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April 2011

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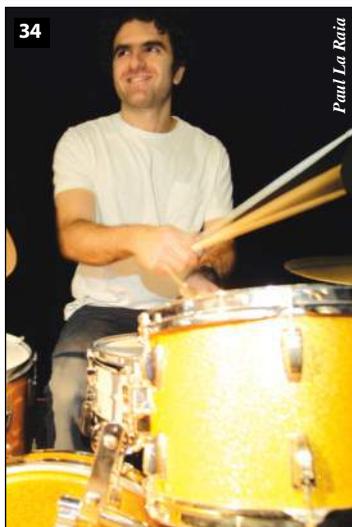
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How a wise drum teacher, an unusual neurological condition, and a deep obsession with classic soul and funk combined to make for one of the grooviest young drummers on the scene.

40 CAMILLE GAINER JONES

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46 JOHN "JR" ROBINSON

Is there another drummer who's seen the inside of a recording studio—and then had the fruits of his labor result in a hit record—more than this month's cover star? Not likely. *This* is how it's done.

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WELLS KELLY



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EDUCATION

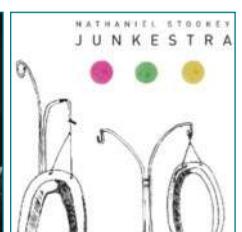
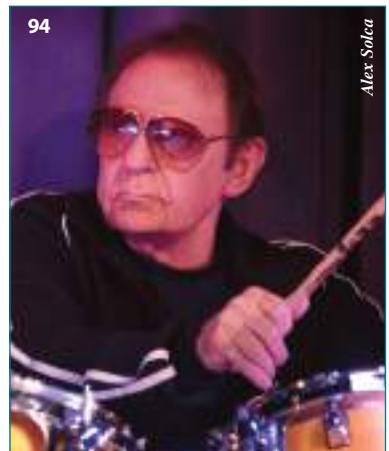
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SABIAN
NEW FOR 2011
GIVEAWAY pg 56

The Bigger Picture

It's Martin Luther King Day, my first day home from the National Association Of Music Merchants (NAMM) convention in Anaheim, California, and I'm catching up on my TiVo. It seems last week's *Modern Family* got superceded by President Obama's address in the wake of the recent Arizona tragedy, which is fine with me since I hadn't been able to see the speech live. The president is eloquently saying that if we fail to respond to senseless violence with a greater empathy for those who think differently from the way we do, we've missed a very important opportunity.

"Sudden loss causes us to look backward," the president says. "But it also forces us to look forward, to reflect on the present and the future, on the manner in which we live our lives.... We may ask ourselves if we've shown enough kindness and generosity and compassion to the people in our lives. Perhaps we question whether we're doing right by our children or our community, whether our priorities are in order.... And we are reminded that in the fleeting time we have on this earth, what matters is not wealth, or status, or power, or fame, but rather how well we have loved, and what small part we have played in making the lives of other people better."

The timing of this is interesting to me. The NAMM show is one giant, noisy cauldron of business making, and though I usually have a ball out in La-La Land, I always come home feeling slightly sullied from the intensity of commerce and self-promotion. Mulling over the president's speech, I wonder how a mere part-time drummer/full-time editor such as me fits into this scenario.

Then I recall a conversation I'd witnessed just three days prior, between *MD* Pro Panelist Jeff Davis and veteran gospel drummer Bill Maxwell. Some of the things Bill said struck me as echoing what the president was trying to say in his speech. Bill said, "We're representing the creator of the world. I want to be creative. I want to be available to still keep my joy, my enthusiasm, and my musicality. I really want to do something that's good. And I want to serve. It's not about me—it's about the listener and the artist. I'm thinking about eternity, and about having an effect on people's lives."

In the twenty-three years I've spent reporting on the world of drumming, I've met some of the most wonderful individuals I've ever had the pleasure of knowing, and I'm very grateful for being given that opportunity. But the music business is an incredibly competitive one, and I've also witnessed drummers take all kinds of unfortunate approaches—often at NAMM shows, unsurprisingly—in their quest to set themselves apart from the pack and climb some imagined ladder to success. Inevitably, though, it's the ones who quietly and brilliantly go about their work that have the most lasting impact. As Jeff Davis wisely pointed out to Bill at the end of their conversation, now he understands why Bill's music had such a profound influence on him as a young drummer: Bill's heart was in the right place, and his spirit came through all those mics and preamps and compressors, undiluted, with the purpose of improving, on whatever level, the lives of those who heard his music.

Every person is free to define success on his or her own terms. I, for one, tend to agree with the president here: Money, fame, and power can be powerful motivators, but in the end what matters is your ability to inspire people to become the best versions of themselves that they can be.

Of course, especially in these tough economic times, it would be foolish of me to suggest that as long as your motivations are pure, you'll survive in this business. But I do think that without some concept of serving the greater good with your talent, whatever success you do have will be missing an essential ingredient: humanity. The president's response in Arizona was absolutely right in this sense: We're all in this together, and blindly looking out for number one is simply not a viable option if we're to survive this crazy world with our hearts intact.



Adam Budofsky

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SCAN FOR INFO

ELLIOT HUMBERTO KAVEE'S RHYTHMIC ILLUSIONS

In part two of Elliot Humberto Kavee's "Pulse And Meter" series (September 2010), the first two exercises are about how to go from 7/8 to 11/8. The process involves grouping the seven in a 2-2-2-1 clave and then substituting a three for every two and a two for the one. I guess that the measure length is the same in both examples, so you could play both exercises in the same song. But I think there's something wrong. How can you subdivide the 8th note at the end of this measure into two notes in a regular way? I think this is impossible. Using the same method (substituting threes for twos and twos for ones) in a 5/8 measure with a 2-2-1 clave gives you 3-3-2. This is a clave in 4/4. It's not possible!

Santi



Kavee Responds

Hi, Santi. Thanks for your letter and interest. First, a clarification: I do not refer to clave in the section of the article you're asking about. The bar length *is* the same in both examples; it is the pulse per bar that changes. The point of the article isn't the modulation to an 11/8 (that's a byproduct of the theory), but how a group of eleven pulses can sound like 7/8. As far as the subdivision of quarter and 8th notes goes, it's not an exact subdivision, because in the 3-3-3-2 version of the seven, the quarter notes (long notes) become a bit shorter and the 8th note (short note) becomes a bit longer. The ratio between the long and short notes is now 3:2 instead of 2:1. The faster underlying pulse of the 3-3-3-2 patterns creates forward momentum, while its triplet base implies swing and gives it a laid-back feel at the same time.

One way to modulate from seven to eleven is to play seventy-seven beats per bar and use subgroupings to map out the modulation. Within a seventy-seven-beat bar, hitting on beats 1, 23, 45, and 67 would create the 2-2-2-1 patterns. Each two is twenty-two beats long, and the one is eleven beats long ($22:11 = 2:1$). For the elongated 3-3-3-2 patterns, the hits will be on 1, 22, 43, and 64. Each three is twenty-one beats long, and the two is fourteen beats long ($21:14 = 3:2$).

The problem with trying to play these patterns in strict mathematical terms is that the pulses are too fast to calculate and hear unless the rate of the measure is extremely slow. The substitution of a 3:2 ratio for a 2:1 ratio is easier to hear. It will be exact as well, without having to compute and play superhuman rates. At a normal tempo the placement of the hits in 2-2-2-1 and 3-3-3-2 patterns is almost identical. That's why it's possible to hear a 3-3-3-2 as a seven.

To calculate the 2-2-1 and 3-3-2 patterns, you need to divide the measure into forty pulses. The 2-2-1 will hit on 1, 17, and 33. (Each two is sixteen beats long, and the one is eight beats long.) The 3-3-2 will hit on 1, 16, and 31. (Each three is fifteen beats long, and the two is ten beats long.) These two patterns are very similar, and that's why you can hear a 3-3-2 as a five. Keep your mind and your ears open, and work with it over and over. It's pretty cool when you take a common rhythm that you've played one way all your life and it suddenly sounds totally different!

Elliot Humberto Kavee

GENTLE GIANT'S JOHN WEATHERS

MD's What Do You Know About John Weathers article in the January 2011 issue delighted me. What a titan! And it never hurts to hear from Jean-Paul Gaster either (Critique). Thanks for the surprises!

Stinky Pete Bodine

Thanks so much for the article on John Weathers. He was a huge influence on me, and I marvel at his playing to this day. He navigated Gentle Giant's intricate music with amazing fluidity and accuracy. One thing he often did was to play a rather simple part when he could have easily gone crackers. This gave the music something that many prog bands didn't have: groove. He did this by choice. He had more chops than he usually displayed, but he could *play*. I wish him a long and happy career, no matter how many limbs he's able to use.

Kelly Simpson

WALLY GATOR WATSON

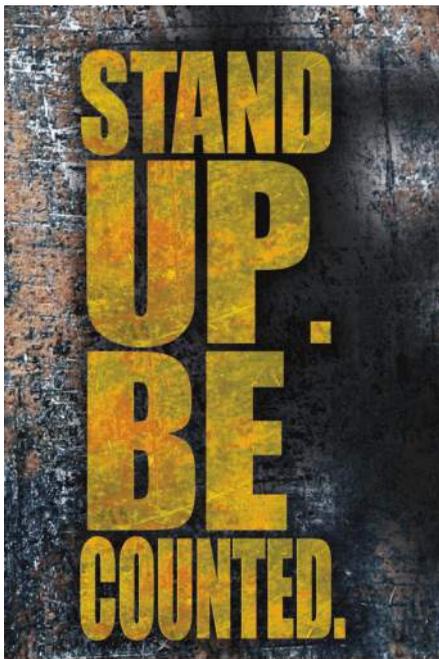
I want to comment on the announcement on moderndrummer.com about Wally Gator Watson's passing. Wally and I were very close friends for twelve years. He and I launched the nonprofit EEMCD Inc. in early 2001, and it was my privilege to serve as assistant CEO and be part of something that was a lifelong dream for Wally. Thank you for acknowledging such a lovely man.

Janell Wight

DROPPED BEAT

In the Practice Pad Shootout in the December 2010 issue, the description of the RamPad Marching series model should have stated that the head is designed to have the feel of a Kevlar head. The pad does not come with an actual Kevlar head.

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THOMAS PRIDGEN

The out-of-this-world slammer returns from Mars with his own thing.

After his Grammy-winning tenure with neo-prog innovators the Mars Volta, drumming prodigy Thomas Pridgen grabs the reins and steers his career in a new direction. With the Memorials, Pridgen fulfills his vision of introducing an African-American prog sound into the modern-rock landscape, with the musical and vocal diversity to move in any direction. Featuring two of Thomas's Berklee buds, vocalist Viveca Hawkins and guitarist Nick Brewer, the eclectic power trio came together in late 2009 on Pridgen's home turf of Oakland, where the band recorded

its thirteen-song debut in seven days.

"Guys like Tony Williams and Billy Cobham released a lot of solo records while still performing as sidemen with artists of all styles," Pridgen says. "I wanted a project that would allow me total freedom to write my own music, while still being a hired gun with other artists." Though there's copious drum action on the album, Pridgen firmly insists, "This is *not* a drum-solo record. It's a total band project



with the focus on the music. As a band leader, I'm bringing my big-league experience with the Mars Volta to the table and utilizing all the business skills I've learned along the way." **Mike Haid**

SCOTT AMENDOLA

Leading, doing sideman work, and composing are all part of the gig for this West Coast improviser.

Bay Area drummer Scott Amendola is busy these days. Having come to national attention in the mid-'90s with guitarist Charlie Hunter's jazz/funk groups and the short-lived but excellent T.J. Kirk (which played grooving covers of Thelonious Monk, James Brown, and Roland Kirk), Amendola now divides his time between kit work for the critically lauded Nels Cline Singers (a dynamic post-jazz instrumental group led by Wilco's lead guitarist), sessions, and his own brilliant bands.



Lenny Gonzalez

On *Lift*, the latest record with his trio, Amendola wrote all the music and displays sensitive drumming and a seasoned leader's approach to group interplay. "In trios, there's more space to play, but also more space to leave," he says. "The listener can focus on fewer things, and that's just as powerful as density." *Not* focusing on Amendola is the listener's challenge. Scott's signature open bass drum, Charmin-soft snare ruffs, spacey electronics, and ability to flat-out swing are all over *Lift* tunes like the New Orleans-esque "Lima Bean" and the floating "Cascade."

Beyond his continuing involvement in forward-thinking jazz collectives, Amendola has also been commissioned to write a piece, "Fade To Orange," for the Oakland Symphony. "Writing is challenging, especially composing for non-improvisers with this piece," he says. "But it's organic and emotional and rewarding for me." **Ilya Stemkovsky**

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ARLEN PEIFFER On Cloud Cult's *Light Chasers* Cloud Cult's *Light Chasers* continues the philosophical and socially/environmentally conscious concerns of mastermind Craig Minowa, while providing danceable beats and heartfelt lyrics. Though the band began as a solo project—Minowa continues to be the principal songwriter, even creating drum parts for *Light Chasers* in Ableton Live—Arlen Peiffer has the job of bringing the beats to life. Peiffer looks back at his introduction to the group as "surprisingly natural" while reveling in how intuitive Minowa's drum parts felt. The drummer approaches music with equal focus on the song—his playing can be subtle or rowdy, depending on the context—and the positive attitude he sees as integral to the band. "My ultimate hope with all of this," he says, "is to be able to share the immense joy I feel while drumming and to have people leave the shows feeling that joy. It's all about keeping a smile on, even through the tough stuff." **Billy Brennan**

JARED CHAMPION

Cage The Elephant's drummer is attacking the groove from both sides now.

Jared Champion's exuberant drumming on Cage The Elephant's rollicking and bluesy self-titled debut disc helped draw lots of attention to the Kentucky-based band, whose funky, infectious grooves lean heavily on rock and R&B influences. "We did the record in ten days, recording a track a day," Champion says. "We did the drums, the rhythm guitars, and the bass live, and that process really allowed us to get a pure sound."

Fast-forward two years, and Cage The Elephant has released its second, decidedly more polished opus, *Thank You Happy Birthday*. Regardless of the production values, though, Champion says, "I try to feed off the energy of the band. That comes from playing with the same guys and reading one another. A lot of our songs are about getting people to dance, and I was trying to sound good and solid while playing uniquely as well. The maturity of the music really helped me play for the song. We went for a harder



Jeff Gentner

and a softer direction at the same time, and that really expanded our groove."

Champion has drums in his blood, and he says he's honed his skills since he was an infant. "My great-grandfather was a big band drummer," Jared explains, "and he passed his skills and his love of drumming

down to my dad. My father never really played the drums to make money, though; he did it because it was a passion. He would always teach me things I couldn't do at the time but that he knew I would eventually figure out." **Steven Douglas Losey**

Also On The Shelves

Natasha Bedingfield Strip Me (Vinnie Colaiuta, Aaron Sterling) /// **Duffy** Endlessly (Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, Emre Ramazanoglu) /// **Plain White T's** Wonders Of The Younger (Dave Tirio) /// **Mr. Big** What If... (Pat Torpey) /// **Duran Duran** All You Need Is Now (Roger Taylor) /// **Anberlin** Dark Is The Way, Light Is A Place (Nathan Young) /// **Jimmy Eat World** Invented (Zach Lind) /// **Eli Degibri** Israeli Song (Al Foster) /// **Pete Levin** Jump! (Lenny White, Manolo Badrena) /// **Charles Bradley** No Time For Dreaming (Homer Steinweiss) /// **...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead** Tao Of The Dead (Jason Reece, Aaron Ford)

On Tour

Ryan Guanzon with New Medicine /// **Nathan Young** with Anberlin /// **Joe Stillwell** with NEEDTOBREATHE /// **Michael Pedicone** with My Chemical Romance /// **Xavier Muriel** with Buckcherry /// **John Blackwell** with Prince /// **Tico Torres** with Bon Jovi

ISMAEL CANCEL

Taking Calle 13's revolutionary reggaeton to the world stage



"Album time for me means waiting for instructions and then finding out in what way the drums can kill," says Ismael Cancel, drummer with the multi-Grammy-winning Puerto Rican reggaeton band Calle 13. According to Cancel, on the group's recent fourth album, *Entren Los Que Quieran*, producer and bandleader Eduardo Cabra, aka Visitante, had the stated purpose of creating new sounds and fusions of rhythms and genres. To that end, Visitante's arrangement ideas ranged from having Ismael record two drumsets on one track for added power ("Calma Pueblo"), employ several snare drums at once to achieve a Balkan tone ("Baile De Los Pobres"), and merge merengue, ska, and drum 'n' bass feels ("Vamo'

A Portarnos Mal").

"I love the studio process," Cancel says. "But the live show is my real passion. Nothing can explain that rush and feeling. With Calle 13 we might play to 3,000 fans in a small venue in Barcelona, or to 150,000 at the ALAS concert in Argentina, as we did a couple of years ago. Live is where I take control."

Though Ismael explains that the band uses a click track live because of the extensive synchronized visual aspect of the

shows, he insists that there is "full organic music happening on stage. In concert I look for the best rhythms and styles that complement the things you hear on the album. I try to expand the ideas I played, keeping in mind the album sound. But the live sound is always cranked up. To my right are three horns, and to my left are my two percussion brothers with every instrument you can imagine, from Latin gadgets to Brazilian drums.

"For me the live show is very important. It's a presentation card, the time when fans can see up close that the things you recorded on an album are real. This is why I'm so proud to take Calle 13's show under my direction when we play live." **Adam Budofsky**





Foghat has been bringing the boogie to classic rock fans for the better part of four decades. But the big beat behind “Slow Ride” and “Fool For The City” says that coasting is never an option.

1 PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE. I carry a practice pad and Fütz pedals with me all the time.

2 WHEN CHECKING INTO A HOTEL, LET THEM KNOW NOT TO HAVE ANYBODY (ANYONE YOU KNOW, ANYWAY) BELOW YOU—OR NEXT DOOR, FOR THAT MATTER. Because with me, if there’s some good music on the TV, it’s going to get loud. Otherwise it’s headphones. I try to be a good neighbor.

3 DON’T BELIEVE YOUR OWN PUBLICITY.

4 DYNAMICS ARE IMPERATIVE. Listen to the song—the words and the lead instrument. Just because we’re in the driver’s seat (and we are), that doesn’t mean it always has to be a race or that we have to play full bore all the time.

5 LISTEN TO RECORDINGS OF YOUR LIVE SHOWS TO MAKE SURE YOU’RE IN THE POCKET. There’s always room to improve.

6 REMEMBER THAT YOU HAVE ONE OR TWO HOURS TO GET IT RIGHT. The other twenty-two hours are just “hurry up and wait.”

7 IT’S NOT WHAT YOU DO—IT’S THE WAY THAT YOU DO IT. That’s what gets results. Work with your rudiments and practice them when you’re playing to music, and not just on the pads. In rock, I think Bonzo and Ginger personified this approach. They both played basic rudiments, but their application on the kit speaks for itself.

8 HAVE FUN WITH IT. It’s *all* about having fun.

9 LISTEN TO YOUR EARLIEST INFLUENCES AND WHAT GOT YOU ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT DRUMS AND MUSIC IN THE FIRST PLACE. Some of my earliest influences were Francis Clay (*Muddy Waters At Newport 1960*), Freddie Below, Earl Palmer, and early Sun recordings with J.M. Van Eaton. And I’m a Jerry Lee Lewis fan.

10 KEEP PHOTOS OF THE GREATS ON YOUR WALL. I have a picture of Buddy Rich on my wall just to remind me what greatness on the kit is. It always makes me smile.

Foghat’s latest album is Last Train Home. For more on Roger Earl and the band, go to foghat.net or [facebook.com/foghat](https://www.facebook.com/foghat).





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SUSIE IBARRA



Among the 2011 MD Pro Panelist's great strengths is her ability to make **meaningful connections in sometimes shockingly diverse musical situations**. We asked Ibarra to describe some of those unusual settings and to offer guidance to the novice rhythmic world traveler in the subtle art of collaborating with players from far afield.

I've heard and performed in a few combinations that perhaps might be surprising but were really interesting in the best ways—like traditional Turkish instrumentalists with traditional Japanese instrumentalists and American jazz improvisers, or traditional Korean drumming with Philippine gong music. Korean music has an interesting triplet in its traditional drumming that mirrors West African rhythms. It makes you wonder.

I've also mixed New Orleans second-line drumming with southern Philippine gong music, Cuban danzons with klezmer, Brazilian berimbau rhythms with Western contemporary composition for percussion.... I just received a CD of Nepali peace songs mixed with world beats on kit; that was so interesting. And there have been extensive explorations and collaborations by Indian musicians, Indonesian gamelan players, and Western musicians, in styles ranging from contemporary composition to fusion, jazz, pop, and electronica. Also, Tuvan throat singing with a jazz rhythm section—that was incredible performance art. I could go on and on.

I would encourage the rhythmic explorer who is interested in expanding his or her ears and experience to listen to a lot of music. Take it in—especially the music that you have an affinity for, and, if you're about to play or perform with musicians from a specific region, that culture's music. Then, when you're in a rehearsal or a playing situation, listen—but don't overthink it. In the end, it's all music. Trust your ears and your ability to play with the other musicians. As in any situation, *participate* in the music, and play what's needed to make the best music in that moment, whether it involves delivering the part on a score, improvising, supporting, soloing, or working in a rhythm section.

