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# CONTENTS

Volume 42 • Number 2  
Cover and Contents photos by John Abbott

## ON THE COVER

### 28 MATT WILSON

Pursuing the unfamiliar, unafraid to unleash.  
by Willie Rose



### 16 ITALIAN VINTAGE DRUMS AND CYMBALS

by Adam Budofsky

### 26 ON TOPIC: SONNY EMORY

by Bob Girouard

### 38 SPOON'S JIM ENO

by Stephen Bidwell

### 42 JD McPHERSON'S JASON SMAY

by Patrick Berkery

### 46 BOOKER STARDRUM

by Adam Budofsky

### 50 WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT...TONY NEWMAN?

by Will Romano

### 78 DARE TO DRUM

by Lauren Vogel Weiss

## LESSONS

### 56 BASICS

**The Fundamentals of 3/4 Rock** Where to Play the Backbeat by Joel Rothman

### 58 STRICTLY TECHNIQUE

**Moeller Through the Chapin Lens** Examining Upstroke and Downstroke Mechanics by Claus Hessler

### 60 ROCK 'N' JAZZ CLINIC

**Two-Limb Patterns** Grooving Over Linear Ostinatos by Joel Popelsky

### 62 JAZZ DRUMMER'S WORKSHOP

**Bebop Syncopation** Part 2: Philly Joe Jones by Mike Alfieri

### 64 ROCK PERSPECTIVES

**Exploring Five-Over-Three** Mastering a Difficult Grouping, Step by Step by Aaron Edgar

### 66 CONCEPTS

**Understanding and Utilizing Fear** Tips for Turning Anxiety Into Achievement by Mark Schulman

## EQUIPMENT

### 18 PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

**Hendrix** Perfect Ply Series Drumset  
**Beier** 6.5x15 and 7.5x15 Steel Snares  
**DW** 5000 Series Lowboy Hi-Hat  
**Vater** Acorn Tip and Player's Design Drumstick Additions

### 54 GEARING UP

Led Zeppelin Experience's Jason Bonham

### 68 SHOP TALK

**The George Way Drum Company**  
The Iconic Man and the Rebirth of His Legacy Brand  
by Bob Campbell

### 72 NEW AND NOTABLE

**WIN!**  
An Alesis Strike Pro Electronic Drumkit Worth \$2,400!

Page 57

## DEPARTMENTS

### 8 An Editor's Overview

Around and Around We Go  
by Mike Dawson

### 10 Readers' Platform

Can Feel Be Taught, or Is It a Gift?

### 12 Out Now

Asking Alexandria's James Cassells

### 13 On Tour

Elizabeth Goodfellow  
With Iron & Wine

### 14 News

### 15 Must-Have Gear

Will Calhoun

### 80 Critique

Led Zeppelin book,  
Carl Palmer DVD, and more

### 82 Inside Methods

Paul Wertico's *Turn the Beat Around*

### 86 Backbeats

ProgPower USA XVIII

### 88 Kit of the Month

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## Around and Around We Go

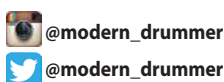
It's hard to believe that we've already turned the corner toward another year, and *Modern Drummer* is celebrating forty-two years of publishing in 2018. While that pales in comparison to the 4.54 billion times this rock we live on has circled the sun, we're enormously proud and honored to continue to be your top drum publication of choice...especially when there are so many other options available today to satisfy your percussive needs.

We couldn't and wouldn't be here if it weren't for the continuous and consistent support of loyal readers like you. And we're forever thankful for your trust in the decisions on who we feature, what gear we review, and which educational articles we choose to share. We don't always make the obvious choices. (Would it be much fun if we did?) But we do spend a lot of time deliberating those decisions. After all, there are only so many spaces to fill each year, but the pool of great artists, products, and lesson ideas keeps expanding and deepening. From our perspective, the drumming community is as strong and healthy as ever, and we're endlessly grateful to play a part in bringing us all together, regardless of where we come from, who our favorite band is, or how drumming fits into our daily lives.

This month's cover artist, Matt Wilson, may not be a household name, but he's one of the most unusual and revered jazz drummers/leaders of the past twenty years. Not only is he insanely talented, but he's also been steadfast in carving out a career on his own terms, however quirky or unconventional the paths may be. If you're not familiar with Wilson's work, check out his latest record, *Honey and Salt*, which is a playful tribute to the renowned American poet Carl Sandburg. Then dig into his interview in this issue. If there's one thing I've gleaned from observing Matt's career through the years, it's that there's no single set of rules to follow when it comes to making meaningful art. Well...maybe there's one thing: Just do you!

*Mike Dawson*

**Michael Dawson**  
Managing Editor



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## READERS' PLATFORM

### November Issue

I was doing my abbreviated charts for a rehearsal and needed a break. My November issue of *Modern Drummer* had been up on the mantel unopened, so I grabbed it for a look.

Billy Amendola's Editor's Overview, "Make Every Second Count," was as refreshing as a walk on Daytona Beach. His timely advice gave me pause to free my mind from my morning routine and focus on his encouraging words. I pondered my life, blessings, goals, and directions. Bravo!

"What Song Inspired You to Start Playing the Drums?" in Readers' Platform was a fun read. I'm a vintage drummer born in 1952, and I began playing in 1964 after seeing Ringo and the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, as mentioned by Thomas Reid.

On Topic with the legendary Jimmy Cobb was a real treat. I loved Cobb's various comments and wisdom on playing and on his time with Miles Davis and John Coltrane. I also loved his commentary on the late, great Mickey Roker.

Thanks for keeping *MD* founder Ron Spagnardi's dream moving forward. The service you provide to the drumming community is golden.

**Timothy Lee Cromer**



### Can Feel Be Taught, or Is It a Gift?

*Unlike certain aspects of drumming, such as timing, technique, and dynamics, developing a drummer's sense of groove or feel can be somewhat of an ambiguous*

*task. Even more obscuring is the debate that arises among the drumming community over whether groove can be developed in the first place or if it's a natural ability. Our readers*

*and social media followers recently joined in on the discussion, and here are some of their thoughts.*

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Having seen it as a student at the Musicians Institute in Los Angeles in the late '80s, I can attest that people can learn to groove. However, there's a subtle difference between a drummer with a natural, soulful groove and someone that shed for hours along to [Toto's] "Rosanna." But it can be subjective, because what grooves for one person may not for another.

**Greg Levine**

It's a matter of interest, passion, and the understanding of what groove really is—and I'm still working on that myself after twenty-nine years of playing. But I don't believe in those who say "I can't." It's just a matter of understanding what it's all about and falling in love with the process to learn.

**Björn Rautio**

Talent, be it even minimal, is required to play time. Playing in time is the first step en route to grooving. Musical talent in its minimal form is needed at the very least to learn the elementary aspects of any instrument. Mind you, I'm just speaking

about time—to make time groove with nuance and dynamics is an entirely different level of proficiency. But it's not possible without talent. Groove is a gift because talent is needed. Sure, you have to nurture the talent and practice to develop the skills needed. But without talent, all the practicing in the world won't help you.

**Steve Hass**

I think having a natural ability or gift can be a part of it. The sales industry requires a learnable set of skills too, but some people are naturals who start out inherently ahead of the rest.

**Jeff Marshall**

Anything can be improved upon with dedication and guidance. Otherwise the entire concept of education would be worthless.

**Fionn Ó Ceallacháin**

**Want your voice heard? Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, and keep an eye out for next month's question.**

## Dropped Beats

On page 16 of the October 2017 issue, drummer Steven Nistor should have been credited for playing drums on the Sparks album *Hippopotamus*.

The photo accompanying the 1984 Tour Custom entry in the "Yamaha Drums at 50" feature in the November 2017 issue was incorrect. That photo was of a YD9000RD set. This is the shot that should have run. Thanks to reader Richie Rosenbaum for the correction.



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# OUT NOW

## James Cassells on Asking Alexandria's *Asking Alexandria*

The genre-defying British transplants release their fifth full-length after welcoming back their original vocalist.



A little more than a year after reuniting with original lead singer Danny Worsnop, the genre-straddling heavy rock group Asking Alexandria released its fifth studio album this past December 15. Partly inspired by the reunion with Worsnop, the rested and reenergized group chose to work with producer Matt Good (From First to Last, D.R.U.G.S.) instead of its usual go-to guy, Joey Sturgis (We Came as Romans, the Devil Wears Prada). “We still love Joey to bits,” the band’s longtime drummer, James Cassells, says. “But Matt’s a good friend of ours, and we wanted to try something different. With Danny returning to the band, we wanted a fresh start.”

Cassells’ wide, smashing groove and huge, natural drum tones on lead single “Into the Fire” reveal a hard-earned maturity that’s evident throughout the album. The drummer’s straightforward drive and massive snare tone on opener “Alone in a Room” and restrained fills on “Under Denver” also stand out. Cassells explains that while tracking he was able to draw inspiration from the tones he achieved in the studio with Good. “I feel like everything was just captured so well,” he says. “We were listening back to the raw drum takes with no EQ or editing, and they sounded amazing. That’s when you know that you captured a good sound—when there’s no tampering and it’s already beautiful. I just had a great time recording, and as soon as you know that you’re capturing

great sounds, the whole tracking process turns from being a chore to being awesome.”

Cassells says that the band’s approach to writing has matured. “A lot of people ask us, ‘Is it going to be heavy? Are you going to do pop songs? Is it going to be electronic?’ We’re just trying to write good songs. They ask, ‘Are the songs going to sound like Asking Alexandria?’ Of course they are—we’re the ones writing and recording them! Danny’s voice hasn’t changed. If you liked *From Death to Destiny* [Worsnop’s previous album with the group], you’re going to like this one.”

With more than 5 million views of the album’s lead single on YouTube a month after its release, Cassells is confident about the reception to the band’s new material. “Honestly, from the reaction from all over the world to ‘Into the Fire,’ I think that everyone’s really going to love this album,” he says. “They’re going to take it as it is: an album with a lot of good and honest songs. I feel like a lot of people are going to relate to that.”

Asking Alexandria will be coheadlining with Black Veil Brides on a U.S. and European tour in early 2018. **Ben Meyer**

**James Cassells plays Tama drums, Sabian cymbals, Vic Firth sticks, and Axis pedals.**



## More New Releases

**Charles Hayward & Thurston Moore** *Improvisations* (Charles Hayward) /// **The Dear Hunter** *All Is as All Should Be* (Nick Crescenzo) /// **Icarus the Owl** *Rearm Circuits* (Rob Bernknopf)



# ON TOUR



## Elizabeth Goodfellow With Iron & Wine

The drummer, percussionist, and vocalist invigorates a seasoned indie artist's new album and extensive back catalog.

This past August 25, the singer-songwriter Sam Beam—better known by the moniker Iron & Wine—released his eighth full-length album, *Beast Epic*. For the current tour in support of the effort, Beam recruited drummer and backup vocalist Elizabeth Goodfellow to supply the earthy, delicate drum tones that Joe Adamik originally laid down underneath the record's indie-folk vibes. To re-create those parts on stage, Goodfellow made a few adjustments to her normal setup.

"In order to get that same subtle, hollow, and gentle sound live, I'm using a soft beater on the kick, placing handkerchiefs on certain drums to deaden the attack, and playing the toms with timpani mallets," Goodfellow explains. "I'm playing very little hi-hat and instead playing the hi-hat patterns on a set of bongos. I'm also tying some bells to each of my legs, a technique I picked up from watching my friend Jay Bellerose, since I thought that sound would work well for the enchanting nature of many of Sam's songs. There's a trap table where my second rack tom would otherwise be, populated with a hubcap, a cello bow, a children's ratchet toy, several shakers, a vintage tambourine, and anything else I find on the road that I think will be fun

---

Elizabeth Goodfellow plays C&C drums, Regal Tip drumsticks, and vintage Zildjian cymbals. She also plays a vintage Ludwig snare in a black oyster pearl wrap and a Ludwig Speed King pedal.

to throw into the mix. We improvise quite a bit."

While Goodfellow sticks to the parts Adamik played on *Beast Epic*, she revisited Iron & Wine's back catalog to give the songs new life on the road. "For older songs—and there are many—Sam Beam likes to reimagine them," Goodfellow says. "This requires that I abandon the recorded version and present new options for the patterns and sonic palette. So I have quite a lot of opportunity to bring in my own ideas, which is extremely rewarding. The songs have great 'bones' and can be performed in multiple treatments. This keeps things fresh for Sam, the band, and the audience. You never know how you might hear one of your Iron & Wine favorites performed."

Since starting her professional career at the age of seventeen in the U.S. Air Force Band of the West Coast, Goodfellow has played with the Emily Anne Band and jazz trumpeter/vocalist Bria Skonberg. She's also a member of the rock group We Are the West. As she gets set to release a debut solo record this February 23, *MD* asks what advice she'd offer up-and-coming drummers considering her blooming career.

"One thing I've learned is that it's the people who stick with their passion who eventually realize their goals," Goodfellow says. "Nothing happens overnight, and you have to really love music to make a living doing it. And don't be afraid of failure. If you're doing things right, you'll fail much more than you'll succeed. When you *do* succeed it'll be because of everything you learned along the way. Everyone has her own unique path in this industry, and sometimes finding the right direction takes trial and error. Nobody can tell you which way to go but you." **Willie Rose**

## Also on the Road

Matt Best with Tonight Alive /// Zac Burrell with Night Argent /// Bobby Jarzombek with Fates Warning /// Jeff Fabb with Black Label Society /// Aaron Hill with Eyehategod /// Reed Mullin with Corrosion of Conformity

# NEWS

## Yamaha Drums Celebrates Fiftieth Anniversary

This past September 30, Yamaha Drums celebrated its fiftieth anniversary at the Musicians Institute in Hollywood, California. More than 400 guests attended the event, which featured an interactive exhibit of current and legacy Yamaha drumsets, including the company's first kit, released in 1967. Attendees test-drove the gear on display as they mingled with professionals from the Yamaha artist roster, and drum designers offered a technical and historical perspective on the company's evolution.

The hands-on presentation was followed by onstage performances by event headliners Larnell Lewis (Snarky Puppy), Dave Weckl (Chick Corea, solo), and Tommy Aldridge (Whitesnake, Ozzy Osbourne). The Yamaha team also honored drummers Bill Gibson (Huey Lewis and the News) and Rick Marotta (studio legend) with special appreciation awards.

Yamaha Drums marketing manager Steven Fisher closed out the event with a few remarks. "Fifty years of making high-quality, handcrafted drums is a major milestone in Yamaha's history, and it's a pleasure to be celebrating it with our customers, artists, and Yamaha colleagues," he said. "What we're really excited about, however, is the next fifty years. Yamaha has the resources, know-how, and innovative spirit to take drums and drumming to the next level for the next generation of players. Stay tuned."



## Tyshawn Sorey Receives 2017 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship

Drummer, composer, and multi-instrumentalist Tyshawn Sorey was recently named a recipient of a 2017 MacArthur Fellowship. In a statement, the MacArthur Foundation said Sorey received the award for "assimilating and transforming ideas from a broad spectrum of musical idioms and defying distinctions between genres, composition, and improvisation in a singular expression of contemporary music." The foundation also praised Sorey's "refined sense of restraint and balance that allows him to maintain his own unique voice while bringing a vast array of musical settings to life."

Sorey is among twenty-four 2017 MacArthur Fellows who span a range of disciplines, including visual art, human rights and social justice, theater, writing, and history. The MacArthur



Fellowship awards a no-strings-attached \$625,000—distributed over five years—to these select individuals. Past MacArthur Fellows include the musicians Anthony Braxton, John Zorn, George Lewis, Jason Moran, and Dafnis Prieto.

In 2017 Sorey began a new faculty appointment as assistant professor of music at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut; released his sixth record as a leader, *Verisimilitude*; and toured widely. On February 20 Sorey will premiere *Cycles of My Being*, which is part of Carnegie Hall's 125 Commissions Project, at Opera Philadelphia.

The song cycle features original text provided by poet and MacArthur Fellow Terrance Hayes, along with tenor Lawrence Brownlee. The New York premiere will be held April 24 at Carnegie Hall.

## Sabian Appoints Mark Love to Director of Research and Product Development

Sabian recently announced that master product specialist Mark Love has been promoted to the newly created position of director of research and product development. In his new role, Love will take on overall responsibility for the development and creation of new instruments and of enhanced manufacturing techniques, and he'll oversee and maintain product quality standards.

A thirty-five-year veteran of the Sabian team,



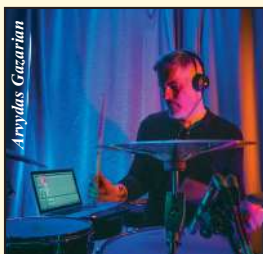
Love has been instrumental in developing some of the company's innovative series, including the Omni, Evolution, and Paragon lines and Radia Cup Chimes.

Sabian Vault veteran Dave Williams will take over Love's day-to-day role as Vault operations lead. Williams will be responsible for leadership of Vault staff, Vault inventory management, production scheduling, quality testing, and sales order fulfillment.

## Who's Playing What



**Jon Epcar** (John Legend, Carney, solo) has joined the **Craviotto** family of artists.



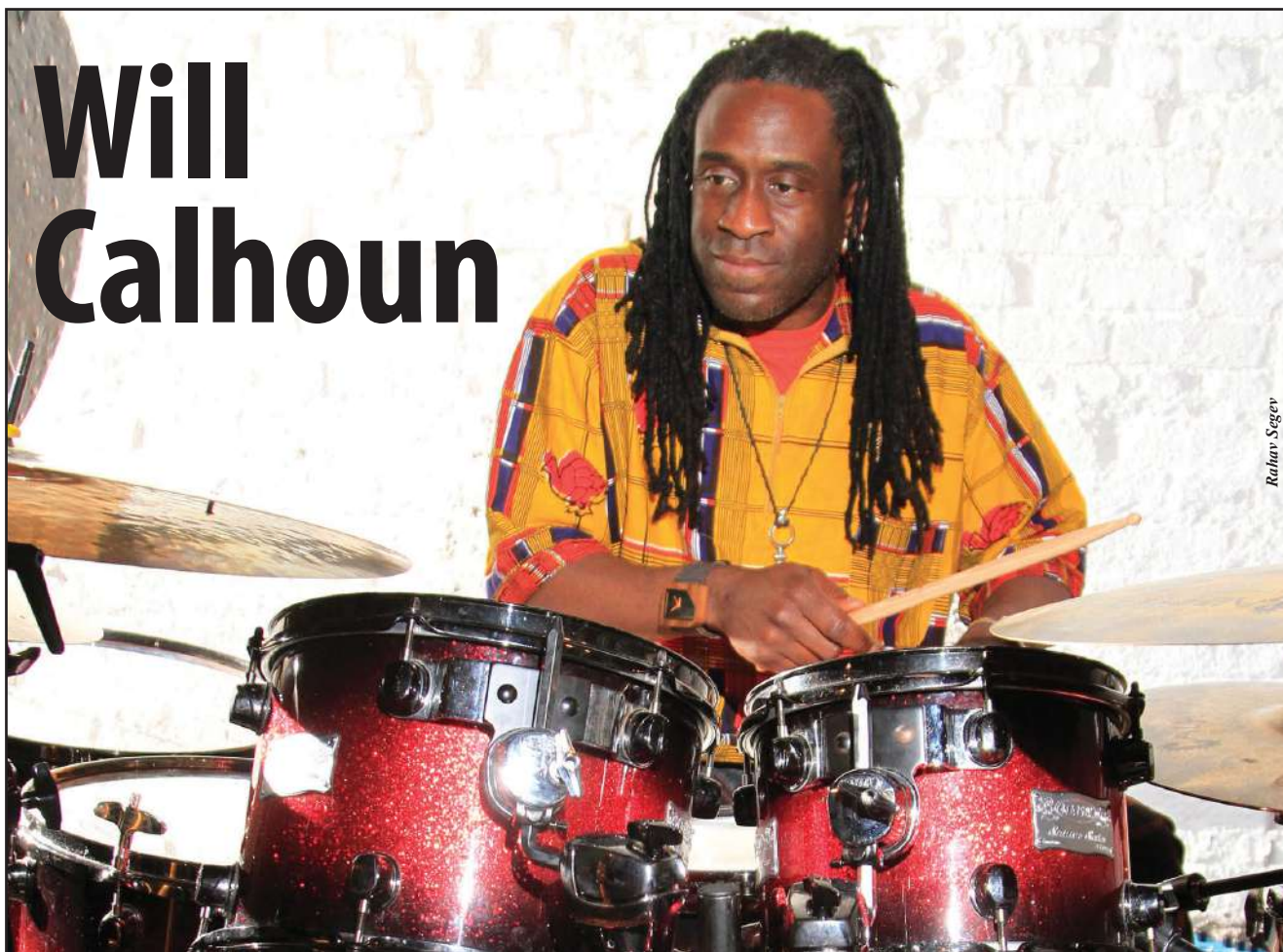
**Mark Heaney** (Extemporize, solo) has joined the **Turkish** cymbals roster.

**Ian Haugland** (Europe) has joined the **101 Drums** artist roster.





# Will Calhoun



Rahav Segev

**W**ill Calhoun has toured the world as a member of Living Colour for nearly thirty years. One thing he's learned is that airlines will take advantage of musicians. So over the years he's found ways to do them one better.

"I used box cases for snare drums, pedals, and sticks," Calhoun says. "When the airlines would ask, 'What are you working on?' I'd say, 'I'm shooting a documentary film on German wiener schnitzels.' They'd always wave [through] all my gear! I have a photographer's business card, which worked 90 percent of the time. When you say 'filmmaker,' it's like saying 'Harvard' or 'Yale.' They wouldn't weigh it; therefore I didn't have to pay extra. That worked up until 9/11."

These days Calhoun takes other measures. Currently touring the latest Living Colour album, *Shade*, he keeps a Mapex Saturn 5 set and Sabian cymbals in a storage space in Bremen, Germany, that doubles as a repair shop, and uses backline gear when needed. He also totes fragile equipment like his Korg Wavedrum in carry-on luggage. "I've had a lot of things damaged on airlines," Will explains, "and I don't want to buy that gear all over again. Airlines open things. And with my hairstyle they assume I have some weed tucked away in a delay unit."

If anything does get smashed, though, Calhoun makes sure to get paid. "Delta has reimbursed me for new gear," he says. "But Air France is the worst. They don't put things back correctly, and when you open the cases everything falls out. So I take photographs. I call the promoter over. I have him write a letter, I have the rental company write a letter, and I write a letter. Then I send the airline the bill. They pay, every time. Read the fine print on the back of the ticket—nothing over five grand. They'll even go to eBay or call a music store to verify

the cost. But they've always paid."

When out of the airport, Calhoun centers himself in strange lands with personal items that make him feel like he's at home, even when he's not. "I carry my daily jewelry," he says, "a couple spiritual books by Krishnamurti.... The road can make you jaded, but Krishnamurti keeps me grounded. I bring my favorite Gibraltar drum keys, as well as handmade West African garments given to me by the children of master musicians. It's like your relative has given you something precious. I'm particular about footwear too. I carry handmade Moroccan belhaj [slippers]—they fit like a glove—and a performance shoe. Right now that's soft custom Converse. And I take an everyday pair of lace-up Cole Haans, and Australian Blundstones—they're black, they're waterproof, and I can play in them. If the weather gets dodgy in Europe, I put those on. Boom!"

A jump rope ("500 reps before every gig"), Kashmiri chai tea with dried kelp, an RTOM Moongel Workout Pad, and a Yamaha RX11 drum machine also go into Calhoun's carry-on, along with his in-ear monitors, which double as stage monitors and personal headphones for his 80G iPod. "I use Audiofly AF1120s," the drummer says. "They're simple, they're smooth, and they're really light. They sound clean. I use them right out of my mixer. And they remove outside noise as well as noise-canceling headphones do."

Thirty years of traveling—does Calhoun still enjoy the journey? "I love the road," he says. "Something happens to you when you perform for people. It's a spiritual experience. And touring the globe is the best education in the world."

**Ken Micallef**



# Italian Vintage Drums and Cymbals

Vintage drum expert Luca Luciano's book is a fascinating introduction to some of the most unusual drums you'll likely never see.

It's logical that the elevated interest in vintage drums that we've experienced in the past couple decades has focused largely on instruments of American origin. Jazz and rock 'n' roll, the two most significant styles of music that have exploited our ever-evolving "contraption," were both born in the States. And given America's leadership in manufacturing and the arts in the twentieth century, it makes sense that its drum-making industry excelled in terms of innovation, quality, and distribution, at least until the rest of the developed world caught up in the late '70s and early '80s.

But as *Italian Vintage Drums and Cymbals* by Luca Luciano makes clear, while Slingerland, Ludwig, Gretsch, and Rogers were providing the beat that moved millions of American feet between the golden age of swing and the rise of arena rock, something strange and wonderful was happening on the other side of the Atlantic.

