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IN THE TIME MACHINE WITH NIGEL OLSSON

R&B SUPERSTAR USHER’S AARON SPEARS

NASHVILLE A-LIST STUDIO DRUMMER CHAD CROMWELL

LOS ANGELES SESSION MASTER CURT BISQUERA

ALL-NEW B.O.A. TECHNOLOGY GOES HI-TECH!
Shown from top to bottom: Collector's Series® Aluminum, Brass, Copper and Bronze
DRUM NOTES

DIVERSITY IN DRUMMING
As I glance through this latest edition of Edge magazine and witness so many different, yet inspiring drummers within its pages, I’m instantly reminded of how diverse the drumming world can be. Whether it’s jazz, R&B, pop, country, hard rock or alternative, one thing remains constant—the drums are our voice.

At DW, we never forget that diversity means many drummers have specialized needs. By making pedals that are easily adjustable to every player’s taste, a full line of hardware in multiple weights and drums that not only sing, but are as versatile as the multitude of music genres represented here, our goal is to make tools for drummers to express that voice.

We’ve received a number of patents and have had many novel ideas over the years, but the ones that really stick out in my mind are those that have made a change in the way drummers approach the instrument, no matter what style of music they play. These are the ideas and the innovations that cross over musical boundaries: the free-floating 9000, the double pedal, the 9702 Multi Stand, Timbre Matching and even our new VLT technology. They all make translating the language of music just that much easier.

So, as we welcome new artists from all over the music world to the DW family, we can learn from each other and embrace our diversity. It’s part of what makes drumming a truly universal language.

Don Lombardi
President, Drum Workshop, Inc.

Free in this issue is a full-color poster fresh from Motley Crue’s sold-out reunion tour. Over the years, Tommy has reached legendary status among hard rock’s elite and has inspired generations of young drummers with his solid chops and energetic stage persona. This one-of-a-kind poster can only be found in Edge magazine and is nothing but pure Tommy! Don’t forget, you can see more of Tommy and the boys at www.dwdrums.com—The Drummer’s Web Site. Period.
Introducing the LX Exotic Series. It's an 8-ply all-maple shell finished in stunning Kurillian Birch with a flawless Charcoal to Natural Lacquer Fade. LX comes in a standard 5-piece kit configuration with heavy-duty 900 Series hardware pack and available 8” and 16” add-ons.

From the moment you sit behind an all-new LX Exotic drumset, you'll realize that this is no ordinary drumkit. With a host of pro features and serious sound that rivals much more expensive offerings, LX is Pacific taken to the next level.
SET-UP SPECS:
Collector’s Series® Maple Drums with Black Lacquer
over Spider Pine Exotic and Satin Chrome Hardware
18x24” Bass Drum
10x13” Edge Snare Drum mounted on floor tom legs
8x10”, 9x12”, 13x16”, 14x18” Tom-Toms
9000 Single Pedal
9500 Hi-Hat Stand
9100 Standard Drum Throne
PDP Super Rack
AARON SPEARS

NO BLUES

IT’S BEEN ANOTHER CHART-TOPPING YEAR FOR R&B SUPERSTAR USHER, AND HIS STICK MAN IS MAKING A NAME FOR HIMSELF AS ONE OF DRUMMING’S NEWEST CHOP MASTERS. >>>

EDGE: Talk about coming up in the gospel scene and how that shaped your playing.

Aaron Spears: I was born and raised in DC. I remember my first taste of music was in church. I came up as a Church of God in Christ kid. As I look back there were so many different grooves and feels represented. The choir would sing so many different types of songs. I would play everything from a blues shuffle to a straight funk groove. It was never a dull moment. Back then I always thought of it as fun and challenging but now I see how even then it helped to shape my vocab and my love for music. It was definitely a great outlet for me. When I’m not on tour you can find me playing at my church. I’ll never get away from my roots.

EDGE: How do you make the transition from playing in church to being a professional musician?

