Josh Freese

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Josh Freese
on location
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It’s not just a play on words. The fact is, DW’s mission statement is to solve problems for drummers, create the instruments and gear that can inspire musicians, and take the art form to new and uncharted places. So, how exactly does that work? It can be as simple as offering reliable, lightweight hardware for the working player, or a smoother, more accurate pedal that makes live performances that much more explosive. It can also come from an accessory product that changes a set-up just enough to open new creative doors, or a snare drum shell crafted from an alternative material.

It all comes down to innovation. We are always exploring new ideas and striving for improvement. If we don’t continue to adapt to the way the instrument is evolving with today’s players and their techniques, we’re at risk of becoming musical dinosaurs. True, we’ve found some pretty old lumber for some of our Timeless Timber kits, but we’re talking about offering drummers more choices, more sonic possibilities, and more ways to expand their percussive palette. Who knows, maybe we should change our slogan from The Drummer’s Choice to The Drummer’s Choices?

As you enjoy this 13th issue of Edge, we hope you’ll gain some new insights and discover ideas that will change the way you approach the instrument and perhaps ignite an artistic spark that didn’t previously exist. To us, “The Cutting Edge” isn’t just a catch phrase or a way to label our latest product designs. It all goes back to our mission statement and our belief in a Darwinian approach to making drums and gear, while constantly refining and reinventing the tools needed to craft new rhythms and new beats.

Play on.

Scott Donnell
Editor, Edge Magazine

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Scott Donnell: Talk a little about how drummers can develop their own voice.

Carl Allen: This is an excellent question. I'd like to preface it by saying that in my opinion, specifically when we're talking about Jazz, one should possess some basic knowledge of the tradition, because part of what we are attempting to do when we play is to add to the existing language and vocabulary of the idiom. That being said, there are a number of ways to develop your own voice. I have often said that great musicians are also great thieves. In music, we steal or borrow ideas from what we hear. I don't think that the masters left us all of this great music for us to merely copy and regurgitate. We have to find a way to take ideas and make them our own. I have often said that great musicians are also great thieves. In music, we steal or borrow ideas from what we hear. I don't think that the masters left us all of this great music for us to merely copy and regurgitate. We have to find a way to take ideas and make them our own.

SD: How did you cultivate your playing style?

CA: As I mentioned, I took a lot of what I heard on recordings and in live performances from some of the masters. I transcribed them, learned their vocabulary, and explored a lot. One of the great lessons that I learned early on is that it takes courage to explore what it is that you are hearing, but it's very necessary. I grew up listening to and playing a lot of styles of music long before I started playing Jazz. Gospel, R&B, Soul, and Funk are where I 'lived' before I started visiting Jazz, so to speak. When I was around ten years old, I started to really hear melody and wanted to adapt that approach to the drums. I can recall a conversation that I once had with the great Freddie Hubbard. We were on the road and I remember telling him that I didn't think I was hearing the drums the way that I was supposed to hear them. He said, "What do you mean?" I replied, "I hear what Blakey, Tony, Elvin, Higgins, and others are doing, which I love. I want to do that, but also do what you, Miles, Monk, Trane, and others are doing." He started laughing, his head off. I thought, "Oh man, I am in trouble." He then encouraged me to follow my vision and said that as long as I did what I was supposed to do as a drummer, that I could explore this conversation. In a way, he gave me permission to start asking what has become my favorite question: what if? Once I felt like I could explore more, I started learning 'non-drummer' solos, but playing them on the drums. This led me to taking ideas from other non-Jazz musicians and trying to apply it to what I was hearing. I still do it to this day.

SD: In a strange way, is there a Jazz drumming rulebook?

CA: I am not sure if there is a rulebook per se for jazz drumming as much as there is for just making great music. I'm sure it may be different for others, but for me, it's simple. Here are a few of my rules:

The Ride Cymbal: This is where it starts for me when playing Jazz. I always say that you should be able to swing the whole band with just your ride cymbal. Play great time, make it feel good and make it dance.

Play Great Dynamics: Listen to others...
more that you listen to yourself.  

Contribute to the Conversation at Hand: 
This means playing something that makes sense conceptually, stylistically, and is pertinent to what's happening at that moment.  

Sound: The sound of your instrument has to compliment the music. This goes not only for the tuning of the drums, but the tone as well.  

Concept: Be aware of the concept of the music. In order for the music to swing or dance it has to feel like Jazz. We have to be around it; listen to live music.  In order for the music and the lineage to be strong, you have to play and he allowed me to explore and make mistakes. If something didn't work he'd just say, “Try something different,” and said, “Do you play the drums or do the drums play you? If you could really play, it wouldn't matter.” He walked away laughing. I was about twenty years old at the time. Lesson learned.  

SD: How do you teach Jazz? 
CA: I think with Jazz music, like other genres, you learn by doing. It's a language, a culture, and it's social music. We have to be around it; listen to live performances, a ton of recordings, and be prepared for a lot of trial and error. When I was with Freddie, he never told me how to play and he allowed me to explore and make mistakes. If something didn’t work he’d just say, “Try something different,” and I knew what that meant. It wasn’t until years later that I understood the value of being able to just figure it out. More importantly, you have to want it. This also means accepting that phase where you will sound bad before you sound good. Some musicians have a hard time with this, but I think that’s part of the growth process.  

SD: In today's world, how do you achieve a career as a Jazz drummer? 
CA: Although the music business has changed immensely over the past thirty, or so, years, many things still remain the same. Learn your instrument. Learn the music and the lineage. Learn as much about the business as you can. Show up on time, be prepared, and be nice. This is a people business; relationships and resources are cyclical, so this is very important.  

SD: Does your kit change from gig-to-gig? 
CA: I know that the obvious answer to this question would be, “Yes.” However, in my case, it doesn’t change much. I may add an additional floor tom, second snare, or go between one or two mounted toms, but that’s about it. It’s a Big Band gig I may use a 20” bass drum. There are times, if I am doing a commercial or movie soundtrack, I may use a 22” bass drum, but that’s rare in recent years. I try to adjust my touch more than anything. A friend of mine says, “Your touch produces your sound and not the other way around.” He’s a pianist, which means that he’s playing a different instrument just about every day.  

Years ago, I was on a gig in Paris along with Art Blakey and Billy Higgins. We all had to play the same drums, which were horrible (this, of course, was before I started playing DW). Both of those guys sounded amazing and I really sounded horrible. After the gig I was furious. I was kicking chairs and complaining about the drums. Art said, “What’s wrong?” I proceeded to tell him about my drum ride. He laughed and said, “Do you play the drums or do the drums play you? If you could really play, it wouldn’t matter.” He walked away laughing. I was about twenty years old at the time. Lesson learned.  

SD: Describe your sound. 
CA: I would like to think of my sound as warm, clear, and recognizable. I never have any muffling on my drums or anything inside of them. I like for my drums to be open, resonant, and singing. I want those around me to feel the wood and warmth of the drum.  

SD: How do you create your signature sound? 
CA: I create my signature sound through exploring. I’ve spent years experimenting with not only creating different sounds, but also changing up my set-up from time-to-time. I think that sometimes we take our set-up for granted. I like for it to feel like it’s part of me and an extension of my body, if you will.  

Art (Blakey) used to talk to me about posture and how important it is. This, I do believe, has had an effect on my sound. Speaking of sound, I also work on drawing a sound out of the drum by focusing on playing into the drum versus playing off of the drum. I use both techniques. I once asked Elvin Jones what he practiced with his feet and he said, “The same thing I do with my hands.” I’ve always remembered this and try to do the same. For me, the key is having a balanced sound.  

SD: Does a Jazz drummer have to use coated heads and tune up high? 
CA: There was a time when I would say, “Definitely, yes.” Hearing and spending time around Tony Williams changed all of that for me. In his later years, he used clear black dot heads. I dare anyone to say that he didn’t get a great sound from the instrument or make it sound like Jazz. Al Foster is a great example of someone who tuned their drums low and still sounded amazing. There are many others, as well.  

SD: What’s the perfect workhorse snare drum? 
CA: This is not a fair question. (Laughs). I love snares drums! For years, I swore by wood snare shells, but recently I have been going between a 5x14 Collector’s Maple Mahogany and a 6.5x14 Nickel over Brass snare drum. I titanium whenever I play either of these drums. I have many snares and when I’m recording, I’ve been known to bring three or four snares.  

SD: Who’s the Elvin of 2016? 
CA: Obed Calvaire is someone that I really dig. Some of the other younger guys in this vein are Jonathan Barber, Jason Brown, McClenthy Hunter, Jerome Jennings, Bryan Carter, and Justin Brown. I am so proud of all of these guys. There is a kid named Kojo Roney, who is the son of Anton Roney and the nephew of trumpeter Wallace Roney; I think he’s eleven now. It just sick the way that he has really digested Tony’s concept for tuning, comping, and just playing the instrument. Check him out. He’s also a great kid and he’s very well-balanced.  

There are others that I feel are also doing great things and blending styles together; guys like Marcus Baylor, Mark Whitfield, Jr., Terreon Gully, and Jamison Ross.  

SD: Have you discovered new talent? 
CA: Several years ago, I started a production company. My aim was to primarily focus on talent that I believed deserved more attention. This would not only be the younger musicians, but some of the older masters that I felt had been overlooked. This included Nicholas Payson, Roy Hargrove, Eric Harland (he was eighteen years old at the time), Brian Blade, Cyrus Chestnut, and many others.  

I taught at The Juilliard School for twelve years; the last six as the Artistic Director of Jazz Studies. During my tenure there I was able to help nurture many of today’s active players like Jerome Jennings, Ulysses Owens, McClenthy Hunter, Lee Pearson, Marion Felder, Bryan Carter, Lawrence Leathers, Aaron Diehl, Miyako Katakura, Ron Williams, Kris Bowens, Joe Saylor, Phil Kuehn, Jonathan Batiste, Eleni Charles, Marshall Gilkes, Yasushi Nakamura, and many others. I must say that I had a lot of help from a great faculty that included Ron Carter, Kenny Barron, Rodney Jones, Kenny Washington, Billy Drummond, Steve Wilson, Ron Blake, Steve Turre, Wyckoff Gordon, Eddie Henderson, and...
I think of a lot of the young drummers who are out here working have studied with me at some point, and they’re playing with the likes of Gregory Porter, Michael Buettner, Chris Botti, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, Kurt Elling, and many others. I am just trying to do for the next generation what Blakey, Elvin, Higgins, Tony, Max, Roy Haynes, Mel Lewis, and Philly Joe did for me. I am happy to say that I’m not alone in this endeavor. As the old adage says, “It takes a village.”

CA: For me, DW drums have always sounded great. I remember right after I signed with you guys, I visited the factory and we discussed sizes, sound, feel, etc., Don Lombardi and John Good said, “How about we just send you something and you can let us know what you like and don’t like about them. Then, we can make some changes to make it your kit.” The drums were perfect right out of the box!

I do think that DW has a much broader range of sounds now than they did twenty years ago. The Jazz Series are amazing, as are all of the other drums that they make. One major difference for me is the 13” mounted tom. Until I started playing DW, I found that the 13” toms of many other brands sounded somewhat tight or choked. DW had the first 13” tom that had a well-balanced, round, full, and warm sound. Sounds like I’m describing a person, huh? Funny! (Laughs). DW drums have so much personality to them. They defy the odds in a way that I have never heard and breathing hard. I looked at John and Don and said, “Where do I sign?” That was it. I was hooked and still am.

When I first got with DW they didn’t have any lightweight hardware. I remember having a conversation with Don about this. I felt that this was a market that no one was addressing. I think he was somewhat skeptical, initially. I know that Jim Rupp had also spoken with him about it from a consumer’s perspective. I was looking at it not only for me, but thinking of all of the guys that I would see taking drums on the subway in New York or taking them up five flights of stairs to their apartments. I’d see drummers come up with their own homemade version of hardware, so I knew that there was a need. Needless to say, DW has to keep up with the demand. The new UltraLight hardware is just mind-blowing for me. Not to mention that my drum tech (and his back) loves it. Thanks, you guys.

CA: What would you recommend to a drummer that wants to purchase their first DW kit?
SD: In terms of which model or series, I would say that it depends on the music that you’re playing and your budget. I was never in agreement with the idea that PDP drums are a ‘budget line’ of drums. I’ve used them many times via backline companies and they all sounded great. I’ve never played a bad DW kit. I am curious about the Mini Pro kit, too. I haven’t heard one yet. I’d like to see DW do more with the 13” bass drum. I would just recommend being open to possibilities because nothing is familiar with DW drums and they have a preconceived notion of what they want, they may be surprised...pleasantly so.

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SD: What’s on your schedule for 2016?
CA: 2016 is looking to be a busy year, starting with the Jazz Cruise with Christian McBride and Dianne Reeves. January-February, I’ll be touring with The Mack Avenue Super Band with Christian McBride, Gary Burton, Sean Jones, Tia Fuller, and others. In between tour dates, I’ll also be doing a lot of clinics at schools and music stores.

Other things on the horizon for 2016 include touring with a project called The Art of Elvin. It’s a band that pays tribute to Art Blakey and Elvin Jones. We played PASIC in 2014 and had a great time. People were so supportive and showed so much love that I decided to try to keep this band going, so we will be touring throughout the year. I’ve also been playing with the legendary saxophonist Benny Golson for more than twenty years and we’ve recently recorded a new CD, so we’ll tour for the new release, as well.

DW: What’s on your drumming bucket list?
CA: There have been many, but when I get to spend time with someone one-on-one or in a clinic situation and you get to see and hear the immediate change in their playing, it’s an affirmation of the importance of sharing this gift that we have. Another one that comes to mind was playing with Freddie Hubbard in Berlin (with special guests Woody Shaw and Dizzy Gillespie). When Freddie introduced me to Dizzy he said, “Hey Diz, this is my drummer Carl Allen.” Man, I thought I would pass out just hearing him say that to Dizzy. Wow! I played with Dizzy for a few months; at that time I was also the Road Manager and Musical Director. He even played some of my music! It’s still unreal to this day.

One of the best life lessons that all of the aforementioned legendary musicians taught me is that music is a fraternity. It’s a privilege and an honor to be a part of what so many great people have spent their lives building. It has to be respected and never taken for granted. I remember meeting the great Ndugu Chancler the first time and he was so nice and gracious to me that it scared me, because I had assumed that if he was this nice, he must have thought that I was someone else. (Laughs). I thought, “Wow! He finds out that I’m not that person, his approach to me will change.” I said, “Hi, Mr. Chancler, my name is Carl Allen.” He said, “I know who you are. How you doing?” I’ve never forgotten that love and that warmth. He and I are close to this day. The great Billy Higgins said this about playing music: “Carl, it beats laying bricks.” I agree, and I know that I am a blessed man to be able to do so.

