

Product Close-Up: Alesis Strata Core Set, Drummer Wallet



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MAY 2025



## The Journey of Primus' **JOHN HOFFMAN**

**Tony Brock**  
**Les Claypool**  
150 Years of  
**Sonor Drums**

Remembering Marco Soccoli



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# AN EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

## The Drum Community

Because of the passing of everybody's friend Marco Soccoli, and the fact that so many drummers wanted to contribute their thoughts to Marco's *Modern Drummer* tribute, I am thinking about the drum community a lot this month. The *Modern Drummer* tributes are always a tough thing to do, and I have been involved in a lot of them. We seem to lose a member of the drumming community every week. It's always nice to pay tribute to a member of the community, but the circumstances are never pleasant.



I have the great fortune to talk to drummers young and old every day and all day. Whether it's one of my many students, an up-and-coming drummer promoting a new project, an established drummer doing an interview, or an all-time great reaching out just to catch up. I am "literally" surrounded by drummers 24-7, and that feels good. Although my playing career has me working for and with other musicians, I have always felt that the drumming community is a little different. Drummers have a strong bond, we all have a shared past of "suffering" for our choice of instrument and practice, those circumstances give every drummer a relatability and a commonality, but it's *more* than that. I don't know how many drummers I've encountered through the years, but the "bad guys" could be counted on your hands alone. At times, we may encounter a drummer who is at work (setting up, tearing down, rushing to a gig or session, checking in or out of a hotel, or in the middle of some other business-related or touring issue/crisis,) and we all have bad days at work; but (with *very few* exceptions) the drum community is a supportive, friendly, and close-knit bunch of hard-working people. Musical genres and styles don't matter, stature doesn't matter, playing level doesn't matter... If you play drums, welcome to the community, we're all here to help and support.

Read the *Modern Drummer* interviews and watch any of the many drumming and drummer podcasts. Feel the camaraderie, love, support, and respect that we give to each of our drum brothers and sisters. That extends far beyond your favorite drummers, it includes percussionists, artist representatives, techs, drum and cymbal makers and factory workers, writers, reviewers, teachers, promotions people, live and studio engineers, fans, students, and drumming peers young and old. Drummers do all sorts of jobs in our community, and that is what keeps it going! Once a drummer always a drummer.

In honor of Marco Soccoli, and the brother and sisterhood of drummers everywhere, I raise a glass and say THANK YOU to EVERY drummer and member of the drumming community. I am proud that *Modern Drummer* is serving our drumming community and helping us all contribute to and create the groove of music and the groove of life!

**Mark Griffith**

**Editor-in-Chief, Director of Content**  
**Modern Drummer**



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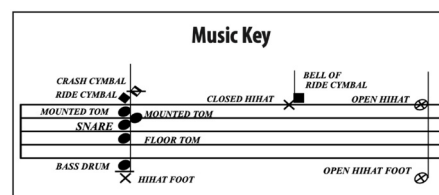
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### Clearly, Daniel's Dream Kit

This month's *Modern Drummer* Kit of the Month comes from Daniel Fleischmann of Germany. He writes, "This is my dream kit just because of how it sounds. Acrylic is such a modern material but I was fortunate enough to do a blindfold check at the Wahan Factory in Mainz, Germany. The owner of the company, Wahan (not Wuhan,) had me listen (blindfolded) to two kits with the same sizes, a Beech kit, and an Acrylic kit. The sound of the Acrylic was just killer! I was very surprised. My Wahan Acrylic drum sizes are: an 18 x 22" Bass drum, toms in 7 x 8", 8 x 10", 9 x 12", floor toms in 12 x 14" and 14 x 16", and I use a Wahan Custom Funkmaster 5 x 14" Snare. I also play Paiste Cymbals.





# Have You Been Practicing?

By Peter Erskine

I'm no stranger to the mental time machine, going back a few or many years to revisit something I said or a choice I made. Of course, life does not allow us to go back and change history, but we *can* learn from our mistakes as well as from our successes. My suspicion is that I'm not at alone in this practice. Meanwhile, **practicing**, or the lack thereof, looms large on most musicians' *histor-a-meter*. How many times have I wished that I had practiced more?

And yet, I did practice a lot when I was young. Countless hours at the drums, on the practice pad, the snare drum, playing the xylophone or marimba, and again at the drumset. It was a mandated chore at times, but normally I couldn't wait to make music. If this sounds familiar, keep reading.

Practicing can take the form of goal-specific work, such as "complete the following exercises," or the practice session can be revelatory, as in "play and pay attention." ANYTHING that's not 100% smooth, tonal, or in time is practically screaming for your attention. This self-reveal of execution hits and misses is my favorite way to spend time at the drums, where I allow the instrument and my hands to inform me of what needs working. Treating a practice session as "homework" allows me to prepare something specifically for a gig. The only time I've felt a tinge of stage fright is when I knew I was under-prepared.

experience? Bad judgement.") In any event, I bothered once to add up the number of hours I had played and practiced the drums leading up to my being asked to join the band Weather Report (back when I was all of 24 years of age.) The total was, not surprisingly, darn near 10,000 hours!

I wouldn't want to even begin trying to count the number of hours that I've played since, but I'll bet that the combined total of hours — between rehearsing, performing, recording, and practicing (as well as teaching) — is a LOT. From what I can tell, much of the practice time results in or resides as an accumulative effect. In other words, a learned set of skills and traits that remain available despite the lack of daily paradiddles or scales. Granted, the perpetual student who devotes their time to an assiduous and disciplined practice regimen will have technical advantages. But much to my delight, I am finding that it's not *de rigueur* to put in the daily rudimental ritual to achieve drumming fluency and, dare I say, poetry.

With Mike Clark's permission, I will quote a social media post this great drummer and friend made not so long ago: "What made Philly Joe magic for me was his poetry! The way he turned a phrase or his last minute change-ups. His genius. I hear people playing Wilcoxon and some of his signature licks but without the poetry or mystery I don't find it interesting! I know most of



Photos by George Harris

There's a theory that 10,000 hours of time spent doing a particular skill will lead to greatness. I am not 100% certain that this is a universal truth, but much like ingesting chicken soup when suffering from a cold: it couldn't hurt. Whenever we read about an incident or accident involving a passenger jet, the number of pilot flight hours is always mentioned as both significant and relevant. It all adds up to **experience**. (If you read last month's column, I mentioned "Reminds me of a line from my book: What makes good judgement? Experience. What makes

those licks, but I already heard him doing it!!

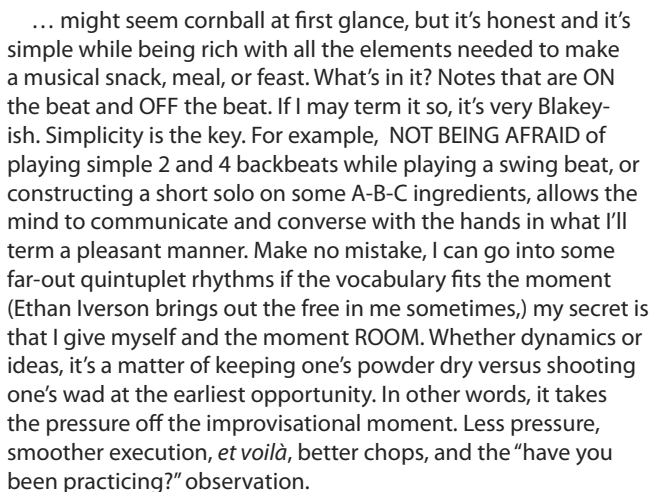
"Some drummers have a talent for rudiments in jazz. If it sounds ricky-yucky, corny, or strained it's not fun for me. Just playing some of those things to make the statement "this is where I am or the canon I speak" isn't enough to hold my attention. How to make those phrases lay funky will get me. Funky in a jazz way.

"He had street smarts, street humor he was like the (Muhammad) Ali of the drums for me ... much more than how he



My quoting Mike's post is not meant to indict any particular approach to utilizing rudiments, but I introduce his comments into evidence that technical or rudimental mastery is not essential to effective expressiveness. I would introduce as evidence Exhibit Number #1 my own lack of rudimental discipline (forget mastery!) And please bear in mind that I will never dare compare myself to jazz drumming legends. Imagine my surprise last night after a jazz set with pianist Ethan Iverson and bassist Darek Oles at the Sam First jazz club in LA when former student Kevin van den Elzen asked me, "Man, have you been practicing?"

However, I knew what he was talking about. I managed to sound like I had indeed been practicing. How do I explain effortless execution while approaching near-retirement with little practice time to show for how I spend my days? Kevin is an excellent drummer, and he is a former student. I felt compelled to make a teachable moment out of this, and my improvised answer surprised me as well as him. I told Kevin, "Well, yeah, the effortlessness was there tonight. Number one, I'd say that the snare drum was a huge help." (Pardon the plug, but the Tama 50th Limited Mastercraft Rosewood 5x14" Snare Drum has been a game-changer for me.) The best way to describe playing this drum is that it's like having a conversation with someone who is so empathetic and close to you, that they can complete your sentence for you before you've said *anything*. The response and tone are true. In fact, I find the responsiveness to be "off the charts" good, and the drum's sound profile is both crisp and warm. I continued, "The main thing is that I am not afraid to play relatively simple and corny ideas, and melodic motifs that are not so technically demanding. When I was younger, I approached soloing like alligator-wrestling, the licks had to be mastered, subjugated, and subdued so I could brandish them to a skeptical world, as if to say, "Look at what I can do!" And THAT puts the drummer too far in front of their musical skis. Building upon a melodic rhythm motif such as:



A photograph of a man with a beard, wearing a black jacket, playing the drums in a dimly lit room. A double bass player is visible in the background.

Okay, the time machine beckons. What **would** I do differently if the world did work that way? Let's play this parlor game. I would have practiced more Wilcoxon and George Lawrence Stone as well as spending much more time in the books of Elliot Fine/Marvin Dahlgren and Colin Bailey (respectively, *Modern Rudimental Swing Solos*, *Stick Control*, *4-Way Coordination*, and *Bass Drum Control*.) The titles alone tell the story. I also would not have dated good ol' what's-her-name way back when ... but that's another story for another time

Meanwhile, I'm grateful for the emphasis I did receive from my professor at Indiana University, George Gaber, who did his best to cultivate in me what he termed "Gladstone Hands." My takeaway was to focus on touch and tone. I'm prone to believe that the foundation he built has served my musical instincts and approach well. My wish for all drummers is that they be able to find their own key to musical understanding. It makes for a most enjoyable time. 🥁

**MODERN DRUMMER** *Magazine*

**PETER ERSKINE**

Special feature: Peter Erskine on his career and the drumming world.



# NEW & NOTABLE

## NEW VATER STICKS, EVANS HEADS, DDRUM E-FLEX BT8 ELECTRONIC SET, CLEAR SOUND Baffles, ORANGE NOISE CANCELLING HEADPHONES



### New Vater Chad Sexton Signature Stick

Vater has been quietly working with Chad Sexton on an updated stick model to perfectly align with his newfound needs as a player. Although it is the same width as his previous model, the updated version of his stick has grown  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to stretch to 16  $\frac{1}{4}$ ". With a refined technique and overall playing approach, Chad slightly tweaked the specs of his custom model to perfectly align with his newfound needs as a player. The update to his custom model adds a little extra length and is finished in white paint, which not only adds a cool visual look but has also been very helpful to Chad's grip while performing long duration 311 shows. Ask for Chad Sexton's new signature stick model wherever you buy your drumsticks.

Specifications:

Length: 16  $\frac{1}{4}$ " 41.27 cm.

Grip: 0.580 inches 1.47 cm.

Tip: Barrel.

Wood type: Hickory.

### New Heads from Evans

Evans is expanding the UV1 line with the all-new UV1 Reverse Dot Snare Batter. Known for its uncompromising durability and UV-cured coating, UV1 now offers even more articulation and focus thanks to a 3-mil slotted patch placed on the underside of the drumhead. The slotted Reverse Dot design enhances attack while maintaining open resonance, providing responsive, expressive playing without sacrificing strength. This marks the first Reverse Dot variant in the UV1 series—ideal for players demanding focused clarity, tight control, and rock-solid durability.

Additionally, Evans is also extending their best-selling HD Dry line with five new tom sizes in: 8", 10", 15", 16", and 18". Originally



designed as a snare batter, HD Dry has earned a dedicated following for its dry, punchy tone and built-in overtone control—qualities that are now available across the full kit. With two-ply construction, precision-drilled dry vents, and a 2-mil control ring, these heads deliver tighter, more focused sound,



and unmatched tonal control. These exciting new releases underscore our commitment to providing drummers with the precision, control, and durability they expect from Evans.

## ddrum® E-Flex BT8 Electronic Drum Set

ddrum® introduces its E-Flex BT8 complete electronic drum set solution, ideal for beginning players or drummers seeking a quiet practice solution with a small footprint. The new unit builds upon the strengths of the popular original E-Flex by adding new features and upgrades.



### Specifications:

- 3 – 6" Mesh Tom Pads
- 1 – 6" Dual Zone Snare Pad
- 1 – 9" Crash Cymbal with Choke Function
- 1 – 9" Ride Cymbal with Bell zone and Choke Function
- 1 – 9" Hi-Hat Pad
- 1 – BT-Series Module with Bluetooth connectivity
- 1 – Hi-Hat Controller
- 1 – Bass Pad with Bass drum pedal
- 1 – Throne
- 1 – Complete Rack
- 1 – Pair of Drumsticks

Significant enhancements to the E-Flex BT8 include a new bass drum pad with bass drum pedal, rather than a basic foot controller, and a brand-new Module with Bluetooth connectivity (which it shares with the E-Flex BT9.) Like its predecessor, the E-Flex BT8 features responsive and natural feeling mesh heads, Double Bass Mode, and ddrum's eye-catching red and black color-scheme. Double Bass Mode is especially useful for players looking to improve their double-bass patterns. The E-Flex BT8 Electronic Drum Set has a price of \$429 USD MAP. To learn more, visit [www.ddrum.com](http://www.ddrum.com)

## Clearsound: The Solution for Better Sound

The perfect solution for controlling drum sound on stage, in the studio and at church, Clearsound Baffles are an innovative, effective, eye-catching, and are an easy-to-use method for isolating and improving sound in live and recording situations. The transparent, lightweight acoustic treatment system is specifically designed to reduce bleed from cymbals into nearby microphones and eliminate frequency conflicts—naturally dampening the cymbals' high-end and allowing the vocals to cut through in any mix.



In addition, unlike other acoustic treatments that can affect the drummer's comfort and performance, each Clearsound baffle can be quickly and easily mounted on a cymbal or mic stand and positioned wherever necessary—enhancing their sound without restricting their drumming.

The 22" and 24" diameter baffles are available individually and in convenient sets of four. Clearsound also offers a soft carrying case as well as cymbal stand mounting arms and microphone stand adapters. 26", 28", and 30" models are available by special order.

Clearsound Baffles are used and endorsed by top professional sound engineers and drummers, including Gil Sharone (Marilyn Manson,) Roy Mayorga (Jerry Cantrell,) Valerie Franco (Independent,) Eric Downs (Benson Boone,) Clemons Poindexter (Khalid,) Nic Collins (Genesis,) Shannon Leto (30 Seconds To Mars,) and many more.

Affordably priced, Clearsound Baffles are available at leading drum shops, rehearsal studios and backline companies. To learn more, visit [www.clearsoundbaffles.com](http://www.clearsoundbaffles.com), follow @clearsoundbaffles or email [sales@clearsoundbaffles.com](mailto:sales@clearsoundbaffles.com).



## Orange Release 'O' Edition MKII Noise Cancelling Headphones

'O' Edition MKII Noise Cancelling Headphones from Orange have been developed for fully personalized, high-fidelity audio. With a new range of customizable features, they put the user in complete control of their listening experience.


Engineered for sonic precision and with powerful 40mm close voice-coil drivers, the headphones deliver excellent dynamic range and depth with well-defined, flawless, high-quality sound.

The 'O' Edition MKII Headphones feature *Active Noise Cancellation* (ANC), with three presets that block out unwanted noise. It can be operated at the touch of a button or with the *Orange Amps App* which offers full ANC personalization, so users can stay aware of ambient sounds. The app offers a tailorable 10-band EQ for fine tuning over a wide range of frequencies.

The easily accessible *Touchpad Control* on the right side of the headphones allows users to quickly pause, play, skip music tracks or answer calls. The touchpad volume control, in conjunction with the built-in mic, provides clear conversation at home, office or on the move.

Using ultra-fast, stable *Wireless Bluetooth 5.2* technology, the headphones pair quickly and seamlessly, and also include a 3.5mm AUX cable for additional connectivity options. The headphones have up to 50 hours of battery life, and a rapid charge option which will deliver up to seven hours of playback time with just a 15-minute charge.

The headphones are lightweight and comfortable with soft rotating cushioned ear cups with an adjustable and secure headband. They fold easily into the supplied carrying

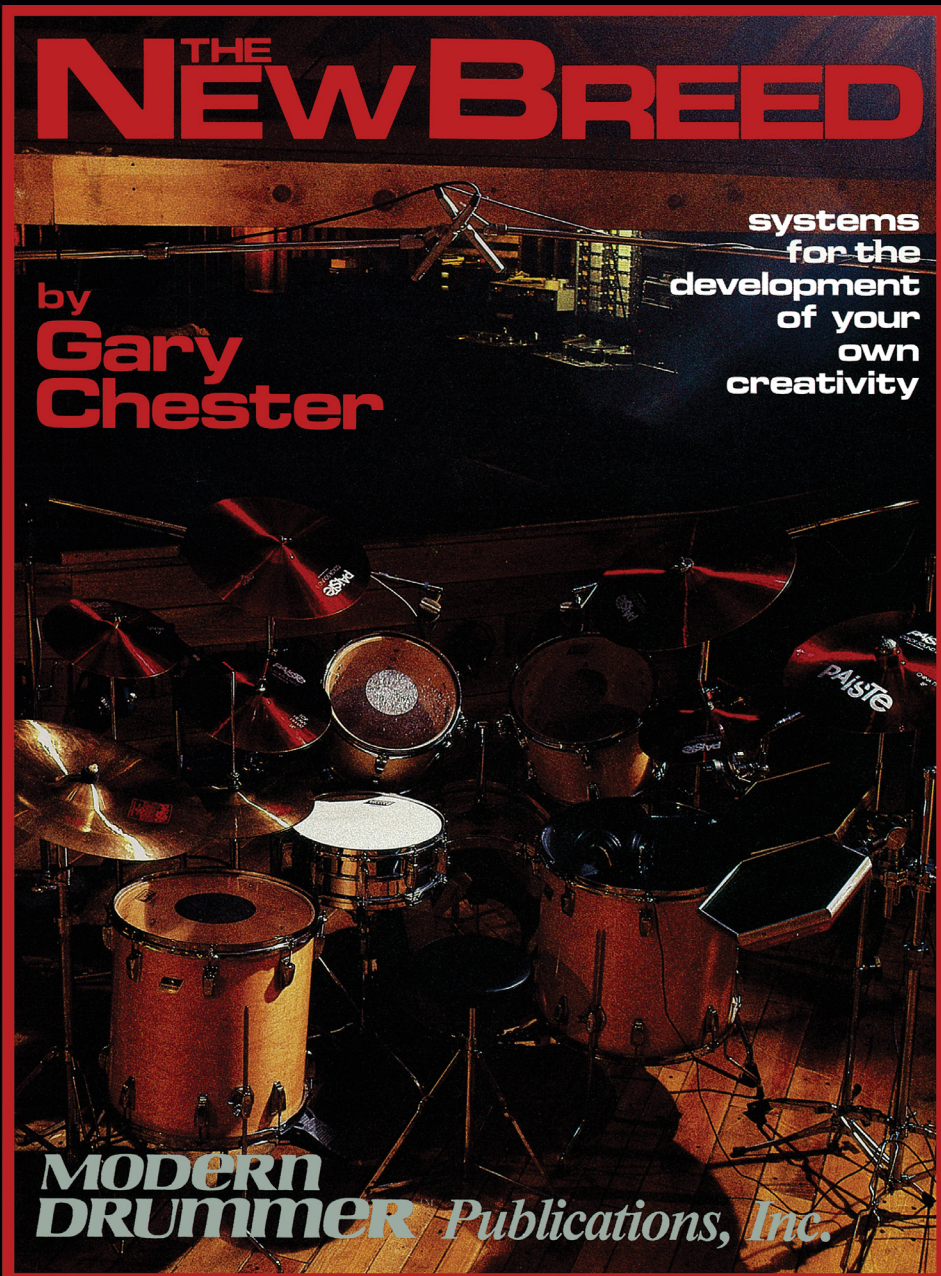
case and come with a USB-C charging cable. The 'O' Edition MKII Headphones RRP is £169 / \$229. To find out more and to purchase the 'O' Edition MKII Headphones, go to <https://orangeamps.com/> or <https://orangessentials.com/>. 





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# PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

## ALESIS STRATA CORE

By Jason Mehler

In October of 2024, Alesis Drums announced the launch of the Strata Core, a compact yet fully featured addition to their Strata Series of e-kits. With a 30% reduced footprint compared to its sibling the Strata Prime and a lower price point, The Strata Core is an intriguing e-kit offering. For this month's Product Close-Up, I put the Alesis Strata Core to the test.

### WHAT'S IN THE BOX

The Strata Core Ships in a single box and includes the Core Drum Module, the Strata Kick Tower with 8" mesh pad, a 12" mesh snare pad, two 8" mesh rack tom pads, a 10" mesh floor tom pad, 12" hi-hat cymbal with magnetic control system, 14" ride cymbal, and two 12" crash cymbals.

The included hardware consists of a four-post steel rack, three cymbal boom arms, and a double-braced snare stand. Other items included in the box are the wiring harness, drum module mount, a sliding bar drum key, Velcro cable straps, assembly manual, and a card for a 90-day Drumeo subscription.

### WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

You will not find a hi-hat stand, drum throne, or bass drum pedal in the Strata Core package. This is typical for e-kits in this price range, where manufacturers prioritize packing in high-end features while keeping the overall cost competitive.

### HARDWARE SET UP

Having unboxed my fair share of e-kits over the years, I found the Alesis Strata Core to be one of the smoother and more enjoyable setups I've encountered. The components are very neatly packaged and easy to pop out of their box or slip out of their poly bag with little need for a box-cutter or blade.



The hardware setup of the Strata Core took a little over an hour at a relaxed pace, with most of the time being spent on rack assembly and drum positioning. Alesis has a great assembly guide video by Adam Tuminaro on their YouTube channel that takes all the guesswork out of setting up the Strata Core kit.

If you are meticulous about cable management, neatly mounting the wiring harness may end up being the most time-consuming part of the setup. The multi-pin connector includes







unusually long cables compared to similar e-kits, giving you plenty of flexibility to position pads and cymbals wherever you like with minimal restrictions due to cable length. Each TRS cable is clearly labeled for its corresponding drum or cymbal using durable, color-coded shrink tubing for easy identification.

The drum module mounts on an extension of the rack to the left of the hi-hat (or to the right, if you're left-handed.) The multipin cable mounts to the underside of the module, but unlike other similar e-kits, the connector itself doesn't have its own screws. Instead, it relies on the module's mounting bracket to hold the connection securely in place.

The kick drum tower comes ready to play with minimal setup needed beyond positioning and adjusting the mesh head tension to suit your preference. It has spiked screws and a Velcro strip (AKA, the pet-hair magnet,) to keep it firmly in place on a drum rug, along with a sturdy base plate for attaching your preferred kick pedal. The 10" mesh pad provides ample space to accommodate dual beaters from a double pedal setup.

## AESTHETICS

While drummers shopping in this price range might prioritize features over looks, the Strata Core brings a touch of flair to the table. The deep red-oyster shell finish, paired with black rims and gold tension rods, gives the kit a stylish edge over the typical black-and-white aesthetic of comparable setups. The rack and kick tower have a matte black finish, complimented by chrome cymbal boom arms and snare stand. Overall, it's a good-looking kit for the price. I do wish more of the drum shell was visible, as the rich red finish is hard to fully appreciate with only about an inch of it showing on each pad.

## FIRST IMPRESSION

For a small footprint e-kit, the Strata Core is very comfortable to play, with flexible mounting options to get everything just right. Having the hi-hat and snare stand as stand-alone

components makes positioning much easier than the rack-mounted option, allowing you to swing out the rack a little further on the left if you wanted to make room for additional items, such as a laptop, more pads, or a tray table.

The mesh pads offer a familiar response, and the head tension is adjustable on all pads. The rubber rims on the drums are tough enough to handle hard playing while still soft enough to keep noise levels low. Same goes for the rubber cymbals, staying quiet while still providing enough stick rebound to maintain a natural, cymbal-like playing feel.

Once the module is powered on, the kit feels very natural to play. For the most part, the sounds are where you expect them to be like cymbal bells, rim shots etc. The cymbal pads have three zones (bell, bow, and edge) with 360-degree triggering, so there are no dead zones. They also spin freely on the stand, making them compatible with standard cymbal stands. The bell area is smaller than I'd prefer and requires a bit more precision to strike cleanly without hitting the hard plastic screw in the center.

The triggering on the snare drum and toms is very dynamic, though on my test kit, the volume of the floor tom needed some adjusting, as it was quieter than the rack toms. The bass drum in most of the samples is a bit aggressive, which I prefer. Some players may choose to dial it back some to better suit their playing style.

I like the feel of the hi-hat, which performs well after initial calibration. The sampled hi-hat sounds seem to get better as you dig deeper into the available kit samples. Volume-wise, I'd add a little to the hats on most of the kits.

## WORKING WITH THE STRATA CORE DRUM MODULE

Powering on the Strata Core drum module initiates a 30-second boot up process, which is understandable, given the number of samples and features it has. The module boasts an impressive spec sheet that includes 25GB of onboard content



across 75 drum kits. It features over 370 individual kit pieces, more than 800 articulations, and a staggering 144,000 samples with multiple adjustable microphone channels, giving you a high level of control over your sound samples.

After booting up, I was glad to see an update prompt appear, giving me the option to download and install the latest firmware over Wi-Fi. No need to import from a USB flash drive, though that is still an option if necessary. I proceeded to download and install the firmware. There was a brief moment of panic when the screen went completely white for longer than expected, but everything came back up just fine.

The Strata Core drum module's seven-inch touch screen is bright and clear, and though smaller than the ten-inch screen on the Strata Prime, it still provides a high level of visibility and ease of navigation through kits and settings. The physical control knobs and buttons on the face of the module are backlit, making them easy targets in low light situations.

Navigating the Strata Core's menu is refreshingly straightforward, and I'm genuinely impressed by how thoughtfully the interface is designed. The settings are laid out in a clean, logical manner, making it easy to explore and customize without feeling overwhelmed. I found myself instinctively knowing where to look for specific settings, which is not always the case with e-kits. As I began flipping through the preset drum kits and digging into the adjustable parameters, it quickly became clear just how deep the Strata Core's sonic potential really is. Some of the custom settings are:

**Layering Options:** You can stack up to four different sounds per pad zone, giving you the ability to create complex, multi-dimensional voices that respond dynamically to your playing.

**Mic Channel Control:** Each drum includes adjustable microphone channels, letting you blend close mics, overheads, and room ambience to shape the overall tone and depth.

**Articulation Tweaks:** Modify how different playing techniques—like rimshots, cross-sticks, or cymbal bells—respond, offering a more personalized and expressive performance.

**Built-in Effects:** Each pad can be shaped further with onboard tools like EQ, compression, and reverb, allowing you to dial in polished, studio-quality tones directly from the module.

The module has outputs on the back for Audio IN/OUT, two additional triggers, MIDI, USB, and power. The front has both a 1/4" and 1/8" jack for headphones, which is awesome. One thing to note though is that the Strata Core only sends stereo output, not individual instruments. You'll need to use an external MIDI library for that.

The metronome and recording functions, while useful, don't



feel as refined as the rest of the Strata Core's sleek interface. The touchscreen is intuitive, but some of the button behavior—like Tap Tempo being labeled "Tempo" or the metronome starting playback instead of opening settings—takes a moment to get used to. A bit more touchscreen integration here would really elevate the experience.

### PLAYING THE STRATA CORE

The Strata Core is packed with fun and interesting sound samples to experiment with. I especially love hunting for strange and unconventional sounds, just to grab my kids' attention. My youngest son instantly fell in love with the Electric 2 Kit, which is arguably one of the most gloriously obnoxious sounds ever to grace an e-kit library.

One of the things I find especially sweet about the Strata Core is how satisfying rimshots feel when paired with the layers and tone of the Strata Core's sound sample library. It's a standout feature.

Another feature that is a blast to over-use is the single-stick cymbal choke. Just press the stick into the cymbal at the edge and you get a satisfying choke sound without falling off your throne.

