Remembering Roy Haynes and Zakir Hussain

MODERN DRUMMER

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FEBRUARY 2025

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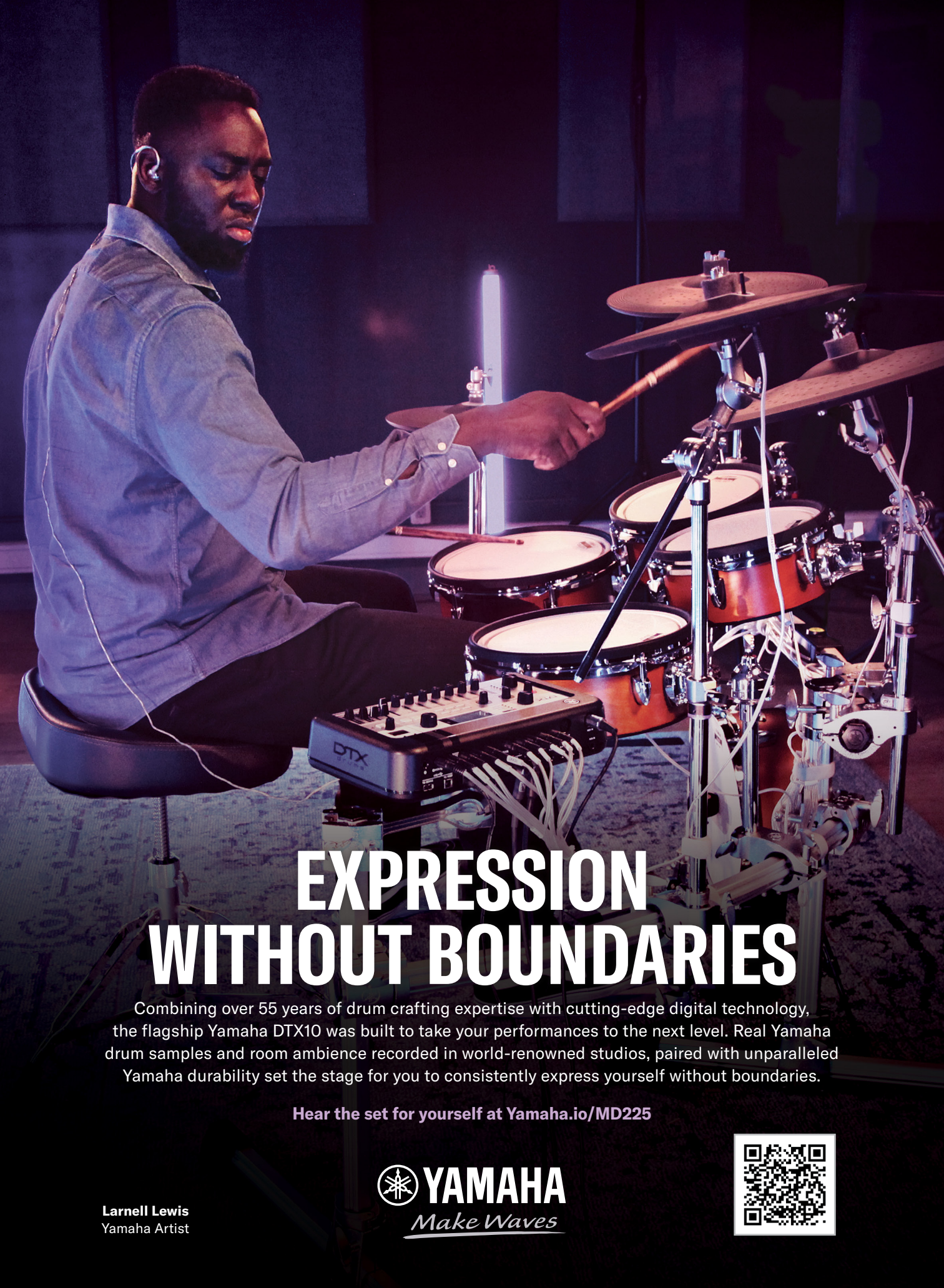
Interviews with Joe Dyson & Mark Schulman



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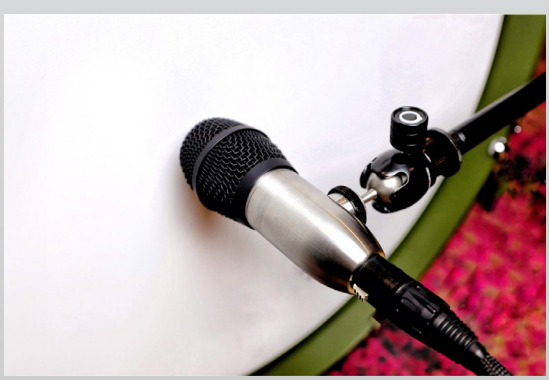

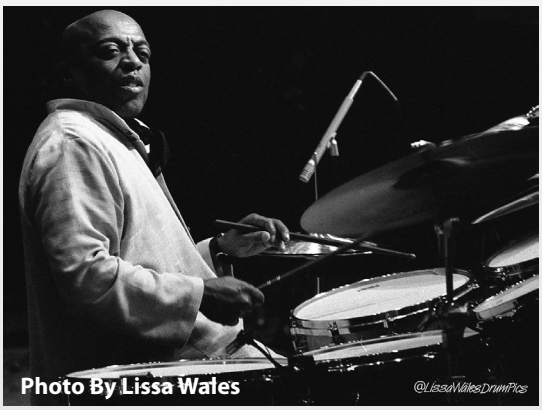

DEPARTMENTS

AN EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

Roy and Zakir

At the very end of 2024 the music world lost two legendary drummers, Roy Haynes and Zakir Hussain. I am fortunate enough to have known, spent time with, and interviewed both men.

Roy Haynes was my first and strongest jazz drumming influence and has been ever since I picked up a pair of sticks. I can't count the number of times I saw him play live and sat with him laughing as I peppered him with questions about his drumming, career, and life. In the 90s, I urged Roy to let he and I write his life story together, he was always too busy playing music and enjoying life to reflect on his own remarkable life, career, and drumming.

I learned about tabla player, composer, percussionist, and producer Zakir Hussain much later in my life. I had admired his music and was astounded by the sounds that he coaxed from the tabla. When we were introduced by our mutual friend Steve Smith, I was unprepared for the endless stream of musical and life wisdom that came from him. Upon meeting Zakir, I was taken by his joyful sense of musical exploration and adventure. He seemed both very serious and childlike with a keen sense of musical exploration. Being around Zakir was transformative. All the drummers who played with him referred to him as a teacher, yet he referred to himself as a student. The stylistic breadth of his musical collaborations was amazing. He inspired all the musicians he worked with, he was fearless, compassionate, focused, humble, and confident.

I hope our tributes, these very special people's own words, and my memories of them inspires you to reach higher, and continue to live, laugh, learn, and love through music and drumming. Their music and our in-person interactions will continue to inspire me forever.

Mark Griffith
Editor-in-Chief, Director of Content
Modern Drummer

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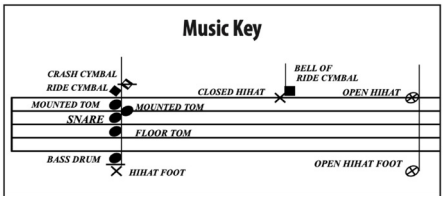
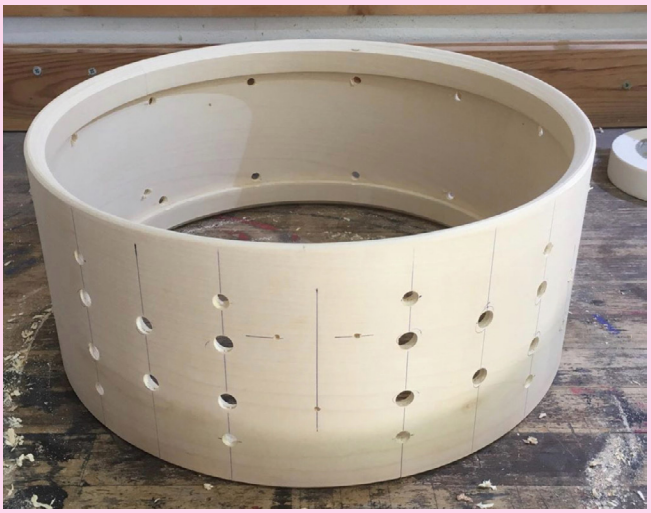


KIT OF THE MONTH



Drumming and Love, Love and Drumming

This month's Kit of the Month comes to us from Daniel Wagoner of Browns Summit, North Carolina. Daniel commissioned Varus Drums to build this unique kit for his wife as a 50th Birthday Gift. They had originally met because Daniel was her drum kit instructor.

Daniel's wife passed away last year from a very rare and aggressive cancer, she was only 52. Daniel remembers, "Days before she passed, she asked me to not let her kit just sit and collect dust. I promised her that I would not let that happen. I retired my personal kit and started to use her kit as my own. Telling her that put a much-needed smile on both of our faces!"

When Daniel originally purchased the kit for his wife, it was a basic 4-piece kit. 18x22 kick, 8x12 mounted tom, 16"x 16" floor, and 6.5x14 snare. He decided to take that kit and build it out to create a Neil Peart R40 inspired (not a replica) kit. He commissioned Varus to complete the toms to his specifications. The Snare Drum pictured on the kit is Daniel's beloved Tama Artwood Snare. This is the complete kit and its dimensions.

DRUMS: Varus 8 Ply Maple Shells with Pink Painted Finish: Bass, 18x22" (the outer hoop is 3" wide;) Snare, 6.5x14" 6 ply, with specially designed vent ports; Mounted Toms: 6 ply with 45° bearing edges: 7x8, 7x10, 8x12, 9x13; Floor Toms; 16x16, 16x18.

CYMBALS: 14" Paiste 602 (Blue Label) Sound Edge Hi-Hats, 8" Zildjian A Splash, 16" Zildjian A Custom Crash, two 18" Zildjian A Custom Crashes, 20" Zildjian A Custom Crash, 18" Wuhan China Type, 20" Zildjian A Custom China, 22" Paiste Signature Series Power Ride Cymbal.

HARDWARE: DW 9000 booms, snare stand, and hi-hat stand, DW 9000 Wide Seat throne, DW 9000 Double Kick Pedal.

HEADS: **Kick**: Aquarian Super Kick II; **Toms**: Top, Remo (Pink) Colortone Emperor Heads, bottom Remo Ambassador; **Snare**: Top, Remo Powerstroke 77 Colortone Red; Bottom, Remo Ambassador Hazy.

Brush Playing, Not Air Conditioning Part 2

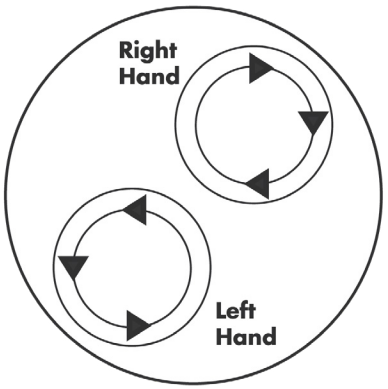
By Peter Erskine

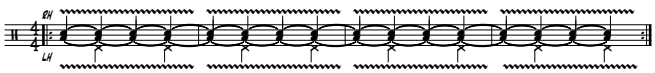
"And the seasons, they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and down
We're captive on the carousel of time
We can't return, we can only look
Behind, from where we came
And go round and round and round, in the circle game."

Joni Mitchell, The Circle Game
[© March 22, 1966; R. Joan Mitchell, then August 22, 1966; Gandalf Pub Co]

I've had the honor of drumming for Joni Mitchell on two albums (*Mingus* [1979] and *Both Sides Now* [2000]) as well as touring with her during the summer of 2000, and I'd venture that I played brushes about 70% of those times. The *Mingus* album band consisted of Jaco Pastorius, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, and myself (with some overdubs by Don Alias and Emil Richards,) while the *Both Sides Now* album featured a symphony orchestra with the music arranged and conducted by Vince Mendoza. You can find various videos of Joni with orchestra from the year 2000 on the internet, and you'll see and hear me playing the brushes. While an orchestra is a much bigger ship to steer than a piano trio, it is easily possible to exert plenty of time feel with just a pair of brushes. It is quite literally a *circle game*. Let's look at how it is done.

Moving the brushes in sweeping motions across the drumhead can be approached first as if you are gathering bundles of wheat, or secondly as if you are swimming the breaststroke. Whichever way you choose to play, the hands are rotating in opposite directions. While most drummers move their left hand clockwise and right hand counter-clockwise (resembling the gathering up of wheat, for example,) I like to sweep my hands and arms as if I am doing the breaststroke (right hand is clock-wise, left hand is counter-clockwise.) Elvin Jones did it this way, and my buddy Steve Gadd also plays his brushes in this manner. Jeff Hamilton is a wheat-gatherer (and an incredible one at that, he's my favorite brush-player.) There are no rules or laws here, only what sounds good to your ears. My first teacher must have shown me how-to play the brushes, but I developed most of my technique by playing along to recordings and trying to get the same sound and feel as the drummer on the album. I will recommend this: if you're new to the game, try moving your right-hand brush in a clockwise

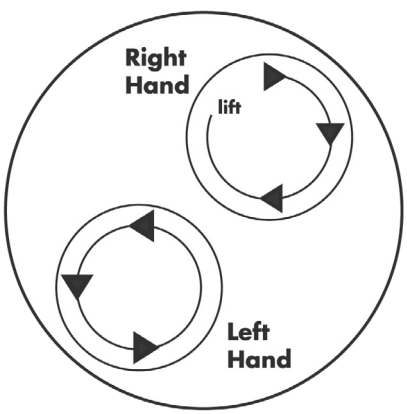




motion, etc. I have found this to be the EASIEST way to get a good sound while providing a good beat with the brushes. If you're a wheat gatherer, jump into the pool because the water's fine.

Set a metronome to quarter note equals 50 BPM and move one of your brushes in a circular motion on the drumhead. The brush should be a parallel as possible to the drumhead so that it is achieving maximum contact with minimum pressure. Make one rotation of the brush on the head, per quarter note. The right hand's circle should be located at approximately 1 or 2 o'clock while the left brush is 7 or 8 o'clock.

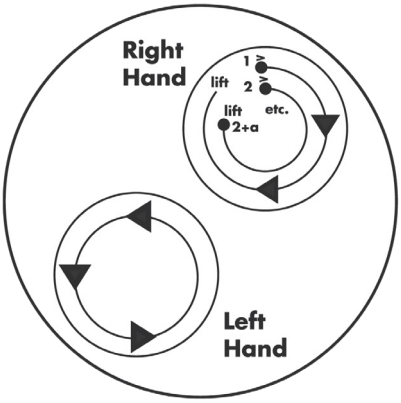
For now, we're in "air conditioning" mode (see last month's article) while we get used to the speed of movement and consistency of motion. Once you're feeling comfortable, lift the right brush off the head just prior to each metronome pulse and bring the brush back down onto the head in time with the metronome. I don't recommend that you use headphones for this just yet, it's best if you can hear the sounds that you're creating on the drumhead with your brushes.

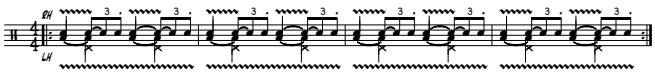


Drawing upon your practice and experience of moving the brush around the head and beginning each stroke with a "tap," generate that gentle tap for each quarter note. The left brush

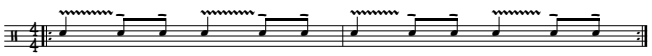
stays on the drumhead, it is providing a cushion of sound and it is damping the head from any ring (I'm convinced that this is pleasing to our modern ears, as many of the brush recordings we have referenced over the years were performed on calfskin heads, heads that do not go "boiing" in the good night.) In any sonic event, do not push or "swoosh" a pulse with your left brush but, rather, just keep it in a circular holding pattern. Try this at different tempos, both slower and faster: a quarter-note pulse, nothing more for the moment. Be careful not to push or swish the beat by rotating your wrist; I move the brush by rotating my arm from the shoulder. The tap motion is not so much straight up and down as it is slightly angled.

NOW let's add the subdivision with the right hand (for simplicity's sake I'm going to refer to the LEAD HAND as the right hand; if you are left-handed, kindly interpret accordingly.) Same general movement and motion, only adding an additional tap to articulate the ride pattern with the right hand.





Ballads can be played in either a swung-eighth/triplet feel, or a more-straight/up-and-down eighth note feel:



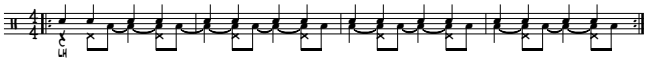
Paying attention to the music should inform you on which subdivision or rhythmic approach to take. If in doubt, ask the musical person in charge or your rhythm section mates. The late great drummer and educator Ed Shaughnessy once said that 90% of brush-playing rhythms comes from the right hand, so you can be comfortable in starting out your "brush with fame" from that angle.

Speaking of angles: keep it simple and natural. Additional guidance or inspiration can be found by looking at the way Fred Astaire moved when he danced. Look him up on YouTube and add this to your homework. Brush playing should look AND sound elegant.

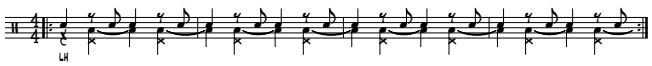
Slow jazz tempos might be swung or played straight, but they should always be rendered with delicacy, care along with confidence. This is why articulation is so important. Understated clarity might not move a mountain, but it can certainly move an orchestra and most definitely informs a trio.

Fast tempos are like a hamburger TV ad from the 70s: it takes two hands to handle a whopper. Divide and conquer. You get the idea. There are several ways to play up-tempo brushes, and here are two methods I find reliable:

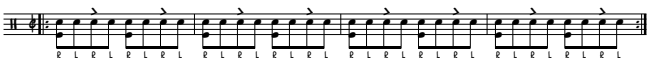
1). Tap or articulate quarter notes with the right hand while playing the ride-pattern subdivision (the "+"/"and" of 2 + 4) with the left hand. Remember not to tap and bounce, rather to gently but firmly dead-stick the brush onto the head. One brush or the other should be on the drumhead at all times. Practice this at various tempos and use your ears to get the balance and timing so that the beat feels good to you. Add the hi-hat on 2 + 4 and you should be in business.



2). Play 2 and 4 with the left hand while playing the 1 + 3 including the skip or subdivision pick-up as follows. With practice, you should be able to get this sounding and feeling good.



Minimal movement and relaxation. Think and feel "swing" (intention.) Send me in, Coach.



Finally, the Nashville "train" beat with brushes. I played this for the first time while recording a Toyota pick-up truck commercial. I have used it for some of my own projects and find that it works nicely without the hi-hat … just snare and bass drum. Dead-sticking.

Meanwhile, I spent New Year's Eve playing mostly jazz ballads with an orchestra while accompanying singer Seth MacFarlane. The seasons, just like my brushes, go round and round.

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

NEW & NOTABLE

DW COLLECTOR'S PURE CHERRY EXPANSION PACK, NEW SHURE SMART MICROPHONE

DW Collector's Pure Cherry Shell Expansion Pack Now Available

DW Soundworks™ has added the DW Collector's Series® Pure Cherry Shell expansion pack to its growing range of drum samples. Cherry is a very musical wood that produces brighter attack, melodic clarity, and slightly darker tonality when compared to maple. These sounds appeal to drummers who prefer a punchy, rounder timbre for dynamic styles like fusion, funk, gospel, and pop. In the DW Collector's Series Pure Cherry Shell Expansion Pack, all the sonic qualities of the DW Collector's Series Pure Cherry drums have been recorded in the DW factory in hi-fidelity. The drum sounds have been sampled at 24-bit, 88.2kHz, and the expansion pack includes 12 custom presets to enable users to explore the sought-after sound of cherry shells, which have heavy midrange tone with balanced sustain.

DW has designed DW Soundworks™ to deliver a powerful software solution that puts drummers in control of their sound. Compatible with most DAWs, its intuitive interface offers a choice of processing controls and effects to fine-tune every detail. It is available to purchase and download on Roland's Cloud. To find out more about the DW Collectors Pure Cherry Shell Expansion Pack and DW Soundworks™ please visit **https://www.dwdrums.com/software/**.

Shure MV7i Smart Microphone

Shure is pleased to announce the Shure MV7i Smart Microphone + Interface, a podcast-friendly mic with a built-in audio interface featuring an XLR-1/4-inch mic/instrument/line input with 48V phantom power. The preamp provides up to 60dB of gain, which is enough to power hard-to-drive dynamic mics without the need for an external signal booster. Given the combo input, the MV7i is also designed to accommodate musicians and singer-songwriters looking to record instruments alongside their vocals.

Sonically modeled after the Shure SM7B, the MV7i is designed to deliver a rich, clean and natural vocal reproduction. The MV7i microphone is also optimized for singers, thanks to its ability to handle SPLs up to 128 dB and provide a wide 50 Hz to 16 kHz frequency response. With a unidirectional cardioid polar pattern, the Shure MV7i microphone directs its focus on the speaker or singer while minimizing any noise from the surrounding environment.

Ludwig Universal Model Snare Drums—Six Sweet Cherry Plies

By Brian Hill

Let's take a *Modern Drummer* Product Close-Up look at the newest version of an iconic classic snare drum from yesteryear. But first, let's take a quick look back in time. The Ludwig "Universal" Model Snare Drums were first introduced in 1924, and apart from the WW II years, stayed in production through the early 1950's as a versatile and affordable drum product line. Bass drums were also part of the model line-up. The snare shells were originally offered in "all metal" (brass), and single ply solid Maple versions. Single ply solid mahogany shells were also available, but only on special order. By the end of the 1920's, most wooden shells for Ludwig drums were starting to be made of 3-5 plies of wood, consisting of mostly mahogany and poplar woods. Some drums had maple reinforcement rings.

The original shells were marketed as Aero-Kraft Construction and were touted as being built "in accordance with the recognized correct principles used in the manufacture of aero planes." They were also, "Said to be stronger, lighter, immune to climate changes, able to stand up under hard usage, and able to maintain perfect roundness." The idea being presented, was that plywood is stronger than a single ply application for drum shell construction.

Today, there is a brand-new cherry Ludwig "Universal" Model Snare Drum being offered, this is a newer line of snare drums that Ludwig first reintroduced in 2022.

Specs

The drum for this month's review is a sweet, 6-ply, 7.5 mm thick, solid cherry Ludwig "Universal" Model snare drum, measuring in at 6.5" x 14" with all chrome plated hardware. The hardware consists of 10 double-post tubes lugs, a P88i snare strainer with a P35 butt plate, 18 strand steel wire snares, and 2.3 mm triple-flange counter hoops. All points of contact with the outer shell (tube lugs, strainer, butt) have rubber insulators. Heads are REMO made Ludwig UT Coated batter heads over UT Clear snare side heads.

The snare beds are very shallow and typical for Ludwig drums in general. I think this consistent style of snare bed is one aspect that helps give Ludwig that familiar "Ludwig Sound" we've come to expect from these storied drums. The shell bearing edges sport an internal 45-degree angle with an outer 30-degree round-over edge. There are no inside reinforcement rings on this shell.

An updated version of the Ludwig "Universal" Model metal badge is mounted on the off-centered air vent and is secured by a metal gromet. This badge is virtually identical to the badge Ludwig used on the "Universal" Model Drums in the 1930's.

Looks

This tub has a striking look! The clear finish of the shell allows the beautiful, sweet cherry grain to show through with a high-gloss sheen that brings out the natural cherry colors with rich hues that are pleasing to the eye. The interior of the shell is also finely sanded and done right with a clear finish that also allows the cherry grain to shine through. The P88i strainer and P35 butt plate not only work great, but also had a very pleasing look to them. Ten double posted

tube lugs function well and are very reminiscent of the original design and look from the 1920's through the 1950's. Very nice touches!

Today's "Universal" Model line of snares come complete with 12 options: 8 metal and 4 wood shells. Since we are concerned in this review with the wooden versions, we'll stick to those shells. From "softest to hardest" in the hardwood family of wood shells presented here, we have Mahogany, Cherry, Walnut, and Beech wood shells to choose from. This generally means that the "softer" hardwoods will have a comparatively "wider, rounder" note width than a "harder" type of hardwood. But for today, cherry it is!

Sound

Cherry is not one of those woods that I see very often in drums. Compared with other wood sources, cherry shells have a sound characteristic that is closer to a warmer, darker, sweeter version of maple. It certainly has the projection and "crack" of maple with depth and brightness at the same time but is also very controlled. The note is of a wider width, with lots of snare sound. If you take the drum to higher tuning, the note tightens up a bit more to a medium width and so on. It was easy to work with and responded very well to different tunings and seemed to be very much at home in the mid-to-higher ranges. Over-all, I noticed very few unpleasant over-tones. For those who want a maple-type sound but also want a warmer, sweeter version, cherry is a great choice!

I found easy cross-stick sounds with rimshots flying off the drum. Backbeats had that familiar cutting, powerful and "classic sound." However, sensitivity was not sacrificed as extremely soft playing still had plenty of crisp snare response for a shell measuring 6.5" in depth. With the snares in the "off" position, the drum has a very nice "tom" sound with lots of body and depth. Articulation of note was not a problem!

I found the playability and overall sound to be deep, rich, and beefy, while retaining quick and responsive sensitivity. The cherry plies brought a fairly short sustain with nice mid-level frequencies that kept the sound fat and projecting. This cherry drum also brings a crisp, classic brightness in the snares. Nice Sound!

To me, the Universal Model has always been presented as a high quality, middle of the road, versatile work-horse drum, sensibly priced for best value. From beginners to pros, this is a drum that gets the job done very nicely. With 100 years of history involved, these drums have always been built to last and sound great. I know this as I'm still using my Ludwig "Universal" Model Bass Drum from the 1930's!

True to the name, the Ludwig "Universal" Model Snare Drums would be at home in any musical settings from concert, orchestral, jazz, rock, country, etc. This drum is truly "universal" in all possible applications. Pricewise, I found it to be very affordable. On-line numbers were anywhere from $350-$450 along with much valuable information. Now that you've met *this* sweet cherry snare, check *yours* out at **ludwig-drums.com** for info on a "Universal" fit that's worth your time!

Earthworks Audio DK6 Drum Mic Kit

By Jason Mehler

Earthworks audio has earned its reputation for producing high-precision pro-grade mics and equipment. I have seen their products in-use on several major tours while filming rundowns for *Modern Drummer*. In July of 2024, Earthworks unveiled the DK6 Drum Mic Kit. The DK6 kit is a professional level microphone kit aimed at drummers and engineers who are looking to get the transparent sound that Earthworks is known for, in a durable and cost-effective solution built specifically for drums. For this month's Product Close-Up, I will be reviewing the DK6 Drum Mic Kit in my home practice studio.

What's In the Box

The DK6 Drum Mic Kit comes in a durable SKB case, with a customized hard foam insert. The kit includes two SR20sp Gen 2 microphones with clips, a DM6 Bass Drum Microphone with a swivel ball mount, and three DM17 tom/snare microphones with RM3 rim mounts.

Specifications

All six microphones are XLR output and require 48v phantom power. They all have a frequency response 20Hz-20KHz and minimum load impedance of 1kOhm. The DM6 Bass Drum Mic has a Super-cardioid polar pattern while the DM17 and SR20 Gen 2 are Cardioid. They all have high input levels with the DM6 Bass Drum at 150 dB SPL, while the DM17 and the SR20 Gen 2 can handle up to 155 dB SPL input. Each mic is just over four inches in length, the heaviest of which is the DM6 weighing 1.25 lbs.

First Impressions

I was impressed by the quality of the entire DK6 kit out of the box. The SKB case by itself would likely survive a fall from a penthouse apartment. Each microphone is weighty and just feels like a premium product. The sleek design of the DM17 and the DM6 mics make them look like they were plucked straight out of a Sci-Fi movie. It's hard to resist the temptation to wield one like a futuristic ray gun. The small size and durability of the mics, even when attached to their mounts, seems ideal for live performances and the rigors of the road.

The Setup

My drum kit is situated in a spacious room with a high, angled ceiling. The acoustics are fairly live, but the room does a good job of preventing vibrations from reflecting back to the sound source.

I set up the SR20 overheads in a spaced pair placement above each side of the kit. I then attached the DM17 mics to the toms and snare drum using the included RM3 rim mounts. The first thing that stood out to me was how solid the RM3 mounts felt once secured to the triple-flanged hoops on the toms. Honestly, you could probably carry the drum by grabbing the mic like a handle, with zero damage (not that I'm suggesting you do that!) The DM3 mount has a steel sliding plate which allows you to move the mic closer to the drums center.

My snare drum rim is a die cast double flanged hoop, so the RM3 mount was a little tricky. It worked, but I wouldn't say it was as sturdy as the triple-flanged hoops. The good news is that the DM17 mic's body has a threaded hole for use with a standard 3/8" microphone stand adapter, so you could use the stand or mount of your choice.

The DM6 bass drum microphone has an awesome swivel mount, which allowed me to set the mic stand's base on the drum rug beside the bass drum leg and angle the mic right at the port hole entrance of the bass drum head. Combined with the mic's compact size, it created a very low-profile setup.

To provide phantom power to all six microphones I needed to connect them via XLR cables to two separate mixers. I wanted to keep the test simple, so I routed the left and right output signal to my laptop using a small 2-channel interface. No need to track every mic separately, after all, I just wanted to see how the mics performed completely flat without any additional processing.

Testing the Mics

Using Bandlab's Cakewalk, I configured two tracks to record a stereo mix. The big surprise came when I hit the drums for the first time. I couldn't believe how good the drums sounded, and moreover, how true to the source it all sounded right from the start. I was expecting some trial and error, but it honestly sounded good enough to hit record.

The default angle of the DM17 mics on the DM3 mounts is perfect for the toms and snare. Despite my quick and improvised setup, with no precise attention to the distance between the mics and the snare center, there were no phasing issues with the

overheads. Additionally, thanks to the high SPL handling of the mics, there was no clipping or distortion either.

The DM6 bass drum mic had all the elements that I look for in a kick sound, usually achieved by employing multiple microphones. The super cardioid polar pattern does a great job of rejecting the off-axis sounds produced by the surrounding drums and cymbals, while emphasizing the attack and punch of the beater striking the head.

Overall, I'd describe the entire mix as exceptionally "honest." The mics in the DK6 package do a remarkable job of capturing the actual sound in the room without adding any artificial character. While other mics are great for achieving specific sounds, these seem to excel when you want to start with the most accurate representation of the instrument's natural sound in the room.

Conclusion

The Earthworks DK6 Drum Microphone Kit is a well-rounded package that excels in both sound quality, durability, and design. It's obvious that a great deal of thought and experimentation went into crafting this product. With that, Earthworks has created a more affordable alternative to their high-end offerings, specifically designed with the practical needs of gigging drummers and engineers in mind. The Earthworks DK6 Drum Microphone Kit retails at $1499 and can be found at:

https://earthworksaudio.com/drum-microphones/dk6_drum_microphone_kit/

KickPort 2- Bass Drum Enhancer

By Jason Mehler

Although the KickPort by KickPort International has been on the market for years, I thought it would be worthwhile to take a fresh look at its latest version, especially since *Modern Drummer* hasn't previously reviewed it. For this Product Close-Up, the team at KickPort kindly supplied its new KickPort 2 for us to test.

What's the Difference?

Aside from a wider range of color options (ours came in blue,) the main difference between the KickPort 2 and its predecessor, is that the KickPort 2 features a wider opening that allows more low-end frequencies. The original KickPort's is 6x6x6 and the new KickPort 2 is 6x7x7. They have also improved the collar design making for an easier installation and included a stiffer retaining ring to prevent wear and tear over time. The changes can be heard, and the improvements are appreciated.

What is it for?

The KickPort website suggests that the KickPort 2 will help you "achieve a smoother, more focused natural overall sound with more impact from any bass drum-all sizes, brands and materials." The KickPort is essentially a bass drum sound enhancer that is designed to produce a richer, deeper bass drum tone.

Installation

If your bass drum's resonant head already has a port hole, the chances are, the KickPort will fit without any modification. Otherwise, the KickPort comes with a port hole template and trim ring, which together, help to ensure a professional looking installation.

In my case, my resonant head was solid, so I needed to cut the porthole. The instructions on the packaging had small black and white images, detailing the steps to install the KickPort. They were a bit hard to read for my old eyes. Luckily the product is not very complex. Installation required a utility knife and the port hole trim template which is a thick mylar ring with an adhesive backing.

The idea is to adhere the template ring to the resonant head wherever you would like the port hole to be. There is no need to remove the drumhead for this process. Then with the utility knife, poke a hole within the inner circle of the template ring and cut out a circle using the template edge as a guide. I was able to do this with ease.

The next step is to fold back the rubber retention flap and jimmy the KickPort into place. You then must reach through the port hole and flip the retention flap until it securely grips the resonant head.

Testing the KickPort

To evaluate whether the KickPort delivers on its promises, I set up a few different microphones, including an sE Electronics V-Kick, an Earthworks DM6, and an AKG D112. Before recording, I had a friend play the bass drum so I could listen firsthand to its sound with and without the KickPort. I did notice a slight difference with the new KIckPort 2. I would describe it as a more confident tone with a cleaner low end. The same could be said for the results of my microphone tests. However, while mic'd up the difference was even more apparent. When mic'd up, the kick sounded punchier and more pronounced, with a smoother low end. With each microphone, the difference was apparent.

Conclusion

Overall, I feel the KickPort 2 did improve the sound of the bass drum. It's like the drum had more to say than it was saying before if that makes sense. It also helps protect the head from damage around the port hole and I kinda like the way it looks. The KickPort 2 comes in many colors and retails for $48.99 and can be found at:

www.kickport.com/kickport

STEVEN DOAR
HOLLY MADGE
AICHA DJIDJELLI
ALEKSANDRA SUKLAR
BUZZ ALLAN

Photo by Alex Kluft

This month Modern Drummer is honored for the opportunity to interview the entire Hans Zimmer Live touring percussion section of Steven Doar, Holly Madge, Aicha Djidjelli, and Aleksandra Suklar. Who with Buzz Allan, (who does not tour with the percussion section) also recorded the inimitable and exciting new soundtrack for Dune Part Two.

