Reviews of New Gear From: Yamaha, Slingerland, JK Hooves, and HHHusher

MODERN DRUMMER

THE WORLD'S #1
DRUM COMMUNITY SINCE 1977

FEBRUARY 2026



Josh Freese

Just A Minute

Breaking Down Borders
Raphael Pannier

Senegalese Master Drummer
Khadim Niang

King Gizzard's Heartbeat
Mickey "Cavs" Cavanagh

Drummer and DJ
Rumpus

In Memoriam: Thommy Price

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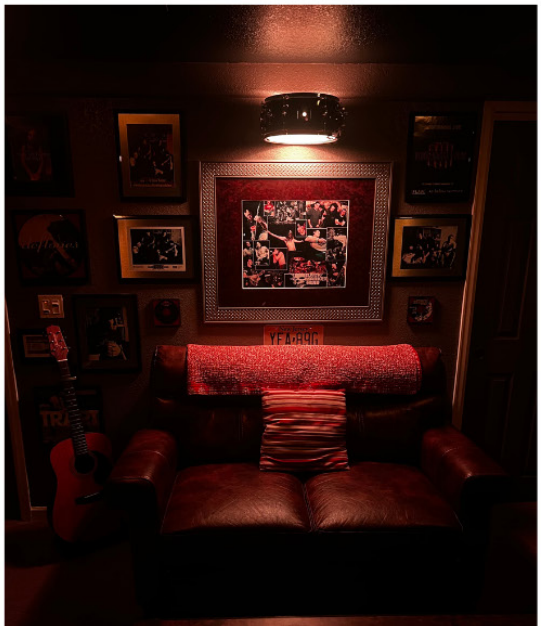


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Thommy Price
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EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

Why Do You Play Drums?



A student recently asked me why I play drums. In my 45 years of playing drums and 25 years of teaching, I have been asked a lot of difficult questions. However, this answer seemed simple. Whenever I heard drumming as a kid, it made me and others happy. I like making others happy, and I enjoy being happy *(don't we all?)* The communication of the drums and playing music is the best way that I can make people happy. I'm not a doctor, an athlete, a world leader, an actor, or a religious leader, *I'm a drummer*. Whether it's the people listening to the music I am creating, or the other musicians in the band, it all comes back to the fact that *I like to make people happy. That's what I do.*

Creative expression is a reaction to the times in which we are living, and creativity is a lifeblood for me. To me, creating a smile, happiness, and enriching the life of others, is the most creative act of them all. Fortunately, making music (and creating smiles) has given me a lot in return, taken me around the world, and has made me infinitely happy.

Along the way, I have found that I also enjoy studying the evolution and creative expression of music and drumming. It's fascinating to study how the musicians before me have expressed themselves and created happiness with their own music, and how this process has evolved. This study has turned into a fascinating part of my life. Listening, researching, interviewing, and writing about the evolution of drums, drummers, drumming, and music now deeply informs how I play music and attempt to put a smile on people's faces. It has also introduced me to the vast and wonderful brotherhood of drummers and drumming.

Eventually, sharing (teaching) what I've learned has become another important part of my life. I have found that sharing my love of music, drumming, creativity, and musical discovery, through teaching and writing also helps people and makes them smile.

I have also seen that the communication, and the natural resource of music and drumming can offer therapy and solace to others, creating a sense of happiness that helps them navigate the hurdles of life. Seeing music changing lives, having a positive effect on people, and inspiring change, enriches my life beyond anything I can imagine.

Which brings me back to… *making others happy makes me happy*. And drums, drumming, and music is my best way of accomplishing that. *And the circle, it goes round and round...* As the editor-in-chief of *Modern Drummer*, I always say that we are trying to change the world one drummer at a time, and along the way, make drummers smile.

Why do YOU play drums? Are YOU using drums and music to make people happy? Are YOU using the drums to make the world a better place?

We hope so.



Mark Griffith

Editor-in-chief

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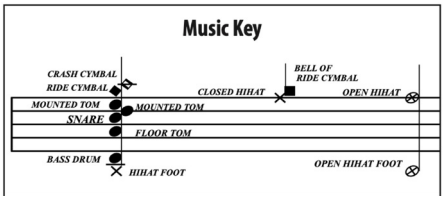
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A Longing, After 22 Years of Musical Hibernation

Ian Roberts began drumming at the age of 11 and played passionately for 20 years, until the birth of his son in 2000. At that point, family and work became his top priorities, and he completely stepped away from music and gigs. He even sold his beloved Tama double bass drum kit, which had been his pride and joy. Fast forward to 2022, his son had grown into a young man, and Ian had recently moved into a cozy house that came with a large atomic bomb shelter in the basement. With this new chapter, he felt it was the perfect time to revive his passion for drumming. Ian wanted to rekindle his skills, get some exercise, and most importantly, find joy in music again. He decided to invest in a drum kit that would closely resemble the feel of an acoustic set while offering modern versatility in sound and styles and chose the Roland VAD706. Since then, he has gradually enhanced it with extra toms, cymbals, pads, hardware, and software. It even includes a tribute to Slayer's iconic *Reign in Blood* album on both bass drum heads.

Drums- Roland: VAD-706 V-Drums Acoustic Design Drum Kit – Gloss Cherry, customized set. Snare: 1 x PD-140DS Digital Snare (14" three-ply mesh head, multi-sensor system;) Rack Toms: 2 x PDA120 (12" rack toms, two-ply mesh heads; Floor Toms: 2 x PDA140F (14" floor toms, three-ply mesh heads;) Bass Drums: 2 x KD-222 Kick Drum (22".)

Cymbals- Hi-Hat: 1 x VH-14D Digital Hi-Hat (14",) Ride: 1 x CY-18DR Digital Ride Cymbal (18",) Trigger Pads: 3 x Roland BT-1.

Hardware- Snare Stand: 1 x RDH-130 Snare Drum Stand; Cymbal Stands: mixed setup that includes 3 x DCS-30, 5 x DBS-30; Sound Module Stand: 1 x PDS-20; Clamps: 2 x APC-33.

Electronics- Sound Module: 1 x TD-50X; Trigger Modules: 2 x TM-6 PRO; Foot Switch: 1 x FS-6 Dual Foot Switch.

Accessories- Noise Eaters: 4 x NE-1, 3 x NE-10.

"Don't Touch That Dial!"

By Peter Erskine

The expression "don't touch that dial" was uttered frequently during the heyday of radio in the 1930s when broadcasters wanted to ensure that their listeners would not stray and tune-in to another station ("… and now, a word from our sponsors, the Acme Corporation. Don't touch that dial! We'll be back soon with more adventures of *Rin Tin Tin*!") In later years, broadcast television adopted the saying, and it has since become understood as a general plea for someone to stay tuned or to keep paying attention. For this month's column, I am co-opting the phrase as both a plea and admonition to live sound engineers. These are the folks who stand between us drummers and the audience who's listening to us when it comes to sound. In my experience as both a drummer and an audience member, sound people touch their dials WA-A-A-A-Y too much.



Here's an example of a typical transgression: a band is playing a jazz tune, and there's a more-or-less good balance between all of the instruments. Let's say we're listening to a quartet, and it's time for a bass solo. Most drummers I know will immediately play more softly when the bassist begins their solo. How soft? It seems like that doesn't matter to the front-of-house sound engineer, since the volume of the bass will be raised because the bass is playing a solo, and so the bass should now be as loud or louder than the entire group was two minutes before. Think about this: the audience was listening to a well-balanced representation of four musicians interacting with one another, respecting the various dynamic levels and frequencies emanating from each instrument, only to have it all radically change because the bass is now taking a solo. It is not natural for a plucked (or bowed) bass to sound as loud or large as an entire band all of a sudden, solo, or otherwise.

Another example might be a pianist in a big band, or, let's say, a saxophonist. Why should one instrument all of a sudden be louder than the entire big band was just seconds earlier? That is not how large or small ensembles operate. Unnaturally loud is just that: unnatural.

Because of this, the audience is robbed of hearing the music as it is meant to sound. The musicians are robbed of the ability to determine the relative dynamics they are choosing to play. And the history or legacy of the music is being trampled upon by a self-appointed sonic arbiter who may or may not have experience with jazz music as it has been developed and played over the years. The musicians on-stage may find it difficult if not impossible to properly play when they're hearing themselves larger-than-life all of a sudden from the front of house speakers. And have we mentioned SUBWOOFERS yet?

By way of disclaimer: my trio's tour rider or contract addendum consists of three or four pages, and one of those pages consists solely of the following in very large letters:

NO SUB WOOFERS

I regard the unnaturally loud emphasis of acoustic instruments' low frequencies to be offensive, unrealistic, and unnecessary. Again, the sound we have trained our entire lives to produce is being RE-produced with *extreme prejudice* (to borrow a phrase from the film "Apocalypse Now").

The whole purpose of ensemble playing is to experience that phenomenon of the sum being greater than the parts. There's magic in them thar hills, so mine it. Do you see what I just did there? "Mine." Not the sound engineer's. How do we teach students of the instrument and art form if the relative balance between musicians is handled by some *Wizard of Oz* busying themselves at a console full of faders, knobs, and dials? It has been my unhappy experience that *most* FOH (front of house) sound engineers cannot NOT touch something that is otherwise perfectly fine if left alone. And the choice of adding so much bass to the music? Subsonic bass is NOT where the funk is, nor is it where the swing is.

Getting back to the musicians, it is an artist's responsibility to assess the space. This is as true for actors in the theater as it is for musicians in a concert hall or on a jazz club stage. I texted my good friend, theater, and voice-acting director Jack Fletcher about this, posing the following summation and question: "Hey, quick question… going to write an article for *Modern Drummer* magazine about how unnecessary it is for front-of-house sound people to turn up an instrument when it's soloing and how it destroys all sense of ensemble blend. I'm thinking of making an analogy to a Shakespeare play when a character makes a reference, and a spotlight would light up on another actor and how dumb that would be in theater… any handy examples?" His reply was typical Jack: "Use the question in your article, that's good enough." He did add that we all tend to jump to technology being our safety net. Our ears are better safeguards. If you cannot hear another instrument on-stage when you are playing, then chances are pretty good that you're playing too loud. (I will remind readers that this is a jazz drumming column.)

I also have misgivings about the use of plexiglass screens on-stage that surround a drumset. These unforgiving walls pretty much ruin the sound of the drums and cymbals while separating us from the other instruments of the ensemble. While that might seem perfectly fine to a violinist on-stage, the chances are good that such a violinist was most likely exposed to a drummer who played too loud for the setting. Rimshots, anyone? In a word: don't.

Another note of cautionary advice: do your best to keep the stage volume as soft as possible. USE YOUR EARS. Endeavor as a musical unit to NOT change monitor levels once the concert has started. You can't MONITOR your way to audio perfection. As soon as one monitor's level changes, it invariably sets off a chain reaction. My earnest advice: USE YOUR EARS and be a grown-up when you play. Or as my good friend Jaco Pastorius said to me years ago, "Just concentrate, man."


George Gaber & Peter Erskine

This brings back another memory I have recounted in more than one drum clinic, and that's the story of my having returned to Indiana University after three years on the road bashing it out with Stan Kenton's very large and very loud big band. My percussion professor, George Gaber, was concerned and dismayed by how heavy-handed my touch had gotten. I was a 21-year-old college sophomore who was assigned to the premiere symphony orchestra at the school. Kenny Aronoff was the timpanist. I was the Chinese temple block player. At the concert's end, Gaber came up on stage and approached the percussion section, congratulating each player in turn: "Bravo, excellent job," or "You sounded terrific, bravo!" When he came to me, I was expecting similar kudos but got instead, "I wanna see you in my office first thing tomorrow morning," followed by another "Bravo, terrific job," to the next percussionist in line.

'What the hell …?' I thought. Needless to say, I got up plenty early the next morning and drove to school in order to go and knock on Gaber's office studio door. He opened it, looked at me and said, "Why were you hitting those things so hard last night?" And then he shut the door in my face.

Shortly thereafter at a private lesson, he got exasperated by my touch on the snare drum while playing some rhythmic etude or exercise out of a book, and he waved his arm for me to stop. He picked up a triangle beater from his desk and held it out for me to grab it. "You see that triangle over there?" pointing to the corner of his office, I nodded my head as he spoke. "*Mezzo-piano*. You get once chance." I took the triangle beater and played as *mezzo-piano* of a note as I could. "Nope," he declared, "Too loud… now get out."

What do you do with THAT? Well, I took it as a sign to begin working on my touch. How? Well, being the world's best or softest triangle player was not a pressing concern for me, but I understood the unspoken assignment. I needed to develop my touch so that I could produce a BEAUTIFUL sound with a drumstick, as CONSISTENT as it was BEAUTIFUL. How? By practicing whole notes on the ride cymbal. Slow, too.

Guess what? After a while, my touch became part of me. Musicality became my best friend. Awareness breeds love.

THAT'S what all of this is about. Paying attention. Being grateful for the space surrounding EACH note. Got a solo? Thinking of playing a flurry of notes? Yeah, you and just about every other drummer who plays a solo. Guess what? It's boring, and it is so self-limiting. But, combining and integrating a flourish into a well-told story, well then you are creating something interesting. The solo becomes part of the timekeeping, the timekeeping becomes part of the solo, "everything is timekeeping" and not just the other way around. Let's say, however, that as you're doing this, the sound person cranks up the sound of your bass drum beyond proportion. The result? It becomes impossible to speak your musical truth.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to say these things in *Modern Drummer*. I can only wish that there was a magazine like Modern Audio Engineer where I could address their readership. Meanwhile, I'll hope that word might get around. I have been preaching this message for a while now. At a recent Percussive Arts Society PASIC concert soundcheck, I walked out to the audio desk to hear how the front of house mix was sounding. Unable to resist, I said to the engineer, 'You realize that this is a Percussive Arts Society conference, right? NOT an International Bass Players' Day concert,' and he looked at me like the jerk I was resembling.

All to say to our good and hard-working friends who are mixing the concert, and in whose hands our musical destinies depend:

Set it and forget it.
Sit back and enjoy the music.
DON'T TOUCH THAT DIAL

To my drumming friends, be the kind of drummer who does not need a plexiglass screen to impose good musical manners. Thank you and you're welcome.


Mr. & Mrs. Gaber

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



NEW & NOTABLE

NEW PRODUCTS AND ENDORSERS FROM TOCA PERCUSSION, GROVER PRO PERCUSSION, AND THE AKAI MPC XL

NEW FROM TOCA PERCUSSION

Toca percussion is proud to announce 15 new products including the Hannah Welton Auxiliary Snare Drum, the Boom-A-Drums, and our new innovation, the Talking Djembe. Toca is also proud to announce Eddie Montalvo as an endorser. Eddie is the elder statesman of Latin drumming and has been the musical director of the Fania All-Stars for decades.



Hannah Welton Auxiliary Drum



Talking Djembe



Boom-A-Drums

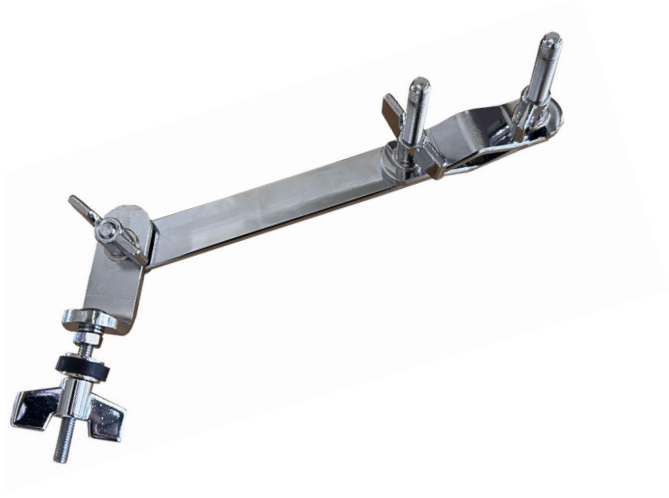


Eddie Montalvo

NEW FROM GROVER PRO PERCUSSION

Grover Pro Percussion is excited to continue the growth of our Grover Protégé line with a new collection of Timpani Mallets, Mallet Bags, and Mallet and Bag Kits. The Grover Pro line has a new mallet rack that holds up to 19 pairs of mallets, and an innovative new Bar Chime Mount.







AKAI PROFESSIONAL UNVEILS THE MPC XL



Akai Professional is proud to announce the launch of the MPC XL®, the flagship of all standalone music production tools, to their lineup of industry-leading music production equipment. This powerful studio centerpiece delivers unprecedented processing capabilities, expressive control, and professional I/O connectivity, all without requiring a computer. Designed to give beatmakers, producers, and musicians complete creative freedom, MPC XL puts the power of a full studio right at your fingertips. The MPC XL is the most powerful MPC ever delivers next-generation processing, expressive MPCe® pads, and pro I/O for computer-free music production.

A Studio Centerpiece Built for Modern Production

The MPC XL features a Gen 2 8-core processor with 4x the processing power of previous MPCs and 16GB RAM, delivering industry-leading speed and performance that rivals computer-based systems. Seamlessly integrated with MPC3 OS as an all-in-one system, the MPC XL can load up to 32 plugin instruments and 16 audio tracks simultaneously, with support for up to 256 simultaneous voices. The expansive 10.1" HD multi-gesture touchscreen with tilt provides real-time visual feedback, while one-to-one control buttons ensure immediate access to every feature for an uninterrupted creative workflow.

Revolutionary MPCe Pads and Hands-On Control

At the heart of the MPC XL are the ultra-responsive MPCe pads with 3D-sensing technology, bringing an unprecedented level of expression to beat making and production. With four quadrants per pad, producers can morph, loop, layer, and control sounds and effects freely, opening up new dimensions of creative possibility. The MPC XL also features 16 touch-responsive Q-Link knobs with OLED displays for instant visual feedback, a dedicated step sequencer with 16 RGB function buttons, an assignable performance touch-strip for tactile control, and the innovative XL Channel Command for quick access to mixing and recording parameters with dedicated OLED display and encoder.

Connectivity for Any Workflow

The MPC XL is designed to serve as the hub of any studio setup. Professional-grade mic preamps with phantom power capture vocals and acoustic instruments with studio clarity. Dedicated instrument inputs handle guitars and basses, while





phono inputs connect turntables for direct sampling. Eight separate outputs enable complex routing to external gear or multitrack recording into a DAW. For modular synth enthusiasts and DAWless jammers, 16 CV outputs transform the MPC XL into a command center for entire hardware ecosystems.

Loaded with Inspiration

The MPC XL comes production-ready with an extensive collection of plugins, samples, and effects including Native Instruments MPC Edition Play Series Analog Dreams and the Lone Forest Expansion giving producers immediate access to professional-grade sounds and processing tools. Combined with its full-featured sampler capabilities including pro stem separation, time-stretching, slicing, keygroup instruments, resampling, and plugin layering, plus DAW-like workflow features such as multi-track sequencing, clip launching, and full arrangement view, the MPC XL provides a complete musical solution that grows with every creator.



"The MPC XL represents the evolution of everything we've learned from decades of innovation in music production," said Andy Mac, Creative Global Marketing and Artist Relations Manager at Akai Professional. "We've created a true studio-grade workhorse that delivers DAW-like power in a standalone format. MPC XL removes every barrier between inspiration and creation, giving producers the speed, control, and connectivity to bring their most ambitious musical visions to life."

Key Features:

Performance & Processing Power

- Gen 2 8-core processor with 4x the processing power of previous MPCs

- 16GB RAM for running multiple plugins simultaneously

- 256GB internal NVMe SSD storage with SATA expansion bay for additional storage

- Support for up to 32 plugin instruments, 16 audio tracks, and 256 simultaneous voices

- Production-ready plugins, samples, and effects included

Expressive Control & Interface

- Ultra-responsive MPCe pads with 3D-sensing technology and four quadrants per pad for advanced expression

- 16 Q-Link knobs with performance-control OLEDs for immediate visual feedback

- Assignable performance touch-strip for tactile control of Performance FX, note repeats, and channel faders

- Step sequencer with 16 RGB function buttons

- XL Channel Command with dedicated OLED display and encoder for quick mixing and recording parameter access

- One-to-one function buttons for immediate access to every feature

- 10.1" HD multi-gesture touchscreen with tilt

Professional I/O & Connectivity

- 2 XLR/TRS combo inputs with mic preamps and phantom power for crystal-clear recordings

- 2 dedicated instrument inputs for recording guitars and keyboards

- 2 phono inputs for connecting turntables

- 8 separate line outputs for external routing and mixing

- USB-C connectivity for 24 channels of audio I/O and 32 channels of MIDI I/O

- 8 stereo 1/8" CV/Gate outputs for a total of 16 CV outs, perfect for modular rigs and synth setups

- 4 five-pin MIDI outputs and 2 five-pin MIDI inputs

Standalone Workflow

- No computer required: standalone hardware with MPC3 OS for a streamlined workflow

- Full-featured sampler with time-stretching, slicing, keygroup instruments, resampling, and plugin layering

- DAW-like workflow with multi-track sequencing, clip launching, and full arrangement view

- Pro stem separation and high-quality time-stretching

Availability and Pricing

The Akai Professional MPC XL is available now for €2,899.99, £2,499.99, and $2,899 USD, through authorized dealers and select music retailers worldwide, positioning it as a professional studio investment that eliminates the need for a computer and additional hardware.

JK Drum Systems: JKHooves, Stabilize Your Drum Set!

By Brian Hill

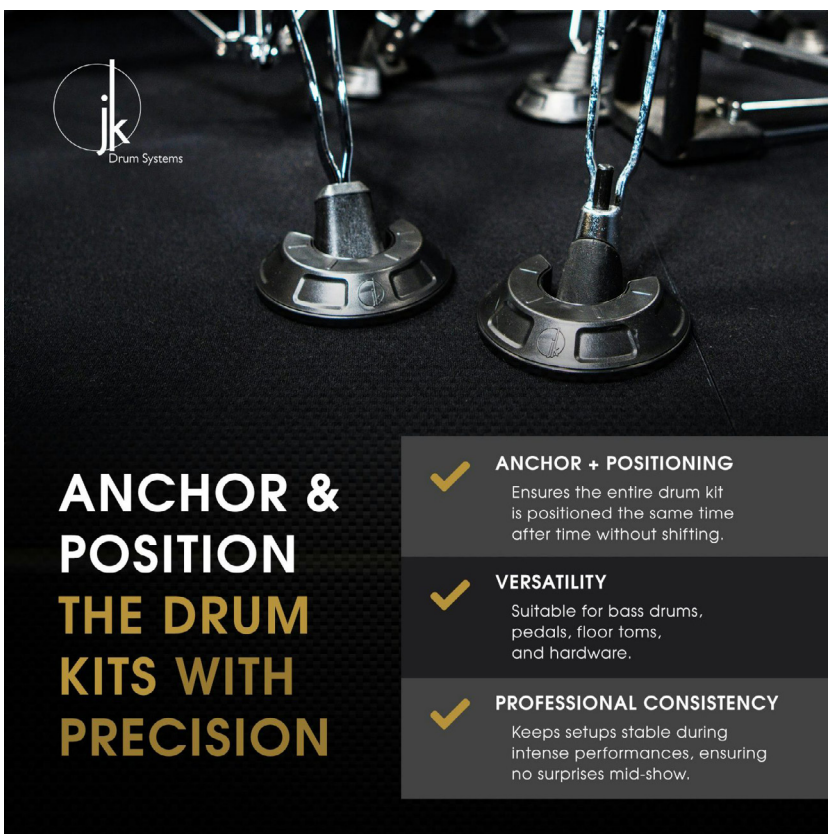
Direct from the Netherlands comes "The Drum Positioning System of The World!" If you like to set up your kit the same way every time, you need to mark your gig rug with something. JK Drum Systems has an affordable, high-end way that not only look great, but actually work (!!!) in several different ways. *Modern Drummer* received a set of the JK Hooves to try out on our drum kits. So, what are JK Hooves?

JK Hooves are a small plastic semi-circle about four inches in diameter with a 90-degree opening that attaches to your gig rug that holds up even under the most hard-hitting situations and marks the placement of your gear. JK Hooves utilize a familiar "hook and loop" backing that firmly attaches to the rug. We found them great for marking the kick drum at a minimum, but they can mark the placement of any stand for consistent set-up and stabilization. This is a good solution!

With the 90-degree opening, you can also use JK Hooves to keep your pedals in place. Whether you use them on a kick pedal or a hi-hat, or any other pedal that fits, you're sure to stay in place in any hard-hitting situation. JK Hooves will stay firmly attached to the gig rug even rolled up for transport. These tough little disks are very cool and easy!

JK Hooves is a great accessory for any drummer with a need and a desire to stand out from the rest of the drummers who are constantly readjusting (and chasing) their sets when playing live.. They look great, do the job and are affordable. JK Hooves are used and endorsed by major players, you can find some excellent videos out there. I found the 2-pack starting at $25.00 and the 16-pack at $175.00 at Amazon online. So, Stabilize Your Drum Set! Check 'em out at **jkdrumsystems.com**.





Slingerland Radio King Outfit 13/16/24 with 6.5x14 Snare Drum

By Jason Mehler

Last year, after much anticipation, the Slingerland brand officially returned to the scene. Launched not as a reimagined modern version, but as a deliberate effort to reconnect with the brand's original construction methods, materials, and tonal concepts that have helped define American drumming for decades. For this month's Product Close-Up, we're taking a close look at a Slingerland Radio King Outfit in Blue and Silver Lacquer, paired with a 6.5 x 14 matching snare drum.

Specs

The Radio King Outfit is a three-drum shell pack consisting of a 9 x 13 rack tom, 16 x 16 floor tom, and a commanding 14 x 24 bass drum with wooden hoops. The drum shells feature a traditional three-ply mahogany/poplar/mahogany construction, reinforced with steam-bent maple re-rings, and finished with rounded 30-degree bearing edges. The hardware is nickel-plated, including the Stick Saver hoops on the toms and snare, which feature an inward-beveled flange to reduce stick wear. The 13-inch tom has an isolation mount which can be used on a tom stand or placed on a standard snare drum stand. The floor tom sits on three high-quality half-inch diameter floor tom legs which include memory locks. All drums feature the Classic Slingerland Radio King cloud-style badge. The 6.5 x 14 snare drum is equipped with Slingerland's re-tooled Zoomatic throw-off, streamlined lugs, and a 20-strand snare wire. With the exception of the bass drum, each drum has a period-correct internal dual-felt adjustable drum muffle installed near the batter head. The Radio King drums ship with Slingerland-branded Remo coated heads on the batter side and clear Remo heads on the resonant side.



First Impressions

Even under close inspection, these drums clearly reflect a high level of build quality. There are no visible defects or leftover manufacturing remnants such as sawdust, splinters, or rough finishing. The nickel-plated hardware adds a touch of vintage elegance, complemented by tasteful Slingerland branding throughout. Examining the interiors reinforces the sense of a premium quality product: the maple reinforcement rings are cleanly and precisely adhered to the mahogany inner layer with no gaps, nicks, or chips, and the horizontal wood grain is uniform across all drums— attractive enough that it could easily stand on its own as an exterior finish. Even the finer details feel thoughtfully executed, from the plated screws to the Slingerland-branded washers. The Blue and Silver lacquer finish of the review kit has the vintage vibe, though slightly less reminiscent of the classic look associated with White Marine Pearl or Black Diamond Pearl wrapped finishes. Regardless, the kit as a whole conveys an unmistakable sense of nostalgia for another era that you can feel, even before a single note is played.

Set-Up and Tuning

Since I received only the three-piece shell pack and snare drum, I used my own hardware for this review. I set up the kit in a left-handed configuration with the 13-inch tom mounted on a snare stand. I used a single bass drum pedal, hi-hat, and a ride cymbal on a boom positioned just above the bass drum. I usually position my snare drum so that the throw-off sits at six o'clock, however with the compact, stationary design of the Zoomatic throw-off, it felt natural to have it at nine o'clock, knowing that it would not intrude on my bass drum leg when in the off position.

Tuning the drums proved to be as straight-forward as expected. Using a Tune-Bot Studio tuner on the rack tom, I tapped around the edges near each lug and made small, incremental adjustments as I worked around the drum. A strong, musical tone came together very quickly, with no problem areas or inconsistencies that would suggest uneven bearing edges. I barely touched the tuning of the floor tom. It sounded great straight out of the box, delivering a deep, authoritative tone. The heavier hardware gives the drum a well-planted feel that really lets it speak with confidence.

As great as the floor tom is, the undeniable centerpiece to the kit is the commanding 14 x 24 bass drum. Its classic T-style lugs are a welcome throwback when tuning the kick didn't require a drum



key. I'd forgoten how convenient that was. With a couple of twists here or there, the drum is ready to go. Small muffling pillows are installed on both the batter and resonant heads, and when struck, the drum produces a deep slap that is both bark and bite. Dig in and it hits hard; back off and the drum opens up to reveal a deep round tone with long, space-filling decay. It's a versatile monster!

As the former owner of a 1960s-era Slingerland student model snare drum, tuning up the Radio King immediately stirred some memories. I was shocked by how closely the sound characteristics matched what I remember from that older drum. I suppose it is mainly due to the stick-saver hoops, which produce a lovely, chamber-like ring that feels almost like a natural reverb. The throw-off on the Radio King snare is far superior to the rusted latch that lived on my old drum. It has an adjustment wheel that works very well to dial in the desired snare tension.

Playing the Drums

With drums all tuned up, I dove right in. The first thing I noticed was the richness of the tone and how, though each drum has its own very distinct voice, you can't deny that they are siblings. Again, maybe it's the hoops that are tying it all together, but the kit speaks with a unified character that feels cohesive and musical.

I experimented with the internal mufflers which seem to work 1,000 times better than what I remember about my old drum. I absolutely hated muffling my old drum because it would choke the drum, However, the new drums sing, even when fully muffled by the internal felt pads.

The snare drum is incredibly responsive, delivering clean buzz rolls from center to edge and everywhere in between. Cross-sticks on this drum are pure heaven, as are rim shots, and brush strokes.

I had so much fun playing these drums. Taken as a whole, the Radio King feels inspiring and deeply musical.

Conclusion

The Slingerland Radio King Outfit feels less like a new product launch and more like a careful continuation of a story that has been paused for decades. From shell construction and hardware choices to the way the drums respond under the hands and feet, everything seems to reflect a clear commitment to doing things the right way, rather than the fast or flashy way. For players drawn to big, authoritative drums with unmistakable vintage character, this kit makes a compelling case. For the Slingerland purists out there, you will be pleasantly surprised at how faithfully this new chapter honors the legacy.



The Slingerland Radio King Outfit 13/16/24 retails for $3,599.00

The Slingerland Radio King Artist Snare 6.5 x 14 retails for $799.00

Check them out at: **https://www.slingerland.com/drums/drum-sets/radio-king-outfit/**

Yamaha EAD50

By Jason Mehler



When Yamaha introduced the EAD10 drum recording system, it quietly rewired a lot of drummers' expectations around recording. Clamp on a sensor, plug in a module, put on headphones, and suddenly you were producing a polished kit sound without fighting with mic placement, cable management, phase issues, and lost inspiration. It was a way to get out of your own way.

Now Yamaha has expanded that idea with the release of the EAD50. The core concept is familiar— real drums, fast setup, immediate results— but, as Yamaha's engineers emphasized in our recent call, this isn't an "EAD10 with a few extra knobs." The EAD50 is built to go much deeper. Their goal was a friction-free way to get professional drum sounds instantly, with enough power and flexibility to step in for a full recording or live rig when the situation (or your curiosity) demands it.

For this Product Close-Up we'll compare the foundational features of the EAD50 with its predecessor and dive into the newly introduced capabilities that push Yamaha's Electronic Acoustic Drum concept into more serious recording and performance territory.

Who is the EAD50 for?

Based on my conversation with the Yamaha team, the EAD50 was positioned for drummers who have outgrown simple stereo capture and want greater control, expandability, and integration, without giving up ease. While it can still deliver a great sound right out of the box, the EAD50 is aimed at players who plan to go further by adding microphones, shaping mixes, and routing signals in more sophisticated ways.

In our conversation about the EAD50, live performance and hybrid use were emphasized as key applications, particularly for gigging drummers, churches, and drum techs who need backing tracks, setlist-based scene changes, in-ear monitoring, and clean front-of-house feeds from a single unit.

The EAD50 is aimed at technically curious and advancing players. While it's easy to get started, the system is meant to grow with you. It rewards drummers who want deeper control, expanded mic setups, and a better understanding of recording and sound, all without losing the simplicity that makes the original EAD concept so great.

