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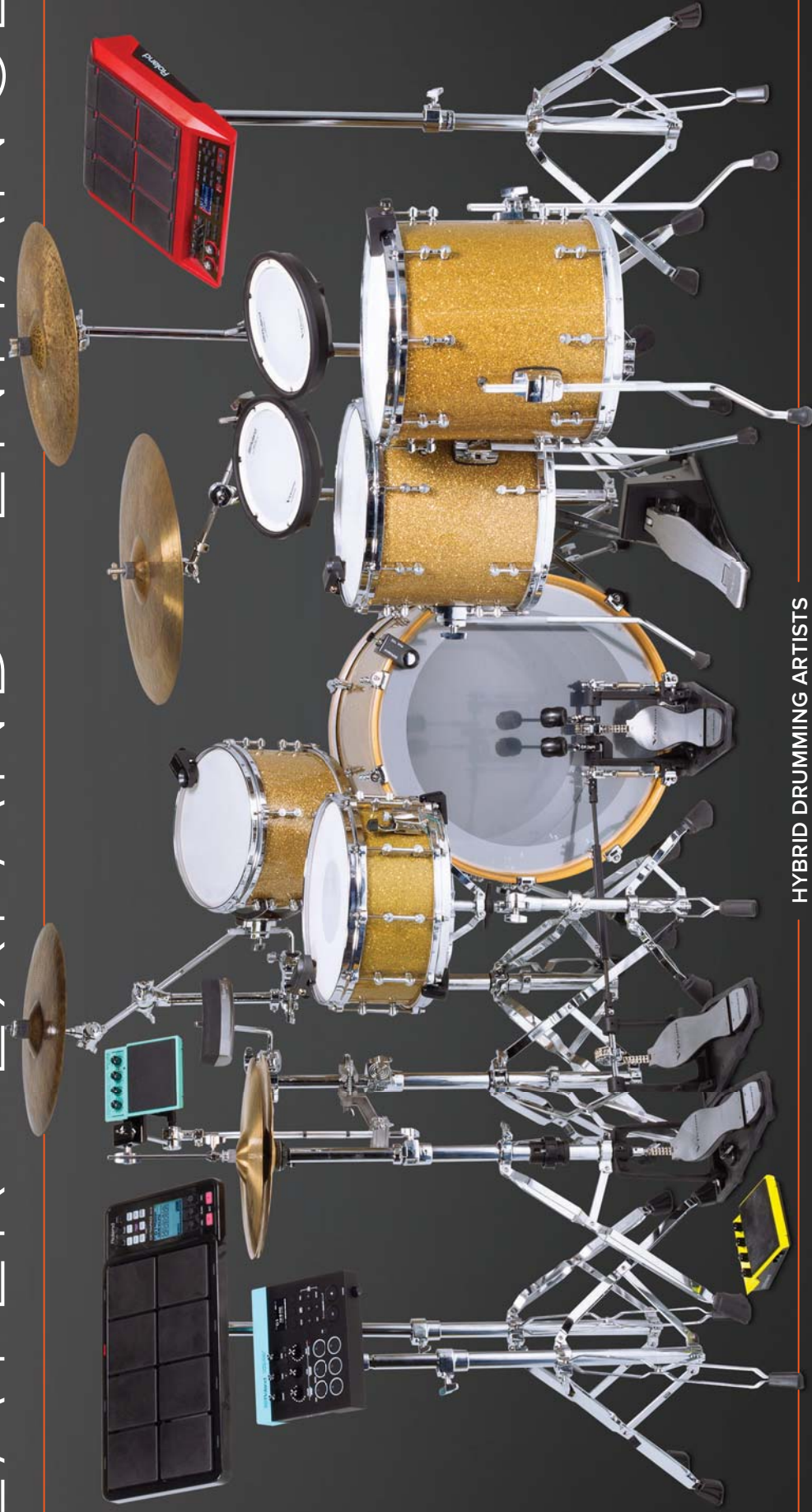
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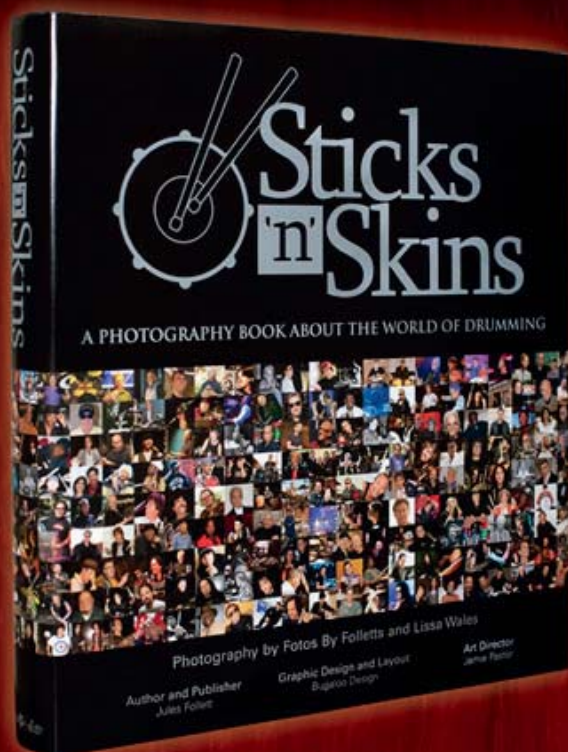


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AN EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

Props to the Drum Shops

When was the last time you visited a music store or drum shop? If you're like me, you're probably spending less and less time hanging and talking shop with other local drummers and musicians while picking up a new pair of sticks because of how convenient it is these days to order that stuff online. Heck, the bulk of my vintage collection came from scouring eBay, Musician's Friend, Reverb, and other auction websites.

I hadn't thought much about how apathetic I'd become in regards to supporting independent drum retailers until this past year, when I started booking drum clinics around the east coast. The first event was at Philadelphia Drum & Percussion, which is a super-cool spot in northeast Philly that's set up more like an art gallery than a retail store, with an emphasis on boutique and/or limited snares and kits by A&F, RBH, Keplinger, Sugar Percussion, and others, as well as choice cymbals from Bosphorus, Sabian, Zildjian, and Meinl, plus hip accessories like the Reflexx CP1 practice pad, Snareweight M80 dampener, and Low Boy beaters. The storeowner, Brandon, is one of the most knowledgeable guys I know when it comes to getting the scoop on what's hot—and what's not.

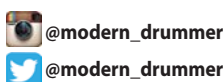
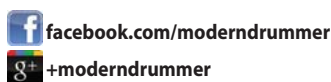
The next place I visited was a hybrid drum school/retail space in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, called EPIC Percussion. The folks there are doing great things to provide top-notch education to young, aspiring percussionists, and co-owner Mike Wrench is helping children and adults with disabilities through his drumming-centric Upbeat Outreach program. I also took a trip back to my hometown of Frederick, Maryland, to give a workshop at Make 'N' Music, which is the store where I spent many hours as a teenager drooling over the latest Zildjian cymbals and DW pedals, usually after getting schooled on the Joe Morello methods of drumming by the great teacher Keith McMichael. I hadn't been inside Make 'N' Music for many years—probably not since I picked up my first professional drumset from them: a limited-edition Premier Signia kit with a dark walnut stain and gold-plated hardware. (I still have that kit, and it still knocks me out like it did back in 1997.) But I was thrilled to see that many of the same people still work there, and the shop remains stocked with tons of fun gear. They also added a really nice performance room in the back, providing the perfect professional yet casual atmosphere for my clinic.

On the way back to New Jersey, I stopped by Woodland Percussion, which is a custom shop and retail space located about a half hour west of Wilmington, Delaware, in the little town of Avondale, Pennsylvania. Like Brandon at Philly Drum, Woodland's owner, Allan Fausnaught, has focused his inventory on harder-to-find boutique items, like Sweet Spot machined-aluminum hi-hat clutches, Big Fat Snare Drum mutes, Spinbal cymbal spinners, One Beat Better practice pads, Booty Shaker tom isolators, Drumtacs dampener pads, KBrakes bass drum anchors, NickyMoon custom cymbals, and Tackle Instrument cases. Alan also keeps a stock of handmade stave-shell snares, kits, cajons, shakers, and claves that he builds from a variety of woods, including reclaimed local pine. (Visit woodlandpercussion.com to check out some of his handiwork. The Black Out Birch series snares really caught my attention.)

Everyone who came out to these clinics was super supportive and eager to learn. I hope they left inspired to spend a few more minutes on their kits that day; I know I did. If you find yourself near one of these stores, or any drum shop for that matter, do yourself a favor and pop in for a visit. The real-world drum community is waiting for you!

Mike Dawson

Michael Dawson
Managing Editor



Brady Hartman

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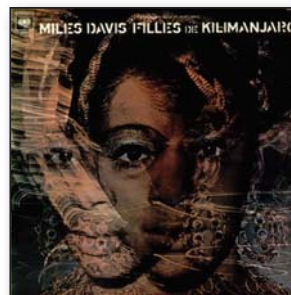
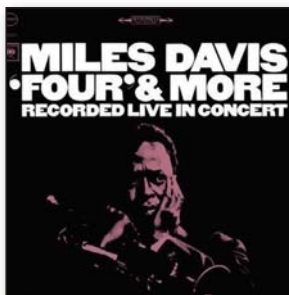
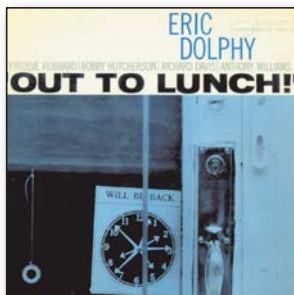
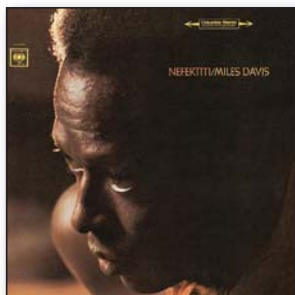
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What's Your Favorite Tony Williams Album?



In this month's *Jazz Drummer's Workshop*, the Brooklyn-based drummer and educator Mike Alfieri demonstrates ways to develop unique ride patterns inspired by the jazz great Tony Williams. To coincide with the piece, we asked our readers and social media followers to name one album that Williams played on that best sums up his enduring drumming. MD cover artist and jazz ambassador Matt Wilson weighed in with Eric Dolphy's *Out to Lunch!* while the studio legend and MD Readers Poll Hall of Famer Vinnie Colaiuta offered Miles Davis's *Nefertiti* as one pick. Here are some more responses.

One of my favorites is the Miles Davis record *Filles de Kilimanjaro* [1968]. It was a transitional album for Davis and jazz in general, and Tony's playing changed, too. The rock music of the day had a big effect on them, and this was the last record before Miles changed his sound completely again and Tony went on to form his own band, the Tony Williams Lifetime. Davis and Williams did do one more record together after this, *In a Silent Way*, which is also one of my favorites. And it's hard not to mention *Nefertiti*, *Miles Smiles*, and all of the Davis records that Williams played on during that era. Those albums changed the world of drumming forever in a few years.

Aaron Comess

I can't pick just one, as Tony reinvented himself multiple times. But I do have three favorites from different eras. From Tony's early career, I'd pick Miles Davis's *Four & More*. From his middle era, it'd be the Tony

Williams Lifetime's *Believe It*. And from the later part of Tony's career, it'd be his solo record *Foreign Intrigue*.

If I had to pick just one, though, it'd be *Foreign Intrigue*. He boldly incorporates electronic drums into a straight-ahead context. The title track opens with a 12/8 Afro-Cuban-esque jazz groove where Tony is playing Simmons toms along with his acoustic kit, and then electronic claps enter via a drum machine. It's totally badass and forward-thinking.

Foreign Intrigue was from Tony's later career, where he was playing straight-ahead jazz on bigger, rock-sized drums, so the electronic sounds sit well with the sound of his larger acoustic kit. I've always been into blending acoustic and electronic drums, so I loved this album when it came out, and I still love it!

Steven Wolf

As unfair as it would be to only choose one, I'd have to pick *Nefertiti*. The way Williams' cymbals sound, the way the drums are tuned, and his fiery, impressionistic playing would become the catalyst for modern drumming.

Mike Walsh

Turn It Over by the Tony Williams Lifetime is my favorite by Williams. I'm so drawn to the eerie, stripped down tunes that are almost out of left field when compared to much of his other work.

Michael Dallara

For me it's a toss-up between Miles Davis's *Filles de Kilimanjaro* and *Ego* by the Tony Williams Lifetime. Both albums

demonstrate the power, finesse, and rhythmic mastery that would eventually place Williams in the vanguard of modern drumming. Williams was truly a drummer supreme.

Victor DeLorenzo

It's impossible to capture his breadth in one record, and lots of my favorites have already been mentioned, so I'll give a nod to Williams' love for the avant-garde: Sam Rivers' *Fuchsia Swing Song* easily features some of Tony's deepest playing on record.

David Stanoch

Miles Smiles changed my life. Tony was twenty years old when he recorded it, and it completely changed how I thought a drummer could interpret jazz. I can't imagine if he knew how revolutionary his playing was at the time.

Tyler Jackson Miller

Nefertiti by Miles Davis. Williams was on fire on that one! I love how he develops the ride cymbal pattern, and I love his creativity and energy. It's one of my all-time favorite Miles Davis albums.

Adrien Legay

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

Dropped Beat

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Jack Stratton on Vulfpeck's *Hill Climber*

The multitasking group infuses nasty feels and refreshing sounds into a modern funk setting. Here their founding drummer sounds off on their latest killing outing.

Since forming at the University of Michigan's School of Music, Theatre, and Dance in 2011, the modern funk quartet Vulfpeck have developed a feverishly devoted fan base and serious cred among the music community, thanks in part to the group's highly appealing take on classic funk, as well as their substantial YouTube presence. The band—composed of Jack Stratton on drums, keyboards, and vocals; Theo Katzman on drums, guitar, and vocals; Woody Goss on keyboards; and Joe Dart on bass—released their fourth full-length, *Hill Climber*, on December 7. Vulfpeck packed the album tight with their signature brand of funk and refreshingly contemporary throwback sound, and they even brought along a few collaborators, including rising drum star Louis Cole of the electronic duo Knower, who delivered an explosive guest spot.

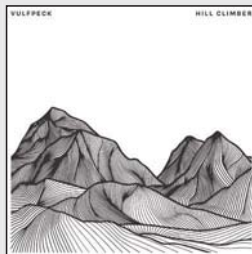
Each track on *Hill Climber*, which was recorded in Los Angeles and in Ann Arbor, Michigan, is accompanied by a unique video, following a tradition that dates back to the band's 2011 viral YouTube video for the single "Beastly." That success of the "Beastly" video encouraged the band to follow that same release model with their four EPs and as many LPs. Beyond providing a distinct, almost homemade look into the band's style and humor, each song's video offers a keen glimpse into its production techniques, dirty-funk aesthetic, and vibrant chops.

While Stratton composed the majority of Vulfpeck's output early on, collaborations have become more common, including on *Hill Climber*. "We split songwriting duties," Stratton explains. "I wrote the first few EPs, and then Woody came in with tunes, and then Theo came in with tunes. Then we covered some

tunes by friends like [the Los Angeles-based multi-instrumentalists and songwriters] Joey Dosik and Ryan Lerman. All the while, I'd pick out Joe Dart bass lines from live shows and turn those into songs as well." Katzman and Stratton decide who's playing drums on a particular cut on a song-by-song basis. "Theo has a much better ear for harmony than I do," Stratton says. "So if it's a difficult Woody song, I'll play drums."

On *Hill Climber*'s "It Gets Funkier IV," the group recruited funk and drum 'n' bass drumming guru Louis Cole, who propels the tune with a blazing open-handed 16th-note funk barrage. "We're huge fans of Louis," Stratton says. "He lives nearby, and I asked if he wanted to feature [on the album]. He came over at noon and said he hadn't slept." Sleep or no, the drummer's right-hand snare ghost notes blaze throughout the three-minute cut, especially during the rapid four-stroke flurries in the song's featured drum break.

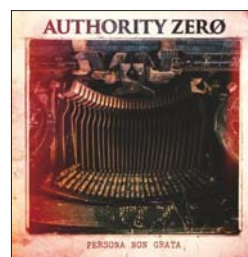
Vulfpeck's signature dry drum tone seriously pops on every one of the group's records, a sound that Stratton explains is inspired by Chic, ABBA, and Earth, Wind & Fire records. To achieve those tones in the studio, Stratton developed a particular production approach. "I generally opt for close-miking the drums with dynamic mics, like a Shure SM57, and I really muffle them," he says. "I get them nice and quiet so you can hit them comfortably but not be too loud in the room." The drummer adds that he maintains a fairly stripped-down setup when recording. "Kick, snare, and hat, baby!" he chuckles, adding, "and we used whatever drums were at the studio for *Hill Climber*. We travel with a Roots EQ snare mute, too. Instant Ringo!" **Willie Rose**



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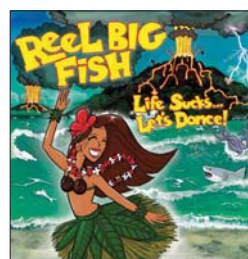
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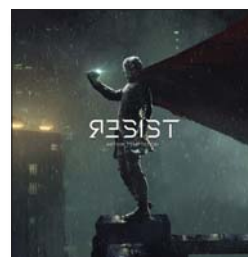
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ON TOUR

Scott Quintana with Kacey Musgraves

"Less is more" for the tasteful Nashville touring and session pro, as he accompanies a chart-topping modern country music star around the world.



For the past four years, the Nashville-based drummer and producer Scott Quintana has been touring the globe with the country singer and songwriter Kacey Musgraves. After meeting and developing a friendship with the hitmaker through writers' rounds and jam sessions around Music City, Quintana eventually found himself in the right place at the right time. "I'd just left the artist I was touring with," Quintana says, "and Kacey needed someone to take over the drum chair for her next record cycle. She and her bandleader at the time reached out, told me what they were looking for, and asked if I was interested. I knew the rest of the band already too, so it was a pretty easy transition."

Now four years in, the drummer will be hitting the road again in early January with the group across the North American leg of their *Oh, What a World* tour, a trek that originally kicked off last October in Europe and will last at least through March.

To cover Musgraves' catalog live—including 2013's *Same Trailer Different Park*, which won an ACM Album of the Year award and a Grammy for Best Country Album; the Grammy-nominated 2015 release *Pageant Material*; and 2018's *Golden Hour*, which just won the CMA Album of the Year award—Quintana explains that he tries to maintain a disciplined, "play-for-the-song" mentality that he's been developing since he first started on the drums. "A lot of [that comes from] just playing to records my whole life and following the examples of other drummers that had the same mindset," he says. "Honestly, my approach is similar to [my] social personality, in that I'm pretty reserved unless I actually have something to say. I rarely desire being in the spotlight, and I'm much happier being a foundation for everyone else to stand on and feel comfortable enough to say what

they want, musically speaking. And it's cliché, but the rule of 'less is more' is the name of the game here. Play with intent, and don't let parts just fall out of you that don't have a purpose."

Quintana also tends to stick close to the parts on Musgraves' records, which have featured the session ace Fred Eltringham (Sheryl Crow) and Nashville producer, composer, and multi-instrumentalist Ian Fitchuk on drums. For Scott, those live duties might include delicately feathering tambourine backbeats with a brush (check out the group's sold-out 2015 Royal London Hall performance on YouTube) or adding slick ghost notes on his kick and snare between a straight-ahead, four-on-floor groove behind a 2018 performance of "High Horse" on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. "I'll always learn the parts as is and go from there," Quintana says. "Kacey puts a lot of work into getting her recordings just right, and while she's open-minded about new ideas, the part that's on the record is often there for a reason. Fortunately for me, I really dig the guys she's used in the studio, and the recorded parts are pretty close to what I'd want to play anyway."

After four years, does the drummer feel any extra pressure playing such high-profile gigs with Musgraves? "TV can always add a little edge to my nerves, especially if it's a live broadcast," he says. "But like most things, the more you do it, the more comfort you'll have. It also helps realizing that in most cases, nobody is going to be watching it under the same microscope that I am. You have to just relax and enjoy making music with the people around you." **Willie Rose**

Scott Quintana endorses Q Drums, Istanbul Agop cymbals, Roland electronics, Evans heads, Vic Firth sticks, Gibraltar hardware, and Porter & Davies and JH Audio products.

Also on the Road

Rob Rolfe with Enter Shikari /// Dan Pawlovich with Panic! at the Disco /// Bryan Harris with the Vegabonds



Doc Sweeney

RX Series Drumset

High-end, hybrid shells blending the punch and depth of bubinga with the powdery explosiveness of aluminum.



San Diego-based Doc Sweeney Drums specializes in building top-notch snares and kits out of exotic and domestic woods in solid, single-ply, stave, and now hybrid configurations. The new RX series blends top and bottom rings of stave timber with a center portion that's rolled from premium-grade aluminum. The wood segments can be crafted from any species. We were sent a four-piece setup featuring bubinga with 8x12 and 14x14 toms, a 14x20 bass drum, and a 7x14 snare. Let's check it out.

Specs

Doc Sweeney prides itself on using the best-quality components possible on its drums. The shells are CNC-milled to very precise dimensions, the proprietary tube lugs are milled from aircraft-grade aluminum, and all of the fasteners are stainless steel. The hoops on our review kit were sturdy "stick saver" types, with an inward-rolled top flange. The oil finish on the bubinga is hand-rubbed to a nice shine while also allowing the natural texture of timber to remain present.

Evans, Remo, or Aquarian drumheads are available. This kit came with Aquarian Response 2 Coated batters and single-ply Classic Clear resonants on the toms, a Studio-X Texture Coated with Power Dot snare batter, a Super Kick I Coated bass drum batter, and a Gloss White bass drum front head with an offset 4.75" port.

The snare came with a three-position Trick GS007 throw-off and Canopus Vintage series wires. The throw-off is attached to a custom-made metal bridge so that screws pass through the bubinga shell segments rather than the center aluminum ring. The vintage-style gull-wing bass drum spurs are attached to removable DW-made metal clamps that affix to the front hoop, so no extra holes are drilled into the shell itself. This hoop-mounted spur system works great, and I appreciate the fact that it puts less stress on the shell. But I did find myself mistaking the clamp adjustment screws for tension rods on a couple of occasions when I was trying to make quick tuning changes. That's definitely more of an issue of user error, but I thought it should be noted nonetheless.

The rack tom has no mounting hardware, so a snare basket is required. (Doc Sweeney offers RIMS mounts, if desired.) The floor tom came with a RIMS Dynamount system. This system allows the leg brackets to float off the shell by mounting to an aluminum ring that's suspended between the bottom-side lugs and the hoop, thus promoting pure, unencumbered resonance.

In terms of craftsmanship, this RX series kit is as top-notch as anything we've ever seen. The shells are meticulously milled and shaped; even the contact points between the aluminum and bubinga portions are beautifully contoured. And the bearing edges are ultra-precise and smooth. The drums are hefty and durable, yet not overly designed. In short, they're pro-quality, top to bottom.

Sound

My order of operations for testing drumsets is to begin by tuning the entire kit fairly high, to what most would consider the bebop range. Most times, a 14" floor tom ends up at G, a 12" rack tom sits at C, and the snare falls around E or Eb. The kick, depending on its size, usually lands at G or C. At this tight tuning, most drums are right at the edge of choking out. Not so with this Doc Sweeney RX kit. Even with that much tension on the drumheads, these drums exuded the big, round, and full sound that usually comes into bloom at medium and lower tunings. They responded beautifully with a pitch-pure note at all dynamics. Whisper-quiet strokes evoked much more shell tone than is typical, and as my stick heights began to reach ridiculous levels, the shells refused to sputter. This higher



tuning also highlighted the focused, balanced tone and rubbery punch of the bubinga shell segments.

As I backed off the tuning, the RX drums began to take on a new character that emphasized the dry explosiveness of the aluminum center segments. The tone was still warm, deep, and focused, but there was a powdery punch in the attack that gave the drums an effervescent vibe. (Fans of the chesty smack of a medium-tuned aluminum snare can likely relate.) The lower I took the tuning, the more pronounced the effect the aluminum had on the timbre. The

aluminum shell segment also helped tighten up the decay so that no muffling was needed at any point in our review. Whether cranked all the way up or loosened to the point of wrinkles, the overtones were perfectly balanced, and they died off quickly and musically. I've played a lot of drums in my day, and I've not encountered anything that piqued my ear quite like these RX bubinga/aluminum beauties from Doc Sweeney. Check out docsweeneydrums.com for more information.

Michael Dawson



Amedia

Jazz Legend and Vision Series Cymbals

Embracing the past while also expanding the sonic palette.

Amedia is one of a handful of cymbal companies in Istanbul, Turkey, that employ centuries-old manufacturing methods done primarily by hand. Some of its lines hark back to the dark, complex cymbal tones of hard bop, while others are designed to inspire brand-new textures for modern-day applications. The Amedia models we have for review here are the classic-style Jazz Legends and the more contemporary Vision series.

Jazz Legend Series: A Reworked Classic

The Jazz Legend series comprises a full range of crashes (14"–19"), rides (19"–24"), hi-hats (13" and 14"), and splashes (6"–12"). We were sent the 14" hi-hats, 22" ride, and 16", 17", and 18" crashes. All the cymbals feature traditionally finished and finely lathed bottoms, while the tops are extensively hammered and sparsely lathed to leave visible thin bands of raw bronze across the entire surface. The hi-hats and crashes have small, deep, and clearly defined bells, and the ride has a contrasting wide, flat bell with a more integrated slope.

The hi-hats feature a medium-thin top and a medium-heavy bottom. The ride is thin and flexible, and the crashes are paper-thin and soft. The hi-hats have the firmest feel, which helps make foot chicks clean and crisp. The crashes and ride feel loose and buttery, exhibiting a ton of wobble and roar when hit aggressively at the edge, while also being dry enough to allow a sparkling stick click to carve through the simmering wash at lower dynamics. With rich, warm tones that are more complex, expressive, and nuanced than your everyday general-use B20-bronze cymbals—yet not as limited in application as the dark and dry sounds of more extreme, raw options—these Jazz Legend models offer all the unique vibe and character of broken-in vintage cymbals in much more consistent, durable designs.





Vision Series: A Bit of Grit

A new line for Amedia, the Vision series comprises thin, hand-hammered models featuring broad bells, wide vintage-style lathing, and an extra round of deep ball-peen hammer marks spaced about 1.5" apart across the entire bow. The extra hammering adds more dissonance and explosiveness to the tone, making these models a bit more aggressive and trashy-sounding than the Jazz Legends.

We checked out a pair of 15" Vision hi-hats, a 19" crash, and a 22" ride. The crash and ride are thin but firmer than the Jazz Legends, so they don't feel as soft or have as much wobble. They're more articulate and have a tighter decay, but they still open up nicely and produce smooth,

lush overtones at all dynamics. The hi-hats sound chunky but not clunky, and they have plenty of articulation for executing clear double strokes. In the open position, they roar with a deep, guttural voice, and the foot chick is broad but crisp. The Vision series is a perfect match for contemporary jazz/fusion applications, as well as modern R&B, hip-hop, or other electronics-infused genres requiring a mix of old-school warmth and modern punch.

Michael Dawson



Tama

Classic Stand Series

Sturdier versions of vintage-style, lightweight designs for more modern applications.

A couple years ago, Tama revived the simple, compact, and lightweight design of cymbal stands from the 1960s with the flat-base Classic model. The company has since fleshed out an entire hardware series based on the past but with enough contemporary tweaks to make them sturdier and more versatile for today's drummers. The Classic Stand series comprises the HC52F straight cymbal stand, the HP50 bass drum pedal, the HH55F hi-hat, the HTS58F tom stand, and the HS50S snare stand. The cymbal, tom, and hi-hat stands have flat bases, while the snare stand has a traditional tripod to accommodate a more compact setup.

