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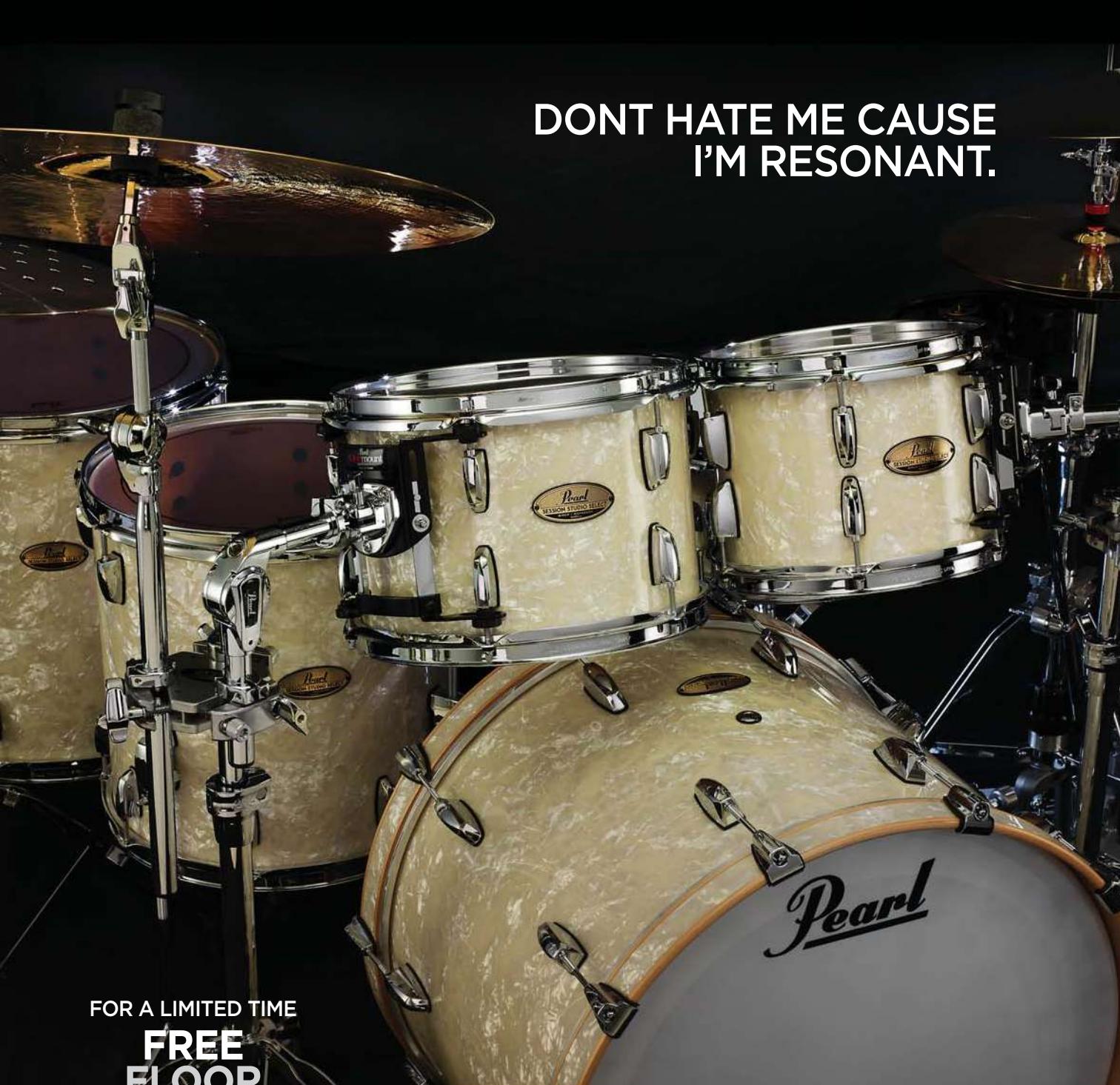
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Famous on Instagram for a series of videos shot at the concerts of soul singer José James, the drummer has become a social media star; his groove-drenched clips regularly racking up views in the millions. But he's far from an overnight sensation—or a one-trick pony.

by Ken Micallef



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*Ronald is currently on tour with Jazz Saxophonist Kamasi Washington.*

Coachella 2018

# AN EDITOR'S OVERVIEW

## On the Road

I love our new series, "It Happened on the Road," and this month's piece on Courtney Barnett's Dave Mudie is no exception. It's wild considering what can happen when you throw a group of musicians into a bus, van, plane, hotel room, grocery store, restaurant, or any other unforeseen scenario that can come up while touring. And it can be a true test to work out a group's dynamics over the course of a long trek in a confined space. And that's not even taking into account whatever unexpected circumstances may arise in the course of travelling to each venue.

No doubt like many of you, I've experienced a few bumps on the road while touring—hotel scuffles that featured hamburgers being thrown at bandmates; verbal and, unfortunately, physical fights over money; 400-mile drives on the way to playing to an empty room.... Those instances actually seem pretty tame compared to some of the experiences that fill our pages!

A few months ago I was gifted with a map of the U.S. and a set of pushpins. I finally got around to digging up some of the tour itineraries I lived by on the road, and I started placing markers on each city I've played.

What a trip. On the way into Chicago, besides stopping for the obligatory deep-dish pizza and a much-needed shower and rest at the home of one of our bandmates' relatives, we watched a car spin out of control right in front of us. Our guitarist slammed on the brakes of our fifteen-passenger van, which was pulling a trailer filled with a backline in flight cases. When we finally came to a stop in the middle lane, we found ourselves practically face-to-face with the driver, who was facing the wrong direction and looking directly at us. Thankfully no one was hurt, although it definitely raised our blood pressure.

Another time, at the very beginning of a winter trek that started in Georgia, the area got hit by a rare snowstorm. Being from the Northeast, to us it seemed closer to a drizzle than a blizzard. Regardless, the entire city shut down, including the venue of our first gig, so we found ourselves stuck. And in what seemed—at least to us—an odd move, city officials called for sand to be dumped onto the streets to improve traction. Sand! Considering the state's probable lack of preparedness for such weather, it could have seemed like a logical choice. To us, however, it just seemed...*bizarre*.

By the time this issue arrives in your mailbox or appears on your local newsstand, the summer tours will be entering their dog days, and the fall treks will be around the corner. If you find yourself on the road—whether on tour or on a business trip or family vacation—stay safe, be prepared for the unexpected, but most of all, have fun.

Enjoy the issue.



**Willie Rose**  
Associate Editor



Dave Hill

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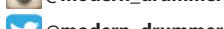
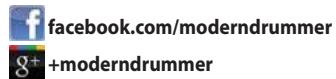
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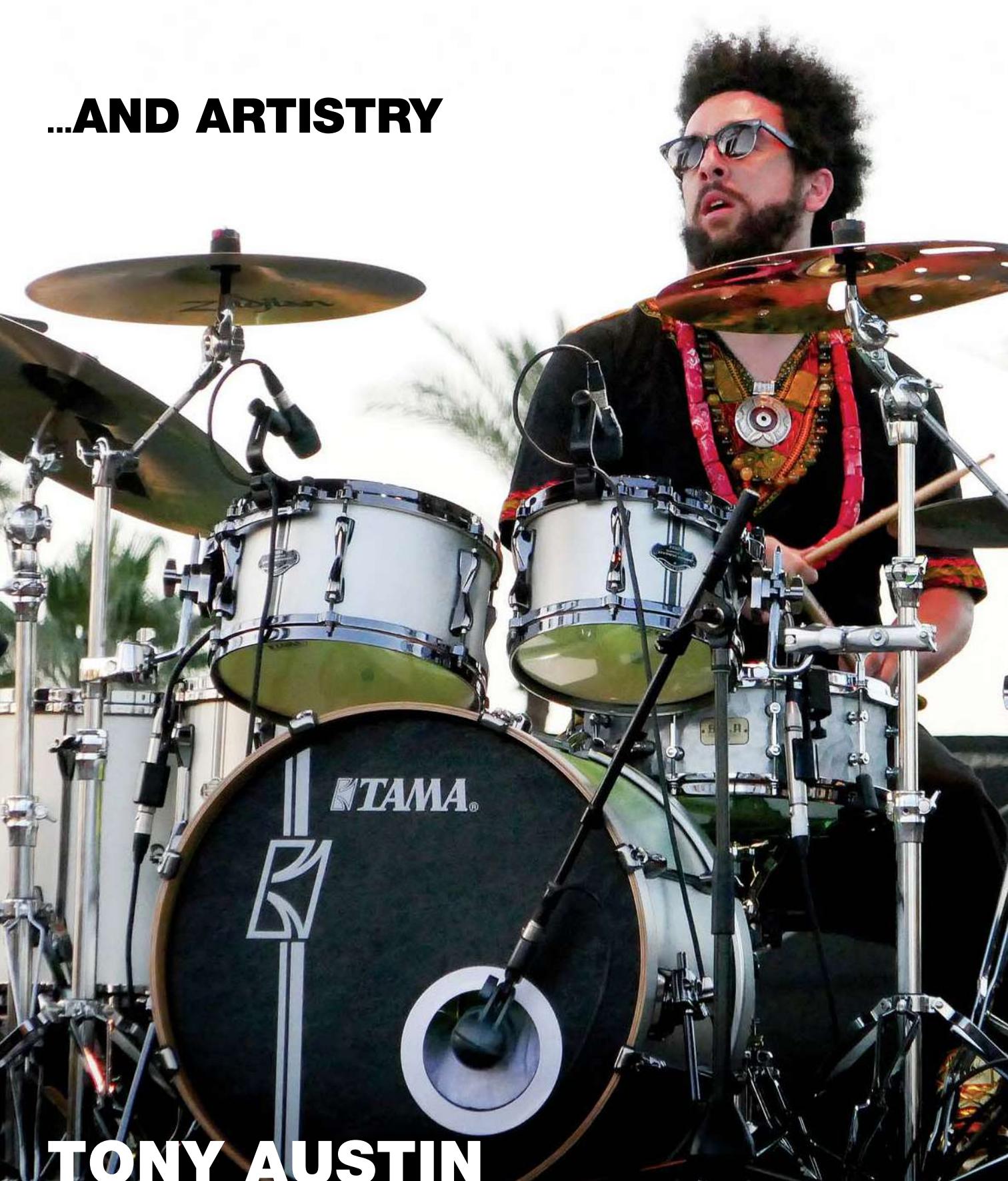
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# ...AND ARTISTRY



## TONY AUSTIN

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Tony is sharing the stage with Ronald on Kamasi Washington's Heaven and Earth tour.

Coachella 2018

# What's Your Favorite John Bonham Performance?

In this month's Rock 'n' Jazz Clinic, the drummer and educator Powell Randolph explores a classic John Bonham foot pattern. In keeping with the "Bonzo" theme, we were curious to find out from our readers and social media followers which specific performances best captured the late rock legend's iconic sound.

"Moby Dick" from *Led Zeppelin II*. It was the first time that I heard a drummer truly unleash his jazz influence on a rock record. Sure, it's an extended drum solo. But it also demonstrates the language Bonham had accumulated up to that point. We see that he doesn't just have chops, but also dynamics and space. "Moby Dick" is one of a select few drum solos to reach a pinnacle that only some of the greatest rock drummers of the past have reached.

**Landon Blackburn**

*Houses of the Holy*, hands down. Every song is a masterpiece, as is the whole album. There's not a wasted note or breath to be heard. It's rock's equivalent to Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* or John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*. This album displays the full range of Bonham's abilities and talent. From the blazing open hi-hat and almost punk rock savagery of "The Song Remains the Same," to the gorgeous ballad, "The Rain Song," the epic stoner ballad, "No Quarter," the insane breakbeat opening of "The Crunge," the funkiness of "Over the Hills and Far Away," and the classic, implied dub phrasing and perfect fills of "D'yer Mak'er." How can you go wrong? Obviously, all of Zeppelin's albums are great, but *Houses*

brings it all together in one concise package—and that's not to mention the iconic album cover!

**Lynn Farmer**

"The Ocean" from *Houses of the Holy* is a perfect example of Bonham's ability to switch between a groove that accentuates Jimmy Page's guitar riff and a hard-hitting rock beat that's as heavy as anything. Throw in a classic shuffle feel at the end for good measure, and you've got a consummate Bonham performance.

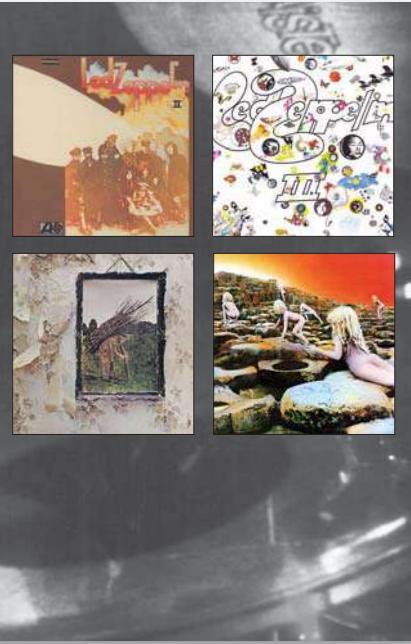
**Andy Rumschlag**

I'd say "Bonzo's Montreux" from *Coda* because of the layers and the depth of tone and resonance. Wow. The story he tells while crafting this percussion instrumental spoke to me from an early time in my drumming years. Just as watching a drum battle between Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich had captivated me, "Bonzo's Montreux" entranced me through my headphones the first time I borrowed my brother's *Coda* album. Since then I've tried to emulate some of that same funk, power, and grace into my own playing.

**Joe R.**

*Led Zeppelin IV*. This album was part of my childhood and taught me to have solid and coherent grooves. After many years, I decided to revisit this masterpiece, and there was still a lot of information to be learned. Bonham left a legacy and wrote an incredible chapter in rock 'n' roll history.

**Rafael Belculfine**



His playing on the live album *How the West Was Won* stands out to me. Everything he's known for is showcased perfectly, such as his dynamics, power, and beautiful improvisation. It's all there. Buy this album and absorb every note, phrase, and fill. It'll make you a better drummer.

**Andrew DeLaubell**

I'd pick "The Ocean" because of the odd time signature and incredible pocket. It's an awesome display of his technique and approach. And the live version of the song from *How the West Was Won* just kills. Bonham plays the verse groove on the ride, and it really opens up going into the chorus.

**Patrick Handlofsky**

I'd choose "Black Dog" from *Led Zeppelin IV* as the definitive Bonzo drum track. His drums are in lockstep with the guitar and bass, plus it has that great heavy rock groove, and he effectively navigates the various time signatures throughout with perfect feel. He also throws in some killer fills for added emphasis. This song has it all.

**Steven Scheifley**

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# OUT NOW

## Matt Starr on Mr. Big's *Live From Milan*

The latest live release from the seminal rock hitmakers documents one of the group's last performances with their founding sticksman, Pat Torpey.



After releasing their ninth studio album, *Defying Gravity*, in July 2017, the veteran chart-topping rock group Mr. Big set out on an international tour in support of the effort. As the group's longtime drummer and founding member Pat Torpey continued playing live with Mr. Big despite his ongoing battle with Parkinson's disease, he was joined onstage by the Ace Frehley and Burning Rain alumnus Matt Starr, who handled the majority of the drumming duties throughout the tour. *Live From Milan*, a twenty-two-song package recorded during the *Defying Gravity* tour and released July 13, faithfully preserves one of the last concerts Torpey played with Mr. Big before his passing on February 7.

Starr worked intimately with Torpey to handle the majority of the group's set, which includes such Mr. Big hits as "Alive and Kickin,'" "Just Take My Heart," and the chart-topping rock ballad "To Be With You." When approaching Mr. Big's material, Starr explains that he stays true to Torpey's original parts. "The way Pat played reminded me a lot of Denny Carmassi on the first [self-titled] Montrose LP," Starr says. "Every note had a reason, and if you took one note away, the whole thing changed. So it was clear to me how it had to be in Mr. Big. Pat was a very deliberate guy, and I appreciated that. There are some moments in a solo section or during the outro of a song where I might do something slightly different, but not much."

Starr was asked to join Mr. Big after Billy Sheehan, one of the group's guitarists, saw him play and sing AC/DC's "T.N.T." at a Hollywood jam. A year later Sheehan invited Starr to help out on an upcoming tour, and the drummer met up with the band to play a few songs. "It was a very emotional experience because Tim Heyne, the band's manager, and Pat were both there," Starr explains. "Usually after you play a song with a new band and it feels good, there are smiles and thumbs up. This was very different,

because although it felt good together, the guy they *really* wanted, and the guy who had always done it, was in the room but unable to do it. It was important for me to play with confidence but also be mindful of this."

In the opening pattern of "1992" off of *Live From Milan*, Starr plays a blazing tom groove that deceptively mimics a powerful double bass pattern. "I'm playing 16th notes between the floor tom and bass drums, with straight 8th notes on the floor tom," he explains. "The snare is accenting the higher notes in Paul [Gilbert's] guitar part. It seemed like a natural fit and appropriate for a band like Mr. Big."

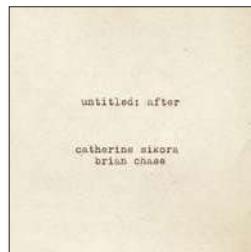
And while Starr is certainly capable of handling other *Live From Milan* standout moments, such as the blazing fills during the verse breaks in "American Beauty," there are some Torpey-isms that the drummer might still need to shed. "Pat had this heel/toe thing he would do on the hi-hat that made a splashing sound," Starr says. "When I saw him play it, that was the one time I told him, 'I don't think that's gonna happen for me.' He just laughed. He was a very articulate guy, but easygoing as well."

As Starr continues to honor Torpey's legacy on tour with Mr. Big, he reflects fondly on the late drummer's impact. "Pat was a master of composition," Starr says. "There was always a reason for every single note he played. He was extremely creative at coming up with fresh ways to support what Billy and Paul were doing on guitar without getting in the way. He was incredibly musical. And he was definitely a 'less is more' player. That said, he could play anything he needed to at any point if the song called for it." **Willie Rose**

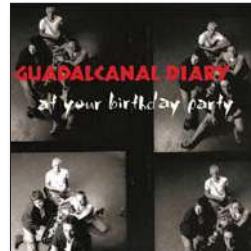
**Matt Starr plays Ludwig drums and Paiste cymbals, and he uses Vater drumsticks, DW hardware, Humes & Berg cases, Canopus snare wires, Tuner Fish lug locks, and Drumtacs dampeners.**



## More New Releases



Catherine Sikora and Brian Chase  
*Untitled: After* (Brian Chase)



Guadalcanal Diary  
*At Your Birthday Party* (John Poe)



Immortal  
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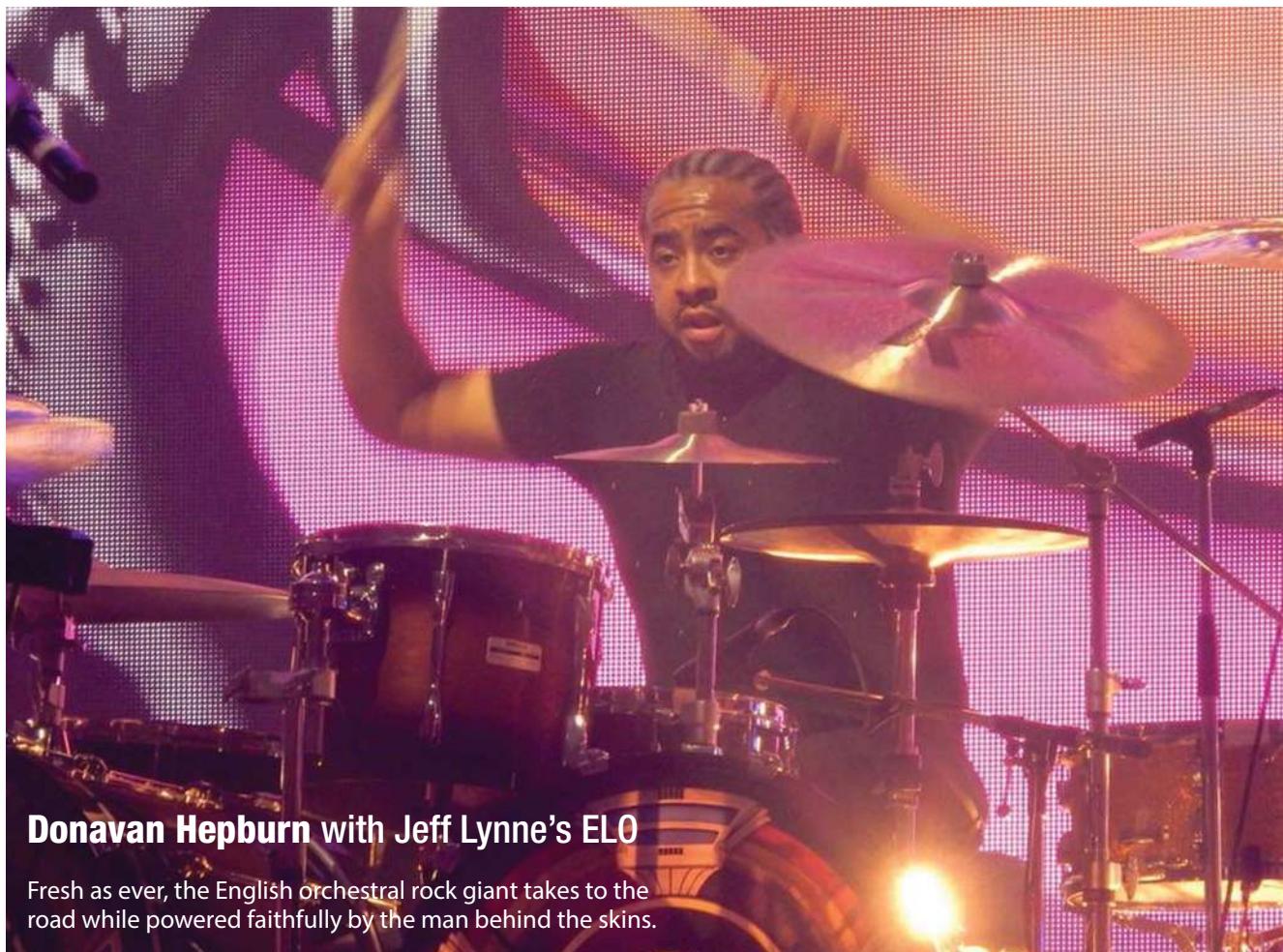


Boz Scaggs  
*Out of the Blues* (Jim Keltner)



Deafheaven  
*Ordinary Corrupt Human Love* (Daniel Tracy)

# ON TOUR



## Donavan Hepburn with Jeff Lynne's ELO

Fresh as ever, the English orchestral rock giant takes to the road while powered faithfully by the man behind the skins.

Many veteran acts that still tread the boards decades after they started like to say that they're sounding and playing "better than ever." But let's face it—that's not always the case.

One artist who could be justified in making such a claim is Electric Light Orchestra founder Jeff Lynne. Touring these days as Jeff Lynne's ELO, the singer, guitarist, and songwriter's voice is astoundingly well-preserved. And supporting him is a super-tight twelve-piece unit, anchored by drummer Donavan Hepburn, that brings to life the orchestral nuances of ELO classics like "Evil Woman," "Can't Get It Out of My Head," and "Mr. Blue Sky." The group's current U.S. and international tour lasts through this October.

If you haven't seen the band live, you can refer to 2017's *Wembley or Bust* live album and film to check out Hepburn's faithful and masterful piloting of Lynne's vehicle. Hepburn takes an "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" approach, replicating with loving accuracy original ELO drummer Bev Bevan's graceful, tumbling fills in "Telephone Line," the four-on-the-floor pulse and snappy snare licks of "Shine a Little Love," and the brawny groove of "Do Ya." He holds it all down with a deep pocket that gives the songs a familiar yet contemporary vibe—not unlike the energy Abe Laboriel Jr. brings to Paul McCartney's live show.

"That's me being true to the music, understanding the era and the authenticity of those records," Hepburn says regarding his methodology with the group. "If I approach it any other way, it instantly changes the feel. Take a song like 'Telephone Line.' You have

those big drum fills in a ballad. If you take them out, there's a key part missing."

Hepburn also put a good deal of thought into choosing his gear for the ELO shows, settling on a kit that produces a slightly deader version of that classic "Jeff Lynne" drum sound. His toms are deep and thuddy while still featuring plenty of tone. His Ludwig Black Beauty snare is tuned to sound fat and soft around the edges, but it still packs a nice crack, giving the backbeats to "Showdown" and "Ma-Ma-Ma Belle" plenty of teeth. And the ride has a dark and lovely ping that sits quite nicely with the piano and strings on "Evil Woman."

"I could have tried to land a vintage kit," Hepburn says. "It'd be absolutely perfect for this gig. But they don't tour very well. The closest thing to vintage in the Yamaha range is the YD9000. They came out in the late '70s, and I have a '90s version with clear Remo CS Black Dot heads on the toms, with no bottom heads. And I'm using Zildjian Avedis, K, and Keropé cymbals. Jeff didn't want explosive cymbals that are high-pitched; he wants them dark and warm."

"I really took the time to listen to the music and replicate that sound," Hepburn adds. "Jeff came in right away and noticed it—he said the drums and cymbals sounded great. The fact that his ears tuned in to my drums was brilliant." **Patrick Berkery**

**Donavan Hepburn plays Yamaha drums, Zildjian cymbals, Remo heads, and Promark sticks.**

### Also on the Road

**Jason Sutter** with Cher /// **Jimmy Chamberlin** with Smashing Pumpkins /// **Shannon Larkin** with Godsmack /// **Chad Sexton** with 311 /// **Pete Parada** with the Offspring /// **Patrick Meese** with Nathaniel Rateliff & the Night Sweats /// **Jon Fishman** with Phish /// **Matt Abts** with Gov't Mule /// **Anton Fig** with Joe Bonamassa /// **Shannon Forrest** with Toto





Nathan West

# Margaret Glaspy's Tim Kuhl

**T**im Kuhl's musical background is rooted in classical percussion and jazz. But in recent years, electronica artists, who can captivate crowds with little more than a laptop and quick-thinking musical minds, have seduced the drummer into conceptualizing outside—and inside—the “box.” Kuhl's stripped-down approach has shaped the direction of his software-based songwriting and impacted his choices in gear.

The thirty-six-year-old native of Baltimore, Maryland, moved to New York City in 2003, assimilated quickly into the Big Apple's progressive jazz scene, and eventually transitioned into other musical settings. Over the last decade-plus, the Brooklyn resident has hooked up with rockers the Izzys, led his own jazz band, the Tim Kuhl Group, recorded fusion-y solo efforts *Ghost* and *King*, and racked up credits performing with numerous artists, most notably Sean Lennon's Ghost of a Saber Tooth Tiger (GOASTT) and vocalist/guitarist/bandleader Margaret Glaspy.