What's in the Box

Inside the box you'll find the EAD50 drum module itself, along with the redesigned DSU50 sensor unit, which combines stereo microphones and an integrated kick trigger in a single, rugged housing. The mounting bracket, connection cable, and two additional XLR cables are included, along with the power adapter and instruction manual.

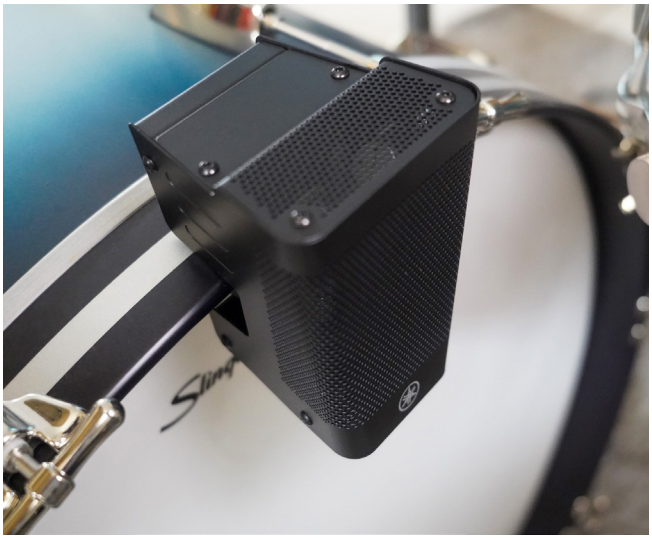
Drum Module Specs

The Yamaha EAD50 drum module significantly expands on the original EAD concept with a much more robust I/O layout. It provides five mic/line inputs, each with gain control and phantom power support, allowing the EAD50 to function as a multi-mic recording system rather than just a stereo capture device. On the output side, the module offers eight assignable individual outputs in addition to a stereo master output and headphone monitoring, making it viable for front-of-house feeds, in-ear monitoring, and studio routing. The EAD50 also includes five physical trigger inputs each of which support dual-zone triggering, allowing you to build out a fairly deep acoustic/electric setup.

For playback and performance, the EAD50 supports SD card and USB media for backing tracks and setlists, Bluetooth for wireless audio and control, and USB connectivity for recording and integration with a DAW or Yamaha's control app.

Drum Sensor Unit Specs

The included DSU50 Drum Sensor Unit combines stereo microphones arranged for full kit capture with an integrated bass drum trigger in a single, compact housing. The microphones are designed to deliver a balanced stereo image of the kit, while the trigger provides consistent kick drum reinforcement using samples. The DSU50 mounts directly to the bass drum hoop, but it also includes a threaded connection, allowing it to be mounted on a mic stand for alternative placement. In addition to working as



the primary sensor for the EAD50 system, the DSU50 can be paired with additional microphones, or even a second sensor unit, giving players more flexibility in how much of the kit they want to capture.

Control Surface & Interface

The Yamaha EAD50 is intentionally laid out to feel like a compact analog channel strip, not a menu-heavy drum brain. The front panel centers around five channel knobs, which change function depending on mode, acting as input gain, faders, pan controls, EQ "color," compression, and effects. All so you can shape sounds quickly without diving into screens. A standout feature is the set of six fully assignable rotary encoders, which can be mapped to parameters like reverb amount, reverb tail, compression ratio, attack, or release, all designed to be adjusted while playing.

There is a dedicated five-band master EQ on the output, meant for fast, global tonal fixes in real-world rooms or on stage. Individual faders are present to control the volume of Audio, Click, Mic/trigger, Output, and Phones. Soft silicone buttons are used to navigate the menu, switch between modes, change settings, and toggle features. The menu controls a lot of the settings, but overall, the control surface prioritizes tactile, ear-driven mixing, encouraging players to make meaningful adjustments in the moment rather than getting lost in the menu screen.

Standout Differences Between EAD10 and EAD50

The EAD10 excels as a fixed, stereo-based system that delivers instant results. The EAD50 starts in that same place but removes the ceiling almost immediately.

With the EAD50, the system stops being defined by the sensor alone and starts behaving more like a modular recording and performance rig. The ability to add mics, manage gain and routing per channel, and store complete configurations as scenes fundamentally change the unit's role overall. You can build and recall setups that are tailored to different rooms, songs, or applications.

In a live setting, where the EAD10 works well only as a sound source, the EAD50 takes on a more central role, replacing several expensive pieces of gear by handling monitoring, playback, and routing duties in one place. A combination of superpowers that quickly start to justify the EAD50's higher price point once you put it to work.

Setup and Playing

Setting up the EAD50 on my four-piece kit is exactly the same as with the EAD10, except for the use of a dual XLR-style cable rather than the TRS cable of the EAD10. The inputs on the module are clearly labeled with both letters and an icon image representing the Drum Sensor Unit, so there's no second-guessing where anything goes. From there, it was simply a matter of plugging in the trigger, power, and headphones, after which it was on to playing the drums.

With the EAD50 powered on and set to the first scene, I slapped on the headphones and began playing the drums. It immediately felt like an extension of the EAD10, with a mix-ready balance, but with a more refined sound quality. There's a noticeable improvement in clarity and depth compared to EAD10; an area the Yamaha team said was a major focus when refining the DSU50 sensor design.

Flipping through the factory Scenes to find interesting sound combinations was the next logical step, and the EAD50 did not disappoint. The range is broad, spanning clean, natural kit sounds, to heavily processed and ambient options. I spent most of my review time hopping around to different scenes and adjusting the modifier controls while simultaneously keeping a groove going on the drums. It's nice not to have to chase a menu setting for simple volume and effects adjustments.

The built-in click is easy to engage, and the tempo can be adjusted with a physical knob to the right of the LCD screen. There are a few different click sounds to choose from, depending on your preference. I think I drove my family crazy with the cowbell click combined with the human voice count "1,2,3,4".

Getting Creative with the EAD50

After getting comfortable with the core setup, I wanted to experiment with a few of the expanded features of the EAD50. Adding additional microphones and triggers was the first step. Bringing in a dedicated snare mic and adding an extra trigger was so simple that it felt like a natural extension of the system rather than a departure from it. I did notice that the snare trigger was only programmed on some of the preset scenes, which may be due to my test unit being a prototype. In any event, I was able to flip through and customize the sample sounds assigned to the triggers without any fuss.

I also wanted to see how the DSU50 would perform when used as a standalone condenser mic, detached from the bass drum, especially now that it can be mounted on a mic stand. Used as a traditional overhead, it captured a clean, well-balanced stereo image of the kit, offering a noticeably different and more open perspective than when mounted on the bass drum. I then moved it out in front of the kit, about six feet away and just above the height of the bass drum rim, where it delivered a punchy, aggressive sound with plenty of focus.

Just for fun, I experimented further by plugging in the sensor from the EAD10 into the EAD50 module as a trigger. Having both sensors attached as triggers, I messed around by mounting them to separate music stands. I've heard through the grapevine that other folks are getting creative with it as well, involving percussion instruments or just holding and tapping on the trigger itself while singing or rapping. However you choose to use it, the EAD50 clearly leaves plenty of room for experimentation and inspiration.

Conclusion

The EAD50 doesn't just add features; it removes obstacles. By consolidating what would normally require multiple microphones, a mixer, an interface, a playback device, and a monitoring setup into a single unit, it dramatically simplifies both recording and live workflows. That kind of reduction doesn't only lighten the gear load; it makes it easier to act on ideas, turning a moment of inspiration into something tangible. The EAD50 retails for $1,599. For more info, Visit **https://usa.yamaha.com/products/musical_instruments/drums/ea_drums/ead/ead50/index.html**

HHHusher

By Jason Mehler



If you've ever recorded drums - or watched an engineer wrestle with a drum mix - you know one of the most hard-fought battles is microphone bleed. One particularly common occurrence is the hi-hat cymbals bleeding into the snare mic. Engineers try to squash it with mic placement, drummers adjust their technique, and in the end, everyone accepts a little bleed as "just part of it." That's the problem that HHHusher is trying to solve. For this month's Product Close-Up, we'll put the HHHusher to the test.

What's in the Box

Inside the box, the HHHusher comes ready to integrate into a wide range of hi-hat and mic setups. You'll find the main HHHusher isolation unit, built around its rigid shell and internal sound-absorbing materials, along with a set of interchangeable neoprene "lip" extensions that let you fine-tune coverage based on cymbal size, mic placement, and playing style. Mounting hardware for attaching the unit securely to a standard hi-hat stand is included, as well as simple setup instructions to get you up and running quickly without guesswork.

The Set Up

Being a left-handed drummer, my hi-hat lives on the right. At the time of this writing, the company does not offer a left-handed version of the HHHusher, however, the current model still does an effective job of reducing bleed.

To get started, I set up a 4-piece kit with a 14-inch snare and 14-inch Sabian hi-hats. At first, the HHHusher was a bit confusing. Luckily, there is a quick start guide included in the box, and there are helpful videos available online to make the process clear.

I began by assembling the clamp on the HHHusher and installing it onto the shaft just below the bottom hi-hat cymbal. There are spacers included with the HHHusher that are used to make it compatible with hi-hat sizes up to 16". In my case, the 14" hi-hats did not require additional spacers. I left the clamp slightly loose at first so I could make small adjustments.

Next, I set the height so that the top edge of the HHHusher sat just under the plane of the bottom hat, close enough to block the direct path of the snare mic without interfering with the hi-hat's movement. I rotated the HHHusher to a position that allowed a comfortable path for my drumstick to hit the cymbal while still maintaining the wall between the mic and hi-hat. With everything positioned correctly, I tightened the clamp down securely and tested the hi-hat action to make sure nothing shifted or rubbed.

Testing the HHHusher

Decibel Meter test: I recently picked up a decibel meter, so I decided to put the HHHusher to the test and measure what it was actually doing in terms of real-world noise reduction. To get an accurate reading, I mounted the meter on a stand in the exact position of the snare mic. I played consistent hi-hat patterns both with and without the HHHusher installed, keeping

my dynamics as even as possible.

With the HHHusher removed, consistent hi-hat playing registered at roughly 102 dB on the meter. After installing the HHHusher and repeating the same performance at the same dynamics, the reading dropped to 92.4 dB, a reduction of nearly 10 dB, representing a significant decrease in hi-hat energy reaching the mic. That's enough to make a meaningful difference in both live and studio mixing situations. I'm sure I could reduce the decibels even further with the use of the additional lip extensions; however, in my left-handed setup, the positioning felt a little uncomfortable for me.

Mic Test: To evaluate the HHHusher in a traditional close-mic scenario, I ran a test using a Shure SM57 placed between the rack tom and the hi-hat, aimed directly at the center of the snare head. I also had a set of overhead condenser mics in place.

With the HHHusher removed, the hi-hat was clearly present in the snare mic, especially during open hat patterns. Once the HHHusher was installed, the difference was immediate. The snare mic sounded more focused, with less high-frequency splash or washiness competing with the snare's attack and body. Ghost notes and softer dynamics translated more clearly, and the overall snare tone felt easier to work with before any EQ or compression was applied. A key thing to mention is that the HHHusher had relatively no negative effect on the overhead mics due to its open top.

Bonus Test: To push things a step further, I thought it would be interesting and practical to test the HHHusher with the Yamaha EAD10 system. The EAD10 is commonly used by content creators because it does a great job in capturing a complete balanced image of the overall kit using only two internal condenser mics from its mounted position at the top of the bass drum hoop. That mounting position is an important detail because the EAD10's internal condenser microphones have a clear line-of-sight to the hi-hat. With no physical barrier in-place, the hi-hat's direct energy easily makes its way into the EAD10's mix. In this context, the HHHusher feels less like a bleed solution and more like a refining tool for hi-hat volume. Some hi-hat cymbals are simply louder or more cutting than others, and with the EAD10, that brightness can dominate the overall kit sound. Introducing the HHHusher effectively broke that direct line-of-sight between the hi-hat and the EAD10 microphones. The result wasn't a dramatic change in tone, but a noticeable refinement in hi-hat volume. It was as if I moved the hi-hat stand a few feet away from the mics, adding another layer of control over hi-hat presence in the mix.





Conclusion

With a refreshingly direct approach, the HHHusher tackles a long-standing drum-recording challenge. Instead of engineers and drummers working around hi-hat bleed, it addresses the problem at the source in a meaningful, measurable way, without negatively impacting feel, playability, or the overall sound of the kit.

For drummers, engineers, and even content creators looking for more control before reaching for EQ and compression, the HHHusher proves to be a practical, well-thought-out solution. The HHHusher retails for $499 and is available at: **https://www.hhhusher.com/**

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JOSH FREESE GIVES US, JUST A MINUTE

By Mark Griffith

Photos by Alex Kluft



A few years ago, Josh Freese was thrown in the spotlight by joining the Foo Fighters. Then he got even more attention when he was let go by the Foo Fighters. But Josh Freese is so much more than that! He occasionally gets pegged as a session drummer because of his hundreds of album credits, but he is much more than that as well.

Josh Freese is a multi-talented drummer, multi-instrumentalist, songwriter, devoted father, and family man, who has toured with Paramore, Sublime and Ween. He has been (or is) a member of several bands including: Devo, Sting, Guns 'n' Roses, The Vandals, Danny Elfman, The Replacements, Weezer, The Offspring, and he is now excited to be back playing with A Perfect Circle and Nine Inch Nails.

On top of all of that, Josh has also released many solo records including the last two, called Just A Minute Vol 1 and Vol 2, on Loosegroove Records. Those two records are made up entirely of one-minute songs, and they act as a nice insight into Freese's way of thinking. In this wide-ranging conversation Josh had a lot to say. Josh and I talked for much longer than just a minute. We had an in-depth conversation about his career, the many bands, the records, the sessions, and yes… the Foo Fighters.

MD: The new record is the second volume of your one-minute songs records, where did that idea come from?

JF: Most of these songs were done in one batch in 2020 and '21 during the pandemic. I've had a home studio for years, and I'm always either complaining that I don't have enough time to use it, or I'm complaining that I've got too much time to use. If I'm not using it much, it's because I'm busy out in the real world traveling in and out of town, But I'm thinking, *'I wish I could just get back in my studio for a day or two,'* because I usually have got no time to think about going into my backyard and working. If I'm home for a week or two, and I've been gone for a while, I can't come home after being gone for two months and say, *'Hey I'm gonna go work in the studio all night.'* I've got a wife and four kids; I want to be home and be a dad and do family stuff. I'm not complaining, I'm just happy trying to find some sort of balance. I enjoy having the time to be creative and work in my studio, but then I'll look at my watch and think I should be out there in the real world doing other stuff. I do a lot of remote session work in my studio too, I'll get hired by a band from Lisbon, Portugal. Maybe they've scraped together a few bucks to hire me to play drums, but they can't afford the extra ten grand to fly me there and get a hotel and hire techs. Instead, they can email the tracks and the Pro Tools files and can I knock it out send it back. I get to use my backyard studio in that capacity as well.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I was back there messing around and just having fun being creative and experimenting with stuff, and I thought, *'I'm going to write a batch of one-minute songs, make some videos on my phone, and put them up on Instagram.'* I had no plans of releasing them, and no expectation to make any money from them. I had no plans of monetizing them in any way, it was just creating for creativity's sake, literally

There's literally no rules in music, and it's fine to sound weird. Does it matter? No!

for the fun of it. That's what it's being done for, because it's not I'm not getting rich from making this record. But while doing it, I realized that I was having fun doing these one-minute songs, it wasn't daunting at all. I didn't have to think, *'I've got to write this song, it's got to have an intro, a verse, a chorus, a bridge, a solo section, and an outro.'* Writing 60 second songs is like writing a nursery rhyme. I was having fun doing them and I sent one to my buddy Stone Gossard from Pearl Jam. He's an old friend and he's always been a cheerleader of mine. So I sent him a complete song and he immediately wanted to put it out for fun because he was doing a reboot of his label Loosegroove Records. At the time, I had probably 20 or 30 one-minute songs and he thought that we could do two volumes. We put the first one out fairly quickly, but when the pandemic ended, I started getting busy playing gigs touring the world again. There was some procrastination involved (of course) getting to *Just a Minute Volume 2*. I'd already put out the first one and there was no pressure of, *'I've got to get this record out!!!'* Putting this record was (jokingly) for the ever-growing ADHD community out there (which seems to be everyone these days including myself.) If you're listening and you don't like a song, by the time you grab your phone to push next, it's going to be over, so you might as well just sit the damn thing out! I was still writing one-minute songs over the last couple years for fun but now I feel that I'm ready to graduate now to two-minute songs. I just finished a few 3 1/2 minute and two minute and 50 second regular pop rock'n'roll length songs.

Some of these songs have me playing the simplest drum



parts you've ever heard. There are also two or three songs that have programmed drums where I just pushed play and didn't even program anything. And there's three or four songs with no drums at all, it's just piano. This record is definitely more about the music, songs, and songwriting, not necessarily a spotlight on the drums.

MD: Going long is always easy, but succinctness is always hard. Did writing these tunes turn into an exercise in editing and being succinct?

JF: For sure. There are a few songs on the record that were longer songs that I'd already recorded. But I challenged myself to edit them down.

MD: Trim the fat?

JF: Yup. All the songs aren't *exactly* 60 seconds, one might be 58 seconds, and the next track might be a minute and two seconds, but they're all within 5 seconds of a minute. But it wasn't too hard. If I had a good A section and B section, a good verse, and a good chorus, it was pretty easy. It was always a fun exercise and a fun challenge to make a good one-minute song.



For every record that I played on, and people knew about, there is seven that I did the sessions, got paid, and no one ever heard it, including myself! Because the artist got dropped, the album never came out, or it came out and sold six copies, whatever...

I'll tell you a quick story about the song that Stone Gossard heard and made him want to this out. There's a song called "Our Famous Drummer" that was a 2 1/2-minute song. The Vandals are always looking for strange and funny things odd things to write about. We're not singing about girls, heartbreak, or down with the man. It's all kind of silly, weird, and obscure stuff like having problems with your food order and having to send your food back constantly.

One of the guys in the Vandals said we should write a song called "Our Famous Drummer" about how the Vandals were a *small-time* band compared to the other things that I go and do, but they wanted me to write it about myself as if the band was writing it about me. They wanted me to write a song about honoring me and busting my balls at the same time. So, I wrote "Our Famous Drummer" about how they found me playing in Tomorrowland at Disneyland and rescued me from playing jazz clubs my whole life. But there is the part that sucks when every summer all these other bands come and pay me more money to go on tour and take me away from my buddies. For that song, I shortened the intro, I shortened the re-intro after the second chorus, and at the end there's a big drum fill right before the song just stops, you can actually hear that I start singing a bridge I went I cut it. When I first sent it to the label, Stone liked the song, but he thought that it ended really weird, you're not supposed to do that. But there's literally no rules in music, and it's fine to sound weird. Does it matter? No! That is a fun example of editing and trimming the fat, and not worrying about the rules.

There's another song on this record that I really like called "Somehow I like Lou Reed." That was originally a Vandals demo that I wrote, and it was originally a big F.U. song to *Variety* magazine. They were suing the Vandals in a big lawsuit that went on for a long time that ended up getting dropped, it was totally ridiculous. So I wrote this whole F.U. song to *Variety* magazine, but we never recorded or released it. I already had the music and I just shortened it to make it one minute. I wrote a completely new melody and a new batch of lyrics about how I love Lou Reed even though sometimes I wince and can't believe that he rhymed one word with another, because it was so pretentious and complex. But I still couldn't wait to hear the song again. That irony was never lost on me with Lou's music. I love the effect that he had on music.

There are actually a few songs on each of these records that I am thinking about expanding into longer songs. I doubt that I'll do that, but who knows— I'm always writing songs but there's not a massive audience for my music. I do it because it's I like doing it, it's fun, it's a part of me, and I'm always going to do it. Who knows, weird things happen. Maybe someone who is a fan of mine will decide to license one of my silly songs for the theme of their television show. Writing music, having it out there, and publishing it… I always see it as a lottery ticket. It might not be worth anything, but at some point, you might hit the lottery. I'm friends with the guys from the punk rock band Fear. In the late 80s, when Guns 'n' Roses was massive and selling millions of records, they covered a Fear song on *The Spaghetti Incid*ent record. Fear's lead singer, Lee, told me, "Here's this two-minute punk rock song that I wrote back in '78 that made me almost no

money. But Guns 'n' Roses thought Fear was cool a cool band, so they recorded a Fear song and it bought me my ranch in Austin, Texas." Who's gonna argue with that?

MD: There are some funny song titles on the new record, are they autobiographical?

JF: "I Didn't Know I Played with Avril Lavigne" is a true story. One day a producer friend of mine who calls me once a year to play on stuff for him called me and asked me to record a bunch of drum tracks. Like a lot of session work I was doing at the time, it was just me and the producer and a Pro Tools rig. No band and no artist. I show up at the studio and he's got everything on the Pro Tools rig, the music is all tight with the click track so I can play along to it. They mute the drum machine or whatever temp drums are on there, and I do the tunes, it's like drum karaoke. We did about four or five songs in an evening, and because it was a new artist that I'd never heard of, her name went in one ear and out the other. At that time, I was making a lot records like that. For every record that I played on, and people knew about, there is seven that I did the sessions, got paid, and no one ever heard it, including myself! Because the artist got dropped, the album never came out, or it came out and sold six copies, *whatever*… About a year later, an artist who we now know as Avril Lavigne is everywhere, her videos are all over MTV, and someone says, "Hey I saw your name on that Avril Lavigne record…" I say, *'No I didn't play on that,'* and they tell me that my name is on it. So I look at the credits online, and I see Josh Freese drums on tracks 1, 5-6, 10, 12. Then I look for a producer or engineer's name that I recognize in the credits to trigger my memory, and I see that tracks 1,5-6, 10, and 12 were produced by Cliff Magness, that's my buddy Cliff and the last time I saw him we were in the studio knocking out a bunch of tracks. Those turned out to be Avril Lavigne's tunes.

I kind of used the Vaseline song "Molly's Lips" (that was covered by Nirvana) as a model. It's a super catchy, super poppy, super simple in the verse and the chorus, pop tune, and the chords never change.

The same thing happened almost 20 years ago now with a band called the New Radicals. When I recorded with the New Radicals, it was just one guy named Gregg Alexander. I did one day of recording for him and six months later a friend of mine who is a big music fan tells me that he saw my name on the New Radicals record. I had never heard of the New Radicals, but when I looked at the credits, I saw all songs written and performed by Gregg Alexander. Since I had recorded with him, he had decided to give his project the name of a band.

MD: From the new record, the drumming on "Electric Saxophone's Is Fun" is really funky, almost Chic-like.

JF: That's just a nonsense crazy song. Some of these songs (that one included) I'm singing into my laptop computer microphone on Garage Band while I was on tour.

MD: Are you playing drums on it?

JF: Yeah. I did that on Garage Band and came home and dumped into my Pro Tools rig. Originally, there was this really cheesy stock disco drum beat on it that I didn't mind, I kind of liked it. But it sounded really bad, I dumped it into Pro Tools, and I was trying to EQ it and do all these tricks. I tried to find another drum loop and I finally just decided to play drums on it. Sometimes I like really squared off, rigid, dumb sounding, drum machine stuff for certain songs, but I had to play drums on that one.

MD: The groove on "God Gave Rock 'n Roll to You, Satan Wants it Back" is pretty killer.

JF: That's one of my favorite songs on the record because it just sounds insane. The whole track just sounds like Black Flag meets the Butthole Surfers. It's just complete meltdown craziness. I play 95% of the instruments on the record, but my brother plays piano on one song and the lead guitar on "God Gave Rock 'n Roll to You, Satan Wants it Back" is Robin Finck, the guitarist from Nine Inch Nails. He's great at totally giving it up it and sounding like his guitar is being strangled. It just sounds like complete manic chaos energy, it's so surreal and crazy. That's probably the ugliest (in a good way) track on the record. My other favorite songs on the record are the last two songs which are both instrumentals with no drums. "Gregorio" is just me playing synthesizer, and the second to last song is called "There's a Light" which is just me playing piano with my friend Petra Haden playing violin. It's really pretty and beautiful song.

I wish that I opened the record with "God Gave Rock 'n' Roll to You, Satan Wants it Back" and ended with "There's a Light" because that would represent the ugliest most nasty sounds moving towards the most pretty and sensitive polar opposite of the musical spectrum.

MD: "If You Know, You Know" sounds like it could be a single.

JF: It's first song on the album but it's not even my favorite song. It's one of the songs that there is a video for, but there are others that are just as catchy and more autobiographical.

I saw Buddy push himself ferociously, with sweat pouring off him, and giving 110% every second that he played. Watching the physicality of what he did made a huge impression on me as a kid.

The song "Wasted with The Ween" (and I call them "*The*" Ween because of the bad *Saturday Night Live* spin off movie *It's Pat* where Pat keeps on referring to them as The Ween) is about when I recorded with Ween in the early 2000s. I drank way too much, it was the last time I ever vomited from drinking, and it was a horrible-awesome-horrible night.

There's another track that's really poppy that I really like called "Give Em Nuthin." That started off as an exercise to literally just play 2 chords and go between those two chords for a minute. I kind of used the Vaseline song "Molly's Lips" (that was covered by Nirvana) as a model. It's a super catchy, super poppy, super simple in the verse and the chorus, pop tune, and the chords never change. "Give Em Nuthin" is one of the best songs on the record, but it's so simple and so dumbed down.

That song is about when I went to New York in 1993 to play on MTV's *120 Minutes* with Paul Westerberg from The Replacements. It was his big chance to record these live songs for MTV, and they were gonna put a couple of the songs in rotation. However, before we could even start taping, Westerberg took a break without telling anybody, left the studio and walked back to his hotel. He didn't want to be there, he didn't want to do it, and he didn't say anything to anybody. Meanwhile, I'm 20 years old

sitting behind the drums, the camera guys are freaking out, the stage manager is running around looking for Paul, and the people from Warner Brothers with the headset and clipboards are asking, "Where's the singer?" I'm just saying, *'I don't know, don't look at me, I'm just the drummer.'* "Give Em Nuthin" is about my *big chance* to give them nothing, and Paul's self-sabotage. I'm his biggest fan in the world, but I watched him shoot himself in both feet over and over, and I guess that's part of this lore, and he really can't blame anybody but himself. He told me his favorite movie is a film called the *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner.* It's about a guy that everyone wants to become this great runner, and he trains and trains, and then at the big race he's a mile ahead everybody and he stops running at the finish line and let's everyone go past him. That says it all about Paul, and I can appreciate that.

MD: You mentioned your brother playing piano on a track from the new record, you come from a musical family, how has that affected your career?

JF: My dad conducted the Disneyland big band, so I was around the Disneyland big band every weekend. I got to watch my dad conduct the big band and was around all that music and those musicians. But I was not only seeing that band, I saw the other music in Disneyland all the time. I'd go over and watch the rock band play; I'd see the Top 40 band, I got to watch the Dixieland band, the Latin band, there were all these different kinds of styles of music happening around the park.

Disneyland would also have guest bands during the summer and have big band jazz summers with the Glenn Miller Orchestra, Louie Bellson's band, and the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra all for a week at a time. Then Buddy Rich would close out the summer every year. So, I got to see him three or four years in a row for a week straight. I got to sit 15 feet from Buddy's drums on multiple occasions, and I got to meet Buddy two or three times. I saw Buddy push himself ferociously, with sweat pouring off him, and giving 110% every second that he played. Watching the physicality of what he did made a huge impression on me as a kid. Meanwhile, my dad was whispering to me about how Buddy had three heart-attacks and was still playing a great as ever.

My dad can play a little bit of every instrument, he had he had some sort of deal with Yamaha brass instrument department, and they gave him a Yamaha Recording Custom drum kit with a defective finish. A few years later, I found that kit up in the attic. I tell my kids this story all the time, because everyone's so involved scrolling on their freaking telephones. They say, "Oh I'm bored," and I tell them that one day I was so bored that I was looking around my attic and I found a drum set and I asked my parents to bring it downstairs so I could play it. If I was sitting on my phone *busy and content,* I would have never found that drum set, and my life would be completely different.

MD: You never know what you're going to miss while you are scrolling on your phone.

JF: It could have been a Sears drum set; it didn't matter what kind of drums they were. But my dad played me the simplest beat in the world with the simplest dumbest drum fill, and I thought, *'Wow that sounds like a rock'n'roll record!'* I was amazed that my dad could play the drums too! Then he handed me the sticks and said, "Here, you try it." I sat down and played that groove and that fill and thought, *'This is easier than I thought it was going to be.'* That gave me this big chunk of confidence and I



instantly wanted to get better and play more.

I started reading *Modern Drummer* and I saw this Yamaha drum ad with Vinnie, Gadd, Erskine, Ed Soph, Steve Houghton, Yogi Horton, Steve Jordan, and I was blown away that I had the same kit as they were playing.

I started playing along to the four records I had: Van Halen *I*, Devo *Freedom of Choice*, Queen *The Game*, and Journey *Escape*. Disneyland also had this library for employees that you could go and check out records, so I took full advantage of that as well. I remember listening to The Police *Zenyatta Mondatta,* and the first record by The Cars a lot too. Years later getting to play and record with Devo and getting to play a lot of those Police tunes with Sting brought me back to when I was nine years old playing along to those records.

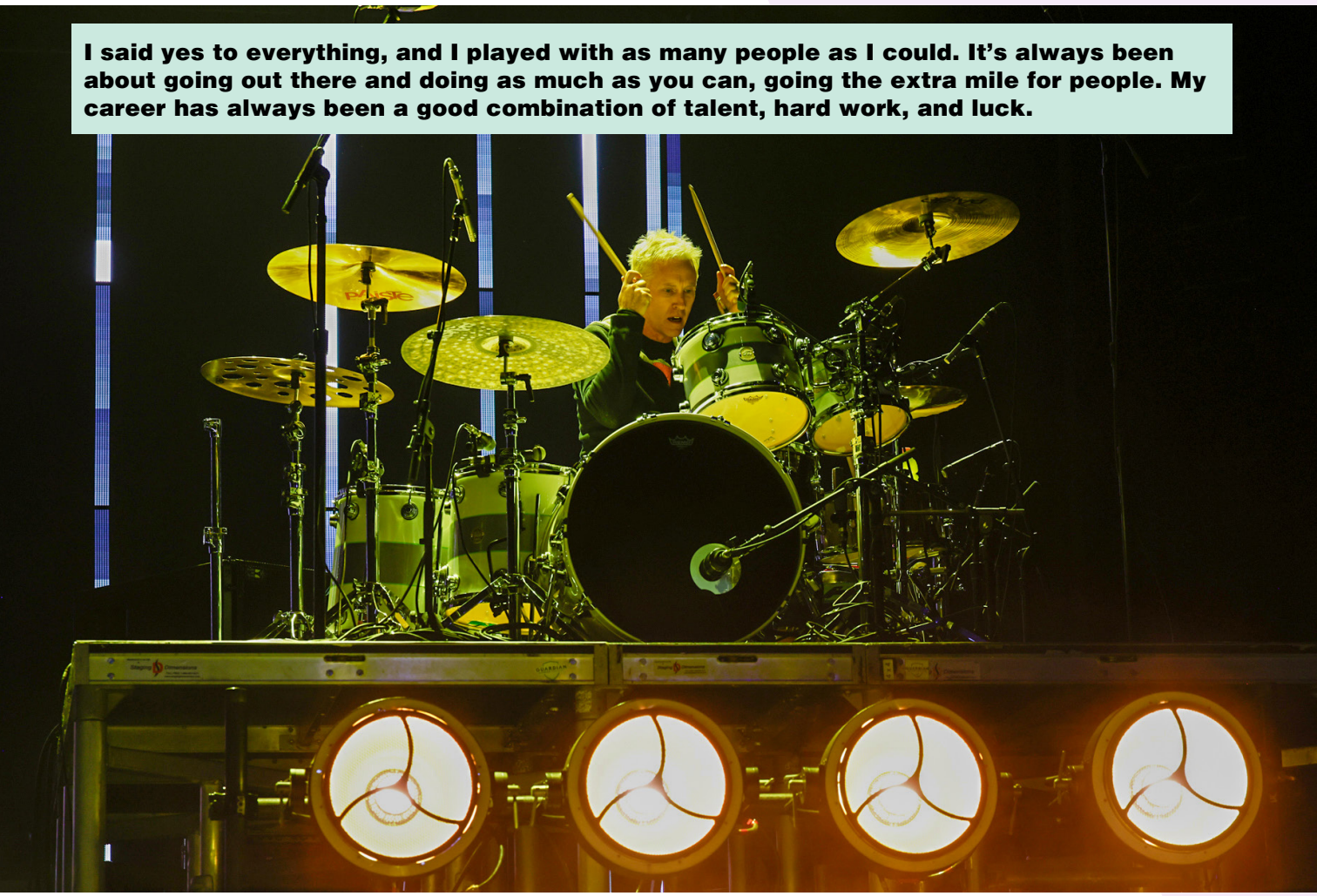
MD: Were you influenced by Budgie (of Siouxsie and the Banshees,) because to my ears you sound like him.

