

Reviews of Roland VAD 516, and new snare drums from Yamaha and Voxel



# MODERN DRUMMER

THE WORLD'S #1  
DRUM COMMUNITY SINCE 1977

MARCH 2026

## CHAD SEXTON

### THE MUSICAL UNITY OF 311

Onstage with Olivia Rodrigo

**Jordi Radnoti**

Inspiring a New Generation

**Luigi Paraventi**

**NAMM Pictorial**



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WITH NICKO McBRAIN

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## EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

### It Takes A Village to Create a Drummer

Think back to when and how you started drumming?

Many of us grew up listening to the radio, hearing recordings, seeing drums on TV, watching MTV, attending concerts, and *eventually* going to drum clinics, watching drum videos, and going down the drumming rabbit-hole on YouTube. Through these experiences we drew inspiration from the long lineage of the all-time great drummers.



*But who was the drummer that first inspired you by seeing him or her in-person and up-close?* It was probably a local drummer in a band, a friend, a band teacher at school, a parent, a local drum corps or marching band, or a big brother or sister. *That is the person who inspired you to want to play the drums.* We often forget about our original in-person drumming inspirations, they are very special people. These are the people that lit our drumming fuse.

*Secondly, who was the person that inspired you to become a drummer?* Whether it was teaching us our first song, or sitting us down at a drum set for the very first time? These are the people that first taught us about the act of drumming, they made drumming a *real* thing. It was right in front of our eyes and ears, it was one-on-one magic. They added the fuel to the fire. They created the aspiration.

*Lastly, who was your first drum teacher?* This was the person that saw the burning fuse and the full tank of fuel. They kept the fire burning and added oxygen to keep the fire lit and burning out of control. They motivated us to learn about the art of drumming, holding the sticks, reading music, listen to certain music, and they taught us about drums, cymbals, heads, and sticks. Through education, they encouraged the explosion of our desire, passion, and creativity.

Sometimes all of these people are the same person, *but not often*. In life, we see lots of things on TV, develop various interests, and learn about many different things. But they don't inspire us to develop and follow a burning passion. The progression of inspiration, aspiration, and education is a magical combination. We should all make a point of thanking those special people in our lives.

This unique combination of inspiration, aspiration, and education is what we at *Modern Drummer* try to encourage and cultivate. Yes, it does take a village to create a drummer. That village is also called a community. The community of *Modern Drummer* is a vast one. It is comprised of a digital magazine, exclusive interviews, gear reviews, social media, *Metal Sticks* and *Give the Drummer Some* VIP podcasts, Tour Kit Rundowns, Out Now, Collector's Corner, the Neil Peart Scholarship, and much more... But the most important part of the *Modern Drummer* community is YOU. Join the tradition of inspiration, aspiration, and education and be an active part of the Modern Drummer Community.

**Mark Griffith**

**Editor-in-chief, Director of Content**

**Modern Drummer**



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**MODERN DRUMMER** magazine (ISSN 0194-4533) is published digitally monthly and print bi-monthly by **MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc.**, 1279 W. Palmetto Park Rd PO Box 276064 Boca Raton, FL 33427. PERIODICALS MAIL POSTAGE paid at Boca Raton, FL 33427 and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 2024 by MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the permission of the publisher is prohibited.

**EDITORIAL/ADVERTISING/ ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES:** MODERN DRUMMER Publications, 1279 W. Palmetto Park Rd PO Box 276064 Boca Raton, FL 33427. Email: [info@moderndrummer.com](mailto:info@moderndrummer.com).

**SUBSCRIPTION CORRESPONDENCE:** Modern Drummer, 1279 W. Palmetto Park Rd, PO Box 276064, Boca Raton, FL 33427. Change of address: Allow at least six weeks for a change. Please provide both old and new address and send to [info@moderndrummer.com](mailto:info@moderndrummer.com)

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Modern Drummer, 1279 W. Palmetto Park Rd PO Box 276064 Boca Raton, FL 33427.

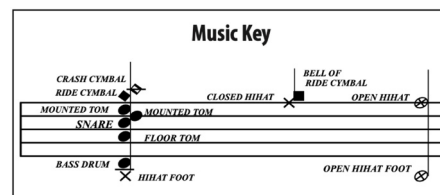
Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 41480017 Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: PO Box 875, Stn A, Windsor ON N9A 6P2

**MEMBER:** National Association of Music Merchants, Percussive Arts Society

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## KIT OF THE MONTH



### Keeping the Volume Down!

This month's Modern Drummer Kit of the Month comes to us from Alison Gibb. Alison started to play at the age of 50 and has been playing and taking lessons for four years. She bought this Mapex kit from her drum teacher, and her supportive partner gave her Remo Silent Stroke Heads and Zildjian Low Volume 80 Cymbals. Her drums are 10", 12", 14" toms, a 20" Bass Drum, and a 14" snare. The 14" Hi-hats, 16" and 18" Crash, and 20" Ride all help to keep the volume down. Congrats to Alison for joining the community of drummers! Late starters are always a welcome addition to the club. Keep practicing!!!

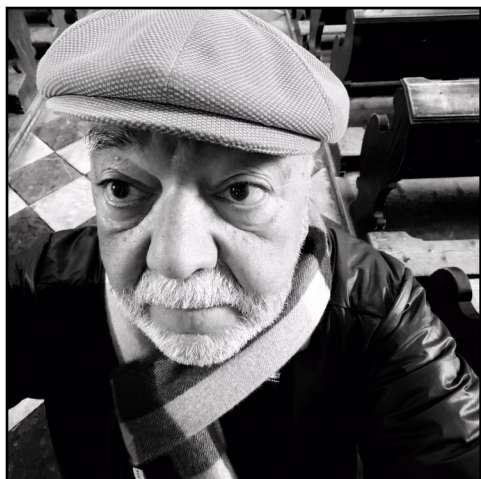




# Dipping Your Toes Into the Water

By Peter Erskine

The trials and tribulations of the traveling band / road warrior / touring musician are the stuff of legend. At least for those of us who leave home and manage to survive and later recount the highs and lows of successful gigs, balanced out by canceled flights and beat-up backline drum sets. I'm currently touring Europe with three other veteran musicians, we are being billed as "The Art of the Quartet." Danish saxophonist Benjamin Koppel has organized this project, casting pianist Kevin Hays and bassist Scott Colley as players number three and four to complete the quartet. I could not be a happier drummer. The music has been great, nine nights in a row so far. But the days have not been without their hiccups.



Ten gigs.  
Ten drum sets.  
Ten flights.  
Ten hotels.  
What could possibly go wrong?

"Pivot" has become an operational word as well as an essential bit of philosophy on this trip. When a best-laid plan or unexpected

detour popped up, we had two choices: complain and feel hard done by, or pivot. If the pivot did not solve a problem, it served to change the mood from grim to positive. On at least two occasions, Scott Colley would need only to remind me, "Pete. Pivot." Cool. I'm digging on "pivot," but you can come up with your own panacea password. It buys just enough time and grace to get you through to the next moment. These three musicians are all cool customers in the travel vicissitudes department, and I'm learning from them. Old dogs CAN learn new tricks. So a cancelled flight becomes a collective effort at problem solving, and we always got ourselves to the next gig with being only mildly worse for wear.

Hotel room too small in Prague? Returning to the front desk and smiling, I ask if I might have the opportunity to pay for an upgrade. Next thing I know, I'm in a really nice room at no extra charge. The value of a confident smile should not be underestimated. Waiting at the front of the queue to board a plane? Then being told that I must go back to a service desk to have my boarding pass stamped... I go, I get my stamp, and I *'excuse me, sorry, thank you, excuse me, thank you, sorry, excuse me, thank you'* my way back to the front of the line. Saxophonist Benjamin Koppel observed in a text, "The determination, conviction, and politeness combined— beautiful!" I replied, 'An exquisite balance is required for ultimate effectiveness.' I visualize the positive outcome of my actions. Believe it or not, I have found more lost items like car keys or my wife's glasses this way. Or, when traveling, and finding my way back to the front of

the line. I'm still dreading the "Hey, not so fast, pal, where do you think you're going?" pushback, but, so far so good.

When I'm not traveling, I work with an engineer named Aaron. Every time Aaron comes to work in my studio, something will require his attention. In other words, a problem. I'll apologize to him when he has to get down on his hands and knees to track down a bad cable connection, but he'll always pop his head up with a smile and say, "A problem is simply an opportunity for a solution!" THAT'S the person you want to have around you. Pivot.

Back on the road, my drum tuning abilities, along with figuring out how to best deal with missing cymbal stand parts or a wobbly snare stand, have been put to the test. "Drums du jour." Drums of the day. Some of the kits have been magnificent, like the 1961 Gretsch round-badge red sparkle kit at the jazz club in Oslo, Norway. Tip: request fresh drumheads of your choice ahead of time if you can. One of the great things about Remo Coated Ambassadors is that they're so common. I carry a small bag of spare cymbal felts and wing nuts as well as a couple of bass drum beaters of choice. I was dreading having to deal with a different drum set each day. But I began to look forward to the challenge and the game of meeting a kit and making it sound the best that I could. The following is not a tip as much as a request: when playing someone else's drum set, you do not need to tighten the hardware within a millimeter of its life. Think of the next drummer who will be touching the drums after you. Leave them better than how you found them. And whatever you do, do NOT steal any of the parts like cymbal felts or washers. All I can say is that it will be bad for your karma.

I like to enjoy some relative peace and quiet when tuning, so I would leave an hour earlier than everyone else in the band for the club. That meant an hour less of napping or walking around time, but the true purpose of touring is to make music. I also enjoy not feeling too rushed; giving yourself ample (or at least appropriate) time to accomplish



something will always give better results. And my results were that I happened to meet some very nice old drum sets. Each club had its own acoustics and sound. Each drum set was different. But every night, I sounded like myself. Pivot. Pivot with extreme prejudice, perhaps. A better term might be INTENTION. Let's not forget TONE and TOUCH while we're at it.

While leaving the bandstand at a jazz club in the Netherlands, an inspired young drummer came up to me and told me that the





feeling of the TIME was so meaningful, powerful, and impressive to him. He asked, "How do you do this?" As my intention was to get to the dressing room rather quickly after our 90-minute set, I opted for a concise answer. I

told him, 'I've

learned more about time-feel by focusing on TONE. The SOUND has so much to do with the feel.' This is something I've discussed in the pages of *Modern Drummer*, so regular readers will recognize this approach. It's an approach that calls for rhythmic discipline and awareness, of course. Two better words might be PRACTICE and INTENTION. My evolution from being a drummer who hits things very well, to a drummer who can musically command the time, came only when I paid attention to the sound I was hearing and producing. TOUCH. A practical note: softer dynamic levels are a more fertile soil in which to nurture and grow this skill. In any event, I thought I saw (the faintest bit of) a lightbulb illuminating the space around that drummer's head. *I think he got it.* As soon as you're ready to ask the question, you should be ready for the answer. It can be that simple.

Next morning: early departure from the hotel to the airport to fly to London. The band is pivoting right and left to deal with one thing after the other. I discovered that new line-cutting technique! And before we know it, we're standing in the lobby of the hotel in London. However, the rooms are not ready. The friendly young woman at the hotel reception desk asks if I am interested to upgrade the room that the jazz club has procured, then THAT room would be ready for checking in. I know I need to take a nap in order to play two shows that evening. The choice is a no-brainer. The best \$70 I ever spent. Nice room. Quiet. Available.

I got to the club ahead of the band and met a challenging house drum set. One thing I'm noticing is that drums on the jazz club circuit all seem to be meeting me with their resonant heads cranked as tightly as could be, as if that's the easy fix to make a tom-tom sound good or, at least, sound like "jazz." No tone. Not for me. I perform resuscitation procedures on the 12" and 14" toms by decreasing the tension and they both come back to life. The club has great acoustics, and the band enjoys playing both shows. I should mention that I'm using a new cymbal set-up for me, a 20" Kerope Ride prototype balanced out by an 18" Zildjian Flat Ride prototype. Both of these cymbals are soft, but they speak with authority and enough volume.

In-between sets, I met up with writer Brent Keefe who has penned reviews for MD in the past as well as interviewing me for UK publications. I know him to be knowledgeable about all things drumming. Brent heard bassist Scott Colley and me bending the time a bit: a tension and release effect by one of us holding the line whilst the other pushes or pulls the tempo a bit. I'm talking subtle amounts for the most part. It can be a

fine line in music "between clever and stupid" as the film *Spinal Tap* originated. So our combined radars (sensory awareness with data input from hundreds of gigs' worth of experience) prevent any mid-air disasters. I may have created this part of the discussion by mentioning the drummer from the night before who had asked about time. Anyway, Brent asked me, "What are you thinking when you hear Scott going ...?" I interrupted Brent with, 'NO THINKING. There is not time to think. It's like dipping your toe into the water. Do you THINK it might be warm or do you THINK that it might be cold? THINKING does not change the temperature of the water! The water answers the question!'

I recognized that I liked the sound of this right away and pulled out my iPhone to make a note of it. Hence, this the title of this column.

Esthetic choices: exciting. Audience satisfaction and response: gratifying (but not defining!) The sense of a job well-done: check. Now let's go back to the hotel so we can all get some sleep because it's another early departure tomorrow.

On the way back to the hotel, Scott Colley told the band a story about jazz guitar legend Jim Hall recounting his first meeting with the one and only Freddie Green who played for years with the Count Basie Orchestra. An excited and eager-to-learn Jim Hall seized the moment to ask Freddie Green what advice he could give him to make him a better musician. Freddie Green turned to the young Jim Hall and said, "Always pack your suitcase the night before, and make sure the band uniform is on top." In other words, we can make our best music by living our best lives. That's the ultimate pivot.



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





# NEW & NOTABLE

## **Roland V-Drums 3 and 5 Series, TR 1000 Rhythm Creator, and CR-78 Software Rhythm Composer, DW 3000 Hardware Series Hardware Packs, True-Cast Snare, PDP Concept Series Locking Thrones, Concept Acrylic Kit and Snare, Latin Percussion City Timbales, Limited Edition Cherry Congas and Bongos**

### **Roland V-Drums 3 and 5 Series**



Roland was showcasing the V-Drums 3 and 5 Series, two all-new electronic drum kit lineups based around the powerful V31 and V51 sound modules during The NAMM Show 2026 (Room 202, Level 2). These next-generation modules are part of a unified ecosystem with the flagship V71 from the V-Drums 7 Series, providing full cross-compatibility across V-Drums modules for the first time. Players can drum with core onboard sounds created for the V-Drums 7 Series and stay inspired with a growing library of curated drumming content on Roland Cloud, including multi-layered V-Drums Instrument Expansions based on premium DW drum sets. V-Drums 3 and 5 Series kits also offer additional features like newly developed pads, updated hardware, wireless app integration, and more.

V31, V51, and V71 V-Drums Modules offer Unified Sound and Unmatched Expression. Released in 2024 to wide acclaim, the V-Drums 7 Series and V71 module debuted an entirely new onboard sound library created in collaboration with Drum Workshop (DW), bringing unmatched realism and creative command to V-Drums. The V31 and V51 modules feature the same internal engine as the V71, providing drummers a unified sound experience with identical sounds and expansion path options.

Crafted from a hand-picked selection of the world's finest drum sets, the sounds in each module deliver the detail, punch, and sonic quality found in top professional drum sample libraries for computer-based production. Multi-layer sample playback and round-robin randomization ensure natural sound with no "machine-gun" effect. Roland's proprietary behavior modeling adds the finishing touch, refining the sound with smooth, artifact-free transitions for every articulation and over 16,000 variations in dynamic response with Roland digital pads. The V-Drums 3, 5, and 7 Series platforms offer two ways to play: the module's expandable sound library and DW Soundworks

software for computer-based drumming. Six months of Roland Cloud Ultimate membership is included with purchase, providing untethered access to DW Soundworks and related content, V-Drums Instrument Expansions, newly developed V-Drums Kit Packs, and more.

Users can subscribe after the trial ends or purchase their favorite selections with Lifetime Keys. The V31, V51, and V71 modules include built-in Roland wireless adapters, allowing users to audition and download sound content directly via the Roland Cloud Connect app on a mobile device. Modules can be updated wirelessly, making it simple to stay up to date with the latest system software. Bluetooth audio/MIDI is available to jam with songs on a smartphone, play along with video lessons, and more. Each module also includes an integrated USB audio/MIDI interface to communicate with DW Soundworks, dedicated editor software apps, and DAW platforms to record multi-channel audio over a single cable. (V31 and V51 Editor software for macOS and Windows will be available in late 2025.) The new V-Drums Play app for iOS and Android (available in late 2025) will enable users to control essential module functions from a smartphone, including kit selection, metronome settings, and recording. The optional RSH-10 V-Drums Smartphone Holder provides a solid solution for mounting a phone to an accessible location within the kit, offering secure attachment for intense drumming sessions and a highly adjustable design for easy positioning. All modules also provide detailed customization tools to edit, and process sounds, plus onboard coach mode features for practice and skill development. Kit and module purchases include Drum Pass, an exclusive Roland bundle of 100 Melodics™ interactive lessons specially developed for V-Drums players.



The V51 module in every kit hits the sweet spot within the latest V-Drums universe, offering full Roland digital pad support and robust I/O in an efficient hardware command center. V-Drums 5 Series kits come in a variety of models for different



styles, from the traditional vibe of V-Drums Acoustic Design to the high-tech profiles of classic V-Drums sets.

The VAD516 V-Drums Acoustic Design kit is the pinnacle of the V-Drums 5 Series, combining the immersive look, feel, and stage presence of an acoustic drum set with Roland's groundbreaking digital snare (PD-14DSX), ride (CY-18DR), and hi-hat (VH-14D) pads and advanced V-Drums features. Outfitted with attractive Midnight Sparkle wraps, this five-piece kit includes two rack toms (PDA100-MS and PDA120-MS), a floor tom (PDA140F-MS), and the newly developed KD-20-MS, a full-size 20-inch kick drum with the same high-res triggering as the KD-22 from the V-Drums 7 Series. As the mid-level kit in the V-Drums 5 Series lineup, the TD516 combines premium sound and flexibility with a spacious footprint, enhanced playability, and digital pad integration. Equipped with digital snare (PD-140DS), ride (CY-18DR), and hi-hat (VH-14D) pads and a large kick pad (KD-12), it's made for drummers who want a refined playing experience without the flagship expense. The TD513 is the entry point into the V-Drums 5 Series, offering high-end expression and performance in a streamlined, accessible setup. Featuring redesigned tom pads (two PD-8H and one PD-10H) for enhanced feel, a highly responsive 12-inch snare pad (PD-12P), and the new MDS-Standard 3 stand, the TD513 provides an authentic drumming experience coupled with serious customization tools to personalize the sound. V-Drums 3 Series: Next-Level Drumming Starts Here The V-Drums 3 Series brings advanced V-Drums expression and flexibility to three compact kits for daily practice, home recording, and tight spaces. Based around the streamlined V31 module, each kit features updated components for enhanced playability and powerful tools for skill development and jamming. The V31 also includes a dedicated digital trigger input that allows users to upgrade their setup with a high-resolution Roland digital snare, ride, or hi-hat pad. The VAD316 brings the acclaimed V-Drums Acoustic Design experience to the V-Drums 3 Series. With a 12-inch snare (PDA-120LS), shallow-depth wood tom shells (two PDA100L-BK and one PDA120L-BK), and a full-size kick drum (KD-18-BK), this kit offers the stage presence, feel, and familiar layout of a traditional acoustic set—but with complete volume control. The mid-level TD316 is filled with pro-inspired enhancements that provide an immersive playing setup in a modest footprint. A 12-inch snare pad (PD-12P) upgraded tom pads (two PD-8H and one PD-10H), three cymbal pads (two CY-12C-T crash and one CY-14R-T ride), and stand-mounted VH-10 hi-hats offer a familiar, acoustic-style feel, while the new MDS-Compact 2 stand features a wider layout for increased setup flexibility.

The TD313 delivers high-end V-Drums sound and feel in a space-saving format that's perfect for home practice and studio sessions. Featuring a 12-inch snare pad (PDX-12), upgraded tom pads (two PD-8H and one PD-10H), and a rock-solid kick pad (KD-10), this kit provides a realistic and rewarding playing experience for dedicated students and drumming enthusiasts.

The Roland V-Drums 3 and 5 Series are available now as follows: USD: VAD516 \$5,799.99; TD516 \$3,699.99; TD513 \$2,699.99; V51 \$1,899.99; VAD316 \$3,399.99; TD316 \$1,999.99; TD313 \$1,699.99; V31 \$999.99. To learn more about the V-Drums 3, 5, and 7 Series, visit [Roland.com](http://Roland.com).

## The Roland TR-1000 Rhythm Creator

The Roland TR-1000 Rhythm Creator is a groundbreaking new creative platform that fuses iconic TR heritage with modern innovation to ignite the next era of rhythm. The TR-1000 Rhythm Creator is a groundbreaking new drum machine built with and for artists to catalyze the next evolution of rhythm culture. As the latest member of the famous TR lineage, the TR-1000 builds on the legacy of the TR-808 and TR-909 as the first Roland drum machine in over 40 years with true analog voices, coupled with the latest digital sound and sampling technologies and a performance-focused user interface. From the speaker-rattling boom of the TR-808 to the distinctive punch of the TR 909, Roland's original TR rhythm instruments from the early 1980s have fueled the ambitions of generations of music makers. First embraced by underground creators, TR sounds are now deeply embedded in modern music, forming the backbone of hip-hop and trap, the pulse of techno and house, and the foundational grooves for contemporary pop songs across every genre.

The TR-1000 launches the legendary TR heritage into the future with a bold mission: to inspire a culture hungry for the next wave of rhythmic experimentation. Musicians and producers can conceive, create, and perform with a range of premium drum sounds, powered by analog, digital, and sampling engines with advanced tone-shaping and layered track architecture. The TR-1000's analog engine features 16 of the most coveted circuits from the TR-808 and TR-909, faithfully recreated from the original designs with detailed engineering and carefully selected modern components. Alongside the TR-1000's analog voices are powerful digital sounds driven by Roland's latest advancements, including 21 circuit-bent TR-808 and TR-909 models built with Analog Circuit Behavior (ACB) technology, FM percussion, virtual analog tones, and a deep PCM library for sonic exploration and fresh textures.

Classic TR instruments laid the framework for countless electronic music genres—and when paired with digital sampling, their influence deepened. Comprehensive sample tools are fully integrated into the TR-1000 workflow, including stereo sampling and resampling, BPM sync, seamless time-stretching, and non-destructive slice editing.





## NEW & NOTABLE CONT.

The onboard 64 GB memory comes with a curated collection of 2000 samples, with 46 GB free for user captures, edits, and sample imports. Creators can refine and transform sounds and rhythms with the TR-1000's rich palette of tactile effects. There's a new analog state-variable filter (SVF) inspired by vintage Roland OTA designs, a dedicated analog drive, and a wide array of digital processing. Each track combines a model-specific sound generator, compressor, multimode filter/four-band EQ, and amp/envelope control. Four of the available tracks allow for two sound generators to be stacked or programmed separately with per-track FX, internal sidechaining, output routing, and a three-target LFO. The TR-1000's advanced sequencer expands on the familiar TR workflow with a focus on feel and flexibility. Users can program sounds fast, perform with intent, and shape rhythms in real time using extensive pattern tools, expressive controls, and new off-grid options to fine-tune the pocket. An ergonomic panel layout encourages creative exploration with high-grip knobs and smooth, responsive faders. The new Morph slider allows for radical transformations with simple movements, while the snapshot feature creates playable step buttons that instantly recall any knob position for an instrument.

