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# MASTHEAD

ISSUE TWELVE, SPRING 2016

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“I am relatively new to DW  
and, from a distance, I held  
an image of John Good as  
someone who sits about in  
a laboratory tapping and  
listening to the voices of wood;  
diverting, bending, curving the  
grain. He and his technicians,  
in a sense, playing with nature.  
I discovered it was all true!  
I really enjoy playing these  
drums!”

– Virgil Donati



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# BAGGAGE FEES

VOLUME THREE, *ISSUE TWELVE*

♦♦♦

I went to a gig for the first time in a while yesterday. It lasted for about two hours but it felt like five minutes. I stood in a room full of people, didn't really talk to anyone, and left with a feeling of jubilation. That's pretty weird when you think about it. Unless it did actually last five minutes and I got ripped off. Entirely possible.

I almost didn't bother going. I had a bunch of excuses that pretty much revolved around the idea of trying to save money by staying in. The tickets weren't even that expensive; I could easily consume the equivalent value in Gummy Bears just sat at home. I know because I do most nights. But for some reason, I peeled myself off the sofa and headed out. I'm grateful I did.

It had been some time since I'd listened to a drum kit being played loudly through a PA. My own set sounds like wet toilet roll, so it was a welcome change. I stood and privately basked in the excellence of amplified, professionally mixed sound.

It made me realise that I should make more of an effort to see live music. For a long time, I lived in a place where the only bands that came though the nearby town were sold by Lance Armstrong and had the word "Livestrong" on them. Small venues – ones that are unlikely to garner sponsorship from a telecommunications provider – will appreciate your support, and so will the musicians. If, like me, you enjoy complaining about Ticketmaster's monopolisation of live music, it's the most direct way to support the side of the industry that doesn't operate like a mismanaged airline.

Don't fear the venue with the floor sticky enough to catch mice, or the bathroom that might potentially be a crime scene. It's less scary than the prospect of your local venue exclusively dealing in stadium seating.

Welcome to Volume Three, Issue 12 of The Drummer's Journal.

Tom.

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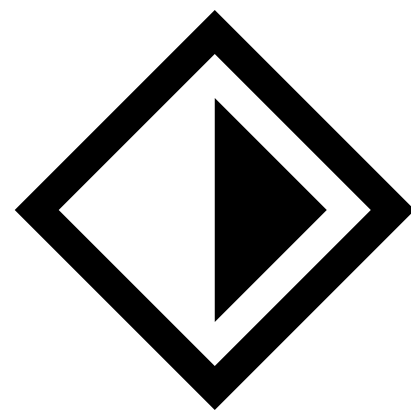
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# A JOYRIDE OR TWO

DINOSAUR JR.'S MURPH

*Words & photography by Tom Hoare*





PHOTO BY JOSEPH



Emmet Jefferson Murphy, usually known as Murph, is somewhat understated for the drummer of a band often credited as pioneers of alternative rock. In person, he seems far removed from the brash, punkish aesthetic that initially endeared Dinosaur Jr. to many.

As a description of the music Dinosaur Jr. play, alternative rock isn't particularly revealing; today you could walk into a record store, look in the alternative rock section and find records from the likes of REM alongside those from Rammstein. Using "alternative rock" as a search term in Spotify relays about as much cohesive information as the North Korean intranet. In the mid 1980s, however, alternative rock was an altogether more specific term, and was used to describe a wave of rock bands signed to independent labels, playing shows not backed by corporate promotion. Dinosaur Jr. were one of these bands.

By the early 90s, media attention on the likes of Sonic Youth and the Pixies had exponentially increased. Dinosaur Jr. were no exception. In 1991, the same year Nirvana unveiled *Nevermind*, they released their major label debut, *Green Mind*, and were sent packing on the European festival circuit. By the time they returned to the US, alternative rock was no longer consigned to the underground. It had the metal ribs and canvas canopy it needed to be thrust up into the sky as an umbrella term to end all umbrella terms.

Frontman J Mascis developed a reputation as quiet and introspective off stage, and a loud, fuzzy, guitar-wielding icon on it. Bassist Lou Barlow, somewhat disparagingly, became known for his feuds with J, his ejection from the band in 1989 an MTV anchor's wet dream. But Murph has largely remained Murph – he sits at the back of the stage holding everything together with a sort of frenzied finesse. I met Murph prior to the band's 30th anniversary show in New York. Perhaps it's best he takes it from here.

♦ ♦ ♦



♦ ♦ ♦  
“IT’S TRUE THAT I  
USED TO STEAL MY  
MOM’S CAR AND  
GO JOYRIDING.”  
♦ ♦ ♦

**I**grew up in Connecticut then I moved to Amherst, Massachusetts when I was in high school. My parents separated; my father was a university professor so I moved in with him. Then I met J and Lou. I’ve known J since I was about 16 years old.

**As a kid, I remember thinking how a lot of people in Amherst seemed sort of hick-like.** I was used to the city and was a little more dialled into the urban thing. I was just like, “wow, this is farm country.”

**Junior high school was horrible, but high school was great because I had a girlfriend.** Amherst was a college town, so there was a lot of partying. I did a lot of that.

**I was a wild kid. I’m the classic Keith Moon drummer stereotype.** I was always energised, super ADD. I would always be tapping on stuff. One day, my teacher was like, “why don’t you get a drum set and go home, instead of constantly tapping on things in class?” It was like a light bulb; I was about 11 so I think the teacher’s sarcasm was lost on me a bit, I was like, “that’s a great idea, I should do that.”

**My dad was really cool with me being a drummer.** We went to a second hand shop and found this old Ludwig drum set that was in the window and we bought it for like 350 dollars. It was a ’68 I think and it was pretty beat up. We lived in this small condominium apartment. It had little bedrooms with high ceilings so I took our mattresses and put them up against the windows to act as sound insulation. I got the bass drum and put it up against the bed to stop

it sliding. I was making a ton of noise trying to play along to records. It’s a shame I later sold that kit. At the time, I didn’t realise it might be worth something.

**I was really into pop radio and I remember specifically listening to drums when I was 10 or 11.** I could pick out the bell of a cymbal or the kick, whereas other kids would be like, “what’s a snare?” For some reason I just knew what was happening, so I thought I should just become a drummer.

**It’s true that I used to steal my mom’s car and go joyriding.** I was quite young, like 15, so this was before I even had a licence. I would push it out of the garage at night so it didn’t make any noise, then go and pick up friends and go on these tears until about five in the



♦ ♦ ♦  
“IT’S ALSO TRUE THAT  
I RECORDED PARTS FOR  
I BET ON SKY SHORTLY  
AFTER BEING IN A  
SERIOUS CAR WRECK.  
IT TURNED OUT I HAD  
BROKEN RIBS. AND  
ALSO HAD A BROKEN  
FOOT. AND ALSO A  
BAD CONCUSSION.”  
♦ ♦ ♦





MURPH AT THE GREAT NORTHERN  
WITH DINOSAUR JR., 2010  
PHOTO BY JACOB LAMBERT

♦ ♦ ♦  
“I DID FIND IT  
FRUSTRATING  
HAVING THIS GUY  
WHO IS SO MUCH  
BETTER AT DRUMS  
ALWAYS SHOWING  
YOU UP. IT WAS HARD  
TO DEAL WITH.”  
♦ ♦ ♦

morning before bringing it back. I got caught because one morning my mother was standing on the lawn waiting for me. That’s part of the reason I got moved up to Massachusetts, because she got so irritated that she wanted to send me to military school to straighten me out. Instead, my father was like, “let’s try having him live with me in Massachusetts.” I’d actually totally forgotten all about this.

**You couldn’t get away with that stuff now** - joyriding I mean - because you’d get locked up in a juvenile prison or sent to some sort of boys’ home. It’s a whole different society today, it’s kind of sad.

**Initially I thought I’d just go to university and be a normal person.** I just remember the band having a very frank conversation after high school. We knew we weren’t cut out for real work and that

we’d just go crazy if we tried. So we decided that music was probably our only vehicle and that we should at least try.

**People ask us about whether we were thinking about a trajectory,** but I was never thinking about things like, “one day we might be doing a 30 year reunion in New York.” When you’re 20, that’s not on your mind at all.

**Things with the band really took off** when Sonic Youth took us on tour in 1986. We started getting lots of label interest, then we went on a big European tour. It all happened really fast.

**When we came back from Europe,** a lot of US journalists thought we were a British band because they’d seen so much British press.

Like a lot of things with this band, it just kind of happened. Then we started to become well known in the US.

**It’s also true that I recorded parts for the Dino album** I Bet on Sky shortly after being in a serious car wreck. I literally flipped my car, and walked into the studio totally beat up and limping. J and Lou were just like, “woah!” I think the drumming actually helped me recover a bit.

**It turned out I had broken ribs.** And also had a broken foot. And also a bad concussion. To be honest, I was in so much pain that if I deviated from anything that wasn’t simple drumming-wise, it would hurt too bad. I actually became ultra-focused and that’s why I think the drumming is really good on that record. It’s not too busy or frenzied.



**The wreck happened because it was winter** and I was coming home on this road which was pretty curvy and there was lots of black ice. I went round a corner too fast and the car started sliding then it caught on the pavement and flipped.

**I guess I was the ‘proggy’ guy because I grew up listening to a lot of 1970s jazz fusion.** I remember listening to Billy Cobham and there was this energy that I just wanted to be a part of. I also went to a lot of punk rock shows. I think that added fuel to the fire.

**I’m totally self-taught,** but today I’m much more focused and I have a clarity with drumming in my life in general. This is something I didn’t have before. When we were playing shows back then it felt like we were flying by the seat of our pants. It was just like a rollercoaster ride when we played gigs, but now I feel like we can control the volume and power instead of it being this crazy wash of sound.