JF: Interesting. We have the same haircut! If you if you squint, I could look like Budgie. This is really uncool to say, but no, I don't know a whole lot about Budgie, I know he was the drummer in Siouxsie and the Banshees, and I'm supposed to know more about them than I do, I've got friends who are going to roll their eyes and say, "Dude that's so uncool, admitting that you don't know much about Budgie, but I'm not super well versed in his playing.

MD: Aside from listening and playing with records, did you take lessons?

JF: I took some lessons at Jim's House of Music in Placentia, CA from Ron Romano, who taught me all my rudiments and was a good teacher. At the age of 13 through 15 I started taking lessons from the legendary Roy Burns. Roy was semi-retired from playing, was running Aquarian (drumheads and accessories,) and teaching privately in Orange County. Roy was an amazing teacher, he taught me how to read, and was great at breaking things down and having you look at things differently which would help you get you over an intimidating psychological hurdle. I did a lot of jazz stuff and reading stuff with Roy, and I had my sights set on going to Berklee, because that's where Vinnie, Steve Smith, and John Robinson went.

I said yes to everything, and I played with as many people as I could. It's always been about going out there and doing as much as you can, going the extra mile for people. My career has always been a good combination of talent, hard work, and luck.



But then I ended up starting to make records and touring when I was 15, first with Dweezil Zappa and then with soap opera star Michael Damian, who had a big hit and a number one single in the summer of '89. I got my GED and left high school in 10th grade, which my kids will never let me forget. But I tell them when I left school, I wasn't wasting time on my cell phone; all I did was eat, sleep, and breathe, drums. By that time, I had already been in the musician's union for four years, I was networking constantly, and I already had an endorsement with

Zildjian and DW. The point is, I was already busy working when I was 15 or 16 years old. I was recording and I was starting to meet people when an older musician gave me this advice, "Right now you're doing what all those other guys hope and pray they get to do after they graduate, so just keep doing what you are doing. If you want to go back to school someday, it will always be there." So, I took that advice and I never stopped. I said yes to everything, and I played with as many people as I could. It's always been about going out there and doing as much as you can, going the extra mile for people. My career has always been a good combination of talent, hard work, and luck. When people ask me about building a career, that's what I tell them, then I ask them how serious they *really* are about doing this. I'm going to be 53 soon, and one of the few luxuries that I feel like I have earned is now I might say yes to 90% of the things that come my way instead of 100%.

MD: And when did that "luxury" come to you?

JF: Within the last 7-8 years. But I still yes to *almost* everything. I can't say the name of the band, but there's a famous band that wanted me to go out and do some gigs with them, and the pay is really good. But the dates literally went right up until the day before the Nine Inch Nails rehearsals start. I was talking about it with my wife, who usually says, "Go do it!" And we both agreed that it seemed like a bit much. I felt like I was going to be walking the Nine Inch Nails rehearsals hurting physically from playing all those arena gigs. I had to tell them no because there's too much going on right now. I'm not 30 years old anymore, and I really must look at the physicality of everything. I have to stretch now, I do massage, acupuncture, or all of the above. But I have to think in those terms, I can't just go and beat the hell out of the drums all night every night in arena's and blow it off physically without really trying to take care of myself and my body. As drummers, what we do can be pretty athletic, so I have to (kind of) pick and choose sometimes.

MD: Athlete's think about giving themselves (and their bodies) recovery time, we should too. When did you start to become aware of that?

JF: About 10-12 years ago, right around the time I was turning 40. I started getting back aches in my lower back from all the traveling and sitting. I can tell you exactly when that started. I was on a session that Bob Rock was producing for Gavin Rossdale, the singer from Bush. I had been behind the drums for a couple of days, and we barely took a break. And after seven or eight hours of sitting behind the drums, playing a take, listening, playing, listening… I felt like I gotta get up and move around, I was feeling it in my back and my butt. I had to stretch for a few minutes. That was the first time I felt that way. I was being neglectful and still thinking that I was 18 years old.

MD: You have been in some really cool bands, let me ask you have some of those opportunities came to you? How did Devo come to you?

JF: Devo came to me because I've been a lifelong fan, they were the one band that stayed with me while I was growing up. There are certain bands that you can look back and think, *'I can't believe I used to like so and so,'* or *'I can't believe I used to have so and so's poster on my wall.'* But there are certain bands that stay with you forever, and Devo is one of them. I learned about them when "Whip It" was a hit. That was a quirky, catchy, funny, weird, fun, song; the video is like a cartoon. But then I realized that they were way deeper and more serious than I thought. Brian Eno produced their first record, and David Bowie and Neil Young were championing them and helping them get signed. Most importantly, they sounded like nobody else. Then they did their weird, bizarre, and awesome cover of "Satisfaction." As I got older, I understood them more and realized they weren't just a Saturday morning cartoon, they were playing deep, artistic, conceptual, music.

When I started playing with the Vandals, we were making our first record, and I was like 16 or 17. We had heard that one of the guys in Devo (Bob Casale) was available as an engineer and a producer, so were able to hire one him to produce our record. We scraped together just enough money. We all were Devo fans, but I was the youngest. I was *definitely not* trying to act cool around Bob, and I latched on to him and went all fanboy. At the time, Devo was kind of on ice, they hadn't broken up, they were taking a break, and everyone in the band was doing other stuff. Mark was doing music for *Pee Wee's Playhouse* and *The Rugrats*, and Jerry was directing commercials and videos for Soundgarden, Rush, and the Foo Fighters. A couple years later, Devo decided to start doing some gigs because bands like Nirvana, Soundgarden, and Weezer were covering their songs. Devo wasn't really "reuniting" because they never officially broke up. But Alan Meyers (the original drummer) wasn't really on board to play, they had a falling out with Alan who was a great drummer. So Bob told the Devo guys, "I know this kid drummer, and I'm sure he would die to do some Devo gigs," and that's how that happened.

I didn't understand the beauty of simplicity, or the beauty of Jeff Porcaro, Jim Keltner, or Steve Jordan. I thought that you had to play in odd times and be busy to be any good. As I got older, I realized that wasn't the case.

They hadn't played together in five years, and my first show with them was at the Sundance Film Festival. Last month marked the 30-year anniversary of the first gig I played with them. It always breaks my heart when I have to sit out shows, because there's times when they won't do anything for a year, and I'll be on a four month tour with Sting (or whoever,) and they'll ask if I can come and play a gig, and I have to say, 'I'm on tour with my *real job* for six weeks, I can't just leave for one gig, and it's a bummer for me. But I always will work with them, unfortunately it has to be on and off, but I really love those guys and their music.

MD: Did Alan's drumming hit you, or did the whole band and the music hit you?

JF: It was the whole thing. If anything, I didn't appreciate Alan's drumming at first, or at least I didn't know I was appreciating his drumming. It's interesting, that was around the time I was getting into *"drummer's drummers"* like Steve Gadd, Vinnie, and Terry Bozzio. I didn't understand the beauty of simplicity, or the beauty of Jeff Porcaro, Jim Keltner, or Steve Jordan. I thought that you had to play in odd times and be busy to be any good. As I got older, I realized that wasn't the case. To be honest, there's lots of guys that play in odd times and are really technically good that I'm not interested in at all. And there are guys that play simply whose drumming really resonates with me. At first, I didn't understand what was good about Alan's drumming because I was too in my *"Zappa Drummer Mode."*

MD: But then you hear some of the deceptively hard, linear type

of grooves that Alan was playing, and you realize that the gap between Alan Meyers and Vinnie or Terry wasn't as wide as one might think.

JF: Absolutely, you're right! When you listen to those records, you hear a lot of strange linear ideas, and Alan's approach to certain things was really cool and un-drummer-like, in a funny way.

MD: You mentioned the *"Zappa Drummer Mode."* But you have more than a passing relationship to *"Zappa Drummer Mode,"* you played on Dweezil Zappa's first record *Confessions*. How did you wind up playing with Dweezil?

JF: I was a HUGE fan of Frank's. I met Ahmet (his son) when I was 14 when were both doing the same TV show. I never played with Frank, but I was smart enough to want to get good enough to play with Frank, but I wasn't even close. There were guys sight reading "The Black Page," and I was not at that level! Dweezil had been playing with Terry and Chad, but eventually we played together. I enjoyed playing in Dweezil's band, getting to hang out at Frank's house, and just being around the family. As a kid, I used to dream of meeting Frank, seeing his studio, let alone being able to go to the studio, it was literally a dream come true to do that with Dweezil. Being that young and being able to do that was really special. Dweezil's *Confessions* (with Scott Thunes playing bass) was the first record I made. I got to track in Frank's studio and have coffee around the kitchen table many times.

MD: What did you learn from that entire experience?

JF: A great work ethic, and it trickled down to Dweezil and Ahmet. I wish they could resolve their differences; family is important.

MD: When you played with Weezer, because (drummer) Patrick Wilson wanted to play guitar in the band, how did you approach the Weezer drum parts?

JF: With those songs there's not a whole lot of room for different interpretations, other than just playing the parts as well as you can play them. Weezer isn't a jam band, Weezer is great, simple, straight ahead, (kind of) alternative rock band. There isn't a lot of room, or the need for me to put any special spin on anything, just play the songs well. But… I gotta tell you, I was playing with them about a month ago, and I wasn't throwing in crazy fills or anything, but there was one point during the show, I forget what song I was playing, but whatever I played, I remember thinking, *'I need to bring it back a couple notches, I should take that out and not play so big in that section— pull the reins back a little bit, fit into the puzzle more naturally, and blend in with the group a little bit more.'*

MD: It's always interesting to hear a drummer play a gig when he shouldn't bring his entire vocabulary to the gig.

JF: Producer-engineer Sean Bevan (Nine Inch Nails, Marilyn Manson, Ministry, A Perfect Circle) told Billy Howerdel (guitarist and songwriter in A Perfect Circle) something to the effect of, "What I like about Josh's drumming is that he can kick it into fifth gear whenever he wants, but he chooses those moments carefully, so they stick out more. He's usually playing in third or fourth gear, but he can rev it up whenever he feels it, rather than playing crazy shit all over the place." That's a luxury that comes with age.

Last week I was playing with The Vandals and there was a moment towards the beginning of the show, and I was playing something semi-difficult to play and involved. I realized that I used to worry about coming out and playing as hard, fast, and flashy as I could right off the bat to impress the room. But now I don't have to do that anymore. I don't have to start in fifth gear if I don't feel like it. I'm not worried about people leaving the gig thinking, "Josh wasn't that great he wasn't beating the hell out of the drums at the very beginning." I'm really comfortable enough in my own skin and with my reputation to go out and give it my all, without feeling like I have to prove something. But it's funny, I do still flip-flop (at times) between playing *like I have something to prove* and playing *like I've got nothing to prove* and just do my thing not to impress the room.

MD: What do you do on a session when you are presented with a tune, and you are not hearing any drums, or anything differently than what is already on the track?

JF: When I was younger, I wouldn't say it because I wouldn't want to nix myself out of playing on the track. But as I've gotten older and more mature as a musician, there's times that I really don't hear much happening in a song. Either the song needs no drums, or it should be really non-invasive like playing a kick drum on quarter notes to give it more of pulse; or maybe just playing side stick until the chorus.

I used to worry about coming out and playing as hard, fast, and flashy as I could right off the bat to impress the room. But now I don't have to do that anymore. I don't have to start in fifth gear if I don't feel like it.

Sometimes a band or a producer wants me to play on (or fix) only one song. I come in, they play me the track, and half the time I'll think to myself, *'That sounds pretty damn good to me.'* But I don't wanna ace myself out. But then I realize, I wasn't there for the birth of this song. Maybe they worked painstakingly on this song forever with whomever was playing drums on the track, and because they worked hard on it to get it to where it is, every time it comes to the chorus maybe they still *think they hear that edit*, and it drives them nuts. Psychologically they just want to know that after the drama of working on it forever, Freese came in and it felt great right off the bat, and now they can move on. But at the end of the day, if you put my track up against the other drummer, the average person probably wouldn't know the difference.

MD: Sometimes people hear with their brains and their eyes.

JF: Exactly!

MD: I know you and Vinnie Colaiuta are good friends, tell me about the importance that he has had in your playing and to your career.

JF: I met Vinnie at the 1984 NAMM show. I recognized his name from reading *Modern Drummer*, I was probably 11 years old. He was playing at the Simmons drum booth, it was a room full of adult drummers, I was the only kid there, and I had no idea what I was hearing. To say, *'It blew me away,'* is downplaying it. *It changed my life!!!* Seeing Vinnie play opened a whole new world of possibilities, I heard things on the drums that I didn't know were possible. He was so nice to me as a kid, and he took me around to a few booths. That Sunday night he put me on the guest list and saved me some seats behind the drums at the Baked Potato when he was playing with Dog Cheese, which

was Joni Mitchell's band (bassist Larry Klein, guitarist Mike Landau, and Vinnie) at the time. Seeing that band was a religious experience. Over the years there is a growing misconception that I "studied with Vinnie," but we never sat down with a book and talked drums. But I learned so much from sitting three feet behind him at the Baked Potato and watching and listening to him as he was at his peak. He was on fire, there was nobody more on fire than Vinnie at that time, in that club, doing what he did. But he always took the time to talk to me about stuff, and I always remember that when a kid asks me a question, to sign something, or for a picture.

Once you get on a gig, there's a reason you are in the room, you should know what's right, no one shouldn't have to hold your hand. You need to be confident enough not to have to ask a bunch of questions. You need to have a good enough taste barometer on stuff to fit in pretty quickly.

JR Robinson was the same way with me. He had me come a to a recording session twice. The first time was a Barry Manilow session that George Duke was producing, and I sat in the room with John Robinson and George Duke cutting drums tracks. Shortly after, my mom drove me to Ocean Way Studios to see JR record with Jon Anderson from Yes. I got to spend the day in the control room watching how these guys would talk to one another, watching them work on takes, and seeing how all that stuff would transpire. That was huge, JR was so generous and nice, he holds a special place in my heart. Gregg Bissonette, Jim Keltner, Terry Bozzio, Chad Wackerman, and Jeff Porcaro were always so nice, sweet, and very supportive to me as well. It was always special when I would run into those guys in the studios.

Go and meet people, you gotta go meet people and put yourself out there. Play for free, you don't have to get paid right now. Sometimes you're playing music that you don't really like, but you have got to get involved with as much stuff as you can. Get involved, some of it will stick and some of it won't.

MD: What did you learn from being around those guys.

JF: The work ethic. Those guys would put themselves into different situations every day. I get emails from people and messages on social media from people that want to move to LA and break into studio scene, and they want to know how to do it. But it's not a trade that you go to school for, then you get out of school, and you're guaranteed some jobs just because you're a good drummer. That doesn't mean you're going to get the job. We all know great players that never made a living doing it. And we all know guys that aren't so great and made a great living. There's no rhyme or reason to becoming successful.

My son is starting to play guitar and he's asking me the same questions. I tell him to go to gigs. Talk to the to the drummer that's loading his drums out, or talk to the bassist loading his bass rig in. Go and meet people, you gotta go meet people and put yourself out there. Play for free, you don't have to get paid right now. Sometimes you're playing music that you don't really like, but you have got to get involved with as much stuff as you can. Get involved, some of it will stick and some of it won't. But you need to experience all these different things to make you the player that you are eventually going to become. Hopefully all that will lead to a couple of job opportunities.

It was always cool walking around the NAMM show and seeing Vinnie and Jeff (or whomever) run into one another. The camaraderie all those guys had with their peers was amazing to see and experience. The brotherhood that went into it was so special. It was cool to see that these guys didn't seem to be in any sort of competition with each other, they had nothing to prove. I remember seeing that and enjoying seeing those relationships. I try to bring that to my fellow drummers and the guys from my age group now. I remember running into Abe in 2002 in New Orleans at some Super Bowl celebration concert. I was subbing for Adrian in No Doubt and Abe had been playing with Paul McCartney for about a year and had just gotten the Sting gig. I was so happy, genuinely excited, and blown away for him. I was buzzing, *where do you go from there?* Ironically, two years later I started working with Sting.

MD: How did the Sting gig come to you?

JF: The Sting gig came to me in 2004, I was getting off the road with A Perfect Circle for a while and I was trying to stay home and not do any heavy touring for a while because I had a young son. Towards the end of 2004, my manager called and said, "I got a call from Sting's office, they're looking for a drummer, and for whatever reason all fingers are pointing towards you." I wasn't expecting that. He had been on tour with a 12-piece band, and he wanted to go out in 2005 and rock! He wanted to do two guitars, bass, and drums, go heavy on the Police catalog, and take the gloves off. His manager, actually his A&R guy for years, Martin Kirshenbaum was a fan of mine and had seen me playing with different bands, and another person at his label also knew all about me. So I went down and met with Sting while he was on tour with Annie Lennox at the end of 2004, we talked for like 20 minutes about Vinnie, Stewart, Omar, punk rock, jazz, and songwriting… After 20-30 minutes, Sting says, "Well, you seem to know what you're talking about, I guess you've got the gig." I asked him, *'Don't I have to go through a big audition?'* But then I realized, I've had to audition guys, I've had to sit there and audition bass players, guitar players, and it sucks, *no one wants to do that*. After he said, "You've got the gig," then I realized, *oh shit, now I've really got to deliver, and I was kind of nervous.* About two months later we started rehearsals in Italy, and I was such a big Police fan and such a fan of Dominic Miller his longtime guitarist… I *knew* it was going to be OK, but because I got this gig without auditioning, and Sting and Dominic really didn't know much about me, it was a weird situation. Everyone in their sphere knew me, and they trusted that, and everyone was confident that I was going to pull it off, but it was still weird. I got there and we got off to a good start, but I was still a little scared— but an hour or two later it got better, it was great, and it felt really good, I was so relieved. Once you're there, there's a reason you're there, and Sting (for the most part) lets you do what you want, as long as it's not *too far out*. I watched it happen with another guy that was playing in the band around that time, it didn't last super long. The other drummer was new, and he was constantly

asking Sting, "What should I do here? What should I play there?" Once you get on a gig, there's a reason you are in the room, you should know what's right, no one shouldn't have to hold your hand. You need to be confident enough *not* to have to ask a bunch of questions. You need to have a good enough taste barometer on stuff to fit in pretty quickly. That being said, they accepted me into their musical world, and I was able to hang. It was great, we toured a bit in 2005 and then we took a long break.

During that long break, I got the opportunity to work for Nine Inch Nails. I knew them a little bit because A Perfect Circle's first tour in 2000 was opening the Nine Inch Nails for 2 ½ months. I knew Trent a little bit, and I was friends with some of the guys in the band, but they were in a bind because they were on tour and their drummer was having health problems. I went out to "fill in" for a couple shows and learned quickly that Nine Inch Nails was a lot more fun than I thought it was going to be. Trent asked me if I wanted to stay, and I said, *'Actually, yes, I do want to stay.'* Sting understood, he and I are on good terms. Everyone's got to work, and Sting gets it, he's had million guys in and out of his band, but I was really freaked out about upsetting him or offending him by leaving the band. But he said, "I get it, go do your thing, it's all good." He and I have remained friends, eventually Vinnie and Abe came back for a little bit, and then Vinnie came back full time, but what you must realize is Sting tours A LOT!

Sure, it's cool when someone says, "Do some Josh Freese stuff," but I don't really know what the hell that means, other than I'm gonna do what I would want to do hear. In those cases, I'm gonna approach something the way I would naturally approach it.

MD: I talked with Vinnie about that a while back.

JF: When Sting would take a month off, Vinnie would go out with Herbie Hancock or Jeff Beck. Then Sting would get a great one-off gig for some corporate event and would call me to do the one gig. The first time I did that, after not playing with him for a while, we did one rehearsal the day before the gig, and it was great. I did all my homework and halfway through the rehearsal, Sting realized that we didn't really need to rehearse, which was a big compliment to me. Then I wouldn't hear from him for a year or so, and he'd call me for another one-off corporate gig. To prepare, we would just do a long sound check from three until five and the gig would go great. He realized that they could just call me and didn't have to waste a day rehearsing and playing "Roxanne" and "Message in a Bottle" *again*! For a while, I would kind of dip in and out of his orbit, and in 2016 Vinnie wanted to come off the road, because (like I said) Sting NEVER stops!

Sting loves Vinnie, Vinnie can't do anything to bum Sting out, they just worship and value him. But they understand that some people don't want to be on tour *all the time*, so Sting would still occasionally call me to come back and do it full time. In 2016 I went back and did it full time until 2019. But there was a lot of touring out of the country, and I have a family at home. So it's not weird if he calls me or not, he's not pissed at me and I'm not pissed at him, it's all good. I just needed to not be in Europe for months at a time. I left again at the end of 2021 without anything major in the wings. Around that time I started playing with my friends in The Offspring. I had made records with them over time, but I started doing some touring with them at the end of 2021 and most of 2022.

You know what's funny? Both Sting and Nine Inch Nails are two artists that I worked with years ago and stopped, and then started up again years later. When I left NIN in 2009, it was because my wife and I were having our third child. I was the only one in the band with kids, we had two young boys and we were having a daughter, I needed to be off the road. I told Trent in advance with many months' notice that I just needed to stay home, take care of my family, and be around. Trent totally got it. He was sad to see me go, but he understood. Last year, after the Foo Fighters thing, Trent called me and asked if I would want to do Nine Inch Nails again, and I said sure. Both Sting and Nine Inch Nails were bands that I had put in time with, stopped, and then came back. Everything lined up, circumstance and schedule wise.

MD: How has the NIN gig evolved from when you were first doing it until now?

JF: Not a whole lot has changed. Trent Reznor has always been incredibly focused and driven, it's palpable. Being around him and seeing the way he works is pretty inspiring. Probably more so than most of the people I've worked with. I got to be honest, I've worked with some of the greatest artists in the music business, but there's something interesting about Trent Reznor. The way he does his thing, he's such a hard worker, and he's so dedicated to every aspect of everything. He was like that when I worked with him 20 years ago, and he's exactly the same now. Half the songs are the same because they're hits from past records. Now there's some new material and the production is different, but the way things are run and the level of everything that goes into it musically and visually (with the show) is the same. It's first class, seeing the show is like seeing *Cirque Du Soleil*, it's pretty amazing.

MD: What have you learned from working with Trent?

JF: Trent and I are similar; I always want to rehearse more than less. I want to make sure that I'm there an hour early. We're both very focused, driven, and professional in that regard. There's a lot of people that aren't like that. The first time I was around Trent was in 2000 when A Perfect Circle opened for NIN. I wasn't working with him, but I was around him a little bit. But in 2002, I worked with him in the studio to record drums on the infamous Tapeworm project, that is still unreleased. It was Trent, Maynard James Keenan, Atticus Ross, Danny Lohner, and me playing drums. That was the first time I ever saw a "lead singer" show up early to the studio, help mic the drums, and know how to work the board. Trent didn't just walk in at the last second and say, "Where am I singing?" "What room should I go in?" He was controlling the session. In essence, he was the producer, not just a singer waltzing in and saying, "OK let's do this because I gotta leave in an hour." He's there for every last minute, and that's really inspiring, he leads by example.

MD: You have played and recorded quite a bit with Danny Elfman, and I love the record *Big Mess* that you did with him, how did that come to you?

JF: My relationship with Danny is really cool. I have worked with him on and off over the years on some of his soundtrack stuff. But most of the soundtrack stuff is orchestral and he's not using a rock'n'roll drum setup or approach. It's interesting working

with him on his stuff because I've been a fan for a long time. In 2019, I was on the road with Sting and Danny's manager called me to record a couple new songs and do some weird festival in Tasmania or something. I told him that I would love to do it, time allowing.

At that point, I knew Danny a little bit from doing some soundtrack work here and there, but once I sat down with him to record these two new songs, we got along really well and had fun. We started talking in depth about his music and what he wanted to do with it, then the pandemic happened, and he started writing like crazy. During that time, it went from, "Hey I've got these two songs I want to release," to "I'm going to make a whole record." We started recording more stuff, he was really serious about masking and getting tested, so it was just me, an engineer, and him in the studio. It was bizarre, but we got a bunch of stuff done, and it was fun and insightful. It's always great to work with someone that is that talented, driven, hard-working, and focused (similar to Trent,) and at the same time, very human, and very cool.

He would actually ask me what I thought of a specific song. I'm thinking, *'Why is Danny Elfman asking me these questions, I'm the session drummer?* And that is usually the way I get treated. But he's very open and interested in other people's opinions, including mine. That was flattering and really cool. Getting to work with him on *Big Mess* was really gratifying and rewarding. The end result is pretty wild, and I'm really proud of it.

MD: What is the percentage of records that you do, that you are asked to be "Josh Freese" as opposed to just being a semi-anonymous drummer on a session?

JF: There used to be more examples of me being hired to be *a drum machine*, but the older I've gotten and the more I've made my little mark in the in the music world, the more I've been hired to be Josh Freese and not a drum machine. But that still happens, and that's fine. I signed up for it and if I'm if I'm being hired to play on someone's pop thing, I'm there to do what they want me to do (within reason.) I'd say the breakdown now is 50/50.

Depending on the project, some people are a little bit looser, and sometimes the music's a little more interesting. Other times, it's straight up (kind of) cookie cutter pop stuff, so it could really be anybody playing drums. But maybe they're hiring me because I'm going to get the job done quicker than the guy right down the hall, or I've got a relationship with the producer, and he likes hiring me.



But one thing that's nice is people still reference the same things to get a vibe. Someone might say, "In the bridge, think Ringo all the way, and I'll listen to it and think, *'Oh yeah, I get what they're saying.'* Someone might say, "This is dying for a big Bonham halftime thing," or "This is a Stewart Copeland thing," and I know exactly what they're talking about. I'm still speaking the same language as the musicians and producers in the studio.

Sure, it's cool when someone says, "Do some Josh Freese stuff," *but I don't really know what the hell that means,* other than I'm gonna do what I would want to do hear. In those cases, I'm gonna approach something the way I would naturally approach it. What I'll do with some people is I'll do some takes and as soon as we have some things that sound good, I'll say, *'I can do*

more for you guys, just let me know what you want more or less of? I've given you what I would like to hear if I was the producer, the songwriter, or the listener. I've done everything that I would naturally do on this track, now you tell me what you like and what you don't like.' Sometimes they'll say it's perfect, let's move on. Or they'll say, "We love when you do that one fill at the end of the song, can you do more of that?" Or someone might like the vibe but want it a little bit simpler. It's always changing, but the older I get, the more I get asked to play like me, *(whatever that means.)*

MD: Are you a first take guy? If not, what is usually your best take, and how many takes is too many?

JF: I think the days of having to do 15 or 20 takes are gone. It's been ages since I've been asked to do that. Sure, there's something fun and spirited about saying, *'That was it!'* But I usually like to do a few more just for safety measures. Even if the people in the room think that we got it after one take, I'll ask them for *permission* to do another take or two. I always want to make sure that all the bases are covered, I would hate to leave after one take and the artist or producer discovers later that we should've had Josh try the tom thing on the bridge.

It's easier now to get takes that people can live with Pro Tools compared to tape, you used to really have to commit to a take, and after I left there was not a whole lot of changing that could be done. Now, I can leave a session and they can change this and that, and use the fill from the bridge to open the song… There's a million different ways someone can tailor a drum track. It depends on the track and the producer.

MD: You broke in right at the end of tape and at the beginning of Pro Tools, right?

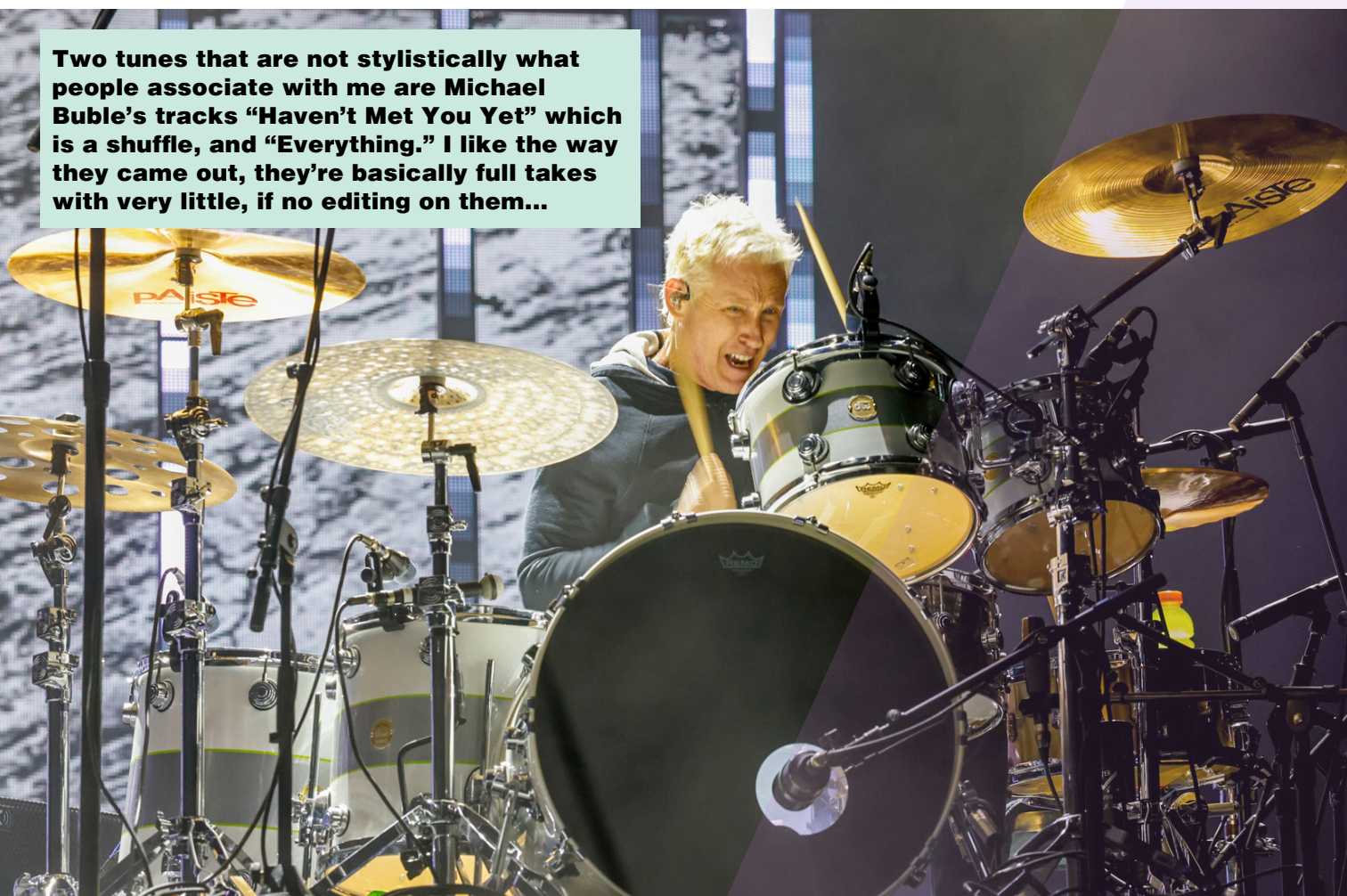
JF: Yeah, I did about five years of recording on tape, but I understand the evolution to Pro Tools.

MD: All things being equal, do you have a preference?

JF: I flip-flop a little. It's like that conversation of, was it better when you had to wait until Friday night to watch *Jaws* at 8:00 on NBC? It was exciting because you saw it once and on Monday you talked about it with your friends at school. *Is that better?* Or is it better to be able to watch any movie ever made, whenever you want? There's something special about that, but that also (kind of) devalues it. If you love Snickers bars and you eat a mountain of them every day, after a week you're gonna get sick of Snickers bars.

There are things that were really great about tape. Not only does it sound amazing (if you know what you're doing,) but having to commit to something. There's something to be said for having to say, 'That's it!' That used to separate the men from the boys. Now, I've got friends that are great songwriters and producers that will say, "I'd love to hire you Josh, but the young guy that runs my Pro Tools rig is an OK drummer. He'll go in and play a couple takes, chop it up and fix it, and I've got my take. He's free and he's right here, it's easy. So the guy or girl doing it, isn't really a drummer, they're an engineer that just happened to be there, but they can play well enough to chop it up. Like I said, the tape separated the men from the boys, and you really had to deliver. Now, you can get away with anything. When I was working with Slash and Ian Astbury he had a great joke, Ian said, "What did the Pro Tools engineer say to the band? That was horrible guys, come on in, we're done."

