Product Close-Up: Evans Heads & ProMark Sticks

MODERN DRUMMER

THE WORLD'S #1 DRUM COMMUNITY SINCE 1977

JUNE 2025

THE OFFSPRING'S BRANDON PERTZBORN

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TWO MONTHS OF COVER INSPIRATION AND ADVICE

By Mark Griffith

Modern Drummer's last two cover interviews should act as true inspiration and advice for drummers everywhere. John Hoffman came out of nowhere to earn the gig as the new drummer for Primus. There were other drummers competing for that gig that were better known, had more "chops," had a much better gig pedigree, and had bigger names in the drum industry.

Brandon Pertzborn also came out of nowhere to get his first gig as the drummer for the legendary punk band Black Flag. But he didn't stop there. Brandon went on to play with Doyle (from The Misfits,) Ho99o9, Marilyn Manson, Limp Bizkit, Suicidal Tendencies**,** and The Offspring.

In an industry where (so-called) "big breaks" are sought, John Hoffman's *big break* was throwing his hat (among thousands) in the ring and pursuing an available big gig. Brandon's *big break* was simply putting an ad on Craigslist. Both had studied, practiced, played on their local scenes, and developed their drumming skills playing with people. There are *no overnight sensations!*

Neither of them "knew somebody," had a friend (or relative) in the band, or any inside info for their "big breaks." (To me) this is beyond refreshing. There is hope for every drummer out there to become a member of a successful band. The steps in this process are obvious. Work hard, learn your craft, practice, play with other people, talk to other people, and when someone gives you a chance, be *thoroughly* prepared. Oh, and be able to *play your ass off*. At a certain level, *EVERYONE can play!*

When you apply for *any* new job, become the *solution* for your potential boss. Make their job and life *easy*. Be over-prepared, if you are told to learn four songs, learn ten. Be early, if you are told to be at a rehearsal or audition at 5pm, be there at 4pm, hang out, set-up, and be *ready to play* at 5pm. As drummers, if we are "on time," we are *late*. Develop your interpersonal skills, be able to talk and communicate *clearly* with people, and listen. Be easy to get along with, be flexible, be responsible, and honor your word. As much as your *drumming*, your *word* is your reputation. Both John and Brandon have done all the above, it has worked for *them*, and could work for *you*.

Becoming a successful musician is exactly like becoming a successful (*fill in the blank*.) Learn your craft, learn everything about your field, meet and talk to people that are already working in your field, ask questions, be thoroughly over-prepared, and (from day one) present yourself as a complete professional. Don't get caught up in the exceptions to those rules, excuses are for failures. Lastly, for the younger readers who are currently seeking summer jobs, or starting new careers after college, the above advice will also help you immensely in those quests as well.

Good Luck!

Mark Griffith

Editor-in Chief, Director of Content

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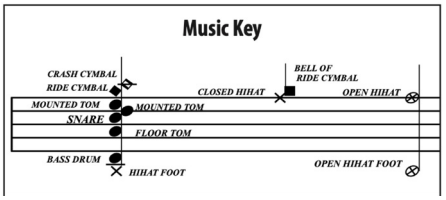
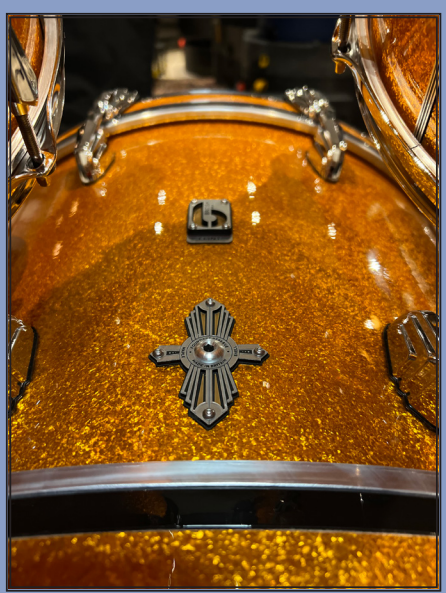


Sonny's Gold Sparkle Founders Reserve Kit

This month's *Modern Drummer* Kit of the Month comes to us from Sonny Flint. Sonny's main rock kit is a hand-crafted British Drum Company Founders Reserve kit with a Gold Sparkle wrap, roundover bearing edges, and Palladium hardware. The shells are Rock Maple 10ply 6mm shells with a Birdseye Maple inner veneer. The sizes of Sonny's kit are: 14x22 Bass Drum, 16x18 Floor Tom, 16x16 Floor Tom, 11x14 Rack Tom, and a 10x13 Rack Tom.



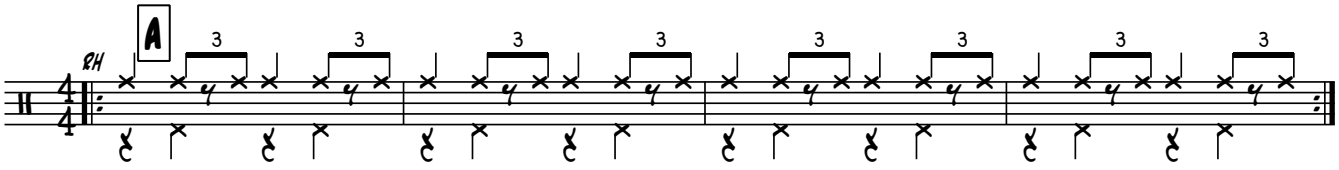
Variety is the Main Ingredient, The Rule of Threes

By Peter Erskine

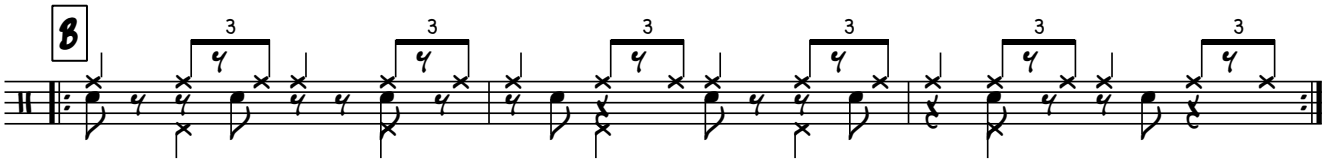
365 days in a year. That's 52 weeks. 12 months. 525,600 minutes. And so on. While some minutes will be more exciting, interesting, or pleasurable than others, every minute is to be cherished. Lucky you, just LOOK at how many valuable moments you have ahead of you. If you're bored, then a change in your point of view might just be what the Dr. Um ordered.

Let's practice the Rule of Threes. 4/4 time. Our subdivision will be even-eighths or less, even though we're swinging the time (LEGATO expression enables any eighth note to feel as though it's swinging.)

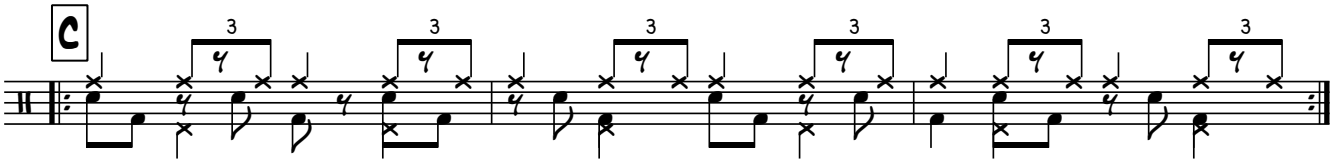
Start off with the ride cymbal pattern by itself, with the hi-hat playing on beats 2 and 4.



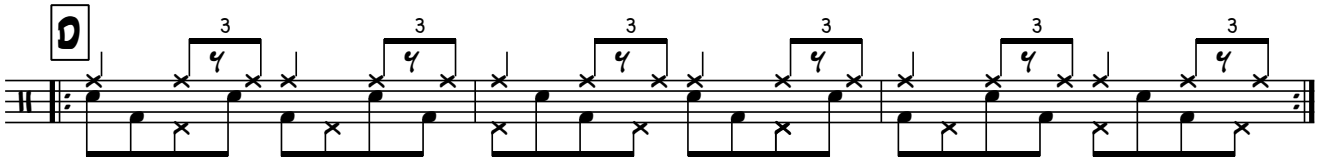
Now add the snare drum (snares ON or OFF, try it both ways!)



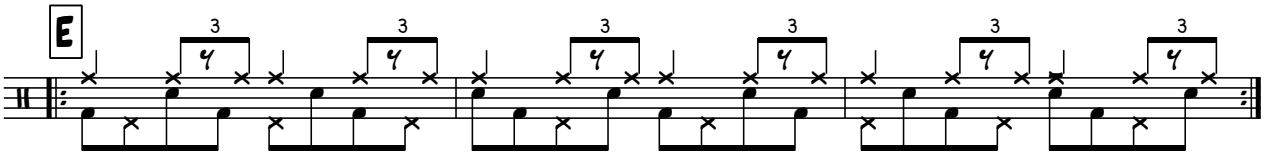
Followed by the bass drum, like this.



Change the hi-hat from its 2 and 4 to the following, all while keeping the ride pattern flowing.



Now let's change the order of the three voices which are playing on every third beat.



From this independence or coordination exercise, let's now switch over to improvisation mode. While playing the bass drum softly on every quarter note with the hat on 2 and 4, improvise around the kit by FIRST playing a tom or a snare (snares off) on every third eighth-note subdivision or beat.

Now let's fill in the empty eighth-note spaces and accent every third eighth-note subdivision. Get in touch with the sense of FLOW that your drumming is generating at this very moment. Is it smooth, or herky-jerky? In other words, does the sound conjure an image of a waterfall, or a stack of cans that are falling down? Hint: *the waterfall answer should be the one you want.*

I like to treat this form of practice as the best kind of feedback loop. If the hands do the talking without the person playing the drums being mindful, then an excellent learning opportunity could be going to waste. The idea, I submit, is for your practice session to INFORM YOU of your rhythmic accuracy, consistency, touch (volume consistency and control,) tone (the sound,) and so on. If ANY element sounds or feels out of place, that is YOU telling YOU to focus on THAT. Simply put, there's no better way to find out what needs work. Keeping it slow, soft, and simple allows your mind and body to comprehend, absorb, and produce the drumming you're capable of performing.

-Change the dynamics. How's your control?
-Change the balance of one voice on the drumset. How's your control?
-Change the tempo (for mindful practicing, I suggest counting yourself off versus switching tempos willy-nilly.)
-Metronomes are okay. Headphones? Not for this … you should be playing soft enough to not warrant hearing protection, and it's important that you hear what you're doing as clearly as possible.

These are just tip of the iceberg practice suggestions or solutions. The possibilities are limitless. You are the music. You are the drum book. You are the solution.

LISTENING: how many recorded examples can you think of or find that utilize, exploit, and celebrate the "Rule of Threes"? I turn to the threes (not triplets, but accented notes every three beats or subdivisions) often, many times for creating a fill. Threes are the bedrocks of syncopation, tension and release, and are a gateway to rhythmic improvisation.

What else have I been up to since last I scribed? Let's see … I flew to Budapest and played with a big band there, followed by drum workshops in Spain, Italy, and Belgium. I played another concert in Vienna (jazz arrangements of the music of Viennese-born film composers Max Steiner and Erich Wolfgang Korngold.) I came home and worked with the Los Angeles Philharmonic playing a benefit concert at the Hollywood Bowl for the victims of the January fires in LA. I attended the premiere of a movie I wrote and recorded the score for, titled *Sacramento* (my daughter Maya Erskine is one of the actors.) I presented workshops in Kutztown, PA and Ann Arbor, MI while playing concerts in those two towns with singer Kurt Elling, celebrating the music of Weather Report. And, I almost forgot, performed the world premiere of a Mass composed by Carlos Simon.

I then experienced a highlight of my musical life, getting to record and play in concert with my trio with pianist Alan Pasqua, this time with bassist Scott Colley who was subbing for our regular bass player Darek Oles. In both instances in both cities (Chicago and Wichita,) we elected to play softly and without fanfare (and, in Wichita, without any sound reinforcement,) drawing the audience in. People came up to me afterwards with tears in their eyes, thanking us for respecting their ears and their intelligence. Nice. Even nicer was running into my old friend and drumming hero Matt Wilson. We were both in town taking part in the Wichita Jazz Festival. I played there for the first time back in 1973, with the Stan Kenton Orchestra. That was then and that was loud. Matt took me to coolest hat store called Hatman Jack's. That's what friends are for.

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

NEW & NOTABLE

ROLAND'S NEW WIRELESS TRIGGER TECHNOLOGY, PORTER & DAVIES ON TOUR, NEW 64 AUDIO ASPIRE UNIVERSAL IEM MODELS, WAVES FREE PLUGIN PACK

New Roland DrumLink Wireless Products

Roland has announced the official release of the DrumLink wireless system and related products. Developed in partnership between Roland and Drum Workshop (DW,) DrumLink is a new wireless triggering technology for electronic pads, cymbals, and drum triggers. From Roland V-Drums kits to hybrid acoustic-electronic configurations, the modular DrumLink system streamlines connectivity for faster setup and a cleaner look.

Designed specifically for drumming applications, the proprietary DrumLink system delivers lightning-fast response and rock-solid performance that feels identical to analog triggering. Up to 30 active instruments are supported simultaneously (depending on the sound source,) unlocking a growing range of hybrid, electronic, and software-based drumming setups.

The DrumLink system features two core components: the WT-10 Wireless Trigger Adapter and DH-10 DrumLink Hub. Supported sound sources include the Roland V71, TD-50X, and TD-27 sound modules, SPD-SX PRO Sampling Pad, and the DW Soundworks software instrument. The WT-10 also makes it easy for owners of Drum Workshop's DWe acoustic-electronic wireless convertible drums to integrate Roland pads within their sets.

WT-10 Wireless Trigger Adapter

The WT-10 converts the analog trigger outputs on compatible Roland drum/cymbal pads and acoustic drum triggers to wireless signals. Two inputs support single-and dual-trigger pads, allowing users to connect two pads to one unit. A single cymbal with two outputs can be connected for bow/bell/edge triggering, and hi-hat pads with two trigger/control outputs are also supported. The integrated mount is highly adjustable, enabling secure and flexible attachment to drum/pad rims, bass drum hoops, and cymbal/hi-hat stands.

DH-10 DrumLink Hub

The compact DH-10 DrumLink Hub captures trigger signals from up to 15 WT-10 units, which are sent to the sound module or a computer via a simple USB-C connection. The DH-10 also has a TRS MIDI output for sending trigger signals to any sound source that receives MIDI note messages and CC data.

Roland V-Cymbals for DWe Convertible Drum Sets

The Roland 4CY-4WT-01 DrumLink Cymbal Pack provides a ready-made solution for outfitting a DWe acoustic-electronic

wireless convertible drum set with Roland's leading electronic cymbals. These expressive pads deliver authentic feel, response, and movement, and have very low in-room noise levels when played. This bundle includes three CY-16R-T crash/ride pads, one VH-10 V-Hi-Hat pad, and four WT-10 Wireless Trigger Adapters that communicate with the kit's DWe DrumLink Wireless Hub. Drum Workshop also offers complete four-and five-piece DWe kit bundles with Roland V-Cymbals and WT-10 units included.

To learn more about the DrumLink system, visit **Roland.com.** To learn more about DWe acoustic-electronic wireless convertible drum sets, visit **DWdrums.com.**

Porter & Davies on Tour With Snow Patrol, Linkin Park, Cat Burns & More

With summer on the way Porter & Davies are delighted to offer a guide to the bands and artists using their world-famous tactile monitoring systems on tours, for festival appearances and in the studio.

Groove master, Ash Soan, is one of the most in demand session players today. He has played on 29 number-one albums and 10 number-one singles as well as 58 top ten albums and 17 top ten singles. He is currently on tour with Snow Patrol, one of the most enduring indie band Britain has ever produced. Of his BC2rm Soan says '*I have been using Porter & Davies for decades now. From Tori Amos, Snow Patrol and in the studio, there is no better...*'

Also hitting the road and headlining the *UEFA Championship Final Kick Off Show* this summer are one of the biggest Nu-Metal and Alternative bands, Linkin Park. The band's new drummer, Colin Brittain, has been using his BC2 on tour as well as when recording the recently released album *From Zero*.

Drummer with Singer-songwriter and Brit and Mercury Award nominee, Cat Burns, is Sharlene Goodridge who also tours with the Prince tribute band, New Purple Celebration. Talking about her recently acquired BC2 she said: '*Wow, what a game-changer! As a drummer, I've always been on the lookout for gear that can elevate my performance. I've done so many shows using a sub along with my in-ears, but I never got the same feeling. Something was lacking, something was missing, the BC2 allows me to truly feel the bass and enhances my overall sound. From show to show, this incredible piece of equipment has made a noticeable difference in my playing, allowing me to deliver better performances every time. I'm thrilled to be a part of an amazing company.*'

BC2s are also being used by Jay Weinberg on tour with Suicidal Tendencies, Daniel Fang out with Turnstile, and Tom Coll touring with Fontaines DC. Gavin Harrison will be using one in the studio with Nick Johnson and on tour with Pineapple Thief.

In addition, several Porter & Davies TT6 Equipped Thrones will also be out on tour with Andrew Marshall with Billie Elish, JR Robinson for his USA shows, Shinya Terachi and Dir En Grey, P.H Naffah on drums for Roger Clyne and the Peacemakers and Barry Kerch playing with Shinedown.

To find out more about making touring and studio work *feel* better go to **https://www.porteranddavies.co.uk/.**

New 64 Audio Aspire Universal IEM Series Models Now Shipping

64 Audio, the leader in custom and universal fit in-ear monitors (IEM,) is proud to announce its new additions (1, 2, and 3) to its recently launched Aspire Series of Universal In-Ear Monitor (UIEM) are now available at 64audio.com. Aspire 1 is 64 Audio's first pro single-driver IEM, whereas 2, 3, and 4 are state-of-the-art hybrid designs using both dynamic and balanced armature drivers.

"Specifically designed for musicians and live music professionals, the three new Aspire models (1, 2, and 3) have been designed with the same sonic characteristics and technology worn by the world's greatest performers using 64 Audio custom in-ear monitors," explained Vitaliy Belonozhko, 64 Audio founder and chief executive officer. "The Aspire Series separate themselves from any other UIEMs in their class, making this powerful sound signature a perfect blend of accuracy and musicality."

Models 1, 2, and 3 have MSRPs of $349.99, $499.99, and $649.99 respectively, with the recently launched Aspire 4 model reduced to $799.99. The form factor for Aspire 1 (single driver), Aspire 2 (dual driver), Aspire 3 (three driver), and Aspire 4 (four-driver) have been designed and engineered by the same innovative team responsible for developing the industry standard audio gear that 64 Audio is known for.

Aspire 1 and 2 include the Helmholtz Resonator, a unique acoustic structure that eliminates resonance by precisely targeting frequencies for optimum tuning. Aspire 3 and 4 include a high-frequency Waveguide, a custom designed acoustic structure integrated onto the high-frequency balanced armature driver.

APEX® Core, 64 Audio's patented technology, is seamlessly integrated into the body of Aspire 1, 2, 3, and 4 earphones. The pressure relieving channel provides controlled leak via acoustic filters as opposed to pneumatically interactive foam in 64 Audio's traditional apex™ implementation. Aspire users can significantly reduce ear fatigue while maintaining roughly 20db of noise isolation.

Unique in its shape and implementation, Waveguide increases the driver's efficiency by directing and focusing its energy for a crisp and clear sound. While hard to compete with the legendary response of 64 Audio's patented tia™ high-driver, this configuration may be the closest thing to it on the market.

Additional specifications and accessories include a molded ABS Shell + Stainless Steel Nozzle; a 48in. Black IPX Cable; 64 Audio Branded Zipper Case; Foam & Silicone Ear Tips; Cleaning Tool; and a 1/4in. Adaptor.

"Whether you're just getting into monitoring with in-ears, not ready for customs, need a backup set, or simply prefer generic fitting products, Aspire offers best-in-class sound and ergonomics, now with four models to choose from," Belonozhko concluded.

Since 2010, 64 Audio has crafted thousands of custom in-ear monitors for some of the world's greatest musical talent. Working with these discerning and critical entertainers has shaped 64 Audio's products and technological development, culminating in the company's most accessible UIEM to date. Sharing that same legendary DNA and patented technology, Aspire 4 is the ultimate UIEM for anyone who needs to HEAR LIKE A PRO.

From studio to stage to sophisticated home audio environments, 64 Audio has created the industry's most innovative universal and custom-built in-ear monitors available to date. The company was founded in 2010 by Vitaliy Belonozhko, a sound engineer who has been working with musicians and production companies for nearly two decades. He discovered the advantages of IEMs over traditional floor "wedges" and recognized that a better solution to in-ear monitoring was needed. Today, 64 Audio supplies products worldwide to some of the best-known musicians, singers, and engineers in the world, as well as discerning audiophiles who demand nothing but the best sound reproduction from their systems. With new and unrivaled technologies such as apex®, LID™, tia™ and 3D-Fit™, 64 Audio excels in challenging traditional earphone designs to bring-to-market unique and innovative audio products. For more information on 64 Audio, please visit **www.64audio.com.**

Waves Audio announces the Waves Free Plugin Pack

Waves Audio the world's leading developer of professional audio signal processing technologies and plugins, announces a Free Plugin Pack, including free ongoing updates. With Waves' Free Plugin Pack, users who are looking to level up their mixing and music production can get started for free, with professional, high-quality tools trusted by the world's leading producers and engineers.

Packed with plugins for warm analog saturation, analog-modeled EQ and compressors, specialty reverbs, creative FX pedals, and even a powerhouse FM synth, this collection goes beyond the stock plugins found in a typical DAW's library. This pack is designed to inspire creativity and elevate sound quality, and it also includes future free updates, ensuring its value grows with time. The Waves Free Plugin Pack includes these plugins:

Lil Tube: Sweet Analog Saturation

Warm up your mix with the sweet, rich sound of real tube saturation. This easy-to-use plugin adds depth, character, and harmonic warmth to any track.

IR Live Convolution Reverb: Real-World Reverb

Add space and realism with impulse response (IR) reverbs that emulate real environments—from concert halls to studios and beyond.

V-EQ3: Smooth & Musical Vintage Analog EQ

Shape your sound with accuracy and precision using the warmth and depth of a legendary three-band vintage EQ. Perfect for enhancing vocals, instruments, and mixes.

V-Comp: Classic Vintage Compressor

Add smooth, musical dynamics with this classic analog-modeled compressor, inspired by a legendary unit used on countless classic recordings.

AudioTrack: All-in-One Channel Strip

A complete mixing solution in a single plugin, featuring EQ, compression, and gating to streamline your workflow.

Flow Motion: Hybrid FM Synth

Experiment with this powerful FM synthesizer with intuitive modulation, deep sound design capabilities and over 1000 presets.

GTR Solo: Pro Effect Pedal-Style FX

Get studio-quality tones with a versatile collection of amp and effects emulations. From rich distortion to lush modulation and delay, these FX work not just on guitars, but also on vocals, synths, and more.

In addition, users will receive **StudioVerse Audio Effects** and **StudioVerse Instruments,** delivering instant access to custom plugin chains designed by top producers and engineers. Whether you need a polished vocal chain, a punchy drum mix, or a creative FX stack, StudioVerse gives you the pro sound—without the guesswork. Just load a chain and go. With the Waves Free Plugin Pack, you can start creating with Waves' cutting-edge plugins and optimize your sound—completely free.

Evans Drumheads: Level 360 All-Around!

By Brian Hill

The idea of the Mylar plastic drum head goes back as early as 1952. By the end of 1956, drummer Chick Evans had partnered up and founded Evans Products, Inc. It was this new Evans company that *made it happen*. Mylar heads became the future of drum heads, because they didn't have the problems of natural animal hide heads. Even so, those first synthetic heads had problems that needed to be worked out over the next several decades.

When D'Addario purchased Evans Heads in the early 1990's, they continued to improve the product quality immensely. Evans acquired several patents in the 1980's and established even more patents going forward. Evans reasoned that the drum head should effectively conform to a drum's bearing edge, and they debuted a logical solution called Level 360. Since 2013, all Evans drum heads are exactly that: Level, 360 degrees around. Level 360 is the pinnacle of drum head construction!

Some of Evans' technical highlights include a "steeper collar for more clearance on all shells (including some that may be out of round,) a rolled-over metal hoop, so heads NEVER get pulled or broken from the collar." The folks at Evans asked *Modern Drummer* to check out several of their heads and see what we thought. So, let's see what they sent over and start making some noise!

Modern Drummer received a nice selection of Evans heads that included: the HD Dry tom, Strata 1000 tom and snare heads, UV1 Reverse Dot snare, EMAD Calftone, and EMAD2 Clear kick heads. For further comparison, I'm also going to throw in the G1 Coated Snare and the EC2S Clear SST (aka EC2) for toms.

We'll start with the snare heads. The Evans G1 Coated head will act as my baseline (as an Ambassador would if we were discussing Remo) to compare other Evans heads. The G1 coated is a single ply 10 mil film that is a great basic, "getter-done" snare head that also works very well on toms. The G1 head has a balanced attack, long sustain, is fairly bright sounding, and durable.

The UV1 Reverse Dot snare head is a single ply coated head that is 10 mils thick. UV1 utilizes a patented UV-cured coating process to help provide greater durability and consistency of texture. With the Reverse Dot on the under side of the head, greater focus is realized compared to heads without the dot. Furthermore, the attack is balanced, the sustain is moderately long, and is the tone is somewhat bright. Hitting a UV1 Reverse Dot snare head square center sounded a bit tighter than the G1.

The Strata 1000 is also a single-ply head. It is a 10-mil head with a Strata coating that helps the head resemble the sound (and look) of a thicker calfskin. The Strata line was originally created for Orchestral snare, bass, and toms. But many drum set players are really turning on to this versatile, wide open, and warm head choice. The tones from the snares and toms that I tested the Strata 1000 heads on, were warm and earthy. The attack was more defined with a more subtle sustain and a warmer tone than a G1. However, Strata 1000 heads are deemed to be a bit less durable than the G1 heads. The Strata 1000 heads will get you closer to that vintage, calf sound without the inherent problems of calf.

Speaking of calf heads, the EMAD Calftone kick head is a fairly close, synthetic alternative to calfskin. The Calftone texture is technically a single-ply natural looking coated 12 mil film, that emulates the look and sound of calf skin. It sounds warm, rich, and powerful without the problems of natural skin. The

attack was both balanced and defined with a short sustain. The tone was moderate, and the durability is thought to be less than the EMAD2 Clear kick head. Your results may vary. I combined the EMAD Calftone kick head with the Strata 1000 heads on snare and toms on a vintage style kit, and it sounded like a powerful version of a 1950s rock and roll kit!

The HD Dry is a two-ply coated head. It consists of an outer ply of 5 mil and an inner ply of 7.5 mil film. There is an additional 2 mil overtone control ring on the underside of the head that "floats" with the head to help eliminate excessive overtones and controls sustain. This floating ring acts something like an "acoustic gate." Unique to this head is the series of precision drilled, dry vent holes around the perimeter of the head that help to reduce the overtones and control the sustain. The HD Dry heads have a defined attack, moderate sustain, medium tone, and durability. I thought the resonance was beefy, rich, and controlled on the toms that I put them on. They are also much more controlled than the EC2's and need no muffling.

The Evans Externally Mounted Adjustable Damping (EMAD) system contains two different interchangeable foam damping rings that maximize attack and low end. The EMAD2 Clear head is a two-ply combination of 7 mil over 10 mil film, the attack was really maxed with a short sustain, greater mid-range (for clarity,) and durability. I liked the punch I got out of this head. Each Evans kick head comes with one beater impact patch to help reinforce the strike zone on the head.

That's the rundown of the several different heads that Evans wanted us to review. I found every head to be accurate with the Evans description that came with them. I've personally used several Evans heads for years and have no problem referring them to anyone. I like that each head has a "tone" to it when held in my hands. And before mounting them on a drum, there are no wrinkles when laying un-tensioned on the bearing edge of a drum.

How you use and choose your heads will certainly come down to your own particular needs, drums, preferences, dampening, ability, and ears. Describing drumheads can be a little like asking twenty people to describe their perfect cup of coffee. You gotta know that you're going to get twenty different answers. If you are interested enough to create your own answers, go to the Evans website at: Daddario.com. Check 'em out and see what other cool (Level) heads are offered to help you stay well rounded with your sound.

Rebounding with Excellence.

By Brian Hill

ProMark Drumsticks were founded in 1957 by Herb Brochstein. Since that period, ProMark has evolved to become a leading staple in drumstick innovation and manufacturing. As is commonly known today, the company is now owned and operated by D'Addario. Since that acquisition, the quality and consistency of the product-line has continued to grow and improve, placing ProMark as a real leader in the genre.

Our friends over at Pro Mark asked *Modern Drummer* to take a look, or rather take a *"Whack!"* at some of their Hickory drumsticks. ProMark sent over a box with a nice assortment of their traditional Classic Hickory Forward sticks and four different versions in their Hickory Rebound series. All sticks came in 5A. The different versions of the sticks looked very inviting and are even in my favorite size, so, let's get whacking!

First up: The Classic Hickory Forward 5A. These sticks come in at a length of 16" / 406.4mm with a diameter of .551" / 14mm (or just over half an inch for the rest of us.) The tips are wood with an oval shape. The nice lacquer finish looks good while not being too slippery in your hands.

The Classic Hickory Forward 5A model is a more traditional, front heavy feeling stick style that goes way back in the ProMark lineage. Drummers who grew up using this type of stick from ProMark will really appreciate the performance and familiarity of this feel. Being a "front heavy" design, this is a great stick for harder playing and digging into a bell with power and clarity. The Classic Forward model comes in sizes 7A, 5A, 5B, and 2B widths.

Being that this is a *Classic* design for ProMark, I pulled out a couple sets of old ProMark sticks I had since the 80s which matched the Hickory Forward 5A sticks I have here. These old sticks were also 5A but made of a different wood. In the 80's, ProMark also had a line of Oak sticks, which were a heavier, denser wood. I found that the new Hickory Forward 5A sticks were much easier and lighter to use and didn't beat up my hands like these heavier woods. The Hickory sticks felt much faster!

The second set of sticks sent over were the four versions of the Hickory Rebound 5A series. These sticks were also 16" / 406mm in length but were just a bit thicker in diameter at .565" / 14.4mm. Why are they thicker if they are all 5A's? Well, the Rebound series is a rear heavy feeling stick with a longer, thinner tapper (or shoulder) than the Hickory Forward, providing a bit more agility and responsiveness. The tips are wood and in the shape of a reimagined Acorn design.

Our group of ProMark Hickory Rebound 5A sticks came with the straight-up regular version that sported a clear lacquer finish. There was also a RAW Hickory finished version, which of course had no finish applied and was nicely sanded providing a natural, no-slip feel that I really liked. A green colored print on the stick (instead of the regular black ink) made a nice subtle statement. The only difference between these two models was that one had a lacquer finish, and the other did not.

The ProMark FireGrain Rebound 5A is ProMark's most durable stick here. Using a patented Heat Tempering Process that seemingly transforms hickory wood into a harder, denser material that's great for harder hitting and durability. This is a tradition with wood that is as old as the caveman, who would place their wood-tipped spears into the fire to harden them for a more durable and useful implement.

The fourth and final pair were the ActiveGrip Hickory Rebound 5A model. These sticks are coated with a non-slip finish that "utilizes D'Addario's patented, heat activated ActiveGrip solution…. Engineered to get tackier as your hands sweat and body temperature rises." They are also designed not to make marks on the things you hit with them.

All ProMark sticks are weight-sorted and paired as well as being pitched matched to help give the player the best possible matched set of instrumental implements possible. Our rep at ProMark had this to say about the matching process: "We have a proprietary process that we like to call ProMatch which features the tightest tolerances currently in the industry. Allowing us to offer the most consistent sticks on the market." Every one of these sticks performed exceptionally well for me. I think that almost anybody could pick up a pair of any of these sticks and play well with them.

I did not break one of these sticks, and not for lack of trying! Now each stick did show normal wear and tear, but again, they didn't break. (Your results may vary depending on how you hit!) I always like to know that I can rely on the implement that I'm using, and these did not disappoint. Hickory is the most popular and useful wood for modern drum set style playing.

The one thing I haven't mentioned, but I think adds to the over-all vibe here. It's that ProMark drumsticks are made in Texas, USA! And you know what they say: Don't Mess with Texas! So, grab a pair or two and get *WHACKING!* Check out the sticks on the ProMark web site: **Daddario.com**. Prices vary depending on model and quantity.