**J is also a phenomenal drummer and he did record some of the drum tracks himself.** Back then I did find it frustrating having this guy who is so much better at drums kind of always showing you up. And it was hard to deal with. He recorded drum parts I couldn’t initially play so I had to learn them. The good thing about it was that learning his parts made me a better drummer, but admittedly it was quite a difficult way to do it.

**When the band broke up,** I did some session work for a bit in New York. I found that with session work, you have to take your personality out of it, whereas being in a band is all about who you are. It is to me, at least. I probably do more session stuff now to be honest.

♦ ♦ ♦  
 “A LOT OF OUR  
 RECORDING  
 SESSIONS WERE  
 TENSE, LOTS OF  
 PRESSURE, LOTS  
 OF ANXIETY.”  
 ♦ ♦ ♦





PHOTO BY QUIQUE



**When we got back together as Dinosaur Jr.,** I was kind of dreading it. I had to relearn a lot of material from older albums. I guess that worried me because that wasn't always a fun time, and we're known as a pretty volatile band and not getting along. We weren't all cosy and friendly. It wasn't like that at all.

**A lot of our old recording sessions were tense,** lots of pressure, lots of anxiety. It's not really pleasant to remember all that. But when I listened to Dinosaur [debut record] recently, I was like, "actually this is pretty cool." It was nice to have that reaction. It changed my outlook completely.

**I feel like we haven't specifically talked about drums,** is that ok? I don't suppose people will really care what my favourite snare head is. When I think about it, I'm not sure I have one. So maybe that's all for the better then.

**I'll close out with a joke:** Why did the Irish lady only put 239 beans in a pot when she cooked soup? Because any more would be too farty... actually I'm not sure that'll work in print if you don't read it in an Irish accent though. Try it again in an Irish accent.

♦ ♦ ♦







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# BRASS TACKS

IRON MAIDEN'S NICKO MCBRAIN

*Words By Tom Hoare*



PHOTO BY ARJAN AELMANS



Nicko must have thought I'd never been in a hotel before. The first 15 minutes of our interview consisted of me walking round his five star suite complimenting pretty much everything about it. The lamps (ornate); the carpets (tactile); the ironing board's action (smooth). It didn't occur to me that, as I evaluated the room's hard and soft furnishings, it must have seemed like I'd just re-joined civilisation following a childhood spent with a pack of benevolent wolves. At least Nicko didn't seem too perturbed, and simply nodded and smiled politely. Or maybe he was just making sure I wasn't going to steal anything. I'll never know.

An explanation for my actions is something I've yet to fully comprehend, but, at the very least, they require some sort of preface. So here it is.

Nicko, like me, was in Los Angeles for the National Association of Musical Merchants show; a trade event where instrument manufacturers spend a fortune exhibiting their new products for the year ahead. About 100,000 people attend the show, which means hotels in the area are booked out well in advance. I discovered this to my detriment.

The only vacant room within a five-mile radius was at a motel about an hour's walk from the convention centre. It was only when I checked in that I realised it was the type of place where you can also book rooms by the hour. Instead of those miniature bottles of shower gel, the only complimentary item I found was a scattering of pubic hairs in the sink. Equally eye-catching were the large scorch marks on the carpet, which

suggested that, at some point, someone had a decent sized fire going just by the foot of the bed.

On the first night, I developed an incredibly aggressive cough, presumably aggravated by whatever spores were lurking in the pillows. The next night was spent wondering if the headboard of the bed next door was suddenly going to smash through our shared wall given it was unceasingly slamming against it. I was most intrigued by the pool – a crumbling, circular concrete hole in the parking lot that looked more like the remnants of a botched archaeological excavation than something you'd voluntarily get into. But the old saying that beggars can't be choosers rang true. It was either this or nothing.

Perhaps this is why I found my visit to Nicko's hotel so enthralling. My stint in what Trip Advisor described as "America's worst motel" had made Nicko's place look like the Taj Mahal. Or at least that's what I'm sticking with.

♦ ♦ ♦



## Hackneyed

Nicko joined Iron Maiden in 1982. Since then he's made 13 studio albums with what many people consider to be one of the most influential heavy metal bands of all time.

What's subtly impressive about Iron Maiden is that they've never really fallen off the wagon during the course of their 30-year recording career. Whilst some of their releases have received more praise than others, their output has been remarkably consistent. It's also worth considering that mainstream support for metal has come and gone over the years, presenting ample opportunity for the band to devolve into some sort of classic metal nostalgia act. Instead, their current situation is the exact opposite; Iron Maiden are more popular today than they've ever been.

Nicko is classically extroverted in the sense he's talkative, energetic and outgoing. His laugh has the cadence of a cartoon villain's cackle, except in a much lower register. His voice still has that cockney lilt, with women unilaterally addressed as "darlin'", men as "mate." His hair is long enough for it to pose a legitimate hazard when in the vicinity of machinery with exposed moving parts.

Two days earlier, I'd watched Nicko attend a meet and greet session where a line of fans had waited for about three hours in order to see him. The whole event lasted quite a long time, and might have gone a bit quicker if Nicko hadn't had lengthy conversations with each fan he met. "It's true that

I usually struggle to keep my mouth shut," he grins, "it's probably my upbringing."

Nicko grew up in Hackney, East London. It's an area that, in 2011, was the centre of media attention after serious rioting broke out on the streets. Somewhat unfairly, it was dubbed by the press as, "the home of the urban poor," an area "blighted by racism, classism and economic stagnation."

Although it's an origin story that has come to define some of Britain's most famous metal musicians, Nicko was never really the angst ridden, disillusioned kid who turned to metal as an escape from urban poverty. "I've actually got very fond memories of my childhood in London," Nicko states, his head cocked to the side. "We had one channel of telly and no computers. School was a chore and I didn't do very well academically, but home was very loving. I remember my mum saying that I needed to get a trade. I told her that I did have a trade – I was going to be a drummer. She didn't like that. 'It's too fickle,' she said. All my dad used to say in these situations was, 'son, please make my life easy and just do what your mum asks.' I only realised what he meant when I had kids.

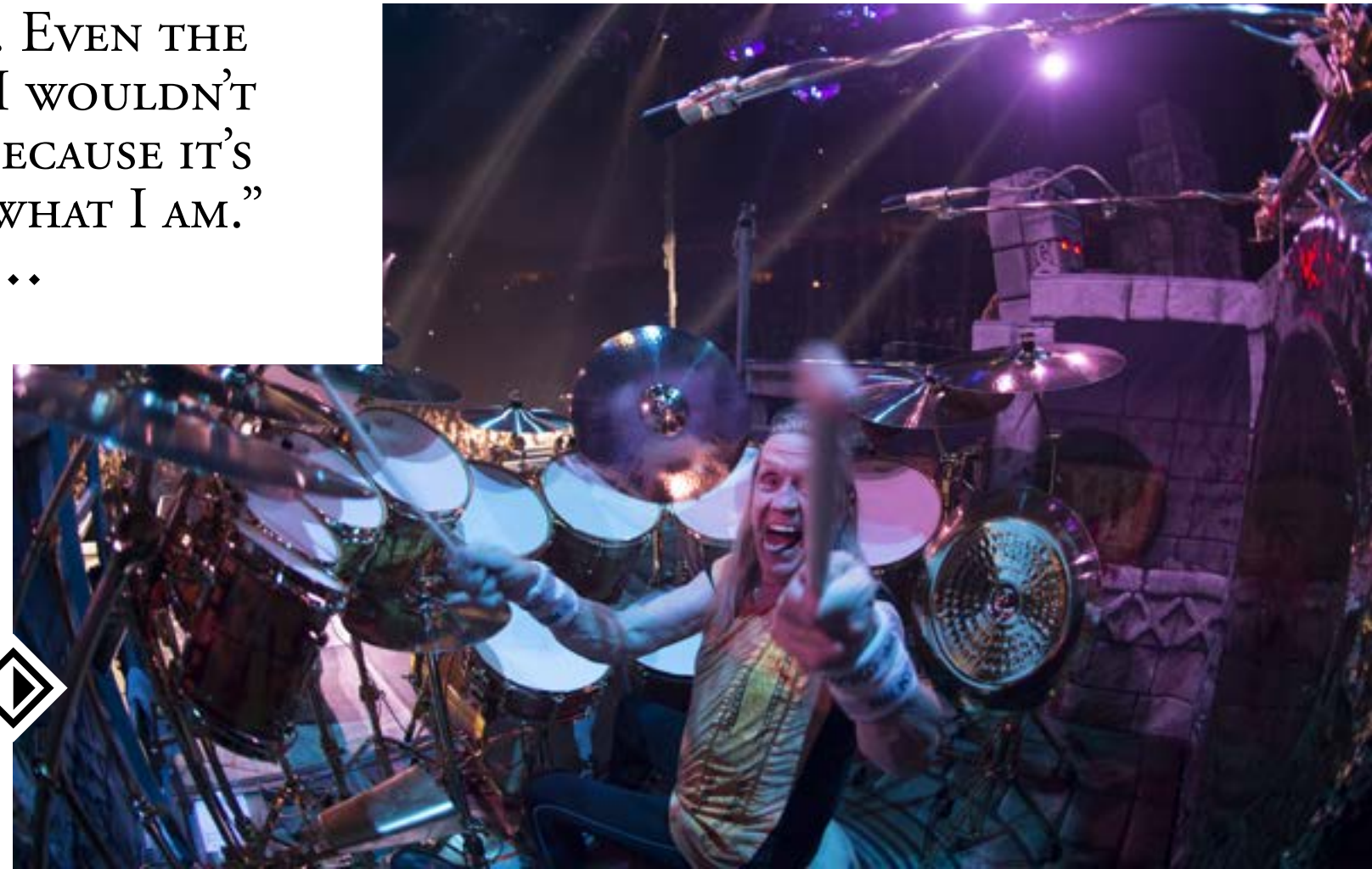


PHOTO BY JOHN MCMURTRIE

♦ ♦ ♦

“PEOPLE ASK ME,  
‘WHAT WOULD YOU  
CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE?’  
WELL, ABSOLUTELY  
NOTHING. EVEN THE  
BAD SHIT I WOULDN'T  
CHANGE BECAUSE IT'S  
MADE ME WHAT I AM.”