### IN CONCLUSION

The Strata Core delivers where it counts—great sounds, tons of tweakability, and a clean, modern design. It's compact, comfortable, and fits right in at its price point. If you've already got a hi-hat stand, drum throne, and pedal, you're ahead of the game. The Strata Core retails for \$1999. Check it out at

<https://www.alesisd drums.com/>



# THE DRUMMER WALLET 2.0

By Jason Mehler

I'm not sure why drummers often double as inventors. Maybe it's because, unlike guitarists or keyboard players, we can pretty much hit anything to make music. That type of freedom tends to spark some wild ideas and endless experimentation. One such drummer/inventor is Danny Wolf, creator of Drummer Wallet. I came across a clever post by Danny on social media about the new Drummer Wallet 2.0 which is an all-in-one accessory designed specifically with drummers in mind. I reached out and received a pair of drummer wallets to review for this month's Product Close-Up.

## ORIGINAL VERSION

The original Drummer Wallet flew under the radar for me, probably because it looks so much like a standard wallet. Hidden inside though, is a strong magnet designed to adhere the wallet to the rim of your drum while the flat side dampens the drum head, eliminating overtones.

## VERSION 2.0

The new Drummer Wallet 2.0 comes in a few colors and acts as 3 different products:

**Wallet** – A pocket or slot holds about seven cards, which can be accessed by pushing down on a button with your thumb. The cards slide out with each card protruding slightly more than the other, making it easy to access the card you need. A second pocket is included on the side to hold a small amount of thin items such as cash or receipts.

**Drum Mute** – It works as a drumhead dampener, mimicking the classic wallet-on-the-snare trick drummers have used for years to achieve a fat, punchy sound. It features a strong magnetic strip on the side that securely attaches to the rim of your snare drum, enabling quick and easy application or removal during performances.

**Practice Pad** – A familiar gum rubber pad surface which delivers a natural rebound and playing feel, closely resembling that of a real drumhead. The underside of the pad features 24 small suction cups that grip smooth surfaces such as glass, plastic, or polished wood. This keeps the pad firmly in place while playing and makes it easy to practice anywhere, anytime.



panic. I love the feel and snack-like size. I'm compelled to take a bite out of it. The pop out feature of the card slot is the party trick that will surely trigger the "ooo's" and "ahh's" from your friends. The drum pad feels very familiar, like the original Real Feel pads from the past.

## PUTTING IT TO THE TEST

When I received the Drummer Wallet 2.0, I transferred the important cards from my bulky leather wallet. The limited storage on the Drummer Wallet quickly made me realize that I've been carrying a lot of junk. Time to grow up and ditch the pack rat habits. I was a bit worried that having just one or a few cards might make them loose or prone to slipping out. But that's not the case. Even with a single card, the Drummer Wallet holds it securely. Consider the wallet test passed.

As a drum mute, the Drummer Wallet 2.0 performs well. It's dense enough, and the soft gum rubber pad closely mimics how a real wallet sits and reacts on a drumhead. I found the magnet works better on some drums than others, depending on the type of metal and height of the rim. Regardless, consider the drum mute test passed.

The drum pad feature does its job well enough to pass my test. That said, the suction cups and the surface you're sticking it to need to be clean, or you might hear a little chirping sound when striking the pad, and it may slide around a bit.

## IN CONCLUSION

After a month with the Drummer Wallet 2.0, my old wallet has officially been banished to the sock drawer. I really like how it helps me stay organized and having a built-in pad and mute on hand is both super convenient and a solid conversation starter. It's well-built and tough enough that I'm pretty sure it'll outlast my previous wallets, at least until version Drummer Wallet 3.0 hits the scene. The Drummer Wallet 2.0 retails at \$49.99. Get yours at: <https://drummerwallet.com/>

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Drummer Wallet 2.0 doesn't actually look like a wallet, which is fine by me. Chances are, if you accidentally dropped it at the grocery store, it would still be sitting right where you left it by the time you came sprinting back in a





# THE JOURNEY OF PRIMUS' THE JOURNEY OF PRIMUS.



Photos courtesy/permission of John Hoffman





# JOHN HOFFMAN

# JOHN HOFFMAN

BY DANNY "ZIGGY" LAVERDE

Last year, many of us were surprised when Primus announced that drummer Tim "Herb" Alexander was leaving the band. It had happened before, but this time seemed different. Soon after, Primus announced that it would be holding the Interstellar Drum Derby in search for their new drummer. Over 6,000 drummers threw their hats into the ring, created audition videos, and vied for this prestigious gig. Ultimately, it came down to two drummers, and then, *there was one*. Shreveport, Louisiana's John Hoffman is not an overnight success. His journey was not a straight line nor was it an easy ride. The Primus audition was a long and arduous process. But John feels that he spent his entire life preparing for this opportunity, and when the time came, he gave it his best with no illusions of grandeur. John spent his entire life honing his drumming skills working on the Louisiana music scene, and his humility, personality, musicality, preparation, and perseverance was paying off. *Modern Drummer* is proud to get the entire story of this exciting ride direct from "Hoffer's" mouth. Follow along as John details his musical voyage that has led to him becoming the new drummer for Primus.



**MD:** Let's start from the beginning. How did you get into music and drumming specifically?

**JH:** My dad is a musician, so I was always around music growing up. My dad met my mom while he was on tour. They got married, ended up moving to Hawaii, and I was born in Honolulu. When they were there, my dad got a great gig on the island playing with the biggest Hawaiian rock band at the time, called "TeaZer." According to my dad, they opened for The Police back in the day, and when I saw Stewart Copeland play the drums, I pointed at the set and said my first word which was "drums." Only I didn't say drums, I said "dums." That's pretty much how it happened. I got my first kit when I was around 18 months old.

My dad moved back home to Shreveport, Louisiana where his family is from, not long after, they formed the band "The Killer Bees," which was one of the original American reggae bands back in the

'80s. They moved to Austin shortly after and the band quickly gained momentum. They opened for everybody that came through. They were first American reggae band to be invited to Sun Splash, which is the biggest festival in Jamaica. My dad had long blond dreadlocks which was pretty crazy. He always brought me to everything he was doing, even when I shouldn't have been there. My mom was the same way. She was always really into the lifestyle. To me, being on the tour bus and backstage at concerts was just regular life. It didn't seem strange, but it was great since I ended up being a career musician. I couldn't have

asked for a better upbringing. I discovered music as I grew older. My dad always helped me find cool music, and I always listened to what he was listening to. When I was about 12, I discovered Jimi Hendrix. I loved *Are You Experienced?* and the way Mitch Mitchell played. I was always trying to copy what he was doing. I discovered several other bands along the way, and when I was about 17, I discovered Primus. I was into Primus, Tool, and Incubus. Those bands were life-changing for me. I was coming into my own and figuring out what I liked. When I discovered those bands, it was the coolest stuff I'd ever heard. I had already been exposed to Frank Zappa, so I was already into experimental progressive stuff. But I always listened to all music regardless of genre.

**MD:** Were you in any bands growing up while you were discovering all this music?

**JH:** When I was 17 or so, I started jamming with a couple dudes.

I went over to their place, and they started playing this cool funky riff. We started jamming on it and I asked, "What's that song called?" They said, "We're calling it "Tommy the Cat." I said, "That's the coolest song name I've ever heard!" They replied, "We can't actually call it that because that's the name of a Primus song," then they played me Primus' "Tommy the Cat." I remembered hearing the song before, but I never knew who it was. Immediately, Primus became my favorite band. I listened to everything they did up to that point.

**MD:** After high school, how did you begin pursuing a professional career in drumming?

**JH:** As I said, my dad was a musician, so as far as making money, it always seemed *normal* to do that. When I was a teenager, my dad ushered me into the life. The first few years I was playing and getting paid for it I was usually playing with my dad, eventually I started doing my own thing. The momentum came

from my dad holding my hand early on. In my mid-20s, I moved from Phoenix back to Shreveport, and my dad introduced me to everybody there. It seemed like everyone already knew me when I got there. It didn't take me long to fall into these pockets of different people and different bands. That's how bands usually form, you meet people that you enjoy hanging out with, and then you start gigging. I've been able to maintain a living playing music around here for the past 20 years or so. I've gotten to play with everyone here who needed a drummer. I've stayed very busy playing music for a couple decades. I feel pretty lucky.

**MD:** Were there ever moments when you questioned whether a career in music was sustainable for you, or has it always felt like the path you were meant to follow?

**...when I was about 17, I discovered Primus. I was into Primus, Tool, and Incubus. Those bands were life-changing for me. I was coming into my own and figuring out what I liked.**

**JH:** There were hard times when I thought about getting a job that paid better, but that was typically in a time of crisis when I needed money. I can safely say that even during the times that I didn't think it was going to work out, I've always stayed patient and kept my nose to the grindstone. Things have always turned around and worked out. In a music career especially, sometimes





things are great and sometimes you might go a couple months without any work. It might seem unsustainable, but if you stay motivated and do what you have to do, things always turn around. I'm lucky that things have always worked out for me that way. Granted, I have a pretty strong work ethic, I've always gone and gotten things. I haven't just sat back and waited for things to fall in my lap. I have a good reputation, people know they can always count on me, I've set up a good thing in Shreveport. Even now that the Primus thing happened, my reputation around here has carried over to them. They don't know me, they're taking a chance as much as I am. I think they were able to see that I wasn't "controversial" before I came into the band, I just do my thing and play the music.

**MD:** You played in a band called Dirtfoot that opened for Primus at one point. Were you in the band then?

**JH:** I've been in Dirtfoot for over 10 years, I think they opened for Primus about a year or two before I got in the band. There was definitely a connection, but I didn't tour with Dirtfoot and Primus before my audition.

**MD:** Was Dirtfoot your biggest gig to date before you joined Primus?

**JH:** It was definitely one of the more stable gigs that I've done. I'd played a lot of one-off gigs as a fill in drummer. I've probably done that more than anything else. I have done some high-profile gigs when I wasn't necessarily *in the band*.

**MD:** What was your gigging life before joining Dirtfoot?

**JH:** I did a lot of touring back in the MySpace days. Some of the bands that I played with barely exist on the Internet now because there wasn't any documentation of them other than Polaroid photos. I have a lot of experience touring, but most of the people I've played with, as established as they are, aren't names that are highly recognizable to most people. It was a lot of DIY stuff, opening for bigger bands, and filling in for bigger bands.

**MD:** How do you go about learning songs on short notice for

gigs?

**JH:** For me, it's all instincts and reflexes. I'll obviously chart everything out, but I'll chart it out in a way that reads, "The song starts out at about 125 BPM, does this in the verse, goes to half-time in the chorus, does this thing after guitar solo." I won't write down everything that happens in the song, but I'll put pins in certain places. If I haven't had a lot of time to prepare, I'm sort of going by where I think the song is going to go. If it sounds as though we're going to drop out, I'll drop out. In those situations, I've found that there's usually one person in the band

who will be there with you and help you out with cues. In my experience, you find *that* guy in the band and be their best friend. If they move their guitar headstock down, you figure out what they mean and learn how to read their cues. That's helped me a lot. It's a lot of preparation, nerves, and hoping that you don't mess up. But there's usually someone in the band to help you out. I've never made an enormous mistake on stage.

**MD:** What's your approach to learning songs if you're given a large setlist?

**JH:** Usually, repetition is best. I really enjoy listening to a song over and over. A lot of times, just writing out the songs will help me memorize what's going on. I'm also a big fan of being able to sleep on it. I've come to find that if you have to learn a lot of music real fast, you'll hit a mental wall. In my experience, I'll wake up the following day and whatever I was struggling with, will just be in my brain and be much easier than the night before, because I've had time to internalize it. For some gigs, I've had eight or nine charts all over the floor and I'm looking all over the place during the entire set. I do whatever I've got to do.

**MD:** What was your ultimate goal with your drumming career? Where did you see yourself going before joining Primus?

**JH:** My dad tells everyone that I always said I wanted to be the greatest drummer in the world. That was my motivation. Over



**I've been able to maintain a living playing music around here for the past 20 years or so. I've gotten to play with everyone here who needed a drummer. I've stayed very busy playing music for a couple decades. I feel pretty lucky.**



time, reality sets in, and the idea of *what* the greatest drummer in the world is and *what* success is, changes. That change occurs between the time you're a bright-eyed child and a grown-up trying to make your way. I don't know if I'll ever be the greatest drummer in the world, but I've never stopped trying to be my

**There were hard times when I thought about getting a job that paid better, but that was typically in a time of crisis when I needed money. I can safely say that even during the times that I didn't think it was going to work out, I've always stayed patient and kept my nose to the grindstone.**

own individual drummer. Of course, I've taken things from other people and applied them to my own style.

**MD:** What went through your mind when you first saw Primus announce the Interstellar Drum Derby? What was your journey from sending in your audition video to hearing back from Les Claypool himself?

**JH:** I found out about the Drum Derby on either Facebook or Instagram. They made the post that Herb had left pretty abruptly and that they were going to be holding the Interstellar Drum Derby to find their next drummer. My initial thought was, "Woah dude, that's crazy! Are they really going to find some random dude considering Les (Claypool) is best friends with Danny Carey and Stewart Copeland?" I thought that I'd give it a shot. I didn't think, 'Oh, this is my chance!' It didn't feel *real enough* for that, but I threw my name in the hat and sent them a video. It was a pretty short video of "John the Fisherman." I just enjoy that song and thought it was good to groove on. It's

kind of a funky pocket groove. It's not too technical, too rock 'n' roll, or a big tom beat. It's a pretty good representation of Primus' material. I really didn't overthink it too much at that point. I sent the video in and didn't expect much from it, but I got a response email from the Primus crew. Then I realized it was a formality response to everyone who sent in a video. Eventually I sent in a second video after they made another post saying they were not really digging the auditions too much. They were getting videos that were perfect covers of Primus songs, but they didn't really show much personality. People weren't going out of their way to be different. I took that as my cue to throw a

*Hail Mary* at them. Between my first and second videos, a buddy of mine from Phoenix who's very well-established, said he had gotten some inside information that Les and the guys weren't feeling the videos. He told me, "If you come at this thing from another angle, you might have a better shot. Les enjoys hi-hat grooves." I worked really hard on my second video. I spent three straight days filming and editing. No sleep and constantly grinding, so when I sent it, it felt like a real accomplishment. My follow-up video that was 14 or 15 minutes long, *that* was the one that ultimately got me the audition. Again, I wasn't expecting much, so when I saw that second post I thought, 'What can I give them that's going to answer all the questions?'

**MD:** What did you do differently on your second video?

**JH:** I spoke a little bit so they could hear my personality, and I made some clips of me just playing some funky grooves and I included some stuff of me doing video game covers. It wasn't very long until Primus put out their second post







saying that said they were looking for another type of presentation.

I had this feeling that if they *just* watched my second video, they would *at least* be intrigued. When I sent that in, I got another blanket response — “Thanks for sending it in. Don’t contact us, we’ll contact you. We’re very busy around here.” Two days later I got an email directly from Les Claypool. That’s when things changed and the reality of everything set in. Up until that point, you’re just reading stuff on a computer, the interaction wasn’t there. When I got Les’ email that said, “Hey, cool video. We’d like to invite you to come and audition in person, that was when it felt like the work I’d put in meant something. The reality of meeting Primus and *possibly* becoming their new drummer really hit me. I just started crying. I was overwhelmed with

emotions. I read the email and dropped my phone. It took me about half an hour to respond. It felt as though that alone was a victory, this guy knows my name, and that felt so crazy. It was quite a moment. It definitely put me in a new mindset. I was feeling good about things.

Then they put out another post that said they’d had some hackers scamming and sending out catfish emails telling people that they got an audition. I was so in denial, I thought my email was definitely real, then I thought for a couple minutes and thought, “There’s no way the real Les Claypool emailed me.” I thought I got scammed. It was heartbroken. But it didn’t take me long to get to the bottom of it. I contacted the management, and they responded quickly and said that I wasn’t one of the scamming victims. It was a huge relief.





**MD:** Your second video was very unique in how you presented yourself and your playing. Where did you get the idea of playing TV theme songs?

**JH:** When COVID hit a lot of people didn't have much to do. I had all this time on my hands, and I'd always wanted to start making videos. I just never had time. I just started using my phone and recording room audio. It was bad quality and I didn't know what I was doing, but I was really enjoying learning the process of how to make better quality videos. Somewhere along the way, I started doing TV theme song covers. The first one was the *Ducktales* theme. At the time, I was getting 100 or 200 views on my other videos. Then I put out the *Ducktales* video and got about 10,000 views. It was obviously something that people liked, so I just kept doing it, and I started really liking it. I'm such a nerd. I grew up on Saturday morning cartoons and video games. I'm a child of the 80s and the 90s, Nintendo, Super Nintendo, PlayStation, all that stuff. I don't know how many hours I spent playing Nintendo when you hear the same 30 second loop of music in the games. A lot of those songs were just burned into my brain as a child, so it was a natural thing. I started getting more followers and it just became a thing that I was known for. When I made the second video, all of those videos were so perfect for the audition video. I just knew Les would think that was cool, and I had a really good selection of TV themes to add to the video.

Getting this gig has been such an incredible process and journey. It's overwhelming, but now that it's all said and done, I can look back on so many things that led up to this. It seems like

**I've found that there's usually one person in the band who will be there with you and help you out with cues. In my experience, you find that guy in the band and be their best friend. If they move their guitar headstock down, you figure out what they mean and learn how to read their cues.**

so many of the choices I've made in my life and the directions that I've taken have all led up to the Primus gig.

**MD:** Can you give us some examples of what that you think you did that led up to getting

the gig with Primus?

**JH:** My whole life path in general, such as having people speak up for me saying that I was a trustworthy guy. If my reputation wasn't good, then I wouldn't have had people saying, "I'd love to vouch for you." As far as my audition video, I probably had more positive comments on the section where I played those covers than just about anything else. It's just very relatable and I guess it makes me seem like a normal dude, because I'm just playing along with these goofy songs that I love. It just seems like everything that I've done up to this point was the right decision.

When I got to the Primus audition process, I knew that it would be a tough door to open. Then it opened and I walked through. Then there was another door, which was going to be a little tougher. When I entered the next room (so to speak,) I was thinking that I'd be surprised if next door opened, then I enter

the next room, and the next room, and the next room. After a while, I thought, 'Dude, this is going my way... This is crazy!' I just felt so much fortune and luck during this whole Primus audition process, it got to the point where it was just funny. I couldn't believe that I was still there. The whole time, all I ever intended to do was just go and do my best. My attitude was to go and become the drummer for Primus. However, I didn't think the odds were necessarily in my favor, but my attitude was to do everything I could, make the right impression, and get this gig. As it went on and things were working out so well, it got to the point where I was thinking, 'It's crazy how this is turning out in my favor.'

I know that luck is when preparation meets opportunity, and I've always believed that. But if you're not ready, then you're not going to have anything to show for that luck. I was as prepared as I could've been, and I'm just glad they liked me and saw something in me. So now we're going to see where we can take it.

**MD:** How did you start preparing for the first in person audition after receiving the email from Les?

**JH:** I put myself into a 100 percent Primus mindset. Before the initial audition, I put myself into the mindset of, "Okay, I'm auditioning for Primus. This is the most important thing in my life right now." I cut back on a lot of the gigs and stuff I was doing in town. I got some of my friends to cover gigs for me, and everybody knew what I was doing. As soon as everybody found out that I was auditioning for Primus, every single person in my life said, "Yes! We've got your back. Just do your thing." I cut myself out of as much as I could and focused on the Primus thing.

I'll make this comparison. I'm a huge UFC fan. I love boxing, jiu-jitsu, MMA, and all things combat sports. Whenever those fighters have a fight, or go into a championship bout. They'll spend about two months before the fight living and breathing the fight and their opponent. That's what they have to do to be mentally prepared. This sounds goofy, but I put myself into that same sort of mindset where Primus was my fight. I imagined that in a couple of months, I'm going to go in, and I'm going to have the fight of my life. Obviously we're talking about a musical situation, but in my mind and in my world, this was the fight of my life. I went in fully prepared and set on getting this gig.

**MD:** How much time did you have between receiving the email and going to the live audition?

**JH:** About six weeks. I think my audition date was January 22<sup>nd</sup>, and I think I got the email late November or early December.

**MD:** During that time, what did you do to prepare yourself in your "drum fight camp?"

**JH:** I immediately kicked into Primus gear. I started listening to everything and really focusing on the different styles of the different drummers. Jayski, Brain, and Herb all have such drastically different styles, so I was really focusing on what to do to honor their styles the most. Even though they sent us a list of songs to play at the audition, which I was obviously working on like crazy, I was also listening to a lot of other stuff. I made myself a playlist of a couple hours' worth of Primus stuff, and I would filter through those and play along with them and look towards the future.

**MD:** Did you watch live footage of each drummer to pick up on their style more?



**JH:** Definitely. As a fan of the band, I was pretty familiar with their vibes already, but I definitely went back and specifically listened to a lot of their stuff. I really put myself into the mindset of, "This is their vibe, their vibe, and their vibe." Coming into the band, it's obvious they're looking for somebody who can pay respect to the past drummers and play these songs that the fans



have known to hear a certain way over decades. You can't come in a just do whatever over their songs. Primus was obviously looking for a drummer that could cover all the bases of past drummers but also be individual and stand out on their own.

**Over time, reality sets in, and the idea of what the greatest drummer in the world is and what success is, changes. That change occurs between the time you're a bright-eyed child and a grown-up trying to make your way.**

It's a pretty tall order, but I'm just very fortunate that I checked enough boxes for them to give me a chance and give me the ability to come in and make the changes needed for me to be as good as I can be with Primus.

**MD:** Can you walk us through the days leading up to your audition—what was going through your mind as everything unfolded, especially with the wildfires in L.A.?

**JH:** My audition was on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and January 7<sup>th</sup> was the beginning of the massive devastation of wildfires in L.A. I was literally about to buy my plane ticket and get all my stuff squared away to go to the audition, and I'm sitting at home in Louisiana and the news is showing that it would appear that all of Los Angeles had burned to the ground. I thought, 'Dude, this is devastating. Is this audition even going to happen?' Then I find out that Larry LaLonde lost his home in the fires, so there was a definite moment of not knowing whether this whole thing was going to happen. Obviously, no one would've blamed anyone if they were to cancel the whole drum audition considering what was going on, so I kind of just put a pin in it. At the same time, I'm also wondering if I was even going to be able to find a hotel room in L.A.? I just imagined the thousands of displaced people. The audition was in North Hollywood, and that was right in the middle of all these fires. It all seemed a little up in the air, so I ended up not flying out there and driving out instead. I remember as I left the driveway, my wife was seeing me off and I said, 'Alright babe, I'm going to go

change our lives.' I made a whole road trip out of it, so that gave me a few extra days of focus time. I'm driving across West Texas listening to Primus, thinking about everything, and I was pretty pumped. I spent three days driving out there, but I could've done it faster. It was about a 26-hour drive, and I would drive until I was tired, get a room, hang out, and if I saw something on the side of the road, I would take a selfie. I wasn't in a huge hurry to get there, so it really gave me time to be in a good place mentally for the audition. I was by myself for a couple days and was able to really put myself in there. I was in as good of a place as I'd ever been.

When I got to the original audition, I was feeling great. I was really confident. I went into the room, and everything's getting set up. I'm chatting with people, still feeling great. I'm looking in the opposite direction, and Les enters the room. He tends to greet people with the word, "Ahoy!" That's how he says, "Hi!" So, I'm looking the other way and hear, "Ahoy!" in that distinct Les Claypool voice, so I knew it was him. All of my coolness, preparation, and my mindset of everything of being ready for the moment, immediately left my body the moment he came in the room. As soon as he said, "Ahoy!" I said, 'Uh... hi Sir... Mr. Claypool Sir... it's so nice to meet you!' I turned into this little fanboy.

Although I don't recall exactly what happened at that audition because I haven't seen the footage yet, I do know that I was extremely nervous. I'm really going to cringe whenever I see the footage. I just know that the preparation wasn't fully there in





**It seems like so many of the choices I've made in my life and the directions that I've taken have all led up to the Primus gig.**

the moment. The reality of how things happen in real life took over. I'm a very emotional and sensitive dude. I was watching the audition videos from the other drummers, and the one thing I noticed about all of them was that they're all so cool and laid-back in their videos. Everybody's so chill, and they're just interacting with Les and Larry (LaLonde) like they've been best friends forever. I know that when I was in the room, I was not being that casual, calm, and cool with them. I know I was nervous, but they were so cool. They're incredibly kind people. They've been very supportive, and I think that even in the moment in the room, they could tell I was nervous. They'd make little jokes and stuff, but they didn't make me feel out of place or anything.

**MD:** How many songs did they send you to play at the audition?

**JH:** They sent six songs, and we were going to play four of them, but they gave us a choice. "Those Damned Blue-Collar Tweekers" and "Groundhog's Day" were mandatory. Then they gave us a choice of "Duchess and the Proverbial Mind Spread" or "Last Salmon Man." I chose "Duchess." Then they gave us a choice of "Tommy the Cat" or "Jerry Was a Racecar Driver," and I chose "Tommy." Apparently I was the first drummer in the audition to choose "Duchess." All of the other drummers had picked "Salmon Man." I don't know if that had anything to do with what they thought about my audition. I think the other drummers picked "Salmon Man" because it was a little different. It was probably the most hi-hat heavy of the songs, so I think people wanted to showcase that style. It's a little straighter too. "Duchess" is in 11/4 so I guess you could say it's more technical and there's a drum solo in it. I picked "Duchess" because I've always liked that song. When I picked "Tommy the Cat," I could tell that Les was not too happy about that. It's such a busy song for him and I think most of the other drummers picked that one as well.

**MD:** What equipment did you bring to the audition?

**JH:** I didn't bring much. They offered a backline set for us to use, so I didn't have to bring a whole lot. I brought a snare drum, some cymbals, and my sticks, and I ended up using their snare drum. I only used my cymbals and my sticks. That was it. I played everything else that was there. I used my own in-ear system too, but they had everything ready. They didn't forget anything, everything was covered.

**MD:** What were you thinking

and feeling as you walked into the audition space?

**JH:** I got to the audition at Third Encore Studios in North

Hollywood, when I pulled up in the parking lot, I stepped out of my car and stood there for a second. I look over and I see Nikki Glaspie come out of the building. Nikki's one of my favorite drummers, she's amazing. The reality of how big this is, just hit me. My audition was going directly after Nikki's. Then I thought, 'Of course Nikki Glaspie is auditioning. This is Primus. This isn't some classic rock cover band; this is the highest level.' At that point, their manager Brad Sands is standing out in the parking lot and he's on a phone call. I'd never met Brad, so I didn't know what he looked like, but I had talked to him on the phone, and he probably knew what I looked like because of my audition videos. I'm kind of awkwardly making eye contact with him, and he got off the phone, comes over, and greets me. We had a moment, and it was super cool. He tells me what's going to happen and says their tour manager John (Sanchez) is going to come over and give me the rundown. A couple minutes go by, and John comes over and asks me a few questions. He says, "Okay, what we're going to do is send you over there to put the mic on you. They're going to have a camera on you, so when we go in, you're going to walk through the door and look around the room." That was about it. When it was time to roll, they asked me, "Are you ready?" and I said, "Yeah! Let's go!" They opened the door, I walked in, and it was my time. Everybody greeted me with, "Hey, there's John! Alright! Cool! Right this way!" Even though I felt like I was the least known person auditioning in the whole process, I did not feel at all like anyone was trying to *big*

*time* me. It was just, "Cool! Glad you're here! Remember, you're here for a reason. We *wanted* you to be here. This is going to be awesome!" It just felt great. They were very accommodating. Once I started, I felt like everybody in the room was attentive, almost like they were eagerly awaiting my audition to see what I was going to do. Everyone stopped what they were doing and just watched me. It was definitely a big deal. I was playing it cool, and not freaking out.

Like I said, once Les came in, I don't know why everything changed so quickly. I was putting a lot of pressure on myself, but it really wasn't coming from anywhere but internally. As soon as the audition started, I was on react mode, Not, "It would be cool if they asked me this, and it would be funny if I said this." I was just saying whatever came out of my mouth, and it probably wasn't anywhere as cool as what I had planned out. Overall, it was such an incredible experience. If all I did was go to L.A., meet



them, audition, and spend an hour with them, I would still feel like I leveled up. I just felt like a different person and things were validated.

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**MD:** What was going through your head the moment you met Les and Larry, and how did it feel to talk with them and finally jam together?