Solo recordings, such as 2012's *St. Helena*, 2015's *1982*, and 2018's *Sky Valley*, reflect Kuhl's evolution from modern jazz to electronica-obsessed composer, whose cinematic soundscapes are rife with near-hypnotic synth lines, repetitive rhythm tracks, stoic spoken-word passages, and electronically processed acoustic percussion. “There are technically acoustic drums on all but two songs on *Sky Valley*,” says Tim, “but all the acoustic drum tracks are doubled with electronic drums, manipulating the sound a bit.”

Although fueled in part by the visionary literary work of sci-fi cult figure Philip K. Dick, horror master Stephen King, and 19th Century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky, Kuhl swears by big screen classics conjured by filmmakers such as Michael Mann, David Cronenberg, David Lynch, and horror director and composer John

Carpenter, who's recently applied 21st Century software technology in his soundtrack work to create spooky signature sounds. “These directors often have wild ideas but are very in tune with how they mix music with their visuals,” says Kuhl.

Tim clings to George Lawrence Stone's enduring book *Stick*

*Control* to exercise his drumming muscles, but looks to other inspirational sources to ignite his songwriting spark. During precious downtime before gigs, Kuhl composes music with audio software and an iPad, a habit he formed while touring with Sean Lennon's GOASTT in 2014. Although he currently uses Ableton Live, Kuhl also occasionally taps GarageBand. “I strive for meditative or quiet time away from the noise a tour can bring,” says Kuhl. “Writing music with little association to what I'm performing on the road is similar in that it helps clear the mind.”

A self-described “basic” kit mirrors the drummer's newfound fondness for streamlining his creative process. “I use a 1965 Champagne Sparkle Ludwig Club Date kit with an 8x12 rack tom, a 14x14 floor tom, and a 14x20 kick drum,” says Tim, who's been awarded a residency at Pete's Candy Store in Brooklyn through this December. “I play a 6.5x14 MapleWorks snare drum I bought at a drum shop in Baltimore ten years ago. For cymbals I have 14" K Zildjian hi-hats from the 1960s and a 20" Paiste Traditional Light ride, but I've also used a 22" Zildjian Avedis ride with rivets from the 1970s, which can sound like an electronic effect when mixed in with electronic instruments.” Kuhl also uses a Roland SPD-SX sampling pad that triggers tracks and samples he's made from recent records like *Sky Valley* and *1982*. Kuhl's stick of choice is Vater's 5B model.

When performing in a duo with trombonist Rick Parker, Kuhl further explores the musical and rhythmic possibilities converging at the nexus of analog drumming and electronic devices. “I play drum beats over the already existent sounds and samples,” says Tim, who's taken up the practice of donning headphones for these shows, “and Rick adds all the textures he can via a trombone that runs through a full pedal rig. It's all very human to have a person physically play a horn. It's the same thing with drums. People have to exert themselves to generate sound. The idea is to mix this physicality with the use of electronics.”

The surreal and often chilling squalls of the semi-improvisational Kuhl-Parker musical environment evoke a dystopian future while recalling the joys of techno rock and sinister sonic qualities of archetypal '80s horror film soundtracks. “It's cool to know that performing can feel new each time you play live,” says Kuhl. “That's important, because it makes the live experience more enjoyable.”

**Will Romano**





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## PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

# Bone Custom Drums

## Maple/Carbon Fiber Drumset

A modern-sounding kit with some vintage punch.

**When you think of who's making** top-shelf handcrafted drums, a small company out of Central Europe might not come to mind first. But maybe it should. Since 2005, Slovenia-based Bone Custom Drums has been building high-quality and completely customizable kits and snares for all types of drummers.

Bone Custom Drums states on its website, "You dream it, we'll build it." That's a refreshing business motto. Most custom drum companies offer a short range of options that can be mixed and matched, or they specialize in a certain style of drum. Bone is able to offer just about anything a drummer could want, down to shell construction (type of material and number of plies), size, hardware, and finish.

For review this month, we received a six-piece drumset with a 17x20 kick, 15x14 and 15x16 floor toms, 6x10 and 7x12 rack toms, and a 5.5x14 snare. The shells are a hybrid of maple and carbon fiber.

### Look and Build

This is a stunning drumkit that combines features of modern and vintage drums. Every detail, from the precisely cut bearing edges to the heavy-duty vent holes, is paid the same amount of attention and respect. The finish is a clean-looking natural maple with a matte lacquer and black nickel hardware. That color contrast is echoed by the shell construction, which has an interior layer of shiny, black carbon fiber. When viewing the kit from the drum throne, I was reminded of the painted interior of some vintage drums but with a more modern, sleek aesthetic. The classic beavertail lugs also contribute a bit of vintage vibe.

The drums feature black nickel-coated tension rods, and the hardware is insulated with gaskets to reduce vibration and contact to the wood. Bone-branded Evans drumheads include clear 2-ply batters and clear single-ply bottoms on the toms, a 2-ply coated batter and a thin single-ply clear bottom on the snare, and a clear 2-ply batter head with a black single-ply ported front head on the bass drum. Other nice appointments include a Trick GS007 three-position throw-off, black nickel Gauger RIMS mounts, and an extra-wide front bass drum hoop, which adds a more modern look when viewed from the front.

### Sounds

The tones these drums produce are punchy, articulate, controlled, and warm. While maple is a popular wood for drum making, the addition of the carbon-fiber inner ply enhances the low end and adds more punch and focus. The choice of heads and 2.3 mm steel hoops also contribute to the focused sound of the snare and toms. I usually add a bit of muffling to toms, but these required no dampening and sounded full and fat even at finger-tight tuning. They opened up and sang nicely at medium and higher tunings as well.

I also usually add muffling to bass drums to reduce rumble. When tuned low, this kick had minimal rumble and a pleasant, warm tone. Bass drums of this diameter (20") sometimes sacrifice low-end power for punch, but this one had more depth than expected. You wouldn't know it was a 20" drum unless you saw it.

The snare was my favorite piece of the kit. It was very warm, dry, and responsive. At low tunings, it produced a lot of fatness. At medium and high



tunings, it remained on the drier side but had enough overtones to lend character. It also had quite a bit more crack than I expected, most likely due to the addition of the carbon fiber on the inside of the shell. This snare maintained a consistently buttery feel throughout its tuning range. Even when tuned high, it felt like I was playing a larger drum at a low tuning.

The Bone Custom maple/carbon fiber drumkit was a pleasure to

play. It's clear that the makers take great pride in the instruments they build. Their meticulousness makes all the difference. The hybrid shells and heavy-duty build resulted in a punchy, focused, warm sound that would be right at home in a variety of musical styles, from rock to metal, funk, and fusion. If you're looking for a truly custom drumset, don't overlook Bone Custom Drums.

**Christopher Kozar**



## PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

# Istanbul Mehmet

## Hamer Series Cymbals

Heavily hammered, dark-sounding cymbals with extra dry, trashy tones.

**Istanbul, Turkey, is widely recognized** as the epicenter of traditional handcrafted cymbals. Master craftsman Mehmet Tamdeger founded Istanbul Mehmet in 1996, after Agop Tomarcuk, his longtime business partner at the original Istanbul factory, passed away. In the ensuing twenty-plus years, Mehmet has continued to refine his classic-style cymbals as well as innovate a wide variety of modern designs. The Hamer models we have for review, which feature large, deep hammer marks for additional trashiness and complexity, should appeal to drummers favoring the dry, dark, quick, and explosive sounds that are currently popular.

### 16" Hi-Hats

Hamer hi-hats are available in 10", 12", 13", 14", 15", and 16" sizes. We were sent a 16" pair. Both cymbals are fully lathed on the underside, while the tops are only lathed on the outer 2". The rest of the surface is raw. In addition to traditional hammer patterns, both cymbals feature about sixteen larger dimples on the bow created with a wide hammer. The top cymbal is medium-thin, and the bottom is heavy.

Even though they're oversized, these cymbals performed like a standard set of hi-hats, rather than like a pair of crash cymbals. They were extremely articulate and crisp, producing a chunky closed sound when struck with the shoulder of the stick and a defined "tick" when played on top with the tip. The larger diameter resulted in a lower-than-average pitch, and the extra hammering introduced some complexity and trashiness when I played the cymbals in a partially open position. The foot chick was strong and tight. They had a slower response to quick, open barks, but they clamped back down to the closed position with little residual sustain or overtone. These would be ideal hi-hats for players looking for a darker, deeper tone that has some of the trashiness you'd get from well-worn vintage cymbals or by pairing up some thin crashes, but with a much sturdier, chunkier, and robust tone.



Hamer hi-hats





Flange crash

### Split, Classic, and Flange Crashes

Hamer crashes are available in 14" to 20" sizes and in three styles. The Split crashes look similar to the hi-hats, with a lathed bottom and partially lathed top. They have additional dimple hammerings, which gives the metal a looser, thinner feel and extra trashy overtones. The 17" Split crash we checked out had an interesting sound that had a quick yet somewhat muted attack, a dark and dry tone, and a fast decay. You could potentially ride on the raw portion of the bow at low volumes and achieve a clean, woody attack with a controlled wash, and the bell produced a rich, dark tone. I would take this cymbal on low-volume gigs that also demand nuanced, complex crash/ride timbres.

The 17" Classic crash is fully lathed on both sides and has roughly the same number of dimple marks as the Split, but its sound is a stark contrast—deeper, more defined, trashier, and with a more abrasive sustain. The attack was equally fast, but the decay was a bit longer and the tone was a bit harsher. This cymbal effectively bridges the gap between the short, explosive tone of a China and the complex, dark sound of a thin, hand-crafted crash.

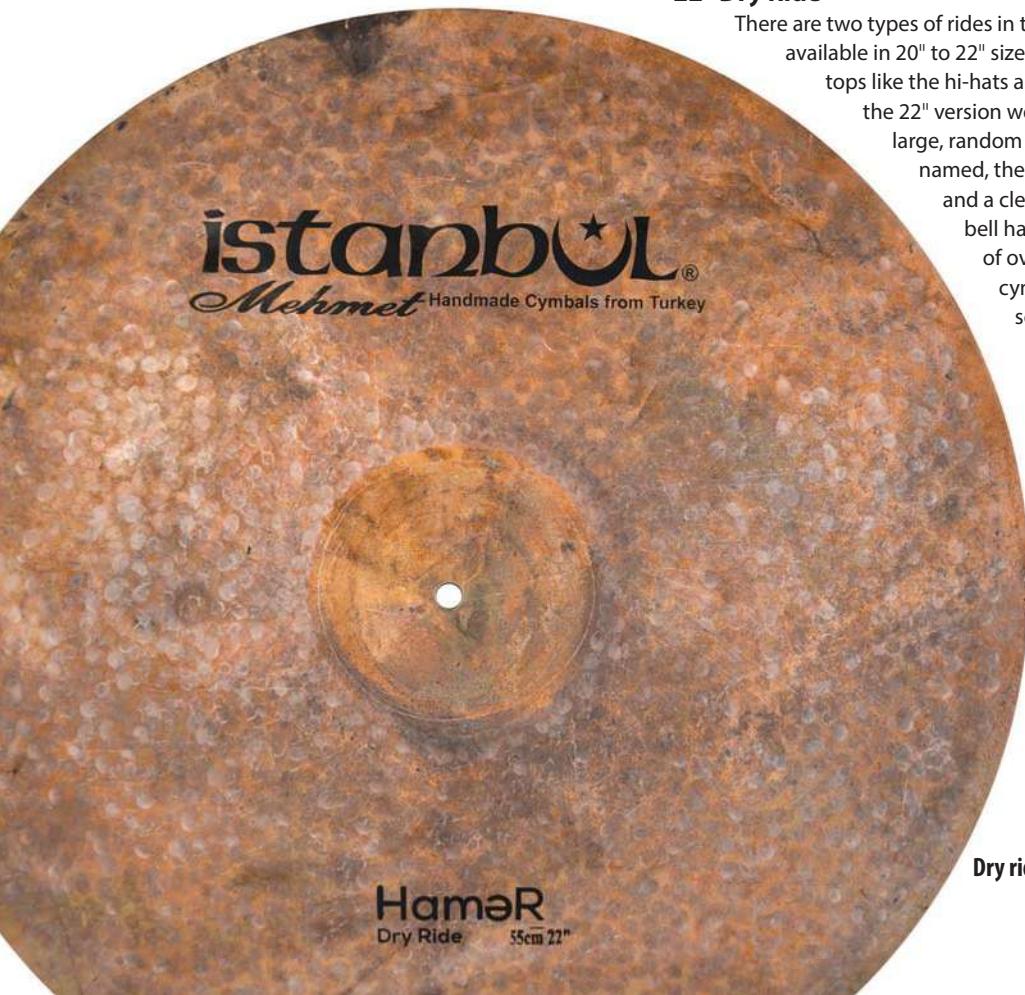
The Flange crash looks a lot like the Split crash, except that all of the extra-wide hammer marks are located only on the lathed outer portion.

This pattern softens the edges considerably and gives the cymbal a lot of flex. You can hear a bit of pitch wobble when you strike the Flange crash with force at the edge. But when struck with a more delicate flick of the stick, it opens up with a complex, breathy tone without excessive volume, which sounded great when punctuating the ends of musical phrases and fills. The 18" Flange crash that we tested was my favorite of the group, especially when paired with the ride in jazz and fusion contexts.

### 22" Dry Ride

There are two types of rides in the Hamer series: Warm and Dry. Both are available in 20" to 22" sizes. The Warm models have the dual finished tops like the hi-hats and Split crashes. The Dry rides, including the 22" version we reviewed, are completely raw and have large, random hammer marks across the bow. Aptly named, the 22" Hamer Dry ride has very little sustain and a clear, dark, and woody stick response. The bell has a deep and rich sound with just a touch of overtone. The extra hammering gave the cymbal a soft, broken-in feel and introduced some complexity that gave ride patterns a touch of trashiness without excessive wash. Playing slow ride patterns on the Dry ride didn't feel overly bare, while ultra-fast patterns spoke with supreme clarity at low and moderate volumes. It's not often that you'll come across a ride cymbal that strikes that delicate balance between clarity, complexity, and expressiveness. This is one of those times.

**Michael Dawson**



Dry ride



## PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

# Alesis

## Command Mesh Drumkit

A competitive entry-level setup with improved feel and sample upload capabilities.

**Alesis has expanded its line** of electronic drumsets by upgrading the mid-level Command series kit to include mesh-head toms in place of the previously used rubber pads, in addition to the mesh-head snare and kick. Despite being a budget-friendly kit, the Command Mesh setup doesn't skimp on performance and features.

### What's in the Box?

The Command Mesh kit ships with an 8" kick (with a pedal), a 10" dual-zone snare, three 8" dual-zone toms, a 10" ride cymbal pad, a 10" crash, and a 10" hi-hat with a foot pedal. All of the drums have mesh heads, and the ride and crash pads have choke capabilities. The included Command Advanced Drum Module features seventy-four kits (fifty-four presets and twenty for user customization) and 671 sounds. You can also build a full custom kit by loading in your own samples via a USB thumb drive. There are sixty play-along tracks within the module, and it has a built-in

performance recorder, a metronome, and an auxiliary input so you can plug in and practice along to your own audio devices.

The entire kit mounts on an aluminum four-post chrome rack with a snake of cables that attach to the rack with included hook-and-loop fasteners. Including unboxing, I had the kit completely set up within seventy minutes.

### Pads, Cymbals, and Pedals

The mesh-head pads offered a great feel and plenty of rebound, and the soft mesh made for minimal contact noise, which is ideal for quiet practice. Even though the snare was only 10" in diameter and the toms were 8", I didn't find the sizes to be problematic. And they do contribute to a more compact stage footprint, which makes this kit ideal for smaller practice rooms and stages. The bass drum pad stood up firmly and can accommodate any pedal, but the included one got the job done just fine.

The rubber-coated plastic cymbal pads played as expected; there's always an adjustment in technique needed to





accommodate the more rigid feel of electronic cymbal pads as compared to acoustic cymbals. The choke function took some getting used to as well; there was a relatively small zone to grab, and it was a bit tough to achieve consistency. The cymbals and the cymbal inputs are single-zone, so if you wanted to add a ride with a second zone at the bell, you would have to connect it to the additional dual-zone tom input.

### Command Module

The Command Module is simple to navigate, and it's identical to the one included with the pricier Alesis Crimson II kit. Customizing the preset kits didn't require reading the manual in order to figure out how to select a pad, change the sound, and edit its volume, panning, pitch, reverb, or decay.

You can load your own sounds into the module from a USB flash drive, but the drive needs to be formatted to a FAT32 file system, which can be done through the module. The module can hold 15 MB of files internally, or you can trigger sounds from the USB drive, thereby increasing the available memory. I was able to upload a few samples and build a new kit just as quickly and easily as when I was modifying kits using just the onboard sounds.

I wasn't optimistic about the hi-hat, since it wasn't designed with two plates that come together, like a conventional hi-hat. But aside from a little lag in response when doing quick fills, I was able to get the hi-hat to work well in most patterns. Per Alesis, the hi-hat input on this module won't support an upgraded hi-hat like the Pro X hi-hat from the Strike series. The overall sensitivity of all the pads on the Command Mesh kit wasn't quite at the level you'd get from a pro-level kit, especially towards the edges. But the mesh heads still provide a huge improvement in subtlety over the rubber pads typically found on kits in this price range.

### The Value

The Alesis Command Mesh drumkit is an affordable entry point at less than a third of the cost of Alesis's professional-level Strike Pro. So if you're looking into getting a simple electronic set for at-home practice, you're dabbling with electronics for the first time, or your church or theater gig demands an electronic kit at a budget price, the Command Mesh model will get the job done. Even with such a competitive price (\$699), it offers plenty of features, a relatively realistic feel, and a solid onboard library of customizable sounds.

**Stephen Bidwell**

## PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

# Vater

## Extended Play Drumsticks

A new innovation for increased durability with a guarantee to back it up.

**Vater has long been** a heavy hitter in the drumstick business, offering a wide range of products for everyone from classical percussionists to world-touring rock drummers. Artists such as Mike Mangini (Dream Theater), Max Weinberg (Bruce Springsteen), Mike Johnston (MikesLessons.com), and Frank Ferrer (Guns N' Roses) all rely on Vater products. Whether you're an endorser or not, though, making each stick last as long as possible can mean saving some serious cash over the long run.

Most stick companies have made attempts to address durability, often at the expense of the natural feel of a traditional wood stick. Vater is now offering a solution designed to maintain that feel—the Extended Play series.

### The Details

There are two key features that increase the durability of Extended Play drumsticks. The first feature is a pearl-colored, specially formulated finish on the top half of the drumstick that's designed to slow chipping and cracking. The second is a 3" section of blended material, called the Stick Shield, that's wrapped around the rimshot area of the stick and is said to be eight times stronger than steel. Vater is so confident in its Stick Shield technology that it offers a guarantee against breakage in the area protected by the Stick Shield. (More information about the guarantee can be found at [vater.com](http://vater.com).) The Extended Play series is available in 5A, 5B, Power 5A, Power 5B, and 3A sizes, with wood or nylon tips. The Extended Play series is also available in two marching models: the MV7 and MV8. All Extended Play models cost around \$13.

### In Use

We had the opportunity to test the Extended Play series for several weeks in rehearsals with a fusion band and a heavier rock group, as well as during regular practice sessions. Although we were sent multiple pairs in each size, I ended up using just one pair the entire time because neither the tip, the shoulder, nor the shaft became damaged enough to justify moving to a different pair. For reference, a pair of traditional wood sticks usually lasts me one week of practice, one practice session with my heavy rock band, or a few practices with the fusion project.

After a couple weeks of playing, the tip and shoulder areas of the Extended Plays were the first to show signs of wear. But the damage was subtle and certainly not enough for me to justify tossing the sticks in the trash. After about three weeks, I started to see some slight splintering around the Stick Shield rimshot area. Even with my heavier playing style, the lifespan of the Extended Play sticks was double that of traditional sticks, while maintaining the familiar feel of regular models. If you typically have to toss sticks prematurely because of shattered wood around the rimshot area, the Extended Play series would be a great alternative rather than going to a fully synthetic stick.

**Miguel Monroy**



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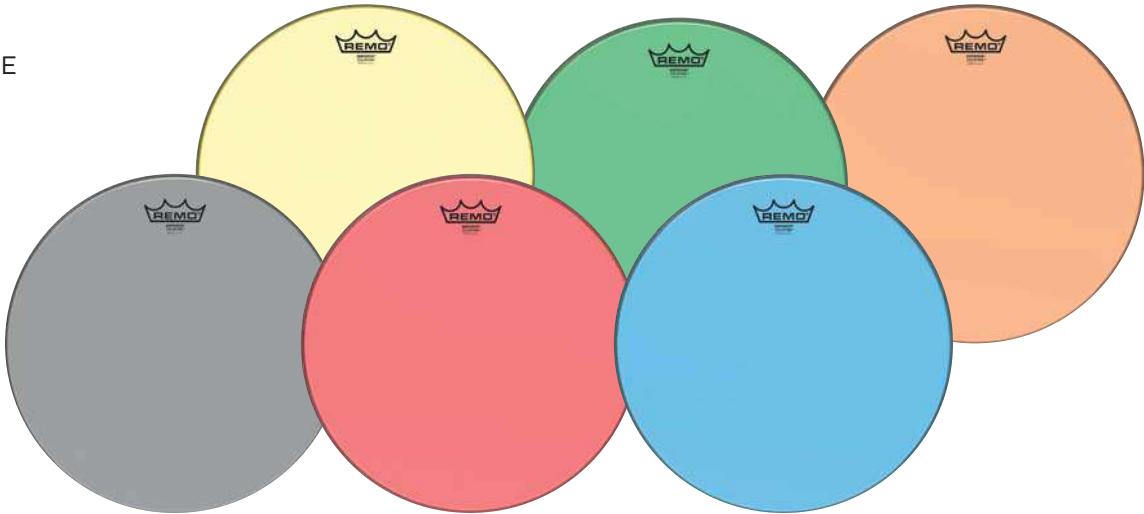
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Bishop Briggs'

# Nik Hughes

*MD* caught up with Nik Hughes while he was on tour with British indie-pop artist Bishop Briggs to find out how he recreates for the stage the unique mixture of electronics and acoustic drums from Briggs' recordings. "Our idea is to honor the record but still be able to take it to the level that the audience expects when seeing a big show," says Hughes. "With each tour, we tweak little things that help our performance. This rig is a representation of what's on the records, which is programmed soul, trap, and hip-hop beats.

"It's been easy to get the samples that were used on the recordings, since the producers are also members of the band," the drummer continues. "We chop up those samples so that I can actively play them, rather than just fire a loop and let it run. I do this with my Roland SPD-SX and external triggers. We use a lot of samples per song, so the extra triggers help to spread those sounds around the kit. The mesh heads give a great feel and allow for ghost notes and dynamics."

Hughes' goal is to bring the record to life on stage. "I felt like I needed a live acoustic element to help the impact, especially on the choruses," he says. "Bishop has a really powerful voice, so I felt I needed to be able to go bigger to match her dynamics. I started to add one or two acoustic pieces to the kit during each run of shows.

"The first thing I added was my Mapex Saturn bass drum, which is flipped on its side," Hughes explains. "I play it with sticks, so we added an Audix D6 microphone to give it more low end. It still sounds like a bass drum but with more top-end attack. That allows me to accentuate the kicks I play with the trigger, and I can play more fills. It also helped me feel a little more comfortable because I felt like I was sitting behind a conventional drumkit. With just the trigger pads, I felt a little exposed."

"Next I added a live tambourine because they used a lot of that on the record," he says. "Then I added some cymbals. We make very little onstage noise, so when I heard about Zildjian's Gen16s, I wanted to give them a try. We ended up not using the sound module and just going with the sound of the cymbals themselves through a condenser mic with some EQ. They also help the energy of the louder dynamics because they give me a cymbal to hit rather than a pad. I usually use them in the last chorus for that extra lift."

"I finally added a snare drum," Nik concludes. "But we're still using acoustic triggers, so even with this acoustic snare we can blend the recorded sounds with the live element."



**Drums:** Roland and Mapex  
A. Roland SPD-SX sampling pad (kick sounds sent to the sub output, everything else goes to the master output)

B. 6.5x14 Mapex Sledgehammer brass snare with Roland RT-30HR trigger  
C. 18x22 Mapex Saturn IV maple bass drum with three Pearl legs and Roland RT-30K trigger

D. Roland SPD-SX (for acoustic drum triggers only)  
E. Roland PD-100 trigger pad  
F. Roland PD-85 trigger pad  
G. Roland KT-10 foot triggers

**Drumheads:** Evans G2 Coated snare batter and GMAD bass drum batter

**Cymbals:** Zildjian  
1. 18" Gen16 crash  
2. 20" Gen16 crash/ride

**Percussion:** LP mounted tambourine  
Sticks: Vater Los Angeles 5A wood tip

**Hardware:** Mapex Falcon double-braced snare, tom, and cymbal stands, and cymbal stands without the boom arms for Roland SPD-SX pads

**Backup Electronics:** Roland KT-10 foot trigger, Mapex Falcon BD pedal with Roland KD-7 foot trigger, and PDX-100 trigger pad



## ON TOPIC

# Barrett Martin

The former Screaming Trees drummer on his writings, recordings, and life as a Zen monk.

### On the main goal of his book, *The Singing Earth*

I wrote *The Singing Earth* as a way to teach people, through storytelling and the accompanying soundtrack, about the incredible music that exists around the world, most of which is not mainstream, popular music. I want people to understand that, for the vast majority of human beings, music is a way of life and a survival mechanism that reaffirms their identity and cultural importance. I also wanted to show, from my firsthand experience, how music is created within these sacred environments I visited, and I wanted to raise awareness about climate change, which became an important part of the book as I witnessed this happening around the world.

I was on six continents, visiting fourteen different musical regions, from the Amazon rainforest to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. I saw firsthand the devastating effects of global warming and climate change. Ultimately, I want people to see their divine connection to the Earth, the beauty of our indigenous people, and the incredible landscapes and seascapes that are increasingly endangered. We can reverse this damage if we wake up and decide to take action at an individual level. It can be done, but we have to act.

### On Zen and the art of drumming

I was ordained in Soto Zen. The whole time that I lived in L.A., between about 1996 and 2001, I was a student at the Detroit Street Zen Center in central Hollywood. I had this interesting life where I lived in the same building as the zendo, and I would study Zen in the morning and evening and do sessions during the day. It was almost a perfect schedule. After studying for a few years I became an ordained monk. I was actually supposed to go to Japan and study in Osaka, but that was when I decided to go back to school. So I did two learning things—this spiritual practice, and then I went back and did the academic practice.

