

Product Close-Up: Yamaha Pedals & Evans Attacktile Pad



THE WORLD'S #1  
DRUM COMMUNITY SINCE 1977

# MODERN DRUMMER

JULY 2025



THE MANY HATS OF  
**NARADA  
MICHAEL  
WALDEN**

Sam Hunt's  
**Josh Sales**  
UK Phenom  
**Anna Mylee**  
Remembering Al Foster



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Remembering Al Foster



# AN EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

## BE A FUSION DRUMMER

By Mark Griffith

The word *fusion* gets a lot of use in this issue. Unfortunately, it's become somewhat of a "bad" word in some musical circles. It's (unfortunate) meaning has become the name of the style of music, born in the late 60s and early 70s from a blend of jazz and rock music created by Tony Williams, Miles Davis, and many bands like Lifetime, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Weather Report, Return To Forever, and Herbie Hancock's Mwandishi and Headhunters bands. Some might say that the creativity of the original jazz-rock (or rock-jazz) evolved into fusion which was often heard as music with more notes and time signatures than taste. All of it later became a misunderstood falsification for a way that jazz musicians could gain popularity, acceptance, and money by making records for rock listeners and fans. While there are shards of truth to each of these gross generalizations; isn't almost ALL music a *fusion* of some sorts? The world is filled with roots music that grew purely out of a folk or indigenous tradition, the rest of us created styles and fusions.

Rock and Roll was born from the fusion of Blues, R&B, Boogie Woogie, and Gospel music. Western Swing, Hillbilly music, and the Blues fused to give us the twang of Country music. Jazz fused the Blues, African rhythms, European Classical harmony, and improvisation. Even modern Thrash Metal is fusion is fusion, it combines British Heavy Metal, Hardcore Punk, and Progressive Rock music. Fusing existing styles of music is how many modern musicians create new music, and that gives us new drumming styles. Each new fusion of music has many ingredients, styles, and roots that we drummers need to be familiar with to ground things and make them interesting and unique.

In this issue of *Modern Drummer*, when Narada Michael Walden talks about fusing the energy of jazz-rock fusion with R&B to get the electricity and excitement of Whitney Houston's first records, it created something new and popular.

Because the drums are a common denominator is so much modern music, we are natural creators of many new "fusions" or musical approaches. There are fantastic drummers mixing all kinds of music, and hopefully we'll never be done. In visual art, there are three primary colors red, yellow, and blue (or more specifically cyan, magenta, and yellow.) When combined with light, those three colors (or hues) create every color that we have ever seen. This is the same process as ours. With the light of creativity, roots music and cultures will keep being combined to create new styles of music, and new styles of music will continue to be fused to create new musical and drumming fusions. Be a fusion musician and drummer! Please....

Mark Griffith

Editor-in-chief, Director of Content

Modern Drummer



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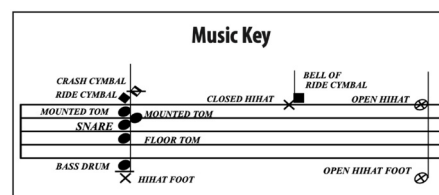
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## KIT OF THE MONTH

### Vlad's Yamaha's

This month's Kit of the Month comes to us from longtime *Modern Drummer* reader, Vladimyr Tsinguilev. His wonderful fish-eye photos capture his entire kit, and wonderful practice room-studio. In speaking about the kit, Vlad says, "I am very proud of the way my kit evolved throughout the years. I lead with my left hand, and it somehow developed into this mirrored kit (I am thinking Mike Mangini, Furio Chirico, Billy Cobham, Carter Beauford) but it is only influenced by those drummers. I have my own style of playing and setting the kit. It is a fusion set-up built to give justice to my musical needs." Thanks Vlad, nice kit!

**Drums:** Yamaha Stage Custom's in Honey Amber finish., with all Birch Shells. A 17x22" bass drum, 7x8", 7x10", 8x12" rack toms, and 15x16" and 16x18" floor toms. The kit is rounded out with a 6.5x14" Tama G-Walnut Sound Lab Project Series snare drum in Matte Black Walnut Finish.

**Cymbals:** 22" Mehteran Custom Ride (sandblasted), 17" Mehteran Premium Brilliant China, 16" MEINL Byzance Traditional Thin Crash, Stagg 6" Black Metal Bell Cymbal Medium on top (upside down,) 14" Meinl Thomas Lang Signature Fast Hats, 14" Furia Brilliant Hats (closed or semi-open,) 10" Meinl Byzance Brilliant Splash, 6" Zildjian A Custom Brilliant Splash on top (upside down,) 10" Stagg Black Metal Medium Splash, 8" Sabian AAX Brilliant Splash stacked upside down on top, 18" Mehteran Amazon Dual Crash, 7" Stagg Black Metal Bell Medium on top, 17" Mehteran Premium Brilliant Crash, 16" Stagg DH Brilliant China.

**Drumheads:** Evans - Hydraulic Red on 8" Tom, GPlus on toms, various other heads. **Percussion:** LP Red Jam Block, LP Blue Jam Block, LP Cowbell, and a couple of other non-LP cowbells, Meinl Cyclops tambourine on top of the closed hi-hat. **Drumsticks:** Vic Firth, Pro Mark, Vater, Regal Tip. Depends on the situation. **Brushes:** ProMark, Vic Firth. **Mallets:** Zildjian. **Hardware:** Yamaha DFP9500C Double Chain Double Pedal, Tama HH315D Hi-hat stand, Roland RDT-SV Drum Throne. 



# Simple Truths

By Peter Erskine

*It feels like a good time to state some simple truths...*

## THE BESTS

### The best-recorded drum sounds (in my opinion)...

Buddy Rich's Rogers kit on the first two big band albums he recorded for Pacific Jazz. Wally Heider was the engineer. Simply some of the best-sounding drums you'll ever hear.

Roy Haynes Ludwig kit on the Chick Corea album *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*. Up until this recording's release, I had never heard the drums sound so loud, present, and up-front in a jazz mix, or *any* mix for that matter. Every detail can be heard and savored. As it should be.

Bobby Colomby's drum sound on the second Blood, Sweat & Tears album. Again, the presence of the kit. Wow. Nice.

### The most exquisite combination of drumset and conga drums...

Mel Lewis and Francisco Aguabella on the Dizzy Gillespie album *New Continent*, playing on the tune "Chorale" (the suite's final movement). The delicious "rub" of the 2 and 3 does not get any tastier. Composed by Lalo Schiffrin. Find it and check it out from 4:30 on (the entire album is most worth a listen). For me, this moment explains everything that I want to know about jazz drumming.

### The best pop drumming track...

Jeff Porcaro on Michael McDonald's "That's Why." Don't ask me why ... it just is.

### My favorite drum solo...

Art Blakey on the tune "Ife L'ayo (There is Happiness in Love)" from his album *The African Beat*. Its simplicity and power define

drumming greatness.

### Some of the most swinging drumming I've ever heard...

Louis Hayes with Cannonball Adderley's Sextet. Sam Jones on bass.

### My favorite Bernard "Pretty" Purdie drumming...

It might just be the stuff he plays on fellow drummer-turned-singer Grady Tate's album *Windmills of Your Mind*. Listen to "Would You Believe." You won't believe it.

### The coolest drumbeat I've ever heard...

That would have to be Maurice White playing the hi-hat on the 16<sup>th</sup> note upbeat before the snare drum backbeat on the Ramsey Lewis cover of Stevie Wonder's "My Cherie Amour."

### The two most electrifying drumming performances that come to mind...

1. Steve Gadd with the U.S. Army jazz band when I was in high school. 1970.

2. Joe LaBarbera accompanying saxophonist Jimmy Greene during a jam session on one of those jazz cruises. He began Jimmy's solo on the hi-hat and remained playing the hi-hat (for his ride) until the end of the tune. 2015.

I literally jumped out of my chair on both occasions. What's 45 years between amazements? Steve and Joe both hail from Rochester, New York, by the way. Far out.

## OKAY... MOVING ON TO THINGS

### The best snare drum I ever played...

This would be a toss-up between the Billy Gladstone snare that was built for Shelly Manne (shown to me by Larry Bunker,) or Buddy Rich's actual Fibes snare drum that was on display at

Steve Maxwell's shop in Manhattan. The closest drums to those two gems are either the Tama 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mastercraft Rosewood reissue, or the new Slingerland Radio King (both 5" depth.)

### The best bass drum pedals I have played...

Either the Tama Iron Cobra or the DW5000. The new models from both Yamaha and Sakae are impressive, but then again so was the original Rogers.

### The best cymbal stand is...

Hands down, the Tama Classic. Period.

### My favorite shaker...

It's still the LP Shake-It.

### My favorite pencil...

The Palomino Blackwing 602.





### **My favorite pen...**

The Pilot Timeline Ballpoint.

### **The best printer...**

Any Hewlett-Packard.

### **My favorite bass drum mic...**

The 47-FET (several excellent reproductions are available).

### **My favorite snare drum mic...**

The Shure SM57.

### **My favorite cymbals...**

Zildjian.

### **My favorite brushes...**

Vic Firth's "Heritage" (purple handle) brush.

## **HOW ABOUT SOME LEAST FAVORITES?**

I hate when front of house sound mixers change the levels of the instruments on-stage, so that a solo bass or solo piano is louder than the entire big band, for example. Sound reinforcement has gotten out of hand, with most mixers suffering delusions of grandeur and sonic omnipotence.

I hate when drums are mic'ed too closely. The ring of a drum head is part of the process enabling a drum's tone to project. Listening to a drum one inch away from the head is not how a drum is meant to be deciphered or heard.

I hate auto tune and whatever else that's contributing to the mockery of making music.

I hate subwoofers.

In the film of the same name, *Conan the Barbarian* replied to Genghis Khan when asked what is *best* in life, his reply: "Crush your enemies, see them driven before you, and hear the lamentation of their women!" I lament the anger in our society.

I lament the loss of support for the arts in general, music education in particular.

And I'll leave it at those two laments for now. Let's get back to the superlatives, as those are way more fun and interesting to read. But thank you, Arnold.

## **THE TOP OF THE POPS**

### **The best jazz drumming I can think of...**

Elvin Jones' playing on his album *Dear John C.* Second best? Bob Moses' drumming on "In the Fall" from the Steve Swallow album *Home*. But let's not forget Chick Webb's "Liza (All the Clouds'll Roll Away)." And just about any Mel Lewis you can find on record (which is a lot.)

### **The hero of the Dave Brubeck Quartet...**

It's not Joe Morello, but the bass player Eugene Wright. Sue me.

### **The most unforgettable musical experience while playing...**

While on tour with Joni Mitchell and orchestra in 2001, Herbie Hancock was introduced to come on-stage while bass player Chuck Berghofer and I played a "Killer Joe" type of groove.

Quarter notes on the ride cymbal with a cross-stick on beat four ... Herbie strides across the stage, acknowledging the audiences' applause while plopping himself down onto the piano bench. He played 2 chords in a dotted quarter note on the downbeat followed by an eighth note on the "and" of beat two ... and I felt my right arm literally snap into place with the time and energy chi that he transmitted. I'm talking real kung-fu stuff here. Never experienced anything like it before or since.

### **The best musician I have ever played with...**

I'd have to say Herbie Hancock.

### **My favorite music to listen to while relaxing...**

Debussy's piano music.

### **My favorite composition...**

Dave Brubeck's "The Duke." My favorite recording of "The Duke" would be from the Miles Davis / Gil Evans album *Miles Ahead*.

### **My favorite Miles album...**

*Miles in the Sky*. (Sue me again.)

## **PET PEEVES**

Drummers who sit in, moving parts of the kit around and adjusting stand placements or heights, and then not returning the kit to its original position. As Buddy Rich said to Roy Haynes, "Play it like it lays, Haynes." Just sit down and play.

Drummers who play every accent as a combination head/rim hit. Hey! Remember! Save your exclamation points for when they'll really matter! They'll be most effective that way!

Bands who, when playing before another band on a double bill, play longer than the agreed-upon length of time. Be professional as well as courteous.

Anyone who shakes your hand with too tight of a grip. Hey, we use these things to make a living! Okay!?!

## **REMINDERS**

If you can't hear an instrument on-stage while you're playing, then you're probably playing too loud.

Always bring a pencil to rehearsal.

Do no harm.

Warm-up quietly and pay attention to the TONE your sticks are producing on the practice pad.

Be self-aware.

Have fun.

**Check out Peter's drummer profile page, and get a copy of his Legends book at [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com)**





# NEW & NOTABLE

## DW SONICPLY SHELLS

### Drum Workshop SonicPly Shells

Drum Workshop has introduced SonicPly drum shells to the Collector's Series, the first new shell construction since PurpleCore in 2021. Developed by DW's "woodologist," John Good, the latest design blends the best characteristics of wood and metal to offer a new, exciting sonic experience. John Good, nicknamed the "Wood Whisperer" by legendary Rush drummer Neil Peart, has an encyclopedic knowledge of the science of wood plies, their sonic properties, and how to create great-sounding drums. Good's skills were honed over many years on the road as a drum tech with Michael Jackson, Frank Zappa, and many more.

SonicPly is the result of two years of relentless experimentation led by Good. The shells are formed by bonding aircraft-grade aluminum and North American maple plies using a special adhesive formula. The result is a drum shell that seamlessly balances the optimum qualities of both wood and metal, to offer drummers a sensational new sonic adventure. The SonicPly drums, available in shell sizes ranging from 10" to 24" diameters, fuse eight plies of Maple with a 0.6mm core of Aluminum, while the snares have been built using twelve plies of wood with two, strategically placed

Aluminum plies. This precise construction balances the warmth and resonance of the Maple wood, with the crisp attack and dry sustain of the Aluminum alloy.

The result is a set of drums that speak with projection and unparalleled dynamic response. When played, SonicPly drum shells cut through dense mixes, with enhanced presence, to ensure every note is heard with clarity, making them suitable for studio or stage. All SonicPly drums are fitted with DW's tour-proven Collector's Series hardware including Suspended Tom Mounts (STM,) full-sized turret lugs, True Hoops, and a standard bearing edge. The shells are available in all Collector's Series finishes, including exotic veneers and custom lacquers. This next generation of DW drum shell innovation has been designed for professionals seeking drums that redefine sonic versatility and projection. SonicPly is built for drummers who demand sound perfection.





# NEW HEADPHONES FROM BEYERDYNAMIC

## New headphones from beyerdynamic



beyerdynamic, the preferred audio brand for musicians and studio professionals worldwide, has introduced the DT 990 PRO X: the next evolution of the legendary DT 990 PRO headphones, now with a detachable cable, advanced comfort, powerful STELLAR .45 driver system and lower impedance rating that allows for better performance across a wide range of devices.

The DT 990 PRO has been a trusted tool in studios since the 1980s, praised for its detailed sound, affordable price point, optimal comfort, and durability. Over the decades, it's earned loyalty from renowned musicians and producers, including Flume, Martin Garrix, and Metro Boomin. Today, the open-back DT 990 PRO X builds upon that legacy and takes it to a new level. Designed for critical listening and editing, the expansive soundstage makes it the perfect complement to studio monitors, offering precision and clarity that help studio professionals identify even the finest sonic details and errors in their mix.

"Most at-home producers have studio monitors that they use to listen back to their mixes, said Kevin Nietsch, Product Manager at beyerdynamic. "With the DT 990 PRO X, we wanted to create a tool that modern studio professionals didn't already have. The DT 990 PRO X headphones are engineered to magnify subtle mix imperfections that might otherwise go unnoticed – a true companion for studio monitors."

### Made for Professionals. Built to Last.

Designed with today's at-home studio workflows in mind, the DT 990 PRO X features a 48-ohm impedance, making it easy to use across a variety of playback devices –from professional audio interfaces to portable setups. The detachable 3m mini-XLR to 3.5mm cable (with a 6.3mm adapter included) offers maximum connection flexibility in any environment. At its core is beyerdynamic's STELLAR .45 driver system, engineered in Germany with a wide frequency range of 5 –40,000 Hz, offering exceptional resolution, low distortion, and impressive dynamic response.

Additional features of the DT 990 PRO X include ultra-soft velour ear cushions, and an ergonomically padded headband designed to alleviate pressure on the top of the head. The headphone is built with serviceable components to ensure it remains a go-to studio essential for years to come. "The release of the DT 770 PRO X and DT 990 PRO X marks a new chapter for beyerdynamic –one where we're adapting to the needs of the constantly evolving music production landscape," continued Nietsch. "We're proud to serve the next generation of studio professionals and creators by continuing to release products that align with these needs."

### Availability and Pricing

The DT 990 PRO X studio headphones are now available for \$199 USD via [beyerdynamic.com](https://www.beyerdynamic.com) and authorized retailers. Each pair includes a 3m Mini-XLR to 3.5mm jack cable, a 3.5mm to 6.3mm adapter, and a drawstring carry bag.





# PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

## EVANS REALFEEL 10" ATTACKTILE PAD SCHOLASTIC PACK

By Jason Mehler

The RealFeel drum pad was a trusted favorite among drummers long before it became part of the Evans (D'Addario) lineup. I still have my original HQ Percussion double-sided 12" RealFeel from the early 2000's. The newer Evans model with its slimmer design and textured gum rubber surface carries on the legacy of quality and performance.

Late last year, Evans announced the release of their latest innovation, the RealFeel Attacktile 10" drum pad. This pad features a patented UV coating, designed to provide more attack, volume, and sonic feedback. For this month's Product Close-Up, I will be reviewing the Evans Attacktile Scholastic Pack which includes the pad, a stand, and a pair of sticks.

### The Pack

As mentioned, the Scholastic Pack includes a 10" RealFeel Attacktile drum pad, an Evans Apprentice Practice Pad Stand, and a pair of ProMark Rebound 5A drumsticks. It is an all-in-one package, designed for practice and instruction.

### Setup

The single-braced Apprentice Pad Stand is slim and easy to set up. On the underside of the RealFeel pad there is an 8mm threaded insert which mounts to the stand by spinning the pad clockwise. The height and angle are easily adjustable, making the combo great for varying practice environments.

### Pad Review

The first thing to mention about the pad is the 10" diameter. It's large enough that it can sit securely on your lap, and small

enough to slide into a backpack or carry freely. I now prefer this size over my 12" pad, having tested it for a few weeks.

The core of the Attacktile pad is made from a dense pressed particle board, providing a solid, weighty foundation like the other RealFeel products. A rubberized, slip-resistant ring of padding on the underside holds the pad in place on smooth surfaces.

The playing side of the pad has a gum rubber base with a white UV-treated laminate top layer that's lightly textured. Striking the surface, the Attacktile has a higher pitch and is more articulate than traditional RealFeel models. The stick definition is crisp, making this pad a little louder than the others. Something to consider if you intend to practice in quiet environments.

In terms of feel, it reminds me of a tightly tuned Kevlar head on a marching snare. Accented strokes have a satisfying pop to them and taps (or ghost notes) remain soft yet distinctly audible. The sharp definition of the playing surface makes the pad a bit unforgiving, which, in my opinion, can be a good thing. For example, I've been working on my flat flams, where both sticks strike the pad at precisely the same moment in time, with the goal of sounding like one stick. The slightest inaccuracy produces an obvious flam, rather than a single note. This pad has helped me tighten up my technique over the past few weeks.

### Scholastic Pack Review

Purchasing this product as a pack seems like a great way to quickly facilitate instruction, whether one on one or in a group setting. Having the pad on a stand from the start promotes proper posture, and the pad's increased volume makes it easier for instructors to clearly hear students' playing. For drumlines, the Scholastic Pack offers a uniform setup that helps ensure every player is practicing on the same surface, with the same feel and response. The included ProMark Rebound 5A sticks are great for individual students or general percussion classes.

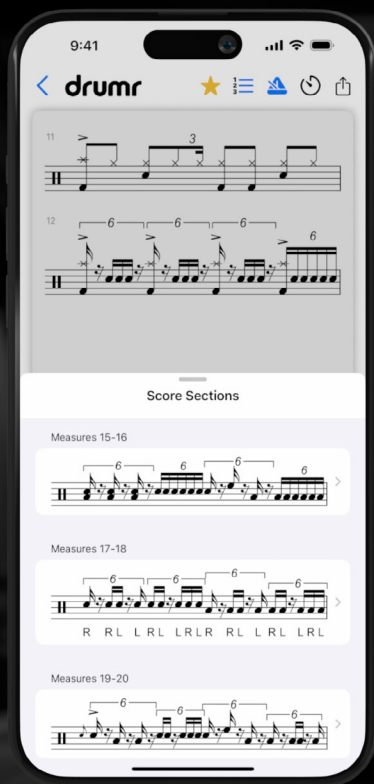
In my testing, I found the pad to be more than satisfactory for practice at home or on the go. The stand easily adjusts to a comfortable height. There's not much I would improve except for maybe reinforcing the mounting mechanism under the pad as it may loosen over time.

### Conclusion

The Evans RealFeel Attacktile 10" Pad is a solid product worthy of the RealFeel label and when combined with the other components in the Scholastic Pack, it is a reliable option for teachers and students alike. The Evans RealFeel Attacktile 10" Pad Scholastic Pack retails for \$104.99. Check it out at: <https://www.daddario.com/products/percussion/percussion-accessories/drum-pads-stands/realfeel-attacktile-drum-pad-scholastic-pack-10-inch/>







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# PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

## SOME MOST EXCELLENT FOOTWORK!

By Brian Hill

Yamaha Corporation is Making Waves again with their new high-end kick and two legged hi-hat pedals! *Modern Drummer* received a box full of these impressive pedals to take through their paces and see what we thought of them. What we found was *most excellent!* So, let's start kicking things around with the kick pedals.

The FP9C Single and the DFP9C Double Pedals are very much the same pedal except the double comes with a few obvious differences. Let's begin with the similarities. Each pedal comes with an axle-stabilizing bearing chamber; a low-profile stabilizing hinge; easy-access, auto-lock spring adjustment; weight-adjustable felt beaters; independent beater / footboard angle adjustment; ball bearing drive connection; anti-skid heel spikes; and a heavy-duty carrying case.

Both pedals also come with a double chain drive and an optional belt drive attachment piece included. The FP9D and DFP9D are the Direct Drive versions and are available based on your preference. The double kick pedals of course came with a heavy-duty adjustable drive shaft with all-bearing universal joints and a secondary pedal anchor.

I found these pedals to be extremely well built, with smooth action, are very fast, and very articulate! They responded as if they were a part of my foot and had a responsive action I've rarely felt in foot pedals before. Along with the action, I found them to be powerful in stroke, while at the same time, super sensitive and articulate to dynamics. The footboards are wide and smooth to the feel. So don't mind going "bare footing" on these boards.

The HHS9D Two Legged Hi Hat stand is a flagship design as well as a powerful force in hi-hat pedals design. As with the kick pedals, it was designed to become "one" with the player with an extremely flexible set-up routine. The unique design brings a balanced blend of high-level functionality, user convenience, and ruggedness. The incorporation of ball bearings in the upper and lower parts of the Yamaha Direct Link System and the ball bearings in the hinge sections ensure smooth and easy footwork in combination with the mirror-shine polished footboards.

The two-legged, independent swivel apparatus features totally adjustable legs with adjustable spurs in each foot for real stabilization. As with most two-legged designs, you can



easily adjust the vertical angle of the stand with the turn of a screw. These features allow the user to place the stand virtually anywhere in the set-up. Memory locks are everywhere to help make set-up a snap.

The HHS9D Hi-Hat stand features a very simple and effective spring tension adjustment capability. The adjustment dial for the spring tension is made of durable metal featuring an instruction mark on top for easy rotation direction even during a performance while confirming the tension strength with an easy to see indicator.



The footboard angle is also freely adjustable by loosening a single bolt, operated with a drum key. The heel plate is a low-profile design for smooth playability. The heel section also incorporates spurs to help keep the hi-hat from sliding. The entire stand folds up for easy transport.

The Hi Hat Clutch is certainly worth mentioning as it has a unique design. The LC9 Clutch allows the clutch nut attachment to operate with a simple twist instead of screwing the bottom nut to the clutch. Using a harder felt design leads to significant sound improvement, while the double lock nuts actively prevent unintended loosening while

playing. The bottom cymbal tilt adjuster is nicely enclosed to prevent the loss of the typical adjusting screw along with an anti-loosening mechanism.

For our review, Yamaha also included the CWHSAT9 Cowbell / Hi-Hat Stand Attachment Clamp. This clamp attaches to the kick drum hoop or any stand to hold a variety of instruments. It's basically two clamps in one! It can be a cowbell (or any percussion piece) holder, hold a boom arm for a cymbal or a tom, or you can use it in a double kick set-up to attach the hi-hat stand to the kick drum. This is one of the better clamps I've seen, not only for its versatility and sturdiness, but for its value.

Overall, I found every piece in this grouping to be of the highest quality! Yamaha has always been known for their attention to detail and these pieces surely attest to that thinking. The pedals were as fast as I could make them go, and as articulate and sensitive as I can be. Sturdy, durable, and extremely well thought out. You can't go wrong here.



All that being said, they're not cheap! The retail on the FP9 single kick is \$645.00; the DFP-9D/S double kick \$1274.00; HHS9D hi-hat stand \$980.00; and the CWHSAT9 Clamp is \$168.00. I know what you're thinking. I did, however, find much more attractive street pricing on-line.

The Yamaha pedals in this series are some of the finest pedals I've tried and would recommend them to anyone who wants to play some of the best gear on the market! So, get ready to make some waves with some fancy footwork with these most excellent pedals! Check'em out at **Yamaha.com**.







# The Many Hats of Narada Michael Walden

**By Mark Griffith**

In 1974, Michael Walden was given the name Narada which means “Supreme Musician” by his guru Sri Chinmoy. His career (and this interview) features him giving the knowledge of the many hats he wears as a drummer, producer, songwriter, and bandleader that has resulted in fifty-seven #1 hits, three Grammy’s, and one Emmy. Recently, there is also a highly recommended book written about Narada called, *Narada Michael Walden: Drumming, Spirit, and Music*.

Today, when you look at Narada’s website, it opens with a bold question, “What do these Stars have in common?” Then there is a graphic of 40 records of people like Whitney Houston, Aretha Franklin, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Carlos Santana, Jeff Beck, Weather Report, Lou Rawls, Al Jarreau, Elton John, Steve Winwood, Ray Charles, Al Green, among *many* others. The answer is (of course,) Narada Michael Walden. Our conversation takes a deep dive into Narada’s fascinating career and his many hats. Upon reading we will all join the list of legendary musicians with whom Narada has given his knowledge.