AS: Making the transition from the kid sitting in the first row of the church, begging and waiting impatiently with my one pair of sticks for my turn to play, to where I am now definitely was a process. As I got older, I began to listen to anything and whenever I could get my hands on. I would practice in my basement with records I would hear on the radio or with cassette tapes. I loved playing with tunes recorded by The Winans, The Hawkins Singers, Commissioned and John P. Kee. Those were some of my absolute favorites. I would imagine that I was the drummer putting it down on those different records. As I got older, I started to get into more diverse styles of music. I remember listening to music from Phil Collins, EWF, Run DMC, Prince, Sting, Stevie Wonder and even a little Metallica, Van Halen and AC/DC. Hearing what was happening on some of those records was like an incredible new world! I did a little playing in my high school marching band and also with the jazz band in college, but I didn’t really feel like I found my place until I began to play with a gospel group in D.C. called Gide-

on Band. It was there my musicianship and concept of playing together with a band began. Our music was compared a lot to Mint Condition and EWF because of the instrumentation represented. We had three horns, two keyboards, a B3 Hammond, percussion, bass, lead, three vocalists and drums. We also performed all our songs with a sequencer (drum machine). This really helped me because when it came to hitting on the big stage, the challenge of playing with tracks and loops was not difficult for me. If it wasn’t for Gideon, I am sure that the transition wouldn’t have been as smooth. However, going into the first week of rehearsal smoothing out the rough spots, that’s a whole different mountain to climb. If it wasn’t for God, the support of the band and the insight of my MD, and the advice of a couple of the rough spots, that’s a whole different

EDGE: Describe your live set-up with Ush- er and why you’ve gone with a relatively modest kit.

AS: On the tour I am playing a beautiful DW Black Spider Pine Maple kit with Satin Chrome hardware. I sound like a salesman [laughs]. I play an 8x10”, 9x12”, 14x16”, 14x18” (the 18” is to the left of my hi-hat), 18x24” kick and a 10x13” Edge snare—this monster sits on floor tom legs. I use the Pacific rack and the 9000 hi-hat and single pedal. These were the tools used to make this tour feel like heaven to me. A lot of people ask why I only have a six-piece kit. That’s easy. After my tech Polo and I configured my cymbal setup there was no room for anything else. Just kidding! Coming up in church, a 12”, 13”, 16”, 22” kick and 14” snare were the norm, so I honestly just stayed close to what I’m used to. I have always been comfortable playing a five-piece but I added the 18” on my left because some of the tunes called for really big, beefy fills. Those 16” and 18” VLT floor toms are just what the doctor ordered. The low tones are powerful! I really did have a lot of cymbals set up there on my kit though [laughs]!

EDGE: Do you have a particular warm-up routine?

AS: I can’t say that I do. Did I miss that section in my trusty drummer’s handbook [laughs]? As the tour went on though, I did find myself doing pretty
much the exact same thing before every show. I would get dressed for the show and listen to a couple songs from Jay-Z's *The Black Album*. I would give Polo our secret handshake, and from the time I'd sit down on my kit until my MD, Valdez, would call for the intro to the show, I would pray and ask God to take away any nervousness, help me make it through this show and play it the way he would have me to. That was about it.

**EDGE:** How has Usher’s immense popularity and rise to the top of the charts directly affected your drumming career?

**AS:** It’s absolutely incredible! I couldn’t have asked for a better situation. I know this was nothing but God that worked this out for me. I have been dreaming of playing at this level ever since I can remember. I used to wonder what it would be like to be in any magazine or publication, to be affiliated with the best sponsors in the world and possibly appear on some of my favorite late night TV shows. Because of Usher and Valdez allowing me to be a part of their team, I don’t have to dream about it anymore.