Zen is all about being right in the moment, every moment, moment to moment. Right now, speaking to you, I'm thinking of the words I'm speaking and staying as mentally present as I possibly can. The same is true with everything in life, whether you're cooking dinner, working on your car, cleaning your house, or laying down a drum track.

It's particularly true with drumming, as you're using both legs and both arms, and your rhythm has to be very precise to fit into the groove of the song—whether you're leaning back or forward, thinking about the performance itself and about how you're going to

color the drumset with your musicality. The ability to keep your mind clear, focused, and right in the present moment, from millisecond to millisecond, really helps you improve your performance in everything.

I think many drummers do this automatically without even knowing that they're doing it. You go into this Zen mind where you're completely awake and conscious of what you're doing, but you're also in this natural fluid [state], so the rhythms and the drumming itself just flows out of your body.

### On the upcoming Barrett Martin Group album

This new record is titled *The Quality of Fire*. It's at least twenty songs, a double album. It's the same core band as [my previous album] *Transcendence* but adding Kim Thayil [Soundgarden], Peter Buck [R.E.M.], Wayne Horvitz [Bill Frisell, John Zorn, Robin Holcomb], and probably Dave Catching [Eagles of Death Metal]. It's literally half jazz musicians and half rock musicians, but guys like Peter and Kim, even though they were in huge rock bands, are incredible guitar players and can play anything. So this next record is the biggest record I've ever produced, twenty songs with all these players coming in and out of the studio. It's a big undertaking.



**On the drumset as an altar**  
Something a mentor of mine said that always resonated with me was that one of the greatest spiritual paths was the path of the artist; the artistic path itself is a spiritual tradition. You can make that path be a spiritual path by the message you're trying to convey to the world.

I think about where I've spent the most time: It's sitting behind a drumset, either practicing or playing a tour, and it has to have been tens of thousands of hours by now. Whenever I'm playing drums I'm trying to convey my soul through them. That's my prime directive. When I'm a producer working with a band, I try to get the heart of the band and capture that in the recording, so it's kind of just different perspectives of that same path.

**Barrett Martin plays Tama drums, Sabian cymbals, and Yamaha vibraphones and marimbas, and he uses Vic Firth drumsticks.**

**Story by Stephen Bidwell**  
**Photos by Charles Peterson**



# Nate Smith

## Fearless Flyer

Story by Ken Micallef

Photos by John Fell

A jazz drummer by trade, yet with an innate ability to enthrall with groove intensity alone, Nate Smith is reanimating the eternal grace, mystery, and magic of the 16th-note soul/R&B groove, which he simply calls “pocket.” Introduced to Instagram and Facebook audiences by a series of videos shot at the concerts of soul ‘n’ jazz singer José James, Smith has become a social media star, his groove-drenched clips regularly racking up views in the millions. And his message couldn’t be simpler.

Typically culled from deep within a José James concert, when a fevered song performance climaxes in a drum solo, Smith lets rip with what is now his patented 16th-note pocket. It’s a sleekly polished vehicle of 2-and-4 backbeat, its quarter-note pulses sewn together and set aloft by Nate’s hypnotic 16th-note hi-hat rhythm, while his right foot pumps hand-in-glove bass drum permutations below. And the permutations continue around the set, as Smith explores a million and one ways to dissect, expand, and enlighten the groove with popping floor tom slams, swirling snare ruffs, abrupt cymbal shouts, and disruptive time trails.

Nate Smith connects.

His setup: simple—snare drum, bass drum, hi-hat, cymbals. His touch: light, swift, and propulsive. His tone: dark and pungent. His ghost-note-encrusted signature: instantly recognizable.

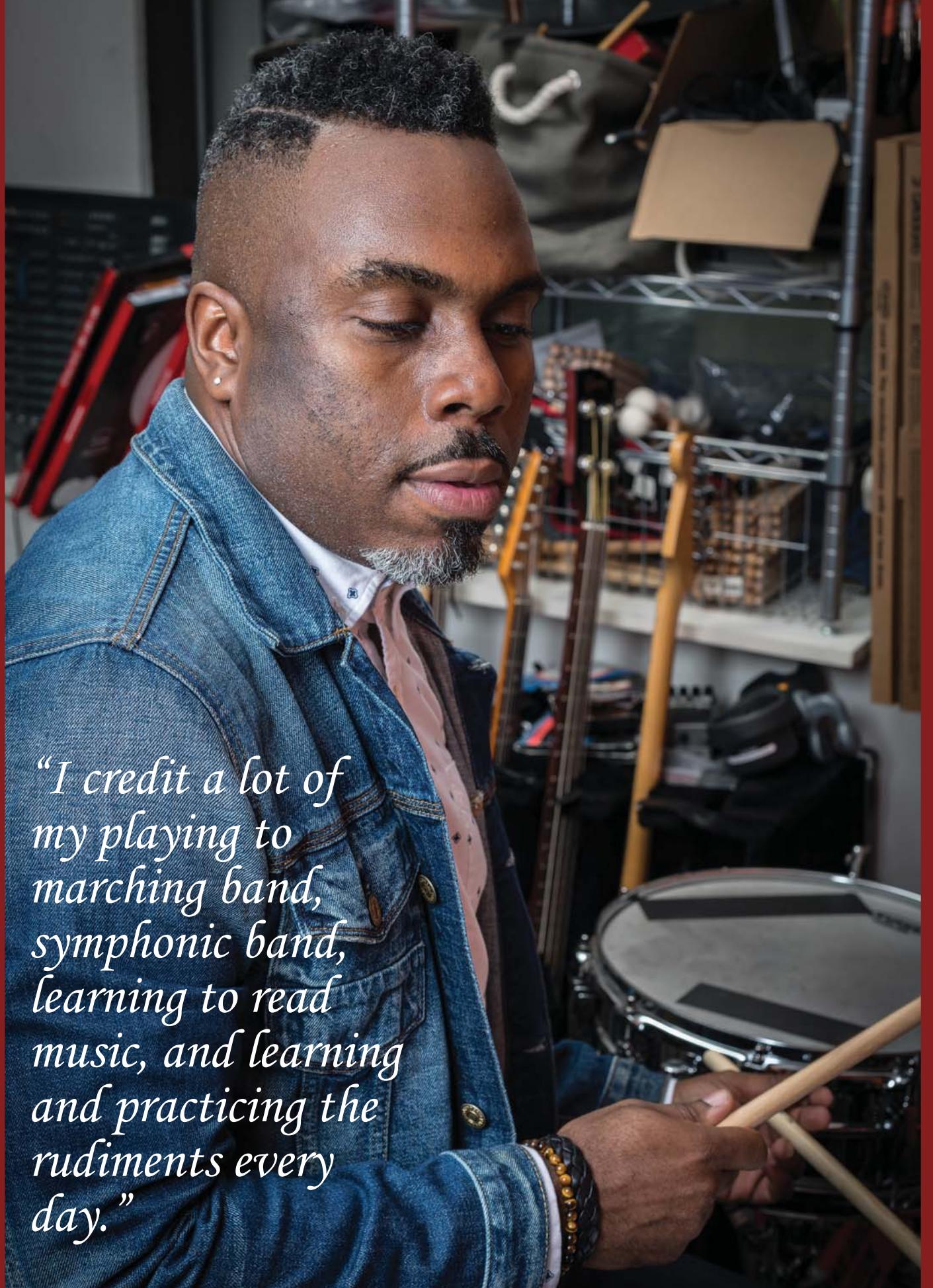
A star is born.

If you take Nate Smith on his sexy 16th notes alone, though, you’d be missing much. Smith’s a veteran of the groups of estimable bassist Dave Holland, saxophonist Chris Potter, guitarist Adam Rogers (DICE), and jazz luminaries Betty Carter, Ravi Coltrane, Lionel Loueke, Regina Carter, Nicholas Payton, and John Patitucci, and even pop hipster Joe Jackson. Smith is also a revered educator, having served on the faculty of Betty Carter’s Jazz Ahead at the Kennedy Center (2013, 2014) as well as the 2014 Thailand International Jazz Conference. In 2015, he was the featured artist in residence at his alma mater, James Madison University, where he received a B.S. in media arts and design in 1997.

That Smith wasn’t a music major in college speaks to his renegade stance, his artistic vision, his groove drumming swimming a jazz circumference. If you’re looking for a key to discovering your own individuality, Nate Smith’s life lesson is one to embrace.

In the summer of 2017, when José James videos featuring Smith’s heated 16th-note solos were beginning to catch fire on social media, the drummer released his thoughtful and at times provocative sophomore album, *Kinfolk: Postcards from Everywhere*, on his own Waterbaby Music label, for which he would receive a Grammy Award nomination for the song “Home Free.” MD spoke with Nate after he’d returned from performing two nights at D.C.’s Blues Alley with Ravi Coltrane.





*“I credit a lot of my playing to marching band, symphonic band, learning to read music, and learning and practicing the rudiments every day.”*

**MD:** When *Kinfolk* was released, *MD* offered you an inside feature, but you held out for a cover. What gave you the confidence to know you would get the cover eventually?

**Nate:** I didn't know I would get it. I just thought to myself, I'm going to keep working. And since *MD* did a feature on me previously, and this is the time for me to really expand.... I'm looking at the Instagram and Facebook numbers and the requests that I'm getting for lessons and instructional videos, and I'm realizing that all of this work is having an impact and resonating with people.

**MD:** So social media numbers translate into lessons?

**Nate:** They do, it's turned into lessons, master classes, clinics. The two guys I'm working with at Ludwig and Evans, Ulysses Salazar and Kyle Thomas, respectively, they're younger guys looking to bridge this gap between the companies and social media. They saw that these videos were going viral, into the thousands and even millions of views. José James will post a video with me, and then I'll repost it. Eventually my numbers—because so many drummers are following me, and they share it and reshare it—the view count rises exponentially. The last video we posted showed me dropping a drum stick during a José James show, and I continued to play my solo.

**MD:** So you're playing a one-handed groove solo?

**Nate:** Yes, that's it. Last time I checked, that video had 3.5 million views.

**MD:** That's remarkable.

**Nate:** A couple things happened at once. The video thing was happening and social media was taking off as I was releasing this record. I don't know if the people who like *Kinfolk* and the people who like drum videos are the same people, but some of them are. There was some overlap, and I thought: *This is reaching enough people that I should try to make as big an impact with an issue as I can.* I was saying to people, "I'm not only a drummer who drops sticks and makes videos, I actually write songs and have a band!" So some of that audience has followed me over to *Kinfolk*. But most people into *Kinfolk* are jazz fans, music fans anyway. I can't nail the demographics, but there's definitely a difference between those two audiences.

**MD:** What is it about the pocket that fascinates audiences?

**Nate:** The trend has been that you'd watch drum video after drum video. And these guys and girls would play amazing fill after amazing fill. After thirty seconds of incredible drumming, it's like...so where's the story? Where's the dynamics? Where's the touch? Where's the suspense? There's no risk if you pull off everything you're going for. My clips that have gotten the most views are live ones from José James shows. You hear the audience reacting, and that's important; it



makes people feel like they're part of the event.

The other thing, in some of the videos the unexpected happens. A stick will break, or I'll drop a stick or go for something that I don't quite pull off. People can see that it's improvised. And it's minimal; I'm just playing kick, snare, and hi-hat. I'm trying to find this language using the ghost notes and the hi-hat differently, with dynamics and touch. I used to set up a lot more drums, but I realized I wasn't playing them! I want to focus on what I'm actually playing and try to create a language. That might be part of why people are gravitating toward these videos.

**MD:** And is it also because the 16th-note pocket, which used to be as common as dirt, is now nowhere to be heard or seen, except in hip-hop as a programmed "flavor"?

**Nate:** That's true. It's kind of a throwback. There's no one out there playing a minimal, ghost-note-filled pocket. Cats aren't coming out of Omar Hakim and Steve Gadd. There's a generational divide where some cats have checked that stuff, and some haven't—they're into the more chops-oriented drummers. Think about the Daft Punk record with Omar and James Genus, *Random Access Memories*. I was told Omar and James just showed up and played and came up with parts. That record reminded everyone of that feel. Like the "Get Lucky" track. J.R. Robinson is on the record too.

**MD:** I think of Bernard Purdie, Jabo Starks, Clyde Stubblefield, and David Garibaldi as the essential 16th-note groove-movers.

**Nate:** The influences for me were later: Omar and Steve Gadd and Harvey Mason. Still, [it's] that same idea that considered touch and playing consecutive 16th notes on the hi-hat. People aren't really doing that anymore. With José James we'll start with one groove and then it will turn into something else. Eventually the 16th-note idea will come in. Especially if we're playing something high energy, we get to a spot in a performance where we're trading ideas. José does this digital scratching thing with his voice and I'm playing along with him. That's where I play a lot of the 16th-note grooves.

Playing with José has opened up my drumming. We play basically the same set every night, and I have to find different ways of playing the music to keep it interesting.

**MD:** What is the Fearless Flyers project we see on Instagram? It looks like a takeoff of Robert Palmer's "Addicted to Love" video, but it's all dudes in sunglasses, not supermodels with guitars.

**Nate:** Fearless Flyers is Cory Wong and Joe Dart from Vulfpeck, then Mark Lettieri from Snarky Puppy on guitar. Jack Stratton produces Vulfpeck and Fearless Flyers. Every song is recorded in real time and every song gets a video. The videos make you feel like you're in the room with the band. Jack took these ideas from Vulfpeck's popular videos and put them together. So we did six songs, six videos. The first video got 5 million views. It's crazy. Everything was based around what's cool about each individual's playing. They saw me playing the 16th-note grooves and wanted to focus on that for many of the tracks. We do an Afrobeat version of "Under the Sea," which is kind of kitschy. It grooves.

**MD:** The music is funky, like an L.A. version of the Meters.

**Nate:** I like that the guys are plugged in to a history and a lineage. We checked out old videos of Al Jackson, and Steve Gadd with Grover Washington. There's a connection to history.

**MD:** You were playing hi-hat-based pocket grooves during our first *Modern Drummer* interview. You've played a lot of straight-ahead jazz, including the Chris Potter and Dave Holland gigs. There's DeJohnette-ish playing on *Kinfolk*. What's the fascination with pocket grooves?

**Nate:** I don't know! I'm as much a child of Jack DeJohnette and Art Blakey and Philly Joe and Jimmy Cobb as I am of Clyde Stubblefield and Jabo Starks and Purdie and Gadd. And the jazz drummers I really like are the funkiest guys. I love Jimmy Cobb and feel he's tremendously underrated. He isn't a flashy player, but you'd be hard pressed to find better-feeling records than the ones he's played on. Like *Kind of Blue*, that's amazing-feeling music. The quarter note is so strong on Jimmy's records. In terms of a feeling, that's what brought me into jazz. His drumming made me want to dance. Playing the pocket stuff is all about trying to get to that feeling. Before jazz, I was into Prince, Sting's first band...that was my thing. I was always thinking about the groove first—before the chops.

## Smoothing the Pocket

**MD:** Watching you play the pocket groove, it's like a meditation for you; you're deep into it. What's your process for making the pocket work?

**Nate:** I'm thinking so much about consistency of sound and consistency of space. We live in the grid world, where everything is recorded on Pro Tools. But music felt better before Pro Tools. The music was breathing, there were human beings making it.

**MD:** The time wasn't "perfect," but you can hear the musicians.

**Nate:** You can hear the people, that's where I'm at. I'm really thinking about each beat and each space between the beats. I'm singing it, kind of humming it to myself. I'm singing the kick and snare drum parts. I'm so focused on the sound and the space and making sure

everything is consistent. I'm so wrapped up in sound when I play the pocket. When I do deviate and add stuff, I want to drift as far as I can without losing the time. It's a process of being there and then letting go and coming back.

**MD:** Back in the late 1970s, there were many 16th-note hits, like Player's "Baby Come Back," Tower of Power's "What Is Hip," Earth, Wind & Fire's "Shining Star," Toto's "Hold the Line" and "Georgy Porgy".... The drummer had to maintain that 16th-note flow with the right hand on the hi-hat and the 2-and-4 backbeat. It's like the motion of a wave. Is that a lost art?

**Nate:** Maybe so. I don't see guys doing it. And if you do, it's a two-handed 16th on the hi-hat. But playing one-handed 16th-note hi-hat creates a different sound, a different motion. At this point it's not the thing in demand. I think of all the Barry White songs with Ed Greene. Great drummer. The way those 16th-note slow jams would breathe... and you could tell he was using one hand. Alphonse Mouzon. "Midnight Plane" by Ronnie Foster.

**MD:** Billy Cobham's *Spectrum* album, with "Le Lis" and "Stratus."

**Nate:** Talk about a guy who has a sound! Holy cow. That's tough to do

## Smith's Setup

### Drums: Ludwig

- 5x14 Supraphonic snare
- 5x14 Classic Maple snare (left side)
- 8x12 Classic Maple tom
- 14x14 Classic Maple floor tom
- 16x16 Legacy Mahogany floor tom
- 14x20 Ludwig Legacy Mahogany bass drum

### Cymbals: Zildjian

- 15" K Light hi-hats
- 22" Constantinople Bounce ride
- 22" Constantinople Overhammered ride
- 17" A Custom crash

### Percussion: LP Basket Shaker and plastic Egg Shakers

### Electronics: Sensory Percussion

by Sunhouse triggers, 13" MacBook Pro Retina, Ableton Live, Avid Pro Tools

**Sticks:** Vater Manhattan 7A, Wire Tap retractable wire brush, T7 mallet, Vintage Bomber bass drum beater

**Heads:** Evans G2 Coated batter on Classic Maple snare, Calftone batter on Supraphonic snare, Calftone tom and bass drum batters and Genera Reso bottoms

on the drums, have your own personality like that.

**MD:** And that's what this is about for you. The way you've presented yourself, it's unique and personal. You wear your heart on your sleeve both in your drumming and in how you've approached press. Even recording your parents for interludes about your family on *Kinfolk* is highly personal. That approach wouldn't work with just any musician.

**Nate:** I'm always thinking: *Would I want to hear this music? As a fan, would I want to hear this story? Do I care about this? Does it make sense in the narrative of the record to have interludes with my parents?* If you can find a way to make listeners care about a story as much as the music, then you can really pull them in and give them a reason to invest.

**MD:** How do you make playing the 16th-note flow seamless and comfortable?

**Nate:** It's something I've been doing a long time. When students ask, I go back to those marching band warm-ups, playing sequential exercises. Eight on each hand, or sixteen on each hand. Trying to accent the downbeats. You build this muscle memory, this technique where you're letting the stick do some of the work. If I'm playing the [cadences] fast, I take advantage of the stick rebound. So there's the main stroke, then I let the next stroke happen on its own. I find a way to negotiate it. So I'm not working so hard. And I'm using the shank of the stick on the hi-hat for most of the 16th-note sound. It depends on

the tempo. If it's slower I can get in there with the shank of the stick for that thick sound. That's what Gadd did. He would open it up and get that really beautiful sound on the hi-hat. He'd also play with the butt of the stick on the snare. It was in his hands; he would get this snare drum sound that no one else could get.

I also really got into James Gadson, which comes in handy with José James doing the Bill Withers material. It's hard to overstate the importance of James Gadson. He's on all the great Bill Withers records and so many sessions. There's something special about the way he plays the hi-hat. Bill Withers' "Use Me" is about as "swunkey" as it gets. There's so much language in there, and I don't know if a lot of younger drummers are really checking out those records. Younger drummers and R&B music fans are digging the pocket stuff because they haven't heard it before. They've moved into Chris Dave and Eric Harland. Those guys know these older drummers, of course, but I'm not sure the younger drummers have put together all the dots.

**MD:** Are younger drummers coming out of Chris Dave? Ground zero would seem to be Dennis Chambers for the gospel-chops drummers and beyond.

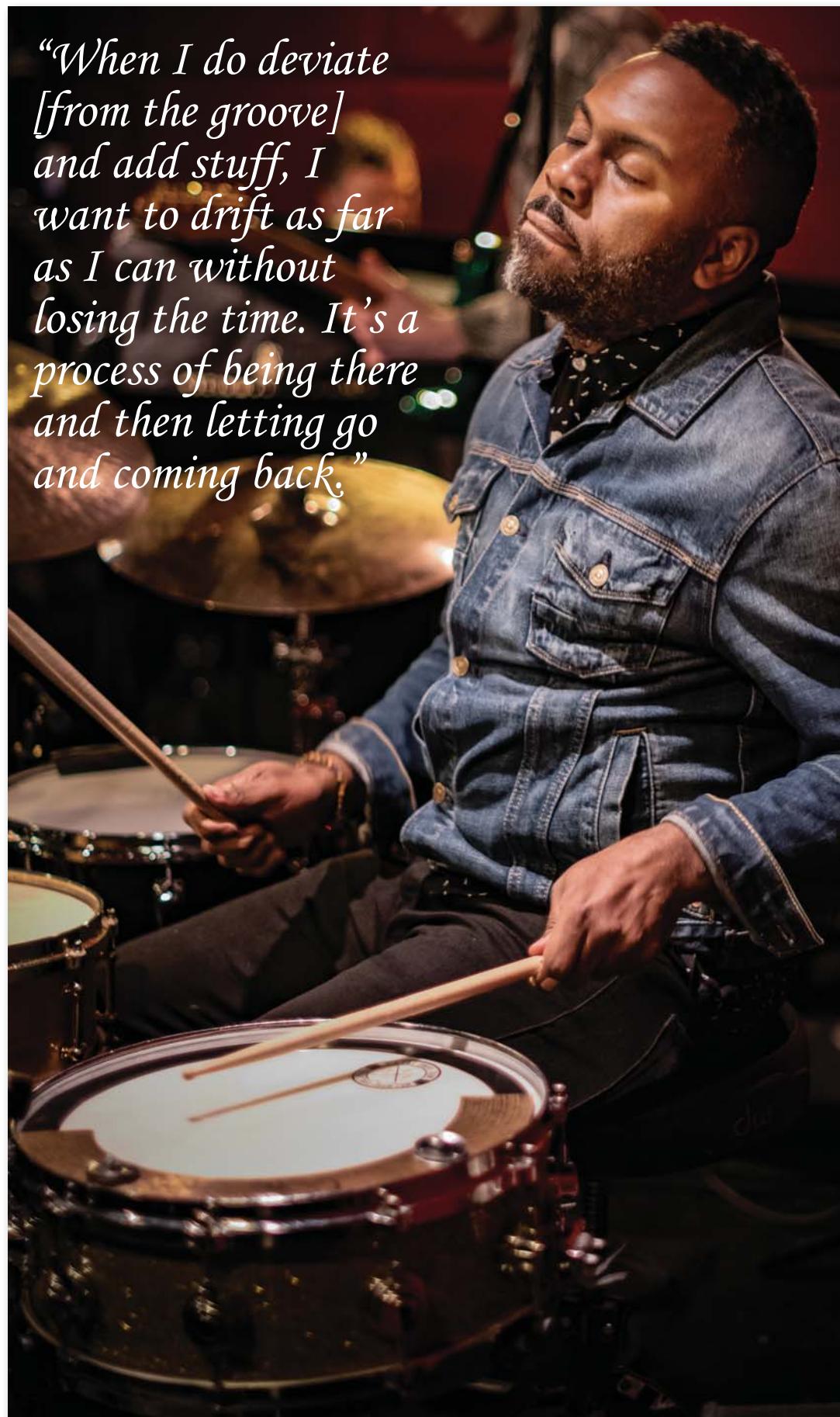
**Nate:** I agree. Chambers is everywhere. And it's certain Chambers recordings, like John Scofield's *Loud Jazz*. Those are like the holy grail. I'm not as big a disciple of Dennis, but you'd be hard pressed to name a more influential drummer. And Scofield's *Still Warm* with Omar Hakim is an important influence for me. Weather Report's *Domino Theory*, Sting's *The Dream of the Blue Turtles* and *Bring on the Night*, all great records for Omar. And also his session stuff with Joe Sample—it's all touch.

### Students Then and Now

**MD:** What do most students want from you?

**Nate:** Pocket. First, we put the sticks away and listen to some music. I play James Gadson with

*"When I do deviate [from the groove] and add stuff, I want to drift as far as I can without losing the time. It's a process of being there and then letting go and coming back."*



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## Nate Smith

Bill Withers, J.R. Robinson with Michael Jackson. Steve Gadd playing "Mister Magic" with Grover Washington. I'll ask what they hear, and often they'll notice the feel but they're fixated on the drums and the 16th-note pocket. I refer them back to the music. Often they want to know how to do a beat, but it's disconnected from the music. They want to know "how I do that thing in the video." But the rest of the concert is me playing in a band! [laughs] It's in the context of a live show. With José the zenith of a song can lead to a drum solo. That's where the videos come from.

**MD:** When teaching pocket, do you instruct students on how to make the groove happen with and without a metronome?

**Nate:** Absolutely. I'll set up a click track and we'll play. I encourage the students to record themselves—which I always did. I have them play with and without the click. Nine times out of ten their time is more accurate with the click; but when they get off the click and just play, their personality comes out. How do you bridge that, express yourself with the click track? That's the real challenge. And I always have students play along with records. Play along with drummers that have great time—where, even if they rush, the

feel is right. If you get the feeling right, you'll really be on to something.

**MD:** To what do you credit your consistency of sound and groove?

**Nate:** I credit a lot of my playing to marching band, symphonic band, learning to read music, and learning and practicing the rudiments every day. It's helped me so much, and I rely on that stuff every day, even if it's only five minutes. That makes me check in. I have to talk to the hands and make sure they're on.

**MD:** Do you recall your marching band exercises?

**Nate:** I'd shed all the flam rudiments: flam accents, flam taps, pataflafas, all at the same tempo. I'd alternate them—that forces you to focus on what your hands are playing. I would start soft and go really loud and then try to come back down. Make sure you can articulate all the rudiments no matter the dynamic level, so you can hear all the strokes. That's the most important thing, to be able to clearly hear everything you're playing, whether it's triple piano or triple forte.

**MD:** At what tempo?

**Nate:** I would start around a quarter note equals 100 or 110. I'd shed triplets with flam



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## Kinfolk Tracks

**"Intro: Wish You Were Here"** Setting the stage.

**"Skip Step"** The funky true album opener levels the playing field with an odd-metered arrangement, dancing vocals, agitated guitar lines, and Smith's hypnotic drumming.

**"Bounce: pts I + II"** Instantly morphs the mood, a breezy backbeat melded with serpentine guitar and roaming tenor saxophone.

**"Mom: Postcards from Detroit/Floyd/Salem"** An interlude with Nate's mother retelling the family's lineage in whispered tones.

**"Retold"** Simple and lovely; revolving piano, a heavenly vocal chorus, and gentle drums and saxophone paint a moment of bliss.

**"Disenchantment: The Weight"** Surrounded by strings, vocalist Amma Whatt recites memories over Smith's odd-metered snare drum marching beat, followed by a wide-open, triumphal pocket.