Far from being simple re-creations of American instruments, many of the Italian models featured unusual design elements that would tickle even the least gear-savvy drum fan. "It's really true that Italian manufacturers were thinking outside the box," says Luciano, a semiprofessional rock and jazz drummer who counts among his prime influences the idiosyncratic Stewart Copeland of the Police and the famed British free jazzer Tony Oxley. "At the birth of drum [manufacturing] in Europe, we looked at jazz drumsets, but even if we never saw one [in person], we looked at photos. Then was the beginning of the imagination! It follows that every country [developed] its own problem solving, following a universal idea but using its own materials, style, and engineering. The Hollywood by Meazzi company [in particular] was very rich in terms of that."

According to Luciano, drum manufacturing in Italy began in full



This remarkable HiPercussion kit featured wheels, but calling it "portable" might be a stretch.

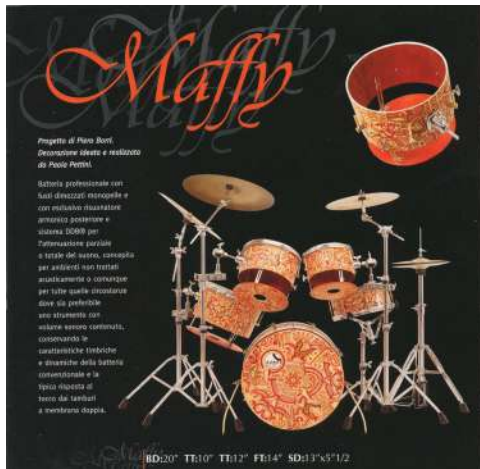
Affectionately referred to as "washing machine" or "pressure cooker" drums, Davoli models were first made of iron, and then brushed stainless steel. The innovative drums, launched in 1969, were rack-mounted and capable of being folded up for transport, and featured 14" toms and snares.



By Marcello Merenda, courtesy of the Cesari Collection



This rare single-headed, double bass Hollywood Cristalline set “was great to see in person,” the author says, “but very fragile.”



An ad for Daila's Maffy line boasted easy muffling due to the drums' “sliding blades.”



in the 1920s with Umberto Alberti's FISMOM brand—an acronym for Fabbrica Italiana Strumenti Musicali per Orchestre Moderne, or Italian Factory of Musical Instruments for Modern Orchestras. Among the more successful Italian companies were Hollywood and HiPercussion. The former managed to attract jazz greats like Max Roach and Art Blakey to its kits—Roach even had a line named after him—while the latter appealed to players including Pete Gill of the metal acts Saxon and Motörhead. Today high-quality Italian drum manufacturing continues with companies like Tamburo and Le Soprano.

As in America, in Italy we also find well-regarded cymbal brands, like Spizzichino and UFIP, as well as electronic percussion products such as Davoli's Drum Synth Effect and Hollywood's Tronic acoustic/electronic drumkit. “The Tronic featured a rack, volume and tone controls, and piezo microphones—so many concepts of the future,” Luciano says. “But the price was too high and nobody was really

**This tunable HiPercussion floor tom was based on earlier designs by WFL and Carlton. “The clear version was great,” Luca Luciano says, “because you were able to see the mechanism.”**

interested in it.” In 1968 no less a drum star than Billy Cobham presented the instrument at Carnegie Hall.

But it's the acoustic instruments in *Italian Vintage Drums and Cymbals* that ultimately draw our attention, largely due to the ambitious approaches to hardware, portability, and finishes exhibited by companies like Daila, Bariselli, Di Bernardino, and Finest e Varie. Ranging from gorgeous furniture-quality instruments, which one imagines would sonically rival the best of American offerings, to futuristic sets that seemingly create more arrangement and setup problems than they solve, the drums featured in the book remind us of the unceasing desire of manufacturers throughout the world to apply imagination, innovation, and dedication to boldly move the art of instrument design forward—even as they find themselves being sidetracked by some fascinating detours along the way.

While Luciano is still working on getting worldwide distribution for *Italian Vintage Drums and Cymbals*, the book can be ordered directly through the publisher Wakepress by emailing [ordini@wakepress.it](mailto:ordini@wakepress.it) or visiting [www.wakepress.it/ilvintagedellebatterie.html](http://www.wakepress.it/ilvintagedellebatterie.html).  
**Adam Budofsky**



# Hendrix

## Perfect Ply Series Drumset

A warmer and rounder-sounding 4-ply counterpart to the company's hi-fi, snappy stave setups.

**Hendrix Drums first caught** our attention a few years ago when it debuted its American black walnut Archetype series drumset. Those drums feature thin stave shells and have amazing projection as well as low, pure fundamental tones and super-clean attack. This past year the company introduced the Perfect Ply series, which features 4-ply walnut shells with 1" reinforcement rings. These drums are available in four- and five-piece shell packs with 18x22 or 16x20 bass drums and different combinations of tom sizes ranging from 8x10 to 16x16. We were sent the 5 Piece Rock configuration (\$2,099) with 8x10, 9x12, 14x14, and 16x16 toms and an 18x22 bass drum.

### The Nitty-Gritty Details

The Perfect Ply series is only available in walnut, but you can get the shells with a satin finish or a hard polyester gloss. Our review kit has the satin finish, which allowed the beautiful dark grain of the walnut to exist as naturally as possible. The 4-ply shells are thin (5mm), and the bearing edges are rounder than what you'll find on most contemporary kits. Perfect Ply rack toms have forty-five-degree inner cuts and rounded outer edges, and the floor toms and bass drum edges are completely round.

The drums come with small single-point lugs that are milled from aluminum to minimize weight and maximize shell resonance. I was shocked by how lightweight these drums were; even the large 18x22 bass drum was easy to lift with one hand. The rack toms come with RIMS-style suspension mounts, and the floor tom legs have a 90-degree bend and hollow rubber feet to promote sustain. All of the hardware is insulated with plastic gaskets, including the bass drum claws, lugs, floor tom leg brackets, and spurs.

Perfect Ply series drums come stock with Remo Clear Emperor tom batters, Clear Ambassador bottoms, and the Powerstroke 3 bass drum system with a ported white front and clear batter.

### How They Sound

Hendrix states that the Perfect Ply series was created with the objective of "producing a tonally pure, extremely sensitive, and versatile ply-constructed drumset." Medium-dense walnut is used in this series because it has a warm, round, and deep tone with extra-punchy low-end. The shells are cut thin so that the drums have excellent response and produce consistent tones at all dynamics.

We tested the toms and kick across the entire tuning range and discovered that they were very consistent, with clean, crisp attack, round and robust sustain, and a moderate but smooth decay. Very high tunings had more warmth than I get from most, which kept them from sounding brittle or choked while promoting super-quick attack and a shorter sustain.

The drums had obvious sweet spots, however, in the lower registers. They could be tuned very low for a fat, meaty punch with a ton of low end minus excessive rumble or fluttering distortion. I didn't need to fuss with fine-tuning or muffling the drums at any point in our review, yet they sounded as if they had been labored over for hours to dial in the perfect tone. Compared to my favorite vintage maple/poplar kit with round bearing edges, the Hendrix Perfect Ply had deeper low-end, stronger punch, darker tone, and cleaner attack. These are definitely modern-sounding drums, and they fall right in line with the powerful, hi-fi sound that defined Hendrix's Archetype stave series, but they introduce some of the fullness and warmth that has made ply-shell drums the go-to choice for decades.

**Michael Dawson**





# Beier

## 6.5x15 and 7.5x15 Steel Snares

Extra depth for larger-than-life backbeats.

We reviewed the shallow 4"- and 5.5"-deep versions of Beier's vintage-inspired 1.5mm steel 15" snares back in the February 2016 issue and fell in love with their deadly combo of power, punch, and crispness, especially at lower tunings. This month we're checking out two of the company's deeper steel models: a 6.5x15 and a 7.5x15. Both had eight lugs and came with Beier's signature textured black finish. Priced very competitively, the 6.5" sells for \$535, and the 7.5" is \$575. Let's check them out.

### 6.5x15

This drum came outfitted with Beier's bridge-style engraved lug, which is a modernized version of the box-type lug found on many vintage drums that's been designed to make minimal contact to the shell. The strainer featured DW's super-smooth Mag magnetized throw-off. Twenty-strand Puresound wires and Remo drumheads (CS Coated batter and Hazy Ambassador bottom) were also included. The hoops were standard 2.3mm triple-flange steel. The tension rods featured black plastic washers to facilitate smoother tuning and to help mitigate detuning under heavy use.

Despite its large size, the 6.5x15 Beier had a lot of versatility. It could be tuned tight to get a snappy "pop," but it had a lower and fatter tone than you'd get from a 13" or 14" drum tuned at the same tension. Medium batter-head tension produced some nice pitch bend, but it was in the lower ranges where this drum was most comfortable. Medium-low tension resulted in a meaty punch and super crisp attack, and low tunings had a huge Def Leppard-style "gush."



6.5x15



7.5x15

There were some noticeable midrange overtones when I played the 6.5x15 wide open, but they were fairly contained. One or two muffling gels were all that was needed to eliminate the ring and shorten the decay to achieve a thick, dense tone with bright, tight snare response. Microphones loved this drum; I didn't need to crank the high-end EQ to increase its presence at lower tunings. And it could easily project backbeats all the way to the back of the room when required to do so.

### 7.5x15

Aside from its extra inch of depth, the only difference on the 7.5x15 drum was that it had chromed-brass tube lugs instead of the engraved boxes. Everything else is identical. This deeper drum was sonically similar to the 6.5x15. Snare response was quick and snappy, the overtones were mostly focused in the midrange, the attack was strong and punchy, and it had plenty of thick, dense body. The sustain was a bit longer, but it didn't ring forever. Again, a gel or two was all that I needed to shorten the decay and rein in the overtones.

The most notable advantage of this deeper Beier snare is that it never bottomed out or started to sound compressed when played at high volume. Again, low and medium-low tunings were exceptional, and produced a thumping, sizzling timbre that sounded as if it was lifted straight off a vintage Roland TR-909 drum machine. For those of you looking for larger-than-life snare tones, get yourself one of Beier's steel beasts. There's nothing else quite like them.

**Michael Dawson**



# DW

## 5000 Series Lowboy Hi-Hat

A modernized throwback to the original sock cymbal.

**Before the modern hi-hat** existed there was a device that allowed early drumset players to control a pair of small crash cymbals with a pedal. This aptly named lowboy extended a foot or so above the floor, which helped keep the kit compact but also positioned the cymbals too low to be hit with sticks. The lowboy was rendered obsolete with the invention of the modern hi-hat stand, which allowed the cymbals to be raised up above the snare drum.

DW recently revived the lowboy and rebranded it as a foot instrument for hand drummers and drumset players looking to expand their sonic palette with additional foot sounds. While based on an early twentieth century design, the 5000 Series Lowboy isn't a flimsy replica. In fact, it has all the hallmarks of design and function that have made DW's hardware so popular over the years.

### Features

The 5500LB Lowboy has DW's venerable shoe-shaped black footboard and the upgraded Delta ball-bearing hinge that appear on all 5000 series pedals. It also features a steel baseplate with a non-skid rubber grip to keep the stand stable and to prevent it from slipping on hard surfaces. The footboard comes with a drum key and holder as well.

To keep the Lowboy extra-compact, DW created a unique drive system, called Glide Track, which positions the footboard to the side of the shaft, rather than below it. The footboard sits on top of a lever arm that rotates and pulls the rod downwards when depressed. The cymbal seat has an angle adjustment that can be utilized to minimize airlock, and the clutch has a locking nut to keep the cymbals from working loose as you play.

The shaft of the Lowboy is fixed to the footboard, so it can't be folded flat during transport. But the total height is just 14", and the pedal comes with a nylon carrying case that's about the size of a small laptop bag. The LP-branded medium-weight cymbals are 9", and one of them features six .75" holes. The holes help create a grittier, trashier "chick" tone.

### Function

I play a lot of acoustic gigs in small clubs where my setup often comprises a cajon, djembe, or congas, and various shakers and tambourines. Sometimes I bring a bass drum or cajon pedal, but rarely do I bother with a hi-hat. Instead I'll put a tambourine on the floor and rock my left foot on it whenever I need to add that sound to the groove. I enjoy the challenge of trying to control and manipulate the tambourine as it lies on the floor, but I admit that it's a flawed approach. Adding the DW Lowboy to my setup made a nominal impact on my load-in time and took up no additional floor space, which is crucial when having to cram a band into a tight corner of a restaurant.

The Lowboy pedal felt super quick and smooth, and the footboard never wobbled or slid around during the gig, even when I wasn't using a drum rug. The small cymbals were great for adding bright chirps and funky splashes, and the pull rod extended just enough beyond the clutch to allow me to attach a tambourine for additional sounds. You can also swap out the 9" cymbals for larger hi-hats if you want a deeper chick sound. And if desired, the Lowboy is slim enough to be placed within a standard drumkit fairly easily. I was skeptical as to whether the Lowboy would prove to be useful enough to warrant its revival, but given its discreet yet stable design and ease of use, it's winning me over—one mellow gig at a time.

**Michael Dawson**





# Vater

## Acorn Tip and Player's Design Drumstick Additions

Uniquely shaped signature models and a classic-shaped bead for the most popular sizes.



Since first launching as an independent brand twenty-five years ago, Vater has grown into one of the world's leading drumstick manufacturers, in part due to its partnership with key high-profile artists, but also because of its smart strategy to focus on developing a catalog full of unique but practical products. Some of Vater's latest additions include signature sticks for Deftones' Abe Cunningham, versatile Canadian performer/educator Anthony Michelli, and Dream Theater's Mike Mangini, as well as new acorn-tip versions of the popular 5A, Power 5A, and Power 5B models.

### Mangini, Michelli, and Cunningham Player's Designs

Dream Theater drummer Mike Mangini's Wicked Piston is one of the more unusually shaped drumsticks we've seen. Made of American hickory, the WP starts with a 580" 5A-style grip and then increases to .620" towards the upper third before tapering down to a large acorn tip. The extra width at the top adds weight and gives the stick a lot of front-leaning throw. The stick also measures 16.75", which is significantly longer than a typical 16" 5A or 5B. You can utilize the additional length to manipulate how front-heavy the stick feels by shifting your fulcrum point up or down the grip. The thicker section also produces denser, fatter rimshots and cymbal crashes when you strike with the shoulder. I found that the Wicked Piston had fairly comfortable rebound when I held the sticks with about 2" of wood extending from the bottom of my hands. Positioning my fulcrum further back minimized rebound but gave the sticks a lot of propulsion and power. The large tip also produced loud, full tones from drums and cymbals.

Anthony Michelli's AM 595 drumstick is .595" wide and 16" long, which is only .010" thinner than Vater's regular 5B. The tip is acorn-shaped, and the shoulder has a gradual taper to promote maximum rebound and balance. Michelli is a versatile drummer who plays gigs that require many different styles and dynamics, and his stick is designed to excel in every situation, from jazz to hard-hitting pop or fusion. The acorn tip produced full, rich sounds from drums and cymbals, and the shoulder taper was beefy enough to withstand rimshots while still providing perfect rebound. The AM 595 would be the ideal choice for drummers looking for something that's a step up

from a 5A but not quite as hefty as a 5B. This was my personal favorite of the bunch.

For drummers looking to bridge the size gap between a 5B and a 2B, Vater developed the Cool Breeze with modern rock great Abe Cunningham of Deftones. This stick is .600" in diameter and 16.625" long. Although this is an extra-long stick, it didn't feel oversized. In fact, it had a great combination of forward-leaning throw and nimble rebound. If you play anything like Cunningham, whose style features a lot of intricate flourishes as well as aggressive backbeats and fills, then you'll find everything you need in this stick. It has the perfect balance of power and grace.

### 5A, Power 5A, and Power 5B Acorn

Vater also added acorn tips to three of its popular 5A, Power 5A, and Power 5B models. The 5A Acorn has the same weight and dimensions as the company's popular Los Angeles 5A (.570"x16"), but the smaller, shorter tip offers a slightly fuller and more articulate tone. This is a definite go-to for a variety of gigs that require clean cymbal sounds, dynamic control, and quick response.

The Power 5A Acorn is fairly close in size to Cunningham's Cool Breeze. It measures .580"x16.5" and has a large tip. This stick plays and feels like a big stick, even though it's technically within the 5A range. Go for this model if you want power and extended reach but need a fairly thin grip.

The Power 5B Acorn is a large stick, measuring .610"x16.5", but it doesn't feel cumbersome. I had to choke up a bit higher than normal to find the optimal balance point for my fulcrum, but there was still plenty of length to reach crashes and instruments placed at the far sides of the kit. The acorn tip produced big, broad tones, and the hefty shoulder held up well after multiple hours of heavy rimshots. These are big, beefy sticks that were a perfect match for throwing down bombastic beats on an oversized setup.

All of these new models, which are made of high-quality white hickory, were perfectly straight and pitch-balanced, and they had a smooth but not overly lacquered finish that allowed me to maintain a comfortable, relaxed grip regardless of whether I was playing in a cool, dry studio or in a humid, sweaty club.

**Michael Dawson**



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# ON TOPIC



# Sonny Emory

## **On the advantage of formal study.**

Formal study is paramount for any drummer who's looking to be versatile enough to sustain a career. Unless you happen to be lucky enough to be in a band that's already successful. But being a sideman in today's industry, you're going to have to go into a lot of different areas comfortably. As far as feel, you're just trying to listen and learn from the players that feel good to you and home in on what that *thing* is.

## **On the preparation needed to embrace music as diverse as Earth Wind & Fire, Bette Midler, and Steely Dan.**

First of all, EWF's music is incredible and encompasses so many genres. Conversely, the touch and feel required to play behind Bette Midler or Steely Dan is something completely different. I spent a lot of years playing behind singers and for theatrical productions. I got all the "Broadway" experience from doing that for years, and that really helped. I couldn't have done any of it without reading. That's why I'm an advocate of formal training for younger players.

## **On teaching in the digital age: more fun, or more challenging?**

For me it's less fun. Although you have FaceTime, Skype, and other tools at your disposal, it's just not the same as being in the same room with the student. When I assess a cat's playing, I look at what their body is doing while they're playing. You can't really see what's going on without that. Digital time is cool, but real time in the flesh is the shit.

## **On the importance of learning another instrument.**

Keyboards or guitar is very important for drummers to learn—any chordal-based instrument. It broadens your palette and you start to experience drums in a different way.

## **On thinking in terms of melodies or rhythmic patterns when soloing.**

I do both. I also emphasize dynamics. I grew up listening to a lot of straight-ahead jazz, and I always try to play as musically as I can.

## **On the development of the new album *Love Is the Greatest* by Sonny Emory's Cachet.**

Earth Wind & Fire's Maurice White said something very poignant to me back when we were making my first solo album, *Hypnofunk*, in 1995. Maurice coproduced the album, and we were about halfway through the recording when he walked into the studio and said, "Sonny, I'm passing the baton to you." At the time I didn't quite understand what he meant, or the magnitude of that statement. I spent thirteen years with EWF, and it was thirteen years of grooming. I feel blessed just to have been a part of his and the band's legacy. It took a while to put Cachet together, because of all my touring commitments. I let the material dictate the direction of the band. With this album I wanted to display my funkier side and embrace all generations. I hope I've succeeded.

## **On self-producing: total freedom, or constrictive?**

Believe it or not, it can be constricting. You can only go as far as your thoughts will take you, and you may need some outside influences to help you see the light at the end of the tunnel. In hindsight, I think it's a lot easier when you collaborate. On the other side of the coin, it's emancipating to produce yourself. This time I wanted to sit in the hot seat alone and test the waters. I wanted this record to sound the way I wanted it to sound.

## **On advising young drummers.**

The first thing I talk about is humility, attitude, and keeping the proper perspective. As sidemen, we have to respect that. Sometimes younger players are not down with what they've been hired for, which is to play the music that they were contracted for and that's *all*—at least until and if the artist gives them the green light to go further. Accept the professional challenge, go out each night and play that music to the best of your ability, and keep it moving. Also, honor your word. If you commit to a gig, honor it and the commitment you've made to that artist. When all is said and done, that's how you'll be judged.

**Interview by Bob Girouard**


Emory plays Yamaha drums, Zildjian cymbals, and Toca and LP percussion, and he uses Vic Firth sticks, Remo heads, Shure mics, and Meyer sound systems.



# Matt Wilson

The Ambassador  
of Unvention



A man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a grey suit jacket, a white shirt, and a blue and black patterned tie, is shown from the chest up. He is holding a drumstick in his right hand and has a joyful expression, with his mouth open as if laughing or shouting. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**An experienced  
pursuer of the unfamiliar,  
and a passionate leader  
who's unafraid to unleash, the  
eternally curious drummer carves a  
unique way along his journey of musical  
discovery—all the while bringing as many  
of us along as he can.**

**Story by Willie Rose  
Photos by John Abbott**

During an early set at Manhattan's Birdland jazz club this past September, a sharp-dressed Matt Wilson took the stage behind jazz pianist Tamir Hendelman and bassist Marco Panascia. Sitting straight, tall, and attentive, the drummer began addressing the first tune's melody on his ride cymbal with delicate flicks of his fingers, making the stick almost appear to bend as he kept familiar time. Sparse hi-hat chicks fluttered, avoiding 2 and 4 at Wilson's whim. A feathered bass drum played a delicate cat-and-mouse game with a ghosted snare as the tune progressed. All was calm.

Then Wilson exploded. A snare crack and crash startled the Broadway dinner crowd and lit a blaze beneath Hendelman's solo, setting a precedent for the rest of the night's dynamic and emotional waves. Throughout the set, Wilson shifted between postured addresser and untethered instigator—comping on a hi-hat stand or tom rim, exploring an extended tamborim solo, and gracefully sweeping with brushes underneath Hendelman's gorgeous ballads.

These contrasts define Wilson's aesthetic, and might be a reason why he's been such an in-demand drummer on the New York jazz scene since his arrival in 1992. Throughout his career, Wilson has played on hundreds of records—more than 400 by his count—with artists such as John Medeski, Denny Zeitlin, Gary Versace, Charlie Haden, Lee Konitz, and David Liebman. A brief survey of Wilson's performance credits reveals appearances with Herbie Hancock, Dewey Redman, Andrew Hill, and Bobby Hutcherson, among many others. And Wilson maintains an extensive teaching agenda, which includes positions at New York's New School, SUNY Purchase, and Sarah Lawrence College, and trips throughout the year to Stanford University in California.

Over the past twenty years, Wilson has racked up his fair share of recordings as a leader, including his latest album, *Honey and Salt*, which upon release this past August garnered plenty of critical praise. The project features eighteen compositions inspired by the poetry of the Pulitzer Prize-winning American writer Carl Sandburg. Guest artists such as Christian McBride, John Scofield, Bill Frisell, and Joe Lovano lend their voices to readings of the poems throughout the record's four sections, and Wilson even duets with Sandburg's recorded recitation of "Fog." *MD* caught up with an exhilarated Wilson shortly after the record's release.



**“You need to be flexible and go for it. You want to care, but you don’t want to be too careful, and you don’t want to be careless.”**



## As Ways Welcome Ways

**MD:** How's the reception for *Honey and Salt*?

**Matt:** Overwhelming. I'm ecstatic about the response to the record, but maybe what's more satisfying is that audiences really love the gigs. And the band has been so in the moment, flexible, and allegiant to the songs.

Somebody wrote that they thought the band was great because it was selfless but everybody got to be themselves at the same time. So you knew who they were, but yet collectively it went on a journey, which is one of my goals with any of these projects—to let people play, but really to surround yourself with people that also let you do just that.

None of this happens unless you really know who those musicians are or have welcomed music with them like that.

So it's been fun. And it's risky, because as organized as I try to be, I want to have departure points as a bandleader where the music is organized enough that people know it's a band. But I don't want it to become a routine. How do you keep welcoming it each night with a new perspective?

One of my goals with whatever project I'm involved in is to have it immediately sound like a band. However you can lift it, welcome it, and provide whatever's needed to allow the other musicians to think, *Now we're really a band*, even if it's the first time you've ever played.

**MD:** How do you provide that feeling?

**Matt:** I think part of that is knowing. I'm turning fifty-three, and I think I've learned now that when you realize that you have the best seat in the house and you hear the proceedings going on, you have more of a tendency to play what's needed for the music. Not to say that it's taken me that long to realize that. But it's a thought that seems like it's right before our eyes and ears but can get somewhat marred by all the things we're dedicated to learning.

There's a craft to what we do. There are tangibles and intangibles. There are tangibles like reading, knowing the spirit, or studying things that people have done to influence you or not influence you. There are the conscious and unconscious parts of being a musician. I think we want to have both. We want to be the people that can react in the moment. But at the same time, you want to have people around you that can retain. And if you rehearse, remember where things go, hopefully keep the time together, and follow the forms—all the nuts and bolts—then that's part of it too. If you can have a marriage of the tangibles and intangibles, then I think it really helps foster a group aesthetic.

Whatever you offer the sound, you want to hope that it helps the sound of the song

and everybody else's sound. Is what you're playing helping the piano, guitar, saxophone, or drums? And vice versa. When a band hears that, then we're really sharing sound. We're not just playing something and hoping that it sticks.