Together, Aicha, Holly, Aleksandra, and Steven Doar, have been amazing audiences around the world for the last several years. And with a new show called Hans Zimmer Live, The Next Level on the horizon for 2025 and 2026, many more people will be hearing Hans Zimmer's jaw dropping music, seeing this

RECORDING DUNE PART 2 AND TAKING HANS ZIMMER LIVE TO THE NEXT LEVEL

BY MARK GRIFFITH

breathtaking new show, and hearing this astounding percussion section.

Add to this that Steven, Holly, Aicha, and Aleksandra, are the winners of Modern Drummer's 2024 Readers Poll Award for Best World Percussion, and (with Buzz Allan) Best Recorded Performance, and you become a group of world-class musicians that Modern Drummer had to interview.

Like any Marvel superhero story, each of these drummers has a unique talent, and were brought into the fold with that certain skill in mind. All of them are world class, collaborative musicians. In this series of interviews, each of them explains their role in the Hans Zimmer Live Percussion Section, and how their careers led up to this fantastic gig.

STEVEN DOAR: MUSICAL DIRECTING AND PLAYING PERCUSSION WITH HANS ZIMMER

Working in the studio with multi-Oscar and Grammy winner Hans Zimmer is a full-time gig. But percussionist Steven Doar does much more than that. He is also the musical director and a percussionist for Hans Zimmer Live and was integral in the recording of the award-winning Dune Part 2 soundtrack. Steven is also a composer and an arranger in his own right, and he is one quarter of one of the baddest percussion sections around.

MD: What is your musical background, and what is your background before working with Hans Zimmer on the soundtrack to *Dune Part Two*?

SD: I started with Hans Zimmer in 2017 as his assistant and then I went on the road with him for the 2017 tour as his backline tech. It's funny because although I've been touring with him for eight years now, I don't really consider that as my main gig. My main gig is working in the studio with Hans. I was just thrust into the Musical Director (MD) role and playing percussion for this new show.

MD: Are you a drummer-percussionist by training?

SD: Yes, the drum kit was the first instrument I played when I was a kid. But percussion and piano became my main instruments. In high school I studied mostly rudimental percussion, playing quads in drumline.

MD: Did you do any drum corps?

SD: Yes, but just through my high school in Alabama under our director Keith Anderson. We did WGI and indoor drumline stuff during the winter and spring and then we did normal band competitions during the fall. My main drum teacher, Brian Barley, was heavily involved in drum corps. He taught me most of my technique that I still have to revisit regularly when shows are coming up. It's funny, drum corps is such an "American thing" in my head. It's big, it's overwhelming, its loud, and in your face… I know there's other countries that do it now, but WGI and indoor drumline is uniquely over the top, it's such a niche thing, you take it so seriously, you're running around in these outfits… People that don't know, look at it and wonder what the hell is that? But it's the coolest thing. When I finished high school, a lot of my friends went into drum corps, I'm not sure if I would have made it, but I was interested in other things.

I studied some jazz harmony classes at the local university when I was in high school. I loved harmony and everything that involved music. I was an ultra-music-nerd in high school, everyone in drumline was a nerd. I always thought of music as one big thing that was for everybody, and I knew I didn't want to *only* study percussion, I just wanted to learn as much as I could from all angles of music. I got really into production and a lot of the tech stuff pretty early on. It's not that I said, 'OK I'm done with drums,' music just led me down some different paths.

When I was in high school, I taught drums to elementary and middle school kids, and in college I taught some high school kids too. I try to keep in mind that you can learn from everybody. Even when people say someone is a bad teacher, I don't believe

Photo by Alex Kluft

in such a thing. You must learn *how* you learn, and that's a skill that is extremely difficult to wrap your head around. I think you can study with the best teacher in the world and not learn a thing from them if you haven't figured out how you learn. Even if you are with a bad teacher, you can learn things *not to do*. I've worked with people that I didn't particularly want to work with, but there's still lessons to be learned. They're not bad people, and you can learn from everybody that you that you encounter. I don't always walk the walk, but I try.

My main gig is working in the studio with Hans. I was just thrust into the Musical Director (MD) role and playing percussion for this new show.

I went to Berklee College of Music for drum kit, and I felt like a bit of fraud. I was an "OK" kit player and my technique was pretty good, but there were some amazing drum set players there. I'll never forget going to an audition for a jazz band there and the player that went before me introduced herself saying, "Hi I'm Jazz…" I just thought 'well… *shit*.' I'm pretty sure it was Jas Kayser, who's a great drummer that I re-stumbled upon a few years ago. She sounded great, I sounded horrible, I still learned a lot. At that time, I didn't have that performer headspace, and I wasn't interested in it, I just wanted to focus on composition. I switched over to piano pretty quickly at Berklee because I wanted to get more harmony into my life, I spent all my time playing keyboards and then I focused heavily on production and composition. I wound up majoring in film scoring with a minor in conducting, I got really into tech stuff, but I didn't have a clue what I was doing. I was too interested in too many things, it was great. The great thing about the Berklee experience was the amount of people and cultures that were there, but I was brutally under the spell of impostor syndrome every day, I was sitting next to prodigies who have their own documentaries and wondering what am I doing here?

After Berklee, I moved to LA and started working in in the film music business for a composer named Jim Dooley. That was a very intense few years, learning on the job, handling a bit more pressure than I had been used to, I learned a lot from him. He had a room at Remote Control Productions, which is Hans Zimmer's studio. Jim had a little machine room next door with all the computers and servers, and I was just crammed in there. After a few years, I was asked if I was interested in assisting Hans. That was 2017, and ever since it has been a combination of chaos, huge learning curves, and challenges.

MD: Welcome to life as a musician! So, what does Hans Zimmer's assistant do, or maybe the more appropriate question might be, what *doesn't* Hans Zimmer's assistant do?

SD: Every day is different, which is cool. I really love working with Hans. He has a great core team, between all of them, I've had a lot of mentors.

When I started, every day was this overwhelming amount of data input into my head, I was just thinking, 'Oh my God, I don't know what I'm doing!' But between Hans and Chuck Choi, Hans' main technical consultant, I sort of had a creative mentor and a technical mentor. Both demanded high quality for everything. After a year or two of getting things under control I figured out that I had to funnel everything down and sort through all this input constantly while thinking, 'What does Hans need in the moment?' It's just like assisting anybody, it's very overwhelming, but it's all about what does the person that you're working for need? What do they like? What's the fluff? What's the stuff you can't worry about, can delegate, or do yourself? What can you anticipate? I can apply all of this to myself as well.

MD: Sounds a lot like being a drummer.

SD: Right! Hans is savvy, man. He's done it all and nothing can slip by, so I learned on the job very quickly. From a technical perspective, I made sure his rig works, made sure anything he needed was set up, handled deliverables, things like that. I definitely made a lot of coffees for guests. I don't know why people find that demeaning, I love coffee. I'd make a coffee for anybody.

I had lots of musical and non-musical things to do, but within the first year with him, I was programming and doing some small arrangements. They weren't necessarily great, but that's how you learn, and I was trying to prove myself. We went on tour very soon after I started as well, I was working backline. Again, there was a huge learning curve because that was a totally different world with different terminology, different mindsets, and personalities, and I had absolutely no idea what I was doing! Every day there were a lot of panic attacks, it was good, I learned a lot. I had great people around to help as well. It was great assisting him, just jam packed. He had a lot of patience when it counted. Then it just evolved into different roles over time.

MD: The longer that I live, the more I believe that the only way to *really* learn *some* things is to jump into the deep end, sink a little, learn how to tread water, keep your head above water, and then learn how to swim.

SD: That's the perfect analogy, because while you are treading water and learning to swim, you are getting stronger. The more pressure you put on yourself, the more you learn how much you can handle. It's a process of stripping your confidence down and building it back up.

MD: In the 10 years of working with Hans, what have you learned?

I always thought of music as one big thing that was for everybody, and I knew I didn't want to only study percussion, I just wanted to learn as much as I could from all angles of music.

SD: That's an insane question. Obviously, there are so many specific musical things I couldn't list them all, but one of my favorite things are the different ways of thinking you pick up through osmosis and just being around. They are kind of like mindsets or frameworks, *I guess*. I've never talked to him about this, so I don't know if these are things that he actually does deliberately, they're just how I like to think about them.

One of the things that Hans does brilliantly is to combine ideas that are not "supposed" to be combined, and I definitely try to use this idea deliberately. For example, what would happen if you combined some sort of Sri Lankan traditional music with punk rock from the 90s, and then formatted it like a Wagnerian Symphony? What would happen if you combined those things? Is it cool? Is it necessary? Is it fun? Most importantly, does it help tell the story? You can take that kind of mindset and apply it to anything day-to-day, not just music.

Hans is great at putting different teams of people together, his collaborations are next level. He'll give someone a chance that you might look at and wonder, 'What do they know?' Then suddenly your mind is blown because of that one ingredient that you didn't expect. I'm no A-lister with a 45-year career, but I'm guessing collaboration is a great way to stay excited about new ideas. It just makes everything more enjoyable and definitely has made me a better composer and musician.

MD: And now you are back to playing drums and percussion while you are also Hans' Musical Director (MD.) How did that happen?

SD: In 2019, out of nowhere Hans threw me in as a percussionist, and now I'm back to playing percussion, which is great. But as it usually happens, I did not ask for it. It was a challenge that they dangled in front of me, and I tend to bite on those challenges. Hans' musical director for all his shows has been a composer and musician named Nick Glennie-Smith. He's brilliant, and again a huge mentor in my life. He played on so many records as a keyboard player in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, as well as being a composer and conductor for sessions. Nick has done it all. He was my musical director when I was just playing in the show, and I worked closely with him when we were putting together the shows. He was unable to go on this tour, so he recommended to Hans that I give it a shot. It kind of made sense because I've done multiple things on the touring side. I did some tech, I helped and played on the arrangements, and I already knew everybody. Basically, I was given this well-oiled machine and told not to break it. I'm an OK musical director, I'm not amazing, but I know everybody's personality very well. I know what they need, and I know that the main goal is provide for Hans on stage. As long as that happens then it's going to be a successful show.

You must learn how you learn, and that's a skill that is extremely difficult to wrap your head around. I think you can study with the best teacher in the world and not learn a thing from them if you haven't figured out how you learn.

Photo by Steve Curley

MD: Have you ever worked as an MD before?

SD: Not like this, but I wouldn't be able to do the MD job if I hadn't learned from Nick, he's a phenomenal teacher. We have 55 people on stage, everyone needs something, and everyone has a different personality. I love that. Any project is a giant Venn Diagram, and if you have taken the lead, and you are the main point of contact, you have different hats that you must wear. I like big picture stuff. So, to answer your question, even though I haven't worked as an MD, I think there's enough overlap from film projects, music projects, or just as a human being and managing relationships. It's all really the same thing in my head. I like looking at the bigger picture as much as I can and seeing what's actually important from the audience's perspective and from the artist's perspective.

MD: Our reader's see drummers talking about Musical Director's a lot, can you tell the readers, exactly what an MD does?

SD: Let me give a disclaimer first, this is from my experience so far, although I have worked with a lot of MDs through my career. If you asked someone else, they'd probably give you a different perspective as well. The MD (Musical Director) is the person that makes sure that everything related to the music goes as planned. Sometimes you have creative decisions to make when you're putting the show together. In my situation, Hans makes a lot of these decisions because it's his show. So as a musical director, yes, I have input, and if nobody's answering a question, I'll just make a decision to keep things moving. But overall, this is the same for any MD, my job is to make sure that whatever Hans has in his head, Hans' vision is coming to fruition.

I haven't worked on a lot of huge worldwide arena tours, but I would be very surprised if there is a better crew than the one that we have. It's a crazy show, we have Hans, 55 or so musicians on stage, 20 soloists, all sorts of instruments, and a huge lighting show. The MD helps facilitate all of that. I don't want to tell anyone what to do, but I want to make sure that (for example) the monitor engineer (Maurizio Gennari,) playback engineer (Frank Pollak,) and the front of house engineer (Colin Pink,) have time to program any changes in the show. I am putting together a plan for rehearsals and soundcheck, things like that. If an issue comes up, the MD is one of the roles that can step in and help make a decision. One of the best pieces of advice I've ever gotten from my dad is as soon as you have 60% of the information you need to make a decision, make a choice and trust that you can adjust if it's wrong. With this show we are constantly revising and thinking through how we can make it better, and from my perspective, I'm going to definitely rely heavily on other people's expert advice. I do not have any desire to tell Pedro Eustache how to play the flute, I don't know how to play the flute. Sure, I've written for flute but that's very different than playing it, and if he says we should adjust something because the instrument will sound better, I'm going to listen. We also have guitarist Guthrie Govan playing parts that don't even sound like guitar parts. What am I going to tell him?

I switched over to piano pretty quickly at Berklee because I wanted to get more harmony into my life, I spent all my time playing keyboards and then I focused heavily on production and composition.

The great thing about the percussion section of Holly, Aicha, Aleksandra, and me is that we all have very different backgrounds. I love that. If you want punk drums or anything with a raw tribal quality Aicha's killer, and Holly has an enormous amount of flexibility with styles and ideas, which is a reflection of herself and her interests beyond percussion. Aleksandra and I are on two different sides of the stage, and Alexandra's setup is huge. She's a phenomenally trained classical percussionist. She knows how to groove like crazy. I don't have the extensive classical background that she does, so if Aleksandra says, "Let's try this with four mallets." I'm (of course) going to say, 'Do anything that you want to do, and if there's an issue that I notice, of course I'll let you know. I'm surrounded by people that are just next level in their careers, from the crew and the staging to the set designers, to the musicians. My perspective is, if everything works great and it's getting improved upon with great ideas, and Hans and Steve Kofsky (Hans' business partner) are happy, then I've done my job!

MD: What is your main instrument in the live show?

SD: My main instrument is percussion and I play keyboards as well. My setup is a MalletKAT and some keyboards. Aleksandra and I have a Cubase rig and we trigger sounds from the MalletKAT. Hans likes tweaking sounds so sometimes I'll be playing a weird synth harp patch that I made on Zebra and sometimes I'll be playing a Moog. I play a snare drum for a couple of moments, and I play djembe, surdo, tubular bells, some wood blocks, cowbells, and shakers, and a big gran casa (orchestral bass drum.)

MD: Is there a section leader within the percussion section?

SD: No, we are all very close friends, we all know our strengths and our weaknesses.

We were rehearsing the percussion section for this show for a couple of weeks in Essen, Germany. Nick was musical director at the time, and there was another musical director and orchestrator named Martin Gellner who was there to help with rehearsals. We spent a couple of weeks dedicated to the percussion parts, that's how we sorted it all out. It was amazing because we were at the backline warehouse, and if we needed any weird instruments we just walked to the warehouse and there it was. That was when Holly and Aicha created the idea of the percussion spine between the two kits on the middle of the stage.

MD: When the percussion section gets a piece of music, do you get a percussion score and split it up, or are there already parts assigned?

SD: It's a combination. There are some parts that we wrote and worked out because they needed to be specific between the four of us. For certain kit grooves we agreed that some things should be Aicha, and some should be Holly, because of their distinct drumming voices. For example, I helped do the arrangement on *The Last Samurai*, I put a bunch of percussion into the demo. When it came to learning that piece, it was Martin that orchestrated out the parts. But that was basically a guide, Hans is always up for reinventing his pieces. You might think he wants everything to be exactly as it was, but he doesn't. He wants it to be new. Holly and Aicha are playing drum kit, but there's no kit parts on *The Last Samurai*, but they're banging out these cool grooves now. Once Hans hears an idea, he might suggest adjusting this or trying that, but he's game for anything that sounds cool.

Hans always talks about the band because it's a unique thing, it's 20 soloists with an orchestra and each soloist has their own strengths, backgrounds, and careers. They're all going to bring in something new, it is very collaborative. Yes, as a percussion section we have a road map, we have specific things we need to hit, but truthfully all the parts could have been rhythm charts. The marimba parts are pretty specific, but even on those I improvise a little bit every night. But after playing with the same three other percussionists every night for three years, it's amazing because we know exactly what's going to happen between us.

The more pressure you put on yourself, the more you learn how much you can handle. It's a process of stripping your confidence down and building it back up.

MD: When you first got a composition and started to play it, what percentage of the part was written vs. improvised?

SD: On this show, I'd say it's probably 50-50. We have huge input because (for example) only a few of these compositions and arrangements actually had a drum kit in them. Probably more than half of Holly and Aicha's drum parts are parts they came up with, and they worked really hard to come up with them. I just made-up half of my parts out of self-preservation to be honest. And Alexandra reads phenomenally well, so she probably used the written notes the most out of the four of us, but then she tweaked them and made them her own.

MD: So now, after you have been playing this show for three years has that 50-50 percentage changed?

SD: I'm making these numbers up of course, but I'd say it's now 70% improvised and 30 % written, or something like that. After such a long rehearsal process for this show, things get pretty sorted out. But Holly, Aicha, and Aleksandra are constantly trying to improve things which is awesome. They are constantly saying that something could be better, or what if we do this instead… and it's almost always an improvement. So yeah, it has probably evolved to 70-30.

One of the things that Hans does brilliantly is to combine ideas that are not "supposed" to be combined, and I definitely try to use this idea deliberately.

MD: When you are presented with a song, how much of the parts are written, and how much do you have to create within the rhythm chart?

SD: When I am doing a demo, I was trained that the demo is (pretty much) the final version. But we make the parts our own for the show, the written parts are a guide, as long as what we play is still in the spirit of the arrangement. But Hans has a completely different emotional attachment to his arrangements because they are his life's work. So sometimes he'll make a point to say that something specific must be in there.

MD: How well does Hans write percussion parts?

SD: From my perspective, very well. I hear a lot of his love of Kraftwerk and old-school prog-rock in his percussion writing. When I watch Hans program drums, create sounds, or produce a session with players, maybe he won't write some crazy, ridiculous, polyrhythm thing that El Estepario would play (I adore that guy, he's nuts.) If he wanted something like that, I think he might find someone in that plays that style, and bring them in the studio. He'll put on his producer's hat, and they'll do something amazing in the track together.

Sometimes you must forget the technique that you're supposed to play and do whatever the hell you want to do. If it sounds cool and it works emotionally with what you're trying to do, it works.

Another thing I appreciate about Hans is that he's so good at sound design, he's definitely injected his obsession with sound design into me. For example, the sound of a taiko drum can be infinite depending on how you play it, mic it, and record it. From a sound design perspective, there is an infinite number of sounds in any drum. Hans is obsessed with those kinds of things. One really interesting thing that I've learned is to play and record an instrument really quietly and then blow up the volume in the mix, it becomes a completely different thing. I'm sure every producer on earth has their own toolkit of ideas and preferences like that. It opens the mind up to new things.

Like I said before, even that one little technique is about mindset, it's all about doing the opposite, getting a contrast, trying new things, and combining ideas. Sometimes you must forget the technique that you're *supposed* to play and do whatever the hell you want to do. If it sounds cool and it works emotionally with what you're trying to do, it works. I'm trying my best to do it more and more…

MD: Music is one of the only things in the world where the end justifies the means. In the end, if it sounds good, *it is good*.

SD: Absolutely!

HOLLY MADGE: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Holly Madge can be found at the double kit and percussion spine of Hans Zimmer Live and is a member of the dynamic percussion section who recorded on Dune Part Two. Her first loves of jazz, drum & bass, hip-hop and orchestral soundscapes define her distinctive grooves and inform her appetite for designing unique custom hybrid set ups. Holly is a true team player who, alongside her career as a live and recording drummer and percussionist on the London scene, is studying a masters in "Music, Mind, and Brain," researching the collective music experience with a focus on the positive physical and social effects of rhythmic entrainment (locking in with a beat.)

MD: What is your musical and drumming background?

HM: My Mum worked in a record shop in the 60s, so we had a lot of drum-lead 60s rock and soul music playing around the house (Rolling Stones, Beatles, Osibisa, and Stax.) My Dad had Paul Simon's *Graceland*, New Orleans jazz and The Seekers on repeat in the car and I was absolutely enchanted with a mixtape our family friends lovingly made for us packed full of incredible grooves from South America and the Caribbean (from Celia Cruz's *Quimbara* to Lord Kitchener's *Sugar Bum Bum*.) Percussion-lead music dripping in feel and well-crafted arrangements became a primary love.

I grew up in the West Country which is known for its unique and alternative music scene (home of Massive Attack and Muse). When I was ten, I was learning clarinet and piano and out busking in town regularly. One day I sat at my friend's kit in a barn and instantly unlocked another part of my personality. I found a whole new love in the power and full body immersion of drums, not to mention the collective band culture that intrinsically came with it.

Crazily, around that time I do distinctly remember seeing an orchestra playing a medley of "The Lion King," (which was my first experience of Hans' music), and I pointed to the drummer, turned to my mum and said, "I want to do THAT!"

MD: I think *The Lion King* and all its percussion inspired an entire generation of drummers.

HM: I agree, it was so iconic. At the time, away from city life and pre-internet, it was a rare opportunity to experience influences of grooves from other cultures in the mainstream media, no doubt a lightbulb moment for so many kids at such a formative age.

My parents and teachers held me to my exclamation about "The Lion King" and it wasn't long before those legendary music teachers that you never forget, Mrs. Kermode, Mr. Horton and many more - musical portals to your future - set the pace for

professional musicianship by throwing me into every scenario they could.

A pivotal moment was coming home to my first ever drum kit – finding my Mum, head scarf on, duster and polish in hand, big knowing smile on her face, lovingly restoring a maroon Pearl Maxwin kit in the sitting room (it has always been Pearl!). As far as core memories go, it was up there alongside the day we brought our dog home!

I had an exceptional teacher called Colin Bellworthy who lovingly called a spade a spade and really focused on no-frills, classy groove. He loved Steve Gadd and we spent hours poring over tasteful cowbell choices and ghost notes in grooves. Colin was, and still is, an incredible player, every time he sat at my kit (a Pearl Masters maple kit by this point) he made it sound colossal. There was no time afforded to filling space with fiddly embellishments, I was encouraged to harness the power and get to the heart of the groove.

Photo by Alex Kluft

The county of Devon is well known for the way that it supports young musicians, we were finding our way on seafront pub's rooftops jamming Jimi Hendrix to the audience on the beach, and infiltrating every folk, rock, and jazz festival around. I got massively into jazz and fusion and joined the county jazz orchestra (DYJO) that was run by Brian Moore & Gerry Swainger. They used to throw all these crazy big band charts at us, sometimes for double kit with my incredibly talented mate George Cooper, it was a TIME!

Some of us from the big band formed a side project called Melonius Funk and we deep dived into writing some crazy fusion. It was like having four extra brothers - we would take over my parent's attic once a week and write these crazy "hip hop in 5/4 that starts halfway through the second beat… but make it groove" type of tunes. We all really cared and would passionately squabble over structures, chords and drill grooves and endings for hours on end. We played at Cheltenham and Manchester Jazz Festivals and supported Maceo Parker, Marlena Shaw, and Azymuth. It was a wonderfully supportive and progressive time.

I earned the nick name Cinderella at about 14. I'd be out at gigs and clubs and would suddenly disappear at midnight, Mum kindly coming to pick me up before school the next day. I'm eternally thankful to my parents for all the jam sessions and gigs they took me to; the lessons and the endless hours of linear funk grooves, and Crazy Army ghost note practice that they endured! It's the biggest privilege to bring them to Hans' gigs now and share the joys of this life they worked so hard to offer me.

My music degree at Southampton University was performance based, but it had a musicology element to it as well. That's where I began my love of researching and writing about music and musicology. I studied with a percussionist called Dan Priest who opened my mind and playing style to lots of Latin material, and with legendary jazz drummer, Trevor Tompkins. I also discovered artists like The Cinematic Orchestra, early John Mayer, Incubus, Maria Schneider, and drummers including Carter Beauford, Steve Jordan, and Luke Flowers.

My big band playing continued, performing at the North Sea and Montreux Jazz Festival. That is my favorite music because as a big band drummer, you play a pivotal role in underpinning the feel and the emotion of the music, commanding the groove while listening and interacting with the other sections. You are sitting in the middle of a musical powerhouse capable of the most insane dynamic range. One of my favorite feelings in the world is sitting in Birdland (in New York) experiencing the intensity of a big band playing insanely quietly. Being behind that kit is like the driving seat of a finely tuned vintage Jaguar.

MD: After you left university, what was your early professional career like?

HM: I started playing with pop artists, and I got lucky when one of my first jobs was at the Radio One Big Weekend with a legendary Swedish pop artist named Robyn. I think Aicha might have also been on that gig as well. It was 10 or 15 female drummers playing in a drum line, that was a great introduction to a lot of other female kick-ass musicians within the industry at that time. Actually, one of those people ended up being the person that recommended me for Hans.

I did a lot of pop stuff on the radio, TV, and recordings. After a while I got frustrated with labels not paying for months and disillusioned with the emphasis on image. However, I am grateful for those gigs. They taught me about the inner workings and pace of TV, film, and radio. I learned a new level of professionalism and it taught me how to adapt on the fly, but I needed to balance them with music-focused projects for long term satisfaction. I started exploring more percussive areas and the dance influence was strong. I had grown up listening to my brother play Prodigy and Goldie, then I got to shadow my mate Martin playing percussion with Judge Jools. That instant, open connection with a dance audience was infectious. I started playing with some great progressive house DJ's and it fed into my desire to be interactive and create something in the moment, something unique to that crowd and environment. I found that what I learned about listening, dynamics, and picking out lines to interact with in jazz, served me well; as did the age-old expression "space is a place."

One day I sat at my friend's kit in a barn and instantly unlocked another part of my personality.

However, I was missing experiencing the rich soundscapes of orchestras and sight reading, so I went in search of that. It was the start of a pivotal time beginning to blend these worlds, mixing a jazz background with orchestral and dance sonorities. One of my favorite gigs to experience of all time was Basement Jaxx with the Metropole Orkest at the Barbican. To be treated to such exquisite musicianship folded into extraordinarily creative arrangements whilst soaking up the uninhibited collective joy of dance music in this iconic venue and breaking all the stuffy constraints of certain etiquette, was the best kind of liberating. That was a definite turning point on deciding where I wanted to steer my direction and mindset.

MD: Those "interesting musical combinations," and those various musical approaches-styles can also help when it comes time to make a living as a musician. The more different styles you can play, the more opportunities there are to work.

HM: Yeah, totally. And alongside your exposure to a wider range of work from gigging there's other job avenues that can help nourish you in unique ways alongside your playing. After those first experiences with slow-paying record companies, I took a job working for iTunes as the UK Music intern for a year, followed by a year working for the iTunes Festival at the Roundhouse in London. That's 30 gigs in 30 days from Foo Fighters to Paul Simon to Tony Bennett – that's a lot of next level drummers passing through to learn from!

With that job I was swimming in demos, EP's, and catalogues of record labels. Suddenly my listening world just exploded. The alternative fringes of the world of pop, rock and electronica were a fun and formative place to be. I was still playing full time and I'd be getting up to write our weekly sales reports in time for the Monday morning meeting in various places round the world the morning after gigs. It was a wild time juggling it all, I loved the challenge and this new perspective on the industry, but I was running out of hours and playing was a non-negotiable part of my life, so I dove back into it.

After that I really cut my teeth in performing, those were my 'yes' years. In one year, I recorded on films like *Mission Impossible: Fallout* and Frank Turner's *No Man's Land* album, had an Ibiza residency with Idris Elba, worked with an Australian circus company, travelled to Nairobi to perform at their Jazz Festival with some incredible Kenyan artists, and took myself to Cuba to study. I was also drummer for jungle/drum & bass duo The Correspondents. We played some WILD gigs on festival stages at the UK's most iconic festivals like Glastonbury and Boomtown. Those were some of my favorite gigs, standing on the creative shoulders of absolute giants of their art, Tim (a lover of Bernard Purdie) crafting every fine detail in the production, Ian spinning this exceptional lyricism, designing costumes, album art, backdrops…you name it, it was 100% them. I was humbled and privileged to be along for the most raucous and sweatiest ride of my life. At that time, I was taking every opportunity and really stretching myself, but I didn't know where it was leading…

MD: It seems that all these different experiences have made you the perfect percussionist for Hans' gig.

HM: Hans has a love of unusual blends, so my past experience in navigating different musical worlds definitely helped there. You've gotta have a playfulness and willingness to pivot! It is the dream gig, being given a set full of constellations of fully formed grooves and percussive moments and being invited to call on your intuition and past experience to bring a palette, a unique voice, and a presence, into that space. It's the most thought-provoking gig I've ever worked on. We are always considering what's happening elsewhere in the music at that minute. What sonorities and individual frequencies will complement given the presence of certain electronic components and placement of particular parts given the feel? And navigating how the music breathes and moves across these 14-minute-long pieces of music.

Then, given the sheer scale of the production, there's the useful understanding and awareness of what's happening in production world that you acquire over the years and can fold into your musical considerations - the symbiotic relationship with the lights, technical elements of staging, and sound that you can play with. Also understanding that any potential constraints or processes need to be considered and respected. The first week of every tour my brain is exhausted, re-adjusting

... as a big band drummer, you play a pivotal role in underpinning the feel and the emotion of the music, commanding the groove while listening and interacting with the other sections. You are sitting in the middle of a musical powerhouse capable of the most insane dynamic range.

to thinking on these micro and macro levels over a three-hour gig, but I absolutely adore it.

MD: You also mentioned that you enjoy writing about music, in what ways do you write about music?

HM: I've always liked the time that writing allows you to really think through what you're portraying and finding links and new questions in the process. My course at university allowed me to investigate the relationship between music and society and the links between certain moments in our history and music. I'm currently doing my masters on music, mind, and the brain. It is based on the neuroscience research of the relationship between music and the brain. I am particularly interested in neural entrainment, which involves how our brains lock in with a musical pulse and the outcomes from different kinds of entrainment (social and motor.)

the drum community, who was one of the people that was instrumental in getting me on to Hans's gig, has talked in the past about running in time and tempo with music that you're about to play.

Entrainment is also a super helpful tool for going over parts even when you don't have a kit to play. Either visualizing something or listening to it (without even tapping) can help cement things in your brain. Because of that I'm more open to capitalizing time when I'm on the go to learn music, as a complimentary form of practice to that at the kit.

MD: What music have you been listening to recently?

HM: I love Richard Spaven's work, and John Bleases' and Adam Betts' playing on Goldie's live work. I have so much respect for that live project, because of their decision to play all live with no

Photo by Suzanne Teresa

MD: How has your study affected your playing?

HM: I think it just makes me aware of humans' capacity to lock in. We were doing a gig with The Outlook Orchestra and Nightmares on Wax, a British trip-hop artist who uses a lot of samples. My role was to play the percussion parts live with samples that were at those particular tempos between 70 and 100 BPM where placement and groove is everything. On one song I had to play a repeating rhythm on three and ah. About a week before, I realized I needed to start slowing myself down, so I started doing everything slower, and it made a massive positive difference. I realized that I had to lock into a different internal tempo that helped me greet those moments eye to eye and savor it.

Mike Dolbear, an absolute giant in music education and

tracks. I revisit Bonobo's live sets online often and the Heritage Orchestra gigs too. For me there is such an art to arranging electronic and dance music for live orchestras and bands and exploring hybrid set ups.

I've just treated myself to an incredible original Ferguson radiogram from the 1970s, so I've been digging through my Donald Fagen, Beatles, and Soul Family's *Philly Soul* album indulging in mixes that were made for vinyl. I've also been loving listening to my bandmate's new releases- check out Rusanda Panfili's *Libertango* album and Nile Marr's *Lonely Hearts Killer*.

My Spotify playlists are hilarious. A few years ago, I was involved in a TV series where I had to recreate the percussion lines and samples from tracks from the 50s to now, I was doing between 8-15 tracks a day. Getting into the real granular stuff of blending

samples on logic and tuning cowbell samples between semitones gave me a newfound respect for 80s and 90s pop and electronica hits, indulging in exploring beautiful conga and tambourine patterns of 60s/70s soul, and the art of a beautifully crafted country song. So if I leave Spotify on now, you're in for a magical mystery ride!

MD: And what (besides Hans' music) have you been doing recently?

HM: I try to set myself challenges each year to find projects to focus on certain parts of my playing or new areas of the industry. One of my favorites has been depping on ABBA *Voyage*, which gave me the opportunity to really sit in that four on the floor space over some undeniable bangers! Again, like with Hans, being physically right in the middle of the arrangement gives you a beautiful opportunity to understand Benny and Bjorn's decisions from the inside out. It's also fascinating to be involved in a show with such advanced technical engineering, due to the holograms and unique production elements to consider as a performer, in this incredible custom-built venue, it's a great education.

I started exploring more percussive areas and the dance influence was strong. I had grown up listening to my brother play Prodigy and Goldie...

I found that what I learned about listening, dynamics, and picking out lines to interact with in jazz, served me well...

It was the start of a pivotal time beginning to blend these worlds, mixing a jazz background with orchestral and dance sonorities.

I have really enjoyed recording on several projects this year including Luke Solomon's album (Defected Records.) I met Luke working on Honey Dijon's insane Radiant Baby Orchestra set at the South Bank. I also had the utter pleasure of performing at Chaka Khan's Meltdown Festival with The House Gospel Choir. That was a unique blend of gospel and dance music with a live band and a big custom hybrid kit/percussion set up. Every year I write a list of projects I'm inspired by, and would love to work with, and they were on that list. Try wiping the smile (and a few tears) off my face at the end of that gig!

The joy of playing both kit and percussion is a rare opportunity to learn in real time playing alongside people. Listening to their choices and watching their processes, this year I've been fortunate enough to play and record with the likes of Ralph Salmins, Carlos Hercules, Paul Stewart, Deej, and Joe Evans on various sessions and tours, each one is a glorious, real-time masterclass!

I am particularly interested in neural entrainment, which involves how our brains lock in with a musical pulse and the outcomes from different kinds of entrainment (social and motor.)

MD: So, when did you start playing with Hans Zimmer, and how did you get the call??

HM: In 2014 Hans had two gigs at Hammersmith Apollo. I got a call from Mike Dolbear saying that they wanted six female percussionists. That's all I knew at that point. The second we got the music we had a bit of prep time with Satnam Ramgotra, who had been Hans' long-time drummer and percussionist with a super distinct style and delivery. We were working on a big percussion section moment in seven in "Angels and Demons," which was off the charts - they locked in the lights to the solo which created an intense experience of getting strobed from under the drums during the 7/4 solo, and that was our intro to working with Hans! We thought due to the level of production, the two gigs had to be a one-off's and we were just happy to have been a part of that moment because it was like no other gig around!