Made for seamless integration with hybrid configurations, modular rigs, and modern studios, the TR-1000 offers extensive I/O and routing flexibility to support expansive production and performance setups. The companion TR-1000 App enables hardware control from a computer, providing a large graphical interface for real-time parameter editing, a librarian for organizing sounds, and more. The TR-1000 Rhythm Creator is available now for \$2,699.99 To learn more about the TR-1000 Rhythm Creator, visit [Roland.com](https://www.roland.com)

### Roland CR-78 Software Rhythm Composer



A Classic Drum Machine Heard on Countless Pop and Rock Hits, Now Available as a DAW Plug-In. Roland announces the CR-78 Software Rhythm Composer, the latest member of the expanding family of software-based instruments on Roland Cloud. Driven by the company's acclaimed Analog Circuit Behavior (ACB) technology, the CR-78 authentically recreates the sound of the original vintage hardware, enhanced with modern sequencing features, individual sound mixing and tuning, DAW tempo sync, drag-and-drop audio/MIDI support, and more. Well before the famous TR-808 and TR-909 revolutionized hip-hop and dance, the CR-

78 CompuRhythm had a massive influence on the music world. Debuting in 1978 as Roland's first programmable rhythm machine, the CR-78 was quickly adopted by musicians and producers of the era seeking new rhythm textures. Its fat analog sound and distinctive pulse are integral to countless hits across many genres, from new wave and early electronic music to mainstream pop and rock.

The CR-78 Software Rhythm Composer features a familiar interface based on the original tabletop unit. Skins are available to choose between the wood panel and black vinyl covering variations of the CR-78 during its production run. Like the original hardware, the software version is very intuitive to use, with direct-access controls for rhythm patterns, instrument sounds, shuffle, fills, volume balance, fade-in/fade-out, and more. The original CR-78 offered simple programmability with slots for four pattern variations.

The CR-78 Software Rhythm Composer supercharges this workflow, providing a detailed Pattern view where users can enter, delete, and fine-tune steps, control instrument levels, and adjust individual parameters such as tuning and decay. The Kit screen offers expanded mixing control, supplementing instrument parameters with details like panning, mute/solo, and main/sub output routing. The CR-78 is available with a Roland Cloud Ultimate membership or a Lifetime Key purchase.

### DW 3000 Hardware Series Hardware Packs



Drum Workshop, Inc. has packaged its top selling line of drummer-friendly 3000 Series pedals, thrones, hi-hats, and snare stands into all-new hardware pack configurations. The popular line of 3000 Series hardware and pedals features double-braced tripods, medium weight tubing, hinged memory locks, and a myriad of drummer-friendly features. Engineered for drummers of all levels, each pack offers drummers pro-inspired and build-quality at an attractive price.

Designed in California, the optimized packs are available as 2, 3 and 4-piece variations that are perfectly suited for acoustic and e-drummers of all skill levels. The 2-piece packs include a pedal and throne in both single (DWCP3000PKA3) and double pedal (DWCP3000PKA4) options. Add a 3-leg hi-hat stand for single pedals (DWCP3000PKA5) or 2-leg stand with rotating tripod (DWCP3000PKA6) for double pedal setups. Rounding out each pack, a snare stand with Glide Tilter basket adjustment can be added in both single pedal (DWCP3000PKA7) and double pedal (DWCP3000PKA8) offerings.



To find out more about the new DW 3000 Series Hardware Packs please go to <http://www.dwdrums.com/>.

## DW True-Cast 4x14" Snare Drum



The Limited Edition MFG True-Cast 4x14" Snare Drum was designed in collaboration with DW artist Dave Elitch as the latest offering in the highly coveted True-Cast series.

The precision-engineered MFG True-Cast™ 4x14" Snare Drum has a sand-cast, machined Bell Bronze shell with a contoured interior shape ranging from 5mm at the top and bottom to 3mm in the center. Its features include patented 2-piece machined solid Brass Mini Turret lugs with dual lug receivers, and True-Cast counter hoops which deliver ample volume, attack, and an incredibly wide tuning range.

The limited-edition snare also includes machined Brass Mini MAG™ throw-off with a matching butt plate, True Pitch™ tension rods, 20-strand True-Tone™ snare wires, and DW MFG heads by Remo USA. Only 100 numbered DW MFG True-Cast™ 4x14" Snare Drums will ever be produced.

The fully machined collectable comes with a blacked-out custom-made flight case by Calzone Anvil USA and a signed certificate of authenticity.

To find out more please go to <http://www.dwdrums.com/>.

## New PDP Concept Series Locking Thrones



The new PDP Concept Series Locking Thrones take drum seating to the next level with the *first-ever pneumatic valve that can easily be locked*. This innovative, new design allows users to lift or lower the throne seat with the flip of a lever, then lock it in position with the easy turn of a locking wing screw. Two seat top designs are available: 15" round or tractor-style.

The thrones have padded, memory foam seats for extra comfort and are reinforced with an X-Brace. They are mounted on a double-braced, heavy-weight steel tubing tripod for durability and in-play stability. The PDP-branded oversized anti-slip rubber feet reduce slippage on most playing surfaces.

To find out more about the PDP Thrones, please visit <http://www.pacificdrums.com/>

## Pacific Drums and Percussion (PDP) Concept Acrylic Kit and Snare



The Concept Acrylic Kit and Snare offer a new twist on synthetic drums, featuring seamless Acrylic hoops around the drum set for a unique translucent vibe.

A world first, the Concept Acrylic Series features 1" seamless Acrylic hoops fitted on the seamless shells on the toms and snare, with 2" seamless hoops on the bass drum. These hoops offer a cutting rimshot and help to control the overtones.

The patented STM™ system secures the mounted toms in place and provides enhanced resonance with maximum sustain. The drums are also equipped with chrome hardware, True-Pitch® tension rods for accurate and secure tuning, vintage-style claw hooks, and Remo heads. The Concept Acrylic Snare is 6-1/2 x 14" and is equipped with the DW MAG™ Throw-Off for a smooth, rapid on-off adjustment.

There are two shell pack configurations, with a matching 6.5"x14" snare drum also available:

4-Piece: 7x10, 8x12, 16x16, and 16x22 or

6-piece: 7x8, 7x10, 8x12, 14x14, 16x16, and 16x22



Acrylic kits have been the mainstay of popular music for decades. With appealing looks, bright attack, focused tone, and controlled sustain, the PDP Concept Acrylic Kit and Snare will make an instant impression.

To find out more about the PDP Concept Acrylic Kit and Snare, please visit: <http://www.pacificdrums.com/>

## Latin Percussion City Timbales

Latin Percussion (LP®) has extended the City Series with the City Timbales, an affordable, quality set of drums ideal for early and student players to work out their chops.

The 6" deep City Timbales (LP256NY) feature Black Sand Steel shells that are drum key tunable. Each of the 13" and 14" timbales are fitted with black hardware for a sleek monochromatic look. The drums are also equipped with straight rims with recessed clips to facilitate playing rim shots.

The City Timbales are supplied with an ultra-lightweight Aluminum leg stand which includes a cowbell mount, a cowbell, timbale sticks and a drum key. These drums are feature-rich and an incredible value. The timbales are bright, sharp, and



loud, with great attack making them perfect for adding texture to many different music genres.

To find out more, please visit <https://www.lpmusic.com/>.

## LP Limited-Edition Cherry Congas and Bongos.

The new LP Limited-Edition Congas and Bongos are constructed from solid-ply 100% Cherry wood, which produces a bright, musical tone with balanced sustain for an ear-catching performance. They are fitted with copper-plated hardware, a top-tuning system with  $\frac{5}{16}$ " diameter tuning rods, Comfort Curve II rims for added playing comfort, and hand-selected rawhide heads for that classic LP feel and tone.

The Conga set is available in all three traditional sizes: 11" Quinto, 11- $\frac{3}{4}$ " Conga, and 12- $\frac{1}{2}$ " Tumba, and the set of Bongos features 7- $\frac{1}{4}$ " and 8- $\frac{5}{8}$ " drums.

To find out more, please visit <https://www.lpmusic.com/>.



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## INDUSTRY HAPPENINGS

**D**rum Workshop, Inc. is delighted to see Alex González using his DWe Acoustic-Electronic Wireless kit on the current 29 arena date of the Maná *Vivir Sin Aire* tour.

Maná is considered by many to be one of the greatest Spanish-language rock bands, and in 2025, they became the first Spanish-language rock band to be nominated for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Since the band's inception in the 1980s, they have earned four Grammy Awards, eight Latin Grammy Awards, and multiple other prestigious honors.

As the powerful and dynamic drummer of Maná, Alex González is pivotal in crafting the band's rhythmic foundation. His unique drumming style has significantly influenced rock drumming with its energy, precision, and musicality.

Alex González has been using his DWe Piano Black Gloss kit combined with the Roland V71 drum module, V-cymbals, and DrumLink™ WT-10 wireless adaptors on the 'B' stage for the more intimate parts of the arena shows, where the band plays on a riser in the middle of the show floor. The DWe kit is vital for keeping stage volume down when the band plays together in close proximity. As Alex explains in the [video](#), his DWe setup



includes drum samples of many DW shells, such as the DW Purpleheart expansion pack for the V Series drum modules, plus the Swiss Family cymbal expansion pack. All of which means he can fully personalize his kit.

Maná recently played their [43rd arena show](#) in the LA area, surpassing Bruce Springsteen's record for most arena performances in the region. Watch Alex and the team talking about using the DWe kit when they played the Kia Forum in Los Angeles, [here](#). 



# PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

## New Yamaha Recording Custom Snare Drums: Aluminum and Stainless Steel

By Brian Hill

In *Modern Drummer's* first look at the new series of Recording Custom Snare Drums, we looked at the Birch and Brass shell models. This time we are going to look at a few more shell versions of this storied series. Steve Gadd was instrumental in developing the series and worked with the Yamaha team in Japan to develop these outstanding offerings.

Yamaha's Recording Custom Snare Drum line is certainly a top pick for many recording artists. Yamaha sent *Modern Drummer* two more versions in different sizes of the group: Aluminum and Stainless-Steel Snares. These two metal snares share the ranks with the Recording Custom Solid Brass Snares previously reviewed in *Modern Drummer*. So, let's continue the tub-thumping and check out these two types of tubs.



The Aluminum Recording Custom snare is a 1.2mm all aluminum shell with an outward facing center bead. Sizes include a 14" x 5.5" and 14" x 6.5" shells in a "brushed aluminum" finish. Bearing edges are 45 degrees with an off-centered vent hole, reinforced. Chrome-plated counter hoops are 3.0mm AL-DC, die cast hoops. There are 10 chrome-plated newly designed one-piece lugs (as opposed to the two-piece versions that came before). Remo Ambassador heads are standard.

A heavy-duty Q-Type snare strainer and DC3 Snare Butt provide easy positioning and tensioning of the snares. The 6.5" drum features 25 strand steel wire snares while the 5.5" drum has a 20-strand snare. The 5.5" drum also comes with optional Steve Gadd inspired 10-strand snares. The 10-strand snare is actually a 14-strand snare with the middle four snares removed. Yamaha says that "this special snare wire enhances the cutoff of the sound, enabling the artist to produce a crisper staccato tone." Nice touch!

The Stainless-Steel Snares came in 1.2mm thick shells measuring 14" x 5.5" and 14" x 7". These shells also feature an outward facing center bead for strength and Yamaha says that the outward facing center bead also offers a "more open sound" with a "crisp articulate performance."

Bearing edges are 45 degrees along with an off-centered, reinforced vent hole. Counter hoops are 2.3mm Dyna Hoops, triple flanged. The snare strainer, butt, and snares are identical to the aluminum snares as well as the 10 chrome-plated lugs.

Again, Remo heads are standard. These drums look as good as they sound.

The Yamaha Recording Custom Aluminum Snares had a very familiar sound. Warm and bright at the same time and with plenty of character and projection. Sensitive and crisp snare response was great at all volumes. These drums were easy to tune and very responsive at all normal tuning ranges. One of things I really dug about this drum was its presence!



The Recording Custom Stainless-Steel Snares were powerful and a bit brighter, very sensitive and projecting. Like all the Recording Custom Snares, the Stainless-Steel drums were very musical instruments with lots of great snare tones and without the unpleasant overtones I hear in some metal drums. They were responsive and easy to tune in all normal ranges. These are clean, articulate sounding drums. Rumor has it that Steve Gadd's Signature Snare has a lot in common with the 5.5" Stainless Steel model!

Again, I tuned all the drums to a medium 85psi on the Drum Dial to try and get an equal and non-biased representation of the shell sounds. I thought the stainless Steel was the brightest of all four of the mentioned drum materials (Brass with Birch being the darkest,) and the Aluminum Recording Custom had the warm, fat timbre you look for in an aluminum shell.

When considering the shell depth of a snare, it is widely accepted that the shallower shell will give a livelier, wetter snare sound. A deeper shell will generally provide a shorter, more controlled note. All these drums exhibited these sonic characteristics and sensitivity, and they scream with a clean, musical, percussive presence.

One other standout feature of the entire series was the ease and clarity of the cross-stick sound. Cross-sticks couldn't be easier or better sounding! This is another great reason the Recording Custom series is a preferred recording instrument.

Choosing your Yamaha Recording Custom Snare from this group of Birch, Brass, Aluminum, and Stainless-Steel will certainly come down to personal taste and the kind of music you are playing. Whichever drum you decide on will perform like a great snare drum should. These are high-end, quality drums that will serve you well. Pricing varies from model to model. It's all about quality! Check 'em out at **Yamaha.com**.



# Artstruments MR1 Drum Mounting Bracket

By Jason Mehler

In a previous review of Artstruments products, I explored the full display experience of the 5PK-L Drum Mounting Kit with its multiple brackets and LED lighting designed to turn a drum set into an elaborate art installation. The reality is that most Artstruments customers are not looking for a full-scale installation. Many just want an easy, reliable way to hang a few drums for storage or to show them off without adding complexity or committing to permanent wiring. That is exactly where the MR1 bracket shines, and why it deserves its own Product Close-Up.

## Build and Design

The MR1 bracket is a great example of thoughtful simplicity. Constructed of sturdy steel, it feels strong enough to confidently support heavy snare drums and toms while maintaining a low-profile appearance once mounted. It is designed to hook directly onto most metal-rimmed drums including triple-flanged and diecast hoops, and the vinyl-coated contact points help protect the drum from scratches during installation and removal. There are no moving parts or complicated adjustments, which makes the MR1 approachable for players who may not consider themselves particularly handy.

## Installation and Everyday Practicality

Installation is refreshingly simple and will feel familiar to anyone who has ever hung a picture frame or piece of wall art. Thanks to the clever design of the MR1, the drum's weight is directed downward toward the wall rather than pulling outward, which helps keep the load stable and reduces the need to land perfectly on a stud. The included drywall anchors

make the process straightforward, allowing you to let the drum naturally guide the placement instead of working around fixed stud locations or relying on complicated measurements. Within minutes, a drum that was previously taking up floor space can be securely mounted and easily accessible.

## Real-World Use

After several months of using multiple MR1 brackets in my own space, I have had zero issues to report. They have remained solid and reliable, even with regular drum swaps. I will admit that I am guilty of playing the drums while they were still hanging on the wall, which I am pretty sure is not the intended use, but the brackets handled it without complaint. The hook design also does not choke the drumhead, so the drums still sound great, which makes resisting the urge to play them a real challenge.

## Conclusion

The Artstruments MR1 bracket takes the guesswork out of mounting a drum on the wall. Before this came along, the solution would have involved a trip to Home Depot and a handful of random parts that probably would have damaged both the wall and the drum. Thankfully, the MR1 already exists, and it does the job cleanly without turning the project into a DIY experiment gone wrong.

The Artstruments MR1 mount retails at \$19.99. Get yours at <https://www.artstruments.net/product-page/mr1>



# Roland VAD516

By Jason Mehler

If you've followed Roland's Acoustic Design lineup of V-Drums over the past few years, you already know the story: full size shells, premium hardware, and an e-kit that looks like it belongs in front of a large audience rather than in the corner of the spare bedroom. With their latest release of the VAD516, Roland is leaning into a bigger idea: giving players a drum kit that behaves less like a piece of gear and more like a creative hub. From deeper editing tools and performance-focused controls to Wi-Fi connectivity, the VAD516 with its V51 drum module pushes beyond familiar territory, to address workflow – streamlining how drummers practice, record and perform. For this month's Product Close-Up, we will take a closer look at VAD516 and its V51 drum module to see how the updated features translate to practical, real-world use.

## Kit Configuration

The kit ships in Roland's Midnight Sparkle finish and includes a 20" KD-20-MS kick drum, a 10" PDA100-MS rack tom, a 12" PDA120-MS rack tom, and a 14" PDA140F-MS floor tom. Front and center is the PD-14DSX digital snare, accompanied by the VH-14D digital hi-hat, CY-18DR digital ride, and a pair of crashes: a CY-14R-T and CY-16R-T. Along with the drums and cymbals comes four pieces of premium hardware: 2 X DCS-30 drum combo stands for the toms and crashes, a DBS-30 drum boom stand for the ride cymbal, and a PDS-5 stand for the V51 drum module, which is also included in the package. NOT included with the kit are a kick pedal, hi-hat stand, drum throne, or any SD cards or output cables.

## Drum Module Specifications

At the heart of the VAD516 is the V51 drum module, which serves as both the sound engine and control center for the kit. The module supports Roland's latest digital trigger technology, featuring three dedicated digital inputs for the PD-14DSX snare, VH-14D hi-hats, and CY-18DR ride. Additional analog trigger inputs allow for toms, crashes, and auxiliary pads.

Connectivity is extensive without feeling excessive. The rear panel includes stereo main outputs along with two assignable mono direct outputs for routing individual instruments, making it suitable for live performance or recording setups. USB-C provides multi-channel audio and MIDI connectivity for integration with a computer or DAW, while traditional five-pin MIDI ports allow communication with external hardware. Bluetooth audio and MIDI are built in for wireless playback and control, and onboard Wi-Fi enables access to Roland Cloud content and system updates directly from a mobile device.

Storage and playback options include an SD card slot for backing tracks and recording export, along with two

headphone outputs for personal monitoring. Physical faders on the front panel provide quick access to instrument levels, and dedicated knobs handle master volume, Bluetooth audio, and monitoring adjustments. Overall, the V51 module balances practical connectivity with a streamlined interface that remains approachable even with its deeper feature set.

## Hardware Setup

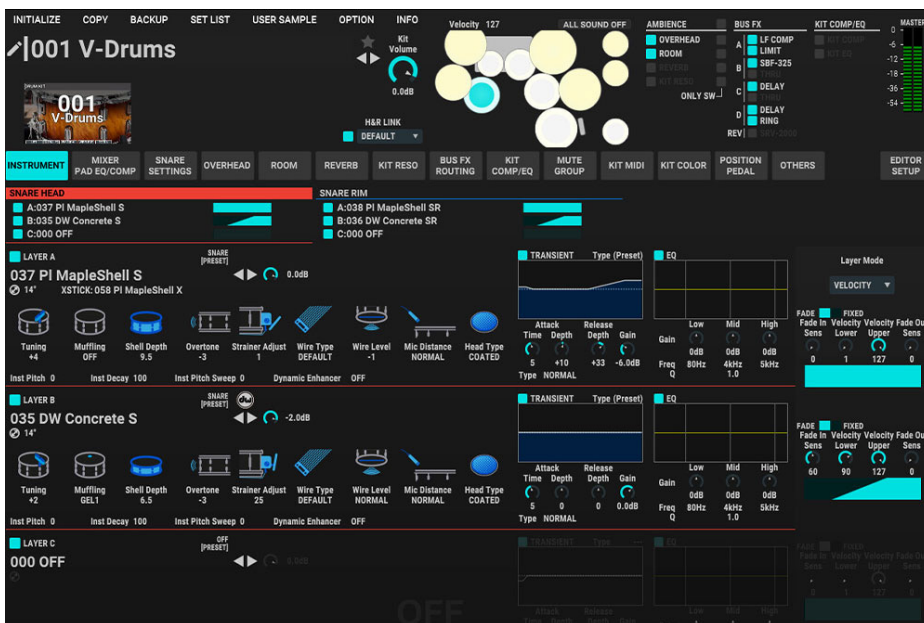
With the exception of a few e-kit-specific features, setting up the VAD516 feels very familiar. Anyone who's ever setup an acoustic drum set, will breeze through 90 percent of the process without a glance at the included setup manual. The included double-braced stands are incredibly solid, and the ball-and-socket joints on the tom arms and cymbal booms make it easy and flexible to position everything just right. The heavy-duty hardware adds to the overall aesthetic while providing tour-worthy sturdiness and resilience.

Unboxing and assembly were straightforward and wiring up the kit was painless. Roland's labeled cable harness keeps things organized, and most connections are exactly where you would expect them to be. I did panic for a split second when the bass drum cable wouldn't fit into what I thought was the jack at the top of the drum, only to realize it was actually the breather hole, with the real connection located on the batter-side head next to the foot pedal. I'll admit I felt a bit stupid in that moment, but I'd be willing to bet that I'm far from the only one who's tried to plug the cable there.



As a left-handed player, I did notice a minor limitation with the cable routing. The bass drum's connection jack sits to the left of the foot pedal, which works perfectly for right-handed setups, but slightly restricted my positioning of the V51 module due to a short cable length. It's a very small issue and was the only hiccup I encountered during setup, aside from an elusive "missing" cable that turned out to be quietly hiding in a cardboard insert the whole time. Overall, the setup experience is a cakewalk, and the VAD516 immediately delivers the visual presence of a full-size stage kit.





(similar to a touchscreen) works flawlessly for detecting cross-stick patterns. The drum plays so naturally that it becomes one of those components that you stop thinking about after a few minutes because it simply behaves the way you expect.

The rest of the pads follow that same philosophy. The toms feel consistent and familiar, with just the right amount of give and rebound. The cymbals, though made of rubber, are thin and light enough to receive the stroke and move like real cymbals without killing the vibe.

The V51 drum module itself feels straightforward after a few minutes of navigating the layout. Most controls are easy to locate, and small adjustments don't require digging

too deep into the menus. I was tripped up a little when trying to find the coaching feature, as it wasn't immediately obvious that the Shift button needed to be held down while pressing the Song/Coach button. Once that was figured out, everything else felt quick and intuitive, such as moving between kits and adjusting settings.

The coaching feature introduces two new learning tools: Phrase Trainer, which displays actual notation for you to play along to while it scores your accuracy note by note, and Blast Beat, which benchmarks your playing speed so that you can improve based on past performance.

#### Bluetooth / Wi-Fi / Roland Cloud Editor Workflow

The Roland V-Drums team boasts about the expanded wireless connectivity of the new V-Series modules, and I was eager to test it out. I downloaded the Roland Cloud app on my iPhone and connected to the V51 via Bluetooth. Once

#### Kit Sounds

The V51 draws from the exact same sound engine and presets as Roland's flagship V71 module, giving the VAD516 access to a wide library of premium, studio-oriented drum sounds. The overall balance between instruments remains consistent as you move from kit to kit, making it easy to explore different sounds without constantly adjusting levels. Many of the presets feel mix-ready right out of the box, with layered samples and subtle modeling that help the dynamics respond naturally without sounding overly processed.

#### Playing Experience and Module Highlights

Once everything is assembled, the VAD516 has a very inviting stance. Powering on the V51 drum module initiates a brief loading process, and then you're off to the races. I was relieved to discover everything had been wired correctly, with each drum triggering the intended sound when struck. Even better, the kit sounded perfectly balanced right out of the gate, with no immediate need to adjust individual instrument levels. That said, the dedicated faders on the V51 module make it quick and easy to refine levels on the fly if you prefer to tailor the mix to your own playing style.