♦ ♦ ♦







IRON MAIDEN STUDIO ALBUMS,  
LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM.

1980 IRON MAIDEN

1981 KILLERS

1982 THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

1983 PIECE OF MIND

1984 POWERSLAVE

1986 SOMEWHERE IN TIME

1988 SEVENTH SON OF A SEVENTH SON

1990 NO PRAYER FOR THE DYING

1992 FEAR OF THE DARK

1995 THE X FACTOR

1998 VIRTUAL XI

2000 BRAVE NEW WORLD

2003 DANCE OF DEATH

2006 A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

2010 THE FINAL FRONTIER

2015 THE BOOK OF SOULS



PHOTO BY ARJAN AELMANS



“So I went to college and, after four years, got a qualification in mechanical engineering. And as soon as I got that I was off. I turned pro not long after.

“I’m not saying it wasn’t tough growing up. Certainly it was a struggle putting food on the table. And now I look around today and see everything we have. Everyone with their phones, sat at the dinner table looking at a screen. Some people ask me, ‘what would you change in your life?’ Well, absolutely nothing. Even the bad shit I wouldn’t change because it’s made me what I am.”

“In terms of your career, how have your aspirations changed with time?”

“When I was young, I wanted to be Ringo Starr. My dreams were, one: play the Royal Albert Hall, and two: make an LP. I figured if I was ever in a position to be playing the Royal Albert Hall then I could probably afford to hang it up whenever I wanted.”

“Have you played the Royal Albert Hall?”

“No, I haven’t! Bruce [Dickinson, vocals] has though, the bastard!” Nicko grins. “But I think I was pretty naïve when I was younger. When I first started out, I asked Sonor for a free drum kit. I called them up and said, ‘I’m playing with this phenomenal guitar player called Pat Travers, can I have a kit?’ Their response was brilliant: ‘Do Rolls Royce give away their cars?’ So after that, I bought one.



“A Rolls Royce?”

“No, not a bloody Rolls Royce – a Sonor drum kit. Anyway, I ended up getting fired from that gig with Pat. I remember this very clearly. A guy called David Hemmings was the manager. I got a phone call from David and he told me, ‘sorry Nicko, but we’ve got to part company.’ I immediately thought, ‘oh, Dave’s leaving, how sad’, so I replied, ‘sorry to see you go, mate.’ There’s silence for a few seconds, then I hear, ‘no Nick, you’re the one who is leaving.’ Christ, I was so naïve I didn’t even realise I was getting fired.

“That was actually a pretty bad period of my life. They kept my bloody drum kit too. I went back to the management and said, ‘this is disgraceful, you can’t just keep my drum kit, I need it. You’ll have to buy me another!’ Thankfully, they did.”

### **Piss On A Wall**

Anyone who has seen Iron Maiden live will recognise that Nicko is always obscured behind an enormous kit, and a whole show can pass where you’ll see little more than a wayward stick. Equally as characteristic is Nicko’s outright rejection of an item that has become a hallmark of metal as a genre: the double bass pedal. He maintains it’s an aspect of drumming that’s never really interested him.

“I never studied ‘the art’ like a lot of other players. I couldn’t read music. I didn’t study under someone. I just only ever did what I felt was right. So, in that respect, people said, ‘well you’re not

really a serious player are you? You haven’t done the academics have you?’ Well, no I haven’t. But I still got where I am now. And when I look at people like Vinnie Colaiuta and JR Robinson, you could piss on the wall and they could play it. But my approach is that I’ll never rest on my laurels. I still get nervous. I’m conscious of letting people down. And in some ways I’m quite selfishly motivated. I want to make music for me – for us, Iron Maiden.

“I’m not that great a player. I’m not a virtuoso. I can pretty much only do what I do with the band. I’m not fast or technical because, initially, I was a pop player. And when I heard Keith Moon I was like, ‘that’s it.’ He made me want to be one of the top players in my genre.

“My dad passed in ‘85, but I’m pleased he got to see me with Iron Maiden at Hammersmith Odeon. He also got to see me win a Kerrang poll for best drummer. I remember that because I beat Cozy Powell to the top spot. I saw Cozy shortly after that poll had been published, and he approached me and said, ‘let me see your hands for a second.’ My first thought was that, as a fellow drummer, he was concerned about the state of my hands. So Cozy looked at them and then looked at me, totally straight-faced, and said, ‘I thought you’d have a few blisters after submitting all those votes for yourself.’ And I just thought, ‘you cheeky bastard!’”

“Anyhow, I still need to play the Royal Albert Hall. I’m not sure they’d let Maiden in there. It’d bring the roof down.”

“As a qualified engineer, could you not sort that out for them?”

“Christ I wasn’t that sort of engineer! I’m not sure I could even use a protractor now, let alone rebuild a roof.”

### **Rollercoaster**

Out of Nicko’s hotel window, the arcing rollercoaster tracks of Disneyland are visible in the distance. I sit in my chair (utile) and relive some awkward memories from my visit to the park the day before.

At the NAMM show, I’d met a guy who was a snare drummer in Disneyland’s daily 3pm parade. As I didn’t fancy a day spent in my motel room, I accepted an offer to attend. After the parade had passed, the realisation that I was a lone male at Disney settled in. I spent the rest of the day awkwardly standing in line for rollercoasters surrounded by excited families. The most excruciating part was one of the ride operators assuming that I was the child of an older couple who were in line in front of me. The couple looked absolutely horrified at the suggestion. I might have been offended by their reaction if I hadn’t been so preoccupied

♦ ♦ ♦

“SO, IN THAT RESPECT, PEOPLE SAID, ‘WELL YOU’RE NOT REALLY A SERIOUS PLAYER ARE YOU? YOU HAVEN’T DONE THE ACADEMICS HAVE YOU?’ WELL, NO I HAVEN’T. BUT I STILL GOT WHERE I AM NOW.”

♦ ♦ ♦



PHOTO BY JOHN MCMURTRIE





with intently wishing I could vanish. After all, Disneyland is billed as the “place where dreams come true” so it was worth a shot.

I tell this to Nicko and he seems to find it mildly entertaining.

“You know, Aerosmith have an Aerosmith themed rollercoaster,” he states.

“What would an Iron Maiden themed rollercoaster consist of?”

Nicko sits in deep thought for a few seconds. “I’d make it really fearful, loads of dark corners and surprises. Remember when you used to go on the ghost train and it’d be pitch black, fake cobwebs hanging down, then suddenly something would jump out and touch your face? I’d make it like that. And there could be a finger, Eddie’s finger, that comes out of the seat and goes up your arse. Well, not actually up your arse, not inside it – I’ve phrased this whole thing very badly - more just something that gives your arse a gentle squeeze. Then people would be turning to the person next to them saying, ‘oi, did you just touch my arse?’” Nicko sits and admires his idea for a few seconds.

“How do you envision a theme park’s marketing department promoting that specific feature?”

Nicko’s eyes suddenly widen with revelation. “Actually, you could call the rollercoaster ‘The Iron Maiden.’ It’d have to be a sort of train on big old wooden rollercoaster, shaky as hell, frighten the life out of you.”

“So it’d be a near death experience basically?”

“Yeah, I say that’d about do it.”

### Nasal Appreciation

According to Google, the most popular internet searches relating to Nicko are:

Nicko McBrain Iron Maiden, Nicko McBrain drummer, Nicko McBrain restaurant (he owns a restaurant in Florida called Rock n Roll Ribs) and Nicko McBrain nose.

“Nose?” Nicko queries after I read the list aloud, “people are searching the internet for information about my nose? Why would they do that?”

“I was hoping you’d tell me.”

“I suppose it does have a very distinct profile, it’s a little deformed because it’s been smacked so many times.”

“I didn’t have you down as a brawler...”

“Well, the first time I broke it was because I had a fight at school with someone who was actually a mate. Peter Beecham his name was. He beat the fuck out of me. It started as a casual duffle bag fight...

“A causal duffle bag fight?”

“Yeah, swinging our bags at each other, then it got out of hand and then he clobbered me, so





I smacked him back. Then he went, ‘right you fucking bastard’ and then the fists properly came out. So, yeah, he broke my nose. It was a classic school brawl, everyone in a circle chanting, *‘fight! fight! fight!’* I wonder where he is today.” Nicko turns to a camera that’s recording the interview and looks down the lens. “Peter Beecham. Look what you did, you bastard.” He quickly gestures to his nose. “But look where I am now though, fuck you.” His laugh booms for a few seconds before

his expression falls. “Jesus, actually that was a terrible thing to say. Sorry about that.”

“Anyhow, after a few days my nose was still swollen and it hurt like hell so I went to the doctors. He said, ‘your nose is broken. If you’d come to see me sooner I could have put it back for you. Now, it’s not so easy.’ Then I had an operation on the NHS where they took some bone out of my hip, and inserted it into my nose. It was the worst thing I’ve ever done in my life, just excruciating.

Then, it got broken again not too long after, and because of the agonising experience of getting it put right the first time, I just left it and that’s how it’s been ever since. I think it’s now just part of my character. My sister used to say I had a nose like a ski jump because it has a little flick at the end.” Nicko goes cross-eyed slightly looking at the end of his nose. “The face that sank a 1000 ships,” he grins.