The Pedals

Drawing inspiration from vintage models, especially the innovative Rogers Swivo-Matic of the 1960s, the HP50 bass drum pedal incorporates some very sophisticated features within a compact, simple design. The footboard is lightweight and smooth to facilitate quick, sliding double strokes while being rugged enough to endure heavy stomping. The side pillar is height-adjustable, so you can lower the beater's striking point when using 16", 18", or 20" bass drums without having to shorten the length of the beater itself. This is a great feature that allows you to maintain a familiar feel from the pedal while also being able to achieve optimal tones from smaller kicks. These adjustments are made by loosening a tension rod on the side of the pillar. The beater angle can be independently adjusted as well, and the footboard height can be raised or lowered by changing the chain position on the cam.

Also similar to the Rogers, the Tama Classic pedal features a top-mounted spring assembly that allows you to make adjustments quickly and easily while seated at the drumset. The spring post features a fine-toothed gear so it can be folded down for compact storage when the pedal is not in use.

Other thoughtful features include a slightly tapered felt beater that's contoured to strike flush against the drumhead, a side-access hoop clamp adjustment screw, and a wire base assembly that can be detached and safely secured under the footboard when stored in a pedal bag or hardware case.

Aside from these smart, working-drummer-friendly features, the Tama Classic pedal also feels great. It's quick and nimble while also providing plenty of power and punch when needed. Unless you have a habit of destroying footboards and bending beaters, I don't think you'd find much—if anything—to complain about, especially if you're looking to keep your setup as simple and lightweight as possible.

The HH55F hi-hat stand is a perfect complement to the bass drum pedal. It has the same smooth, lightweight footboard and a wire base that hooks to



the underside of the footboard when disconnected so the stand can be folded up easily and compactly for storage. The flat-base tripod features single-braced legs with rubber tips and has retractable spikes that can be engaged to prevent the stand from sliding during use. I'm usually leery of taking flat-base hi-hat stands to gigs for fear of tipping or sliding them when playing at higher dynamics, but the Tama Classic stand proved me wrong over the course of several hours of relentless foot stomps and heavy 16th grooves. The spikes needed to be engaged to keep the footboard from scooting away during foot-heavy sections, but once I had those dialed in, the stand never budged or threatened to tip over. The T-bolt that locks the legs into place held its position, thanks to the extra grip of the knurled base pipe, and the die-cast joint and memory lock connecting the upper and lower pipes prevented any vertical slippage or rotation. The spring tension and footboard angle of the HH55F hi-hat can be adjusted independently via two tension rods placed at the point where the footboard meets the center pipe. This hi-hat earned top marks in terms of both portability and performance.

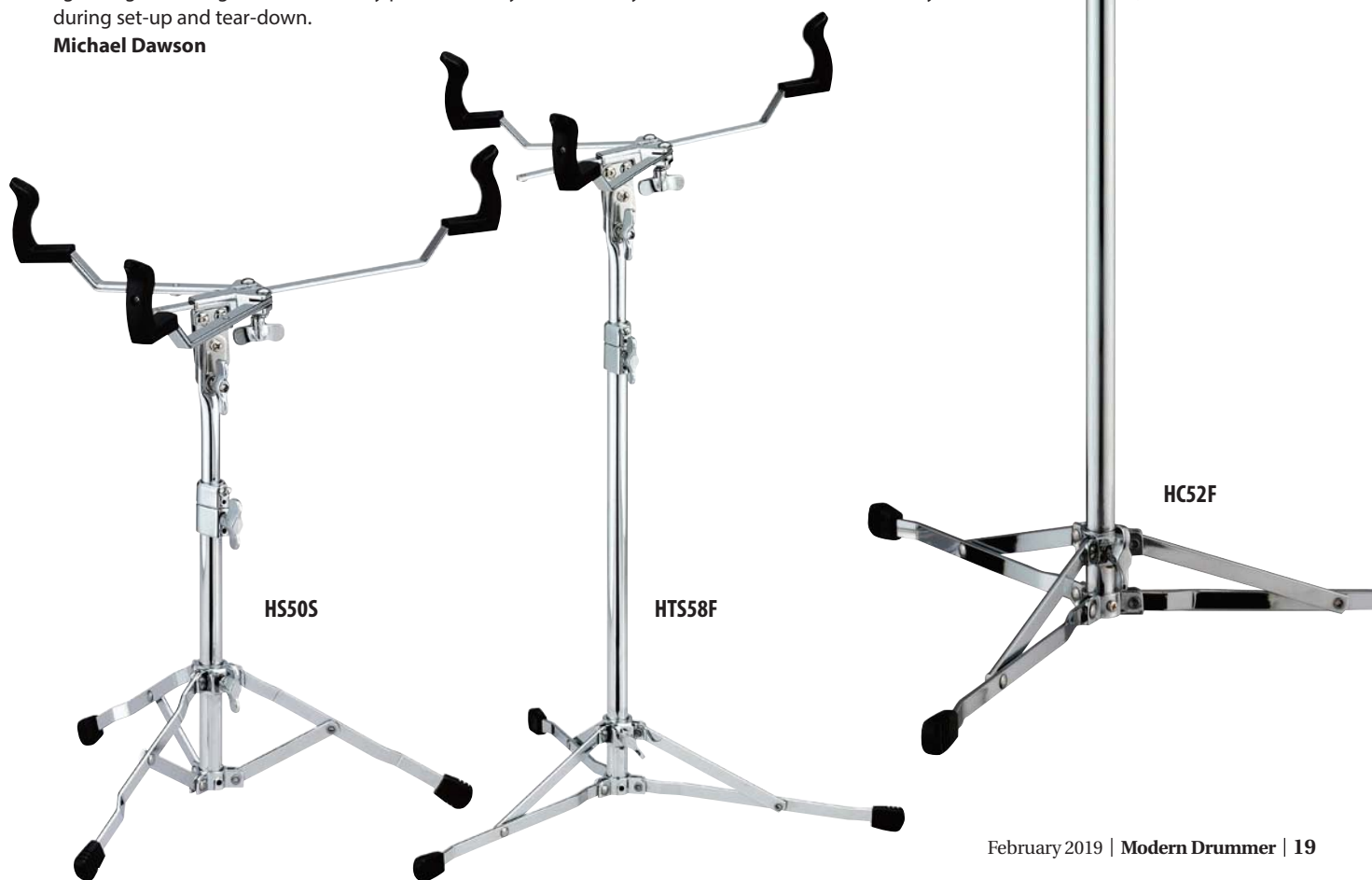
The Stands

The Classic cymbal stand, which we reviewed in detail in the April 2017 issue of *MD*, looks nearly identical to the flat-base stands that were made in the 1960s. It's super compact, folding up to under 23" and weighting just 3.2 lbs. The biggest difference, however, is that Tama's version features a 9 mm solid upper portion that provides much more strength and stability than the hollow rods used back in the day. The tilter has a gear assembly with finer teeth than those used in the past to allow for ten-degree angle changes while also preventing slippage. Cymbal height ranges from 23.25" to 51.25", which I found to provide plenty of options for most compact setups with the cymbals placed below eye level.

At first glance, the HS50S snare stand could easily be mistaken for a flimsy old stand from the mid twentieth century. It's as lightweight and compact as those vintage offerings—weighing only 3.11 lbs. and measuring only 23.625" when folded up—but two of the arms are double-braced to increase stability and eliminate wobble, and the gearless tilter allows for incremental angle adjustments not afforded by traditional gears. The arms are brilliantly redesigned to hold 12"-15" drums securely without restricting resonance.

The HTS58F Classic tom stand has a flat base that allows it to be tucked very close to the side of the bass drum for a more compact, comfortable setup. The height can be adjusted from 22.25" to 32.25", which provided plenty of options for a single-rack-tom setup with small or large kick drums. The basket is single-braced to keep the weight down (3.15 lbs.), and the upper and lower pipes are held securely in place with a die-cast joint and memory lock. I've used the Classic series stands and pedals in a variety of situations, from playing quiet background music to full-production festivals, and they've performed as well as any other lightweight offering that's crossed my path. And they've noticeably reduced the wear and tear on my back during set-up and tear-down.

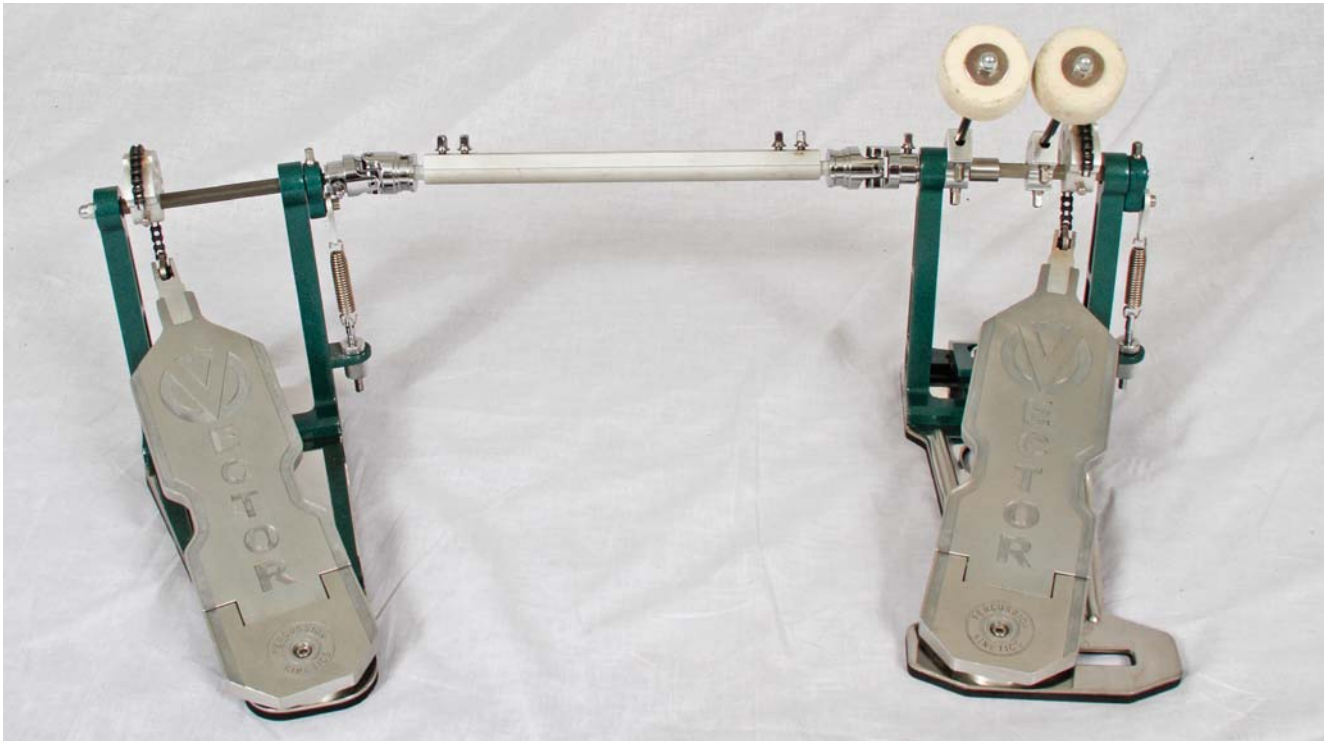
Michael Dawson



Percussion Kinetics

Vector G1 Double Pedal

A strong, smooth option for double-kick players looking to make foot positioning more ergonomic.



Percussion Kinetics developed the G1 single pedal several years ago so drummers could sit at the kit with a more natural outward-turned foot position without having to shift the position of their bass drum or sacrifice pedal response by coming down on the footboard at an angle. Players who've had the chance to try the G1 know that this is no gimmick, especially for those of us dealing with nagging knee, back, and leg issues caused by years of forcing our lower bodies into awkward positions at the kit. It works. The company recently designed a double version, which we have for review here.

The Ortho-Kinetic System

The crux of the Vector G1 pedal is its moveable footboard. The footboard comprises an adjustable heel that can slide several inches from left to right, as well as a self-aligning cam that can be moved to any position along the axle independent of the beater holder. There's also an adjustable hoop clamp that slides independent of the footboard to ensure that the pedal connects flush with the hoop regardless of the beater and footboard positioning. The G1 double pedal features two nearly identical G1s, complete with rotating footboards and separate spring assemblies. The primary pedal has been reengineered slightly to accommodate a small axle that drives the secondary cam and beater. The second beater is fixed in one place on the axle, so it can't be moved horizontally. But its angle can be adjusted independent of the footboard height. The

primary pedal has several inches of horizontal positioning options, depending on how far the main footboard is angled outwards. All Vector G1 pedals come with traditional round felt beaters and a single-chain drive.

Performance

The universal joints and telescoping posts that connect the two pedals on the Vector double pedal are highly engineered from lightweight, heavy-duty aluminum, and they exhibit zero lag or give. This results in the auxiliary pedal responding as quickly and powerfully as the primary. Having the ability to angle the auxiliary footboard independent of the bracket allows the baseplate to be positioned more in line with the universal joint, which also helps minimize friction and lag. I also found that the moveable footboard allowed me to easily tuck the second pedal next to the hi-hat or to make minor adjustments to prevent the cam and chain from rubbing against a leg of the hi-hat stand.

Beyond giving the auxiliary pedal a quick, powerful feel, having the spring assembly on the secondary bracket simplified the initial setup process, since I could make minor adjustments to the spring tension while playing the pedal. I've been a proud user of the G1 single pedal for a few years; it's helped eliminate some minor knee pain that I'd been experiencing after playing long gigs with a standard pedal. Now that a double pedal version is available, I think it's time to finally bring my lagging left foot up to speed.

Michael Dawson





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Beck's

Chris Coleman

MD checked in with pop/R&B drummer Chris Coleman while he was on tour with Beck. "Beck is very meticulous about every sound that comes off that stage," says Coleman, "but I couldn't be more different from his drummer of the past fifteen years, Joey Waronker. So it took us a little bit of time to get synced up and feel comfortable about the sound of the drums. As an example, we had several different cymbal shoot-outs. We went through everything that I own, plus around fifty cymbals from the Meinl factory, to come up with what I use onstage. Also, there are points in the show where I use different snares to make it more like the record. His catalog is so deep and diverse, and he wants each song to sound like the record. This gig definitely keeps me on my toes."

The kit that was set up at Chris's audition, a huge Ludwig setup with concert toms, gave the drummer a heads-up on what kind of sound Beck wanted. "I've taken a few ideas from that kit and changed my rig to get the right mix where I could be comfortable while delivering the songs as Beck likes them," Coleman says.

A major change for Beck during this past tour was the stage setup. "He's always had a vintage stage look," says Coleman, "but his new record is very pop-oriented, so they changed up the stage vibe to match. I'm up on a six-foot riser, which keeps me above Beck's head, making the sound more tolerable to him. Another cool feature of this new stage is that I have an LCD panel in front of and behind me, so it appears like I'm floating."

On the subject of incorporating electronics into his acoustic kit, Coleman says, "Beck's albums have so many different sounds on them that the whole band has to use electronics to recreate them live. I'm excited about Roland's products, as they've drastically changed my way of approaching a gig. For instance, there's no automation in this show; we play the sounds and loops in real time. That gives the music life. This took me a minute to get used to, because if someone misses a cue, it messes up the rest of us. But it makes us more of a band and not just folks on stage playing their parts."



Drums: Sonor SQ2 X-Ray Acrylic

- A.** 6x14 steel snare
- B.** 7x14 Beech Tigerwood snare
- C.** 5.5x12 acrylic snare
- D.** 7x8 tom
- E.** 7x10 tom
- F.** 7x12 tom
- G.** 13x14 floor tom
- H.** 15x16 floor tom
- I.** 18x22 bass drum
- J.** 17x20 bass drum

Cymbals: Meinl

- 1.** 16" Byzance Brilliant China
- 2.** 18" Byzance Dark crash
- 3.** 14" Byzance Jazz Thin hi-hats
- 4.** 22" Byzance Sand crash
- 5.** 24" R&D ride
- 6.** 28" R&D ride
- 7.** 20" custom effects crash

Hardware: Sonor 6000 Series stands and Giant Step pedals, DW 900 hi-hats

Heads: Evans Onyx tom batters;

EC Reverse Dot batter on main snare, EC batter on 12" snare, ST Dry batter on Beech snare, and 300 Snare Side resonants on all snares; EQ4 Clear bass drum batters

Sticks: Vic Firth Chris Coleman model

Electronics: Roland SPD-SX sampling pad, TD-50 module, RT-30HR triggers, BT-1 trigger pad, and KT-10 kick trigger pedals

Interview by Dave Previ

Photos by John Shore



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ON TOPIC

Denny Seiwell

His new, Grammy-nominated album represents a major return to his roots as a jazz artist. “That’s why we call it *Boomerang*,” says the drummer, whose first rock ’n’ roll recording was Paul McCartney’s hit 1971 album, *Ram*. “A boomerang comes back to you. I was a jazzer until I met Paul.”

MD: On the first song on *Boomerang*, “Cheetahs & Gazelles,” you come out with a blistering display of chops. What’s going on there? Possibly shades of Joe Morello?

Denny: No, it’s more like the father of Brazilian drummers, Milton Banana. Or even Airto Moreira. The song is kind of a modern-day samba, and I open with a street beat. The time signature? Believe it or not, it’s in four; the accents go over the barline.

MD: You’ve stated that on this album you were going for a “big-little band” sound.

Denny: Yes, when we first started playing together, we would catch ourselves going for licks and figures that were written for big bands. It represents years and years of all of us growing within the same genre. It’s a big band sound in a little band space.

MD: You cover “Live & Let Die” as a stripped-down shuffle. It’s also less orchestrated than Paul McCartney’s original version. Did Paul work with you on developing this version?

Denny: No, but I wanted to have one McCartney song on the record, so why not do the track that I’m best known for? We tried to catch every section of the song without breaking down the groove. As soon as I got it on tape, I sent a copy to Paul, and he absolutely loved it.

MD: On the song “Baby Mama,” your kick/snare groove next to rock great Edgar Winter’s saxophone reminds listeners that you haven’t lost your rhythm ’n’ blues chops at all. It’s like a page from your method book, *What Not to Play!* Was it fun recording this song?

Denny: Absolutely. We wanted it to come across as a gospel thing, and the result speaks for itself. Edgar is a superlative musician and friend, and an asset to this album.

MD: “Dropping Darkness” is like a haunting finale behind the credits of a movie soundtrack. Do you plan on expanding the reach of the album beyond radio?

Denny: We would love that. Our record company, QVR, has a division designed for television and film. Since I produced it, I wasn’t sure how to handle this song in conjunction with the other ones on the album. I decided to let it stand on its own because it’s infectious. Once you hear it, it’s very hard to get it out of your head.

MD: What suggestions do you have for young drummers who want to be leaders?

Denny: Don’t do it! Not, at least, right off the bat. If you’re a young drummer, pay your dues. Wait until you gain the knowledge and experience to bring to the table. I waited until I was seventy-five years old to become a leader; I’ve worked with the top producers and artists like Leon Russell, Paul McCartney, and James Brown.

MD: You’re celebrating your fiftieth anniversary in the music business. Your diverse drumming abilities have served you well. If you had to do it all over again, is there anything you’d do differently?

Denny: Yeah, the way I left Paul. It was a period of time that was the best and worst time in history for the Beatles, Wings, everything. That’s one of the only regrets I have in my life, but it worked out pretty darn good. I didn’t know how to handle a decision that I made at the time. Decisions are really important in life, so before you burn any bridges, make sure you’ve got something on the other side. Ultimately, if you’re not ready for the ups and downs of the music biz, go find another career.

Bob Girouard

Denny Seiwell plays DW drums and Zildjian cymbals. He uses Innovative Percussion sticks, Remo heads, and Beato bags.





Alex Solca

Karriem Riggins

Among the most profound musical developments of the millennium is the melding of jazz and hip-hop, and this drummer is at its absolute epicenter. While he seemingly worked both ends of the spectrum for years—and think about the spectacular talent it takes to kill it with jazz legends like Betty Carter and Ray Brown *and* hip-hop groundbreakers like Common and J Dilla—in reality he's been fusing the two rhythmic worlds at the kit and in the production studio since the beginning. Now with August Greene, a nearly clairvoyant coming together of modern-music superstars, his work has achieved new heights of widespread creativity.

Story by Ken Micallef

Photos by Alex Solca

Drummer/producer Karriem Riggins is a speeding comet blazing across the hip-hop cosmos. Insiders have known about him for years, as the Detroit native is responsible for some of the most stellar hip-hop beats this side of the legendary J Dilla. In actual fact, Riggins collaborated with Dilla as a member of influential '90s hip-hop trio Slum Village, and contributed to his solo albums. The phenomenally influential beat explorer had a profound effect on Riggins' aesthetic, but to be sure, the drummer fed Dilla's imagination as well. Modern hip-hop is better for their teamwork.

Sadly, Dilla passed in 2006, but Riggins, who'd already racked up playing and production credits like Daft Punk and the Roots, continued to elevate the work of prominent acts with his artistry. His beats—which in hip-hop parlance translates to a track's overall production, not simply its drumbeat—have provided the rhythmic bedrock for seven of rap star Common's albums, as well as recordings by Kanye West, Erykah Badu, Madlib, and Talib Kweli. He's also released two full-length albums as a leader, 2012's *Alone Together* and 2017's *Headnod Suite*.



Lately Riggins has been turning heads as a member of the supergroup August Greene, which includes Common and keyboardist Robert Glasper. August Greene's self-titled debut album features populist hip-hop vehicles as well as some very sophisticated rhythmic perambulations involving odd meters, Brazilian rhythms, daring sleights of hand, and, notably, an absence of samples. Recent performances on NPR's Tiny Desk Concert series affirmed Riggins' deep soul groove and profuse production skills. The three principal stars of the collective have all enthusiastically expressed their desire to continue exploring the unique bond they've developed.

August Greene's deranged beat stew includes the stumbling yet earth-grIPPING groove of "Black Kennedy," the time-shifting glee of "Aya," and the get-outta-town, snare-drum-jabbing, Brazilian-beat-infused "No Apologies." Beyond his production brains, Riggins' role in August Greene is one of a daring beat futurist, the soft-spoken drummer laying down live drum beats (with no editing) that alter common hip-hop perceptions.

The forty-three-year-old Emmy Award winner's alter ego as a swinging powerhouse of a drummer is as impressive as his hip-hop work. Riggins currently performs as a member of superstar jazz vocalist Diana Krall's trio; past jazz employers include Betty Carter, Mulgrew Miller, Eric Reed, Theo Croker, Ray Brown, Orrin Evans, Roy Hargrove, and Kandace Springs, whose latest record Riggins also produced. The drummer even

appeared on Paul McCartney's 2012 album of jazz and pop covers, *Kisses on the Bottom*.

Though most of Riggins' appearances on YouTube reflect his hip-hop work, a performance he did with trumpeter Roy Hargrove in front of a German audience in 1996 provides a particularly clear example of his jazz skills. Posted by MikeBuddy1, the clip shows Hargrove's group playing "La Costa De La Cuba" by Charles Craig, a simmering medium-fast straight-ahead piece. At the 5:12 mark Riggins cuts loose with Philly Joe Jones-styled snare drum fusillades; his snare technique is beautiful, nearly flawless. A brief Elvin Jones-inspired hi-hat bash morphs into classic stick-on-stick rolls, then cymbal dead-sticking, followed by burning snare/tom/bass drum combinations. The solo is over barely a minute later, but in that short time Riggins has succinctly laid out the history of jazz drumming with swift aplomb.

And Riggins has hardly left jazz behind; as busy as a man with a hundred limbs, as this interview was being conducted he was producing the Warner Bros. debut of drummer Gregory Hutchinson—a major mentor—as well as bassist Rodney Whitaker's latest. In reality, though, Riggins' artistry isn't a one-or-the-other thing; the influence of classic jazz drummers informs his R&B work, and his jazz playing is as contemporary as the most forward-looking hip-hop productions. We began our discussion by exploring how both strains of American music are manifested in his art.

MD: You're very successful working in two distinct music idioms. You've said that swing is the style that links everything together.

Karriem: A lot of the different things that I do, the different genres that connect in my work, all have the element of swing, which is the syncopation. Some call it funk, but it all brings it together and makes it soulful.

MD: You're one of the very few drummers who can legitimately play both hip-hop and jazz. How do you do that?

Karriem: It's just the way I was raised. I was given the freedom to listen to everything that I love. My mom listened to a lot of gospel and soul music. My dad, Emmanuel Riggins [a regular with guitarist Grant Green], was a jazz musician who played piano. So I heard him live and heard all the records in his collection, as well as classical music. I heard a lot of Chopin and Beethoven. Hearing all of those things kind of fused things together, along with the music of our generation, hip-hop. My first rap 45 was the Fat Boys' "Stick 'Em" in 1984.

MD: It seems that with the advent of Kamasi Washington, Kendrick Lamar, and Robert

Glasper, genres are merging. You've said that some kids now hear jazz and hip-hop as the same.

Karriem: Artists like Kendrick have put a lot of the younger generation on to jazz; a lot of the younger generation had no clue what jazz is. We've been doing this since I moved to New York. There was never a lane where you could do both. It was either/or. I have a fanbase in hip-hop and one in jazz, and they never really linked until a lot of these things started to come together, these artists brought it together.

MD: Does the average August Greene fan know you've played straight-ahead jazz as well?

Karriem: Yes. Before, there would be fans who just knew me from playing with Diana Krall and had no idea that I produced and played with Common, Kanye West, and a lot of other artists. Artists such as Kamasi Washington, who are bridging that gap and bringing that light to it—they're great representatives of what's going on. I really dig what Kamasi is doing. We're in good hands.

MD: Do you have more recording credits as a jazz drummer or as a hip-hop producer?

Karriem: I've never added them up, but it could be that I have more credits on the production side, seeing as I've done some full projects. I'm just honored to have played with the artists that I've played with, especially making those records with Ray Brown. My first record with him included Oscar Peterson and Milt Jackson. That was schooling just to learn Ray's conception of trio. That opened me up to a lot of different things and made it easy for me to interpret a lot of different jazz songs. Art Blakey and Elvin Jones were great interpreters. When I joined Ray Brown's trio, that helped me to learn from that perspective of how to play.

MD: You've worked with the absolute masters of jazz.

Karriem: It's just sad that a lot of the records I've recorded, the labels have folded and you can't even find them online. Even some of the Ray Brown records. He was on Telarc, which is gone, and the Mulgrew Miller records I recorded are out of print.

August Greene

MD: There are no samples on the August Greene album, so are all of your drum grooves live, start to finish?

Karriem: Yes, start to finish. That's actually what I'm working on today. We're starting a new record. I tracked drums for a day. A lot of this music we build from the drums—I'd say 80 percent—and then we write around that. So today I was just recording a lot of different ideas. But I have more of a method now. I'll record and pull from all of the great ideas and put them in a song mode, so when Robert and Common come in, they can start to build from those ideas. That's pretty much how all the August Greene

songs have been constructed.

MD: So you might create a 16th-note pocket or a Brazilian rhythm or an odd funk groove...?

Karriem: Yes, different rhythms that I hear in my head. Usually the guys come in a little later. After I'm there for a couple hours, they start to hear melodies from that, but initially it's all drums, no melodies or anything. It's just stripped-down grooves. Some of them are hip-hop grooves, some are quirky offbeat patterns—so many different ideas. My brain starts spinning when they come in.

MD: What's the meter in "No Apologies"?

Karriem: It's kind of a subdivided eight. I was playing it swung. I was actually going

to another idea and they heard that as I was trying to skip past it, and they said, "Wait, go back to that." There's a heavy funk element in that one, more so than on the other stuff.