**MD:** How do you technically achieve that?

**Matt:** You want to have ways—there's no single way of playing. Ways reduce limitations, but we want limitations too. We want to welcome limitations, because those define us. The way Miles Davis played with Charlie Parker was different from the way he played with Dizzy Gillespie, based on limitations. He couldn't play the same way. So sometimes you have to realize: *This is what I can do*. And I think that's a mature decision. Not to say that you're not going to grow or improve on certain areas.

We're always trying to improve as



musicians. But I don't think that should ever stop us from being a part of the group. Maybe sometimes more information or more knowledge may hold us back. Sometimes being naïve is great. I always tell people, "I like being an idiot." I don't really want to know. I want to know but not know—to me that's a sign of creativity or imagination. You take in all these other elements, but you don't really know the answer. And I think we're always trying to tap into that. If we really knew what was going on, we probably wouldn't make such an effort to be a part of it. We're still mystified by why this can happen. We can give people the aspects to be ready, but we can't really tell them what the essence of the art is.

My church's minister recently talked about this great concept from a famous hand-knitting teacher and designer, the late Elizabeth Zimmermann. Zimmermann

didn't claim to invent anything. She called it "unventing." She gathered her influences—she'd take from here and there, and then suddenly she'd have something going on. And I looked back on my life a little bit, and that's what's been possible. I've been fortunate in that regard to have people guide me at the right time, and I've been there to welcome it at the right time.

**MD:** Do you have specific ways or concepts that you teach every student, or does it vary?

**Matt:** All of the above. Music evolves, and now it's slightly more vertical than it used to be. I think jazz drummers of a certain era—and I was maybe on the tail end because I got to see those folks play—but that music was a little more horizontal. It was moving forward movement-wise. There's nothing wrong with that, but other generations have grown up listening to music that's quantized,

and there's a marked difference between the lows and the highs or between the bass drum and the rest of the spectrum. That's influenced swing, which I think is great. That's why we have these marvelous younger players—younger players than me—that I really admire. Eric Harland, Marcus Gilmore, Mark Guiliana, Obed Calvaire, Kendrick Scott, Johnathan Blake.... I love that they have something different to do. I heard Gerald Clayton's trio at the Monterey Jazz Festival, and it gave me a lot of hope that there's this new format in a genre that's been around for quite a while.

But again, I was very fortunate to have great teachers and guides that helped me learn how to teach. I studied with Ed Soph in the summer of 1984 on a National Endowment grant. He taught me to let the stick do the work as a way and to let that be a part of the melody of the ride cymbal.

Plus I was at a point in my life where in that summer of '84 I was almost twenty, and I had the time to really work on that stuff. So when I went back for lessons I had the stuff ready.

**MD:** How was your experience with Ed Soph?

**Matt:** I was staying in Boston, and I would drive down to Connecticut, where Ed was at that point. I may have had one lesson where it really wasn't together, and I didn't want to experience that again. [laughs] So at that point, I needed somebody to ask me, "Do you really want to do this?"

I think that's good. I've been fortunate to be surrounded by very supportive people. And when somebody came along that maybe conveyed some tough love to me, it's because I needed it. Maybe I thought I had it figured out. Then somebody came along and said, "Well, no you don't." [laughs] And those

moments came at a good time too. And they didn't do it in a cruel way. They did it with love.

**MD:** What first drew you to jazz?

**Matt:** It was the feel. And I think I came to the drums really from jazz. But it depends on who you are. Some people who are a little older than me, a lot of it for them probably started from Ringo, right? And as much as I love the Beatles, I was too young to know.

I first saw Buddy Rich on the show *Here's Lucy*. And my buddy also had this record called *Rich Versus Roach*. Max Roach improvised with the bass on "Sing, Sing, Sing." Buddy plays a solo that's phenomenal too. But to me, Max Roach really was singing, and it spoke to me.

But what I'm still marveled by is that every situation—and I'm lucky—but every situation

that I'm involved with, I'm still learning and gaining so much inspiration from it. And one of the things that I'm just tickled about is that over a year I play with such a wide range of musicians and settings, and, even in one night, a wide range of feels. And I just feel like that's part of the day. And I don't put any project over anything else. Nothing's more important, and there's nothing I'd rather do. It's those people you're playing with that really make that difference.

And you never know. Tomorrow I may meet some musician that I've never played with before, and that could be a real changer. Like with the "unventing" concept from the sermon. There's something about that to me. So I think one of the main things is to remain curious until the day they—whatever choice is made—they shut the lid or whatever. [laughs]

The human aspect of jazz is still really the key. I think the thing that really got me turned on to jazz was when I saw Clark Terry, Dizzy Gillespie, and Oscar Peterson. They were three beacons of joy, of humor, of everything. I didn't really understand what was going on at the time, but it was great. I mean I think I did understand, but I didn't know technically what was going on. But I felt that music. When my friend and I saw the Basie Orchestra, we actually met Mr. Basie, and we met [longtime Basie guitarist] Freddie Green. They were so friendly, and they were playing a high school gymnasium in Chillicothe, Illinois. They played that night like they were playing wherever. They were really giving it up.

Louie Bellson was also a big influence. He was from Illinois too, and he would come around fairly often as a guest at a college or high school. We'd go, and he'd remember you and your name. And that made you feel really important and inspired. I didn't realize at the time how heavy he was. But the kindness that he conveyed was a real influence. He'd ask, "Hey, Matt, have you been practicing?" It inspired you. I was able to see these musicians' abilities to lift others' spirits.

**MD:** Did any of those experiences inspire you to teach?

**Matt:** I had a great teacher as a young person—John Larson. He had a distinct way of teaching. He taught what he knew. He was imaginative with it, and he cared. And it was always evolving. And I took one very important lesson with George Marsh, who totally turned my movement and posture around. I also took a seminar with Bob Moses during that same summer of '84 in Boston. That was another serious life-changer. But Bob had an aesthetic and he had a way of conveying what his thoughts were about



this. And I love that.

Some people are teachers directly, and some people you just learn a lot from by watching them or just being around them. And then other people have ways of saying, "I think you could try this." So I had the ability to do that, I think. I felt that teaching is a good thing to do, and I enjoy it very much.

I really love teaching ensembles. I like the private lesson aspect of what I do. But I love that at the New School, for example, I teach ensembles. I also have saxophone, guitar, and bass players study with me. I love that I can just help people with music. And I don't play those instruments, so I'm not teaching them that. But I convey what I've learned from bassists or sax players about sound, or even what I learned about sound from my wife. She was such a great violinist. I learned so much about sound and music from her. One

You've done everything to be ready, but when it comes time to play, you're ready and present to be there. You're flexible, and you trust. All those factors make a difference.

At Monterey a few weeks ago, Joe Lovano read one of the *Honey and Salt* poems. Joe had this presence when he walked out, without his saxophone, to read. He was confident, in the moment, fearless, vulnerable—all those things that allow people in. And vulnerability is important. We might think that everybody gets protected a little too much. And when they don't have that vulnerability, it doesn't let people in. But having that vulnerability when you see someone play with rough edges, that's key. That makes us realize that they're human, and, in turn, makes us want to be even more endeared to them.

We're talking about people that just have

aesthetic, I think, from Mr. Jones.

One of my favorite aspects of this is the community and the support and respect. Even if somebody does something differently from what you do, you have to respect them for the time they've put into what they do and the courage and hard work it takes to do this. Nobody gets anything for nothing. Nobody's handing you anything. The people that put the time in—Allison Miller, Terri Lyne Carrington—it's amazing.

And again, to me it's really about the people. The artist Marcel Duchamp said, "I don't really believe in art—I believe in artists." And I feel that way about music. I believe in music, but I *really* believe in musicians. Musicians are the ones that bring music alive. They're special. Their personalities, how they react to the band, how flexible they are, or how giving and sharing they are—those



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**Hardware:** DW

**Sticks:** Zildjian John Riley signature sticks, Regal Tip wire and Fat Cat plastic brushes, and assorted mallets

of the things I miss most—I mean, I miss so much about her being gone—but one of the things I miss is that I could ask her questions like, "What's this in music mean?" There are obviously many other things I miss more, but she was so knowledgeable about music.

I'm very fortunate to surround myself in my own bands with some really great communicators. Not only communicating from their instruments, but they're able to really communicate about what they do. Terell Stafford, Jeff Lederer, Gary Versace, Ron Miles, Dawn Thomson... the list goes on. I've learned so much about their philosophies. And we didn't sound each other out before we got going—you find those journeys when you're together.

**MD:** Is there a concept they all share?

**Matt:** I think the overall concept is probably *presence*. You're present and you're in it.

this presence on the bandstand. People like Peter Erskine, Billy Hart, Jeff Hamilton, or Jimmy Cobb. Whatever they're playing, it's hugging you, whether you're on the bandstand or in the audience. That's what makes them unique. You hear them, and you know who they are.

Sometimes I think we've had to codify education. But you need to let people be who they are, because we can't control it. I want students to know things, and I want them to be curious. But their journey is going to be completely different from mine. And it gets back to what music can be for them, not what I *think* it should be for them. They may take a completely different route. For example, Andrew Cyrille and Rashied Ali were both students of Philly Joe Jones. But they found their own ways of playing. And we know who they are. But they got their initial

factors take it to a different level. And I think that's something that we have there all the time. We have to become aware of it, celebrate it, and work on that aspect of our musicianship. It's all a balance.

### Embracing the Unknown

**MD:** Do you have any concept behind playing on rims or stands?

**Matt:** I think they're just things that you welcome. When you're in that zone, or you're working on being a part of that zone, the music and the instrument can be like a fountain. Things keep emerging. And that's why I don't want to be bored. I've never been bored. I think there's always something that's there, and I don't really need to add stuff to it. I don't need to travel to exotic places to find it. That process is all good too, but for me it's all right there. And the community will

## Matt Wilson

provide that too.

The last few weeks of these *Honey and Salt* tours, the music evolved on different nights. When we started a tune, we had no idea where it was going. I would wonder, *How could that happen?* And then sometimes those little thoughts get in your brain, and you kind of want to push it, or you think it should be this way or that way.

**MD:** How do you overcome those little thoughts?

**Matt:** That's one of those mysteries. Lee Konitz, the great alto saxophone player, is ninety. He said to me fifteen years ago, "You know what I want to do with my remaining years?" I didn't know. I thought it was going to be some grand project. He said, "I just want to keep doing what I'm doing, but do it better." Here's a gentleman who's played "All the Things You Are" thousands of times, and yet he still finds something new to do on the tune. So part of it is just being open, willing, ready, and also knowing that some nights, whatever.

Mel Lewis once told me, "I never have a bad night. I just have better nights than others." He was grateful to be a part of the music every night. That's one of the reasons why we come back to this. Each night we're so excited to see what kind of trouble we can

get into, in a good way.

And those accidents create new opportunities. That's beautiful when something goes to a different place because you dropped something, or the tune starts and the bass doesn't, or the saxophone player has to change reeds. You can't just stop. You keep going. All those kinds of things are just welcoming.

With Tamir Hendelman and Marco Panascia, I've known them for a while. We've already had a nice band aesthetic. We knew the music, but we went up there really for that moment. Not to be like, "We almost have it." You need to have it be what it's going to be at that point and be flexible and go for it. You want to care, but you don't want to be too careful, and you don't want to be careless. To me, the ultimate word to describe it is carefree, where you've got it together, you're around likeminded people, and the music can just go places. It's carefree, but we do care. We want it to be of excellence.

And that's something that you need to promote too. Why does it have to be "almost"? The music should be totally what you want it to be, or what you hear the possibilities of it being. To me that effort takes it to another level. And I think that's something I learned from my mother, even

about small projects. If I had to put together a trifold poster for a science fair, why can't I put the time in to have it be special? I think I got a lot of that from my parents about being unique. They welcomed it too, and I value that influence.

So I'm not complacent. I do want things to be of excellence. I want it to be fun and inclusive, and I want it to go places. But I also really want it to be a journey of who the musicians are and how I've set up an environment to allow them to be something. And that's a word I love to use a lot as well—allow. As a fellow player, as a listener, how do you allow the people to be a part of the journey? And there are some amazing allowers out there. They make you sound so great by what they do or how they welcome, surprise, and engage you, and maybe even make you uncomfortable to the point where you have to figure out what to do. They may collide with you, and you have to figure out what to do. You collide, offer, and receive. It's all of that, and it's a fun way of approaching it.

## *Honey and Salt*

**MD:** Where did the inspiration come from for this project?

**Matt:** I grew up in the same area as Carl Sandburg. As you get older, you might

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become more loyal or allegiant to your region. You realize where you're from, and you start to realize that there are connections to things. And I think you see that in your parents, your siblings, and your community, and you're influenced by them.

As I got older I realized that Sandburg was interested in jazz, which is something I'm interested in. I guess we met in the middle—he died in 1967, when I was almost three years old. But I found out that we shared an interest in terms of what we do. I started to realize how—again, it's coming back to the concept of unventing—you start to gather these influences. The great bassist Chris Lightcap said, "You are what you listen to." And so you gather from the records you listened to, the food you ate, the art you've seen, or the books you've read. You start to ask, *What inspired these people to create these things?*

One time at Stanford for a jazz workshop, [bassist] Martin Wind and I were watching a jam session at a coffeehouse. This young man was sitting across from us with two laptops hooked together, working with a keyboard on his lap, and he had all of these crazy formulas written down. I leaned to him and said, "Sorry, I don't mean to be nosy, but I have to express that that's really amazing

what you're working on." He turned to me and said, "You know what? What these guys are doing up here on stage, *that's amazing.*" Here's a guy working with these formulas and two laptops who was more fascinated with what the band was doing on "All the Things You Are" or "Autumn Leaves." So I think as human beings we have to respect and see others' gifts. You want to take those things in.

I'm always more interested to find out what people are into other than music. For me, it was poetry. I really like Mr. Sandburg, and I think the regional aspect of it connected me more than seeing someone I liked. I'm from that same soil. Just like the people from New Orleans, Houston, or St. Louis share that. Your heritage should play a part in what you're offering to the world.

**MD:** How did you approach adapting the poems into a tune?

**Matt:** "Choose" to me was obviously a march. "The single clenched fist lifted and ready," that rhythm alone [sings the melody to "Choose"], that just said it. "Soup" seemed like this story that had a resolution. It's not a traditional blues per se, but it has the blues feeling to it. "We Must Be Polite" seemed to have this whimsical kind of vibe, and I've always loved that New Orleans clave feel, and that Bo Diddley beat specifically.

I just wanted each song to have a different flavor. And in the case of "Offering and Rebuff," "I Sang," or "Stars, Songs, Faces," to really take those words and have them be lyrics, that process was really fun.

In "Anywhere and Everywhere People," I noticed that certain words showed up a lot. "Anywhere," "everywhere," "nowhere," and "seen" are in that poem quite a bit. So I thought if I wrote little themes that go with each of those words, it could almost be like playing a sample. We recorded the music, and then we recorded little horn samples that go with each of those words and played them different ways. So when Christian McBride recited it, he knew the groove and the horns' rhythm. And we just added those samples to those words. When we do it live, we stretch it a bit. When we get to "seen," we might let the metric aspect of it go for a little bit and sit on "seen" before starting back up. We've gotten pretty free with it in that regard. But we formatted that part to be a departure.

And again I want each track to have a personality, but also be able to have a link that does tie them all together in terms of aesthetics and theme. We didn't really worry about the sequence of mixing slow or fast tunes. We just put them together. And my producer, Matt Balitsaris, and I have a great

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working relationship. So again, this stuff doesn't come by itself. Sometimes moments would come up, and he'd shake his head a little bit and ask, "What are you trying to go for here?" I'd say, "I have this. It's going to happen. I can feel it." So we'd try it. Again,

you create that trust, and then I trust him. There are some things that he did on his own that I thought would work. Or there were accidents.

**MD:** How do you handle an accident in the moment?

**Matt:** The other night, we were playing "Bubbles," which is a tune from one of my other records that has a poem. I was a little tired, and I started reciting "As Wave Follows Wave" instead. Nobody even thought a second about it. We did that, and then they got to a point where we start repeating "As Wave Follows Wave." I did a second recitation while they kept that section going underneath "Bubbles." I didn't tell anybody, "Keep it going; I'm going to do this." We didn't explain it. But there again, we just welcomed something new. In the words of [vibraphonist] Stefon Harris, "Mistakes aren't mistakes. You just think of them as new opportunities."

One of the great things that I think is beautiful about jazz music, other than the feel or what's involved in it, is the musician's ability to be flexible and adaptable in the moment. I think all music does that to a certain extent. But jazz, that's one of the styles that really allows it. That's the excitement of it. And I think people can sense when something is going down. They know when it's not going the way it's supposed to, or they know that they're in for something special.



## Wilson on His Favorites

### Buddy Rich and Max Roach

#### *Rich Versus Roach*

I remember the day I heard Max solo with bass accompaniment on "Sing, Sing, Sing." I thought, *Wow, I want to do THAT!*

### Various Artists *The Drums*

This is a three-LP set [on Impulse! Records] that my brother got me for Christmas when I was thirteen years old. It spanned from Baby Dodds through Barry Altschul. I heard Sid Catlett, Papa Jo Jones, Kenny Clarke, Roy Haynes, Elvin Jones, Dannie Richmond, Shelly Manne, Paul Motian, Sunny Murray, and many more for the first time on this record. This was monumental in opening me up to what the possibilities of jazz drumming could be.

### Miles Davis

#### *Workin' With the Miles Davis Quintet*

I heard this in a record store, ran up to the counter and inquired what it was, and bought it right then. Philly Joe Jones' ride cymbal

melody is so buoyant, and you can see the sound because it's so clear. It remains the benchmark for my cymbal sound.

### Old and New Dreams *Playing*

This record just hugs you. Ed Blackwell plays melodies on the ride cymbal, snare, toms—everywhere! I was fortunate to play in bands led by saxophonist Dewey Redman and by bassist Charlie Haden [Blackwell's bandmates, along with cornet player Don Cherry, in *Old and New Dreams*]. Wow, talk about dreams coming true. I played trio with them one night in Montreal. I actually pinched myself and said, "I really am here."

### Albert Ayler *Love Cry*

I heard this on the radio while on the road and bought it the next day. The sound just speaks to me. Milford Graves paints, aligns, and collides, all the while lifting the music with power and grace.



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# Jim Eno

## of Spoon

For three consecutive nights during the 2017 South by Southwest conference, the Austin punk rock mecca Emo's was temporarily christened Eno's in honor of the headlining band's drummer.



Few acts get to take over a venue for multiple consecutive gigs during the annual music conference, but there was a line going around the block each night for the Austin institution Spoon, which was commemorating the release of its ninth album, *Hot Thoughts*, and a return to Matador Records, the label that had released its first LP, *Telephono*, back in 1996.

Jim Eno grew up in Warwick, Rhode Island, went to college in North Carolina, and found his way to Texas while working as a designer in the computer industry. Within Spoon's minimalist pop sound, the drums and percussion occupy a vital role, but one that by design weaves itself into the fabric of each song. Eno comes very much from a Ringo Starr mold in terms of his song-centric performances, but on repeated listens the texture and the sound of the drums prove to be as important as the grooves themselves.

A decade ago Eno tore down the original garage behind his West Austin home, where Spoon had recorded since the late '90s, and in its place built a two-story recording studio that he named Public Hi-Fi. Working with an award-winning architect, Eno created a unique and practical space featuring construction details like adobe brick and earthen plaster walls for a unique vibe acoustically and visually, as well as a growing selection of vintage and modern gear. *MD* met with the drummer in the studio's control room to talk about his work in Spoon and beyond.

**MD:** So, how did you come to the drums?

**Jim:** I started playing along with records on the radio when I was super-young. My parents got me a pair of drumsticks, and I would play on the couch. My dad took up upholstery because I would tear up the couches so much, and I would ask for a drumset every year for Christmas but never got one. My mom still feels a little bit guilty about that.

In college at NC State I did a co-op program. Every other semester you'd go and work someplace, and one semester I worked at IBM in Virginia. I had a roommate who was a guitar player, and we went up to D.C. and bought a drumset, so at nineteen or twenty I got my first kit. I think it was a CB700. After that I started playing in cover bands and learning how to play. I was so excited that I set it up right at the bottom of the stairs in the basement where we played, so you could barely get around it. I just wanted to play it so badly. I think the first song I played was "Sunday Bloody Sunday."

**MD:** What were some other early influences?

**Jim:** I was really into the early U2 stuff,

the Smiths, the The, R.E.M., Elvis Costello, Depeche Mode, the Cure—the early alternative scene. Later I got my first job, at Compaq in Houston, and I found out they had a big band that would play every week in one of the conference rooms. My whole thing was that if I could learn jazz it would help my rock playing, so I played big band and combo jazz for about two years, and I went to community college in Houston for combo and lessons and all that stuff. I was playing like six days a week, which was pretty awesome.

**MD:** So at some point work brought you to Austin, where you met [Spoon cofounder] Britt Daniel?

**Jim:** Yeah, I moved to Austin to work at Motorola, doing microprocessor design. I was in a couple of random bands, and through that I hooked up with this guy Brad Shenfeld, who was playing in a band with Britt, the Alien Beats. We were in that band for about two years, and then Brad went to law school in L.A., so the band broke up. Fast-forward ten years, and Brad is now our lawyer.

After the Alien Beats broke up, Britt asked if I wanted to come over and check out some songs he was writing, and a lot of those songs became the first Spoon record, *Telephono*. There were a lot of odd time signatures on that record. Things go from, like, six in the verse to five or something in the chorus, and I was just really into that. It was really good for a drummer. The thing was to play those songs without making them seem like they were in an odd time signature, because they were also pop songs. Britt wouldn't do that to be tricky or cute or anything like that; it was just how he wrote melodies. "The Fitted Shirt" [from 2001's *Girls Can Tell*] is one of those songs, and we've had people play that with us and they'll play it in four. As soon as you hit that first odd measure the whole band is like, "Wait, what just happened?"

**MD:** There's an early video on YouTube where you're playing a Tama Artstar kit.

**Jim:** I probably used the Tamas on *Telephono*. I don't remember what I used on the next album, *A Series of Sneaks*—maybe the same kit.

Story by Stephen Bidwell    Photos by Jessica Alexander





**MD:** The drum sounds gain a lot of character around *Girls Can Tell*.

**Jim:** I started using vintage kits, like a '62 Rogers that I bought in Houston, and I bet I was using that on *Girls Can Tell*.

**MD:** How did you start to explore the sounds of the kit in the studio?

**Jim:** A lot of that came down to the producers we were working with at the time. John Croslin was going for more of a radio type of sound [on *Telephono*]. I like more *round* drums. I don't like super-compressed snares, and I like to hear the thuddy Beatles sound. Mike McCarthy, who started producing with us on *Girls Can Tell* and continued to for the next three albums, really liked that sound too. So you can tell, like you said, that it was a pretty big shift sonically.

Also, after *A Series of Sneaks* I started buying studio gear, for many reasons. One was so that we could be as self-sufficient as possible. I was never going to quit my day job to just be a drummer in a band, because it didn't make sense to me to just sit around while Britt was writing songs. I needed things to do during our downtime. I really loved being in the studio, so I figured I could start recording with other bands while Britt's writing. It also helps me to sort

of keep quality control on Spoon records, questioning the producer and steering it toward where I know Britt and I will like the final product.

**MD:** So in the late '90s you started with a two-inch 16-track machine and Pro Tools 3?

**Jim:** Yeah. We've moved a long a bit since then. [laughs] I had a Trident 24 board, and we would rent a tape machine to start. When we started doing the *Love Ways* EP here in the previous studio, we would use the tape machine and then sync it to Pro Tools if we ran out of tracks.

**MD:** You currently have a Neve board. Has Rupert Neve ever come to check it out?

**Jim:** It's an 8016, and he has. It's from about 1969 or '70. A broker in London had it, and it was in quite rough shape. Those 24 API mic pre's and EQs are from Leon Russell's console from 1975. I just put them in last year.

**MD:** What do you look for in drums and cymbals when tracking?

**Jim:** I always use pretty dark cymbals. I use Istanbul Agop pretty much exclusively, and I think they're awesome. In the studio [I'll sometimes use] a line called Xist. They're really nice—sparkly but dark. For hi-hats I might use a pair of 15" OM hats, which cut but are really dark and dry. [Bob Dylan guitarist] Charlie Sexton was in the other day

and was like, "What the hell are these hi-hats? I want a pair!"

**MD:** How do you choose drums, and specifically snares, for a track?

**Jim:** The snare is the key; sonically everything comes off it. I prefer a pretty dead snare, tight and crispy. I have a drum closet with eight or ten snares, and I'll be like, "Today seems like a good day for *this* guy," and I'll bring it down, tweak it up, and see if it works with what we're doing.

I also have two snare drums I made. I use one of them live, and I used one of them on *Hot Thoughts*. I would buy a Keller shell and then get the edges beveled but do all the hardware and staining. I did one in the early '90s in Houston. It's a 5.5x14 with a very odd snare bed and weird edges, but it sounds really cool. For tracking I've been using more metal snares, maybe a Ludwig Supraphonic or a Jeff Ocheltree snare made of Paiste cymbals [the Spirit of 2002 model]. I use a Ludwig Black Beauty a lot too, but I have to not pull it out [too much] because it's bit like crack, and I want to have things sound different. It has a very distinctive *whap* sound that sounds very much like a drum machine.