Then we got the call that two of us were joining a 2016 tour: Lucy Landymore and I on percussion, with Satnam Ramgotra playing kit. That was a super intense and memorable introduction to touring on the arena scale. Lucy moved on to the *World of Hans Zimmer* tour, which is a more symphonic setup, and Aicha came on board for a stupidly fun five-month tour around Australia, Asia, and the US. Then COVID hit. Satnam focused on other projects after COVID, and the opportunity arose to play kit.

Aicha and I were in conversation one day and we were talking about our prospective parts. I was saying that double bass drum stuff was really not my thing, and she would do a better job of that. Meanwhile, she was saying that congas and tambourines were not really her thing, and they were totally my bag! We realized that we could surely (and literally) meet in the middle. We created a massive hybrid setup where we could call on both of our skill sets and come together as a percussion and groove powerhouse. It made perfect sense and the sheer expanse of the range of sonorities and shades of presence that we could achieve was mind blowing.

We had played the show so many times that we knew what instruments belonged in what piece, it felt very natural placing every instrument on the percussion spine, and it worked magically. We texted Hans a picture of the scribbled down set-up, because we had nothing to lose, and he replied, "Ladies, budget…" We figured, "Oh well, it was worth a try." Ten minutes later, Hans called us back (in classic Hans fashion) and said he had forwarded our diagram to the lighting department, and by that night everything was sorted out. And here we are, still in our ever-evolving semi-detached groove palace of dreams!

MD: Have you ever found out why the original call was for six female percussionists?

HM: Hans' entire band is roughly split 50 / 50 gender-wise overall, there is a real element of equality. Perhaps at that time in that social climate ten years ago it was a conscious decision, maybe a statement of handing power to women at a time when we were under-represented, but the great thing is that every one of the musicians was talented and there because they were qualified for the job.

MD: How has Hans' gig evolved overall in the ten years that you have been doing it?

HM: As a whole, the venues have gotten bigger, and as a

result the show has gotten bigger. But the careful balance of retaining its focus on the potency of the music, whatever scale the show takes, remains top priority. In the 15-20,000 capacity shows it has definitely risen to the occasion. John and Hailey Featherstone's lighting design is extraordinary throughout, and endlessly musical. I think the most acute example of that is their exact mapping of the main rhythmic motif in *Dune* (affectionately known as "Wormboy.") That is a crazy complex and free-sounding motif which they managed to fire over the audience perfectly in sync with the drums, the attention to detail is mind blowing!

Over time we have obviously gotten to know the music more intimately, and Hans is never one to "rinse and repeat" so there are new variations coming all the time and new works getting added to the set. He is always keen to progress the show, he's usually at least one show-design ahead of us. He's exceptionally generous, always thinking about the band and giving us these beautiful showcase moments.

Usually, any changes come about in a rehearsal or a sound check. Hans has got this way of sitting at the piano leaning on his arms, just watching. If you didn't know him you would think he was just relaxing, but he's tuned in to everything. Suddenly something cool will happen and he'll say, "Would you care to do that tonight?" Watching such a large ship gracefully pivot on Hans' pinpoint vision, facilitated by the skill and passion of the crew and musicians, is remarkable… there's a lot happening, but Hans is never afraid to switch it up and we all benefit from that.

MD: How has the percussion section evolved in the ten years that you have been doing the gig?

HM: At first when it was the six of us, we had roto toms and electronics. When we moved to two of us on percussion, we had some of his iconic samples on SPDSX, djembes, toms, and a mixture of sticks for different sonorities on the heads and rims. One of the biggest luxuries of this band is that we stand in the middle of those arrangements physically; we've got an orchestra behind us, we've got the horns over here, and all the strings over there. Being in the middle of all those musicians, you get an inside perspective on Hans' vision. I'm grateful that we had those years to really get under the skin of the music and absorb the intentions behind what the percussion was doing and its role within the bigger picture.

When the two kits and percussion spine came together and we joined forces with the truly remarkable percussionists Aleksandra and Steven, everything took off creatively for us! Zero ego, maximal emotional intelligence, and the seemingly endless talent to portray and deliver that emotion across such a wide range of genres – that's a special combination, it felt like we'd hit the jackpot! The talent, musicianship, and camaraderie between us all is super unique. Aleksandra Suklar is on another level and so expressive, and when she gets her groove on you know about it. Steven has the glossiest snare rolls and keeps this cool casual demeanor whilst serving out ridiculous feel AND precision.

MD: How are Aicha and you different drummers, and how are you the same, stylistically?

HM: Firstly, I'd like to take the opportunity to say how much I respect and adore Aicha's playing both as a stand-alone player and as my rhythm partner. She has these incredible ears and a natural playing style that makes it look like she's dancing, she's super in tune with the groove. Her mean bass drum foot from those punk days also deserves a big shout out!

We have a sibling-like relationship and leave egos at the door (I genuinely can't imagine how it would work without that!) There's a diplomacy and a level of open communication that would impress most family counselors. We both try to steer clear of being self-indulgent and try to really serve the music and celebrate each other's skill sets. We have areas where we cross over within the dance-electronic world and the funk world. If we have something punk related it's her bag, and if we have something jazz related it's my bag. But we are naturally (and thankfully,) super aligned on groove and placement. We share a love of uncluttered impactful grooves, attention to sonic detail, and letting the sentiment of the music lead.

Our roles are a fine balance of iconic parts that need to stay intact and areas to show our individual colors. That has happened with the help of the most legendary musical director, exceptional musician, and composer Nick Glennie-Smith (who has been with Hans since the start of his career) and orchestrator Martin Gellner, with special mention to Steven Doar, who aside from being an integral part of our percussion section and a composer in his own right, has recently assumed dulcet-toned and highly astute musical director duties on tour…how he balances that for a 20 piece band, orchestra, and choir, alongside playing those percussion parts is far beyond me.

MD: How much are you and Aicha playing kit together?

We created a massive hybrid setup where we could call on both of our skill sets and come together as a percussion and groove powerhouse...And here we are, still in our ever-evolving semi-detached groove palace of dreams!

HM: We're probably both on kit about 70% of the time. Of that, we're either playing similar (with one of us on snare and one of us one on toms) or exactly the same groove about 40% of the time. But obviously we're always locking in, and are hyper-aware of each other's sonorities, dynamics, and feel.

MD: How much have you been involved in creating these parts?

HM: We had a ten-day rehearsal session at Essen with Nick, Martin and all four of us in the percussion section. The rehearsal space was attached to a huge warehouse of kits and percussion, so we took a few coffee breaks in search of the perfect crashes for certain pieces! The six of us spent ten days setting the gear up, getting used to it, refining, and making sure that there was nothing superfluous, and Aicha and I settled into our new home; our beloved champagne sparkle custom half Pearl and Sabian (me,) half Gretsch and Zildjian (Aicha) kit with our LP percussion and Roland electronics arranged in a spine between us. We're shoulder to shoulder at the kit, and we specifically designed the percussion spine so we'd be playing face to face. During "Gladiator" we are surrounded by Lisa and the ladies of the band singing and creating a special drum circle communal feel that translates in the music.

MD: I've never seen a digital bar count off stage for the whole band to see.

HM: These are 10-and-15-minute-long compositions, so the bar count is always a good reference point especially if you hear

something unusual in the mix in sound check. You can look over and make note of what bar you were at so it can be corrected, it's not like you can say *"check the second chorus."*

MD: You also mentioned that the light cues are programmed, are you performing with a click?

HM: Yes. On-stage there are 20 band members, an orchestra, and a choir, but there are some things that are on tracks that physically couldn't be created live. The majority of what you hear IS live though - there's about 270 channels into mix extraordinaire Colin Pink's desk! When you consider the unusual synth parts and the lighting, the click and the bar count it's one succinct time coded unit. In essence it is a big ship that's not easy to turn, but we've got Hans at the helm and one incredible tech team, so it'll always find extraordinary ways of sailing in new directions!

One of the biggest luxuries of this band is that we stand in the middle of those arrangements physically; we've got an orchestra behind us, we've got the horns over here, and all the strings over there. Being in the middle of all those musicians, you get an inside perspective on Hans' vision.

MD: Is everyone on the click?

HM: Everyone is on click in their own individual mix. There are some electronic moments where we follow the click bang on, and others such as the groove in "Interstellar," where stylistically we're sitting behind it. There are also pieces like "Gladiator" and "Last Samurai" where the click moves and breathes with the melody so yes, everyone needs to know where the click is, so they can work with and navigate around it as appropriate.

MD: What do you look for from a drummer when you are playing percussion?

HM: I'm looking for someone who is listening and wants to work as a team. A drummer having an awareness doesn't mean that you have to say too much. It's lovely if we each have our own space, they're owning the groove, and I can weave in and around them and we come together to set up fills and interact in certain moments, ideally with eye contact and a cheeky grin! That's when we work best together and produce something richer through a shared love of listening and communication.

MD: As a drummer, what do want from a percussionist?

HM: Listening. Beyond that, I want someone who's imaginative, creative, playful, perceptive, adaptable, a percussionist who keeps groove at the very heart of everything they do. Say what you mean, and you don't need to say anymore. Just be a team player, have fun, bring a vibe, and send it! I think any role in music starts with being a team player and listening.

MD: What are some of your favorite tunes to play in the show?

HM: I hate to start with a predictable one, but it would have to be "Lion King" wouldn't it? There's a moment near the end where we've gone through this tasty 12/8 groove and then we steer into the final big theme. Aicha and I play this huge joint groove and smile at each other, that moment never gets old. We trade fills, knowing the journey we've been on to get here and it's a real moment.

From a playing perspective we start the show with "Mombasa" from *Inception* and that's Aicha and I coming out of the gate like racehorses, we go straight into it, that's a very special moment for us to share and fun to play around with the panning opportunities of two kits playing slightly different parts. We follow that with "Wonder Woman" which is in a super powerful seven, a proper work out after "Mombasa," but my absolute favorite playing moment is "Dark Phoenix" because it combines all my musical loves. It's fusion, it's in six, it's got this jungle dance electronica vibe to it, but it's also orchestral. There's one particular little groove in there that I get to play. Aicha is fully engrossed in the electronics, I'm on this jungle setup with a mini snare, and Loire Cotler is behind us weaving vocal percussion lines through it, that's some serious rhythmic power!

The finale of the set is a beautiful moment to take stock each night and sit with your gratitude. There is no clearer moment of togetherness for me than when we're playing "Time." When we get to the very end, the arena of 10,000 people is "pin drop silent" each and every night. I take my in-ears out for a moment to share in the silence, its humbling and overwhelming, and an absolute credit to the power of Hans' one-of-a-kind vision.

There's something quite poignant about bringing the focus to the subject of time, how we started the evening as strangers and over three hours collectively reflected on the deeply personal moments in our lives that this music has soundtracked. It would be difficult to not feel collectively connected by the end and for Hans to, through one solo piano phrase, mark that moment of togetherness, acknowledging that we are more than the sum of our parts. For me, it exhibits what makes him a once in a lifetime artist to work with, because of his innate understanding and ability to communicate what it is to be human.

AICHA DJIDJELLI: THE PUNK AFRICA DRUMMER

Aicha Djidjelli is one of the two drum kit players that you see at centerstage when you see Hans Zimmer Live and hear the soundtrack to Dune Part Two. She blends an interest in Middle Eastern and African percussion, polyrhythm, punk, Hip Hop and EDM. Her musical standards are high, and her groove is deep, and that groove has been uniting the orchestra, chorus, and 20 soloists in the amazing Hans Zimmer Live for the last (almost) 10 years.

MD: I'll start by saying that through talking to everyone in the percussion section, the sense of camaraderie and love that you all share is a real testament to the community of drummers and drumming.

AD: You would not believe how honest our love for each other is. They are absolute treasures, and our percussion section is something special. I think it might have to do with a drummer's mentality and having a certain type of personality that makes you content being at the back of the stage, with other band members right in front of you, with their backs to you, sometimes blocking your view of the crowd. Maybe a drummer's personality enjoys being a bit hidden. Or maybe it's as simple as, "Once a drummer, always a roadie."

MD: What is your musical background?

AD: I am half Algerian and half English. When I was growing up my mum and dad had a music shop in Essex, my mum plays piano, but worked full time elsewhere, my father was an electronic engineer, and he would go out on repairs fixing anything from old Hammond organs to Moog synthesizers. I would go with him, some repairs lasted for days it seemed. I started playing piano in the music shop when I was five, but it wasn't until I was older, and the shop had closed that the drums came into the picture. My dad's best friend, Neil Hardy accidentally got me into drums. He is a semi-professional drummer and plays in function bands. He has always been very passionate about music and facilitated my first band. The day I found drums we were at his house, it was Boxing Day, and The Beatles "Free as a Bird" was playing, that was an old recording that they'd found in an archive, and it had just been put out. It had an eerie and haunting vocal, stunning piano but I could hear this amazing beat. I sat behind Neil's drum kit for the first time and just started playing along. I remember the feeling and the connection with the bass drum and the snare, the vibrations, the sound, it just blew me to pieces. It was like something that I had never experienced, I felt a connection to the instrument instantly. To be honest with you, I never made a conscious decision to become a drummer, but the need to play has never left me and now all these years later, I'm still doing it. It's quite moving because it just *happened* one day. The drums were with me all through my teens, they're such a companion, they've taken me all around the world, my drums are like a best friend, and they've showed me the path to my people. I was self-taught from age 11 until the age of 18 (that's when I went to Drumtech music school in London.) Very early on, I remember Neil saying to me, "You don't need lessons because you'll sound like the teacher. If it already makes sense to you, just do it."

I got in a band the day we went back to school after the Christmas holidays. At break time at school, we would go down to the music department and make an absolute racket. None of us knew what we were doing, it was pure fun with drums, bass, and guitars. My first band was a four-piece band called Stress. As well as rehearsing at school, on Wednesday evenings and Sundays we'd go to the cellar of Neil's clothes shop (Hardy's) and use his gear. He had this amazing late-sixties champagne sparkle Ludwig set, some amps, and a PA set up. It was a band's dream. We had a nice little routine, that just became our world. We did our first gig after a matter of weeks playing together when I was 12. We played at the Oliver Twist in Colchester. We played covers by bands like Kenickie, Sleeper, and we had a few of our own original songs. Thankfully there was a house kit there because I didn't own a drumset yet. We put on gigs in rural Essex, Chelmsford, Ipswich, Colchester, played at biker clubs like Flacks in Braintree and the Harlow Square, grotty venues with sticky floors. That was when I fell in love with rock'n'roll. Our friends came to our shows on a coach we would privately hire to get all our friends to the gigs. We were too young to drive. We would sell coach tickets at school to cover the cost. Then the bus would do the rounds through the villages picking up everybody, they were such fun days. Neil introduced me to John Bonham recordings, and I fell in love instantly, he was the first drummer whose groove, feel, and sound resonated with me. I loved everything about Bonham from the squeaky Speed King bass drum pedal to the different inflections he put in a beat, to the massive groove on "Good Times, Bad Times." and "When the

The drums were with me all through my teens, they're such a companion, they've taken me all around the world, my drums are like a best friend, and they've showed me the path to my people.

Photo by April Nicole

Levee Breaks." I also got into The Who and Cream. I remember noticing that when Ginger Baker played "White Room" there wasn't a crash on the one after the tom fills. I listened to all the little ways that drummers would build and release tension in the grooves. I approach music from listening, that's what kind of drummer I am, and the vocal is incredibly important to me. There's always a conversation to be had between the drums and the vocals. Everything I know is an interpretation and an expression of something that exists because of its surroundings.

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Dynamics are everything, creating shapes, sounds, and narratives, within the music adds to the emotion and story. It's how we connect with each other, and in turn, the listener.

There are so many ways to approach music, and everyone has their own unique journey. In this percussion section everyone comes from a different background which is fantastic. Aleksandra is an amazing classical percussionist and marimba artist, Holly comes from a trained jazz background and played in an orchestral setting quite early on in her formative years. Steven is profound with his talents which spread way further than drums, I am all about deep groove and being emotive.

MD: But you *did* go to Drumtech, what did you study there?

AD: Popular music performance. It was so interesting for me because I'd played by ear already since age 11, I knew if something was swung, and what that would sound like, but I didn't know it was called a *swung rhythm*. I could play sixteenth note and an eighth note grooves, but I didn't know what they were called. I was learning how to communicate with other musicians. I had learned so much musical information subconsciously, but I didn't know the terminologies and phrases for anything. I didn't know the lingo, I didn't have any technique, and my ergonomics were a mess. My little fingers were sticking out, I didn't know much about stick technique until I got there. I was also learning about different styles of music and what constitutes something sounding like hip hop, reggae, or jazz. For me, school was drumming fundamentals, technique, and the theoretical element of music. Drumtech really elevated my playing because I developed an understanding of what I was doing and was able to build on that.

MD: At Drumtech did you learn from your peers?

AD: Absolutely, that's a great point. Buzz Allen (who played on *Dune Part Two* with us) was one of my best friends at Drumtech and still is. Whilst at school we had two drum kits set up facing each other in our student house, and we were always playing together. Another friend of mine Steve Tanton was into Stewart Copeland, his hi-hat playing swung so much it was incredible. When I heard Steve play, I could always tell it was him. I really began to understand about everybody's individuality and unique style. Everyone sounded so different, and I loved that…

MD: After university, how did your career begin and progress?

AD: While I was at Drumtech, there was a recording studio right next door that was owned by Lisa Stansfield or somebody pretty major. I was hanging around outside of that studio in Stanley Gardens in Acton, I didn't know anybody in the professional music world, someone came out of the studio, and I started chatting with them. He told me that he was a producer and was about to do an album for a girl called Amy Studt and that I might wanna come and meet her with a thought of recording with her because I was about her age. That was my beginnings of essentially being a professional musician, and I hadn't finished school yet. I played on her record called *My Paper Made Men*, and loved songs like "She Walks Beautiful," and "One Last Cigarette." I joined her band and was put on a retainer by her label. We supported Razorlight on some live gigs and big stages, but I was also still doing my degree. After the first gig, opening for Razorlight in front of about 3,000 people, everyone was hanging out and having fun backstage afterwards, but I had to drive back without even seeing the headliners to finish my dissertation for Drumtech that was due the next day. I was so upset, and I remember feeling gutted to leave so early. But I was so close to finishing my degree, and I couldn't give up on earning it because I had worked so hard for it. I knew it was the right thing to do and my time would come enjoying those post gig moments to the full. But I did end up getting my degree and getting first class honors, so I was very happy. However, I don't think my degree has helped me one bit in "the real music world." But Drumtech was very important in my progression on the drums, and the gig with Amy lasted a couple of years.

Aleksandra is an amazing classical percussionist and marimba artist, Holly comes from a trained jazz background and played in an orchestral setting quite early on in her formative years. Steven is profound with his talents which spread way further than drums, I am all about deep groove and being emotive.

MD: 20 years ago, when you were pushed into the deep end with Amy Studt, were you prepared?

AD: I was ready, but I didn't think that I was. That happens to me a lot. I loved it because I love the social element of being in band and being part of a team. I love people, I love art, I love ideas, and I really enjoy collaboration. And it was quite nice to be getting paid and upping the scale of the gigs.

But bands can be like relationships, and at some point, things stop flowing right, you might not be getting the right nourishment from the project, and you don't feel excited and connected, that's when it's time to leave. I have left a good deal of bands right before the band broke up.

But I have turned a lot of bands down as well, for various reasons. Someone would call and the first thing they would talk about is gender. They'd tell me that they wanted a "girl drummer." So many bands didn't ask if I wanted to join their band, or if I was interested in their music? They just wanted a "girl drummer." That was always quite upsetting to me. It seemed out of context. I'm not in the fashion world, I'm not a statistic, I have never waved the flag of being a "girl drummer," that doesn't have to be a thing for me, that's style over substance. I didn't want to play that game; I just want to create music that moves

people or makes people want to move. But if I hadn't been true to myself and always put the music first it wouldn't have led me to other bands like Ghostpoet, Richard Fearless, and Go-Kart Mozart and all the weird and wonderful musicians I've met. But working in less ordinary underground bands was always the route I took if the music grabbed me, it was where I'd come from. The people and the intent had to be right, and all those bands led to me joining the wonderful *Hans Zimmer Live*.

Photo by Alex Kluft

MD: So how did you get the Hans Zimmer gig?

AD: It was through Mike Dolebear (from Drumtech.) Mike called me up and asked if I would be interested in doing a gig as a part of a drum line. I said, "What's a drumline?" And he explained it to me. It sounded like more of an American thing. I said, "I don't think that's my thing," and said no. Mike called me back and said, "Aicha this is for something really quite special, I think you will really enjoy it." I said, "OK then." That was 2014 and it was Hans' first ever gig in London, it was called *Hans Zimmer Revealed* and we played at the Hammersmith Apollo. There were six drummers in the drumline, three of us on each side, and we were featured on three pieces. These pieces of music were the most intricate pieces of music that I had ever tried to play at that point. I had a little bit of training learning songs like Yes' "Roundabout" or Yngwie Malmsteen "Far Beyond the Sun" (or whatever.) But Hans' music was something else. It never repeats, it just keeps evolving with speed, groove, dynamics, and story. I had never been exposed to that musical formula. We played a drum solo in "Angels and Demons" in a fast 7/8, and to be honest, it blew my mind. I had never sunk my teeth into something quite like that before. But we were just a feature, we were little sprinkles on the top of the cake for those two gigs. I don't think I was very good at that first gig, because that part was incredibly complex and there wasn't enough time for me to fully understand it. Lucy Landymore was on the same side as me and Holly was on the other. They can both sight read very well so I was sort of copying them. So, I had this little taste of Hans Zimmer. After that gig I went on the 2015 Warped Tour with my three-piece punk band The Kenneths, and Lucy and Holly got picked to join Hans' band and they did a three-month tour in 2016. I had no animosity about not being on board and didn't feel any jealousy or anything, I had my band and things were going really well. When they played in London at Wembley in 2016, I went and watched and ended up hanging out afterwards with the band. Three months later, my phone rings and it's an American number, and it was Satnam Ramgotra (who was playing kit for Hans.) He told me that Lucy was leaving and asked if I wanted to join the band and do a six-month tour. The longest tour I had ever done at that point was two or three weeks. I was stunned and I will always be thankful to Satnam for recommending me and making that call.

MD: Do you know what he saw in you, or why he recommended you for the gig?

AD: He loved that I had my own thing going on and was in my own band making music, Hans loves that. Hans is such a rule breaker, he's not interested in someone coming out squeaky clean every time off of the standard industry approved conveyor belt. He's about taking things and flipping them on their heads. He loves the mash-up. On paper, this band is a real mixed bag: different age groups, musical styles, interests, educational backgrounds, and upbringings. The people in the *Hans Zimmer*

Live band are so diverse. There's so much variety in this band that it's a miracle that it works. The entire production is like a fully functioning ecosystem, and that's all thanks to Hans. He can see people, he sees who they are, even if they aren't showing him who they are, he has a 7th sense. He's incredible, a genius, so unique, a fearless, bold leader who happens to be one of the best human being's that I've ever met. I'm so thankful for all that he is and all that I'm able to be a part of. I think I ended up getting in the band because I was different from some of the other musicians that he had, I just added a different flavor.

Hans is such a rule breaker, he's not interested in someone coming out squeaky clean every time off of the standard industry approved conveyor belt. He's about taking things and flipping them on their heads.

MD: Every dish needs some pepper!

AD: Exactly! So, I said yes and joined the band officially, but I wanted to call Lucy since we'd done those initial shows together. She already knew that she wasn't doing the tour, but I didn't want anyone else to tell her that I was doing the gig, and I wanted to do things with integrity and professionalism. They sent me the set list and I have been in "Hans Wonderland" from that point. I've done every gig since, which is somewhere around 180 gigs worldwide and featured in four film scores.

MD: How did you learn the music?

AD: They sent me two hours and 45 minutes' worth of music, and I had the music playing in my ears everywhere and all the time. I learned the whole show before I even looked at my parts. I wanted to know what was happening when I was not playing, and what I was doing when it was my turn to play. It's a long way of learning, and it's a long learning process. But I needed to get it in my bones. When we're playing live, if all the systems go down and the iPads turn off, I'll keep going, it's foolproof. People panic about the wind blowing their music off the stand, or if they're not on the right page on the iPad, but I learned the whole thing before I even looked at the music. I wanted to understand how it feels to hear it. Then I started working it out and taking it little bit by little bit. The space where I don't play is a vital as the times when I do, because it's all context.

MD: What was your setup like for that first tour, and tell me about the creation of the percussion spine?

AD: For my initial setup (10 years ago) I was playing percussion, not drum kit. I had two floor toms, a djembe, darbuka, shakers, electronic pads, and a cymbal. We toured with that until COVID happened. Satnam left after COVID, and that's when Holly and I both started playing drum kit.

MS: Besides playing more kit now, how has your role in the band evolved?

AD: It has evolved a lot! At first, I was pepper, now we're holding the beat. It takes a while to get used to this band because there's so many people, so many different approaches, and so much interpretation. For example, the orchestra will always land slightly later than the rhythm section will naturally land. With all those layers, my job is to work out what is the starting point, who holds the tune at this moment, what are they saying, and what is the landing point. I must pick out lines from the melody, and its ever changing. I find my weave to lock into. Then it will evolve onto the next layer. I'll tune into that and help stabilize everything (orchestra, chorus, and soloists) as best I can. It's so much more than locking in with just the bassist. Which is what I've done in bands since my formative years. It will go from guitar, to violin, to choir and so on. My focus shifts depending on the specific section, and it changes multiple times within one piece. The drum section has this down, we talk about what specific line to latch onto for the right placement. In "The Lion King" alone, during the stampede I'm focused on the choir and the strings. In "Gladiator," its Pedro's duduk at the start, then the brass for the battle scene. "The Last Samurai" is all about the strings and letting them breathe. There is all this musical weaving happening that changes pace, there is a lot of emotion involved. And we all must tell the story at the right moment. We must channel it so that our audience of 20,000+ people can feel it together. That's what makes gigs so special. The connection to have moments together in the same space, making memories that last a lifetime. The world needs that right now, more than ever, and I'm so fortunate to able to be a part of those moments.

MD: What do you do when you can't find that meeting place to lock everything in?

AD: I get really into the details of the music. Our front of house has 247 channels, grouped to 90, which are sent to PA system. After each gig Colin Pink our FOH engineer uploads the show. When something doesn't feel right, I'll always find time the next day to listen to the recording of a certain part. I'll listen to what *everyone else* is doing and how I'm relating to it. For a drummer, listening to what everyone else is doing is the trick. Being patient, allowing something to breathe as it needs to breathe, and keeping it fluid. It usually requires me to understand a detail to a deeper extent. I really care about those details so I do a lot of listening back, so the next time it gets to that point in the show I'm on what the string players are doing at that point (or whatever it might be.)

There are only a few moments in the show when Holly and I are playing kit in unison. We're always doing something different; the pieces are so layered and require it. But we come together on "The Lion King," "Man of Steel," and "Dark Phoenix," with some big beautifully layered grooves. Our groove naturally sits together very well, and we have no problem saying to each other, "Hold that back a bit," or, "Tune into Nile at this point, that riff is where we're at." We're a team in that sense. It means a lot to Holly and I, we keep tweaking it. We are getting our fills in "Mombasa" to have a call and response, and we are creating build ups in "Pirates" that work together. It is so fun and never ending! I absolutely love the sheer amount of drums that are needed in this band.

MD: Most importantly, you all have got huge ears within the percussion section and within the music, and it's obvious.

AD: That's what it all comes down to, isn't it?

MD: What is the difference between *The World of Hans Zimmer* and *Hans Zimmer Live*?

AD: I have only played in *Hans Zimmer Live* but there is a big difference. *The World of Hans Zimmer* is a symphonic celebration of Hans' music and there are film graphics in the show. Whereas, in *Hans Zimmer Live* there's no film content at all and the analogue synths are a huge feature, so it's more of a hybrid show. Hans is rocking out with the band in *Hans Zimmer Live*. He's playing keys, guitar, synth and talking to the audience. It

really feels like a huge family because some members like Andy Pask (bass) and Nick Glennie Smith (MD/Keys) have worked with him for 40+ years. We all get lost in the music. When playing "Pirates," I'm not thinking about playing sixes, I'm thinking about the water crashing over the boat and the intent of my part within the piece. I want people to feel it, the energy must make its way right to the back row! I always see the silhouettes and hope they feel a part of us.

MD: Do you think your punk background helps you connect all of that?

AD: Yes because I'm not thinking about what "the dots" are saying. The dots are a tool to communicate, it's the quickest way for someone to communicate an idea to another person or a large group of people such as an orchestra. They are a communication tool, a written form of audio language. I think this is an interesting debate because I'm sure that musicians who are quick with the dots could do a deep musical dive on the spiritual level. But if someone is so focused on processing the reading, are they really thinking about how everything sits as a global thing? I don't know, I can't get inside someone else's head. I know that when I'm reading, I'm calculating my part alone against a pulse which loses a lot of the deeper context of the other layers within the piece. What I do know is that through the prep work that I have done, is that I'm present in the moment and bouncing off the other musicians.

MD: It's the same feeling as when an actor goes of the book and put the script down. That's when things become real. But we (as a society) have a hard time with presence right now.

AD: Definitely. But presence is the real part of us as humans. If we aren't present, we're just holograms, and the music (and everything) will be the same every night. Then you are trying to make a moment instead of honestly letting a moment happen.

MD: Is there anyone else in the band coming from that present state of deep groove?

AD: Yes, guitarist Nile Marr. Johnny Marr from The Smiths is a really good friend of Hans. Johnny was in the band in 2016, and his son Nile joined when I did in 2017. I instantly connected to Nile because he comes from the indie band world as me. We love loads of the same music and have a similar relationship doing what we do and bringing it to life in Hans' world... I love the relationship between Nile and Guthrie as they're such different musicians. Guitarist Guthrie Govan is sensational, we all know that he is *actually* an alien who is just visiting earth. Guthrie and Nile are both so important because they have such different approaches and fill an entirely different sonic space. The sound palette requires both styles and approaches in the show, they're completely unique with different sounds, styles, influences. They work so well together!

MD: Is the musical relationship between Guthrie and Nile like the relationship between you and Holly?

AD: Yes. We're all on the same team but we each all have our little unique space. The band needs that and the show needs that. We divided up drum duties to suit us. I'm really interested in sounds and polyrhythms with a North African and Middle Eastern lineage. I play African percussion and frame drums, like a darbuka. Holly has South American percussion influence, congas, and timbales; she does the South American percussion stuff so well.

We have everything set up, so we play to our strengths. My Gretsch Brooklyn drums are tuned deeper with coated heads, and I play double pedal and cover a lot of the low end thunder. Holly has a tighter higher tuned kit with clear heads. My percussion rig has more African elements and I have more electronics built into my kit, I am using a KT-10, and TM6 aux pads. We designed the two kits with the percussion spine for this show, everything has a place and serves this set list. It looks like it could be a little indulgent, but it isn't. Sure, I can play a gig on kick, snare, and hats… But I can't play Hans Zimmer gig with kick, snare, and hats. Hans' epic music needs all the sounds and layers that we are playing, it also gives us the scope to mix and match between the vast instruments between us. I'm just glad I don't have to set it all up (laughs!)

MD: How much input have you had in creating your parts?

AD: Varying degrees. When Satnam Ramgotra wasn't in the band anymore and this version of the show got put together in 2020, Hans essentially asked Holly and I how we wanted to sort it out. When this first happened it was all set parts, and what's happened since is the parts have been tweaked it to suit what's going on in the music. We've had to slightly change things, but that freedom is restricted because there's so many musical layers. A gig like this needs people who have their musical ears switched on, this isn't an ego fest, it's 55 musicians on stage, there's no room for any out of context over-playing. It's amazing to have chops, I really care about chops. I've worked really hard to try and become a drummer with great chops in my arsenal, but I'm not playing things if they are not required for the story.

MD: In the evolution of this music how has the improvising within the parts changed?

AD: At first, they were set in stone parts, you are a cog in this machine, and this is your role. Now there is a little more room for improvising, I might play different fills, but it's improvising within a quite rigid context. There is a lot going on, Hans has already filled the musical spaces. This band is absolutely about being a team and serving the piece. I find it quite distasteful when people overplay, I think it comes from a lack of confidence in certain scenarios. But there is something quite charming about something being a little "not right."

MD: I call it grit, and music needs grit. Great music is built on imperfection.

AD: When everything is perfectly on the grid, music has no soul.

MD: Are you still memorizing the entire show? Do you have any cues or notes written down?

It's so much more than locking in with just the bassist. Which is what I've done in bands since my formative years. It will go from guitar, to violin, to choir and so on. My focus shifts depending on the specific section, and it changes multiple times within one piece.

AD: It's all in my head. I haven't got a proper iPad or a pedal page turner; I've got a crappy fake copycat tablet and I would have to swipe the page turns if I was using it. I do have the music in front of me for a snare solo thing at the start of "Bond." But I have it because it's only Holly and I and it's an encore. We go on stage while the crowd is going crazy clapping and then it's literally

only me and Holly playing this solo on snare, and it must be bang on! I also need the music for a specific section in "Wonder Woman" because there's about 20 different grooves in the piece and some of the really delicate parts to need to be just so.

MD: How do you memorize, what are you listening to within the music?

If you want your music to transcend, it must come from a pure place for it to enter a pure space in somebody else. Your attitude defines your altitude, and the struggle is part of the reward.

AD: I'm essentially listening to who's playing what, how the story goes, and how the piece evolves. I memorize through repetition, but I don't memorize something by trying to memorize it. It's through listening to it on repeat and subconsciously letting it become a part of you, letting the song get in your blood. Then, once it's in there, I need to work out what parts I need to actually play.

When I was doing more band-oriented playing, (which I am still doing,) I always listened to the lyrics. I always want to know what the lyrics are saying and what is the point of the song. I think the drums and the lyrics must be closely entwined. When people first start drumming, they may not realize that they just block everything out and its loud. The sound of cymbals takes up so much musical space. It takes time to learn how to play drums with a light and delicate touch. It's more difficult to play drums very softly than loudly. Ever since my first gig with Amy Studt, I've been listening to the vocals when I was recording and trying my best to be a dynamic player.