In the end, I think whether things do or don't work depends on the root of the sincerity of the musicians playing together, and how they listen.



Paul La Raia



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eBay Supra-Phonic

I recently won a 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 14 Ludwig snare on eBay. It was listed as a 1980s Supra-Phonic, and I wanted to confirm this. The large gold eyestone badge reads "Monroe NC." The inside of the shell has the number 409 in black print. The drum has a P85 strainer and butt plate and ten lugs, and a magnet sticks to the shell. Is this a real chrome-over-aluminum Supra-Phonic or a chrome-over-steel entry-level snare in disguise? **Fil**

"That's a real Supra-Phonic," says drum historian Harry Cangany. "The plating is flaking off, which is a sign of an aluminum shell, because chrome doesn't stick to aluminum very well. Aluminum shells were and still are used on Supra-Phonics and Acrolites; the exteriors, however, are different on each. [Supra-Phonics have chrome plating, whereas Acrolites do not.] The model of your snare is LM 402. I can't say for sure why the number 409 would appear. That particular number is not in any Ludwig resource material. Perhaps the 9 is really a 2, and the stamping wasn't clear or complete. As for the magnet test, I can't really comment on why a magnet stuck to the shell, unless it was placed near the butt plate or a lug."



MIND MATTERS Overcoming Common Mental Barriers In Music

by Bernie Schallehn

My Dad's Kit

I'm sixteen years old and have been playing drums for about five months. When I started playing, my dad gave me his old kit and was very excited about me following in his footsteps. The problem is, I really don't like his drums. They're old and have been stored in the basement for years. The white finish has yellowed, and there's rust on the chrome. Plus it's only a four-piece kit. I don't want to hurt his feelings, but I really want a new kit in a fade finish with a bunch of toms, maybe even two bass drums. I'm in a band, but we haven't played out yet. When that time comes, I can't imagine playing my first gig with my dad's old, beat-up drums. What do I do? Ricky L.

Let me preface my response by saying that I can only illuminate different choices, or possible solutions, that you haven't yet considered. I can't tell you what to do. Ultimately, you will need to make the decisions regarding your dilemma.

First, let's look at your concern about the number of drums on your kit. Every Saturday night, at approximately 11:34 P.M., after a cast member shouts out, "Live from New York, it's Saturday night!" Shawn Pelton's job as the house drummer on *Saturday Night Live* is to amp up the live and TV audience. He plays with his whole being—his mind, his heart, his hands, and his feet—and he does so on a four-piece kit. That's all he needs to get the job done...and done *well*.

Shawn is in good company too. Dave Grohl (Nirvana, Foo Fighters), Josh Freese (studio ace), Questlove (the Roots), Abe Laboriel Jr. (Paul McCartney), Steve Jordan (R&B/pop drummer extraordinaire), Charlie Watts (the Rolling Stones), Stanton Moore (Galactic), Dominic Howard (Muse), Justin Foley (Killswitch Engage)—the list goes on and on—all choose to play small kits. Why? Because what really matters is not the number of drums you play, but *how* you play the drums you have.

A big kit with a gorgeous finish always catches my eye when I



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MIND MATTERS

see one in an ad or stroll into a music store. Major drum companies spend big bucks on photography to make their products look absolutely irresistible. When Zak Starkey played his double bass rig at the 2010 Super Bowl, he looked and sounded awesome. Big kits undeniably have their place in music. But remember that you haven't even played your first gig yet.

At sixteen, you may actually have difficulty in being allowed to perform at venues that serve alcohol. Let's assume, though, that you are able to play at a nightclub, bar, or roadhouse. You'll be surprised by what constitutes a "stage" at some of these venues. A miniscule swatch of carpeting in a far-off corner may be the only space you have to set up your drums. A club owner's job is to hear the sweet ring of his cash register. The more space he allots for a band, the fewer patrons he can cram into his club. If you wind up playing house parties, youth centers, or maybe at your high school, you'll probably encounter similar space issues, unless you're lucky enough to score the stage in the school's auditorium.

I would never dissuade you from purchasing that tobacco-fade-finish kit with two kicks and a slew of toms, but unless you have an extended-body cargo van, have you considered how you're going to cart around your massive arsenal?

Consider these alternatives to rushing out and buying an enormous kit:

1. Chrome can be cleaned and rust can be removed. Google "rust removers." I use Espirit D-Ruster, which is nontoxic and environmentally safe.
 2. Rims/hoops and other hardware can be replaced if the rust is too thick.
 3. You can recover your four-piece kit. There are ads in the back of *Modern Drummer* that offer a wealth of new and dazzling finishes. You can have your set professionally recovered, or you can do it yourself. If you decide to try it yourself, I recommend the DVD *Guerrilla Drum Making*.
 4. You can use a double pedal instead of two bass drums.
- Your dad gifted you his drums, a possession that at one point in his life was probably very important to him. That's an act of love. The fact that you don't want to hurt his feelings suggests that you two have a good relationship. The one statement you made that has me a little uncomfortable is about your dad's excitement over your "following in his footsteps." You've been playing for only five months. It's hard to predict whether you'll stick with it. If you decide to quit, will that dash whatever expectations he may have?

If you decide to buy a big kit and use that instead of his vintage set, I'm guessing that your dad might be a little hurt. It's a rejection of sorts, but perhaps he'll realize that you and he are bound to have different tastes in music, drums, and drummers. Good luck!

Bernie Schallehn has been a drummer and percussionist for over forty-five years. He holds a master's degree in counseling psychology and, while in private practice, held the credentials of a certified clinical mental health counselor and a certified alcohol and substance abuse counselor.

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YAMAHA

ROCK TOUR KIT by David Ciauro

MODERN DRUMMER
DIGITALLY ENHANCED



Current economic trends haven't stopped Yamaha from introducing new products to the market, but what has changed is the company's approach. The strategy behind Yamaha's lineup of Rock Tour kits found its niche in the following three ways: by visually captivating an audience with edgy, eye-catching aesthetics; by targeting a genre-specific demographic; and by emphasizing the quality of the select number of kit configurations produced.

THE SPECS

Rock Tour drums are available in five finishes. There's matte metallic silver and matte metallic black, both of which come with matte silver lugs and hoops and feature 9-ply reforested big leaf mahogany shells. The other three finishes are textured ash in green, red sunburst, and smoke sunburst, with chrome hoops and lugs and 6-ply big leaf mahogany/2-ply textured ash shells.

All Rock Tour drums have 1.6 mm triple-flange hoops, and the toms are equipped with the same YESS mounts seen on high-end Yamaha models. The four-piece kit with a matching snare in this review sells for \$1,199.

LOOK FAMILIAR?

The matte metallic black set on review here may have you wondering, *Where have I seen that kit before?* The Lexus car company handpicked these slick-looking drums to star in one of its commercials—and showed the drums so much that it was hard to discern whether you were watching a Lexus commercial featuring Yamaha drums or vice versa.

In the world of musical instru-

ments, buying gear on looks alone can be a dangerous thing. Young players, however, are particularly eye-driven consumers, and with the matte finish options as a lure, Yamaha is sure to catch plenty of fish. Rock Tour kits call out to young, hard-rocking drummers who are perhaps initially preoccupied by how their kits fit their band's image more than by how they sound. Yamaha, of course, takes pride in producing quality instruments, so the company could not forsake upholding its standards.

In an effort to keep production costs down, Yamaha decided to research and produce the most popular sizes being used by young rock drummers. Instead of offering consumers the option of choosing any size and depth along with a multitude of finishes, the company scaled back the quantity in order to make the Rock Tour line more affordable. Then Yamaha dressed up the kits with looks that kill—and made them sound pretty killer too.

TRUE MAHOGANY SHELLS

Big leaf mahogany was chosen for the Rock Tour line because it's a true mahogany that's cost effective, and it can be harvested in a more environmentally conscious way. Grown in a managed forest in Indonesia, this particular wood is very hard. The hardness is said to increase the drums' projection. Another attractive quality is the warmth and body in the tone that comes from the hardness of the wood.

THE TONES

Without any muffling on the 18x22 kick, the ring was a bit overbearing, and the tone lacked focus. After I placed a pillow inside the drum and tuned both heads just tighter

than wrinkling, the clear Remo Powerstroke 3 batter head gave a nice slappy attack plus boxy sub-frequencies that I felt in my chest. Other tunings didn't yield better results, so I stuck with that one, which suited the intended rock/punk genre well enough. One word of warning, though, in regard to the bass drum claws: They do not retract, and thus the bottom spike is always exposed.

The 8x12 tom and 15x16 floor tom were equipped with Remo Pinstripe batter heads, and lower tunings again sounded best. There was an equal balance of attack and focused tones, with a lively presence but a short decay. The tone was firmly contained, which was especially useful when I played rolling 16th-note fills. The downside of the preferred lower tuning was a decreased stick response.

On most "affordable" kits I've played, the matching wood snares have been the least exciting of the bunch. Along those lines, the 6x14 matching big leaf mahogany snare on this kit was simply okay. The tone was constricted and, in general, not impressively expressive. When I cranked up the coated Ambassador batter head and applied some Moongel, however, a dry "crack" sat nicely over the punchy-sounding toms and kick.

CONCLUSION

The Rock Tour line is meant to cater to the young rock and/or punk drummer—an audience that Yamaha hasn't previously gone after with such vigor. The result is gratifying on the visual, aural, and economic fronts. But although the quality is present, the overall diversity and tonality of the Rock Tour models are unavoidably, if not intentionally, focused in their appeal.

yamahadrums.com

SPECIFIC LINEUP

Rock Tour drums are offered in a limited number of sizes, in order to keep production costs down and to reflect the setups that today's young rock drummers are commonly playing. The line includes 7x10, 8x12, and 9x13 rack toms; 13x14 and 15x16 floor toms; an 18x22, 10-lug bass drum; and either a matching 6x14, 10-lug snare or a 5¹/₂x14, 10-lug chromed steel version.



ROCK TOUR REBELS

To promote the spirit of the Rock Tour line, Yamaha hooked up four up-and-coming rock drummers in unsigned bands. These Rock Tour Rebels (from left, Fusebox Funk's Jeff "ByrDog" Byrd, Voodoo Glow Skulls' Chris Dalley, Ryan Peel Band's Ryan Peel, and Crane's Justin Sims) are taking Rock Tour kits on the road to help show off the sights and sounds of the new line.

ISTANBUL MEHMET

MC CONSTANTINOPLÉ JAZZ CYMBALS

by Thomas Wendt

A jazz drummer's signature is almost always found in his or her cymbal beat, and a special cymbal can help players in this genre convey their musical message most effectively. The artisans at the Istanbul Mehmet cymbal company understand this, and that's why they continue to make cymbals the old-fashioned way—by hand. Such a method produces instruments that have an identity all their own, and this especially holds true for Istanbul Mehmet's MC Constantinople Jazz line. Like so many of the drummers who play jazz, these cymbals are real characters.

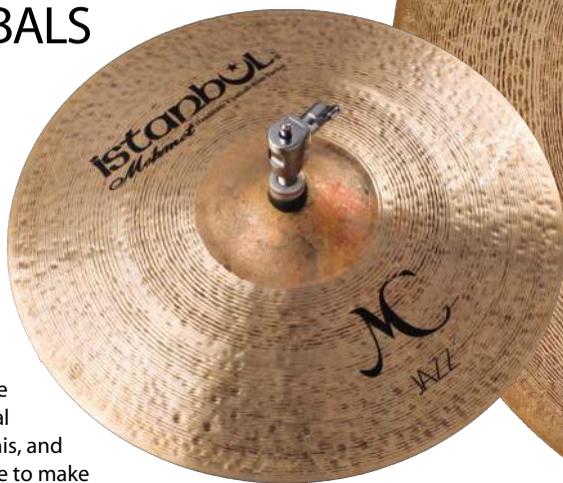
The line features a 22" ride, a 20" riveted ride, an 18" crash/ride, and 14" hi-hats. I thoroughly enjoyed playing and experimenting with these cymbals. I primarily used them with wood-tip sticks but also tried them with nylon tips as well. I played them in a variety of settings, including a vocal quartet (singer with piano, bass, and drums), a traditional quintet (two horns, piano, bass, and drums), a horn trio (trumpet, bass, and drums), a piano trio (piano, bass, and drums), a big band, and a Latin jazz quintet (tenor sax, guitar, congas, bass, and drums).

22" RIDE

To me the 22" ride was the most distinctive of the lot. It was extremely light, especially for such a large model. The stick definition was fantastic, and, when crashed, the cymbal had a beautiful low drone quality with a fairly quick decay. When I played time on the bow, the ride spoke with a low, dry stick tone. This cymbal worked very well in all of the groups

18" CRASH/RIDE

The 18" MC Jazz cymbal was quite versatile, and it really grew on me the more I played it. Even more than the others, it had a very dark and dry tone and a very fast decay when crashed. It was quite thin, but because of its good stick definition it worked well as a left-side crash/ride, reminding me a little of some of Mel Lewis's 18" left-side cymbals from the '80s. It also performed well as an auxiliary crash with the big band and would most likely work as a larger crash in a fusion setting.



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except the big band and the Latin jazz quintet. While its stick definition was great, I felt that with the big band the ride didn't have quite enough body to deal with all the sound produced by the ensemble.

I also noticed that at a fast tempo and a high volume, the overtones of the 22" ride became somewhat uneven and interfered with the continuity of the overall sound. This was perhaps because the cymbal is so thin.

The bell was rather small for a 22", and while it had a good sound, I found it lacked the projection needed to cut through the Latin jazz quintet. The cymbal performed beautifully in the other settings.

20" RIVETED RIDE

This model was not only my personal favorite of the lot but also the most versatile. While it worked well in all of the playing situations, it sounded best in the traditional quintet and piano trio. This medium-weight cymbal gave off fairly pronounced overtones. At lower volume levels, the overtones proved to be only slightly problematic. The stick tone was fairly low but still projected well in all of my testing situations.

I played this ride with and without the rivets, and it sounded good both ways. Without the rivets it could be played with brushes, working well behind an acoustic bass solo. I also found I could use the cymbal as either a left-side crash/ride or a main right-side ride. As with the 22", its stick definition was wonderful.

14" HI-HATS

The hi-hats proved to be my least favorite of the set. Both cymbals had a good general low tone but were very heavy (the bottom cymbal being extremely heavy). They were reminiscent of some of Jack DeJohnette's hi-hats of recent years. I had a difficult time getting a consistent sound from them. It seemed as if every time I pressed the pedal down I was getting a different sound. These hats, however, could work well in a fusion setting or, for that matter, in any harder-hitting situation. For most traditional jazz, though, they were just a bit too heavy and clunky sounding for my tastes.

OVERVIEW

In addition to their unique sounds, these MC Constantinople Jazz cymbals are aesthetically gorgeous. I received several compliments from other musicians on the bandstand about them. And despite some of my criticisms, I feel that their combination of a quality sound and a striking finish make them a great addition to Istanbul Mehmet's catalog.

And I wouldn't encourage only jazz players to check out these cymbals. Although MC Constantinople models are geared toward jazz, I believe that drummers in many different musical settings could enjoy them. Taking the time to really explore great instruments like these could only enhance and bring to life your playing and musical voice.

istanbulmehmet.com

REGAL TIP

PERFORMER SERIES AND YELLOW JACKET BRUSHES

by Thomas Wendt

For years Regal Tip has been producing some of the best wire brushes on the market, so it comes as no surprise to see that the company has delved into the arena of signature brushes. From the Performer series brush line, we have for review models designed by Jeff Hamilton, Clayton Cameron, and the late Ed Thigpen. Also reviewed here is the company's lightweight Yellow Jacket budget model.

Being an avid brush player who has used Regal Tip's classic telescoping rubber-handle model (583R) for years, I was very excited to give these newer brushes a try and to compare them with my longtime favorite. I found each of the pairs in this review to have a distinctive feel and unique characteristics that could suit many different kinds of players.

PERFORMER SERIES

First up was the non-telescoping Clayton Cameron model (593C). These brushes felt great right out of the box. The wires had good flexibility and a nice medium-size spread. The handles are slightly longer than those on most brush models, which gave the 593C the more balanced feel of a stick. Anyone familiar with Cameron's virtuosic style will understand why the drummer chose this type of design; quick multiple strokes (singles or doubles) are achieved a little easier with these brushes. The one thing that I didn't like about this model is that the entire handle isn't made of gum rubber—the base is plastic and has a round metal bead on the end. While this feature came in handy for achieving different sounds and effects on the drums, it somewhat limited the brushes' ease of use on cymbals, making it a bit difficult to play smooth swells. List price: \$40.

The late Ed Thigpen was one of the great brush masters of all time, so it makes perfect sense for Regal Tip to include him in the Performer brush series. Thigpen's model (584W) was my personal favorite of the lot.

The gauge and flexibility of the wires were great. The telescoping capabilities let me adjust the wire spread to my liking, and the desired spread stayed in place throughout a performance. The diameter of the handle on these is slightly wider than that of most brushes, allowing the player to relax the hands a bit. (When it comes to playing smoothly with brushes, staying relaxed is crucial.) While the handles on the Thigpen model are not all gum rubber—the base is wood—the brushes have the classic metal loop at the end of the push rod, making it possible to create a variety of cymbal accents and scrapes. List price: \$44.

Next I experimented with the Jeff Hamilton model (596R), which is similar to Regal Tip's Classic wire brush with a couple exceptions. First, the all-gum-rubber handle has a slightly wider diameter, and the wires are fairly stiff and fewer in number. While these brushes felt good to play, I had a difficult time obtaining the sweeping sound I wanted from them. The wires did become a little more flexible after a while, but I still had a tough time getting the desired sound. This stiffer feel is likely due to the fact that the wires are of a thicker gauge than those of the other models. I tend to dig my sweeping left hand into the drum a little more than a player like Hamilton does, so I need the wires to have a bit more flexibility. I understand, however, why the drummer designed this model the way

he did. His technique utilizes a lot of lateral strokes, and these brushes responded beautifully when used in that manner. When sweeping using just the tips of the brushes, I found a good high-pitched sound that worked very well in larger groups. I would also encourage pop-

and rock-oriented players to check out this model, as it could work well in more backbeat-style situations. List price: \$40.

CONCLUSION

Brushwork is very personal; every one of us has our own unique touch and way of playing. It's nice to see that a company that already touts some of the most tried-and-true brush models on the market has continued to come up with more options for those of us who still work at this increasingly rare art form.

regaltip.com



BUDGET-CONSCIOUS BRUSHES

Regal Tip's Yellow Jacket (575-YJ) is a lightweight, economical brush model with a standard gum rubber handle. These brushes can telescope to three different spread sizes. While they had a nice overall feel, I found them to be a little too lightweight for my personal taste. Also, the handles are a bit shorter than those on most other brushes. I found this model worked well in softer piano- or guitar-trio settings, but when more oomph was required I had a hard time getting them to respond the way I wanted. That said, these are possibly the best budget-line brushes I've played. List price: \$26.





Universal Percussion

The Drummer's Distributor

by Rick Van Horn

On the surface, Universal Percussion appears to be a pretty straightforward business. It is, in fact, America's largest exclusive distributor of percussion products. The company doesn't sell directly to consumers; instead it supplies retailers around the world with hundreds of percussion products offered by dozens of major manufacturers. If you bought a cymbal, a drum book, or even a pair of sticks recently, chances are good that your dealer obtained it from Universal.

But there's more to Universal than the term *distributor* would indicate. There's history: UP's background covers more than thirty-five years of trials and tribulations. There's mystery: An inscription written in the concrete driveway leading to UP's Columbiana, Ohio, warehouse reads, "The 3rd Return From The Ashes, 9/98." There's innovation: In addition to stocking all major brands, Universal offers several of its own lines of high-quality yet affordable drums, cymbals, heads, bags, and accessories. And above all, there's personality: Universal Percussion is a company full of genuine, friendly, and knowledgeable people, starting at the top.

HISTORY

Universal Percussion's story begins in 1976, when a young drummer named Tom Shelley graduated from high school in Youngstown, Ohio. With a combina-

tion of youthful enthusiasm, optimism, and naiveté, he took \$1,000 that he'd saved from the drumming gigs he'd played while in school and opened his own 400-square-foot drum shop. He called it the Technical Labs Drum Dept.

Things started slowly. Shelley's first customer was also his second customer—with twenty days between visits. But Shelley persevered, and eventually his little business grew. He added product lines, did repairs and drum recovering, and offered lessons given by local teachers.

Shelley also began making drums in the back of the shop, starting with Cannon toms. These were 8"-diameter single-head melodic drums available in four deep-shell sizes. They were the first such design in the industry, and they proved popular enough for Shelley to start wholesaling them to music stores. This led to the creation of Cannon snare drums, which Shelley made using Keller shells and Fibes throw-offs. "We sold a lot of those snares," Tom recalls. "I think I personally built five or six thousand drums."

MYSTERY

Things went well for Shelley's fledgling drum shop until April 1978. "I had [legendary jazz drummer] Tony Williams coming in for a clinic," Tom recalls. "The night before the clinic was to happen, my shop was firebombed. I lost everything,

and I had no insurance."