BRANDON

I can't think of another drummer who has had a run as successful as Brandon Pertzborn. In less than a decade, he has gone from being a hungry young drummer on the Dallas-Fort Worth music scene to being a member of Black Flag, Doyle (from The Misfits,) Ho99o9, Marilyn Manson, Suicidal Tendencies, as well as playing with Limp Bizkit, and Corey Taylor (from Slipknot/Stone Sour.) Now, he has been tearing it up as a member of The Offspring for the last two years. *Hearing* Brandon on Marilyn Manson's *We Are Chaos*, and The Offspring's most recent record *Supercharged*, you hear Brandon's sense of groove, his attention to detail, and his relentless power. *Seeing* him tour with The Offspring, you'll be amazed by his tornadic and energetic approach to drumming that is grounded in authenticity, context, and taste. *Talking* to him, you'll be impressed by a smart young drummer whose feet are firmly planted on the ground, and that (ironically) didn't grow up wanting to be the drummer in some of the most successful punk and hardcore bands ever. But that's what happened. At the age of 30, he is a drummer that speaks like a wise old master. He's worked hard, he's learned a lot, and he's got a lot to share.

Photo by Tijs van Leur

PERTZBORN

THE RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF GIVING THE MUSIC EXACTLY WHAT IT NEEDS

BY MARK GRIFFITH

MD: How did you start playing drums?

BP: I was in 6th grade, so it must have been around 2006, and I was already playing hockey outside of school, but once you reached middle school you had to either pick a sport offered by the school or be in band. Since I was already playing hockey outside of school, I didn't want to do another sport, so I picked band. Once I signed up for band, I was looking around and I thought that drums looked the most fun, and I already had a couple of friends who played drums. Between my friends who showed me a few things, and taking private lessons, that was the genesis of it.

MD: Who was your first teacher, and what did you start working on in those lessons?

BP: My teacher's name was Ludo Baccherini, and I still keep in touch with him. He was a major pillar on my outlook of what a drummer's role entails. Once I was comfortable with some basic beats and became good enough to play with friends, he and I had many philosophical conversations regarding the role of the drummer. As an adolescent, I just wanted to play as fast as possible and show everyone the cool new fills I was learning. He would sit me down and say, "That's not what this is about, you're the backbone, you're the engine of what's going on here. If you're playing like that, you're not going to get hired for many gigs." He spoke to me in a way that really shaped how I look at the instrument, and what my role is within the band—including how to take on the leadership role of a drummer.

MD: Do you remember what he was teaching you?

BP: Well, I'm 30 years old and I started playing 17-18 years ago, but it feels like a lifetime ago. Honestly, what remains present to me most profoundly from my time with Ludo were the conversations more than the playing. Again, discussing topics of what a drummer should provide to a band – rather than memorizing exact patterns or rudiments. I remember learning my very first beats with my friends before I even took lessons. I vividly remember going over to my friend's house, and he played a Fall Out Boy song called "Dance, Dance." The intro to that song is only kick and snare and I recall hearing that and having such a visceral feeling of engagement. That was the first time I heard live drumming that close to me. I was completely enthralled. I remember wondering, "How did he learn that? How is he even playing that?" I couldn't wrap my head around how it was even possible. These were some of the core moments that started my journey. Over the next couple of years, I would ask my friends to show me beats they had learned, and I tried to replicate (as much as I could.) Then I would go back to their houses, and they would show me more. Eventually, my skill built and built, but it certainly wasn't an overnight success.

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Photo by Tijs van Leur

MD: What type of music were you listening to back then?

BP: My parents loved (and still love) classic rock, so that was most of what I was listening to at home. My dad's all-time favorite band is Boston, so I heard Boston every day. He also loved (and still does) bands such as The Cars, The Doobie Brothers, AC/DC, Hall & Oates, etc. My mom has always loved The Who, The Rolling Stones, Van Halen, Led Zeppelin, and so on. They both liked grunge as well, so I would also hear no shortage of Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, and Alice in Chains, etc. Those are the bands in the forefront of my memory, but certainly, I was hearing all different types of rock'n'roll in the house.

MD: At that point, were you starting to pay attention to drummers, or was it just about the bands?

BP: You know what's funny, I remember one of my very first times going into Guitar Center, and the drum department had these massive photos of drummers along with their names. I remember thinking (not in a negative way, but more-so a joyful way) *people actually know the names of drummers?* As a kid I thought drummers were anonymous. I didn't know a single drummer's name. As a 12-year-old, I remember thinking, "I guess people know the names of drummers, I better look these guys up." I was certainly exposed to music, and I had a passion for music, but I didn't know people's names aside from just the band's name.

Another important aspect is that this was around the time of the video games *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*. Their influence on my development was paramount. Prior to *Rock Band* I was just a kid who played an instrument. I practiced for a half an hour every other day or so. Then around 13 or 14, I started playing *Rock Band* and that's when everything changed. Prior to Rock Band, it was a little difficult to learn complex songs by myself. I could play beats, but I was stuck within the parameters of my own musical vocabulary. If I heard a song that I wanted to learn, it was hard for me to pick out what the drummer was doing if it was outside my vocabulary. I knew I could do something "similar," but I couldn't figure out exactly what the drummer was doing. With *Rock Band*, once you reached expert mode, the exact rhythms the drummer was playing on the track were coming down the screen. However, while it was amazing to have a tool like this to learn thousands of new beats, I was still cognizant that with *Rock Band* you didn't have to play with dynamics or feel. It didn't matter if you were rushing or if you were behind the beat. If you were playing the notes, you were good to go. So, I used *Rock Band* as a tool to expand my musical vocabulary, but still took years and years to practice the musicality portion of drumming – feel, groove, dynamics, swing – and most of all, playing with other musicians.

MD: That's really interesting. I remember when (the video game) *Rock Band* first came out, I remember thinking that this is really going to inspire some young musicians, but you are the first guy that I have talked to that has referenced the importance of *Rock Band*.

BP: I remember every time I would turn on the game, there would be an alternating daily message, and one of them would say something along the lines of "If you play this game long enough, you might just make it in a big band in real life." I remember thinking, 'That's my dream, that would be so cool!'

MD: How did *Rock Band* transfer to playing with people? And how did growing up in Texas effect your musical upbringing?

BP: I was born and raised in a suburb of Dallas, Texas called Grapevine, and lived there until I was 19 before moving to Los Angeles. Growing up, I was constantly surrounded by music in the Dallas area. There were so many kids my age who played music and lived close to me. I would teach lessons at local music schools and play in a bunch of different bands with friends. Once I started gigging, my friends and I would go down to Deep Ellum, which is a neighborhood in Dallas where the clubs are. One of the very first shows I attended was The Devil Wears Prada at a club called The Door in 2010. That was a life changing moment for me! I had certainly been to local shows before, but this was the first time I really felt part of the "scene." It was all kids my age, and it was 'our' music— not our parent's, or anyone else's. I remember when the band went on stage, the crowd crammed towards the stage, and the pit took over and the crowd erupted. I couldn't believe the energy from the stage, and from the crowd. I said to myself, "THIS is what I'm doing! This is what I'm meant to do and I'm going to pursue this endlessly." That show gave me a feeling like no other and I knew I belonged there. That club is also where some of my first gigs were. Now that I think back, going down to Deep Ellum and being part of the Dallas-Fort Worth music scene felt very welcoming, and I was meeting so many people down there.

In terms of playing with other people, getting immersed in the scene was huge for my development. At a certain point I realized that my musical vocabulary was sufficient enough, so I needed to play with actual people. I needed to learn what the difference was between playing solo and playing with other musicians. My drum instructor, Ludo, talked to me about the contrast between playing solo and playing with other people all the time. He would demonstrate what my responsibility (as a drummer) is. I learned about counting the band in at the right tempo, maintaining that tempo, looking around and watching what was going on around me, and adjusting within my playing. Ludo talked to me about really listening to everyone else in the band, including the singer and their phrasing. For example, if

In 2014 we opened for Stone Sour in Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. I remember thinking, 'If this is all I ever do, I've made it!'.

Photo by Tijs van Leur

they are struggling to get words out, you might be rushing. Now that I'm a more mature musician, I see countless ways to identify where the tempo needs to sit, and that mindset was really generated by Ludo making sure that I listen to everyone else – almost more than myself. I would do my best to use the tools he was teaching me when playing around town, and I loved being able to utilize those problem-solving skills I was learning. I found that when problem solving while drumming, it would really engage the leadership aspect in my brain. It's not much different from the role of a conductor, a quarterback in football, a director on a video shoot, etc., and I realized I equally enjoyed the leadership aspect of drumming just as much as the musical aspect. I suppose the marriage of the artistic side of my brain along with the logical side of my brain is something I really enjoy exercising— and I've found drumming to be that vehicle.

MD: Did you start some bands with your friends?

BP: Oh, for sure. Some of my first bands were with friends from school, and when I think back to those times, those are some of my greatest memories of playing music. Even just as much – if not more than playing arenas, stadiums, and festivals. There's something so special about those first couple years of playing music with your friends and figuring it out together. There was also a music school in town called For Those About to Rock School (yes, an amazing play on words from the AC/DC song), and I was in a few different bands with some of the kids who took lessons there. The owners of the school were in an amazing AC/DC tribute band, and we would open for them at House of Blues and other venues around town. Additionally, just like so many other drummers, I really developed my chops playing at church. What was great about that, is there's typically a music director to hold you accountable to what you're playing and to make sure the transitions are smooth. This was a big contrast rather than just bashing away with friends – you actually had to make sure you weren't overplaying!

MD: How long were you playing around town before you were in a good band?

BP: When I was 16 or 17 years old, so around 2011 or so, I played with an artist named Zoe Ann, and she was a great singer. This was one of the first times there was a manager involved with a band I was in, and that was really exciting to see that side of things. I was also in a band called Vibe Zoo with my buddy Harrison and would jam almost every day. I really honed my jamming and improv skills with him. I also joined a Dallas band called Drayter, and we played all over Dallas and ended up doing a record with Dave Fortman, who had worked with Slipknot, Godsmack, Evanescence, etc. I couldn't believe I was tracking a record with the guy who produced *All Hope is Gone* by Slipknot. I remember learning so much about the recording process and the uniqueness of tracking a record versus playing live. In 2014 we opened for Stone Sour in Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. I remember thinking, 'If this is all I ever do, I've made it!'. After those gigs, I knew I needed more of that. But I didn't know how

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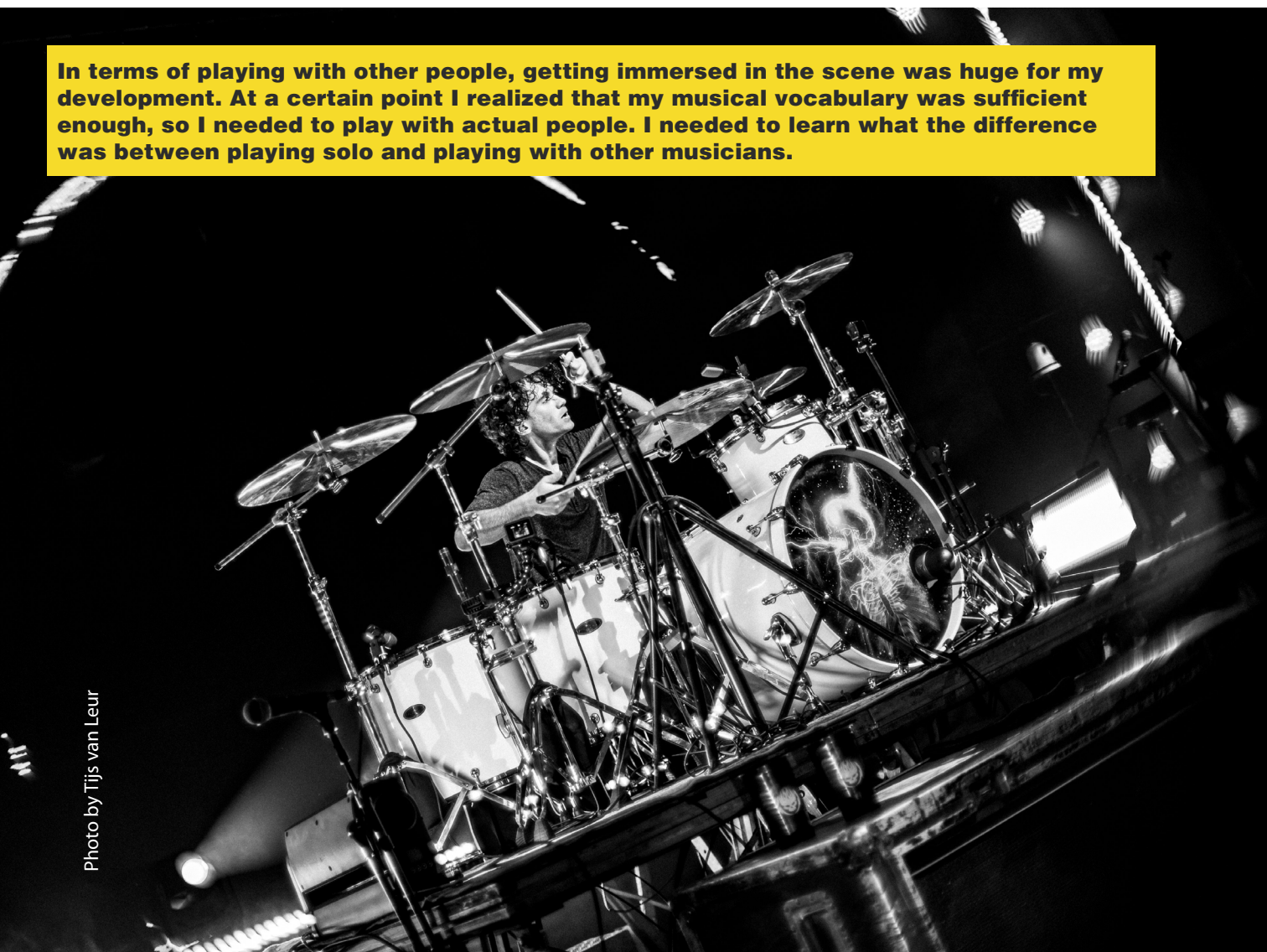

Photo by Tijs van Leur

Photo by Tris van Leur

to take it past the local level. I knew that I was good enough, I felt like I was meeting everyone I could, and I felt like I was looking at things the right way, but I didn't know how to achieve the "*big break*."

I found that when problem solving while drumming, it would really engage the leadership aspect in my brain. It's not much different from the role of a conductor, a quarterback in football, a director on a video shoot...

A couple weeks later, after endlessly wishing I could be on more tours like the Stone Sour run that just ended, I put a musician's ad on Craigslist that essentially said: 'My name is Brandon Pertzborn, I play drums, and whether you need someone who can teach drum lessons, tour, studio work, whatever… I'm your guy.' I also linked some videos in that Craigslist ad.

That night, Greg Ginn (the founding guitarist of Black Flag) emailed me after finding my Craigslist ad. His email essentially said: "Hey Brandon, I checked out your videos, Black Flag is looking for a drummer, let me know if you're available and interested…" I felt like I had just won the lottery, I couldn't believe it.

MD: It turns out that your "big break" was simply placing an ad. *Anybody* can do that.

BP: Absolutely, I received that e-mail around 11:00 pm and it had his phone number at the bottom. I thought, 'Well he emailed me at 11:00, I might as well try to call him,' I was so excited. He lived about three hours away from Dallas and he asked me to come down to his studio sometime during the week so he could watch me play. I told him that I could come down anytime and he said he wanted me to learn some material first. For the next few days, I crammed as many Black Flag songs as I could, and he sent me some jam tracks of him just playing bass and guitar with no drums. I think he wanted to see what my ideas were and what I would put on top of that.

MD: There's the next part of your "big break," hard work, and knowing the importance of being prepared. How do you learn songs?

BP: My greatest ally in learning material has always been charting parts out. I chart out the structure of the song (intro, verse, chorus) and I'll write down the kick pattern for each section. Obviously, it can get more complicated than that, but for the most part, that's the formula. Then I'll approach the song in bite size pieces. I'll learn the intro, then the verse, and once I feel I have that, I'll continue to proceed through the song. I do that for every song, then I listen to it relentlessly. I'll even play mental games throughout the day to quiz myself. For example, if the song is at the chorus, I'll try to remember what's coming next, and if I get it wrong, I'll rewind the song to dissect why I got it wrong. I've found that the more vehicles I have to memorize a song, the greater chance I have of memorizing it quickly. You should see how much I'm air drumming before I even take the song to the kit.

After a few days of preparing, I drove down and auditioned for Greg**.** I played a whole bunch of Black Flag songs to pre-recorded tracks. I also played to pre-recorded tracks of him jamming while he watched. I remember that it was difficult to stay on tempo since there was no click on the pre-recorded tracks coming out of the PA. But again, problem solving. Sometimes that means you need to simplify your parts so

that you can stay on time in complicated situations. I clearly remember doing that here. A week later, he reached out and said the job was mine. I joined Black Flag in March of 2014 at 19 years old, and we ended up rehearsing for six weeks prior to the tour. Greg loves to rehearse a lot, so we would often rehearse twice a day, five days a week. On the weekends, I would drive back up to Dallas before heading back down the following week.

And just like the common theme of my career so far, I received a call out of left field, and next thing you know, I'm touring that summer as a fill in with Limp Bizkit.

We then hit the road that summer and knocked out 60+ shows with very minimal off days. I remember we had stretch of shows with no off days that topped over 20 days in a row. That sure was one way to begin my touring career! I wouldn't trade it for anything though.

MD: During those rehearsals and during that tour how did your drumming evolve, and what did you learn from Greg?

My greatest ally in learning material has always been charting parts out. I chart out the structure of the song (intro, verse, chorus,) and I'll write down the kick pattern for each section. Obviously, it can get more complicated than that, but for the most part, that's the formula.

BP: Wow, where do I even start? Well, first of all, there's not another musician on planet earth like Greg Ginn. During Black Flag shows, there's a lot of improvised jamming moments, and I really had to re-calibrate the way I thought about jamming. Growing up, I was in a band called Vibe Zoo, and we would jam all the time; and I really learned the art of jamming (who should lead in different moments, and what dictates who's leading – as well as following the other musicians.) But the way Greg Ginn approaches jamming felt like I needed to approach it with an entirely new perspective. His approach to jamming almost felt like a foreign language that I was trying to decipher in real time. Maybe that was one of the aspects he liked about me? We certainly shared many musical commonalities, but I can't pretend I grew up the same way as him musically. I'd like to think that juxtaposition created some really cool moments.

In terms of physicality, the biggest aspect that sticks out to me was the constant eighth notes on the hi-hats. To me, it's a trademark Black Flag quality – and it's so important. Those eighth notes have to be hammered away to achieve the frenetic energy, and that easily triples the physicality of the parts. Honestly, aside from that, most of what I did was pretty familiar, and wasn't much different than the rock drumming that I grew up with, it was just faster. I had already played a lot of metal music, so I had no problem with playing fast, but hammering out those quick eighth notes and trying to keep my stamina up to do that took some work.

MD: How did you develop the ability to hammer those punk hi-hat eighth notes?

BP: Honestly, I'm still improving on that. I could write a book on different approaches to playing the hi-hat for different styles. The way I learned to play the hi-hat was with the Moeller technique, but I've definitely evolved my approach as the years have gone on as it relates to the punk style of eighth notes on the hats.

MD: Alternating between playing with the shoulder of the stick and the tip of the stick?

BP: Yes. When I played with Black Flag, I started with that technique on the hi-hat because that's how I was taught to play and that's what I heard in most music. But in Black Flag it was different, it was a more of a "hammering them out" primarily with the shoulder of the stick type-of-style, while not keeping the hats fully closed. I think of it more as a "blue collar" type of feel— rather than how a slick studio drummer would approach it— and that certainly took me some time to realize and incorporate in my playing. Honestly, it's only been in recent years that I have really honed the approach of not always utilizing the perfectly clean Moeller technique with some of the punk stuff.

MD: That's not the sound.

BP: Yeah, like I said, it's more of a "blue collar" feel. I almost envision a dude in his garage hammering eighth notes with grit. I'm not sure if it does, but mentally, I almost think of it coming more from your elbow and shoulder than you normally would, as well as using more of the shoulder of the stick, and keeping the hats a little open, even when you feel like it should be completely closed— which is not how I was taught to play, at all. But again, I only utilize this in particular contexts— mostly the punk stuff.

MD: Playing the hi-hat like that is a little more relentless and less groove oriented. It fits the musical approach better. How did you learn that?

BP: Well, in a way, I'd say it is very groove oriented. When I listen to Black Flag and The Offspring— those hammered out hi-hats give so much life and energy and vibe to the music— but again, it's a bit counter-intuitive since I was taught to play a much cleaner approach to the hi-hat growing up. And to be honest, when I was in Black Flag, I was still honing a lot of my approach. I think I was still playing "shoulder-tip" (like you just explained.) It hadn't dawned on me that I needed to do it differently, I was 19 years old and that's how I had learned.

MD: Did Greg ever address the fact that that might not have felt right?

BP: No, not at all. I think it still felt really good. These are just really micro details – but they're still important to me. For Greg, even if I had omitted the eighth notes and just played solely quarter notes, I don't think he would have said anything. In a certain way he's more musically minded than technically minded. If it feels good, it's good, even (and sometimes to him, especially) if you're playing it different from the record. Oftentimes he would say that the record is wrong, but I wanted to maintain what I heard on the records the best I could, because it spoke to me, and those records are special.

Overall, Black Flag was a great experience. Greg Ginn is Greg Ginn, he is totally DIY. We were touring in a van, and we were road dogs. It was my first actual tour, so I had no prior expectations going in. We had very few off days and we were in a van driving upwards of eight hours a day with no techs or crew. We were all (including Greg) loading our own gear, setting up, line checking, sound checking, playing the show, then tearing down and driving for a couple hours to make headway,

then getting a hotel, to wake up the next morning and repeat. At one stretch we did 22 shows in a row.

MD: How and why did you move on from Black Flag?

BP: The tour ended in August of 2014, and the writing on the wall was that we'd be taking an indefinite break from touring. So, I had to decide, do I go back home to Dallas? Or do I give Los Angeles a try? LA seemed to make sense because so much of the music industry is based out there. Also, Mike Vallely (singer of Black Flag at the time), invited me to play a show with his other band, Revolution Mother, near LA. And, my girlfriend, Emily (we're now married and have been together for 11 years), was born and raised in the Los Angeles area -- so the choice was pretty clear to give it a try out there. So, in September of 2014, I officially moved, got a job at Guitar Center, placed Craigslist ads, and took local gigs rehearsing and playing local shows. A few months later, in December of 2014, I called my friend, Ethan Kauffman to see if he knew of anyone looking for a drummer (years ago, he produced a record I worked on in LA when I was visiting from Dallas). We met for breakfast, and he told me to look up a guy named Barry Squire who was essentially a musician headhunter. Come to find out, in Los Angeles, often when a band is looking for musician, they would reach out to Barry, and he would source musicians who would be a good fit. I looked him up on Facebook and immediately saw on his page that a band called With Our Arms to the Sun was looking for a drummer to go on tour opening for John 5 (guitarist from Marilyn Manson and Rob Zombie) and then a tour opening for Doyle (guitarist from The Misfits.) I knew that would get me back into the musical realm that I wanted to be in, so I reached out to Barry.

Photo by Tijs van Leur

I'd also like to take this time to give my condolences to Barry's family as he unfortunately passed away recently. I owe so much of my career to Barry, and he was such a cornerstone in the Los Angeles music scene. I really hope he knew how many lives he changed. He is brought up in conversations all the time when talking with fellow musicians. He was surely a loved man.

So back to December 2014, Barry set up an audition with the band and when it was my turn I walked in and tried to just crush the songs with everything I could. They were a primarily-instrumental prog rock band, so with that opportunity I figured I'd nail the prog rock thing - because I could play odd time signatures and play technically all day long, but I thought that I could also bring a rock'n'roll vibe to their music. I always try to find a way to bring my uniqueness to a gig. That has always been a focus. I want to honor what's going on, but I want to see how I can bring my own flavor to situations. I got that gig and I toured with With Our Arms to the Sun opening for John 5, and it was incredible. While I had been doing a bunch of local LA gigs already, that was my first touring gig since moving there, and I was so excited to be back on the road– especially considering I was getting involved in the LA scene. After the tour opening for John 5, we then went on tour opening for Doyle on the first 15 dates of a 30-show tour. Our last show was in Omaha, Nebraska and I still hadn't met anyone in Doyle's band yet. I figured that before I went home, I might as well go say hi to Doyle and the rest of the band. The first member I met was the singer, Alex Story who couldn't have been any nicer. We talked for a bit, and then he introduced me to Doyle and the rest of the band. The next day our band drove back home to California. I remember sitting on the couch and having a very similar feeling to the one I had while I was still living in Dallas after the Stone Sour run last year before Black Flag — I knew I needed more of this. I wanted to be on the road so bad. So how serendipitous was it that at that same moment, I received a text from Doyle's tour manager asking what I was doing the next month. She asked if I could play double kick drum and if I had heard Doyle's record.

She said they were going to be in LA in three days and might need to swap out drummers. She asked if I'd be interested in hopping on board if they do indeed end up swapping drummers. I said absolutely! Because I knew that things were up in the air, I had a choice… I could wait to learn the material until she confirmed, or I could start charting it out and learning the music immediately – so that's what I did – and fortunately I did, because I didn't receive confirmation until the night before they got to town that I would in fact be playing. When they got to town, I immediately met with Doyle, rehearsed three songs, and then played The Whiskey that night.

Honestly, aside from that, most of what I did was pretty familiar, and wasn't much different than the rock drumming that I grew up with, it was just faster.

We ended up touring the US for the next month, and I remember thinking how funny it was that at this point, I had only been touring for less than a year and had already played with Black Flag, and Doyle from the Misfts – but I didn't grow up a punk drummer! I was thrown into this world and couldn't be any happier about it.

I ended up playing with Doyle from 2015-2017 and had the best time ever. We toured nonstop and recorded an album together. The best part about it was they all quickly became my best friends, and it was an amazing environment. I felt like I was really coming into my own as a punk rock drummer— even more so than with Black Flag. I harnessed so much power and aggression playing with Doyle, and every night we made it our mission to go on stage and completely crush. At a certain point, Doyle started playing again in the Misfits reunion shows, so our schedule slowed down a bit. I ended up working again a lot back in the LA scene, but I wanted to get on the road more. I figured, 'Well, Craigslist worked for me back in 2014 with Black Flag, I might as well try it again.' Eventually a band called Ho99o9 (pronounced horror) reached out, and I ended up touring with them from 2016-2019. We hit the ground running hard and played everywhere all over the US and Europe primarily. This was my first time going to Europe and playing the festival circuit. We would play those festivals in Europe, and it felt like we were Metallica. The crowd absolutely would eat it up and it was such a fun experience. I certainly planned on staying with Ho99o9. The camp treated me so well, and I could really feel the project growing, and it was very exciting to be part of, but in 2019, I received a phone call that changed everything.

Back in in 2015, when I toured with With Our Arms to the Sun, opening for John 5 – John and I would talk, and we ended up staying in touch over the following years. We always wanted to play together, but the schedule never panned out. Then in 2019, he called me and mentioned that Marilyn Manson was looking for a drummer. I couldn't believe it. I was so happy playing with Ho99o9 and had every intention of continuing with them, but there comes a time in life where decisions must be made – and I just couldn't say no to playing with such a legendary artist I respected so much. The thought of headlining arenas and festivals was a dream I'd had since I was a kid.

I wanted to immediately send in some videos of me playing

Photo by Tijs van Leur

some Manson songs so John could pass them on to the camp, but I was in Dallas visiting family with absolutely no gear. I called around and found a studio that was opening at 10 AM the next morning, so I learned "Sweet Dreams" and "Beautiful People" that night, bought a GoPro and drumsticks, and cranked out two videos and sent them to John.

I ended up auditioning in Hollywood with just the band at first.

Honestly, it's only been in recent years that I have really honed the approach of not always utilizing the perfectly clean Moeller technique with some of the punk stuff.

Then I was called back the second day for Manson to check me out as well. He watched me play a few songs with the band, and then we spoke for a while and immediately hit it off. We both knew it would be an amazing fit. For the next couple of months,

When I listen to Black Flag and The Offspring— those hammered out hi-hats give so much life and energy and vibe to the music— but again, it's a bit counter-intuitive since I was taught to play a much cleaner approach to the hi-hat growing up.

we would talk all the time about future touring, plans, and his vision for the band. It was such an exciting time, and I couldn't wait to take on the responsibility of headlining arenas. I knew it was a massive task at hand, and I was really excited for the increased responsibility of playing shows at this level.

Sure, with Black Flag, Doyle, and Ho99o9, I had musical responsibilities, but with Marilyn Manson there was a whole production, so I needed to relentlessly study everything about that gig. I studied the way the count offs were done, I learned what he was used to, how I was supposed to cue him, the timing of the wardrobe changes, the timing of the set changes on stage, and how all of that correlated with the timing of the song count-offs … I studied *everything* you can imagine regarding that gig – every exact mark and cue so that the whole production stayed on the same page – and most of this was done through watching YouTube videos of live shows. The more you study on your own, the less questions you have to ask.

My predecessor on that gig was Gil Sharone and I really appreciated his musical approach to a lot of the parts. I noticed that Gil's count offs would be on an open hi-hat and a China, but he would play a different (higher pitched) China on the downbeat. I'd never played with two Chinas before, but I thought that was a really musical way of counting off songs. You could count 1,2,3,4, and wash out on the downbeat with a higher pitched China. Another thing to note was that I was the only one in the band with the click track. If there was a moment in any song where there were no drums, you had to keep time on quarter notes, so everyone stayed in time. It was important to me to keep everything related to drums the same way that Manson was used to. I wanted to make it a seamless transition, I didn't want anything to change. But what I *did* want to change, was bringing my energy and emotion to that stage.

What I always remind myself, is that even during the times where I am honoring someone else's drum parts or maintaining a way of playing that someone had previously done, I can still provide the most important and unique characteristic— my own energy. I think the marriage of those two worlds has aided me more than anything else. Respecting what has come before me, but blending it with who I am.

MD: You have mentioned that you always try to honor what is already happening in a band, while also bringing in your own flavor. What do you consider to be "your flavor"?

BP: That's a great question. Honestly, during Black Flag I don't even know if I had realized what "my identity" was, I was 19. At that point my contribution would have just been a youthful energy while being someone who completely respects and honors the parts, and not only plays them correctly but with the emotion and conviction to play them authentically. When you can do that, it creates emotional waves that people can feel. I really started to hone that when I started to play with Doyle because that was a paramount focus to us. We just wanted to go out there and destroy, we would try to bring as much aggression as we could to the stage, we all fed off the passion and the fury from each other. In more recent years, I've just refined those aspects— respecting what has come before me while bringing my own energy to it.

MD: Back tracking a little bit, wasn't this around the same time you played with Corey Taylor (from Slipknot)? How was that experience?

BP: I played a couple shows with Corey right before I joined Manson in 2019, and it was incredible. The set was filled with of some of our favorite cover songs throughout the decades, and it really reminded me of growing up playing with friends. It was such a good vibe and so fun. I have to say, Corey is a true artist in every sense of the word. It was just inspiring playing music with him. His passion is radiant.

MD: So back to you career trajectory, talk to me about the COVID timeline?

BP: When COVID first really hit the US in March of 2020, I remember thinking, 'Well, a couple months off at home won't be too bad of a thing. But obviously, a couple months ended up turning into a couple more months, and on and on. At a certain point, it became pretty nerve-wracking to think, 'Will we ever get back out there playing shows?" Fortunately, once 2021 rolled around, it really looked like that summer would be promising for live shows. And just like the common theme of my career so far, I received a call out of left field, and next thing you know, I'm touring that summer as a fill in with Limp Bizkit. What an amazing summer that was. One of our first shows was Lollapalooza in Chicago and we absolutely crushed it. I remember being told it would be pro-shot, live streamed on Hulu and then posted on YouTube— and if anything, that motivated me even more to go kill it — and it was only our third show with minimal rehearsal!

When I played with Manson at first, my focus was primarily related to production aspects, such as the timing of wardrobe changes, set changes, and making sure I was starting the click tracks at the right moment. There was a whole lot of production and moving parts reliant on very specific timing. But with Limp Bizkit I was focused on other aspects. For example, with Bizkit, there's no click track, so I was very focused on making sure all the songs felt 'right.' The thing about Bizkit is that the music, groove, and feel have such a unique vibe, so it was a big focus

to sit right in the pocket, and then focus on the swing. I have to give it up to their drummer John Otto. That man has so much swing— but in his own unique way. It was a really fun challenge. But just like anything, once you come out on the other side of the challenge, you grow so much from those situations. You establish a precedent for yourself that you know you can succeed in those stressful situations and be confident if and when it happens in the future.