**MD:** Congrats on your two new dance-oriented records *Evolution* and *Euphoria* and the single “The More I Love My Life” (with Santana, Sting, and Stevie Wonder.) I must admit that when I heard the singles “Evolution,” “Hungry 4U” and “Close to my Heart” my first reaction is that the musical spirit of Prince is alive and well and living on through Narada Michael Walden.

**NMW:** I love Prince, and in some ways, I hope you are correct, we were friends. I started to play jazz rock fusion before the musical world knew about Prince, then he was able to jump in and really capitalize and commercialize with his own brand of funky-rock-jazz fusion for the world. At this time of my life, funk is at the heart and soul of all my music, so I take that as a compliment, thank you very much.

simultaneously maintain a career as a R&B and pop musician, producer, and composer? Those seem to be *completely* different worlds, yet you have maintained a huge presence (and success) in all at the same time.

**NMW:** For me it's all music and quite frankly the answer is about my childhood. I'm from Kalamazoo, MI. In Michigan, we learned to hear and appreciate all kinds of music. I must say that jazz was predominant in our household. I heard Nina Simone, Horace Silver's *Six Pieces of Silver*, Jimmy Smith's *The Sermon*, while Dave Brubeck and Cannonball Adderley were all coming around too. On the pop side, The Everly Brothers, Frankie Lymon, Johnny Mathis, Patti Page, all that music was around. Of course, there was Motown with “Shotgun” by Junior Walker and “Sho



**At this time of my life, funk is at the heart and soul of all my music, so I take that as a compliment, thank you very much.**

**MD:** Truthfully, I think it's *also* a compliment to Prince.

**NMW:** Thank you for saying that as well.

**MD:** You've been busy, and I also must compliment you on your wonderful new band and the recordings *Thunder*, *Immortality* and *Rising Sun*, those records include some of the drumming that we all expect from a Narada Michael Walden led band and recording. I would also like to draw everyone's attention to a newly issued recording of your amazing band The Warriors *Live at the Keystone* from back in 1983, it's got that mind-blowing drumming and funky fusion that we all know and love! And all these recordings are available from your label Tarpan Records.

That brings me to a question that I have wanted to ask you for a very long time. How does a legendary jazz-rock fusion drummer

Around” by Smokey Robinson and The Miracles. The beginning of Motown was powerful, and we latched on to every little thing that came out of there, especially the powerful chord changes and grooves on The Four Tops “Baby I Need Your Lovin.” Then there was Curtis Mayfield coming out of Chicago with “Gypsy Woman” and “I’m So Proud,” and Ramsey Lewis too. I was listening to every little thing that created the sound of the Midwest. But I’m a combination of everything I heard as a kid. When I heard “Purple Haze” on the radio, Jimi Hendrix knocked my socks off! We were all gravitationally pulled that way, Hendrix was powerful. The honest answer to that question is that I just really love music!

In 1973, when I first heard Mahavishnu Orchestra, John McLaughlin was so far ahead as an individual musician. I had already heard The Flock which was an early jazz rock band out of

Chicago that had Jerry Goodman playing violin. Then I heard *The Inner Mounting Flame* with Jerry Goodman, Jan Hammer, Rick Laird, and Billy Cobham. I had never heard anything like that!

**In Michigan, we learned to hear and appreciate all kinds of music. I must say that jazz was predominant in our household.**

Nobody was sure exactly what they were doing. It was (not only) jazz-rock-fusion but they were twisting it with all the Indian rhythms and odd times in 7, 9, 11, 13, and 17. Inside of all that, they were so fluent and so funky, it was really mind blowing for me. I knew that I had to learn about that world, so I spent the next few years of my life delving into and trying to learn those worlds and those time zones, while being funky and free within the different time zones. That led me to learn about that musical world as best as I could, before I even met John.

**MD:** How did you go from loving and admiring the music of Mahavishnu, to playing the music of Mahavishnu?

**NMW:** It was a life changing event when I met John backstage at a Hartford CT Mahavishnu show. To this day, I've never seen anything as intense as I saw that night. At the end of the night, everyone except Billy and John left the stage, the spotlight was on John McLaughlin and Billy, and what they did together was just otherworldly. Their playing together was so clean and so powerful. After that show, I was able to meet John in a little room backstage, after he dried off his sweat, he came in and talked to me with his combination of English gentleman meets Miles Davis. I told him that I had never seen anything like what I saw tonight and that I wanted to be like him. I had spent most of my life wanting to be the drummer for Jimi Hendrix, but he had just died, but here I was talking with the next genius, who had showed me where it can go. I knew that 'Vishnu was into the whole meditation, prayer, and spiritual life with his guru Sri Chinmoy, and he said, "Much of what I'm doing is through utilizing meditation in my life," then he looked at his watch and said, "I'm going to see the guru at 6 AM in Queens, NY and I'll tell

him that I met you." Then it hit me, 6:00 AM!!! He wasn't going to sleep, he's going to drive all night to go and see the guru, that was mind blowing to me. About a week later he called me and said, "Hey Michael this is John McLaughlin, I want you to go meet the guru tonight, I can't be there, but I want you to go. I was way up in the woods in Connecticut, so I brushed my hair back, shaved, put on my white clothes, and drove to meet the guru in Queens, NY. That day, after the group meditation, the guru said, "You are Mahavishnu's friend, I accept you within my heart and he walked away. It was so intense, I was kind of scared, but I felt like a grandson. John McLaughlin became my teacher

and everything that I had been asking for was right in front of me. It was overwhelming, that night set me on the road of opening my heart, opening a new life, becoming celibate with no drugs, becoming a vegetarian, and taking music more seriously. Then John invited me to visit him at his restaurant and we began playing, maybe six months later he asked if I would come and play with him. I was advanced to some degree, but nothing could prepare you for playing with the kind of elevation that he brings. His music could go from screamingly loud to pin drop quiet in a matter of seconds. He would always say, "Listen. That was the one thing Miles Davis told all of us to do. Listen." I started to realize that when I was really listening, John's body would start to rock and sway, he would go somewhere, it was like what I had seen at that show in Hartford. His body would lose

the conscious feelings, and he would get so high on the music that I just had to stay on it. It was beautiful, and I wanted to do everything I could to get him into that mode.

**MD:** When you were first playing with John, did you two play duets like he and Billy did in the inception of the group, and like you had seen in concert?

**NMW:** Yes, we played lots of duets. But before that, John had me take him to my barn in Connecticut where I lived and rehearsed with my band. We jammed together with my friends (bassist Ralphe Armstrong and keyboardist Gayle Moran) that's where he met Ralphe Armstrong who is a beast of a bassist. Then John called me and said I'll teach you to play with me and you





can bring your bass player and your keyboard player. He and I started working together on playing in 7, 9, and 11. His rhythmic thing is so advanced that he would rarely play the downbeat. He plays this cat and mouse game with you. I asked him if he was counting and he said, "No, I feel the shape of every time zone (time signature.)" 7, 9, 11, 13, (whatever) are all shapes to him. You must try to feel the shape of it, the time zone lays inside the shape of it, you can count it if you want to. At the beginning I had to count because I didn't want to lose it. When you do that long enough, you can feel the shapes of each time signature, that's where he lives.

**MD:** How did you learn those compositions?

**NMW:** He would give me cassettes of songs like "Hymn to Him," I brought Ralphie Armstrong and Gayle Moran to Mahavishnu, and he brought in Jean-Luc Ponty. The sound that we put together was awesome. Then he told us that he was going to get Beatles producer George Martin to produce our first album in London. We learned the skeletons of "Wings of Karma" and "Vision is a Naked Sword" and played live with the Buffalo Philharmonic. Then we recorded them with a full-on orchestra in the studio in London with George Martin. Originally, at the sessions the engineer put me right next to the strings, but after they heard how loud I played it was obvious that was not going to work. Then they moved the entire rhythm section across the hall, we had little TV cameras to see Michael Tillson Thomas conducting the orchestra, that's how we started recording, it was

a mind-blowing experience. I learned about production from George Martin. With George, everything was peaceful, beautiful, and very encouraging. I asked him if he could phase my cymbals like Ringo Starr, and he said, "No, I've already done that."

**MD:** Was Mahavishnu Orchestra *Apocalypse* your first record?

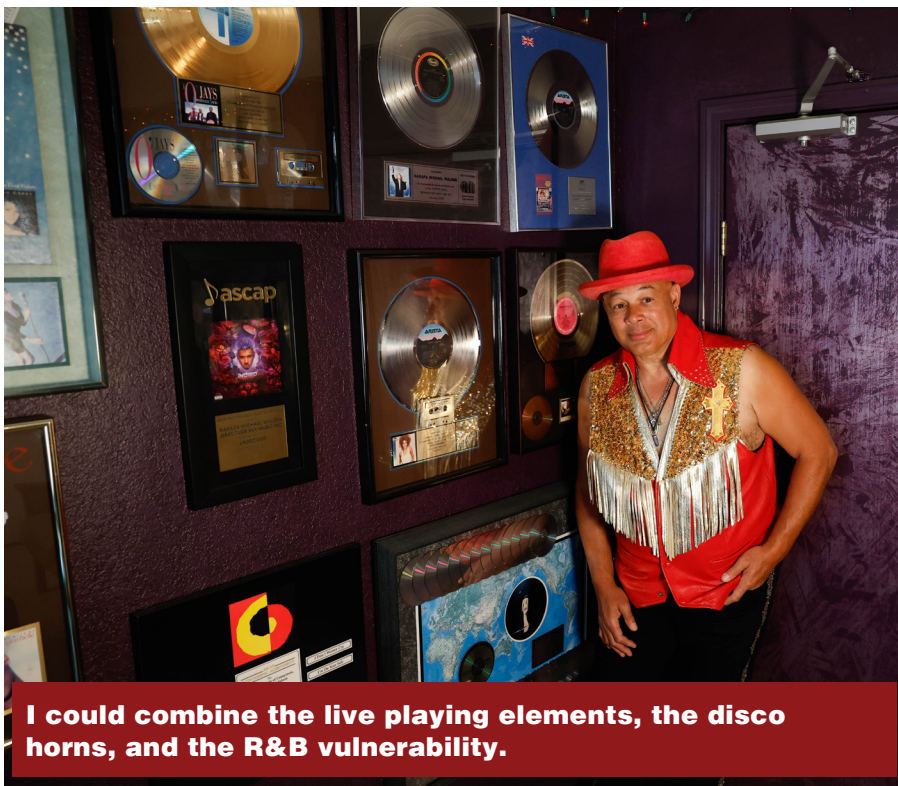
**NMW:** I had done some smaller records in Michigan with a band called Avatar, we were trying to get things together. I did a lot of recording with the new McGuire Sisters; we were trying to get Teo Macero to produce us, but that never really got tight. So yes, the first real record of my life is *Apocalypse*. Actually, *Visions of the Emerald Beyond* was much tighter because we had toured. We tracked the song "Earth Ship" last, and John said, "Look, you have played a lot of drums on this record, but for this one, you've got to cool it."

**MD:** Your Mahavishnu years (1974-76) and the recordings *Apocalypse* and *Visions of the Emerald Beyond* are completely discussed in your new book, but after you recorded (the underappreciated) *Inner Worlds*, John disbanded the group. You went on to make some outstanding fusion records including Jeff Beck *Wired*, Alphonso Johnson *Moonshadows*, Allan Holdsworth's *Velvet Darkness*, you played on two tracks on Weather Report's *Black Market*, and you did a track on Jaco's debut recording. After that run of legendary recordings, you went out on your own. Your own jazz rock recordings *Garden of Love Light* and *I Cry, I Smile* had a distinct R&B flavor that had not previously been found in fusion, you were even singing on your

**In 1973, when I first heard Mahavishnu Orchestra, John McLaughlin was so far ahead as an individual musician...I had never heard anything like that! Nobody was sure exactly what they were doing.**







**NMW:** Thank you for asking that question. The truth is that the good Lord blessed me. I was staying at the Hilton Hotel across from the Ed Sullivan theater, and I rented a Fender Rhodes and a Clavinet to have in my hotel room. In a couple of days, I wrote the four songs "I Don't Want Nobody Else to Dance with You," "Love Me Only," "Give Your Love a Chance," and "They Want the Feeling," they just came to me. The lyrics, the music, all of it. Then it was just a matter of getting with the cats and teaching them the songs and cutting the record. We also hired a string arranger named Patrick Adams who was a big shot in the disco world. I wanted to make sure I had him involved because of his status in the dance world. I was also really turned on by the sound of Bobby Colomby's sound on the drums. I even went to Jimi Hendrix's Electric Ladyland studio to work on "They Want the Feeling," I wanted Jimi's spirit and it came through for me.

1977 single entitled "Delightful." After playing jazz-rock-fusion what prompted the infusion of R&B?

**NMW:** After that part of my career calmed down, I was forced to figure out where I was going to make my living. I made *Garden of Love Light*, and I did a little more R&B and soul on *I Cry, I Smile*. After the two singles "Soul Bird" and "Better Man" didn't catch on, I did not want to be dropped because that would be like death. So, the record company suggested that I try to understand what was happening in the current music scene, which (at the time) was disco and dance music. In 1978 in New York City, disco and dance music was exploding and Atlantic Records asked me to go there and just check out what was happening. They wanted to see if it would resonate with me, so I went to New York City. I understood the R&B world because I came up in that world. But when I heard a song by Rick James called "You and I" that gave me some new ideas. I could combine the live playing elements, the disco horns, and the R&B vulnerability. I called the Brecker brothers (Michael and Randy,) and David Sanborn to play with me. I got Hiram Bullock on guitar and Clifford Carter to play the keyboard stuff. I hired Bob Clearmountain at The Power Station who had recorded the great sounding Chic records. I found musical things in the dance world that turned me on. All of that really helped me to blossom and succeed in the R&B world.

**MD:** When the record company gave you the edict of "you better write a hit," what did you do to accomplish that. How does someone sit down and write a hit?

**I've always loved singing, I'm not a great singer, but I love to do it. I also love playing and singing at the same time. I've always known that if you're gonna have a hit you better sing it...**





**MD:** All of that was on your first big record as a solo artist called *Awakening* recorded in 1978. You were also singing lead vocals on that record, had you ever sung before your solo records?

**NMW:** I've always loved singing, I'm not a great singer, but I love

**I love funk, and I realized that if you were funky and you had a hook, you could do anything you wanted. But the hook was the main thing.**

to do it. I also love playing and singing at the same time. I've always known that if you're gonna have a hit you better sing it, so I kept my hand in that world. On that record in particular, Bob Clearmountain came up with a formula where I doubled my vocals. That doubling gave my voice a big sound for the radio, it was a small but mighty trick.

**So when I joined Mahavishnu, I brought some of the Parliament Funkadelic approach of funk into playing in those outside time zones (time signatures,) and it just worked.**

**MD:** Besides the Rick James music, what of the other music from the first wave of disco hit you?

**NMW:** Everything. The Trammps, Chic, lots of stuff... But it was the drums themselves, they were so predominant and powerful. To have the drums be that turned up in the music was like wow! I figured out that if I just maintained the four on the floor, I could be free with everything else on top, so I made sure that I did that. I love funk, and I realized that if you were funky and you

had a hook, you could do anything you wanted. But the hook was the main thing. You could space out if you had that hook, it was just a slight changing of my mindset.

**MD:** Did Tony Thompson's playing with Chic hit you hard?

**NMW:** Tony Thompson was actually one of my students. When I was with Mahavishnu I had a few young drum students out in Queens. Tony Thompson, and Omar Hakim were two of my students. When I was teaching Tony, we worked on not rushing when you played a fill. When I first met him, he would rush every time he played a fill, but his groove was great! He became a real hot shot with Chic and The Power Station. I'm really proud of my history with Tony and Omar.

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

**NMW:** Omar was always great, and very smooth. When I first met him, he was 17 or 18 and he was way ahead of his age. His chops were amazing. Playing fast rolls and paradiddles was second nature. With Omar, I just had him play for me. I would play piano and he played drums. We would try different things, and I would just kick him into a direction with different piano rhythms, and I would wait to see what he would do. He was always a genius

though. I have found that most people just need confidence and encouragement, as a teacher I'm not trying to undo what somebody already knows, I just want to push them. Omar was always as advanced as he is today.

**MD:** It's amazing that after playing fusion with Mahavishnu, releasing some amazing jazz-rock-R&B fusion records under your own name, recording your own hit R&B record *Awakening*, and even recording on Robert Fripp's *Exposure* in 1979, you were





**A big lesson that I learned was that people just need your full attention. It's like being a doctor in an operation. Whether a producer was being hands on or hands off, I felt that artists were not being given their full attention.**

able to have these two parallel careers as a fusion drummer and start producing R&B records for Phillis Hyman and Sister Sledge. Was there ever a time when the record company executives tried to discourage the fusion aspect of your career?

**NMW:** No, because as long as I was writing hit songs and making money for them, they were happy. Record executives like Ahmet Ertegun were throwing parties for me because we were making money.

Then producer Henry Allen brought a new artist named Stacy Lattisaw to me to produce, and the doors really started opening. In my early production with Stacy, I hired Mike Gibbs to give things a spring of energy. He had arranged the beautiful strings for Mahavishnu's *Apocalypse* and my solo records. I was always finding ways to keep merging the different worlds of music that I loved, while trying to survive in the music business. I didn't want to lose myself through having no jobs and having to do other things. I wanted to



Street" and "Dynamite!" That's when the phone really started ringing from other labels. Everyone was asking, "How do you make those hit records?" I just said, "Well, I'm from Michigan, we love *all* kinds of music."

**MD:** It ain't just a Michigan thing, I'm from Philly and we came up playing all styles of music too!

**NMW:** I love the Philly Soul music. But there was one particular band that I heard in high school that stopped me in my tracks, The Delfonics. Those Thom Bell productions on songs like "La La (Means I Love You)" and "Didn't I (Blow Your Mind This Time),"



were so powerful and Earl Young's drumming was so perfectly dialed in, it was beautiful.

**MD:** Meanwhile, while all your hitmaking is happening, you were doing sessions with people like guitarist Roy Buchanan.

**NMW:** Roy was very beloved in the music world. In London they revered Eric Clapton, and Roy was revered in that same way at Atlantic Records. There was something about him, they all knew he had a special gift. That's how we went into recording that record, then he got Stanley Clarke to produce, and we brought in guitarist Ray Gomez to play rhythm guitar. I met Roy and I learned how tender and kind he was as a person, I told him that I wanted to compose a song for his wife Judy. There was such a loving

survive, so I called upon all the things I knew in order to survive, it's all music! With Stacy, I produced a string of hits including "Let Me Be Your Angel," "Jump to the Beat," "Love on a Two-Way

atmosphere at those sessions and Roy was so beloved and so respected, I'm just so happy to have the credential of that album with him.



**MD:** Do you still compose the same way?

**NMW:** It changes all the time. I'm usually at the piano and I'll find a piano chord or synthesizer sound and the sound of the chord will touch my heart and make a melody come out of me. That's what usually happens. Then I'll program a little groove to help inspire me, the combination of a groove and a sound at the keyboard is usually the combination that helps me open my heart and want to sing something that could be a hook. I usually start with a hook first, then I'll put the music to the lyric, but lots of times that first inspiration comes from a sound. For me, there is something about a beautiful sound that touches my heart.

Just think about The Carpenters' "Close to You," it's the beauty of the whole thing. Smokey Robinson and early Stevie Wonder

funk to the fusion world. That caught me more than anything else, I have to say that. Quite frankly, anyone who wants to make a living in this business needs to be a chameleon. Lenny White did it with Return to Forever. He's a jazz guy, he's a funk guy, he's a lot of things. He's anything you might need at any moment. So when I joined Mahavishnu, I brought some of the Parliament Funkadelic approach of funk into playing in those outside time zones (time signatures,) and it just worked.

**MD:** You were one of the first fusion drummers who didn't have an extensive background in playing jazz. How do you think that made you different from Lenny and Billy?

**NMW:** I do have a background in jazz, but I didn't come up playing strictly jazz. I can play jazz, I can play rock, and I can play funk. But when I play jazz, it comes out sounding too powerful, but I can play jazz. I just didn't want to be competing with Tony Williams and Max Roach, I wanted to go in my own way. The guy that I really must mention is Jack DeJohnette. His playing on Freddie Hubbard's *First Light* record really inspired me. That record was so free and funky, it made me want to go to the Berklee School of Music and study with Alan Dawson. But Dawson's schedule was all filled up, and I didn't want to be just hanging out in Boston waiting for Dawson, so I drove to California with a friend of mine. When we got to California,

**Yes, I always like to bless the song with live drumming. It can be light drumming with brushes or sticks, or a combination. I discovered that early on.**



records as well, they're just so beautiful. That beauty really effects people. For example, I was playing in China with Jeff Beck after he had recorded the beautiful song "Because We've Ended as Lovers" and we didn't play that song in the set. The crowd would not let us leave the stadium until we played that song! We *HAD* to go back on the stage and play that song because it was so touching, and it just purged their heart and emotions. That's what beautiful music does to people.

**MD:** How did the fusion music and drumming and the R&B music inform each other?

**NMW:** I always felt the funk in the fusion. What I admired about Billy Cobham was that he brought the James Brown back beat funk into the fusion world. Buddy Miles did that for Hendrix too. Billy was always strong and funky, but his chops took him to a place we had never seen before. Coming from the amazing band Dreams and deriving from the recording *Icarus* with Paul Winter and Paul McCandless, Billy was bringing the

I heard a guy that had come on the scene in Oakland named Sandy McKee in a band called Cold Blood. Cold Blood was so sharp and funky, I didn't know what Sandy was doing or where he was going. But that is what made me start merging all the different musical worlds that I knew. I wanted to bring Jack, Billy, Tony, and Sandy McKee together with the music of Stevie Wonder, that's where my music came from.

**MD:** Speaking of Cold Blood, did you hear drummer Gaylord Birch? He was in Cold Blood after Sandy.

**NMW:** I wasn't keyed into that, but Gaylord worked with Carlos Santana too.

**MD:** Yes, he's killing on *Festival*.

**NMW:** I found out that Gaylord Birch also did some work with the Pointer Sisters, and I didn't know that. I just saw some footage of him where he is just death defying, he is doing some stuff that's simply outlandish!

**MD:** He did an amazing live record with the Pointer Sisters called *Live at the Opera House*, “death defying” is an appropriate description. How did you weave your R&B approach into fusion?

**NMW:** I came into fusion at a time when the natural progression of fusion was to include the dance element and make it more accessible. On songs like “The Way of the Pilgrim” from *Inner*

**NMW:** When Joe offered me the gig in Weather Report, I had to turn him down. After Mahavishnu and Weather Report I had a thirst for the rock world, so I went with Tommy Bolin.

**MD:** Was Joe upset that you turned him down?

**NMW:** Probably. When I was doing the *Black Market* record, Joe told me a great story. He said that if Wayne ever gets mad at me, I go in my garden and dig in the black earth and I give him a couple of potatoes and then he’s not mad anymore.

Fast forward, I had a show in Japan called “Super Producers of ‘95” and I wanted members of Weather Report to come over and play with me. Joe said he would do it, and then he got cold feet and wanted to back out. I said, ‘Joe you can’t back out now because they’ve advertised it in Japan.’ Then I remembered Joe’s potato story, and I sent him a bag of potatoes, and it worked. He said, “Alright I’ll meet you over there.” Sometimes the small things are big things.

**MD:** You played a funky track on Jaco’s debut solo recording with Sam and Dave called “Come On, Come Over.”

**NMW:** We did that live at Bobby Colomby’s upstairs garage studio, what a wonderful experience. I loved Jaco, he was really trying to bring the musical world together, and I wish he was still with us today.

**MD:** Did you help get Jaco in Weather Report?

**NMW:** Around 1971-2 I was living in Florida, and I was playing with Jaco a lot down there, he was the buzz. There were so many incredible musicians down there at that time. But Jaco and I would play together at his apartment. When we were playing, I realized he liked me playing in 4/4 while he played in seven, or when I played seven against his 4/4. We were really getting into things. I knew he was really advanced, so when I was recording the tune “Black Market” with Weather Report, Joe asked who I thought would be a good bassist for the band because Alphonso was leaving. I said, ‘There’s this guy Jaco Pastorius in



**When I’m making records, I’m always thinking singles, meaning hooks.**

*Worlds*, “Led Boots” and “Come Dancing” with Jeff Beck... all that stuff is a merge of heavy funk, Motown, and fusion. When I played with Weather Report on Jaco’s audition, which was a song called “Cannonball,” (from *Black Market*) that was a real merging of funk and fusion. When Zawinul was teaching Jaco that song, at first Jaco was overplaying the song and Zawinul said, “Don’t put that shit in my song,” and we all froze. Then Jaco settled down, learned the song, and played it great.

**MD:** How did you recording with Weather Report come about?

**NMW:** I had made an album with (Weather Report bassist) Alphonso Johnson called *Moonshadows*, and he suggested I do something with Joe and Weather Report. When I went to the session, Joe said that he had the beginning of a song (“Black Market,”) but he wanted to splice me into it and just go out. So I played along with the track, and I knew they wanted me to kick it off with that bridge. They punched me in, and suddenly I’m back in Kalamazoo!!! I didn’t know Wayne had that streak in him, I knew he was a genius, but now I’m playing on the bell of the ride, and it was just cracking. Then Joe really took it back there with that popping thing, I was really taken aback by working with them. I must give a lot of love to Chester Thompson (who was playing drums in the band,) and Alex Acuna who was kicking all that lightning percussion stuff on the “Black Market” track. I was really happy to be in the company of these great heroes of mine and they were so kind and loving to me.

**MD:** Why didn’t you join Weather Report?

**Most things that were recorded live caught me. The live aspect, the energy, give me the applause of the people, that would catch me.**





Florida... Joe had already heard about him, and that's when he brought Jaco in and we recorded "Cannonball." Joe was going to call the song "Empty Chair" or "Cannonball." That was his audition, Joe really put Jaco on the fire and melted him down to become *the* Jaco Pastorius, one of the greats of all time.

**MD:** So now let's jump past everything we have talked about and talk about your production. We talked about Stacy Lattisaw, but how did that lead to your masterpieces productions with Aretha Franklin on *Who's Zoomin' Who?* The first Whitney Houston records, and Mariah Carey?

