentic and real. It was a good experiment to see someone from outside the band bring his perspective and ideas and intentions.

**MD:** Were you open to the producer's suggestions for your parts?

**Alex:** In the past, I had total liberty to do whatever I wanted, obviously with the consent of Fher and the band. We would sit down and discuss things, and I put



my confidence in him. At the end of the day, this is what the band decided to do. That's happened with a lot of bands, and sometimes it's been good and it's worked, and sometimes it hasn't. But the important thing is to take risks in art and also challenge yourself as a drummer.

**MD:** Is your warm-up routine still the same, in terms of stretches and the like, or have things evolved?

**Alex:** I always recommend stretching to drummers. In the past couple of years, I've learned certain exercises that come from yoga and pilates—stretching your back and your arms and legs and relaxing your muscles. I hit the drums pretty hard, and it's important to protect your spinal cord if you're moving your head around a lot and going for it. I've always been a very aggressive drummer with the way I attack the drums during the fast songs, and I need to be warmed up and relaxed, because you can hurt yourself. And I've never had any issues at all with my fingers, my arms, my back, or my neck. Stretching and warming up a half hour before I hit the stage really helps.

I don't know how to read music, but it's important to go through the rudiments. Start off slow and build up. Don't overdo it, just fifteen minutes, and maybe put on your headphones. That way you hit the stage relaxed and ready.

**MD:** How do you keep the control while still being an animated drummer?

**Alex:** I think it has to do with having so many years of experience. I started professionally at fifteen. I'm fifty now. I've always been concerned with trying to get



the best performance onstage, whether I'm in a bar, club, arena, or stadium. People paid for a ticket, and I want to give them the best show possible.

I was a huge Keith Moon fan, and more people were looking at him than at [the Who singer] Roger Daltrey. [laughs] I saw that the drummer can get as much attention as the lead singer or guitar player. So it was always important to put on a good show and be visually cool. But at the same time you have to be playing what you're supposed to be playing and not messing up

or being out of time. It's about consistency and going for it live. Going for that lick or that fill and trying to do something that keeps it emotional or energetic.

I love seeing drummers who are passionate when they're playing. I don't care if it's jazz or funk or whatever type of music. I want to leave the arena and think, that guy was so freaking passionate, he puts so much energy and love into what he's doing. I want to transmit that so [others] can approach the instrument with the same intention. It's great to have the knowledge of all the fills

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# ALEX'S SETUP

## MAIN STAGE KIT

**Drums:** DW Collector's drums in custom stainless-steel finish (finish and artwork by John Douglas)

- 4x14 bell brass snare (main, custom painted red)
- 6x10 stainless-steel snare (custom by Ronn Dunnett)
- 8x10 and 9x12 toms
- 14x16 and 16x18 floor toms
- 16x24 bass drum
- 18x6 and 21x6 stainless-steel Octobans (custom by Ronn Dunnett)
- 13" LP stainless-steel timbale
- LP Ridge Rider cowbell (custom chrome)

**Cymbals:** Paiste 2002 series

- 16" Power crash
- 18" China
- 8" splash
- 13" Sound Edge hi-hats
- 18" Power crash
- 8" splash
- 10" splash
- 20" Power ride
- 20" Power crash
- 14" Sound Edge hi-hats
- 20" China
- 20" Power crash

**Hardware:** DW rack and stands (custom built by Alex Gonzalez and drum tech Julio Galindo), including 9000 series double pedal, hi-hat, snare stand, low drum throne

**Heads:** Remo, including Ambassador X Coated snare batters; Emperor Clear tom batters and Ambassador Clear resonants; Ambassador Clear Octoban, timbale, piccolo toms, and Rototom batters; Powerstroke P3 Clear bass drum batters, Powerstroke P4 24" front head (painted by John Douglas), Starfire Chrome 18" front head (artwork done at Remo factory)

**Sticks:** Vic Firth Alex Gonzalez signature model

**Microphones:** Shure, Crown headset

**Accessories:** Clear Tune in-ear monitors, Boss FS-6 dual foot pedal to start and stop sequences. No triggers or samplers.



## SOLO KIT

**Drums**

- 3.5x14 custom DW piccolo snare
- 8" and 10" DW piccolo toms
- 12" and 14" Remo Rototoms
- 16x18 DW stainless-steel bass drum

**Hardware:** DW rack (custom built by Alex and drum tech Julio Galindo), 5000 series double pedal and snare stand

**Cymbals:** Paiste 2002 series

- 14" crash
- 10" splash
- 10" Mega Bell
- stack: 15" crash/14" Sound Edge hi-hat bottom/10" splash
- 18" Novo China
- 12" splash hi-hats

**Heads:** same as main kit

## B STAGE KIT

**Drums:** DW cocktail kit in Matte Black finish

- 6x13 stainless-steel snare
- 6x10 and 6x12 toms
- 16x24 bass drum
- 13" LP timbale
- LP Li'l Ridge Rider cowbell

**Cymbals:** Paiste Signature series

- 8" splash
- 17" full crash
- 10" splash
- 20" full crash
- 13" Dark Crisp hi-hats

**Hardware:** DW 9000 series stands, 5000 single bass drum pedal

**Heads:** Remo Ambassador X snare batter; Emperor tom batters and Ambassador resonants; Ambassador timbale batter; Emperor bass drum batter and Ambassador front

## C STAGE KIT

**Drums:** DW Classics in White Marine Pearl

- 5x14 snare
- 8x12 tom
- 14 x14 floor tom
- 13" LP Rock timbale
- 14x24 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Paiste Formula 602 Modern Essentials series

- 14" hi-hats
- 16" crash
- 10" splash
- 20" ride

- 18" crash
- 18" China

**Hardware:** DW 6000 series single bass drum pedal, trap case throne in White Marine Pearl wrap

**Heads:** Remo Ambassador X Coated snare batter; Ambassador Coated tom and bass drum batters and resonants; Ambassador Coated timbale batter

and chops and technique, but passion is part of the equation.

**MD:** Your drum solo is a big part of your show. How has that evolved over the years? Do you have a general map of where you're going, or do you just wing it?

**Alex:** There's a generation that grew up on drum solos, like guitar solos—or anybody that has an intimate moment with the crowd. It's you and your instrument, and you go for it. I enjoy that moment because

it's just you and the audience. For me it's never been about trying to show off. It's always been about the musicality of it and throwing in a little bit of entertainment.

Every tour I try to add something different. For this tour, we have three stages. On the main stage is one drumset, and the B stage has a small cocktail kit that comes from underneath. And then there's another drumset at the end of the arena on a little island. We wanted to get as close as possible

to our fans. And I wanted to do something inspired by Neil Peart, a 360-degree kit. So you see my main kit, but then I had a hybrid kit put on the riser. When Neil had that kit that surrounded him, half was acoustic and half was electronic. I wanted mine to be all acoustic. So on the kit behind me is a 16x18 kick drum, and then 8" and 10" piccolo concert toms, and then 12" and 14" Rototoms. And then I have a weird setup of Paiste cymbals with these 12" hi-hats I



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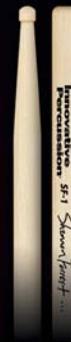
**MATT-1**  
WOOD: HICKORY  
LENGTH: 16 1/2"  
DIAMETER: .580"  
BEAD: TEARDROP



**CLOUD**  
SHAFT: STEEL  
LENGTH: 8 1/8"  
CORE: CORK  
COVER: SOFT  
POLYESTER



**LA SESSION**  
WOOD: HICKORY  
LENGTH: 16 1/8"  
DIAMETER: .580"  
BEAD: TEARDROP



**SF-1**  
WOOD: HICKORY  
LENGTH: 16 1/8"  
DIAMETER: .580"  
BEAD: SMALL  
BARREL





**MD:** What's it like playing that stand-up cocktail kit?

**Alex:** I started using the DW cocktail kit back in 2008. I have to take my hat off to that company, because they've always been concerned with whatever the drummer needs. And they still have that custom-shop philosophy, which I love, because all my drums have been custom since 1992. Normally on cocktail kits, the kick drum is [facing] up, and I've done that on past tours. But this time I wanted to drop the kick drum, so it's a regular kick but looks like a bazooka. So I adjusted the pedal and had Remo make me a special head for the front and the back.

And on the third stage, the island stage, I have a beautiful White Marine Pearl DW set. I'm a huge Buddy Rich fan. I remember as a little kid, I was so in awe of that white marine pearl kit he had. And the new kit I'm using on this tour is a DW Collector's stainless-steel kit. They grinded all the stainless-steel shells to give them a unique finish.

**MD:** You used to have those two Chinas on both sides high up. Those have come down.

**Alex:** When I started playing, I was really into Terry Bozzio. As a teen, I could only afford one China, [laughs] and I had it really high on my right side. But then later, when I got my Paiste endorsement, I had my Chinas up like Terry. I always found that very comfortable to play. And on every tour, I'd bring them up or down. On this tour I brought them down so everything is symmetrical. In front of me I have my crashes, my splashes, my ride, and hi-hats. And immediately to my left I have an 18" China, and to my right I have a 20" China, plus two other crashes. It's just arranging

put together from splashes, a white noise cymbal, and a China.

I wanted to do this thing in 360 and just have fun. For me, playing that solo is about having that moment with your instrument and improvising. And every night is not the same. There are seven movements because it has to do with the way my drum riser is built and spins. First I face the audience and then it moves to the left, then the right, then 360, and then back to the front. So I wanted people to think it was entertaining, but also for anyone who plays drums, I wanted them to think I was technically doing some cool stuff up there. And I don't use triggers; it's just me beating the hell out of it.

**MD:** Why is the solo divided into movements?

**Alex:** Because of the production and the lighting, and because my tech has to manually move the riser. So I'll improvise on the snare drum, or improvise between the snare, kick, and toms. Then I'll stop and another movement will be on my floor toms and rack toms. Then another movement will be on the other side of the kit on the Octobans and the timbales and a 10" tom and 10" snare. Then I'll improvise on the hybrid kit. Then I'll go back to the main snare and do some stick tricks. So everything is planned production-wise, but as a drummer in the moment, everything is improvised. And that keeps it on the edge.

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things so they work and at the same time look cool.

I come from a generation where we were into looking at everyone's gear. If you think about the '70s, '80s, and '90s, everyone was so into making their kits look so badass, no matter what you were playing. That's just who I am. It's important for your drums to look cool but also important that you can play them. There are kits that look ridiculously awesome but they're probably difficult to play.

**MD:** Is De La Tierra still active? How have you prepared for that gig, since it's so hard-hitting?

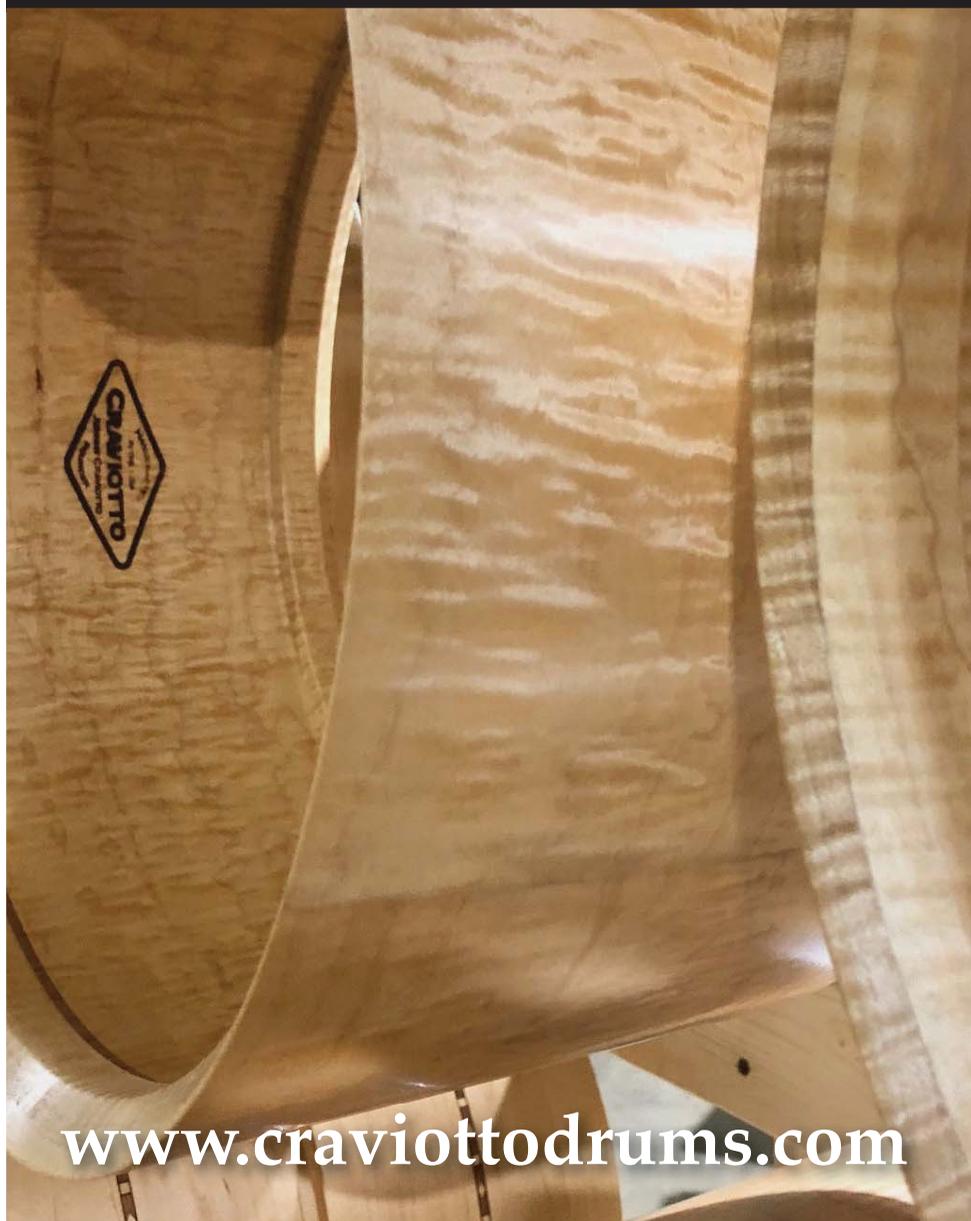
**Alex:** De La Tierra is still active, but we're in a little bit of a pause mode because [guitarist] Andreas Kisser is finishing a new album with Sepultura. But we're in talks to record a new album, and everybody's writing material and getting ready to bring all these ideas and riffs and songs to the table. I prepare by listening to what they send me, and I just practice my ass off. [laughs] When we're in pre-production, we rehearse the songs live.

The last album, *II*, which was produced by Ross Robinson, we recorded live. That was an amazing experience. Ross has a [drum] room in his home studio, and I'm on the drums and there's a guy in front of me, and we're all tracking live to analog tape. It's nourishing and positive for me as a drummer to play with other musicians and to play other genres. If it wasn't for Maná, I wouldn't have met all these amazing musicians that I know. You always have to be grateful for where you come from. There are a lot of metal drummers who would like to play jazz or pop music or electronic music, and I always tell people to not be afraid to play what they want to play. Don't close yourself off and not take the opportunity to enjoy other types of music. Because it's enriching.

**MD:** How has the industry changed the way Maná writes music? Do you just do your thing? Or do trends influence the band's approach?

**Alex:** We've always been an honest band. What you see is what you get. We've been through so many changes in the industry, but we've always stuck to what we've wanted to do and musically what we feel is right for us as a band.

I really miss how it used to be, when people would buy records and CDs and cassettes. Now with streaming it's a whole different ballgame. But on the other hand, the internet and social media have brought something positive. One way is that if you're a musician and you're working in your home studio, [social media] is a great tool to get your music out there, besides having to go



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play bars and clubs like we did when we were starting. And now you don't need a record company. You can upload a song to iTunes or Spotify. How many musicians are now famous because they were able to put something up on the internet? Before, record companies had to send scouts to bars and clubs and discover the new artists and sign them.

So it has its pros and cons. Sales have dropped because people now think music is free. It's very difficult for someone to write music and live off of "free." If everyone could write music or be a musician, then everyone would be doing it. And it has a price. So that's something that the industry, sooner or later, is going to have to correct. It's art and it's talent, and you have to protect that.

But for drummers, YouTube is an amazing instrument. When I grew up, there wasn't MTV or videos. You went to a record store and bought a record and listened to your favorite drummer and tried to copy or imitate them. Now you can see those classic drummers like Ringo or Bonham or Keith Moon or Peart or anybody you can imagine. It's like they opened up the holy grail.

**MD:** It's great to see videos of Bonham, but you can't teach someone feel. What's your take on Instagram videos of drummers just blazing?

**Alex:** It's a double-edged sword. God bless all these amazing drummers who I admire, like Thomas Pridden, Tony Royster Jr., Eric Moore. You see all these amazing fills, but those guys can also play a groove and a cross-stick on a ballad. They can lay down a 2 and 4. They have that background, that knowledge. I think it should be a balance.

**MD:** Steve Gadd gets hired by James Taylor not because of the stuff he blazed on Chick Corea's records. He also feels better than the next guy.