♦ ♦ ♦

“THEN HE WENT,  
‘RIGHT YOU FUCKING  
BASTARD’ AND THEN  
THE FISTS PROPERLY  
CAME OUT. SO, YEAH,  
HE BROKE MY NOSE.”

♦ ♦ ♦

## Hair of the Beast

In early 2015, Iron Maiden’s frontman Bruce Dickinson was diagnosed with tongue cancer, from which he has now successfully recovered. Bruce’s diagnosis came shortly after the band had recorded their sixteenth studio album, *The Book of Souls*.

“We recorded that album with Bruce knowing that something wasn’t right,” Nicko states. He shifts in his chair and seems to tighten up, crossing his arms and legs. His perpetual grin seems so momentarily disappear. “It was only after we finished recording that he went to the doctors. When the news came back that he had cancer, I was just concerned for a friend. Plus it made me think about my own situation, my own health. When he got the all clear, I looked at Bruce and thought, ‘here’s my mate, he’s been through hell, beaten cancer, and none of it was his fault’. And there I was, putting myself through hell too, except I was doing it to myself with drink. So I knew I had to stop. I took a lot of inspiration from Bruce, it made me realise how stupid I was being.” Nicko pauses, and after a few seconds I wonder if he’s waiting for me to ask another question, before he suddenly continues.

“I knew my drinking was getting bad when I saw footage of an interview I’d done when I was pissed. I’d probably been drinking for about four days straight. My eyes were red and bloodshot, I was slurring words and not making any sense. I don’t remember doing the interview at all. I realised that is not good situation to be in. So I haven’t

had a drink in a while now. I’m not saying I’ll never have another but something had to change.

“I was at dinner last night with some friends and everyone was getting a bit drunk. I love red wine and this bottle went right past me, and I immediately thought ‘give me that bottle,’ but I let it go. It wasn’t a nice feeling. I know that all it would take is one drink. But I’m just glad Bruce is alright. He seems to be running on 20 cylinders at the moment.”

With this, my time with Nicko was pretty much up. He looked at his watch, swore loudly and announced he was late for a meeting. It felt like a slightly abrupt place to leave things as we said a hurried goodbye.

When I got back to my motel, I noticed I wasn’t as distracted by the oppressive dankness as usual. After what Nicko had said about his own health, plus what Bruce had been though, I felt relieved the only thing I had to contend with was potentially being eaten alive by bed bugs.

As I’d left Nicko, I saw him rifling through his suitcase looking slightly panicked. Maybe he was actually checking whether or not I’d stolen something. At least now I know if I wait long enough at a meet and greet, I’ll certainly get the opportunity to ask him.

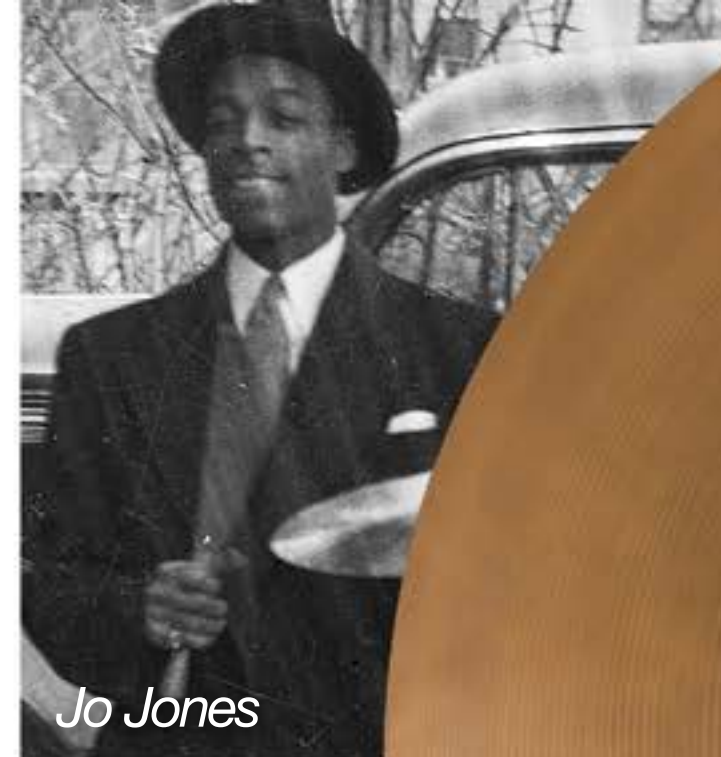
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A black and white portrait of Lenny White, a Black man with a mustache, wearing a dark beanie and a patterned sweater. He is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. His hands are clasped in front of him.

# LENNY WHITE

## THE SPACE IN-BETWEEN

*Words By Tom Hoare  
Photography by Bex Wade*

♦ ♦ ♦

On a Thursday morning in August 1969, a relatively unknown 19-year-old drummer from Queens, New York sat in a studio with 13 of America's most iconic jazz musicians. Amongst them was Miles Davis. They were about to make a record called *Bitches Brew* – an album which would become known as one of Davis' most revolutionary works. That drummer was Lenny White. And by his own admission, he had little idea of what to expect.





**B**itches Brew is regarded by many as a watershed moment in the evolution of jazz. It saw Davis take a step away from the swing rhythms and solely acoustic instrumentation that were explicit in his earlier works and, instead, adopt elements of another musical movement that was hitting its social stride: rock.

On a much wider scale, it's a record that held a mirror up to late 1960s America. With a rosy tint, it's easy to see 1969 as the year when humanity lovingly embraced in a collective LSD-infused love-in. The reality was that the United States – certainly not for the first time since 1776 – was on the verge of tearing its social fabric into increasingly tiny pieces. The Vietnam War had caused an outpouring of public opposition, but a series of events closer to home continued to pitch the American public against each other: the introduction of the pill; the assassination of Martin Luther King; The Stone Wall Riots. In each case, the social and cultural shifts which would result from such events were profound.

Music was no exception, and whilst it may seem very far removed – even trivial – compared to the events above, it served to challenge its own cultural stereotypes. In doing so, some saw Bitches Brew as a cash-in by Davis; an overtly commercial exploit in pursuit of a wider audience. Like Dylan in 1965, he faced criticism for the use of an electric instrument, neglecting a purist notion of jazz he'd helped, in part, to establish. For others, it was a nod towards the future in the knowledge that jazz needed to grow to avoid becoming entrenched by tradition.

I meet Lenny in a quiet bar near the university at which he teaches. We sit in a booth in the very corner of a basement room, its velvet furnishings a confusing indication as to whether we were somewhere seedy or confidently reputable. The suspiciously dim lighting didn't help. A small stage area with a curtain drawn across it makes the hair on my neck stand up. I silently hope that I had not arranged to meet one of jazz's great musicians in a strip club.

A fully clothed waiter brings over a menu and I breathe a sigh of

relief. He hands the menu to Lenny, who studies it intently for several minutes. I get the initial impression that Lenny is not someone who makes any decision lightly.

Lenny is low-key. He speaks softly with a sort of gravelly rasp, which makes everything he says seem stylishly dramatic.

The Grammys had been on TV the night before and, given Lenny has several of his own, this is where our conversation starts off.

"Yeah, that's right," Lenny nods, "I've got four."

♦ ♦ ♦

#### **The Drummer's Journal: Did you go the ceremonies?**

Lenny White: No, I didn't. I planned to go to the last one but I got carjacked a few days before.

#### **Carjacked?**

Yeah. I'm lucky to be here really. A guy with a ski mask and gloves jumped into the front seat of my car when I was at a gas station. He pushed me out of the car and I fell on to a glass case that cut my face up real bad. So yeah, I couldn't go to the Grammys.

#### **How would you summarise Bitches Brew as a record?**

The record was done in 1969, which was an eventful year in the history of the world. Man walked on the moon, we were at war with Vietnam. America was changing and so was society. We were no longer innocent. Bitches Brew was made 24 hours after Jimi Hendrix hit the last note at Woodstock. Ultimately, it's a jazz record that changed the way people viewed what jazz was. It was a gold record, which was rare for that type of music. [Lenny's food arrives] You want some? It's vegetarian - I don't eat meat.







...

“A GUY WITH A SKI MASK AND GLOVES JUMPED INTO THE FRONT SEAT OF MY CAR WHEN I WAS AT A GAS STATION. HE PUSHED ME OUT OF THE CAR AND I FELL ON TO A GLASS CASE THAT CUT MY FACE UP REAL BAD.”

...

PHOTO BY TOM MARCELLO





**Why not?**

I just never had a very good taste for it.

**Not even bacon?**

I used to love bacon. But it's been a long time since I've eaten it.

**Do you think you could eat a burger?**

[*Feigns revulsion*] No. But when you're on the road it's pretty difficult not to accidentally eat meat. I pretty much survive on bags of nuts and fruit. But I make great pizza.

**What makes it so special?**

My combinations. I'm not going to tell you what it is. I make my own dough but I don't use tomato sauce at all.

**That sounds controversial...**

It is.

**What do you use instead?**

I can't tell you.

**Is it cheese?**

... Yeah, I use cheese.

**How did we start talking about pizza again?**

I've no idea. I think we were talking about Bitches Brew.

**Right. What would you say Bitches Brew did for your career?**

To be quite honest, the only reason I got to do it was because Tony Williams couldn't. Tony Williams also recommended me to do the next record I did because he couldn't do that. Ultimately, I played on Bitches Brew because I was in the right place at the right time. I was asked to do something and it went well.

