Tony Royster, Jr.
on location
Los Angeles, CA
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Editor’s Notes:
All in the Family

There is a lot of talk about family at Drum Workshop: joining the DW family, the DW family of artists, the family of DW products, etc. Not so ironically, we are a family business. We are privately-owned-and-operated and generations of several families have worked here for decades. That’s not so unique in our line of business, so why bother shining a light on it? Because family is at the core of everything we do. We want the remarkable stable of talented artists that we work with to feel like they are part of a very special group and we aspire to have the drummers that choose to play our products enjoy that same feeling of community and belonging. Some may never meet their drumming idols, but they can appreciate knowing that they play the same instruments and share the same love of the craft. Other musicians are always amazed at how drummers will flock to see each other perform and endlessly talk shop with each other. Call it a common language, a common bond, or an extended family; it’s a connection that cannot be denied.

Those that visit the DW factory often tell us that they can feel the solidarity here, the sense that everyone is working with a shared purpose and an understanding that what they are doing is important to so many people. It is humbling to think that so many drummers the world over have made Drum Workshop part of their personal musical journey. We realize that this collective commonality is an intangible concept. You can’t package it and you can’t sell it. That’s a good thing, because we wouldn’t want to. It is a feeling that you can only experience as a drummer, an understanding that offers a secure sense of knowing that you are part of a tight-knit musical community.

Extraordinary and magical things happen when an audience identifies with a brand so closely. This sort of fascination can only take root when it involves something as passionate as playing music. In the end, we can only hope that cultivating new ideas and working closely with like-minded drumming fanatics will further expand the art form and the family of drummers that comes along with it.

Scott Donnell
Editor, Edge Magazine

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I have a lot of drummer friends and many of them have a certain idea of what DW drums sound like. They tend to think that Drum Workshop’s shells have a very specific “modern” sound. This opinion is likely a holdover from when only one shell option existed: the Collector’s Series all-Maple shell with 3-ply reinforcement hoops. I often explain to them that DW’s sonic options have evolved greatly since those early days. Today, there are literally dozens of shell configurations to satisfy almost any tonal preference. The best part is that DW’s Custom Shop makes very consistent, high-quality shells. I live in the area and visit the factory often, so I’ve seen it firsthand. It’s also important to note that a well-made shell will only get better with age. It will mellow just like an acoustic guitar, getting warmer and more resonant as the moisture content lessens. In my humble opinion, the Jazz Series shell, with its soft Gumwood core, is the most versatile shell that DW makes, and I’ll tell you why.

Soon after I received the set, I used it on a TV scoring session. The music was a mixture of moodier stuff and heavier Rock. On some tracks I needed a more retro, almost vintage, sound so I used a medium-to-high tuning and coated Emperors. For the heavier stuff, I needed to get a low and fat sound. I dropped the toms down as far as I could and, using the same head combination, they absolutely rumbled. The producer was more than thrilled with the drum sound and, let’s face it, that’s the feedback that matters the most.

I used a backline Jazz Series kit earlier this year when Ozomatli was the house band for the televised ESPY Awards. I rarely try new things in these circumstances, but I played them in DW’s showroom a few times and thought they were impressive. Bottom line, I was stoked on the sound I got. The set was very easy to tune and the sound was boomy and full. I fell in love with the tone and received many compliments on the sound. From that day forward, I decided to get my hands on a Jazz Series kit and have them be my primary drums.

Those that know me know I’m a vintage drum fanatic, and I tend to be a stickler when it comes to tone. I realize that I have a discerning ear, but I must say that I’m truly impressed by how the Jazz Series captures the essence of these old Maple/Gum shells. Remember, these are not vintage drums, so the build quality is exceptional. The hardware has all of the innovative bells and whistles, and they are more than road-worthy. Although I got the Maple/Gum version, DW has added Mahogany/Gum and Cherry/Gum to the line this year. I would say that the Mahogany version is a bit warmer and the Cherry is a little more aggressive. It’s a subjective choice and you really can’t go wrong with any of them. It’s also nice to know that DW is always considering us drummers. They’re raising the bar on custom drum building and offering more sound options than ever before. Who knows, the Jazz Series might just be your sound, too.
Eric Hernandez has a very grounded view of his success and is grateful that he gets to do what he loves most. In his first Edge feature, he talks about drawing to playing drums.

Ever since that early exposure, he realized this and bought me my first drum kit. Ever since that early exposure, I remember when I was four years old, my dad was super flashy and we did a performance for the guests at my table. I can take care of my family, and in this situation with him, I’m able to put food on the table. I can provide for my family, and we did a performance for the guests at my table. I can take care of my family, and in this situation with him, I’m able to put food on the table.

SD: How do you figure out your drum parts?
EH: We usually figure them out together. When Bruno is in the writing process, we’ll usually go into the studio. Sometimes, it happens before the studio. We’ll do sound checks and jam as a band and find parts. Or, he may hear something he likes and have our engineer record it so we can remember what we did. Then, we’ll go into the studio and work on it. He’ll call me in after having mapped out some drum parts and ask me to clean them up, or work on them myself. He is a great drummer, so he knows what works. He doesn’t really consider himself a drummer, but he can really play. His feel is incredible and real. So, a lot of the time, we’ll improvise. I may throw something extra into his kick pattern, or a snare, or backbeat. It usually starts that way and then it goes into the programming stage. But the ideas also start out organically at a sound check or in the studio. He also likes to collaborate with other producers. They’ll think of something and then have me polish up the drum parts. That’s another great thing about our relationship. I never have to pressure him to be like, “Hey, put me on a record.” He knows what he wants; he has his team and his formula. I’m just happy to be part of the birthing process of what may become a radio smash. I’ve collaborated with his team on some big songs and I’m honored to be part of the line-up.

SD: Do you try to emulate the vibe of the programmed drum parts, or are you trying to make it sound more human and organic?
EH: We try to sound less quantized, but trying to make it sound more human and organic?
SD: You mentioned triggers. Were you always interested in technology, or is it something you got into by necessity?

EH: I’m more of a dinosaur. I grew up playing an acoustic kit and that’s all I know. Then, I realized the importance of integrating electronics. I am fortunate enough to play a hybrid kit, instead of going full-electronic. I’ve done that on some gigs and it isn’t nearly as fun. I’m not really that good at the electronic stuff, but my techs and I are always having these tech conversations. I’m thirty-eight years old and I struggle with opening my mind up to new things, but the reality is I need to stay current. I need to know the technology and how to use it. But, to answer your question about electronics, this isn’t a very technical gig. I’ve done that on some gigs and it isn’t nearly as fun. I’m not really that good at the electronic stuff, but my techs and I are always having these tech conversations. I’m thirty-eight years old and I struggle with opening my mind up to new things, but the reality is I need to stay current. I need to know the technology and how to use it. But, to answer your question about electronics, this isn’t a very technical gig.

SD: Is there a venue that you haven’t performed yet that you really want to play?

EH: Because L.A. is such a home for me, I would have to say Dodger Stadium. Being a huge baseball fan, I would really love to play there.

SD: Do you have a backstage routine?

EH: I wait until about 45 minutes before taking the stage to warm-up. I’ll call my wife and son and ask them to wish me luck, and then I’ll do a pre-show toast and pray. It’s like clockwork.

SD: Do you practice on a pillow or pads?

EH: I have the DW practice pads. I use a pillow at times. Sometimes, I’m down the street from a couch I’ll play on it. Single-strokes, double-strokes, and paradiddles, just to get the blood flowing.

SD: Can you tell the readers what kit you’re currently playing?

EH: I’m playing a DW Collector’s Series “Gold Top” Lacquer Maple VLT kit with 10” and 12” rack toms, 16” and 18” floor toms, and a 22” kick. My snare size has always been a 7x14”. I’ve got nothing but good reviews about them from other artists and colleagues.

SD: Kudos to your front-of-house engineer and to your drum tech, Jason. Everything sounds top-notch. He does a really nice job with tuning your drums. And while I am dishing out compliments, you get a really good sound out of those toms at low volumes. You don’t play too hard, just enough so that everything sings and resonates like it should.

EH: Thanks, I agree with you 100%.

There’s an approach to the kit and cymbals, as well as how to hit a snare drum. I can get a solid crack out of a snare, and I know that’s not always easy for some players.

SD: Same with your foot technique.

EH: Exactly. Then, again, it comes down to my drum tech and front-of-house man. They know my sound and spend a lot of time on my kit. They know what I want out of the drums; it’s about everyone in the band. They’re all very detailed and articulate. However, I’m very lucky that the front-of-house man likes drums.

SD: It’s a big band with a lot of instrumentation, but the mix never sounds muddy. I’ve seen you two now and your sounds are very consistent, which isn’t always easy because different venues have different acoustics.

EH: You know, The Hollywood Bowl had amazing sound.

SD: Do you do any of the tweaking on your drum kit, or does Jason take care of that side of things?

EH: I do, sometimes. I tune my drums by ear but Jason is a little more technical. If something doesn’t sound right to me, he may come in. We’ll disagree at times, but he’ll explain what he’s hearing. I may tweak it, or tune up or down, but that’s rare because he usually has it down.

SD: Can you describe your ideal drum sound?

EH: I definitely want that big, 80’s Rock, Phil Collins drum sound. My front-of-house guy and I have both grown with this gig. We’ve both been here since day one, and we’re really close. We talk all of the time. He used to gate the crap out of my drums and I would tell him, “No, let’s let these drums sing a little because they have notes.” He’s grown so much as an engineer. He can explain his reasoning behind everything he does and get it. We’ve tried everything from opening up the gates to putting triggers on the drums, but it’s hard to get anything that sounds big. It’s a very unique situation. I think that by nurturing these relationships, it helps make our connections long-lived and shows a mutual respect for the artist and instrument-maker.

EH: Yep, exactly. DW until I die!

SD: What are your favorite and least favorable parts about touring?

EH: My favorite part of touring is playing. I love feeling the response from the audience. I escape from reality. There is nothing I wish I could be doing, except being a father. My least favorable part is being away from my son, my four-month-old daughter, and my wife, of course. That’s easily the hardest part about touring. I miss them like crazy. And when I go places and see some of the things I have seen, I want to be able to share it with my family. I always make a mental note and think about taking them back some time. The only time my mind isn’t thinking about my family is when I am playing on stage. I get lost in it.

SD: What do you do when you’re on the road and not playing?

EH: If I’m not playing, I’m exercising. I have a workout regimen now. When I am not doing that, I’m FaceTiming back home. Other than that, I have a normal routine. I have my coffee, my breakfast, sound check, and other daily stuff.

SD: What do you do when you’re home?

EH: I’m so consumed with being a dad. Today was picture day at school, so I took my son. I love taking them to school. I load them up in the car and take them to baseball. I suck at baseball, but I want to be there and teach him to the best of my abilities!

SD: Who do you idolize?

EH: My dad and my little brother. All of our ideals came from what our dad instilled in us. The visual and musical influences that the show is inspired by what he used to do. Not on this scale, but his influences are there. I see a lot of my dad in my little brother. And when Brunos produces a show or a new song, I see those influences in my little brother. I take this stuff very smart, and at the core of what we do. If I could be half the man my father is, it would be awesome. He’s my hero.
BRENT FITZ

by Scott Donnell

Slash’s drummer, Brent Fitz, has found a way to live the Rock dream in a time when music may be more fragmented than ever. He was not an overnight success, by any means, but to many fans it seemed like he’s come out of nowhere to snag a prized gig with one of Rock’s most legendary guitar heroes. We caught up with Brent in his hometown of Las Vegas to learn how this small-town Canadian rocker makes good.

Scott Donnell: So, how many tours have you done with Slash and this particular lineup?

Brent Fitz: I would have to say three, because we started on his solo record first. Then, we moved to Apocalyptic Love. This is a lead-in tour because we’re opening for Aerosmith until our record comes out in a couple months, then we will be going out on our own. We’re on tour for the upcoming record right now, but it’s cool because we get to play a lot of our old music, mixed with some of our new songs. We don’t Walsh that as a song to be haid because nobody’s heard them, yet.