**Alex:** Right. Look at Steve Jordan. He's one of the other drummers who I love. Come on, man, he's just so solid and keeping it straight ahead. I wish I had the chops of those guys, but that's not my reality. It's important for people to know that even if they don't have those chops, they can still be professional drummers. Look at Charlie Watts. If you have what the band requires and what the song requires and what the producer requires, you'll have a career.

Every night onstage, I give everything. I'm so grateful that what I dreamed as a little kid, I'm living that dream. I want people to leave inspired after they see our band. And if you're a little girl or boy or even an adult, and I've inspired you to pick up the drums, I've accomplished more than I ever dreamed of. I'm just very thankful.



# ALEX GONZALEZ

#Mana

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photo by Clemente Ruiz

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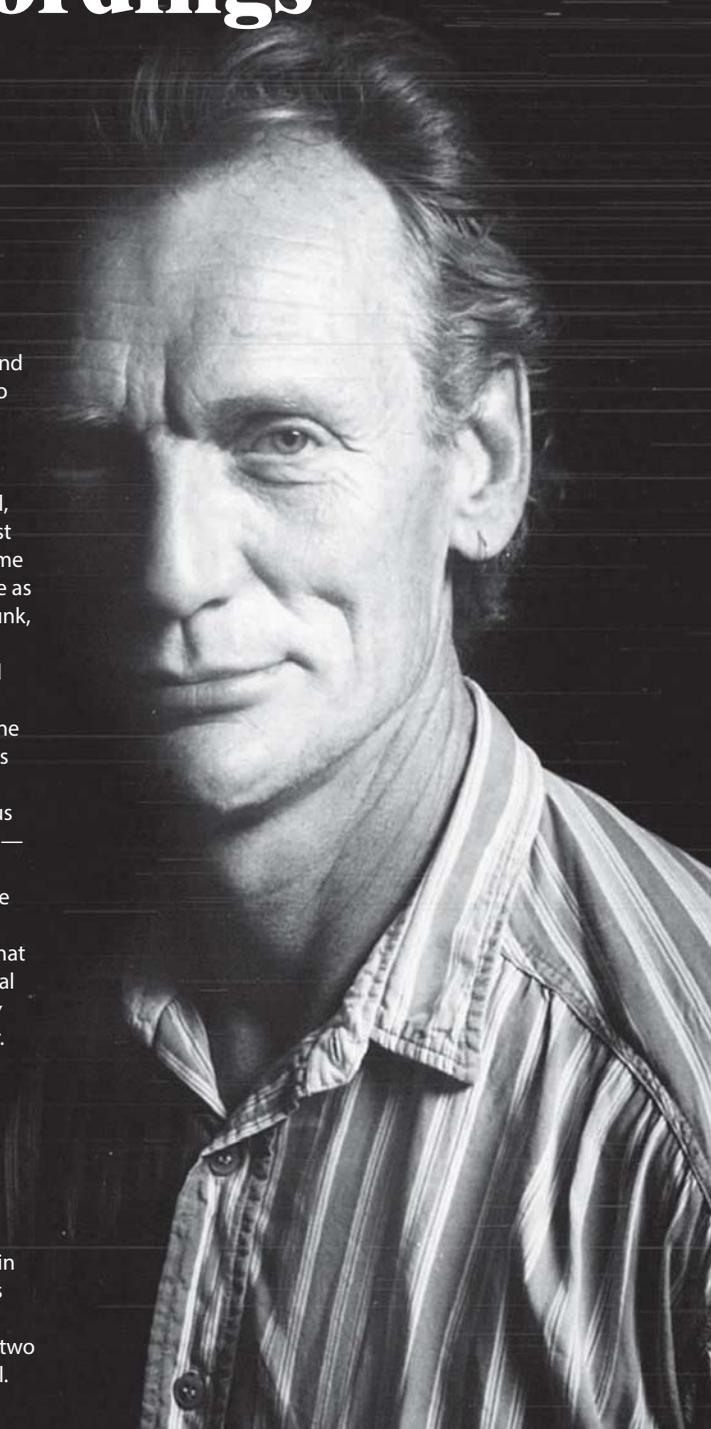
# The Classic Recordings of Ginger Baker Part 1

Today Ginger Baker is as well known for his volatile personality as he is for his contributions to the evolution of our instrument. But if it wasn't for those musical contributions—which began before the birth of classic rock and continued until his passing last year at the age of eighty—there would be no “Mr. Baker” to beware of, as an explosive 2012 documentary suggested.

Truth be known, the beats, solos, and improvisations that the drummer concocted with the British supergroups Cream and Blind Faith, with his own bands, and with fellow iconoclasts like Fela Kuti, John Lydon, and Bill Laswell, are just as intriguing as the bullet points of his biography. Ginger was a stylist who wore his jazz and African-drumming influences on his sleeve. At the same time, he was remarkably adaptable, fitting like a glove in scenarios as diverse as Hawkwind's psychedelic trance metal, Public Image Ltd's bombastic post-punk, or his Air Force's highly ambitious melding of soul, jazz, and ethnic music.

Drop the needle on any of the numerous sides he recorded, however, and Ginger's voice always came to the fore. While he can rightly be described as one of the most influential drummers in rock history, what Ginger had, no one else had, and no one else *could* have. Baker might have burned more bridges than most, but that voice, that thundering, earthy, unique voice...no other drummer was ever able to completely cop it. What Ginger did bequeath to us was the notion that the drums weren't merely equal to all other instruments—they were the *mother* of all instruments. And so, no matter what musical situation we may find ourselves in, we drummers are the true directors of the proceedings. We always have been, and because ours is the most adaptable and primary of all instruments, we always will be. Of course, how we make that happen is up to each one of us as individuals. But witnessing Ginger's musical triumphs—and yes, even his failures—left us little doubt that the music, *any* music, is ours to shape. It's our birthright, our responsibility, our superpower. Ginger reminded the world of that every time he put stick to drum.

As with any musician of value, the best way to understand Ginger's art and place in history is to study the artifacts—his recordings. By now you've surely read the commentary from critics and fellow musicians that poured in after Ginger's passing. Perhaps you've seen the documentaries—besides *Beware of Mr. Baker* there's also *Ginger Baker in Africa* and the *Classic Artists* volume on Cream. The music, however, speaks for itself, and for the astute follower of drumming, there's much to listen to, and to analyze. To help you in your research, we're highlighting some of Ginger Baker's greatest recordings in a multipart feature, including some that often fall between the cracks in discussions about the great drummer. This month we focus on Ginger's first two decades of activity, when the rock world initially fell under his rhythmic spell.



## 1960s: I Feel Free—Rocker with a Jazzer's Mind

by Ilya Stemkovsky

Ginger Baker, along with other notable mid-1960s drummers like Mitch Mitchell, often gets credited with introducing a jazz and swing sensibility into the exploding British R&B music scene of the time. And nowhere were his talents more fully on display than on his earliest prominent recordings with the Graham Bond Organisation. “Swinging London” must have meant something quite different to the young Baker, because he arrives almost fully formed on the Graham

Bond Organisation's debut album, *The Sound of '65*, with a drumming technique and flair that would turn modern music on its ear and help ignite the flame of a new sound that would soon become known simply as rock.

Bond's instrumentation mirrored many typical jazz groups of the time, with organ, saxophones, bass, and drums, though the leader's rough 'n' tough vocal delivery added an aggressive element that

would assure the band stood out. It helped that the rhythm section was made up of future legends Baker and bassist Jack Bruce, who would reconvene a few years later in another group. But more on that later. *The Sound of '65* (released March 1965) is the sound of a nascent Baker discovering his rhythmic gifts and advancing the instrument forward, by using the unorthodox vocabulary that would soon make him a drumming icon.

The album opens with the greasy striptease blues "Hoochie Koochie Man," and Baker fills the song's open breaks with already-developed tom fills and quick bass drum licks. "Neighbour, Neighbour" shows Baker could keep straight, session-man time with big beats and space, and he cha-chas his way through the instrumental "Spanish Blues," before moving to a lively ride and tom beat. The familiar Baker soloing sound can be found on the percussive showcase "Oh Baby," with its snares-off tom patterns, bare hands on drums slickness, and ultra-clean triplet licks. Another organ-led instrumental, "Wade in the Water," is Baker charging ahead as if kicking a big band into high gear, and the uptempo double-time stomp of the group's take on "Got My Mojo Working" allows Baker to lay down a fierce kick and snare workout. The album rounds out with more heavy-handed swinging brushes ("Train Time") and 12/8 balladry ("Tammy"), and though the release didn't burn up the charts, a new sound from the drummer's seat was undoubtedly here.

The Graham Bond Organisation would put out only one other record with the Baker/Bruce section, *There's a Bond Between Us* (released November 1965). More organ instrumentals and energetic drumming would pepper the disc, with Baker working his ride and toms on "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," whipping out fancy 32nd-note fills at the end of "What'd I Say?," and honing his blues chops on "The Night Time Is the Right Time." Most importantly, "Camels and Elephants" is yet another solo drum showcase for Baker, this time improving on the previous album's "Oh Baby" with a further-developed level of chops and melodic invention played against a steady hi-hat pulse ostinato. Baker would return to these ideas on his famous "Toad" soon enough, because he and Bruce would join forces with guitar hero Eric Clapton to form Cream in 1966.

Whether Cream invented heavy metal or jam rock is open to debate; but what's clear is that something new was in the English air by 1966. Along with ex-Yardbird Clapton and a double-threat vocalist and bassist in Bruce, Baker now had the "cream" of the British musician crop to expand on the possibilities of popular music. One of the original "power trio" groups, Cream gave each player room to express himself while still bringing a weighty fullness. The band dabbled in blues, psychedelic rock, and somewhat radio-friendly material, and in late 1966 released *Fresh Cream*, giving Baker his biggest platform yet to develop his idiosyncratic style.

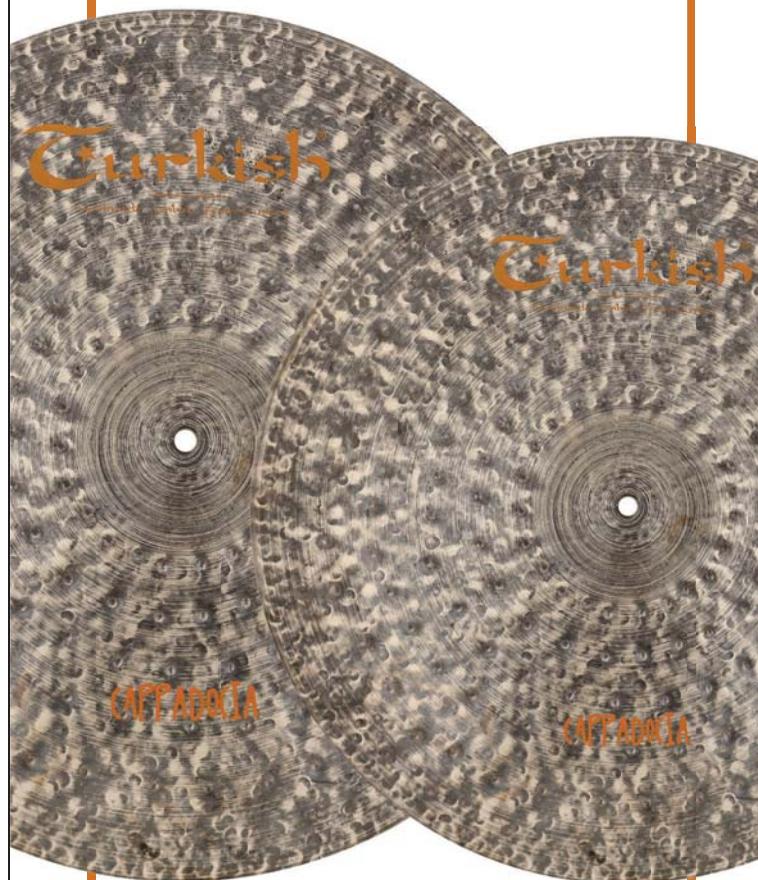
The sloshy hi-hats driving "I Feel Free" are pure Baker attitude, and the beefy toms and tidal-wave rolls in "N.S.U." let listeners know that there was now another option in the Beatles vs. Stones debate, at least from a drumming standpoint. The debut contains druggy blues dirges ("Sleepy Time Time"), dramatic cymbal crashing ("Spoonful"), and more Baker uptempo kick and snare mayhem ("Rollin' and Tumblin'"). But it was on "Toad" that Baker announced his true arrival on the world stage. In just over five minutes, all of Baker's signature moves are displayed, from crafty double bass work, to stuttering tom-toms, to him soloing between his free limbs while keeping time on his ride. This was a big noise, not yet heard on record, and though Keith Moon enjoyed and suffered the reputation of being a "madman drummer," Baker was hot on his heels in that department.

The band released its second album, *Disraeli Gears*, in late 1967, and hit singles and worldwide fandom followed. Perhaps the song most associated with Cream, "Sunshine of Your Love," would grace the airwaves with Baker's dynamic tribal tom downbeats and inventive fills. And dig the outro fade with some wild Baker cymbal thunder.



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Another signature Baker rhythmic flavor, downbeats without crashing, would also emerge with distinction around this period. Baker and Co. would dabble in a funky blues (“Strange Brew”), chugging shuffles (“Take It Back”), and



melodicism, and double bass control. Little did fans know Cream would have only one studio record left in them, as the band announced it would disband following a farewell tour.

The fourth and final Cream record, *Goodbye*,

released in February 1969, would again feature a combination of live and studio tracks, likely due to an increasing lack of original material, inspiration, and harmony among the band’s members. Nevertheless, Baker is an animal on the live “I’m So Glad,” going extra hard at his kit with power. Everyone sounds like they’re on eleven on the live blues workout “Sitting on Top of the World,” and Baker has fun with the opening of his hats on “Badge.” Baker’s insistent cymbal pulse leads “What a Bringdown,” another track that shows the drummer’s agility playing over odd times. For further study of Baker’s stage skills, check out *Live Cream* and *Live Cream Volume II*.

Following Cream’s breakup, Clapton would have informal jams with Traffic singer Steve Winwood, and after Baker showed up to sit in one day, it was decided the musicians would form a group. Rounded out by ex-Family bassist Ric Grech, Blind Faith would release one eponymous album in 1969, a record filled with strong material and timeless performances. Baker’s syncopated kick sounds huge on “Had to Cry Today,” and his lighter percussion on “Can’t Find My Way Home” showed that his playing wasn’t only about bombast and volume. Elsewhere there’s the lilting cymbal play and heavy rock guitar solo middle section of “Presence of the Lord” and more jazzified 5/4 caressing and drum soloing on Baker’s own “Do What You Like.” Blind Faith disbanded shortly after its last tour, but Baker would retain both

Dropping in the summer of 1968, *Wheels of Fire* was yet another advancement for the group and its drummer. Recording studio sonics were beginning to improve exponentially, and the increasingly psychedelic nature of the music as well as Baker’s kit tones would benefit from the step up in clarity. A double album, *Wheels* contained a studio disc with three Baker co-writes as well as a disc of live performances. Baker brings maximum drama to the 5/4 intro in “White Room” and continues to avoid those downbeat crashes. More odd times begin “Passing the Time” before big crashes and big bass drums dominate the proceedings. There’s a crooked waltz (“Pressed Rat and Warthog”), a spacious funk-stomp where Baker keeps flipping the beat around (“Politician”), and a perfectly constructed drum part accentuating an unorthodox song structure (“Those Were the Days”). Marvel at how Baker brings the tight linear snare and kick funk on “Born Under a Bad Sign.” The live material contains an energetic “Crossroads” and a sixteen-minute take of Baker’s famous “Toad,” where the drummer shows off some hip polyrhythms, tom-tom

Following Cream’s breakup, Clapton would have informal jams with Traffic singer Steve Winwood, and after Baker showed up to sit in one day, it was decided the musicians would form a group. Rounded out by ex-Family bassist Ric Grech, Blind Faith would release one eponymous album in 1969, a record filled with strong material and timeless performances. Baker’s syncopated kick sounds huge on “Had to Cry Today,” and his lighter percussion on “Can’t Find My Way Home” showed that his playing wasn’t only about bombast and volume. Elsewhere there’s the lilting cymbal play and heavy rock guitar solo middle section of “Presence of the Lord” and more jazzified 5/4 caressing and drum soloing on Baker’s own “Do What You Like.” Blind Faith disbanded shortly after its last tour, but Baker would retain both



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Winwood and Grech in his next musical adventure, Ginger Baker's Air Force.

## 1970s: Africa— The Great Influence

by Keith Carne

By the time Cream and Blind Faith disbanded, Ginger Baker was one of the most well-known and respected drummers on the planet. But he didn't necessarily take steps to make sure he stayed that way. His group, Air Force, a psychedelic-y jazz-rock-y, world-music-y project, gave Baker a platform to showcase his ideas about what his brand of fusion music sounded like. He started embracing influences way outside Western rock and jazz pedagogy, and he'd define this period of his career by following those influences all the way to Africa.