The PD-14DSX digital snare quickly became the focus of my playing experience. The addition of a functional throw-off is a welcome feature, and the ability to customize its settings gives it a level of flexibility that goes beyond a traditional acoustic throw-off. The snare itself feels comfortable and responsive. The low-profile rubberized rim makes rimshots feel more natural than previous designs, and the electrostatic sensor



connected, I connected it to my Wi-Fi network through the app. This allowed me to download and install the latest firmware for the module, which took about 12-15 minutes to completely update. The update was successful, and I moved on to explore the Roland Cloud app.

The Roland Cloud App ecosystem serves as a hub for expansion software and tools that extend the module's sound library and capabilities. There are many downloadable kit packs by DW and Roland that you can purchase right through the app and install on the V51 module. I gave it a try by downloading some of the free V-Drum Legacy packs, and it worked like a charm.

Also available for download through the Roland Cloud app is the free V51 Editor, which lets you further customize the V51 settings from a computer. I installed it on my laptop to have it available while sitting at the kit. The larger screen made it easy to navigate and modify kit parameters such as mixing levels, effects, routing, sound assignments, and set list creation. Striking a pad automatically selects it for editing on both the module and the software, and any adjustments made from either side update in real time. It creates a workflow that feels connected, giving you multiple ways to "skin a cat."

One useful customization that can be done inside the editor is setting the color of the selected kit, which will change the color of the illuminated buttons on the drum module as well as the light at the top of the snare throw-off. This makes it easy to identify the currently loaded drum kit preset, saving you from disaster and embarrassment at the gig.

## Recording

Recording on the V51 module is very easy and can be done by clicking the physical buttons on the module's face, or by using another phone app called V-Drums Play. With the V-Drums Play app, your drum recording is stored as Midi information and playing it back on your phone basically controls the V51 module as if you were playing the kit itself. Because the recording is stored as MIDI, you can easily switch drum kits on the V51 and audition different sounds using the same performance.



Another major advantage to the MIDI recording is that you can use the faders on the V51 to control the playback volume of each individual drum in the recording. So, for those of us who like to work granularly on our playing, it becomes very easy to isolate and scrutinize the timing, feel, dynamics, and accuracy of each limb, simply by adjusting volume faders.

## Conclusion

After spending time with the VAD516, it feels like a steady evolution of Roland's Acoustic Design lineup rather than a dramatic reinvention. I love how Roland is branching out with apps and tools, using wireless technologies that allow the kit to grow and evolve through new sound libraries, and software updates. At the same time, the familiar full-size layout and responsive digital components keep the playing experience grounded, familiar, and comfortable. The VAD516 strikes a thoughtful balance between tradition and modern workflow, offering a flexible platform that adapts easily to practice, recording, or performance.

The Roland VAD516 retails for \$5,799.99. Check it out at: <https://www.roland.com/us/products/vad516/>





# VOXEL Percussion: 3D Printed Drums, Sound Art in Audio Visions

By Brian Hill

In the beginning there was wood. And then clay, metal, plastic, fiberglass, acrylic and even glass to name a few! Seems like folks have been making drums out of almost anything they can stretch a membrane on and create a beautiful noise. It was only a matter of time before someone would take the leap into 3D printing for a drum shell. Voxel Percussion's Markus Vogl is the mastermind behind this groundbreaking format and design.



3D printing brings the world of art firmly into the world of percussive sounds. Voxel Percussion sent *Modern Drummer* one of these amazing pieces of “audio visions” to see if they sounded as good as they looked. So, let’s take a good look, or rather a good listen to something new!

The drum we received was a custom designed 6”x14” 3D printed shell, in a Red Black Pulse pattern from their Motion series. The shell is a reinforced design that weighs about 9 lbs. Eight black custom designed rod lugs fit nicely on the shell along with standard 2.3mm triple flange counter hoops. Voxel Percussion uses a magnetic style snare throw-off (DW style reproduction) and butt, along with 20 strand steel wire snares. Evans EC2 batter and clear Attack snare side heads round out the amenities.

Voxel Percussion says this about the drums: “Launched in 2024, leveraging the power of 3D printing and laser cutting, Voxel Percussion is redefining the traditional drum shell with intricate, custom shapes and textures that were previously impossible through conventional manufacturing methods. Each drum is created as a unique work of art, blending the studio’s rich heritage in cutting edge design and technology.”

“Our goal with Voxel Percussion is to push the boundaries of what’s possible in drum making. By embracing digital fabrication techniques, we’re able to include laser-engraved drumheads and snare inserts, allowing further personalization,” says Markus Vogl.

Indeed, the drum we received was totally customized for *Modern Drummer*! The drum had an acrylic insert with the *Modern Drummer* logo laser etched neatly into the center of the insert. The MD logo was also 3D designed into the outside of the shell while the VOXEL logo was 3D printed on the inside of the shell. These are really nice touches!

The overall look of the drum is nothing less than astonishing! The Red Black Pulse pattern is 3D amazing. The red and black look different on each side of the drum and from different angles, as the colors blend seamlessly together in the Motion series. Stage lights really catch these shells and make them light up and shine with a real glow. Whatever colors, design, or graphics you have in mind could be made into a drum shell. They are truly amazing!

Voxel Percussion also employs a totally different approach with the acrylic insert that they custom make and laser engrave for each drum. I think this approach helps give the drum its controlled characteristics. Some of the inserts are more solid in nature while others are completely perforated. I’ve seen a few examples of shell designs and I have a hard time describing them, but they sound great, and they look so cool!

But do they really sound as good as they look? I think so! The sound of the drum we received was a very controlled, dry sound, void of any unwanted overtones. In fact, these drums are extremely clean and tight sounding. The microphone really liked these drums, too! The snares off sound was full, with great presence. The back beat with the snares on was cracking with cut, and the cross stick was easy. It’s a great Rock and Metal drum, but I think it would do well in most musical situations.

If you want “Looks That Kill!” these could be *your* drums. Voxel Percussion has many different patterns to choose from, but *your* design could only be a “program” away. VOXEL Percussion makes complete 3D printed drum kits that just blew me away when I sat down at them. They were fat and full of the clean tones and sounds I want to hear in a great drum kit.

So put the art back into your sound with Voxel Percussion’s 3D Printed drums and get in on the ground floor of yet another audio-visual option in the world of percussive arts and sound. You won’t look like anyone else! Check ‘em out at [voxeldrums.com](http://voxeldrums.com).





# CHAD SEXTON

By Mark Griffith

In 35 years as the drummer for 311, Chad Sexton and 311 have recorded 14 studio records, two live records, four EP's, and four DVD's. Several of their recordings have resulted in platinum and gold records and numerous hit tunes, and 311 has sold over 10 million records. Through all that success, Chad has created some fantastic drum parts and written some killer songs. 311's unique mix of rock, rap, reggae, and funk demands a lot from their drummer, and Chad never disappoints. The band's annual Unity tours always boast musical unity and cross-genre support, and 311 even has a day named in their honor. But where do those creatively cool drum parts and funky grooves come from? This month, let us all celebrate 311 Day (March 11<sup>th</sup>) together and celebrate musical unity with a discussion that ranges from the Sky Ryders Drum Corps to Kiss to Weather Report (and everything in between) to find out what makes Chad Sexton tick?

Photos by Alex Kluff





# The Musical Unity of 311



**MD:** What was it like to start out as a drummer in Omaha, Nebraska?

**CS:** I grew up in the 70s and 80s in the Midwest, and it was a really great place to grow up. It might not seem like a “musical Mecca,” but there were lots of musicians and lots of bands to go see back then. Both of my parents were professional musicians in the 70s. My dad played guitar and my mom played keyboards, we were a musical family. I took my first drum lesson in 1975 when I was about five years old, but it didn’t last long. I couldn’t concentrate, I was just too young, all I wanted to do was watch cartoons. After I grew up a bit, I got back involved with drums. Back in those days, we were lucky enough to have brick and mortar, mom and pop, drum stores where they sold drums. But drum stores were also a drum hangout, and we were lucky enough to have a drum store in Omaha. That’s where I started taking lessons.

Somewhere around 1980, I started taking lessons and hanging out at Joe Voda’s Drum City. I started on snare then I moved to drum set. My drum teacher was Steve Thomas from Omaha, NE. He’s the guy that showed me what drum corps was about, and I loved it! I was enthralled by drum corps, I joined a small Class A drum corps there in Omaha called The River City Railmen, I marched with them for three years and then I joined the Sky Ryders from Kansas. I marched with them for two years while I continued taking lessons. During my drum corps experience I was taking lessons from several different teachers in Omaha learning different musical styles and different instruments like marimba, concert snare drum, and drum set. The drum corps experience was very formative and prominent in forming the drumming style I have today. Even though 311 is mostly a rock band, we go into reggae and other styles. I’ve always loved and was very influenced by drum corps writing. It was very formative to how I approach writing drum parts for songs.

The other thing about growing up in Omaha was that we had a great music program in our school district. The jazz band in high school would win all sorts of awards and I loved playing and reading the charts in jazz band. Our teacher, Roger Groth, put a lot of effort and work into choosing music that was cool for us to play both in concert band and in jazz band. I had a lot of great music teachers along the way like Jim Johnson, Steve Raybine, Chris Poulton, Brian Morhardt, Larry Lawless, Luigi Waites, I could go on and on... I keep in touch and always try and hook up with my first teacher Steve Thomas when I’m back home. Last year, we were having dinner together and he said, “Do you realize your first lesson with me was 50 years ago?” I didn’t realize it had been that long, I thought he was joking. I am just so lucky to have grown up in Omaha, Nebraska with a drum store, a drum corps, and all those great teachers. So many guys that I learned from have helped me get to the place that I’ve been in for these last few decades with 311, I couldn’t have been luckier.

I also should mention that I was fortunate enough to be able to play gigs with my dad starting at 11 years old. I also did my first

studio recording with him when I was about 12. I played gigs with him off and on until I was about 17 or 18. These experiences were really important in development as a live player. I find you can only practice so much, but the real learning occurs when you’re live in front of an audience.

**MD:** I worked in a drum shop when I was a kid, and it was a monumental piece of my early musical education. Talk about the importance of learning in the environment of the drum shop.

**CS:** You and I were both very fortunate, eventually I worked at the drum shop too. Joe Voda’s Drum City was the epitome of a drum shop. I was lucky because my mom Linda worked there and then I started working there, so I was always there. The hang at the drum shop is where I learned so much musically. Drummers would come in and talk about different musicians and records, that’s where I learned about Jaco Pastorius, Carmen McRae, Dave Weckl, Joey Baron, Dennis Chambers, Chick Corea, John Scofield, John McLaughlin with Mahavishnu and Billy Cobham. It was such an educational hang. I learned about all sorts of music, back then guys would make me tapes. There was a guy named Charles Gamble who had the prettiest handwriting, and he would make me these perfectly labeled tapes of bands like Weather Report, he would come in the shop and say, “Here, I made this for you, check it out!” That’s what the hang was about, learning about music, learning about players, and learning about albums. Back then there were no cell phones, and it seemed like we had so much more time, I would go home and stick that tape in, and just take it all in. I’m such a fan of the 70s and the 80s when I think and reminisce about those times, I’m just blown away.

**MD:** You and I are about the same age, and I call the drumming generation before us, the greatest drum generation. Those guys just wanted to share information. But they weren’t politically correct, and they weren’t interested in telling us how great we or they were, but they taught us a lot. Tell me about learning from that generation of drummers.

**CS:** You are so right. They weren’t politically correct, they weren’t saying, “Oh you’re doing great son...” I remember playing some rock stuff for Joe Voda (the owner of the store) and him saying, “I can teach a monkey to do that,” because it wasn’t jazz or improvisation. That’s the way they looked at it. They were always pushing me to learn about other music. It was always about musicality, not overplaying, knowing that everything’s not a drum solo, and playing for the song instead of trying to show off. I would go to jam sessions and play, I would come off stage and an older guy would say, “When you were playing up there, you were too loud for this room.” I was embarrassed but I learned the hard way. I’m the type of guy that wanted someone to tell me what I was doing wrong. In drum corps, if you made a mistake, you had to do ten push-ups. Some guys reacted well to that, and some guys didn’t. I love the dudes from that generation and even the generation before. The drummers from the 40s like Buddy Rich and Louie Bellson, I saw those cats play live because I was lucky enough to live in Omaha. Those bands were always touring and coming through Omaha in the late 70s early 80s and I was fortunate that somebody would take me to those concerts, because they knew that it was important for me to see those bands. I could go on forever about this. I realize that I had the luckiest, happiest, childhood ever! I was surrounded by drums and surrounded by people that cared.

**MD:** I remember an older drummer who was always expressing the importance of shuffles to me, did you know any older dudes



like that?

**CS:** Yeah, the old schoolers would say, "You gotta swing that more!" I can recall a time when I got a piece of manuscript in drum corps with eighth notes written on it, but upon looking at the manuscript, (in my opinion) it didn't look like they were playing it correctly. So I showed some older dudes, and they said, "They're swinging it! That's an *interpretation*! They could have written the dotted eighth note and the 16th note for you,

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but you have to interpret the way they're playing it, then you'll just fit in."

**MD:** You had to listen, interpret, and play accordingly.

**CS:** I learned from some of those dudes that sometimes you can swing the hardest with quarter notes. It doesn't always have to be Ding-Ding-a-Ding Ding-a-Ding to swing— something can swing with *just* quarter notes. Everything that you're placing in between will provide the swing, but sometimes you can provide time that is so hardcore with just quarter notes. I love that. On different records you can hear guys playing one of the most extreme shuffles with just quarter notes. One of the best shuffles I've ever heard is on a Weather Report record, the two notes are so close they are almost together. It's all about interpretation. Learning about all that was feeding my brain and my soul.

**MD:** Tell me about how all your drum corps and musical training led to 311?

**CS:** In drum corps I had friends that were very musical and talented and who loved music as much as I did, and I learned a lot from them and their different musical influences. It really broadened my scope of what was out there musically. I suppose that helped in being in a band that blends genres. In high school, some of us started forming cover bands together, the basis of 311 really started in the summer of '88. Not everyone was there, but it was Nick, Tim, me, and another guy named Ward playing keyboards. That was our first original band called Unity, and it was the beginning that led to 311. After a while, everyone went their separate ways. I was going to college in Lincoln, NE for Nuclear Medicine-Radiology, Tim was in Arizona, and Nick was in Cali. In my first year of college, I was taking prerequisites and Nick kept calling and telling me that I had to continue to play music. At the beginning of my second year, I went to the Med Center to take an admissions test. Music had always been in my blood, and as I was walking into the Med Center to take the test, I looked at the wall and I looked at the ceiling and said, *'No, this is not for me, I'm not doing this.'* I took the test anyway, but afterward I went straight to my mom's work (the drum store) and told her, *'I'm moving to California to play music,'* and she cried. I said, *'If I if I don't try this now, I'm never gonna do it, and I'll have time to work my way out of it if it doesn't work, I just need to go and try this.'* In 1989, Nick and I went to California and started a version of our band Unity. Eventually, we moved back to Nebraska, and I started playing in a cover band with P-Nut and another guy Jim, then Nick joined our band, and we did some previous originals, then Tim and SA joined, and that was the start of 311 in 1990. We made our first record and





released a CD while we were still in Omaha, and we all moved to California in 1992, Eddy Offord, who produced some Yes records, was interested in working with us and producing us, and we got our first record deal.

**MD:** 311 has so many musical ingredients, what ingredients did you bring to 311?

**CS:** I brought a plethora of musical influences with me. There was a lot of special writing that was happening in the 80s drum corps from Tom Float and the Blue Devils, and Ralph Hardimon who was writing for the Santa Clara Vanguard. I realized later how strongly influenced I was by how they phrased things, and how they put things together. That was one thing that I brought to the musical table. Sure, 311 was playing rock, but I was incorporating some of the drum corps naturally. I wasn't copying anything; it was just the drum corps influence. I didn't realize that until later when I was listening to some 80s drum corps. I instantly heard how influenced I was by their phrasing and writing—I couldn't believe it.

311 has a wide range of musical influences, we go from Prince to Bad Brains to old jazz to Zappa and Bob Marley, we like it all. So, with the other guys coming from all those different areas, I was bringing influences from Mahavishnu Orchestra with Billy Cobham and John Scofield with Dennis Chambers. We have a band of many influences from a lot of different genres, I think that's apparent. But it's not like we had an agenda to be like that, it was a really natural process that brought everything together.

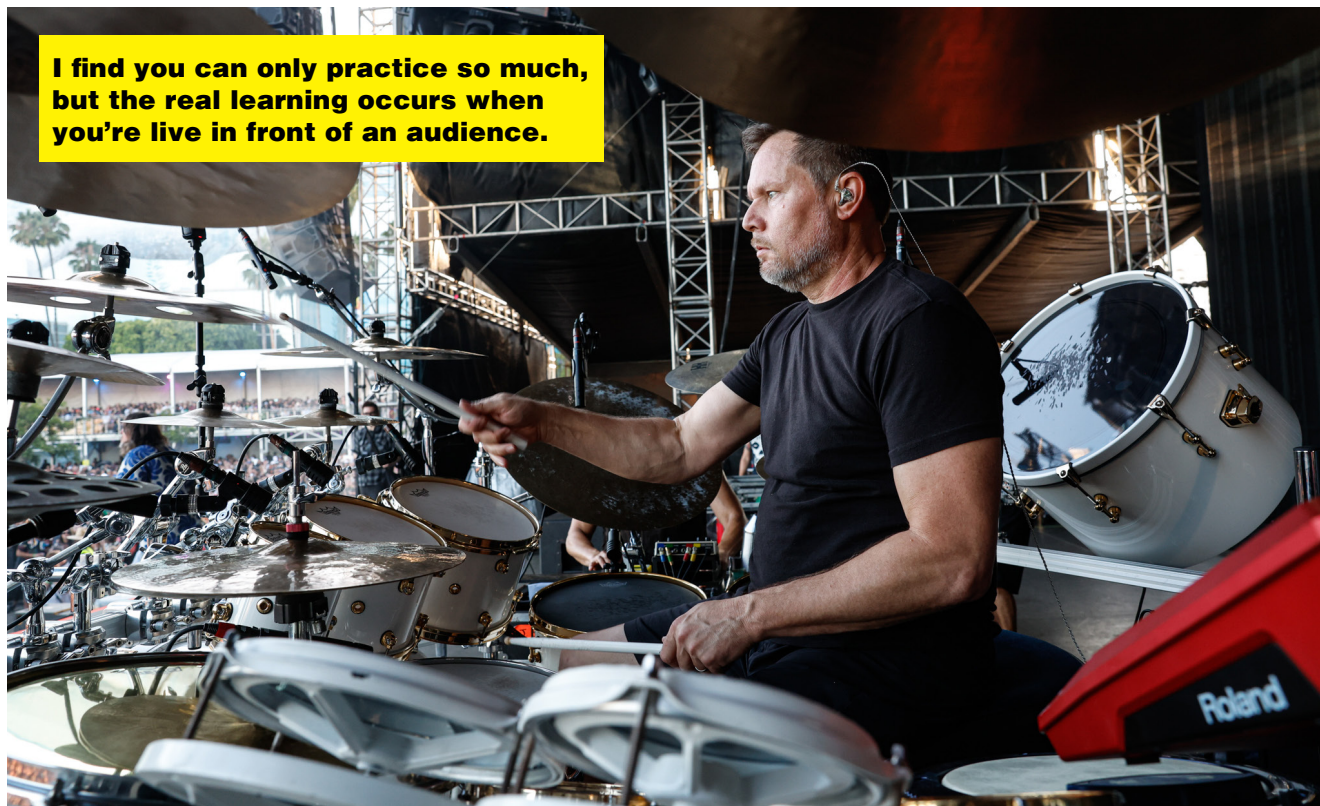
Simple Minds, I love that dude. There is a Simple Minds record from 1982 called *New Gold Dream* that influenced me a lot. The drumming on that record is so simple, but it's so good. I just think that's a brilliant 80s style record. I was influenced by Alan White a lot. The thing I wasn't really into was metal, I'd rather listen to funk.

**MD:** Are there any other important recordings that you'd like to mention that you listened to in your development as a drummer?

**CS:** Mahavishnu Orchestra *Visions of the Emerald Beyond* with Narada Michael Walden. That record is so vicious and his drum sound so raw, I have loved that forever. The first Jaco Pastorius record is beautiful, but it's more than the drumming, that whole record is a huge influence. As a kid coming up, Led Zeppelin 2, but I love them all. John Bonham is a huge influence although I don't know how exactly... he just made you want to play the drums. Frank Zappa's *Joe's Garage* with Vinnie is just unbelievable, ask anybody. Rush *Moving Pictures*, I spent a lot of time playing along to John Scofield's *Blue Matter* and *Loud Jazz* with Dennis Chambers.

Because I marched playing snare drum with those big sticks in drum corps for five years, whenever I came home from playing snare for a few months, all I wanted to do was play drum set. One year, I came home and saw a Chick Corea Electric Band concert on PBS, they were playing "Got a Match" from the first record, and Dave Weckl's playing on that first record and *Eye*

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At this point in my life it's hard for me to even keep track of my influences. As a kid growing up, Kiss was my thing. I saw them for the first time in 1978, and they were a huge influence on me. But I have so many musical and drumming influences—whether it's John Bonham, Neil Peart, or even Jaco Pastorius. Jaco was huge influence even though he's a bass player. Mel Gaynor from

*of the Beholder* floored me. I just couldn't get over what Dave was doing. I've listened to both of those records lately and the drum tones that he is getting are so good, it's unbelievable. We all know what he was doing with triggers, but those electronic sounds were a huge influence. The way that Omar Hakim



was using those sounds on Weather Report's *Sportin' Life* was amazing too.

**MD:** How did all of those influences manifest in 311?

**CS:** That's a hard question for me to answer because honestly my approach has been to try and keep my brain out of it. I try to do what's natural, and I think our brains can interfere with that. The more analytical you get, the worse it gets, at least for a guy like me. When I was young, drum corps was about trying to be perfect, but I've let that go. But when I listen to my own playing, I can still hear phrasing from drum corps, I can hear phrasing from Alan White, I can hear the influence of Neil Peart, Dennis Chambers, and even Dave Weckl. But it's not a conscious thing, I try and let those influences be unconscious and just play whatever the music and song that we're playing dictates.

I do write some of the songs and music in 311, so in terms of writing songs and rock riffs, those influences come from the writers I grew up with. I learned about chord progressions from different things I was listening to by

**MD:** How do you write music?

**CS:** That's sort of a mystery. For 311, I've written on both keyboards and on guitar. Most of the time I write on guitar. I just set my guitar up with a real rock sound with distortion and sometimes an octave effect, and I play single note riffs like Led Zeppelin or Kiss might. I just play around and hopefully something comes. But sometimes something doesn't come, and that's fine. A while back, I was trying to write some riffs and I probably recorded 14 ideas, and I remember thinking, '*These all just suck!*' It's funny how writing happens. A few years ago I was trying to write a real rocker and the only ideas that were coming through were slower song ideas. They were cool ideas, but I needed to rock, I wanted to write something with a faster tempo. I tried to block the slow stuff, but they were the only things coming. My solution was to lay that song out and put it to the side. That song ended up being on our last record *Full*

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Chick Corea and Joe Zawinul. Weather Report is one of my all-time favorite bands. I could listen to their music forever!

**MD:** What's your favorite Weather Report record?

**CS:** That's a hard question. Of course, *Heavy Weather* was a commercial success for them, but I love *Sportin' Life*.

**MD:** Victor Bailey and Omar Hakim had such a strong hookup, and (Percussionist) Mino Cinelu's singing and acoustic guitar playing on "Confians" is one of my favorite songs ever!