SD: What type of reaction are you getting? Sometimes, when an artist plays new material, there can be a mixed response.

BF: It’s good! But, yeah, I know what you mean. Everyone will be singing along with a song and then during the next one they kind of tilt their heads to the side, like a dog would. “Do we like this one? Yeah, okay.”

SD: It must be cool to win them over with new music.

BF: Yeah. But then, after the show, they want to hear it again and are wondering where they can get the tangible CD. Well, they’ll have to wait two months. But, it’s all good.

SD: How did you get hooked up with Slash? How did that whole meeting come about?

BF: I think the story started once I moved to L.A. I never had a resume, or anything, and I grew up in Canada where nothing I did prior to the move ever mattered. I was, basically, starting over. I had a bunch of touring experience with a lot of great musicians, but once I moved to L.A., I had to figure out a way to show people what I had done. I needed to get introduced to people for cooler gigs. I mostly got shows based off of recommendations. Every gig I ever got was from somebody looking out for me and suggesting me. So, I never went through the auditions.

SD: That says a lot about you as a person and a musician.

BF: You have to be able to deliver, right? I would have to say my niche is that I play piano and sing. I feel like that makes me stand out. Sometimes a Rock drummer doing a jazz gig isn’t always the best thing, so I think it was my piano playing that helped me on a musical level. I know that it helped me back when Vince Neil was looking for a drummer. There are probably plenty of great drummers that can play Tommy Lee’s parts, but you also have to play “Home Sweet Home” and that instantly knocks out a whole bunch of contenders. When I got that call they told me that they had been asking around, and I was the only guy who could fit the part and play piano. I was like, “Oh, fair enough.” That gig led to others. Next, I was able to fill in with Alice Cooper. I think Slash connected with the fact that the Alice Cooper gig had a lot of music that had to be learned. Plus, he’s friends with Alice, so he probably thought that if I was good enough for Alice, I would be good enough for him.

SD: Who was the actual person that recommended you to Slash?

BF: It was a tour manager that worked with Velvet Revolver. It’s a crazy, convoluted story, but I swear it was my piano playing that got me introduced to Slash. There was a show here in Vegas called Monster Circus, which was a group of guys doing a Rock spectacle. It had Dee Snider singing, Fred Coury was on drums, Bruce Kulick on guitar, John Corabi on vocals, and Troy Montana...all these guys put this band together. There is another show in town that is very similar.

SD: How is the music scene in the States different than the music scene in Canada?

BF: As a player in Canada, you get a lot of stage time but not a lot of opportunity. There are a lot of musicians up there that get really good, but unless you are willing to take the plunge and move to a more dangerous, fertile city like New York or L.A., you may never break through. I was stupid enough to have the balls to come down here, because I was a big fish in a small pond. I played with so many great artists up there, but as soon as I moved down here, it was as if I knew nothing.

SD: There are some common threads here. We recently interviewed Craig MacIntyre with the Goo Goo Dolls. Do you know Craig?

BF: Yeah, he is a great dude.

SD: Well, he’s from a small town in Massachusetts, and he was talking about making that leap. He was also a big fish in Boston, but he packed up and moved to L.A. I think you need confidence in your ability, as well as a little blind faith, to make that move.

BF: I think I knew that I had done enough time in the trenches in Canada. It’s changed since I’ve been up there. I used to play at clubs when I was under-age. It was cool to play in front of people and be able to get all of the bad notes out by performing, and not just practicing. So, I got that down. Then, I really wanted to connect with other drummers, maybe some of my heroes. But my heroes were not in Canada, they were all in L.A. or New York, so I figured that if I moved, I may just get a shot at hooking up with them.

SD: Is that why you moved to Vegas?

BF: No, I’ve been here for years. It just kind of worked out because they already had a drummer and I sort of fit myself into the gig. And it just so happened that the manager for that show also worked with Velvet Revolver. He recommended me at the time Slash was looking to put a band together. He called me up and said, “Slash is putting a band together to finish this record, so put your name in the hat.” So, if it wasn’t for the gig in Vegas, I may have never had this opportunity.

SD: How about getting a gig with Slash?

BF: It was a tour manager that worked with Velvet Revolver. It’s a crazy, convoluted story, but I swear it was my piano playing that got me introduced to Slash. There was a show here in Vegas called Monster Circus, which was a group of guys doing a Rock spectacle. It had Dee Snider singing, Fred Coury was on drums, Bruce Kulick on guitar, John Corabi on vocals, and Troy Montana...all these guys put this band together. There is another show in town that is very similar.

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SD: At some point, you have to stretch out. You have to guess when the time is right.

BF: I figured it was time. I was twenty-six years old and I loved playing music from the late 70’s and 80’s. That scene in L.A. was riveting, from Guns’ N’ Roses to Mötley Crüe. Those hands were the pinnacle for me, but when I got here, in 1996, it was just confusing. Everyone was asking, “What is going on right now?” and I was like, “I’m here, let’s do this!” And they were pretty much telling me, “Sorry, you missed it.” Then I had to figure out what the next wave of new music was going to be. Luckily, the next band that I got to work with had Bruce Kulick (former Kiss) and John Corabi (former Mötley Crüe) in it. They were from two bands that I really admired.

SD: What label were you on?

BF: We were on a New York label called Spitfire. Very independent stuff.

SD: Did they have wide distribution?

BF: Really, there wasn’t enough hype because they weren’t original members of their former bands and we were doing something completely new. We went ‘indie’ on it. I loved it because I was starting from zero and building a career. It was funny because everyone would say, “The band is: Bruce from Kiss, John from Mötley Crüe, James from David Lee Roth, and some guy from Canada.” That was my title. Ironically, I recently talked with Bruce and John, and they were telling me that I was the guy that was able to use that experience. I somehow found a way to build off of it and turn it into a lasting thing.

SD: Now, you’re playing with a guitar god, making records, and performing at major venues. What’s it like going back to your hometown?

BF: There are always some naysayers. I have some musician friends back home that look in the mirror and wish they’d taken that plunge. It’s not that I was the best drummer; I was just the most focused at making a career in music. You always have to deliver as a player. I didn’t spend too much time practicing in my basement;
I made sure that I was playing with other people.

**SD:** How did you make the transition from piano to drums?

**BF:** Oh, yeah, I took lessons from a really good jazz drummer and his son. And I learned a lot of Jazz and Rock. I love Jazz, but I wanted to specialize in one area. I didn’t want to be the guy that dabbled in Jazz, dabbled in Rock, and was also a Country drummer. I have done a lot of those gigs, and that’s where piano has helped me, but I’m not going to fool myself into thinking that my Jazz playing is as good as my Rock playing.

**SD:** What would be your list of top five ‘desert island’ albums?

**BF:** The Beatles are beyond the realm of music. Then, I would have to put The Rolling Stones right up there. But Kiss was the band that inspired me to be a drummer. Van Halen was such a massive influence, too. Everyone says that John Bonham was a strong influence, as well, but I started playing in 1980, the year he died. I remember playing Zeppelin tunes in the basement with my friends, without even knowing that he died. Rush is good, too. Everyone in Canada is a Rush fan. I mean they’re a great band, but I never looked at them as Canada’s national Rock band.

**SD:** What are your top five favorite Rock bands?

**BF:** Donald Fagan’s Nightfly, Jeff’s Spill Milk, Rush’s Moving Pictures, Van Halen’s Diver Down, and Cheap Trick’s Dream Police.

**SD:** What type of drums are you using on this tour?

**BF:** Maple/Gum. The kick is Maple to accommodate the size. I usually like to record with a smaller bass drum, but the 28” is all for looks. I really feel good with a big kick drum when I play live.

**SD:** What type of shells is your kit made with?

**BF:** Maple/Gum. The kick is Maple to accommodate the size. I usually like to record with a smaller bass drum, but the 28” is all for looks. I really feel good with a big kick drum when I play live.

**SD:** Which of the Jazz shells configurations are they?

**BF:** Maple/Gum. The kick is Maple to accommodate the size. I usually like to record with a smaller bass drum, but the 28” is all for looks. I really feel good with a big kick drum when I play live.

**SD:** Everyone is air drumming in the audience.

**BF:** Yeah, his kit wasn’t even complete yet! The toms didn’t match the other drums. I still watch his videos.
SD:  How big are the hi-hats?
JM:  All of my hi-hats are 15”. I wanted to play 16” hats, but I kept cutting my hand, so I was like, “Maybe I should move on down.”

SD:  Does an inch make a difference?
JM:  Yes, it does.

SD:  How did you end up on a Rock tour like this, anyway?
JM:  I got asked this question a lot. When I was 19 years old, I filled in for Aaron Spears on the Backstreet Boys tour when he left to do something else. The MD for the Backstreet Boys was a guy named Arnie Guild. We worked together over the years. Our last collaboration was with Ceelo Green about a year ago. Anyway, Daughtry was going through some stuff and they needed a new drummer and Arnie was in charge at the time. It came down to two drummers and, in the end, they chose me, which was pretty cool.

SD:  Was there an audition process?
JM:  Nope.

SD:  Is there a difference between working a Rock gig like this, versus a Pop or Hip-Hop show?
JM:  Yes. For me, Hip-Hop, R&B, and Pop are all about hitting the right patterns on the records. It’s hard to explain, but you feel like you only have about two seconds to express yourself. They’re more structured. Rock is more open to different things. Of course, you have to play the patterns that are on the records, but you can also express yourself.

SD:  And is Daughtry cool with that?
JM:  They are super cool with it, but I was worried about it at first. I was worried whether they were going to allow me to express myself or not, but they’ve been very open to it. We even have this song where we set up solos and get everyone involved. They like all of that stuff, which is cool because I was on my way to playing some Jazz or Fusion because I was so over playing structured material.

SD:  Now you get to stretch out.
JM:  Yeah, it’s pretty amazing and super fun.

SD:  Did you have to tailor your playing style to suit the gig?
JM:  Yeah, I changed my style up because I wanted it to sound more authentic. I didn’t want to be playing a bunch of R&B or Gospel fills. I wanted to do Rock music, so I began rehearsing and I studied the guys that I thought were amazing.

SD:  Like who?
JM:  Before I even got the gig, I was studying guys like John Bonham and Chad Smith. I was trying to soak in their styles and approaches. One thing I try to do at every show is play from my heart, and I believe that those two guys were always playing from their heart. I mean, they were playing Rock music, but it was heartfelt. I kind of wanted to have that vibe and that approach applied for maybe a month before I did this thing, and as time went on, the band gave me even more suggestions. I was always going up to them and saying, “Man, what do you listen to?” They know because they were playing Rock music in our dressing room all the time! I was like, “Cool, let’s get it in.”

SD:  I’m guessing that experiencing other genres like this is helping your career. When you get back into other gigs, jazz or whatever that may be, will you have an expanded vocabulary?
JM:  Heck yeah, and I’m super excited about that! And I am very excited to be playing Rock music, man. I was talking with my girl the other day and I was saying, “You know, I’m so much, Hip-Hop, R&B, even some Country stuff, and now I am playing Rock!” I feel pretty good right now. For being a 26-year-old that started to tour at 19, I’m not doing too shabby. I’m growing.

SD:  What preparation for this gig have you had, other than studying those Rock influences? Were you woodshedding?
JM:  I was studying everything. I put music on in the car and just ride around while soaking it in.

SD:  Ear training?
JM:  Yeah. You know, after you listen to something for so long, you kind of start to know how to play it. So, I would just go downstairs, practice along with the records, and just go from there.

SD:  What tips would you give to aspiring drummers? What advice do you have, as far as what not to do?
JM:  Wow, I would have to say that they shouldn’t get cocky or full of themselves. I feel like there are different strokes for different folks, and everyone has different opportunities. The way I got in isn’t the same way someone else may get in. I just feel like no matter what situation you are in, you should stay humble. A lot of people say that all the time, but it’s important. You’re on the road with your handmates for a while and nobody wants to be the guy that everyone thinks is full of himself, the guy no one wants to hang out with. Even if you’re the sh*t, you need to stay humble or people are going to talk behind your back. Then, when you hit rock bottom, you will really hit rock bottom.

