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JANUARY 2024

for KING + COUNTRY

A Drummer's Delight with: Chris Karabelas, Joel and Luke Smallbone, and Garrett Tyler



Aaron Spears
Remembered

Steve Lukather
Talks Drummers

Lol Tolhurst and Budgie
Are Curious Creatures

Virgil Donati
Discusses Techra Sticks

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Cooking! Drumming!



As the holidays continue, we continue eating our favorite foods, and as ALL of my students know, I love to use food and cooking as a metaphor for music and drumming. Any musician is like one of your favorite prepared foods. Be it a classic casserole, a time-honored smoked meat, a magical lasagna, or a tasty after-dinner cocktail. A great cook spends year's perfecting a special dish and assembling them to compose a memorable meal and experience for friends and family to enjoy. This composition inspires smiles, memories, and a bond for all that gather around the table. *Sound familiar?*

Drummers spend a lifetime adding the ingredients to create the recipe for our musical and drumming selves. A band assembles musicians and compositions that create smiles, memories, and a bond with anyone who hears us.

Take this month's cover story of for KING + COUNTRY. Joel and Luke Smallbone have built on the songwriting of White Heart, Amy Grant, and the music they experienced growing up and performing with family members and at church. Luke Smallbone added drumming to his own recipe and was inspired by drummer Aaron Sterling. Today, Luke Smallbone plays a marching snare in the band's live show.

When drummer Garrett Tyler was added to for KING + COUNRTY; he added an additional percussive voice to the live performances. The expertise he gained from his involvement in the Blue Devil's drum corps helped him orchestrate percussion in Joel and Luke's music. The rudimental approach of Steve Gadd is a huge musical ingredient in Garret's own recipe. His multi-instrumentalist background added a unique taste, as did his work with Judah and the Lion. Garrett added considerable measurements of Questlove, J. Dilla., and various Nashville drummers to his own musical recipe.

Percussionist Chris Karabelas is the icing on for KING + COUNTRY's musical cake. Chris' early ingredients came from Taylor Hawkins, Mark Walker, Dennis Chambers, Stevie Wonder, and Washington DC's native Go-Go music. But his love of percussion was sparked in college by playing Bach *Chorale's* on marimba. Ed Uribe's book's sparked Chris' self-study in Afro-Cuban and Brazilian percussion. Chris continued with his own study of salsa music. However, it is Chris' experience playing musical theater that is the main ingredient that he brings to for KING + COUNTRY. They refer to his percussive icing as "perc-world."

It should also be mentioned that the extensive study that both Garrett and Chris have done with the legendary Chester Thompson (Frank Zappa, Weather Report, Genesis, Phil Collins) at Belmont University has become an integral ingredient in both of their musical recipes. Chester's teaching is an invisible ingredient to for KING + COUNTRY.

Ponder ALL of the musical ingredients that have gone into the for KING + COUNTRY live show. It is a four-course meal of drum inspired music, including several tasty dishes of drums and percussion that feature a plethora of fresh musical and drumming ingredients.

Dinner is served!

Mark Griffith
"Head Chef"
Editor-in-Chief, Director of Content

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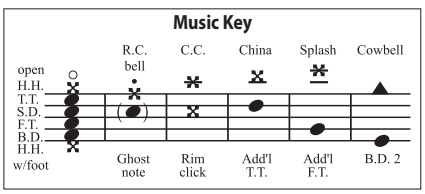
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Bruce's Original Ludwig Vistalite's





This month's Kit of the Month comes to us from Bruce DeVino. Bruce tells us, "Last June on Father's Day, I attended a church rummage sale. I purchased these Ludwig 1976 Vistalite Series E Black and White Pattern drums in their original cases. These were in a storage unit of a person who had passed away and the family donated them to the church for the sale. There wasn't a snare, but there were Zildjian cymbals, a Roger's Big Foot pedal, and an old Tama pedal in the trap case. All the drums needed was a nice cleaning inside and out, I also did some light work around the bass drum rims. I am a percussionist of over 50 years in every genre, and with the 50th anniversary of the Ludwig Vistalite's, it was no coincidence that I was the one to purchase these classic drums. The family tells me that the drums and cymbals have not been played in over 35 years. I made a very good donation to the organization and took home what you see. I am amazed at this discovery and find. The drums are standard sizes with a 14 x 22 bass drum, 8 x 12 tom, 9 x 13 tom, and a 16 x 16 floor tom. The cymbals are all Zildjian with a 24" Ride, 15" Rock Beat Hi Hats, 16" and 18" Crashes." Congrats on your discovery and refurbishing of some classic old drums Bruce!



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It's a New Year, Twelve Advice's of the Holidays

By Peter Erskine

Now is a good time to pass along some drumming tips that are important to me, and I hope that you will find these helpful as well. I will list them in numerical sequence, but not necessarily in any order. Here are my *Twelve Advice's of The Holidays* …

1. Warm-Up before any rehearsal or gig. Find a simple and reliable routine that works for you. Warming-up should be an enjoyable part of your playing universe. Make time for it and find a space for yourself. My favorite warm-up consists of playing softly and slowly on a practice pad so my brain — informed by my eyes, ears, hands, and arms — can evaluate and appreciate the sound and the motion I'm producing. This process is meditative and deceptively productive in terms of improving mobility as well as touch. Are my rebounds the same in both hands? Is the angle of my strokes the same? How is my tone? What doesn't feel right as far as my body architecture goes? How's my posture? What are my fingers, shoulders, and elbows doing? And so on…

Vic Firth counseled me some years ago that warming up would become more and more necessary as I aged. While growing older, my go-to warm-up exercise is the same routine that was first shown to me over fifty years ago by Professor George Gaber. Beginning with the right hand, I play 8 strokes, followed by 8 strokes with the left; then 7(R), 7(L), 6(R), 6(L), 5(R), 5(L), and so on. It looks like this:

8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L

This warm-up can be played either unaccented, or with an accent at the beginning of each hand's new sequence. You can also play these in unison (without flams). I've played this exercise dutifully over the years, but never so mindfully as I do now—or as SOFT as I do now. This warm-up is like a communion and benediction for me. This approach was inspired by learning the following about the late great cellist Pablo Casals (1876–1973): "Casals attributes his long life and youthfulness to his habit of playing Bach's "Preludes and Fugues" on the piano every morning. This communion renews his spirit and creates a cheerful mood with which to begin the day's work. 'Each day I am born anew,' he says." Okay, so "8-7-6-5-4-etc." is *not* Bach, but I treat this mechanical exercise in much the same way.

I find music in this warm-up by concentrating on the TONE my sticks are making on a PRACTICE PAD (yes!) I have found the best way to do this is to limit the rebound height as well as velocity of the sticks, AND the speed of the strokes. FAST and LOUD are NOT the goals here; quite the contrary: I am using this moment to say hello to my hands, fingers, elbows, back, ears, mind, sticks, the pad, the room, and life itself. 8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 and back up to 8 again. Then I migrate to improvised singles and doubles on the pad—always paying attention to stick heights, rebound angles, and sound. If a practice pad is not practical — and I'm already on-stage with the show beginning soon— I can use my right thigh as a practice surface. *So much for tone.*

Warming up not only prepares our body, it also improves our confidence. Drumming is a game of inches; more precisely, it is a game of milliseconds. Even the slightest delay as a result of the drummer second-guessing his or her choice can result in a beat that simply does not feel "*right*." In my experience, warming up not only improves my playing, but my body hurts less after I'm done playing for the day. It's a win-win. It's fun and it's good for you. *Treat this spinach like a cookie.*

2. Always include a pencil and a drum key in your stickbag. I have learned to make it a habit to also include a couple of cymbal stand felt washers and a spare hi-hat clutch for good measure. It's not a bad idea to also pack some form of muffling for your snare and bass drum. Just in case the music requires less-than-more ring (often dependent on the acoustics of the space you're in as well as the proximity of the microphones, if any, to your drumheads).

Why a pencil? In case there's music to be read. Have you ever seen one of those "F U CN RD THS" (If you can read this…) messages? Well, if you can read what I'm writing, then you're old enough to be able to read music, and there's no excuse to not knowing how to do it. Unless your name is Buddy Rich or Dennis Chambers, please learn how to read music. It's simple, it's essential, and it opens an entire universe of playing possibilities for you. Having a pencil at a rehearsal or recording marks you as a player of professional capacity. Not being able to read means, literally, being illiterate. *That's no badge of honor.*

3. If you find yourself playing in a unionized performance space (a venue that is staffed with crew members who belong to the I.A.T.S.E. labor union), **respect the rules of the house**. This is as simple as introducing yourself to the crew boss and saying, "Hi, my name is Peter, I will be playing drums tonight. I just want to make sure I'm respecting the house rules: is it okay for me to move my drums onto the stage?" (Some union houses have VERY specific rules regarding who touches what and when.) This simple introduction informs the union that I understand the situation and that I am conveying respect to THEM. This ALWAYS results in a hassle-free experience for the remainder of the engagement. NOT doing this can invite trouble.

Some venues have a policy of the stage being "dark" between soundcheck and showtime. RESPECT THAT. If you're a member of a touring band, your stage or band manager will most certainly tell you and your bandmates about this. Violating a dark stage (something as simple as going onto the stage to retrieve your sticks so you can warm up) can result in a violation and a fine that the promoter will have to pay. This all sounds onerous, but these rules protect the workers who present shows on these stages. RESPECT THE HOUSE RULES and show this respect to the hard-working men and women of the craft unions. *This is one City Hall you that cannot fight.*

4. While you're introducing yourself to the crew, extend a pleasant hello to the sound team when playing a show. **Establish a friendly rapport with the sound crew**, this keeps the rest of the day pleasant and productive for all concerned. Learn their names, especially the monitor mixer's. If I'm going to say anything to the person responsible for my sound out front, I might start off with a friendly, "Please let me know if any of my drums are misbehaving," which indicates that I'm open to suggestion and am cooperative, while also communicating that I am in charge of my sound and that I will let him or her know if any of THEIR sonic choices are misbehaving. Production can and ought to be a two-way street. By the way, one of the signs on my street says that a microphone too close to a drumhead will not sound natural. *No tailgating!*

5. When on-stage, try to **keep the stage volume as low as possible** in terms of monitor levels. You can thank me now or you can thank me later, but excessive monitor levels anywhere on-stage are a certain cause for bad sound out front as well as lousy musical communication when you are playing. This may seem counter-intuitive, because what is the purpose of a monitor other than to provide full and complete sonic disclosure? Here's a simple rule: if you can't hear another instrument on-stage, then the odds are that you're playing too loud. Monitor mixers are used to vocalists or instrumentalists preferring to have everything LOUD in their monitors (often with a lot of reverb). Side wedges (communal monitor speakers positioned at the side of the stage facing towards the band) are often louder than need be, but because they are not in front of any one player or person, no one thinks to speak up and say, "Hey, that's louder than it needs to be." *Try it, you'll like it.*

6. My stage rider is simple when my group goes on tour. We reserve one page for the following message in really big letters:

NO SUBWOOFERS

There's a useful anecdote involving the great funk saxophonist Maceo Parker (who worked with James Brown) during a soundcheck. When he heard the low-end mess being created by the front of house engineer who was turning up the subwoofer, he stopped and motioned, explaining that, "The funk is not down there… the funk is up here." Think about some of your favorite recordings: is there a boatload of sub-frequency house-rattling bass? No.

Subwoofers can cause all manner of sonic havoc when an acoustic bass is being pumped through the house PA. Add an acoustic piano, ringing toms, perhaps a bass drum, and a hollow riser or stage? And it will NOT sound good. When it's not too loud and dialed-in carefully, a big ol' PA system can work wonders. But some engineers think that loud bass is the answer to everything. **Avoid unnatural loudness** with any instrument, especially the bass. *You're welcome.*

7. There are different ways to accomplish this ask, but you'll be doing your band a favor if you can **perform part of your on-stage soundcheck with the front of house system turned OFF.** It's impossible to know what sound you're initially creating and getting on-stage if the front of house engineer is second-guessing or trying to dial-in sounds while you're attempting to set stage levels. This invites and requires that you take control of the situation. Not always an easy thing to do when it's not your band. I do not hesitate to speak up about sound these days. **Hear something, say something**. *Life is too short.*

8. Meanwhile, in the studio, when practicing or working, **please practice headphone safety.** When wearing headphones and not tracking, get into the habit of pushing the ear cups off-center so that you can hear if someone calls your name. You also reduce the odds of being on the wrong end of an accidental snap, crackle, or pop. I can also recommend learning to use headphones with one phone pushed off the ear so that you hear the acoustic sound, balance, and level you are creating at the kit. Depending on the headset, you may not realize how softly or loudly you're actually playing.

9. Don't be shy to **know your worth** and state it in terms of getting paid. This can be a delicate art. Often, I will respond to the "how much do you want?" question with an honest, "You know your budget better than I do. What are my services worth to the project?" Some gigs are budget conscious. We will find ourselves sometimes playing for low or no money wages, but this is not *always* a bad thing. YOU have to figure out the ratio and cost-benefit to the experience and/or exposure you're getting versus a fair and respectable wage. *The math is rarely perfect*. That said, I tend not to count the money in front of a client when I'm paid in cash, and I do try to clarify the fee before the gig.

Keep a work diary; once you're busy, it's so easy to remember all of the particulars about a job if you've written it down, and it's fun to review your work in later years. The tax authorities think that this is a good idea, too. While I'm at it: **Pay your taxes.**

10. Do your homework. How do I play something? I LISTEN to THAT music. If you can hear it, then you can sing it. And if you can sing it, then you can play it. It's that simple. Oh yeah, *don't forget to practice.*

11. My father once told me, **"You have to give something to someone before you try to take something away."** Meaning: be kind, be diplomatic, say something to help and not to hurt, and if you need a favor (musical or otherwise), you'll accomplish more by complimenting another player before asking them to do something different versus just attacking them with an admonition like, "Hey, don't do that."

Breathe deep. Be aware of your posture. Appreciate — even love — the people you are creating with. It is a privilege to be able to make music with others. And I'll go out on a Christmas tree limb here and state that **drumming really is all about making music with others.**

12. Finally... **It is a bass drum, NOT a kick drum.**

I want to thank *Modern Drummer* for giving me this platform every month. Wishing you all a healthy, happy, and prosperous new year. Peace and safety to all.



Check out Peter's drummer profile page, and get a copy of his Legends book at moderndrummer.com

NEW and NOTABLE

DW Design Series Snares: Now In Aluminum

The Drum Workshop Design Series® range has been expanded with the addition of two Aluminum snare drums. The new thin, beaded, matte aluminum snares are superbly versatile with a distinctive sound for classic onstage vibes.

The Design Series® snare has a 1mm rolled Aluminum shell and features high-end DW hardware including: The DW MAG™ throw-off which allows drummers to precisely adjust snare tension with a smooth, friction-free easy action, DW's True-Pitch® rods that offer more exact tuning, low-mass mini-turret lugs for reduced shell tension, DW TrueTone® snare wires and rounded triple-flange hoops to provide drummers with open attack and rim shots.



The new Design Series® Aluminum snare is available in two sizes, 5½x14" and 6½x14". With thin beaded aluminum shells, these snares offer a more resonant tone with more overtones than their thicker rolled-shell cousins, while producing a rounder attack with drier resonance. The drums classy matte finish with DW patented chrome hardware. To find out more about The Design Series® Aluminum snare please go to **dwdrums.com/**

Melodics Announces Revolutionary New Program for Acoustic Drums And Partnership with DrumChannel

Melodics, the leading music educational app for keys, pads and electronic drums, is excited to announce the upcoming launch of its highly anticipated Acoustic Drums program. For the first time, all beginner drummers and music enthusiasts can now learn to play the drums in a fun and interactive way, right from their own devices. Limited VIP spots are available for incentives like early access, exclusive song content, and important updates prior to the launch. New and existing customers can sign up for the VIP list at **https://melodics.com/drums-vip.**

The new Acoustic Drums program from Melodics provides users with access to a comprehensive curriculum designed to teach drumming techniques, rhythm, and coordination. This first-of-its-kind program combines a mix of high-quality guided lessons, practice exercises, play-along songs and real-time feedback to help aspiring percussionists begin their journey towards playing drums. This program is designed to revolutionize the way drummers learn and practice their craft.

What sets Melodics' Acoustic Drums program apart is its unique approach to learning. Traditional online learning methods do not provide sufficient user feedback on playing technique or progress. Melodics' program utilizes an interactive system in which drummers get real-time feedback— so they know they are hitting the right beat, and can track their progress over time, enhancing understanding and engagement. This progressive method makes it easier for beginners to grasp the fundamentals of drumming and develop a solid foundation of skills, with a personalized online experience that is much closer to a drum tutor, for a fraction of the cost.



One of the key features of Acoustic Drums is its innovative new technology that was created to provide instantaneous feedback, leveraging machine learning and advanced sound detection technology. Users can calibrate their acoustic drum kits to the app which then analyses the user's performance in real-time, providing instant feedback to help them improve their timing, technique, and overall drumming skills. This interactive feedback system makes practicing enjoyable and effective, helping users progress at their own pace; built in motivational mechanics make practice fun and engaging which keeps them drumming for longer.

Through Melodics for Acoustic Drums, users can choose their preferred learning path and set goals to track their progress. The app also offers a wide range of drumming exercises and songs, allowing users to learn popular beats and play along with their favorite tracks. "We are thrilled to extend our renowned e-drums experience to acoustic drums for beginners," said Sam Gribben, CEO of Melodics. "Learning to play the drums can be challenging, and our goal is to make it accessible and enjoyable for everyone. With our app, beginners can learn at their own pace, practice anytime, and receive instant feedback to help them grow as musicians."

The Acoustic Drums program will be available for download on the Melodics app for Windows, Mac, and iOS devices starting November 30th. With annual and monthly plans available, Melodics subscriptions start from $10.99/month

for the Standard Plan and $14.99/month for the Premium Plan. Visit the Melodics website to learn more and sign up for the early VIP access.

Melodics Partnership with Drum Channel

Deepening the learning possibilities for beginner drummers, Melodics, the leading music educational app for keys, pads and drums, has partnered with Drum Channel, a leading video-based tutorial platform for drummers, to develop and roll out an innovative program for beginner level drummers. As the first of many forthcoming initiatives, the companies have created an entry-level, beginner program that allows students to benefit from Drum Channel's popular play along videos while leveraging the strength of Melodics application-based instant feedback features. "We are thrilled to announce our exciting partnership with Drum Channel, a true powerhouse in the world of drumming education," said Sam Gribben, Founder and CEO of Melodics. "Drum Channel's extensive library of lessons and shows, led by top-tier instructors, perfectly complements Melodics' interactive practice experience. This partnership is more than just a collaboration; it's a harmonious fusion of two innovative platforms dedicated to enriching the drumming journey for enthusiasts of all levels."

Simple, proven, interface

Melodics has created accompanying lessons for Drum Channels' Playalongs in its Level 100 course, designed specifically for beginners to get started with drums. When subscribing to the Melodics app, customers can select Drum Channel tutorial videos as part of the onboarding process. Subscribers of Melodics and Drum Channel are also eligible for a 20% discount from either platform.

An accompanying course of Melodics lessons have been made available to Drum Channel customers, with more in the pipeline already under development. Customers start the process with a tutorial, and then view the Drum Channel Playalong performance video of their choice. Once this is complete, users can practice that same Playalong song in the Melodics app, receiving instant feedback and measurement of their performance. This process leads to incremental and meaningful improvements in learning.

"We are truly excited to be working closely with Melodics," commented Don Lombardi, Founder of Drum Channel. "At Drum Channel, our mission is to empower students with the best possible resources to enhance our customers' skills and passion for drumming. With Melodics' gamified approach to learning, new drummers will have a fun and engaging experience while improving rhythm, timing, and musicality with Melodics innovative instant feedback feature." "This partnership isn't just about collaboration; it's about showcasing something truly remarkable to provide drummers, whether they're just starting out or seasoned pros, with more tools to achieve their drumming goals," Gribben adds. "We're excited to invite our users to explore this new dimension of drumming education, where the rhythms of innovation and passion converge."

To gain access to the new partnership assets, customers of Drum Channel should explore the Level 100 course which link out to Melodics partnership landing page: **https://melodics.com/partners/drumchannel** Melodics customers will find Drum Channel content and special offers integrated into their subscription onboarding experience.

Porter & Davies Used by Drummers with Bruce Springsteen, Greta Van Fleet, Hans Zimmer & More

Porter & Davies, renowned for their world class silent tactile monitoring systems, are proud to announce new drummers using their range of products. These now include: Max Weinberg, the longtime drummer of the legendary Bruce Springsteen's E Street band. He has been using his BC2rm since the summer and will be using it when the 2024 world tour kicks off in March. Another new family member is UB40's iconic drummer and founder member Jimmy Brown. 2024 will see him put his new Gigster to good use as he and the band celebrate forty five years together with a tour and new album. Internationally acclaimed drummer Adam 'Smiley' Wade has graced the stage with some of the industry's most notable talents including Jessie J and Craig David. He is now using a BC2 when drumming live and in the studio. Aicha Djidjelli (pictured), drummer and percussionist with multi Oscar and Grammy Award winner, Hans Zimmer, has just purchased a BC2 to aid her with both acoustic and electronic drum playing.The portable BC2 puts a drummer right in the heart of the kit allowing them to feel every nuance of every beat without latency. Now using the BC2 on tour are: Clemons Poindexter playing with Kahlid, Greta Van Fleet's Daniel Wagner, and Blas Elias with the Trans-Siberian Orchestra. Also using the BC2 are Adam Savage with While She Sleeps, Matt Yonkerwith Less Than Jake, Justin Brown with Thundercat, and Jimmi Naylor with indie legends The Pidgeon Detectives.


David Phillips

The big brother to the BC2 is the TT6 Equipped Throne which is designed to be driven by existing monitor amps. Bill Ransom the accomplished drummer with the Grammy nominated blues singer, Beth Hart, opted for this choice as he heads out on her 2024 tour. To find out more about enriching studio and live performances please go to **porteranddavies.co.uk/.**

Zildjian 400th Anniversary Celebration

Story and Photos by Bob Campbell

The Avedis Zildjian Company has the enviable reputation of being not only the oldest cymbal maker, but also one of the oldest, highly regarded, and most enduring family businesses in the world. It is quite incredible to think that this all began over 400 years ago.

In 1618, an Armenian alchemist named Avedis I, living in Constantinople, discovered a new alloy that would forever change the world. Like many alchemists of his day, he dreamt of making gold from other less precious metals. Avedis failed to produce gold, but he instead ingeniously devised methods to produce specific alloys combining copper, tin, and silver, which were especially well-suited to cymbal construction. This exact alloy combination remains a closely guarded family secret. These Avedis cymbals were so unique and impressive that they gained the attention of Sultan Mustafa I of the Ottoman Empire, who requested that these cymbals be used by his military bands. In 1623, the Sultan gave Avedis the family name, "Zildjian", which literally translates to "cymbal smith". The Sultan additionally granted Avedis the permission to start his own cymbal company. With this royal act, the Avedis Zildjian Company was born.

Over the centuries, subsequent generations of Zildjians have continued to innovate upon the original Zildjian formula and successfully grow the business, which now incorporates Vic Firth and Balter mallets. The name Zildjian has become legendary for its outstanding musicality, versatility, unique signature sound, and quality. Many of the world's greatest drummers have been characterized by their great "Zildjian sound", including drumming legends like Baby Dodds, Art Blakey, Louis Bellson, Gene Krupa, Earl Palmer, Buddy Rich, Max Roach, Elvin Jones, Papa Jo Jones, Dave Tough, Charlie Watts, Chick Webb, and Tony Williams.

In celebration of their 400th anniversary, Zildjian hosted a star-studded gala event at Roadrunner in Boston, MA. The many generations of the Zildjian family were well represented at the table of honor: Craigie Zildjian (Executive Chair, President), Debbie Zildjian (Board of Directors Member), Cady Zildjian (Vice Chair, Board of Directors), Emily Zildjian Hill (Board of Directors Member) and Samantha Zildjian (Board of Directors Member). Cady, Emily, and Samantha represent the 15th generation of Zildjian shareholders!

The venue and exclusive VIP area were adorned with shrines of Zildjian past, including drum sets with Zildjian cymbals from The Beatles/Ringo Starr, Green Day/Tré Cool, Elvin Jones, and Dennis Chambers. Mounted displays with individual historic cymbals from Zak Starkey (a red, white, and blue cymbal used in The Who's half-time performance at Super Bowl XLIV) and a circa 1910 Zildjian adorned the walls. Several unique



From Left; Cady Zildjian. Sheila E., Emily Zildjian Hill, Omar Hakim, Debbie Zildjian, Eddie Bayers, Peter Erskine, Samantha Zildjian, Craigie Zildjian, Steve Smith, Terri Lyne Carrington, Dennis Chambers, Fred Armisen

Here are the performers who paid tribute, and the 2023 Zildjian HOF Inductees

Jamie-Leigh Schultz, Gorden Campbell, Marc Quiñones (video) paid tribute to **Sheila E**. Evan Hutchings and Chris Fryar paid tribute to **Eddie Bayers**. Devon Taylor and Aaron Spears paid tribute to **Dennis Chambers**. Roni Kaspi, and Marcus Gilmore paid tribute to **Terri Lyne Carrington**. Adam Deitch, and Nate Smith paid tribute to **Omar Hakim**. Antonio Sanchez and Russ Miller paid tribute to **Steve Smith**. Justin Faulkner and Adam Nussbaum paid tribute to **Peter Erskine**. Ash Soan and Josh Dun paid tribute to **Ringo Starr**.

and signed instruments were on display to support a charity auction for MusiCares.

The anniversary concert was hosted by noted comedian, actor, writer, producer, and drummer(!), Fred Armisten. Fred gave a hilarious intro monologue and was an incredible emcee for the evening. The evening focused on performances honoring the eight new inductees to the Zildjian Hall of Fame (HOF): Sheila E., Eddie Bayers, Dennis Chambers, Terri Lyne Carrington, Omar Hakim, Steve Smith, Peter Erskine, and Ringo Starr. For each Zildjian HOF inductee, outstanding tribute performances were given in their honor and in recognition of the role that Zildjian has played in their music careers.

The tribute performances were truly incredible and inspiring, with each artist paying homage to their personal idols and mentors now in the Zildjian HOF. In their testimonials, the performers each recognized the pivotal role that Zildjian cymbals played in influencing and shaping their individual sound and how their amazing cymbals contributed to their creativity.

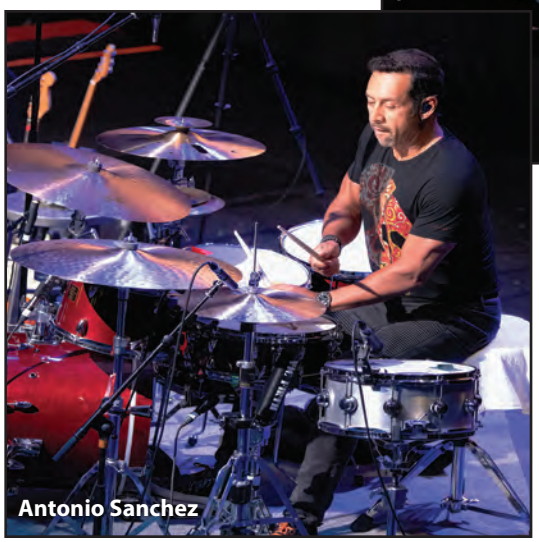

Jamie-Leigh Schultz


Adam Nussbaum

Thankfully there is still a chance for all to share in the Zildjian 400th celebration, as there are many exciting new 400th anniversary limited edition items for sale, including a 400th anniversary glass ornament (with authentic cymbal shavings from the Zildjian foundry), Alchemy classic baseball cap, 400th anniversary T-shirt set, a special 400th anniversary drumstick bundle, and much more available at **https://zildjian.com.** Zildjian is also offering 400th Anniversary Limited Edition Vault cymbals selected from the Zildjian family's private vault. These include 200 vintage 20" A. Zildjian rides produced during the 1940's and 200 vintage 15" A. Zildjian crash cymbals from between the mid-1930's to mid-1950's. Notably, all of the vault cymbals have stick marks and fingerprints, some of which belonged to Armand Zildjian and Avedis Zildjian III themselves. These are truly amazing, unique, and historical items! These cymbals come in heavy duty, foam-lined cases for added protection.



Nate Smith


Antonio Sanchez

Zildjian has set the bar for quality and innovation in cymbal craftsmanship to which all others are compared. The 400th anniversary concert was a superb celebration of the company's enduring commitment to drummers worldwide and the beauty of the musical sounds which emanate from Zildjian cymbals in the hands of masterful drummers. We look forward to many more years of excellence and innovation.

For more information on the history of the Avedis Zildjian Company, check out the book, *Zildjian – A History of Legendary Cymbal Makers,* by Jon Cohan and at **https://zildjian.com/pages/brand.** Jon Cohan recently noted, "So many twists of fate, fortuitous decisions, and perfect alignments of events had to happen for a business to last 400 years. It's almost unfathomable that any company could do that. That the same family has been associated with the product of that company for that length time is, as far as I know, unparalleled. And the fact that the company has maintained such a high standard and carried the same ethos of quality from the 17th century into the 21st century is a mind-boggling feat. While the cymbal landscape nowadays includes so many wonderful cymbal smiths, I think it's fair to say that none of them would exist without Zildjian having blazed the trail."

Chicago Drum's Solid Walnut Snare

Classic Vintage Sound with Time Honored Craftsmanship

By Brian Hil

Chicago Drum was officially born in 2011, but the roots of this amazing drum company go back decades, in fact, generations! Three generations to be precise. Jim Moritz, Chicago Drum's founder and president, is a third-generation drum builder and former employee of the Slingerland Drum Company. Jim's two great uncles as well as his father worked at the Slingerland plant in Chicago and helped teach him the business. Jim also has 30 plus years of working as a machinist to compliment his knowledge of woodworking, drum building, and fine craftsmanship.

I first became aware of Jim and the Chicago Drum company at the Chicago Drum Show. Year after year I kept an eye on this company, talking to Jim and tapping his drums. They always looked and sounded great, so I knew I finally needed to get my hands on one of these drums and do a review for *Modern Drummer*.

Chicago Drum has always kept a close association with the tradition of the Slingerland drums that Jim, his dad and uncles made during their time at the Slingerland factory. As tradition held, Chicago Drum originally started out only offering two distinct shell formulas of Maple / Poplar and Mahogany / Poplar. These two shells provided that very familiar and classic vintage sound from the era. However, new offerings were around the corner.

Chicago Drum has been making steam-bent single ply, solid shell drums of walnut, cherry, and mahogany that will rival most contenders. In fact, during their one and only foray into the Not So Modern Drummer Snare Drum Olympics in 2014, Chicago Drum won first place in both the Plywood and Solid/Single Ply shell categories! One of those drums was sold on the spot. Jim said that "Placing first in the Snare Drum Olympics was a HUGE honor," and that, "It validates our passion for, and the amount of, craftsmanship that goes into every drum we make."

Modern Drummer received a beautiful, single-ply walnut snare drum to both take us down memory lane and see how it would work in today's musical environment. The minute I hit this drum, I knew I had heard this sound in my formative years (you know….. *back in the day!*). This is a serious "old school" drum. So, let's take it apart, smack it around, and see what's going on.

Our review drum measured in at 6" x 14" with a quarter inch solid walnut ply shell. The wood was joined together utilizing



a scarf joint to create a very secure and solid shell. Attached to the shell were two solid walnut reinforcement rings that are also about a quarter inch thick. These rings are also joined by a scarf joint as apposed to doing a butt joint.

The bearing edges are a 30-degree vintage round-over incorporating the rings in concert with the edge. The result is a nice thick bearing edge area on the shell. The bearing edges are perfectly hand sanded and finished. A thin layer of paraffin wax is added to give the head a nice smooth place to sit. The entire shell, inside and out, is fine sanded and finished with tung oil. I found the snare bed to be fairly deep, about four inches wide, and also finely finished.

Visually, the inside of the drum was exceptionally gorgeous! The rings, while being made of walnut, as is the shell, were a darker wood grain that created a striking appearance and a contrast that made me think of expertly crafted antique furniture. The appearance of the interior did not overshadow the exterior of the drum, which was equally striking. Chicago Drum overlooks no details.

All of the hardware came chrome plated. The tube lugs were two-posted and gave a nice sleek, minimalistic, vintage look. Die-cast hoops, a two-point snare throw-off and butt, as well as Puresound 20-strand Blaster snares rounded out the hardware on this beauty.

This drum was equipped with a Remo Coated Ambassador batter with a Hazy Ambassador on the snare side. Chicago Drum uses an oval badge that reminds me of the old Slingerland badges that were popular on the 1960-70's-ish drums, secured by an in-house made, period-correct style grommet for air venting. Nice touch!

While this drum looks great, it's the rich sound that is getting my real attention. This drum is clean! It's simple! But, *somewhat complicated*. To older drummers, the sound will seem reminiscent. To younger drummers, it may seem just awesome! Walnut will by nature, provide a darker, dryer, lower fundamental note: a warm, controlled timbre if you will. In contrast, bent wood shells and die-cast hoops generally offer a more crisp, brighter note. This drum combines all of these characteristics in an intersting way, and the snare drum simply comes to life when struck.

The drum's musical versatility is wide ranging. I played this drum in various styles and tunings, and it responded great. The cross stick and rim shots were strong with a very musical, vintage sound. Back beats seemed to melt into the groove with ease. There were no unpleasant overtones, and the snare response was fat and clean with no rattles or unwanted buzz. The over-all sensitivity was very good and musical.