MD: Give me some records that you feel show your musical and



Two tunes that are not stylistically what people associate with me are Michael Buble's tracks "Haven't Met You Yet" which is a shuffle, and "Everything." I like the way they came out, they're basically full takes with very little, if no editing on them...

drumming skills in full force.

JF: There's lots of records I played on that I don't care about hearing again because the project wasn't very interesting and I literally did it because the producer asked me and he was a friend, or it was good money, and this is my job. Then there's things that artistically and creatively, I have more of a voice in. There's Vandals records I listen back to and think *this is really cool,* and there's Vandals songs I skip over because I didn't like the way we did it, and I still don't like it.

There are a lot of great musicians that can't take a compliment, they are *always* saying, "I hated that. That's sucked!" But there's certain things that I'll take the compliment on and be proud of. But for every one of those, there's 20 things that I did, and I don't like the drums.

MD: So what are the ones that stick out to you?

JF: I like the first three A Perfect Circle records, *Mer De Noms*, *13th Step*, and *Emotive*, and especially the first two. I think a lot of that stuff is great. I like the way my drums are being represented, the music is something that I had a big part of, I had a hand in it from the ground up, and I'm not just walking in and being told to play two and four and really simple. It's semi progressive, but it's still groove oriented, and I think some of the music is interesting and cool. I listen to the way the drums came out on those tracks and I'm really proud. At the time, I thought the third record was a copout because it's a covers record, but now I like it. What we didn't do is just take a song and do a slightly different, faster, version. We (kind of) used Devo's cover of "Satisfaction" as the measuring stick. When we covered a song, the only thing you're going to recognize is the lyrical content, we made the covers our own and completely different. There's a lot of stuff on *Emotive* that's pretty interesting. We did a cover of the Fear song "Let's Have a War," and when you listen to the drums, it sounds like some weird drum and bass, electronica, jungle, drum stuff with a lot of delays and effects. But it's not that at all, there's no delays happening. I had a 20" kick, a small snare, and a 12" hi-hat in a small, pretty tight, room; and I played along to the track, but I didn't play one specific pattern. I was all over the map. Then I did the same thing again, and it became this weird up-tempo funky chatter of drumming, then we panned them hard right and left. It sounds like all this crazy programming, but it's just two drum takes, one in the right speaker and one in the left speaker, the way it came out is really cool. I'm really proud of that one, it's pretty bizarre.

Some of the Vandals records like *Live Fast Diarrhea* and *The Quicken*ing are great example of no click track and first takes. At the time, I thought it was weird that I was letting it go down like that, but whatever… Our guitar player, Warren, produces those records he and I were cutting guitar and drums together, and he said, "Who cares if it if it speeds up a little bit, slows down, or if you drop a stick, let's just go for it." Most of those takes are first takes, and there's some ridiculous stuff. The snare drum sounds like crap, the fills are kind of sloppy, but in a cool and refreshing way that's not perfectly gridded out and nothing is fixed. At the time, I wondered why I was gonna let those be the takes. But I listen back to it now, 30 years later, and I hear certain parts and think, *'That's got a great spirit and vibe, I'm really happy with the way that it came out.'*

Patrick Wilson (drummer from Weezer) and I were recently talking about music and drum tracks today, and he said that he thought it sounded like everything today was in "ALL CAPS!" And I thought that was a great way of saying it. That goes back to my *eating a mountain of Snickers bars every day,* analogy. After a while, *who cares*.

MD: I wanted to ask you about the Mike Ness record *Cheating at Solitaire*, and the Social Distortion record *Hard Times and Nursery Rhymes*. I love those records, and you sound so perfect on Mike's music.

JF: I need to listen those again. For whatever reason, I shouldn't say I forgot about those records, but I never really listened to them, *and I should*. I like Mike Ness and I like Social Distortion. I look at Social Distortion almost like the West Coast Ramones. The Ramones are one of my favorite bands, and although they play the same three chords and they're singing about the same stuff, their songs are all really different. I like them all, I wanna hear them all, and they don't all just sound like the same song to me. Social Distortion's manager (Michael) said to me a while back, "You wanna know what's great about Social Distortion, it's like comfort food. It's simple, it's good, you know what you're gonna get, and you love it!" I've always loved what Mike has done, and I need to go back and visit those records again. I was really excited to work with Mike Ness and happy and proud to have my name attached to those records.

I remember thinking, 'What the hell are you calling me for? If Jeff and Steve Jordan didn't play it the way he liked, you guys are never going to get what you want.' Those two guys are two of my favorite drummers and two guys that would knock a track out of the park.

MD: Who is the artist that you were most surprised by when you got the call?

JF: John Fogerty, and it's a good story. 35 years ago in 1993, John's assistant called me, I was 20 years old, and I had green hair. I was touring that summer with Paul Westerberg, and I was home on a break. They asked me to come to the studio because John had a song that he had cut with Jeff Porcaro. This was only eight or nine months after Jeff passed away, and John had a song that he cut with Jeff, and he wasn't happy with it. Then they hired Steve Jordan to track it, and John wasn't happy with that either. So they asked me to come in and work on it? I remember thinking, *'What the hell are you calling me for? If Jeff and Steve Jordan didn't play it the way he liked, you guys are never going to get what you want.'* Those two guys are two of my favorite drummers and two guys that would knock a track out of the park. But I was just young enough and up for any challenge. When I got there, they had two six-foot stacks of Ampex 456 two-inch tape, and each tape had three takes of the same song on it. The song was not rocket science; I could have taught my wife to play it. I looked at the stacks of tape and thought, *'Oh dude…'* I was freaked out. I went outside for a minute, and the engineer says, "Hey man, just go and do your thing, none of us really know what he's looking for, only he knows. Don't try and play like Jeff or Steve, play like you, it's either going to work or it's not, but we're happy to have you down here and we'll have a great time." John was playing guitar in the room and the great bassist Bob Glaub was playing bass, we're tracking, and it felt good. John seemed to be happy, and I went home. That night his assistant calls and asks me to come back tomorrow and do another track. I was feeling really good about myself. I went

back the next day and did another track. That felt good too. The guys seemed to be having a good time, and John was really nice to me. I'm a fairly good read on people, and John worked on that record for a long, long, time. Every once in a while, I would call them and ask if either of my songs was still in the running, because the record still hadn't come out. When the record came out, I wasn't on either track, but I wasn't bummed. I felt like if Jeff didn't play the way they wanted, and Steve Jordan didn't do it the way they wanted, if they liked me, I was probably doing something *wrong*.

MD: That was for the *Blue Moon Swamp* record, and I have heard that same story from nearly every LA session drummer.

JF: Amazingly, once every five years or so, John's people call me to do a tour, and I have never been able to do it because I am previously booked, but they still call.

MD: Any other tracks that you want to call to people's attention?

JF: Two tunes that are not stylistically what people associate with me are Michael Buble's tracks "Haven't Met You Yet" which is a shuffle, and "Everything." I like the way they came out, they're basically full takes with very little, if no editing on them, the players are great, and the songs are great. I'm really proud of the way they both feel. Those songs are the polar opposite of (another record that I'm proud of,) Suicidal Tendencies *The Art of Rebellion*, which we did on tape with very little fixing. That's another record that I'm really proud of.

I'd much rather hear someone play something simple, good, and spirited; then try to impress with something that's more complicated and ends up sounding convoluted, and in the end, is not as good. I call it the *grilled cheese experience*. Which means, I would rather have the world's greatest grilled cheese sandwich on the world's greatest bread with just the right amount of butter and crispiness, then have some chef make this convoluted dish with 30 different ingredients and all this weird sauce. Sure, maybe they went to culinary school and maybe this took a long time to create and prepare— but there is nothing better than a great grilled cheese sandwich.

MD: Is the session world as dead as everyone claims, or is it just a passing of the torch?

JF: That's a great question. Obviously, there's tons of people making tons of records all the time, but I think there's two sides to the coin. Anyone can make a record in their bedroom at home. But is it going to sound like *Aja* by Steely Dan? No. But how many kids would care about *Aja* right now?

A bandmate of mine in The Vandals was talking about his daughter listening to music, and how he thinks this music is the worst crap he has ever heard. I started laughing and said, "That's the way it's supposed to be, that's the way we were with our parents, and how our parents were torturing our grandparents with The Beatles." Our grandparents hated The Beatles, and our parents thought we were nuts for the music that we were listening to. Now we're hearing things and we're convinced its shit, *but maybe it's not*.

I loved having Dave as a bandleader. I truly respect him so much as a drummer first and foremost. To me, he's a drummer first and everything else is second. I've listened to him on all the great records he's played drums on more than I've listened to any Foo Fighters stuff. It really was cool being in a band where the leader is a phenomenal drummer that you respect... that's really fun.

For the older generation of guys, of which I snuck in on the last train out of the station, people were doing a lot of sessions and getting paid a lot of money, and those days are over. I can remember sleeping on the couch at recording studios because I was working on someone's record super late, and I was scheduled to do a completely different session the next morning. I simply did not want to drive home from Hollywood to Orange County at 2am and have to come back at 9:00 in the morning. But it was fun, and I liked it. If I didn't want to work that much I wouldn't have worked that much, but I loved the opportunity to work that much. But it got to a point when there was a lot of shit music that was getting signed. I was playing on a lot of stuff that wasn't great, and I would be driving home thinking, "Yeah, I made a lot of money today, but the music I'm playing is a bummer and it doesn't feel that good. Anyone could be playing drums because they're going to chop it up anyway. Truthfully, it started feeling kind of gross. The records that I get called to play on today, and the people that I work with, the quality is better because not every jackass is getting a record deal anymore. Yes, there are tons of people making records, and maybe they're not that great, but the ones that aren't that great probably can't afford to hire top tier session guys anyway. So the stuff that I do now is a little better quality overall. However, there is much less money involved, so that's where the live gigs come in. I tell guys today that if they are doing half as many sessions as I am, *they're not working*. For a long time there were a lot of guys that were kidding themselves saying that there were still sessions going on.

MD: Is that why so many guys now are taking road gigs?

JF: Yeah, I think that that everyone has (kind of) had to make a shift. I don't think that older session guys are going on the road because they *want* to be on tour for months at a time. But at the same time, there's something to be said for playing live, we all like play live. But as we get older, have wives and kids, and all that stuff, we don't want to be on tour all the time. But it's funny, I'm not on tour *all the time,* friends of mine think I'm gone all the time, and I'm really not. I go in and out of town, and sometimes I'm gone for long stretches, but I'm home a lot too, you'd be surprised.

MD: That's why NIN seems like a perfect gig because Trent has all his soundtrack work, and it doesn't seem like he goes out for really long stretches of time.

JF: Exactly. That being said, Trent has got six kids all pretty young, and all under one roof. The whole movie industry was waiting for him to start scoring films, and he was constantly putting them off. Then, when he started with his friend David Fincher, the first film he scored was *The Social Network*, and he won an Academy Award for it. After that, he did David Fincher's next film *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, and now he's busy doing soundtracks. I like to say that he's busy enough raising six kids and sitting at home scoring films and winning Academy Awards that he doesn't have to be on the road. But Nine Inch Nails is his baby, that's his identity, he hires people to fill in the blanks and play the instruments on tour, but he said it best. Nine Inch Nails is a solo project, but he gave it a name to hide behind, and he loves doing it.

MD: We have a lot of pictures in this article of you playing many different gigs, and no two sets are exactly the same. Do you change drum sets and cymbal set-ups for specific gigs and sessions?

JF: Not unless it's a really specialized thing, like if someone is going for a vintage real wide open drum thing, or they're really specific about something. It's not like one day I've got a Ringo set up and the next day I've got a Danny Carey setup. I never go super far left or right it's always kind of in the middle. From there, depending on the gig, I might take away a few cymbals or add a few cymbals. I might add a second side snare or maybe put a floor tom on my left because the music is really tom heavy and I'm using two hands on certain tom patterns. But for the most part, I'd say 85% of my setup stays the same, then I'll just add a few bells and whistles depending on the project.

I've been with DW drums my entire life; I've been a DW endorser since I was a teenager. I don't have to be a gear guy because I know what sounds good, and I know what works. I haven't had to chase gear because my drums always sound great, I'm not the guy that is out on tour looking for that magic snare drum on my day off. Trust me, occasionally I might click around on Reverb looking for a vintage this or that, but I'm not constantly doing it. I have a bunch of what I know works and it's always going to work. I'm just as involved as a father, a songwriter, an all-around musician, and a family guy— I've got other things to take up my time and money other than searching for *another* great snare drum. Meanwhile, I've got some really crummy snare drums that sound great too! I'm not a "collector," although I've collected a good number of drums throughout my career. I've got, maybe, 30-35 snare drums, I don't even know.

I was talking to Joey Waronker a while back and he had just gotten a new vintage *something*. And I realized that except for an old orange sparkle Gretsch kit that my dad bought me years ago, I didn't have any vintage gear. So that day I went into Pro Drum and bought a vintage silver sparkle Ludwig kit because I felt guilty that all my peers had vintage gear.

MD: What's your favorite snare drum?

JF: I used to own some more extreme drums, but I don't know if I even own a piccolo snare anymore. And I don't own a 10" deep marching snare. I asked a photographer friend, what is your favorite camera, what camera I should get? And his answer was interesting. He said, "The best camera you have, is whatever camera you have on you at that time," and I understood what he was saying. When I was putting together a kit for recent Vandals gig, I had four or five snare drums at my house and I grabbed the one sounds that sounds the best, that had a head that looked like it wasn't about to break, and that sounded good at the time.

I do have an an older 1970s engraved Black Beauty that sounds great, and over the pandemic I bought three of the Paiste Spirit of 2002 snares. I own four of them now. I think they are special for a few different reasons. Not only do they sound great for the kind of music that I'm playing, but they're also loud as hell, they speak well, they cut, and they look great. But I like the story behind them. I know they are not just melted down cymbals, there's other stuff that goes into it. But the fact that some of those cymbals, and you can get all Zen about it, there's the sweat and time of those drummer's cymbals in those drums, and all the energy from those drummers, famous or not, is inside each drum. That's special and cool, I like that.

MD: So I have to ask you about the Foo Fighter situation.

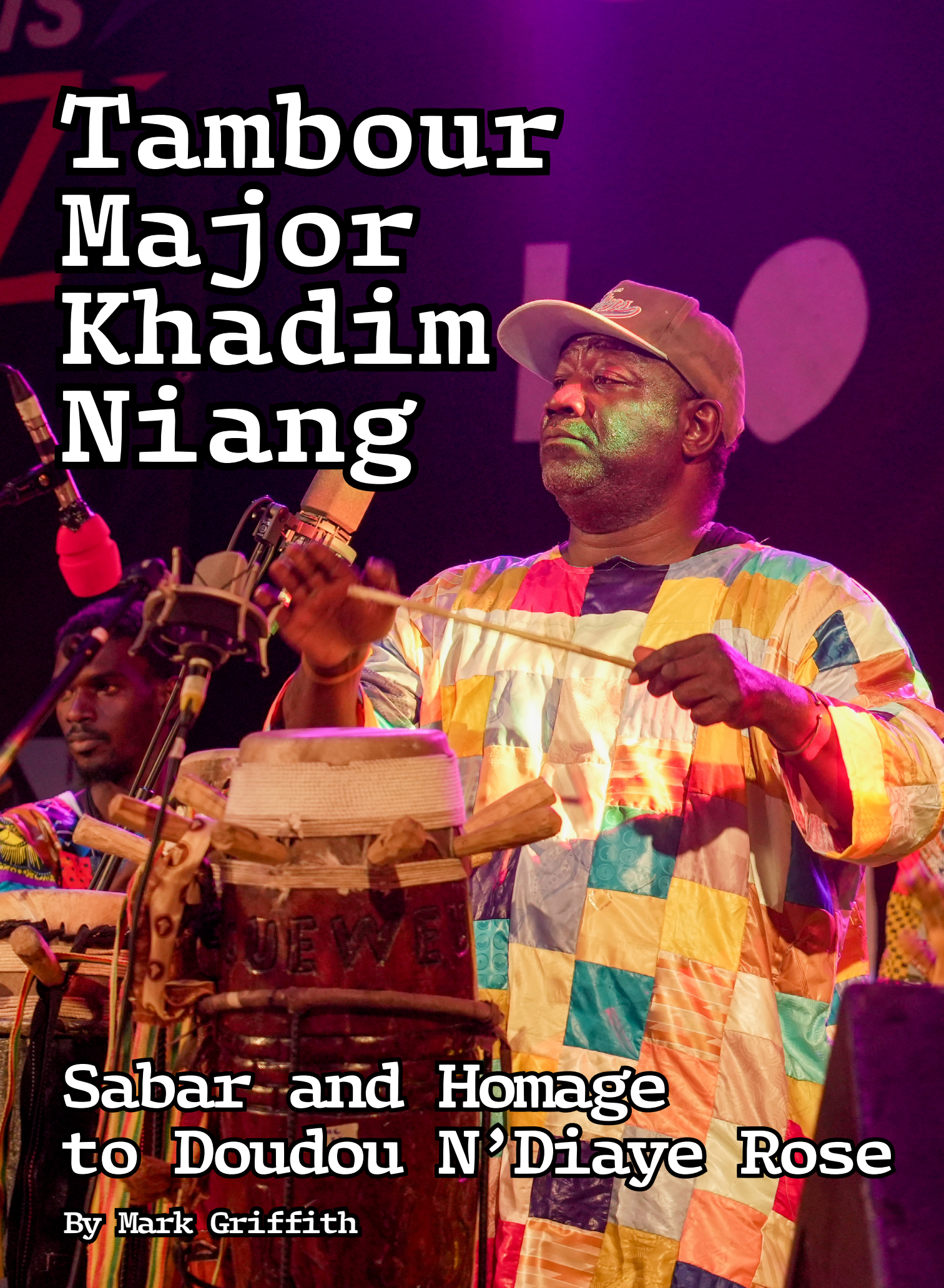
JF: I know… However, the Foo Fighters are such a big, mainstream band that everything I say gets taken out of context, reposted, and blown out of proportion. People created headlines from one quick, simple comment I made on a podcast not long ago, it's crazy. I've got to be careful about what I say about it. But I've got a lot to say about it and I've been just trying to figure out how and when, to go about really articulating it.

I have a couple small theories, but I can't really go into them right now. I did really enjoy the two years I spent with those guys however, and they were good to me… until they weren't. I liked playing with them. And I loved having Dave as a bandleader. I truly respect him so much as a drummer first and foremost. To me, he's a drummer first and everything else is second. I've listened to him on all the great records he's played drums on more than I've listened to any Foo Fighters stuff. It really was cool being in a band where the leader is a phenomenal drummer that you respect… that's really fun. Off stage, we could sit around and geek out on Lars' drumming on …*And Justice For All* and those early Metallica records, talking about what was so unique and cool about it. Then we'd turn around and geek out on Buddy Rich and then Bill Stevenson and Black Flag, etc.

We basically came from the same era too and could relate to one another. But I enjoyed being around those guys, they were generous and good to me… and *THAT'S* what makes the whole thing even more of a mystery. I think I'm a pretty good read on people, and I did not see that coming. One day it was nothing but laughs, we're on stage and Dave's looking at me every night like, "You're killing it dude!!!" And then it was just… *over*.

The day it went down I was hanging out on a day off with A Perfect Circle and the Primus guys. Everyone was in shock and asking me what the hell happened. I just remember thinking that I was really grateful to be out there on tour with my friends and with a great crew… playing music I liked with people that I've had a long history with.





Tambour Major Khadim Niang

Sabar and Homage to Doudou N'Diaye Rose

By Mark Griffith



As drummers we are always hearing about our connection to Africa, and how the roots of what we do as drummers ultimately leads back to Africa. The African connection to drumming has been emphasized by popular drummers from Art Blakey to Ginger Baker, to Stewart Copeland making pilgrimages (of sorts) to Africa to speak and play with, and learn from, African tribal drummers. However, in the 50-year history of *Modern Drummer*, there have never been any interviews with any African tribal drummers, *until now*.

In 1992, I first heard the recording *Djabote* by Senegalese Master Drummer, composer, and bandleader Doudou N'Diaye Rose. He was the recognized living, modern master of Senegalese musical (and cultural) tradition called Sabar. Rose was one of the most revered and respected African drummers in modern history. He was the Senegalese Buddy Rich, Max Roach, Ringo Starr, Papa Jo Jones, John Bonham, and Baby Dodds all wrapped into one person. *Djabote* is a fascinating recording of Rose's band of 50 drummers and an 80-piece female choir. It is a monumental, artistic, and cultural, document of beautiful music. In his life, Rose performed or recorded with The Rolling Stones, Miles Davis, Peter Gabriel, and Bill Bruford, and his drum recordings have been used on recordings by many artists including Nine Inch Nails. There was even a feature film made about Rose in 1993, also called *Djabote*.

I always wanted to interview Doudou N'Diaye Rose, but he died in 2015. I thought my chance to learn from this master of drumming, and take his words to the masses had disappeared, until last year. In 2025, I received a recording by French drummer Raphaël Pannier called *Live in Saint Louis, Senegal*. The record featured a Senegalese Sabar drumming group led by Khadim Niang, and featured a song called "Hommage to Doudou N'Diaye Rose." I contacted Pannier and a great deal of communication followed. Finally, with the help of Raphaël Pannier, Ann Braithwaite, and Khadim's cousin (who is a Senegalese cultural ambassador,) a three continent, multi-language interview with Khadim Niang was arranged.

After some initial technical problems, I quickly learned that Master Drummer Khadim Niang was a prize student of Doudou N'Diaye Rose, was carrying on the Senegalese tradition of Sabar, leading his own drumming group, and teaching in Senegal. This was going to be a once in a lifetime opportunity for all of us to learn directly from African Master Drummer, and disciple of Doudou N'Diaye Rose, Khadim Niang.

MD: What is Sabar?

KN: Sabar is the name of a family of seven drums, a family of rhythms, a dance, the name of a culture, and the name of a kind of spirituality and healing. The same word encapsulates all these concepts.

MD: How old is the tradition of Sabar? How far back does it reach?

KN: Before the kingdoms, which means approximately 3000 BC.

MD: Khadim, are you what is called a "Master Drummer"?

KN: Yes, I am considered a Master Drummer. But the correct term is Tambour Major. Becoming a Tambour Major is something that you learn, it's not a grade. It's an entire curve of work that you start developing as a child. I started studying with my uncle and developing when I was seven years old. Drumming is a family griot tradition. Initially, I learned from my uncle; and when I was 19, I was selected into the band of the biggest Master Drummer of them all, Doudou N'Diaye Rose. I was in his band for three years. After that, the elders deemed that I knew enough drum secrets to elect me as Tambour Major. Being a Tambour Major is not only about playing drums, it's about the entire knowledge of the culture and the secrets of Sabar drumming.

MD: You use the term "secrets," how many secrets of Sabar drumming are there?



KN: Too many to list or even talk about. Being a Tambour Major is linked to everything that is mystical or spiritual. There is a layer of knowledge that is mandatory. You must know the differences between all the spiritual rhythms. We use different spiritual rhythms in different spiritual situations. For example, there are certain rhythms when you get baptized, and there are certain rhythms when there is a wedding. Any event that is linked with spirituality has different rhythms, there are different rhythms and different drum songs to go with every ceremony.

MD: What is the difference between a Master Drummer from Senegal, and a Master Drummer from Ghana, Mali, or another African nation?

KN: Obviously there are different traditions in Mali, Gambia, Mauritania, and Guinea. I have done the work to travel and learn all of them. There are commonalities in all the traditions, but the most common aspect is the djembe. There are common rhythms in all West African music. All West African musicians are able to communicate and use the same cultural codes and rhythms played on the djembe. However, Sabar is the music and culture of Senegal, and it is very different.

MD: What did you learn as a student of Doudou N'Diaye Rose?

KN: I entered the band in 1997 and stayed until 1999, I was very young. I learned the secret rhythms and I learned how to compose from Doudou N'Diaye Rose. It was very powerful for me to learn how to compose. Doudou N'Diaye Rose had

Sabar is the name of a family of seven drums, a family of rhythms, a dance, the name of a culture, and the name of a kind of spirituality and healing.

an amazing talent and an amazing gift for composition, his compositions are magical. He would compose for all the musicians and that inspired me. In his band, I learned how to play with four, eight, or sixteen drummers and all the rules of putting all the rhythms together in large bands.

Doudou N'Diaye Rose was the person that created different rhythms for the nation of Senegal. For example, he composed the national anthem for the national news on TV. He composed music for many different contexts. Composing music for different contexts and creating rhythms for specific situations are two big things that I learned from Doudou N'Diaye Rose.

Doudou brought Sabar outside of Senegal to the whole world, and it is now recognized worldwide. Japan recently created a celebration for Doudou because Japan has a lot of sacred drums and rhythms as well. There is a big connection between Sabar and society. Doudou's generosity and social work was outstanding. One day he noticed that there were 20 drummers missing from a rehearsal because they had made a pilgrimage to Mecca. For Muslim's that is a very important step, so he funded their trip to Mecca. That's the kind of thing he would do. Improving the social situation was very important to him because Sabar and music has a component of bringing people together, that social aspect of music is an important part of why music exists.

MD: Tell us about Sabar music, and the instruments that you use in Sabar?

KN: Sabar is a is a big word that includes many different components. First, Sabar is a family of seven different drums:

N'der, Thiol, Khine, M'beung M'beung, Tungune, Talmbat and Gorong. One of those drums was actually created by Doudou. Second, is the important mystical and spiritual aspect of the Sabar tradition.

The number seven is represented everywhere in Sabar. There are seven different pegs that help you tune the drum, you have seven different strings that help tension the drum, there are seven different pieces that make the drum, and there are seven different materials used in making the drum. This spiritual and mystical aspect of the number seven is very important and helps define Sabar.

I learned Sabar through the griot tradition from my elders. The griot system has passed down rhythms to me from my great grandparents, great great grandparents, and so on. It has gone on for many generations. Within Sabar, the depth of the learning process is extensive. I had to learn so much and so many different rhythms beginning as a kid.

After the family of drums, and the spiritual component of Sabar is the lifestyle and the culture that we live within. At first, Sabar is a means of communication, a language. There is a fascinating relationship between the Wolof language and Sabar rhythms. We teach rhythms with language, and it's how we communicate from village to village. Even today I am asked to announce things within the village. If there is a death or a wedding, someone will come to me and ask me to make the announcement using the appropriate rhythm of Sabar so everyone would know what has happened. But Sabar is also a way to communicate from a living person to something beyond the living. Sabar contains the spirituality of communicating beyond the living.

The next part of Sabar is the Sabar dances which are based on the different rhythms of Sabar. These dances have names like, Badambe, Thiep bou Dieng, M'beng M'beng, Wangu, and Wallou Wallou. The dances and the rhythms are totally linked.

MD: How did you adapt Sabar to jazz and Raphaël's music?

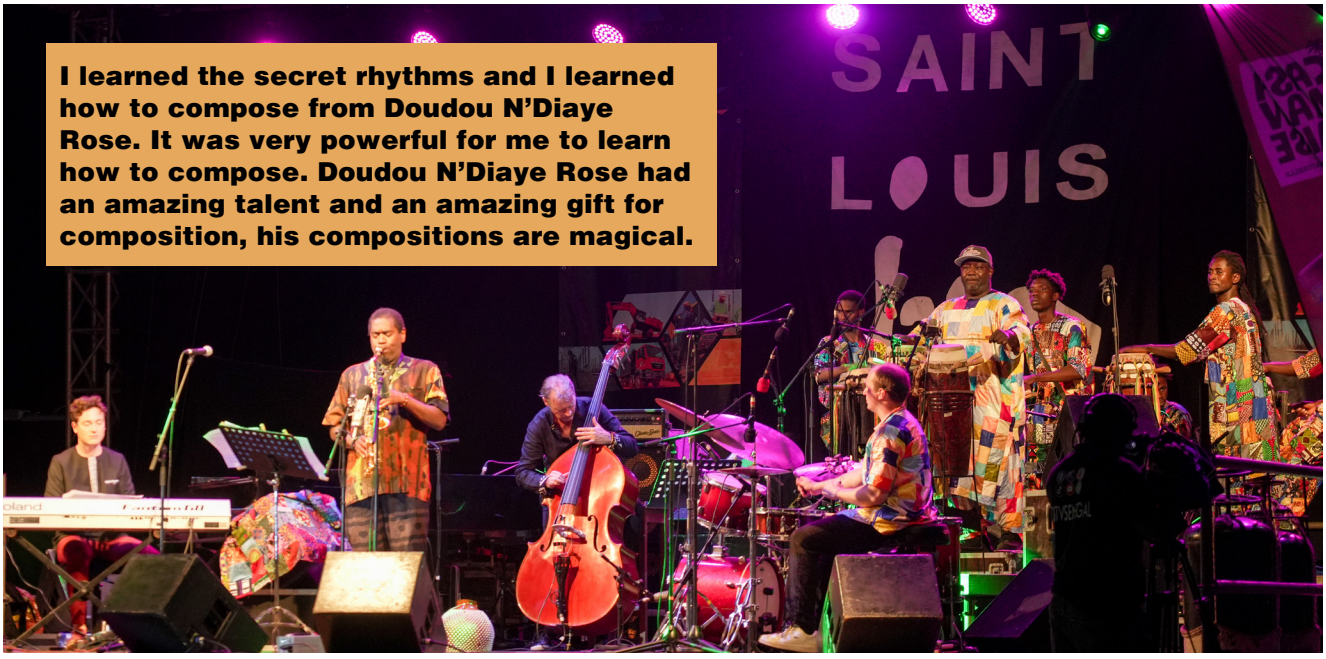
KN: I studied his music first. I have heard jazz music previously.

Being a Tambour Major is linked to everything that is mystical or spiritual. There is a layer of knowledge that is mandatory. You must know the differences between all the spiritual rhythms.

Importantly, beginning in 1991 we have had a jazz festival in Saint Louis, Senegal every year. I have been exposed to jazz on an international level. I collaborated with Steve Coleman in 1996 and with Wallace Roney in 2010. Steve Coleman had been working with Cuban percussionists and he brought them to Saint Louis. I played alone with Steve, and Wallace. However, this project was different because we didn't want anybody to direct the whole thing. Raphaël and I wanted a real exchange, so we proceeded very differently. We had to adapt for each tune, and there were different challenges for each tune.

The first time I met Raphaël was in 2023. He came to Senegal by himself, and we played together. It was kind of a test to see if he and I would be comfortable with the project. We discovered that we might be able to build something, to communicate, and to create music together. The first challenge for me was to understand what type of drummer, composer, and arranger Raphaël was. I asked my band to rely on my experience as a





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Master, as a drummer who had been exposed to jazz, and as someone who had already participated in a jazz context. I asked my band to listen and be extra aware of the musical directions I gave. I asked my band to rely on me to manage and adapt to create new music. For example, we had not experienced the dynamics, the new rhythmic cycles, or the way we could interact with the soloists. That was all a very new concept for us, and we worked on that together.

We proceeded very differently for each tune. "Lonely Woman" was Raphaël's arrangement and I suggested new rhythms to play on top of it. My imagination and experience as a composer told me to add a layer of percussion on top of that song.

"Naima" was very different because I sent Raphaël a bunch of pretty complicated rhythms. The first rhythm that I suggested was for the introduction. It was something that no one in Raphaël's group could understand (not even saxophonist Yosvany Terry who is very experienced in Cuban percussion and African culture.) So, we had to simplify it for them. In Sabar, we have a rhythmic concept where we don't really have a "one," rhythm is turning all the time. For that rhythm specifically, I started singing it and simplified it for them until it was clear.

MD: Is there such a thing as the feeling of "swing" or "groove" in Sabar?

KN: No, I don't know what the feeling of "swing" relates to, I have never heard that word.

MD: How about the traditional swing rhythm-pattern on the ride cymbal of spang-a-lang?

KN: Of course, that rhythm is in our music. In Sabar, some of the drums have that rhythmic role, that exact same pattern is played on a drum called the talmbat. The talmbat's role is the bass and it drives his ensemble. The second-best drummer in the band plays a drum called the M'beung M'beung, the M'beung M'beung is the click, they call it "Mr. Click" and its pattern always lands on the beat. The rhythm of the jazz ride cymbal is similar to the rhythm and the role of the Dun Dun. The Dun Dun is a set of three big drums that are put on the floor and played with two sticks, they also have a melodic component within their patterns. We play the Dun Dun patterns in the same way as (and similarly to) the jazz ride cymbal pattern. To me, the relationship between the Talmbat, the M'beung M'beung, and the Dun Dun in the Sabar group, is similar to the very specific roles of time, the upright bass, and the ride cymbal, in jazz.