MD: What other gigs are you doing now besides Hans?

AD: I work with the band Awkward Moments which is an electronic dance project. We have done some charity gigs in London for Earthpercent which is Brian Eno's charity and played some festivals. Through my work with Awkward Moments, I'm getting really interested in hybrid drum kits, I did a bit of this with Andy Gangadeen and he taught me a lot. I'm doing a deep dive into different polyrhythmic stuff because I really want to make my own album that brings everything together, piano, polyrhythm and EDM.

I'm obsessed with a Dead Can Dance track called "Song for the Stars" there are some beautiful rhythms going on in there. I am also listening to a musician named Sona Jobarteh, her score to a film called *Motherland* is some of the most beautiful music I have heard of late, "Kemet," "Maat," and "Battle of Qadesh" are outstanding pieces. Loire Cotler (the voice of *Dune*) has also introduced me to a lot of great music and her husband Glen Velez. They've become a positive force of inspiration in my life, and I took some amazing frame drum and shaker lessons with Glen. I also love pianist Chilly Gonzales.

The Hans gig is an absolute dream, it's everything I've ever wanted! But there's another part of me that wants to make people dance and be silly. For me it's very important to have an enriched life, I'm not chasing material things. Capitalism is trying to make us believe that we're not worthy if we don't have certain things, that's horrific and terrible for us and the planet. We create our own reality. When I went to Drumtech I remember chatting to people who said they wanted to get in a massive band and tour around the world, but then in the same breath they said that they would probably just end up teaching. I remember thinking that they would probably end up teaching *because they're already saying that*.

MD: If you can't see it, you can't do it.

AD: When I was 12, I went to my first festival and saw Moby play. I just remember looking at the drummer and wondering, 'How did he get on that stage?' I wanted to do that, I wanted to get there. Along the way, the goal posts always change, and that's good. You must believe in the process that every little step is feeding into another step. Make music that makes you happy, because if you do, you will be a part of something that makes others happy, because they will feel it. If you want your music to transcend, it must come from a pure place for it to enter a pure space in somebody else. Your attitude defines your altitude, and the struggle is part of the reward. All the best things in life are created through friction. There's genius in two things that are clashing together, it might be uncomfortable, like growing pains, but if you just keep going, you're gonna shed another layer and you're going to get closer to who you really are. Listen to your gut and make good art because we need it right now.

Hans has taught me that kindness and loyalty mean everything. He's so loyal to his team.

MD: What have you learned from working with Hans for so long?

AD: Hans has taught me that kindness and loyalty mean everything. He's so loyal to his team. His assistant Cynthia is in her 70s, and she's this wonderful lady who feels like your grandma. She's been his assistant for 40 years. I was just welcomed into "Hansworld" with warmth and open arms. From working with Hans, I feel like I've been dealing with "middlemen" all along, hostile, and full of themselves. Now I've reached the other side where no one is trying to prove anything, and no one is trying to belittle anybody. Our original musical director Nick Glennie-Smith, and now Steven Doar, are so kind. Nick says, "Music is the only team sport without any opposition," I just love that. To keep the innocence and the purity of music as refined and raw as my first ever musical project, but on a scale of this magnitude, is quite an accomplishment. They never make anybody feel like they're not doing the right thing or not playing the right part. You might have the assumption in a project like this that there's always going to be someone on your back ready to roast and humiliate you in front of everybody, because of the sheer amount of people who want a piece of this specific pie; but no, they're kind, appreciative, and they respect what you do. Hans and his people are on another level, they are refined, beautiful, big-hearted souls who want goodness for this world with the hope that we can all be entwined by our shared love of music.

ALEKSANDRA ŠUKLAR: I'M NOT A CLASSICAL MUSICIAN, I'M A CLASSICAL PERCUSSIONIST!

Aleksandra Šuklar is the most recent addition to the Hans Zimmer Live percussion section. Joining the band in 2019, she is deeply rooted in classical percussion and performance. However, I have never heard another classical musician talk so much about groove as Aleksandra. But she was quick to correct me and say, "But I'm not a classical musician, I'm a classical percussionist!"

MD: On stage, all the people in the *Hans Zimmer Live* percussion section are playing multiple instruments. Outside of the Hans Zimmer gig, what do you consider to be your primary instrument?

AS: I would consider myself a multi-percussionist and I feel at home with different kinds of set-ups, marimba, vibraphone, and anything else that can contribute to the richness of the percussive sound. This is the general approach I have in music, which has contributed to the set-up I use in *Hans Zimmer Live*, which includes four timpani, three tom- toms, two bongos, djembe, darbuka, cymbals, a gran casa, and a MalletKat.

I admire each member of our percussion section for all their skills and abilities, it is truly an honor to play with Aicha, Holly, and Steven on stage, and to be with them off-stage day to day while on tour. Each of them is such a bad-ass player and our collegial energy makes a truly remarkable team, something that one doesn't encounter often. It is very rare to have such an ego free vibe, professional relationship, and friendship with all of them. However, I think that we percussionists and drummers in general, are very friendly, very kind, very supportive to each other, and very nice to be around.

MD: I agree. Where are you from, and could you tell me about your musical background?

AS: I was born in Serbia, and I grew up in Slovenia. I spent six years in Serbia, 14 years in Slovenia, and I have been based in Vienna since 2010.

Photo by Alex Kluft

MD: How does how does a kid from Serbia and Slovenia become a talented classical percussionist?

AS: I come from a family of musicians. My first instrument was violin and I played it for six years. However, I didn't really resonate with the instrument, I felt the need to experience the groove within me while I was playing, and I wanted to create that groove myself. I started playing percussion in Slovenia when I was 11. I had the most wonderful teachers that one could have as a youngster starting out. They created such a nice and supportive atmosphere, it was about getting your work done, but they emphasized that in such a chill and cool way without any pressure which is a big thing to achieve as a teacher.

MD: What were you studying?

AS: My original wish was to become a drum set player, but then all the other instruments were introduced to me. I started playing marimba, vibraphone, timpani, and multi percussion, which were the instruments which got me into this world.

MD: What was it about the mallet instruments that resonated with you?

AS: It was the sound of the marimba, and I remember as a kid starting out, I couldn't wait to start playing with 4 mallets technique. As a beginner I could really spend hours just practicing scales, since I was so drawn to it.

MD: The marimba is one of the most beautiful sounds in the world.

AS: I fell in love with that sound too. Just hearing the mallets falling on the wooden bars and exploring the different sound colors makes me spend time with this instrument for hours at a time.

MD: What four mallet technique do you use, Burton or Stevens?

AS: I started with Burton, and I stayed with Burton. It seems to be the one that works best for me. I find that all the techniques are great, you just have to find the one that suits you best.

MD: What is some of your favorite music to play on marimba?

AS: Recently, I have been spending quite some time with Cello Suites by Johann Sebastian Bach. I like getting back to them over and over again, playing and practicing them really nourishes my soul. Besides that, I enjoy playing and researching the modern literature for marimba.

MD: Did you aspire to join an orchestra or become a soloist?

AS: I have always been drawn more to solo repertoire and solo performances, more than wishing to pursue a job as an orchestral musician. However, I really enjoy symphonic works and have collaborated with orchestras such as Vienna State Opera Symphony Orchestra, The Radio Symphony Orchestra Vienna, Slovenian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Vienna Chamber Orchestra. My wish and need to perform as a soloist has resulted in two marimba concertos and one double concerto that are dedicated to me, which I have also premiered and performed with the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra and the Chamber Orchestra of Slovenian Philharmonic.

Photo by Alex Kluft

MD: How has living in the musical city of Vienna for the last 15 years shaped you? It is one of the great musical cities in the world.

AS: Vienna offers culture on every corner, with approximately 30 concerts a day and possibilities to experience all major artists and musicians of any musical genre daily. Visiting and listening to numerous concerts in Viennese Musikverein, Konzerthaus Vienna while I was student has shaped my musical taste and specially getting to perform in these halls with different project formations or as a soloist means a lot to me.

MD: Did you study mallet percussion first and then branch into other percussion, or were you studying it all at the same time?

AS: I studied all the instruments pretty much at the same time, from the beginning on. Only in the times when I would be doing some marimba competitions, would I be focused on marimba repertoire only.

MD: What was some of your favorite, or most challenging repertoire?

AS: There are many works for marimba and percussion that have been a huge inspiration to me as a performer. I studied at Music and Arts University of Vienna and graduated in the class of Nebojša Živković. He is a percussionist and composer who has unlocked many layers of my artistic expression and made me dive into the magnificent world of percussive instruments while studying with him and playing his works. This whole journey has definitely left a huge mark on me as an artist. I have also performed works by contemporary Japanese composers such as Keiko Abe, Minoru Miki, Toru Takemitsu, Jasuo Sueyoshi, all the way to American composers like Casey Cangelosi and Gene Koshinski, which are very often part of my solo-recital repertoire.

I find that in classical percussion, we need more music and compositions, since the field of solo-percussion is relatively new. I enjoy collaborating with different composers regarding new works for percussion. As I have previously mentioned, there

are three wonderful concertos that are dedicated to me, and I have had a chance to premiere: "The Corridors" -Concertino for marimba and strings by Slavko Šuklar (my father,) "Marimbakonzert" by Tristan Schulze and "Double Concerto for Cello and Percussion" by Nebojša Živković. Besides these compositions, I have also premiered a work "Sanagi" by Pauchi Sasaki for Multi-Percussion and String quartet in Berlin at Rolex Arts Weekend.

MD: How did having a father who was a composer influence you in your formative years?

AS: It was very nice having musicians around you while growing up. Having a father as a composer, mother as a conductress, and two sisters as violinist and pianist, I was really surrounded by music every day. That helped me develop a tremendous musical understanding. There would be many afternoons, and evenings when my father would be just sitting and composing for many hours. Now that I think about it, it was wonderful to see him so dedicated and passionate about the work he loves to do most. I'll include my whole family in that thought, I am very grateful that they have shown me the way to the music and that doing what you love most is the biggest gift you can get in life.

MD: Do you compose?

AS: I have just released my first composition entitled "Domitus" on all streaming platforms, as well as video and it is available and published as sheet music. It is written for multi-percussion solo and in terms of setup, it reflects my personal taste; it's a small, practical setup with two toms, kick drum, bongos, two cymbals, and two China gongs. The title of the piece is a Latin word for "taming," inspired by the classical development of percussion which we can witness during last 50 to 70 years. While modern compositions strive to "tame" this primal instrument, the pulse, rhythm, and groove remain untamed forces, awakening instinct and moving the core of our being, no matter how old or new the composition. I composed it mainly because I wanted to play another piece for multi percussion, so I thought, 'Why don't I try writing something?' "Domitus" can be seen here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k3mFchoqlBk

MD: How much have you been influenced by 20th Century Percussion Ensemble music such as Varese's "Ionisation"?

AS: I've definitely been influenced by a lot of contemporary music, and I performed "Ionisation" a couple of years ago in Viennese Musikverein with Ensemble Kontrapunkte. It feels very special and important to perform the first work ever written for percussion ensemble. Every musical genre or direction that one gets to play and experience, can be only beneficial for a musician. Performing orchestral music, solo works for percussion, contemporary music in ensembles, baroque arrangements, and film music, has shaped me in a unique way and helped develop my expressiveness in percussion and music, and formed what I bring to *Hans Zimmer Live*.

I felt the need to experience the groove within me while I was playing, and I wanted to create that groove myself. I started playing percussion in Slovenia when I was 11.

MD: How did the Hans Zimmer gig come to you?

AS: About eight years ago, while I was finishing my studies, I was recording film and soundtrack music in a "Synchron Stage Orchestra" for Netflix and Hollywood productions. At that time the conductor of the Orchestra was asked to suggest a percussionist for a project called *The World of Hans Zimmer*. He gave me a call, telling me that he would like to suggest me and asking if I would be interested. After we spoke, I got contacted by the organizers of the project and submitted my audio and video materials for casting. It took around six months for me to get a final confirmation, eventually I finally got approved and I joined *The World of Hans Zimmer*. That is a project curated by Hans Zimmer, where he is not performing, but is in charge of everything. This project was my first personal contact with him. In 2018, we played at *Hollywood in Vienna* the performed the entire *The World of Hans Zimmer* concert. Hans Zimmer came to me after the show and told me that he would like to have me join *Hans Zimmer Live*. Of course, I was very happy and excited to hear that, but I kept my excitement low, and didn't tell anyone until I got the official call and email. Since 2019, I have been part of *Hans Zimmer Live*.

MD: On that first tour, what of Hans' music were you playing?

AS: Let's see if I can remember the whole set list: "Dark Knight," "King Arthur," "Mission Impossible," "Pearl Harbor," "Rush," "Da Vinci Code," "Madagascar," "Pirates of the Caribbean," "Spirit," "Kung Fu Panda," "The Holiday," "Hannibal," "Gladiator" and "Inception."

Recently, I have been spending quite some time with Cello Suites by Johann Sebastian Bach. I like getting back to them over and over again, playing and practicing them really nourishes my soul.

MD: When was the first time that you recorded with Hans?

AS: It was during COVID, when Hans asked me to work on *The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge on the Run*. It was my first time recording on my own. I set up the mics and the interface and recorded into my laptop, and I accidently recorded and sent them my files in mono. I remember when I was listening and testing the sounds, I was thinking, 'This sounds good, I really like how everything was so equal all around.' Then I sent the files and got an e-mail back saying, "Aleksandra, next time please send the files in stereo." I thought, 'Oh my God, everything is wrong, I will have to re-record all of it again!' I was trying so hard to do my best, and I failed with such a basic thing. Thankfully they did not make a big deal out of it, and everything worked out well at the end.

MD: When you started doing *Hans Zimmer Live*, was all the music scored out?

AS: Before this new show started in 2022, we had two weeks in Essen, Germany for percussion rehearsals only. The main idea about spending this time as a section together is to work out our set-ups, divide the parts that are written, and add our personal touch to the instruments that we are playing. In Hans' environment, ideas are always welcome. This is really inspiring, and it motivates you to think out of the box.

MD: In the past, I have been involved in situations where classical musicians were asked to improvise and bring something of "their own" to the parts, and it was very difficult for them to do that. So as a classically trained musician, how

comfortable were you in improvising and bringing your own ideas to Hans' music?

AS: That is a great question! But remember I'm a classical *percussionist*! After working with Hans for a couple of years and recording some of the music for his film projects, I have to say that it definitely contributed to broadening my horizons in creativity. With Hans, you are free to work around and set yourself free within the written music.

MD: How did you get comfortable with that?

I find that in classical percussion, we need more music and compositions, since the field of solo-percussion is relatively new. I enjoy collaborating with different composers regarding new works for percussion.

AS: You just try it out and do it… I am always thinking of how the sounds I am playing resonate with the entire orchestra out front. When I record for Hans, I try a couple of different things and we see what works. The whole process is a very fine and nuanced process, but it's amazing to watch Hans in his creative environment.

MD: What was the first day of recording for *Dune Part Two* like?

AS: The first day we got the written sheet music for "Worm Army" and "The Arrival," and we had to be very exact and unified with our playing. When recording film scores, the precision of being with the click track is essential. It was very inspirational to be a part of a percussion section with Aicha Djidjeli, Holly Madge, and Buzz Alan that immediately locked in with the track.

MD: I have heard about the second day of the *Dune Part Two* percussion sessions where you were all just creating different sounds. I imagine that for a modern percussionist, that was a very exciting session.

AS: Exactly, the second day was for samples and sound design purposes. We had to explore and create sounds that were sounding futuristic and ancient at the same time. We used different combinations of metal, sounds with chains that Holly and Aicha were creating with buckets, shells in the darbukas, and using rather untypical ways of playing. I recorded hitting a surdo with my palm and needed to produce the exact same sound on every note throughout the whole track. Therefore, I made an outline of my hand on the head of the surdo with a pencil, that way I could make the stroke as precise as possible.

MD: (As classical percussionists) we are often asked to create sounds with non-musical instruments like anvils, brake drums, and pieces of sheet metal, so this probably wasn't as outside-the-box as it was for the others.

AS: Everyone in the section was getting into thinking outside-of-the-box. We were using the most fun combinations of objects and inventing sounds that you could never imagine. It feels very unusual to play something that you have never held in your hands before, which can often be the case, especially in contemporary music.

MD: Can you tell me about putting your earrings in a fry pan?

AS: They told you about that? Hans Zimmer asked each of us to bring something that sounds antique or new, as long as it created a futuristic, interesting, ringing metal sound. I was traveling from Vienna to London with a full suitcase of percussion instruments. I had to think about what would fit the instructions that Hans gave us and would fit my suitcase at the same time. I remembered that I have these two frypans that I had used in the past for some of my setups playing some contemporary music and I brought them as part of my collection for this recording session. When I got to the session, I decided to put a pair of metal earrings in the pans and swirl them around making this continuous scraping and scratching sound. The special challenge was throwing the earrings in the air like flipping pancakes, because the pans are rather heavy, and the click does not adapt to your playing.

MD: You had to flip your earrings in a fry pan, in time with a click? I'll bet that's the first time you have been asked to do that?

AS: True, it was my first time flipping earrings to a click.

MD: How comfortable are you with playing with a click?

AS: I would say that I am quite comfortable, since as a percussionist you are bound to the daily practice with the metronome— or at least you should be. You must be able to clarify your timing with as much precision as possible.

MD: What have you learned from your percussion section mates?

AS: We make such a wonderful and great team together, one could only dream for this. When you really get to work with people like Aicha, Holly, and Steven, you feel the impact that each of us is contributing to the section in every sense. I really admire everyone's professional attitude, while at the same time enjoying the process in a relaxed atmosphere with constant jokes flying around.

MD: You mentioned earlier creating a setup. I don't know if many drummers know how important or difficult it is to do that unless they have played musicals or in orchestras. There is a lot involved, could you explain that process?

AS: As a classically trained percussionist, you're very often confronted with building set-ups and mapping the instruments effectively, according to the composition. You're constantly building, adapting, and moving things around you.

For *Hans Zimmer Live*, one has a complete freedom of how the instruments are going to be positioned within your own station. It is wished that you add your personal touch to the choice of instruments that are already the core of your station and then you work around it.

While modern compositions strive to "tame" this primal instrument, the pulse, rhythm, and groove remain untamed forces, awakening instinct and moving the core of our being...

MD: Exactly how did you create your percussion setup for the show?

AS: Firstly (of course) you are thinking about the music and how the instruments that you are using contribute to the whole picture of sound. You can be creative with your setup, but the music should be first. When you get the core instruments for the show, which are in my case, are timpani and MalletKat, you start adding the rest around it.

MD: What about the convenience of getting from instrument to instrument how much do you think about that?

AS: I always map my set up in a way that works the best while switching from one instrument to another. Sometimes it takes a couple of days, until I have found the ideal positioning of everything I am playing.

MD: What are some of your favorite songs or musical highlights in *Hans Zimmer Live*?

AS: I truly admire all of Hans Zimmer's work and the endless power of creativity that you hear in every second of his music. Every one of his soundtracks has its own special thing. The song that makes me feel like I am in some other dimension and out of this world is "Paul's Dream" from *Dune*. It moves the core of my being and I feel like some bigger force possesses all of us on stage. It's such a powerful experience every night.

MD: What have you learned from working with Hans Zimmer?

AS: Open your mind, work with no ego, and that you must be genuine when creating and performing.

MD: How has playing Hans' music helped you evolve as a musician through the years?

AS: Playing Hans' music has opened a whole new world for me. In creative terms, whatever you do, it should be done with a sense of playfulness. The attitude that all ideas are welcome and that the bad ideas are simply part of the process makes it feel so freeing. Every time you perform, you make someone's evening special, and we should strive for those moments. The audience takes those moments home with them. Playing Hans' music for many years has brought me to different places within myself, experiencing that while sharing the stage with him, is something that is I treasure because it is priceless.

BUZZ ALLAN: ANYTHING YOU CAN HIT WITH ANYTHING TO MAKE A GOOD NOISE!

It is a phone call we all dream of getting. For some reason, a drummer can't make a recording session, and a friend has recommended you for the gig. This time the lucky drummer was Buzz Allan, the session was Hans Zimmer's soundtrack to Dune Part Two, and the drummer that made the recommendation and the call was Aicha Djidjelli.

MD: What is your drumming background?

BA: I started playing drums when I was 13 years old in high school, I had three years of wonderful lessons while I was there. When I was 22, I moved to London and went to a school called Drumtech, which is where I met Aicha, who is one of my *Dune Part Two* counterparts, and who recommended me for the *Dune Part Two* recording sessions. I spent four years studying at Drumtech, and there was a little crossover into the professional world, so I started working in the industry while I was finishing my degree. I've been with a Doors tribute band called Doors Alive for 20 years. We started out in in the backrooms of pubs and tiny little clubs where we played to very few people, we worked and worked and now it has become a global thing and we play all over the world to hundreds, sometimes over a thousand people. The Doors Alive has been very good to me over the years, it's a great band and great music. There is a lot of stuff in there that you wouldn't normally find in a rock band. There are a lot of Latin grooves, a lot of swing and jazz, a lot of 17-minute songs that don't have much structure, it's a good bunch of guys, and has been a great journey.

MD: What did you study at Drumtech?

BA: At Drumtech you study everything. We started very simply with some good old 12 Bar Blues, which is you know a nice way to get into playing with a band and grooving. Then you go through a lot of rock, a lot of fusion, and a lot of jazz in your third year. That probably put me in good stead for the for the Doors sound because a swinging feeling is definitely advantageous to play that music. Drumtech was about becoming a jack of all trades. We also studied music theory, we had to do the same theory as the guitarists, singers, and bass players. So for drummers who didn't play a tuned instrument that was challenging, but I loved it, I actually really love the theory side music.

MD: You are on the *Dune Part Two* soundtrack, but you don't play in the touring band, how did this all come about?

BA: They needed a fourth percussionist to jump in with them for the recording, Aicha put my name in the hat, and it was a done deal. It was an "easy" path, but having the recording be your "audition" was pretty intense, I'm not gonna lie, I was very nervous!

Photos Courtesy of Buzz Allan

MD: What were the circumstances for needing you? I know there is already four percussionists in the section, what was your role on the recording?

BA: The reason they needed me, was because Steven Doar is also a composer, sound designer, and Hans' assistant. He was in LA working directly with Hans. Aicha and Holly are here in London, and Alexandra came in from Vienna. They needed a fourth percussionist (preferably in the London area,) to record with Aicha, Holly, and Aleksandra, so Steven didn't have to come away from the production in LA. I live in London so that was that.

When we got into the studio, the first full day was playing parts that were already composed. We had scores in front of us and the backing tracks. The four of us (Aicha, Holly, Aleksandra, and me) were all playing in unison in our little semicircle. We had some of the most beautiful microphones I have ever seen in my life, and we were tracking in the most wonderful studio I've ever been in (RAK Studios in North London.) Day two was very experimental. We had free reign to create and record weird and wonderful noises.

MD: So you were (more or less) covering Steven's role as the fourth member of the percussion section?

BA: Yes. They have a couple of tunes in the live set from *Dune Part Two* and the parts that I played will be the ones that either Steven or Aleksandra play on the percussion side of things, Holly and Aicha are playing drum kit.

MD: What instruments did you play on *Dune Part Two*?

BA: On day one, we had all kinds of ancient, old, and beautiful djembe's, darbukas, massive surdos that were used as the biggest bass drums that you have ever seen, some shakers, guiros, and some metalworks type instruments. Day two was a more experimental day. We played all kinds of weird stuff. Aleksandra put her earrings in a frying pan which created an incredibly unique sound. We had a big iron anvil, I played a big aluminum spring with a hammer, I also put a Chinese bell inside a brake drum and rolled it around to get a weird scraping sound. I even played a hard-shell case that one of the ancient drums came in for a very low-pitched bass drum sort of sound.

MD: Who was coming up with the "instruments" (for lack of a better term?) Was Hans requesting sounds that he was hearing in his head, and you four were tasked with creating those sounds?

We played all kinds of weird stuff. Aleksandra put her earrings in a frying pan which created an incredibly unique sound.

BA: It was very free reign. We picked up stuff and figured that if we hit this thing with that thing, it wouldn't sound bad. But then we would wonder, what it would sound like if we changed what we were hitting something with? Sometimes we would hit metal with metal, and sometimes we would hit metal with wood to dull it down a bit. It was a total collaboration between the four of us. Everybody was coming up with these weird and wonderful ideas which was an amazing and creative environment to be in. The engineer Isabel Gracefield came up with some ideas as well. She was the person who would suggest hitting something with metal and with wood to dull it down, she has a great mind for the soundscapes that Hans is going for. Steve Lipson is a wonderful producer too. If he thinks something is great, he'll tell you, and if he thinks it's crap, he'll tell you.

MD: So day two was basically workshopping sounds?

BA: Yes, a lot of it was exactly that. We created (what we called) tool kits of rhythm. We would play rhythmic sounds to a click. We would play a bunch of sounds to 100 BPM, then 120, then 140, and so on. We had no idea if what we were doing was good, and if it would be used. Later we learned from Steven Doar that everything got used which was very cool.

When the movie came out, myself, Aicha and my wife all went to see the movie together. We were in the theatre and every time Aicha or I heard something we did, we would nudge each other between the seats.

MD: Was Hans there while you were tracking?

BA: No, we had a Zoom link on an iPad in the live room with us. They could listen back to what we were doing. Steve Lipson had the production responsibilities. Steve has worked with Hans for a long time, and he knows what Hans wants. He guided us through everything.

MD: What type of guidance did he offer?

BA: Some very specific and some quite vague. When it came to day one, it was, "This is what we want, let's nail it, get it done, and move on." On day two, he was very open to the experimental attitude. He's very specific and open with his criticism which is fantastic. He's really fast at getting the job done, it was impressive.

MD: Was that the first percussion session you have been involved in like that?

BA: Day one was more orthodox and traditional with us reading and playing parts. But the level of experimentation on day two was unlike something that I had ever done. It was a definitely a unique session, and it was so much fun!

MD: On day one was everything written, or was there some improvisation happening as well?

BA: If I remember correctly, day one was all written parts that were pretty rigid. It was, "This is what Hans wants, this is what the producers want, and this is what the sound designers want. " We wanted to nail all those written parts. Day two was the more creative and improvisational day.

MD: Do you have a background in hand percussion or tuned percussion (marimba, vibes, etc.?)

BA: I would say that I'm more of a drum kit player, but I definitely have played a lot of hand percussion. I haven't done too many gigs like that, but when I was at Drumtech we learned quite a lot of Latin, Brazilian, and Afro Cuban percussion. That was my way into hand percussion, but I love all kinds of percussion, anything you can hit with anything to make a good noise is OK in my book.

MD: How much time did you have to prepare for the *Dune Part Two* session?

BA: I had some time to prepare, but not very long. Aicha called

me six or seven days before the session, I was actually on my way to Portugal to do a festival gig. So, I was gone for three days. When I got back, I crammed like crazy for four days, just listening and and trying to pick out the parts. The information came in dribs and drabs, I got some backing tracks first and I did lots of listening, then I got the scores in a PDF format, and I pieced everything together. Thankfully, yes, there was some prep time because there were some odd times, a lot of time changes, and some tempo changes in there, so prep was key.

MD: How good of a reader are you?

BA: I am not a bad reader, but I'm definitely not the kind of person who could jump straight into a reading gig or a theatre gig where you've got lots of charts. That would be a challenge for me. But I played violin and piano as a kid, so my reading is pretty good, and I teach drums so I'm reading for the students too. The reading was mostly fine, but there was one track that was in 5/8 and had a random bar of 4/8, and a random bar of 6/8 at the end. I didn't blink for that entire tune.

MD: How long were the sessions?

BA: Downbeat was 10:00 AM I think so we showed up at nine, had some coffee and a chat, and set up. Then at ten on the button, it was, 'Let's get the job done.' We were working until probably 6-7 PM, then Isabel and her assistants would start trimming audio files, bouncing everything down, and getting everything mixed and sent off to Hans so that he could listen to overnight and come back to us in the morning.

MD: Do you know why you weren't invited into the live touring band?

BA: I wasn't asked. I know that Hans handpicks his family of musicians and he's already got an amazing percussion section. Don't get me wrong, if Hans asked, I would jump at the opportunity.

MD: When was the first time you heard your work and sounds for the movie?

BA: The first time I heard it was when the soundtrack came out on Spotify, which (I think) was a little bit before the movie was released. I listened to it very carefully and I tried to listen for some of the parts we had done. When I heard stuff that I recognized, I was thinking, 'Holy moly there we are!' When the movie came out, myself, Aicha and my wife all went to see the movie together. We were in the theatre and every time Aicha or I heard something we did, we would nudge each other between the seats.

MD: What other gigs and recording work have you done recently?

BA: It's been a little while since I've done some recording work, most of the Doors Live stuff is live work. I record drums for my wife's music at Pink Bird Studios. Her artist's name is Seaker, and I'm always touring with Doors Alive. Being involved with the *Dune Part Two* soundtrack was just such an honor for me. Then when we got nominated for**,** and won the Modern Drummer Readers Poll award it was unbelievable and humbling. I'm happy that so many people liked what we did. Thanks to *Modern Drummer*, it's a huge deal, and I couldn't be prouder.

HOW MARK SCHULMAN OVERCAME HEARING LOSS TO REDEFINE HIS CAREER

By Mark Griffith

Photos by Lisa Skarell

If you like music and you haven't seen Mark Schulman play live by now, I don't know who you have been watching. Mark Schulman has been a road warrior drummer for 32 years, touring with P!nk, Billy Idol, Foreigner, Stevie Nicks, Cher, Sheryl Crow, just to name a few. He has played for over a billion people with some of the greatest artists on the planet, but as I said, if you haven't seen him play by now, you might not get the chance anymore. Because for Mark Schulman everything is always evolving, and things are changing… It's been a long time since Modern Drummer has spoken with Mark, and we were happy to talk about some rare subjects that musicians don't usually want to talk about: Leaving a BIG Gig, Retiring from Touring, Inspirational Speaking, Hearing Loss, and Hearing Aids.

MD: I don't know if I am hearing this correctly, but are you retiring from drumming?

MS: No not at all, I've stopped touring. I toured for 32 years, and during that time I also developed a speaking career, and the speaking career has become robust and successful. In 2019, I had done 51 speaking gigs while I was on tour with P!nk because she only played three times a week, and there was a lot of time off. When I did that, everything went beautifully, but suddenly P!nk's manager didn't want me to speak anymore. After COVID, when P!nk was restarting and returning to the road, her manager asked me to completely stop doing the speaking engagements altogether. I was at a crossroads, I was a touring drummer, but I had worked really hard to develop my speaking career, develop all those relationships, and I just wasn't willing to give it up. I had been touring with P!nk for 14 years, and I had been on the road for 32 years, that's a long time. I was already thinking that I was going to do one more tour and then stop. But when he asked me to stop doing something that frankly has a much higher sense of purpose to me and is vastly more challenging, I just wasn't willing to relinquish my speaking career. I had built relationships with the agents, clients, and meeting planners. The speaking career is an extension and an evolution of the career that I had already started by doing drum clinics. I did my first drum clinic in '91, my parents were both professors and I think I have the teaching gene in me. I like getting up in front of people, and in my clinics I was starting to find that people were resonating with my stories and my success coaching more than the drumming. Many great drummers do drum clinics, and they just play and play, but they're really not that communicative. I was very communicative and that seemed to mean a lot.

It was actually Dom Famularo that inspired my speaking career. Dom and I did a clinic tour together and he was talking about how he was asked to do a motivational speech because someone had seen him doing a drum clinic. Ever since then, speaking was in the back of my head. I thought that I could convert the way I was speaking at clinics to a different demographic. And why not expand to the collegiate and the corporate market, so I worked very hard developing my speaking skills. I studied with two speaking coaches, an acting coach, a director, a storyteller, and I really expanded my ability as an orator. Through my successful drumming career, I felt that I already understood what the corporate world needed from a speaker. I was gutsy and started cold calling the agents and people.

When I speak, I call it rock show disguised as a keynote speech. My drums are still there, I play a P!nk medley, a Billy Idol medley, a Cher medley, and a Foreigner medley, because I toured with all those bands. I play a drum solo and I use drumming and music as a metaphor for corporate performance. I just wrote my second book called *The Attitude Equation*. My book is on the power of attitude, and attitude is everything. As musicians it's not just about what we are, and it's not just about what we do. Music is who we are. Now with Heather Crider who is a neuro coach, the love of my life, and the gal that runs our business; we now have a new program called "The Everyday Rock Star." That program involves stats and assessments, we're going full-on corporate now. We are offering corporations the ability to measure their employees' impact, productivity, communication skills, and other parameters based on science pillars and how they improve. I'm in deep, there's no turning back now.

When I speak, I call it rock show disguised as a keynote speech. My drums are still there, I play a P!nk medley, a Billy Idol medley, a Cher medley, and a Foreigner medley, because I toured with all those bands. I play a drum solo and I use drumming and music as a metaphor for corporate performance.

MD: Who have you spoken to in your recent speaking gigs?

MS: I've spoken to everyone from American Express to Microsoft to Dell to IBM to McDonalds and Blue Cross/Blue Shield. I speak to everyone across the board, large and small. I'm so grateful to have spoken for many of the Fortune 500 companies. But it's not just big companies, I spoke for the National Association of Realtors in front of 20 people in a boathouse in Maine. A few years back, I spoke for Jessica Alba's company in a room the size of my living room.

I am still playing, and I have an All-Star band. I think the only person that could get me back on the road

would be if Abe Laboriel Jr. broke his arm and McCartney called. I think I would drop speaking for McCartney, but that's about it. I've played with such great artists in my 32 years of touring, I feel so grateful. I've had the most amazing experiences, but you want to evolve, and the speaking career is just part of my evolution.

MD: I was a road warrior for 15 years, and its hard work, and it can be a real grind.