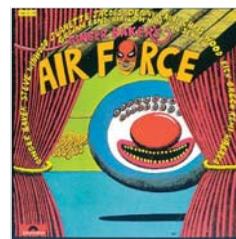
In the fall of 1971 Baker loaded up his Range Rover and set out (by land!) to Lagos, then the capital of Nigeria. With documentary filmmaker Tony Palmer in tow to shoot his long trek across the Sahara, the resulting movie, *Ginger Baker in Africa*, plays like a psychedelic travelogue. (Think: an exotic *Easy Rider*.) Palmer captures pretty much everything along the road—Baker's disputes with border police, the preparations to make his vehicle climate-ready, the cigarettes he smoked down to their nasty filters, the monotony of the seemingly endless road, the velvety dunes towering in the distance, his maniacal grin set aflame in the desert sun....

Most importantly, Palmer captures Baker jamming with some amazing musicians at impromptu sessions at taverns along the route. These moments—some of the best playing in his career—are pure, and they allow you to see how deep Baker's pocket can be. He doesn't have a second bass drum, and he isn't surrounded by cymbals; he lays down blown-out, rumbling grooves on the kits

that happened to be around, a great equalizing force that shows that he had a sound regardless of the gear he used (though he was a longtime loyal Ludwig endorser). It's as close as he got to stripping away his rockstar image. You can feel the ecstaticism in his commitment to the groove. He is blissed out, and even though that could be the result of drugs, his glassy thousand-yard-stare only adds to the music's hypnotism.

Though Baker was often taken to flights of fancy—especially after his short-lived bands broke up—he wasn't simply "following the groove" down to Lagos. He was partly driven by a desire to open a recording studio there. When he finally opened Batakota studio in 1973, it became the first 16-track recording studio in West Africa. He recorded there with Fela Kuti and cut a track with Paul McCartney for the Wings album *Band on the Run*. He also recorded local musicians there, though this would land him in hot water, and hasten his exit from the country—but more on that later.

It wasn't just the business opportunity that drove him to explore Africa, though. Its drip-drip-drip musical influence began more than a decade earlier. In Jay Bulger's 2012 documentary, *Beware of Mr. Baker*, Ginger says that his exposure to African drumming came at the hands of Phil Seamen, a British big-band drummer who served as something of a mentor to him when he was just starting to make his way in England's music scene. After an all-night jam session, the two



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# Ginger Baker

went back to Seamen's basement flat, where he played a recording of Tutsi drummers for a wide-eyed Baker. In the film, Baker recalls how much the playing moved him, and how it blew his mind to learn that the "real" beat was in four, not three, the way he'd been counting it.

That night held other significances, too: it was the first time Baker was exposed to heroin, a drug that would eventually provide many problems for him (he only helped Seamen tie off that night; he wouldn't try it

for himself until slightly later on). In 2013 he told *The Guardian* that he "came off heroin something like 29 times." Looking back, it's ironic that his first major drug experience came at the same moment he discovered his love for African music: he didn't kick heroin until 1981, but he'd claim later in life that getting clean was one of his other motivations for visiting the continent.

Many say that the drum was born in Africa, so it's impossible to calculate the influence that the place plays in every

drummer's life, whether they're aware of it or not. Baker was very aware of the way he was moved by the continent's culture, and you can hear him lean into those impulses all the way back in his time with Graham Bond. His work with Air Force highlights this influence even more clearly. His touch seems more dimensional on the band's recordings. On "Early in the Morning," the second track from their self-titled debut (a live performance recorded at the Royal Albert Hall), Baker begins the groove by smacking his snare and rack toms like they're hand drums. It seems somehow controlled and careless at once. The tune unfolds into a joyful, raucous jam, eventually landing somewhere between samba and strut. The album's sixth track, "Aiko Biaye," displays its African influence pretty blatantly. The song develops as a flowing triplet vamp while sax, organ, and guitar melodies cascade around the groove. These melodic textures nod toward Afrobeat influence, too—horns and distorted organs double guitar leads, all of which are articulated with very little vibrato, lending the music an exotic and mysterious air. And Baker's playing is grander and more perpetual than in his rock projects from the '60s.

The '70s were a musically open period in Baker's career, so it's fitting that his first release post-Air Force announced his embrace of an African aesthetic even more brazenly. *Atunde* (which roughly translates to "We are here!"), a single that Baker released under the name Ginger Baker's Drum Choir, feels like a massive shift because it features only hand drums and vocals phrased over one another in shifting vamps.

Until this point, Baker always made his presence known and felt by way of his massive setup, his massive sound, and/or his massive personality. Yet this recording strips back many of those elements. It doesn't sound out of place in his body of work, though; each measure is still jammed to its margins with rhythmic twists and variations that lie on top of one another. Yet the playing is more focused, and seems to exist mainly to bolster the singers' joyful proclamations of self-actualization: "We are here! Everything is alright!"

It's really *Live!* with Fela Ransome-Kuti and the Africa '70 that best encapsulates the drummer's time on the continent. This recording is commonly ranked among the greatest live records, and for good reason. *Live!* documents Baker's most mature and group-oriented playing to date. In 2009, Tony Allen, Fela Kuti's longtime drummer and music director, told *Rolling Stone* that "[Baker] understands the African beat more than any other Westerner." *Live!* allows you to hear just what he means. Allen spent his life

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## Ginger Baker

defining the Afrobeat feel and performing it with Kuti—essentially the most famous musician in West Africa. Still, it can be difficult to tell his playing apart from Baker's.

Baker is credited with appearances on all four of the album's tracks, yet it sounds as if he only plays drumset on two songs: "Ye Ye De Smell" and "Carry Me." (The fifth track, a double-drum feature, was recorded years after this live date and tacked onto the CD release.) Information on who plays what exactly on *Live!* is scant—there are five percussionists listed in the credits in addition to Baker and Allen. But based on the

patterns, dynamics, touch, and the way the drums are panned in the headphones on the double-kit tunes (Allen's kit is panned to the right ear, Baker's to the left, and the patterns coming from the right side are recognizably similar to the playing on the first two tracks), it sounds as if Baker "merely" takes his place among the supporting percussionists in the Africa 70 band on the first two tracks. This seems humble for Baker, and his willingness to play a supportive role is a huge sign of musical maturation.

On "Let's Start," the album's lead-off track, the band's percussion section (all

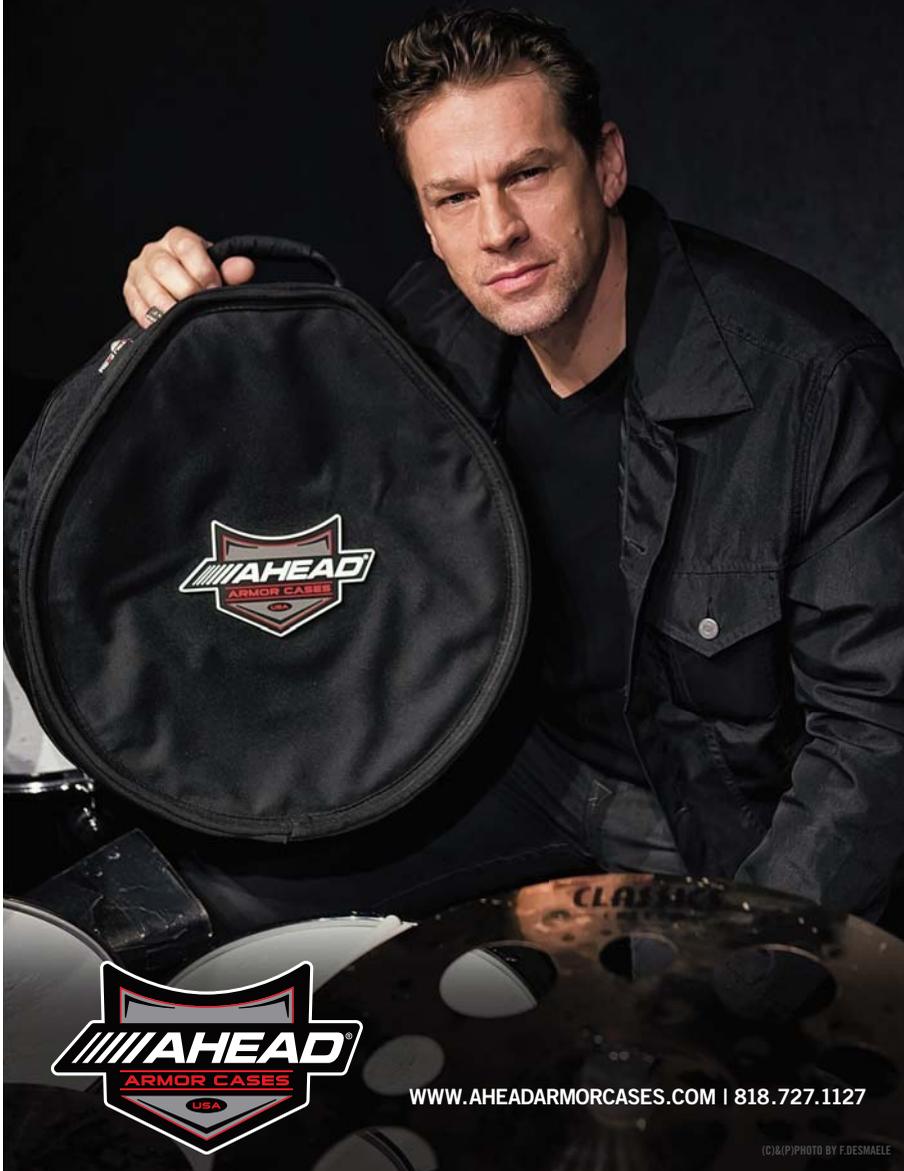
seven of them) sounds like one drunken virtuoso—loose and woozy but with intent and passion. It's the sound of precision masked by an affected lilt, and it's a recipe for infectious dance and groove.

The record shifts into a different gear during the third track, "Ye Ye De Smell," a tune that Kuti wrote for Baker, and the first of two songs that feature both Baker and Allen on drumset. Their interplay introduces a new layer of buoyancy to the group and the groove. Baker's playing is of course more bombastic than Allen's—you can hear explosiveness more than flow coming from Ginger. But he commits lovingly to the communal rhythm. Many of his signatures (placing the snare on 1, displacing the crash) align perfectly with the elements West African drummers use to conjure that Afrobeat sound. During the song's drum solo section, Allen solos while Baker holds down the groove for him, then vice versa. Both perform fun, blasting solos. Yet it's Baker's *supportive* playing during Allen's solo that seems like the biggest signifier of his evolved feel: a swing-era "spang-a-lang" that sounds like it's been steamrollered, it's so tight, flat, and focused. He tips in that pocket for almost two minutes without varying a note, defying what must have been a raging impulse to respond to Allen's calls. His hi-hat is vintage Baker, too—topped with a tambourine, sloshing and snapping on pretty much every 8th note.

Baker's time in Nigeria was cut short when his studio went bust. Baker said that the studio failed because of a potentially violent feud with corrupt local businessmen. He presumably offended a connected local businessman by providing the musicians in Lagos with an alternative place to record, and to get even, they sent armed men into his studio and seized control. Baker slipped out of the back door while bullets ricocheted in his wake. He hopped into his car, started driving, and didn't stop until he was clear of the country. With his studio essentially lost, he left Africa altogether, though he would come back to play and perform from time to time.

The rest of his life—in music and in general—radiates with the influence from the time he spent in Nigeria. Africa spoke to Baker, and it's why he eventually settled there in the last years of his life (though he'd make a home in the country of South Africa, not Nigeria). He'd fold the influence of these explorative years into another period in his career, one where he took his explorations even further and finally began to make people understand that he was much more than a "rock drummer."

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A-list Drummer Derrick Wright

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# Horacio "El Negro" Hernández

The revered Latin-jazz drummer, who turned concepts like left-foot clave into drumming staples, is back with an expansive new audio-visual package.

Story by Ken Micallef  
Photos by John Fell

**H**oracio “El Negro” Hernández is one of the busiest, most accomplished, and most popular drummers in the world, renowned for his mastery and popularization of the left-foot clave and his overwhelmingly musical Afro-Cuban drumming in general. A typical El Negro performance finds him smiling and tranquil, barely breaking a sweat as he blazes through impossibly difficult rhythms abetted by stupefying improvisations. El Negro’s drumming flows like water.

Music is in El Negro’s blood. “When I was a kid, my dad had the only jazz radio show in Cuba, Radio Granma CMDF,” he recalls. “It was a classical music radio station that had an hour of jazz, a show called *Jazz: Its History and Its Interpreters*. My father knew everything about any jazz musician. He played piano and trumpet. The show still exists.”

In the 1980s, prior to his international fame, El Negro was the Steve Gadd of the Cuban recording world. Based at legendary EGREM studios in Havana, where he slept on a mattress in the control room between sessions, El Negro cut hundreds of recordings with traditional and popular Cuban artists. “My biggest dream as a drummer when I was fourteen or fifteen was to be the stick god of Cuba,” he says. “I wanted to do any session, every session.”

After leaving Cuba in 1990—he defected while on tour in Italy—El Negro came to the U.S., recording with John Patitucci, Eddie Palmieri, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Paquito D’Rivera, Victor Mendoza, David Sánchez,

Tito Puente, and many other Latin, fusion, and jazz giants. In 1997 he joined the lineup of Santana, with whom he won a Grammy for his work on the commercial comeback LP *Supernatural*, and became a busy clinician. In the past decade, El Negro’s recording output has included recordings by his own band, Italuba, and a diverse list of artists including Robby Ameen, Bebo Valdés, Irvin Mayfield, Jack Bruce, Concha Buika, Fahir Atakoğlu, La Sonora Ponceña, Diego el Cigala, Salazh Trio, Osamu, and Italian superstar Zucchero.

While less visible to U.S. audiences of late—more on that below—Hernández will surely be back in drumming headlines this year, due to the release of his CD/DVD *Italuba Big Band Live*. Recorded with his expanded Italuba lineup, the package is a tour de force of Afro-Cuban rhythms and big band excitement.

Performing music originally recorded on the first two Italuba albums (a third is reportedly already in the can) *Italuba Big Band Live* features ten compositions that run the gamut from rumba clave, mambo, and cascara to odd meters and insanely complex large ensemble figures. Through it all, El Negro smiles and emits serenity like some mountaintop buddha. While the big band’s figures are maddeningly challenging, El Negro’s drumming is of the pocket variety, making the music flow, pulse, and pound, but never overshadowing his percussionists or soloists.



**MD:** What have you been doing since we last spoke?

**El Negro:** I’m still giving clinics, doing drum festivals, recording, and playing with Italuba. I live in between Miami and Cuba and sometimes New York, but Europe is where I work a lot. That’s not just for me; jazz in general is supported by Europeans a lot more than by Americans. What I really love to do more than anything is practice.

**MD:** What do you consider your career highlights?

**El Negro:** There have been many through the years. I went on the road for the first time when I was eighteen, and since then it’s nonstop.

One day, at the very end of the Zucchero

tour, I was not able to run correctly. After three months I was unable to move the entire right side of my body. A neurosurgeon performed surgery on my spine, a seven-hour surgery. Two of my vertebrae had been totally destroyed. When I was a child I fell off a horse, and that did it. Then ten years of playing drums in the EGREM studio and carrying drums.... A month after the surgery I was playing again.

**MD:** Did you learn anything from that experience that you want to pass along to other musicians?

**El Negro:** I think the biggest lesson was that in life there is always some kind of pain. I was taking every single gig I could. Every day. Every night. Carrying drums, lifting weights,

going in the studio, like a cyclone. I am not that young anymore.

**MD:** *Italuba Big Band Live* is very well recorded. You noted in another interview that you tried to record the band in New York, but the musicians couldn’t cut the charts.

**El Negro:** Yes, that was Arturo O’Farrill’s Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra. One of the many gigs I did was with Chico O’Farrill, Arturo’s father. This DVD started in Rome, Italy. They gave us the auditorium in Rome to make this project with Italuba. So we started working with an Italian orchestra, and it was going great. But the economic crisis hit Europe in 2008. They fired the orchestra. So I took the record to New York. I gave Arturo O’Farrill a CD with all

the basic tracks: bass, drums, percussion, piano, and all the charts. So six months later we went in to record and ultimately had to throw it all out. We lost thousands of dollars.

**MD:** Was the problem cultural or technical?

**El Negro:** It was more technical than cultural. Arturo never gave the music to anybody. So they were unprepared to read it. But we did four rehearsals before we went into the studio.

**MD:** It's rhythmically challenging music. Most of it is in 4/4, but the counterpoint rhythms sound daunting.

**El Negro:** The drum parts are probably the easiest part of the whole thing. I wanted to play rhythms that would be perfectly understood by American drummers, like an American way of playing the drums married to the Afro-Cuban rhythm section. I played [straight] drums, and the orchestra played the Afro-Cuban figures. I'm playing as an Afro-Cuban drummer but with the optic of making the 2 and 4 understood by all musicians.