SD: What’s on your drumming bucket list?
CA: There’s so much that I’d still like to do. I would love to play with Fred Hammond, Marcus Roberts, Paul Simon, and James Taylor, to name a few. Surprised? I love a lot of different kinds of music. Musicians tend to typecast, but I love it all.

SD: What has been the most gratifying musical experience of your career?
CA: I am in their band. For me, it’s all about giving back. When my sister called to tell me of my mom’s passing, she told me that one of the gigs that I have been doing for about eleven years now is being part of the rhythm section for the Thelonious Monk competition. This happens every year, and part of my duties includes playing behind twelve-to-fifteen semi-finalists. We rehearse with each of them for thirty minutes and perform the following day. I enjoy it because it’s a challenge to make each one of them feel comfortable, as if I am in their band. For me, it’s all about serving the music. I love doing a lot of different kinds of gigs and projects, so there will be many great things happening.
On the heels of introducing the innovative Machined Direct-Drive (MDD) bass drum pedals, DW decided to focus on creating a hi-hat counterpart that matches not only their look and feel, but their adjustability and sturdiness, as well. Needless to say, the development of this stand was a new venture for us that could only come to fruition after countless hours of R&D and physical testing. I recently sat down with Rich Sikra, DW’s Director of Research and Development, to discuss this state-of-the-art addition to our impressive roster of hi-hat stands.

Brook Dalton: What was the biggest challenge in fabricating this stand? You weren’t dealing with a few tweaks or upgrades, you had to design a new drive system for it to work.

Rich Sikra: We wanted to make a stand that had the ability to give the player a ‘free floating’ footboard feel and that offered more traditional ‘solid stop’ action in one stand. Getting a direct-drive pedal to have a floating feel was pretty challenging and took some time to accomplish. In the testing phase of the new pedal design we worked with a lot of drummers during the various stages of its inception and listened to their feedback. Once we figured out the best blueprint, we realized that we could carry over the basics of the design to a hi-hat stand.

RS: We really wanted to make it user-friendly. The spring adjustment is based on the MDD pedal system, so a simple turn of the drum key changes the tension. It also has a laser-marked scale to show what setting you are on. The footboard height adjustment is unique and easy for the drummer to set. We also added a folding feature on the foot plate that locks into place using a toe clamp lever like the one used on a bass drum hoop clamp. This makes its set-up for the drummer quick and easy.

BD: How is the adjustability on the MDD Hi-Hat different from a typical hi-hat stand?

RS: We had received a lot of requests to put out a hi-hat in the MDD line before we invented it. So far, the feedback has been great! Of course, the drummers who already owned an MDD pedal really wanted a matching hi-hat, but we had to make it feel exceptionally good. Hopefully, we’ve met their expectations.

RS: Adjusting the tension on the cymbals while playing isn’t something that most drummers can do. It usually takes two hands to do this. We wanted to come up with a clutch that could be adjusted with one hand while playing. We also wanted a clutch that would not loosen up while playing without adding extra locking screws. Since the clutch matches the hi-hat’s goal of being more user-friendly, we thought it would make sense to release it on the MDD hi-hat first.

BD: How has the response been from artists or customers that have been playing this stand?

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BD: This is the first DW hi-hat stand that comes standard with the One-Touch Clutch. Why is the OTC a good fit for this piece of hardware?

RS: The One-Touch Clutch™ is a single-turn, hi-hat pedal that is designed for quick and easy adjustment. It allows the player to make quick adjustments without having to use both hands, which is ideal for live performances where time is of the essence. The OTC is designed to be durable and reliable, ensuring that it can withstand the rigors of constant use without sacrificing performance.

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One day he’s on a private jet with Sting, the next day he’s in a cargo van with The Vandals.

Josh Freese is the consummate working musician. He possesses a work ethic that just won’t quit, is a genre-bending chameleon, and has a rock-solid reputation that precedes him. A drum geek from a very early age, he grew up in a musical family and harnessed his enthusiasm to help pave a fruitful and diverse career path. Yes, there are quite a few extremely talented players in the drumming universe, but for many artists and bands, there’s truly no alternative.
Scott Donnell: Tell us about meeting your drumming idols at such a young age.

Josh Freese: Getting to meet some of my favorite drummers but haven't actually met a kid yet, it was a huge deal. Growing up in Southern California, I started going to NAMM shows when I was ten. I walked around with a check point-and-a-shot camera and an autograph album that was a little bigger than a wallet. I followed Vinnie (Colaiuta) and Terry (Bozzio) around like a lost puppy dog, and they were so cool to me. They didn't have to be, but they were! Those guys, along with Keltner, Porcaro, JR, and Gregg Bissonette were such a big deal to me, especially at that age. I even had their phone numbers and would call and bug them about stuff. My dad would drive me up to LA when I was 10-12 years old to see Vinnie play at the Baked Potato. He'd put me on the list and save a few seats right next to his drums. That stuff absolutely blew me away. Getting to watch him up close and actually pick his brain about stuff had a major impact on me.

SD: Do you still talk to Vinnie often? What do you guys talk about?

JF: I talk to Vinnie a few times a year and we keep in touch via email. It's funny because we're both working so much, of course we're never on the same gigs. We might cross paths if one of us played bass! (Laughs). He's one of those guys though; we can go a long time without seeing each other and when we hang out it's like no time has passed. He's forever my buddy and, arguably, my all-time favorite drummer.

SD: Do you still do a lot of sessions? What is your preferred workhorse snare?

JF: I have a lot of kits that sound great, of course, and all of them are in the rotation, but the one I've been going back to most often is the same kit I've been using with a lot in recent years with The Replacements and with Sublime with Rome. It's a Gun Metal Grey Collector's Series kit. It has a 22" kick, 12" and 13" toms, with 16" and 18" floor toms. That's my 'go-to' kit right now. With The Replacements, I just take the 13" tom away and have one up and two down. I use a variety of 14" snare drums, but, for the most part, I lean towards the Collector's metal snare drums. I really like the Brass, Bronze, and the Aluminum snares. They seem to cut the most in a Rock n' Roll-type setting. You've got to compete with all those damn guitar amps!

SD: Do you like tweaking your kit? SD: What is the perfect Josh Freese drum sound?

JF: I like tweaking my kit, but I don't tweak out too hard on it. Knowing me, I'll just make it sound worse than it sounded when I first sat down! I will say that I've had drum techs since I was sixteen or seventeen and, of course, I spent many years before that loading my own gear, setting up, tearing down…all of that. I do, however, like to sit down and change heads sometimes. It feels good. I feel connected to the drums when I do it.

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JF: I like tweaking my kit, but I don't tweak out too hard on it. Knowing me, I'll just make it sound worse than it sounded when I first sat down! I will say that I've had drum techs since I was sixteen or seventeen and, of course, I spent many years before that loading my own gear, setting up, tearing down…all of that. I do, however, like to sit down and change heads sometimes. It feels good. I feel connected to the drums when I do it.

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This wife and didn't want to be on the road. After reforming, they toured for a bit and were just getting started when Brad died. songs performed live, because most people singing and playing guitar, and they were some of their shows, when Rome started to a screeching halt. A few years ago, I saw I watched their career rise and then come scene, we ran in some of the same circles. pretty much. They used to play shows with guys since the beginning of their career, after leaving Nine Inch Nails, but you know stuff with Devo, The Vandals, and Sting, with Weezer and was doing some one-off sessions. I'd been trying to stay off the road but I was basically at home and doing stuff with Devo, The Vandals, and Sting, but I was basically at home and doing sessions. I'd been trying to stay off the road after leaving Nine Inch Nails, but you know how that goes. I've known the Sublime guys since the beginning of their career, pretty much. They used to play shows with The Vandals and because we were Long Beach residents and in the Punk Rock scene, we ran in some of the same circles. I watched their career rise and then come to a screeching halt. A few years ago, I saw some of their shows, when Rome started singing and playing guitar, and they were great. It was nice seeing so many people that loved their music, go to see them perform live, because most people didn't get the chance, originally. They were just getting started when Brad died. After reforming, they toured for a bit and then Bud Gaugh was having a child with his wife and didn't want to be on the road anymore. They caught me at a rare time when I didn't have any big commitments or immediate plans. I've always loved their songs and it was a slightly new style for me to play, so it sounded interesting. I've always loved Eric Wilson too. He's a great bass player, good dude, and a total character. Rome grew up learning to play guitar while listening to their records. He's an amazing talent, great writer, and he has an incredible voice.

SD: How has touring changed over the years?
JF: Touring can still be a lot of fun but, like anything, it can change as you get older and have done it for so many years. I don't go out as much as I used to. The party thing slows down once you have a family and start behaving yourself. In that respect, it has become a little too adult and boring for me at times, but oh well. Being away from my family is hard those days, but going out and playing gigs is definitely a necessity, now more than ever. You can't download or steal a live concert experience and with the recording end of things suffering, bands are really having to tour more often. The internet and technology have helped make touring easier on a lot of fronts: being able to communicate with everyone on tour and back at home, working on music, writing and recording on the road, etc. Passing the soundcheck. I'll usually talk to them a bit during rehearsals to make sure we both are on the same page, as far as the drums and the mix go. It's always a good sign when you have more than two people a night tell you that it sounded good out front. Not that the show was cool or the band kicked ass, but that the actual sound was great.

SD: Why Sublime? Why now?
JF: The Sublime with Rome thing happened at a perfect time. I'd just stopped working with Weezer and was doing some one-off stuff with Devo, The Vandals, and Sting, but I was basically at home and doing sessions. I'd been trying to stay off the road after leaving Nine Inch Nails, but you know how that goes. I've known the Sublime guys since the beginning of their career, pretty much. They used to play shows with The Vandals and because we were Long Beach residents and in the Punk Rock scene, we ran in some of the same circles. I watched their career rise and then come to a screeching halt. A few years ago, I saw some of their shows, when Rome started singing and playing guitar, and they were great. It was nice seeing so many people that loved their music, go to see them perform live, because most people didn't get the chance, originally. They were just getting started when Brad died. After reforming, they toured for a bit and then Bud Gaugh was having a child with his wife and didn't want to be on the road anymore. They caught me at a rare time when I didn't have any big commitments or immediate plans. I've always loved their songs and it was a slightly new style for me to play, so it sounded interesting. I've always loved Eric Wilson too. He's a great bass player, good dude, and a total character. Rome grew up learning to play guitar while listening to their records. He's an amazing talent, great writer, and he has an incredible voice.

SD: Have you seen any young drummers recently that have impressed you?
JF: There's a young guy that a lot of people don't know, but should. His name is Lajoy Bean and he's a bad-ass. He's from Utah, but lives in LA now. He has a great feel and amazing chops. He plays all over town and is one of the guys that are out there doing it. I met him through his brother; they were doing some recording together for some of my brother's stuff. He's really solid and has a great command of the instrument. Obviously, I'm sure there are a ton of amazing up-and-comers that I'm just not aware of.
always evolving and ever-changing, so I'm headed. I'd say, at this point, I'm pretty

Atom Willard: How long have you been with Beyoncé?

Venzella Joy Williams: I started playing with her in January of 2014, so just shy of two years.

VJW: Like you said, after that amount of time, I was developing both playing and practiced. She earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice with a minor in music, and practiced; all the while writing and producing her own music. Here's my conversation with this newcomer that just won't stop!

You think that you're busy, or maybe you've done enough practicing this week? Well, I'd like to introduce you to someone who will not only inspire you, but humbly shame you and your schedule. Meet Venzella Joy Williams. Joy plays for Beyoncé, but before she staked her claim as part of B's elaborate road show, she put in her time. She went to school and practiced. She worked and practiced. She earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice with a minor in music, and practiced; all the while writing and producing her own music. Here's my conversation with this newcomer that just won't stop!

Atom Willard: How long have you been practicing with Beyoncé?

VJW: Yeah, I don't understand that. I still have to be really cognizant and very aware of any last-minute changes to things we're doing differently, but I do feel comfortable in the gig.

AW: How do you have a practice routine these days?

VJW: I try to get in at least two hours a day. Now, I'm playing with so many different artists here in LA that I'm constantly learning new music. There's a lot of 'ear shedding' going on. I'm making notes on arrangements and listening to the songs, then I'll sit at the kit and work out patterns and things.

AW: How much do you practice each day?

VJW: We all use in-ears, so the loudest thing in my mix is the click. Next is the backing tracks, then the percussion and drum tracks. I like to have bass, keys, and the lead vocal in there somewhere, just sitting perfectly. I have a slate that counts us in, but the click is definitely the loudest.

AW: What is your favorite part of the show? Is there anything you really look forward to?

VJW: The On the Run tour had Tony Rosyster and I playing with Jay-Z and B, and we'd perform 'Holy Grail' together. It's a really dope song to begin with and the way B would sing the chorus was just magical. I guess that had to be my favorite part.

AW: Do you have any audition tips for when you play live?

VJW: Oh man, very true. I didn't realize the importance in that until like 2009. When I went into production myself, I would produce a song for a band and then I'd go see them live. I would listen for every little thing. I could really relate that to my playing, and really understood the importance, not only to the artist, but to the producer. So, when I'm playing a record live I want people to be able to recognize the song. I'm improvising, that might not translate. In a live setting it's best to play them exactly how they are on the recording, but try adding a little life to it. Stay true to the pattern, but add a little flair.

AW: What are you working on now?

VJW: Usually I'll start a record on keyboards. Then, once I've established my chords and the lead lines, I'll work on a bass line, or have my sister, Viee, add a bass line since she's a bad bass player! Then, I'll record or program the drums. That part comes easiest to me, so I just leave it for last.

AW: What are you working on now?

VJW: Yeah, I got a five-piece TKO drum kit when I was ten years old.

AW: What did you expect it or were you surprised?

VJW: Well, when I first started playing and practicing I was always playing along with CDs and MP3s. Then, with the band at church, I was already programming click tracks and adding synths and stuff. That was actually good preparation for the future gigs. For the worship service I would bring the Roland VS or have a laptop and have the praise singers singing along with the tracks that were in my ears, so by the time I got this gig with Beyoncé I was pretty comfortable with all of that.

AW: You know you are playing to a lot of tracks with Beyoncé. Was that an easy transition for you?

VJW: We all use in-ears, so the loudest thing in my mix is the click. Next is the backing tracks, then the percussion and drum tracks. I like to have bass, keys, and the lead vocal in there somewhere, just sitting perfectly. I have a slate that counts us in, but the click is definitely the loudest.

AW: What do you do in your live mix?

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AW: Do you have a formal drumming education?

VJW: I was in band at school, so that helped with rudiments and reading. In high school I had a teacher named Gabe Wilson and we’d get together on Saturdays and work through charts and different grooves. In college I studied in Jazz band, so it all worked out. I think the theory and reading really helped. At that time, I was playing in church with my band, Heaven Bound, so I was developing both playing by ear and learning to read.