**JH:** Les had been playing with so many drummers that his fingers were sore. One of the things he does is put glue on his fingers to harden up and turn into calluses. So, he comes in the room gluing his fingers, and while his fingers are drying he's chatting with me to figure out what I'm about. I've been around famous people before, and of lot of times it's like, 'Yeah, whatever,' but Les Claypool is one of those people that feels a little bit extra. I've been such a fan of his, and he's been one of my main musical influences. My interpretation of him was little intimidating because there's a lot of respect there. As cool and funny as he is, I still feel a bit of that intimidation factor, which is wearing off quickly as I hang out with him. However, in *that* moment, it felt overwhelming. Then

his fingers are dry, and he starts busting into a riff. As soon as he does, my instincts kicked in. It was on. I knew what to do and I just jammed right in.

We spent about half an hour improvising and jamming. Les threw a barrage of riffs at me to make sure I was paying attention and following, so every time we hit a new riff, by measure two I thought, 'Cool! Let's go! I'm with you.' I was just trying to show them I'm listening. It was great. Every minute or so, I'm thinking, 'Oh crap, I'm jamming with Les Claypool and Larry,' but then I'd sink back in. Overall, the jam felt like I was good to go. The overwhelming feelings weren't taking over at that point. It felt way more natural because I'm in my thing. So, we did that and spent about the next half an hour playing the Primus material which also went well.

I'm very critical and pretty much can't stand anything I do, so at the end I'm thinking, 'I missed that... That was not perfect...' I just wanted to come in and have an undeniably perfect audition. I got caught up on the little mistakes I made, and it turned out that they're not even paying attention to that. Mistakes can be fixed, they were listening for vibe and feel.

Before the process started, I didn't really know who else was going to be auditioning. I knew a few guys, and I'd been in contact with a few other guys who were coming from the place that I was coming from. Then I come to find there's people like Nikki Glaspie and Thomas Pridgen that are also auditioning. When I started discovering who else was auditioning, that was a big shock. It was hard for me to convince myself that they were going to choose me over someone like Thomas Pridgen or someone else with a huge name in the drum world. My skepticism was definitely kicking in. No matter how good of an audition I thought I had, it was going to be hard to stack up to some of those people. Now that I know who the Primus guys are and what they were looking for, everything makes a lot more

sense as to why certain drummers didn't work. If you put a list of drummers on a piece of paper, I'm going to say, 'That drummer is going to get this gig because it's *that* drummer.' You realize after the process that there are so many more things involved than just who's the most badass drummer. There are so many boxes that need to be checked.

**MD:** What was your overall plan or mindset going into the audition? How did you get along with the band?

**JH:** My whole mindset when I went into this thing was to keep my mouth shut and keep my eyes and ears wide open. I'm not



trying to show up into Primus's jam room and say, 'Back in my small town, we do things like this.' They don't care. I was there to learn and to get on their page. They have so much experience and so much knowledge that I'd be a fool to try not to learn every possible thing I can from these guys. So far, I think I've done a pretty good job of just absorbing the information, and I already feel like I'm a better player for it. Les Claypool is not going to tell me, 'Hey, why don't you try it this way instead of that way?' So far, he hasn't suggested anything like that. Every suggestion has been, 'Why don't you try this?' and I'll try it that way and realize it's clearly better. I've been trying to be a student as much as possible.

**MD:** How did you feel once the audition was done?

**JH:** I was so happy. I got done with the audition and things went well. As nervous as I was, things went well enough in the audition that I ended up getting the gig. There was this sense of



relief. Regardless of whatever happened, I didn't have to think about Primus for a day or two. I could just think about anything else. So, I got done with the audition and I wanted to blow off some steam, so I went down to the Baked Potato in L.A. I didn't know who was there, but it didn't matter. I get down there, and Oz Noy was playing that night. Oz is one of my favorite guitar players, I didn't know who was playing drums, and I figured it was going to be Dave Weckl. However, it was sold out and I ended up going next door to a sushi restaurant. I ate some sushi, and that was kind of my celebratory dinner as Oz and his band were just ripping next door. As I left the sushi restaurant I heard the badass drummer. I walked past the door guy, and asked who was playing drums? He told me it was Joel Taylor. I had just discovered who Joel Taylor was like a month before. He's an L.A. legend. He has played with everybody and he was just crushing it. The door guy told me a seat at the bar had actually opened up so I went inside, hung out, had a few drinks, and watched Oz Noy with Joel Taylor on drums. It was the best relief after the whole Primus thing because the musicianship was so high-level. I spent the rest of the evening letting go a little bit and not worrying about anything.

**MD:** How long did it take for you to find out you were going to the next step of the audition process?

**JH:** A couple of days later, I was driving back to Shreveport, and I was making a road trip out of the way back home as well. I used to live in Phoenix, so I stopped in Phoenix and saw some homies and hung out for a day. Somewhere around Hobbs, New Mexico

or West Texas, I'm on my last day of driving, and I'm thinking about going home and making another video like the ones I made for my audition and telling everybody what happened.

Right around that time, I get a phone call from a weird area code. I answer the phone, and it was Les Claypool. I said, 'Hi Mr. Claypool! What's going on?' When I realized it was him, my initial thought was he's going to say, 'Hey man, great audition! Just keep your head up. You impressed us all. We're going to go a different direction, but good job!' I thought it was going to be one of *those* calls. He said all that stuff, and then he said, 'We want to fly you out to the Primus headquarters and take place in the final part of the audition. Don't tell anybody, this is all still a big secret.' Within a week or two they were going to fly me back out. So my thought process of, 'I'm going make a video to tell my whole story!' changed to, 'I've got to be quiet about this.'

**MD:** How did you feel when you got the phone call from Les calling you back for the final part of the audition process?

**JH:** I was on top of the world, much like when I got the initial email from him and I just started crying. I was just overwhelmed with emotions. After Les called me for the finals, I went right back into the two-a-day afternoon and night practices. For the final part of the audition, they gave me a setlist of eight or nine songs to play as if I was playing a Primus gig. I had to play them straight through with all the jamming and stuff they would do. For the other part of the process, Les was going to throw a song at me and the other auditioning drummers to write a part to and record it.

A couple weeks went by, and I flew out to the Derby, which was about an hour and half north of the San Francisco. I didn't know who I was up against, but I was told it was going to be me and two other drummers. I was running late because there was really bad weather that day. As I'm arriving I see Gergő Borlai standing there. Needless to say, Gergő is one of the baddest drummers on the planet. Obviously, he was one of the other finalists, and I have this shocked look on my face, I'm sure I looked at him like I was crazy. Then I walk up and say, 'Gergő! Hey! I'm a big fan of yours.' It was cool. He took a selfie with me, but I have to be completely honest, in that moment we were looking at each other, I think both of us probably thought that he was getting the gig. He didn't know me, and I was a total underdog.

The Primus camp did a very good job of keeping everybody individualized. He was super cool, and I think we both realized how funny the moment was. It was an *are you kidding me* moment. I'm such a fan of some of the other people that auditioned. A few weeks earlier, when I saw Nikki, it was another dose of reality. At that point, I was thinking, 'I'm in the end of this thing. There were 6,200 audition videos, and I made it to the top ten, then I made it to the finals.' There was an unbelievability about it all, but also the reality of, 'I've already been through a lot of this process, and now I'm here.' I was confident, but because I'm a fan of these drummers and the

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drum community, when I heard some of the names, I just couldn't get past that. That was tougher than anything. Regardless of what I did, I knew that it was going to be really tough to top some of those drummers.

On the first day of the final audition, I played the set and at the end of the day Les gives me a song that was just him playing bass. No vocals or guitar or anything, it was basically just an arrangement. I had one night to create whatever drum part I was going to play. I went back to the hotel, set up my little pillow fort drumset on the bed, listened to the song for about six hours, wrote the part, went in the next day, and we played the song. We recorded it, and Les seemed super happy with it. I was pretty pumped about that. When it was all said and done, he was excited about what I played and thought it was groovy, funky, and cool. Les plays his hand real close to the vest. He said, "Yeah, that was good," and if he says it's good, that means it's *good*. Don't expect much more. That's just how he is, at least in my experience so far. We get done with recording the song, we're listening to it back, and he's getting kind of excited. He's said, "Yeah, that's cool right there!" It was the first time in the process that he'd given me much of anything *extra*. That sense of approval felt great, especially after working so hard. Once we recorded that song, I didn't know if I had gotten the gig yet. They didn't tell me anything, but it still felt like a huge relief.

**MD:** How did you find out that you got the gig and were the new drummer for Primus?

**JH:** The audition was done and the next day I was leaving to fly back to Shreveport. Before that, to wrap everything up, there was a dinner party for the whole crew and the band. It was trivia night at the Pachyderm Station which is kind of Les's hangout spot. The whole crew is there and close friends of the band are there too. It's a real intimate environment, and we're playing trivia and drinking wine. I'm still relieved because it's just kind of over. Regardless of whatever happens, the pressure's off. I remember riding to the place from the hotel with John Sanchez (the tour manager) and saying, "Man, it just feels good. I don't have to think about Primus for a while now that I know it's all done. Meanwhile, John's just sitting there saying, "Mm-hmm, yeah, sure you can." That was kind of funny now that I look back on it.

As I'm talking, I can hear coming out of kitchen that everybody is singing, "For he's a jolly good drummer! For he's a jolly good drummer!" I'm kind of confused, and I realize that they're singing and bringing me a box. Although nothing had been said yet, I thought, "Something is about to happen..." So again, I started crying. Les sets the box in front of me, and I'm just looking at him, looking at the box, and looking at him. He said, "Open the box," so I open the box. There's a cake in there, and written on the cake it says, "Hoffington, you got the gig."

"Hoffington" is the nickname that Les gave me. Everybody in Primusville has a nickname. My nickname has been shortened to "Hoffer" since then. Seeing the cake, all my emotions came



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out. It's a room full of people where everybody's clapping, and other people are crying because I'm crying. The cameras are fully on me, so I realize I should probably pick myself up out of this emotional moment and share it with everybody. At the same time, I'm trying not to cry even more than I'm crying. I can barely talk, and the tears are rolling. If I was by myself where nobody could see me, I probably would've completely broken down, but I'm (sort of) holding it together. I'm standing up and they're asking me questions, "How do you feel?" and (while crying) I said, "Oh, I feel great." It was just an amazing moment. I'd put in so much work for the audition process and it was such a relief. It seemed that everything in my life had led up to this. It was this whole moment of validation. It was indescribable. If we had this interview a few weeks ago, I'd be crying. But I've had a little time to process everything.

In that moment when Les said, "Hey, you got the gig," he also said, "And on top of that, you're going to make your debut playing a show with us in the Dominican Republic alongside Tool." I'm thinking, "How can you make this incredible movie-esque situation even more insane?" Danny Carey is one of my favorite drummers! This is the cherry on top of this absolutely insane story. Then Les was telling everybody, "We still can't tell anyone, this is still under wraps. It's going to be another three weeks before this goes public." At that point, I'm just thinking, "Whatever dude. I don't care how long it takes. You can't make me sad about anything." The rest of the night was great. I left the next morning and about ten minutes away from the airport I got a text from Les, and it said, "Get ready," and it had a wink face emoji. I'm thinking, "Get ready for what, dude? What now?" It took about one minute from when he texted, for my phone to go absolutely haywire. I'm talking 1,000 messages and 10,000 comments. I got around 15,000 Instagram followers in a day. Basically, what had happened was Les had gone on his Instagram and announced that I had gotten the gig. Immediately, *Revolver* magazine and all these publications are



posting it. People are texting me, “Dude, have you Googled yourself?” You could Google “John Hoffman” and it would just be this onslaught. Two hours later, you could Google my name it was a whole new list of things. All of my supporters and family are freaking out because the news had spread so quickly. From the point where I read the text from Les that said, “Get ready,” nothing in my life has been the same. It was an immediate change for the better for everything in my life.

**MD:** How did your friends and family react to the news?

**JH:** I think my wife was happier than I was. She reacted about how you would expect. Things have been phenomenal around here with us. It’s been great. She’s thinking about the future, I’m thinking about the future, she’s been so supportive of me. This is a win for both of us. She worked hard too! There’s been so many times when one of us had to lean on the other one just to make it. She was right there with me the whole time. I just talked with my dad on the phone a couple days ago, and he’s beyond excited. He couldn’t be happier. My brother is also a drummer, and he’s super pumped. Everybody in my whole world is beyond excited. Being from Shreveport, it’s not a “small” small town, but there’s not a whole lot of things here that people can be proud of. So, this whole Primus situation has been really cool for everyone in this town.

**MD:** What do you remember most about your first show with the band? That Dominican Republic gig sounds like it was a huge moment.

**The biggest thing for me is the amount of space they’re giving me to grow. They’ve given me the guidelines, helped me out, and made a few corrections, but for the most part, at the end of the day they tell me, “We want you to be you and add your energy and style to this music.”**

**JH:** The Dominican gig was with Tool, Mastodon, Coheed and Cambria, King’s X, Fishbone... *I mean, c’mon.* In the moment, the gig was so awesome and so incredible. Everything about it was better than I expected because I got to meet all of these people that I’ve been a fan of. Tool always had a mysterious vibe, they’ve always been shrouded in mystery. Growing up, there really wasn’t a ton of interviews with those guys. You were left to speculate on your own based on your interpretation of their music and their art style. When I was growing up, I kind of imagined Danny Carey being this sort of serious, stern type of dude, and when I met him, he was such the opposite. He was so happy-go-lucky, funny, and everything is just cool. Cut to the concert, and I’m waiting for my moment. I’m watching Danny as he’s playing a few songs with Primus before I came out. It gets to my turn, and I remember just coming out from the back of the stage and walking up to the drum riser. It took the crowd a second to realize what was happening because Primus didn’t announce that I was going to be there. It was a bit of a surprise for me to come out on stage, and the intention was to have an impromptu moment, which I thought was a cool idea. There was a lot of expectation on me before I even played a single note. Once the moment happened, and it went well, it felt like I was in the band. From that point on, it felt like I was no longer *trying* to get the gig.

**MD:** Have you started designing your kit for the upcoming tour?

**JH:** I got with DW pretty much right away. I’d been playing DW for a while already, and when I got the Primus gig, there’s a name value that goes along with that. Tim Soya, who’s the unofficial Primus drum tech/auxiliary member of the band, knows everybody in the industry. He hooked me up with DW. I

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spoke to Steven Vega (the DW rep) on the phone and we hit it off immediately. They agreed to bring me into the family, and I started designing my kit. It’s not going to be ready until the *Onward and Upward* tour. For the *Sessanta* tour, they gave me a loaner kit, which is pure cherry with a middle ply of aluminum. It was a one-off prototype kit that John Good made and let us borrow. I enjoyed the loaner kit so much that I had my kit designed as full cherry with the internal aluminum ply. I ended up with slightly different sizes but the with same design and color.

**MD:** What about the front bass drum head? Who designs that?

**JH:** I think they have a guy that does all the custom drumhead art for them, but I’ve had people inbox me and offer to do it. I’m still the new guy and I don’t know everybody yet, so I imagine there’s a Primus art guy that handles that type of thing.

**MD:** What was the most impactful part of your time during the entire audition process?

**JH:** Les said several things to me throughout the process. I don’t want to butcher those, so I’ll just say there have been a few incredibly impactful words of advice that he’s given me over this process. It’s almost got that “dad” type of advice.

At least from where I’m sitting it comes off that way. The biggest thing for me is the amount of space they’re giving me to grow. They’ve given me the guidelines, helped me out, and made a few corrections, but for the most part, at the end of the day they tell me, “We want you to be you and add your energy and style to this music.” They just want to make sure that I’m paying tribute to the stuff that’s there already. When I came into the situation, I might have been thinking that I was playing the songs accurately to the album, but it turns out there are so many nuance-y things that I really wasn’t picking up. They would say, “Hold on. That part right there. You can’t do that there.” Then I’d reevaluate. There were little things that needed to be corrected,

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but once all those things were done, everyone has said, “I know this is crazy, but you’re the drummer for Primus now. We know this is all new for you, and we’re here to help you acclimate to this new life you have.” They’re definitely making sure I’m working, but for the most part, I have not felt like someone was standing over my shoulder and forcing me to do anything. It’s been extremely comfortable, and considering how big this band is, I couldn’t be more grateful.

On top of that, they're all just such great guys. When I was presented with this opportunity to play with Primus, I didn't know them on a personal level. A lot of times with bands, once you get into the inner circle, and you learn that this dude's kind of crazy, or something is toxic. This whole time, I was praying that this was not going to be one of those situations. I didn't want to get this gig and be locked into this thing where I'm just miserable. It turns out that not only am I not miserable, but that these guys are so cool and kind. Not just them, but the entire Primus family. It's so tight-knit and they are so appreciative of each other. It's just amazing.

Now that I'm in the band, I can see why it was such a long process. You don't just allow a stranger off the street to come into your home. You have to earn it. You have to prove who you are so you don't come in and destroy everything. Now that I know what a tight family the Primus group is, I'm honored to even be a part of it. I realized that all of this was necessary to find the right guy because everybody in there is important. I couldn't be happier!!! 🤘







Photos courtesy/permission of Tony Brock



# TONY BROCK: THAT SLEAZY, GREASY, ENGLISH BACKBEAT

BY MARK GRIFFITH

Most might know Tony Brock as the drummer from the 70s and 80s band The Babys, but his career is MUCH more than that. He has a new band called Close Enemies, but we'll start at the beginning. Tony started in the English progressive band called Spontaneous Combustion. Greg Lake produced their debut in 1972, and their second release was called *Triad*. Spontaneous Combustion broke up and Brock went on to join a band called Strider and made their third record called *Misunderstood*. After Strider, Brock helped form The Babys with guitarist Wally Stocker and singer John Waite. The Babys first self-titled record was produced by Bob Ezrin. Their second record *Broken Heart* was more soulful and more polished and was produced by Ron Nevison. Nevison produced The Babys third record called *Headfirst*. It was even more pop-ish. Kevin Elson produced The Babys next record called *Union Jack*. That record contained the band's biggest hits "Back on My Feet Again" and "Midnight Rendezvous." After The Baby's singer John Waite left the band for a solo career, Jonathan Cain departed for Journey, and Ricky Phillips joined Damn Yankees and then Styx. The Babys floundered for a while, but Brock and guitarist Wally Stocker have kept the band going off and on for the last 50 years.

After The Babys initial break-up, Brock toured and

recorded with Eddie Money until Rod Stewart called. Stewart had heard Brock (when Strider opened for Faces years before) and Tony's drumming stuck in his mind. Rod wanted Brock to join his band replacing Carmine Appice in 1981. Both Appice and Brock appeared on Stewart's *Tonight I'm Yours*, and Brock joined the band. Tony played on the *Absolutely Live* recording, *Body Wishes*, *Camouflage*, *Every Beat of my Heart*, and *Out of Order*. In 1988, when Stewart let go of his entire band, Brock was the only musician who wasn't let go, Brock stayed with Stewart until 1991 when Tony left to begin producing.

Tony began producing and playing with Australian singing legend Jimmy Barnes appearing on *Freight Train Heart*, *Barnestorming*, *Two Fires*, *Soul Deep*, *Heat*, and *Flesh and Wood*. Brock's producing flourished and he opened his own studio. Over the years Tony has also worked with Elton John, Bernie Taupin's Farm Dogs, Primal Scream, Keith Urban, and Roy Orbison and has production credits on soundtracks for the TV shows *Baywatch* and *Flipper*, plus the 1985 comedy movie *Just One of the Guys*.

Today, Brock has a new band. He has joined forces with guitarist Trace Foster, Aerosmith's Tom Hamilton, Sheryl Crow's Peter Stroud and Chasen Hampton. Together they have formed the exciting new band called Close Enemies.



**MD:** How did your new band Close Enemies come together?

**TB:** This new band is something you could only hope for at my age, and here it is... and damn it's good! Trace Foster worked for AC DC's Angus Young as his tech, and he happens to be the backup guitarist for just about everybody. Trace had a dream, and he started the whole thing, so it's *all his fault*. He knew Peter Stroud from Sheryl Crow and Don Henley's bands. Trace and Peter had been talking about putting a band together for a while. They finally got some songs together and Peter brought me in to play drums because we've been talking for years about doing something together. I love playing with Peter because he has that natural, nasty, greasy, groove that I love. I still have that with Wally Stocker with The Babys too, It's so rare! Trace asked Tom Hamilton from Aerosmith to come down, and after he heard the songs, he was blown away. We auditioned a lot of singers, but Chasen Hampton became the front man we were looking for. I know it's an old cliché, but this band is just magic, just an incredible bond! Now we have great management, Denny with TLG and Virgin records, it's all working like a well-oiled machine.

**MD:** How would you describe Close Enemies music?

**TB:** It's soulful, it's got pocket, it's greasy, it's sleazy, it's got that groove from hell. There is a little bit of Americana in there, and a little bit of England in there. It's melodic and somewhat commercial not that we're selling out. Peter Stroud's guitar work is spectacular. We just did a guest spot on the radio yesterday, and if you can't play a song on an acoustic guitar, you really don't have a song. We did three tracks with just acoustic guitar, vocals, and me playing shakers and tambourine (and singing some backgrounds,) and it was really good.

In live shows, since Tom Hamilton (bassist from Aerosmith) is in the band we also do "Sweet Emotion" and "Sick as a Dog" live, and we also do The Babys "Headfirst" and "Midnight



Rendezvous." It's great to groove together with Tom, and I'm really picky with bass players, I'm sure you are too. If you don't have a good bass player, the pocket just goes out the window.

**MD:** What do you like from a bassist and what don't you like from a bassist?

**I'm not letting go of what I do as a drummer, I like to think I'm a musical drummer because that is more important than showing off my chops all the time.**

**TB:** I don't like when it's normal and obvious. I love melody, and a bassist doesn't always have to play with the kick drum. To me, a bass player can stretch and maybe play the third once and a while. Tom's all about that. If you're locked, you enhance each other's playing, you give the band a foundation. Free's bass player Andy Fraser was like that, Wally and I got to play with him one time, and oh my Lord, no wonder Simon Kirke had such a good time in that band.

**MD:** Are you doing are you doing any of the songwriting with Close Enemies?

**TB:** Oh yes absolutely! Every song has a little part of each of us. Whether Trace or Peter came up with the song initially, we've all put our parts into it, and a little bit of everyone comes out in the songs. I'm not letting go of what I do as a drummer, I like to think I'm a musical drummer because that is more important than showing off my chops all the time. However, if you do show off every now and again that makes it more important when you are grooving.

**MD:** Can we talk about your long career in the music and drumming business? There aren't many guys who have enjoyed a 50-year career in rock and roll drumming.

**TB:** I was lucky enough to start off





with a band called Spontaneous Combustion which Greg Lake produced. Greg and I grew up together in the same town and Spontaneous Combustion was his first production. I was lucky enough to watch King Crimson in the early days, I watched the whole *In the Court of the Crimson King* recording go down.

**Admiration does not even describe the feelings that I had for John Bonham; it was way more than that. He always said (regarding double bass drums) that if you couldn't do it with one foot, you shouldn't do it (laughs.)**

**MD:** What was it like to see and hear that session?

**TB:** I was around 17 and it was just eye opening. Watching Eddie Offord kick that beautiful Neve board to get that explosion sound out of it was simply jaw dropping. To watch those guys put that stuff together was unbelievable. They had obviously done a fair bit of rehearsing because what I saw go down was precise and wonderful. They were a heck of a rhythm section to watch, I was blown away. That's what inspired my band (Spontaneous Combustion) that Greg Lake produced. Spontaneous Combustion became a prog band, and we did some tours opening for Emerson, Lake, and Palmer. When we went out on the road together, I was lucky enough to have a few lessons with Carl Palmer. Carl was gracious enough to talk to me and we set up two kits together. The important thing that I took from Carl was to learn to read music, that was a big lesson. I was a piano player first and my mum tried to teach me to read music, but I just wanted to play rock'n'roll.

**MD:** There were quite a few legends around London at that time, did you see Bonham play?

**TB:** Yes, John and I were friends. Admiration does not even describe the feelings that I had for John Bonham; it was way more than that. He always said (regarding double bass drums) that if you couldn't do it with one foot, you shouldn't do it (laughs.) I remember walking into the Rainbow club one night, and I heard this tumbling and crashing coming down the stairs. Suddenly, this huge man lands on his back and looks up at me and says, "Hello Tone." Just to have John look up at my face and say hello, after he had a few too many, was quite a moment.

**MD:** With The Babys you worked with some legendary producers in Bob Ezrin, Ron Nevison, and Keith Olsen. After The Babys you went on to do some producing as well. What did you learn from Bob, Ron, and Keith?

**TB:** I stole everything from Ron Nevison. His three or four mic trick was my favorite drum sound. He did The Babys record *Broken Heart*, which was my favorite record. We had The Record Plant's mobile truck parked outside of this beautiful mansion that we rented. The mansion had a spiral staircase all the way down to the floor where we put one shotgun mic, we used three microphones on the drums in stereo in the hallway, and we had rooms off to the side where we put the amplifiers. Of course, Wally and I had to look at each other. To watch how Ron Nevison put all that together, and how he got that drum sound with the room mics was amazing. He let the drums do their things by themselves. Of course, I was pretty good at getting that big John Bonham sound, but I made it my own. I didn't want to just copy someone (even if it was Bonham.) I took a little bit from everybody, and I made it my own. That's how you become yourself, and not just a copycat. I *think* that's what I've done. I know I can play all the technical chops that I love to do and that gives me the confidence to not to show off all the

time and just play for the song. However, when I can play for the song, it touches me. Musical drumming brings you up to a level where other musicians treat you with more respect and as an equal. Throughout time, the disrespect that drummers get, has hurt a lot of great drummers/musicians, it's not right. We've become songwriters, producers, singers... look at Phil Collins for God's sake! He's unbelievable, that's just one example. I'm so glad we're finally getting the respect that we deserve.

**MD:** Was Ron Nevison's use of three or four mic's what is now known as the "Glyn Johns Mic technique"?

**TB:** Absolutely. Ron was the first guy to do that, and Glyn Johns was doing the same thing. Two room mics, and basically one over the whole kit. I started putting two room mics behind me and compressing the crap out of them. That way I've gotten more low-end from the drum kit, it just pumps. But you gotta have the right room to do that. Not every room has that nice bottom end and warmth that you need. I try to get in a room that has warm wood and wood floors and allow the room to do its thing.

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**MD:** What are your microphones of choice today, and what were your microphones of choice back then?

**TB:** Neumann U49, I always have a Neumann U47 FET on the front of the kick to get that lovely resonance and Neumann U87's in the room, we did have a Shure 57 as a close snare mic, just because there's always some grace notes on the snare





drum that are not always picked up by the room mics. I did (and still do) use the Sennheiser 421 on the toms, they're great microphones. Those mics are what work for the sound I like to get, it's more of an older-style drum sound, but I like it, and it sounds great on record.

**MD:** You also worked with producer Bob Ezrin and Keith Olsen as well, what did you learn from them about producing?

**TB:** Bob Ezrin was The Babys first producer it was strange because when I was on my way to Canada with the Baby's to record with Bob when Rod Stewart called me to join the Rod Stewart Group. Rod had heard me in my second band called Strider when we opened for Faces. However, The Babys had just signed with Chrysalis records, so I couldn't accept Rod's offer. When we got to Canada to record with Bob, we had a really great experience. But to me, Bob didn't really get my drum sound, so we would bang heads a little bit. I'm not one of those guys who will cause arguments or anything, but I try to enforce what I do on the drums. I play simplistic and get that beautiful sleazy groove and that English backbeat, that's what I do. But I can't do that if I've got a tiny drum sound. I kept keep pushing Bob to get a bigger sound, but his room was not good for that.

Our second record with The Babys was produced by Ron Nevison. Like I said, Ron and I got along right away. We had the same attitude about drum sounds, so that was a great experience. We wound up doing two albums with Ron.



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Then we went to Keith Olsen for our fourth album. That was good, but we had changed members by then. We had Jonathan Cain and Ricky Phillips playing bass. Jonathan would eventually go to Journey, and Ricky would join Damn Yankees and then go on to Styx. When they joined The Babys, the whole dynamic had changed. Keith had trouble getting my John Bonham-esque big drum sound. That's the sound that we all love to get, but we had a hard time trying to fit that sound into the new musical direction and style that The Babys were pushing towards. I did compromise a little bit, we had wonderful songs and I played well, but the drum sounds didn't match with what I did. People hire me (to this day) for my big drum sound and that greasy English backbeat. And I'm at my best when my drum sound matches how I am playing.

**MD:** That's a very interesting point. So many people have tried to fit that kind of drum sound into a mix where there just wasn't enough room for big drum sounds. Let's face it, Zeppelin wasn't a very dense band, and there was a lot of room for Bonham's huge sound in their music mix, and in the recorded mix of the records. But let's get back to that "sleazy, greasy, English backbeat," where did that come from?