**CS:** Absolutely! I also love *Black Market* and *Mysterious Traveler*. Then there is *Night Passage* and *Mr. Gone*, I love them all! My wife asks me, "Seriously, how many more times can you listen to this?" But I just love Weather Report's music.

*Bloom*, it's called "Friend." It's a slower, real simple song, but it just wanted to come through. I tried to ignore it and push it aside. It might sound cliché, but I think writing comes from a different place. There are different styles of writers. Some writers might refine a song in Pro Tools, some writers try to emulate something. I want my songs to come from another place, your heart, or the cosmos, *wherever...* I try and approach it naturally and not analyze stuff too much.

**MD:** How do you create drum parts?

**CS:** I try to use a completely natural approach. Obviously, whatever rhythm is happening in the riff or the chords that the guitars and bass are playing will inspire me. I'll either emulate what they're doing or just put a backbeat behind what they're

doing. I just sit there and start moving my arms until something comes together. It's usually pretty basic at first, then I develop it, develop the transitions, and then I'll record and listen to it. Sometimes while you're playing a part, you'll think what you're doing sounds a certain way. Then you listen back and think, *'There's too many bass drum notes in there. I gotta remove this one and that one.'* That's when the analyzing starts. Finally, after I get the drum part (kind of) "there" with some transitions, I record and listen to it again while I analyze it. But during the creative process I try not to do any analyzing, I'm just playing. Sometimes that process has been very successful, and the part stands the test of time. Sometimes in retrospect I'll look back and think, *'I should have put a little more thought into that part, I should have done something else and thought about it a little more,'* but that's what happens in 35 years of a band.

**MD:** Give me a few 311 songs that you think the drum part works really well, and a few where you think you should have done something different?

**CS:** I really like my drumming on the last three records, *Mosaic*, *Voyager* and *Full Bloom*. I'm really happy with my playing on the song "Space and Time." It seems like I'm just grooving all the way down, but underneath there's a lot of details and the beat switches up. I really love how that song came together. There's a song called "Stainless" on *Voyager* where I created a cool drum part. I'm really happy with the beats on the song "Too Late" from *Mosaic*. I think those drum parts are very unique. I'm not just repeating what I've done in the past 30 years on a lot of those tracks, which is good thing. I played some good stuff on the *311 (Blue Record)*. *Grassroots* is a very strange record, but it's very creative, and I'm very happy with that music. *Music* is our first record with Eddie Offord producing, and I'm really happy with that one too.

Something that *could* be lacking in my opinion, would be some songs on 2005's *Don't Tread On Me*. It just seems like maybe the whole band wasn't firing on all cylinders for that. That's only

my opinion, the other guys might disagree, but (I think) there's some lackluster performances on there. I could have probably put more time and effort into really composing what I wanted to play on that record. When I'm listening back or preparing for one of our big "311 Days" where we play a lot of songs from the past that I start thinking, *'I don't even know if I'll play it like that, I've gotta change that a little bit, that's not as rocking as I can make it.'*

**MD:** When you hear an old performance you don't like is it usually that you wished you played less or more?

**CS:** I don't think it's as easy as that, it's usually the part. Sometimes I'll hear a part, and it's just bland or my phrasing is a dud, and I'll want to add some life to it. Maybe that would equate to adding more notes, I don't know. I try not to get mad about it because it's a long career and those things are going to happen.

**MD:** From yourself, and from others, what do you think creates a great drum part?

**CS:** For me, the most important thing is creativity. When you hear something that you haven't heard before, that's pretty cool. But then there's the whole thing of not overplaying. If you're playing a song you have to *play the song* and you have to *support the song*, that's our role. There's been iconic drum parts that have come from just doing that. Whether it's a Beatles song or a Rush song... the other thing is great phrasing. I'm a fan of phrasing. I'm a fan of rounding things out to make them go or tying phrases together with a fill like I did on "Amber." If I can, I like to use a signature fill idea throughout a whole song to tie it together.

**MD:** A rhythmic hook.

**CS:** It's cool when you can create that one fill that's exactly right for the song. But I think there are other characteristics of a great drum part too. The tone of the drums, how the drums sound, and how the compression is used. Sometimes I'm involved in the production side of things. Our song "Amber" is a good example

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**I think your playing has to change and evolve, it's kind of a parallel to living life and getting older. But lots of things have changed, including the way you record and stuff like that.**

of using compression between the hi-hat and the snare with one mic. I think it was a Shure SM7 and a blue face DBX 266 compressor. Ron St. Germain, our producer, got a perfect balance and characteristic tone for the song through his use of compression. That tone helped the melodies, the chord progressions, and everything else in the song. If you can get all of that together: creativity, phrasing, tone, compression, that can be magic.

**MD:** A lot of people throw the term “phrasing” around, what does the word phrasing mean to you?

**CS:** In today's popular music (rock music, pop music, or R&B) there is a lot of looping. There's a live part and then there's a drum loop. Phrasing to me is the same for a melodic instrument as it would be for a rhythm instrument. Melodically you can have a line, that line could be a phrase of four, eight, sixteen measures, or it can be any length of time, there are no rules. So a phrase is the entire idea. If you're looping a beat, you will usually put something on the end of the last measure to say, “This is the end of the idea.”

**MD:** Some sort of rhythmic punctuation.

**CS:** Yes. With loops (or when you are looping live beats) there is the entire idea, which is (kind of) one piece. How you identify that “one piece” is by doing something at the end of the fourth or eighth measure, or wherever you want your phrase to end. Our song “Amber” is a good example. There is a certain snare drum fill at the end of that loop that makes it become a phrase. That's what phrasing is to me.

Alan White has a very particular and unique way of phrasing his beats. If you listen to the Yes music (*90125* and *Big Generator*) you'll hear that he phrases his beats in a very cool way. You might already know those songs because you have heard them a lot, but if you analyze those beats to really see what he's doing there, it's so cool.



**MD:** Let's dig into Alan White's drumming some more, because you have brought his name up a few times.

**CS:** Obviously he came on board with Yes after Bruford, and as a kid growing up, I loved those records (*90125* and *Big Generator*.) To me, he's playing so creatively for the song, (as I said) his phrasing is so unique, and his parts are unique. Even though they're more simplified, they are great drum parts. How he applied the drums to the odd time signature in the song “Changes” is one of my favorites. You can play anything in an odd time, but the way he phrased that beat flowed so well. I didn't realize how influenced I was by him until much later, when I heard myself playing some ideas that I heard him play years earlier. I'm so glad I got to meet him once at a NAMM show and tell him how much his playing meant to me.

**MD:** I think you nailed it; Alan created great drum parts for songs. I always wondered if his earlier session playing with people like George Harrison helped him develop his talent for creating great drum parts. Did you ever hear the record he did with David Torn, and Tony Levin? It's called *Levin, Torn, White* and



it's amazing!

**CS:** Wow, I need to check that out.

**MD:** Do you create a lot of your own loops?

**CS:** On the first record we were heavy into electronics. There were 808 sounds and little electronic sounds everywhere. That was a real creative process. Back in the day we'd use an MPC 60 to make loops and load in sounds from a floppy disc. Nick would bring a loop in and he'd be grabbing sounds from somewhere. It was fun putting all that stuff together back then. We do add electronics, noises, synths, and effects into our music all the time, but you have to make sure nothing is clashing, and nothing is flam-ing, unless you want that. It's changed over the years, when we first started, we were recording on tape in

imprint when they hear you live. That's what I try and do, and that's what we try and do as a band. In the early 90s, I saw a band that I loved, and they went off script so much that I couldn't even tell what song they were playing, but God bless 'em, everyone's different.

**MD:** In the 35 years the band has been together, how has your playing evolved?

**CS:** I think your playing has to change and evolve, it's kind of a parallel to living life and getting older. But lots of things have changed, including the way you record and stuff like that. I think I still have the same philosophy to playing drums that I did back when we started in the early days, but I would hope that I've learned something from my mistakes in the past. Maybe I'm biased, but I don't think I've taken a step back yet, and I know



the early 90s, the first record we went digital wasn't until 2009, everything before that is tape.

**MD:** 311 didn't switch to all digital until 2009? That's late.

**CS:** We were trying to hang in there as long as we could.

**MD:** When you are playing older songs live, how closely do you try to stay to the original drum parts?

**CS:** I try and stick to the recorded parts, there should only be slight differences. I was always a fan of people playing their parts, that probably comes from my drum corps perspective. Every time I saw a band live, I enjoyed it more when they were playing *"that part I love."* When people listen to your record, they're having a great time; that imprint is going into their subconscious, and (in my opinion) you want to give them that

that'll happen one day. But I think I'm playing as good (if not better) than I ever have been, and the same thing goes with writing new music. I know that I've gotta keep it fresh and keep it creative, and I think I've been doing that drumming-wise.

**MD:** You just mentioned that recording techniques might have changed how you play. I'm assuming you are talking about tape vs. ProTools. How has that change affected how you play?

**CS:** Obviously when you're recording to tape, in a 15-minute reel of tape you have one, two, or three takes per reel of tape, and tape is expensive, so you can't just waste tape. If need be, you could edit the tape and the takes, but you couldn't have a bunch of cuts. With digital, you can have as many edits as you want. What I like about tape is that you have to be rehearsed enough and have something important enough and good enough to commit to put on tape. Nowadays you don't have



to know the song as well as you should because you can just edit all the good sections together. I don't know if that is really changing the *playing*, but it does change the *preparation*. Today, there sometimes seems to be a lack of importance in being super solid, well-rehearsed, and having something good enough to *want* to record.

**MD:** Do you guys record with a click?

**CS:** Yes, for the most part. I don't think we had a click on the *Blue Record* (311.)

We used a click on our first record because Eddie wanted us to do that.

We had never done that before, we were very young, I was 22, but we gave it a shot and it was fine. Eddie really wanted to lay that record down

on the grid because we were young, hyper, and spastic. He wanted to organize all that energy. Of course when you're on the grid the edits can happen a lot easier. But once again, you have to be well-rehearsed and understand the grooves to lay things down without a click.

**MD:** Do you play live to a click?

**CS:** It's interesting that you asked that. Yes, we have been playing live to a click for consistency and production integration with digital guitar amps, lights, and screens. Everything is tied to a computer. But I recently approached the band and said, '*We need to get rid of some of this stuff, it's just too much. We can't play every song to the click; we need to get rid of the click track on a lot of the songs.*' We need to just roll with it because there's a certain connection with the audience that is made when you're not playing to a click track. It's REAL, and it's coming from a band of human beings. So we're making that change this year. We won't be taking every song off the click because there are some intense songs that have big production, and there are a few songs with some backing tracks that are just massive, and we want to keep that. But with a lot of the older songs we're just going to freeform it. We used to do that and there was a certain vibe.

**MD:** Did you feel like that band was relying on it too much?

**CS:** Not "relying" on it. But I could tell that it really changed the way that I play sometimes. I'm talking about very small things. During a show I could feel that the click (kind of) changed the way I might go into that next groove, but I knew that I had to stay on top of it, so that's what suffers. It gets rid of the human aspect.

Don't get me wrong, I was in drum corps, I can follow a click track. My philosophy is if I ever get behind or ahead, I don't try and adjust immediately. Over four measures, I'll slightly slow down and suddenly (or not so suddenly) we're back. I'm pretty experienced with it and pretty good at lining things up. But there's just a free form vibe of pushing a fill or a holding back a groove that we must get back to. We've been doing this for a while, and we have changed everything else in our orbit except for that. I have the philosophy of, '*We can only change on the outside so much— if we expect a real change, we need to change what we're doing.*'

**MD:** Did you get any push back from the band?

**CS:** No, not really. I brought it up at the end of our tour in South

America. I saw Kiss on one of their last shows, they weren't playing to a click, and it was great. The idea has been brewing for a while, and finally I said that I think we need to go in that direction. We're going to start doing it at our next rehearsals, I'm excited about that.

We'll still start every tune with a click. What's funny is when you get up there in some altitude, or you've been traveling for days and you're a little tired, when that click track comes on at the beginning of a song and you're thinking, '*I would have started this song way slower!*' So we're going to do the show like we normally do, whoever starts a song will get the click and when the whole band comes in the click gets turned off. That way we can make sure we're starting off right on the runway and going for lift off. But when the song starts, we're going to take away the training wheels, that's how it is going to happen.

**MD:** I had a weird altitude issue while touring years ago. When you are doing one-night stays in certain altitudes, that must be tough.

**I want my songs to come from another place, your heart, or the cosmos, wherever...**

**CS:** It is, I always have to deal with it, but some dudes don't get affected by it at all. When you play Red Rocks, that's roughly 6,500 feet above sea level, and playing in Vail (between 8,000 and 11,000 feet above sea level) is really weird. Experience plays into it, when you know what's coming and you know what to expect, you know what to do when it happens. When you're short of breath from altitude, obviously the oxygen is thinner, and you feel like you're out of breath. The natural tendency

is to take a breath in hurry because you're out of breath. What works for me is to blow (exhale) out the carbon first, that seems to help me a lot, but altitude has always affected me. I just have to be aware, and I get through it.

**MD:** I know that when a football team is playing in Denver, they get there two days ahead of time just so they can get acclimated, but sometimes when we're touring, we don't have that luxury. When you are playing Red Rocks do you arrive there a day early to let your body adjust?

**CS:** Sometimes you can, but not always. You might be able to schedule a day off in Denver, but you won't have a day off in Red Rocks, which is much higher than Denver. I've occasionally had to roll into Vail and play that day, and it freaks you out if you're not you're not aware of it because it catches you off guard. You wonder why you are out of breath after going up four steps.

**MD:** As a hard touring band, do you have any other touring advice for any young musicians?

**CS:** For me it's about eating right, or at least eating enough for your sustenance for the shows each night. Playing requires energy, so eating enough to have energy is important. Hydration and getting enough sleep are essential. On the bus in the morning, I will lay there as long as I can, just to make sure I've got enough energy for the show that night, but everyone's different. Some people might require less energy, or the style of music they're playing might require less energy. Another thing to realize is that as time goes by, depending how long the tour is, you'll notice that at a certain point, people around you (or you) might start to get easily agitated, because you want to go home, and you've been away for a long time. Going day-to-day, moving all this stuff, and living out of a suitcase, can get to you

after six weeks or so. You'll notice that after being out for about five weeks, people start griping a little more (to put it nicely.) But you must realize that's because everyone's been out there for a long time, and you've hit the threshold. As soon as they go home for about a week, they're ready to go out again. There's always ups and downs, but it's all about handling the downs, because everyone seems to handle the ups the same way.

**MD:** Do you have any side-projects happening outside of 311?

**CS:** I have an electronica project that I'm going to release this year called Transmission Prism. I have a band called Sun Will Shine with Tim Mahoney (311 guitarist) and 311's sound engineer Scotch Ralston who has been there since the beginning. He's always helped me write songs, so we decided to do a project together. I'm working on another project with a pop singer named Medea Lily. We're about to release her first single in the next couple months. We've done several covers together including a Beatles song, "Black Hole Sun," "Can't Stay Away from You" by Gloria Estefan, and "Don't Break My Heart" by UB40. Medea is my niece, and it just started off as something we were going to do for fun, but it turned out really good and she has decided to pursue music. She has a deal through SKP records and that will be coming out soon.

**MD:** In 2005, you opened and ran a successful drum store for many years, what made you do that?

**CS:** We had a good run from 2005 until 2013, but it was not like opening a brick-and-mortar store back in the 80s or 90s. That came simply from the love of hanging out at a drum store. It probably should have been reversed; I should have created a retail store that became a hangout instead of a hangout that became a retail store. At that point there were still some drum stores that still existed, unfortunately a lot of them have closed by now. But when I opened the store in 2005, there were still some good drum stores around the country, and I was trying to give that environment back to drummers. It was kind of nice because my mom and brother actually ran the store, so it was a family business. It was great, there were a lot of friends and connections made through that store, a lot of great players came into that store, and if you talk to any of them, they'll tell you that my drum store was awesome! Honestly, I wish I could still provide it, but in this business climate, it's very hard. I'm glad we did it, it was a good run, it was a lot of good memories and hard work. I can't believe that I opened that store 20 years ago!

**MD:** I know you recently did a [Modern Drummer Tour Kit Rundown](#) where you talk about your Pearl kits, Sabian, Vater, and Remo. Do you change your sets from tour to tour much?

**CS:** The pieces don't change much, but the actual drums have changed. My current set is a Pearl Masterworks, the last one was a Masters. The new Masterworks kit is white with gold hardware, it looks really cool. I've never had gold hardware before, and the white and gold is really sharp. My mounted toms are 6, 10, 12, and my floor toms are 14 and 16.

**MD:** 6", 10", 12"? That's a little strange, what do you have against 8" toms?

**CS:** For the tone that I'm looking for from a small tom, an 8" does not go high enough. If you're doing a roll down the toms you know, it's more extreme to me to have the 6" tom. It might not make a difference to a normal listener, but to me it makes a difference.

**MD:** So why just have the 6"?

**CS:** There was a time (8-10 years ago) when I had a lot more toms, I had a 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, and that was really fun to play. However, to fit all the drums, I had the 6" closer to me and the 8" was sort of above it. When I was doing fills, I tended to skip the 8", so eventually I decided to get rid of a couple toms. But I kept the 6" there and I've been rolling that way ever since, I really enjoy it.

**MD:** Do your cymbals change?

**CS:** Not much. I like big crashes and I'm using the HHX O-Zones, I'm using two 20's but (I think) they stopped making them about a year ago. Sometimes I'll add an 18" and a China. Sabian just started making a 22" Wide-Lip China and it sounds great, it's not harsh and sounds great. I use a 22" Artisan brilliant ride, and my hi-hats are Artisan 15" hats. When I was getting some hi-hats from Sabian, I wanted to try the Artisans, but they were out of 14's, so I tried the 15's and now I've been playing the 15's for a while, and I don't think I'll ever go back. They just sound like "big





boy cymbals." I have a few extra special effects cymbals around, some splashes and a miniature China, my vintage Rocktagon splash that they made in the 90s. I have my 16" Remo Roto Tom set up with the pedal, so I can hit the pedal and adjust the pitch. When we put a mic on that thing, it sounds so big out front, it just rumbles you. I love the Simon Phillips and Stewart Copeland sounds from the 80s, so I always have some Rocket toms (which are Pearl's version of Octobans) set up to change things up and have fun. I've even talked myself into this: For the next 311 record, I swear to God I'm using electric toms. I might need to buy an old Simmons module, and maybe I'll mix them like Dave Weckl, or maybe not— but those tones are going to be in there. You'd be hard pressed to find a bigger 80s fan than me, I just love that stuff. Why not? I've done so many recordings of bare-bones tom sounds, after 35 years why not take a left turn and start doing some of that stuff.

**MD:** You have a "311 Day" coming this month (3-11 is March

11<sup>th</sup>), and you do 311 shows every other year, what can you tell me about the tradition of doing 311 shows.

**CS:** We do a special 311 show every other year, sometimes March 11th falls on a weird day for people to travel and take off work, so this year we're not playing exactly on 3-11. This year it's on March 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. But we've been doing this event every two years for 26 years, this year it's in Las Vegas. It's a really cool thing because a lot of times you play a show, or a festival and you have a limited time to play. There's a lot of different types of 311 fans, and sometimes we have to paint with some broad strokes for the set lists. But for our hardcore fans, we've created this day so every couple years we can dive deep into our catalog. Last time we probably played 85 songs in two days. It's a massive two-day event, and it's really cool. We've got some cool things planned this time, and we're digging deep into our catalog to play rarities, B sides, and stuff we don't usually play. Everyone has fun!





# Jordi Radnoti: The Pressure of Being Prepared

By Danny “Ziggy” Laverde

Jordi Radnoti’s drumming is rooted in preparation and trust. Trust in the work, the music, and herself. After coming up through drumline, local bands, and a wide mix of styles, she learned early what it actually takes to operate at a professional level: know the music cold, stay adaptable, and show up prepared for anything. That mindset carried her through a high-pressure audition process and onto the world’s biggest stages with Olivia Rodrigo, where split-second decisions, massive crowds, and zero room for error are the norm. From headlining festivals in South America to navigating the mental and physical demands of touring, Radnoti approaches every show with focus and intent, balancing rock-driven energy with the discipline required to serve the song. It’s not about hype, it’s about being prepared, doing the work, and delivering when it counts.





Photos by Alex Klufft

**MD:** What first inspired you to start playing the drums?

**JR:** Honestly, I always thought drums just looked cool and they always spoke to me. I think what really made me start playing when I was 12 was watching Travis Barker because he has the whole “rockstar thing” and his beats are super cool and innovative. I love the way it all fits in with Blink-182’s music. I think that’s when I really connected the dots and thought, *‘Oh, I wanna play drums!’* Now more than ever, the biggest influences on my playing are Dave Grohl and John Bonham.

I started playing because I found out about my school’s drumline. I played piano before that because my grandma made me, and eventually I started to realize I wanted to try something else. I got really into drumline in middle school, then I started learning covers because one day my friends came up to me and said, “We know you play drums, do you wanna join our band?” I said, *‘Sure!’* and we would practice in the band room at lunch. I just fell in love with it from there.

**MD:** When did you decide that you wanted to pursue music as a career?

**JR:** It was probably when I was 15 or 16. I went to a battle of the bands, and I realized I love the adrenaline rush you get on stage. I fell in love with it and thought, “This is what I wanna do with my life.” I realized how much joy I got from playing on stage and getting to have those experiences with people. I think it’s really special. It clicked right there. The next year, I went to a different battle of the bands and kept being inspired by all the musicians who were around me. I really thought it was cool, so I put my all into that. I started playing in the local scene and hanging around those bands more. I became super involved in multiple bands.

**MD:** Were you writing your own songs around this time?

**JR:** I had a couple bands that would write, but then I started writing my own solo stuff around my sophomore year. That was a fun period of time where I was just discovering how to use Garage Band and learning what a DAW was.

**MD:** When you started taking your first steps towards a career in drumming, did you try to make it as a working drummer? Or did you focus more on playing with one of your bands?

**JR:** I did whatever stuck because I just wanted to perform and work in live music. I got more into the “hired gun” thing when I started college at USC Thornton School of Music. I made a lot of great friends over there. I continued putting myself out

there more so as a drummer than as part of a band. Drums were always at the forefront. That was always the goal, but at the same time, I did whatever I could do to get my name out there. Most of the work I ended up doing was performing.

**MD:** Were you playing a lot of different styles of music when you were starting out, or was it mainly one genre?

**JR:** Different styles for sure, but I’m primarily a rock drummer. That’s my most comfortable genre for sure, but I love all styles of music. I did some jam band stuff with my friend Betsy, and I did jazz band in high school all four years. I also exercised some more of my “pop” chops. It was a lot of different things, and it still is.

**MD:** How did you learn and improve as a drummer? Did you have a practice routine, or did you mostly just play gigs?

**JR:** It was more playing gigs. I would think, *‘I have to learn this, so let me look into it and work it out.’* I took lessons when I first started, and I’ve taken more from a few different mentors since then. There are still so many people I want to take lessons from because you can never learn enough, there are so many different perspectives. I remember I tried to study jazz in high school to expand my vocabulary and understanding of the drums. I’ve got a long way to go with figuring out different things I can do behind the kit.



**I fell in love with it and thought, “This is what I wanna do with my life.” I realized how much joy I got from playing on stage and getting to have those experiences with people.**

**Don’t be unprepared, be over-prepared.**

**MD:** What was the first big gig you got when you started playing professionally?

**JR:** When I was 19, I got hired to play a North American tour with Tessa Violet. I had never done a pop gig like that, and I came into it very unaware and unprepared, and I actually got fired. It was my first big tour and I got fired. It sucked in the moment, but I thought, *‘All I can do from that, is learn.’* That’s when I had just started college. However, there was a huge silver lining in that moment. I thought, *‘You failed, you got fired, learn from it. Don’t make that same mistake again.’* If anything, it motivated me to really get better and put my all into my drumming. I wouldn’t have it any other way, I’m glad I got fired. [My main takeaway was] don’t be unprepared, be overprepared. I should’ve known [the set] like the back my hand, but I didn’t. I was so used to playing with bands, so I was thinking, *‘Oh, I got it,’* but when it comes to a pop gig like that, you’ve got to be ready at any moment to adjust. It’s easier to do that when you have it all prepared. I just felt young and dumb in that moment.