AW: What about lessons? Did you have a formal drumming education?

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American Drummer Jonathan Tuitt Talks About Playing with Emeli Sandé, Church and School

Jonathan Tuitt has already done so many things right. He’s landed gigs with a ton of UK and U.S. touring artists, including Tiffany Bloom, Katy B, and Jessye. I met Jonathan when he was 18. He’s been Emeli Sandé’s go-to drummer for the past four years. Along with extensive touring, he finds himself trying to maintain a balance between home life, road life, and the rigors of being a travelling musician. I enjoyed the opportunity to talk shop with one of UK drumming’s rising stars.

**AT**: Twenty-five years old, Jonathan Tuitt has already done so many things right. He’s landed gigs with a ton of UK and U.S. touring artists, including Tiffany Bloom, Katy B, and Jessye. I met Jonathan when he was 18. He’s been Emeli Sandé’s go-to drummer for the past four years. Along with extensive touring, he finds himself trying to maintain a balance between home life, road life, and the rigors of being a travelling musician. I enjoyed the opportunity to talk shop with one of UK drumming’s rising stars.

**AW**: How did this gig come about?
**JT**: The Musical Director was a guy I knew. He had initially received the call, and then he reached out to me. It’s been weird, I’ve really never had to audition for a tour, an artist, or anything. It’s always just come about from people I know.

**AW**: Wow, that’s pretty lucky. Most players have to go through at least some auditioning and cut their teeth before they start getting calls.
**JT**: The first gig I got was from another drummer named Josh McKenzie. He had to leave this one gig, so he said, “Just come out to a rehearsal.” The next day he called me and said, “Okay, just go ahead and run the soundcheck for me.” Then he said, “Oh, I’m not going to make the show, just go ahead and run the show.” Right into the deep end! From then on, I was on the tour. Then, it’s kind of been like that, from solo-to-solo.

**AW**: What’s a good friend.
**JT**: I kind of see him like a mentor, really. I had told him once, “I’m looking for a gig,” and he said, “Okay Jon, I’ll look after you.” Even now, he still helps me keep stuff going.

**AW**: It’s great to have someone you admire that you can turn to for career help.
**JT**: Yeah, for sure. He’s been touring professionally since he was about fifteen and he’s about twenty-eight now, so he’s really doing well. He’s probably one of the most renowned UK drummers, especially from the Gospel scene. Because of his help, I’ve been on the road since I was eighteen. I’m pretty fortunate in that respect.

**AW**: I’m glad to hear you acknowledge that you appreciate the opportunities you’ve been given. A lot of guys just think, “Yeah, this is what I deserve.”
**JT**: I’ll see these guys playing in a cafe or Jazz bar, and their talent is crazy but they just can’t get on a gig, so it’s always felt like it’s been a privilege for me. I’m blessed. Even if I were to never tour again, the amount that I’ve experienced already makes me feel pretty lucky.

**AW**: So, what would you say is the correct ratio between talent or playing ability and social skills?
**JT**: People skills will always overshadow talent, because once you go on a tour and you’re in a bus and in hotels, it’s more about how it is to hang with someone. Plus, so much about this business is who you know. If people like you, they’re going to want to help you out. So, whenever I’m doing clinics, I’ll explain that it’s not just who you know, but the kind of person you are to be around.

**AW**: Have you spent much time in the States?
**JT**: We were there in 2013 and the first part of 2014 for about six months, on and off. She had a good little run in America, between New York, Chicago, and Miami, but we were sort of based out of LA.

**AW**: Had you toured in the States before that?
**JT**: No, Em was the first one to bring me stateside. I had been through Europe and to Australia with other artists, but she was the first one to bring me out there, so she broke through that barrier for me. All through 2012-14 we were in America almost once a month, sometimes just for one day. Once we flew to Washington, and we were only there for like eight hours to do the show in front of the Capitol Building.

**AW**: Speaking of being on the road, I know you recently got married. How hard is it finding the balance with her and being away from home so much?
**JT**: It’s come pretty naturally. My wife and I had met when I was touring, so she had become used to that idea a bit. It’s just one of those things where I’ve had to put in the work. I’ll surprise her while I’m away; do something to show I’m still thinking of her. Emeli is quite a family-oriented person and she’s really great about having the girlfriends out on the road, so she’ll come out now and then. Travelling is not an easy thing. Not every lady really understands this, and it’s a hard thing to expect them to understand.

**AW**: What’s your first live drumming experience?
**JT**: My first live drumming experience was playing for a Gospel choir by the name of Kainé Gospel Choir in Norway. I was fifteen. Before that, I was just playing in church and school.

**AW**: How do you decide what to play, or not to play, for the song?
**JT**: I start out around an older crowd of drummers and they always said, “Jon, the fancy stuff is good, the flashy chops are good, but you’ve got to play the song.” The song pays the bills. You’re not there for Jonathan, you’re there for the song.” It was a big change for me, because sometimes you want to play on a song, but you’ve got to have that discipline, and that was the hardest thing. People want to hear the record, and I think a lot of younger drummers forget that, or don’t understand it. It’s about backing up the artist. When I get off the road and I’m back in church, that’s my time to play my heart out, and that’s what keeps me going.

**AW**: I even try to go back and listen to the records. Whether I’ve recorded them or not, I make sure that the song hasn’t evolved too much from the original version because that’s the version the audience has fallen in love with.
**JT**: Exactly. You’ll see people in the audience air drumming, and they’re playing what they’ve heard on the record. It’s what they expect to hear. If you play something different it might sound good to the few musicians in the crowd, but for all of the other people it’s just too far out for them. You’ve got to find a balance; put your own sound on it, but not too much.

**AW**: What’s one of your favorite parts of the show? Is there a favorite song to play?
**JT**: There are two songs, actually. One song is called “Wonder” and it’s got this kind of tribal sound and feel. The intro has this tribal Afro beats and I’ve got a bit of a solo at the beginning of that one. We’ve even got some live percussion, and we both literally get to play out. Then there’s another called “My Kind of Love.” That one is really drum-heavy. It’s got some Rock fills with emphasized phrases and that sort of thing.

**AW**: That one seems pretty cinematic.
**JT**: It’s one of those songs that changes the whole set. It really can set us on the track to be full-steam until the end of the show, and Emeli loves it too.

**AW**: Do you have a rigid practice schedule when you’re off the road?
**JT**: I don’t have a practice regimen, really. Normally, I’ll just work on some rudiments or patterns on a pad when I have free time.

**AW**: Do you have any drumming goals that you still want to accomplish?
**JT**: I want to be able to play on more records, and play on my own records with my own music. I’d also like to go into Africa to play some shows. When I hear clips of certain young players there, guys that don’t have big drum kits, some of their rhythms are just out of this world. That’s something I definitely want to go and experience. I want to start exploring more music from Senegal and Cameroon.

**AW**: So, you write your own music as well?
**JT**: What other instruments do you play?
**JT**: I play bass and a bit of keyboard, but I’ve been trying to get more involved as a writer. I’ve been inspired by some of the musicians around me to create music that I want to hear; that I love. I’m not one of those guys who wants to be famous or be the front person, but I want to do my thing.

**AW**: Anything you want to say to young players coming up?
**JT**: Yeah, find that balance and always be true to the music. Something I wish I did when I was younger is to learn to read music. I find that a lot of the Gospel cats come from a place where they are exposed to a lot of high-quality music early on, but that they lose some of the fundamentals like rudiments and reading. As you get a bit older, you start to realize these things are you can use. Also, listen to all kinds of music. There’s no point in just being the best R&B drummer, or Gospel drummer; it just puts you into a category. Whereas, being open to other types of playing styles can open horizons.

You never know when your last gig is going to be, so just enjoy it.
Ask anyone who has been in a band for more than twenty years and they will inevitably have a suitcase full of stories about their music biz ups, downs, and everything in between. They’ll probably talk about their waning interest in their craft, the songs they’ve played countless times, and the rigors of the road. This is not the case with Incubus mainstay, Jose Pasillas. He and his long-time bandmates have played high school parties, sold millions of records, and continue to push forward as a family unit. We recently waxed poetic about art, motorbikes, music, and cycling. Then we got heavy — we gibbed about the challenges and how those experiences can shape our perceptions and, ultimately, our creative sensibilities.

JOSE PASILLAS
Don’t SWEAT THE Technique
BY ATOM WILLARD

Atom Willard: So, you started playing drums in high school?

Jose Pasillas: Yeah, I actually got my first drum kit when I was fifteen and just about to go into the 10th grade. I had been playing percussion at school since the 8th grade but I had always wanted to play the drums. I always felt in tune with the drums and when I’d listen to songs I could decipher the snare and kick parts before I ever sat at a drum set. I could kind of play because I had been air drumming a lot.

AW: ‘Cmon, no way! That’s crazy!’

JP: Yeah, so the first time I was at a drum kit I could play regular beats and I remember playing “Funky Cold Medina” by Tom Luis. That was the hot song back in the day and I remember doing that fill (beat-boxes the fill) right off the bat and then just sitting there like, “That was awesome!” (Laughs).

AW: You were like, “I can play drums!”

JP: Totally! And it was funny because I hadn’t bought my first cassettes until about the 6th grade; and they were a Ramones record and a Led Zeppelin record.

AW: You’re just saying that because it looks cool?

JP: No, they were! I had no idea how cool it was at the time, but my friend’s older sister listened to Led Zeppelin and it was awesome! I was so into it; she was a rebel bad-ass. I remember sitting in front of a mirror and pretending that I was playing the drums along with that solo.

AW: Wow, what a trip. So you were drawn to the idea of drumming early on.

JP: Yeah, even before I realized it myself, really. Once, I found an old home movie and “Purple Rain” was playing in the background, and I was air drumming away. I was eight or nine years old and it really looks like I know what I’m doing! By the 7th grade I was saying, “I kind of want to play the drums” but I didn’t want to be in the school band because I thought it was for nerds. In the 8th grade, I finally joined the school band until I could get my own drums. I played the toms, the bass drum, and vibraphone. Then I saw the older kids in snare ensemble; they’d go out and compete. They actually pulled me out of the band to replace their cymbal player. So I got to travel and go to those competitions, and ever since then I have loved marching, all the snares playing together and all the tricks. I really regret not going on and learning more of that stuff.

AW: No marching band in high school?

JP: No, that was right around the time that I was starting to get into skateboarding really heavily, and that’s all I would do. I would play on my friend’s drum kit, dream about the drums, and just skateboard.
all the time. I didn’t play soccer, I didn’t take drum lessons like my parents wanted me to, I just wanted to skate and play my friend’s drum kit.

AW: It seems like you connected the dots pretty well. What else helped motivate you to put sticks in your hands?

JP: Well, yeah! I was like, “That was one of the coolest things that has ever happened to me!”

AW: So crazy.

JP: But it gets better! A few days later, he knocks on my door again and brings me an old drum throne. He said, “You shouldn’t be sitting on that chair.” He gave me this totally rad DW drum throne and it was my first cherished possession. Around this time we had already been playing parties. I had that throne for at least a few years; it was easily the best part of my drum kit. So, we were playing a show in San Diego and we were the first of twenty bands, or whatever. Whoever was loading our gear out had put it on top of this big speaker. When we got home I was like, “Where’s my throne??” And our bass player said, “I know you weren’t going to find it, they put it up on a speaker. Why didn’t you grab it?” I was devastated. Years later, Steven was pretty messed up and his mom had come to take care of him. His mom came over and said, “I know Steven gave you a drum stool and I’m going to need that back.” I was like, “I’d love to give it to you, but it’s gone; it got lost at a show.” She said, “That’s not okay. Seriously, I’m going to need that back.”

Then she just left.

AW: Too funny. Well, I guess there couldn’t have been more signs that said you should be a drummer.

JP: When Mike gave me that old kit, I played it constantly. I mean, I was respectful to my parents and never played too early or late. And they were great; they never once told me to stop the racket.

AW: Did they ask if you wanted to take lessons?


JP: Yeah, we were fifteen years old and writing Incubus songs. Now we’re pushing forty and we’re still doing the same thing.

AW: What are your favorite aspects of what we do as drummers? Is it recording the live shows, or a bit of everything?

JP: My favorite part is definitely playing shows, traveling to crazy places, and playing the drums for people. Writing can be difficult. Sometimes the chemistry is there and it can be really fun, but it can also become arduous at times.

AW: When it works, it’s great, but if it’s not working, then it’s a drag.

JP: Exactly. But even if it’s 50% of the time, it’s hard, and pretty strenuous. And my part seems to get the least attention these days. We’ll be hanging out for a few hours and if it’s good we’ll just track it before I’m even that comfortable with playing it. That’s only been the case on the last couple records. Before that, we would write 12-13 songs and just play them over and over until we knew them up and down, left and right, then we could go in and track them really quick, like in a couple of weeks. That was the way to get everyone’s best performance. This new way has pushed me to be creative quickly. I’ve become pretty good at it, but it’s not my favorite method. As soon as we go on the road and start playing the songs more, they take on a life of their own. So, I’ve always viewed the recording process and the live shows to be two completely different things. When we’re playing live, I can change my parts to what I feel like they should have been on the recordings.

AW: We both share a love of motorcycles and things with two wheels. Do you see any parallels between riding motorcycles and playing the drums?

JP: I know, I think they are both art forms and an extension of myself. I don’t know if I could say that about a more traditional 9-5 job. The freedom of playing the drums and the freedom of riding a motorcycle or bicycle in the canyons… there are definitely ties to both. I’m an adrenaline junky, too. So playing shows and dragging your knee around the corners at the track are both huge sources of adrenaline. Climbing 4000 feet on your bicycle is another, more suffering way to achieve it, but it’s all the same.

AW: You’ve played so many shows in front of thousands of people, where does the adrenaline come in at this point? Isn’t it all too familiar? Are you going for fills, or coming up with stuff at the last second?

AW: Drums were your life back then. Do you still have some of those feelings today?

JP: I do. I mean, it’s a blessing and a curse; all I do is think about drums. I don’t play any other instruments, which is sad. After all this time I can only play a handful of chords on a guitar and that’s it. But I can’t help it, no matter what kind of music I’m listening to, all I can do is focus on the drums. It’s still exciting for me, I still get that child-like feeling; it’s just never gone away. Even playing shows, the adrenaline and excitement, it’s like nothing else.

AW: I did the exact same thing, but just wasn’t able to stay in the same band my entire life! (Laughs).

JP: I know, dude. It’s a rare occurrence for sure. Twenty-five years, you know.

AW: Which sounds like a really long time but, really, you were just a kid when you started.

JP: Years later, Steven was pretty messed up and he said, “Hey man, can I play your drums?” And before I could answer, he was just in the house. He walks into my house, then in this silk robe that was way too back and says, “Um, Steven’s at the front door!” So, one day he comes over to my house and thanks man.