But it wasn't like I suddenly got hundreds of job offers. Shortly after the sessions finished, I did a tour with [jazz pianist] Buddy

Montgomery, and we were pretty much broke for the entire thing. We ended up in LA and stayed with a friend of Buddy's because we couldn't afford a hotel. I ended up going to see Miles as he was in town and doing a show. I didn't have any money for a ticket so I hung around outside. Then, Jack DeJonette steps out. He sees me and I say hi, so he takes me inside to see Miles. Miles asks why I'm in town and I say it's because I've no money to get home. Miles gives me twenty dollars and tells me to get a ticket back to NY. That twenty dollars fed me, Buddy, and Buddy's friend for an entire week. When I eventually got back home to NY, I went to round to Miles' house to give him his twenty dollars back. I think he liked that.

**Did you feel like you'd realised a dream when you recorded with Miles?**

Bitches Brew happened for three days from 10am in the morning to 1pm in the afternoon at Columbia studios in August, 1969. I woke up in October out of a deep sleep, sat up in bed and said to myself, "I recorded with Miles Davis!" It took that long for me to realise it was going to be special. I just regret that it wasn't documented. There are no photographs of this session. None. But at the same time, it was kind of a traumatic experience for me.

**What was traumatic about it?**

There's one song called Miles Runs The Voodoo Down. In rehearsal, Miles comes over and whispers in my ear, "you ain't getting the chicken."

**The chicken? Did he know you were vegetarian?**

He meant that I wasn't funky enough. Don Alias was playing percussion, and he said, "Miles, I think I got this beat that might work." And he sat down and played this real simple beat and my heart just sank. I realised that I'd out-thought myself, I had been overplaying. When the session was over, I was sat in the corner looking sad. Miles came over and said, "don't worry about what happened earlier. Just show up here at 10am tomorrow." After that day, every time I've gone into a session I've asked what it is that's wanted from me. That was a huge lesson.





♦ ♦ ♦

“AFTER THAT DAY,  
EVERY TIME I’VE  
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♦ ♦ ♦





**Is it true you turned down the opportunity to be Jimi Hendrix's drummer?**

Yeah, shortly after Bitches Brew was released, Miles came into a club I was playing at one night. He took me into the backroom and asked, "do you want to play drums with Jimi Hendrix?" And I said, "nah."

**Why did you say no?**

Because I wanted to play drums with Miles Davis!

**How many times have you thought about that since?**

Pretty much every day *[laughs]*.

**Did you go to Woodstock?**

Nah. I was too heavily into jazz. But I loved Led Zeppelin and John Bonham. In My Time of Dying is my favourite rock and roll tune. I've got a nice story about this actually.

**Let's hear it.**

Forty years after Bitches Brew, I go into Pro Drum Shop in LA and they have a book of John Bonham talking about all his Led Zeppelin sessions. I flick through and go to the page where he's talking about recording In My Time of Dying. And right there, in his words, was the sentence: "this was inspired by Tony Williams, Alphonse Mouzon and Lenny White." I ain't making this up. My head just went *[convincingly mimics head exploding]*. That meant a lot to me.

**Did you take a break from playing for a while to be a producer?**

Yeah, that was a big mistake.

**Why was that?**

Because I felt like I'd separated myself from music.

**Can you elaborate?**

For a lot of people, reality is about paying their rent and their bills. They might hate their job or be dealing with problems like an ill family member. This is life for a lot of people; to wake up every day and feel crushed by your responsibilities. But then they might go and

put on a record, and for those seven minutes, 20 minutes, or the hour that they're listening to that single or album, they're in another world. The light shines through. Artists are light bearers, we bring light into people's lives. I'm not saying this to be cute, it's the truth. I genuinely believe that.

**How do you feel about music's role in society today compared to 60 years ago?**

All music was counter-culture at some point. Rock was counter culture. Jazz was counter culture. This is exactly what made it appealing. You could hear people curse, act wild and take drugs and do all those things that America wasn't doing. At that time, America was into Pat Boone. But now, those

things that were counter culture are now part of mainstream society. That's why music today sucks. So when you think of Hemmingway, Picasso, Frank Lloyd Wright, Bob Dylan – does Taylor Swift really fit into that category? Does Kanye West? Get out of here. Did you watch the Grammys?

**No, I didn't.**

That's the problem. You know why it's a problem? Because the only

♦ ♦ ♦

“THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT  
MADE IT APPEALING.  
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♦ ♦ ♦

PHOTO BY TOM MARCELLO







people that can police a change are no longer interested. It's like elections. I don't vote, and I don't care how you say it, but my vote is not going to change anything. America has systemic problems that I can't change. I am part of the generation that has changed things. Now it's changing again but for the wrong reasons.

**Do you disagree with the idea that change happens one person at a time?**

Do you believe that? If so, I applaud your attitude but that's no longer the attitude of most people. Today all I see is everyone just following the pack.

**What separates a good teacher from a bad one?**

At school, I was atrocious at math because of the way it was taught to me. As a teacher, you need to relate to your students. Once you relate to them, you can talk to them, and if you can talk to them, then you can teach them something. If anyone takes away anything from this interview, I think that's an important fact.

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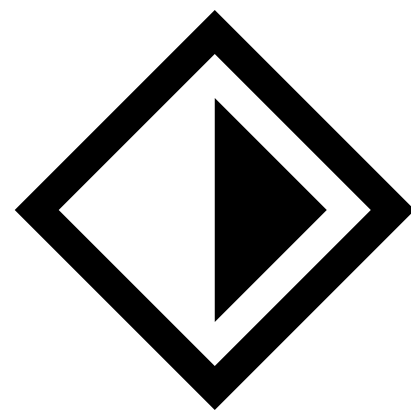
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# EXHIBITION SHOW

Photography by Keka Marzagao

Some people looked a bit confused. Then again, perhaps you can't blame them. It's not everyday you wander into a museum to find someone at a drum kit playing as loud as they can. Add in another 19 drummers located throughout the museum in stairwells, galleries and corridors, and you've got a living, breathing, pop-up exhibition.

Most treated it like a mini music festival. A beat boxer, followed by a crowd of spectators, would walk around the museum, relaying a beat from one drummer to the next.

The event, which coincided with International Woman's Day, was entitled The Oral History of Female Drummers. Curated by Tom Tom Magazine, it served to highlight female musicians playing an instrument that, historically, the media and music industries have treated as masculine.