MS: Actually, I never looked at it as a grind, I got into the flow. For me it was really kind of easy because I really did love it. I loved the people I worked with, I loved the band and the singers, I loved the people on the bus… Especially with P!nk, they were all my dear friends and I just adored everybody. So I never felt the grind of it, it was actually pretty simple. It was simpler than what I do now. On the road you're always on the same schedule. You get on the bus after the gig, you get up in the morning, you have the day to yourself, you go to sound check, you do the gig. I don't want to sound like it was arduous because it wasn't. It was exciting, it was fantastic, and it was a lot simpler than getting up in front of a corporate audience who doesn't know who the hell you are! When I speak, I need to educate, entertain, and engage all these people for an hour by myself, and they have no idea what to expect. Frankly, it is vastly more challenging that touring. It's all on me now, having been a drummer for all these artists I didn't realize how easy it was to hide behind the drums. Don't get me wrong, I always played every note like it matterd, that's one of the concepts in my speeches. It's not what we play but how we play it, every single note matters. If you attach a purpose to every note, every word, every thought, every action, then you become more passionate. Then the passion feeds the purpose, and the purpose feeds the passion. I call that cycle of engagement, it all matters. How the hell else do you think I was able to play "So What" by P!nk over 800 times!

I still play, I've got my All-Star band and I still do sessions, and I do some teaching too, but I do miss the road. I just saw a Foreigner, I played with Foreigner on and off for 20 years. And I don't think I missed the road so much as when I saw that bunch of sweaty blokes on stage just playing their butts off. I miss that!!! But the speaking career feels like where I am meant to be right now.

Photos by Lisa Skarell

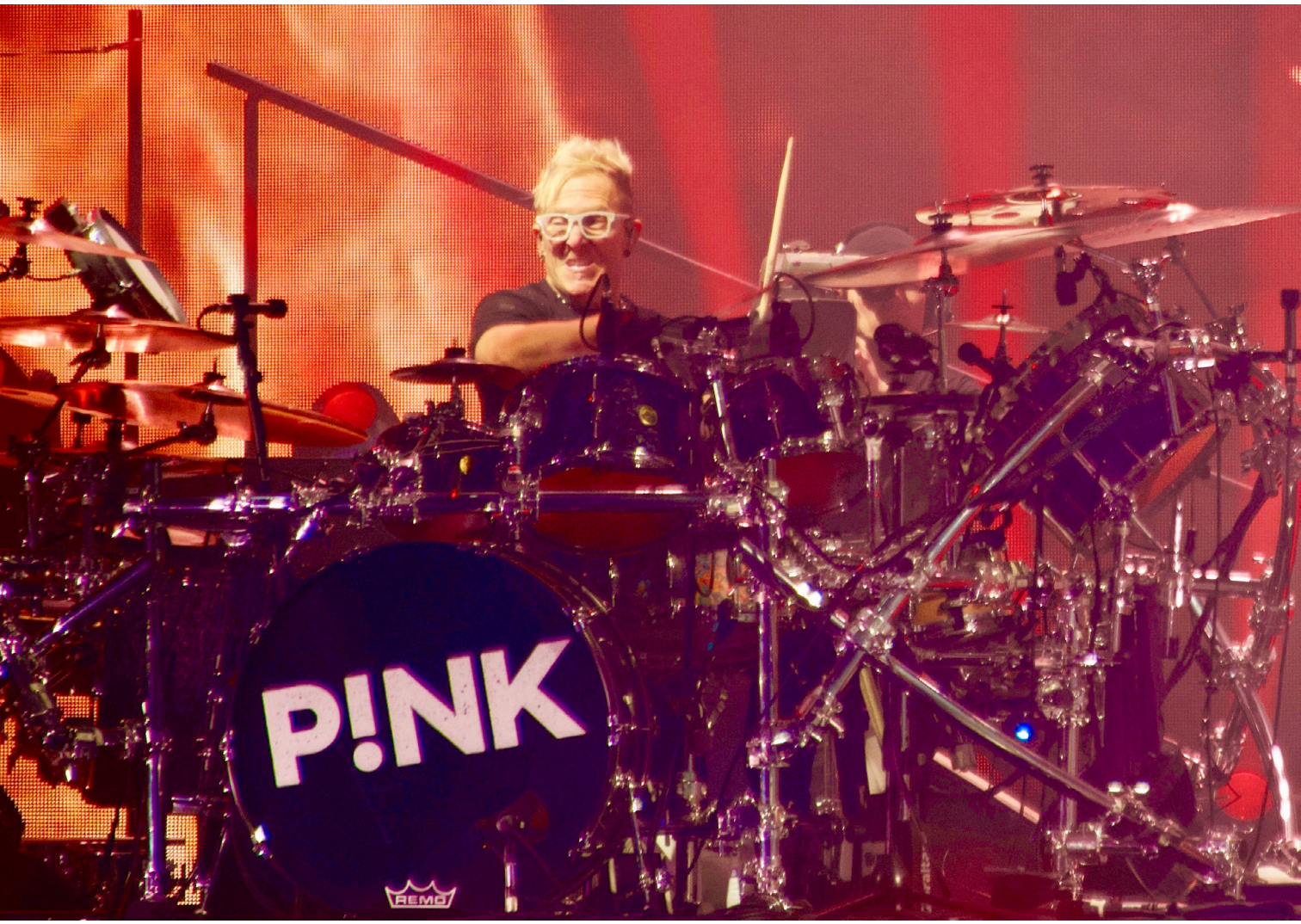
MD: Who is in your All-Star band?

MS: The band is called the All-Star Royal Jam and the core band is Kim Bullard (Elton John, Yes, Santana, Kenny Loggins, Heart,) Eric Dover (Slash, Alice Cooper and Jellyfish,) Ashley Reed (Cher, Filter,) August Zadra (Styx, Jeff Scott Soto, Jason Scheff, Jim Peterik, Nuno Bettencourt,) and Ben Morrow (Cher,) and we usually bring in a guest singer.

MD: You mentioned sessions, do you have an active recording schedule?

MS: I do my share of sessions, but the session industry has changed. Bands used to tour to promote their records, now bands give away their music to promote their touring because touring is the revenue stream. Because of that change, I do a lot of sessions for private clients who send me tracks over the internet, but as we know there are a lot of drummers are doing that. I've got a recording setup, and I share my studio with two of my best friends Eric Gobel who's an amazing engineer, and Julian Coryell who is a fantastic guitar player. I always have a drumset set up and mic'd. I don't really go after the sessions like Kenny Aronoff, who is one of my dear friends. Kenny is still really immersed in the session world, I'm not that way at all, I'm really immersed in the speaking world and everything else is secondary. I love recording, it's always been a joy. I used to do a lot of producing and even underscoring, I used to do a lot of commercials and that sort of thing, but my focus has narrowed because what I'm doing now requires extreme focus.

My book called *The Attitude Equation* came out in April, and it has interviews with people like Judd Apatow and Howie Mandel, I also talk to some of my favorite drummers and dear friends from Antonio Sanchez, Matt Sorum, Gregg Bissonnette, to Bozzio, Rich Redmond and Carmine. I talk to all these successful people about how attitude has not only shaped their successes but also shaped their failures. We talk about how powerful attitude is because your attitude is what drives your behavior, think about the power and the leverage of that! Your behavior is what determines the consequences or outcomes of your life. A + B = C (Attitude + Behavior = Consequences.) That's the attitude equation co-written by Dr. Jim Samuels who is the mentor of my life. It's his equation, but that's what I speak about in my speeches, that's the foundation of my current speech called "Hacking the Rock-Star Attitude." I throw this whole rock star DNA back into the audience's lap and get them feeling like rock stars, it's very interactive. I have people doing interactive clapping exercises to demonstrate active listening and all sorts of cool stuff.



MD: Speaking of listening, after 32 years of touring, how are your ears?

MS: I teach every one of my drum students about the importance of protecting your hearing!!! At 15 years old I had tinnitus, but I was fastidious about protecting my hearing. Even if I played one song with a band without protecting my hearing, I would have intense tinnitus, and it ended up taking its toll.

When I talk about hearing loss to anyone who understands frequencies, I tell them that down at 4K which is where the snare drum and the click track is, I've lost 60 dB. I had no idea

how bad my hearing had gotten until I got it checked. Then I hooked up with Widex hearing aids, and I've been wearing them ever since. They came out with the SmartRIC which has four microphones and a computer chip inside each hearing aid. They are controlled via Bluetooth so I can actually listen to music and hear conversations on my mobile. The SmartRIC adjusts to the environment you're in, it's pretty damn amazing. I was at the point where if I was in a restaurant and someone wasn't looking right at me, I couldn't understand a word they were saying. I kept on saying 'What? What?' I kept turning up the TV louder and louder, and I was becoming a nuisance to people until I got the Widex hearing aids. They really did make me a lot easier to be around.

I loved the people I worked with, I loved the band and the singers, I loved the people on the bus… Especially with P!nk, they were all my dear friends and I just adored everybody. So I never felt the grind of it, it was actually pretty simple. It was simpler than what I do now.

I was actually moved to tears one time. I'll never forget when I first got my hearing aids I was in my bathroom and I put them in, suddenly, I could hear the birds chirping outside. Can you imagine that feeling? I thought '*Oh my God, I had no idea what I've been missing!*' Then I put on the hearing aids and there was a whole world going on around me that I was unaware of. It was profound and emotional for me; I'm almost getting choked up now.

MD: Was it both ears?

MS: Yes, both ears had exactly the same hearing loss. When I put in the hearing aids, it was like a new planet for me. If I can use a metaphor of another sense, it was kind of like I had been seeing in black and white, and then I put in the hearing aids and I was seeing in color.

MD: Do you know what the loss came from, or what caused it?

MS: I think part of it was just genetic, and like I said, 4K is right about where the snare drum and the click track is. Although I have been wearing molded in-ears since 1998, everything was still pretty loud in my in-ears and you're getting the same frequencies over and over and over. After a while it's not typical for a human to be exposed to those kind of volume levels and that kind of repetitive frequency. I think it was a combination of everything.

MD: Do you think wearing in-ears had anything to do anything to do with it?

MS: What I love about in-ears is that they seal out all the external noise. I can actually control the volume and I've always tried to keep the volume down in my in-ears. The problem with in- ears is the same with wearing your Bluetooth headphones, people crank them up way too high. I have always been very conscientious to keep my in-ear volume as low as I possibly could. But even keeping the volume as low as I possibly could, it's still rock 'n' roll and I'm still sitting behind a set of drums. No matter how well they seal, there is still sound leaking in from the stage and from the drums, so if you're conscientious about the volume of your in-ears they can be an absolute asset, but if you're cranking them too loud, you're still gonna be destroying your hearing and creating potential hearing loss.

MD: My audiologist has told me about his concern that in-ears are sealing too well and creating such a closed chamber that there is no escape for the air, and the added pressure of that small, sealed chamber is creating the atmosphere for damage to your ears.

MS: I understand that concern, but now you can port them, and you can control the amount of porting. However, as a drummer if they don't seal, I'm getting so much extraneous noise, so the sealing actually helps lower the overall volume for me. Then I can control the volume in my in- ears. But I understand your audiologist's concern because as I said, most people just crank them too loud. But the difference between wearing them and not wearing them is crazy to me. As I said, if I don't wear hearing protection and play with a band, within one song my ears are buzzing like a swarm of cicadas.

MD: Did you ever wear custom molded ear plugs?

MS: Sure, JH Audio Roxanne's are my jam. Now when I do my speeches, I wear my molded in ears but the only thing I have in them are my music tracks and a click track, I don't have the drums and I don't have my voice in my in-ears. When you're on stage with a big act everyone has their own custom in-ear mix, so it's beautiful. Now I'm just trying to block out noise and it's very strange because I do my whole speech with fully sealed molded in-ears, but I'm used to it now.

MD: How well do these new Widex SmartRIC hearing aids work?

MS: For me it's a profound. The Widex SmartRIC's have a computer in each hearing aid, there are four microphones in each hearing aid, and they're completely adaptive. You can program them any way you want them to be adaptive in any environment. They will detect if you're in an environment with a very loud background, you can control the front, back, and side because they're computerized, you have control over what you like and how you want to control the frequency curve. There is a frequency curve for music, a frequency curve for restaurants and various other environments. I keep mine set to the general overall frequency curve and let them do their thing, it's been a life changer for me.

I always played every note like it mattered, that's one of the concepts in my speeches. It's not what we play but how we play it, every single note matters. If you attach a purpose to every note, every word, every thought, every action, then you become more passionate. Then the passion feeds the purpose, and the purpose feeds the passion.

MD: Can you wear the hearing aids and play?

MS: Here's the interesting thing about that. I don't wear them in practice but when I go to a concert, because they're intelligent, they actually start blocking out the loud volume from the concert. I didn't even realize they would do that until I forgot to take them out when I went to a show. I realized I had them in and they were reducing the volume of the show. So I can keep them in instead of putting ear plugs in, and I don't get the

horrible tinnitus, they're smarter than I am.

MD: I have been wearing custom molded plugs since I was 12 or so, whenever I record, I wear GK Ultraphones, I wear custom plugs at shows, clubs, on planes, and busses, and I *still* have some left ear hearing loss and tinnitus. However, (importantly) both of my parents wore hearing aids too, so my loss might also be genetic. But I talk to drummers every day and all day, and so many of us have some left ear damage from the snare drum, hi-hats, and crash. I wonder what else we can do?

MS: I found out that the air pods actually cancel noise very well, because for me that's just as critical. I keep them with me all the time, even when I'm driving. I travel so much on planes and that is really damaging to your hearing too. It's not always loud noise, sometimes it's the constant noise like on a plane. I used to wear the full-blown noise cancelling headphones on planes, but I found out that air pods do that very well too. I don't want to lose any more hearing because it's already compromised enough.

I'll never forget when I first got my hearing aids I was in my bathroom and I put them in, suddenly, I could hear the birds chirping outside. Can you imagine that feeling? I thought 'Oh my God, I had no idea what I've been missing!'

MD: My molded plugs are never more than a reach away; people don't realize how loud the world has become.

MS: Especially if you are in someplace like New York City. One of the things I noticed when I went to New York City a few months back is when I walked out of my hotel… it's so loud there, everybody's honking and yelling. I could never live in a place like that.

MD: What else were you not hearing that you now realize you weren't hearing?

MS: Everything! My big challenge was that I'd have to crank up the TV really loud, but I was missing conversations too. I just got tired of saying "What?" so many times a day. There were times in conversation that I just would listen and try to get the missing words from context, so I wasn't annoying people so much.

MD: And as drummers we are really good lip readers, from having to read the lips of other musicians on stage.

MS: Absolutely! But conversation was the big one for me. My biggest impetus for wanting to get hearing aids was when I realized how much I was missing in conversation. If you are standing right in front of me, I still can hear and understand you completely, even with the amount of loss that I have. But the moment I go out in public or the moment that you turn around, forget it.

That's probably the biggest thing I can tell people, you don't know what you've been missing until you know what you've been missing. You may think it's embarrassing, you may not want to deal with it, but don't be foolish!

MD: Did you talk to any other musicians about you hearing loss to find out what their experiences were?

MS: No, I just started to notice that people like Jonathan Cain and Kelly Keagy all had that little tube going into their ears. I was seeing that little tube on so many people, and you don't know unless you know. I just started noticing that a lot of musicians are wearing hearing aids. I wear glasses so you really can't see them, but I don't mind, and I'm actually proud of them. If anybody ever asked me about them, I'd say, *'Yeah, I wear hearing aids, I'm a damn drummer, I've been a drummer my whole life and I was on the road for 32 years, what do you expect?'* But no, I didn't really consult with anybody except for the fact that I started really noticing a lot of other people wearing them. I just realized that a friend of mine who's a forensic accountant was wearing hearing aids, and I never realized it. A lot of more people are wearing them, and the awareness has been heightened and I think that's a blessing for people. Why go through life having substandard hearing when it's so easy to get some Widex hearing aids and hear better, why torture yourself?

MD: Did you check out, or do you use any other hearing aids?

MS: Widex makes different levels of hearing aids and that's what makes them great. They have different models that are more affordable at different levels. I've tried a few different ones, I'm wearing the smart SmartRIC, and apparently, they're coming out with some new super high-end ones that I can't wait to try. I tried the ones below the Smart RIC's and frankly I didn't notice that much difference from the SmartRIC. They also have some that go directly in your ears that don't have the computer and Bluetooth access, and that only have one setting, but they're invisible. I will wear those if I really don't want anybody to see that I'm wearing them. Those sound a little more hollow. I obviously prefer the full computerized ones with all four microphones because the inner ear ones only have one microphone, but it's great because you can wear hearing aids and you cannot see them because they're buried deep inside your ears.

MD: Are they comfortable?

MS: When I have them in, I'm not even aware that I'm wearing them. But when I take them off it feels like someone just put a sock over my head because the hearing aid is compensating for my 60dB loss at 4K. It all comes back to you don't know what you're missing until you know what you're missing.

MD: Besides the 4K loss, did you have any other hearing loss in the spectrum?

MS: I have some high-end loss, but it wasn't that severe. My frequency spectrum is not that good past 12K but that's also part of aging. As you age, you do lose your high end. I remember being tested when I was 18 and I could hear up to 19 K and I didn't realize how lucky I was back then. Fortunately, my tinnitus is not that extreme, unless I irritate my hearing by not protecting it. However, I am very susceptible to getting very bad tinnitus, but mine will go away. However, a few of my friends have really nasty tinnitus and it's emotionally taxing on them because they can't sleep.

MD: Do hearing aids help with tinnitus?

MS: They don't really need to help with my tinnitus, they just bring me everything that's missing. I don't really notice the tinnitus when I have them on because my loss of hearing is

so heightened that the tinnitus isn't that bad. But it's always there so it's just something that I live with, and that I'm used to. However, a good audiologist will learn how to compensate for anything that you're missing or anything that you need. I know that Widex has some different apps that they use with hearing aids and tinnitus.

MD: I commend you for talking about hearing loss, because musicians don't want to talk about it, I don't know why.

MS: I can't talk about it enough! When you have hearing loss, you can't get it back. Hopefully within the next 20 years they'll be able to do something to restore hearing, but at this point they're not very close.

MD: Why do you think musicians don't want to talk about it?

MS: I don't know. I guess people feel embarrassed by it. For me, I use it as an opportunity to stand on my soapbox and remind people about it, because I just believe it's so critical. There's nothing to be embarrassed about, it's not personal. If there is a complete lack of awareness and an unwillingness to even admit there's a problem, that's just denial. I think that part of it is denial and part of it is embarrassment, and it's there's nothing to be embarrassed about, we're drummers, protect your ears!

MD: Is hearing loss as rampant with musicians at your level as I might think it is?

MS: I think it's more rampant than we know. There are a lot of people that have really butchered their hearing, and they either don't want to admit it, or they don't know. It's a lack of knowledge because (again) you don't know what you don't know. I didn't know about my loss until I got my hearing tested, and then I put on the hearing aids and was amazed at what I had been missing. That's probably the biggest thing I can tell people, you don't know what you've been missing until you know what you've been missing. You may think it's embarrassing, you may not want to deal with it, but don't be foolish! You're depriving yourself of potentially having a much better life, a much more fulfilling life, and a much more broadened life. If you broaden any of your senses, that heightens the experience of your life. That's what it did for me.

MD: I remember I was talking with Peter Erskine a while back about tinnitus, and he said, "Just imagine never being able to experience silence ever again." That really hit me!

MS: But remember that tinnitus is a different classification of hearing loss that frequency hearing loss, so I don't know exactly how a company like Widex would accommodate tinnitus. I'm just glad that I can hear at an even plane when I have my hearing aids in.

MD: What would you advise young musicians, (or non-musicians) to do to try to take care of their ears?

MS: WEAR HEARING PROTECTION! That's all I ask people to do. Custom molded plugs, non-custom plugs, even those foam plugs. Just stick them in. They cut everything equally so you're still hearing everything you would hear, just at a lower volume and that preserves the damage that can happen. It's really worth it. Be aware! When you're traveling on a plane, protect your hearing. If you're on a five-hour flight, you're hearing five hours of constant jet engines. People are unaware of how much damage that is causing, so pay attention. If you've got an old loud car or you're driving a Porsche, Lamborghini, Corvette, or

an old Mustang; those suckers are loud, wear hearing protection while you're driving. I know it's doesn't sound cool but just do it.

I love protecting my hearing, it's become something that if I don't do it, I feel really vulnerable. So yeah, I'm a little codependent on my hearing protection and my hearing aids at this point, I admit it, I want to be the poster child for hearing protection. Young musicians don't realize how uncool it is to lose their hearing, it's way cooler to use hearing protection.

Especially with young drummers, I'm kind of stickler for really good tempo so one of my things is when you're rehearsing, rehearse every song with a metronome so you're dialing in the tempo. I did that when I got the Stevie Nicks gig. When I got the Stevie Nicks gig, Waddy Wachtel was the musical director he told me Stevie hates click tracks. Therefore, I played every song and every rehearsal for five weeks with a click track in my in-ears only. I did that so we could dial in the tempos and so everybody else developed muscle memory of the tempo. I was trying to be in service to the band above and beyond what they even knew. When we got to the shows the tempos were so dialed in and everybody was so used to those tempos because we had rehearsed it at the same tempo every day multiple times a day. So I'm a stickler for tempo as well. But it works beautifully with ear protection because I put my molded in-ears in, and I listen to the tempo and make sure we're playing every song at the same tempo every single rehearsal and every single gig.

MD: How did your career in drumming set you up for your career in speaking?

MS: As I explained earlier, I did 1000 drum clinics and all I really did was take that format and transfer it to the corporate and collegiate worlds. I made it more content based and less drumming based. I did a lot of research on what the corporate world needed, I always do pre- conference calls to determine if I'm speaking to salespeople, IT people, or an aggregate group of everybody. Sometimes a company will bring in the entire group, everyone from the blue-collar folks to the executives, to the C-Suite people. Then I customize what I'm doing to what they need and who I'm speaking to. I customize my content around their particular needs and what their goals and challenges are. I really do my homework. It's a lot of preparation but it's super high energy, and it's still super rock'n'roll. The first corporate gig I did, I showed up in a suit and tie and I quickly realized that they wanted me for me. The next one I did, I showed up with another jacket that had the sleeves cut off. Now I just show up as rock'n'roll as I possibly can be because that's what they want and that's what they hire me for. They may not expect a guy who's articulate and intelligent and has content relevance, they expect a rock and roller dude that's going to tell road stories, but that's the surprise. When I talk about my cancer survival it gets very emotional, I have people in tears. I take people on a journey. I've worked very hard at this, and I'm very proud of it.

Whether I'm talking to my daughter, playing drums on stage, giving a speech, or even doing an interview. I believe that we are all here to be of service.

I love what I do, I realized many years ago that everything I do is to be of service. Whether I'm talking to my daughter, playing drums on stage, giving a speech, or even doing an interview. I believe that we are all here to be of service and have the greatest impact so anything I can do to be of service to as many people as I can, I always do. I think that if you look at your life that way, it's a lot more fulfilling. You should go out of your way to give, rather than to receive. I love to give as much as I possibly can.

MD: I couldn't agree more.

The Versatile Virtuoso: Joe Dyson's Journey Through Jazz

By Herman Jackson

Joe Dyson is a name that resonates deeply within the jazz community, even if he doesn't have one particular band to call home. Instead, Joe has built his reputation playing with a veritable who's who of jazz greats, moving seamlessly between genres and leaving his distinct rhythmic imprint wherever he goes. Whether it's touring with Pat Metheny, laying down grooves in New Orleans, or exploring new rhythmic possibilities, Joe Dyson is the modern drummer's drummer—fluent in tradition yet always pushing boundaries.

MD: When did you start playing drums?

JD: I was just a baby when I first picked up sticks. My parents got me this tiny drum kit when I was about two and a half, and it was all over from there. My mom says I was always tapping on pots and pans in the kitchen. She knew I had a knack for rhythm early on.

MD: What was your first real gig?

JD: I started playing in church. My dad played the organ, and I'd be sitting there with him, tapping away on the organ bench. It was like I had no choice—the drums chose me, not the other way around. Eventually, I got to play for real during service, and that's when things got serious.

MD: Who were your early influences?

JD: My family was my first influence, no question. My uncle, John Dyson Jr., was the first drummer I really saw up close. I'd watch him play in church and just be mesmerized by how effortlessly he commanded the room.

My influences quickly expanded, particularly within the New Orleans music scene. Derrick Tab, Jenard Andrews, and Sammy Cyrus— they are legendary brass band snare drummers who shaped my understanding of rhythm. Those guys are the heartbeat of New Orleans. Derrick's snare work was like nothing I'd ever heard, and Jenard, with NewBreed Brass Band, redefined what a snare drummer could do as a bandleader. Sammy Cyrus, another influential brass band snare drummer, opened my eyes to the power of syncopation and groove in a brass band setting. All these drummers gave me a whole new perspective on how to weave intricate rhythms into the music. And then there's Adonis Rose— he was a crucial figure in my journey. Adonis was the first guy I studied with at NOCCA Riverfront, even before I officially got there. I learned about him through my friend Khris Royal. His sharp, intentional sound blew me away. He had this incredible dexterity and control over the drums. After Katrina, Adonis even gave me my first Zildjian cymbals—a 20" Pre-Aged Dry Ride and a 22" Medium Constantinople. I'm forever indebted to him. Then there is Dana Hawkins, he's an incredible drummer from the gospel, funk, fusion, and jazz scenes. I first met Dana at Berklee when I was 15. Hearing him play changed my life, Dana looked after me when I moved to Massachusetts after Katrina. He's truly my brother.

MD: What is your thought process when creating your drum parts?

JD: I've always approached drumming from both a groove and a melodic perspective. It's about finding that sweet spot where you're holding the groove but also contributing to the melody of the music. In jazz, it's especially important because the drums

I've always approached drumming from both a groove and a melodic perspective. It's about finding that sweet spot where you're holding the groove but also contributing to the melody of the music.

Photos Courtesy of Joe Dyson

aren't just keeping time—they're part of the conversation. I was heavily influenced by people like Max Roach and Tony Williams, who showed me that the drums could sing. It's not just about playing loud or fast—it's about shaping the music."

MD: What kind of drums and cymbals are you using now?

JD: My current kit is from Canopus; they are beautiful drums. It's their RFM series, and I've been using them on the road with Pat Metheny. It's a larger kit than what I started with, but I don't always use the full setup. Right now, I'm playing a 12" rack tom, 14" and 16" floor toms, and a 22" bass drum. The snare is a 5.5x14.

I love Zildjian cymbals! I've been playing a 22" Kerope from Zildjian, and it's just so versatile. Sometimes I'll add a chain for a little extra texture, but even without it, the cymbal sounds amazing. I also like the Pre-Aged Dry Ride—it's got that old-school vibe that I love. Adonis Rose gifted me my first set of Zildjians, and I've been hooked ever since."

MD: Do you tune your drums to specific pitches?

JD: Absolutely! I actually tune my drums to a minor triad, which gives them a melodic quality. I didn't always do this, though. I used to tune in fourths, like Max Roach did, but after hearing my teacher Herman [Jackson] tune his drums like a bugle call, I started experimenting with triads. It gives the kit this bluesy, soulful tone that I love.

MD: How do you play in time so well?

JD: (Laughing) I guess that comes from playing in church and with so many different bands growing up. Playing in New Orleans teaches you how to lock in—especially with all the syncopation and rhythms floating around. You can't help but develop a solid sense of time when you're surrounded by so much groove. But it's also about listening. I always try to tune in to what the bass player is doing, especially in jazz. The drums and bass have to be in constant dialogue—if we're not locked in, the whole thing falls apart.

Playing in New Orleans teaches you how to lock in–especially with all the syncopation and rhythms floating around. You can't help but develop a solid sense of time when you're surrounded by so much groove.

MD: Who are your favorite bass players?

JD: There are so many… Max Moran, who I play with in the Bridge Trio, is definitely one of my favorites. Then there's Dezron Douglas, Vicente Archer, and Harish Raghavan—all monsters on the bass. I've had the pleasure of playing with them, and every time, it's like a masterclass. I'd love to play with Meshell Ndegeocello, Christian McBride, Matt Garrison, and Buster Williams though. I just played with James Genus recently, and man, I want to do more with him. And Rufus Reid—that guy is a legend. I'd love to be in a room with him and see what happens."

MD: What has it been like touring with Pat Metheny?

JD: Touring with Pat has been amazing. The first time I got the email from him, I thought it was spam! It wasn't until James Francies told me that Pat was really trying to get in touch with me that I realized what was happening. Playing with Pat Metheny is a dream come true. The crowds are huge, and the energy is incredible. Pat is a master. He treats every show like it could be his last, and that inspires me to give it my all every night.

MD: What's your favorite recording that you are on?

JD: I think one of my favorites is with Dr. Lonnie Smith. Playing with him was a spiritual experience—he just pulled things out of me that I didn't even know were there. That's the beauty of playing with great musicians—they elevate your game.

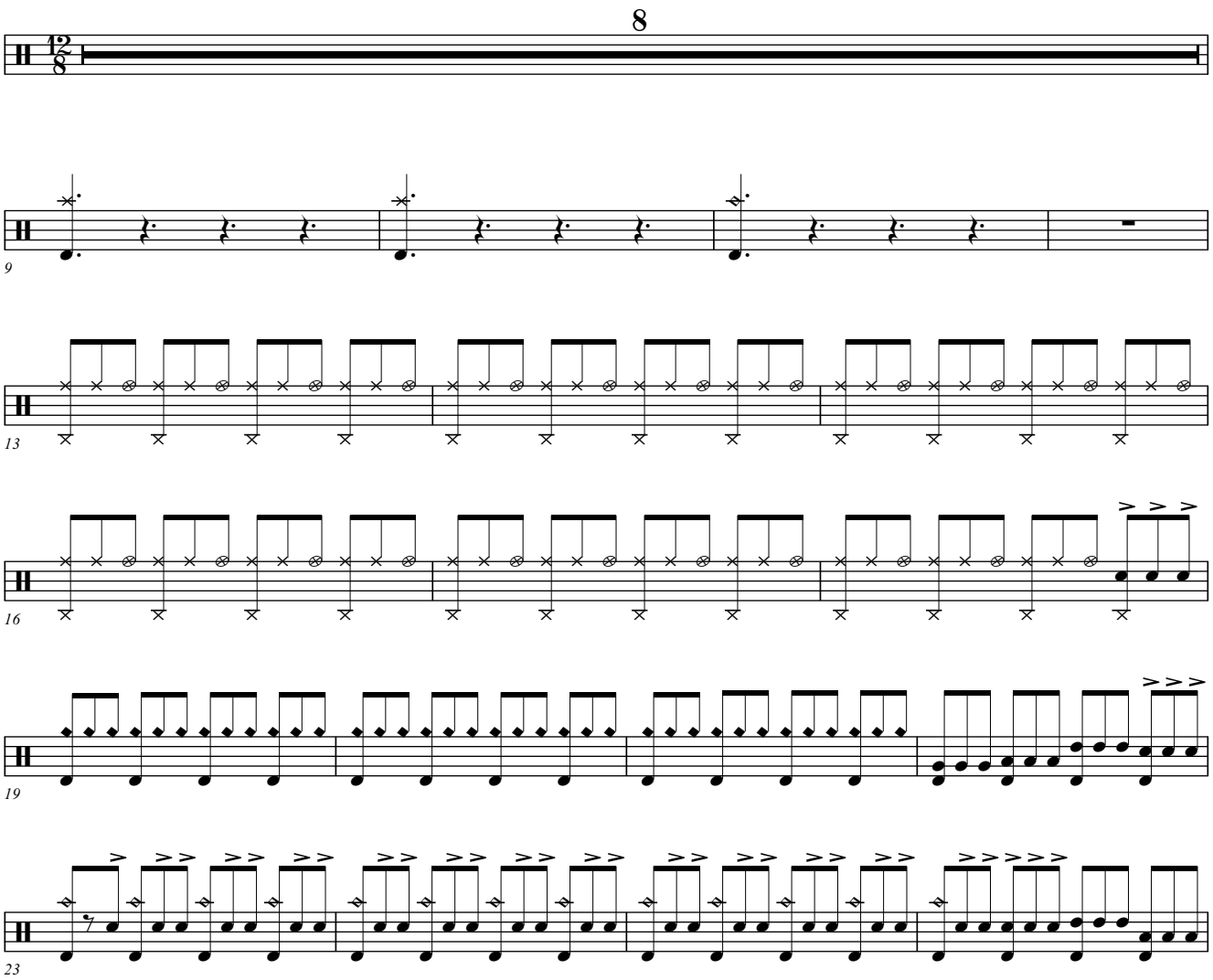
Joe Dyson may not be tied to one specific band, but that's what makes him such an exciting drummer. He's a musical chameleon, effortlessly shifting between styles and leaving his mark on every stage he graces. Whether he's playing in a jazz trio, laying down funky grooves, or touring with legends like Pat Metheny, Joe Dyson's drumming is always evolving—much like the man himself.