**MD:** Since being dismissed from that gig, do you still get anxious about playing a new gig or have you had a more confident mindset going into them? How did you bounce back afterwards?



**JR:** I still get that anxiety, but you've got to put your best foot forward. That's all you can do. I still get scared, but as long as I know I've done everything I can do; it helps my confidence. I don't get stage fright because I'll always prepare myself. [After being fired] I practiced a bunch and I talked to a bunch of other drummers that have been doing the hired gun stuff for a while. I wanted to learn what I could do. In that moment, I realized, *'It's okay, it's a mistake. This happened for a reason.'* I kept posting videos, to me, that's a resume' of your playing. Then just word of mouth stuff where people would say, "We need a drummer for this gig." One of my first gigs out of that was with Dasha, who lives in Nashville now. When she was living in LA, she was having an album release show at the Moroccan Lounge, so I got to do that. That was on my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday actually, and they snuck me into Barney's afterwards. That was one of the first hired gigs I had after the Tessa Violet gig. Then I was playing for some other local LA artists. It was a lot of one-offs. I was still in school, so I was trying to balance those two things, but the main goal was always to play drums, keep getting better, and immerse myself in the art and the scene.

**MD:** Did you finish college?

**JR:** No, I'm still there, but I'm on a leave of absence.

**MD:** When did you stop school and why?

**JR:** It was actually a year ago today exactly. That was when I got the call that I would be playing with Olivia Rodrigo, which was the most insane and surreal moment.

**MD:** Who called you up about getting the gig with Olivia?

**JR:** Stacy [Jones], who's the music director for Olivia and her band, had hit me up. We had been Instagram mutuals for a while because he's a music director and a drummer. He plays with Miley Cyrus, he has his own band called American Hi-Fi, and he drums in Letters to Cleo. We have a lot of mutual friends as well. They were having auditions, and one of my friends Tosh [Peterson], who I'm sure you know is an insane drummer, had recommended me to Stacy. Then Stacy told me, "Here's my number, call me if you're interested." From there he just told me about the audition. The audition actually got pushed back because it was around the time the wildfires were happening. Finally at the end of the month, it happened.

**MD:** What did you play for your audition?

**JR:** It was three songs, all very dynamically different. I just remember being scared. I mean, it was a stressful time with the fires and all that, but I thought, *'This is just more time to prepare, so I better really be on my game.'* I actually had a gig the night before with my friend Sasha at The Troubadour. We were headlining and I was backlining, so I knew, *'I've gotta get out of here as fast as I can,'* because I was the first audition of the day. I had an early morning and a late night right next to each other, so I was pretty scared about that. It was hard to sleep because I knew I had this big thing in the morning. I tried to get out of there as fast as I could after the show and just tried my best to sleep as much as I could.

**MD:** What's your process for learning new music for an upcoming gig?

**JR:** First, I listen through for the structure of the song. Then I like to listen through to see if there are extra bars or other not-so-straightforward parts. Then I like to go in and look for specific hits or specific moments like fills that set up a section, and of course the general beat and groove of the song. I'll listen to it a

few times, but first I always just listen for the form and map out what beat or groove is being used in each section to build off from there.

**MD:** Could you walk us through the audition process for the Olivia Rodrigo gig? How did you feel throughout it?

**JR:** I was nervous, but I also wasn't nervous at the same time. I know some of the other drummers that auditioned, and they're people I've looked up to. I was just this new person in the scene who hadn't had a major gig like that before, so I was just really happy to be there. I got there pretty early before my audition, and they were still setting up. Stacy was there checking some drum sounds, and he started playing "Scentless Apprentice." Obviously, I'm a huge Dave Grohl fan so I couldn't believe it—Then Stacy started playing "Song for the Dead," and I started mirroring him on the kit. That helped ease the nerves. I ran to the bathroom, and I was thinking, *'Ok, get ready.'* Then I walked back, and Olivia was there. We talked for a bit, and everyone on the team started funneling in. They were all at this table, and it was so intimidating. I feel really comfortable behind the kit, that's where home is for me. I was just playing with the bassist because the rhythm section has to be locked in.

**You don't know who you're inspiring. I get to hopefully inspire the next generation of drummers, especially girl drummers. I'm grateful for that.**



Then I went home and got a callback on the same day, so I went back and auditioned again that same day. I was honored. It was a really cool feeling and very exciting. I remember I called my mom first. She was at work, and someone caught her reaction. It was so cute. She's a nurse so she was in her scrubs, and she was

saying, "Oh my god!" The next day was my birthday, so it was a crazy sequence of events.

**MD:** So, you only played along with the bassist, but Olivia and the rest of the team were still watching?

**JR:** Yeah.

**MD:** What was it like transitioning to such a major gig?

**JR:** We had lots of time to prep, which was very nice. We had about five weeks of rehearsals, and I made sure to learn everything from both the live and recorded versions, any sort of references they gave me. I got to rehearse the weekend before we started with the full band with the bassist Moa [Munoz]. It was really nice. It was a smooth transition because I went into it as ready as possible.

**It's super inspiring and empowering to be around women on and off the stage. We have quite a few women on the crew too, and it's nice to have that energy and understanding. It's very empowering.**

**MD:** Could you tell us about your first show with Olivia?

**JR:** I'd probably never played to more than a couple thousand people before. My first show of the tour with Olivia was in South America. That leg also included the Lollapalooza show that she was headlining. It was very surreal. I love festivals. At that point and at that level, everything is such a big machine. Having my own tech

because everybody was screaming. There's a moment in the set where Olivia just plays guitar and sings. I took out one of my in-ears during that moment, and there was just a sea of people screaming back at the stage. It was crazy and so cool, but so insane. That's the only word I can use, "Insane."

**MD:** Sounds like you had the best view in the house!

**JR:** Yeah! They put me on a riser and I'm centerstage. I like that because I know sometimes the band is in the pit or tucked away. It was cool getting to be on stage and see everything. There are so many people at a show, and it just looks like a carpet. Everybody's so small and there's just so many of them. I don't pay attention to the crowd because I'm so focused and in the zone with what I'm playing, but every now and then, I have a little break from playing, I just look out and take it in. There is one song called "Happier" where Olivia has everyone take their lights out, and that is a really cool moment. All these people in unison, singing, putting their lights in the air, *and we're in Chile*. It's so cool getting to travel the world and have that experience. You don't know who you're inspiring. I get to hopefully inspire the next generation of drummers, especially girl drummers. I'm grateful for that.

**MD:** It must feel really empowering to play in a female-focused band.

**JR:** It's super inspiring and empowering to be around women on and off the stage. We have quite a few women on the crew too, and it's nice to have that energy and understanding. It's very empowering. "Supportive" is a good word to use. There are also two moms in the band, and that's something I feel isn't normalized yet. I didn't even think about it until I met the band and started working with them. That is so cool and so badass! Our bassist was pregnant for the first leg and had her baby in August. I don't think that's something people see a lot or think about, but that was really cool to see. They've all been incredible mentors and supporters of me. I feel really lucky to know them.

**MD:** What's the most important thing you've learned from working with this band?

**JR:** At the end of the day, just be a good person, regardless of all the music. As long as you are focusing on the right things and just being a good sport then it'll be okay. Everyone's really nice and incredible to be around. Not only have they taught me a lot about music and touring, but also just how to be an adult. It's been a really cool transition for me in this time in my life. I'm in my early 20s, I'm actually turning 23 tomorrow. I can't thank them enough. I'm forever indebted to them.

**MD:** How did the shows feel after your first performance with Olivia and the band?

**JR:** My second show with Olivia was in Argentina, and I've never felt so nervous before a show. That's when it all hit me. I love performing, but it's a lot to take in and adjust to. I just got really overwhelmed. I had never gotten anxious to the point where I felt like I was going to throw up or pass out. On our way to the venue, I told the band, 'Guys, I'm really nervous,' and they took care of me, and the show went really well.

**MD:** Have you ever had a moment right before a gig where you felt extremely tense or light-headed?

**JR:** Oh yeah, that's happened plenty of times if I don't warm up enough or get myself into the zone. There was a show in Mexico City where I was dehydrated, and when we went on, I didn't realize the elevation there was pretty high. I felt like I was going to pass out because I started seeing stars. I know I couldn't



was definitely an adjustment. There was no sound check, and it was just a lot to adjust to. We got to soundcheck at the first show, which was Lollapalooza in Chile. I think there was 80,000 people or something. I remember I was pretty nervous, but I tried not to overthink it. The second you overthink it is when you mess up. I knew I had practiced this a million times, just stay focused, then I pretty much blacked out from the adrenaline. All I remember is thinking, 'Oh my gosh, I just got through my first song,' and seeing everyone looking over and thinking, 'You're doing great!' It was so surreal, and everything was so loud



pass out in front of 65,000 people. I was so light-headed. We had oxygen tanks on stage, and because there are some songs where I don't play in the first half, I would run off to the side of the stage and grab some oxygen. I was lucky enough that my tech (who's very sweet) helped me stay hydrated. That was scary, but I got through it.

**MD:** How do you prepare for a gig now?

**JR:** Nowadays, I practice everything a hundred times until it feels like second nature. I also like to listen to previous live recordings and the actual records to notice any subtle differences. You never know what somebody wants for a live performance and how different it is from the record. Also, I take care of my health. I'm not going to go out the night before; I'd rather get rest and make sure my mind and body are sharp. I have to treat it like a sport sometimes. It's very athletic and you have to be your best self. All those little factors add up.

**MD:** What's your typical pre-show ritual?

**JR:** Before a show, I just like to be chill because the second you step on stage, it's chaos. There are people screaming and it's very overstimulating. You've got to be able to keep calm so you can focus on the music. I think that was the hardest adjustment for me, learning how to snap into that before a show. It didn't take long to figure out, but it's super important to turn that on and block out everything else around you. I like to get some food

in as an artist. They're the best, and it was really cool full circle moment for me. I'd always wanted to be an artist for Zildjian. Then [I signed with] Pearl, which was cool. They made the first kit I owned besides the little First Act kit that I got when I was 11 or 12. After that, I had an Export kit for the longest time. Tosh also connected me with Pearl because he's a Pearl artist. I talked to them and said, *'I love Pearl and I'm going on this tour.'* They said, *'We'll get you set up with a kit for the tour.'* Shoutout to John [Farquharson] from Pearl.

**MD:** How did you and Pearl decide on your kit configuration?

**JR:** I like one up, two down. There was nothing too crazy I needed for the setup. It was definitely a dream kit. It's a Reference One in black sparkle. I love sparkle kits. The shells are a mix of mahogany, maple, and birch. I have a 6.5 x 14" black nickel over brass Sensitone for my main snare. It's (kind of) their version of a Black Beauty. I also have a Reference One side snare for a fatter and more low-end sound that I use on a couple songs. It's nice to have that variety and texture. I have Remo heads on all the drums: Emperor Clears on the toms, a Powerstroke 77 on the snare, and a Powerstroke 3 kick head. The toms are 13", 16", and 18" with a 14 x 24" kick. That's how I roll. It's my dream kit.

**MD:** Is there anything you're thinking of changing or adding to the kit in the near future?

**At the end of the day, just be a good person, regardless of all the music. As long as you are focusing on the right things and just being a good sport then it'll be okay.**

from catering, maybe listen to some music, warm up plenty, and stretch a lot (I like to use a foam roller). Then we walk out and it's showtime.

**MD:** What are you thinking just as you're about to go on stage for a big arena show?

**JR:** The first thing I'm thinking is, *'Don't mess up.'* The second thing is, *'How amazing!'* I feel very lucky to get to do this. As stressful as it gets sometimes, it was my dream as a kid to play for all these people and to play with a band. It's really special to be a part of that. Walking onto that stage, I'm thinking, *'Alright, let's just give everything because how lucky are we to get to do that.'*

**MD:** Could you go over some highlights of the past year of touring?

**JR:** It was a very cool year. I feel like I've grown a lot as a person and as a musician. Getting the experiences to travel and play in different countries as well as see the world through that lens was really awesome. We got to play with Robert Smith at Glastonbury, Weezer at Lollapalooza and David Byrne at the Governors Ball. Robert Smith is so sweet. He's such a true artist and a down-to-earth guy. It was cool getting to hang with him before the show. Playing with Weezer was a full circle moment because that was my and Olivia's first concert.

**MD:** How did you pick the gear you're currently using for the Olivia Rodrigo gig? Tell us about how you secured your endorsement deals.

**JR:** When it comes to cymbals, I've always played Zildjian. I got connected through Tosh because he's also a Zildjian artist. When I told him I got the gig, he said, "Okay, I'm gonna connect you to Kirsten [Jensen]." We got connected, and I was super stoked because Zildjian has always been my first choice for cymbals. I got in with them at the beginning of 2025, then they took me

**JR:** I would like to add a concert tom. I would have it [Taylor] Hawkins-style: far up on my left. That would be just for fun. Maybe a couple rototoms. My setup is so versatile, so I'd probably keep things pretty similar.

**MD:** What do you have lined up for this year?

**JR:** I've got some things in the works. This Saturday I'm going to meet up with a band that I might play with in the spring, but I won't say too much. I also have some little tours lined up. Just little things here and there. I'm also going to do a two-week run across the US with Don Miggs. He's a producer. We'll see what the summer's like because it's all still being planned.

**MD:** Will you be back with Olivia this year?

**JR:** We'll see. Hopefully, but nobody knows. I love that group so much. Everyone's so sweet. It's like family.

**MD:** What would you say to any aspiring drummers (specifically girls) who might be reading this?

**JR:** I feel like there's always some sort of discouragement for girl drummers. There might be some adversity for sure. There's still a very strong stereotype for women in music, but it's important to stay strong and look past that. If you want to do something, find the right people that will support you. It sounds cliché, but it's true. You've got to keep your eyes on the goal and not get discouraged. You're probably going to come across a lot of people who are jealous, but don't listen to those negative comments. Don't let people tell you that you can't do something. 🥁



# LUIGI PARAVENTI:

## PRECISION, PATIENCE, AND THE NEXT GENERATION

BY DANNY "ZIGGY" LAVERDE



**F**or Luigi Paraventi, momentum didn't just arrive, it arrived with preparation. At just 20 years old, the São Paulo born drummer has already stepped into professional situations that demand authority, precision, and trust. He's carrying himself with a calm that feels earned, not assumed. Raised in a deeply musical household and shaped by early heroes like Ringo Starr, Danny Carey, and Eloy Casagrande, Paraventi built his foundation through obsessive practice, relentless curiosity, and a deep respect for the instrument. That discipline led him from early gigs and Tool tribute projects to earning the call to perform and tour with Kiko Loureiro, an opportunity most drummers can only imagine. In this interview, Paraventi reflects on the mentors and moments that shaped his path. And why patience, humility, and consistency (not virality,) are the real markers of a career that's just beginning.





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**MD:** How did you start on the drums. What inspired you to start playing?

**LP:** I grew up in a musical environment. It's a tradition in my family. My grandma used to be a piano player, so it's cross-generational. My dad is a guitar player, so I grew up watching his band play live. I was a great friend of all of his drummers, and they naturally became my first influences. The drums always got my attention since the first day. At some point in my life, my dad came to me and said, "You need to start to practice an instrument. What do you want to do?" I said, "I want to sing! I want to be a singer," and he said, "Okay, but first, start on drums to learn about rhythm." I said, "Okay, let's do it," and I kept drumming, I never stopped. I just fell in love with drums, and I started to play with my dad and his band. It was very natural because my home was a really inspiring environment. My dad was always into rock music like Led Zeppelin and The Beatles. That was super interesting to me when I was eight years old, and Ringo Starr was my first drum hero.

**MD:** When did you start playing with other people besides your dad and his bandmates? What did your musical journey look like?

**LP:** I've had some key points in my life. My first one was when I heard about The Beatles and discovered Ringo Starr. When I was nine years old, I had a Beatles record in my house, and I used to play along with it from the top to the bottom every day after school. That was the first time I was involved with playing along to music with my drums. I used to gig with my dad and his band, and we'd play pop/rock songs in pubs and nightclubs in São Paulo. My dad is a great influence on me, and my friend as well. I met some friends in music school and we started a band to cover Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath. Then, I had my second epiphanic moment when I discovered Tool and Danny Carey. That was mind blowing. I was 11 or 12 years old, and I discovered the song "Forty Six & 2," the one where Danny does the awesome drum solo in the middle. That was really inspiring, and I had just started to practice double bass at that time. That was a key point for me, and I started a Tool tribute band with my friends when I was 12 years old. We were four kids obsessed with Tool, and we were covering all the Tool songs. We used to play at school festivals and gig around São Paulo. My third epiphanic moment was when I discovered Eloy Casagrande, and I just became obsessed with metal drumming and fast double bass. I really wanted to push my attention and playing towards something like that.

**MD:** How did you learn and improve your double bass drumming technique?

**LP:** That's interesting because I never had a double bass lesson, but I don't consider myself self-taught. My first days playing double bass were when I was 12 years old playing "Forty Six & 2" and "Schism" (the ending part with those triplets.) I was just trying to figure out what Danny was doing by myself. I had the opportunity of growing up in the internet generation and watching videos of my drum heroes playing live. I could see, 'Oh, so I must do it like this... It's something like this...' But it's not that easy, it's really difficult. It was hard to play super tight at fast tempos, so it was something I had to struggle with a lot. I started playing the patterns from the Tool songs. Then I discovered the Virgil Donati method book *Double Bass Drum Freedom*. It's a super cool book, and it came with a play-along CD. Those exercises were super important to my development.

Then I discovered Eloy Casagrande, watching him play was



Photo by Iris Alves

**... I had my second epiphanic moment when I discovered Tool and Danny Carey. That was mind blowing. I was 11 or 12 years old, and I discovered the song "Forty Six & 2," the one where Danny does the awesome drum solo in the middle.**

super important to me. When I went to a Casagrande & Hanysz concert, my table was behind his kit so I could watch him play super close. I just watched him playing the swivel technique, and thought, 'Okay, I need to learn this. This is something really important to my life. I want to play like this so I can play tight, fast, and strong with the volume that I need.' So, I started to practice by myself in my studio just trying to imitate him. I practiced double bass for four or five hours daily for two years just to learn that technique because it was super difficult. Nowadays, I like to keep a "maintenance" routine. I need to keep practicing, being good is not just something you achieve like, 'Oh, I'm the double bass master!' I need to keep practicing daily. As I said before, it was a natural process. I just watched my drum heroes, tried to do it like them, and that was it. The swivel technique was a crucial thing in my playing because it was so important in playing the songs that I wanted to play and creating the drum parts with my band. When I got the opportunity to play with Kiko Loureiro, those songs were fast, so the swivel technique was super important to play the parts. [I started learning the technique when] I was around 15 years old, and it became natural to me when I was around 17 or 18. The moment that I played with Kiko was the



moment I felt comfortable enough to play it live.

**MD:** How did you get the gig with Kiko Loureiro?

**LP:** This is a crazy story. I was touring with a Brazilian pop singer called Carol Biazin, and we were in the south of the country in a city called Curitiba. I was waiting for soundcheck backstage just watching some reels, and “Kiko Loureiro,” popped up on my DMs on Instagram. I thought, ‘*What???*’ It was a message from him saying, “Hey Luigi, congratulations on your work! I have two concerts in São Paulo in December.” It was October, so it was a month and half from the shows. He wrote “Bruno Valverde,” who is the main drummer on his gig, “is not going to be able to do it because he’s going to be playing with Angra. Do you wanna do it?” I said, ‘*Of course! For sure, but how did you get my contact? Where did you find me?*’ He texted me the setlist, and I started to practice the songs and learn the drum parts. The drummers who had worked with him before me were great drummers like Virgil Donati, Bruno Valverde, Mike Terrana, and a Brazilian drummer called Cuca Teixeira. That’s a lot of influences to me, and I needed to play as well as them. I needed to be ready for that, so I practiced the setlist a lot. We just had one rehearsal together, and it was kind of an “audition” because it was just me

**... I had my second epiphanic moment when I discovered Tool and Danny Carey. That was mind blowing. I was 11 or 12 years old, and I discovered the song “Forty Six & 2,” the one where Danny does the awesome drum solo in the middle.**



and him in my studio. He used my father’s amp. It was great. Then we rehearsed with the other guys from the band. The bass player, Junior Braguinha, plays with Virgil Donati as well, he’s a great bass player. The shows were awesome, and it was a great experience. The next year [in 2024,] I had the opportunity of touring with him. We shared the stage with Zakk Wylde’s project Zakk Sabbath. It was a great time. This year we had just one gig in Colombia at GuitarFest, but we keep in contact. He’s

a great friend of mine, he’s a great mentor, and he gave me a lot of instructions. He helped me a lot with my social media stuff. When I was a child, I used to listen to a lot of Angra and Megadeth, so it was great time for me. My dad is a big fan of him too.

**MD:** What was it like playing with Kiko for the first time in your studio?

**LP:** I was super nervous. I am super young compared to the guys that I play with, and I need to learn how to act in a professional situation. [I thought,] ‘*Should I say something to him? Should I tell a joke to him? What should I do to break the ice between us?*’ I was 18 years old at that time, and it was one of my first professional gigs. He asked me about backline, and I’m used to bringing all the stuff for my shows, that was really different for me. I learned a lot with him, and it was awesome. He’s a great guy and he’s a great friend, but I cannot lie to you, I was super nervous for the first rehearsal. I had practiced a lot, so it was not difficult to play, but it was a difficult situation to be in.

**MD:** How did you build your relationship with Eloy Casagrande?

**LP:** Eloy is probably my main influence. I like to say that my life can be split up into *before* knowing about Eloy and his career, and *after*. He’s a Brazilian drummer that is playing around the world with a huge band, and that’s really inspiring. A lot of people think that I used to be one of his students, but I was just a fan. The first time that I saw him live was in a drum workshop at a local school, but I didn’t have the opportunity to talk with him. Watching him playing live was super inspiring. I was the first guy to cover songs from the record *Quadra* by Sepultura. I

recorded drum covers of songs from the record, and [Eloy] saw the covers. I was 15 or 16 years old at the time, and he started to follow me on Instagram. He texted me and said, “Oh man, you’re so awesome! Keep playing and keep practicing. Let’s keep in contact!” Then we met in person at the music school where I used to practice and have lessons. We talked a little, but that was it. This year, I was watching an Anika Niles drum clinic here in São Paulo, and he was there. I thought, ‘*Oh, he doesn’t remember me. It was a long time ago,*’ but he saw me and said, “Oh, Luigi! Come here man!” He introduced me to all the guys he was talking with, and we talked about gigs. He invited me to go to his local practice room in São Paulo to talk with him and share a little bit of experience

with me. We had a great time, I consider him a “friend,” but of course he’s also a mentor. He’s my biggest drum hero. I’m not his “best friend,” but I’m close to him. I talk to him constantly and sometimes I ask him for advice about professional situations that I am involved in, and he is super great. He invites me to lunch to talk about things. He’s always been so helpful to me, I’m super young and now I have started to get involved with some brands and gigs, and he’s always really supportive. I always listen to his opinions on my professional situations. He inspires me to be a

good drummer because every day he's practicing. He's the best drummer on the heavy metal scene, but he keeps practicing every day to get better.