**MD:** Sometimes you'll go for a very non-drum-like quality in the snare, like on "Rent I

## RECORDINGS

"Hot Thoughts" from *Hot Thoughts*  
/// "Do You" from *They Want My Soul* /// "You Got Yr. Cherry Bomb" from *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga* /// "The Infinite Pet" from *Gimme Fiction*

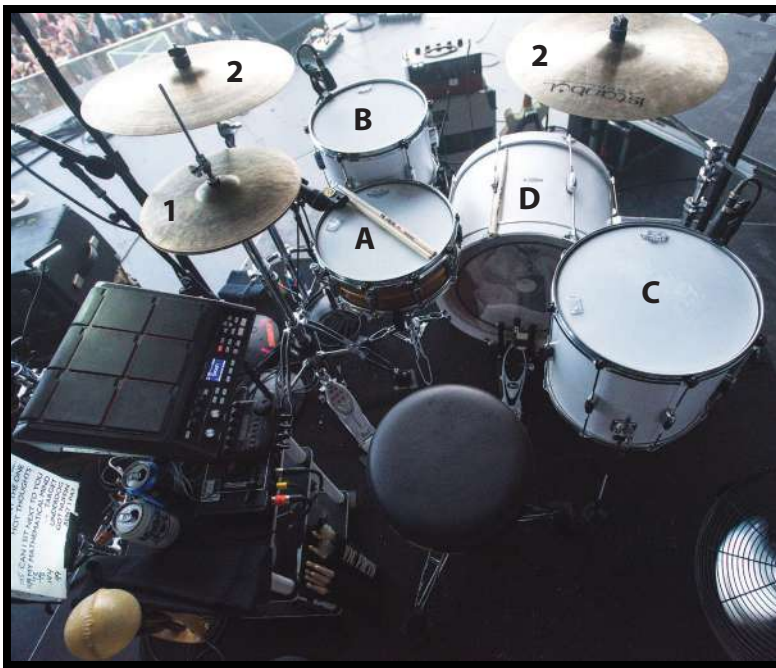
## PRODUCTIONS

**Walker Lukens** Tell It to the Judge  
/// **The Relatives** The Electric Word  
/// !!! Thr!!ler /// **Hard Proof** Public Hi-Fi Sessions 03

## INFLUENCES

**Elvis Costello** Punch the Clock (Pete Thomas) /// **Morrissey** Viva Hate (Andrew Paresi) /// **PJ Harvey** Dry (Rob Ellis) /// **Rubén Blades y Son del Solar** Antecedente (Bobby Allende, Ralph Irizarry, Marc Quiñones) /// **David Bowie** Young Americans (Andy Newmark, Dennis Davis) /// **Joe Strummer and the Mescaleros** The Hellcat Years (Steve Barnard, Luke Bullen, Pablo Cook, Ged Lynch, Scott Shields, Josh Freese) /// **The Beatles** Abbey Road (Ringo Starr) /// **Radiohead** In Rainbows (Philip Selway) /// **Factory Floor** Factory Floor (Gabriel Gurnsey) /// **The Flaming Lips** The Soft Bulletin (Steven Drozd) /// **Herbie Hancock** Head Hunters (Harvey Mason, Bill Summers)





## Eno's Live Setup

**Drums:** C&C African mahogany/poplar/African mahogany shells in white formica finish

- A.** 5x14 Ludwig Copperphonic snare
- B.** 8x12 tom
- C.** 14x16 floor tom
- D.** 16x22 bass drum

**Cymbals:** Istanbul Agop

- 1.** 14" Traditional Medium hi-hats
- 2.** 19" Traditional Medium crash (two)

**Heads:** Remo, including Coated Ambassador or Coated Vintage A tom and snare batters and Clear Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter

**Sticks:** Vic Firth SD10

**Hardware:** Pearl stands and bass drum pedal

**Electronics:** Roland SPD-SX and snare trigger, Shure P4M 4-channel mixer used for mixing samples from MainStage in the keyboard player's laptop, Tama Rhythm Watch RW200, Electro-Voice 635A Omni microphone (set up behind the drums to pick up room and audience sound)

**Accessories:** JH Audio Roxanne in-ear monitors

Pay," from *They Want My Soul*.

**Jim:** That's a tight room sound, with distortion from the close mic. That song wouldn't work with a small, booth-style recording where everything was dead and dry and super-close. That's probably the biggest concern: Does the kit work for how we're approaching the song?

**MD:** Do you have any favorite dampening techniques?

**Jim:** Not really. I usually use Moongel, or maybe towels. As far as other tricks, I do a lot of cymbal stacking. There's a lot of songs I've worked on where we tried to make it sound like trash cans, and that's always a good way to do that. Istanbul Agop makes this cool Trash Hit cymbal that's [partially] un-lathed and warped on the edge, so when you sit it on top of another cymbal it's pretty cool because it doesn't choke it and just sort of vibrates.

**MD:** Was "The Underdog" [from *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga*] the only track you guys did with Jon Brion?

**Jim:** We did another version of "You Got Yr. Cherry Bomb" with him, but it never came out. He's a super guy to work with. One of the horn players on "The Underdog" is Jason Freese, Josh's brother.

**MD:** You teach audio recording a bit now.

**Jim:** I'm going to do this program again with Ohio University, where a few recording majors come down for a week in January and we do two sessions of live recording for a song, a basic tracking day, an overdub day, and then a mix day.

**MD:** You mostly tracked at David Fridmann's studio for *Hot Thoughts*, but did any drums

get tracked here at Public Hi-Fi?

**Jim:** I tracked "First Caress" here, in the booth. We were working on it and weren't sure if it was sounding right, and I just said, "Let me take another crack at the drums here," and it was a good thing to do.

**MD:** When you have electronic parts, do you do the programming?

**MD:** How does songwriting work between you and Britt? Do you ever write as a duo?

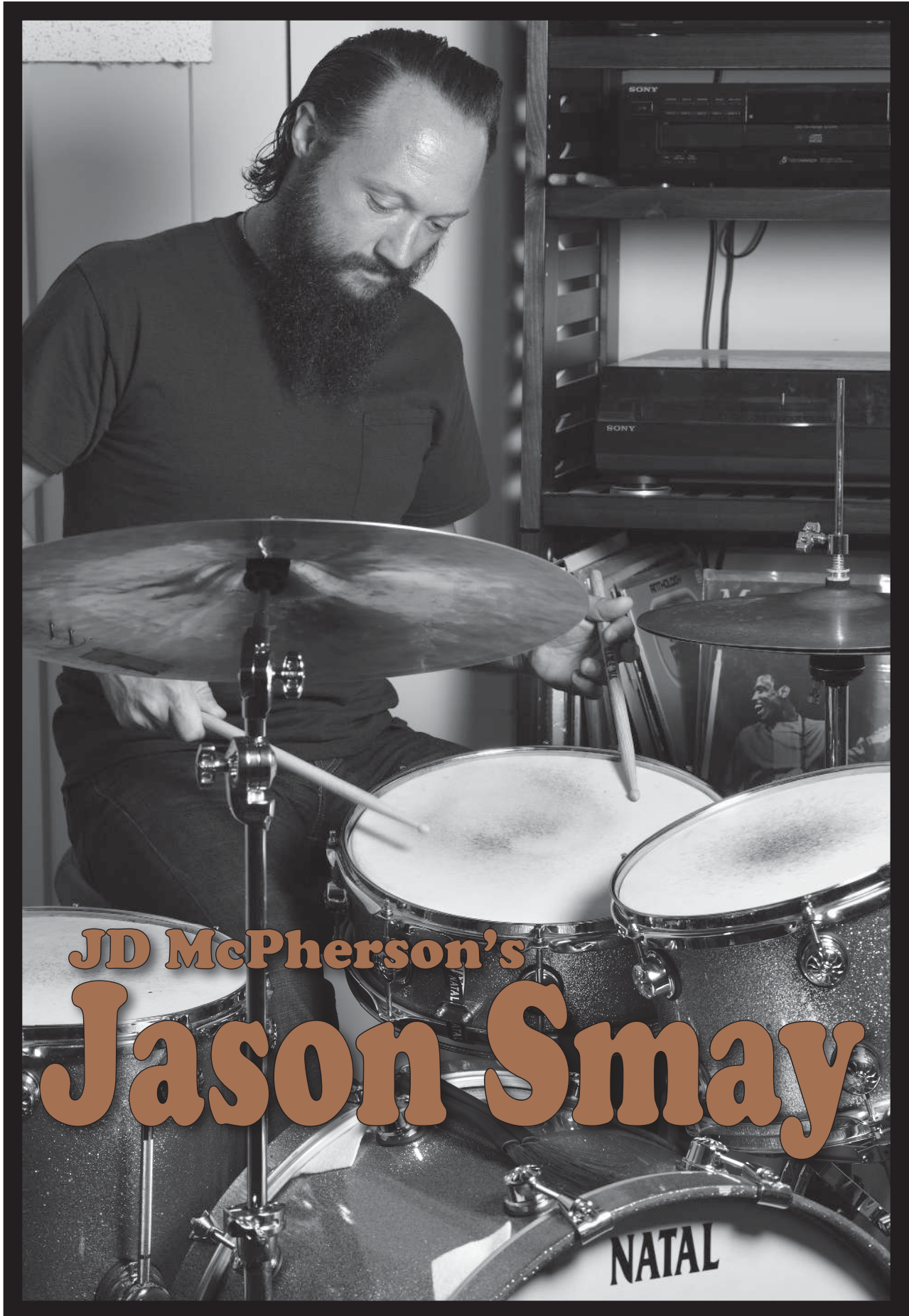
**Jim:** He does a lot of the programming on a drum machine. Sometimes I hear the demo, sometimes I don't. He might come over and be like, "Hey, here's a couple things—let's play them together," so then I don't have any preconceived notion on what the beat



**Jim:** A lot of times we will. Britt will feed the drum machine into Pro Tools and then edit the sounds. We have pretty big sample libraries here, so if, say, the kick is good but needs a little more attack, then we just start layering samples and things in Pro Tools. I've used Slate Audio plug-ins, and I feel like that's a good way to take a snare drum and add an electronic element to it.

should be. At other times the demo is pretty fleshed out. Then there's times where we'll just leave the drum machine and I won't even play on the song, which I'm totally fine with. I feel like records are better when things are varied from song to song, so I don't have to play an acoustic drumkit on every song. Because what we're really trying to do here is just make a great record.





JD McPherson's  
**Jason Smay**

## He might've had his sights set on a different musical path, but the skills he honed sure come in handy today, driving the tunes of one of the coolest roots rockers on the scene.

**J**ason Smay was destined to hold it down for throwbacks like the roots rocker JD McPherson and the Mexican-wrestling-mask-wearing, surf-rock instrumentalists Los Straitjackets. Growing up just outside Rochester, New York, Smay leaned heavily retro in his tastes. He loved vintage hot rods and motorcycles (he remains an avid collector and tinkerer) and old-school jazz, R&B, and rock. Once he picked up the sticks, Smay obsessed over Ringo and Earl Palmer, big band icons like Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa, bop giants like Philly Joe Jones and Art Taylor, and more obscure players like Woody Herman's tub-thumper Dave Tough, whose economical style made a huge impression.

"As much as I loved Buddy and all his crazy solos, I see myself more like Tough," Smay explains. "He served the song, and he served the band by laying a foundation. I want to let the actual solo instruments go without having someone say, 'What the hell is that guy doing back there on the drums? I don't feel 2 and 4.'"

On McPherson's excellent new album, *Undivided Heart & Soul*, you can definitely feel Smay bringing the 2 and 4, whether it's on a sweet ballad ("Hunting

for Sugar"), a taut shuffle ("Lucky Penny"), or a swinging groove ("Let's Get Out of Here While We're Young"). You can also feel Smay stretching beyond his comfort zone as McPherson and coproducer Dan Molad, drummer for the band Lucius, stretch the definition of what "roots rock" can sound like circa 2017.

Smay's roots still show when he swings those dotted 8ths, chugs along on the snare to double the quarters he's playing on the cymbal, or fills melodically around the kit. Filtered through Molad's cut-and-paste production techniques, his snappy snare licks are transformed into hooks and his backbeats become deconstructed bedrock upon which McPherson's songs pulse and shimmy. The end result is a beautiful fusion of technology and Smay's trad-grip/tilted-snare sensibilities.

"It's not 1962 anymore, and I have to get past that," Smay says with a laugh when talking about Molad's approach to capturing drum tracks. "It's not really how I think or work, but I didn't mind doing that. I play the way I play—for better or for worse. It's still me drumming on a roots-based record. But it doesn't sound like one JD's written before."

**MD:** As a drummer with a pretty retro background and tastes, how was the experience of making a record with a drummer/producer coming from more of an indie background?

**Jason:** There were overlaps in what he likes and what I like. But then there's other things where he's like, "Try this beat from this drum break or this breakbeat thing." And I'm like, "Dude, you either gotta play it for me or pull it up on YouTube. I don't relate." [laughs] Then I'd say something like, "You know that song where Earl Palmer does this...?" and he says, "I'll look it up." It was two guys that come to the same place from totally different streets.

**MD:** You play some standout fills throughout the record. The breaks in "Lucky Penny" have those flams and triplet-y figures between the toms and the snare. Did you map out those parts in advance?

**Jason:** Those flam-type fills are my

interpretation of Ginger Baker drum breaks. We were messing around with the song one day and I was playing flam-type fills like he would play, but I figured I'd get it together in the studio. And I showed Dan some of my ideas and he said, "Great, I want options." He wanted tracks of fills to choose from. So I played the groove to a click, and then I played fills for the breaks. He wanted me to do one where I go completely crazy. So I do these insanely fast rolls all the way around. He'd say, "That's cool, but it's not you—do a different one." So I did those fills that end up on the song, and he said, "That's it—that's the one I'm using." If Dan hadn't been there, I probably wouldn't have done drum tracks just with breaks.

**MD:** The fills are pretty integral to some other songs too. You repeat them to the point where they become hooks. Like that Hal Blaine—y five-stroke snare roll that repeats throughout "Crying's Just a Thing

You Do."

**Jason:** Originally I probably played it half as many times as what ended up on the record. I try to be really minimal. Especially on a record—it's forever. I don't want to listen back and go, *Why did I do that extra fill?* I just played it and JD said, "Do that, but do it more." He liked the way it felt as a repeating part, and Dan wanted to make it part of the hook.

**MD:** You mention that you try to play more minimally on record. But since you're such a hardworking road band, is it tough to get out of that balls-to-the-wall "live drummer" mode once it's time to make a record?

**Jason:** We're the kind of band that once you get in road mode, you stay in road mode. And then your management says, "Come up for air, guys. And, by the way, when you take your break from the road, you've got to write a new record." So I guess that's how I go into studio mode. [laughs]

Story by Patrick Berkery

Photos by Rick Malkin

For this record, we tried going into a studio quickly after getting off tour, with some ideas JD had, and thought maybe we'd catch lightning in a bottle. And it was *sort of* there, but there's that thing where you think, *Should we be paying to write the songs in the studio when we could take another month to think about what we're doing?*

So JD came up to my place a couple of times, just to knock around a couple of ideas, and we just started recording. We took the ideas that we had already fleshed out, and fleshed them out some more. I try to be the guy in the studio that, even if I'm dog-assed tired, I never let it show. I try to be the cheerleader, I try to be the comedian—I try to be the guy that's rallying everyone. It doesn't always work. [laughs]

**MD:** There's a great YouTube clip of you taking a quick solo during your Los Straitjackets days. [Search "Los Straitjackets—Jason Smay solo."] At one point you're doing a buzz roll on the snare and you bring it down to a whisper, yet you articulate each stroke so well. What kinds of exercises do you do to achieve that kind of stick control?

**Jason:** I obsessed over Buddy Rich and his left hand. Watched all the videos, measured my drum seat to 24" because that's where he was at—and that's where I've always stayed! I tried to learn as much of his stuff as possible.

As a kid I would sit and practice with 2Bs or marching-band sticks on my thigh and play rolls, trying to control the sticks. I can still do it to a degree. It totally builds your strength. I just worked really hard trying to play snare drum stuff like Buddy Rich. Whether I can or not, I'm not going to be the judge of that.

**MD:** Even though you've made your bones playing in, for lack of a better term, roots-rock bands, you've always tapped into your jazz background. You took a fair number of solo breaks and covered things like "Sing, Sing, Sing" with Los Straitjackets, and there's been plenty of shuffling and swinging with JD McPherson. Is there a part of you that still wants to be a jazz drummer?

**Jason:** I wanted to be a jazz drummer, but it didn't work out. I found my true love playing roots music. But I tried my damndest to be a jazz player.

**MD:** But coming up playing jazz has given you skills that have made you very effective at the style of music you *did* end up playing. Shuffles are a real blind spot for a lot of drummers, but you play them with conviction.

**Jason:** The shuffle kind of got me going.



### Smay's Setup

#### Drums: Natal

- 5x14 snare
- 8x12 tom
- 14x14 floor tom
- 14x20 bass drum

#### Cymbals: Dream

1. 15" Bliss hi-hats
2. 20" Bliss crash/ride

#### Sticks: Vic Firth 7A wood-tip

#### Heads: Remo Coated Ambassador batters

#### Hardware: Natal

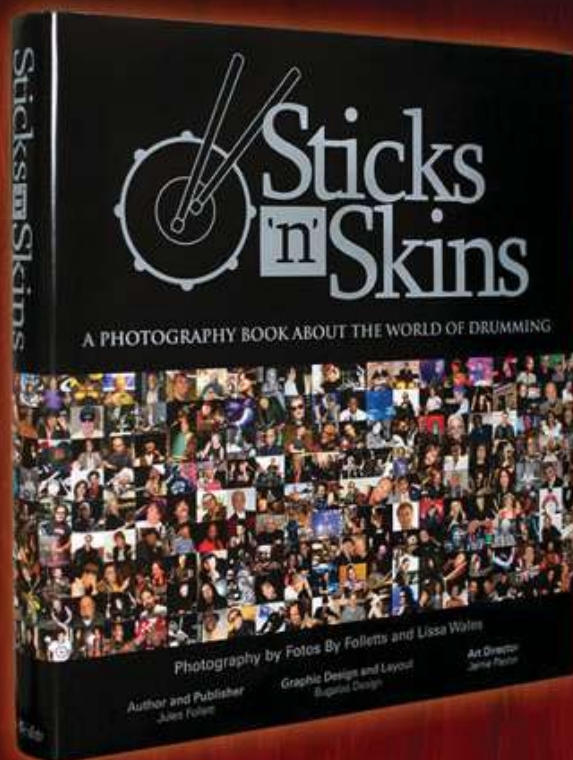
There were a few really amazing jazz drummers in Rochester who got all the gigs. And I wanted to *gig*. I was hanging out a lot at this great old jazz and blues club in town, Shep's Paradise. One night this blues guy was in there and said, "Hey man, you're always here hanging out—why don't you sit in?" So I did. And I'd always loved rhythm-and-blues music, so I started playing a shuffle and they go, "Whoa, how'd you learn to shuffle like that?"

Then I started getting blues gigs, because I could shuffle and I *like* to shuffle. I'm not a drummer that shuffles for two minutes, then starts playing fills. I'll shuffle all night

long and I'm fine with it. So I started getting gigs doing that. Then this Western-swing guy saw me playing and said, "You've got a really mean shuffle—you ever play country music?" And I said, "No, I'm not really into country music." So he said, "What about Western swing?" And he tells me it's a little jazz, a little country, a little rock 'n' roll. I figured I could be down with that. So he said, "Learn this CD. We leave tomorrow on tour." I said, "What?" I was just out of high school!

But that was my first taste of the road. I've been going ever since.





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# booker stardrum

The drummer, who grew up in a household steeped in top-level twentieth-century classical music performance, has built up an impressive résumé featuring some of the most compelling experimental pop and rock groups of the past decade. He's also released an adventurous percussion-oriented electroacoustic album and developed an evolving solo show that reveals unique methods. Now a move from New York City to Los Angeles has signaled a new chapter in his career development, which currently includes membership in the psychedelic pop act Jerry Paper and former Sonic Youth guitarist Lee Ranaldo's touring band. *MD* recently spoke with the artist about his approaches and aesthetic.

story by adam budofsky  
photos by alex solca

**MD:** Your mother, Stefani Starin, and father, Dean Drummond, founded the contemporary classical group Newband, which performed original material as well as the works of composers like Harry Partch. Your dad was actually the director of the Harry Partch Ensemble at Montclair State University. Did you ever play in the Partch ensemble?

**Booker:** No, but my dad became the custodian of those instruments in 1990, when I was two, so I grew up around them and came to love them. They're amazing instruments. At first I thought they were weird, and maybe I was a little embarrassed about what my parents did [laughs], but I came to think it was really cool, and I like Harry Partch's music, as well as my dad's. And I worked with the instruments with my dad—I'd pack them up, load them on a truck, and drive them to a gig in Boston or something. And I would occasionally go to the studio with my dad, and as I was becoming more of a serious musician he would give me an easier part to kind of check out, like a bass marimba part, for instance.

**MD:** You studied drums at SUNY Purchase.

**Booker:** Yes, I was in the conservatory of music there, in the jazz studies program, where I studied with Kenny Washington and John Riley. I learned a lot from my teachers studying that music, but I always had one foot out the door. I'd gotten into more experimental improv music and treating my drums—using contact mics, messing around with computers. I also took a class called Electroacoustic Music 2, which was taught by this really cool experimental composer, Du Yun, and another that was taught by one of the original sound-sculpture artists, Liz Phillips.

Around 2010, 2011, I started playing in two different bands, Cloud Becomes Your Hand and Landlady, and I was in a more performance-oriented, experimental music group called VaVatican. Around 2012 I started doing solo stuff, which was more in the vein of my improv electroacoustic compositional world.

**MD:** How was the music on your solo album, *Dance And*, conceived?

**Booker:** The album was composed in the spirit of it being a single piece of music. The first two tracks are introduction pieces, and from track three on it's a seamless composition. The process for composing the music was a combination of bedroom trial-and-error, demoing ideas on a synthesizer, and messing around on my computer, in combination with my solo performances. I've always considered my solo set to be one piece that I've just been changing and adapting as I go. Introducing ideas, taking ideas out until it's a new thing.

The recording was done in several spurts, and I worked closely in collaboration with producer and saxophonist Nathaniel Morgan, who was in VaVatican with me and was part of the improv music scene that I joined in Brooklyn. We did two sessions upstate and a session in Brooklyn.

**MD:** You've achieved a very seamless integration of percussion and electronics on *Dance And*. What were some of the approaches that you took?

**Booker:** We'd overlay ideas and do things like use the signal from a contact mic on a cymbal. Once I recorded something on bells and ended up not liking it and being frustrated with the time spent working on it, and Nathaniel said, "Let's spend a little more time and run everything to a guitar amp with heavy distortion." Another idea we went with was taking an electric guitar with an open tuning and putting it right next to the drums. We recorded the drums with mics but also grabbed the signal from the guitar, and the sympathetic resonance from the drums created a really cool drone. So that got mixed into it. Things like that, where the drums are creating this larger sound.

This was the type of thing that I was able to get into at Purchase, in the classes I took outside of the jazz program. No one's really going to teach you *all* of this stuff, though. It's the sort of thing you're supposed to figure out on your own.

We also used a hell of a lot of plug-ins. I'm a big fan of heavily processed sounds, so we'd experiment with putting multiple limiters on the drums, things like that.

**MD:** What kind of treatments do you do live?

**Booker:** I put contact mics on my snare and floor tom, and I run them both through reverb, including a reverse reverb that I love. It interacts with what I'm doing and I can interact with it. I also use a Nord drum synth. It's changed since, but my set used to begin with this rolling thing on a couple different sine waves tuned in fourths. The bass frequency was a fourth down and a quarter tone down from there.

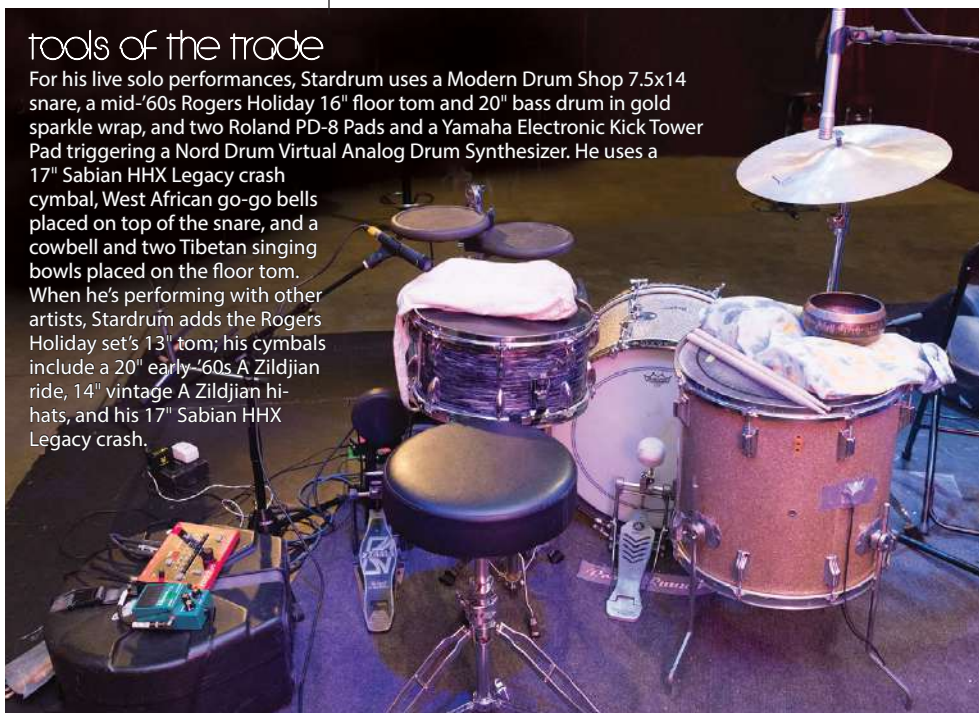
**MD:** You reference "rough-cut edits" in the description section of one of your videos. Can you explain that?