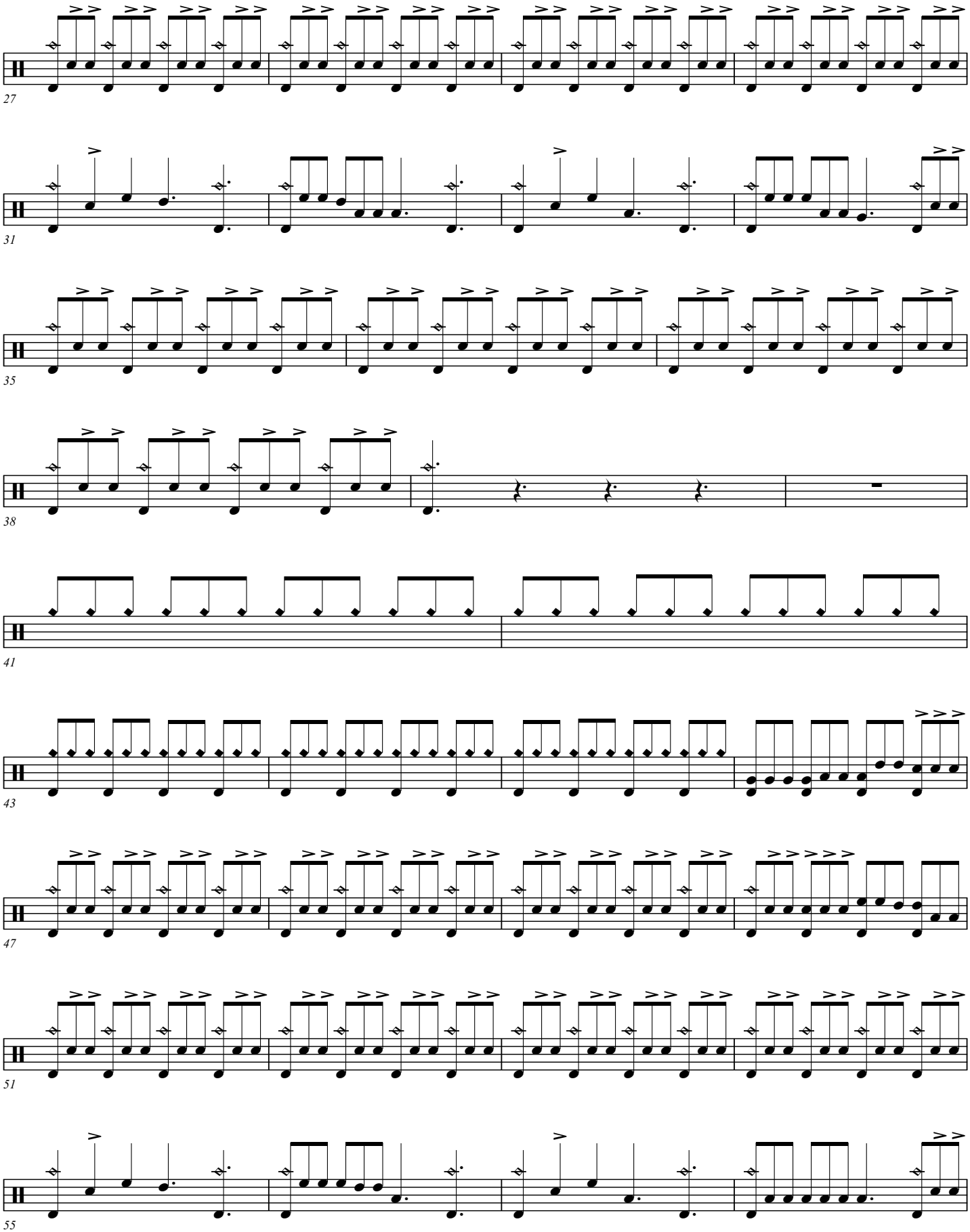
Boston's "Foreplay/Long Time" drummer Sib Hashian

Transcription by Marc Atkinson

Written in 1969 by Tom Scholz, "Foreplay/Long Time" was the first song recorded by Boston. Initially recorded with the band's original drummer, Jim Masdea, the studio insisted on replacing him, leading Tom to recruit Sib Hashian. For the recording, Sib was tasked with transcribing and playing the original drum parts as they were initially recorded. The studio believed a new drummer could bring a better overall feel to the music, a decision that proved successful. Sib's groove brought a distinct energy and style that elevated the song, as evident in this iconic Boston track.

This song is not only a true classic but also a fantastic introduction to reading music and refining your drumming groove. Personally, it holds a special place in my heart, as it was one of the first songs I ever learned to play on the drums.

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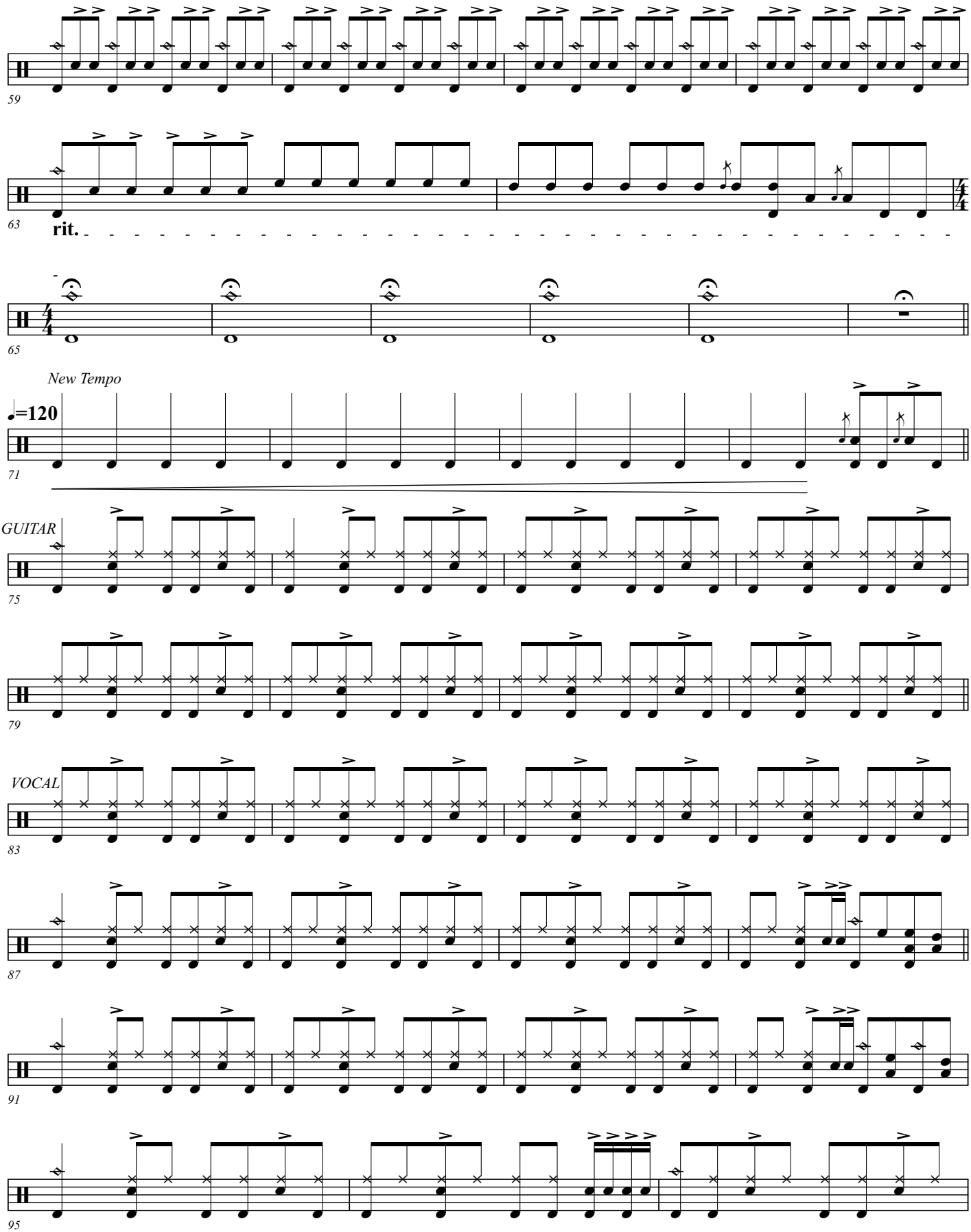
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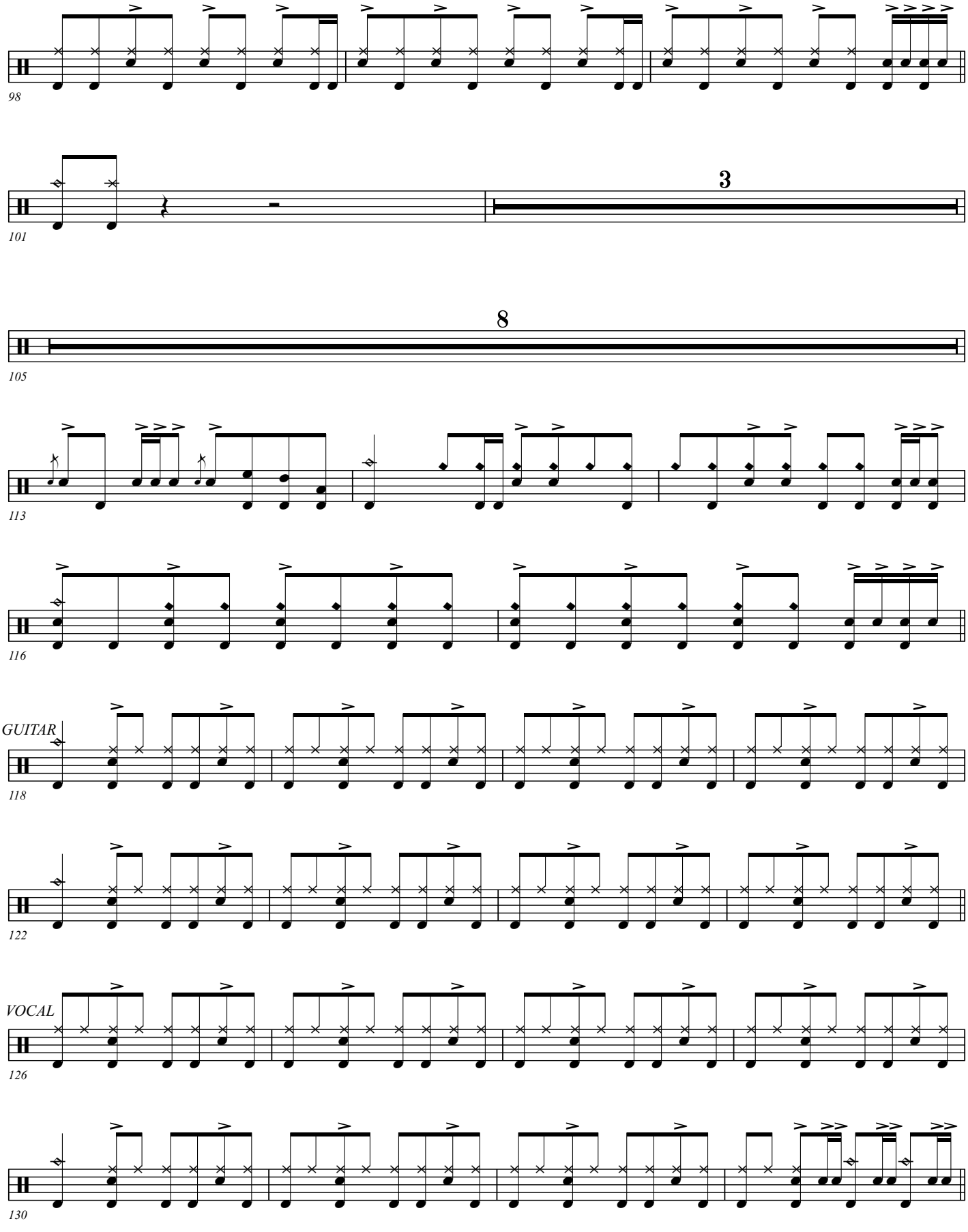
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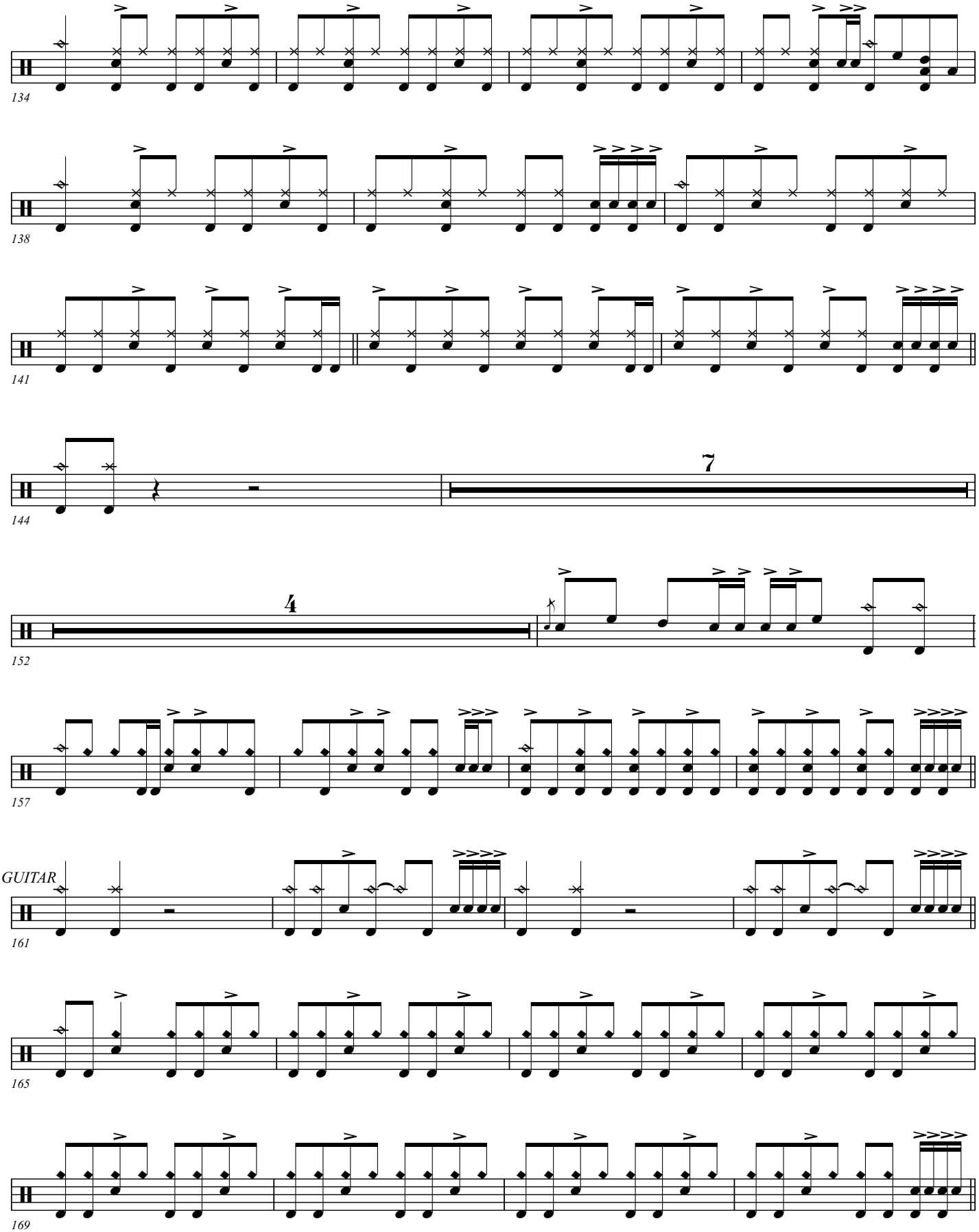
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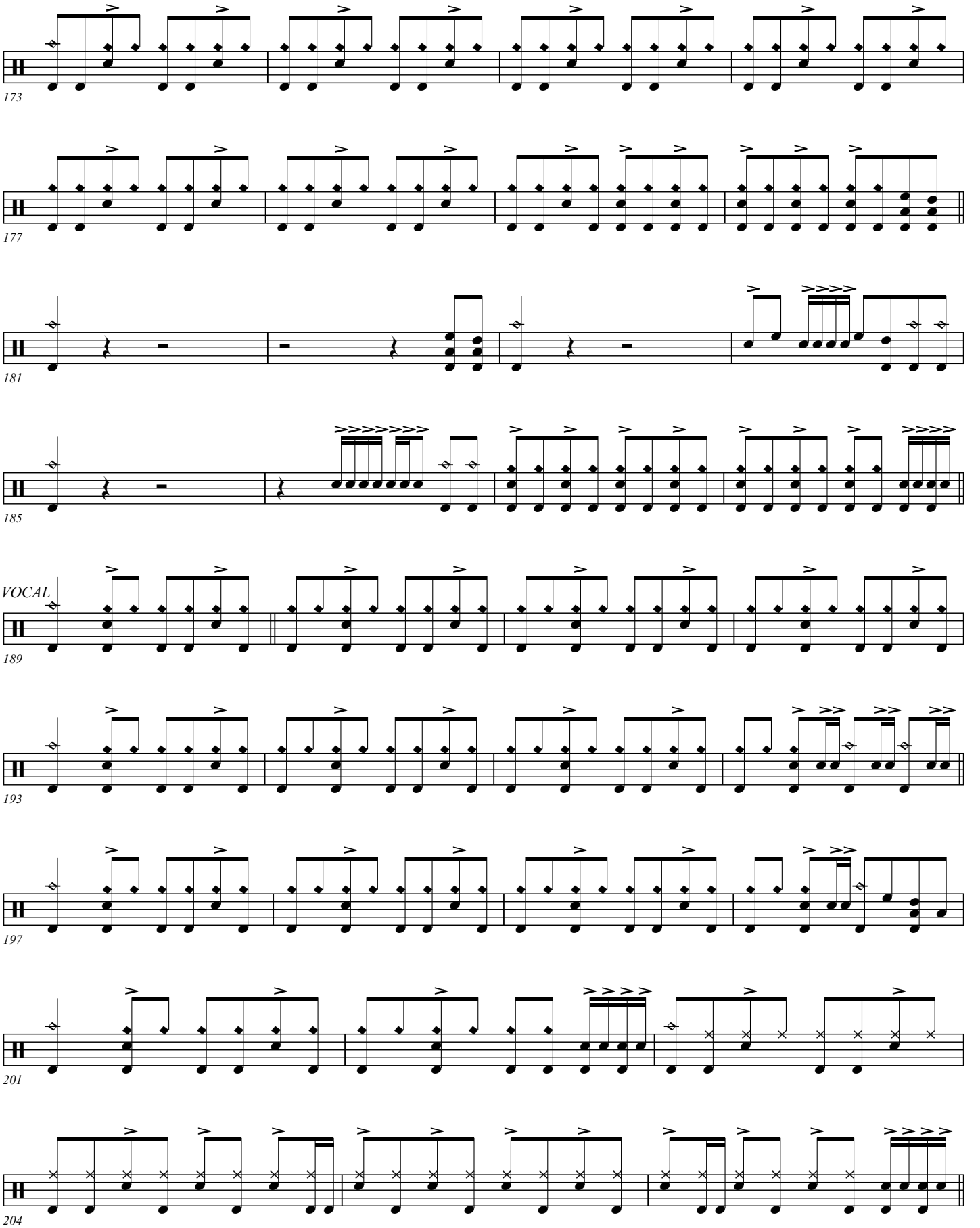
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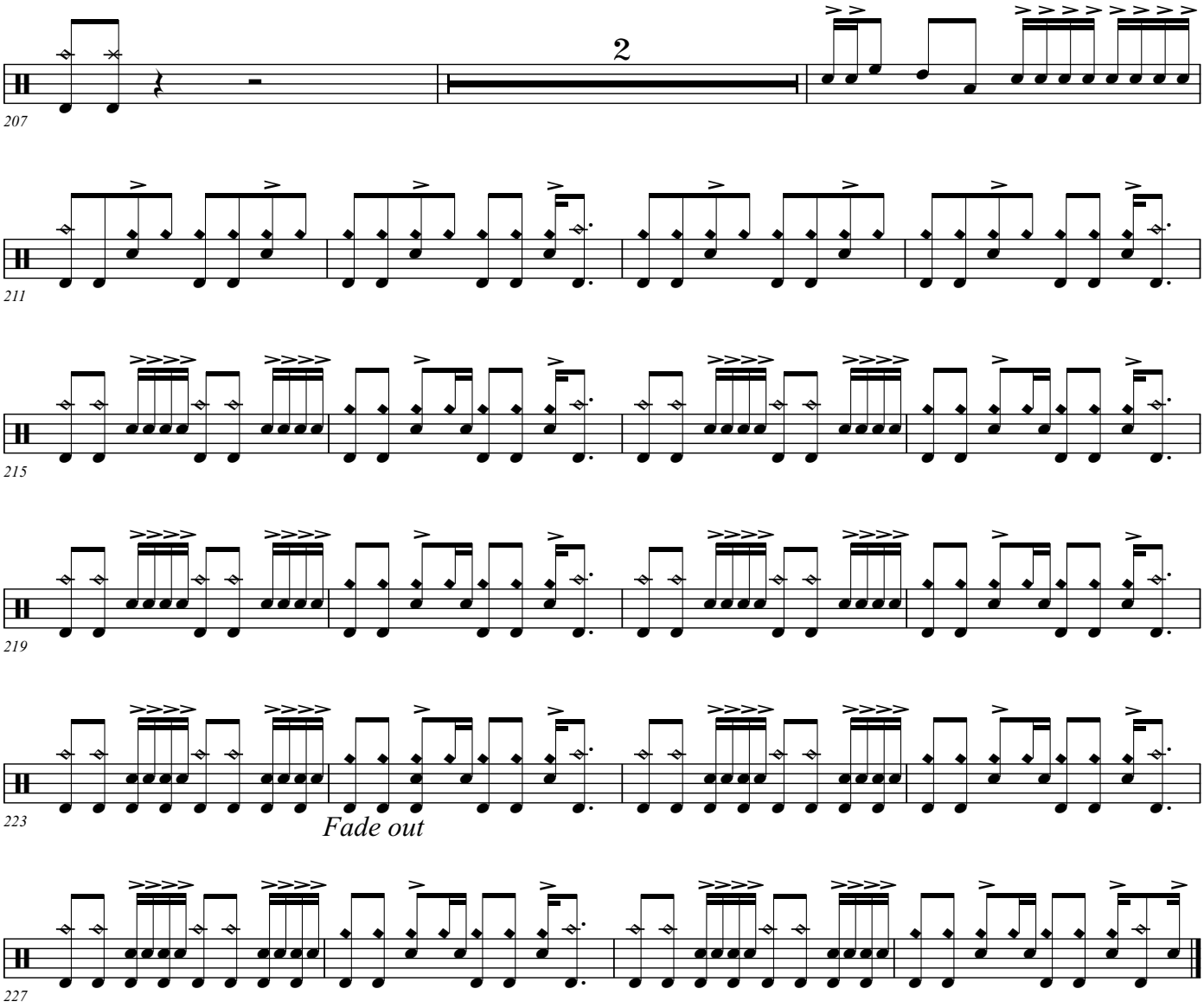
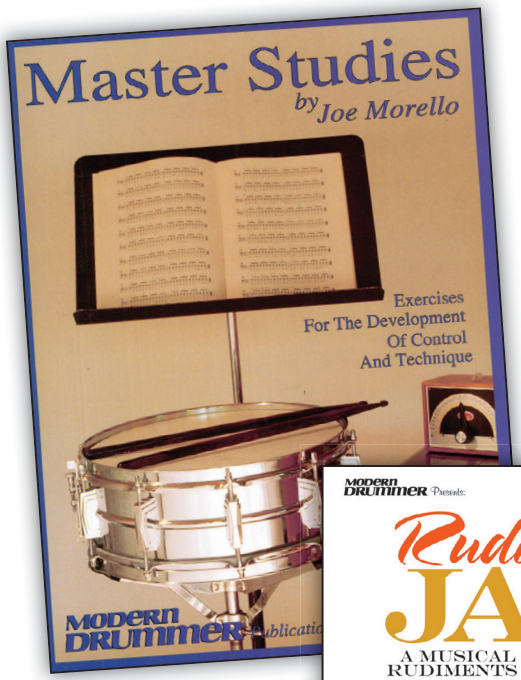


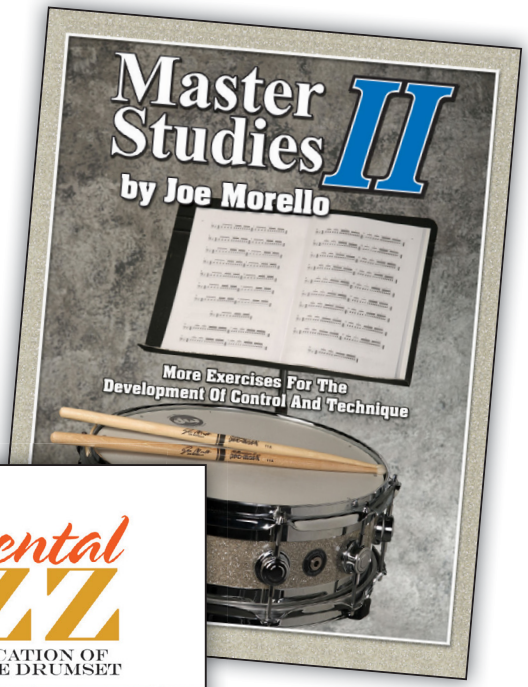
Marc Atkinson, a dedicated musician, honed his craft under the guidance of the renowned Gary Chaffee. Now calling Las Vegas home, Marc is on the brink of unveiling his labor of love—a comprehensive transcription book that promises to captivate music enthusiasts worldwide.

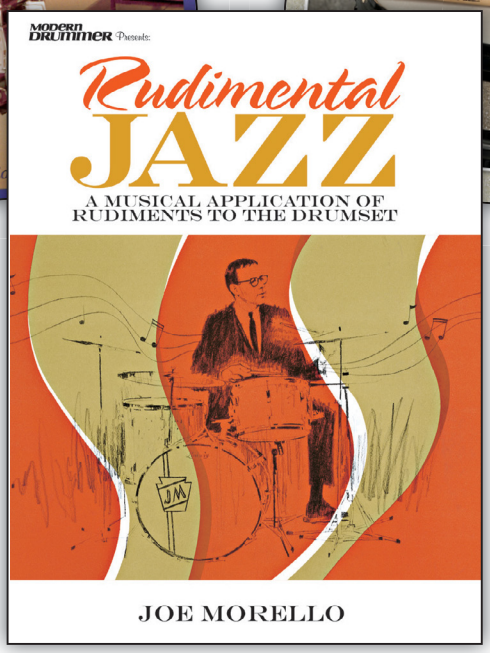
Check out Marc's *Modern Drummer* profile page at moderndrummer.com

MODERN DRUMMER

The Joe Morello Collection







Master Studies
This book focuses on these important aspects: accent studies, buzz-roll exercises, single and double-stroke patterns, control studies, flam patterns, dynamic development, endurance studies, and much more!

Master Studies II
Like Master Studies, this is a workbook of material to use in developing the hands for drumming. Challenging exercises encourage students to learn slow, sensible and accurate practice techniques.

Rudimental Jazz
The precursor to his two most widely used instructional books – Master Studies and Master Studies II – this book covers: techniques such as right and left hand grips, playing position, striking the snare drum & hi-hat and more; beginning exercises; drum beats; teacher's charts; graphic cutouts and more.

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Five Drumming FLOW Hacks You Can Use TODAY

By Chris Lesso

I believe getting into flow is one of the main reasons we drum. This is where that feeling of *the drums playing you* comes from. We all have those days that feel like the furthest thing from flow, it's when we stiffen up and overthink every move. But knowing how to surrender and drop into the zone is what keeps drumming fun, making it a lifestyle for the long game.

How You Move is How You Groove!

Drumming IS movement. It's a dance, an effortless flow where our signature sound is an echo of our motions. Think of your drums as a "dream catcher," the conduit that catches your unique movements for the world to hear. Your movement creates your sound. To sound consistent, relaxed, and flowing, we must move in the same way. This is big magic at work!

Feet First

Forget the old school "hands down" rudimental approach. Drumming needs to be felt from the feet up, not the hands down. Hunting for ultimate self-expression we need to be grounded, using gravity as a tool.

I started with hands first, and I couldn't shake the feeling of being unbalanced for years. I didn't find my solid balance behind the kit until much later. Drumming is dance, martial arts, and yoga combined. It is where a connection to the earth is everything. Next level balance roots and grounds us so we can flow around the space that our large instrument lives in.

Use the Ground as Your Weapon

In Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, there's a concept of "using the ground as a weapon." With so much focus on combinations and holds, utilizing gravity as a tool can be overlooked. Become rooted to the power of the earth, using it as your ally to be centered, ready, balanced, and grounded. This simple shift of perspective is right there for the taking, which is why so many miss it. Once you've opened-up to this world, you've got it for life.

Just Breathe

"I had a discovery about my own playing. I would start out my own solos playing some pretty good stuff ... but as I went along, it would get worse and worse. What I realized is that as I played, I was just forgetting to breathe! The less oxygen I got, of course, the worse I played." **Bela Fleck**

Breathing could be the most overlooked and underused area of drumming. Unlike singing or a wind instrument, we don't have to incorporate breathing into the producing the flow of our notes, so we can fall into the habit of taking tight shallow breaths without even knowing it. This only keeps us firmly in our own way, trapping us in our heads as we get tangled in self defeating anxiety. Many people don't know how to breathe. When we were babies, we inhaled and exhaled naturally, but bad habits picked up along the way can stick with us. We take breathing for granted because it's automatic, but it's still a skill we need to practice. Your breath is your best friend you can always go to when you need to re-center. It's ground zero for all movement and creativity. I know a drummer who literally wrote the word BREATHE in big letters right on top of his drum. As he swirls around his kit, seeing just a flash of that reminder reels him back in.

Open Handed Drumming is to Play Open-Hearted

If you're still 100% crossing, you're stuck in the past. Open handed drumming simply means drumming without crossing our hands. Needlessly and always putting one hand over the other when we play is a relic, an old story that's stunting your growth. Open handed drumming taps into the body language of inner power. With our arms at our sides with our chest out, our physiology moves to deep breathing and a calm strength. Our heart is now open to the world to dare greatly. To be vulnerable is the beginning of having the courage to reveal who we really are. This is the "martial arts of drumming," where our left and right-side zones become our ally. I didn't go full open handed until after 17 years of crossing. I adapted 1% at a time to eventually go for it, but it didn't happen in a day. Take small steps forward, and then go as "all in" when you can. And you can! We are ten times stronger than we think we are. We underestimate what we can accomplish with the compounding of time, but tomorrow is already here. What's at stake is your reinvention, and your future self won't regret it.

Open handed drumming empowers you and armed with these qualities, you can conquer anything. With a stronger foundation you can make the creative choices that reflect you, and not blindly follow tradition just because *it's always been done that way*. Rejoice in you being YOU and having the audacity to rethink the instrument. That's how it got to where it is today, propelled by those who dared greatly to disrupt. This attitude isn't for those that want to stay in their comfort zone, because behind the safety of the known we can't truly own the moment. I get excited by the edginess of not playing it safe. Playing open handed and open-hearted means you're stepping into the arena to discover the uncommon greatness that lives in you.

Get your free drumming flow hacks and TRANSFORM through DRUMMING! Start your journey today with your FREE intro and training at **chrislesso.net/LTRDRUMMING**

Encyclopedia of Double Bass Drumming: Linear Cross-Rhythm Combinations

By Bobby Rondinelli

In the new and revised edition of the *Encyclopedia of Double Bass Drumming*, Bobby includes nine new double bass drumming chapters. The new and expanded edition covers contemporary techniques such as bass drum double strokes, feet-only exercises, binary and ternary rhythms, "skiplets," beat turnarounds, the "ladder", and playing doubles with the hands while playing singles with the feet. These concepts will challenge your playing while expanding your double bass vocabulary. If practiced with intention and diligence, this material will help to prepare you for the demands of today's music. This material is advanced, but completely attainable for anyone who has completed the previous chapters in the book.

In the last few lessons in Rock Perspectives, we have been exploring Linear Cross-Rhythms in many note-grouping combinations (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9.) These groupings can apply to eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and sixteenth note triplets. Below are several combinations that Bobby recommends using in his book.

The following combinations will help you develop more linear cross-rhythm fills and phrases in addition to what's been presented so far. Any of the previously covered cross-rhythm phrases can be played using these combinations. However, the possibilities of cross-rhythm combinations are limitless. Experiment with your own combinations.

The groups of numbers below represent combinations of either 16th notes (in the 16th note groupings,) or eighth notes or 16th note triplets (in the triplet groupings.) Notice that these groupings of numbers add up to 16 (for the 16th note section) or 24 (two measures of eighth note triplets or one measure of 16th note triplets.) Remember the combination of numbers represents a cross rhythm, and their order greatly affects the sound of the fill.