**TB:** I think us English drummers stole it from you American guys. I used to listen to a lot of American Soul and R&B like Al Green / Otis Redding and all those wonderful drummers like Al Jackson Jr. That feel was something that wasn't talked about in England, we all listened to R&B and soul music from America, so it just became a natural way for us to play. Most American drummers play right on the money all the time, and I can do that with ease, I've done tons of drum tracks with a click from start to finish, but





that's not always needed. American drummers tend to see that as an accomplishment. Sure, if you speed up and slow down, that's not so good unless the song requires it. But to me, I want my snare drum a little behind the beat every time. I think that's what makes the groove. Furthermore, the guitarist is usually in

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front of the beat a little bit, sort of pushing, that makes the back beat and the groove even bigger and better. That's what we love to do! We don't talk about it, but it's expected, and that's why I get hired.

**MD:** That "sleazy, greasy, English backbeat," really intrigues me. There are so many English drummers of your generation that have it. Simon Kirke, Kenney Jones, even drummers like Clive Bunker and Alan White. Where do you think it comes from?

**TB:** Kenny is a great drummer and a good friend; we talk at least once a month. I actually just did an interview with (Free, Bad Company drummer) Simon Kirke, and we talked about this very thing. We came up with the fact that we didn't really know what we were doing at the time, but we just knew we had to have that pocket. Simon and I shared the same information that I'm sharing with you now. We stole it from the soul groove from you American guys. Simon listened to the same bands and the same drummers that I did. And those guys just naturally had that groove. The back beat was just a little just lazy, but the hi-hat and the kick drum was right on the money. Those drummers like Al Jackson would just lay the snare drum back a little bit, and then pick it up a little bit in the choruses, that's what would create that energy. Simon was saying the same thing, but none of us talked about it back then. It was something that you'd hear, we would watch each other. We had a little niche of all us drummers. Phil Rudd from AC DC has the same thing. You can't do that with a drum machine.

**MD:** Do you think it's because England is such a small country, and it was such a little scene back then that all you guys were so

intertwined? Or was it an "anti-chops" thing?

**TB:** Maybe, but I listened to Billy Cobham a lot too, I did capture his chops, and of course you can't avoid Buddy Rich. I admired all the wonderful American jazz drummers. I listened to American drummers all the time. But after a while, many of them, (who I won't name,) were (too) right on the money, in my humble opinion the ultimate drummer to capture chops and groove is Todd Sucherman.

**MD:** It sounds like the precision that many American rock drummers developed over time, is what sets you and them apart. That first wave of R&B, rock and roll, and jazz drummers had a consistent inconsistency that created an American groove, and all you English drummers absorbed it and loved it. However, for some reason the next few generations of (American) rock drummers were trying to "perfect" things a little too much, while you (English) guys were happy with the inconsistencies.

**TB:** Yes. Maybe it's because many of us, including myself, were self-taught. I took that and got to what I believe is a pretty high level. But you don't know what you don't know. And if you don't know *exactly* what you're doing sometimes you can create some great stuff. I just listened to the drummers and music that I loved, and I wanted to do what I heard. I stole a little bit from everybody. In the interview we did together, Simon Kirke put it

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really well, he said, "We're just passing it on. We take things from other people, and we pass it on to the next generation."

**MD:** Are The Babys still around making music?

**TB:** Back in 1981, we couldn't believe that John Waite wanted to break up the band to start a solo career. We never understood it, and still don't to this day. I guess he just wanted to be in more control. But he's doing really well for himself and he's singing great, his voice still sounds good, he is singing his ass off! To answer your question, yes, The Babys are still doing a bunch of live gigs every year. Playing the songs like we recorded them with more passion, opposite of Mr. Waite.

Wally is Paul Kossoff (Free's guitarist) reincarnated but has his own style, and (of course) I love Simon Kirke. In The Babys every time we would write a song we'd usually wonder, 'What would Free do, or 'What would Bad Company do here?' That was our style in those days, John Waite had a little bit of Paul Rodgers in him, but he was different enough. Then you add keyboardist Michael Corby, and it was magic. It worked. We were lucky enough to have a couple of top 10's and tour all over the world. When we broke up in 1981, Wally and I tried to keep The Babys going but we couldn't find the right players. That's when I went to Eddie Money and played on his *No Control* album, then I joined Rod Stewart's band for 12 years.

**MD:** What was joining Rod's band like after Carmine Appice?





**TB:** It was a little awkward. Because Carmine was still in the band at that time, and Rod had neglected to tell me that. I walked into the studio and my drum kit was already set up, and there's Carmine in the control room. At that point, I didn't know

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Carmine was still in the band, otherwise I would have called Carmine and said, 'What's going on?' But he told me that he was co-producing with Jim Cregan, and he went on to tell me that everybody needs another groove and a different pocket at some point. So I just slotted in and ended up doing the whole album.

Carmine and I actually did some background vocals together because I did a lot of the backing vocals on The Babys albums, and Carmine can sing pretty well. Unfortunately, Carmine was let go halfway through the album, and I still feel bad about that. Whenever we are together, I ask Carmine, 'Are we OK?' And he assures me that we're absolutely fine. Rod just needed a change in that part of his career. He later told me that he made more money after he left Rod Stewart than he did when he was playing with Rod. Money is definitely not the reason I was in the band! The Rod Stewart Group (as it was known,) gave me a wonderful outlet for my musical career. I was lucky enough to be with Rod for 12 years and I wound up playing on most of Rod's big hits.

**MD:** What was it like being produced by a drummer?

**TB:** By that time, he was already on the outs as far as Rod was concerned. It was awkward, but Carmine didn't really have much input, he was there behind the glass and didn't have much to say, that was the only uncomfortable thing for me. He wasn't upset, I later learned that he knew he was gone before I even walked in.

**MD:** Talk about playing behind a legendary singer like Rod?

**TB:** It was magic, he and I had a mutual respect, and we never had a bad word. He would look back at me when I was playing a groove and just smile, and I would do the same back to him. We used to have a bowl of hot sake behind the drum kit, and Rod would come around the back and scoop a glass in the hot sake and say, "Yeah Tony, we've still got it!" He was amazing every night, and if he didn't feel spot on, he would cancel the show. He knew the standard they had to hold. We abused the alcohol in those days, but we never let the show down. I can't say anything bad about the man, we had the most wonderful

time. We were called the Rod Stewart Group, and everyone was equal. Rod even dressed in the same dressing room as us. It was never Rod Stewart and his backing band; it was always the Rod Stewart Group. I've always been in bands; I've never worked for someone. When I was working with Rod, I never felt I was working for him. He never asked or told me what to play. We were dear friends and were writing

songs together for Rod. When I heard "Baby Jane" I brought it to Rod three times. I said Rod, you have to try this song. The first time he poo-pooed it, the second time he didn't want to sing it, but the third time we went in the studio and started playing

that shuffle groove, and I said, 'This is it Rod!' Then we recorded it and it wound up being one of his mainstay hits. I didn't write it, Jay Davis the bass player did.

I started using electronics and Simmons drums with Rod, I think I was one of the first drummers to use the Simmons drums, but I used them to help me not to replace the drum kit. You can't ever replace a real drum kit, but I used them to make for more of a show in my drum solo with Rod.

**MD:** Do you remember when you first saw the Simmons drums?

**TB:** Glyn Thomas was the original Simmons guy in America, even though Simmons came out of England. In 1982, they were being advertised and everybody said it's like hitting a piece of wood, *which it was*. But with the SP1200 and the SDX, I programmed drum machine parts and I played percussion and sound effects. In my

drum solo I had a bassline going, and I'd play over the hits. I am thinking about putting all that back in, because I really enjoyed it and I think it adds to a solo. It turns a solo into musical piece rather than just showing off your technical skills. I was also sampling my big snare and bass drum sounds from the records and triggering them live.

**MD:** And people are still doing that today.

**TB:** Amazing!

**MD:** Tell me about when Rod broke up that band, and you were the only musician who wasn't fired.

**TB:** In the Rod Stewart Group as we knew it, I was the last one





to move on. Jim Cregan moved on earlier, and Kevin Savigar unfortunately got sick, so we had to replace him, and eventually I was the only one left of the Rod Stewart Group.

**MD:** Then (bassist) Carmine Rojas came in the band, and you guys sounded wonderful together.

**TB:** I loved playing with Carmine, he had all the musical credits, we were good together.

**MD:** So many singers are hard on drummers, telling us not to play fills over the vocals, and making sure we don't step on the lyrics. Did Rod ever give you instructions like that?

**TB:** Yeah, there are things you don't do. But it's not something I ever went out of my way to think about. I just didn't do it. There might have been an occasion where I stepped on his lyrics, and I quickly realized that I did it. Then I would correct myself. But Rod never said, 'Don't do this or that.'

**MD:** Through working with Rod, you wound up working with Elton John and Jeff Beck, tell me about that.

**TB:** I didn't actually work with Elton, I played with him when we played South Africa together. Elton was there and we had a wonderful time. Here's something quite interesting. When I first met Elton, he knew more about me than I knew about myself. He is very intelligent and intuitive about other musicians and what they've done. His knowledge of what everybody's done is amazing. I had never met the man before, and I said, 'Hi Elton, how are you doing?' And he replied, 'Hello Tony Brock, I liked your playing with The Babys, and he went through my whole catalogue asking, 'How'd you do this?' and, 'What did you play on that?' I stepped back and wondered what the heck was going on.

**MD:** It was like you were being stalked by Elton John (*laughter*).

**TB:** No kidding... but he's very informed about the history of musicians and players, or at least that's what I can assume, because why would he just pick on me (*more laughter*!)

**MD:** You also played with the legendary Roy Orbison.

**TB:** Yes, I did a session for Roy, unfortunately I didn't know it was gonna be his last album. We did some lovely stuff together, and Roy was a lovely man, but he seemed to be hiding behind the glass in the vocal booth a lot. You could tell there was something not quite right. I have just heard in the last couple of weeks that the record is finally ready to be released, so that is something to look forward to. I've been lucky enough to play with a lot of wonderful people, but Roy Orbison is an absolute legend. Roy had an aura about him like Rod does. When Rod walks in a room you can just feel it in the air, Roy had that same thing, and so did Jeff Beck.

**MD:** What was it like to play with Jeff Beck, he is one of my heroes.

**But you don't know what you don't know. And if you don't know exactly what you're doing sometimes you can create some great stuff. In The Babys, every time we would write a song we'd usually wonder, 'What would Free do, or 'What would Bad Company do here?'**

**TB:** He had the same thing, when he walked onto the plane, you didn't even know it was him, but you could feel something come over you, the hairs on the back of your neck would go up, and there's Jeff! Superstars have that thing.

I got to do Rod's song "Infatuation" with Jeff, we got on like a house on fire because (at that point) I was into cars. You couldn't talk to Jeff about guitars or amplifiers he hated it, but if you talked cars with him, you were in. There was a mutual admiration society going on at that point. I couldn't believe I was playing with Jeff Beck and Rod Stewart. When Rod did a tour in 87 or 88,

**Carmine was still in the band at that time, and Rod had neglected to tell me that. I walked into the studio and my drum kit was already set up, and there's Carmine in the control room.**

Jeff came up and did a five-song set in the middle of Rod's set. Jeff didn't want to bring his drummer, he wanted me to play, so I was lucky enough to play drums with him for those sets. We started off with Jeff's tune "The Pump" and it would start from nothing and just build to such a level where it was just screaming. That didn't last too long because Jeff gets bored, and he doesn't want to be on the road that long. But what a moment, and what a pleasure to play with that man!

**MD:** After you left Rod, you went on to play with another legend. Many Americans might not know who Jimmy Barnes is, but he's like the Australian Bruce Springsteen, and you produced, and played with him for quite a while.

**TB:** Jimmy was the first man to be asked to join AC DC after Bon died. He's a wonderful man. I spent seven years going back and forth to Australia working with Jimmy. That came about because Jonathan Cain was producing Jimmy up in San Francisco, and Mick Fleetwood was doing some of the tracks and Jonathan asked me to come up and play on a couple tracks. I did "Working Class Man" which became Jimmy Barnes' all time biggest hit. That song was the first thing I played on with him, and Jimmy just grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and said, "You're with me!" I ended up doing most of the album and did everything live and





everything in the studio for seven years, we had seven number ones while I was playing drums for him. Jimmy and I wrote together, and I co-produced the records with Don Gehman.

**MD:** There is (yet) another great producer that you worked with. How did all these great producers that you worked with influence Tony Brock “the producer.”

**The Rod Stewart Group (as it was known,) gave me a wonderful outlet for my musical career. I was lucky enough to be with Rod for 12 years and I wound up playing on most of Rod’s big hits.**

**TB:** As a producer I have learned what NOT to do, and how to get things done in the quickest time possible without being cheap. I love seeing how things come together when you have put the right people together. The magic that I’m bringing is bringing in the right players. I’ve been lucky enough to work with some great producers, and I’ve watched how they do it, how they put the right players together, they all have people they know. But I’ve also learned not to change what a band does. If you try and push what *you* do onto a band then you’re destroying their dream, you must make the most of what the band wants to do, producers guide bands in a way, so they don’t mess things up. I think that’s what I bring to the table. I like to write music as well, so I bring what I’ve learned over the years as a writer. I’m fairly musical myself, so I’d like to think that I help keep the integrity in the music, because it’s all about the song.

**MD:** You said that you have learned what NOT to do, what are

those things?

**TB:** The first one is to not get F’d up before you come to the studio, make sure you know your parts, unfortunately that’s not always the case. However, I also know that when a part gets messed up it can magically become a new song.

**MD:** The old saying, “There are no mistakes only happy accidents that lead to new opportunities.” Right?

**TB:** Obviously studio time is expensive, but now everybody’s got their own little studio, which in some ways is good and in other ways is bad. People send me things all the time that are just unfixable, and I am the unfortunate one to tell them that it sounds bad.

**MD:** What is unfixable?

**TB:** A bad groove, or an arrangement that isn’t thought out. If I can’t change those two things (if they aren’t working,) then it’s not worth it and I have to be honest with them. If the foundation isn’t there from the drums and bass, you don’t have anything. I tell people that they aren’t getting paid by the note. That’s the hardest part about being a producer; being honest and up front

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and making sure that the band doesn’t hate you at the end of the day. A lot of people think they know it know it all, I don’t know it all that’s for sure, but I do know not to do stupid things.

It’s all about communication, the bands are usually there to learn and get better from a producer’s knowledge, but if an artist doesn’t want that, they shouldn’t be there in the first place.

**MD:** You have a rack of snare drums behind you, I am a bit of a snare drum addict, what are some of your favorite snares?

**TB:** There are 32 snares on that shelf, in 1974 Bill Ludwig gave me a 5.5x14 Black Beauty Super Sensitive, and that has been on every record that I have ever played on. That drum has been on all the Babys stuff, all the Rod stuff, and all the Jimmy Barnes stuff. I could put up five different snares, then I put this one on the stand and play it, and every engineer and producer says, “That’s it!” It’s on the new Close Enemies record too. Of course, because it’s a Super Sensitive I need to bring a screwdriver with me everywhere I go, but the crispness that you get from every grace note is amazing. I just got a 6.5” Black Beauty and it’s nice, so I am going to see if that does the job. Recently, Bill Ludwig III gave me one of his new





Aluminum snares and I like it, so I have used that live a few times. I have an old wooden Hayman snare, I have some Gretsch snares that love, a few older Tama's, and a handful of Ludwig's including a bronze drum from Ludwig. Jeff Ocheltree made Billy Cobham and me a snare from an older Camco 14" tom that was cut in half, so now that's a 7" Camco snare. I also have a couple of 15" Ludwig Marching snares

**MD:** What kind of drums are you playing with Close Enemies?

**TB:** I have a hand painted Gretsch kit, and my first kit was a lovely Ludwig kit that I also had hand painted. I also played Tama back in the day, but now with Close Enemies I'm playing DW, and they sound great.

**MD:** Someone told me one time that you were one of the first guys to have a big bass drum set up as what we now call a "gong bass drum."

**TB:** Starting with The Babys, I had a 36" bass drum behind me next to my gong, and I would hit them both at the same time as part of my drum solo. I did that from '76 all the way through Rod in '92.

**MD:** So maybe you are the "father of the gong bass drum." You also set up a small tom on the left of your hi-hat, how did that start?

**TB:** That came from my first days when I had a huge kit. I had tom's all around me, 6, 8, 10, 12 and all the way to my second 18" floor tom. That's the hand painted Ludwig kit that everybody wants to buy from me. As the years went on, I realized that I didn't need all that, so I ended up leaving just the 10 and 12 to the left of my hi-hat. I have to reach for them with my left hand and I can't reach them with my right hand, unless I spin the seat around, so when I do a drum fill, it gives me a different fill that no one would ever think to play. I surely wouldn't think of playing those fills if it wasn't for setting up my toms like that. So, on my new DW kit I have either an 8 and 10 or a 10 and a 12 off to the left of my hi-hat, a 13 in front of me, 16 and 18" floor toms, and usually a 24 or 26" bass drum.

When Camco changed to DW, John Good was gracious enough to put a drum kit together for me. My kit was one of the first kits that he figured out the tuning of the shells. He chose these particular toms for me in the pitches that I like. I will always play Zildjian cymbals, and Remo heads. Todd Sucherman told me about the Pearl Eliminator Double pedal a while back and I love it.

I just spoke to Sam Thureau from HHG drums about building me a beautiful solid shell kit, he's making me a 7x14 Cedar snare right now, I can't wait to play it! I think I'm done with playing laminated kits for a while, I want to play a solid shelled kit.

**MD:** You are living in Georgia, is there a reason that you aren't in a bigger music city like Nashville or LA?

**TB:** I lived in LA for 24 years, one of my sons is still there. I'm really proud of being a good father, that's what it's all about for me. Then I remarried and my new wife Jan is from Georgia, and her mother was not doing so well, so we moved here for her.

But I ended up just loving it here! We are up in the Georgia mountains, and I feel like I've got a little bit of England right here. The people are great, I can ride my motorcycles around here, and my neighbors haven't complained yet about me playing my drums. However, I'm sure someone will at the exact moment I'm playing a rudiment that's giving me some trouble (laughs.)

**I like to write music as well, so I bring what I've learned over the years as a writer. I'm fairly musical myself, so I'd like to think that I help keep the integrity in the music, because it's all about the song.**

**MD:** When does the Close Enemies record come out?

**TB:** Nick DiDia is mixing it as we speak. We just released a single called "The Sound of a Train" and our second single is called "Inside Out." Our third single "Sweet Baby Jesus" is going to be released at the same time as this article. I honestly didn't think that I'd be this excited about a band ever again, but it's been fun! I just want to be known and remembered as a musical rock drummer, with a big fat groove, a nice pocket, and that English back beat.

**MD:** You are, but don't forget about the "sleazy and greasy" part!

**TB:** Oh yeah... thanks! 🥁





# LES CLAYPOOL:

## INSIDE THE INTERSTELLAR DRUM DERBY

BY DANNY "ZIGGY" LAVERDE

**W**hen Primus lost their drummer (again,) this time it was different. For a band that's always had a knack for finding unique and brilliant rhythm players, there was suddenly... no plan. No backup. No "oh, we'll just call this guy." Just an empty drum throne and a big question mark. Longtime drummer Tim "Herb" Alexander was stepping away for

the third time, and for the first time in the band's wild history, there wasn't a clear path forward. With no clear replacement in sight, Les turned to one of the biggest tools at any musician's disposal today, the internet. He started watching drum videos, scanning everything he could. As he sifted through videos of talent, each with their own style, technique, and energy, he

realized there was a much bigger world of drummers out there than he'd imagined.

That's how the now-infamous Interstellar Drum Derby was born. It was an open audition for anyone, anywhere, to submit their take on Primus songs and throw their name into the hat. In that process, John Hoffman, or "Hoffer" as Les now calls him, was not the flashiest or the loudest. But one of the few who, with each submission, kept climbing. His playing had feel, groove, and taste. Above all, he had ears, the kind that listen as much as they play. What started as a long shot quickly turned into something much more. Hoffer's not just keeping time for Primus, he's breathing new life into it, bringing a fresh energy and dynamic that's pushing the band forward. In this interview, Les takes us through the entire journey. From late-night YouTube deep dives to sifting through an overwhelming flood of emails. He shares the moment when he first saw Hoffer play live and how he felt that he could be the one. It's not just a story about a drummer joining a band. It's about the strange, modern, magical way a new chapter can start.



Photo by Paul Haggard



**MD:** How did you come up with the idea of the open audition and the Interstellar Drum Derby?

**LC:** The inspiration came from desperately needing a drummer. We were high and dry. This is the third time that Herb has left the band, and we always had somebody waiting and ready. We always had the idea of, "Oh, let's get this person." This time, we didn't have that. The first thing I did was call Danny Carey and say, "Hey man, do you know anybody?" and he recommended a couple folks. Then I just started going down the YouTube rabbit hole and watching all these different drummers. I was amazed

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how many spectacular players that were out there that nobody really knew about, or at least in the commercial world. It just sparked the notion of, "Hey, this is an opportunity for us to seek out a nugget that may be out there looking to be discovered."

**MD:** Were you surprised by the number of audition videos you received?

**LC:** We didn't really expect that many. It was overwhelming. A very good friend of ours (Tim Soya,) whom we've known since the early days when Jayski (Jay Lane) was in the band, has always been a huge fan and has worked for us on and off throughout the years. He's very vested in seeing Primus do well and get the right person. So, he watched all the videos. Ler watched most of the videos, and I watched the ones that were filtered. We basically had four folders. We had a one-star folder, a two-star folder, a three-star folder, and a four-star folder. One-star meant, "This person's really good," two-star meant, "Wow, this person's very exceptional," three-star meant, "They're incredible," and four-star is, "They've got to get an audition no matter what." I would go through and look at those folders after these guys went through the 6,100 or so that there were.

**MD:** What star folder was John Hoffman in during the process?

**LC:** I don't know. He wasn't in the four-star folder. What

**Primus as an entity has had ten drummers, I joke, but that includes the LinnDrum I recorded "Too Many Puppies" on back in 1984. Herb was actually our eighth drummer, so that makes Hoffer number nine.**

happened was I had seen his submission, and it was cool because of the production value of it. He played along with "John the Fisherman" and had graphics behind him. He looked very cool, but it didn't really set him apart from that many other people to the point where he was going to get an instant audition. What I was noticing was a lot of people would play along with Primus tunes, often in the mix you couldn't tell who was playing what. You couldn't hear if it was the recording or the player. You could see if somebody has finesse or not. So, I posted again and said, "Hey, it's great that you people are all playing along with the Primus tunes but also include something that has a little of your own flavor." When John resubmitted, it was unbelievable. It was spectacular, so he got thrown into the four-star folder after that.

**MD:** What about his second video submission captivated you?

**LC:** Just everything, even the stuff he was doing on his own. He was showing different rudiments and whatnot, and it was just very cool. You could just tell he had finesse and great dynamics, and his attack was spectacular. Unfortunately, a lot of drummer's kind of bash their way through things. Those types of players have never been compelling for me, but John wasn't one of those. He has a lot of finesse.

**MD:** What were you specifically looking for during the audition process?

**LC:** Primus as an entity has had ten drummers, I joke, but that includes the LinnDrum I recorded on "Too Many Puppies" on back in 1984. Herb was actually our eighth drummer, so that makes Hoffer number nine. There's been a lot of variances between all these different players. The three recorded drummers (Herb, Jayski, and Brain) are all very unique. A lot of people don't realize how much of those first three records were Jayski arrangements. All that crazy hi-hat stuff, that's a very "Jayski" thing. His style is very prominent within the early material. I'm a sucker for crispy hi-hats and cymbal catches.

We were definitely looking for someone that had a great groove and someone who's more musical than athletic. A lot of players can do all the crazy things, but it's not necessarily overly musical. It's very impressive to watch, but it didn't necessarily lend itself to the musical conversation. Personality was a big thing, and

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there was nobody at the audition that was a disappointment. Every single player was extraordinarily pleasant and fun to play with. Ler was going through one of the craziest times of his life. His house had just burned down. We'd play a song, and he'd have to stop and grab his phone to see if he got a text from a potential rental because he was looking for a house to move his family into. All the houses were being scooped up. It was a very intense time, and I was surprised he even wanted to do it. He's such a trooper and such a positive person. He said, "No, I need this distraction," so we dove in. It was a blast. Like I said, they were all amazing.

**MD:** In the video series, your connection with John really stood out. Did playing with him feel natural right from the start?

**LC:** It's like anything else. When you're having a conversation with somebody, like when you (as a journalist) are interviewing somebody, sometimes (I would imagine) it's like pulling teeth. Sometimes it's very awkward, sometimes it just flows, and you have an amazing conversation. That's the way life is, you walk into a room, there's people in the room, some people you gravitate towards, some people you don't, some people you really hit it off with and you're able to have that communication. It's the same with music. With ol' Hoffer, we could really tell that he was listening, responding, and not just playing his part. I find the folly of a lot of musicians, especially drummers, is that they just want to play their part and play it the best they possibly can. They want to play their part perfectly and they're not really listening and reacting to what's going on around them. They're just focused on their part, and I've noticed that with a lot of players. I was guilty of that in my youth. We all kind of go through it. You're just nervous and you forget to



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listen. Listening is a huge thing, and ol' Hoffer's got big ears. He hears stuff and he reacts. One of my favorite players to ever play with was Bernie Worrell. They guy heard and reacted to every little thing. It'll be interesting to see what Hoffer develops into, because every time we play, it clicks a little more and becomes

interesting to see how he blossoms in this world.

**MD:** I know it hasn't been that long since Hoffer joined the band, but how has the chemistry developed between you and him both before and after his first show?

**LC:** One thing that endeared me to him immediately is that he reminded me of my brother right off the bat. You could tell he was really nervous. He's very polite, unassuming, and modest, and my brother's very much like that. He would say, "Oh, can I do anything for you? Can I help you here? Am I in your way?" He's one of those guys, and that's the way Hoffer was when he



more intuitive. It'll be interesting to see the band in a year or two, three, or five. I have a relationship with Jayski that when we get in a room together, he won't even have his drumset completely put together. Then I'll start playing something and he's just on it. We just have a line of communication that's spectacular because we've been playing together for 35 years or so. He's a very dear friend, so I'm looking forward to developing that with Hoffer. We brought Jay (Lane) in at one point after Hoffer got the gig because Hoffer's such a big fan. We sat down and just had a big jam, and one of the things Jayski pointed out was, "I can't wait to see this guy in a few years because he's very impressionable and eager to learn, and he's already got the feel and the chops." It'll be

first showed up. As we were learning the tunes, we were saying, "Hey man, just relax," because you could tell he was not quite comfortable at times. He'd gotten to where we were playing the tunes well, and we were ready for this [first] show. So, here he is, he's about to do his first big show with Primus. Danny [Carey] was supposed to do the entire gig, but we decided to bring Hoffer down. Danny did the first three songs, then they did a song together, then Hoffer did four or five songs, then they did "My Name is Mud" together. We did the soundcheck and it was amazing. They played together and jumped on each other's kits. It was a good time. We're all hanging out in Danny's [dressing]

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room, it was about 15 minutes before the show, and I'm looking at Hoffer and I can tell he's starting to get that look going. He said, "Man, I've got to tell you, I'm starting to feel it. I'm starting to feel the butterflies." I said, "Look man, just relax. It's going to be fun. Just cool down, it's going to be great." Then he said, "I'm trying man, I'm trying really hard." You could tell he was winding himself up. I look over at Danny on the other side of the room,

**I've played with many drummers that are spectacular live, but then you put them in the studio, and something happens. It just doesn't work. It's rare, but it happens.**

and he said, "Man, I'm nervous to play these Primus songs." It just diffused the whole thing, because here's Danny Carey, arguably one of the greatest drummers on the planet right now, and he's nervous about playing Primus songs in front of all these people. You could see Hoffer just relax, and we went up and it was spectacular. I'd look back at Hoffer and he's just smiling away doing his thing, and he killed it. It was a perfect entry into our world.

**MD:** What ultimately made you feel that John was the right fit after narrowing it down to the finalists? And what stood out to you about his take on the new track you had him record?

**LC:** We were going to do a final three, but we ended up doing a final two. It was Gergő (Borlai) and Hoffer. Running the set was very important because there's a lot of material, there are three spectacular drummers who recorded this material, and you have to be respectful to it. There were some players that were unbelievably good, but they were interpreting the material in their own way. If we were just starting this band, it would've been a different story as to whom we would've picked. It was very important that they were able to nail all the stuff. Both Gergő and Hoffer killed it on all levels. Then when recording the tune, my idea was, "Okay, I'm going to write a song, I'm going to bring it in, we're going to learn the song, we'll record it, and we'll see how people do in the studio." It's a different ballgame. I've played with many drummers that are spectacular live, but then you put them in the studio, and something happens. It just doesn't work. It's rare, but it happens. Hoffer's approach was a little more of that crispy hi-hat "Jayski" feel. It was funkier, but it had a drive to it. Gergő, for lack of a better term, was kind of like Herb meets Dennis Chambers, which was spectacular, but Hoffer ended up winning in the end.