**Booker:** That's referring to the track "Sands Dream," which has these really stark cuts. When we recorded that piece it was coming from an idea from the live set. I did sort of a long, five-minute or more, rolling pattern on a nipple gong. When I did it live, it was cool because I was able to respond to the acoustics of the space, but in the recording setting it didn't work to have just one rolling nipple gong happening, so we recorded like five and overlaid them on top of each other.

Then, as I worked with it, I realized that something else had to be going on. That's where the thing we did with the sympathetic vibrations of the guitar comes in. Elsewhere on the album, the drums

## tools of the trade

For his live solo performances, Stardrum uses a Modern Drum Shop 7.5x14 snare, a mid-'60s Rogers Holiday 16" floor tom and 20" bass drum in gold sparkle wrap, and two Roland PD-8 Pads and a Yamaha Electronic Kick Tower Pad triggering a Nord Drum Virtual Analog Drum Synthesizer. He uses a 17" Sabian HHX Legacy crash cymbal, West African go-go bells placed on top of the snare, and a cowbell and two Tibetan singing bowls placed on the floor tom. When he's performing with other artists, Stardrum adds the Rogers Holiday set's 13" tom; his cymbals include a 20" early-'60s A Zildjian ride, 14" vintage A Zildjian hi-hats, and his 17" Sabian HHX Legacy crash.



are very muted, but on this part I had the drums open and ringing out, thus being able to get the vibrations from the guitar. What we wound up doing is having these really stark cuts between the nipple-gong part and this kind of thundering but calm drum-fill thing.

**MD:** In the piece “Looking And” the parts don’t line up perfectly rhythmically, but it’s somehow satisfying.

**Booker:** It’s interesting that you brought up the idea of syncopation versus sort of arrhythmic syncopation, because it’s a concept that I’m a little obsessed with right now—the elasticity of rhythm, and how to create really groovy music that’s not necessarily lined up and syncopated in a conventional sense. For “Looking And” we took this synthesizer melody that I composed and recorded it, sped it up, looped it, and used it as a kind of sequencer. Then we layered a bunch of synthesizers on top of it and had some droning happening, and I did this soloistic drum part. It’s probably the most drummy, bashing moment on the album.

**MD:** Let’s talk about some of the other projects you’ve been involved in, such as Natalie Mering’s *Weyes Blood*. How did you come to each other’s attention?

**Booker:** We met in Iowa City at a festival when I was on tour with the band *Delicate Steve*. She was on tour opening for *Amen Dunes*. She wasn’t actually on the festival, but we wound up partying and having a fun evening, and we realized that we both lived in New York and knew some mutual people. We kept in touch, and while she was recording her last album with Chris Cohen in L.A., I was also in L.A., checking out the city and playing music. And the first weekend I was there I got messages from both of them separately, like, “You want to play drums on this song ‘Do You Need My Love?’” Chris played drums on every other song. I had very little going on, because I’d just arrived in L.A. So we spent a day rehearsing the song and a day recording it.

**MD:** How come Chris didn’t play on it?

**Booker:** I think that Chris wasn’t hearing his own part for it, and maybe he was happy to have someone else come in and play drums on a track, because he had been playing drums and producing and recording the whole thing. He was playing other instruments too. I think they both were happy to have someone come in with some fresh ears. After she finished recording the album, we started touring in the fall of 2016.

**MD:** The band *Landlady* was interesting in that there were two drummers.

**Booker:** Yes, it was me and Ian Chang. We’d switch off between sitting drumset and a standing set with a percussion tree.

**MD:** Was there a game plan in terms of how that served the music?

**Booker:** Each song had a different approach, but usually the drumset was a foundational part and the standing kit was a complement to that. But a lot of the time we wrote interlocking parts that had the potential to sound like one monster eight-limbed drumset.

**MD:** With your solo music, do you see a time when that will turn into more of a band setting?

**Booker:** I want to continue having a solo project, for a number of reasons, but mostly because it’s easy. I can organize it myself, and it’s at a point where people ask me to do it, which is cool. I recently

moved to L.A., and one of the things on my mind is to potentially start a band. It was something I wanted to do in New York. I did do a record-release show for *Dance And* as a four-person percussion ensemble, and we played the album from start to finish. It was sort of a drumset concerto.

**MD:** Who were the other players?

**Booker:** Sam Sowyrda, who plays malletKAT in *Cloud Becomes Your Hand*, and Max Jaffee [*Elder Ones*, *Delicate Steve*] and Austin Vaughn [*Ashcan Orchestra*, *Here We Go Magic*], two other brilliant drummers. But yeah, I’ve been hearing some sounds and ideas that might at a certain point require that there be more of a band.

**MD:** You’re currently touring with Lee Ranaldo. What are the most demanding or satisfying aspects of playing with him?

**Booker:** We’re playing the music from Lee’s new album, *Electric Trim*, which I don’t play on. I think like any gig playing someone else’s music, the interesting part for me is finding that sweet spot where I’m



## recordings

### **Booker Stardrum**

“Drim Dram,” “Touching And” from *Dance And*

### **Cloud Becomes Your Hand**

“Bridge of Ignorance Returns,” “Aye Aye” from *Rest in Fleas*

### **Landlady**

“Electric Abdomen,” “Nina,” “Rest in Place” from *The World Is a Loud Place*

### **Weyes Blood**

“Do You Need My Love” from *Front Row Seat to Earth*

### **Sam Evian**

“Summer Running” from *Premium*

### **Sunshine Soldier**

“Thump” (available on bandcamp)

really playing like myself while at the same time serving the vision of the music, which belongs almost entirely to someone else.

*Electric Trim* is super-produced, but we’re playing it as a trio without a bass player and intentionally approaching the music way more stripped down. The challenge is playing subtly and tastefully, texturally and openly, but, given the limitations of the instrumentation, also taking up just the right amount of sonic space when necessary. Lee, after all, was in *Sonic Youth*, and there’s certainly a precedent for rocking out, so we have to leave room for that as well.

**MD:** Do you see a connection between the people you work with?

**Booker:** That’s a good question. All the projects stand alone in their own way, and they all exist in slightly different music communities. But I’d say that in general there is an open-mindedness in the community that I’ve found myself in and structured my life around. Something that I’ve always loved and appreciated in my musical life is diversity and doing lots of different things. But some taste of experimentation has got to be in there.



# WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT...?

## Tony Newman

A true survivor, this swashbuckling British drummer brings tales from the golden age of rock 'n' roll excess—and some of the heaviest performances of the era.



Story by Will Romano

Photos by Jeff Ragland

Inspired by the rebellious sounds of pioneering rock 'n' rollers such as Bill Haley and Little Richard, the barnstorming British drummer Tony Newman developed a slashing, swinging, hard-driving style that met the considerable demands of the breakneck creative pace set by standard-bearers of the U.K. rock music scene during the 1960s and 1970s.

Having cut his teeth on the pulse-pounding jazz, soul, and rock 'n' roll madness of Sounds Incorporated, the Southampton, Hampshire, native attracted the attention of rock royalty such as David Bowie, Jeff Beck, Marc Bolan, and the Who. By the mid-1970s, Newman's professional *and* personal life was off the hook. His phone rang incessantly with calls for recording and touring opportunities, while his frenetic playing and lifestyle were accompanied by an increasing dependence on illicit substances.

A change of scenery was sorely needed. A move to Nashville in the '80s rescued this Baby Boomer from becoming another self-inflicted casualty of the chemical, cultural, and psychosexual blitzkrieg known as the classic rock era. "Getting sober was ridiculous," Newman says. "I was working with Crystal Gayle and experienced times of sheer terror. You take away the alcohol and drugs, and the fear comes in. It was almost paralyzing. You had to overcome that. I was grateful to have a gig. [Gayle] had so many hits it's ridiculous. It was very fortuitous."

Newman has long since turned his back on his near-suicidal extracurricular activities, and the seventy-four-year-old drummer remains active to this day, telling us of the likelihood he'll be gigging with Chicago lead guitarist Keith Howland and bassist/vocalist John Cowan (New Grass Revival, the Doobie Brothers). With Newman, anything and everything is possible.

**MD:** You once said you escaped into music because of some difficulties at home.

**Tony:** Yeah. It was like primal scream therapy. I would disappear into the drums for hours and hours. It all started in about 1953, I suppose, when I heard Louie Bellson's "Skin Deep." I liked the early Bill Haley stuff too. I was in the Boy Scouts, very briefly, and they held dances. They had a drumkit at this hall, but no drummer. I don't know what the hell had gone on. But I sat down and that was it. I remember my left leg aching after I played, but apparently I could play. Eventually I got a drumkit out of my paper round, and I turned professional when I was seventeen and joined Sounds Incorporated.

**MD:** You had a very exciting style, even at that early age.

**Tony:** The amazing thing about Sounds Incorporated is that we joined Gene Vincent. All of a sudden we had a world-class rock 'n' roll act, and that band got elevated immediately. It was very odd with them, though. One moment you would be poppy, and the next we would get booked to perform with Mary Wells, Ben E. King, the Shirelles, and Sam Cooke. Charts would be sent to us, or we would be fully rehearsed before the acts came to England. But after Gene Vincent, his manager, Don Arden, said, "I'm bringing in Little Richard and I want you to play for him." A clock inside of me got switched on when I first heard [Richard's] "Lucille." That was it. I couldn't do anything else but play drums and exciting rock.

**MD:** What happened with the Little Richard gig?

**Tony:** Richard came in with Billy Preston [for a European tour in 1962] and we had all these Quincy Jones arrangements, all these gospel songs, which weren't easy to play. But the first night we played with him was just insane.

**MD:** What was going on to cause such a stir?

**Tony:** Everyone thought this was going to be a gospel tour. We did too. Anyway, we were playing a riff, waiting for [Richard] to come on stage. He was actually in the balcony, with a cape on. He leaps off of the balcony with this

ridiculous cape flying behind him and then lands on stage. Forget the gospel stuff—we knew we were going to rock. Billy Preston's organ was screaming. It was a recipe for madness.

**MD:** After Sounds Incorporated, you joined the Jeff Beck Group with Rod Stewart on vocals?

**Tony:** Actually, from 1965 till 1969 I did sessions with Cliff Richard and Cilla Black and was their personal drummer. I'd also worked with Petula Clark, Tom Jones, lots of people. Jeff called me, I suppose in 1969, and wanted me to play with him. He loved what I did.

**MD:** Some say the Jeff Beck Group was the prototype for Led Zeppelin.

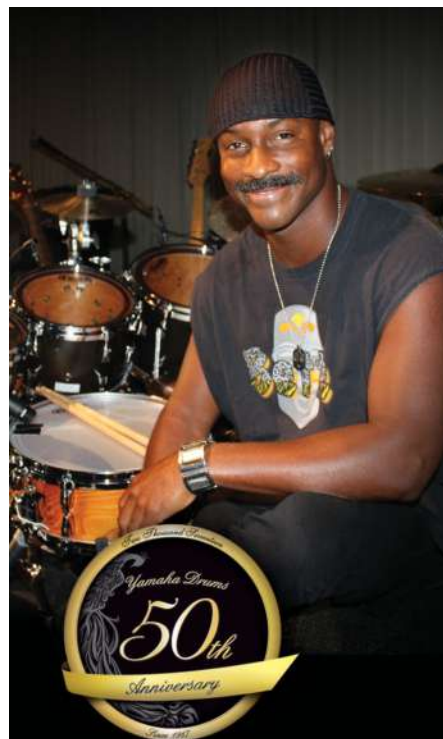
**Tony:** The Jeff Beck Group was managed by Peter Grant, who was also Led Zeppelin's manager. Bonzo [Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham] and I went out on the town, and that was the last time we ever did that together. We were mad. [Bonham] actually gave me one of his Ludwig kits, and I used that for a while with the band May Blitz.

**MD:** What were some of the early impressions of the Jeff Beck Group?

**Tony:** I remember we were in New York and were supposed to do Woodstock, but Jeff went back to England, freaked out because his girlfriend was supposedly having sex with the gardener. We never did Woodstock. Also, having just done a religious tour with Cliff Richard, the first thing I noticed was that Rod [Stewart] was very concerned about image and how he looked. He loved [Mick] Jagger's poses on stage. He also loved Sam Cooke. Rod would take the best of both of those and put it in himself.

Jeff thought that Ronnie [Wood, bassist] and Rod should join the Girl Scouts. [laughs] Rod and Jeff would never look at one another on the stage. If they shared a mic it was back to back. Nicky Hopkins [piano player], who was in the band, said, "You wake up every morning and you don't know if there's going to be a band left." We were never close as people.

**MD:** Your playing in that band is pretty powerful, though.



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## Hello, Newman!

At times aggressive and at others fully dynamic, these vintage performances remind us of why Tony Newman was in such high demand.

**Sounds Incorporated** "William Tell" (from *Sounds Incorporated*) /// **Jeff Beck Group** "All Shook Up," "Spanish Boots," "Plynth (Water Down the Drain)" (*Beck-Ola*) /// **Donovan** "Barabajagal" (*Barabajagal*) /// **May Blitz** "Snakes and Ladders," "In Part," "8 Mad Grim Nits" (*The 2nd of May*) /// **David Bowie** "Moonage Daydream," "Sweet Thing," "Aladdin Sane," "Big Brother" (*David Live*) /// **Three Man Army** "Polecat Woman" (*Two*) /// **Boxer** "Shooting Star" (*Below the Belt*) /// **The Who** "Amazing Journey," "Cousin Kevin" (*Tommy* original soundtrack recording) /// **T. Rex** "Jason B. Sad" (*Dandy in the Underworld*) /// **Crystal Gayle** "Easier Said Than Done" (*True Love*)



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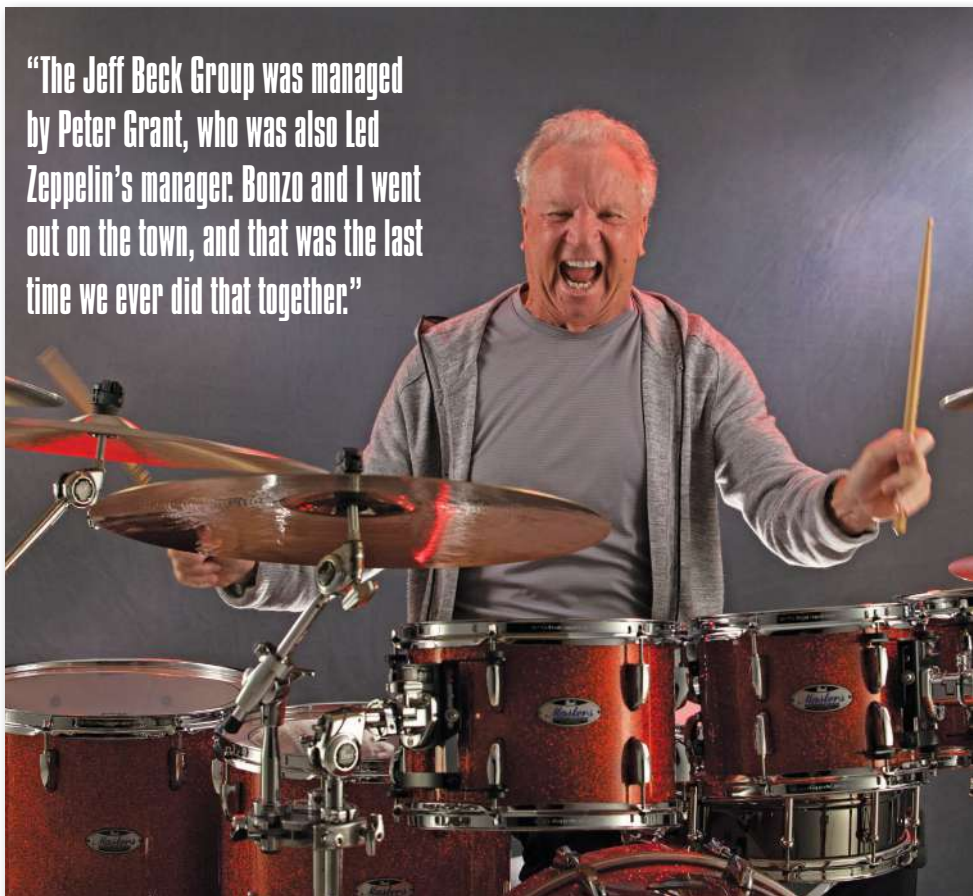
A DIVISION OF SABIAN

**Tony:** One of the beats, on “Plynth (Water Down the Drain)” [from 1969’s *Beck-Ola*], I think it was, was inspired by listening to Edwin Starr’s “25 Miles.” I actually lifted it. I knew Ginger [Baker, Cream], not well, but we both loved Phil Seamen, who was out to lunch but was a great player. I would see him play on Saturday nights at the Marquee Club in London, and he would give me a lesson before the set; he’d be banging chairs and kicking the tables. Phil did beautiful doubles,

dope and maybe have some pills every now and again. Nothing outrageous. Interestingly, some time later I saw Woody [Ron Wood] with Charlie Watts and the Rolling Stones, and they asked me, “What the f\*\*k!” Like: *What happened to you?* I said, “It’s a really strange thing. I took a trip in 1978 and woke up playing brushes with Crystal Gayle in the 1980s.”

**MD:** When did you finally break free of your addictions?

“The Jeff Beck Group was managed by Peter Grant, who was also Led Zeppelin’s manager. Bonzo and I went out on the town, and that was the last time we ever did that together.”



and singles too.

**MD:** He had his troubles, didn’t he?

**Tony:** Oh, Lord, yeah. Everyone was doing smack—heroin. I did things myself and it was a disaster.

**MD:** Did you have a drug habit?

**Tony:** I’m a recovering drug addict and alcoholic. I started to drink when I was thirteen and I liked the effect, but I couldn’t play drunk. However, Gene Vincent gave us a hit of speed before our shows. It was like a hallucinogenic for me. When you’d tour America, there would be groupies and all the dealers who put out cocaine and smack. There I was, doing it.

**MD:** How far down that path were you when you joined the Jeff Beck Group?

**Tony:** I would go down to the pub, smoke

**Tony:** I got sober in 1983, and that’s when I took a one-way ticket to Nashville. Funny thing is, I’ve been fortunate in my accounts. In that sense my life has been blessed. I mean, one day I’m working in the studio and I get a call from David Bowie: “Can you come and do this?” I left the band I was in, Three Man Army, to join Bowie.

**MD:** What can you tell us about working with him?

**Tony:** We were working on the *Diamond Dogs* album when David asked me: “I’m doing a theatrical tour of America. Would you like to come on tour with us?” We went to New York, and we were there for a month, rehearsing every day. I had no idea of David’s repertoire. He was ever so nice. When I was in the studio with him he never, ever told me what to play.

He'd give me scenarios of what he wanted me to imagine as I was playing drums. One of the scenarios, for "Sweet Thing," was that he wanted me to imagine I was a teenage French drummer, watching a guillotining for the first time.

**MD:** What?

**Tony:** Yeah. I'll never forget that. But for the tour Toni Basil came in for the choreography and there was a stage manager, someone we called "Nick the Russian" [Nick Russiyan]. He was actually a Broadway stage manager. When we came to the show it was enormous. Bowie had these colossal sets. It was like a Broadway show, on the road.

We recorded the [David Live] album in Philadelphia, but I was doing so much blow that I didn't know what was going on when I got on stage. I sat down and played—a basket case. Apparently we did another night, which I have no idea of. I thought I played dreadfully on both nights. I was doing a lot of cocaine and sharing it with a lot of other people. It was getting pretty bloody mad. I've never listened to [David Live]. I couldn't face listening to it. Then, apparently, they remixed that and my son called me from England and said, "You ought to have a listen to this. You use a double kick and

everything on it." I got a copy and read the liner notes, and I think David remarked that the drums were great both nights.

**MD:** You thought you'd ruined it.

**Tony:** Absolutely. For f\*\*k's sake, let's get through with this. Around then my wife at the time, Margo, had gone nuts in England. I got her to come to New York to see John Lennon's doctor, and he said she needed to go to the sanitarium. She brought two of the kids, and so they came on the road with me. The English bass player Herbie Flowers said he'd thoroughly had enough of [touring] and was leaving. For some reason I left too. [Bowie guitarist] Earl Slick and the manager would call me, "Please come back." But I was so into my addiction that I didn't want to do it anymore. I had burned myself out on it.

I was so sad when David died. I'd seen him a couple of times after I left. The show went on, obviously, and it worked out great. I always wanted to make amends to him for being so selfish. I was always professional and showed up and did my job prior to this. But all of a sudden the drugs had gotten to me and I went nuts. Horrible. I left my wife and kids and I was sitting in a flat in London drinking special brew and this Victorian laudanum called Dr. J. Collis Browne's cough mixture. I lost my drums in some deal around the time I was in the band Boxer. I had nothing. I'd get this little bottle, shake it up, put it in a pint glass, and drink it. Within about ten minutes the chloroform hit me and I would be euphoric, followed by ten hours of heroin buzz.

**MD:** How do Marc Bolan and T. Rex figure in all of this?

**Tony:** Herbie Flowers called me and said, "Marc Bolan hasn't been on the road [for a while] and he really could do with a drummer. Will you come over?" I said, "I haven't got a drumkit." He said, "I'll make sure they rent you one." I went over to the studio and made the drums sound pretty nice. I had a wonderful gig. I loved [Bolan]. He and I were great buddies. I think Marc Bolan was one of the greatest acts I've ever been on stage with. He had so much charisma. I'm really sorry he died. It was a great tragedy.

**MD:** Let's return to your wife. You're saying she had mental issues?

**Tony:** Yes. She was very ill. She'd been a session singer, the epitome of the Liverpool sound. She'd do three or four sessions a day. Unbelievable. She died [in 2016]. We had been divorced forever, but she was a good woman. What had happened was I'd just left her, and the kids had an awful time. At one point she was diagnosed with osteoporosis and she was taking medicine for her pain, which turned out to be an antidepressant. It was like she woke up and was happy again. I was thrilled. I mean, I was someone who tried to kill himself every day for twenty-seven years. Someone, actually it was George Harrison, said to me, "Life is very fragile. It's like a drop of dew on a lotus leaf. You touch the leaf and you only have to move your hand and [the dew drop] will fall off." I thank my higher power for the privilege of having people like what I do. I've had a great life. And I'm still here. [laughs] Holy smokes! I must be doing something right.

**Tony Newman plays Pearl drums and Sabian cymbals and uses Vic Firth sticks and Remo heads.**



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# Led Zeppelin Experience's Jason Bonham

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- C.** 14x16 floor tom
- D.** 16x18 floor tom
- E.** 14x26 bass drum
- F.** Ludwig 26" timpani with chrome-plated bowl and black hardware

**Cymbals:** Paiste

- 1.** 15" 2002 Sound Edge hi-hats
- 2.** 22" Formula 602 Thin crash
- 3.** 24" 2002 ride
- 4.** 22" 2002 crash
- 5.** 38" symphonic gong (not pictured)

**Hardware:** DW, including 9000 series stands and throne and 8002 double pedal

**Sticks:** Promark Rock Maple Jason Bonham model

**Heads:** Remo Smooth White CS with black dot tom batters and Clear Ambassador resonants, Emperor X snare batter and Ambassador Hazy snare-side, Clear Powerstroke 3 bass drum batter and Starfire chrome front (no hole)

**Accessories:** Roland BT-1 Bar Trigger pad, SPD-SX multipad, and PD-8 trigger pad; Boss FS-5U footswitch; and Rhythm Tech RT7420 Hat Trick tambourine

**Jason Bonham and his Led Zeppelin Experience band** have been touring for the past year to celebrate an important anniversary. "It was forty years ago when Led Zeppelin toured the USA [for the last time with his father, the legendary John Bonham]," says Jason, with a big smile. Jason has been a DW artist since 1987, and he always wanted the company to make him a stainless-steel kit. "The last kit that my dad used was stainless-steel," he says.