MD: Do you relate to such rhythmic feelings as pushing or dragging a rhythm?

KN: The aspects of rhythmic push and pull relate to the way we answer each other within terms of rhythm and time.

MD: What do you call it when the music is feeling really good, and everything is flowing perfectly?

KN: We really don't have a word for that.

MD: What would you like to teach drum set players, and music lovers of the world, about Sabar?

... we had not experienced the dynamics, the new rhythmic cycles, or the way we could interact with the soloists. That was all a very new concept for us, and we worked on that together.

KN: There are different concepts of time and feeling. Those concepts are part of the secrets of Sabar. I think that drummers could come and learn Sabar to develop a better sense of elasticity within the time. Drummers should feel rhythms inside their body. Because of the relationship between the rhythm and dance in Sabar, rhythm must be anchored deep inside of the body.

MD: Do you ever listen to the drum set players from around the world?

KN: Yes, but I don't know any of their names.

MD: In my musical development, I have listened Mustapha Tettey Addy from Ghana, Doudou N'Diaye Rose, popular musicians like Fela, Tony Allen, Salif Kieta and Youssou N'Dour, and to your playing with Raphael Pannier on your record

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together, but what other African musicians should I be listening to?

KN: Mor Thiam, Babou N'Gom, and M'Baye Gueye Faye, are all musicians that I enjoy listening to.

MD: Are there any concerns or issues with putting sacred Sabar music on record?

KN: No, we protect ourselves from problems by playing specific rhythms every morning. Those sacred rhythms ask the evil spirits to stay away and protect us against the possible problems.

MD: What have you learned from playing with musicians like Raphaël Pannier, Steve Coleman, and Wallace Roney?

KN: Their approach to music is very different from ours. Sometimes it's difficult to intellectualize and learn new things because our two learning processes are so different. However, playing with other musicians brings me a lot of openness, I am very open to new music, and I have just started composing a new tune just for Raphael and us to play together.

MD: Do you have any advice for American musicians or drummers in general?

KN: I invite all musicians to discover Sabar. I really like getting inside of musical traditions and I invite people to learn about the traditional instruments. Don't only learn for the drum set but dig into rhythms with traditional influence.

MD: What does playing music mean to you?

KN: Music is my whole life. If I didn't play music I would be stressed, and my life would be lacking something. Music is my whole purpose in life. I always dreamed about becoming a great Master Drummer (Tambour Major) and I always idolized Doudou N'Diaye Rose. I wanted to be like him. Trying to accomplish that goal brings me immense happiness and joy.

MD: Do you still practice, and what do you practice?

KN: I practice and research to create new compositions. My desire is always to compose new rhythms. I invent new rhythms by myself and then I call two other drummers from my band. Together, we establish and refine the rhythms and compositions. I practice the process of composition.

MD: What does your band practice?

KN: I am a master griot in my village, and I teach at my own Academy. At the Academy we have formal lessons three times a week. But with my band, they already know the repertoire, so we don't *need* to rehearse. But we play every day. If we want to learn new compositions, that will come naturally at some point during the day. But there is no formal time to rehearse.



Raphaël Pannier: Breaking Down Borders

By Mark Griffith

Last year, Raphaël Pannier released his recording *Live in Saint Louis, Senegal*. When I first listened to it, I liked it because it was something new, the combination of a jazz quartet and an African Sabar drumming group was something that I had never heard before. But I didn't know how much it would change the next six months of my life. As I wrote in the introduction of Khadim Niang's interview, my 34-year interest in Doudou N'Diaye Rose stemmed from his record *Djabote,* and since his death in 2015, I figured that any pathway in learning more about his drumming tradition had died with him. Fortunately, I was wrong. When I saw that Raphaël and Khadim had composed a song called "Hommage to Doudou N'Diaye Rose" my journalistic instincts kicked in, and I started making phone calls. Raphael was kind enough to assist in introducing me to Khadim, and he translated during our interview. But the recording and my interest was not only about Khadim and Doudou N'Diaye Rose. I was also very interested in this French drummer that, like me, had developed a strong curiosity in the African tradition of Sabar through hearing the drumming of Doudou N'Diaye Rose, and I wanted to know how his interest led to this fascinating record.

Photo by Sylvain Gripoix



MD: Before we start talking about the new record, what is your drumming background?

RP: I started drumming in France very early, but when I was 19, I moved to the US to study at Berklee in Boston for four years, and then at the Manhattan School of Music, in New York, where I lived for six years. My drumming education is American. At Berklee I studied with Ralph Peterson and Terri Lyne Carrington and all the other good teachers.

I got exposed to jazz and improvisation through the American tradition of drumming and for the last 10-15 years my mentor has been Obed Calvaire. I've actually been exposed to the American tradition of jazz drumming more than the French tradition. At the time, when I left France, I had almost completely and consciously avoided the French jazz drumming tradition.

MD: Why?

RP: I didn't like it at the time *(I was a teenager!)* It didn't resonate with me. I wanted something with more groove, something that had more depth, something that was more pattern-oriented, and with more jazz vocabulary. That's why I studied for 10 years in the US at Berklee and Manhattan School of Music. I returned to France five years ago, and now I'm making a new connection with the French tradition. I'm very happy living in France now, and I can link both traditions. Also, thanks to my US training, I get much better gigs in France. I have been playing recently and recording with guitarist Biréli Lagrène for example, which was a dream of mine.

MD: I knew Ralph for 30 years; he was a very close friend of mine. What did you learn from Ralph Peterson and Terri Lyne Carrington?

RP: Ralph's swing was so strong. The way he would talk would swing, and the way he walked would swing. I really remember my first lessons with him, the volume of his speaking voice, the attitude of his drumming, the volume that he played the drums, and the conviction he had with every feel. Ralph was an encyclopedia of jazz. His whole dialogue with the soloist was amazing. At our lessons, he would play trumpet which would help me from the perspective of a drummer playing with a soloist. At my first lesson Ralph gave me the Alan Dawson "Ritual" and a list of 150 standards to learn. I had a lot of work to do. I love Ralph's recordings with his Triangular band, the Live at Mt. Fuji with Kenny Garrett, and the stuff with Michael Brecker. Actually, Khadim reminds me a lot of Ralph Peterson, the attitude, the conviction, and even their voice is very similar.

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Photo by JB Millot

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MD: I can definitely hear that!

RP: With Terri Lyne, we transcribed some Brian Blade, she taught me how to play around the clave', and how the clave' concept works in Latin music. What I remember mostly was her sound. Just having her in the same room and hearing her play, I was really amazed by her control of the sound, and how she created her own sound. Even on the on the bad drum sets in the classrooms, she would sound the same way as she does with Herbie or with Wayne, and I was really shocked by that.

MD: What other drummers have you been influenced by, and why?

RP: Obed is my hero. But Eric Harland, Brian Blade, and Obed Calvaire would be my top three drummers. Brian is always inspiring for his interaction and power. But his dynamic palette is insane. I have seen him playing concerts at *ppp* and I've seen him playing at *fff,* the range he has is insane. The poetry he creates on the drums inspires me. Eric Harland has that beyond human intelligence. The way he deals with musical direction is really something else. Obed is about versatility and humility within the music. He submits to music, he understands what is needed, and he gives you that.

I think the grounded aspect of the jazz drumming tradition is in the patterns. I think many people try to shortcut that, and just do some improvisational kind of painting and playing colors.

Obed talks about learning what the music needs and being at the service of the music. That is my thing. I also see rhythm as a language that speaks to a culture. I want that.

To be honest, I resisted it as a teenager, which was the time I left France. But now that I'm back here, I'm reconnecting with it and discovering many beautiful aspects of the French jazz drumming tradition. For example, I have rediscovered many great French drummers like Christian Vander, Andre Ceccarelli… and many more. I'm also reconnecting with the contemporary music side of things, and the classical/contemporary percussion. Finally, the African and Caribbean scenes are very strong here, which brings a lot to the tradition.

MD: I understand what you are saying. One jazz drummer I do really like is the French-Italian drummer, Aldo Romano. And he is a perfect transition to start talking about your new record, because like you, he went to Africa and recorded as well. What inspired you to put this new project and recording with Khadim together?



Photo by Cecilia Collantes

MD: Why did you resist the French drumming tradition?

RP: Within the swing tradition in France the big thing is to get away from the patterns, and that's something that I didn't like at the time when I left France. I think the grounded aspect of the jazz drumming tradition is in the patterns. I think many people try to shortcut that, and just do some improvisational kind of painting and playing colors. But generally, that's not something that strikes me. I want much more tradition in my drumming.

RP: Doudou N'Diaye Rose and the recording *Djabote*. When I was young, I was exposed to that record. Soon after, I saw the documentary also called *Djabote*. Eric Serra, who mixed our new album, is a very famous film composer in France, but he also

produced Doudou N'Diaye Rose's *Djabote*.

Years ago, Eric decided to produce an album of this Senegalese Master Drummer (Doudou,) Eric invested a lot of money to make the *Djabote* record and the documentary. I saw the movie and heard the record when I was three, and it became a dream of mine to play with Doudou. I was fascinated by how he directed his band. His music had power, depth, and richness. 80 drummers playing together is simply incredible. I tried to transcribe those crazy rhythms hundreds of times, but there was no way. There are too many layers, and it doesn't fit into any traditional time signatures or rhythmic notation. Doudou and his masterpiece *Djabote* was really my guide in wanting to become a drummer, he was the inspiration for this new record, and Eric was a huge help.

I became a drummer within my culture in the jazz style of drumming. Then I went to the US for 10 years, but I always had Doudou and *Djabote* in my mind. He was my guide. When I came back to France, I started talking to everybody about my dream to mix the Sabar and jazz. I went (by myself) to Senegal to travel and listen and get exposed to Sabar music. I talked to everyone I could, and by the power of word of mouth, people introduced me to Khadim who was the perfect guy to help me accomplish my dream, because he had been exposed to jazz, learned from Doudou, and he was a Sabar master.

MD: What did you learn about the drumming and the culture of Sabar?

RP: Sabar is a whole world containing different concepts. It is a family of seven drums, a dance, a culture, a means of communication, a means of spirituality, a means of healing, and a means of entertainment. Inside of the culture of Sabar, everything is linked. There are no borders, that's the way they live. Griot people have their roles and are entirely dedicated to these disciplines, they learn rhythm from day one. All these rhythms and culture must be passed to the next generation and be received from the previous generation. Sabar is centuries old, and for me, the fascinating thing is how much their life is linked to rhythm. As a drummer, it's incredible to see that people can live through rhythm.



MD: Does Sabar exist outside of Senegal?

KN: No, it is only in Senegal.

MD: What do you learn from working with Sabar musicians?

RP: First of all, their relationship between rhythm and language in unbelievable. Over there, people literally speak to each other using only rhythm. That helped me see rhythm as a language, no matter what the music style.

The relationship to dance really shook me. They can't separate dancing and playing, as a matter of fact it is even the same word. You play to dance; you dance to play.

I saw the movie and heard the record [Djabote] when I was three, and it became a dream of mine to play with Doudou. I was fascinated by how he directed his band. His music had power, depth, and richness. 80 drummers playing together is simply incredible.

The depth of their rhythm is amazing. Rhythm is linked to spirits, ancestors, and other different beliefs. They need each other to play. It was impossible for them to play alone; no rhythm would make sense without the others.

The richness of their vocabulary was unbelievable. Because of their language system, the elasticity and finesse of each rhythm is so immense, it was extremely inspiring.

The precision when they play their baks is amazing. When they play their baks there is a very special energy that circulates within the band that leads to a common precision and (almost) nuclear sound.

The weight of hierarchy within the band is also very strong. Every band member has a very precise role that he must respect, so the music will work. This role evolves over the years, and you must climb up a ladder of roles in order to become a master. This path is very long and is very impressive and inspiring to me.

And finally, there is so much music. There are many sounds, ideas, and music… I can't put into words how much Sabar has influenced me.

MD: What was the biggest challenge for you to play with the Sabar Group?

RP: Learning what they call "the baks." The baks are what they call "the breaks," and they have *a lot* of breaks. The baks are a whole repertoire, when the master calls some baks, everybody knows the code. The code is the cue that starts the bak. So, when you have somebody like me who doesn't know the codes or the baks, it appears to be totally magical when out of nowhere, suddenly you have 15 drummers playing a super tight rhythmic break in unison. That repertoire is exactly like you, or I would learn "Autumn Leaves" or any standard tune. They just know the breaks and they know the codes.

MD: It's like the Indian musical tradition of playing a Tihai.

RP: Yes, if you listen to Doudou N'Diaye Rose's *Djabote* recording, you are hearing rhythms that we can't transcribe, codes, and baks. And they are all linked to language. The fascinating thing

is that none of those rhythms fit into our grid of 4/4, 6/8, or something else. When they play a bak (break,) it's just amazing. Some baks are four beats, and some baks are five minutes long.

MD: How many baks are there?

RP: There is an endless number of baks because people are always creating new ones.

MD: Like we are always writing new songs.

RP: When we recorded "Naima" we started with this whole architecture of different rhythms, then we had to decide (together) whether we were going to expand it, where we were going to put the solos, and what type of solos there should be.



The most difficult thing was understanding that their concept of rhythm has no beginning and no end. They don't understand the concept of "one." It was impossible to understand because their rhythms are so flexible within the time.

We had all these different musical moments that created the whole architecture and the entire arc of the tune. The challenge for "Naima" was to put all these sacred rhythms together with the tune, and how to manage and pace the rhythms one after the other.

"Take Five" was a different type of challenge for Khadim and his group because 5/4 doesn't exist in Sabar because it's not danceable. Khadim taught 5/4 to his guys, but for us jazz musicians 5/4 is a very "educational" thing, so I had to find a fun way to arrange "Take Five", so it didn't sound like an exercise. I had the idea of putting the small fives inside of the big five to create something different and have a little more rhythmic fun.

The richness of their rhythms is so linked with their language that rhythm is not something that they intellectualize. Intellectualizing the difference between 5/8 and 5/4, or the small fives inside of the big five is something that doesn't match with their language. To them, it appears extremely complicated because it's out of their language. But it was *exactly* the same way for us. Sometimes their rhythms appeared super complicated for us, but for them it was just a language that they speak, and it was super easy for them.

The most difficult thing was understanding that their concept of rhythm has no beginning and no end. They don't understand the concept of "one." It was impossible to understand because their rhythms are so flexible within the time. Khadim would start a rhythm in new place every time. Within their drumming there is (some kind of) an echo of rhythms, and you can get mixed up. In so many cases we just couldn't understand what they were playing. On top of that, there are the codes. Khadim would call (or cue) codes which started repertoire that we didn't know. We had to learn about the whole architecture of their tunes so we could understand what was happening. I spent tons of time trying to transcribe their music with my own concept of "one," I would assign a logical place to become one and try to write a chart and a bass line so we could identify these terms. So, when they would play a code, we would know what to play.

The concept of dynamics was also challenging. They don't have dynamics, they're really proud of their sound, which is beautiful, but the sound of eight drummers playing together is super loud, it's *nuclear* loud. They have seven drums, and they always play with a minimum of eight drummers, so we had to deal with an incredible volume. We had an upright bass and there was no way the upright bass could compete with that volume, so we had to have moments where we practiced rhythms at an extra-minimum dynamic.

MD: Was that *insulting* to them?

RP: No. We were constantly aware of an aspect of colonialism. We were conscious of the misconception of us being the "white guys" coming to steal their music from them. But they didn't see it that way at all. They were just so happy that people would come and create with them. Their generosity was outstanding, and the happiness surrounding their creation of music was amazing. I lived in America for ten years, and the problem of racism is much worse in America and France than it is in Africa. We never had to have any conversations about being white, being black, or being in the position of stealing their music. It was not a problem to mix and remove the borders to create something new.

MD: We have talked about the differences in your musical approach and the Sabar musicians' approach, but in the spirit of unity what were the similarities in your approaches?

RP: There is the obvious thing of *when it sounds good, it sounds good*. Music is music and no matter where you are, music is still the same. When we're all playing together, when we feel good and the music is happening, and when we respect each other, the music always sounds good, that's universal! When Khadim and I were working together on this project, we were *never* afraid that the project would not work or fail. Of course, it would work because it was music. We just had to adjust some levels here and there, but the music was always there.

MD: Music IS the ultimate universal language. How long did you rehearse with Khadim's group before the recording?

RP: We rehearsed for seven super intense days. We played for 12 hours a day, and *we* got tired way before *they* did. The sheer

volume of being in the same room with the eight drummers made it that we *needed* breaks. They are used to playing all day every day. For us, it's cool to play all day every day for three or maybe four days, but we were all exhausted at the end. I was even more worn out at the end because I was also composing, arranging, and making the decisions.

MD: On the record, you played three jazz tunes, "Lonely Woman," "Take Five," and "Naima" with the Sabar group, and they had four tunes of their own, "Xalat Bou Set," "Hommage to Doudou N'Diaye Rose," "Sine Saloum," and "Djolokanete!" How did you approach the two kinds of tunes differently?

RP: "Hommage…" was totally percussion at first. We didn't plan on playing on that piece, we tried many things, but that piece was so tight that it was almost impossible to detach and create some moments for the entire band. And I wanted them to have their moment during the concert when they were just going to play this piece by themselves. But with the adrenaline of things, (bassist) Francois Moutin and I just started playing with them and it sounded great. We were playing free and improvising on top of what they were playing, and we just let go. Francois and I had a chart that I transcribed so we could play most of the stuff together. What they were playing was so tight that it was no problem. For "Naima" there were some pre-planned grooves, and we put two choruses of piano solo and a sax solo. "Xalat Bou Set" was a common composition-collaboration between both groups. We added some melodies to "Sine Saloum," but we didn't change much, that was mostly coming from them. Everything was a true collaboration.

MD: In the end, it all came together, and it sounds wonderful. When you were playing free with them, could they relate to playing free?

RP: No, that concept was totally foreign to them. As you asked Khadim, even the idea of swing was foreign. Yes, he had been exposed to jazz, which to some extent, really changed his musical vision, but so many of the jazz concepts were foreign to them. The idea of interaction was really mind blowing to them. Their musical framework is very strict, they have a whole hierarchy that is very set, and improvisation is not part of it. For them, it was mind blowing to see that we could improvise. Also, the concept of changing musical direction within a song was very strange to them as well. In jazz, we can change musical directions. If the pianist suddenly decides to play soft, we're going to follow him. If the saxophonist decides to double the tempo, we're gonna double the tempo together as a band. But we had to teach them about all that. Even giving musical direction to feed the musical dialogue was very foreign to them. I'm sure we didn't understand as much from them, as they did from us.

MD: But in the end, you created some music that is truly new, and different from anything else that has ever been done. That is difficult to do. Are you going to collaborate more in the future?

RP: I hope so. We are trying to sell the idea the US, and it looks like some people are interested, but it's difficult because it's many people and many instruments, so the necessary budget is big; but I'm remaining positive. The piece that we are working on now, is a homage to Ahmad Jamal and we are hoping to play it at some jazz festivals.

MD: Hank Jones did a recording that was a collaboration with West African drummer Cheick-Tidiane Seck called *Sarala*.

RP: And Tony Williams went to Senegal, and I've heard about a new film documentary of his trip. Speaking of films, we have also made a documentary about this entire project that will be released soon. I think more jazz drummers should investigate West African drumming. There is so much depth to their rhythms and their rhythmic language it's amazing. With their drumming they can literally talk to each other. In Sabar there is real meaning behind the rhythms, rhythm actually means something. Their lives and culture are based around rhythm.

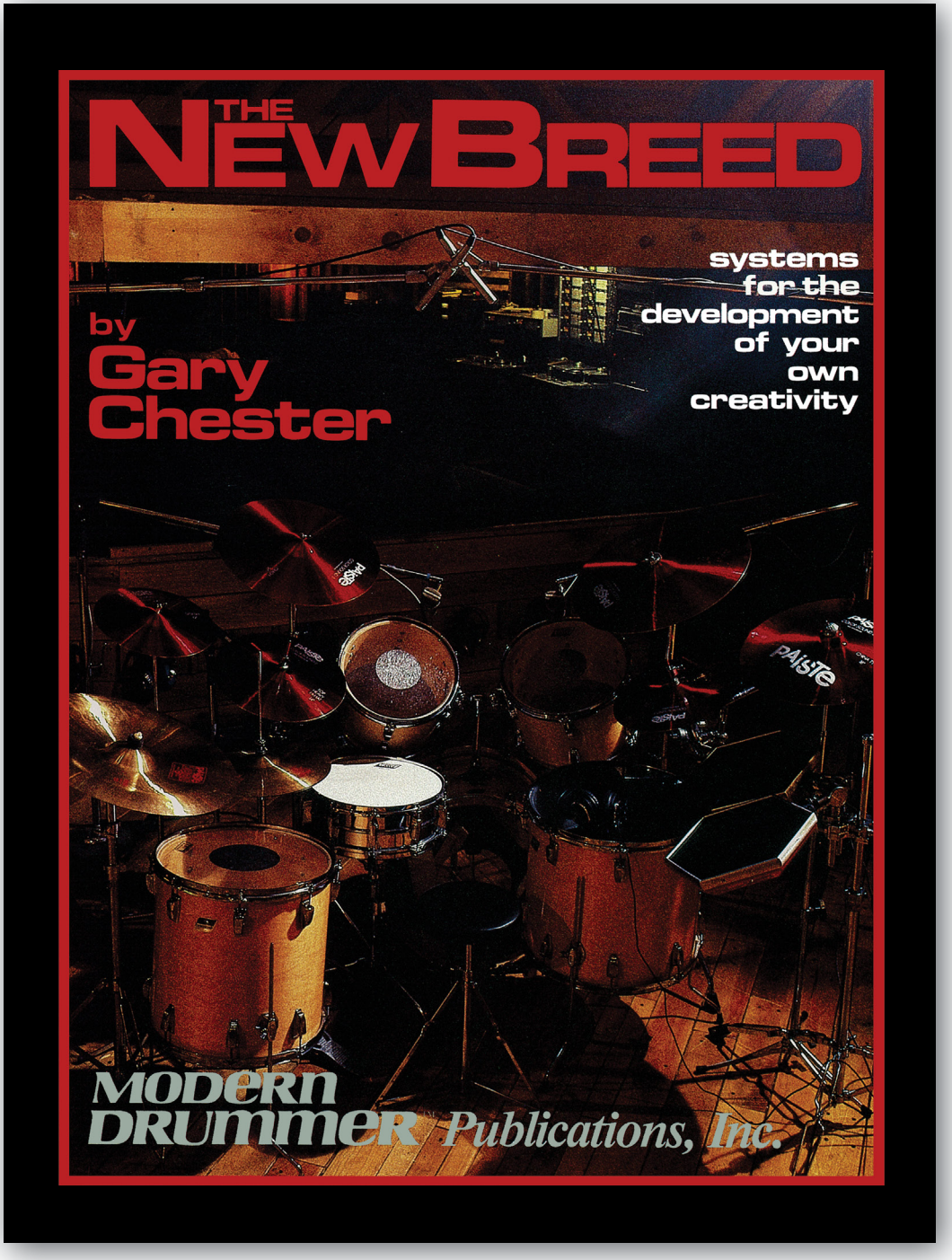
MD: When you really think about it, ALL our lives are based on rhythm. If someone's metronome stops, their song is over.



Photo by JB Millot

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Michael "Cavs" Cavanagh
of King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard

By Danny "Ziggy" Laverde



Every band needs a heartbeat. King Gizzard has "Cavs" pushing harder, louder, and bigger until the impossible feels normal. Recently there has been an orchestra at his back, a sold-out crowd in front of him, and nothing slowing him down.



Photos by Deb Duval

MD: On this current tour, you're playing *Phantom Island* in its entirety and then selected songs from your previous albums in the second half of your set. Not only that, you're also being backed by a live orchestra. Could you walk us through what it was like preparing to play these songs with them for this tour?

MC: For *Phantom* Island, the arrangements were already written. We got this guy Sean [O'Loughlin] who's a composer and he wrote the arrangements for the back catalog in the second half of our live set. They were songs we thought sound epic with the orchestra. We did songs like "Dragon," "Crumbling Castle," and "The River," and some of them are quite technical as well. We got the arrangements written in MIDI form, got them sent to us, and then we rehearsed to them. We were rehearsing over the last month around four days a week from about 10:00 'til 4:00 each day. It's the most we've rehearsed for anything. The first show was in Philly, and we came a couple days early for production rehearsal. Then we rehearsed with the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia for the first time. There were a few things that we had to iron out in the arrangements. Some things weren't quite working so we rearranged or crossed out sections. The orchestras are amazing; they're such good players. It's a whole different world to us. We're touring with conductor Sarah Hicks who's been amazing. She's the bridge between the orchestra and us.



MD: What kinds of percussion are in the orchestras you're playing with? Are you doing anything different now that you have all these other performers on stage?

MC: It's only me and a timpani player, and I'm doing the same thing as usual. We still wanted to be able to jam with the orchestra, so when we do something like "The River" or "Iron Lung," we have these vamps that we can repeat which we're slowly starting to integrate into the set. Now there's three different forms that the orchestra can play along with us as we switch from one to the other. I mostly prepped for the cues since I'm keeping time in the bits where the band drops out and it's just the orchestra. It's kind of hard because you're keeping time for this big 30-piece ensemble. It's just been crazy. We never thought we'd get to play with an orchestra. When we first started the rehearsals in Philly with them, I got chills. I can't believe I used to play in pubs and stuff and now I'm doing this.

MD: What does the ensemble sound like from where you are on stage each night?

MC: I don't really hear [the orchestra] acoustically, but I've got it all in my in-ears. During the rehearsals when I wasn't playing, I'd pop an in-ear out and listen to it all. It just sounds so sick even when the orchestra's just tuning.

MD: What would you say is your favorite song in the set to play with the orchestra?

MC: I think "Crumbling Castle." The arrangement's great and it's got some really big and epic moments in it. It's also a really technical song with different time signatures. The orchestras have been nailing it and Sarah's been killing it.

MD: Tell us how you're feeling now that you finished your second night at Forest Hills Stadium in Queens, NY.

MC: The whole place was full these past two nights. The last time we played here was good too, but there were still some empty spaces. We started this last night pretty heavy, and we did a "disco" version of "Sense." That was really fun for me. Tonight was the only show without the orchestra on this tour apart from when we do the Field of Vision festival in Colorado. I'm also really

excited about our show with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra. We're doing a bunch of shows in Europe and Australia with an orchestra this year too.

MD: What will be different about the Colorado festival shows?

MC: It'll be three days, and we play every night with different bands every day. It keeps it weird (laughs). The sight is really cool and it's the first year we've done it. If all goes well, we might make it an annual thing. It's themed around the whole "King Gizzard Universe." There's gonna be heaps of bootleg markets and stuff like that. We're embracing the Gizzard community. Ambrose's mom is gonna be flying out to do some yoga classes there too (laughs.)

MD: What kind of non-acoustic drums are you using on this tour?

MC: I've got my electronic snare, and the main samples I use on stage are the same ones I used on Cookie's solo project *Pipe-eye*. I've also got another sample that I made from blending a classic 909 snare with a Simmons snare that I recorded on *The Silver Cord*.

MD: One last question. The band recently took all your music down from Spotify, and your community seemed to be in support of this decision. Will your catalog be off the platform permanently or is it just for an indefinite amount of time?

MC: We might be back on Spotify if things get better over there. I think our music is still on all the other platforms, and given the recent circumstances with Spotify, we just had to do it. We don't expect anyone to follow suit or whatever, it was just a moral decision we had to make.





RUMPUS

BY DANNY "ZIGGY" LAVERDE

Rumpus grew up on punk rock and carried that raw, restless energy straight into the DJ booth. With a drum kit wired into his sets, he's turning dance floors upside down, proving that live drumming can hit just as hard in the electronic world as it does on a stage with amps and guitars.



Photos Courtesy


Roland

MD: What got you into playing drums and performing live at a young age?

R: When I was 12 years old, my mom said, "I want you to try the drums," which is the weirdest thing for a parent to say. Electronic drums weren't around back then, so it was always a matter of listening to someone sit in the basement and bang away horribly out of beat. She was super supportive and said, "I think this would be great for you. You're always full of energy." She put me in drum lessons which I did for a couple years, but I didn't really enjoy it that much because I wasn't really applying anything to actual music. I was just sitting in the basement practicing some routines. It was kind of fun, but I was also losing interest after a couple years. Then I had a friend in high school who played guitar, so I said, 'I play drums. What kind of music do you like?' He said, "My favorite band is Rage Against the Machine," and I said, 'No way! That's my favorite band! Wanna come over after school and bring your guitar so we can jam some RATM songs?' So, he came over, we started playing RATM covers, and it ignited a fire in me right away. We were also both sort of into the punk rock scene, so we started playing punk covers from bands like Pennywise and Lagwagon. Then we started writing our own music and formed our own punk band through high school and little while after. We brought in another guitarist and a bassist, and we had a run with that punk band for about five or six years. We did a little bit of touring too. We actually played Warped Tour. We went through a bunch of changes, but it was really fun being super young and getting to be a part of that scene. Those experiences still inspire me today. Next to electronic music, all I listen to is old school punk rock.

MD: When and how did you first get into electronic music? Did you start dabbling in production before or after the band ended?

R: That came after we disbanded. I'd always enjoyed electronic music, but I wasn't super into it. Sometimes I'd be in the back of our touring van listening to The Prodigy, The Chemical Brothers, Daft Punk, and stuff like that. Those were some of the acts that got me into that style of music. Then the band broke up and we all went different directions. I took a break from music for a little while because being in band can be a lot at times. A lot of my friends at the time were DJs, so I would go to their shows and chill with them. At my house I had my own DJ decks that I'd mess around with even though I didn't really know what I was doing. It was just a hobby at that point, but then I played a few shows as a DJ and got a couple good opportunities thrown at me. Once I started playing again, I realized how much I missed live performance. There had been a void in my soul that was completely filled once I got back on stage. I started putting more effort into it, and all these doors started opening. I realized that if I really worked at this, I could make a career out of music. I knew I needed to start creating my own music, so I went headfirst into production. Every single day for six months I learned to produce.

I knew I needed to start creating my own music, so I went headfirst into production. Every single day for six months I learned to produce. Then I started writing my own music. It's been a little over ten years now that I've been producing.



Then I started writing my own music. It's been a little over ten years now that I've been producing. I always feel like I can learn more, but I've written a lot of stuff over the last few years that I've been proud of. I didn't expect any of this to happen, but it's all come so naturally out of my passion for music.

MD: What DAW did you start out with when learning how to produce?

R: I actually started in Logic for about a month. Then I realized there wasn't a lot of information about it on YouTube at the time, so I started using Ableton and I'm glad I made the change.

When I saw the biggest DJs in the world playing my records on the biggest stages in the world, that was the moment. It was quite a long road to get there, but I definitely feel very proud. With my "Innerbloom" remix, I wasn't even planning on releasing it.



MD: Did it feel any different when you started to play drums at the front of the stage after playing in the back for all those years in the punk band?

R: I love sitting on my drum kit whether it's at the back or at the front of the stage. I'm so passionate about drumming that to me, DJing is secondary. My first love is drumming. DJing is fun, but it's not super challenging. What I really like about drumming is being pushed to change things up. I still missing being back on the drums for the whole set though.

MD: Does the acoustic drum kit factor a lot into your writing process?

R: Honestly, no. I make house music, and everything is so quantized. If I want to record a certain fill or something I will, but generally I can grab a couple samples and write something in my DAW faster than getting on the drum kit and playing the beat. A lot of it's very repetitive, so once I write a 16-bar loop, that's what the song is mostly gonna be. I don't generally play for my productions, but when I go out and perform, I'll add the live drums. Although a lot of time when I'm writing, I'll take the song and play it back on my kit to see if it'll work live and if the drums will enhance the track.

MD: Where did you get the idea to incorporate live drumming into your DJ sets?

R: I have a DJ friend who's known I'm a drummer for a long time, and one day they asked, "Why aren't you incorporating your drums into this?" I hadn't really thought about it yet, but at the time it seemed like a lot of work. Then I went down to the music store and checked out some electronic pads. I felt the Roland SPD-SX fit my style the best, so I brought it home and messed around with it. Then I brought it to my show, and the crowd reaction proved I needed that element in my set. It was a game changer.

MD: How has your live rig evolved throughout the years?