**"Spinning Down"** Dave Holland's bass ushers in a mysterious and rhythmic instrumental.

**"Pages"** Glides like a ride in a hot-air balloon, with Nate's bouncing pocket fully active, at full force. Gretchen Parlato provides the vocal.

**"From Here: Interlude"** A Steve Gadd-inspired groove.

**"Morning and Allison"** Down and dirty drive.

**"Spiracles"** A gentle rise.

**"Small Moves: Interlude"** P-Funk worthy.

**"Dad: Postcards from Isaac Street"** Nate's father fills in more family history.

**"Home Free"** The thoroughly surprising and emotional closer.



accents, 16th notes with flam taps, or Swiss Army 8th triplets at that tempo. Then I'd displace the accents. That's another way of training the hands. I studied *Stick Control*, Haskell W. Harr's *Drum Method for Band and Orchestra*—that was tough—and Ted Reed's *Syncopation*. I still do this: start a click track, open up a method book, and sight-read sixteen bars of something. It opens up your brain. That's how I reboot.

**MD:** Do you have a pre-gig warm-up?

**Nate:** I'll do a marching band exercise called the Sprinkler. It's eight 8th notes on each hand, then two bars of alternating 16th notes. I'll start slowly and then go fast. Slow and loud, fast and soft. You can't be on autopilot and play that.

### Beating the Beast: Instagram

**MD:** Your Instagram popularity is impressive.

**Nate:** People will also post the videos on their YouTube accounts. I have tons of YouTube views, but I don't have a channel! I've seen a compilation called Nate Smith Grooves. It's five minutes of me playing a pocket, and a banner saying "Subscribe to my page." Someone transcribed thirty-two bars of one of my José James video solos, and invited viewers to send them money for a transcription. I've thought about anonymously following one of these guys and buying the transcription, then pointing out to them how it's wrong. Get them in some trouble. [laughs]

**MD:** What specific José James songs feature your 16th-note pocket?

**Nate:** One's called "Park Bench People," from an album called *The Dreamer*. The basis of the groove is Freddie Hubbard's "Red Clay." We'll play that groove and get into different permutations of 16th notes. It's really

developed into a thing with José, which audiences from London to Amsterdam to D.C. have really taken to. José's Bill Withers record features me, keyboardist Kris Bowers, guitarist Brad Williams, and bassist Pino Palladino. He's the dream bass player. He plays the part, then he'll adlib something that will knock out everyone in the studio. What just happened!

### Kinfolk

**MD:** *Kinfolk* earned you a Grammy nomination. The improvisations, the compositions, some serious drumming, the flow—it's all uniquely you, though some of the material is reminiscent of the funky cosmic organic thing George Duke did on the album *The Aura Will Prevail*. There's so much happening on the song "Skip Step," for example—odd meters, polyrhythms....

**Nate:** I was thinking about Maurice White when we recorded and mixed "Skip Step." He's a huge influence on me, not only as a songwriter and as a musician, but how he made great records. I wanted everyone on *Kinfolk* to show their personality. A record like Duke's *Brazilian Love Affair* has so much personality. That's the first George Duke record I ever heard. The first couple tunes with Brazilian percussion...what a great band on that record! And that feeling, it's light but also thick.

**MD:** Did you envision *Kinfolk* as a journey?

**Nate:** I wanted it to feel like you were traveling a path, to give people this idea of what it feels like to be a journeyman musician. There's an interlude with a cab driver in one song—he gives this great Beatitudes speech. Then there are the interludes with my parents. And the segues between songs...I wanted listeners to have

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## Nate Smith

the sense that each song was a brick in the road. I wanted the record to have an arc; it starts with the street noise and ends with a somber, soft piece.

**MD:** What's the meter in "Skip Step"?

**Nate:** That's 4/4 plus 3/4 plus 3/8, so 17/8. It's divided in that way.

**MD:** "Spinning Down" is a kind of smoky, Herbie Hancock vehicle.

**Nate:** The minute I heard that bass line, I knew Dave Holland had to play it. That line was inspired by him, and I learned so much about composing and writing for a band from Dave. He really understood how to write for the quintet and big band I was part of. He wrote for personalities.

**MD:** Why did you use a marching-type groove in "Disenchantment"?

**Nate:** The lyric is somber, and there's this feeling of carrying a burden. That marching band thing felt somber to me.

**MD:** On the album and live, you tune your kit to an almost 1970s sound: frequency-flat toms, taut sounds.

**Nate:** Most of my favorite records were recorded in the '70s and early '80s. It's like osmosis. And when I do R&B or hip-hop production, the samples I use are from that era. They tend to speak a little more, there's more impact in those sounds. I've always

gravitated to that dry, gritty drum sound. The first drum sounds I ever sampled were from Earth, Wind & Fire's *All 'n All*. Sly Stone records like *Fresh*—whew! Talk about touch and tone, all that language Andy Newmark is playing on "In Time"—so great.

I have a theory. Guys like Clyde Stubblefield were playing small 18" bass drums that were baffled with blankets and pillows. Clyde's snare drum sound is tight, crisp. Not a lot of tone, but tons of impact. I play rimshots for the snare drum backbeat. I seem to live in that sound.

**MD:** "Spiracles" opens with a slow, watery, dreamy cymbal sound that really flows. How do you make that flow happen?

**Nate:** I try to think about the music. The thing about "Spiracles," that's originally from a 1999 Stereolab record, *Cobra and Phases Group Play Voltage in the Milky Night*. The changes are so pretty and nostalgic, it has this '70s feel. I keep going back to the '70s! That's where the prettiest music was. Regarding the pocket and the '70s, I guess I'm tapping into something people have forgotten about.

**MD:** "Home Free" is a lovely song, and the violin melody is unusual. It's an open, slow groove, but perhaps a weird way to end a record?

**Nate:** I couldn't think of anything that I'd want to hear after it. It *felt* like the closing song. And it's also a very minimal moment. The band is fading out, the strings are holding a note, fade to black.

## Come on, See the Show

**MD:** Who's the audience for *Pocket Change*, your Loop Loft digital and vinyl project released on your WaterBaby Music label?

**Nate:** It's meant for producers and DJs on one hand, people who can take the loops, chop them up, sample them—whatever they want to do. And also people who just like to use drums. I think of Max Roach's *Drums Unlimited* record—which is an inspiration for this, how Max played so melodically—and Jamire Williams' *Effectual*, from last year. And anybody who is creative. This could be used for scoring films, for dance. I am really curious to see who uses it. I'll have the bpm listed on the label so DJs can have a starting point.

**MD:** One track reminds me of a study in tom drops.

**Nate:** That's "Dum Dum," a deep house groove where the tom sounds are used as a hook or refrain.

**MD:** Is "Spress Theyself" a takeoff on "Express Yourself" by Charles Wright & the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band?

**Nate:** Yes, as well as the N.W.A. version, which samples the song.

**MD:** "Warble" has some displacement. That's unusual for a groove-themed release.

**Nate:** The title is about the shakiness of moving something over by one sextuplet; or making [the accent] early.

**MD:** "Big/Little Five" explores five.

**Nate:** I've always played odd-metered music with Dave and Chris, even with Ravi Coltrane. If you can make an odd meter groove, you're on to something. I was thinking of 5/8 versus 5/4, then a larger phrase like 5/2. It's like a wheel within the wheel.

## Do Like Nate?

**MD:** Do you feel like an accidental Instagram star?

**Nate:** Yes. I didn't see it coming. Musically, I get why people dig it and are sharing it. But I certainly didn't set out to do it.

**MD:** So you don't have any tips on how to repeat that?

**Nate:** Nope. Just share your work, share your process. People want to know. Instagram and Facebook are like scrolling talent shows.

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# Dave Alvin's Lisa Pankratz

## Instinct. Intention. Interaction.

Story by Stephen Belans

Photos by Jessica Alexander

**A**t the Continental Club in Austin, Texas, a curtain-lined wall behind the stage separates the main room from the back room, where a red-felt pool table gets far more use displaying the band's merch than pocketing balls. A few feet away, beyond the back room's makeshift bar and a tub of iced-down Lone Star beer, you'll find a framed photo of drummer Lisa Pankratz. Over the years, this snug little venue built its worldwide reputation by consistently delivering the best in American roots music. The same can be said for Pankratz. She's earned her spot on that wall.

It's been more than a decade since Lisa Pankratz began working with Dave Alvin, the Grammy-winning roots rock shape-shifter who founded the Blasters with his brother Phil, did a stint with punk rockers X and their country offshoot the Knitters, and continues to release solo albums ranging from twangy rock 'n' roll to more intimate acoustic records rooted in country and blues. Alvin relies on Pankratz, whose perfectly suited style is somehow simultaneously raw and refined, for touring and recording his solo efforts, including his most recent release, *Downey to Lubbock*, a

duo project with Texas crooner Jimmie Dale Gilmore. We sat down at her appropriately vintage 1950s-style kitchen table in the cozy South Austin home she shares with her husband and rhythm section mate, bassist Brad Fordham, to discuss her career before they headed west to start the Alvin/Gilmore tour.

Pankratz grew up on her grandfather's ranch in Dripping Springs, Texas, a small community twenty-five miles southwest of Austin, watching her father play drums in his reggae band and raiding his record collection. "There's a lot of music in the air in Texas, whether it's hardcore country music, gospel music, Tejano music, Doug Sahm in whatever [project] he was doing at any given point.... The blues, obviously. I would rediscover some of these records that were in the house. There was this Johnny Bush record, and I was just like, *Well, hell! This is everything!* This is shuffles, ballads, waltzes. Amazing Caruso-like singing. It struck something that just felt internal. I had a great starter collection of American rock 'n' roll/R&B 45s and a certain amount of country. I was playing along with all of those kinds of records."





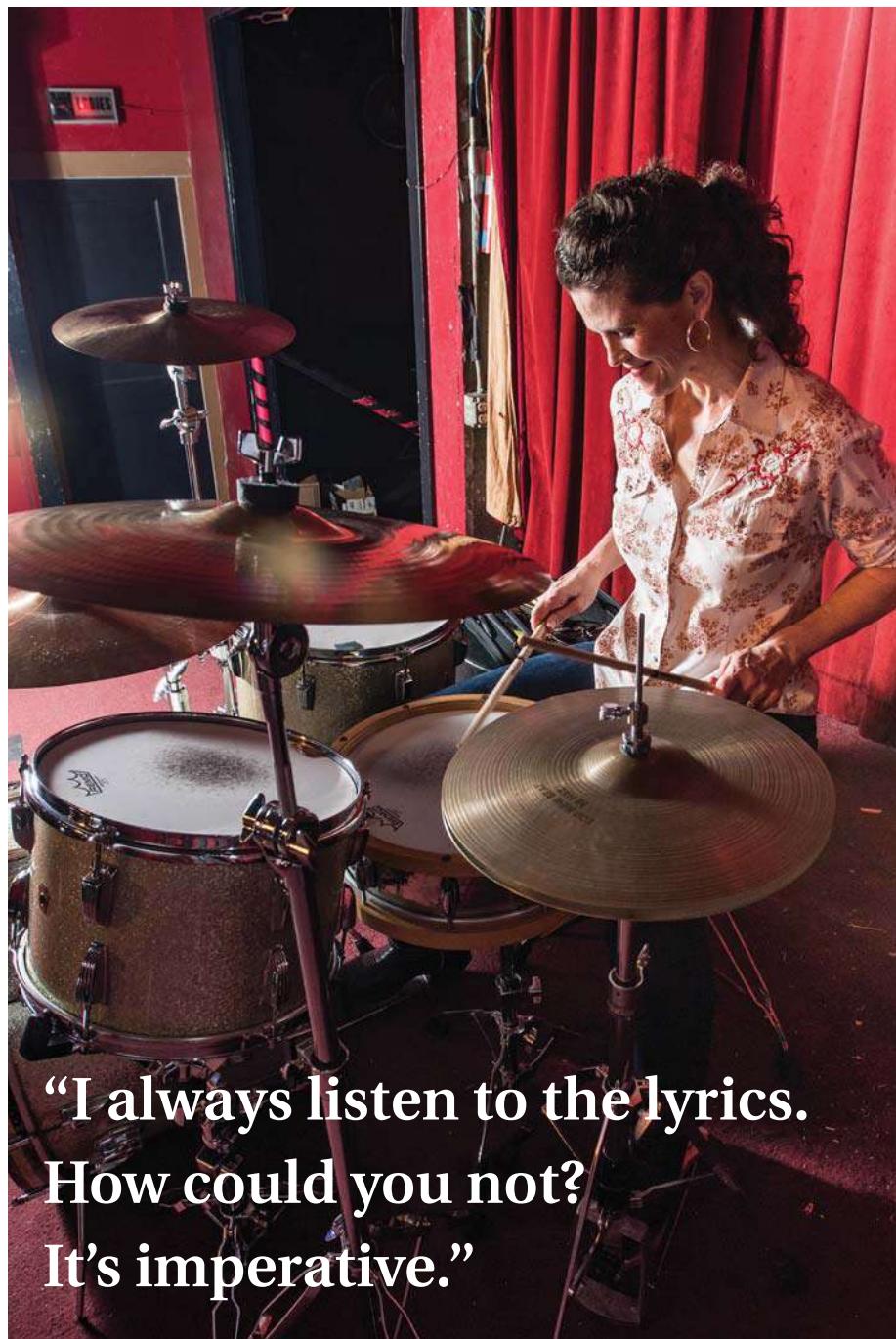
At some point, Lisa found a cassette tape that opened her ears and helped shape her taste. "One side was all Elvis Sun sessions and the Johnny Burnette Trio, and I never got past that side of the tape for quite a few years because it blew my mind. And the other side was a whole bunch of Health and Happiness shows with Hank Williams and Audrey Williams. And I loved that too!"

Pankratz also saw plenty of performances by the famously formative Texas multi-genre band Greezy Wheels, which included her uncle on guitar.

"They played all kinds of stuff, and I liked a lot of it, but when they would do a country song I would perk up a little bit. That would draw me in more than some of the other stuff they were doing."

"My dad loved Bill Monroe," Lisa goes on. "There was this one instrumental Bill Monroe record, *Uncle Pen*. I would just play brushes with that and try to fit in with the feel of what was going on, because there weren't any drums on it." Lisa learned that she could create her own parts without merely mimicking someone else. "That was a good way to put some drums in somewhere but hopefully not interrupt, so if you get in a context with that sort of a lineup you know how to be a part of it without ruining it." Later she applied that strategy in dance halls and recording studios when usually drummer-less artists like Wayne Hancock or the Carper Family came calling. "I used to take it as a badge of honor that bands that generally play without a drummer would sometimes ask me to either play with them or record with them," she says. "You have to learn to come to each other a little bit, because they're not used to it." Pankratz also started sitting in with High Noon, another drums-free outfit where she connected with bassist Kevin Smith.

"When Kevin and I started playing



**"I always listen to the lyrics.  
How could you not?  
It's imperative."**

## Tools of the Trade

Pankratz tours with her 1968 silver sparkle Ludwig kit. "I found it in a used drum shop. It's far from pristine, and it's just the three drums—22/13/16. It sounds great."

Lisa stores the drums in L.A. when she's not touring. "Whenever I get back out there and set them up and hit them, I'm just like, *Oh, yeah*. I'm so happy! They're faded. Somebody had them in a car or a smoky house...I don't know what they did to them. But I don't mind it. They have their own character, and I like it."

"I've also got a '58 WFL kit that I bought from a friend that's become my work-around-town kit. And I have a '58 matching snare. It didn't originally come with that kit, but it's the same year and finish."

For a long time, Pankratz used a '68 Ludwig Supraphonic as her main snare. Veering from her vintage preferences, she tried something different. "A few years ago a friend put this snare together. It's a

hammered steel Gretsch with those Yamaha wood hoops on it. I just liked it. It's kind of become my other workhorse snare. I've used it on all kinds of stuff. The wood hoops temper that hammered steel, and it's got a beautiful cross-stick sound. I'm always looking for a different sound, but I seem to go back to those two snares. I wish I could just sound like a Little Richard record all the time!"

Regarding cymbals, Pankratz says, "I generally like Zildjians. I love vintage cymbals, and if I had time I'd love to be a detective and track down that perfect '50s or '60s ride cymbal. One day I'll find it, but I don't have the time right now. Years ago after a bunch of my stuff was stolen, I can't remember where or why but I bought a 20" Paiste 2002. I liked it, so I just kept playing it."

Lisa adds that her preferred heads are Remos, and that she'll occasionally use a full front head on her bass drum.

together, we were playing roots rock and rockabilly stuff. Hillbilly here, more blues there, it wasn't exactly the same thing that some of the other rockabilly bands were doing, but that's what made it so cool. Kevin and I have always instinctively just played stuff together that I've never done with anybody else. We naturally pushed in the same places and left spaces for each other. The same with Brad, in a different way. They're probably the two bass players I've had the best musical bond with in my life. I've certainly had fun playing with other people, but Kevin and Brad have been real anchors for me. I think it helps bring out the best in me sometimes, too.

"If Brad plays a melodic thing," says Lisa, "I know where he's going and I can complement it. Brad and I sort of instinctively decide, alright, are we going to match completely on this? Maybe a dotted-quarter/8th country thing? Or is it more of a thing where you have the pattern and I'm going to enhance it, but I can put my accents in if I want to? That just depends on the song."

"They both come with good knowledge of music where bass is a really strong part of it. I know how to flesh out what they're doing—it's not just staying out of the way. It's almost like the bass could lead it instead of the kick drum. The kick drum is more of an enhancer. If they're playing strong enough, then I can do some little punches here and there. I sometimes like it when the kick drum has its own part as opposed to just being the pulse, constantly. I'm comfortable weaving in and out of what they're doing."

Playing with High Noon also led to tours with Ronnie Dawson, which Pankratz did until the legendary rockabilly guitarist's death in 2003. "When we got together, it was a pretty specific thing that Ronnie was doing, and I think I was on his wavelength." Check out YouTube for her slamming backbeat and machine gun snare fills with Dawson on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, and you'll agree. "He said in an interview once that he thought there was some extra intuition, so to speak, and he didn't mean it in a patronizing 'women's intuition' kind of way. There was a feel; there was an empathy that wasn't always there before. Whether that's because I'm a chick or whether it's because he and I had a connection, it was there. He was a damn good bandleader. He could turn any band into a better one."

A few years of freelancing followed Lisa's time with Dawson. She played on a record that Dave Alvin produced for the Derailers, and he called her for a 2007 tour of his own, which led to their enduring musical relationship. "These are two very big pillars in my musical world, Dave and Ronnie."

Like Dawson, Alvin leads his band with authority and awareness. "Dave's really generous on stage. We practically set up in a straight line across the front. Everybody gets their moment. For the most part I'm parallel with his amp, unless the stage just won't accommodate it or it's a festival where you have to be back on a riser. Not a lot of people do that. There are things that we've all come up with on the road that become part of the song. And Dave likes it because, when something works, he keeps it in the show

and that part will grow throughout a tour. We're contributing, and at the same time, Dave can almost play his band like he plays his instrument. We're with him in the moment."

Pankratz follows her instincts with confidence and intention, and constantly interacts with her bandmates. She keeps her attention on the music and her eyes laser-focused on the bandleader with an almost intimidating intensity. "If he signals something or goes somewhere musically, the band is gonna go there. It's as if the band is a part of his instrument.

"Another thing I love about it is doing a show with an arc and supporting that, knowing that there's a beginning, a middle, and an end. I think of the entire show, and I think of the arcs within the songs. He tells all these amazing stories in the songs. It finally hit me one day. I was like, *Oh! This whole show is an arc. The entire show is a story of a bunch of little stories.*"

Lisa's wider view of the show's construction helps her choose broad variations for songs with similar grooves. "For instance," she explains. "'Harlan County' and 'Ash Grove' are both blues shuffles. I keep 'Harlan' atmospheric. With that one, it's just about making the groove really fat and following the dynamics in the appropriate places, and any kind of accent is really going to be a punch in the face. But on 'Ash Grove,' the way it's developed, Brad and I open up a lot more. I'll start out a little more conservative, but by the middle of the song I'm not feeling bad about any of the fills I'm doing! [laughs]

It fits the song, but at the same time, you're not hearing the same groove you heard at the beginning of the show on 'Harlan County.'"

Pankratz often navigates two or three train beat songs within a show, taking what the song offers to help her differentiate them. "Is it consistent throughout the whole song? Is there a steady 'ba-dap?'" she says, singing a pickup into a backbeat. Using her own shorthand for accenting both 8ths of both train backbeats, "Maybe it's a double surf."

Lisa applies that same care and attention to crafting parts within each song. She introduces new elements as the arrangements develop, changing a snare or kick pattern to move things forward. Her natural wrist movement on the ride cymbal is a side-to-side sweeping motion similar to Ringo's, and she uses it or abandons it with purpose. "It's less staccato to my ear, especially on a country or blues swingy kind of shuffle. I like that open feel; it's rounder. My wrist just does that sweeping motion naturally. It's a more intentional distinction if I think to myself, 'Okay, on this section I'm going to play straight up and down and that's going to be the feel.' And if it's appropriate, that's fine. But that, to me, is more of a decision than sweeping along."

Sometimes the carving and construction of parts is more subtle, but each choice carries greater weight. "Maybe in a later part of





## Lisa Pankratz

the chorus you add a ching ring on the 2 or something like that," Lisa suggests. "It's not in your face the whole time, and you might not add that in until the second verse or chorus, or even wait until the solo, but it brings something different and adds lift. Every little changeup on a brush beat or every little extra hi-hat hit colors the song. You're not just getting through the song, you're playing the story. I always listen to the lyrics. How could you not? It's imperative. To me it is, anyway."

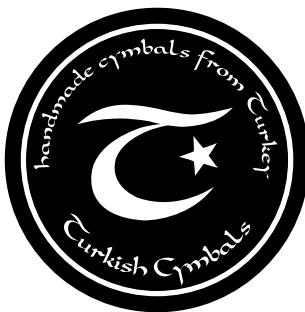
On the new record, Pankratz deftly drives an Alvin original, "Billy the Kid and Geronimo," with a flowing pulse that blooms with the narrative. "He wanted an intimation of a military thing, but not a hard-core street beat. It's definitely brushes, and it's not a set pattern, although some stuff does recur. I'm just following the story, making something that hopefully feels right under it."

Pankratz brings a similar sensitivity and fresh feel to the lilting cover of Woody Guthrie's "Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)." "It's been recorded many times," she says of the song that recounts a 1940s plane crash. "It's a heartbreakin' song! I think the Byrds might have even done it at one point [it appears on that group's 1969 album *The Ballad of Easy Rider*], but wow! Jimmie singing it is heart-rippin'."

The realities of geography, scheduling, and modern recording budgets sometimes affect work opportunities. Alvin generally produces his records in L.A., while Pankratz and Fordham live in Austin. "He thought they had to have it done by a certain time, so he had already used some of his guys from out there," she says. (Pankratz shares drumming duties on *Downey to Lubbock* with veteran Los Angeles drummer Don Heffington, who worked with both Alvin and Gilmore on previous projects.) As circumstances evolved, it worked out that Pankratz and Fordham found themselves in a position to contribute. "We were only recording for like four days. Dave started getting inspired and we turned some of these tracks into something that they didn't necessarily start out as. Some of it would turn into like a big, power R&B type of a thing. I love that part. It's not always that way—time is money in the studio and all that—but when you're able to go in there and let little things inspire you, it's fun."

Taking cues from the drummers in her early record collection, Lisa had an epiphany. She was inspired not so much by the drumming itself but by the results of their musical choices. "I eventually came to realize that I like the way the drumming *fit in*," she says. "I really like the approach that a lot of these guys had and, to the degree that I've forced myself to analyze any of it, these guys were like first-generation rock 'n' roll. They were coming from being inspired by the first wave of American drumming—big bands and jazz bands and marching bands—slowly distilling into rock 'n' roll. James Van Eaton at Sun Records. Jerry Allison with Buddy Holly and the Crickets. There wasn't 'standard' anything—blues, rock, country, or whatever. They were creating."

"Buddy Harman was a big thing for me," Lisa goes on. "Most of those guys would usually cite Gene Krupa, right? And so I'd learn about him and found out he liked Baby Dodds and Chick Webb, so I figured I need to know about them, too. I like a lot of that stuff, so I'd listen to them. Where they were coming from jazz and swing that distilled down into rock 'n' roll, I'm coming from rock 'n' roll and trying to broaden back out. I realized that I like this and I like that, and somehow it feels like me. If you want to call it rockabilly, fine. I like rock 'n' roll, and I live in the country. Somehow it seems like it makes sense."



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# Dena Tauriello



The veteran drummer has entered a particularly fruitful phase of her career, playing the hot new musical *Head Over Heels* and ramping up her workload with Matchbox Twenty singer and solo star Rob Thomas. Each, in its own way, is the kind of gig she's been preparing for forever.

Story by Ilya Stemkovsky

Photos by John Fell



Dena Tauriello has rocked her whole life. Coming up with several bands, she brought power to the stage and a solid pocket in the studio. With country rockers Antigone Rising, Tauriello honed her craft to become the respected timekeeper she is today, displaying equal parts muscle and finesse over the course of several well-received records and tons of live concerts.

Tauriello's secret weapon wasn't just bashing away with abandon, though. Rather, it was her undying love for both Ringo Starr and Karen Carpenter, two drummers who got by without much flash, but whose sounds were irreplaceable in their respective bands. That's the influence she draws on as a member of Matchbox Twenty frontman Rob Thomas's stripped down quartet, where she taps into her subtler side. And now Tauriello finds herself deep in the world of Broadway, locked in the pit of *Head Over Heels*, a new production featuring the music of '80s pop rockers the Go-Go's.

One might think this is a whole new scene of meticulous charts and stuffy audiences, certainly the opposite of the seedy rock clubs and festival stages Tauriello has been dealing with her whole life. But today's Broadway is a different animal, with numerous recent shows featuring full-on rock bands playing modern hits. So Tauriello will have room to shine and bring a little of her attention and song-oriented detail to material everyone knows. Oh, and of course she's still going to rock.

**MD:** How did *Head Over Heels* happen? Were there auditions? Did you have to brush up on sight-reading?

**Dena:** Interesting you mention those things, because neither of them were part of the process. I didn't audition or have to do any sight-reading.

As is so often the case in this industry, I knew the right people. I had been on a quest for the last several years to get connected to the Broadway world. I grew up a theater geek, and my mom used to take us to see shows, front center orchestra. And back then, before it turned into these full rock orchestrations, there was a real, full orchestra down there, and I'd sit and peer over the edge of the railing into the pit and look at the drummer and think how cool it was. I also had aspirations of playing rock 'n' roll, which is the path I took out of the gate. But over the last few years I started to put my toe in the water of trying to figure out how to crack this nut.