We had played a couple of parties and written Incubus songs. Now we’re pushing forty and we’re still doing the same thing. After all this time I can only play a handful of chords on a guitar and that’s it. But I can’t help it, no matter what kind of music I’m listening to, all I can do is focus on the drums. It’s still exciting for me, I still get that child-like feeling; it’s just never gone away. Even playing shows, the adrenaline and excitement, it’s like nothing else.

AW: What’s it like to connect the dots pretty well? What else helped motivate you to put sticks in your hands?

JP: I was in the 6th grade when he moved in. He would play drums in the middle of the night and our neighborhood was just lived, but I remember sitting up thinking it was f**king awesome! Everyone was calling the cops, but I was just listening and unconsciously dissecting it.

AW: Hang on! Were you a Guns N’ Roses fan or were you introduced to them when he moved in next door?

JP: Sort of. Appetite for Destruction had just come out. He had been living there for about a year, then that record came out and he was just gone. All of the girls at my school loved G N’ R and I was into them too. It was totally new to me, but it was awesome that the drummer lived next door! Then, when he got kicked out, he was home a lot. I had just inherited my guitar player’s stepdad’s old CB700 drum kit and I played it every day. He must have heard me playing at some point. I would end up next door and ask him if I could see his drum kit. He had this huge double-kick White Oyster DW set and I would just sit down behind it. I wouldn’t even play it; I would just stare at it for about five minutes and I’d be like, “Okay cool, thanks man.”

AW: He’s just like, “Whatever, kid.”

JP: Totally. He always said, “Yeah man, go ahead.” So, one day he comes over to my house super early on a weekend morning while we were eating breakfast. There’s this knock on the door and my mom comes back and says, “Uh, Steven’s at the front door.” I’m like, “Really?” He’s standing there in this silk robe that was way too short, his hair is all teased-out and f**ked up, and he said, “Hey man, can I play your drums?” And before I could answer, he was just in the house. He walks into my house, goes right by my parents, doesn’t say, “Hi” or anything, heads right to my room and sits down at my old busted-up kit that had no stool, it just had a kitchen chair. He looks up at me and my parents and says, “Mr. Brownstone” and just starts smashing the drums, not even making contact with the heads. Half of the time, he was just thrashing for like 20-to-30 seconds, and then he just stood up and left. He didn’t even say, “Goodbye” or anything.

AW: I would have completely lost it.

JP: Well, yeah! I was like, “That was one of the coolest things that has ever happened to me!”

AW: No kidding.

JP: But it gets better! A few days later, he knocks on my door again and brings me old drum throne. He said, “You shouldn’t be sitting on that chair.” He gave me this totally rad DW drum throne and it was my first cherished possession. Around this time we had already been playing parties. I had that throne for at least a few years; it was easily the best part of my drum kit. So, we were playing a show in San Diego and we were the first of twenty bands, or whatever. Whoever was loading our gear out had put it on top of this big speaker. When we got home I was like, “Where’s my throne???” And our bass player said, “I know you weren’t going to find it, they put it up on a speaker. Why didn’t you grab it?” I was devastated. Years later, Steven was pretty messed up and his mom had come to take care of him. His mom came over and said, “I know Steven gave you a drum stool and I’m going to need that back.” I was like, “I’d love to give it to you, but it’s gone; it got lost at a show.” She said, “That’s not okay. Seriously, I’m going to need that back.”

Then she just left.

AW: Too funny. Well, I guess there couldn’t have been more signs that said you should be a drummer.

JP: When Mike gave me that old kit, I played it constantly. I mean, I was respectful to my parents and never played too early or late. And they were great; they never once told me to stop the racket.

AW: Did they ask if you wanted to take lessons?


then, we had just been playing Metallica and Megadeth covers. I was never really into that stuff, I liked Punk and Alternative. We had played a couple of parties and then, a few months later, Brandon joined. After that, we started writing original music and playing real shows. We didn’t know what we were doing; we just thought it was fun.

AW: I did the exact same thing, but just wasn’t able to stay in the same band my entire life! (Laughs).

JP: I know, dude. It’s a rare occurrence for sure. Twenty-five years, you know.

AW: Which sounds like a really long time but, really, you were just a kid when you started.

JP: We were going into 10th grade and Mike and our bass player and I had been playing for a few months. We were friends with Brandon. I had known him since we were kids, and he was like, “Hey, do you mind if I come over to your practice and try to sing?” We agreed to it because up until
shows I'm really thinking about the parts easier. During the first few months of tour is the same way; the second half is "Okay, this is way more comfortable." A point is, and after twenty-five laps I'm like, riding on a new track. For a while, I'm just

JP: It really depends on where I'm at, like riding where you are super focused? wandering during a show, or is it more immersed in it. Do you find your mind being in the moment, completely distractions whatsoever. It's all about get totally lost out there. I prefer no such a high level of concentration; I

AW: For me, being at the track requires I always feel like I can control that stuff right? One time I saw him actually drop a stick and I was so stoked! (laughs). I didn't think he was human before that. In a weird way, it made me feel a little better. I'm more at ease now than I've ever been. I don't get messed up before a show to calm the nerves. That's the hardest thing, having all this nervous energy right before a show. It can either make you play really well, or it can mess everything up. Over the past two years I've been really trying to challenge myself to make it work for me in a positive way: I'm taking it on as more of a challenge. Then, if I do make a mistake, I try not to let it mess up the rest of my show. It also depends on where we are in a tour. If we've been playing for a year, I always feel like I can control that stuff more and enjoy it.

AW: For me, being at the track requires such a high level of concentration; I get totally lost out there. I prefer no distractions whatsoever. It's all about being in the moment, completely immersed in it. Do you find your mind wandering during a show, or is it more like riding where you are super focused?

JP: It really depends on where I'm at, like riding on a new track. For a while, I'm just learning when to brake, when the turn-in point is, and after twenty-five laps I'm like, "Okay, this way more comfortable." A tour is the same way; the second half is easier. During the first few months of shows I'm really thinking about the parts and what I'm playing. When I start really thinking about what I'm doing, that's when I'm up. I need to get past that hurdle of learning the new set, which can be 30-40 songs in the rehearsals, before it becomes second-nature and I can relax.

AW: Do you guys tend to keep the same set for an entire tour, or do you mix it up?

JP: We try to mix it up. We have about a twenty-two song skeleton that we follow, but there are usually five or six spots that we rotate. That's mostly controlled by Brandon, depending on how his voice is feeling. He has to pace himself a certain way and the direction that the set flows has a lot to do with that. We have a lot of songs that people are expecting to hear, so writing a set is actually one of the most difficult things for us. We need to play specific things, but there are so many songs to choose from that it ends up taking us a few weeks to figure out what is and isn't working. There can be things that we all think are awesome but the crowd doesn't react to them, so we'll change them up.

AW: Do you get any weird vibes from the other band members for riding motorcycles or going to the track?

JP: No, not really; a few of us commute on bikes. Ben (Kenney) and (DJ) Kil have both been riding for a long time. It's always in the back of our minds, for sure. I mean it is a precarious mode of transportation, especially when we're writing a record. I've crashed my bike on freeways, canyons, and on the track and that has made me a better rider. But when there's a tour coming up and there's a lot of money and people involved, I'll be a bit more conscious of that and I'll be a little more cautious. But I love riding, it's what I do. If I mellow out on the motorcycle, I'll still go ride my road bike on Mulholland Highway five days a week. 

AW: What is equally as sketchy?

JP: It might even be worse because the cars are closer and I'm basically wearing no protection. So I have to draw that line about what's good for me in my life. I get hit, I get bit; I'll deal with it. But the love that I have for cycling and the peace I get from it means I'm going to keep doing it.

AW: Well, it's an escape right? It's a way to get out of your head, or get deeper into your head... however you want to look at it.

JP: A lot of my 'therapy' happens while cycling. I spend hours thinking about stuff. There's nothing I've found that's better for my mood and happiness. When I come back from a ride, I'm just good. I'm also constantly thinking about either art pieces, drum parts, or other life issues, but especially on the creative side. I think that cycling and riding motorcycles falls under the same creative umbrella.

AW: Have you always been into art and painting?

JP: I've been drawing since I was a little kid; it's something I've always loved. Painting, and working on bigger pieces has been a more recent endeavor, like within the last 8-10 years. If I wasn't in music, I would be in art somewhere, like a graphic artist or designer. Kind of like with skateboarding, I was getting really good and I had it in my mind that I was going to become a pro. That's another creative art form, but as I started playing the drums more, the skateboarding became less important.

AW: How important is it to have another creative outlet besides drumming? Do you think it helps your music 'brain' to have different avenues?

JP: It probably does in a subconscious kind of way. I mean, whenever I'm working on something creative there's music on in the background. Actually, there's always music on. That's how I grew up, really. There was always music on at home growing up; it just made life better. If I had to mow the lawn, I hated it, but if I had a Walkman, it was cool.

AW: Do you have any defined goals with your drumming?

JP: For sure, I always want to become a better drummer. That's always what every musician wants, right?

AW: Well yeah, but everyone may have a different idea of what 'better' means. How would you define it?

JP: I would mean being able to sit down at the drum kit and just play what I'm thinking. After we've had a break, I'll sit at the drums and have all these ideas and ideas in my head but I just can't translate them to the kit. After I get back into playing more regularly, I feel like I can try
stuff and it just works out. If it could be more immediate, that would be a goal.

**AW: How about with art?**

**JP:** For years I've been asked to share and sell my art, and there was a part of me that really wants to do that. It's just a matter of putting all the pieces together at once to do it. I've also thought about designing a line of T-shirts. I've delved into making canvases with my photography and want to evolve that into incorporating my photos with painting on canvas. I know those are things I'll do in the near future, but I thought really early on that it would be cool if I could sit down at any drum kit and make it sound rad. We've done our last few records with Brendan O'Brien and he always has these drum kits that sound really good. So, I said, "If you can make it sound great, I'll play it." One time I tried to adjust one of those kits to be more like mine, and I couldn't get comfortable so I just decided to not even try. I just sit down and play how the tech sets them up. In the studio I'm playing a DW Classics kit with a big 22" kick and full-size toms. There's no way I'm going to sit a little higher. I started messing with tilting it forward, like Jazz guys, and then I actually began cutting my snare stands lower.

**AW:** The weirdest thing is that you can sit down at a traditional set-up and play fine!

**JP:** I would always be annoyed with someone who was a 'shredder' on drums, guitar, bass, or whatever. They're like, "Oh, it's not my kit so I can't play it." Drum sets are weird because there are so many pieces, but I thought really early on that it would be cool if I could sit down at any drum kit and make it sound rad. We've done our last few records with Brendan O'Brien and he always has these drum kits that sound really good. So, I said, "If you can make it sound great, I'll play it." One time I tried to adjust one of those kits to be more like mine, and I couldn't get comfortable so I just decided to not even try. I just sit down and play how the tech sets them up. In the studio I'm playing a DW Classics kit with a big 22" kick and full-size toms. There's no way I'm going to sit a little higher. I started messing with tilting it forward, like Jazz guys, and then I actually began cutting my snare stands lower.

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Years ago, I met Harvey Mason for the first time while doing a clinic in St. Louis. He demonstrated some techniques that he often used in the many studio sessions that he did on a day-to-day basis. I was completely mesmerized by what I saw and heard. Harvey had a drum machine programmed to play a 16 bar loop, in which the first 8 bars played a percussion loop and the second 8 bars were just space. Harvey played his slick and tasty grooves and fills throughout the loop and nailed the downbeat consistently, over and over. I literally freaked out. I wanted to learn how to possess such a great feel and be able to master time like I saw him demonstrate.

I moved to Los Angeles after I had a few over-the-phone lessons with Harvey. I was told that in order to be able to play like what I saw, I needed help. I was introduced to the great Joe Porcaro and I started on my journey in the world of timekeeping.

One of the first things I did was to play exercises of 1 measure in and 1 measure out. Then I increased it to 2 measures, then 4, then 8. Joe gave me an exercise that involved counting and using the syllable LA for the quarter note. I had to give the note the full duration, no matter what I played. After working with these drills, I wrote my first book, Time Test. I published it myself but I didn't properly copyright it so there were numerous copycat books and materials that came out because I had taught students worldwide and the information spread like wildfire. In 2004, I finally landed a deal and It's About Time was born. These are excerpts from it. The book contains hundreds of drills to help you learn how to control your timekeeping issues. If you'd like the audio version you can purchase my book at Alfredpublishing.com, iTunes, or your local music shop. Have fun!

You will need a drum machine, metronome, or a computer in order to get the most out of these drills, in order to change tempos, etc. The drills that are shown in the following examples are tested and proven to help you understand and improve the slightest time flaws that you may have.

**Verbal counting:**
Count each quarter note by giving it a syllable of your choice. Be sure to give the note the proper duration. It is very important not to cut the note off. This will help you feel the complete whole note space at different tempos.

**Working with the metronome:**
Play a simple drum pattern while using the metronome as one of the given subdivisions. Be sure to use the verbal counting method. Pay close attention to the different placements of the metronome.
For more information on Fred Dinkins, visit: www.freddinkins.com.

Fred Dinkins has been playing professionally for over thirty years and is one of the top drum instructors at P.I.T./Musician’s Institute in Hollywood, California. His previous projects include recording with Al Green, Peaches & Herb, Paul Jackson, Jr., Heat Wave, Denise Williams, and countless others. In addition to being a sought-after instructor, session artist, and touring musician, Fred is also the author of the book, It’s About Time.

Exercise 2.1
Try using this exercise for double-time drills. The click will become beats 1 and 3.

Exercise 2.2
This example can be used for playing Jazz and Latin styles.

Exercise 2.3
This example can also be used for playing Jazz and Latin styles.

Exercise 2.4
The click is on the E’s and the Duh’s of the beat. If you’re with the click, you’ve turned the beat around.

Exercise 2.5
The middle triplet is the most difficult to feel. On the play along, you’ll sometimes hear the downbeat.

Exercise 2.6
The last beat of the triplet is much easier to feel. Try playing different shuffle feels. You’ll have fun with this one.

Exercise 5.1
Notice how the snare drum is right down the middle; it’s lined up perfectly with the click. After many years of trials, I’ve learned that your body position can play a significant part in determining where the tone is felt. For example, try sitting up straight, this will help you play the middle of the beat.

Exercise 5.2
Now, notice how the snare drum in this example is slightly behind the click. This is called playing ‘behind the beat’. Playing behind the beat gives the listener a feeling of calmness or a feeling of being cool. I often hear some strange suggestions given to drummers about how to play this way. Things like playing flams between the hi-hat and snare drum. Just imagine what that would sound like, especially while recording with $1000 microphones that magnify your slightest move. Again, let’s use the body-positioning tool. Try leaning back slightly while hitting the snare. This may take some getting used to, but it really works.