With this drum boasting it's vintage roots, I had to try a calf-skin head on it, and I was blown away! If you want a really "period" vintage sound, try calfskin on this drum. The sound was crisp and lively with a very earthy vibe. It would be especially great for jazz or concert environments. I also wanted to compare the Remo head that came with the drum with an Evans G1 Coated Batter head. The Remo gave the drum a fairly dry, controlled sound that was really good. The Evans head tended to open the drum up more (as did the calf head) and gave a somewhat wider, livelier note. Honestly, I liked them all!

There are a lot of snare drum sounds today, but I really don't think that many of them will ever replace the sounds that were made popular during the formative years of "popular" music. In my humble opinion, the snare drum was fundamentally perfected in the 1920's. Drums from this early time through the 1970's had distinct sounds and complex characteristics that most modern drums just don't usually have. I've seen modern, top recording drummers record with some of these early drums for their distinctly musical voices. Thankfully, Chicago Drum has faithfully and perfectly recreated this type of sound for today's market.



These drums are not only reminiscent of some of the best wood drums and sounds of that period, but also rival and far exceed many of them in musical sound and quality. The craftsmanship and attention to detail that goes into a Chicago Drum creates and eminates from extremely high standards, which is plainly evident in their drums. I have had the privilege to see many drums over the years and this is certainly one of the more perfect snare drums I've seen! This one's a winner! The list price is $999.00. Check 'em out at **chicagodrum.com.**

CTM CE220 IN-Ear Monitors

Loud& Clear

By Jason Mehler



Founded by a drummer/sound engineer, Clear Tune Monitors (CTM) out of Orlando, Florida has been manufacturing high-quality custom in-ear monitors for over fifteen years. Their premium custom IEMs have accompanied many well-known touring and performing musicians around the world. CTM recently expanded their product offerings to include a line of Universal in-ear monitors, aimed at a broader consumer electronics market. Among the new products are the CTM CE220 dual driver in-ear monitors. For this month's product close-up, I will put on a set of CE220s and give them a listen.

Who Are These For?

The universal series of monitors are designed for consumers that are ready to step up to a high-quality in-ear monitoring system at a lower price point than custom-molded in-ears. I spoke to a CTM representative who described several scenarios where these low-cost alternatives would be ideal such as:

•Drummers looking for high quality in-ears at an affordable price
•Touring musicians needing a quick, reliable monitoring solution
•Musicians wanting a trusty backup for their custom molded IEMs
•Audio teams who keep "house pairs" of IEMs on-hand

What's In the Box?

The product comes in a well-designed box with a clear plastic cover that flips up to reveal a pair of CE220s, each pre-attached to a braided audio cable via a 2-pin connector. Also in the box is a circular zip-able carrying case with a bag of assorted earphone tips inside, as well as a 1/8" to 1/4" stereo headphone adapter.

Product Specs

•Speaker: Two Balanced Armature
•Input Sensitivity: 124db-SPL @ 1mW
•Freq Response: 20 Hz to 16 kHz
•Impedance: 20 ohm @ 1 kHz
•Input Connector: 1/8" (3.5mm)
•Universal Fit
•-26dB Passive Noise Isolation

Construction

The housing of the compact in-ear device seems solid and very durable. The circular aluminum stem, where the rubber earbud tips attach, is securely molded into the smokey gray transparent plastic housing. The stem has a small filter screen on the end, protecting the internal mechanisms from debris while also resisting moisture. The detachable 2-pin connector cable is easy to unplug, but secure enough to handle any rough tugging or pulling. The rubberized cable is braided in a twisted pattern, which helps to give it a bit of flexibility and strength. The cable has a small section of flexible shrink tubing or sheathing on the device end that curves the cable over and behind the ear and helps to secure the monitors in place with minimal discomfort.

Putting on the In-Ears
Those familiar with balanced Armature style in-ear monitors know that having an air-tight seal inside the ear canal allows the listener to experience all the audio frequencies that the monitors produce. Therefore, choosing the right sized universal earbud tips is crucial. The CE220 comes with several tip options, however I found that I needed a longer flanged tip to get the best seal in my ears. Luckily, universal tips are very inexpensive, and I already had several different size options on-hand to try out.



At the moment of this writing, I've been wearing the CE220 IEMs for several hours. They are very comfortable. The cable is lightweight and barely noticeable. The earpieces fit snuggly and securely in my ears, even when I make dramatic head movements. After 3 hours of use, there is still no soreness or pressure and no pain has developed in the cartilage of my ears, like I've experienced with other IEMs.

Listening Experience
When I sat down to begin this review, I first wanted to listen to random songs that I consider to be well-engineered and could potentially showcase the clarity of the dual balanced armatures at different frequencies as well as stereo separation. Songs like "Jet City Woman" and "Is There Anybody Listening" by Queensrÿche, Dire Straits "Brothers in Arms", Radiohead "Dollar & Cents", I Mother Earth "So Gently We Go" and "Not Quite Sonic", and many more.

I was very impressed by the clarity, balance, and representation of the entire frequency range, both at low and high volumes. For a dual driver in-ear, the lows do remarkably well, displaying a surprising presence and punch. The midrange is glorious, and the highs are pristine. The overall mix remained consistent with increased volume, never becoming harsh or unbearable. On the contrary, it was very enjoyable, and made me eager to move to the next phase of the review. Playing some drums!

Playing Experience
I was excited to hop on the drums and do what we, as drummers, have been doing since the beginning: jamming to someone else's tunes! I tore through a long playlist of my favorite songs, making exaggerated movements like "Animal" from the Muppets. The CE220 monitors were very comfortable and held up to as good of a beating as I could give them, short of pyro blasts or rain showers. The sound remained clean, and the monitors stayed intact throughout my Muppet tantrum. It was great fun!

A Word About CTM's Customer Service
I recently spoke to drummer and CTM endorser Tony Escapa, who is currently on tour with Ricky Martin, during our filming of his Tour Kit Rundown for *Modern Drummer*. Tony has endorsed CTM for over 10 years and I could tell that he loves the gear he is using and considers the folks at CTM to be his extended family. He said that his experience with the company is a testament to their customer service because he has unique requirements and they have always gone out of their way to accommodate. As for the durability of CTM products, Tony was eager to state that some of the trusty monitors that he carries with him have been in his gear for over ten years, and they still perform consistently.



Conclusion
The sound, durability, and comfort of the CE220 In-Ear monitors leaves me no doubt that they would excel in most monitoring situations, whether as the primary pair of IEMs or as a dependable backup. Furthermore, the company seems very committed to quality and good customer service. If the price fits your budget, I'd say go ahead and pull the trigger. The CE220 In-Ear Monitors currently retail at $249.00 and can be found at:
https://cleartunemonitors.com

for KING + COUNTRY

A Drummer's Delight with Luke Smallbone, Garrett Tyler, and Chris Karabelas

By Mark Griffith

The band for KING + COUNTRY is a Christian pop band led by Joel and Luke Smallbone. Joel is a singer-songwriter, and Luke Smallbone is a drummer-singer-songwriter. Both Luke and Joel play drums and percussion during the band's live show, as does the entire band. In 2012, *Billboard* called for KING + COUNTRY "One of the New Artists to Watch." *American Songwriter* called them "Australia's answer to Coldplay." In 2014, their album *Run Wild, Live Free, Love Strong* won a Grammy. In 2020 they released a Christmas album called *A Drummer Boy Christmas,* in 2022, they released their fifth album called *What are We Waiting For?* and 2024 will bring the release of their feature film *Unsung Heroes.*

Their live show features Luke Smallbone (and his son Phoenix) both playing field drums, drummer Garrett Tyler, and percussionist Chris Karabelas. It is a spectacular drum centric percussive celebration. At one point in the show almost everyone on stage is playing drums or percussion. It's a drummer's delight. In the middle of their Christmas tour, *Modern Drummer* sat down with the for KING + COUNTRY primary percussion section (Luke, Garrett, and Chris) to find out about how it all came together.



Kadin Tooley


Kadin Tooley

MD: Luke, tell me about for KING + COUNTRY?

LS: We're from Australia and we came to America as a broke family. My dad was a concert promoter in Australia, and we write about all of those things. We believe that it's the poet's job to articulate what another cannot. It's our job to write songs that fill in the blanks for other people's hearts and souls. When you're driving on vacation there's these dotted lines on the road and they keep you in the lane, but you never remember the dotted lines. In some cases, artists write about the great sights from that vacation, or the wrecks that took place. You write about the things that that leave you high on life. We were raised in the church, so we write about God, our love for God, and we write about our love for people. I write about the love that I have for my wife and children. Our hope is that people can listen to our music, and they'll know that there's something different about us. I hope they'll say, "There's someone else out in this world like me!" That's what we really try to accomplish.

MD: You are not only a singer-songwriter, but you have played drums on most of the for KING + COUNTRY records, correct?

LS: I have played drums on almost every for KING + COUNTRY record, I'm one of those unique drummers that grew up (kind of) teaching myself. I am not the world's greatest drummer in the sense of playing live for a band, but that's the gift of the studio. With modern music, it has more to do with the idea and the part. That is more important than the execution, because at the end of the day we can execute it however we want, and we can redo it. Most of the time nowadays with modern music, simplification is most important. You can even just take your best four bar loop and just keep it going for the whole tune. I have the benefit of being one of those drummers that just fell in love with the drums at a young age. I fell in love with it because I loved to be able to sit at the kit and make music immediately, I didn't need to join a drumline, I didn't need to go get a lesson, I didn't need to have a piano, with a drum set I could just create music immediately. That probably says a lot about my personality, but that's what made me start and follow through with the drums. After playing drums almost my entire life, still to this day, I look forward to getting up on stage and playing the drums.

MD: What was the first music and drummer that lit the drumming fire for you?

LS: My oldest sister was a musician and I looked up to the drummers that played for her. None of them were legendary by any means. But the guy that made me realize that there is a whole different level to drumming is Aaron Sterling. He played on our first record, and I just remember thinking this guy's a drumming savant, yet he's a really nice guy. Aaron is

so skilled, so gifted, and so professional, it really lit the fire of drumming for me. After doing that record, I went home realizing that there's a whole different level of drumming ability that I could aspire towards. For the most part, my brother Joel and I are songwriters. But hearing Aaron actually showed us what we were looking for. I didn't know there were musicians out here that are that good and that creative, I didn't really know that was possible. I grew up around a lot of drummers that were really good but were real jerks. I knew drummers that were really creative but not very consistent. Aaron Sterling was the first drummer that blew my mind because he had the complete package. Therefore, I would probably say that he's the guy that ignited my drumming fire and created a different level of drumming and musical passion when we worked with him 11 or 12 years ago.

MD: Was there any music in Australia that grabbed you, or was it American rock that you were hearing?

LS: My dad was a concert promoter in Australia in the 80s. When we were growing up, he would bring bands like White Heart, Stryper, and Amy Grant to tour in Australia. Because of that, my drumming experience was all over the place and with many different artists. Stryper was playing metal, White Heart was playing rock, and Amy Grant was playing pop. Hearing all that different music at a very young age taught me to love and appreciate all of it. That's probably why I love drummers that can do it all.

MD: You have played drums on all of your records, what was the thinking behind you not playing drums live with for KING + COUNTRY?

LS: We were coming up in the industry during the crash of 2008 and 2009, which was a terrible time to be an artist and get a record deal. A radio promotions executive said something very interesting to me, he said, "The wonderful thing about being a new artist is that no one has a track record on you. They can't tell you that testing says that we can't play you. But the problem is that if you are not unique, why would they play you?" If you're a new solo artist, why would radio play your music when the radio listenership is used to hearing another solo artist? Why would they play an artist who is new and creates no real advantage for them? So for us it became about being unique. We are a songwriting duo who is very drum centric which comes from me. I'm always in the studio working on the drums and doing all these different percussion things.


Alex Kluft

I have the benefit of being one of those drummers that just fell in love with the drums at a young age. I fell in love with it because I loved to be able to sit at the kit and make music immediately.

To answer your question, when we first started working on the live show, we wondered what we could do to make ourselves unique. I said, "Well I can play drums." That's when I started playing a field snare live, in some cases I would play it as if I was behind a kit. I started swinging it around my back and doing weird

performance things with the field drum. Suddenly we were unique and different from everybody else.

I would tell young drummers the same thing. Young drummers emulate and look at the greats, but they need to become their own drummer. For example, if you're just going to try to play exactly like Aaron Sterling, sure he's amazing, but you gotta find a way to be unique. Think outside the box. Why would a band hire someone who sounds like Aaron Sterling when they can just go get Aaron Sterling to play in their band or on their record?

MD: As a songwriter and a drummer, what do you look for from a drummer?

LS: Aaron and I talked about this 12 years ago when he was doing our first record. It was a big conversation for me, he probably wouldn't even remember it. He told me, "I think of drums as melodies, that really hit me. When I write songs, I'm usually the guy with the melody, but I thought that was a fantastic interpretation of what I'm looking for from a drummer. I am looking for someone to support the song I have written, to support the lyrics, and think of the lyrics and the song while finding the right spaces and places. Drums do create melodies, but you have to find the right place to do something that can become a hook. Drums can become hooks, it's all in how you design your fills, beats, and all the different things. Nowadays, I would say that rap music (for the most part) is treating rhythm like a hook. Obviously, there are millions of different genres of music, but what I'm looking for in a drummer is someone who can it fit in with everything else that's going on, support the actual melody and support the actual lyric as well. What I don't want is "Guitar Center in the studio." That means NOT showing me all the amazing licks that you can do.

MD: Drum wise, what are some of your favorite drum tracks on your own records?

LS: I've never been asked that question in my entire life, which is hilarious, so I've never really thought much about it. I usually just feel it and away we go. We did a song many years ago called "Joy." It has kind of a Latin feel to it, and I'll never forget thinking to myself, we're really not a Latin band, but I did get to put a Latin beat underneath that song. There does come a point where you just think, "Why not? Who cares? Let's just do it!" It's still probably my favorite song to play live. There is something about Latin rhythms that just forces people to dance. It just forces people to move. One of my favorite musical decisions was to put that Latin thing on that song. I'm really grateful that we did that.

MD: I know you play the drum set on your records, but live you have Garrett Tyler playing drum set in the band. for KING + COUNTRY have become known for a very cool drum centric live show, do you ever play drum set live?

LS: People love the drums! For the most part, I'm only playing the field snare because with Garrett and Chris Karabelas behind us and they've got the drums and percussion covered. For me it's all about picking the moments to dig in. It's about how I accentuate some of the things that they're doing and building on what they do. The drummer drives the emotion of every song, so depending on how much they allow a song to grow or how much they don't allow a song to grow, me playing the field snare is the icing on the cake. I'm another layer of how we're gonna take this song to another level. I love being able to be that next layer, that addition to what Garrett and Chris are doing on stage.

We used to do a little bit of a drum off and do this little solo thing, so I'll do some of that depending on the show. I don't do that for our Christmas Little Drummer Boy show, but I'll get up and play some percussion. To be honest about my ability, the last thing people want to see is a step down in ability from how Garrett and Chris play, and that's exactly what would happen if I was to play.

MD: But we've all got our own drumming thumbprints, and I'm sure you can do some things that they can't do, and vice-versa.

LS: That's true, and very nice, so never say never (I guess.)

MD: I know Garrett was playing percussion in the band with another drummer, and then he became the drummer in the band. How did that evolution happen?

LS: With our music there's always plenty of little percussion bits and pieces that were on the records. For a while we didn't have all of those parts represented live in our show, and it hit us that a percussionist is very visually interesting and would add to the music. Part of the reason why we're so drum centric is because it is very interesting visually. It's interesting when you're watching something that is visually uncommon or that doesn't usually happen. Percussion is not something that you see every day, it's just fun and it looks cool. You would be amazed at how those little additions make people want to move and groove a little bit more. It's nice that we have the space on stage now to include percussion, it's certainly a decision that we're not regretting.


Kadin Tooley

On this tour, my son Phoenix is playing drums on stage on the song "The Little Drummer Boy." On our Christmas tour, that is one of the biggest parts of the show. He played the part of "The Little Drummer Boy" in our video when he was five, but now he's eight, and he's actually getting pretty dang good at drumming. He gets up there with the in-ears and he's playing with the click and it's a showstopper. People don't expect to see an eight-year-

old kid on stage in front of 11,000 people playing his drum for everybody as "The Little Drummer Boy."

MD: Did you teach him to play?

LS: Yeah, he's got a little bit of me in him, he just he just loves playing drums. The other day he told my wife that he really wants to be a good drummer. As a kid, you don't know any better, you go for things that you shouldn't go for, and you play stuff that you shouldn't play, there's really no "rules." If there comes a time where he wants to become really good, he'll know that he must put in the time, and he will need some shepherding. But the thing about kids today is they are learning as much as they can by themselves and finding who they are in it, that's important. I think it's very difficult for parents to say you gotta go practice, because if you do maybe they won't love it. If a kid is forced to practice for six months, they might beg their parents to never have to do that again, because it's no longer fun. So right now, for him it's a combination of this is fun, while managing a little bit of extra practice, and discovering who he is. That's what we're doing and it's turning out nicely.

MD: In six years, if he tells you (again) he wants to be a "really good drummer," what are you going to tell him? What's a good drummer?

LS: One of the things that I loved about playing and exploring the drums as a kid was when I listened to a guy playing at church and I knew he was "OK." But then I would go here a professional drummer play the simplest four on the floor beat and wonder why it felt so good. You are hearing the hours and hours of practice and that's what I would tell him. If you want to be great you must be able to take the simplest stuff and catch people's attention. Not because of how complex it is, because it feels so good. That's what I'm looking for in a drummer. Someone who can take the simple and can make it electric.

MD: Besides the great drummers in your band, what other drummers do you hear that can take the simple and make it electric?

LS: I grew up I grew up listening to a lot of U2. Larry Mullen Jr. wasn't a "drummer's drummer," but when you listen to his parts, he's thinking and playing "drum-hooks." The intro for "Sunday Bloody Sunday" is an absolutely iconic beat that isn't hard to play, but everybody knows it. He resonated with me the most. He thought outside the box, and he created really cool drum parts. Maybe I'm too much of a writer, but that's what I care about. I also like how he plays simple, but he takes risks, yet his playing always feels good.

MD: How do you and your brother write together?

LS: I am usually coming up with some crazy melody, the voice memo app on the iPhone is one of the most amazing tools given to the modern writers. We usually always have another writer with us. That's healthier than two brothers in a room trying to decide what is the right thing. Having a third person in there kind of offsets us a little bit which is good. I'm more of a starter and Joel is more of a finisher, and you need both. Joel is a little bit more focused, I'm very conceptual with lyric ideas. He is very good at filling in the blanks when it comes to lyrics. He's very good at finding the lyric that fits the spot, because in some cases you've got melodies and you need music to go along with it. We complement each other nicely. It's a wonderful thing to get to make music with somebody that you know so well and with someone who has such different talents from yourself.

MD: How involved is Joel with creating drum parts?

LS: If there's something getting in the way towards the end of the process, obviously we will have those discussions. But for the most part, he leaves the drum and percussion stuff to me and the producers. It's good to kind of let us run with those things. That being said, if things don't feel great, Joel will definitely tell us where he hears things that are going wrong.

> We couldn't be happier with how everything with the film Unsung Heroes and the soundtrack has turned out, and the live band with Garrett and Chris sounds better than ever!

MD: How true to the records do you want Garrett and Chris to stay?

LS: Great question! I would venture to say closer than not. We give our guy's freedom, but people come to the show for what they've heard on the record. However, they're also coming to hear your live interpretation of it. You don't want to be changing beats by any means, when it comes to fills you have a little bit of leeway. But when you've got an iconic fill or a fill that is a hook, you play the hook. That was a conversation with the guys early on, and once you set that kind of standard, they get more leeway the longer they're with us. They become indoctrinated with the way that we want things. It's not as much drum wise, but occasionally we do have to say, "Hey guys, it was a fun night last night, but let's just pull it back eight percent," and they're obviously cool with that. Most of the time you have those conversations when you've got a new musician in the band. When you've got guys that been with you as long as these guys have, they start to understand your identity and they actually want to contribute to that identity.

I think a lot of drummers have to be careful when they play for somebody else, they need to be an asset not a distraction to what the bandleader is doing. They need to learn how to provide a service to the leader and help them become better, not necessarily different. A lot of times younger drummers will want to do it their way, and you have to tell them, "What you're doing isn't better, it's just different. If it was played this way on the record, I would prefer it to be played that way live." When it comes to music, "new" and "better" are very different things. Find ways to serve the creators, be an asset not a distraction.

MD: What appealed to you about Garrett when you first brought him in as your percussionist, before he became your drummer?

LS: We were looking to make some changes rhythmically. Garrett started as our percussionist and got promoted to the lead drummer. We were looking for someone to give us a true percussion experience. He comes with an amazing amount of education and is very well versed in his craft. We actually did something that we've never done before, prior to Garrett every other musician in our band had come from previous relationships, but we were looking for some fresh blood. So, we did some tryouts during COVID. We told people who wanted to try out to set up a camera and play in front of it, which is totally awkward and the worst thing that you could ask any musician to do. But that was intentional, because if you're willing to do that, it says a lot about who you are. If you can play in the most

miserable times with just a camera in front of you, you're going to be pretty dang good when it comes to the live show.

Garrett is a cool dude who just has a cool vibe. He can also play chordal instruments which has been a very appealing aspect to our show. Having our guys switch instruments during the show is something people can't quite wrap their heads around. It's entertaining. When we realized Garrett was a good percussionist, and he could play other things, and he was cool playing percussion as sort of "the number two guy," it was an easy decision. I don't think of percussionists as "number two guys," but unfortunately that's the way some people seem to think.

People who want to be professional drummers think of the craft as the only thing that matters. There's plenty of good drummers in the world, and there's plenty of good musicians in the world. But in my humble opinion, the playing is only 15 to 20% of the equation. The rest of it has to do with whether you are servant hearted, what's your attitude, knowing your place, and knowing when to be the funny guy and when to be quiet. Garrett was all of that. He's a better guy than he is a player, and he's a *great* player. There is nothing worse than being stuck on a bus with people that you don't like.

> The drummer drives the emotion of every song, so depending on how much they allow a song to grow or how much they don't allow a song to grow, me playing the field snare is the icing on the cake.



Kadin Tooley

MD: What does percussionist Chris Karabelas bring to for KING + COUNTRY?

LS: I think Garrett always wanted to be our drummer. He wasn't really obvious about it, but I could just tell. Garrett is a drummer. Chris has a genuine love for percussion. This is not "number two" for him, he wants to be the percussionist, that's what I love about Chris. He just wants to find those intricate little things that add extra layers to the music, and he loves it. That's been surprising to me about Chris, and I've enjoyed that.

MD: What's coming up for the band after the Christmas Tour?

LS: We are releasing a film called *Unsung Heroes* on April 26th. It's a family movie that is about my parents' journey from Australia to America. Lions Gate is the distributor, and it'll be in about 2000 theaters. It is a special project that we've been working on for several years. People ask why we are making movies? We are big believers in family, and people are looking everywhere else to make a difference in the world. But Mother Theresa had this great saying, she said, "If you want to change the world, go home and love your family." I think that we need those types of stories being told today, so on April 26th the film comes out and we couldn't be more excited about it.

MD: Will there be new for KING + COUNTRY music in the film?

LS: We're doing an "Inspired by…" soundtrack. We're doing two originals and the rest of it is covers. We're doing an Amy Grant song called "Lead Me On," we're covering Michael W. Smith's song called "Place in this World," we're playing "Rhythm of My Heart" by Rod Stewart, and "To Hell with the Devil" by Stryper. Everybody just does the same thing in music all the time, we wanted to take a risk and do some things that we otherwise wouldn't do. This is not a quintessential or normal for KING + COUNTRY album, but we're taking some classic songs and giving them a for KING + COUNTRY flair. We couldn't be happier with how everything with the film *Unsung Heroes* and the soundtrack has turned out, and the live band with Garrett and Chris sounds better than ever!

Check out Luke's drummer profile page, at moderndrummer.com

for KING + COUNTRY

and Judah and the Lion, Drummer Garrett Tyler

By Mark Griffith

As we move through the for KING + COUNTRY percussion section, we move on to drummer and musical director Garrett Tyler. Garrett has been on the Nashville music scene for quite a while. His musical background is interesting, starting with the Blue Devils drum corps, attending Belmont University, touring with various bands and independent projects, and eventually joining Judah and the Lion. Today he holds the drum chair with both Judah and the Lion and for KING + COUNTRY. He has a lot to share about drumming and building a career in music, but we'll start at the beginning.



Alex Kluft

MD: Are you originally from Nashville?
GT: I'm not, but I have been in Nashville for nine years. In the time that I have been here it has almost become unrecognizable, it's changed a lot. Nashville is and has been the hub for country and contemporary Christian music, but there are some great bands and independent artists coming out of Nashville, too. But at its heart, Nashville still feels like a small town and has a very warm homelike vibe to it.

I was born in a super small town called Pocahontas, Arkansas. I spent most of my childhood there before transferring to Jonesboro, AR. That is where I went to high school and attended ASU for my undergraduate degree in music education. While in college, I did quite a bit of traveling as a part of the Blue Devils drum and bugle corps out of Concord, California, so I flew back and forth every month for rehearsals and would live there starting in May. Once summer hit, we would hit the road competing all over the country. Those years were truly some of the best memories during that time of my life. I moved to Nashville in 2015, after I wrapped up an international tour with the Blue Devils and started graduate school at Belmont University. I've been in Nashville ever since!


Kadin Tooley

MD: Before drum corps, what got you involved in drumming?
GT: I was always into music because of my family. My mom was always listening to rock n roll, my dad had all the r&b/soul jams, my brother was introducing me to punk, my sister kept me aware of the popular music trends, and my grandparents knew country & western like the back of their hand. When I was younger there were no bands playing live in bars in our town or major concerts nearby. In fifth grade I went to a high school football game, I saw the drumline at the very top of the bleachers. It felt like they were having more fun than anyone else there. Right then, I said to myself, "I want to do that!" I signed up for "beginning" band and from that point on, band was my life. I dedicated every second of free time I had to practicing drums, but marching band was the thing that really sparked me. I hadn't actually sat down at a kit yet; my beginning lessons were classical/orchestral style drumming and technique. I was playing as much as I could in my free time, and I put a ton of work in, I progressed pretty quickly and in my seventh grade year I was added to the high school drumline. Obviously, I felt a calling to the drums, and throughout seventh, eighth, and ninth grade I really focused on snare drum and orchestral percussion. For most of my junior and high school years I made First band, first chair All-Region and All-State band. It wasn't until high school rolled around when I was truly introduced to the world behind a drum set. My instructors introduced me to jazz, and I began to melt into a world that would change my life forever. I also started a rock band, but we only played in my living room to an audience of two, my parents.

MD: What jazz did your teacher introduce you to?
GT: There were countless records and artists, but a few stood out more than others. Chet Baker, Miles Davis, Chick Corea, John Coltrane, and Dave Brubeck were a few artists who had drummers that I absolutely loved: Philly Joe Jones, Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, Joe Morello, and Steve Gadd. I feel like I always

gravitated towards drummers who had a really strong rudimental background.

After I began to expand my drum knowledge as a kit player, I tried to balance all three drum approaches during my high school years. I did All-State Jazz, All-Region Concert Band, I auditioned for the All-American Marching Band, and I made the snare line. I was one of five drummers in the country to land that position. The other people in the All-American Marching Band were in early stages of drum corps, and one of my buddies, Chris Bright, was in the Blue Devils B Corps. That was my initial connection to the Blue Devils. As I stated earlier, I attended college at Arkansas State University (2010-2014) and received my undergraduate degree in Music Education. I focused on orchestral percussion because the school didn't do much that was drum set related. There was a jazz band and I tried to do some drum set studies, but most of what I learned on the kit was on my own. My teacher, Craig Collison studied at North Texas with Ed Soph, but I primarily had to seek out drum set instruction on my own while I was focusing on marching and orchestral percussion at school. I auditioned for the Blue Devils in 2011 and made it on drum set. In my first year (2012) we won the DCI World Championship, and we got second place my second year. During these years I spent a lot of time traveling to PASIC and going to clinics at the Memphis Drum Shop, and just trying to branch out and experience as much music as I could. In college I also played a ton in church and travelled the south performing with Christian Baxter Band. We would tour during the summer and on the weekends. During my time with Christian, I began running playback and had my first pro experiences using IEMs, playing with a click, and writing drum parts in the studio. When I was in my final semester during my student teaching I remember thinking, "I love education, but I don't want to be strictly an educator. I want to be a performer and tour the world." I loved my craft and art too much. But I didn't really know what that looked like at the time. When I aged out of DCI the Blue Devils were starting a thing called BDI. They put together a small band to tour Europe and the UK. It was a condensed hornline, drumline, and a small combo that toured Europe doing clinics and performances for a month and a half. It was during this time when everything really started taking off for me.

> I signed up for "beginning" band and from that point on, band was my life. I dedicated every second of free time I had to practicing drums, but marching band was the thing that really sparked me.


Kadin Tooley

Through that whole process my mom was encouraging me to think about grad school, but in my head, I wanted to move to Nashville and do the Nashville music thing without school. I ended up applying and auditioning at Belmont University in Nashville and got in. It was one of the best decisions of my life because that's where I met my wife and studied drums with Chester Thompson and Todd London. While I was there, I jumped into the Nashville scene of young musicians, local shows in bars/clubs, and started playing with some local friends of mine. My first professional touring and gigs were with an artist named Christy Nockels in 2015. She's a worship artist who was an integral part of starting Passion

City Church in Atlanta. Her husband, Nathan Nockels is an incredible producer and musician. They had just moved back to Nashville from Atlanta and were looking for a drummer, so I started touring with them. They became like a second family to me and I can't imagine my music career without them.

MD: It sounds like you were keeping busy when you moved to Nashville.

GT: When you are starting a career you need to say yes to everything. I started a band, Local Sound, and had some success doing the Outcry tour in 2017; I graduated that next spring. The rest of that year I was touring with Local Sound and Christy and different independent artists in the Nashville scene. My first van tour was with R.Lum.R., who had a big hit single and was popping off as a new up and coming artist. He was playing hip-hop, R&B, and pop. I auditioned for his band and started touring with him in 2018. Touring with R.LUM.R was a highlight, we opened for artists like Louis the Child, Billie Eilish, and Sylvan Esso. Later that year, the band Judah and the Lion called me to sub in for them on some shows. I immediately clicked with those guys, and in 2019 they asked me to tour with them full time. That was a massive year for me, Judah and the Lion did two European tours and a big US-Canadian tour. I also did a two-month tour with the artists Jagwar Twin, I got engaged, and I got married!


Alex Kluft

MD: I heard you with Judah and the Lion, you sounded amazing. That band is just one of the most unique bands I've ever heard. The title of the record *Folk Hop 'n Roll* just about says it all. What do you bring to that band?

GT: I think I bring my own sound and elevate the show musically and visually. I am the first outsider they brought in that wasn't already a close friend of the band, so I came in with a high threshold for performing. I have also done a lot of Musical Director work and playback engineering work, the whole Ableton tracks world is kind of second nature to me. I introduced some electronics and live sampling to the show, and our playing and chemistry just clicked. Those are some of my best friends. I joined right after they recorded the album *Pep Talks*. After the *Pep Talks* tour cycle, I went on to record on their album *Revival*, and most of the new music that has followed.

With any project that I'm a part of, I try to make it better than it was when I got there both musically and culturally.

With any project that I'm a part of, I try to make it better than it was when I got there both musically and culturally. That's what I have tried to do since being a part of for KING + COUNTRY, too.

MD: And then everything came to a screeching halt with COVID.

GT: COVID changed everything for everyone. Everything lived online. Social media took off, and marketing overshadowed art. I feel like the music scene is in such an interesting place right now. It's not really about the art necessarily, it's about streams, shares, and going viral on TikTok, rather than focusing on artists who have something to say. I've seen that shift happen. I've seen the shift go from wanting to create an awesome live show for the sake of the music, to wanting to go viral with a song and get signed. The live scene isn't quite what it was, but at the same time people are still doing it. There's still incredible music being made, there's some cool new venues, and people are adapting. Like anything you must adapt, change, and adjust. I am proud to know so many young artists and musicians who are focusing on the art. Thankfully during COVID, I was extremely busy. I was doing a ton of songwriting and producing as well as teaching online. Some of my favorite music that I have worked on was during 2020. Once 2021 rolled around, things started opening up more and I was asked to audition for for KING + COUNRTY as their second drummer/multi-instrumentalist.

MD: How did marching band and drum corps lead to what you are doing today with for KING + COUNTRY and Judah and the Lion?

GT: To this day, I am a very rudimental drummer, my biggest inspiration is Steve Gadd. I clogged and tap danced for eight years, and Gadd was a dancer. After marching band, I knew I wanted to do drum corps, but I was just so much more in love with the drum set. I didn't want to spend all my time and energy just playing snare. In college, I remember Googling which drum corps had a drum set player and at the time (I believe) it was the

'Devs, the Blue Coats, Madison Scouts, and The Cavaliers. I knew Scott Johnson was with the Blue Devils, and I'd also read that the Blue Devils were very jazz forward. Gordon Goodwin was doing a lot of the arrangements, and it seemed like they were the only drum corps where the drum set was active and didn't necessarily feel too "marching band." The way they used the kit felt very musical and more applicable to the real world of music. With the 'Devs I felt that I could really be a kit player and not feel like a marching player on a drum set.

The ear training and the work ethic were the huge things that I learned from drum corps. You come out of high school with talent, eagerness, and drive. I feel like the Blue Devils is where I refined my mental focus and my ear through repetition and the hours of work you had to put in. In the corps, like in a band, the drum set is the glue of the band. The drum set ties the front ensemble to the drumline. You are just locked in on the drumline the whole time, but they're halfway across the field playing five-tuplets and all these crazy rhythms. You must lock in to what they are doing while playing a full drum set. It all just clicked and made sense and scratched the itch of the rudimentary and groove style that I loved. I knew Gadd had played in the Air Force band and blending that style into pocket and feel was the musical bridge for me.