**MD:** What would you say is the most important thing Eloy ever taught or told you?

**LP:** That is a great question. I think the most important thing with him was to be really consistent with what you believe. He told me once to just be yourself, do your stuff, keep practicing, keep showing your work to people, and keep connecting with other musicians online. You need to be natural with your career because everything happens in a natural way. Just keep practicing and doing what you want. He always told me to believe in myself.

**MD:** What was your reaction to Eloy becoming the latest drummer for Slipknot?

**LP:** The day the announcement came out was super inspiring. I was crying because he's a Brazilian drummer, he's my idol, and he's playing with Slipknot. He's going to share the stage with Corey [Taylor] and Clown! I went to his first concert with Slipknot in São Paulo. It was super inspiring and emotional. It's a daily inspiration for me because I say to myself, 'I can do it. I will achieve my goals because my main influence did it. I need to

**Eloy is probably my main influence. I like to say that my life can be split up into before knowing about Eloy and his career, and after. He's a Brazilian drummer that is playing around the world with a huge band, and that's really inspiring.**

*keep practicing, sharing my videos, and being a good person. It's not impossible, I just need to try my best and stay humble.'* Eloy's the drummer for Slipknot but he's super humble and funny. I cannot imagine my life without drums, but before being a good drummer, I always want to be a good person. Eloy is a great example. I want to be like him in that way. Being humble is super important because Instagram is just numbers.

**You need to be natural with your career because everything happens in a natural way. Just keep practicing and doing what you want. He (Eloy) always told me to believe in myself.**

**MD:** You're still so early in your career but you've already made a ton of connections through your Instagram.

**LP:** Instagram is really crazy because a lot of great musicians that are impossible to get in touch with are following me. I think the craziest one was Sean Ono Lennon, John Lennon's son.

**MD:** What brought you to start teaching drums and creating your own drum courses?

**LP:** I had the opportunity to teach in a local school. I gave classes there for a year, and then I had the opportunity to give private lessons in my studio. I believe that my method in double bass and technique is something that takes time and mentorship, so I like to be close to my students and be with them during their practice. I am super happy to be a teacher because I had a lot of teachers like Jean Dolabella. He's a great drummer too. Being a teacher is super great, but it's a great responsibility. You need to be close to your students, watch their growth, and give them







Photo by Iris Alves

**I always say that the most important thing is to be authentic. Always be humble, and always practice because we need new artists around the world. Art is a way of expressing our emotions, visions, and opinions, and we need new people sharing their expressions on the drum set.**

the right directions. I just came out with my double bass drum course with Isac Jamba. he was the producer for my drum course. He was also my mentor for my method and the format of my course. We just sold more than 100 classes, and it's great because we are getting the opportunity to share a little bit of my knowledge with young drummers, people who want to learn double bass, and people who want to create their own drum parts. I love being a teacher and I love doing drum clinics as well. I'm super obsessed with that. I like to travel and show my work in different cities in Brazil and around the world. I like to play my solo songs and play drum solos because it's something that I practice a lot. My influences like Dave Weckl and Vinnie Colaiuta used to do a lot of that stuff, so I really want to replicate that. Teaching is a great way of learning because you get to revisit some subjects and techniques.

**MD:** What was your favorite album (from a drumming perspective) that came out in 2025?

**LP:** That's a great question. I really loved the Yungblud and Aerosmith collaboration album. It's awesome. The song "My Only Angel" is beautiful. I have a great friendship with the drummer Ben Sharp who's playing with Yungblud. I just love the approach he gave to the songs live.

**MD:** What advice would you give to young viewers who watch your videos and want to become drummers themselves?

**LP:** I always say that the most important thing is to be authentic. Always be humble, and always practice because we need new artists around the world. Art is a way of expressing our emotions, visions, and opinions, and we need new people sharing their expressions on the drum set. It's beautiful to watch a new drummer and see their career grow because we have space for everyone. We need as many drummers as we can find. Be different and authentic with your language, your style, your dynamics, and your phrasing. Drumming is always first, it's more important than social media and marketing. Keep drumming, keep doing it authentically, and that's it. That is my advice for everyone.

**MD:** Any other closing remarks?

**LP:** I have my own instrumental project called TrotaMundo, and we just released our first EP called EVA with special guest Bumblefoot. He shared the stage in São Paulo with Kiko Loureiro, and we became really good friends. He said, "Oh, I want to be part of it. Send me the song." He came up with a great guitar solo. You can listen to it on streaming now. Also, if you are someone who wants to work with me, just DM me on Instagram or send me an email and let's do it! 🎧

# "Amber" by 311 from the recording *From Chaos*, drummer Chad Sexton

Transcription by Marc Atkinson

This month's transcription takes a dive into this month's cover feature interview Chad Sexton's laid-back groove on the 311 song "Amber." It's a deceptively simple and deeply felt part that is built entirely on restraint, groove, and phrasing. Chad settles into a relaxed, reggae-influenced pocket with total ease, allowing space and feel to drive the track. No flash—just unwavering time, subtle dynamics, and a smooth pulse that lets the song float from beginning to end. This is a perfect example of letting the music dictate the groove and the approach.

**♩=83** **AMBER**

**INTRO** 8

**VERSE** 9

13

**CHORUS** 17

21

25

29

**GUITAR SOLO** 33



37

**CHORUS**

41

45

**VERSE**

47

51

**CHORUS**

55

59

**CHORUS**

63

67

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

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



# Silent Drum Practice

By Micha Fromm

The drum set is a great instrument, but it is also quite loud, which means you can't play it anywhere and anytime without causing problems. I often hear from students saying that they couldn't practice, or could only practice for a short time, because their neighbors or parents complained about the noise. Sometimes the lack of practice is because the available rehearsal room time conflicted with other things, because the rehearsal room was too far away, or because they were too lazy to go. Maybe someone is not practicing because they don't own a drum set yet. Does any of this sound familiar?

The good news is that there are lots of very useful exercises that you can do without any drums at all. You can do silent or low-noise practice at home or on the go. I'll show you how it works in this series of articles.

## Effective Timing Training

Timing is the ability of musicians to maintain a certain tempo as precisely as possible over a long period of time, and to hit the different note subdivisions as accurately as possible. A widespread misconception among drummers is that practicing regularly to the metronome automatically leads to an improvement in timing. Unfortunately, this is not the case. If you don't have a clear starting point and motion sequence to execute a beat, and you haven't developed pulse awareness, you'll just chase after every single click without improving your timing. As soon as you start playing without a metronome, your "timing" will collapse again.

One great tool to develop pulse awareness is counting the beat while clapping rhythms. You don't need any sticks or drums, just your hands and your voice, and you'll get a great training for your pulse awareness and timing. You can start by counting quarter notes and then increase the difficulty by counting only the "+" beats (eighth offbeats) or the "e" beats (sixteenth offbeats.)

Clapping Exercise: Groups of Three



Clap the notes shown in the musical example (upper staff) and count the quarter notes (lower staff) aloud. Start by counting the 3/4 time shown (always counting to "3").

When that works, try clapping the three-note grouping on the bottom and count the 4/4 pulse (always counting to "4") on top. In 4/4 time, it takes three beats for the pattern to start again on "1."

Both versions (3/4 and 4/4) are shown in the video. The counting in the videos is in German Language. You can use English subtitles if needed.



Repeat clapping the grouping of three and:

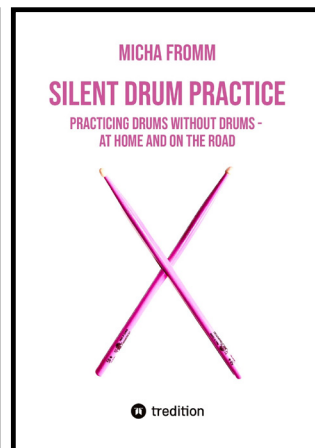
- count in 5/4 and 7/4
- count only the "+" beats
- count only the "e" beats

Counting in 5/4 and 7/4 means that you count "1, 2, 3, 4, 5" (5/4) and "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7" while you clap the grouping of three. It takes three bars for both examples until the pattern starts on the "1" again.

Counting only the "+" means you don't count any numbers but only the "+" between (eighth notes syncopations). That repeats itself after three quarter notes.

Counting only the "e" means you don't count any numbers or "+" but only the "e" between (sixteenth notes syncopations). That also repeats itself after three quarter notes.

You can find more on the topic of practicing drums without drums in my book SILENT DRUM PRACTICE (Tredition Publishing 2025.)



**Micha Fromm** is a professional drummer, educator and author from Hanover, Germany.

Micha has already played with artists such as Peter Maffay, Kim Sanders, The Dublin Legends, Velvet Viper, Martin Gerschwitz (Iron Butterfly), Victor Smolski, Pop meets Classic and many more. Touring has taken Micha all over Europe and as far as China.

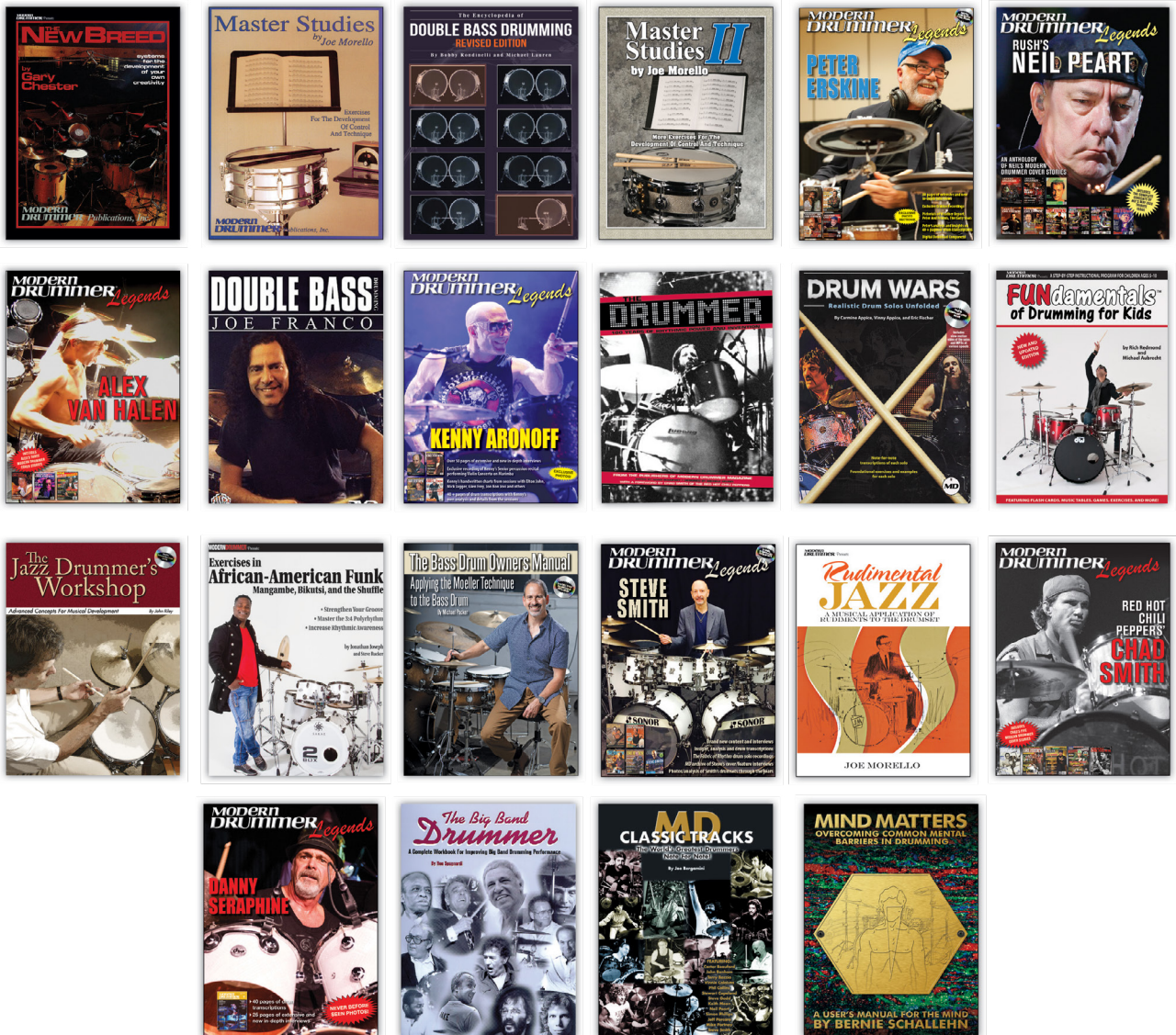
Micha is also working as an educator and author for several drum magazines and has published two drum books – Groove Workout and Silent Drum Practice (Amazon #1 Bestseller, Nomination Best Educational Product, MD.) In 2013, Micha received the award for "Best Drummer" at Deutscher Rock & Pop Preis.

Micha is supported by Yamaha Drums, Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals, Los Cabos Drumsticks, Evans Drumheads, Audix, Ahead Armor Cases, Schlagwerk, Fischer Amps, Drumprax, Handmade Custom Drums, SkyGel Damper Pads, Cordial, Latin Percussion und Drumsigns. 



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# The Swing Pulse

By Chris Lesso

*"It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing."*

## Duke Ellington

The swing pulse is that kinetic quality that you can't quite put your finger on, the quality that you intuitively know when it's there, or when it's lacking. This magic alchemy is hard to describe, but we know it when we hear it. It makes us move! Any world class drummer, no matter how fringe or extreme, can rock you with the swing pulse. It makes any style come alive. Like a super vitamin or nutrient, every drummer aspires to infuse it in their playing. But that luminous feeling doesn't come from notes on a page. It comes from what's in between those notes. Like any language, we get it through immersion. Wake up to this, and it will elevate every aspect of our rhythm. How do we get this mojo in our drumming? Imbuing our even two and four grooves with the roundness of the triplet is the magic equation. Immerse yourself in the lexicon of 3s, just as much as your binary rhythms. Neither side can be ignored to get the full depth of what rhythm can be. Eventually they blend together, it is as natural as absorbing inflections in language.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the earliest roots of the drumset were swing rhythms. This is the language of the triplet. Over time, the backbeat took over the world and a bit that original flavor faded away. But you don't need to be a fan of specific styles to enrich your own expression. There's a magic that happens to rhythm when you delve into the world of 3s. The even to odd ratios give our rhythms depth. Even numbers resolve. Odd numbers push. The binary symmetry of straight lines is balanced with the oddness of round curves. The 'rock' has to have the 'roll'. It smooths out our groove, offsetting boxy rigid corners gives things character. We need the binary lockstep of 2s, along with the rolling nature of 3s. Without the fusion of both worlds, the swing pulse eludes us.

As we create, layering 2s and 3s opens new possibilities. They pop up in endless combinations in music we love. The singer might be phrasing in 3s while the music pulses in 4s. We might hear a hard hitting two and four backbeat with every third note underneath on the bass. It's all vibrations cycling at different speeds, gliding together as one, grounded yet in motion. This holds our ear, building just enough tension to keep it fascinating, and irresistibly making us move. Rhythm with swing is a dance of order and chaos, stability, and motion. It's grounded but playful, certain but curious. This push and pull hypnotizes us to where we start swaying along without even realizing it. Architects and sculptors know this, using interplay to evoke emotion, making the viewer feel something without ever knowing why. There has to be smooth, round, odd numbered, lines to offset the jagged, straight, even numbered,

edges. Blended together the frame takes flight, infusing flat two-dimensional grooves with a worldly three-dimensional feel. The flavor of both, births the multiverse of a 3D swinging pulse. It draws us in with just enough complexity to dazzle. Without that blend, rhythm feels flat, stale, and boring. Together it feels alive, and that equals big time groove. To take that feeling forward into the future, have your grids of 3s down just as much as your 4s, and if you're brave, the next frontier would be 5s. Hear how they flow, create with them, and your grooves will open up and swing, effortlessly.

*"The goal of life is living in agreement with nature."* **Zeno**

The push-and-pull dance of even and odd go naturally together and exist in nature. Asymmetrical numbers are abundant, creating layers of fascinating tapestries. It's mysterious but natural. Notice them in flowers, seashells, leaves, and you'll start to see them everywhere. You can even see it in your own hands, the bone segments of our fingers are set in threes. Rhythm is layered through all things in patterns and pulses. This balance in motion makes our beats flow because it mimics the depth of the world around us. It emits the sound of life. Absorb that same cascade of rhythm, and our swing pulse and sense of groove grows. Without it, rhythm feels unnatural, or dead. There are entire worlds to explore that our limited senses might not allow us to see, but they are very real. Magic is everywhere! We are drawn to truth in rhythm, music, and life. When we hear swing pulse in music, it moves us because it is us.

Join the 'Life Through Rhythm' global drumming movement with your free FLOW drumming guide at [chrislessom.com](http://chrislessom.com)



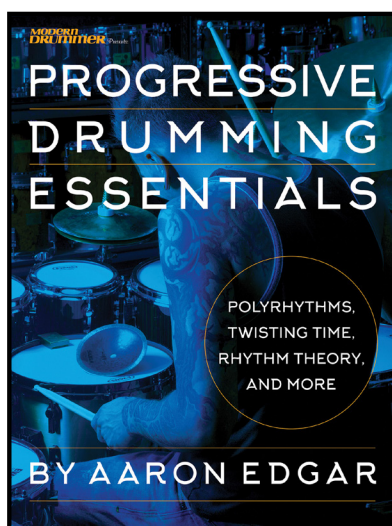


# Progressive Drumming Essentials: Groove Contraction

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, this month let's learn about Groove Contraction!

Groove contraction can create rhythmic tension and release. Similar to how, with implied metric modulation, we can use new subdivisions to trick listeners into feeling like the quarter-note pulse has shifted, we can use the concept of contraction to make tempos feel like they've changed. Unlike metric modulation, however, groove contraction modifies the subdivision while maintaining the original quarter-note pulse.

Let's start with an 8th-note-triplet pattern between the hi-hat and snare (Exercise 1). To create tension, we'll insert another ghost note, which changes the pattern's subdivision to 16th notes (Exercise 2). Employ quiet ghost notes and consistent hi-hat accents in both phrases. Using your metronome, transition back and forth between the following two exercises.



After you've mastered each hand pattern and can transition between the two, it's time to expand them into actual grooves. To create a more dramatic effect, the bass drum and snare pattern in Exercises 3 and 4 were written to sound as similar to each other as possible.



Using these examples in a playing situation can depend on your musical setting. I like to treat the "tension" version—in this case Exercise 4—as a drum fill out of the original triplet groove. Try playing Exercise 3, and on every fourth or eighth bar, play Exercise 4 as a drum fill.

## DIDDLES

Next let's apply diddles to this concept. In Exercise 5 we have a 16th-note funk groove composed of paradiddles between the hi-hat and snare. We'll create our tension using paradiddle-diddles as 16th-note triplets. Alternate between these patterns, playing two bars each. Focus on your accents and bass drum placement—they're meant to resemble each other.



Moving the second bass drum note in Exercise 6 to the "&" of beat 3 makes these previous two grooves sound closer to one another. However, its current placement is a closer match to the bass drum and hand-pattern interaction in Exercise 5. Combining this with the faster feel of the 16th-note triplets results in an intricate and twisted version of Example 5.

Let's expand this concept further by creating similar feels within quintuplets and septuplets. We'll use a RLRLRL quintuplet sticking and a RLLRLRL septuplet sticking.

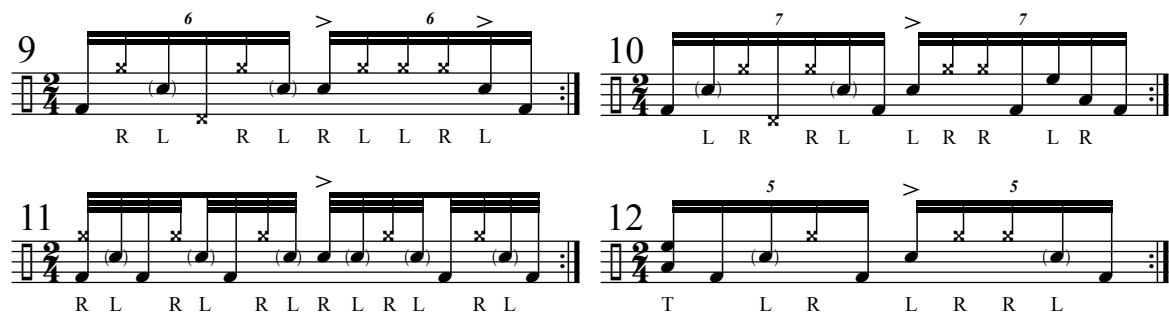


After you've worked through these grooves individually, it's time to string them together. Transition through Exercises 5–8 in order of their subdivision, starting with 16th notes, then moving to quintuplets, 16th-note triplets, and finally septuplets.

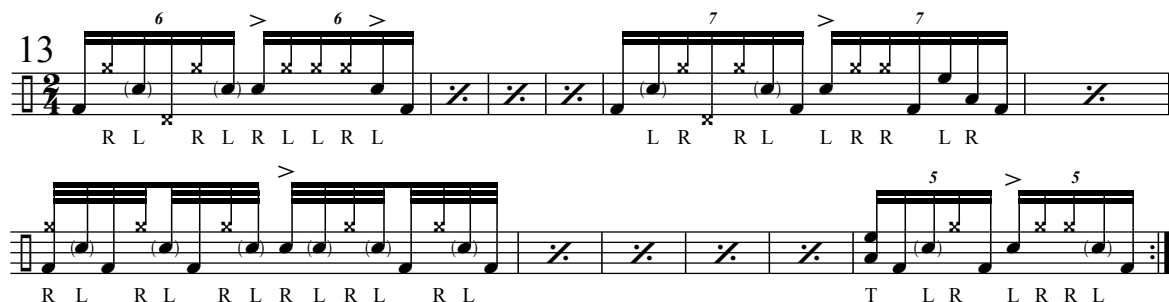
The tension increases with each new subdivision as more notes are jammed in between the similar accent pattern. When you get to the end, release the tension you've created by repeating back to the start.

## LINEAR PATTERNS

We can also apply contraction to linear grooves. Here we'll place less emphasis on keeping the grooves similar and instead focus on creating a longer phrase that goes through 16th-note triplets, septuplets, and 32nd notes, and then dramatically slows down with quintuplets before repeating back to 16th-note triplets. These 2/4 patterns employ a strong kick on beat 1 and an accented snare on beat 2.



Since the quintuplets and septuplets create the most tension, let's use them as shorter transitions between the main 16th-note triplet and 32nd-note grooves. For this we'll use a pair of six-measure phrases. The first phrase consists of four bars of Exercise 9 followed by two bars of Exercise 10. Our second phrase uses five bars of Exercise 11 and one bar of Exercise 12.



## TAKING IT FURTHER

These last two examples share a pattern that's based on inverted doubles between the hi-hat and bass drum. In Exercise 14 we're playing 16th notes in 5/4, and in Exercise 15 we modulate the same pattern into 4/4 using quintuplets. Each groove has a snare backbeat on beats 2 and 4, and there's one additional snare to round out beat 5 in Exercise 14.