What Shelley did have was determination. He applied for a loan from the Cleveland office of the Small Business Administration and got his business back on its feet. Within three years he was again operating as a retailer and a small-time manufacturer. Things were looking up—until late in 1981, when the shop was firebombed again. (No perpetrator was ever discovered for these attacks.)

But Shelley was determined not to let anyone or anything keep him from realizing his dream. "I hung a big banner in the window announcing our 'Return From The Ashes' sale," he recalls. "I was telling the world that nobody was going to put me out of business."

INNOVATION

Not only did Shelley not go out of business, he expanded. His father—himself an important figure in UP history—suggested that if Tom could sell Cannon toms and snare drums to dealers, they could probably also sell other brand lines at the same time. "In 1977, I started selling LP cowbells and accessories and Fibes drumsticks," Shelley says. "Over the next few years I added a lot of other product lines, including Pro-Mark and Regal Tip sticks. I was one of the first to distribute Evans heads, and I can still remember asking Vic Firth if I could carry his line of sticks. At that time Vic

was selling sticks out of his house. I remember calling Vic Firth Inc. and asking the person who answered the phone if I could speak with Vic. The reply was, "Speaking!"

While he was expanding the range of brands that he offered to dealers, Shelley was also developing his Cannon line of accessories. In 1978, he was one of the first to start putting drum parts in clear plastic bags with branded header cards so drummers could see the parts hanging in the shops. "Up until that time," Tom says, "parts like wing nuts, tension rods, and cymbal sleeves were all stuck in drawers in the back rooms of stores."

Over the years the Cannon line grew to include affordable drums, stands, hardware, and an extensive range of accessories and parts. Developing all of these products required Shelley to travel to Taiwan, China, and various international trade shows, and he had to air-freight samples to and from the factories. "Most of the products were made to my personal specs," Shelley says. "It was a lot of work, but I did it because I loved it. And I still do."

Beyond the Cannon line, Shelley saw an opportunity to develop other proprietary products. In 1994, he introduced Attack drumheads—an affordable yet high-quality line made overseas to his specifications. Shelley also worked with the makers of the legendary Wuhan Chinese cymbals to develop a Western-style cymbal series, and he partnered with the famed drum-bag designer Fred Beato to create a collection of bags made in China, which UP distributes exclusively, along with Beato's U.S.-made bags.

All of this development led to growth that has turned Universal Percussion from

a small retail/manufacturing operation into a multi-million-dollar distribution business. That business relocated to its present 53,000-square-foot headquarters in Columbiana in 1998...following yet a *third* suspicious fire in Youngstown. (Hence the "3rd Return From The Ashes" inscription in the driveway.)

The new facility allowed Universal to further expand its product offerings. Expansion has continued since the building opened, and today the warehouse shelves are filled with more than 7,000 items from dozens of major manufacturers, such as Danmar, Hot Sticks, Keller, Ludwig, Mike Balter, Pro-Mark, Regal Tip, Rhythm Tech, Trick, Vater, and Vic Firth. Recent additions to UP's offerings include Remo drumheads and percussion instruments, Premier drums, Zildjian cymbals, DW hardware and pedals, Toca and LP percussion, and Tama hardware.

PERSONALITY

To Tom Shelley, operating Universal Percussion is more than a way of doing business. It's quite simply a way of life. And it's extremely personal. "When I think about business relationships," Shelley says, "I think of them as friendships. I can't think of one company or key customer that I don't have a long-standing personal relationship with."

Tom's father, William Shelley, was a major figure in UP's business until his passing in January 1998. "In 1977, I had just started making drums in my shop," Tom remembers. "The steel mill that my dad worked in closed. He was only fifty, so he didn't have enough time in to collect a pension. I made him a vice president and a major stockholder in my business, so he

had a place to hang his hat again. From that point forward my dad and I, along with Jim Bickley, built UP one product at a time."

In mentioning Universal vice president of sales Jim Bickley, Shelley introduces yet another key personality in UP's history. Citing Bickley's contribution to that history, Shelley says, "When I first opened my drum shop thirty-five years ago, Jim was one of my first customers. Shortly thereafter, he asked me if I'd consider hiring him to teach. I did, and Jim proved his dedication by driving forty minutes just to teach one student. He also worked part time in the store for three dollars an hour plus a small commission.

"Things were pretty lean for both of us for the first ten years," Shelley continues. "Jim and I shared an apartment then, and we were like *The Odd Couple*. I was Oscar. A normal day for us was to work at the shop, go out to eat together, and then play gigs until 3 A.M. Some nights we'd drink coffee and BS until dawn...then sleep a couple of hours and go back to work at the shop."

When Shelley closed his retail store to concentrate on UP, he asked Bickley to stay on and help him develop the new business. Jim's been at Tom's side ever since. "Success in business is all about relationships," Shelley says. "Not just with your customers and your suppliers, but also with your employees. At Universal we have a genuine family relationship, and I'm very grateful to have such a wonderful family!"

For more, visit universalpercussion.com.



Rob Mazzei



Why work to understand other instruments when it's hard enough to unlock the intricacies and mystery of the drums? Surely there's a lifetime of records, books, and video clips that we can immerse ourselves in, studying the drumming of our heroes and looking forward to that day when we're finally "good."

But as the accomplished all-around musicians surveyed in this piece make clear, having a working knowledge of

Understanding Other Instruments

music theory and a certain level of proficiency on another instrument can open up whole new *worlds* for our drumming—and create exciting new opportunities for musical contribution and expression.

Drummers Phil Puleo (Cop Shoot Cop, Swans), Nick D'Virgilio (Spock's Beard, Cirque Du Soleil), and 2011 *MD Pro Panel* member Peter Erskine come from different musical backgrounds, but all share an important commonality: They understand the role of other instruments, and they use that wisdom to broaden the scope of their drumming and compositions. Here they tell us about the many varied ways that their interest in instruments beyond the drums has affected what they do at the kit.

by Ilya Stemkovsky

E.J. DeCoste



PETER ERSKINE

MD: Was there an instrument besides the drums that you gravitated toward?

Peter: Everything percussive was interesting to me. When I was younger, thanks in part to watching Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts on TV, I wanted to be a symphonic percussionist. I studied xylophone, vibraphone, and eventually marimba. I was also taking piano lessons, so I gained a rudimentary knowledge of the keyboard. All that fed my appetite for what would become my great interest in synthesizers. Being in Weather Report, it was natural that my interest would only grow, working alongside Josef Zawinul. The more you know, the more you know.

MD: When scoring music, do you separate the drummer from the composer?

Peter: For me, no, there's no separation. It's all music, and I try to compose even when I play the drums. That said, obviously coming up with a melody is different from coming up with a beat, as melodic as the beat may be. I wish I knew more about harmony. But the limitations have their usefulness too. Necessity is the mother of invention, so if you don't have a lot of skills, then you don't have a lot of licks. It forms a slightly more direct line from the heart to the page.

Zawinul gave me great advice. He told me to try writing in keys I wasn't comfortable in. Then I'd discover chordal possibilities or tonal things I wouldn't have thought of. I utilize that when I can't manage it all intellectually—it's a nice rolling of the dice.

MD: Let's talk about theater scoring.
Peter: As a writer, I don't have the skills of those I admire. But the written word or poetry is my favorite way to get the creative juices flowing. For a play we put on recently called *Crimes Of The Heart*, as soon as I got the script I sat down at the keyboard and immediately a song came out. You have to trust the text. The text is an invitation to create. For a while I was also dabbling in haiku, seeing if that might spark some musical flights of fancy.

And how do you get better? Practice. Purely mechanical, building-up-megachops practice is okay for some things. But I'm interested in musicians really putting thought into what they do and going for these specific results, either compositional or improvisational or playing.

MD: What have you learned from the multitude of great artists you've worked with regarding instrumental proficiency?

Peter: I've sounded good when I've played with musicians who were bet-

ter. Someone once asked me how my playing had changed over the years. My answer surprised me. I said that when I was younger, I played as if my life depended on it. And maybe now I play as if someone else's life depends on it.

MD: How can drummers open themselves up to be inspired by non-drummer-centric music besides simply listening or appreciating?

Peter: But listening really is the answer—to classical music like Bach or Mozart. I ask my students to internalize and own a piece of music they hear, maybe some post-bop solos from Freddie Hubbard. Some will transcribe it, and some I'll ask to be able to sing along and tap it on their thighs. It sharpens their hearing, so they can get what the other musicians are doing and weave that into their drumming. It isn't everyone on separate ski slopes trying to race to the bottom of the hill. And if they can't identify intervals and scales, we don't do a whole lot on the drums until they pass basic ear training.

MD: That'll get them good at understanding other instruments.

Peter: Understanding chordal instruments like keyboard or guitar gives you a greater opportunity to understand the harmonic structure of the songs you're playing. In bands, I'd be envious after a gig when the other players would talk about tonal centers and how they were playing in different keys. I thought I was missing a lot by not speaking that language.

To people who say, "You don't need to know how to read," I say, "Why promote illiteracy?" And when playing drums, if you really pay attention to the music, you should never be stumped as to what to play. The music will never lie to you.

MD: Ever feel prejudice from other musicians, as if drummers should just stick to drums? And is it a constant struggle to "prove yourself"?

Peter: No. I saw musicians really blossom when they got into songwriting. Michael Brecker, Tony Williams... I never saw Tony happier than when he talked about studying composition. When I got to New York and wanted to

Our Contributors



Peter Erskine is one of the most sought-after and recorded drummers of the past thirty years. His unique touch, fluidity, and inimitable musical approach have graced albums and concert stages with the likes of Stan Kenton, Maynard Ferguson, Steps Ahead, Steely Dan, and the Yellowjackets. In Weather Report, Erskine and legendary bassist Jaco Pastorius formed one of the all-time great rhythm sections. Besides leading his own groups, producing instructional texts and videos, and teaching at USC, Peter composes scores for film and theater, including Shakespeare plays.



Phil Puleo is equally at home playing rock grooves on a standard kit and banging on sheets of metal or playing hammered dulcimer. After achieving some acclaim with the industrial group Cop Shoot Cop, Puleo went on to tour and record with Swans and Angels Of Light. He also scores soundtracks and composes music, some of which was used in a Nike TV commercial. Phil is currently on tour with a re-formed Swans.



Nick D'Virgilio's powerful, technical drumming is a perfect fit for the acclaimed progressive rock group Spock's Beard. Since 2002, D'Virgilio has also sung lead vocals and played guitar and keys for live Spock's performances. He's played with Tears For Fears and ex-Zappa guitarist Mike Keneally, and, alongside drummer Nir Z, he recorded with Genesis on *Calling All Stations*. Beyond his busy schedule with Spock's Beard, solo projects, and clinics, Nick plays in touring productions for Cirque Du Soleil.

contribute tunes, the guys were open to it. It helps to have kindness and encouragement around you.

PHIL PULEO

MD: Were you always interested in other instruments besides the drums?

Phil: After I'd played a conventional kit in college, Cop Shoot Cop took me into a more "percussionist" style of drumming, where I'd stand and play. It made my beats different from my contemporaries'. The kick was set up like a large floor tom, and I had an actual cafeteria hot dog pot among other bits of metal, all hanging from a cage. After Cop, I began to play more tonal instruments in bands like Swans and on my own work.

MD: Is that when you began expanding your sonic palette to include other instruments like hammered dulcimer and world flutes?

Phil: I chose the hammered dulcimer after Swans leader Michael Gira wanted some tone percussion for the 1995–96 tour. I would swipe all the strings with a guitar pick while pounding on a mounted kick with my other hand. Later I experimented with instruments from Autoharp to Casiotone keys to flutes and harmonicas. I'd try different textures and melodies.

It didn't matter that I wasn't a master. If the sound I made fit, we'd use it. I'm not a virtuoso. I know my limits and play enough to fit the music. I'm a minimalist, and that affords me the ability to play almost any instrument that I can make a sound with.

MD: How have MIDI and other modern technology changed the way you orchestrate or compose?

Phil: Composing is an additive and subtractive process for me. Computers make it easier to try different things—maybe even too easy. It's hard to stop. [laughs] I'm not crazy about MIDI instrument sound quality, and I don't like getting bogged down with production, so usually I bring a song to a point where I think I need real players and a kick-ass producer. So technology and MIDI are a big help in composing, but not so much for the

finished product.

I do, however, learn new tricks, so getting better at production is a goal. My newest MIDI sound is a Turkish spike fiddle, which I try to play staccato along with violins, making it more lively and quirky, since my intonation and bowing aren't perfect yet. It sounds very primitive, which I love. As for MIDI drums, I hate them, which is why my solo work doesn't have any drums! Sometimes I'll loop real drum tracks and pitch them down or up, just to add a little more character to the sound.

MD: When composing, do you separate your harmonic brain from your rhythmic/drummer brain?

Phil: Yes, but sometimes I try avoiding drums altogether—although songs that begin with drums tend to be more alive than songs that start in other ways. I do wish I'd learned to read music and play piano. I think that would help me compose faster.

MD: What's your relationship with

other instruments live? Do you switch or improvise?

Phil: For the latest Swans tour, I'm playing drums and dulcimer. So there's really no chance to switch instruments. It would be nearly impossible for the drums, which hold the main groove, to drop out in order to play an improv dulcimer solo! [laughs] Also, keeping the mood of a song is important. "Improv without wanking" is a good rule. [Swans percussionist] Thor Harris and I also play off each other, as he doubles or counters what I do—although he does have more toys and varied parts in this band than I do. We set up so close that we can play each other's cymbals.

MD: Ever feel prejudice from other musicians, as if drummers should just stick to drums? And is it a constant struggle to "prove yourself"?

Phil: Yes. But I do feel fortunate that my bandmates recognized my unique style, and that my rhythms helped them write their parts. I do feel the



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Kim Thompson / Beyoncé

need to prove myself, since in bands I'd come up with the beats, not necessarily the "music."

I do think the important thing is how you use other instruments at the level you can play them. Turkish ney, spike fiddle, banjo—I can't play them, but I use them, as Bill Bruford describes, as "tone colors." I think anyone with a good ear can pick up any instrument and get good results if they think simply and listen. Work with what you have in an interesting way.

NICK D'VIRGILIO

MD: Ever feel prejudice from other musicians—as if drummers should just stick to drums? And is it a constant struggle to "prove yourself"?

Nick: No, I don't feel prejudice at all. Most drummers want to play other instruments—Marco Minnemann plays great guitar, and Virgil Donati plays great piano. It widens your horizons as a drummer to understand what these instruments are doing. You learn

about how songs are created and built from the ground up.

If you look at some old piece by Rachmaninoff and try to play the rhythms with just two sticks, it's seriously hard. Bring that over to a kit, and it expands the vocabulary of your music. Even at my drum clinics, I'll play something on guitar and explain that drummers should learn another instrument. And you don't have to be the guy in the back. If you hear the bassist playing a wrong note somewhere, it helps when you understand that. It makes life a lot easier.

MD: Did you always play other instruments?

Nick: My brother taught me some chords on guitar when I was young, and then I started learning Led Zeppelin riffs. We also had a piano in the house, so I'd learn by ear. But I always loved the sound and feel of the guitar, so I was pulled toward that quite a bit. I was also jealous of guitarists being out front and rocking out.

MD: Did you feel prepared to assume all those other duties in Spock's Beard in 2002?

Nick: By that time I had taken guitar and piano more seriously, and my ability to read and write music had jumped a millionfold since I was a kid. I had more understanding of theory, which you really should know if you want to write music. So it did make the transition easier to become the utility guy I am now.

MD: What's your songwriting process like for Spock's Beard or solo work? Do you start with drum grooves, or are you composing on guitar or keys?

Nick: Really it's a combination of all three, depending on the track. It mostly starts on guitar, though, where you can come up with a chord progression. I don't hear vocal melodies when I'm playing a drum groove—more riff-based stuff, and I'll think of a bass line and expand on it. On guitar, though, a melody will be the first thing to come to mind, not necessarily drumbeats.

MD: Spock's Beard has multiple guitars and keyboards on stage at once. How do you avoid clutter?

Nick: That's tough with this band. In the studio it's very easy to layer stuff. It's hard for our keyboardist to play everything live. And I'm mostly the rhythm guitar player, but I also do lead and harmony lines, and I have a keyboard where I play pads and fill in the parts he can't. And we try not to use any backing tracks. I get to dive into many different things in one night's work.

For my Cirque Du Soleil gig, these acrobats are doing triple half-gainers on a little piece of wood. But it's circus drumming—I'm watching the show, and I must be musical while hitting a crash when they do a trick. I have to be on my toes and make it exciting for the audience.

MD: Do you practice other instruments with the same fervor as drums?

Nick: I actually enjoy it. You can just be in your bed with a guitar and practice scales and picking technique. It helps me get to another level. But I still play more drums.



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Sharon Jones & the Dap-Kings' Homer Steinweiss

Story by Patrick Berkery
Photos by Paul La Raia

How a wise drum teacher, an unusual neurological condition, and a deep obsession with classic soul and funk combined to make for **one of the grooviest young drummers on the scene.**

You don't really think "modern" drummer when you come across Homer Steinweiss. The Dap-Kings timekeeper is a throwback, possessing a sound, style, and work ethic similar to that of legendary soul and R&B house drummers of the '60s, like Pistol Allen and Uriel Jones at Motown or Al Jackson Jr. at Stax.

You most definitely *do* think "funky" drummer upon hearing Steinweiss's work, though. For nearly a decade, the New York City native has been laying it down in the tradition of those aforementioned drumming giants, for Sharon Jones & the Dap-Kings, the funk/soul/R&B ensemble whose fan base and musical scope have expanded with each new release—as have Homer's skills.

Steinweiss's feel on the group's early single "Genuine"—a repetitive James Brown-style funk song—is totally appropriate. But you can hear that Homer and the Dap-Kings were still trying to reconcile their roots with their

creative aspirations. Drop the needle anywhere on last year's *I Learned The Hard Way* album, however, and you'll hear a band and a drummer who've found their own thing. The grooves maintain their slippery stutter, but Steinweiss supplies a smoother foundation for Jones's brassy voice, the soaring horns, and the sweet background vocals.

"The group started out kind of like a funk band—playing James Brown-style stuff with a little bit of soul," the thirty-one-year-old Steinweiss says. "And since high school I considered myself a funk drummer. But the more we traveled and listened to music, the more the collective taste of the band widened.

"I really started to develop my skills as a drummer when we went on the road," Homer goes on. "I had some natural talent; I'd been practicing and had played with a band. But I didn't actually get to be able to play with chops and hold steady grooves until I was on tour for like a year. Then I felt like a different drummer."

While playing with the Dap-Kings occupies much of Steinweiss's time, it's hardly his entire workload. Homer serves as the house drummer for many artists on the Dap-Kings' label, Daptone, in addition to co-owning his own soul- and R&B-rooted label and studio, Dunham Records and Dunham Studios.

And since the producer Mark Ronson used the Dap-Kings on Amy Winehouse's 2007 breakthrough album, *Back To Black*, Steinweiss has become an in-demand session drummer, recording with Sheryl Crow, Al Green, Cee Lo, and most recently on Ronson's own cut-and-paste masterpiece, *Record Collection*.

Amazingly, Steinweiss has been keeping this busy pace for the last year-plus while suffering from the neurological condition focal dystonia. In layman's terms it means the brain isn't telling a muscle or group of muscles what to do, resulting in undesirable muscular contractions. In Steinweiss's case, his right foot was affected to the point where it simply wasn't able to work the kick pedal. So he bought a double pedal, kept his hi-hat clamped shut, and began using his left foot as his primary kick foot.

"It's something that happened over a long period of time," the drummer explains. "Every once in a while my right foot started feeling weird. I kept practicing, and it just was not getting better. It got to a point where I was doing sessions and gigging all the time, and one day I just said, 'Guys, I can't work right now—my right foot feels weird.' I bought a double bass pedal, stuck it on there, and within a week I

was back at it—no one noticed. I'm kind of shocked that it worked. I'm a left-foot drummer now."

MD caught up with Steinweiss as he was resting both feet during some rare downtime before the Dap-Kings' pre-Christmas Australian dates.

MD: Using your left foot on the double pedal and keeping the hi-hat closed, don't you miss the kicks where you open and close the hi-hat? That's a foundational element of a lot of soul and funk drumming.

Homer: Yeah, I miss that every once in a while. But honestly, I like things being taken away. When I sit down at a drumset and I don't like the way some-thing sounds, I just remove that drum.

That's just part of my thing. I'm a minimalist. Taking away that element of my drumming makes a lot of other things open up. I feel I had gotten into this habit of opening up the hi-hat every time I would go into a fill, just to make some noise. I think through my fills a lot more now.

MD: What do you do with your right foot?

Homer: For a long time it was just this sad little right foot that didn't do anything. Now it's starting to get some of its skills back. So I basically have been learning just a couple of really subtle double bass things

where I'll be like, "ba-boom-boom," but using the left and right on the "ba-boom" instead of doubling up on the left.

MD: Do you intend to get back to using your right foot on the kick?

Homer: I don't know. This style is really feeling good. Even the guys in the band say, "Ever since you went to the left foot, your time got better." I've thought about doing a double bass drum thing, with two different tones. I've thought about turning the drumset left-handed and playing completely open, so I can open the hi-hat with my right foot. But my right foot is such a weird thing. It's hard to say if and when it will be better.