Exercise 5.3
Notice how the snare drum in this shot, it comes slightly before the click. This is called playing ‘on top of the beat’. Again, let’s try the body-positioning tool. Try leaning forward slightly. It will help you play on top of the beat. This will take some time to get used to, but it works.

Exercise 5.4
The middle triplet is the most difficult to feel. On the play along, you’ll sometimes hear the downbeat.

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Exercise 5.50
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EDGE: If you could work with any bass player, who would it be?  
Thom Pridgen: I would love to work with Pino Palladino or Anthony Jackson. They’re gods.

EDGE: What is the best facet of being a clinician?  
TP: My favorite aspect of doing clinics is being able to talk to people one-on-one. Sometimes the questions they ask will spark things in me that make me play better and/or make me a better musician.

EDGE: Do you still get nervous before taking the stage?  
TP: I don’t get nervous unless I don’t know the music well. Sometimes I get thrown into situations and I won’t get a good chance to learn the music correctly beforehand.

EDGE: What type of shell is your workhorse snare made of: wood, metal, acrylic?  
TP: I usually play the DW metal drums. I love the Stainless Steel 6.5x14” snare. It’s definitely the most multi-purpose metal drum I have.

EDGE: Have you ever thought of an invention or upgrade for the drum kit?  
TP: All the time! I think of so many different drum gadgets, ideas, and ways to improve a kit… I’ll tell people my ideas and sometimes they fall on deaf ears, but sometimes they don’t.

EDGE: How far can you throw a bass drum?  
TP: I haven’t thrown a drum in a while, but I’m sure I could shoot a free throw with a bass drum.

EDGE: What is the most difficult song that you’ve played live?  
TP: Difficult? I don’t know. I don’t see difficulties, I see challenges and I can’t really name many that pop up in my mind.

EDGE: Is playing the drums your primary form of exercise?  
TP: Yes. I play drums a lot. I also work out sometimes, just to help stay in shape.

EDGE: Which drummers have inspired you recently?  
TP: Lately, I’ve been watching Shariq Tucker, Mike Mitchell, and Maison Guidry. I think they’ll be the next big things in drumming. They have a bunch of ideas and great techniques, but they also have a lot of love for tradition and you can really hear that in their playing.

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EDGE: How important is muscle memory to your style of playing?  
TP: I think it’s super important because I always have to learn so much music. It’s difficult having so many songs from different artists in your head and using muscle memory definitely helps.

EDGE: Do you always use the same size drumsticks, or do they vary for different playing situations?  
TP: I have a signature model with Promark that is my primary stick, but I will play smaller sticks in small clubs in order to control the dynamics a little bit more.

EDGE: Do you use much technology to help with your drumming? Websites, apps, GoPro cameras…?  
TP: I don’t feel like I’m using technology to improve my drumming, but I do use it to help showcase what I’m doing. Everyone is so caught up in filming and technology these days!

EDGE: What city do you look forward to visiting when you’re on tour?  
TP: Well, we’re currently playing eight shows all over Russia and one show in Baku. I’m very curious about those areas.

EDGE: How did the recording of the Sopko album differ from tracking previous records that you’ve played on?  
TP: When we recorded that album, we just jammed. We didn’t rehearse or plan anything! That’s what made it such a different experience.

EDGE: Do you have a favorite Punk drummer?  
TP: Brooks Wackerman and Earl Hudson.

EDGE: Was winning a Grammy a big surprise for you or was it one of your career goals?  
TP: It was never a personal goal of mine and I was surprised when we (The Mars Volta) were nominated. But, when I saw our nomination I just knew that we’d win it.

EDGE: How often do you need to change your drum heads?  
TP: When I’m on tour I’ll change snare heads after every show because breaking heads in the middle of a show can be horrible on stage. My tom and kick heads get changed every other week. But when I’m at home I’ll keep the heads on forever.

EDGE: Do you prefer the spring tension on your pedals to be tight or loose?  
TP: I actually play my pedals straight out of the box. I don’t really adjust them much.

EDGE: If you played guitar in a band, what type of music would you play?  
TP: Rock and Blues.

EDGE: What is the best facet of being a clinician?  
TP: My favorite aspect of doing clinics is being able to talk to people one-on-one. Sometimes the questions they ask will spark things in me that make me play better and/or make me a better musician.

EDGE: Do you still get nervous before taking the stage?  
TP: I don’t get nervous unless I don’t know the music well. Sometimes I get thrown into situations and I won’t get a good chance to learn the music correctly beforehand.

EDGE: What type of shell is your workhorse snare made of: wood, metal, acrylic?  
TP: I usually play the DW metal drums. I love the Stainless Steel 6.5x14” snare. It’s definitely the most multi-purpose metal drum I have.

EDGE: Have you ever thought of an invention or upgrade for the drum kit?  
TP: All the time! I think of so many different drum gadgets, ideas, and ways to improve a kit… I’ll tell people my ideas and sometimes they fall on deaf ears, but sometimes they don’t.

EDGE: How far can you throw a bass drum?  
TP: I haven’t thrown a drum in a while, but I’m sure I could shoot a free throw with a bass drum.

EDGE: What is the most difficult song that you’ve played live?  
TP: Difficult? I don’t know. I don’t see difficulties, I see challenges and I can’t really name many that pop up in my mind.

EDGE: Is playing the drums your primary form of exercise?  
TP: Yes. I play drums a lot. I also work out sometimes, just to help stay in shape.

EDGE: Which drummers have inspired you recently?  
TP: Lately, I’ve been watching Shariq Tucker, Mike Mitchell, and Maison Guidry. I think they’ll be the next big things in drumming. They have a bunch of ideas and great techniques, but they also have a lot of love for tradition and you can really hear that in their playing.

EDGE: How important is muscle memory to your style of playing?  
TP: I think it’s super important because I always have to learn so much music. It’s difficult having so many songs from different artists in your head and using muscle memory definitely helps.

EDGE: Do you always use the same size drumsticks, or do they vary for different playing situations?  
TP: I have a signature model with Promark that is my primary stick, but I will play smaller sticks in small clubs in order to control the dynamics a little bit more.

EDGE: Do you use much technology to help with your drumming? Websites, apps, GoPro cameras…?  
TP: I don’t feel like I’m using technology to improve my drumming, but I do use it to help showcase what I’m doing. Everyone is so caught up in filming and technology these days!

EDGE: What city do you look forward to visiting when you’re on tour?  
TP: Well, we’re currently playing eight shows all over Russia and one show in Baku. I’m very curious about those areas.

EDGE: How did the recording of the Sopko album differ from tracking previous records that you’ve played on?  
TP: When we recorded that album, we just jammed. We didn’t rehearse or plan anything! That’s what made it such a different experience.

EDGE: Do you have a favorite Punk drummer?  
TP: Brooks Wackerman and Earl Hudson.

EDGE: Was winning a Grammy a big surprise for you or was it one of your career goals?  
TP: It was never a personal goal of mine and I was surprised when we (The Mars Volta) were nominated. But, when I saw our nomination I just knew that we’d win it.

EDGE: How often do you need to change your drum heads?  
TP: When I’m on tour I’ll change snare heads after every show because breaking heads in the middle of a show can be horrible on stage. My tom and kick heads get changed every other week. But when I’m at home I’ll keep the heads on forever.

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EDGE: If you played guitar in a band, what type of music would you play?  
TP: Rock and Blues.

EDGE: What sort of impact did attending Berklee have on your life as a musician?  
TP: I met people there that I’ll never be able to replace… people that I call my brothers and sisters, even beyond music. I have other reasons that Berklee was good for me, but networking and meeting the important people that I met there go beyond anything else.
The De Los Reyes family has some seriously deep musical roots dating back several generations. Working percussionists to the core, these two brothers share a history in music, but have created their own stories as to how they arrived. Younger brother, Daniel de los Reyes, resides in Atlanta while Walfredo Reyes, Jr. lives in LA. We were able to meet up, in a short window between their various projects, and talk about family, career, and music.

**Daniel de los Reyes**: Just so you know, my brother and I are third generation musicians from the De Los Reyes Family.

**Walfredo Reyes, Jr.**: Ok. Were they all percussionists?

**Daniel de los Reyes**: Just so you know, as a musician, you have footprints. By the way, he’s still got plenty of energy and still looking plenty of and! But, you know, my grandad was a great balladier, a crooner. Miguelito was the up-tempo guy with the huge voice and he was also the drummer. In those days, the drum set wasn’t really incorporated into the orchestras or bands as it is today; it was beginning to evolve into that. My dad was obviously one of the people that pioneered that whole playing style, and he probably looked up to Miguelito.

**Walfredo Reyes, Jr.**: At this time, quite a few musicians were coming from Cuba and influencing American music. Do you think, because your family was playing music in Havana, this is what brought those musical opportunities and influences to your dad?

**Daniel de los Reyes**: You’re talking about Mantanzas in the 1950s, and even Havana was very rural. Not everyone was able to do this. We were always going where there was music opportunities and influences to your dad? BR: Your dad eventually moved to the US. This was in the 1960s?

**Daniel de los Reyes**: Yes, I was born in 1962, so that would’ve been 1961. My dad moved to New York and then he was offered a show in San Juan, Puerto Rico at the Tropicana showroom. He went there with the piano player that used to be in Casino de la Playa. He got the showroom gig over there and asked my dad to be the drummer in the orchestra band. So we moved to Puerto Rico.

**Walfredo Reyes, Jr.**: I was born and immediately, within months, we went straight to live in San Juan.

**Daniel de los Reyes**: So, they were also being, not commercialized, but being able to play that kind of music for the masses. They got opportunities to travel to New York, and it just kept growing from there. BR: In Las Vegas, Danny would’ve been about ten and Wally around sixteen. At this point, how far along were each of you in your playing? Had you started yet?

**Daniel de los Reyes**: I don’t know the exact reason my father opted to go in the direction of the drums, but I could take a stab at it. When they used to travel a lot, back and-forth to New York from Havana, my dad loved the movies in those days. He probably saw Gene Krupa. Gene was bigger than life and, you know, such an incredible character to watch. I think he probably had a big impact on my dad, on the drums. Maybe Miguelito Valdelló, as well. Miguelito was the lead singer in my grandfather’s orchestra. My grandfather was one of the leaders and creators of the orchestra called Casino de la Playa. Miguelito was a good-looking guy, being the singer, and he also played the drums. He probably had a big impact.

**Walfredo Reyes, Jr.**: Yeah, when my dad lived in New York City, I think he was ten years old, or something like that. Of course, there was not only Latin music, there was jazz, Big Band, and many other styles of music. He used to talk a lot about Gene Krupa and his Big Band. So, he started studying with Henry Adler in New York City. By the time he was eighteen, he went back to Cuba and he was a drum set player. That’s when he mixed all the styles. You know, in Cuba and in Puerto Rico, it wasn’t just Latin music that was performed. You have to remember, all the American artists went over there to do shows in the hotel showrooms. So, my dad had to play all of the American styles like Jazz, Fostnot, Swing, etc. Then, when they had the Latin section, that’s when he started raising the drum set with the Latin style. Instead of playing exclusively different instruments, he brought them over to the drum set.

**Daniel de los Reyes**: And, again, it’s just a guess why my dad chose to do in that direction with the drums, but I’m glad he did. I never asked him why. Obviously, we ended up taking the torch and following in his footsteps. By the way, he’s still got plenty of energy and still looking plenty of and! But, you know, my grandad was a great balladier, a crooner. Miguelito was the incredible pioneers like Armando Pezaza, Francisco Aguabella, Candido Camero, Julio Collazo, Carlos “Patato” Valdés, Oscar Valdés, Marcelino Valdés, Mongo Santamaría, and Chano Pozo, to name a few. Yes, those guys are very traditional, but they were also playing the shows in Havana. So, they were also being, not commercialized, but being able to play that kind of music for the masses. They got opportunities to travel to New York, and it just kept growing from there.

**Daniel de los Reyes**: This is what brought those musical opportunities and influences to your dad. My dad eventually moved to the US. This was in the 1960s? Walfredo Reyes, Jr.**: Yes, I was born in 1962, so that would’ve been 1961. My dad moved to New York and then he was offered a show in San Juan, Puerto Rico at the Tropicana showroom. He went there with the piano player that used to be in Casino de la Playa. He got the showroom gig over there and asked my dad to be the drummer in the Orchestra band. So, he started studying with Henry Adler in New York City. By the time he was eighteen, he went back to Cuba and he was a drum set player. That’s when he mixed all the styles. You know, in Cuba and in Puerto Rico, it wasn’t just Latin music that was performed. You have to remember, all the American artists went over there to do shows in the hotel showrooms. So, my dad had to play all of the American styles like Jazz, Fostnot, Swing, etc. Then, when they had the Latin section, that’s when he started raising the drum set with the Latin style. Instead of playing exclusively different instruments, he brought them over to the drum set.

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**Walfredo Reyes, Jr.**: I was born and immediately, within months, we went straight to live in San Juan.

**Daniel de los Reyes**: Just so you know, as a musician, you were always going where there was music or where there was work. And in those days, Cuba closed up, so Havana was no longer accessible. New York was an option, but New York wasn’t paying that much, especially with a growing family. That job in Puerto Rico offered a decent paycheck and it was the hometown of my mother. After ten years, what do you do? The job was ending, so my dad had to go somewhere. It was either back to New York, Atlantic City, Los Angeles, or Las Vegas! Las Vegas was thriving in those days. Those were the days of Elvis Presley, Ann Margret, and Frank Sinatra, so my dad got the house gig there. That’s why we ended up moving.

**Walfredo Reyes, Jr.**: In Las Vegas, Danny would’ve been about ten and Wally around sixteen. At this point, how far along were each of you in your playing? Had you started yet?

**Daniel de los Reyes**: My brother, for sure. I was dabbling. Since we were little, we were always around drumming. All of my dad’s friends, like Alan Dawson, Louie Bellson, Roy Burns, Alex Acuña, Rudy Regalado, Cireses Vilató, and many, many others were coming to the house to practice, study, talk, and hang out. Let’s say your dad’s a plumber and you go with him to his job. Well, my dad would take us to the showrooms. So, our playgrounds were the showrooms watching Paul Anka, Sammy Davis, and Debbie Reynolds. In those days, we were fortunate that you could make a living being a musician, and that’s what he did. He wasn’t an engineer.
When I said, “I want drum lessons” I soon would’ve played piano; if he played guitar, were around so much already in my house; “Hey, I want to play drums!” The drums The Stones, all those groups on TV. I said, when I was thirteen, and percussion being around, I started to play a musician. Similarly, in my case, I will absorb a lot of that. Walfredo number you’re the son of a doctor, you probably had many animals. You don’t realize, if I remember I actually set up the drum set in my room. I was sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen when I started to practice Judo too. I turned to get the room. I started on the drum set, but probably just out of necessity. I ended up liking hitting something with my hand as opposed to hitting something with a stick. Maybe it was because my brother was in that room for so many hours, so I had to have access to something outside of the room. Who knows? I hate to even say drummer or percussionist. My brother is just as much of a percussionist. Really, we’re all just rythmitists. My brother started working with you and I started playing with my hand in the university room. He was definitely serious and going in that direction. He was a full-on musician.