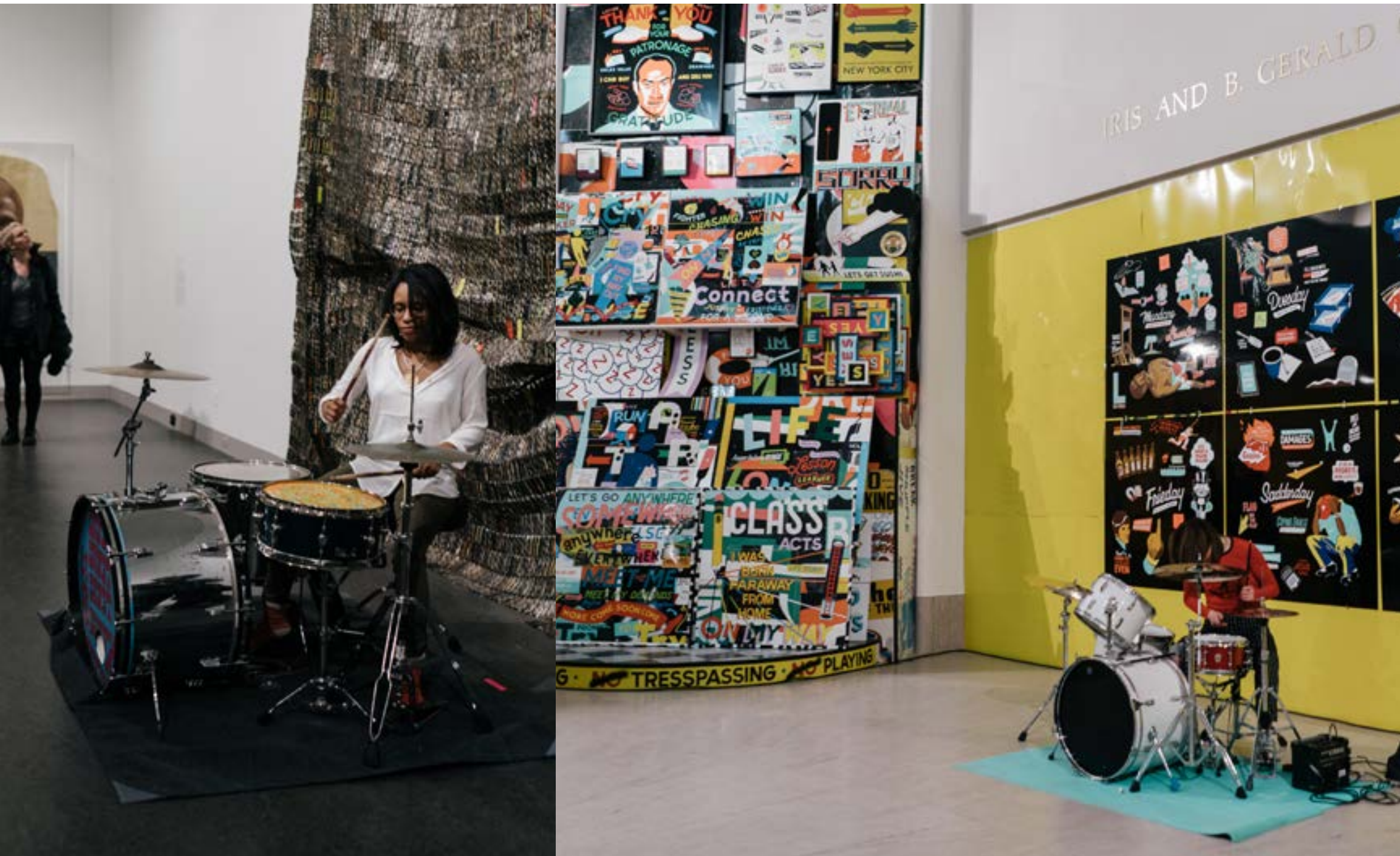
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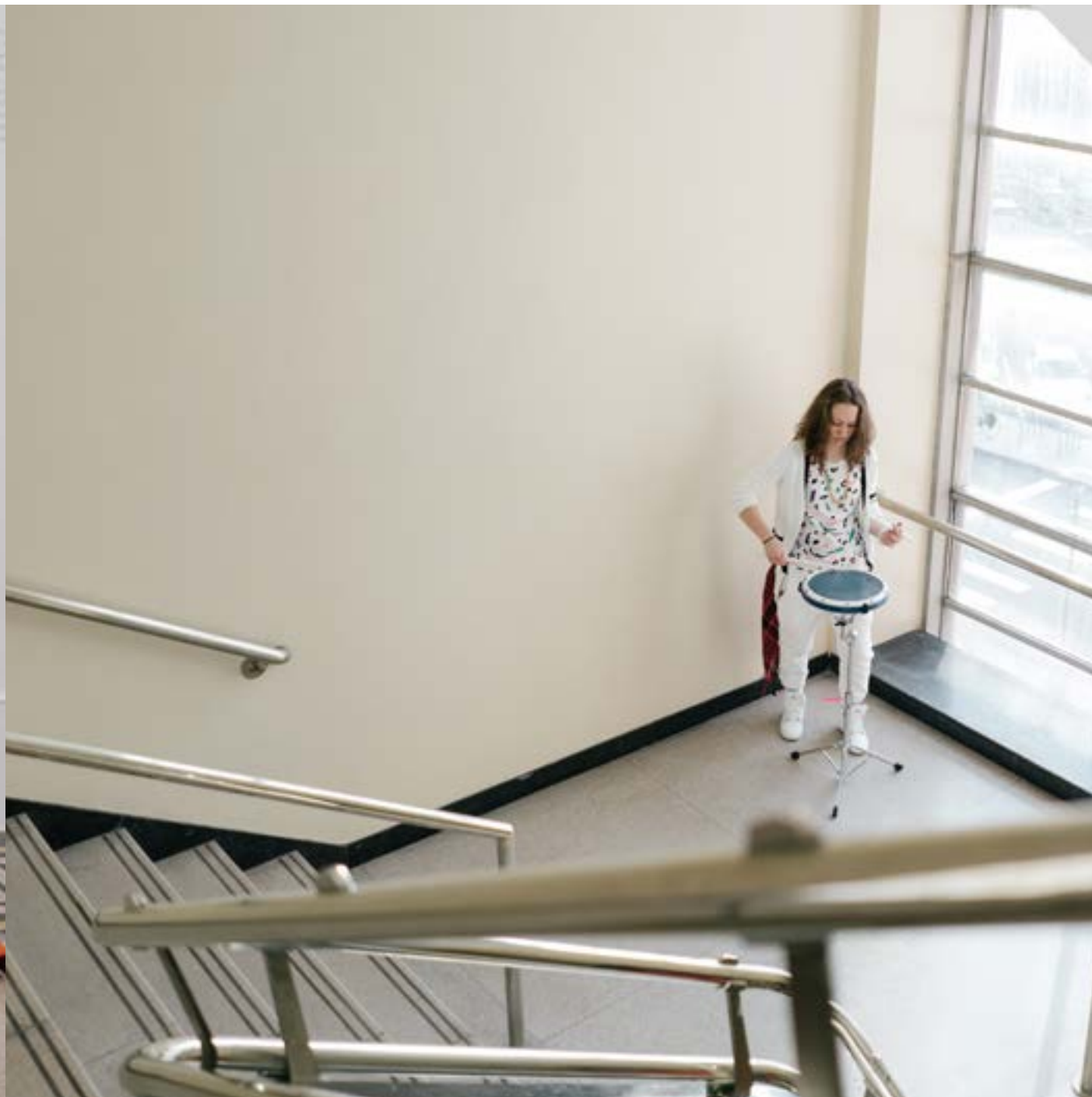








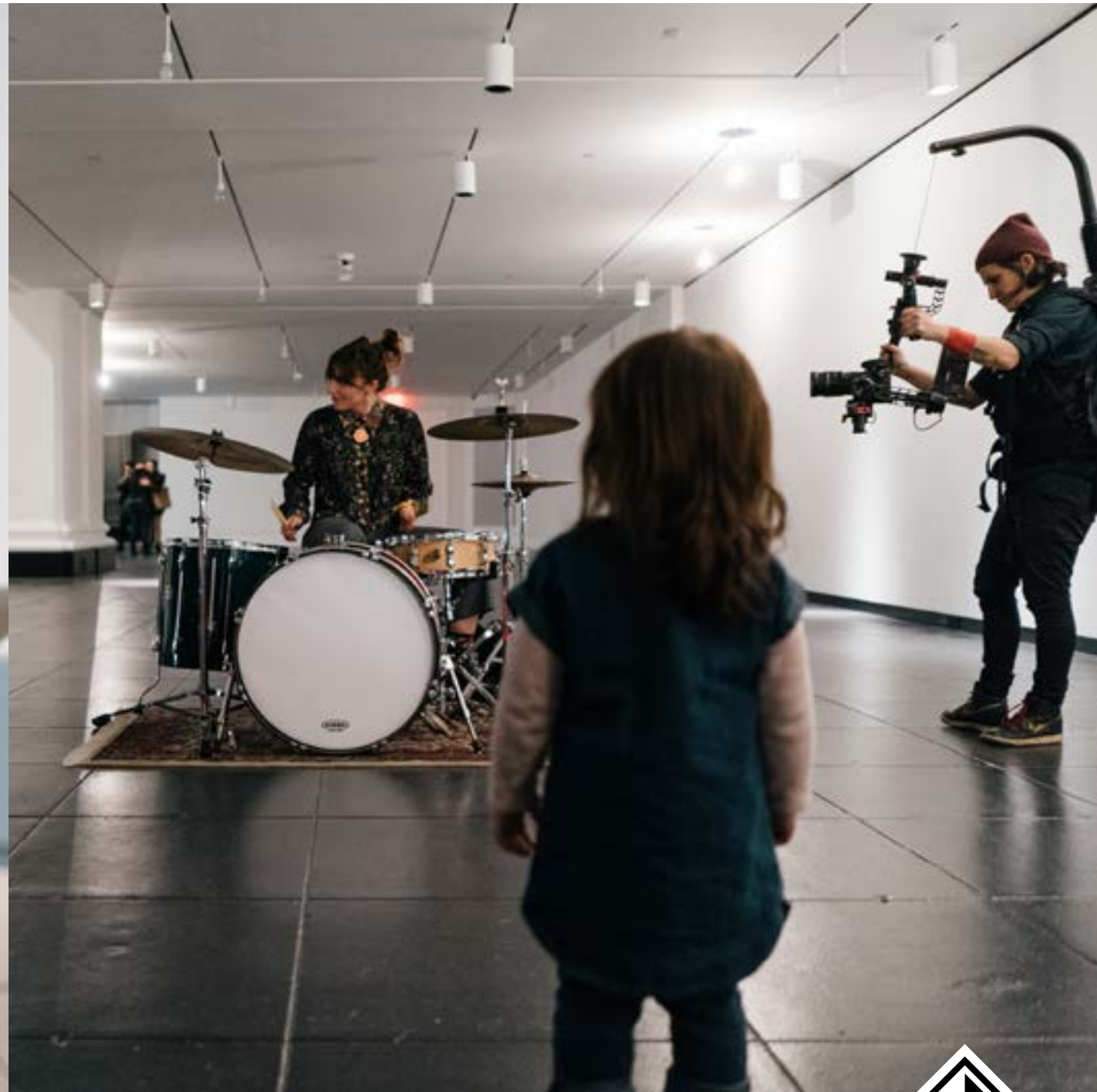






















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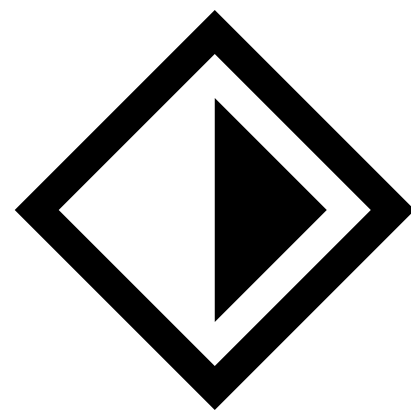
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The Zildjian logo, featuring the brand name in a stylized, black, cursive script.





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# CAREER PATHS

A CONVERSATION WITH DEBBIE KNOX-  
HEWSON

*Words by Julia Kaye  
Photography by Bex Wade*





I remember the day I received my A Level results very clearly. I've wondered since, had that envelope contained a list of A grades, would I have heard the sound of doors opening? Because when I found myself staring at a bunch of Es and Fs, I could sure as shit hear them slamming shut.

I actually specialised at failing tests. I failed my driving test enough times to actually get used to the process of showing up and failing. I would go as far as to say I was good at it. One thing was for sure: my picture was never going to end up in any school or college newsletter followed by a small caption explaining how I'd exceeded everyone's expectations and become a model of success.

What to do after you've failed at something can be pretty daunting. I was already mortified that my time at school had ended in academic suicide, and it wasn't helped by people making out like I'd thrown my entire life away as a result. Moving on from that sort of stuff is trickier than it sounds. It was for me, at least.

When I consider that Debbie Knox-Hewson was in a similar position to me after school, it makes me respect anyone who can treat under-achievement as a learning exercise and move on. Debbie, now a session drummer in London, made a conscious decision to actively make that career happen, enrolling at Tech Music School with the goal of becoming a working drummer. Two years later, she landed a gig doing arena tours as the drummer for Charli XCX.