MD: What are your roots as a drummer?

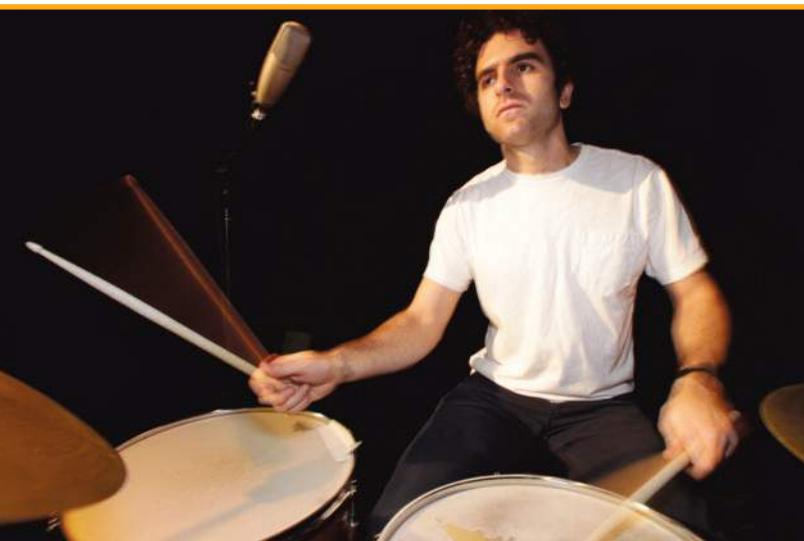
HOMER'S SETUP



"I use vintage Ludwig kits," Steinweiss says. "The one in the picture is from '62 or '63. Not sure of the model, as I think it's a bit of a transition drum for Ludwig. My studio kit is a Ludwig Club Date, with a 20" bass drum, a 12" rack tom, a 16" floor tom, and a 14" Acrolite snare. My cymbals are all vintage '60s Zildjian A: 14" hi hats, 18" crash, 20" ride. My hardware includes a Ludwig flat-base cymbal stand, a Pearl snare stand, a Yamaha hi-hat stand, and a DW 5000 double bass pedal. My sticks are Vater Cymbal Stick series with teardrop tips—best sticks ever—and my heads are Remo coated Ambassadors on top and clear Ambassadors on the bottom. My cases include a custom Glenn Cronkhite 20" leather cymbal bag and XL Protec Classic series hard cases."

INFLUENCES

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HOMER STEINWEISS

Homer: My parents are both musicians. When I was around nine or ten they said I should play an instrument, and they asked what I wanted to play. I wanted to play the congas. So they got me a conga drum and I took a couple lessons, and that was kind of the beginning. Around ten or eleven I decided I wanted to play the drumset, so my parents got me lessons with this guy who had me on the pad doing things like paradiddles for a year. Then I took lessons until I was around fifteen with Matt Patuto [author of *Drum Set Systems* and an *MD* contributor]. Through him, I learned how to play drumset, and my parents eventually bought me a Pearl Export kit.

MD: And you grew up in Manhattan, where it's kind of hard to have a kit in your house.

Homer: Exactly. My parents owned a brownstone at the time, and we put the kit in this big room on the second floor. It was so loud in there, and I didn't know how to tune it. I thought, *This is going to be a disaster*. But we lived right next door to this famous

crazy artist, Louise Bourgeois, and she supposedly was inspired by the sound of my drums, so we really didn't get any complaints.

MD: Were your influences taking shape then?

Homer: My first big drumset influence was probably Dave Grohl when I was in seventh or eighth grade—I was Nirvana all the way. Soundgarden, Nirvana, all those guys. I'd bring the records to Matt and say, "Can you teach me how to play 'Smells Like Teen Spirit'?" And he'd say, "I'll teach you this, but you also have to learn *this*," and he'd make me buy *The Best Of Booker T & The MGs* and learn "Green Onions" or something. Just learn how to play "boom-whack, boom-whack" without playing any fills. Looking back on it, he hooked me up.

MD: So you were already gravitating toward R&B and soul at a young age?

Homer: I think so. I remember really specifically learning "Green Onions" during my formative drumming years and thinking, *This shit is badass*. Matt would give me James Brown tapes, all

this stuff. So by the time I was fourteen, I was trying to learn Meters and James Brown drumbeats. I was playing "Cissy Strut"...I probably still can't play that beat correctly, but I figured it out. I learned the "Mother Popcorn" beat, learned all that stuff on the snare drum and started doing those ghost strokes all the time. I was absorbing all that stuff in high school, listening to it day in and day out.

MD: You apply the ghost-stroke feel to some of your 16th-note patterns on the hi-hat, like on "If You Call" from *I Learned The Hard Way*.

Homer: Yeah, it's my favorite thing to play. You hear it on a lot of old James Brown and Joe Tex records. I could play that all day.

MD: You achieve a really crisp old-school drum sound on the records you play on. Is that a combination of the kit you're using, your touch, and the mic placement?

Homer: I like to think of it that way—that synthesis of the drumset, the way that I play, and the way the mics are placed. I would say the drumset would

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probably be the least important thing. I love vintage drums. I love my '60s Ludwig kits. But some of these records are not necessarily recorded on old drums. They're recorded on drums we think sound good. We put the mics in the right place, and I just play.

I like to think that I have a tone on the set. We usually use only one or two mics on the kit, so I have to balance everything. It has to be balanced to a place where they're not going to tweak the levels or the general volume of the bass drum or snare drum.

MD: Even though some of the work you've done with Mark Ronson is a little more "on the grid" in terms of the production, as far as your role goes, is he still just capturing you playing drums in a room?

Homer: Exactly. We're at my studios, he's got a few mics up on the kit, and we're just recording, mostly straight to tape. But then he'll do a lot of additional production. He's adding a lot of stuff afterwards. I'm not exactly sure how all those songs [on *Record Collection*] were finished.

MD: Did you have any idea of how the songs were going to end up sounding in terms of melody?

Homer: Actually, no. A lot of times we were just trying to develop a really cool rhythm-section part that left space for a melody. In that case you've just got to play as badass a rhythm track as you can and hope it works with the melody.

MD: You're clearly a well-versed student of the soul, R&B, and funk genres. Beyond absorbing the music, have you spent a lot of time evaluating what's different about certain drummers' styles, guys like Al Jackson, Pistol Allen, and Zigaboo Modeliste?

Homer: Definitely. I love the way Al Jackson didn't play any bullshit on records. He just played badass grooves that everyone could dance to. The Motown guys, it was just crazy the way they played and the sound they got on those records. Then the New Orleans thing was a huge influence on me because of Zig and the Eddie Bo records with James Black; it came from that second-line/jazz tradition.

Rock 'n' roll drumming was also a

huge influence. Even though I'm a soul/funk drummer, the musicality of the way Ringo Starr played was a huge influence on the way I play. Even though I'm always playing soul beats, I'm thinking, *What would Ringo do right here?*

MD: You do a nice job of fusing the simplicity of Al Jackson's backbeats, the busy-ness of the James Brown stuff, and that real funky swing Zigaboo has.

Homer: Thanks. I try to be an amalgam of those different styles. There's something unique I pull out from each, and I try to form my own thing from that. I remember Phillippe Lehman, who owned Desco Records [home to Steinweiss's pre-Dap-Kings band the Mighty Imperials], said, "You know, if the Meters covered all the James Brown songs and James Brown covered all the Meters songs, it would be awesome." So I think about that. How can I mix these two styles up?



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Camille Gainer Jones

Whether playing four-on-the-floor old-school soul, laying down a hot salsa groove, or swinging hard on a brisk bebop tune, **she's always at home on the kit, providing a strong rhythmic foundation in whatever situation she's called to.**

Story by Stephen Styles
Photos by Rob Mazzella



Growing up in Queens, New York, Camille Gainer Jones soaked up a wealth of musical history and drumming experience from legendary players like Omar Hakim and Lenny White, who happened to live in her neighborhood. At the same time, she was developing a strong sense of musicality and playing for the song by copying the original drum parts on records from her father's extensive collection of funk, R&B, and disco. Later, she became a student of the legendary jazz drummer Michael Carvin, a pivotal experience that she's still growing from.

With a career that includes serving her country in the U.S. Army band and backing artists such as Roberta Flack, Tom Brown, Roy Ayers, and James "JT" Taylor, plus producing tracks for Def Jam, teaching at Drummers Collective in New York City, running a private teaching studio, producing the instructional DVD *The Adventures Of Drummette.com*, releasing her first CD as a leader, coming out with a signature GMS snare, and penning two new books, Gainer Jones is a prime example of what it means to stay fresh, focused, and in demand.

MD: You seem to have carved out a great niche for yourself, between playing gigs and sessions, touring, and teaching. How have you managed to stay so busy?

Camille: I believe that it's important to work hard and to try not to put too many eggs in one basket. Early in my career, I realized that regardless of which artist I'm working for at any particular time, no one else owes me a living except for me. I have to rely on myself to earn that living. Shows can get canceled, the artist may become ill, or any other number of things can happen that equal not going out on tour. But life keeps moving, bills keep coming, so I work hard to promote myself, book my own gigs when I'm home, and maintain a steady teaching schedule. This helps to ensure that I'm staying active, giving back, and earning an income.

RECORDINGS

AS DRUMMER: Steve Coleman Drop Kick /// Antonio Hart Ama Tu Sonrisa /// Fresh Band Come Back Lover /// Marc Cary & Indigenous People Unite /// Jaine Rogers Under Your Skin /// LaChanze Love /// Mark Adams Asceticism /// Arianne Whyte Arianne Whyte /// Cornelius Claudio Kreusch Scoop, Live At The Blue Note /// **AS PRODUCER:** Fu2 "Boomin' In Ya Jeep" /// Black Pack "Black Pack" /// 2PAC "When We Ride On Our Enemies" (remix) /// Dead Prez "Police State" (remix) /// Jay-Z "Threat" (remix) /// Cassidy "Freestyle" (remix) /// Various Attic Beatz Vol. 1 & 2, The Funky Presidents, G-Clef Meets The Funky Drummer Vol. 1 and 2

INFLUENCES

Elvin Jones, Philly Joe Jones, Chris Dave, Steve Jordan, Tony Williams, Dennis Chambers, Jerome "Bigfoot" Brailey, Eric Harland, Marvin McQuitty, Terri Lyne Carrington, Will Kennedy, Al Jackson Jr., Brian Frasier-Moore, James "Diamond" Williams, George Brown, Fred White, the RZA

MD: You've managed to hold the drum chair for several great artists that tour extensively. What has been the secret to keeping a touring gig?

Camille: A lot of it is based on relationships and professionalism. That applies both to touring and doing local gigs. People say it's all about who you know. There's some truth to that, but it's also about who knows you. Whether it's a touring gig or a

local gig, I strive to show professionalism by learning the music, having the right gear for the job, and being on time for everything—rehearsal, dinner, lobby call, etc.

As people get to know you, those kinds of things matter. Once you earn their trust and respect, they'll keep you in mind. If they don't have anything happening, they'll refer you when someone else is looking

Camille's Kit



Drums: GMS Special Edition in "snappin' apple" finish
A. 6x13 Camille Gainer signature snare
B. 7x10 tom
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D. 14x14 floor tom
E. 14x16 floor tom
F. 18x20 bass drum
G. 7x12 snare
H. 5½x14 snare (natural maple finish)

Heads: Evans coated Genera Dry main snare batter, EC Reverse Dot side-snare batters, and Hazy 300 bottoms; clear EC2 tom batters and EC Resonant bottoms; and clear EMAD bass drum batter and EMAD Resonant front head

Cymbals: Sabian
1. 13" HHX Groove Hats
2. 16" HHX Evolution crash
3. 18" HHX Evolution O-Zone crash
4. 16" AAX O-Zone crash
5. 17" HHX Legacy crash
6. 10" AAX O-Zone splash
7. 8" AAX splash
8. 20" HHX Evolution ride
9. 16" HHX Evolution crash
10. 16" AAX Evolution O-Zone crash
Not shown: 16" HH Chinese

Sticks: Vic Firth AJ1 or 5A

Electronics: Propellerhead Reason and Toontrack EZdrummer and Superior 2.0 software, OnBoard Research Beatnik Rhythmic Analyzer practice pad

for a player. That's how I've gotten a lot of work. Sometimes it comes from people hearing me when I'm playing with an artist, and then they reach out to me to work with them. Sometimes it's a product of networking and staying in contact with people. It comes in different ways, and it's all a blessing.

MD: Let's talk about your approach to some of the standout tracks you've worked on. For example, you show impressive jazz chops on Cornelius Claudio Kreusch's *Live At The Blue Note*. [This album is not currently available, but Gainer Jones has posted some tracks on her website.] One tune that really sticks out is "McBee." It opens with a fast bebop swing pattern. How did you develop your straight-ahead technique?

Camille: Over the years I've practiced to a lot of jazz records featuring players like Philly Joe Jones, Billy Hart, Arthur Taylor, and Michael Carvin. Listening and playing with records helps with learning the style. It also helps build endurance. If a song has a real fast tempo, I don't try to think at the speed of the tune. Say the tune is 180 bpm; I try to think half of that, which is 90 bpm. It's much easier to subdivide, comp, and keep up with everything at that rate.

MD: Your approach to "Fodumbe" on that same record is a cool, energetic take on a familiar ride/snare pattern. Can you share how you built your parts on that track?

Camille: The pattern is based on the double paradiddle. [See sidebar at right.] I split the parts between the snare and hi-hat, with a strong backbeat on the snare. A lot of the notes are played as grace notes, but I move the accents around to kind of keep it moving and push the



"FODUMBE"

MUSIC KEY

H.H.

S.D.

B.D.

Here's Gainer Jones's drum part from Cornelius Claudio Kreusch's "Fodumbe," as heard live with the pianist at the Blue Note. To download a free copy of the song, and to download Camille's instructional DVD, *The Adventures Of Drummette.com*, go to camillegainer1.blogspot.com.

groove along. The bass drum alternates between locking into the bass player's part and lining up with the right hand of the paradiddle pattern. Because everyone is playing busy, I did my best to add color to the tune while still holding the groove together.

MD: On the Jaine Rogers album *Under Your Skin* you do some really cool brushwork on "Monday."

Camille: Thank you. When I first heard the track, I immediately felt brushes were called for. But I didn't want to use the traditional swing brush pattern. Instead I played a counterclockwise circle, but I'd pick up the brushes between 11 and 7 o'clock on the drum at each pass. I did all my comping with the left hand instead of the right, and all the comping was tied to the bass line instead of the melody, which I think added a slightly different energy.

MD: Your phrasing, especially when you're playing big fills, has a unique looseness to it. It almost sounds as if you're going to come out slightly off the 1, but then you finish dead center

A Drummette's Adventures

In her unusual instructional DVD, Camille Gainer Jones lays out her priorities and philosophies—and offers up some burning performances. We'll let her explain further....

My DVD, *The Adventures Of Drummette.com*, is my journey through all the styles that I love to play—fusion, jazz, odd-meter playing, hip-hop, R&B grooves, gospel.... In addition to sections on hand technique and "words of wisdom," I included a performance aspect to help drummers who are not necessarily into reading and musical terminology. This gives them something they can grasp on a visual tip, and it also addresses the technical side, with PDFs of the hand exercises, hopefully encouraging them to get their reading chops together.

My motivation for such a project is always to help enlighten. After all is said and done, music is a gift that should be shared, not hoarded, and that goes for whatever chops or licks that we drummers think we invented. If you go back and study enough music and drummers, and not just from your peer group, you'll find that nothing is new under the sun—not even the configuration of your drumset. That realization will humble you and therefore allow you to continue to grow. Without wisdom and insight, what you think is so slick and hip today will be outdated in just a few years.

What I like to bring to my students, whether in private instruction, at the Collective, or in clinics, is being well rounded as a player and being a musician first. A musician plays what the music calls for; a drummer plays to get a *who!* from his or her friends. There's no check collecting in *who!* drumming. In my practice I emphasize the importance of learning to play a song, knowing where to make the setups in a song, playing the correct beats and grooves—having a strong foundation as far as form is concerned. I also stress being able to solo over the form, being able to feel four, eight, twelve, or however many bars.

In addition, I feel it's very important to be able to read. It simplifies the process of learning music and committing it to memory. And you'll be able to continually reinvent yourself. I also teach hand/foot combos—the types of fills we use in gospel and R&B playing today—and brushes. I like my students to have a firm rudimental foundation as well.

Most important in this game, though, is the mental aspect of the business. You can be the most outstanding player in the world, but if you show up late or not at all, can't get along with people, don't learn the music, and don't return phone calls or emails, then you'll have a very difficult time making a living in this business. Talent is great, but having your head on straight is better.



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CAMILLE GAINER JONES

on the 1. How did you develop that twist to your style?

Camille: It comes from being comfortable on the kit and working to give certain types of music a different lift. Sometimes I'll swing the notes when I'm playing a fill instead of playing them straight. When I'm playing four-on-the-floor soul music, the fills I play are a lot tighter and straight, to line up with that style. It just depends on what type of gig I'm doing.

MD: You get hired to play a lot of old-school funk and R&B. What tips do you have for drummers who want to learn those styles?

Camille: Growing up, I played along to tons of records. I always learned the drum parts note for note, which I think a lot of drummers skip over nowadays. Learning the original beat to classic songs is very beneficial, because in addition to deepening your vocabulary, it makes you more marketable for knowing tunes. That means knowing the right tempo, setups, when to open

the hi-hat, etc.

I often see players who say they know a tune play the wrong beat or the wrong feel. Knowing a tune is more than just knowing the accents and breaks. A lot of those songs have distinct drum parts that contributed to making them hits. You can't just play whatever hi-hat or bass drum pattern you want. You have to learn the beats, the fills, and the *vibe* of those songs and be able to reproduce them live. It's a matter of listening and developing your knowledge of repertoire. A good way to start is to search out and learn the original drum parts to the top twenty hits of different genres, such as the top disco hits, the top '70s R&B hits, the top twenty bebop standards, and so on.

MD: What other advice do you have for players who want to be working professionals?

Camille: One: Learn to read sheet music and charts. Two: Own a black suit or tux and black and white dress

shirts. Three: Save some money! Even if it's only twenty-five dollars a week, always save. Four: Go see live music—pay to see a show. Sometimes going to see a concert or club gig is better than taking a lesson. Pay attention to what the cats on stage are doing, and try to learn from what you see and hear.

And five: Network. Get some nice business cards made, and keep them on you. When you go check out music, introduce yourself to the artist as well as the players. Exchange information and get to know them. Working players recognize when you're trying to get your name out there, because at one time they had to do the same thing. Don't be too aggressive, where you're vibing on the drummer or acting like you think you can do the gig better. Just be cool and hang out. You never know when a call might come and someone you met while hanging out will think of you for the gig.



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Is there another drummer who's seen the inside of a recording studio—and then had the fruits of his labor result in a hit record—more than this month's cover star? Not likely. **This is how it's done.**

If there's any doubt about John "JR" Robinson's claim of being the most recorded drummer in history, all you have to do is go to johnjrrobinson.com and listen for five minutes. Immediately you'll be treated to an unbelievably deep and varied montage of songs that Robinson has played on in his twenty-five-plus years as a successful studio drummer—songs like "All Night Long" by Lionel Richie, "I'm So Excited" and "Slow Hand" by the Pointer Sisters, "Just A Gigolo" and "California Girls" by David Lee Roth, "Higher Love" by Steve Winwood, "Change The World" by Eric Clapton and Babyface, "We Are The World" by USA For Africa, and "Rock With You," "Bad," and "The Way You Make Me Feel" by Michael Jackson. If this were where his credits stopped, that alone would be an astounding accomplishment. But with JR, the hits keep coming, and coming, and coming....

producer Quincy Jones, who took note of the drummer's infectious groove and hired him for the recording of Michael Jackson's *Off The Wall* album. This ignited a long and triumphant collaboration between Jones and Jackson, as well as between Jones and Robinson. Consequently, JR became a go-to guy for future Jackson/Jones productions, appearing on roughly half of Michael's blockbuster hits over the following decade. Throughout this period John continued to work with Rufus And Chaka Khan, and in 1983 he won a Grammy for their single "Ain't Nobody."