SD:  Can you recall any mistakes that you’ve made as a professional player?
JM:  You know, I’ve had a lot of people in my life tell me about the mistakes they’ve made and that has helped me to stay on the right track. One thing I realize now is that sometimes I didn’t take situations as seriously as I should have.

SD:  Do you mean keeping your head in the game?
JM:  Yeah, I shouldn’t have been lazy, or expected to play hard without working hard, or gone out drinking instead of practicing. I thought I was too cool for school and with social media instead of preparing. I really should have been listening to the music and practicing more. It didn’t happen often, but when every drummer on a triple bill is playing a DW kit, we take notice. It’s a fun feeling knowing that doesn’t happen often, but when every drummer on a triple bill is playing a DW kit, we take notice. It’s a fun feeling knowing that everyone thinks is full of himself, the guy no one wants to hang out with. Even if you’re the sh*t, you need to stay humble or people are going to talk behind your back. Then, when you hit rock bottom, you will really hit rock bottom.

SD:  Do you play along with your iPod?
JM:  Of course! You’re never too old to learn. I love artist development. I have a couple of artists that I work with back home. They aren’t just friends, they’re legitimate artists and they consider me to be their producer. When I went home this past weekend, I spent a few days with my family, but two of those days were dedicated to me finishing up records for some of these artists. I’m trying to span farther than just Jamal, the drummer. I am also Jamal, the father. I have two kids. I love God and I know I have been blessed with a gift. I love clothes, I love shoes, and I love artist development. I have a couple of artists that I work with back home. They aren’t just friends, they’re legitimate artists and they consider me to be their producer. When I went home this past weekend, I spent a few days with my family, but two of those days were dedicated to me finishing up records for some of these artists. I’m trying to span farther than just Jamal, the drummer. I am a drummer, but I think I would like to be a part of the Jamil brand tree. Of course, I’m still practicing and listening to the younger drummers work. I want to be able to better myself as a player, but also better my brand. In order for me to continue the
Scott Donnell: This seems like a really fun tour for you. How’s it going, so far? Craig Macintyre: It’s been six weeks in and it’s amazing! We’re halfway through it and everyone is super great. The drummers are kicking each others’ butts every night. Craig Macintyre: We are six weeks in and ...
orth to go the extra mile and grab a beer with everyone. But there is something like going out and supporting a fellow artist and hanging out with them. After they see you a few times, they’re like, “Man, this guy really likes to get off his couch and knock on your door.” So, I don’t sit on the phone to ring. It’s all about the vibes you put out. Kenny Aronoff is a good example. He might not always be the right guy for you, but he is so reliable. He’ll chart the parts out perfectly and have everything down; that’s why everyone uses him. He’s the guy that will chart out forty songs and roads without keeping in contact with you. Yesterday, I was on the phone to ring. It’s all about the vibes you put out. Kenny Aronoff is a good example. He might not always be the right guy for you, but he is so reliable. He’ll chart the parts out perfectly and have everything down; that’s why everyone uses him. He’s the guy that will chart out forty songs and roads without keeping in contact with you.

SD: What was the idea behind the whole acoustic thing? Were you guys planning the whole acoustic show? DH: We got offered the tour and that was just kind of the deal. So, we were like, “How can we make this work for us?”

SD: Earlier, you and Jamali were talking about how you share a similar upbringing: you learned to play in church. Tell us about that. DH: Yeah, we’re church kids. Since I can remember, I’ve been playing drums. I tell people I started playing around seven-years-old, but my mom tells me it was more like three-years-old. For us, church was all we wanted to do. My dad was a musician and my mother was a singer. So being in that environment created an attraction to the drums. I think that every little boy wants to play them. We would always sit next to the drummers at church, hoping to hop-on and play. After doing the church thing for a while, I joined a Punk hand during my sophomore year of high school. That’s when everything started to have a direction.

SD: Do you have a signature sound that you stick with all the time? DH: This is the first tour in a while where I’m teching for myself, and I’ve always had different drum techs that would tune differently. Sometimes it’s worked, sometimes it didn’t. As long as it sounded good, now I’m trying to get back into hands-on tuning. I’m kind of out of practice. Recently, I’ve been watching the John Good tuning videos online. No joke!

SD: What was the idea behind your kit setup? What was the idea behind your kit setup? DH: We were supposed to play acoustic on this tour, but I like, “What am I supposed to do, play a cajon for three months?” So I asked, “What can I get away with?” I wanted to bring a kit and everyone with production was ok with it, so I just stripped it down.

SD: Are you using brushes or Hot Rods to complement the acoustic? DH: No. I just use sticks. I thought I was going to do the rute brushes thing, but no.

SD: The acoustic guitars are loud enough? DH: Yeah, but they are playing electric guitars, too. We amp it back up a bit. I think the term “acoustic” was very loose.

SD: Did it feel like a natural move? DH: Yeah, very organic. I thought, “Man, I’m joining the Plain White’s!” I got in the band and we just worked and kept touring.

SD: What have been some of your most memorable experiences with the band, so far? DH: The Grammys were cool. My dad was at the Grammys a few years earlier because his choir was nominated. I got to go with him, and then a few years later I was nominated. That was an awesome experience. We also played on the main stage at this festival in Germany, called Rock am Ring. There were hundreds of thousands of people there. That was really crazy! And, coincidently, that’s the show where I met my wife.

SD: Is there a drummer on this tour? Do you guys ever go out about gear? DH: No. I just use sticks. I thought I was going to do the rute brushes thing, but no.

SD: SD: Are you one of those bands that write while you’re on the road? DH: For sure. We can now. Every now and then you pick up a guitar and write in the bus or in the hotel room but, you know it’s summer. (Laughs). I’m just trying to be honest.

SD: What’s the horizon for you, after this tour? DH: We go on tour in Europe this September on a USO military run, and after that we have some one-off shows until the end of the year.

SD: Did you have plans beyond that? DH: We’ve kind of limbo with our label. Well, not really in limbo; we’re just trying to get our masters back and figure out what to do with this record. It’s holding us up a bit.

SD: Are you actively involved in the business decisions of the band? DH: Yeah, as much as it can be. You, obviously, have a lead member and they can outweigh some votes at times, but that’s okay. We communicate through email, but Tim (O’Keefe) is definitely the most assertive person. We let him take care of the dirty work. For the most part, it’s democracy. That’s how we decide on things.

SD: Sometimes, you just want to play drums. DH: That’s the truth!
Have you heard of Dae-Dae? Yeah, Dae-Dae Haddon. He was news to me, but, as you will soon learn, he has subtly established himself in a big way. Let’s drop some names that he has backed: Rihanna, Faith Evans, Nelly, Jesse McCartney, Jessica Simpson, Brandy Norwood, Anita Baker, and the list goes on. Best of all, he’s one of those guys that just seems to get it. He has all of his priorities lined up and knows what counts and what matters with his drumming...and beyond. After traveling the world with a notable list of chart-toppers and playing on tons of Pop, Soul, and Worship records, he has no trouble keeping it all in perspective.

Atom Willard: How long have you been playing drums?
David “Dae-Dae” Haddon: Drums have always been a part of my life. My dad and mom said I began playing at around two years old, but I can’t even remember when I started. I’ve just always been passionate about them.

AW: Was there ever a point where you thought, “Okay, I can do this for real. For life.”?
DDH: I never had that kind of moment. I was motivated when I saw Michael Jackson’s Dangerous tour with Ricky Lawson on drums. That was when I knew I wanted to play. I wanted to be a solid player. I was into chops when I was younger, but my brothers wouldn’t let me be on their records because I played too many notes.

AW: What? Like, they’d say, “No more rack tom.”?
DDH: No more rack tom, no more floor tom. (Laughs). They just let me have this kick-snare-hat and said, “That’s all you need!”

AW: Well, that’s one way to do it.
DDH: My brothers were really into Michael Jackson’s Dangerous tour, as well, and they said, “Watch this guy!” They were talking about Ricky Lawson and I got really into his style. It was just so solid. It wasn’t that he was blazing on the drums, but he was just feeling the beats, sounds, all of the claps, and he was hitting all kinds of stuff. If you pay close attention to that DVD, it’s really interesting.

Dae-Dae played football and loved sports, but an early surgery ended his playing days. According to his father, that was how it was meant to be.

DDH: My dad said, “You have to concentrate on your drumming.” He was really pushing us all. We grew up kind
of like the Jacksons. My dad was really into music and he pushed us because he thought we were good enough. He just spoke it into existence, starting from an early age. I remember riding in the car when I was twelve years old and telling my dad how much I liked football, and other sports, and he said I needed to focus on the drums. He said I was going to be travelling the world playing with the best if I kept at it. Now, every last one of my family members does something in the music business. If it’s not singing or producing, we have another aspect covered. And my family is big! I have nine siblings.

AW: How many drummers are in there?

DDH: Well, we all play the drums a little bit, but I’m the main one.

After years of playing in church and refining his drumming style, Dae-Dae came to L.A. with one of his older brothers and was able to get a gig touring with the Nisan Stewart-produced artist, Tweet. At the age of twenty, he cut his teeth during that first nine-week tour, being out on the road with guys like Dante Nolen, Charlie Burrell, and his longtime friend and confidant, Nisan Stewart’s brother, Rapture.

AW: So, how is that you and Nisan are so close?

DDH: Nisan Stewart is really like another brother to me. People don’t know this, but I kind of knew Nisan even before I knew Nisan. Our families were really close growing up. Our fathers were both pastors and great friends. So, in a way, we were born into each other’s families. He’s always been there to look out for me. He’s a big help in my life. It’s beyond the drums and music, he’s my brother!

AW: I want to be in your family! It must have helped with getting shows. You’ve got some pretty big names on your rap sheet. How did some of these gigs come about?

DDH: (Laughs). It’s a blessing, for sure. Yeah, there was another cool situation, too. Chris Johnson was playing with Rihanna for about a month and he had to leave, so he recommended me for the gig. It was still early in her career when I came in. Over time, I grew with that experience, and the situation kept on growing. I’ll always remember when the manager brought everyone into this room and told us all, “We’re about to be gone. We’re about to be serious.” At the time, I was only twenty-three and had no idea about real money. I was just happy we were getting paid. It was great, but he was talking about buying houses! I had never thought about buying a house, or anything. It was pretty surreal. It was all happening just as my dad said it would. It was wild!

AW: Once you did a few tours like that, your name started getting out there and you just started getting calls, right?

DDH: Absolutely, but favor ain’t fair. I tell my friends that all the time. Stay on your knees and pray for favor.

AW: You have to earn it, right? No one makes it that doesn’t deserve it, but we both know that there are a LOT of really good players out there that never get the chances we’ve had, or the opportunities to do half of the things we’ve been lucky enough to do.

DDH: I just try to stay up on my craft and play my way. I just try to keep it solid. When we’re backing someone else, it’s not about us until they say, “Go Atomic, go Dae-Dae.” Then, we’ve got to stick it and we’ve got to hold it down. That’s how we provide for our families; that’s what we need to do.

AW: You love it. It’s not just with drumming, that’s how I view everyday life. You’ve got to be as solid, and reliable, as you can be in all aspects of your life. If you want me to go nuts, I will.

DDH: I definitely have it in my back pocket. Not a lot, but I’ve got enough.

AW: I feel like the way you drive is kind of like the way you play drums. Is there any truth to that?

DDH: (Laughs). I hold it down. I just stay around the speed limit and hold it down.

AW: Okay, let’s try doing some word association.

DDH: Say what?

AW: Okay, here we go: drum riser.

DDH: Tall!

AW: Solo.

DDH: Bass!

AW: Groove.

DDH: Foundation.

AW: Pocket.

DDH: Me!

AW: Confidence.