BR: Which university did you attend, Wally? WR: I went to New Mexico. I actually started studying music and percussion before the drum set in the Valley High School Jazz Band. My friend, Adam, was the Jazz Band drummer. He’s an amazing drummer. I remember I was in the room. I was on stage playing percussion. Then, I joined every band I could in town. After that, I started working professionally with Deborah Reyes and other artists on the Vegas Strip.

So, that’s what I tell all of the students now. They say, “Well, I’m a Rock drummer, I’m a Metal drummer…” I say, “Are you kidding me?” Anything with the word music, you join. Otherwise, you’re going to need a job outside of music. Do you want to work in the music business while you actually work to get to where you need to go to be a successful music writer? DR: No, I was just curious. DR: When I was working as a busboy, I thought, “I can’t put you on the snare drum or on the floor tom!” My dad is a second degree Black Belt in Judo, so Danny and I had to practice Judo too. Kamar was saved! (Both laugh.) My dad kind of got into a form of judo at age five. There was a Judo quote on the refrigerator that said, “While you’re not practicing, someone else is. When you shall meet, guess who will win.” So, every time I was not practicing my lessons, my reading, my rudiments, my drumming, my beats, my percussion…someone else would be there. When I was sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen when I started to practice Judo too. I turned to get the room. I started on the drum set, but probably just out of necessity. I ended up liking hitting something with my hand as opposed to hitting something with a stick. Maybe it was because my brother was in that room for so many hours, so I had to have access to something outside of the room. Who knows? I hate to even say drummer or percussionist. My brother is just as much of a percussionist. Really, we’re all just rythmitists. My brother started working with you and I started playing with my hand in the university room. He was definitely serious and going in that direction. He was a full-on musician.

BR: It’s clear that you had a career path toward being a musician at a certain point. How about you, Danny? DR: I was a very late bloomer. My brother was older than me, who had kids, doing that! But in those days, you didn’t get my ass kicked until I tried to move to Los Angeles. In Las Vegas, I had a roof over my head and a plate of food, so I could be immature. I would work as a percussionist in local bands but it wasn’t a necessity, it was just something I liked to do. It was cool. I loved music, but I really didn’t have the opportunity to practice the rest of my life. During my teen years, I was doing different kinds of jobs around town. I’d make $500-$600 and, as a teenager, I was like, “Wow! So, I wasn’t really growing up.

My brother had left Las Vegas and I went to the University of Miami to study music. I was on the road, working as a busboy, I thought, “I can’t put you on the snare drum or on the floor tom!” My dad is a second degree Black Belt in Judo, so Danny and I had to practice Judo too. Kamar was saved! (Both laugh.) My dad kind of got into a form of judo at age five. There was a Judo quote on the refrigerator that said, “While you’re not practicing, someone else is. When you shall meet, guess who will win.” So, every time I was not practicing my lessons, my reading, my rudiments, my drumming, my beats, my percussion…someone else would be there. When I was sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen when I started to practice Judo too. I turned to get the room. I started on the drum set, but probably just out of necessity. I ended up liking hitting something with my hand as opposed to hitting something with a stick. Maybe it was because my brother was in that room for so many hours, so I had to have access to something outside of the room. Who knows? I hate to even say drummer or percussionist. My brother is just as much of a percussionist. Really, we’re all just rythmitists. My brother started working with you and I started playing with my hand in the university room. He was definitely serious and going in that direction. He was a full-on musician.

BR: It’s refreshing to hear that you both were not just handed gigs due to your association with a famous musician. You both assume that. Clearly, you’ve had to pay the same dues and paid as much pavement as anyone. As the De Los Reyes Family grows, do you see similar experiences for the next generation? WR: When you have a lot of music in the house, it happens consciously and unconsciously. My oldest two kids are musicians. My son, Joseph, he had drums, he had Giovanni Hidalgo, Danny, and my dad. I mean, music is like a pacifier. Instead of a pacifier, he used to take a set of drum sticks to preschool. It’s in the air; you absorb it.

BR: Absolutely! My brother helped out a little bit. My dad helped out a little bit, but from there, he (Wally) took it! We admire each other, we respect each other, older than me, who had kids, doing that! But in those days, you didn’t get my ass kicked until I tried to move to Los Angeles. In Las Vegas, I had a roof over my head and a plate of food, so I could be immature. I would work as a percussionist in local bands but it wasn’t a necessity, it was just something I liked to do. It was cool. I loved music, but I really didn’t have the opportunity to practice the rest of my life. During my teen years, I was doing different kinds of jobs around town. I’d make $500-$600 and, as a teenager, I was like, “Wow! So, I wasn’t really growing up.

WR: Yeah, we all found our own way. My dad basically put the goods on the table for us to create our own dish.

BR: That’s a great analogy! DR: Yeah, I don’t know if you’re noticed, but drummers and percussionists are really good cooks! They’re really good at estimating ingredients, cutting amounts, and they’re constantly changing it up. It doesn’t have to be this exact thing. They just like to experiment.

BR: In your current projects, do you find yourself utilizing that kind of experimentation? Danny, is that the case with the Zac Brown Band? DR: Yeah, the Zac Brown project keeps me plenty busy. We’re starting to branch out and tour the world outside the United States, which is very cool for a band that is primarily known in the Country/Southern Rock genre. We’re very excited about that. It’s actually very rare that we’re not playing in the United States. And we’re so grateful for that. But I say, “Thank god!” Like my brother says, “It’s such a blessing that we’re working as musicians, and we know it.” Being able to pay some bills and you know, that’s the main thing. My brother and I are both Wally’s beautiful daughters, that’s so true and responsible to my job with the Zac Brown Band. I’m building my music schools, www.DayGlow.org, and putting together courses. It’s been a blessing that I’m one of them is a full-time gig. We’re also working on a song that David Garfield is producing. My brother and I are playing for Wally’s beautiful daughter, Tutti, is singing. Hopefully, my dad will also join us, and my brother, Kamar, is going to sing too. I’m super excited about that. It’s always cool to watch how the family gets together.

BR: Wally, you’re playing percussion with Chicago. Do you feel like you get to experiment a lot with them? WR: Well, yeah. All of the artists give you some freedom. You add things little-by-little, depending on what you’re going to play there. With Chicago, I play the percussion and everything is great but even after a year, Jimmy Pankow say, “You know, when you guys get to work together…” So, I’ll say, “Okay! I won’t play congas.” What do you play the artist who is working with you to play. I also have my own little band that I play with right now, Wallow! In Wallow! I take suggestions from the guys in the band, but the lead is all in my own band, the guitar player might tell me, “I think if we do this and this, it would be better.” And I’ll listen! I say, “Let’s try that!”

BR: I have to say, this has been a real pleasure. It’s been less of an interview and more of an inside glimpse into your musical family lives. Family and community seem to be a big priority in your lives.

WR: Family is one thing, but I think the drumming community is really a tight community, too. When I was playing with Joe Sample, he used to say, “What? ‘Where’s my dad when I need him?’” – drum conventions, drum circles, drum meetings, drum this, drum that, you’re always hanging out together!”
Brook Dalton: So, how did you become involved with Home Street Home? Was Fat Mike, or the powers-that-be, more impressed with your resume, the fact that you attended Berklee, or did they know you from the LA music scene?

Sean Winchester: Thankfully, they were interested in me on multiple levels. It all started because I was rehearsing next to Marc Orrell, the ex-guitarist for Dropkick Murphys. We had neighboring rehearsal spaces, so we naturally hit it off and became friends. I eventually joined his original band, Wild Roses. Marc mentioned to me that he had been doing this project with Fat Mike and asked if I wanted to be involved. At the time, Everclear wasn’t playing a lot so I said, “Hell yes!” Marc was basically in charge of finding good players to become the pit band for the show. He pulled in Jeff Roffredo (Tiger Army, Aggrolites) on bass and Chris Cheney (The Living End) on guitar. So, the four of us started rehearsals but we really didn’t even know what was happening at the time! Mike would shoot us some songs so we kept learning them, but it wasn’t until there was a residency booked at Z Space in San Francisco that we realized that it was an actual event.

BD: What is it like to work for Fat Mike?

SW: Mike is easily one of the best bosses I’ve ever had. It’s great because he really doesn’t have much of an ego, so he doesn’t need to be micro-managing everything. He has a good business infrastructure and he trusts everybody to do their jobs.

BD: Was somebody singing along with you while you were rehearsing, since you hadn’t worked with the cast yet?

SW: Yeah, the cast wasn’t there for our Los Angeles rehearsals so David O, the Musical Director, sang for us. He’s such a rad guy. He’s known for doing a bunch of avant garde musicals so it was great to have him sing for us. Plus, that was the first time that we had heard the words to the songs, and these lyrics are really messed up! They deal with drugs and some heavy sexual stuff, but we needed to know them for the vocal cues. We were sitting there in disbelief the first time David was singing them. That was when we starting asking who this play was catered to! Who is the target audience here? It’s great because Mike doesn’t care about that sort of thing. He just wanted to make a musical that is entertaining and cool. I actually didn’t even meet Mike until a week before the San Francisco residency began!
I redeemed myself the next day. That music for reference. I was so scared, but I realized that it's better to learn the music read, even though they had given me a lot of work. At the time, I didn't know who he was for the drummer. The production was an experience. There have been shows that have...
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STEVE FERRONÉ, TOM PETTY & THE HEARTBREAKERS
JOSH MACINTYRE, MARMOZETS
DAVEY BROZOWSKI, MODEST MOUSE
REMI AGUILLELLA, DAUGHTER
MATT BILLINGSLEA, TAYLOR SWIFT
VALERIE SEPULVEDA, DIAMANTE, THE VIBRANT SOUND
PINO ROVERETO, CAMILO SESTO, DAVID DE MARIA
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TOBI DERER, BEYOND THE BLACK
BERNARD PURDIE, INDEPENDENT
ASH SOAN, THE WATERBOYS
DERRICK WRIGHT, ADELE
NEIL WILKINSON, INDEPENDENT
GLEN SOBEL, ALICE COOPER

F = FULL LINE
PH = PEDALS & HARDWARE
Gary Wallis

Mr. Wallis’ Wild Ride

by Ian Croft

Gary Wallis only ever wanted to sing along with The Beatles. Needless to say, that love for ‘the song’ has never wavered. However, it would be drums and percussion that brought him before millions at Live Aid, and playing to millions more in front of Egypt’s pyramids with Jean Michel Jarre at the turn of the millennium. With a resume that boasts Sir Tom Jones, Pink Floyd, Il Divo, Nik Kershaw, 10CC, Westlife, Mike & The Mechanics, Dusty Springfield, and so many more, Wallis’ formidable talent is obvious as a consummate drummer, percussionist, producer, and the current Musical Director for four notable international artists.

How did this UK-based upstart arrive at the most distinguished echelon of hired-gun drummers? Well, let’s just say it’s been a wild ride.

Ian Croft: What were you listening to during your formative years?
Gary Wallis: Pretty much my brother’s record collection. He had the whole Beatles collection, along with early Free records, Bad Company, Deep Purple, Led Zeppelin, and ironically enough, some Pink Floyd records. My exposure was to all those early and great English Rock bands and, at that time, surprisingly not many American bands. It has never really strayed much further from that!

IC: Was there a particular record that made you want to become a drummer?
GW: No. Unequivocally, it was the entire collection of Beatles records. I remember the beginning of Help and how that excited me, musically. I was never really driven by the actual instrumentation; it was songs that got me excited. If I could sing them, I would love them and I wanted to sing along. I remember being four or five years old and hearing Sergeant Pepper’s being played in the house. So it was The Beatles and Ringo Starr and, to this day, that has never wavered.

IC: Did you get involved with music at school?
GW: Yes, I took an hourly drum lesson each week from a teacher named Dave Barry. He took me through the Jim Chapin book and he was quite a ‘turned-on’ guy and a great Be-Bop player. Once you go through that book, you never go back; it’s the bible. Dave was quite a taskmaster and he drilled me week after week. He actually bought me the book because we didn’t have much money growing up in South London. He would give me five pages to work on each week and if I had not learned them by the following week, he’d crack me over the head with a stick! And then, I’d have ten pages to work through by the following week. He actually taught me a great sense of discipline and a high work ethic to get it right. It made me want to keep improving.
IC: Were you just hitting on a practice pad at home?
GW: No, but to go back to earlier days, I used to break my mother’s knitting needles hanging on things, and then I’d hide them back into her knitting supplies. So, for my third Christmas, my parents bought me a toy drum set, which I proceeded to smash into pieces about ten minutes after it came out of the box! I had a little heady adventure as a child. Some years later, my dad took his life savings of £26 out of the bank and took me to Drum City in Charing Cross Road, London and bought me a broadband bass drum, Olympic snare drum, Axja cymbal, and a pair of Kut hi-hats. He told me, “Now, you practice every day!” Having that kind of support was incredible and he was very adamant that I practiced daily. He didn’t care that it sounded like someone building a shed in the next room. (Laughs). After that, every year we’d go and trawl pawn shops to find an old rack tom or floor tom, and my dad would re-cover the drums in fabric (a thin, sticky-backed plastic covering), so that it looked like a matching set of new drums, like those I saw on television. It didn’t matter that the drums were all different brands; the set had a uniform look and made me feel like a drummer on the TV.

At my school, there were a lot of kids into music and we’d play at break times, after school, and during the holidays. From the time I was about thirteen years old, I was always in bands of one form or another, and it gave me a great focus. Music was a great outlet from everything bad around me. I had all of this positive stuff going through my mind instead of negative, destructive things.

IC: Your first major professional gig was with The Truth at sixteen years old. So really, you’ve never had to do a ‘proper’ job in your life.
GW: No, I’ve only ever played the bloody drums! (Laughs). I’m rubbish at everything else.

IC: You started getting gigs playing percussion. How did that begin?
GW: My dad came home one day with a set of congas and put them down in front of me. My parents had some old Edmundo Ros records with songs such as “One Note Samba” and “Tico-Tico”. As cheesy as the top line was, the bottom line held the authentic rhythms, and that’s how I practiced. I learned my first twelve months was when I was twelve. At fourteen, I auditioned and was accepted to the Royal Academy of Music. I’d study on weekends with a potential for the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. My good friend and fellow drummer, Steve White, was also at the Academy. We were sight-reading classical scores, playing tympani, glockenspiels, vibraphone, and tubular bells.