**MD:** You wanted a product that would sell.

**El Negro:** No, we'll never sell anything ever again! [laughs] I simply wanted American drummers to understand the rhythms on the drums with the Afro-Cuban rhythms played by the orchestra. The way drummers know me is because I play things that can be different in every bar. On my first DVD with John Patitucci, on any of those tracks, if you take a bar and loop it, you have a groove. Take the second bar and loop it: that's another groove. We're just improvising and talking. But I wanted a steady drumbeat on the Italuba Big Band recording.

**MD:** Besides the rhythmic concept, what was the goal with the release?

**El Negro:** To bring out the experiences I had playing with other big



Thanks to Carriage House Studios, where the photos for this feature were taken.

bands, like Chico O'Farrill and Bebo Valdés' big bands and Paquito D'Rivera's United Nations Orchestra. These kids in the big band, they put their heart, soul, and talent into this.

**MD:** How did you get funding for this?

**El Negro:** You see, Cuba still mesmerizes me. We have no money for food, but we have money for music. The state funded the whole thing. They even found a way to bring my drums from the States to Cuba.

**MD:** You're a rock star in Cuba, right?

**El Negro:** Many people don't even know me in Cuba; there is no publicity there. And usually when you leave Cuba you are silenced. No one says your name. You are considered a traitor.

**MD:** What do you practice? What's challenging for you now?

**El Negro:** Whatever I can't play. I don't have a practice routine. My practice routine is to sit and play. If something doesn't go right, I stay there until it does. That leads me to something else that I cannot play.

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It all comes from listening. There aren't drummers in the music I heard growing up, not like there are in American music. It's not hard to imitate those drummers. Even if it's technically amazing, you know what it is. It's very clear. But in a Cuban percussion ensemble you don't know who plays what. The low bongo sound can be the high conga. You just hear this massive thing.

**MD:** So when developing new things, you base it off the percussion ensemble?

**El Negro:** I try to capture the spirit of that conversation. They're not playing a random thing; they're talking to each other. They're answering and responding, bringing the tradition into contemporary music, using phrases they learned before.

**MD:** How did you develop the left-foot clave? Were you the first to do it?

**El Negro:** I was not the first; I was the one to popularize it. I'd seen guys in Cuba doing it. They would do it as a steady rhythm, but stop when they began improvising. I developed how to improvise with it. It was a study of coordination that all came from Jim Chapin's book, the very first coordination book we all learned. I'd play the exercise from the book, then work in the clave.

**MD:** The clave has two parts, made of two and three notes. Are they interchangeable?

**El Negro:** There's the son clave and there's the rumba clave, which is the more modern and syncopated clave. We play the rumba clave on the [new release]. The clave is not two rhythms—it's one rhythm. It's broken up into two [halves] for people to be able to write it clearly, to be able to make people understand when the clave changes direction without having to add an odd-time bar. If you write it in two bars, the music that happens above the clave can be in two places. The accent of this music can be in two places, on the two of the clave or the three of the clave. So if you write the clave in one bar, if you want to change the accent, then you have to add a 2/4 bar. But if you write it in two you don't have to add extra bars. You put the accent where you want it and that's it.

In this music the clave is always in mind. The pulse of the music and the clave. They're the two poles of our rhythmic world.

**MD:** When was it that you started doing the left-foot clave?

## El Negro's Setup



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- 5. 22" light ride
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- 7. 18" crash
- 8. 16" China

**Sticks:** Promark TX424W Horacio "El Negro" Hernández signature hickory wood-tip sticks, TB4 Telescoping wire brushes

**El Negro:** Around 1980. In Italy with Italuba I had a practice room to myself. What I play now came from that practice.

**MD:** What do you tell drummers who want to develop left-foot clave?

**El Negro:** First, develop coordination with the hands. You can't jump in from nowhere. But more than anything else, it's about hearing. It's

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## Horacio Hernández

coordination and the ability to hear all those things happening at once.

**MD:** What do you cover in your clinics these days?

**El Negro:** [Plays two against three on table using clave] Don't attempt clave in the feet if you can't do this with your hands. This is not about playing a lot of stuff. It's simple, just two things happening at once. It's not complicated. It's just patience. Sometimes in lessons, students do the first lesson, come back, and they want to play left-foot clave. Please, listen to me! You have to be patient. My book, *Conversations in Clave*, discusses this.

**MD:** Many drummers at your level don't practice; they just play the gig. Why do you still love to practice?

**El Negro:** Because for me it's endless. I'm never going to get there. There's always something that I can't get to. I'm never going to be able to touch the light at the end of the tunnel. Because you get inside and the light moves away. You don't even know where you're going.

**MD:** If we were to hear you practicing, would it sound complicated to us?

**El Negro:** Perhaps not. For me the most important word is precision.

**MD:** How do you practice that?

**El Negro:** [Hits table] It's right there, *right there*. Play with the intensity you want: soft or loud, medium, it doesn't matter what sound. Precision is crucial. So many drummers just want chops, something fast. The most important words are precision and dynamics.

**MD:** How do you practice dynamics?

**El Negro:** Just trying to find different colors of the same thing. The same scene. [Taps different dynamic levels on table] You can do that everywhere.

**MD:** What do you find challenging now?

**El Negro:** Speed is a challenge. For that I practice in front of the TV.

**MD:** Do you practice things you wouldn't necessarily play on a gig?

**El Negro:** Of course. You don't use everything you practice. When you practice rolls, you might practice a seven-stroke roll, but you will probably never use that on a gig.

**MD:** How does being a musician in Cuba differ from being one in the U.S.?

**El Negro:** It's a different mentality. For us, music is going to save your life. In the U.S., music is what's going to screw up your life. Tell a parent in the U.S. that their kid wants to be a musician. What will they say? In Cuba, you *want* your kids to be musicians, because that is what will save their life.

No matter what you do, you've got to be the best you can be. In Cuba if you don't have a diploma, you cannot be a musician. To make it as a self-taught musician you have to be extremely great. Cuba is a system where everything is state approved. To be a musician you have to pass an exam from the state.

**MD:** Is the level of the average Cuban musician higher or lower than it used to be?

**El Negro:** It gets higher every day. They are looking after us. You can get all the music on the internet in Cuba, but it's extremely

expensive, \$20 for two hours. That's the monthly salary for many Cubans. But people share the internet to share the music.

**MD:** Can you tour a big band like this?

**El Negro:** It's almost impossible. What happens these days is you tour your core band, then add players in different cities to make up a big band. Like WDR in Germany or the BBC band in London.

**MD:** Will you have a release party for the DVD in the States?

**El Negro:** I'd love to but it's hard. These days people seek publicity above all else, more than seeking to elevate the audience. This big band has never played in New York. Someone would have to make it happen. I truly don't care. I'm very happy to work internationally. I lived in New York for fifteen years, but now I couldn't do it. I couldn't make it. You can't pay your bills playing at Smalls Jazz Club. Forget it.

**MD:** How do you want people to listen to this new release; what do you want them to get out of it?

**El Negro:** To capture and listen to the beauty of Cuban music. There's such a long history of Cuban big bands: Benny Moré, Tito Puente, Chico O'Farrill.... This music is what we've learned from all of them. I would love for drummers to understand this connection. It's the same connection that Dizzy Gillespie had with Chano Pozo, the same connection he found between jazz and Cuban music. Dizzy knew it could be one thing. It's all the same—2 and 4 is the same for everybody.



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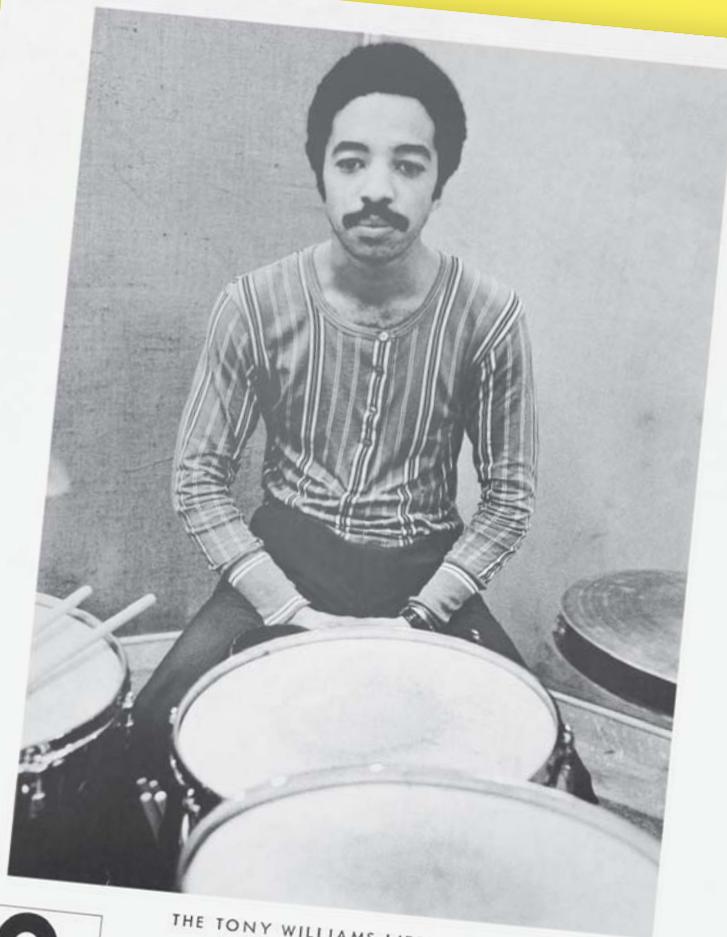


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As Tony Williams famously said, "To me, Emergency is the best of everything, like a combination of the last fifteen years, of everything I've learned. I don't think of it as one thing or another. I think of it as the best of everything. I don't care what people call it. If you like something, do it! Don't hide from it!"

Relentless and uncompromising with Tony at the helm, 'Emergency' is bursting with complex instrumental interaction and sophisticated improvisation. It remains one of the most important recordings of all time, having unveiled a revolutionary musical style and concept that discerning listeners are still struggling to decode and fully comprehend five decades later.



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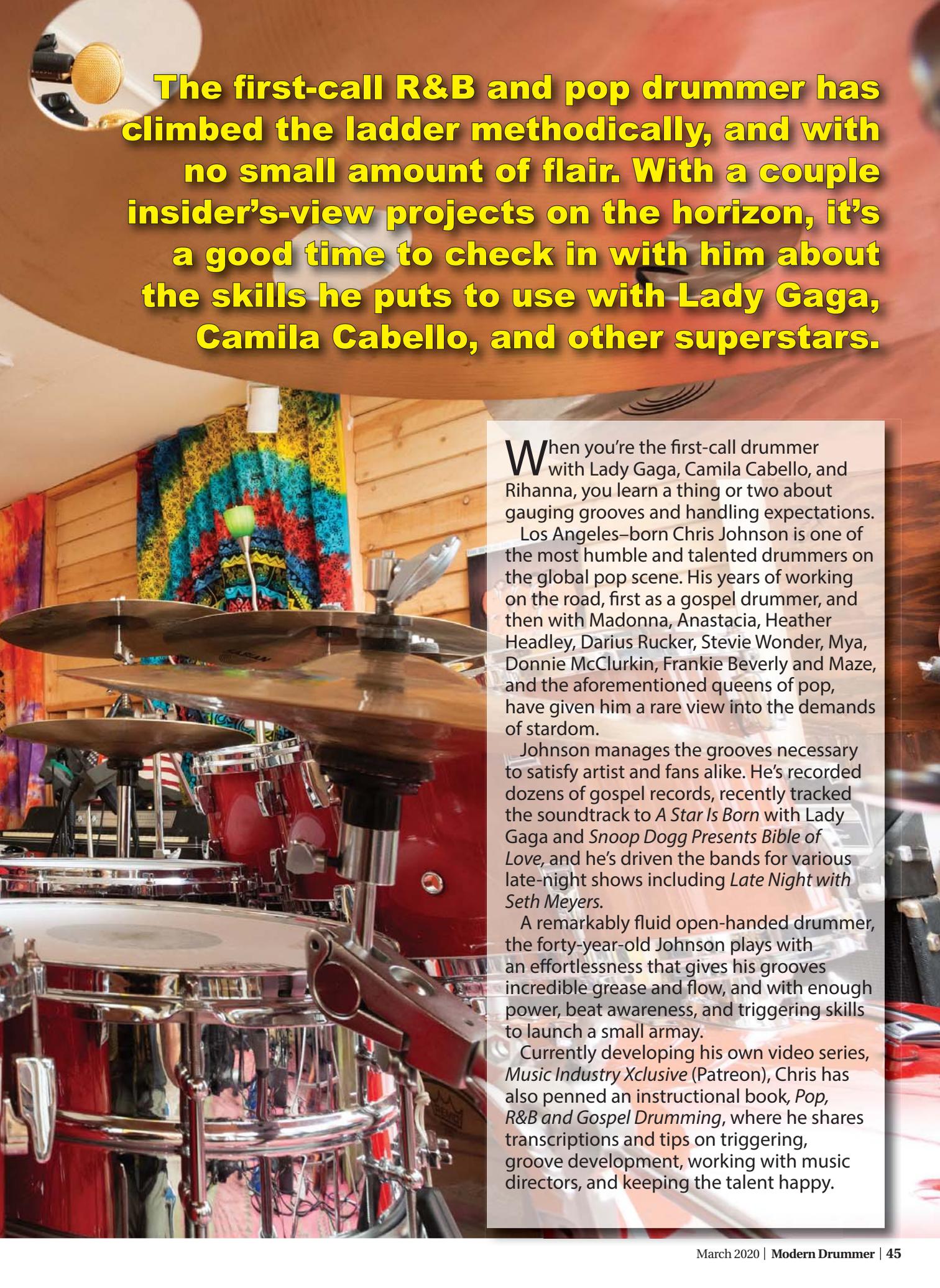
Towards the end of his tenure with Miles Davis, Tony Williams had already begun to use a heavier Ride cymbal to compete with his mentor's increasing use of electric instruments. But for the all-out electronic assault of his own Lifetime group, Williams needed a Ride cymbal that could cut through and be heard yet at the same time would still retain the deeply expressive, darker, trashier cymbal sounds that had become his trademark. In tribute to that epic era in Tony's evolution, the Artisans at Istanbul Mehmet bring you the next phase in the Tony Williams Tribute Cymbal series.

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# Chris Johnson



Story by Ken Micallef  
Photos by Alex Solca



**The first-call R&B and pop drummer has climbed the ladder methodically, and with no small amount of flair. With a couple insider's-view projects on the horizon, it's a good time to check in with him about the skills he puts to use with Lady Gaga, Camila Cabello, and other superstars.**

**W**hen you're the first-call drummer with Lady Gaga, Camila Cabello, and Rihanna, you learn a thing or two about gauging grooves and handling expectations.

Los Angeles-born Chris Johnson is one of the most humble and talented drummers on the global pop scene. His years of working on the road, first as a gospel drummer, and then with Madonna, Anastacia, Heather Headley, Darius Rucker, Stevie Wonder, Mya, Donnie McClurkin, Frankie Beverly and Maze, and the aforementioned queens of pop, have given him a rare view into the demands of stardom.

Johnson manages the grooves necessary to satisfy artist and fans alike. He's recorded dozens of gospel records, recently tracked the soundtrack to *A Star Is Born* with Lady Gaga and *Snoop Dogg Presents Bible of Love*, and he's driven the bands for various late-night shows including *Late Night with Seth Meyers*.

A remarkably fluid open-handed drummer, the forty-year-old Johnson plays with an effortless grace that gives his grooves incredible grease and flow, and with enough power, beat awareness, and triggering skills to launch a small army.

Currently developing his own video series, *Music Industry Xclusive* (Patreon), Chris has also penned an instructional book, *Pop, R&B and Gospel Drumming*, where he shares transcriptions and tips on triggering, groove development, working with music directors, and keeping the talent happy.

**MD:** You're a natural open-handed drummer. Your playing seems effortless, and you have great sound, time, and feel. Many drummers do left-hand lead, but not as fluently as you do. Being left-handed must help.

**Chris:** Yes, thank you. When I began playing kick, snare, and hi-hat open-handed in church as a kid, whatever I crashed was either in front of me or to my left. I wouldn't even play the toms because it just felt weird to cross over with my right hand. After a while I learned how to lead with my right hand, and that helped my overall approach. And that's how I came up with some cool combinations. Even on my tom work now, my strong hand is my left hand, so I can

play doubles around the set and come back to the snare drum without having to cross over.

**MD:** Do you lead tom fills with your left or right hand?

**Chris:** Generally I lead with my left, because the fills I play aren't complex to the point where they need to be choreographed in a certain way. I lead with my left and try to even out the snare strokes between my two hands so I can lead with either. In the early years I wouldn't set up anything to the right side of the kit other than two toms, a ride, and a crash. It took time to incorporate my right side. But it does feel easier to move around the kit open-handed.

**MD:** You get a tremendous right-hand

whack on the snare drum. Do you weight-train, and if so, does that affect your drumming, strength, and power?

**Chris:** I stay active and work out. This gig with Lady Gaga is high-energy. There are no down moments. The drums have to be super heavy and felt. It's like a rock show.