In addition to possessing the golden touch in the studio, JR is one of the few reigning studio drummers who takes high-profile tours, performing regularly with Quincy Jones since 1979 and with Barbra Streisand since 1993. Robinson was also the drummer on Peter Frampton's *Frampton Comes Alive 2* tour, and recently he's

JOHN "JR"

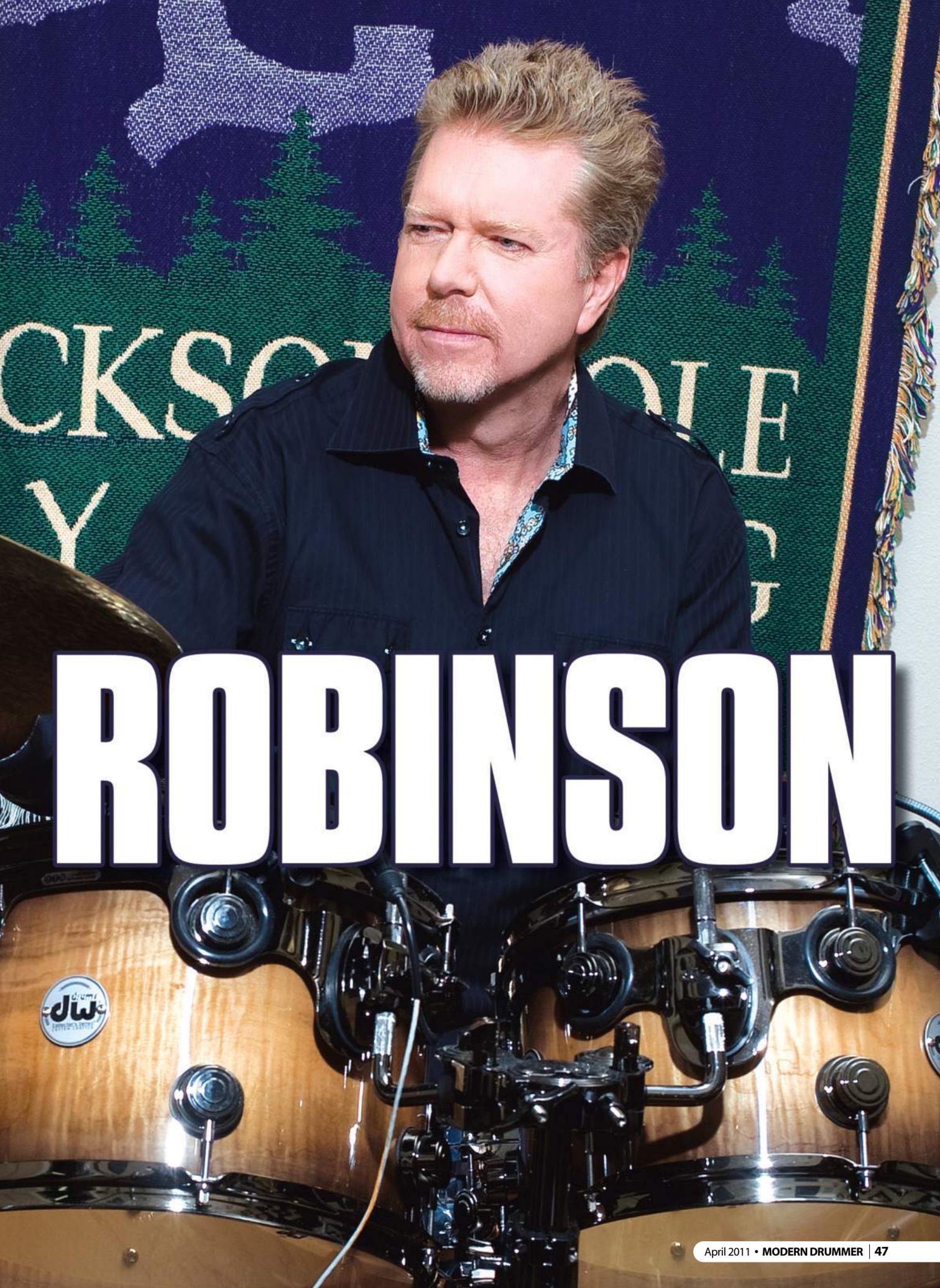
John Robinson was born in 1954 in Creston, Iowa. His parents were very supportive of their son's desire to be a musician, and when he was only five years old they started John on piano lessons. Three years later he moved over to the drums, and two years after that, at age ten, the future studio king formed his first band. In high school JR juggled basketball and track with drumming. After graduation he made music his top priority and moved to Boston to attend the Berklee School Of Music.

In 1978, Robinson was asked to relocate to Los Angeles and join the already established R&B band Rufus. Soon after that JR met the legendary

been traveling the world with the superstar producer and musician David Foster.

These days JR has several projects happening, including a band with Michael Thompson, Bobby Watson, and Mo Pleasure called Native Son; a new solo CD, *Platinum*; and an upcoming instructional DVD produced by the Drum Channel and distributed by Alfred Music.

MD caught up with JR soon after his performance at the 2010 Percussive Arts Society International Convention, where he reminded everyone in attendance why he's considered among the very best drummers in history at laying down the *perfect* feel-good groove.



ROBINSON

MD: So, how does a six-foot-four basketball player from the Midwest become one of the grooviest drummers on the planet?

JR: [laughs] I really don't know. I guess my genetic pool is pretty strong from both my parents. But I always say that God has blessed me—it just happens.

MD: Who was the first groove drummer you really took notice of?

JR: Al Jackson Jr. of Booker T & the MGs. [The groove] just felt right, and he didn't play *any* fills. My ring tone is Booker T's "Hip Hug-Her." I got heavily into Booker T, and then later I worked with him several times.

MD: Anyone else?

JR: I listen to Billy Cobham a lot. When Billy made that transition in '69 or '70 and had a band called Dreams, I really liked the way he began to approach his instrument. His concept was what I was all about: There's a lot of funk going on. His *Spectrum* album is one of my favorites. Billy has a propensity to play forward, but in that context it felt funky to me. I also listen to anything by Parliament Funkadelic and George Clinton. Early on I was into Sly & the Family Stone. When Earth, Wind & Fire first came out, that immediately turned my head. I consider that music to be the bible—anything with Freddie White, or Maurice White in the old

days. The key was the song; it wasn't necessarily what the drummer was playing.

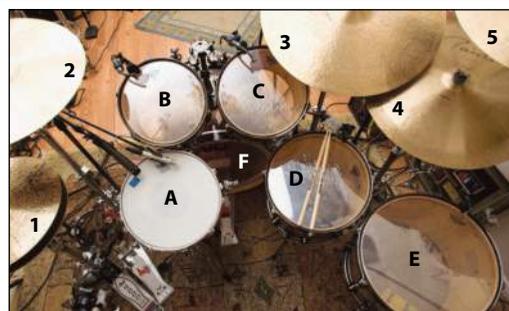
I also got heavily into all eras of Headhunters—when I was at Berklee and Herbie Hancock's *Head Hunters* record came out with Harvey Mason, I couldn't stop playing it. Then later with Mike Clark...it's great music. And I always thought that John Bonham with Led Zeppelin represented a completely different version of what funk is.

MD: Do you naturally tend to play more ahead of the beat or more behind it?

JR: This is an interesting question, and



JR'S DRUMS



Drums: DW maple or birch Collector's series

A. 4x14 copper snare

B. 8x12 tom

C. 9x13 tom

D. 13x16 floor tom

E. 14x18 floor tom

F. 18x24 bass drum

JR also uses 6 1/2x14 brass and wood snares.

Cymbals: Paiste

1. 15" Signature Dark Energy Mark I Hats
(or 15" 2002 Sound Edge hi-hats)

2. 20" Signature Full crash

3. 24" Twenty Masters Signature Groove Deep ride
(or 22" Dark Energy Mark II or 24" 2002 ride)

4. 22" Signature swish prototype with twenty rivets

5. 19" Dark Energy Mark I crash

Heads: Remo coated Emperor X snare batter, Remo clear Emperor tom batters, and Remo clear Powerstroke 3 or DW Coated Clear bass drum batter

Hardware: DW double tom mount on bass drum, 9300 snare stand, 5500TD hi-hat stand, 9710 straight cymbal stands, 9700 straight/boom cymbal stands, and 9120AL AirLift throne with tractor seat; Axis double pedal; BumChum monitoring system mounted on seat top

Sticks: Regal Tip John Robinson Performer series brushes and sticks

Electronics: Shure microphones (Beta 52 inside bass drum, SM57 and KSM137 on snare, Beta 98AMP on toms, SM81 on hi-hat and as overheads), M-Audio mixer



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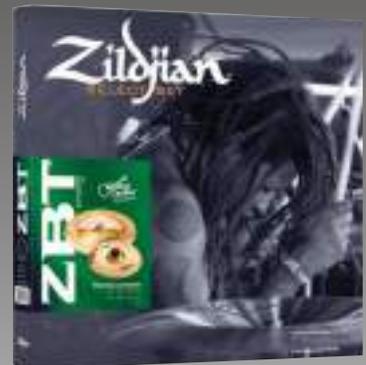
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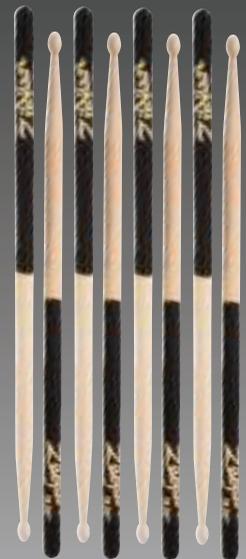
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I'm glad you brought it up. Obviously time is my forte, and my concept is that for right-handed players the right foot is the key. Every time I hit the bass drum it lands *exactly* on the beat. It's never behind or in front.

Now, let's say I lay the snare drum slightly behind that. It would still work—until I add the hi-hat. Once you add the hi-hat, it becomes a mystery: How do you tie it all together? So what I do is phrase the hi-hat *exactly* on the downbeat with the kick drum, and then I pull it back within an 8th-note phrase, all through one-bar or two-bar phrases. It still sounds like it's grooving. That creates my style.

MD: Let's talk about your new DVD.

JR: We did three separate DVDs. I started with two drumsets at the Drum Channel studios. I used my A recording set, then to my right I used a four-piece DW Jazz series bebop kit with an 18" bass drum. I go through complete tuning techniques from my perspective. I also go through cymbal selection and the concept of how to blend cymbals with the drums. I talk about time concepts, and I blow around on both kits. And I talk about microphone technique, which a lot of guys don't really touch on.

MD: That's a helpful topic, especially nowadays, since just about everyone has a studio. How do you feel about that trend?

JR: Don't get me going. [laughs] Well, I'm glad they all have studios and there's that much work going around, but there are a lot of drummers out there now, and the industry has made it easy for anybody to record. I'm not bagging on drummers as much as I am on bad songs getting out there that were recorded with one microphone and sent to mastering with an MP3 mix.

MD: How do you feel when your performance is put on a grid and chopped up, with sections moved around?

JR: I think the key is to just be *on* right from the get-go. I don't particularly like the method. You feel violated. Though in my own studio I've chopped the shit out of my own performances—if the song calls for it. Nowadays you could go find a plumber working on somebody's house and have him play drums for a

minute and make him sound good, which is sad.

We always make the joke in the studio that sometimes the artist or producer wants all of us who have gone to Berklee to play a bit sloppier.

George Duke used to say, "Will you please *not* play so good?" [laughs]

MD: What tips would you suggest for getting better at controlling dynamics? I've seen you go from hitting like a monster to playing very softly.

JR: I think that's from [famed player/teacher] Alan Dawson badgering the hell out of me and going through all those method books. But you also learn that in the field. You've got to go through *Stick Control* and just work on it. A lot of pro drummers will recommend not playing on really bouncy pads in the beginning. And learn to keep your fingers on the sticks; if your fingers start coming off the sticks, you're losing control. You need to have total control of the stick at all times.

MD: I notice that you sometimes turn your left hand upward while you're playing.

JR: I turn it constantly, but it's all subconscious. It has to do with different timbres I'm getting out of the drumstick. Also, in the early '80s, a lot of those records we were cutting, like "All Night Long," had 16th notes on the hats. I would do those with two hands, instead of the way Jeff Porcaro usually would, with one.

MD: Using two hands creates a certain feel—it seems like it swings a bit more.

JR: It does. You can control the whole thing. I have an exercise where I'm playing perfectly straight 16th notes on the hi-hat, with 1 and 3 on the kick and 2 and 4 on the snare. Within a three-minute exercise I'll go from swung to straight within the exact same groove.

PROPS FROM PEERS

"I've worked with John under every recording condition imaginable. We cut songs that were done in pieces, recording the hi-hat first, then kick and snare, then tom overdubs—as we did for Rufus's 'Ain't Nobody' and Steve Winwood's *Back In The High Life* album. We made a live record, *Rufus And Chaka Khan Stompin' At The Savoy*, and we recorded the studio track 'Don't Go To Strangers' with everyone in the room—no overdubs. In another case we replaced the drums on a track I wasn't happy with, and John played the whole kit as if he was on the original date. In every case he made those performances swing, rock, and shine like nobody's business. In my opinion there's no one better." —**Russ Titelman**

"I love working with JR! He is not only a great drummer but also a sweet, kind, and supportive person, especially when I was on stage with him." —**Barbra Streisand**

"John Robinson is quite simply the best drummer I have ever worked with—the greatest amongst the greats. Every house needs a foundation, and when we do concerts or recordings I cannot think of anyone else that I would rather have laying down that foundation. He is rock solid and innovative, a monster player in every genre of music, and the musician that I depend on the most and worry about the least. I can't tell you how much he has contributed to my career and the careers of countless others. It is with great pride and honor that I get to say a few words on his behalf. It's hard to keep it short when talking about JR. He is one hell of a great guy with the best attitude 100 percent of the time. John, thank you for all that you do for me and so many others. I am your friend and fan." —**David Foster**

"I fell in love with JR the first time I heard him. That's why I tried to steal him." —**Quincy Jones**

A lot of people want to know how I do that. It's easy; you just slow down the left hand or speed it up.

MD: What tips do you have in the area of tuning?

JR: I select drums that are conducive to my body size, so I'll usually use a 24" bass drum; whether it's 14", 16", or 18" deep, I don't care. I've always tuned the heads on the bass drum a bit lower than they come from the factory. With my DW drums, they get it right for me coming out of the box. I do put a small hole in the front head on all my studio drumsets. So that's tuned low, and I have my little secret packing-blanket thing that sits in there with an old Rufus sandbag on top. The weight of the bag on the blanket adds this interesting pumped-up low end. It's a controlled sound, and it's not necessarily good for all drummers. I would love to play on a wide-open bass drum. But if I were to do that, you might as well kiss

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INFLUENCES

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3,000 records goodbye, because that doesn't work with a lot of music.

MD: Do you have the microphones in front of the kick, inside it, or both?

JR: Both. On all my bass drums I use the May system inside and Shure Beta 52s outside, and if the engineer wants to tap into that, that's great. I do find a lot of the time, especially on live gigs, the cats will only put a 52 right in front of the hole in front of the bass drum. But that's risky, because if somebody walks by your drumkit—and they always do—they could bang into that mic and move it.

With toms, I always tune from the lowest drum on up. I like to associate drum tuning with building the foundation of a house. We have to lay the foundation first and then build up. Once the whole drumset is there, then you do the bass, then the keyboards and guitars and vocals, and then the strings. It's just a frequency thing, though there are times when the drums aren't necessarily the lowest thing on the track. Quincy and I talked about this for years: "Is the bass drum going to be above the bass on this track, or below it?"

MD: And that would be dictated by the song?

JR: That's correct. And it involves the tuning or equalization of the kick drum—and which bass player is on the date. Certain bass players have a midrange sound, and others have a low- and high-end sound.

MD: If the bass frequencies are too low, it gets muddy sounding.

JR: That's right, and that's something that I'm not sure a lot of the younger guys are aware of. You don't learn it until you apply it, but it's something to

"Can you stop the ring?" In that case I'll take a little piece of duct tape, roll it up, and just set it on top of the head, right over the rim, and that controls it a little. Moongel works really well for that too. But I've found, especially with the DW drums, that I don't have to do much of anything.

I use larger toms; my A set is 12", 13", 16", and 18". I use clear Emperor heads on top too, which are a bit thicker—they still ring, but not too much. Most of the engineers I work with know what they're doing. They know how it all blends into the sound.

MD: What about snare drums?

JR: Most of us drummers, at least from my generation, are ride cymbal and snare drum whores. I know I am! [laughs] Lately I've been using this DW 4" copper snare drum. You would think that a 4" wouldn't tune low enough, but it'll go deep, and it translates all frequencies perfectly. DW has this little gearshift throw-off on the snares, which I leave in the middle setting most of the time. On tour with David Foster, I'll leave it there for the first third of the show, then when [former Chicago singer] Peter Cetera comes out I immediately de-tune it one whole tone and put it to its loosest setting on the gearshift. The drum opens up like an old Linn sample. Now, if I'm doing some kind of a tight R&B thing, like with Ruben Studdard, I'll go to the tight setting.

MD: And this is all just from the throw-off switch?

JR: Yes. It's different from a typical snare throw-off. [Drum designer] John Good at DW is a genius. We should have had that concept years ago.

MD: Do you ever tune your snare to a

consider.

MD: Do you like to have your toms open and ringing?

JR: I do. There have been some instances in the studio where they've said,

low, thuddy sound?

JR: Not usually, though on the new Native Son record, which will be out this year, I did it on a couple of tracks. I'll put a Pinstripe batter head on, tape the heck out of it, tune it low, and keep the snares kind of tight, and it creates that '70s, '80s rock/R&B sound—that thud, with very little ring. But normally I use an Emperor X head on the batter side. I'll bring it up high enough to seat the head—but not too high—let it sit there a while, and then go wherever I need to go tuning-wise per song.

MD: How can a drummer develop better timing? Are you one for playing or practicing with a click track?

JR: I don't advocate it, but I don't denounce it either. I think that practicing is good no matter what you do. Back when I studied with Alan, with all the hand technique practice, we'd always play with a metronome, mostly for endurance. He wanted you to play singles for sixty seconds at a certain tempo. And I would say that 90 percent of everything I've done is with a click track.

I don't teach a lot, but when I do, I give cats a major workout and then send them on their way. The first hour we go through a whole bunch of stuff, and then the second hour I put them on my kit, turn on Pro Tools, and "produce" them running through ten different tempos. I record them playing to a click, and each time they come in they're ahead of the click—every time. There are two things to be learned from that. One is that I keep the click very loud in my headphones. Also, I use something like an MPC sample with no accents. If the drummers are going to practice with a click, I stress using a quarter-note click only.

MD: As opposed to a shaker or something else doing 8ths or 16ths?

JR: Well, you could do that. But I think to develop confidence you should practice playing slow tempos, because slow tempos are hard. A real slow ballad or 16th-note ballad at around 56 bpm—if you just hear click...click...click, that's a whole lot of space for mistakes to happen in.

If you have a little digital handheld recorder, another exercise would be to

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hit record and put the recorder outside the door and shut the door, so it's muffled. Then just concentrate on one groove and play it for five straight minutes, with *no* fills—kind of like a James Brown audition. Then, when you come back and listen to it, you're going to be able to hear the kick and snare cutting through, and right away you're going to be able to feel if it's rushing or dragging.

Another concept is to record yourself playing a groove without a click for four

bars and then stop for four bars. Then play again for four bars, stop for four—groove, silence, groove, silence.... The "click" should still be going in your head during the silences. Then, when you listen back, tap out the click along with your performance. In a perfect world, you should be coming back in time.

Drummers should also practice only playing on the ride cymbal, going for more of a quarter-note, dotted-8th/16th vibe. I've always said that Tony Williams could control the entire uni-

verse with only his right hand. Just listening to what he played on his ride cymbal is an invaluable learning experience. I think that time concepts can come from going down that particular avenue as well.

Another exercise is to just play a quarter-note, dotted-8th/16th pattern by itself for a long time and then bring in the kick and the snare in half time. It turns into this amazing funk groove. But it's still a bebop pattern. So that's a nice thing to practice as well. You can put anything in half time on your kick and snare drum, while you're playing a double-time feel on the ride.

MD: Those are some great tips. So what's the worst thing a drummer can do in the studio?

JR: Fall in love with the lead singer. [laughs] Seriously, don't smoke pot—that's a bad thing...though I think you're talking more musically and professionally. There are several bad things: Don't be late. I'm always there thirty to sixty minutes before the other cats. Get there early and set up. I'm obviously spoiled and have cartage, and they're always tuning and setting up, but when I get there I tweak everything, retune, move cymbals around, decide what I'm going to use....

And when you're playing with the rhythm section, make sure you don't overplay and make a really bad musical decision. When running down the track there's no need to add things you know you're not going to be playing on the track. Because that's going to make the other musicians play different parts, which doesn't help anything. The key is that you want the output to be one thing, like a team.

You also need to know how to listen before you talk, and you've got to be very respectful of the other musicians. Lots of times drummers will kind of get set in their ways—and I've been combative myself on occasion—but sometimes the producer has a completely different direction for you. So you need to be respectful of the producer and what his direction and concept are for that particular song. Obviously the producer and the artist run the show. What they say is final.



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John "JR" Robinson

by Terry Branam

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John "JR" Robinson defines the idea of pocket with a sense of taste that's not only radio friendly but also highly identifiable. One glance at his extensive discography will reveal the mark his drumming has made on modern music. Robinson plays with a deep understanding of the big picture, as if he'd written the songs himself. His consistent pulse and incredibly accurate note placement complement his knack for playing the right thing at the right time. Let's take a look at some highlights from JR's recorded work.

Rufus And Chaka Khan,

"Do You Love What You Feel?" *Masterjam* (1979)

When Rufus enlisted Quincy Jones to produce the 1979 album *Masterjam*, JR's powerful and crisp drumming certainly grabbed Q's attention. Indeed, this may be one of Robinson's most important recordings; because of it, he started working as a session drummer for Jones. Take a look at the intro fill, followed by the driving pocket groove. (0:00)

Musical notation for the drum part of "Do You Love What You Feel?". It starts with an intro fill at a tempo of 120 bpm, marked with a 3 and a triplet. This is followed by a driving pocket groove in 4/4 time, featuring a consistent pattern of eighth notes with accents.