MD: "Aya" has a great pocket. Can you tell me the evolution of that track?

Karriem: That was built from a jam session that we had at Electric Lady. Robert came with that, and I had to learn the time signature. It took me a few takes to get it, but once I did, that was that. [The rhythm is a bar of four, two bars of five, and a bar of four.] That's the thing... a lot of this stuff came so easy with these guys. The reason we formed this collective was because the music is effortless. It's almost like we're





Riggins' Setup

Drums: Ludwig Legacy Mahogany Aged Onyx
A. 5x14 Black Beauty snare (model LB416)
B. 8x12 tom
C. 16x16 floor tom
D. 18x22 bass drum

Hardware: Ludwig

Cymbals: Zildjian
1. 16" Prototype hi-hats
2. 20" K Kerope ride
3. 20" K Kerope ride with one rivet
4. 20" K Flat ride
5. 19" K Custom Hybrid Trash Smash

Sticks: Vic Firth AS8D sticks, 5A Dual-Tone mallets, Heritage brushes

Heads: Remo Ambassador Coated batters and resonants

Electronics: Sunhouse Sensory Percussion

doing what we're supposed to be doing. It's like God is working through us. The songs just come, and we hear it back and it's like...wow...some of my favorite work is collaborating with these guys.

Staggered Time Beat-Stutters

MD: When you stagger the time within the beat, is that the J Dilla influence?

Karriem: A lot of Dilla, but also a lot of Elvin Jones. Elvin deserves a lot of credit for the way we hear music. There are so many different nuances and so much syncopation in his playing, and that influenced Dilla. Dilla found what some would call the flaw or mistake, and made it the song. A lot of people criticized Elvin Jones, some considered his playing sloppy. But it's really funky. Dilla played off those types of things—he would recreate them on a machine. What Elvin and Dilla did definitely influenced my drumming. Dilla took it to another level, where a backbeat was involved.

MD: You stagger the time in "Black Kennedy" and "Let Go" from the August Greene album. It's like the drum pattern is in time, but within the bar, segments are off time. How would you teach that?

Riggins' on His Top-Ten Jazz Influences

Art Blakey *Caravan* (Art Blakey)

I loved the way Blakey played as a leader and how he commanded the drums on this record, especially on "Thermo" and "Sweet 'n' Sour." He's just a great interpreter. Blakey would bring these songs in and make them his. For a second Art Blakey choice, I would go with *Moanin'*.

Headhunters *Thrust* (Mike Clark)

Mike Clark is one of my favorite drummers. Pocket! He's just an incredible drummer. The pocket between him and bassist Paul Jackson...amazing. That's the funk sound that I heard in my head when I was young—the sound was Mike Clark. "Actual Proof" and "Butterfly" are two of my favorites on this album. Because Mike and Paul are really tight friends, it shows in their playing. You can hear it when musicians hang out together and are one, like family. It's like when you really learn someone's playing, you almost know what they're going to play next. Mike and Paul's intuition—it's magical. When I first heard Mike play straight-ahead, I actually thought it was Tony Williams. He has a great straight-ahead approach.

Nancy Wilson and Cannonball Adderley *Nancy Wilson/Cannonball Adderley* (Louis Hayes)

Louis Hayes provides another example of how to accompany a singer. It's important for drummers to know how to do that. There's a certain simplicity that's involved, and I know

Miles Davis talked about it a lot, like drummers playing "quiet fire." Louis is one of those drummers that had intensity without volume; you just feel the groove. You feel the intensity.

Roy Haynes, Phineas Newborn, Paul Chambers *We Three* (Roy Haynes)

Phineas Newborn, Paul Chambers, and Roy are playing their butts off on this record. Roy is just a beast. It's one of the only records I've heard with him and Paul Chambers, and they had such a great bass-drums hookup. They're pulse players playing the beat and super in the [pocket]. This is up there with Roy's *Out of the Afternoon*, because this is early Roy, and you can hear how he evolved. And with Phineas being a virtuoso pianist who's playing all over the piano, this record gives you a lesson on how to play with someone who plays a lot on their instrument. Phineas plays so much that there's not a lot of room to say anything on another instrument other than to just groove. Though when Roy took his solos, he killed it.

Tommy Flanagan *Overseas* (Elvin Jones)

This is young Elvin, and not that he was copying or emulating, but you can hear the influence of Max Roach. Elvin plays brushes on the whole record, and it's just very tasteful. I feel like brushes is a lost art form now. *Overseas* was an important record for me, for learning syncopation and the language of brush technique. I would confuse Elvin with Max Roach. And then I heard from a lot of the drummers that I grew up around in Detroit,

like Lawrence Williams, that Elvin was heavily into Max when he was a young kid. You can still hear that Elvin influence of the triplets and his personal taste, but you can also hear some of the language of Max Roach. Max is such a pioneer of the bebop sound.

Grant Green *Matador* (Elvin Jones)

This record gave me that classic Elvin Jones feeling. This is a simpler Elvin Jones recording, because he's right in the groove, and he and bassist Bob Cranshaw have a great connection between them and with the guitar and piano. Elvin also plays on Grant Green's *Solid*, *Street of Dreams*, *I Want to Hold Your Hand*, and *Talkin' About!* *Solid* is another one of my favorites. But on *Matador* he's doing his Elvin groove.

Wayne Shorter *Night Dreamer* (Elvin Jones)

This is an incredible record. "Oriental Folk Song" touched me. There are certain melodies that can make you emotional, and that one definitely stood out. I learned all these records when I was in high school. It's hard to describe the feeling that I got from hearing Elvin's connection with [bassist] Reggie Workman on there. I feel that the pocket that Elvin had on *Night Dreamer* with Reggie was right in the middle of the beat, and he just drove straight through it. It's just wide open, with not too much space in his ride cymbal, but it's just so killing. *Speak No Evil* is also great.

Philly Joe Jones *Showcase* (Philly Joe Jones) *Showcase* was the first Philly Joe record that

Karriem: A lot of that is retraining the way you play. It's a different independence. We learn how to play with the independence that we have to play straight. Some drummers try to play everything lined up with the metronome. But think of it in a sense where every limb is doing something different, like your snare drum is behind the beat, your hi-hat is on the beat, and the bass drum floats in between the two. Those are things that have to be practiced. Independence is very important in achieving that.

MD: Would you practice that against a metronome?

Karriem: Repeatedly think about and practice it. It's not something that I can explain physically how to do, but it's definitely something that happens over time. If you can think it, you can do it. If you can understand it, you can do it.

MD: I've read that back in Detroit you and J Dilla would trade ideas. He might ask you for a CD-R full of drumbeats. Would he then take those beats and stagger the rhythms?

Karriem: Dilla was a mystery man. One idea would give him another idea that would be totally different. We made each other mix CDs of music, and I would record drums and

just different ideas that we would trade. If he really wanted a rhythm [performed], he would have me come in. He would never tell me what to play; he'd say, "Give me something similar to this tempo."

MD: You played on his records *Welcome 2 Detroit*, *The Diary*, and *The Shining*, correct?

Karriem: Yes, I produced and played on the track "Drive Me Wild" from *The Diary*, and on *Welcome 2 Detroit* I produced and played on "The Clapper" and played on "Rico Suave

Recordings

Q-Tip "Breathe and Stop," "Let's Ride" ///

Busta Rhymes "So Hardcore" /// **J Dilla**

"Come Get It" /// **A Tribe Called Quest**

"Word Play" /// **Slum Village** "Jealousy"

/// **Busta Rhymes** "Turn Me Up Some" ///

Spacek "Eve (Jay Dee mix)" /// **Common**

"The Movement" /// **Slum Village** "Get It

Together" /// **Rodney Whitaker** upcoming

album

I discovered where he was really speaking. You can hear the drumheads on the record, and it's like he would play, and you heard the melody. That's the first record that taught me about playing the melody on the drums. When I joined Ray Brown's trio, he was big on drummers playing the melody, and that record helped me to understand that philosophy.

Miles Davis *Nefertiti* (Tony Williams)

When Tony came in, he became a great interpreter of Wayne Shorter's music. I really studied "Fall" when I was in high school. I would have that song on repeat all day. That was like the soundtrack of my life. I wouldn't literally transcribe the drums, but I would make mental notes of certain ways that Tony would approach that song. It's incredible the way they play the melody. There are no solos—they play the melody throughout the song—and the way Tony accompanied that melody was incredible.

Nat King Cole *After Midnight* (Lee Young)

Lee Young was a great drummer. I was introduced to his playing through Ray Brown. Ray hooked me up with my first music attorney, who was Lee Young's son. So that's when I discovered Lee and listened to all the *After Midnight* sessions. Very tasteful, very pocket-oriented. I became a fan from this record alone. The brush technique that he used was just flawless. Great pocket with the brushes.



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Karriem Riggins

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MD: Who's playing on "African Rhythms" from *Welcome 2 Detroit*?

Karriem: That's Dilla playing drums.

MD: Kaytranada's "Bus Ride" from 99.9% is mad.

Karriem: That was a great one. I'm playing off the triplet there. That's a heavy triplet. He sent me a loop and I just came up with some different ideas, and the triplet worked. He sent me the loop and we tracked it the next day. That was our first collaboration; we have a few more in the can that we're going to release soon.

Welcome to Detroit

MD: Coming up, did you study the usual books, Ted Reed's *Syncope* and the like?

Karriem: I did, and some of Charley Wilcoxon's *Modern Rudimental Swing Solos*, and Alan Dawson's book, all in middle school.

MD: Your first professional gig was with Betty Carter.

Karriem: Betty Bebop Carter was amazing to me. Greg Hutchinson, who's the reason for so many of these great gigs that I got to play on, heard me in high school and then



introduced me to Betty in 1994. She brought me into her Jazz Ahead program. We did two shows at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and one at the Apollo. I moved to New York with the money that I made from that show. We made like \$3,000.

MD: Then what happened?

Karriem: I began playing gigs and recorded with Stephen Scott, did a few shows with Vanessa Rubin, and then I landed the gig with Mulgrew Miller's trio from 1994 until about '96. I joined Roy Hargrove's band at the same time. I met Dilla in '96, and I began working with Slum Village in '97.

MD: Were you a jazz drummer before you dabbled in hip-hop and R&B, or were they happening concurrently?

Karriem: No, everything was exactly as it is now, simultaneously kind of brewing. Some of the first rhythms that I played on the drums were those old-school rap rhythms.

MD: There must have been a time when you were heavily shedding jazz and rudiments and learning all the swing dudes, though.

Karriem: Definitely. I was practicing all of those things in band in elementary school and in middle school, but during any break we'd start going into hip-hop rhythms.

The influence of jazz and being under the tutelage of my dad and [Detroit jazz legend] Marcus Belgrave, they taught me the work ethic and the importance of technique and the language of bebop and all those things at a young age.

MD: You had legit training?

Karriem: Yes, in school marching band. I was privileged to hear live jazz shows when cats came into town. In Detroit we have one of the greatest jazz festivals, the Montreux Jazz Festival. It was affiliated with the actual

Montreux Jazz Festival. I got a chance to hear all my favorite drummers, from Elvin Jones to Roy Haynes. Then I hooked up with Greg Hutchinson when I was fifteen, and that *really* set me straight. He helped in what I needed to check out, and he's been a great inspiration and gave me a lot of direction. He was playing with Roy Hargrove at the time. I'm producing Greg's new record on Warner Bros. Incredible record. His drumming is ridiculous. This shows his other side.

MD: When did you first start playing the drums?

Karriem: I was two when I began playing rhythms. Marcus Belgrave left a set of drums at our house, because when he would go on tour people kept breaking into his house to steal his instruments.

MD: So when you became serious on the drums, what you did focus on?

Karriem: I became serious in fourth or fifth grade. My dad made me practice a lot of rudiments, because that influences what we play in jazz solos. I learned how to play melodies through the rudiments; that was a heavy focus in those years.

MD: What do you mean playing "melodies through the rudiments"?

Karriem: I would learn to play a bebop melody, like "Au Privave," and then I'd learn how to play it while playing triplets, for example. So I'd be playing regular triplets, the rudiment triplets, and try to find the rhythm of the melody in the triplets and accent those. Then I'd work on Swiss Army triplets and flam rudiments, and a lot of different things like that.

MD: So you'd be playing the form of the song through rudiments?

Karriem: Exactly.

MD: You are a master drummer. What skills were hard for you to learn?

Karriem: I don't consider myself a master. I feel that I'm still on the quest. Being around Ray Brown and a lot of those guys taught me to be a humble student. I don't feel like I've mastered anything. I'm definitely on a quest to find the truth. But, I guess the basic swing beat came easy.

MD: You grew up with it in your family.

Karriem: I did. But Greg Hutchinson really pulled my coattails when he came to Detroit, and we started to connect. Because a lot of things I was doing *sounded* right, but I was physically doing them wrong. Greg helped me kind of get the whole thing together. I started off as a lefty, and then I switched way late in the game, in the eighth grade.

MD: Do you still write as a lefty?

Karriem: No. I switched everything. I would go to jam sessions and cats would say, "Aw, here he comes, the lefty—we have to switch the set around." So I decided to change.

MD: Does that help your hand-to-hand facility?

Karriem: Sometimes I go in the studio, and I'll play the opposite way, and it definitely challenges me to play something different, which is cool.

Headnodding It

MD: Was your second solo album, *The Headnod Suite*, entirely programmed?

Karriem: It's a mixture. I just used everything that I loved, from playing to programming. Some of it is just loops of my ideas I played on the keyboard—interludes, things like that. *The Headnod Suite* was for music lovers in general. As a producer I try



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Karriem Riggins

not to make everything drum heavy. That will just speak to one audience. I try to use a lot of different things that will pull everyone and capture their attention.

Machine Beats

MD: I read that you're using Ableton Live and Native Instruments' Maschine for beats. Is there other gear you rely on when you're making beats?

Karriem: I use Sensory Percussion by Sunhouse. It records all your MIDI information from the drums. In a lot of stuff that I've been doing I've been getting away from actual programming; it's more hands-on with me playing these rhythms live. This is all straight from the set, but it [creates] MIDI information from exactly what I played on the set. I can put any sound on those rhythms.

MD: Are we hearing any of that on the August Greene record?

Karriem: You will on this next one that we're working on now. The first record is all live sounds from the drums. On the next one I'm fusing more of a sound library on to some of the songs.

MD: Kendrick Scott did a great track using Sensory Percussion, "Philando."

Karriem: I don't have many super-favorite drummers of this generation. But Kendrick is one of them, and Marcus Gilmore and Gregory Hutchinson. Damion Reid. There are some great drummers doing great things right now. Corey Fonville with Butcher Brown and Christian Scott. And Chris Dave and Questlove—two beasts!

MD: What does the Sensory Percussion gear help you achieve?

Karriem: It allows me to play my instrument and it records every little nuance that I play.

You can play something really light like a ghost note—it picks everything up. A lot of that stuff won't translate on an actual drum machine, and it takes a lot of skill to program it on the pad. Sensory Percussion allows me to cut my workflow in half and knock that out and move on to the next thing. It's a genius program.

From Elvin Jones to J Dilla

MD: In the jazz pantheon, who are the drummers that you really love, the drummers who had the biggest influence on you?

Karriem: Elvin Jones, Philly Joe Jones, Art Blakey, Tony Williams. Roy Haynes. I really loved a drummer who played on some Paul Chambers records, Lex Humphries. I really like the simplicity in his playing, and his strong ride cymbal quarter notes. I really got into him because a lot of the things that I've done with singers and playing with large ensembles, sometimes it's about the simplicity in the music. So I got a lot from listening to Lex Humphries. Of course, Pistol Allen, who played on a lot of Motown records. And John "Jabo" Starks.

MD: Which Slum Village records were you involved with?

Karriem: Slum Village's *Fantastic, Vol. 1* and *Fantastic, Vol. 2*. I produced four songs on *Trinity (Past, Present and Future)*. That was around the time Dilla was working on *Welcome 2 Detroit* and *The Diary*, which was in the can until it came out in 2016.

MD: How do you think Dilla influenced you as a drummer?

Karriem: Well, just his producer's mind. He taught me to play with that producer's ear, to listen to song structure. I learned from Common as well. I learned what a rapper, another musician, or a listener would want from a producer.

MD: Can you suggest the J Dilla tracks that show his beat innovations?

Karriem: Sure. Q-Tip's "Breathe and Stop" and "Let's Ride"; Busta Rhymes' "So Hardcore" and "Turn Me Up Some"; J Dilla's "Come Get It" and "That Shit"; Slum Village's "Get It Together" and "Jealousy"; Spacek's "Eve (Jay Dee mix)"; and Common's "The Movement." There are others as well. His stuff was incredible. He knew how to mix and how to get the right tones out of every instrument; that comes from studying records. I applaud him for bringing that to the younger generation of producers who are doing the same now. They hear those different nuances.

MD: Was J Dilla a fan of Elvin Jones?

Karriem: Definitely, Philly Joe Jones and Elvin. I went through his record collection. I found a lot of Elvin records, a lot of Philly Joe Jones with various artists, and Art Blakey. And a lot of Dilla's one-shot drum sounds will be from a Philly Joe solo. It's a snare drum, and you think it may be Clyde Stubblefield, but it's Philly Joe Jones playing a stick on a stick or a rimshot.

Technique

MD: Do you have a warm-up routine or go-to chops builders?

Karriem: My warm-up routine consists of alternating five-, seven- and nine-stroke rolls, very slowly building speed. As far as

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chop-building techniques, it helps me to play flammed mills and Swiss Army triplets on a pillow.

MD: How does your mindset change when switching between hip-hop and jazz drumming?

Karriem: My playing attitude about hip-hop is less is more. I play trashy Zildjian cymbals, which leave room for other frequencies. And I'll use Vic Firth 5A sticks when playing hip-hop.

Jazz is playing with an open mind to accompany and/or drive anything that's happening. Possibilities are endless, so

awareness is very important to me. Listen to what's going on. I tend to play lighter sticks when playing jazz because it gets a nice cymbal sound. I use the Vic Firth AS8D sticks and the Heritage brushes.

MD: How do you maintain your technique?

Karriem: I try to shed for two to three hours a day in the morning when I get up, just making sure that my limbs are even—and working on independence daily is a necessity. You can lose independence, so I practice different things on each limb, even if I'm not at a drumset—just sitting there and tapping my foot and tapping rhythms out.

The Producer's Mind

MD: You're producing the next Greg Hutchinson record, and you produced the recent Kandace Springs record, *Indigo*.

Karriem: Yes. That was more about organizing and reconstructing her songs. Some of the songs were in demo form and some were without any instrumentation. Some of the music is performed by live players I brought in, and some of it was produced with Ableton Live.

MD: You have a working studio in Van Nuys, California.

Karriem: It's pretty much my laboratory. I do everything here. I have a lot of records, and they're all here, and all my drums and drum machines. I have an SSL desk and a collection of microphones. I'm still building it, but the room is complete. Some of the Kandace Springs and August Greene was tracked at my studio. I called it Rhythm Estate. I've been in L.A. for a while, but this is the first time that I can be creative in a place that I really dig.

MD: What's the challenge of playing with Diana Krall?


Karriem: Early on, because I'd been playing with Ray Brown and Roy Hargrove, there was a sensitivity that I didn't have in my playing. So that was challenging when I first started with her, learning how to play with a singer—and how she's not *just* a singer. She's a great musician. I learned so many different tunes and ways to play different genres. She doesn't just play jazz—we even do bluegrass. It challenged me to listen and learn what's going on in some of her songs. So working with her opens me up.

MD: Is Diana Krall still one of your main gigs?

Karriem: I do a lot of touring with her; whenever she's touring I'm there. Between Diana and August Greene now picking up, I have zero time for a lot of other things.

MD: What are your drumming goals?




Karriem: I want to get to the point where I have enough time in both worlds where if I have to go and play drums, I don't have to work so hard to get my chops back. It's one thing practicing rudiments every day and making sure your wrists are warmed up for a gig. But it's another thing when you're on stage; it's physically different. So I just want to have the strength and ability to do everything that I love to do equally. That's the only goal, because I'm learning in both worlds. I'm pulling from the jazz rhythms and everything I've learned on the drums and incorporating that into my production, and vice versa. Everything is feeding everything else.




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Interpol's
Sam Fogarino
Rhythmic Empath



Story by David Ciauro

Photos by Alex Solca

Like few units before or since, New York's Interpol truly embodies the city's sound and spirit. Oozing style and sophistication while maintaining a streetwise disposition that reflects the grit and grime as much as the beauty, the band's musical landscapes sweep from ambient waves of melodic melancholy to driving bursts of pulsating tension. On their sixth and latest studio release, *Marauder*, drummer Sam Fogarino wanted to tap into yet another element of the city—its swing.

By doing so, Fogarino succeeded in creating a recipe of his own that drew not only from his own classic-rock drumming heroes, but from famed R&B players and producers. *Marauder's* powerful opener, "If You Really Love Nothing," has an infectious, galloping swing that sets the tone for the entire record. "Those grooves are like riding a horse," Fogarino offers. "Once you hit the pocket, it just glides and plays itself."

For *Marauder* Interpol enlisted producer Dave Fridmann—famed for his work with Mercury Rev, the Flaming Lips, and Tame Impala, among others—and opted to record the entire album analog. The inherent parameters of recording to tape pushed the core of the songs to the forefront, that core being the three strong musical personalities in the group: Fogarino, guitarist Daniel Kessler, and singer/guitarist/bassist Paul Banks. Sonically, *Marauder* finds Interpol at the intersection of where they've been and where they're going. We spoke with Fogarino right as the media blitz for the highly anticipated *Marauder* was beginning.

MD: Is *Marauder* Interpol's first album to be recorded to tape?

Sam: To this degree, yes. We kept the chain 100-percent analog. Every record we've done has been analog on the front end, using tape as a preamp of sorts for the notion of warming up the digital files. Dave Fridmann took it old-school. If it hit tape, it wasn't just to grace the tone. It was performance-related, because of the freedom that you *don't* have with a tape machine as opposed to the laziness created with the luxury of digital technology. When recording to tape, you have to prepare for the performance; there's no fixing it in post-production. That's the

biggest benefit of recording to tape—you have to have your performances together.

MD: Was the decision to go all-analog part of a discussion the band had with Dave Fridmann before entering the studio?

Sam: We didn't really discuss anything ahead of time, and that was the whole point of working with Dave, who's a proper producer, so to speak. We didn't worry about the process. We trusted his experience.

MD: As you mentioned, all past Interpol records were recorded to tape, but then dumped to Pro Tools for post-production. Did it rattle you at all to learn that this album was going to be analog all the way?



Fogarino's Setup

Drums:

- Gretsch Broadcaster in Crème Oyster Nitron finish
- 6.5x14 Keplinger stainless steel snare (10-lug with die-cast hoops)
- 9x13 tom
- 14x14 floor tom
- 16x16 floor tom
- 14x24 bass drum

Cymbals:

- Dream
- 15" Dark Matter hi-hats
- 18" Dark Matter crash
- 20" Bliss crash-ride
- 20" Dark Matter ride

Hardware: DW, including a Machined Direct Drive single pedal with Danmar Zoro white felt square beater, and a

Machined Direct Drive hi-hat stand

Sticks: Vic Firth 5A wood-tip (white)

Heads: Aquarian, including Performance II, Reflector, Hi Frequency Resonant, and Classic Clear snare side

Sam: I didn't have any trepidation. I'm fifty years old, so recording to tape is not novel to me. The first time I recorded was in 1984 at a community college, and that was to half-inch 8-track tape. So I was totally up for it, because it's in my muscle memory, and I found it exciting. It really locked the band in, in ways that I can't really explain. I think the [performances] speak for themselves. When I was tracking, Dave would say in the moment, "Make it feel this way," and we'd hone a given part in the moment. It was a very liberating experience. The whole statement was about being a band.

MD: What's your attitude toward using a click track?

Sam: I love the click. The click is [my] homeboy. It reveals itself when it's appropriate. Aside from recording, I think a good test for using a click is playing the song live. If a song's personality comes off while you're governed, then it's great, and it's meant to be. But if the song seems to suffer or feel really stiff, then forget it, and allow those fluctuations. Lately, the whole band has been trying to decide what's going to be on the click and what's not, and thus far, it's been pretty interesting.

Some songs tend to get really fast live. It's kind of horrifying, when you can measure how some of our older songs end up being like 10 bpm faster on stage. Sometimes that still works, and you leave it alone because people are used to those interpretations. And then sometimes you're like, "Wow, we've been playing this song like shit for ten years." [laughs] And when that's the realization, you bring it back by introducing the click, and it re-informs the whole intention of the song. Sometimes the aggravated energy of live performance mars those songs. And we have this duality between playing these driving, 16th-note punk-rock songs, and then slowing it down and getting mid-tempo and ethereal. On stage it's sometimes hard to switch those hats, because you either feel in the role or you want to play on top of every beat, and the click will just go, "Nope! This is how we're gonna do this, man!" So I love the click.

MD: For songs that were recorded to a click, have you ever bumped them up a few bpm for live performances?

Sam: Yeah, dude! In fact, you're kind of reading my mind, because I just did that the other day without telling the band. [laughs] Sometimes just bumping up the bpm by one or two keeps the energy from falling behind, which is what usually happens when there's discomfort from my tempos being anything close to empirical. Sometimes I can really feel it, and maybe I'm



not relaxed enough to allow them to gain a little swagger. It's amazing, when you're metering it, how much difference just one bpm can make. Depending on the type of song you're playing, it can make *all* the difference! Whereas other times it can be like five bpm plus or minus, and it still feels relatively the same. It's mind-boggling.

MD: In addition to going all analog, did the band and Dave set any other parameters for the recording process?

Sam: I think Dave didn't want to go past what was afforded to us by the tape; we couldn't rely on having endless tracks and independent playlists. In addition, as much as I like it, on our last album there was so much midrange going on. There were tons of guitars, as well as space filled up with keyboards and strings, that it created this solid block, which has the potential to kill any dynamics happening above or below that frequency. Dave steered away from that. We decided to keep it simple, or keep it to what was there at the core of the song. To intentionally leave space is cool, because in the digital domain it's so easy to default to filling all the space with extra sound.

Dave steered that, and it made things more exciting as a result because the initial

“If a song’s personality comes off while you’re governed, then it’s meant to be. But if the song seems to suffer, then forget it, and allow those fluctuations.”

intention of the songs stayed intact. And that always starts with just the three of us, with Daniel being the only one playing guitar, Paul playing bass, and me playing drums. That's what you hear on this record because that's how the songs were written. When we were writing these songs, we'd always record these simple room-mic demos, and you can kind of hear that spirit on the record. It wasn't that those demos presented a finished product, but they were songs that sounded fine with just those three voices, and I think Dave fed off of that.

MD: That said, are what we hear on the record primarily full takes?

Sam: Pretty much. Dave would sometimes comp multitrack tape, which is so old-school. It's brazen! Editing with razor blades. That's what's so impressive about him. He jumps between the analog and digital worlds with relative ease. It was always his decision, which made it so easy for me to play my parts and not worry about anything else—not about how it sounds, about what it was being recorded to, what kind of compressors were engaged....

After I was done tracking, I had fun marveling over what was happening, and I was a total geek about it. That's when I



started asking about what compressors or mics he used on different records, or about his time in Mercury Rev. He was such a sport about it.

MD: Was there anything about Dave's studio that surprised you in regards to his approach to miking and recording drums?