**MD:** Are you planning on releasing any new material with Hoffer on drums in the near future?

**LC:** We do have this new song that we recorded as part of the

**Hoffman is pointing at certain material like, "I want to play this song," and they are songs we haven't played in a long time or ever live. He's picking them as a fan, so it's interesting to get that perspective as well.**

audition process that will be released. In fact, I was just mixing it.

**MD:** Has bringing Hoffer on reignited a creative spark in the band?

**LC:** I think it's blown a breath of fresh air into the band because I wasn't planning on touring this summer with Primus. We did a lot of touring last year, and we're doing *Sessanta* again this year. I was going to do something else this summer, but because of this change, we're excited to go back on the road. Also, Hoffer is pointing at certain material like, "I want to play this song," and

they are songs we haven't played in a long time or ever live. He's picking them as a fan, so it's interesting to get that perspective as well. Brain's a dear old friend, so he knew the material, but he didn't sit around listening to Primus. That's not what he did, and Jayski's just Jayski. He's like my brother and we have this musical bond, but he doesn't sit around listening to Primus either.

Also, Herb is obviously very close to the material because he recorded a lot of it. Having someone who grew up on this material, was inspired by it, and has listened to it probably more than we have, is interesting when writing a setlist or working on what we're going to be playing for this next tour.

**MD:** What songs did Hoffer bring up that surprised you?

**LC:** I don't really want to say because I don't want to spill the beans on what we're going to be playing this summer. We have so much material that you kind of forget about this song or that song.

**MD:** Overall, what is it like working with Hoffer?

**LC:** He's just so damn happy to be there. It's infectious. He's very eloquent and well-spoken. He's a great writer, and you don't necessarily get that from him in the hang because he's very quiet and unassuming. Even the way he speaks when he's being interviewed, he's good at communicating, not *just* with his drums. Like I said, it's interesting to get this fresh perspective on something that we've been around for so long. He's a great man. It's almost like a storybook. It's such a great tale of how this all came together for him. At first, he wasn't really up in the top, then he resubmitted, and he got an audition. He was (pretty much) the underdog the whole way. Then he got it, and it's just been this amazing story learning about him, his father, and his background. Now he's the hero of Shreveport. Then he shows up at our first gig wearing a Saints jersey because he's a Louisiana boy, and it has the number "9" on it. He's the ninth drummer, so there's all this synchronicity.

**MD:** You play drums too, right? What's your relationship with the drums compared to playing the bass?

**LC:** Bass is just a much sultrier instrument, but I love playing drums too. My hero on the drums is Jayski. I just try and copy him all the time. That's what I do.





# MARCO SOCCOLI

## REMEMBERED



"The drum community is a community like no other. It is made up of very special people whose work (and sometime *much* more) revolves around drumming, drums, and music. Marco Socoli was a very special person and a pillar of our drum community.

As a drummer, Marco hit the 90s New York metal scene as the talented drummer in the bands Galaxy and ROXX. He played a multi-pedal set before it became a popular, much later. In ROXX, he played big sets, big beats, and big fills.

He continued to be an integral part of the New York City drumming community when he became the drum department manager for (at different times) both Sam Ash Music and Manny's Music on 48<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan. In those days, 48<sup>th</sup> Street, and its row of massive music stores, was an epicenter of the NYC music world. Everyone shopped there and everyone hung out there. Whether you were a drumming icon or a young kid shopping for your first kit, Marco treated you like an important member of the drumming community.

Marco's commitment to service led him into Artist Relations for Vic Firth, then ProMark and Evans. In that position, Marco was among the best. He made every drummer feel like a rock star. I know from first-hand experience when he signed me as a Vic Firth endorser.

At NAMM shows and PASIC conventions, you got the impression that Marco knew every drummer in the world, every model of equipment, and what *everybody* used! *Maybe he did!* That was his job, he loved his job, and

he did it very well.

He was the glue that created memorable nights. He was the life of the party, always the first one to greet you, and the last to give you a hug as you left. His grappa toasts were legendary as was his big smile and even bigger personality. When Marco was around, the night would not end early, and *everyone* would have the time of their lives. Marco was New York City personified.

Many of the good times were documented by Marco's photographs, he was an avid and talented photographer. As you'll see here, I don't think there is any musician that doesn't have at least one selfie with Marco, or a perfect photo that he took of them, he was literally *everywhere*.

Marco Socoli was about community and family, every drummer and member of the community was family, and he made everyone feel that way. Most of all, he put smiles on everyone's faces and created lasting memories.

But there was *one* thing more important than the family of drumming and drummers, and that was his own family. Marco spent many years taking care of his aging mother in Queens, because nothing was more important than family.

Marco had the biggest heart and was one of the biggest personalities in the drumming community. Not only does the drumming world need more like him, but the world (in general) needs more like him. He was one of a kind and will be deeply missed!" — **Mark Griffith**

"Marco was one of my oldest and dearest friends. They broke the mold after he was born, truly one of a kind. Him and his wife Carol are some of the nicest people you'll ever meet. I remember the days we would spend together on 48th street in Manhattan, they were classic! Marco started working at Sam Ash and then went over to Manny's, that was when he really blew up.

There wasn't a person around that didn't know or love Marco; he helped us become the drummers of our dreams. Marco was always on top of things— He knew about the newest drumhead, snare drum, cymbal, electronic kit, whatever it was...HE KNEW!



Danny Carey, Gavin Harrison, Marco, Gregg Bissonette, Carmine Appice, Jojo Mayer



Marco was a 'go big or go home' type of guy; whatever he did, he made sure to do it in the biggest and most colorful way possible!

I would look forward to attending the NAMM shows because he was part of the crew I'd hang with. That crew was Marco, John Tempesta, Abe Cunningham, Frank Delgado, Aaron Vishria, John Dolmayan, Mike Portnoy, Jason Bitner, Alex Skolnick, Mark Menghi, and Brann Dailor. (I might be forgetting some names.) We would have the greatest times during these hangs; Marco would always provide these little bottles of Grappa. **WHEW!!!!** Those would go down hard sometimes, but you couldn't get out of having one—it was Marco's way of showing love. He became known as "grappaman" because of this and he **LOVED** it!

I never thought there would be a day without Marco... I am very saddened by his passing. I won't be able to hear his voice anymore, I won't be able to High-Five him back, feel his hugs, listen to him tell a good story, hear him rock out on a kit... There are so many things I will miss about him, but the thing I'll miss the most is HIM." — **Charlie Benante**

"I've been a drummer for the last 40 plus years and I grew up in Astoria Queens with my friend Marco Soccoli. Marco was one of the kindest, giving, and all-around amazing human beings around. My dad and Marco's dad both came to the US from Italy...and we grew up with 'Italian' values... Family... Food... Live life to the fullest... And an occasional shot of 'grappa,' Marco's favorite libation. I remember watching Marco perform in his first few bands Galaxy and Roxx. He was an **AMAZING** drummer! In 1986, he helped me with my first drum set while working at Sam Ash on 48th Street in Manhattan. He made sure I walked out with the **BEST** drums my money could buy. A seven-piece Sequoia Red Pearl MLX kit which I still use to this day with my band Foreign Journey. When I received the call this past Sunday, I was heartbroken. Marco was loved and respected by so many in the music industry and the drum world and community around the world! There are so many stories from everyone he's worked with. Marco will be missed greatly. Rest In Peace Marco... We ALL Love You!" — **Corrado Mazzuca**

Marco was a great friend of mine, and every time I saw him, I felt lifted up... He always made me laugh and smile with his incredible sense of humor. In 2011, Marco organized an incredible group of drummers (Danny Carey, Gavin Harrison, Carmine Appice, Jojo Mayer) to come out and hang out at my one of my gigs in Los Angeles at Café Cordele with my jazz quintet... What a blast! He was always doing fun things like this for the drumming community." — **Gregg Bissonette**

"When I received the sad news of Marco's passing, I was still reeling from Clem Burke passing away a few days earlier. I'm still trying to process the loss of my two old friends. I met Marco in 1985 or 1986 when he was working for Sam Ash on 48th St. He was a force in music retail. He was generous and always willing to help anyone, which is evident in how beloved he was. Although he went on to work in Artist Relations, and that's probably what many people will remember him for, I'll always think of Marco as the 'Pope of 48th Street.' His phone calls or texts usually opened with, 'Hey Paisan!' He had a gigantic personality and was always the life of the party. Or usually, the guy hosting the party. Here's an example from Zildjian Day

in New York in 1990. L-R: Me, Mike Morse (RIP), Marco, (future Saturday Night Live drummer) Shawn Pelton, Kenny Aronoff, Tris Imboden & Cecilia Noel. And almost 20 years later at Keith Carlock's wedding. Rest easy, Paisan. You'll be missed, but never forgotten. My deepest condolences to Carol and everyone in Marco's circle." — **John DeChristopher**



Glenn Noyes, Scott Devours, Marco, Toby Kay Noyes, Todd Sucherman

"I first met Marco when he was the manager of the drum shop at Manny's Music on 48th Street in New York City. It's easy to still see and feel that friendly energy he brought to everything, whether helping someone pick out a drumset or find the correct wing nut for their cymbal stand. He saved my hide on more than one occasion. Safe to say that Marco brought drum company artist relations to both a new level and century. Marco also brought more rock guys to the industry table than ever before (which had been jazz-biased for a long time). I'm sorry that he's gone, he was a good friend to all. My condolences to his wife Carol and to all who knew and loved him." — **Peter Erskine**

"Marco Soccoli loved drummers, music, his wife Carol, and certainly loved telling stories over great food and drinks. He was a one-of-a-kind old school music business legend that just knew everybody and was friends with everyone. A force of nature that was singularly unique who could sometimes speak so quickly it was as if he was a machine. He made everyone feel welcome at his table. Marco was also a gifted photographer and I have some amazing photos that he took at a few different live shows. He would generously send a tube with several sizes of photos, some blown up to poster size—he did this all on his own just because he wanted to share things with you. He'd come to shows with bags of burned CD's (back before everything was on YouTube) and of all sorts of musical treats for you, again, because he was excited to hook you up with goodies. I think everyone always felt great to be pulled back for a grappa shot with him at the trade shows. It was a moment of solace from the hectic show, but you were pulled into the fun vortex that was Marco Soccoli. He will be missed and remembered fondly by thousands of musicians and industry folks who were lucky to be caught up in his orbit. Thanks for the friendship and all the good times, Marco. You made the world a better place. Cheers to you." — **Todd Sucherman**

"I was heartbroken to hear that Marco had passed away. We had been friends for forty years. In my early days, as a struggling NYC drummer, Marco would always take care of me when I visited him at Sam Ash ... a few pairs of free sticks here and there, lots of laughs and of course, grappa. But, most importantly, he



gave me a never wavering friendship.

When my old band, Damn Yankees, released an album and it went Platinum, I had a record award made with Marco's name on it ... and walked into Sam Ash one day and handed it to him. That award hung on the wall of the drum department for years ... it was my way of saying Thank You to him. We *all* Thank You Marco ... and we will all miss you." —**Michael Cartellone**

"As much as anyone I've known since coming to town in 1980, Marco WAS the NYC drum scene for the last forty years. He would be everywhere, seemingly appearing at everybody's gig on the same night. And then there was the challenge of going back out and trying to play a good set after downing a bunch of his tubes of grappa that he always had an unlimited stash of! Most of all it was always about the love: our unique Family of Drummers. RIP." — **Robby Ameen**

"I first met Marco in 1997 or 1998 when he was working on 48th Street, selling for either Manny's or Sam Ash—I can't quite recall, as he bounced between the two. From the start, Marco's passion and energy for the drum business shone through, authentic and infectious. It's no wonder he was likely the best salesman 48th Street ever had. Customers sought his knowledge and advice, and artists trusted him implicitly. He took care of everyone, always with a smile and a shot of grappa.

As his career evolved, Marco brought that same familial warmth to his role as Director of Artist Relations at Vic Firth. Wherever he went, smiles and laughter followed. In quieter moments, his sincerity was palpable—he genuinely cared about you and your family. Marco was a big-hearted man who, like any great artist relations professional, gave far more than he ever received. The outpouring of tributes now reveals just how many lives he touched and uplifted.

Our careers crisscrossed and intertwined over the past 30 years. Though we didn't speak as often as we'd have liked, every



Marco, Vinnie Colaiuta, Frank Bellucci

conversation felt like picking up right where we left off. I always assumed Marco would be there, a constant presence. Only now am I grappling with the reality that he's gone. You will be deeply missed, my friend. May you join your famiglia in heaven, sipping the finest grappa the angels can offer. One day, we'll all join you to share in that heavenly toast. My deepest love and condolences to your beloved wife, Carol, and your entire family."

— **Joe Testa**

"Marco Socoli was a one-of-a-kind human being, aside from being one of the best in the drum business, he was a great guy and always went above and beyond for his 'familia.' I was honored to be a part of that with our friendship that spanned over 35 years



Michael Cartellone, Marco & Friends at NAMM

starting when I would travel to NYC to buy cymbals off him on 48th street decades ago. I will miss him tremendously." — **Jason Bittner**

"Such a loss. Marco was a beautiful soul, full of energy, grace, and generosity. I have Marco's home address in my Rolodex! That's how long we were friends from when he worked at Vic Firth and then Evans-maker of my favorite blue hydraulic heads!

He was always a sight for sore eyes and always had an encouraging word about the music business or a gig he had attended. Such enthusiasm! He will be deeply missed by me and so many of my colleagues, I am sure." — **Chris Parker**

"Marco was an amazing man. When you were signed to a company he worked for, he took amazing interest in your career and anything you needed. His BBQs were amazing. All your drumming friends, his train setup, his crazy drum sets. Always a great time with a great guy. The last years of his life were very turbulent. Taking care of his mom and trying to get work. I'm devastated that I will never see him at another one of my gigs. This photo was at one of my gigs 5-6 years ago. I loved Marco and always tried to help him. He was the best; he will be missed by many friends RIP my Italian buddy. My condolences go out to Carol and the family so sorry." — **Carmine Appice**

"I have met a few people in my life that have just pure energy and are truly full of life. Marco Socoli is one of the few. He was an amazing human being. I learned so much from him. Marco had the energy of 20 men (probably more than that.) His infectious smile, always put a person at ease. He was a problem solver. Artists knew if they had a problem, Marco could fix it. He was an incredible listener. If you needed someone to hear you out ... you sought out Marco, he was your guy. He was so knowledgeable. Marco knew drums. He knew every aspect of it, he was a walking dictionary of drums. He was a loving husband. He loved his wife (Carol) so much! I always enjoyed seeing them together. Marco was a lot of things, that's what made him "Marco." Brother Marco, I pray that your soul is resting in peace and my condolences to your family! You will be missed. Love!"

— **Chris Hart**

"Marco and I go back to his time working at Manny's on 48th Street in NYC. He had an outrageously outgoing personality, was good at his job, and a lot of fun. A few years after I met Marco, Vic Firth came to me and asked me a question that went something like this: "People are going to say either I'm crazy or a genius, but



I'm thinking of hiring Marco Soccoli as our Vic Firth Artist Rep, what do you think of that?" I told him I loved the idea. He probably asked quite a few people that question and Vic hiring Marco was an inspired choice! Marco was a perfect Artist Rep, a Rock'n'Roll incarnation of the original Zildjian artist rep Lennie DiMuzio. Over the years Marco was a friend and a super supportive cheerleader for me and all drummers. One particularly memorable occasion is when he booked a table for about 20 or more Vic Firth endorsers to see my Vital Information group at Catalina's Jazz Club in LA. Gregg Bissonette, Carmine Appice, Marco, and many other drummers were sitting right up front enjoying the show. I miss Marco's infectious energy, enthusiasm, and love. He truly loved life, music, drums, and drummers. Marco is missed." —**Steve Smith**



Marco, Steve Smith, Barron Brown, Mark Griffith

"I was recording at Right Track Studio, next to Sam Ash on 48th street where Marco ran the drum department. We weren't getting a good bass drum sound and the producer said my bass drum didn't sound good. I sent my tech to Long Island to get three more bass drums. Still no drum sound. I called Marco he sent 10 more bass drums. I called Anton Fig who had just recorded at the same studio. He asked, 'Are you having a problem with your bass drum?' Then I called Steve Ettelson from Yamaha. I said, 'Steve you usually can't get two bass drums to sound the same, we can't get 12 to sound different.' He said, 'When a studio sucks it sucks constantly.' Marco and I couldn't stop laughing. We packed up and went to Teddy Pendergrass' studio in Philly. Marco was always there to help, laugh, and have grappa. He was one of the greatest guys the drumming world ever had. RIP Marco." —**Bobby Rondinelli**

"Marco, a NYC legend in the drumming and music community. I met him like so many drummers did in NYC — buying drumsticks from him in Manny's music. He made everyone feel like they were important unconditionally whether you were a punk kid or the drummer from the Rolling Stones. This never altered even as he graduated from Manny's and started working for Vic Firth, D'Addario and so many others - it just enabled him to be able to help more people on a higher level. He was laser focused on the people he loved starting with his wife and mother, then to anyone you came into his life in the music community. His huge, loving, compassionate heart was second to none. I choose to use him as an example of how to make this world a better place by caring and loving people, without judgement." —**Van Romaine**

"I have countless awesome stories that I could tell about my dear friend Marco Soccoli... but I will share one here. At the NAMM show (2013, if memory serves) certain drummers were invited along with Marco to go have dinner with Bill Ward from Black Sabbath. Thankfully for me, I was one of them. Needless to say, I was beyond thrilled to have dinner and talk to such a drum legend but also to spend some time with some fellow drummers/friends of mine. Marco could've asked 50 different drummers that would've bit their own hand off to go to that dinner, but he chose me, and I will forever be thankful to him for that. I have known Marco since 2004 when I joined Megadeth and he was my artist rep at Vic Firth drumsticks. When Marco left several years later to go work for ProMark drumsticks and Evans drumheads, I was the first guy to leave my respective drumstick company and drumhead company at the time to go with Marco just to show my loyalty to him for what he's done for me over the years. Marco was a true friend to the 9th degree, and I will miss him dearly, as will countless others. Simply put, he was the BEST artist relations guy on the planet, but even a better human being." —**Shawn Drover**

"Marco is truly one of the most beloved members of our industry. He is an icon... I purposely put this in present time because he lives through all of us. He was not only a constant source of laughter and selfless attention paid to others... but he was a motivator, a true friend, and a freakin' character among an industry of characters!

I remember when he came to visit me in my studio when my 15-year-old daughter was barely 8 weeks old... He brought some mini drumsticks, and beyond any other business that we had to do, he insisted on taking photos of me and my daughter behind the drum set. This is a truly special being... a truly special soul. Marco... We mourn you; we celebrate you, and most importantly, we love you." —**Mark Schulman**

"I am sending love, sympathies, and condolences to Marco's wife, Carol. No matter where the 'guy hang' was, whether it would be the NAMM show, or tooling around New York City after a show to grab some great Italian food, Marco's main concern was always taking care of his family and his wife. We had so many great times, I'll cherish those memories. Rest in peace, my brother!" —**Dave Weckl**

"I'm truly shocked to hear of Marco Soccoli's untimely passing. It's hard to believe that someone who emanated so much LIFE could be taken from us at such a young age. Marco was one part A&R rep, one part 'wise guy' New Yorker, and one part rock star. He truly straddled the line between the freewheeling 'sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll' style of the old days, and the more buttoned up, conservative drum industry we have today.



Mark Schulman and his daughter taken by Marco.



When I first started going to NAMM shows in LA in the early '90s, Marco always stood out. To watch him swagger around the floor, gladhanding everybody who passed by and wielding that HAIRCUT, I just assumed he was some super famous rock drummer. And Marco was always the life of the party. I'm sure that every remembrance will mention how he could be found slinging shots of grappa at every industry party he ever attended.

Marco's generosity was also unmatched. He never showed up empty-handed. When I became a Vic Firth artist in 2009, I had just moved to New York City. Marco brought out the welcome mat. At our first meeting, he not only bought me lunch, but handed me a huge bag full of stick samples and VF swag. That small gesture meant a lot during a difficult time of transition.

After I played my first PASIC that same year, Marco sent me a bunch of incredible photos he had taken of my performance. At an industry event at the Drummer's Collective, Marco handed me a bag full of blank DVDs onto which he had burned hours of incredible historical bootleg concert footage. In that thick Queen's accent, he told me, *"Well Dan, since you're da guy who's into all dat drum history stuff, you should be da one to have dese."* Beyond the parties and the crazy times, it was these small acts of kindness and generosity that really made Marco stand out to me. He was a beautiful cat, a real "mensch," and a one-of-a-kind human being. The world is surely a sorrier place without him."

—**Daniel Glass**

"Everyone knew Marco. We always knew fun, and laughs would be had when Marco was there, on top of him being such an advocate for players and taking care of our instruments and what we needed. He was on top of it. But it wasn't just that part, it was his personality and how he dealt with people and valued them. The 'lost art' of A&R.



Marco & Corrado Mazzuca and family

We also knew him affectionally as 'Grappa Man.' One day while I was on tour, I was in Manhattan and went to go and see Marco. He was working on 48th street at the time. I went upstairs to see him and say hi, and he pulled out a bottle of grappa from behind something, I think it was a speaker, on the shelf. He poured a couple of shots, and I said, "Marco, It's noon." He continued, telling me that it's straight from Italy...and insisted that I try it, so I did. Somehow, I managed to walk out of there. But when I got to the street, I literally saw double. I have no idea how I got back to my hotel. Rest in peace Marco. Thanks for the memories, and for always being there for us."

— **Vinnie Colaiuta**

"Marco was one of one! He was the vibrant cheerleader of our drum community, a modern-day version of the cool industry cats I grew up with. Marco reeked of life and besides all he did in retail, was a great drummer and total Rock Star. He could have held his own in any of the huge 80s Rock bands. His band, Roxx opened for us (Widowmaker) in the early 90s and he had the most maxed out ddrum kit I've ever seen. Marco was also an amazing photographer. He came to a Bonzo Bash 10 years ago in NYC and a week later, I received a package with two 11" x 14" glossy prints of shots that he took of me. They were amazing! He could have texted me a couple of JPEGs but that wasn't Marco's style, he was always so generous and over the top. His and Carol's wedding reception was like a PAS show with the room filled with drummers and drum kits. I'm happy that the last time we hung was at a NYC drum event and we shared a table and bonded for the last time... Rest easy my friend. My sincere condolences to Carol and the Soccoli family." —**Joe Franco**



Ben Davies, Marco and Joe Testa

"I met Marco in the late 80's and crossed paths with him over the decades on many different occasions and he never changed from the same passionate, funny, friendly, and very cool cat. Never to be forgotten!" — **Shannon Larkin**

"When I got into the drum/cymbal industry back in the 80s it was still full of many of the original architects of the industry such as Armand Zildjian, Remo Belli, and Vic Firth; and a lot of special and memorable characters such as Artist Relations legends Lennie DiMuzio, Lloyd McCausland, and Joe Hibbs. But even among an industry full of such characters, Marco truly stood out as one of the most memorable of them all.

I was fortunate enough to be able to call Marco my friend since his early days managing the drum department at Sam Ash on 48th street. Those were really special times back when 48th street was still the center of the drum retail universe, and the street was still really hopping. Marco ran the drum department like his own personal fiefdom and the place was always filled with drummers who'd come there just to see him. There was so much funny stuff that used to go on there, some of which might not be fit to print. I remember one time when Marco was sneaking Grappa to Elvin Jones in one of the back rooms and Elvin's wife Keiko got so mad at him! (*Well, it was still the morning!*) It was all good natured, but very funny. But that was one of the reasons why Marco was so special, you could be Elvin Jones or Matt Sorum... everybody loved Marco.



I have so many memories of Marco it is difficult to select just one. I will always remember his wedding to his beloved Carolann. It was the most memorable wedding for many reasons, not the least of which might be because it is the only wedding reception I ever attended where the groom played a 15-minute electronic drum solo as a tribute to his bride! Marco and Carolann attended my wedding also and I would like to share this beautiful photo attached of the two of them at the reception.

Another time I remember was after the Buddy Rich Memorial Scholarship concert in Los Angeles in 1989. All the artists and the Zildjian crew were staying at the famous Hyatt House hotel on Sunset Blvd and Marco had come out also for the show. That's where many bands would stay back then when they were on tour and so often there would be a horde of young girls waiting outside to see whatever band might be staying there. After we checked out of the hotel, we walked out into the parking lot and were immediately set upon by a gaggle of young girls all clamoring to get Marco's autograph. I don't think they actually knew who he was...he just looked like a Rock Star!! He had that way about him.

He was such a larger-than-life character that I am honestly finding it difficult to accept that he is gone. You could not do anything other than laugh and smile when Marco was around, and he leaves a huge hole in the drumming community. He will be so greatly missed." — **Colin L. Schofield**

"I am saddened beyond belief at the news of the passing of my dear brother and fellow drummer Marco Soccoli from this mortal coil. Marco was a force of nature in my life from the moment I met him. His mischievous, Cheshire Cat grin was a welcome and comforting sight, which served as a beacon and invitation for joyous times, intense laughter and of course, copious amounts of grappa.

Marco was one of the most loving and generous people I've ever met, and a man adored by ALL who knew him and who were fortunate enough to have him as a friend. When I close my eyes and think of Marco, being in his presence was like basking in the heat and glory of the Caribbean Sun. His warmth and zest for life was infectious, and his generosity knew no bounds.

The world has lost a rare and beautiful man, and I am devastated. Yet I am filled with Love and Gratitude for having known this remarkable gem of a human. Marco was one of a kind and a true inspiration for me to live my life to the fullest. Godspeed Marco....you will be deeply missed." — **Chuck Burgi**

"As everyone who knew him will all agree, Marco Soccoli was one of a kind! From the days of Manny's Music and drinking grappa with him to the awesome hangs at trade shows and drumming events, it was always an unforgettable experience. One of my favorite memories is when Marco came

over to my home for a visit and met my family. He took pictures of my kids, played games with them, and had them laughing to where they didn't want him to leave. I then took him to meet my parents, who fell in love with him as well, and my mom made him a bowl of her famous pasta fagioli. It was a wonderful day and one that I'm thankful to have shared with Marco and my family. The last few times I saw Marco in person was when Vinnie Colaiuta was in town playing with Herbie Hancock. After the concert, we all went to my buddy's restaurant and ate and laughed the night away. Another classic day and night. Yesterday on Easter Sunday, I went to text Marco to wish him a Happy Easter like we would do on holidays...Heartbreaking. God bless him and his family. Rest In Peace Marco. I'm blessed to have known you." — **Frank Bellucci**

*Modern Drummer thanks all of Marco Soccoli's friends for sending us their wonderful memories and pictures. He touched us all, and left us with wonderful memories, he was a very special person. Our thoughts, prayers, and deepest condolences go out to his wife Carol, the rest of the Soccoli family, and all his friends.*





# 150 YEARS OF SONOR DRUMS:

A CONVERSATION WITH JEFF MULVIHILL

BY MARK GRIFFITH

In 1875 the then 28-year-old journeyman Johannes Link founded the first drum factory in Weissenfels, Germany with the aim to produce drum skins and basic marching drums. Over the following 32 years, this endeavor would expand and grow with son Otto Link joining his father's business in 1906 and the registering of the trademark SONOR at the Imperial Patent Office in Munich in 1907. 150 Years later, Sonor is still making drums, and after 150 years of innovation and drum making, they are the benchmark upon which many drums are judged. As you will read, since day one, Sonor have been innovators in design, manufacturing, and materials. Their craftsmanship is that of legend. Sonor drums are simply some of the finest musical instruments in the world. For Sonor's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, *Modern Drummer* wanted to talk to them about their history of design, manufacturing, and materials. Upon the recent retirement of Karl-Heinz Menzel, Sonor has a new team in place with eyes on the future and respect for the legacy. Chris Figgen (Marketing,) Olrik Mrowka (Sales,) Nico Lange (Artist Relations,) and Jannis Kockman (Product Management,) are all in place at the German headquarters supported by USA Brand Manager Jeff Mulvihill with a renewed commitment and support to the present and the future of drumming, this new Sonor team is upholding the long-standing tradition of Sonor quality and innovation. We sat down with Jeff to talk all things Sonor, and about some new drums that they will be making to celebrate their big anniversary.