IC: So, you had this full-on education coming at you from every angle.
GW: Yes, I had Led Zeppelin in the bedroom, Edmundo Ros in the living room, and I was sight-reading Beethoven on the weekends with the junior Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. The orchestra had guest conductors, and one week Leonard Bernstein came in and Steve and I had to sight-read West Side Story in front of him. I was paralyzed with fear! Steve and I became great friends throughout this time, but we didn’t take up the offer of further education with the Academy as the world of Pop and Rock was calling. Steve got the gig with Paul Weller’s Style Council, and Paul called me and asked if I wanted to come and play percussion. So, I finally got my ‘Ros chops’ out and put them to good use alongside Steve playing the drum set. We both got to do our first world tour with The Style Council and I was only seventeen years old! I remember getting drunk on sake in Japan and thinking, “How on earth did I get here!” (Laughs).

IC: You then went on to work with Nik Kershaw, right?
GW: I was eighteen then and Nik was the biggest-selling artist of that time with eleven number one hits. I was projected into that ‘super-player’ world and it was an amazing ride. We were touring in Australia and I bumped into David Bowie back at the hotel; he was there with bassist Carmine Rojas and guitarist Carlos Alomar. They asked how I’d feel about playing some percussion with them. Bowie was with Blondie at the time and Robert Palmer in the band Power Station. I asked when the gig would start and they told me, “Three days’ time!” So I flew back to London, saw my mum, gave her a kiss, packed my bag, and flew to New York the very next morning. Suddenly, there I was with the chic crew, and that same year, we played Live Aid! It was my first time on stage with all of the world watching, mind you! Jack Nicholson helped me set my drums up! I was so exited at the prospect of the experience! It was our turn on the night and we played the London Eye. I had that night off and it was our turn at JFK. After the Power Station set I had a shower, changed my clothes, and then played a six-song set with Duran Duran. So I got to play Live Aid twice!

IC: After that, the world must have been your oyster.
GW: I came back and I was cutting a lot of records with many different artists. In those glorious days, there was a lot of work around.

IC: At that time, artists were still making and recording ‘demos’, which must have given you great insight into the studio system and how it operated.
GW: I would do demos, some even for free, so that I could learn about the studio craft. Depending upon the outcome of the demos, I might get hired to cut the record. I quickly had to learn what a ‘drop-in’ was and how to fix things. You supply all of your oyster. I learnt to be able to cover percussion and some drum parts, as well, so the rig had to combine both elements. We were playing stadiums, so I had to make it look big and I wanted something that nobody had seen before. That was my guideline.

IC: It seems that you’ve got to play with all of these incredible artists that hire you for what you do and who you are. You’re not really had to compromise.
GW: I’ve been very lucky. Currently, I’ve played with so many diverse artists, yet you’ve remained a player that has never been pigeonholed as just a Rock drummer, Pop drummer, or a percussionist. That has to be refreshing. GW: I’ve been very lucky. Currently, I’m out as drummer and MD with Sir....
Tom Jones. I’m also MD for a few other artists, but I have the drum chair subbed out for those gigs while I tour with Tom.

IC: How do you manage to keep everything running smoothly?  
GW: I’m very careful about whom I use to sub for those artists and I make sure that the drummers I use are fully prepared. I keep in constant touch with the sub and with the main artist every week, so I know how things are going. I’m one for preparation, especially as MD. Last night, I was listening back to tapes of three recent Tom Jones shows and wrote notes, not only for myself, but for the other band members too. That helps me to see how the set may have slipped or moved in different directions, even from a tempo point of view. There always needs to be an intellectual focus. You can go into autopilot mode, but that should never happen. If you don’t have attention to detail, you won’t have a career!

IC: Do you have a preference for studio or live work? 
GW: I love playing live and being at the kit. It’s so much more rewarding for me than being in the studio. It’s that instant gratification of making music and receiving an immediate emotional response from the crowd. It’s a conversation between the artist and the audience. Plus, I get to play with some truly great musicians along the way.

IC: You have been with DW for many years now. How did that come about? 
GW: I first met John Good at Live Aid when he was the drum tech for Jonathan Moffett. My tech, Paul Davis, and John became good friends. My friendship with John became greater through Paul, and John and I started hanging out together whenever I’d be in California. When Nick Mason left Ludwig, Paul suggested to Nick that he should check out DW and Paul hooked Nick up with John, as well. Nick went with DW and was very happy, so when my second Floyd tour started to happen, Nick asked if I’d also go with the company, as Nick wanted everything to be unified. I already knew John well and liked the product, so Nick and I flew over to LA and worked with John to design the Pink Floyd sets that we used for that tour. That was the start of our long and happy relationship together.

IC: I noticed that you’re using a pretty interesting set-up for this Tom Jones tour. 
GW: Tom has had such a big career, but the set-list isn’t all of his hits. It’s comprised of a lot of music that he grew up listening to; music that influenced him to become a singer. So, it’s very diverse, with tunes from artists such as Lonnie Johnson, Howlin’ Wolf, and Sister Rosetta Tharpe. It is pre-Rock n’ Roll Americana, so I need to be able to recreate different sounds between both set-ups. With the main kit, I am using an 18x24” bass drum, 8x12” rack tom, 16x16” and 16x18” floor toms, and a 6x14” Chrome snare drum; all of which have coated Remo heads. The snare and rack toms are tuned really tight so that I get a nice ringing vintage tone, but I keep the floor toms tuned really low. The bass drum has no padding whatsoever; the batter head is really loose and the front resonant head is really tight. It sounds like a cannon! I play ‘off the head’ with that drum to get a New Orleans-type marching band sound.

Then I swivel 90° to my left, where I have a smaller set with a 16x22” bass drum, 8x10” rack tom, 14x14” floor tom, and 5x14” snare. All of those drums are fitted with coated Remo heads, too, and tuned to get a ‘pop’ sound with quite a bit of dampening to them for the more modern tunes. That kit has a lot of volume, but with a very short signal. I use old heads where I’ve cut the hoop away and just use the head area which I can drop onto the snare or floor tom and get a very quick change of sound, depending upon the song. Sometimes, I drop a tea towel down behind the bass drum so that the heater has to play through the towel which, again, gives me a different sound. It’s the quickest and easiest way to change textures to suit the songs.

IC: Finally, what words of advice would you give to a young player starting out today? 
GW: Good Luck! (Laughs). That, and keep your head down, work on your craft, practice hard and, above all, be disciplined. Remember that it’s music you are playing, not drums!

Photos: David Phillips

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A DRUMMER’S Guide to Social Etiquette by Nick Ruffini

On average, people spend 1.72 hours per day engaged in social media. So, wonder why this means for you and other fellow drummers? It means that there are plenty of opportunities to interact and create relationships with fans, customers, trendsetters, and tastemakers. But before you rush to social media to start pushing your latest record or telling people to buy your merch, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Add Value
Adding value is by far the most important piece of the social puzzle. This can take on many forms, including entertainment, pertinent information, problem solving, and other relevant content. The more value you bring to your followers, the more connected they become with your brand/product and, eventually, they can become evangelists. I created a podcast two years ago and, to date, have broadcast 145 podcasts. This content is 100% free. Why? Simple; it adds value for drummers. It pays off big time when I launch a new product, sell a book, or pitch something. I’ve given a thousand times more value to my audience than what I ask from them in return. Because of that, they’re all too happy to buy my products, help spread the word, and be part of my social media marketing team. The more value and interaction you can provide to your followers, the better. Adding value for your audience is paramount for cutting through all of the social noise out there. Before you post something, ask yourself: “Is this adding value?” If the answer is no, don’t post it.

Be Social, Not a Pitchman
Social media is more of a cocktail party than a shopping cart. Your job is to offer something of worth to the people who follow you and to engage with them on a personal level. Who would you rather talk to at a party, the person with something interesting to say or the person who is trying to sell you something as soon as they introduce themselves? There tends to be a lot of “buy our new thing” or “check out our latest product” or even “vote for us on this site” out there. If you’re continually asking people to do things and constantly selling stuff on your social channels, it’s the equivalent to a TV station that plays nothing but commercials. How long would YOU stay tuned-in for that kind of unrelenting sales pitch? The more you pitch, the less people will stay engaged.

Does this mean you can never sell? Of course it doesn’t. Again, think of it as a reciprocal relationship. Keep in mind, this is a long-term strategy and it takes months or even years to play out, but it works! If you’re known as the source for free content, expert advice, etc., then when it’s time make a sale, fans will be lining up to support you.

Give the People What They Want
Users expect certain types of posts on certain platforms. This is known as native content, which is a fancy way of saying that users have very specific expectations. Instagram followers want amazing, inspiring pictures and videos. Twitter users want to see short spurts of information and want to interact one-on-one with others. Facebookers can digest longer-form content and engage in extended discussions. If your content is native, it won’t disrupt the experience and won’t seem out of place. The typical strategy is to place the same content on every social channel. That’s not only the wrong approach, it’s also boring. I suggest posting content that is created specifically for each platform. This will ensure that you’re posting native content and will give your audience multiple ways to engage with you, rather than seeing the same thing on every channel. It also aids in being a credible source of content for your audience. You never want to appear to be recycling or reusing your messages.

Start Slow and Be Patient
These are multiple platforms to manage and if you’re a one-man-band, it may prove to be overwhelming. I suggest selecting one or two platforms to concentrate on and forget the rest. Take some time to learn Facebook and Instagram or Twitter and Pinterest, get a good handle on what you’re doing, and work on growing your audience from there. You can move to new accounts once you’ve established a good base on these platforms. Also, remember that you don’t have to post every day. Posting once a week is better than not posting at all, posting twice a week is better than once a week...you get the idea. If you can only dedicate time for one or two days per week, do that. You can always increase the quantity of posts as you become more proficient. The social media game is a marathon, not a sprint. Yes, there are people who have exploded on social media seemingly overnight, but these are anomalies. Typically, it takes time to find your cadence, learn your audience’s likes and dislikes, and discover your voice. Ultimately, you’ll want to strive to continuously produce high-quality content, and I promise you that your social following will grow over time.

For more in-depth social media training, check out DrummersSMBC.com.

Nick Ruffini | DrummersResource.com
Building on the success of the MDD Machined Direct Drive™ pedal, the MCD is a boutique pedal that shares many of the patented features, industrial design, and build-quality of its direct-drive cousin. The most striking difference is an adjustable, sprocket-less cam that incorporates a gear shift-style lever. This lever allows players to quickly shift between the most popular chain-drive cam settings and is easily accessible when mounted to a bass drum.

DW Director of R&D, Rich Sikra, explains, “We knew this would be the next logical step when we were introducing the MDD pedals. So many of our artists absolutely love their 9000 pedals, but they’re also enamored with the form and function of DW MFG. Plus, we knew that the direct-drive feel wasn’t for everyone. It’s been a really fun and challenging project for the R&D team.”

Other notable features include a racing-style, all-aluminum, perforated footboard with matching contoured heel plate, Tri-Pivot Swivel Toe-Clamp™, V.E.R.T. Vertical Spring Adjustment™, 110 Control Beater™, and more. A DW MFG carrying case is also included and the recently released MDD Hi-Hat complements the MCD pedals perfectly.

For more information and exact specifications, visit: www.dwdrums.com/hardware/dwmfg
from Shanghai to Chicago. Who else land the same day you take off if flying Pacific Ocean but, on the contrary, you takes an extra day to fly west over the international date line. For instance, it would be bumpy at first, but it helps highlight the trickiest parts of the songs. Finally, I will switch from the iNod to a metronome, and just play through all of the songs with only a click track while singing the melody and arrangements in my head. This can be the toughest part, but it’s only when I do this that I feel as though I actually know the songs. It’s as though I am inside all of the phrasing. And, practically speaking, if things go wrong on stage (bad monitor mix, guitarist breaks a string, singer gets lost), I’ll know exactly where we are, and I’ll be able to hold everyone together. As a drummer, you are often steering the ship!

The Gear: Ok, we’ve confirmed the dates for our upcoming performance and we’ve learned all of the music. Now we have to organize the logistics of the equipment. You’ll probably have to find out if the venue/studio has its own backline or will you rent a drum kit? Or do you need to bring your own gear to the gig? Then, according to the music, I will decide on drum sound options. The kick drum size, and its tuning. The amount of toms, and their sizes. Coated Arches (clear vs. Clear Peristyles) or metal or wood snare drum? How about a side snare drum turned off and cranked like a timbale, or should it be deep and chunky? Which cymbals would work well, and how many? Maybe an extra mounted hi-hat would be cool. Double-headed? Are there mounted cymbals? Or a small set of mounted hi-hats? A floor tom and LH on tambourine. I notate the temps and markings. And, if time allows, I will even check out alternate versions of the songs (remixes, live versions, cover versions) on Spotify or YouTube.

Part #2 of this learning process takes place on the actual drum set. I take my folder of charts, throw on the headphones, and play along with the chart from the songs feel on the instrument. At first, I approach the songs exactly like the charts. After a while (if possible), then, I gradually adjust them in ways that I believe would make them even more musical. That might mean changing the way I play the kick drum from 16ths to 8ths, or adding ghost notes to the snare part, or simplifying the kick drum pattern, or coming up with an alternate drum fill that does not clash with the acoustic guitar part or the vocal melody. In general, I prefer to have all of the songs learned well enough to be the point where I can do them exactly like the record, or differentially from the recorded versions in case the artist, producer, or engineer wants to make changes. I like to freshen up the approach. Brainstorm for multiple options. The artist could either be completely sold on their album version, or they could be open to doing something else. You can’t be sure, so it’s a good idea to have choices.

Part #3 of the learning process is the memorization. Even though I’ve been working on my reading since I was in middle school, I have to work on my charts on stage or during recording sessions. Staring at a page makes me feel as though I have not internalized the music. But being able to count bars on stage is a ‘Stylist’ will probably tell you to “wear all black” and “just look cool.” Rock & Roll.

The Show: Countless articles have been written about the professionalism needed to maintain a career as a working musician. This includes concepts such as “punctuality,” “getting along with others,” and “not vomiting in the artist’s dressing room or getting arrested at the airport.” Assuming we’ve already read and internalized these nuggets, I’ll just skip ahead to showtime. Hint: I like to write my own set-lists and tape them where I can see them. It’s a habit that makes memorization a lot easier. On set-lists, I will often scribble a note for each song such as, “count off the guitarist for this one,” or “switch to mallets”, or “don’t forget that(ugh! This is a team effort). (2) Expect things to go wrong on stage, and embrace those moments. (3) Expect the unexpected. At some point, the topic of ‘Look’ will probably come up and a person called an ‘Stylist’ will probably tell you to “wear all black” and “just look cool.” Rock & Roll.

The Look: At some point, the topic of ‘Look’ will probably come up and a person called a ‘Stylist’ will probably tell you to “wear all black” and “just look cool.” Rock & Roll.