DDH: You’ve got to have it.

AW: Arrogance.

DDH: Trash.

AW: Success.

DDH: Aiming for it every day.

AW: Nice. So, now that you’ve played in pretty much every imaginable situation, what’s your favorite?

DDH: I still love to play at church. That’s how I praise, so that will always be first. After that, what’s the most fun? Well, that has to be my Monday night jam in Hollywood. We (JJ & The Spectacular) get together and we can really stretch out because there’s so much freedom. That’s the best scenario for learning and for having fun. We can just play and groove and that’s a lot of fun for me.

AW: Is there anything you want to say to anyone out there?

DDH: If you are anybody that has ever helped me out, thank you! I love you. I cannot express how much it means to me and I can’t wait to pay it back.

AW: Do you have any advice to give to our readers?

DDH: Find out who you are and give it 110%. That includes anything in life, not just drumming. Jay-Z once said something that I feel is the most real advice in the world. He said, “Every single person has some kind of genius in them. You just have to find it and do it.”
Tony Royster, Jr. is a percussive freak of nature. One listen and you'll recognize his unique creativity and feel. He has a signature style that has helped define the GospelChops drumming movement and has solidified him as a bona fide power player. His tenure with Jay-Z has enabled him to go mainstream while his drum industry persona continues to mature and grow. With his first-ever solo record on the way, and his stock rising in the touring world, his next chapter promises to be his most impressive. We met up with Tony in the celebrity epicenter of Beverly Hills, California to soak up some sun and talk about drums, DJs, and endorsement deals.
SD: You have a very distinct playing style. How did you create your own drumming voice?

TR: Growing up, I knew a lot of musicians, but I never really sat down and studied anyone. I never watched their videos for hours while trying to mimic their style. I would listen to them because I liked how they played, but I just did what I wanted to do. I think that's the best way to develop your own voice in music. That's how you create your own style. Tuning is also really important. When I hear Chris Dave, I automatically know who it is, just based on the sound. Instead of hitting a crash, he’ll hit a secondary snare, and that’s something that’s uniquely his. These are just some examples of creating your own sound.

SD: Are you worried about being typecast? You’re pretty much been at the pinnacle of the Hip-Hop world for years now. Are you concerned that you won’t get gigs in other genres?

TR: That doesn’t bother me at all. People can go online and see me playing other styles of music. Obviously, Hip-Hop is very simple. The only hard parts are the breaks and the drops. I’m feeling it and trying to make it sound like the album but, you know, I started backwards. I didn’t start out playing with an artist. I started out as a clinician. For a long time, I was doing clinics and master classes, so, obviously, I can play other kinds of music.

SD: Did you audition for the Jay-Z gigs?

TR: I wouldn’t consider it an audition. I was in Poland when Nisan Stewart was putting the band together. He said he wanted some young cats that could play, but they were starting rehearsals that day. I told him I couldn’t start that soon, so I didn’t think I would get it. Then I flew to Georgia, for my connecting flight to California, and Nisan called me and asked where I was. I said I was in Georgia and he told me to go down to Delta and get the ticket he bought for me to fly to New York. I didn’t even put my bags on the belt; I just got right on the plane. I had to learn twenty songs in a couple of hours. Jay came in and heard a little bit, thought it was good, then left. I’ve been with him ever since.

SD: You’ve recently been on tour with Jay-Z and Beyoncé. Tell us about that.

TR: It was very epic to play a show with both artists! It was cool to integrate Hip-Hop with Pop. It was a fun time, but you couldn’t see us because we weren’t on the stage due to Beyoncé’s dance routines. So, we didn’t get the connection with the audience that an artist usually gets. It was a great learning experience because we got to concentrate more on the music and less on putting on a show.

SD: Where were you positioned?

TR: Behind the stage and about six feet under it. We were behind the video wall.

SD: Sounds like a new experience, for sure.

TR: Yeah, I wasn’t expecting it at all. It was, in a huge hand, too. There were nine girls and two guys. There was also a total of eleven dancers. It was a really big production and they just couldn’t fit us all on the stage.

SD: Did you get to hang out with fellow DW artist, Venzella Joy (Beyoncé)?

TR: Yeah, we hung out a few times. Starting off, I could tell she was a little nervous about playing with me, and I just wanted to make sure she was as comfortable as possible. But she is a great drummer and can hold her own. She’s also the nicest person I’ve ever met! We talked about drums a little bit, but we mostly talked about other stuff and got to know one another. They were great people, indeed.

SD: How do you stay in shape when you’re on the road? Do you have a routine of warming up or going to the gym?

TR: It really depends. There are some nights where we’ll end really late and hitting the gym in the morning is just not an option. We play sports sometimes, like basketball or football, but the drumming is always a workout. I also try to eat right.

SD: When you’re on the road, do you get many calls from other artists about gigs, or do they know that you’re booked?

TR: No calls like that are coming in because they know I am on tour with Jay-Z. A call may come in when there is a break in the tour, when people see me around town, or when I reach out to other artists to let them know I am done. People might think that I’m too expensive because I play for Jay-Z, but it really depends. I like to develop relationships with other artists, but if they never call or reach out, we may never get the opportunity.

SD: Let’s talk about the Tony Royster, Jr. brand and how it’s perceived.

TR: The biggest thing that I try to do is to reach out to my fans and all of the people who support my drumming career. I use all forms of social media, especially Instagram. That allows people to see and hear me, which they really appreciate.

SD: How do you decide which brands you want to promote?

TR: Well, if it’s a clothing company, I want it to be something I am comfortable wearing. For other brands, they have to be things that make sense. I mean, if it is a money situation, it has to be a solid business move and I have to be supportive of the products.

SD: On that topic, tell us a little about the GoPro project.

TR: GoPro is, obviously, very well-known for their cameras and now they’re trying to integrate what they do with the music world. I recently made a video with them. There were literally thirty GoPro cameras mounted to my drum set. I was wearing chest cams, mouth cams, and foot cams! They thought that I might be a good face for their music brand. Right now, I think it’s a great business move.

SD: It seems like you’ve been making a lot of business decisions about your music career lately. Do you think you’ve become more business savvy?

TR: Definitely. I’ve learned a lot over the years. Slowly, but surely, I have become an entrepreneur. I am getting older and now I can hold my own. My dad used to be my manager, but now I understand the business, why certain choices are being made, and which decisions to make. I am trying to get my hands into everything.

SD: Talk about your drummer/DJ venture.

TR: Well, the club market is very lucrative and I want to start learning how to become a DJ. I want to start creating my own formula like other artists have done. In the past, you’ve seen drummers like Tommy Lee and Travis Barker do it. A big name helps you bypass a lot of steps in
this industry, but having a good formula is also very important. I want to be a DJ that understands drumming, music, and how to mix. I’ve done it before and it’s nothing short of amazing.

**SD:** How do you decide your next career moves?

**TR:** You do what you have to do in order to pay the bills. Having a residency doesn’t mean I will be working three-to-five days a week. It could be one day every two weeks. It’s how you make the deal. If a day is open, I am going to do it. It’s about the music and the drumming but it has to make sense. I’m always meeting new and different people and making great relationships. That’s how you grow, by building relationships.

**SD:** Tell us a bit about your relationship with Drum Workshop.

**TR:** Oh, man! I’ve only been with three drum companies over the years. I was with Remo, then I went to Pearl, and in 1998 I came to DW. At first, I think I fell in love with Drum Workshop because of the finishes. Then, I grew an appreciation for how the drums were made. In the end, the sound is what I’m after. I learned about the other artists that are associated with the company and I wanted to be with the DW family. I’ve been with Drum Workshop ever since. The drums are incredible and they speak for themselves. Don Lombardi, John Good, Scott Donnell, and all of the people that have been there since the beginning have made it a great experience for me. Also, DW is all over the world so it’s easy to get equipment anywhere I might need it.

**SD:** What sound are you going for these days?

**TR:** Maple/Mahogany. I have several snares. I love the Edge snare and the Super Solid is amazing, too! Even the PDP kits sound really good. The new set I just got for the Jay-Z tour is extremely warm and has a nice attack. My kick drums always have plenty of bottom end and attack, and that’s very important to me. Hopefully, John Good will let me go to the factory and build my own drums one day!
The good news is that the half-time shuffle is still very much alive today with a variety of current artists exposing it to a whole new generation. This infectious groove will never cease to inspire all who hear it. I hope you take the time to explore A and drive into my book which took me eight years to complete. It will be challenging for sure. But if you rise up to it, it will be a challenge that will bear much fruit in your groove life and who couldn’t use a little more of that!

Peace, Love and Groove,
Zoro

Zoro is an award-winning drummer, author, educator and motivational speaker. He has toured and recorded with Lenny Kravitz, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, Britthly Brown, The Jovon Edwards and many others. He is the author of The Big City, Big Picture Thinking for Success, and the Commandments of R&B Drumming series by Alfred Publishing. He teaches at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee.


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EDGE: If you're not drumming, what are you doing?
SM: I play guitar and I also play bass, some banjo, as well as some keyboard. I am able to build tracks at my house for some of my demos so it helps me to find things somewhat proficient on other instruments. I think it's important for a drummer to be able to not just play another instrument, but learn to record and mix, as well. Getting another perspective, particularly in the pocket department, helps you gain insight to what other musicians need from you and helps you earn a greater sense of musicality. I also played some sax in college, but I politely decline nowadays. I like to keep my friends.

EDGE: What's the Nashville scene like these days?
SM: The Nashville scene is freakin' exploding with new talent! I saw it in the writing room with young writers and on the road. Broadway is always happening with a bunch of great bar bands from Country, to Rock, to Bluegrass, and even Rockabilly. Lots of different genres outside of Country and Bluegrass have grown, especially on the heels of successful bands like Paramore, Kings of Leon, The Black Keys, and Jack White relocating to Nashville. East Nashville, in particular, is really making its mark as being one of the hippest indie music scenes in the country with events like the East Side Hootenanny and the East Nashville Underground. There's also the weekly Nashville Dancin's on Riverfront. It's great to see a lot of the new young writers out there making it happen. I can't tell you how many times I've seen a small Kia or Camry with a trailer hitched to it and a group of kids jamming in the back. That makes me smile.

EDGE: What's your favorite drumming website?
SM: Drummerworld is a great site to check out all drummers, past and present, who's playing what, and what latest record they've played on. It has great forums to ask questions and chat with others. I also check out the newest, greatest hits, dwdrums.com does it for me!

EDGE: Who do you jam with?
SM: Sometimes we jam on the bus, but it's usually an acoustic guitar, playing classic Country or Bluegrass, with Dierks leading the charge. We let the other guys in the band provide the backdrop and vocals. A few years back, on Kenny Chesney's tour, we would set up in one of the dressing rooms and jam with his band and some players from some of the other bands. Dierks' group on the Ridge tour was one I remember. It was Dierks, me on the drums, our steel guitar player, Tim, and the Grammy award-winning Travelin' McCourys. We played classic Bluegrass, as well as songs off the album, and some of Dierks' hits. It was Bluegrass-style playing and we did small clubs and smaller theatres. Every song was a jam in the sense that the solos were open and beginnings and endings evolved. We also had guests sit in occasionally, like Sam Bush or Chris Thile.

EDGE: Do you tweak your pedals a certain way?
SM: I don't do any unusual pedal tweaking. I've learned the importance of balance on the drum kit so my DW 5000 kick and DW 5000 hi-hat pedals are equal distances from each other and have a natural, not-too-tight-or-loose action. I pretty much play the setting right out of the box.

EDGE: How is your set-up constantly changing or is it pretty consistent?
SM: My set-up does tend to change from year to year. I believe in staying fresh and one of the aspects of that is my set-up. This year, it's more stripped down, with two Zildjian A Custom crashes and my favorite prototype Lab ride. I love rocking my favorite Maple/Mahogany DWs in the Coarse Silver Lacquer. I play a 5.5x14" Short Stack tom and a 16x6½" floor tom. I'm keeping everything a little tighter and even smaller. Even though I've played some of these drums over a thousand times, I still find small nuances to incorporate and adjust the dynamics. Changing my set-up helps me explore those possibilities.