**NMW:** Stacy Lattisaw was my first real production masterpiece. I was jumping into the world of hit records where I was a writer, producer, and a singer. I was trying my hand at making hits that would be beautiful. I wanted to feel good about the music and make money at the same time. I learned how to make vocals shine by working with Patti Austin, Angela Bofill, and Phillis Hyman, all of them were great singers. Then came Aretha, and by that time I was ready for the "Queen of Soul." By the time Whitney Houston came along I was ready for Whitney, I had already done all that work with those great singers, so it was very natural for me.

**MD:** What producers had a strong influence on how you produced records?

**NMW:** Quincy Jones was my mentor. We became friends and he was the one that called me and said, "We could use more producers, more *helpers*. That's how he put it. I knew he was right because I always had a hard time always finding the right

helper when I was making my records. Quincy suggested that I might want to take a more serious role as a developer. That shifted my thinking. He was right, because all the people whom I admired didn't love the studio. Being in the studio is very daunting. Being behind the microphone and wanting to record something that is gonna live for 100 plus years is daunting. A big lesson that I learned was that people just need your full attention. It's like being a doctor in an operation. Whether a producer was being hands on or hands off, I felt that artists were not being given their full attention. But with my full attention on them, they felt the endorphins kick in when they started singing, then I learned some tricks. I learned to get the spirit side first, get the endings, get the soul, the magic, get all the backside done,

**Hearing Art Blakey play 2 and 4 backbeats for 20 minutes straight on Jimmy Smith's "The Sermon" taught me that backbeats could swing very hard.**

then I could start to work on the first verse. I learned that if you spend too much time the other way around and spending too much time on the first verse, you may never get to the ending because now the brain is involved, and the brain will stop the spirit management.

**MD:** You were actually creating and composing backwards.

**NMW:** Yes, Quincy would always say, "Don't strangle the baby in the crib." That means love your songs, dress them up, and let them grow up and evolve. When I would get an "OK" song, I would *really* work on it, work on the arrangement, put some funk on it, and it would become mighty.

**MD:** If you had to describe your production style, how would you describe it?

**NMW:** I've taken what I learned in the Mahavishnu Orchestra, the fusion energy and electricity and plugged it into pop music. That's how you get Whitney's "How Will I Know," "I Wanna Dance with Somebody," "So Emotional" and Aretha's "Freeway of Love." I want the energy and the electricity of fusion, and I'm also very aware that a song and the vocals have gotta be tight. You need a song that you can hear 100 times and not get tired of it. That means that I live on both sides, electricity and energy, and love and spirit. And it can't rush, rushing is amateur, everything must lay right. Recording a hit is like taming a wild horse.

**MD:** Do you like to, or need to, play drums on your productions?

**NMW:** Yes, I always like to bless the song with live drumming. It can be light drumming with brushes or sticks, or a combination. I discovered that early on. I like to use conga drum pattern from a machine for the consistency of time. You can use those elements and play along with it to create a live feeling. I liked to use the Linn kick drum with my snare, my cymbals, and my heart. When you mix those, that's a great start. At the time, I had to realize the power of being innovative with machines or otherwise the sound wasn't competitive and wouldn't be accepted.

**MD:** As a producer do you keep track of what's happening on the charts, and what's popular in musical trends?

**NMW:** Yes, I'm aware of that. Quincy would always say to "Look to the top ten in Europe, and the top ten of London, that will give you a clue what's about to happen in the US. Then look to what is happening in New York, because New York is the hub



of the world. What are they dancing to in New York? What are they're talking about in New York? In New York, you'll always the germs of what's going to be the next thing. I've always liked the energy that comes out in New York when you are playing live.

**MD:** Speaking of playing live; in the middle of all those hits, you put together a jaw dropping fusion band called The Warriors. I know The Warriors didn't record, but the new live record that you released from 1983 is absolutely smokin'!

**NMW:** That was a time of my life when I was making the hit R&B music that we have been talking about, but I longed for a vehicle where I could keep my drum chops up. At that time, Walter Afanasieff was a guy who I was bringing up as a producer and Walter had a little side band. I told Walter that I wanted to join his band to just keep myself sharp. I learned his music and then we brought in bassist Randy Jackson and became the rhythm

more, and on the entire album I wanted to play more, and it just worked out.

**MD:** Your production has such a strong thumbprint. When you co-produced and played on the Journey record *Freedom*, it wound up sounding like a Narada Michael Walden record.

**NMW:** Thank you. The Journey album was during COVID. Neal Schon and I became very close making Neal's solo album *Universe*. He came here and I worked hard with him on his solo album, and he played beautifully. When COVID hit, we said let's make a Journey album. As we all know that downtime became almost two years. In that time, we got Randy Jackson playing bass in LA, Jonathan Cain played his parts in Nashville, and we were going on Skype with Arnel in the Philippines to do his vocals. I really looked to Neal because Neal is Journey, and I just let him do his thing. I was like a midwife.



**I also want to give love to all the forefathers who just made it possible and showed us the divine mysteries of the drumming world. And there are so many great young girls playing, it's very inspiring. Today, everybody can play.**

section for The Warriors. We brought in guitarist Joaquin Lievano and violinist Steve Kindler from Mahavishnu, and it worked out. That was my tip of the hat to the fusion era during the time of making R&B hit records.

**MD:** More recently, all the R&B and the fusion has come together on your record *Immortality*, what can you tell me about that?

**NMW:** Yes, I made that when Aretha died. That was on my mind, and I got on the keyboard and the flood gates opened. In my mind, I envisioned the love of all the Saints hugging and welcoming the Queen to heaven. The music called for me to play

**MD:** And now we get back to where we started. I swear when I heard your record *Euphoria*, I thought I was listening to a Prince record.

**NMW:** This record is a combination of programming and playing. We're at a time where the top 10 and top 20 around the world are dance, electronic, and techno music. So, we mixed all of that. I work with a guy named Lino Nicolosi who also produces Billy Cobham, that's how I found him. He called me to sing a song on one of Billy's tracks, and we built a friendship. When we made this new album, I really wanted to make an internationally successful album. Lino plays a funky stank rhythm guitar, his



sister plays genius bass, his wife sings a bit, and his brother plays cool keyboards. I cut some stuff here and I sent it to him, and we sent some tracks back and forth for this new record.

**MD:** How do you decide what you are going to program, and what you are going to play on the drums?

**NMW:** From a writing standpoint, most things start with a program. Then I'll go to the drums and see what sounds better, playing my drums or using the program, or a combination of both. That's usually how it works out.

**MD:** When you produce your own recordings, how do you pick a single?

**NMW:** When I'm making records, I'm *always* thinking singles, meaning *hooks*. Singles are all about timing, people are in certain times in their own lives. So I often open my studio to my friends (Lino in this case,) what they're feeling, and what they may be doing. He had been doing some work with some DJ's and radio stations who are spinning records. For example, our song called "Break Free" came out in the UK and they really jumped on it. I'm also aware that some of the things might be more on the fusiony side, but there are college radio stations that like that. I like to spread it around and not just be stuck in one bag.

**MD:** If there's one thing that can be said about you, it's that you have NEVER been stuck in one bag.

**NMW:** It all comes back to the aspect of "Love" in music. We don't talk about it enough, there is something that is beyond drumming and music, it's love!

**MD:** Tell me about the new book?

**NMW:** I looked on YouTube and there was this guy named Aubrey Dale doing a version of "Cosmic Strut." He was not only playing the song, but he had written the whole thing out, and was teaching people how to play it. I got a hold of him, and we became friends. I asked him to do a couple more transcriptions from the *Wired* album, and after those transcriptions we decided to make a book called *Narada Michael Walden: Drumming, Spirit, and Music*. I like the idea of having something inviting to share

with everybody.

**MD:** You have a very unique double bass drumming style, where did it come from?

**NMW:** There was a drummer with a band called the Shades of Brown out of Chicago, they were an all-black band, and they were the funkier and baddest band in the world. The guy on drums was able to play really fast ideas with two hand notes and two foot notes but with one bass drum, so I learned to adopt that into my vocabulary. Later, I started using two bass drums because I wanted the sound to be even bigger. I also realized that I didn't have the hand speed or the single stroke roll speed to compete with Billy Cobham or Tony Williams. So, I started mixing in the two hands and two bass drum notes idea, but with two feet. So again, it was a mixture of those two worlds coming together. It's the first thing I play on "Vision is a Naked Sword" on Mahavishnu's *Apocalypse*. But it came from the funk drummer in Shades of Brown. When we did my first tour of America, Europe, and Australia we were playing three sets a night and I was really able to develop, stretch, and experiment with that stuff. Terry Bozzio was on some of those same shows with Zappa and we did our best to keep up with each other. I also heard Steve Smith doing that stuff with Jean-Luc Ponty.

As I think back, I also remember that in high school marching band I used to work on playing strong double stroke rolls, I did that in my college days too. My doubles were so strong that they sounded like singles, and that helped me a lot too.

**MD:** How did you develop your doubles?

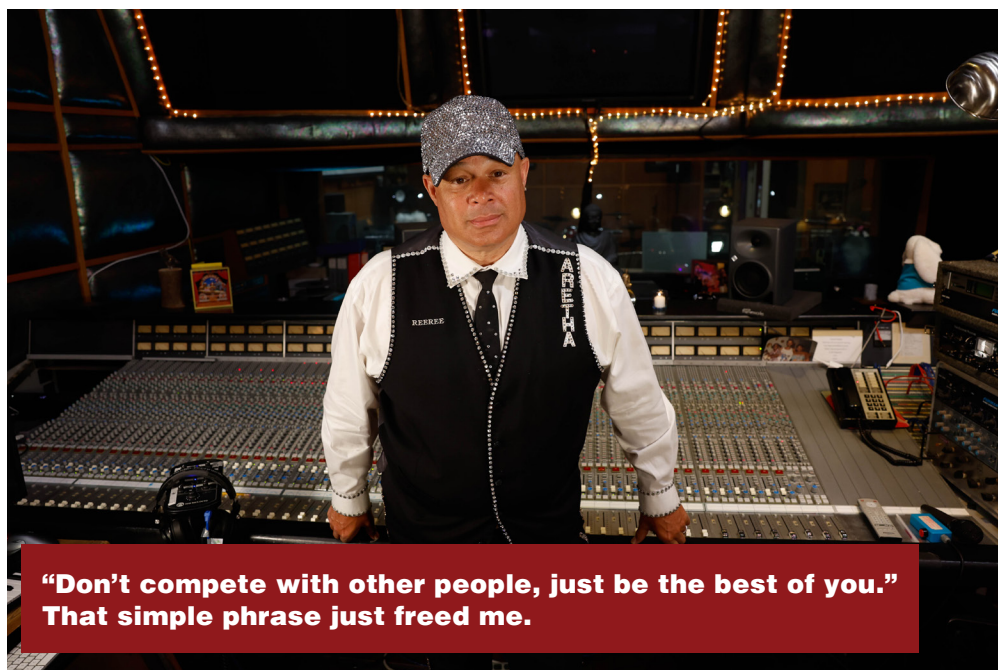
**NMW:** In the Plainwell High School Marching Band we did seven-mile parades, and our leader was a guy named Ron Fair who was also a drummer. He was a snare drumming technical whiz, so you had to have clean, strong, sharp, doubles. All these things helped me along the way.

**MD:** Did you do the double exercise where you had to accent the second note of the double?

**NMW:** Sometimes, but not as much. Do you know the solo called "Connecticut Halftime"? I learned that, and that's what got me into college at The College of Western Michigan, it had a lot of doubles and stuff in it.

**MD:** Give me a few records that you listened to (and are still listening to,) that were monumental to your development?

**NMW:** I must first acknowledge my life as a kid coming up, because that's when I was most impressionable and took in the most information. Today, I don't think I take the time to absorb the things I love like I did when I was a kid. When I was a kid, Nina Simone *Live at Town Hall* and Ray Charles *Live* were incredible, Stevie Wonder's song "Fingertips" live in 1963 was incredible.



**"Don't compete with other people, just be the best of you."  
That simple phrase just freed me.**



**MD:** I think Marvin Gaye played drums on that.

**NMW:** Most things that were recorded live caught me. The live aspect, the energy, give me the applause of the people, that would catch me. George Shearing *Live* with Peggy Lee was another beautiful record.

**MD:** That's *Beauty and the Beat* with Roy Haynes.

**NMW:** The band called The Three Sounds had a drummer named Bill Dowdy, and I memorized every note that he played, that record is what made my dad think that I was pretty good, and he bought me a drum kit.

**MD:** They were a swinging trio; you are the first guy that I have ever heard to mention Bill Dowdy and The Three Sounds.

**NMW:** They were from Battle Creek, MI. so they were always around. I also loved Vernell Fournier on "Poinciana" with Ahmad Jamal. Hearing Art Blakey play 2 and 4 backbeats for 20 minutes straight on Jimmy Smith's "The Sermon" taught me that backbeats could swing very hard. I also love Steve Gadd's playing on "The Closer I Get to You" by Roberta Flack and Donny Hathaway. Gadd makes everything feel so *not rushed*, it's just beautiful. Gadd's pocket is so deep. Hearing Bernard Purdie with Jeff Beck and Wilbur Bascomb taught me to relax while playing fusion, because Bernard *was always just Bernard*. Carmine Appice with Vanilla Fudge always killed me, and guys like Steve Smith and Dave Weckl have always been mean, but they are getting even meaner! But I want to send some love to all the young drummers who are coming on strong, Eric Moore is like Charlie Parker on the drums, he's so fluid. I also want to give love to all the forefathers who just made it possible and showed us the divine mysteries of the drumming world. And there are so many great young girls playing, it's very inspiring. Today, everybody can play.

**MD:** What are some of your favorite records that you have played on?

**NMW:** Thank you for asking that question but I'm just very happy to just be so many recordings. If you just stay busy, so much can be accomplished. I'm grateful to be discovered by Mahavishnu, and to make my first record with him. Working with Robert Fripp and doing his song "Breathless" on the *Exposure* record was just magic to me. I'm a fan of people like Wayne Shorter and Stevie Wonder who have changed music in our lifetime. So for me, every bit of it has been a delight. I even had a band with Eddie Hazel from Funkadelic. Then we get into the singers Stacy Lattisaw, Angela Bofill, Mariah was incredible, Elton John, Steve Winwood, Carlos Santana, Barbra Streisand, and Aretha... It's all beautiful and joyful music. Even the 13 Rainforest

benefit shows (which aren't records,) playing with those heavyweights was mind blowing. I actually played with Nina Simone just before she passed away. Then there's the young singers coming up, the young Tevin Campbell, Shanice, Lisa Fischer... The artists today who succeed know about rhythm. I've had a blessed career and I'm nothing but thankful.

**MD:** You mentioned Bernard Purdie, you played with Jeff Beck after Bernard. But you also played in Mahavishnu after Billy Cobham, and you came back to Jeff Beck after Vinnie played with him. How do you approach coming on a gig after a drumming genius has had the seat before you?

**NMW:** My guru Sri Chimnoy taught me early in my career, he said "Don't compete with other people, just be the best of you." That simple phrase just freed me. I've always felt that no matter who came before me on a gig, I can't trip on that. They have got their own thing, and so do I.

**MD:** We ALL do.

**NMW:** Amen.









# Sam Hunt's **Josh Sales**, The Best Version of Himself

By Mark Griffith

**D**rummer Josh Sales has had an interesting up-bringing. After early exposure to a drum-oriented film, his midwestern and slightly confined Indiana roots, were turned into becoming a more "free-range" child, when his family moved to London for a short time. He learned quickly that the creativity of the big city agreed with him. He took the lessons of playing baseball as a young man in Indiana and applied them to drumming and exploring music while his family lived in London. And he worked hard! When his family returned to the States, his work ethic led him dive into drumming, there was no other option. This led to working and DIY touring with several local bands from Indiana. But the big city, and a bigger career was calling him south to Nashville.

Josh moved to Nashville at the perfect time. In 2011, the city was cheap, and there were musicians everywhere. It took a few years, but Josh finally hooked up with another former athlete, singer-songwriter (and college football standout) Sam Hunt. He joined Hunt's band, applied the lessons that he had learned in his early life, and they have been going strong for 11 years. Josh is now Sam Hunt's musical director, he played on Hunt's records *Montevallo* and *Southside*, and has played on many of his biggest hits such as "Body Like a Back Road" and "House Party." At 37, the hitmaking and big stages have not changed Josh Sales one bit, he is still a hard-working drummer making his way on the Nashville music scene, always looking to learn and improve, and always diving into new and eclectic music. And all of that is what makes Josh, the best version of himself. *Modern Drummer* is proud to introduce you to Josh Sales.



Photos Courtesy of Josh Sales



**MD:** How and when did you start playing drums?

**JS:** My mom always tells the story that when I was in her belly, she was in college. As I was growing larger and larger, she was going to different classes, and she said that every time she went to her jazz history class, she felt me rumbling around down in there, so she knew music activated something that made me react. Around age nine, I started really noticing the drums. There was a movie called *That Thing You Do*, and I'm assuming a lot of musicians and drummers within my generation were also affected by that. The drummer in the movie is a very respectable, strong, reliable, human who has a lot of talent; he's just someone you want to root for. When I saw that movie, that became the first beat I ever played. My third-grade teacher's son had a drum kit and we lived in the same neighborhood, that was my first time ever touching a drum kit. He was one of the big cooler kids and he let me sit down on his drum kit. I had never touched the drums before, but I was able to play the beat from *That Thing You Do*. One of the older kids said, "Hey, you're pretty good at that," and that was it. That was when I decided that this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. I just knew from that moment.

**MD:** That's a cool film, and probably one of the only movies where a drumbeat has a prominent role in the plot of the film. That's interesting, I am always intrigued by what gets us to the drums first. How did that first time sitting at the drums progress?

**JS:** My parents were pretty wise; they didn't want to make a full investment on a giant drum kit that makes a lot of noise

until they knew I was really into it. They got me a practice pad and some sticks, and they got me some drum lessons. The lessons were just basic rudimentary stuff, but they wanted to make sure that I was into it before they bought me a set. So, I studied at The Drum Center of Indianapolis which was great. I spent a year just chopping away on single strokes, double strokes, rudiments, and doing all the technique building. Most importantly, I didn't quit. The next Christmas they bought me a no name, \$70, kit out of a barn in Indiana, it was the best Christmas I ever had. I woke up and saw that kit and from there on I continued to take lessons, I joined the school band, and I continued my education all the way up until I was in sixth grade and my family moved to London, England. My father worked in the pharmaceutical industry for Eli Lilly, and they shipped our whole family to England so he could train the people in London. That (kind of) severed my American drum education, but it immersed me in a whole different thing in London. I was much freer in London; I was taking the train by myself to meet up with different musicians and learning from them. That also instilled the travel bug in me, I really enjoyed seeking and learning about other cultures which makes touring easy. It definitely laid the framework for me to want to continue to travel, play music, and see new places. In the US baseball was my main thing, but once we moved, I learned that there's no serious baseball in England. So, baseball was done, which was probably pretty good for me, and it was all eyes on drums. I started jumping into bands around seventh grade, we learned some covers and

**There was a movie called *That Thing You Do*... The drummer in the movie is a very respectable, strong, reliable, human who has a lot of talent; he's just someone you want to root for. When I saw that movie, that became the first beat I ever played.**





**Once I got into high school in Indiana, I did my best in school, but all my attention was on music. There was no other option. There was no thought of failure, I was going to keep doing it and keep doing it.**

started making our own tunes. I was in England for three years before we moved back to Indiana. Once I got into high school in Indiana, I did my best in school, but all my attention was on music. There was no other option. There was no thought of failure, I was going to keep doing it and keep doing it.

**MD:** What was the difference between being a young drummer in the US, and being a young drummer in London?

**JS:** There was a massive difference in culture and influence. The amount of new music I was being introduced to and the drummers that were coming through London made a massive impact on me. I had some cool opportunities in Indiana to see some clinics of some fantastic drummers before we moved, but *everything* is in London. It's the big city in Europe and it gave me a very large picture of all the different types of music I could study and all the different talents that were playing those types of music. Being in London pulled the veil back and gave me a much bigger picture of all the different possibilities that music could offer.

**MD:** What music were you being exposed to in Indiana, and what music were you being exposed to in London?

**JS:** When I started in Indiana, I was still pretty young, so I was

still under the influence of my parents taste in music and what was on the radio. My mom had fantastic taste in music, so I was raised on Led Zeppelin, The Beatles, Stone Temple Pilots, Alice in Chains, and Soundgarden. I would have wanted to listen to that music whether my parents were listening to it or not. Once I got to London, it was a whole lot of different things. I discovered Fela Kuti and D'Angelo, and I found all kinds of music with rhythms that I couldn't understand and styles that I wasn't aware of. I started blending my parent's music and their influences into this giant musical world which is what led me to what I am today as a musician.

**MD:** What happened to all those influences when you got back to the States?

**JS:** I was a sophomore in high school when we got back to the States, at that point Indiana felt limiting and small. In London, I could take the train by myself and go anywhere. In Indiana, I couldn't even drive yet. I felt "house locked," so I was just shedding on the kit and having musicians come over to practice. It was all music until I graduated high school. I was playing in original bands, doing weekend shows, and trying to get some stable ground under my feet and find some form of success in Indiana. I had some great experiences. Once I graduated from

**Once I got to London, it was a whole lot of different things. I discovered Fela Kuti and D'Angelo, and I found all kinds of music with rhythms that I couldn't understand and styles that I wasn't aware of.**





high school, some of the bands I was playing with did the DIY tour thing. We were jumping in a 15 passenger Econoline van with 250,000 miles on it (and a lot of stuff wrong with it,) but I got to do the tour thing and see the humble origins of touring. Sometimes there would be eight people in the audience, and sometimes we wouldn't have a place to sleep afterwards, the band was splitting a Walmart sub for dinner and sleeping in the

**Early on, I was being taught and trained to chase playing professional baseball if I wanted to. I applied all the same things to learning the drums that I did when I was learning to be a pitcher.**

van in a Walmart parking lot. It was very humble origins, but I got the understanding of how the whole process works: getting to the venue, meeting the people, load in, doing the show, etc.... I was building the muscle memory of what a successful tour could be, I learned the groundworks of touring. I did that with original acts until I was 26. At that point, I started to feel a little claustrophobic in Indiana. At that point you're in your prime and I decided that it was time to move to where the machine was, and where there might be more opportunities for success.

I moved to Nashville in 2011 which turned out to be a pretty great time to move to Nashville. I could live in East Nashville for \$475 a month all in with utilities, it was a very fostering time to be in Nashville. I didn't have a lot to my name as a musician in town, but I got a job at Innovative Percussion drumstick company based in Nashville, and it felt like everything was

aligning. I moved into a city that I truly believed would have opportunities for me, I was working in the music industry, and I just started grinding. It was the longest, and most fun, three years of my life. I was just working my tail off playing with anyone that I connected with. It was actually the same thing that I did in Indiana. Very humble origins, playing with different original acts, and playing shows that didn't pack houses. But

I genuinely feel like all of that created the runway. Playing those shows that didn't have a lot of people created a lot of motivation. I feel like I had a huge advantage because I did the DIY touring from the ground up.

In 2014, I ended up getting recommended for the Sam Hunt gig that I'm currently doing. I am so grateful and fulfilled to be playing with a band that, from the very first show in 2014, was playing sold out shows. And it has remained that way for a decade plus.

**MD:** I know Sam almost became a pro football player, and you had an early love of baseball. Were there any similarities for you between playing baseball and playing drums?

**JS:** Early on, I was being taught and trained to chase playing professional baseball if I wanted to. I applied all the same things to learning the drums that I did when I was learning to be a pitcher. I learned how to be "all in," and that helped when I studied drumming. In baseball, the pitcher directs the flow of the game, all eyes are on you to start the action with every single pitch.

**MD:** That's what we do as drummers.

**JS:** Absolutely. Obviously, there's the teamwork aspect, the routine of continually doing (practicing) the same thing,





working with people to build knowledge to get you to the premier level. Drums and baseball have a direct correlation. When I left Indiana to go to England, all the things that I learned, and led me to do well in baseball, directly applied to the drums.

**My number one piece of advice for a musician, outside of moving to where the opportunities are, is telling the people that are doing what you want to do, in a polite and concise way, that you are open to any opportunities that they may hear about.**

It gave me a head start when it came to fitting in with a band, being a solid team player, and constantly working on technique. Today, I get the same thrill from drumming. When I was young, I always wanted to pitch in major league baseball stadiums,

**I was listening to Chris McHugh who was playing with Keith Urban at the time. He's a studio legend and I was keeping an eye on him and listening to what he was doing. I was listening to all of country radio at that time, I was doing my best to let my brain take in all the different players.**

now we're playing sold-out shows at Wrigley Field. Music has supplemented the original dream of baseball and became the secondary dream that ended up being the dream I truly wanted the whole time.

**MD:** When you got to Nashville, how did you start to play around town?

**JS:** I moved to Nashville with two of my Indiana Hoosier buddies that were moving there as well. One of them is a talented songwriter. So, I moved to Nashville with a community of super talented musicians who are very good human beings. From day one, we had a practice space, we were

writing original tunes, and we organized shows. I didn't have that "new guy in a big city, I'm lost, I don't know what to do" experience. I immediately had a great network of people, some that were local and some that had just moved there, and we

went really hard right off the bat. I was working, making \$8 an hour, and just grinding, but the moment I got out of work, it was drums and live music. I didn't have any off time, I was working to cover the

bills so I could do the thing that I wanted to do and doing that nonstop!