MD: You become "battle tested." I think there is something to be learned from every tune, from every gig, and from ever musician we are lucky enough to work with.

BP: Absolutely, I couldn't agree more. When John Otto plays with his right hand on the hi-hat, his left hand is usually playing every upbeat as a ghost note on the snare, and he brings his right hand down for the backbeat, so he's almost always playing 16th notes between his hands. I tried to totally immerse myself in that approach and I really tried to replicate the way he played while also bringing a little bit of my style (but not as much as normal.) In the case of Limp Bizkit, I really felt that my role was to recreate what John Otto does to the best of my ability.

Like I mentioned, the third show I did with them was Lollapalooza in Chicago, and I think that was a trademark moment and a reintroduction for the band for many people at that moment in time, and I was honored to be there for that. But as expected, John came back, and has been killing it with Bizkit again. He's a legend – and I just couldn't believe I had the honor to (attempt) to hold it down for him that summer.

When I look back on my time with Limp Bizkit, it was an era in which I grew tremendously as a musician. What an amazing, musical band. But at the end of it, I was back in the same boat again… *What do I do now?* That is when Mike Muir from Suicidal Tendencies called.

MD: This is almost unbelievable, it's almost like the plot of a movie.

BP: I know! A few years prior in 2018, I played a one-off show with Suicidal opening for the Misfits, and I had stayed in touch with the guys throughout the years. After Limp Bizkit wrapped up and Mike Muir (Suicidal Tendencies founder and singer) called and asked if I'd be interested in joining Suicidal, I couldn't believe the timing. Bizkit had just wrapped up and literally a week later I'm on the phone with Mike Muir talking about joining Suicidal Tendencies.

I've always loved Suicidal, it was a dream to play with them, and every single person has really become family. I'll tell you this… you learn a whole lot playing with a band like Suicidal Tendencies for a couple years. It was a good combination of pretty much everything I had done prior. Obviously, Suicidal has so much of punk rock thing where everything is really fast, but it has a lot of groove stuff too, and I'm so glad I had Bizkit under my belt before doing Suicidal, because Bizkit gave me a lot of tools I could apply here.

I could feel the difference in my musicianship from before Bizkit to after Bizkit. Bizkit was all about the swing. Even now, when I

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Photo by Josh Kim

play normal rock beats, I have a little bit of that swing in there. I had some of that prior to Bizkit, but not to the degree I do now. I remember first playing with Suicidal and thinking that I felt like a different drummer because of my time with Limp Bizkit. For me to be able to combine the groove aspect from Bizkit and the intensity of Black Flag and Doyle together was amazing. Then, on top of that, you're watching Mike Muir on stage, there's no click track, and Mike is calling all the shots. There's no way that you could phone it in and just go through the motions (even for just one show) with Suicidal; you must watch Mike the whole time and you can't trust the set list. Oftentimes you're thinking that we're going to go into the next song on the set list, but you hear Mike talking to the crowd, and with deductive reasoning and based on what he's talking about, you know that we're going to go into something different. Then, in real time, you must figure out what he's talking about and get ready for whatever song we're about to play. Sometimes, he would be talking, and I would think we're going into "Possessed to Skate," and suddenly, he says "WAR!" and I know we are about to play "War Inside My Head." With Suicidal there's certain cues, intros, and interludes that you play for each song. Changes happen quickly. You have to be on your tippy toes. It was more than just executing the songs; it was being in a band where you never knew what's going to happen next.

Before I joined Suicidal, I studied hours of live footage from YouTube. I noticed that certain speeches correlate with certain songs and interludes. There were times when we did vamps and I would do a tom build before a song, and I had to figure out that when Mike says "*this*," that's when I crash out, do a fill, do a four count, and *then* it goes into the song. For me, It's all about relentless study and asking good questions. If you study enough, hopefully those questions will dwindle down from a whole bunch to a select few. I couldn't be any more thankful for my time with Suicidal Tendencies. I really feel like if you can play with them, you can play with anyone. Really, every part of your brain is firing all at once during a show with them.

MD: Now let's move onto Offspring. I'm sure when you got the call for the audition, you charted everything out, did your homework, and were super prepared when you got there.

BP: You're right. Coincidentally, I studied all the parts note-for-note, and it really worked to my benefit because Dexter (the singer of The Offspring) has essentially written most of the drum parts throughout the history of the band. He knows the drum parts inside and out, and he really appreciated me being meticulous about the kick patterns. Prior to the audition, there was a video I made where I played (the Offspring song) "Hammerhead," and he noticed that I played it note for note and he thought that was cool. It's funny, because in that video, I played everything verbatim, except for a slight variation of a fill near the end of the song. When I filmed the video, I wanted to redo it because the fill wasn't exact, but thankfully I kept it as is because later Dexter had mentioned "I almost thought you were miming the parts until I saw that one fill was different." So in a way, it proved to him I wasn't miming. So yes, charting things

I had only been touring for less than a year and had already played with Black Flag, and Doyle from the Misfts – but I didn't grow up a punk drummer! I was thrown into this world and couldn't be any happier about it.

Photo by Josh Kim

out has always come in handy on a personal level, but this was one of the first times that somebody had specifically remarked and appreciated the exact execution of every single note.

MD: You went from 2014 with Black Flag to 2023 and joining The Offspring. That's a heck of a nine years that brought you from Black Flag, to With Our Arms to the Sun, Doyle, Ho99o9, Corey Taylor, Marilyn Manson, Limp Bizkit, Suicidal Tendencies, and The Offspring. I can't think of any 30-year-old drummer that has had a similar and just as successful career trajectory. That's pretty amazing!

Sure, with Black Flag, Doyle, and Ho99o9, I had musical responsibilities, but with Marilyn Manson there was a whole production, so I needed to relentlessly study everything about that gig.

BP: I know, and I'm very thankful. Each band I've been in has taught me so much, and I'm so happy to where it has led me in The Offspring. I'm having so much fun here. And it really feels like a family. Noodles, Dexter, Todd, Jonah, and I go out there every night and really give it our all. It's inspiring to be in a group like this.

MD: What has it been like growing up in the "musical and drumming public?" Every gig that you have had has been a popular band with quite a following, and everybody has seen you evolve and grow up on pretty big gigs.

BP: To be honest, I haven't thought about that much, but that's a good question. I don't feel like I've grown up in the spotlight in terms of drumming, I've always felt like I've gotten these really amazing gigs, and aside from putting in the work and showing up and playing to the best of my ability, I haven't really concerned myself with the "spotlight" aspect of it.

MD: Did you try to stay out of the spotlight intentionally?

BP: No, I wouldn't say so.

MD: Do you think that staying out of the spotlight has helped your career and helped you get some of these calls and gigs?

BP: I understand what you're asking and that is another good question, I've just never thought too much about 'being in the spotlight.' Obviously, I'm aware that's what comes with the job, but it's not something I get too wrapped into thinking about.

MD: Do you have a big social media presence?

BP: Growing up, I remember how big of a deal it was to me when I first started seeing drum covers on YouTube. This was probably in 2007 during the early days of YouTube, watching Cobus videos. I also remember seeing Travis Barker cover "Crank That" by Soulja Boy back then— and those were really defining moments for me. Those were some of the first times I was able to watch a drummer that close up, and it's always stuck with me. So I always try to offer stuff like that when I can— whether it's live drum cam footage or covers in a studio. I think it's amazing we live in a time where these resources are available.

MD: After two years in The Offspring, tell me about how your drumming has evolved on the gig while playing The Offspring's music.

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BP: Well, what I love about playing with The Offspring is that it's really a musical combination of everything I've done in my career leading up to here. For example, from Black Flag, I became really proficient at the fast eighth notes hi-hat beats, and we certainly do that with Offspring. From Doyle and Ho99o9, I remember the aggression I played with, and I apply that here. From Manson, I remember the meticulousness I played with, and I apply that here. From Limp Bizkit, I bring the swing – and from Suicidal Tendencies, I bring the spontaneity from that gig over here. So really, it's applying everything I've learned, which has worked out incredibly well here.

It was important to me to keep everything related to drums the same way that Manson was used to. I wanted to make it a seamless transition, I didn't want anything to change. But what I did want to change, was bringing my energy and emotion to that stage.

But something really specific to Offspring that comes to mind is the hi-hat stuff we were talking about before with Black Flag. It's pretty similar to The Offspring approach in that when you think it should be a fully closed hat, you keep it partly open, and you're really putting more of the shoulder of the stick into it, rather than approaching it with the cleanest Moeller technique. Listen to songs such as "Come Out and Play," "Self Esteem," and even "Pretty Fly," and you can really hear it. I learned to play the hi-hat like we were talking about before, alternating between the shoulder of the stick and the tip of the stick. But The Offspring's music is grittier than that. I almost think of it as hammering the hi-hat with finesse – it's finding that balance between playing musically, but also giving the music the attack it needs. On some of these Offspring songs, when you use the shoulder and tip of the stick in, it doesn't feel right. You (almost) must use the shoulder of the stick the whole time on the hats in some of these songs, and at first, that was really counterintuitive to me. When I first started doing that it felt like such a sin to play that way. It felt like an abomination to approach a drum set and just hammer the hi-hat like that, but when I listen to these songs, they're really meant to be played with that grit. It really adds to the vibe of these songs and makes them special. Even going into present day, I'm still really thinking about the small things that added to the vibe on those records.

I couldn't be any more thankful for my time with Suicidal Tendencies. I really feel like if you can play with them, you can play with anyone. Really, every part of your brain is firing all at once during a show with them.

MD: Musically speaking, I don't even think I would call that a "small thing." But it's interesting, when we are taught to play drums, the efficiency in how we play is stressed as being very important. Sometimes getting as much result with as little effort as possible is what technique is about. But sometimes we have to forget about what's "correct" to create another sound or vibe.

BP: Yes! That is one of my favorite parts of the arts in general, but especially with what we do in music. There are these tools and these fundamentals that we should be cognizant of, but sometimes when those things aren't appropriate for a particular context, we can break the rules to create the most special, genuine, and sincere thing possible. And it's real. That's what I'm trying to recreate when I play these Offspring songs. I'm trying to capture the special magic that was on those records. For example, on the drum intro for "Bad Habit" it's just the hi-hat keeping time with the pedal. I can hear that the hi-hat clutch is really loose, and when the hi-hats open they ring a bit because the clutch is too loose. I was talking to (Offspring's singer) Dexter because we talk about all the meticulous details of the drum parts. I said to him, 'Do you know why that sounds so great? It's because the hi-hat clutch is too loose. If there was a professional studio drummer playing that tune, he would have fixed that, but the fact that it wasn't fixed is what makes that part special, it gives it that vibe.

MD: Is there anything that you have done to develop your strength at "hammering" the hi-hat?

BP: Well, nothing specifically for the hi-hat, but more so to improve overall strength behind the drums… I have a pair of those old-school hand exercise things that you squeeze, and I do that religiously. You can use it in the traditional way, but you can also flip it upside down and it works the muscles between your thumb and index finger. Then you can put it below your pinky and your thumb, and it works those muscles. Since I've been doing that, I feel so much stronger behind the kit. I've also been running, biking, and generally living a really active lifestyle more so than ever before, and I've noticed the more physically in-shape that I am, the less I have to think when I'm playing drums— my body just plays— it's almost like turning on 'cruise control.'

MD: When you are playing those fast eighth note hi-hat parts, do you ever have to pull it back to quarter notes because of fatigue? Or what I call having a "fallback position."

BP: I love your term, "fallback position." In my head, I call it "cheating," but I'm going to go with your term from now on! I train as much as possible to be able to keep my endurance on those really fast eighth notes, but of course from time to time, you just simply get fatigued and have to let up into quarter notes here and there— but it's all about the timing of when you do it. There are many moments when you can do it in a musical way. For example, if there's a song where the guitar part is palm muted and at the end of the phrase they open up, that's where I can start playing open hi-hat quarter notes at the end of the phrase as a fallback position.

MD: Is (Offspring's singer) Dexter Holland a drummer?

BP: I don't think he's "technically" a drummer, but he's an amazing "air drummer," and he absolutely and fully understands the inner workings of drums just as much as any drummer I know. He and I have amazing conversations about the drums, and we get deeper than I do with most fellow drummers. He is so aware of micro-details of the drum parts, it's amazing. He doesn't play "actual" drums, but I know if he sat down at a set he could. He'll air drum and he knows exactly where everything should be. About a week ago, we were sitting down on tour talking about the song "Can't Get My Head Around You." We were discussing the kick pattern during the chorus, and he suggested that instead of playing the kick pattern that's on the record to instead have the kick pattern follow the rhythm of the vocal melody instead. He air drummed it, I wrote it down and we tried it that night, and we liked it. If he took a week to practice drums, he'd be ripping.

MD: Does the fact that he knows the drum parts so well ever become intimidating?

BP: No, I enjoy it and to be honest, when it comes to music, my brain works in the same manner. With drumming, I can get really analytical and meticulous, and I have a good ability to memorize exact drum parts. But it's not like if I make a mistake on a stage he looks back and throws something, it's nothing like that. It's just that the conversations we have off stage about drums are really interesting. I don't think if I've ever had such broad and general conversations about drum parts with a singer as I've had with Dexter.

There are these tools and these fundamentals that we should be cognizant of, but sometimes when those things aren't appropriate for a particular context, we can break the rules to create the most special, genuine, and sincere thing possible. And it's real.

As I mentioned earlier, the first video I did of an Offspring song was "Hammerhead," which is coincidently the song that introduced me to the band as a teenager. During the bridge it's just four on the floor with eighth notes on the hi-hats. On the first bar the hi-hat opens one time, on the second bar it opens three times, and the third bar it opens two times. When Dexter noticed that I memorized it as such, he went on to explain that when they recorded that song, they went back and forth deciding what the best sequence for that open hat pattern was. And honestly, I love being in a band that is so meticulous and cares so much about each part.

Obviously, as a drummer, you really have a unique relationship with every other musician in the band, and it's always been important to me to make it clear they can rely on me; I want them to know that I'll count things at the correct time, and I'm going to play songs at the right tempo, and if anything goes awry on stage, I'll be able to problem solve and get everything back on track. Because Dexter and I have this drum-based connection too, it makes it a great situation.

MD: Who are your biggest drumming inspirations?

BP: I've always taken inspiration from any anyone I'm watching. I hate to give you such a cliché, but that's what speaks to me. But when it comes down to it, I like drummers who are responding to the environment they're in and playing what's right for that environment. And the keyword is "responding." I don't want to paint by numbers so much that I'm just reciting parts. Obviously, a certain amount is that, but I also want to be a living organism within the band and respond to what I'm hearing. Even different size stages and acoustics can determine whether I should I crash or ride on this cymbal, if I should I play rim shots here, or if I should play a busy fill or keep it stripped down? Often, even the tone the guitarist is playing with can influence my approach to a part.

And when thinking about this, Chad Smith is the first that comes to mind. His groove has power, swing, and taste. He never overplays, and he gives the music exactly what it needs. That speaks to me. You can see he's constantly responding to the musical environment, rather than purely reciting parts. So that's the challenge I give myself – the marriage of those two worlds – reciting parts, while also playing with a certain amount of spontaneity based on the musical and acoustic environment I'm in at the moment.

Last year, Offspring did a tour with blink-182, and it's undeniable how good Travis is. It's what I said about 'responding to the environment you're in,' that's exactly what Travis has nailed. He obviously identified very early on with blink, that what the guitars and bass are doing leaves ample room for the drums to carry the melodic weight, and it works so well. It's only considered overplaying if it's not appropriate for the context, and as for Travis with blink, I wouldn't consider any of it overplaying. It fits so well with the other instruments.

I always try to find the correlation between all styles of music. When that's what you're seeking, you'll see that all styles of music are considerably more related than most consider. Luckily, I think I just inherently do that, rather than it being an exercise I have to try to apply – it's just how I naturally hear music.

I also must mention Matt Cameron. As a kid, the first time I realized I was listening to an odd time signature was by listening to "The Day I Tried to Live" by Soundgarden. The way Matt takes very complex time signatures and smooths them out to sound so natural is abundantly inspiring. There's a whole art to that, and Matt is such an inspiration in that domain.

Growing up, when I first heard Chris Adler in Lamb of God, he really spoke to me, and was a massive inspiration. He would put splashes and bells in fills, and as a kid, I didn't even know that was possible. What I took away from him most, was his sense of composition. He was one of those guys who was intensely listening to what the guitars were doing, and he was complimenting and responding to the guitars so precisely, profoundly, and distinctly – with such musical and expressive ideas. Growing up, I also felt the same exact way about Mike Portnoy.

Today, when I listen to Eloy Casagrande, I'm blown away. Honestly, each year, I become a little less interested in the extreme approach to metal drumming, but something about Eloy's approach resonates so much with me. He almost approaches the instrument as a soul, or funk, or Motown drummer – but then translates that into metal. It's so inspiring.

Illan Rubin is another one, to me, he is like the modern day and progressive John Bonham. I also like Ronnie Vannucci from the Killers a lot… I mean, talk about an expressive drummer.

MD: A while back you told me that (ironically) you didn't come up as a punk-rock drummer. How does a drummer who didn't grow up as a punk rock drummer become a member of some of the most popular punk rock and hardcore bands like Black Flag, Suicidal Tendencies, Marilyn Manson, and The Offspring?

BP: I always try to find the correlation between all styles of music. When that's what you're seeking, you'll see that all styles of music are considerably more related than most consider. Luckily, I think I just inherently do that, rather than it being an

exercise I have to try to apply – it's just how I naturally hear music. Whether it's punk, metal, rock, funk, or anything else, I can easily hear it on a piano in my head. Even if it's screaming metal, I can strip all those layers away and just hear what the essence of the melody is. It's always the melody that speaks to me. Back when I was with Black Flag, I was thinking, (for example) 'On a fundamental level, how is Black Flag so different from Bon Jovi?" It isn't. The approach is different, the intent is different, the message is different, and on and on, but when you break it all down, it's not that different. It ALL comes down to the melody and how to support that. Now, if you're talking jazz or something, yeah *that's different*…

MD: I'm going to disagree with you there, it's really not. There's a lot more things that relate The Offspring, Miles Davis, and Beethoven than things that don't.

BP: Yeah, and what is completely universal, is that as a drummer, I'm here to support, make everything feel good, and make everyone comfortable. When you look at it from that vantage point, it makes everything simpler.

MD: And similar.

BP: How do I need to respond to the music that I'm hearing? That's how I am thinking, it doesn't matter if it's punk or soft rock. The overwhelming majority of the time I'm playing, I'm focusing on what everyone else is doing more than I'm focusing on myself. When I was younger that wasn't the case, but each year that goes by, that percentage has increased tenfold. A lot of that has to do with the fact that I learned how to play guitar when I was a teenager. I can put myself in the shoes of a non-drummer and ask myself what they want to hear. What are the other musicians looking for? Rather than being a "*drummer's drummer"* and playing the most impressive licks, I think of the other instruments first and foremost, and that's what helps my musicality more than anything. If I can hear the guitarist palm muting, how does that influence my approach different than if it were open chords? Is the bass player driving 8th notes, or is he jumping around a little? That's going to determine what I play in micro ways. I think of myself as a layer to support the music.


Photo by Tijs van Leur

MD: Moving through all these successful bands in your career, have you ever *not* gotten a gig that you wanted?

BP: Luckily, I don't think so. I remember when I was with Ho99o9 I got a call to do a gig with Corey Taylor from Slipknot, and I almost couldn't do it because I was with Ho99o9, and we were really busy. I remember thinking that I would kill to do this, I gotta make this work. But it was just one of those things that fortunately worked out. And thankfully it did.

At the end of the day, I'm just so grateful. In everyone's lives there's day-to-day problems, and when you're in the middle of things, you're always putting out fires. However, when you're in the middle of things you also can't appreciate them as much. Fortunately, I try to always do my best to adapt to the situation at hand, and I've always found a way to make things work to the best of my ability— as well as being more comfortable during the moments when they don't work out. I must admit, when looking back, it's amazing how everything has worked out, but it hasn't always felt like that. I can't stress that enough! I gloss over a lot of the hard work that I've done to prepare for a gig, but I always put in the work. It does make me feel good to know I've never had a problem with anyone I've worked with, and I'm also still friends with every person I've worked with – and that's honestly the most important thing to me.

I know I'm not a "drummer's drummer" and overall, I think of that as an asset, because the overwhelming majority of people in this world are *not* drummers— but they are fans of music. If I can figure out what the non-drummers are looking for, and what speaks to them, I think I'm on to something. I suppose that's the relentless path I'm on. The life of an artist.

To find out more about Brandon Pertzborn, check out his drumming and his gear on Modern Drummer's Tour Kit Rundown at **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQMBgLcZ0kg**

Chris Adler

Chapter Two: FirstBorne

By Mark Griffith

With a new band called FirstBorne and a debut record called *Lucky* that is coming out in July, legendary and influential drummer Chris Adler (ex of Lamb of God and Megadeth) is starting a new chapter in his musical life. He would also like to set the record straight concerning the end of the first chapter of his musical life. It's been a wild ride!

MD: How would you describe your new band FirstBorne and your new music?

CA: It's just fun, it's the type of music that I have been missing for quite a long time. The bonds within the band are strong, there's no business pressure or expectations within the friendships. The other members of the band (singer Girish Pradham and guitarist Myrone) are wildly talented in their own fields and bring a lot to the table, capable of almost anything we dream up. We are able to let our guards down and make music that we wanted to make. Prior to doing the album, we self-released about 20 songs on YouTube and Bandcamp. When we went into the studio to record *Lucky,* we had already written another 100 songs that we planned on widdling down to a "top 10" or so for the record, but instead, two days before we went in, we decided to scrap all previously written material. We had never been in the same room at the same time, all our previous work had been done remotely sending files back and forth. FirstBorne's singer Girish lives in India, our guitar player Myrone lives in LA, and I'm on the East Coast in Virginia. We had never actually shared a physical space to make music together, so we decided to scrap all the

demo's, breathe the same air, and see what we could do. The goal was to wake up and write about anything any one of us were inspired by that day. There was no defined direction like in bands that I've been in before. FirstBorne is wide open. *Lucky,* to us, is a great hard rock album that harkens back to some of the best of the 80s hard rock and metal. All three of us grew up on

the fun side of 80s metal, as opposed to the pummeling often negative growly stuff. I've had an extensive career and long run in that circle and it's not always the most pleasant place to be. Once you are pigeonholed, the writing process becomes static. Often the label, management and even the band members expect a certain thing for continued success. When you hope to keep paying the rent, often times you do what you are expected to do. FirstBorne is different – it is wide open, and we all seem to gravitate to the heavier 80s stuff that we all grew up with. We truly had a blast recording, we just let it flow. While the record includes some pretty intense performances, writing it was the opposite of challenging,

> There was no defined direction like in bands that I've been in before. FirstBorne is wide open. Lucky, to us, is a great hard rock album that harkens back to some of the best of the 80s hard rock and metal.

MD: How is your arm, and how are you doing physically since your accident?

CA: Thanks for asking about that. The accident was in 2018, I had a great surgeon, and within six months I went through Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and I was good to go. With all the metal in my arm now, it is probably stronger than it was prior to the accident. I've seen it reported that my accident was part of the reason that I stepped away, or that things fell apart with Lamb of God. But the accident had very little to do with it.

MD: Let's set the record straight, what happened?

CA: I haven't talked about this before; it's been quite a wild ride. It was a pretty difficult time, all these crazy things in my life happened at the same time. I got divorced, my mom died, had the split from both Megadeth and Lamb of God, and a very unfortunate diagnosis…

Around 2003, I started noticing something odd going on with my right foot. It wasn't too bad, but occasionally, my right foot wouldn't do what I wanted it to. I would tell it to move, and it wouldn't move until maybe a second later. I would intend for it to depress the kick pedal and it would shoot back or to the side. This seemed to progress and happen more often as time went on. I tried everything to fix it, all kinds of stretching, exercise, no exercise, physical therapy, yoga, Tai chi… I did everything I could to regain, and maintain, control of my right foot; but I was slowly losing more and more control. Around 2016, I finally went to Neurological Associates here in Richmond, and while they had a few guesses, they recommended that I go to a higher level of neurological care at VCU (Virginia Commonwealth University and the Medical College of Virginia) in conjunction with John Hopkins. They put me through a myriad of tests, and I was diagnosed with something called Task Specific Focal Dystonia, also known as Musicians Dystonia in my case. I've heard of it more and more recently, but at the time I was diagnosed, I had no idea what it was.

> I've seen it reported that my accident was part of the reason that I stepped away, or that things fell apart with Lamb of God. But the accident had very little to do with it.

MD: What is Task Specific Focal Dystonia?

CA: It's not particularly common. What happens is that when you practice a particular movement for decades, the repeated practice and repeated motion causes the nerve pathway for that motion to break down. It slowly gets to the point where the nerve pathway starts to fail, effectively disabling the motion… and there's no cure. My brain tells my right foot to kick the pedal, my foot gets the message, but the muscles that would fire in the opposite direction also fire at the same time. Basically, the nerve is confused, it doesn't know what to do. It happens a lot to quarterbacks, golfers, and musicians. I know that (Cannibal Corpse bassist) Alex Webster has come forward saying that he's had it, and in the Nickelback documentary their drummer Daniel Adair mentions that he had the same type of thing in his arm or his hand. Once I understood what it was, it felt like a death sentence. I was unable to proficiently play my own creations in Lamb and Megadeth.

Towards the end of 2015 and 16 I was having a lot of trouble with my right foot, it was embarrassing. I was coming off stage really upset with myself. If you know much about Lamb, we were a pretty dysfunctional family which didn't help, but we made it work. That dysfunction probably helped us be hyper creative and push each other. When I took the gig joining Megadeth, I'm sure that strained our relationship even more, then when I came back to Lamb with this diagnosis and said, "Hey guys there's a couple songs that I don't think I'm ever going to be able to play again," that felt like the nail in the coffin for me as a member of Lamb of God. There were certain things in a few Lamb of God songs that I wasn't able to do, and I wasn't given the opportunity to remove those songs from the set. I don't blame them because they were fairly important songs for us to be playing. To this day there are certain Lamb songs that I wrote and absolutely can't play. It was a devastating time for me, I felt like I lost my career, I had just lost my mom, and I was going through a terrible divorce. With Task Specific Focal Dystonia, the only thing that you can do is to basically relearn how to play the drums in a different way. In the past I was really hesitant to bring this up because I didn't want to lose my future playing career.

MD: So how does one go about leaving your own band?

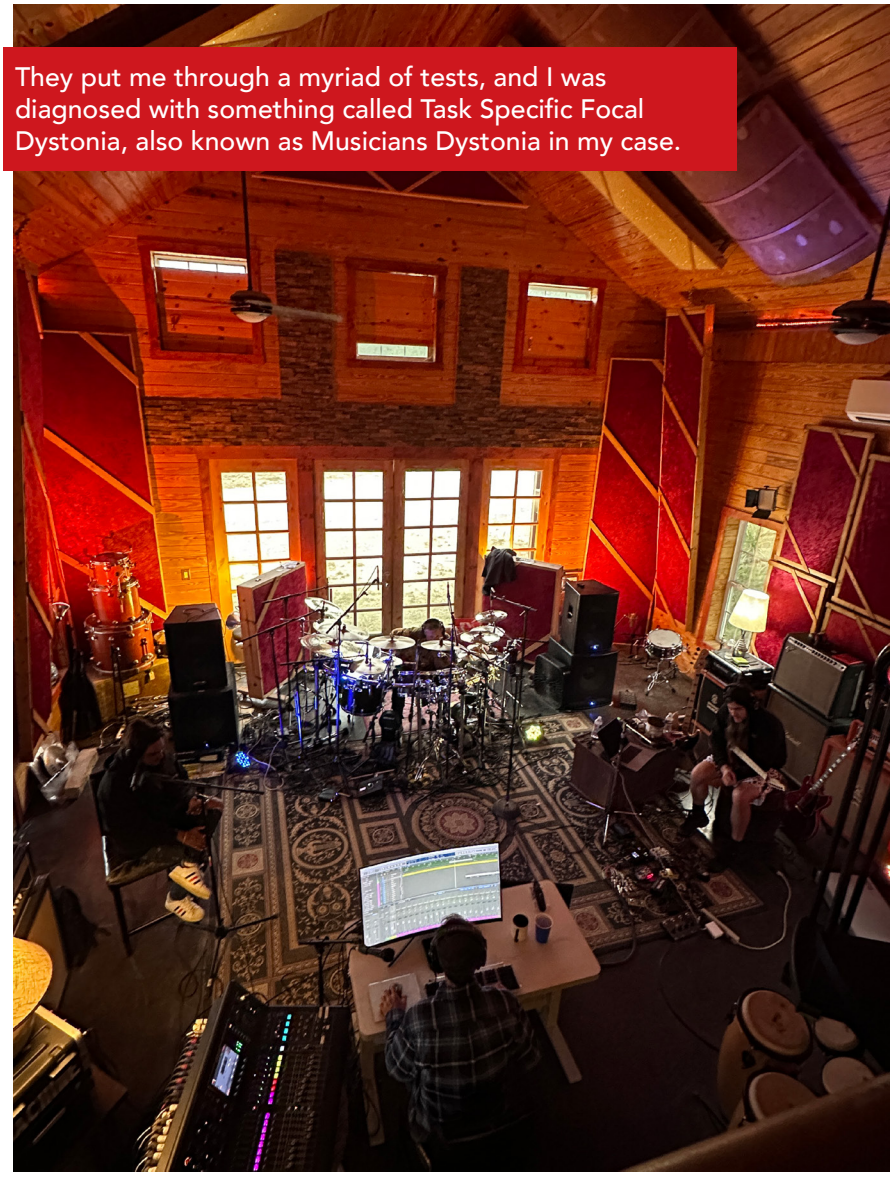
CA: I was certainly one of the original guys and the band started in my house, but everybody contributed as much as they could. If you ask anybody involved at the beginning of the band, I was certainly more involved than just playing drums. I wouldn't call it my band, but it was my career, and after two decades, it was my identity. It was everything that I had worked for.

There's was a lot of introspection on my part about the real answer to that question, it's hard to get into details about it. If you spent any time following the band, you know we were a bit of a dysfunctional success story, and it was never my intention to leave. I think the diagnosis of the dystonia and not being able to do a few popular songs, the band's relationships in conjunction with me taking on the Megadeth opportunity, made things fragile leading to the "services no longer required" message. It was the heaviest thing I'd ever been hit with. From my perspective Lamb became business relationships, my dystonia diagnosis happened around the same time I was dealing with some really heavy life adulting and I was beat up and in a hole. It was a pretty depressing time and it hurt a lot.

MD: How did you deal with the Task Specific Focal Dystonia?

CA: I continued the physical therapy and met with multiple specialists. There are a few slightly risky operations, you can get shots of Botox into the leg muscles that would counteract the intended motion. It's hit or miss, but I tried that for a while. It didn't work. The only solution was to figure out a different way to play. For the past couple years, up until this recording, I've really been focusing on relearning how to play. In my case, that meant leading with my left foot instead of my right. Occasionally, my right foot still gets slightly different signals and still trips up. It's quite the re-learning process. It has changed the way that I am able to play. Now I'm able to make use of the strengths that I developed over those two years, and the knowledge I gained. With the FirstBorne material and this record, I put myself to the test - pushing things a bit, I constantly want to push and discover what I'm capable of. At the same time, I did not want to be fixing everything in editing and post-production. I intend to go on tour and be able to play everything on the record. FirstBorne is not as double kick intensive, but I didn't phone it in. There's some really interesting and creative drum work on the record using new techniques that I've learned. It's humbling, but I don't need to be the star of the show, there's two other guys in the band that are incredibly talented. I can still create interesting and cool drum parts and of course help arrange things as I have done in every other band I've worked with.

They put me through a myriad of tests, and I was diagnosed with something called Task Specific Focal Dystonia, also known as Musicians Dystonia in my case.



MD: Let me set your mind at ease. When I heard this new record, absolutely NOTHING sounded or clued me into the fact that you had to revamp your drumming approach. You sound as good as ever. There is some ridiculous drumming on this record.

CA: I'm happy to hear that. It's been a wild ride, the dystonia was rough, but coming out of it into this band and recording this music has been the greatest medicine ever. I've put in a lot of work, and I'm glad to hear that the guys at *Modern Drummer* are enjoying my playing and the band.

MD: Let's talk about how you are approaching the left foot lead, and how it's working with time keeping, fills, and double bass drumming. When you are playing a single bass drum groove, are you playing with your left or right?