EDGE: Metal or wood snare?
SM: My gitsle snare is a 5.5x14" DW Black Nickel over Brass that I absolutely love!! It records amazingly well and is really freakin' loud on the deck, if you need it to be. It's definitely my favorite snare. I have a killer-sounding 5x14" DW maple snare that I primarily use for recording at the house.

EDGE: Write your own 20th question and answer it
SM: What would my advice be for younger players? Get out and play as much as you can, whether it pays or not. The more you play the better you get. Record yourself as often as you can, even on an iPhone, it doesn't have to be a sophisticated set-up. We record our shows every night! Listen to other drummers, musical and otherwise. Have your opinions, but be open and enthusiastic to others, as well. Do a lot of listening to drummers and music outside of your genre and listen to the legends too, they started just like you. Endo music and enthusiasm to others, as well. Do a lot of listening to drummers and music outside of your genre and listen to the legends too, they started just like you. Endo music and listen to others, musically and otherwise.

20 QUESTIONS ||| STEVE MISAMORE

STEVE MISAMORE

I have a fairly domesticated schedule at home when I'm off the road, which starts with plenty of yard work. Some find it funny that I don't hire folks to do it, but I really enjoy it. I also have a co-op writing deal at Zavitol Music Group, so I'm writing as much as I can. Occasionally, you might see me backing someone on acoustic guitar for a writer's showcase. I also have a love for aviation and am currently working on my instrument rating in a Cessna 172. I just got my high-performance endorsement in a Cirrus SR22 T. I picked up photography a few years back and have shot a few music videos as well as the components?

SM: That's a tough question because I've liked so many of them over the years for so many reasons. I think I would love to answer with who I'm currently into, instead of the usual suspects. This can change in an instant, but I would have to say Matt Chamberlain for his outstanding musicianship, Taylor Hawkins for his fire, Jon Bellion for his incredible style, and Jeff Hamilton for his taste. That was four. You can finish the punch line.

EDGE: Have your favorite "Tom Sawyer" licks don't fit as well as some of the classic, simple fills. There are a few favorites that just work every time.

EDGE: What's your favorite meal on the road?
SM: Usually the one in front of me! It's a challenge to make good choices on the road. Sometimes catering offers good, balanced choices and sometimes the dessert table is screaming, "Look at me!" I like so many different kinds of food; I just try to make sure it covers a wide color palate.

EDGE: What's your favorite drumming website?
SM: Drummerworld is a great site to check out all drummers, past and present, who's playing what, and what latest record they've played on. It has great forums to ask questions and chat with others. I also check out the newest, greatest hits, dwdrums.com does it for me!
When did you make your way down south?

Richie: Well, I was born in New York and lived there with my grandparents until I was about seven years old. My family left New York and moved back to Puerto Rico. It was a traveling family. My mom was a stewardess back in those days and met my father on the plane, so when they got married, I went and lived with them. He was trying to get to know me and the rest is history.

SD: Is that the same way Roland got into music? By just being around it?

Richie: Yeah. When he was born, I was already playing.

Scott Donnell: Richie, did the family's interest in music start with you?

Richie Garcia: No, it started with my father. Actually, he's my step-father but I consider him to be my father. He used to play congas in the 40's in San Francisco. He was in a band called Havana Madrid in the days of Ricky Ricardo. If you look at my first educational book on congas you'll see a picture of Ricky playing. The story was, Armando Peraza had just come from Cuba and my dad helped him get in this band. He even shared half of his salary so he could do the gig. He put him up with the drummer's dad passed away, so the rest is history.

SD: Family Ties

Richie & Roland Garcia

by Scott Donnell

I t appears that in some families, the Latin percussion roots run deep. The levels of success achieved by such renowned players as the Escovedo and Reyes families are legendary. Now, we can add the Garcías to that list. Their patriarch, Richie, has played with some of the most notable names in music, including Diana Ross, Phil Collins, and Stevie Wonder, as well as working on a host of major motion picture soundtracks. His son, Roland, is now the go-to percussionist on network television hits such as American Idol and Dancing with the Stars. So, how did this California-based percussion attack become so in-demand? In this case, family matters.

Roland: Luckily, we lived right next to a park. I would practice there every day.

Richie: I have a studio below my master bedroom and he would play there too, but those drums can cut through any soundproofing!

SD: Do you have any specific memories that you want to share?

Roland: There are so many. I remember a time when my dad was playing for The Lion King on Broadway. There are two percussionists that play on balconies on either side of the stage. I had to ask permission from the show, but they allowed me to sit behind my dad and watch him play. From the first time I saw a show that follows a conductor. That was the coolest thing to me. Now that I’m working on TV shows like American Idol and Dancing with the Stars, that’s all I’m doing. I follow a conductor, read music, and improvise.

SD: You seem like a very well-rounded musician. Were you first drawn to hand percussion?

Roland: The first thing I was really drawn to was the drum set. It’s hard to play hand percussion when you’re really small because your hands are tiny, but with a drum set, you have sticks and you can get a full sound. One thing my dad taught me was to learn as many styles and instruments as I could. When I got to high school, the first show I ever played was at The Hollywood Bowl. It was with a group of high school kids called, The Latin Sounds Initiative.

Richie: When I played at church, I would tell my kids to pick up any instrument and join in. I told them that drums are fantastic, but to be successful in music, you should learn percussion, too. I told them that every band has a drummer, so what is the next best thing? Percussion. There will be a time that the drummer is sick or can’t play, and who would you turn to? You, if you’re skilled in different instruments. This has happened to me many times. One time, I was playing with Frankie Vie in Las Vegas and the drummer’s dad passed away, so he had to leave. They asked me to play.
SD: Do you both know Persian music, as well?  
Richie: Of course, I grew up in a household where we knew Persian music. We played the various instruments, with my father playing the drums. I also play percussion and my father plays the drums.

SD: So, you both know Persian music, as well?  
Richie: That is the benefit of being skilled in various instruments; you can be part of that way, if anything comes up, we can do things together.

SD: Do you keep tabs on the latest gear?  
Richie: I like to see what’s out there and what’s new from year-to-year. I ask LP to send me the latest stuff, so I can form an opinion about it when people ask me about it. Richie is always coming up to me and telling me what’s charged.

SD: Are there things you’ve learned from Roland over the years?  
Richie: I would have to say integrity. He has a lot of integrity and he is very serious about what he does and about preparing for a job. I don’t know if you could say that it is something that I have learned, but it is definitely something I’ve noticed.

SD: Do you ever give Roland advice about the music business?  
Richie: Not these days, because he’s become his own man, but early on I would talk to him about being responsible, showing up on time, and using the right gear. You know, being a true professional.

SD: What about explaining how to find the gigs and keep them?  
Richie: For sure. He’ll tell you himself; the reason he’s been able to get so much work is because people trust him. All of the various musicians I have played for trust me because they know I’m not there to steal their gigs.

SD: Have you ever discussed the endorsement games?  
Richie: I’ve been going to the NAMM show since it started. Richie: That is the benefit of being skilled with various instruments.

SD: Do you guys ever jam together?  
Roland: Yeah, all the time and with different bands. We played together at Radio City Music Hall with Diana Ross. We also played with a well-known Persian singer; I play percussion and my father plays the drums.

SD: So, you both know Persian music, as well?  
Richie: A lot of it is learning the rhythms and incorporating it on Latin instruments. We play the rhythms they want, but on our instruments; mostly because the traditional Persian instruments are not loud enough.

SD: But, do you ever jam at home?  
Richie: Just to get together and jam! Not so much, but we do meet up when there are things that we need to work on. Lately, I’ve been calling him to go over some basic conga styles.

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Scott Donnell: What was the genesis of SDC?

Frank Zummo: It was a fun and accidental experiment that just went wild. I moved to L.A. from New York about ten years ago. Then, I met Bobby and Adam (Alt), who are brothers from Jersey. We hit it off immediately, because of the east coast bond, and they told me about how they had their own percussion show at the Remo Center. They said I should come by and check it out. I believe it was called, Bobby and Adam Alt’s Experiment. It was like a children’s charity event, and in the middle of their show they had a segment where they used pots, pans, and found objects. I told them that I had been using found objects back east, and that we should get together. Bobby said, “There’s a junkyard across from my rehearsal space in downtown L.A. Let’s go there with a couple of cameras and just go wild. Maybe we’ll film it, just for fun.” So we did. We counted: 1, 2, 3, 4…and then just started hitting everything possible! We edited it down to a short film. Bobby comes from the Warped Tour/Punk Rock world and I come from a background in theme parks. So, we sent this video out to people we knew, to see what they might think. That video allowed us to get contracted out for a whole summer at Six Flags Magic Mountain in Valencia. SD: Was it always called Street Drum Corps?

FZ: No, in the beginning it was called, Bang. Our Lawyer was like, “Good luck trying to trademark and patent this thing!” We wanted to turn this into a big community and a company with different productions, kind of like Cirque du Solei, so we decided on Street Drum Corps. Under the SDC umbrella, we can have other productions, such as a kids’ show or performances in Vegas. At Magic Mountain, Kevin Lyman (Warped Tour Founder) heard what we were doing and said he wanted us to join Warped. So, he invited us out to do the whole west coast portion of the tour and, coincidentally and simultaneously, he started his own record label and wanted to sign us. It all took off from there. Bands used to take us on tour to amp up the crowd before they would go on stage. So, we played with The Used, Deftones, Thirty Seconds to Mars, Matisyahu, and others. That really kick-started our fan base. We were getting all these tours and theme park work, but we couldn’t be at all of these places at once. Eventually, the theme parks said that they would either replace us, or we could find subs to train. It was genius. We started casting drummers to perform and that’s how we got to where we are today.
We used a 55 gallon oil drum and a Mac truck track that he grinds on. It sounds really heavy. Depending on the production, we’ll have different shapes and sizes of drums, as well as different sounds and electronics, as well. When you are on stage, there’s a wheel around dumpsters and the larger things we use in the studio, so we record those sounds and play them on pads.

SD: What’s your favorite percussion instrument? How do you guys collaborate on this stuff? FZ: It’s still very experimental. There’s no one idea or concept. Someone will come in with an idea or concept, or a feeling, or a vibe. Most of these things aren’t that exciting by themselves. For example, a grinder might get distorted by pushing it through a Marshall stack to help give it an edgy sound. No matter how wacky an idea may be, we’ll still try it! If it fails, it fails. If it works, it works. For our ten-year anniversary record we wanted a new song but we’ve been so busy with our performances, we didn’t have time to go into the studio. So, we used a very simple record with Roy Mayorga (Stone Sour). He has an amazing home studio and he played with us during our Vegas residency. He’s one of the best drummers that have played with us. We enjoyed that, and we made this really cool Tribal/Industrial song called “Images of Justice”.