Sam: Yeah—he did all of it! But it was minimal at the same time. There weren't a ton of room mics, and it was amazing because the sound of his room when you hear it on playback defies where the mic was placed. It would seem like a mic would be placed way too close to its source, but it would still have so much ambience. He just knows his room. It hasn't really been treated to be a [typical] studio either. It's just kind of a living room with the ceiling removed and vaulted, opening up to a loft. Those were my burning questions: "Did you treat this room or have it tuned? Did you design this room to sound the way it does?" Before I could even ask the question, he told me that he used to have a partner at the studio back in the day, and they just went into the room, clapped, and said, "Yeah, this is it—this is cool." He's a teacher as well, so he knows what "proper" is, but he knows that some things are not meant to be empirical. It's subjective.

MD: Speaking of empirical evidence, everything you're saying validates my experience when I first heard the record. My first impression was that it sounded like I was in the room with the band. It

was voyeuristic in that way, like you're watching a band at their rehearsal space without the spectacle that comes with a concert experience. There's an honesty and vulnerability in that.

Sam: I would agree, and I'm glad you hear that. That's what's fun about listening to Zeppelin or the Rolling Stones or any true rock band with a guitar/bass/drums configuration. You can hear the band as a whole, and it's exciting and natural.

MD: Being that the studio was an atypical drum room, is there a specific kit setup that records well in that room, or did you use your own kits? I know you're playing a Gretsch Broadcaster now.

Sam: I used a frankensteined C&C kit comprised of components from three of my C&C kits. All of my C&C kits are based off of Gretsch kits in regards to the bearing edges and the wood selection and plies, so that was [the reason for] the switch back to Gretsch.

MD: Were there any particular drummers or styles that inspired your parts on *Marauder*?

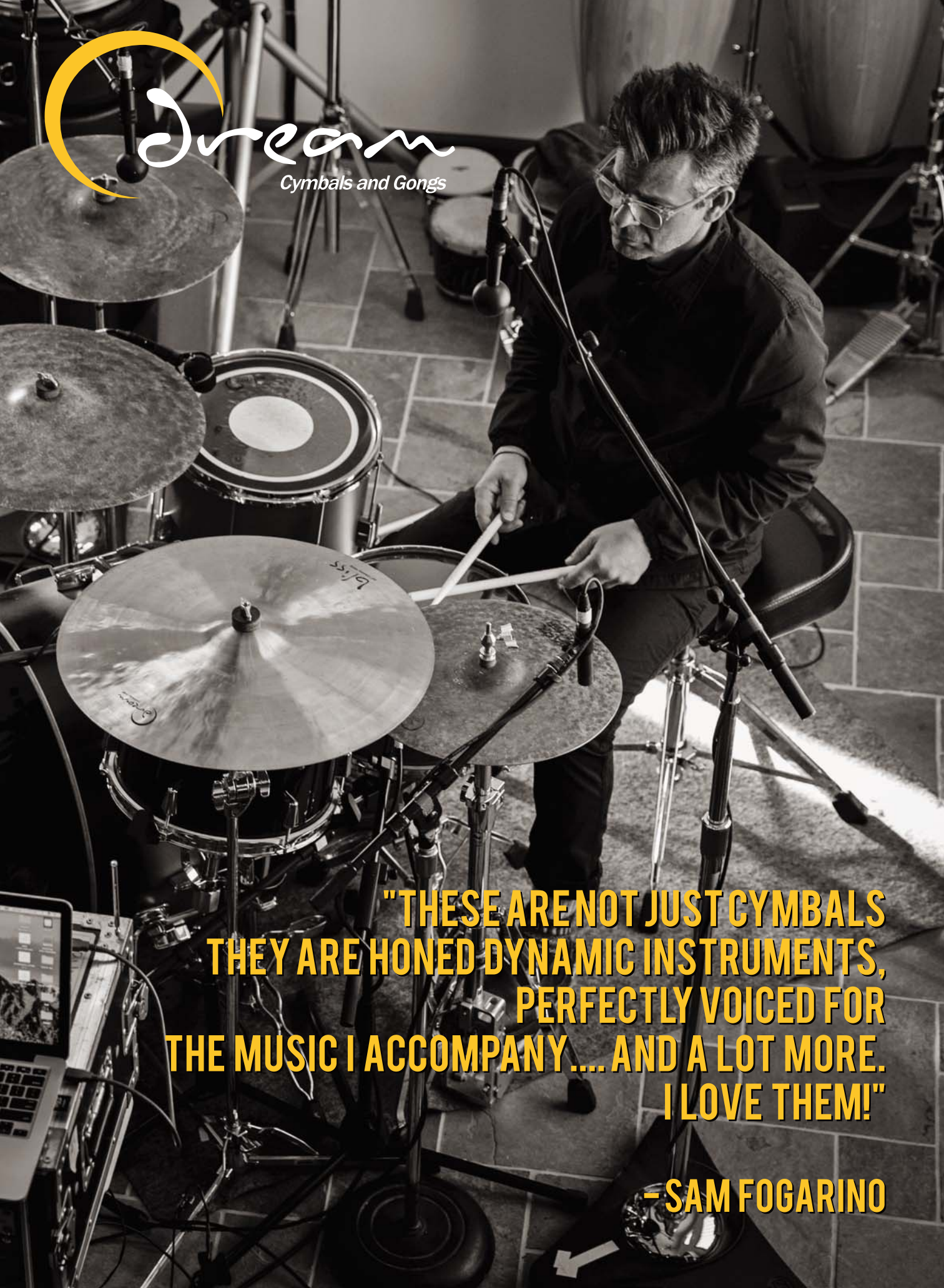
Sam: There were my go-tos of John Bonham and Charlie Watts, but I also got hooked on the idea of making this record swing in spots. I've toyed with it in the past, perhaps implying a swing. But this time I wanted to do it for real, and so I listened to old Otis Redding. I also listened to what Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis did rhythmically with their drum programming on Janet Jackson's *Control* record. They had such a

cool interpretation of what the drum parts should be on that record, and I can almost picture two drummers being needed to play that stuff. I was a teenager when that record came out, and at that point I didn't care so much about lyrics and such, and I wasn't really empathetic to the songs melodically. But what really got me was how amazing those drums sounded, whether they were real or not. The minds that created those parts [make for] one badass drummer. To my weird brain, some of those beats could have easily applied to some of the metal songs of that period; it kind of smeared everything together for me.

MD: The album's press release mentions how Paul's lyrics got more personal on this record. When you're in the writing process, are the lyrics written, and how does that affect your awareness of how what you're playing might be clashing with a melody?

Sam: The melody is usually intact pretty early on, but Paul waits for the final hour to write the actual lyrics. So that and the intention of the song are what he pines over. There's always been a good rhythmic and vocal-melody relationship. And that's not my intuition, that's his rhythmic intuition, which aids [my ability] to accentuate rather than step on the vocals. Paul is very open about borrowing from the rhythm. He finds melody in the rhythm. It's all rhythm at the end of the day—it all has meter—but how he adds musical value to that is a testament to his own badassness.

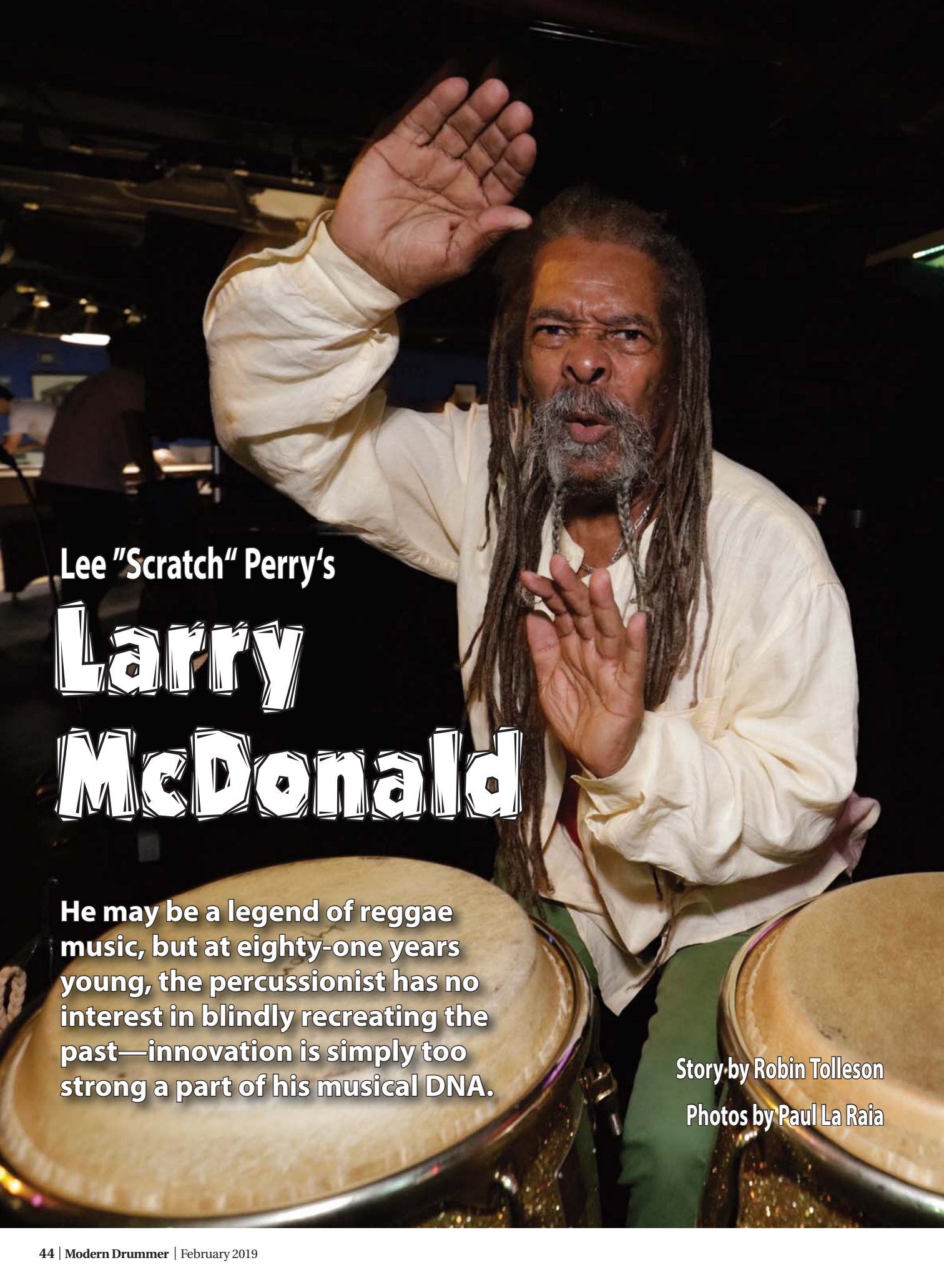




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- SAM FOGARINO



Lee "Scratch" Perry's

Larry McDonald

He may be a legend of reggae music, but at eighty-one years young, the percussionist has no interest in blindly recreating the past—innovation is simply too strong a part of his musical DNA.

Story by Robin Tolleson
Photos by Paul La Raia

Larry McDonald's conga playing is a thread that runs through more than half a century of Jamaican music. His recording and touring credits with that island's icons are *deep*—from Toots and the Maytals to Count Ossie to Ernest Ranglin—and continue with a dynamic showing on Lee “Scratch” Perry & Subatomic Sound System's recent *Super Ape Returns to Conquer* album. McDonald's résumé is bolstered by a nearly thirty-year stint with the late Gil Scott-Heron and collaborations with the likes of Taj Mahal, Natalie Merchant, Shemekia Copeland, Cat Power, and the metal band Soulfly.

McDonald, who was born in 1937 in Port Maria, Jamaica, recalls singing and acting in stage productions in school as a boy. Becoming a professional percussionist came later—and tragically. “I was in an accident back in Jamaica,” McDonald recalls. “My best friend died, and he was just a quarter of a century into his life. It shook me. It occurred to me that I'm going to have to figure out what I want to do with my life. For my first twenty-four years, I'd done what everybody said I should do: go to school and get a collar-and-tie job, a civil service job. But that wasn't what I really wanted to do, that was just something I *could* do. I don't know exactly when, but it dawned on me that what I wanted to do was play drums, and I wanted to play hand drums, because I didn't want anything to come between me and the skin.”

McDonald listened to Jamaican conga players like Montego Joe and Jerome Walter, but he picked up ideas everywhere. “There were hand drummers, but there weren't very many conga players,” he says. “Conga players were mostly around the dance groups, classical dance theater companies and so on. I didn't have a teacher. The first thing I needed was a drum. Then I spent a year figuring out how to get sounds out of it.”

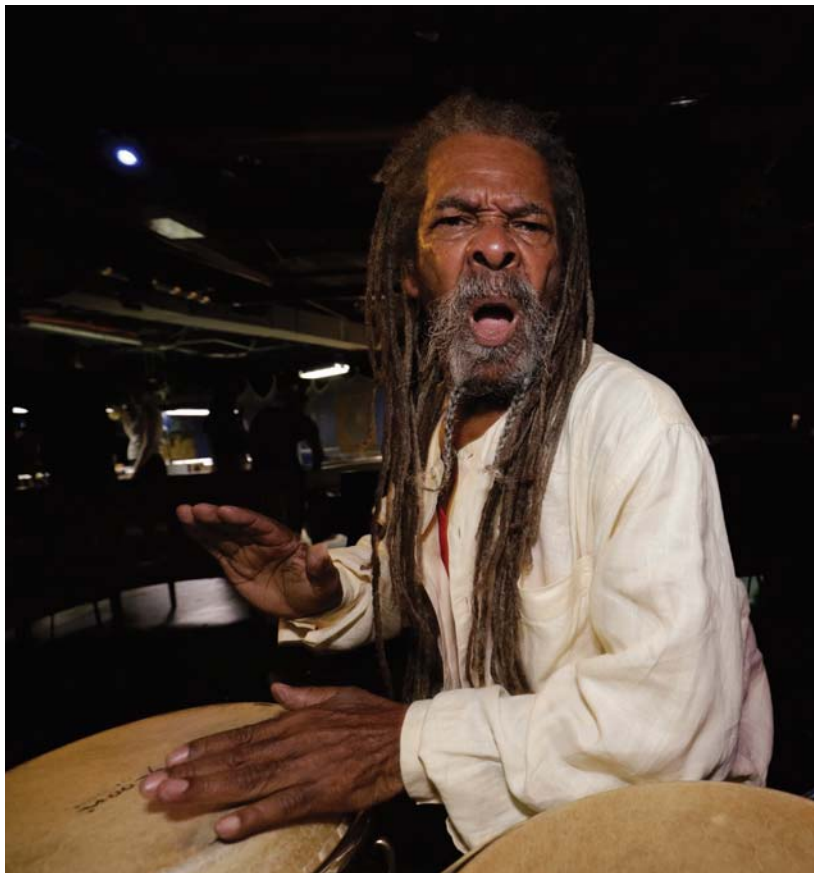
McDonald's musical horizons were opened through the airwaves. “I was into music way before I started playing,” he says. “I used to listen to Radio Havana back in the day, when Castro was still in the Sierra Maestra. They had a theme song that they would play every half an hour, and it featured one of the greatest Cuban conga players, Tata Güines. I listened for that every half hour, and besides trying to do some of that, I tried stuff that came in my head. I watched people that stole their stuff, like every good musician does, and took their stuff as a starting point and made something different out of it. I wanted to play everything, whatever it was. I just wanted to be a conga player.”

Percussionists need great ears, and McDonald developed his through listening habits he describes as “omnivorous.” He recalls winding up his aunt's gramophone and playing vinyl records of Broadway soundtracks and operas by Gilbert and Sullivan. “Then when I went to school,” he adds, “I was straight into bebop, man. I *still* play sort of bebop congas. [laughs] At least that's what I think of.”

“Bebop taught me that one and one is not necessarily two,” McDonald continues, “it could be eleven. It also taught me that the music could go anywhere at any time, so your mind had to be prepared for that. You always had to be listening. My first experience was playing a jazz session on Sundays, and my first lesson was how to stay out of everybody's way. I would play whatever, but just get out of the way, you know. I make sure that what I'm doing isn't upsetting the groove.”

McDonald says the music demanded that level of discipline. “When you go back and listen to those early ska records,” he explains, “that was some serious bebop solos and herky-jerky rhythms, and those guys were players. And to fit with them, you just had to sit there, and don't get in anybody's way. Just do not f**k it up. Yeah, because they'll tell you about that, too.”

“You know, guys like Tommy McCook, Roland Alphonso, the great Ernest Ranglin—I was just honored that these accomplished musicians allowed me to come on their bandstands. I always had to kind of punch above my weight—that's my M.O. right now,



particularly with the instrument. You know, you don't hear anybody say, 'I'm going to go out and get me the baddest conga player I can find and put a band together.' You don't hear nobody say that—except if he's a conga player. [laughs] So I had to come to terms with that. You do need a certain amount of recognition to advance your career, but I was in it because I really wanted to play.”

“I just wanted to get my hands on a drum and learn how to get sounds out of it,” McDonald continues, “and learn how to put them together. After that, I thought, *You really need to go back and learn some stuff about what you're trying to do to go forward.* You know, being self-taught has its virtues and its drawbacks. Every so often I tell myself I really should learn to read, but when you don't read you have to go for a different kind of adjustment than the cat who's got his eye on the paper. I'm just sitting with nothing but what I'm hearing, and I've got to adjust for everything, or they'll call somebody else for the session.”

The young percussionist took a gig at the Runaway Bay Inn, and as he began to see more bands in person, he realized, “I didn't know enough to know what I didn't know. What I was trying to say on one drum was being played by a conga player, a bongo player, a



timbale player, a tambourine player, and a maracas player. I was listening to the total sum of all the parts, and trying to suggest the identifying trait of all of the different things. I tried to synthesize them into a way of playing. I don't recommend that you play somebody's licks how they play them, but you can find what's in it that makes it like that, grab on to that." McDonald was influenced as much by drumset players, like his countryman Karl McLeod, as he was by percussionists.

In 1973, McDonald took a gig in Hilton Head, South Carolina, that led to a four-year stint with Taj Mahal following the blues great's reggae-influenced *Mo' Roots* album. Gigs with famed Cameroonian sax player Manu Dibango and with Latin percussionist Ray Barretto and the Fania All-Stars soon followed. Then a connection with famed producer Malcolm Cecil led to McDonald joining up with soul singer Gil Scott-Heron, a musical relationship that lasted nearly three decades.

"The music was exemplary," McDonald says. "Gil's stuff was some of the best that I've ever been involved with. It wasn't like reggae, but reggae was what took me to the man. I had done an album at TONTO Studio, which was owned by Malcolm Cecil, who happened to be Gil's engineer and producer. So Malcolm, armed with the knowledge of doing his first reggae album, told Gil, 'Look, you need to do a reggae album.' Malcolm was a musician, so he said, 'I know where to go to get it to be a reggae album.' That's when he called me, and I called my friend Ken Lazarus to put the proper reggae guitar on it. Then they asked me to go on the road behind the album. For the next twenty-eight years, that was my main gig."

For most of that time, Heron didn't use

a drumset player, giving McDonald more rhythmic responsibility. "We were at the Blue Angel in Philly one night, and it was supposed to be two percussionists and a drummer," McDonald recalls. "The drummer didn't show, so we played without a drummer. The engineer was playing back the set during a break, listening to it, and he said, 'I think this is how we're going to do it for a while with the instrumentation. A while turned out to be years. I was playing timbales with my billfold on the small timbale for a backbeat. It was ironic that I ended up playing with sticks, which I didn't want to do in the first place, but that's what it called for.'"

In the early 1990s, McDonald studied briefly with C. K. Ladzekpo, director of the African Music and Dance Ensemble at UC Berkeley. "I took stuff from that music and put it in my bag too," he says. "Somebody asked me, when I play with those musicians, going through all the various tempos, 'Well, how do you count it if you never went to school?' I say, 'I play the pulse.' I find the point that everybody has to pass—every so often it always comes back there. I find that, then I find out how long it takes from that point to come back around. I feel my pulse and then work from that. I'm not even going to try to be counting that. I did the best I could with it as an unschooled musician."

In 2009 McDonald began recording his first solo project. The uplifting and adventurous result, *Drumquestra*, is built completely with percussion and vocals, and it features many of Jamaica's most gifted drummers, spanning generations. Sly Dunbar, Karl McLeod, Royo Smith, Delroy Williams, Karl Messado, and "Sticky" Thompson are joined by versatile New York drummer Swiss Chris [John Legend], London-based player Rod Youngs, and

Brazilian percussionist Marivaldo Dos Santos, as well as vocalists Dollarman, Toots Hibbert, Mutabaruka, and Shaza. Also featured on one song are Stephen Marley drummer Squidly Cole and his father, singer StrangeJah Cole.

McDonald, now living in New York, is again recording and touring with dub master Lee "Scratch" Perry. Larry and Scratch have a history dating back to Perry's famous Black Ark Studio in Jamaica. "I used to do sessions down there," says the percussionist. "That's how a lot of my stuff ended up on reggae classics. Stuff I did ended up on Max Romeo's album, on Bob Marley's album, on Bunny Wailer's album. He got a four-track machine, and back in those days four-track was like totally unbelievable. Stuff he would do... I don't think he ever read the manual. I think he just opened the box and started messing with it. But the music still holds up."

DJ Emch directs the Subatomic Sound System, with alto sax player Troy Shaka Simms and McDonald, in Perry's touring unit. "Emch controls all of the tracks," McDonald explains. "Anything from any album that Lee has done, he gets it together." Emch made the recording process easy on *Super Ape Returns to Conquer*, according to McDonald. "Emch completely strips down the song and works on the electronic stuff," he says. "When he's got that down, he calls me and I go in and put all the percussion tracks on at one time. Might take three hours, three-and-a-half. It's a great working arrangement. I can pretty much do what I like, because I'm not getting in anybody's way."

"I know these songs because I've heard them over the years," says McDonald. "But at the point when we're going to record, I don't know what ideas might come to mind, so I'll bring a couple drums and a bag of



toys: bells, vibraslap, cabasa, tambourine, triangle, cymbals, gankogui, rain stick, stone chimes.... I listen to the parts for changes—for any funny breaks anywhere in the song that I need to look out for. By this time, something will have occurred to me to put on there, and I put that on first. Then maybe I'll record three more tracks, and then we go on to the next one. We do it like that, one by one by one, all the way down.

"For the main theme, the main part of the tune when 'Scratch' be singing, I'll play one thing, and then when it comes to Troy for a solo, I switch to something else, just to underline what he's saying. I may or may not go back to the original thing that I used, depending on how the tune develops."

Some of the percussion on "Chase the Devil" and "Patience Dub" is processed with heavy reverb, but while he's recording, McDonald doesn't think about how it will be mixed later. "I'm playing straight up what I'm feeling. There's hardly any consideration of who's going to do what with what. That is their headache. Mainly I just try to not be too busy, so that everything I play can be used. I don't like to leave my stuff on the cutting room floor, so I play with that idea in mind. I'm self-editing from the first beat. It doesn't come from a place of doubt or hesitation, I'm just trying to figure out, on the fly, the best way I should go. And all of it is in like a split second, by the time my hand comes off the drum from this beat until the time I bring it

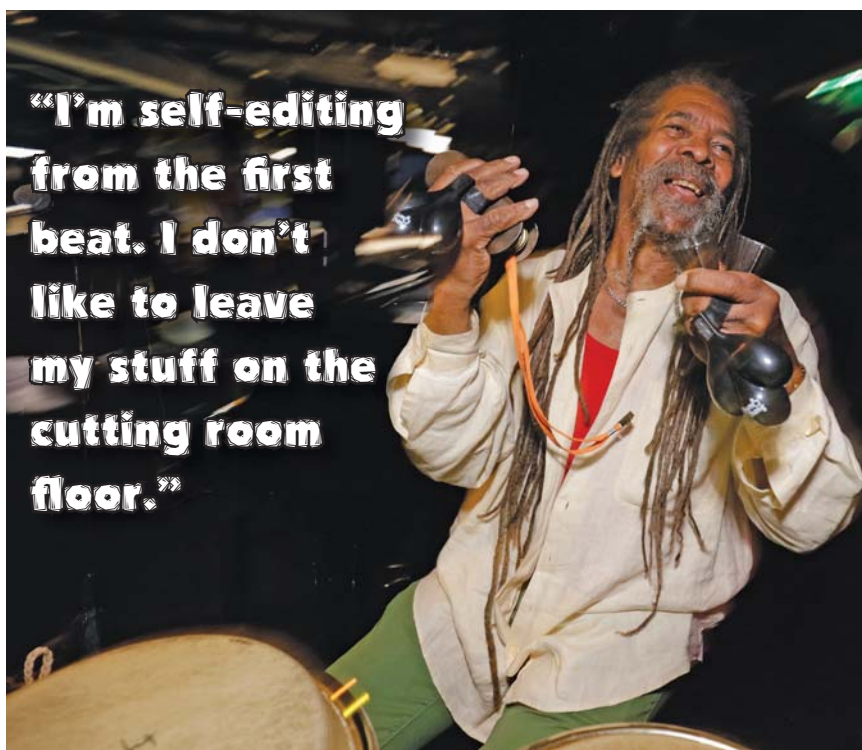
back down on the next beat.

"I play stuff, and then I take it home and learn it. I didn't have it before I played, but now that it came out and proved to be valid, I have to have that in my arsenal if it's needed. Sometimes I'll play a conga on the song, and the next time I'll do hand percussion or some other drum, just to see if I can sing the tune with something other than congas. My thing now is triangle. I'll break out the triangle at a certain point—like really crazy up-tempo stuff, double-time triangle.

On "Curly Dub," McDonald puts a 6/8 feel over the 4/4. "These songs are classics that we're doing over, so you have to respect the track," he says. "I have the ultimate respect for tradition, but I don't let tradition prevent me from doing something new sometimes. I have to try it myself, and see that it does or doesn't work, rather than somebody telling me."

During "War Ina Babylon" and "Black Vest," McDonald breaks into a double-time on repeater drum. "American audiences like the uptempo things," he says. "Well, with reggae you can't destroy the vibe of the tune, but when I'm feeling like it's dragging, I'll shift to a double-time thing underneath, like subliminally, and keep it right there until the front row gets up from leaning their elbows on the stage, and starts bobbing their heads. That double-time thing is one of the ways that I play ska, and I'll put it wherever I think it's needed. You can't stand in front of me with your elbows on the stage, I'm not going to have any of that. You don't have to be dancing around, but you've at least got to be bobbing your head or something. We've got a lot of power as drummers to get people moving."

Larry McDonald plays Tycoon congas.



Crack the Sky's

JOEY D'AMICO

by Will Romano

His musical road hasn't always been smoothly paved—or paved at all. But with two new releases and continual live work with the band he cofounded forty years ago—a band that some consider America's premier progressive pop act—he's reminding us what a monster player he's always been.

When Joey D'Amico was tracking Crack the Sky's 1975 self-titled debut, veteran recording engineer Don Puluse (Billy Joel, Bob Dylan) bestowed upon him a bit of wisdom he hasn't easily forgotten. "Hopefully this won't be your last record," Puluse said to D'Amico, adding, "You don't have to throw in everything you know. Just build yourself. As you learn, people can see your progression as a drummer and how you're improving."

Although he's periodically exited and rejoined the guitar-driven, harmony-rich art-rock band over the years, it's been D'Amico's economic and selfless playing that's defined the pulse of Crack the Sky. Two recent releases, *Crackology*, packed with rerecorded CTS perennial favorites, and *Living in Reverse*, rife with surprisingly fresh electroacoustic material, highlight D'Amico's team-player approach. It's one he embraced early on. "In the 1970s, when the whole band played on a track, they would play it back to hear if I made any mistakes," says D'Amico. "If what I did was okay, they would add on their tracks. I got used to doing tracks in one or two takes. I didn't want to waste

everybody's time."