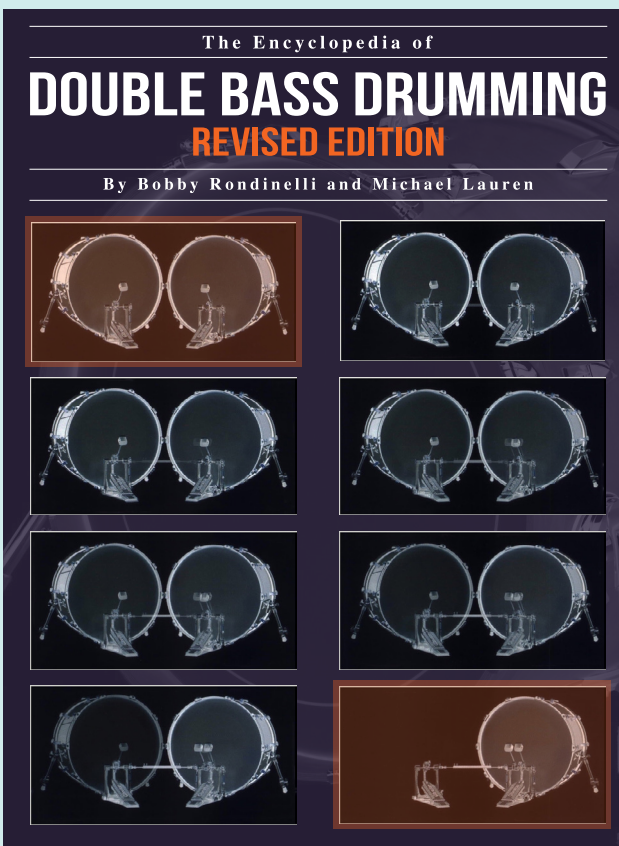
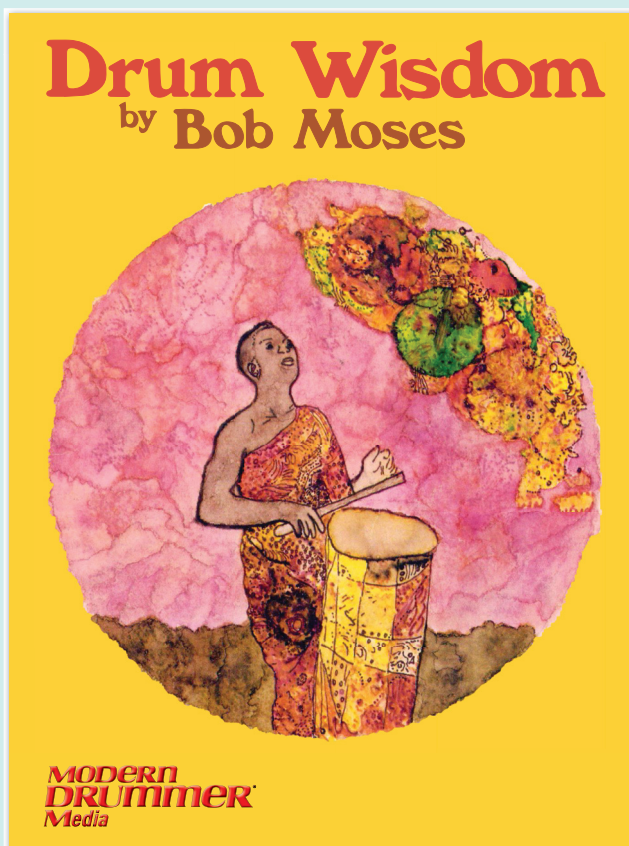
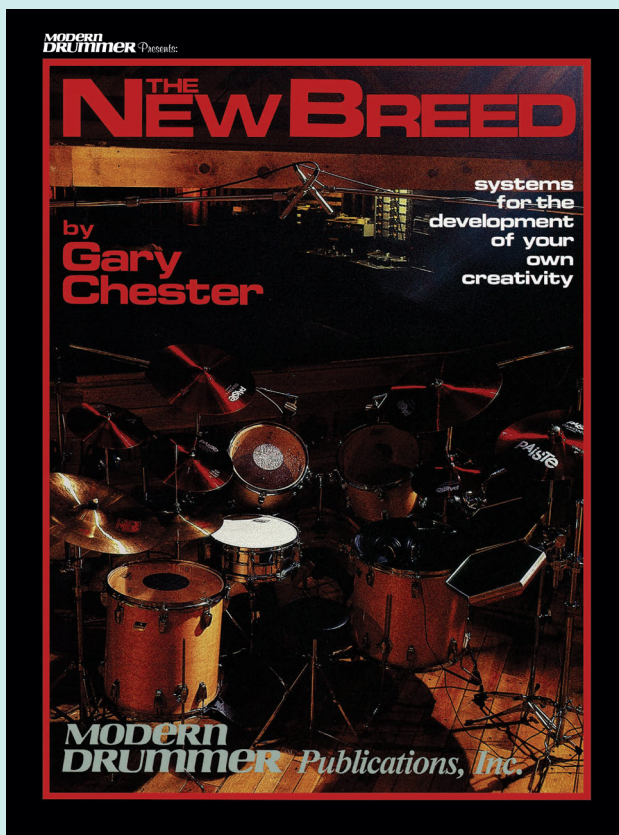
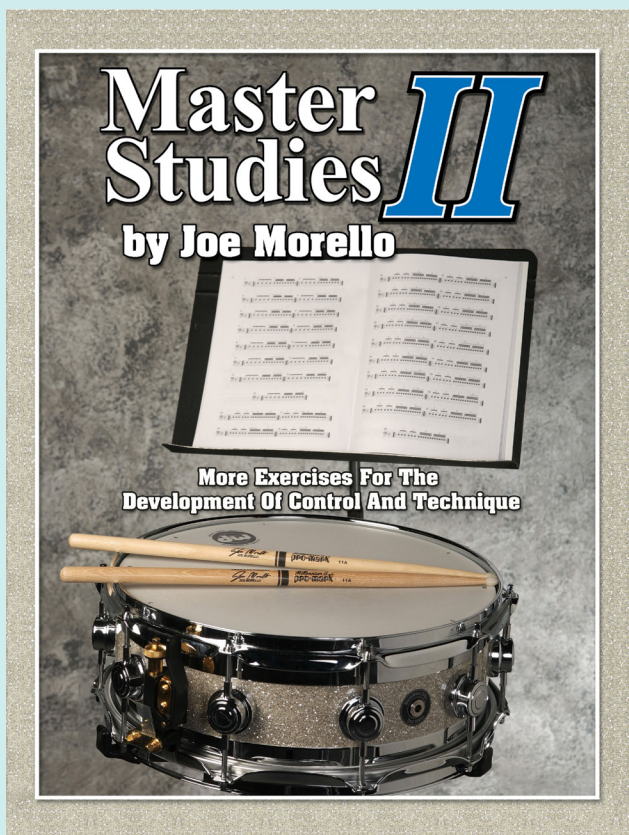


Exercises 14 and 15 also sound great between the bass drum and floor tom. Experiment with these patterns as well as the other grooves in this lesson. Writing your own patterns is a great method for working these concepts into your playing.

You may not want to pull out this tool on every gig, but in an appropriate musical context, you can use it to create a range of subtle, powerful, and unique rhythmic statements.







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## Master Studies II: Developing the Single Stroke Roll (Some More...)

**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 even more of Joe's ways and techniques to develop the single stroke roll.

## ***Groups Of Three And Five***

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

### Arrow Notation Key

Full stroke  
Tap  
Down stroke  
Up stroke

R L R L

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

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



## Groups Of Five And Seven

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7 > 5 > 5 > 7 > 5 > 7 > 7 > 5 > 7

RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL

8 > 7 > 7 > 7 > 5 > 7 > 7 > 7 > 5

RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL

9 > 5 > 7 > 5 > 7 > 7 > 5 > 7 > 5

RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL

10 > 5 > 5 > 5 > 5 > 7 > 7 > 7 > 7

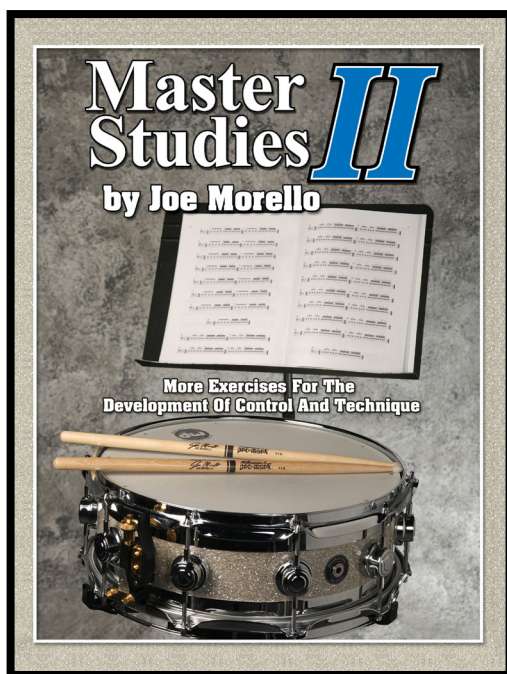
RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL

11 > 7 > 5 > 7 > 5 > 7 > 7 > 5 > 5

RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL

12 > 5 > 7 > 5 > 7 > 5 > 5 > 5 > 7

RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL





# The New Breed: Advanced Reading

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. In the last few months we have spent time on Gary Chester's Advanced Systems, after combining the Advanced Systems with his original Reading (melodies,) we can start to combine Gary's Advanced Systems with some Advanced Reading. Or you can start by combining the original Systems with the Advanced Reading.

## EXERCISE 1



## EXERCISE 2

The image displays ten staves of musical notation, likely for a bass line, in 4/4 time. The notation is written in a single system, with each staff containing a measure of music. The notes are primarily eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. There are several measures with rests. The final measure of each staff is marked with a double bar line and a '2' above it, indicating a second ending or a repeat. The notation is clean and professional, with clear note heads and stems.



## EXERCISE 3



# Snare Drums from the Northup Drum Museum

By Tim Northup

The snare drum originated from the medieval tabor, a rope-tensioned drum used for military signals, it became a distinct instrument with sharper, brighter, sounds through innovations like screw-tensioning gut and coiled metal snares. Throughout the Middle Ages it was used to accompany the flute and played a role in military bands to signal commands. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, composers for opera and orchestras began including the snare drum. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the snare drum became central to jazz and rock, with famous models like the Slingerland Radio King and Ludwig Supraphonic defining its sound in popular music.

Which snare drum is the most recorded drum in history? This question is a good debate and possibly a matter of opinion, but this is what history has shown so far. The Slingerland Radio King snare drum, especially the 1930-50's models with solid maple shells and stick chopper hoops were (at one time) considered the most recorded wooden shell drum in history.

The Ludwig Supraphonic metal shell snare drum now reigns as the most recorded drum in history, especially in the rock era. Introduced in 1958, the first versions were chrome over brass shells with brass hoops, but by 1963 the "Supra" had transitioned

to a lighter less expensive material, chrome over an aluminum alloy, called "Ludalloy." Hal Blaine played a chrome over brass Ludwig Supraphonic on thousands of recordings throughout the years, helping propel it to the top! As time progressed, other notable snare drums were coming up the ranks. The Ludwig Acrolite, a similar version of the Supra, quickly gained ground as a favorite all around snare drum for studio recording. The modern Ludwig Black Beauty, Bell Brass snares from Tama, and other popular snares from Yamaha, Gretsch, Sonor, Brady, Noble & Cooley, and DW have become popular favorites on recordings.

The snare drum is a very personal choice for drummers. We all have our favorite snare drum, and sometimes it's more than one! With smaller side-snares, many drummers today are choosing to use two (or more) snare drums on their kit, giving a more diverse sound in the music they are playing. Something as simple as changing the snare drum to a deeper snare for rock, or a smaller, snappier, and thinner snare for jazz, can make your sound fit the style of music you are playing. I have heard drummers that visit the museum say that they are always on the look out for (what they consider to be) the "perfect snare drum," meaning the drum that they feel has the best sound overall for many different styles of music that they play.

At the Northup Drums Museum, we have over 100 snare drums that you can see and play. All our drums are in playing condition. The collection is very diverse, spanning over 100 years from major American drum companies like Ludwig, Slingerland, Leedy, Gretsch, and Rogers. We also have some unusual smaller companies that produced drums from the late 1800s to early 1930s. In a past Collector's Corner article I spotlighted our







collection of Ludwig, Slingerland, and Leedy, vintage Black Beauty snares. This month let's take a look at a sampling of some of the other snare drums that you can see and play at the Northrup Drums Museum.

In the photos, you see Ludwig snare drums that were manufactured between 1927 and 2009. We have a 1960s Jazz Festival in Oyster Black just like the one made famous by Ringo Starr. You see a 1920's Pioneer model in original black enamel paint and a 2009 limited edition Corey Miller (famous tattoo artist) snare drum featuring tattoo artwork on a WMP wrap. The 1940 snare drum in Top Hat and Cane (1999 re-issue wrap by Jack Lawton) is a favorite of many visitors. The 1970's Acrolite, 1960s Supraphonic (both made of Ludalloy) are famous workhorses, and the 1930s Peacock Pearl is a beautiful drum. Our 1941 WFL Ray Bauduc model is featured in a rare painted marble finish, and our 1930 Super Sensitive snare is shown in a rare Lavender Pearl. The Ludwig collection is rounded out with a 1930s Super Ludwig in WMP with Deluxe Gold hardware, a 1927 Ludwig Super in Ludwiggold finish, and a 1940s Universal snare in WMP.

In the next photo we have a group of vintage Slingerland snare drums. First, is a 1960 Hollywood Ace in black and gold duco finish, then two early 1960's Radio King solid shell snare drums in sparkling gold and sparkling silver with clamshell strainers. The sparkling gold drum was actually my very first snare drum, purchased used in 1979! Next is a 1951 8" deep Gene Krupa Radio King snare in WMP. Our 1929 Artist model has a tone flange and is seen in a rare sea green pearl. Another artist model was made in 1934 in a rare sparkling green. Our 1936 Gene Krupa 6.5" deep Radio King in WMP was its first year of production and Gene's favorite snare drum. The next drum is very rare, a 7"x14" Broadcaster in a walnut veneer over a solid maple shell. Broadcaster drums were only produced for about one year from 1934 to '35. Slingerland was sued by Gretsch

for the use of the Broadcaster name because they already had a Broadcaster line of drums, and the name was too similar. In 1936, the Radio King snare drum was born, and because of Gene Krupa's rising fame it quickly became one of the most iconic and recorded drums in history. You see a 1950's Radio King in the rare size of 4.5"x13" in WMP, a 1960's Hollywood Ace in silver and blue duco finish, and two 1960s Artist Model solid maple shell snare drums in a rare fiesta pearl and the more common black diamond pearl. Lastly is a 1970s Buddy Rich chrome over brass model with a TDR snare strainer.

We are proud of our vast collection of classic Leedy snare drums. You see a custom size 5.5x14 1930s Broadway Swingster in sparkling green. A 1950s Leedy and Ludwig WMP in 6.5"x14" and 4"x14". Next to that are 1927 nickel over brass Professional models in 4" and 6.5". The 1936 Broadway Standard is a classic snare drum shown in sparkling gold, and the 1940 Broadway Standard Swingster in WMP was a favorite drum of the swing era. The 1930 Broadway Duall in black onyx, is a rare drum that has two sets of snare wires, one under the top head and one on the bottom head. We conclude our collection of Leedy drums with two 1930s Broadway Parallel models, one in black diamond pearl and one in chrome over brass.

NDM has a few Gretsch drums as well. We have two limited edition 2002 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary drums. This series marked 75 years since the 1927 launch of the Gretsch-American line, which coincided with 1927 historic events like Lindbergh's flight and the first "talking" picture. The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary drums featured a Harvey Mason Grand Old Flag Broadcaster model, and a Custom Stars and Stripes model. Also in the photo are two Catalina Club snares, in WMP and a cool black pearl swirl wrap, and a .....original bags!

Our two war time drums are interesting. During WWII the USA had a 10% rule. This meant that any drum manufactured





during that time had to use 10% or less metal. This was because of the war effort and the fact that all metal was being used to make military equipment. Drum manufacturers had to get creative and figure out how to stay in business and produce drums with hardware mostly made of wood. This resulted in the 1942 Ludwig Victory model and the 1942 Slingerland Rolling Bomber snare drums.

In 1925 Slingerland purchased two small drum companies, Eugene Geisler, and Liberty Drum Co. This started their drum business, and by 1927 Slingerland was producing and selling drums. We have two examples of these early banjo style drums, one made by Eugene Geisler and the same drum with the first Slingerland badge. They are heavy cast aluminum drums with nickel over brass hoops and banjo style clips that tension the heads. These drums were offered in black and were unpainted, and are rare to find in good, playable condition.

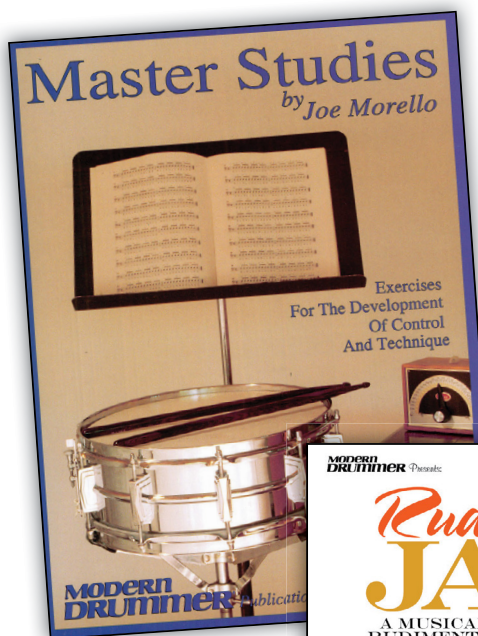
For more information on this diverse collection of snare drums or if you would like to visit the Northup Drums Museum and play all of these snare drums, visit [www.northupdrums.com](http://www.northupdrums.com) or call 607-434-4769.





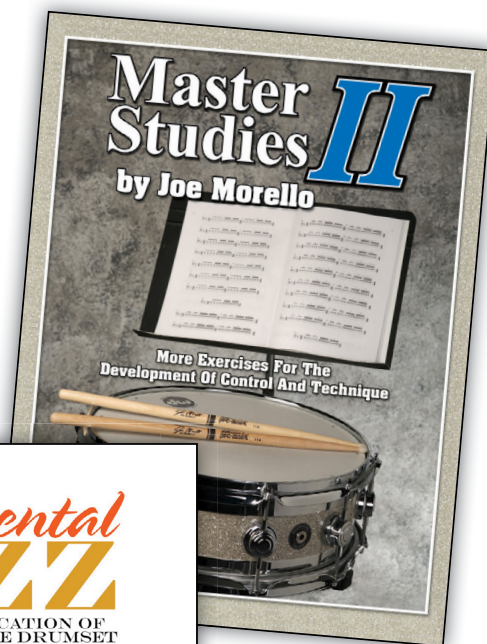
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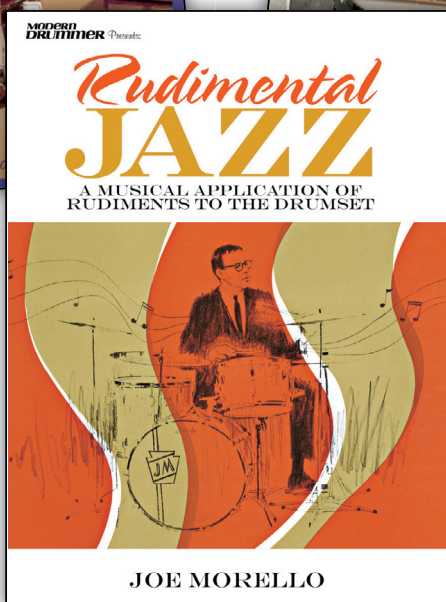
### Master Studies

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# The NAMM 2026 Show

Photos by Alex Klufft



Efnote Drums



Liverpool Sticks



Pearl Belle Meade Bourbon Kit



John Dolmayan Yamaha 2025 Tour Kit



Meinl



John Dolmayan Yamaha 2025 Tour Kit





Scorpion Percussion



Istanbul Mehmet IMC



Kingzbeat Kit



Sonor



Canopus



British Drum Co.



**Rick Latham**



**Jackson Daw, Vinny Appice, Andrew Daw**



**Jason Gianni and Joshua Simonds**



**Chris Hart and Kirsten Jensen**



**Terry Baker, Rashid Williams, and Lunar Rae**



**Tre Cool and Ludwig team**



**Ronald Bruner Sr. and Tony Austin**



**John Cowell and Roger Johnson**









Sonor



DW Drums



Tre Cool / Ludwig



Pearl



Canopus



Chad Smith DW Kit





**Roger Johnson and Giulliana Merello**



**John Tessin and Turning Jane Band**



**Leon Kitrell, Terry Baker,  
Deshaun Allen, Rashid Williams**



**Hank Lin, Miles Elze, Jackson Daw,  
Preston French, Prestyn  
Smith, Jordi Radnoti, Izzy**



**Big Mike Hart, DeAndre Hemby, Zyaire, Tigs,  
Buddy Bangs, Brandon Harris, Philip Major Willis**



**Ronald Bruner Sr. and Marvin Smitty Smith**



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

## Miles Davis

*The Complete Live at the Plugged Nickel 1965*

Tony Williams drums  
Columbia/Legacy



In 1965, the Miles Davis Quintet played a week at Chicago's Plugged Nickel nightclub. It was an infamous gig for many reasons. Firstly, the record company didn't inform the band ahead of time that they would be recording. But the main reason for this musical treasure was Tony Williams's spur of the moment suggestion of playing "anti-music." This was his term for lighting a musical match where everyone in the band (Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, and Tony Williams) would, as Hancock describes, "Whatever someone expects you to play, that's the last thing that you play," and no one told Miles Davis. In the liner notes to this box set the music is described perfectly, "They were stretching blueprints in midair, trusting instinct over certainty. They didn't just play music, they dismantled it, stretched it, interrogated it... Miles and his band weren't just making music, they were unmaking it to discover it again."

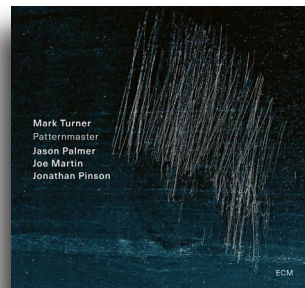
But that is only part of the story behind this important box set of music. The Plugged Nickel recordings were issued in the 1970s as a single LP, and then a double LP. In 1992 a seven CD Japanese box set was issued of all of the recordings for the week. However, it was only issued in Japan, and nearly impossible to find/buy elsewhere. It became a musical holy grail for musicians (especially drummers) since it featured some of Tony Williams best playing. In 1995, an eight CD box set was (finally) released by Sony, (for the record I have both of these box sets.) That widely released box set was a revelation, and its mystical musical contents were devoured, dissected, and digested by musicians everywhere. Although the two original box sets were very listenable, the recording was very raw, and the sound (to my ears) was very loose, unfocused, and very mid-rangy.

Now we have this remastered 2026 version, released as a celebration of (what would be) Miles Davis's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. On this version the low end is much tighter, the harsh mids are gone, Tony's drums and cymbals sound much warmer, and the overall sound is much more pleasant. The playing is incendiary, creative, and on the edge. The band is applying Tony's "anti-music" to perfection, and these eight CD's (or LP's) are enjoyable, educational, and exciting. There are new (very informative) liner notes, and a few new pictures, but it's all about the amazing music. According to Miles, "the band revolved around Tony—" As drummers, that's all we have to know! After years of different issues and reissues, this is the BEST way to hear Tony's idea of "anti-music," and everyone plays an important role in this essential music. Thank you, Miles, and Columbia/Legacy, for fixing and reissuing this masterpiece.