**MD:** How long have you been with Sonor?

**JM:** That's a strange question to answer, I've been with the company since 2012, but I have been managing the Sonor brand for the last four years. Now I am honored to help create and lead Sonor's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. It's been an exciting year so far; we have released several things and there is more to come. We had a big NAMM show and we've got anniversary product rolling out all year. The 150<sup>th</sup> celebration was kicked off by a celebration at the NAMM show this year. In September we are having an international celebration event at the Sonor factory in Germany. 150 years is a big thing, that's no small accomplishment.

**MD:** Talk to me about Sonor's last four years, as we all know the last 10 years or so have been a challenge to everyone.

**JM:** The big news is the changing of the guard in Germany. We've seen the retirement of our hero Karl-Heinz

**Internally we've righted the ship and we've gotten our artist support in order so we can celebrate our anniversary, make new stuff, innovate, and continue to drive what we have always done with Sonor.**

Menzel. He is synonymous with, and has been the face of, the brand for all his 40-year career. But Sonor has a new crew running things and breathing new and renewed life and energy into what we do. Sonor has a new director of marketing, new artist relations, and a new product manager. The changes in those kinds of positions have given us the stability we need to carry on. Karl-Heinz is our hero and he's still a great friend, but it was time for him to relax.

**MD:** In the changing of the guard, what was the most immediate change?

**JM:** Internally we had to gain a little bit more of a 2025





perspective and strategy on what to do beyond what Sonor has been known to do. There's been ups and downs for the brand in the last couple of decades, but now we're on a more modern and strategic way of thinking. We have NOT left our old-world craftsmanship behind, Sonor is still out in the woods in the middle of the nowhere, and there are generations of engineers and drum builders working in the factory, that's the most important part of Sonor. The second thing has been a renewed commitment and communication with all our artists. If you look at the Sonor artist roster, it might be the strongest roster in the

**SQ2 is factory produced but handmade, so it's craftsman meets mass production. SQ2 are one-of-a-kind instruments, but Sonor is a big facility, it's not just somebody's basement.**

drum business. It's everybody's drum heroes: Steve Smith, Jack DeJohnette, Danny Carey, JoJo Mayer, Adam Nussbaum, Benny Greb, Jeff "Tain" Watts, Mikkey Dee, Chris Coleman, now Todd Sucherman, and many more.

We have a stable roster because those drummers love the instrument that helps give them their sound. Sonor has been through periods of thick and thin regarding who's feeling confident about their support. Internally we've righted the ship and we've gotten our artist support in order so we can celebrate our anniversary, make new stuff, innovate, and continue to drive what we have always done with Sonor.

**MD:** Are the SQ2 drums still the flagship of the brand?



**JM:** SQ2 is the flagship for the brand, but there's a few things that are worth noting. Our custom SQ2 series has grown extremely well in the last couple of years. It's really expanded and reached a lot of new customers and that makes us very proud. SQ2 is factory produced but handmade, so it's craftsman meets mass production. SQ2 are one-of-a-kind instruments, but Sonor is a big facility, it's not just somebody's basement. SQ2 takes you into the world of nearly completely custom drums with a multitude of choices in all the aspects of the drum: shell types, shell thickness, veneers, finishes, hardware selection, and sizes. SQ2 offers everything from gong drums to small snare drums. SQ2 drums run the whole gamut of anything you can imagine, and anything your mind desires in drums.

**We are releasing some special 150th Anniversary products. The first wave of Heritage product is a reissue and a reimagining of the 8 x 14" Cast Bronze signature snare drum.**

**MD:** What type of new drums are you releasing for the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary?

**JM:** We are releasing some special 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary products. The first wave of Heritage product is a reissue and a reimagining of the 14 x 8" Cast Bronze signature snare drum. There will be a very limited number of those. The second wave will be our special Sonor Heritage kits. Those kits have a natural bubinga veneer that is not available anywhere else, making them sort of "the best of the best." (SQ2 remains as our everyday top of the line flagship product.) The Heritage kits are a nod to our Signature series drum set with the same Waterfall Bubinga inner and outer veneer and heavy beech shells that Sonor is known for. They are directly inspired by the Signature series of the late 70s and early 80s that everyone had posters of and dreamed about. We will have a couple of different choices including both Heritage sized shell packs with the extra deep toms and the more modern fusion sizes. The third wave is a nod to the Sonor Lite series with original spec birch shells, Scandinavian Birch inner and outer veneers and black plated hardware. The Sonor Lite fans will love our beautiful reimagining of that series. Also, we'll have a special drum kit coming out in the summer and another later in the fall. We're keeping those exciting details under wraps so stay tuned.

**MD:** Have there been any challenges in going back and recreating or revisiting the greatest drums from Sonor's past?

**JM:** I think anytime you try to recreate something exactly as



**The Heritage kits are a nod to our Signature series drum set with the same Waterfall Bubinga inner and outer veneer and heavy beech shells that Sonor is known for. They are directly inspired by the Signature series of the late 70s and early 80s that everyone had posters of and dreamed about.**

it once was, when processes and materials were so different, there will be some challenges. In terms of the Bubinga kits, that beautiful Bubinga veneer is not cheap, but that's not something that Sonor has ever shied away from. We are proud to make the most incredible looking and sounding drums you've ever seen or heard in your life, that's the DNA of the brand. Over these 150 years, dollars and cents are always challenging, but when you're talking about the highest end drums in the world; luxury leads,

and recreate the rounded bearing edges. All those things together make those drums what they are, and truthfully, at the time Sonor needed a shot in the arm. It was a great time

to generate excitement with something as cool as those Vintage Teardrop era kits and snares. It was a huge success, and they continue to sell well today.

**MD:** Are they back for good?

**JM:** Yes, they are in the catalog, and we'll have them around for quite some time. The cool thing about those drums is the sheer versatility, and we've tried to document this in some of our video



and dollars and cents start to become a second priority.

**MD:** Speaking of reissuing drums from the past, what was the impetus for finally bringing the Vintage series Sonor's back, and why did it take so long?

**JM:** Now we're going all the way back to 2014 and 15 so it's been a minute. The inspiration to bring those back was a trend in the market, simply put. There were a lot of reissues and throwback stuff coming out back then, it was kind of in vogue to bring back something that a brand was known for. Not that we follow what others do just because others do it, but there was a moment where it made sense and there was a demand for that sort of thing. And when you have the sexiest drums of all, it was a good time to bring back those teardrop lugs, vintage finishes,

marketing. We call them the Vintage series, and you can see nostalgia there, but they really are a versatile instrument. They can sound like the drums of today when playing pop or rock music, they aren't just a jazz drum. You can tune them up and play pop songs, you can tune them down and play 70s classic rock. When you hit them hard, they respond. Tommy Clufetos has been known to play Vintage series. Steve Smith plays them with Vital Information, Nir Z uses Vintage series drums on sessions in Nashville regularly for anything from modern bro-country to country pop, blues, and progressive styles. They aren't just for brushes and swing; I think sometimes that gets lost with the term "vintage." I think the Vintage series has emerged and now has legs of its own. We plan to stick with them. We've

**We are proud to make the most incredible looking and sounding drums you've ever seen or heard in your life, that's the DNA of the brand.**



discontinued a couple of finishes and we've added some new finishes like you do with drums along the way, and there is even more to come.

**MD:** Can you run be down Sonor's product line today, I have a hard time keeping up with what's what (with all brands of drums.)

**JM:** It all starts with a series called AQX. They are entry level poplar drum sets that come in three different sparkle finishes. They are complete offerings with a shell pack, snare drum, and

**We call them the Vintage series, and you can see nostalgia there, but they really are a versatile instrument. They can sound like the drums of today when playing pop or rock music, they aren't just a jazz drum.**

hardware to get any beginner or enthusiast off the ground with a package that makes sense. As far as entry level kits go, AQX has higher quality than most, which is something you see with Sonor at every price point. Every line of Sonor drums has a little bit of the top end included. We have features and quality specs that are one step ahead of nearly every brand out there. We continue up through the catalog to AQ1 which are 100% Birch mid-range kits in lacquer finishes. This is where we see a couple of appointments that Sonor is known for, like the tunesafe lug system. From there, we go to AQ2 which is our mid-range maple offering. This is also where we get into Martini and Safari traveler kits with 14" and 16" bass drums. Those all come in a wide range of finishes and size choices. From there we get to different snare drums like the Kompressor series and the Artist series snare

**As far as entry level kits go, AQX has higher quality than most, which is something you see with Sonor at every price point. Every line of Sonor drums has a little bit of the top end included.**

drums and signature models from Gavin Harrison and Benny Greb. There are several classic Sonor sounds in our snare drum range, and all are beautifully appointed with options like gold hardware and other things that make Sonor famous. Then we get into SQ1 series, which is a 100% Birch series with many different set configurations and several finish choices in flat satin lacquers. Next comes Vintage series with all its appointments from the 50s and 60s Sonor Teardrop drums. Beyond the Vintage series is when we get into SQ2 which are the most custom and highest end drum offering of its kind.

The special thing about SQ2 series is that we've got an Online SQ2 Configurator built into the website where you can go and design the drum kit of your dreams over and over again until you get exactly what you want. It's fun to get in there and play around with your dream configurations. We were one of the first companies to do that. I am biased, but I think our Online SQ2 Configurator is the best one of its kind, it's very intuitive. It's fun to point and click on things like sizes and shell types, you can drop down the color menu, switch colors, veneers, and hardware fittings and move things around to make your exact custom configuration. With our online configurator you have an infinite amount of time at your fingertips, and you really have time to experiment. You can do multiple versions of

your dream kit until you dial it into exactly what you want. Doing it online means that you can take your time creating your drum kit and you can really find exactly what you want before hitting save, sending your order to your favorite retailer, or printing it out and taking it to your local drum shop.

Another milestone is the release of the Sonor Kompressor snare drum series. If you look at Sonor for most of its history, snare drums have been on the pricey side. We wanted to offer a series of metal shelled snare drums that are approachable to more than just those drummers who have a couple thousand dollars to spend on a snare drum. Sonor Kompressor snares come in steel, aluminum, and brass. They are workhorse bread and butter snare drums for anyone in the \$600.00 range. I call the Kompressor snares Sonor's "Supraphonic killers," that's how I think of them. We

created them to penetrate the "everyday working-man's snare drum" segment of the drumming population. That's been a big release for us in the last few years and we have recently added two Beech wood shell models to compliment the lineup.

**MD:** I have always been a fan of Sonor drums, but I have a few random Sonor questions that drummer's have always wondered about. Why did Sonor choose Beech to become its main wood?

**JM:** It goes back decades and decades to the German homeland. Honestly, Beech is regional in that part of Germany. It's a traditional German material that not only was widely available in that part of the country, but it's an ideal tone wood for drum shells. You don't hear about Beech in a whole lot of other instruments like guitars or violins, but for drum making it's nearly perfect. It's a great mix of hard and soft, it can be it can be

molded into round shells, and it's got a sound character that is unique. Nearly all the big brands make Maple or Birch drums, perhaps with some other combination of something in there, but Beech has a has a thing of its own. It's half of what makes Sonor so magical. The

Beech shell and the slightly undersized shell diameters are the Sonor secret sauce.

**MD:** What purpose does the undersized shell serve?

**JM:** The undersized shell enhances the resonance of the drum. That's the shortest, cleanest, clearest answer to the whole thing. If you think of a drumhead pulled over the edge of a drum, there is an edge (regardless of the shape of the edge,) and a collar to



the drumhead. If you have a perfectly mathematical sized 12" tom, your shell edge is going to the back of the collar. If you slightly undersize the diameter of the shell, your edge is on the sweet spot of the collar giving you an extended tuning range, and the drumhead has more freedom of motion.

**MD:** Is it also because the metal flesh-hoop of the head is not compressing and inhibiting the shell?

**JM:** Yes, to a certain extent. If you think of timpani, the collar of the head is a good inch and a half to two inches extended beyond the bowl, the undersized Sonor shell is not altogether different from that concept and that type of idea. However, the timpani takes that concept to another level because they want huge tonal resonance from the bowl. But the physics of it are nearly the same.

**MD:** It's also the same idea that is used on a gong bass drum, correct?

**JM:** Yes.

**MD:** Where did the thickness of Sonor shells come from?

**JM:** Now we're talking about the late 1970's. There is an inspiring story about when Horst Link walked into the factory and exclaimed something to the tune of, "I want to make the biggest, loudest, and most incredible drums anyone has ever seen anywhere!" The challenge was accepted, and they got to work. They wondered what would happen if they used deep sizes and thick plies in the shell recipe. The music of the time (70s classic

rock and the beginnings of heavy metal) was sort of in line with that experiment. That is when we see the beginnings of concerts in stadiums, big rock bands emerging and getting louder, and twin guitar lineups and huge amplifiers. So thick and deep drum shells with pinstripe or black dot heads, with a guy hammering them like a crazy person was meeting the musical needs of the time. It was an incredible experiment.

**MD:** Was Sonor the first drum company to use amazing looking exotic wood veneers on the outer ply of the drum?

**JM:** That is a fantastic question. I would have to do a little research on that. I'm very reluctant to make claims like "the first" and "the only one," but that is a good question. The American companies Slingerland, Ludwig, and Gretsch were not known for exotic veneers. The Asian companies have done them a little bit in the last few decades, but we'd have to do a little research on that.

**MD:** I know the Vintage series drums have big round over edges, as did the original Teardrop Sonor's, when did Sonor make the switch from rounded edges to a more modern edge, and why was that change made?

**JM:** That's an interesting topic and another Sonor milestone of note. As you said, if we go back to the 50s and 60s, the teardrop era drums had rounded edges. The same experiment that we were talking about earlier, (making the deepest thickest biggest loudest drums possible,) is when we see the adoption of the inner sharp 45 degree bearing edge, and Sonor claims to be one of the first drum companies doing that. While those 70s drums were a mile deep and very thick, having

**You don't hear about Beech in a whole lot of other instruments like guitars or violins, but for drum making it's nearly perfect. It's a great mix of hard and soft, it can be it can be molded into round shells, and it's got a sound character that is unique.**





that sharp edge and the slightly undersized shell in contact with the collar of the head, gave the most resonance from the drumhead. Moving all that sound into that huge cylinder creates more life and more tone from those monster drums. That Sonor experimentation and discovery made the inner cut 45 degree bearing edge nearly an industry standard from both American and Asian companies.

**MD:** What I find interesting is that with all the innovation concerning resonance from drum companies, head manufacturers were creating ways to dampen and cut down on resonance by thicker treated heads and unnatural head dampening devices. I've never understood that. But then Sonor came up with a unique system that would slightly dampen a drum without attaching anything to the heads.

**JM:** In the late 70s and early 80s Sonor had a built-in bass drum dampening system with vertical felt strips that you could dial in, that was pretty innovative. Later, with the Designer series Sonor created what's called the T.A.R mount (Total Acoustic Resonance.) It's an H shaped bar bracket that's fixed to four lug points with a dial that compresses or releases some pressure on the shell controlling some of the overtones of the rack toms.

**MD:** It was always quite strange to me, because as drummers we don't want our drums to resonate like timpani, but it seemed that's what drum manufacturers were working towards.

**JM:** This is an endless topic in the drum business, and for a long time it was the race for isolation. Nobody wanted anything touching or being screwed into the shell.

**MD:** It seemed as though drum companies wanted drums to ring forever. Meanwhile, the head manufacturers offered a million ways to dampen our drums. And yet the music itself, didn't want either of those extremes.

**While those 70s drums were a mile deep and very thick, having that sharp edge and the slightly undersized shell in contact with the collar of the head, gave the most resonance from the drumhead.**

**JM:** That's a great observation, that's incredible, isn't it? At some point, a manufacturer or an innovator thankfully asked themselves, "How resonant do we really need toms to be?" Maple and Birch are the industry standards, and they each resonate a little differently. But Beech has a special thing, it's got a little bit of natural EQ, for lack of a better term. Then the T.A.R system gave us an option, not based on isolation and 'let it ring

**There is an inspiring story about when Horst Link walked into the factory and exclaimed something to the tune of, "I want to make the biggest, loudest, and most incredible drums anyone has ever seen anywhere!"**

forever.' The T.A.R system gives you the option to control your instrument from the instrument, without putting a piece of tape on the drumhead. The T.A.R system offered a little bit of control over the overtones of the tom from a device associated with the tom. It's not an on or off switch, but it does offer some control especially in an environment where you're close mic'ed, under

microphones, and you're trying to balance your instrument.

**MD:** Is that still being used?

**JM:** Yes, the T.A.R mount is standard equipment on all SQ2 drums.

**MD:** Since Beech works and sounds so good, why did Sonor go into Maple and Birch a while back with Maple and Birch



Designer Series drums?

**JM:** Good question. The 90s was the Maple decade. Many of your favorite players had smaller cymbals, 16" crashes, splashes, and 13" high hats were everywhere. Everyone was using piccolo snare drums, everything was higher, cleaner, and very hi-fi to keep in step with the music. The Sonor Delite and Hi Lite series were very popular. Sonor was meeting the needs of the market and the music of the time. Today, in the 2000s we see a reemergence of more classic-throwback-heritage-legacy music (whatever you want to call it.) People are putting Ringo tea towels over their toms, cymbals are getting bigger (again,) snare drums are getting deeper, and suddenly Beech makes all the sense in the world (again.)

**MD:** If the 90s were the decade of maple, I guess you could say the 70s and 80s were the decade of Birch, is that why Sonor entered the land of Birch drums?

**JM:** Like any manufacturer with a variety of products in a catalog who is trying to meet the needs of different players, trying to meet the ears of different musicians, and trying to meet the needs of different music; I think that would be correct. I know there are Birch drummers and Maple drummers but let's face it, there's some marketing in there too. However, in the late 70s and 80s there was a difference between live drum sounds and recorded studio drum sounds. With Maple drums there is more mid-range and a wider spectrum of frequencies. Birch is a little bit more controlled, which is why drummers like them for the studios. Birch is a bit more friendly to the microphone. Can we hear these differences on a stage or in a room side by side with our naked ears? *Maybe...* But I think the difference is between being on a stage in front of people and being in a small booth with microphones on every drum. Anybody who's a Steve Gadd expert will tell you

about Gadd using Birch toms and a Maple bass drum, I would have to yield to Steve Gadd who is an undisputed expert in both stage and studio on that.

**MD:** Didn't Steve Smith also mix the woods on his newer white Journey Sonor kit?

**JM:** His bass drums were Beech, and the toms were Maple.

**MD:** So then to bring it full circle, what is the difference between Beech, Birch, and Maple?

**JM:** It sounds cliché, but Beech is (kind of) the best of both worlds. It creates a unique sound that seems to be magic for our ears. Then we can go down the rabbit hole and start talking about the shell thicknesses or edges on Beech. As we said, the Vintage series is a medium shell with rounded edges, with SQ2 you can have thin, medium, or heavy Beech shells. We brought Todd Sucherman to the roster and his sound is heavy Beech all around on everything snare drum, toms, bass drums, and all

**Today, in the 2000s we see a reemergence of more classic-throwback-heritage-legacy music (whatever you want to call it.) People are putting Ringo tea towels over their toms, cymbals are getting bigger (again,) snare drums are getting deeper, and suddenly Beech makes all the sense in the world (again.)**

with 45° edges. That sound gives him a baseline so his hands can do what his hands do, and he's got the hands to make magic.

**MD:** What does a thin beech shell sound like?

**JM:** The low frequencies are a little bit more pronounced, there's a little bit more character going on inside the thin Beech cylinders, and there's a little bit more resonance. Most of us gravitate towards either the medium or heavy Beech shell recipes because it's a very clear note. You get back from a Beech drum exactly what you put into it. There's something about the way the frequencies travel with Beech that makes a high-end drumming feel, a lot of us can't put that into words, not even the pros can put that into words, they just know, "That's what I want, I like *THAT* sound!" The thicker the cylinder, the more rigid the cylinder, the shorter and more projection of the sound, that's physics.

**MD:** I know that you don't only manage Sonor, but you also manage Mapex, are the companies related, do they work together?

**JM:** No, they are separate entities. I keep everything that I do for both companies separate. For me it's a very natural thing. I love both companies; I tell people a lot it's like playing in two

different bands at the same time. And anyone who's grown up as a working drummer knows what that's like. You play with one band this week and the other band the next week, but you kick ass with both of them all the time. That's how I look at it.

**MD:** For a while Sonor has had a bad reputation for artist support, how have you gone about fixing that?

**JM:** We have made a greater commitment to communication on multiple levels and platforms. We have made new hires with Nico Lange in Germany and Henry Go in the USA; they have made a new commitment to doing the job of artist support.

**MD:** Since you are based in Nashville, what have you done to integrate Sonor drums into the Nashville scene?

**JM:** We have done that in two different ways. I support the local scene with house gear pretty liberally. I have a program in place here where I'm able to support a lot of local clubs with house gear especially downtown on Nashville's Broadway. There are

Sonor house kits in place on many of those stages. Playing on Nashville's Broadway is unique, we don't even call them gigs, we call them shifts. The shifts start at 10 am and

they end at 2 am. There are four, four-hour shifts, and the music keeps playing all day. Between shifts it's often a very tight turnaround, the drummer will grab his or her cymbals and get off stage, and the next drummer for the next shift throws their cymbals up and it's 1-2-3-4 go! Downtown, drummers rarely bring their own gear.

In Nashville's recording community, Sonor's involvement might not as visible because it's behind the scenes, but we've got Sonor drums at all the big cartage companies in town, and in the big studios. We've got Nashville studio drummers like Nir Z, Chris McHugh, Jerry Pentecost, Tim Haines, and some others playing Sonor on everything from country to Blues to rock and pop. The Kompressor snare drums have been on a lot of recordings, whether they're being used by Sonor artists or not. A lot of players are reaching for those. The metal shells on the Kompressor snares are undersized too which is not easy to do with metal shell manufacturing, it's a whole different set of tooling for metal shells. You've got to do your math, and you've got to bend the edges and make the beads all with a shell diameter of about 13.75 inches. The same principle applies there, there's a unique life to the sound of those metal drums compared to "the standards."

**MD:** Which of the Sonor Kompressor's Steel, Aluminum, or Brass are getting the most use?

**JM:** Aluminum and brass, for sure. The aluminum drums are so beautiful under a microphone, it's a go to recorded sound, especially here in town. The aluminum Kompressors are on a lot of stuff. The steel shell is a definite workhorse, and there is just a little bit more mystique with the black plated brass.

Here is a fun story. In 1902, William F. Ludwig played a snare drum duet with Tom Mills. Mills was the snare drummer with the John Philip Sousa band. Mills was playing a European (presumably Sonor) 6.5 x 13 brass snare drum. After years, William Ludwig was able to buy that snare drum from Mills, and Ludwig used it as the model for the first Ludwig metal snares in 1911.





**MD:** When you were designing the Kompressors what were you going for?

**JM:** Two things. If you look at the rest of the Sonor snare drum catalog, they're unique craftsman level drums. We needed a series of high-quality workhorse snares. That was the main

**There hasn't been any changes in Sonor's physical drum material or construction, what has changed is a renewed sense of commitment. There is a new energy, and a new life to the brand.**

goal. Metal shell snares are in vogue more than ever these days. Everybody's reaching for metal snare drums. We wanted to make a high-quality mainstream metal shell snare and make it at an approachable price point.

**MD:** Does Sonor still do the Orff educational instrument program?

**JM:** Yes, it's a separate department, my counterpart Tim Henry manages all that business in the USA because it's a different segment of the market with different retailers and different customers. It's elementary classrooms rather than individuals, and it's more institutional. It's a different type of business, but Sonor has been the market leader in that segment of the business for many decades now, that is really a feather in the Sonor cap. Orff is part of our 150-year history and there are as many historical milestones in Orff children's educational instruments as there are with Sonor drums. Some of the most historical instruments in the Sonor museum are small xylophones and glockenspiels that were used in early classroom education, and that's a big deal for us.

**MD:** Why has Sonor always used the slotted rods on their drums?

**JM:** That was more of a regional thing than a Sonor thing. Premier had slotted rods, Trixon had slotted rods, there are some other German drum brands, that have gone by the wayside, that had slotted rods. It was the standard in Europe. Many of us know Sonor for having them because it's the most prominent drum company that did that.

**MD:** And because it pissed us drummers off when we had the wrong drum key on backline gigs and at festivals.

**JM:** I know! But the simple answer is that it was more of a regional European standard.

**MD:** Why does Sonor's chrome look so beautiful and so much better than everyone else's?

**JM:** It's simply the level of quality of the process and materials. That's a key reason why we're not the cheapest drum company in the marketplace, you get what you pay for. It's not a cash grab, there are refinements in both the wood and metal parts of our instruments. For example, many hardware manufacturers will rivet the legs together meaning the stand collars are connected with pin rivets or with flex rivets. When you look at Sonor's high-end 600 series cymbal, high hat, and snare drum stands you'll see that we use stainless steel pins to make a very high-quality connection so when you unfold a Sonor stand or move a boom arm, you'll feel the precision tolerance that is different from other stands in the marketplace. The threaded inserts on a lug casing, the number of threads on a screw. All of

that is threaded into the DNA of the Sonor brand, it's all about attention to detail, that is where your money goes.

**MD:** Speaking of beauty, having seen Todd Sucherman's beautiful new set of Sonor's, what can you tell me about the process of bringing Todd to Sonor and creating his new set?

**JM:** From my perspective that was nothing but fun to put together. Todd's return to Sonor is probably best articulated by himself and some of the content you've seen. He's such an eloquent gentleman. When he speaks about how he remembers the sound of drums for the first time, playing with his family, and on his first recording session, that's not scripted. He could never get that out of his mind. Returning to the quintessential dream drum sound of his youth is special for him and us.

On the company's side of it, there hasn't been any changes in Sonor's physical drum material or construction, what has changed is a renewed sense of commitment. There is a new energy, and a new life to the brand. The people behind the brand make the brand, and that has always been the case at Sonor. There is a renewed commitment to growing Sonor globally and that's what drummers like Todd and you have noticed in the recent years. I'm working with a newly energized team of people behind the brand both in Germany and in the USA. We do have some manufacturing in China, you can't be a top to bottom catalog brand without multiple facets of your industry, it's one big collaboration. There are ups and downs, but we're feeling good about the path we're on right now.

**MD:** I'll say it, because you're too humble to say it. You and your Sonor team are doing a good job and people are seeing it. And big congrats on 150 Years of drum making!

**JM:** We are having a blast doing what we do. Thank you very much. 🥁



# Primus "Eleven" from *Sailing the Seas of Cheese*, drummer Tim Alexander

Transcription by Marc Atkinson

This month's transcription honors Primus and their "old" drummer Tim Alexander, with the Primus track "Eleven" from their album *Sailing the Seas of Cheese*. As the title implies, the song is based in an 11-beat groove.

To make the rhythm easier to read and internalize, I've written it as alternating bars of 6/8 and 5/8. This breakdown helps simplify the counting and aligns with the phrasing the band is playing. The notation reflects this approach, with beams grouped to show the underlying subdivision—typically felt as

3+3 in the 6/8 bar and 3+2 in the 5/8 bar.

Throughout the basic groove, the kick drum usually lands on beat one of each bar, while the snare hits beat four in both. This pattern reinforces the pulse Tim is feeling and playing. When learning the song, I recommend counting it as alternating bars of 6 (counted 1-2-3, 1-2-3) and 5 (counted 1-2-3, 1-2), rather than as a single bar of eleven. This method will help you lock into the feel and phrasing more naturally.