Very little has changed. Without flash or fanfare, D'Amico drives a hard groove through the dense music madness unfolding all around him. Tracks such as "Ice," "Hold On/Surf City," "Lighten Up McGraw," and "Nuclear Apathy" from *Crackology* and "Bang" and "Raining Rain" from *Living in Reverse* demonstrate how crucial D'Amico's timekeeping has been—and still is—to the band's musical direction.

"Joey lays a solid foundation for the monkeyshines that we do," says songwriter, vocalist, guitarist, and keyboardist John Palumbo.

"He's like a human metronome," adds guitarist/multi-instrumentalist Rick Witkowski. "He has an innate, perfect timing."

"Joey D'Amico may be the most ego-free drummer, maybe the most ego-free musician, I've ever worked with," claims bassist/vocalist Dave DeMarco. "On top of it, he's the nicest guy in the world."

As early as 1980's *White Music*, electronic and other sound effects bolstered CTS songs. For 1989's *From the Greenhouse*, Palumbo programmed beats, eschewing acoustic drumming altogether. Today,

Linda Miller

D'Amico blends his craft seamlessly with the band's synthetic aesthetics.

"For *Living in Reverse*, some of the rhythm tracks were electronic," says D'Amico, who adds that the band recorded live in Witkowski's Studio L whenever they could. "I would play around with whatever beat was programmed and enhance it. Other times I'd play a complete song."

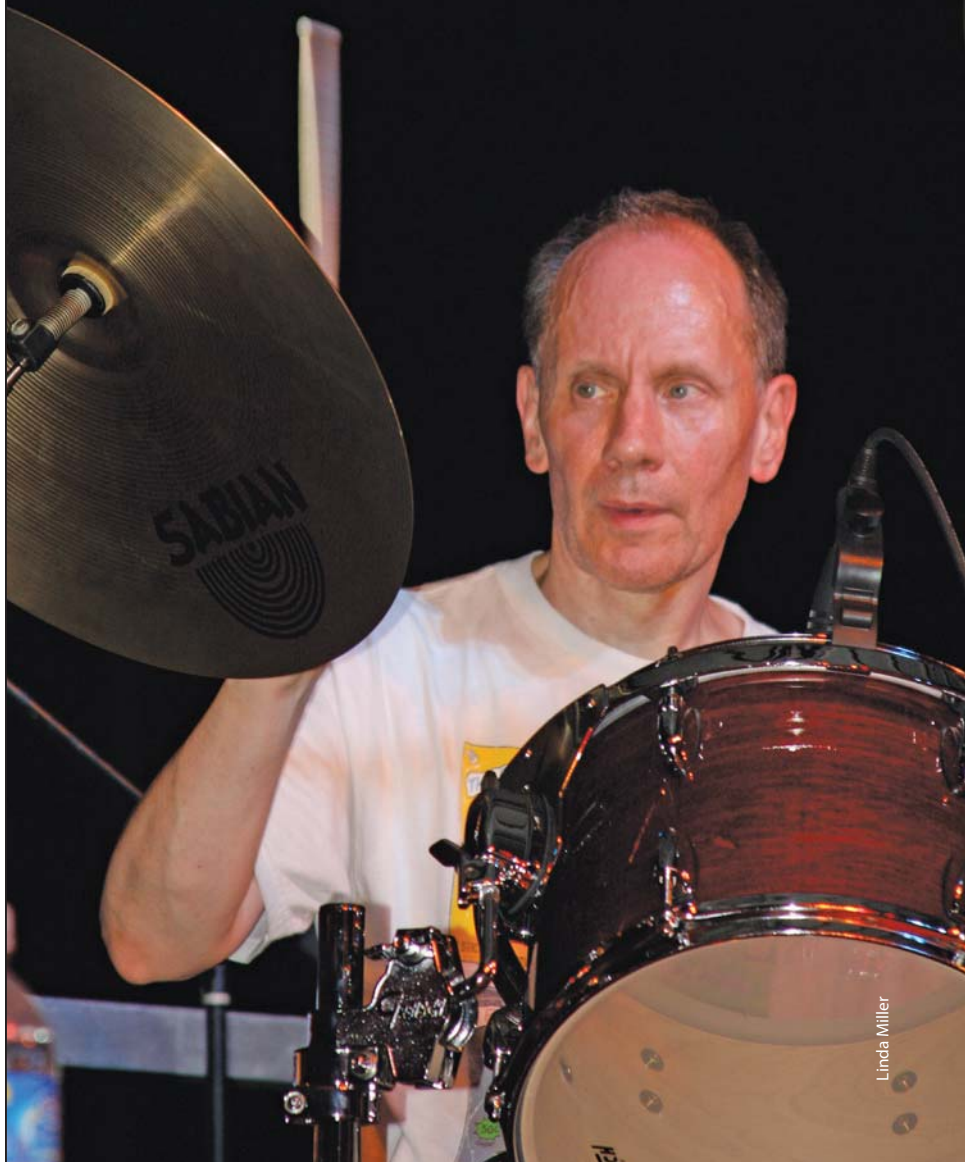
D'Amico relates that the track "Bang" was developed rather organically in the studio. "I traveled with [guitarist] Bobby Hird to Rick's studio in Weirton [West Virginia], and we'd just throw ideas around," says D'Amico. "Bang" is a blend of electronics and acoustic drums, and it was Bobby who came up with the Latin beat on it. I wasn't hearing it, but my experience told me to listen to everybody in the band for ideas."

"When I send them my demos, it's all keyboards, drum machine, and guitars, and Joey has to learn what those machines are doing," says Palumbo, who's done mixing work for Yoko Ono and collaborated with the cultural icon for the 2018 single, "Hey, Mr. President." "He does this without complaining. A lot of drummers don't like to do that."

Understanding why D'Amico is so prized, we should trace the band's history back to its origins. One of D'Amico's earliest memories as a young drummer, barely big enough to reach the foot pedals, was sitting in with a local band for a cover of "Wipe Out." "Eventually in eighth grade I received a drumkit," says D'Amico. "The first one was a Ludwig, and that was close to when the Beatles came out."

"Ringo was the first real drummer to make an impression on me," D'Amico continues. "A *Hard Day's Night* came out, and I was able to see what Ringo was doing on his hi-hat. That was the first time I zoned in on the structure of a song and how he would switch from the hi-hat to the ride cymbal to transition from one section of the song to another."

D'Amico took lessons but soon ditched sheet music for playing along with his favorite records. Word got around Steubenville, Ohio, that a budding drummer was building his chops and could keep pretty good time. "Because I was the only guy who had a drumset in school, [original Crack the Sky



bassist] Joe Macre would come to the house and play rhythm guitar," says D'Amico. "But he didn't really know how to play many songs."

Soon enough, though, the boys had enough songs together to begin gigging locally, and by the end of one fateful night, they'd discovered two things: they were a solid outfit, and the bass player had failed to plug in his amp. "From then on Joe Macre decided to play bass," says D'Amico. "That's how Crack the Sky happened."

Throughout his teens, D'Amico remained open to different forms of music. "I became infatuated with the James Brown Band," he

recalls. "I saw them live when I was in high school, and what I remember most is the constant movement on the snare drum. I picked up on what they were doing—how the left hand was not stagnant."

Finding college life unfulfilling, D'Amico quit school and hooked up with Witkowski, then of the band Scheherazade and already a regional legend. "News spread through the [Ohio River] Valley of this guy who played drums but was also a great guitar player," says D'Amico, who uses Witkowski's 1969 Rogers kit when he records in Studio L. "Later, when I would sing during shows, Rick would hop back to play drums. We would switch off like that throughout the night."

After Witkowski met Palumbo in a local music store, the band solidified. "We were rehearsing in the cold cellar of Gary's Day Care center," says D'Amico. "About an hour before the rest of the band would get there, Joe Macre and I would practice. It was a team, really. [Guitarist] Jimmy [Griffiths] and

Tools of the Trade

While Joey D'Amico records on the 1969 Rogers kit that Rick Witkowski has at his West Virginia studio, he plays Gretsch drums at home and on the road. D'Amico's setup includes a mix of Sabian and Zildjian cymbals, and he uses Tama stands, an Ahead Spinal-G drum throne, and the same Ludwig Speed King pedal he's used since eighth grade.

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Joey D'Amico



Rick collaborated, and then we would try to piece it together to see what John [Palumbo] thought.”

“Mack [Macre] wanted to lock into the kick drum so much, he would lay down and put his head inside it so he could feel the rhythm,” adds Witkowski.

By the early 1970s, members of what would be Crack the Sky came to the attention of Jim Croce producers Terry Cashman (aka Dennis Minogue) and Tommy West (Thomas Picardo). The business partners failed to bite. Within a couple of years, however, the band delivered a highly polished demo that Cashman’s nephew, Terence Minogue, used to convince his uncle and West to take a second look at Crack the Sky, then-dubbed ArcAngel.

Cashman and West initially wished to sign Crack the Sky with ABC, but instead established the Lifesong Records label, which

pressed much of the band’s classic material, in 1975.

Crack the Sky roamed a broad musical spectrum, sometimes within the span of a single song, from riff-driven muso rock and string-laden art-rock to dark Americana, rock ‘n’ roll shuffling, and techno new wave, recalling the Beatles at their most meditative, King Crimson at their jazzy knottiest, and even Earth, Wind & Fire’s horn-baked soulfulness. Songs such as “Ice,” “Surf City,” “Rangers at Midnight,” “Animal Skins,” “Lighten Up McGraw,” “Safety in Numbers,” “Flashlight,” and “Nuclear Apathy” showcase how smoothly D’Amico navigated very choppy musical waters through concise rhythmic patterns, while shadowing gnarly guitar riffs with clearly defined accents and anchoring polyrhythmic patterns with a measure of funk and hard-rock spunk. “Don Puluse gave good

advice," says D'Amico, "and when I became more relaxed, I tried to do little things when I thought there were openings, but not overplay."

Airplay and a *Rolling Stone* Debut Album of the Year nod seemed to indicate greater things to come. Alas, commercial fortune didn't materialize. The label's inadequate distribution system meant that Crack the Sky records weren't always delivered to the stores in towns where radio station DJs were spinning them. When the stars aligned, though, Crack exceeded expectations. "They're like the Beatles in Baltimore," Terence Minogue said in 2017.

The rise of disco, financial spats between the band and Lifesong (the subject of the Palumbo-penned "We Want Mine"), and internal conflicts didn't help the band's stability. Palumbo exited prior to the recording of 1978's *Safety in Numbers* at Le Studio in Morin Heights, Quebec. The group recruited lead singer Gary Lee Chappell and recorded songs Palumbo wrote or cowrote anyway, including one that D'Amico took lead vocals on, "Long Nights," which resurfaced on *Crackology*.

Where it once appeared that Crack the Sky's dynamic music and dark and often quirky character-driven lyrics had bottled the zeitgeist of a turbulent and disaffected post-Watergate America, by the late 1970s the band was quickly losing whatever cultural currency it had accrued. By the early 1980s, CTS became largely a studio vehicle for Palumbo and, to a degree, Witkowski. D'Amico decided it was time to split.

"When the band broke up, Joe Macre went back to Steubenville," says D'Amico. "I was in New Jersey looking for work, and I was going to start parking cars at some country club. Right when I was going to do that, Joe called and said he had this thing going on in Ohio, the B. E. Taylor Group." D'Amico, along with Macre and Witkowski, appeared on three commercial records with Taylor, including 1983's *Love Won the Fight*, which spawned the popular lovesick anthem "Vitamin L," sung by D'Amico.

It was a surprising turn of events, considering that Taylor (who would pass away in 2016 from an inoperable brain tumor) was a brassy singer with a big, blue-eyed-soul voice. "I sang more often back in the B. E. Taylor Group days," says D'Amico. "Because I wanted to have a better view of the audience when singing, I decided to try a different angle with my drums. It seemed to work and, more importantly, Rick Witkowski thought it looked cool."

D'Amico returned to the Crack the Sky fold a couple years later, playing a series of shows at the legendary Hammerjacks club in Baltimore and contributing vocals to the albums *From the Greenhouse* and *Dog City*. When his work with the band slowed again, he joined a local band playing covers and some originals, and he continued to work occasionally with Witkowski. After a stint with Greek band Acropolis Now, which challenged the drummer through their liberal application of Eastern European tempos and rhythms, D'Amico joined Starburst, a ten-piece group with horns, touring the casino circuit. "Jobs were sometimes difficult to book," recalls D'Amico, "because a lot of venues didn't want to hire a ten-piece show band."

Though he was optimistic as a new century dawned, D'Amico discovered job opportunities were nearly nonexistent. Pulling up stakes provided fewer prospects and greater frustration. "In 2003 we came to Gettysburg, because my wife got a teaching job," D'Amico says. "It was a tough five years; I sent résumés to music stores but didn't get any calls."

Just as D'Amico was resigning himself to

a slow fade from the music business, Macre, who'd transitioned into the worlds of jingles and audio engineering/production, plucked his boyhood friend from his career quagmire and invited him to perform once again with Crack the Sky and reclaim the drum throne from John Tracey.

D'Amico subsequently recorded CTS's 2010 studio album, *Machine*, 2012's *Ostrich*, and 2015's *The Beauty of Nothing*, and he appears on the DVD *All Access*, which documents the band's 2008 appearance at RoSfest and another show in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, from later that same year. And the album *Alive and Kickin' Ass*, released in 2006, culls smokin' live performances from Cleveland and Philadelphia, expanding on and incorporating the original tracks from the 1978 Lifesong entry *Live Sky*.

D'Amico is back where so many believe he belonged in the first place—rooting CTS's busy, idiosyncratic art-rock. "I'm pretty close to the rest of the guys now," says D'Amico. "When we do rehearsals we convene in Westminster, Maryland. That's only about an hour away from me. It makes it convenient."



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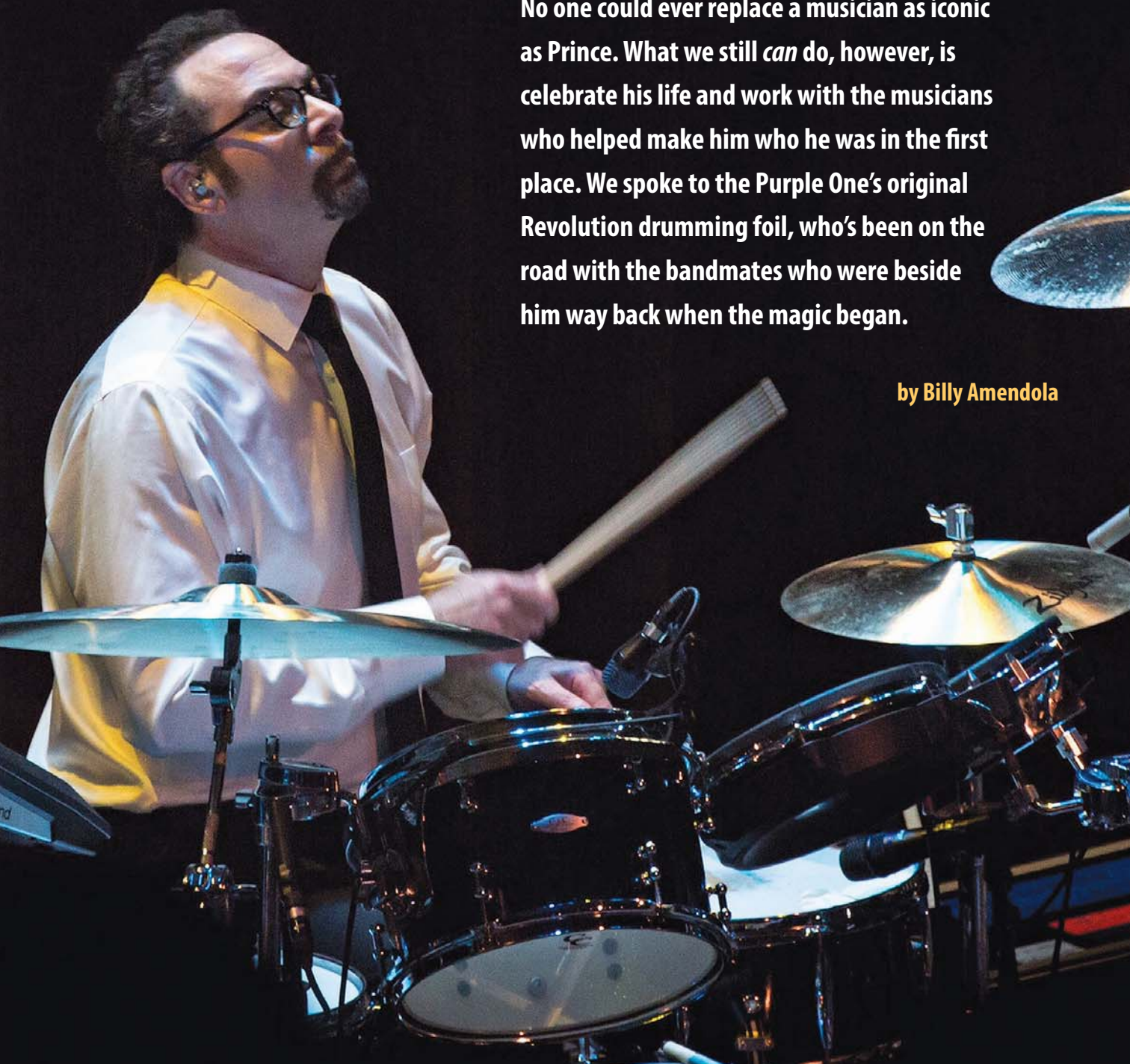
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Timeless and Authentic Bobby Z of the Revolution

No one could ever replace a musician as iconic as Prince. What we still *can* do, however, is celebrate his life and work with the musicians who helped make him who he was in the first place. We spoke to the Purple One's original Revolution drumming foil, who's been on the road with the bandmates who were beside him way back when the magic began.

by Billy Amendola





John Collins

As a member of the Revolution, Bobby Z accompanied Prince on his rise to fame between 1978 and 1986. Though the singer and multi-instrumentalist recorded his first several albums almost solely on his own, his 1981 album, *Controversy*, featured Z on one track, and on '84's blockbuster, *Purple Rain*, Z appeared on half the album. Perhaps more importantly, though, Z and his bandmates in the Revolution helped establish the sound that defined Prince's famous live show, which, like his albums, increasingly featured electronic drums. Z's hybrid drumkit utilized the then-brand-new technology, helping move it forward in drummers' minds as a valid tool.

Back in the studio, Bobby Z continued to share the drum seat with Prince on 1985's *Around the World in a Day* and '86's *Parade*, but when guitarist Wendy Melvoin and keyboardist Lisa Coleman left the Revolution at the end of the *Parade* tour to go out on their own, the group disbanded, and Prince replaced Z on drums with Sheila E.

Z didn't sit still, though, and went on to add support to Wendy & Lisa's self-titled 1987 debut album, coproduce tracks on Culture Club singer Boy George's since-deleted 1988 album, *Tense Nervous Headache* (tracks are currently available on the album *High Hat*), and, in 1989, release his own, self-titled album. "I'm proud of the projects I worked on in my role behind the desk," Z says today. "I'm very lucky to have produced with some extremely talented people. Growing up in our household, my mother encouraged our creativity. We were the first by far in our area to have music and band practice in our basement. I grew up as a studio rat as well as a live drummer, and I'm grateful to have had a lot of time in both situations."

Bobby Z was born Robert Rivkin on January 9, 1956, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. At the age of six he started taking an interest in music, and by the time he was in junior high school he'd formed a band and got his first taste of touring. Z met Prince in the late '70s while working for Owen Husney, who is often given credit for having discovered Prince. Bobby's stage name came from the nickname that his grandfather would call him, "Butzie." "I was Butzie to my Grandpa Charlie the day I was born," says the drummer. "He was my buddy. I was four years old when he passed, and I was crushed. But from then on my brothers David and Steve shortened Butzie to just Z. Prince wanted people to connect us, so he gave David the Z moniker as well."

In early 2010, Bobby suffered a near-fatal heart attack. After recovering, he set up a charity called My Purple Heart to raise public awareness of heart attack warning signs and risk factors, as well as raise funds for research. In 2011, he celebrated the one-year anniversary of surviving his heart attack with a reunion performance with the Revolution at the popular Minneapolis club First Avenue. The show, which featured Revolution members Melvoin, Coleman, bassist Brown Mark, keyboardist Dr. Fink, guitarist Dez Dickerson, and sax player Eric Leeds, was called "Benefit 2 Celebrate Life!" Beyond raising needed funds, it represented the first time the Revolution had played together since 2003.

The last time Bobby would perform with Prince was ten years later, when he joined his old boss on stage for "Purple Rain" during the last two shows of the 3rdeyegirl tour. Reflecting back, Bobby says of the performances (which happened on the same night), "It was a thrill to be back onstage with Prince." Alas, it was never to be again, as Prince unexpectedly died in April 2016 of an accidental opioid overdose. Surviving Revolution members responded by regrouping, and they have been performing regularly since.

When not on tour, Bobby Z hosts a radio show in Minneapolis on the Current 89.3 FM and their newly launched web radio channel, the Purple Current. We caught up with him while the Revolution was in New York for two shows at Sony Hall. Original band members Wendy Melvoin, Lisa Coleman, Brown Mark, Dr. Fink, and Bobby—along with Mint Condition's Stokley on vocals—funked up the sold-out crowd and had everyone dancing and singing along to every song from the get-go. This was not a tribute band by any means. It was the real deal, and you could truly hear the influence they had on the superstar's early sound. The Revolution was, and remains, timeless and authentic.

MD: First things first—how are you feeling?

Bobby: I'm feeling really good! I'm very lucky to have been at the right place and the right time to have amazing doctors save my life twice. I had a serious artery blockage and a subsequent heart attack almost eight years ago, and then

complications two years afterwards, with an incident with a stent. Even though my heart has some damaged areas, with the right meds and cardiac rehab, as they say on TV, you can live longer and stay out of the hospital. We're all very fortunate to benefit from the advances of

modern medicine.

MD: Let's go back to the beginning. What got you interested in music and drums?

Bobby: I grew up watching my brother David's band in the basement. The drummer, John Hughes, was a fantastic rudimentary player. He had a huge impact on me. His drums were set up most days in the basement, and I was trying to play on those before I could even reach the pedals. Then along came Ringo on *Ed Sullivan* and, *poof*, at seven years old I was officially a drummer!

MD: Today your brother David is a very talented and successful producer, engineer, mixer, and writer. Besides his longstanding work with Prince, he's worked with Billy Idol, Buddy Guy, Neneh Cherry, A-ha, and Fine Young Cannibals, and he was a member of Lipps Inc., who had a huge hit with "Funkytown."

Bobby: He did well! David was the godfather of "the Minneapolis sound." He taught us and Prince how to make records. He has an instinctive record sense. He made us all better players and producers. Both my brothers are amazing talents. My bother Steve is an Academy Award-nominated film editor for *Avatar*.

MD: How did you hook up with Prince and then go on to be a member of his band?

Bobby: I met Prince at Moon Sound studios during the making of his first demo. I worked for Owen Husney, Prince's manager at the time, as a delivery runner for his advertising firm. So my job became basically to drive him around, and we became friends. Then we started to jam. I auditioned against every drummer in Minneapolis twice, and then got the job and became his drummer for eleven years. Our friendship lasted until the very end.

MD: What did you learn from Prince?

Bobby: He knew pretty much everything there is to know about performing, no matter the instrument. His musical discipline of time and space was impeccable. He was one of the greatest masters of music of all time.

MD: Of all the classic Prince tracks, do you have any favorites?

Bobby: My proudest achievement in drumming for him is "Purple Rain." The live track was recorded by my brother David

and was done in one of the first mobile studio trucks, which was parked right outside of the First Avenue club on the night of August 3, 1983. We played the song for only a week or so, and it had been arranged by the band. It truly was a unique experience, with Prince letting go of a song completely to the band. With a few minor fixes, the live version of "Purple Rain" is what you see in the movie and hear on the soundtrack. I swear that song is alive every time we play it—always fluid, emotional, and otherworldly.

MD: Did you and Prince play together on recordings?

Bobby: When I think of Prince and all the percussion and drums he and I did, it really boggles my mind. He was a very proficient drummer, especially in the studio. The studio was a blank canvas for Prince, and the drums were no exception. There were no rules for how to record drums, but the beat was always front and center. A lot of the drum tracks were recorded in a very unorthodox way. And of course the super advantage he had over all of the musicians that played for him was that he heard it all in his head and could play your part. Having said that, he loved to be challenged—but only if your ideas were good!

MD: Prince always had amazing musicians. The late John Blackwell idolized you. Did you know John?

Bobby: I did know him. He was so gracious and so gifted as a drummer. I was very lucky to have spent time hanging out with John at Paisley Park and watch him in action at rehearsals with Prince. His respect was an honor and a gift to me. Not everybody has humility and talent. He is truly missed.

MD: In those early days, electronics were fairly new. How did you get into playing along to sequences and programmed drums?

Bobby: Prince had one of the first Linn LM-1 drum machines. The song "Private Joy" [from *Controversy*] is the first time you hear it on record. I think drum machines in general scared all drummers back then, but Prince's manager at the time, Steve Fagnoli, gave me some advice. He said, "It's here, so learn how to use it." It was very good advice.

At the onset there was no technology available to support Prince's desire to have

Bobby Z on His Purple Heart Foundation

I formed my Purple Heart Foundation in partnership with the American Heart Association after my recovery. We did amazing benefit shows for three years in a row all at First Avenue. We did the first one with the Revolution, with Prince's blessing. The second show was with actor and singer Maya Rudolph, [pre-Revolution bassist] André Cymone, and Dez Dickerson. And the third show was with [Prince singer] Apollonia and Brian Setzer. We actually saved lives with these amazing shows by showing PSAs from the AHA that showed people how to recognize the signs of a heart attack, and how to do hand CPR to the beat of the Bee Gees' "Stayin' Alive." I know it sounds crazy, but that is the BPM at which you need to do a chest pump on an attack victim's chest while you wait for first responders to arrive. We received amazing testimonial letters that said things like, "You helped my father," and, "You saved my uncle." For more information, your readers should visit the American Heart Association at heart.org. They do amazing work in the fight against heart disease.

a drum machine that was playable via pads. We used the outputs from the LM-1 to trigger small acoustic guitar pickups and mics placed inside the snare. Don Batts, our genius tech, had created an interface that made Simmons pads trigger the Linn sounds. It was quite unpredictable and would often double trigger. I remember praying on live TV during the American Music Awards performance of "Purple Rain" that it would work. It did, luckily, but technology quickly caught up, and playable pads become popular.

Prince's real precision innovation in the studio was the Pearl Syncussion pads and sounds. On our tour now I use samples of those sounds to create the authentic electronic cymbals, toms, and bombs that are such a big part of our music.

MD: What made you and the band decide to go out on tour?