Lots of musicians have been flocking to Broadway over the years, with the changes in the music industry. It's a union gig, it's steady work, and it's fun. So I started reaching out to drummers who held drum chairs on Broadway—Andrés Forero with *Hamilton* and *In the Heights* before that, Matt Vander Ende with *Wicked*, and Sammy Merendino with *Kinky Boots*. Out of that bunch, Sammy most notably came out of the rock world, playing with Cyndi Lauper. He really encouraged me to pursue it and introduced me to people there. When *Head Over Heels* was in the works, they wanted an all-female band to play the music of the Go-Go's, so Sammy put my name in. And they reached out. Was I interested? Absolutely. Was I available? Absolutely.

**MD:** When you saw those drummers play, and it's mostly rock kits, were you thinking *I can do this*, or were you intimidated by the whole stifling nature of boxed-in parts and charted orchestration?

**Dena:** Truthfully, when I saw Andrés do *In the Heights*, it scared the crap out of me. [laughs] That was the first show I got to sit and watch and the first book I got to see, so for me that was insane because I didn't grow up with that Afro-Cuban/Latin flair. Plus, he was doing a thousand things at once. But it was exciting to be able to see how intense and exciting those roles are, for that and for *Hamilton* and *Kinky Boots*. *Wicked* was more orchestral, and Matt and I had a discussion about how that might not be for everyone. But the others felt doable and very interesting. Even though you're doing the same thing eight shows a week, they're very demanding drum chairs, and that was cool. And *Head Over Heels* is a similar thing. I'm very busy, and it's very drum-heavy—a lot of fast tempos, a lot of involved stuff happening.

**MD:** Were you a Go-Go's fan growing up?

**Dena:** Being a female musician, they were a huge influence in that they were an all-female rock band writing and performing their own songs. Seeing that on MTV was huge. It's been a blast revisiting their catalogue and so much fun playing these songs.

**MD:** What's the process like to interpret those songs for the Broadway stage? Are you sticking to the original arrangements?

**Dena:** The drum parts were orchestrated very true to [original Go-Go's drummer] Gina Schock's creations, but within that, there are vamps, dialogue, and moments within the song that will shift gears and do a couple bars of something else. It's not a straight





## Song Serving

### Rob Thomas on Dena Tauriello

When you see Dena, she looks like such a badass. She thinks like a songwriter when she writes parts out. She doesn't just think about the rhythm—she's in service of the song and moves around with the melody. She plays off of what I'm doing melodically. A lot of times a drummer is there for the 2 and 4 but they're still off in their own little world, but Dena subtly moves around everything without overplaying. I always appreciate that, especially when we're working up a new version of a song; you start playing and you know she's always going to go to the right place.

Dena has meter and all the kind of stuff you have to have to play professionally, but on top of that there's an intimacy. We're playing without a bass, sometimes just a left hand on a piano. So she has to drive the bus and be the thing that anchors everything down. But she also has to create a vibe out of it, which you maybe wouldn't have to do if you were bashing it out in an arena show. She's like [Matchbox Twenty's] Paul Doucette without the bashing. He's always written really great drum parts, and she's really keen on doing that as well.

I also can't say enough about Dena as a person. She's one of the greatest people I've ever met in my life. Just being around her is such a good energy.

top-to-bottom playing of a song, like in *Mama Mia!* or *Jersey Boys*. But in the song, it's pretty true to what Gina had done. And a lot of moments [in the charts] just say "fill," so it's not dictating to me exactly what to play. But being as familiar as I am with the songs, I'm honoring Gina's flavor and flair. And some of this stuff is kind of motoring—195 bpm, 200, 225....

**MD:** When it says "fill," is your intention to play the same one every night at that moment, to not mess anyone up?

**Dena:** Yeah, that's my intention, to either do the exact same thing or very close and in the spirit of what I had been doing, because the choreography is so intense and there's so much going on in most numbers. I want everyone to feel comfortable and kind of know what they're getting every night. That's important.

**MD:** At the end of the show, you're actually on stage?

**Dena:** Yes, there's a reveal, and the whole band is featured along with all this great choreography. For the majority of the show I'm in an isolation booth, stage right, in the wings somewhere. But for that part I'm on a platform on stage with the rest of the band.

**MD:** What's the gear like? Are you using a standard rock kit, and are there electronics?

**Dena:** Both kits are Pearl. I have a five-piece kit in the booth and a four-piece for the onstage portion. There's a little bit of percussion. I'll be playing some djembe in a couple of places, and the usual assortment of tambourine and triangle. And there's no electronics.

**MD:** How will you deal with conflicts, with eight shows a week, and if the show is successful and runs for a while?

**Dena:** One of the beautiful things about this kind of gig is having the flexibility to sub out. When Rob Thomas dates come up, I'm his one-off, private, corporate-event drummer. When he goes on a solo tour, that's Abe Fogle on drums. I'm doing the stripped-down, acoustic-arrangement band, which we've been affectionately calling the Rob Thomas Quartet. I'll fly out, and usually it's a three-day commitment. So I could easily sub out for something like that, which is my intention.

**MD:** How do you approach the obviously lighter vibe of the Rob Thomas arrangements?

**Dena:** I really love it. My background is in a singer-songwriter kind of a thing, meaning that's what I love, what I listen to. As a kid learning, you want to play bombastic stuff because it's fun. I'd put on the Who and play along to Keith Moon—who doesn't love that? But the heart and soul of where I come



from is the Beatles and the Carpenters. It's very sensitive to the melody, it's serving the song. That mindset is what's necessary here.

Rob's songs are so brilliant and beautiful and wonderful, you need to serve them, and in this setting, where it's really pulled back and beautifully arranged and thoughtful, I enjoy allowing that to come through. For me, it was never about soloing or trying to show off, and I never put a lot of time and energy into that. I just love coming up with parts that work for songs. That gives me the greatest satisfaction as a drummer, and I get to do that with Rob. You really can hear all these things at work, great guitar lines and beautiful piano parts and melodies and lyrics. It's a joy.

**MD:** Do you work with brushes and rods with Rob?

**Dena:** It's pretty stripped down. I use mostly Hot Rods, the Bundle Sticks, and brushes on a couple of tunes, and on "Smooth" I use sticks, because I have one of those RhythmTech StickBall Shakers on the stick.

**MD:** What's the Drums and Disabilities [D.A.D.] program you're involved in?

**Dena:** It's amazing to see how kids can respond and the changes that drumming can effect in them. Drumming facilitates left- and right-brain integration, which can help with a myriad of things, when looking at oppositional defiant disorder, ADHD, and things on that spectrum. I've worked with kids who are nonverbal, who don't communicate, who can barely make eye contact. When you get them with a pair of drumsticks in their hands, all of a sudden they're looking at you and connect in whatever way they're capable of. It's an amazing process.

**Dena Tauriello plays Pearl drums and hardware and Sabian cymbals, and she uses Evans heads, Promark products, and Studio Lab Percussion Drumtacs muffling devices.**

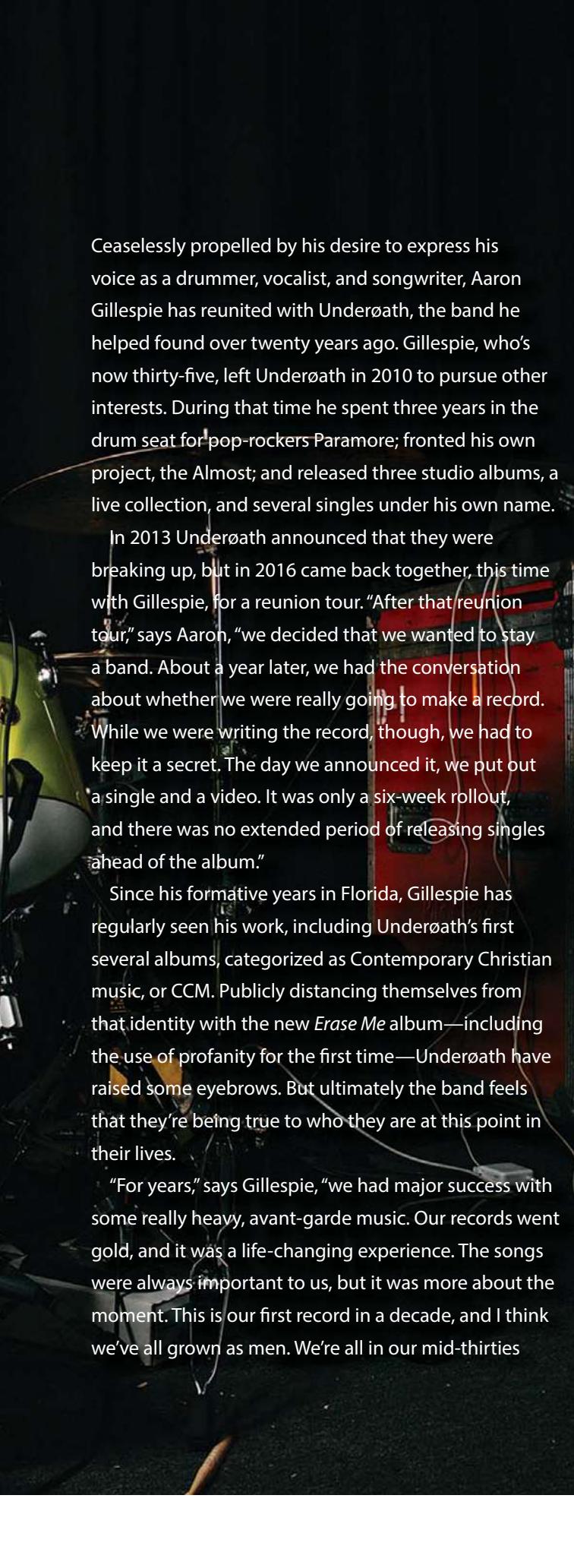


# Underøath's Aaron Gillespie

After nearly ten years away from the band he cofounded while still a teenager, the drummer returns with a new full-length, a 2018 world tour, and a fire in his belly.



Story by Ben Meyer  
Photos by Dan Newman



Ceaselessly propelled by his desire to express his voice as a drummer, vocalist, and songwriter, Aaron Gillespie has reunited with Underøath, the band he helped found over twenty years ago. Gillespie, who's now thirty-five, left Underøath in 2010 to pursue other interests. During that time he spent three years in the drum seat for pop-rockers Paramore; fronted his own project, the Almost; and released three studio albums, a live collection, and several singles under his own name.

In 2013 Underøath announced that they were breaking up, but in 2016 came back together, this time with Gillespie, for a reunion tour. "After that reunion tour," says Aaron, "we decided that we wanted to stay a band. About a year later, we had the conversation about whether we were really going to make a record. While we were writing the record, though, we had to keep it a secret. The day we announced it, we put out a single and a video. It was only a six-week rollout, and there was no extended period of releasing singles ahead of the album."

Since his formative years in Florida, Gillespie has regularly seen his work, including Underøath's first several albums, categorized as Contemporary Christian music, or CCM. Publicly distancing themselves from that identity with the new *Erase Me* album—including the use of profanity for the first time—Underøath have raised some eyebrows. But ultimately the band feels that they're being true to who they are at this point in their lives.

"For years," says Gillespie, "we had major success with some really heavy, avant-garde music. Our records went gold, and it was a life-changing experience. The songs were always important to us, but it was more about the moment. This is our first record in a decade, and I think we've all grown as men. We're all in our mid-thirties

now. I did a lot of sideman work, and I think [the time away] kind of grew us all up a bit. We all realized that what we loved about music is the songs more than the moments. I think that's the place that we're coming from."

Gillespie co-wrote all of the nearly thirty songs that he and his bandmates brought to producer Matt Squire for *Erase Me*. "For the entire writing process, [singer] Spencer Chamberlain was living in New York City, I was in Utah, and the rest of the band was in Florida. Only four of us recorded the album. [Guitarist] Timothy McTague recorded every string instrument, [keyboardist] Christopher Dudley worked his ass off, and then it was Spencer and me."

"In the past," Aaron explains, "all six of us would go into a room and 'jam-write.' [Guitarist James Smith and bassist Grant Brandell round out the lineup.] It would take a year or a year and a half to get to twelve songs, and those twelve songs were what we recorded. This time we didn't really want to take that approach. We were sending material back and forth, and it was a very different experience from the previous records."

"As you can tell, this record is very different from our other material, and it started even more differently. It started in a very 'left' place, with us almost writing pop songs, because that's just what we were feeling at the time. Tim is into a lot of hip-hop, and we just all started writing stuff and then adding guitars to it to make it sound like rock 'n' roll—and it worked. We started in a room together with Matt Squire playing bass, just jamming on one of the songs that we thought was going to make the record—which is funny because that song *didn't* make the record. But we realized that we didn't want to work that way, we just wanted to build the songs together, and we just started working."



## Tools of the Trade

**Drums:** Gretsch USA Custom kit in Underøath Pantone Green

- 6.5x14 Keplinger custom steel snare ("Dale") with PureSound snare wires and Gretsch USA snare hardware
- 8x13 concert tom
- 14x16 concert floor tom
- 18x18 concert floor tom
- 12x24 bass drum
- additional snares: Gretsch 6.5x14 cast aluminum ("JR"), Gretsch 6.5x14 cast bronze ("Betty")

**Hardware:** DW 9000 series cymbal and snare stands, and 5000 series single bass drum pedal with Gibraltar round felt beater; Wedgie cymbal washers

- 17" hi-hats (K Constantinople crash on top, K Constantinople Suspended underneath)
- 22" K Constantinople Overhammered ride
- 22" K Constantinople Renaissance ride
- 23" K Sweet ride

**Heads:** Remo Emperor X coated snare batter and Emperor Hazy snare side, Controlled Sound tom batters, and Powerstroke 3 coated bass drum batter

**Sticks:** Vic Firth American Classic 2Bs

Eschewing modern production comforts like sample replacement and excessive quantization and editing, Gillespie went for full takes and worked with Squire to get his parts to tell the story he intended to tell. "I wanted to be real about this record," he says, "and really play for the songs. I think modern music, especially heavy music, is too replaced and compressed. I'm just not into that. We did legit full takes and flew in my drum tech and changed the heads for every song on this one. I really wanted the album to feel and sound like you were standing in front of a drumset."

"We spent a lot of time getting the drums to poke out," Aaron continues. "I loved the drum sound. I had a great Gretsch USA Custom kit sent in and, like, thirty snare drums. I mean, Gregg Keplinger sent me one of his personal snares. It was awesome. But for the first week, something about it was just bothering me. I was uninspired. So one afternoon, when they were cutting bass or something, I got into the rental car and drove to a pawn shop. I picked up all these orphaned drums. There was a 15" Ludwig Vistalite floor tom and a 12" Premier rack tom from the '70s. There was also a Premier kick drum from the '70s that had all the wrap taken off and had water damage."

Taking his find back to the studio, Gillespie kept all of the original heads on the drums, put Sennheiser MD 421 mics inside each, and... "I recorded ninety percent of the verses to the songs with those drums," he reveals. "I think that when your 'A' kit comes in after the 'B' kit, it sounds crazy. You need so much texture to get people's attention these days."

Among Gillespie's standout moments on *Erase Me* is his all-out linear assault on lead single "On My Teeth." Regarding the genesis of the song, he says, "We

**Electronics:** Roland SPD-SX sample pad and kick trigger pad

**Accessories:** Lewitt Audio and Sennheiser mics, Ahead drum rug, Winding Wheel Supply stick bag, Vater percussion stick holders

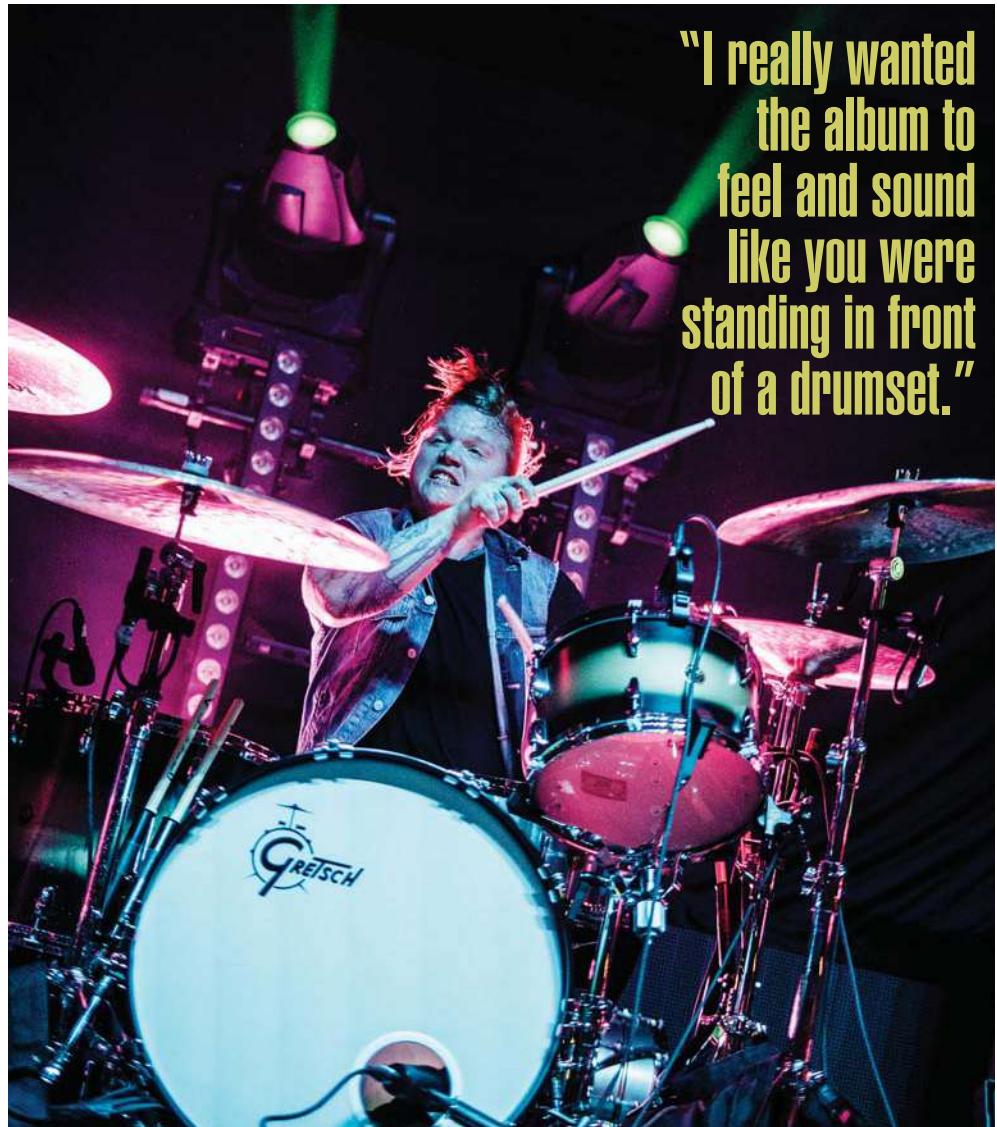
went to a restaurant one day, and on the way back we were listening to the Nine Inch Nails record *With Teeth*, which has a song on it called 'You Know What You Are?' It has this thunderous rack tom/snare drum part in the verse, played by Dave Grohl. I was like, 'I bet we could do something like that!' When we got back, Matt said, 'Okay, do it.' We put the click on at 180 bpm, and that part is what I played.

"We just did things differently from how we've done them before," Aaron says. "A lot of those songs were created from an idea rather than written [as a whole piece]. I'd come in with a groove that was supposed to be used for something completely unrelated, and we'd just start to build on it. We found that to be a really great process for us rather than the traditional way of getting in a room and jamming."

Gillespie's parts stick like glue to the industrially flavored second single, "Rapture." Other standout performances among the album's eleven carefully crafted tracks are his boiling fills and emotional yet controlled smashing on album opener "It Has to Start Somewhere," his clever backbeat displacement on "Bloodlust," and his intense, all-over-the-kit approach to "Sink With You."

On working with Matt Squire, whose résumé as a producer includes acts that would seem contrary to Underøath's metalcore and post-hardcore background, Gillespie says, "It was cool, because Matt got his start as an assistant to Brian McTernan [Darkest Hour, Hot Water Music, Thrice, Circa Survive, Sky Eats Airplane]. Brian owned the original Salad Days studio in Baltimore, Maryland, where they did all the Dischord Records stuff and the first couple of Thrice records—all of these records that we really liked growing up. Matt went out on his own and did *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out* by Panic! at the Disco, which did something like three and a half million copies. He did a bunch of heavy stuff too, then he moved to L.A. and did Ariana Grande and One Direction's first records. He became a pop guy for a decade. During this time, Brian McTernan became a real estate agent and sold Matt the studio, so we made this record at the original Salad Days in Baltimore.

"When we reached out to Matt," Gillespie continues, "he'd just moved back to the East Coast, and ours was the first rock record he'd done in eight years. We all thought it would be a brilliant choice because he's a pop guy who came from punk rock and metal. We were kind of doing some of that, trying to sprinkle a little pop into our music, so here's a guy that does both—let's see what happens."



**"I really wanted the album to feel and sound like you were standing in front of a drumset."**

Tracking drums with him was super cool because he would say, 'You don't need to play that. What are you *saying* by playing that?' That's something I'll never forget, and I've decided to always ask drummers that with my own productions. What are you saying by playing that? You're saying, 'Look at me, look how good I am,' or you're saying nothing and letting the music breathe."

Often when Gillespie's playing falls into the busier end of that spectrum, he's simultaneously providing Underøath's clean vocals. "It's a learning curve every time we make a record," he says. "Obviously we don't record drums and vocals at the same time, so I always have to figure out how to do the parts together live. We just had two weeks of rehearsals, and I was having to learn how to [sing and play the new songs] at the same time."

As Aaron suggested, those new tracks stray a bit from the group's hardcore roots, a trajectory not all fans were automatically on board with. "This album has the biggest preorder in the history of the band," Aaron says. "The lead single is the most streamed song and the most watched video in the history of the band, and I think a lot of that is because of curiosity. But yes, there's also been a lot of backlash already. My response to that is that I would seriously rather work at Chic-fil-A than make the same record over and over again."



## Keith Forsey

The drummer, producer, and songwriter has had a hugely successful career playing multiple, invaluable roles with Billy Idol, Simple Minds, Donna Summer, and other pop and rock greats. Here, close associate **Erik Eldenius** gets personal with the triple-threat artist, who in the past has tended to steer clear of the spotlight.



Erik Eldenius

I initially met Keith Forsey in 1999 in Los Angeles, when I auditioned for and then worked with Nik Frost, a local artist that Keith was developing. What stuck out more than anything during that audition was Keith's energy. He was standing right by my drums, air drumming as he directed the action. I remember thinking, *Wow, this guy really knows how to work you up.*

Keith also produced four songs on *Ex Girlfriends* by my band Low Millions, including the album's two singles. It was riveting to see how he would inspire us with his fierce energy and almost battlefield-like command. And whether playing the role of cheerleader or critic, he was always open to ideas, from whoever had one. He understood the value of the collective effort and the creative joy that it brings to a project. You would always know when something *wasn't* working—Keith was very direct—but he would never be negative or put you

down. Keith is always looking to make something work out.

One day he asked me if I wanted to record for Billy Idol, who Keith has worked with since the very beginning of his solo career. Billy was writing new material and had songs to demo up. Fast forward to 2012; by now I'd recorded a good amount for Billy over the years, but Keith was calling to say that Billy was wondering if I was available to do some gigs. If all went well, there could even be an opportunity to join the band.

I've been with Billy for six years now, so I owe Keith my career. Whenever I tell him that he laughs it off like the immensely humble man that he is. Very few people have the history and reputation that he has, yet it's always as if he wants to give credit to someone else. But there aren't enough superlatives for how I feel about the man, who I think of as my mentor.

**Erik:** What started you playing the drums?

**Keith:** My brother Colin, who is six years older than me, sang and played guitar—which he made himself—and we would listen to Elvis, Gene Vincent, Little Richard, and all those early records. He would bring home the gear from his band, including the drums. Drums in those days had calfskin heads, and they had a certain smell. That smell fascinated me.

When I was around twelve, Colin started to show me basic beats. Soon after that, I would carry my drums up to the church youth hall, and my band would play all the hits of the time—the Stones, etc. I used to have a mic around my neck so I could sing. [laughs]

Later I went on the road with my brother's band. I'd help them with the gear and packing the van, and I'd constantly watch them play. One day their drummer got sick and they said, "Do you think you can handle the gig?" We had one rehearsal and pulled it off. Soon after, they fired their drummer. I was sixteen or seventeen. And then when I was around eighteen, we got a deal from Kennedy Street Enterprises, which at the time was the big-time Mersey Beat management company in Manchester.

**Erik:** Who were some of your drumming influences growing up?

**Keith:** The first album I ever bought was Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. I liked Philly Joe Jones, Jon Hiseman, obviously Ringo and the Beatles, Keith Moon, Charlie Watts. I loved Kenney Jones' style and swing. Simon Kirke from Free and Bad Company—he has great swing and a great feel. I liked more of the drummers that played with less flashy technique and more feel. But it wasn't so much the drummers that I was chasing; it was more about the music.

**Erik:** How did all of this lead to you getting into the recording scene?

**Keith:** My brother's band

eventually broke up. He went on to become head of CBS promotion in London. I carried on playing in a few different bands, and then I went to Germany, which is when I got into the studio world. I was twenty-one and started playing with this acid-rock-electric-violin-crazy-political band [Amon Düül II] for a few years, and one of their managers booked musicians. Because I was a longhaired English rocker type drummer—at that time there weren't many of those in Germany—I got gigs in the studio. [laughs]

**Erik:** Is that when you met producer Giorgio Moroder?

**Keith:** Yes. I started doing studio dates with Pete Bellotte, who was Donna Summer's coproducer, and he liked what I was playing and pulled me in the studio for Giorgio. I played with Giorgio for the next thirty years. They brought me from Munich to Los Angeles when Donna signed with Casablanca Records. That's when I started writing with them as well.

**Erik:** What was the transition from playing drums to writing like?

**Keith:** When Donna did her double album *Bad Girls*, we didn't have enough material, and Moroder said to [multi-instrumentalist] Harold Faltermeyer, who was also working on the gig, "Go write some songs, boys, we need songs!" So Pete Bellotte, Harold, and I went off and wrote songs. I co-wrote "Hot Stuff" and "Sunset People."

I'm now living in Giorgio's house in Beverly Hills, doing mostly

disco sessions in L.A. with him, and I'm watching as all this music's coming to him to produce. One day he says to me, "Check out all of this and find the good stuff." I'm going through it and find a cassette with "Idol" written on it. I didn't even know what the artist looked like, but I said to Giorgio, "This could be really cool, he has a great voice." He didn't really react, so I said, "How about I produce it for your company?" Billy's band, Generation X, already had an album out and was managed by Kiss's manager, Bill Aucoin. Giorgio said, "You don't have to do it for my company; I'll call Bill and tell him you're capable of doing it yourself."