Bonham first used this kit when he played with the surviving members of Led Zeppelin in 2002. "I wanted it to look the same for them so that when they walked into the rehearsal room that first day, they would feel comfortable," he says. "I had it exact, even down to the positioning of the mics. Do you think they noticed? Nope. [laughs] "It's weird, though," Jason continues. "Once I let go of that fanaticism of trying to get everything right, they turned around and told me, 'You play much better when you stop trying to be your dad. You're more like your dad when you're just being yourself.' Dad could play anyone's drums, even my tiny little child's drumkit, and he still sounded like him. I'm always trying to get it as close as I can."

"There's a narrower sweet spot on these when compared to the Vistalites," Jason says. "My tech Chris [Huwiler] tunes the drums, and I fine tune them. Chris and I have known each other for so long that if I didn't have a soundcheck and had to just walk on stage and start playing, I'd have complete confidence. But because he works for other drummers, he sometimes thinks my snare drum should sound like theirs. I often say, 'Just back down a touch. We ain't the Chili Peppers. We don't need that high piccolo sound.' [laughs]

"When I was around sixteen years old, Phil Collins told me that his 8" and 10" heads were

**GEARING UP** ON STAGE AND UP CLOSE

Interview and photos by Sayre Beirman



Diplomats, then he went to Ambassadors and Emperors [on the larger drums]. If he used those heavier heads on the smaller drums, the heads wouldn't have any movement because they're so thick. He was so right. To get the same sound out of a smaller drum, you need a thinner drumhead."

As far as kit components that Bonham can't live without, his Vater cup holder was the first item on his list. "It's saved me from having to lean back to get my drink," he says. "I also [love their] slightly longer beaters that can be adjusted to a 26" kick drum. A standard-size beater doesn't get to the center. But maybe that's why dad's drums sounded so good—his beater didn't hit the center of the drum. Come to think of it, his sticks weren't as long either, and he played with them way up in his hands. Hmm...."

Jason recently rejoined Paiste, which was the cymbal company his father used throughout his career. "We didn't do it with a big bang," he says. "People were surprised, but it's that classic sound that you get instantly when you put up these cymbals."





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WALK ON  
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1164

# The Fundamentals of 3/4 Rock

## Where to Play the Backbeat

by Joel Rothman

In 4/4 Western music—whether rock or jazz—the backbeat is usually played on beats 2 and 4. In 12/8, the backbeat often falls on the 8th-note counts of beats 4 and 10. Typical backbeat placement in 4/4 and 12/8 is notated as follows.

Basic rock groove:                      Basic jazz groove:                      Basic 12/8 groove:

For other time signatures, it can be argued that there's no general standard for the placement of the backbeat, and you'd most likely position it according to the rhythmic makeup of the tune and the tempo. Having said that, the following exercises demonstrate some possibilities for playing a backbeat in rock music in 3/4.

There are dozens of bass drum patterns that can be played under these exercises. To keep the focus on the placement of the backbeats, only one possible bass drum figure is notated for each exercise. However, in most exercises one of the bass drum notes will be in parentheses. First play the exercises with all the indicated bass drum notes, and then practice it while omitting the notes in parentheses. This provides one extra bass drum variation for each exercise.

Here are some backbeat possibilities for rock patterns in 3/4.

2

Ghost notes—quiet snare strokes that are played between backbeats—add a richer, more intricate sound to grooves. The following exercises demonstrate some ghost note possibilities in 3/4.

3

This article presents just a few possibilities of where to place the backbeat in 3/4. I suggest you explore additional ideas using the exercises in this lesson as a starting point. Good luck!

**Joel Rothman** is the author of nearly one hundred drum and percussion books, which sell worldwide through his company, JR Publications. For more info, visit [joelrothman.com](http://joelrothman.com).



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# Moeller Through the Chapin Lens

## Examining Upstroke and Downstroke Mechanics

by Claus Hessler

Few topics are more subject to debate among the drumming community than the Moeller technique. This column isn't meant to teach you right from wrong. Instead, we'll elaborate on how Jim Chapin taught the technique. Jim was a master of the Moeller technique, and he learned it directly from its greatest promoter, Sanford Moeller. I feel honored and blessed to have gotten to know Jim during the last twenty years of his life. He had such a vast knowledge of stick technique, and I'm forever grateful to have studied with him.

In this lesson we'll talk about some frequent misunderstandings regarding the upstroke and downstroke mechanics of the Moeller technique and the related reaction of the stick. We'll also go over a few terms Chapin used to describe the stick's motion.

Chapin and Moeller looked at the movement of the hand to indicate the up or down motions. Neither of them wanted the stick to be forced down—only the hand would move down on each downstroke. The tip of the stick should not freeze in the down position, but instead react freely without any tension in the player's hand. Both teachers wanted the stick to rebound in the most relaxed way. They wanted the tips of the sticks to literally fly back, and Chapin described this motion as “flying tips.” Only by allowing the stick to move could they see the potential for the Moeller technique's pumping motion. From there, it's a question of how much of the stick's rebound, or “fly-back,” do you allow for, which mostly depends on the tempo and volume.

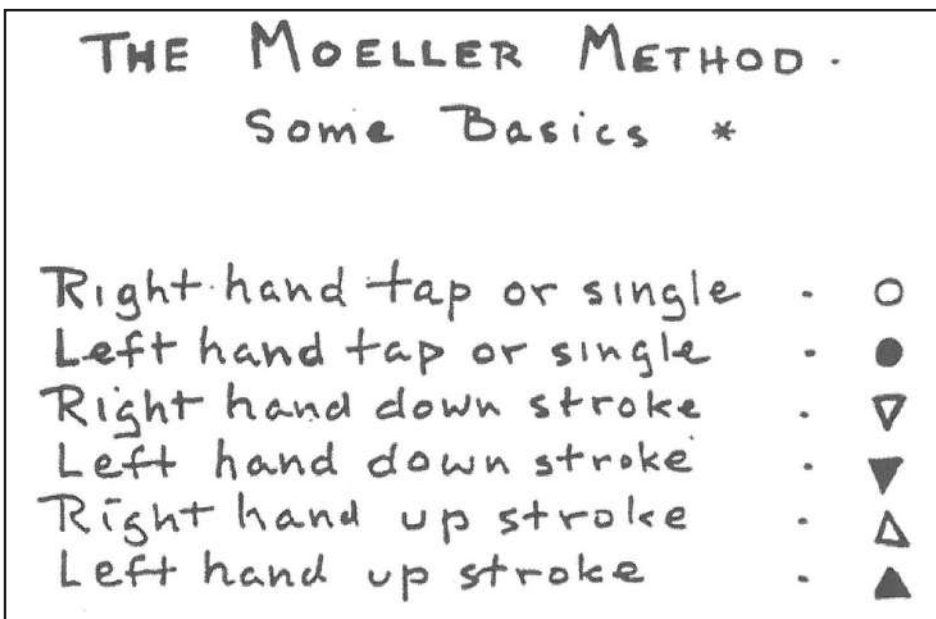
There are two different ways of looking at up and down motions. One way is to observe the stick and let it be the reference for the stroke. The Gladstone technique, which was named for the great Radio City Music Hall percussionist

William D. Gladstone and taught by George Lawrence Stone and his master student Joe Morello, is the best example for this first category.

However, the movement of the hand at the time of the hit can also indicate upstrokes or downstrokes. And when you start applying some of the Moeller technique's motions, this perspective makes much more sense.

In the following series of exercises, which are taken from my DVD *Drumming Kairos*, the goal is to have the stick fly back in a controlled way. The key to mastering the exercises is understanding that the triplets on beat 4 make it necessary to reduce the height of the stick compared to the straight 8th or 16th notes. Once you have an idea of how much more closed your hand should be in order to achieve the intended subdivision, you're set. Your stick will bounce back less in your hand when it is in more of a closed position, and the strokes you play will be closer together. With the exception of Exercise 1, left-hand strokes are written below the line while right-hand strokes are written above the line.

Exercise 1 can be played with five different stickings: right only, left only, unison flat flams, right-handed flams, and left-handed flams. Exercises 2 and 3 expand on different rhythmic possibilities. And Exercise 4 features quiet and loud strokes that are played at the same time between both hands. In Exercise 4, make sure there are no flams and that you don't force the stick to stay down. (Remember the “fly back” action that Moeller and Chapin stressed.) Be aware that the height of the stick isn't the only thing that creates a loud or soft stroke. The speed of the tip of the stick at the moment of contact is also a factor.



Jim Chapin used a system of dots and triangles to indicate upstrokes and downstrokes. He adapted the strategy from Sanford Moeller, who was—as far as I know—the first to use symbols to indicate up and down motions, in *The Moeller Book: The Art of Snare Drumming*. As explained in *The Moeller Book*, white symbols were used to indicate right-hand strokes, and black symbols were used to indicate left-hand strokes.

1

2

3

4

If you're familiar with Moeller's concepts, *Drumming Kairos* will help you decode and comprehend his system. I also highly recommend Chapin's video *Speed, Power, Control, Endurance*, which is an indispensable tool when it comes to understanding the Moeller technique.

Claus Hessler is an active clinician in Europe, Asia, and the United States. For more, visit [claushessler.com](http://claushessler.com).



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# Two-Limb Patterns

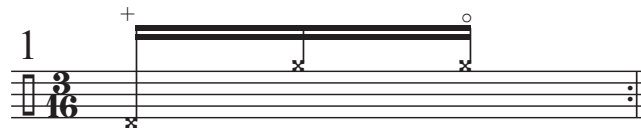
## Grooving Over Linear Ostinatos

by Joel Popelsky

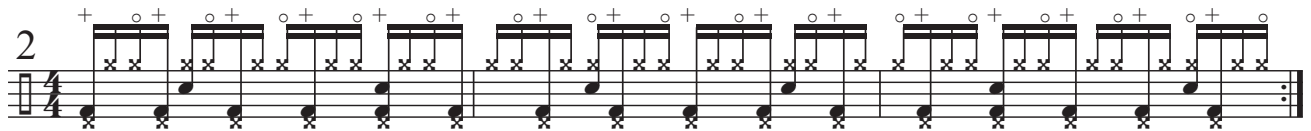
**Linear drumming is an approach** to playing in which none of your limbs play simultaneously. Typically, linear patterns involve both hands and one or both feet. In this article I'll demonstrate some interesting grooves based on a 16th-note linear ostinato that's played between the right hand and the left foot on the hi-hat and the left foot on the hi-hat pedal.

You can practice these grooves using a three-step approach. First, master the right-hand and left-foot linear pattern. Next we'll incorporate the bass drum over the ostinato, and then finally we'll add the snare. You can also work on these grooves without opening the hi-hat, and then incorporate the openings as you become more comfortable with the patterns. Practice these phrases at a comfortable tempo.

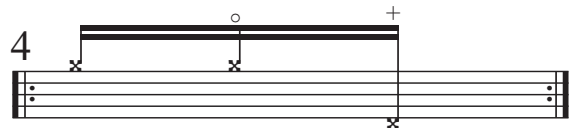
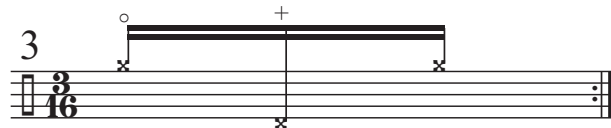
The first groove is based on the 3/16 linear hi-hat pattern notated in Exercise 1. Spend time with this figure before moving on.



Exercise 2 demonstrates a three-bar groove in 4/4 based on the previous pattern. Note that it takes three measures before the groove resolves. In this example, the snare plays beats 2 and 4, and the bass drum follows the left foot.



Try practicing Exercises 3 and 4 in a similar three-measure groove. Play the snare on 2 and 4 and mimic the hi-hat foot with the bass drum.



Exercises 5–9 demonstrate bass drum variations for Exercise 2. These figures are more challenging than the original pattern because the kick doesn't follow the hi-hat foot.



Exercise 10 demonstrates a three-bar groove based on Exercise 1 that uses the bass drum pattern from Exercise 8 and places the snare on beats 2 and 4.



I encourage you try your own snare and bass drum patterns with Exercises 1, 3, and 4 to create three-bar grooves similar to Exercise 10.

In Exercises 11–13 we'll explore some one-bar grooves that incorporate linear hi-hat patterns that are a bit more complicated than the previous examples. Again, it might be helpful to isolate the hi-hat pattern before adding the snare and bass drum.

Exercise 11: A single bar of music in 4/4 time. The hi-hat pattern consists of a sequence of eighth notes with various accents and dynamics. The snare and bass drum patterns are also indicated.

Exercise 12: A single bar of music in 4/4 time. The hi-hat pattern consists of a sequence of eighth notes with various accents and dynamics. The snare and bass drum patterns are also indicated.

Exercise 13: A single bar of music in 4/4 time. The hi-hat pattern consists of a sequence of eighth notes with various accents and dynamics. The snare and bass drum patterns are also indicated.

Finally, let's combine a linear pattern played between the snare and bass drum with another linear pattern played between the right hand on the hi-hat and the left foot on the hi-hat pedal. This one's challenging, so don't get discouraged if it takes some time to get down.

Exercise 14: A single bar of music in 4/4 time. The hi-hat pattern consists of a sequence of eighth notes with various accents and dynamics. The snare and bass drum patterns are also indicated.

Joel Popelsky has been playing drums for more than forty years and has studied with Henry Adler, Norman Grossman, and Frank Marino. He currently plays several times a month with hUShh, an Orange County, New York-based classic rock cover band.



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**Mike Alfieri** is a Brooklyn, New York-based drummer and educator. He has a bachelor's degree in music education from the Crane School of Music and a master's degree in jazz studies from SUNY Purchase. For more info, visit [mikealfieri.net](http://mikealfieri.net).



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## Exploring Five-Over-Three

### Mastering a Difficult Grouping, Step by Step

by Aaron Edgar



**Thinking back to when** I first started tackling polyrhythms, five-over-three groupings gave me a considerable amount of trouble. I didn't have much facility with quintuplets at the time, and a five-over-three polyrhythm has a lot of space between each partial. I vividly recall sitting in a hotel lobby between sets on a freelance gig, tapping on my leg, and counting intently until I finally started to get a handle on the rhythm.

The trick to this grouping—and to any polyrhythm—is to feel how the polyrhythmic layer fits over the pulse. In five-over-three's basic form, we're playing five equally spaced notes across a bar of 3/4. The five side of the grouping needs to feel syncopated, and the three side acts as a quarter-note pulse. However, you can displace the three side to different parts of the beat.

To get started with this polyrhythm, play solid quintuplets across a bar of 3/4 time while counting out loud using the syllables "ta, ka, din, ah, gah." Your voice is an integral part of the learning process and will help you form a deeper connection to the rhythms. Tap quarter notes with your foot and accent every third quintuplet partial with your hands.



It can help to nod your head on "ta." You have to feel the pulse, and the hands' accents should feel syncopated. If you start to feel this as triplets, you're playing a three-over-five polyrhythm, which is the wrong grouping. Go slow enough to maintain the correct rhythmic perspective.

Once you can feel the rhythm correctly, you can start the polyrhythm on different parts of the beat. Exercises 2 and 3 demonstrate the two remaining permutations of the five side of the five-over-three polyrhythm.



When working with polyrhythms that feature more space between each partial, it can be helpful to utilize a sticking that's the same length as each space. Since we're accenting every third quintuplet note, RLL and LRR are great choices. Accent the single stroke and ghost the doubles. Using a sticking that you can put on autopilot can alleviate some of your brain's workload.

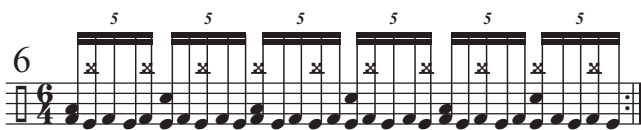
We can also apply rudiments to these groupings. Exercise 4 applies Swiss triplets to the five-over-three polyrhythm.



Next we'll reinforce the feel of the polyrhythm by playing quintuplets with the feet. This allows you to align every partial of the polyrhythm with a powerful bass drum note. Don't forget to count and bob your head on the pulse. In Exercise 5, the left hand plays a quarter note on the rack tom while the right hand starts the five side of the polyrhythm on the second quintuplet partial of beat 1 on the floor tom. When you're comfortable with this rhythm, try orchestrating each hand individually around the kit. The leading foot reverses on repeat.



Exercise 6 orchestrates the three side of the previous grouping between a floor tom or gong drum and the snare to simulate a basic rock beat. Playing solid quintuplets on the bass drums and outlining the five side of the grouping on a cymbal stack creates an aggressive polyrhythmic groove.



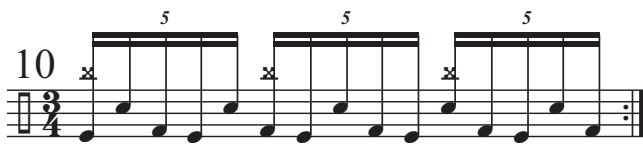
The following examples explore each permutation of a kick and snare pattern that voices the five with a three-partial grouping: right kick, left kick, and rimshot.

Let's start with a groove that uses solid quintuplets on the bass drums, as notated in Exercise 7. We'll also play quarter notes on a cymbal stack in the following examples. Reverse the leading foot on the repeat.



The goal is to maintain the aggressiveness and intensity of the previous quintuplet groove when transitioning into the polyrhythmic variations that are broken up with the snare. Here are the variations.





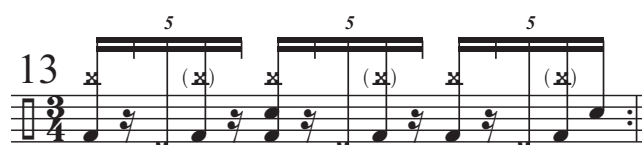
Exercise 11 demonstrates a quintuplet-inspired double bass shuffle. I play this groove in the bridge of the Third Ion song "Van Halien" from the album *13/8bit*. The bridge also employs Exercise 8 as a turnaround in different arrangements as the section progresses.



In Exercise 12, the bass drum begins on an ordinary shuffle starting point and the stack plays a twisted quintuplet shuffle feel. Accent the quarter notes on the stack and play each third partial ("din") a little quieter. This pair of contrasting shuffle rhythms creates an interesting syncopation when applied to a groove.



Exercises 13 and 14 feature a kick and hi-hat quintuplet shuffle ostinato. In Exercise 14, we play the five side of the polyrhythm on a cymbal stack with the right hand. Work on each exercise separately before alternating between the two.



One of the best things you can do when practicing polyrhythms is to play them in a musical context by incorporating them into grooves. It can be easy to learn an isolated pattern, but if you can't hear how it's applied musically, you'll have trouble playing it in a realistic setting. Don't forget to alternate between the polyrhythmic groove and something without the polyrhythm that reinforces the pulse. The more comfortable the transitions become between the two contrasting phrases, the more likely you'll be able to bring these polyrhythmic ideas to the table with a band.



**Aaron Edgar** plays with the Canadian prog-metal band Third Ion and is a session drummer, clinician, and author. His latest book, *Progressive Drumming Essentials*, is available through Modern Drummer Publications. For more info, visit [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com).



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**RTOM**

# Understanding and Utilizing Fear

## Tips for Turning Anxiety Into Achievement

by Mark Schulman

**The great actor/comedian** Jerry Seinfeld once said, “According to most studies, people’s number-one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. This means that to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.” Sometimes fear is a reaction to an illusion we’ve created in our minds. But if we think these illusions are real, then our reactions need to be treated as such.

### F.E.A.R. (False Evidence Appearing Real)

Fear as an emotional reaction to something that is threatening is appropriate, such as a car careening towards you or someone holding a gun to your head. In those types of situations, fear is designed to preserve your life. In other words, there are

times when you *should* be afraid. But in the context of setting and achieving personal goals, once you’re clear on your objectives, you can quell illusionary fear by setting realistic expectations of what you want to achieve. Assess your competence as specifically as you can, and then align your expectations with that reality. In short, you can avoid feelings of false fear by making sure that your expectations about your performance are realistic and based on your actual competency.

While chatting with Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh about stage fright, he referred to the book *Confessions of a Public Speaker* by Scott Berkun, which references evolution in relation to fear. “Ten thousand years ago,” says Hsieh, “if you had five hundred pairs of eyes on you and your back was against the

wall, you were dead. Now if you’re in that situation, you’re a leader.”

### Turning Fear Into Focus

When asked about how he deals with fear, blind athlete and motivational speaker Erik Weihenmayer explained to me, “On one side you have the adventure of life—the excitement and the fun and the thrill. On the other side, you have the fear. You have the positive stuff pulling you one way, and the fear pulling you the other way. It’s then a question of which one is more powerful.”

Weihenmayer recalled how terrified he was the first time he climbed the Khumbu Icefall. “I remember waking up early,” he said. “I had a cup of coffee in my hand, and my hand was shaking like crazy. I couldn’t even hold the cup. I remember thinking, *Wow, I can’t even*



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function. *I can't even tie a knot.*"

But there's a point at which you're as ready as you're ever going to be. At that point, Weihenmayer says, fear can only sabotage you: "You've prepared. You've done everything you can. You're ready. This is your moment. At that point, all those fears and doubts start to pour in because your brain wants to protect you. It's a mechanism left over from when we were cavemen. That fear protects you from walking out and getting eaten by a saber-toothed tiger.

"It short-circuits you," Weihenmayer continues. "It says, 'What are you *doing*—get off the mountain. Go down to the sunshine and sidewalks and hamburgers.' You just have to accept that that's the way the brain functions. It's calling you away from adventure."

If Weihenmayer had listened to his brain, he would never have summited Mount Everest. He's learned to transmit his fear into focus and a hyper-awareness of his surroundings—clarity. "There's a really cool Tibetan quote that I heard when I was on Everest," says Weihenmayer. "'The nature of the mind is like water. If you do not disturb it, it will become clear.' Your mind can fill up with all these distractions and doubts that try to pull you away. You overthink. When I'm climbing and get freaked out, I go into a Zen state that's about awareness and focus rather than mud and distraction. I keep my mind still, like water."

Weihenmayer could focus on the enormity of the mountain and the failings of the human body, but he chooses to think only about the possibilities for success. "I envision myself crossing ladders—doing things right, going through the motions correctly in my brain," he says. "Ultimately, I see myself celebrating on the summit with my team. Doing things right in your mind first is a lesson in positive self-reinforcement."

Weihenmayer has an alchemy theory about turning the negative (lead) into the positive (gold). "There's a point where I felt that fear was no longer in control," he says. "You can panic, but that isn't going to help you come down from a mountain in a massive storm when there are a million things that could go wrong. Out of necessity, I learned to translate the potentially uncontrollable panic that happens in my brain into a sense of hyperawareness. I think, *I'm here, and I can do no wrong. This is a 'Don't Fall Zone,' so I'm not going fall.*"

Through all of his adventures, Weihenmayer keeps focused on his goals. When you get caught up in distractions, you're concentrating on all of the things that could derail or undermine your purpose. Weihenmayer has developed the ability to translate panic into hyperawareness out of necessity—because he's operating in actual life-and-death situations.

It's humbling to compare my performance anxiety as a drummer to the fear of falling down the side of a mountain. Having said that, fear of any

kind can still feel insurmountable, even if the actual consequences are not life threatening. This is why it's important to push aside thoughts of everything that could go wrong in a given situation so we can forge ahead and achieve our true goals.



**Mark Schulman** is a first-call drummer who's played for Pink, Foreigner, Cher, Billy Idol, Sheryl Crow, and Stevie Nicks. For more information, go to [markschulman.com](http://markschulman.com).



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# The George Way Drum Company

## The Iconic Man and the Rebirth of His Legacy Brand

by Bob Campbell

**G**eorge Way may not be a household name to all drummers, but he was one of the greatest innovators in American drum history. From his first venture, Advance Drum Company, to working with George B. Stone, Leedy, Amrawco, Slingerland, Rogers, C.G. Conn, Leedy & Ludwig, and eventually his own namesake brand, Way was a key contributor to the evolution of modern drums. But his legacy might have faded into the history books were it not for the intervention of Ronn Dunnett of Dunnett Classic Drums, who purchased the rights to George Way drums in 2006 and reintroduced them to the world.

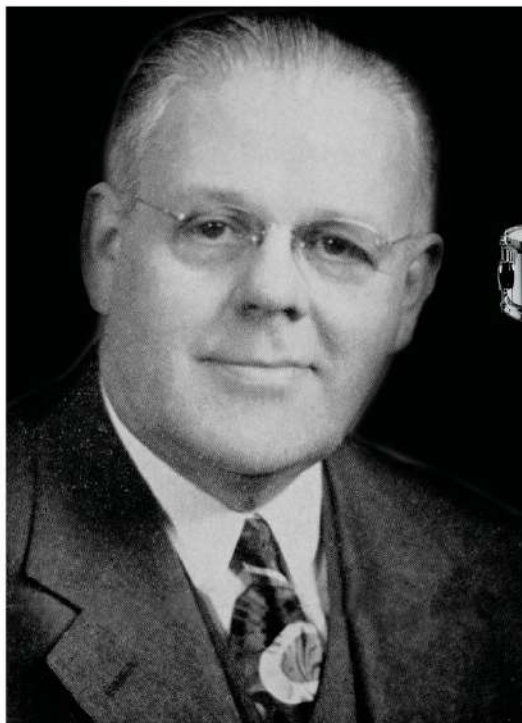
### Who Was George Way?