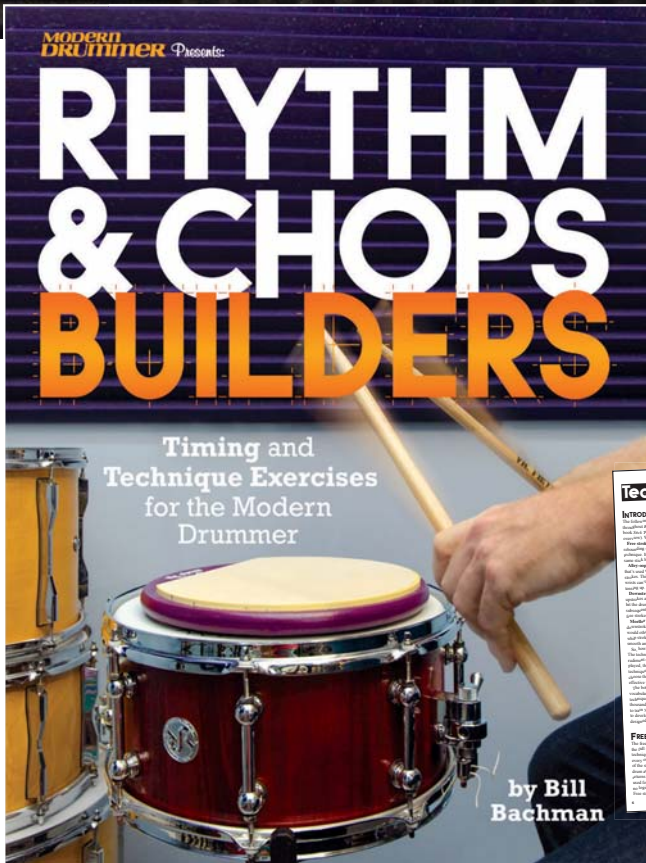
Bobby: It's only been two years now since Prince passed. The band is just enjoying sharing his music with his fans, many of whom are still grieving. We're finding out that this music means so much to so many people. It's lifecycle music. I want to thank all the fans for their support of the band and me. We're all still in shock from Prince's passing. We found that playing his music is a happiness factory. At this point in our lives it feels like it's a gift that he left for us, not to regain past glories, but to spread something that is so elusive in our time now...coming together for him.

Tools of the Trade

Back in the day, Bobby Z played a Ludwig kit with Black Simmons SDSV pads, a Simmons SDSV module, a Linn LM-1 drum machine, two black Pearl Syncussion pads, two Pearl Syncussion modules, and Zildjian cymbals (14" hi-hats, 16" and 18" crashes, 20" ride). Today he plays DW drums, and all loops and sounds are fired from a Roland SPD-SX multipad. Like his original Ludwig kit, Bobby's current DW features a 14" tom, an 18" floor tom, and a 22" bass drum. He still plays Zildjian cymbals.



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10 Reasons to Love Pete Thomas

By Patrick Berkery

We could stick to Elvis Costello and the Attractions/Imposters stuff and still fill half this issue with reasons to love Pete Thomas. But we're digging deeper, because there's much to love about the work Thomas has done apart from Costello as well.

As highlight-heavy as Thomas's forty-year-plus tenure with Costello

has been—filled with frantic pub rock, classic pop and soul, an album with New Orleans legend Allen Toussaint, and one covering country royalty—it's scratching the surface. Thomas's session discography includes adventurous work with roots legends Los Lobos and Bonnie Raitt; singer-songwriters Randy Newman, Sheryl Crow, Suzanne

Vega, and the late Elliott Smith; Led Zeppelin's John Paul Jones; and dozens of records with Latin pop and rock artists that have been successful in Spanish-speaking countries.

Whittling down the list of worthy tracks to just the ten covered here was a difficult task. Getting to pick Pete's brain about these tracks felt like a reward.

"(I Don't Want to Go to) Chelsea" Elvis Costello and the Attractions (*This Year's Model*, 1978)

If there's a better four-bar drum intro than this, feel free to let us know. The *pop-pop* of Thomas's tightly tuned Supraphonic snare sets up that intro, where he delivers a half-time variation of his idol Mitch Mitchell's groove on Jimi Hendrix's "Fire." He continues that motif throughout, anchoring the dub-influenced bass line of Bruce Thomas (no relation), while occasionally slipping into double time and firing off slashing fills and accents.

"The precedent of some fancy drumming had been set," says Thomas. "Watching the Detectives' [from Costello's debut album, with Steve Goulding on drums] had that drum intro. 'Chelsea' is me saying, 'If Elvis Costello is going to have fancy drum intros, I'm doing one.' It was one of the first few takes. If you really listen to it, I'm trying out stuff all the way through."

"Lipstick Vogue" (*This Year's Model*)

Another killer intro here, this one a frenzied snare-and-tom combination that slides neatly into tightly coiled double time. That intro pattern returns between verses slightly faster, before a spooky breakdown gives way to a twelve-bar Thomas solo that sounds like a punk drummer interpreting "Sing, Sing, Sing." It's so totally over the top, but totally together.

"The intro bit just came out of the air," Thomas shares, "and Elvis probably jumped on it—'That's great, do that!' That's the thing with Elvis: If there's drumming all over it—if it's good—he'll be on it. He's not just going to say, 'Shut up, I need more room to sing.' There's probably been times where he's said something *like* that. But he wouldn't ever stifle creativity."

"(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love, and Understanding" Elvis Costello and the Attractions (*Armed Forces*, 1979)

A beautiful thing happens on this song, common to many early Attractions songs. It's that *feeling* that the track could derail, when in reality Thomas has everything locked down. He does a lot of playing here without overplaying, carefully tucking extended snare licks, 'round-the-kit fills, and syncopated turnarounds into just the right spots. Like most Attractions songs from that era, this was cut live, full-band and lead vocal. That's probably why so many years later, it still sounds so energized and inspired. "All I had to do was rock it out," says Thomas. "It was one of those takes where we just hit it. You know how rarely that happens. You have to be thankful for the rest of your life that at that one moment, everybody nailed it, including the vocal!"

"New Lace Sleeves" Elvis Costello and the Attractions (*Trust*, 1981)

Another kind of mesmerizing drum intro here: a jazzy hi-hat pattern bookended by a kick on the 1 and a snare hit on the "&" of 4; a relatively fancy beat for Thomas that dances around Costello's curvy melody. It's also a different kind of Attractions sound overall, featuring lots of space for Thomas to sink into with a groove he says is a nod to Stevie Wonder's "Superstition." The inspiration to the intro/verse groove is less obvious. "[Producer] Nick Lowe was standing by the drums while we were trying things out and said, 'What about something like [a cover of the Rolling Stones'] 'Satisfaction'—that Devo thing. And I probably did something, and Nick said, 'Do the snare there, the hi-hat there...,' and then I had to make sense of it. It's 'Satisfaction' by Devo into 'Superstition,' and it doesn't sound anything like either."

“Dream in Blue” Los Lobos (*Kiko*, 1992)

Thomas has a way of fitting into other artists’ worlds while still sounding very much like the drummer you know and love from the Costello records: his skittering snare part on this track from 1992’s *Kiko* album (the first of several he did with Los Lobos) has a funky feel, though you don’t get the feeling he’s trying to *make* it funky, not even when he downshifts into half-time. It’s just pure Pete.

“That was a beat called the ‘ragamuffin beat,’ which is like an English reggae beat. Colin Fahey, who was the engineer on [Costello’s 1986 album] *Blood & Chocolate*, taught me it. I suggested the beat, and they actually gave me a writing credit. They gave me 10 percent, which is amazing.”

“The Great Nations of Europe”

Randy Newman (*Bad Love*, 1999)

Thomas had logged many miles with one great lyricist (Costello) when Randy Newman came calling in 1999 with this theatrical composition. Thomas is in near-constant motion throughout, segueing from a marching pattern to half-time to double-time and back again. With skillful, orchestral touches, he helps to form the score for Newman’s black-comedy history lesson with strings, horns, woodwinds, and bass. “I got a demo of him playing it pretty loose,” Thomas recalls. “I just mapped it all out. Then I went in the studio with him and the bass player and we just laid it down, very sparse. Then he orchestrates it to the things you do on the drums. It’s a fond memory. And I actually learned some stuff as well! It was a good history lesson.”

“Junk Bond Trader” Elliott Smith (*Figure 8*, 2000)

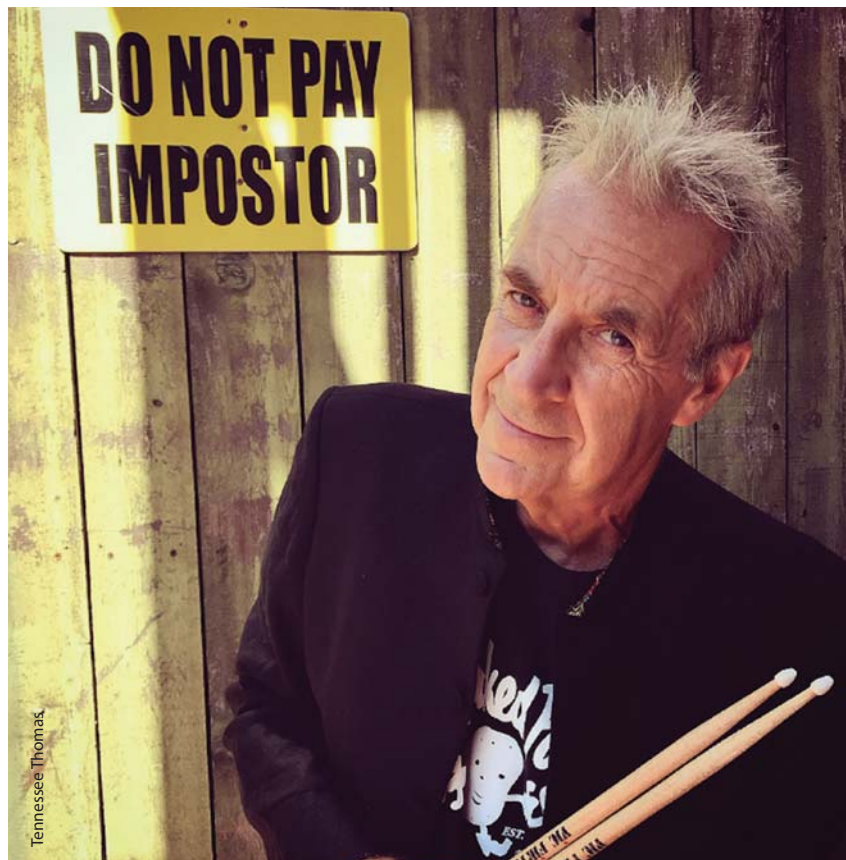
Smith usually operated as a one-man band in the studio, but producers Tom Rothrock and Rob Schnapf asked Thomas to bolster a few songs on the *Figure 8* album, including this down-tempo groover. Overdubbing to a track already cut with Smith on drums, Thomas keeps everything nice and tight behind the fluctuating cadence of Smith’s melody. His pocket is rock solid, and creative sonic touches like lightly playing the resonant side of the snare in the bridge add dynamics to the track. “I guess they felt that the drums could be better or different or something,” Thomas surmises. “So I got a call and went down to Sunset Sound. I think Elliott showed me roughly what he had in mind. And they just set me up on my own in the room. He was sort of a dark guy; everyone was sort of walking on eggshells around him. But I found him to be really nice.”

“Bedlam” Elvis Costello and the Imposters (*The Delivery Man*, 2004)

Thomas has all limbs working overtime here, as his left foot taps out splashy 8th notes on the hi-hats while his right foot lays down steady 8ths on the kick to anchor a paradiddle-type pattern between the floor tom and snare. It’s a busy bit of drumming that blends perfectly with the chaotic, Arabic-tinged swirls of noise on this track about the Middle East circa the Iraq War. Thomas: “My idea with the drum part was to make it sound like one of those Arab orchestras, with eight drummers doing all that flamming. I would have loved it if we could have gotten some of those guys playing dumbek and tar drums on that track.”

“Vámonos” La Santa Cecilia (*Buenaventura*, 2016)

Some of Thomas’s most fascinating work has taken place in the rock/pop en Español world. He falls right in the pocket on this track with the genre-bending Mexican-American band La Santa Cecilia, toggling between a bright and peppy 4/4, a choppy reggae feel that sounds like something from the early Costello playbook, and solid half-time. Thomas proves here that great “song drumming” is universally applicable. “It’s not so much that I’m really good at Latin drumming,” he insists. “It’s more like, ‘Get this English guy. He’ll put a bit of a twist on it. It’ll sound simpler.’ The way I play it might be a slightly different groove, might not be so ahead of the beat; a lot of those [Latin] guys play ahead of the beat.”



“Under Lime” Elvis Costello and the Imposters (*Look Now*, 2018)

Thomas has mastered the art of making Costello’s immaculate pop songs sound a little messy. Listen to the way he bashes the hi-hats over the pristine melody and Burt Bacharach-esque chord changes in “Under Lime.” Those sloshy hats—plus sweet sonic touches like an uncharacteristically dead and fat snare and overdubbed toms for a timpani sound—contrast beautifully with his elegant navigation of the track’s many changes. “It has those different sections, and you think of your parts,” he says. “It’s a bit like scaffolding. There’s vocals here in the verse, okay... this is the bit about a clock ticking—okay, sidestick... this is the bit where there’s going to be all these vocals—alright, sort of military drumming, toms EQ’d to sound like timpani.... There’s a lot there, but it came together pretty quick.”

Pete Thomas plays DW drums and Zildjian cymbals and uses Remo heads and Vic Firth sticks.



The Modern Drummer Guide to Reading Rhythms

Part 3: 8th Notes and 8th-Note Rests

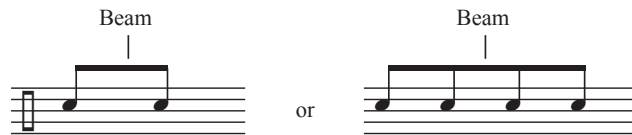
by Miguel Monroy

In the last installment of this series we explored whole-note, half-note, and quarter-note durations. We learned that in 4/4 time, a whole note lasts for four beats, a half note for two beats, and a quarter note for one beat. In this lesson we'll learn how to read 8th notes and 8th-note rests. Let's dig in!

8th notes and 8th-note rests last for one half of a quarter note or quarter-note rest. As such, you can fit two 8th notes or rests in the same amount of space as one quarter note. Likewise, you can fit a total of eight 8th notes in a measure of 4/4. 8th notes are notated with a single **flag**, as demonstrated in the following example.



If there are two or more consecutive 8th notes notated together, they are typically connected by a **beam**.



Counting 8th Notes and 8th-Note Rests

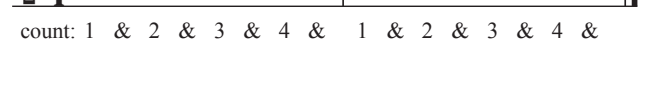
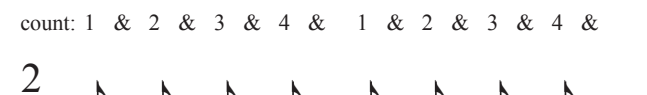
In Part 2 of this series, we counted each beat (or pulse) of 4/4 by saying, "1, 2, 3, 4." With the addition of 8th notes, we now have to **subdivide** each number, or beat, that we were counting before because there's a new note between each pulse. We do this by using the word "and," which is often written and referred to as "&" in musical notation. Our new method of counting will be, "1-&, 2-&, 3-&, 4-&." Essentially, we're dividing each pulse in half and counting the second half of each beat with "&."

Let's start out by counting out loud at a consistent tempo. Set a metronome to play quarter notes at a slow tempo, such as 60 bpm (beats per minute), and tap your foot along with each pulse. Every time you hear the metronome and tap your foot, say, "1," "2," "3," and "4" consecutively, with one count per beat before repeating back to beat 1. Directly between each count, you'll say the word "&." When your foot goes down on the beat, say the whole number. When your foot goes up, say, "&." It's important to keep all of your counting perfectly even, meaning you maintain the same spacing between each count.



Playing 8th Notes and 8th-Note Rests

After you feel comfortable counting this subdivision, it's time to start reading some preliminary 8th-note phrases. It's essential that you count out loud and use a metronome while playing these exercises to help you internalize the beat and keep you honest. Remember that 8th notes can fall on the first half, second half, or both halves of a beat.



Playing Quarter Notes, 8th Notes, and 8th-Note Rests

After you're comfortable counting and playing isolated 8th notes and 8th-note rests, combine them with the other note values that we've learned so far. In the following exercises we'll combine 8th notes and quarter notes to practice alternating between both note rates. Even when playing quarter notes, you should continue to count the 8th notes out loud ("1-&, 2-&, 3-&, 4-&") to internalize the subdivision's pulse.

10



count: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

11



count: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

12



count: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

13



count: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

14



count: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

15



count: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

16



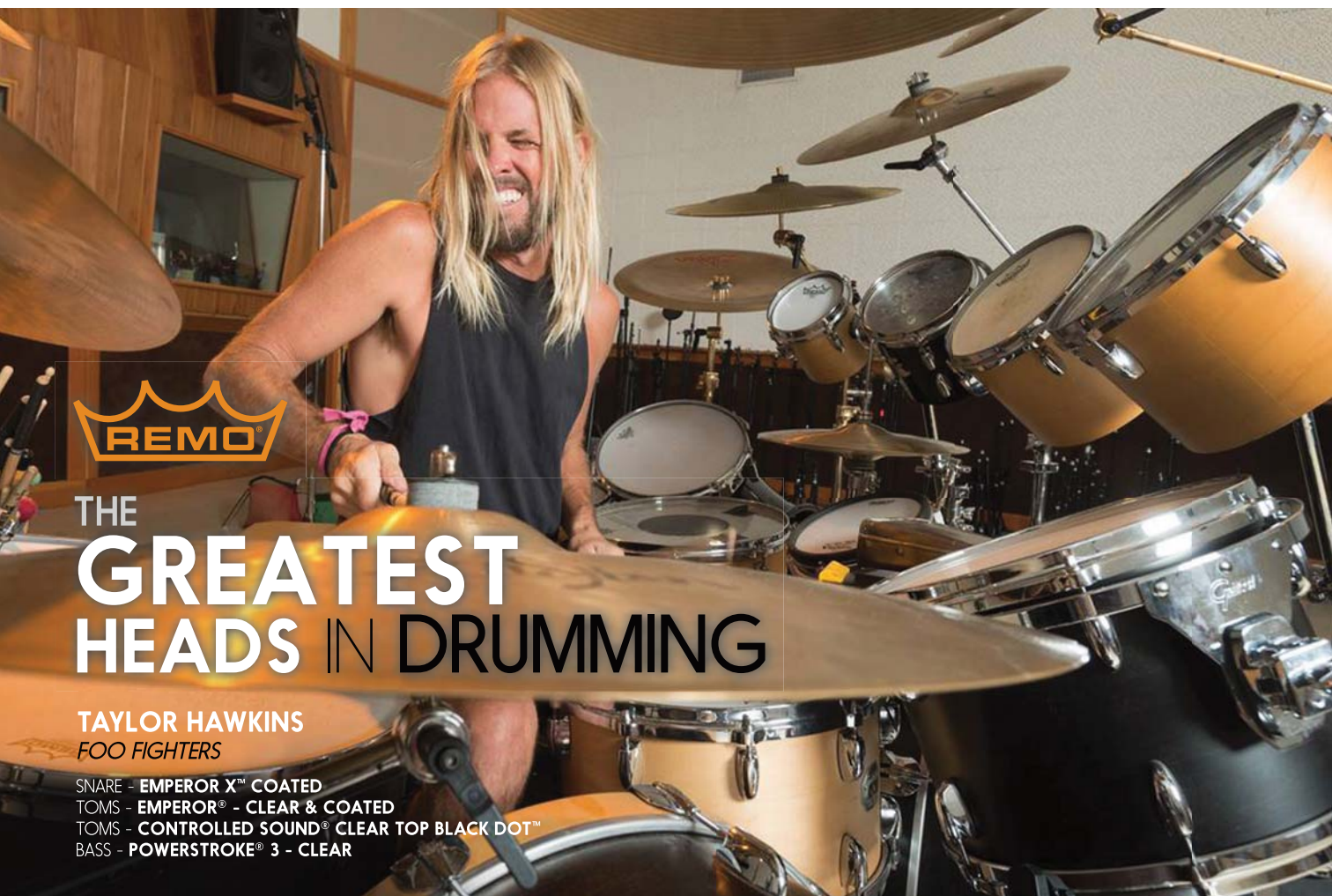
count: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

17



count: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Next time, we'll start digging into 16th notes.



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Path Orchestration

A Unique Method for Developing Fills

by Jost Nickel



This workshop explores a voicing idea that I call path orchestration, which is a method that I mainly use to come up with interesting fills.

When you play fills, the subdivision you choose is crucial and is usually the first decision you make, either consciously or not. In addition to a song's tempo, the subdivision determines whether a fill will sound slow or fast. If you want to play a fast figure at 120 bpm, you might choose a subdivision of 16th-note triplets. Likewise, if you want to play a fast fill at 80 bpm, you might choose 32nd notes instead.

The second thing to consider when playing fills is what you actually play in that subdivision. Are you using a certain figure that results in a repetitive rhythmic phrase? Again, this may or may not be a conscious decision.

This workshop explores an approach to a 16th-note fill. The three-note figure we'll use is simple, repetitive, and effective, and it consists of a right-hand stroke, a left-hand stroke, and a bass drum stroke. Because the figure is three notes long, there's an underlying polyrhythmic feel.

Let's play the figure for one measure with both hands on the snare. Play three bars of groove and then Exercise 1 as a fill.

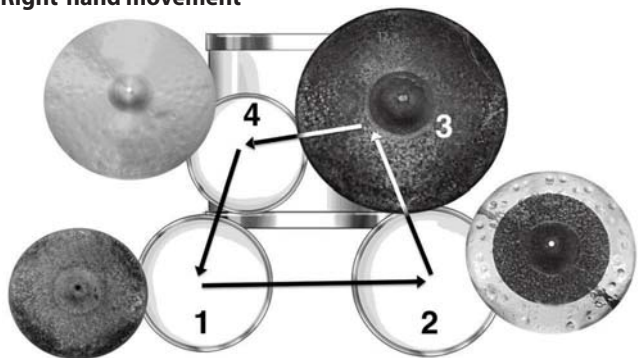
Next play the three-note phrase as a two-bar fill. This grouping continues throughout both measures. Play two bars of groove followed by Exercise 2 as your fill.

Once you're comfortable playing that figure, you can start making the fill more musical by changing its voicing or by adding dynamics.

Let's focus on orchestration. With path orchestration, you utilize a predetermined path on the drumset, and each hand plays different sets of instruments. For example, the right hand plays a path between four voices: snare, floor tom, ride, and rack tom. The left hand plays a different path between three voices: snare, hi-hat, and rack tom. The three-note grouping (right hand, left hand, and bass drum) remains unchanged.

Let's start by incorporating path orchestration with the right hand only. The left hand is left out of the following example to provide a clearer view of the right hand's path throughout the phrase.

Right-hand movement

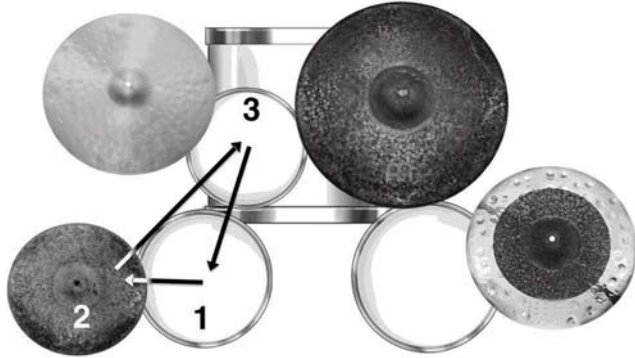


Because the right hand plays four different voices, the orchestration repeats itself after four rounds through the three-note grouping.

Here's an exercise to get you comfortable with the right hand's path. We'll play the repeated right-hand, left-hand, and right-foot phrase, and the right hand will alternate between the snare, floor tom, ride, and rack tom while the left hand stays on the snare.

Now let's orchestrate the left hand. This voicing repeats after three cycles as the left hand plays the snare, hi-hat, and rack tom.

Left-hand movement



Here's a preliminary exercise to get you comfortable with the left hand's path. Play the three-note grouping over two measures, in which the left hand alternates between snare, hi-hat, and rack tom while the right hand stays on the snare.

6

R L R L R L R L R L R

L R L R L R L R L R L

Now play both together in a two-bar fill. Try to memorize the fill and play it by heart. Let the various paths of your hands around the set really sink in. Theoretically, the orchestration repeats itself after you've played the three-note grouping twelve times. However, there's not enough room for that cycle in a two-bar fill.

Here's the full phrase.

7

R L R L R L R L R L R

L R L R L R L R L R L

Path orchestration can, of course, be transferred to other fills of your choosing. Keep in mind, though, that the concept sounds best when the hands play single strokes exclusively.

To review, remember to consider the following when playing fills:

- What subdivision should I use?
- What rhythmic concepts am I using within that subdivision?
- How can I change the sound of that fill with orchestration?
- How can I change the sound of that fill with dynamics?

Visit modern drummer.com for a video demonstration of Exercise 7 at two different tempos. And for more fill concepts and ideas, check out my new book, *Jost Nickel's Fill Book*.



Jost Nickel is a top session and touring drummer in Germany, as well as an international clinician and author who endorses Sonor, Meinl, Remo, Vic Firth, and Beyerdynamic products. For more information, visit jostnickel.com.



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Bebop Syncopation

Part 4: Tony Williams' Ride Variations

by Mike Alfieri

"There ain't but one Tony Williams when it comes to playing the drums," jazz legend Miles Davis famously said in his autobiography. "There was nobody like him before or since."

Williams was a prodigy, coming to prominence with Davis at the age of seventeen. Miles hired Williams after hearing him play around Boston with saxophonists Sam Rivers and Jackie McLean. The drummer's approach to the instrument combined visceral expression with virtuosic technique. The momentum of his 8th notes propelled the music in previously unheard ways, and his almost straight but intensely swinging ride playing inspired generations of drummers that followed, including the jazz and funk drumming great Mike Clark, who was featured in the December 2018 issue of *Modern Drummer*. Clark spoke extensively about Williams' drum sound in an interview with the Snapshots Music and Arts Foundation. (Search "Mike Clark: Tony Williams Interview.")

Williams' playing with Miles Davis on recordings such as 1963's *Seven Steps to Heaven* and 1965's *E.S.P.* is strongly rooted in the bebop language. But Tony added his own inspired twists and turns to the vocabulary; at a Zildjian Day clinic from 1985 (also on YouTube), he described his own approach as a combination of Philly Joe Jones' animation and creativity, Art Blakey's drive, and Max Roach's technique and melodicism.

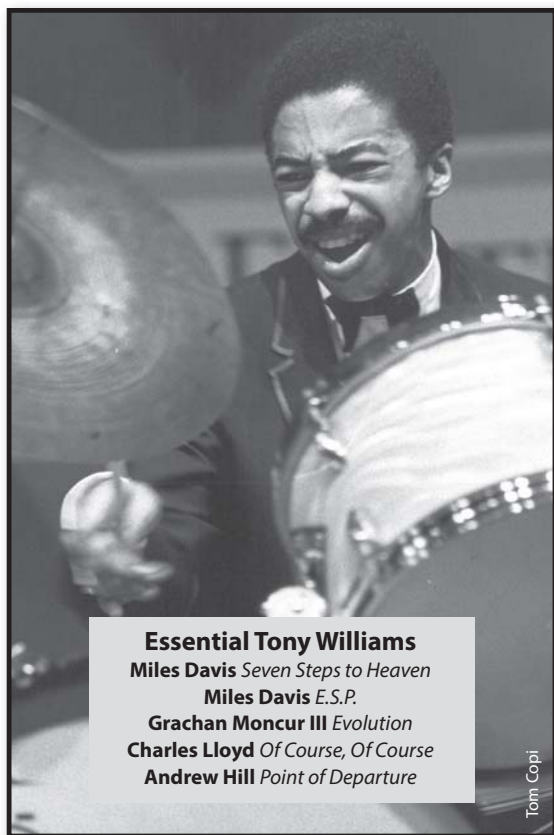
In this lesson we'll explore some of Williams' early ride patterns while interpreting single-voice rhythmic notation from the great Ted Reed book, *Syncopation*. When dissecting these early recordings, I've found that Williams transferred the typical jazz ride pattern's skip notes on the "&" of beats 2 and 4 to different parts of the measure. Practicing this will develop your ride cymbal control while also strengthening your four-way coordination.