SD: There’s also a musical, melodic element to SDC. How do you guys write songs? Is there a structure? FZ: Definitely. We use very high-strung percussive sound, but there are also arrangements that are accompanied by stringed instruments, such as guitar, as well as some electronic tools or grinders, and then we try to figure out how to make them sound different. Obviously, piano and keyboards are pretty simple because they are percussive. I know a little theory, so we’ll add that stuff in. We’ve also worked with producers that have helped us. We did a full band record where we had someone from DW play those instruments. Roy got on his kit and only used toms and did an incredible job with that. It was very minimal. As the records get better, we only used a snare, floor tom, and a crash. It was kind of flipped from the usual set-up. It was like we’d just had the House of Cards where we had to come in and say, “We love what you guys are doing, we’re excited to be doing what you want to do. We have the right vibe. If things look good, then we’ll keep you in and do whatever you guys want to do.” That was our formula. We’ve been doing that for a long time. So, when we decided to record the new song but we’ve been so busy with our touring, we’ve been a lot of things that are happening in the world. We’ve still had some pretty epic shows at the Hard Rock. We turned it into the biggest production that we could. We had still walkers, girls in aerial cages, backers, music, special effects. For that one-off show, we’ve had percussionists, Roy and Adrian Young come out. Those guys were fans of what we did and had been a huge inspiration for the past ten years. All the shows we’ve had a sound check and sound man, and we ended up getting our show to do a couple of shows. It was our first full band show, and it was a really fun time. We decided to go down. When we did the Hard Rock residency in Vegas we knew that an hour-long drum show is a little bit too much, so we decided to do half of the set with a band. We had the musicians at the back of the stage and the drums up front. It was kind of flipped from the usual set-up. We wanted something new and we wanted to try something different. We’ve got to keep going. Now we had to come up with a new format and a new sound. It’s still has this kind of effect. It inspired us again. SD: Do you see anyone other than the band members that want to start writing songs? FZ: How do you think people respond to that sound? FZ: Because they are not being preached to, they are just hearing music, and it’s a different experience. Everyone, from two-year-olds to grandparents, was enjoying it. We really related with this people.

SD: Let’s get back to the residency you did at the Hard Rock. Tell us about the shows you recorded for the other artists that you worked with for those shows, FZ: The Hard Rock shows were something very special. We had a drum design for each show that was a great accomplishment for all of us. We always wanted to work in Vegas, but standard showrooms weren’t a good fit, so we looked around for big stage and we made a giant display. They really much tried to recreate our stage. We went out in January and said, “We’re going to use a Marshall stack to help give it an edgier sound. We might get distorted by pushing it through the speaker cabinet. This is something that I’ve been working on for a long time. We did it and we really enjoyed it. We have our equipment. We’ve worked with some of the best drummers, like washing machines, angle grinders, palm sanders, air compressors, a fire hydrant, and Tommy Lee’s home studio. We did our Big Noise record at Dave Grohl’s place and Tommy Lee’s home studio. We have played at huge drum studios. We have done a couple of our records in LA, and we’ve worked with some of the best drummers. We have worked with some of the best drummers, like washing machines, angle grinders, palm sanders, air compressors,
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<td>Patty Anne Miller</td>
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<td>Aron Mellergardh</td>
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<td>Matt Starr</td>
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<td>Mario Rubalcaba</td>
<td>Off!/Rocket From The Crypt F</td>
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<td>Brian Steele</td>
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**NEW ARTISTS**

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<td>My Morning Jacket F</td>
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**ENOUGH SAID.**
Touring with Two Door Cinema Club has allowed Ben Thompson to see the world while doing what he loves best. As the Irish Alt Rockers continue to churn out their hits, the baby-faced hired gun is plotting his rise to drumming greatness.

While Ben was visiting the DW Custom Shop for the very first time, we discussed aspects of touring, career goals, and the pitfalls of long-distance relationships.

Scott Donnell: You hadn’t had a chance to visit DW prior to today. Tell us a little bit about your first experience here and your reaction to seeing the factory.

Ben Thompson: I don’t think I stopped smiling the entire time I was walking around! It’s given me some wrinkles. Back in the UK, we don’t have the space for facilities like this. Being able to come over and actually see it (not on a YouTube video) is quite amazing. Walking through the different zones and smelling the different stages from the glue to the lacquer, and even the boxing area, is an (continued)
SD: Did you think John Good only existed on YouTube?
BT: That was exactly what it felt like to walk into the factory and see that he has his own raised office in the middle of the factory where he puts together perfect drum sets is incredible!

SD: And you saw Terry Bozio’s set.
BT: That was absolutely mind-blowing! Being a drummer that plays a three-foothigh practice kit and seeing something that scale, I didn’t quite know where to look, or stand, or touch. It’s something that I would respect; someone being able to control that hub of an instrument is pretty mind-blowing.

SD: Tell us about the current kit that you’re playing.
BT: I’m playing a Collector’s kit with super thin shells. I’ve got a 16x20” kick because I like the sound of it. It’s good for everything I do. It’s perfect for Pop stuff but you can use it for a wide variety of genres. I have a 12” rack and 9” floor, which I love. It’s very simple and it’s all-maple and it sounds absolutely amazing. I’ve got it wrapped in Black Galaxy Finish Ply.

SD: After today, what will you be dreaming about on your way home?
BT: I didn’t realize how many options there were to make your drum kit exactly how you want it. Now that I’ve been here, I see how much detail you can put into making it your own.

SD: Do you think the DW sound, or the way you can tailor your kit, meshes with you as a player, in general?
BT: I like it! I think it’s a personal thing that makes it more interesting. Deep-sounding drums and when we were going through the tour, you were explaining the actual way that the shells are built. It was a bit hard to believe being able to feel the resistance of the way the plies are laid when they are vertical versus horizontal. It was amazing to be able to deliver your vision with the sound that I want. When I was younger, the first time I heard a DW kick drum, it sounded like it was being played through a PA with massive subs without even being plugged in! That was when I decided I had to play these drums.

SD: Do you concentrate on ‘feel’ with your drumming to a great extent?
BT: What’s brilliant is that every audience in different countries reacts in different ways. Playing in Asia is fascinating, especially in the middle of the night. When you’re playing, they go absolutely crazy, jumping up and down, throwing things in the air, but as soon as you stop, you can hear a pin drop. It’s quite weird, their way of showing respect while you’re speaking. I can’t crank up the snare drum between songs because they’d hear it. It’s really nice to see something that you’d only ever play differently, adding their own feel.

SD: What’s the opposite of that?
BT: There are several UK festivals where you might get a beer can hitting you on the side of the head, or something.

SD: Do you use Skype a lot?
BT: Yeah, Skype is life-changing. I don’t know how people toured when they just had to send letters. It must have been so much easier to have it a lot easier than they used to.

SD: What are some of your favorite gigs you’ve played?
BT: The first time that I came over to the U.S., I was seventeen and we were supporting Phoenix. During the first show, my drummer, Thomas, got a phone call and found out that his wife had gone into labor early and that he’d have to fly home that day. There were two-to-three weeks of this arena-sized tour left. They were sitting in the dressing room going, “What the hell are we going to do?” They came next door and said, “Please, do you think you can do it?” I was seventeen years old, it was my first time ever performing in America, and we were playing massive venues. Back home, we were used to going to 500-1000 people in a room, but here we were playing to 10,000 people. Then they turned around and said, “Do you want to jump on the drums?” If you’ve seen Thomas play, you know he leaves very, very big boots to fill, visually. I thought, “This is a stupid opportunity, I can’t turn it down.” So, I agreed. I had twenty-four hours. The next day, conveniently, was a day off. I turned around and said, “Do you want to jump on the drums?” If you’ve seen Thomas play, you know he leaves very, very big boots to fill, visually. I thought, “This is a stupid opportunity, I can’t turn it down.” So, I agreed. I had twenty-four hours. The next day, conveniently, was a day off. I had that day to learn the 100 drum parts. I ended up doing an hour-long slot of support with Two Door, then a 20 minute change-over, and then an hour-and-fifty-minute set with Phoenix for nearly three weeks. The Phoenix parts are way more difficult. I think this was the way he moved his body to the music. It was so amazing. I’d never seen anything like it. I didn’t want to copy him. I wanted to make my own style. Where is my high-energy performance style developed. I also lost a couple of stones. I went from a chubby 17-year-old to a fit one.

SD: Would you feel prepared if that ever happened again?
BT: It was an amazing experience to have to learn something so quickly. I don’t think I made any mistakes. They never said anything. I was quite proud.

SD: Do you have any advice for young players?
BT: Get out and play. So many drummers sit at home and practice the technical side of drumming, like rudiments, but for me, it’s much more about actually going out and playing with musicians. The big stars are the ones who are playing with the best drummers. They want you to lay the groove down and do your job so people can dance. If you’re playing something on the drums that people can’t dance to, then you’re not doing your job.
Atom Willard
I am Punk

by Brook Dalton

I was an atypically sweltering and downright overhearing afternoon in the San Fernando Valley but I didn’t let it bother me one bit. I was too distracted and excited about being able to hang out with one of my all-time favorite musicians. Atom Willard arrived with a smile on his face and the world’s cutest French Bulldog, Michi, buzzing around his feet. After sharing a few exhausting rounds of terrible jokes (he really likes bad jokes), we sat down to discuss topics spanning the seminal San Diego Punk scene of the 90’s, touring the country in a box truck, and his current excitement in being Against Me!’s time-keeper.

Brook Dalton: I remember the first time that I saw you perform; it was either 1992 or 1993 at The Palace in Hollywood. I was a huge fan of Superchunk and Rocket from the Crypt played with them, but I had never heard you guys until that night. You opened the show and I was floored. I was sort of numb during the night. You opened the show and I was numb. You might have still been in school in 1992, so I might have still been a kid.

Atom Willard: Dude, I graduated high school in 1992, so I might have still been a senior when we played that show!

Brook Dalton: Dude, I graduated high school in 1992, so I might have still been a senior when we played that show!

Atom Willard: The San Diego Punk/Indie scene was so important in the 90’s and most people I know consider Rocket to be sort of the figurehead for that movement. You were an integral piece to an influential community, even in your youth. Can you talk a bit about those formative early days?

Atom Willard: Yeah, that was the one! It was totally my fault, too. They went me, a kid that wasn’t even eighteen, to rent the van for the tour. The rental place offered me this crazy van that had a big steel divider running down the middle of it, so I told them it wouldn’t work and I needed something with more space. They sent me, a few exhausting rounds of terrible jokes (he really likes bad jokes), we sat down to discuss topics spanning the seminal San Diego Punk scene of the 90’s, touring the country in a box truck, and his current excitement in being Against Me!’s time-keeper.

Brook Dalton: Was that the tour that you did in 1992?

Atom Willard: After Rocket from the Crypt, you ended up being the drum tech for Weezer. Did it feel odd to be on tour and not be the one playing the shows, or did it seem like an organic progression to you?

Atom Willard: Well, thanks for saying so. You didn’t have to do that, but it always left an impression with me that you took the time to reach out. It must be nice to inspire people like that.

Atom Willard: My parents always tried to get me to take lessons. My dad is into education, so he was like, “You might want to try and do this the right way.” They liked the idea of me studying, but I was never behind the thought of practicing rudiments. The lessons would have me playing only on the snare drum and that wasn’t what I was about. I just wanted to play along with Kiss records. My mom still has this photo of me, as a little kid, sitting behind a snare and I look so angry! I was such a pissed-off five-year-old.

Atom Willard: Man, we better be good.” We weren’t really thinking beyond that.

Brook Dalton: After Rocket from the Crypt, you ended up being the drum tech for Weezer. Did it feel odd to be on tour and not be the one playing the shows, or did it seem like an organic progression to you?

Atom Willard: Oh yeah, there’s nothing else like it. People ask, “What do you get out of being in a band?” Sure, it’s a lot of fun and we have a good time, but at the end of the day, if someone says, “Hey, you made me want to play the drums”, then I’ve actually done something; I’ve affected someone in a positive way. To me, that’s a greater pay-off. I really believe to do something that’s bigger than myself, by playing an instrument that I love, is the biggest reward. We always tried to make it a priority to respond to letters and communicate like that, especially if it was addressed to an individual member of the band. I mean, I still try to do that. It’s so much easier now with social media. Even if just one favorite someone’s tweet, they know that I saw it and appreciated it.

Atom Willard: It seemed to me like you joined Against Me! in kind of a whirlwind. They had a situation and needed a drummer for the Australian tour and the next thing I knew, you were playing those shows.

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Brook Dalton: Did you take formal lessons?