I remember seeing the Buddy Rich Tribute Concert video with Weckl, Vinnie, and Gadd. Obviously, I was inspired by all those guys in so many ways. But there was something about Gadd's groove. Vinnie and Weckl are incredible drummers, but they weren't the same type of performers as Gadd. When Gadd played, he commanded the stage. Whereas Dave and Vinnie were soloists, Gadd had a simplicity in the way he played. I was just a kid, but that caught my ear, and I was hooked. Obviously, I dove into his records and his videos. I loved his incorporation of diddle-based rudiments in his drumming. I could see stuff in him that I was doing in marching band and drum corps. The diddle and inverted diddle grooves, the paradiddle grooves, the flams, and the linear two-handed fills— I just found myself gravitating towards how he played because it made sense to me. You hear a simplicity in his playing, but the absolute intentionality of his drumming is what makes him such a great drummer and performer. He plays with such authority, but he never gets in the way, ever!

MD: You mentioned that you have dance training in clogging and tap. What is clogging?

GT: I was trained in all sorts of dance, ballet, jazz, tap, etc. I was a clogger for about eight years. The way that I explain clogging is this: Clogging is to Fiddle, as Tap is to the violin. Basically, it's the same thing, but stylistically it's very different. In clogging, the tap is loosely attached to the bottom of the shoe. It has a more legato "flammier" sound, whereas tap is more staccato. Clogging has a less "refined" feel to it and is more closely associated with folk dance while tap dance always felt more sophisticated.

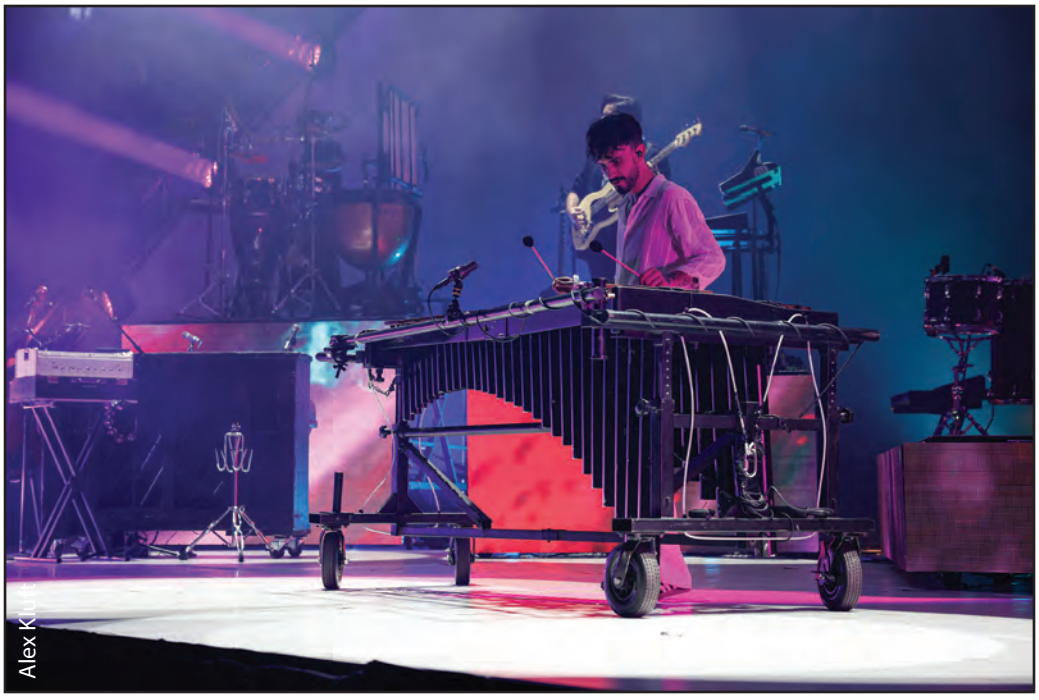
MD: Talk about the kind of ear training that you had to do with the Blue Devils.

GT: When you're marching, you're dealing with sound delays across an entire football field and having to anticipate entrances. When you're in the front, you're always having to "listen back." That was the biggest thing they trained us to do. When the season started, they even did the visual aid with someone at the back of the field and someone at the front of the field both playing. When the person in the back of the field was "listening forward" and trying to play at the same time, there was always a flam. When we would reverse it, it was perfectly in sync. Most of



the time you're watching the conductor with your peripheral vision, but at the same time having to (kind of) ignore them. I would watch the feet of our center snare drummer because I was on the front sidelines.

In 2013, our show was called "The Rewrite of Spring" because it was the 100th anniversary of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring." I started the show with a big rock groove, when the drumline would come in, they had to anticipate the delay of me playing. When they entered, immediately I was not leading the band anymore. You just get used to those minor adjustments of laying back or pushing forward, learning not to freeze, and continue playing and just slow yourself down. For me that has carried forward so much. You can't stop if something goes wrong, you have to fix it on the fly and learn to listen meticulously. That was one of the greatest things I learned in drum corps.


Alex K

The amount of just BPM training we would do by just listening to clicks and memorizing tempo points was helpful too. Randomly throughout the day, Scott Johnson would have a metronome just clicking and just randomly point to me and say, "Play 110 or whatever tempo he was feeling." He would do that all summer to the point where you were just undeniable with the click and tempo, it was just a part of you. That training makes playing in bands with a click so much easier and musical. The process of sitting back, and knowing when to lean forward, and finding that space within the groove. I remember Steve Jordan saying that he never wants to bury the click, he always wants to be around the pocket because that's what creates the human element. So being able to adjust forward and back when you need to, is what makes music human and what makes the groove feel so good.

MD: What type of things did you study with Chester Thompson at Belmont University?

GT: My time with Chester was a lot of independence and ambidexterity training, and a lot of mind over matter training. He had "Chestersizes." That was when he would create these exercises with two drum sets in the room. He would start each lesson by just playing a pattern or a figure and then you would join in. Then he would adjust it slightly and let it evolve and change, and you would have to follow and adapt. He would push you to the point of thinking I cannot keep up with what he's doing and then we'd stop. Then he'd say, "OK let's dive into this." It was cool because he allowed you to explore, listen, and use your ears first. Then we would get into reading. He had countless exercises that we did both with right-hand and left-hand lead. There was a drum set with two rides and two hi-hats, and you would do everything open handed and traditionally. All the stuff we worked on wasn't necessarily anything you would ever play on a gig; he was training consistency. He wanted you to get to a place where you could tackle any musical scenario thrown at you. Anything someone could think of, you would already have done it before: so nothing was uncomfortable. He would stretch you to your absolute limit by having you play crazy polyrhythms and different combinations. You would play a groove where (for example,) your left foot would be doing a 2-3 son clave' pattern, your right foot is playing the tumbao pattern, your right hand is reading out of *Syncopation*, and your left hand is playing dotted eighth notes. Then he'd have you flip everything from left to right without stopping. Sometimes when you got stuck, he would tell you to stop thinking about it and imagine watching yourself play what you're playing, as if you were in the third person. He had a great way of getting you out of your head. Then you would play it and wonder how you just played that so effortlessly. He had a wonderful sense of confidence building while also having an extremely high standard of excellence. You didn't wanna let him down, and at the same time he was flexing on you. He'd casually say, "Hey I'm out for two weeks because I'm in Europe with Genesis." I really loved working with him. He brought out so much detail and confidence in my playing.

> The performance factor and the showmanship of our live show is off the charts. It's been incredible, and these are some of my favorite shows ever.

MD: That brings us to for KING + COUNTRY, tell me how that

happened?

GT: As mentioned before, I auditioned and was originally brought in as a second drummer and multi-instrumentalist. The for KING + COUNTRY live show is very drum forward. During the show at some point almost everybody hits a drum. The performance factor and the showmanship of our live show is off the charts. It's been incredible, and these are some of my favorite shows ever.

MD: Can you talk about joining a project that is led (or at least co-led) by a drummer? That's not a thing we often get to do unless you're Chester Thompson.

GT: That is a funny coincidence that my instructor was also in a drummer led band. Anyway, the drums are obviously the heartbeat of for KING + COUNTRY. When I did my audition, I was told that everyone in the band had to be a multi-instrumentalist, so I recorded two of their songs where I played everything. I basically reproduced those two songs on video. I played drum set, marching percussion, world percussion, keys, bass, I even did some vocal vocoder stuff. I showcased everything I could do. I came into the band during a bit of a musical transition. They brought me in, and we had two drum sets, so I was playing kit two and some auxiliary percussion parts. They were looking to make some adjustments and the last album they put out was really a pop mainstream project. They were leaning more into that mainstream world doing a single with Jordin Sparks and Hillary from Lady A, and doing a lot of collaborations with other artists in different genres; but the drums were a musical focus. When I first joined, I just wanted to serve where I was put, and try to elevate it as much as I could. Part of my integration into the band was actually the beginning of some pretty major changes that are now a huge part of the show. A goal of mine was to create a true world percussion section with my background and training as a percussionist. I transitioned from just doubling drum parts into a world-perc setup that brought layers, dynamics, and finesse to the songs. Another aspect of what I brought to the show was the use of sample machines where we could play elements from the backing tracks as live instruments. That was something that I did with Judah as well. I introduced MIDI controllers, an MPC, and the Akai Force. Live, I was chopping up stems and playing the electronics like a DJ.

I feel like I joined and served what they needed. I just tried to bring my best, be a great performer, an encouraging person, and help progress the band forward, while showcasing my expertise behind the kit.

I feel like everyone in the band was really vibing with the new level of musicianship and it hit a point where they made a few personnel changes and asked me to be the main kit player as well as band leader. That is how the transition happened. I feel like I joined and served what they needed. I just tried to bring my best, be a great performer, an encouraging person, and help progress the band forward, while showcasing my expertise behind the kit.

MD: That sounds like a tough line to walk. You were doing the gig, while you were expanding the gig, and taking charge of someone else's band a little bit.

GT: I honestly didn't really think about it. I just tried to show up and bring my best. I'm very grateful for the opportunities when I wasn't behind the kit because I feel like it's made me a better player. When I do clinics, I tell musicians that the music industry is not the same industry that it was. Especially in the live music scene. Everyone is expected to do so much more; it's hard to be a one trick pony in the music industry nowadays. You have to be able to do more things. You can't be stubborn and limit yourself to only one thing if you really want to be as successful as possible. When I started with both Judah and for KING + COUNTRY, I took the back seat, I served the gig before I leaned in. Because I have a background in marching, orchestral percussion, and world percussion; I dove in and tried to suggest things that could add to the overall performance. It's about serving where you're planted. I think that always leads to better things and I am very grateful for all my experiences.

MD: Explain to the younger drummers out there what a drummer is now expected to bring to a gig.

GT: When I first moved to Nashville, I ran into a guy at Bridgestone Arena, we ended up chatting and I asked him what he did. He said, "I play acoustic guitar for Kenny Chesney." He had been Kenny Chesney's acoustic guitar player for his whole career. But those days are long gone. What I have found through all the gigs that I've done since I've started touring professionally, is that knowing Ableton, knowing how to build a session, knowing how to run playback— All of that has made me more valuable. Being able to implement electronics and being a hybrid drummer only makes you more desirable. When you have triggers on all your drums that creates a whole different thing than just "free range drumming." When you're triggering extra sounds you have to play the part a little more meticulously. Having a background in orchestral and marching has helped me a lot. With for KING + COUNTRY I have played marching snare, quads, tubular bells, marimba, timpani, percussion, drum set, piano, and vocoder.

Outside of that, most of the time when I'm recommending someone for a gig, hiring out a band, or are looking for someone— I'm looking for a guitarist who can also play keys, or a keys player who can play bass, these days musicians have to double-dip a lot. For example, Bon Iver has a drummer with a keyboard rig next to him. Ultimately, knowing more than just your instrument is going to make you a better player because you're learning a new skill and training your ear to listen and play differently. That only makes you more hireable and a better musician. You don't have to be the best at a second instrument, just be proficient. I don't think I would have been selected for the for KING + COUNTRY gig if I would have said, "I'm just playing kit." You never know how one thing could lead to another. Just being willing to adapt and follow the road where it takes you.

MD: We live in a world where being "overqualified" is being "qualified."

GT: I don't consider myself a rock or jazz drummer, I am a musician. I play all styles of music. That takes a lot of years and a lot of learning and listening to different styles and musical

approaches. In Latin music, sixteenth notes are felt completely different than in rock or in pop.

Take Questlove for example. I respect him so much. He is one of the most knowledgeable human beings that I've ever come across. Hearing him talk about his journey in music, the knowledge of the records that he knows, different styles, and being able to enter a different situation and change the feel up— that's what it's about, that's what is going to get you hired. The expertise is in how you play, but it's also in how you listen, how you respond, how you serve the music, and knowing that it's not necessarily about you. That's what being a good musician is about.

MD: Are you arranging the percussion parts for the band? At some point during the show, everybody in the band is playing a percussion instrument.



Alex Kluft

GT: I am the band leader, and the keyboardist/bassist Danny Lopez co-leads with me as Musical Director. I am usually overseeing everything in the drum world while he most often leads the melodic side of things. The band setup now has me behind the kit steering the ship and one of my best friends Chris Karabelas on percussion. With Chris, what's kind of cool is I created the percussion role, I created that world and adapted a lot of those parts before becoming the drummer. Therefore, I have a large understanding of what he is already playing, but he has taken those parts and adapted them and has put his own fingerprints on every part. Luke plays the marching snare drum as well. That adds another layer to the groove. If I'm doing a kick and snare pattern, he will play a similar marching figure or pattern that blends in. Other than Chris's parts, all the other drum moments are more for showmanship and overall effect of the show. I play the groove, and they're outlining the accents, and contributing to the larger groove. It adds that extra visual element to what the audience is hearing and seeing. Auxiliary percussion wise, it's all pretty simple, it's a lot of quarter note, eighth note, and sixteenth note driven stuff, and doubling figures. I don't like to micromanage, we built this band and we've found these players because they're great at what they do, and there's trust there.

Ultimately, you learn the song, you put your finger fingerprint on it, and do your thing. If something doesn't make sense, I'll say, "I'm not feeling that, try this instead, I think this will fit the groove better." For the auxiliary drum moments, Danny and I are suggesting what to play on those impact moments. We do a few breakdowns in the show where it's just drums and sample pads. We'll rehearse those breakdowns as kind of a loop, and I'll have people stagger in and out so they can really hear what their part does. I don't want it to feel like, "This is the part, play it!" I want that feeling of chemistry where everyone's contributing and has a voice, but also knows that there is a high standard since there is so much going on.

This iteration of the band is the best it's ever been, and I think that's because everyone feels like they're bringing something to the table. Everyone in this band is so talented, musically gifted, and they are multi-instrumentalists, so everything clicks really easily.

MD: How do you approach playing with a percussionist, are you

hyper aware of not doubling parts?

GT: Obviously the drums are what steers the ship. Chris' percussion adds all the spice and the color that is layered inside. If I was playing by myself, I might add a little more color on the hi-hat or be a little busier and more nuanced. But, depending on the song, I try to create space for Chris to speak through. We have a couple songs that are more pop-rock, and I could easily spice up the hi-hat patterns, but I lay it back and leave space for him. Chris has got stacks, metallic stacks, and shakers. It's about listening and knowing when to stay out of the way to serve the larger ensemble. There are moments where each of us get to lean in. We do a song called "Joy" that is Chris' time to shine, it's kind of a reggaeton Latin tune, and Chris kills it! With drums and percussion, it's all about how we can fill the space to make the groove bigger.

What's fun about for KING + COUNTRY is the wide musical spectrum in their discography. Because of the collaborations we have, there are pop forward songs with a lot of electronics, but then we have some big anthemic rock'n'roll where I'm just slamming the drums like a bulldozer. Then we have some songs that are very arranged where we're playing specific parts, and if you don't play that part, the song doesn't work. It's exciting as a drummer because you get to scratch the itch for many different styles, and we get to express many different musical ideas and dynamics.


Alex Kluft

MD: What kind of gear are you playing?

GT: I endorse Zildjian cymbals, Vic Firth sticks, DW hardware, Evans drumheads, 64 Audio in-ears, and I use Snare Weight for drum muffling. But for drums, I'm actually not with a drum company because I love playing so many different drums. My favorite drums are a 1958 transition badge mahogany Ludwig kit. I don't tour with them because they're so old, but I love those drums. My first kit ever was a 90s Premier kit and my mom made me promise that I'd never sell them. I still have every piece of gear that I've ever owned. I've also got a DW Maple Collector Series Ruby Glass kit for the pop stuff and a Gretsch Catalina kit.

But what I really love are Franklin Drums. They're a boutique company out of Franklin, TN owned by Will Chapman (drummer in Colony House.) I tour with those drums, and I have designed some that sound great. Aaron Sterling plays a couple Franklin kits and uses a lot of Franklin drums. It's cool because not a lot of people know about them, but they're local and I really love supporting local companies that are doing cool stuff. With King I'm playing a 12, 16, 22, Black Maple Franklin kit, and with Judah I play a 12, 16, 20 Satin Flame Mahogany Franklin kit. With Judah I also have a 24" remote kick that is tuned wide open. All the kicks are 14 inches deep. I am using a 6 1/2 by 14 Franklin Aged Vintage Steel snare with flange hoops on it, I love it! I was playing a Franklin Raw Brass snare with die cast hoops, but the vintage steel has a little more bite and depth. One of my favorite snares is a 13" Ludwig Black Beauty Piccolo snare, I always use that as my side snare, it's got a great crack.

MD: Are you a "snare drum guy?"

GT: Yeah, I've got a few snares outside of the ones on the road. Obviously, you must have a Supraphonic, I've got an Acrolite that is just a workhorse. One of my favorite snares is the Yamaha Elvin Jones Signature snare with the wood hoops. My brother was a rock-head, so he inspired me to get the Joey Jordison Slipknot snare. I've got a Pearl Sensitone concert snare and a Yamaha Birch Custom snare that I really love. A company called Dial-Tune sent me a cool snare with no rims and a dial for the top and bottom heads. I have used that in the studio quite a bit. It's really fat with heavy hardware, so you get a thick sound out of it. And I have a Maple Gretsch Catalina snare that I love because it has this perfectly thin sound with a nice little bite. I like to have each snare tuned to what they do best and I kind of leave them there.

MD: What are you using from Zildjian?

GT: I gravitate naturally towards the K's and Constantinople's. I have a Constantinople Medium Low, Overhammered Con, Renaissance Ride, the K Light Ride, an Avedis Ride with some rivets for some jazzier things, and 16" Avedis hi-hats. I've got a few of their older effects cymbals that they don't make anymore, like the Remix with the tambourine jingles riveted to it, a Crash of Doom, and some spiral stuff. I also really dig the 15" fat hats!

MD: Being a Nashville musician, what would you tell a young drummer who was thinking of moving to Nashville to start his or her career?

GT: I would start by asking them what their intentions are? Having spent a lot of time in Nashville, LA, and New York I've learned this. If you want to be in the Broadway scene or the jazz scene you must be in New York. If you want to be a pop drummer, don't move to Nashville, move to LA. That's where the pop bands are coming out from. There is a studio called The Beehive that hires so many bands in the pop world. But if you want to really get into studio work, heavy touring, obviously the CCM or the Country market, and if you want a smaller bubble to

get connected quicker, then it's Nashville all the way. Nashville is the hub for drummers and studio work. Even in LA they're hiring Nashville drummers to play on many records. Nashville is known as a drummer city, but it depends on what you want to do. As a drummer, Nashville is a great bet especially if you want to tour and do studio work.

MD: Who are some of your favorite Nashville drummers today?

GT: I love Aaron Sterling, he's a great drummer, he lives in Franklin just south of Nashville. Garrett Goodwin is a huge mentor of mine. He was Carrie Underwood's drummer since the beginning of her career, he just left a few years ago. He was a big influence especially because playing in arenas is very different from playing in clubs. How and what you play has to translate in arenas. He taught me a lot as I was starting to play arenas. There are moments for flashiness, but it's about big motions, big fills, and energy; he is a great example of that in the country world. Another great country drummer is Ben Sesar, but one of my favorite Nashville drummers that a lot of people don't know about is Marcus Finnie. He's played with Kirk Whalum, Taj Mahal, and Keb' Mo. Marcus is a heavy jazz-fusion guy, a studio guy, and a monster drummer, one of my favorites. Obviously, Chester Thompson is great, and early on I took some lessons from and got connected with Zoro (Lenny Kravitz' old drummer.) Daru Jones is another great voice in the Nashville drumming scene. And my friends like Ryan Winnen, Will Chapman, and Troy Bruner are drummers for some of my favorite newer rock bands.


Alex Kluft

MD: What are some of your "go-to" recordings to listen to?

GT: Stevie Wonder's entire discography, but most specifically *Songs in the Key of Life*. He's my favorite musician of all time, and one of my favorite drummers. A lot of people don't know he played drums on a lot of his records. Anything he touches is an absolute lesson in music. Michael Jackson's *Off the Wall,* JR Robinson is THE man, he's as good as it gets. Also Michael Jackson's *Thriller* with Ndugu Chancler and Jeff Porcaro. I try to study and learn from them as much as I can. D'Angelo's *Voodoo* album, Questlove's drumming on that album is iconic. *Choose Your Weapon* by Hiatus Kaiyote, that is a modern left-of-center masterpiece. And of course, Paul Simon's "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover" with Gadd. Honestly, anything with Gadd on it! There is so much good music out there, it is hard to list everything. Another go-to for me is the production by J. Dilla. I actually wrote my master's thesis on the whole J. Dilla thing, the whole "drunken drag style of beats." I wanted to be one of the first more academic guys explaining how to play that stuff. It's more based on ear and feel, but I wanted to be an early resource academically on how to approach that. J. Dilla's *Donuts*, and the stuff with Slum Village is probably some of my favorite J. Dilla music.

MD: What are some of the records that you have done that you would point people to as being representative of your approach?

GT: I actually have a Spotify playlist of everything I've ever recorded if you search my playlists. I'm really proud of Judah and the Lion's *Revival*. I also have a project with the lead singer of Judah and the Lion, and my wife called *Pink Laundry* that's just a real punk rock'n'roll project with probably some of my favorite drum parts. I'm extremely proud of the record called *To the King* with my band Local Sound. I'm excited for the release of the new for KING + COUNTRY feature film *Unsung Hero* that's coming out in the spring. I played on six of the songs for the soundtrack. I also have a solo project that's under my name Garrett P. Tyler called *New Normal* that is exciting to me, because it's the music that strictly features my artistic voice. I wrote and co-produced it with producer/friend Justin Amundrud and my "musical spouse" Danny Lopez, we work on everything together. We also have a new project under the brand called *DLOxGPT* that is strictly instrumental jazz music. Our goal is for that to be a stamp on the Nashville music scene, and we have a ton of new music coming out.

Ultimately, what you do doesn't define who you are. Especially in the arts. In the end what carries you in this world is relationships, how you treat other people, and who you are as a person. That's what defines you. If all of the music is (somehow) stripped away, those things are what shape who you are. I feel very blessed to work with Grammy award winning artists, perform on multiple stages around the world, and share my gifts with aspiring musicians and fans, but my joy in this world is my wife, family, and friends! I also would love to give a huge shoutout to my family for always supporting my drumming, my wife for constantly inspiring me to be the best version of myself, to God, and to all my band directors and music instructors that have influenced me along the way: Howard Dunn, Brenda Harbison, Brady Massey, Steve Warner, Stan Hall, Craig Collison, Timothy Oliver, Jack Mizutani, Brian Dinkel, Jim Wunderlich, Todd London, Chester Thompson, and Jeff Kirk.

Check out Garrett's drummer profile page, at moderndrummer.com

for KING + COUNTRY

Percussionist Chris Karabelas

By Mark Griffith

Percussionist Chris Karabelas' journey is an interesting story. He grew up outside of Baltimore, MD. His father was a big music fan who took him to more concerts than he can even remember. At five, his parents bought him a djembe to get him off their pots and pans, and at 10 they bought him a drum set under the condition he started taking lessons. At 15 he enrolled in the Paul Green School of Rock where he played shows in a bathing suit because of his obsession with Taylor Hawkins. By 17, Chris was playing for the School of Rock All-Stars touring band and sitting in at his teachers' gigs. All this time he was only playing drum set. When he enrolled at Belmont University, he was a commercial percussion (drum set) performance major. Chris is thankful that his start on drum set was outside of an academic setting. But his musical evolution really started in school. *Interesting*…



Alex Kluft


Alex Kluft

CK: As a drummer I never really felt comfortable with chops. I was never a chop player. I was never in drum corps or marching band. I thrived through pocket playing and just playing with other people. Even at a young age, if you put me on the bandstand with a band, I was able to create a solid foundation, but if you asked me to take a drum solo, I just kept groovin', I played groove solos like I heard Steve Jordan do. I've always liked the feeling of a solid pocket, that was the reason I wanted to play drums.

In Baltimore, I had a great teacher named John Thomakos. His teaching style was a game changer for my playing. You can ask Dennis Chambers about John. John Thomakos is one of the best and most solid drummers that you will ever hear; he introduced me to Latin music, and Mark Walker's playing on Andy Narrell's *Fire in the Engine Room* record. Through John I was hearing and learning about samba, baiao, and I became obsessed with Afro-Cuban music. I was really starting to get into the percussion heavy genres of music by the time I went to college.

MD: What specifically did you study with John?

CK: Our lessons would sometimes last for two or three hours. We would play, and then we'd talk about music for hours. Those are the best lessons! But specifically, I've never heard somebody accent a bass drum like John. Specifically in a setting where you are playing a baiao. You don't really hear the first and third kick notes, but that's where the feel is. David Garibaldi talks about the volumes of each limb in a lot of his books, we applied that to a Latin setting. You are kind of rearranging how you hear; you're not really thinking about two and four anymore. John was into feeling the emotion behind any style, and really digging into that. He also had a book, *The Drumset Styles Encyclopedia* full of musical recommendations. This is how I learned about the Steely Dan *Alive in America* record with Dennis Chambers and Peter Erskine. I pretty much worshipped that record from the end of high school throughout college. I could probably play you that whole record from back to front.

Through watching John Thomakos play at shows, I learned about space, dynamics, playing accents throughout a fill or a groove, when to drive a song, and went NOT to drive a song. He was really into letting the drums speak for themselves while sitting in the pocket.

I also learned another crazy Baltimore thing. One of our buddies had a circle drill and he would drill a hole in the side of his bass drum shell to create a porthole for miking. That way you could still have a solid front resonant head with no hole.


Alex Kluft

With the hole in the shell, you get a roundness to the kick drum tone from the resonance of solid heads on both sides. It works well with a big kick drum. I did it on one of my old Pearl Export bass drum shells, and for rock music where you want a big bass drum tone, it made a difference. I wouldn't do it to a custom drum set, but if you have an old cheap set lying around give it a try.

MD: You grew up in Baltimore, was Go-Go music an influence on you?

CK: No question. That feeling that you get from Go-Go music, in terms of pocket playing, there's nothing like it. John Thomakos (everything goes back to John) introduced me to Chuck Brown and the Soul Searchers. When I heard all the percussion going on, the conga rhythms, and that almighty cowbell, it changed my life. With for KING + COUNTRY we play a song called "Together," and that Go-Go groove is all I'm doing. The tambourine in one hand and the bell and mounted tambourine. with the other hand. It's a song they recorded with Kirk Franklin so it's very gospel with a full choir backing us up in the tracks, I know Kirk has a lot of Go-Go inspiration behind his music, especially on the *Hello Fear* record. There is a song on that called "Before I Die" that is just straight up Go-Go.

That feeling that you get from Go-Go music, in terms of pocket playing, there's nothing like it...When I heard all the percussion going on, the conga rhythms, and that almighty cowbell, it changed my life

MD: I fell in love with the Go-Go band Trouble Funk.

CK: I saw Trouble Funk open for the Foo Fighters in 2014, it was secret show at the 9:30 Club. This is the benefit of having a dad who's obsessed with concerts. There was a thing called Big Tony's Birthday Bash hosted by Dave Grohl, and in the bottom corner of the poster there was a Foo Fighters emblem. This was right after they recorded *Wasting Light*, and because that logo was on the poster (and my father and I were HUGE Foo's and Taylor Hawkins fans) we figured that the Foo's would also be playing, and we had to go. The opener was Dave Grohl's old punk band from DC called Scream. Then Big Tony and Trouble Funk played for two hours straight, just straight up Go-Go. It was my first time in a proper DC Go-Go setting. This is a core memory for me, just life changing. To see the whole room dance the way it did for two hours straight (with no breaks) was amazing! Then Foo Fighters came out played another two hours, it was like a five-hour show all together. Trouble Funk and Chuck Brown and the Soul Searchers were the two main bands for me for a while.

If any drummer wants to learn what pocket is or how to play in it, you can't teach it from a book or talking about it. It's about playing with other people and listening and realizing the feeling of it when you're grooving. Drummers need to listen and play along with records, for example records by Prince, Stevie Wonder, James Brown, and Earth, Wind, & Fire— the GOATS of groove. But in terms of "swang," that loose 16th-note type of swing (if you're going to put a name to it,) and locking into that pocket so you can create some feelings with your audience in the room, the answer is Chuck Brown and the Soul Searchers, Trouble Funk, and Go-Go music!

MD: When did you start to focus on playing percussion?

CK: Before going to college, I didn't know what a marimba or timpani even was. I saw those instruments, but I never knew what they were or how to play them. I did take two months of classical lessons just so I could get into college and pass the audition, that was my introduction to marimba and timpani. The first two years of college it was mandatory to do all the classical stuff and I absolutely fell in love with it. A lot of my peers were doing it just so they didn't have to do it anymore, but I fell head over heels in love with classical percussion. There is something about the sound of a five-octave marimba being played with soft mallets— I had never heard a sound that beautiful before. I found myself in a practice room at midnight trying to play Bach Chorales. Just hearing the sound of the low chords in that small room was magical. My two percussion teachers were Todd London and Dr. Christopher Norton (Todd world percussion and Dr. Norton classical.) In terms of hand percussion, I just started playing congas and kind of figured out the different tones and technique. There was a grad student named Aaron Walters who taught me a lot about tumbao, cascara, and other percussion sounds and rhythms as well. I was in our school's main jazz band for four years playing percussion, they needed a percussionist, so I did it. Playing percussion for that ensemble drove me to practice and do my own research on how to play congas, bongos, timbales, etc. That's also where I met and first played with Garrett. My sophomore year was his first year of grad school, that was his only ensemble playing drum set and I was playing percussion. We did that for two years, and we got really close.

There is something about the sound of a five-octave marimba being played with soft mallets— I had never heard a sound that beautiful before.

MD: It's interesting that you mention learning from both Aaron and Garrett. I tell students that in college you often learn as much (or more) from your fellow students as you do from your teachers.

CK: Absolutely. I was still playing drum set, but as I saw there weren't many musicians my age playing percussion in a commercial setting, I slowly began to have more interest in percussion. Todd London was a huge help answering any questions I had about hand drums and how to get specific



Alex Kluft

tones out of them. He also introduced me to the AMAZING Ed Uribe Brazilian and Afro Cuban/Brazilian books, they became my encyclopedias. I really need to go back to those books and shed, and really dive in again to some different styles like guaguanco and mambo. There is always so much to learn.

MD: And with a GREAT teacher (or book,) you will get years of things to work on from a single lesson.

CK: That's true, Chester Thompson would make us voice memo all our lessons with him, and I still go back and work on some of the stuff that he had us doing.


Kadin Tooley

MD: Garrett and I talked about what he learned from Chester, but what did *you* learn from Chester?

CK: That man changed my left hand forever. Everything he had you do right-handed you had to do left-handed. It was all about true four-way independence. He is very dry, and I always love a teacher that will tell me something I'm doing sucks. If it sucks, *please tell me it sucks*. Then I'll get it better. I know a lot of people get their feelings hurt but I love the criticism of, "Yeah man— that's just bad. But here's how we get better." I love that criticism. Independence is everything with Chester. He's got a whole bunch of "Chestersizes" where (for example) you're swinging with one hand and playing straight eighths with the other, and your feet are doing left foot clave' or something weird. He will tell you that 100% of what you do in this room you will never do in on the gig, it's just gonna help you start moving things around. His end goal was to get you to a point where all you had to do was think of the sound and you'd play it—you're not sitting their thinking what exactly your individual limbs are doing.

It's very similar to Gary Chester *New Breed* book, which I also was introduced to in high school by John, but Gary Chester's whole thing of doing the independence exercises at an insanely slow BPMs drove me nuts. Chester Thompson's thing is like that book, but on steroids.

I always love a teacher that will tell me something I'm doing sucks. If it sucks, *please tell me it sucks*.

MD: What drove you to commit to becoming a percussionist?

CK: Near the end of school, you start to think about what you are going to do after school. I loved playing drum set, but I was really starting to fall in love with classical percussion and world percussion. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that the one gig that I could do all three on (drum set, classical percussion, and world percussion) was musical theater.

They would only hire out the Belmont Pit Orchestra to local professionals, and another friend named Ryan Blihovde and I were constantly wanting the school to hire us to play the shows (he's actually in New York currently subbing on *Aladdin* and a few other shows.) Ryan was the first one to get hired into the pit orchestra at Belmont, and once he left, he threw the gig to me. By the time I graduated I had four local theater gigs: a children's theater, the National Shakespeare Festival, Street Theatre Company, and the Belmont shows. My musical life had become multi-perc setups. The first show I ever played was called *Parade* by Jason Robert Brown. That's setup had two timpani, marching snare, a small drum set, wood blocks, glockenspiel, chimes, and more. With shows like that you're really getting into true four-way independence.