Billy's debut EP, *Don't Stop*, was the first record I ever produced. It had huge underground hits, especially in New York City, but it wasn't a big [national] success. After that record, Billy left Generation X. They wanted to fire me because we didn't sell enough records, although "Dancing with Myself" was a hit off that record. And it was Billy who said to all the A-list American producers at the label, "I want to do it with Keith. He understands what I'm all about." We got along really well. And then he came to the States.

**Erik:** Did you play drums on those early Idol records?

**Keith:** I produced them all and played on a couple of the hits. I didn't play on "Dancing with Myself," that was [the Clash's] Terry Chimes. I played on "White Wedding" and a few others that I don't remember. It was more important and more interesting to me to have other drummers play on it. I didn't enjoy producing and playing. I wanted to keep it on the producer's side and not worry about "How am I playing?" It was better to have an objective opinion.

**Erik:** When producing, how hands-on are you with the drummer?

**Keith:** I'm pretty easy, and I speak with the drummers. I'll ask about certain things, maybe different fills here or there. If something's not sounding right, I might change mic placement, but I usually don't pay attention to stuff like that because I work with engineers who know what they're doing.

**Erik:** Eventually you started doing movie soundtracks like *The Breakfast Club*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, and *Flashdance*.

**Keith:** I liked working with Faltermeyer and Giorgio when they were doing soundtracks. I'd come in and play some drums, then co-write some songs with them. When I took on *The Breakfast Club*, at first I thought I bit off more than I could chew. We got successful when I co-wrote "Don't You (Forget About Me)" with Steve Schiff [guitarist/songwriter from the Nina Hagen band]. But scoring was not me; my contribution to those soundtracks was mostly songs.

**Erik:** There are rumors about "Don't You (Forget About Me)" being written for Billy Idol.

**Keith:** No, it was written for Simple Minds. Steve Schiff and I were big Simple Minds fans, but they turned it down. The next possibility was Bryan Ferry, but he didn't want to do it. The company wanted Corey Hart, who had a huge hit at the time with "Sunglasses at Night," but I thought he wasn't the guy. So I kept pushing for Simple Minds. We flew to England and [that's when they finally] decided to do it.



**Form left:** Billy Idol, Keith Forsey, guitarist Steve Stevens, and engineer Michael Frondelli in the studio.

## Keith Forsey

**Erik:** When you decide to work with an artist, what is it that attracts you to them?

**Keith:** I think you can sum it up with some of the artists I worked with—Psychedelic Furs, Billy Idol, and Nina Hagen. All three are strong personalities. Nina is a totally underrated singer—fantastic voice, incredible personality. The Psychedelic Furs' vocal sound, they have the whole thing going on. Idol—what a *big* sound. That's mainly what I look for. If they have those qualities, it makes the picture clearer to me. I think a producer's job is in the back of the room. The artist has all the juice, and you're just helping them

put that on tape. You're their biggest fan and biggest mirror. It's only when you think they're missing their own mark that you kind of knock them back on track.

**Erik:** Did you experience bands that weren't good enough to cut their own records? Did you have to make a lot of tough decisions as a producer?

**Keith:** Yes. Funny enough, with drummers—and I don't know if it was because I was a drummer—but I always thought they didn't take their pocket and their groove seriously enough. It always seemed to me like they were more worried about the fills.

**Erik:** Do you think that's because of the increased use of drum machines?

**Keith:** That's certainly one of the reasons. Billy and Steve would write a lot in the studio, and we would program the Linn drum machine to use as a guide. Once we got used to that sound and then tried to replace the machine with a live drummer—especially with the 808 machine—all of a sudden, it's like, *What happened, where did our pocket go?* Trying to replace the machine with a real drummer was hard work; not everyone could do it.

**Erik:** What do you feel is your biggest achievement?

**Keith:** Probably writing and producing "Don't You (Forget About Me)." It changed my life, and it seemed to me like I'd finally written a really good song. I loved everything about it. The basic groove was based on a song by the ska band Fun Boy Three's version of "Our Lips Are Sealed" [which was co-written by Go-Go's guitarist Jane Wiedlin and Specials/Fun Boy Three singer Terry Hall]. Fun Boy Three had that groove on their version, but it was looser. I thought, *I have to use that groove*. So I had that in my head, then Shifty came in and off we went. And then Simple Minds took the demo so much further—it had that great drum fill and Jim Kerr's "Hey, hey, hey!" vocal. That will probably be on my tombstone when I die. [laughs]

**Erik:** Do you have tips for someone who would like a career like yours?

**Keith:** Climb that ladder four or five steps at a time, but don't try to grab too much at once. Don't be like, *I need the publishing*. Maybe you *don't* need the publishing right away. Keep writing; when you go up a few more rungs on that ladder, then you can ask for publishing. Don't be greedy or pushy, just be friendly, be part of the team, and let it grow. When we wrote "Hot Stuff," I didn't get a piece of the publishing. I could have said, "Hey, I deserve a piece of that." But I was happy I got my songwriting credit on a Donna Summer hit; that's a huge step, why be greedy? Later you'll write your own songs and get your publishing and everything else.

Assholes will show themselves; don't work with them no matter how good they are. You'll get along with the good guys. You'll create something together, and everybody wins. Find the right team of people who have something to offer, and you'll get there.

In addition to Low Millions and Billy Idol, **Erik Eldenius** has worked with Cher, Donna Summer, LeAnn Rimes, Five for Fighting, Anastacia, Jackson Browne, Vanessa Carlton, and Mandy Moore.

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OFF THE RECORD

# Nick D'Virgilio on Spock's Beard's *Noise Floor*

Diving Into the Prog Veterans' Overdue Reunion

by Austin Burcham



This past May 25 the seminal prog-rock group Spock's Beard released *Noise Floor*, a two-disc record that features the multifaceted drum wizard Nick D'Virgilio. In 2011, Nick, who was an original member of Spock's Beard, parted ways with the group after twenty years to pursue a touring gig with Cirque du Soleil. "If I hadn't joined Cirque du Soleil, I probably would never have left Spock's," D'Virgilio says. "I just wasn't around to give the band the time it needed, and I couldn't ask them to wait for me. Originally when I joined Cirque it was going to be for two years. But I kept going and going. The band needed to move on."

After his Cirque du Soleil tenure, D'Virgilio joined the team at online instrument retailer Sweetwater Sound, which ultimately led to the band's *Noise Floor* reunion. "Now that I'm at Sweetwater, I have the opportunity to bring in artists and bands that I've worked with for projects," the drummer explains. "We got Spock's here for one of our recording workshops, which was a perfect way for us to play together again. Afterward, the guys asked if I wanted to record a new album. I was totally up for it, and I got to record the drums at Sweetwater Studios. So it was a win all around."

D'Virgilio took advantage of Sweetwater's extensive collection of gear for the *Noise Floor* session. "The main kit

was our studio's DW Collector's Series set made of cherry and gum wood," he says. "It's a killer kit with so much tone and punch. We also used a Mapex Saturn Tour Edition kit for a few things, like the song 'So This Is Life.' The kit's hybrid maple and walnut shells gave us a big gushy sound for that tune. The DW kit is big, with 8", 10", and 12" rack toms, 16" and 18" floor toms, and an 18x23 bass drum. The Mapex kit was a simple 9x13 rack tom, 16x16 floor tom, and 16x24 kick."

D'Virgilio also had the luxury of swapping out plenty of snares during the recording. "We used a bunch, such as a Ludwig 8x14 Hammered Brass, a 6.5x14 DW Purpleheart, a 6.5x14 Pearl Sensitone, an old 6x12 Mapex Black Panther, a 6.5x14 Ludwig Supraphonic LM402, and a 6.5x14 Gretsch USA Bell Brass." The drummer was also able to incorporate a mix of Sabian, Zildjian, Meinl, Paiste, and Wuhan cymbals into the kit. According to Nick, "Nothing was smaller than a 17". And I went for a drier ride sound with cymbals like my 20" Meinl Byzance Dark, a 21" Zildjian K Custom Special Dry, and a 21" Sabian HHX Groove ride. I also remember using 15" Zildjian K Light and 16" Sabian Apollo hi-hats. For the China cymbals, I used my 22" Meinl Byzance Jazz China ride and a selection of Wuhans."

Let's check out some highlights from *Noise Floor*.

## Off the Record

### "To Breathe Another Day"

The album opens with keys and heavy hits before D'Virgilio jumps into this funky groove in 7/4. (0:23, 140 bpm)

The song then erupts into a frantic departure from the main groove, and Nick matches the intensity with this killer pattern. (4:22, 140 bpm)

### "What Becomes of Me"

The album's second track features a drum and vocal break, which D'Virgilio fills with this evolving groove in 7/4. (4:04, 140 bpm)

### "One So Wise"

An extended instrumental intro kicks off this track before Nick settles into this driving 6/4 groove while matching the bass line perfectly. (1:07, 93 bpm)

The groove then develops into this broken 16th-note hi-hat feel with openings that elevate the energy of the track and foreshadow the upcoming chorus. (1:38, 93 bpm)

### "Box of Spiders"

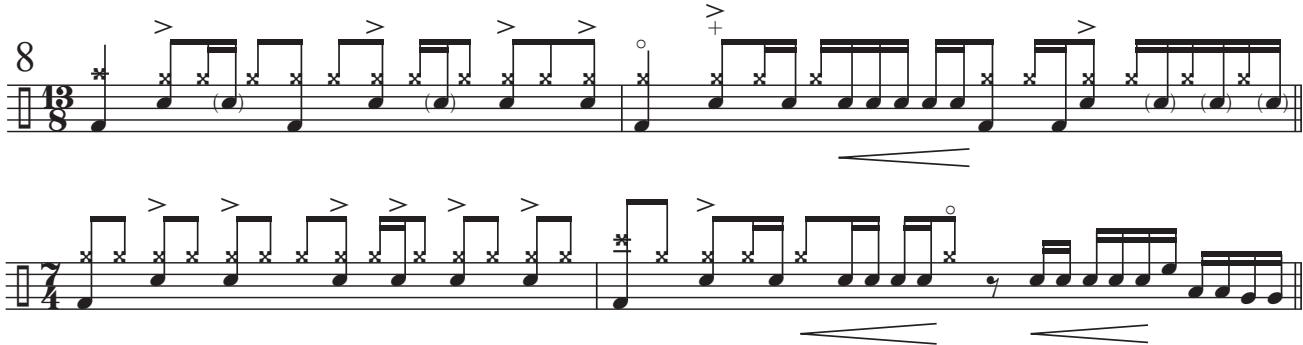
This mind-bending instrumental takes a lot of wild turns before descending into a quirky piano riff, which Nick complements with this groove in 3/4. (3:07, 135 bpm)

## "Armageddon Nervous"

Noise Floor's closing track begins with a driving synth pattern in cycles of 13/8 and 7/4. Check out D'Virgilio's pattern during this section. (0:10, 170 bpm)



Further into the song, the band drops out while Nick lays down this funky groove. (1:21, 170 bpm)



**Austin Burcham** is a drummer, educator, and graduate of the Musician's Institute. He's the creator of the YouTube lesson series *Study the Greats*, which you can visit at [youtube.com/abbdrums](https://www.youtube.com/abbdrums). For more information, visit [abbdrums.com](http://abbdrums.com).



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# Belly Dance Rhythms for Drumset

## Part 2: Exploring Odd Meters

by Ruben van Rompaey

In the June 2014 issue, we introduced you to some of the most common rhythms used in traditional belly dance music. In this lesson we'll take a look at seven odd-meter belly dance rhythms and adapt them to the drumset.

"Belly dance" is a Western umbrella term for certain dance styles originating from several countries around the Middle East, North Africa, eastern Europe (the Balkans), and Mediterranean Sea areas. The music that's used contains a rich variety of interesting rhythms. Traditionally, the rhythms are played on percussion instruments such as the bendir, which is a frame drum, and the darbuka, an hourglass-shaped goblet drum that's considered the most prominent accompaniment percussive instrument for belly dancers.

Many popular belly dance songs are based on rather uncomplicated structures. However, some awkward odd meters are incorporated as well. For example, folk music from the Balkans features fast, uneven beats that have inspired American tribal fusion music. Classical Turkish art music has also left its mark on the genre, resulting in a variety of interesting rhythms. Consisting of groups of two and three notes, the uneven rhythm families are referred to as "aksak," meaning "limping" in Turkish. Their uneven subdivisions make them interesting and fun to play, creating a source of inspiration for the contemporary drummer.

### Shoosh

This relatively easy five-beat rhythm is said to be of Persian origin and is mainly used in improvisational tribal belly dance styles that have a trancelike character.

Drumset notation for Shoosh in 5/8 time. The pattern consists of a single eighth note followed by a group of four eighth notes. The first note is marked with a '+' sign above it, and the second note in the group is marked with a '>' symbol above it. The third note in the group is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the fourth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it. The fifth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it.

### Chaabi

Moroccan/Algerian chaabi music is known for some groovy and unique 6/8 rhythms. Notice that the phrase starts with the snare instead of the bass drum. This pattern can also be written in 12/8.

Drumset notation for Chaabi in 6/8 time. The pattern consists of a single eighth note followed by a group of four eighth notes. The first note is marked with a '>' symbol above it, and the second note in the group is marked with a circled 'o' above it. The third note in the group is marked with a '+' sign above it, and the fourth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it. The fifth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the sixth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it. Below the notation, the drum strokes are labeled: R L R L R L R L R L.

### Rachenitsa

This fast Bulgarian folk rhythm in 7/8—and sometimes 7/16—is regarded as one of the country's national folk dances.

Drumset notation for Rachenitsa in 7/8 time. The pattern consists of a single eighth note followed by a group of four eighth notes. The first note is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the second note in the group is marked with a '>' symbol above it. The third note in the group is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the fourth note is marked with a '>' symbol above it.

### Roman Aksak

As stated previously, "aksak" means "limping," while in this case "Roman" refers to the gypsy people living in Turkey. The Roman aksak is a Turkish rhythm that's felt in a sequence of two, two, three, and two 8th notes.

Drumset notation for Roman Aksak in 4/8 time. The pattern consists of a single eighth note followed by a group of four eighth notes. The first note is marked with a '+' sign above it, and the second note in the group is marked with a circled 'x' below it. The third note in the group is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the fourth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it. The fifth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the sixth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it.

### Samai Thaqil

Also referred to as "aksak semai" or "samaai," this classical rhythm of Ottoman-Turkish origin is very popular among belly dancers for slow sections of a routine. A similar rhythm played twice as fast is referred to as "curcuna."

Drumset notation for Samai Thaqil in 5/8 time. The pattern consists of a single eighth note followed by a group of four eighth notes. The first note is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the second note in the group is marked with a circled 'x' below it. The third note in the group is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the fourth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it. The fifth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the sixth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it.

### Gankino Horo

This Bulgarian rhythm in 11/8 is felt in a sequence of two, two, three, two, and two 8th-note groupings. It's usually played at fast tempos.

Drumset notation for Gankino Horo in 11/8 time. The pattern consists of a single eighth note followed by a group of four eighth notes. The first note is marked with a '+' sign above it, and the second note in the group is marked with a circled 'x' below it. The third note in the group is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the fourth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it. The fifth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the sixth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it.

### Zarafat

Here's an interesting classical Egyptian rhythm in 13/8 that's used in Arabic muwashahat music.

Drumset notation for Zarafat in 13/8 time. The pattern consists of a single eighth note followed by a group of four eighth notes. The first note is marked with a '+' sign above it, and the second note in the group is marked with a circled 'x' below it. The third note in the group is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the fourth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it. The fifth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it, and the sixth note is marked with a circled 'x' below it.

Let these rhythms inspire you to explore their rich musical and cultural backgrounds, and enjoy!



Tom Dausner

**Ruben van Rompaey** is a solo artist and workshop leader who has performed at a variety of national and international jazz and belly dance festivals. He has released two instructional DVDs and is the author of method books for drums and darbuka. For more, visit magnatune.com/artists/rompaey.

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# Must-Know Grooves

## Demystifying the Half-Time Shuffle

by Jim Riley

This month we're tackling a groove that has confounded drummers for more than forty years: The half-time shuffle. This groove's ghost note placement has been a mystery to many drummers since legends such as Bernard Purdie, John Bonham, and Jeff Porcaro first laid it down in the late '70s and early '80s. In this lesson we'll explore this pattern with fresh eyes and ears. Let's dig in!

First, we need to establish a shuffle pattern on the hi-hat. If we're counting triplets as "1 & a, 2 & a, 3 & a, 4 & a," we'll be playing the counts "1 a, 2 a, 3 a, 4 a" on the hi-hat while resting on the middle triplet partial ("&") of each beat. Pay attention to the accent pattern in the following example and be sure to maintain that accent's emphasis throughout the rest of the lesson. A nice, relaxed song that you can play along with while practicing these initial exercises is Track 18 from my book, *Survival Guide for the Modern Drummer*.

Exercise 1: A 4/4 time signature with a quarter note bass drum on beat 1. The hi-hat pattern consists of four groups of three strokes each, with accents on the first and third strokes of each group. Ghost notes are placed between the middle strokes of each group.

Next we'll add ghost notes. These should be played softly in the center of the snare for maximum clarity. The ghost notes will be played with the left hand on the middle triplet partials ("&") between the shuffled hi-hat pattern. Remember to start slowly.

Exercise 2: Similar to Exercise 1, but with ghost notes added on the middle triplet partials of the hi-hat pattern. The ghost notes are indicated by small 'x' marks between the middle strokes of each group of three.

This next concept is key to being able to execute the half-time shuffle. We need to play an accented snare backbeat that's immediately followed by a ghost note. I like to call this a "backbeat stutter." This concept is worth practicing as an isolated example.

Exercise 3: An isolated example showing a snare backbeat (accented) followed immediately by a ghost note (softly played). The ghost note is indicated by a small 'x' mark.

Let's establish the half-time shuffle's hand pattern. We'll combine the concepts from Exercises 2 and 3 into one cohesive phrase that we'll utilize throughout the rest of this lesson. Take time to internalize this example.

Exercise 4: Combines the concepts from Exercises 2 and 3 into a cohesive phrase. It features the snare backbeat and ghost note from Exercise 3, integrated into the shuffle pattern from Exercise 2.

Next we'll add the bass drum. Start by simply adding the kick on beat 1. This is the simplest version of the groove, and it's a very useful pattern.

### In This Lesson

- What are the characteristics of the half-time shuffle?
- Which drummers defined this groove?
- Which songs feature the half-time shuffle?

Exercise 5: Adds a bass drum kick on beat 1. The hi-hat pattern remains the same as in Exercise 4.

In this next example we'll add the third triplet partial ("a") of beat 4 on the bass drum. Bernard Purdie played this groove on the Steely Dan track "Babylon Sisters," from the group's 1980 album, *Gaucho*.

Exercise 6: Adds the third triplet partial ("a") of beat 4 on the bass drum. The hi-hat pattern remains the same as in Exercise 4.

And if we add a bass drum note on the third triplet partial ("a") of beat 2, we'll be playing the groove Purdie recorded on Steely Dan's "Home at Last," from 1977's *Aja*.

Exercise 7: Adds the third triplet partial ("a") of beat 2 on the bass drum. The hi-hat pattern remains the same as in Exercise 4.

In the chorus of "Home at Last," Purdie plays an open hi-hat on the last triplet partial ("a") of each beat. This can sound complicated, but Purdie is just playing quarter notes with the hi-hat foot, which makes the coordination easier. Let's play the right hand and left foot to get a feel for this pattern.

Exercise 8: Shows the open hi-hat pattern on the last triplet partial ("a") of each beat. The hi-hat pattern remains the same as in Exercise 4.

Now let's incorporate the open hi-hat pattern into the groove from Exercise 7.

Exercise 9: Incorporates the open hi-hat pattern from Exercise 8 into the groove from Exercise 7. The hi-hat pattern remains the same as in Exercise 4.

Two years after Purdie played "Home at Last," John Bonham immortalized his version of the half-time shuffle with his performance on Led Zeppelin's "Fool in the Rain," from 1979's *In Through the Out Door*. First let's isolate Bonham's modified bass drum and right-hand pattern.

Exercise 10: Shows the modified bass drum and right-hand pattern for "Fool in the Rain." The hi-hat pattern remains the same as in Exercise 4.

Bonham didn't employ quite as many ghost notes as Purdie. Let's add in the ones he played on "Fool in the Rain."

Exercise 11: Combines the modified bass drum and right-hand pattern from Exercise 10 with the ghost notes from Exercise 3. The hi-hat pattern remains the same as in Exercise 4.

The signature element of Bonham's half-time shuffle was the accent and hi-hat opening on the last triplet partial ("a") of beat 1. Remember that just like Purdie's chorus pattern on "Home at Last," the left foot closes on the quarter note. In this case, the hi-hat pedal closes on beat 2.

12      3 o + 3      3      3

If you listen closely to Bonham's version, notice that it's really a four-bar phrase. Bonham plays Exercise 12 for the first three bars while adding a "backbeat stutter" on beat 4 of the fourth measure, as demonstrated in the following example.

13      3 o + 3      3      3

Exercise 14 demonstrates the full four-bar phrase.

14      3 o + 3      3      3      3 o + 3      3      3

3 o + 3      3      3      3 o + 3      3      3

The late Jeff Porcaro stated that both Purdie and Bonham influenced his groove on the Toto tune "Rosanna." His third influence in formulating this groove was the Bo Diddley beat, which is based on a 3:2 clave. Here's that rhythm played on the bass drum.

15      —3—

In the second measure of this rhythm, Porcaro displaced the first bass drum note forward by one triplet partial and added another note on the "a" of beat 4. Let's play his modified Bo Diddley bass drum rhythm with the shuffled hi-hat pattern.

### The Half-Time Shuffle: Essential Listening

**Bernard Purdie** on Steely Dan's "Home at Last" from *Aja*

and "Babylon Sisters" from *Gaucho*

**John Bonham** on Led Zeppelin's "Fool in the Rain" from *In Through the Out Door*

**Jeff Porcaro** on Toto's "Rosanna" from *Toto IV*

**Brady Blade Jr.** on Dave Matthews' "So Damn Lucky" from *Some Devil*

**Jason McGerr** on Death Cab for Cutie's "Grapevine Fires" from *Narrow Stairs*

16      3      3      3      3      3      3      3      3

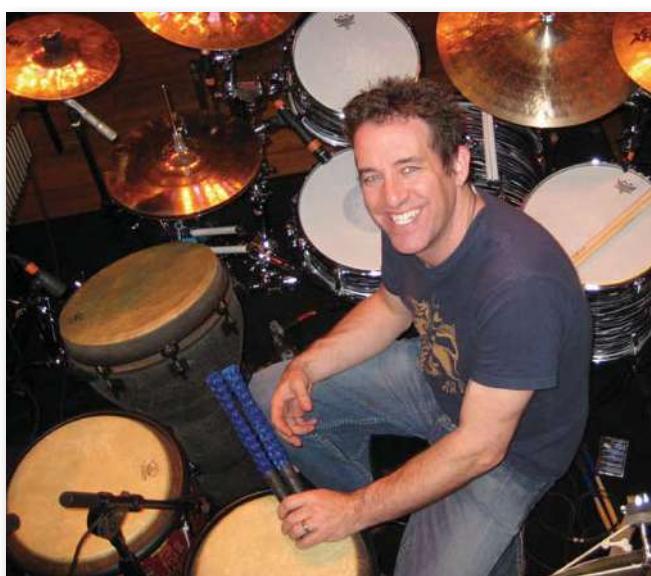
Next let's add the snare backbeats. Notice that in this groove the snare and bass drum are played simultaneously on beat 3 of the second measure.

17      3      3      3      3      3      3      3      3

Finally, let's add the ghost notes back in. Be sure to take it slowly at first. Once you're comfortable playing this at a slow tempo, try bumping up the speed using Track 75 from my book.

18      3      3      3      3      3      3      3      3

Keep practicing this groove! You never know when you'll need it, and you'll be glad to have it in your bag of tricks. For me, the moment that I most needed it occurred when Toto's Steve Lukather sat in with Rascal Flatts in Philadelphia to play—you guessed it—"Rosanna."



**Jim Riley** is the drummer and bandleader for Rascal Flatts. His book *Survival Guide for the Modern Drummer* is available from Alfred Music. For more information, visit [jimrileymusic.com](http://jimrileymusic.com).



# A John Bonham Foot Pattern

## Variations on One of the Rock Legend's Signatures

by Powell Randolph

I remember the first time I heard "Good Times Bad Times" by Led Zeppelin. I was blown away by the footwork of John Bonham on that song. In this article, we'll focus on one of Bonham's foot patterns and play different hand variations on top of it. Here's the foot ostinato we'll be using.

1

Now add quarter-note flams and flat flams on the snare, toms, and crashes.

2

3

4

Spreading out the spacing of a right-hand flam creates two 16th-note-triplet partials, as demonstrated in Exercise 5. Orchestrate the right hand around the toms while maintaining the foot ostinato.

5

To turn this foot pattern into a groove, play quarter notes with your right hand on a cowbell and a backbeat on beat 3 with your left.

6

This next example is similar to the beat Bonham plays on the last verse of "Good Times Bad Times."

7

The next four examples incorporate four-over-three and three-over-two polyrhythms.

8

9

10

11

Now try these variations using alternating triplets over the foot ostinato.

12

13 R L R > <sup>3</sup> L R L > <sup>3</sup> L R L > <sup>3</sup> L R L  
  
 14 R L R L R L > <sup>3</sup> L R L > <sup>3</sup> L R L  
  
 15 R L R > <sup>3</sup> L R L > <sup>3</sup> L R L > <sup>3</sup> L R L  
  
 16 R L R > <sup>3</sup> L R L > <sup>3</sup> L R L > <sup>3</sup> L R L  
  
 17 R L R < <sup>3</sup> L R L < <sup>3</sup> L R L < <sup>3</sup> L R L  
  
 18 R L R < <sup>3</sup> L R L > <sup>3</sup> L R L < <sup>3</sup> L R L

Here are a few variations that incorporate 16th notes.

19 R L R L < <sup>3</sup>  
  
 20 R L R < <sup>3</sup> R L R < <sup>3</sup> R L R < <sup>3</sup> R L R < <sup>3</sup>

21 L R L R < <sup>3</sup>  
  
 22 L R L R < <sup>3</sup>  
  
 23 L R L R < <sup>3</sup> L R L R < <sup>3</sup> L R L R < <sup>3</sup> L R L R < <sup>3</sup>

These last two examples add offbeat 16th-note triplets in between the two bass drum triplet partials.