CA: I can switch back and forth, if it's a beat with no double bass, the right foot tends to act normal, but as soon as I get into patterns, triplets, and quick runs of double bass, the right foot says 'Hey, I thought I told you we're done with that shit!' In those cases, I will lead with my left, and make my right foot "think differently."

MD: How did you go about the process of getting your right foot to "think differently?"

CA: It's been hours and hours of really slow repetitious practice. It's almost been like starting over again. Interestingly enough, when I started playing drums, I never took drum lessons, so as I was trying to work this out, I actually bought a bunch of beginner drumming books, pattern books, and I started working with them and a metronome very slowly. I focused for hours on my feet and trying to start phrases with my left. It's one thing to do that with your feet running on their own, but when you start adding the hands to that it's almost like learning independence for the first time. When I'm playing with my right foot lead, I've always been very confident with my hand-foot independence, but it really does throw a wrench into things when you start to lead with your left foot. Gaining that independence has been the result of intense woodshedding. There's no harm for any drummer to gain (or develop) their independence on the other side, it can have a cool effect on your drumming. But in my case, it was essential for me to be able to do all the stuff that I wanted to play with left foot lead.

MD: Being originally "self-taught," where and how did you come up with some of the stuff that you were playing in Lamb? That is some super creative and complex drumming.

CA: I certainly had a lot of influences but as far as far as lessons go, yeah, I was self-

...when I came back to Lamb with this diagnosis and said, "Hey guys there's a couple songs that I don't think I'm ever going to be able to play again," that felt like the nail in the coffin for me as a member of Lamb of God.

taught. I have always been a fan of metal, but as a kid my first records were Michael Jackson and Aerosmith. Then I started skateboarding and got into punk rock, and somebody played me a Megadeth song and I immediately fell in love with thrash metal. However, I started by playing guitar and bass, I didn't start playing drums until I was 21. Since I was playing guitar in my teenage years, I lost the hero worship years as far as drummers go. When most people start playing drums, they typically have a favorite kind of music, often even a specific band, and they begin to emulate their favorite bands. When I was growing up, I was listening to guitarists. That's what I wanted to do. When I decided to switch to drums, the drummers I really loved from listening to all kinds of guitar music were guys like Stewart Copeland, Billy Cobham, and Shannon Larkin (in Wrathchild America.) I liked drummers that weren't playing metal. One of the first songs I ever tried to learn on the drums was The Police's "Message in a Bottle." I don't recommend this to anybody because it had me almost in tears! To this day that tune is nearly impossible, but those are the kinds of things that I was listening to and learning little bits and pieces of, on the drums. I was bringing all of that into a crazy metal band. It wasn't on purpose, I wasn't trying to stand out, but I think that really helped. In addition to me *not* having a very specific drummer that I wanted to sound like, I was taking other musical genres and speeding them up, or just taking them as they were, and bringing them into this very rigid genre of music called metal. I think that process by itself had me sounding more unique than some of my peers.

MD: I am a firm believer in that process as well. Whenever we only listen to the music that we are playing it becomes very incestuous, and it doesn't inspire or breed a lot of innovation or creativity.

CA: That same subject came up for me recently in a conversation with Gene Hoglan. Gene is one of my favorite guys, I don't know anybody that doesn't respect Gene Hoglan's drumming, and if you don't, there's something wrong with your ears. We were recording up in Vancouver, he was around, and I was telling him my story while he was asking me about what he thought were some really interesting drum parts. I told him about how I loved his drumming and asked him about his secret in creating some of his really interesting drum parts. He said, "When I was a kid, I took funk drum lessons and I got really good at playing funk. Then I turned into a metalhead, and I took all that funk stuff and sped it up." That says it all. When you're not locked into whatever genre of music you are playing and aren't concerned with what you are *supposed* to be playing, it opens everything up.

MD: Maybe that is why when I first heard FirstBorne, it sounded like a new Van Halen record. And I can't think of much higher praise that that.

CA: I love that you heard that. When we were recording *Lucky*, we put all our past demos to the side. We all lived together in an Airbnb near the studio in Austin TX. We'd wake up, drive to the studio together, stare at each other and say "OK, what do you got?" It was typically (guitarist) Myrone who would start the process with a multitude of riffs. We would figure if we already had a song like his riff, if the new riff was going to broaden the record, or if it was too close to something else that we had already written. If Myrone's riff was like something we already had, within a second, he would have something else. He's a

From my perspective Lamb became business relationships, my dystonia diagnosis happened around the same time I was dealing with some really heavy life adulting and I was beat up and in a hole.

wildly creative guy, I encourage everybody to check out his solo records, which is the reason I got in touch with him. I just love his playing; it makes me smile every time I listen to anything that he does. We recorded with (producer) Machine, who has an incredible catalog, did the best-selling Lamb records as well as a lot of Clutch records; he's an amazing producer. So between Myrone, Machine, and myself we were constantly writing. Of course, (vocalist) Girish was coming up with all sorts of cool vocal ideas on the fly. It was a wonderful way to work because we hadn't prepared anything. Between the three of us, we would take the riffs, work them out, and figure out the song structure. Some tunes are more Prog songs, some have a standard structure, and there are some super out of the box ones as well. It was a super immersive creative process that turned out (what I think is) a pretty great record.

> The only solution was to figure out a different way to play. For the past couple years, up until this recording, I've really been focusing on relearning how to play. In my case, that meant leading with my left foot instead of my right.

MD: When you guys were working on tunes and demos remotely (before this new record,) how were you composing, and what were your primary contributions to the tunes?

CA: I would either send Myrone a weird and strange beat, or he would send me a riff. I have a nice Roland TD30 electronic drum kit that's pretty robust. It almost captures everything that I have on my acoustic set. I'm running that through Logic into Superior Drummer with the Toontrack drum sound expansion pack called Drums of Destruction, which is my actual acoustic kit that we recorded with Josh Wilbur. So, the acoustic samples are my sounds and I'm playing them, and that's how it sounds. I honestly take the approach of (and I've heard Stewart Copeland say this) if I hear that the song needs something very simple, I'm going to do everything I can, *NOT* to do that! I take my time to come up with something that's a little more unique. I would do that in Lamb all the time, and it would drive the guys crazy. They would come up with a straight heavy 4/4 riff, and I would come up with a beat in six to put over it. I love doing that stuff, but it drove the guys in Lamb nuts. But those are actually some of the more popular Lamb songs. Now with FirstBorne, we come up with something interesting and we go back and forth, then we go to the next part, if it doesn't fit, we'll start a different song, by the end there's little pieces of songs floating around everywhere. I think my strength lies in my memory of all those little pieces. Outside of the drums themselves, the process of arranging is (kind of) my strong suit, and usually my main contribution. Someone might bring in a cool idea on Thursday, but not know what to do with it or where to go with it. The next week, we might be writing another tune and get stuck, and I will remember that thing last from Thursday that didn't fit and be able to use it in a new song. I seem to always have a musical database going in my head. It is pretty easy for me to reference an idea that we threw out from a couple days ago and try it in a new song.

MD: Did you use the electronic kit on the new record?

CA: No, everything that we have recorded prior to this record and released on YouTube and Bandcamp was done on my electronic kit at home. But this new record was done with my acoustic set at Machine's studio near Austin, TX with Machine mixing and producing. But within the last month, four or five

people have gotten in touch with me to do some drum tracks for them here at home and they have come out fantastic. The e-kit is a great tool to have.

MD: You mentioned playing a groove in six when Lamb had written a tune in four, but as a self-taught drummer, where did those ideas and that ability come from?

CA: I don't really have an answer to that, one part of it was that I didn't have a teacher telling me *not* to do that. When I was a kid, I played piano, guitar, saxophone, and even a little bit of violin. When I was learning to read music, my teachers always asked why I was phrasing and playing everything in a triplet feel? I hear almost everything in six.

MD: No matter how it's written?

CA: Yeah, I've noticed it in the music that I like to listen to as well. A good portion of the music I listen to is in 6/8, in a triplet feel; it's not exclusive, but usually the stuff that hypes me up is in six.

MD: Tell me about the first single from the new record "Wake Up."

CA: There's some heavy songs on the record, but we wanted something with a more punkish kind of feel and vibe. When we were recording in Texas, we were only slated to record for four weeks, which is a little tight, so we were moving really quick and anything and everything from that experience was a potential musical influence. "Wake Up" came one night that we came home and ended up watching one of the *Rocky* movies, and there's a scene where his kid is trying to get him not to do the fight, and Rocky gives him this insane motivational speech, that's what "Wake Up" is based on.

"Shine" has a lot to do with guns because when we recorded in Texas, it was Girish's first time in the US, and we're recording where everybody has got a cowboy hat and a gun. Even in the grocery store they were walking around with guns; Girish was surprised and maybe a little freaked out by the crazy US gun culture – not opposed, it was just vastly different than his life experience.

> FirstBorne is not as double kick intensive, but I didn't phone it in. There's some really interesting and creative drum work on the record using new techniques that I've learned.

MD: Is Girish bringing any Indian influence to FirstBorne?

CA: He was brought up on Indian music, and his band Girish and the Chronicles is very 80s rock, I encourage everyone to check them out, they're really good. There is a robust metal scene across India that is healthy and vibrant, a few of the bands are just starting to break out. One massive band is called Thaikkadum Bridge. I actually recorded a song with them at their studio when I was on tour in India, the song is called "Namah" and it's on one of their most recent records. It was a thrill to work with those guys, they are wildly talented. Every time Lamb would go over there, we'd have a list of incredible Indian bands that would open our shows. I would always check them out. Honestly, I was intimidated by many of them, they were that good.

MD: "Shine" is the most modern metal sounding song on the record, how influenced have you guys been by the modern metal of today?

CA: It's funny that you asked that. When I was in Lamb of God and Megadeth, I was the biggest metalhead and metal nerd that you'd ever meet. I knew every player, every band, and every new album. I knew how a band's new record was different than the last one, and I knew the trajectory of every band. I knew everything that was going on in the scene and I thought it was my job to do that. If I was directing movies, I'd want to see other people's movies and see what I could learn, what could be better, and what could be done differently. I was really ingrained and immersed in the scene. As soon as I left Lamb, that stopped. I have no idea what's going on anymore, I'm not keeping up with anybody, I haven't even heard the new Lamb or the new Megadeth stuff, I have no idea what's happening. That is a little purposeful, because I don't want to start Chapter Two with FirstBorne by chasing something. That would be impossible. I've spent my entire life working for Lamb of God and everybody involved. I wanted to make that the best thing that it could be, and it turned into this insane monster. For me to break off on my own and chase that or improve upon that would be stupid, I don't want to do that. I want to do something different. I trust Girish and Myrone. They keep their finger on the pulse, at the same time they're both renegades who are not following any particular trends, which is what I love about them. Myrone and

I had done 20 (or so) songs together before I met Girish. I was doing a drum clinic tour across India, and each evening I'd play a local club with the local hotshots from that area. That's how I heard Girish, and he completely blew me away. I called Myrone and told him we had struck gold and found a singer. We don't want to try to fit FirstBorne into anything, there is (and was) no preconceived direction whatsoever. If "Shine" sounds like what is out there happening today, then I would love what's happening today because I love that song.

MD: I think "Only a Fool" is the best *song* on the record, what can you tell me about that one?

CA: I'm flattered to hear you say that. When we were writing that, we were thinking it would be one of the less metal and more rock'n'roll tracks. Girish had a lot to say with that arrangement and the lyrics. That was one of those days where Myrone woke up with an idea, and within 45 minutes we had a structure, and we dug in.

MD: What are some of your favorite songs from the record?

CA: I think "Shine" is my favorite, and I was I was hoping we would talk about that. It's interesting that you thought it sounded the most like modern metal tune. I just like the vibe. It's kind of eerie and cool and at a tempo where everything is huge. Sonically and production wise, that song probably sounds the best.

"Normandy" probably won't be everybody's favorite song, but that's one of my favorite songs from the record. Queensrÿche is one of my favorite bands of all time, and "Normandy" has a very *Mindcrime* kind of vibe to it. I'm not going to say that *wasn't* on purpose. That morning we came in and Machine just went around the room and asked, "What's your favorite band?" I said Queensrÿche, and Myrone, without even saying anything, plays this riff that sounds like Queensrÿche. I said, "Hold on, we can't sound *exactly* like Queensrÿche, let's mix it up a little bit… But it's OK to show your influences a little bit, everybody has influences.

MD: By hearing the double bass drum part in "Again," I would say your feet are working together just fine.

CA: Well thank you! It's the lead track on the record for a reason. It's a hard rock song but (Myrone can correct me if I'm wrong) it's in E, so it sounds a little happier than most metal tunes. "Again" is just a feel-good hard rock song that song reminds me of driving fast near a beach. One of my favorite records is Joe Satriani's *Surfing with the Alien,* I always thought that record had that "driving with the top down carefree beachy kind of vibe." Drum wise I've always been a fan of flipping things around and taking a verse and making a verse part A and part B and creating a drum announcement that things are about to change. This song is a little different, typically I would default to an up-tempo sort of a verse that would drop into half time, "Again" is kind of the opposite of that, it picks up heading into the chorus and then it sits back down. I would like to say that we thought it through, wrote it down, and all that stuff, but it was really just Myrone and me just staring at each other, playing,

and picking up on each other's nonverbal communication.

MD: "Rescue Me" is another great hard rock tune.

CA: That is Myrone and Machine's favorite song from the record, it's almost a ballad. My dog hurt his leg while we were recording, and Myrone started playing that to soothe my dog. When we brought it in and started recording it, I was concerned because I was still programed that this is gonna be a hard rock record. I knew it couldn't be as metal as the other stuff I had done, and I didn't wanna deal with those comparisons. But "Rescue Me" felt a little too far off. However, as it came together, I really opened up to the song, because it was what we really set out to do. It was something different, outside of my box, and it didn't sound like what you thought we would sound like. It's not that I was having a hard time swallowing it, I'm very proud of "Rescue Me" and I'm glad it's on the record, but it's so different than anything that I've ever done, so I was initially a bit nervous. I'm excited to see what the response to it will be, I can't deny that it's a great song and it had to be on the record. It is exactly what we were supposed to do and exactly what I told myself I was supposed to do. That tune is the super curveball, but I'm super proud of it.

> There's no harm for any drummer to gain (or develop) their independence on the other side, it can have a cool effect on your drumming. But in my case, it was essential for me to be able to do all the stuff that I wanted to play with left foot lead.

MD: Do you think it's important for musicians to play outside of their comfort zone?

CA: That's been the story of my life really for the past five years, relearning to play is completely outside of my comfort zone. There were times when I remember telling my wife that I was never going to play drums again. However, as I started working with Myrone, it became fun. Although I was frustrated, I was determined to make it work, but it was still a battle.

In the context of drumming, because I learned without lessons, learning things like Police and Aerosmith songs, this wasn't entirely outside of what I was what I knew I could do. I think I had just been pushing myself to play the extreme metal stuff for so long that it was actually a bit of a relief as far as just letting go of that very specific way of playing. It was kind of freeing, and a little bit scary, because I'm not known for doing things like this. With FirstBorne I am super comfortable with playing what I know will fit the song, but (at times) it is probably the opposite of what people expect from me. My apprehension was more of the nerves of all the expectations, but I encouraged myself to drop the expectations throughout the whole process. The whole idea was to leave those expectations at the door and just play what feels good for the material.

> I was taking other musical genres and speeding them up, or just taking them as they were, and bringing them into this very rigid genre of music called metal. I think that process by itself had me sounding more unique than some of my peers.

MD: You have now worked with Machine (the producer) many times, why do you guys work so well together?

CA: Machine and I originally worked together in 2003 on the *Ashes of the Wake* record. Lamb had just signed to Epic, and they came to us with some pretty crazy ideas for producers. Somewhere in that conversation they mentioned this guy "Machine." I didn't know much about him or what Machine had done at the time. I knew he had been in England studying sound design, he was really into Drum and Bass stuff, and he was doing sound design for Prodigy. He came in dressed really weird, and we all wondered what the hell does this guy know about metal? We gave him a really hard time. But for the same reason that we chose to go with Epic, (we had a great offer from Roadrunner records which had all the metal bands,) we did the unexpected and we went with Machine as our producer. We figured that if he doesn't know too much about metal, maybe that will help our record sound different than all the other metal records. But we did not let him have very much of a voice in in the recording of that record, and I know that frustrated him. However, there was two songs that we let him have a voice on, and those two songs, "Something to Die For" and "Laid to Rest," are the songs that blew-up that record. Because of that, I knew that I wanted to work with him again, and we all wanted to let him in. So we contacted him, and he said, "No way." I flew up to New York, took him out to dinner, and told him that we all agreed that his contributions made *Ashes of the Wake* significantly different and better than it would have been, had we not had him have a voice in those two songs. I promised him that he would be the sixth member and have an equal vote on everything. He thought it over for a day or two and agreed. We did the *Sacrament* album with his input on everything. The numbers speak for themselves on that record, it's the best-selling Lamb of God record. After that, he and I maintained our friendship and we have worked together occasionally on some little projects here and there. When FirstBorne started, he was my first choice to mix some of the first songs that we put together. Then when we were thinking about doing this record, he was the only person that I wanted to do it. Not because we are friends, and it certainly has nothing to do with him agreeing with me all the time. In fact, Machine is more than happy and very confident to argue with me about something for hours. We both love the challenge of working with each other. He's got a really cool place outside of Austin called The Barn Recording Studio and I really love working with him.

> When I decided to switch to drums, the drummers I really loved from listening to all kinds of guitar music were guys like Stewart Copeland, Billy Cobham, and Shannon Larkin (in Wrathchild America.) I liked drummers that weren't playing metal.

When it comes to vocals, Machine is just a mastermind of concepts, voicings, group vocal ideas, and different types of harmonies. He really takes vocals to the next level. We were able to do a whole lot on the vocal front with Girish because he's such a great singer. I know people listen to the vocals and they're interested in the lyrics, but I was never into vocals and lyrics. I was always more interested in the guitar playing and the drumming. I know that's not what drives most people's listening, so with Girish's talent working with Machine, it is pretty impressive. They did some things that I didn't think were even possible.

Machine does another thing that I like. When we were demoing these songs by playing them live, Machine would record the song and take the audio file of the song that we had just demo recorded and create a tempo map that was true to how we played it. I first saw him do this back when we were doing the *Ashes of the Wake* album in 2003. Once everything was set up, he would have a click track tempo map for the tune. There were times where the pre-chorus would ramp up a little bit and maybe the breakdown would move back and forth. On those earlier records with Lamb, a lot of people noticed that there was a distinct live feeling, even though we tracked all those records separately. That's exactly what we did with this record, we made tempo maps for everything, and tracked to those.

That same subject came up for me recently in a conversation with Gene Hoglan. Gene is one of my favorite guys, I don't know anybody that doesn't respect Gene Hoglan's drumming, and if you don't, there's something wrong with your ears.

MD: If you are going to have (or let) the tunes breathe, why not just track without a click?

CA: That's a fair question. It is probably for sake of the producer or the mixer's editing process.

MD: Has your gear changed since your playing approach and your band has changed?

CA: No, it's exactly as it was when I played with Lamb and Megadeth. Mapex Saturn series drums and my signature Mapex Warbird snare. I absolutely love that snare; its high-pitched ring adds a little tension to everything. My Meinl cymbals are exactly the same too. I have a great relationship with both of those companies. It's not that I haven't seen other brands and had my eyes and ears open to what's going on. But Joe Hibbs from Mapex taught me that all the big drum company's top lines of gear are *all* exceptional products. The thing about working as an endorser and an endorsee is that it is about the relationships that you have with the people. There's a gent at Meinl named Chris Brewer and we've been friends since 2003. He's always had my back and he's always been a good friend, so as much as I appreciate the equipment, I really value the relationships that I have with the people.

MD: Does your signature high-pitched snare sound come from your early love of Stewart Copeland?

CA: A little bit, and (although I've never been a huge fan) every time I hear a 311 song I think, "That's a cool snare sound!" Even before Lamb of God, I was using a piccolo snare to try and emulate that high pitched snare sound. For whatever reason I like that snare sound. That's why we created my Warbird snare that is 5x12 and all Walnut. That ring drives producers crazy because it's pretty intense, so most of the time we do bring it down a little bit in the mixing process. But there's something about that snare sound that excites me.

MD: Who is playing bass in the band?

CA: Myrone is playing bass on the new record, and our friend James LoMenzo (bassist for Megadeth) played on almost everything before the new record. James was interested in playing bass with us, he and Myrone are in Cali and see each other here and there. We're all buddies, and I don't want to speak for James, but part of the deal in Megadeth, and probably the reason I'm not in Megadeth right now, is that when you're in Megadeth you're *in Megadeth*. So there's no hard feelings, we're all good.

I honestly take the approach of (and I've heard Stewart Copeland say this) if I hear that the song needs something very simple, I'm going to do everything I can, NOT to do that! I take my time to come up with something that's a little more unique.

MD: You have mentioned the influence of Megadeth a few times, and you were in the band for about two years including the recording *Dystopia*; who was your favorite Megadeth drummer?

CA: Gar Samuelson. He was basically a traditional jazz drummer, and he was just speeding that stuff up for Megadeth. As a kid, when I got that cassette of Megadeth, I went full on in the direction of metal for my entire life. Megadeth set me on the path to do what I do today. Of course, I love everything that we accomplished in Lamb of God from the beginning, I'm wildly proud of all that we did, and not just the awards. But when I got that call from Dave to help him write a Megadeth record, it was a full circle moment, and just unbelievable. I was on cloud nine, it was the coolest thing that ever happened to me. When

I'm very happy to have been able to get out of that funk and turn my head towards Chapter Two, and I realized that Chapter Two didn't need to look like Chapter One.

I did my first live Megadeth gig, a friend of mine Maria Ferrero, who had been around from the early days of Metallica and Megadeth, said that I was playing just like Gar and that I looked like an octopus back there. That was so awesome to hear, and that's why I remember it to this day.

MD: Is FirstBorne going to tour?

CA: We are talking about that now. And there are some opportunities. Right now, it's really weird because of the current administration and the visas and all the insanity that's going on. So, because Girish is from India, we talked about the fact that it would probably be easier for us to go there and tour. I've been to India eight or nine times doing drum clinics that were drawing 2000 plus people. Girish is a well-known artist in India with his band Girish and The Chronicles, so I think if we start there, we can put a tour together in Southeast Asia. That would allow us the organizational structure and the funds to put work visas and things like that together and be able to get Girish over here to tour in North America.

MD: Under the topic of whatever doesn't kill us makes us stronger, what did you learn from the entire process of the Musicians Dystonia, leaving Lamb, and staring this new band?

CA: Wow, that's a big question. Initially I was really resentful of a lot of things that happened during that time. I was never suicidal or anything, but I was certainly depressed, and I didn't know if I wanted to continue playing drums because every time I did, it was an exercise in frustration. All the other things that were going on at the same time had me in a pretty bad spot. However, I did some great work with mental health professionals, I committed to recovering from that and dealing with those feelings, I got remarried, and I couldn't be happier! I'm very happy to have been able to get out of that funk and turn my head towards Chapter Two, and I realized that Chapter Two didn't need to look like Chapter One. We're not getting any younger, at this point in my life I am happy to move forward without regrets or resentment, and to move into something that makes and keeps me happy. Perseverance is not giving into the depression and the feelings that almost make yourself unable to function. I give credit to my wife, Myrone, and Girish. Those three really helped me find a really positive way to use my drumming skills, have fun, and have friends. It's been a nice change from some of the earlier projects that I did. When money starts going around, the egos get big, and a band becomes a very business-oriented situation. Now, to have friends and do whatever the hell we want to do, it's fun again.

Savannah Harris: Slick, Swagger, and Swing!

By Mark Griffith

When Terri Lyne Carrington goes out of her way to tell you about a drummer and Christian McBride hires that same drummer for his new band, it is someone that you NEED to check out! That drummer is Savannah Harris, she is 31 years old, and she is all over the global music scene. Savannah has played with Kenny Barron, Cecile McLorin Salvant, is touring with Christian McBride's new band Ursa Major, and leading and recording with her own electronic group called ØKSE. Her well-rounded drumming combines Oakland slick, Washington DC swagger, and New York swing. Combining a musical background in hardcore, electronic, funk, and jazz, she is creating her own voice on the drums. Whether she's playing inde rock or with the jazz masters, she brings a heartfelt sincerity and groove to her drumming. Modern Drummer is proud to introduce our readers to, Savannah Harris.

Photos by Aubrey Lace Taylor and Stephan Diethelm

MD: How long have you been in New York, and where are you from?

SH: I'm from Oakland, California, I did my undergrad at Howard University in DC in journalism, and then I moved to New York in 2016. I've been in New York for nine years or so and it's been great for me. I went to Howard for journalism, but I was also part of the music program. I was working a lot in DC with a lot of the incredible musicians who were living there.

MD: What prompted the move to New York?

There was a cat who taught us all, he recently passed away, his name was Achyutan (Pattillo.) He was a legendary cat in the Bay Area, he taught every single drummer from the Bay Area. He was the one who got us all really aware of the four-limb connection, independence, the cleanliness of our sound, and how to generate a sound from the drums.

SH: As a kid I always knew that eventually I was gonna end up in New York because there were so many cats from my area that I grew up watching. People like Justin Brown, Thomas Pridgen, Ambrose Akinmusire, all these different cats… I knew that after my time in DC I would go to New York and make something happen, it just felt like the next logical step. Honestly, the day after I graduated my dad and I packed up a U-Haul and I went North. It was great because I got to experience so much music. This was pre-pandemic, so the culture and the nightlife culture were still super potent and strong. I was seeing shows every day, hanging out with cats that are usually hard to get access to, but they were all right there, it was great.

MD: What was coming up as a musician in the Bay Area like?

SH: The culture and the scene was so strong, you had guys like John Santos and Jesus Diaz that were representing the Latin jazz community in the Bay Area. Then there were old school cats like Larry Vann who played with The Whispers, Eddie Marshall who played with Bobby Hutcherson, there was also a huge Gospel scene in the Bay Area too. There were drummers of all variations playing at a super high level. Then you have the history of Sly and the Family Stone and Gregg Errico, Tower of Power and David Garibaldi, The Headhunters and Mike Clark, there were so many cats around. All those elements were ever-present, and in the 90s there was so much activity going on in the live music scene. Both of my parents are musicians, so as a kid I was hanging out and getting to see Chick Corea, Shirley Horn, Elvin… It was incredible! I feel extremely privileged and extremely lucky to have grown up in the Bay Area at that time.

MD: What instruments did your mom and dad play?

SH: My father is a pianist, and he also makes drums. He is a lifetime subscriber of *Modern Drummer*, we used to put the issues on the table and look at the kits together. My stepfather was a trumpet player, and he ran a program called The Oaktown Jazz Workshops. They were both performers, educators, and composers. They were real parts of the scene and the musical community. I got to grow up playing with them, I had my first gigs with them as a kid, they took me to their gigs, we were schlepping the gear and they were teaching me how to set up quickly. There were moments where it was tough, but it was the best education for what I'm doing now.

MD: Did your dad have a drum making company?

SH: No, he just made drums. He made me a set, a set for himself, and he made sets for a couple of other guys around town, but his drums sound fantastic! I've had guys come to me and say if your dad ever wants to start really making custom kits for us, let us know. Whenever I go visit him, he's got a couple kits set up in the house, his kits really do sound great!

MD: Did you have any drumming mentors around Oakland that you learned a lot from?

SH: There was a cat who taught us all, he recently passed away, his name was Achyutan (Pattillo.) He was a legendary cat in the Bay Area, he taught every single drummer from the Bay Area. He was the one who got us all really aware of the four-limb connection, independence, the cleanliness of our sound, and how to generate a sound from the drums. Sly Randolph is a great educator in the Bay Area that every one of us had to pass through. Darrell Green is an incredible drummer from Oakland who has played with everybody, he's been living in New York for a long time now. He's serious, for me Darrell was the cat that set the standard in terms of anything tippin' or bop related. Darrell knows the lineage and the language for all that stuff, and (for me) he really set the bar for what that sound was going to be here in the Bay. Jack Dorsey was another cat whose playing I love. He was close to my father, and I spent a lot of time learning from him. John Adams grew up in the Bay Area, went to Berklee, and then came back to the Bay Area, I spent a lot of time checking him out. I spent time watching how Justin Brown formed his career, went about life, and playing music. I feel like the strength of drummers from the Bay Area is in our versatility

because you have to play everything here.

MD: When you went to DC for school, who were you playing with, and were there any drumming mentors there that you found?

I learned early on that if I was gonna play drums, I needed to be able to do all of it, so that's what I was attempting to do from the beginning.

SH: I formed a lot of musical relationships when I was in DC. That is where I first played with Geri Allen, Cyrus Chestnut, and I played with Jason Moran at the Kennedy Center a handful of times. I was working a lot with bassist Taurus Mateen. In terms of drummer's kind of passing the torch, CV Dashiell is just above me of generation-wise, he set the standard for the kind of sound you can get out of the drums. He was about language, versatility, dexterity, and he had hands like crazy. Fred Irby III was there too; he is the director of the jazz ensemble at Howard University. I was really fortunate in DC to be surrounded by great musicians in DC as well as in Oakland.

MD: You keep mentioning versatility, what type of music did you come up listening to and playing?

SH: A lot of punk and hardcore, a lot of lot of Latin music, funk, tippin', and avant-garde. My parents met at the Coltrane church, so I went through that too. When I was a kid my first gig was with Idris Ackamoor and the Pyramids. I learned early on that if I was gonna play drums, I needed to be able to do all of it, so that's what I was attempting to do from the beginning.

MD: Did you take lessons or was it just a case of being around it and absorbing?

SH: It's interesting, I never really did formal lessons on a weekly basis until I got to grad school at Manhattan School of Music. There, I was studying with Kendrick Scott which was huge for me, and that was really the first time in my life where on a weekly basis, and sometimes twice a week, I was working with somebody and getting to it. Most of what I got growing up was through those mentors I mentioned. I learned on gigs when different musicians would tell me, "Do this," "Don't do that!" "You need to work on this." "This is how you internalize tempo." "This is the language people want to hear when you're playing." All that kind of stuff really came from trial and error on gigs and having people pull you to the side and say, "This is what needs to happen in order for you to be successful." I'm grateful for that because sometimes I think if you're locked in with a teacher for a long period of time, your point of view can become (kind of) singular. For me it was beneficial to have many different cats teaching me from different angles about what playing the drums is *really* about. I know there's different approaches, but that really worked for me.

MD: When you got to Manhattan School of Music, what types of things were you studying with Kendrick?

SH: Kendrick Scott is incredible. The things that I love most about his playing is that he has such a tailored and dialed-in sound that he's able to get out of the drums. His concept is expansive, his language is expansive, and his independence is great. So those were the things that I wound up studying with him. I really thought if I don't get some of that from him, I'm missing an opportunity. He really helped me learn how to shape music, which (of course) is something that we're always developing. Once we can hear more, play more, and execute more, hopefully the process of shaping music expands. But Kendrick showed me how to take what anyone hands you (any chart, any piece of music, any concept) and how to play around the melody and shape it harmonically. A drummer provides something much more than "just playing time." Of course, we play time, but on top of that we must be able to take the music somewhere. Kendrick really deepened my understanding of how to attempt to do that. What was great was that Kendrick was

very busy touring around that time, so when he couldn't make a lesson, he would have Marcus Gilmore or Henry Cole sub for him. So I got the experience of learning from some very different drummers who all had strong musical concepts.

MD: How did Kendrick express to his students how to shape music?

SH: Here's what I got from him. He really taught me how to start from the melody down, I think a lot of drummers approach learning and internalizing music from a rhythmic perspective first. If you start with the melodic perspective, then the harmonic perspective, then the rhythmic perspective. That way you get this top down and tiered approach. When you have that, you are playing and shaping every part of the music at one time. Functionally, you become and provide the glue for everyone, then everyone feels super secure in what they're doing, and they can start to expand and shape the music as well. That's what he taught me through specific examples.

> I learned on gigs when different musicians would tell me, "Do this," "Don't do that!" "You need to work on this." "This is how you internalize tempo." "This is the language people want to hear when you're playing." All that kind of stuff really came from trial and error on gigs and having people pull you to the side...

MD: Such as?

SH: If we take a tune like "Stablemates" that tune has these melodic components that you can extract and apply them around the kit and you can use those as comping vocabulary. He was showing me those kinds of concepts and then (of course) working with me on a lot of rhythmic independence stuff so that I could execute the stuff that I was hearing and orchestrate it around the set, in creative ways.

MD: Were you working a lot while you were working on your master's degree at the Manhattan School of Music?