MD: All those "Chestersizes" paid off.

CK: With a lot of the Belmont productions, they only had enough money to pay one percussionist, so I was playing both percussion books, which each had multiple parts. It got crazy real fast.

I remember playing a production of *On the Town*, which was originally written for two percussionists, but I was doing the show alone. I had a month to really shed that show. There was a point where I was muting timpani with my face because it was at the end of a unison cymbal roll and a timpani figure, and I had to mute the cymbal roll and the timpani at the same time.

Through playing bigger percussion setups in the jazz band and musical theater, studying world percussion, playing percussion in some cover bands around town, and playing some drum set, I became a percussionist. I love the choreography of all of the stuff where you are playing multiple parts and running between instruments. During college, I did theater work over the summer of my Junior and Senior years in Colorado with Rocky Mountain Repertory Theater. After college I got hooked up with a contactor through friends and got the Broadway tour of *Elf*. After that I moved to New York and got the Broadway tour of *SpongeBob*. Seven months into the nine-month *SpongeBob* tour the pandemic hit…

MD: And everything stopped.

CK: During the pandemic I fell in love with salsa music. I bought myself a nice pair of timbales, and I dove deep into all kinds of salsa music. Bands like Tony Succar and pretty much any band that Marc Quinones was in. He's played on Tony Succar stuff, but he also played on some Victor Manuelle and Marc Anthony recordings. My pandemic was playing *Mario Kart* and practicing

salsa music. I was transcribing, practicing, doing all the salsa four-way independence, which is a different independence from a lot of the theater world choreography. I saw a contemporary salsa percussionist in Nashville playing congas with one hand, timbal with the other, playing timbal rolls with a stick and his hand (that sounded like two sticks,) left foot clave', tumbao with his bass drum, and singing background vocals. His name is Manotas Ramirez, he is just mind-blowing!

MD: You mentioned the choreography of playing a multi-perc setup for a show. Where did you learn that skill?

CK: It's true choreography. For example, you might only have two beats to grab a different mallet and a get a different instrument in your line of view. I learned that from doing percussion ensemble in college. I was the kid that did like pretty much every single ensemble that I could. The requirement was to be in one ensemble, I was in *seven*. I just wanted to learn about everything. That choreography was one of those things.

You see you see that break in the music right there? That's where your left hand is going to put down this this mallet and pick up this shaker while you are playing xylophone with the other hand. Oh, *you can't do it yet,* you need to go practice. That's where the hours in the practice room come in. That's when I started writing these moves and changes in the score. You make notes saying, "During this break your right hand has to move to the cymbal." I would write in the score "RH —> SUS" or whatever your shorthand may be. I would find those moments and go to the practice room to practice that whole choreography (while playing the figures) until I didn't mess it up. For Broadway shows you can look at reference pictures of how percussionists who've done your show in the past have set up. But for me, many times I was playing two books at the same time, so I had to go through the whole score and do my homework figuring everything out; where to put the music stands, page turns, mirrors to see the conductor, I need this instrument here… Choreography that's what it is. No one is really going to teach you how to do that, you just need to figure it out yourself.

So much of this applies to the for KING + COUNTRY gig. Garrett started as the percussionist and created the percussion station for the group. A lot of the melodic choreography he developed. When I came to the group, I added more toys, drums, cymbal stacks, and sounds to the set up. Most of the time I'm playing sleigh bells with my foot, shaker and conga with one hand, and playing chimes and glock with the other. I find myself often playing shaker and congas at the same time. The difference between this gig and pit gigs is there's no charts, it's two hours of memorized music, and I had to learn it in a week. That was a learning curve for me.

MD: How did you memorize two hours of music in a week?

CK: Repetition, repetition, repetition! I had a cheat sheet of keys and chord symbols. But the more you do it, the more you are using muscle memory.

MD: How did the percussion role in for KING + COUNTRY change when you came it?

CK: They always had percussion, obviously this is a drum and percussion forward band. But they've never had a proper perc-world set up. Garrett was the person to get that ball rolling with them, he created their first true "perc-world" set up while he was the percussionist. He was playing the sleigh bell part with his left foot while he was playing a glock line or playing chimes and playing shaker with his other hand (Garrett started as a percussion major as an under-grad.) Then when I came into the group and Garrett moved to drum set, I was able to build on the foundation he laid. Coming from the multi-perc-Broadway-set-up world and obsessing over the rigs of percussionists like Keita Ogawa and Nate Werth, I just added more toys, drums, and cymbal stacks to the percussion station.



There are parts and melodies that must be played (on glock, chimes, etc.) Those didn't really change. The only thing that changed is when I'm playing a glock melody, I have a free hand to comp on conga. If I'm playing a shaker, and Garrett's playing some tom stuff, I'll join with some congas. I added more of a comping aspect to the percussion parts and made them speak through my voice and my way of playing. This gig also has a lot of pop rock moments, so that's where I play a lot of stacks and metallic sounds. In my head, I'm imitating a drum machine-808

sample lines on live percussion. All in all, I've been able to add more drums and sounds to the show, accompanied by my style of playing.

MD: How much of the for KING + COUNTRY gig is improvised?

CK: I'd say about 40%, but you're playing a part while you're comping with one hand, so one hand is improvising while one hand is playing the part. Garrett and I create our drum and percussion parts in rehearsal, so in rehearsal it's more about the band moments. Garrett and Danny are both our MD's, but they allow me to use my ears to create different variations on some parts, unless it's a melody. Glock melodies and sleigh bell patterns are probably 60% of the gig come Christmas time, but through half of that you're also listening to this song and figuring out different comping sounds and rhythms. There's an EDM breakdown at the end of a song called "God Only Knows" that's just us playing. I create more of the 808 vibe, and I add cymbal stack sounds while syncopating with Garrett. Your improvised parts become the parts you play night to night.


Alex Kluft

MD: How many different shows do you guys have?

CK: We are doing the Christmas show now, then there is a completely different Spring show, and then we are going to start an elevated acoustic show next year. This, like a lot of gigs I've had, I really must practice for. This is a great band, and everybody holds everyone else accountable for how and what they are playing.

Sometimes with Broadway shows (which are VERY scripted,) you can be playing the parts and sort of go on auto pilot. But you can't ever play anything different than what's on the page most of the time (for obvious reasons.)

MD: What is your basic set up for this band?

CK: For the Spring shows I have congas, bongos, a piccolo snare drum, cymbal stacks, timbales, cowbells, jam blocks, tambourine and mounted tambourine, Indonesian Ankle Bells, bottle caps, shell rattle, and surdo/bass drum, while the chimes are on a different riser. For the Christmas show, the chimes, timpani, and glock are added in the perc-world station.

MD: What are some of your favorite songs to play on this tour?

CK: On "Silent Night" I am playing a glock melody line that I love, and during the second verse I'm playing congas and shaker while Garrett is playing a mallet tom groove, and it's just pocket. All my favorite moments are pocket moments. I love doing "Oh Come All Ye Faithful," "Baby Boy," and "Joy to The World" because there is a lot of choreography and quick changes and I'm never playing less than two instruments at the same time. In the Spring we play a song called "Cheering You On" where Garrett is playing an MPC-sampler, so I'm driving the groove in my percussion set up. My bass drum/surdo is on my right while the bongos are on my left and the stack, bells, and mounted tambourine are in the middle, so to play the groove I've come up with requires me to switch between right and left-hand leads (thanks to Chester Thompson for making that "not a thing" anymore!) All these songs require me to feel like an octopus. I do get play drum set on two songs, I play on a rock version of "Angels We Have Heard on High," and on one of the band's hits called "Joy" I play drums, Garrett's on marimba, and the keyboard player Danny is on percussion. That's always a fun moment in the show.

MD: What are some of your favorite percussion sounds?

CK: With for KING, I use an Ocean Drum (Meinl calls it an Energy Drum) during one of the slow moments, and it sounds like an ocean, it's crazy. Upcycle Percussion has these bottle caps that start with big laundry detergent caps at the bottom and go up to Coca-Cola bottlecaps, and it sounds like water! I love the LP Cricket. It's typically used for one handed clave' but if you do it slow enough it really sounds like a cricket. You can hear it 44 seconds into Lionel Richie's song "All Night Long." But I'd have to say my favorite percussion instrument is a shaker; the variety of tones and versions there are. You can also easily make your own to create a totally unique sound. Shakers are essential in

most percussion set ups. On a totally separate note my favorite instrument sound is the French Horn.

MD: How has your drumming background helped you as a percussionist?

CK: It helps you lock in on the pocket, the pocket is everything. No one is going to care how good your technique is if you aren't locked in the pocket. Proper technique is going to help you get a good sound and good tone from your instrument.

I know I have a very "Western" approach to Latin music, but I know the traditional tumbao patterns, and I can play in a traditional salsa setting. But on this gig, I must be able to transfer that into a pop rock setting. In that setting, I'm playing congas differently than if I were on a salsa band stand. My goal as a percussionist is to make sure sound wise, I'm not lining up with the snare drum exactly (or most of what the drummer is playing). If my backbeats are his backbeats, we're playing on similar audio wavelengths. If I'm slapping my conga when he's hitting a backbeat on snare drum, the conga is just going to be lost in translation, and it's going to affect the snare drum sound. If you have this perfect snare drum sound and there is another instrument being played as loud as the snare, it won't work. You're not gonna mix a record and put in a conga sound with a snare drum backbeat. My job is all about creating a groove that will get me out of the way of what the drummer is doing, while complementing it and putting more flavor in the groove. I add types of sounds that will make everything feel bigger, and maybe more pop, tribal, traditional, or whatever the song needs. I do that on a song-by-song basis.


Kadin Tooley

MD: How aware are you of not doubling any of the drummer's parts, and how aware should a drummer be about not doubling any of your parts or sounds?

CK: 100% aware at all times, you gotta listen, that's everything. Sure, there are times where we are locking in and playing the same parts, but we are always thinking about complimenting each other's parts and the textures of the sounds the other guy is playing.

MD: What are some of your favorite textures or combinations of sounds?

CK: Shaker and conga. Also, while Garrett is playing a groove, I love playing the ankle bells that I have set up in the spaces between his notes, and the tambourine on the backbeats. I'll hit the tambourine with him, but ankle bells kind of brighten up a groove, they imitate a light tambourine sound. I like different types of cymbal stacks, my stack on the right is an old Zildjian A Custom that is cracked to shreds below a Camber high hat top, it just sounds like "perfect trash." Throughout the show, I create a lot of the 808 textures with stacks, that gets things more pop-like. But the combination of ankle bells with cymbals stacks… maybe a tambourine back beat? *Saucy*.

MD: Are you playing any electronics?

CK: There's nothing electronic in my setup, but I play electronics around the stage on four songs this tour. We have one station which has an Ableton Push (I think it's technically an Akai Force we just call it a Push) and an SPD built in. We have another station with an MPC and another SPD built in. And a remote SPD with two Roland drum pads on the other side. I use that on for KING'S hit song "Priceless." The role of these parts is to play what the tracks would be playing, but live. My favorite moment of playing these "track" parts is in the band's latest Grammy-nominated single "Love Me Like I Am" featuring Jordin Sparks; I play the sub-bass line and some 808 sounds on the Push and I feel like a DJ.

MD: Who are some of your favorite percussionists?

CK: Traditionally I'd say Marc Quinones, I don't think I've heard a cleaner timbal player. Pedrito Martinez in New York creates some amazing parts on his multi-perc setup, he's also an insane conga player. Nate Werth and Keita Ogawa with Snarky Puppy, just in terms of like getting into more of a commercial setting. Chris Dave's percussionist with the Drumhedz, Frank Moka is one of the tastiest players out there; how he compliments Dave's grooves is MAGIC. They sound like one unit, it's inspiring.

MD: What are you working on right now?

CK: For this gig I've been shedding playing conga with one hand and being able to play other things with the other hand at the same time. Whether it's a cascara or shaker or whatever, I'm getting more into that realm because most of my gigs are not just playing one instrument at a time. I'm never *just* playing congas, I'm usually picking up something else, so lately I've been really shedding that aspect of my playing. I'm also really honing in on a good conga tone, I think it's gotten a lot better over the years, but it could always use some improvement.

MD: We're *all* always working on our sound and our touch.

CK: I'd like to take the time to thank some of my mentors and teachers I've had over the years to whom I owe a great deal; I wouldn't be where I am today without them: John Thomakos, Jason Heiser, Todd London, Chester Thompson, Derico Watson, Dr. Christopher Norton, Todd Kemp, John Smedstad, and Dr. Jeff Kirk.

Check out Chris's drummer profile page, at moderndrummer.com

Lol Tolhurst and Budgie are Curious Creatures



By Jeff Ryan

It's hard to imagine two other drummers from the post-punk era more influential than Lol Tolhurst from The Cure and Budgie from Siouxsie and the Banshees. Still to this day, you can't turn on any alternative internet radio station for longer than a few minutes without hearing The Cure's "Boys Don't Cry" or "A Forest" or the Banshees' "Spellbound." The Banshees also recorded one of the most captivating hit cover versions of The Beatles' "Dear Prudence" which had Budgie on full display rolling "Ringo like" all over the kit. Lol and Budgie have their own unique aesthetic for developing their distinctive drumming patterns and explaining their 40-year involvements in those bands, and their influence is far reaching.

Lol's minimalistic beats always complemented The Cure's lead singer and writer Robert Smith's melodies perfectly until he moved to keyboards in 1985 for the *Head on the Door* album. Lol departed in 1990 after making their doom and gloom masterpiece *Disentegration*. In contrast, is Budgie's physicality and melodic tom structures that propelled Siouxsie and the Banshees for decades as well as their voice/percussion duo, The Creatures which expanded his palette to indigenous and experimental percussive instruments like marimba, steel drums, and Kodo drumming.

It just makes sense that these two drummers, after all these years, have now joined forces along with producer Jacknife Lee to create their own project, aptly called Lol Tolhurst / Budgie / Jacknife Lee. Together they have created a beautiful and powerful drum-centric and melodically expansive album called *Los Angeles*. It's not a surprising alliance given their history together and separately in their own formative bands. As a bonus, they've pulled in foundational rock figures such as Primal Scream's Bobby Gillespie and the angular and melodically infectious founder of LCD Soundsystem, James Murphy. Last but not least, Lol and Budgie called one of rock's most idolized and adored guitarists, U2's The Edge, to round out the sound and contributing his unique and powerful guitar melodies and atmosphere to the project. As someone who grew up listening to both Lol and Budgie, it was a pleasure to catch up with them, discuss their recent collaboration, and all things drum related that led to the creation of *Los Angeles* and their successful podcast, *Curious Creatures*.

MD: Let's start at the beginning to give some of our readers, who may not be as familiar with you a bit of insight into how you both got into playing drums and how you each became the drummers in the bands for which you're best known; Lol with The Cure and Budgie with The Slits, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and The Creatures.

Lol: I had decided to form some kind of musical group at school, and they had a music room there. I purloined the snare drum, took it home, and got Buddy Rich's book of snare drum rudiments out of the library. That's really where I started. Then at maybe 14, I persuaded my mother to go to the local music store to vouch for me to buy this terrible old Maxwin (Pearl) kit. The kit had stands that were about as thick as my finger, and every time you hit the crash it would fall over. It all sort of went from there. I started to get lessons from a guy named Andy McBride, who was a jazz drummer, and played on the cruise ship the QE2.

Budgie: My career started when I was about 13 or 14. I played in a little cabaret band. We had a guitarist and a bass player, the guitarist played like Cliff Richard and the Shadows. They had learned all these songs and told me, "We need a drummer, and you're going to be the drummer." Before that, I'd only ever played a bongo or a snare drum, never a full drum kit. Then I went on to play with The Spitfire Boys, which was the first kind of punk band in Liverpool. Then I joined Big in Japan.

I got a little Olympic kit and tied it together with string. The bass drum and the hi-hat stand had to be tied to my seat so they would stay in one place. My first live playing experience was on a Sunday afternoon at a club. I remember the curtains were closed at the front of the stage, the drums were set up and this organ kicked in "Da Da Da…" Then the bass started following along, and someone turned around to me and said "Just play along!" I didn't really know any beats or anything at the time, and if I remember right, I was either elated or totally crapping myself! But that was my initiation into playing drums. From that point on, we learned a lot of the classics, like Elvis Presley's "Don't Be Cruel," "Hound Dog," and "Blue Suede Shoes." We didn't even know who the drummers were or anything like that. I really learned my chops from playing live on stage. Our singer Chuck, who was well ahead of his time, with big black sideburns and makeup just looked back at me and said, "Look to the front and smile." That was a great idea because (of course) I was staring down at my hi-hat stand, doing that drummer thing that we all do. As if all the clues to my drumming needs were down there by my left foot. I think that was the best advice I ever got for playing drums, "Look to the front and smile!" From that point on, I was always looking up. I smiled all the way through The Slits.

> I think that was the best advice I ever got for playing drums, "Look to the front and smile!" From that point on, I was always looking up.
>
> —Budgie

I loved playing with The Slits. Arianna was so entertaining and there's a great picture of me on stage with them and my head is popping up over the toms, I look like jack in the box and I'm just smiling. That didn't go too well with the Banshees though, probably because I was in some kind of aggressive trance or something.

MD: You two go back to 1979 with the *Join Hands* tour when the Banshees and The Cure were touring together. After that, did the two of you stay in touch over the years?

Lol: Yeah, but we live a continent apart, and we have for 30 years. Nowadays, because of Zoom, we see each other literally every other day. But when Budgie would come through playing with the Banshees, I would go have a chat and we'd hang out. We liked each other from the beginning. I always tell people, all drummers are friends, it's like being the goal keeper, you kinda have to be friends with other goalkeepers.

> I purloined the snare drum, took it home, and got Buddy Rich's book of snare drum rudiments out of the library. That's really where I started.
>
> —Lol Tolhurst

Budgie: Me, Siouxsie, Severin, and John McGeogh would drop in on Robert, Lol and whoever was playing bass for The Cure at the time. We'd pop up. I remember being around when you were shooting the video for "Love Cats." I'm pretty sure it was one of those comeback videos and I was thinking, "This is great! Why aren't our videos like this? This is loads of fun!"

Like most bands we didn't get to talk to other bands, we were always busy. If we weren't in the studio we were on the road. It was always just chance meetings. LA was the place where we'd spend the most time, and it was usually just chance meetings in Los Angeles. When we were touring, you'd either land in LA and play loads of gigs around California, or you'd start on the East Coast and head towards Los Angeles. By the time you got to LA, the band was really cooking, you knew everything, and you didn't have to soundcheck. LA was always the place I would get to if I had the chance. But life turned topsy turvy and went head over heels for me. (Again,) I thought of LA. I've got some old friends in LA, and I thought I should just go there. So I did. It's a funny thing, you can meet up with somebody you haven't seen for year or two and pick up the conversation, like no time has passed.

MD: Back in 2020, I saw the announcement for this project, and I believe the initial moniker for the project was *LTXB* and I thought to myself, surely these guys have stayed in touch over the years.

Budgie: Back then we were just really "playing with letters."

MD: What was the catalyst that brought the two of you together again after all these years and what was the inspiration to start this project?

Lol: Budgie was on tour here with John Grant. A good friend of mine, Joe Wong, has a podcast called *The Trap Set*, which is

all about drums. Joe told me that he was going to go interview Budgie while he was touring with John Grant. I thought I'd go along because I wanted to say hello to Budgie again.

Budgie: You sat in on the interview with Joe.

Lol: Yeah, exactly. Then me, Budgie, Joe Wong, and Kevin Haskins (from Bauhaus, who turned up for some reason) had breakfast together downtown.

Budgie: Kevin was always somebody that you'd bump into when you came through LA. It was a bit like The Last Supper in reverse? All of these disciples of drums coming together.

Lol: I said, you know what, we should do something. It won't be The Three Tenors, it will be The Three Drummers! We were joking and laughing a bit, and it started from there. Budgie finished his tour with John Grant, flew back to Berlin and got on another plane to come straight out to see me and Kevin. That is when we piled all these drums together to go and make some noise.



Budgie: We had loads of drums from my friend Walter down in Echo Park. We went to his place first, and just started putting ideas together. We got a bit more serious and took it up to Tommy Lee's studio. It got even more serious when we started mixing and getting somebody to do some singing. At first, we thought, "Maybe we could sing?" But we quickly realized that we were barking up the wrong tree.

Lol: It was a good reintroduction to how to make a record and do stuff. I suppose that's all it was. By the time we had finished that first section, Kevin had to leave and had to go back to play with Bauhaus. We finished that first section and thought, "We have a record that sounds like what you would imagine a record would sound like made by guys from The Cure, Banshees, and Bauhaus, and produced by a guy from Nine Inch Nails." Then we thought to ourselves, "We don't really want to do that."

Budgie: There's a video of us all at Tommy's studio. The music is pumping and we're all bobbing our heads up and down to the music. Because that's what music makes you do.

Lol: But we didn't really want to go back, that's excavation. We didn't want to polish off the bones, we wanted to discover something. We wanted to do something different. I knew JackKnife through some friends of mine, and I had a chat with him at a festival up in Topanga Canyon. I played our music for him, and he said, "Let's just start again. I think we could start again." On the way home I called Budgie, and said, "I think I found the guy for us. I think he's the right person." Budgie got back on a plane, and we went up to Yosemite National Park.

Budgie: We went up to Yosemite National Park and bonded over cooking, a Native American drum, and a pool table. Jacknife played us some of his strange 12 inch mixes, and long extended mixes, and we liked them. We thought, "Jacknife is pretty good at pool and pretty good at mixing, and he's just an all-around nice guy."

MD: I did listen to his episode on your podcast, *Curious Creatures*. He seems super interesting and very empathetic. Is Jacknife a musician as well?

Lol: He plays guitar and was a guitarist in a punk band in the nineties in Ireland called Compulsion.

Budgie: I think if you put Jacknife in front of any instrument he'd make a nice sound, or a horrible sound, or a nice horrible sound, with taste.

MD: Before the recording process started, and given the fact that you're both multi-instrumentalists, did the two of you sit down and plan out what each of you would play? Did you bring your own songs, melodic, or rhythmic ideas to the table? Or did it just happen naturally and organically in the studio?

Lol: The latter, most definitely.

Budgie: Part two.

Lol: One of the good things about being with Jacknife is that we went back to the way that we first started making music. When you first start to learn your instrument as a teenager it's more of a social thing. You sit around in someone's house or garage with your friends, and one of them can play a bit of guitar, and you can play a bit of drums, and you just start playing stuff. Suddenly someone says, "Play that bit again", and then you do it, and you just keep doing it, and keep going with it.

One day Jacknife asked us, "What is the job of the musician? The job of the musician is discovery." So we did it that way, and it was really good and kind of easy. We would go there every day and have coffee. We'd be talking and getting to know each other, and Jacknife would say "Oh, I've got a record about that," and he would pull it out and play it in the background. Jacknife's got a million albums, and every day, 20 more would come to the house. So we'd have coffee, listen to music, and after an hour or so we'd say, "Should we go make some music?"

Budgie: It was like a dream really, I mean, I flew in, and I didn't have time for jet lag or anything like that, it was just a perfect type of situation. The perfect ambiance, just lovely.

MD: I like to call it an album from the future.

Lol: I like that! An album from the future!

MD: The record has these amazing and deep musical roots from both of you, but it's very forward thinking. There's obviously nods to your past. I heard a couple of hi-hat snatches from Budgie that reminded me of the Banshees' song, "Happy House." I heard a keyboard line that sounded a bit like something from The Cure's *Japanese Whispers*. But it's all very cohesive.

Budgie: So, it's like *Back to the Future*? (*Laughter*.) We wanted that car but all we got was Tommy Lee's Bentley. There were times where I thought "Happy House" would fit here. Sometimes you miss playing beats, or you miss a vibe that you had. Or you miss something that was lost in a final mix, or got lost in the

transition of playing the same song live for ten years. It was nice dipping into your own bag of tricks with a different set of people that responded in different ways. That was one aspect of this project. Then we brought in the vocalists and it changed all that much more.

MD: I'm curious about the rhythmic patterns, in particular that 16th note triplet pattern that circles round and round, and the sounds on the title track, "Los Angeles." Can you describe how that song came about and who played what on that track?

Budgie: I remember that very glam rock riff first. All the sixteenth note triplet stuff was a lot of Steve Reich slipping into our psyche. It was very exposed in some places. I've certainly been a fan of Steve Reich's drumming. But as Lol said, Jacknife's eclectic and obscure vinyl collection was always there and playing. So it could have come from Burundi music, French lounge music, or French lounge music featuring Calypso, or even something Icelandic. You know, sounds from the past.

Lol: Jacknife's studio is very different than other studios. It's in a beautiful place and it's nice and relaxing as you look over the mountains, it's just lovely. But the actual studio is full of two things: drum bits and synthesizers. Budgie and I remembered the other day that we didn't actually have any full drum kits, just lots of drum bits and every synthesizer ever known to man. So between those two big piles of inspiration, we could conjure up most things. We did go down to a local folk music store who had a lot of percussion as well. We bought some wooden teeth that we used on a couple tracks.

Budgie: I remember one of the beats I had for "Los Angeles." I remembered it when we sat down a few weeks ago. Lol and I just met up a recently to do some press, some photographs, and shoot two videos, as well as start rehearsals. We started with "Los Angeles," and I remember thinking, *what is that beat?* Because sometimes you have to re-figure, not *what* you played, but what *actually* makes the song *work*. Sometimes it's very obviously just a beat, one simple thing. But "Los Angeles" is a kind of an amalgam of many things.



Lol: On some of the tracks, there's 70-80 multi tracked things with lots of little extra drum bits. We kept saying, let's put this, let's put that… Now *somehow* we gotta process this altogether and figure out how to play it!

Budgie: I found myself playing the drumbeat to a Creatures song. It was a song The Creatures did whilst waiting for The Glove (a side project of Robert Smith of The Cure and Steve Severin from Siouxsie and the Banshees) to finish their album. The A side was a recording of "Right Now" by Herbie Mann, and the B-side was our own composition called "Weathercade." The beat was this kind of triplet, gallopy thing. Then Siouxsie came in and heard the one in a different place, so she twisted my beat around. It was weird, but it worked. It's not what I played (or intended) but she was obviously very happy about it. But with this project I could put that beat back where I put it in the first place for a completely different song. And (of course) you don't really hear it because it's just a part of everything, but it fit.

It's kind of like when you have a favorite bit on guitar, or when pianists would have certain moves on the keyboard that would just fall under their fingers comfortably. It's the same with drums. You have your little kind of comfortable routines, but you have to push yourself out of them.

I remember playing around at the time with this four on the floor beat with a kick drum, while my hands were doing syncopated and melodic patterns. That really is how The Creatures (kind of) came about. But with this latest record, Lol was working on synth loops and melodies, it was a nice way to revisit similar territory without just putting a very obvious beat on it.

MD: It all works well, and the propulsive tom things that are happening in that song work really well. It's funny you just mentioned the song "Weathercade". About a month ago, I ran across this old YouTube video called "Play at Home", and you did this whole diatribe in the zoo that was very funny, and I think that video has that song is in it?

Budgie: That's right! It's not what we really intended, because we never really played that song in the studio. That's the only version we have of it.

MD: It's interesting, the mood and dynamics change from track to track on this album. The tracks "Los Angeles," "Uh Oh," and "Skins" are definitely drum forward. But the vibe goes from drum forward to dreamlike and everything in between. Despite that, there's an overall cohesiveness to the album which nowadays I think is quite rare. Was that something that was somewhat planned out between the three of you, or did it just happen as the recording process went on?

Lol: It more or less just happened. When we finished the first parts, we thought we were going to make an instrumental album. That's why we have the names the way they are, like Mobius, Rodelius, or Eno, we wanted to have the same kind of thing.

We had all these 10-minute instrumentals. When I took Budgie back to the airport the whole world shut down for two years. At that point we thought, what do we do with this stuff? We had the time do something different and we started asking people to be on the record. Budgie asked Bobby Gillespie from Primal Scream and James Murphy from LCD Soundsystem to listen to a couple of songs. We gave the recordings to people and artists that we liked and that we're sympathetic with. They came up with the right reasons to want to sing, and the right things to sing. It was almost like natural osmosis. It all just worked out that way. By the time we'd got all the stuff back, we wondered to ourselves, what's this album about? We decided it really is about the place where we made it and our relationship with that place (Los Angeles.) Then one day, Budgie and I were talking, and we were trying to decide what to put on the front cover. Budgie told me to take a photograph of this *oil pump jack thing* I had been talking about. What people don't realize about Los Angeles, is that yes, it's glitz and glam and Hollywood and all that, but it's also an oil town. There's oil derrick's all over the place. At Beverly Hills High School there's an oil derrick in plain sight, just kind of hidden by this poncy screen.

Budgie: Back to the process. That cohesiveness of sound that we've mentioned a couple of times came from Lol creating all these loops and soundscapes and sending them to Jacknife. He

would send them back and we would like specific tracks. So, then we'd focus on one which could be the basis for any of the tracks. Then the drums would come to the forefront and the lyric would take over and bring it into another realm.

Sometimes it would sound like the song "The Past (Being Eaten)", they were just sound swells that took you on a trip. That was the journey that I heard when I heard it on the proper speakers in the studio rather than listening to it on my iPhone. There was so much detail and so much texture in the loops and soundscapes that Lol was making. There wasn't a lot of pre-planning, but there was pre-production that we didn't even realize was happening. You had your unusual ideas and you fed them in. It was really different because everything was allowed. There was nobody at the door going saying to us, *you don't look right for this club,* we've all done *that* before. For this, everything was allowed, and inside our little world that we created, everything sounded different. There were references to the past, the future, and the current climate, and it was all affected by what was about to happen because we sensed it happening.

Lol: It was definitely more about discovery than anything else. I also discovered that Budgie is an excellent harmonica player.

Budgie: That is thanks to the theme from *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. I always wanted to play the intro to *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. Back in my hometown, you could get yourself a free pint of beer if you could play the intro to *The Old Grey Whistle Test*.

Lol: My overwhelming memory of this whole album is sitting there plonking away on some keyboard while Budgie's sitting on the couch looking at me, gesturing with a big thumbs up and saying "Yeah, yeah, it was amazing what you just did!" I haven't had that feeling in years.

MD: Having played music and drums for over 30 years, I've always found working with other drummers / percussionists quite easy, almost like we have this unspoken telepathic communication when working together. Did you find that happening between the two of you while making this album?

Lol: Yes! I found that to be the case with Budgie. I think with any musician you work with and that you admire, you instinctively know their style and what's likely to be played or suggested. And yes, it's telepathically so with us!

Budgie: It was all completely telepathic with one slight twist; we secretly channeled our communications through Jacknife Lee. He was (of course) a willing participant in the experiment which worked out very well indeed. But yes, that secret language of drummers has presented itself to me before. I felt it with Leonard Eto for The Creatures' *Hai* session in 2002. And again, as I tuned my timbales, I saw the knowing smiles of Mabi and Mandala (South African drummers) when I toured with Juno Reactor in 2009. But Lol and I have taken it to another level, often conversing without even realizing it until later.

MD: I've found your podcast *Curious Creatures* very entertaining. It doesn't only deal with both of your legacies in the post punk world, and all the amazing times you each have had together and separately in each other's respective bands. I also find the conversations with your guests to be honest and endearing as well as quite vulnerable at times. Was that your original intention?

Lol: We wanted to introduce ourselves as people, not just drummers in a band. We were also aware that making vulnerability a talking point would help make us unique in this field. That might sound calculated, but it was because we wanted to express what we find useful in conversations as well.

Budgie: The original intention was us hosting a TV show which would be a cross between *Last of The Summer Wine* and *Top Gear* (with music instead of cars.) There's no TV show yet! But we do often find ourselves talking about old familiar tracks, while *embracing* and *abhorring* the good and bad of the digital age.

MD: Were you surprised at how open, genuine, and sometimes emotionally revealing the conversations wound up being?

Lol: Yes, occasionally. We were always aware that this was part of what we wanted *Curious Creatures* to be.

Budgie: We have no agenda, we have no script. Having fine-tuned our drummer's telepathy, we try to create a safe place for open and honest talk. It allows us to reach the parts that other podcasts cannot reach.

> We are really just blessed with great performances, not just lyrics and melodies, but great performances with so much character and guts from everybody. —Budgie

MD: Lol, I thoroughly enjoyed your book *Cured*. As a massive Cure fan from the mid 80s until the present, I found it illuminating and overall an amazing tale of redemption and how you were really able to dig deep and find your true self, it's a really great piece of work. Budgie, I know you also are currently working on a book and I'm excited to read that. I also loved the foreword you did for the book *Goth*. With both of you being gifted musicians, what made you decide to start writing?

Lol: I remember a conversation with Pearl Thompson when he said to me "You've always been a writer, even when we were teenagers, I always thought of you as a writer." It just took me a few years to realize that myself! To me, it's as satisfying as creating music.

Budgie: Thank you for the "gifted" compliment, it took me a long time to accept being a "musician." From writing lyrics— which could take forever— to writing a web-blog— which is often spontaneous, it's now time to reflect on the whole story. I am also mentioned in the writing of others. And I often wonder if they have the right person, so I thought I should deliver my own version of events.

MD: Well, getting back to the music and the album, I know a lot of drummers will be interested in what gear the two of you gravitated towards in the studio. Were there any particular drums, cymbals, percussion, or drumhead configurations that both of you thought would help shape this album in the way you envisioned it? After our conversation, I know it was definitely more about the music even though it was a drum forward record, would you agree with that?