24 L R R L < <sup>3</sup> R L R L < <sup>3</sup> R L R L < <sup>3</sup> R R  
  
 25 R L R L < <sup>3</sup> R L R L < <sup>3</sup> L R L R L < <sup>3</sup> R L



Powell Randolph is a drum teacher at Alpha Music in Virginia Beach and plays rock shows with orchestras around North America for Windborne Music Productions.



# Hiding in Plain Sight

## Musically Applying Odd Rhythms

by Aaron Edgar



**Unless you're playing in a technical prog-metal band**, you may find it difficult to apply odd rhythmic ideas to songs without getting deathly glares from your bandmates. Although I wouldn't suggest that you start cramming polyrhythms and septuplets into pop covers on your next wedding gig, these types of musically taboo rhythms can be used nonintrusively if you're playing with open-minded musicians.

There are some precautions to consider when playing unusual figures in a musical setting. Clashing with other rhythms is rarely a good choice. If the band is playing 16th notes, don't start shredding quintuplets. Also, avoid stepping on the vocals. Save polyrhythms and odd subdivisions for sections that feature space or for figures and phrases within the music that support your rhythmic choices.

Think about how odd rhythms affect the sound and feel of music. Rhythms that contrast with the pulse have a tendency to add tension, especially when accenting those figures. However, using subtle sounds to voice odd phrases can steer this tension toward mystery and intrigue. It's important to keep this in mind when considering what type of musical vocabulary to use. You don't want to yell when the conversation calls for a whisper.

You'll have far greater success when playing odd rhythms if you explore them thoroughly rather than cramming a few memorized licks into an inappropriate space. My favorite way to explore odd figures is by first applying them to a four-on-the-floor feel. By practicing this way, you'll learn how the rhythm works within the pulse.

In Exercise 1 we'll play a four-on-the-floor bass drum pattern. Your right hand plays 16th notes on the ride while also playing backbeats on the snare. With your left hand, play every third 32nd note quietly on a second ride or other subtle cymbal sound. Practice this beat until the bass drum and snare feel solid underneath the funky yet consistent ride pattern.

In the previous example, the rhythm resolves evenly even if we displace each voice in the figure. Once you understand this phrase, feel free to modify or extract certain pieces of it and apply those figures to new feels. We'll explore this concept in the following examples.

Exercise 2 demonstrates an embellished 16th-note groove and applies beats 5 and 6 from Exercise 1 to the end of the phrase. Exercise 3 orchestrates the same figure from Exercise 1 on the toms as a fill. Also try playing these figures at the end of a four-bar phrase.

We can also play the ride rhythm with the hi-hat foot, which frees your right hand to play more expressively. Try playing the following right-hand pattern on a bell that's resting on your snare. If you don't have a bell, quietly playing your ride works as well.

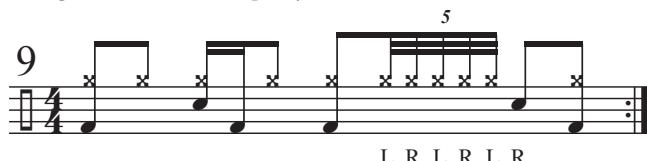
Playing the hi-hat foot in odd groupings is another great way to subtly incorporate challenging rhythms. While revisiting our four-on-the-floor framework, let's play every third 16th note with the hi-hat foot. Count out loud, start with the ride and hi-hat foot, and slowly add the bass drum and snare once everything feels comfortable. If your hi-hat foot independence needs work, check out Gary Chester's classic book, *The New Breed*, to whip it into shape.

Exercise 6 places the previous hi-hat-foot rhythm into the second measure of a two-bar phrase. In this variation, the hi-hat adds a cool, funky four-over-three flavor without being too rhythmically intrusive.

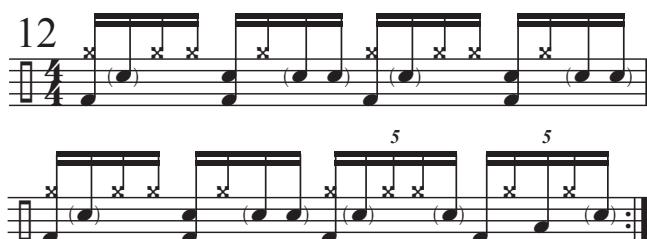
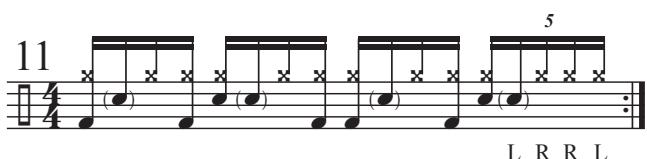
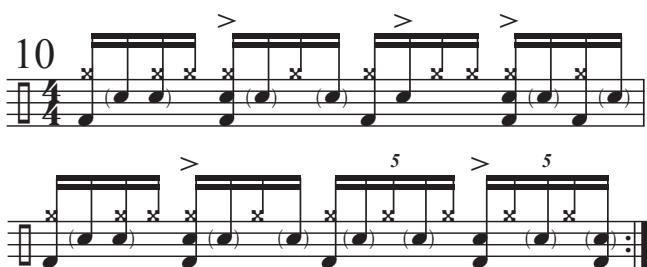
The next two examples place every fifth 16th note on the hi-hat pedal. In Exercise 7 the full pattern resolves evenly in 5/4. In Exercise 8, we'll leave out the first beat of the 5/4 phrase and embellish with an additional hi-hat note to round out the pattern on the "&" of beat 4. This results in a funky left-foot pattern.

To start incorporating quintuplets into musical phrases, proceed with additional caution. Make sure these patterns don't clash with what the other musicians are doing.

Playing rolls that lead into accented notes can create unique statements. Exercise 9 places a quintuplet single-stroke roll on the hi-hat leading into a snare backbeat. If played subtly enough, the roll works equally well when voiced on the snare.



The final three examples employ quintuplets as fills within grooves. These figures create tension going into a transition, resulting in a release when you solidly land back on beat 1. Exercise 10 places single-stroke quintuplets on beats 3 and 4 of the second measure. Play this with a loud, aggressive bass drum to ensure that the quarter-note feel doesn't waver when transitioning from 16ths to quintuplets. Exercises 11 and 12 explore additional sticking patterns in similar phrases.



These are just a few ways in which we can explore unique rhythms in a subtle way. Once you've mastered the previous material, create your own variations using individual pieces from Exercises 1 and 5. Keep in mind that if the phrases you're playing aren't effortless, they're likely to sound jagged, which can result in those deathly glares from your bandmates. If it doesn't feel funky to you, it won't feel funky to anyone else!

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





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# Drumset Ergonomics

## Part 3: Pedal Placement

by Brandon Green

**In Part 2 of this series, we discussed** the importance of setting your throne height to a position that will be optimal for your body to be comfortable and strong for a lifetime of playing. This time we're going to focus on pedal placement.

The choices we make when positioning our pedals on the floor have a huge impact on how balanced we feel on the throne, and our balance will determine how efficiently we can use the pedals. A lack of balance and symmetry can also cause unnecessary stress on joints and tissues, which could lead to issues in the future.

### Remove the Misconceptions

Drummers have generally embraced the notion that the shins should be positioned at a 90-degree angle to the floor. Another common practice for determining where to place the pedals is to sit on the throne and simply place your feet in front of you. The theory is that wherever your feet land is where your pedals should sit. While those rules might work for some, there isn't a one-size-fits-all manual for setting up your kit.

### External Variable 1: The Pedals

While there's a wide variety of makes and models of pedals, most perform similar functions. Pedals create a long and effective lever system to transfer the force of our feet to the bass drum, hi-hats, or other auxiliary instruments. The placement of these pedals as they relate to the throne will dramatically influence your performance as well as your risk of injury.

### External Variable 2: The Snare

The snare drum and its tripod stand create obstacles for your pedals and legs. The diameter of the drum and the length of your legs will influence the position of your feet. For example, if you have short legs and use a 14" or larger diameter snare, your legs might need to be opened wider than ideal to accommodate the drum. If you feel like your legs are being forced uncomfortably farther apart because of your snare size, consider testing a 13" drum.

### Internal Variable 1: The Hip Complex

Pedal and snare placement involves your leg-to-hip bone system (acetabular-femoral), which has three degrees of freedom. We'll be focusing on the sagittal plane (front-to-back) joint motion and transverse plane abduction from a hip-flexed position with the leg situated outward.



### Internal Variable 2: The Feet and Ankles

When talking about pedal placement, the complex foot and ankle systems obviously come into play. The ankle is a thirty-bone system capable of fifty-five articulations. We're going to keep it simple and only examine the sagittal plane (front-to-back) plantar flexion and dorsiflexion. The key muscles to consider are the gastrocnemius, soleus, plantaris, peroneals, tibialis anterior, and tibialis posterior.



### Pedal Width Assessment

Look at last month's article on throne height again to ensure that you're sitting in a position that's optimal for your body. Now slide your feet all the way together, and then separate them as wide as you can without allowing your knees to bow. Repeat this three to five times. As you repeat, your muscles become stimulated through a type of muscle memory called "post-activation potentiation," which may affect how much motion you have during the assessment. I suggest taking your shoes off during the test to reduce friction. The amount of adduction available to you will indicate how wide you can set your pedals and remain comfortable.

Once you've determined a comfortable pedal position, place your feet on top of the pedals and lift the front of each foot as high as it will go without the heel leaving the ground. This determines maximum dorsiflexion. If you're unable to lift your foot off the pedal because of tension in your shin, you're sitting too close to the pedals. To remedy this, slide your throne back six inches and try again. When dealing with a biomechanical system as fine-tuned as the feet, we want to be sure to operate within our active range of motion. If the pedal is constantly pushing you into a position that results in loss of control, plantar fasciitis or shin splints can develop.





Once you've determined how wide your legs can be placed comfortably on the pedals, you can adjust the distance to accommodate your setup. Single-kick players are afforded a number of options. Multiple-pedal users may be a bit more limited depending on the range of motion of their hips.



### Minimize Hip Rotation

One of the key reasons why you need to determine how far apart your feet can be positioned comfortably is to heighten your awareness of whether or not you're forcing excessive internal or external rotation of the hip. External rotation occurs if you spread your knees too far apart around the snare in relation to where the pedals are placed underneath. Internal rotation often occurs if the pedals are placed too far apart, or if you have to reach under floor toms or side snares to play a pedal.

Hip rotation isn't dangerous by itself, but when you combine it with the repetitive lifting motion required to play pedals, the muscles can shorten. Shortened muscles have decreased ability to generate force, which means that your hip muscles will have

to work harder when in rotation. This can lead to muscle strains over time.

If you follow the assessment outlined in this article, you will create a better operating window for your hips, which will decrease the risk of hip injury and lower back strain. See you next month!



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](http://drum-mechanics.com).



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[paiste.com](http://paiste.com)



## Roland RT-MicS Hybrid Drum Module

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[roland.com](http://roland.com)



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[dwelectronics.com](http://dwelectronics.com)



# Sam Adato's Drum Shop

## Eugene, Oregon

The minute you encounter Sam Adato, you know you're meeting a throwback. It's not uncommon to walk into his shop and find Sam—still proudly rocking the hair of someone who was wreaking double-kick havoc on the Bay Area metal scene of the late '80s—blasting Blue Öyster Cult as he works on a repair at the counter, surrounded by vintage kits, concert toms, snares, and old rock posters that make you feel like you're in a drummer's bedroom circa 1973. Sam caught the vintage drum bug as a teenager in the late '70s—before they were even called "vintage drums." That bug became a passion that's sustained him as a shop owner for twenty-five years. With guidance from the late Johnny Craviotto and financial assistance from his parents, Sam opened the original shop in 1993 in San Francisco. Changing times and a desire for a change of scenery brought him to Eugene in 2013. Sam spoke with *MD* about his journey from budding vintage drum nerd to long-standing shop owner.

**I started playing at seventeen.** I bought a Ludwig kit a year later in 1979 and was looking to add on to it, and I saw an ad: 'Garage full of old drums!' So I went over and met the guy, Joe Northern. He had multiple 3-ply Ludwig Thermagloss kits with 26" and 28" bass drums, old Slingerlands and Radio Kings. And he did rewraps, so I asked him to rewrap my kit in blue sparkle. I started taking lessons from him, and we became friends. He taught me about refurbishing drums, polishing and tuning them. I would go home and take my old Ludwigs apart, polish the lug casings, make sure the screws were tight, tuning them, all that. We're still friends to this day. I don't know where I'd be without him.

**I moved to Santa Cruz in 1988, and there was a music store called the Musician's Trading Post.** It was buy-sell-trade, and the drum department was a mess! It was mostly used stuff, but everything was dirty. Nothing was polished, nothing was

tuned, there's a guy sitting behind the counter eating a tuna fish sandwich.... I remember saying to my girlfriend, 'I should be working there.' I ended up meeting the owner and said I wanted to work there. He asked, 'How do you know how to do this?' and I said, 'Well, I do some work for Johnny Craviotto.' Johnny was *legendary* around there, so I was hired. I immediately started taking apart every drum—polishing, tuning, all the hard work cleaning out that whole shop.

**It was the tip of the iceberg for the vintage drum market in the late '80s.** Slowly but surely, after I started refurbishing stuff, guys would come in and buy these old Slingerlands and Ludwigs. It was almost like I was setting the prices of vintage gear. There was *Not So Modern Drummer*, which was just a paper back then. So I'd refer to that and use my expertise.



**Sam Adato with his 1971 Ludwig Thermagloss set and the hybrid snare drum that Johnny Craviotto made for him.** "Johnny C. played a huge role in my life," says Sam, who achieved some success with, among others, the band Wrekking Machine. "We played with Testament and Exodus and all those bands. I've been in bands that shared stages with Deep Purple, Blue Öyster Cult, UFO, and King's X. And I was in a great surf band in Santa Cruz. I'm quite proud of my achievements as a drummer."





**Around late 1991, you could see that the shop wasn't doing so great.** And a light bulb went off in my head: 'I could open my own shop.' I knew what to pay for stuff; I knew what to sell it for. I knew how to refurbish. I had a one-track mind: opening my own shop in San Francisco. Every spare dollar I had, I started buying gear. When I opened, there was no Craigslist, no eBay. So people that wanted to sell stuff would bring it into the shop. By the late '90s, business was ripping in San Francisco. I was packed with killer vintage stuff.

**Things started changing.** Drummers started buying things off Craigslist. And a lot less vintage stuff was coming in, as people started selling it themselves on the internet. To my detriment, I was a latecomer to the internet, and I wasn't going out looking for stuff. I was so spoiled with things coming to me for so long. So my inventory started shrinking. Things were getting more expensive in San Francisco. I was in my fifties. I could've spent another ten years there, but sometimes you just want a change.

**I'd been up to Eugene before; I really liked it.** And I did my research. I knew it was a college town, that there were some clubs there and a big enough music scene that I thought I could survive. And I do. It's not the same as it was in San Francisco. I wish business was better here. But a lot of stores are struggling. I still manage to make a living doing what I love. I have my own little niche here. And how many people can open the doors to their own business, turn up the stereo, work on drums, and rock out all day? I'm kind of living the dream as far as that goes.

**Interview by Patrick Berkery**



Adato, pictured here with his beloved 1954 Ford F-100 "Big Blue" pickup, says it's been a trade-off moving his shop from a major city like San Francisco to a town like Eugene. "Smaller city, fewer drummers, less business. Drummers here are looking for the same thing, only on a smaller scale. But my house is five minutes from my shop. I don't have to deal with commuting an hour or two. That makes up for not making as much money. My stress level is a lot lower."



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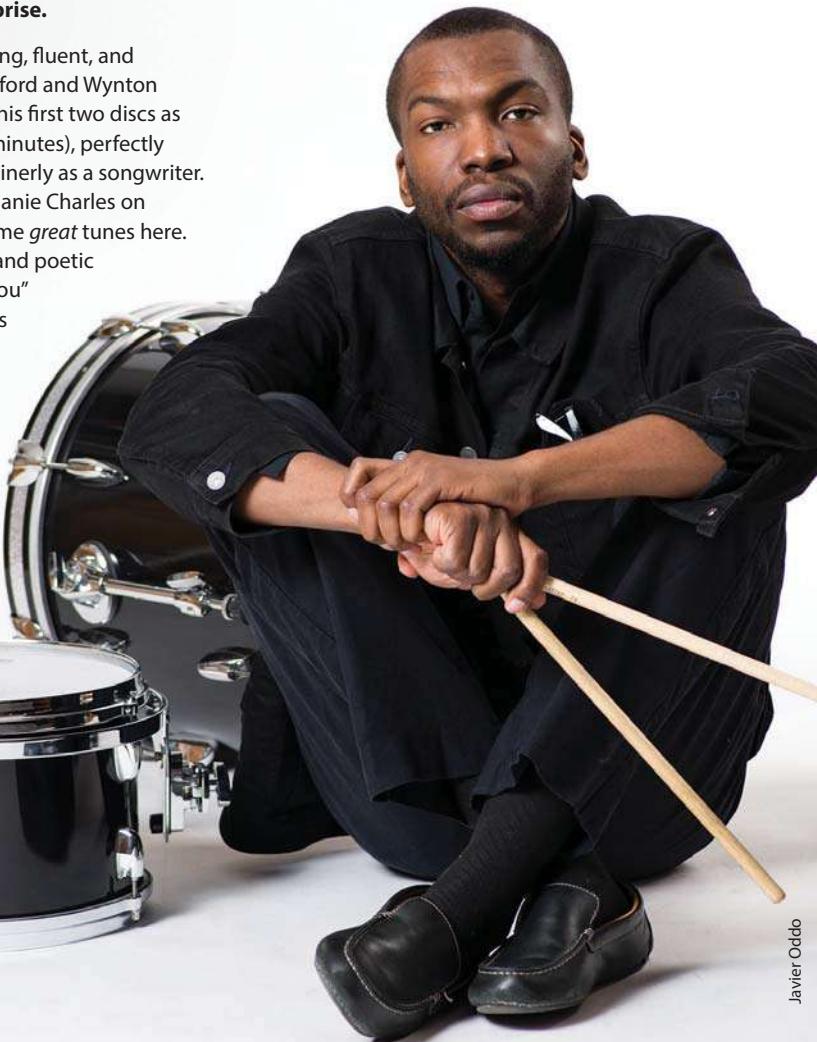
## RECORDINGS Taking the Reins

### Reggie Quinerly Words to Love

An ascending drummer delivers a welcome surprise.

Reggie Quinerly proved himself as a strong, swinging, fluent, and sensitive drummer accompanying the likes of Branford and Wynton Marsalis, Joe Lovano, and Greg Osby, as well as on his first two discs as a leader. Taking a left turn, this brief (thirty-seven minutes), perfectly balanced, self-produced third album highlights Quinerly as a songwriter. Eight songs feature vocalists Milton Suggs and Melanie Charles on alternating tracks hitting homers, and there are some great tunes here. Quinerly leans to strong melodies, kinetic energy, and poetic lyrics, from the irresistible soul jazz of "Until I Met You" to the spare, aching beauty of the 3/4 ballad "Times We've Yet to See." Ably joined by pianist Orrin Evans, bassist Ben Wolfe, and alto saxophonist Jaleel Shaw, Quinerly shows drum mastery in his accompanying and interaction, whether in service of crisp, up-tempo swing ("Love's Ferris Wheel") or gentle colorations ("Still Frames"). A strong, personal stamp of leadership from this captivating drummer/composer. (reggiequierly.com)

**Jeff Potter**



Javier Oddo

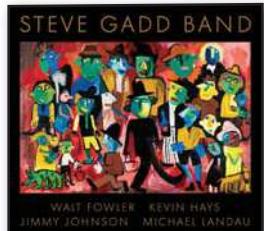
### Steve Gadd Steve Gadd Band

The drum maestro returns with his band of like-minded partners for more groovy goodness.

Steve Gadd has always played the so-called "spaces between the notes," and hearing him lay down the funky brilliance on these new studio tracks featuring his band of killers is the gift that keeps on giving. The simple lilt of "Where's Earth?" is how you keep time but command the flow; Gadd stays with a sidestick long after a mere mortal would bring in a heavier backbeat. The drummer plays a cool, light-as-a-feather half-time shuffle on "Foameopathy" and the perfect combination of slightly opened hats and snare ghosting on the chugging "Skulk." On "One Point Five," Gadd works his cowbell

magic and engages in a little duo conversation with his son Duke, who adds percussion; and caresses his ride gently on "Timpanogos." Notably, drum solos were not on the menu for this record. Four albums in, this group is feeling each other more deeply, playing with the restraint encouraged by its sage leader, and showing no signs of creative malaise. ([www.drstevegadd.com](http://www.drstevegadd.com))

**Ilya Stemkovsky**





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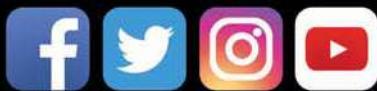
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## Critique

### Joe Satriani

#### What Happens Next

**CHAD SMITH** brings serious attitude and tough beats on this guitar hero's date.

Joe Satriani has employed excellent drummers on his records over the years, but teaming up here with his Chickenfoot bandmate and longtime Chili Pepper Chad Smith seems to be a special occasion for each. Opener "Energy" is pure drive, Smith sloshing his open hats with fervor before opening up on a ride with some hip bell accenting. Smith isn't shy about tossing off



big flams in the half-time breakdowns and bringing it all home with a hammering snare ending before you're aware of what hit ya.

Featuring legendary bassist Glenn Hughes, this is a power trio to the max, and the rest of the album is more of the same uncompromising rock 'n' (drum) roll, with Smith doing his take on a double-time "Satch Boogie" on "Headrush" and laying down a slinky, kick syncopation groove on "Super Funky Badass." Smith is the quintessential "play-for-the-song" guy,

but with a welcome wildness and healthy disregard for sounding too perfect. It's our loss that he doesn't do more one-off sessions. ([www.satriani.com](http://www.satriani.com))

Ilya Stemkovsky

### Wess Meets West *A Light Within the Fracture*

**On its third full-length, the Connecticut band offers strong compositions, ambient programming, and a very solid performance from ANDY PORTA.**

"Defiant Optimism," the longest track here at over ten minutes, may best express an underlying sentiment of Wess Meets West, a band that respectfully nods toward its post-rock antecedents while boasting a voice of its own. In the song's bigger moments, drummer Andy Porta proves that he knows how to play with understated authority in support of a triumphant riff. And while marching beats can come off as post-rock cliché on "Temporary Galaxies," Porta refreshingly orchestrates them around the entire kit; eventually they're bathed in post-production delay, making for a highly satisfying conclusion to the song. Elsewhere his choices are equally powerful, whether

employing a simple tom figure with lots of space on "Foghorns on the Baltic," or really going for it and achieving a huge payoff for the last two minutes of "Direct Experience." With *A Light Within the Fracture*, Porta and Wess Meets West make a commendable addition to the post-rock canon. (Hassel) Stephen Bidwell

### Here Lies Man *You Will Know Nothing*

**The L.A.-based band, featuring the former drummer of Brooklyn Afrobeat pioneers Antibalas, exists to answer one simple question: What if Black Sabbath played Afrobeat?**

On the eleven gritty and hard-grooving tracks of *You Will Know Nothing*, the follow-up to Here Lies Man's self-titled 2017 debut album, **GEOFF MANN** filters his knowledge of Afrobeat legend Tony Allen through the playing of original Black Sabbath drummer Bill Ward, and vice versa. While Richard Panta and Reinaldo DeJesus cover congas and percussion, Geoff, the son of famed jazz flautist Herbie Mann, provides multiple layers of drumset, resulting in some pleasingly dry and crunchy textures.

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A photograph of three people: a woman with long dark hair and a red and white striped shirt, a man wearing a blue baseball cap and a dark shirt, and a young boy in a wheelchair wearing a blue t-shirt. They are all smiling and appear to be happy. The woman is holding a large yellow drum.

"Although something might sound like one instrument," Mann tells *MD*, "there are subtle layers shifting through. It's definitely a headphones album." Opener "Animal Noises" marches along with a Tony Allen-like snare/kick conversation, but imagine Tony playing

with bats in place of sticks and the horn section parts being covered by a pair of overdriven guitars. Meanwhile, "Taking the Blame" features an opening riff that would fit perfectly on a stoner rock record, a more traditional Afrobeat rhythm in the second

section, and a bashy chorus that moves into a dreamy electric piano in the outro. An intriguing and enjoyable listen for riff-rock fans and Afrobeat heads alike. (RidingEasy)

**Stephen Bidwell**

## MULTIMEDIA

### Camp Duty Update by Claus Hessler

A well-researched and thorough study of the history and background of modern rudimental drumming.

With the recently released English translation of *Camp Duty Update*, the German drummer, author, and clinician Claus Hessler presents a comprehensive historical review of international rudimental drumming and how the art evolved to its current state as it relates to the United States' military repertoire.

Hessler traces drumming's European development from the 14th to 17th centuries before shifting focus to rudimental growth in the New World from the Revolutionary War era onward. The drummer cites his ample research and provides illustrations and notation when needed. And when addressing early, somewhat ambiguous European drumming notation that doesn't necessarily define such aspects as meter, sticking, or feel, Hessler's informed interpretations succinctly explain the era's drumming notation evolution from indeterminate to determinate.



The bulk of the book then focuses on the United States Camp and Garrison Duty—the collection of tunes that 19th century American military drummers played to signal soldiers' typical daily routines—and "quicksteps," which Hessler defines as standard military songs that didn't have an organizational function in the army. For each piece, Hessler provides notation, historical background, and, if applicable, its function in soldiers' daily routines.

Hessler also traces the notational and interpretive differences present among previously published versions of traditional songs such as "The Three Camps" or "The Downfall of Paris" while explaining how he's chosen to notate each piece's present form in the book. And an MP3 CD includes recordings of each piece that Hessler plays with the piccolo fifer Matthias Dörsam, as well as fast and slow play-along versions of the tunes.

Even if you don't read music or have an interest in rudimental drumming or history, you'd be missing out on a special, well-done work if you didn't check this one out. (\$19.99 [book and CD], Alfred) **Willie Rose**

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# Courtney Barnett's Dave Mudie

**A**lright drummers, let's go over that international travel checklist one last time: suitcase, cell phone, cell phone charger, snare and cymbals (assuming there's a backline kit being provided at your destination), sticks, in-ears, drum key, and, most importantly, *your passport*.

What's that? You left your passport in your suitcase, which you sent ahead with the tour manager, who's traveling to the next gig by train—and you've only just realized this on the way to the airport? Well, good luck getting on that flight and making the gig.