### Gaga to Cabello

**MD:** You're playing with Lady Gaga and Camila Cabello simultaneously. Is that overlapping of gigs standard?

**Chris:** I'm grateful for every opportunity. My gigs with Stevie Wonder and Rihanna overlapped. When that happens I'm up front with both parties, and if we can work it out, that's cool, and if we can't work it out, then



**Q:** Do Gaga or Cabello or Rihanna come to rehearsals?

**A:** Oh, yeah. These are regular people, man. It's about the music. Everyone feels that way.

I'll choose the gig with the most work.

Stevie Wonder was the greatest musical experience of my entire life. I had an opportunity to finish out a tour with Rihanna, and the Rihanna dates were longer than the Stevie dates. But I wanted to play with Stevie. I have a family to support, so I gotta do what I gotta do. Rihanna's people were cool—"Just let us know when you're open and honest with all parties, it makes it much easier, versus double booking yourself and ruining your chances with both gigs.

**MD:** Your setups with both Gaga and Cabello look big. How do you configure your set differently for each of those artists?

**Chris:** The first things I pay attention to are the snare



drums. So obviously, if you're playing a particular record or series of records, and they want certain tones—high tones, low tones, and mid tones—it's safe to have all three snare drums there just in case, and then you'll be more versatile versus playing one snare drum through a whole show. My Camila Cabello setup is 10" and 12" toms, a 16" floor tom, and a 22" kick. Gaga is 10", 12", and 13" toms, 16" and 18" floor toms, and a 24" kick drum.

**MD:** How do you arrive at the fee you charge artists?

**Chris:** There's usually a figure circulating, especially with the [higher] caliber gigs. I negotiate my own salary. They'll offer a figure, and I'll counter-offer. As soon as everyone is comfortable, we're set. They'll send out a deal memo

## Chris Johnson's Lady Gaga Setup



**Drums:** Yamaha Black Live Custom and Oak Custom kit

**A.** 7x14 Blue Sparkle Loud Series Oak snare

**B.** 6.5x14 Manu Katché Aluminum snare

**C.** 8x12 Live Custom tom

**D.** 7x10 Live Custom tom

**E.** 8x13 Live Custom tom

**F.** 6.5x13 Brass snare

**G.** 18x18 Oak Custom floor tom

**H.** 16x16 Live Custom floor tom

**I.** 18x24 Oak Custom bass drum

**Cymbals:** Sabian

**1.** 22" Artisan Light ride

**2.** 17" hi-hats (prototype)

**3.** 20" X-Plosion crash

**4.** 22" HHX X-Treme crash

**5.** 22" Legacy Heavy ride

**6.** 22" O-Zone crash (prototype)

**7.** 20" Artisan crash

**8.** 13" Artisan X-Hats

**9.** 19" Legacy crash

**Sticks:** Vater Power 3As

**Heads:** Remo, including

Coated P77 14" snare batters and Ambassador snare sides; Controlled Sound Coated 13" snare batter and Hazy snare side; Emperor Vintage Clear tom batters and Ambassador resonants (Emperor Clear 18" resonant); Powerstroke P3 Clear bass drum batter and standard all black Yamaha logo resonant

**Electronics:**

**aa.** Yamaha DTX-MULTI 12 pads

**bb.** Yamaha DTX trigger pads

**cc.** Roland KT-10 kick trigger pedal

**Drum Rack:** LADS Custom Designs (Chris Achzet)

Chris Johnson



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confirming everything.

**MD:** Do Gaga or Cabello or Rihanna come to rehearsals?

**Chris:** Oh, yeah, of course. These are regular people, man. Everybody that I've worked with has been super cool and super respectful, because that's what I try to exude. The contract has been discussed; I know how much I'm getting paid; I'm comfortable. Now it's about the music. Everyone feels that way.

## Music Directors

**MD:** It seems there's a circle of twelve drummers who do all the major pop gigs.

**Chris:** There are a few musical directors that circulate in the industry. I came up with Rickey Minor. Now it's Adam Blackstone, Ray Chew, Michael Bearden. They know one another, and they all use the same drummers. There are a select few on every instrument. Once you're in there, you're in.

**MD:** Tough auditions? Tough MDs?

**Chris:** Frankie Beverly of Maze was the toughest. He likes to challenge people, so he'll tell you to play a certain tempo and later he'll speed it up and look at you like, "Why are you playing it that slow?" That was challenging to the ego, questioning if I can really play or not. It was mind-game-driven. But it also helped teach me that you can't second-guess your ability and skill level when it comes to somebody else's standards. But he was testing my character, testing to see if I was on form. I was used to it because they speed up songs all the time in church. All my lessons in church apply out here in the pop world, the R&B world as well.

## Evolution

**MD:** Do you read charts?

**Chris:** I haven't had any formal training. I've learned how to read

bars. And if we play through a song in rehearsal and I recognize what the figures are, I'll be able to play them again. My church background helps with that. My mother was the choir director. She was really strict when it came to what music was supposed to sound like. So if you hear something on the album, that's what you play. If I don't hear it, I'm not going to play it. If I have a rehearsal, great; if not, then I have to be quick on my feet. I can reference the record or the chart, so I get through it like that. I did a Nelly Furtado gig with no rehearsal. I learned her songs on the plane to Dubai, then played the gig.

**MD:** You learned grooves by popular gospel artists playing in church?

**Chris:** Exactly, all those years playing at City of Refuge Church in Gardena, California. As a kid I could only listen to gospel music because my dad was a pastor. I moved out when I was eighteen, then I learned generations of songs. Teddy Campbell recommended me for the Stevie Wonder gig, so I downloaded a whole bunch of music. I worked my way up to the '80s and '90s.

**MD:** How did you evolve stylistically on the drums?

**Chris:** I played what I felt. And then if there

was something specific, I just mimicked it. As soon as I started playing with Rickey Minor, they started playing Motown. I had to learn that verbatim. At that point in my career I didn't lead with my right hand, so I had to figure it all out leading with my left. I just mimicked what I heard and played what I felt.

I also played marching band in high school, and that helped strengthen my right hand. When you play certain things in marching band, like paradiddles, whatever you play on your left hand you mirror on your right hand. That really helped me develop evenness between hands.

**MD:** Is it a given that you're always triggering snare and tom sounds?

**Chris:** Mainly snares and kicks. It's hard trying to interpret Lady Gaga's music; she has many albums, and she's been through different sounds and sonics. The MD will ask for drum sounds that will work for the songs. You have to pick and choose. There's a lot of big, shotgun-sounding snares I can trigger off my big-body snare using the Yamaha trigger and brain. I incorporate the acoustic drums with the electronics; it's electronics heavy, but we get the freedom to trigger and duplicate those sounds ourselves with the acoustic set.

## Pop, R&B and Gospel Drumming

**MD:** What's the format of your book?

**Chris:** It includes notation and audio. Videos will be available from the publisher's website and on social media. The notation will cover the drumming in the videos, and audio will be available as free downloads.

The church-based guys I work with came up with gospel music for the book. And there's music from Legally Blind, my band with players from the bands of Rihanna, Justin Timberlake, Janet Jackson, and Stevie Wonder. We also have a couple records out. There will be transcriptions of my drumming on Rihanna's "Umbrella," Cabello's "Havana," and Stevie Wonder's "Superstition."

**MD:** Let's run over some chapters. What's in "Technical Development"?

**Chris:** That covers making the drumset comfortable enough for you to reach everything, developing a type of response so that when you see any set of drums—not necessarily the one that you've dialed in to be perfect—they'll be easier to play. It's also about hitting the drums and cymbals in a way to get a consistent sound.

**MD:** "Stylistic/Genre Awareness."

**Chris:** That's about paying attention to sounds. The drum sounds with Gaga will be different from the ones with Camila,

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Photo- Clemente Ruiz

## Chris Johnson

because the demand is different. The Gaga music is heavy. It's more electronic and bordering on metal at times. Camila's music is more pop-oriented and more live—even though it's with tracks. Rihanna's music was a mix between bubblegum pop and hip-hop, to more emo, like sleepy music.

**MD:** "Groove Development."

**Chris:** How many drummers are in Los Angeles? Maybe 10,000? 20,000? And how many of those 20,000 drummers will sound alike—19,000, right? The way I approach groove development is like going up a

ramp. A lot of drummers approach songs like they're already on 10. You need to understand dynamic levels, intensity levels, knowing the song, keeping good time. And giving the song a little at a time. Just give it enough to breathe, and if you play something, don't let it get in the way of the music. If it's not distracting, then you're probably doing okay.

**MD:** "Improvisation and Soloing."

**Chris:** Some artists will give me space to solo over changes. It depends on the artist. I've never been a solo guy, but when I do

solo, I try to paint a picture. We can't put all the paint on the canvas at one time. So take your time and pick the colors. The safest thing to do is turn off the snares and play the snare and the toms, high to low, then turn the snares back on, or whatever it is. But the basis of it is still good time and knowing the form. It all falls back on the trifecta: kick, snare, and hat, and establishing a pulse in which you can stay in time and keep hitting the 1.

**MD:** "Working with Backing Tracks, Sequencers, Electronics, and Programmed Parts."

**Chris:** Electronics are not drums. If you play a ghost note on a triggered snare, for example, it's going to sound like whatever [is dialed in], like a snap or a clap or whatever. So you can't really play ghost notes. All of these seemingly small things will change your approach and the way you play with triggers. I get deeper into that within the chapter.

**MD:** "Technical Exercises and Groove Builders."

**Chris:** For example, start with a groove at a chosen tempo until you feel comfortable. Now slow it down, because it's going to feel different when you slow it down. And get comfortable at the slower tempo. Once you get comfortable that way, speed it back up. And then pick another groove and repeat.

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

**Chris:** I want to help as many people as I can. Sometimes when drummers do clinics and master classes, the material isn't tangible enough for people to take home. I want to give people something more than complex material.

I love my job. I would be doing this even if I didn't make money, because it makes me happy and fulfills me. And if I feel happy and fulfilled in life, I'll be less mean to other people. I'll be more tolerant and compassionate to my neighbor. And maybe they'll be more tolerant and compassionate as well. If you're not happy with what you do, and if it's not fulfilling you now, then let's figure out how to get to what it is that *will* make you happy.

Be grateful. There are millions of people around the world who'd give their left arm to be where we're at, just to play music—and not even playing at the level of arenas and stadiums. So use your instrument as a vehicle to actually serve your purpose in life.

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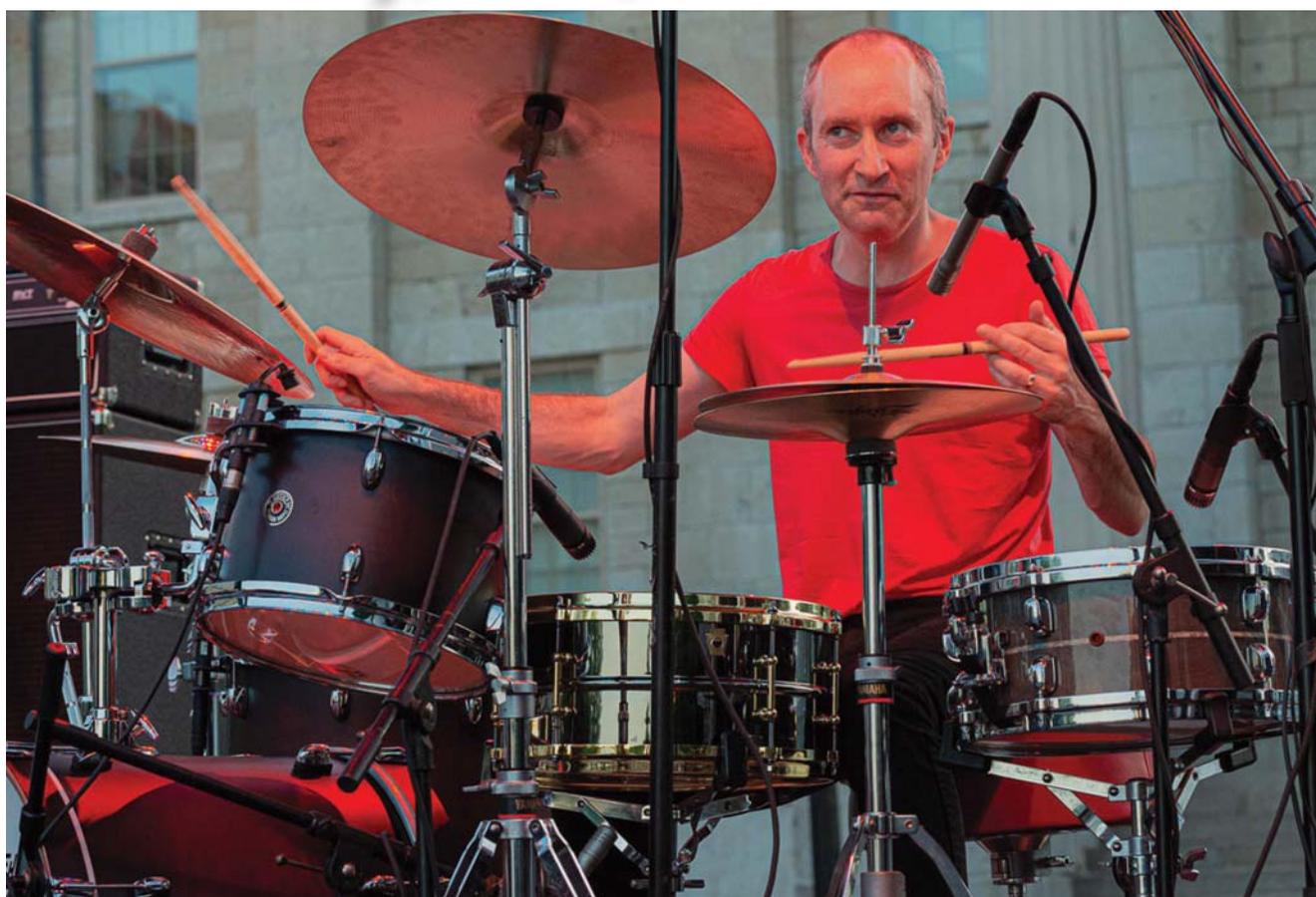
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# Nate Wood

## Redefining What's Possible with Kneebody, fOUR, and More

Story by Terry Branam  
Photos by George Burrows



**T**he multifarious talents of Nate Wood are at the cutting edge of modern innovation. He's a complete musician with the unique ability to perform on drums, bass, guitar, keyboards, and vocals—often at the same time.

The Los Angeles native is an accomplished performer and composer. His musical roots run deep within a family of talented musicians. Nate is equally comfortable playing intricate fusion arrangements and modern indie-pop. Whether sparring with virtuoso pianist/composer Tigran Hamasyan, fueling the well-oiled jazz/funk vehicle Kneebody, or performing as a one-man solo act as fOUR, Wood has carved out a unique and ultra-creative place for himself within the modern drumming community.

Wood sports a full-bodied drum sound with dry, articulate cymbals and a medium- to high-pitched snare. His tones always perfectly fit within the ensemble, yet he's not afraid to step

outside the box and augment his kit by layering on small metallic instruments like splashes, gongs, and tambourines. "I started augmenting my drums with gongs, cymbals, etcetera in 2003, when Kneebody started," says Nate. "When the guys started introducing effects to their horns, they suggested I get some kind of electric drum thing to augment the sound of the band. I said 'hell no' to that and decided to just augment my kit in different ways for every song so that it sounded like I was changing drum patches on an electronic kit. That's partly why my drums are so open. I can play into the kick to make it have a shorter decay, or I can put towels over the drums for a deader sound. I augment the toms and snare with splash cymbals or gongs to get sounds that don't sound like a traditional drumkit." Nate thinks like a complete musician, and this approach informs every note and tone that he chooses to play. Let's spotlight some of his highly inventive work.



## “Drum Battle,” Kneebody, *Anti-Hero* (2017)

Nate’s role in his own band, Kneebody, is foundational. His unique sound and rhythmic support serve as the backbone to the project. His use of forward-thinking jazz concepts paired with funk precision make for an exciting concept to power this group of like-minded musicians to new frontiers in jazz/funk/electonica.