## Mark Turner

*Patternmaster*

Jonathan Pinson drums  
ECM

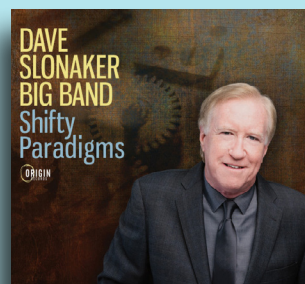


Ever since drummer Jonathan Pinson was featured in *Modern Drummer*, he has been playing and logging lots of miles with tenor saxophonist Mark Turner (who knows a thing or two about great drummers.) This is their second record together, (the first being *Return to the Stars*), and Turner's quartet just keeps getting better. This is one of the best bands currently recording for ECM, and a band that has a strong direction and concept. The bounce of the title track is infectious. "Trece Ocho" has a delightful swagger. Pinson's drums and cymbals are recorded to perfection, just listen to "The Happiest Man on Earth." Bassist Joe Martin and Pinson are a playful pairing, and trumpeter Jason Palmer and Turner weave in-between, over, and under, Martin and Pinson's deeply intertwined lines. In this context, this pair of drums and bass is more Blackwell and Haden than Philly Joe and Paul Chambers. But it is Turner's compositions and the various moods they set, that are the real stars here. When a band is given such strong material with such a strong concept, it is hard to go wrong. And there isn't a wrong turn on this entire recording.

## Dave Slonaker Big Band

*Shifty Paradigms*

Peter Erskine drums  
Brian Kilgore percussion  
Origin Records



Is there a busier drummer around than Peter Erskine? But as his schedule has gotten even busier, it seems that his playing has gotten less busy. And while there are many drummers in LA that can drive a big band through tricky charts, no one does it better than Peter Erskine. As I said in his *Modern Drummer* Legends book, I don't think that Peter Erskine has ever made a *bad* record. He always seems to give the music what it needs, and *Shifty Paradigms* is no exception. One of my favorite things on this record is Peter's "oops I forgot to play, falling down the steps, land on your feet" break coming into to the shout chorus on the opener "Dash Cam." WOW! Listen to how Peter sets up the tempo changes on "Bye Bye Blues," again—WOW! Composer-arranger Dave Slonaker has really created some interesting charts for the band to navigate, and Erskine



is driving the bus to perfection. Listen to Peter's breaks on "Bye Bye Blues" and "3rd and Four" and how he only exerts his musical muscle when it's absolutely necessary. The navigation that Peter exudes on "Comin' Home" is simultaneously gentle and strong, but never too strong— amazing! This perfect *lack of strength* is on display to perfection on "Shifty Paradigms." Sometimes it actually sounds like Slonaker's arrangements have been created for Erskine to show off his wide range of subtle drumming skills. Dave Slonaker's *Shifty Paradigms* is a great record and a clinic in *modern* and *musical* big band drumming.

### Eddie Allen's Push

*The Rhythm*

EJ Strickland drums

Origin Records

A record called *The Rhythm* sounds like it should feature some wonderful drumming, and it does! Drummer EJ Strickland is one of the most overlooked jazz drummers on the New York jazz scene. He always makes everyone around him sound better, and he always plays the music with taste and perfection. This record is no different. His hook-up with bassist Kenny Davis is transparent, always there without drawing too much attention to itself. Listen to how Strickland plays the title track and on "The Journey" connecting the dots of the different sections. On "Between the Darkness and the Dawn" EJ pushes the ensemble and the soloists just enough, and he plays a killer solo. "Maurice" is a nice light funk with a swingin' bridge, "Mood Indigo" is *almost* reggae, "Daybreak" is a soulful jaunt, "Worth Saying" is filled with stop time phrases, "Our Day Will Come" has a very "Poinciana" twist to the groove, and "7 Days" is in a swinging seven. EJ Strickland is perfect throughout. This is very good record with an excellent drummer pushing *The Rhythm*. Kudos to Eddie Allan, EJ Strickland, and the entire band!



a joy to hear. Quincy Phillips is a veteran of Christian McBride's bands, and has never sounded better than he does on this recording. His interaction with Ali is empathetic, and his hook-up with bassist Kris Funn is strong. The recording's arrangements are notable and very enjoyable. Pianist Alex Brown steals the show on many tunes, and bass clarinetist Todd Marcus is one of the best around on that instrument. Each member of the band contributes a composition or an arrangement. The songs "For Baby," "The Thong Song" (a cover of Sisqo's hit,) and "The Gary Bartz Medley" are the highlights of the record. This is a very good band and recording that deserves much wider recognition. Their blend of honoring the tradition and looking toward the future, while playing in the NOW, is wonderful.

### Shawn Lovato

*Biotic*

Henry Mermer drums

Endectomorph Music

The saxophone trio always leaves enough space for drummers to step forward, and *Biotic* is no different. Bassist Shawn Lovato has created a nice playground for his trio (including tenor saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock.) The trio's sound harkens back to the trio of Dave Holland, Sam Rivers, and Barry Altschul, and maybe some of Steve Coleman or Joe Lovano's more recent music. The trio darts, zigs, and zags through seven of Lovato's snaky compositions. Mermer's drums are an equal part of this interesting trio and are very well recorded. Lovato's bass sound is huge and woody, and his compositions and the concept for this record are enjoyable and intriguing. Laubrock's tenor sound is big and breathy and is perfect for this instrumentation. *Biotic* might not be for everybody, but for fans of all of the above-mentioned musicians, this will be an enjoyable listen and a welcome addition.



### Baltimore Jazz Collective

*Self-Titled*

Quincy Phillips drums

Stricker Street Records

When the East Coast jazz capitals are discussed, Baltimore is often overlooked. However many jazz luminaries come from Baltimore, including Cab Calloway, Eubie Blake, Billie Holiday, Baby Laurence, and Gary Bartz. The Baltimore Jazz Collective takes the opportunity of this recording to pay tribute to many of the city's most notable jazz musicians, by some of the city's most notable jazz musicians of today. Trumpeter Sean Jones and drummer Quincy Phillips may be the most well-known musicians on this recording, but the entire band sounds fantastic. Of special note is tapper-singer Brinae Ali, whose tapping on several songs is



### Edward Simon

*Latin American Songbook, Vol 2.*

*Venezuela*

Adam Cruz drums

Artist Share

Unfortunately, when we musicians refer to "Latin music" we are usually referring to Afro Cuban or Caribbean music, but there is so much more music "Latin" to music to explore. Thankfully, pianist Edward Simon has taken it upon himself to expose us to the various music of South America, and on this recording, he focusses on the music of Venezuela. The six compositions that Simon, bassist Ruben Rogers, and drummer Adam Cruz play, come from Venezuelan composers. The music is beautiful, the interpretations are stunning, and the playing is spectacular. Adam Cruz plays a rambunctious solo on "Presagio." He lays out on the beautiful ballad entitled "Atardecer." The groove of



much of this music is built into the melodies, and Cruz adds his modern sense of rhythmic buoyancy. When “Anhelante” kicks in it just takes off, and the feeling of joy is massive. The trio’s interpretation of “El Vuelo de la Mosca” *sounds* authentic (to my untrained ears,) and the longing of “Sabana” is stunning. Cruz has a unique transparency when he plays. He never gets in the way, and he lets the music blossom around him. They way this trio focusses on, and interprets the beautiful music of Venezuela, makes you want to know more about their musical heritage and traditions.

### Greg Rahn

#### *Side Hustle*

Mick Mestek (7 tracks) Randy Hayes (1 track) Jeff Campitelli (1 track) drums  
Derek Rolando percussion  
Total Immersion Music

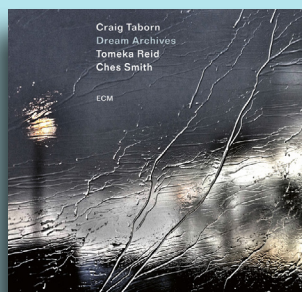


Composer, pianist, keyboard player Doug Rahn is a music lifer whose credits are too many (and various) to list, as is drummer Mick Mestek (who also played in Tower of Power for a while in the 80s.) “Chick Flick” is the opener, and it builds your interest immediately. “Side Hustle” is a romping shuffle and Mestek’s groove is undeniable. “Jam Night” is the first tune that features the late guitarist Drew Zingg (who is deeply missed,) and he sounds fantastic on three of the nine songs. Jeff Campitelli guests on the song “Chillin’ at the Crawdaddy Lounge” playing brushes in Rahn’s trio that portrays the tune’s title. Drummer Phil Hawkins also plays additional drums on the track. The groove on “Brand New Bad Idea” sits in the pocket very nicely, as does “Songo Blues” which features saxophonist Alex Murzyn. The band’s cover of Steely Dan’s “Josie” is a nice closer with Rahn playing the melody on the melodica and synths. Mestek does the groove proud and sounds great throughout. This is a wonderful record of musicality and maturity, made by veterans of the music scene.

### Craig Taborn

#### *Dream Archives*

Ches Smith drums, vibraphone, percussion, electronics  
ECM Records



Keyboardist Craig Taborn and drummer Ches Smith have both flown a bit under the radar, which is only one aspect that makes them a perfect pairing. Another reason is that they both blend acoustic and electronic perfectly, and another is that they both use space in their playing as well as they use notes. Violincello player Tomeka Reid rounds out this unique trio. The trio’s take on Geri Allen’s “When Kabuya Dances” and Paul Motian’s classic “Mumbo Jumbo” are both quite good and are the centerpieces of this recording. This trio paints with wonderful aplomb. The delicacy of “Dream Archive” is beautiful. Reid is featured on “Enchant” and Smith’s percussion groove brings the recording to a peaceful close.

### Bobby Rozario

#### *Healer*

Nathaniel Townsley (four tracks,) Robby Ameen (five tracks,) Greg Gonzalez (one track,) drums  
Jhair Sala, Luisito Quintero, Greg Gonzalez, Bobby Rozario, percussion  
Origin Records



This is guitarist Bobby Rozario’s second recording for Origin Records. A guitar-led band that is a strong combination of Latin percussion and funky drumming, a singing guitarist, and a deep spiritual conviction, could draw an easy comparison to classic 60s and 70s era Santana, and that would be fair. But Rozario is more than that. His guitar playing is deeply grounded, his singing is nice, and his compositions are well conceived. His musical arrangements and ideas flow, and (like Santana) he has great taste in drummers. Drummers Nat Townsley, Robby Ameen, and Greg Gonzalez, propel Rozario’s music and arrangements very well, and all of their playing melds very well with the percussionists. Bassists James Genus and Ruben Rodriguez both lay down a strong foundation, and organist Neil “Nail” Alexander is the musical glue that holds everything together. This is very enjoyable music.

### Simon Hanes

#### *Gargantua*

Jon Starks, Matt Bent, Kevin Murray, drums  
Pyroclastic Records



When composer-arranger Simon Hanes envisioned *Gargantua*, he wasn’t kidding. *Gargantua* is a suite of music played by a large ensemble of 15 musicians in five sections consisting of three musicians each, those sections are Voices, French Horns, Trombones, Basses, and Drum Sets. Hanes’ compositional strategies are inspired by Renaissance polyphony, Ukrainian trembita music, the long horns of Tibet, 70s hard rock, metal and hardcore music, noise, American minimalism, and turn-of-the-century European avant-garde music. Are you intrigued yet? The composer even states that the song “Submit to the Fabulosity” draws on stylistic references and quotes from Stravinsky, Mozart, Sum 41, John Williams, Led Zeppelin, Xenakis, and Nirvana. Does that whet your musical appetite? There are times that some music defies explanation and category, and this is one of those times. This is beautiful, scary, simple, and complex music. Filled with extremes and contradictions. The three drum set players create a daunting section of percussion that fulfil the composer’s *Gargantua* concept. Hanes’ *Gargantua* has to be heard to be believed, but for those with an open mind, and big ears, it is an exciting listen.



## Mattias Svensson

### *Embrace*

Morten Lund drums  
Origin Records

Bassist Mattias Svensson has assembled a very good international trio of pianist Bill Mays and drummer Morten Lund for an enchanting set of music. Mays is a veteran of the American jazz scene. Lund is a Danish drummer who is no newcomer to the jazz scene. Svensson is a Swedish bassist who has established a nice resume'. Together they create a nice blend of European and American jazz that doesn't lean in either direction too much, and this is what makes it different and original. Mays brings an American aesthetic to Svensson's music. Both Svensson and Lund have big rich sounds, and they have a nice musical sympathy and concept. Their repertoire is varied, not relying on standards, or any one stylistic approach. The funky and romping backbeat of "Shagit" is a nice contrast to the bluesy impressionism of "Bluetiful." Lund plays a wonderful solo on "Shagit." The interludes called "Fredriksson 2" and "Fredriksson 3" are very enjoyable. I wish more people would assemble trios like this. Mattias Svensson has indeed created a unique trio of musicians playing a unique set of music.



## Kate Olson

### *So It Goes*

Evan Woodle drums and  
percussion  
OA2 Records

Seattle saxophonist Kate Olson's new record is enjoyable and entertaining. For me, *So It Goes* is identified by its chordless instrumentation (which means no comping or chordal instruments like piano, guitar, or vibes.) The record begins with Olson trading with drummer Evan Woodle on a bluesy Mingus-ish blues. This is an interesting and fun start to the musical proceedings. The electric bass of Tim Carey gives the record a more contemporary sound, but the chordless quartet keeps the music adventuresome. Pianist Wayne Horvitz plays piano on three tunes which guarantees some adventure, and Geoff Harper plays acoustic bass on two tunes ("So It Goes" and "Translinear Light") creating a different texture within the band. Brass player (trumpet and trombone) Conner Eisenmenger is Olson's melodic foil in the core quartet. Both Carey and Woodle leave ample space within the chordless quartet, so the soloists are given a wide-open road to traverse. Chordless instrumentation can be a tricky one for bassists and drummers, the instrumentation creates more harmonic responsibility for us. It also encourages us to use bigger sounds and busier comping in the extra space, but this is a fine line to walk. The three tunes with Wayne Horvitz are my favorite cuts on the record ("So It Goes," "Translinear Light," and "Afterthoughts.") Alice Coltrane's "Translinear Light" is the longest and most adventuresome cut on the record, and the musical centerpiece of the recording. The contemplation of "Pink Mountain" is beautiful, as is the quirky playfulness of "All Pear Shaped." Woodle's playing on the closer of "Weigh Out" is a fun conclusion to an adventurous and well-balanced record. Although I don't often comment on album art, the cover and inside artwork of Haren Vakil is very cool and representative of the record's music.



## Miroslav Vitous

### *Mountain Call*

Jack DeJohnette (5 tracks)  
Gerald Cleaver (5 tracks)  
ECM

Legendary bassist Miroslav Vitous' new recording is a combination of many different things. There are eight duet tracks of Vitous and clarinetist Michel Portal, two duets of Vitous and DeJohnette, three tracks of Vitous, DeJohnette, and bass clarinetist Bob Mintzer, with members of the Czech National Symphony, and five tracks with a quartet featuring Vitous, saxophonist Gary Campbell, singer Esperanza Spalding, and drummer Gerald Cleaver (and symphonic samples.) The duet tracks could be enjoyable for drummers to play along with. "Tribal Dance" is a duet conversation between DeJohnette and Vitous and is an interesting study of elastic time. "Epilog" is a more subdued conversation but with Vitous interspersing orchestral samples. The trio of Mintzer, Vitous, and DeJohnette (with an orchestra) is an interesting six-minute combination of textures. The 12-minutes of the quartet tracks are the most cohesive and most enjoyable music of the record. I enjoyed the combination of Spalding's voice with Vitous' bass, and Cleaver's floating time.



# Lowell “Sly” Dunbar

May 10, 1952 – January 26, 2026

Interview by Ken Micallef

In 2018, MD chatted with the legendary Sly Dunbar about some of his most noteworthy performances, his influences, and quizzed the living legend on the qualities of a serious reggae drum approach. In salute to this riddim innovator, we are reprinting this insightful interview.

Sly Dunbar possessed one of the most expansive, eclectic, and revered résumés in reggae history. He won two Grammy’s, was nominated 13 times, and recorded two solo records called *Simple Sly Man*, and *Sly Wicked and Slick*. In the ‘70s and ‘80s, Lowell “Sly” Dunbar and bassist Robbie Shakespeare, aka the Riddim Twins, did as much to popularize reggae as other giants of the genre, such as Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Gregory Isaacs, Burning Spear, the Aggrovators, Black Uhuru, and Third World. Dunbar’s enormous, driving, and insistent groove and Shakespeare’s deep bass support fueled not only the music of Jamaican superstars but also that of Mick Jagger, Bob Dylan, Joe Cocker, and Yoko Ono, among many others. The duo has also recorded a good number of popular and well-regarded albums under the name Sly & Robbie, including *Blackwood Dub*.

**MD:** You’ve influenced thousands of drummers, but which ones influenced you?

**Sly:** Al Jackson Jr. was key, then the Stax and Motown drummers, all the drummers on Philadelphia International Records, and the Skatalites’ Lloyd Knibb.

**MD:** What is your particular innovation in reggae?

**Sly:** I copped licks from everybody, but I realized I had to go into the studio and create my own sound. At Channel One studio, we wanted that Philadelphia sound for the drums. We knew that would be something new. And I wanted to see people dance. I like groove. I want them tapping their feet. You need to make every song groove. If I can make the people dance with the drums alone, then I will be armed with something.

**MD:** Did you change your groove technically in any way from the earlier reggae drummers?

**Sly:** I don’t know what I was doing, but I tried to fall in love with the microphones on the drums.

**MD:** You played something special on the Mighty Diamonds’ song “Right Time.”

**Sly:** I played double 8th-note snare drum accents. In reggae back then you didn’t play a constant pattern through the song. But I played that pattern right through the song. Nobody could believe I was doing that steady for the full three minutes. They thought it was a delay from the console doing it.

**MD:** Were you replicating a delay?

**Sly:** No, I was not thinking of the delay. I was thinking of the pattern and other drummers. I’d heard Lloyd Knibb play a similar pattern in a Skatalites song called “Addis Ababa.” And I used to watch a lot of African movies and listen to African recordings, people singing and dancing to drums. On “Addis Ababa” Lloyd’s pattern pushed people more into the rhythm. They’re hearing the drums right up front. And I would go to a lot of parties and dances and analyze stuff for myself. That gave me ideas and

inspiration.

**MD:** You’ve played on so many great sessions. What was your general approach?

**Sly:** I would go in with an open mind. The night before I might be listening to some jazz or Earth, Wind & Fire and take in some ideas. I’d listen with patterns in my head, everything going. Then I would listen to the song, check the tempo, check the melody, check what the bassist is doing. Then I tried to fit my drum part right in between everything. I am not trying to play the song; I am trying to perform the song with the artist.

**MD:** Do you play rim click with the butt or the tip?

**Sly:** The butt end.

**MD:** Heel up or heel down on the bass drum pedal?

**Sly:** I used to play heel down, but now I do a lot of touring, and I need more energy. You can play softer in the studio.

**MD:** In the ‘70s you recorded at the Channel One studio with Lee Perry, Bob Marley, Bunny Lee, and Peter Tosh, then you and Robbie Shakespeare became even more famous working with many American and British artists. Did your approach change with the Rolling Stones, Joe Cocker, and Bob Dylan?

**Sly:** It didn’t really change, but it was a different world. Whatever we did, we took a little part of reggae into the sessions. We did a track for Mick Jagger called “Just Another Night,” and at the end we did a dancehall groove, then back into the rock beat. We experimented; nobody knew we were going to do that.

**MD:** You recorded *Infidels* and *Empire Burlesque* with Bob Dylan.

**Sly:** We couldn’t believe it when we got the call. Bob called me directly. The coolest session ever. He came in with his guitar and harmonica and started playing a groove. We’d join in on what he was doing and try to create the rhythm around him. He recorded everything. He said, “I want to recut ‘Jokerman,’” and we thought, *Why?* We went in and ran it down. He said, “That’s it.” I don’t know what he wanted.

**MD:** Can you recall a session that was particularly difficult?

**Sly:** Not difficult, but sometimes it’s just not working—the simple little things they ask you to do, and you just stumble until you get it.

**MD:** What’s the secret to playing a great groove?

**Sly:** I like to keep things moving, and if the music is not grooving, nobody will move. We come from the Caribbean with the calypso rhythms, and when R&B started coming in we fused it with calypso. We did a Grace Jones song called “My Jamaican Guy,” where I’m playing R&B mixed with mento. She’s singing a mento melody and I’m playing an R&B thing—it’s coming from both ends. Sometimes I would listen to what someone was singing to find a groove or [incorporate] other patterns I’ve found over the years; they come to me. People will say, “Play one of your Sly things for me.”

**MD:** If a young drummer has just discovered Sly Dunbar, which recordings would you recommend?

**Sly:** One of my favorites is Grace Jones’ *Private Life*. The recording quality is good, and the Jamaicans still go crazy for it. That took me to that next level internationally. Or they could also listen to the Channel One stuff or Black Uhuru—we produced those as well. We made it all go.

**MD:** What advice do you give to young drummers regarding



mastering a groove?

**Sly:** You have to play not for yourself only. You have to try and be steady as you can. I don't like to play a lot of fills unless it's necessary; it has to really feel good within a song. Today's music is more computerized, but I got to create my own sound

because we did so much recording. I knew what I wanted my drums to sound like. But it's hard today because there isn't so much live recording being done. But be focused, and practice and listen a lot—that is key. 🥁

The magazine cover features a photograph of Sly Dunbar, a Black man with dreadlocks, wearing a red beret and a light-colored shirt, playing a drum kit. He is holding two drumsticks and looking directly at the camera. The background shows a stage setting with palm trees and stage equipment. The title 'MODERN DRUMMER' is in large, bold, yellow letters at the top. Below it, a yellow banner reads 'The International Magazine Exclusively For Drummers'. In the top right corner, there is a small yellow logo of a drum and a price tag '\$2.50 (In USA) APRIL 1985'. The name 'SLY Dunbar' is written in large, bold, yellow letters across the middle right. On the bottom left, a yellow and orange gradient box contains the text 'L.A. Session Man Steve Schaeffer Chico Hamilton Ian Wallace Getting Your Dook Published'. On the bottom right, red text lists additional content: 'Plus: Electronic Kit Close-Up Solo Ideas For Hi-Hat Krupa's "China Doll"'.

# MODERN DRUMMER

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## SLY Dunbar

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**Steve Schaeffer**  
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Plus:  
**Electronic Kit Close-Up**  
**Solo Ideas For Hi-Hat**  
**Krupa's "China Doll"**



# Sean T. Lane's Heart Touring Kit

Photos by Jason Mehler & Alex Kluff



**Ludwig Drums** - Classic Maple 2017 Mod Orange Finish: 9x13 Rack Tom, 14x14 Floor Tom, 16x16 Floor Tom, 14x22 Bass Drum.

**Snares** - 7x14 Keplinger Black Iron Snare, 6.5X14 Keplinger Stainless Steel Snare (swap between for main snare.)

**Paiste Cymbals:** 19" Formula 602 Modern Essentials Crash, 20" Formula 602 Modern Essentials Crash, 15" 602 Formula 602 Modern Essentials Hi-Hat, 21" Signature Dark Energy Ride MK II, 22" Masters Swish.

**Hardware:** Tama Classic Light Hardware, Tama Iron Cobra hi-hat Stand, DW 9000 Single Pedal, Roc n Soc Nitro Drum Throne.

**Remo Drumheads:** Toms - Remo Coated Emperor top/ Remo Coated Ambassador bottom; Snare - Remo Coated Emperor top/ Remo Ambassador Hazy Bottom; Bass Drum - Batter Remo Clear or Coated 22" Powerstroke 3, Bass Drum Reso Remo Ebony Powerstroke 3 (Hand painted logo by Dean Tomasek.)

**Sticks:** Vic Firth Peter Erskine Ride Stick.

**Electronics / Percussion:** Roland SPD One; The Bike - Electro Acoustic Percussion and Bowed String Device made by Sean T. Lane; Bike Bells made by Gregg Keplinger; Bike Preamp made by Rick Mullikin.







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Jimmy Chamberlin - Smashing Pumpkins



Max Weinberg - Bruce Springsteen

Mickey "Cavs" Cavanagh - KGLW

Mike Portnoy - Winery Dogs

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