SH: I moved to New York in 2016, and for a whole year I was working. Then I started my master's degree. While I was in grad school, I was starting to get offers to tour. By my second year, I was starting to tour a lot, and after I graduated, the touring took over, but I graduated in 2019. Then COVID happened and we all were thinking, 'Oh shit, what are we going to do, I don't know if this is going to come back,' and I was just getting started.

> I'm grateful for that because sometimes I think if you're locked in with a teacher for a long period of time, your point of view can become (kind of) singular. For me it was beneficial to have many different cats teaching me from different angles about what playing the drums is really about.

MD: That was a shock for everyone, but I can't imagine what that was like just as you were starting your career.

SH: As rhythm section players, we're always trying to build our "sideman roster" through touring, getting out there, and hitting the pavement to be seen and heard. That's how we expand our offerings at first, then we can bring in our stuff as leaders. That was my plan. Then when the touring thing folded for a while because of COVID, I wondered how this was going to go. So, I did some local recording work during that time, and luckily Europe opened back up and some touring stuff was able to start happening again. From 2022 until now, that's the bulk of what I've been doing, just getting those hours in on the road, which has been really fun and energizing.

MD: Who were you recording with during that time?

SH: I did Peter Evans' *Being and Becoming*, Maria Grand's *Reciprocity*, a record by Mathis Picard, Or Bareket Quartet's recording *Sahar*, Helado Negro's *Far In* and *Phasor*, and Kate Davis' *Trophy*. It was all independent stuff and some cool new jazz stuff.

MD: What was the first touring you did?

SH: I did four tours with bassist Or Bareket whose following has grown in Europe. I did two records with him, and that led to some recordings with Petter Eldh called *Projekt Drums* featuring other drummers like Eric Harland, Nate Wood, and Richard Spaven. Then I started doing some touring with vocalist Cecile McLorin Salvant for a couple of years. Starting in 2017, I began subbing for Jonathan Blake in Kenny Barron's trio. I've learned so much from playing with Kenny, and it opened a lot of doors for me professionally. Eventually I wound up on Christian McBride's radar, and he asked me to join his new project, Ursa Major. So for the last few years, I have been on the road for about 10 months of each year.

Christian's Ursa Major is a super hybrid band, we're tippin,' we're playing melodic choppy fusion, some Brazilian Samba type stuff, everything! It's cool because we all have different backgrounds, but there is some overlap. We have a huge playlist of records going that everyone is talking about on the road, that playlist is just insane. When you are around someone like Christian, he has access to a lot of history that the rest of us in the band don't. You would be crazy not to pay attention to that learning opportunity.

MD: Has Ursa Major recorded yet?

SH: We just dropped a single which is one of my compositions called "More Is" in March, that's out on digital and 7" vinyl (because Christian is such a vinyl head.) We are going into the studio in September to make a full-length recording, we've been writing a bunch of stuff and it's been nice to have the time to develop that music while we've been on tour for the last couple months.

MD: In a band in which everyone is bringing something a little different to the mix, what do you bring?

SH: Hopefully the capacity to get into all of it. There's really no musical direction that I'm uncomfortable going, I'm eager to bring each person in the band, starting with Christian, a feeling of stability and fluidity so that they can go wherever they want to go, and know that I'm right there with them. Within jazz, there's people who (kind of) belong to certain pockets of time or music. Because I grew up in the late 50s and 60s music zone, I hope that means that I'm able to stretch in either direction. When I was young, me and my dad were always in the car listening to Mahavishnu Orchestra, then I'd be in the car with my stepdad, and we'd be listening to Sly and the Family Stone.

That's what I hope that I bring to the band. That point of view, my versatility, and I'm also a good hang.

MD: You mentioned that you just recorded one of your tunes with Ursa Major, how do you compose?

SH: At the piano, melody comes first, I am a shower singer and there are moments where I'm hearing something, or I'm out walking or driving and I'm hearing something. Whenever that happens, I'll put it in my voice notes, and I'll go home and flesh it out at the piano. I use Ableton to assemble demos and flesh out what I want different from different parts. That's how I assemble different sonics and timbres.

MD: Who are some of your favorite composers?

SH: I love the writing of Wayne Shorter, I love Tony Williams Lifetime, but I also love PJ Harvey and Gilberto Gil. That's the sonic world that I'm coming from. Sometimes when people say that, it feels elusive and hard to pin down, but for me I am looking for the common denominators in all those different styles of music.

MD: What are those common denominators?

SH: Harmonic density, but not to the point where it's distracting and alienating. Harmonic density for people to be moved by and really enjoy, that's very important to me.

MD: What drummers did you grow up listening to? And what drummers today to you pay attention to?

SH: The first sounds that I heard were Elvin Jones, Billy Higgins, Jeff "Tain" Watts, and Brian Blade. Those were the drummers in my ear as a child and growing up. As I continued, Tony Williams, Dennis Chambers, and Gregg Errico factored in heavily. I also really enjoy Pheeroan akLaff's concept on a lot of the Henry Threadgill stuff and other things. As a teenager I was listening to Chris Dave, Marcus Gilmore, Eric Harland, Justin Brown, and Ronald Bruner's playing with Kenny Garrett. There's so many. You and I could sit here and talk drums forever. On the rock side, I love Joey Castillo, Stewart Copeland, I really like DH Peligro from the Dead Kennedy's, and Earl Hudson from Bad Brains. Then there is the power of John Bonham, Keith Moon, and Dave Grohl. That power is what first attracted me to the drums. I love the big presence of the drums, but with dynamic range and flexibility. That's why I like Mitch Mitchell. I feel like everyone should be checking out Henry Cole, he is on another level, as is Dafnis Prieto. There is no shortage of great drummers in the world.

MD: Do you have plans to record as a leader?

SH: Yes, I hope to complete my record this summer, some of it is already done. I can describe the stuff that's complete as a combination of fast jungle DnB type stuff, with some tippin', some singing, and electronic elements. I released a single as an Apple Music exclusive called "Child." That gives a good sense of the musical direction that some of my music is going. It has a soundscape vibe with some singing and some cool guitars, but then it kind of turns into more of an industrial thing by the end of the track. It's a little scary because it's not like some of the work that most people have seen me do.

I also have a project called ØKSE which came out last year and is up for album of the year for the Dutch Jazz Prize. ØKSE is with saxophonist Mette Rasmussen, turntablist Val Jeanty, and bassist Petter Eldh. That record is straight-ahead, noise, free, hip-hop, it's just a crazy combination of things. We're going to the studio again in June to make record number two. ØKSE ties the jazz with electronic stuff.

MD: There are many younger musicians out there who are

Once we can hear more, play more, and execute more, hopefully the process of shaping music expands... A drummer provides something much more than "just playing time." Of course, we play time, but on top of that we must be able to take the music somewhere.

contemplating moving to New York to start their playing careers, talk to them about what that move is like.

SH: If you are looking to build a community around the music that you love to play, New York is a great place to do that. If you're looking for a place that's going to challenge you and continue to challenge you, New York is a great place to do that. If you have something compelling going on in the city where you live, and it's challenging you, and you feel like New York is not the best fit for your personality, don't force it. You can absolutely make something happen wherever you are in the world, especially now. I think there was a time where you needed to be in New York, LA, or London to get heard or seen. But now there are so many compelling scenes around the country and the world, it's up to you. You must have the stomach for New York. As we all know, it's a tough place. Those of us who live here know it's a place that's gonna continuously challenge you. Even at the point when you're finally doing the work that you wanna be doing, there's going to be more challenges. The more you know, the more you need to know. And if you're down for that, New York City the best place in the world.

MD: You have talked extensively about the scenes in the Bay Area, DC, and New York. Talk about the importance of being part of a scene.

SH: You can be an incredible technician, an incredible player, and you can be the baddest cat in the world, but if you don't develop relationships, you're going to have a hard time being able to express your craft. I think it's important to learn how to be a solid human being; somebody who can be depended on to be professional and to honor their commitments. Sometimes that's easier said than done. Sometimes you have several options competing for a particular time slot. It can be hard to figure out how to move within those scenarios, but you have to stick to your principles and your values. I think it's important to be honest, professional, and sweet. I grew up in a time and came to New York at a time where you (kind of) had to be a little bit of an a**hole, and there is a time for that. There are moments where you need that armor, so it's good to have it just in case you need it. But now, you get more bees with honey, and if you can figure out how to be solid and have boundaries, it will make the process of being a part of a scene a lot easier because you won't be burning bridges as you go. That's what I think about that!

MD: Talk to us about being a woman on the music scene?

SH: It's interesting, I think many things have changed, and unfortunately some things have not changed in terms of how women are evaluated in music. I can't speak for the pop world though it does appear that in the pop world this is also true, but in jazz there are just so many more women involved, there's so many women playing drums today. If I go on Instagram and check out drummers, so many of them are women.

MD: I teach, and almost half of my students are young girls.

SH: That's awesome! What really speaks to me is that it seems like the perception of the instrument has shifted, girls can now see themselves playing drums. I hear from so many women over the age of 50 after shows. They tell me, "All I wanted as a kid was to play drums, and everyone said no way, that's weird!" Generationally, I *think I understand* that point of view.

MD: But that doesn't mean that you agree with it.

SH: Exactly. But now it's cool for girls to play drums, and it's cool to see women skateboarding, and everything else! I think it's amazing that all these young women are playing drums, bass, piano, and guitar. It makes me proud and happy to see. But the main thing that we all should hold ourselves to, is that we want to be evaluated on the basis of our skills and our abilities on the instrument, and our professionalism. I think the perfect blend that I'm seeking as an individual and as a woman is to be free to express femininity, and at the same time, when I get on the drums it's time to hit! I'm a hitter first! And to have both sides represented, and NOT in conflict. That's freeing to me.

MD: What have you learned from playing with Christian McBride, he is one of the greatest bassists in the world.

SH: I'll start with time. Christian has such an impeccable and decisive sound and beat, playing with a bassist like that requires so much focus and attention, you can't phone it in. I've learned a lot about how to mesh our quarter notes and mesh our pockets together. I've learned what I need to do and how I need to adjust to make the music glide. Another thing that I've learned from him is about how to listen on a much deeper level. Christian hears everything! He hears and anticipates where everything's going because he's played with everybody. Everything that

you're doing, he has already played it. He has that kind of musical library to draw upon in real time. Learning (or trying) to hear like that is another thing I've learned from him. His knowledge base about the music is so deep, the references that he is bringing up casually in conversation are so deep, I'm constantly googling his musical references. Then I go back, and I listen to the records that he has mentioned. The coolest thing is getting to hear whatever he is geeking out about and coming away with my own understanding of things. One day he'll be talking about VSOP and quoting one of Freddie Hubbard's solos or something. Then you go back, and you listen to it, and you try to hear what he's hearing. It develops your library of musical responses and you're able to respond to things differently on the gig as they're happening.

Outside of the music, I've learned so many lessons from just watching him be who he is. He's so personally stable in how he deals with everything from promoters and agents to how he manages his business and deals with logistics and the demands of travel. He's so even, that's been incredible to watch. I've learned a lot about how to be a bandleader and how to keep the morale high, he's really masterful at that. Playing with Christian is really a master class in leadership.

Kenny Barron is the same way. Kenny knows every tune that has ever been written. His first gig was with Dizzy Gillespie when he was 19, and Christian played with Freddie Hubbard when he was 17. Christian and Kenny are real masters! To be around people who have been playing at the highest musical level from the time they were teenagers is special. Their knowledge of repertoire is massive! You're always learning new tunes, you're always learning about records you didn't know about, and you're getting to hear all these stories about the legends. Through that, you get to learn about how to be in this business, how to move, how to act, how to keep your career going, and how to survive through times of adversity. Any professional musician picking up *Modern Drummer* magazine knows that in their musical life, there *will* be times that you have nothing happening.

MD: COVID is a perfect example.

SH: That was a really hard time. It was hard to get through it because I was 25 and I had no reference point of what was going to happen after a period like that. As you were saying before, if you've been in the game for a longer period of time, you've already learned how to weather these different storms, but I didn't really know how to do that, so I was just freaking out. I wrote a lot of music during that time, I was in the studio a lot, that's what I was doing. I was playing other people's music and I was working on my own stuff in the studio. I had written an EP of music and I was producing it with Morgan Guerin, he's a multi-instrumentalist in New York and a producer. He plays with esperanza spalding and Terri Lyne Carrington as well. I was also writing with my roommate Joy Morales who most people know through her work with Hosier. We were all making music together and hanging out, that's how I got through COVID. I honestly just waited it out and kept checking in on people. But I tried to put myself in the position for when everything opened, when that happened, I wanted to be on people's minds.

MD: Are you a big social media person?

SH: I'm not a big social media person, I would say I'm a moderate social media person. I feel like there's different ways of approaching social media. I have friends who post tons and tons of videos of playing and stuff, and I that is super effective and can really work well. But it's not as authentic for me, so I do a mix of drum clips, me running my mouth, tour diary stuff, pictures I've taken, and that kind of thing. It's sort of a mix, but it's a little more personal and less promotional.

If you start with the melodic perspective, then the harmonic perspective, then the rhythmic perspective. That way you get this top down and tiered approach.

MD: Has your journalism degree from Howard come into play in your music career?

SH: I used to write for a publication and event production group called *Capital Bop* in DC. I wrote about what was going on in DC at the time. I wrote a piece for *Modern Drummer* on Justin Tyson several years back. Christian is always encouraging me to get back on the horse with writing so that's been on my mind. But my priority is continuing to strengthen my work as a sideman and then getting my catalog together as a leader. Those are the two biggest things that need to happen right now, and (of course) they're also the hardest things to make happen.

Of course, there is always more of that to develop and more of that to do, but eventually I would like to become an artistic director. I want to have such a strong catalog as an individual and a strong catalog as a side person that I become an obvious choice for an artistic director position. The reason that I would like to do that is because unfortunately bigger budgets stay in the realm of bigger artists. But there are a lot of people doing interesting work and making interesting music that are not being platformed. There are some cracks that are being filled in by a lot of people that we've mentioned like Geri Allen, Stefon Harris, Christian McBride, Jason Moran, and Terri Lyne Carrington. I want to be that when it's my turn. I want to platform other musicians across generations because there's a lot of musicians that are making really interesting stuff, that (for one reason or another) haven't been platformed at that level. It would be cool to let the generations converge and get these projects funded so that they can reach new audiences. I'm very passionate about that!

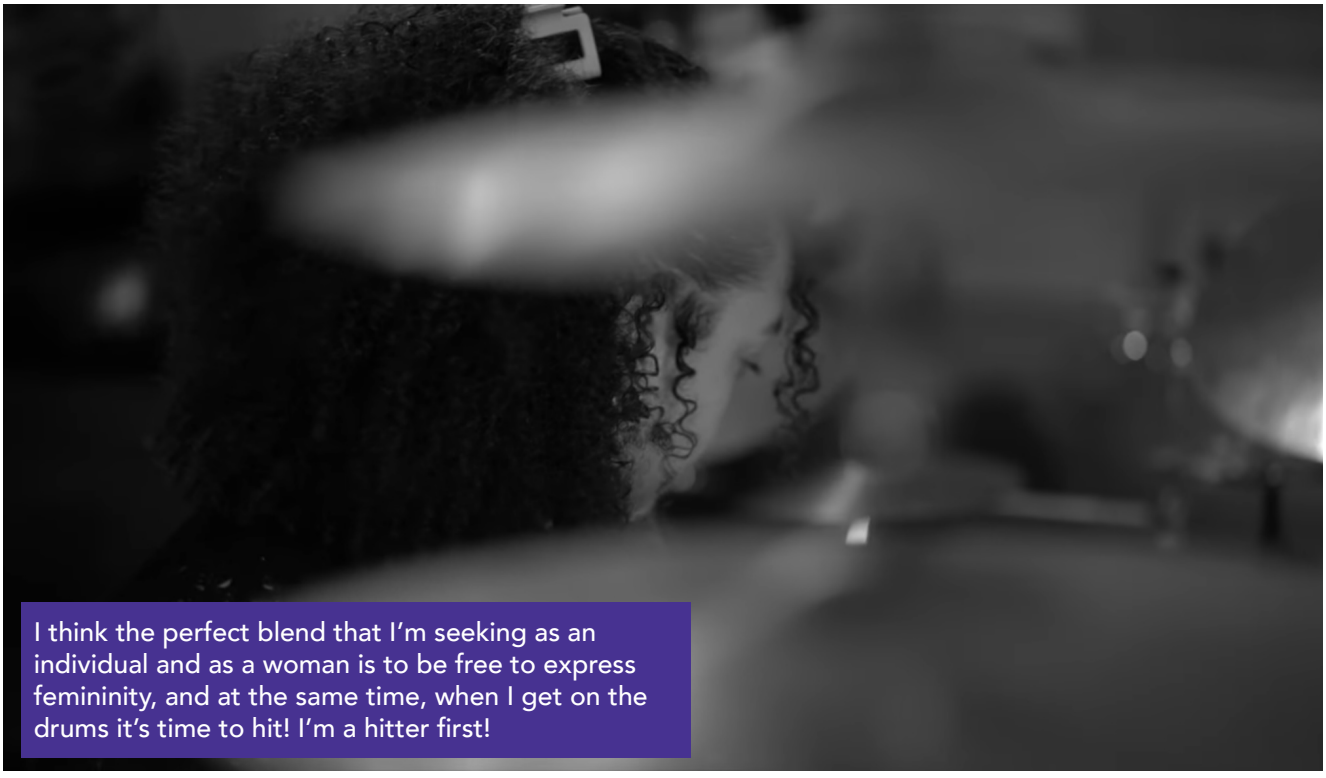
MD: Can we circle back to what is on the Ursa Major band's road playlist, what on it?

SH: There is a lot of Andrew Hill, we love Joey DeFrancesco's *Live with the Five Spot*, VSOP *Live Under the Sky* is another record that's talked about a lot, the duo record with Charlie Haden and Hank Jones called *Come Sunday*, Geri Allen *The Printmakers*, Ron Carter, Herbie Hancock, and Tony Williams *Third Plane*, Ornette Coleman *New York is Now,* Nat Adderley *Calling Out Loud,* and Phineas Newborn's *Fabulous.*

MD: *Fabulous* is a great record with Denzil Best playing drums.

SH: I put the record with Kenny Clarke, Andrew Cyrille, Milford Graves, and Don Moye called *Pieces of Time* on the playlist. And someone put on Grachan Moncur III *Evolution* on the list, but I don't know that record.

MD: That's an AMAZING record with Tony Williams, he also did another one called *Some Other Stuff,* I have played with Grachan. He's also on a legendary Jackie Mclean record with Tony called *One Step Beyond*. But I was waiting for a Dilla record or something like that from the Ursa Major playlist.



I think the perfect blend that I'm seeking as an individual and as a woman is to be free to express femininity, and at the same time, when I get on the drums it's time to hit! I'm a hitter first!

SH: That would have come from me! I don't think I added any J. Dilla to the playlist, but I have tons of Dilla bootlegs from the *Welcome to Detroit* era.

MD: What drums that you are playing in the pictures in this article, that set is fascinating, huge, and daunting.

SH: Those photos are from this internet series called *Stephan's Basement* which is by Stephan Diethelm. He's a promoter in Switzerland, he frequently invites drummers to play this massive kit that's in his basement. He has filmed episodes with JK Kim, Jeff Ballard, Antonio Sanchez, Nate Wood, Kassa Overall, and other people. It's a unique and fun kit to play.

MD: What kind of drums and cymbals do you use?

SH: I love my Istanbul Agop cymbals. With Christian I use a 22" Medium prototype on the right and a 22" Traditional Jazz Ride on my left. On my far right I have a 19" X-ist crash, and I'm using

30th anniversary 15" hi-hats. I change my cymbals until I find a setup that works for whatever tours I have coming up, and I'll stick with those for a while. In the past, there's been times where I've been using two 30th Anniversaries and a Signature, and when I'm doing ØKSE I throw up a bunch of X-ists and its trash time. As far as drums, I have a Gretsch USA Custom at home, and they sound beautiful. On the road I'm either playing a USA Custom or a Yamaha Maple Absolute. Those kits are widely available on the road, and they are great sounding kits that you can quickly get a good sound from. My sticks are Vic Firth 5A's, I like them because I can do a piano trio, then I can go play with Christian McBride, then I can go do a shredder set with ØKSE all with the same sticks and it's comfortable and easy. I'm pretty easy going with gear, maybe I'm a little too easy going with gear. Sometimes I think I could be pickier, but there is something fun and challenging about seeing the gear that is in front of you, and making it work.

MD: What are you practicing these days, what are you working on?

SH: I have regiments for when I'm home and regiments for when I'm on the road. When I'm on the road, I mainly just do rudiment pad stuff which could be anything from warm-ups to rudiments to Wilcoxon. I will go back to Wilcoxon and make sure I have that stuff together. When I'm home, I try to challenge myself by picking different meters, setting the metronome in wonky tempos and places, and shedding each rhythmic subdivision in any meter at any tempo. I like to restrict my playing to one subdivision, then incorporate another one, then add another one onto that. For what I'm doing, I always want to feel extremely fluid in any meter, while being able to pronounce any subdivision available, because that's what the music that I'm playing usually relies upon. If someone is trying to go somewhere I need to be comfortable in my limbs playing all the different subdivisions and keeping the thing moving. At home I also challenge myself in terms of improvising in terms of where I start and end phrases, and where I can place things within the bar. And sometimes it feels good to just go into my practice space and annihilate! You don't always get that opportunity in most playing situations, especially in New York.

Bassist Antoine Fafard, composing for the great modern drummers

By Mark Griffith

After ten recordings that have featured some of the greatest modern drummers ever, bassist and composer extraordinaire Antoine Fafard has a story to tell. He began by leading, touring, and recording five records with his own Canadian fusion band Spaced Out. In 2011 Fafard released his first solo record entitled *Solus Operandi*. It included drummer Martin Maheux (from Spaced Out,) but Antoine also asked Dave Weckl to play on three tracks as well. He sent the tracks to Weckl who recorded three amazing performances at his home studio, and Fafards's "concept" was born. In the ensuing years, Fafard has written music for and recorded with Terry Bozzio, Chad Wackerman, Simon Phillips, Vinnie Colaiuta, Gavin Harrison, Todd Sucherman, and Gary Husband. Antoine Fafard has great taste in drummers and drumming, and his compositions and records let these drummers do what they do best.

MD: How did you conceptualize this way of recording and putting out your records?

AF: When I work on my music, the drums are usually added at the end of the process. That means that the drummer will work with final tracks, including solos, melodies, and everything else. I always make a point of saying that, because that's the opposite of the traditional way of recording drums. The standard recording process is usually drums and bass first with temporary guitar tracks, then solos and vocals at the very end. That's how records have been made for years. My approach is different, but it works really well.

MD: When you record like that do you ever have the temptation to go back and record a guitar or bass part or solo after the drums are done to make things more interactive?

AF: Yeah, but it's rarely going to be something major. If the drummer did something and the bass line is a little off, I'll fix it. Sometimes I might massage the bass track a little bit to add more interaction between the parts. But what I love about my approach, is that the drummer is hearing the solos, and is playing with that solo (that has already been recorded.) The interaction will be more palpable than if it's done the other way around. If a sax player or any other player improvises first, the drummer can do his thing. When I listen back to an album, I will notice how the drummer interacted with the soloists, and he could only do if the solos were recorded previously. I might do little bit of fixing at the end but only if there's a significant musical reason to do it.

MD: When you record, do you record with live drums and then replace them, or is it a loop, or do you program the drums?

AF: I'm really involved in composing the drum parts, programming a drum part is one of my first stages of composition. I usually program pretty specific grooves and even fills. The drummer will listen to what I have programmed, and

Photo by Colin D Miller

When I work on my music, the drums are usually added at the end of the process. That means that the drummer will work with final tracks, including solos, melodies, and everything else.

I give them the freedom to either play what I've programmed, if it makes sense to them, or just go in a different direction. The drummers that play on my records don't have to be told what sounds good or what to play on the drums, that is why I always give them the opportunity and the freedom of playing whatever they want. Some drummers have commented on my programmed drum parts, saying that I program really good parts, and I take that as a big compliment.

I'm not a drummer, but as a bassist, I understand the instrument. When I compose music, the drums are never an afterthought, they are instead embedded in the composition. As a bass player,

I want my bass lines to really lock with the drums, so they make sense together. When I create a project, I wear two hats, one is the composer hat, and the other is the player hat (on bass and guitars.) If I don't get a drum part that fits with my bass lines, or the other way around, it doesn't make sense musically.

MD: So, we'll reverse the question. How do you (as a bassist) record such an interactive sounding bass part when you aren't interacting with what the drummer is playing?

AF: The first thing is that the drum part that I program needs to be intentional and part of the composition. I'm not taking a loop and copying it 100 times, that doesn't make musical sense to me. There's no intention in that, my drum programs are composed for my music. The drummer will know what to do with what I have programmed.

On my most recent project, Gary Husband commented that he didn't really have a choice but to play exactly what I programmed because nothing else fit with the music. When I have done projects with Todd Sucherman, he says that my parts are so suitable for the songs that he often plays his parts very close to what I originally programmed on the demos. He then of course adds his real human feel together with amazing fills! I thank him for liking my programmed drum parts, but I still tell him that if he thinks of something different (or better) to please just go for it. But he is aware that what I've programmed is for that song. That's how I approach it. But one thing is for sure, there's the demo with the programmed drums, but when the drummer does his thing, it always elevates everything by 100%. When I am working remotely with someone who doesn't live in the same country as me, and I hear the drum tracks for the first time, there's a little bit of a trepidation, but it's the best feeling in the world!

MD: You must be a good drum programmer.

AF: I would never release any of my music with the programmed parts, but for this new record, I am selling a book of all the parts that were used during the sessions, and it includes the exact drum parts that I wrote and programmed. Often, I'll write a part that will be a combination of some intricate beats that are

The drummers that play on my records don't have to be told what sounds good or what to play on the drums, that is why I always give them the opportunity and the freedom of playing whatever they want.

a part of the music, and then slashes for the other parts of the composition, the drummer knows the intention, and he knows what to do. My parts are a mixture of detail and slashes, they are like a big band chart.

MD: Aside from the drum programming, how do you compose?

AF: That has changed over the years. If I was answering that question 20 years ago, my reply would have been that I am a riff and rhythm-oriented composer. I was inspired by the band Planet X and their rhythmic intricacy back then. But over the years that's changed. Now I compose everything from the guitar or the piano, and it comes from a harmonic intention first. Although rhythm is never an afterthought, these days I write from a harmonic point of view. I sit on the guitar and try to find voicings or progressions that I've never used before. Then I play around with tempo and styles, but harmony comes first. When you hear the crazy drum parts you might think that everything is coming from the drum part, and sometimes that's

the case. Once I get a nice series of chords, I start to think about rhythm and time signatures. Although my music sounds very rhythm oriented, most of it is composed from a harmonic origin. Sometimes I do have a rhythm or beat in mind, so I'll write it down and keep it for a future composition or project and try to pair it with a fitting chord progression. On *Perpetual Mutations*, I wrote a piece called "Dark Wind" in 15/16 for Gavin Harrison to play, but I never want a song to sound like it's "just" a rhythmic or a drum exercise. There must be more than that, a composition has to go somewhere.

I realized that the compositional aspect was more important to me than just playing the bass, that is when I picked up the guitar again.

MD: Who are some of your favorite composers?

AF: Zappa is at the top of my list. I'm not a "Zappa expert," I don't know everything he's done, but I just love the way he approached his catalog. His career was about the whole oeuvre, not just one album or one song. He had different periods and worked with great musicians, he just let his creativity go everywhere. To me, Zappa is the model of a composer who did what he believed. Of course, I'm influenced by a long list of musicians and composers, I'm a prog fan so the two UK albums have influenced me to this day. Everything that Allan Holdsworth has done, both his approach to the guitar and the intricacy of his harmonic progressions have been very influential. Funny enough, I hire a lot of musicians that have worked with both Zappa and Holdsworth, that's not a coincidence. I love what Jeff Beck did on over the years, I love that when you listen to Jeff Beck, you hear his approach and his identity through all sorts of different musical variants. I love Chick Corea for the same reason. I'm very open minded, for instance, I knew Gino Vannelli was from Montreal, but I didn't realize his music was so musically rich. The list goes on and on, I love 20th century modern music and all the way back to Bach. Once you dive into music, you realize there is genius everywhere!

MD: Guitarist Jerry DeVilliers Jr. plays guitar on many of your records, but I noticed that you are also playing guitar on your most recent projects, were you a guitarist first?

AF: As a teen, I decided to focus on and study the bass, in hindsight I should have also kept up with other harmonic instruments like the guitar and the piano. I studied in Montreal in different colleges, and I tried to get as much information I could get on the bass, my idea I was to become a studio musician or a gigging bass player. I was reading a lot of charts on gigs and things like that, but that's a thing of the past now. I realized that the compositional aspect was more important to me than just playing the bass, that is when I picked up the guitar again. I needed a physical instrument with harmonic possibilities to experiment and compose with, so I rediscovered the guitar. I had six years of classical guitar study before the bass, so I went back and started to approach it like a beginner. I wanted to discover and explore my own creativity. I always consider the bass to be my main and strongest instrument. For the last 25 years I've been in the creativity business, and it's now really about the albums and my creative output.

MD: Let's talk through some of your records that feature amazing drummers and drumming.

AF: It started in 2000 when I did five albums with a band called Spaced Out, we were a jazz fusion band from Canada, and we did five studio albums between 2000 and 2008. The band was three guys who went to university together in Canada and we decided to start a band. It was a like a solo project because I did all the writing, arranging, even the mixing of the recordings. After that band broke up, I released *Solus Operandi* in 2011, that was my first *real* solo album. That is when I started to hire musicians from around the world. I had Dave Weckl play on a few tracks on *Solus Operandi*, that was my first collaboration with Dave. That process was what opened my eyes to the fact that I could work with great drummers that I admire. That record (kind of) kicked off the crazy adventure I've been on ever since.

MD: Were you and Dave sending tracks back and forth?

AF: The process was very straightforward – I sent Dave the tracks and charts, and he sent me back the completed and final drum

tracks. The drums were done so well, that there didn't have to be any back and forth. There are a few different elements to having someone do tracks remotely. First, there's the quality of the recording, second is the quality of the playing, third is the overall sound and musical approach of the drummer that is captured through the instrument and the recording. If that sound and approach has been captured well, you've got the whole package. Weckl's tracks had everything! The recording sounded great, and the drumming was absolutely amazing and exciting. Working with Dave was an amazing experience.

For my most recent recording *Quadra Spherium* with Gary Husband, we went into a recording studio in London and were there together while he recorded the drum tracks. This record is probably one of the most jazz-sounding albums I've released so far… especially with the strong presence of saxophone on it. Gary and I both love Tony Williams. You can feel the Tony Williams approach in Gary's playing. I'm not saying he's trying to copy Tony, it's in Gary's philosophy and approach. When we did this new project, we often recorded a song seven or eight times, and each take was unique and very different. After all those takes, it was an interesting jigsaw puzzle of finding the "best" one.

MD: Did you edit together different drum tracks?

AF: The first thing we did was find the best overall take. On one take, Gary might play a section on the hi-hat, on the second take he would play it on the ride, and on the third take he might play it on the toms. Sometimes I had too many good options, that was Gary's approach, and I knew it would work for the music on this record. Occasionally, we might have liked Gary's approach behind the guitar solo and put it together with his playing from another section, I was always trying to highlight the best elements of Gary's drumming. The challenge was to find the right part at the right moment, that was an interesting process, but not as hard as you would think.

MD: Before we talk about the other projects, how did this new one come together. This is the second time that you have recorded with Gary on drums, and he has played keyboards on *Borromean Odyssey* and *Proto Mundi*.

AF: The recording process and concept is different for each recording. Sometimes I hear one song and I know which musicians I'm going to put on the project. I love the creative process of making a new project or concept, but sometimes I have to determine if I've done something similar before. I take the approach that no-one wants to hear exactly the same predictable thing twice.

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This new record *Quadra Spherium* came together because of two separate musical opportunities. One opportunity was seasoned veteran saxophonist Jean-Pierre Zanella. He was an old teacher of mine in Montreal. He is primarily an alto and soprano sax player, but a while back I asked him to record something on the tenor in the style of Michael Brecker. What he played was amazing. That was when the concept of *Quadra Spherium* started. Recently Gary Husband called me and said, "I've got a new Pearl Crystal Beat kit, it's an acrylic set like Billy Cobham's from the 70s, and it sounds great! The new kit is mic'd up in a studio, and if you have any new projects, I'm available." As a composer it doesn't take a lot to persuade me, when a great musician says "I'm available" you jump on that. But I didn't have anything specifically composed for him at that point, so I put the concept of the tenor sax and Gary together. I knew those two guys had never played together on an album project, but I also knew it would work. I wrote some music in a fusion approach not dissimilar to Return to Forever or the Chick Corea Electric Band. That was how the concept of this new record came together. Everything was done in two sessions from each of the players. I recorded my tracks in my home studio. Gary did one session in 2023 and another one in 2024, both on his Pearl Crystal Beat drums. I was there, and I also filmed the whole thing. On the Canadian side of things, Jean-Pierre did his parts in two or three sessions, and I put it all together. While were working on the new record I said to Gary, 'Sometimes drummers go to a session and are told not to overplay, but you'll *never* hear that from me.'