♦ ♦ ♦





**The Drummer's Journal: Busy day?**

Debbie Knox-Hewson: I'm struggling a bit today to be honest. In fact, I need to get a glass of water. Or maybe a drink would sort me out.

**Hair of the dog?**

Yeah. A Bloody Mary would do it. But I haven't done much today really, I lived in Berlin until about a week ago so I've only just moved back to the UK. It was interesting getting some drum students and looking for work in Germany without talking any German.

**Speaking of work, you've managed to build a career in a pretty short space of time. What made you decide to become a professional drummer?**

Really it was because I didn't have anything to lose. I'd totally messed up my A Levels. Colossally.

**Why was that?**

At the time, I just didn't have much of a passion for study, and it's funny because I read a lot now. I actually enjoy reading textbooks. But back then, all I wanted was to be in a band. So I saved up some money to go to Ghana to learn more about drumming and the djembe. Unfortunately, I discovered that the djembe isn't even a Ghanaian instrument, which was embarrassing considering I was in Ghana at the time. The important thing is that I came back from that trip feeling like I wanted to give music a go. I felt like if I just worked at it for long enough there should be a job with my name on it.

**Then you enrolled at Tech Music School in London?**

Right. I was lucky because my parents lent me half of the money for a year at Tech. Initially, I really struggled. I found the classes difficult; I had to work hard to keep up with it. I'd only just learned what a metronome was and I was being taught by these amazing teachers who were talking about reading charts and big

band scores. I'd only just bought Stick Control.

**You felt like the other students were better?**

Absolutely. I felt really far behind and I felt frustrated. The experience itself was amazing, but I knew early on that I should have come at a better level. I only did a year there, then I took the summer to practise. And I practised a lot. Then, when I was more confident, I did a year at the Brighton Institute of Modern Music.

**Did you ever question yourself at any point as to whether you'd made the right decision?**

I don't think I did. I could see my progress and I knew I was getting better. I'm a big advocate of having a practice log so you can see your improvements over time. If you ever get down about things, that's a massive help. It became sort of addictive for me, the idea of improving. I deliberately focused my time to become a pop session drummer.

**When I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do, there was a point where I was like, "maybe I could be a drummer." Then, when I sat down and thought about it, I realised, "actually I'm pretty shit, I definitely won't make it," and I did something else. But now I feel like I wish I'd at least tried...**

There were only a few times when I've been disheartened. When arranging auditions, I used to sign off emails with just "D" and then when I'd turn up on the day people would be like, "sorry, we thought you were going to be a guy." But the flip side is that you'll also get a casting call that's like, "we want a female drummer."

**When you graduated from the Brighton Institute of Modern Music, how did you get the Charli XCX gig?**

I didn't graduate. It was towards the end of my first year when I got the Charli gig. I heard about the auditions and decided







to go for it. It all happened incredibly fast. I auditioned on a Friday, heard back on Monday, then I was straight into two weeks solid rehearsal for an arena tour with Paramore. The first show of that tour was my first show to a crowd of more than 200 people. It was also my first show playing to a click and my first show using electronics.

**That was another learning curve?**

Well, I had bigged myself up quite a bit in the audition. I kind of made out that I was a seasoned function drummer, when in fact I'd only ever played about two weddings. Certainly I think everyone else had more experience than I did. But I felt confident in my own playing, I knew I'd put a lot of hours in. To be honest, it happened that fast I didn't have time to doubt myself.

**Did you have this expectation of what it was going to be like to be a professional drummer? And has reality differed from expectation?**

I knew the whole rockstar vibe where you turn up late or drunk wasn't a thing for session players. But what did surprise me was that, on the road, I assumed everyone would be talking about music all the time. I found that, in general, people don't want to talk about King Crimson with you for five hours. Also please don't quote me as saying "on the road" as it's cringeworthy.

**"On the road"?**

It makes me think of Spinal Tap or some old greasy rocker who is like, "what happens on the road stays on the road." Not pleasant.

♦ ♦ ♦

"I'D ONLY JUST LEARNED  
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J-POP TUNE.”

♦ ♦ ♦







**Sometimes I feel pop music gets a bit of a bad rep and that people talk down about it...**

I'll admit that, before I took the gig, I wouldn't listen to pop music. I was living on a diet of Mahavishnu Orchestra and King Crimson. But working with Charli really changed my perception of pop. It's not easy to make pop music, nor is it easy to make things that sound simple. Also, I realised that the whole music snobbery thing is mostly due to instrumentation. You could take a Foo Fighters song, slightly alter the instrumentation, and it would resemble a J-pop tune.

**Do you think pop drumming gets overlooked as something a drummer would aspire to play?**

Professionally, I call myself a pop drummer. I don't just practise to pop and I don't just take pop gigs, but most of my work certainly has been classed as popular music. I was about to say something but maybe I shouldn't say it...

**Naturally I'm going to suggest you do say it...**

Ok, so I went to a gig recently that was quite proggy. One-half of me was standing there with this row of 60-year-old men who have ponytails as long as mine, and we're all just groove-facing. But then the other half of me was just like, "it's such a shame that you can be so technically good at your instrument, but I'm not really feeling anything beyond the fact you are a good musician." It's not like the music was hurting my heart, whereas a good pop song will actually do that. I'm not saying that only happens with pop, but I feel the same way about pop drumming too. It's the most "for the people" type drumming – it's accessible, certainly more than a free-jazz solo.

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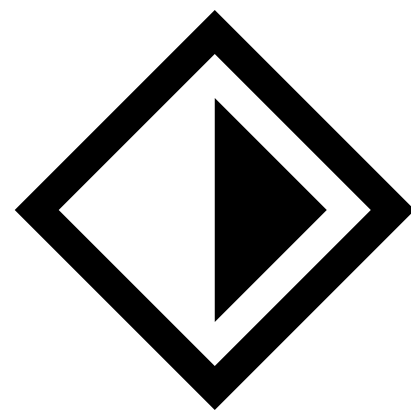
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# STAINLESS IMPROV

A CONVERSATION WITH MARK GUILIANA

*Words by Tom Hoare*

*Photos by Deneka Peniston*





“Why would you do that to him?” my flatmate questioned when I informed her that Mark Guiliana was coming round to our home. “Are you going to tidy up? This place is a hovel.”

It’s true the state of our place was pretty dismal. I began to acknowledge this as I fielded more questions pitched in disbelief: “Why didn’t you arrange to meet him in a coffee shop or something?”

“I thought it’d be quieter here.”

“When will he arrive?”

“In about two hours.” I looked at the pile of unwashed dishes in the sink. The sofa, having accumulated years worth of Doritos crumbs, did indeed smell pretty stale. The situation was now starkly different to how I’d imagined it. I quickly began to realise that I’d invited someone I barely knew to what could easily be mistaken for a crack den.

Two hours later when Mark arrived, I answered the door through a fog of Fabreze, my eyes burning slightly. It may have been Mark’s diligent politeness, but I was grateful to see he wasn’t outwardly disgusted. “Nice place,” he smiles.

Mark Guiliana is someone who is pushing the boundaries of creativity and musicianship on the drum set and has been for some time. I’m sure if you said this to him directly, he’d play down such a suggestion immediately, but it’s true. It’s why David Bowie hired him to play on what would ultimately be his final album, Blackstar. It’s why his own band Mehliana was nominated for a Grammy. On paper, he’s a classically trained jazz musician with a passion for Aphex Twin and improvisation. In practice, he’s a person who could approach most musical situations in a way that the vast majority could not.

Mark sits on the sofa, the cushions of which I’d watched spinning around in a tumble dryer about 30 minutes earlier.

♦ ♦ ♦

♦ ♦ ♦  
“WHENEVER  
I TRIED TO BE  
UNIQUE, I’D FAIL  
HORRIBLY.”  
♦ ♦ ♦







PHOTO BY  
DENEKA PENISTON

**The Drummer's Journal: I think those cushions may be a bit damp...**

Mark Guiliana: Nah, they feel fine. They're certainly fragrant.

**You're originally from New Jersey. Is it actually like it appears on *The Sopranos*?**

I grew up very close to where a lot of that show was shot. No pun intended. It's fiction but it's inspired by real events. I can't speak to any of the violence and that sort of stuff, but the day to day reality of the show seems accurate. I was really sad when James Gandolfini died. I used to watch that show on a Sunday evening when I was a teenager.

**Your profile as a drummer seems to always be on the up...**

Thank you.

**Initially, you were rejected from certain jazz college programs. How does it feel to look back on that?**

To be honest, I didn't necessarily disagree with being rejected. I started playing drums when I was in high school. I suppose I was the hot shot at my school, but I never made county band or state band. I think if someone got accepted ahead of me, then that was most likely accurate. I didn't know I was going to go to school for music until I actually decided to do so. The first round of applications was more just feeling it out, I knew if I didn't get accepted I would have gone and done a different degree. I eventually got accepted and went to school for music. And it was only then whilst I was at school that I thought, "I'm pretty sure this is what I should do." Sometimes I still think that way now.

**In what sense? Self-doubt?**

Not so much self-doubt but, for me, it's important to have a lightness to this whole thing. I'm not one of those people who can say, "I was put here on this earth to be a drummer and make music." I just feel very lucky that I've found something I want to pursue. Even now I'm still like, "I'm pretty sure this is what I should be doing." It's beautiful when someone can say with such confidence that they were put here to be a drummer, and I'd honestly believe someone if they told me that, but to me that seems like such a massive amount of pressure to put on yourself.