## ELEVEN

♩=216

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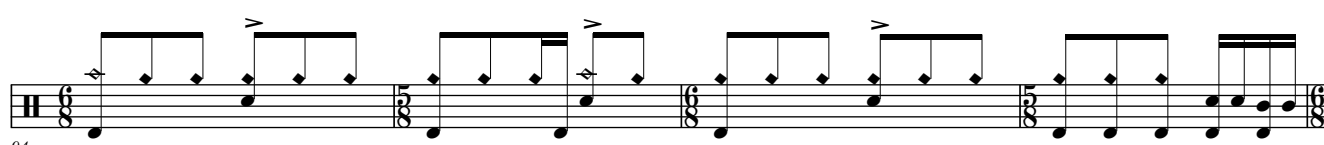
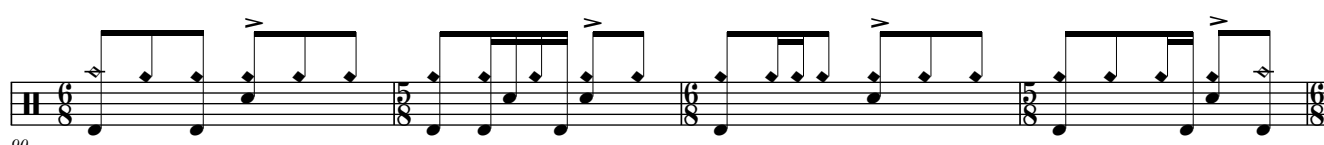
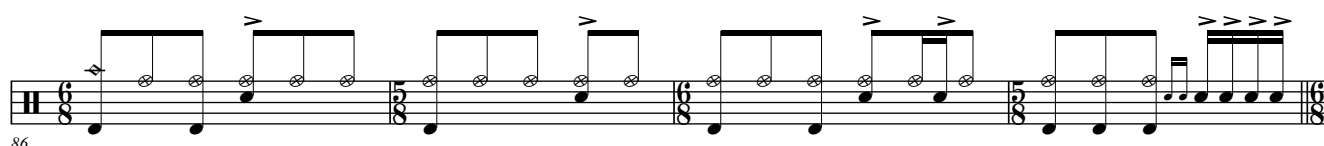
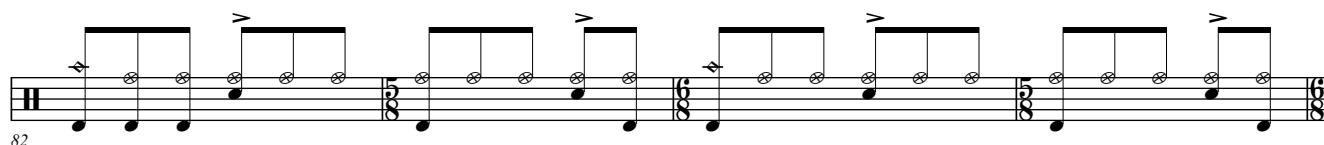
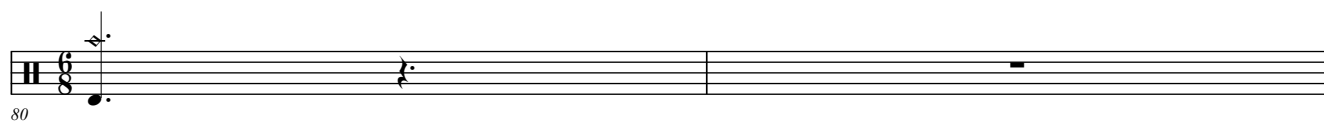
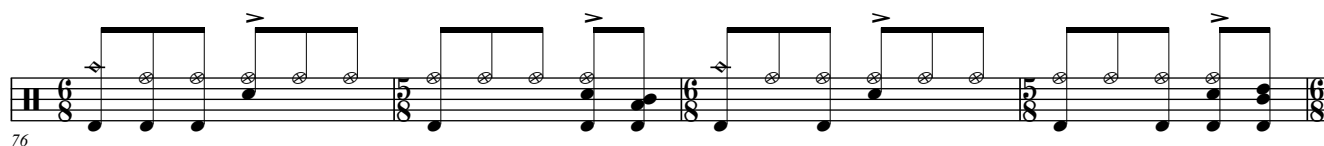
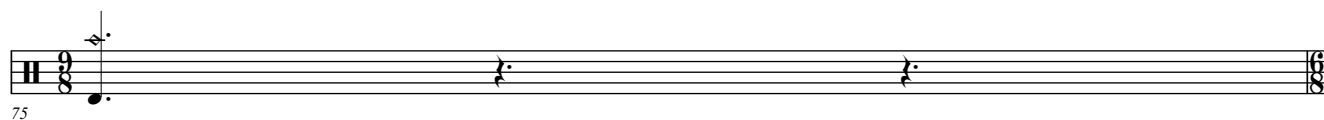
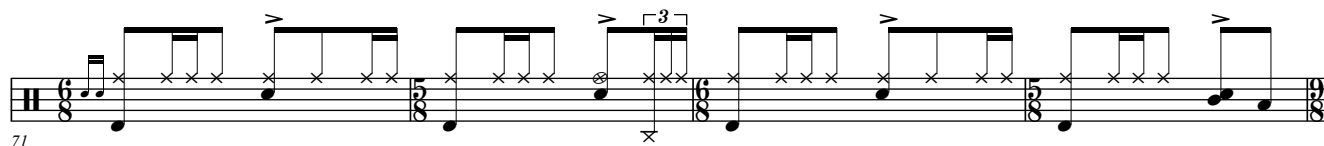
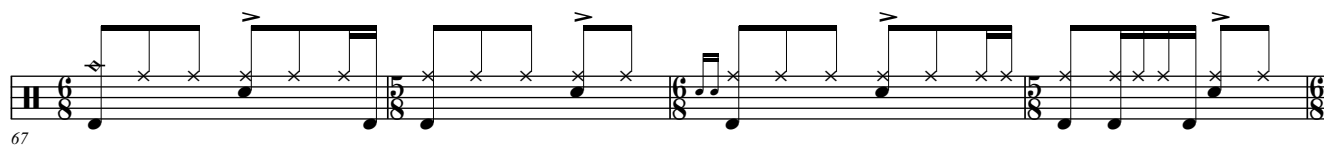
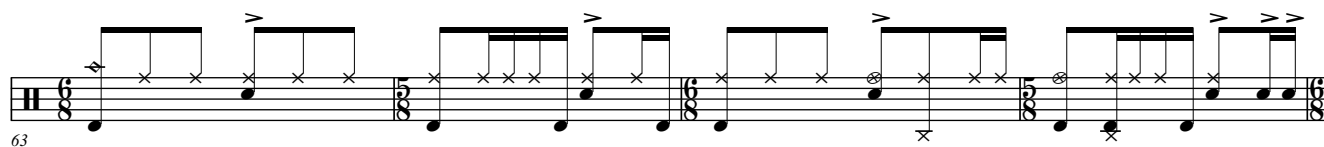
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Marc Atkinson, a dedicated musician, honed his craft under the guidance of the renowned Gary Chaffee. Now calling Las Vegas home, Marc is on the brink of unveiling his labor of love—a comprehensive transcription book that promises to captivate music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

**Check out Marc's *Modern Drummer* profile page at [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com)**



# SIMPLICITY WINS: The Go-Round Grooves

By Chris Lesso

**W**hat is groove? Think of it as an empty cup that you pour your own meaning into. A name is like this. How many Chris' do you know? The name is the same, but every time you think of that certain person, it's like a cup to be filled with all the different impressions, experiences, and feelings that only go with that individual. The Chinese language of written characters uses this concept of multi meanings, where one character can represent a few things rolled into one symbol. Most other languages have one meaning for each word, but

there are some words that are not statically defined, and are different depending on what meaning the person saying it puts within it. The essence you put inside it gives it the nuances of personality that defines it.

So what does "groove" mean to you? Groove has a general meaning, as we drummers throw this word around everywhere, but you need to fill the meaning in for yourself, like an empty cup being filled with a flavor of tea. I've asked this question to many drummers, and usually, we'll come up with some common themes: dancing, attitude, and grace. Even though we all know when we hear an undeniable groove, take some time and think about what it means to you to unlock these qualities in yourself. You might find it hard to put your finger on it, but this simple act of reflection is where the value lies. Reflection builds awareness, which can transform your approach in an instant.

*"You can't get to courage without walking through vulnerability."*

**Brené Brown**

Groove is a sign of life. What makes things sound so alive to us, are the imperfections within them. The tiny flaws we have are engaging because they reveal who we really are. They actually connect us to our world because it's something we all share. Life is perfect in its imperfections. Never hide them, but proudly display them for all to see. Have the courage to be vulnerable. A groove that makes you move is never robotically perfect.

Some modern music using technology has removed all the tiny imperfections, and the result is something hollow and lifeless. Music from the past just grooves more, because more of the natural imperfections were left in. We *FEEL* it on a deeper level, because we have an innate ability to have empathy for the preciousness of life itself. Imperfections are also a sign of life, and this is why we can relate to them.

What I call **"The Go-Round Grooves"** have reverence for simplicity. They're the (so called) *easy* grooves you may have skipped over or forgotten. Simple rhythms are often the most powerful. The way we play them transmits who we are. They must be played with supreme confidence and no trace of insecurity or fear. They must push and drive, but also lay back. Give them the right effect, and they become a force of nature. Simplicity is powerful. There's no rule that says you must play them, and some drummers don't, but chances are you will. We live in a Go-Round Groove world! You've been hearing them ever since you were in your Mom's belly. They're probably the first beats you played, and what drew you to want to pick up the sticks in the first place. Imagine the iconic beat to "We Will Rock

You" by Queen, 80,000 fans all stomping and clapping in unison. You don't even have to be a drummer to know them, but how we move dictates our sound. This is the power of the Go-Round Grooves.

So why do I refer to them as the "Go-Round Grooves"? Because they make the global heartbeat of music 'go round.' They're a worldwide phenomenon, spreading music to every corner of the planet in a way humanity has never known. The Go-Round Grooves are heard in every country and on every continent, turning the world into one big musical village. What are the biggest bands you can think of? They all use these grooves to reach millions. Whether it's Maroon 5 or Metallica, Justin Bieber, or Jay Z, you hear them everywhere. They all draw from the same source grooves as the foundation for the songs that shake the earth. These grooves are the global heartbeat of drumming that makes your favorite songs come to life.

The name Go-Round Grooves came from when I was in the Toronto airport on my way to a European tour. Before boarding the plane, I heard a Red Hot Chili Peppers song in the lounge, the song was based on the Go-Round-Groove *Doum-Doum Ta - Doum-Doum Ta...* After touching ground across the ocean a few hours later, I heard the exact song playing over the loudspeakers in Europe. It hit me that this song with that beat was vibrating around the world. Think of some mega songs you can relate to, chances are that a Go-Round-Groove is the heartbeat that ties them together. These rhythms live in our DNA and are heard everywhere, resonating back into human history.

*"The majority follow. If there's 100, 99 will follow. Only one raps in his own voice."* **GZA**

The greats used their Go-Round grooves to shake the world, and so can you. Don't just play the notes from the page like so many do, but use these insights to craft the WAY you play them, and who you are will shine through. Do **YOU!** Are you ready to unleash your potential in drumming and life? Chris Lesso's LTR DRUMMING METHOD is for drummers who want to reach higher. Start today with your free training at

**[chrislesso.net/LTRDRUMMING](http://chrislesso.net/LTRDRUMMING)**





# Encyclopedia of Double Bass Drumming: The Ladder

By Bobby Rondinelli

For the last several months, we have been excerpting chapters from the new and revised edition of the *Encyclopedia of Double Bass Drumming* by Bobby Rondinelli. The new and expanded edition of his book includes nine new double bass drumming chapters. This new edition covers contemporary techniques such as bass drum double strokes, feet-only exercises, binary and ternary rhythms, “skiplets”, beat turnarounds, 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.

Here is how Bobby explains “The Ladder” in his book:

A few months ago, I got together with *Modern Drummer* editor-in-chief Bill Miller to play some of the new chapters I was developing for a new edition of my book, *The Encyclopedia of Double Bass Drumming*. We spent a fun afternoon playing through patterns and exchanging ideas.

At one point Bill asked me if I’d ever played this hand foot combination: right hand, left foot, left hand, right foot. He mentioned it was something that he worked on and loved the sound of. Apparently, drummers like Vinnie Colaiuta and Gregg Bissonette have mastered this combo and do amazing things with it. Well, I told Bill I hadn’t played it but that I’d work on it. A few days later, I called him to say how much fun I was having with it and how working on this pattern was like climbing a ladder.

I feel that the ladder is one of the newest and most unusual sounding double bass patterns to come along in a while period. Of course, anyone who plays double bass has played quads: right hand, left hand, right foot, left foot.



Since the 1960s, quads have been king. But the ladder is the future. Again, it’s simply right hand left foot, left hand, right foot. While it looks somewhat similar too quads on the page, it’s completely different-sounding.



The ladder is much more difficult to play than quads, because the hands are playing singles while the feet are playing singles in between the hands. But the sound of the ladder is very “centered” and much more powerful.

Bill explained to me that the best way to begin developing a feel for the ladder is to think in triplets. (He mentioned that’s how he heard Bissonette explain it.) Try playing the next example very slowly. Don’t increase the speed until you really begin to feel the “motion” of the pattern. Once you have this down, you’ll be able to move to the rest of the examples a lot easier.



For the next example, which is in 16th notes instead of triplets, your hands stay consistent while your feet move in and out of the pattern.



Let’s take that same approach, but apply it to triplets.



Once you have the previous examples together, you can take the ladder in many different directions. I’ve been experimenting with patterns in which the feet stay constant, and the hands drop in and out. Essentially, I’m inverting the ladder so it will start with a foot, this way the feet don’t have to change their motion.

In Example 6, start by slowly playing the eighth note double bass pattern in the first measure and then drop the hands between the feet in the second measure. Again, start this very slowly.



Now try playing a 16th note pattern. Be sure to keep the ladder even, don’t flam the sound.



The last example involves a triplet groove that moves into a ladder fill.



Take your time with these ideas and be sure to start out at a very slow tempo. Like everything else, it’s hard until it becomes easy. But once you get it, you’ll see how cool the ladder sounds. Enjoy!



## Master Studies II: Paradiddles with Fill-Ins Using Double Strokes

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 discuss Joe's concept of playing paradiddles with fill-ins using double strokes.

These exercises build upon the Paradiddles with Fill-Ins Using Single Strokes that we learned last month. Now we have added Joe's next step in the process, Fill-Ins with Double Strokes. This exercise will help you build control of the rebound stroke, thereby increasing your ability to play a double stroke roll.

6

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

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

7

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

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

8

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

L R L L R R L R L R L

9

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

L R L L R R L R L R L

10

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

L R L R L L R L R L R

11

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

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

# Arrow Notation Key

Full stroke   Tap   Down stroke   Up stroke

R   L   R   L

Up and down arrows = Full Stroke  
Dash = Tap Stroke  
Down arrow = Down Stroke  
Up arrow = Up Stroke

This key is the same as used in the book *Accents and Rebounds* to show continuity in Joe's continuation of his teacher G.L. Stone.



12

> - - ^ - > - - ^ - > - - ^ - > - - ^ -

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

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

13

> - - ^ - > - - ^ - > - - ^ - > - - ^ -

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

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

14

> - - ^ - > - - ^ - > - - ^ - > - - ^ -

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

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

15

> - - ^ - > - - ^ - > - - ^ - > - - ^ -

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

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

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

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

1

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

2

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

3

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

4

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

5

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





# The New Breed

By Gary Chester

This month, *Modern Drummer* will start excerpting sections of Gary Chester's groundbreaking book *The New Breed*. This book, and Gary's teaching methods are deeply intertwined, it is a *lifelong* commitment of dedication, study, and development. Before we start reprinting Gary Chester's Concepts, Systems, Reading Exercises, Advanced Systems, Advanced Reading Exercises, Composite Systems, Grooves, and Applications; it is important to learn a little about Gary Chester, read his own words of wisdom, and read the thoughts of a few of his most notable students. Next month, we'll dive in! *Get ready...*

Gary Chester was one of the most famous drum instructors in drumming history. He took his extensive musical experience from playing drums and percussion on hundreds of sessions in the New York recording studios and turned them into his own drumming systems. He taught these systems to many drummers in his own teaching studio and many of his students earned their own success in the world of music.

The systems in *The New Breed* will help you to develop your coordination and reading ability, and will give you a greater awareness of time, all of which will allow you to be part of the "new breed" of studio drummers." They are, "Systems for the development of your own creativity."

Gary's teaching system is the most challenging I've ever seen. It focuses on reading, coordination, time, feel, and concentration level all at the same time. — **Dave Weckl**

Through Gary Chester's approach to the drumset, I discovered two different personalities in my playing. By leading with either the right hand or the left hand, I can create two completely different sounds. This concept has worked very successfully in my recording and performing with the John Cougar Mellencamp band. — **Kenny Aronoff**

Gary's systems have helped me to make tremendous improvement in my time feel, coordination, studio playing, and overall approach to the drumset. I recommend this book to all serious students of the drums. — **Danny Gottlieb**

Gary's systems are excellent for developing the skills and concepts necessary for good drumming as well as good musicianship. — **Howard Joines**

Gary's systems are the ultimate in coordination and concentration. If you can imagine one drummer sounding like three or four drummers, you're on the right track. — **Tony Cruz**

Gary's systems have helped me develop a much stronger sense of time and awareness in conjunction with flow and sensitivity. Most importantly, the systems have given me the strongest sense of balance and center I have ever experienced behind the drums. — **Chris Adams**

This is Gary Chester's important introduction to *The New Breed*.

## INTRODUCTION

All drummers develop their own patterns, beats, and methods of execution as they grow as musicians. However, when playing in the studios they come up against a variety of vastly different musical situations. During my many years in the studio I dealt with many different producers, some of whom played a little bit of drums, and some of whom wanted tricky and unique drum parts. I would take 15 minutes and write the parts out, then play them in the studio, and then take the parts home and file them away. I accumulated quite a

few of what I call "systems" — things that weren't based on normal, everyday drum playing. This book illustrates many of these systems, and is designed to develop coordination, musicality, reading ability, and confidence. It also provides drummers with new and exciting material to help them develop individual creativity.

These systems are not designed to be played strictly as exercises, but to be used as tools to develop new musical ideas. In the studio, you must be prepared to play an incredible variety of musical genres — jazz, rock, Latin, fusion, country, etc. The material contained within these systems can be applied to any and all musical styles.

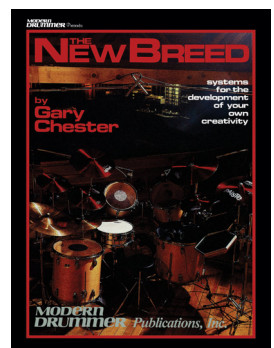
Another aspect of studio playing is sight reading. You should be able to sight-read anything without any problem. Of course, even if you are a great reader, if you come across some tricky patterns and you don't have the coordination to go with the reading, it will throw you. Therefore, the systems in this book will promote advanced reading and coordination not only of single-line drum parts, but multi-line drum parts as well.


The main benefit of mastering these systems, however, is the development of individual creativity. All musicians need inspiration and material to continue their own musical growth. Hopefully, the information contained in these systems will provide you with new possibilities and ideas for continued musical development. The systems will prepare you for things you might encounter in the studio — reading, coordination, and flexibility. They will also prepare you to be part of the current musical trends, and to create the music of the future.

Current trends in music allow these systems to be used more and more. Once a number of drummers master the systems and can sight-read multi-line drum music, it is possible that composers and arrangers will write music with this approach in mind. It is my hope that, by illustrating these systems, I can help drummers understand their instrument better and help them become members of the new breed of drummers who will take part in the shaping of modern music.

Today, Gary Chester's teaching legacy is stronger than ever. Adding to that is the New Gary Chester video series that is now available! This series contains ongoing releases of New Breed instructional videos taught by Chester's original students, and special guests. *The New Breed* instructional videos have been created to honor, preserve, and maintain Gary's original teaching systems and approach. They can be seen at [YouTube/GaryChesterTheDrummer.com](https://www.youtube.com/GaryChesterTheDrummer) You can also study the authors approach on Zoom anywhere in the world from Gary's original students by being paired to a New Breed Approved teacher. a

Email: [GaryChesterTheDrummer@gmail.com](mailto:GaryChesterTheDrummer@gmail.com) for information.



Next month, *Modern Drummer* will start with the first excerpts from *The New Breed*. 

# Rhythm Vocabulary Development Series Part 2: Filling in the Spaces in 7/4

By Michael Packer

## Rhythm as Space: Unlocking Your Creative Flow in 7/4

In our last installment, we explored how rhythmic vocabulary can be expanded by understanding rhythm not just as notes, but as *space*—a concept that becomes even more powerful in odd time signatures. This month, we take a deeper dive into the time signature 7/4 and how to “fill in the spaces” with creative intention.

Understanding rhythm as space means recognizing that each note occupies a portion of time. For instance, in 4/4, a quarter note fills one beat—it’s a space with infinite possibilities. You can fill that space with two eighth notes, a triplet, or more nuanced figures like a five-note grouping. This idea isn’t just theoretical—it’s your toolbox for musical vocabulary. Now, let’s bring that philosophy into the world of 7/4.

## Breaking Down the Bar: Finding the Form in 7

The first hurdle with 7/4 is psychological. It doesn’t “feel” as intuitive as 4/4 or 6/8. But here’s the secret: **divide and conquer**. Many drummers find it helpful to break 7/4 into groupings such as:

- 3 + 4
- 4 + 3
- 2 + 2 + 3
- Or even 2 + 3 + 2

Each breakdown creates a different musical identity as it places downbeats or stresses in different parts of the measure. Think of these as mini phrases. Once you’ve chosen your grouping, you can begin filling each segment with its own rhythmic vocabulary.

## Filling the Space: Quarter and Dotted Quarter Concepts

Let’s revisit the concept of “filling” the space of a note. In 7/4, your measure contains seven quarter-note spaces. Some of those spaces might naturally feel like quarter notes (two eighths) or dotted quarters (three eighths), depending on your phrasing. Below are rhythms you can use to fill those spaces.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

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13.

14.

15.

16.

17.

18.

19.

20.

21.

22.

23.

24.

25.

26.

27.

28.



29. 30. 31. 32.

33. 34. 35. 36.

37. 38. 39. 40.

41. 42. 43. 44.

45. 46. 47. 48.

1. 2. 3. 4.

5. 6. 7. 8.

9. 10. 11. 12.

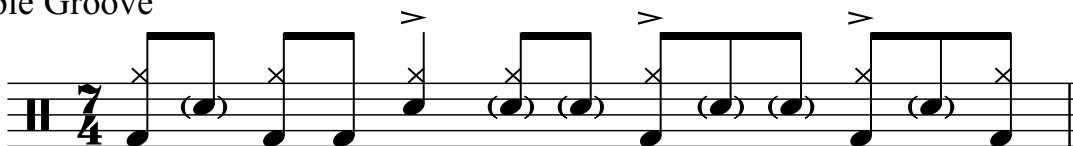
13. 14. 15. 16.

17. 18. 19. 20.

21. 22.

Think of the rhythm you create as a **melody**—a sequence of rhythms that repeat or evolve. Start by playing the single line rhythm (hands only, no kit) that fits your chosen grouping. Then repeat it until it becomes familiar.

## Sample Groove


$$2 \quad 2 \quad 2 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 3$$


The goal here isn't to master one idea in 7/4—it's to become so comfortable that you can improvise fluently. Use structured repetition to build confidence, but don't stop there. Create your own phrases. Push boundaries.

A man with a beard and short hair, wearing a grey patterned shirt, is seated behind a DW drum kit. He is holding a drumstick in his right hand, raised as if about to play. The drum kit includes a large black bass drum with the DW logo and a white circular graphic, two orange-tinted snare drums, and two orange-tinted toms. There are two large cymbals on stands. The background is a white wall with a large window featuring a grid pattern. The floor is dark and reflective.

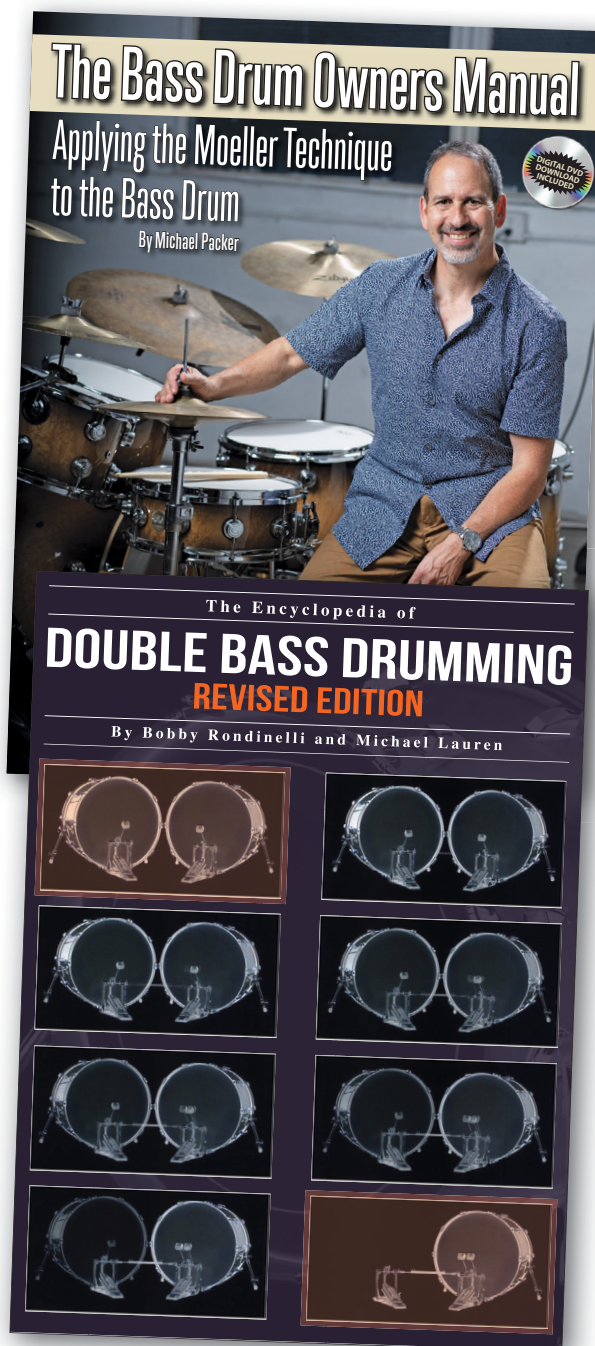
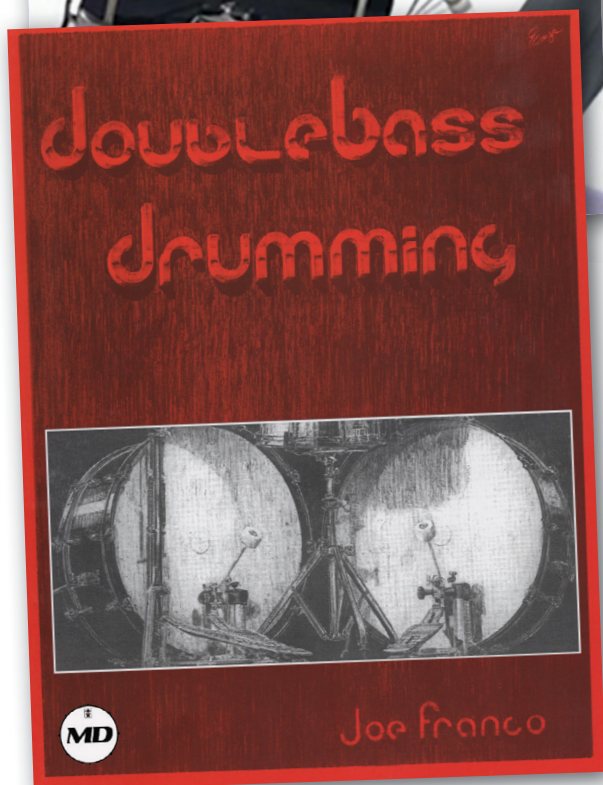




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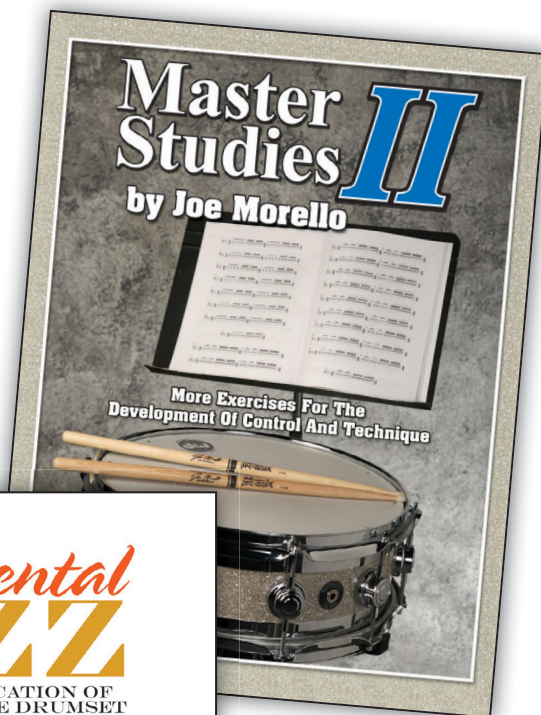
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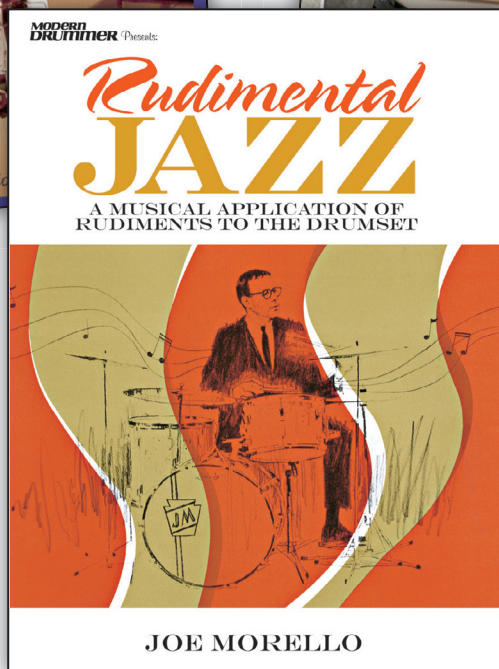
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# 1928 Leedy Ship Silhouette and Indian Scene Trap Drum Sets

By Tim Northup

The year 1928 is a very important year in drum history at the Northup Drums Museum. Many of our early trap drum kits with factory painted heads are from the 1928-30 era. From about 1924 to 1940 both the Leedy and Ludwig companies offered a variety of oil painted scenes on bass drum heads in their catalogs. As we have discussed in previous articles, 1928 saw some big changes in the drum world and major drum equipment innovations. In 1928, the hi-hat was first offered in catalogs, and Slingerland entered the drum business. This was also when Leedy and Ludwig decided to get into the banjo business to compete with Slingerland, a mistake that eventually cost both companies their businesses. In 1929, both Ludwig and Leedy were forced to sell to C.G. Conn. LTD, one of the world's largest instrument manufacturers. Conn moved both Ludwig and Leedy from Chicago and Indianapolis (respectively) to one large factory in Elkhart, Indiana. Leedy and Ludwig, even though they were manufactured in the same building, were marketed separately under their original names until 1951, when Conn decided to merge the companies, and the Leedy & Ludwig company was born.