A freelance musician sometimes get a call to perform with one artist for eight months straight. Other times, he or she could get called to perform with different artists within a week. It helps to have a system of organization to handle this type of workload. Over the years, I have developed my own process that enables me to assimilate tons of songs and bounce from one job to the next. Here are a few key points to consider.

The Details: Firstly, the details could always use some clarification. Let’s say a phone call or email comes in asking, “Are you available from February 15th through the 18th?” That does not tell me very much about the job. Therefore, I often begin by digging for more information. What is this mystery gig? Are the proposed dates for rehearsals, a concert, a couple of recording sessions? Will this event take place in Los Angeles, or somewhere out of town? And if the job is out of town, when would I need to leave, and when would I return? Also, keep in mind the issue of time zones, and the international date line. For instance, it takes an extra day to fly west over the Pacific Ocean but, on the contrary, you land the same day you take off if flying from Shanghai to Chicago. Who else

in a playlist form on iTunes. And, if possible, I prefer to get a set list order too. That helps me later on while trying to memorize the music. I’ll sync up my iPod (yes, still use one of those) so that I can take this music around with me on car rides, hikes, or plane flights.

The Learning: Now comes the real ‘homework’ of the job. I set aside a period of time to chart out all of the songs. First, I start with a stack of plain white printer paper (although I have been known to use a napkin, a torn sheet from a journal, or the backside of junk mail), a black pen, good headphones that allow me to distinguish kick drum patterns and bass lines, and any tap-tempo metronome. Then I go down the list of songs, writing out charts using my own version of notation and hieroglyphics. My charts are usually as detailed as they need to be, but not unnecessarily detailed. For instance, I have a system similar to the one that I learned for reading high school Big Band/djazz charts. Left-to-right, top-to-bottom, with symbols like introduction, verse, pre-chorus, bridge, solo, outro, etc. How many bars are in each section? Include rests, accents, and union figures. Get down to the nitty gritty to note specific beats and signature drum fills. What would my hands be doing at any given time? RH on closed hi-hat and LH on tambourine. RH on floor tom and LH on tambourine. I notate the temps and markings. And, if time allows, I will even check out alternate versions of the songs (remixes, live versions, cover versions) on Spotify or YouTube.

The Music: Now that you’ve accepted the gig, the next step of the process would be to get ahead of the music. Normally, a batch of MP3s is sent to me by email. However, for recording sessions, I might receive entire Pro Tools files via a service such as WeTransfer. I like to put all the music on this gig. The ‘hang’ is often as important as the music. What is the pay? Would it be hourly, daily, weekly? What are the travel arrangements? Would we be driving in a van to San Francisco, or flying to Barcelona? It there some type of cancelation policy between now and then if the entire project falls through or gets postponed? It’s considerable and I aim to avoid any unforeseen travel expenses between 50-100% of the income in the case of a cancelation.

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The Compensation:
Lastly, get paid. This sounds simple, but it’s important. And you’d be surprised how difficult this part can be. For musicians, it’s not common to get paid before you do the work. Therefore, you’ll probably have to type up and send an invoice. There is a myriad of ways to transfer payment such as: direct deposit, PayPal, Western Union, cash, or “the check is in the mail.” Keep track of all outstanding payments because certain people will space out and forget.

I hope this gives you a brief look into what I do to prepare for a performance. You’ll find that most pro drummers out there have a similar approach and work ethic. And keep in mind this helpful sports quote: “Don’t practice until you get it right. Practice until you can’t get it wrong.”

Here’s an example of a sample drum rider that I have used in a rental company:

Brendan Buckley:
Drum Rider (Shelby Lynne 2016 U.S. Tour)

DW (jazz, Classics, or Collector’s Maple series):
- 14”x22” bass drum (hole in front head, with pillow inside)
- 9”x13” rack tom (on snare stand)
- 16”x16” floor tom (on 3 legs)
- 6”x14” black nickel snare drum
- 5”x13” titanium snare drum

DW Hardware:
- cymbal stands (x5)
- snare drum stands (x3)
- hi-hat stand
- DW5002 double pedal (x2)
- Throne

Sabian Cymbals:
- 15” Artisan hi-hats (or HHX)
- 22” Artisan ride cymbal (or HHX)
- 18” Artisan crash (or Evolution)
- 18” Evolution crash (or HHX)
- 19” HHX Extreme crash
- 8” splash

Remo Drum Heads:
- Coated Ambassadors on all tops
- Clear Ambassador on all bottoms
- Bass drum: 3 on bass drum batter side
- Vic Firth sticks:
  - 5A wood tips
  - T1 Timpani mallets

LP:
- mounted cyclops tambourine
- shaker

Accessories:
- drum rug
- golf tape
- drum key
- towel
- water
- miniature electric fan
Brook Dalton: I know that you started playing music at an early age but decided to switch from focusing on the piano to the drums. What was it about the drums that was so appealing to you?

Mika Fineo: Ah man, I'll probably sound like some technical stiff here, but I can honestly relate it to this: the piano requires that you have ten fingers working keys that trigger hammers to strike a series of strings in a rather percussive fashion. In addition to the fingers, your feet are working the pedals of the piano for sustain, etc. So, when playing this instrument, you're taking all of these mechanics and getting them to work together in rhythmic harmony and tempo. With the drum set, you're using two hands and two feet that, again, must work in rhythmic harmony with each other. The hands use sticks to strike the head of a drum or a cymbal while the feet work pedals to play the kick and the hi-hat's sustain/chick. When I first sat down on the drum set (already some years deep into a classical piano foundation and lessons) I sensed a connection. What was so appealing about the drums to me? I was a decent piano player (nothing great) but when I played the drum set for the very first time, I excelled at it. All the discipline and mechanics I learned from classical piano training led me to be able to play the kit at a pretty advanced stage, for a beginner. The instant connection and gratification that I felt with the drums consumed me. I fell in love with drumming right then and there! I was just taken over by its power and command. The drums were so much cooler to me!

BD: Do you still play the piano, or other instruments, much?

MF: Absolutely. The piano will always be a passion of mine and it helps me to communicate to other musicians in terms of melody, key, scale, song structure, harmony, etc. I use it more to write nowadays, but I'll say that there are few things more therapeutic to my soul than to sit down on a killer grand piano in an empty concert hall and just play away. The reverberation of its sound in a magical environment is haunting to me.

Brook Dalton: In your opinion, how important is it to be able to play different types of music? Is it more valuable to concentrate on one category or are you better served in being

While there are a myriad of characteristics that are arguably essential for a great drummer to possess, it's hard to imagine one that doesn't demonstrate strong determination, focused talent, and consistent creativity. Mika Fineo's check-list has all of these traits marked off, along with countless others. Based out of Nashville and Los Angeles, this eclectic and multi-faceted factotum knows exactly what sort of work ethic and attitude it takes to succeed in today's entertainment industries. His impressive resume includes having worked with a range of acts such as Filter, Karmin, Blake Lewis, and Puddle of Mudd. Naturally, Mika is proud of his credits but he is also continually expanding his potential and looking forward to his musical future. I consider myself fortunate to have touched base and talked shop with this genuine and motivated go-getter.
able to spread out your abilities to a lesser extent?

MF: I feel that it’s wise to learn as many styles of music as you can. You can never master all of them, but having a sense and knowledge of as many styles as possible will allow you to be a well-rounded player and better able to communicate. Of course, we all find a few styles that we end up gravitating towards. But if we start to narrow our musical direction stylistically, we tend to hit plateaus by focusing on only one thing. I try not to get trapped into this because you sort of ‘typecast’ yourself if you want to try out for future gigs that are out of your comfort zone. So yeah, learn as many styles as you can and try to actually become them when you’re studying them. Get submerged in the style for a bit and strive to understand the musical language that the artist or band is trying to communicate with.

BD: When you joined Filter, did you have a previous knowledge of their material or did you have to suddenly learn the set from scratch?

MF: I was always a big believer in the Filter sound from the very beginning. I really felt that it was cutting-edge stuff. I had known all the material inside-and-out from the first record through The Amalgamut, which was the most recent album at the time when I joined. The first album only had programmed drums; the real drums came in on the following albums. I felt that, from a drummer’s standpoint, the second and third albums held some of the most magical drumming and production there. It was a sound I longed to further develop with Filter. The crazy thing is that I always imagined that I’d actually be their drummer, at some point. So, it was chilling when I got the call from Richard (Patrick) shortly after moving to LA. When we all got into a room for the first time to rehearse, we pretty much had the first three albums down in a day.

BD: What are the primary differences between the Nashville and Los Angeles music scenes? Do the different settings affect your particular playing style much?

MF: Yeah, there are some differences. So far, I find them mostly to be from the touring standpoint. You’re sort of a ‘weekend warrior’ as far as tours go in Nashville. No matter how big the tour or artist, you’re out for three-to-four days every week, back home for three, and then repeat. When I’m working with artists based in LA, I tend to go out for much longer periods of time and don’t return for weeks or months. Also, Nashville still holds a fairly dominant Country music scene. So your Country chops have to be on-point and you must be able to play for what the music calls for. You need to have that discipline. But things are changing very rapidly with so much of the industry now relocating from places like Los Angeles and New York to Nashville. So, the scene is sort of all over the place at the moment for working musicians and the genre of artists that are basing themselves there. I never wanted to get locked down into the Nashville Country scene, so I still work out of LA a lot. But I will say that I have been very blessed since only living there so much of the industry now relocating there. For a short time and already having done some really solid arena tours with some fantastic Nashville-based artists.

BD: Does your gear or kit set-up change from gig-to-gig, or are you most comfortable with a particular configuration?

MF: Man, the gear and set-up options these days are endless and you can get lost in all of the beautiful products out there. But, so far, I don’t change my set-up a whole bunch, other than shell materials, head types, and cymbals. I try to keep a common theme that allows me a good amount of options to go in any direction, stylistically. I seem to constantly land work with artists that have a lot of diversity in their sound. So, my kit has to be able to go from a tight snare/resonant Pop/R&B tom thing to being able to turn around and deliver a deep Rock ‘thud’ at the same time. So far, I find that using a 22” kick, 10” and 12” racks with 16” and 18” floor toms can cover a fairly wide palette. I throw a sampler pad up, as well, to open even more options for the artist.

BD: What is the best piece of drumming-related advice that you’ve received?

MF: Oh man, that’s a tough one. But here’s something I’d say is imperative and highly overlooked, in relation to your practice routine: play to a metronome. You should seek to master being able to count out loud, everything from whole notes all the way up to 16th notes over whatever you’re playing on the kit. Start slow and work up the tempo little by little. When you master that, try to count out loud in triplets. That’s a game-
changer and harder than it sounds when you’re ripping off heads with your chops. With this exercise you’ll start to fine-tune your ‘internal metronome’ and you will always know where you are within the beat. When it comes time to play the easy stuff your groove will be so freakin’ dialed!

**BD: What hobbies or interests do you have outside of music?**

**MF:** It’s so cliché, but I am fascinated with travel and foreign culture. Just sitting down to an odd meal in a foreign country with a friendly local while embracing their traditions...I love that. When I’m not playing music, you’ll find me constantly working with my hands. I’m always building something, fixing something, or creating some kind of gadget that helps make my life easier. I’ve been wanting to start a company that specializes in unique travel products I’ve created to help organize and streamline the constant traveler. Nerdy, I know!

**BD: If you could sit in with any band, or group of musicians, and play a show with them, who would it be?**

**MF:** Well, funny enough, this has already happened to me twice. I dreamed of playing with Filter and then...boom! I dreamed of playing with Korn and again...BOOM! So, in the element of things happening in threes, my next dream is to work with Ed Sheeran. What that dude does as a one-piece is just nuts. I’d be all over that should he ever decide to put a band together!

**BD: I know that you will incorporate electronic elements like programming, slates, and click tracks into your drumming. How much do you feel that technology has influenced your playing? Would you say that you are dependent on some of those features?**

**MF:** I love adding the element of electronics, especially in today’s music. The options become limitless then. By having slates within the live tracks you can allow the band to learn the songs much faster. With slates you get these ‘cheats’ allowing the band to learn the songs much quicker and be able to not fluctuate your tempo without one. And knowing how to play behind, on, and just in front of the beat is something you will be called to do at some point, or another.

**BD: What does your current drum kit configuration look like?**

**MF:** I passionately use all DW 9000 and 5000 hardware throughout my kit along with big, dark, and thin Sabian cymbals, typically. Various two-ply Evans heads are usually on the kit, but the Evans Heavyweight head on my snare is imperative for me in live settings. It’s incredible! Vater Fusion wood tip sticks are my current wood. For live drums, I mostly use DW Collector’s Series snare drums and for the toms and kicks I’ve been taking out the Kolls-Royce of DW drum kit often. I mainly use them for studio sessions. The PDP Concept Maple drums are like the Lexus of DW, so to say. They get the job done very well but if they take a hit or get a deep scratch, I don’t freak out and look for replacements. (Laughs). I also love the Kickport product, as well as Cympad felts. For my in-ears, I’m using 1964 Ears (now 64 Audio) V6 stage models. My actual drum set-up is two-up, two-down, a high and low tuned snare, and a sampler pad. One thing I tend to always demand is a larger ride that’s thin enough to crash on but has a thick/strong bell that cuts. A ride cymbal with that kind of versatility is such a go-to for me. Sabian has mastered this with the Omni cymbal! Cymbal sizes and weights are always changing for me, depending on the gig. When I’m tracking, I seem to use Ableton most of the time.

**BD: How often do you play drums when you’re not touring?**

**MF:** Oh boy, not as often as I wish I could. I’m currently working on building a studio in my new home and seek to have it as a place that I can practice and track in 24 hours-a-day. That’s been a life-long goal of mine.

**BD: What are your musical plans for the immediate future?**

**MF:** They’re kind of all over the place at the moment. In addition to touring, I’d like to start doing clinics and consulting. I also plan on getting back to my own material, at some point, and putting out an album. I want to collaborate with all of the talented friends I’ve met over the years.

**BD: What are your hopes or goals for your long-term future as a drummer?**

**MF:** One thing that I’ve been narrowing down within this musical journey is my motivation. I’m constantly asking myself, “What am I looking to achieve and why is it that I do what I do? How can I use my gift to improve the lives of others?” For me, travelling to far-off lands and sharing the gift of music with people, seeing the smile it puts on their faces, the pulse that the drums inject into their soul creating them to dance out-of-control and forget about life for a bit...that’s the stuff for me! When an individual can step away from the day-to-day mess that life can create and free themselves within the music you’re performing, that’s my reward and I plan to continue with it for as long as I can. It’s always a goal of mine to work with artists in the future that have a message of hope and positivity. There’s enough darkness out there on this planet. Positive music can be so healing to the soul and doesn’t need to be cheesy to achieve it. Just look at U2!

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