The song “Drum Battle” features Wood chopping up sections that alternate between 9/4 and 5/4. When the band snaps into the A section, Nate plays a quarter note–based groove that glues together the rhythm section’s unison figures. (1:36)

♩ = 140 (low snare)

When the drum solo starts, Nate plays some elastic phrasing that sounds like the time is going in and out of focus. Check out how he runs up and down the rhythmic scale, creating a dizzying effect. (5:23)

♩ = 140

### "Nerd Mountain," Kneebody, *You Can Have Your Moment* (2010)

The opening bars of this angular fusion maze find Wood doubling the melody of the bridge with what could be described as a drumming synth patch. Wood places metallic percussion instruments across the kit to alter the tone and offer interesting textures to the section, and carefully orchestrates around the drums to match up with the horn parts. (0:00)

♩ = 117

\*played as a stacked cymbal

### "Trite," Kneebody, *The Line* (2013)

On this song, the band plays a four-over-six polyrhythm while Nate holds things down with a quick double-time groove that favors the 6/4 meter. Towards the middle of the first sixteen bars, he decrescendos as he dislocates the drum 'n' bass-type hi-hat rhythms by expanding the note rates into triplets. The resulting effect is that it sounds like someone is simultaneously turning down the volume and variable-speed knobs on an old tape machine, even though in actuality the meter remains the same. (0:00)

♩ = 225

### **“Still Play,” Kneebody, *The Line***

The rolling 5/8 meter of this track is treated as a funky quintuplet groove. The drums and sax flow through the beats, making the pulse feel even. Nate plays on a cymbal stack or other metallic instrument with the right hand while ghosting the snare and grabbing occasional open hi-hat notes with his left. (0:00)



♩ = 240

\*played as a stacked cymbal

3

5

7

### **“Red Hail (of Pomegranate Seeds),” Tigran Hamasyan and Aratta Rebirth, *Red Hail* (2009)**

The music of groundbreaking pianist/composer Tigran Hamasyan would challenge even the most accomplished musicians, and on this song, Nate finds himself in the middle of a rhythmic hurricane. The Meshuggah-type riffs include syncopated, over-the-bar rhythms that are outlined on the bass drum and cymbals while the snare jabs accents around them. (0:14)

♩ = 105

Later in the song, the band shifts into a slower, crunchier version of the same rhythm. Nate anchors the riff with a heavy backbeat on beats 2 and 4. (1:53)

♩ = 90

**“Vardavar,” Tigran Hamasyan, *The Poet* (2014)**

The repeating rhythm played by the piano and drums at the beginning of this song makes it sound like an intricate neoclassical etude. Upon further listening, however, a pattern emerges; it can be broken up as 5/16 + 5/16 + 3/16 for the first half, and then 5/16 + 5/16 + 4/16 + 5/16 for the second.

The musical notation for 'Vardavar' consists of two staves. The first staff shows a sequence of notes with time signatures of 5/16, 3/16, and 5/16. The second staff continues the sequence with time signatures of 5/16, 4/16, and 5/16. Accents (>) are placed over several notes in both staves.

All together, these groupings add up to thirty-two 16th notes, so the pattern can also be perceived as two measures of 4/4.

The musical notation for 'Vardavar' is shown in 4/4 time with a tempo of 140. The notes are grouped into seven brackets with values 5, 5, 3, 5, 5, 4, and 5. Accents (>) are placed over several notes.

**“Pt. 1. Collapse,” Tigran Hamasyan, *Shadow Theater* (2014)**

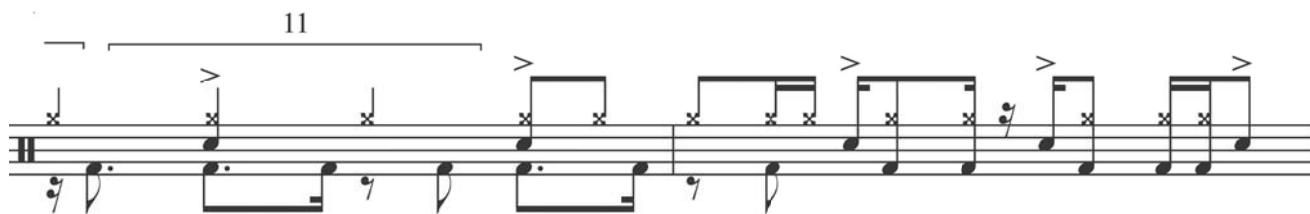
The intro theme to this song appears to be in a time signature of 11/16 that’s broken into subdivisions of 3 + 3 + 3 + 2. But this song is actually in 4/4 time, as it twists to a resolution at the end of the four-measure phrase. Nate’s bass drum plays the main figure, and the snare plays some accents inside the groupings of eleven.

The musical notation for 'Pt. 1. Collapse' consists of two staves. The first staff shows a sequence of notes with a tempo of 117 and groupings of 11 notes. The second staff continues the sequence with a grouping of 11 notes. Accents (>) are placed over several notes.

**“Pt. 2. Alternative Universe,” Tigran Hamasyan, *Shadow Theater***

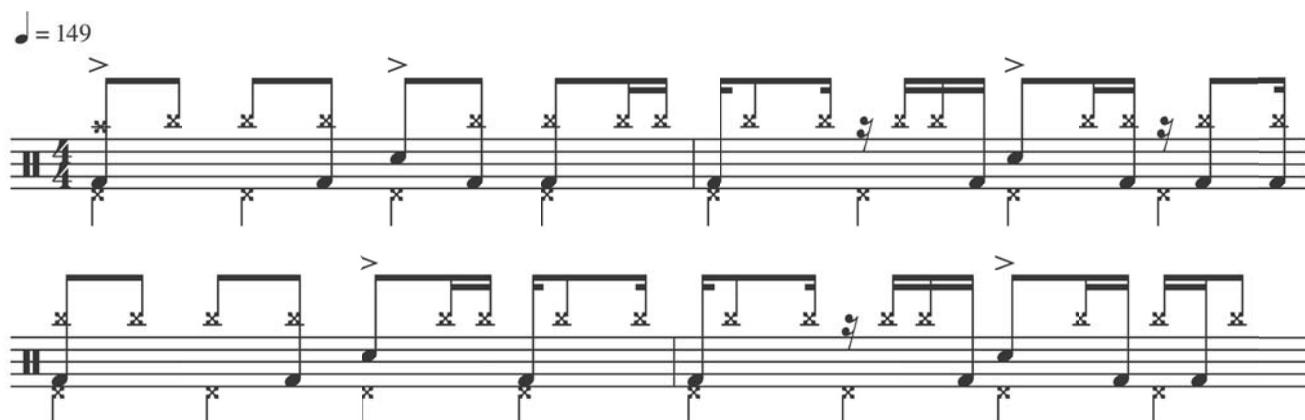
The ending of this song sees a return of the previous theme from “Pt. 1. Collapse.” This time Wood pulls back the curtain and adds a backbeat to reveal the true 4/4 identity of the track. (4:36)

The musical notation for 'Pt. 2. Alternative Universe' consists of two staves. The first staff shows a sequence of notes with a tempo of 124 and groupings of 11 notes. The second staff continues the sequence with a grouping of 11 notes. Accents (>) are placed over several notes.



### “Rabbit,” *fOUR*, *X.it* (2019)

Nate’s latest solo project, *fOUR*, is a hybrid of electronica, pop, and improvisation. In this project, Wood manages to play bass with his left hand and drums and keyboard with his right, all while singing. The following groove is from the song “Rabbit.” Nate plays this part with the right hand while using a hammer-on technique with the left hand to play a bass guitar line that locks in with the bass drum. (3:11)



### “Sides,” *fOUR*, *X.it*

Here’s another interesting groove from the *X.it* album. Again, the bass guitar is in lockstep with the right foot on the bass drum. The left foot generates groove the time with quarter notes, while the right hand snaps accents on the snare. Nate is also tapping some keyboard notes on the right hand in unison with the bass drum hits at the beginning of the bar. The ghost notes on the snare and a small gong placed on the rack tom fill the spaces between the bass drum rhythms. (0:00)



### “Tenth Ire (1 Handed Drum Solo in 13),” *fOUR*, unreleased (2019)

Just when you thought that Nate has taken his music to the outer limits of what is possible within a one-man solo project, along comes the song “Tenth Ire (1 Handed Drum Solo in 13).” As the title suggests, the time signature is 13/8.

This excerpt occurs at the beginning of a drum solo near the end of the song. Wood darts with exactitude between the snare, an auxiliary hi-hat, the ride, and a small cymbal placed on top of the snare. Check out how Nate adds weight to the snare accents that are placed within long strings of 16th notes by doubling them with the bass drum. Nate locks the left foot onto the 8th-note pulse to give the section forward motion while freeing up the auxiliary hi-hat to play between the steps. (2:17)



♩ = 280

13/8

3

5

7

9

11

13

15





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# Metric Modulation

## Moving Beyond the Rhythmic Illusion

by Aaron Edgar

What's commonly called "implied metric modulation" refers to the auditory illusion that takes place when you apply patterns typically played in one subdivision (for example, 16th notes) within another subdivision (such as triplets). This makes the pattern sound like it's being played at a different speed without affecting the actual tempo.

To illustrate the idea, here are two bars of quintuplets with an iconic rock groove forced into that framework. When you first try to play this pattern, make sure to count out loud and focus on how the superimposed beat feels against the quarter note.

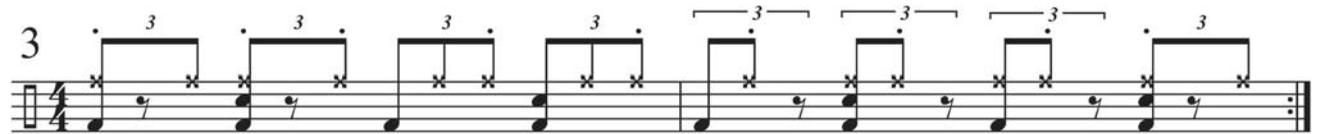


Things get really fun with modulation when we use it as a tool to compress or expand rhythms without going as abstruse and awkward as in the rhythmic illusion in Example 1. If we mine the concept for little nuggets of rhythmic gold, and then bring the pattern back to 4/4, we can end up with some unique material.

For the first few exercises, we'll keep a solid four-on-the-floor beat with the kick and snare, so we can focus on how various modulated rhythms interact with the pulse. First up is a funky 16th-based groove with a few bell accents on the ride. This is the basic pattern that we're going to be expanding and contracting via modulation in subsequent examples.



To begin, we'll expand, or slow down, into 8th-note triplets.



Now we'll do the opposite by contracting, or speeding up, into 16th-note triplets.



Don't try to hear the original ride pattern when working on Examples 3 and 4. Think of them as completely new syncopated triplet-based rhythms to add to your vocabulary.

In the next example, the same ride pattern is applied within quintuplets.



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## Rock Perspectives

A good way to start incorporating these ideas into your playing is to pick a smaller section of the full pattern and loop it. In Example 6, I took my favorite sections of the quintuplet ride rhythm (beats 1, 2, and 3 of bar 2 and beat 4 of bar 1) and looped that.

6

Now rather than expand and contract a single sound source, let's see what we can do with full beats. To keep these ideas from sounding like rhythmic illusions, start with something that's a little more abstract. In Example 7, the only note that's accented on the pulse is the kick on beat 1. In Example 8, that pattern is spread across 16th-note triplets.

7

8

Example 8 sounds strange when played completely on its own. But try to sink into the groove, and focus on internalizing how the kick and snare accents line up on different parts of the beat. When you've got the pattern flowing, grab your favorite pieces of the groove to create something more usable.

Example 9 is a variation that I came up with that starts from the final 16th-note triplet partial of beat 2 in bar 2 of Example 8. To make it sound more musical, I added a kick drum on beat 1 and turned the ghost note on beat 4 into an accent.

9

You can simplify the concept further by grabbing just the kick and snare accents from the original pattern and replacing the hi-hat or ride with something more common. Example 10 does this with a shuffle hi-hat pattern.

10



**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.

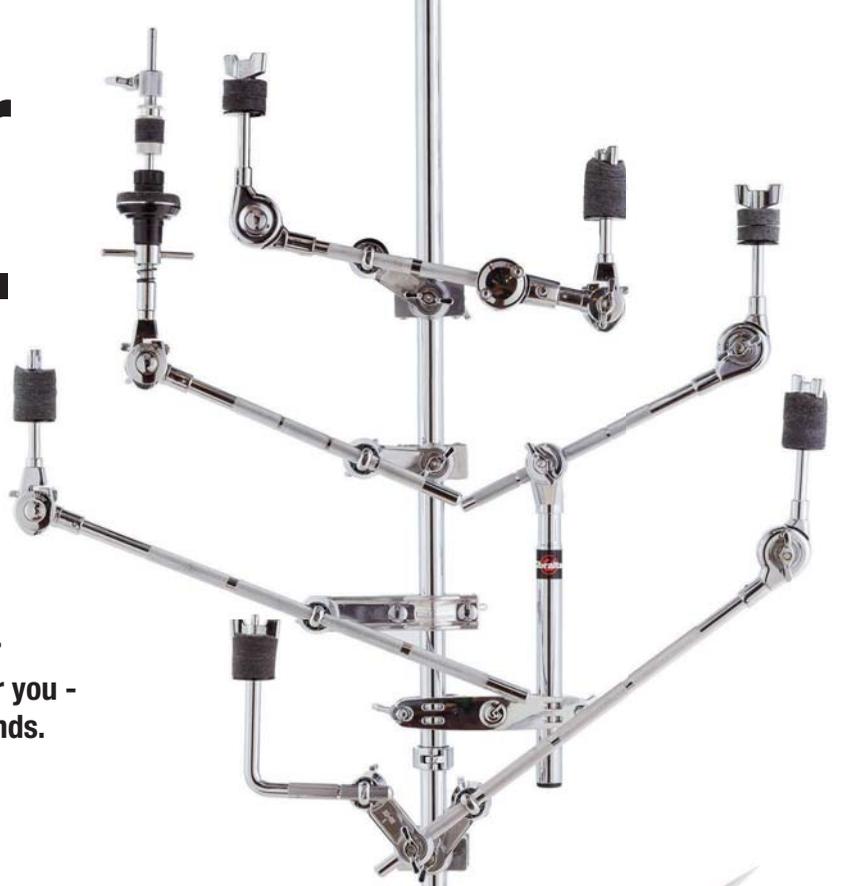


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# “Rhythm Basics” Expanded

## Part 1: How to Build Advanced Hand Technique Based on Simple Patterns

by Andy Shoniker

This is the first lesson in a three-part series that is to be used in conjunction with the “Rhythm Basics” educational pack we produced for the SYNKD customizable rhythm sequencer app, which is available for iOS devices. This app allows you to create and edit chains of rhythms comprising subdivisions from quarter notes to 32nd notes in any time signature, from 1/4 to 21/16. The Rhythm Basics pack contains nearly 600 fundamental patterns covering every note position of quarter notes, 8th notes, triplets, and 16th notes. This first article shows you several ways in which Rhythm Basics can be expanded to develop more advanced hand technique.

In Exercise 2, we’re simply playing alternating single strokes while accenting one of the rhythm chains from the “Rhythm Basics” pack (Example 1).

1

2

R | R | r | L | r | L  
L | r | L | r | | R | | R

In Exercise 3, we’re using flams in place of the accents. Notice that we included sticking variations for this interpretation. The first and second stickings are alternating patterns starting with the right and left hands. The third and fourth sticking patterns use flam taps within the framework.

3

R | | R | | r | L | r | L  
L | r | L | r | | R | | R  
R | r | L | | r | L | | R  
L | | R | r | | R | r | L

In Exercise 4, we’re using 32nd-note fill-ins for all of the unaccented notes. This exercise should be practiced with singles and doubles, as indicated in the stickings.

4

R | r | | R | | r | | r | L | r | | R  
L | | | r | L | r | | r | | R | | r | L  
R | | | R | | | r | r | L | r | r | L  
L | r | r | L | r | r | | R | | | R

In Exercise 5, all of the accents are played as 32nd notes while the unaccented notes remain as 16ths. Again, practice phrasing the 32nd notes as singles or doubles.

5

R | L | R | L | R | L | R | L | R | L | R | L  
L | R | L | R | L | R | L | R | L | R | L | R  
R | R | L | R | R | L | R | L | L | R | L | L  
L | L | R | L | L | R | L | R | R | L | R | R

Exercise 6 uses one note rate for the entire bar, which in this case is a 32nd-note subdivision. We chose a mixed paradiddle-type sticking that’s great for improving your diddle control.

6

R | l | r | r | L | r | l | l | r | r | L | r | l | l | R | l  
L | r | l | l | R | l | r | r | l | l | R | l | r | r | L | r

The next group of exercises follows the same protocol as Exercises 2–6, but we’ve changed the rhythm chain to one that goes between 16th notes and triplets (Example 7). These types of phrases make for great timing and accuracy practice.

7

In Exercises 8–12, you have to shift between 32nd-note and sextuplet subdivisions.

8

R | l | r | L | R | | | R  
L | r | | R | L | r | L

9

R | | r | L | R | | | R  
L | r | | R | L | r | L

10

R | | r | | r | L | R | r | | R  
L | r | | r | | R | L | | r | L  
R | | | r | r | L | R | | | R  
L | r | r | | R | L | r | r | L



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



R l r r l l R l R l r r L r  
 L r l l r r L r L r l l R l

Next time we will focus on some ways to interpret the Rhythm Basics patterns on the drumset.



**Andy Shoniker** is a member of the New York/Paris-based trio SOTL. He is also the creator of the SYNKD app for iOS. For more information, visit [www.andyshoniker.com](http://www.andyshoniker.com), [www.sotl-theband.com](http://www.sotl-theband.com), and [www.synkdapp.com](http://www.synkdapp.com).



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# The Ancient European Rudimental Codex

## Part 3: The Double Drag Tap

by Claus Hessler

Welcome to the third column of our Rudimental Codex series, which focuses on an alternative collection of rudiments based on an ancient European legacy of drumming. If you've worked through the first two parts, we hope that the French- and Swiss-style flams we discussed opened your mind to many new phrasing options.