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Atom Willard: The Green Album and End of the Century were both really big for us. It was a real heady time. We heard about Weezer and thought, “We should be doing this.” I ended up playing percussion on some songs on The Green Album and did SNI with them. It was cool because I got to watch Patrick perform every night, and he’s one of my favorite drummers of all time, but it definitely wasn’t the same as playing the drums. To be honest, I had a really hard time on the tour because it was very difficult to not be playing. I realized that I’m not cut out for it. I enjoy being around drums, making them sound good, and learning about them, but that’s not where my passion lies. It wasn’t enough of a reason to be away from home.
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AW: They've been really awesome about everything and very open about me trying new stuff. I've been in other situations where the band was like, "Um, don't try that. Just play what's on the record and stick to the script." But Against Me! has been really into me playing with my own feel. I think part of that reasoning is because they've had a bunch of drummers in the past. It hasn't allowed for them to get used to the songs being played in any particular way. We've also re-worked some of the songs to give them a new life.

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BD: I recently saw you play at FYF in L.A. and it made me realize that Against Me! is in a cool place, as far as shows go. You're able to hit in during a giant festival like that, but then you can turn around and play a mid-sized theater and feel right at home. Do you have a preference when it comes to the size of the audience?

AW: I do, actually. I've been lucky enough to play huge shows in the past. With The Offspring, we played a festival in France with more than 100,000 people in the crowd. It was absolutely mind-boggling. We saw weird things like fires popping up in the distance! [laughs]. So, I've played some shows that were incredible benchmarks, but if I had a choice, I'd play to an audience of 2,000 people where anyone can get on the stage, have fun, and interact. Those gigs are big enough that everything sounds good, it's not stifling hot, and there's a certain energy in the air. You're so close with the crowd and everybody's on the same page. It's contagious and it's unstoppable.

BD: Most times, when someone joins a pre-existing band, they don't have a ton of creative freedom with their library of songs because the fans are familiar with them in the way they were recorded. I didn't get that feeling when I saw you play the older Against Me! songs. How much leeway do you have with their catalog?

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Scott Donnell: How long have you been one of the ‘newer guys’ with Journey?
Deen Castronovo: It will be sixteen years, coming up on February 17th.

SD: Do they give you a watch for that?
DC: They give me nothing but a hard time!

SD: Obviously, you’ve played in several bands with Neal Schon. Was it your relationship with him that led to the Journey gig?
DC: Yeah, pretty much. When Steve Perry left the band and Steve Smith decided to leave along with him, I was the one they called. They asked me because they knew I was familiar with all of the Journey material. I was like, “Hell yeah! I’ll do it!”

SD: Somebody recently sent me a YouTube video of you singing while playing the drums. It reminded me of the skill set you possess and made me realize that there aren’t many articles out there about this sort of thing. How did you discover that you can drum and sing?
DC: When I was eleven years old, I was in a power trio called The Enemy. I remember the guitarist bringing me the Journey album, Infinity and I was like, “What is this?” He told me to learn “La Do Da” and asked if I could sing it. Since I hadn’t hit puberty yet, I was able to pull it off! That’s where I learned how to sing and play drums. I learned it while playing Journey songs.

SD: Naturally, you are a big Journey fan, but how did you become the ballad singer of the band?
DC: Well, when Steve Augeri (the singer that replaced Steve Perry) came in, he had some vocal issues in 2006 and was having a really hard time. I remember one show in Bristol, Virginia; they had my drum tech, Jim Hanley, play drums and they had me up front to sing. I performed “Faithfully”, “Open Arms”, and “Who’s Crying Now?” and I was so afraid. It’s easy to sing when you’ve got a bunch of drums, cymbals, and microphones in front of you because nobody can see you. When you’re up in front, it’s another story. I remember lifting my hands during “Open Arms” and they

We’re more than familiar with the great singing Rock drummers of all time. Most of us can name them off the top of our head: Phil Collins, Don Henley, Levon Helm, even Kelly Keagy. This short list is probably missing a few entries, but there’s one name that drummers and music fans almost never utter. We humbly submit: Mr. Deen Castronovo. Singing a Journey ballad is a full-time job for most well-trained vocalists. Try it sometime. Of course, your drum kit might not fit in your shower. We met up with Deen backstage while the band was preparing to perform yet another sold out show. Among other things, we chatted about the finer points of singing and drumming. If you think that you may have an untapped or hidden talent, read on.
SD: Unbelievable. Have you done any other singing aside from Journey?
DC: I am doing work right now with Jack Blades and Doug Aldrich. I’m actually finishing up recording vocals with them soon.

SD: You’re the lead vocalist?
DC: Yep! I am the lead vocalist on that whole record. The band is called Revolution Saints. Serafino (Perugino), the president of Frontiers Records, asked me if I would sing on a project and I said, “Okay, sure.” He always wanted me to do a solo record and I told him that I don’t do that. I wouldn’t know what to do. So, he hired this gentleman by the name of Alessandro Roscioli who wrote everything, played the drums, guitar, keyboards, bass, and sang on the demos. He had a killer voice, so I said, “Why would you want me to do this? You do this and I’ll play the drums.” But he said that Serafino wanted me to do it. So I was like, “Alright.”

SD: Will you be touring with this project?
DC: I don’t know if we will have enough time to tour, that’s the thing.

SD: If they do go on tour, would you play drums and sing?
DC: Yeah, but I don’t know if I will be able to do all of that stuff. I’ve never really had the opportunity to sing an entire Journey set while playing drums. I usually just play a few songs. I have done it in a few different times, and that’s worked pretty well so far, but I’ve never been able to do it live.

SD: Who are some of your favorite singing drummers?
DC: Of course, you have Don Henley and Phil Collins; those were the guys I listened to. There was also Gil Moore (Triumph). The first guy that stood out to me was Peter Criss on “Black Diamond.” I heard that and thought it was killer. But yeah, I really didn’t listen to Don Henley that much as a drummer/singer. For me, he was always a singer and he could play drums, too. We knew Phil played drums because of his work with Genesis, but I knew him as a drummer before that in Brand X.

SD: I think this interview might shed some light on you as a singer because people already recognize you as an amazing drummer. You sing in the show, but I don’t know if people really know the deal.
DC: People don’t. You can see the crowd looking around and wondering who is singing. A lot of people think it’s a backing track until the camera comes on and they see me.

SD: Do you have a home studio?
DC: No, when they want to do something, they’ll have me come out. My son has a wicked studio at his house.

SD: What type of music does he play?
DC: Oh, his stuff is ultra-heavy. He sounds like a cross between Linkin Park and Slipknot. He’s singing now, too. He’s not playing drums as much anymore, so he records drums now and he plays guitar. I asked him where he learned how to play guitar and he was like, “I don’t know.”

SD: Do you play guitar?
DC: Not really, and I couldn’t write a song to save my life.

SD: But you’re a singer with a sense of melody.
DC: Yeah, but for me to sit down with chops. I remember Herbie (Herbert) saying that chops belong at the butcher shop. I mean, Smith had all the chops in the world, but he knew when and how to play them for the song. Now look at him.

SD: You’ve been a professional drummer for a long time. How has your career evolved over the years?
DC: I think I’ve evolved as a drummer. I do more with the songs now. Before, I was in Thrash bands with shredder guitarists and it was all about the licks I could do. Now, I play more for the song. You don’t mess with iconic songs; that would be sinful.

SD: You have all that facility and you can harness it if you have to.
DC: Maybe here and there. I do as much as I can without getting the stink eye. We all know about the stink eye.

SD: Do you proactively work on your drumming, or do you feel like being on tour is enough to keep you fresh?
DC: It does and it doesn’t. You have to remember that I grew up with a Metal background, so there was no finesse there. I had the finesse of a jackhammer. Now, I have a nice smooth rhythm and I’m still learning how to be a pocket player. Steve Smith once said, “Do a lot with less movement.” You see these guys and they barely move, but they are killing it! They hardly break a sweat. So I’m trying to play more for the songs and I am learning more and more. I’m not really concentrating on chops. I remember Herbie (J-Herbert) saying that chops belong at the butcher shop. I mean, Smith had all the chops in the world, but he knew when and how to play them for the song. Now look at him.

SD: He’s gone off in a completely different direction. It’s all about stretching out musically.
DC: That guy is a genius. He really is.

SD: He’s been your drumming mentor, or is that different?
DC: We did in 2003, and it destroyed me. Talk about a lesson in humility. He would turn to me and he’d be like, “Check this out.” Then he would just go off and ask if I liked it. I always said, “Yes, I liked that. No, I can’t do that. That burns me out.” He was so humble. He would show me stuff, but I couldn’t quite grasp it.

SD: You talked about how you wanted to be more of a groove player, but have chops, too. Can those two worlds get along?
DC: I think they did in Journey, with Steve Smith in the band, but he knew when to do it.

SD: Yeah, but he was really playing for the song. Do you think you’re doing the same thing?
DC: That’s the goal. You know, when you hear Todd Sucherman with Styx, you know that’s his hat. That’s what he wants to do and he’s capable of making it happen. When those elements come together, it’s magic.
The MDD pedal is more than just a new flagship product; it represents the culmination of more than four decades of passion and know-how. It also introduces the birth of DW Manufacturing, a new arm of the company that will specialize in precisely-machined pedals and hardware constructed from the finest materials and componentry. You might say that the in-house DW MFG machine shop is the counterpart to our well-known Custom Shop. Both are equally dedicated to creating premium products that take drumming to new and exciting places. So why the MDD and why now?

To tell the story of the first-ever DW direct drive pedal, we need to go back in time quite a few years, before the introduction of the popular 9000 pedal. To mark the unveiling of our Floating Rotor Technology, a limited number of machined aluminum pedals with ultra-thin footboards were produced. These pedals are highly-coveted and artists such as Steve Smith and Gregg Bissonette play theirs to this very day. Technically, the first incarnation of the 9000 was the first DW machined pedal and since that time, we’ve heard from so many top-level players requesting that we revisit that design aesthetic.

Fast-forward nearly eight years to discussions of another pedal idea that had also been a much-talked about topic in the DW R&D world: the direct drive pedal. After careful deliberation, it was decided that both concepts would be combined to create a new pedal that would challenge DW convention. Product Designer, Rich Sikra, was enlisted to take on the assignment that would nearly consume his career for the better part of two years. This pedal needed to satisfy die-hard direct drive aficionados, yet appeal to chain drive connoisseurs; a nearly impossible task.

A direct drive pedal was relatively unfamiliar territory at the time. As Rich would soon learn, the geometry of the linkage, in relationship to the movement of the footboard and stroke, greatly influences the feel and overall playability. When designing pedals at DW, feel is paramount. Everything else (features, build materials, look, etc.) is secondary. Ultimately, the pedal needs to feel like an extension of the drummer, while never inhibiting their creative flow. That said, visual appeal is also important. A perforated, racing-inspired footboard was incorporated, along with a matching contoured heel-plate. Most of the pedal would be machined from billet aluminum, so the appearance would be a by-product of the manufacturing process. Some pretty nifty, never-before-seen features were also included: VERT (vertical spring adjustment), a swivel version of the Tri-Pivot toe clamp, and even a versatile new Control Beater system that allows the drummer to swap out the striking surfaces and adjust the weight distribution in seconds.

MDD pedals epitomize the company’s dedication to innovation and the advancement of quality manufacturing. For a complete list of features and specifications, visit us online at: www.dwdrums.com. Better yet, check one out at your favorite pro drum shop and let us know what you think via social media. We made this pedal for you.
As drummers, we are truly spoiled these days, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the throne department. It is now commonplace to have a sturdy and balanced throne for drummers defined a mission: to solve the problems that drummers face in the most elegant and effective way possible.

I remember my first kit; I was eight years old and so thrilled with my junkyard drums I got for Christmas. I also remember my first throne. It was really squishy on top and after a few months I could feel the bolts under the padding digging into my backside. It sucked. An upgrade was due. Luckily for me, the next Christmas I received a pneumatic throne. I’ll never forget being excited to pull the lever and have it go up, and then being unable to get it to go back down because I didn’t weigh enough!

These days I wear my DW 9100 round-top thrones. I’ve owned one of them for over a decade and it shows no signs of stopping. I hadn’t really investigated what else DW had to offer because I’ve been so content with what I’ve been using. In the studio or on tour, the 9100 does the job for me. As it turns out, there are some great throne options for any drummer in any situation (and any budget) that I wasn’t aware even existed.