**EDGE:** What’s it like to play the Grammys with the “Godfather of Soul” James Brown?

**AS:** It was an absolute honor. I really felt like I was dreaming even in the rehearsals. A couple of my closest friends helped to put things in perspective and it was such a huge honor to be there. They both are extremely successful. They shared with me that it took one of them ten years before he got to play there, and the other is still waiting for the opportunity. So please try to understand my excitement. This is my first professional gig and tour, and I get to play at the pinnacle of music recognition with the number one artist in the world. And on top of that, the “Godfather of Soul” is coming out to make a special appearance. Wow-eee! It took a few days for the reality to set in. I really thought I was dreaming until James Brown showed up for rehearsal—I was so swoll. Keep in mind, we are talking about “Soul Brother #1,” “Mr. Papa Got A Brand New Bag,” the original “Sex Machine” himself. We also had Fred Wesley and the best horn players I have ever had the honor to share the stage with. These guys have played with everyone from Phil Collins to Maxwell. Did I mention this is one of the biggest stages in the world with two of the biggest names in music? Oh, okay, cool. I just wanted to make sure you knew [laughs]. Once the music started and Mr. Brown looked at me with approval, I was cool. He later verbalized his consent in regard to how I was playing his song. I did a good job of trying to stay chill, but, man, on the inside I was so hype. Wow! It was definitely an experience that I will never forget.

**EDGE:** You’ve been traveling the world over the past year and a half. Any interesting or funny stories?

**AS:** Wow-eee! There were so many memories, man. This was an incredible experience for me personally off stage, as well as professionally on stage. I could tell you about the time I felt a little sick just minutes before a live TV taping in N.Y. where I earned the nickname “Dynamite Bottom.” I could talk about how the band—Natural, Buddy, Valdez and I—would stay up for hours trying to determine who was the PS2 nighttime champion. It was always me, but please don’t mention it to the others. Maybe I could share about the time when Usher picked a girl out of the audience to sing to and she had the look on her face like he better have picked
her because she belonged up there with him. She was so stuck on herself. So he stopped the music, politely asked her to return to her seat and picked a young lady who was crying and singing with disbelief as she danced with him while he sang to her. I could even talk about all the celebs that I have had the privilege to meet. Looking back, all these things were really cool. There are, like, a thousand more memories in my head that I could mention but the one that totally sticks out in my mind is when I got to go to the house of one of my heroes, Bootsy Collins. He was soooooo cool. One of my friends has been doing some work with him and mentioned that we were in town. Mr. Collins was like, “Bring them over to the house.” It’s crazy! It’s like a museum. So many different pictures and memorabilia. So many different basses. I remember seeing a couple of them during his performances on TV or on video. I was so swoll! Here I am with the band, chillin’ at Bootzilla’s crib. Unbelievable! He has a studio in the basement. We all got on the instruments and brought in the funk for like an hour. It was so much fun. He gave us our official funk cards. Definitely an experience I will never forget!

EDGE: What advice would you have for young, aspiring R&B or Hip Hop players that are looking for a career as a pro drummer?

AS: I would first tell them to be patient and wait for their opportunity to come, but make sure to be ready when it shows up. Chops and licks are really cool when you are shedding, but on the gig you have to be able to establish the groove and play the part above anything else. Once the groove is laid down, it’s the placement of those chops that you have in your vocabulary that will set you apart from the players who focus on wowing the crowd with the ultimate super-fast double roll of death and mortification. That’s whack! Stuff like that will get you an aisle or a window seat on the way back to your house quick. Do not get caught up in the hype that these gigs can bring. It’s so easy to go down in flames because you aren’t being true to yourself. My MD would always tell me about how so many great musicians got fired on their day off. Stay humble and really appreciate what it is that your gift has made room for you to do. I have met so many incredible musicians who are dying to be able to play at the professional level. If you get there, you can’t take it for granted. It’s really a blessing. I think the most important thing that I can share with the future cats is how important it is to keep God first. Stay grounded in him. He will direct your paths and put you where you need to be. When you do get there, make sure you cherish and enjoy every second of it.
EDGE: What inspired you to start playing?

Nigel Olsson: I spent a lot of my early years in West Africa because my father was a pilot. He was the chief pilot for the Ghana government. A pilot being the guy that brings big ships in and out of the harbor so they don’t crash. And he never lost one, so I guess he was good [laughs]. So, my older brother and I would spend our summers in Ghana—it used to be the Gold Coast—for eight weeks at a time in the summer, and it was like, still is, a major, major part of my life. I think about it often, about going back. Now that it’s Ghana, it’s changed a lot because it got political. There’s war on either side, you know, there’s Nigeria and Gambia and all them places. But on the weekends, the local people would have, like, what we would call jam sessions now. And they’d beat on anything, you know? It was all about beating on stuff, hollowed-out pieces of tree—you know, basically what you guys do [laughs]. They’d chop a tree down and make a canoe out of it; and then they’d chop another tree down, and hollow it out, and make a drum out of it. And, you know, they’d have animal skin heads and stuff, and different tonal quality. But I always remembered that the low tones were the ones that stuck with me, and I think it stuck forever and ever. So my early mega-influence was these African people bashing away, basically.