I played with one act for about a year and a half, and then I

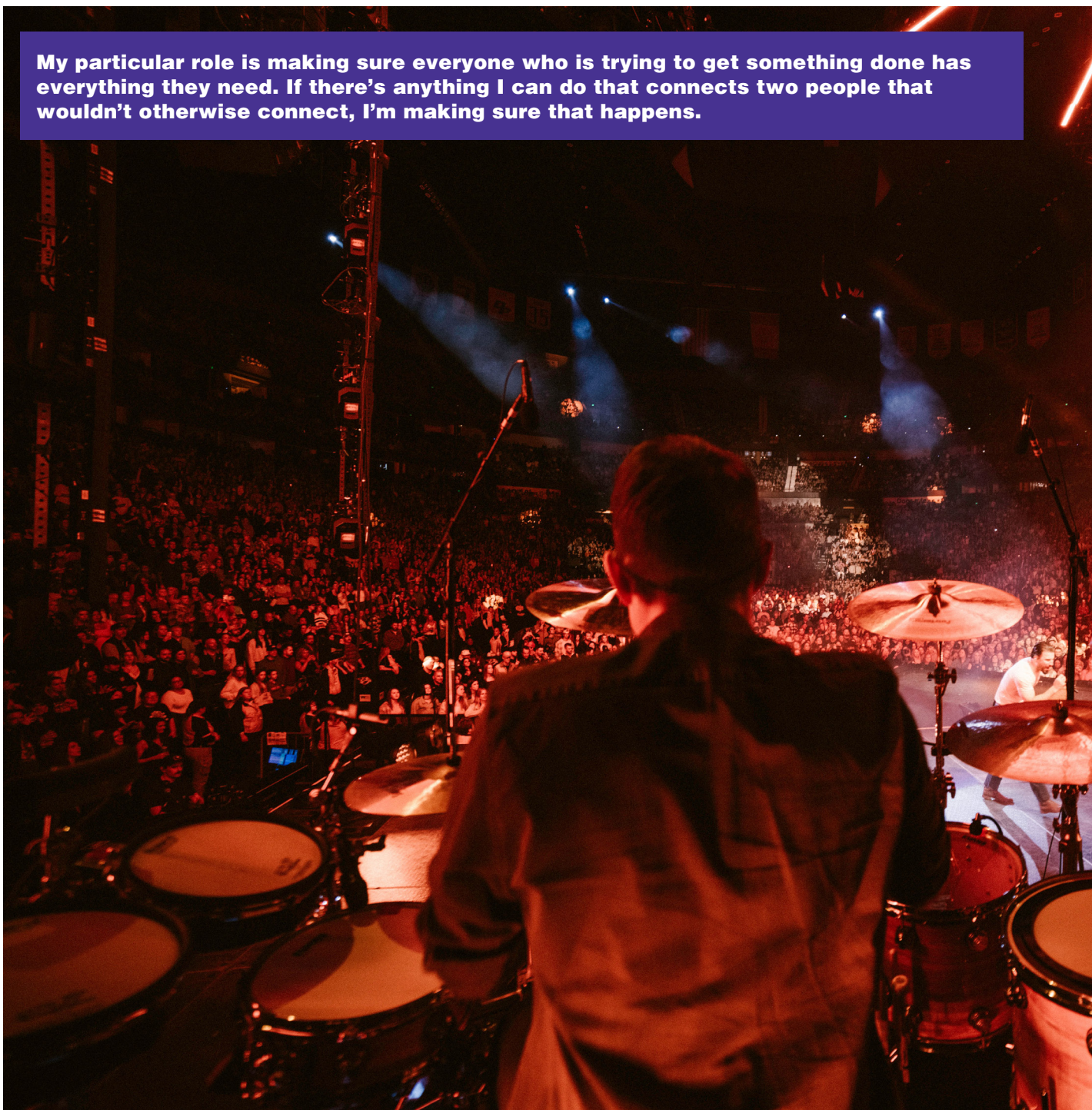




started jumping around to other acts that just needed someone to fill in. I finally started getting paid for playing drums. That was a huge thing because up until then I was doing it for “the love of the game” and for the experience. Early on, I was jumping between four or five different original acts, learning people’s whole catalog, and stepping in for another musician while trying to keep the musical level up. I was starting to learn some angles

**JS:** My number one piece of advice for a musician, outside of moving to where the opportunities are, is telling the people that are doing what you want to do, in a polite and concise way, that you are open to any opportunities that they may hear about. Telling them that will hopefully make your name ring a bell in their head. You want people to feel confident to say, “This person might be a good fit.” There’s a strategy and a certain way to do it.

**My particular role is making sure everyone who is trying to get something done has everything they need. If there’s anything I can do that connects two people that wouldn’t otherwise connect, I’m making sure that happens.**



of the industry that I had encountered before. Then, thanks to some friends from Indiana who had plugged into the scene and found some success, I started to have some success.

**MD:** What were the “angles of the industry” that you learned?

You don’t want to come off as desperate or needy, but if you do it in the right way, people will keep you in mind.

One of my good buddies Matt Juneau was touring with his band and Sam Hunt was opening for him. Sam didn’t have a drummer



or a bassist. It was Sam another guitarist and a tracks rig sitting on an ironing board on the stage. Sam's manager asked my buddy Matt if he knew anyone that plays drums that might be a good fit. Four months before, I had told Matt that I was actively looking for an opportunity and that it will mean a lot if you mention my name. And Matt told Sam's manager, "Josh Sales, give him a call." Now I'm eleven years deep in this gig, doing



everything I ever wanted to do, and a lot of things I couldn't have imagined. And it's because of that one conversation with Matt and putting it out to the world that I'm seeking this, I won't let you down if you mention my name, and I'll live up to the

recommendation.

**MD:** When you first got to Nashville, what drummers were you paying attention to in town, and what drummers were you aware of?

**JS:** Regarding the Nashville scene, I was listening to Chris McHugh who was playing with Keith Urban at the time. He's a studio legend and I was keeping an eye on him and listening to what he was doing. I was listening to all of country radio at that time, I was doing my best to let my brain take in all the different players. Therefore, any session player that was playing on the radio during the 2011 to 2014 era made an impact on me. Rich Redmond was playing all over with Jason Aldean and a lot of other people, it's disturbing how many massively talented musicians in Nashville. Many of them are people whose names you wouldn't even know, but I was mainly just letting my brain soak in the country music industry because that's where most of the opportunities are in Nashville.

Beyond that, I am also heavily influenced by a whole other side of the musical world too. Questlove's playing on the D'Angelo stuff, all the drummers that Robert Glasper had. That music was my vacation time of listening to music that I wanted to explore. That music has had a massive impact on the way that I think about drums.

**MD:** How so?

**JS:** With Questlove, it's not about hitting super hard, it's playing a very reliable pocket and focusing on a feel and a reliability. You don't even necessarily need a crash cymbal. It's just about serving and carrying the song. With country music there is that aspect, on some of the more subtle songs the drums aren't as much of a feature. It was cool to study some music that I could play with a kick, a snare, a hat, and that's it... while covering the song. In some circumstances it's a little harder to dial that in and have no distractions. It's a different muscle that can be applied to all genres of music.

Even his playing on Fallon is amazing. I have a I have an interesting story about that. I use Porter and Davies drum thrones which have the tactile response built in so you can feel the music. When we were playing the Fallon show for the second time, I'm sitting on my throne during the commercial break waiting to be announced and play. As I was watching the Roots play, I was hearing Questlove's drums through my in-ears and feeling his playing through my throne. The sound engineer must have routed his kick drum into my Porter and Davies, so I was feeling Questlove's playing through my throne, and it was the most magical thing very few people get to experience. As I was watching the Roots play, I'm sitting on my throne and getting this adrenaline-endorphin thing going on. That was such an honor because he's one of those players that I've been admiring my entire life, then I get to sit there and have his in-ear mix and his playing going through my throne... That's as close as I'll ever be to being Questlove, it was a pretty good day.

**MD:** What is your favorite Questlove record?

**JS:** Obviously all the Roots stuff, the Erykah Badu stuff, the Soulquarians stuff. I think my favorite Roots record is *Things Fall Apart*, and obviously the D'Angelo stuff.

**MD:** After Sam got rid of the tracks (and the ironing board) how did he make the adjustment to having a live drummer, and how has the gig evolved in the 11 years you have been there?

**JS:** When I got that call and I jumped in the room with the guys,



the manager was really pushing the fact that it was time to step up and get a drummer. They rented a pretty small room at SIR, and because it was a tiny room, I was matching the dynamic of the rest of the band and the room. They had their amps set to a certain level, and I was trying to blend into the mix properly, but it was such a small room, and they were not used to cymbals and rimshots, so they were a little overwhelmed even with me trying to blend and sit at the right level. I knew all the parts, I'd done all the homework, I went in there and played the songs and didn't have any hiccups or issues. Afterwards, I spoke with the manager, and he said I think we need to get you all in a bigger room. The next day they bumped us up to a bigger room and everyone was all smiles afterwards. So, in a way, I got set up a little bit, if I had not blended and played too loud, I could have lost that opportunity. But the next day, it went fantastic. The first show we played together in 2014 was completely sold

to being paid for doing this intensely special thing that I would have done for free anyway, has been amazing. I've had so much fun in my whole career with Sam, I would have done it for free, I'm glad I didn't have to, but just the fact that I'm getting paid now to do the thing that I was already doing, and happy doing is a huge thing!

In those early days, I did a lot of driving after playing the shows, you use a lot of energy doing those long drives after a gig. Since I had already done that, and I had gone through the perils of bad weather, long drives, and van breakdowns; I had seen that stuff before, and I was very prepared and much less shaken when things didn't go the way you hoped while on tour.

**MD:** Give me your best van breakdown story, everyone has one.

**JS:** In one of my early DIY touring days, we were in the absolute middle of nowhere in Midwest, out in the boondocks of Ohio, and the van broke down. You're half thinking, "Is this gonna be a *"the hills have eyes situation"* and I'm gonna get murdered in the middle of the night. The guys in the band didn't have AAA and they didn't have the money for a tow. Miraculously, a local pulls over and talks to some of the guys in the band that were very easy to connect with. They made friends quickly and those people took us in. We ended up at their old farm with our busted up and broken-down van. They rummaged through a junk pile to find an old piece to replace what was broken on our van while we're just sitting around. This was at the very start of smartphones and somehow, through their ingenuity, they put our broken van back together and we made the show. It always seemed to work out, we only had one time where the van broke down and we had to get rescued by one of the parents of the group, that's a pretty good track good for the three or four years of my DIY touring, but that stuff happens, and you just learn to deal with it. Therefore, later, when things don't go right, you don't get as shaken.



out, and the band was the same guys as it is now. There is a real brotherhood in this band. From the very beginning it felt as though all the tools that I had developed from the DIY touring days fully applied and gave me a lot of balance and strength. That strength led me to feeling comfortable in asking Sam to be the band leader and the music director, and he was gracious enough to allow me that privilege, and that's something I absolutely treasure. It has been fun to develop those muscles as well.

**MD:** How did your early DIY touring days help you prepare for your gig with Sam Hunt?

**JS:** The act, and the whole process of lugging your drums into the van, out of the van, setting them up, playing the show, and then tearing them down and putting them back in the van is (generally) the most caloric work of the band. When doing all of that for \$0.00, and for the love of it, thousands of times, led

**MD:** As Sam's musical director, are you involved in song writing?

**JS:** I'm blessed that Sam does call us to play on some cuts for the records. I've played on a couple of his bigger songs which is the primary reason I moved to Nashville, I wanted to play on songs and be a part of the energy of the genre.

**MD:** You are playing on a lot of Sam's hits.

**JS:** I know, I'm on a few of the hits and I'm really grateful for

**...when you have success with a producer there's a charm and an energy that carries over when you continue to work together. So Zach felt comfortable with me, and he gave me a call.**

that. Being on those songs will last a lifetime. Regarding the songwriting process itself, I love the situation we're in. Sam is the director of his entire vision, but he will pass ideas by us,



and when he's showing us songs, he will ask us if we have any suggestions. He'll take our opinions, and if he agrees with them, he will edit them in to get things closer to what we all feel is a quality song. I did the original band thing for a long time. The experiences I had in that context was very tumultuous and

**I ran into a philosophy called Stoicism which is very broad. It focuses a lot on things that happen to you, how you respond to them, and the control that you have over situations...I just look at what is the most efficient and intelligent way to manage something and flip the energy so it's not hitting me, I'm flipping it and putting the energy where it needs to go to get problems solved.**

stressful. Trying to get five people's egos and opinions into one functioning song is very difficult. It's nice that Sam is kind of headstrong, it's a blessing with him as the leader because he's not asking us for lyric ideas or bridge ideas. He's asking us if the energy is close to how we feel it should be, or if anything could be added. He'll ask if something is too big or too small— bigger picture questions. Importantly, he isn't letting us convolute the whole thing to where we break down and the song goes away. I've been through that with the original band thing, it gets non-productive really quick. I love that he's the leader, we're the structure, and we're keeping everything rock solid so he can let his musical vision move forward.

**MD:** On Sam's record *Montevallo* and *Southside* do you know how Sam determined which tracks you were going to play on the record?

**JS:** He has a vision, and the decision is based on the vibe of the song, or what he knows to be our strengths. Quite often, those decisions are producer based. When he works with one particular producer, I get called a lot, when he moves over to other producers, they have their own guys. That's how it goes, everyone has their guys. I'm fortunate enough not to have too much ego and let that affect me. I like having a balance of being able to be on some stuff and then learn from the drummers who record way more than me. There are some players on these songs that do three sessions a day everyday Monday through Friday and sometimes on the weekends. There's an art and a muscle that they have that you can't have as a full-time touring musician. I get an education through constantly learning new songs that I didn't cut.

**MD:** What have you learned from learning songs that drummers like Nir Z and Chris McHugh have cut?

**JS:** I notice the dynamics a lot. They are subtle masters of making the chorus pop, having verse sit in the right way, and having the bridge push and give the song some energy. That is a really subtle thing, but after studying those parts, I play the songs differently. For example, on Sam's song called "23" I hear what the drummer did on that song and because of that, I am pulling back very quietly in the verses, I take their lead on the decisions they made and apply them to the song. It's valuable information, and it comes from years of studying their process. Another big one is the openness of some of their fills. I really love when you don't play every 16th note in a fill, those guys will play some wide-open

fills with a lot of space and let the percussion and the rest of the instrumentation fill in the rest of the space. That's a valuable lesson. They build ideas around space.

**MD:** Are you guys playing to a click or loops live?

**JS:** Yes, we have never not played to a click live. Every band that I have ever played with has played live with a click. Sometimes it's been by my own choice, and sometimes it's been a group decision. I like the feel of just playing the music organically without the click, but regarding recreating the energy of the song and having it be rock solid and reliable (and with guitar effects and tones) the click helps everyone's muscle memory. I have been playing to a click track nonstop since I was 17, I never knew

anything different, so when I jumped in with Sam it was just like breathing, it's totally normal.

**MD:** What click sound and rhythm do you like?

**JS:** I'm not super picky, maybe once or twice I've asked for a sound to be changed, but whatever the stock one that they threw in when I first joined up with Sam is fine. I just get it to the DB level that sits with the mix and I'm good. I'm not a I'm not a cowbell guy so I know what I *don't like*. For fast songs I like eighth notes, for really slow songs I'll subdivide more and do sixteenths. But I'm good with eighths most of the time, quarters depending if it sits at a certain spot on the on the BPM.

**MD:** What are some of your favorite songs to play with Sam, and why?

**JS:** Sam has a song called "Ex To See" that is fun to play, but



we ended up having a giant remix done. The remix is very bombastic, filled with energy, very big, and there's a drum feature section in it so I really enjoy that one. I like playing "House Party" because I cut that song. I wrote that beat from the ground up, it's really fun and has a lot of pocket. The audience always responds to that. When I play that song, it feels like I'm



producing the thing that I came to Nashville to do. I'm playing the part that I wrote that's on the record and that everyone has heard, and I get to play it live. That's rewarding every time.

**MD:** How did you wind up playing on Dustin Lynch's record's *Current Mood* and *Tullahoma*?

**JS:** That ties into the producer calling the people that he's comfortable with. Zach Crowell was the producer for all of Sam's *Montevallo*, and when you have success with a producer there's a charm and an energy that carries over when you continue to work together. So Zach felt comfortable with me, and he gave me a call. I did a few different sessions that resulted in me playing on four or five of Dustin's songs, and two of those became number ones. It was just fantastic getting to work with Zach. That that was when I started to get into the room with the other session players in town that were the guys that were there every day doing three sessions a day and seeing how they work. It was a fantastic opportunity; I've learned so much from being in the same room with Zach and the musicians he chooses.

**MD:** What have you learned from Zach?

**JS:** He has a great casualness; he knows if something is working or not, he doesn't overthink things. He did something that I really love. He had Sam's whole band come in at the tail end of the recording and do the fun environment noise behind the songs. We did the gang vocals, and we were genuinely laughing, being brothers, hooting and hollering while we were doing the gang vocals. It's a subconscious thing that I'm sure a lot of people do but getting to see it work and the strategy and the decision behind it is much different than just hearing it in the track. It has this subconscious energy that makes people want to feel that way too. It's cool just seeing the little magic tricks that you might not pick out unless you really were listening closely, or you were in the room.

**MD:** Do you know what Zach likes about working with you?

**JS:** To be honest, I think he likes that I'm not the standard *go in and I hit exactly what's expected session guy*. I'm a live player. Sam was the disruptor in the industry, he came in and just completely changed the view and the angle of country music. And I was doing that with the session stuff. With "House Party" they had originally cut it with a session guy on drums, but while we were touring the song, I had already written my own version of the drum part. Sam played us the recorded version in rehearsals, and everyone was listening and one of the guitarists said, "I like your part better" in front of Zach. That was what got me my first cut with Sam. I was already playing the song and I was doing it my way. My energy, not being from Nashville and being very

eclectic musically, led to a more exciting drum part that made the cut. So, I think Zach likes that I'm not one of those guys that's going to come in and play the part that people would expect me to play, even if it's the most professional dialed in part. I have my own tastes and flavors; I think that's why he calls me.

**MD:** What's the difference between being a live guy and a studio guy?

**JS:** In my opinion, they're completely different dynamics. In the studio you're playing to the mics a lot more and the mics are significantly higher end. Quite often the musicians are in the room with you and their ears are also on the line with how hard you're playing the cymbals. Live, the front of house engineer can turn your overheads down and there's a performative aspect. Live, you might be a little more animated because you're trying

to give the audience a show. You don't have to do that in a session, the main thing in a session is dynamics and space because the drums are such a building block thing on a recording. Playing live there's so much grace, it's organic, and as long as you're playing the parts and not being disturbingly undynamic or animalistic on the drums in a way that hurts the mix, you can get away with a lot more.

**MD:** Are you working on a new Sam Hunt record?

**JS:** Yes, he has so many good songs from before the *Montevallo* era, but he's so particular about his songs and what part of his life they represent. Being honest, a lot of the songs that we've been wishing that he would put out from way back in the day, just aren't where he is now. He's working hard with a lot of the songwriters that he's had success with in the past, as well as some new ones, to put together a new album. I'm really excited that his current single called "Country House" just jumped into the top five at country radio. We're all so

excited and supportive of him because through the 11-12 years that we've known him, and all the things we've gone through, he's still putting out music that is at the same level or stronger due to his life experiences, it's cool to see high quality songs from Sam coming from a totally different inspiration base.

**MD:** Have you been Sam's musical director since day one?

**JS:** When I first joined there was kind of acclimation period. But this ties into my advice of asking for what you want and putting it out there. I think people respect when you are confident and politely ask for something that you want, or you ask for the opportunity to eventually move towards that opportunity. Within the first 6 months of jumping on with Sam, I sat down and told Sam, "No one has the musical director role right now, and it would be a great honor if you would give me the chance to fill that role. I've spent my entire life building the tools to do that job." In the same conversation I told him, "It's a goal for me *not* to have too much ego involved in this, if you think I'm doing





a fantastic job, great. But, if for any reason down the line, you don't think I'm cutting it, I want you to have someone step in and do the job." It was a no pressure offer of, "I think I could do great at this, I'd like an opportunity, and there will be no tension down the line if you want to go in a different direction." Eleven years later, I'm still being offered that opportunity and I cherish it.

**I'm a huge nature person and being on stage in front of thousands of people with crazy lights and pyro is the opposite of the natural world, but those beautiful wood drum veneers give me a reminder of the place that I love the most outside of being on stage, which is out in nature.**

**MD:** Tell us about how you approach the job of an MD?

**JS:** Some MDs are hyper involved. If you are playing with an artist who changes details every single show, whether it's track space with Ableton or Pro Tools, editing things, communicating with the players, or writing out charts. With those acts the MD is super involved, it's a heavy-handed role every single day. I'm lucky, for me it's about building communication within the band, especially if you're bringing in other players. I must make sure that everyone feels comfortable and has all the ammunition and information they need to do well. I see myself as more of a connector to the entire organism. If anything needs to be done, even if it's not necessarily my role, I'm going to make sure that the connection is made, double tapped, and things are flowing and being taken care of, no matter what. My particular role is making sure everyone who is trying to get something done has everything they need. If there's anything I can do that connects two people that wouldn't otherwise connect, I'm making sure that happens. My main thing is the information connection and making sure that if Sam or management wants something, we have it covered.

**MD:** Where does your absolute lack of ego come from?

**JS:** It would be foolish to say that I have zero ego, because that's

impossible. It definitely flares up when a tour starts, and you are performing in front of the audience. Then it goes away almost completely when I'm off tour. In my downtime I find myself not remembering things that I've accomplished when I'm not on tour I'm just a human that's existing day-to-day. I'm the oldest in my family, I have a younger brother and sister. I've always had a responsibility with them as the big brother where I'm just

reliable. I'm not going to be the guy that acts up and gets angry and starts a fight. I'm not going to be the person that blows up emotionally. I'm very stable. You can throw a lot of stuff at me, but I'm generally gonna be the same person all the time. I ran into a philosophy called *Stoicism* which is very broad. It focuses a lot on things that happen to you, how you respond to them, and the

control that you have over situations. From the things that I've read, through stoicism I've found that 99% of the things that you encounter aren't things that you have control over, and all you really have is your response to those situations. I genuinely think that helps me a lot. There could be chaos and stressful things that need to get done, but I don't take it personally, I just look at what is the most efficient and intelligent way to manage something and flip the energy so it's not hitting me, I'm flipping it and putting the energy where it needs to go to get problems solved.

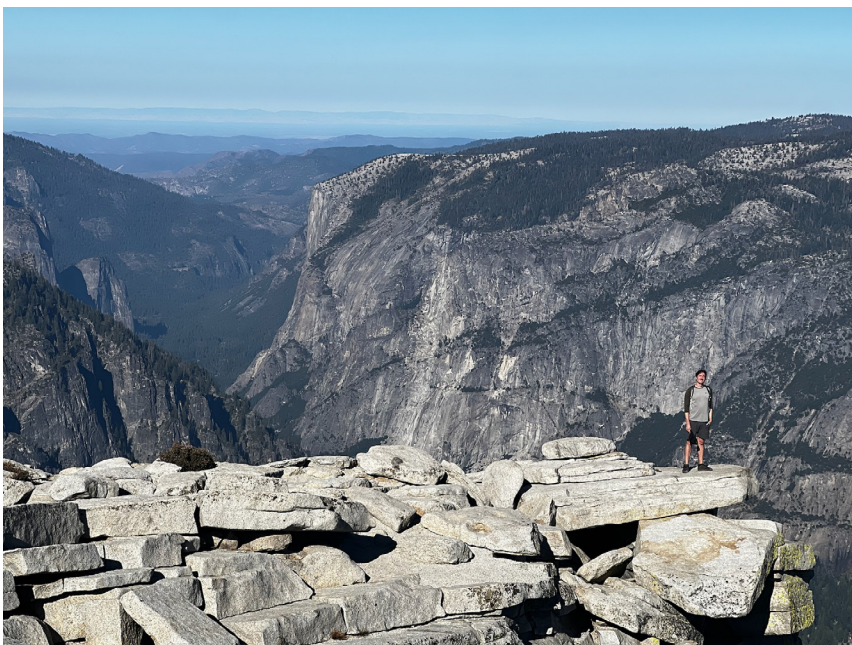
**MD:** What kind of drums and cymbals are you using?

**JS:** I was really close with Johnny Craviotto when he was alive, and I used his drums for a long time, he would come out to shows. I played Craviotto from 2012 to 2015. Our first major tour was with Lady Antebellum, and Hunter Hayes and both those drummers played Craviotto as well. I never officially endorsed Craviotto I just played them because I loved them. But we got to a certain point, and I was thinking big picture about the availability and support service. DW drums were always the drums that I lusted after when I was a child, they were the drums that I enjoyed playing the most growing up, so it was one of those things where I was just biding my time until I made a connection and a friendship with the guys at DW.

In 2015 I reached out to Garrison because things were firing on all cylinders on my end. I told them my story, which is the same with ProMark and Zildjian. Zildjian was the first cymbal I ever hit, DW drums for the first drums that I really fell in love with, so I reached out to Garrison and jumped on with them. You can quote me on this, I'm a lifer with my gear I'm not a shifty jumping from one brand to another type of guy. All my companies are companies that I'll be with for the rest of my life.

**MD:** What DW drums are you playing?

**JS:** I have a Maple SSC Collector's kit with an exotic wood finish. I'm a complete sucker for the any of the exotic wood finishes, I'm a huge nature person and being on stage in front of thousands of people with crazy lights and pyro is the opposite of the natural world, but those beautiful wood drum veneers give me a reminder of the place that I love the most outside of being on stage, which is out in nature. I'm playing





a seven-piece Collectors kit and I have some Roland triggers set up to trigger direct sounds from the record. Early in my career I was throwing some crazy and random sounds in that added to the show, but now it's a little more streamlined and it's just replication of the record. I play a 16x22 kick drum an 8x10, 9x12, 12x14 and 14x16, so it's just two up two down. I have two of the same snare drums which are 6 1/2x 14 DW titanium snare drums, one is tuned up into the crackier range, and one is tuned lower in kind of a "gush" sound, and I have a popcorn snare to the left which is 5x12.

**MD:** Are you a snare drum guy?

**JS:** YES! I am in a massive Brady phase; I have many Brady snare drums, and I love them so much. I love the Australian hardwoods. I got pretty competitive with getting ahold of them in the era when you could buy them for \$750 or \$1000, so I stocked up. I have multiple different block drums in many different woods like Jarrah and Sheoak, and some of the rarer exotic wood ones as well. I'm such a wood guy, I do like metal drums as well, there's a reason the Supraphonic is the most used snare drum. But I'm way into Craviotto and Brady drums for the wood stuff.

**MD:** What is your favorite Craviotto snare?

**JS:** I have an 8x14 walnut snare that tunes really beautifully and fat, you could leave the same head on it the rest of the rest

of) dent as opposed to splinter. But the Oak also sends shock into your wrists to absorb quite a bit That's why I switched to Hickory. It's not something you think about when you're 18 or 20 but as you get a little bit older, I decided to swap over, and I noticed immediately. At the end of the shows, I didn't have any of those effects and feeling in my wrists that I was feeling with Oak, so it's been a nice upgrade to hickory. For heads I use Evans G2 Coated over G1's and a heavyweight head on my gush fat snare. I use an EMAD2 on the kick and a standard G2 coated on my main and popcorn snares. Why fix it if it works? For me, those particular heads sound so classic, and they hold up well. I do use an Emad Tom head on my 16. It gives me a pseudo kick sound, a very low-end thump, so I don't need a gong bass drum. They sound great, but I'm not a big kit guy, so that 16" floor tom with an Emad head gives me what I'm looking for without having to add a whole other drum.