Michael Jackson, "Rock With You," *Off The Wall* (1979)

Speaking of intro fills, this is probably JR's most recognizable. Notice the absence of a crash cymbal on the first downbeat of the song. This was one of Robinson's first sessions for Quincy Jones after the *Masterjam* album. He delivers his signature two-handed 16th-note beat with great conviction. (0:00)

Musical notation for the drum part of "Rock With You". It begins with an intro fill at 114 bpm, marked with a 3 and a triplet. The main groove is a signature two-handed 16th-note beat in 4/4 time, consisting of a steady eighth-note pattern.

Quincy Jones, "The Dude," *The Dude* (1981)

The Dude is a star-studded album with incredible production, songwriting, and performances. Here's a sneaky triplet figure that JR plays to build the excitement and suspense heading into the following section. (1:45)

Musical notation for the drum part of "The Dude". It features a triplet figure at a tempo of 96 bpm. The notation includes a staff with notes and a corresponding line of drum notation (L R) with accents. The drum notation shows a sequence of sixteenth notes and eighth notes, with some notes marked with '6' and '3' to indicate specific rhythmic patterns.

Rufus And Chaka Khan, "Ain't Nobody,"

Stompin' At The Savoy (1983)

JR won a Grammy with Rufus And Chaka Khan for the song "Ain't Nobody." His machinelike precision is on display in this deceptively difficult part. The rest in the middle of the bar provides a nice breath inside the busy pattern. (0:25)

Musical notation for the drum part of "Ain't Nobody". It starts at a tempo of 104 bpm. The notation shows a complex pattern of eighth notes and sixteenth notes, with a rest in the middle of the bar. The drum notation includes a sequence of notes with accents and a rest.

Steve Winwood, "Higher Love,"

Back In The High Life (1986)

The song "Higher Love" peaked at number one on the *Billboard* charts and starts with an unusual but instantly recognizable cascara/timble part. (0:00)

Musical notation for the drum part of "Higher Love". It starts at a tempo of 99 bpm. The notation shows a cascara/timble part in 4/4 time, consisting of a steady eighth-note pattern. The drum notation includes a sequence of notes with accents and a rest.

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STYLE & ANALYSIS: JOHN "JR" ROBINSON

John Robinson, "Skunkin'," *Funkshui* (2007)

JR's use of ghost notes on this funky fusion track provides the glue that holds everything in place. As always, John pays extra attention to the subtleties of the hi-hat and uses only the tip of the stick on the open notes in the second bar. (0:00)

♩ = 104

LRLRLR LL
RLRRLRL

Later in the track JR concludes an extended solo over a funky vamp with some quick tap rolls and offbeat cymbal accents. (5:15)

♩ = 113

RL LLRRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL
RLLRRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL

RRLRRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL
RLLRRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL

TRW, "Hard Time Love," *Rivers Of Paradise* (2008)

On this collaboration with fellow studio musicians Michael Thompson and Mark Williamson, Robinson's playing is as fresh and lively as ever. The intro fill and groove to this up-tempo rocker display some nice flam combinations and a very original-sounding two-handed hi-hat groove.

♩ = 190

rL rLRLrL RLrLLRRLrLL
RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL



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Your Syllabus

Building An Ever-Evolving Library by Joe Bergamini

One of the things that private drum instructors enjoy most is the fact that because we work independently, we can create our own course of study for our students. But this can also be a bad thing. Because there is no accreditation or oversight of private drum teachers, it's up to us to push ourselves to be the best possible instructors. Anyone who has taken courses at the college level knows that with each course of study comes a syllabus—a list of books that are required to be purchased and used while taking the course. This article will focus on the thought behind creating that list.

Why You Need One

Creating a syllabus is something that can benefit all private drum instructors and their students. In order to be a good teacher, you must have a vast knowledge of music and drummers—and this includes having a selection of music that you're continually listening to, referring to, and recommending to students. This idea extends to educational materials. The selection of drum books and DVDs available today is of such an amazingly high level of quality that every teacher should tap into and benefit from it.

Many teachers employ a very small number of books (if any) and often write out exercises on staff paper. I believe this method misses an opportunity to capitalize on the range of products currently available from dozens of great artists and authors. In my teaching practice, each student gets a syllabus of books, and we work on a regular basis from those books. Don't get me wrong; I often write out exercises and customize the lessons. But when my students want to learn Afro-Cuban drumming, they are assisted by Frank Malabe and Bob Weiner in *Afro-Cuban Rhythms For*

Drumset. When they want to learn R&B and funk, they're assisted by Zoro in *The Commandments Of R&B Drumming* and by Stanton Moore in *Groove Alchemy*. Do they want to work on double bass technique? There's *The Encyclopedia Of Double Bass Drumming* by Bobby Rondinelli and Michael Lauren, *Double Pedal Metal* by Steve Kilgallon, and my own *Pedal Control*, which I cowrote with Dom Famularo. And along the way, in every style, each student is coached by Tommy Igoe, as we learn the songs in his *Groove Essentials* package. All of these famous artists/authors are assisting *me* in teaching my students!

The Anti-Book Approach

Some teachers have a concern that they need to go "beyond the books." Of course this is true, but it assumes that you are aware of, understand, and have applied the knowledge found in the books before branching out with your own ideas. Going beyond the books is not the same as ignoring the books.

Some instructors are concerned that using books will stifle their own preferred teaching methods. I can appreciate wanting to create a personal educational style, and I try to do this as well, but why would I attempt to invent a method of teaching jazz drumming when John Riley, who's an expert in the field, invested years of research into *The Art Of Bop Drumming*? Just about every one of my students goes through that book.

There are tried-and-true drum manuals, such as Ted Reed's *Syncopation* and Gary Chester's *The New Breed*. Those are amazing, time-



less books that we all should use. But I can't tell you how many students have come to me from a previous teacher and told me all they used was *Syncopation* and a book of staff paper. Yes, I know it's theoretically possible to teach students everything they need to know using that one book, but to me that displays either a lack of knowledge of the products that are available to the modern drum instructor, a stubborn desire to cling to an old-fashioned method of doing things, or a lack of desire to research what's available on the current market. When I was building my teaching practice, I invested hundreds of dollars in books and DVDs in order to track down the most effective materials. Most of my peers also have huge libraries of media that are referred to as needed.

Another disadvantage to the staff-paper-and-book approach is that in today's market, drum lessons are sometimes competing with after-school sports, karate lessons, video games, and other activities. I've found that using different books and DVDs helps keep things exciting for my students. We simply can't expect to teach drumming the way it was taught thirty years ago and retain

students whose attention is being clamored for by so many other things.

Use It All

Often we private instructors develop a system using certain materials that we stick with over time. Although I understand and agree with the “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” philosophy, I feel that we need to continually reevaluate our methods to make sure that we’re providing the best possible resources to our students. For example, for years I used Jim Chapin’s classic book *Advanced Techniques For The Modern Drummer* to teach jazz. When *The Art Of Bop Drumming* came out, I realized that it contained a lot more material about jazz performance—whereas Chapin’s book mainly focuses on independence. *Baby Steps To Giant Steps*, by Peter Retzlaff and Jim Rupp, differs from both of the aforementioned books in that it has a more extensive section on broken ride cymbal patterns, and it contains eleven play-along tracks.

As I’ve reevaluated my approach to teaching jazz over the years, I’ve realized that all of these books offer something unique, and most of my students wind up purchasing all three. I see no reason to limit it to one or another.

The Extra Expense

As you start to implement your syllabus and request that your students purchase books and DVDs, you might be faced with resistance from parents. As a parent myself, I’ve found that every activity my children take part in requires spending money. It wouldn’t make much sense for me to sign up my son for the local soccer league and then not purchase the proper equipment for him to practice with at home. It’s the same thing with drum lessons, and I’m not shy about telling parents so.

That said, I’ve personally never had problems getting parents and students to purchase the requested materials. Most of my students like developing a library of reference books and DVDs, and they enjoy a

sense of accomplishment as we finish going through them.

One interesting thing that many teachers don’t realize is that your syllabus can also generate extra income for your teaching practice. If you have your own private studio, it’s possible for you to purchase books at wholesale prices from the publishers and then resell them to your students. I’ve been doing this for years, and it has resulted in a nice chunk of extra income each

year. My students purchase all the books in my syllabus, and sometimes they also purchase books and DVDs on their own, outside of lessons.



Joe Bergamini is the senior drum editor for Hudson Music and an active performer who has worked with Happy The Man, 4Front, Bumblefoot, Dennis DeYoung, and the Broadway productions of *Movin’ Out*, *In The Heights*, *The Lion King*, *Jersey Boys*, and *Rock Of Ages*. He is also the author of six acclaimed drum books and an educator/clinician who performs and teaches at his private studio in New Jersey.



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The next step is to orchestrate the hands while also incorporating the bass drum. The following are examples of moving the right hand, the left hand, and then both hands while substituting the bass drum for one hand or the other. These fill ideas sound very melodic and syncopated.

Right-hand movement left-hand movement Right- and left-hand movement

Here's a groove to work with, plus a couple of my favorite fills.

Once you're comfortable with everything we've discussed so far, start outlining the pulse in different ways using the hi-hat foot. Here are four possibilities. Enjoy!



Matt Patuto is the author of *Drum Set Systems*, a member of the Vic Firth Education Team, and a clinician for Vic Firth and Alternate Mode. For more information, visit mattpatuto.com.



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Write Creative Drum Parts

Part 1: Direct Connection by Chris Prescott



Over the years I've had many students ask for help in writing drum parts for their bands' songs. A bandmate might record a part and pass the drummer a copy so he or she can create something

for it. For a newer player, this can be a little stressful. This series of articles will help you figure out where to begin.

There's no right or wrong way to go about writing drum parts, but a great place to start is by examining some of your favorite songs. Notice what the drummer is playing and determine if there's some evident meaning or purpose in the parts. How are the drums supporting the music? Often you'll find that the rhythms being played are not in the drums alone but are shared by other musicians as well. A classic example is the way the kick drum is frequently played in unison with the bass guitar.

We can go a step further and say that all of the rhythms in a song are fair game for this direct connection. Inspiration might be found in the strumming of the guitar, notes from the piano, or even a rhythm sung in a vocal melody. Try transcribing these rhythms, and then interpret them directly on the drumset.

After you investigate some of the possibilities, you may choose to play the patterns exactly as transcribed, or you may simplify them down to their essential accented notes. It's up to you to make the musical choices. Many different possibilities will be revealed by following this systematic method of connecting your parts with the rhythms in the song.

For the sake of demonstrating this method of interpretation, we'll use the following pattern and call it the guitar-strumming rhythm.



While keeping a steady cymbal pulse, play the entire strumming rhythm on the bass drum. This ensures that you have fully assimilated the rhythm you're interpreting. Take it slowly at first, as it may feel a bit dense playing everything on one drum. Things will get easier when you start to distribute the notes to different parts of your drumset.

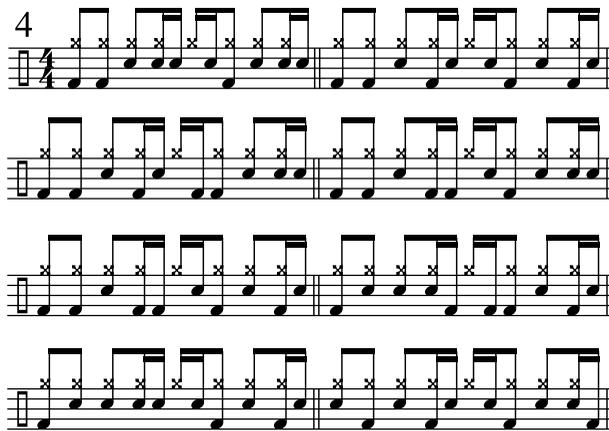
Here's the guitar-strumming rhythm phrased on the bass drum.



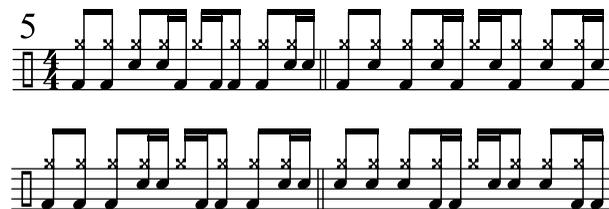
The next step is to play the snare drum on beats 2 and 4, bringing in the old faithful backbeat, which helps create forward momentum in the song. It's very interesting to note how much a pattern is transformed by moving or omitting these backbeats. The effect can be dramatic.



When interpreting a part, it's very important to observe which of the strong beats (1, 2, 3, 4) are *not* being played in the original pattern. You may want to avoid playing on these missing beats. If you fill them, the direct connection to the original rhythm could become diluted. The guitar-strumming rhythm, for example, has a missing strong beat on beat 3. Make sure to skip this note in your part when you reproduce the rhythm exactly. Here are some possibilities. Once you have these down, create some of your own.



Here are some examples that abandon the steady backbeat concept for a slightly more adventurous approach.



Beware: This direct connection system can yield overly busy drum parts at times. Always think about the effect you're having on the song. An easy way to make the parts sound simpler without changing the patterns is to use lightly played ghost notes, which help set off the accented snare

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drum backbeats on 2 and 4. Playing dynamically helps give the beat a clear, driving quality without your having to drastically simplify the part.

Playing all the notes at the same velocity—like in this next example—can make the groove feel claustrophobic.



Using a range of dynamics in your playing gives an otherwise identical pattern a more spacious, focused feeling.



I highly recommend counting through the pattern before picking up the sticks to play. The act of counting is a commitment to understanding what you're learning; doing so allows your brain to catch up with what you're attempting to perform and helps clear up any confusion you may be experiencing with the rhythms.

Remember that simply counting out the notes in order does not necessarily mean you're counting correctly. Be sure

to give each count its proper value. Listen to yourself as you count the rhythm, and make sure it accurately matches the actual rhythm of what you're attempting. I'm often surprised by students' reluctance to count aloud, but invariably it helps to do so. Counting while playing can be a little awkward if you're not used to doing it. Start slowly, and work on it often, because it's a skill well worth having.

Transcription (the act of writing out rhythms) is another important step in assimilating new ideas. The small effort it takes to transcribe an idea not only clears up what you're hearing but also gives your brain a visual cue to help you play accurately.

As with any art form, there's no surefire formula for creating music that works for every musician. This direct connection approach is just one way to bring ideas to our attention that we may have otherwise overlooked. Try to exhaust all possibilities before deciding on your final choice. You might be surprised with what you come up with. I've found that looking at musical choices systematically and methodically breaks me out of conventional thinking. Sometimes creativity needs a spark. Hopefully one of these approaches can be a spark for you.



Chris Prescott is a San Diego-based multi-instrumentalist who currently drums for Pinback. His recently published book, *Creative Construction*, is available through his website, ccdumbooks.com.



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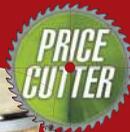
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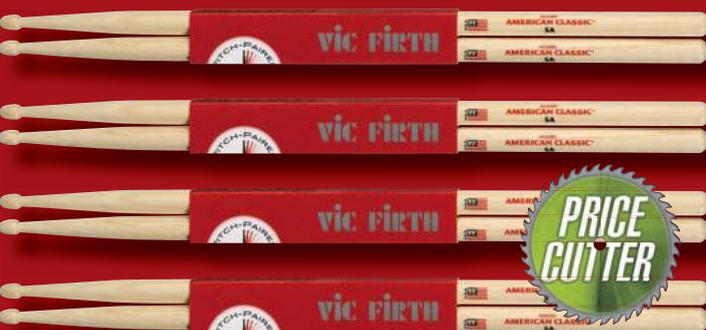
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Beyond The Barline

Advanced Phrasing Based On Latin And Jazz Traditions

by German Baratto

MUSIC KEY		
	C.C.	R.C.
H.H.	*	*
T.T.	*	*
S.D.	*	*
F.T.	*	*
B.D.	*	*
H.H.	*	*
w/foot		

In this article we'll discuss an approach to improvising that allows drummers to play solos with longer and more interesting phrases. This type of advanced phrasing, which involves extending ideas beyond traditional four-bar segments, is used often in jazz on the drumset and in Afro-Cuban music on timbales, congas, and bongos.

The study starts with an accent grid exercise that creates a hemiola (a superimposed three-beat feel) when applied in standard 4/4 time. Begin by practicing each measure of the grid in 3/4 (as written) until it feels comfortable. Make sure you use consistent stick heights for the accents and taps. Practice the grid on a pad or snare first, and then experiment by putting the accents on different elements of the kit (toms, cowbells, cymbals, etc.).

Here's the basic grid in 3/4.

Now practice each measure of the grid in 4/4. In the following example, I've phrased measure 13 of the grid in four. This simple idea can help you create interesting phrases that are syncopated and more musical. You won't be playing one-bar ideas anymore.

The study continues with one-bar patterns in 3/4. Again, practice each pattern in three until it feels comfortable or you have it memorized. Play the patterns on a pad or snare first, and then experiment by orchestrating them around the drumset.

Once you've memorized the patterns, play the three-beat phrases over 4/4 time. Start slowly, as the hemiola can be challenging to hear at first. Here's one of those three-beat patterns phrased in four.

Now let's discuss different stickings that you can apply to these patterns to create more musical options when you start orchestrating the rhythms around the set. One thing you can do is play the three-beat figure with accents and then fill in the rests with unaccented 8th notes. You can use alternate sticking or right-hand lead.

Here's the same pattern from Example 4 played with the right hand as accents, while filling in the rests with unaccented 8th notes with the left hand.

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

Once you have that down, try moving the right hand around the toms.

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

In this next example, I decided to split the right hand between the cymbal and the snare, playing the bass drum every time the hand plays the cymbal.



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7

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

For coordination practice, and to help keep the hemiola grounded in 4/4, I'll introduce a hi-hat ostinato (repeated pattern) on beats 2 and 4. (You could also play left-foot clave for an even more challenging exercise.)

8

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

Another way to apply these over-the-barline phrases is to play them as cross-rhythms with one hand while the other hand plays a steady 4/4 ostinato. Any ostinato will work. Here are three common right-hand patterns used in cumbia, songo, and other Latin American styles.

9

While you're playing one of those ostinatos with the right hand, play one of the three-beat hemiolas from Example 3 with the left. Here's an example in which the left hand moves between the snare and rack tom.

10

It's my hope that these exercises will help you develop your own musical ideas when playing solos in a variety of styles. As you're practicing, remember to start slowly at first, keep track of where you are in the measure, and pay attention to the mechanics of your strokes. Have fun!



German Baratto is an adjunct professor at Middle Tennessee State University and the University Of North Alabama and the percussion coordinator for the Oakland High School marching band. He also composes for Crucial Music in Los Angeles, and his music and articles have been published by Row-Loff Productions and *Percussive Notes*. Baratto endorses Innovative Percussion sticks and mallets.



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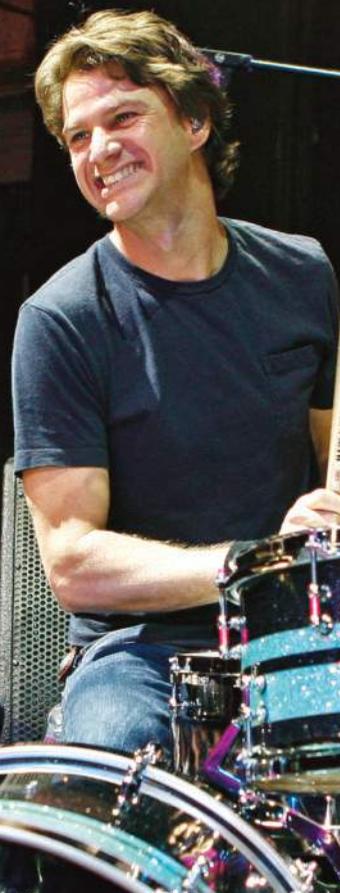
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"There's a lot more to playing 2 and 4 than just playing 2 and 4," says **Miley Cyrus's drummer/musical director**. What it takes to make the drums *pop* on a pop record.



Stacy Berman

STACY JONES

by Ilya Stemkovsky

Teen sensation Miley Cyrus appears on a candle-adorned American Music Awards stage to sing her new ballad "Forgiveness And Love." This is not the lasers and dancers of the Black Eyed Peas; the backing band is in the dark. But you can feel drummer Stacy Jones. With a perfect pocket, a great tone, and just the right flam-tastic tom fill to kick things into double time, Jones knows how to support the song, as he's been doing for years with a variety of rock groups. He's also the musical director for Cyrus's band, cleverly assembling a unit that's able to cut through arenas full of screaming teenagers and keep things interesting.

Jones cut his drumming teeth with the '90s rockers Letters To Cleo and Veruca Salt. Later he traded in his sticks for strings, forming American Hi-Fi and singing lead and playing guitar. After a long hiatus from the kit, Jones returned to active drumming duty with Cyrus and is now busier than ever, writing, producing in his studio, and touring with Hi-Fi, Cyrus, and the Lemonheads. *MD* caught up with Stacy to discuss fills that are hooks and taking drummers to "rock school."