Budgie: Yeah, I think we were aware that there was gonna be a lot of post-production work going on. You know, a lot of treatments on things. But I do recall that we had a whole rack of roto toms, and I've got some here as well. That's what Lol had on his kit on that *Join Hands Tour* in '79 (The Cure and Siouxsie and The Banshees first tour together.) Lol and Robert were forever going, "No, no, turn it more this way, no that way," while turning the

roto tom into where it's getting specific pitches. Funny enough, that's what you hear on the intro to "Los Angeles." You don't get that sound on regular drums. I also had some clay drums which I broke, I remember getting really excited about that. Lol had that sort of silicone mounted marimba trigger thing, that was quite an invention. That was more on the end of the album, where the engineer came in and said "It's percussion day in the studio," but really *everyday* was like that.

MD: These last four years have obviously been trying for everyone including and most considerably touring acts, but it looks like now everything is basically back to normal, (*whatever that is?*) so when you decide to tour what does the touring band look like?

Budgie: We thought that you were gonna be sitting in with us Jeff?

MD: You give me the call and I'll be there! (*all laughing*)

Budgie: It could well be, because that's probably where we're at with it at the moment. While rehearsing recently, it sounded great with just Lol and I in the studio. We didn't even have to play any of the stuff off the album, we were just playing and enjoying it.

Lol: I've come to the conclusion that it's probably best if I just play drums. I'll also play some wacky keyboard stuff that I can twiddle some really strange sounds on. That's fun to do as well, and that's it really.

Budgie: Yeah, if somebody turns up and decides that they want to do the James Murphy track, or if James himself turns up, that'll be great.

MD: Will any of the guest artists come along for the tour?

Budgie: We are really just blessed with great performances, not just lyrics and melodies, but great performances with so much character and guts from everybody. If one of them turned up, it would make our year, and the audience would never forget it. So we'll see... We'll see what we can pull together. We've both been in the situation where we try and figure out if we should we keep it as a two-piece or shall we augment it?

MD: What's next for this project and for each of you? Both together and in your own musical journey's, and with your writing, as well as with the *Curious Creatures* podcast?

Lol: More of the above, yes. More records, more books, and some shows. I think we've found our groove together!

Budgie: Next is to practice acceptance of whatever happens next, and to follow our maxim, "Nothing needs to be done and everything will be done." It's worked well for us so far. We keep out of the way and just go with the flow. But we're definitely feeling the *"got to get out and play live"* itch!

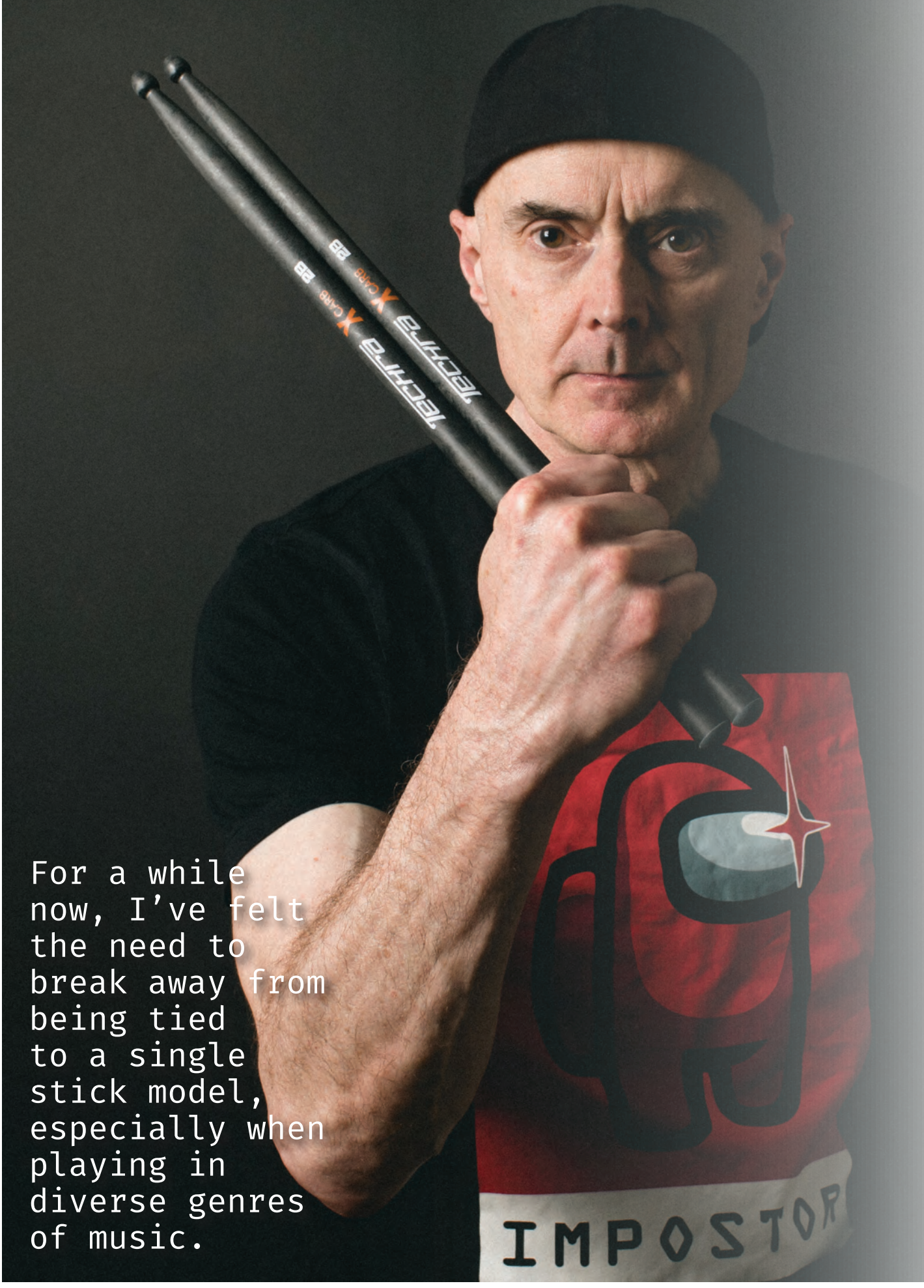
MD: It's such an honor to discuss these things with you. I've looked up to both of you and your musical contributions for over forty years, and I probably wouldn't have taken my own musical and drumming adventures without your inspirational playing, so thank you!

Lol: Oh, thank you, now I'm gonna start blubbering. That's very kind Jeff, thank you.

Budgie: Thank you. It does make it all worthwhile, it really does. Because, you know, times can get hard sometimes, it isn't all *easy peasy*. And yet, when we get behind the drum kit, nothing matters, it all just goes away. Isn't this the greatest way of just passing the time?

Check out Lol and Budgie's drummer profile page, at moderndrummer.com





For a while now, I've felt the need to break away from being tied to a single stick model, especially when playing in diverse genres of music.

Virgil Donati

Discusses Designing his New Techra Sticks

By Mark Griffith



Virgil Donati is one of today's finest and most intelligent drummers. The precision, articulation, and power in his playing is world renowned. When *Modern Drummer* learned that he was now endorsing Techra Sticks, we were intrigued. We wanted him to share his insight and ask him about his new stick choice, and the hands-on process of designing his new signature Techra Sticks.

Many people think drumstick design is a simple process. This couldn't be further from the truth. It is much more than just picking a few stick characteristics and applying them to a piece of wood (or carbon fiber in this case.) Many years ago, I followed along as a friend of mine was designing his own signature stick with a major stick manufacturer, and I learned a lot about the involved process.

When I recently learned that Virgil was going through this process with Techra, I was eager to ask him about it and have him explain his own process and share what he requires and wants from his sticks. I knew Virgil's precision, thoughtfulness, and intelligence would offer some real insight.

MD: Have you ever used synthetic sticks before?
VD: No, I hadn't delved into synthetic sticks before, but my introduction to Techra was through Jonathan Mover. There was a period in 2021, when I was rehearsing in his studios in LA, he was so enthusiastic about these new sticks he was using that he recommended them to me. His positivity led to Techra sending me the first batch to try out, and that curiosity became the starting point of my journey with synthetic sticks.
MD: Alessandro (of Techra) tells me that you are designing two different signature Techra sticks, what is the difference between the two models?
VD: For a while now, I've felt the need to break away from being tied to a single stick model, especially when playing in diverse genres of music. I wanted to share my preferences and make my audience aware of the possibility of switching sticks based on the music. It's about giving them a glimpse into my approach and providing an option to see how I can tailor my drumming with different sticks for various styles.

One of my signature sticks models is based on a 2B, it carries a heftier feel, and delivers a powerful response. My other signature stick is different. The second model features a more streamlined design with a smaller, rounder tip, which I love, offering a comfortable feel, especially for jazz and acoustic genres. The variations are aimed at enhancing my response to the diverse musical landscapes I navigate.

It's all about finding that sweet spot between comfort and control. After years of playing, the feel in my hands becomes a crucial factor—it's like an extension of my own rhythm.

MD: How do you go about picking and designing a stick size?
VD: Selecting a stick size involves a nuanced consideration of various factors that directly impacts my interaction with the drums. The density, diameter, and length of the stick play pivotal roles in achieving the desired responsiveness and feel. Contrary to the intuitive notion that a lighter stick might make playing easier, it's crucial to understand that a certain heft is necessary for optimal responsiveness from the drum. The density of the stick contributes to the power and projection of each stroke. Too light, and you risk sacrificing the depth and authority in your sound. It's all about finding that sweet spot between comfort and control. After years of playing, the feel in my hands becomes a crucial factor—it's like an extension of my own rhythm.
MD: Is there any aspect of a stick size (taper, balance, tip shape, shank diameter) that is more important to you?
VD: For me, the balance takes the lead. Over time, as drummers, we develop a nuanced feeling in our hands, and the balance of the stick becomes a crucial factor in translating that sensitivity into a seamless and responsive drumming experience. Of course, the right taper, tip shape, and shank diameter contribute to the overall feel and balance.
MD: What is the most important





characteristic of a stick to you?

VD: The feel of the sticks in my hands is a crucial factor. It's a tactile connection that evolves with time and experience, influencing the nuances of my playing. The "feel" of the sticks in my hands is a bridge to the expressive "feel" conveyed through my rhythmic ideas when striking the drums.

MD: What is the aspect of wood sticks that has brought you to synthetic Techra sticks?

VD: This is a difficult question to answer because, let's be honest, wood is a wonderful, warm, natural material. However, my journey towards Techra was primarily driven by a quest for absolute precision in balance and weight consistency with each pair of sticks. Techra Sticks provide a level of uniformity that ensures no deviation. The switch to synthetic does bring a unique sensation, and there was an adjustment period. I played and tested the sticks for several months, until I realized there was an added layer of durability and consistency without compromising the tactile feedback I've cultivated over the years. I'm now embracing the modern resonance of carbon.

MD: How do you test a stick during the design process?

VD: I engaged in an iterative testing phase by experimenting with prototypes sent by the company. I explored various tips, and stick dimensions, considering different sizes and gauges, to refine the feeling I'm seeking. This hands-on approach allowed me to work within the parameters of potential modifications the company can make, ensuring that the final design aligns precisely with the nuanced preferences I aim to achieve in my drumming experience.

MD: How quickly can you tell if a new stick design is or isn't working?

VD: It happens almost instantly. It's a visceral response, a recognition of whether the stick feels right in my hands and translates my playing dynamics effectively.

MD: What surprised you when you used Techra sticks for the first time?

I felt a surprising level of responsiveness that seemed comparable to traditional wood sticks.

VD: Well, the thing that comes to mind, is that I felt a surprising level of responsiveness that seemed comparable to traditional wood sticks. But as I said earlier, to fully integrate them took a bit of adjustment time, involving some back and forth between wood and carbon until I truly felt the seamless transition in my drumming experience.

MD: What is most surprising and satisfying about Techra sticks now after more than one year of use?

VD: After more than a year with Techra sticks, the most satisfying aspect is the consistent feel. It's become a reliable companion, preserving the sensitivity in my hands while offering the durability needed for extensive playing sessions.

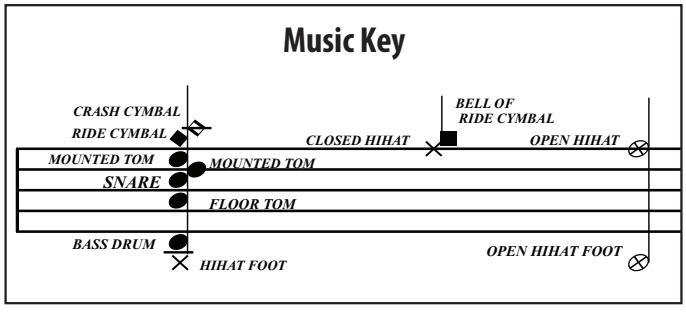
Check out Virgil's drummer profile page, at moderndrummer.com
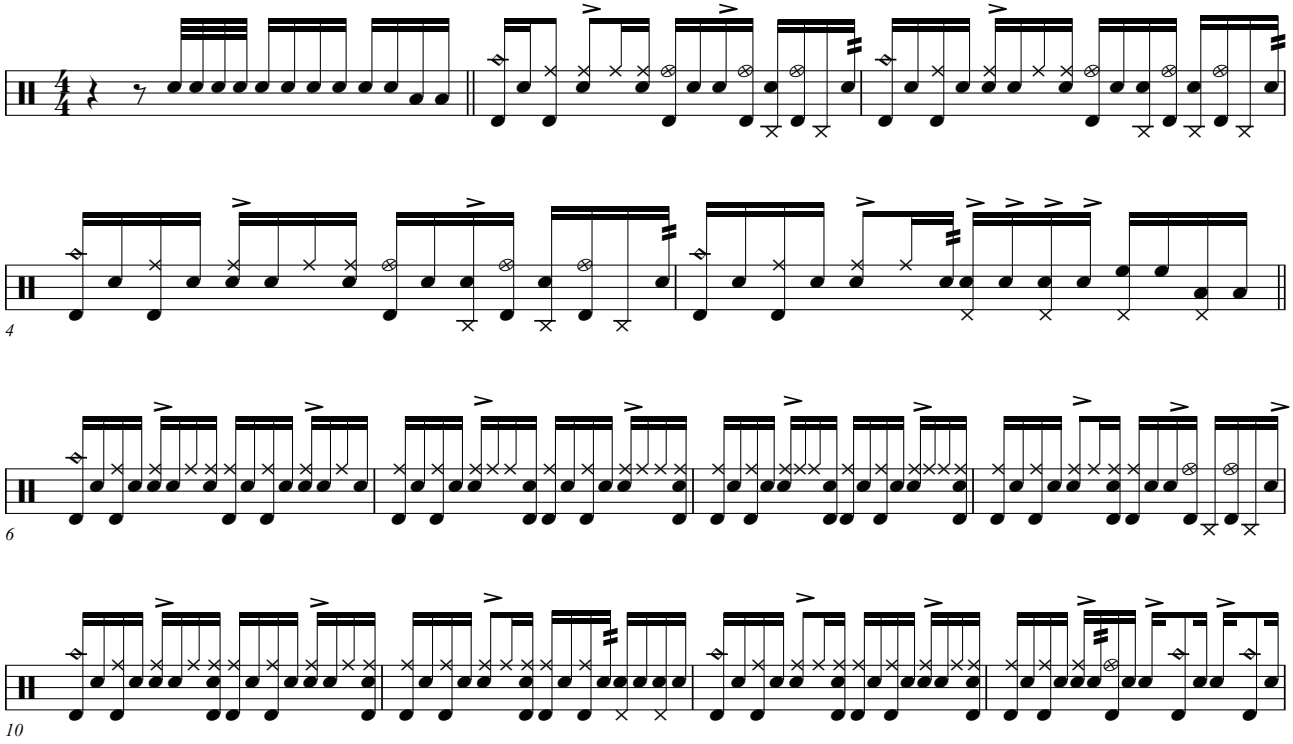
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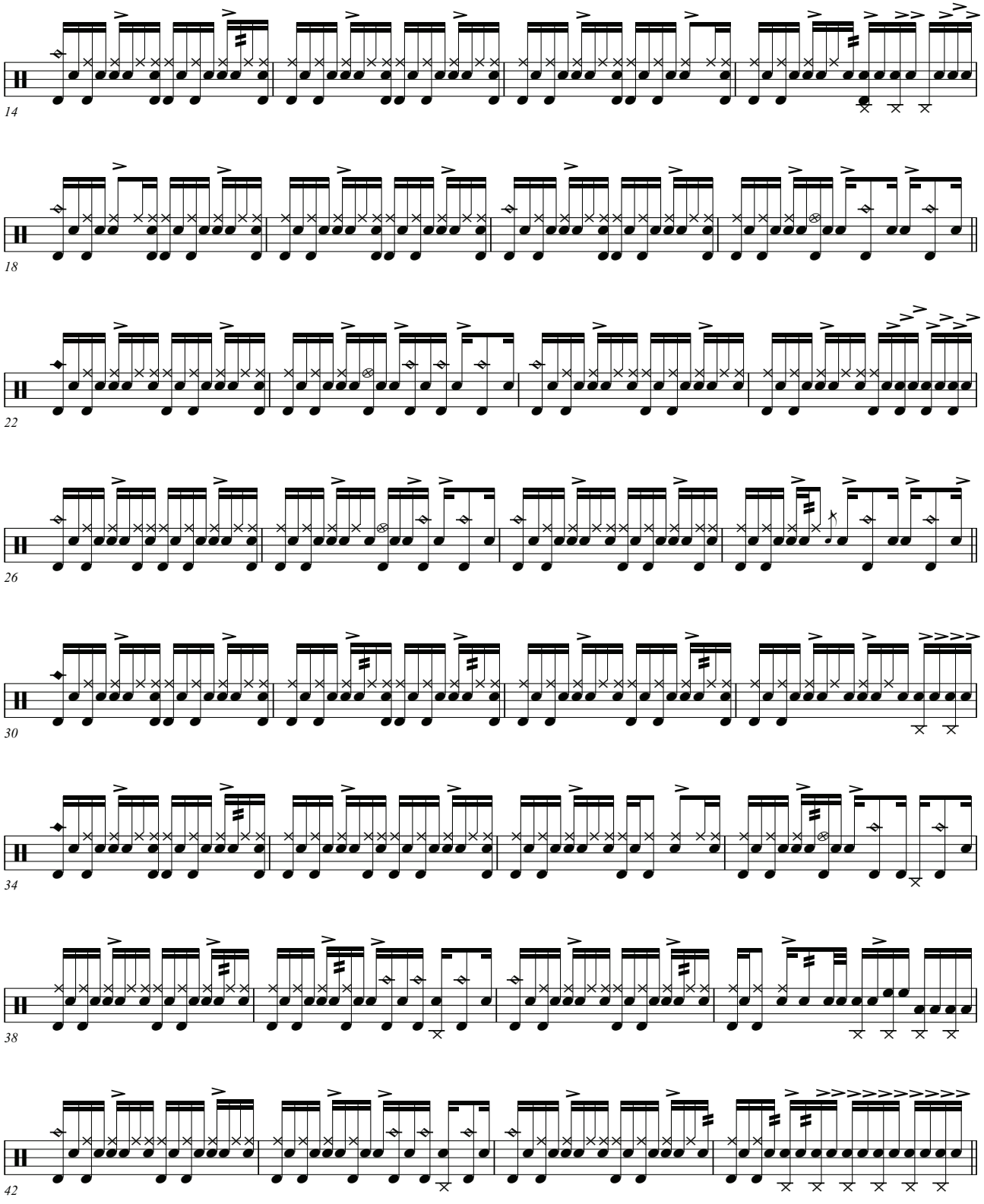
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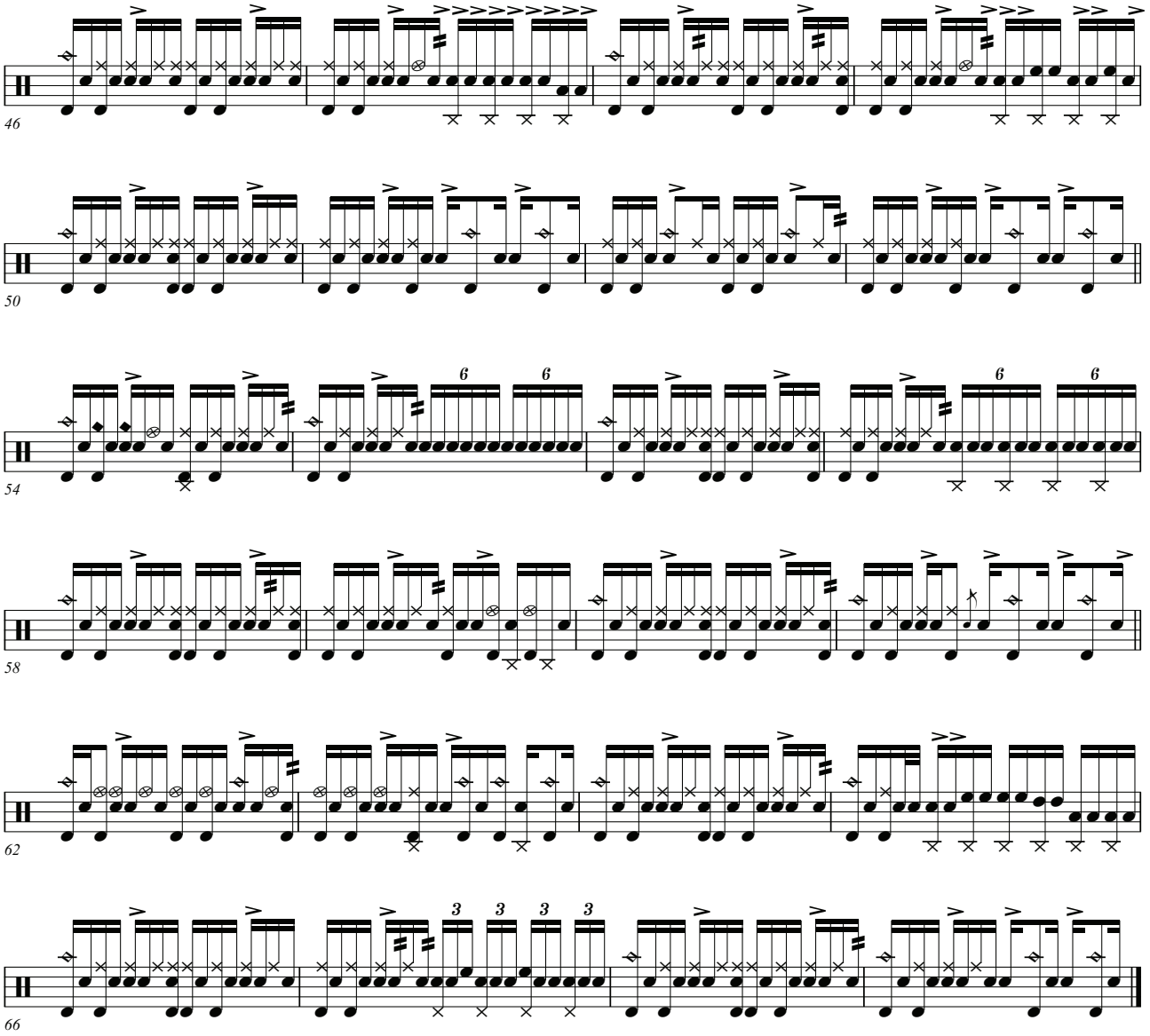
This month's transcription comes from the timeless track "Take The Money And Run." It boasts a fantastic groove with delectable ghost notes that enhance the overall sound. Recorded with Gary Mallaber playing drums, who not only sang but also co-wrote some of the music. Gary's versatile drumming can be enjoyed in collaborations with artists like Bruce Springsteen, Van Morrison, and Eddie Money to name a few. Playing this piece is a joy, offering a fun experience while honing left-hand ghost notes— there's more complexity than meets the eye.








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Marc Atkinson, a dedicated musician, honed his craft under the guidance of the renowned Gary Chaffee. Now calling Las Vegas home, Marc is on the brink of unveiling his labor of love—a comprehensive transcription book that promises to captivate music enthusiasts worldwide.

Check out Marc's *Modern Drummer* profile page at moderndrummer.com

DON'T COMPETE, CREATE!

By Chris Lesso

"Comparison is the thief of joy."
—Theodore Roosevelt

There's always someone better, stronger, faster. If we didn't know this already, we're surrounded by reminders that can doom us to self-doubt. In our hyper connected world, it doesn't take long before we see someone on the drums half our age doing things we can only half comprehend. After all our hard work, this can be deflating! It's easy to feel down when everybody's "better" than you. When I went to Cuba years ago to study with some master drummers, I was completely humbled not only by the master drummers, but by the incredible kid drummers that seemed to appear everywhere. There were 11 year old kids that could play circles around me! When the backdrop of talent is that good, it's easy to feel inferior.

This comparing competitive mindset locks you in your thinking mind, sealing your fate in a game you'll never win. Creating from a place of curiosity is what sparks the best within us. The solution is counterintuitive. Don't compete on their playing field, create your own. There, you'll always be master. One drummer that no one could compete with was the great Buddy Rich. He was untouchable. What he couldn't understand was when he heard a reaction like, 'After seeing you play I'm going to go home and burn my sticks!' These people completely missed the point. Buddy wanted his performances to push you towards a better version of yourself. Standing next to the fire of greatness unlocks our own possibility and potential, if we let it. Instead of competing in a race we'll never win, use it as FUEL for an unstoppable rise. There's always someone ahead of us doing with ease what takes us excruciating effort. We all feel this! It may not seem like it, but those drummers are in the exact same battle. Drumming is an inner game before it's an outer one. Use it all as inspiration. When you're surrounded by greatness that seems to eclipse you, let it bring out the greatness within YOU.



Imposter syndrome can get the best of us, even those drummers we put on a pedestal are not immune. I heard a story about the first time Jim Keltner was on the cover of *Modern Drummer* magazine. 'Who am I to be up there?', he thought. Drummers in the spotlight were the ones who blazed around the kit in ways he never did. Even though Jim had played with giants like Steely Dan and Bob Dylan, he had a style of laid back simplicity. He wasn't in any race to impress, and at first he doubted what he had to say in the world of flashy drummers. But over time Jim came to realize no one could do what he did, and he did it in that special way that only he could. Jim's *superpowers* are his feel and touch, *not* in speedy double bass or polyrhythms. As easy as his style sounds, simple is not easy. There's a big reason Jim was sought after by these iconic artists. He had the courage to be himself. Over time he came to embrace his persona, (trademark dark sunglasses and all,) of serving the music with simplicity to create a niche all his own. The next time he was on the cover, he had an effortless smile of someone who has zero pressure to compete, and he was full of confidence to play straight from the heart.

"If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."
—Wayne Dyer

No one in the world can be you. Just like your fingerprint, your voice is unique in a sea of billions. Without even trying, no two people sound alike when striking a drum. Let's celebrate these differences, not run from them. Shifting how you see the game of drumming is the key. Competition focuses on what's going on in the outer world. Creating shifts the focus to our inner world. I once saw an experiment come alive that was a game changer. I was in a room full of drummers at a workshop, and the leader asked for five volunteers to line up behind a drumkit. The instructions were simple: play a basic beat without stopping, then pass the sticks to the person behind you. You weren't allowed to change a thing! Same sticks, same drums, same groove. What do you think happened? Everyone sounded just a little different, their nuances crept out in unique ways. Try to hide them, and you will never shine through. What if instead of masking our sound, we exploit what makes us unique and amplify it by ten? It takes a leap of faith, but stepping onto a playing field all your own is the root of confidence.

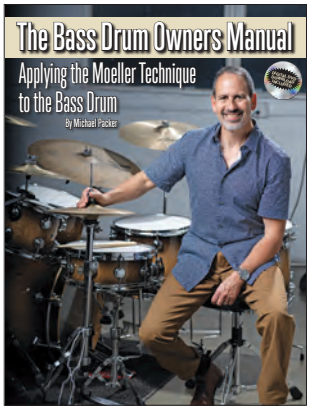
This is how our favorite drummers can embrace the world stage and not be intimidated to play small. They never compete trying to "one up" those watching. They tap into a persona all their own. All it takes is the courage to act. Speak YOUR voice on the drums, loud and proud! Forget your competition, because there is none. There is only one person to compete against: the "you of yesterday." When this is all we face, we start playing the infinite game of getting 1% better every day. There will always be someone who can out-play you, but make sure they can never out-FUN you! When we play from a place of joy, we go back to creating from a place of limitless playfulness. When you catch yourself sliding back into a competing comparing mindset, gently bring it back to "Don't Compete, Create." TRANSFORM through DRUMMING today! Connect with Chris to start your Life Through Rhythm'journey with a free intro course: **chrislesso.net/LTRDRUMMING**

Check out Chris's *Modern Drummer* profile page at moderndrummer.com

The Bass Drum Owners Manual:

Applying the Moeller Technique to the Bass Drum, Hand and Foot Combinations
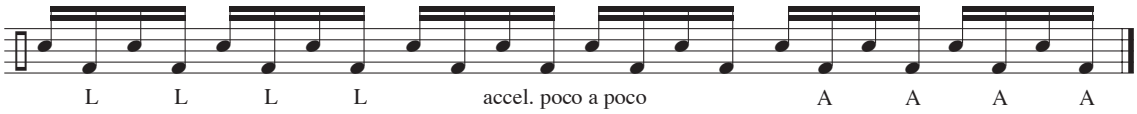
By Michael Packer



This month *Modern Drummer* will continue to include excerpts from Michael Packer's essential book on bass drum control and technique *The Bass Drum Owners Manual: Applying the Moeller Technique to the Bass Drum.* As you will see, this is a new way of thinking about bass drum (and foot) control that is based in an old, popular, and useful hand technique called The Moeller Technique. Michael addresses the essential components of bass drum and hi-hat control. Let Michael's wisdom and the wisdom of the Moeller Technique help you improve the control, sound, and eventually speed, of your feet, regard-less of musical style.
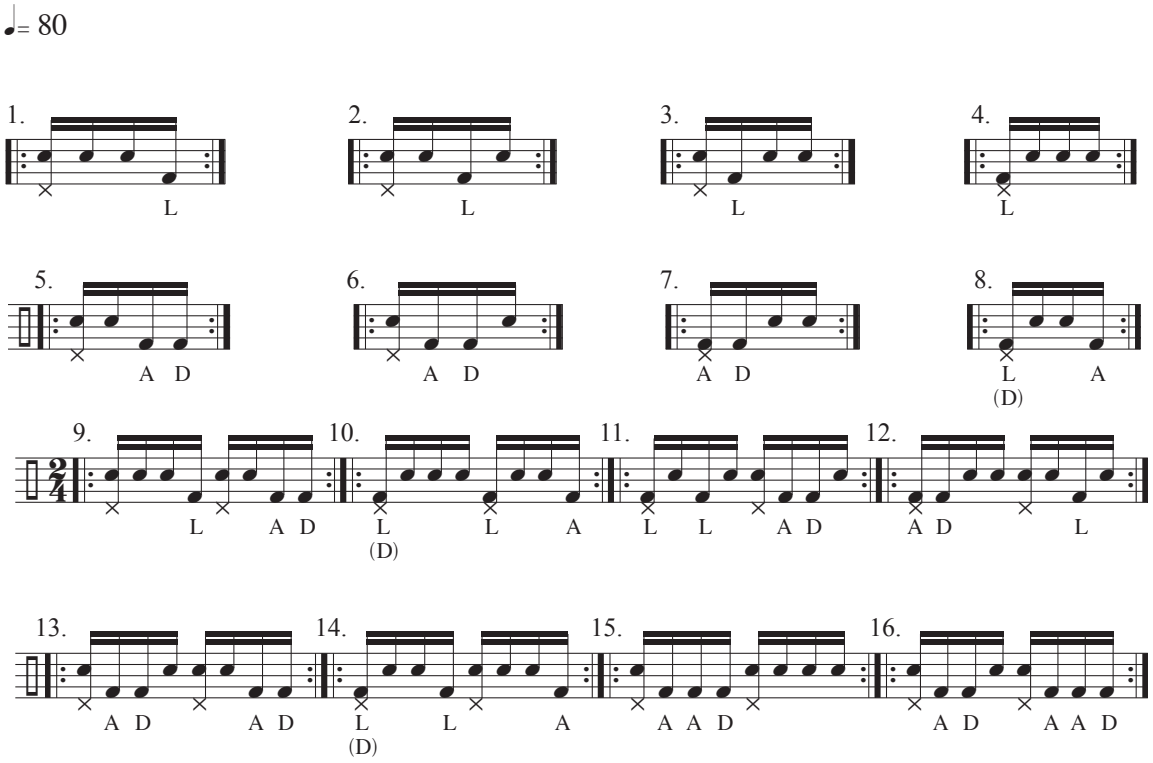
Alternating Strokes, Hands and Feet

When playing alternating strokes between the hands and feet, the bass drum strokes used are dictated by the tempo of the notes. Slower tempos require leg strokes, while faster tempos use ankle strokes. Start playing the following exercise slowly and gradually increase the tempo. You will discover where you must switch from leg to ankle strokes. Remember to keep the foot and ankle as relaxed as possible in order to maximize the rebound of the beater.
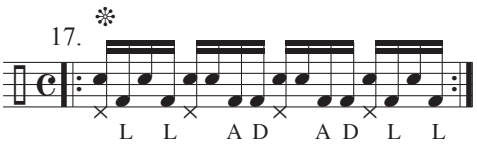


Hand and Foot Combinations
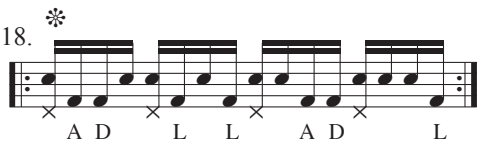
The following exercises will aid in the development of your musical ideas and their execution. Many great drummers incorporate hand and foot combinations as a large part of their vocabu-lary. Including the bass drum in fills and solos will balance the sound of the drum set. These exercises are first to be played as written, with the hi-hat on the downbeats. This will help de-velop a strong sense of the pulse and is a great independence builder. When you're comforta-ble with each exercise, orchestrate freely around the drum set and drop out the hi-hat for a nice melodic approach.
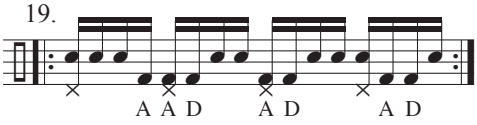


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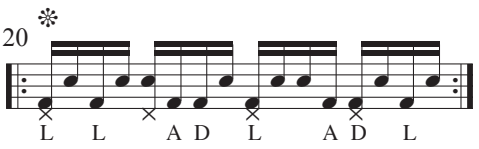


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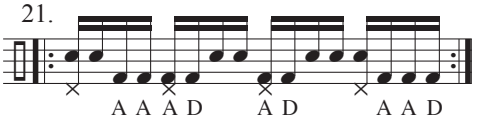


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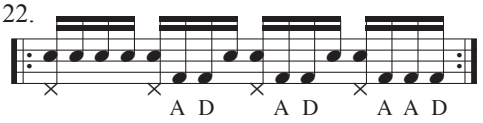


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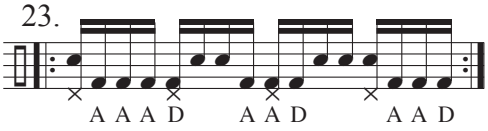


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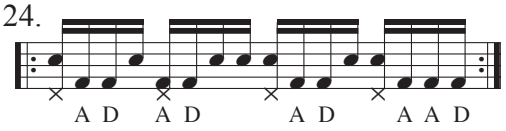


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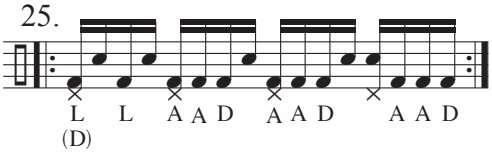


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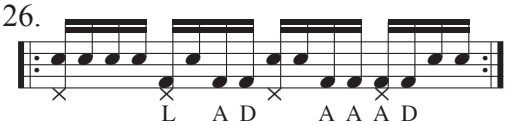


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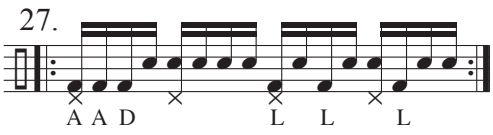
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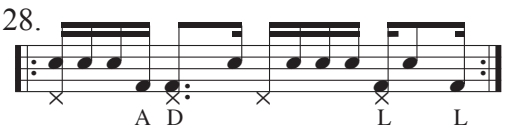


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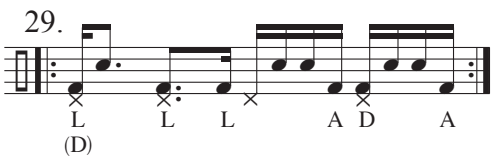


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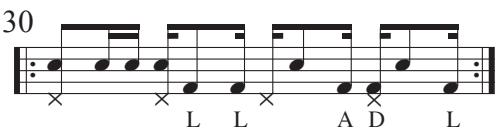


* Remember, When playing faster change the consecutive leg strokes to ankle strokes.