**MD:** What are some of your favorite drum and music records that have influenced you the most?

**JS:** I'm widely eclectic I like jazz, dub, Afro Cuban, any African based stuff, the origin of our instrument connects to everything more than we give it credit for. I would have to say John Coltrane *A Love Supreme*, either of the early D'Angelo records, Robert Glasper *Black Radio* and the *Robert Glasper Experiment*, Led Zeppelin 3, The Beatles *Rubber Soul*, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Billy Cobham *Spectrum*, anything Jeff Porcaro played on from

**I value feel and sound first, but freedom and creativity are a very close second. Being able to play what you hear and do things that are a little avant-garde has a lot of value to me as well.**

of your life, it just sounds like a record when you hit it. That's definitely my favorite. I also have a 6 1/2 Maple that I've used on a lot of sessions that is tuned more mid-rangey. They just sing so beautifully.

**MD:** Give me a few snare drum *wildcards*?

**JS:** I have an 8" and a 6 1/2" Zilkova, I really like the hollowed-out tree idea and sound. They are so responsive it's almost disturbing. You have to be so deadly accurate with your ghost notes and your buzz rolls with those drums. The 6 1/2 feels like more of a more "broad use" drum though. Of course, I have a Supraphonic from the 70s, and with that or a Black Beauty, it's the same story— you can have of dingy old head on it, and it sounds like a rock record.

**MD:** What cymbals are you using?

**JS:** I'm a Zildjian guy, mostly the K Sweets. I am using them all around, my hi-hats are 15's, 18" and 19" left to right for crashes, a 21" K Sweet Ride, and I use a 20" Oriental Crash of Doom to the right. I absolutely love that cymbal. I have two little stack effect cymbals that I use just for articulated accent fun stuff in between the notes. I just saw the new Kerope's that were just released and haven't had a chance to listen to them in person, but from some of the videos, I really am hoping to try out one or two of those as well. I played 16" hi-hats for a while, and I still love those to death, I like how they sit under the vocal and are a little more fat, but there's a lot of articulated stuff going on in Sam's music, so I jumped to 15's to find the middle ground between the articulation and the under the vocal fatness.

I'm playing ProMark 5B Hickory Rebound, I have used Oak sticks my whole life because I like the way that they hold up, they (kind

his whole discography. Jeff's feel and his touch on all the Toto records is amazing, then I'll throw in Vinnie's playing on the live Karizma record called *Document*. That just such a fun album. I value feel and sound first, but freedom and creativity are a very close second. Being able to play what you hear and do things that are a little avant-garde has a lot of value to me as well. From the drum side of things, I really like Hiatus Kaiode, his drum parts are so creative. I like everything that Yussef Dayes has done, and I love Yussef Kamaal's *Black Focus* record. That record sounds so classic and timeless that I can't believe it came out in the last 10 years. That sounds like a record that has been alive forever.

**MD:** What are you practicing right now?

**JS:** I've been working on the *GaddimENTS* book a lot because flams are something that I always can work on. The Colin Bailey *Bass Drum Control* book. I've been using that for my feet because I found that triple strokes at higher BPM's are almost like a stutter for me, so I am starting them really slow and building then up so I have a more fluent vocabulary with my feet. I have been spending a lot of time with all the Rick Latham books, and the Time Functioning part of the Gary Chaffee books is a complete gold mine! The scariest thing I have started working on is Gary Chester's *New Breed*— dear Lord!

**MD:** Any advice for young drummers?

**JS:** I already mentioned how important I think it is to *actually* come out and ask for what you want. But it's also so important to move to a place where opportunities are more likely. That is super important, and those are the two keys to me talking to you and being in the fortunate position that I am today.

In a much bigger picture, be a good person, make as many good



**...chasing down being the best version of yourself is something you can stand on that makes everything else you do, including play music and drums, much easier and better.**

decisions as you can, those things snowball. It's very virtuous to just say that, but everyone makes mistakes, and humans are human. But if you can make a habit of making good decisions and building on those decisions, that relieves anxiety and makes you a person people want to be around. In general, good decisions make you feel good about who you are. I would tell people to chase down trying to be the best version of yourself as you can.

**MD:** But how do you learn how to be the best version of yourself?

**JS:** By making mistakes and seeing how they make you feel. That's a big one. I've made my fair share, don't be afraid to make mistakes, if you're such a perfectionist that you're unwilling to make mistakes, you're going to be stuck in one place for the rest of your life. You gotta break out of the shell, trip and fall, and make mistakes. But chasing down being the best version of yourself is something you can stand on that makes everything else you do, including play music and drums, much easier and better.

**MD:** What else do you do beside play music and drums?

**JS:** My balance to the chaotic life that is touring, and live shows

is nature, camping, and hiking. I'm a big advocate for our National Park system. That is the polar opposite of being on stage. Walking around a beautiful lake and seeing a bald eagle or camping out and listening to a waterfall next to you balances me in a way that it feels like a cheat code.

**MD:** What are two or three your favorite national parks?

**JS:** That like naming your favorite Beatles album—it's not easy! I'll say Grand Teton National Park, the Hawaii National Volcanoes on the Big Island, and Big Bend down in Texas. They all are on the same level of beauty but those three are reliably ones that I'll visit over and over again.





# ANNA MYLEE:

## CREATING HER OWN VOICE BEHIND THE DRUMS

BY JOHN GLOZEK, JR.



Photo by Pam Mastrototaro

Anna Mylee started her musical career in her native Belgium at the age of 14 when she started touring the country with several musical projects. At the age of 18, she moved to London to study at Tech Music School (currently BIMM London). Quickly after graduating, Anna started touring with various English projects both nationally and internationally. In 2015, Anna crossed the pond to Los Angeles to study with renowned drummers such as Kenny Aronoff, Mark Schulman, and Bruce Becker. These lessons developed and deepened her knowledge about music psychology, practice efficiency, and especially the Moeller technique. At that time, she also recorded an album alongside Mark Schulman and Julian Coryell before heading back to Europe in 2016.

Since her return to the UK in 2017, she has toured Europe and the UK with her bands Crimson Veil, DORJA and Birdeatsbaby as well as doing sessions for other rock and metal bands throughout the years.

Currently Anna is working on a new project with Exometry, a prog metal trio band from the UK and Belgium. Anna has also developed a specialized teaching practice for intermediate and advanced students looking to improve their hand technique and creativity around the drum kit.

Through giving masterclasses at places such as the Royal College of Music (London,) touring, and posting instructional material on various social media platforms, she has developed quite a following on social media. Anna has now gained an international reputation within the drumming community, mostly for her progressive playing and exploration of odd time signatures.





Photo by Pam Mastrotoaro



**MD:** Let's start way back. What inspired you or who inspired you to take up the drums?

**AM:** I've been asking myself that question for a long time now. I think I've come up with two answers. One that is very early on was my dad being a guitar player, as long as I can remember I would go to see him perform at concerts. I know I was tiny, and I was asleep by the middle of the performance most of time. I can remember only listening to the drums. I said to my mom, I can't hear dad. I can't hear dad playing the guitar. He's not loud enough. And she said, no, he's loud. I was like, no, I can only hear the drums. I guess I was always drawn to it, but the drummer who inspired me to take up the drums was Dave Grohl.

**MD:** So that came much later.

**AM:** Yes. I was learning a bit of guitar at the time, and I found

**When I didn't know how to play something, I would just listen to it again and again, and try to work it out. That's how I would learn things at first.**

16. There were no drum teachers around where I lived. My dad helped me out with a little bit listening and just trying to reproduce what I could hear in songs and making it work behind the drums. When I didn't know how to play something, I would just listen to it again and again, and try to work it out. That's how I would learn things at first. Obviously, I had a bad technique, but I had a really good ear. I couldn't really read music either. When I met my teacher Davide Zecca at a music camp during the summer here in Belgium, I learned a bit more technique and reading. I was 15 or 16, he not only gave me my first lessons, but he encouraged me like no one could have at the time. He said to me, what do you want to do when you're older? What do you want to do professionally? I told him that ideally, I'd love to be a musician, but I know it's not going to be possible. I had it stuck in my head that it was never going to be possible. I was a young woman in a lost place in Belgium and I couldn't speak English. Furthermore, in Belgium there's not a booming



it a bit boring, but I was interested in music. I just found guitar boring, then I saw a live DVD performance of Nirvana and I saw Dave Grohl behind the drums having the time of his life, and he was wild. I thought, wow, that looks like so much fun. That is the seat I want. I don't care about guitar, playing drums is what I want to do.

**MD:** So Dave Grohl was an early influence, and then I'm guessing you started taking lessons. Who were some of your early instructors?

**AM:** I was actually self-taught for the longest time. I started playing drums when I was 11, and I think my very first drum lesson was when I was 15. I had regular lessons when I was

music industry. But I had that fixation as a young woman that I was not going to be as good as anybody else. I had it in my head that it was the dream I was never going to reach. Davide said, "Well of course it's possible, I'll help you out." And just those words destroyed all my beliefs that I had said to myself. I started taking lessons with him for a couple of years, and he helped me enter the university in London.

**MD:** While you were taking lessons with Davide, were there certain books you worked from? Were you working out of the most popular drum books at the time, or maybe some books that we've never even heard of?

**AM:** That's a good question. I think most of the things he gave



me were books that were not so famous, and not so well known. There were a few patterns, and some jazz coordination exercises. I'm unsure which book he took those exercises from, but they were good. I still have the copies at home, but I'm not entirely sure if he wrote them himself or just copied stuff from other books. I think the only famous book we worked on was *Syncopation*. That is the big classic. And we also worked on *Stick Control*, of course!

**MD:** After working with him for a few years, when did your dream finally become a reality?

**AM:** It's still becoming a reality. I live it every day. But as soon as he said it was possible, I lived that whole experience in a different way. I was already on my journey.

**MD:** When did the journey take you to the United States? In the States didn't you work with and study with some famous drummers?

**AM:** My first step was London, and for someone who grew up in a tiny village in Belgium, that was a massive step. Davide helped me enter the university in London where I did a degree in popular music performance, then I stayed in London because at least I had work there. I didn't go back to Belgium. Then, I met someone who gave me the opportunity to work alongside him in Los Angeles and I took the opportunity! I stayed in the U.S. for 10 months and studied, but I also recorded an album alongside Mark Schulman and Julian Coryell in Venice Beach.

That was my first professional studio experience. Before that, it was just small productions. I couldn't stay in the US more

**I never wanted to play and tour someone else's drum parts. I was not interested in that. I would rather play small gigs, but I want to play my parts. I want to create them, and I want to play what I create. With this band, it is exactly that.**



Photo by Davor Birt

**We wrote this new Crimson Veil album during the pandemic, and we felt like it was something new. It was a brand-new sound. And they wanted to go a little bit more metal.**

than 10 months because of visa issues. As we know, it's always the issue... So, I went back to Belgium for a year and eventually discovered that London is where I belonged. So I went back to London in 2018 and stayed until 2024. I've now moved back to Belgium.

**MD:** You've brought us up to current day and you're about to go on tour.

**AM:** Yes.

**MD:** You've toured before. Tell me about your band, the concept of the band, and how do you feel about touring?

**AM:** I'm going to go on tour with my band, Crimson Veil. I joined them in 2019 at the release of their latest album and I toured with them. They were a nice bunch of people, so why not stay, but then the pandemic hit. So essentially, I only did one tour with them as our old project called Birdeatsbaby. We wrote this new album during the pandemic, and we felt like it was something new. It was a brand-new sound. And they wanted to go a little bit more metal. Both things made it sound completely different than what they were doing before. And we got signed with a label with this new project. We decided to start fresh and start under a new name called Crimson Veil. So, this is our debut album under that new name, and we are writing our new album, while we're still touring the first one. We are supporting Combi Christ on their European tour.

Touring was always my dream. I always just wanted to tour. Mark Schulman said to me, "Be very specific about what you want from your dreams. The more



Photo by Davor Birt

©Davor Birt



specific you are, the more you can adjust your journey, get to the right place, not get lost along the way, and maybe lose time, be disappointed, or end up in the place you didn't want to be." I never wanted to play and tour someone else's drum parts. I was not interested in that. I would rather play small gigs, but I want

**To be playing your own weird drum parts and weird music, with weird band mates who happen to be super lovely, is amazing every night. We have a great time!**

to play my parts. I want to create them, and I want to play what I create. With this band, it is exactly that. This band and this music feel amazing. To be playing your own weird drum parts and weird music, with weird band mates who happen to be super lovely, is amazing every night. We have a great time!

**MD:** You made me think of two questions, you talk about your creative side. What music do you listen to? What gets your creative juices flowing?

**AM:** I don't necessarily listen to the style of music I play. I mean, obviously I do listen to a lot of proggy music, so that's one thing, but not necessarily the prog I play. For example, my favorite band is Toto. But I also love folk music and acoustic bands like Bon Iver, Ben Howard, and Tracy Chapman, they are all very talented artists. I've always loved that (kind of) chilled music. I also love the funk, fusion, and happy vibes played by talented bands like Dirty Loops, Vulfpeck,

and Snarky Puppy. Then there's the dark progressive part of me, which is more into bands like Tool, Wheel, Opeth, and Porcupine Tree. I absolutely love Steven Wilson and everything he does. Listening to a wide array of great musicians is what inspires me the most.

**MD:** You post quite a bit of creative instruction material on social media.

**AM:** Yes.

**MD:** Let me ask you, why?

**AM:** Social media can be a weird and very tricky place for a musician to navigate. I think it's so easy to get stuck in the wrong direction with it. I never found much interest in just showing off on social media just playing covers or someone else's parts just to say, "Hey, I can play this." I don't feel good posting that kind of content. I don't see why it would be a good thing for my followers. When I give lessons to my students, I don't like to tell them exactly what to do. I like to give them tools and directions, and hints on how to use those tools. What's very important is that they use those tools themselves to come up with things

**I don't necessarily listen to the style of music I play. I mean, obviously I do listen to a lot of proggy music, so that's one thing, but not necessarily the prog I play. For example, my favorite band is Toto.**

that I wouldn't have discovered. I remember having issues with fills, I asked some teachers (that I'm not going to name,) "How do I get unstuck from always playing the same fills?" And they said, "Well, I'm just going to play you a few fills, you can just remember them, and then you can play them."



Photo by Davor Birt



For me, this is giving a fish to someone instead of teaching them how to fish. It's like, great, I'll copy those two fills and in two months' time I'm in the same place again. That's not what I was looking for, and I don't want to be that teacher to my students and my followers. So how do I find my ideas? There's nothing better than just having tools. The reason I like to post on social media is to present tools that will open a new way of thinking for the people watching. Then they can experiment behind the kit themselves. I greatly prefer to inspire people than to show off for my own ego...

**MD:** Speaking of inspiring, and we had talked about this in a previous conversation, but at one point you had met Dom Famularo and you said he inspired you. How did he inspire you

and what do you remember about meeting him?

**AM:** It was very brief. Unfortunately, he was very busy. It was at a UK drum show in Manchester. Obviously, everyone wanted to talk to him. He didn't necessarily inspire me when I met him because we didn't say much. But he gave a very positive vibe. When someone like Dom just wants to give positive vibes to everyone around them – it's inspiring. He was always smiling and enjoying what he was doing, enjoying the music, and being creative. It is wonderful to meet someone like Dom because it's very rare nowadays.

Another great example of someone who seems to be very similar in that way, and someone whose videos I love watching, is Bob Ross. He's so positive and he's so inspiring.

**I never found much interest in just showing off on social media just playing covers or someone else's parts just to say, "Hey, I can play this." I don't feel good posting that kind of content.**

**MD:** Yes, it is. What would you like to accomplish as a player and in your career?

**AM:** I was never interested in being famous because I don't think fame is a very positive aspect in people's life. When they have it, it's hard to deal with it. My goal has always been to create and share what I create. The top of my ambition would be to be respected within my field and create something new and unique. When I listen to some drummers playing progressive rock or metal, I can usually tell who is playing the drums. Drummers like Gavin Harrison, Danny Carey, Marco Minneman, Mike Portnoy, they have their signature sound and voice behind the drums. No two drummers sound like them. This is what I am working on, I'm working on creating my own signature sound.



Photo by Pam Mastrototaro





# Billy Cobham "Quadrant 4" from the Billy Cobham recording *Spectrum*

Transcription by Marc Atkinson

Let's rewind to October 3rd, 1973—the day *Spectrum* by the legendary Billy Cobham hit the world. Recorded in just three days, the album captures a raw, live energy, with most tracks laid down in only one or two takes. That urgency and spontaneity shine through in every performance, showcasing Cobham's unmatched technical brilliance.

While the entire album is a landmark in fusion history, the opening track, "Quadrant 4," deserves special attention. This explosive groove takes the essence of a shuffle, slams down the gas pedal, and drives it through two bass drums at breakneck speed. That's right—the quarter note clocks in at 242 BPM. The power, control, and precision it demands are staggering—and

Billy delivers it all with jaw-dropping ease.

At the time, it was unlike *almost* anything anyone had ever heard. Yes, Cactus' "Parchman Farm" was recorded in 1970 with Carmine Appice playing a mean double bass drum shuffle, but "Quadrant 4" pushed the boundaries even further, and continued to inspire generations of players, influencing iconic tracks like Van Halen's *Hot for Teacher*.

If you're brave enough to take this one on, take your time and be patient. You'll need stamina, focus—and maybe bring an extra pair of sneakers... because this groove just might burn holes in your shoes!

## QUADRANT 4

♩=242

INTRO

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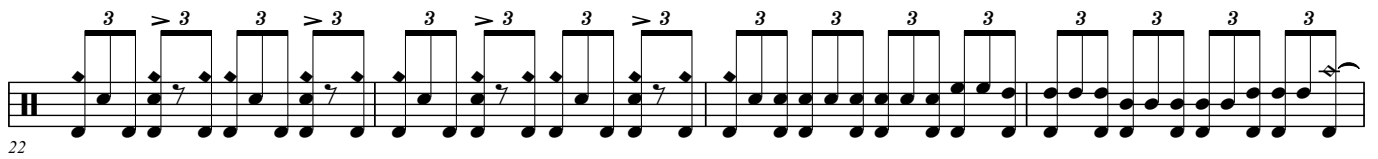
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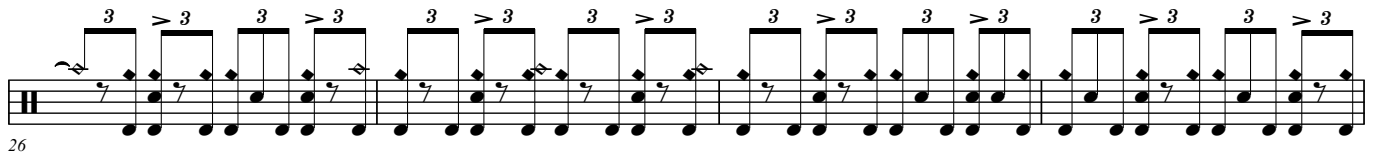
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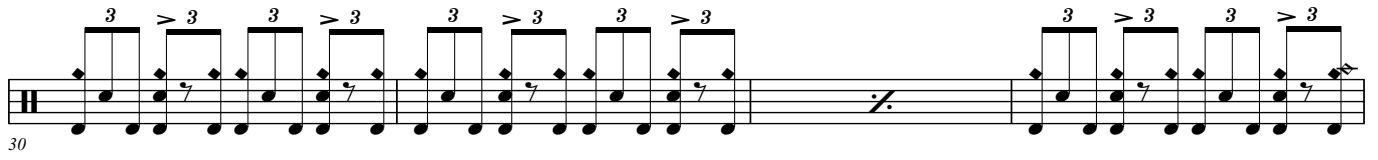
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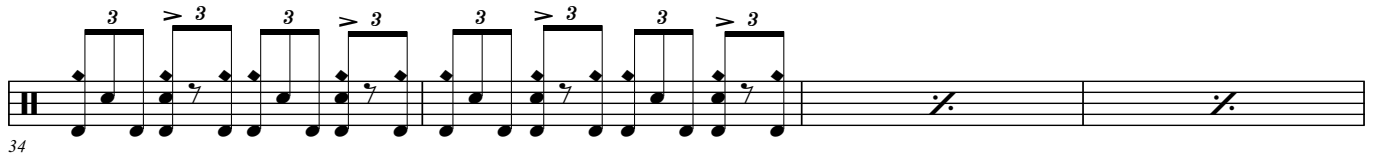
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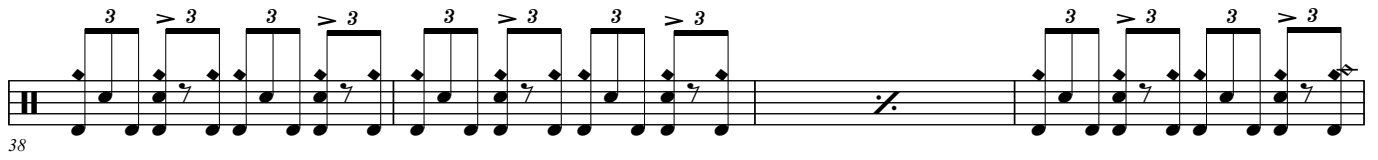
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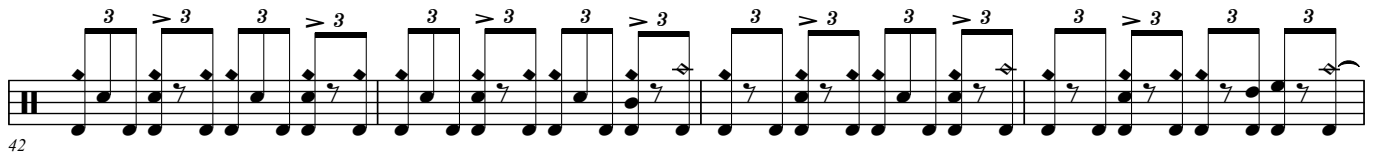
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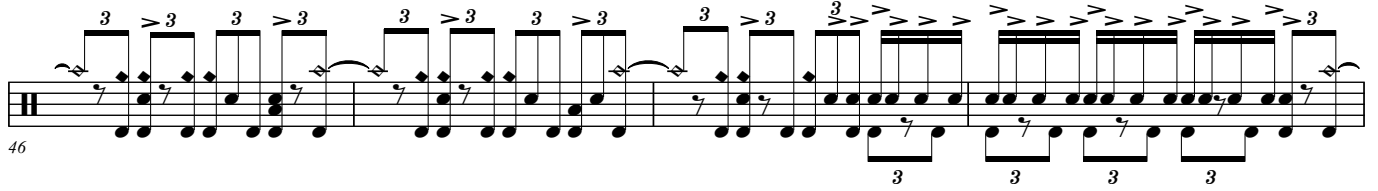
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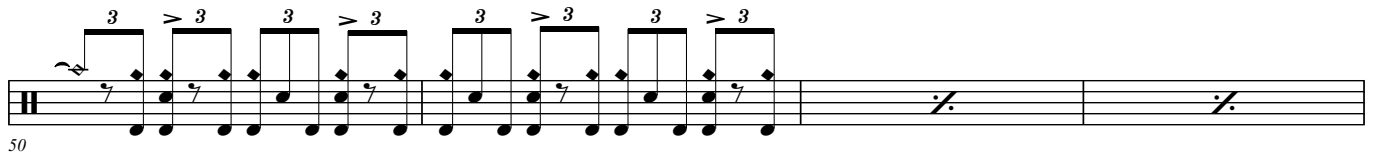
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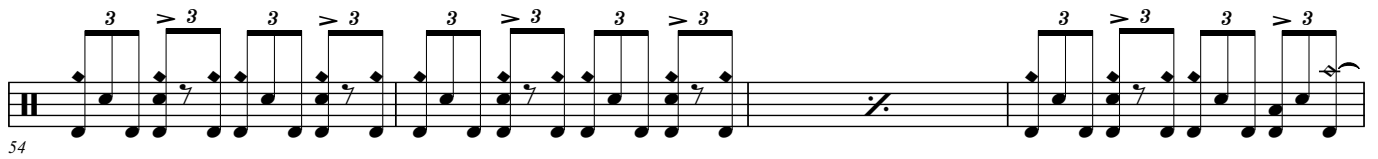
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MELODY 74

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94

Musical staff 94-97: Four measures of music. Measures 94-96 each contain two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'. Measure 97 contains four groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'.

98

Musical staff 98-101: Measures 98-100 each contain two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'. Measure 101 contains two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3', followed by a double bar line and a repeat sign.

102

Musical staff 102-105: Measures 102-103 each contain two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'. Measure 104 contains two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3', followed by a double bar line and a repeat sign. Measure 105 contains four groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'.

*GUITAR SOLO*

106

Musical staff 106-109: Measures 106-108 each contain two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'. Measure 109 contains two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3', followed by a double bar line and a repeat sign.

110

Musical staff 110-113: Measures 110-111 each contain two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'. Measure 112 contains two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3', followed by a double bar line and a repeat sign. Measure 113 contains four groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'.

114

Musical staff 114-117: Measures 114-115 each contain two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'. Measure 116 contains two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3', followed by a double bar line and a repeat sign. Measure 117 contains four groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'.

118

Musical staff 118-121: Measures 118-119 each contain two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'. Measure 120 contains two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3', followed by a double bar line and a repeat sign. Measure 121 contains four groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'.