Exercise 1 demonstrates the first line of page 38 in *Syncopation*. The examples in this lesson focus on interpreting this single-voice rhythm on the drumset. Once you're comfortable with each variation, practice reading the entirety of page 38, as well as other rhythmic literature, using these interpretations.



Play the written 8th notes on the snare drum, the quarter notes on the bass drum, and the hi-hat foot on beats 2 and 4. Keep in mind that all the embellishments Tony played propelled the time. Even at the fastest tempos, Williams kept everything he played articulate and clear, an approach he picked up from the great jazz drummer and educator Alan Dawson. For more variations that are inspired by Tony's style, try playing the hi-hat foot on all four quarter notes. Also try voicing some of the 8th notes on other drums.

Here are the ride pattern variations combined with the orchestrated *Syncopation* pattern from Exercise 1. Once you can play these comfortably, use each ride pattern as an ostinato, and practice reading through the entirety of page 38 and beyond.



Essential Tony Williams
Miles Davis *Seven Steps to Heaven*
Miles Davis *E.S.P.*
Grachan Moncur III *Evolution*
Charles Lloyd *Of Course, Of Course*
Andrew Hill *Point of Departure*

Tom Copi



Exercise 6 implies a polyrhythmic phrase, which Williams also often employed. To make this fit, try to imagine that you're superimposing measures of 3/4 over the four-beat phrases. The ride pattern resets, landing on the downbeat every three measures. Quarter notes on the hi-hat foot will help keep the pulse grounded.



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 information, visit mikealfieri.net.



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Reggae 101: The Steppers Beat

Exploring One of the Genre's Essential Grooves

by Tommy Benedetti

The steppers beat is one of the bedrock grooves in roots reggae drumming. In fact, the steppers, rockers, and one-drop beats comprise the very foundation of roots reggae music's golden age, which spans roughly between 1975 and 1985. In this column we're going to focus on one aspect of steppers that can really bring the groove to life: the rim click.

First let's talk about the other two pieces of the steppers beat, the bass drum and hi-hat. Steppers rhythms are also referred to as four-on-the-floor patterns, which are grooves in which the bass drum plays solid, driving quarter notes on each beat. While the hi-hat pattern can vary, we're going to stick with a straight 8th-note pattern so that we can concentrate on getting creative with the rim click.

As you get comfortable with these exercises, feel free to spice them up by simply adding a couple 16th notes to the end of beat 1 on the hi-hat or by throwing in an occasional 8th note on the bass drum in between the four-on-the-floor pattern. One of the things that I love most about the steppers beat is its tough, militant feel. And with the pulsating bass drum, you can create some very cool interplay between the kick and the rim click.

We'll start with a pretty standard pattern that drops the rim click on beat 3 of each measure, but throws in a couple of 8th notes to give it a push-pull effect. The bass drum is pushing, but the 8th notes on the "&" of beat 4 in measure 1 and beat 1 in measure 2 give it some of the interplay that I referred to previously.



This next example explores a great groove inspired by one of the steppers masters, Sly Dunbar. His sound and precision represent the hallmarks of this style of drumming. This rim click pattern plays a 3:2 clave with a slight variation on the last note. In a traditional 3:2 son clave pattern, the last note would fall on beat 3 of the second measure. This pattern moves the last note to the "&" of beat 3, giving it kind of a cyclical feel. You can hear Sly play this beat on the Black Uhuru tune "Plastic Smile," starting around the 0:20 mark.



This next pattern builds on Exercise 1 by adding 8th notes on the "&" of beat 3 in both measures. Again, notice the interesting combinations created between the rim click and bass drum by simply adding a few 8th notes.



For this next example we'll drop some 16th notes into the mix in the first measure. These figures give this groove a different flavor. I learned this pattern from a rare recording of Liberation Group's song "Namibia," which can be found on the compilations *Studio One Scorcher* and *Studio One Muzik City*. Liberation Group was one of the names used for the house band of Studio One, a prominent reggae record label and studio in Kingston, Jamaica.

It's very important to keep the 8th notes on the hi-hat nice and steady while the rim click pattern weaves between them. This beat's circular African drumming vibe is a lot of fun to play.



In the first four examples, the rim click pattern unfolded over two measures. In the next two grooves, we're going to cut its length in half so that the entire pattern will be one measure long. These shorter phrases obviously have fewer notes, so you can trance out on them more easily.



This next pattern incorporates the 16th-note figure that we played in Exercise 4. You might recognize this rim click pattern as a 2:3 son clave, which works well in this context.



I play these last two examples in the tune "Hard Man Fe Dead" from the album *Fireflies*, the most recent release by my band John Brown's Body. This track is a good example of an up-tempo steppers beat. The majority of the tune features a two-bar pattern. What I really like about this beat is the way the rim click pattern syncs up with the rhythm of the lead vocals in the chorus. Little subtleties like this are important in reggae drumming and can add a unique element to a song. (140 bpm.)



I play this final example during the song's outro; it gives it a double-time feel that sends the tune out on a high note with an extra shot of energy. This is a repetitive two-beat pattern, but I'm writing it out as a one-bar pattern for consistency. Start slowly on this one, and work it up to speed while keeping the 16th notes crisp.



These examples represent a variety of approaches to the steppers beat. They're practical, and most importantly, a lot of fun to play. Once you're comfortable with these, create your own patterns of varying lengths. Another idea is to take one or two of the notes in these patterns and move the rim click to a tom or the snare, or move the hi-hat to the ride cymbal. There are so many rhythmic possibilities you can use to create a memorable beat using the rim click over the groove's signature, driving bass drum pattern. Step it up, and have fun!

Essential Steppers Beats

Black Uhuru "Plastic Smile" (Sly Dunbar)

Keith Hudson "Rasta Country" (Eric "Fish" Clarke)

Sugar Minott "Mr. Fisherman" (Sly Dunbar)

Bob Marley and the Wailers "Exodus" (Carlton "Carly" Barrett)

Tapper Zukie "M.P.L.A." (Sly Dunbar)



Tobin Voggeser

Tommy Benedetti is a Boston-based drummer and one of the founding members of the reggae band John Brown's Body. He has recorded eleven records and toured internationally with JBB since 1998. Tommy also performs regularly throughout New England with Dub Apocalypse and Organically Good Trio. He endorses Walberg & Auge, Vater, and Evans products.



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Musical Palindromes

A Twisted Rhythmic Challenge

by Aaron Edgar



Palindromes are words, phrases, or sequences that read the same backward as they do forward. They can be numbers (12321), letters (rotator), or sentences (Go hang a salami; I'm a lasagna hog!). Palindromes have even shown up in album titles, such as Miles Davis's *Live-Evil*. We can mirror rhythmic patterns on the drums just as easily as letters and numbers, and in this lesson we'll apply this concept to the drumset.

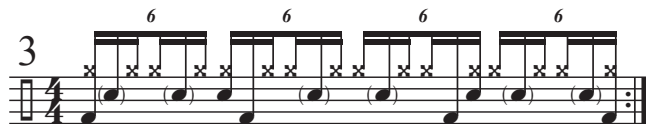
Let's start with a simple 16th-note groove in the first two beats of a 4/4 measure. Once we get to beat 3, we'll copy our initial counts of "1-e-&-a, 2-e-&-a" in reverse order: "a & e 2, a & e 1." By doing this, the original snare accent from beat 2 won't fall on beat 4, where it normally sits; instead it will be one 16th note earlier, on the "a" of beat 3.



Single-stroke stickings become interesting when we start mirroring them, and the effect is especially apparent if we utilize two sound sources. Exercise 2 demonstrates this voicing between a cymbal stack or ride and the hi-hat.



Shuffled ride patterns are naturally palindromic. Applying this idea to a shuffle groove results in a unique, mirrored second half without altering the cymbal pattern.



This concept becomes even more intriguing when we start experimenting with different subdivisions. In Exercise 4, double strokes twist their way through mirrored quintuplets and 16th notes.



So far we've explored rhythms in which the center notes are doubled, like in the palindrome "doom mood." By applying this concept to odd 16th-note meters, we can start to find rhythms that reverse from a single center point, like in the palindrome "deified."

Let's start in 15/16, which our palindromic shuffle can fit into evenly. Exercise 5 explores this with a single snare accent in the middle of the measure.



We often naturally accent the first note of a shuffled ride pattern. Exercise 6 moves the previous pattern to the ride, and we'll voice that accent on the ride bell in the first half of the measure. In the second half of the pattern, the accent shifts to the second note of the shuffle.



We can also incorporate flams into our rhythmic palindromes. To start, we'll play Exercise 1 and replace the snare accent on beat 2 with a flam. On beat 2, our right hand will come off the hi-hats or cymbal stack to precede the snare accent, as usual. However in reverse, on the "a" of beat 3, our grace note will fall subtly *after* the accent. This may take time to get used to, but the effect that's produced is unique and interesting. Positioning will make or break the inverted flam, so pay attention to where your arms are located while playing.



Linear patterns also work well as palindromes. The first linear beat I ever learned was from the I Mother Earth song "Used to Be Alright." In Exercise 8, I've started with the second half of the verse groove, which drummer Christian Tanna plays at 0:26. The only difference here from the main groove of that song is that your right hand plays on the "&" of each beat and alternates between the ride cymbal and the rim of a drum. Be careful in bar 2, as this comfortable offbeat motif shifts to the "e" of each beat.



As we discovered earlier, palindromic rhythms take on a unique flavor when we start to mix up the subdivisions. Our pattern from Exercise 8 has twenty-six notes, so let's try

reinterpreting that as four quintuplets and a sextuplet. The difference between those two subdivisions is subtle, so spend time practicing the base rhythm with a metronome before trying to tackle this beat.

Here's the base rhythm.



And here's the full pattern.



The pattern within the quintuplet sequence flows in such a unique way that it stands alone quite well as an isolated palindrome.



One thing that translates a little less intuitively is the idea of applying sentence palindromes to rhythm. For example, "A man, a plan, a canal—Panama!" If we build rhythms while only worrying about the order of the notes, we can create phrases that are less obvious but still rhythmically unique.

To do this effectively, we need a rhythm that's broken up with little spaces between groups of notes. The song "Van Halien" from my band, Third Ion, is written this way using a phrase made from the following groups of notes, each separated by a single rest: 1, 2, 3, 2, 5, 2. The song is written in quintuplets, but at the 0:48 mark it modulates for a few passes into 16th notes in 21/16. This is the version of the rhythm we're going to experiment with.



Because we're only playing fifteen of the twenty-one possible notes in that measure, we can apply our beat from Exercise 5 to this new rhythm perfectly. Within this rhythmic framework, trading a couple of the ghost notes for backbeats and moving the original snare to the floor tom will round out the beat in an interesting way.



Finally, since every one of the left-hand notes from Exercise 13 plays on the "&" of each beat, it would be criminal to not cut this down to an even 5/4 and turn all of those notes into backbeats.



In the same way that writers use tools such as haiku, iambic pentameter, and palindromes to aid their creativity and expression, we can do the same with music. Have fun!



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.



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Warm-Ups and Mobility Guidance

Part 2: Hands

by Brandon Green

What's the most effective way to warm up your hands? Let's address this question from the perspective of biomechanics. The potentiation exercises we're going to discuss will be performed as isometrics. While there are more advanced and efficient methods to activate your muscles, performing controlled isometric exercises is the safest and easiest way to get started.

As we discussed last month, isometric warm-ups are intended to elicit a post-activation potentiation (PAP) response, which is often called "muscle memory" or, more accurately, "motor-control memory."

What Is an Isometric?

An isometric is a form of resistance exercise that generates no change in position. Imagine pushing into a wall. The wall will not move, but if you push with more force, your body will contract harder in response. This is based on Newton's third law of reaction forces, which states, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."

Isometrics are a great place to begin potentiation exercises because it's unlikely that you will injure yourself performing an isometric—as long as you stay within the guidelines below.

1. Stay within your active range of motion. Make sure that you're controlling the motion to achieve each position and not forcing yourself into an extreme position.

2. Avoid pain. If you experience some pain near the end of your range of motion, avoid going that far. Back off into a position that doesn't hurt. Pushing into pain will only cause more pain.

3. Avoid fatigue. Remember that these are warm-up exercises. As soon as a warm-up becomes physically challenging, you're entering into the realm of resistance exercise. Fatiguing your muscles during a warm-up will not help increase force production.

4. Feel the muscles that you want to feel. To make your warm-up efficient, focus your attention on the movements of the muscles being used.

5. Contract the muscles being used as hard as you possibly can. Try to contract your muscles as if you're a bodybuilder flexing on stage. This high level of contraction will help increase your awareness of the muscles being used for each exercise. The more awareness you have, the faster and more readily you can prepare your body for an optimal performance.

Internal Components

To warm up the hands, we are going to focus on the wrist, finger extensors and flexors, and the radioulnar supinators and pronators.

Isometrics for PAP

To help you produce the most amount of torque (force in a rotary environment), use one or both of your drumsticks to perform the following exercises.

Radioulnar supination from a 90-degree elbow position

Turn your hand outward to meet a barrier. Push into the end of your range of motion to create a contraction, and hold for three to five seconds. Repeat three to five times.



Radioulnar pronation from a 90-degree elbow position

Turn your hand inward to meet a barrier. Push into the end of your range of motion to create a contraction, and hold for three to five seconds. Repeat three to five times.



Palm-down wrist extension

Extend your wrist to meet a barrier. Push into the end of your range of motion to create a contraction, and hold for three to five seconds. Repeat three to five times.



Palm-down wrist flexion

Flex your wrist to meet a barrier. Push into the end of your range of motion to create a contraction, and hold for three to five seconds. Repeat three to five times.



I've been asked if it's a good idea to play through rudiments to warm up the hands. I encourage that completely. The most effective method I've found is to alternate between doing a series of isometric exercises (like those described previously)

and playing rudiments for two or three cycles. This ensures that you're activating all of the muscles in the hands and applying them efficiently within a skills-based environment (i.e., drumming).

Next month we'll explore ways to properly warm up the muscles in your legs. See you then.



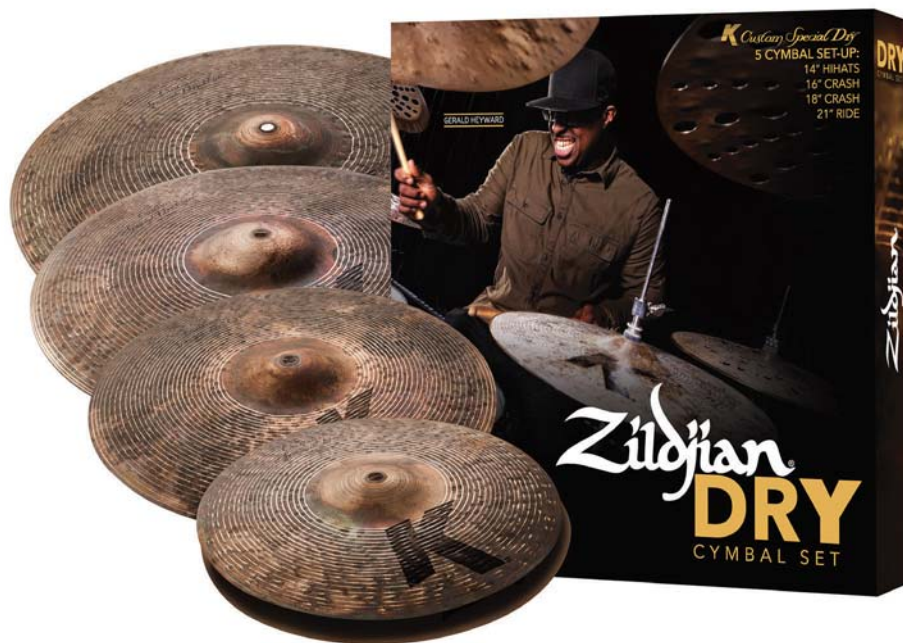
Muscle and exercise specialist **Brandon Green** is the founder of Strata Internal Performance Center, and is the owner of the drummer-centric biomechanics and fitness website drum-mechanics.com.



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zildjian.com



Los Cabos Black Widow Drumsticks

Black Widows are black-dipped red hickory drumsticks featuring a glossy finish.

loscabosdrumsticks.com

Evans Hydraulic Red Drumheads

Hydraulic Red drumheads feature a thin layer of oil sandwiched between two plies of 7-mil red film, offering maximum durability and a short, fat sound. Hydraulics are designed to be easy to tune and ideal for troublesome drums and players with limited tuning experience.

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evansdrumheads.com





Gretsch Nitron Laminates

Several durable Nitron laminates have been added to Gretsch's Renown, Catalina, and Energy series. The Catalina Club four-piece jazz configuration is now available in Blue Satin Flame, Renown kits are available in "big flake" Turquoise Sparkle and Copper Sparkle finishes, and the Energy series now includes a Ruby Sparkle option.

gretschdrums.com

Roland GO:MIXER PRO Smartphone Audio Mixer and Virtual Stage Camera App

The GO:MIXER PRO and Virtual Stage camera app offer an integrated solution to create high-quality video content with a smartphone. GO:MIXER PRO can connect and mix up to nine audio sources at once, including powered microphones, guitars, and line-level gear like keyboards and drum machines. Dedicated controls provide easy volume adjustment, and the stereo output is sent straight to your smartphone for capturing in a video or audio app. Additional features include headphone output with level control, a dedicated Loop Back panel switch, and a Center Cancel function to create karaoke-style tracks. GO:MIXER PRO doubles as a standalone, battery-powered mixer for practice and on-the-go performing.

The free Virtual Stage camera app removes the background from a performance video in real time and replaces it with movie footage or stills. Virtual Stage camera can also produce a blue/green screen background in a video for later manipulation.

roland.com



Sabian Soul Side Ride

The limited-edition 21" Soul Side ride was developed with Tower of Power's David Garibaldi. The double-hammered HH ride features a buffed, raw top and a fully lathed bottom and is said to provide the ideal amount of shimmer in the high end, a transparent wash, and a touch of warmth without losing articulation. Only 250 of these cymbals will be produced.

sabian.com

Meinl

Byzance Vintage Sand Hats

The new hand-hammered, Medium Thin 16" Byzance Vintage hi-hat features a sandblasted finish and is said to be dark and low with a dry character.

meinlcymbals.com



WristGrips Drum Accessory

WristGrips help prevent and heal tendonitis, arthritis, and carpal tunnel issues by compressing and supporting the wrist and increasing oxygen and blood flow, while allowing for a full range of motion. The low-profile, all-black design is made from 100-percent cotton, and hand washable. List price is \$19.95.

wrist-grips.com



Roland TD-1DMK V-Drums

This entry-level electronic drumset offers a variety of drum sounds, authentic feel, and access to skill-building tools with onboard coach functions and free "Melodics for V-Drums" training software. Dual-ply mesh heads for the snare and toms feature adjustable tension to provide natural rebound. The kick pad is compatible with standard single and double pedals and features a soft-rubber surface that absorbs noise from the beater impact while maintaining a familiar acoustic feel and response.

roland.com

Audio-Technica Drum Mic Bundles

The PRO-DRUM4 and PRO-DRUM7 bundles are designed for all-purpose live or studio use. The PRO-DRUM4 includes a PRO 25ax hypercardioid dynamic microphone for the kick, a PRO 63 cardioid dynamic microphone for the snare, and two PRO 23 cardioid dynamic microphones for toms. List price is \$249. The PRO-DRUM7 bundle includes a PRO 25ax, a PRO 63, two PRO 23s, and two AT2021 cardioid condenser microphones for overheads. List price is \$399.

The ATM-DRUM4 and ATM-DRUM7 bundles are geared more towards professional touring and studio drummers. The ATM-DRUM4 includes ATM250 and ATM650 hypercardioid dynamic microphones for the kick and snare and two ATM450 cardioid condenser microphones for overheads. List price is \$499. The ATM-DRUM7 bundle includes an ATM250, an ATM650, three ATM230 hypercardioid dynamic microphones for toms, and two ATM450s. List price is \$799. Each of the bundles includes drum mounts and a carrying case.

audio-technica.com



ATM-DRUM7



Tama Starclassic Performer B/B Exotix Tigerwood Kit and S.L.P. Big Black Steel Snare

Tama's Starclassic Performer BB kit is now available in Gloss Natural Tigerwood and Midnight Blue Tigerwood finishes with Brushed Black Nickel hardware. Features include die-cast hoops and Star-Cast mounting systems with Quick-Lock tom brackets. This limited-edition kit includes an 18x22 bass drum with a tom holder bracket, 8x10 and 9x12 rack toms, and 12x14 and 14x16 floor toms.

The Big Black Steel snare drum features an 8" deep, 1 mm steel shell that's designed to sound fat, provide maximum power, and work ideally for heavy metal and hard rock players. Additional features include Mighty Hoop rims and black-nickel plating.

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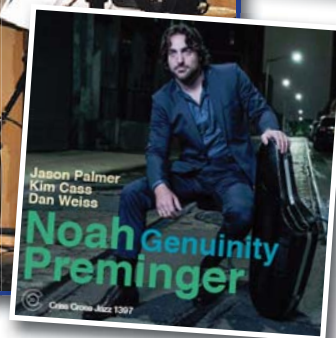
CRITIQUE

RECORDINGS Taking the Reins

Donald Sturge Anthony McKenzie II *Silenced*

One drummer's unique and bold statement on topical events.

On *Silenced*, accomplished drummer/composer Donald Sturge Anthony McKenzie II and an impressive cast of collaborators (including Nels Cline) navigate a series of chaotic improvisations to call awareness to the trend of unarmed citizens killed by police. The resulting listening experience is appropriately disquieting, with many tracks resisting conventional song structures. Within this framework, McKenzie picks ideal moments to pierce the chaos with oppressive industrial grooves and frantic jazz accents, careening off his collaborators' noisy accompaniment to propulsive effect. In fact, one of *Silenced's* accomplishments is that even in its most transgressive or mournful improvisations, it never loses a sense of momentum, keeping listeners confident that each sonic simulation of tragedy has been crafted with narrative intention. (577 Records) **Keaton Lamle**



Dan Weiss *Starebaby* Noah Preminger *Genuinity*

Drummer DAN WEISS applied Konnakol rhythms and the fast-talking Fed Ex guy's chatter to drumset; he reveals more from his bulging trick bag on two recent releases.

Dan Weiss plays Max Roach to Noah Preminger's Sonny Rollins on the latter's *Genuinity*, a jazz-blowing fest of massive proportions. Clomping his hi-hats, madly dissecting the rhythms, and swinging as if his life depended on it, Weiss burns like a manic fireball. (Criss Cross)

Weiss's own *Starebaby* is a progressive funhouse with so many left turns it will challenge your practice schedule and massively entertain your ears. Weiss's drumming is *explicit* in every sense of the word; his compositions are brain-bending and fresh. He seems to compose from the drumset, his angular rhythms punching malevolent keyboards and growling bass. Like incandescent blasts from a smelt furnace, *Starebaby* melds thoughtful iron ore stratagems to progressive rock intent. (Pi Recordings) **Ken Micallef**

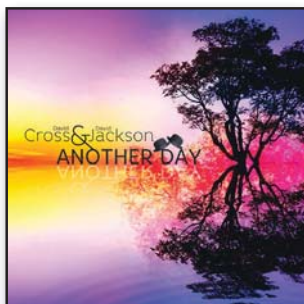
Other Drummer-Leds to Check Out

Devin Gray Dirigo Rataplan /// Larry Crockett Drum Love /// Jeff "Siege" Siegel Quartet London Live /// Jae Sinnett The Americana Groove Project /// Henry Conerway III With Pride for Dignity /// Mike Spinrad Horns /// Carlos Ezequiel Circular

Cross & Jackson *Another Day*

What do legendary players from legendary bands need for their new music? The right drummer, of course.

Fans of 1970s-era King Crimson and Van der Graaf Generator will rejoice in the meeting of two of those classic bands' alumni getting together to make a sweet noise, with help from an able rhythm section featuring **Craig Blundell** on drums. KC violinist David Cross and VdG Generator saxophonist David Jackson are certainly longer in the tooth in 2018, but their writing here is a nice vehicle for their melodic tendencies and still-effective soloing. Progressive rock, even the modern kind, isn't always about technical prowess, though there's certainly plenty of that throughout this disc. But while Blundell can blaze with the best of them (see his flashy hi-hat work in opener "Predator"), it's his inventive ideas and attention to quasi-funky patterns that give this material an extra push. Dig how the drummer moves from the straighter rock beat in "Come Again" to spacious breaks that he fills in with thunderous rolls and syncopated ride-bell hits. Music that pushes the boundaries is still alive and well. (crossandjackson.com) **Ilya Stembkovsky**



Yellowjackets *Raising Our Voice*

WILL KENNEDY's drumming is an indispensable force.

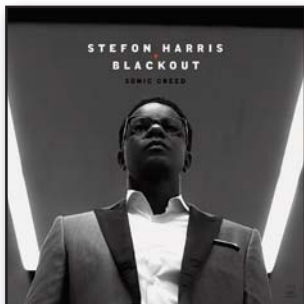
We're well past the point of needing to expound on Will Kennedy's technical virtuosity. But what truly places this drummer on a lofty pedestal is his skill for interpreting, creating parts, and interacting in an integral way; in essence, he is invariably a "co-composer." In a departure for the Yellowjackets, this release includes singer Luciana Souza, who enhances the gorgeous ensemble sound via wordless and worded vocals. Keyboardist Russell Ferrante and saxophonist Bob Mintzer are superb, as always, as is relative newcomer and bassist Dane Alderson, who makes a terrific pairing with Kennedy. On compositions mixing jazz, funk, and plentiful Brazilian shadings, Kennedy transports the trickily syncopated, tight arrangements with micro hills and valleys of dynamics, creating a slipstream groove. Kennedy helmed the Yellowjackets from 1987 to 2000 and returned following a ten-year hiatus. Those deep ties are felt here. No place like home. (Mack Avenue) **Jeff Potter**



Stefon Harris & Blackout *Sonic Creed*

A vanguard jazz mallet man strides onward.

From a purely percussion-oriented standpoint, here's a triple treasure: leader/vibraphonist/marimba player Stefon Harris animates marvelous arrangements with his stellar jazz and classical chops, kitman **Terreon Gully** brilliantly fuels the mix of jazz, funk, R&B, and occasional shades of hip-hop, and guest conguero Pedrito Martinez catalyzes the groove. But this disc amounts to far more than instrumental prowess. Harris's septet, Blackout, and guests deliver a thrilling, melodic, and thoroughly heartfelt standout. There's complexity, yet always at the service of storytelling, passion, and often good fun. Gully paints diverse canvases. On "Dat Dere," he generates a Latin/funk vibe by mixing up the syncopation with a cracking snare. In contrast, the irresistible "Chasin' Kendall," inspired by '70s R&B, finds him nodding to that era with restrained fours on a deep snare, while on "Throw It Away" he craftily weaves a foundation from brief suggestive fragments. Every minute is fresh air. (Motéma) **Jeff Potter**



Rob Dixon Trio *Coast to Crossroads*

A soulful trio rides the MIKE CLARK groove train.