EDGE: How do you make the transition from hearing African music, which is sort of like a language and religion there, to a drumset?

NO: To me it’s all about the tone of the drums. You know, I don’t read or anything, and I can’t do a roll—if they asked me to play “God Save the Queen” it’s gonna be, “Off with his head!” ‘cause I can’t even do a roll. But it’s just that tonal thing, and when I hear the music, especially Elton’s music, which is very inspirational to me, you know, the big ballads and stuff, I plan what I’m going to play, but I hear the low tonal quality. You know, my drum fills aren’t very technical, but they’re planned to be big and huge.

EDGE: Tell us about your front-of-house sound man, Clive. I understand he’s been with you since the beginning.

NO: He’s been there the whole time, and you know, he’s been through many, many drummers as well. He just loves this new kit, and we got it past him with these kick drums because he loved the “Ghana” kit, but that’s our studio kit now because as soon as it goes in the studio you put a microphone on that kit. You don’t have to hardly use any EQ or anything. Engineer’s dream, right? So we’re keeping that for studio work now. “The Pinky,” the pink and purple one, he loves that as a road kit. Loves it. And when we had discussed doing a special kit for Las Vegas for The Red Piano, John Good had said, “Listen to this bass drum.” And we went into the little workroom, showroom, whatever it is, and he said, “Hit that.” And I boinked it once, and I said, “Phew! That’s it. Let’s do it. Let’s get it ‘round Clive, though.” [laughs] So Clive basically didn’t know, I don’t think, until John told him about three or four weeks ago when we were in Vegas.

EDGE: I want to just get back briefly to you transitioning from being inspired by African drums to actually your first experiences playing drumset. How you got started playing, you know, in popular music, or…?

NO: Well actually, I started out as a guitar player. I was with this band—I’ve forgotten what they’re even called—and I was a guitar player. ‘Cause in those days, this was like the nineteen—mid-’60s, I would think. In those days you only needed to know basically three chords, which I’ve now forgotten [laughs]. And I was, like, the lead singer and rhythm guitar player. And our drummer had left, or he didn’t show for a gig one night, and you know, I could basically keep time, so I just went back and bashed away on the drums and loved it. And loved it even more because some of the places where we used to play in those early ’60s, if you didn’t play The Beatles or The Rolling Stones they’d start hurling stuff at you, you know. ‘Cause mainly we were playing in working men’s clubs or pubs, you know, I mean rough stuff. So I figured out, if I’m sitting behind the drums and the cymbals I’ve kind of got shields, you know [laughs].
EDGE: So you never had lessons?

NO: No lessons, no.

EDGE: So you developed your style of playing on your own?

NO: I just used to put the headphones on and play along to records. Whether it was Cliff Richard records, or Lonnie Donegan records, or Beatles, whatever. And I'd just play along with them. And that's basically how I started. And then, there's what I call my "descriptive drumming," which would be, you know, those big fills that I put in the Elton songs. When I first heard, I think it was The Beatles' White Album, when you heard Ringo's drums in stereo in the headphones, it was amazing 'cause he's got that low tonal quality. I think it was Geoff Emerick who was the engineer on that particular record—and I think they used to put sheets and carpets over it. Just to make it sound like "duj, dju, dju, dju, djum." I wanted to take that a little bit further and have that kind of sound—but with the sheets off. That's where I was looking for that low "duuoooom"—that you don't stop the tone, you make it ring on, you know? And I was a nightmare actually when we first started recording with Elton because I didn't want to tape up the drums. I wanted that "djuum," but in those days, you know, they'd always say, "Oh, it's rattling. You've got a rattle here," and you'd spend, like, hours trying to find where the rattle was coming from. Then, actually, Slingerland built me a kit with wooden rims. It was in the '70s, like '73 or '72. And I had wooden rims on them. Oversize toms, oversize kick drums, and these wooden rims on the toms. And we found that wooden rims in the studio don't rattle like metal ones do because of me having to tune the drums so low. So, that worked.