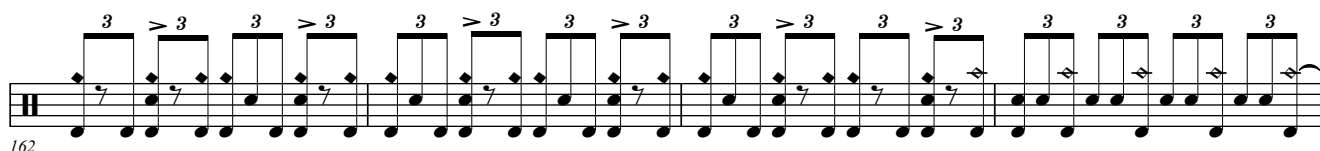
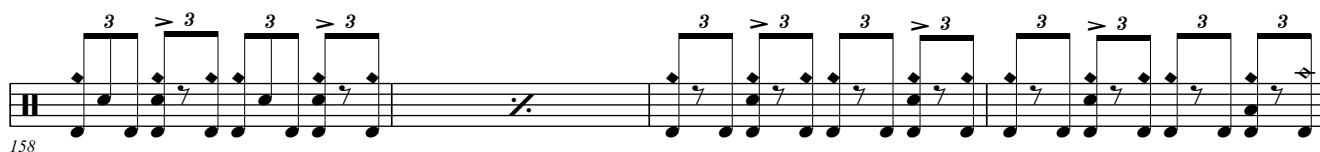
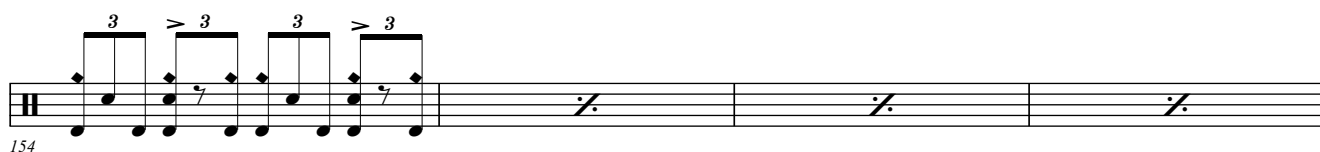
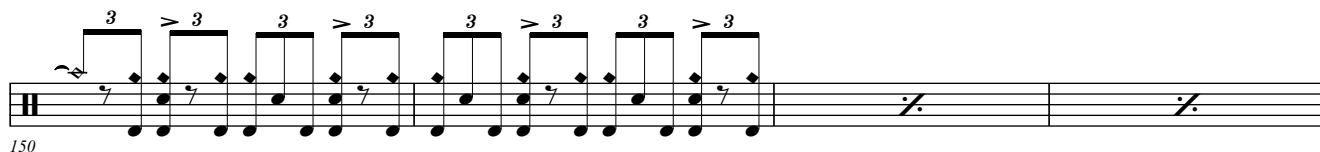
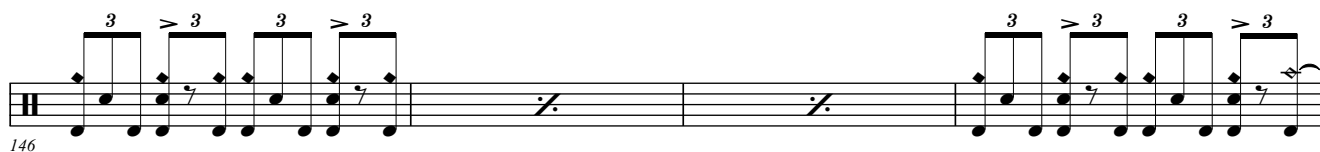
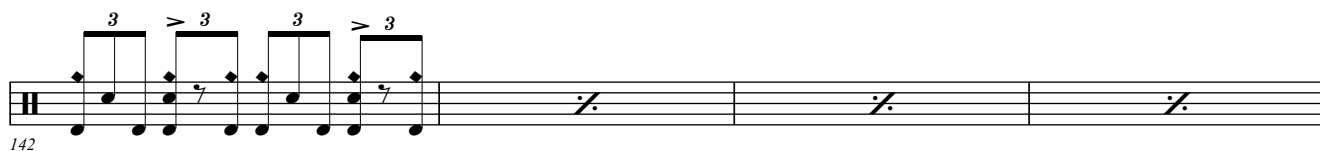
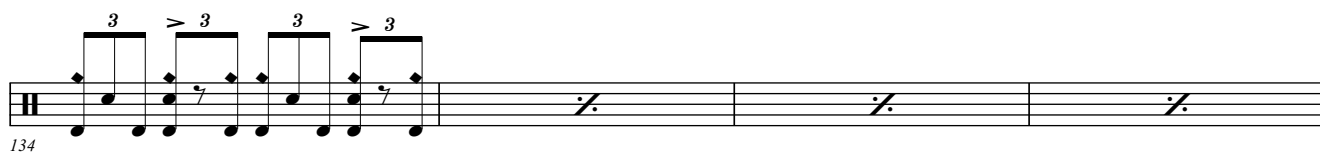
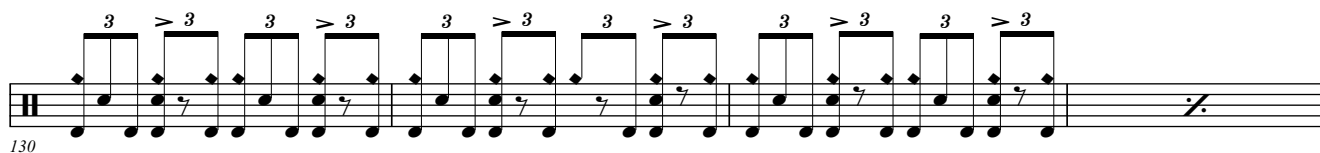
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Musical staff 122-125: Measures 122-123 each contain two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'. Measure 124 contains two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3', followed by a double bar line and a repeat sign. Measure 125 contains four groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'.

126

Musical staff 126-129: Measures 126-127 each contain two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'. Measure 128 contains two groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3', followed by a double bar line and a repeat sign. Measure 129 contains four groups of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>) and a '3'.





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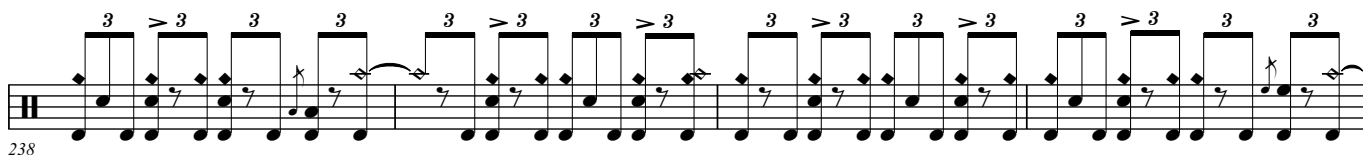
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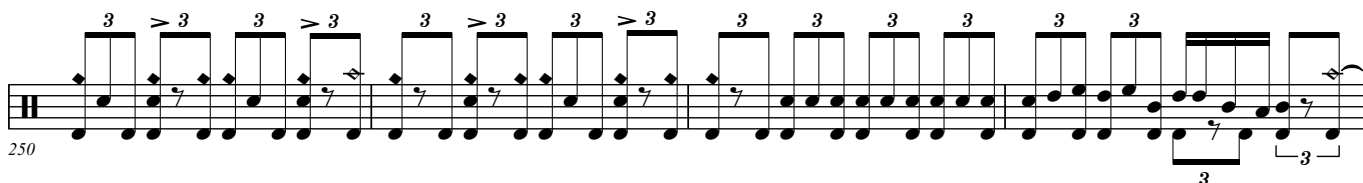
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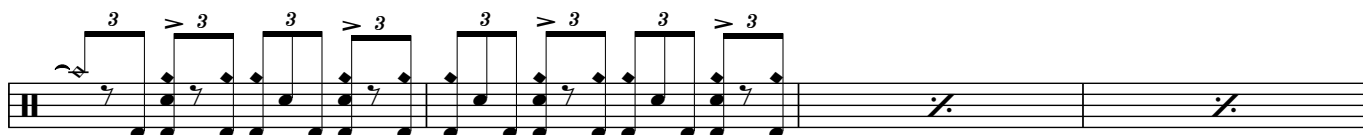
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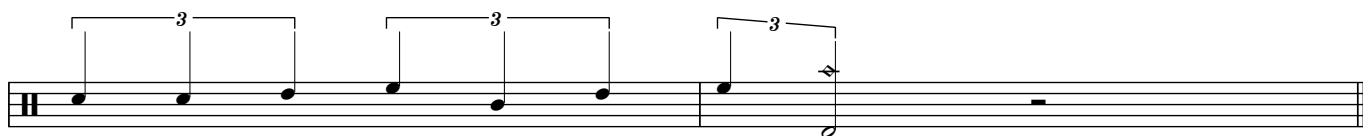
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Marc Atkinson, a dedicated musician, honed his craft under the guidance of the renowned Gary Chaffee. Now calling Las Vegas home, Marc is on the brink of unveiling his labor of love—a comprehensive transcription book that promises to captivate music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

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





# The 5th Limb: SING YOUR DRUMS

By Chris Lesso

**S**inging anything we can hear or imagine births it into the world by giving it shape and substance. Now we're no longer *just drummers*, but *sound-crafters*. Singing rhythms taps into the soul of the drummer, awakening consciousness of a deeper state of flow. Our best ideas shine when we power down the over-thinking analytic mind to where our true voice lives. Singing the drums links us to our inner rhythm like no other tool. It is an ancient tradition that every rhythmically rich culture practices in their own way. When we say "singing rhythm," we're not talking about Stevie Wonder. We're drawing a line between the math and melody of rhythm. It's a way to express percussive melody using the 5th limb of the voice. To let the groove guide you, have your singing down first. Singing captures the essence of smooth phrasing in language, making it more expressive. When we play, we want to play in our own voice, true and unmistakable.

How can we *sing rhythm*? We're going to keep it musical, natural, and flowing. And fun! Singing is the bridge between numbers and melody. The syllables in space are our building blocks. For sounds, Doum can be our low range, while Ta is higher on top. The dialogue between them is like a conversation, dancing back and forth to create limitless beats. Ding is our mid-range, like the jazz rhythm Ding Ding-a Ding Ding-a Ding. For numbers, we can borrow from the Indian rhythmic system of Konnakol, but other schools and cultures have their own spin on these. 2s are Ta-Ka, 3s are Ta-Ki-Ta, and 4s are Ta-Ka-Di-Mi. 1 would be Ta, or if it's resolving at the end, Da. Any number block

can be played on any sound. From there, we can combine them in a multitude of ways to get 5s, 6s, and 7s.

There are many variations to explore with these rhythmic building blocks, but this is a great place to start. Any changes you make, stay true to the key components. We're not going totally random, but adhering to a language, and a vocabulary of phonetics. For the most part, singing is systematized. It's intentional, melodic, focused, and never haphazard. Random sounds only muddy our clarity. We're free to come up with other syllables, as long as they're musical. We're not so much focused on the actual sound being created on the kit, but more on the flow itself. Consistency is key, and the backbone of language. With these elements we can break down any rhythm, merging the tapestry of numbers with the melody of song.

Plodding old school counting vs the flow of singing literally feels different. Singing is liberating, tapping into different parts of our brains to make musical phrasing effortless. When I traveled to India to study with master drummers, I saw rhythm come alive through their oral tradition. Everything is spoken, nothing is written. You're not even allowed to touch the drum before you can sing rhythms clearly and confidently first. Focus is a muscle, and the more we use it, our ears and memory get sharper. Everything is simplified. Singing rhythms eliminates any guessing, so there's no muddy waters in our expression. How deep you go is up to you, but even just the basics will propel your expression to new heights. All we need to push our limits is the concept infused with the spirit. Then, we're only scratching the surface of opening our gateway to rhythm.

An advantage to singing rhythms is that you can practice anywhere, anytime, and you are never dependent on gear. Speak them as you walk, using your steps as the beat. Your pace is the tempo, adding syncopated layers on top. And what if the syllables turned into rhymes? Poetry in motion over sharp beats becomes hip hop. Each MC has their own unique flow executed with confidence, and so should we. In hip hop, an MC (from "master of ceremonies") is not just a rapper. Putting lyrics over a beat is only the beginning. An MC completely commands the crowd's energy, moving and inspiring. Singing gives us this power if we go deep too. The way we speak it over the pulse is how our drumming will sound. Like an MC, we don't even need any drums to amplify our inner rhythm. Singing rhythms and hip hop relate closely, replacing phonetics for poetry. All around the world, global lines of rhythm connect. It's one mind and one groove, a wellspring splintering into endless evolutions.

All cultures throughout time have practiced singing rhythms. Every region has its nuances, but there's no part of the world that hasn't expressed rhythm in this way. It's "natural," as in, *nature*. The earth speaks to us, and we can join in its song. We hear rhythm all around us. Take a walk in the forest and listen to the rhythmic singing of birds. There are so many layers to be picked up on. If we can play what we sing, we're being guided by our ear, not our head. Sing what you hear, then play what you sing. This emphasizes musicality, and the smoothness we hear in phrasing when we speak from the heart. It's deep, expressive, and very human. It's us declaring that we're alive. Get Chris' free OPEN HANDED DRUMMING guide at [chrislessonet.net/OPEN](http://chrislessonet.net/OPEN)



# Progressive Drumming Essentials: Double Bass Boot Camp

By Aaron Edgar

*Progressive Drumming Essentials* is a collection of articles originally written for *Modern Drummer* magazine. They are exactly what the title says, PROGRESSIVE drumming essentials. This series of articles, and the book that contains them all, represent a great deal of material that Aaron constructed over the years for his own development, he credits them as being a large part of finding his voice on the drums.

The book, *Progressive Drumming Essentials*, is organized into six sections (Fundamentals, Odd Subdivisions, Rhythmic Tricks, More Odd Subdivisions, Polyrhythms, and A New Perspective on Polyrhythms.) We will be excerpting Aaron's articles in our Rock Perspectives series for a new generation of drummers to learn

the *Progressive Drumming Essentials*.

Aaron Edgar says in the introduction to his book, "I believe that learning music is a journey. You'll find greater depth of understanding when you dig deeper into the material. Once you've mastered what's on the page, modify it! Make these ideas your own and explore your own creativity. Treating these lessons in this fashion, while striving to internalize the rhythms against a steady pulse, will ultimately free you to integrate any rhythm or concept into your playing in a natural way. I sincerely hope you have as much fun with this material as I do!" We couldn't agree more. Let's get to work on Aaron's Double Bass Boot Camp.

One thing that can separate drummers with great double bass chops from those who struggle is their willingness to push themselves beyond their limits. You have to put in serious time if you want to get significant results. How many hours have you spent on speed and endurance? Whatever the answer, get prepared to work. If you're not exhausted after running these drills, you didn't practice hard enough.

This routine takes a little over an hour and is split into two thirty-minute sets. Each set consists of six bass drum patterns that are played for five minutes each without stopping. Even if your technique starts to fall apart, dig deep and push through until the end. The goal is to reach your breaking point and then push a little further.

Since the focus is on our feet, the hand patterns are open to interpretation. Start with the notated 8th-note hi-hat and snare pattern, but feel free to improvise as long as it doesn't interfere with your feet. A great alternative to this phrase is to match your hand pattern with the feet. (See Exercises 7–11.) Try cutting out the hands to isolate the bass drums. However, don't practice that way exclusively—fast feet are useless if you can't coordinate them with your hands.

Try practicing with tight sounds for your cymbals, because playing on washy cymbals can make it difficult to hear your bass drum accuracy. Closed hi-hats and tight stacks are my preferred choices.

Before starting with set one, stretch your legs. I like to hit all of the muscle groups from my hips down to my shins and calves. You'll be working for a while, so keep water and a towel on hand.

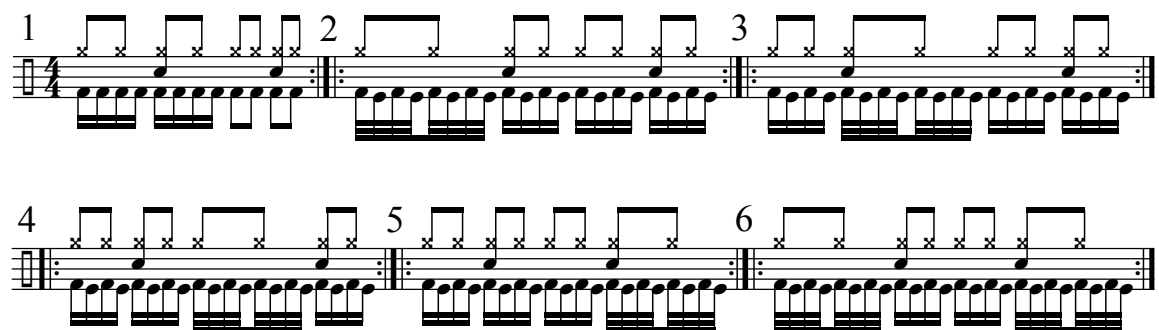
After stretching, strap on ankle weights and set your metronome reasonably below your maximum 32nd-note tempo. If you're not sure what that is, 70–80 bpm is a good place to start.

## THE WORKOUT BEGINS

00:01–05:00: The first five minutes is a warm-up. Use this time to isolate each foot. Begin with Exercise 1, playing four bars with only the right foot and then four bars with the left foot. After a minute or two, play longer groups of 16th notes with each foot before switching.

05:01–25:00: At the five-minute mark, switch to Exercise 2 without stopping. Keep advancing continuously in five-minute increments through Exercises 3–5. Stay focused, and maintain consistency and power. If you start to cramp up, pull the notes from a different muscle group. Use your full leg (coming from your hip), your ankles, or a combination of both. Experiment with a heel-down technique to work your shin muscles. Do whatever it takes to power through.

25:01–30:00: In the last five minutes, double the amount of 32nd notes (Exercise 6). Try to push yourself close to failure. You should be barely holding on by the end. If you can make it cleanly through the entire half hour, pick a faster tempo next time.





## SET TWO

30:01–55:00: You can skip the warm-up (Exercise 1), but you'll need to make up for those five minutes. Either practice one of the beats twice as long, or add one of the more advanced beats from Exercises 7–11.

55:01–60:00: At this point you should be struggling a little. Don't forget that the goal is to push yourself to your limits and beyond. If you get to the end of your second set and you still have energy, repeat the last exercise or add another full set.

The harder you push yourself, the better your results will be. If you end up going longer than an hour, try more challenging tempos or beats next time. Part of the drill here is to find your breaking point within an hour.

## ADVANCED VARIATIONS

For an additional challenge, modify the intensity of the beats to suit your ability level. Exercises 7–11 each have four more 32nd notes and have been notated with the hands matching the feet on two different hi-hats.

Alt. H.H.

7 8 9 10 11

For more of a workout, try leading the entire drill with your weaker foot. If you're comfortable leading either way, try switching your lead foot every bar by adding a triplet to the end of the phrase. Exercise 12 demonstrates this idea by placing 16th-note triplets at the end of Exercise 3.

12

3 3

For best results, run through this set of drills two or three times per week. I wrote these exercises for my own development, and they've helped me push through some frustrating plateaus. They can do the same for you.

## ADVANCED SET (60-90 MINUTES)

For those of you looking to push even further, try running two or three sets without breaks or removing the ankle weights. Do set one exactly the same, but when you get to the end, bump up the tempo without stopping and jump right into set two. You can choose to do the warm-up for five minutes, or double any of the beats within the second set. If you get to the last ten minutes and feel like you still have energy, continue into a third set with another tempo boost.

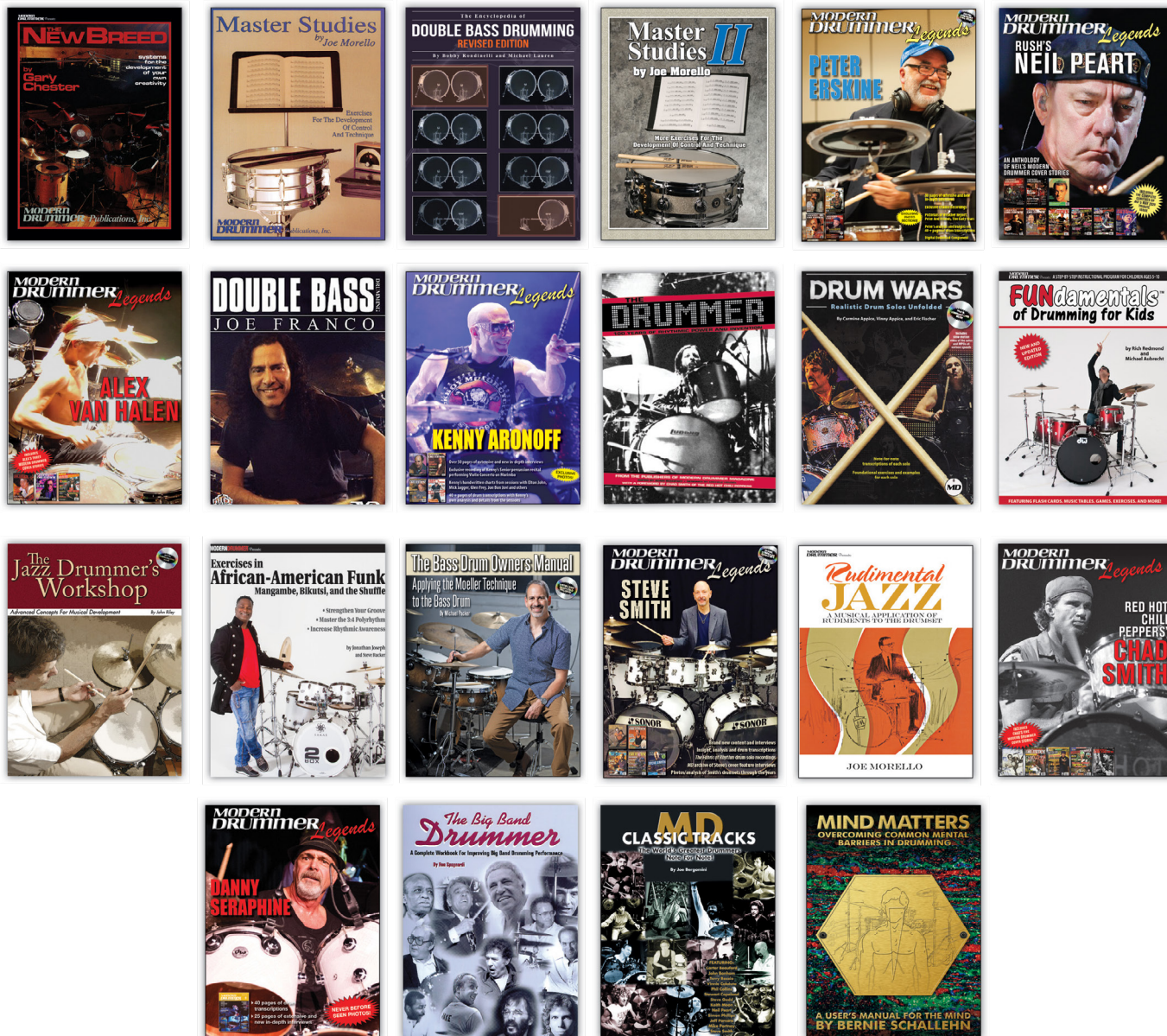
For the last ten minutes of this advanced set, try bumping up the tempo by one or two bpm every minute. The goal is to push yourself to your breaking point. If you take yourself to the edge of your abilities every time you practice, you'll have the best chance of breaking through plateaus.

## BREAK TIME

Stand up if you need to, stretch, and towel off. To keep your intensity up, don't rest too long between sets. Two or three minutes should be plenty of time. Take off your ankle weights, bump your metronome up 10 bpm, and run the entire set again.

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# Master Studies II: Variations of the Triple Paradiddle

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 include some of Joe's wonderful Variations of the Triple Paradiddle.

**Arrow Notation Key**

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.

1  
 R L R L R L R R L R L R L L

2  
 R R L R L R L R L L R L R L R L

3  
 R L L R L R L R L R R L R L R L

4  
 R L R R L R L R L R L L R L R L

5  
 R L R L L R L R L R L R R L R L

6  
 R L R L R R L R L R L R L L R L

7  
 R L R L R L L R L R L R R L

This exercise builds upon the previous one. Now we've added fill-ins. Play each one slowly at first. Once you begin to develop technical proficiency, increase the tempo setting on your metronome.

1  
R L R 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

3  
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

4  
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

5  
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

6  
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

7  
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

This exercise builds upon the previous exercises, only now we're using 8th-note triplets. These are also wonderful for developing accent control. I think you'll find them quite fun to play.

1  
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L



3 3 > > 3 3 3 > > 3 3 3 > >

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

2 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > >

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

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

3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > >

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

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

4 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > >

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

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

5 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > >

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

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

6 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > > 3 3 > >

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

Three staves of drum notation for triplets with fill-ins. Each staff has a 4/4 time signature and contains two measures of music. The notation includes eighth notes, triplets, and various accents. Below each staff is a sequence of 'L' and 'R' characters representing the foot pattern, with dashed lines and arrows indicating the timing of the strokes.

## Variations Of Triple Paradiddles In Triplets With Fill-Ins

Now we've added fill-ins. Play each one slowly at first. As you gain technical proficiency, you can increase the tempo setting on your metronome.

Three variations of triple paradiddles in triplets with fill-ins, numbered 1, 2, and 3. Each variation consists of two staves of drum notation in 4/4 time, with foot patterns and timing arrows below.





## *The New Breed: Concepts*

By Gary Chester

# 39 SYSTEMS

The following pages contain 39 basic patterns, called “systems,” followed by ten pages of reading material, which are to be used as the “melodies” for each system.

Start by memorizing the system, being careful to play the correct instrument with the correct hand or foot. You will not be playing the melody yet, but be sure to notice where you are eventually to play it. Play the system many times, striving to make it feel as good as possible. While you are playing the system, sing the click pulse (quarter notes).

After you have memorized a system, turn to the first two Reading pages (14 and 15) and play them as the Melody of the system, on the instrument that is specified with each system. After you can play both pages from beginning to end comfortably, proceed to the second set of Melodies, and practice them the same way.

It is not intended that you rush through any of this material. Do not proceed onward until you have achieved total mental and physical independence and awareness with each system.

To aid your awareness, you should learn to sing each part that you are playing, in addition to singing the click pulse. In other words, while playing the complete System with Melody, sing (1) the click pulse, (2) the melody, (3) the snare drum line, (4) the cymbal line, (5) the hi-hat line, etc.

When singing, it helps to sing a sound that resembles the particular instrument, and to sing it as rhythmically as possible *out loud*. For example, the bass drum part might sound like “boom,” while you might sing the hi-hat part with a “chick” sound.

The following abbreviations are used in this book:

H.H. = hi-hat                      Ride = ride cymbal (or additional closed hi-hat)  
Bell = cymbal bell      B.D. = bass drum      Fl. tom = floor tom

Melody = Reading exercise pages

L.H. = Left hand              R.H. = Right hand  
L. F. = Left foot              R.F. = Right foot

Examples:

R.H./Ride = Right hand on ride cymbal (or closed hi-hat)

L.H./Fl. tom = Left hand on floor tom

R.F./B.D./Melody = Right foot on bass drum plays melody


L.F./H.H. = Left foot on hi-hat



I suggest practicing each bar at least four times, or as many times as it takes to get a good understanding of what you are playing. Start slowly and relax. The tendency is to rush through each measure and get right to the end. That is not the point of the exercise, although you will be able to do that after you have mastered each individual measure.