16th-Note Groupings In One-Bar Fills

A)
1. 33334
2. 43333
3. 34333
4. 33433
5. 33343

B)
1. 5533
2. 3355
3. 3535
4. 5353
5. 3553

C)
1. 772
2. 277
3. 727

D)
1. 97
2. 79

E)
1. 943
2. 349
3. 439
4. 934
5. 394
6. 493

Triplet Groupings (Twenty-Four 8th-Note Triplets For Two Measures, Twenty-Four 16th-Note Triplets For One Measure)

A)
1. 444444

B)
1. 55554
2. 45555
3. 54555
4. 55455
5. 55545

C)
1. 7773
2. 3777
3. 7377
4. 7737

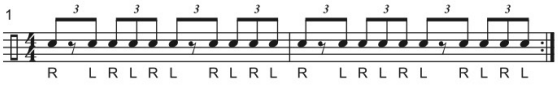
D)
1. 5577
2. 5757
3. 7575
4. 5775
5. 7557

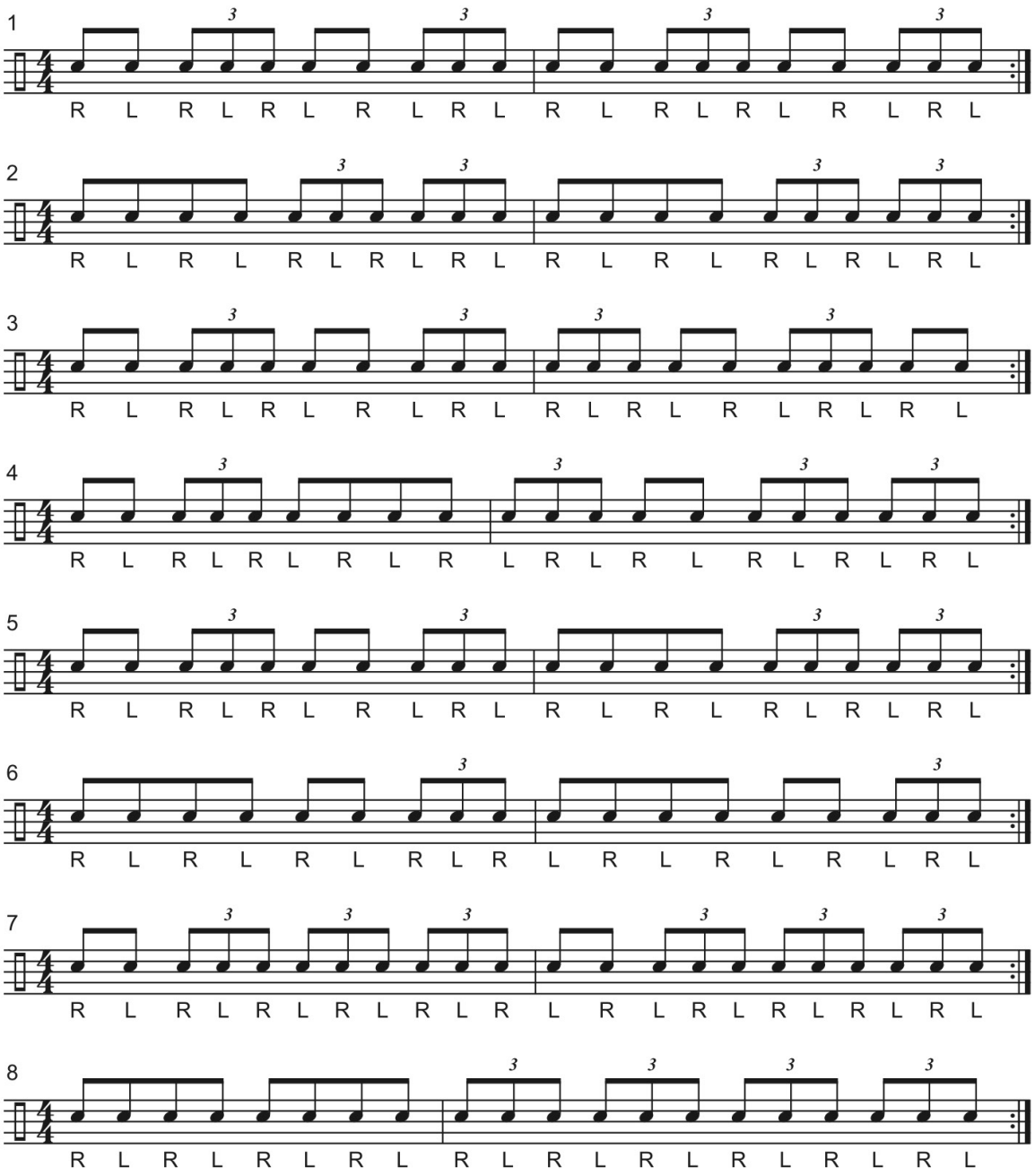
Master Studies II: Eighth Note and Triplet Combinations

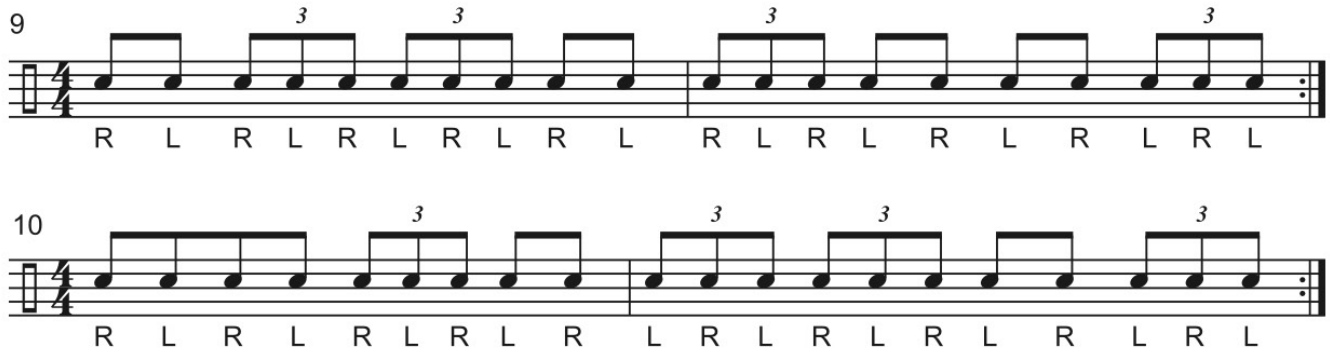
By Joe Morello

As a follow-up to Joe Morello's legendary *Master Studies* book, he released *Master Studies II* in 2006. Joe was a masterful teacher and helped many great drummers with their musicality, technique, and touch. Joe was also masterful at creating exercises, many of Joe's exercises were variations or outgrowths of his time studying with George Lawrence Stone, but many also came from Joe's own musical mind. *Master Studies II* is another wonderful book filled with the exercises that Joe developed for (and with) his students, it is also filled with wisdom from the master Joe Morello. Join *Modern Drummer* as we explore Joe Morello's *Master Studies II*. This month we will start with some wonderful eighth note and triplet combinations that Joe created.

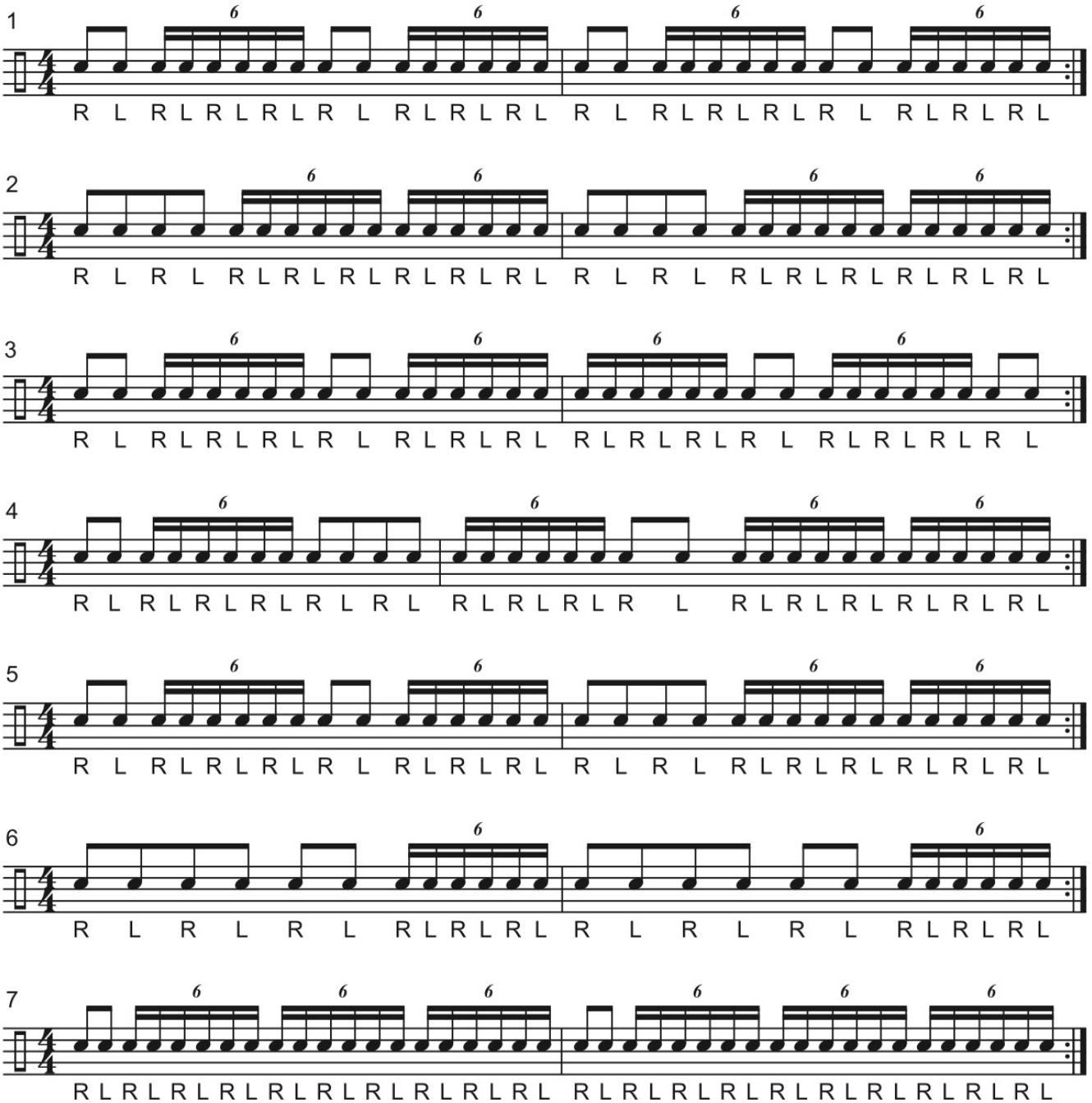
The following exercises can be played as written i.e., in their classical or "legitimate" form, where the eighth note is given its true value. They can also be played using an eighth note triplet (or jazz feel,) as shown in the first smaller example below. Use your imagination to create different phrasings by adding accents. Also feel free to experiment with varied dynamic levels.

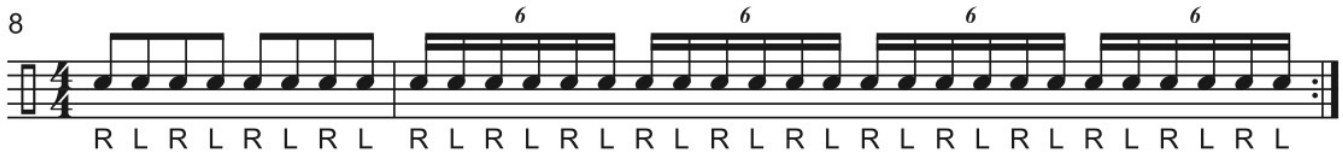




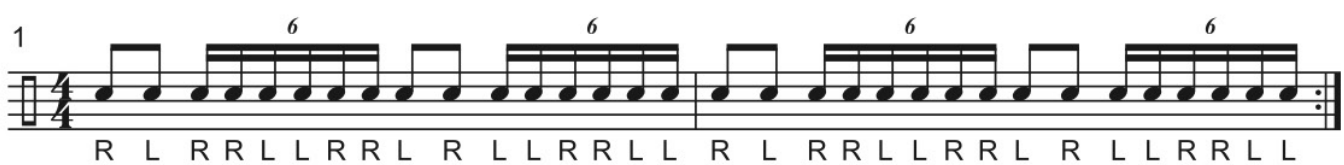


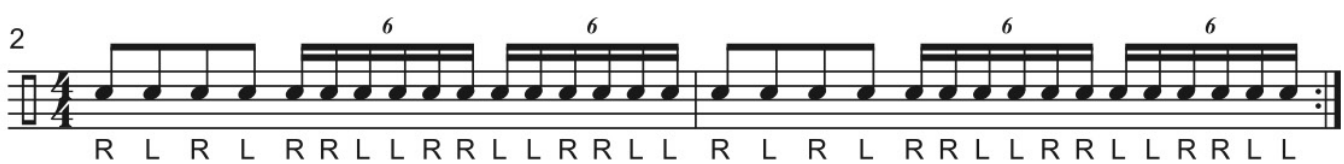
The following is a variation of the previous exercise using groups of six in single strokes. These are great for building your single-stroke-roll chops.

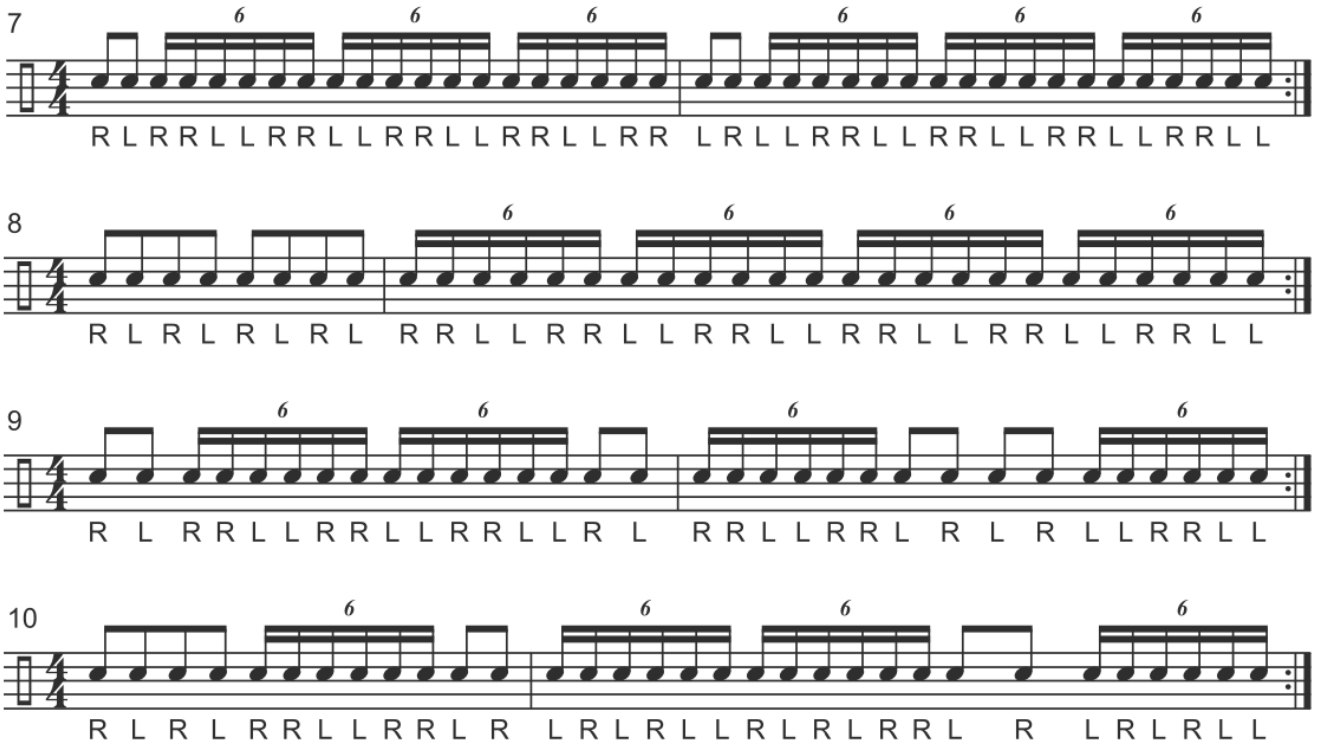




The following exercise is similar to the previous one, only now we're using double strokes instead of single strokes on each group of six.







Understanding the Language of Music
Chord Progressions 101

By Ron Spagnardi

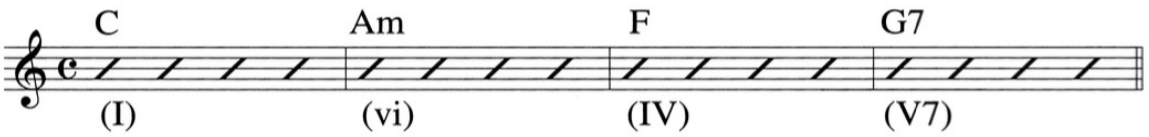
Modern Drummer founder Ron Spagnardi wrote an excellent book called *Understanding the Language of Music, a Drummer's Guide to Theory and Harmony.* This book spells out the basics of theory and harmony in a very easy to understand way. It is a fantastic book for drummers looking to learn about the language of music beyond drumming. We are honored to reprint parts of Ron's book here in *Modern Drummer* for everyone to read and learn.

After learning about chord alterations in December's *Modern Drummer*, this month we will be talking about the basic chord progressions that we find in popular music. It is helpful for drummers to know what the chord progression is for any song or music they are playing.

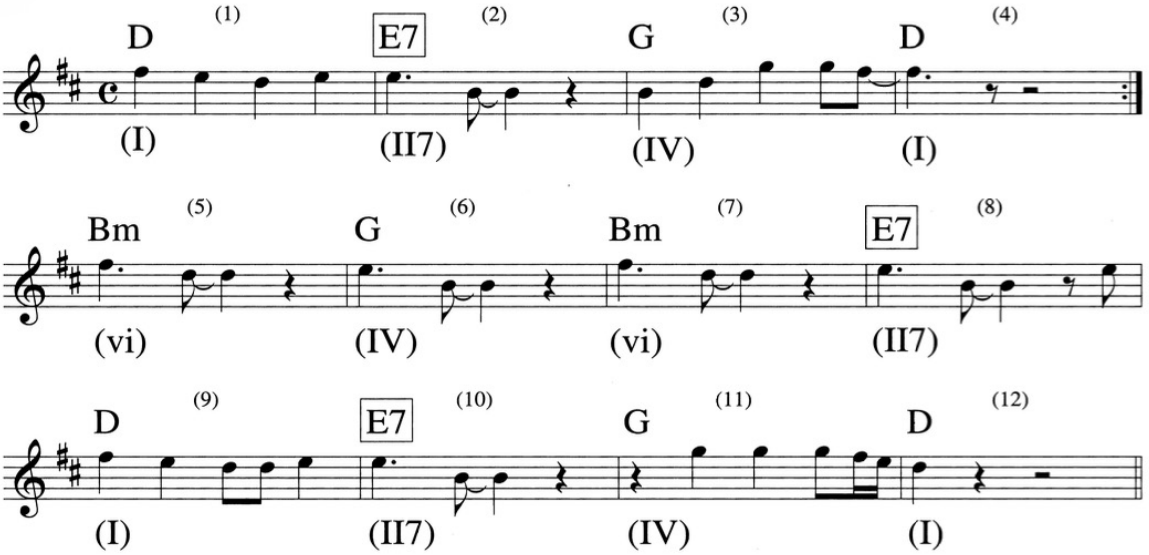
Now let's look at some common (and some not-so-common) chord progressions. Some of the progressions we'll examine have been used on popular hit recordings, rock and jazz tunes, solo improvisations, and a number of classic standards. Let's begin by going back a bit before we move forward.

Rock Retrospective

One particular chord progression was the basis behind literally hundreds of '50s and '60s rock tunes, many of which are still performed today. Here's the famous I, vi, IV, V7 progression in the key of C. Try it on your keyboard.

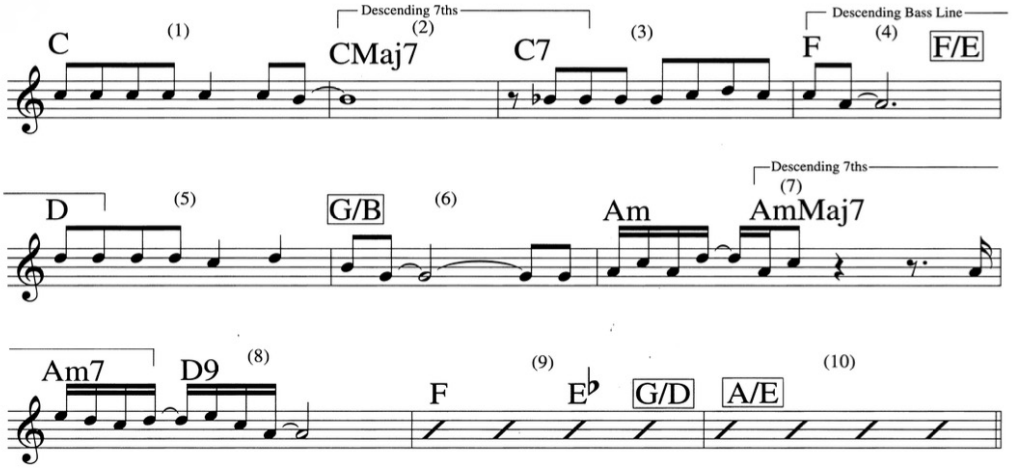


By the mid-'60s, groups like The Beatles started to move away from this overused progression and began to explore new harmonies. Here's a simple example from The Beatles' "Eight Days A Week." (Note, in the second, eighth, and tenth bars, how the customary *minor* ii chord in the key of D (Em) functions as a *dominant 7th* instead (E7), giving the tune a fresh harmonic approach.



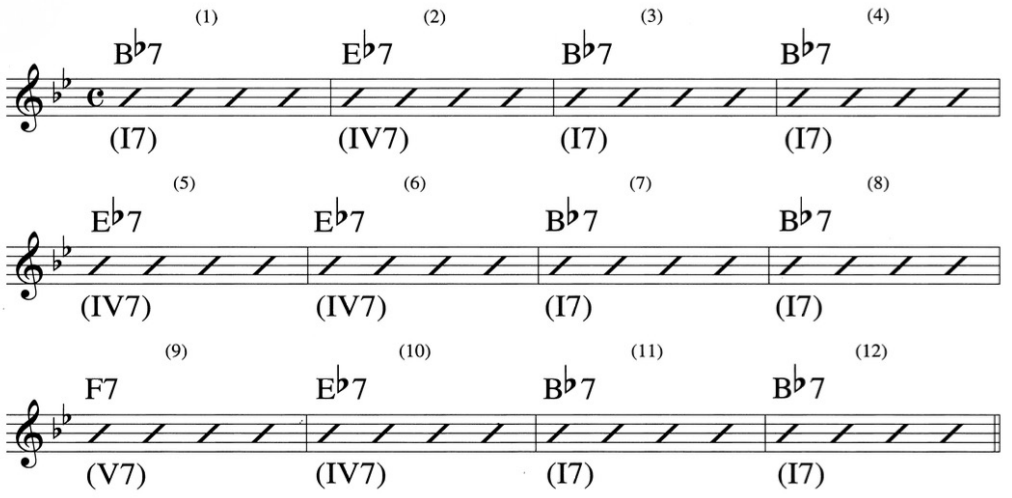
The late George Harrison's haunting ten-bar progression on "Something" is also worthy of analysis. Notice in the following example the descending 7ths in bars two and three with the CMaj7 (C, E, G, B) to C7 (C, E, G, B♭) progression, and again in bars seven and eight with the AmMaj7 (A, C, E, G#) to Am7 (A, C, E, G). The descending bass line (F, E, D) is another effective harmonic device used in measures four and five.

Occasionally a composer will request that a specific bass note be played, indicating this through the use of a slash chord. The F slash E (F/E) in bar four is a typical slash chord designation, indicating an F chord with the major 7th (E) in the bass. You'll find more slash chords in measures six (G/B), nine (G/D), and ten (A/E). Notes other than the root in the bass, specified via slash chords, are used to achieve stronger bass lines and smoother voice leading.



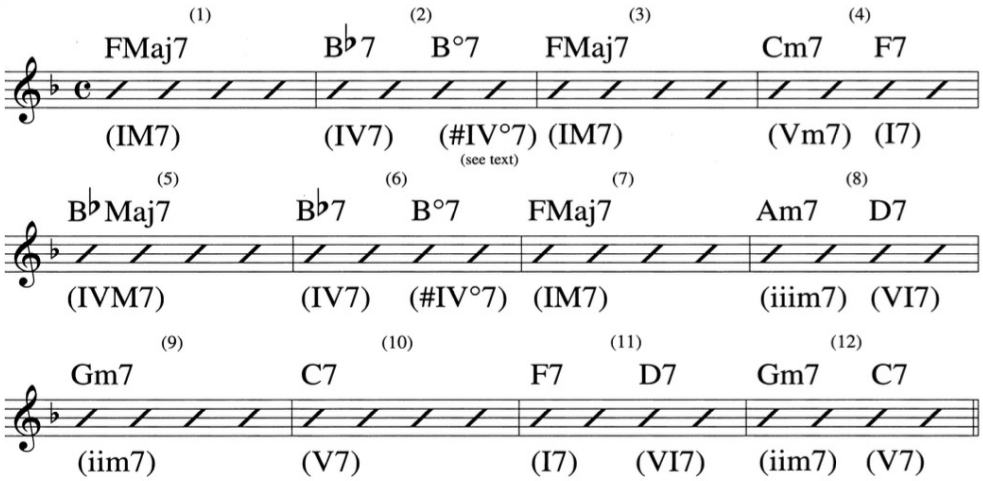
Birth Of The Blues

Rock and jazz musicians have been writing tunes and improvising solos on the twelve-bar blues progression since the early 20th century. The basic blues progression consists of nothing more than all dominant I, IV, and V chords. Here's the progression in the key of B♭. Try it in a few other keys using the Roman numeral system (shown beneath each measure) after you've mastered it in B♭.



Chord substitution (replacing one chord for another) is common in blues progressions, and over the years musicians have devised hundreds of versions. The next example, common among jazz players, is a much hipper version of the basic blues progression.

Notice how the Roman numerals make it much easier to transpose the progression into other keys. Of course, when using the Roman numeral system, it's essential to pay careful attention to the upper- and lower-case spellings that indicate whether the chord is a major 7th or a minor 7th (M = major 7th, m = minor 7th).



Note: The #IV°7 chord in measure two is not as complicated as it first appears. Take it one step at a time: Since B♭ is the IV chord in the key of F, the root of the #IV chord now becomes B natural. The ° and 7 symbols simply tell us that it's a full-diminished 7th chord. Thus, the chord is spelled B, D, F, G#. Simple!

Todd Sucherman's Entire Pearl Styx Kit

By Donn Bennett

After 53 years, 17 albums and countless world tours, Styx is rocking harder than ever and playing over 100 shows every year. They've sold 54 million records and are the only band to ever release four consecutive triple-platinum albums.

Todd Sucherman's drumming has propelled Styx to new heights since joining the band in 1996. His instructional clinics, masterclasses, videos, and his strong online presence have made him one of today's most influential and admired drummers.

After 25 years as an enthusiastic endorser of Pearl drums, Todd recently moved back to Sonor drums. Todd's first set was a Sonor, and returning to Sonor will be a (sort of) homecoming.

With a new collection of Sonor drums, Todd is left with the enviable problem of having more drums than he has room for. Therefore, he's asked my help in finding a new home for the beloved Pearl Masterworks set that has served him so faithfully since 2013.

Todd played this massive Pearl Masterworks drum set in countless globe crossing performances with Styx from 2013 to 2019, and now he's making the ENTIRE set available; every drum, cymbal, accessory, clamp, mount, pedal, and stand is being offered. Even Todd's touring stick bag and his well-worn Styx road cases are being included!

All of the drums are Pearl Masterworks Heavy Maple Shells with Bubinga Artisan veneer inside and out. The drums are finished in Figured Bubinga Walnut Burst Lacquer and completed with custom Rose Gold hardware. This is the first Pearl drum set ever made using Rose Gold hardware.

This set was lovingly cared for by Todd's long time drum tech, the late great Paulie Carrizzo. When Paulie passed in 2022, Todd's current tech Mark Petrocelli stepped up as the new caretaker of this precious piece of drum building excellence and Styx history. Between Paulie and Mark, the set remains in extraordinary condition, even after six years on the road with one of the hardest touring bands in the world. On close inspection the set shows some minor scars but from a few feet away you'd think it was brand new. Todd is even including his complete collection of new and unused Rose Gold replacement lugs, tom arms, throw offs and extra parts.

The only thing more stunning than the overwhelming visual appeal of this remarkable set is the way it plays and sounds. Todd chose the heavy Maple and Bubinga shells for their warmth, projection, and articulation. Each Sabian cymbal was hand chosen to articulate a precise sound in Todd's creative palette. This set can be seen and heard in countless live videos and recordings including *Styx's Live at the Orleans Arena, Las Vegas 2014 DVD*.

Todd is extremely excited to find a new owner who can appreciate the set as much as he has. In fact, he wants to make the whole experience so special that he's offered to personally set up and tune the set in the new owner's home or studio, answer any questions, and even give the new owner a private lesson.

The live photos seen in this article are part of a collection of hundreds of professional quality photos that Todd has collected and curated over the life of this set. The entire collection of live and behind the scenes photos are included.

Here's what is included with the set:

DRUMS: Two 18x22 bass drums, 7x6 (custom size), 7x8 tom, 8x10, 8x12, mounted toms, 14x14, 16x16, and 16x18 floor toms, a 14x20 gong drum, and a (20 ply) 5x14 snare drum.

HARDWARE: Snare Stand S1030, Eliminator Hi Hat Stand, Pearl Roadster Throne, 2 Eliminator Chain Drive Bass Drum Pedals, 12 Cymbal boom arms, and an X-Hat.

COMPLETE ICON RACK: 4 curved bars, 4 uprights, extension for gong drum, roughly 25 Icon rack clamp fittings, 9 tom arms (7 are Rose Gold), 4 Opti-Mount tom mounts, all rack mounted microphone holders.

SABIAN CYMBALS: 6" AA Splash, 8" AAX Splash, 9" Prototype Bell, 10" AA Splash, 18"V crash, 19"V crash, 20"V crash, 21" China w/rivets, 22"V crash, 22" AAX Extreme China, 22" Prototype Signature HH Session Ride, 2 pair 14" AA Medium Hi-Hats.

ACCESSORIES: Treeworks Wind Chimes, Rhythm Tech Tambourine, Sabian Finger Cymbal, Kentville Drums Bubinga Drum Waiter, Artisan Customs Bubinga & Redwood Stick Holders, Stick Bucket, Monitor Pack Holder, Todd's Touring Stick Bag and Sticks, "TS" Custom Logo Bass Drum heads, plus Original Pearl Masterworks Bass Drum heads.

FLIGHT CASES: 4 Styx logo rolling road cases and workstation, including original Styx drummer/founding member John Panozzo's white "D2" case.

TOUR ARTIFACTS: A surprise collection of Todd's STYX tour artifacts including laminates, backstage passes, set lists, a drumhead signed by all members of Styx, and more...

This drum set is a remarkable piece of Styx's and Todd Sucherman's musical history. It is a glowing example of Pearl and Sabian's master craftsmanship.

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 and keep looking for new musical avenues to explore. You'll never know what new music you might find inspiring! Listen and learn.

Miles Davis Quintet
In France 1963 & 1964: The Bootleg Series Vol. 8
Tony Williams drums
Columbia Legacy Records

27 Years after the death of Tony Williams, the opportunity to hear any "new" (never heard before) recordings of Tony is a reason for drummers to celebrate. Add the fact that Tony is playing with one of the greatest jazz groups to ever exist, and at a very transitional period for the band, makes it even more special. Don't get turned off by the "Bootleg Series" subtitle. These are stellar recordings of both versions of Miles' "Great Quintet" (with George Coleman on CDs 1-4 and with Wayne Shorter on CDs 5-6.) Sure, 10 of the 30 tracks have already been released, but 20 long tracks of never before heard music of this band is to be cherished, and the remastering job is stupendous. We can hear this band evolving right before our ears.

This is *Modern Drummer*, so we'll focus on Tony Williams and his drumming here. His playing is much more traditional on these recordings than you'll find on other recordings from this era, this music is an important study. The ferocity of the 1964 Carnegie Hall concerts in not on these recordings, and the jazz drumming tradition is present and accounted for. Tony is grounded in the Miles drumming tradition of Philly Joe and Jimmy Cobb while dropping little hints of the future. Remember Tony Williams is 18 years old at the time, and he is driving a band of jazz legends. The sound, the chops, the musicality, the drive… it's all there. This is six CDs worth of musical and drumming highlights! Essential!

McCoy Tyner and Joe Henderson
Forces of Nature, Live at Slugs
Jack DeJohnette drums
JDJ Legacy Series-Blue Note Records

It turns out that Jack DeJohnette has been keeping some unbelievable live tapes made throughout much of his career in his possession, and now he's letting us all in on that secret. In a little NY club in 1966, McCoy Tyner and Joe Henderson called on a 24-year-old Jack DeJohnette (and bassist Henry Grimes) to light a fire, and for 79 minutes and five songs that's exactly what they did. In Jack's words, "Everybody played like there was no tomorrow." The gig was recorded by a professional audio engineer named Orville O'Brien, and before the tapes were lost, thankfully DeJohnette asked a copy. That tape was used for this one-of-a-kind recording. Is the recording quality "perfect" by 21st Century recording standards, no… but it just doesn't matter! This is incendiary music! Like the Miles boxset above, some music shouldn't be described, it should be heard, this is such music, words fail us. The band patiently explores and finds every interesting nook and cranny of these compositions, and just wears them out. "In 'N Out" and "Taking Off" are over 25 minutes long, "We'll Be Together Again" is 14 minutes, Tyner's "The Believer" clocks in at 10 minutes, and Henderson's "Isotope" is a *mere* 7 minutes. It's just like being there in the club. A holy grail of modern jazz music! Thanks Jack.

Steve Smith and Vital Information
New Perspective
Steve Smith drums
Drum Legacy Recordings

For those that haven't been following along, one of the longest running fusion bands in history is now a trio featuring pianist Manuel Valera and bassist Janek Gwizdala, and Vital Information's music has changed (how could it not?) The band is now a piano trio with electric bass and added synthesizers. After a lot of touring, this is the second recording of this edition of the band, everything is coming together, and the music is evolving. Explaining this music is complicated, perhaps the best comparison is Hiromi's trio that Smith was also a part of, or maybe it's best to say it's a *New Perspective* on the piano trio. And in this "new perspective" there are some pleasant surprises.

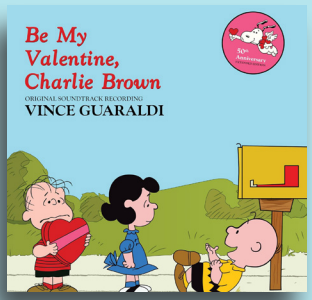
Smith is (perhaps) embracing his past (or maybe fusing present and his past) with Manuel Valera's jazz trio arrangements (maybe de-rangements) of "Open Arms" "Who's Crying Now" and "Don't Stop Believin,'" but don't worry, they are fantastic, you might not even be able to find the melodies in there amongst all the playing. "Open Arms" is the best of the bunch. Janek Gwizdala turns the saccharine classic into a very lyrical and perfect bass feature. "Don't Stop Believin,'" is a little more obvious, with a definite Weather Report intro, bassline, and vibe. Vital Information's flag waving closer, "A Perfect Date," gets a nice arrangement and update. Michael Brecker's "Sumo" is nice addition of a forgotten fusion classic! The relaxed shuffle on "Three of a Kind" feels great. And "Josef" is a KILLER tribute by Valera to Josef Zawinul. I really like how the band is comping behind Smith's konnakol on "Charukeshi." The konnakol is becoming an organic fabric of Smith and the band. When Smith kicks everything into fifth gear at the end of "8+5" and "A Perfect

Date" it feels like the original more fusion-ish version of Vital, it just smokes! This version of Vital Information is working very nicely, everyone is an equal part "ensemblist" and soloist. Smith's Sonor drums sound fantastic as always, as does his drumming. There are some great tunes, interesting arrangements, and remarkable playing from the trio… What more can you ask for?

Avishai Cohen
Ashes to Gold
Ziv Ravitz drums
ECM Records

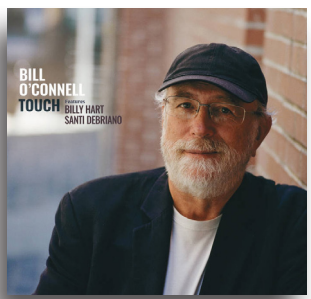
ECM records always sound fantastic, and this one is no different. Trumpeter Avishai Cohen is lyrical and patient, pianist Yonathan Avishai is impressionistic and explosive, and bassist Barak Mori and drummer Ziv Ravitz create an interactive and subtle musical launching pad for everyone. The five-part suite of "Ashes to Gold" is the musical centerpiece on this record, and the listener can hear the meaning of the title in the music. This is slowly evolving music that goes from dusty impressionism to musical gold. The ensemble's arrangement and performance of Ravel's "Adagio Assai" from his "Piano Concerto in G Major" is also very enjoyable.