**You were on the cover of *Modern Drummer* in 2014. That's right, yeah.**

**Did you send that issue to the college programs that rejected you?**

[Laughs] No, I don't hold a grudge at all. Even the place I got into, William Patterson University, I was wait-listed and only got accepted because one of the people ahead of me didn't go. I'm a big sports fan and there are a lot of athletes that do behave like that if they don't get drafted as high as they'd like. They always seem to have that grudge. For me, I wouldn't do it any differently. It all worked out great.

**What are the merits of a formal music education?**

Well, I just knew I needed that sort of intensive study. Both my parents are teachers so I've always been in that environment. I always found it easier to work rather than not work and fail. That option always seemed infinitely more stressful to me. But you don't necessarily need to go to school on a formal level to succeed.







...

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**How did you know you needed to go?**

I had some friends who went to college and could pretty much sleep through their classes and get an A. But I needed all that stuff and that I'd be challenged by it. I welcomed that challenge and I always felt inspired to work hard. Some of my friends who were better players, they weren't challenged at all, and it kind of ruined their association to music. They were bored and had no incentive to carry it through.

**What were some of the disadvantages?**

The biggest disadvantage is money spent. I went to a state school in New Jersey so it was pretty affordable. It just happens to have a great jazz program. I wasn't in a situation where I was having to pay \$40,000 a year like some programs. That would have meant that I would have graduated with debts of about 120,000 dollars. And with that education, I'd be competing not for a huge salary, but a \$50 gig. And even to get that the competition would be high. It's one thing to pay that money and become a doctor with a clear career path with a salary, but there's nothing guaranteed with music. That's difficult. Also, it's very rare that a university's curriculum will match your interests one hundred percent. That said, if you take the money out of the equation, I think school is a no-brainer.

**You've said previously that, when you were learning, you felt a pressure to be "unique". Where did that pressure come from?**

I would assume it's the goal of any creative artist to be themselves and, in doing so, create some unique art. A lot of my heroes are very singular unique voices. But I've had more success finding myself artistically when that wasn't my goal.

**Uniqueness?**

Right. Whenever I tried to be unique, I'd fail horribly.

**Why?**

Because it would be based on materialistic decisions that I was making to try and be original. On the drum set, it's very easy to be unique just with gear. You can go to a drum shop, spend a few hundred bucks, come home with some weird stuff, and you're the only guy with this setup, so that makes you unique. But there's no depth to that. I found it was thinking about what not to do that led me to unique results.

**Can you give an example?**

I'd improvise, but I'd tell myself that anytime I play a pattern that reminds me of something else, I have to stop and put the sticks down. Sometimes I'd play for about three seconds before realising, "oh, there's that Elvin Jones fill again." Then I'd stop, put the sticks down for a moment and then start again.

That exercise allowed me to become more aware of what I'm playing. It's ok to play things that are inspired by other people but I think when I was younger I was doing it without even realising it. And if you're doing that then you're not really making your own decisions. So I ripped a lot of things out of my vocabulary. I'd tell myself that I'm not allowed to play certain things, which left a large void because of what I'd just cut out. Instead, I was left to fill that space with my own ideas. It forced me to look in the mirror and create something.

**Do you think it's rarer now for someone to sustain a career as a professional drummer than it was 30 years ago?**

To be honest, I don't know. I think the internet has been nothing but helpful, but because my career started before it became a huge thing, I didn't really need it in that respect. Perhaps that's still true today, I don't know. When I started touring there was no YouTube. I remember people not really knowing how to react when footage of their gigs began appearing on there. It certainly freaked people out.

**What have you learnt as a working drummer that you can't learn in college?**

Versatility. When I go on the road, all I take are my cymbals. I'm playing different drums every night, and as much as I love my own kit, I also really get a buzz from walking into a room, seeing what the set-up is for that night, and treating it as a welcome challenge as to how I can express myself in a way that I can stand by. I never, ever blame the instrument if the music doesn't feel right. It's my job to deal with whatever I have there. That branches out into learning how to play a room. No one can explain that to you, it's something that comes with experience.

**Playing a room?**

Maybe you're in a little basement club which is acoustically dead and you can play as loud as you want. Then the next night, you're in a theatre and you hit the snare and it lasts for about eight measures.

♦ ♦ ♦  
 “THE BEST DEFENCE  
 MECHANISM  
 FROM CRITICISM  
 IS CONFIDENCE —  
 NOT EGO.”  
 ♦ ♦ ♦







Adapting to that is something you can only develop by getting out there.

**You can't teach someone experience?**

I always hated whenever people said to me, "all you need is experience." I was like, "well, what actually counts as experience?" Now I know – say yes to every gig. Play the wedding gig, the Broadway show, the church, or along with that DJ at the club. Say yes to putting yourself in different situations. And over time, you might realise, "man I hate this brunch gig playing for all these rich people who aren't even listening." But I feel like, even in those situations, you should be able to get something out of it. Work on your dynamics or your time.

**Are you ever conscious of people's reaction to what you're doing?**

The best defence mechanism from criticism is confidence – not ego. Making my own records isn't a lucrative operation. It's an artistic thing; I want to make my own music. A lot of the sideman stuff is very fulfilling, but from a purely artistic standpoint, it might not truly be what I want to do. For me, if someone doesn't like what I've done, that's totally ok as long as I know I did everything I could. If I rushed making a record, then I'd be like, "fuck, they're right. I've been busted."

**Has that ever happened?**

No, not really. Sometimes with sideman gigs when I was younger, I'd get a call to do a record, and there'd just be a single rehearsal before putting something on tape. Some sessions I wish I'd had a bit more time to work with. But that's just the way it goes.

**Have you ever received any exceptional advice throughout your career?**

When I think about people I looked up to, they always put the music first. They'd get hired for a reason, and that was because they were pretty selfless and let the music do the talking. That is definitely something I try to do.

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# THE DEEP END

## WHY I QUIT MY JOB TO BE A WORKING DRUMMER

*Words by Will Daly*

*Illustration by Hector Guzman*

♦ ♦ ♦

**T**wo months ago, I quit my day job to play drums full time. It was a decision that I didn't make lightly, and it was made all the more difficult because my day job was actually something I really enjoyed.

I worked for Warner Bros as a Film Education and Learning Facilitator at their Studio Tour in London. My job was to teach people about the different areas of filmmaking. From costume and set design, to film pitching and movie marketing, the aim was to inspire people to work in the film industry.

Filmmaking is one of the most collaborative processes and anyone can be a part of. It takes communicators, coordinators, riggers, electricians, hair and make up artists, designers, stunt performers, business minds, sculptors, prop builders, featherologists (real job), costume buyers, musicians, actors - the list goes on. A big part of my job was making anyone feel like they could be part of that world if that's what they wanted to do. And in doing so, my team and I taught more than 45,000 students in three and a half years.







...

“IF I WERE A STAR  
WARS CHARACTER I’D  
BE WEDGE ANTILLES.  
I’M A FORD FOCUS –  
THE IPOD SHUFFLE,  
I’M GOOD BUT NOT  
YET GREAT.”

...





Working at a film studio meant I regularly got to spend time with some remarkable people. As well as the creative minds behind the scenes, I met amazing actors like Alan Rickman, film producers like David Heyman, and even Her Majesty J.K. Rowling. I'd been there since the beginning; part of the team that built a unique place that is loved by a lot of people. My last day was certainly bittersweet.

What happened to make me leave something I enjoyed so greatly? Nothing. Instead, my decision was based on something that's been with me for a long time: the drums. Although I enjoyed it immensely, I realised that another spin on my day job was that I was teaching the same lesson over and over again, five times a day, five days a week. Although I have a huge passion for movies, I've never actually worked on one myself. I was just telling people how great other people's work is. So I took the leap of faith to make a living from behind the kit. I registered as self-employed and my initial aim was to pay the rent by playing drums.

Above all, I knew I needed to improve as a drummer in order to realistically do this. My drumming vocabulary and skills were limited to that of someone who grew up with Dave Grohl, Chad Smith and Taylor Hawkins as their idols. Rock drums? I'll smash them out the park, but jazz in odd time signatures? I am Matt LeBlanc in Lost In Space. Terrible.

I am what you'd call a solid drummer. I do what I do pretty well, but I could definitely be better. If I were a football team I'd be Everton, entertaining and at times explosive, but still finishing mid-table. If I were a Star Wars character I'd be Wedge Antilles. I'm a Ford Focus; the iPod Shuffle, I'm good but not yet great. Instead, I need to be able to play like Barcelona.

When you work for a big company, your career progression is dictated by budget cuts, head counts and performance reviews. When you play drums for yourself, you are the one who can control how your playing progresses.

I can't deny that, at times, this decision has been very intimidating. Going from a nice monthly pay cheque, to hoping that a drum student doesn't cancel on you at the last minute is a complete change in perspective. I'm by no means in poverty, but I certainly stopped taking some things for granted.

♦ ♦ ♦

“SELF-DOUBT  
SOMETIMES CREEPS  
UP ON ME LIKE A  
DONALD TRUMP  
CAMPAIGN.”

♦ ♦ ♦

I've also been faced with some questions I've yet to really come up with any concrete answers for. Do I play more paid gigs in the function band and so have less time to create original music? How can I quickly raise my profile? What separates me from the rest? Should I be focusing on gigging or teaching?

Last week, I was offered a chance to teach music part time at a local school, but at the expense of giving up the private students I currently teach at a drum studio. I also received another offer that was similar in that taking it would mean sacrificing my own musical project. Although the financially attractive option might seem like the quick and easy way, maybe it's not actually the best long term-choice for me developing as a drummer.

Whilst self-doubt sometimes creeps up on me like a Donald Trump campaign, my own ambition, together with support from my friends and family, has helped me a lot. I knew the first few months would be hard, but on the plus side I have had more time to practise than I ever did in the last four years. I've recruited six new students and

secured four paid gigs in April alone. I'll make rent this month, goal one achieved.

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