When you read these systems in practice, try to read the phrases across as you would sight-read a page of music—not up and down. By this I mean that most people relate each note to where it falls in relation to the quarter note. It is good to feel this when you sing, but I do not recommend trying to read against the quarter.

① L.H. + R.H./H.H.  
R.F./B.D./Melody



Left and right hands play simultaneously on hi-hats in this system. Be careful to avoid “flamming.”

②

R.H./H.H.  
L.H./S.D.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.

③

L.H./H.H.  
R.H./S.D.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.

④

R.H./H.H.  
L.H./S.D.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.R.

The musical notation for exercise 4 is written on a single staff with a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature. The melody line consists of eighth notes, and the bass line consists of eighth notes. The notation is as follows:   
Measure 1: G2 (quarter), A2 (quarter), B2 (quarter), C3 (quarter).   
Measure 2: D3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), F3 (quarter), G3 (quarter).   
Measure 3: A3 (quarter), B3 (quarter), C4 (quarter), D4 (quarter).   
Measure 4: E4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter).   
Measure 5: B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), D5 (quarter), E5 (quarter).   
Measure 6: F5 (quarter), G5 (quarter), A5 (quarter), B5 (quarter).   
Measure 7: C6 (quarter), D6 (quarter), E6 (quarter), F6 (quarter).   
Measure 8: G6 (quarter), A6 (quarter), B6 (quarter), C7 (quarter).   
Measure 9: D7 (quarter), E7 (quarter), F7 (quarter), G7 (quarter).   
Measure 10: A7 (quarter), B7 (quarter), C8 (quarter), D8 (quarter).   
Measure 11: E8 (quarter), F8 (quarter), G8 (quarter), A8 (quarter).   
Measure 12: B8 (quarter), C9 (quarter), D9 (quarter), E9 (quarter).   
Measure 13: F9 (quarter), G9 (quarter), A9 (quarter), B9 (quarter).   
Measure 14: C10 (quarter), D10 (quarter), E10 (quarter), F10 (quarter).   
Measure 15: G10 (quarter), A10 (quarter), B10 (quarter), C11 (quarter).   
Measure 16: D11 (quarter), E11 (quarter), F11 (quarter), G11 (quarter).   
Measure 17: A11 (quarter), B11 (quarter), C12 (quarter), D12 (quarter).   
Measure 18: E12 (quarter), F12 (quarter), G12 (quarter), A12 (quarter).   
Measure 19: B12 (quarter), C13 (quarter), D13 (quarter), E13 (quarter).   
Measure 20: F13 (quarter), G13 (quarter), A13 (quarter), B13 (quarter).   
Measure 21: C14 (quarter), D14 (quarter), E14 (quarter), F14 (quarter).   
Measure 22: G14 (quarter), A14 (quarter), B14 (quarter), C15 (quarter).   
Measure 23: D15 (quarter), E15 (quarter), F15 (quarter), G15 (quarter).   
Measure 24: A15 (quarter), B15 (quarter), C16 (quarter), D16 (quarter).   
Measure 25: E16 (quarter), F16 (quarter), G16 (quarter), A16 (quarter).   
Measure 26: B16 (quarter), C17 (quarter), D17 (quarter), E17 (quarter).   
Measure 27: F17 (quarter), G17 (quarter), A17 (quarter), B17 (quarter).   
Measure 28: C18 (quarter), D18 (quarter), E18 (quarter), F18 (quarter).   
Measure 29: G18 (quarter), A18 (quarter), B18 (quarter), C19 (quarter).   
Measure 30: D19 (quarter), E19 (quarter), F19 (quarter), G19 (quarter).   
Measure 31: A19 (quarter), B19 (quarter), C20 (quarter), D20 (quarter).   
Measure 32: E20 (quarter), F20 (quarter), G20 (quarter), A20 (quarter).   
Measure 33: B20 (quarter), C21 (quarter), D21 (quarter), E21 (quarter).   
Measure 34: F21 (quarter), G21 (quarter), A21 (quarter), B21 (quarter).   
Measure 35: C22 (quarter), D22 (quarter), E22 (quarter), F22 (quarter).   
Measure 36: G22 (quarter), A22 (quarter), B22 (quarter), C23 (quarter).   
Measure 37: D23 (quarter), E23 (quarter), F23 (quarter), G23 (quarter).   
Measure 38: A23 (quarter), B23 (quarter), C24 (quarter), D24 (quarter).   
Measure 39: E24 (quarter), F24 (quarter), G24 (quarter), A24 (quarter).   
Measure 40: B24 (quarter), C25 (quarter), D25 (quarter), E25 (quarter).   
Measure 41: F25 (quarter), G25 (quarter), A25 (quarter), B25 (quarter).   
Measure 42: C26 (quarter), D26 (quarter), E26 (quarter), F26 (quarter).   
Measure 43: G26 (quarter), A26 (quarter), B26 (quarter), C27 (quarter).   
Measure 44: D27 (quarter), E27 (quarter), F27 (quarter), G27 (quarter).   
Measure 45: A27 (quarter), B27 (quarter), C28 (quarter), D28 (quarter).   
Measure 46: E28 (quarter), F28 (quarter), G28 (quarter), A28 (quarter).   
Measure 47: B28 (quarter), C29 (quarter), D29 (quarter), E29 (quarter).   
Measure 48: F29 (quarter), G29 (quarter), A29 (quarter), B29 (quarter).   
Measure 49: C30 (quarter), D30 (quarter), E30 (quarter), F30 (quarter).   
Measure 50: G30 (quarter), A30 (quarter), B30 (quarter), C31 (quarter).   
Measure 51: D31 (quarter), E31 (quarter), F31 (quarter), G31 (quarter).   
Measure 52: A31 (quarter), B31 (quarter), C32 (quarter), D32 (quarter).   
Measure 53: E32 (quarter), F32 (quarter), G32 (quarter), A32 (quarter).   
Measure 54: B32 (quarter), C33 (quarter), D33 (quarter), E33 (quarter).   
Measure 55: F33 (quarter), G33 (quarter), A33 (quarter), B33 (quarter).   
Measure 56: C34 (quarter), D34 (quarter), E34 (quarter), F34 (quarter).   
Measure 57: G34 (quarter), A34 (quarter), B34 (quarter), C35 (quarter).   
Measure 58: D35 (quarter), E35 (quarter), F35 (quarter), G35 (quarter).   
Measure 59: A35 (quarter), B35 (quarter), C36 (quarter), D36 (quarter).   
Measure 60: E36 (quarter), F36 (quarter), G36 (quarter), A36 (quarter).   
Measure 61: B36 (quarter), C37 (quarter), D37 (quarter), E37 (quarter).   
Measure 62: F37 (quarter), G37 (quarter), A37 (quarter), B37 (quarter).   
Measure 63: C38 (quarter), D38 (quarter), E38 (quarter), F38 (quarter).   
Measure 64: G38 (quarter), A38 (quarter), B38 (quarter), C39 (quarter).   
Measure 65: D39 (quarter), E39 (quarter), F39 (quarter), G39 (quarter).   
Measure 66: A39 (quarter), B39 (quarter), C40 (quarter), D40 (quarter).   
Measure 67: E40 (quarter), F40 (quarter), G40 (quarter), A40 (quarter).   
Measure 68: B40 (quarter), C41 (quarter), D41 (quarter), E41 (quarter).   
Measure 69: F41 (quarter), G41 (quarter), A41 (quarter), B41 (quarter).   
Measure 70: C42 (quarter), D42 (quarter), E42 (quarter), F42 (quarter).   
Measure 71: G42 (quarter), A42 (quarter), B42 (quarter), C43 (quarter).   
Measure 72: D43 (quarter), E43 (quarter), F43 (quarter), G43 (quarter).   
Measure 73: A43 (quarter), B43 (quarter), C44 (quarter), D44 (quarter).   
Measure 74: E44 (quarter), F44 (quarter), G44 (quarter), A44 (quarter).   
Measure 75: B44 (quarter), C45 (quarter), D45 (quarter), E45 (quarter).   
Measure 76: F45 (quarter), G45 (quarter), A45 (quarter), B45 (quarter).   
Measure 77: C46 (quarter), D46 (quarter), E46 (quarter), F46 (quarter).   
Measure 78: G46 (quarter), A46 (quarter), B46 (quarter), C47 (quarter).   
Measure 79: D47 (quarter), E47 (quarter), F47 (quarter), G47 (quarter).   
Measure 80: A47 (quarter), B47 (quarter), C48 (quarter), D48 (quarter).   
Measure 81: E48 (quarter), F48 (quarter), G48 (quarter), A48 (quarter).   
Measure 82: B48 (quarter), C49 (quarter), D49 (quarter), E49 (quarter).   
Measure 83: F49 (quarter), G49 (quarter), A49 (quarter), B49 (quarter).   
Measure 84: C50 (quarter), D50 (quarter), E50 (quarter), F50 (quarter).   
Measure 85: G50 (quarter), A50 (quarter), B50 (quarter), C51 (quarter).   
Measure 86: D51 (quarter), E51 (quarter), F51 (quarter), G51 (quarter).   
Measure 87: A51 (quarter), B51 (quarter), C52 (quarter), D52 (quarter).   
Measure 88: E52 (quarter), F52 (quarter), G52 (quarter), A52 (quarter).   
Measure 89: B52 (quarter), C53 (quarter), D53 (quarter), E53 (quarter).   
Measure 90: F53 (quarter), G53 (quarter), A53 (quarter), B53 (quarter).   
Measure 91: C54 (quarter), D54 (quarter), E54 (quarter), F54 (quarter).   
Measure 92: G54 (quarter), A54 (quarter), B54 (quarter), C55 (quarter).   
Measure 93: D55 (quarter), E55 (quarter), F55 (quarter), G55 (quarter).   
Measure 94: A55 (quarter), B55 (quarter), C56 (quarter), D56 (quarter).   
Measure 95: E56 (quarter), F56 (quarter), G56 (quarter), A56 (quarter).   
Measure 96: B56 (quarter), C57 (quarter), D57 (quarter), E57 (quarter).   
Measure 97: F57 (quarter), G57 (quarter), A57 (quarter), B57 (quarter).   
Measure 98: C58 (quarter), D58 (quarter), E58 (quarter), F58 (quarter).   
Measure 99: G58 (quarter), A58 (quarter), B58 (quarter), C59 (quarter).   
Measure 100: D59 (quarter), E59 (quarter), F59 (quarter), G59 (quarter).   
Measure 101: A59 (quarter), B59 (quarter), C60 (quarter), D60 (quarter).   
Measure 102: E60 (quarter), F60 (quarter), G60 (quarter), A60 (quarter).   
Measure 103: B60 (quarter), C61 (quarter), D61 (quarter), E61 (quarter).   
Measure 104: F61 (quarter), G61 (quarter), A61 (quarter), B61 (quarter).   
Measure 105: C62 (quarter), D62 (quarter), E62 (quarter), F62 (quarter).   
Measure 106: G62 (quarter), A62 (quarter), B62 (quarter), C63 (quarter).   
Measure 107: D63 (quarter), E63 (quarter), F63 (quarter), G63 (quarter).   
Measure 108: A63 (quarter), B63 (quarter), C64 (quarter), D64 (quarter).   
Measure 109: E64 (quarter), F64 (quarter), G64 (quarter), A64 (quarter).   
Measure 110: B64 (quarter), C65 (quarter), D65 (quarter), E65 (quarter).   
Measure 111: F65 (quarter), G65 (quarter), A65 (quarter), B65 (quarter).   
Measure 112: C66 (quarter), D66 (quarter), E66 (quarter), F66 (quarter).   
Measure 113: G66 (quarter), A66 (quarter), B66 (quarter), C67 (quarter).   
Measure 114: D67 (quarter), E67 (quarter), F67 (quarter), G67 (quarter).   
Measure 115: A67 (quarter), B67 (quarter), C68 (quarter), D68 (quarter).   
Measure 116: E68 (quarter), F68 (quarter), G68 (quarter), A68 (quarter).   
Measure 117: B68 (quarter), C69 (quarter), D69 (quarter), E69 (quarter).   
Measure 118: F69 (quarter), G69 (quarter), A69 (quarter), B69 (quarter).   
Measure 119: C70 (quarter), D70 (quarter), E70 (quarter), F70 (quarter).   
Measure 120: G70 (quarter), A70 (quarter), B70 (quarter), C71 (quarter).   
Measure 121: D71 (quarter), E71 (quarter), F71 (quarter), G71 (quarter).   
Measure 122: A71 (quarter), B71 (quarter), C72 (quarter), D72 (quarter).   
Measure 123: E72 (quarter), F72 (quarter), G72 (quarter), A72 (quarter).   
Measure 124: B72 (quarter), C73 (quarter), D73 (quarter), E73 (quarter).   
Measure 125: F73 (quarter), G73 (quarter), A73 (quarter), B73 (

5

L.H./H.H.  
R.H./S.D.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.

The fifth measure of the piece is shown. It begins with a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff with eighth notes and rests. The accompaniment is written on a single staff with eighth notes and rests. The measure ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

⑥

R.H./R.Cym.  
L.H./S.D.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.

Figure 6 shows measures 1-4 of the musical score. The score is in 4/4 time and features a bass clef. The melody is played by the Right Hand (R.H.) and Right Cymbal (R.Cym.), while the Left Hand (L.H.) plays the Snare Drum (S.D.). The Right Foot (R.F.) plays the Bass Drum (B.D.) and the Left Foot (L.F.) plays the Hi-Hat (H.H.). The melody consists of eighth notes, and the drum parts are indicated by 'x' marks on the staff.

[illegible]

8

R.H./R.Cym.  
L.H./S.D.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.

9

L.H./R.Cym.  
R.H./S.D.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.

10

R.H./R.Cym.  
L.H./S.D.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.

11

L.H./R.Cym.  
R.H./S.D.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.

12

R.H./H.H.  
L.H./S.D.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.

13

L.H./H.H.  
R.H./S.D.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.

14

{ L.H./H.H.  
L.H./S.D.  
R.H./F.T.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.

15

{ R.H./H.H.  
R.H./S.D.  
L.H./F.T.  
R.F./B.D./Melody  
L.F./H.H.





# Rhythm Vocabulary Development Series Part 4: Playing in 5/8

By Michael Packer

In the last installment of this series, we explored the concept of “filling the spaces” in 6/8—how understanding rhythm as spatial awareness can give your vocabulary new dimension and depth. This time, we’re venturing into slightly more angular territory with 5/8.

## Understanding the Pulse:

At first glance, 5/8 can feel awkward. It’s not symmetrical, and it doesn’t have the built-in flow of 6/8 or the even predictability of 4/4. But that asymmetry is exactly what makes 5/8 a compelling meter for rhythmic invention and creativity.

5/8 is typically broken down into note groupings of 3 + 2 or 2 + 3. Each grouping has its own musical feel:

- 3 + 2: ((1, 2, 3 + 1, 2)
- 2 + 3: (1, 2 + 1, 2, 3)

Occasionally, you’ll hear musicians subdivide it as 2 + 2 + 1, 1 + 4 or even approach it in a phrasing-free “floating” way in one group of 5. The point is: the note groupings define the feel of the meter.

## Filling the Space in 5/8:

Once you decide how you’re hearing the pulse, you can begin to fill in the measure with intentional subdivisions. 5/8 contains five eighth notes, but each of those spaces is an opportunity to play as little or as many notes as you’d like to.

Now, let’s revisit the concept of “filling” the space of a note. In 5/8, your measure contains five eighth-note spaces. Some of these spaces might naturally feel like eighth notes (two sixteenths), dotted quarters (three eighths), or even triplet groupings.

Below are rhythmic ideas you can use to fill the spaces:

1.

2.

3.

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28.



### Playing the Space: Why It Matters

Just like in 6/8, understanding what you don't play in 5/8 is as important as what you do. Don't rush to fill every beat—let silence become part of the groove. A well-placed rest in an odd meter has more impact than a rushed flurry of notes.

Think of your rhythm as a conversation. Pacing, breath, and tension-and-release give your phrases clarity. Your rhythmic ideas should not just count—they should speak.

Start by choosing one of the subdivisions and play a simple, single-line rhythm with your hands to internalize the feel. Once it's comfortable, expand on it—transform that rhythm into a full groove or develop it into a dynamic fill.

### Final Thought: Build Your Rhythmic Voice

This series isn't about mastering "licks" in odd meters. It's about developing fluency, so your musical ideas can land naturally in any time signature. Rhythmic vocabulary in odd time isn't about complexity for its own sake. It's about expressing your unique voice as a drummer. When you make 5/8 feel like home, you're not just navigating time—you're reshaping it.

When you practice this method, feel the weight of every note value, and fill the space with intention. Stay tuned for Part 5, where we'll dive into 7/8 phrasing.





# The 100 Year History of the Modern Drum Set

By Tim Northup

It's difficult to imagine that the drum set of today has only been in existence for just over 100 years. The history of the modern drum set began in the late 1800's, with a drummer being able to play the snare and bass drum together. That was when the need for the percussion section to take up less space in a pit orchestra setting first arrived. This also meant that

modern drum set was beginning to take shape by the mid-to-late 1920's, but a very important instrument did not exist until 1927-28, the hi-hat!

Before the hi-hat, the only foot-controlled cymbal mechanism was the Ludwig "Charleston" Snowshoe pedal, introduced in 1926. The Charleston pedal was made of two wooden foot boards with a spring between them to open and close the cymbals. The hi-hat that every modern-day drummer uses today, did not exist until 1927, and was not widely popular or widely used until the mid 1930s. Until then, drummers played time on the snare drum, woodblock, or rims. The hi-hat was only used for sound effects. Hand cymbals and hi-hat type hoop mounted cymbals were also used for effects and occasional time keeping.

The first mounted toms and floor toms were not tunable, they were tack headed Chinese toms. The picture in this article is the Northup Drum Museum's 1930 Ludwig Peacock Pearl outfit. In the early 1930s, drum companies such as Leedy, Ludwig, and Slingerland made their own style of tack headed toms. Then they began making tack bottom, but tunable top toms. In (about) 1936, Gene Krupa and the Slingerland Drum Company were instrumental in making the first separate tension rack and floor toms, which led us to the modern-day drum kit.

In the 1930s and 40s the drum set configuration was different. It usually consisted of a 26" or 28" bass drum, a snare drum, two hoop mounted toms (usually 12" and 13", or 14") that were set apart on each side of the bass drum. The 16" floor toms were usually mounted in a cradle. The space between the mounted toms was occupied by a wood block, and one or two



(economically speaking,) one drummer could replace three.

The invention of the first bass drum pedal enabled a single drummer to play the bass drum with his foot, leaving both hands free to play the snare drum and strike a cymbal attached to the top of the bass drum. The next invention was a striker cymbal that was attached vertically to the rim of the bass drum and struck with a small clanger arm that was attached to the bass drum. This allowed the drummer to hit the cymbal and bass drum together for effects and accents. These striker cymbals continued to be used on drum kits until the late 1930s.

The first cataloged drum set appeared in 1918 by the Ludwig Drum Company. The complete "Jazz-Er-Up" outfit featured an 8x24" single tension bass drum, a 3x12" single tension snare drum, a bass drum pedal with striker cymbal, a two-tone wood block, and a hoop mounted suspended Chinese cymbal. Here at the Northup Drums Museum, we have a catalog picture perfect example of this set on display. The 1923 complete "Tango" outfit features a similar set with an upgraded 3x13 single tension snare drum and a new Ludwig Jr. pedal.

In the following years, larger bass drums (mostly 14x28") and separate tension snare drums (in either metal or solid maple wood shells) were standard. Professional sets added new accessories like Chinese tom toms, Chinese floor toms, and sound effects like wood blocks, ratchets, and sizzle cymbals. The






cowbells that could also be mounted in the center. The cymbals usually included hi-hat, two small crash cymbals (measuring between 11" and 14") and a small 6" or 8" splash cymbal. Ride cymbals were not widely used until the mid to late 1940's. For this article, the photographed example is our 1938 Slingerland Krupa Super Radio King set.


By the 1950s and 60s, the bass drums were getting smaller, and the cymbals were getting bigger. The 24" bass drums were becoming 18" and 20" bass drums. The small crashes were being replaced by 16" to 20" crash cymbals, and the 20" to 24" ride cymbals were also becoming popular. The drum set from the 1960's is basically the modern-day acoustic drum set. Besides the addition of more toms and snare drums, double bass drums, and better hardware, not much has changed since then.

The Northrup Drums Museum features drum kits ranging from the 1923 Ludwig "tango outfit", to the 1930's trap sets, 1940's Swing sets, 1960's sets, and all the way up to modern sets. The photos of the sets in this article are only a few examples of the timeline and history of the drum set. We can see how the 1923 Ludwig "tango outfit" evolved into the modern-day drum set that we all play today. The pictured "modern-day" set is a late 1960's Joe Cusatis model No. 4N Slingerland set, in a pearl finish of sparkling red and silver bands. This set consists of a chrome over wood 5x14" snare drum, a 14x20" bass drum, the toms are an 8x12" mounted tom, and a 16x16" floor tom, and it is shown with Zildjian cymbals. If you would like to experience the timeline, evolution, and history of the drum set, and play (and compare) the drums from each time period, make a plan the visit the Northrup Drums Museum or take a virtual tour at [www.northrupdrums.com](http://www.northrupdrums.com).

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## Ludwig Complete "Tango" Outfit



Here is a drum outfit that comes mighty near to being good everywhere. It's just the right size to be handy, regardless of where you take it and the kind of work you are doing. It's the easiest thing in the world to carry and handle when moving from one job to another. For a Small Orchestra outfit you can get nothing finer. At the same time it works splendidly in the Home Orchestra. For home entertainments, little dancing parties where someone plays the phonograph or player piano—the LUDWIG TANGO OUTFIT is the whole show. More than one music room in well-to-do families have this outfit and they declare it's "the making of the party."

When it comes to price, we have priced it right. We know it is popular and that it is indispensable and we have made the price easily within your reach. Look at the cut—all that the modern jazz drummer could wish for.

It includes

- 1 8x24" thumb rod bass drum.
- 1 3x12" snare drum, both drums with finest grade heads.
- 1 Ludwig Junior pedal, including cymbal holder and pair spurs.
- 1 11" pedal cymbal.
- 1 12" Chinese crash cymbal.
- 1 two-tone wood block with holder.
- 1 pair sticks and snare drum stand.
- 1 crash cymbal holder.

No. 963, complete, ..... \$.....



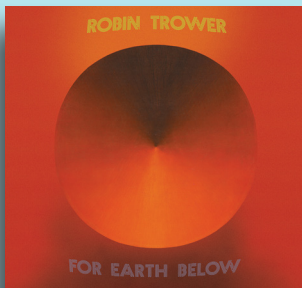


*Modern Drummer* enjoys spotlighting new recordings that have the drums at the center of their sound. These recordings might be drummer-led, or just include a high-quality, special, or unique drumming and musical performance from the drummer and/or musicians in the band. This column is not restricted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

### Robin Trower

*For Earth Below* 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Special Edition 4 CD Box  
Bill Lordan drums  
Chrysalis Records

In 2020, when *Modern Drummer* spoke to drummer Bill Lordan about his book *From the Basement to the Coliseum*, there weren't a lot of recordings available to hear his drumming. Lordan had recorded in the last edition of Sly and The Family Stone and had recorded and toured with Robin Trower for 13 years, but the recordings were scarce. That problem has been fixed. Today, the recording that best represents Lordan's drumming is available as a four CD box set of Robin Trower's record *For Earth Below*. This new box set features a remastered version of the original 1975 recording, a new stereo mix, a mostly unreleased CD of *Outtakes & Rarities*, and an entire CD of unreleased (and outstanding) live material recorded *Live at the Shrine Auditorium & Expo Hall, in Los Angeles, March 16, 1975*. Trower is a guitar legend, known for his seminal recording *Bridge of Sighs*, and a longtime leader of his own power trio. Lordan replaced original Trower drummer Reg Isidore and brought an underlying funkiness and deeper groove to Trower's band. "A Tale Untold" gives us evidence of the brand of funk that Lordan brought top Sly's band, and the live versions of Lordan's drum feature "Alethea" show us Lordan's drum corps influenced virtuosity. As can be heard on the thirteen live tracks from 1975, Lordan is a very solid, adventurous, and musical rock drummer that brings a little something extra to the music. For further evidence, check out "Gonna Be More Suspicious," and the super slow and grooving "For Earth Below." This was Trower's best trio, and thankfully this new box set brings Lordan's best drumming to life once again. Now we can all appreciate and learn from Bill Lordan's masterful drumming.



met at the Manhattan School of Music and met guest bassist Buster Williams while he was teaching there. With these three musicians, there are faint echoes of some of the classic trios that we all know and love, but they are building on that tradition with something new and fresh, and turning the corner. The three musicians meet the music as equals and create some beautiful and heartfelt music. From the opening and solos of "Back at the Right Spot" we know we are in for something special. Cardillo's rolling solo gently breaks some new ground and provides a nice peak for the tune. Williams' own classics "Christina" and "Where Giants Dwell" as well as Mulgrew Miller's "Soul Leo" provide the trio some room to stretch. Cardillo's 11 bar blues entitled "Kind of Blues" puts a bar of  $\frac{3}{4}$  as the final bar of the form and uses some new harmonic devices to make things interesting. Perazzo's "Ricordi" provides a nice sonic encapsulation of this trio's lyrical approach. The sound of the recording is exceptional, and everyone is playing very well. But it is the creativity and the sincerity that this trio is displaying that makes it special. They are not overtly breaking down the walls of tradition, but they are not playing it safe either. This is a wonderful record and a pleasant surprise!

### Jordan VanHemert

*Survival of the Fittest*  
Lewis Nash drums  
Origin Records

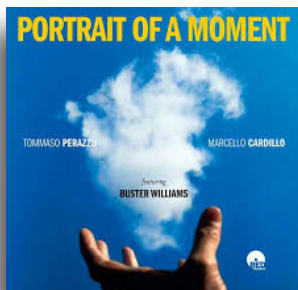
Lewis Nash has never played a "bad" note in his life, and that's why he's on so many records. He proves this again on saxophonist Jordan VanHemert's third recording as a leader. Whether it's Nash's dancing brushes on "Tread Lightly," his intro and rollicking five-minute duet with VanHemert on "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise," or his uber-musical solo on "Milyang Arirang," everything Lewis Nash plays works to perfection. Listen to Lewis Nash's support of trumpeter Terrell Stafford and pianist Helen Sung on the outstanding "Mo's Blues" for his Nash's down-home take on timekeeping perfection. The title cut "Survival of the Fittest" is a standout track, the support that Nash, bassist Rodney Whitaker, and pianist Helen Sung give the soloists to go anywhere is sheer professionalism, and the resulting music is beautiful. Kudos to one and all!