Don't think for a minute that forgetting your passport is the kind of egregious mistake that only a rookie could make. Dave Mudie was a veteran of many international flights and hundreds of gigs with Courtney Barnett when he allowed himself to become separated from his passport as the band was about to travel from London to play a festival in France, a couple of years back. And don't think for a minute the show can't go on without the drummer. Without hers, Barnett played a solo acoustic set at the festival. Meanwhile, Mudie was forced to cool his heels in London, spending a "lonely day and night" waiting for the tour manager to backtrack from France to deliver his passport.

Dave explains what happened...

"We were playing in London, and there was a festival in France the next day. We got to bed at around 4 A.M. and had to get up at 6 A.M. to get to the airport. Our tour manager took my suitcase, which my passport was in, and he got on a train to the south of France. Of course I realized this after the fact. I was at the airport with the guys and Courtney waved goodbye and said, 'Try to get your passport back and hopefully we'll see you there.'

"I was running around London trying to call our tour manager, but I couldn't get in touch until he'd reached his destination about twelve hours later. By that time



I'd missed the festival. I spent the night in London, staying with someone from our label. Our tour manager had to come straight back on the train. He got in at 6 A.M. the next morning and didn't have a very happy expression on his face. So I missed that festival in France, but ended up making the next one, Primavera, with about five minutes to spare."

And the lesson here is?

"Definitely, always hold on to your passport," Mudie says. "I've got it in my pocket all the time now. It was a teachable moment, I guess."

That passport will remain in Mudie's pocket for the foreseeable future, as he expects to be globe-trotting with Barnett well into 2019 behind her new album, *Tell Me How You Really Feel*. The drummer says Barnett's gradual ascension from small clubs to larger halls and prime festivals over a very busy last four-and-a-half years has given him a pretty good perspective about life on the road.

"It's the best job ever," he says, "but it turns into a thing where you're playing and moving all the time, and the back of the venue is the main thing you see. So you live for that hour or two of the day when you're finally playing."

"And you've got to look after yourself," Mudie adds. "Eat well, get sleep if you can. You're doing it for the music, so you've got to remember that. I try and learn a new thing every week, something new on drums or guitar."

In his travels, Mudie has also learned a thing or two about how to handle gear malfunctions. Prior to playing with Barnett, he once fell off the back of a truck—which was serving as a stage—in the middle of a gig. "The back leg of the stool fell off the truck," he recalls with a laugh. "It was about a five-foot drop, on grass at least. Lesson learned here: don't set up so close to the edge of the stage. And maybe don't play on a truck." And he's developed a surefire way for not missing a beat when his kick pedal gives out mid-song. "Just kick the kick drum. It's happened quite a few times to me. The mic should pick it up." **Patrick Berkery**

## Road Gear

Mudie plays C&C red and silver sparkle drums (13" rack tom, 16" floor tom, 24" kick), a Ludwig Black Beauty snare, Zildjian Keropé cymbals, LP shakers, and uses Vic Firth 7A wood-tip sticks and, usually, Gibraltar hardware.



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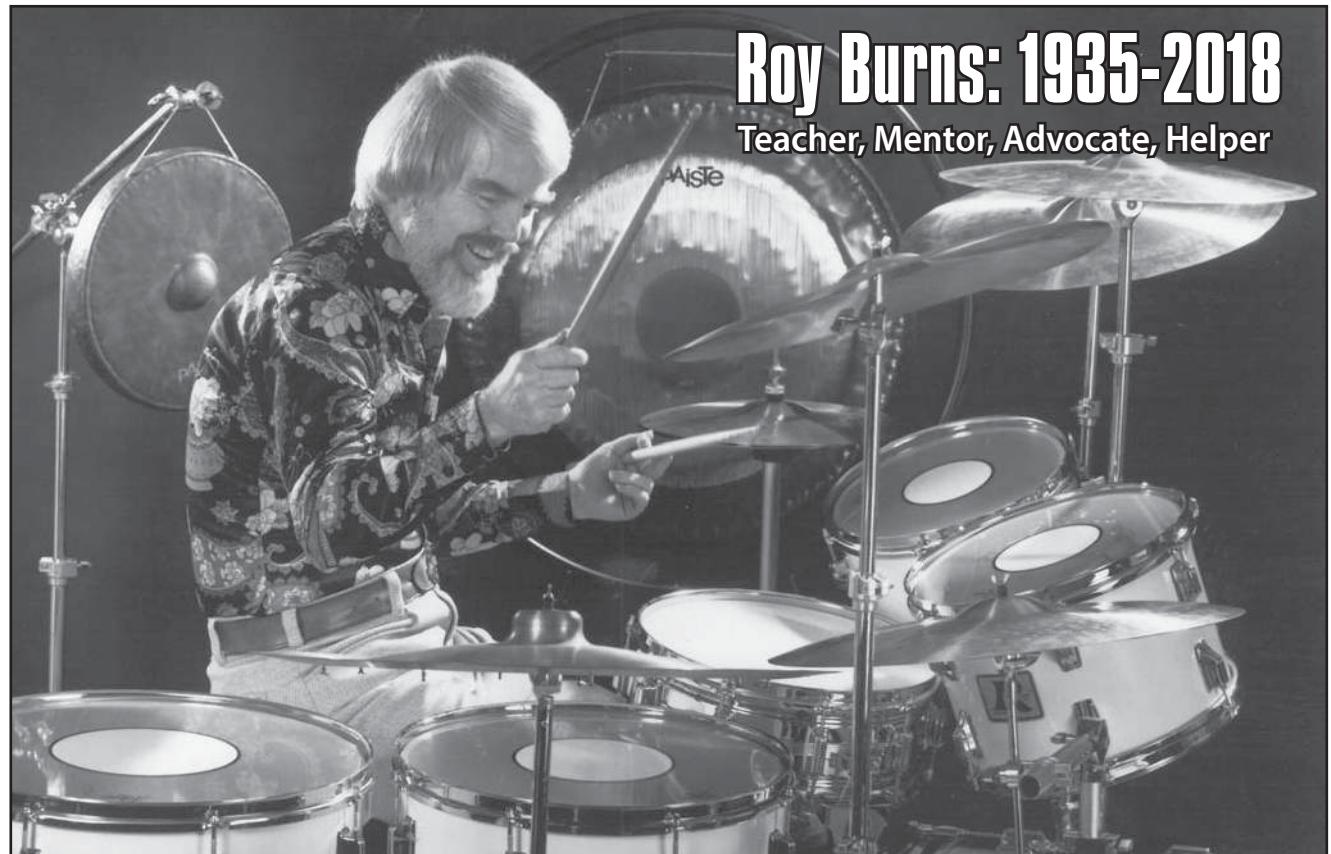
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## IN MEMORIAM



# Roy Burns: 1935-2018

Teacher, Mentor, Advocate, Helper

**R**oy Burns was a fixture in the worlds of jazz and percussion. From the driving and sophisticated drumming he provided on countless recordings to the characteristic jokes he shared at the Aquarian booth during industry gatherings like PASIC and NAMM, he put his unique stamp on our musical community.

Whether it was his idea for a revolutionary cymbal spring, the design of a new type of drumhead, or any number of other manufacturing ideas, Roy worked closely with Ron Marquez, president and cofounder of Aquarian Drumheads. "Roy was the best and most trusted friend that one could ever wish for," Marquez tells *MD*. "From the first hello, there was a connection that we both experienced. That connection turned into a thirty-eight-year partnership that was envied by all our peers."

"One of Roy's many great contributions to the drumming community was his limitless knowledge of drumming," Marquez adds, "which he was so respectfully eager to share in his books and clinics. His passing has left an infinite void in the hearts of the Aquarian family. Roy can never be replaced and will always have a prominent place in our memories."

Another member of the Aquarian family is Chris Brady, director of artist relations and marketing for the company. "Roy was our teacher, our mentor, our advocate, and our

helper. He was truly the drummer's champion!

"One of my fondest memories of Roy," Brady continues, "was traveling to Germany and hanging out with him at the hotel, just watching drum videos and *MADtv* clips on YouTube!"

"When I was about eighteen years old," recalls jazz drumming legend Joe Porcaro, "I went to the Nola rehearsal studio in New York City to audition for a band. As I was looking for the audition room, I heard this incredible drumming coming from one of the other studios. I asked the janitor who the drummer was and he said, 'Some young kid from Kansas City. He's driving us crazy!'" Forty years later, Burns invited Porcaro to endorse his new line of Aquarian drumheads. "Roy was a class act as well as a great role model for drummers," says Joe. "Besides having great technique, he had great time and a great concept for big band drumming. I just wish I could remember more of his jokes!"

Lauren Vogel Weiss, who grew up in the drum business as the daughter of Lone Star Percussion founder Harvey Vogel, and who gathered together the quotes here, remembers Roy fondly. "It was an honor for me to interview Roy for the *Modern Drummer* sister publication *Drum Business* several years ago," she says. "And it was even more of an honor that the article was used on the *Modern Drummer* website when he passed. Rest in peace, Roy."

**"Roy was my favorite and probably most beneficial teacher that I had the good fortune of studying with. He was a true gentleman and treated everyone with kindness and respect. In return that's exactly what you'd want to give back to him—always. He made you want to be good and to do good.**

**"Roy's wisdom and knowledge went far beyond just sitting behind the drums. Knowing him, talking with him, listening to him...he taught me about following through, being patient, and instead of getting frustrated with something, just taking a minute and looking at it from a different perspective and then giving it another go. Such a class act. He truly made me want to be a better person and will forever hold a special place in my heart."**

—Josh Freese

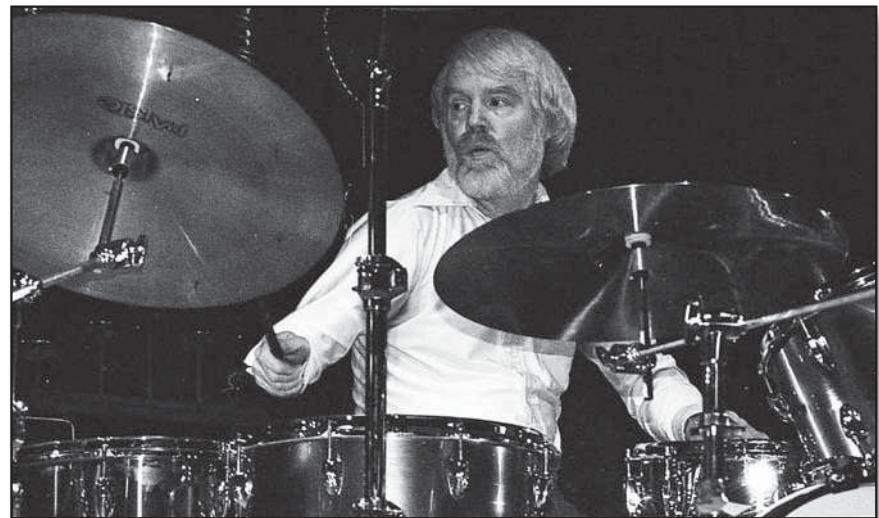
# A Hero's Path

by Russ Miller

In 1980, Modern Drummer asked Roy Burns to write a column for the magazine. He did, and he continued to write Concepts columns until 1992. I was asked to take it over in September of 2014. When my first stab at the column hit subscribers and newsstands, one of the first calls I received was from the Aquarian office: "Russ, Roy wants to talk to you." I called him back and said, "Roy, it freaked me out that *MD* wants me to do your column." He was delightful—as always—and said, "I couldn't ask for a better musician to write that column." I asked him if he had any advice, and he said, "Just tell them what it takes to do what we do, Russ. They'll appreciate it, and they will all get a lot out of it. You've done all these things; it's your job to give that information back."

That was a meaningful phone call for several reasons. First off, I met Roy when I was thirteen years old. He was the artist of my first drum clinic in Canton, Ohio, in 1982. (He was a lot of drummers' first clinic because he was the guy who invented them.) Second, I was able to become closer with Roy years later. I spoke to him a few times about the different eras of his career. Those conversations made me start to think about the fact that there are other contributions to be made to drumming beyond just playing. This is what led me to be involved in product development for the past twenty years.

I'm mourning Roy's passing but am also humbled to have known this man, who did so much for drumming, the industry, and music. I learned a crucial truth from

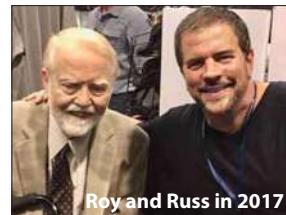


Roy: everybody has a different business plan. Your drumming hero's path is not necessarily the same as yours. Roy carved new paths in the drumming world and had three successful careers in this business, first as a very successful player, then as a drumming artist and clinician, and finally as a manufacturer. Any one of those would be enough to be honored, but the fact that he did all three is simply amazing. And they stemmed out of Roy doing what he loved to do. Funny how that works, right? The things we love most are often the things we do the best, so we don't hesitate to pour ourselves into them. Success usually follows excellence.

The generation of the greats that started this industry is leaving us. That saddens me, but I feel empowered by it at the same time. I want to carry on that level of excellence, diligence, and love for the drums that Roy

and those before us had.

I was on a flight with big band legend Louie Bellson years ago. We spoke about many things. Louie was a gem, and he said to me that day, "Russ, we're all going to be gone soon, and it's up to you guys to carry on what we started. You have experiences



Roy and Russ in 2017

that only a few get, so you owe it to everybody younger than you." It was almost the same thing Roy told me years later. Roy, Remo Belli, Vic Firth, Armand Zildjian, Louie, Elvin Jones, and so many others have left us. But they

created a legacy for all of us to carry on. I'm so proud of the fact that I grew up learning from these great gentlemen.

Thanks to Roy for his inspiration, dedication, and vision—as well as for the wicked hi-hat solo he played back in 1982 in Canton, Ohio. I never forgot it, and the history of drumming will never forget him.

## My Obi-Wan

Professional player and former Roy Burns student Evan Stone paints an intimate portrait of his mentor.

Roy Burns was more than a great drummer; he was a great man. I don't think I was ever around Roy when he didn't have a smile on his face or wasn't cracking a joke to get you to laugh. That was his character. And he was a real character, no doubt.

I met Roy when I was fifteen years old. At the time I was taking drum lessons with Glen Young, who thought it'd be best if I started to study with the then-legendary Burns. I

was a clueless teenage schlub who had no idea about jazz music or the legends that Roy had performed with throughout his career. But Glen talked him up pretty good, which piqued my interest.

I called the number Glen gave me. Roy answered the phone, and I told him that I wanted to study with him. He said, "Alright, meet me in the parking lot at Mission Viejo High School on Saturday at 12:00 P.M. sharp." I

agreed, he said goodbye, and we hung up.

I guess I assumed we'd be starting lessons on that Saturday, so I came prepared. I showed up to the parking lot at noon as discussed and looked around but didn't see anyone. I heard a drumline playing in the distance and started to walk over to the sounds. As I approached I saw this man walking toward me. He greeted me and said, "Hi, Evan, I'm Roy Burns. I teach lessons out of Fullerton at a music store called This Is Music—can you make it next Saturday?" to which I agreed. We shook hands and he walked off, probably to go eat lunch, as it was 12:00 P.M., and if you knew Roy, you knew

that that's when he took his lunch...like clockwork.

A little puzzled, I walked back to my car and drove home. *I suppose he could have just told me that on the phone*, I thought. But I guess that was my first real audition, and apparently I passed. Perhaps he just wanted to see if I was going to actually show up or just be another flakey student. I never did ask him about that.

Every Saturday for about five years I drove to that little music store in Fullerton to take lessons with Roy. I looked forward to my weekly lesson, as Roy was very different from the other teachers I'd previously had. He wasn't only a great teacher who taught about the traditional aspects of drumming; he was more like a life coach and a philosopher. He had so many great stories—about his experiences playing with Benny Goodman and Woody Herman, about his time at NBC playing on *The Merv Griffin Show*, about Buddy Rich—and so many nuggets of pure wisdom that I always loved hearing about. And of course, there were his jokes. My favorite was about the drummer who always dragged, and as a result was so depressed that he wanted to end his life—so he jumped behind the train! Of course I'm paraphrasing; it's much more R-rated a joke than that...Roy liked the R-rated jokes.

During one of the first lessons we had, Roy told me to go buy a book to read called *The Inner Game of Tennis*. I thought this was a strange requirement for a drum lesson, but I didn't question it and read the book as instructed. I remember reading about the chapter on visualization and how tennis players score more points if they envision the ball staying within the court's lines versus hoping that it wouldn't go outside of them. He was teaching me about the power of positive thinking.

This was an eye-opening concept to me at the time—and what a brilliant way to teach drumming and life lessons. Roy didn't see them as separate things.

It was nearly impossible to feel sad around Roy, as he'd instantly pick up on it and find a way to make you laugh. He made life less scary for me and put things into their proper perspective. Incidentally, Roy was the first teacher to say the word "shit" to me, which I thought was rather amusing and quite frankly, pretty cool.

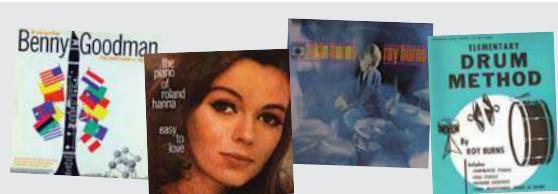
He was real.

Maybe Roy's realness was due partly to his being from a small town in Kansas, and I could relate to that. In any event, he was a "take no shit" kind of guy, and as a kid from

Long Island, New York, I liked that a lot.

Roy moved himself to New York City when he was nineteen years old, alone with a few bucks in his pocket and his drums. That takes serious balls. But Roy had the goods, and soon after moving to New York he landed the gig with the Woody Herman Big Band. He was destined for greatness.

I remember Roy telling me about the bands he played with, and when he mentioned Benny Goodman, I recalled seeing a vinyl recording that my father had of Benny at the Brussels World's Fair. For some reason I clearly remembered that album cover, so I went through my pop's collection and found that LP. I turned it over and started reading the credits on the back cover, and lo and behold, the drummer on that recording was none other than my teacher, Roy Burns! (Although I think they spelled it "Burnes" on the album.) Roy's performance on "Sing, Sing, Sing" is



Among Roy's recording credits are *Benny Goodman Plays World Favorites*, *Roland Hanna's Easy to Love*, and his own debut as a leader, *Skin Burns*, released on Roulette in 1962, when the drummer was only twenty-seven years old. That same year, he published his highly regarded *Elementary Drum Method* book.

absolutely stellar, and his drum solo on that record catapulted him to fame and most certainly etched his musicality into the halls of greatness.

This was super exciting to me. Then I came to find out that Roy was on the cover of (the bible of drumming) *Modern Drummer* magazine. *MD* was the only real reading material for me at the time, so this was particularly exciting to me as well. And not only was he on the cover, he was on the cover of the second issue! The very first issue of *MD* was with Buddy Rich on the cover—and Roy followed that act!

Then I found out that Roy was writing a column for *Modern Drummer* called Concepts. As a youngster thumbing through the magazine, I guess I was more interested in the nice pictures than in actually reading the articles—a nasty habit I developed while reading some of my father's personal magazine collection—but when I found this out I dug up my past issues so I could read all the articles that Roy had written, with a growing appetite for his wisdom. Every month when *MD* came in the mail, before doing anything else, I'd

immediately go to his column to read what he had to say. He always had great advice to offer.

To be able to study with Roy was incredible, to say the least. His hands were ridiculously fast, and his technique was flawless. He played with precision, and he commanded perfection without demanding it. He sounded so good to my ears, and I loved it every time he would sit down to show me an example on the drums.

I'll always look back at my time with Roy with extreme fondness. I enjoyed visiting with him over the years at the Aquarian factory in California, sitting in his office and listening to more of his industry stories and getting caught up on his latest jokes. But before we parted, he'd always find a way to say something to remind me about a lesson we may have already gone over but that needed to be reiterated.

Roy was the eternal teacher. He was my mentor. He was my Obi-Wan Kenobi.

And so I found it very fitting that on May 4 I'd receive the phone call from Chris Brady at Aquarian, letting me know that Roy had passed. I knew when I saw the call coming in, and I didn't want to answer the phone. But I did at the last second, hoping I'd be wrong. I was having lunch and watching TV, which happened to be playing *Star Wars* all day long, as it was "May the Fourth." I'd paused the screen on the scene of Obi-Wan getting ready to face Darth Vader.

After I hung up with Chris, I realized what was on the TV. And although I was deeply saddened by the news, I also found peace in seeing that Obi-Wan was staring at me from my TV.

Like Obi-Wan, Roy may have disappeared physically, but he will always remain with all who knew him and all who may get to know him through his music, recordings, books, and articles.

And Roy will always remain with me. His lessons are embedded in my soul. They're part of my construct and my approach to music, and more importantly, my life. I pass his lessons on to my students, so they too will benefit from his legacy.

I'll miss you, Roy, but I know your voice will always remain with me. Thank you for being my Obi-Wan.

Until we meet again.

**Evan Stone** has played with Toni Childs, Maynard Ferguson, the Greg Adams Band, and Aly & AJ, and leads his own group, the Translucent Ham Sandwich Band.





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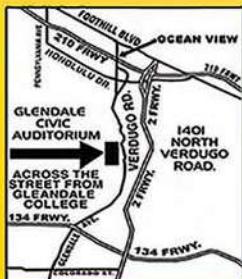


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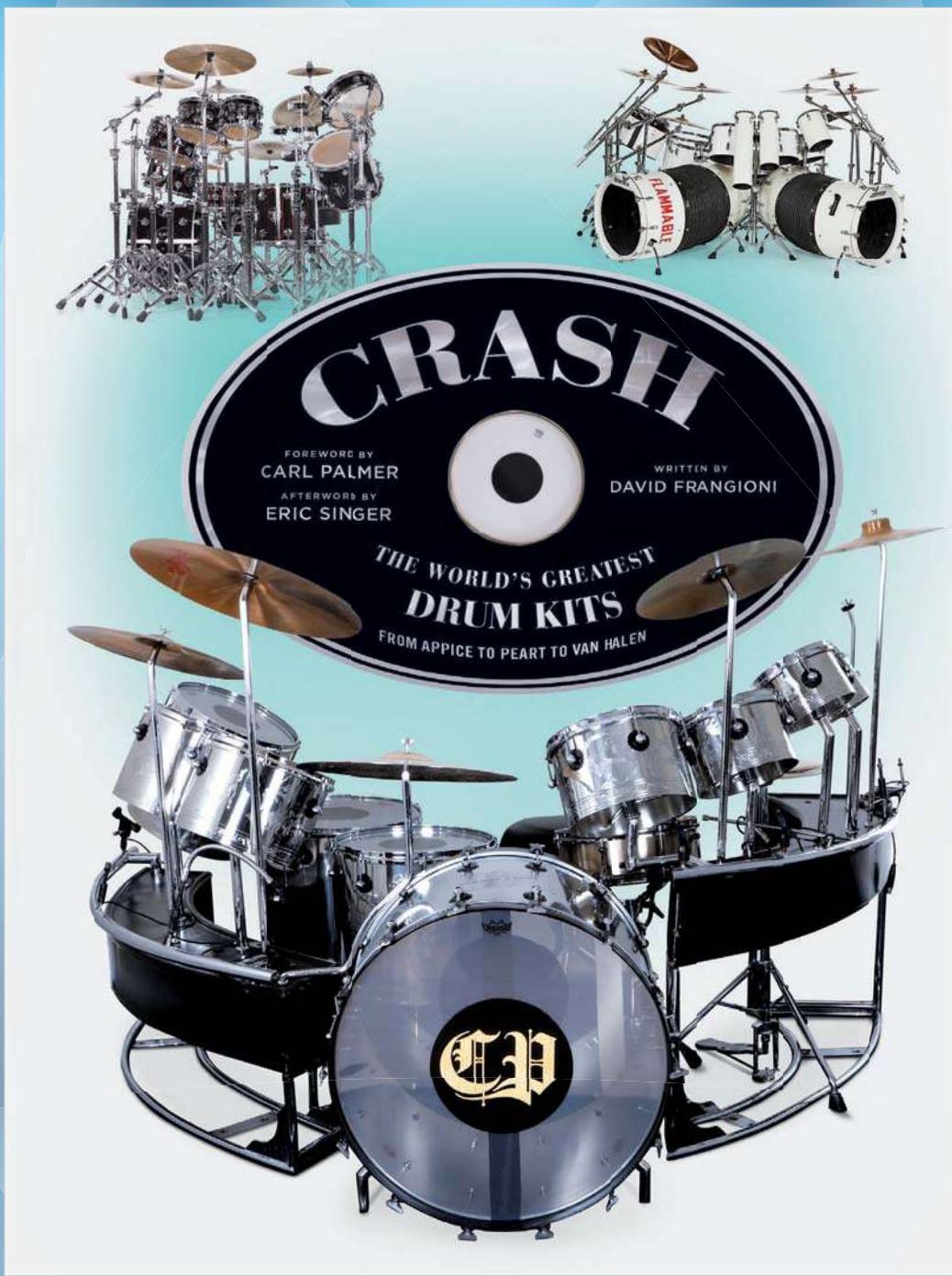
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A TRIBUTE TO THE MUSIC OF EVANESCENCE



# An Evanescence Tribute

**The U.K.-based drummer** Ben McIlvenna assembled this customized Tama Silverstar for live gigs with his Evanescence tribute band, Fallen. McIlvenna tells *MD* that he's been building the setup over the past five years. "It started out as a standard five-piece shell pack," he says. "I've slowly added to it year by year to create my own sound, feel, and stage image. And I've personally designed some elements of the kit. It comes in handy being a product engineer by trade!"

McIlvenna says that when he first joined Fallen, the kit was more modest. "I kept her to a five-piece setup for the first year to match Will Hunt's Evanescence setup," he explains. "However, once the tribute became busier and I became more comfortable with the material, I began upgrading the set and incorporating a few progressive elements into the music."

McIlvenna also drew inspiration for the kit's arrangement from a certain prog-drumming ace. "I'm a huge Mike Portnoy fan," he says.

"After discovering him around 2000, everything about my playing changed, and I adapted more of a progressive style and setup."

McIlvenna's kit consists of an 18x22 kick, a custom 6.5x14 stainless-steel snare, 7x8, 8x10, and 9x12 rack toms, 14x14 and 14x16 floor toms, and four 6" Octobans in 16", 18", 20", and 22" depths. The drummer refinished the shells in a black metal sparkle wrap. A hefty collection of Zildjian A Custom and Paiste Alpha cymbals round out the kit, including four splashes, three Chinas, four crashes, a ride, two sets of hi-hats, and a 6" Zildjian Zil-Bel and 14" Paiste PST X stack.

McIlvenna also plays Evans heads and uses a Tama Iron Cobra double bass pedal and hi-hat stand, along with a Pearl Eliminator remote hi-hat stand. To complete the setup, the drummer modified a Pearl Icon three-sided rack to include vertical Gibraltar rack bars. "The addition of the vertical curved bars enabled me to better position cymbals higher up while dodging lower booms and cymbals below," McIlvenna says. "And they also look pretty cool!"

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



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