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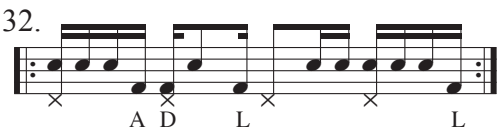


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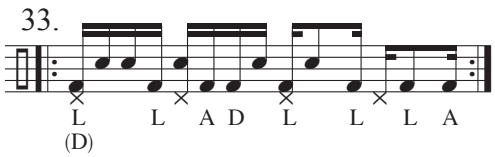
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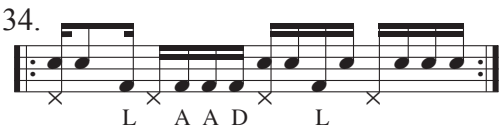


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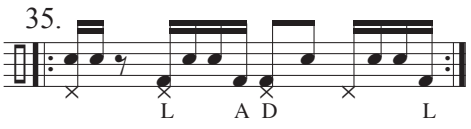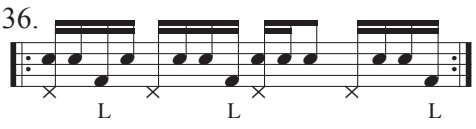


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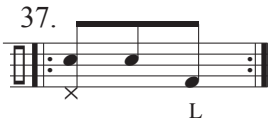


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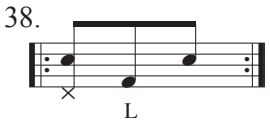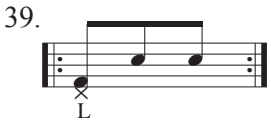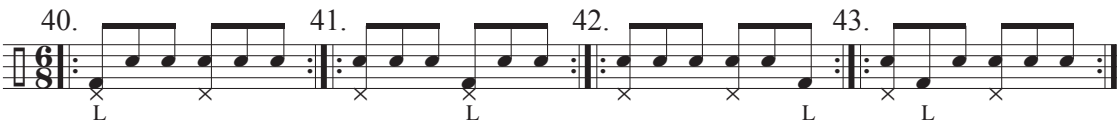






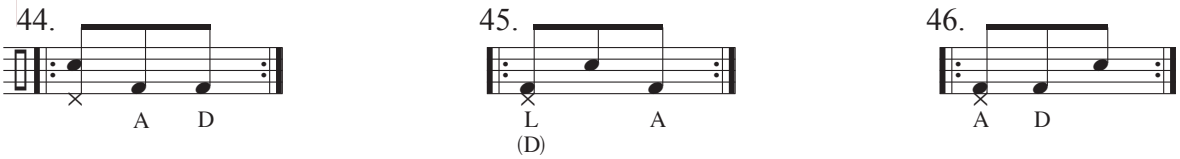
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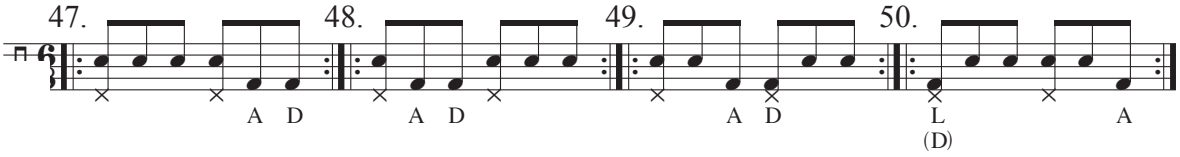


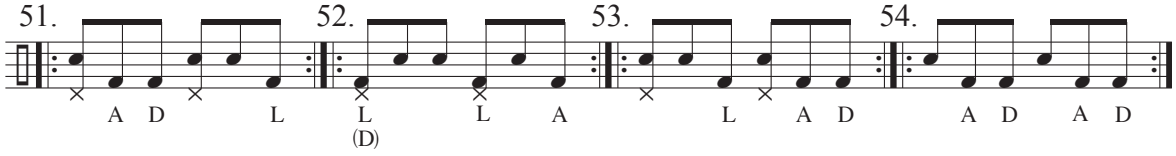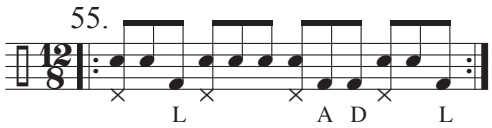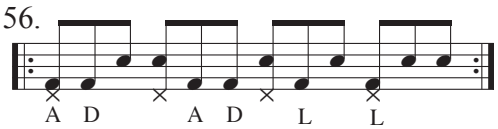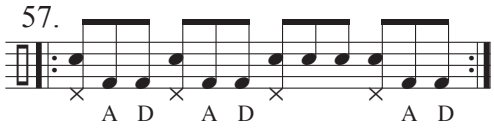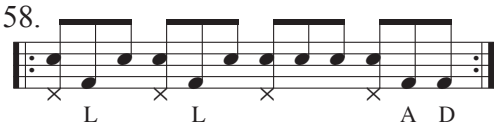












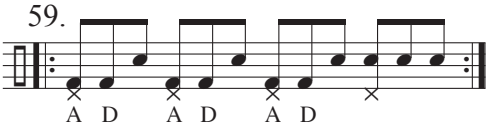




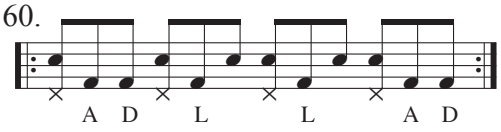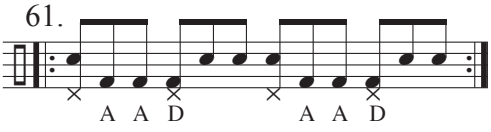




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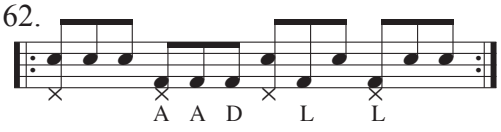


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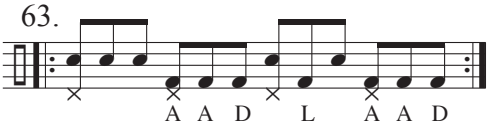


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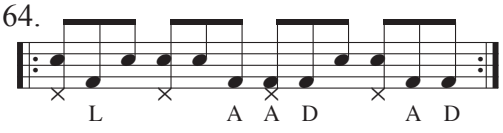


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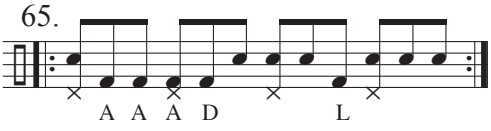


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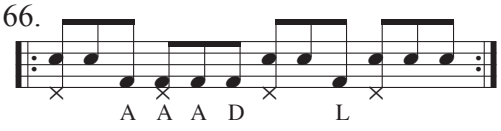


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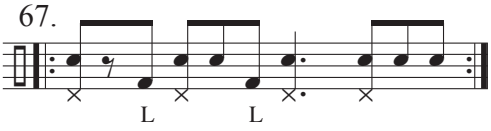


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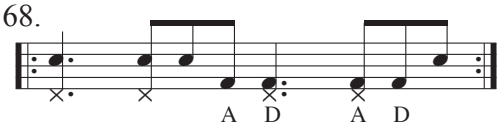


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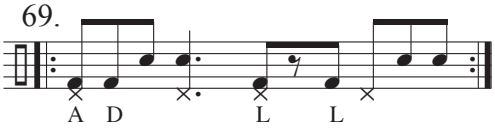


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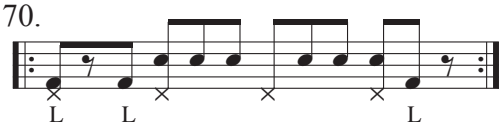


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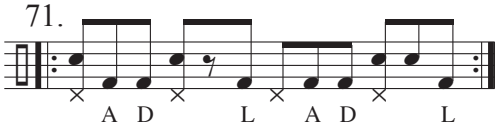


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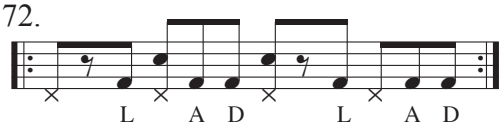


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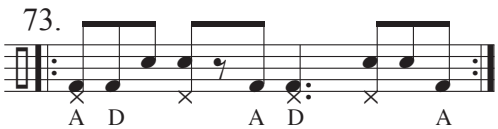


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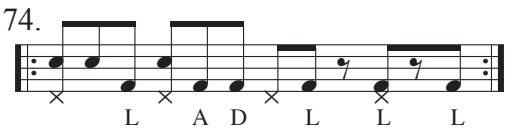


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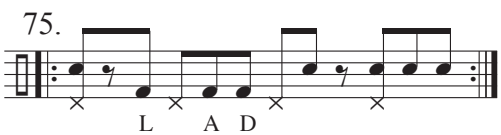


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Check out Michael's *Modern Drummer* profile page and get your copy of *The Bass Drum Owners Manual* at moderndrummer.com

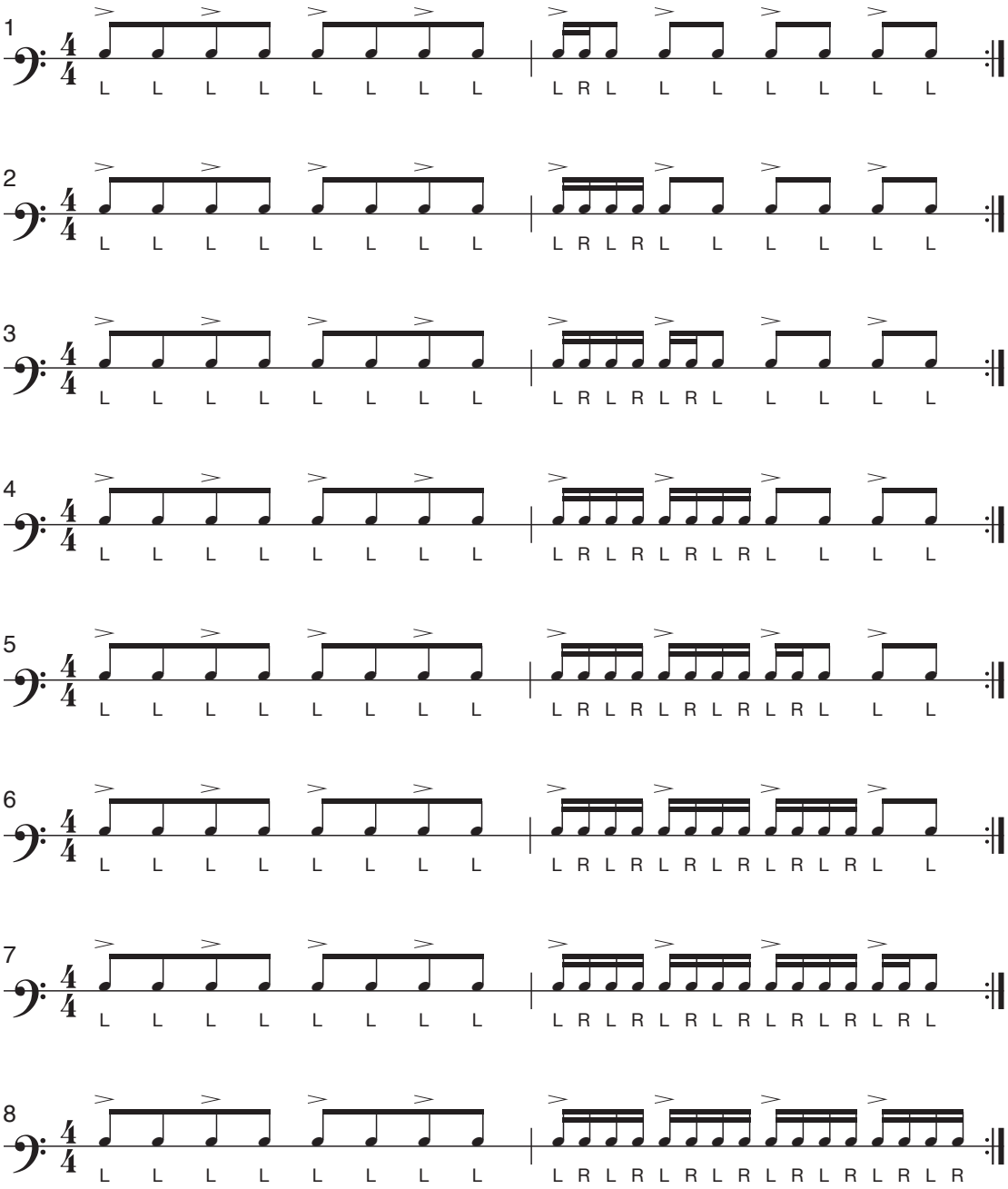
Groups of Two with Fill-ins

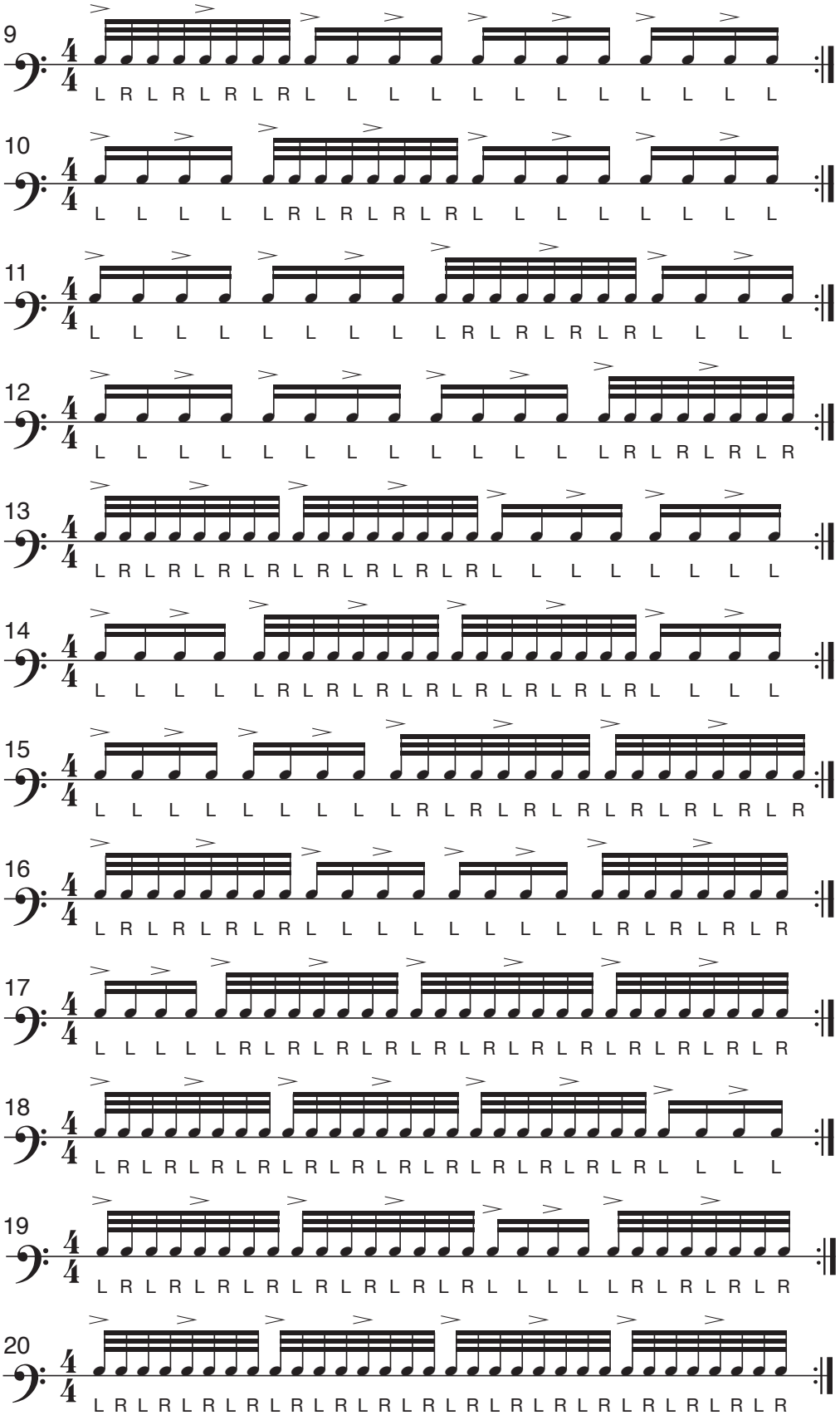
By Joe Morello



Joe Morello advanced the idea of endurance studies with his Fill-In studies included in his book *Master Studies*. These are not "drum fills," instead they are endurance exercises built on the idea of filling in between the primary rhythms of the exercise.

This month's exercise is similar to the previous sections of fill-ins based on groups of three and four notes which were included in previous issues of *Modern Drummer*. This month's exercise's are based on playing accented groups of two with one hand, while filling in with the other hand. As with the previous sections practice these with a right-hand and a left-hand lead.





Check out Joe's *Modern Drummer* profile page and get your copy of *Master Studies* at moderndrummer.com

Duet 15

By Ron Spagnardi

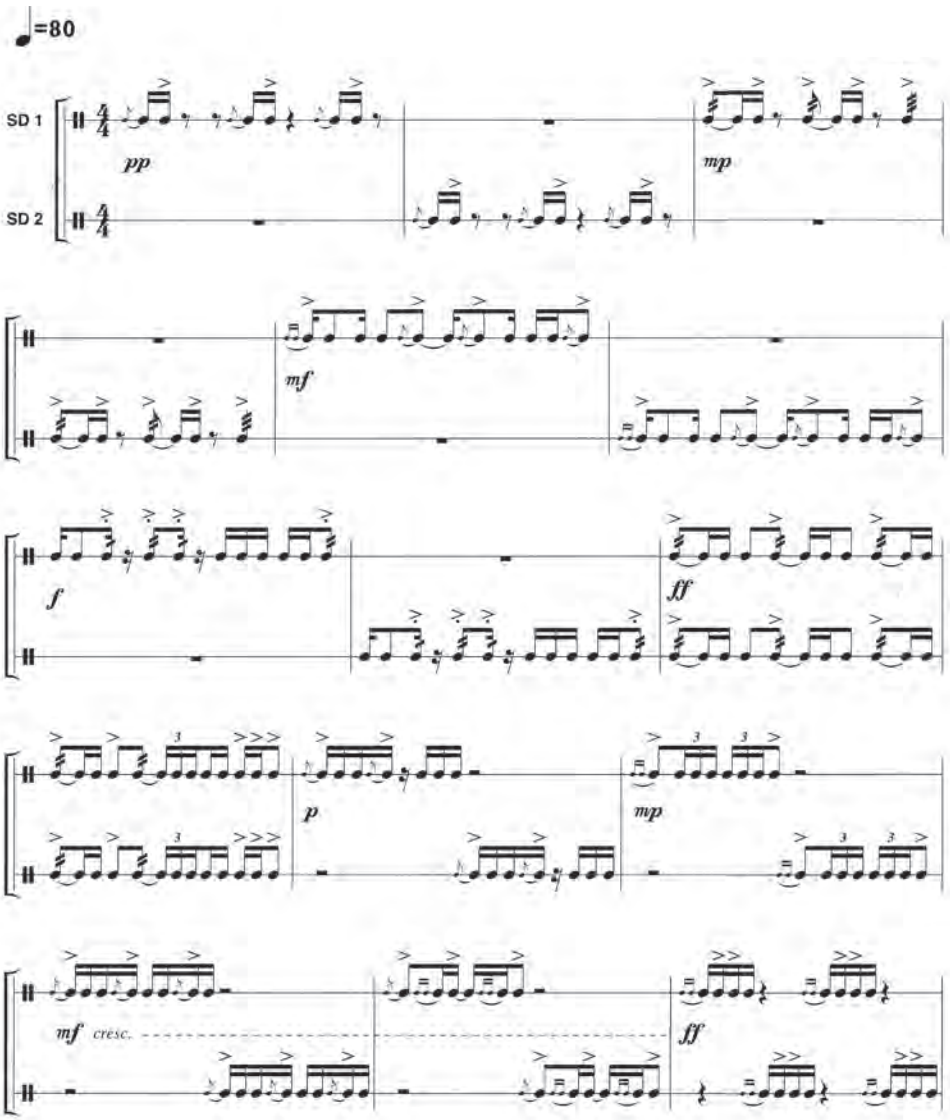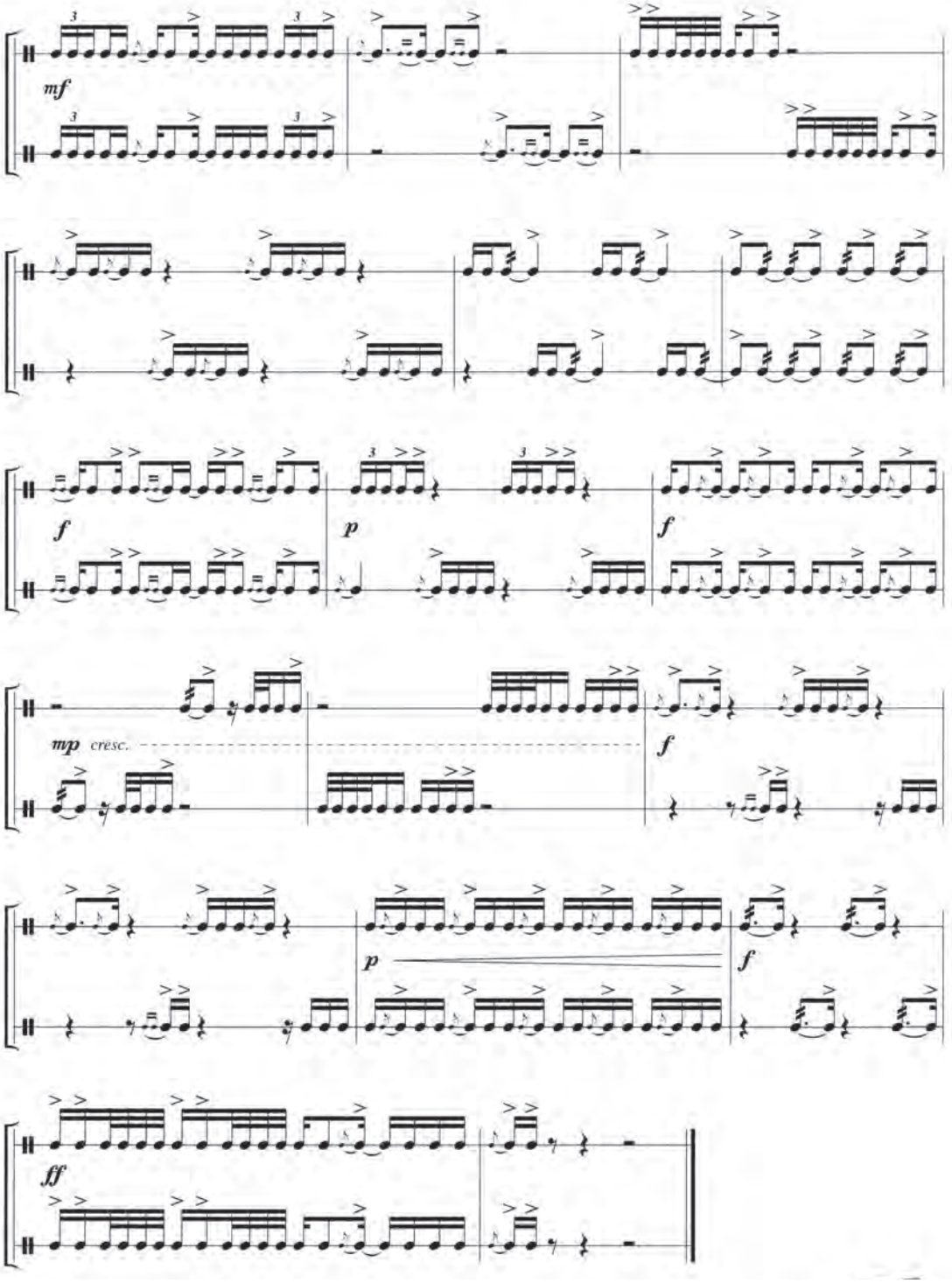


Ron Spagnardi wrote a terrific book called *Snare Drum Duets: 25 Duets for Two Snare Drummers*. It offers a selection of 25 challenging duets that range in difficulty from relatively simple to more complex. A wide assortment of time signatures is used throughout the book, from 2/4 and common time to 5/8, 7-8, and 12/8, among others. These snare drum duets can be used in several different ways.

This month's duet is in 4/4, and doesn't stretch out (rhythmically) too much. Start at a slower tempo than you *think* you should, because it get's more rhythmically dense at the end of the duet. And mind those accents, that's what really makes this duet sing.

Two players may use the book as written in duet format, remembering to alternate parts. The metronome marking above each duet indicates the suggested speed at which the material should be performed. However, the tempo can be adjusted up or down in accordance with the ability of the players. Obviously precise execution and perfect timing are essential on the part of both players when performing the material in duet format.

For those working with the book without the benefit of a second player snare drum parts one and two can be practiced as individual solos for improvement of basic reading skills. Conscientious practice of the material in snare drum duets will most definitely improve both reading and technical skills, regardless of the manner in which the book is utilized.





Check out Ron's *Modern Drummer* profile page and get your copy of *Snare Drum Duets* at moderndrummer.com

Steve Lukather

By Mark Griffith

Guitarist, leader of Toto, solo artist, and session guitarist Steve Lukather has a lot to teach us about drumming and drummers. Whether it's in Toto, on his 11 solo records, or on the countless sessions in his career, he has played with the cream of the crop. He even has a big announcement to make about the new Toto drummer in 2024 and going forward. Pay attention as he shares his insights on working with some of the greatest drummers ever.


Alex Kluft

MD: As a songwriter, and a guitar player both as a rhythm player and a soloist, what do you want or need from a drummer?
SL: I did my first record date in 1976, and since then I have learned many things. But one thing is for sure. If you have a great drummer in the band, the other people can be "OK." It's been said a thousand times, a great drummer makes the whole band better, an awful drummer makes a great band awful. If it doesn't *feel* right, it just doesn't work. Jeff Porcaro always said that if you can't groove, *you suck*. If you can't groove it doesn't matter how many mega chops you have, don't forget to learn the simple stuff. That's where all the YouTube wonder kids go wrong. Please don't get me wrong, there's some incredible technically brilliant young players out there— but how many times does it take them to get the perfect take for YouTube? How about the pressures of no rehearsal time, or "No I don't like that part, come up with something else, RIGHT NOW." There's nothing wrong with developing chops, we all do it, I know I do. There are really incredible musicians that know how to groove AND know how to kill it— I'm a big fan of those musicians. I especially love to see the girls stepping up. Thankfully, gone are the days of, "You're good for a girl." Now you're just kicking ass! No matter what gender you are.

You gotta understand, I'm spoiled, I have gotten to work with so many of the greatest drummers in the world from day one. Carlos Vega was the drummer in our first high school band. Our band with Steve Porcaro, Carlos Vega, Mike Landau, John Pierce, and myself was basically a Steely Dan tribute band (before the term tribute band existed.) Jeff was recording *Katie Lied* with Steely Dan when we were in high school and was hanging around and would come and sit in with us. Mike Porcaro also had a great vibe, and what an amazing bass player!

Jeff was so magical. When he walked into the room the lights just got brighter, he had a charisma in his playing and in everything about him. I heard Jeff make very few mistakes in 30 years. The thing that people still don't understand is that Jeff's

charisma matched his drumming abilities. Everyone wanted Jeff to be their drummer. I first got to play with Jeff when we were in high school thru his brother Steve. We met and he asked me and Mike Landau to join his band and we brought in John Pierce in from our neighborhood. We all wanted to be studio players after meeting Steve and his family. Jeff and David Paich were doing studio work at the highest level, and they were our heroes. That studio thing opened up a whole level of possibilities in our minds, our connection with Jeff was important. We all had tunnel vision, we never thought that there was a possibility of failure. There was never a time when we weren't playing, studying, or practicing our instruments. We used to cut school to play music at *someone else's* school. They really must get music back in the schools. You don't have to become a professional musician from taking music in school, it helps with everything in a person's development.

We lost Carlos and Jeff over 30 years ago and I still can't get past the tragedy of all of that. Jeff and Carlos loved each other. Carlos was studying with Joe Porcaro among other people, and Carlos and I had a "thing." Carlos had a Latin lope to his playing, he was incredible. Carlos was totally influenced by Jeff. They each had a body language when they played. There are some guys that just have this thing, it's effortless. There are millions of great players, but there are a few that God gave a little bit "extra."

MD: Prairie Prince played a few tracks on your first solo record, how did that come about?

SL: Prairie and I go back to when David Foster brought me in to play with The Tubes much to the guy's chagrin. I started to develop a relationship with Prairie and Fee Waybill. I love the Tubes. Prairie is a fantastic drummer and a great guy. I love Roger Steen, he's a great guitar player. I had nothing to do with being on those records, Foster hired me and put me in the room. But I love Prairie's playing, so I asked him to play on a track, it's that simple.

MD: How do you pick drummers for certain tracks?

SL: Through working with so many different famous producers, I've learned that they're like casting directors. Through the years I had the luxury of doing solo records where I felt like doing some different stuff. That meant that I could get different guys if I wanted to. On my first solo record in 1988, I had Jeff play, how could I not? I also had Carlos on that first solo record, and Carlos loved that. He played on the track that I wrote with Eddie Van Halen. Ed played bass and I played guitar on one of those insane guitar tunings and parts that Ed would come up with. We cut the track with just the three of us. I told Carlos to unleash his inner Keith Moon on that one, and he had a blast doing that. He thanked me for calling him for that track because at the time he was playing with James Taylor, but I knew he could rock from high school. I love to put people in situations where they can do something besides what they are known for, and he killed it!

MD: John Keane also played drums on that first solo record.

SL: I met John when I was 18 years old. David Foster was working with The Keane Brothers on their TV show, and I played on the show. They were talented cats; John and I shared a weird sense of humor and we just hit it off. I loved his whole thing; he could sing too. He ended up being in my first solo band. This was way before he got the *CSI* gig and became a gazillionaire television film writer. He's a tremendous songwriter, singer, drummer, and a great guy.

MD: You have used Gregg Bissonette on several of your solo records, including *Luke*, *Santamental*, *No Substitutions* (with Larry Carlton,) and *I Found the Sun Again*. You also play with Gregg in Ringo's All Starr band, what is it that makes Gregg so special?