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In 2022, I did *Spatium & Tempus* with Todd Sucherman, and I am working on another project with Todd now. Todd is so amazingly professional. I sent him the music and a year later he said I'm recording the session tomorrow. He recorded the album with no charts, he memorized all the music. He does that for everything he plays on, he doesn't rely on anything written he just feels the

music which he has completely assimilated. How many people have the time and the dedication to do that? Let's face it, I'm not Sony Music, I don't have unlimited budgets. But he seems to enjoy my music and has an affinity for it, while putting himself 100% into it. In the end, Todd knows my music better than I do. He has an extremely organized mind. I'll be releasing a brand-new project with Todd later this year, it's all recorded and just needs to be mixed. This project will also feature him his new Sonor drums. I'm really excited to get this new project done.

In 2017, I did *Proto Mundi* with Simon Phillips playing drums. I had the privilege to play the bass parts with him, we tracked at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios, and Jerry Goodman played violin, Jerry has played on many of my projects. *Proto Mundi* was another adventure, it came together at the last minute, Simon said I'm flying over can we do it when I'm there? Simon listened to the music on the flight from LA to London, it's not that Simon wouldn't memorize the music, that was just the nature of the project. We went section by section and it was just amazing to see it come together. Simon's drum set sounded perfect, and he travels with his own microphones, what an absolutely amazing experience. As a composer and a bassist, it is amazing to be there in the room playing when the drummer is tracking his parts but sometimes that isn't possible.

MD: What difference does it make when you get to track the drums and bass together in the same room?

AF: In the end, the difference is difficult to assess. I've done that with Simon Phillips and Gary Husband, but usually my bass parts are already done. Personally, it's a special moment for me and a great experience to be there playing my parts with guys like Simon and Gary, it makes a difference for me, but I don't know if it makes such a difference for the music itself, it's hard to tell. When the music is being recorded, you're in an environment where you want to make the music sound great. At the end of the day, the listener doesn't know when and how those instruments were recorded, and if they were recorded in the same room or the same country. The records become a sonic experience.

MD: You have done a couple projects with Gavin Harrison, *Perpetual Mutations* and *Chemical Reactions*.

AF: Gavin Harrison really composes his parts. I send him my ideas, but he's probably the drummer who takes the most time to make the music his own, which is amazing. When I send Gavin a piece of music, I know it is going to come back differently, and

While were working on the new record I said to Gary, 'Sometimes drummers go to a session and are told not to overplay, but you'll never hear that from me.'

of course better than the original. We have a nice relationship; I'm trying to push the boundaries and bring new things to everyone I work with. Last year Gavin and I got together, and I asked if he wanted to work on some drum and bass stuff together. But he was reluctant, he said that he would prefer to work on songs. I found that inspiring, so we indeed worked on songs instead.

MD: In 2016 you did *Sphere* with Gary Husband playing drums, synthesizer, and piano, and now you did *Quadra Spherium*, what is the difference between the two?

AF: Actually, my first collaboration with Gary was on the album

Photo by Colin D Miller

called *Ad Perpetuum*. Vinnie Colaiuta plays drums on that whole record, but there is one track that I had a drum duet where you've got Vinnie on the left and Gary on the right playing together. That was our first collaboration. On *Sphere* Gary played all the drums, piano, and synth because he is shockingly as good on the piano and keyboards as he is on the drums.

MD: If not *better*.

AF: Yes, he's amazing. Sonically, *Sphere* is very good, we just nailed it on that one. There's also an amazing fusion guitar player called Jerry Devillier Jr. who played on *Sphere*. Everything gelled really well on that. *Sphere* was almost 10 years ago in 2016, so when he asked me if I wanted to do something with him playing the Crystal Beat kit, it was long overdue. I was glad to have Gary back as a drummer, he played synths on *Borromean Odyssey* in 2019 with Todd playing drums.

MD: What was it like working with Vinnie Colaiuta on *Ad Perpetuum*?

AF: Unfortunately, I never met Vinnie, the session took place in LA and (bassist) Jimmy Haslip was the producer on the session. So Vinnie and I didn't have a close connection or contact. I sent the music and the charts, and he did his thing. What came back was simply amazing, unfortunately we haven't done anything since. Vinnie is such an in-demand guy, so when the opportunity presented itself, I jumped at the opportunity, I would have been a fool not to. I think we made a cool fusion album.

MD: What drummers have requested charts, and what guys have created their parts through just listening to the music?

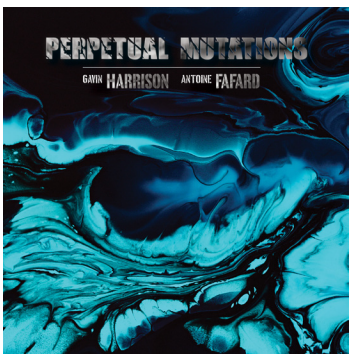
AF: I always write a chart unless they tell me they don't need it. The only drummer who hasn't requested a chart and said don't even bother is Todd. Gavin asked me to just send any chart that

Simon's drum set sounded perfect, and he travels with his own microphones, what an absolutely amazing experience. As a composer and a bassist, it is amazing to be there in the room playing when the drummer is tracking his parts but sometimes that isn't possible.

I had for any instrument. For instance, he would use a violin or a cello written part just to help him with the structure of the piece. But Gavin ends up composing his own drum parts. When I send Gavin the music with the programmed drums, he can listen or ignore those parts, it's up to him. I don't know his process; it would be interesting to know if he ever listened to my programmed drums just to see what was there. I have never asked him that question. His process is his own, and although we live in the same country and we've met, I was never there when he was recording. He records in his own studio, and he's got his own approach.

MD: What drummers have stayed the closest to what you have written, and which drummers have strayed the furthest from your parts?

AF: Todd might be the drummer who's stayed the closest to what I've programmed. I tend to program pretty specific drum parts, and sometimes, it's shocking how close he stays to my programmed beats. It's hard to tell which drummer has gone the furthest away from my programmed parts. There are moments where Gavin goes pretty far from what I've programmed. A few times he has brought some polyrhythmic stuff into few of my pieces that I didn't even understand myself. As the composer, I listened back to try to understand what he played, I think I would have to transcribe it or ask him to be sure of what's happening, but it sounded great… and that's what counts! Gary's approach was a mix. Sometimes he played what I had programmed and sometimes he didn't. But the music that I played with Gary was more open to improvisation. Gary (by nature) is an improvisor.



MD: When guys are creating their drum tracks remotely do you know if they are editing together takes? Or are they going for live single takes? Do you have a preference?

AF: On the latest album I pieced it together some of Gary's takes myself, because I was the editor. What we did during the session is if we liked Take #4, but the intro fill was cool on Take #2, we would edit them together. That that was our approach. I don't know about anyone who's done stuff remotely, that's a good question. If you have your own studio at home, I think you will create tracks to your own taste and satisfaction.

MD: As a Zappa and a UK fan, what was it like to work with Terry Bozzio?

AF: I just did one track with Terry and that was quite a while back. I wish we could have done more but those were the circumstances. I never try to force anything, most people are reachable these days, and I'll contact them and say I have a project and if you're interested let me know. I never contact people without having a project ready for them. Sometimes I have had the scenario where people have said that I should work with this guy or that guy, but I don't have anything written for them. Most of the time I take the gamble of completing something for someone, and I take the risk that they will say, "Sorry it's not for me, I'm not interested, or I'm too busy," which is fine, and I move on, that's my approach to things. With Terry, there was one opportunity so I took it, and if there's another one, I would certainly jump on it.

MD: What was it like to work with Chad Wackerman? Can we compare and contrast Chad and Vinnie?

AF: Chad did two songs for me for *Occultus Tramitis.* People often associate Chad and Vinnie because of the Zappa and Holdsworth connection, but they are two different players. Chad

was very curious about the music I sent him, and he wanted to know who was playing on it. In terms of dynamics and unpredictability, Vinnie is more unpredictable. You can probably analyze what Chad plays easier than what Vinnie plays. In terms of their approach to the kit and music, it's very different. They are both exciting in their own right. I haven't worked enough with Chad, but I know that it would be easy because he really he puts himself into the music, I was always pleased with what came back from Chad, so I'm sure it would be an easy collaboration again.

Gavin Harrison really composes his parts. I send him my ideas, but he's probably the drummer who takes the most time to make the music his own, which is amazing. When I send Gavin a piece of music, I know it is going to come back differently, and of course better than the original.

MD: Do you compose your music with specific drummers in mind?

AF: Yes, now more than ever. In the past, when I didn't have the network or the collaboration history that I have now, I would take whoever I could get. But now the projects are lined up. I'm finalizing this second project with Todd that I composed a few years ago. I am always composing for multiple projects at the same time. Right now, I'm composing something for Gavin and hopefully offer an additional original new recording to add to the two albums we've released together. The idea is to come up with a nice collection of music that (hopefully) the player and the audience will respond to.

MD: We are all different musicians, and we all have different musical thumbprints, how would you compose music differently for (for instance) Gary and Gavin?

AF: That's a good question. They are two great drummers, but they approach the drums completely differently. Gary is a very jazz-oriented guy, he will take chances and follow his instincts. Gavin is a more organized in a sense, his ideas are more structured. When you see him play live with Porcupine Tree or Pineapple Thief, he doesn't play the same fills twice, he's going for it. But when he commits to a certain part for a certain song, he will respect that composed part. When we collaborate, he takes that same kind of approach. Once he composes a part and once it's time to record it, he will commit to that part. That's the difference between those two. Simon Phillips had an approach that was more like Gary's, Simon will follow his improvisational instincts. With Todd, I am trying to think like him when I program a part for him. I think about how Todd would approach something, and most of the time I've been pretty spot on. On this new project, there is a very Police-Stewart Copeland kind of vibe to how I programmed some stuff, and there were some Cozy Powell influenced moments. When I heard the final results, Todd totally got the message and went for the approach I was suggesting.

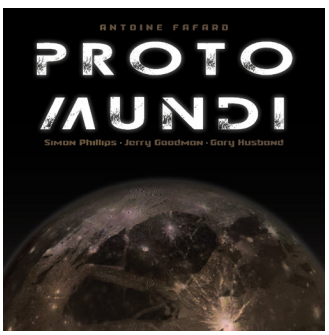
Todd might be the drummer who's stayed the closest to what I've programmed. I tend to program pretty specific drum parts, and sometimes, it's shocking how close he stays to my programmed beats.

MD: What guys haven't you worked with that you would like to work with?

AF: I did those few tracks with Dave Weckl years ago, but I'm writing a new big band album especially for him. It's still in the early steps. I studied big band arranging back in the day, and I've never done anything with a big band, so it's time for me to do a big band album. The music is inspired by the big band record *One More Once* that Michel Camillo did back in the 90s. That's the direction, I'm going to offer it to Dave and see if we can work it out. I want to do a full album with him. But drummers I haven't worked with? That list is very long: Steve Gadd, Bernard Purdie, Dennis Chambers…

MD: If you were amazed by Todd's memorization skills, Dennis' memorization skills will terrify you. I was playing some of the Steve Khan music that Dennis had played many years before, and I asked him about it, and he remembered intricacies and roadmap stuff as if he was staring at the charts. Just terrifying!

AF: I also have a musical affinity with players like for Virgil Donati and Thomas Lang because of their rhythmic intricacy and overall virtuosity. But the various projects that I'm working on now will keep me busy for a while. However, if someone approaches me, and says that they want to do something, I will usually stop what I'm doing and take the opportunity.



The drummers that I have worked with all have their own sound, it's important to say that. When people listen to my music, I want each drummer's voice, style, and approach to be heard clearly through the music. A lot of music you hear these days sound like samples, it all sounds the same with crushed dynamics. I can't even tell who is playing. I want to create a collection of music, pieces, and projects so if you want to hear Vinnie, you'll hear Vinnie. If you want to hear Chad Wackerman, Simon Phillips, Gary Husband, Gavin Harrison, or Todd Sucherman, you will hear

Photo by Colin D Miller

them all through the music I write for them and the way they play it. When I compose, I try to honor the way that they approach music, and their own distinct musical personalities. But does the sound come from the fingers, the sticks, the equipment, the microphone that captured the sound, or the way it's been mixed?

MD: None of the above, it comes from the person.

AF: Exactly! However, it must be said that the drums are probably the most difficult instrument to record and mix. But each of those players, and anyone on that level, has something that makes them sound the way they do. Their personality is embedded in their sound. For instance, when Gavin plays a backbeat, you hear it and it's distinctively him. It's part of his personality. He's decisive and precise. The way you approach and play the instrument is your personality. However, how the drums sound in a room and how they sound on a recording are two different things. When we work on and craft an album, the sounds are as pure and real as possible there's no sampling or anything like that. How the music is mixed and how the drums are integrated with the other instruments is an art form unto itself. My mixer, David Sgualdini is a world-class mixer, and he captures and mixe**s** the true sounds of the drums and each drummer perfectly.

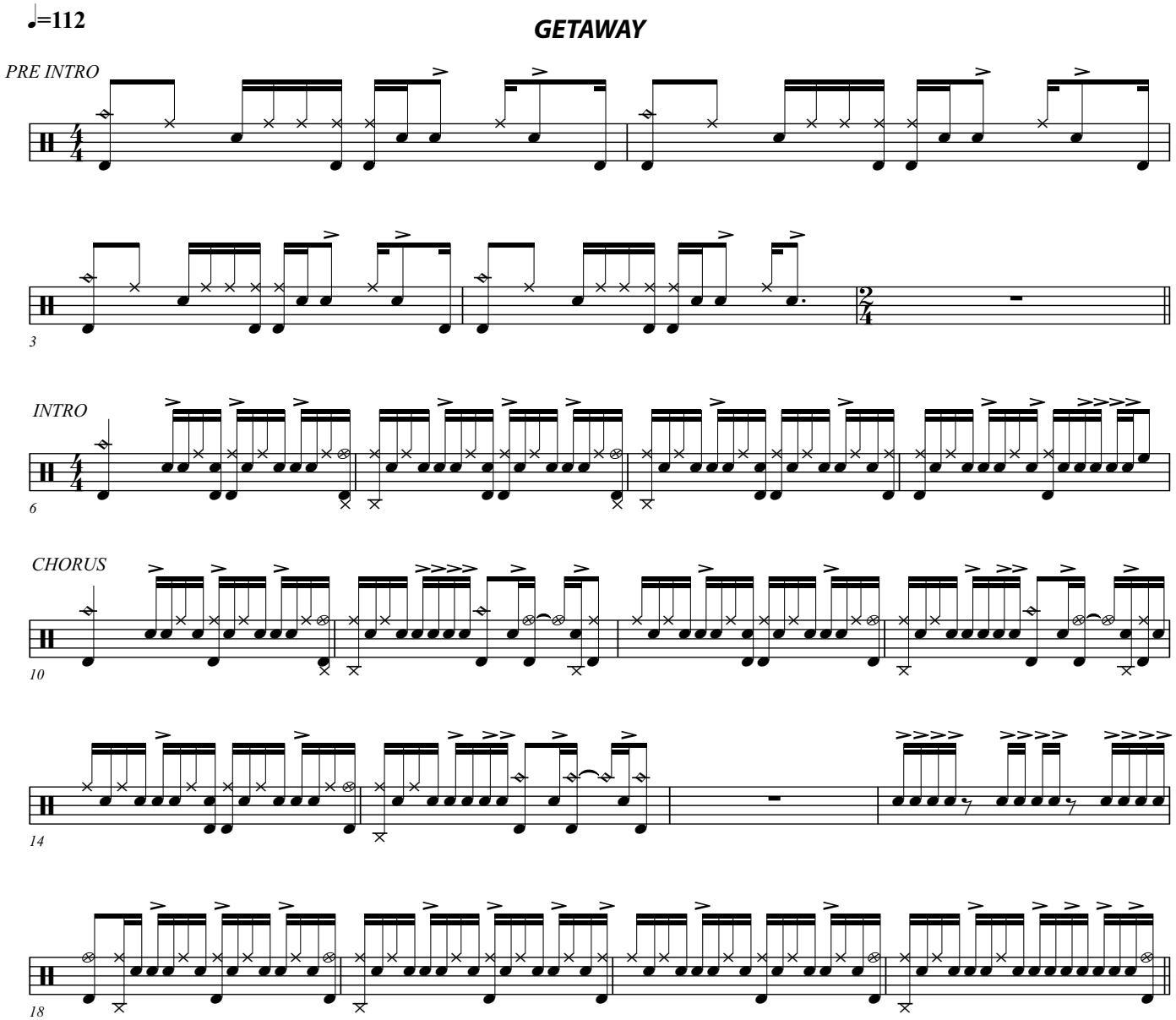
MD: Yes, your records always sound fantastic, you choose the best drummers, and you write music that presents those drummers in their best (or most drumistic) light. That is *exactly* why I wanted to talk to you. Keep up the great work!

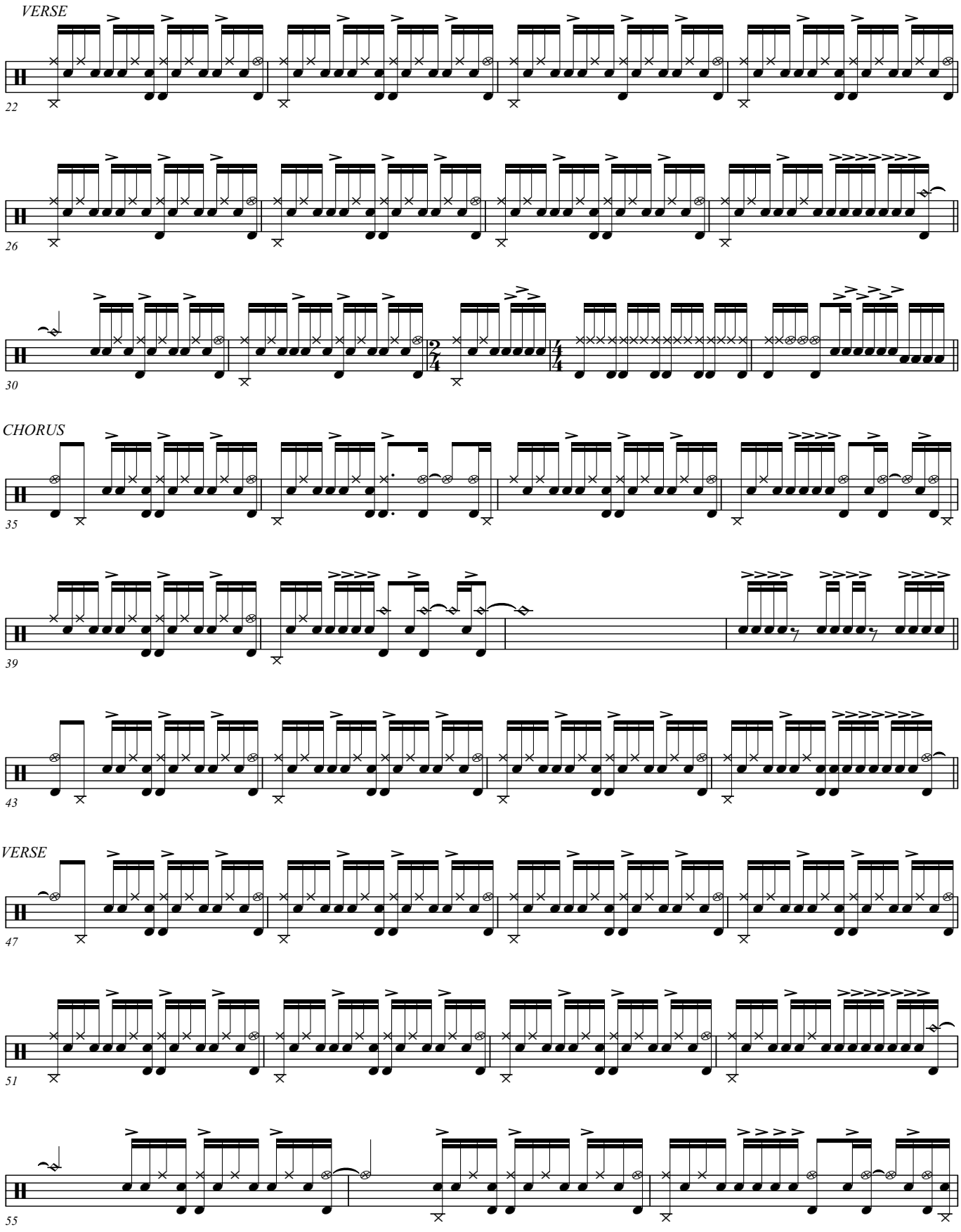
Earth, Wind & Fire's "Getaway" from the recording *Spirit*, Fred White, Drummer

Transcription by Marc Atkinson

This month's transcription is a tribute to the legendary Earth, Wind & Fire. The track "Getaway" appears on the band's seventh studio album "Spirit," released in 1976. Among the group's lineup was drummer Fred White—one of three brothers in the band—who delivers an impeccably tight, funk-infused groove on this track. Pay close attention to the ghost notes played with the left hand (the right hand in Fred's case, as he was a left-handed drummer.) These subtle strokes are key to the groove's depth and give the song its relentless, locomotive drive.

Also worth spotlighting is the exceptional rhythm guitar work of Al McKay. His playing on "Getaway" is a perfect example of his unmatched ability to infuse every groove with energy and soul. In my opinion, McKay ranks among the greatest rhythm guitarists in funk history. His comping on this track is dripping with funk, locking in seamlessly with the rhythm section. His contributions were essential to the signature sound and infectious groove of Earth, Wind & Fire.

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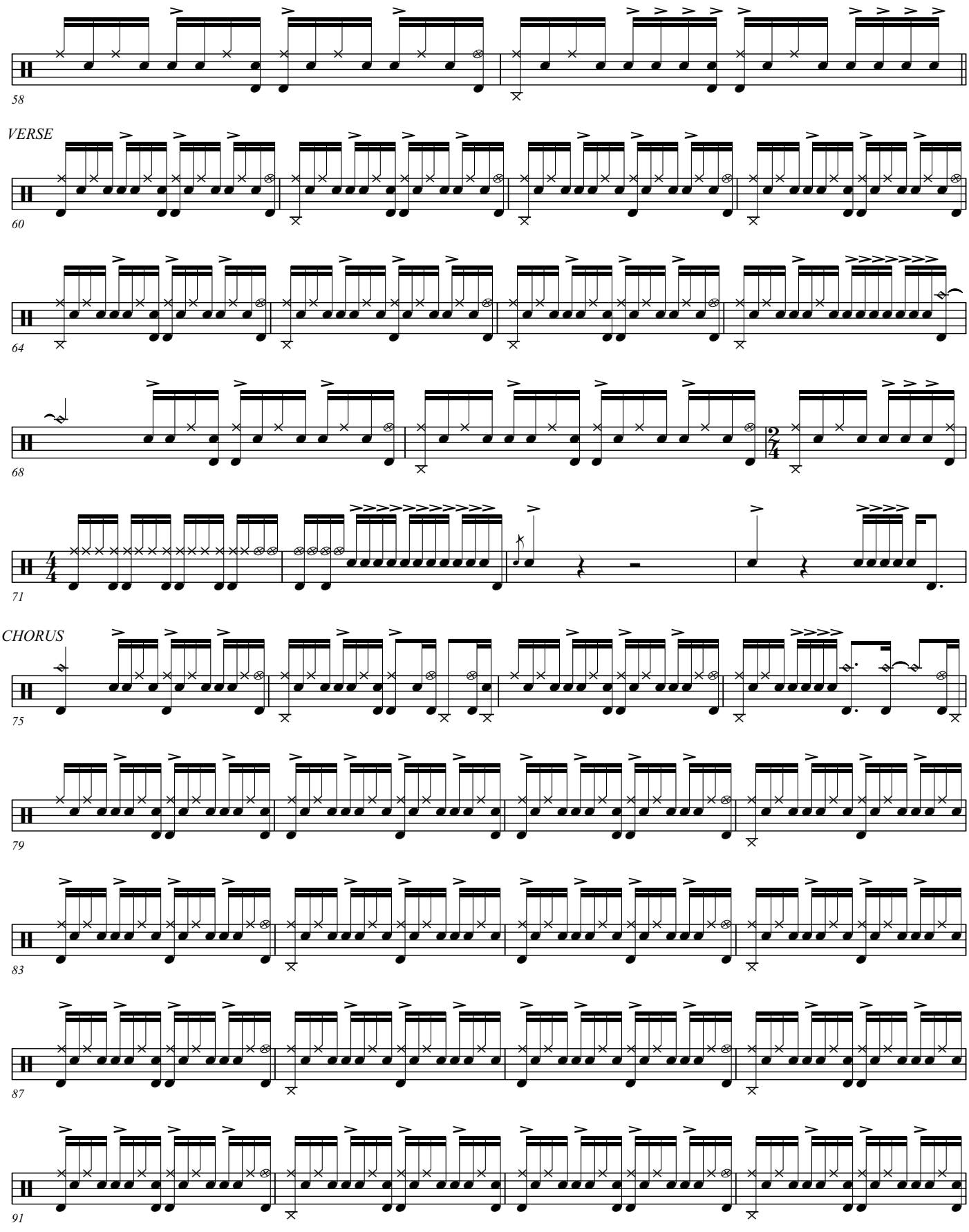
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Marc Atkinson, a dedicated musician, honed his craft under the guidance of the renowned Gary Chaffee. Now calling Las Vegas home, Marc is on the brink of unveiling his labor of love—a comprehensive transcription book that promises to captivate music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

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

Press Play & MOVE

By Chris Lesso

"The real knowing is in the playing. Drums give up their true secrets only to players, not PhDs." **Mickey Hart**

I once heard a health expert ask, if you could do just one thing for your overall well-being that would affect everything else, what would it be? First, I thought of diet, exercise, and even breathing, but the simple answer was this: sleep. We can all think of other tactics like exercise, good food, and lots of water, but getting good sleep is the foundation for all those other things to take effect. Sleep is that 'one thing' that affects every other aspect of our health. So, what's that ONE THING for our drumming?

Get Out of your Head and Into the Movement.

Press play and move! Put on music you love, and play. Move. Put those headphones on and play with music without boundaries. This isn't about playing every note correctly, or deconstructing all the parts. There's a time and place for that, but this is all about getting in the flow and having fun. What comes up comes up; maybe we find a new idea to explore, or come up against a new challenge. The goal is not to overthink but to press play, and go with whatever happens. The only rule is to keep moving. Don't stop! It's the real time balancing act of reacting in the moment, staying challenged while keeping it simple. Some things are only learned by doing.

In Jiu Jitsu, they call it 'mat time.' It is time actually spent on the mat rolling around with an opponent. In flying, they call it 'air time,' time actually spent in the air doing it. Nothing dramatic needs to happen, but we're in the game. There's a time for theory, preparing, and analyzing, and then there's the moment to simply get after it. This is the gift we give ourselves to explore the music we love without expectations. So many drummers are caught up in the same trap of getting lost in the latest tips, tricks, videos, and techniques, when what really works is to simply 'press play and move', a little every day.

Have you ever noticed that when you spend a lot of time with someone that speaks in a certain way, their accent or laugh rubs off on you a bit? A bit of their expression brings out our own. Drumming is a language, and immersing ourselves inside the music, the same thing happens. Is this practice protocol happening enough in your routine? I had to amp this up a little through dropping some of the books and exercises and setting aside time to get in the flow of rhythm and not look in from the outside. Immersion builds confidence. Everything else we learn along the way only compliments our ONE THING! It actually doesn't take much to play music. Keep it simple! Get out of your head, and into the movement.

I was lucky to spend some time with Ed Shaughnessy who played drums in the Johnny Carson *Tonight Show* band. In their 29-year run, they would back up many of the artists performing on the show, everyone from Aretha Franklin to Jimi Hendrix. Imagine how many artists performed on that show in almost three decades! To keep himself sharp, Ed used 'press play and move' in his practice routine. He would turn on the radio when the top 10 hits were played, sit behind his kit, and play along with whatever he heard, which would always change. It didn't matter if he'd heard the songs, or even if he liked them. The goal was to play and react to what he heard in the moment. The challenge was, could he react and add something to the bigger picture of whatever sonic soundscape he was thrust into?

How we practice is how we perform, and the best way to cultivate grace under pressure is to be comfortable being uncomfortable in the practice room. Seeking out uncomfortable conversations and situations that test or frustrate us provokes our untested reserve of strength and resolve. Ed used this exercise because his job depended on it, but you can invent your own version of it. If enthusiasm is the fuel to becoming your best self through drumming, keep it fun!

"Don't think. FEEL." **Bruce Lee**

You're ultimately training yourself to *not* think, but to *feel*. We don't do this enough in the art of learning music. We can get stuck in the exercises and patterns, forgetting the art of deliberate play. Play gets us into a state of flow faster than practicing exercises, and flow states accelerate learning. Trust your intuition and use what you already know. So often we sell ourselves short! You're 10 times stronger than you think you are. Now is your time to take the shackles off and get to know the feeling of freedom. Through this, all other questions and frustrations will dissolve and fall in place.

Are you ready to unleash your potential in drumming and life? Chris Lesso's LTR DRUMMING METHOD is for drummers who want to reach higher. Start today with your free training at **chrislesso.net/LTRDRUMMING**

Progressive Drumming Essentials: Understanding Odd Time Signatures

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, represents 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 own voice on the drums.

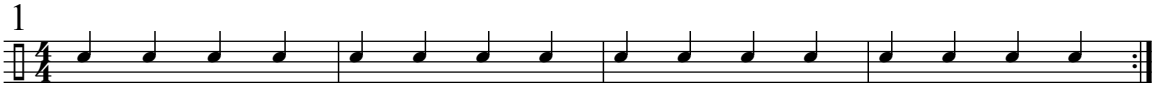
The book, *Progressive Drumming Essentials*, is organized into six sections (Fundamentals, Odd Subdivisions, Rhythmic Tricks, More Odd Subdivisions, Polyrhythms, and A New Perspective on Polyrhythms.) This month we will start excerpting Aaron's expertly written articles in our Rock Perspectives column 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, now let's get to work!

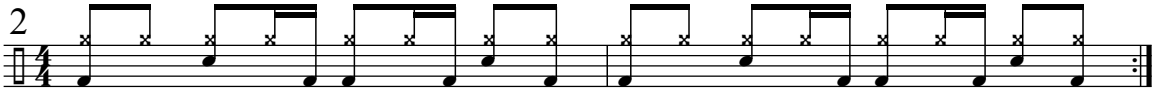
Before we start playing sick grooves in 17/16, let's start at the beginning and define time signatures. Time signatures tell us the length of a bar, or measure. This is done with a pair of numbers. The bottom number refers to a subdivision (4 = quarter notes, 8 = 8th notes, and 16 = 16th notes), and the top number tells us how many of those notes are included in one measure.

Quarter-Note Meters

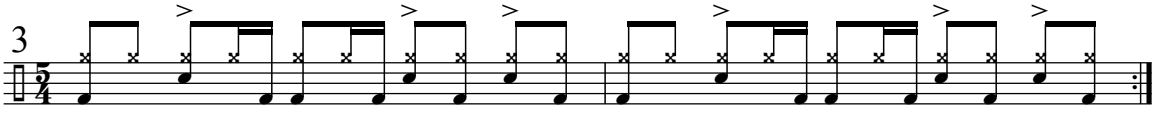
The most common time signature is 4/4, where we have four quarter notes per bar. You aren't limited to playing only quarter notes, though. You can use any subdivision you want, provided that the sum of those subdivisions equals the length of four quarter notes.



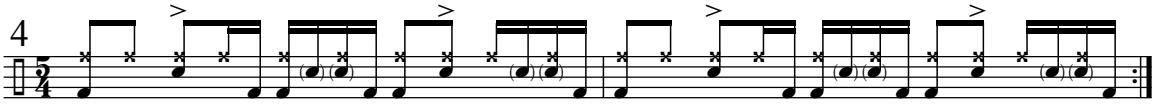
Let's give some quarter-note meters a try. First up is 4/4.