Rob Dixon was determined to record on his own terms: he wanted to play with friends, and it had to be funky. The expressive jazz tenor/alto saxophonist scores on both counts with *Coast to Crossroads*, on which he sports a robust sound with R&B and soul influences. Dixon is a veteran of three tours with Charlie Hunter, and he invited the innovative guitarist onboard, along with guest trombonist Ernest Stuart. This unit has a wide jazz vocabulary and chops aplenty, but keeps the grits and gravy intact. The session is strongly defined by drummer Mike Clark. Putting his bop facet aside, Clark reaches back to the classic "Oakland sound" he helped develop, fuelling several tracks with his funky, super-tight, super-syncopated 16th-note grooves. Hunter locks up, playing pumping bass lines and stabbing organ-like comps on his hybrid seven-string guitar. Clark also un-holsters his killer Texas shuffle on three cuts. A spontaneous in-the-room vibe makes for a funky good time. (Rob Dixon Music) **Jeff Potter**

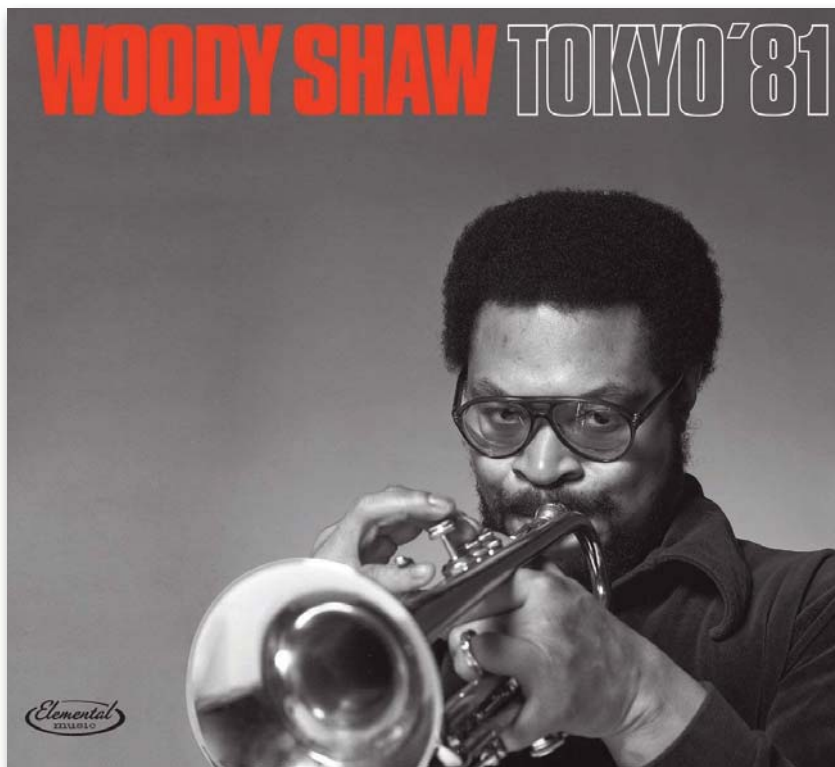


Critique continued

Woody Shaw Tokyo 1981

A jazz gem from the vaults.

In 1980, drummer **Tony Reedus** left college to join his first pro jazz band. And what a band it was. Led by the late great Woody Shaw, this quintet was hailed as one of the groundbreaking trumpeter's finest. Reedus made his startling recording debut with Shaw's *United* (1981), which was followed by three more LPs. This previously unreleased Tokyo concert captures Shaw during his later years playing in top form alongside Reedus, pianist Mulgrew Miller, trombonist Steve Turre, and bassist Stafford James. It's a treat hearing Reedus burning bright on an early live date. Pushing the tight quintet, the young, eager Reedus is on fire throughout, swinging with authority and goading soloists forward, as on the uptempo cooker "Apex." The drummer would go on to a stellar career. Like Shaw, Reedus also passed early (at age forty-nine), making this new release an even more welcome addition to his impressive legacy. Note: A second Woody Shaw Quartet archival collection, *Live in Bremen 1983*, also featuring Tony Reedus, has been released as well. (Elemental Music) **Jeff Potter**



MULTIMEDIA

Trap Style Drumming for the Acoustic & Hybrid Drum Set

by Gregory "Torch" Sgrulloni

Dive into the intricate beats and unique sounds of a modern hip-hop subgenre.

You've heard trap music before—think of that spooky rap with the 808 sub bass and super complex hi-hat programming—but applying it to an acoustic kit will require some serious work. Gregory Sgrulloni, aka Torch, has been studying and playing drum 'n' bass and other electronic dance music for years, and here he breaks down this contemporary style with detailed attention. From creating a modified snare drum for all those buzz rolls, to tuning your kick drum, to explaining the application of the 16th-note, 32nd-note, and triplet rhythms of the music, Torch lays down his concepts in a clear and digestible way. But this stuff is not easy. The "fragments" he presents have endless permutations and combination possibilities, and your hands should be at near marching band drum line levels if you want this material to sound clean and feel authentic. But go at your own pace, and the open-ended nature of the book should yield some surprises, regardless of what genre you normally work in. (Hudson Music)

Ilya Stemkovsky



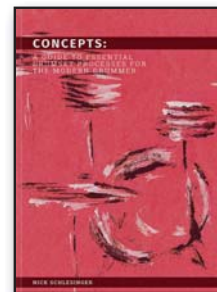
Concepts: A Guide to Essential Drumset Processes for the Modern Drummer

by Nick Schlesinger

Apply these fresh approaches to advance your drumming and musicality.

U.K.-based drummer Nick Schlesinger isn't out to reinvent the wheel with his new book, but the exercises contained in *Concepts: A Guide to Essential Drumset Processes for the Modern Drummer* lend themselves to further exploration when taken as individual ideas or when combined for advanced study. The author tackles topics including accents, melodic playing, linear phrasing, and displacement. He adds a "process" chapter and notated examples for each, helping readers to understand his suggestions but allowing room to find their own path. A "Where to Look for More" section points in the direction of pertinent music and books while a longer recommended listening list has an in-depth assortment of legendary tracks from drumming greats—though it's more of a collection of stuff that influenced Schlesinger as opposed to music exemplifying his concepts. Still, spending some time with the book's various challenges will open up your phrasing and overall rhythmic vocabulary. (drummingconcepts.com)

Ilya Stemkovsky



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Jawbox's For Your Own Special Sweetheart

After emerging from Washington D.C.'s legendary late-'80s post-hardcore scene, Jawbox came of age on their 1994 major-label debut—thanks to the addition of powerhouse drummer **Zach Barocas**.

Jawbox was under a great deal of scrutiny when *For Your Own Special Sweetheart* dropped in early 1994. Following a pair of well-received releases and a half decade of nonstop touring, the Beltway-based foursome had just become the first band to leave Dischord Records—a hallowed Washington D.C. indie label with a universally respected and entirely homegrown roster—in favor of a major-label deal. Moreover, the group's original drummer and founding member, Adam Wade, had recently jumped ship to join scene-mates (and fellow Dischord act) Shudder to Think.

Despite chatter of sacrilege emanating from a fiercely protective underground, Jawbox delivered an instant post-hardcore classic in *Sweetheart*—one that boldly pushed the band's stylistic boundaries while maintaining their abrasive yet undeniably melodic identity. Ironically, signing to Atlantic Records is what gave the blue-collar outfit the means to pony up for Ted Niceley, longtime producer for Dischord's flagship band, Fugazi. But the most critical personnel addition at this time was undoubtedly Zach Barocas—an idiosyncratic juggernaut of a drummer who inspired a body of work that transcended Jawbox's noise-rock roots.

Armed with a trove of unorthodox grooves—magnified by the



Hot Stuff

"68." This fan favorite "Savory" B-side was included as a *Sweetheart* re-master bonus track. The title refers to the song's alternating bars of six and eight, which Barocas deftly negotiates by deploying a pair of slick, breakbeat-style hi-hat barks.

"Whitney Walks." As Barocas hypnotically swings on his trusty 22" Zildjian Earth ride, a spare, syncopated beat emerges alongside sleepy guitars before giving way to a sludgy groove that incorporates nifty tom/kick triplet combos beneath swishy hats.

fact that Barocas is left-handed, but plays a right-handed kit—Jawbox's new timekeeper quickly established himself as a driving creative force. "I wanted to have an explicit presence in what was happening," recalls Barocas, a Rochester, New York, native who'd relocated to Maryland and was living with members of Jawbox when they were seeking a new drummer. "I had ideas about dynamics and power and time signatures. I wanted the beats to sweat a bit, have a deeper pocket. I wanted to take traditional feels and play them loud, get them up on the ceiling."

Look no further than *Sweetheart's* aptly titled "Cruel Swing" for proof of these concepts. Barocas executes one of the most punishing shuffles you'll ever hear, and punctuates it with jarring triplet fills that abruptly terminate in cymbal chokes and hi-hat barks. Similarly, the piston-pumping "LS/MFT" is fueled by a

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scorching 3/4 train-style pattern. "It was supposed to have some swagger," Barocas explains. "Playing these figures, often in an odd time, isn't particularly unusual now, but it wasn't what people in our orbit were doing back then. Drum-forward, sing-a-long music wasn't really a genre."

Contrary to the bombastic drum sounds of most '90s rock records, Barocas's tones on *Sweetheart* are crisp and airy, leaving ample room for Jawbox's road-grading bassist, Kim Coletta, to occupy the low end and drive

the band with her hard-nosed, economic approach. The snare is set to maximum torque, giving rimshots a satisfying "ping" and allowing even the subtlest of grace notes to cut through the din. Barocas's toms are also tuned up quite high, a proclivity he would pursue even further by switching to a 10" rack and a 12" floor in the ensuing months.

A masterwork of tension and release, *Sweetheart's* vocals alternate between bittersweet melodies and outright barks.

Throughout, Jawbox frontman J. Robbins employs his signature brand of oblique wordplay, while his exchanges with fellow guitarist (and occasional vocalist) Bill Barbot range from dissonant drones to jagged stabs to mountain-sized seesaw riffs. "It was a pretty aggressive situation," says Barocas of the duo's oft-combative aesthetic, "which opened up possibilities to make a much larger, more flexible set of sounds."

While Jawbox's "new guy" more than proves his punk-rock mettle on straight-ahead barnburners like "Jackpot Plus!" and "Breathe," he truly shines when playing around—or *against*—his bandmates' ever-changing textural menagerie. Cases in point: Barocas sets the tone on "Cooling Card," swimming upstream with a persistent, ascending tom motif, then unleashes a kit-spanning, 16th-note buzzsaw of a groove that slices through the wall of sound on "Reel." On *Sweetheart* standout "Savory," Barocas's kick bounces between monolithic verse chords, with an emphatic snare/crash accenting the 3 of each bar. He finally arrives at a straight backbeat for the song's fleeting chorus, but not before weaving a cleverly displaced, tom-sprinkled cadence through Robbins and Barbot's chiming guitars.

"These songs all feature variations on the 'In Your Eyes' beat," Barocas reveals. "Jawbox gave me a vehicle to explore my Manu Katché fascination. To date, I have yet to make a recording that isn't directly influenced by his playing on [Peter Gabriel's] *So*."

Barocas's impact on Jawbox wouldn't be fully realized until *Sweetheart's* self-titled follow-up—the band's last, and arguably best, album—which features a bevy of songs purpose-built around his increasingly distinctive rhythmic phrasing. After Jawbox's dissolution in 1997, Barocas relocated to Brooklyn and brought his singular voice even further to the forefront with instrumental post-rock projects The Up On In, and most recently, BELLS.

Jawbox reunited momentarily to promote the 2009 vinyl re-issue of *Sweetheart* with a performance on *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*. But while countless bands have mined the lucrative '90s nostalgia market with festival appearances, tours, and comeback albums, Barocas says Jawbox isn't likely to follow suit. "We had a very good run, and we got out well. I'm pleased to have created music that made people sweat when they were in their twenties, but musically, the four of us [are] all kind of tied up elsewhere. We don't spend a lot of time worrying about the past."

David Jarnstrom

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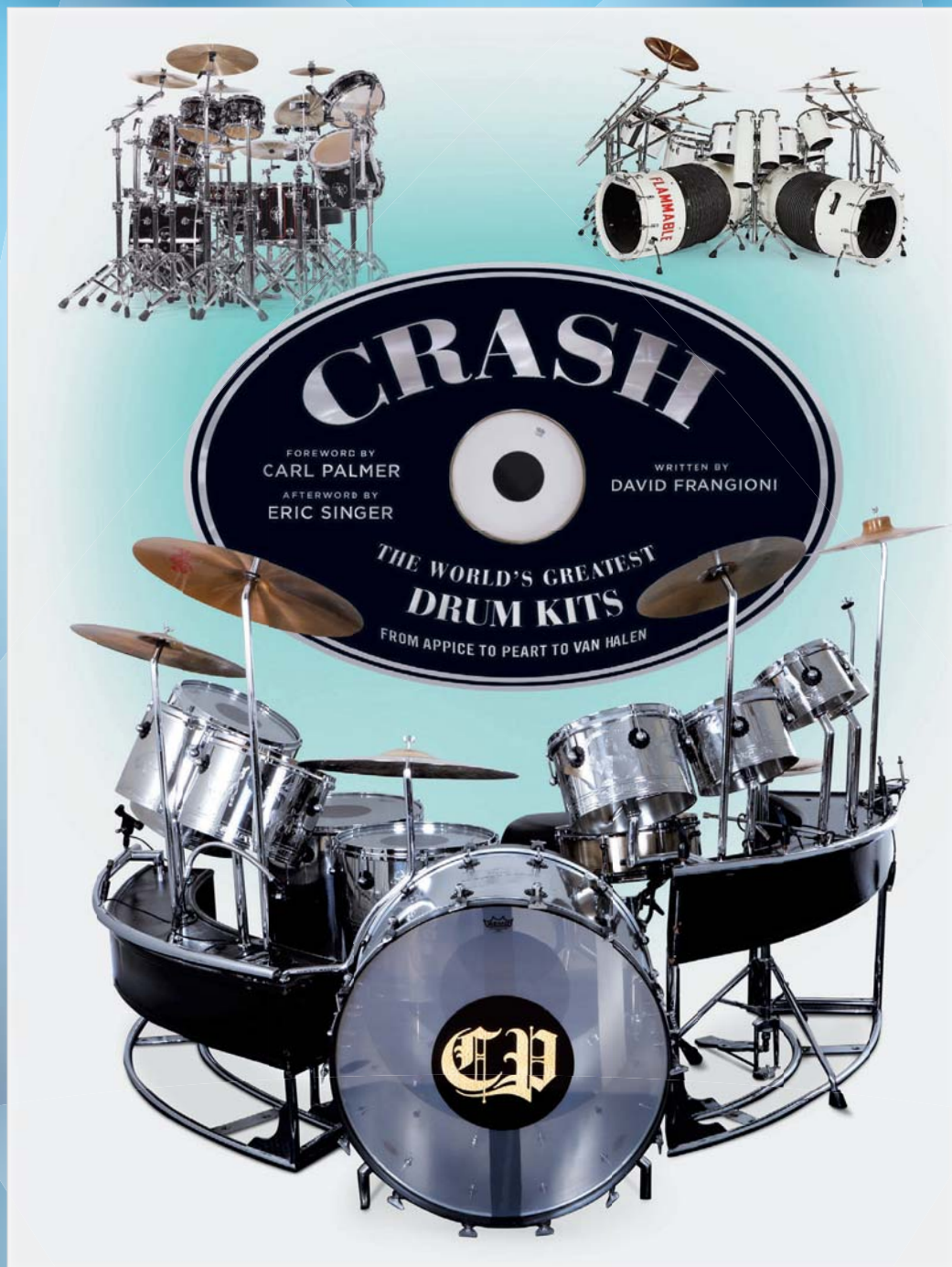


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Dave Elitch's *Getting Out of Your Own Way: A Multitude of Subtleties*



Dave Elitch is not happy with all the false prophets out there. And with his new, super in-depth instructional course, he's on a mission to tell all who will listen how to *really* take their drumming to the next level. "There are many courses out there, some better than others," says Elitch, who's worked with the Mars Volta, Miley Cyrus, and M83, among others. "But I've never seen things dealt with in the exact way that I see them. With social media, there's a laughable amount of self-proclaimed 'teachers' who have little to no real life experience, and who are actually doing a great deal of damage to the people consuming what they are putting out into the world. I didn't need to make this course, and I'm quite busy with my private teaching practice, but these 'teachers' forced my hand. There's a lot of parroting going on but very little substance. I wanted something out there that I could confidently send people to and know they were getting the real, correct information."

Elitch's three-and-a-half-hour course has something for everyone, and through his years of teaching top-level pros in search of some inspiration or who were stuck in a rut, he presents material that digs into the minutiae of a wide range of topics. Sure, he tackles French grip and fulcrum and ankle-only singles with the heel up, but his philosophical musings will ultimately prove the most useful to players of any stage of development.

And his near-flawless technical command and clean playing are a serious sight to behold. "I've strived for the path of least resistance using the correct muscle groups and getting the most return on energy," Elitch says. "Every expression of physical movement or energy should work the same way. It's all about trimming the fat with people to align them with these principles."

When asked about just who the target audience is for all this wisdom, Elitch is all about equal opportunity and having students

"Forty-five-minute, focused chunks with breaks are the most optimal. Instead of basing your practice routine on duration, you should structure it around goals."

get exactly what they need from the course. "If someone is only playing for fun with their own band on the weekends," the drummer says, "they may not necessarily need to go as deep as someone who plays professionally and has hit a wall physiologically and needs to overcome that plateau in order to survive and make a living."

The course is laid out across two sections. The first breaks down hand technique in Elitch's bold, no-nonsense way, addressing real-world drumming issues with a focus on the usual stuff like double strokes and paradiddles. He gets into "Garibaldi Ghost-Note Patterns" and Moeller technique, and there's really no rush to get through everything, as you could spend years on just one of his thirty-second examples. And if you're okay with your hands, Elitch continues with advanced foot technique that's not entirely easy.

"You want to avoid practicing things simply because they're difficult or physically demanding," Elitch says. "And hopefully by the time you get to the end of this [course], your definition of 'difficult' and 'simple' will have changed dramatically."

The second part of the course gets into the deep stuff: phrasing, passive versus active playing, opening up odd times, ear training, tone consistency, ego and confidence in regards to pocket, playing with a click, and lots more. This is the meat of the course for advanced players and should be digested at a deliberate pace, because whether you're playing arenas or simply a weekend warrior playing "American Girl" at that bar again, Elitch shows you how to break it down and think about what you're playing in a new light. Plus, he gets back to basics about foundational topics like practicing.

"Forty-five-minute, focused chunks with breaks are the most optimal," Elitch says. "Instead of basing your practice routine on duration, you should structure it around goals. The problem with time-oriented practice is that it will take everyone a different amount of time to reach a high level of execution. Only take on three to four goals or topics in any given practice session."

Elitch doesn't go overboard on the production value here, but a cool feature is the changing kit environment he presents. There's an open art gallery where his drums have a natural reverb, and there's a small room where his kit is close-miked, so you hear all the smallest details of his sticking.

"I was basically trying to combine the approach of a few of my favorite instructional courses that had a huge impact on me— [videos by] Steve Jordan, Yogi Horton,

Brain—while also making it into my own and letting you into my own world in slightly different and new ways. I really appreciated the down-to-earth, real approach all of those videos had, and it was important for me to convey that energy."

The course includes performance footage of Elitch on stage in large theaters and in a small space with an improvising noise trio. And when asked if it's truly possible to get out of your own way, Elitch is introspective. "It's a very Zen way of approaching this," he

says. "If you think about thinking or try to try, it will remain ever elusive. The only way to do this is by setting the stage and letting it happen. It's the exact same thing as being 'on fire' or 'in the zone' when playing sports: you can't will that to happen. All you can do is set the stage and hope for the best."

Ilya Stemkovsky

Dave Elitch uses DW drums and hardware, Sabian cymbals, Remo heads, and Vic Firth sticks.



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INDUSTRY HAPPENINGS

In Memoriam: Joel Smith

Remembering the hugely influential and multifaceted gospel drummer.

Joel Smith, one of the most prolific drummers in the gospel music scene, passed away this past September 8 at the age of fifty-eight. Beginning in the mid '70s, Smith carved out a unique position as the musical centerpiece of gospel royalty with his uncles Edwin and Walter Hawkins, who were among the first gospel artists in a generation to achieve crossover success by selling millions of records and earning multiple Grammy awards and nominations. Smith sat right in the heart of various Hawkins' projects on drums and, later, bass. In fact, he possessed so much talent on both instruments, he'd often record drums on Hawkins' sessions and then overdub bass on those same tracks.

In addition to projects with the Hawkins family, Smith became an in-demand session player and producer, arranging and performing on countless gospel, R&B, and jazz records, movie scores, and more. A consummate professional, his ability and achievements were only rivaled by his humility and graciousness. Joel was that rare breed that didn't wear his success or ego on his sleeve.

In a video recently uploaded to YouTube titled "Joel Smith



Testimony to Musicians," the drummer shared his view that musicians must remember that we're all gifted by God to use our abilities to show his love. "We all have a tool that God has given us," the drummer said. "And we can't misrepresent it."

Smith certainly didn't misrepresent his gifts throughout his career, and his forward-thinking playing created a rhythmic vibe on the kit that's influenced many of today's top drummers, including Jeremy Haynes, Gerald Heyward, Chris Coleman, Robert "Sput" Searight, and Calvin Rodgers. These drummers proudly acknowledge Smith as one of their greatest inspirations, as Rodgers himself testifies. "I discovered the wonderful musicianship of Joel Smith at a very young age," Rodgers tells *MD*. "His drumming connected with me in a way that

I can't begin to explain. He is my reason. I grew up being a fan, and much later became a friend and a brother. I will miss this wonderful musician and his genuine smile. But I am just one of many who will carry on his legacy and shout his name every chance given. Rest in love, Joel Smith."

Stephen Styles

KoSA 23

The twenty-third KoSA International Percussion Workshop and Drum Camp was held this past June 25–30 at the KoSA Academy in Montreal. The camp's cofounders and directors, Aldo Mazza and his wife, Dr. Jolán Kovács, hosted the five-



day event, which featured instruction on world percussion instruments such as congas, bongos, djembes, cajóns, and drumset and within styles including Cuban, African, jazz, funk, and rock. The event's theme, "Play Better," focused on taking control in your life by studying with top players and applying what you learn to improve yourself. Attendees ranging in age from eleven to sixty-seven came from the United States and Canada and represented all levels of ability.

Clinicians and performers included Mazza, Concordia University professor Jim Doxas, percussionist and educator Yves Cypriot, educator, author, and Broadway drummer Joe Bergamini (via Skype), percussionist Glen Velez, drummer and educator Sergio Bellotti, percussionist Glen Velez, and the Cuban rumba group Clave y Guaguancó.

Also present was Snarky Puppy's Larnell Lewis, who taught and spoke about his beginnings in music and what it takes to make it in the business. Lewis received a KoSA Lifetime Achievement Award for his creative and innovative drumming concepts and techniques. In addition, the drummer and educator Emmanuelle Caplette led participants through a grueling regimen of drumset techniques that stemmed from her own background in the drum corps world. The camp wrapped up with a clinic from Mark Guiliana (Donny McCaslin, David Bowie), in his second appearance as a KoSA faculty member.

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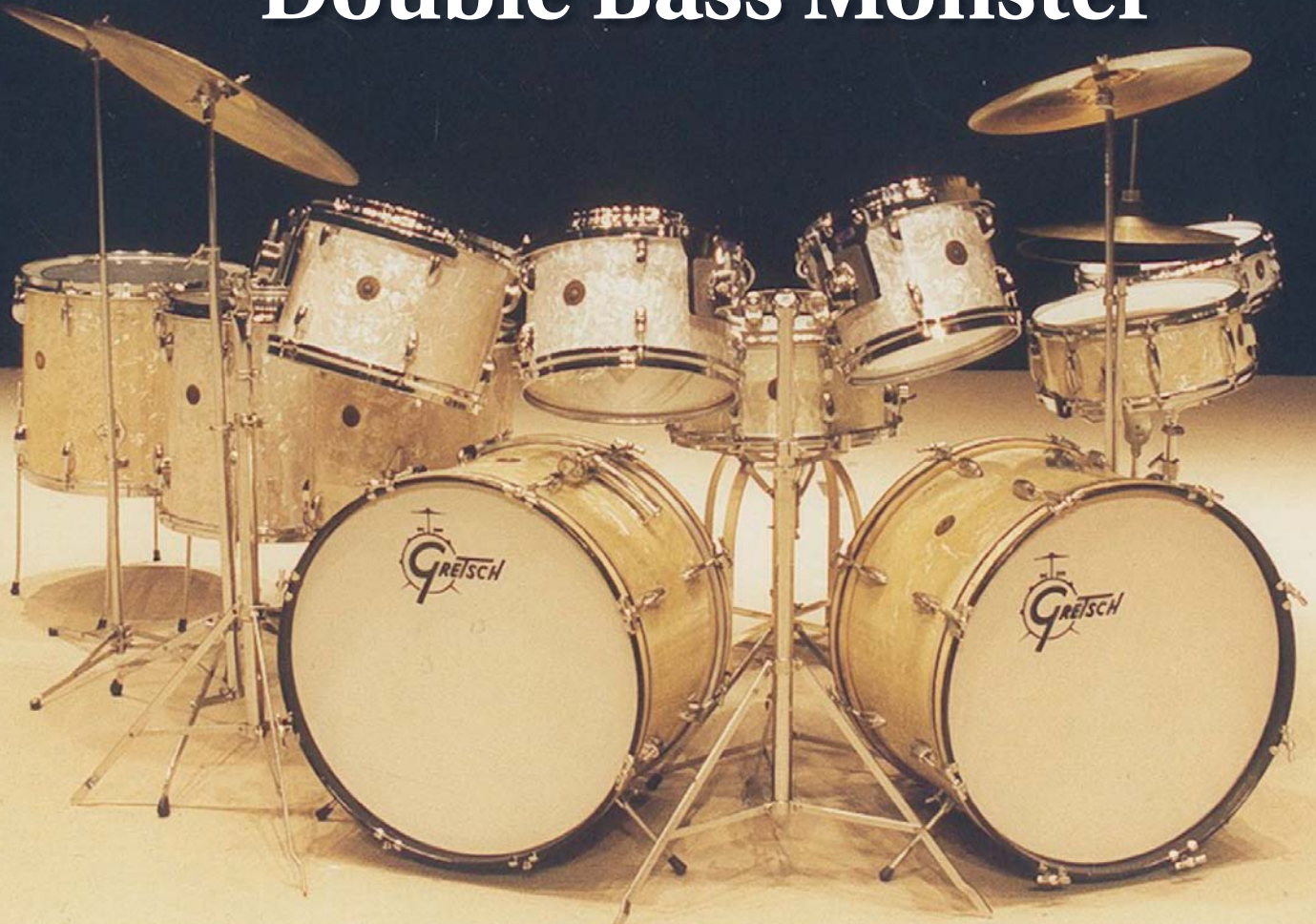
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The Vintage Double Bass Monster



The Brooklyn-based drummer and educator David Clive, who plays with the New York groups the Nawlins Funk Band, Carla V, and John Putnam and Used Blues, assembled this month's featured vintage Gretsch beauty. Clive, who also teaches at the College of Staten Island, Wagner College, and privately, tells *MD* that soon after he started playing drums at ten years old, he caught the drum-collecting fever, buying his first Gretsch Broadkaster snare at a garage sale two years later. "I haven't stopped collecting Gretsch drums since I was a teenager," Clive says. "This is my Gretsch White Pearl 'Double Bass Monster' kit, and it's actually two '50s kits combined, along with a 4x14 Max Roach model snare and a 10" rack

tom from the '60s."

Clive explains that the setup's foundation—a basic four-piece kit from the '50s—consists of a 13" rack tom, a 16" floor tom, a 22" bass drum, and a matching 14" snare, and that it was featured in John Aldridge's book *Guide to Vintage Drums*. Combined with the other drums, the full kit comprises two 14x22 bass drums; 4x14, 5x14, and 6.5x14 snare drums; 8x10, 8x12, and 9x13 rack toms; and 14x14, 16x16, and 16x18 floor toms. "I'm happy to say that the drums are in great condition," Clive offers.

Head to davidclivemusic.com to check out the drummer's entire Gretsch drum collection.

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



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