MD: Why are female artists like Letters To Cleo, Tanya Donelly, and Aimee Mann drawn to you? Is it your more sensitive drumming?

Stacy: [laughs] Maybe it is! In the '90s it was normal for girls to front rock bands. On the radio you'd hear the Foo Fighters followed by a girl band. It's not quite as prevalent today.

MD: During American Hi-Fi, you didn't play drums. What was that like?

Stacy: It was weird. I never sat behind a drumset during the cycle for those first two records. When we'd play with Matchbox Twenty or Everclear, I'd sit in on kit for a tune. But no practicing drums—not being a drummer at all. When I came back around

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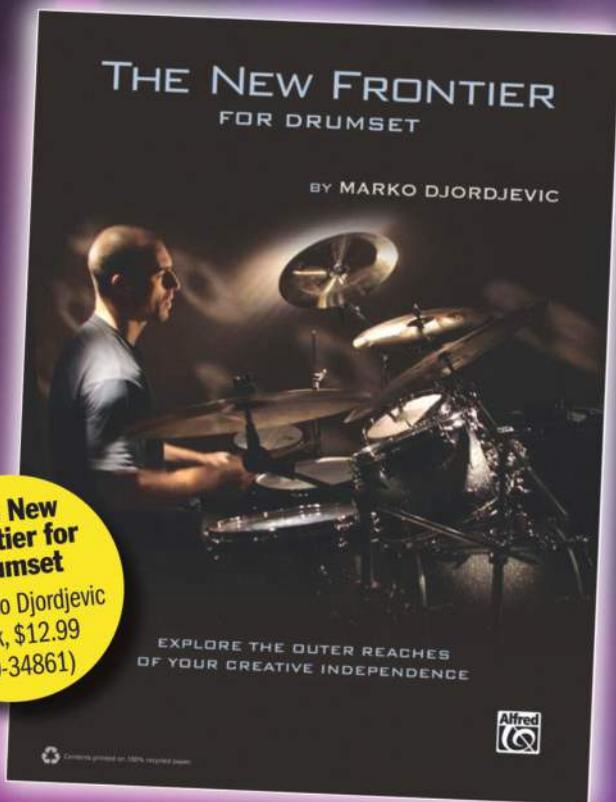


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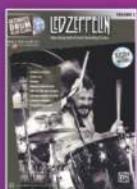
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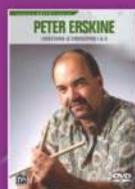
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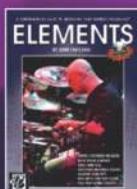
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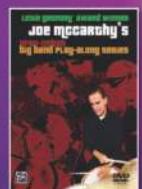
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STACY JONES

to it, I felt like I was a better drummer, with facility I didn't have before and a slightly different approach. It's interesting to take a break from an instrument you've played your whole life and see how you've evolved.

MD: So when the Miley Cyrus opportunity arose, was it like riding a bike?

Stacy: Miley's manager heard me doing some work with a band for MTV's *Total Request Live* and called me about being the musical director for *Hannah Montana*'s live show. He said I could play drums, guitar, or whatever. So this was a great excuse to dust off the sticks.

MD: What was your role like as musical director?

Stacy: I didn't really know how to write out charts; I was just a dumb rock guy. But the job entailed producing the live show. Even in Cleo, I was one of the people who made sure everything ran smoothly. That's common—I know a lot of drummers who take on that role. And the manager wanted me to assemble a real band, not some session group. Top-notch players but also great guys, so it could feel like Miley's band. Nothing against session guys, but when you're putting together a rocking band, you have to get guys who come from that background.

MD: Did you shed for a couple of months

to get back into playing shape?

Stacy: It totally came back. Miley's music might be pop, but it's challenging. There are a lot of different styles over the course of a show, and I play very aggressively. Everything is on the grid. Lights, video, the stage is moving. I play to a click all night, and I want to make it feel good, not sound like some robot. And everything's live, no tracks. She's had great musicians on her records, like Abe Laboriel Jr. and Josh Freese, so that's a challenge too. There's a lot more to playing 2 and 4 than just playing 2 and 4.

MD: What songs are particularly fun to play?

Stacy: "Start All Over," because it rocks more live than on the recording. Her ballads, too, where I lay back in the pocket. I can also pretend to be Dave Grohl or Abe—use different approaches. Like Grohl's power, simplicity, and fills that become the hooks of the songs.

MD: Such as Nirvana's "In Bloom."

Stacy: Yeah! If you're a drummer with a part that's universally air drummed, in my mind, you have succeeded.

MD: How about recording? Are you presented with programming, or is it a blank slate?

Stacy: These days it's fairly typical to get

some programming to use as a guide, but with instructions to do my thing. I'll take a couple passes where I cop the programming, and then I'll go back and add some flair. Then the producer has many options—either the meat and potatoes or the wackier stuff. And I never think about playing some lick I've been working on for three weeks. I always ask questions and follow their lead. Sometimes they're really tied to the demo, and some artists don't care.

MD: What knowledge do you lay on the younger drummers who come to your studio?

Stacy: I take my bands to "rock school." For drummers, that means producing a good tone, tuning, having the right equipment.... Sometimes we'll work on technique or change their "unique" setups that aren't working for them. They'll arrange their kit in a way that's aesthetically pleasing but not ergonomically pleasing.

MD: So what's next for you?

Stacy: Miley is shooting a couple movies, so we're on a bit of a break. I'm doing a lot of producing at my studio, there's a new Hi-Fi record, and I'm touring with the Lemonheads. I've always got something going on, thankfully.



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GEARING UP DRUMKIT DETAILS, ON STAGE AND UP CLOSE



Bon Jovi's **TICO TORRES**

Interview and photos by Sayre Berman

Drums: Pearl Reference series

- A.** 6x14 snare
- B.** 9x12 tom
- C.** 9x13 tom
- D.** 16x16 floor tom
- E.** 16x18 floor tom
- F.** 18x22 bass drum

"I've been with Pearl for about twenty-five years now," Torres says. "It's great to be with a company that's like a family. They've always made drums for me to my specs. I like to incorporate art into my motif." For this current kit, Torres wanted to go black on black, so he and his drum tech, Joe "JD" Dorosz, special ordered nickel-plated hard-



ware. When the shells were delivered from Japan, they were sent straight to drummer/artist Prairie Prince, who collaborated with Tico on the design. JD assembled the drums with the nickel-plated hardware.

Cymbals: Paiste Signature series in custom finish

1. 14" Heavy hi-hats
2. 10" splash
3. 16" Power crash
4. 18" Power crash
5. 20" Power crash
6. 22" 2002 Power ride
7. 20" 2002 China

In keeping with the "subtle flash" look of the drums, Torres wanted something special for his cymbals. "Paiste came up with a translucent black coating for me that doesn't have any adverse effect on the sound," he explains. "They sound as sweet as all the other Paiste products."

"At a glance, they appear black in color," says Paiste marketing manager Andrew Shreve. "But when the stage lights shine on them, you see a beautiful ultra-dark bronze/gold yet translucent-looking cymbal."

Hardware: Pearl drum and cymbal stands, DW 9000 double pedal and 9500 two-leg hi-hat stand, Roc-N-Soc non-hydraulic throne

Heads: Remo Emperor X snare batter and clear Ambassador bottom, coated Emperor tom batters and clear Ambassador bottoms, and coated Powerstroke 3 bass drum batters

Percussion: Latin Percussion Mini Everything Rack, bar chimes, Jam Block with Sliding Bass Drum Percussion Mount, and mountable tambourine with brass jingles

"I have timbales, shakers, and also things that I make in my garage. If I hear something I can use on a record, I try to put something together that will emulate that sound. Sometimes you have to make your own instruments."

Sticks: Ahead

"I still like using wood sticks in the studio because of the way they sound on the cymbals. But for playing this type of hard-hitting rock live, I'm very comfortable with the Ahead sticks. They're made out of aluminum, and they have a plastic tip. The grip is leather wrapped, and I wear gloves when I use them. I no longer have carpal tunnel syndrome. No more pain. These sticks absorb the shock."



RX Bandits' CHRIS TSAGAKIS

Interview by Corrado Rizzi • Photos by Alex Solca



Drums: Dark Horse in walnut finish with maple inlays

- A. 7x14 snare
- B. 3x12 Pearl timbale
- C. 7x13 tom with wood hoops
- D. 20x18 floor tom with wood hoops
- E. 18x26 bass drum

"We like to use a variety of drums on our records," Tsagakis says. "We borrow from different people and try to use a studio that has drums, so we can mix and match different parts. On the last record there are a few songs where I used a 10x28 kick drum. It was gigantic and super-boomy. This kit is designed to match that sound."

Hardware: DW tom and cymbal stands, Pearl hi-hat stand and Eliminator bass drum pedal

Cymbals: Sabian

1. 14" Paragon hi-hats
2. 18" Paragon crash
3. 22" Manhattan Jazz ride

Heads: Remo Emperor X snare batter, Evans coated G2 tom batters, Aquarian Super-Kick II bass drum batter, Remo clear Ambassador timbale batter

"I hit pretty hard, so if I use heads that sound too 'blatty' they die off really quickly. I try to find warmer-sounding heads to get a fatter sound."

Percussion: Latin Percussion Jam Block (attached to hi-hat rod)

Sticks: Vater 3A Fatback



Rogers PowerTone Snare Drum

The Little Brother by Harry Cangany



Rogers' PowerTone is an 8-lug chrome-over-brass or wood snare that was sold with most of the company's kits in the 1960s. Rogers' more expensive Dyna-Sonic snare was made in smaller numbers, so it's harder to find. Some players didn't like the finicky adjustments of the Dyna-Sonic and preferred the more affordable PowerTone.

The PowerTone shell, in the days of beavertail lugs, was 5-ply maple/birch/maple with reinforcing rings and was created by Keller. The PowerTone and Dyna-Sonic feature the same butt plate and a similar but different strainer. The snare bed on a PowerTone is deeper and traditionally had twenty wires, as opposed to the eighteen strands found on Dyna-Sonics.

The example shown here is an extremely clean snare from the Dayton time period (1966–69), before CBS moved its company to Fullerton, California. CBS purchased Rogers in April 1966 to complement its ownership of Fender, which proved to be a bad move for everyone involved.

The Dayton-era drums were built in the same Covington, Ohio, factory that built pre-CBS Cleveland-era Rogers drums. Some collectors want only Rogers drums from Cleveland, but the late Ben Strauss, former sales manager for Rogers, felt the quality was still there during the Dayton days.

I tend to favor Rogers drums made up to about 1971, regardless of the factory. Some of my prejudice is because Rogers changed

to sparkles by 1972, and after that the company launched the MemriLoc system, which introduced 1" holes in the shells to accommodate the large tubing of the new hardware. I prefer the simpler Swiv-O-Matic days.

This PowerTone snare is wrapped in gold sparkle; Rogers called it gold glitter. Rogers and Gretsch, and occasionally Slingerland, used large glitter in irregular patterns, while Ludwig, Camco, and, most of the time, Slingerland used smaller regular-particle sparkles. After forty years, this snare is still vibrant and beautiful under stage lights. Often with vintage gold sparkle wraps, you'll find spots on the sparkle under the tinted top layer. I've mostly seen this on floor toms and bass drums but also on some snare drums.

Fading can be another problem with gold sparkle. Some silver sparkle or gingerale-colored drums currently on the vintage market are actually faded gold sparkle. You have to remove lugs to discover the true original finish.

The PowerTone is an easy-to-tune drum. Rogers was making 45-degree bearing edges before its competition, so you can play an old Rogers wood-shell snare and get a modern sound, but still with a vintage vibe. The beavertails are timeless-looking lugs. Nothing looks old-fashioned or fragile.

A wood-shell PowerTone in excellent condition is valued at about \$600.

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paiste.com

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ultimateears.com



SONOR Benny Greb Signature Snare

Benny Greb's 5³/₄ x 13 signature snare features a beech shell, which is said to give the drum a fat, warm, transparent sound and a wide tuning range. The outer veneer is Scandinavian birch, and a personalized badge features the drummer's unique cartoon-head drawing. A soft rubber ring is applied to the shell.

sonorusa.com



VATER

Regular-Finish Gospel Series Sticks

Due to consumer and artist demand, Vater will now be offering its popular Gospel series, which was previously available in a painted white finish, in the standard Vater finish. Vater's Gospel series consists of three hickory models (5A, 5B, and Fusion) designed to meet the feel, weight, and volume needs of gospel drummers. Models in the line measure 16¹/₂" for some extra length and are available in three diameters to suit different dynamic needs. The round tips on these sticks are said to provide great cymbal clarity and rebound.

vater.com





ALESIS DM7 USB Electronic Drumset

The DM7 USB kit has a total of eight drum and cymbal pads. The large snare pad has three zones, enabling head, rimshot, and rimclick triggering. The crash cymbal can be choked by grabbing the pad at the edge. The DM7 module contains a library of more than 400 drum, cymbal, and percussion instruments in eighty kits (fifty preset and thirty custom). The module also contains controls for adjusting the instruments' pitch, panning, and reverb level. For students, practice exercises, a metronome, fifty-two play-along songs, and a 1/4" mix input for playing along are included, while studio drummers can connect the DM7 USB kit to their computer to record, sequence, and control any VST instrument. (Toontrack EZdrummer Lite software is included.) A preassembled four-post rack makes setup and breakdown of the DM7 USB kit quick and easy. List price: \$799.

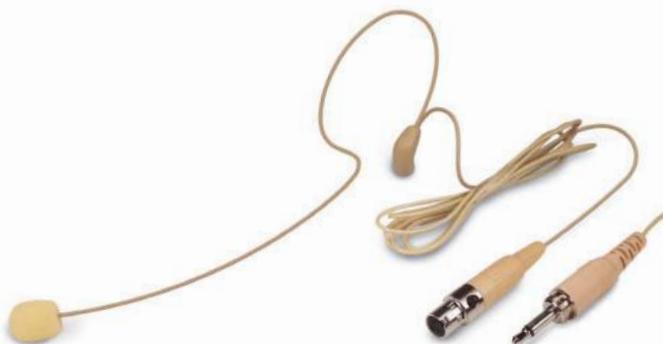
alesis.com



SABIAN AAX Suspended Cymbal

In response to the demand for a darker tone than that available from current AA series suspended cymbals, Sabian has added AAX models. New AAX suspended cymbals are said to respond evenly at all dynamic levels and to provide long sustain for increased projection and tone. Available in natural or brilliant finish, all AAX cymbals are protected by a two-year warranty. The cymbals are available in 16", 17", 18", 19", and 20" sizes.

sabian.com



NADY Headmic Series Additions

Nady Systems recently released two new single-ear head-worn mics, the HM-35 and the HM-45U. Both are wide-bandwidth condenser mics. The HM-35 is omnidirectional; the HM-45U is unidirectional. These mics are designed to ensure clean, transparent audio and enhanced vocal pickup with improved gain before feedback. Their thin, durable metal frames can be easily molded to fit any user comfortably, with or without glasses, hats, or headphones.

nady.com



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Inspired by one of the company's best-selling snare heads, the Coated Controlled Sound, Remo has expanded its X series with the new Controlled Sound X, which is made with a coated 12 mil film that has a 5 mil reverse dot. The head is said to produce more controlled midrange tones, which is ideal for tightly tuned snare drums. CSX heads are available in 10", 12", 13", and 14" sizes.

remo.com

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**WHAT
DO YOU
KNOW
ABOUT...?**

WELLS KELLY

by Sky Schrode

He left indelible impressions on cuts by **Al Kooper, Bonnie Raitt, and Todd Rundgren**, helped put his own band **Orleans** at the top of the charts, and slayed drummers with his subtly adventurous kit work. A drumming disciple explains the magic of one of classic rock's secret geniuses.

“Just pick ‘em up and hold ‘em.” This was the response from Wells Kelly, my favorite drummer ever, when, after I'd consulted all of the drummers in my circle regarding the “proper grip” dilemma, I approached him with that controversial question.

By now I had seen Wells play many times and had become his friend and drumming comrade, recognizing his unprecedented

abilities and technique. I was certain that knowing the secret of his grip would catapult my own playing to new heights. Well, not fretting over that issue any longer *did* help improve my playing. But by no means did it elevate me to anywhere near the visionary level of my old friend, who was then, and remains now, legendary among the drummers who emerged from the mountains of upstate New York, specifically

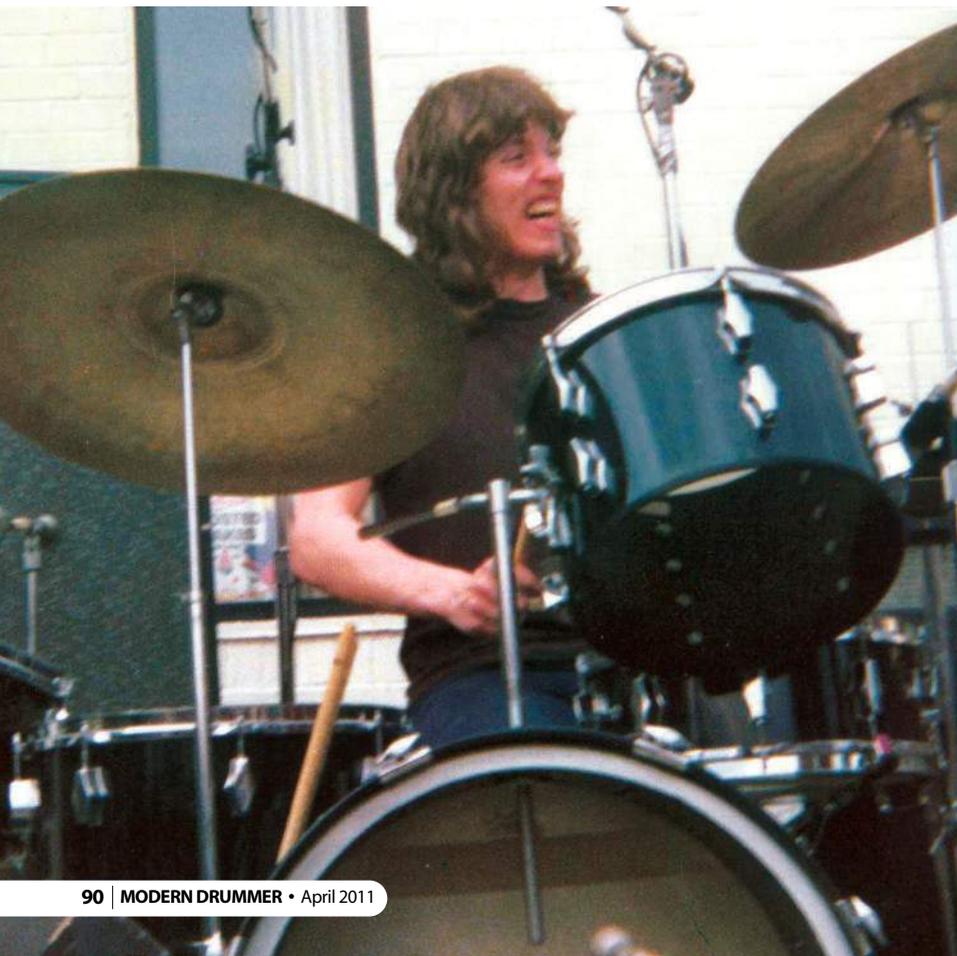
our sleepy but musically gifted little town of Ithaca.

By the time I became aware of Kelly, he had already established a substantial reputation and résumé. He'd performed and recorded with Bonnie Raitt, Todd Rundgren, and Seals & Crofts. He'd also done Blood Sweat And Tears founder and Bob Dylan cohort Al Kooper's *Kooper Session* album, where in the liner notes Kooper mentions that he had never heard Kelly before, but that “everyone” recommended him for the session, and that he “pushed holy hell” out of the band.

Somewhere in the midst of all this, Kelly became a member of the Ithaca band Boffalongo along with his older brother Sherman, who wrote “Dancing In The Moonlight.” A few years later Wells introduced that song to his new band, King Harvest, which scored the familiar and timeless hit single. Also a member of Boffalongo was Larry Hoppen, who, along with Wells and guitarist John Hall, founded the band Orleans in early 1972, soon adding Hoppen's younger brother Lance to complete the lineup. This was the most significant band in each of these musicians' careers, providing classic-rock fans with many memorable recordings, including the hits “Dance With Me,” “Love Takes Time,” and “Still The One.”

As Orleans began to develop its identity and attract devoted fans at an astonishing rate, the buzz began to build about its extraordinary drummer. Audiences were captivated by Kelly's performances, and local musicians could frequently be overheard saying things like, “Yeah, so and so is a great player, but he ain't no Wells Kelly!”