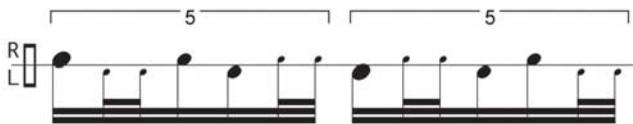
This month we'll be looking at another classic rudiment the double drag, which is also called the double drag tap. In the original European tradition, this phrase is referred to as "tagwachtstreich" (which is Swiss German for "reveille stroke") or "diane" in French. The pattern was part of the routine to wake up soldiers in the morning, and in the American/English tradition it has been used for the dinner call to bring soldiers in for their midday meal.

I think of drag rudiments as the smallest form of a roll. Both the French and the Swiss traditional schools of rudimental drumming call the half drag a three-stroke roll. That said, the doubles used in drag rudiments should have no difference in rhythmic interpretation as those used in longer double-stroke rudiments, like the five-stroke roll. The classic mistake is to phrase drag rudiments with overly dense (or tight) double strokes. An accurate interpretation of the double drag tap should be more flowing and open and would resolve somewhere close to quintuplets, as illustrated below.

### The Double Drag Tap Notation

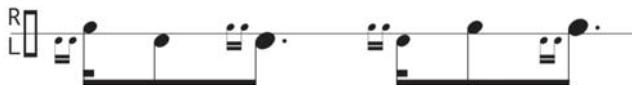


### Interpretation



It's important to note that any piece of written music is subject to interpretation, regardless of style or genre. The traditional Swiss and French schools of rudimental drumming phrase the double drag as notated above. This interpretation opens up the possibility to create reversed or inverted versions of the rudiment, as notated below.

### Reversed Double Drag Tap, Option 1



### Interpretation



### Reversed Double Drag Tap, Option 2



### Interpretation



There are additional ways to build inverted versions of the double drag tap that create some very hip and modern-sounding patterns. Since the phrase is made up of seven strokes, the following exercises show the double drag tap starting on each of the seven positions. The last two exercises show how you could phrase the five-note grouping of the double drag tap within 16th-note and sextuplet subdivisions.



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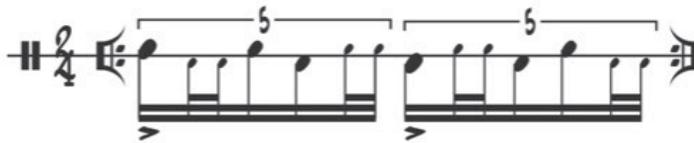
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## DOUBLE DRAG TAP CLOSE UP

THE CONSEQUENCES OF "OPEN" DRAG INTERPRETATION

US: DOUBLE DRAG TAP  
 CH: TAGWACHTSTREICH  
 F: DIANE



(A) (B)

(C) (D)

(E) (F)

### DOUBLE DRAG TAP > 5-NOTE GROUPING IN 16TH NOTES



### DOUBLE DRAG TAP > 5-NOTE GROUPING IN 16TH NOTE TRIPLETS



**Practice Pointers**

You might want to precede each exercise with one measure of hand-to-hand quintuplets. Tap quarter notes with your foot to maintain a solid pulse. Use a metronome, and watch yourself in a mirror or record a video to help evaluate your accuracy. A download of the complete Rudimental Codex poster is available for free at <https://www.percussion-creativ.de>.

Claus Hessler is an author, educator, and international clinician. He endorses Mapex, Sabian, Promark, Evans, Ahead, Gon Bops, and Drummer Shoe products. For more information, visit [claushessler.com](http://claushessler.com).



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## Yamaha

### EAD10 V2 Firmware

The V2 firmware for Yamaha's EAD10 drum module adds new functionality and customizable settings. The TalkBack mode raises the gain on the microphone while dropping out effects and is activated using a drum pad or foot switch. Players can record for ninety minutes, and the click function is routable to the main stereo outputs and/or USB audio output. Additional new settings include Mic Noise Gate Threshold, which sets the opening noise level of the gate; Mic Noise Gate Release Time, which sets the amount of time the gate takes to close; and Jack Noise Reduction, which decreases static noises from cables. Forty-two new scenes optimized for triggers in quieter setups are also now available. [yamaha.com](http://yamaha.com)





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## RETAILER PROFILE

# 2112 Percussion Raleigh, North Carolina

If you need to get a hold of the guy in charge of 2112 Percussion in Raleigh, North Carolina, just ask for Tony Williams. Seriously. And yes, the store is named after the 1976 Rush album. Located a few miles outside the center of the capital city, the newly expanded 2112 Percussion is the only drum retail shop in North Carolina and is worth a special trip.

Proprietor Tony Williams has the shop running at all hours from Monday through Thursday, while Tony's partner, Chris Henderson, with the help of 2112's crack staff, keeps it cranking the rest of the week. Tony's a working drummer who plays as many as a hundred shows a year during weekends with the Atlanta-based '80s tribute band the Breakfast Club. He often books orders and checks in with customers on long drives to gigs. Meanwhile, Chris, who was largely responsible for a recent redesign that doubled the store's floor space, manages online sales via Reverb.com, among other responsibilities.

During recent conversations, Williams and Henderson were warm, expansive, and charmingly modest about the store, which Tony describes as "the Cheers of drum shops." The comparison is apt.

**Williams:** I met Steve Johnson, the original owner, when he first started the shop in the late '80s. I would go into the store a lot in my teens and felt like I was part of the whole family. It wasn't just another store. This had the biggest effect on me. All the guys in there played, not just locals but people like singer Kelly Holland and drummer Jason Patterson from Cry of Love and drummer Kenny Soule from Nantucket—bands touring all over the world. I was just a young punk kid with blue hair, and they would treat me like I had something going on. It's always just been that kind of home feeling. We try to keep that original charm going.

**Henderson:** Steve was one of a kind. He had a real knack for talking to people and always made his customers feel welcome as soon as they walked through the door. If he was working out a deal with someone on a kit, he would usually go into his high-pressure car salesman role, which of course was all in good fun and totally



Founded in 1986 by the late Steve Johnson, 2112 was originally run out of a storage facility in the "boonies" of Zebulon, North Carolina. Johnson would place ads in the local classifieds touting his used drum gear, and interested buyers would track him down for an appointment. His great selection and willingness to make deals soon had Johnson conferring with manufacturers about featuring new products. When a distribution rep told Steve that a retail establishment needed a front door, Johnson quickly rented a unit with the accessory, and the modern era of 2112 was born.

When Johnson passed away in 2016, long-time managers Tony Williams and Chris Henderson took up the baton and have overseen an expansion during a time when the general retail market for drum gear is contracting. Here the two of them weigh in on where they've brought the shop.

hilarious to witness if you happened to be in the shop at the time. His one-liners became so synonymous with a visit to the shop; there were T-shirts made and a board on the wall displaying "Steve's Top Ten List."

**Williams:** Our used inventory is definitely a lot heavier than you see at other music stores. But it's not just about used gear—it's also the used parts. If you come in and you need a particular lug, we likely have that lug in the back. It might take a little digging, but we can usually hook everybody up. If you come in five minutes before closing and your pedal is broken, we can get that set up for you. My business partner, Chris Henderson, has that MacGyver quality about him. We'll get you through your gig no matter what!

**Henderson:** I think our selection of parts and ability to make on-the-spot repairs in most cases really help us to stand out. Having an experienced staff of working drummers, who are knowledgeable



The 2112 staff, from left: Chris Henderson, Kevin Rader-Rodenbaugh, Peter Albrecht, Cameron Brown, Jörg Eichfuss, Tony Williams





**“Our cymbal selection is massive,” says Tony Williams. “You know how cymbals are; you gotta hit ‘em. You can hear some stuff online that gets you in the ballpark, but you have to come in and find your cymbal. The collection has grown massively even in the last six months.”**

### Shopper’s Tip

“When you’re looking to try some new heads,” suggests Williams, “pull out heads you’re already familiar with straight from the box and then pull out some you’re wanting to try, and give them the tap test to see how they compare. You’re not going to be able to tell the exact sound until you get them on the drum, but this method gets you in the ballpark. The tap test can also help when picking out a full set of tom heads (especially with 2-ply heads) to make sure they’re consistent and to make your job tuning easier. Say you have 10", 12", and 16" setup. You could get a real lively 10" and 16", but get a 12" that’s a dud, and you’d have to work harder to get them to sound good together.”

about the gear *and* can provide service, is really important. Customers look for opinions and advice, and they tend to want it from drummers with first-hand experience.

**Williams: Over the last thirty years, it’s been tough at times.** We’ve had the big-box stores coming in. We had the economy crash in 2008. Steve Johnson always did whatever it took to make it. We offer lessons and a Rock School program, which still bring in revenue even when retail is slow. The music scene around the Raleigh area has changed a lot over the years—but there are still a ton of drummers in the area. We’ll take it!

**Henderson: In June we expanded the floor space significantly,** which allowed us to spread things out and make a little better sense of the layout. We now have a dedicated room for our used gear, as well as a room for new hardware, pedals, and thrones. It’s nice to have the extra space, but it didn’t take long for us to fill it up. We’re in an older building close to downtown, and the area is growing and changing rapidly. More than likely, we will be in a new location before too long.

**Henderson: We don’t do a huge amount of online sales,** but every little bit certainly helps.

We tend to concentrate on vintage gear, parts, and items that might be more unusual and can attract a larger viewing online. We take in a ton of trades, so quite often we will have single toms or random parts come in, and they seem to sell quicker online. We sell a fair amount of vintage snare drums and cymbals online as well.

**Williams: We’ve had some amazing visits and workshops here.** Jim Chapin came through several times and would give unforgettable lessons here. He told a bunch of great Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa stories. I can’t remember what he used to drive, but *man* he drove it hard. We had to pick him up one time because his poor car caught on fire on the way to the store.

Todd Sucherman was awesome—a monster player, smart, funny, and very down to earth, and somehow he has time to keep up with everyone online. Shortly after I started working at 2112 he just randomly called the store and said he was in town playing with Styx and wanted to know if any of us wanted to come to the show. He didn’t need anything at all and didn’t know any of us. That really stuck with me. We also had Marco Minnemann come to the shop at 2 A.M. after his gig to buy a couple of snares!

**Interview by John Colpitts**



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# CRITIQUE

## RECORDINGS

### Chick Corea Trio *Trilogy 2* Jeff Denson *Between Two Worlds*

Two new releases feature a fiery and involved Brian Blade.



Chick Corea formed and documented his incredible trio with bassist Christian McBride and drummer Brian Blade several years ago, and now the group returns with *Trilogy 2*, a new double live disc culled from 2016 concerts showcasing yet more magic and fireworks from three of the jazz world's best. Blade has always had big ears and a conversational knack for speaking or listening in the right moments, and here he continues his repartee with his bandmates while swinging his behind off. Blade brilliantly comments on the time because everyone's pulse is so developed, and switches from sticks to brushes so seamlessly, you don't even notice. Dig the way he brings the band back in after McBride's solo in "How Deep Is the Ocean" with an outrageous 32nd-note, over-the-barline tom fill and a trio of crashes that's pure bliss, followed by a bass drum heavy solo as dramatic as it is musical. There are a million notes coming from the drums on a masterful "All Blues," and not one is out of

place. The recording quality is also immaculate. (Concord)

Bassist Jeff Denson's music is of the modern post-bop variety, and along with Blade and French guitarist Romain Pilon, the trio navigates the complex yet open compositions of *Between Two Worlds* with sensitivity. This is chiller stuff, and Blade grooves through the head of "Sucré," gently moving from hats to ride, accenting the tune's syncopations with a gentle touch. The drummer opens "Listen Up" with an unaccompanied solo of kick-and-snare interplay before moving into uptempo swing territory, while the title track receives the softest mallets and his unmistakably understated comping underneath Denson's bowed upright solo. (Ridgeway)

Whether Blade appears on a lesser-known artist's recording or on larger stages with jazz legends, he never fails to sound totally committed and always in the moment. **Ilya Stenkovsky**

## Car Bomb *Mordial*

Comparisons to big-name progressive drummers might be inevitable, but ELLIOT HOFFMAN's performance here more than stands on its own.

Long Island's Car Bomb, who've toured with Animals as Leaders and headlined Euroblast Festival for Progressive Music in Germany, are highly regarded among the prog and tech-metal crowds for their unrelenting brutality, shifting time signatures, and utter disregard for convention. Accordingly, *Mordial* leads with the deceptively dulcet "Start," which consists of forty-four seconds of digital soundscape and clean guitar arpeggios—then smashes you in the face with the pummeling "Fade Out." Drummer Elliot Hoffman steers the careening ship here, and is in total control of the seeming chaos at all times. It's a rare breed of technical player who can navigate material with near-constant time feel and tempo shifts and still somehow make the music groove. Hoffman's huge, natural drum tones, powerful and precise double bass playing on "Vague Skies," shredding fills in the outro of "Scattered Sprites," and shifting metric madness in the choruses of "Hela" stand out, though each track twists the mind with equal fervor. The masterful execution of this complex and shifting material is truly something to behold. (Holy Roar) **Ben Meyer**



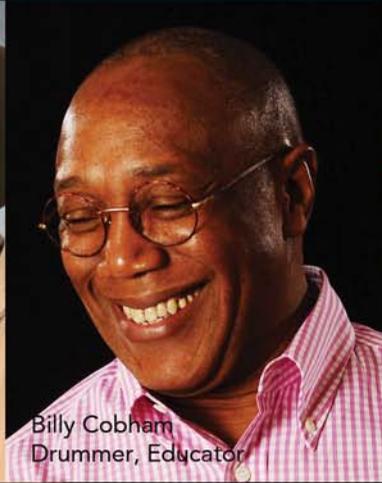
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## TAKING THE REINS

### Samuel Torres *Alegria*

Another ambitious winner from the dynamic Bogotá-born, New York-based percussionist.

*Alegria* means “joy,” and this disc certainly delivers. Conguero/multipercussionist Samuel Torres proved his sideman prowess with Arturo Sandoval, Tito Puente, and Chick Corea, among others. But his own albums as a leader have proved him to be a formidable composer/arranger as well. Whereas his previous exploratory release, *Forced Displacement*, addressed the troubled politics of his native Colombia, this sunny fifth outing points Torres towards his roots, leading a thrilling ten-piece band through compositions that are hip and challenging, yet thoroughly danceable.

In addition to his conga mastery, Torres handles bongos, cajon, talking drum, djembe, and other instruments in a tight propulsive union with drumkit player Pablo Bencid. The Venezuela-born Bencid lends an intense, funky edge to the hybrid grooves, as on the killer alt-Afro 6/8 drive of “The Strength to Love” and his fiery solo over an angular comp in “Baretto Power.” Torres’ conga playing and compositional concepts integrate myriad world grooves into his borderless brand of Latin jazz, including rhythms of Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Cuba, and Africa as well as boogaloo from the New York City barrios. Though the tunes take surprising left turns with their grooves and harmonies, Torres never veers far from his central destination: “alegría.” (Blue Conga) **Jeff Potter**



### Dave Schoepke *Drums on Low*

Organic and thoughtful, pulsing and contemplative, the drummer creates unique solo drum pieces on his debut solo album.

A professional and touring drummer from the Milwaukee area, Dave Schoepke combines composition and improvisation throughout *Drums on Low*. Played and recorded without overdubs, this percussive music possesses an honesty and immediacy that emphasize the full resonant tones of the drums. Each piece explores its own set of ideas and themes, developing and building a sound world while providing both continuity and diversity.

The full, deep bass tones of “War of the Grasshoppers” open the album, setting a mood, followed by “Which One Are You,” which emphasizes the relationship of a snares-off drum and toms, building off a core phrase. Pieces featuring snare drums, experiments in open/muted tom tuning, bell tones, and varying rhythmic motifs fill the album, demonstrating the limitless energy of drums and percussion. While some moments build a rhythmic and texture. Considering the underlying thematic ideas, Schoepke displays sensitivity, inventiveness, and thoughtful development throughout, creating a worthwhile and inspiring listen. (daveschoepke.com) **Martin Patmos**



## MULTIMEDIA

### *The Musician's Lifeline* by Peter Erskine and Dave Black

Master drummers and educators Peter Erskine and Dave Black have produced a follow-up to their 2017 book *The Drummer's Lifeline* that broadens the target audience to all musicians.

By asking a huge array of their friends and colleagues to contribute thoughts on a number of broad topics related to the business and vocation of music, the authors have compiled a textual manifestation of the careering, stimulating, and occasionally bewildering facets of a life in music. While the book has a few targeted essays, it's largely a collection of aphorisms and words of advice presented in many different fonts from the authors' heavy friends. Despite contradictory advice sometimes appearing on the same page (the authors are careful to note this in their introduction), the book is full of the sometimes counterintuitive guidance that accompanies any kind of trade or spiritual practice. Just about every page yields at the very least intuitive insights, and more often crucial guidance for the practicing or aspiring musician. (Alfred) **Jon Colpitts**



### *Advanced Drumming Coordination: A Comprehensive Guide to Four-Way Independence* by Ray Rojo

Beginners should keep walking, but advanced players will find much to challenge themselves with here.