Now let's get away from common time (4/4) by changing the top number from 4 to 5. This means we'll have five quarter notes per measure. We'll modify the basic 4/4 groove in Example 2 by simply repeating the last quarter note. This might feel a little strange at first. Your best bet to make it feel natural is to go slowly and count out loud. I also suggest bobbing your head on the beat, because sometimes you can feel a pattern more easily when you're moving your body along with it.



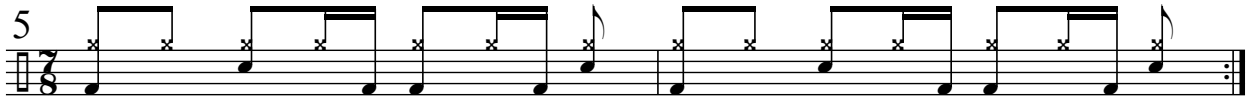
Let's make this feel a little more interesting. Instead of just repeating beat 4 on beat 5, we'll try a new pattern with snare accents on beat 2 and the "&" of 4.



I encourage you to experiment further with other quarter-note meters. Some fun listening homework would be to check out Peter Gabriel's "Solsbury Hill" followed by Primus's "Year of the Parrot." Both songs are in 7/4, but they feel completely different. "Year of the Parrot" is angular and syncopated, while "Solsbury Hill" is so natural feeling that, with just a casual listen, you might not even notice that it's in an odd time signature.

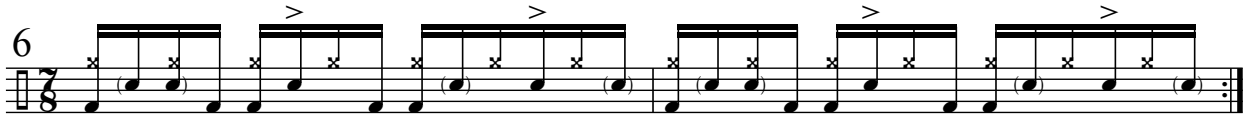
8th-Note Meters

Eighth-note meters are a little bit trickier to pull off. The first time signature we're going to try is 7/8, which is essentially a bar of 4/4 minus one 8th note. The easiest way to get started with this is to drop an 8th note from the last beat of a 4/4 groove that you already know how to play. Let's do that with Example 2.



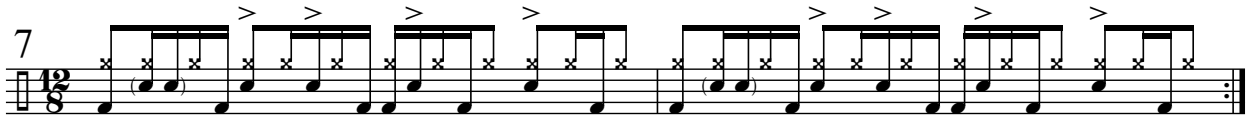
If you haven't played in 7/8 before, it's probably going to feel a bit awkward. The first step in fixing that is to count out loud and accent beat 1. So count the 16th notes ("1-e-&-a, 2-e-&-a, 3-e-&-a, 4-e"), and replace the hi-hat on beat 1 with a crash. Try bobbing your head to the beat as well.

Once you have a handle on that, set a metronome to 8th notes and go back and forth between playing four bars of Example 2 and four bars of Example 5. Repeat that pattern until the odd-time bar feels just as natural as the 4/4 bar. All it takes is relating the challenging part (the 7/8 measure) to something you're already comfortable with (the 4/4 measure). Now let's see how it feels when we spice up the 7/8 groove a little. Try alternating between the following syncopated 7/8 groove and a syncopated 4/4 beat of your choosing.

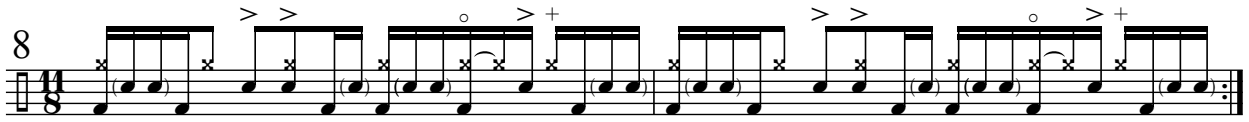


12/8 Time

This time signature is generally felt as four groupings of three 8th notes, which feels the same as playing triplets in 4/4.



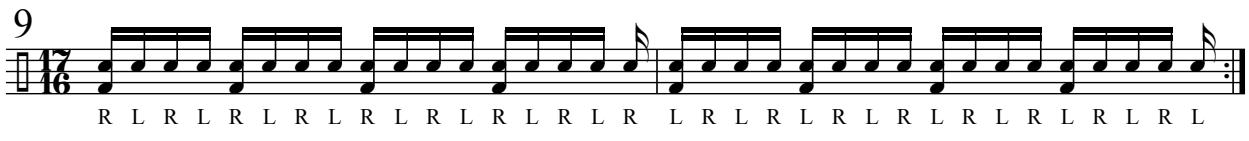
You can use that same type of feel in odd time signatures. Let's try 11/8. Example 8 is especially challenging, because we don't play constant 8th notes with the hi-hats. This broken pattern helps the groove feel unique and syncopated. Spending the time to make patterns like this feel natural will not only help you play challenging grooves, but it'll also help solidify your internal pulse so you can make more standard beats feel even better.

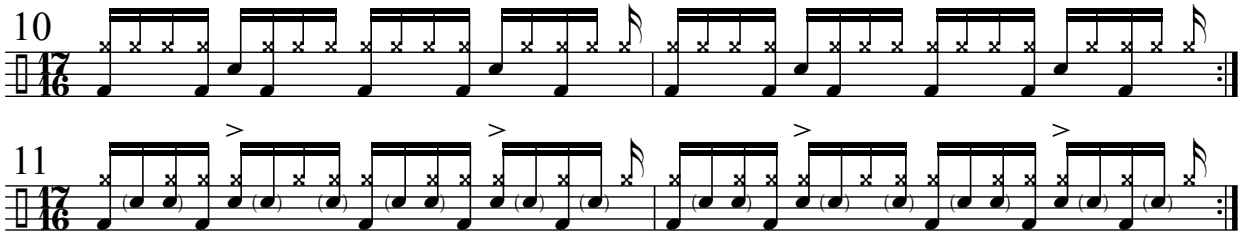


16th Note Meters

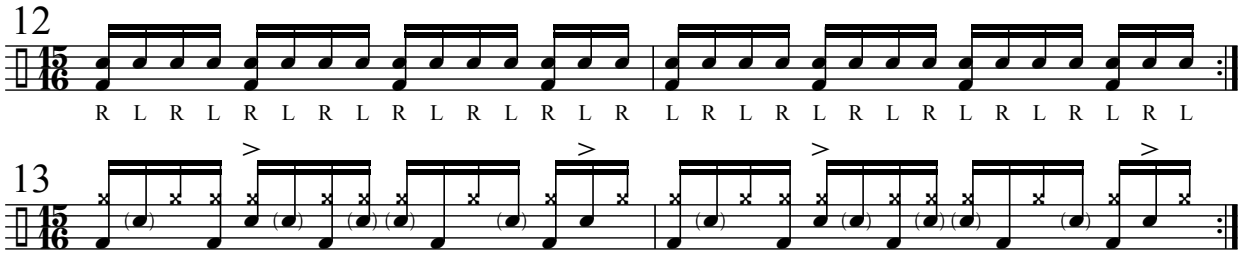
Here's where the lesson starts to get serious. You can consider 16th-note meters as feeling either one 16th note longer than a quarter-note meter or one 16th note shorter. For example, 17/16 is essentially a bar of 4/4 plus one 16th note, and 15/16 is the opposite; it's one 16th less than a bar of 4/4.

The first thing to do is to play constant 16ths on the snare or practice pad and count them aloud. (For the final note, say "Five.") Use singles, and notice that the sticking will reverse on the repeats. Once that's comfortable, add your metronome to the mix to tighten and refine the rhythm. As in the previous examples, go back and forth between the odd-time example and a similar pattern in 4/4.

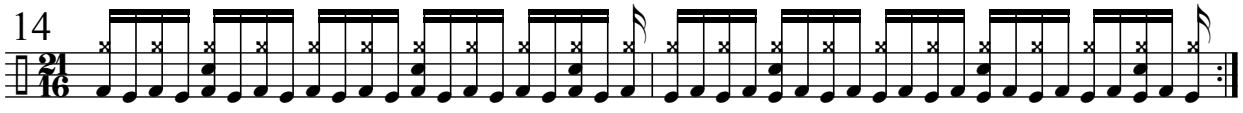




Let's try the same type of idea with 15/16. Take special notice of the bass drum pattern in Example 13.

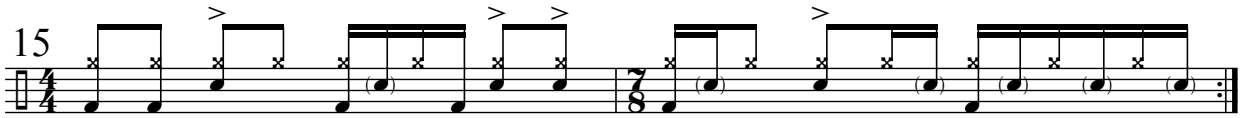


For double bass players, Example 14 is a 21/16 groove to get you started.

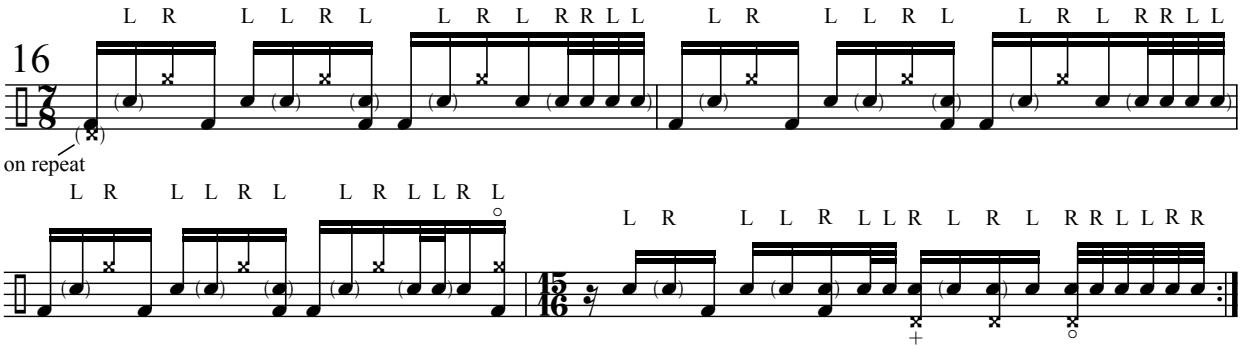


In all of these examples, it's imperative that you feel beat 1 as beat 1 and not as an offbeat. Work through the patterns slowly, focus on counting out loud, and bob your head on at least beat 1 of every bar.

One of the coolest things you can do with odd time signatures is to switch them up. Patterns that consist of more than one time signature are called "composite meters." A great example of this is in Led Zeppelin's song "The Ocean," which is demonstrated in the following example.



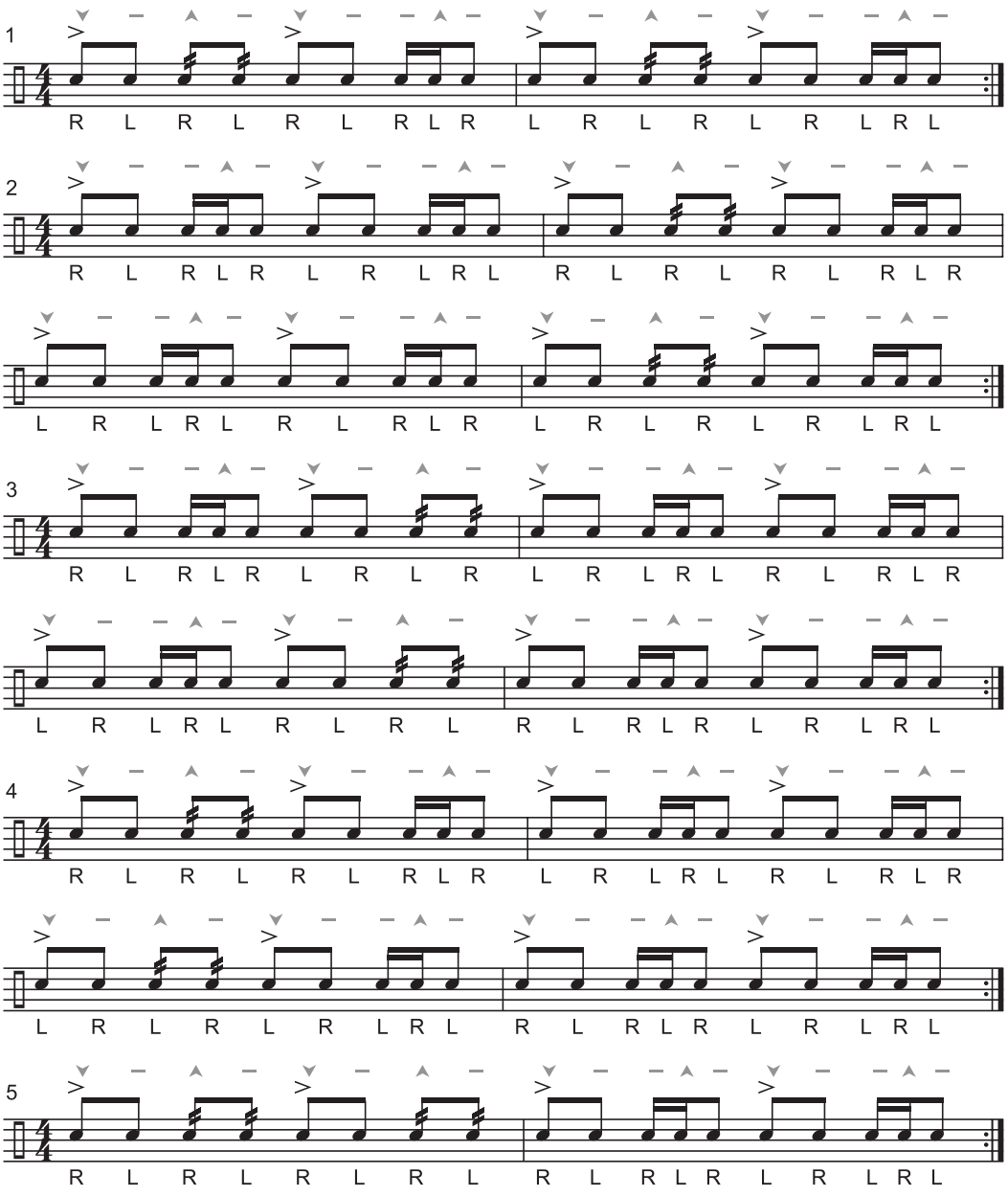
The last example is a syncopated four-bar pattern made up of three bars of 7/8 and one bar of 15/16. This groove is loosely inspired by the soundtrack music to a level in the video game *Spyro: The Dragon 3*, which was written by the great drummer Stewart Copeland. Pay special attention to the dynamics in this example. If the ghost notes are too loud, it can sound like a mess.

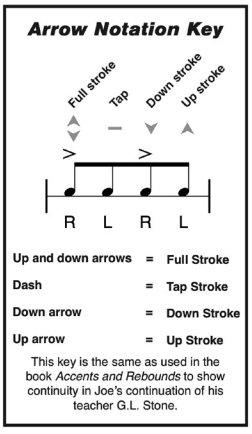


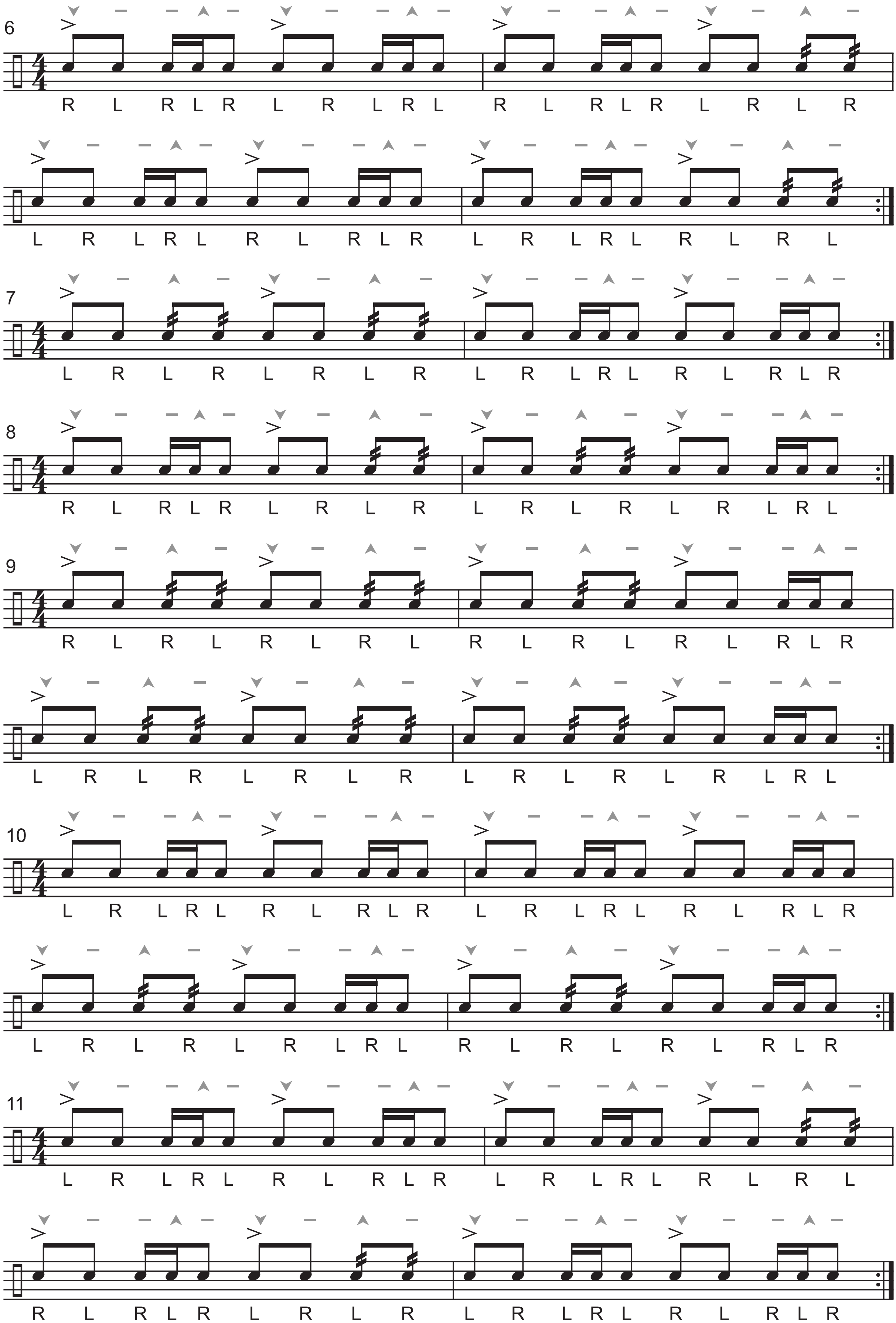
Master Studies II: Paradiddles with Fill-Ins Using Multiple-Rebound Strokes

By Joe Morello

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






6
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L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L
7
L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R
8
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L
9
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R
L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L
10
L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R
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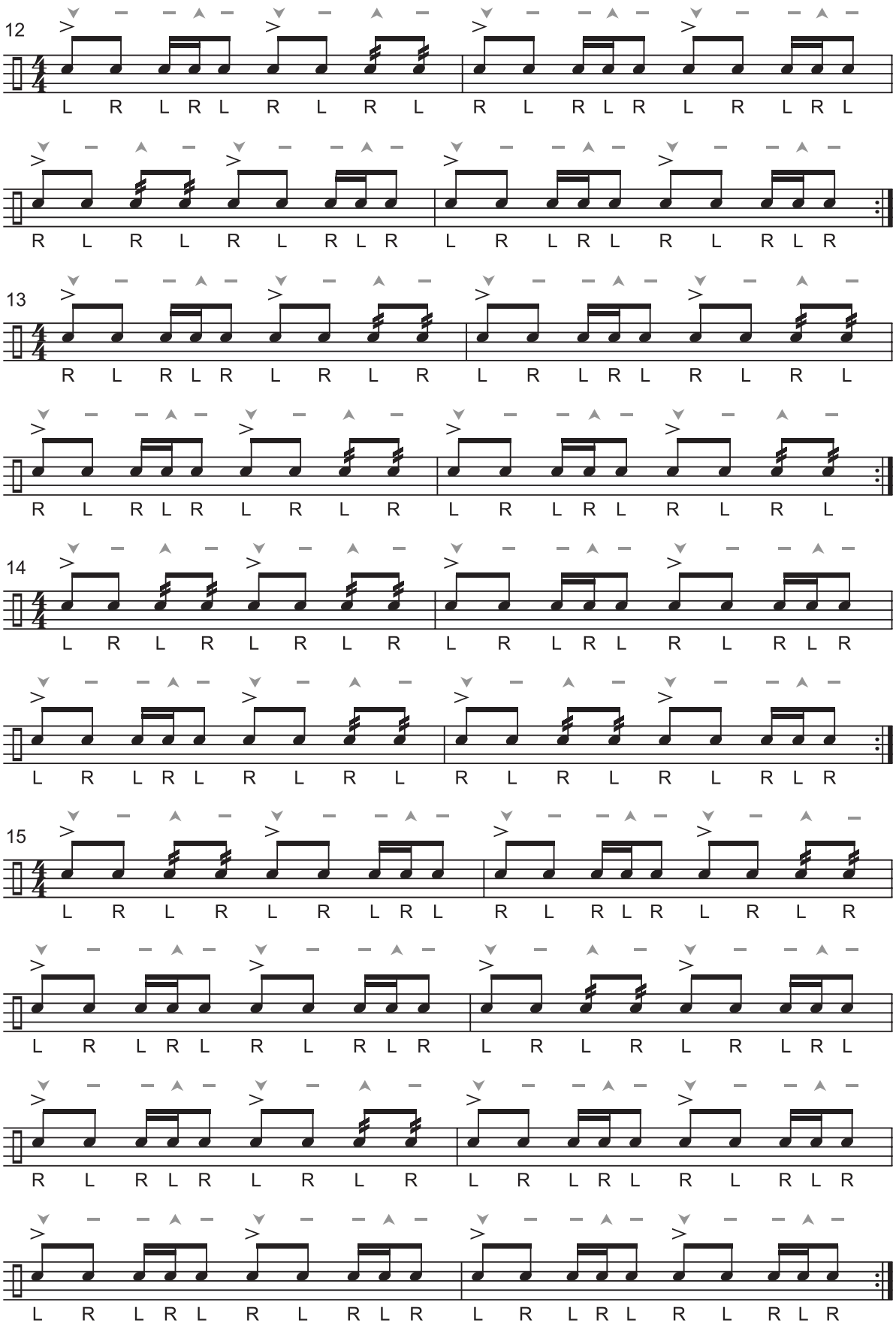
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13
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The New Breed: Concepts

By Gary Chester

Gary Chester's groundbreaking book *The New Breed* is influential and legendary. The book, Gary's teaching methods, and his Concepts are deeply intertwined. They are a *lifelong* commitment of dedication, study, and development. Before we start practicing Gary Chester's Systems, Reading Exercises, Advanced Systems, Advanced Reading Exercises, Composite Systems, Grooves, and Applications from his book; it is important to learn about Gary Chester's own teaching, drumming, and musical concepts. His words, methods, and Concepts are as important as the notes that he wrote for us to practice. Pay special attention to the eight ideas in the section entitled The Importance of Singing, they are eight vital and important ideas for any drummer or musician.

DEVELOPMENT OF ALL LIMBS

One of the biggest problems that many drummers have is the fact that they do not have complete control over all four limbs. Many drummers just practice snare drum exercises and do not incorporate the feet. By the same token, drummers who do incorporate the feet often have trouble leading with the left hand (if they are right-handed). Many drummers come to me and say, "My right hand is fine, but my left hand is terrible." It's the same thing with the feet—strong bass but weak hi-hat. My methods for using these systems cover all aspects of using all four limbs in a practical sense.

RIGHT- AND LEFT-HAND LEAD

All of the systems contained in this book will involve leading with the left hand as well as with the right. This will develop better control over the instrument and eliminate the idea of a weak hand. Most drummers find that, by practicing these exercises with either hand leading, the weaker side becomes the creative side: Since this side is not trained, it is easier for it to groove and play funkier. The concept of left-hand/right-hand lead is especially effective when used with two floor toms and three hi-hats—my concept of "territorial rights." Try to develop a balance in the center of your body, rather than focusing on your right or left.

MY APPROACH TO DRUM SETUP: "TERRITORIAL RIGHTS"

In my drum setup, I use three hi-hats—two in the traditional position and one on the side above the floor tom. I also use a second floor tom to the left of the traditional hi-hat. I find that this offers tremendous flexibility, and I recommend using a similar setup when practicing these systems.

By using three hi-hats, you are opening up a whole new world of possibilities. You can lead with the right hand on the closed right hi-hat, and play patterns, beats, and accents on the drums, cymbals, or other hi-hat to create a variety of feels and tonal colors. You can also lead with the left and have right-hand flexibility. I call this approach "open arms": right-hand lead on the right hi-hat; left-hand lead on the left hi-hat. Crossing over the snare drum to play the hi-hat seems unnatural to me.

This brings us to the second floor tom, and the idea of territorial rights. I use the second floor tom (on the left side) for many sound possibilities. I find it easy to

simulate two bass drums by tuning the tom to the same pitch as the bass drum. It is also very useful when leading with the left hand.

"Territorial rights" refers to playing the instruments on the left side with the left hand, and playing the instruments on the right side with the right hand.

As you can see from the photo, the small tom, hi-hat, cymbals, snare, and large tom (on the left) are most naturally played by the left hand, while the snare, small tom, large tom, hi-hat and cymbals on the right are played by the right hand. It is simple and logical. If you put a four-year-old child behind a set of drums, the child would not cross over to play the hi-hat.

I found that one of the biggest problems I had in the studio (as far as technical execution) was ending a fill on the right side and then getting back to the hi-hat. By using three hi-hats, two floor toms, and left- and right-hand leads, this is no longer a problem. Be sure that you use the same setup when you play that you use when you practice.

BASS DRUM TECHNIQUE

Many drummers wonder whether they should play the bass drum with the heel down or up. I feel that for today's music you need to be able to play both ways.

I personally play with the heel down, and my power comes from the knee down, not from the hip. During my years in the studio, we very rarely played very loudly, and engineers were able to adjust my sound to whatever volume was needed.

However, today's studio playing, as a rule, is much louder. With the invention of modern recording instruments, such as limiters, and the success of heavy rock bands, you are often called upon to play very loudly. Studio engineers today call the bass drum a kick drum, and many times that is what you do—kick it! I find that playing with the heel up gives you a short, staccato sound, and playing with the heel down gives you a more rounded sound. You will need to be able to play at all dynamic levels, so you should practice both methods. I, however, recommend more concentrated effort on the heel-down approach for control.

POSTURE

I'm a firm believer in sitting properly when you practice, play in the studio, or perform live. Good posture will help you keep your stamina and endurance, and prevent possible back injury.

In the studio, I would sometimes work 17- to 20-hour days. In 1969, I suffered a

slipped disc injury and was out of work for six months. Although I felt that my posture was okay, being more aware of specifics in this area might have helped to prevent this injury.

Another benefit of sitting correctly relates to hearing the instrument. Sitting with correct posture allows you to hear the entire set, as opposed to when you are leaning over the hi-hat or snare drum. It also enables you to play with a very natural balance of sound between each part.

I suggest using a mirror when you practice. You can check your posture, and even your facial expressions. Some students bite their lips or stick their tongues out. That just dissipates your energy.

TIME

The most important thing for a drummer is understanding time. This occurs with experience and dedicated practice. There are three basic time feels: on top, in the middle, and behind. You have to find out which time feel works in a particular situation.

On Top—This type of feel generates the most energy and excitement, but there is always a danger of rushing. In playing on top of the beat, you play with a feel slightly in front of the center of the beat.

In The Middle—This type of time feel is exactly that: in the middle of the beat.

Behind—This feel places the groove slightly behind the center of the beat. Playing with Count Basie requires playing behind.

In playing good time with a rhythm section, the bass player and drummer must work well together. It is great if you can find a bass player who you are comfortable with—one who feels time in the same place that you do. Then the two of you can figure out the type of feel required for a given session.

In practicing the systems, you should practice with a click track, because in the studio you must be able to work with it. People say that a metronome doesn't swing. It doesn't, but what you put with it will swing. Practicing the systems with a click will help develop a good sense of time, and will help develop the feel of working with a click. Practice the systems using all three types of time feels.

GROOVE AND SWING

The way to make these systems cook is to know them inside out. When reading a chart for the first time, just about any drummer, even one of the greats, will sound mechanical. But by the third or fourth time through, it should groove. The same idea applies to these systems. The first time you play it, it's not going to swing. These are coordinating exercises, and they are hard. They will be (for the most part) unfamiliar to you, and nothing unfamiliar is going to cook right away. After you understand each system, sing each line, and hear and understand all the lines and parts. Then you can work on specifics about the groove.

After you can play each system reasonably well, tape yourself. Listen for spacing, sound, accents, dynamics, and musical approach. Criticize yourself to the x degree.

Grooving in the studio or with a rhythm section is not a one-person thing. You can practice grooving at home and play great. However, you might get with a rhythm section in which the bass player plays something that contradicts what you are playing, and the groove will be gone. There are many aspects to playing a groove. Bass, guitar, drums and keyboards all must groove together. Therefore, it is important to practice so that what you play feels good to you, but it is also important to get experience with other musicians and work on grooves together.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SINGING

This concept represents one of the most important and beneficial ways of using the

systems. As you go through the systems, you will find that you have to sing various parts of the exercises. You will end up using the voice almost like a fifth limb, and this will help you in many ways. Some of them are:

1. *Ability to hear and feel the quarter note.* One of the first things you have to sing is the quarter note, along with the metronome, as you sight-read. The quarter note is the daddy of the bar; singing it really helps you hear exactly where the quarter is, and how everything you play relates to it. This will result in better time feel and better execution.

2. *Sight-reading ability.* As you advance through the systems, you will find yourself playing with all four limbs and singing a different part each time you play through an exercise. As you sight-read, you will sing the quarter note, then the snare drum part, then the line you are sight-reading, and in some cases, the upbeat and the hi-hat or cymbal part. Practicing in this manner helps you to sight-read without having to sing the melody line all the time, and enables you to recognize figures and execute them instinctively.

3. *Understanding of individual parts.* When playing complicated figures with all four limbs, you must be aware of each individual part that makes up the figure. In the studio, you may sometimes be asked to play the bass drum louder or the snare drum softer. You may find that, by changing just one part of the figure that you are playing, such as simplifying the snare drum or playing a part on the hi-hat instead of the snare, you can create a special effect or please a producer. By practicing these systems while singing a specific part, you will become acutely aware of each part, and thus be able to have more control over dynamics and more flexibility when you are playing.

4. *Alleviate mechanical reading.* Many drummers sight-read well, but they are not really hearing and feeling what they are playing because they are playing mechanically. By mastering the systems and being able to sing each part, sight reading will become less mechanical and more musical. You will be so familiar with figures that coordination and execution will not be a problem; you will be free to create a feel within the music you are sight-reading.

5. *Awareness of pitch and timbre.* When singing each individual part, you should sing in a tone very close to the part that you are focusing on. The snare drum vocal part should sound somewhat like a snare, bass drum like a bass drum, etc. Many drummers are not aware of tones and pitches. Most can hear a snare drum part, but when asked to play the same figure between tom-toms or on the bass drum, they are lost. When practicing the systems, you will find melodic lines shifting around among different instruments. Singing these different parts enables you to understand fully each tone color.

6. *Awareness of spacing.* Singing helps you to be aware of the placement of each beat and the spaces between each note. A common problem is rushing fills when excited. Singing will help you develop an accurate awareness of spacing and precise execution. Some of my students, after mastering the singing of each part, sing the rests while playing the exercise.

7. *Energy.* Singing can create a certain excitement and energy when you are practicing, playing in an isolation booth in the studio, or playing in a live performance situation. When you sing with energy, you play with energy.

8. *Breathing.* Another benefit that results from singing exercises is awareness of correct breathing. Try to sing a drum fill while breathing in. It is incredibly awkward. The fill flows naturally when you release the air. I feel that, if you breathe normally, your playing will flow normally.