R: I remember when I started out, my dream was to be back on an actual drum kit playing along to my tracks, but I needed the right stage and audience to execute that. The pad was fun, but it's not as fun as sitting at a kit and giving it your all. Then I got

offered a kit a few years back when I played Bass Coast. They wanted me on Main Stage at peak time. A lot of these DJ events aren't set up to have live instruments, but I pitched them my idea. I designed a full show with choreographed dancers, a full drum kit, and two drum pads. I wanted to fill the whole stage up, and the festival organizers said, "Let's do it!" That was the first opportunity I had to play a live kit at my own show, and it was so well received. Whenever I get the opportunity to use the kit I do, but I always have my Roland SPD-SX because it can fit in a DJ booth. I've got it pre-dialed in, so I don't have to soundcheck.

MD: Do you extensively plan your set beforehand, or do you prefer to think on the fly?

R: I enjoy making the set as exciting as possible for me. I don't just wanna put on the set in Ableton and let it run. I also don't run my drums into Ableton because they're not quantized. What you're hearing is the raw sound. I like to change my set up when I'm playing. If a crowd isn't really vibing on the underground records, I've gotta change my songs and play stuff that's a bit more well known. I like that control. I think that comes from my punk rock background. I thrive on a little bit of chaos and tension on stage. I like not knowing exactly how it's gonna go. I just played the Bass Coast Festival, and when the artist before me was on their last song, I was getting ready to go on and plug in my drums. I said to them, 'Do you mind if I play on your track?' They said, "Go ahead! Let it rip!" So, I soundchecked on their last track. I'd never even heard the song before, but once you've been drumming for a long time you play well on the fly.

MD: When did you feel like you had made your mark as a solo artist?

R: When I saw the biggest DJs in the world playing my records on the biggest stages in the world, that was the moment. It was quite a long road to get there, but I definitely feel very proud. With my "Innerbloom" remix, I wasn't even planning on releasing it. I was just making it for my own sets because I've always loved that song and wanted my own version. I sent it to a few artists, and they told me to put it out there. Next thing I knew, Dom Dolla had just played it at Tomorrowland and it was on their main page. My phone was exploding with all these messages. Tiësto has been my biggest supporter this past year. He's been sharing when he plays my remix and he'll tag me on the posts. I feel like it's really cool for someone at that level to be giving credit to a smaller artist because that doesn't happen all the time, especially in the dance music scene.

MD: How did you end up getting your song "Set it Off" on the *White Lotus* soundtrack?

R: One day I was hanging with the owner of the record label the song was on, and he just said, "By the way, *White Lotus* might be picking up your track. We're in talks with them right now. Nothing's for sure so don't get too excited. I just wanted to give you a heads up." Apparently, for those TV shows they can go in the editing room just a couple weeks before the episode airs and change things up. No one had let me know for sure what was going on. Then just two days before the episode aired, the sync company tagged me in a post saying my song was in the show. It was cool seeing my music in front of a new audience on such an iconic show.

MD: Where do you see yourself going in the next few years? Do you have a goal?

R: To answer that honestly, I just want to be loving what I'm doing and making a living off doing music. The most important thing to me is that I'm excited and happy about what I'm doing. Goals for me aren't like, 'I'm gonna play this stage or get this gig.' The real goals are staying passionate about what I'm doing and keep moving forward. Slow and steady. I wanna keep improving my live show and incorporating my drums as much as I can. Also, I recently dropped my new track "Neon Lights" with my friend LIINKS. She's done stuff with Travis Barker before, and I knew she was right for the track. It's also more melodic and emotional than my regular stuff. I'm really excited to start playing it live.

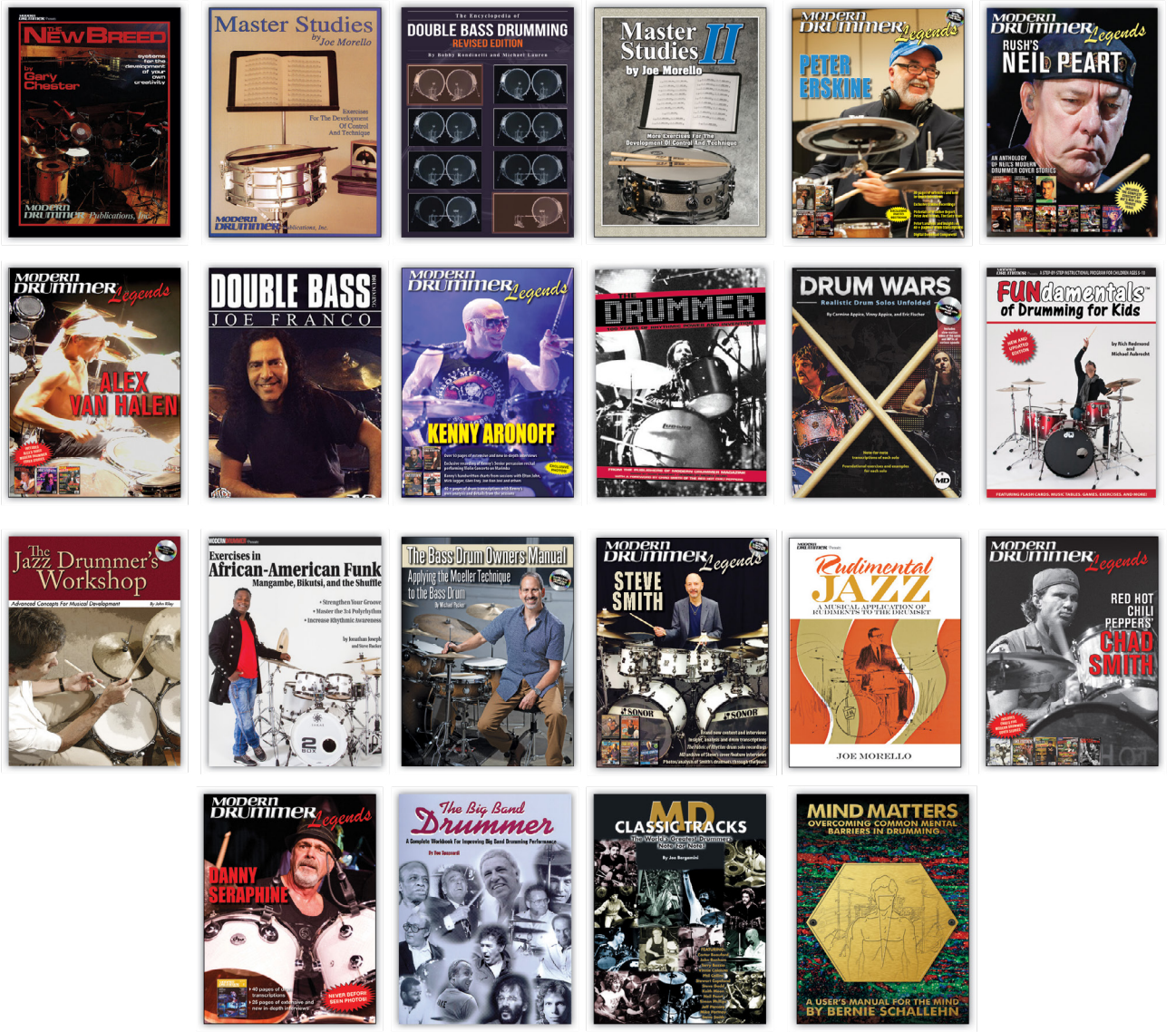
I wanna keep improving my live show and incorporating my drums as much as I can. Also, I recently dropped my new track "Neon Lights" with my friend LIINKS.



Photo by Ron Worobec

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"Can't Stop," Red Hot Chili Peppers, *By The Way*, Chad Smith drums

Transcription by Marc Atkinson

"Can't Stop" by the Red Hot Chili Peppers, from their 2002 album *By the Way*, provides a compelling example of groove-based drumming rooted in stylistic funk. Performed by Chad Smith, the drum part integrates elements of funk, rock, and hip-hop, forming a groove that locks tightly with the bass while propelling the track forward with sustained energy.

The primary groove is driven by an assertive hi-hat pattern and a strongly syncopated backbeat, both of which contribute to the music's sense of urgency and forward motion. Rather than relying on complex fills or dense orchestration, Smith employs a repetitive yet highly hypnotic pattern that functions as the rhythmic backbone of the song.

Although the technical demands of this piece are moderate, its true challenge lies in maintaining precision, endurance, and feel across an extended, highly infectious, and explosive groove— one that is deceptively simple, and almost guaranteed to cause aggressive head-nodding.




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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

A Constructivist Blueprint for Drum Education

By Jeff Asselin

Rudiments sit at the foundation of drumming, yet their relevance is often questioned, ignored, or understated. Still, the world's greatest drummers consistently return to rudimentary vocabulary as the source of their phrasing, coordination, creativity, and expressive identity. From Buddy Rich and Steve Gadd to Neil Peart, Travis Barker, and Jason Sutter, the technical fluency and musical depth they display are inseparable from their early years spent practicing rudimental solos, drum corps repertoire, and exercises designed to formalize stick control.

Rudiments cultivate:

- Coordination, muscle memory, and efficiency of motion

- Mastery of the Four Strokes (Full, Down, Tap, Up)

- Deepened understanding of subdivision, phrasing, and rhythmic architecture

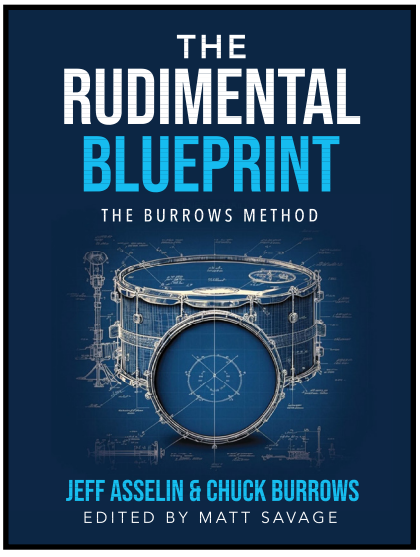
- Expanded vocabulary for grooves, fills, and soloing

- Transferable skills applicable across snare drum, drumset, orchestral percussion, and marching arts

Even in modern genres—EDM, hip-hop, metal, pop session work—the physical fluency, conceptual awareness, and creative tapestries rooted in rudiments give drummers a competitive edge. They read faster. They learn music more efficiently. They collaborate more effectively.

To ground these ideas in practical application, my recent publication, *The Rudimental Blueprint,* presents 100 rudimental solos and duets designed to guide drummers from foundational technique toward expressive musical performance. You will notice that the enclosed solos have a QR code in the top-right corner. This code takes you to a YouTube playlist of videos with an incremental tempo hierarchy, designed to model each step of your musical journey. Each piece is intentionally structured through a constructivist lens (which views knowledge not as delivered but as constructed by the learner through meaningful engagement, context, and reflection,) allowing learners to build new knowledge upon prior experiences through progressive challenges in sticking, articulation, and phrasing. The videos embody Vygotsky's concept of the *More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)*: the learner works alongside a teacher, a peer, or a series of scaffolded video recordings, gaining support as they develop rudimental competence. By engaging with these videos—via the embedded QR-code video demonstrations—drummers experience an interactive, dialogic form of learning that mirrors the apprenticeship models at the heart of percussion tradition.

Rudiments remain one of the most effective pathways to expressive, technically proficient drumming. *The Rudimental Blueprint – The Burrows Method* exists to support that journey—with mentorship, musicality, and modern learning design woven into every page. I invite you to try working through these solos and to share them with your students, friends, and musical colleagues. Copies of the Rudimental Blueprint can be purchased through Hudson Music (Digital version) and Amazon.

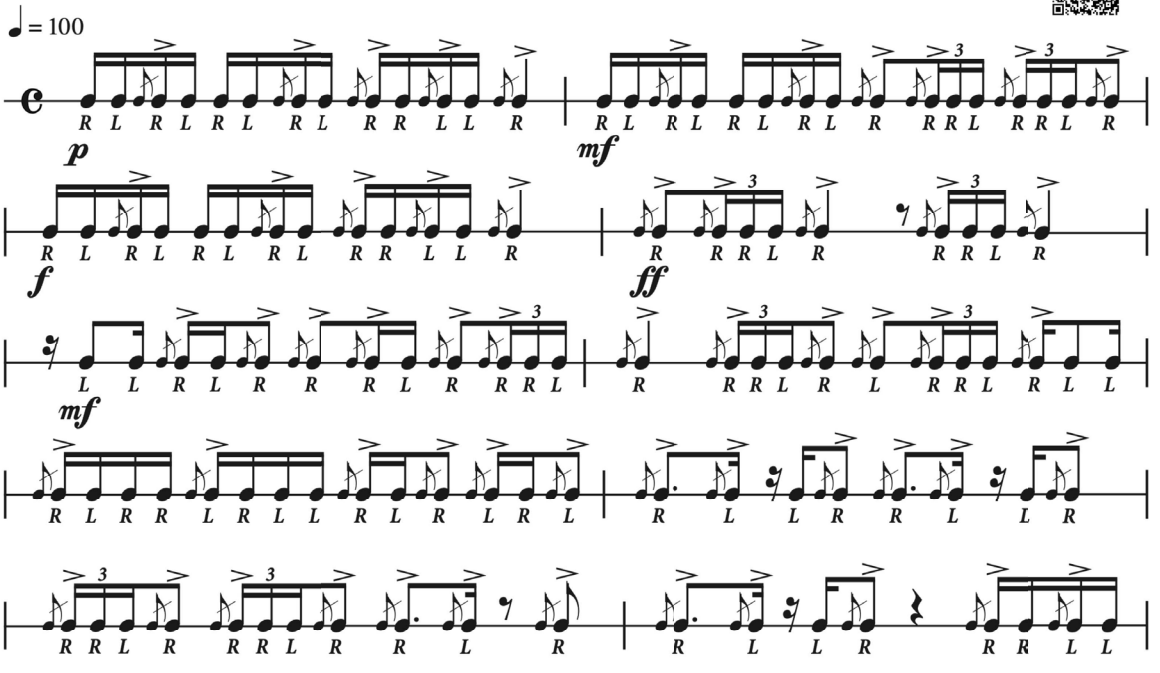


SHOUT! – Part 1





SHOUT! – Part 2







Jeff Asselin is a professor and program coordinator at Algonquin College and a drumset instructor at Carleton University. An active educator and recording artist, he endorses Sonor Drums, Vic Firth, Zildjian, Remo, Cympad, and Protechtor/Gator. His latest publication, ***The Rudimental Blueprint – The Burrows Method****, was co-written with his late mentor Chuck Burrows and edited by Matt Savage. While completing his master's degree in education, Jeff also operates Jeff Asselin Drum Academy and Jeff Asselin Publications, where he continues to bridge performance, pedagogy, and innovative music education.*

The Blackbook of You

By Chris Lesso

A lifetime can go by before we realize we've only been regurgitating the ideas of others, never giving value to our own. The 'blackbook of you' is when we get into the rhythm of practicing our own core motifs over and over, making them bulletproof so we can be more effortlessly creative with less. What are your 'blackbook' of you ideas? To find out, lead with curiosity and chase your enthusiasm. It's the intuition of the heart that knows first, then the mind comes in to weaponize it.

When we freestyle, we play ideas that we'll never see again, surprising us as they come and go. Even though we can run our regular go-to's, we're exploring. With the 'blackbook of you', we're revisiting and refining the core themes that beckon us, those that are irresistible to keep remolding again and again. This is where we'll find the ideas that define us, and then we double down on them. Mine your imagination! Dig deep because the ideas are waiting. Cultivate ten ideas that get you so excited you keep coming back to them, and simple enough to be reimagined in limitless ways. Seek with courage, and the seeds you're drawn to will emerge. The ideas that fascinate you to no end and are so deep they're inexhaustible, will become *your* blackbook of you. They're the ones you will keep coming back to, ideas that never stop spiraling out in endless ways. The themes will stay the same, but there's no end to the variations that spin off them. An outside source may spark them, but these golden nuggets are coming from us.

Your blackbook ideas don't even have to be new. Even Mozart is said to have expressed, "I have never made the slightest effort to compose anything original." All the signature moves of the greats came from somewhere. Ironically, once they're filtered through *your* personal lens, you can't help but express them in your own voice. Often, it's the simple ones hidden in plain sight that are most potent. They could be something from another instrument we transfer to the drums. They could be an old phrase or a standard phrase reimagined. If it's malleable enough, you can be playful with it, then it's *yours*. Over time you'll become familiar with the deeper themes that are distinctly you, the ones that express the DNA of who you are. These are the rough diamonds we set out to discover, then repeatedly polish to perfection. As long as we're feeling the curiosity and enthusiasm, these ideas will come out in your voice.

"Don't let school get in the way of your education." Mark Twain

Patterns and notes from a page are one dimensional and have a short shelf-life. They're one-and-done, because they're devoid of any real connection to *you*. Rehashing something mechanically is something any robot can do; it has no emotional impact. With so much educational material out there to learn from, the 'blackbook of you' strips things back to activate what's in *your* heart, the essentialism of what drumming is to *you*. Going inward can be a little unnerving especially if we've been stuck in the habit of working from other people's ideas— but how about what *we* have to say? It feels riskier to expose our own ideas to the world, but the freedom is liberating. The 'blackbook of you' is the bold search for the truth that is yours alone.

Actually writing out your ideas makes them real. If you can't write music yet? Just get them out, 'dots on the page' style, or simply press audio record on your phone— do anything to preserve them. Your 'blackbook' can be a real black book, or just be a metaphoric vault. It could be a high-tech computer folder with audio files, or low-tech pen to paper. Either way, get them out. Start by developing ten solid ideas that you can always come back to. Documenting them forces you to think through to the essence of the idea and see if it's really worth preserving. There's no reason to stop after ten, but we're looking for a core set of ideas that we can comfortably come back to recreate and reinvent. Your ideas will change and evolve, but the true ones are so simple that we get endless mileage from them for a lifetime. To really *own* which ideas are yours, give them nicknames, like mini characters acting out a play. The names become like triggers, opening doorways. Saying 'tribal toms' or 'driving beat' might not mean anything to anyone else, but to you, those words open worlds. They'll start a new vibe that we can depend on to explore and conquer. The greats in any field do this, they spin the illusion that they can do it all. But in reality, all they've done is take the time to craft a few signature moves to perfection. Once we have *our* core themes, we can now riff on them and recycle them endlessly, being effortlessly creative with less. Tuck your 'blackbook of you' into your belt to take along on your infinite journey of drumming.

Join the 'Life Through Rhythm' global drumming movement with your free FLOW drumming guide at **chrislesso.com**

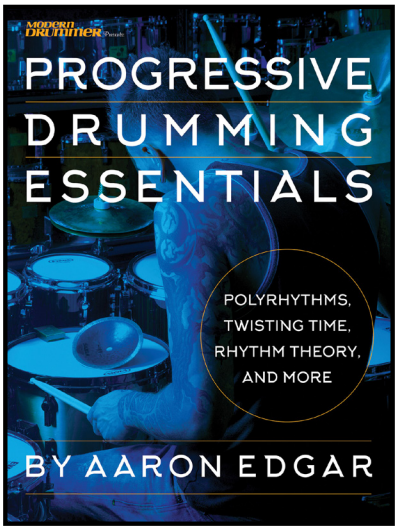


Progressive Drumming Essentials: Making Four Sound Like More

By Aaron Edgar

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

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



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

I'll never forget the first time I heard the metal band Meshuggah. I was mesmerized by the amount of pocket that they were able to get from what I assumed was an odd-time signature. To my surprise, most of what they play can be written out using over-the-barline rhythms in 4/4.

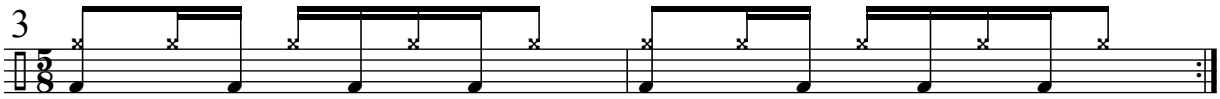
"Stengah," from Meshuggah's album *Nothing*, showcases this odd phrasing technique perfectly. The opening guitar line takes up the space of eleven 8th notes and is repeated until it fills eight measures of 4/4. There are sixty-four 8th notes in eight bars of 4/4, so the 11/8 riff repeats five full times. Then the band fills the remaining 8ths with a portion of the riff before cutting back to the top on beat 1 of the ninth bar.

Example 1 contains the 11/8 "Stengah" guitar rhythm. Example 2 shows the eight-bar 4/4 drum pattern with the guitar line notated on top so you can see how the phrases interact.



There's a lot to remember to make this eight-bar phrase work, especially since every measure differs from the one before. Pay attention to where the pattern lines up with the quarter note, which is played on the china. Every two passes of the 11/8 riff will line up on the quarter note (beat 4 of measure 3 and beat 3 of measure 6). Focusing on this can help you internalize the pattern so that you don't need to think too much about it.

Now let's focus on some shorter odd-note phrases. Example 3 has a funky bass drum figure in 5/8.

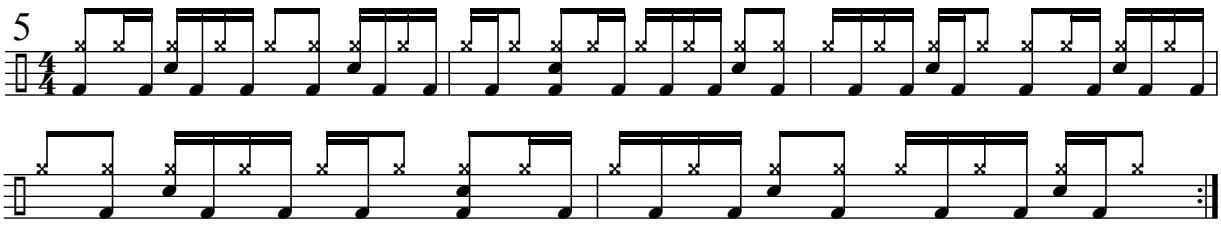


Example 4 loops the 5/8 bass drum pattern across four bars of 4/4 time, with a standard hi-hat and snare groove on top. You can think of the hand pattern as being the length of two quarter notes. With that in mind, the 5/8 bass drum rhythm lines up at the beginning of the hand pattern on beat 3 of the third measure. Playing through the 5/8 pattern twice more will leave a single quarter note at the end. You can play part of the 5/8 pattern within that space, or you can smooth over the transition with a fill.



Experiment with how the 5/8 rhythm works across different numbers of measures. For instance, try a shorter two-bar pattern. You'll have to cut off the 5/8 rhythm at the end to make it fit.

To make the rhythm resolve naturally in 4/4, add one measure to the end of Exercise 4. The result is a five-bar phrase of 4/4 in which the 5/8 rhythm loops uninterrupted.

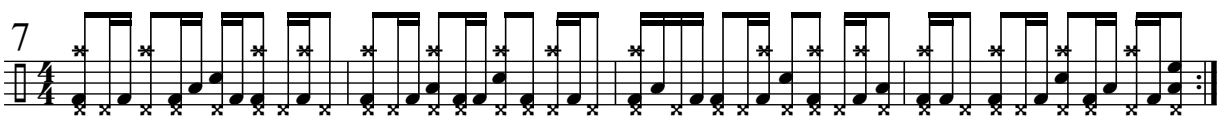


Now try phrasing a 13/16 bass drum and floor tom pattern across four bars of 4/4. The left foot anchors the time by playing 8th notes with the hi-hat foot, and there's a backbeat on beat 3 of each bar to create a half-time feel. Adding crashes that alternate between quarter notes and the underlying rhythm creates an intense progressive metal groove.



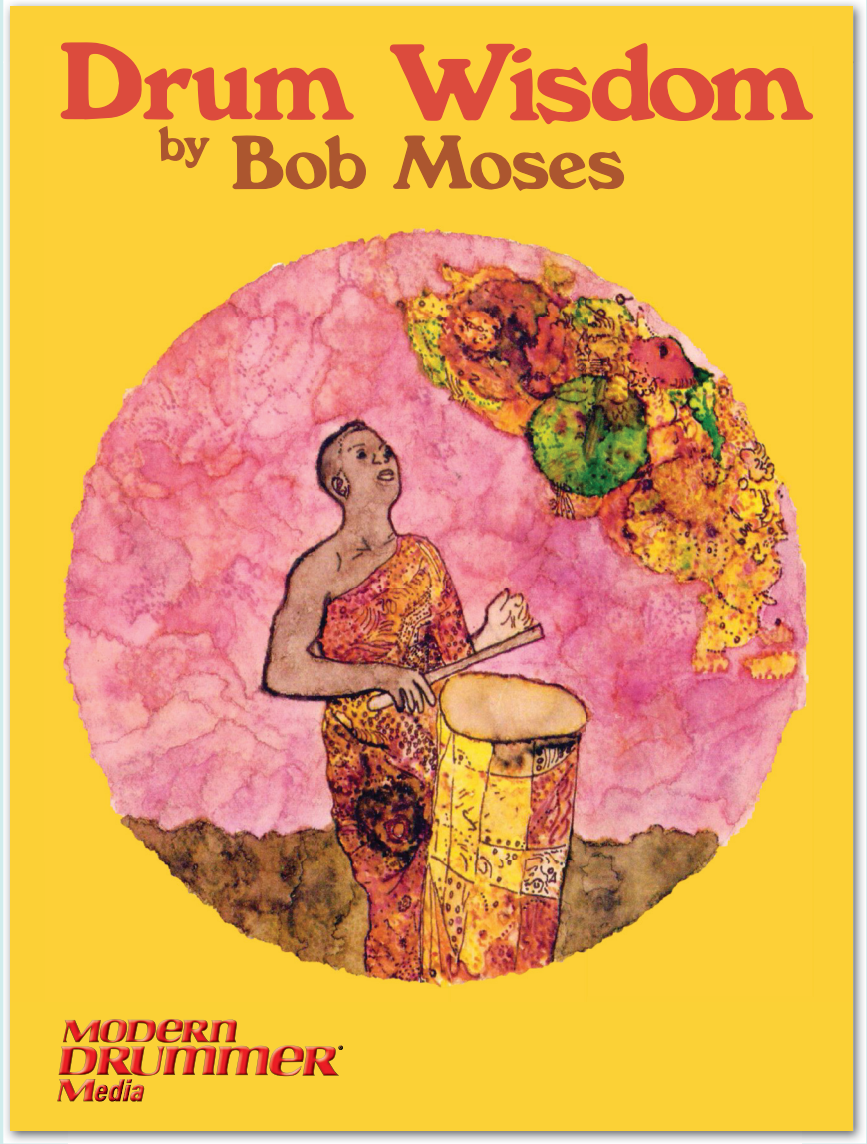
If you're having trouble phrasing the crashes, try working through the pattern and only adding the crashes that line up on quarter notes. Gradually add in the missing crashes as you get more comfortable.

I find phrasing odd-time patterns within 4/4 compelling because it allows you to highlight the quarter-note pulse to create a stronger groove and pocket. Spend some time trying this concept with your own rhythms.



MODERN DRUMMER

Bob Moses' Drum Wisdom

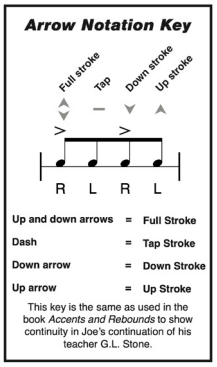


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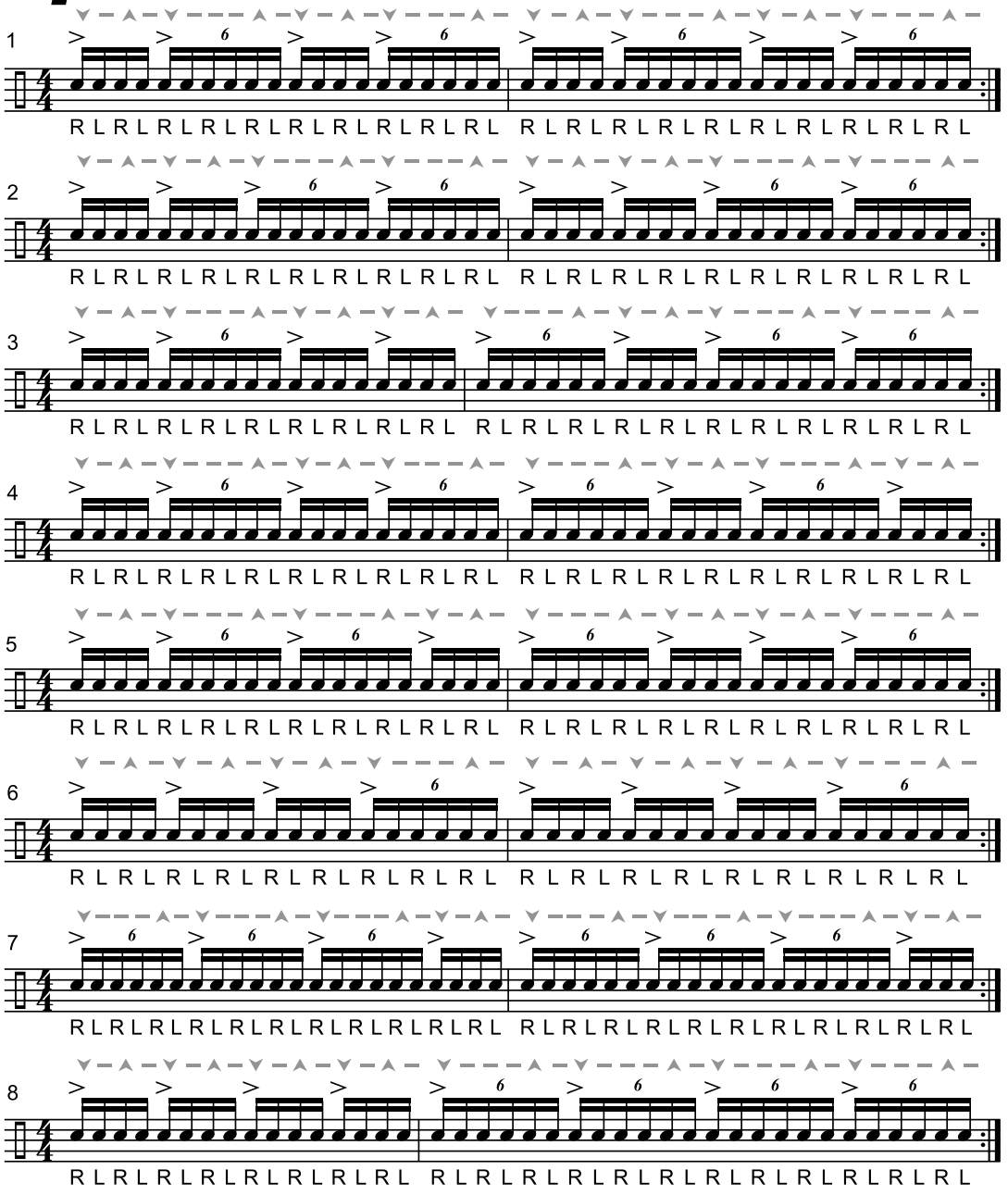
Master Studies II: Developing the Single Stroke Roll

By Joe Morello

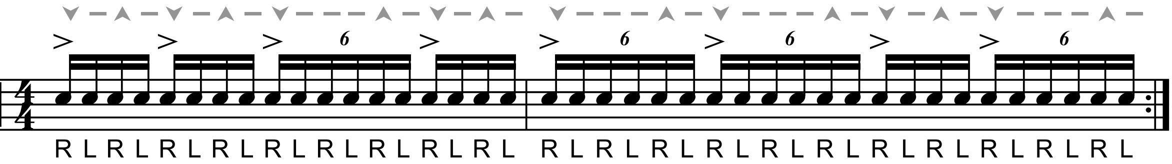
As a follow-up to Joe Morello's legendary *Master Studies* book, he released *Master Studies II* in 2006. Joe was a masterful teacher and helped many great drummers with their musicality, technique, and touch. Joe was also masterful at creating exercises, many of Joe's exercises were variations or outgrowths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