SL: Gregg is one of the greats, he's a special drummer. First off, he is one of the most gifted and dedicated musicians I know. You can throw anything at him. Buddy Rich big band stuff, heavy metal with double kick drums like what he did with David Lee Roth, anything. You wanna play Ringo stuff? He is the expert. He can sight read anything. When he learns something he writes everything out so he can reference it. I've played a million gigs with him at local clubs like the Baked Potato, we play together in Ringo's band, he even subbed for Simon in Toto on a tour in 1995. He's always sensitive to the dynamic and every room. He's the guy that helped me get in Ringo's band. If it wasn't for Gregg (and Jim Keltner) I wouldn't have gotten that call, and 11 years later, I'm still there and it's going great.

> It's been said a thousand times, a great drummer makes the whole band better, an awful drummer makes a great band awful. If it doesn't *feel* right, it just doesn't work.

MD: You mentioned Keltner, I know he hasn't been on any of your solo records but tell me about working with Jim.

SL: Jim always comes and sits in with Ringo when we're playing LA. Jim just brightens up the room, he walks in, and magic happens. Who doesn't revere Jim Keltner? He's not like any other human being alive today. He's just a different kind of cat. When Toto was starting out, he used to come down and listen to tracks with us. Nothing was finished until Keltner gave it the thumbs up. He'd come into the sessions when we were winding down and we would play him what we'd done. He would just sit there and listen, he'd really take it all in. Jim and Jeff were like brothers, they had a special bond. It was wonderful to see them together. There was such a love that exuded when you had the two of them in the same room.

Some of the sessions that Jim and I have done together were fun and maybe a little weird, and many of them were not super famous. We did a Dolly Parton record; we did a Cheryl Ladd date in the late 70's…When Jim plays, he plays with his whole body, he just comes from a different space. I can't really articulate what I'm trying to say— he's one of the special ones. He's got a pocket as deep as anybody, but then there's all those little finesse things that he does. I remember vividly on this Dolly Parton session we did in '78. It was double drums with Jim and Ed Greene. Even back then Jim was always putting weird things on his drums (like a lot of guys do today.) We were cutting the song "Two Doors Down" and in the middle of the take suddenly you hear a bicycle bell on the hook, and nobody knew where it

was coming from, it really made the lyric pop. When Jim did that there was no facial acknowledgment at all, he just grabs for a little something and drops it in, it's always so musical.

MD: You did a live record with Joey Heredia on *El Grupo*.

SL: Joey is another one of the Baked Potato gang, the people that hang out there often work together. I have not seen in in a long time but in 2000, Nuno Bettencourt and I had a band together that went to Japan. Nuno is one of the greatest guitar players of modern times, he blew the air back into rock guitar with Extreme, I'm a big fan of his. After we did a small run in Japan, Nuno had to get back to his regular gig and the band continued as a quartet.



MD: How did Joey wind up in that band, what was it about his playing that attracted you?

SL: Nuno and I went to see a band that Joey had that was playing at La Vee Lee on Ventura Blvd. The band was Steve Weingart, Oskar Cartaya, and Joey. They were playing a Latin fusion kind of thing and just killing it! Nuno and I just looked at each other and said let's just get all these guys as our band. So we went out, had a great time for a couple of weeks, and played a lot of cool self-indulgent music. Joey has a unique pocket because he has that Latin thing that reminded me a little bit of Carlos. Even when they play straight there's something little different to it.

MD: When you did *Ever Changing Times*, you brought in Abe Laboriel Jr. for the entire record, and it was a GREAT record. This is (possibly) a dumb question, but what is it about Abe that prompted that call?



SL: I've known Abe since he was a little kid. He used to come with dad this to sessions and sit next to and watch Jeff or Steve Gadd. He was a nice kid as he was growing up. Then he went to Berklee, and really started to come into his own. He started doing sessions, then he got the McCartney gig, he's just a lovely person. He's a powerhouse with a wicked groove, and the nicest kid you'll ever meet in life. Is there a kinder group of people than the Laboriel family? Nope. Abe's got a big pocket and look at the body language, that says a lot. I really wanted one drummer to play on that whole record and he was the right call.

MD: I understand what you're saying about body language.

SL: Abe is a large man with a big presence…

MD: But you can feel his groove just by watching him move.

SL: Exactly!

MD: Toss Panos is "another one of those guys" with great body language, he played on *Transition*, and you two sound great together.

SL: Toss doesn't play like anybody else; he's got a whole different thing. He used to play with Michael Landau, that's how I first met Toss. He was also in Toy Matinee, he's just a unique person and player. I fell in love with him as a person first, he is a beautiful cat, and he's funny as hell. CJ Vanston mentioned him to me, so



when the opportunity came up to bring him in, CJ was absolutely right. Toss and I started to work together, we played on *Transition*, and we jammed a couple times. Then we got deeper into it we had this band called Nerve Bundle we put together with myself, Toss, Jeff Babko, and Jorgen Carlsson formally of Govt. Mule. Jorgen's got more of a rock thing with a deep pocket and the combination of Toss and Jorgen together was really something else.

MD: Chad Smith was also on *Transition*.

SL: Chad's a friend, he's wonderfully bombastic. First off, you just you wanna cuddle and give him a big hug. He's just the nicest cat, so full of life, and so into music. I had done something with him for some drum company thing. We got a little more friendly and I asked him to do a track on *Transition*. He came in and brought this amazing energy. We cut most of that record as we wrote it and overdubbed the drums. So there was never any demos, the demos became the record. We did all the guitars, keyboards, and vocals to a drum machine with the intention of getting drummers to overdub. When we brought Chad in, he was basically playing to a finished track. He came in, listened to the track once, got a killer drum sound, and played it twice. One time was just to figure it out, there were no charts because I don't think Chad reads, which doesn't matter. As Chad did the second take we were standing up and just laughing at how great it was. He brought such a joy to the music and was giving it all he had, he doesn't play like a "studio guy," no offense to "studio guys." I was very honored, and it was a lot of fun to hang out with him. I think the world of him. He's a sweet man and a killer drummer!



Again, just look at the body language. You can tell when a guy straps on a guitar, sits behind the kit, picks up his bass, or where his hands fall on the keyboard. You think, "This is gonna be good, this guy can play." It's a momentary synapse that goes off in your brain if you're working with somebody you never worked with before. If you don't know the musicians, you're wondering, "OK, how's this gonna go?" As session players we were doing that every day. Every day would be a different rhythm section with incredible players in various permutations. We never knew who was gonna be there. Back in the early days, sometimes we didn't even know who the artist was. You would find out who was playing by walking down the hallway and seeing whose trunks were in the hallway. I did that for almost 20 years. There were no rehearsals, and it wasn't always about



They really must get music back in the schools. You don't have to become a professional musician from taking music in school, it helps with everything in a person's development.

reading the dots. You had to have enough reading ability to read rhythmic notation, the road map (if you will,) but most of time you were writing (creating) your own part and filling in the blanks. That's what we did every day. We were all good at arranging our parts, coming up with hooks on the spot… little lines while the melody and the song was being sold. All the while, the artists, writers, and producers would be saying, "Great! This is what we love. We would have never thought of that." And that's why we worked all the time. It wasn't because of, "Look what I can do!"

MD: What were the drummers who were doing a lot of that work, and what made them special?

SL: Mike Baird was one of the best cats for that. We played together a lot in the 70s and 80s. He helped me a lot when I was starting out, he's a beautiful cat and one of those legendary studio guys. He's a great drummer that could play anything, sight read anything, and has a pocket. He was like Nigel Olsson, you know what I mean? He didn't have Billy Cobham chops, but as far as laying down a groove, getting a track, and making it happen quick while having a blast, that's Mike Baird.



MD: He's on a lot of those England Dan and John Ford Coley records, that's some great pop music, with some great grooves.

SL: I'm on a lot of those too. It cracks me up, someone took an entire era of session playing from 1976 to 1990 and put it in a big bag called "Yacht Rock." I'm not so sure if that's any better than calling it soft rock. But if they include Steely Dan on that yacht, *all aboard!* Steely Dan is my desert island music. I learned so much from learning, dissecting, and playing their music.

I used to work with Rick Shlosser a lot. Mike Botts (from Bread) and Rick would play double drums on sessions. Rick was great, we did a lot of those pop records together. He's one of those drummers like Mike Baird, he's a pocket player who always played the right stuff, tasty feels, great sounding kit, and always had a big smile on his face. Another one of the great session guys was Willie Ornelas. Jeff loved him. Willie introduced me to everybody like David Foster, Larry Carlton, and Jay Graydon. I owe him a great deal of love and thanks.



MD: You mentioned Ed Green?

SL: I love and revere Ed Green, Mr. "Sa-Bag-a-Doo." One day Jeff and I were on the tour bus and we counted how many times Ed played that "Sa-Bag-a-Doo" fill on Steely Dan's, "I Got the News," that was his signature fill, he played it like 80 times. James Gadson was another guy with a signature. His sixteenth note groove like on those Bill Withers songs is THE James Gadson signature groove. These days it seems like the session drummers are not allowed to really stick out, producers want everybody to play well, but don't do anything that's gonna make you stick out, they don't want to give the session guys any time to stretch out and play.



MD: What about Kenny Aronoff, he is creating some unique parts?

SL: The consummate pro, and another guy that writes his stuff out like Gregg. Kenny's a bombastic full-on rock and roller. He's one of the greats. He's one of those guys that if you're hung up, he'll step in with no rehearsal, do the homework, and kill it. That's why he gets invited to play in so many of these TV things where there's an extravaganza with 20 different singers on stage and he plays behind everybody. He is one of the busiest guys around because he shows up and he never screws anything up. You're right, he can be very creative with his parts, and he's a fun hang, that's always the best part. He and I are also both a little insane.

MD: Eric Valentine was on *All's Well That End's Well*, and in your band for a bit.



SL: There's Eric Valentine the producer, and Eric Valentine the drummer that was with me, two different cats. Eric has had an amazing career in in the in the jazz world, I met him through some other guys who said, "We've got the guy for you." I was looking for a live drummer that I could afford. With some of these guys, it's like we'd love to have you, but you're a little pricey for where I'm going with this. Eric is just an incredible drummer. He sold himself when he came in and sat behind the kit and started playing. He played great, he could sing (which really helped me,) was super funny, and he just fit the vibe perfectly. I was lucky to have him. However, when I joined Ringo's band in 2012 and with keeping Toto going, there's really not a lot of room to do much else now. I don't want to work 24/7 like I used to.

MD: Talk about playing with Ringo? He sounds fantastic on your

track "Run to Me."

SL: No Ringo, no rock drumming. Period. I'm gonna go right to the mat with this, how many drummers can just play the drum part and you know what song it is? All those pockets, all those parts, all the genius. Ringo came up with parts that were so creative sonically, he put the back beat in the perfect place, with no click tracks. He comes from the era of the dotted sixteenth note against the straight eight note. That creates a unique lope. Gregg Bissonette has dissected the Ringo thing, there's not a bigger Ringo fan than Gregg. When Ringo and Gregg play together, there's never a flam. We all know that two drummers can be hectic if they don't figure out their roles between each other. Not with Ringo and Gregg, it's magic, they're magic. And Ringo's still every bit as funny as he was in *A Hard Day's Night*. The people that say anything negative about Ringo, I'll come to blows with them! He's such a great example of how to live, and how to be.

MD: After Toto and your record *Candyman*, it was great to hear you and Simon Phillips together on your new record *Bridges*.

SL: After the horrific loss of Jeff 31 years ago; we had just completed *Kingdom of Desire* and had a three-month tour booked, we were really proud of that record and had never done a tour of that length before. We needed a drummer that didn't play like Jeff and didn't have much emotional baggage to the situation. Simon and I were friendly at the time but not real close friends, I had heard of him and loved his playing and I played with him at a gig In Japan in 1986 with Jeff Beck, Carlos Santana, Jan Hammer, Dougie Wimbish, and a ton of other legendary people. We had a blast and when the time came after Jeff… Simon fit the entire musical and emotional situation perfectly. And as it turned out he was moving to LA anyway.

> Gregg is one of the greats, he's a special drummer... He's always sensitive to the dynamic and every room.

He learned the music on the flight over because he's one of the most brilliant musicians I've ever known. He's the classic "A-Type" personality, there is nothing he can't do or fix. The situation was hard for everyone. Paich was there when I first met Jeff, and Mike Porcaro and Jeff were brothers, so that pain is indescribable. The first tune we played at the rehearsal was "Hydra." At the end of the tune Simon went into a double bass drum thing which Jeff *never* did, we all started laughing because it was so different and so great, Mike was a little freaked out, but he went with it, and we all just thought it was amazing and it could work. We played "Rosanna" and Simon did that tune some justice, but no one is ever going to do it like Jeff. You know, I could learn Jimi Hendrix parts, but it will *never* sound like Jimi Hendrix. In the drum world Jeff's parts are like that. Simon had great respect for Jeff's parts, but we asked him to stretch out and make them his own. He had some great suggestions. Simon was really the glue that kept us all from going insane, because we were running on nervous energy and pain. It was an impossible situation for Simon too. He played the Who music after Keith Moon, and here he was playing Jeff's parts. I'm so happy that he has gone on to become and thrive as a great bandleader with his amazing band Protocol and be THE GUY! It sure was fun to get back together with him on *Bridges*. Simon and I are in a great place.

MD: Many of your records including *Bridges*, feature a different drummer on every track—

SL: For *Bridges*, I just knew Simon was going to nail those tracks, so we went to his studio, and it was magic. For the Shannon Forrest tracks I just sent him the stuff with a little bit of direction. Both Simon and Shannon are brilliant engineers. Shannon sent me some of the best drum sounds I've ever heard. In that way Shannon and Simon are similar. I just took advantage of two of the best drummer-engineer's around.

MD: When Keith Carlock joined Toto after Simon left, you guys did a fantastic record called *XIV*, but that band didn't last long. What happened?

SL: Simply put, I got into a bidding war with Walter Becker of Steely Dan over Keith, and Walter won. But I understand why that happened, because Keith is one of the greatest pocket drummers ever and also a great soloist! Keith wanted to try and do both gigs, but that was impossible because we had overlapping schedules. I love Keith, but Walter and Donald outbid me. Keith and I have worked together in a fun band called Toxic Monkey with Bill Evans, Will Lee, and Steve Weingart. And I can't wait for us to play together again.

MD: Sometimes I have to pinch myself, getting to play with all of these drummers in my career is really special. In a way, they are all the same, but also *very* different. But what makes them all great is the pocket, the creativity, and the "spidey sense" (instinct) that they use to make everybody sound good. That's a drummer's job, to make everybody sound good, because if it's swingin' a dodgy note doesn't matter. Everyone makes mistakes, I make some every night, but with a great drummer you can just let those mistakes fly away.

MD: What does your "spidey sense" as a rhythm guitarist need from a drummer in the rhythm section?

SL: A drummer lays it down, and it's up to me to make sure that I am in the pocket with him. Jeff would often have a click in his phones, but he wouldn't want us to hear it, because he liked to play so far behind the click that it would mess us up. He explained it to me, saying, "Look, I want to hear a click because where I put the snare drum is where I am hearing the time, but I need everyone else to play where *they* are hearing the time, because that what's going to make everything come together and gel." And he was never wrong. Jeff always knew what the best takes were, he would play his greatest stuff right away. He would get the perfect drum part and say, "That's my part," everyone else can fix their parts but that's THE drum part. With Toto many of Jeff's drum parts were first or second takes. He had amazing musical instincts. When Paich first brought in "Rosanna" Dave had it envisioned with a Bo Diddley type groove. Jeff immediately said that wouldn't work and played it with a shuffle. When he did that, everything changed instantly, the entire room just lit up. The take on the record is the rhythm section's second take, and again Jeff said that's THE take, and we all fixed our own parts around that. The jam part at the end was us just messing around, Jeff hit that big snare drum flam and broke it down, and we all just kept going.

There is individual time and then there is group time, that's

what creates the magic. That's where the drums and the bass create the lope, the keyboards flow through that lope, and then the rhythm guitar finds a part to tie everything together to create that group groove. Some people play on top, some people play behind, some people have a swing in their playing, and some don't. It's all about finding that magical combination of musicians. Sometimes the rhythm section is badly cast, and the combination of players just isn't working. The simple stuff is what works when you are creating parts for pop music, sometimes you'll hear a little hole that needs to be filled, and you'll come up with something that fills it perfectly, and everyone smiles.

In the Quincy Jones days, I would find myself in a room with a legendary cast of musicians, Stevie Wonder, Paul McCartney, Michael Jackson... But Quincy always came up with the right cast, and it always worked. Whether it's getting to play with Miles Davis working with Toto or playing with Joni Mitchell, all the greats tended to create the best cast of musicians, and sometimes I can't believe that I played a part in their creations.

MD: What happens when the cast of musicians isn't quite working, especially within the rhythm section?

SL: I've seen great— famous musicians on sessions who were presented with a chord chart or a lead sheet and have just folded up like a house of cards when it came to creating a great part on the spot and under pressure. We were used to it every day. Many were not. When I was younger, I was in those situations with Jeff occasionally. Jeff would wear dark glasses sometimes when we were tracking, and if I was playing a little on top, he would push his glasses down on his nose and look over his glasses and motion to me to lay back a little. If it was happening, he would keep the glasses in front of his eyes and just smile. And he was always right.

MD: What was the thinking behind bringing Shannon Forrest into Toto?

SL: I love Shannon Forrest. He's an absolutely stunning musician and one of the nicest human beings on planet earth. He's really into sound, and he's really a student of Jeff, but also has his own thing. Out of all the drummers Toto had, Shannon was probably the closest to Jeff in terms of how he felt things and his restraint. Simon was much more into crazy go for it parts, in a very cool way. After Keith couldn't do it, we didn't know what to do. Then David Hungate brought up Shannon's name and said that we had to get Shannon. I had met Shannon, and I knew he was the number one guy in Nashville. When Shannon came out and played, it was perfect. It really fit. Then Shannon and Lenny Castro, my old soul brother and my number one percussionist, became really close friends. Lenny has always a huge part of the Toto thing.

MD: Talk to me about some of the stuff that the great drummers have said to you throughout the years, what have you learned from us drummers?

SL: The drummer is always right… *unless he's really wrong!* Something else that I learned from firsthand experience is that there's no magic guitar, snare drum, or drum set (or any instrument.) There are magic *people*! A great instrument is a great tool, but it's not gonna make you play any better.

MD: On the last Toto studio record *Old is New*, you put Vinnie Colaiuta on a few tracks, what a wonderful full circle moment that must have been?

SL: It just made sense. I met Vinnie on the Joni Mitchell *Wild Things Run Fast* sessions. Jeff had talked about this kid who was playing with Zappa, and Jeff was helping Vinnie make a name for himself in town by helping him get on some sessions. Back then, when you saw Vinnie live, he was just untouchable. He always had a deep pocket, but he became more of a pocket drummer when he got into the session thing and played with Sting. As we all know, he can sight read "The Black Page," and play the most insane stuff. He (sort of) made all of that crazy rhythmic stuff popular, now people have taken it to another level. I'll bet Vinnie must sometimes think, "I can't believe I created this monster." Eddie Van Halen actually told me, "You know, I didn't mean to create a monster with this tapping thing, I was just trying to fill out the sound of a three-piece band." I'll bet Vinnie must feel the same way. Vinnie's thing is so amazing, it just makes you laugh.

> Who doesn't revere Jim Keltner? He's not like any other human being alive today. He's just a different kind of cat.

MD: Yup, I've seen some of those nights.

SL: He's also a wonderful human being. He's an incredibly soulful and kind person… unless you piss him off, *then look out!* He's always been there for me. We thought that Jeff would love to see Vinnie on a Toto record, Vinnie was never going to go on the road with us, but we were doing four new tracks and it felt right to put one of the greatest drummers ever (and someone that Jeff was close to) on those last four new Toto tracks, once and for all. Vinnie came in and just killed it. We had a blast, it was a wonderful couple of days, and he did his thing.

MD: We have talked about Jeff a lot, can you share something that you haven't already shared about Jeff.

SL: This has nothing to do with chops or playing, but it is one of the funniest things I've ever witnessed. In the late 70s we were on a session with a producer that just wanted to beat this B*b* pop song to death with hundreds of takes, we had tried everything. We were on day two of the same song. There were all these people in the control room at Sunset Sound, and the gobos are set up around Jeff, covering him from everyone's view except the musicians in the room. As the producer asked for take after take, Jeff started taking off his clothes with each take. It got down to the point where Jeff was *butterball naked* except for his knee-high boots. In the control room they really didn't know what was going on, but we're all dying laughing at Jeff, and it's creating all this energy. Suddenly everybody in the control room was freaking out and jumping up and down because the energy of the take was so good. Then, in the middle of the take some guy comes out and walks up to Jeff's wall of gobos and starts staring at him. We weren't going to stop playing because this was going to be THE take. But this guy is just hanging there checking out Jeff playing naked.

MD: I think there is a lesson there. Sometimes a little bit of laughter can make everything a whole lot better…

SL: Yeah, and never stop playing, no matter what! Jeff was a character. Everybody sees him as the legendary perfectionist

and best of the best, and he was. But back in the days of tape machines, you would be in a recording studio all day long, and there was a lot of waiting around. But when it came time for the red light to go on, it was all business.

We were on another one of those painful sessions back in the day when the producer didn't believe the band could get it in a couple of takes. They wanted to stupidly squeeze every minute out of us. They would even erase great takes just to save tape and have the band play it again. Jeff had enough, and we all had to get to our next session. The producers always looked to Jeff because he was the cat, and he was always right. Jeff had a way of using his body language to sell a take to the producer. He would start pointing at the speakers going, "That's it!" So in this case Jeff knew that we all had to split, so he tells me, "I'll get us out of here." After the next take he said," That's THE one!" The producers believed him, and we got out on time. Everybody was happy in the end. Very few of us knew what he had done, *but I got the wink*.

MD: Who haven't you worked with yet?

SL: I can't start naming names because I'm gonna forget somebody. There are some younger guys that that are really incredible who I haven't met but I really admire. Danny Carey from Tool is incredible, and so is the band. Mike Mangini, great drummer. I admire drummers like Mike Portnoy that play the heavier and more prog metal stuff. I love all that stuff as much as I like the Carpenters. People might say it's cheesy, but a great song is a great song, I'm not a musical snob. Nate Smith is a fantastic drummer. Nic Collins is a great drummer, he is now in a new band with my son Trev called The Effect. They are playing incredible music. Phil Collins is one of my all-time favorites. All the Gabriel era, new Genesis, and solo Phil Collins music still puts a smile on my face.

> These days it seems like the session drummers are not allowed to really stick out, producers want everybody to play well, but don't do anything that's gonna make you stick out...

MD: How did Sput Searight come to joining Toto?

SL: Sput came out of nowhere, I got hip to Snarky Puppy, they're one of those bands just came out of nowhere (seemingly to me anyway.) I wondered how many great players can you put in one band? They are so intense and are making wonderful and beautiful music by incredible young players. But Toto needed a fantastic drummer. We had to reconfigure the whole band, and there was a legal issue that took a bad turn, and we had to downsize and rethink how we were going to continue, and *if* we were going to continue. But everything's fine now and everyone is getting along. But while all of that happened, Shannon wanted to do some other stuff and we had some financial issues to resolve. I didn't want to insult Shannon, but we had to go in another direction with some different cats. Everyone has to make a living. Shannon was totally cool and understood what was going on.

We tried something new and cool with Sput and it was a lot of fun. Sput had left Snarky and was doing his new band Ghost Note which is an incredible band! Sput and our keyboard player Xavier Taplin are part of that whole scene, they brought a whole other thing into Toto. They are so youthful and exciting, Sput's got a wicked pocket and can lay it down but he's also a little busier. It was fun to have that type of player and energy. Sput was busier than most of the guys we've had; but I liked that. I brought in bassist John Pierce who was a session guy and was with Huey Lewis for 30 years on top of that. He was my first friend in life. John's a pocket player. If you have a bass player that likes to just lay it down, you can have a busier drummer and have it swing, that's what's happened. It was a different flavor, and it brought a new energy to some of the older material.

MD: You have repeatedly said "was" regarding Sput, is he still in Toto?

SL: As of this writing we have changed up the band a little for the 2024 tours and going forward. Sput and Xavier wanted to get back to their band Ghost Note. They are younger cats and it's their turn to fly! They were amazing to play with, and we love them as people as well! I hope to do more with them again, maybe on something aside from Toto. We have talked about it.

But we are honored to announce that Shannon Forrest is coming back. We are gonna bring the sound of the band back closer to the egg and pay respect to the old records we did. Look…It's not Toto from 1978, 1990, 2000, or 2023… it can't be! Obviously, every time the band changes personnel it's not the same. You could arguably say that when Jeff passed, Toto passed. But what about the rest of us? We continued on. We did albums and tours with Simon, and they were really good, different but good. There were always different versions of the band. When Mike got sick with ALS we were devastated. We had Lee Sklar and Nathan East play with us, and they were awesome but not permanent.

(Toto singer) Joe Williams and I are trying to do our songs justice and keeping our music alive and it's working. I wish I could bring Jeff and Mike back more than anything in the world! But we *are* making sure their families are getting checks. I wish we could have done this in a less weird/sad way. It has all broken my heart, what can I say?

I love everybody and I have no bad feelings towards anybody, and I wish everybody peace and love! Just don't believe everything you read on the internet, that's all I can tell you. No matter what we have all gone through, I will always love them all.

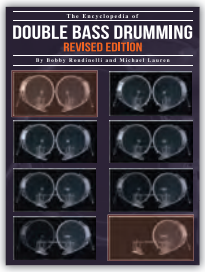
Check out Steve's profile page, at moderndrummer.com

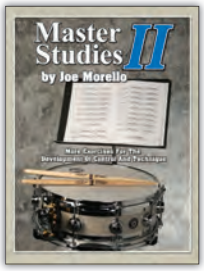
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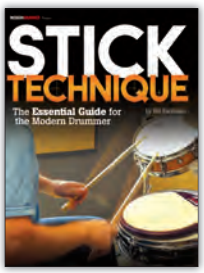




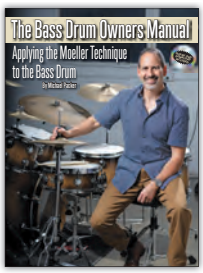


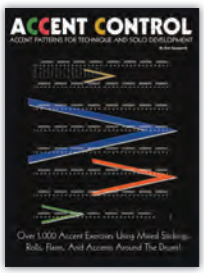


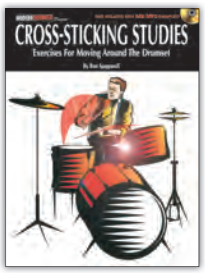






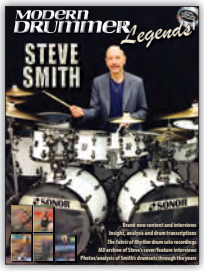


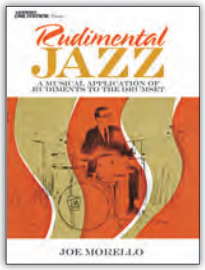


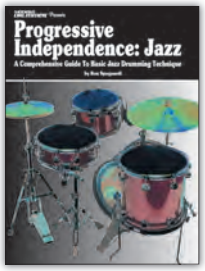


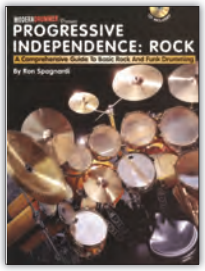


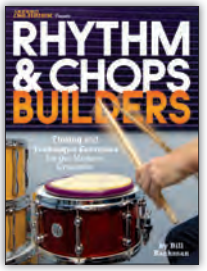






















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Aaron Spears

1976–2023



"It's nice to be important but it is more important to be nice, spread love." This is what Aaron Spears lived by. When we started to ask his close friends and drummers that Aaron had touched and inspired for quotes, it became apparent that he was more than an incredible drummer and friend. Aaron Spears was a light and a mentor for many drummers in the community and most importantly a husband and father.

Aaron was born on October 26, 1976, in Washington, D. C. he grew up playing in his church. From there, he got his first big break joining the Gideon Band at the age of 23. Aaron appeared on many drummers' radars when he joined Usher's band in 2004. Not only did he become Usher's touring drummer, but he produced some songs on the album Confessions which earned him a Grammy nomination. For many up-and-coming drummers, their first glimpse of Aaron was at the 2006 *Modern Drummer Festival*. He cemented his place as a drummer that nobody will ever forget. That performance was one of the best festival performances ever. Many drummers still point to that performance as an inspiration. He showed the world that he had what every drummer wanted to have: infectious energy, killer chops, and laser accuracy.

Aaron's long list of touring and recording credits include Chrisette Michelle, Chamilionaire, David Cook, Joanne Rosario, Lil Wayne, Carrie Underwood, Usher, Jordin Sparks, Chaka Khan, Adam Lambert, Israel Houghton, Mary Mary, The Backstreet Boys, Miley Cyrus, Tiziano Ferro, Lady Gaga, Britney Spears and most recently Ariana Grande.

Everyone who was lucky enough to meet Aaron or become close with him will never forget his humble personality, his deep faith in God, and his infectious smile. One of my favorite Aaron quotes is from his *Modern Drummer* cover story in July 2009, "If I was happy, I play to express my happiness. If I was upset, I would go down and play until I felt better." This is what drumming is all about. Expressing and healing your feelings through drums.

But to Aaron, one thing that was more important than drumming was family. Aaron summed it up perfectly in these words, "As often as possible I'll fly home if there's a gap in the schedule, especially if I'm on a domestic run. If we have a day or two off, I'll jump on a plane and go home. Even though it's short, that time is important, and I'm grateful I can get those moments in. Playing drums and having the chance to earn a living and see the world doing what I love is amazing. It's dope to meet new people and sometimes have people recognize you. That's all good. But none of it compares to family. That's always the most important thing, family."

We never know when our time is up. But we can all learn from Aaron Spears to enjoy every moment and spend as much time as you can with your family.

"Amazing person, musician, father, husband… I've always been inspired by Aaron. His skills as a musician/drummer are obviously incredible but Aaron as a stand-up person is what I will remember and cherish the most."

—Brian Frasier Moore (P!NK)

"As I hurt inside during this time of silence, I ask God why, why my brother, why take the man that restored my darkness? Why a loving father, a husband that made me aspire to have the family I now have? As I sit in sadness with my heart in pain, I have been praying and remembering our history, you always said "smile" give love , if someone shows you hate, just love on them… Aaron saw the light in everyone, he made me who I am today, choosing love to the world and Walking with God. You brought out the kid in me, and at the same, time brought out the care and responsibility. You are a king to the world, to your beloved Jess and Gus, and the friends you considered as your brothers and sisters. You are the king to my son, godfather, as I will see him grow through your spirit and what you taught me. I know you are watching over us now with God taking you, and I will see you soon my bro, I love you Aaron. Thank you all for your love and support, this is a tough time for his friends and family, we greatly appreciate the love you are flowing to him, his legacy, and his family."

—Kaz Rodriguez (Josh Groban)

"Aaron was an inspiration! His life on and off the drums challenged me to be better. He loved me and I loved him. He was always concerned about me and my well-being, and for that I am grateful. I'm blessed to have called him my friend and brother! His big beautiful bright genuine smile will always be the first thing I think of when I think of him. I'm gonna miss him so much."

—Teddy Campbell (Independent)

"Aaron touched the lives of so many people around the world! It's crazy because all of my encounters with him had nothing to do with drums. Amazing drummer. An even more legendary human."

—Diamond Johnson (Beyonce)

"Most people that are as gifted as Aaron was, are typically nowhere near as kind hearted. He truly was one of the most genuine and encouraging guys I ever met. He radiated joy and positivity. We all can only hope and strive to be as good as Aaron was, not only at music, but at caring for others."

—Al Cleveland III (Melanie Martinez)

"It's one thing to see greatness , but it's another thing to know greatness. If you knew Aaron, then you knew one of the greatest gifts the world could have ever encountered. I called Aaron "MR BIG" because he had the biggest smile, the biggest light, the biggest energy, and the biggest heart for just seeing greatness in others. So much so that he always refused to accept the praises from others. Well MR BIG, we are not good without you here but we are going to be GREAT as we carry your spirit with us. There will never be another Aaron Spears"

—Robert 'Sput' Searight

"I remember meeting Aaron Spears while I was on my very first world tour in the early 2000's. He had a smile as big as the sky, and such a warm personality. When I heard him play drums, I remember thinking how could such a nice guy beat up on the drums that way!! Hard hitting, lightning fast, coupled with precision and groove. I'd never ever seen or heard anyone play drums like Aaron Spears played. He was the greatest.
I'll forever be in awe of the amazing gift he was to all of us. As a musician yes, but more than that, as an amazing brother and friend. Always spreading love and positivity. Always smiling and always talking about his family. I'm going to miss all things Aaron Spears, but I believe with my whole heart, I will see him again. To be absent from the body, is to be present with the Lord. Rest in heaven, my brother. I love you."

—Calvin Rodgers (Isley Brothers)

"It's not many times that we meet a person of incredible talent, student of the art, and just a beautiful, kind, gentle soul. That would be Aaron Preston Spears. He has made all the lives of the people who knew him, so much better. His talent for playing drums has been the envy of so many people worldwide. Aaron's desire to share his talents with others is no less than AMAZING! I had told Aaron many times, I will always sing your praises and will always be PROUD of what he had become. A man that the world adored! Rest In Love and Peace."