### Tommaso Perazzo and Marcello Cardillo featuring Buster Williams

*Portrait of a Moment*  
Marcello Cardillo drums  
Red Records

The piano can be a tricky format. If you play it straight down the middle, you can wind up sounding like every other piano trio playing the same classic standards that we have heard in the last 50+ years. But occasionally, you hear a trio that sounds like nothing else. Italian pianist Perazzo and fellow Italian, drummer Cardillo,



### Lari Basilio

#### *Redemption*

Vinnie Colaiuta drums

Self-produced

*Redemption* is Lari Basilio's third record featuring drummer Vinnie Colaiuta. Basilio's music is instrumental guitar melodic rock, similar to the music of Joe Satriani. The band comes out of the gate hard on "Fearless," and Colaiuta really frames Basilio's music well switching between half time and "normal time." Vinnie's tender cross stick groove on the A sections of "Alive and Living" is perfect, and when the B section kicks in, so does the groove. "Running to the Other Side" finds Basilio's layered guitars and Colaiuta's perfectly recorded drums pushing the musical envelope side by side. Leland Sklar is featured on bass on half of the tracks and his playing and sound on "Heartbeat" is simply perfect. Bassist Sean Hurley is the bassist on the other five tracks, and he holds things down very well. The constantly shifting "Seven" is a compositional and a drumming highlight, as is the hard driving "The Fighter." Although Vinnie is known for his pyrotechnics, his sense of groove is sheer joy, "Summertime" sounds like it could be a Sting tune, and that's just how Vinnie plays it. This is a hard groovin' recording that should have guitarists and drummers smiling from ear to ear. If you like this one check out Lari Basilio's *Your Love* and *Far More* (both including Vinnie Colaiuta on the entire recordings.)



### Shemekia Copeland

#### *Blame It On Eve*

Pete Abbott drums

Alligator Records

The Blues is not just a guitar players idiom. There are great singers like Shemekia Copeland, and great drummers that play with great blues artists. Drummer Pete Abbott is an experienced pro, and he is showing it with living legend, Shemekia Copeland. Abbott's blues mambo on "Blame It on Eve" is perfect. Abbott's boogie on "Tough Mother" keeps things moving along, and Pete's pocket on "Broken High Heels," "Is There Anybody Out There?" and "Cadillac Blue" is simply fantastic. His flat-tire shuffle on the hilarious "Wine O' Clock" compliments the lyrics perfectly. Abbott and bassist Lex Price sound very good together and create an exciting time feel for Copeland to do her thing, and there are few that do it better.



### Chris Parker Quartet

#### *Heart of Mine*

Chris Parker drums

Self-Produced

As was discussed in his feature interview a few years ago, the legendary session drummer Chris Parker has entered a new phase of his drumming career. He has put in the time, developed his sound, and he is becoming a jazz drummer, and a very good one at that! Actually, jazz has always been at the core of his drumming, but it is now at the forefront. His trio has grown to a quartet, now including guitarist Yuto Kanazawa. Listen to the funky "I Need Your Love" and Chris' wonderful arrangement of Nat Adderley's "Sermonette." Once again Parker and bassists (alternating between Ameen Saleem and Michael O'Brien) create a nice propulsive and swinging pulse and hook up nicely. Pianist Kyoko Oyobe sounds soulful and fantastic, and her composition "You are the One Mr. Chris Parker" is beautiful. Parker's arrangement mash-up of Thelonious Monk's "Nuttty" and Eddie Harris' "Freedom Jazz Dance" is really fun, and the inclusion of (Parker's onetime employer) Bob Dylan's "Heart of Mine" is a nice surprise. And just listen to the deep pocket on "South Washington Street Parade" that harkens back to his days in Stuff. Parker's newest recordings as a bandleader are always a pleasant surprise, and this one is no exception.



### Fred Hersch

#### *The Surrounding Green*

Joey Baron drums

ECM Records

There are very few pianists on earth who can channel Bill Evans better than Fred Hersch. And the multi-faceted Joey Baron has always sounded like an important disciple of Paul Motian. Add a bassist like Drew Gress, whose playing has the elasticity and sound of Scott LaFaro, and, well, you see where this is going... Bring it all together under the instantly identifiable sound of ECM, and you get a beautiful piano trio using impressionism, improvisation, and gente creativity. Check out the subtle boil of Ornette Coleman's "Law Years." "Palhaco" starts with Baron laying down a sort of *twisted* "Poincianna" groove, that evolves throughout the tune. "Anticipation" is pushed by Baron's brushes and a rhythm approach that keeps everything percolating. After a unique drum intro, the trio takes an interesting turn at Gershwin's "Embraceable You." Joey Baron's drumming continues to inspire, and Hersch continues to create situations for great musicians to thrive.





## Michael Dease

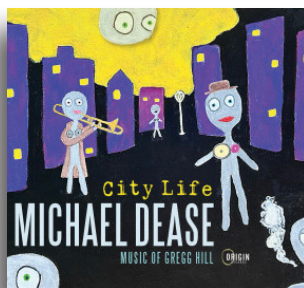
*City Life: Music of Gregg Hill*

Jeff "Tain" Watts drums

Origin Records

A double CD set of Jeff Watts playing music can never be a bad thing. And trombonist Michael Dease has given us just that. The first CD of this two CD is a strange combination.

Dease has given us a trio of trombone, bass, and drums. And while that might seem strange, trios of saxophone, bass, and drums are some of my favorites, so why not a trombone. "Sweet Georgia Gillespie" is a great track that lets Jeff Watts loose, and just listen to what Watts can do over a walking bass line. Bassist Linda May Han Oh and Watts play together very well, Han Oh is loose enough to let Tain be free within the pulse, and paint within the beats. And on "Willow Walks In" he does just that, and to perfection. Tain's loose swagger is legendary, and while we don't hear him as much as we used to, he still sounds as great as ever. Watts truly makes this instrumentation his own, and the listener and the music is better for it. Listen to Watts and Han Oh in her solo on "City Life" as they spar back and forth. The trading between Dease and Watts continues the conversation and raises the bar. On CD two the trio becomes a quintet when it is joined by pianist Geoffrey Keezer, and tenor saxophonist Nicole Glover for a more traditional affair, but the drumming is more of the thunder and lightning excitement that we all expect from Jeff Watts. I love this record.



## Charles Chen

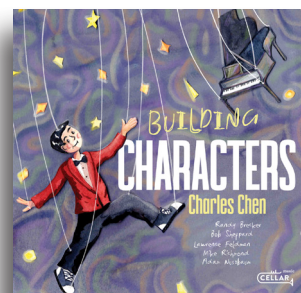
*Building Characters*

Adam Nussbaum drums

Cellar Music

Pianist Charles Chen came up with a cool concept for his new record. Each one of the eight compositions is built on a certain character. That character is sometimes a feeling, a musician, or a sound.

But his band (featuring Randy Brecker, Bob Sheppard, Lawrence Feldman, Mike Richmond, and Adam Nussbaum) completes Chen's concept perfectly. Nussbaum propels, paints, and frames Chen's concept and music in typical Nussbaum style. "Zang Fei, Fierce Warrior" is *well*, just fierce! Listen to Nussbaum and Richmond, peak at the same time, they are a rhythmic pairing that goes back years, and you can tell. "Colossus of Rhodes" sounds like classic Mwandishi-era Hancock and company. And "Straw Hat" recalls classic Lee Morgan funk. When world-class composers like Charles Chen take the time to create a concept of music and a recording like this, what can go wrong? Nothing! This music has real (*well...*) character.



## Antoine Fafard

*Quadra Spherium*

Gary Husband drums

Timeless Momentum Records

In last month's A Different View, composer-bassist-guitarist talked to us about his new record *Quadra Spherium*, and now we have finally gotten to hear it. While drummer Gary Husband is known more for his fusion drumming, he is a jazz musician at heart. His improvisational skills and drumming reflexes are on par with the best, and this is some of his best drumming in recent history. The addition of Jean-Pierre Zanella's organic saxophone sound is a welcome sound in Fafard's music, check out his playing on "Quadrivium." But the star of the show are Fafard's compositions and Gary Husband. Husband and Zanella are very intertwined in the music, and Fafard's basslines somehow hold it all together. Special not must be made of Fafard's Holdsworthian guitar playing on "Flow" as well. How can a bassist be such a good guitarist? Or how can a guitarist be such a good bassist? And how can they both be such a good composer? Husband's Pearl Crystal Beat drums and Paiste cymbals sound fantastic and jump out of the mix. There are so many drumming highlights on this record, to detail them all would take an entire article. This is one of the best instrumental records of the year.



## Joe Farnsworth

### *The Big Room*

Joe Farnsworth drums  
Smoke Sessions

As he talked about in his recent *Modern Drummer* interview last year, Joe Farnsworth is focusing on playing with younger musicians and taking his music to new places. With *The Big Room*, he has done that. This new music features a young band of saxophonist Sarah Hanahan, pianist Emmet Cohen, and vibraphonist Joel Ross playing music that one would associate more with Jackie McLean, Bobby Hutcherson, and Andrew Hill than the bebop that Farnsworth is usually associated with. Farnsworth, bassist Yasushi Nakamura, and trumpeter Jeremy Pelt are the “elders” on this record, but the “youngsters” are setting the tone. Listen to Farnsworth’s solo on “Continuance,” and Ross’s searching composition “What Am I Waiting For?” Pelt’s “All Said and Done” is pure NYC swagger. The duet between Ross and Farns on “The Big Room” is deserving of its title, personally I would love an entire recording of Farnsworth playing duets. And Cohen’s fire breathing “You Already Know” just cooks, check out the drum solo! The funky “Prime Time” is a nice conclusion to a great record. *The Big Room* is Joe Farnsworth’s best record as a bandleader so far.

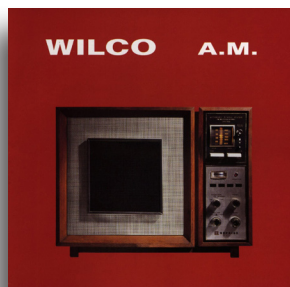


## Wilco

### *A.M.*

Ken Coomer drums  
Rhino High Fidelity Vinyl

The Wilco record *A.M.* was ahead of its time. Fortunately, with a new and amazing mastering cut done by Kevin Gray at Cohearent Audio, a high quality 180-gram vinyl release, and 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary pressing by Optimal Media, it's a good time to revisit this ahead of its time record. This record and this music has never sounded so good and as fresh as it does today with this release. If you are a vinyl hound, this is a wonderful purchase. It's warmth, detail, pressing, and mix sound as good as any vinyl that I have heard in recent years. The music is a refreshing mix that doesn't sound a lot like the Wilco of today, but that's OK. Bands change and music evolves. Some might even say that the debut of Wilco on *A.M.* sounds like a different band, which is fine too. Much of the band is different, but the core of the music is Jeff Tweedy, and he never disappoints. For Wilco fans, you finally have a great pressing of an old favorite. For vinyl fans, you have a spectacular piece of wax to pick up. For music fans, you have a nice opportunity to revisit a forgotten record that was way ahead of its time. But hurry, there is only 5,000 of these being pressed, Rhino did a great job with this.



## Stevie Nicks

### *Bella Donna*

Russ Kunkel, Stan Lynch (two tracks) drums  
Rhino High Fidelity Vinyl

Warm, big, and fat, those are two words that could be used to describe all of drummer Russ Kunkel and Stan Lynch's drumming and drum sounds. They are also two words that are often used to describe a high-quality vinyl re-release and pressing. The only other thing you would need is great songs, a great band, and great production. Stevie Nicks *Bella Donna* has all of that and more, and producer Jimmy Iovine took care of the rest. Named as one of Billboard's 200 All-Time albums, this record needs no further praise, and it deserves all that it has gotten. Kunkel and Lynch's drums have never sounded warmer, bigger, and fatter. Waddy Wachtel's guitars have never been more present and sparkly in the mix, and Nicks' voice has never sounded bigger and warmer. The songs... Well, great songs just have to be heard and felt, and you can really feel them on the new 180-gram vinyl release cut from the original Analog Master Tapes by Kevin Gray at Cohearent Audio. Rhino has done it again!





# Mike Wengren's Original Disturbed Down with the Sickness Touring Kit

Photos by Alex Klufft



**Drums:** Pearl Masters Custom Maple - Midnight Fade - two 18" x 22" Kick Drums, 16" x 18" Floor Tom, 16" x 16" Floor Tom, 12" x 14" Rack Tom, 10" x 12" Rack Tom, 6.5" x 14" Kapur/Fiberglass Snare Drum.

**Heads:** Evans- Toms batter - EC2S batter heads, Toms Resonant - G1, Snare Top - Hydraulic Black coated, Snare Bottom - snare side 500, Kick Batter- EMAD2, Kick Resonant - EMAD Reso.

**Cymbals:** Sabian- 14" AAX Metal Hats, 14" AA Metal Hats, 18" AAX Metal Crash, 18" AA Rock Crash, 19" AA Rock Crash, 19" AAX Metal Crash, 19" AA Rock Crash, 19" AAX Xtreme Chinese, 19" AA Holy China, 23" Jimmy Degrosso Override.

**Hardware:** Pearl Icon Rack, two Pearl Eliminator Demon Chain

Drive Single Pedals, Pearl H930 Hi Hat Stand (Demon Drive,) Pearl Low Position Snare Stand, LP Jam Block with bracket, Porter and Davies Throne w/ Butt kicker and Amp, Custom swivel vocal mic stand.

**Electronics:** Roland- 2 x PD-8 Dual Trigger Drum Pad, 2 x RT-30K Acoustic Bass Drum Trigger, 1 x RT-30HR Dual Acoustic Snare Trigger, Mimic Pro for our Drum Module.

**Drumsticks:** Vater- VHMWN Mike Wengren Signature Drum Sticks.

**In-Ear Monitors:** Jerry Harvey Audio - Roxanne.

**Accessories:** Humes and Berg stick bag.









# Remembering Al Foster

January 18, 1943 – May 28, 2025

By Mark Griffith

**A**l Foster and I met 37 years ago, and we hit it off instantly. He became a mentor, a friend, and a huge influence on my drumming. We spent a good deal of time listening to the records he played on and talking about those recordings and his memories. Al toured and recorded with the legendary Miles Davis, and Sonny Rollins called him, “The last of the great drummers.” Al Foster played and recorded with legends such as Sonny Rollins, Jimmy Heath, Horace Silver, and Bobby Hutcherson, the next generation of jazz greats like Joe Lovano, Randy Brecker, and John Scofield, and even the next generation of greats including Chris Potter, David Kikoski, and Renee Rosnes. Foster even logged undocumented time playing with Thelonious Monk, Stan Getz, and Herbie Hancock. Al Foster was a vital link between jazz of the past, jazz of the present, and jazz of the future.

In his early years, Foster made three records with Blue Mitchell. *The Thing to Do*, was Al's first record, and Chick Corea's first jazz recording (as Al liked to point out.) The song “Fungii Mama” featured a funky Latin-Calypso groove that is classic Al Foster, and a groove that he would play (endlessly) and to great effect, behind Sonny Rollins later in his life. “Hi Heel Sneakers” (from Mitchell's *Down with It*, also featuring Corea) was just as funky. Foster and Corea would record together again much later, on two tunes from John Patitucci's 1989 recording *On the Corner*. Blue Mitchell's *Heads Up!* was a large group recording that found Al playing Jimmy Heath and Duke Pearson arrangements. Al didn't make many large group or big band recordings in his career, but the young Foster did record with the Illinois Jacquet *Soul Explosion* band in 1969, and on two tracks (with Corea) in the Joe Henderson *Big Band* in 1992.

Before Foster was hired in 1972 by Miles Davis, when Davis heard him playing at jazz gig uptown, Al Foster was an active drummer on the New York jazz scene. Foster's early playing had little resemblance of the music that Davis would hire him to play in Miles' new band. Al's drumming swung hard and was steeped in the bebop language of drumming of Art Taylor and Max Roach, with a touch of Joe Chambers, a love for Philly Joe Jones, and a deep respect for Elvin Jones. But Al's genius was in the way that Foster combined these influences to create his own distinct voice at the drums. This early era of Foster's drumming can be heard on Larry Willis' *A New Kind of Soul*, Hugh Masekela's *Reconstruction*, and the outstanding *Brooklyn Brothers* by Cecil Payne & Duke Jordan, which also featured bassist Sam Jones. You can hear the hand in glove hook-up between Jones and Foster on the seminal 70s recordings *Biting the Apple* by Dexter Gordon and Sam Jones' own *Visitation*.

In 1972, Al Foster joined Miles Davis' band (for the first time) and played on some of the most controversial records that Davis had recorded: *Dark Magus*, *In Concert*, *Agharta*, and *Pangaea*. Miles' open ended funk vamps on those live recordings were propelled by a unique Al Foster sense of groove. Miles' subsequent *Big Fun* found a little more musical focus. During these years, Davis had Foster playing raucous funk grooves that swung and were simultaneously felt in half time, “normal” time, and double time. While these grooves were inspired by James Brown and Sly and the Family Stone, in Foster's (gigantic) hands

(and with Miles' encouragement,) they truly became something else. Foster's best recordings of this era are Abbey Lincoln's *People In Me*, and Sam Morrison's *Dune*, which both feature some of Davis' 70's band musicians.

During Miles Davis' retirement, Foster was one of Miles' only contacts with the musical world. When Miles re-emerged in 1981 with *The Man with the Horn*, *We Want Miles*, *Star People*, and *Decoy*, Al Foster was still by his side. This is more accessible music that featured bandmates Bill Evans, Mike Stern, Mino Cinelu, and Marcus Miller. The best examples of Foster's playing during this time is represented on the recording *Miles! Miles! Miles! Live in Japan '81*, and on the 1984 live recordings from the *Montreux Definitive Montreux DVD Collection* live box set featuring Davis' working band including Foster, Bob Berg, Darryl Jones, and John Scofield. Foster's last recording with Miles was on the swinging tune “Mr. Pastorius” from Davis' 1989 recording *Amandla*, that Davis agreed to record at Foster's insistence.

From the late 70s through the early 2000s Foster worked and recorded often with McCoy Tyner. Their *New York Reunion* and *Plays John Coltrane* recordings are classic recordings. The earlier *Quartets 4x4* showed Foster's versatility backing four very different soloists in Freddie Hubbard, John Abercrombie, Bobby Hutcherson, and Arthur Blythe. The later McCoy Tyner Trio with Stanley Clarke and Al Foster is a good listen as well. It was also in 1977 that the legendary Philly Joe Jones invited Foster and Billy Hart to play drums with him on his recording *Plus Two, Drum Night at Storyville* recording.

In 1978, Foster joined Dave Liebman, Randy Brecker, and Richie Beirach on stage at the Village Vanguard for the recording *Pendulum*. Now reissued as a three CD set, this live date is one of Foster's absolute best. The solos are long and deeply exploratory, and Foster gets ample opportunity to open-up in support of Liebman, Brecker, and Beirach. This is an essential recording! On Bob Berg's 1977 recording *New Birth*, Foster plays one of the greatest drum solo's ever with a jaw-dropping solo on the tune “Neptune.”

Al Foster was a superb small group jazz drummer. He excelled in piano trios, and quartets. In the 70's Foster was the second drummer in the Great Jazz Trio (with Hank Jones) recording *Chapter II* and *Move Over*. Foster's perfect touch on the drums graced wonderful piano trio recordings by pianists such as Tommy Flanagan, Hank Jones, Kenny Barron, Joanne Brackeen, Tete Montoliu, Larry Willis, Kenny Drew, Dave Kikoski, and Andy Laverne. A frequent employer of Foster's was pianist Steve Kuhn, whose trio recordings *Porgy*, *Life's Magic*, *Live at Birdland*, and *The Vanguard Date* are very good. However, their 2007 recording *Plays Standards* with Kuhn, Foster, and bassist Buster Williams is an overlooked gem, and includes some of Foster's best playing on record. The solos and the timekeeping on this record are simply out of this world.

While Al didn't record with many singers, the recordings he made with singers were very special and often nominated for Grammy's. In 1990, Foster appeared (with Larry Willis and George Mraz) on Carmen McRae's *Carmen Sings Monk*. His ride cymbal beat on this recording is relentless. In 1998, Al played on

five songs on Shirley Horn's *I Remember Miles*, and his playing was perfect (again.) In one of our conversations, Al told me how much he liked his playing on Kim Kalesti and Marion Cowings' obscure 1990 recording entitled *Kim and Marion*. The rhythm section also featured Kenny Barron and Eddie Gomez.

Bassists loved playing with Al Foster, he made things easy, and he played with them all. Al especially loved playing with bassist Buster Williams. In 1989, Foster joined Buster on a very special recording called *Something More*, which featured the rhythm section of Williams, Foster, and Herbie Hancock, playing behind Wayne Shorter and Shunzo Ohno. Foster also sounded fantastic playing with bassist George Mraz and can be found on Mraz's recording *Bottom Lines*. Mraz and Foster played together quite often and were in a wonderful quartet called *The News* with pianist Kirk Lightsey and, saxophonist Tony Lakatos. Bassist Eddie Gomez and Foster were frequent rhythm section partners, and in 1988 Gomez even created a recording session for Al Foster and Steve Gadd to play together and trade solos, called *Power Play*. In recent history, Foster and bassist Doug Weiss were a wonderful pairing and made many fantastic recordings together.

To many jazz musicians in their 50s (like myself,) The work that Foster did with Joe Henderson in the 80s and 90s is beyond special. Henderson's group was a constant presence on the international jazz scene during that time. The *State of the Tenor Vol. 1 and 2* from the Village Vanguard are jazz staples, and *An Evening with Joe Henderson, Charlie Haden, and Al Foster* is (arguably) even better. This same trio appeared on Haden's *Live, The Montreal Tapes: A Tribute to Joe Henderson*. Henderson also led a tribute to Miles Davis on his award winning, *So Near, So Far* which also featured Foster, Scofield, and Dave Holland. Foster's creativity, elasticized time, broken double strokes around the set, and melodic tom themes, inspired Joe Henderson and whomever else was in Henderson's many bands.

Foster's sound was inimitable. For most of his career he played an original Paiste 22" Sound Creation Dark Ride, which was brought to life with lighter sticks with a shaved down tip, and Al's deft touch. These components brought this ride to life, accented its dark undertones, and its chime-like shank. Al's amazing touch (and those shaved down tips) de-emphasized the cymbal's heft and ping that would have been overwhelming with different sticks and a lacking touch. Very early in his career, Foster also played a German made, 22" Paiste Super as his main ride. Foster's 22" China cymbal mounted over his hi-hats provided a nice sound with brushes often under a bass solo, or a mallet swell at the end of a tune. Al Foster's early recordings were made on a great little set of Slingerland drums, but Al was one of the first Yamaha drum endorsers, and he continued to occasionally play an early purple wrapped Yamaha kit for his entire life. Later, Yamaha Recording Customs, and green Maple Customs were Foster's drums of choice. Al's toms were tuned high into be-bop range, but with a pitch that when combined with a deeper snare (often with the snares turned off) provided a plethora of thematic and melodic comping and soloing motifs.

Al Foster was an unendingly creative drummer. When we first met, he was experimenting with a double bass drum pedal to create open and closed tones, similar to how one would play a Brazilian Surdo. He would often play his toms and snare (or rims) with both ends of the stick simultaneously, creating a roll while he played the ride with his right hand or soloed around the kit. This was one of the reasons behind the extreme angles of his toms and snare. He would also occasionally drop the stick letting

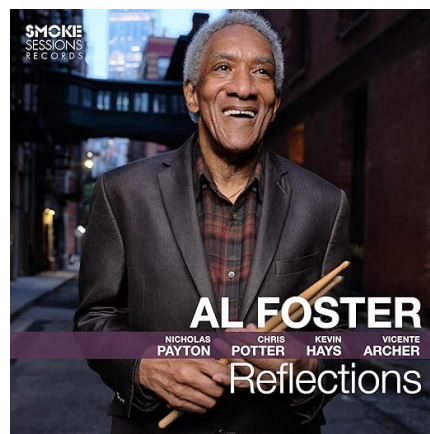
it bounce and dribble out of time while playing some ultra-swinging time. His left foot splashing 13" hi-hats were another of his signature drumming voices. In the 80s and early 90s, Al would often mount two cowbells next to his mounted tom and play them melodically and with mallets adding a unique sound behind soloists.

Al Foster didn't record often as a bandleader, but he loved playing his own compositions that were often named for his loved ones. He was thrilled to include many of these compositions on his later recordings as a leader. Early on, Foster's *Mixed Roots* was a quickly assembled recording that featured music similar (stylistically) to what Foster had been playing in the earlier Miles Davis band. *Mixed Roots* featured Jeff Berlin, TM Stevens, and Michael Brecker. His next recording entitled *Mr. Foster*, continued in a similar vein. In 1997, Foster started composing more, occasionally leading a band, and made a fantastic quartet recording called *Brandyn* which included many of Foster's own compositions. Later in the 2000s, Foster continued leading a band to record his *Love, Peace, & Jazz Live at the Village Vanguard*, and the indispensable DVD *The Paris Concert*. Recently his own *Inspirations & Dedications* and *Reflections* have featured even more of his compositions, and have been released on Smoke records, who also featured Foster in the all-star collective Heads of State band and recordings.

In recent years, Foster made challenging and hard swinging recordings with guitarists Peter Bernstein and Ratko Zjaca, trumpeter Eric LeLann, pianists David Hazeltine, Eric Reed, and Adam Birnbaum, drummer-vibraphonist Jorge Rossy, and saxophonists Eli Degibri and Jerome Sabbagh.

Al Foster's drumming influence was vast. He could be audacious and subtle. His truly original voice at the drums continued to evolve during his life and career. He was a friend and helped the careers of many young (at the time) drummers including Adam Nussbaum, Billy Drummond, Kenny Washington, Victor Lewis, Joe Farnsworth, and myself. He was always listening and encouraging the young drummers of the next generations. Al was *supremely* humble (to a fault,) his humility had him always searching for something more, practicing, and pushing himself on the drums.

*Modern Drummer* sends our deepest condolences to his partner for many years Bonnie Rose Steinberg, Al's four daughters Michelle, Kierra, Monique, and Simone, and his six grandchildren. Al's son with Steinberg, Brandyn, died in 2018. Aloysius Tyrone Foster (January 18, 1943 – May 28, 2025) will be missed, he was 82 years old.







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