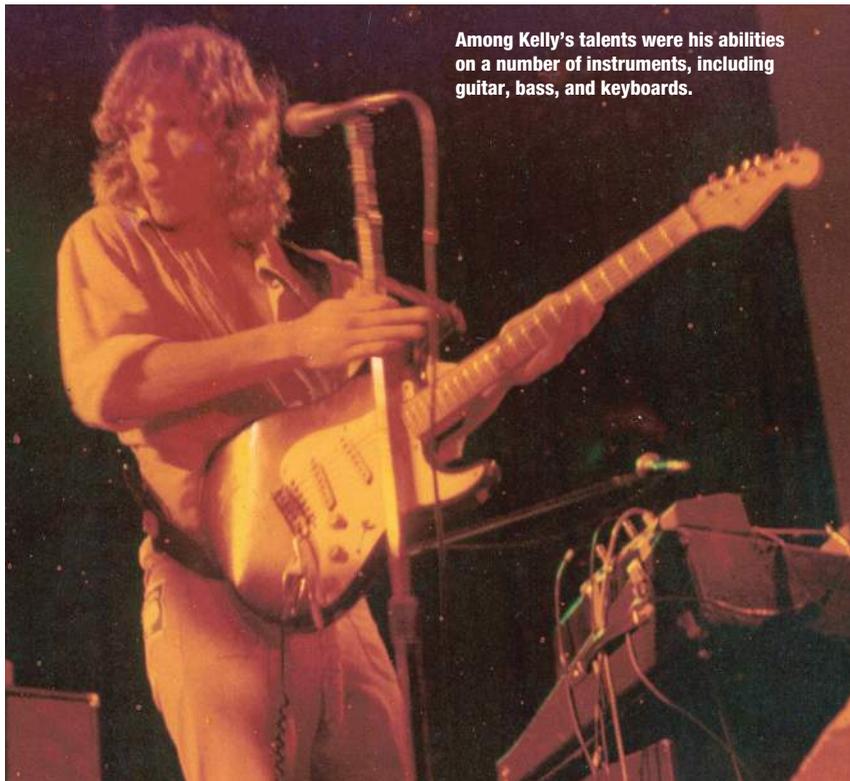
To describe what set Wells apart from



his peers is not a simple task, though ample evidence of his prowess can be found in his sparse, wide-open statements on Orleans cuts like “Time Passes On” and “What I Need,” so pertinent and effective in their simplicity; the amazingly succinct multi-stroke rudimental outbursts of “You’ve Given Me Something” and “Love Takes Time”; and the funky hi-hat squawks and barks he squashed into impossible spaces on “Tongue Tied” and “Cold Spell,” defying and challenging the parameters of time—and consistently winning the round.

Sometimes watching Kelly was like seeing a cat being tossed in midair—scrambling, squiggling, but *always* landing on his feet. Wells’s true impact, though, was more the result of the unique way he expressed and delivered his time feel. He always swirled around the perimeter of the meter without ever actually wavering from it, often placing off-time accents in unorthodox places but insistently jamming that strong groove down your throat, whether he was playing in front of or behind the beat.

Wells also had a way of delivering familiar drum patterns that just felt different from everyone else’s versions. The rest of us could only marvel at the impact and strength of his execution, which mainly came from his powerful wrists, tucked down in there tight to the kit, unlike the full-arm style of many other heavy hitters.



Among Kelly’s talents were his abilities on a number of instruments, including guitar, bass, and keyboards.

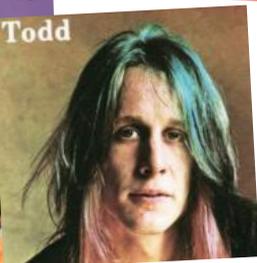
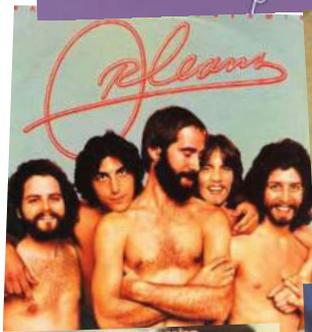
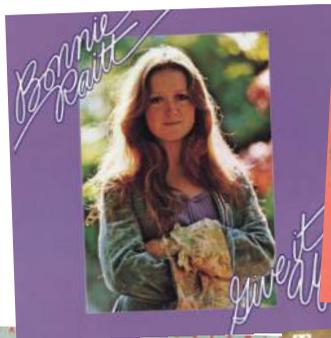
At the same time, it often seemed that his feet were responding to the commands of a different individual, again intentionally placing strokes in unconventional locations, all while maintaining the customary patterns—and, *oh*, what a groove.

How did Kelly arrive at this plateau, we wondered, and how can we get there too? One possible contributing factor is that he was a lefty playing on a righty kit. You’d never sense this while observing the strength in his assertive style, but I suspect it enabled many of the left-handed miracles he delivered. Secondly, Kelly played piano for many years before picking up the sticks, instilling a melodic sense in his soul that manifested itself in his choices of what to hit and when. Aside from these revelations, no one I am aware of has been able to truly solve the mystery of his magic. None of us found the way, and so we continue to insist that nobody played like Wells...he remains “still the one.”

It should be recognized that Kelly was also a talented singer and songwriter, and that he performed expertly on guitar and keyboards. In fact, he seemed competent on any available instrument, and he played them all on stage at various times. I recall once seeing him, in the middle of an impressive drum solo, handed a trumpet by an onlooker, which he effortlessly incorporated into his solo without missing a beat.

In later years Kelly added many credits to his list, including briefly playing and recording with the Beach Boys—not on drums, but on bass. He was the original touring and recording drummer with Clarence Clemons and the Red Bank Rockers, and he hit the road with Steve Forbert, recording a fantastic live King Biscuit show with the singer/guitarist. Kelly also toured with Meat Loaf while tracking the singer’s *Bad Attitude* album. Sadly, in the midst of that tour, on October 29, 1984, Wells passed away at only thirty-five years of age as a result of drug ingestion.

Wells Kelly was a warm, funny, and compassionate friend, very much like a big brother to me and to others—and for many of us, our greatest source of musical education and inspiration. To hear his wonderful playing—especially his live work, where his gifts are most evident—go to orleansonline.com or wolfofgangsvault.com.





RATINGS SCALE

Classic ●●●●●

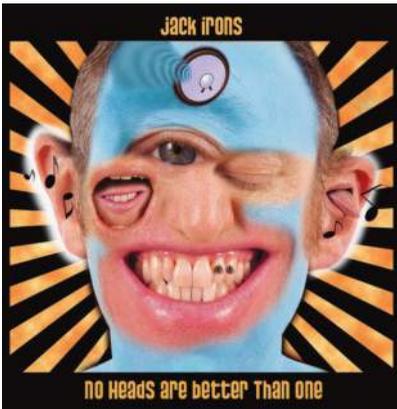
Excellent ●●●●○

Good ●●●○○

Fair ●●○○○

Poor ●○○○○

TAKING THE REINS



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JACK IRONS *NO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE*

As impressive as they are, the typical descriptors of Jack Irons' career—early Chili Peppers drummer, mid-'90s Pearl Jam skinsman, Joe Strummer and Les Claypool collaborator, cofounder of the band Eleven—don't prepare you for the color and content of his work as a leader. On his second solo album, Irons fulfills the promise of his first collection, 2004's *Attention Dimension*, and offers a diverse selection of (mostly) instrumental tracks that are rhythmically compelling, mood heavy, individualistic, and, yes, *drummy*. Not that Jack's playing hasn't been well represented on record previously. But without a band vibe to serve, the drummer's exploratory nature really gets to flower here, with indie-ish loop intermissions ("Moon Tune," "Timbale Space Stew") and weird and worldly imaginary soundtracks ("Love Is All We Want," "Psy-Fi Disco") counterbalancing dense, driving full-kit workouts ("Doubloons," "Submarine Fez," "Sonic Tonic"). There's even a bona fide radio rocker with *hit* written all over it ("Nothing Opens Everything," featuring vocals and guitar by Jack's longtime musical partner Alain Johannes). The drum sound is wet, warm, and wonderful, and Irons is truly playing at the top of his game these days, so fans of his kit work will absolutely get their ya-yas out. With so many great ideas represented here, it's inspiring to reexamine Irons' early recordings for hints of the wonders to come. (jackirons.com) **Adam Budofsky**



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MIKE CLARK *CARNIVAL OF SOUL*

Coming from a soul-jazz vibe, beloved Headhunters drummer Mike Clark shows he's got a new trick or two up his sleeve. There's a slightly lighter, looser edge to this funk. Clark jabs triplet and double-time figures on the rock-steady "Monk's Dream." A few tracks later he plays a beautifully behind-the-beat groove under Jeff Pittson's organ solo on "Turok Son Of Stone," while still packing the fireworks. Later, "Bookin'" gives Clark a momentary chance to rip and roar, and on the very next track he's laying back in the stone-cold soul-jazz space of "Zoyd," punctuating the groove regularly with toms, as well as sweetly setting up the turnaround. The closer, "Catlett Outta The Bag," featuring guest drummer **LENNY WHITE**, is pure funk bliss, heavy on the skins. (Owl Studios) **Robin Tolleson**



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THE TRIO OF OZ *THE TRIO OF OZ*

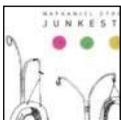
Jazzers covering rock tunes is not new, and the concept tends to work best when those jazzers are actually fully adept at rock, as is the case with *The Trio of Oz*, **OMAR HAKIM**'s new collaboration with pianist Rachel Z. Somewhere between the dizzying 32nd-note triplets on Stone Temple Pilots' "Sour Girl" and the textured acoustic jungle beat on the Killers' "When You Were Young," it's clear the drummer isn't taking the passive approach. Featuring Hakim's colorful cymbal work and plenty of solos, the record feels less like a gimmick than a real band you're curious to catch live. (thetriofoz.com) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



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GERRY GIBBS AND THE ELECTRIC THRASHER ORCH. *PLAY THE MUSIC OF MILES DAVIS 1967-1975*

Capturing the sounds, rhythms, and moods of 1967-75 Miles Davis, drummer Gerry Gibbs and Co. cop the dark prince's voodoo with fiery ambition. Though the twelve-piece orchestra nails such classics as "Nefertiti," "Black Satin," and "Bitches Brew," it also hits some dead ends of static jamming. Still, Gibbs acquits himself phenomenally throughout, recalling a genetic splice of Jack DeJohnette and Al Foster. (Whaling City Sound) **Ken Micallef**



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NATHANIEL STOOKEY *JUNKESTRA*

Classical composer Stookey gathered objects from San Francisco's trash heaps and recycled them as glorious percussion instruments for this three-movement octet piece. Thankfully, Stookey's inventive style, best known through string works, transcends common clatter. Skillfully arranging the instruments' timbres, Stookey creates a captivating, mysterious, and sonorous piece as performed by the **SAN FRANCISCO YOUTH ORCHESTRA**. A bonus "dance mix" provides a whimsical coda. The only downside is the disc's meager 15:33 length. One man's trash is another man's symphony. (Innova) **Jeff Potter**



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WADADA LEO SMITH AND ED BLACKWELL *THE BLUE MOUNTAIN'S SUN DRUMMER*

Funny how we're quick to associate Ed Blackwell with "free." Yet this 1986 concert of fully improvised trumpet-and-drums duets reminds us just how much the late, great drummer was really about creating clear ideas, melody, color, and structure. Supporting Smith's muscular and inventive trumpet playing, Blackwell gives the flights their arc and logic. Few drummers could pull it off with such a satisfying meeting of the cerebral and the earthy. (Kabell Records) **Jeff Potter**

MORE DRUMMER-LED RELEASES by Ilya Stemkovsky

Brooklyn's **DAN WEISS** leads his piano trio on *Timshel*, a set of introspective tunes featuring slick brushes and dramatic swells. The title track's dark, understated polyrhythmic intensity allows Weiss to freewheel around his kit, choking cymbals and accenting odd-time passages. (sunnysiderecords.com)

Muscular, swinging bop, exceptional Latin grooves, and high-energy soloing come together on **PEPPE MEROLLA**'s *Stick With Me*. Merolla's well-recorded debut as a leader pulls no punches, and his extended solo on "Mozzin'" thrills with creative cowbell fills and great footwork. (peppemerolla.com)

On the live *Stories And Negotiations*, Chicago-based drummer **MIKE REED** and his group People, Places & Things recall the Windy City's 1950s roots while featuring some old-school players. Reed is equally at home with brushes and sticks, but it's his tactful support of the elder statesmen that makes the toes tap. (482music.com)

Perennial kit sideman **PAUL VAN WAGENINGEN** and his bassist brother, Marc, lay down TOP-style funk and driving Afro-Cuban rhythms on *Muziek*, a showcase for their studio-honed chops. The inventive Dutch drummer stays authentic, alternately keeping time and letting it fly as needed. (patoisrecords.com)



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STICKS 'N' SKINS CELEBRATES ITS ANNIVERSARY WITH A TRIBUTE TO HAL BLAINE

This past November 21, *Sticks 'N' Skins*, a 560-page coffee-table book for which author Jules Follett and her Fotos By Follets team traveled to fifty-three cities in four countries and photographed more than 500 drummers, celebrated its one-year anniversary at the Grammy Museum in Los Angeles. Many of L.A.'s top drummers and industry leaders attended the gala, which was also a tribute to the great studio drummer Hal Blaine.



Sticks 'N' Skins is dedicated to the late photographer Lissa Wales, whose work is featured at the beginning of the book. Wales's sister Mary Wales Long gave a heartfelt speech in Lissa's honor, as did Jules Follett.

Book advisory board member **Liberty DeVitto**, who couldn't attend the celebration due to gigs back on the East Coast, sent a funny note to Blaine, which was read by event MC **Dom Famularo**. Danny Tedesco, son of Wrecking Crew guitarist Tommy, put together a Blaine video montage using outtakes from his film, *The Wrecking Crew*, about the legendary studio group. Then the house band with Hal's good friend and former Wrecking Crew bandmate Don Randi and percussionist **Pete Korpela** took the stage. Guest drummers who sat in with the band included **Tom Brechtlein**, **John "JR" Robinson**, **Ndugu Chancler**, **James Gadson**, **Kenny Aronoff**, and **Jim Keltner**. Blaine and Keltner closed the show, double drumming on the Nancy Sinatra hit "Drummer Man." For more on *Sticks 'N' Skins*, visit sticksnskins.com.

Photos by Alex Solca

WHO'S PLAYING WHAT

Pearl Drums welcomes **Eric Hernandez** (Bruno Mars), **Robert Ortiz** (Escape The Fate), and **Nick Augusto** (Trivium) to its artist roster.



Tony Liotta is now endorsing Tamburo drums and percussion.

Shine Drums has announced the addition of three new country artists, **Brett Hart** (the Band Perry), **Mike Childers** (Danny Gokey), and **Will Denton** (the JaneDear Girls), to its roster of artists.

Jack Irons has joined the Masters Of Maple family.

Matty Amendola (producer/sessions) is endorsing Cympad, Pro-Mark sticks, and Earthworks microphones.

Anthony "Tiny" Biuso (Rhino Bucket) has added Crush Drums and Evans Drumheads to his list of endorsements.

Caitlin Kalafus (Kicking Daisies) is endorsing Zildjian cymbals.

Jojo Mayer (Nerve) is now playing Evans heads.

Mapex has announced the addition of **Matt Halpern** (Periphery), **Lee Pearson** (Maryland Academy Of Performing Arts), **Matt Johnson** (player/educator), and **Damien Schmitt** (Jean-Luc Ponty) to its list of artists.

Steve Ferrone (Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers) is using Shure's Beta 52A, Beta 91, and SM57 microphones exclusively.

Billy Martin (Medeski Martin & Wood) has joined the Craviotto Drum Company's family of artists.

Thomas Lang, **Derek Roddy**, **John "JR" Robinson**, **Dave Grohl**, **Dominic Howard** (Muse), **Scott Phillips** (Creed), and Chinese drummer **Bei Bei** have joined the DW Drums roster.



Vater Percussion welcomes **Nathan Followill** (Kings Of Leon) to its list of endorsers.

Antonio Sanchez (Pat Metheny) and **Ulysses Owens Jr.** (Kurt Elling) have joined the Remo family.

Steve Smith (Vital Information), **Alex Acuña** (Weather Report), **Dafnis Prieto** (Eddie Palmieri, Michel Camilo), **Pat Mastelotto** (King Crimson), **Robin DiMaggio** (Paul Simon, *Lopez Tonight*), **Chad Smith** (Red Hot Chili Peppers, Chickenfoot), **Peter Erskine** (Weather Report, Steely Dan), **Will Calhoun** (Living Colour), **Peter Michael Escovedo** (Santana, Lionel Richie), and **Danny Carey** (Tool) are endorsing the Korg Wavedrum.

Jay Weinberg has joined the SJC Custom Drums artist roster.

Mika Fineo (Filter) is endorsing Gretsch and Gibraltar.



DRUM FANTASY CAMP 2010

More than 200 drummers from eleven countries took part in the 2010 Drum Fantasy Camp held last August at Cleveland's House Of Blues and Hyatt Regency Hotel. Instructors **Peter Erskine**, **Tommy Igoe**, **Thomas Lang**, **Jojo Mayer**, and **Dave Weckl** taught and performed. Additional classes included **Joe Goretti's** "Drumming Career Course" and sound engineer **Dennis Moody's** drum recording session. Baron Browne (bass), Chrissi Poland (keyboards/vocals), and Vinny Valentino (guitar) formed the house band and ran nightly jams and groove workshops.

The camp opened with a three-hour clinic at the House Of Blues featuring solo and group performances plus a discussion with the audience. Later that evening, each instructor took turns performing at a con-

cert featuring guitarist Mike Stern and bassist Tom Kennedy, and then the instructors performed together with the band, trading solos and wrapping up with an exciting grand finale. The next four days featured intimate three-hour master classes. Campers spent time with each instructor, exploring a myriad of concepts through discussion and playing. In the evenings, campers and instructors socialized and took turns jamming with the band, which played a wide repertoire. Weckl and Lang brought down the house with a fun and exciting duel on the last night. The camp closed out with an inspiring concert at Cleveland's Nighttown club/restaurant. Campers were treated to classic Erskine moments as Peter joined Browne, Poland, and Valentino for a night of jazz and funk.



Registration for the 2011 Drum Fantasy Camp opened in February. For more information, go to drumfantasycamp.com.

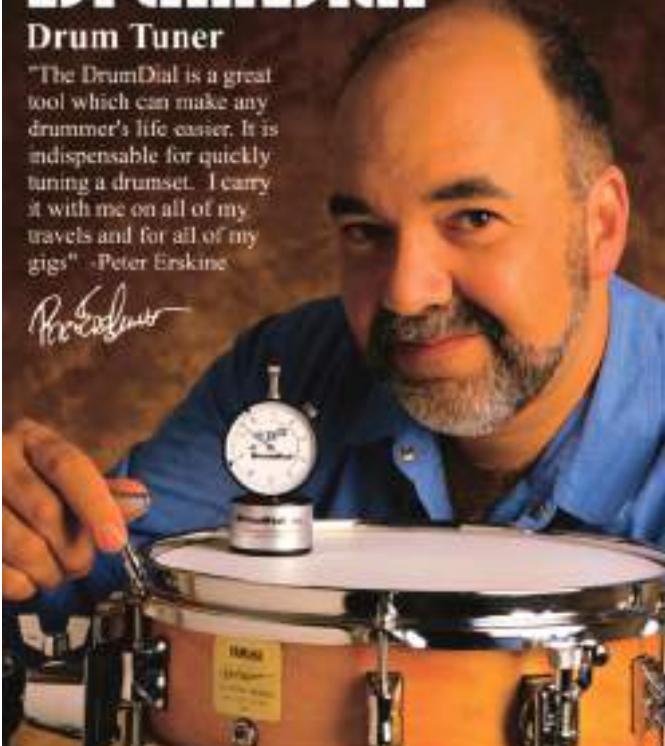


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KIT OF THE MONTH

Extreme Makeover: Drumset Edition



Our latest kit comes from Tobin Wagstaff of Gainesville, Florida, who's the executive director of the nonprofit music school Studio Percussion. In February 2010, Wagstaff's family was featured on the TV show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, with celebrity guests Kiss. Tobin tells *MD* that he was given this drumset before the makeover, and the covering had already been stripped down to the wood. "I kept it in my shed and used it as my 'beater' kit," he says. "All the chrome was banged up and rusty. For years I couldn't decide how to refinish the drums. After *Extreme Makeover*, the idea to refinish them in pictures came to me."

To prep the thirty-year-old kit, Wagstaff spent days grinding out the rust and polishing the hardware; he replaced only what was either broken or missing. "The small tom-tom is dedicated to the volunteers—the everyday folks that helped us," he explains of the photos on the drums. "The floor tom is dedicated to the stars of the build—the designers, the family, the builder, the leads, and the crew. The bass drum is dedicated to the home itself. You'll see pictures of the old house through its 'rock 'n' roll demo,' and the construction of the new home. This is my way of saying thank you to everyone who supported the build." Wagstaff is also grateful to Shandon Smith and Lifeprints Photography for the photos and to Tony Barrett of Talking Walls at Haile and Andy Adleman for helping to install the images on the drums.

Wagstaff ends with a shout-out for the snare drum, which was created by Mike Cherny of Nolan Page Drum Co. "It's made of 100 percent pure crystal," Tobin says. "The first of its kind!"

Photo Submission: Hi-res digital photos, along with descriptive text, may be emailed to billya@modern drummer.com. Show "Kit Of The Month" in the subject line of the message.



NEXT MONTH



The Melvins' DALE GROVER

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- Gearing Up With The **ALLMANS' DRUMMERS**





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