—Chris Hart (Communication & Relationship Manager, REMO)

"I know we have to talk about it, and I know there are things to do but, I don't think it has really hit me in totality that we won't physically be able to see you again. The night you were being honored you decided to close your speech by talking about us being brothers. You started by

"Mr. Aaron Spears was a young man with a beautiful soul with a big heart who seemed to love everyone in his path. The first time I met Aaron it was at a Steve Jordan clinic at Drummers Collective in New York. As I was trying to get to my seat, I ran into Aaron and he had this very infectious smile that lit up the room. Right away you could tell there was something different about him, he just seemed very genuine right off the bat, no pretending. That's what I liked about him. As I got to know him, I learned how much he loved his family.

He honored me at the Zildjian Hall of Fame concert in Boston. He started off with a Gary Willis song that I recorded. He counted in and started playing. Nobody in the band played with him they just stood and looked at him. He's playing and looking at the band, then he stopped. I'm sitting in the balcony with Terri Lyne Carrington, Sheila E, Peter Erskine, Steve Smith, Omar Hakim, and Eddie Bayers thinking that he messed up and he's going to restart. He sat there for two seconds, reached down to the left near his stick bag to put a hat on. We all broke out laughing, he played with the band and killed it. I'll be damned if he didn't play the song better than I did when I recorded it. I told him afterwards that he definitely kicked ass, and I told him I was very honored and pleased with his performance.

We agreed that once I got back from Europe, which was November 13th, He was going to come down to my house and hang with me. Well, the rest is history. As I sit there at his funeral with 2,500 maybe 3,000 family and friends, you can feel the love in the room. It was a beautiful sendoff for a beautiful human being, who definitely died too young. I can definitely tell you from what I know, everyone that he crossed paths with, will definitely miss him, and he will always be in our minds and hearts, Mad love and respect."

—Dennis Chambers

saying I saved your life… But if I am being honest SPEEZ I don't necessarily know what things would be like if you didn't become my big brother! You saved my life; you helped my life…. The drums, the talks, the food, the hangs, the parties, the extended family we made, the gigs, the laughs, the car accidents, the being in the same city working, the things we wanted for our families, what we wanted for the city, …. Bruh it's so much. You really are my big brother.

I wish I had the words to ease my mind and heart. Or the words to explain to everybody…. I definitely don't. I hope your spirit feels my next few words though…Thank you SPEEZ! Thank you for everything!! The years that you were selfless and gave to myself and the world, I pray will not be in vain. We are sure going to make sure that Gus and Jess are straight cause that's what we do. I am going to miss you, the randomness, the clowning, and the love you gave. But I pray your spirit remains here forever. (We were supposed to play a few more times too! Gaaahhh.) Love you bro! Thank you to everybody that has checked on me. I do appreciate it. Y'all say a prayer for Jess, Gus, and Speezo's Family. And if you have some time, say a prayer for me as well."

—Jamal Moore (Usher)

"Aaron Spears. I was his Michael Jordan, and he was my Kobe Bryant. There's nobody like Aaron. On the drums he was so fast, clean, and creative. I just want to say that we lost a giant when we lost him. I want to say that he's my best friend, is my close friend, and he always made sure that I was good in anything that I was doing. He always said to me, "Don't overthink it. Don't overthink it were his words to me all the time, he said, "You got this G, you got it." I'm going to miss him very much, I can't really put it in words. My heart is broken. Sleep well my friend."

—Gerald Heyward (Independent)

"Aaron always said, "It is nice to be important, but more important to be nice." That was not a throw away statement for him. He lived that "call to action" daily and I am convinced it is the reason his loss has been felt so strongly. Aaron had the ability to produce light and smiles in every situation through his musical abilities of course, but more importantly via his personal connections. His extreme talent never overshadowed his ability to love. We lost not just a God given talent; we lost a God loving person.

"Not all heroes wear capes. My hero wore Jordan's and had the same amount of influence and Impact as MJ did on the court behind the drums. He was untouchable on the drums but so approachable off them. With a heart for people bigger than those unbelievable chops and setups!

Countless hours shedding and talking about him with Dexter Hercules. Watching videos from the Basement All-Stars to the Usher clips, and trying to dissect his phrasing (IMPOSSIBLE) He was truly a giant amongst men, and fast forward a few years later. To be able to connect with him and call him a friend and brother will be my life's privilege I will hold near and dear to my heart.

I remember meeting him for the first time after sneaking into his London drum show soundcheck, he greeted me like we'd known each other for years! I said, "You're the best"! He said, "Na I'm the worst, but I'm working on it," too humble. To say my heart aches is an understatement, this one is gonna hurt for a while. Thank you Aaron for your fearless approach to music, you birthed a sound that has transcended genres and will live on forever! A whole generation of drummers are standing on your shoulders. Your legacy is secure, you're on our Mount Rushmore. Rest well, love you my G. Praying for his family and friends and all my fellow drummers and musicians out there."

—Jonathan 'Ginger' Hamilton (Sam Smith)

What a world it would be if we could all honor his legacy by attempting to emulate and pass on the light he so often exemplified."

—Joe Testa (VP Artist Relations, Vic Firth)

"Aaron Spears!!! He had an impact on my drumming since I was 14 years old. I got the chance to meet him at 15 years old and ever since then he has been so supportive and encouraging of my journey. He was the "Big Brother" that was welcoming and constantly smiling. I will never forget the time I was invited to do VF Jams, it was my first time and we were rehearsing a song written by Robert "Sput" Searight. I was a little nervous but excited, I didn't know what to expect so I came out the gate a bit too intense. Basically, I got to the climax of the solo too early. Aaron came over to me in between takes and said "You got it man, you sound amazing. Just take your time." Then I went over to Sput and asked, "How long is the solo section man?" He replied, " You got a while!" I said, "iight Cool! Ima watch you!" We did two more takes and after the second take, Aaron sticks his head out of the control room and says "that was it," while smiling. That moment will forever be with me, it will be a story I will tell my children one day. A legend always!"

—Carlin White (Lana Del Rey)

"Aaron IS one of one. His impact on the drumming community is comparable to that of Michael Jordan or LeBron James to basketball and the NBA. While we will miss him, I'm so glad that he left us so many moments to witness and continue in his greatness on all platforms."

—Nisan Stewart (Dancing with the Stars)

"It's still surreal that I'm writing this about Aaron! He was always easy going and full of life. We laughed a lot when we were around each other and then there were times where we got serious and talked about life decisions or something that we could do to help others. We all know the AMAZING drummer that he was. He didn't sound like anybody. He definitely had his own sound and style of playing, but Aaron was an even better person. We've all been saying it the last few weeks, but it's really true! He was a great man and he genuinely cared about people. That always resonated with me more than anything! Rest well Aaron! We love you! We will work to keep his legacy alive."

—Gorden Campbell (Earth Wind & Fire)

"I've literally known Aaron since we were elementary age kids. Our dads were band mates in various gospel concerts and programs. It's still hard to believe that he's gone from this earth, but now he's in heaven, watching over his family and friends."

—Jay Williams (Dave Koz/Chaka Khan)

"Aaron was truly the embodiment of joy, love, and an uplifting and supportive attitude. He was the light in every room that he entered. His smile was

unforgettable, and his personality always felt so authentic. He was and will continue to be an inspiration in the drumming community as both a great player and a wonderful person. He will be missed but he will never be forgotten. We love you Aaron."

—Stanton Moore (Galactic)

"We lost a gentle giant. Aaron was the perfect example to everyone of what to be. Those of us that were very close to him, and that knew him will agree. Aaron Spears, I love you truly. You will forever be in our hearts and minds."

—Paul 'Buggy' Edwards (Backyard GoGo Band)

"Gonna miss our brother and his energy! Always positive, respectful, one of a kind, and a true general. Thank you for being a great example and inspiration to push the envelope and break barriers in this game as a genre bending well accomplished drummer, businessman, and one of the best to ever pick up a pair of sticks. I remember when we both gave a drum clinic in Paris, France at the Bag Show. He stood side stage with our Remo rep, Chris Hart as they both cheered me on the entire set. One of many things I appreciated from Aaron is he always gave major props and showed love that felt genuine and from the heart. Thank you for your service and brotherhood Aaron Spears. My condolences to your family"

—Daru Jones (Jack White)

"Aaron was a light. His drumming will have an everlasting impact on the world. I remember being around him and always feeling inspired. He was a beacon of kindness and had a gift to unite! Aaron, we love you, man! May your legacy live forever."

—Mike Reid (Janet Jackson)

"Aaron Spears was a larger-than-life human being with other worldly talent. More magnificent than his skill and mastery on drums, was his incredible ability to have the same intentional and deliberate approach when interacting with people. His gift was larger than any musical platform and he should be remembered for how amazing of a human being he was, not just a musician."

—Garrison Brown (Alicia Keys)

"Aaron Spears was an incredibly nice person and an equally incredible player. His kind and humble demeanor, despite his many musical accomplishments, was an inspiration . He will be forever missed."

—Trevor Lawrence Jr. (Dr. Dre)

"Aaron Spears is a friend, an inspiration, world-changer, universe-shifter, and will forever resonate in our hearts. Initiated in 1998, his impact on my musical evolution weaves throughout the fabric of my music education at Howard University. He spearheaded our DW Kick, Snare, Hat: Superstars of Hip Hop and R&B Drumming DVD, and propelled me onto two Super Bowl stages. He impacted the hearts of so many as we served together on the board of The National Black Musicians Coalition. I honor Aaron for the direct impact he had on my life.

He is the quintessential expression of what I see people study to attain, and more often fall short. He is the essence of a master of rhythm. He rests at a frequency in manhood, musicianship, family, humility, and mentorship. He will forever be studied for generations to come. May our community be mindful to continue to support his family."

—Queen Cora Coleman (Prince/Beyonce)

"I met Aaron for the first time at the Modern Drummer Festival in 2006. Aaron was performing as a member of the "Gospel Summit" showcase, who were on right before my slot. I was sitting behind my kit right behind the curtain as Aaron was performing. I was trying to make some last-minute adjustments to my set, but I kept having to jump up and walk over to the side of the stage to watch Aaron absolutely slay it.

He had such a great feel and beautiful, killer pocket, and then in contrast he would explode into these outlandish, daring, insanely fast and powerful chops that made the whole audience, and all the world-class artists backstage go "what the...?? *whaaaat*?? Who is this guy? It was a beautiful thing to see and experience and it put a huge smile on my face.

This performance was a life and career changing moment for Aaron, and I feel blessed and honored that I was allowed to experience that epic performance up close, from mere feet away, peeking through the curtain.

After the performances the artists would sign autographs for the fans in the lobby of the venue and as I walked to the table to sign autographs, Aaron and the other members of the "Gospel Summit" ensemble had just finished signing and were walking away. I watched them walk off towards the backstage area and I sat down to start signing myself, when suddenly someone hugged me from behind and whispered in my ear "That was insane, wow, dude! I love you, bro."' I turned around and it was Aaron, with that big, beaming smile on his face... He had seen me walk up to the table and decided to run back to talk to me. This is who he was. Incredibly humble, kind, selfless, zero ego, incredibly talented and always a down to earth friend and colleague, right from the first moment we met. I thanked him, we hugged, and I told him that his performance was just off the chart awesome, inspiring, and that he absolutely blew me away. We both stared at each other wide-eyed, looked each other up and down and giggled, both of us still emotionally worked up and sweating profusely from our performances, we hugged a couple more times and threw more compliments at each other, we laughed some more, exchanged contact information and then he had to rush off to go catch a plane to the next gig.

We became instant friends that day and always stayed loosely in touch. I performed at many drum festivals over the years with Aaron, we shared the stage many times and even toured together for a few weeks at a time. He was just an absolute joy to be around. Aaron was full of positive energy, always. Always good vibes, always nothing but kindness, respect, humility, and love. What a wonderful human being. What an incredible musician and artist.

I already miss his surprise phone calls and text messages. He would just call or text me a quick "hey bro, all good?" or a funny meme, or a link to some amazing music. I feel blessed that I was allowed to get to know him a little and share some time with him on the road, on stage, backstage, and over many dinners and breakfasts on tour. I miss you, Aaron. May you rest in peace my friend."

—Thomas Lang (Independent/Clinician)

The Evolution of the Hi-Hat

By Tim Northup

The history of how the modern day hi-hat was invented is a subject that many drummers and drum historians will continue to debate. In this article, I am going to give you historical facts and present actual examples of the development of early cymbal mechanisms that led to what we know today as the hi-hat. Many of these are owned by the Northup Drums Museum.

A brief history of how drums were played before the hi-hat was invented is where we will begin. The drum set or "trap" set was born at the turn of the 20th century out of necessity when one drummer could play the snare, bass, and cymbal together, instead of employing three drummers. Vaudeville and silent film drummers helped to develop things like a bass drum pedal with a "clanger" that would strike a cymbal mounted to the bass drum. This was the first pedal driven cymbal sound. Drummers looking for a better sound led to the development of the first foot operated "snowshoe" mechanism. Chicago drummer Vic Berton created a crude pedal out of two pieces wood with small cymbals attached to each end with a spring hinge in the middle so they would crash together. He filed a patent for his device in April 1925 (the patent was granted in 1927.) In 1926 Ludwig created their own version of this device and called it the Charleston "snowshoe" pedal. It allowed the drummer to play an after beat of a "chick" sound or a light crash effect. Other companies such as Leedy and George Stone also made wooden snowshoe pedals at this time. Prior to 1926 there were no sock cymbals or hi-hats shown in any major drum catalogs.



George B. Stone, Ludwig Snowshoe Pedals, W&A Sock Cymbal Pedal, Slingerland Duncan Sock Cymbal Pedal.



Walberg & Auge Sock Cymbal and High Hat Sock pedal ca.1927

What came first, the sock cymbal (lowboy) or the hi-hat? For years, drummers believed that the sock cymbal was around for a while before someone got the idea to raise it up to it to play with a stick. In a 1984 *Modern Drummer* article Papa Jo Jones talks about getting a pipe to extend the sock cymbal to playing height because he couldn't play the sock cymbal on the floor, but the date he remembered doing this was later than when existing stands appeared in catalogs. Others have thought that Gene Krupa was involved in designing the hi-hat, since he was credited for many drum innovations with Slingerland Drum Company. What I have found by studying the catalogs from Leedy, Ludwig, and Walberg & Auge (W&A) proves that the sock cymbal and a version of the hi-hat came out at about the same time.

Walberg & Auge in Worcester, MA. was an innovative manufacturing company that produced most of the hardware for the major drum companies in the early 1920s through the 40s. Barney Walberg of W&A designed a metal version of the Charleston pedal that would fold up for easy transport, this model quickly led to the design of the modern day hi-hat. In 1927 W&A placed an ad showing both versions, "The Universal Cymballam" (the high-hat, Charleston, or sock pedal,) and "The Cymballam" (the compact or sock pedal that folds.) This is the first time we see both the "high hat" and Charleston sock pedal advertised together, which leads us to believe that both were designed at the same time.



Bock-a-da-bocks, Gladstone Hand, Hoop mounted Hi-Hat style, Sizzle, and Greeko Cymbals

However, there is still some debate about that. It is possible that several people had the same idea at about the same time.

The first hi-hat was a little different than what we see today, it had a larger cymbal on the bottom and a smaller "sock" type deep cup cymbal on the top. The 1927 *Leedy Topics* newsletter shows a new "high hat sock cymbal pedal." The 1927 Ludwig catalog shows only the (low) sock cymbal and the Charleston "Snowshoe" pedals. But the 1928 Ludwig catalog shows *both* the Charleston, the new "High Hat Cymbal pedal" and the (low) Perfection "sock" cymbal. Both the Perfection "Sock" cymbal and the "High Hat" versions stayed in the catalogs until the late 1930's. Apparently some drummers still preferred the low sock cymbal to the new hi-hat.



Slingerland Duncan Pedal, (Uncataloged) Ludwig Duncan style pedal, Ludwig Pedal with Clanger

While the hi-hat was developing, hand cymbals, effects, bass drum mounted pairs of cymbals, and sizzle cymbals were all popular. These were all hi-hat *sounding* instruments. The hand cymbals were called Bock-a-da-bocks and were sold by Ludwig and Leedy. The Gladstone Hand cymbals were designed by Billy Gladstone, manufactured and sold by Frank Wolf Drum Company in NYC. Hand cymbals such as these can be heard on early recordings by Chick Webb ("Dog Bottom" 1929,) and Louis Armstrong's Hot Five Band ("West End Blues" featuring Zutty Singleton from 1928.) These hand cymbals have a similar sound to how the hi-hat is played today.

There were many other alternate versions of hi-hat sounds being used by drummers in the late 1920's like Choke Cymbals, Sizzle Cymbals, Upright Sock Cymbals, the Slingerland "Duncan" sock cymbal pedal, hoop mounted deep cup cymbals, hoop mounted spring cymbals and "sting cymbals." All of these were attempts in creating that hi-hat chick and sizzle sound that we hear today. In the 1930s and 40's W&A were still making most of the hardware for the major drum companies, but now companies like Slingerland, Leedy, and Ludwig were using their own cast aluminum foot pedals with their names on them. In the 1940's W&A also made a double hi-hat called the No.1460 TWINSOK. There is a great photo of Gene Krupa trying out hi-hat cymbals on one of these at the Zildjian Factory with Avedis Zildjian standing next to him holding a cymbal. These are very rare and only a few are known to exist. Northup Drums Museum has one in the collection that you can see and play!

The name Avedis Zildjian brings us to the next part of the story, cymbals. The early hi-hat and sock cymbal pedals used heavy stamped or spun brass cymbals. The cymbals were small, measuring anywhere from 7" to 10" in diameter. They were fine for creating that heavy "chick" sound, but jazz was evolving. Drummers like Chick Webb, Papa Jo Jones, and Gene Krupa were playing the hi-hat in a much different style than the early Vaudeville drummers of the past, and Avedis Zildjian was working closely with them. Zildjian's work with Webb, Jones, and Krupa led to the development of larger, thinner, and better sounding cymbals. As the cymbals got bigger and better, the hi-hat continued to evolve into the instrument that we know today.



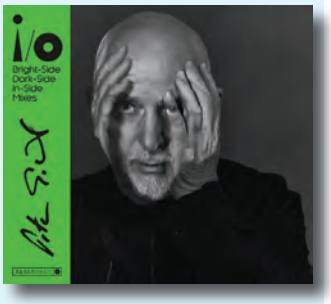
1940's Slingerland (W&A) hi-hat, Rare W&A No.1460 TWINSOCK

The Northup Drums Museum has one the finest collections of the early "sock" cymbal type instruments such as the Ludwig Charleston "snowshoe" Pedals, Perfection "Sock" Cymbals (lowboys,) Slingerland Duncan Sock cymbal pedals, several versions of early hi-hats, and lots of hoop mounted cymbal effects and pairs of hand cymbals. You can visit the Museum to see the catalog images come to life, see how the modern day hi-hat was developed, and even play them to see what they *really* sound and feel like. Visit **www.northupdrums.com** for more information.

OUT NOW!

Modern Drummer is spotlighting new recordings that have the drums at the center of their sound. These recordings might be drummer-led, or just include a high-quality, special, or unique drumming and musical performance from the drummer and/or musicians in the band. This column is not restricted to only recordings, we will also be spotlighting new books and DVD's that are being released. We encourage our readers to listen to the recordings that inspire them, keep looking for new musical avenues to explore, and keep supporting your favorite musicians. You'll never know what new music you might find inspiring! Listen and learn.

Peter Gabriel



i/o
Manu Katche' drums
Ged Lynch percussion
Real World Records

After 20 years of waiting Peter Gabriel has returned with a brand-new record. And one of the best rhythm sections in modern rock of guitarist David Rhodes, bassist Tony Levin, and drummer Manu Katche' is featured throughout. To be completely transparent, I am a massive Peter Gabriel fan, but this is a fantastic record! It harkens to some of his best pre-*So* music, and even has a few *Steam*-like tunes with strong hooks. The songwriting is classic Gabriel, the production is stellar, and of you choose to purchase the package with the Bright Side, Dark Side, and In Side mixes, and you have a strong interest in music production, you will be very happy with everything that is Peter Gabriel *i/o*. Drumwise, Manu Katche' does what he does best, he stays transparent within the music, offering subtle yet strong drum grooves. One of Manu's strongest attributes is how he interacts with percussion and rhythm programming, and this record has a lot of that. There are some wonderful programming and textural contributions from Brian Eno and Richard Chappell. There is even a drum loop by Steve Gadd on one track. To say that *i/o* was worth the wait sounds trite, but it was. Gabriel says he has enough music for another record, let's hope we don't have to wait 20 more years.

The Chick Corea Elektric Band



The Future is Now
Dave Weckl drums
Candid Records

The music world misses the legendary Chick Corea, as do drummers. His music was a guiding light throughout his career. Thankfully he was in the midst of producing this live reunion record (with Dave Weckl) when he died. So many of us were fans of this band, and we are reminded why with this coda to a fantastic life of creating wonderful music. The classic lineup of Patitucci, Gambale, Marienthal, Weckl is featured on two CD's worth of Chick's choice of live recordings from 2016,17, and 18. The tunes span the band's career from early era "Got a Match" to the multi-layered "Behind the Mask," and the band's final outing of "Alan Corday" (which is performed entirely with acoustic instruments.) As anything that Dave Weckl (and Bernie Kirsh) touch, the sound of this recording (and the drum sound) is amazing. What a treat it is to hear this music that was created in a different era of music, performance, and production reinterpreted by the same musicians. The result is earthier, grittier, and more mature performances. Not better, not worse, just different. The band had grown a lot (as we all do.) This record is a wonderful document of that growth, and the groundbreaking music that this band created. And Dave Weckl (and the entire band) sounds better than ever, just listen to Dave's groove on "Charged Particles" and his trading on "Got a Match?"

Kinga Glyk



Real Life
Robert "Sput" Searight drums
Warner Brothers Records
What a treat it is to hear modern drum hero Robert "Sput" Searight in a small group (jazz) setting. Kinga Glyk is a bassist that is doing wonderful things. Her (fretless and fretted) sound and musical approach is a breath of fresh air. Aerophonist (saxophonist) adds an exciting soloing voice, and Michael League (of Snarky Puppy) lends his wonderful keyboard, co-composer, and production skills throughout. I am tempted to say that this sounds like "Small Group Snarky Puppy," but I want to give Kinga Glyk enormous credit for developing her own strong musical voice. Another "too easy" comparison is that the Jaco-ish loop on "Islands" is beautiful, but it is! The whole band gels perfectly, and Glyk and Sput create an elastic and deep groove that is filled with twists and turns, listen to the pocket on "Who Cares." Sput paints with non-traditional drum and cymbals sounds like no other, check out his solo on "Islands." Wonderful music! More please!

Bob McChesney



Come Sunday
Vinnie Colaiuta drums
MoCo Records

Unfortunately, there are have been to few recordings that feature the genius of drummer Vinnie Colaiuta recently. We can blame small budgets and less people actually buying recordings for that. However, his musicality and unrelenting creativity is alive and well on *Come Sunday*. This recording is very special. *Come Sunday* is an interesting project put together

by trombonist and arranger Bob McChesney. McChesney has taken traditional hymns and arranged them for a jazz quintet accompanied by a string section on seven tracks, and a choir on three tracks. To combine spirituality and improvisation is nothing new. But this record takes it to a new level. The songs are well-known hymns that will be recognized by many, they are (excuse the expression) church "standards" that are given a respective yet creative treatment by McChesney and company. There is a lot of strong groove and respect here. A really nice bossa on "How Great Thou Art," Vinnie let's a lot of hits go by on "Simple Gifts" choosing to accentuate the flow of the melody. Vinnie is a great player of arrangements and on "In The Garden" and "Theme for Exodus" he allows the arrangements to really shine. His brief solo on "Simple Gifts" and the extended solo on "Theme from Exodus" both feature melodicism and a wonderful touch. The song "Come Sunday" has a familiar sense of Elvin-ish relaxed broken swing. Dig into this record, there's a lot more there than meets the eye (or ear.)

The Dave Brubeck Quartet

Live from the Northwest, 1959
Joe Morello drums
Brubeck Editions



The Dave Brubeck Quartet was about so much more that odd time signatures, and including exotic flavored music into their repertoire. Only four months before recording the seminal *Time Out,* and one month before recording *Gone with the Wind*, the Dave Brubeck Quartet was playing live (as they did a lot,) and was captured on tape by legendary engineer Wally Heider. Heider captures the entire band nicely, but captures Joe Morello's sound VERY nicely. Joe's hi-hats are crisp, his snare drum is delightfully well rounded, his brushes are smooth, and his bass drum is slightly resonant. The repertoire on this CD consists of mostly standards, with offers a slightly different view of this band. Listen to Joe Morello push on "When the Saints Go Marching In" and "Basin Street Blues," and Morello's relaxed sense of swing on "Gone With the Wind." "Multinomah Blues" and "Two Part Contention" are some of the best straight ahead swing from Morello on record. This is wonderful document of a legendary band before they found their legendary "signature."

Ray Gallon

Grand Company
Lewis Nash drums
Cellar Music Group



There are many classic piano trio recordings in the jazz canon, Ray Gallon's *Grand Company* will be one of them. Gallon's choice of material is perfect. Some well-known standards, some lesser-known standards, and some very well put together originals. The musicians in the trio (Ron Carter and Lewis Nash) are no less that top shelf, and the trio has a wonderful sense of telepathy gained from a collective past. Gallon's arrangements are perfect, not too "cute," and not to "complicated." Lewis Nash brings his "A" game (doesn't he always?) And the big beat and sound of the legendary Ron Carter needs no introduction. Lastly, the trio is impeccably recorded. The up-tempo "Acting Up" features some wonderful fours from Nash, and his brush playing on Duke Ellington's "Drop Me Off In Harlem" and "Two Track Mind" shows an impeccable touch that is very rare. For fans of the many essential Tommy Flanagan and Hank Jones trio recordings, this is a must have.

House of Waters

On Becoming
Antonio Sanchez drums
Ground Up Music



File House of Waters under one of the most interesting instrumentations that you've ever heard: Hammered Dulcimer, Six-String Electric Bass, and Drums. The group's compositions are strong, and the three free improvisation pieces are exciting. Bassist Moto Fukushima shines throughout, providing a nice groove, without relying on six string calisthenics. Mike Stern guests on the track "Hang in the Air" and adds a cool "yang" to the band's "yin," and it's nice to hear Mike and Antonio Sanchez mixing it up a bit. Antonio is the perfect drummer for the House of Waters musical concept floating between the worlds of jazz, world, and a loose floating ECM approach, much like his playing with Pat Metheny. In fact, House of Waters at times sounds similar to a Pat Metheny-ish type of record. "Tsumamiori" is the most compelling and captivating track.

Anthony Fung

Fo(u)rth
Anthony Fung drums
Self-Produced



Anthony Fung's fourth recording as a leader is a nice record. His playing with saxophonist Mark Turner is very interactive, but he seems to have a stronger hookup with pianist Michael Ragonese. Fung and bassist Luca Alemanno create a busy rhythmic launching pad for both Turner and Ragonese that works, but could use some conceptual variations. Fung's personal sound comes to the forefront on "A Drummerlude," and "Fo(u)rth." Thelonious Monk's "Boo Boo's Birthday" gets a nice reading, (this song does not get played enough,) and "Hero Song" offers a surprising change and a unique composition. All in all, this is a good record from an emerging young drummer who is also a very good composer.

Bennie Rodgers II with Doja Cat "The Scarlet Tour."







Drums: Tama Star Bubinga in Piano Black: 6.5 x 14 Star Bubinga Snare, 5.5 x 14 Star Classic Walnut/Birch snare, 5.5 x 10 Star Classic Walnut / Birch snare. Toms, (all Star Bubinga) 6 x 8, 7 x 10, 8 x 12, 16 x 16, 16 x 18, 22 Kick.

Cymbals: Zildjian 18" A Custom Crash, 21" A Custom Anniversary Ride, 18" A Custom EFX, Crash, 19" K Cluster Crash – Brilliant, 21" Custom Special Dry K Trash Crash, 18" A Custom EFX with Spiral Stacker on top, 10" EFX Splash, 8" Trashformer, 16" EFX Crash on top of a 14" Oriental China, 10" EFX Splash, 8" Splash K Custom, 12" Sound Effects Hi-Hat, 16" Avedis Hi Hat.

Heads: Evans Hydraulic Black.

Electronics: two Roland TD50 module (redundant setup,) three Roland RT30H Single Acoustic Drum Trigger, five Roland BT1 Bar Trigger Pad, three Dauz 6" Electronic Trigger Pad in Brick Burst.

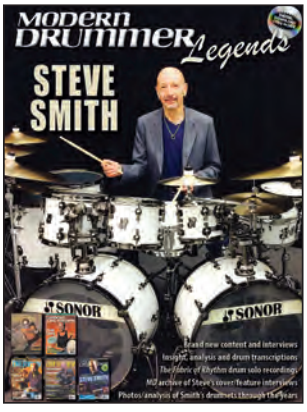
Hardware: Tama Power Tower Drum Rack and Cymbal Stands, two Iron cobra Remote Hi-Hat stands, Iron Cobra Power Glide single pedal.

Accessories: Pier Sound non-felt beaters, KickBlock BD Anchor.

Sticks: Vic Firth 5A Freestyle.

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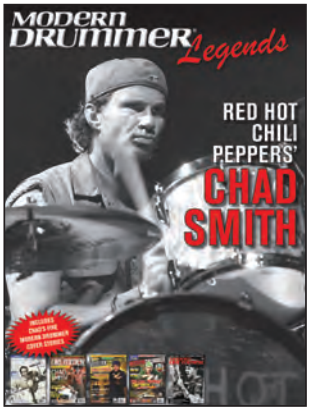
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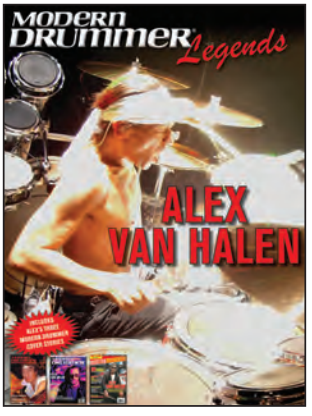














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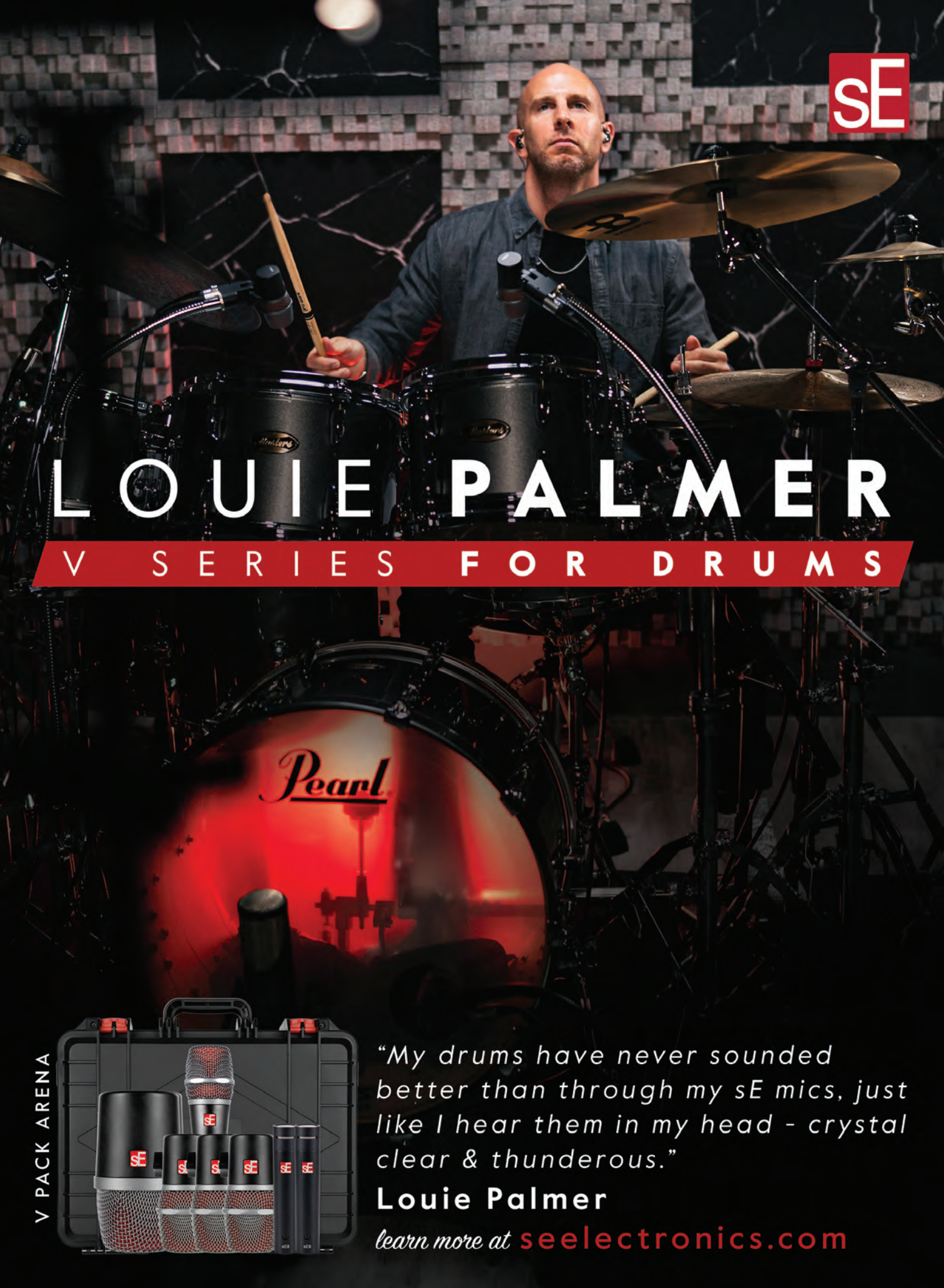
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