The first trap set that we are featuring this month is a **1928 Leedy Ship Silhouette Scene Trap Set**. This was the very first trap set that I purchased about 25 years ago. As a new drum collector with a background in art, this type of set appealed to me. I had been researching early trap sets with factory painted heads when this set was listed for sale on eBay. I quickly made my winning bid, and the rest is history. I was hooked! I decided to focus on these cool vintage 1920's-30's trap kits with original factory painted heads and all the unusual attachments that go along with them. The Ship Silhouette factory painted scene was offered from 1927-35. The set has a 14 x 28 single tension black lacquered bass drum with chrome hardware and the bass drum pedal is a Leedy Fraser professional model. The snare drum is a 6.5"x14" floating head professional model with a light bulb inside. Many snare drums and most bass drums from this period have light bulbs or heating mechanisms in them to warm up the calf skin heads. This was a method to dry out the head

for better tuning in damp weather conditions. The bass drum has a trap table with four temple blocks, two 11" Zildjian crash cymbals, a cowbell, and a woodblock. The toms are a Leedy manufactured Chinese style 4 x 10 tom with dragon decal and a 9 x 13 matching floor tom in a cradle. The hi-hat sock cymbal pedal with 10" cup cymbals complete the set.



Next is a **1928 Leedy Indian Scene Trap Set** with a factory painted bass drum that was *only* produced in 1928. It is a very rare and difficult set to find. The bass drum is a black lacquered 14 x 28 single tension drum with knobby gold hardware. The painted head has a layered effect, similar to Art Deco posters of the period produced by famous illustrators and artists like Rockwell Kent and Roger Broders. The snare drum is a 1928 engraved Black Elite 5 x 14 professional model with knobby gold hardware, which is similar to Ludwig's Black Beauty of the same period. The snare drum also has a Leedy "Rim Shot" gadget, which is a piece of a drumstick attached to the rim that you can pivot off the drum when not needed. The 9" Chinese Tom, with a Leedy decal, is attached with a "sure grip" Chinese tom holder in knobby gold finish. Chinese toms were imported from China and sold through the catalogs, many having a Leedy decal placed on them. The bass drum has a Leedy Fraser professional pedal with clanger cymbal attachment and Leedy muffler. The cymbal set up on this kit is very rare and unique. The 13" Zildjian cymbal has an extremely rare "Cymbal Sizzle Attachment" in Knobby Gold finish that was only offered from 1927-28. The other cymbal is a 11" Zenjian thin crash cymbal. Zenjian was an imprint brand made exclusively for Leedy by A Zildjian. The hi-hat sock cymbal pedal features 10" cup cymbals and was first offered in 1927. The woodblock and cowbell are attached to the bass drum hoop, and the original Leedy drumsticks and brushes are also present with this kit.

If you would like more information about these special and rare 1928 sets or any other trap sets in our collection, visit [www.northupdrums.com](http://www.northupdrums.com). If you would like to **PLAY** these sets visit the Northup Drums Museum.

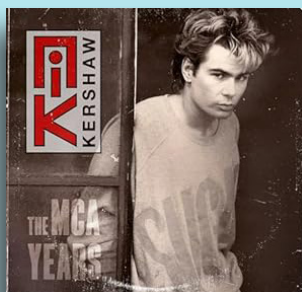


*Modern Drummer* is spotlighting new recordings that have the drums at the center of their sound. These recordings might be drummer-led, or just include a high-quality, special, or unique drumming and musical performances from the drummer and/or musicians in the band. This column is not restricted to 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.

## Nik Kershaw

*The MCA Years*

Charlie Morgan, Mark Brzezicki, Mark Price, Simon Phillips, Vinnie Colaiuta, Jeff Porcaro, drums.  
MCA Records, Cherry Pop Reissue



Nik Kershaw is an obscure and talented English pop songwriter, guitarist, and singer. While some of the sounds and production of these records may sound a little dated, good music (and GREAT drumming) never goes out of style. The Nik Kershaw story begins with two very good records entitled *Human Racing* and *The Riddle* (both featuring drummer Charlie Morgan.) The very good *Radio Musicola* followed and featured both Mark Brzezicki and Simon Phillips (playing an amazing half time shuffle on "Violet to Blue") on separate tracks. In 1989, Nik Kershaw released his fourth record entitled *The Works*. Vinnie Colaiuta played drums on all, but one track ("Walkabout" with Jeff Porcaro,) and upon hearing *The Works*, a lot of the drumming community (justifiably) freaked out. Vinnie's outrageous drumming is a super-creative document of musical pop drumming. Unfortunately, MCA soon went out of business and all these records became impossible to find. All these recordings have now been re-mastered and re-released in this 10 CD and DVD box set, so let the fanatical obsession over Vinnie Colaiuta's drumming on *The Works* (rightfully) restart. This reasonably priced set includes all of four of Kershaw's MCA works and includes remixes, live recordings, and a live DVD, and an informative booklet. One missing element is the detailed listing of which drummer is on which songs on *Radio Musicola*. So let us help, Mark Brzezicki (2-4, 7) Simon Phillips (8, 10) Charley Morgan (9.) For slick 80s and 90s pop music, it doesn't get much better than this. The drumming on *The Works* is well worth the price of admission alone!!!

## Winther, Andersson, Watts

*Steep Steps*

Jeff "Tain" Watts drums  
Hobby Horse Records- NCB



The piano trio of Carl Winther, bassist Richard Andersson, and drummer Jeff Watts is a force to be reckoned with. This is their second record (the first was called *WAW!*) and they are creating beautiful and jaw dropping music. Watts is still the bombastic force that we heard with Wynton and Branford Marsalis in the 80s and 90s, but he has mellowed (*only a little bit!*) with age. The terms "tearing it up"

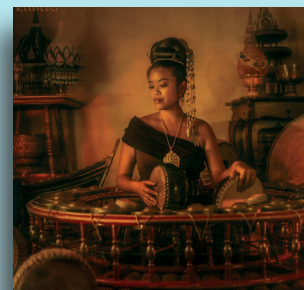
and "slash and burn" could have been created to describe Watts' tornadic drumming and those terms still (VERY much) apply. Watts drumming is so far inside this trio that at times he sounds like he just trying to break out, just listen to McCoy Tyner's "Inner Glimpse." Jeff's sound of Sonor, Sabian, and a dash of old K, has always been stellar, and these recordings are no different. Winther's strong piano playing walks hand in hand with Watts' drumming, which is no small feat. And Andersson's muscular bass playing (and woody tone) hold everything together for a truly exciting recording. Watts brushwork is his secret weapon, and that weapon is revealed on "Soultrane." The song "Steep Steps" is simply a tour de force. After hearing *Steep Steps*, I will also recommend their first record (*WAW!*) which is equally as good. This is a GREAT piano trio!!!

## Salin

*Rammana*

Salin drums

Eli Miller Maboungou, Michael Medrano Brindis, Kicky FOOFOO, percussion  
M.A.P.L Records



Wow! What a breath of fresh air! If you have an ear or a love for African music with a tinge of pop, this will be your new favorite record. Salin is a super-talented (I believe) African-French-Canadian drummer-composer and her music is out of this world! Her rhythmic concept is deeeep and authentic, and her music is melodic, funky, and fun. Her group of drummers play exotic instruments, and her group of vocalists sing with flair and panache (on three tracks.) Alexandre Dion plays a nice sax solo on "Egungun," and the rest of the horn section floats above the funky basslines throughout the entire record. There is even a string quartet laying down some beautiful harmony on a few tracks. "Ma'at" has a cool drum solo, "Painted Lady" has some nice drum breaks and slippery basslines, while the groove on "Current" is bouncy and new (to me.) Have fun finding *one*. "Rammana" is the standout track, and Salin is a standout musician. Thank you to Canada's Council for the Arts for supporting musicians and projects like this. This record is one you will be playing for a while.

## Chris Cheek

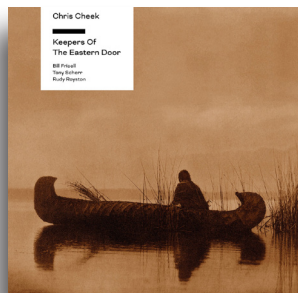
*Keepers of the Eastern Door*

Rudy Royston drums  
Analog Tone Factory

Analog Tone Factory records is producing wonderful sounding records from some wonderful band leaders. Their records are recorded live to two-track onto ½" tape at the Power Station in New York City (or at least all the ones that I have heard are recorded there.) This new record from saxophonist Chris Cheek

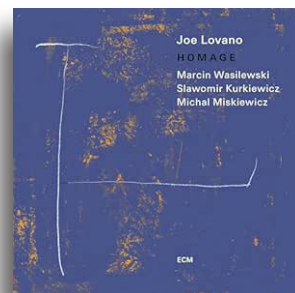


is no exception. Cheek has logged many miles playing with the legendary Paul Motian and others. Both bassist Tony Scherr and drummer Rudy Royston have previously worked with Bill Frisell, so Cheek was hiring a strong rhythm section with cohesiveness and experience together. Cheek's choice to interpret classical music by Oliver Messiaen ("O Sacrum Convivium") and Henry Purcell ("Lost is My Quiet") a few standards ("Smoke Rings," and "On a Clear Day") as well as the Beatles' "From Me to You," and a few Cheek originals is quite telling into Cheek's artistic and creative breadth. The presence of the iconic guitarist Bill Frisell tells the rest of the story. This record has a "loose tightness" to it, and everyone is on *exactly* the same page. Royston has a great cymbal (and drum) sound that is recorded very well here, and Royston walks a fine line between interactive pushing and patient waiting for the music to evolve around him. He and Frisell are a good pair. Royston's loose and funky backbeat on "On a Clear Day" is picture perfect. I hope this label keeps producing this kind of recordings, the records and the production are very good.



## Joe Lovano *Homage* Michal Miskiewicz drums ECM Records

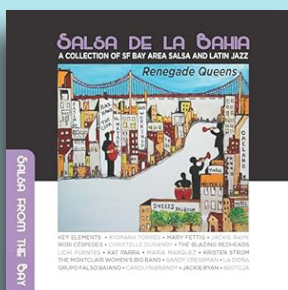
Last year, when Michal Miskiewicz was in America recording with Joe Lovano and appearing at New York's Village Vanguard, *Modern Drummer* interviewed him, and he spoke about the special new record that they had just made with Lovano. Well, this is the record, and it is special. Lovano and Miskiewicz hook up very well (as does the rest of the trio with pianist Marcin Wasilewski and bassist Slawomir Kurkiewicz.) Miskiewicz does the burn hot on a low flame as well as anyone, he is one of the best "ECM drummers" of today. Listen to his wonderfully warm drum sound on the rumbling solo on "Homage," and pay attention to how Lovano's gongs and Miskiewicz drums create a seamless tapestry of sound. "This Side — Catville" shows the entire trio's synchronicity of sound. I must also comment on Lovano's creative use of different gong sounds throughout this (and many other recordings.) Joe Lovano is also a very talented drummer, but when he weaves his rhythmic gong playing into the ensemble is it haunting and mesmerizing. Miskiewicz's Istanbul cymbals sound beautiful as well, as does this entire record!



## Various Artists

*Salsa de la Bahia: Salsa from the Bay, Renegade Queens*

Joyce Baker, Celso Alberti, Michael Spiro, Phil Thompson, Paul van Wageningen, Karina Colis, Jason Lewis, Allison Miller, Lorca Hart, Michaelle Goerlitz, Dillon Vado, drums. Patois Records



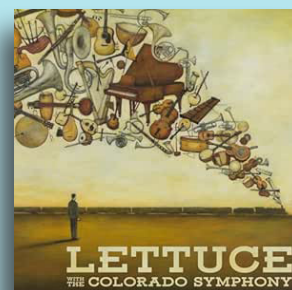
This two CD set collects some of the best and fearless female performers, bandleaders, educators, and trailblazers alongside their male allies from the San Francisco Bay area Latin music scene. And these bandleaders are supported by some of the area's best drummers. But it's not just about the drummers, the female percussionists include Bobi Cespedes, Christelle Durandy, Carolyn Brandy, and Sue "Suki" Kaye. The collection is very well rounded, and the playing is world-class. Mary Fettig's "Take the RR Train" is a highlight with its infectious Brazilian groove. The Blazing Redheads (with composer and arranger Michaelle Goerlitz on drums and percussion) is a great track featuring some heavy groove. Lalo Izquierdo's cajon playing on Lichi Fuentes' "Momento" shows us the most beautiful aspects of this beautiful Peruvian instrument. Carolyn Brandy and drummer Paul van Wageningen lay down a sumptuous groove on "Odie." And the Renegade Queens with drummer Joyce Baker and violinist Sandy Poindexter light up the second disc. Legendary percussionist Mayra Casales and drummer Karina Colis, are the core of Cocomama and their tune "Estoy Ahora En La Punta" is a highlight of CD two. "Caravan" by the Montclair Women's Big Band is driven by the amazing drummer Allison Miller who plays some killer eights, and the recording by Leslie Ann Jones is fantastic. This is an excellent collection of some great Latin bands, exciting music, and killer drummers documenting the fervent Bay Area Latin scene.

## Lettuce

*With the Colorado Symphony*

Adam Deitch drums  
Lettuce Records

Pair one of the baddest funk bands of today with one of the most renowned symphonies of today, put them into a great sounding concert hall, and in front of a receptive and enthusiastic crowd and see what happens. That sounds like a situation that *could* be a sonic disaster (not a musical one.) However, with two bands such as the legendary Lettuce and the wonderfully open-minded Colorado Symphony Orchestra it was a musical marriage made in heaven. Thankfully there were some great audio engineers and first-class musicianship on hand to make it a sonic success. Think about it, so many of the cool old funk recordings from the 60s and 70s often included full string and brass sections, so to my ears, this collaboration makes perfect sense. Why not go "authentic old school" if you can? No synth brass and big string synth pads, this is the REAL thing, and it delivers the real goods! It is so cool to hear the stuttering Dilla influenced "Gang Ten" with a real orchestra. The arrangement, dynamics, and suspense of both "Ghost of Jupiter" and "New Intro" sound like those cool old 70s TV themes that we all love. Deitch's drums sound really good on this record, and his playing is as funky as ever. The orchestration of "The Force" provides just that, the song is a *force* of nature. Dietch and bassist Eric Coomes really hook up on "Larimar," and "Tryllis" couldn't sound bigger. Their funky and emotional cover of "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" is amazing and heartfelt. "Madison Square Trapezoid" is a sonic masterpiece that blends the old and the new. Thankfully this recording is a two CD set, because a project this big, unique, exciting, and special truly deserves to be captured on two CD's.



## Susan Hinkson

*Just In Time*  
Adam Cruz drums  
Windfall Creations

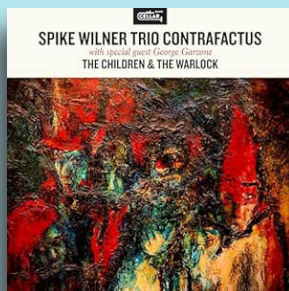
Since Adam Cruz first appeared with Chick Corea's Origin band (before Jeff Ballard,) I've been a fan. The live recording of Origin at New York's Blue Note was a nice coming out party for Cruz, but the subsequent work with Tom Harrell, David Sanchez, and Danilo Perez, and a wonderful solo album called *Milestone*, should have made him a household name in jazz drumming. This recording with the high-quality jazz vocalist Susan Hinkson brings Cruz's maturity and musicality to the forefront. Cruz, bassist Vincente Archer, and pianist Bruce Barth are a swingin' rhythm section backing up a very good singer. Together, they playing some of the best standards ever written. The trio creates some nice on the spot arrangements that set Hinkson up for nothing but success. Cruz's old Corea bandmate, saxophonist Steve Wilson appears on five tunes as well. This is the type of drumming that young drummers who want to make a living playing jazz need to hear; creative, subtle, and super musical. Cruz demonstrates some nice brush playing throughout, a nice groove on "It Might as Well Be Spring," a nice Bolero on "Besame Mucho," a cool swaggering feel (and solo over a bass vamp) on "Just in Time." For young drummers looking for success, this record deserves some study.



## Spike Wilner Trio Contrafactus

*The Children & The Warlock*  
Anthony Pinciotti drums  
Cellar Music

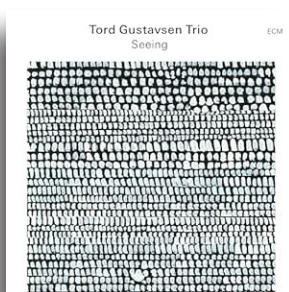
Pianist Spike Wilner has been a mainstay on the NYC jazz scene for a while. Drummer Anthony Pinciotti was just making a name for himself when he died unexpectedly from a heart attack. This may possibly be his last recording. *The Children & The Warlock* is Wilner's tribute to his teacher and mentor Harry Whitaker. Guest saxophonist George Garzone is "The Warlock" with the trio as "The Children," and bassist Paul Gill rounds out the trio. "The Child and the Warlock" and "Moment to Moment" are standout performances that shows Garzone, Wilner and the trio really mixing it up. This is a good recording and a bittersweet tribute to a young drummer who is gone too soon!



## Tord Gustavsen

*Seeing*  
Jarle Vespestad drums  
ECM Records

Norwegian pianist Tord Gustavsen is a veteran of the European jazz scene. This is the trio's sixth recording in a little more than 20 years. Gustavsen's trio often paints with sound



and tone in the ECM tradition but are slightly more aggressive than other modern ECM artists. The music on *Seeing* seems to have a more religious connotation than the music of Gustavsen's past. Bassist Steinar Raknes and drummer Jarle Vespestad seem to have a close musical bond that is reflected in their approach to "Seattle Son," they sound as one. Pay close attention to their playing on "The Old Church" and "Auf meinen lieben Gott." But also listen to how Vespestad and Gustavsen play as one on "Christ lag in Todesbanden." Vespestad's brush approach to "Extended Circle" and "Beneath Your Wisdom" is unique. This trio's empathy and telepathy is a big part of their sound, and what a sound it is.

## Jason T Reddish and The Reddish Fetish

*Lleque*  
Jason T Reddish drums  
Jose Yogul Rosario congas  
Tre Angeles Records

Drummer Jason T Reddish is a talented drummer coming from the tutelage of Michael Carvin. His music is multifaceted, at first sounding free and electronic on "Journey Into Satchidananda," then heavily fusion influenced on Wayne Shorter's "Fusion Flower," and funky on Horace Silver's "Senor Blues" and "Confirmation" Reddish's 5/4 take on "Greensleeves" is creative, and his groove and take on "Naima's Bossa" is nice and refreshing. Pianist Roy Suter shines on "Little Sunflower," as does vocalist J Hacha De Zola on "Lush Life." Reddish's own "Shango Can Fly" closes out the recording with some interesting drum and percussion interplay.



## George Brown

*Jazz in Paris*  
George Brown, Vinnie Colaiuta,  
Roy McCurdy drums  
Astana Music

When Kool and the Gang founding member and drummer George Brown died, he left behind an unfinished recording project dedicated to Miles Davis. Brown's collaborator Wolfgang Amadeus Aicholz was dedicated to continuing and completing the project. Vinnie Colaiuta added drums on six tracks, Roy McCurdy played drums on one track, and Brown played drums alone on three tracks. Brown plays a lot of bass, keyboards, and percussion on many selections on the rest of the recording, and he even sings on a few tracks. *Jazz in Paris* is a smoothly funky and highly produced record that reflects Miles' later *Tutu* and *Amandla* era recordings. The highlight tracks are "MDD" and "Frincess." Roy McCurdy swings "The Kat" with ease, and Colaiuta grooves on "Jardin de Lapin." This is a nice way to remember the legendary George Brown.





## Kneebody

Reach

Nate Wood drums and bass  
Ground Up

Kneebody is one of the most original and enjoyable bands working today. Period. Anyone who hasn't seen Nate Wood play drums and bass simultaneously, is **STRONGLY** encouraged to do so. It is truly astonishing what Nate can do live with two hands and two feet. I don't know if Nate tracked this recording while playing both instruments at the same time, one of the biggest compliments is that it's hard to tell, he's that good! By listening closely, I think he did, but I will leave that aspect to this record alone, because whether he tracked both instruments at the same time or separately is not important. What is important is the music on *Reach*. Saxophonist Ben Wendel, trumpeter Shane Endsley (who also plays bass synth at times,) Keyboardist Adam Benjamin, and Wood are a great band that has been around since 2001. Kneebody is an eclectic band that blends jazz, funk, electronica, and rock. That would imply that this is a "fusion" band, but they don't have the density of "traditional" fusion, and their music is more harmonically structured than *typical* jazz-rock. Kneebody is contemporary jazz with a heavy dose of high-level improvisation, funk, and electronica. Nate Wood is a monster musician who can do it all, and the same can be said for the rest of the band. Although their recordings are very enjoyable, they are an absolute treat to see live because of their use of certain visual signs and cues within the live performances of their music. They are masterful improvisors, with their own language, and their songs are never played the same way *once*. (Ha.) If I am counting correctly, this is their 14<sup>th</sup> record (but who's really counting.) However, this is one of their best records to date, the band sounds very cohesive, and their direction has really evolved and solidified. "Repeat After Me," is a great track. "Lo Hi" is just sheer fun. "Say So" builds a huge wall of sound. "Top Hat" is an amazing display of Wood's creativity and sense of groove. *Reach* is a very good record, the band is really reaching (sorry,) and it is highly recommended!

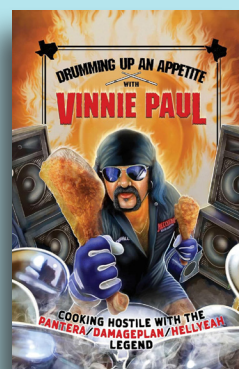


only has Snyderman accurately transcribed amazing solos, but he has transcribed Harland's comping, and time playing. There are also unique observations given by musicians on each of the transcribed tracks about what makes Harland and his playing special, and an in-depth interview with Harland himself. I could not imagine a more comprehensive way to study any drummer than what Snyderman has assembled here. In his Foreword to the book, John Riley says it perfectly when he states, "*The Mastery of Eric Harland* could just as easily be titled *The Mystery of Eric Harland*," and that "The notes themselves are only a beginning of the journey." I couldn't have said it better myself. This is a wonderful book that any fan of Harland's or just great drumming must buy! It is available at many quality drum shops in the US, Southern Percussion in the UK, and Sky Music in Australia. Or through [www.alexsnymdmanmusic.com](http://www.alexsnymdmanmusic.com).

## Drumming Up an Appetite with Vinnie Paul: Cooking Hostile with the Pantera/Damageplan/Hellyeah Legend

By Vinnie Paul  
Z2 Publishing

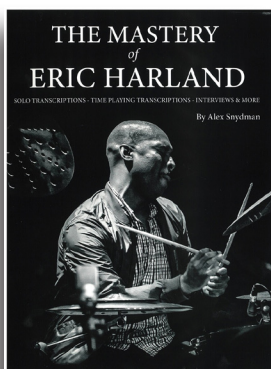
In full disclosure, I must say that I LOVE to cook (and eat!) As I have been told by many drummers in bands that toured with Pantera, Damageplan, or Hellyeah, Vinnie Paul also loved to cook and eat. And from what I've been told, he jumped at the chance to cook for his bandmates, crew, fans, and other musicians on the road. Yes, Vinnie Paul had another passion that fueled his days — incredible eats and delicious treats. This book contains Vinnie's favorite recipes and was written by Vinnie before his passing. It contains over 30 of Vinnie Paul's favorite recipes that are broken into three categories: Main Courses, Sides and Apps, and Desserts. Vinnie is to be commended because this cookbook doesn't make anyone trying to make the recipe's feel unprepared or inferior. There are very few "exotic" ingredients, "specialized" techniques, or complex instructions involved. In cooking as in drumming, sometimes simplicity can go a very long way. But that does not mean that these aren't good recipes! My wife and I have made a few, and each one was wonderful. This is a perfect summertime outdoor grilling book. Our favorites are his "Best Hawaiian Dessert I Ever Made" (Grilled Pineapple,) "Vinnie Paul's World-Famous Stuffed Jalapenos," and his "Bacon Wrapped Hot Dogs." If you like to eat small portions of foods whose names you can't pronounce, placed on fancy plates, this is NOT your cookbook. If you like to pass the time by gathering friends around the table and enjoying life while, laughing, smiling, and getting a little loud... this cookbook is a great place to start. Pantera/Damageplan/Hellyeah music is not required (but it is suggested.)



## The Mastery of Eric Harland: Solo Transcriptions, Time Playing Transcriptions, Interviews & More.

By Alex Snyderman  
Self-Published

Occasionally, you stumble across a simply amazing labor of love project. This is one of them. Not only has drummer-educator Alex Snyderman created an excellent book of drumming transcriptions, but he has also created an informative tome' on his friend, Eric Harland. As we all (should) know, Eric Harland is among the most influential jazz drummers around since the late 90s. But his unique life story (which is eloquently told in this book) is as exciting and captivating as his drumming. This is 92 pages of deep drumming, musical, and life education. Not



# Joe Letz' Till Lindemann Touring Kit

Photos by Alex Klufft

**Drums:** DW Collectors Maple in Matte Red - 18x22 Kick, 18x22 Gong Drum, 14x26 Kick, 16x6 Octoban, 8x12 Rack Tom, 14x16 Floor Tom, 16x18 Floor Tom.

**Snares:** 6.5x14 Maple Snare, 6x12 Maple Side Snare, 7x14 Brass Snare (backup.)

**Heads:** Evans – Main Snare: Heavyweight, Side Snare: UV1 Coated, Toms: UV2 Coated, Main Kick: EQ3 Clear, Side Kick: EQ3 Clear, Gong: EV2 Coated.

**Cymbals:** Paiste – 15" Sound Edge Hi-Hat Top and Bottom, 14" Heavy Full Hi-Hat Top and Bottom, 13" Dark Crisp Hi-Hat Top and Bottom, 20" Rude Thin Crash, 20" Crash/Ride, 22" Power Ride, 18"

Rude Novo China, 20" PST X Swiss Thin Crash, 20" Rude Basher Crash, 2x 20" Paiste Rude Novo China.

**Hardware:** DW- 9000 Pedals and Stands, DW 5000 Remote Bass Drum Pedal Right, DW Machined Chained Drive Double Pedal, DW Counterweights, DW Gong Rack.

**Throne:** Porter & Davies Drum Throne

**Electronics:** Roland TM6 Drum Module, Roland RT30-R Trigger (snare,) Roland RT30-H Trigger (Kick & Side Kick,) Roland RT30K (Gong Drum.)

**Drumsticks:** Vic Firth Metal Sticks.

**Microphones:** sE Electronics.







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Danny Wagner - Greta Van Fleet

Jimmy Chamberlin - Smashing Pumpkins



Max Weinberg - Bruce Springsteen

Mickey "Cavs" Cavanagh - KGLW

Mike Portnoy - Winery Dogs

Mike Wengren - Disturbed

Mikkey Dee - Scorpions

Sarah Jones - Harry Styles

Zac Farro - Paramore

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