George Harrison Bassett was born in San Francisco in 1891 to George Harrison and Angela Bassett. George's mother divorced and remarried William Thompson Way of Boston. At age thirteen, George changed his last name to Way. He took drum lessons from the legendary George B. Stone, paying for them by working as an office boy in the Stone drum factory. At age nineteen, and much to the dismay of his well-to-do parents, George began a career as a vaudeville, circus, and traveling minstrel show drummer. He played with Ringling Brothers Circus, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, George Evans' Honey Boy Minstrels, George M. Cohan's minstrel shows, Gentleman Jim Corbett, Chicago Yellowjackets, and silent film star Al Jolson. George once said of his career choice, "I went into show business to see the world. I got paid to see things that cost tourists lots of money."

### Drum Business Beginnings

Way learned a great deal from his experiences at the Stone drum factory, absorbing all he could. He eventually started coming up with his own designs. These ideas culminated in 1912, when George opened his own business in Edmonton, Canada, called the Advance Drum Company. It was there that he met his future wife, Elsie Maude Johnson, who worked for him as a secretary. The two were married in 1918.

George settled in as the percussionist for Edmonton's Pantages Theatre. Life was good, but the Advance Drum Company was not succeeding the way George imagined. In 1921, U.G. Leedy offered George the position of sales manager at the Leedy drum company. Elsie and George packed their bags and left for Indianapolis, Indiana. As described by author and George Way biographer Rob Cook, "Way was ideally suited for the position of sales manager at Leedy. He understood the drummer, the equipment, and the manufacturing processes. He had an outgoing and often downright jovial personality and was personally acquainted with most of the top 'drum biz' personalities."



George Way



Ronn Dunnett

George was not just a salesman, but also an inventor. While at Leedy, he designed the floating-head hoop, pearl covering, and the parallel drum strainer, and he instituted the Leedy Drum Topics series.

### Moving on From Leedy

At the beginning of the Great Depression, around 1929, C.G. Conn purchased Leedy. George was fortunate to keep his job as sales manager for Leedy Manufacturing Co. in Elkhart, Indiana. He worked happily for many years in sales and promotion and even invented several new products. Then World War II came along. By 1942, Leedy began trimming its sales force, and George was let go. Undaunted, Way used his vast experience in grading and selecting calfskin drumheads and started a new venture selling Amrawco (American Rawhide Manufacturing Company) drumheads, as well as drum covering, sticks, mallets, and instructional books. In 1944, Amrawco offered Way a job as sales manager in its Chicago office. While there, George sold almost as many calfskin heads as Leedy did before the war, and he designed a new drying rack for the drumheads.

### Slingerland, Leedy, and the Launch on His Own

In 1946, George joined Slingerland as sales manager. Unfortunately, he didn't fit in well. The executives at the company considered

George a bit old-fashioned and set in his ways. George felt they were too profit-driven and not customer-focused. Perhaps as a pleasant distraction, George invented the H.H. Ball Bearing pedal for Slingerland, which was the first pedal to feature enclosed spring mechanisms. But within a year, George and Slingerland parted ways. Way then opened the Hollywood Drum Shop with drummer and Leedy endorser Harold MacDonald. The shop was not as successful as George had hoped, so six months later he sold his interest and moved on.

Despite career setbacks, Way always managed to land on his feet. In 1948, Leedy (now owned by Conn) offered George his old job in Elkhart, Indiana. He returned to Leedy, but as was his experience at Slingerland, Way felt that too much attention was being given to profit over customer satisfaction. In 1951, the Leedy and Ludwig & Ludwig divisions of Conn were merged into the new Leedy & Ludwig drum company. Three years later, Conn decided to get out of the drum business, and sold off the assets.

George was again out of a job, but the entrepreneur in him seized the moment as an opportunity to find investors for his next endeavor, the George Way Drum Company. He set up in familiar surroundings—the former Leedy & Ludwig building in Elkhart. He designed a unique variation of the round turret lug for George Way drums, which was later used by Camco and then Drum Workshop.

Over the next seven years, the George Way Drum Company found success in producing snares and drumkits. The owner of Camco, John Rochon, expressed interest in George Way and purchased a sizable number of shares in the company. Rochon eventually bought out other shareholders until he gained majority control of the George Way Drum Company.

On a Saturday in August of 1961, Rochon called a board meeting and insisted on a number of changes, many of which George



**Modern Way kit**

thought were a bit crazy. In a letter, George said, "I told [Rochon] that if he thought Elsie and I were a hindrance to the company, we would drop out." Rochon didn't waste any time deciding. Shortly afterwards, Rochon called another meeting and accepted their resignations. George wrote, "I don't know yet whether we quit or got fired."

### The End of an Era

Way worked for the Rogers Drum Company for about nine months before leaving to resettle back in Elkhart. He started a new company, called G.H.W., because, in George's own words, "This man who took over my old company refuses to let me use my own name, due to an employment contract I held with the stockholders when we first started." Way also sat in with circus bands like the Ringling Brothers.

In 1964, George had a heart attack. Then he fell down a flight of steps and broke his leg, which never healed properly. Way passed



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## Shop Talk

away on February 21, 1969. Frank Reed continued as general manager of G.H.W. and eventually bought the business from Elsie. She died in 1984, and Frank passed away a year later. Frank's son sold the business to Bob Kane, a retired Conn executive. The residual assets and G.H.W. company name were sold in 1986 to E.H. "Mac" McNease of Witmer-McNease Music in South Bend, Indiana.

## The Revival

Two decades passed until another great innovator and entrepreneur, Ronn Dunnett of the Dunnett Classic Drum Company, decided to revive the George Way legacy.

understood the impact his work had on the drums we play today. As a forward-thinking product designer, George Way has always been a great personal inspiration to me. I wanted to restore what was a very important heritage brand and set an example for how such an endeavor could and should be done. By coincidence, the way to do that is exactly the way George ran his companies: with sincerity, honesty, and integrity." In 2006, Dunnett acquired the rights to G.H.W. and the George Way Drum Company, and a second century of George Way drum production was underway.

For this new generation of George Way drums, Dunnett wanted to stay true to the

Ronn adopted George's tuxedo lugs, beer-tap throw-off (with slight modifications), unique triple-flange hoops, and classic cloud badge. He also maintained many of the classic George Way naming conventions, such as Tradition, Advance, Pantages, Studio, Elkhart, Indy, Prestige, Aero, and Hollywood. Dunnett has offered Way drumkits made of walnut and mahogany, and a variety of snares in mahogany, walnut, maple, copper, aluminum, bronze, and brass, as well as other prototype shells. The popularity of these new Way drums has steadily risen over the past few years. George Way/Dunnett endorser and *Lion King* drummer Carter McLean offered this testimonial: "George Way drums offer me a sound not found elsewhere in the drum market. They give back whatever I put into them. They're inspiring to play. George Way is *my* sound."

In reflection, Dunnett says, "I would love nothing more than to sit down with George over a beer and trade stories. There really isn't any way to know how our lives might have had some parallels, but I certainly know we both have had significant successes and a few failures. If there's one particularly beautiful thing, it's that George had Elsie there with him through thick and thin. I'm as lucky as George in that I have my own 'Elsie,' who is my partner and my biggest supporter."

*Special thanks to author/drum historian Rob Cook and Ronn Dunnett for their contributions to this article and for preserving the history and legacy of George Way.*

### Recommended Reading

*George Way's Little Black Book* by Rob Cook (Rebeats Publications, 1992)

*Mr. Leedy and the House of Wonder* by Harry Cangany (Centerstream, 2008)

*The Complete History of the Leedy Drum Company* by Rob Cook (Centersteam, 1993)

*The Slingerland Book* by Rob Cook (Rebeats Publications, 2005)

Dunnett is an enterprising Canadian who had built a thriving business producing high-end custom drums. Like George, Ronn has a flair for sales and promotion and a very creative mind. (Some of Dunnett's innovations include R-Class throw-offs, wood/metal hybrid hoops, the eKee drum key, and an adjustable air vent.)

Dunnett is well educated in drum history and recognized the tremendous impact and legacy of George Way. "My motivation was simple," Ronn recalls. "George Way was the most prolific designer of drum and percussion products—the DaVinci of his time. Yet few knew who he was or

spirit of G.H.W. but maintain modern quality. He says, "In a way, George is still running his company. Even though he's gone, I run everything past him. I like to think I know him well enough to know what he would like and what he would detest. 'What would George do?' is something I ask myself frequently. I've made very few changes to his designs, and I'm constantly reinvesting in the company to recreate his ideas. For example, I'm working on a modern version of his Clock Face throw-off. I'm also planning to make some upgrades to the current drumset hardware, having already die-cast the bass drum claws."



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# Dare to Drum

A recently released documentary shows what happens when an esteemed percussion ensemble, a famous rock drummer, a world-class symphony orchestra, and a somewhat cranky Mother Nature come together for a unique musical event.

by Lauren Vogel Weiss

“Drummers like to collect instruments and naturally explore different percussive sounds,” says John Bryant, director and producer of the recently released documentary *Dare to Drum*. “This film is literally about going around the world, finding different sounds and percussive music, and bringing them back to incorporate into our group sound.” The group Bryant is referring to is the Dallas-based percussion ensemble D’Drum, which also features Ron Snider, Doug Howard, and Ed Smith.

Several years ago the group, which at the time also featured Jamal Mohamed, teamed up with former Police drummer and composer Stewart Copeland, who wrote *Gamelan D’Drum* for percussion quintet and orchestra. The thirty-minute concerto received its world premiere on a threateningly snowy night in February 2011, under the baton of Jaap van Zweden and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

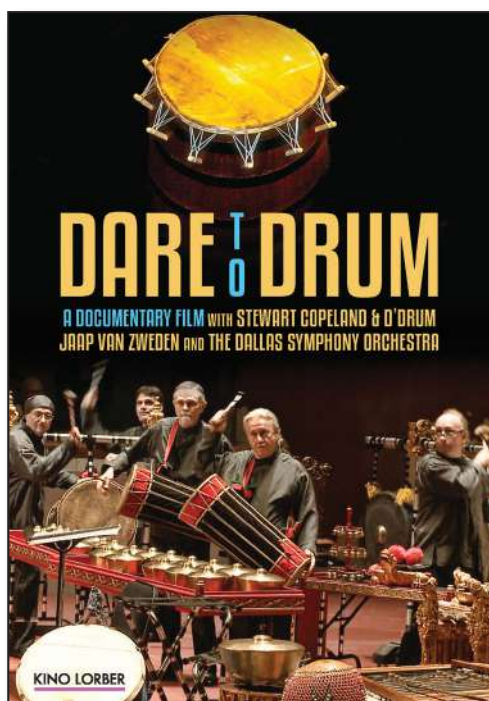
What made Bryant, an accomplished drumset player, decide to direct a film? “It found me rather than me finding it,” he says with a laugh. “I was surrounded by all these elements—Stewart, the Dallas Symphony, D’Drum, maestro van Zweden. I thought this was an opportunity that needed to be captured. Since I’ve been working in the film industry as a music producer and composer, I called up some friends who are cameramen, and the story just organically revealed itself.”

The eighty-five-minute film, which debuted at the 2015 Dallas International Film Festival, lets viewers peek inside 2010 rehearsals as the composition takes shape. Candid discussions between the composer and performers are captured as they play different sections of the piece.

“One of my favorite parts of the film,” Bryant says, “is when all of us—Ron, Doug, Ed, Jamal, and myself—are in a rehearsal with Stewart. We were in the studio and started talking to each other in a drummer’s language, which meant we were articulating rhythms to each other. We weren’t speaking English—we were speaking ‘drum’! It’s a great scene, because for two or three minutes we were just conversing with drum rhythms and not saying any words. I called that chapter “The Language of Drummers.”

“My favorite scene,” Copeland tells *Modern Drummer*, “is when the great maestro conductor is rehearsing with just our heroes and

their gamelan rig. The orch chairs are all empty, so everyone in the room has to imagine what the giant orchestra will be playing. John cleverly filtered in some of the orch parts, just to show how the pieces fit together.”



In addition to being privy to behind-the-scenes footage of the musicians composing, rehearsing, recording, and performing, viewers are taken to locations in Indonesia, where the gamelan was created. (A traditional gamelan comprises gongs tuned to a pentatonic scale, but D’Drum’s custom reyong is twenty-five chromatic gongs, tuned F to F and set up like a keyboard.) The music also features instruments as varied as a Hungarian cimbalom, Middle Eastern dumbek, and a “transcultural” drumkit featuring Ewe barrel drums, a caxixi from West Africa, Turkish cymbals, and an Arabic frame drum.

“When the concert was over,” Bryant explains, “I had all this footage but no money to make the film, so we turned to Kickstarter. We launched a thirty-five-day campaign in October 2013 and raised a little over \$95,000 from 348 people around the world. That was probably harder than making the film itself.”

“John did an amazing job of crafting together all of the footage that we had, going back to the very first meeting with Stewart Copeland,” says D’Drum’s Doug Howard, who’s also principal percussionist with the Dallas Symphony. “The film has tension—and it has humor. It tells a great story, and people seem to identify with it in a positive way.”

“We drummers love to hit things, and this movie is pornography for aggression upon inanimate objects,” Copeland adds with a sly smile. “Our complex minds are beguiled by complex rhythms, and those D’Drum cats in Dallas are a machine of wheels within wheels of interlocking bombast. It’s way too highbrow for guitarists, perhaps, but drummers just love this stuff!”

*Dare to Drum* was released this past September 19, the same date that Jaap van Zweden conducted his first concert as music director designate with the New York Philharmonic in the opening performance of its 2017–18 season. The documentary is available on DVD and digitally from iTunes and Amazon; the package includes the entire concert performance of *Gamelan D’Drum*. Both films are also available for licensing to educational institutions. A trailer can be viewed at [daretodrumfilm.com](http://daretodrumfilm.com).





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# CRITIQUE

## MULTIMEDIA

### **Led Zeppelin: All the Albums, All the Songs** by Martin Popoff

**This survey of the legendary rock band's studio albums falls short of getting to the heart of drummer John Bonham's gifts, so let's take the opportunity to paint a more complete picture.**

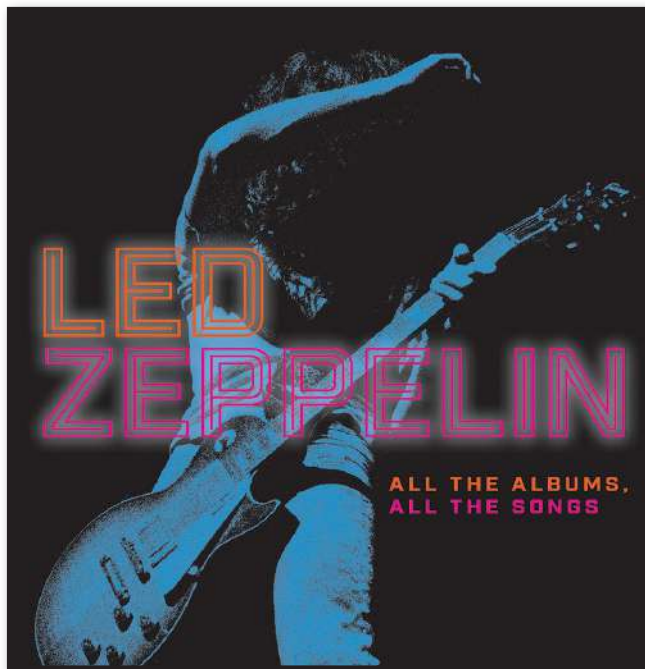
I'm a little anal about reading the introductions and prefaces of books before I even flip through the rest of the pages. Their purpose is to set a tone, establish the credibility and character of the writer, and encapsulate the importance of the book's subject matter, and I want to know all that stuff before being wooed by the pretty pictures. On all of these counts, the intro to Martin Popoff's *Led Zeppelin: All the Albums, All the Songs* drops some warning signs that should be heeded.

In one bizarre passage, Popoff supports his expertise on the book's subject in part by claiming that he's written more record reviews than any other writer in history, and that he's in fact going for the Guinness record in that regard. (Ew, and who really cares?) Two paragraphs later, he gripes about an abundance of existing journalism covering Zeppelin as a live act with this comment: "Zzz." (Boo, and... *huh?*) Before all that, though, in a meaningless aside, he trashes the Beatles. (Ooh, and them's fightin' words!)

Popoff's wrong-headedness on these issues might have been forgivable if he followed through on his promise to "help a bunch of non-drummers" appreciate John Bonham—since, as he states, he's a drummer himself. Unfortunately, while the author sprinkles his prose with lines like "All manner of drummers would later try to decipher how... Bonham played the fast bass drum triplets on 'Good Times Bad Times'... and whether in fact it could be done on anything fewer than two bass drums," he generally glosses over the paramount qualities that made Bonham arguably the greatest rock drummer of all time. It's not his supposed superhuman skills that truly set Bonham apart—though, my *Lord* what skills he had—but rather how unusual and effective his musical choices were, how idiosyncratically he applied them, and how much swagger he consistently played them with.

While Popoff certainly attempts to give Bonham his due, far too often he settles for superficial descriptions of his contributions, and sometimes simply misses the point. Take, for instance, this description of the approach to "Communication Breakdown": "Bonham does nothing much more than goad the riff." To miss the drummer's decision to move the first backbeat in the second bar back to the 1, leaving a dramatic gap in the groove, is to miss a vital clue to his thinking. Bonham understood that what you don't play is as important as the fancy licks that you do play. It's at the core of the heaviness of beats like those on "Whole Lotta Love" and "The Ocean," and it informs his approach to tension and release, exemplified by the dramatic fills on tunes like "Kashmir" and "When the Levee Breaks." Bonham's constant awareness of what a listener expects to hear at any given moment, and the innumerable ways he toys with those expectations, is what makes us bow down to him all these years later. There will always be drummers who can mimic John's parts; there will *never* be another one who thinks like him.

Other examples of lost opportunities to elucidate us include the hi-hat on "Heartbreaker," which Popoff describes as "a simple beat and slightly odd hi-hat signature." Drummers still debate what's going on there, some insisting that it's ghosted snare notes



creating the slightly swung 16ths we're hearing, others suggesting it's a reverb effect causing the illusion of 16ths. Interestingly, the YouTube clips of Bonham's soloed drum track feature a very dry mix, and you don't hear the hi-hat "shuffle," which seems to support the reverb argument. In any event, Bonham's performance is much more than simple—it's totally badass! His bass drum work alone is extraordinary.

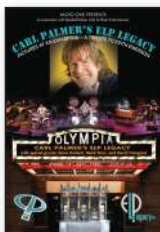
Another example: Popoff describes the drumbeat in the chorus of "Ramble On" as simple, and leaves it at that. Well, perhaps it is to the author, but it's a rite of drumming passage to get that gleefully unique alternating hi-hat/bass drum figure to feel great. Perhaps most disappointing, in his description of "Rock and Roll" in the chapter on *Zeppelin IV*, the author misleadingly describes the song's opening as featuring Bonham's "trick drumming." It doesn't; he's just coming in on the "&" of 3, which the listener is certainly tricked by, but only because the band doesn't provide the benefit of a count-in.

To be fair, Popoff seems to have done some homework in terms of the antecedents of the Zeppelin oeuvre and the circumstances surrounding the various recordings. There's ample discussion of songwriting and production techniques, supported by a decent number of quotes from band members and other associates—though we're rarely provided with the source of those quotes, either within the text or in a separate notes section. And in that otherwise problematic introduction, Popoff does offer the fact that there are two previous authors who have covered Zeppelin top to bottom: Chris Welch (*Led Zeppelin: The Ultimate Collection*) and Dave Lewis (*From a Whisper to a Scream: Complete Guide to the Music of Led Zeppelin*). Unfortunately you'll have to look to those very books, and the bevy of other publications dedicated to this most unusual, exciting, and inspiring of rock bands—and the one-in-a-million drummer who powered it—to get the full story. (Voyageur Press, \$30)

**Adam Budofsky**

## Carl Palmer's ELP Legacy Pictures at an Exhibition: A Tribute To Keith Emerson

A bittersweet nod to not one but two giants of progressive rock, from the man who bore witness.



With the 2016 passing of both of his ELP bandmates, bassist/vocalist Greg Lake and keyboardist extraordinaire Keith Emerson, Carl Palmer is the sole survivor of the groundbreaking progressive trio that creatively merged rock and classical music with a dazzling stage show in the '70s. Filmed in Miami on June 24, 2016 (prior to Lake's passing), this video features a show performed in front of a packed house of prog-rock fans witnessing Palmer's heartfelt tribute to Emerson, who planned to join Palmer on this tour, which was originally designed to celebrate the drummer's fifty-year career.

Along with special guests Steve Hackett (Genesis), Mark Stein (Vanilla Fudge), and David Frangioni (drummer/audio engineer/entrepreneur), Palmer's ELP Legacy guitar/bass/drums trio performs impressive interpretations of ELP classics, including "Karn Evil 9," "The Barbarian," "Knife-Edge," "Hoedown," and the epic "Pictures at an Exhibition." Palmer, age sixty-seven, seems a bit sluggish out of the gate, opening with the rock dirge "Peter Gunn," but quickly gains momentum as the challenging ELP catalog progresses. "Nutrocker" features double drumming with Palmer and concert organizer Frangioni trading licks. By the drum-solo finale, "Fanfare for the Common Man," Palmer is firing on all cylinders, demonstrating his trademark jazz-laced, Buddy Rich-style soloing technique, filled with stick tricks and the blazing hand speed that earned him superstar status in the first place. (carlpalmer.com, \$24.95) **Mike Haid**

## The Drummer's Lifeline by Peter Erskine and Dave Black

Quick tips culled from two lifetimes of pro experience.



The paperback-size *Lifeline* is a decidedly casual, often humorous, and informative mini-volume. Stuff it in your back pocket, crack the spine anywhere, and bounce around between the brief entries. Authors Peter Erskine and Dave Black refer to their "bite-sized bits" as "additional information that didn't seem to fit into the standard drum book." You'll

get suggestions on choosing equipment, maintenance, on-the-spot fixes, proper head tuning, and muffling options. In addition, there's advice on session work, business etiquette, career guidance, mic choices, ergonomics, chart reading, health, warm-up exercises, and plenty of plain ol' hard-earned wisdom. (Along the way are some quick Q&As. A personal favorite: *Question: Should I twirl my sticks? Answer: No.*) The book is most beneficial for beginners and intermediate drummers, but there are goodies for all. Here's one: If your floor tom is resonating too long, invert one leg (metal end to the floor), and this will constrain it. Cool! Can't wait to try that. (alfred.com, \$12.99) **Jeff Potter**

## RECORDINGS

### Neil Zaza *Live at the Kent Stage*

The longtime Styx skinsman brings arena-size goods to the small stage.

**TODD SUCHERMAN** has been creating drama from atop the drum riser for two decades with Styx, and there's more of the same crushing rock power and detailed support on a one-off instrumental fusion live date from guitarist Neil Zaza presented here. Need some fills to start your day? Check out the flurry of toms all over "Magnus 212" or inside the guitar breaks on "Fargo." But Sucherman brings his subtlety game as well, taking the volume way down with some tasty cymbal-pulse comping under the bass solo in "Lost in Your Dream" before opening up with bell offbeats, never drawing too much attention to himself. This is material the drummer can perform in his sleep, and though the melodic compositions are simply a vehicle to showcase Zaza's epic guitar-rock glory, everyone benefits from the guy in the back throwing down perfect time, beautiful dynamics, and just enough sauce to keep things interesting. (Melodik) **Ilya Stemkovsky**

### Antibalas *Where the Gods Are in Peace*

On their fifth full-length and first release in five years, the Brooklyn-based Afrobeat revivalists take a curious turn amid the current political climate and make an intergalactic Western.

Antibalas updates Afrobeat on its own terms, and this outing features three extended pieces of muscular but hypnotic dance music. **MILES ARNTZEN** is behind the kit for this set, replaced in the current touring lineup by **KEVIN RACZKA**, who appears on percussion here, as does singer **DUKE AMAYO**, who also doubles on vibraphone. The nearly eleven-minute opener, "Gold Rush," features Arntzen urgently driving a syncopated pattern around a crunched quarter-note hi-hat pulse that opens up for full horn section passages. "Hook & Crook" comes perhaps the closest to a textbook Tony Allen groove—he being the



drummer who famously played with Afrobeat legend Fela Kuti—but the horn break and percussion hits at the midpoint create a grand left turn that shows there's plenty of room for new ideas in Afrobeat. "Tombstown" is a slow-burning 6/8 suite in three parts, propelled at first by only shekere and congas but swelling to display the gritty might of a twelve-piece band tracked live with Daptone production. Guest vocals from Zap Mama are the icing on a dense, grooving cake. (Daptone) **Stephen Bidwell**

### Under One Sun *Under One Sun*

Three rhythm masters transport an adventurous octet.