Vince Guaraldi
Be My Valentine Charlie Brown
Vince Lateano drums
LMFF productions



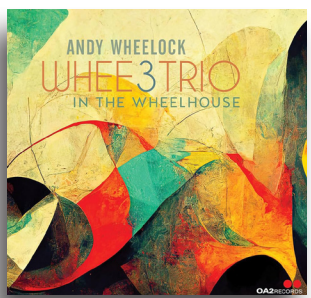
Vince Lateano is a legendary drummer in the San Francisco Bay region. He has made a handful of recordings and is worth checking out. Here he is playing the soundtrack music to a classic 1974 Charlie Brown TV special. Several of these Charlie Brown recordings have been released in the last few years, and they all feature great drummers and great drumming from Mike Clarke, Jack Sperling, and now Vince Lateano. While the main (and often repeated) theme to the show sounds like the jazz standard "Milestones," it is Lateano's tasteful drumming that keeps us listening. His touch is impeccable, his groove is deep, and his swing is infectious. I'm glad this music was released. If only to give me an excuse to call everyone's attention to one of the unsung great drummers, Mr. Vince Lateano., but the music is pretty good too!

Bill O' Connell
Touch
Billy Hart drums
Jojo Records



A piano trio of longtime NYC jazz veterans is nothing new. But a Bill O'Connell jazz trio recording is a little rarer, as he is known for his Latin playing. Billy Hart's playing is responsive as always, no one treats a soloist with what *they* need, more than Billy Hart. He is the ultimate listening and supportive drummer, just listen to "85th Street." Pay attention to Billy's wide swing on "So Beautiful, So Sad." Listen to the magical hook-up of Billy Hart and bassist Santi DeBriano on "Three Little Words," this is how two musicians think as one. Lastly pay attention to O'Connell and Hart passing the ball back and forth on "I Hear a Rhapsody," this is wonderful rhythmic interplay, and a good record.

Andy Wheelock
Whee3Trio
Andy Wheelock drums
OA2 Records

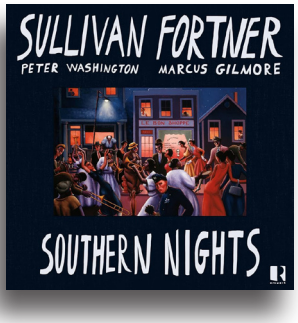


Drummer Andy Wheelock is a welcome mainstay to the Colorado jazz drumming scene, and this recording proves that he belongs at the top of the heap of drummers making their way on the scene. This is wonderful sounding and supple piano trio that can go in any musical direction. Whether it's swinging, funky, elastic, or driving, they sound great. Wheelock and bassist Gonzalo Teppa work together like a hand in a glove. The addition of guitarist Gilad Hekselman really completes the instrumentation. Wheelock composed all (but one) of the tunes on this record, and his compositional approach is very welcome in these days of people putting everything but the kitchen sink into every tune they write. His compositions have a direction, patience, and a maturity to them. The fact that there are some tunes where Wheelock is playing the Ghanaian Gyil while looping and effecting the sound with guitar pedals makes this record even cooler. I love the tune "Kewo" for this exact reason. Hekselman's African guitar approach on "Kewo" just makes the song, and this song makes the record! This is one of the better drummer-led recordings that I have heard in recent memory. Huge congrats to the entire band of versatile pianist Walter Gorra, bassist Gonzalo Teppa, Andy Wheelock, and special guest Gilad Hekselman.

Karl Latham
Living Standards II
Karl Latham drums
Roger Squitero percussion
Drop Zone Jazz Records

I have been seeing a lot of drummers recently playing jazz and fusion arrangements of the rock and prog tunes that they grew up listening to, and (personally) I love that. Any song can be arranged for another context, there are no rules. Karl Latham has done just that on his second foray into this approach, and he has assembled a nice instrumentation to accomplish that goal. The Doors' "Break on Through" is a fantastic opener, with a nice drum solo appropriate to the tune. Latham's groove and arrangement of "What Is and What Should Never Be," is deep and creative. Latham and bassist Mark Egan have a nice hook-up that is on clear display. Keyboardist Henry Hey and guitarist Mitch Stein fill out the performance perfectly and raise this tune to another level. Special mention must be made to the entire band's interaction on the fade out. The addition of vibraphonist Wolfgang Lackerschmid joining the front line is a welcome surprise. The classic tune (and Jim Gordon's drumming) "Layla" always swung, but never like this, and it's very nice. The arrangement of King Crimson's "Matte Kudasai" is especially good, and a very nice addition to the chosen songs. This is a well-conceived band, and a cohesive, and enjoyable recording, expect to hear from a band with Gilmore playing drums, this is a modern take on an old standard. While Fortner and Gilmore are dissecting, bassist Peter Washington is holding it all together, check out Gilmore's solo…Wow! "Waltz for Monk" and "9 Bar Tune" walk the line of construction and deconstruction perfectly. Bill Lee's "Again Never" and "Tres Palabras" both strike a nice groove, and the latter features a wonderful bass solo. "Daahoud" begins with a terrific solo from Gilmore that magically just blends into the head-in, pretty cool. This is a fun recording and features a slightly different side of drummer Marcus Gilmore. Congrats to Fortner for putting together this trio.

Sullivan Fortner
Southern Nights
Marcus Gilmore drums
PIAS Records

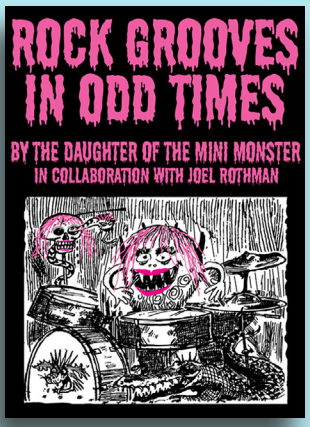


Pianist Sullivan Fortner has been on the scene for a while. This recording finds him really coming into his own. Drummer Marcus Gilmore makes a lot of more "exotic" jazz records with musicians who push the boundaries, and I have wanted to hear him in a more traditional setting for a while, and here's my chance. His playing with Fortner and bassist Peter Washington is very interesting. They are playing straight ahead, while Gilmore is floating, pushing, and prodding, and it's a wonderful combination. The fact that Fortner began this recording with Allen Toussaint's "Southern Nights" is a breath of fresh air, this is a great tune that should be played more. The deconstruction of "I Love You" is what I

Rock Grooves in Odd Times, By the Daughter of the Mini Monster
In Collaboration with Joel Rothman
JR Publications

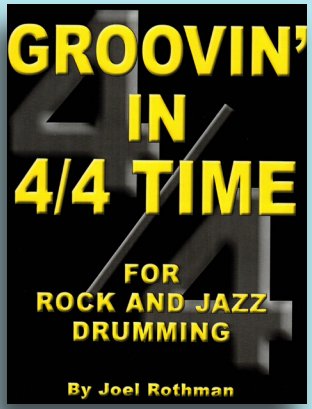
Groovin' in 4/4 Time
By Joel Rothman
JR Publications

Groovin' in Five
By Joel Rothman
JR Publications



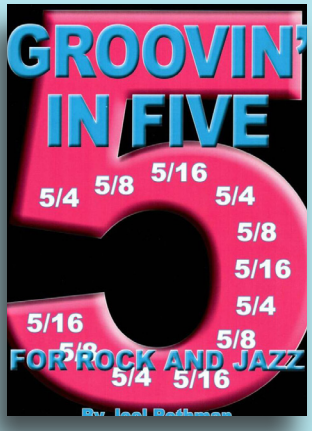
No one has written more drum books than Joel Rothman, and no one fits more beats into a book that Joel Rothman. His *Monster* and *Mini-Monster* books are classics. If you are looking for "new" and creative drumming concepts, look elsewhere. But if you are looking for vocabulary… meaning hundreds of examples of Rock and Jazz grooves in every time signature imaginable, countless ways to incorporate rudiments in your drum set playing or snare drum practice routine, an endless amount of stickings, or more Linear grooves than you can shake a drumstick at… Joel Rothman is your guy.

Rock Grooves in Odd Times presents all its vocabulary-examples as strictly hand grooves (there are no bass drum parts written in this book.) The drummer is encouraged to create his own bass drum patterns based on the bass player, or the music that is being played. Truthfully, I'm not sure if I agree with this approach, I like Rothman's methodology of *Groovin in 4/4* and *Groovin in Five* much better. *Rock Grooves in Odd Times* breaks the (many) hand patterns into three sections: Rock Grooves in Quarter Time, Rock Grooves in Eighth time, and Rock Grooves in Sixteenth Time. All these sections are based on what the denominator of the time signature is (4, 8, or 16.)



Groovin in 4/4 features five sections: Grooves with an eighth note cymbal rhythm; Grooves with a triplet cymbal rhythm; Grooves with a shuffle cymbal rhythm; Grooves with a jazz cymbal rhythm; and Grooves with a 16th note cymbal rhythm. Most grooves (except for the sixteenth groove section) are presented initially as two surface (RH and LH) grooves, then with several bass drum variations. This is a wonderful way to present and develop a groove vocabulary.

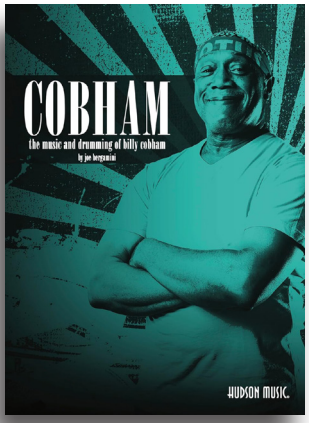
Groovin in Five is a helpful book comprised entirely of groove in 5/4, 5/8, and 5/16. If you need to work on playing in five, you have come to the right place. Each part of the book subdivides the 5 into 2-3, and into 3-2. With those divisions there are six sections of grooves in 5, which is probably more than you'll ever need, but there is never anything wrong with having an extensive vocabulary in any subject. Again, the grooves are initially presented as two surface (RH and LH) grooves and then with several bass drum variations, which again is a wonderful way to present and develop a groove vocabulary.



Both *Groovin' in 4/4* and *Groovin' in Five* are comprised of mainly three surface (RH, LH, RF) grooves, which differentiates these books from the *Rock Grooves in Odd Times* book which is comprised of all cymbal and snare (two surface grooves.) For this reason, I prefer the *Groovin in 4/4* and *Groovin' in Five* books.

There is no doubt that Rothman's books have been filling up the minds of drummers with an endless number of grooves and rudimental applications for a long time. And for a student looking to learn beats, more beats, and even more beats… There is no better place.

Cobham: The Music and Drumming of Billy Cobham
By Joe Bergamini
Hudson Music



Joe Bergamini has written a wonderful book on a wonderful (and often misunderstood) subject, the great Billy Cobham. And for anyone that *thinks* they understand Billy Cobham's drumming, life, and career, I encourage you to take a deep dive and use this book as a guide. We get a thorough explanation of Billy's early and formative years, an examination of his (forgotten) years as a session man and sideman, and a look into the mind of a Cobham as a talented composer and bandleader. Yes, there is a deep look into the legendary and awe-inspiring Mahavishnu days, over 20 jaw-dropping transcriptions, and talk about chops, technique, odd times, and inventive gear. But Billy Cobham is SO MUCH more than that. He is a multi-faceted musician, and thankfully Bergamini covers it ALL in this book. We also get interviews and insights about Billy from two musicians who know him well, and have played with him the most, bassist Ron Carter and guitarist John McLaughlin. We could not ask for a better look into the mind, music, and drumming of one of the legends of drumming, Billy Cobham. This book is a great read and is highly recommended!!!

HAND-PICKED VINYL

As the music world continues to see a resurgence in Vinyl (LP's,) Vinyl Me Please (VMP) is curating and producing some of the best vinyl remasters and pressings around. They are scouring the history of recorded music for forgotten gems and negotiating with new labels to create pristine vinyl releases of classic and new music. Their records range from music recorded decades ago to the most recent and cutting-edge releases. VMP are doing the work of curating the history of music to help listeners and vinyl connoisseurs create a well-rounded and serious collection of high- quality vinyl-LP recordings. In our monthly Hand-Picked Vinyl column, the team at VMP spotlights a couple of their newest vinyl musical masterpieces with significant drumming and percussion embedded deep within those little magic grooves of vinyl.

Muddy Waters
Fathers and Sons
Sam Lay on drums
Buddy Miles on drums for "Got My Mojo Working, Part 2"

Fathers and Sons remains Muddy Waters' greatest mainstream success, peaking at No. 70 on the Billboard 200. A fortuitous cocktail of timing and talent kickstarted a career resurgence for Waters that would last through his critically lauded albums with guitarist Johnny Winter through the late 1970s. Michael Bloomfield and Paul Butterfield had the deference and skill to deftly elevate Muddy's style, playing slow enough, and with enough grit, to convey the heart of his freewheeling club origins. Though the personnel certainly galvanized the setting, it was Muddy's zeal for the affair that proved most affecting. His vocal performances throughout the album's 15 tracks were his best since his 1960 debut at the Newport Folk Festival. Indeed, it's rumored that backstage at a live jamboree, Muddy muttered excited comparisons to that recording which came out nearly a decade earlier. In an era engulfed by white psychedelia, Muddy Waters proved the biggest rock star of all. — **Erin Osmon**

Grizzly Bear
Veckatimest
Christopher Bear on drums

Off the coast of Cape Cod lies a small uninhabited island called *Veckatimest*. The island is a physical space, but for the band Grizzly Bear, it is also a state of mind. *Veckatimest* is the name of the band's third full-length record, originally released in 2009 on Warp Records. It is a stunning piece of music, one that catapulted what was once front man Ed Droste's bedroom project into something far grander and more publicly lauded than the band could've ever imagined.

Veckatimest represents a definitive, landmark sort of moment for indie rock. It moved a genre to the thing that was all the rage on blogs, to fertile grounds from which pop and rap reaped. Jay and Bey watching Grizzly Bear at a random show in Brooklyn eventually led to people like Ezra Koenig and Josh Tillman penning a track on *Lemonade*, and Chairlift's Caroline Polachek on *Beyoncé*. In other words, indie music isn't really the same thing that it once was. The summer of 2009, and Grizzly Bear, have a lot to do with that. — **Sophie Kemp**

John Michael Montgomery
John Michael Montgomery
Lonnie Wilson on drums

In the 90s, the accurate counting of country fans relative to fans of pop, rock, and hip-hop revealed that the country audience was much bigger than anyone would previously acknowledge. It wasn't just farmers or "hicks" listening to country; it was suburban moms, urban professionals, and people whose hands would never work an acre or milk a cow, that were catapulting '90s country stars to the top of the *Billboard* pop charts. The music might have started on prairies or in the hills, but it was ending up on the paved subdivisions and big-box retail stores of the suburbs. With this realization of a "new" audience — country had been trying to appeal to the suburbs since "countrypolitan" made outlaws of Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson — came a new style of country music, one that was smoother, concerned with the everyday realities of the "normal" people who made up country's audience, leading to an Urban Cowboy less like a John Travolta character and more a mode for an entertainer to embody.

At the center of all these storylines is *John Michael Montgomery*, one of the biggest country albums of the mid-'90s, a commercial behemoth crossover that opened up country's big tent, headlined by one of the most earnest balladeers country music has ever seen. A Kentucky boy with a big voice, impeccable phrasing, and promises of devotion. An unassuming performer whose biggest songs made him — and an R&B group — superstars. — **Andrew Winistorfer**

Nik Hughes' Bush Touring Kit

Photos by Jason Mehler

Drums: DW Design Series Gloss White Finish – 18x22 Kick drum, 9x12 Rack Tom, 14x16 Floor Tom, 16x18 Floor Tom

Snares: 6.5x14 DW Bell Brass snare drum, 5.5x14 Maple snare drum Gloss White finish.

Heads: Evans – Toms: clear G2's on top Clear G1s on Bottom; Snare Top: Coated G2; Snare Side Head: Evans 300; Kick: GMAD.

Cymbals: Zildjian - 8" A Custom splash, 10" A Custom splash, 12" K custom dark Splash, 15" K Fat Hats, 19" A Custom Crash, 22" A Custom ride, 20" A Custom Crash, 20" EFX Cymbal.

Sticks: Vater - Classic 5B hickory sticks, wood tip.

Hardware: DW 9000 Series - Double Bass Drum Pedal, Hi-hat stand, Cymbal stands, Snare stands.

Throne: Porter & Davies BC2 thumper amp with round throne.

Mics & Triggers: Kick Inside - Shure Beta 91A on a Kelly Shu Flatz, Kick Outside - Shure Beta 52A on a standard Kelly Shu Mount; Snare Top - SM57, Snare Bottom- AKG 414; Hats- Audio Technica ATM450; Ride- AKG 451; Snare two top - Shure Beta 56A, Snare two Bottom - Shure Beta 98; Toms- Shure Beta 98; Overheads- AKG 414; Roland RT30H trigger on toms and snare (gate control,) Roland RT30k trigger on kick (gate control.)

In Memoriam

By Mark Griffith

Roy Owen Haynes
1925-2024

Roy Haynes was one of the most influential drummers ever. His identifiable sound, vocabulary, sense of swing, musicality, innovation, and unbridled creativity permeated every bandstand and recording that he graced with his magical drumming. To see Roy Haynes was always special, he was a wonderful entertainer and the essence of cool. Roy drove sports cars, and in 1960 was named as one of America's best dressed men. Haynes wore silk, cowboy hats, ascots, fancy leather boots, and fashionable sunglasses on stage. His love of cars and his sense of fashion mirrored his drumming and his personality. Flashy, original, outrageous yet comfortable, and without pretense. During his career he played on over 400 records, with every legend of jazz, and with every generation of jazz innovators.

Roy Haynes was born in 1925 in the Roxbury section of Boston, and took drum lessons early on from drummer Herbert Wright, who was known as the drummer for bandleader James Reese Europe. Wright taught Haynes the basics, and Roy took it from there. By 1945, Haynes was playing in the big band of Luis Russell, they recorded several times and played at the legendary Savoy Ballroom in New York City. When I interviewed Haynes in 2008, I asked him about his playing with Luis Russell, he said, "Luis taught me one very important thing. He taught me that if you ever got lost when you were playing, to just roll. Forget about two and four, just play a roll. I still do that today. The thing that I like is that when you roll, it's free and it's loose. I don't really roll in the traditional manner, but I play loose enough that it's the same feeling as a roll. That's the feeling that I want from my time. I prefer my time to produce a smooth-sailing feeling, like the sound of a roll. I prefer to keep time by providing a longer pulse, and it's great when I am accompanying a soloist who can really deal with that."

In 1947 Haynes started playing with Babs Gonzales and Lester Young, his groundbreaking playing with Gonzales and Young is captured on recordings from 1947 to 49. His career progressed while he played and recorded with Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Sarah Vaughan (for five years,) and Thelonious Monk. In 1951 with Miles Davis, Haynes' playing on the tune "Morpheus" broke all the rules while he broke up the legato time between his four limbs. With Vaughan, Roy recorded two legendary recordings called *Swingin' Easy* and *Live at Mister Kelley's*. With Monk, Haynes first played at the Newport Jazz Festival with Monk's trio. Later, Haynes recorded *Misterioso*, *Thelonious in* Action, and *Discovery! Live at the Five Spot* during the quartet's 18 week stay at the club. During these first 13 years of his career there were also outstanding recordings with Bud Powell, Sonny Rollins, Wardell Gray, Kai Winding, and Nat Adderley. When I asked Haynes about playing with Sarah Vaughan he remembered, "I joined Sarah in 1953 and stayed until 1958. Playing with Sarah was wonderful because I have always been into lyrics and melody. That's what I still enjoy listening to today, music with great melodies and meaningful lyrics. I hope that comes out in my playing. When you play with singers there are certain things you have to do to keep them satisfied. Of course, you must play lighter, especially back then. In the 1950s singers didn't rely on the microphone as much as they do today. But Sarah Vaughan wasn't just a singer; she was a great musician! So playing with Sarah wasn't any different than playing with Charlie Parker."

As the 50s and 60s progressed, Haynes recorded with Sonny Stitt, Kenny Burrell, Art Farmer, Oliver Nelson, Etta Jones, Stan Getz, and did a big band recording with Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis. His four limbed broken sense of timekeeping and keen sense of exploration also became popular with jazz musicians such as Eric Dolphy, Jackie McLean, Andrew Hill, Steve Lacy, and Roland Kirk who were looking forward and breaking new musical ground. While the forward-thinking horn players were hiring Haynes for his interactive playing, the jazz pianists loved his trio playing. Haynes' drumming in piano trios is especially tasteful and unique. Roy's sound never overwhelmed, and his playing weaved into the free-flowing piano trio approach seamlessly. Piano trio recordings with Tommy Flanagan (*Moodsville*,) Jaki Byard (*Here's Jaki*,) Richard Wyands (*Just Us*,) and McCoy Tyner (*Reaching Fourth*) all cemented Roy's piano trio drumming approach and reputation.

Photo By Lissa Wales

In 1953 Haynes made his first recording as a leader called *Jazz Abroad*, and his second in 1954 called *Busman's Holiday*. *We Three* followed in 1959, featuring Haynes with

bassist Paul Chambers, and throughout Roy's career he released over 30 records as a bandleader. In 1962, Haynes released the groundbreaking *Out of the Afternoon* which featured both Roland Kirk and Tommy Flanagan with bassist Henry Grimes; resulting in a unique band that joined different jazz approaches into one cohesive and outstanding record.

In the early 60s Haynes subbed for Elvin Jones with John Coltrane. Haynes' approach was different from Elvin's. While Elvin Jones' tornadic drumming was constantly pushing the exploring Coltrane, Haynes seemed to be walking hand in hand alongside the saxophonist down an unexplored musical path, Haynes was equally suited for Coltrane's musical approach. Haynes is included on Coltrane's recordings *Newport '63, Dear Old Stockholm,* and *Live at the Showboat 1963*.

While playing with Stan Getz in 1966 and '69 Haynes found another musician who shared the same exploratory concept as himself in Gary Burton, now heard on Getz's *Quartet in Paris* recording. The live recordings with Getz and Burton are exciting, but it was the later jazz-rock-tinged recordings with Burton on *Duster, Tennessee Firebird, Country Roads and Other Places*, and the bristling *Times Square* that really lit a fuse.

That fuse never burned brighter than it did on Chick Corea's 1968 trio recording *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs* recording with Haynes and bassist Miroslav Vitous. This is one of the most groundbreaking jazz records ever. Haynes told me that Miroslav and Corea rehearsed this music in 1967 first as a duo, which explains the freedom and the looseness that this record portrays. However, Corea told me that he remembered rehearsing with Haynes as a duo before adding a bassist. Either way, Haynes brought his broken time feel and free-flowing, elasticized pulse and made it a trio that created a musical approach that is still felt today. This trio continued with *Trio Music* in 1982 and *Trio Music Live in Europe* and 2003's *Rendezvous in New York*.

In the 70s and early 80s, Haynes was (believe it or not) horribly unappreciated for his groundbreaking drumming and stature in the jazz community. He led an electric band called Roy Haynes' Hip Ensemble and recorded six records using that approach. But in the late 80s and 90s the jazz world caught up to Haynes and he began to receive the recognition he deserved. Roy Haynes recorded with McCoy Tyner on *Blues for Coltrane*, with David Murray on *Black & Black*, and with Michel Petrucciani on *Michel Plays Petrucciani* and *One Night in Karlsruhe*. Haynes also became a well recorded band leader featuring talented sidemen such as Dave Kikoski, Ed Howard, Craig Handy, Martin Bejerano, Jaleel Shaw, and Marcus Strickland, and featuring guests such as Pat Metheny, Kenny Garrett, and Dave Holland. Roy released his own recordings such as *Homecoming, Te Vou!, Praise, Birds of a Feather, My Shining Hour, Trio, Fountain of Youth, and Royalty.* He also won multiple Grammy's, the JazzPar Award, a NEA Jazz Master, and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement award.

The year 2000 began a 24-year run of Haynes as musical royalty that featured him recording a seminal record with Pat Metheny and Dave Holland called *Question & Answer* and Kenny Barron brought together Haynes and bassist Charlie Haden for *Wanton Spirit*. Haynes also regrouped with Gary Burton on *Like Minds*, and with Chick Corea on *Remembering Bud Powell* both of which won Grammy's. Many of Haynes' most important recordings are captured on a box set called *Roy Haynes: A Life in Time*, which also features video of Roy playing at the Modern Drummer Festival in 2005. The jazz community also began celebrating Roy's birthdays with weeklong star-studded engagements at New York's Blue Note Jazz Club with VIP lines that wrapped around the block.

Roy Haynes had a massive impact on modern drumming and music, but he also had an impact on drum equipment as well. The swing drummers were known for playing large bass drums and Haynes began his bebop years by playing a large bass drum. However, when it was stolen, Ludwig made him a smaller 20" bass drum, making Roy Haynes one of the first drummers to use a smaller bass drum. While the *idea* behind the invention of the first Flat Ride cymbal remains unclear, it was Roy Haynes who took the *sound* of the first Paiste 602 flat rides and made them an integral part of *his* sound. Eventually, he moved to Zildjian and the Zildjian A Custom and K Custom Flat Rides became an equally important sound for Haynes. Throughout his career Roy Haynes had long-standing relationships with Ludwig, Slingerland, and Yamaha Drums which led him to play a Ludwig Downbeat model 4x14 snare drum, followed many years later by a Hammered Bronze Ludwig snare, which resulted in a Hammered Copper Yamaha Signature model snare drum designed in the 2000s.

In 2008, I interviewed Roy Haynes about his drumming style and his approach to drumming. He mentioned his parents' Caribbean roots, and told me, "I consider myself to be a swing drummer. But I never really analyzed what I was doing, either while I was doing it or afterwards… I never really thought about the differences between swing and bop. I just played how I played, and it must have worked because I'm still doing it today." He continued, "I loved Sid Catlett's drumming. I sort of see myself coming out of the tradition of "Big" Sid and "Papa" Jo [Jones]. These weren't rudimental drummers. They were drummers who had a loose feel, and guys who could play intelligent four-bar solos and breaks. That's what I love to hear in drumming. Sid made a recording with Lester Young of "Sometimes I'm Happy" where Sid and Lester trade fours. I think a lot of younger jazz drummers need to go back and check that stuff out. I really liked Sid's drumming… I also used to hear players like Mongo Santamaria and Tito Puente around New York, when the "original" Latin bands were playing everywhere… That sense of phrasing did become a strong influence in my playing… Roy concluded by saying, "I never was the fastest drummer, I never had the fastest hands, and truthfully, I really wasn't interested in that. I never really learned the rudiments, and I have never really played rudimentally. I'll admit that this was probably the hardest or maybe even the "*wrongest*" way to learn how to do things, but it has worked for me. That's probably why I sound different from most of the other players." When I asked Roy to explain why his drumming worked so well with everyone, he said, "That's the greatest compliment in the world. Thank you! But I can't explain it, that's just Roy Haynes."

Roy Haynes was an inspiration and a mentor to many drummers and musicians that came after him, and every musician who encountered him. With a 79-year career of drumming accompanying the most important jazz musicians, few will ever have a longer or more influential drumming career. Roy was 99 years old when he passed, and he was still playing. Roy Haynes was a true drumming and musical legend, and a national treasure. Modern Drummer mourns the loss of a master and sends our condolences to Roy's family, his sons Charles and Graham, his grandson (drummer) Marcus Gilmore, and his friends and musical family. **—Mark Griffith**

Zakir Hussain 1951-2024

Ustad Zakir Hussain Allarakha Qureshi was the greatest and most well-known tabla player in the world. He won Grammy's, and was recognized by the United States, Indian, and Japanese governments for his artistic contributions to the world. His collaborations and recordings with musicians from George Harrison and Van Morrison to The Grateful Dead and Earth, Wind, & Fire, to John McLaughlin, Pharoah Sanders, and Charles Lloyd, to Bela Fleck, Edgar Meyer, and Yo-Yo Ma, and the San Francisco Ballet are renowned and adored. He led the bands Zakir Hussain's Rhythm Experience, The Masters of Percussion, and the Grammy winning Global Drum Project. He co-led the bands Shakti, and Tabla Beat Science, was featured in Mickey Hart's (Grammy Winning) Planet Drum and George Brooks' Summit, and Zakir founded Moment! Records.

Zakir started studying tabla with his father Ustad Allarakha Qureshi as a boy and began touring by the age of 12. In a 2010 interview, I asked Zakir about his musical studies, he replied, "In India, we believe that it is not the teacher who teaches, it is the student who extracts the information from the teacher. In other words, it is the student who inspires the teacher to teach and relate knowledge freely. That spark is the sign of a good student. The student should inspire the teacher to willingly and with an open heart, pass along knowledge with positive energy. He continued, "Let's start with my father (legendary tabla maestro Ustad Allarakha.) He taught me discipline and focus, and how to apply these principles to the repertoire that has been handed down for thousands of years. When I watched Elvin Jones play, I learned that discipline, focus, and repertoire was one thing, but you also must be able to look at a "beat" from every corner, and that every nook and cranny of the beat was vitally important."

Photo By Susana Millman

At the age of 19, Zakir performed with Pandit Ravi Shankar in the United States and started a close friendship with drummer Mickey Hart that continued throughout their lives. In 1987, Zakir released the highly acclaimed recording *Making Music*. In 1992 Zakir and Mickey co-created and co-produced the recording *Planet Drum*, however, Zakir's greatness went far beyond drumming. Zakir composed the opening music for the Olympics in 1996. He collaborated with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Detroit Symphony, and New York Philharmonic, composed "Triple Concerto for Banjo, Bass, and Tabla" with Edgar Meyer and Bela Fleck for the Nashville Symphony, and "Concerto for Four Soloists" for the National Symphony Orchestra. In 2007 the government of India chose Zakir to compose an anthem to celebrate India's 60th year of independence.

Throughout his career he collaborated and played with drummers such as Tony Williams, Billy Cobham, Narada Michael Walden, Airto, Buddy Miles, Mickey Hart, Tito Puente, Armando Perazza, Giovanni Hidalgo, James Gadson, Steve Smith, Gary Husband, and Eric Harland. When I asked Zakir about what he learned from the drummers that he had worked with, his face lit up saying, "Elvin taught us that it was important to be able to make the beat breathe so it could expand

and contract. We all learned this important concept from Elvin, but I felt that it was important to incorporate this idea into the traditional repertoire. From drummers like Olatunji, Armando Perazza, or Francisco Aguabella, I learned how to be melodic and create a speaking language with rhythm. From Mickey Hart I have learned the possibility and the importance of playing rhythms in a trance-like manor. Through this practice, you can go into a meditative zone that will transform you into a whole different world of rhythm. That has opened a whole new can of worms to fish with. When I play with Airto, I learn about using percussion to design soundscapes. From Tony Williams, I was inspired to learn about how drumming could change with a unique combination of swing, tone, and power… I did a drum trio tour many years back with Billy Cobham and Tito Puente. On that tour, I heard Tito playing funk on his timbales! That really changed me; I learned that anything was possible. Then I heard Latin hand drummers like Giovanni Hidalgo and Armando Perazza play three or four congas and hold a melodic pattern with the left hand, while soloing on the quinto with the right hand. That was when I realized that I could express myself both rhythmically and melodically on the tabla."

For the last 20+ years Zakir led a yearly tabla workshop in Marin County that has attracted hundreds of students. Zakir's combination of a childlike musical innocence and sheer, unrelenting musical virtuosity made many people refer to him as a "master musician." And in my opinion, if there ever was a true "drumming guru," Zakir would have been it. However, he refuted those ideas and the idea of "mastery." Instead, he called himself a "good student of music." Zakir Hussain was quite possibly the wisest musician I have ever encountered, as is seen in his explanation (from my interview with him) about pushing musical performance boundaries. "I have fallen flat on my face on stage a million times, and it just doesn't hurt anymore. It just means that I have to practice some more and strive to be better. Everything is a learning experience; you cannot be a master of anything, *ever*! You can only be a very good student of something. So, to think of yourself as a "master" who is going to give the "best" performance every time that you play, is not attainable. That does not exist." He continued, "Every time I walk on stage, I learn something new. But I must add that one of the reasons behind why I have no problems falling on my face in performance is because my confidence has developed through not always having to perform in front of musical "connoisseurs." If I was playing in India constantly, I would have the critics in my face all the time. This would make me more apprehensive to try things that were out of the ordinary, or just not "normal." But through playing internationally, I have found myself playing with musicians who were okay with not being their "best" on a given evening, as long as it was for the sake of trying something different. This has allowed me to adopt that mindset as well and I have found that it is acceptable not to be perfect every night. I believe that it is *more* important to go somewhere *different* every night than to be *perfect*." He concluded, "A musician has certain compositions that he has learned to play, and he can fall back on them in case nothing else is working. But that doesn't mean that he shouldn't try to step out of the circle a little bit every now and then. It's all right to break a few "mind bones" every once in a while… Once you become comfortable with what you know, then you can start to move it around. It's like moving the furniture around in your living room. After you are comfortable in your own home, you find that you can reach the things that surround you with your eyes closed. You know where everything is. But when you get *too* comfortable, you must move things around a little bit or things becomes a little boring. But here's the thing: If you know what that "chair" really looks and feels like, you can make it fit in any room you choose. But you need to have the ability, the capability, the desire, and the confidence to try new things. And those things take time to develop."

Zakir Hussain was a great man, and as seen above, his wisdom knew no boundaries. As an eternal student he mentored, inspired, and taught musicians around the world. As a musician he created deeply emotional music that made people feel and react. His music went beyond mere genre and style, Zakir's music was grounded in the past, rooted in the present, and always looking towards the future. As a tabla drummer his virtuosity amazed fellow tabla drummers with his original sounds and the dexterity of his playing. As a drummer and an important member of the percussion community, he drew us together to celebrate drumming from all corners of the earth, and to teach and learn from one another. He taught us that *anything* is possible, and that it's all right to break a few "mind bones" every once in a while.

Modern Drummer mourns the loss of Zakir Hussain and sends our condolences to Zakir's wife Toni, his daughters Bella and Anisa, his brother Fazal Qureshi, the rest of his family, and his musical friends and family. **—Mark Griffith**

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