Los Angeles-based educator Ray Rojo's new book on four-way independence isn't the first tome to tackle the subject, but in his introduction, he writes about his intention to shift students' perspective from “independent limbs” to “limbs playing different rhythms together.” This is key, because unlike many other texts, *Advanced Drumming Coordination* simplifies the examples by primarily using a two-line staff that cleans up the relationship between your hands and feet and is generally easier to read.

Here, though, “easier” is relative, and you're thrust early on into 15/8 and 21/8 time signatures and breaking up limbs into different patterns. The book continues into polyrhythms and moves into chapters on improvising over ostinatos, and single-limbed and two-limbed soloing. So it's simultaneously a coordination book and a book that's good for sight-reading practice. And with chapters like “Different Subdivisions of Nested Tuplets,” this is certainly not for beginners, and you can spend years on just a couple of its pages.

As always with books covering complex drumming concepts, the object is for students to use the material as a springboard, develop their own voice, and be musical on the kit. Rojo's book should prove a welcome and challenging addition to any advanced player's library. (amazon.com)

**Ilya Stemkovsky**



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# Gary Husband's Drum Videocasts

The veteran fusion drummer's new online tutorial is most concerned with opening doors to self-expression.



**"D**rumming is, and should be, a constantly evolving art form," says Gary Husband. "And I feel we all carry the responsibility to at least strive to take it forward. I'm just putting in my ten cents to encourage deeper investigation into the vast resource of imagination, which I believe is inside all of us, should we choose to be open to it."

Husband knows a thing or two about taking the art of drumming forward. In addition to contributing to the work of famous boundary pushers like John McLaughlin, Allan Holdsworth, and Jack Bruce, the multi-instrumentalist's advanced keyboard skills have enabled him to work alongside some of the most groundbreaking drummers of the modern age, including Billy Cobham and Jack DeJohnette. Like any good teacher, though, Husband has a fondness for emphasizing the basics, but has little concern for teaching others to play "his" way. "Through these videocasts, I'd like to be a motivational and inspirational influence," he says, "drawing on my personal, particular experience and ongoing development as a musician, and serving as an example to those striving to cultivate their *own* voice and establish a path of development for themselves."

**MD:** What inspired this project?

**Gary:** There are some great teachers online already, but my aspirations behind my own project are largely to try to reintroduce into the world of drumming some fundamentals I strongly believe in, and to expand on the value of aspects I feel aren't commonly being considered to any meaningful degree. Especially in the more

creative areas.

**MD:** How are you doing that?

**Gary:** I'm coming at the subject matter quite instinctively from as many angles as possible, in the hope that what I put across proves to be empowering for developing players. And it's directed at those who are keen to explore their musical expression at the kit, however differently, and to reach a bit more.

So in the videocasts, for example, I'm encouraging drummers to really broaden their musical horizons by researching not just drums in alternative types of music to what they are naturally drawn to, but also looking back historically at some of the game-changers in our art. I often provide with the videocasts PDFs of links to stand-out performances, to kick-start the process. I also tackle areas such as the incredible value of playing and interacting with other musicians rather than just concentrating on practice room work, the cultivation of open-handed playing, effective ways of looking at fluidity within odd time signatures, approaches to soloing, and the broader aspects of being creative within all these.

I'm also looking at sound, gear—getting the instrument to work for you as opposed to vice versa, and I'm delving into bringing as much meaning into your expression as possible, being clear and articulate. I give my own take on stuff like warm-up sessions and practice routines, discuss being a bit of a rebel on drums, breaking the mold, and hopefully a lot of expanding stuff that makes you a bigger musician. My conviction in all these areas stems, in a large



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## Inside Methods

part, from reading interviews with some of the great rebels in drumming whose audacious nerve, courage, and innovation gave me both inspiration and a kind of license to pursue rebellious ideas that were coming up in me.

**MD:** What's your general philosophy regarding helping drummers establish their own voice on the drums, while at the same time working to master the drum vocabulary that we all share?

**Gary:** It's my belief that each of us has a voice and highly identifiable touch on the instrument. Each of us is unique. Yet it seems increasingly that with more and more young drummers there are a reluctance and a lack of self-confidence to really indulge in their inner musical aspirations, and to get behind impulses of their own that come up, often out of some general fear that they won't be accepted.

There is way too often a whole insecurity about not being able to "shred" as hard as the new flashy guy on Instagram, which I find deeply disturbing. This intimidating, competitive thing in playing is so alien to me, and particularly at odds with this whole wonderful all-embracing, supportive, and celebratory fellowship of musicians that is the drumming community.

Funnily enough, there isn't anything like the same kind of community with piano. Indeed, I went through a lot of misery at a young age with the competitiveness and one-upmanship that surrounded my classical piano studies, which caused me to abandon the instrument for a few years. Thankfully a little voice deep within me called me back, reminding me there was still this music in me waiting to be realized on the keyboards. So I'm lucky—piano gave me a second chance!

But going back to your question, at the root of all this is the fundamental that if you're a drummer, you're a musician! When and where and how and why you do something on our instrument have a very big impact on the music. It has a very big impact also on the people you're playing with, and, of course, those you're playing for—people that want an experience from you.

I set out to encourage an exploration and application of such things as dynamic effects, understatement, silences, and a whole multitude of approaches that present a journey from the drums in tandem with what your fellow musicians are doing, or simply within a composition. How to punctuate effectively, how to punctuate interestingly! I encourage endless experimentation. Indeed, through trial and error, I found ways—and am still finding ways—of articulating what I need to say from the kit. It's fundamental that a singular and intense commitment to music is intact behind it all. Beyond that, I want to know the person, you know? Tell me a bit about your life and your story through the drums.

**MD:** What age and types of drummer do you think the series would be most appropriate for?

**Gary:** Oh, it's really open season on that score. Young, old, all styles... it's just about being us in music that's meaningful, corresponding

with the person we are and subsequently the musician we are.

**MD:** Please talk a little about the Track Analysis part of the series.

**Gary:** For this strand of videocasts, I give some background to the chosen track, break down the key musical and structural elements of it, and suggest different approaches to tackling it from the drums. Crucially, I'm coming at this from a creative perspective, encouraging a playing approach to the track in a highly personal way, as opposed to taking on board—and worse, doing a karaoke version of—what the original drummer did on it, or what I do on the featured demonstration of the track.

The other thing is, it's often highly challenging music that I'm featuring. For example, there's a composition of mine, "City Nights," with Allan Holdsworth on guitar and Vinnie Colaiuta on drums, that

**"The videocasts are directed at those who are keen to explore their musical expression at the kit, however differently, and to reach a bit more."**

we recorded back in the late '80s, and to this day I've yet to meet anyone who has a clear conception of where the first beat is, or who doesn't believe there's something really complex about its structure. So I've finally had the chance to clear that up in one of these Track Analysis sessions.

I also tackle the old Mahavishnu Orchestra piece "Miles Beyond." I've loved that piece since I was twelve years old, but I never understood the

routine of it until we actually started playing it in John McLaughlin's 4th Dimension group just a few years back. Through John's initial score I was like, *Ah, okay!*

**MD:** Besides the video aspect of the series, you offer drum-less play-alongs and PDFs of charts.

**Gary:** It was always really important to me that anyone can come and have the opportunity to throw their own ideas and everything that occurs to them at the music I play in the videocasts. Sometimes I tackle a piece in two or three different ways to show alternative approaches and how these can profoundly affect the shape and feel of the music. I've already had a few drummers send me their own versions of given tracks, and it's so exciting and rewarding to hear their individual personalities spilling out all over the piece.

There are also charts or drum guides, and the drum-less mixes come with either a click track or without one if preferred. As long as the tracks speak to the listener, and they're excited to dive in, they can come and stretch themselves in the track. It may just happen that they will find themselves playing on a track with the likes of Allan Holdsworth, Jimmy Johnson, and Jerry Goodman from time to time, too!

**MD:** What made you decide not to have subscriptions?

**Gary:** We wanted to avoid that financial tie for people. I was keen to make the tutorials affordable and ones that the drummer could pick and choose according to his or her needs and interests. Treating yourself to a videocast or two when you can manage it is like treating yourself to an album, or a coffee and cake. Except this one is really enriching—but without the caffeine and calories. [laughs] Hopefully the experience will be really positive and enjoyable, and people will be inspired to check out accompanying ones, too.

**Adam Budofsky**



### Study Suggestions

Gary Husband encourages drummers to approach his video series in whatever way works best for them. "Whoever goes to garyhusband.com will see the scope of what we're covering and putting out," he says. "Each videocast has a good, clear written overview showing exactly what it covers, allowing people to take just the ones they fancy. It's a constantly evolving project, and I'm putting up more tutorials regularly, working around my touring and recording schedule. I don't consider there's really a starting point, so in that way it doesn't follow the routine of a conventional course as such. It's really my mission to make it all as comprehensive and inspiring as I can make it. That's all I want to do by it—inspire!"



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# Yesod Williams of Pepper

There are a million and one things that can go awry while on tour, from the mundane to the absurd to the downright dangerous. But things that happen off the road can be equally consequential. The drummer with the SoCal reggae-rock band learned this first hand.



In The Barrel Photo

Yesod Williams of Pepper found himself in the ER two days before he was to sub for Fred Armisen for a week on NBC's *Late Night with Seth Meyers*. "You've got to understand the whole buildup," says Williams. "We've been a band for more than twenty years, we've put out this new album, and I get invited to play on the show, which is such a huge accomplishment as a drummer and as a band. Two days before I was to fly out to New York, I went up to Venice Beach to surf, and on the last wave my board kind of sprung back weird and hit me in my left ankle right below my leash. The chances of it hitting this area are like getting struck by lightning."

After four hours in the ER, the doctor told Yesod his Achilles tendon was only 80 percent sliced, and they would stitch him up to return Monday for surgery—the day of his first show in New York. "I basically

told them, 'The show must go on,'" says Williams. "That's not just a clever saying—it's absolutely the truth. It was my hi-hat foot, but I wasn't going to play any crazy double kick or anything, so I was totally able to pull it off for the whole show." It took Yesod's Achilles tendon another sixty days or so to heal up without surgery.

Pepper began in Kona, Hawaii, but the trio relocated to Southern California in the late '90s. In an early misstep on the mainland, Yesod incurred a DUI on his driving record, which he all but forgot about until the band needed to cross into Canada a few years later. "On those borders they check your whole background, and I didn't know it at the time, but a DUI is a felony in Canada, so they wouldn't let me go over the border. The Border Patrol had to watch me walk out of the bus and back across the border to the American side." What followed

was a taxi ride to the nearest Amtrak station and a few nights in a lonely hotel room while a guitar tech covered his parts. "The moral of the story is, make sure your techs can play your songs," says Williams, "because

then you don't have to cancel shows."

That same guitar tech had to sub for Yesod at least one other time due to a crazy night in Minneapolis, but Yesod has since given up drinking and finds it to be a big part of his health regimen on the road. "I quit a couple of years ago," he says. "I decided to take three months off, and I was like, *Man, this is pretty rad*. After being in a band for twenty years, it's hard to keep up that kind of pace. Another thing is that I only eat seafood. I don't eat any white meat like turkey or anything. Honestly, I probably would even get rid of the seafood, but growing up in Hawaii, I can't give up raw fish—it's my jam."

Williams and Pepper believe in putting on a real show for their fans, and the drummer had long contemplated how to safely stand above the kit and rile up the crowd, à la Lars Ulrich or Vinnie Paul, who'd stand with one foot on their bass drum and the other on their throne. One day while contemplating life, a solution appeared. "I had an epiphany: the Squatty Potty would fit perfectly around the bottom of the drum seat!" If you're not familiar with the bathroom gadget, do a search online, and it'll make perfect sense. Or maybe just look for some live footage of Williams with Pepper—you'll get the whole package.

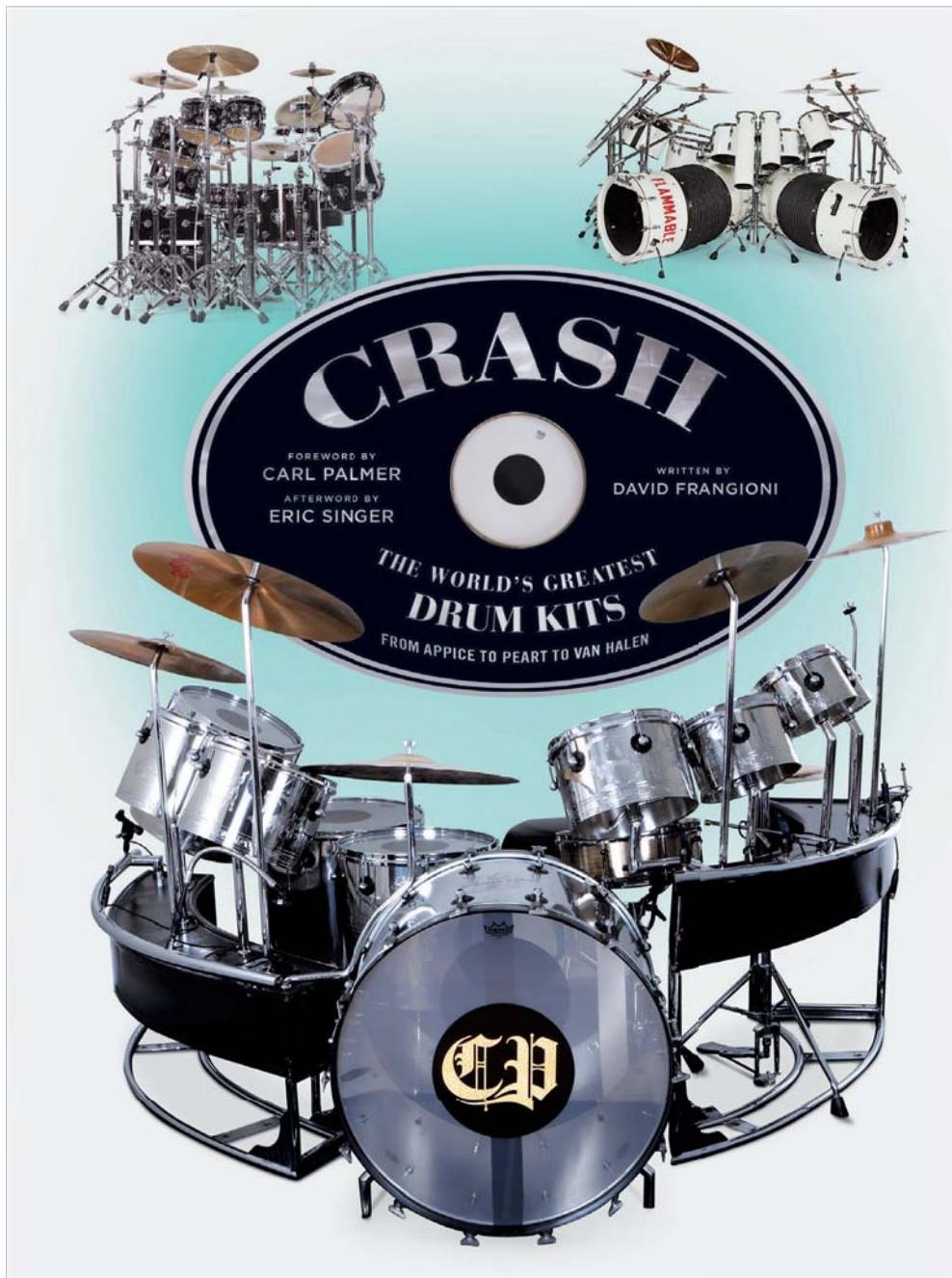
Stephen Bidwell



## Road Gear

Williams plays a seven-piece Tama Starclassic Birch-Bubinga kit in mirror chrome finish. "It's kind of my homage to Lars from Metallica during the *Ride the Lightning* era," he says. The kit features 7x12 and 7.5x13 rack toms, 14x16 and 16x18 floor toms, an 18x22 bass drum, a black brass 7x13 SLP snare set up as a timbale, and a reissue Tama bell brass snare. "This thing, all thirty pounds of it—it's my pride and joy right now," says Williams. His cymbal setup includes Zildjian K Sweet models, some Trash and Oriental effects cymbals, an 8" K splash, and 14" K Session hi-hats. He also utilizes a Roland SPD-SX sample pad, a Porter and Davies drum throne, and Vic Firth Extreme 5B sticks.

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## BACK THROUGH THE STACK



After being in the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony, I guess my goals were altered.

As I began orienting myself towards being a studio player, I began to be drawn towards jazz, because I wanted to be as versatile as possible. So two of my friends and I began shedding a lot of jazz. We listened to a lot of Charlie Parker records, and I learned a bunch of Bird heads on vibes. We did some Bud Powell trios and the like, and we went to a lot of sessions and tried to play.

These sessions would be late at night, and the buses in Pittsburgh would stop

running about midnight. So I'd have to wander the streets or crash at a friend's house until daybreak, then catch a bus and a few hours sleep, and go to classes in the morning. But then—like now—I was still interested in playing a lot of different kinds of music, and I never visualized that I would end up as a "jazz drummer."

Jeff Watts

*Modern Drummer*, September, 1985



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