Under One Sun's stunning debut is spearheaded by saxophonist/multi-reedist Billy Drewes and master percussionist **JAMEY HADDAD**. Drewes' compositions are gorgeous world music/jazz celebrations that unfold in unexpected and arresting ways. Haddad is best known for his global hand drumming/percussion, so it's a treat hearing him here in his role as kit player. Not surprisingly, he delivers effortless feel, precision, dynamics, and an uncanny skill for coloration and orchestration. But the paramount rhythmic wonder here is Haddad's union with tabla player **SALAR NADER** and conga/timbale player **LUISITO QUINTERO**. There is never rhythmic clutter or sonic/textural conflict—only inter-complementing of the highest order. The sophisticated arrangements exploit the beauty of unusual instrumentation that also includes bass, piano, ganun (a horizontal stringed instrument), and the specially designed "hyper accordion." Eight musicians from five countries, under one sun, creating a singular, transfixing voice. (Oberlin Music) **Jeff Potter**



# Paul Wertico's *Turn the Beat Around*

by Martin Patmos

Paul Wertico long ago established himself as a creative force. He's a drummer with excellent technique, great feel, and a strong sense of texture and color. Yet he's also a drummer who makes observations, asks questions, and inevitably comes up with unique approaches and fresh solutions.

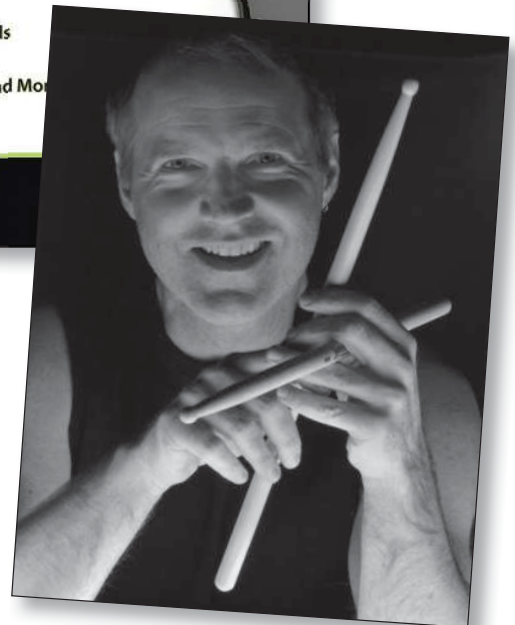
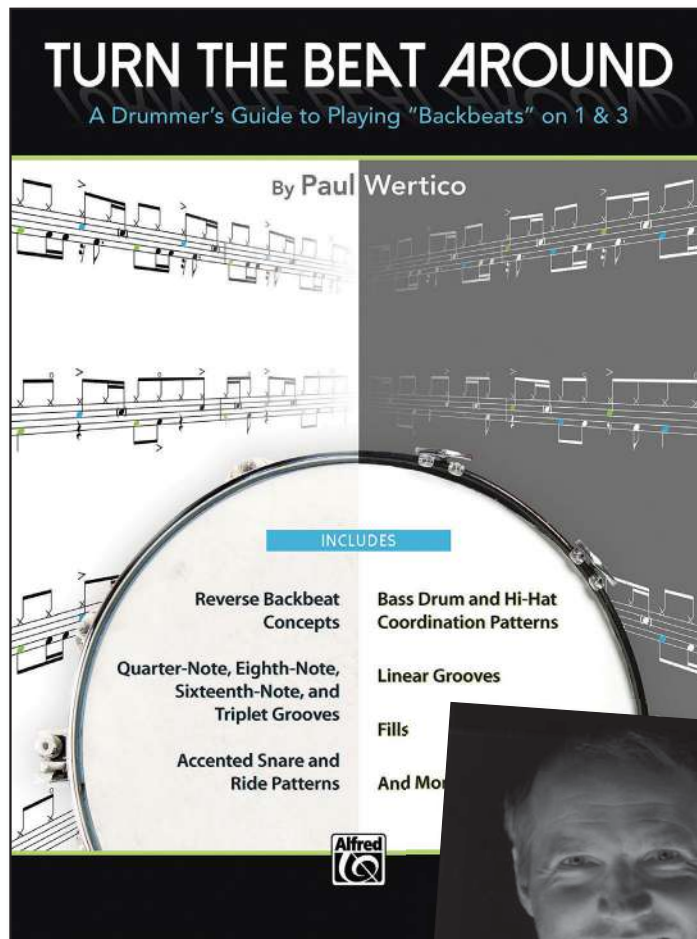
Wertico came to widespread attention during his stint with the Pat Metheny Group, a gig that lasted from 1983 to 2001 and earned him seven Grammys. Wertico is not only a skilled performer, though, he's a respected teacher. Based in Chicago, he's an associate professor of jazz studies at Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts, and his main goal is to challenge his students' ideas. The drummer's new book, *Turn the Beat Around*, exemplifies his penchant for thinking outside the box.

## Observation

And what about those observations, questions, and fresh ideas? *Turn the Beat Around* fully demonstrates Wertico's predilections, with the premise being: What if the backbeat were placed on 1 and 3, rather than the usual 2 and 4? In his introduction to the book, Wertico makes the astute observation that the backbeat has developed a stronger emphasis over time. Early jazz, for instance, didn't emphasize it as strongly as modern styles do. Similarly, rock, R&B, funk, and other forms of backbeat-driven music grew from emphasizing it to *really* emphasizing it. In some cases, Wertico posits, certain types of music can become overly defined by that backbeat.

## Question

So, has it always been this way? Does it have to be this way? What happens if the backbeat is not on 2 and 4? Taking a look back, we can find examples of backbeats on 1 and 3, the downbeat—or as Wertico sometimes refers to it, the “frontbeat.” Perhaps the most famous instance is Ginger Baker's playing on Cream's classic track “Sunshine of Your Love.” Other examples can be found as



## Study Suggestions

“A lot of times I'll suggest to students to practice with a song,” Wertico explains. “It's great to practice with a metronome, because you're going to work with a click, but if you practice with a really good-feeling track, you're not only working on feel, you're also

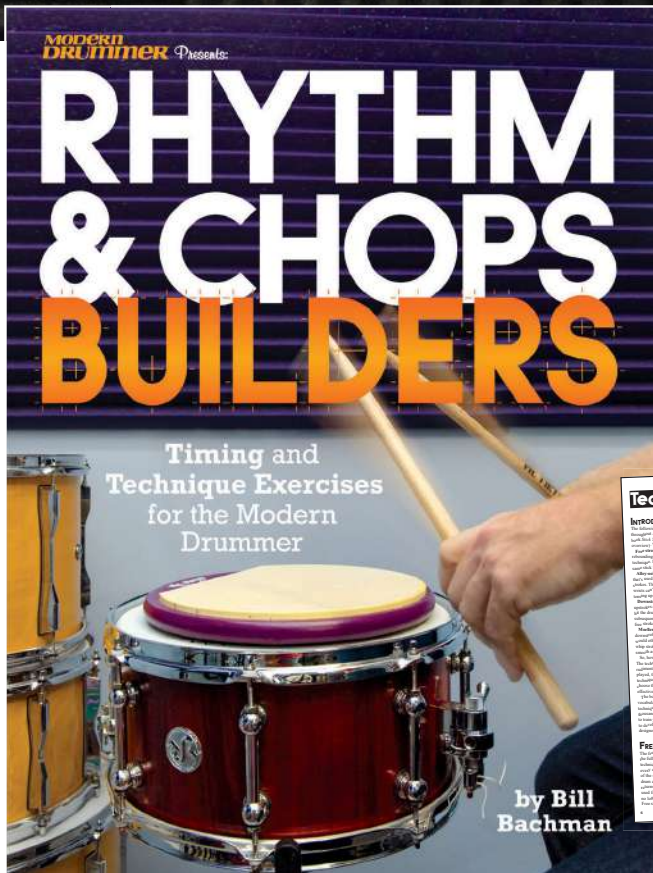
learning a song and you're working on form.

“Find some really great tracks that groove—an Al Green track, for example—something with a really good feel, and play along with that while trying the frontbeats. Try the frontbeat, try to do fills, try to do the

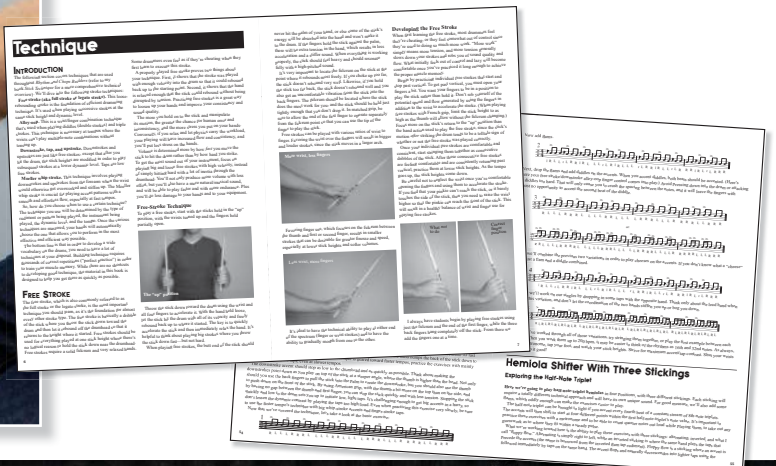
coordination, and then go back and play it the way Al Jackson Jr. did, normally, and see the difference in how that feels. I think it's pretty enlightening.”

For more information on *Turn the Beat Around*, visit [paulwertico.com](http://paulwertico.com).

# BUILD your Chops!



**Rhythm and Chops Builders**, by renowned technique master Bill Bachman, contains a ton of practical and efficient exercises for developing and expanding your rhythmic vocabulary and accuracy, and for increasing your overall comfort level with the sticks. This book is best used in conjunction with Bachman's *Stick Technique*, which focuses on the physical motions required for building loose, flowing, powerful, and fast hands.



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## Inside Methods

well, including future Foreigner drummer Dennis Elliott's playing with the band If, and John Bonham's approach to Led Zeppelin's "Dazed and Confused." Tony Allen, Shelly Manne, and Roy Haynes have experimented with emphasizing 1 and 3 at times as well.

### Idea

As Wertico developed this line of thinking, *Turn the Beat Around* began to take shape. Designed to be used in an open-ended manner, it offers exercises with quarter-note, 8th-note, 16th-note, and triplet grooves, followed by variations on snare, bass drum, and ride patterns. In this way, the exercises and concept can be approached by players at any level. In practice, these beats sound familiar yet unexpected at the same time. They might seem to reference some lost African or samba groove and bring some new interpretations to the beat.

Yet *Turn the Beat Around* is about more than simply the mechanics of 1 and 3. "Books should not only help you technically but also conceptually, and make you more aware of things that you might not be aware of," Wertico says. "In writing this book I really wanted it to not just be about frontbeats but about improving drumming overall. I've been using it with students, and when they go back to the backbeat after working on the frontbeat, their 1 and 3 on the



Now Wertico has been involved with numerous high-level projects and released many albums as both a sideman and a leader. *AfterLive*, the latest release by the trio Wertico, Cain, and Gray, involves an improvised performance—"one hundred percent made up on the spot," Paul is quick to point out. Truly open ended in their thinking, Wertico, David Cain (sax, voice, keys), and Larry Gray (bass, cello, flute) mix a range of styles and sounds both acoustic and electronic, referencing everything from art rock to free jazz. Wertico can be heard creating and navigating textures, playing with drive and spontaneity, and keeping the performance fresh—never an easy feat in completely on-the-spot composition/performance situations. "You don't want to be boring, or vague, or just noodle," Wertico says. "You've really got to come up with the goods."

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bass drum is so much fatter and more pronounced. The intention is not to replace everything necessarily, but to strengthen people's time and feel, and that seems to be working."

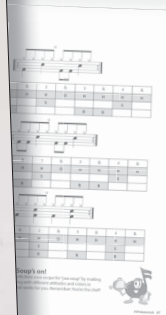
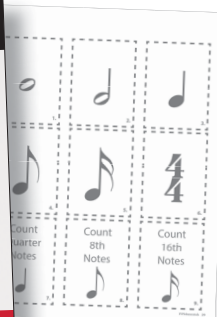
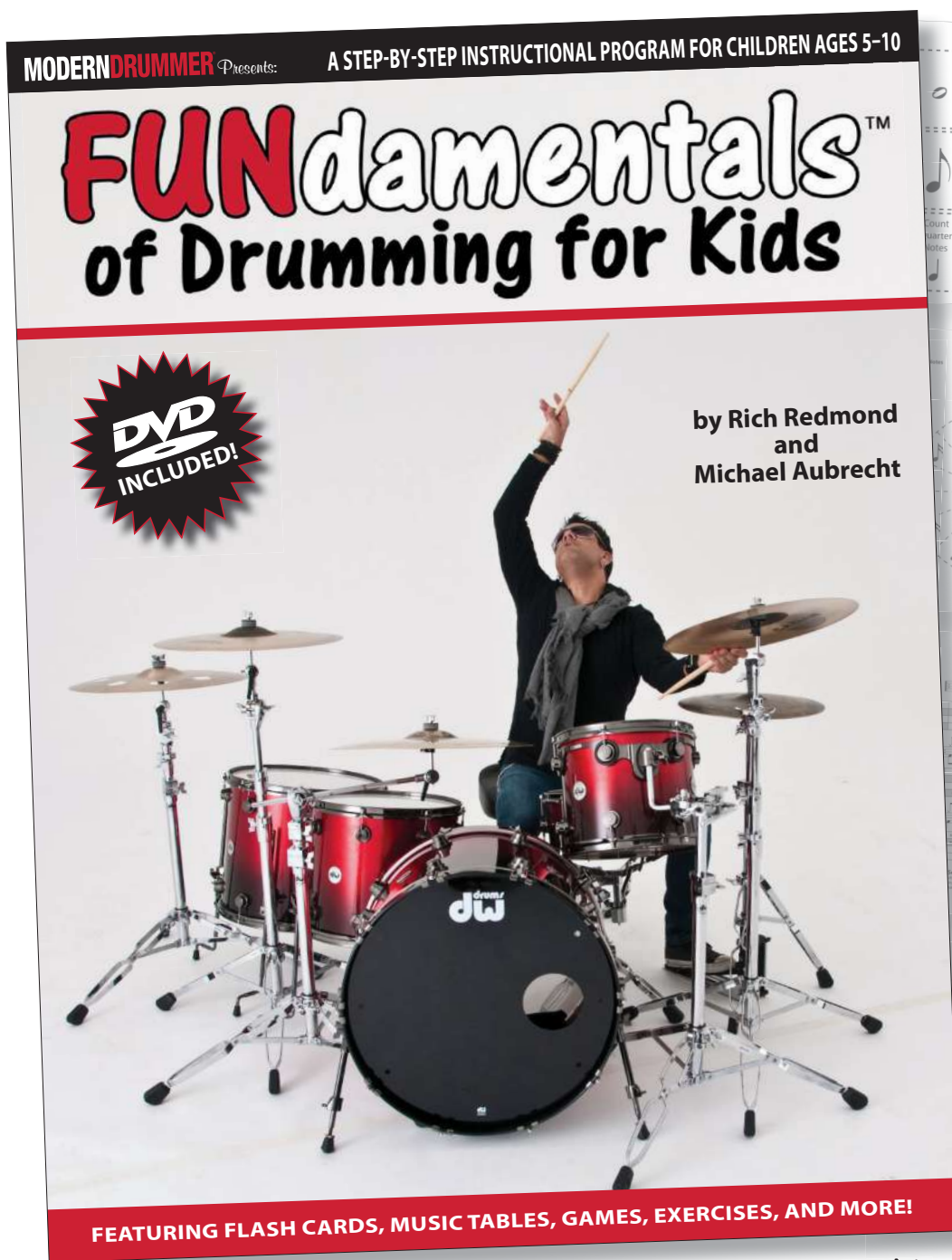
In essence, then, it strengthens the time, feel, and playing of the backbeat by increasing awareness of the frontbeat, while developing a new creative avenue for the player as well. "Beyond a drummer, an arranger or composer can use this concept to start thinking differently," Wertico says. "Why does it always have to be on 2 and 4? Not only the drums [could be affected] but the way the whole rhythm might section work. You displace it, and all of a sudden you've got a different arrangement of something you've always played the same way.

"I've done it on some gigs now," Wertico continues, "and the look on people's faces is like, *Wow, what is this!* Musically it can work—it seems to make it a little more urgent perhaps. I'll tell [the band] I'm going to do it up front, though. You want to make sure at first that they're aware you're going to do it, but it creates really interesting results.

"Expand your concept, expand your hearing," Wertico adds. "That's what this is about."



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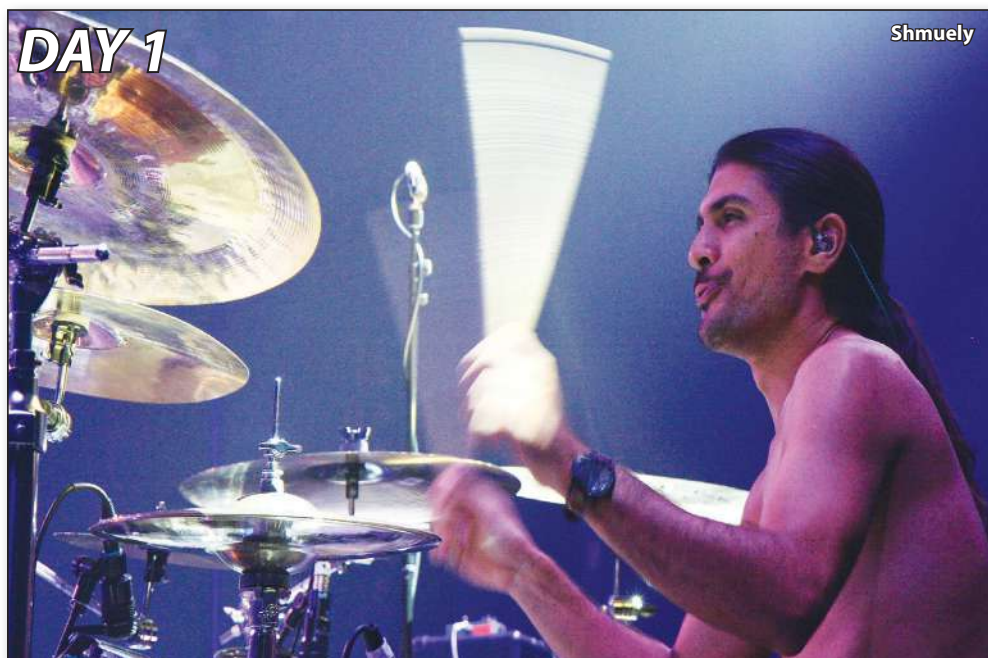
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## PROGPOWER USA XVIII

The Progressive-Metal Festival Heats Up in the Heart of Atlanta

This past September, the Atlanta venue Center Stage treated fans to four days of progressive-metal utopia at the eighteenth edition of the ProgPower USA festival. The sold-out event hosted twenty-one international prog- and power-metal bands with exclusive performances by some longtime favorites. The highly anticipated lineup featured MD Hall of Famer Mike Portnoy in a rare appearance with his Shattered Fortress project. The event's gear sponsors included DW and PDP drums and hardware, Evans heads, Sabian cymbals, Promark sticks, and Shure microphones. The nineteenth edition of ProgPower is scheduled to take place at Center Stage on September 5–8, 2018.

Text and photos by Mike Haid



Drummer **Rich Smith** kicked off day one with the U.K. metal band Power Quest. Next, **Andreas Schipflinger** slayed a set with the Austrian symphonic power-metal group Serenity. **Matan Shmuely** and the Israeli extreme-metal band Orphaned Land then took the stage, followed by headliner Haken, one of the U.K.'s top prog-metal acts, which performed the album *Visions* in its entirety, driven by the dynamic drumming of **Raymond Hearne**.



The Pennsylvania-based metal group Next to None opened day two with an impressive performance from eighteen-year-old **Max Portnoy**, who's confidently following in father Mike's footsteps. The Swedish power-metal act Twilight Force, featuring drummer **De'Azsh**, and German prog-metal favorites Vanden Plas, with **Andreas Lill**, played stellar sets. Coheadliner Between the Buried and Me featured the mind-bending drumming of **Blake Richardson**, whose stop-on-a-dime rhythmic changes dazzled the crowd as the group ran through the complex material that defines its 2007 album, *Colors*. Drummer **Stet Howland** closed the set with the American icon Metal Church and delivered powerful old-school metal madness.

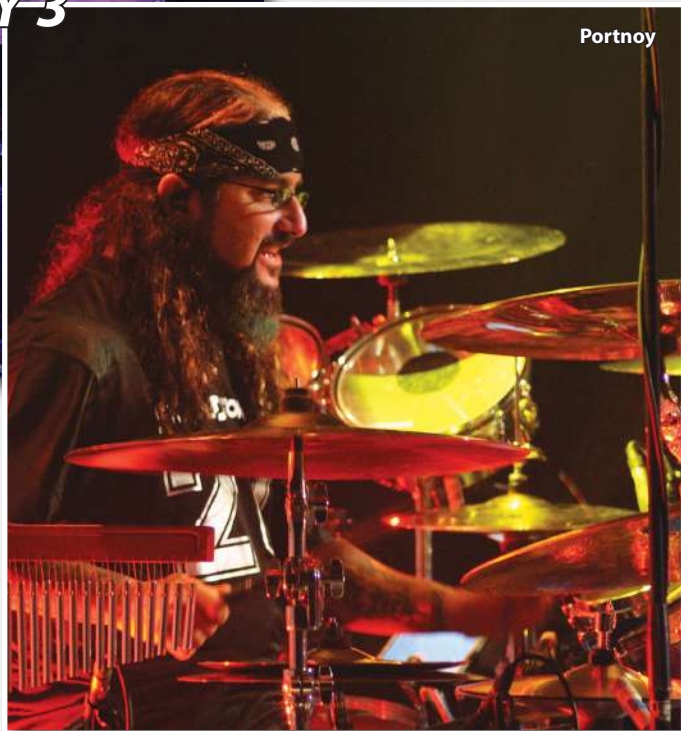




DAY 3

The Brazilian prog-metal group Daydream XI, featuring drummer **Bruno Giordano**, masterfully launched day three. Israel's Distorted Harmony, with drummer **Yoge Gabay**, followed, before **Andres Cobos** took the stage with one of Spain's premier power-metal acts, Lords of Black. Drummer **Dirk Assmuth** tore the roof off with the German band Angel Dust, and the Tunisian group Myrath delivered a solid set of prog metal with **Morgan Berthet's** tasty, gospel-infused drumming.

**Mike Portnoy's** Shattered Fortress, which features members of Haken and the Neal Morse Band, stood out as a highlight of the show during its Friday headliner set. Portnoy handily reminded the enthusiastic crowd why he was such a driving force behind the success of Dream Theater as he played "Twelve-Step Suite," a set of five songs he wrote during his tenure with the band. For Portnoy fans, it was a must-see event and a long-awaited return to the music that made him a widely influential drummer.



Portnoy



DAY 4

Egg

The final day of the festival opened with the impressive Boston power-metal band Seven Spires, featuring drummer **Chris Dovas**. Four Swedish acts followed, including the power-metal ambassadors Dynazty (featuring drummer **George Egg**), the entertainingly evil Snowy Shaw (with **Carl Tudén**), the metal gods Pain (Sebastian Tägtgren), and the fiery Amaranthe (**Morten Löwe Sørensen**). Drummer **Daniel Moilanen** and the Swedish headliners Katatonia brought the packed house of diehard fans to their feet to close the festival.





# Tailor-Made Top Hat



**Chuck Riebling of Ellicott City, Maryland**, started putting this kit together in 2004 after purchasing four blank maple Keller shells. He then brought the drums—a 10-ply 7x13 snare, 6-ply 8x12 and 14x14 toms, and a 10-ply 14x20 bass drum—to vintage drum restorer Jack Lawton of the Lawton Drum Company to finish building the set and apply a ninetieth-anniversary Ludwig Top Hat wrap.

Riebling took advantage of leftover wrap that the restorer possessed. "Initially the Lawton Drum Company was commissioned by Ludwig to build ninety limited-edition Top Hat snare drums in conjunction with the company's anniversary," Riebling explains. "Lawton was then allowed to use the remaining wrap material to refinish other Ludwig drums or build new kits like mine—so long as Ludwig lugs were used on the drums." Lawton was able to produce

fewer than twenty complete sets with the leftover wrap. "Mine," Riebling says, "was the last.

"I opted to install hidden air holes without badges to get a cleaner look that doesn't detract from the finish," Riebling adds. He completed the set with an LP cowbell, Sonor pedals, a Kelly SHU internal bass drum mic mount, Paiste Signature cymbals, and Remo heads on the snare and bass drum and Evans heads on the toms.

With a busy gig schedule, Riebling finds that the set works in a variety of situations. "I'm a freelance drummer," he says, "and I've used the drums to play everything from small blues clubs to wedding gigs to rock shows at outdoor festivals. And the drumset absolutely sings. The smaller sizes result in a higher fundamental pitch that's clean and punchy, easy to play, and works well for any style of music."

**Photo Submission:** Hi-res digital photos, along with descriptive text, may be emailed to [kitoftthmonth@modern drummer.com](mailto:kitoftthmonth@modern drummer.com). Show "Kit of the Month" in the subject line.



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