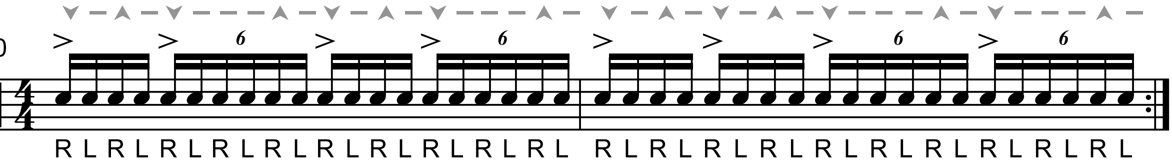
Groups Of Four And Six



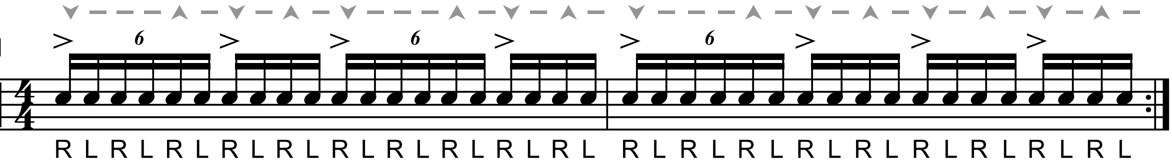
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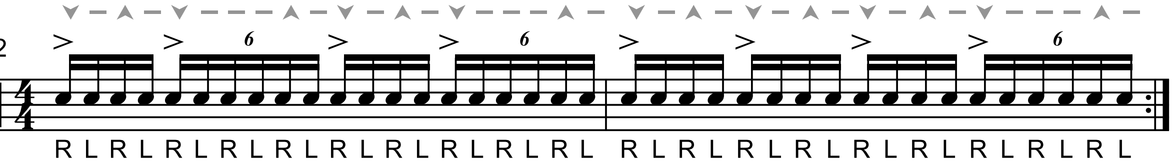
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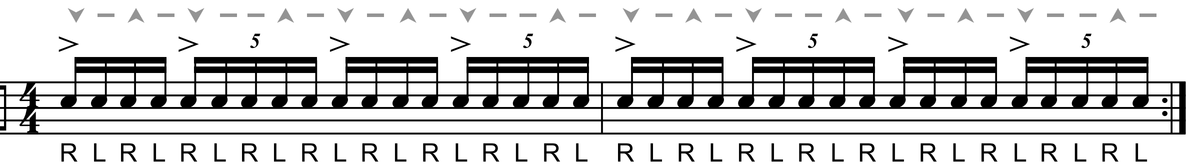


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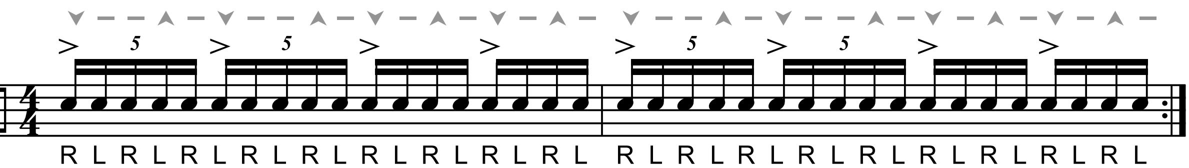


Groups Of Four And Five

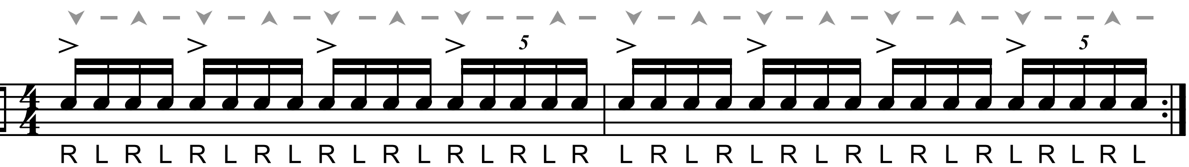
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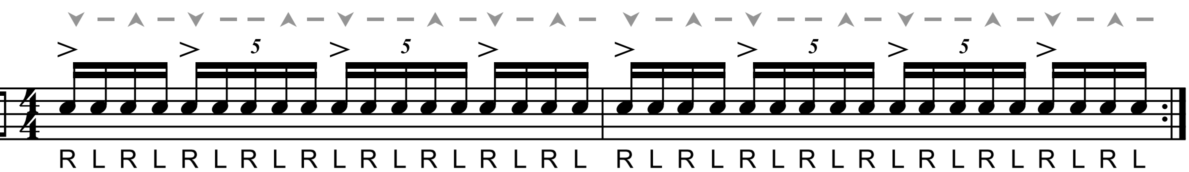
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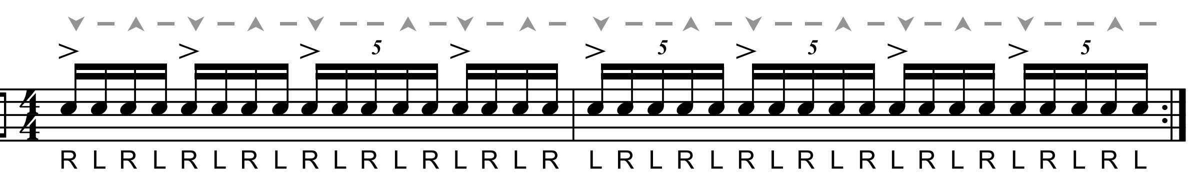
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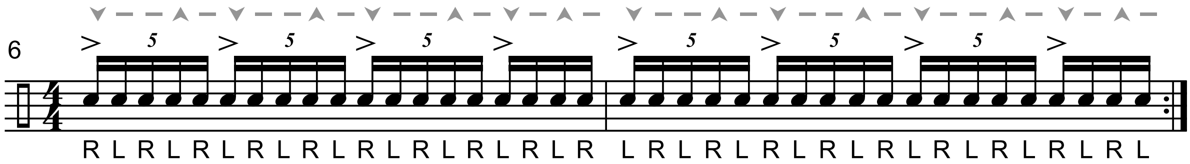
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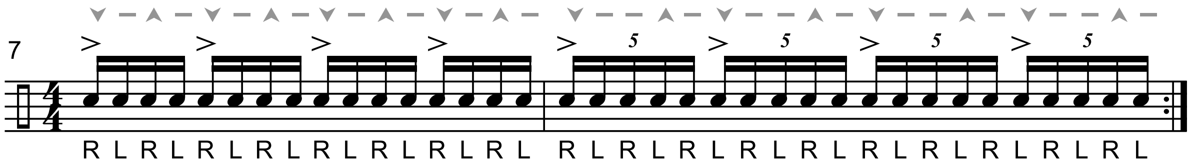
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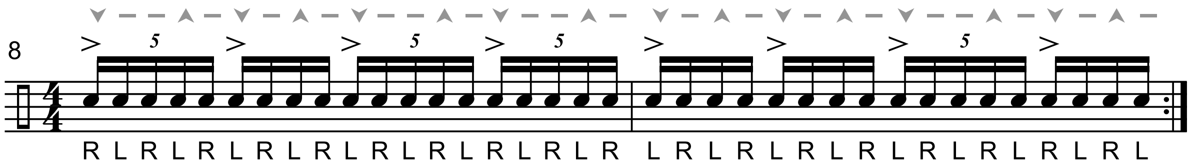
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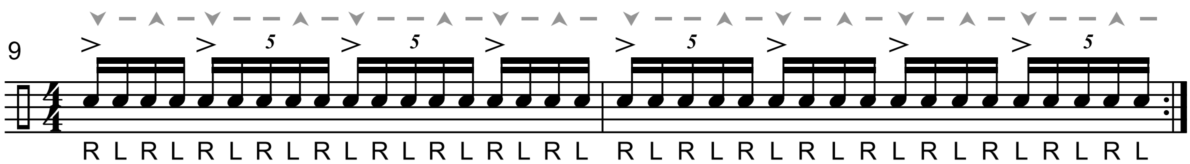
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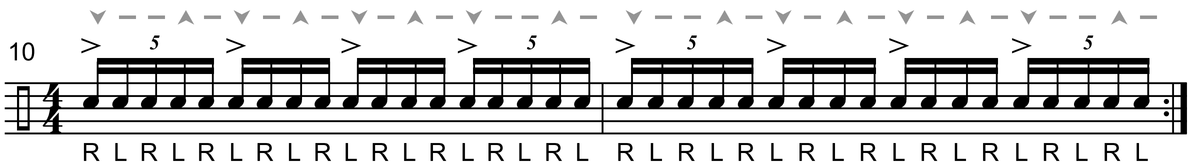
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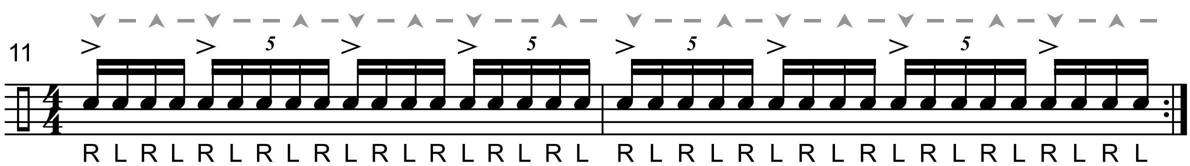
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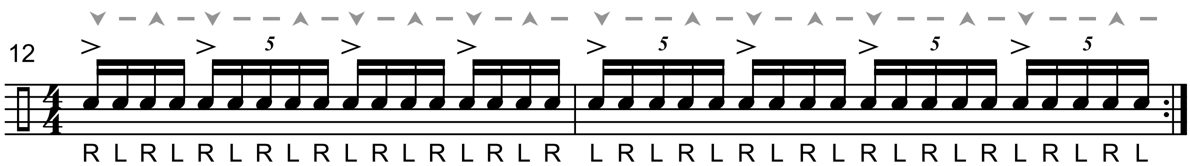
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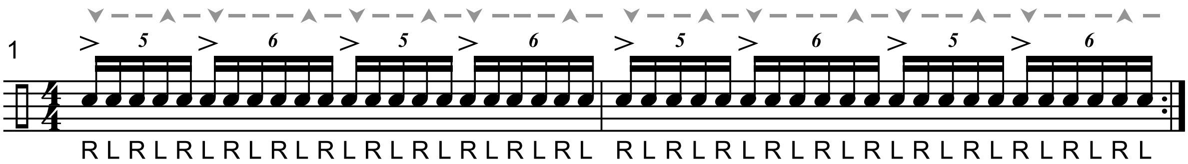


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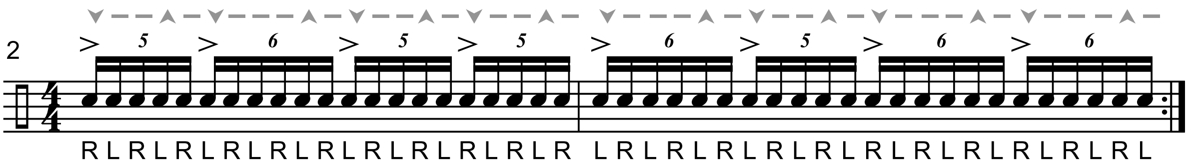


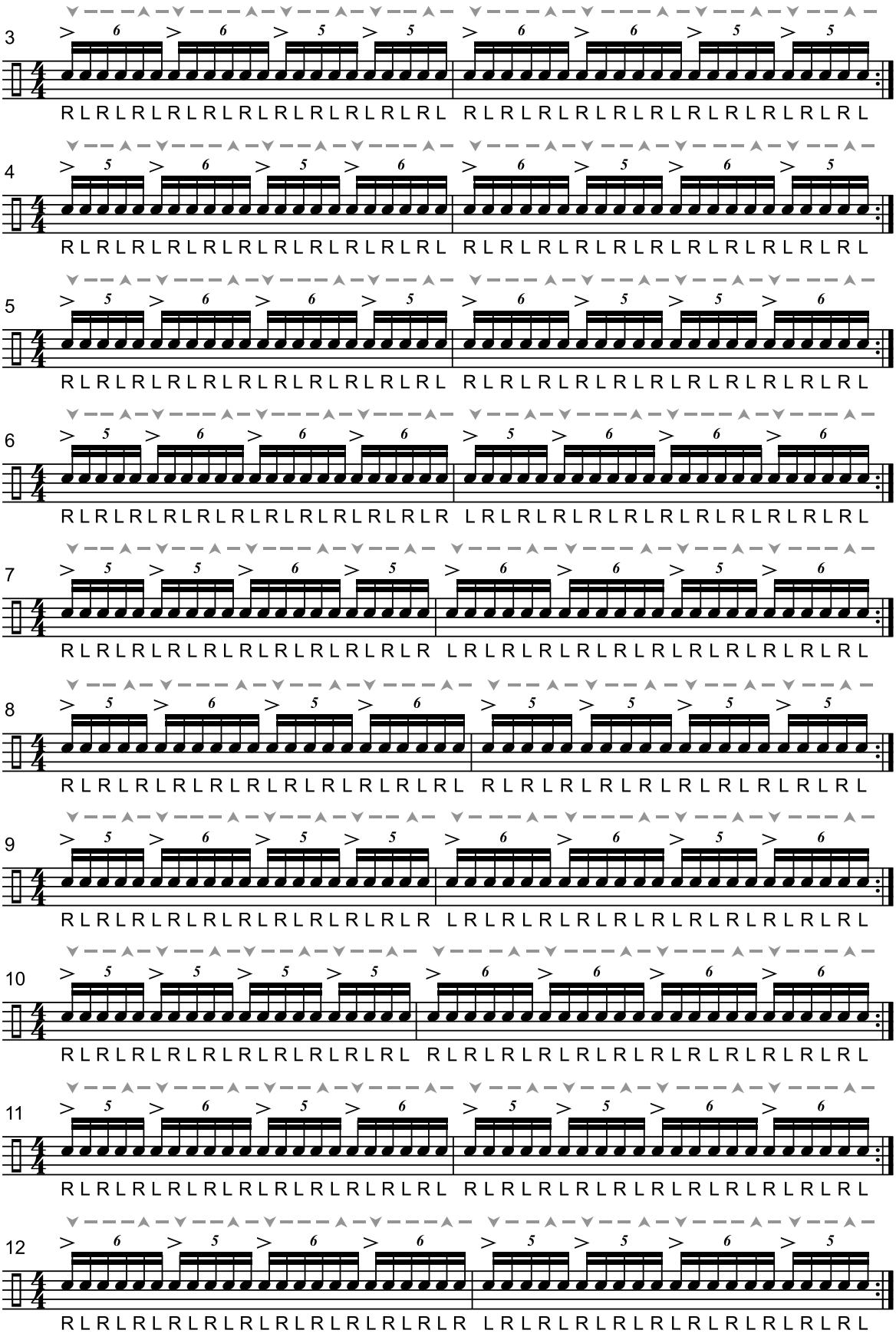
Groups Of Five And Six

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The New Breed: Advanced Systems

By Gary Chester

Gary Chester's groundbreaking book *The New Breed* is legendary. The book, and Gary's teaching methods are deeply intertwined, it is a *lifelong* commitment of dedication, study, and development. Gary Chester's Systems, Reading Exercises, Advanced Systems, Advanced Reading Exercises, Composite Systems, Grooves, and Applications are creative and advanced ways to learn.

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

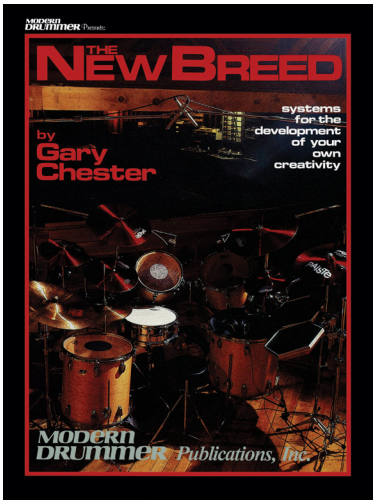
The systems in *The New Breed* will help you to develop your coordination and reading ability, and will give you a greater awareness of time, all of which will allow you to be part of the "new breed" of studio drummers." They are, "Systems for the development of your own creativity."

The following pages contain ten advanced systems, followed by ten additional pages of reading. Be sure to follow the instructions for each system carefully. Some of them involve playing the melody on snare drum, while others call upon you to play an alternating pattern with your hands between the snare drum and hi-hat.

The singing instructions for the first 39 systems apply to this section of the book as well. Singing is an important part of this entire learning process, and it shouldn't be overlooked.

The reading examples in this section are based on two-bar phrases, each of which is repeated. At first, you might want to concentrate on one two-bar phrase at a time. But eventually, you should be able to play straight through the entire page without stopping.

These reading pages can also be used with the first 39 systems. Similarly, reading pages I-A through V-B can be used with the ten advanced systems. Remember that the ultimate goal is to be able to sight-read a melody line while playing a system, so do not stop with the reading exercises in this book. Take other reading books, such as Ralph Pace's *Variations Of Drumming*, Ted Reed's *Syncopation*, Danny Pucillo's *New Concepts Of Reading Drum Music*, or Louie Bellson and Gil Breines' *Modern Reading Text In 4/4*, and practice reading the rhythms in those books while playing the systems in this book.



1a



2a



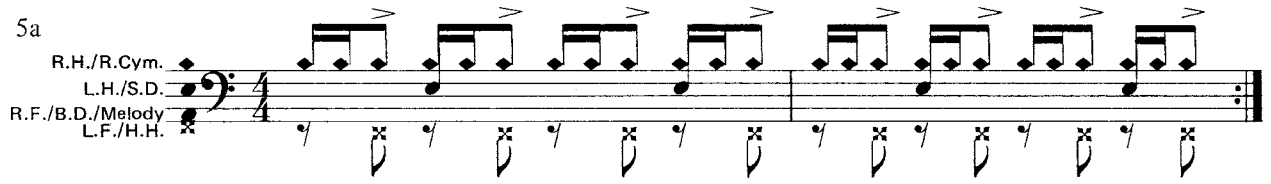
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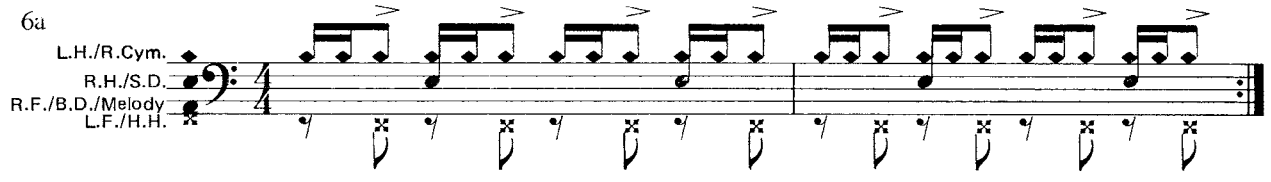
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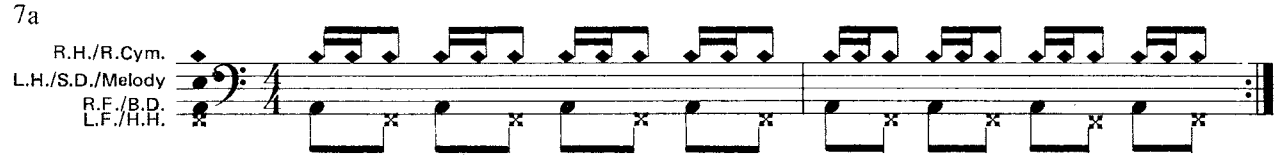
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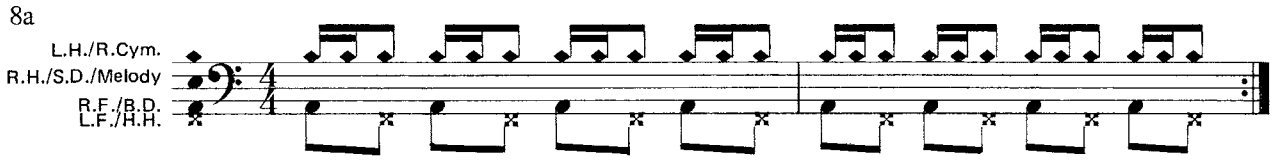
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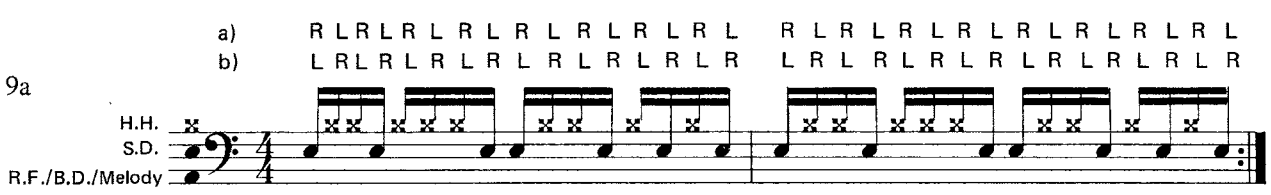
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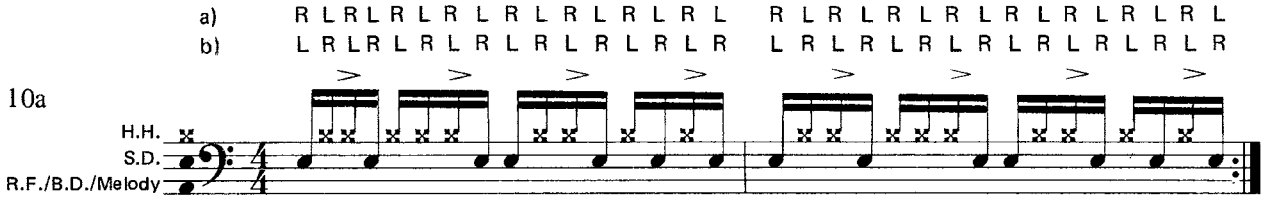
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9a



10a

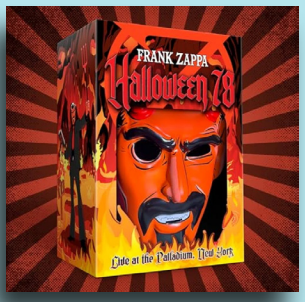


If you have a third hi-hat, you can play upbeats with your left foot on systems 9a and 10a.

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.

Frank Zappa
The 1978 Halloween Concerts, Live at the Palladium , New York
Vinnie Colaiuta drums
Zappa Records



Halloween was always a special occasion for Frank Zappa. He marked this occasion with special concerts, usually held in New York City, and as most of us know, Zappa (thankfully) taped all of his concerts. In 1977, Zappa filmed the concerts in NYC resulting in the *Baby Snakes* film. In 1978, Zappa wanted to raise the bar, so he recorded six shows over four nights. In this new release, two of those shows are featured on this brand new five CD box set. Vinnie Colaiuta had just joined Frank Zappa's band, Ed Mann was in his second year, both bassists Arthur Barrow and Patrick O' Hearn were in the band (O' Hearn playing fretless,) and L. Shankar would appear with the band as a special guest. The band hit the road in August, and by the time Halloween arrived, the band was in fifth gear. This was a very special band, and these were special shows. Many Zappa standards were played including "Suicide Chump," "Easy Meat," "Keep It Greasy," and "The Meek Shall Inherit Nothing." Vinnie Colaiuta sounds utterly ridiculous. Specific drumming highlights include "Thirteen," "Watermelon in Easter Hay," "The Deathless Horsie," "Little House I Used to Live In," and (possibly the only recording of Vinnie playing) "The Black Page #2." The entire recording was produced by vaultmeister Joe Travers and Ahmet Zappa, and the remixing and mastering sounds pristine. This is priceless and essential music. For those interested the box set also comes with a commemorative Frank Zappa Halloween mask and plastic devil's scepter. As a warning, some of these recordings have already appeared on the previously released *Halloween* DVD Audio Disc released in 2003, but this box set sounds MUCH better.

BEAT
Neon Heart Diseases Live in Los Angeles
Danny Carey drums
Inside Out Music



A few years back, Adrian Belew, Steve Vai, Tony Levin, and Danny Carey decides to put a band together to tour and play the music of King Crimson, focusing on the 80s version of Crimson in which Belew and Levin were members. That band recorded a few legendary records called *Three of a Perfect Pair, Beat,* and *Discipline.* Musicians and Crimson fans rejoiced and waited eagerly for tour dates. Well, wait no more. *Neon Heart Diseases Live in Los Angeles* is a two CD and one Bluray box that documents this amazing band and tour to perfection. All the more popular songs from the 80's Crimson are here, "Dig Me," "Elephant Talk," and "Three of a Perfect Pair." As well as King Crimson classics like "Larks Tongues in Aspic Part III" and "Red."

Danny Carey walks a perfect line of honoring Bill Bruford's original drum parts and adding his own unique spin on the music. Carey's drumming is lighter and more slippery than his drumming in Tool. Levin and Carey create a nice rhythmic tapestry for Vai and Belew, and when this band hits fifth gear, look out! Vai and Belew sound fantastic together playing this complex music. But it is in the way that the band plays this music that is interesting. This is no "tribute" band playing old music exactly like the recordings. BEAT interprets the music like a jazz band would interpret a set of standards, using the music as a launching point for creativity and interpretation.

The Blu-ray DVD is excellently filmed, and the three interview segments (beginning, mid-tour, and end-tour) are a fascinating look into the band's treatment, and the evolution, of the music. This is essential listening for Crimson fans and musicians everywhere!

Soen
Reliance
Martin Lopez drums
Silver Lining Records



Swedish progressive metal band Soen is described by drummer Martin Lopez as "melodic, heavy, intricate, and very different than everything else," and he is right. *Reliance* is their seventh studio record, and it is everything Lopez describes. Lopez is a wonderful drummer with a big groove, and big chops. Singer Joel Ekelof sings very well and never resorts to the guttural growl (that we all know as "cookie monster" singing.) Soen's music is heavy with a lot of dynamic shifts, and just enough rhythmic interplay to be exciting and engaging, while it never sounds like the entire band is trying to impress by playing intertwining, unison, and overly complex drum rhythms. Yes, Soen is different. "Axis" is heavy, and the groove is huge. "Huntress" give us a nice sludgy tempo, without being sloppy. "Unbound" grooves hard, and like every Soen tune has very intellectual lyrics. Soen couldn't be tighter if they tried, this music is an army of detuned bulldozers in perfect sync. I would not compare many new bands to Black Sabbath, but I will compare Soen to everything that I like about Black Sabbath, which is the highest praise I can give. Any fans of heavy music will be happy to discover Soen.

Al Foster
Live at Smoke
Al Foster drums
Smoke Sessions



Last year the jazz drumming world lost a giant in Al Foster. But when a great musician passes away, we always have their recorded music to cherish. Thankfully, the people at Smoke were running the tape when Foster took a quartet into the club for one last time, and the results are a joyous celebration of a wonderful person, drummer, and his music. Foster is reaching back to his younger days with some of his playing and is using new vocabulary that he has developed in his decades of performing and practicing. His quartet couldn't be better with old friends and new. Saxophonist Chris Potter and Foster have a long friendship, Brad Mehldau and Foster have played together on occasion, and bassist Joe Martin is a new rhythmic partner for Foster. However, the quartet sounds like they have toured and played together for decades. On this two CD set, each musician is represented with one of their own compositions, augmented by John Coltrane's "Satellite," Sonny Rollins' "Pent-Up House" and Wayne Shorter's "E.S.P.," and a few choice standards. You can feel Foster's big smile in every performance and each note as he searches for something new to play. Al swings, comps, solos, and even lays out, with absolute perfection. While we all wish there were dozens more recordings like this waiting to be heard, we can all listen to this record and the hundreds of recordings that Foster has graced in his 60+ year career. Listen to the fantastic *Live at Smoke,* and smile in appreciation and remembrance, while enjoying the great music that Al Foster left us. This is a fantastic and bittersweet record. Thanks for a lifetime of great music Al!!!

Mammoth
The End
Wolfgang Van Halen drums (all instruments)
BMG Records



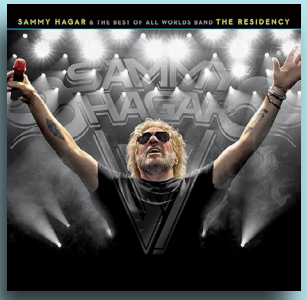
Wolfgang Van Halen is one of the most talented young multi-instrumentalists-songwriters around today, period. This is the third recording by Mammoth in which he wrote everything and plays everything. Surprising to some, Wolf was a drummer first, but that does not negate his songwriting and all of his other instrumental skills. *The End* sounds slightly closer to the first Mammoth record. With *The End,* Mammoth seems to be finding a voice of hard-edged rock (power pop) that previously leaned slightly towards metal (on their second release.) Whatever you want to call it, Mammoth is great tunes, great playing, and great singing. The tunes are outstanding, "The Spell," "One of a Kind," "Something New," and "Happy" are standouts. Wolf's drumming and his groove are powerful, check out "The End" and "I Really Wanna." "Same Old Song" is a killer shuffle, and Wolf's rhythm guitar playing is strong and funky throughout. He is an amazing one-man rhythm section. With all of the instrumental prowess, Wolf's singing (and harmony's) are also very strong, just listen to "Selfish" and "All in Good Time." I'm usually not a fan of records where one person is playing and singing everything, but when the music is this good, what is there not to love? This is a killer new record! I wish it was longer, but keep 'em coming Wolf, I hope this isn't *The End*…

Lettuce
Cook
Adam Deitch drums and percussion
Lettuce Records Regime Music Group



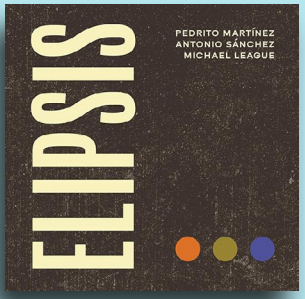
Lettuce is back, and they want you to "lettuce cook!" And they are cooking up a whole new batch of funk. Right out of the box, they hit hard with "Grewt Up" and "Clav It Your Way." If you have been waiting to experience the Lettuce brand of funk, this might be a good time to drop the needle because this batch is simmering to perfection. Adam Deitch, bassist Erick "Jesus" Coomes, and Guitarist Adam "Shmeeans" Coomes, are creating a big groove, and trumpeter Eric Bloom, saxophonist Ryan Zoidis, and keyboard player and occasional singer Nigel Hall are riding the wave of funk playing solos that make you smile. But Lettuce ain't about the solos, it's about the groove. "7 Tribes" could be an old James Brown track. Yup, it's *that* funky. "Rising to the Top" could be a nice piece of Memphis hot buttered soul. "Gold Tooth" has the same recipe as old classic P-Funk, and the same feel. You might even mistake guitarist Adam Coomes for the legendary Eddie Hazel. On "Breathe" Bloom and Zoidis sound as tight as the Memphis Horns. "The Matador" sounds like Sly and the Family Stone is playing at your backyard barbeque in July, I can almost smell the sweat. However, what's that off in the distance, dark clouds? We all might have to go inside because a "Storms Coming." What would it sound like if T.O.P. sat at the picnic table with Stevie Wonder? Well, the song "Cook" gives you a pretty good idea. "Keep On" is a hot dish of Tower of Power. I think you get it by now, this is a killer meal of funk, served up with care. For those vinyl heads and audiophiles out there, we also reviewed this recording on heavy vinyl, masterfully cut, double LP that sounds fantastic. And if you want to actually cook (and eat,) while Lettuce cooks, as an added bonus the LP comes with an insert of eight recipes from the band, they've thought of everything for this party. This music will fill up your soul and your stomach.

Sammy Hagar & The Best of All Worlds Band
The Residency
Kenny Aronoff drums
Big Machine Rock Records



After two records and tours with Joe Satriani (*Shapeshifting* and *The Elephants of Mars,*) Kenny Aronoff now finds himself laying down his big groove for a new "super-band" that is paying tribute to the music that many of us grew up hearing and loving, Montrose, Sammy Hagar, and Van Halen. However, three fifths of the All Worlds band come from the Satriani band that has been touring for the last two years, (Joe Satriani, keyboardist Rai Thistlewayte, and Kenny Aronoff,) so the musical chemistry is impeccable. The other two members are (of course) Hagar and Michael Anthony. While no one can duplicate the power of Alex Van Halen's original drum parts, Aronoff is really bringing it! Check out his double bass chops on "5150," the signature fills, and cross sticks on "Right Now," the hard rockin' funk of "Poundcake," and Kenny's enormous groove on "Best of Both Worlds," "Eagles Fly," "Heavy Metal," "Panama," and "Rock Candy." This is a fascinating listen for any fans of Aronoff, and anyone who wants to the study the drumming of a drummer who can seemingly do it all. Kenny is not just "playing the parts" he is throwing himself into the music and playing his ass off! For a nice ride down memory lane, or to hear a different side of Kenny Aronoff, this is a cool listen.

Pedrito Martinez, Antonio Sanchez, Michael League
Elipsis…
Antonio Sanchez drums
Pedrito Martinez congas, bata, vocals
Ground Up Music



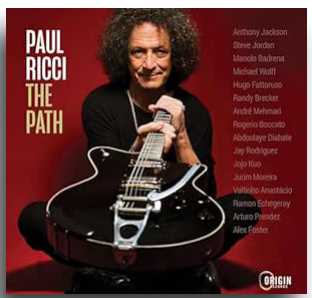
This collaboration is one of the most exciting new recordings and bands that I have heard in a while. All three musicians had equal parts in the compositions, an all three musicians get a chance to shine, support, and solo. League plays everything, including bass, keyboards, and guitar. Martinez is one of the best congueros today, but his bata playing and his vocals are outstanding and haunting. Antonio and Pedrito sound as one, but this is not a "traditional Latin record." The electronics that League provides make this a very contemporary sounding record, kind of like Nine Inch Nails meets Mongo Santamaria. The CD consists of six exciting tunes containing many different textures and flavors. I wish there was more, and I hope there is more on the way!