For this overview of the DW and PDP thrones, I want to ask you a favor. While we are going to start with the most affordable options and work our way up the line, please don’t equate price with quality. For many of us, a lightweight throne is the right decision, and DW knows this. The smaller and lighter thrones are simply options and are all built with the highest level of quality across the board. Think of them as choices. I will try to help delineate which of the various thrones might best suit your needs.

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Let’s begin with the PDP DT800-04. This throne has a round top that I found to be firm and supportive. To set your desired height you use the memory lock. Aim to keep the weight down on your gigging throne for drummers defined a mission: to solve the problems that drummers face in the most elegant and effective way possible.

As drummers, we are truly spoiled these days, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the throne department. It is now commonplace to have a sturdy and comfortable stool. Just a few decades ago, drummers suffered with hard-as-a-rock and woobbly seats that seemed so much as an afterthought by the drum companies of the day. Every now and then when I buy a vintage kit that comes with old hardware, I am astounded at how rickety and painful the old thrones were. No thanks!

Over forty years ago, when Drum Workshop was a humble teaching studio, Don Lombardi envisioned and created a solution to this conundrum. There, in the modest beginnings of DW, the height-adjustable trap seat was born. The runaway success of this throne led to DW’s ability to venture into making other stands. When we talk about thrones and DW, we need to realize that they are in the very DNA of Drum Workshop. What began as a quest to build a comfortable seat for drummers defined a mission: to solve the problems that drummers face
Danny Walker
On Metal’s Cutting Edge
by Brook Dalton

Brook Dalton: I’ve always been very proud of the musical creativity in the Ventura County area. We’re lucky to have been surrounded by good musicians, songwriters, bands, and a strong sense of community. You’ve been a key fixture at the center of a lot of the important, heavy (Punk, Grind, Metal) scenes from this region. Can you talk a bit about when you began playing and what it was like to be part of those earlier bands?

Danny Walker: Well, I started playing drums at a really early age. I was listening to records and picking up ideas, then jamming with neighborhood friends in the garage. When I was in my early teens, I started going to a bunch of local shows in Oxnard and Ventura before I ever played in a band. I’d see groups like The Missing 23rd and Peter Pan’s Army. They were a huge influence on me and I wanted to do what these people were doing. Word got out that I was a drummer in the area, so I started teaming up with different musicians and played in a few local bands, like Destroy Babylon. Uphill Battle was the first band I was in that got signed to a label and toured a bunch, and that was really cool. We were on a label (Relapse) that I respected and had other bands that I liked on their roster. We played a lot in Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Oxnard in the early days and things kind of took off from there.

BD: It seemed like every time Uphill Battle would play a show, there was the general crowd in front of the band, but then there was always this core group of drummers that would migrate to the side of the stage just so we could see what you were doing. We would watch your feet and try to figure out if you were a robot, or not.

DW: Ha! Well, I’m not.

BD: I remember when one of my bands opened for Intronaut, which had to be one of your first shows, and you were really excited to play. Before you went on, you told me, “Dude, there are no blast beats in these songs!” It was great because you were able to readjust from an all-out technical assault to this Prop-Laden sound with heavy textures, but you maintained the energy. What was that shift like for you?

DW: It wasn’t very difficult to pull back. Even though I was playing nothing but Death Metal, Grindcore, and fast Punk, I listened to a lot of slower-paced music. I love Massive Attack, Björk, and Neurosis…stuff that’s more groove-oriented. I have a fascination with that kind of music and I wanted to do something like it because I’d never drummed that way before. I was sure that I could play it, but I never had the opportunity. Before we started Intronaut, Sacha (Durable) was in a band called Anubis Rising and they would play shows with Uphill Battle. We always talked about starting a band together, so we had the chance and it started from there.

BD: It seemed like you guys quickly made the jump from playing local shows and L.A. clubs to going on tour with Tool. Suddenly, you were playing arenas and doing drum solos with Danny Carey. How does your mindset change when you make an advancement like that?

DW: It is kind of a trip, but before Intronaut started I had been touring Europe with bands and doing things, musically, that I had considered to be successful. So, even though one of the guitarists and I had already done bigger things, we had no problem starting from the ground up. We didn’t have an attitude about it; we never thought, “Well, we’ve done this in the past, so this band should start out at a certain level.” We went on small DIY tours, we slept in our van on the side of the road, and we did exactly what we’d done before in our other bands. I definitely feel like we’ve earned what we have. We went out as much as we could, we never denied a tour, we were always willing to play, and we hoped that our music spoke for itself. Specifically, with Tool, they only take out bands that they personally like; politics or management isn’t involved with those decisions.

BD: Right. They took Tweak Bird on tour simply because they’re a great band. They weren’t looking for a household name in the supporting slot.

DW: Yeah, they’ve toured with Isis, Mastodon, and The Melvins because they’re all bands that they respect. Management wasn’t asking, “Well, how will Intronaut contribute to sales on this tour?” Tool doesn’t care; they’ll bring out a Slam poet if they want! Looking back, it’s definitely weird and still kind of hard to swallow.

Near every cultural community, or region, has a handful of stand-out musicians at its heart. I’m talking about the few that are as impressive as they are entertaining; performers that are universally admired while transcending the bias of both naysayers and jealous types. Having been raised in the same musical scenes as Danny Walker, I can tell you that he is one of these stellar talents. When his bands would sometimes tour with bands that we respect, we never denied a tour, we were always willing to play, and we hoped that our music spoke for itself. Specifically, with Tool, they only take out bands that they personally like; politics or management isn’t involved with those decisions.
BD: Are the drum solos that Danny Carey performs alongside the drummer from the opening band rehearsed ahead of time, or are they completely improvised?
DW: We had one rehearsal to kind of hash things out, but beyond that it was all improvised. Actually, I had never seen Tool before we played with them, but I knew that they would pick a song and incorporate a sort of drum battle in the middle of it. On this particular tour, the song was “Lateralus”. They’d break it down at a certain point, Justin Chancellor would play this repetitive bass line, and Danny and I would just groove together and trade eights. We’d swap solos and I’d watch him for the cues. Then, we’d both come in and finish the song off together. So, I actually had to study that song while wearing headphones in the van between shows!

BD: How involved are you with drum education these days? I know that you used to give lessons quite a bit. You also have a YouTube channel with some exercises on it. Is that your main source for teaching or do you still do personal instruction?
DW: I’ll give lessons once in a while, but it’s hard to find the time. There was a time, when I worked at a music store, when I could focus on that. Now I’m doing so many things, musically, and I’m touring so much that I actually give most lessons while I’m on the road. Sometimes a fan will contact me ahead of time and say, “Hey, you’re going to be in my town, can I meet you for a lesson?” So, I’ll show up early and go over some pad exercises and talk about techniques. I try to do some ‘one-off’ meetings like that. I never really considered myself to be an educator because sometimes it’s hard for me to explain what I do.

BD: How did you develop your Prime Grid exercise? Is it something that you personally use to help warm-up?
DW: You know, it wasn’t something that I really thought about; I just started doing it to warm-up. I always did paradiddles and double-stroke rolls to get my hands warm, but I started to throw in these patterns in odd meters. It worked for me because I could, essentially, work on two things at once: I was warming up and testing my ability to hold different meters. It ended up being really fun, so I posted it for people to check out.

BD: Intronaut has a big, commemorative tour coming up next month. I know that you’ll be representing every record, so how do you guys decide on the set-list for something like this?
DW: Yeah, it’s for our ten-year anniversary and we’ll be playing one or two songs from every release. There’s also a thirteen-minute instrumental song from one of our records that we’ve only played once in L.A. and in India, but we’ve never played it on a tour. It’s pretty long and complex and it opens with our guitarist playing tabla. He actually took lessons from Danny Carey’s teacher. We’re also doing some old stuff that we haven’t touched in a while, so that will be a lot of fun. We’ve been touring for the last record for a year and we’ve really saturated the newer songs. It’ll be nice to take a break from
BD: But you’ll play a couple of the newer songs, right?

DW: Yeah, we’ll play some of them, for sure.

BD: You drummed on the new job for a Cowboy album. How did that come about? I know they’re from Arizona, so how did you meet them?

DW: Their line-up is actually from all over the place. A couple guys are from Boston, one of them lives in Denver, and the singer lives in Arizona. But, their home-base is Arizona. Jon Rice, the drummer that they had for years, decided to step away and pursue something else. He’s amazing, by the way. I know the bass player and the guitarist, so they hit me up and said, “Hey, we’ve got a whole record written. Would you be interested in playing on it?” They had the entire album planned, but they had programmed a drum machine for all of the parts. It was basically just filler; it was a skeleton. They told me, “These are just the basic drum ideas, do you do what you want. We’re hiring for your style, so do what you feel is right.” I had a couple months to study it, but I was in Europe for a month with Intronaut. So, everyday, I’d listen to it and chart out the parts as best I could. I wrote down what I thought I’d want to do, but I never actually played it on the drums! I practiced for a week on the kit. He brought me backstage and one of the reps from Jesu’s label approached me and asked, “Hey, you’re Danny, right? Do you want to play drums for Jesu?” I said, “Uh, yeah, I’d love to.” He was a little hammered so I wasn’t sure if it was going to actually happen! (Laughs). But, the next morning he emailed me the set list and put me in contact with Justin Broadrick and Ted Parsons. Ted was the original drummer, but he couldn’t do the tour due to health issues. Jesu actually had trouble getting their work visas, so Intronaut suddenly filled in for them on the first half of that tour. It was an interesting shift for me, but it was a lot of fun.

BD: That’s pretty incredible.

DW: Totally, but it was challenging in a different way. The music is so simplistic and sparse, I was basically emulating a drum machine. That was the first time that I’ve ever had to play with a click track live. I had to be so subdued and eased back.

BD: Did you play with electronics on your kit?

DW: No, but I played with backtracking that he had pre-recorded. It had electronics, extra guitars, drum samples, and layered elements. It was all new to me. Anyone that thinks that music is easy to play doesn’t know what they’re talking about.

BD: I’ve always thought that recording long, slow, and repetitive drum parts is much more difficult than frenetic, shorter songs with more changes in them.

DW: Sure. There’s something in your brain that makes it easy to overthink those patterns when you’re in the studio.

BD: Which drummers, or bands, have you been influenced by recently?

DW: Man, I feel like I’ve been living in a hole lately. I’ve been a big fan of Meshuggah ever since I was a kid. So, getting to tour and hang out with them last year was amazing. I got to watch Tomas Haake drum every night! It was inspiring and I was constantly reminded why he is one of my favorites. Every time we were playing our set, I’d look over and he was at the side of the stage watching me and I just couldn’t believe it. He’s super nice and humble, too. Matt Garstka from Animals as Leaders is phenomenal, too. That guy’s taking over the Metal world right now.

BD: How has your set-up changed over the years? Obviously, you’re with DW now, but have your dimensions stayed the same? Do you add or take away drums when you play with different bands?

DW: I’ll change things up, depending on what I’m doing. Although, I’ve had the same amount of cymbals for about fourteen years and I still off-set my rack toms. But, for instance, when I went out with Cloudkicker I used a stack. It’s one of the sounds that he (Ben Sharp) programs, with Cloudkicker I used a stack. I just couldn’t believe it. He’s super nice and humble, too. Matt Garstka from Animals as Leaders is phenomenal, too. I just couldn’t believe it. He’s super nice and humble, too. Matt Garstka from Animals as Leaders is phenomenal, too.

BD: You’re playing a Design Series kit now. How is that working out for you?

DW: It’s awesome! I can’t believe how much that sucker cuts through. I still have my Collector’s kit, but it’s nice to play something new. I like that it doesn’t have the reinforcement hoops. It sounds very bright and stands out. I’ll be bringing it out on the ten-year anniversary tour.

BD: And it’s already got your initials printed on the kick drum head!

DW: Yeah, man! It was meant to be.