EDGE: So did you play with a click back then?

NO: Nope. No clicks. I hate,loathe click tracks. I even hate ProTools. Because now that Elton has figured out that you can fly stuff in, you know, you only get, really, to play half a song anymore.

EDGE: Everybody's doing that.

NO: Yeah, and flying 'em in.

EDGE: So you developed your style of playing on your own?

NO: Not really. We knew we had the sound together, and we just sat down and played the song. Most of that stuff, the big, big records were cut within one or two takes 'cause if you go any more than five, you lose the freshness of it all, I think. Still to this day, I don't like to go in and play until I've heard the song at least a couple of times—if Elton plays it down a couple of times. I won't sit at the drum kit until he's ready to, like, say, "Okay, let's go and cut it."

There was a song we did on the Captain Fantastic album, I think it's called "We All Fall in Love Sometimes," which goes—it's kind of two songs in one—it goes into "Curtains," and we didn't want to make an edit between the two songs because you would lose the atmosphere. And I have this, what we call my trademark, I have the hi-hat going at the same time as the sizzle cymbal, and that's my trademark. But the sizzle cymbal lasts for so long, we didn't want to make an edit because you'd cut that sizzle off. And there wasn't enough time for the sizzle to fade away before the next song would come in, so we had to cut that whole thing in one take.

EDGE: So did you even cross-fade it?

NO: As you hear it on the record, that's the way we cut it. So, you know, you get halfway through the first song, "We All Fall in Love Sometimes," and you say, "I hope that I remember how to get it to the next!" [laughs] And it was fantastic. Still one of my favorite songs that we've ever, ever recorded because it was just fresh. We were, again, all on the same wavelength, and I remember we had our eyes closed and we knew exactly what we were going to do. And we didn't have to cross-fade or edit or any-
thing. No razor blades on that record.

**EDGE: Talk a little bit about your solo career.**

**NO:** I was happy with most of the stuff I put out. “Put on Your Dancin’ Shoes” was a big record for me. It was, like, top four in America. It never did a thing overseas. But it was a good experience for me to make records because I love being in the studio, that’s my thing. And when I moved to Atlanta, the lady that I was seeing—I mean, we were together for like nine years—she ran, well, owned Bang Records out of Atlanta. So we’d be in the studio all the time, basically, cutting with Paul Davis and some of the Atlanta people and bringing people in from Memphis and Muscle Shoals. That was a great experience to work with those kind of musicians. You know, the Blues guys, and the people from Stax and everything, you know? But, I never toured.

I was going to go on a tour, and then I had a really bad car crash and never made it out onto the road on my own. But I was kind of freaked out anyhow because I didn’t really want to come out and sing, even though I had James Stroud, who was going to play drums. We were going to have, like, two drummers, and I would come out and sing part of the time and then go back and James and I would play together. But I was just freaked out about being the frontman. And it’s not a case of them throwing bottles anymore, I just don’t want to be the frontman, you know? But I’d like to do a record, which I did, and it was only really released in Japan, the most recent one, called *Move the Universe*. I cut that record, but had different singers. I had, like, girl singers, a couple of guy singers, and just did songs that I always wanted to do, like old cover records or whatever. And we tried to get a record deal over here for that, but they said, “Well, we don’t know where to put it.” So... but I just love to be in the studio.

**EDGE: Has your auto racing career played a role in your drumming?**

**NO:** It’s actually backwards. Being a drummer, you are so much more coordinated in a racing car. Because when you’re behind the wheel, and you’re doing, like, 200 miles an hour, and there’s a wall coming up, your reactions have to be very, very, very quick. And, you have to use both sides of your brain. Your hands, arms, legs and feet are doing totally different things all the time, so you have to be really coordinated to do this. And that’s part of my passion. I was so passionate about motor racing, and when I got to go into the Ferrari Challenge and drive these super-cars the way they’re meant to be driven you know, at breakneck speeds, and knowing that there was nobody coming around the other way, well hopefully not, it was amazing. And I did very, very, very well, I think, because of my coordination. You know, your legs have to do different things from your arms and hands. People find it very, very tough. It’s like that thing where you rub your stomach and pat your head, you know, you’ve gotta be coordinated and concentrate.