Chick Corea, Brian Blade, Christian McBride
Trilogy 3
Brian Blade drums
Candid Records



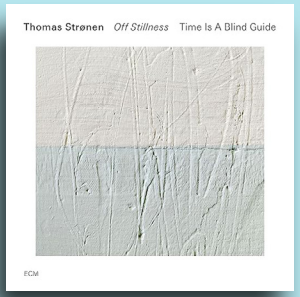
Chick Corea's final recording is a bittersweet affair. This trio had an entire tour booked that was cut short by Covid, and then Corea passed way. But none of those unfortunate circumstances are present on this amazing an joyful recording. The band comes out swinging on "Humpty Dumpty." It's an interesting study to hear Corea play "Humpty Dumpty" with several different drummers throughout the years, and this tune has been played by them ALL (Haynes, Weckl, Colaiuta, Gadd, and Gilmore) and now Blade. The same could be said for "Windows," another Corea standard. Brian seems to be painting a little less on this record than on the first two recordings of this amazing trio, his playing is less impressionistic and more driving. This is neither good nor bad, just *different*. Blade and McBride are a pairing for the ages, going back to the early Joshua Redman band, their hook-up is other worldly. The trio's playfulness on Monk's "Ask Me Now," and "Trinkle Tinkle," and Cole Porter's "You'd Be So Easy to Love" are a lot of fun. Just listen to the communication between Blade and Corea throughout. The trio sets a perfect mood on Corea's composition "Spanish Song," and "Tempus Fugit" is always a perfect closer. Unfortunately, this is the last recording that we were given by Chick Corea, but after leading so many great bands, this was a truly another magical Corea trio.

Paul Ricci
The Path
Steve Jordan, Jojo Kuo, Roggerio Boccato, Jurim Moreira, drums. Manolo Badrena, Valtinho Anastacio, Ramon Echegeray, Arturo Prendez, Hugo Fattoruso, percussion
Origin Records



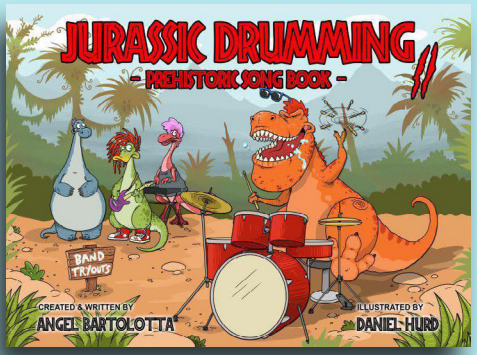
There are a very few drummers whose inclusion will make me pick up a recording, Steve Jordan is one of them. The fact the Jordan, Anthony Jackson, and Manolo Badrena (three fourths of Steve Khan's famed Eyewitness band) play together on three tracks of this record make it instantly appealing to me. Throw in a tune featuring one-time Fela drummer Jojo Kuo, and one tune with Brazilian drummer Jurim Moreira, and you have an attractive rhythmic stew. Jordan and Jackson burn under saxophonist Alex Foster's solo on "Whenever," and they really lay into a groove on "Major Look," while "September Glide" has a very Eyewitness sound to it. Guitarist Paul Ricci plays with a very clean tone, and he really knows how to construct tracks because based on the liner notes, very few of the musicians were together in the same studio when these tunes were tracked, let alone in the same year! And yet you hear a lot of "interaction." Kuo's playing, and the Candombe percussion section on "Lobo" is mesmerizing, as are the haunting vocals of Abdoulaye Diabate. "Around the Block" features Moreira's and Anastacio's taste of Brazil. This is a good record of several varied grooves and bands. I would love to hear what any one of these bands would sound like for an entire recording.

Thomas Stronen
Off Stillness Time is A Blind Guide
Thomas Stronen drums
ECM



With a drummer led piano trio augmented by two string players, you don't really know where this music is going to take you. Norwegian drummer and composer Thomas Stronen is a veteran of the European jazz scene, and he is developing into a very important ECM drummer. His sound, approach, and time-feel, all whisper the strong tradition of ECM drumming. Stronen's compositions are lyrical and filled with thick harmonic texture. The combination of two strings and piano trio is very cool, and possibly something I've never heard before (which is always nice to say.) The way that Stronen guides his ensemble from behind the drums is strongly gentle. The title of this recording somehow tells me about the contradictions within, "Off Stillness" is an interesting phrase, but "Time is a Blind Guide" paints a beautiful picture. "Memories of Paul," "Cubism," and "Dismissed" are my favorite tracks on the record. After Thomas Stronen's duet recording entitled *Relations*, I was eager to hear what came next. This is a perfect, logical, and enjoyable, next step.

Jurassic Drumming, The Dinosaur Method
By Angel Bartolotta
AB Drum Lessons Publishing



I have seen many beginner drum books written for young kids, and several of them use the same technique as Angel Bartolotta by choosing words to represent different rhythmic values and subdivisions. But none of them has done it as thoroughly as Angel and his *Jurassic Drumming, The Dinosaur Method.* By choosing different dinosaur names, kids will (hopefully) stay engaged (what kids don't like dinosaurs?) And they are learning something besides drums. The addition of the "Roar" and "Bite" notes is a creative touch as well. Daniel Hurd's artwork is an essential touch as well, the books have a coloring book- kids-book look to them which is very helpful. The kids might have to sound out some of the dinosaur names at first, and parental help and involvement is always encouraged. This book is a great start for any young kid starting on the drums.

Vancouver Jazz Orchestra
Meets Brian Charette
Jesse Cahill drums
Jack Duncan percussion
Cellar Jazz Records



In the tradition of organist Rhoda Scott playing with the Mel Lewis-Thad Jones Orchestra, Richard "Groove" Holmes playing with Gerald Wilson's big band, or Jimmy Smith recording with a big band, comes the Vancouver Jazz Orchestra with organist Brian Charette. And this pairing carries on the tradition with great arrangements, in the pocket playing, strong soloists, and great arrangements. Jesse Cahill does as good of a job as Mel Lewis and Grady Tate on the aforementioned recordings. Listen to how he navigates the transitions of "Lado a Lado," ties together "Colour Contrast," and creates an original way to play "As Luck Would Have It." The arrangement of Herbie Hancock's "The Sorcerer" is very good, and the swagger of "Shimmy!" "Oh Brother," and "Honeymoon Phase," all sit perfectly in the cut. "Colour Contrast" features Jesse Cahill percolating throughout, which all leads up to a nice drum solo over some nice ensembles from the band. The record ends with a killer shuffle on "The Same Old You With The Same Old Blues." This is a very enjoyable and high-quality record, that jazz lovers will really appreciate.

Jawsome Drums
By Angel Bartolotta
AB Drum Lessons Publishing



As he does with *Jurassic Drumming*, Angel Bartolotta teaches rhythms and reading music by assigning different names to different rhythms and subdivisions. In *Jawsome Drums* the names are shark names and some more difficult rhythms are addressed. The shark names work just as well as the dinosaur names but might be a little easier for young children to say. As in *Jurassic Drumming*, Bartolotta and *Jawsome Drums* teach simple rhythms, builds beats, and combines those beats with different fills in four bar phrases (which is a very nice touch!) Every page has a cool and engaging shark fact, and as above Daniel Hurd's artwork is a real plus. The blank "Certificate of Completion" at the end of the book is also a very thoughtful addition.

These two books cover the same topics in a very similar way, with the big variable being dinosaurs or sharks. They are very well thought out and show the experience of someone who has been teaching for a long time. The rhythms of *Jawsome Drums* get more complex, but don't let that dissuade you. These are both VERY good books for young kids and parents to explore rhythm and drumming and have fun learning together! These books look fun, are fun, and they make learning fun. What more can you ask for?

Zak Starkey's Drums

By Donn Bennett

Zak Starkey has long been regarded as the only drummer capable of adequately carrying the torch for The Who's original drummer, Keith Moon. His 30-year gig with The Who, might have been considered a career highlight, but a lot has happened since Zak Starkey was infamously sacked last year from his gig as the drummer in The Who. Instead, Zak is eagerly planning the next chapter of his already amazing musical journey.

Zak Starkey's musical history started the day he was born to Beatle drummer Ringo Starr and his wife Maureen Starkey in the epicenter of the exploding 1960s rock music world. The entirety of the London music scene were regular guests in the Starkey home. All of The Beatles, members of the Rolling Stones, The Who, Eric Clapton, Elton John, Marc Bolan, Steve Marriott, and countless others were regular fixtures in his life. That's a pretty inspiring environment to grow up in for a music obsessed kid like Zak.

Initially interested in the guitar, Zak received guitar lessons from his dad's pal Marc Bolan. The legendary T. Rex singer and guitarist taught Zak chords while sharing the sofa of the Starkey's living room. Zak continued his guitar tutelage with another family friend, Humble Pie front man Steve Marriott.

Rather ironically, young Zak developed close relationships with two drummers who would precede him in The Who. Keith "Uncle Keith" Moon was a close family friend, regular guest, and occasional babysitter in the Starkey home. Moon never gave Zak any formal drum "lessons," but the pair spent a lot of time talking about drums and music which ultimately steered Zak's interest to the drums. Faces drummer Kenney Jones, who joined The Who following Keith Moon's passing, was also a close family friend and lived nearby. It was Kenney Jones who actually gave Zak drum lessons and taught him to play.

In addition to playing drums with The Who, Zak has played drums with artists including Oasis and Johnny Marr, as well as solo projects with his Who bandmates John Entwistle and Roger Daltrey. He also earned a Grammy for playing guitar and producing Toots and the Maytals' *Got To Be Tough* album in 2020.

Moving forward, he is currently working on recording projects with his bands SSHH and Mantra of the Cosmos which includes collaborations with fellow "Beatle Kids" James McCartney and Sean Lennon. This month he is also debuting his one-man, multi-media clinic/video/performance show *An Evening with Zak Starkey,* at the Gramercy Theater in New York on February 20, 2026.

With so many projects in the works, Zak decided to let go of some artifacts from his storied past and to focus on his ever-expanding future. Over his five-decade career, he's accumulated an extraordinary collection of drums and musical artifacts. Here are a few highlights from the collection. I feel deeply honored to help Zak find appreciative homes for these iconic pieces of his musical history.



Amongst the collection are several custom and prototype Zildjian cymbals made specifically for Zak Starkey. Many are engraved with his name beneath the Zildjian logo.



Keith Moon played this Premier copper timpani circa the mid-late 1970s. The timpani was given to Zak who eventually played it with The Who after joining the band in 1986.



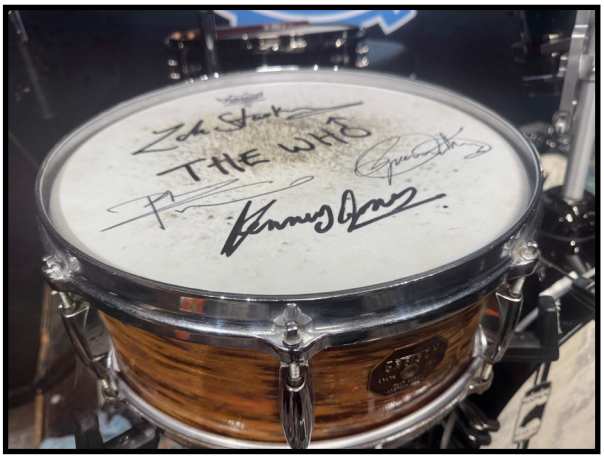
This is the very first set that Zak played with The WHO upon joining the band in 1996. Prior to joining the band, he played the set in solo projects his future WHO bandmates John Entwistle and Roger Daltrey. The drums are custom made DW thick maple shells with a white finish ply and gold hardware. The set was inspired by one of Keith Moon's drum sets with the same finish and hardware. 16x14" and 15x13" floor toms, 14x9", 13x9", 12x9" and 10x8" mounted toms, two 22x16" basses and a 14x5" Edge snare. The set is all mounted on a custom DW rack system.

Zak played this DW Collectors Series set with The WHO circa 1999-2001 which included their entire 2000 US Tour, the 2000 Teenage Cancer Trust and *The Concert For New York* in 2001. The Who's now legendary performance at The Concert For New York is widely considered the highlight of the entire star studded event, as well as The WHO"s greatest performance in the "Zak era" of the band. Interestingly, the set was also played by Zak's drum teacher and predecessor in The WHO, Kenney Jones in 2001.





This custom 22" red, white and blue "Target" cymbal was amongst a complete set of matching cymbals that Zak played with The WHO during their 2010 Super Bowl Halftime show. The band's 12-minute set was seen by 106 million people worldwide.



Another drum with some serious rock 'n' roll pedigree. This Gretsch "DRB Special" snare drum was owned and used by Keith Moon in the early 1970s. After Moon passed the drum was eventually given to Zak who played it on several of his early projects. The drum is signed by Zak, Pete Townsend and Roger Daltrey of The WHO as well as Zak's predecessor in The WHO, Kenney Jones.

This San Diego Sharks NHL Hockey team presented Zak and all the members of The Who these matching team jerseys.

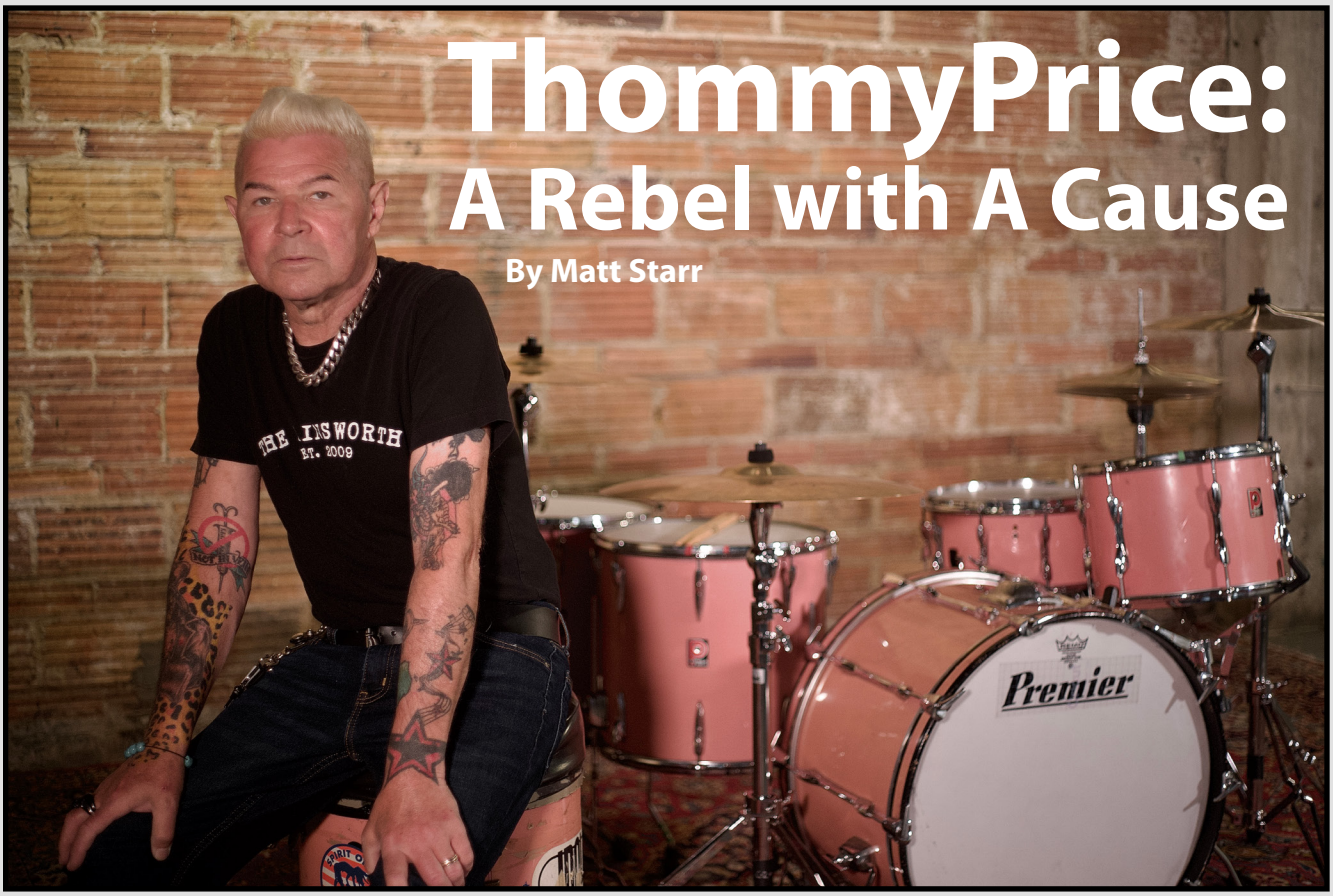




A gold ticket presented to The WHO to commemorate the band's 2016 sold out show at Madison Square Garden in New York.

This 1964 Ludwig "Downbeat" drum set has a truly remarkable history. The set was originally owned by Ringo Starr's good pal, actor Peter Sellers. Sellers gave the set to Ringo Starr in 1968. Ringo played the set in his home for many years before giving it to Zak when he started playing the drums as an early teen. 20x14" bass, 14x14" floor tom, 12x8" mounted tom and a 14x4" Downbeat snare drum. The set is finished in Pink Champagne Pearl finish. Zak played the set with many of his early bands as well as recordings with Oasis.





Thommy Price: A Rebel with A Cause

By Matt Starr

The fact that Brooklyn born, Staten Island raised rock 'n' roll drummer Thommy Price played on records by Joan Jett, Billy Idol, Scandal, Roger Daltrey (The Who,) Rick Ocasek (The Cars,) Debby Harry (Blondie,) Scandal, Blue Oyster Cült, Ron Wood (Rolling Stones,) Peter Wolf (J Geils,) John Waite, The Psychedelic Furs, Ronnie Spector, Mink DeVille, Kasim Sulton, Steve Stevens, Steve Lukather (Toto,) Michael Monroe (Hanoi Rocks,) Enrique Iglesias and others is impressive. However, his credits alone do not get to the heart of what made Thommy such a powerful and unique drummer.

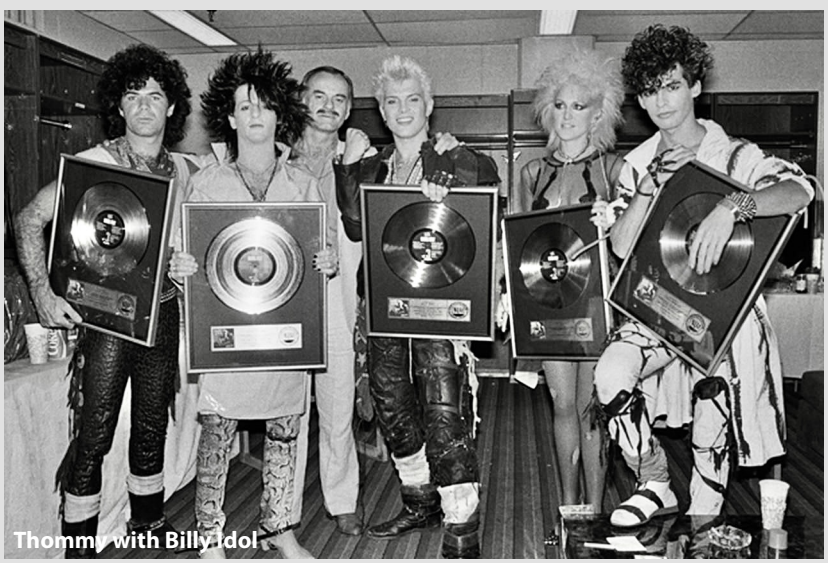
My first exposure to Thommy was on the Joan Jett song "I Hate Myself for Loving You." The floor tom groove plus a handful of killer drum films really brought that song to life. However, it wasn't what he played, it was HOW he played it. There was something magical happening, but as a young drummer I wasn't sure what it was. Next, I heard the Billy Idol song "Rebel Yell." It was a simple four on the floor beat that any drummer could play, but again, there was something magical about it.

Then in 1988, I experienced Thommy Price firsthand. My band opened a few shows for Joan Jett and the Blackhearts. My band rehearsed for weeks and the first night we played better than we had ever played before, it felt great. Then Joan and Thommy took the stage and within four measures of eighth notes, *they destroyed us*. They obliterated everything we had done. I sat there thinking, 'How is this possible? Anyone can play eighth notes.... *anyone*. Why are they so good?'

When Thommy passed in October of 2025, I felt it was important to tell the drummers of the world about him. Almost everyone has heard him on the radio, but I needed them to really know about Thommy Price and why he was so special.

I decided to talk to the musicians and artists Thommy worked with over the years, as well as the drummers who admired him and let them speak to what made Thommy's drumming such a magical force in rock drumming. The phrase "impeccable timing" was used by several of them.

"We made the whole *Rebel Yell* album using a LinnDrum machine, which my producer Keith Forsey had programmed.


Thommy with Billy Idol

And it sounded great, we just thought if we could put a live element of a live drummer doing what the Linn is doing but bringing that humanity to it. Thommy brought this excitement and a humanity to the playing that we were missing with the Linn. Thommy just pushed it that little bit further where he took it into the spectacular.

"It was really exciting playing on stage with Thommy because Thommy was super, super there as a timekeeper, as a player. He just gave his all on stage. He was good fun to be with, we hung out a lot, and we had a great time. I really miss his sort of sparkling personality and he brought a lot of joy to what he did."
BILLY IDOL

"We had a lot of drummers try to replace the LinnDrum on "Rebel Yell." Once Thommy started playing, we knew in four measures that he was the guy. In fact I re-recorded all of my guitars because of how much Tommy's drumming upped the ante. He represents the New York rock 'n' roll thing. Thommy had that energy of someone who had spent a lot of time on the New York subways. He had a wicked sense of humor, quintessential New York."
STEVE STEVENS (Guitarist, Billy Idol 1981 - present, Michael Jackson)


Thommy with Joan Jett

"Music should hit you in the chest and the crotch. Thommy played extremely powerful, minimalistic rock 'n' roll drumming. He did so much with so little. When he did a fill, it really belonged there. The way he put it together was magical. I was always so impressed how he locked in with me. He could read my body language on stage. We had a million little signals. Thommy played right with me in a way that was eerie. Thommy was a very warm person; he was like family."
JOAN JETT (Played with Thommy 1986-2016)

"We played together in our first band, he was 12 and I was 13. We both got fired. I got fired for not having an amp and Thommy got fired for not being flashy enough. I think after that we both decided that we wanted to take the music thing more seriously. I went on to play with Utopia and he got the Scandal gig, we had both made it off of Staten Island."

"He was the right combination of British invasion meets American music. He just had this innate sense of how to hold a rhythm section together. It's not something you can put inside of you from study or practice. It's gotta be there from the beginning and Thommy had it from day one. I've never played with a steadier drummer. Thommy at his peak was unbeatable. He was just perfect. Every single night. There was never a night he wasn't on. I think Thommy loved the way he played. He knew exactly what he did and that he did it better than anyone else."


Thommy with Kasim Sulton

KASIM SULTON (Bassist, Joan Jett, Todd Rundgren, Blue Oyster Cult)

"Thommy was solid as a rock. You could feel his kick drum through your chest and his timing was impeccable. He was a character… he was like one of the Little Rascals. When we did the *Up Your Alley* record, we played live, everybody faced each other in the room. And he was good with suggestions, he'd try stuff. He had great fills. It was like thunder. He played what I call "stiff wristed". Thommy was definitely a New York drummer, straight up rock 'n' roll and he sounded great on the radio."


Thommy with Ricky Byrd

RICKY BYRD (Guitarist - Joan Jett & the Blackhearts, Roger Daltrey)

"I loved Thommy. I never had to think about playing with him. It was like breathing. He rocked but with finesse and control. Thommy had all the right stuff. He just played everything right, pure, and big. He just made it easy. He had what I called the


Thommy with Kenny Aaronson

'hi hat explosion fill' (check out "Desire" by Joan Jett) – it's like a Motown thing. He really played for the song, never overplayed. Off stage we were like pirates but when it came to showtime, he snapped right to it. He was consistent, I never heard him make a mistake. Ever."
KENNY AARONSON (Bassist, Billy Idol, Joan Jett, Dust, Yardbirds)

"Thommy was responsible in a big way for getting me in The Blackhearts. I played with him on a Little Steven event at the Hammerstein Ballroom. After we played, he said to me, 'I like your playing. I like the way you lock into my bass drum.' Then he asked me if I'd be interested in touring with The Blackhearts. We ended up touring the US opening for The Who. There's an internal thing that certain guys have… An internal clock and he had it. It's pretty rare. His pocket was so big, it's easy for a bass player to play to, you just fall into it. With Thommy it was all about the groove and just playing the song. He did it better than anyone. He was the motor in the back of the band."
HAL B. SELZER (Bassist, Joan Jett & the Blackhearts 2015 - present)

"Thommy came in and just beat the shit out of the drums. We never used a click track on the *Warrior* album. He had a built-in metronome. If anyone messed with me, he was right there. We were opening for Adam Ant and some guys were making some lewd gestures at me. Thommy saw this and just clocked one of them with a drumstick.

Thommy was definitely a rock drummer, but he was a sensitive guy, he listened to the singer. I loved singing with him playing drums. He would do a thing at the end of the show that I called the "flailing woodchuck". He loved when I called it that.


Thommy with his Daughter and Wife

Thommy and Ivan Elias (bassist) were like a solid wall of glue. When Thommy left the band, we basically imploded. It just wasn't the same without him."
PATTY SMYTH (Singer, Scandal, played with Thommy 1982–84)

"Thommy played with power. When he hit the toms, he meant it. He could make the drums sounds so good just by he way he played.

We recorded the *Warrior* record at Electric Lady. (Billy Idol was in the other room doing *Rebel Yell*.) We all played live with Patty singing, and no click track. Thommy had very distinctive parts and fills. The way he played those songs was a big part of what made them special."
KEITH MACK (Guitarist, Scandal, played with Thommy 1982–84)

"He's the Hal Blaine of Hard Rock. Thommy's playing was so Brooklyn, so Italian. Back in the day before YouTube, you played like the guys in your neighborhood. You played like the guys you learned from; the guys you went to see play live. He never played a fill that was out of place. It all fit so perfectly. Rock solid backbeat. He had that killer instinct."
JOE FRANCO (Drummer, The Good Rats, Twisted Sister)

"I met Thommy when Scandal was opening for Bryan Adams. You watched him for 30 seconds and immediately became a fan. You just knew he had a lot more than what he was playing. He gave you exactly what the song needed and nothing more. There was some kind of magic when he played. His time was unbeatable. He would pound out that two and four – those perfectly placed quarter notes with hi-hat open just enough to make it big. Impeccable time. "

"Thommy was such a sweet, gentle, shy, guy and then he'd go get behind the drums and play with such intensity and confidence. He just pummeled the groove. Producers must've loved him. I thought about him a lot when I was recording The Cult *Sonic Temple* record. I kept thinking, "What would Thommy do?" "Fire Woman" could easily have been a Thommy Price drum track." (When I told Mickey the "Rebel Yell" LinnDrum story, he laughed and said, '*Thommy would crush a Linn!*')"
MICKEY CURRY (Drummer, Bryan Adams, Hall & Oates)

"He was a song guy. Thommy's got that intangible thing. The energy he had when he played was incredible. Back in the day, Thommy's band used to open up for my band The Word in Staten Island. We had a friendly competition. I was really happy for him when he got the Scandal gig." "
SANDY GENARRO (Drummer, Joan Jett, Cindy Lauper, Pat Travers, The Monkees)

Def Leppard and Joan Jett & the Blackhearts toured the U.S. together in 2000. Thommy was a highlight for me every time he got behind the kit - how relaxed he was & how simple he made drumming look. The parts he played were quite simple in form but to trying to emulate his parts was very challenging. "I Hate Myself for Loving You" and "Rebel Yell" are both great examples of feel and perfect punctuation. He epitomized the New York vibe." "
RICK ALLEN (Drummer, Def Leppard)

"In the late 80s, Thommy asked me to play drums with Price - Sulton. Thommy had played drums and sang on the record, and he asked me to be the drummer in the live band. He took a chance on me. He could've recommended anybody, but he gave me a chance and I'm totally indebted to him. The best drumming advice he gave me was, 'When you go for a fill, don't hit the kick drum until the end.'"
JIMMY CLARK (Drummer, The Price - Sulton Band, Metallica drum tech 2015 -present)

"When I first got with Cheap Trick we toured with Joan. I remember watching him and thinking, 'That's the guy!' When


Thommy with Joan Jett Manager Kenny Laguna

family to capture interviews and record the words of those who loved him most, ensuring his legacy is carried forward through their voices and memories. That legacy also lives on through Thommy's scholarship initiative, The Hit Hard Foundation, **hithardfoundation.com**, which continues his commitment to supporting and inspiring the next generation of musicians."

In writing this article, I not only learned about Thommy, but I learned about what it means to be a true artist. To find your thing and do it. Do it with joy and 100% commitment. Don't worry what other drummers are doing. They may be great, but they'll never be you, and the best you will ever be is when you are being yourself.

Essential Listening:

Joan Jett & the Blackhearts, *Up your Alley*
Billy Idol, *Rebel Yell*
Scandal, *Warrior*
Price - Sulton *Lights On*
Roger Daltrey, *Parting Should Be Painless*
Or go on YouTube and search any live Joan Jett during the 90's or early 2000's.

you see a drummer in his 60's playing like he's still 20, it's amazing. He was killing it. He epitomizes that era of punk / rock 'n' roll drumming. He played all the right parts. When I think of Joan Jett, I think of Thommy Price on drums."

DAXX NIELSEN (Drummer, Cheap Trick 2011 – present)

"People say to me, [about playing with Joan Jett] *'Those are big shoes to fill.'* Thommy didn't wear shoes; Thommy Price wore boots... he poured cement. When you say his name, you gotta say "Thommy f'n Price!" That's the weight. Learning his parts was always a treat. His floor tom was his ride cymbal. I loved all of his tom work. He had a ton of that old school nuance. In the world we live in with all the shred drummers… You gotta go back and look at people like Thommy— that's what you build a career on. Even though he's passed, I still feel like I'm just keeping his seat warm until he returns.""

MICHAEL MCDERMOTT (Drummer, Joan Jett & the Blackhearts 2016 - present)

Thommy's wife Stephanie wanted to acknowledge the importance of Joan Jett's manager Kenny Laguna. "Thommy worked with Kenny since he was a teenager. Kenny was a big part of Thommy's career and musically he always appreciated what Thommy brought to the music." She continued, "In 2022, director Trevor Najera began work on the documentary, *Hit Hard: Thommy Price*. "We been in production for the past three years, and in 2025 we released a teaser trailer offering an early glimpse into the film and Thommy's trailblazing career. When Thommy passed, we were still about a year away from completion, and his loss deeply impacted everyone involved—both personally and creatively— the film was telling the story of a hardened warrior still very much in motion. As we near the end of production, we're meeting with more of Thommy's


Thommy with Matt Starr

Morgan Rose's Sevendust Touring Drums

Photos by Jason Mehler











Drums: Pearl Music City Custom Reference Pure Series in Red Sparkle: 18 X 22 Kick, 18 x 20 Kick, 9 x 10 Rack, 9 x 12 Rack, 16 x 16 Floor w/ legs, 16 x 18 Floor w/ legs.

Snares: Brass 6.5 x 14 Snare, 6.5 x 13 Aux Snare.

Cymbals: Sabian- 21″ HH Power Bell Ride, 19″ Paragon Crash, 18″ Paragon Crash, 18″ Paragon Crash, 16″ AAX O-Zone, 19″ AA Holy China, 14″ AA Mini Chinese, 15″ Paragon Hi Hats, 10″ AAX Splash, 12″ Chopper trash stack, 8″ AAX Air Splash.

Heads: Evans- Tom batter- G2 Clear, Tom resonant - G1 Clear, Snare batter- Heavyweight, Snare resonant (snare side) - Hazy 300, Kick batter- EQ 4 or Emad.

Hardware: Pearl – BC Boom Stands, S Snare Stands, H2050 HH Stand, Redline Chain-drive Double-Kick Pedal.

Electronics: Pearl Redbox.

Drumsticks: Vater – Double-butted Morgan Rose Signature sticks.

Accessories: Kelly Shu Microphone Mounts, Cympad Cymbal Washers.

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