A concept that helps many students is the idea of breathing in the same manner that a horn player breathes. Sometimes I have students write breath marks in each exercise to promote natural breathing.

The concept of singing will become more understandable as you go through the systems. Hopefully, you will find that this is a very enjoyable and beneficial part of your practice routine.

Rhythm Vocabulary Development Series Part 3: Filling in the Spaces in 6/8

By Michael Packer

Rhythm as Space: In our last installment, we explored how rhythmic vocabulary can be expanded by understanding rhythm as space—a concept that becomes even more powerful in odd time signatures like 7/4. This month, we shift our focus to a more familiar but equally versatile meter: 6/8.

Understanding rhythm as space means recognizing that each note occupies a portion of time. In 6/8, this means six eighth-note spaces within a measure. But beyond that basic framework, these spaces can be filled with a wide range of rhythmic combinations. Mastering 6/8 isn't just about playing six eighth notes—it's about exploring the countless ways those spaces can be filled.

Breaking Down the Bar: At its core, 6/8 is often felt as two groups of three—giving it a natural, flowing feel reminiscent of waltzes and triplet-based grooves. But that's just the starting point. You can also subdivide 6/8 in less conventional ways, such as:

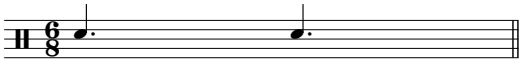
- 3 + 3 (traditional 6/8 feel)
- 2 + 2 + 2 (straight subdivision)
- 4 + 2 (a syncopated approach)

These subdivisions allow you to give 6/8 its own identity, and each creates a different musical character. Once you understand these options, you can choose how you want your 6/8 grooves to feel—whether steady, driving, or syncopated.

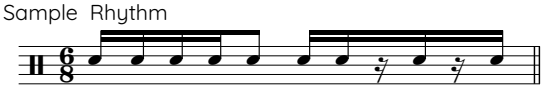
Filling the Space- Eighths, Dotted Quarters, and Beyond: Let's revisit the concept of "filling" the space of a note. In 6/8, your measure contains six eighth-note spaces. Some of these spaces might naturally feel like eighth notes (two sixteenths), dotted quarters (three eighths), or even triplet groupings.

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

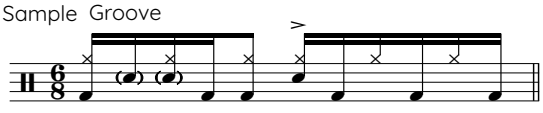
Groupings



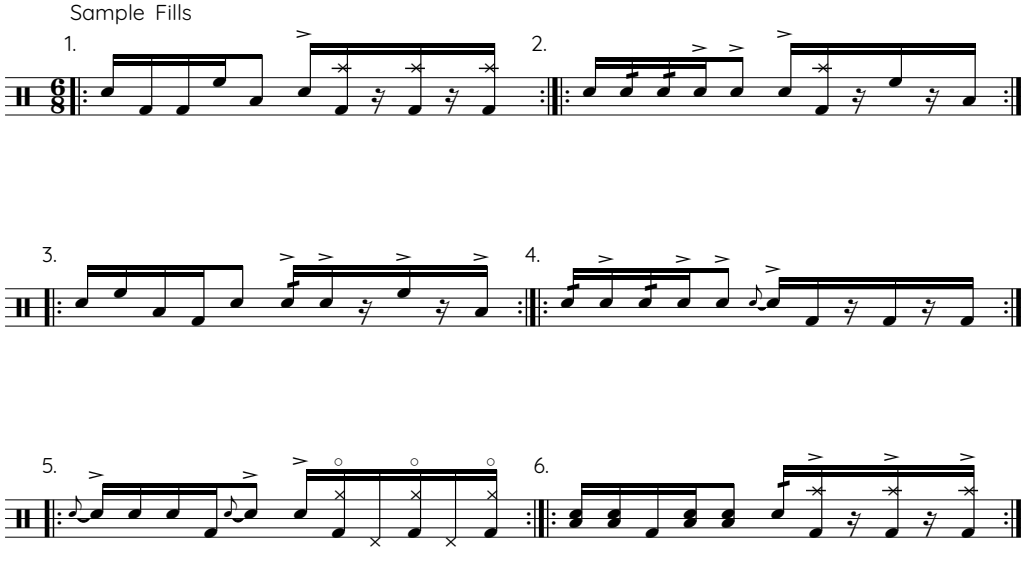
Sample Rhythm



Sample Groove



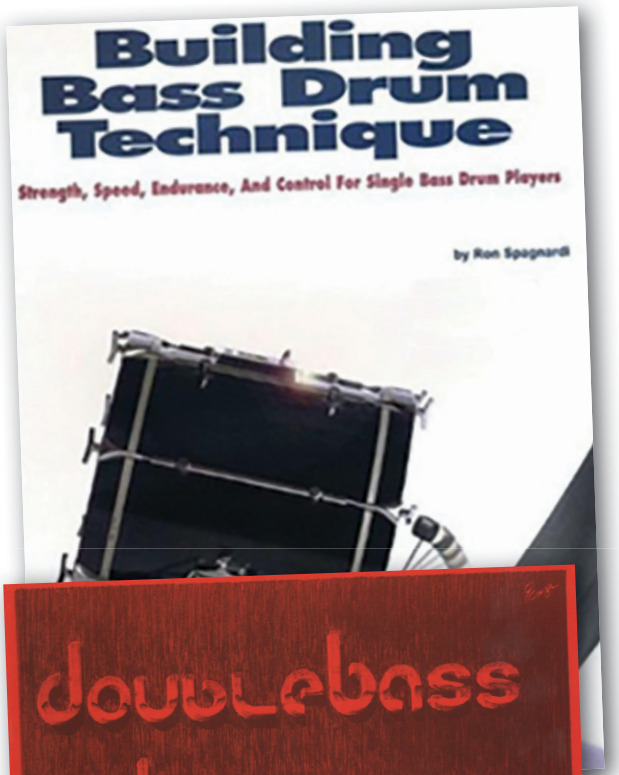
Sample Fills

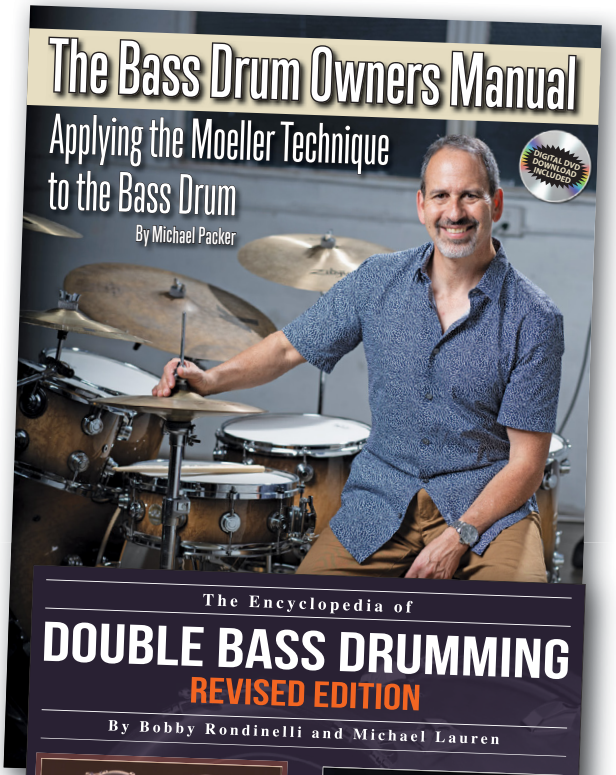


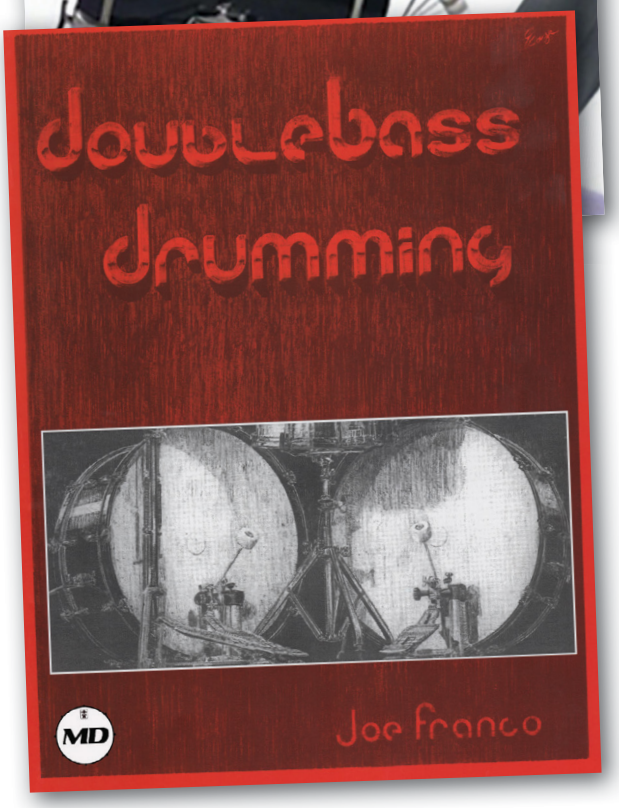
MODERN DRUMMER

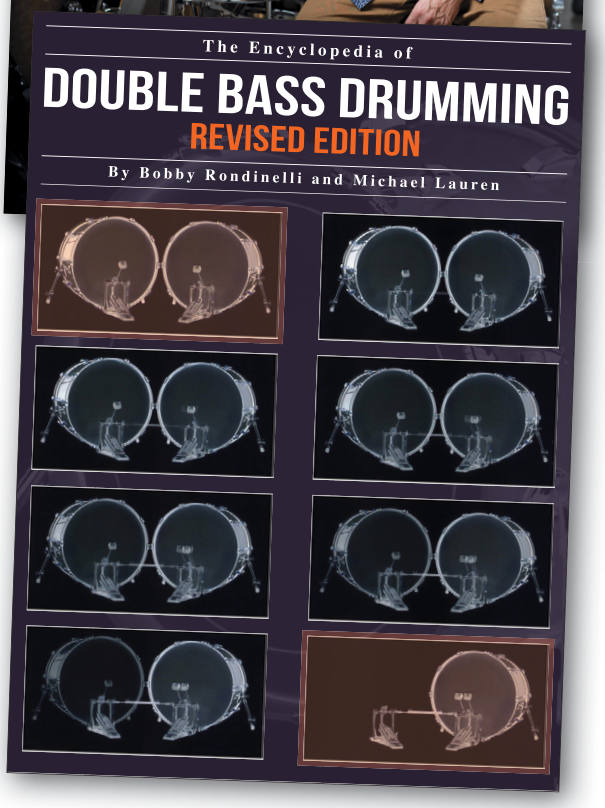
Lessons From The Greats

Bass Drum Technique Books









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More from the Frankie Banali Collection

By Donn Bennett

Frankie Banali was best known as a member of Quiet Riot, the Los Angeles based metal band whose 1983 breakout album *Metal Health* was the first heavy metal album to top the *Billboard* album chart. They racked up huge hits Like "Cum On Feel The Noise," "Mamma We're All Crazy," and "Metal Health (Bang Your Head.)" Their videos were in heavy rotation on MTV, and they toured the world packing some of the world's largest venues including the US Festival in 1983 and Japan Live Aid in 1987.

I got to know Frankie in the early 2000s. He contacted me about some drums belonging to jazz great Elvin Jones. I was surprised to discover that he was very different from his Quiet Riot persona. I had only known him as the crazed metal drummer with huge hair, massive drum kit, and twirling sticks. When he spoke, he gushed endlessly about his deep love and knowledge of Elvin Jones and jazz drumming. He was one of the most humble and serene people I've ever encountered. Over the years I was deeply impressed by the kindness and sincerity he projected into everything he did, and the time and attention he gave to every one of his fans.

In 2019, I got a call from Frankie. He asked me if I'd be willing to manage the sale of his extensive drum collection. He was an avid collector with a massive collection of about 150 snares, 40 sets and over 100 cymbals. He wanted to make sure that his drums would get into the hands of fans and drummers who would appreciate them as much as he had. I assured him they would. I was thrilled to take it on, but I could tell something wasn't right. He said he wasn't quite ready to get started, but just wanted to know if I'd be willing to handle it.

A few weeks later he announced he'd been diagnosed with terminal cancer and confirmed my feeling that something wasn't right. Nothing more was said about the sale. He just wanted to know that his drums would be in good hands, and that his wife wouldn't be left to manage the sale on her own once he passed.

Frankie passed in August of 2020. A couple months later I got a call from my longtime pal Todd Trent. Todd had been the Artist Relations manager at Ludwig for decades. He also ran the drum department at, and eventually owned Ontario Music. Between his years with Ludwig and running one of the most popular music stores in the Los Angeles area, Todd was known and respected by virtually every major drummer in the industry. Todd lived in the Los Angeles area near where Frankie's drums were stored. Frankie's widow had asked his help in the monumental job of organizing and cataloging the gigantic collection. Todd did all the heavy lifting, sorting through the mountains of drum cases that were piled floor to ceiling in a

hot Los Angeles storage unit, eventually getting everything organized and accounted for before loading them on a truck for my Seattle warehouse.

Once I began selling Frankie's drums I started hearing from Frankie's friends and fans. I heard dozens of their stories that all had a common theme. All of them had been overwhelmed with Frankie's friendliness, kindness, and generosity. I spoke to dozens of fans who Frankie had made feel so special by going out of his way to spend time with and showed genuine interest in them. My conversations with Frankie were very much the same. It was apparent that Frankie was a very special person, we were all deeply fortunate to have known him, and we all miss him.

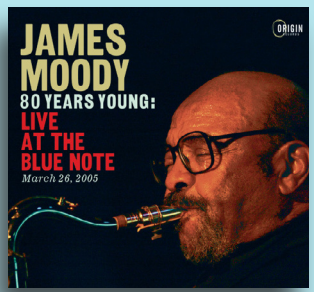
That all happened about five years ago. Earlier this year I got another call from Frankie's wife. She'd discovered some more of Frankie's drum gear in her storage unit that had been left out of the initial sale. These included some of Frankie's favorite Quiet Riot sets, snares, hand drums, accessories, as well as several huge cases full of his parts and hardware. As hard as it was to let it all go, she didn't want his drums just sitting in storage. She wanted them to be seen, played, and heard. Once again, we were loading a truck full of Frankie's and sending them to my Seattle warehouse.

There is a LOT of really cool drum gear in this collection. It's taken weeks to sort through everything and prepare it all for sale. We'll should have most of it posted on our website by the time this article gets published. After that we'll be posting a few things every day until we got it all done. We're still discovering more amazing artifacts as we dig through his cases. Stay tuned, there's much more to come!

OUT NOW!

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!

James Moody
80 Years Young, Live at the Blue Note
Adam Nussbaum drums
Origin Records



For the last part of his life, the legendary James Moody chose to include Adam Nussbaum in his working band. Nussbaum was featured on the outstanding Moody studio recording with Hank Jones called *Our Delight*. For this live recording, Nussbaum is let loose behind the tenor sax legend. Nussbaum, bassist Todd Coolman, and pianist David Hazeltine set the mood for this all-star celebration featuring legends like Slide Hampton, Paquito D' Rivera, Randy Brecker, Cedar Walton, and Jon Faddis. Nussbaum's swinging timekeeping is as wonderful as ever, and his soloing is better than ever. Listen to his solos on "Cherokee" and "Bebop," Adam is really letting it fly! This recording is a perfect celebration of a great man simply known as "Moody" as he, his band, and the musical guests are having fun working through bebop standards like "Cherokee," "Birk's Works," and "Ow." It is also a fantastic example of Nussbaum's supportive and musical drumming.

Gong
I See You
Orlando Allen drums
K Scope Records

Daevid Allen formed the band Gong in 1967 after being involved with the legendary English Fusion band Soft Machine. Gong went through many incarnations in its many years of existence and usually for brief stints included musicians like Bill Bruford, Allan Holdsworth, Steve Hillage, Mino Cinelu, Pip Pyle, and Bill Laswell. *I See You* is Daevid Allen's last recording in Gong before his death in 2015, and thankfully the recording has been remastered and reissued. For the uninitiated, Gong's music will appeal to fans of Zappa and King Crimson. On I See You the playing is spectacular, and the music is muti-directional. Drummer Orlando Allen and bassist Dave Sturt hold everything all together, check out the bassline and drumming on "Pixielation." Guitarists Kavis Torabi and Fabio Golfetti are spectacular, as is saxophonist Ian Fast. Daevid Allen's direction is filled with biting humor and controlled chaos. "I See You" "Zion My T-Shirt" "Pixielation," and "You See Me" are the strongest tracks on the record and all of them feature some fantastic drumming. For those who want to interject a bit of beautiful madness in your life and are fans of impeccable musicianship served up with a dose of a sense of humor, this will be a very enjoyable listen.

Jose Luiz Martins
Odyssey Mixtape
Dana Hawkins, Florian Hass (one track) drums
Origin Records

Brazilian pianist, keyboardist, synthesist, composer, and producer Jose Luiz Martins went through a battle with Focal Dystonia that led him back to his past of graffiti, skate culture, and rock music. This battle was reflected in his newest project called *Odyssey Mixtape*. On it, Martins combines funkier grooves and sound design into his music. Lesser-known drummer, Dana Hawkins (a veteran of Meshell Ndegeocello and Stanley Clarke's bands) was the perfect choice for this musical adventure. His solo on "Cravo E Canela" is jaw dropping. His loose and propulsive groove on "Bloom" is perfect. Hawkins' touch with brushes is unique he uses them as many drummers would use sticks, providing a more sympathetic sound that is also thick (yet quiet.) It's great to hear Dana Hawkins in such a creative musical setting, and that setting was created wonderfully by Jose Luiz Martins, we'll be looking to hear more from him!

Charles Rouse
Two Is One
David Lee drums
Strata-East, Mack Avenue Records

Charles Rouse played saxophone with Thelonious Monk from 1959 through 1969. In 1974 he made a record that The Beastie Boys (and others) have sampled extensively. Now, Mack Avenue is reissuing several Strata-East recordings, and this one is on the top of the list. One of the most interesting aspects of *Two Is One* is the drummer, David Lee. Lee played with Dizzy Gillespie early on and recorded sporadically throughout his career. His recordings most notably include Sonny Rollins' recordings *Horn Culture* and *The Cutting Edge,* Lonnie Liston Smith's *Astral Travelling,* and David Lee's his own recording *Evolution*. Lee was a New Orleans drummer who could swing, play funky, and do everything in between. On *Two Is One*, he gets the opportunity to do just that, however with Rouse there is more funk than swing. Whenever David Lee is playing, you can look forward to that playful New

Orleans swagger and a bass drum that finds the funky cracks in between the beats. Lee also contributes a song (as does drummer-composer Joe Chambers.) The track "Bitchin'" utilizes a funky loping groove throughout. Chambers' "Hopscotch" brings in percussionist Airto and relies on David Lee's propulsive drumming that resembles a New Orleans second line street beat. "In a Funky Way" has a Herbie Hancock Headhunter-Mwandishi feel. The polyrhythmic "Two Is One" features a bass part in 9/8, a drum groove in 6/8, and the saxophone part in ¾, and captures the same feel and excitement. Lee's own composition "In His Presence Searching" is a song with many rhythmic layers. Lee died in 2021, but Charles Rouse's *Two is One* keeps his outstanding drumming alive.

Southern Avenue
Family
Tikyra "TK" Jackson drums
Alligator Records

In the liner notes to Family, producer John Burk writes, "Isaac Hayes once said to me, 'In the 50s and 60s, Memphis sat at the crossroads of music, with Gospel from the churches, the Blues from Mississippi delta, country music from Nashville, jazz and R&B from New Orleans and Atlanta… it all lived in Memphis at the same time and that's the Memphis sound.'" Today, the Memphis sound is all living in Southern Avenue, a family band based in Memphis, TN. TK Jackson hold everything together with a tight groove that supports the music perfectly, Al Jackson Jr. would be very proud. Listen to that groove on "So Much Love" and "Gotta Keep the Love." The songwriting, the playing, the singing, and the harmonies between the three Jackson women (lead singer Tierinii, drummer Tikyra, and violinist Ava) are heartfelt and on point, just dig into "Sisters" and "Late Night Get Down." Guitarist Ori Naftaly (husband of Tierinii) is a well-rounded blues guitarist playing acoustic, electric, slide, and with a pick. He is a strong rhythm player and an exciting lead player; he really shines on "Rum Boogie." Bassists Blake Rhea and Luther Dickson ground the whole sound, and keyboardist Jeremy Powell adds some nice touches. But let's not confuse the subject, Southern Avenue is about the three Jackson sisters and Ori Naftaly, this is strong band and recording with absolutely no shortcomings.

Mehmet Ali Sanlikol
7 Shades of Melancholia
George Lernis drums
Dunya Records

Pianist Mehmet Ali Sanlikol's combination of traditional Turkish music and American jazz on *7 Shades of Melancholia* is a unique and heartfelt musical fusion, and drummer George Lernis is the perfect drummer for this unique excursion and combination. Lernis' background in world percussion compliments Sanlikol's compositions and approach wonderfully. The opener "A Children's Song" leans more towards the jazz approach, finding a foothold and a launching point in the approach that John Coltrane used for "My Favorite Things." Ingrid Jensen's trumpet highlights "One Melancholic Montuno." Lernis's percussion compliments the Turkish vocal and piano of Sanlikol on "Sedd-I Araban Sarki" and "Nikriz Semai." On "Huseyni Jam" all the musical worlds come together for a swinging Turkish jazz celebration. Lernis's drumming marks the transitions perfectly highlighting every musical twist and turn.

Nnenna Freelon
Beneath the Skin
Steve Hass drums
Origin Records

Drummer Steve Hass hit the scene hard playing with Ravi Coltrane and John Scofield, but we haven't heard from him in a while. Lo and behold, he appears on a beautiful record by vocalist and composer Nnenna Freelon, playing alongside pianist-accompanist-extraordinaire Alan Pasqua. Freelon first recorded in the early 90s, and has released 15 records. She has a wonderful heart-felt, dark, and sultry voice, and has a magnificent knack for picking off-the-beaten-track material. Hass sounds fantastic is his support of Freelon and the rest of the ensemble. Hass and bassist Jonathan Richards sound and breathe as one. Hass' touch and sound are perfect for the situation, as is his playing. Listen to how he sets up the first tune on the recording "Journey from the Heart" and listen to how his playing helps set the mood for the entire record. His subtle brushes move "Dark and Lovely" along very smoothly, and Hass gets a chance to step forward a bit on Freelon's outstanding composition "Changed." I don't know if this is Freelon's working band, but it sounds like it, and if it's not, it should be. I would happily pay a lot of money to see and hear Nnenna Freelon with this band surrounding her.

Music Inc: Charles Tolliver, Stanley Cowell, Cecil McBee, Jimmy Hopps.
Live at Slugs Volume I & II
Jimmy Hopps drums
Strata-East, Mack Avenue Records

Occasionally, on some online drumming forum, the subject of "unsung drumming greats" comes up. People make their suggestions and comments, and many are the exactly the same as the last time the subject was raised. For years, I have patiently waited for the name of drummer Jimmy Hopps to be raised. *I'm still waiting…* However, the reissue of these two legendary (slightly underground) recordings has given me the chance to (briefly) talk about the great drummer Jimmy Hopps. Noted jazz musicians that were around in the late 60s and 70s hold Jimmy Hopps' name up high, and these two recordings (gathered here on one CD,) offer some evidence for that reverence. As did many drummers of the time, Hopps' approach fell somewhere between Roy Haynes, Elvin Jones, and Jack

DeJohnette. Hopps' drumming had a drive, an elasticity, and a strong rhythmic presence. Never were these attributes better utilized and more present that with the collective band called Music Inc., and on these two volumes of *Live at Slugs*. Hopps' drumming is delicate, aggressive, strong, adventuresome, and supportive. The music (written by everyone in the band except Hopps) could be described in the same way. Listen to Hopps' propulsive and crisp playing behind Tolliver and Cowell's solos and on the ending vamp on "Wilpan's." Hopps and the rest of the band are absolutely burning on "Our Second Father," check out Hopps' extended solo at the eight-minute mark. Thanks to Mack Avenue for re-releasing the music of Strata-East which was one for the first artist controlled and run music labels. Strata-East paved the way for artists today to self-release and retain control over their own important music.

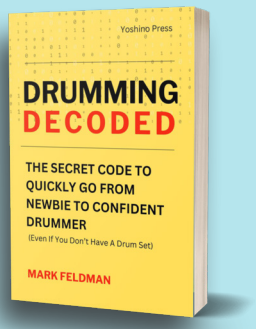
Charlie Ballantine
East By Midwest
Dan Weiss drums
Origin Records

By listening to guitarist Charlie Ballantine, I would say that stylistically he is leaning further to the Bill Frisell, John Scofield, Pat Metheny side of jazz guitar than Jim Hall, Joe Pass, Wes Montgomery. I offer these names as only an explanation of my perceived interpretation of Ballantine's musical direction. Bassist Quinn Sternberg and drummer Dan Weiss support Ballantine's direction perfectly. Mixing some of his originals with Monk and Ornette tunes, a few Beatles tunes ("Strawberry Fields Forever" and "Tomorrow Never Knows") and an Elliot Smith tune "Alameda," tells us even more about Ballantine. His sound is as slightly (and wonderfully) distorted as his direction, and Dan Weiss is right there with him throughout. Weiss' mallet playing on "Tomorrow Never Knows" sets the perfect mood for a super creative version of this classic. But this is a record about the guitarist, his music, and his direction. Weiss and Sternberg set him up for success and don't get in the way, in the best way possible. This support shines the strongest on Ballantine's own "Modern Bohemian" which also features a fantastic solo from Weiss.

Michael Waldrop
Native Son
Michael Waldrop drums
Brad Dutz & Jose Rossy percussion
Origin Records

Drummer-composer Michael Waldrop is a musical veteran with two big band projects (*Time Within Itself* and *Origin Suite)* behind him. This recording is an interesting instrumentation piano trio plus percussion. And these aren't just "any" percussionists, Brad Dutz is a percussionist who has made hundreds of recordings on the LA studio scene, and percussionist Jose Rossy is a onetime member of Weather Report. Waldrop's employment of the piano trio plus percussion is a breath of fresh air, and the percussionists contribute heavily to the recording. "El Vino" (what a creative title!) is a highlight and Waldrop, Dutz, and Rossy interact and sound as one. This is a multi-directional recording and Serbian Pianist Vasil Hadzimanov, (a leader in his own right, plays all the approaches very well, from Evans and Jarrett impressionism on "Belgrade" and "The Wrong Blues," to funky later-day Hancock on "Bitter End." Bassist Martin Gjakonovski holds everything together. A special mention must also be made to how good this record sounds. Waldrop's touch on his drums and cymbals is fantastic, and that touch is represented very well on *Native Son*, and the sonic mix and balance of the drums and percussion is pristine.

Drumming Decoded: The Secret Code to Quickly Go from Newbie to Confident Drummer (Even If You Don't Have a Drum Set)
By Mark Feldman
Yoshino Press



There are enough beginner drum books with countless exercises, and there are many drum books on technique, independence, and reading. And then there are (what I call) the beat of the month books, we've got a lot of those too. *Drumming Decoded* is NOT any one of those books! It is not an exercise book, if fact there aren't many exercises in it. Mark Feldman has codified a system to how beginners can become "drummers." His system is called The Drumming Foundations Framework, and he has used it with thousands of students at his BANG! The Drum School in New York City. He refers to it as "The Step-by-Step Blueprint for Learning to Play Drums." Mark has broken the process into three parts, Enter Stage Left, The Method: The Drumming Foundations Framework, and Let's Learn: Your 1st Drum Lessons. It's a worthwhile read for anyone starting, or thinking about starting, their adventure in drumming. It is also a worthwhile read or for anyone who is teaching drums. The book is part inspirational, part instructional, part in the style of Drumming for Dummies (I like those books,) with a little bit of simple notation near the end. The most impressive aspect of Feldman's system is that it invites you into drumming and doesn't make you feel that you might not be smart enough, good enough, or have enough time, to pick up a pair of sticks for the first time. Drumming isn't some "exclusive country club." This book will speed up anyone's learning process in drumming and help you chart the initial journey with simple and clear learning concepts.

DeAndre Hemby's Teddy Swims Touring Kit

Photos by Jason Mehler

Drums: SJC Drums - 16x22 Kick, 7x8, 7x10, 7x12 Rack Toms, 14x16 and 16x18 Floor Toms, 6.5x14 Brass Snare, 6.5x14 Maple Snare.
Heads: Evans - EC2 and EC Reso on rack toms; EMAD and EC Reso on floor toms; HD Dry on main snare, Genera Dry on ballad snare, Black Onyx on popcorn snare.
Cymbals: Sabian - 15" Medium Hi-Hat, 22" Heavy Legacy Ride, 20" Stratus Crash, 20" HHXPLOSION Crash, 19" HHX Fierce, 18" AAX Aero Crash, 17" HHX Complex Ozone/AA Holy China Stack, 10" AAX Aero Splash/Mini-China Stack, 10" HHX Splash, 10" AAX Aero Splash, 10" AAX Splash.
Hardware: DW 9000 rack, DW 9000 hi-hat stand, Pearl Redline Eliminator Pedals.
Throne: Porter and Davies.
Electronics: Roland - TD50 module, 4 x PD8 pads, 3 x RT-30 triggers, 1 x RT-30 Kick trigger, 1 x KT-10 pedal.
Drumsticks: Vic Firth - 85A.

Clement Anthony "Clem Burke" Bozewski

November 24, 1954 – April 6, 2025

Clem Burke is known as the influential drummer for Blondie, he was a member of Blondie from 1975 until his death and appeared on every Blondie recording and every hit. According to Burke, Blondie combined the influences of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and David Bowie. Blondie peaked with the essential recording *Parallel Lines,* and Burke's beat drove hits such as "Heart of Glass," "One Way or Another," "Call Me," "The Tide is High," and "Rapture."

Clem Burke became famous as the drummer for Blondie, but he was much more than that. Clem Burke is the only drummer that has been a member of three Rock and Roll Hall of Fame bands (Blondie, Eurythmics, and The Ramones.) In the Ramones, he was even given the name Elvis Ramone. Clem Burke played drums on dozens of sessions with people like Pete Townsend, Iggy Pop, Nancy Sinatra, and Bob Dylan. Burke also started many of his own bands such as The Empty Hearts, Chequered Past, and The International Swingers. He played and recorded with The Romantics, The Split Squad, Dramarama, The Plimsouls, The Tearaways, and The Go Go's. The Plimsouls recording *Kool Trash* and Dramarama's *Hi-Fi Sci-Fi* are among the best records that Burke did outside of Blondie. He also put together a band that recorded the theme to the cult movie favorite *Repo Man*. Clem Burke was a rock and roll lifer, he was a musician to the core. Yet in the final years of his life, he became more than a musician, he became a part of the Clem Burke Drumming Project. This project saw "Dr. Burke" working with medical experts from Oxford and Cambridge to improve the lives of others through studying how the brain and body functions while playing the drums.

Photo By Alex Kluft

Burke came up on the thriving New Jersey rock scene while also playing in local Drum Corps with St. Andrew's Bridgemen Drum and Bugle Corps. Burke continued to hone his musical and drumming skills as part of the (self-described) musical workshop of CBGB'S, and eventually joined Blondie. Throughout his career Burke developed a unique drumming voice and approach that incorporated the chaos and energy of his favorite drummer Keith Moon and the control and creativity of Hal Blaine. Burke also spoke about his love for "bubblegum pop music." Burke's love for Moon was so heartfelt that he even bought a pair of shoes that once belonged to Moon. Clem Burke's drumming groove became the soundtrack of an entire era of rock and roll.

In the last part of his life, he became the proud namesake of the Clem Burke Drumming Project. Clem was always a down to earth and very kind person, and this project put his humanity on full display. In a 2023 interview with *Modern Drummer*, Burke talked about the project saying, "I'm delighted to be able to be a part of this, it's a positive spin on being a musician. It's about essential needs in life and helping kids that aren't physically motivated for many reasons. We are showing them that drumming is a form of physical and mental exercise as well. Working the brain on the simplest drumming exercise like a double stroke roll or paradiddle or any simple rudiments is really what it's all about. I'm just the "namesake" of it, but now there are lots of other people involved." He continued, "They have found that my level of fitness, as far as oxygen level, blood pressure, and heart heath, was on parallel with an athlete. They were using the comparison of the British footballer Ronaldo, and my test results were coming up the same as his. They found that drumming helps younger people to be more motivated and it also works for enabling people with autism. There's a whole thesis, I can't really speak for the doctors; it has taken on a life of its own."

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