**EDGE: So, it sounds like you’re purposefully playing fills in a certain way. You’re holding back and playing in a simpler way than you maybe would.**

**NO:** And it’s basically to the lyrics, as well. Because all the big, big ballads that we’ve done with Elton, you know, they’re Bernie’s lyrics. The lyrics have so much meaning and you don’t wanna cover them up with something that’s not really needed. You know, just don’t do a drum fill for the sake of doing it. When we first started recording with Elton, I discovered that if I do a fill across the toms in stereo it travels across the speakers.

**EDGE: Those were the “Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Me” fills...**

**NO:** True. So you know that when you got back in the control

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**SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:**

**Solo Albums:**
- 1980 *Nigel Olsson* (Self-Titled)
- 1981 *Nigel Olsson’s Drum Orchestra and Chorus* (Vol. 2: Move The Universe)

**With Elton John:**
- 1969 *Empty Sky*
- 1970 *11-77*
- 1971 *Tumbleweed Connection*
- 1971 *Madman Across the Water*
- 1972 *Honky Chateau*
- 1972 *Don’t Shoot Me... I’m Only The Piano Player*
- 1973 *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*
- 1974 *Caribou*
- 1975 *Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy*
- 1976 *Here & There*
- 1978 *21 at 33*
- 1981 *The Fox*
- 1983 *Too Low For Zero*
- 1984 *Breaking Hearts*
- 1988 *Reg Strikes Back*
- 1990 *Elton John’s The Road To El Dorado*
- 2000 *One Night Only: The Greatest Hits*
- 2001 *Songs From The West Coast*
- 2004 *Greatest Hits 1970-2002*
- 2004 *Peachtree Road*

**Other appearances:**
- 1968 *Plastic Penny: Two Sides of a Penny*
- 1969 *Plastic Penny: Currency*
- 1969 *Spencer Davis Group: Funky*
- 1970 *Very ’Eavy, Very ’Umble*
- 1970 *Cochise: Swallow Tales*
- 1971 *Mike Hurst: In My Time*
- 1972 *Mick Grabham: Mick The Lad*
- 1972 *Long John Baldry: Everything Stops For Tea*
- 1973 *Kiki Dee: Loving And Free*
- 1973 *Davey Johnstone: Smiling Face*
- 1974 *Jimmy Webb: Land’s End*
- 1975 *Barbie Benton: Something New*
- 1975 *Neil Sedaka: The Hungry Years*
- 1975 *Linda Ronstadt: Prisoner In Disguise*
- 1975 *Rod Stewart: Atlantic Crossing*
- 1976 *Leo Sayer: Endless Flight*
- 1976 *Rick Springfield: Wait For Night*
- 1976 *Brian and Brenda Russell: Word Called Love*
- 1976 *Neil Sedaka: Steppin’ Out*
- 1976 *Peter Lemongello: Do I Love You*
- 1977 *Eric Carmen: Boats Against The Current*
- 1977 *Paul Davis: Singer Of Songs, Teller Of Tales*
- 1977 *Helen Reddy: Ear Candy*
- 1978 *Eric Carmen: Change Of Heart*
- 1978 *Bonnie Pointer: Heaven Must Have Sent You*
- 1978 *Uriah Heep: Landedowne Tapes*
- 1979 *Neil Sedaka: In The Pocket*
- 1981 *Chris Christian*
- 1983 *Barry Manilow: Greatest Hits Volume II*
- 1987 *Spencer Davis Group: Golden Archive Series*
- 1990 *David Foster: River Of Love*
- 1993 *Kenny Rogers: If Only My Heart Had A Voice*
- 1994 *Uriah Heep: Landedowne Tapes*
- 1996 *Leo Sayer: Show Must Go On: Anthology Trutunes*
- 1997 *Eric Carmen: Definitive Collection*
- 1999 *Random Hearts (Original Soundtrack Recording)*
- 2002 *Toto: Through the Looking Glass*
You know, just don’t do a drum fill for the sake of doing it.

room, your toms will travel. And Gus [Dudgeon, producer] was actually the one that said, “Nige, you know, you can leave a few of them out. You’re not Keith Moon. Let Moony do all that stuff. Hold back a little bit.” And that was it. That clicked. It’s what you leave out and that’s been imprinted into my brain since the early, early studio days.

EDGE: So, does Elton ever have anything to say about drum parts?

NO: No. He actually doesn’t say anything to anyone about what they should play because he has so much trust in the way we know his music. So he won’t say anything about, “Well, you play like this, and you play like that.”

EDGE: Tell us about when you and Curt Bisquera were playing together.

NO: He brought me along to you guys. Curt was playing DW at that time because he was part of the band at that stage. DW was basically the sound, the way they were built, it was what I was looking for. And Curt says, “You know, I know these guys really well.” And then Curt made the call right there.

EDGE: So you’ve mentioned that you get pretty anxious before a show.

NO: No, I freak out until I get on that stage. And I don’t know what it is. It’s not that I’m worried if I’ll break a drumstick or make a mistake in a song. I don’t know what it is, I’m just absolutely frightened to death. And with the Vegas shows, it’s so weird, ‘cause I don’t look at a clock, but I have this adrenaline rush. I mean it’s like having heart palpitations, my whole body goes “vrooouh,” and I know that it’s 7:05 and I need to go start getting ready for a 7:30 show. And then Chris, my tech, will come in with a Pepsi—has to be Pepsi. He will hand me the Pepsi fifteen minutes before I go on stage. Every single night. He’ll give half the can to me and half the can to Davy. Before I go on stage, I have to have Dennis, our stage manager, standing on the left of me [laughs]. Keith [Bradley, our manager] will be over by the curtains, Bob Haley, Elton’s assistant, his right-hand guy, is just behind me, and Bob Birch, the bass player, is right behind me to go on the stage behind me. And as soon as our intro begins, I say a little prayer to make this a really good gig, and as the downbeat for the intro music goes, Dennis will always shake my hand and say, “Have a good show, Nige.” And I’ll put my drumstick out here like that, and touch Keith, every single day. And Bob Haley, Elton’s guy, always messes with me because he’s kind of movin’ around, and I know that he’s in the wrong place. And I’ll look back to see that Bob Birch is following me because I’m not going to do it on my own. And Bob will always say, “...and a one...” So, we have our own little ritual. And I’ll always sign all the drumheads before I do the gig, and that makes it all go smooth. It’s like motor racing. You know, if your tire man isn’t there when you come into the pits, you’re in big trouble. You know, it’s all split-second stuff here.

JOHN GOOD TALKS ELTON JOHN WITH NIGEL:

JG: Those were some really big records with big hits. And when we saw you, Elton and the band playing the other night, it felt just like it did the first time I saw the band, in ’71. Back then, it just blew me away. And it wasn’t a big venue, but the people were electrified with it. And I’m still seeing the same feeling coming from that stage.

NO: His songs, there is a special way of playing his songs, and I think we still pull it off. I play, actually, a little bit behind. I tend to hold things way, way back. I was actually once offered a gig with The Beach Boys, and Carl—God rest his soul—said, “No.” ‘Cause Carl and I were good friends, and he says, “No, Nigel wouldn’t work out because he plays too behind the beat. Beach Boys songs are right there, or are a little bit rushed. ‘And Nigel is totally the wrong style.’ And I would tend to hold it back, and I leave out a lot of stuff where people think, “Oh, here comes a fill, here comes a fill.” Oh, well, not with “Nige.” I leave a lot out. It’s that space that makes our records so different, and the way that they’re held back. And, you know, Dee obviously died ten years ago now, and we miss him dreadfully within the band—Davy and I, and Clive. But Bob Birch has that Dee Murray thing going on as well. He studied the way that Dee played on the records. And it’s pretty frightening because sometimes, especially when we’ve been in the studio recently, when Bob plays, it’s very Dee-esque—if that’s a word we can use—Davy and I look at each other and say, “That was a Dee, wasn’t it?”

JG: It just seems to be such a chemistry with him and you guys. I mean, Bob’s one of my favorites...

NO: He’s got it down...

JG: ...and he nails that gig just perfectly...